

JAN N. BREMMER

# Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament  
547*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

# Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

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Jan N. Bremmer

# Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire

Collected Essays III

Mohr Siebeck

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## Preface

The third volume of my *Collected Essays* continues in many ways the first in its focus on early Christianity.<sup>1</sup> There are some important differences, however, in that I devote more, though still limited, attention to Roman-period Judaism,<sup>2</sup> to the interplay of early Christianity with its pagan environment, and to religious developments in Late Antiquity.

It will be useful to give a brief outline of the contents of this book. The first section focuses on Judaism in the Roman imperial period. While the emphasis on diversity is hardly divorced from our contemporary concerns,<sup>3</sup> recent studies rightly analyse early Christianity in all its diversity and with due regard to its relationship to its Jewish background and Jewish contemporaries.<sup>4</sup> Here I first discuss an early example of one of the ways in which Judeans/Jews appropriated Greek traditions to improve their place in the world (Ch. 1),<sup>5</sup> but also a case in which they were attacked for political, social and religious reasons (Ch. 3). These chapters focus on the Greek part of the Mediterranean, but it is too often forgotten that in the crucible of the Mediterranean not only the Greek world but also Rome is of interest for the study of Judaism in the centuries around the turn of the era, as I argue in a study of Vergil (Ch. 2).

However, all these cases occurred before the emergence of the Christ followers as separate organisations. It is one of the problems of early Christianity that it is impossible to trace this development in detail. What we can say is that the early Christ followers, who were not ethnically *Ioudaioi*, never called themselves *Ioudaioi*. Nor do the Roman authors of the late first and early second centuries, such

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<sup>1</sup> J.N. Bremmer, *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity = Collected Essays I* (Tübingen, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> But see also J.N. Bremmer, 'The Manifest and Hidden Heritage of Judaism', *JSJ* 31 (2000) 47–64.

<sup>3</sup> M. Sommer, 'Wie westlich ist das frühe Christentum? Modelle frühchristlicher Diversität und die Entwicklung diversitäts-sensibler Kleingruppenmodelle in der empirischen Soziologie', *ZNT* 26 (2023) 71–90.

<sup>4</sup> H. Leppin, *Die frühen Christen: Von den Anfängen bis Konstantin* (Munich, 2019<sup>1</sup>, 2021<sup>3</sup>), to be read with my review in *ARYS* 17 (2019) 402–16, translated as *The Early Christians from the Beginnings to Constantine* (Cambridge, 2023), to be read with the review by A.K. Petersen, *Numen* 72 (2025) 93–104. Note that Leppin is not mentioned at all by P. Fredriksen, *Ancient Christianities: the first 500 years* (Princeton and London, 2024), whose 'Supplementary Reading' does not mention a single non-English work and hardly any non-Anglo-Saxon scholars.

<sup>5</sup> For the debate over translating *Ioudaioi*/*Iudaei* as Judeans or Jews, see this volume, Chapter 4.1.



as Pliny, Tacitus and Suetonius, mention Jews in connection with the followers of Christ.<sup>6</sup> The major *Apocryphal Acts* of the later second century, that is, the *Acts of John*, *Acts of Andrew*, *Acts of Peter* and the *Acts of Paul*, also pay no attention to the Jews, except for the *Acts of Peter*, which suggests a clear distance between the Jews and the followers of Christ at this point.<sup>7</sup>

I therefore assume that the latter were already meeting in separate places, mostly houses (Ch. 17), by the beginning of the early second century, although they had begun as one of the many different currents of the Judaism operative at that time.<sup>8</sup> However, the slow acceptance of the name ‘Christian’ as a self-designation and the coining of *Christianismos* as an emic term only around the middle of the second century, while *Ioudaismos* predates the Christian era (Ch. 4), suggest that the ‘parting of the ways’ on an ideological/religious level was much slower. The inclusion of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament in the emerging canon and the presence of Judeans/Jews in local communities meant that the separation was never absolute. However, the lack of evidence that would allow us to study developments at the local level means that our knowledge of the process of separation as a whole will always remain severely deficient.<sup>9</sup>

Let us now turn to the interplay between pagans and Christians, which I explore in the second section first by looking at various aspects of the Greek novel or of Christian literature influenced by it (Chs. 5–9). Although the walls between the study of early Christianity and its surrounding pagan world have become less solid in recent decades, it is still the case that our insights into the world of the first centuries of the common era are hampered by disciplinary traditions of studying these worlds separately. One can see this clearly, for example, in a recent authoritative handbook of Greek literature, the title of which, *Die pagane Literatur der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike*,<sup>10</sup> implies that Christian literature was a completely sep-

<sup>6</sup> J. Barclay, “‘Jews’ and ‘Christians’ in the Eyes of Roman Authors c. 100 CE”, in P.J. Tomson and J. Schwartz (eds), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: how to write their histories* (Leiden, 2014) 313–26.

<sup>7</sup> J.N. Bremmer, ‘Jews, Pagans and Christians in the Apocryphal Acts’, in S. Alkier and H. Leppin (eds), *Juden – Heiden – Christen? Religiöse Inklusion und Exklusion in Kleinasien bis Decius* (Tübingen, 2019) 333–62. For the middle of the second century, see M. den Dulk, *Between Jews and Heretics: refiguring Justin Martyr’s Dialogue with Trypho* (London and New York, 2018); M. Niehoff, ‘Jews and the Emergence of Christianity’, in C. Hezser (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Jews and Judaism in Late Antiquity* (London and New York, 2024) 95–110 (also on the first century).

<sup>8</sup> This does not mean that we should say with J. Rüpke, ‘Religion in, for, and against the Roman Empire’, in J. Rüpke et al. (eds), *Empires and Gods I* (Berlin and Boston, 2024) 101–34 at 108 that Christianity ‘is to be addressed as a Jewish subgroup at least for the first two centuries CE’, since this view insufficiently takes into account the growing distance between Christ followers and Judeans/Jews in these two centuries and the changing composition of the Christ followers from Judeans to non-Judeans/Jews.

<sup>9</sup> See now also M. den Dulk et al. (eds), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: mapping the second century* (Leiden, 2024).

<sup>10</sup> B. Zimmermann and A. Rengakos (eds), *Die pagane Literatur der Kaiserzeit und Spätantike* (Munich, 2022).

arate phenomenon. Consequently, such a choice prevents us from seeing the new developments of the first centuries, such as the emergence of the Apologies or the Gospels, in the context of their time. Such a choice also suggests that Christian literature was something exceptional, whereas it would have been more fruitful to present an innovative picture of these first centuries, in which all literary works, regardless of their religious background, are seen as being part of the same period and influenced by the same cultural, political and religious environment.<sup>11</sup> Such an approach would have been much more productive, especially since some novelists seem to have been influenced by (Ch. 6), and even satirised,<sup>12</sup> Christian literature, while the contemporary authors of the *Apocryphal Acts* were clearly reading Greek novels.<sup>13</sup>

Although the study of the novel has flourished in recent times, the genre has been less discussed in relation to the religious developments of the period. However, a study of the priests in the novel shows the diversity of this function in comparison with that of Christian bishops (Ch. 5), and an analysis of sacrifice in the novel suggests that sacrifice became increasingly simplified in Roman times (Ch. 7).<sup>14</sup> Although not a novelist, but certainly influenced by the novel, Lucian paid much attention to miracles, a phenomenon of course very well known from the New Testament. Again, this interest in miracles is a characteristic of the period shared by everyone, high or low, Christian or not (Ch. 9).<sup>15</sup> Another aspect of the same period is the ‘mysterification’ of religion (Chs. 10–14). A number of cults, even the imperial cult (Ch. 10), took on features originally associated with the famous Mystery cults of ancient Greece, Eleusis and Samothrace. At the same time, we can see that pagan philosophers and Christian theologians, such as Celsus and Origen, were very interested in the Mysteries, although they evaluated them in rather different ways (Chs. 11–12). A look at the historiography of the Mysteries shows that the interpretation of these cults proved to be a challenge for earlier scholars, even great ones (Chs. 13–14).

<sup>11</sup> This is rightly argued by R.F. Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman literary culture* (Cambridge, 2021).

<sup>12</sup> This volume, Chapter 8.5; N. Kanavou, ‘Satirizing Christianity in Lucian’s *Peregrinus* and Achilles Tatius’ *Leucippe and Clitophon*’, *NovT* 67 (2025) 99–123.

<sup>13</sup> Bremmer, *MMM*, 219–34.

<sup>14</sup> See also J.N. Bremmer, ‘The Beginning and End of Animal Sacrifice in the Ancient World: some observations’, in C. Facchini *et al.* (eds), *Sacrifice and Sacred Violence: history, comparisons, and the early modern world* (Turnhout, 2025) 47–58.

<sup>15</sup> H. Leppin, ‘Imperial Miracles and Elitist Discourses’, in S. Alkier and A. Weissenrieder (eds), *Miracles Revisited: New Testament miracle stories and their concepts of reality* (Berlin and Boston, 2013) 233–48; R. Zimmermann (ed.), *Kompendium der frühchristlichen Wundererzählungen*, 2 vols (Gütersloh, 2013–2017); K. ní Mheallaigh, *Reading Fiction with Lucian: fakes, freaks and hyperreality* (Cambridge, 2014); S. Grau, ‘Philosophers as θεῖοι ἄνδρες between Dio-genes Laertius and Eunapius of Sardis. Tradition and Discontinuities in the Shaping of Miracle Workers’, in M. Alviz Fernández and D. Hernández de la Fuente (eds), *Shaping the “Divine Men”. Holiness, Charisma and Leadership in the Graeco-Roman World* (Stuttgart, 2023) 177–90.

In the third section, I look at a number of features of, particularly, early Christianity in the second century. Again, largely because of a lack of sufficient sources, this is a difficult period to analyse. It has been described as a ‘laboratory’,<sup>16</sup> and there is some truth in this, although the term itself could easily be applied as well to other periods of Christian history. But it is clear that in the second century we begin to see Christians confronting their pagan environment (Chs. 15–16), organising places of worship (Ch. 17), looking back at the first century (Ch. 18) and expressing their intense love for Christ (Ch. 19). However, in line with the emphasis of recent studies on the diversity of early Christianity (see notes 3 and 4 above), it is still difficult to see how widespread these characteristics were or how widely their writings were read. Even if we now speak of the citification of Jesus or stress the influence of literate freelance experts,<sup>17</sup> it must be said that we see second-century Christianity only through a mirror darkly, with little idea of how it spread and how far its initial influence extended beyond the larger cities, except perhaps in Roman Phrygia.<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, the rapidity of the rise of Christianity has recently been disputed again by Stanley Stowers, and he is certainly right that previous estimates, including my own, have not always been based on reliable data.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, without such a growth it is hard to imagine the impressive literary production of early Christianity,<sup>20</sup> or its mention in the later second century by prominent pagan figures, such as Galen,<sup>21</sup> Lucian (Chs. 9 and 27) and Marcus Aurelius.<sup>22</sup>

This rise has also to be connected to the persecutions of the early second century, which we hear about in pagan sources, such as Tacitus (Ch. 20) and Pliny,<sup>23</sup> but

<sup>16</sup> For the metaphor, see J.M. Lieu, *Explorations in the Second Christian Century: texts, groups, ideas, voices* (Leiden, 2025) 157–73.

<sup>17</sup> E.R. Urciuoli, *Citifying Jesus* (Tübingen, 2024); S.K. Stowers, *History and the Study of Religion: the ancient Mediterranean as a test case* (Oxford, 2024) 227–84; for such freelance entrepreneurs, see this volume, Chapter 14 note 12 and Chapter 29 note 36.

<sup>18</sup> S. Mitchell, *The Christians of Phrygia from Rome to the Turkish Conquest* (Leiden, 2023); R. Parker, *Religion in Roman Phrygia: from polytheism to Christianity* (Oakland, 2023) 118–62.

<sup>19</sup> Stowers, *History and the Study of Religion*, 285–336.

<sup>20</sup> Literary production: L.W. Hurtado, *Destroyer of the Gods* (Waco, 2016) 105–41; this volume, Chapter 29.2, but note also Eus. *HE*. 5.27.

<sup>21</sup> R. Fleming, ‘Galen and the Christians: texts and authority in the second century AD’, in J. Carleton Paget and J. Lieu (eds), *Christianity in the Second Century* (Cambridge, 2017) 171–87; T. Tieleman, ‘Galen on Disagreement: sects, philosophical methods and Christians’, in A. Joosse and A. Ulacco (eds), *Dealing with Disagreement: the construction of traditions in later ancient philosophy* (Turnhout, 2022) 45–58.

<sup>22</sup> For Marcus Aurelius, see C. Motschmann, *Die Religionspolitik Marc Aurels* (Stuttgart, 2002) 220–71; N. Huttunen, *Early Christians Adapting to the Roman Empire: mutual recognition* (Leiden, 2020) 52–57.

<sup>23</sup> For Pliny, see most recently G.M. Oliveira Niglio, ‘La “diversità” dei Cristiani nel carteggio tra Plinio e Traiano’, in A. Maffi and L. Gagliardi (eds), *I diritti degli altri in Grecia e a Roma* (Sankt Augustin, 2011) 373–93; J. Corke-Webster, ‘Trouble in Pontus: the Pliny-Trajan correspondence on the Christians reconsidered’, *TAPA* 147 (2017) 371–411; M. Öhler, ‘Pliny and the Expansion of Christianity in Cities and Rural Areas of Pontus et Bithynia’, in M. Tiwald and J. Zangenberg (eds), *Early Christian Encounters with Town and Countryside: essays on the urban and rural worlds of early Christianity* (Göttingen, 2021) 269–97; M.H. Williams, *Early Classical Authors on Jesus* (London, 2023) 35–49.

also in contemporary Christian sources, such as *1 Peter* (4.14–15) and *Hermas' Shepherd* (*Vis.* 3.2.1, *Sim.* 9.28.3–4). The legal reasons for these persecutions are still unclear. Since Christians could hardly hide their faith from their neighbours,<sup>24</sup> one wonders why more were not executed than we hear about. We also remain largely in the dark about who was responsible for arresting Christians. In a thought-provoking article, James Corke-Webster has suggested that many Christians were accused by their fellow Christians.<sup>25</sup> However, he has not produced a single clear case of someone being put to death because of accusations made by a fellow Christian. In short, more evidence is needed before internal accusations can be seen as a major factor in the Roman persecutions.

In any case, there can be no doubt that those intellectuals who produced accounts of the trials and executions of fellow Christians, who were not called martyrs until the middle of the second century (Ch. 21), were inspired by current historiography and biography to record important events in their community in order to encourage fellow Christians to endure under duress, to combat apostasy and to offer models for imitation.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, a proper understanding of the remaining testimonies has often been bedevilled by the search for authentic accounts. In fact, the surviving texts are media products that have been cut, edited and adapted to new circumstances in their subsequent reception, for example when used in the liturgy or in polemics against other Christians.

This does not mean, however, that they can be written off as a 'form of discourse, a literary genre' or that they 'owed much to the violence against the Jews'. The earliest examples of martyr Acts were not yet part of a genre because such a genre did not yet exist,<sup>27</sup> and the Christian appropriation of the Maccabees and their writings does not seem to have influenced their beliefs or their accounts, which do not mention a Jewish background, except sometimes for a comparison with the Maccabean mother;<sup>28</sup> more elaborate references come only in the third century.<sup>29</sup> Instead, the Christian accounts focus on the martyrs' endurance, their

<sup>24</sup> A. Luijendijk, 'Did Early Christians Keep Their Identity Secret? Neighbors and Strangers in Dionysius of Alexandria, Presbyter Leon, and Flax Merchant Leonides of Oxyrhynchus', in M. Brand and E. Scheerlinck (eds), *Religious Identifications in Late Antique Papyri, 3<sup>rd</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> Century Egypt* (London and New York, 2023) 95–123.

<sup>25</sup> J. Corke-Webster, 'By Whom Were Early Christians Persecuted?', *Past & Present* 261 (2023) 3–46; a similar suggestion already in M. Clauss, *Klio* 94 (2012) 553–55 at 554 (in a review of T.D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*, Tübingen, 2010).

<sup>26</sup> W. Ameling, 'From Persecution to Martyrdom: changes in the Christian perception of the past', in A. Bettenworth *et al.* (eds), *For Example: martyrdom and imitation in early Christian texts and art* (Paderborn, 2020) 77–98.

<sup>27</sup> *Contra* Fredriksen, *Ancient Christianities*, 70 (quotations), cf. Bremmer, *MMM*, 350–52; this volume, Chapter 22.1 (genre).

<sup>28</sup> Maccabees: T. Hilhorst, 'Four Maccabees in Christian Martyrdom Texts', in C. Kroon and D. den Hengst (eds), *Ultima Aetas. Time, Tense and Transience in the Ancient World. Studies in Honour of Jan den Boeft* (Amsterdam, 2000) 107–21; T. Rajak, 'The Maccabean Mother between Pagans, Jews, and Christians', in C. Harrison *et al.* (eds), *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: a Festschrift for Gillian Clark* (Oxford, 2014) 39–56.

<sup>29</sup> J.W. van Henten, 'The Maccabean Martyrs as Models in Early Christian Writings', in

love for Christ and their reward in heaven. It is only by treating these documents like any other historical document that we can advance our knowledge of martyrdom accounts and, consequently, of the ideas and practices of the early Christians.<sup>30</sup> But this requires a detailed study of these texts, as I have tried to do before,<sup>31</sup> and again here in an analysis of the *Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs* and the trial of the Egyptian bishop Phileas (Chs. 22–23). Only such detailed analysis can free us from sweeping statements about the authenticity or inauthenticity of these accounts.<sup>32</sup> These trials are also examples of religious violence, a phenomenon which became increasingly common under the Roman Empire, but which remains difficult to analyse properly (Ch. 24).

Where were the intellectual centres of early Christianity? It is one of the problems of our study of the second century that this period is really too late for most New Testament scholars but too early for Patristic scholars. This is evident from the fact that the date and place of many writings of this century have often been debated without much recent advance in our knowledge. That is why, in the first volume of my *Collected Essays*, I devoted a great deal of attention to the five major *Apocryphal Acts*, which I have been able to date from about the 160s to the 220s, when the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Grundskrift* of the Pseudo-Clementines were written.<sup>33</sup> But while the latter two were plausibly authored in Edessa, the *Acts of John*, the *Acts of Andrew* and the *Acts of Peter* were written in Asia Minor, plausibly in Bithynia, perhaps Nicomedia, and the *Acts of Paul* in its south-western region, not unlikely in Iconium. I have tried to advance our knowledge further by looking at the onomastic evidence of the latter *Acts*, which certainly supports the location in the south-west of Asia Minor, without allowing us to pinpoint a specific city (Ch. 25). A similar onomastic analysis of Ignatius supports his later dating, which is now increasingly accepted, but also suggests that the place of composition was not Rome, as is sometimes thought, but the region of Ephesus and Smyrna (Ch. 26), the latter of which also gave us the famous *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, dated before about 180 (Ch. 27).

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D.J. Wertheim (ed.), *The Jew as Legitimation: Jewish-Gentile relations beyond antisemitism and philosemitism* (London, 2017) 17–32; N. Baumann, “Die durch den siebenfältigen Geist fruchtbare Mutter Kirche” (vgl. Hrabanus Maurus, in 2 Mach. 7). Christliche Deutungen der “makabäischen Märtyrer” im frühen Mittelalter”, in P. Bruns et al. (eds), *Sterben und Töten für Gott? Das Martyrium in Spätantike und frühem Mittelalter* (Münster, 2022) 1–18.

<sup>30</sup> This is not always the case: see J.N. Bremmer, ‘Method and Madness in Dating the *Passion of Perpetua*’, *ASE* 40 (2023) 85–98; F. Dolbeau, *REAug* 70 (2024) 348.

<sup>31</sup> Bremmer, *MMM*, 349–454 (on the *Passion of Perpetua*).

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent recent example of such an analysis, see J.M. Petitfils, ‘Disfigurement and Deliverance: Eusebian portrayals of martyrdom and the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*’, *J ECS* 32 (2024) 341–65; see also J.N. Bremmer, ‘The *Passion of Dioscorus* and the Authenticity of Martyrdom Accounts’, in J. Borsje et al. (eds), *Tyrants, Heroes, Prophets, and Martyrs – Shifting Images from the Past to the Present* (Leiden, 2025), forthcoming.

<sup>33</sup> Bremmer, *MMM*, 219–34 and ‘Third- and Fourth-Century Aspects of the *Homilies*: bishops, statues and sacrifice’, in B.M.J. De Vos and D. Praet (eds), *In Search of Truth in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies* (Tübingen, 2022) 351–74.

These dates and places suggest that western Asia Minor was an important intellectual centre for the emergence of Christianity in the second century. On the other hand, there is also growing evidence that Alexandria was an equally, if not more important intellectual centre in the second century, since it produced not only the *Apocalypse of Peter*, but also, with varying degrees of plausibility, 2 Peter, the *Second Sibylline Oracle* (all three: Ch. 21), the *Protevangelium of James* (Ch. 28), the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas*.<sup>34</sup> It remains unclear, however, how Christianity developed in this metropolis after the ‘pogrom’ of 38 (Ch. 3) and the Jewish revolt under Trajan of 115–117.<sup>35</sup> In any case, the increasingly convincing identification of the Celsus of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* as an Alexandrian philosopher allows us to see that the growth of Christianity in Alexandria worried both pagans like Celsus and, presumably, local Jews, given the Jewish pamphlet used by Celsus (Ch. 27).

However important these urban centres were, it is much more difficult to get a grip on rural Christianity, and the fact that Phrygia remains the only region where we have a reasonably good idea of some rural Christianity, thanks to the inscriptions and the ‘orthodox’ attention given to Montanism,<sup>36</sup> should warn us against seeing emerging Christianity as primarily an urban phenomenon. Our sources are very much biased towards the cities and so we tend to underestimate the extent of Christianity’s influence on the hinterland of the great cities,<sup>37</sup> even though the vast majority of texts will have been produced in the cities.

In the fourth and final section, I turn to Late Antiquity. The rise of early Christianity remains a complicated issue that is still not easy to explain. It should be clear that we need to look at all the actors involved. Obviously, after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the devastating wars under Trajan (115–117) and Hadrian (Bar Kokhba revolt: 132–135/6), Judaism was greatly weakened: one of the results of all this was the abandonment of Greek, which must have contributed to a further loss of influence.<sup>38</sup> As far as traditional Greco-Roman religion is concerned, it can be shown that it gradually changed in the centuries before Constantine, due to various factors, such as the transition into the global Roman Empire, but also the growing impact of literacy and *Intellektualisierung* on religion, the gradual loss of

<sup>34</sup> M.D. Litwa, ‘Thomas in Alexandria: arguments for locating the Gospel and Book of Thomas in Alexandria’, *JBL* 143 (2024) 163–83; J.N. Bremmer, ‘The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*: date, provenance, readership, education, literacy, and *Sitz im Leben*’, in D. Cielontko et al. (eds), *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Leuven, 2025) 27–52.

<sup>35</sup> See B. Schliesser, ‘Jewish Beginnings: earliest Christianity in Alexandria’, in B. Schliesser et al. (eds), *Alexandria* (Tübingen, 2021) 367–97.

<sup>36</sup> For the inscriptions, see the bibliography above, note 18. The literature on Montanism is voluminous, but, most recently, see P. Lampe and H. Mader (eds), ‘*Montanism*’ in the Roman World: the New Prophecy movement from historical, sociological, and ecclesiological perspectives (Göttingen, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Th.A. Robinson, *Who Were the First Christians? Dismantling the Urban Thesis* (Oxford, 2017); A. Cadwallader et al. (eds), *The Village in Antiquity and the Rise of Early Christianity* (London, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> As noted by Leppin, *The Early Christians*, 370.

interest in or even rejection of sacrifice, changing ideas about the gods and the widening gap in religious practice between local elites and the rest of the population (Ch. 29).

It was Constantine, however, who managed to turn the Roman administration in a lasting Christian direction (Ch. 30). His longevity, the Christian education of his children, but also his generally moderate rule (although there was a shift from recognition to tolerance of non-Christian religions), combined with a stable government, laid the foundations for the development of the Christian hegemony in matters of religion.<sup>39</sup> This led to new religious developments, such as the rise of the ascetic movement as exemplified by Antony the Hermit (Ch. 31),<sup>40</sup> although fragments of traditional religion continued to survive in the more rural areas (Ch. 32).

In the last half-century, the study of Late Antiquity has been completely renewed by the work of Peter Brown.<sup>41</sup> But even Brown stands on the shoulders of his predecessors. One of them was the great Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) who, admittedly, is not one of the giants of the study of the period, but whose contribution is not negligible either. Von Harnack's great love was the beginnings of Christianity, but his interests extended to early Islam (Ch. 33). As such, he was also a forerunner of those scholars who today include early Islam in the study of Late Antiquity, thus transcending an overly Eurocentric view of the period. Indeed, it is this period from Jesus to Muhammad that laid the roots for our ideas of religion and therefore remains a source of inspiration and contestation.<sup>42</sup>

I would like to thank the friendly and efficient staff of Mohr Siebeck, especially Jutta Thumm, for once again making this such a nicely produced book. My thanks also go to ANHIMA (Anthropologie et histoire des mondes antiques: Paris [*Métis*]), Brepols (Turnhout), Brill (Leiden), the Centre for Classical Studies at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague (*Eirene*), De Gruyter (Berlin), Habelt (Bonn), Harrassowitz (Wiesbaden), Peeters (Leuven), Taylor & Francis (London: *Religion*), Universitätsverlag Winter (Heidelberg), the Vergilian Society (*Vergilius*), and Wilhelm Fink (Munich) for their permission to reprint the articles mentioned in the Acknowledgements. As I noted in the prefaces to the previous volumes of my *Collected Essays*, it is impossible to completely redo one's own research of two decades. However, I do not wish to reprint views that I

<sup>39</sup> For a balanced evaluation of Constantine in this respect, see J. Wienand, 'Religiöse Toleranz als politisches Argument. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen zur konstantinischen Wende', in M. Wallraff (ed.), *Religiöse Toleranz: Moderne Ideale im Spiegel antiker Realien* (Berlin and Boston, 2016) 67–100.

<sup>40</sup> See also J.N. Bremmer, 'The City a Desert: the case of Jerome's *Paul the First Hermit*', *ETbL* 97 (2021) 385–409; 'A Moderate Ascetic and Wonder Worker: Hilarion of Gaza', in A. Merkt et al. (eds), *Provokateure, Tabubrüche und Denkabenteuer* (Göttingen, 2023) 65–85 and 'Innovative Reception: the case of Jerome's *Life of Hilarion*', in J. Meister et al. (eds), *Die Spätantike als Rezeptionsepoche* (Basel, 2025), forthcoming.

<sup>41</sup> See his autobiography: P. Brown, *Journeys of the Mind: a life in history* (Princeton, 2023).

<sup>42</sup> See now the fascinating study of A. Merkt, *Die religiöse Verwandlung der Welt. Die Anfänge "moderner" Religion in der Spätantike* (Freiburg, 2024).

no longer support or to provide the reader with outdated references. I have therefore once again updated the bibliography, made a number of minor changes and corrections, occasionally added new evidence, and removed overlaps where possible. Of course, this has not been possible in every case, but I have always tried to bring the volume up to date on the more important issues.

I dedicate this volume to Laura Feldt and Tobias Nicklas, two friends who have been very important to my research since I retired at the end of 2009. Laura has been a constant source of inspiration with her projects on marginality, wilderness and total devotion, projects with which it has been a pleasure to collaborate.<sup>43</sup> Tobias made it possible for me to continue with my research on apocryphal literature, when it was no longer possible in Groningen, and this has resulted in a number of books that we have edited with various other colleagues.<sup>44</sup> As Director General, together with his co-directors Harald Buchinger, Andreas Merkt and Laura Lieber, he has turned the Research Centre ‘Beyond Canon’ at the University of Regensburg into a vibrant meeting place where experienced and beginning scholars, inspired not least by Tobias’ own exemplary studies,<sup>45</sup> do cutting-edge research in the biblical traditions beyond the canon. Having enjoyed the hospitality of these two friends on many occasions, together with my ever supportive wife Christine, I hope that this will continue to be the case in the years to come.

The many debts I have incurred over the years in writing these articles are listed at the end of each chapter. However, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Raphael Brendel. Not only did he read many of the first versions of my articles, but he has (re-)read them all for the book. In the process, he has corrected more typos than I would have liked, forced me to be more precise in a number of places and contributed many references from his unrivalled bibliographical knowledge. There can be no doubt that this book is much better than it would have been without his help!<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See especially L. Feldt and J.N. Bremmer (eds), *Marginality, Media, and Mutations of Religious Authority in the History of Christianity = Studies in the History and Anthropology of Religion* 6 (Leuven, 2019); thematic issues on wilderness and saints in *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 97/3 (2021) and on total devotion in *Religion* 53/1 (2023).

<sup>44</sup> I mention here: *The Ascension of Isaiah* (2016), *Thecla: Paul’s Disciple and Saint in the East and West* (2016), *Figures of Ezra* (2018), *The Protevangelium of James* (2020), *The Apostles Peter, Paul, John, Thomas and Philip with their Companions in Late Antiquity* (2021) and *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (2025), all books in the series *Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha* (Leuven: Peeters).

<sup>45</sup> Most recently, T. Nicklas, *The Canon and Beyond* (Tübingen, 2024) and *Spätantike Apostel-erzählungen* (Tübingen, 2025); T. Nicklas and J. Spittler, *Reading Christian Apocrypha: tradition, interpretation, practice* (Minneapolis, 2025).

<sup>46</sup> I am very grateful to my friends Andreas Bendlin, Raphael Brendel and James Rives for their comments on the Preface.





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## Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>AC</i>	<i>L'Antiquité Classique</i>
<i>AfP</i>	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJPh</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>
<i>ARG</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionsgeschichte</i>
<i>BABesch</i>	<i>Bulletin Antieke Beschaving – Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology</i>
<i>BASP</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists</i>
<i>BBKL</i>	<i>Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon</i>
<i>BCH</i>	<i>Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique</i>
<i>BICS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
Bremmer, <i>MMM</i>	J. N. Bremmer, <i>Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity = Collected Essays I</i> (Tübingen, 2017)
Bremmer, <i>The World</i>	J. N. Bremmer, <i>The World of Greek Religion and Mythology = Collected Essays II</i> (Tübingen, 2019)
<i>C&amp;M</i>	<i>Classica &amp; Mediaevalia</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CGRN</i>	J.-M. Carbon, S. Peels and V. Pirenne-Delforge, <i>A Collection of Greek Ritual Norms</i> (Liège, 2016-) = <a href="http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be/">http://cgrn.ulg.ac.be/</a>
<i>ClAnt</i>	<i>Classical Antiquity</i>
<i>CPh</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CR</i>	<i>Classical Review</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DHA</i>	<i>Dialogues d'Histoire Ancienne</i>
<i>DOP</i>	<i>Dumbarton Oak Papers</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>Epigraphica Anatolica</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Early Christianity</i>
<i>ETbL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>FGrH</i>	F. Jacoby, <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–1958)
<i>G&amp;R</i>	<i>Greece &amp; Rome</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</i>
<i>HR</i>	<i>History of Religions</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology</i>
<i>HTbR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HZ</i>	<i>Historische Zeitschrift</i>

<i>IC</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Creticae</i>
<i>ICS</i>	<i>Illinois Classical Studies</i>
<i>IG</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae</i>
<i>JbAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JDAI</i>	<i>Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>J ECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JHS</i>	<i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>
<i>JLA</i>	<i>Journal of Late Antiquity</i>
<i>JNG</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte</i>
<i>JÖAI</i>	<i>Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Instituts in Wien</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JThS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>LÄ</i>	<i>Lexikon der Ägyptologie</i>
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Les Études Classiques</i>
<i>LIMC</i>	<i>Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae</i> (Zürich and Düsseldorf, 1981–2009)
<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum</i>
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTT</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift / Journal for Theology and the Study of Religion</i>
<i>PIR<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Prosopographia Imperii Romani</i> (Berlin, 1933–2015 <sup>2</sup> )
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart, 1950–)
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Stuttgart, 1884–1973)
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
<i>RFIC</i>	<i>Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica</i>
<i>RbM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
<i>RPh</i>	<i>Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>RRE</i>	<i>Religion in the Roman Empire</i>

<i>SCI</i>	<i>Scripta Classica Israelica</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i>
<i>SMEA</i>	<i>Studi Micenei and Egeo-Anatolici</i>
<i>SMSR</i>	<i>Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni</i>
<i>SO</i>	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
<i>TAM</i>	<i>Tituli Asiae Minoris</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>ThesCRA</i>	<i>Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum</i> (Los Angeles, 2004–2012)
<i>ThLL</i>	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</i>
<i>VigChris</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>WJA</i>	<i>Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>WS</i>	<i>Wiener Studien</i>
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity</i>
<i>ZfR</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>ZKTh</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZRGG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte</i>
<i>ZThK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>





*Section I*

Jews and Judaism



## Chapter 1

### Spartans and Jews: Abrahamic Cousins?

The connections between the Spartans and the Jews,<sup>1</sup> authentic or not, have often been analysed,<sup>2</sup> but in this chapter I will confine myself to the more recent literature, in particular the studies by Arnaldo Momigliano (1908–1987), Erich Gruen and Christopher Jones.<sup>3</sup> No new documents have come to light since the debate on the relationship began in the eighteenth century,<sup>4</sup> and the results of my discussion are in the nature of a synthesis of existing knowledge rather than an entirely new approach.

Our earliest, if indirect, source is Hecataeus of Abdera's treatise *On Egypt*, which is also the oldest surviving work on the Jews in Greek literature, although they were already known in Peripatetic circles.<sup>5</sup> Hecataeus probably wrote his work on Egypt around 315 BC.<sup>6</sup> Jews had been in Egypt for many centuries, but after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great and the consolidation of Ptolemy's power there was a great influx of Jewish immigrants, military and otherwise. Hecataeus, who came to Egypt in the wake of Ptolemy, must soon have met some of these Jews in Alexandria. They will have stood out in the Egyptian society as people who were clearly non-Egyptian and non-Greek.<sup>7</sup> Shaye Cohen has asked the question: 'How do you know a Jew in antiquity when you see one?'. The answer would surely have varied according to geography, but it is clear from papyri

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<sup>1</sup> For the problem of whether to write Judeans or Jews, see this volume, Chapter 4.1. I have retained my original writing of Jews in this chapter, as the religious aspect is obviously important here, but in some cases 'Judean' would probably be more appropriate.

<sup>2</sup> For the older literature see the bibliography in R. Katzoff, 'Jonathan and Late Sparta', *AJPh* 106 (1985) 485–9 at 485 note 1, updated in id., *On Jews in the Roman World* (Tübingen, 2019) 288 note 1; add C. Orrieux, 'La "parenté" entre Juifs et Spartiates', in R. Lonis (ed.), *L'étranger dans le monde grec* (Nancy, 1988) 169–91.

<sup>3</sup> A. Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom* (Cambridge, 1975); E. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1998) 253–68, which is rather similar to his *The Construct of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism* (Berlin and Boston, 2016) 153–66; C. P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge MA, 1999) 73–79.

<sup>4</sup> P. E. Jablonski, *Opuscula III* (Leiden, 1810) 261–86 ('De Lacedaemoniorum cum Iudaeis cognatione', 1744').

<sup>5</sup> F. Dirlmeier, review of Jaeger (note 11), *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 59 (1938) 1830–36 at 1836. For Hecataeus, see J. Campos Daroca and P. P. Fuentes González, '(no.) 12 Hécatee d'Abdère', in R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques III* (Paris, 2000) 505–25; W. Ruppenthal Neto, 'O relato de Hecateu de Abdera sobre os judeus', *Hypnos* 41 (2018) 166–92.

<sup>6</sup> P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria*, 3 vols (Oxford, 1972) 2.719–20.

<sup>7</sup> See also this volume, Chapter 3.

that Jews in Egypt were often described as ‘honey-coloured’,<sup>8</sup> which is not surprising since the Egyptians themselves were not infrequently of a darker complexion.<sup>9</sup>

However, Hecataeus did not single out physical differences or describe what he saw in Egypt, but concentrated more on the situation in Palestine than in Egypt. In his discussion, which has come down to us in an excerpt by Diodorus Siculus (40.3),<sup>10</sup> he describes how the Jews had been thrown out of Egypt, but had reorganised themselves in Palestine under the leadership of Moses to whose wisdom and courage he attributes the present state of the country and its legislation. For our purposes the most interesting notice is the following:

The lawgiver (Moses) laid down many rules about military training, making the young practise courage, endurance, in short bear every kind of hardship. He also led expeditions against the neighbouring tribes and divided the large amount of land he had won into allotments. He gave lots of equal size to ordinary persons, but larger ones to the priests, so that they might enjoy larger incomes, and thus perform the service of God without cessation or distraction. Ordinary persons were forbidden to sell their own lots, in any case anybody was led by greed to buy lots, oppress the poor, and cause depopulation (Diod. Sic. 40.30.6–7, tr. Jones, slightly adapted)

The features noted strongly suggest the situation in Sparta, even if its name is not mentioned. This similarity cannot be chance and has often been noted,<sup>11</sup> but the reason for this comparison has insufficiently been thought through until now. Hecataeus’ source about the Jews must have been twofold. On the one hand, we can see the influence of Egyptians, probably priests,<sup>12</sup> who are responsible for the beginning of Hecataeus’ report, in which he relates the Jewish expulsion from Egypt. On the other, there must have been Jews with a much more sympathetic take on their past. This is clear from the fact that Hecataeus can even quote the Torah, as he says at the end of his excursus: ‘At the end of their Laws there is even written that Moses spoke these words to the Jews having heard them from God’ (Diod. Sic. 40.3.6). The quote is not literal, although it seems to echo Deuteronomy (29.1), but it is hard to imagine an Egyptian priest coming up with these words.

<sup>8</sup> S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1999) 29–30.

<sup>9</sup> For the (dark) colour of the Egyptians see A. Cameron, *Callimachus and His Critics* (Princeton, 1995) 233–36; J. den Boeft *et al.*, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXII* (Groningen, 1995) 310; S. Walker and M. Bierbrier, *Ancient Faces. Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt* (London, 1997); T. Samuels, ‘Herodotus and the Black Body: a critical race theory analysis’, *Journal of Black Studies* 46/7 (2015) 723–41.

<sup>10</sup> Sometimes we can supplement Diodorus’ excerpt. For example, Theophrastus (F 584A Fortenbaugh = Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.26) seems to have derived his information about Jewish sacrificial practice from Hecataeus, cf. W. Jaeger, *Diokles von Karystos* (Berlin, 1938) 134–53, although this is contested by Dirlmeier (note 5).

<sup>11</sup> For example: M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (Tübingen, 1973<sup>2</sup>) 465 (hesitatingly); Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 84; Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 261: ‘the parallel ... seems quite incontestable’; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 73–74; K. Berthelot, ‘A New Perspective on the Kinship between Jews and Spartans: the issue of ancestral territory’, in R. Brody *et al.* (eds), *A Vision of the Days: studies in early Jewish history and historiography in honor of Daniel R. Schwartz* (Leiden, 2024) 359–75 at 365.

<sup>12</sup> Jacoby on Hecataeus *FGrH* 264 F 6 (p. 50).

In passing, we may also note that we have here one of the earliest passages in post-Alexander the Great literature where the Pentateuch is referred to as a whole. On the basis of a comparison of the Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira 39.1–3 and the Prologue to the same book, Arie van der Kooij has noted a tripartite division of ‘the Law, the prophets and the other books of our ancestors’ at that time,<sup>13</sup> but our passage already suggests the existence of the Pentateuch as a separate whole in the late fourth century BC. Momigliano even thought that ‘a pre-Septuagint translation of some sections of the Torah is not altogether incredible’,<sup>14</sup> but to presuppose such translations within a good two decades after Alexandria’s foundation is hardly believable.

The earliest Alexandrian Jews must soon have faced the problem of how to explain and to justify their different lifestyle, religious and secular. Hecataeus’ words that Moses ‘as a result of their own expulsion (*xenêlasian*) had introduced a way of life that was somewhat unsocial (*apanthrôpon tina*) and xenophobic (*misoxenon*)’ (Diod. Sic. 40.3.4) show that even at a very early stage of Alexandrian life the Jews had to counter Greek accusations that they did not mix with other people and kept themselves separate. To defend themselves, they seem to have developed the interesting strategy of comparing their way of life to that of the Spartans. Not only did the latter also have a famous lawgiver, Lycurgus,<sup>15</sup> but they were also known in Greece as people who did not like foreigners and even expelled them.<sup>16</sup> By comparing themselves to the xenophobic but illustrious Spartans, the Jews thus cleverly, albeit clearly not always successfully, sought to legitimise their own particular way of life. From Hecataeus’ description of Moses’ military training, we can even conclude that some Jews must have gone quite far in elaborating the comparison, though from a historical point of view clearly much too far.

Yet the comparison must have been successful and was probably sustained by continuing Greek charges of misanthropy against the Jews. At least this conclusion is hardly avoidable from the notice in 2 Macc 5.9 that the high-priest Jason (175–172 BC), after unsuccessful attempts at finding refuge among the Nabataeans and Egyptians, finally took ship to Sparta ‘because of their kinship (*syngeneian*)’ and seems to have perished during this journey. We cannot be hundred percent certain that the words quoted were already in the source of our present text, the original by Jason of Cyrene which was probably written in the 150s BC, but it seems not implausible. Martin Hengel (1926–2009), followed by Christian Habicht (1926–2018) in his much praised translation and commentary on 2 Macc, suggests

<sup>13</sup> A. van der Kooij, ‘The Canonization of Ancient Books Kept in the Temple of Jerusalem’, in id. and K. van der Toorn (eds), *Canonization and Decanonization* (Leiden, 1998) 17–40 and ‘Canonization of Ancient Hebrew Books and Hasmonean Politics’, in J.-M. Auwers and H. J. de Jonge (eds), *The Biblical Canons* (Leuven, 2003) 27–38.

<sup>14</sup> Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> For Moses as lawgiver see especially D. Timpe, ‘Moses als Gesetzgeber’, *Saeculum* 21 (1980) 66–77.

<sup>16</sup> All sources for Spartan *xenêlasia*: T. Figueira, ‘*Xenelasia* and Social Control in Classical Sparta’, *CQ* 53 (2003) 44–74 at 45 note 6.

that the legend only originated in the time of Jason and in the circles of *Reform-judentum*,<sup>17</sup> but this is improbable in the light of our discussion. Anyway, if the legend would have been of such recent origin, Jason would have hardly taken it that seriously. The fact that his successor as high priest was called Menelaus (171-c.161 BC), the name of the mythological king of Sparta during the Trojan War, is probably another indication of the legend.<sup>18</sup>

Our next testimonies are three letters in 1 Macc, a book that is to be dated to the decades around 100 BC,<sup>19</sup> and I will discuss them in their chronological order. The oldest two letters occur in Chapter 12 in connection with an embassy, consisting of Numenius and Antipater (12.16), sent by Jonathan (161–143 BC) around 143 BC to the Romans and Spartans. The names of the ambassadors are indicative of the early process of hellenisation of Palestine.<sup>20</sup> Antipater is a typically Macedonian name, inspired by Alexander the Great's first successor, Antipater.<sup>21</sup> Numenius, on the other hand, was equally a proper Greek name, inspired by the celebration of the new moon, but also a Greek name borne by many Syrians and Phoenicians, where it translates the epichoric name (Ben-)Chodesch.<sup>22</sup> As we also find the name Chodesh in 1 Chron (8.9), a similar process seems to have taken place in Palestine.

Immediately following the text of the letter that Jonathan purportedly sent to the Spartans, we find a letter from the Spartan king Areus. The letter is also quoted by Josephus who not only adapts the style to the phraseology of a genuine Greek letter,<sup>23</sup> but also adds a new end.<sup>24</sup> I will give here first the text as we find it in 1 Macc and add the Josephan end:

To Onias the high priest, Areus, king of the Spartans, greeting. It has been found in a document concerning the Spartans and the Jews that they are brothers and that they are of the stock (*genos*) of Abraham. Now that we know these things, you will do well to write us concerning your peace. We in turn write to you: your livestock and your belongings are ours, and ours are yours. We therefore command that they (the letter-carriers) apprise you concerning these things (1 Macc 12.19–23). Demoteles the letter-carrier will transmit this letter. The writing is square: the seal is an eagle clutching a serpent (Jos. *AJ.* 12.227, tr. Jones).

<sup>17</sup> Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 134, 410 note 682; C. Habicht, 2. *Makkabäerbuch* (Gütersloh, 1976) 226 note 9a, who rightly rejects the idea that Jason's last journey points to the existence of a Jewish colony in Sparta, as Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 89 still seems to accept.

<sup>18</sup> So, persuasively, Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 139; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Gruen, *Heritage*, 265 ('probably at the end of the second century BCE'); K. Berthelot, *In Search of the Promised Land?* (Göttingen, 2018) 68–71.

<sup>20</sup> For early Greek names among the Jews see also Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 118–20, 139.

<sup>21</sup> T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen, 2002) 264–65.

<sup>22</sup> O. Masson, *Onomastica Graeca Selecta III* (Geneva, 2000) 173–4, overlooked by Ilan, *Lexicon*, 300.

<sup>23</sup> T. Nisula, "'Time Has Passed Since You Sent Your Letter': letter phraseology in 1 and 2 Maccabees", *J. Stud. Pseudepigr.* 14 (2005) 201–22 at 212–5.

<sup>24</sup> For a useful juxtaposition of letters from 1 Maccabees in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, but with a superficial analysis, see F. Francis, 'The Parallel Letters of Josephus' *Antiquities* and 1 Maccabees', in id. and R. Wallace (eds), *Tradition as Openness to the Future* (Lanham, New York, London, 1984) 161–74.

The protagonists of this letter are the Spartan king Areus (309/8–265) and, probably, the high priest Onias I. Gruen considers Onias II more likely, but the negative picture of the latter in Josephus (*AJ* 12.157–67) makes this less plausible.<sup>25</sup> In any case, it is beyond any reasonable doubt that this letter is not authentic.<sup>26</sup> First, there are the typical Semitic formulations of putting the name of the recipient first (20),<sup>27</sup> of asking after somebody's peace (22: Gen. 37.14, 43.27; Ex 18.7 etc.) and the offering of the livestock (23: 1 Kg 22.4, 2 Kg 3.7), as if Sparta was still a nomadic society, like Israel at the times of Abraham. Second, it is unthinkable that a Spartan king would have claimed to be a descendant of Abraham. The lack of authenticity is confirmed, somewhat paradoxically, by Josephus' end. As Cardauns has well noted, such detailed information is not evidence of authenticity but of forgery. Moreover, the letter-carrier with his Spartan name and several expressions of Josephus are taken straight from Xenophon (*Hell.* 7.1.32, 39).<sup>28</sup> Even the motif of the serpent-clutching eagle is probably derived from Greece, although it has also been found on the lintels of synagogues in the Golan.<sup>29</sup>

However, there is a significant difference between Areus' letter in 1 Macc and Josephus that has not received the attention it deserves. In the Maccabean version Areus claims to have read in a document, which is of course not specified, that Spartans and Jews both have Abraham as their ancestor. Naturally, the forger could not let Areus say that this was traditional knowledge, but Areus' lack of surprise at suddenly finding a new ancestor is rather striking; participants in modern television programs such as 'Who do you think you are?' would not get away with such a diffident attitude! Yet his belonging to Abraham's *genos* perfectly fits the notice that Jason sailed to Sparta because of their *syngeneia*. This clearly was the current legend among the Jewish upper-class in the first half of the second century BC. Josephus, however, speaks of an intimate relationship (*oikeiotês*: *AJ* 10.226). In the Greek world both terms, *syngeneia* and *oikeiotês*, denoted relationships between cities or peoples. However, *syngeneia* was used in the case of

<sup>25</sup> Areus: G. Marasco, *Sparta agli inizi dell'età ellenistica: il regno di Areo I* (Florence, 1980); P. Cartledge and A. J. Spawforth, *Hellenistic and Roman Sparta* (London, 1989) 28–37; Gruen, *Heritage*, 254–6. Onias I/II: Gruen, *Heritage*, 254 note 32 and the detailed discussion by J. Vanderkam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis, 2004) 124–37, with an unconvincing discussion of Areus' letter.

<sup>26</sup> The best analysis is by B. Cardauns, 'Juden und Spartaner', *Hermes* 95 (1967) 317–24 at 317–19, with previous bibliography. U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Hellenistische Dichtung in der Zeit des Kallimachos*, 2 vols (Berlin, 1924) 1.43 note 1, already noted: 'eine freche Fälschung'; this negative judgment is not refuted by O. Amitay, 'The Correspondence in I Maccabees and the Possible Origins of the Judeo-Spartan Connection', *SCI* 32 (2013) 79–105, who unconvincingly argues their authenticity.

<sup>27</sup> This is well observed by J. Goldstein, *I Maccabees* (New York, 1976) 460, who refers to J. A. Fitzmeyer, 'Some Notes on Aramaic Epistolography', *JBL* 93 (1974) 201–25 at 211.

<sup>28</sup> Cardauns, 'Juden und Spartaner', 319; the connection with Xenophon had already been noted by F.-M. Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabées* (Paris, 1949) 222.

<sup>29</sup> M. Schmidt, 'Adler und Schlange. Ein griechisches Bildzeichen für die Dimension der Zukunft', *Boreas* 6 (1983) 61–71; Y. Turnheim, 'The Eagle and the Snake on Synagogue Lintels in the Golan', *Rivista di Archeologia* 24 (2000) 106–13.



blood relationship or common ancestry, whereas *oikeiotês* indicated just close relationships.<sup>30</sup> Josephus clearly lived in a different world from Jason and Cleodemus, and he knew it. In his time, claims of *syngeneia* would no longer be acceptable, and that is why he, much more subtly, opted for the Greek term *oikeiotês*.

Let us now move on to the second letter. Given that Areus' letter is a fake, albeit an interesting one, any letter that refers to it must by necessity be suspect too. Is this also the case with Jonathan's letter? Let us take a closer look:

Jonathan the high priest, the senate of the nation,<sup>31</sup> the priests, and the remaining Jewish people to their brothers the Spartans, greeting. Already in time past a letter was sent to Onias the high priest from Areus, your king, that you are our brothers, as the appended copy shows. Onias welcomed the envoy with honour, and received the letter, which contained a clear declaration of alliance and friendship. Therefore, though we have no need of such relations, since we have as encouragement the holy books which are in our hands, we have endeavoured to send this letter to renew our brotherhood and friendship with you, so that we may not become alienated from you, for it is a long time ago since you sent your letter to us. We therefore remember you constantly on every occasion, both at our feasts and the other appropriate days, at the sacrifices which we offer and in our prayers, as it is right and proper to remember brothers. And we rejoice at your glory. But as for ourselves, many afflictions and many wars have encircled us and the kings around us have made war against us. We did not want to annoy you, the other allies and our friends in these wars, for we have the help from heaven coming to our aid, and we were rescued from our enemies, and our enemies were humbled. We therefore have chosen Numenius the son of Antiochus and Antipater the son of Jason, and have sent them to Rome to renew the former friendship and alliance with them. We have commanded them to go also to you, to greet you and deliver to you this letter from us concerning the renewal and our brotherhood. And now we would very much appreciate it if you send us a reply to this (1 Macc 12.6–18).

As with his report of the letter of Areus, Josephus supplies us with a version that is much more like the decrees of Greek cities in the Hellenistic period and does not contain embarrassing sentences (*AJ* 13.166–70). However, unlike Christopher Jones, I would not conclude from this more tactful composition that Josephus' version is more authentic.<sup>32</sup> As with the letter of Areus, he was just better informed and more sensitive to the world around him.

In fact, as especially Gruen has argued, the idea that the Jews would have any advantage by approaching Sparta around that time, is hard to sustain.<sup>33</sup> It is also difficult to imagine that the author of 1 Macc would have concentrated on the Spartans only and not mentioned anything from the letter to the Romans, if both letters would

<sup>30</sup> For the terms, see Ed. Will, 'Syngeneia, oikeiotês, philia', *RPh* 69 (1995) 299–325; O. Curty, 'La parenté légendaire à l'époque hellénistique: précisions méthodologiques', *Kernos* 12 (1999) 167–94 and 'Les parentés entre cités chez Polybe, Strabon, Plutarque et Pausanias', in V. Fromentin and S. Gotteland (eds), *Origines gentium* (Paris, 2001) 49–56; D. Musti, 'La "syngeneia" e la "oikeiotês": sinonimi o nuances?', in M. G. Angeli Bertinelli and L. Piccirilli (eds), *Antiqua et mediaevalia. 4. Linguaggio e terminologia diplomatica dall'Antico Oriente all'Impero Bizantino* (Rome, 2001) 43–63.

<sup>31</sup> On the *gerousia* see Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, 48–51.

<sup>32</sup> Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 77–79.

<sup>33</sup> Gruen, *Heritage*, 257–58.

have been available in the Jerusalem archives. Moreover, the letter is puzzling from a practical point of view, as Jonathan does not require any specific help, is patently insincere, as it is hard to imagine that the Jews would remember the Spartans during their sacrifices and festivals, and demonstrates a lack of awareness of the Spartan position after the Roman destruction of Corinth in 146 BC.<sup>34</sup> Finally, the letter is couched in terms that clearly go far beyond what was possible in contemporary diplomatic relations. Surely, if one wants good diplomatic contacts, the last thing to write is: we do not need your help for we have a much better, supernatural ally.

A noteworthy passage in the letter is that Jonathan claims that the Jews have *hagia biblia*, 'holy books', to encourage them (1 Macc. 12.9). The combination of *hagia* with *biblia* is unique and not found in earlier Greek literature. Like the translators of the Septuagint,<sup>35</sup> the author of 1 Macc clearly avoided the term *hieros*, which reminded him probably too much of the Greek cultic usage, whereas the much rarer *hagios* has more the connotations of 'pre-eminently respectable' and 'ancient'.<sup>36</sup> But which books were they? According to 1 Maccabees (3.48), before a decisive battle during the war against Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Jews under Judas the Maccabee 'unrolled the Book of the Law' in order to inquire about the outcome of the battle, and in 2 Maccabees (8.23), Judas publicly read 'the Holy Book' and gave out as watchword 'God is my help'.<sup>37</sup> The latter words frequently recur in 1 and 2 Maccabees and will have been Judas' battle cry,<sup>38</sup> a reflection of which we also find in our letter's 'for we have the help from heaven coming to our aid' (12.15). The main focus of the Maccabees clearly was the Pentateuch, and we may presuppose these books also in our case. Although at that time the Pentateuch was already called the 'Holy Book', there has not yet been found a single scroll containing all the five books of Moses, the exceptions perhaps (but not certainly) being 4Q365, which contains fragments of all five books of the Pentateuch, and Mur 1, which contains fragments from Genesis, Exodus and Numbers.<sup>39</sup> If such scrolls did indeed exist, the scroll(s) of the Pentateuch that was taken from the Temple by the Romans may well have been one too. The fact that it was displayed at the triumphal procession of Vespasian and Titus as well as afterwards kept in the imperial palace itself, together with the purple hangings of the Temple, surely suggests a very special scroll.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> J. R. Bartlett, *1 Maccabees* (Sheffield, 1998) 96.

<sup>35</sup> The exceptions are Jos 6.8 and Dan 1.2.

<sup>36</sup> J. Nuchelmans, 'A propos de *hagios* avant l'époque hellénistique', in A. Bastiaensen *et al.* (eds), *Fructus centesimus. Mélanges G. J. M. Bartelink* (Steenbrugge and Dordrecht, 1989) 239–58.

<sup>37</sup> The exact text of the verse is debated, but the expression 'Holy Book' is not in doubt, cf. Habicht *ad loc.*

<sup>38</sup> J. T. Nelis, *I Makkabeeën uit de grondtekst vertaald en uitgelegd* (Roermond, 1972) 214 compares 1 Macc 3.18–22, 4.8–11; 16.3; 2 Macc 8.20, 23, 35; 12.11; 13.13; 15.8, 35; Habicht, on 2 Macc 8.23, also compares 1QM IV 13 (the War Scroll).

<sup>39</sup> E. Tov, *Scribal Practices and Approaches Reflected in the Texts Found in the Judean Desert* (Leiden, 2004) 74–79.

<sup>40</sup> Jos. BJ 7.121–57, 162.

What about the third letter? According to the author of 1 Macc (14.16), the Romans and ‘even the Spartans’ were highly distressed when they heard about Jonathan’s death. Once again, the mention of Sparta looks like an afterthought, as the place in the sentence indicates and the fact that the verbs in the next two verses regard only the Romans.<sup>41</sup> In fact, after mentioning the letter the Romans sent on brass tablets to renew the friendship and alliance with the Jews, which in itself is a pretty improbable detail, the transition to the letter of the Spartans is rather abrupt:

And this is a copy of the letter which the Spartans sent: ‘The magistrates and the city of the Spartans to Simon the high priest, the elders, the priests and the rest of the Jewish people, our brothers, greeting. The envoys who were sent to our people have told us about your glory and honour, and we rejoiced at their coming. And what they said in the councils of the people we have recorded as follows: “Numenius the son of Antiochus and Antipater the son of Jason, envoys of the Jews, came to us to renew their friendship with us. It has pleased the people to receive these men with honour and to place a copy of their words in the State Archives, so that the people of the Spartans may have a record of them”. And they have sent a copy of this to Simon the high priest’ (1 Macc 14.20–23).

Although some scholars still seem inclined to accept the authenticity of this letter,<sup>42</sup> this is rather unlikely: when the two earlier letters are not authentic, the third one can hardly be authentic either, as Gruen reasonably observes.<sup>43</sup> And indeed, there are several questionable expressions in the letter. Although the letter mentions the envoys of Jonathan, the letter is addressed to Simon. Goldstein suggests that a private Jewish traveller reported the news of Jonathan’s execution while the envoys were in Sparta, but this ingenious suggestion clearly constitutes special pleading, just as his earlier, rather fantastic suggestion that Areus employed an Aramaic scribe to translate his letter into Aramaic.<sup>44</sup> The suggestion also passes over the fact that the vocabulary of the letter does not look Spartan at all and does not contain any specific Spartan expression. Moreover, the Greek is sometimes rather convoluted and employs typically Jewish-Greek expressions.<sup>45</sup> To start with, the combination of *archontes* and *polis* (20) is unique for Sparta, where we would expect mention of the ephors, but the combination does occur in early second-century Seleucid royal letters.<sup>46</sup> The same is true for the combination ‘glory and honour’ (21), which we find from the middle of the third century BC onwards in Seleucid royal letters.<sup>47</sup> Jewish influence can be seen in the term used for the high

<sup>41</sup> See also the commentaries of Nelis and Schunck *ad loc.*

<sup>42</sup> Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom*, 113–14; Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 78.

<sup>43</sup> Gruen, *Heritage*, 258–59.

<sup>44</sup> Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 456–7 (Aramaic scribe), 492 (traveller).

<sup>45</sup> See especially the commentary of Nelis *ad loc.*

<sup>46</sup> Compare C. B. Welles, *Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period* (New Haven, 1934) no. 43.2 (Nysa: early second century BC); 45.2 (Pieria: 186 BC), no. 75.1 (Susa: AD 21 = F. Canali de Rossi, *Iscrizioni dello Estremo Oriente Greco* (Bonn, 2004) no. 218.2).

<sup>47</sup> Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, no. 15.12 (after 261 BC: Erythrae = *I. Erythrae* 31.11); 42.6 (ca. 196 BC: Ilion = *I. Ilion* 37.6); 44.19–20 (189 BC: Daphne); 52.37 (167/6 BC: Miletus = *I. Miletus* 306.1b.37); note also *I. Ilion* 32.33 (decree for Antiochus I: ca. 280 BC).

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