

## The Jewish Diaspora of the Graeco-Roman Period

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*The Cambridge History of Judaism* vol.2: The Hellenistic Age, edd. W.D. Davies and Louis Finkelstein, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. xvii + 738.

*Diaspora Jews and Judaism. Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel*, edd. J. Andrew Overman and Robert S. MacLennan, *South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism* 41, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992, pp. xvii + 368.

William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt, with an Index of the Jewish Inscriptions of Egypt ad Cyrenaica*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, pp. xxiv + 378.

Pieter van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991, pp. 179.

Joseph Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *Les Juifs d'Égypte*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1991, pp. 216.

Paul R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. xvi + 330.

### I

The books under review are only six of the many which have recently come out and deal, declaratively and explicitly, with the “Jewish Diaspora” of the Graeco-Roman period. The new volume of *CHJ*, which appeared 15 years after its articles were written,<sup>1</sup> contains an article by H. Hegermann specifically on “The Diaspora in the Hellenistic Age” (115-66), and the other 17 articles in the volume were commissioned and written according to standard dichotomies: Palestine/Diaspora, Greek/Semitic, politics/religion. Since the volume was first conceived, these last two dichotomies have come under increasing scrutiny and methodological challenge; the first has not.<sup>2</sup> A.T. Kraabel, the honorand of *Diaspora Jews and Judaism*, has devoted his career to the evaluation of “questionable assumptions”<sup>3</sup> about the “Jewish Diaspora” — starting and ending, it seems, in Asia Minor, particularly Sardis — and the outdated appearance of *CHJ* II is partly due to the authors’ inability to consider his challenge to the views that Diaspora Jews were syncretistic, zeal-

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<sup>1</sup> One of the main editors and six of eight advisory editors are no longer alive.

<sup>2</sup> Practically the only discomfort with conventional categories is shown by M. Delcor in his chapter on the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, pp. 409-503.

<sup>3</sup> From the title of one of his best-known essays, leading off this collection (1-20). Let it be said that this is a strange sort of *Festschrift*, of which almost half consists of reprints of articles written by the honorand (who also contributed the Afterword), three pieces by other hands are also reprints, and some of the remaining articles are questionably “in dialogue with” Kraabel. One piece, “The Diaspora in the Modern Study of Judaism”, by J. Andrew Overman (63-78), seems to be a systematic refutation of Kraabel’s work — from which Kraabel emerges unscathed, in my opinion. Limitations of space and patience have prevented full discussion here of every piece in the collection.

ous missionaries, self-conscious aliens and lower class, and that the strongest element in their identity was religious. Yet Kraabel has unexamined assumptions of his own, primarily that Jews and Judaism differed markedly between the “Diaspora” (however diverse) and Palestine (the borders of which he does not inquire into). He has never brought his “lapidary questions” (in the words of the laudatory preface) to bear on the existence of the phenomenon of the Diaspora itself (cf. esp. pp. 15 and 58). The unexamined consensual view of “Diaspora”<sup>4</sup> also characterizes the more narrowly focused regional studies by Trebilco and Méléze-Modrzejewski, van der Horst’s handbook on Jewish epitaphs and, to a far lesser extent, the invaluable new corpus of Egyptian Jewish inscriptions by Horbury and Noy (= *JIGRE*).

The reasons for this surge of interest in the Jewish Diaspora of antiquity — whether intrinsic to the historical material, or retrojected from more contemporary concerns or insights — shall be the task of the next generation to decide. We should wonder, however, whether any term can be useful if applied indiscriminately to Jews as far apart as Babylonia and Spain. One would be hard pressed to find either a concrete definition among ancient Jewish authors of the borders of the land from which Israel was dispersed<sup>5</sup> — that is, who exactly was a “Diaspora Jew”, although many identified themselves as such — or a conventional, universal understanding of the world-wide dispersion. Moreover, evidence for any ancient notion of “Diaspora”, factual or theoretical, actually affected behavior is just as sparse. Neither the word *διασπορά* nor any other general expression was used by Jewish authors writing in Greek. Christian authors, relying on the appearance of the word *διασπορά* in the same Greek Bible that had been available to their Jewish predecessors, are the first to start using the term regularly for the dispersion of the Jews, with obvious theological tendencies.<sup>6</sup>

The modern assumption is similar to the early Christian one: everything outside “Palestine” or “the Holy Land” or “Eretz-Israel” was “Diaspora”, and Jews in the Diaspora lands can be spoken of as a single entity because they experienced similar problems of inferior political (and usually social) status, threats of both assimilation and open hostility from non-Jewish culture, and so forth. Trebilco, for instance, asserts that the Jews

<sup>4</sup> In addition to the standard handbooks representative of the consensus, non-Hebrew readers may be interested to know about the collection of articles, *The Diaspora in the Hellenistic Roman World*, edd. M. Stern and Z. Baras (Jerusalem 1983). See now the investigation (worked up from papers discovered after van Unnik’s death) of the ancient understanding of “Diaspora”, W.C. van Unnik, *Das Selbstverständnis der jüdischen Diaspora in der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit*, ed. P.W. van der Horst (Leiden 1993), which arrived too late to be included in this review.

<sup>5</sup> Research devoted to the borders and settlements of “Eretz Israel” in the Graeco-Roman period has more often than not been ideologically motivated — from the nineteenth-century European explorers who arrived in the Holy Land with Bible and Josephus in hand, to the more modern researchers of historical geography trying to answer modern political questions with history. W.D. Davies, for example, brought out a new edition of his *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism* (1991) “because of the mounting need to understand its theme in the light of events in the Middle East culminating in the Gulf War and its aftermath” (xiii). For more serious history, D. Mendels, *The Land of Israel as a Political Concept in Hasmonean Literature* (Tübingen 1987). See also Z. Safrai, *Borders and Government in Eretz-Israel in the Mishnaic and Talmudic Periods* (Tel Aviv 1980) [Hebrew].

<sup>6</sup> See van der Horst’s appendix in van Unnik (above, n. 4). Interestingly, the Septuagint first uses the word *diaspora* in a *mistranslation* of the Hebrew text of Deut. 28:25; cf. also Jer. 15:7 and Ps. 147:2; there is a significant resonance in John 7:35; and see Kraabel’s remarks on a related matter, 16-20.

whom Antiochus III moved from Babylonia to Asia Minor at the end of the third century “would not have found the issues which faced them in Lydia and Phrygia (such as their remoteness from Jerusalem, the need to adjust to life in a pagan land and matters of internal organisation) as difficult as new settlers from Palestine would have” (p. 6, cf. also 38). But ancient Palestine was not the modern state of Israel. Aside from the relatively brief interludes of the Hasmonean kingdom and the revolutionary Jewish state of 66-70 CE, the entire area was controlled by powerful empires or their clients; “citizenship” and civic rights were as complicated an issue in the traditional Jewish homeland as in the rest of the Mediterranean. Physical closeness to Jerusalem was less important after 70 CE, and even before that event some Jewish groups chose deliberately to live at a distance from the capital; furthermore, in some areas of Palestine, the Jewish population was much thinner than, for example, in the Jewish quarters of Rome, where at least 11 synagogues are known by name,<sup>7</sup> and Alexandria, where the Jews were concentrated into certain quarters.<sup>8</sup> And it has long been known that Hellenistic and Roman culture and religion were pervasive in the traditional Jewish homeland.<sup>9</sup>

Josephus<sup>10</sup> does not talk about the Jews outside Israel as an institution, and he would probably have thought that Jews living in Syria or Egypt had more in common with their co-religionists in Galilee than those living in distant Spain. Moreover, there is little sign in Josephus’ voluminous writings of a theological understanding of exile and dispersion.<sup>11</sup> The repeated biblical promise of ingathering and the gift of the land as a reward for piety is absent (cf. *AJ* 2.212-13), most conspicuously from the narratives of the Patriarchs and Sinai. Deuteronomy’s threat of dispersion, the prophets’ messianic expostulations, as well as the land’s special status in Jewish law, are also missing. In fact, Josephus seems to make an effort to justify the existence of the Diaspora. In an interesting reversal, Balaam, “overwhelmed by the divine spirit”, is made to say in his first prophecy: “the land shall be subject forever to your children, and shall the earth and sea be filled with their fame; you shall suffice for the world, to furnish every land with inhabitants sprung from your race. ... those numbers now are small and shall be contained by the land of Canaan; but know that the habitable world lies before you as an eternal habitation, and your multitudes shall find abode on islands and continent, more numerous even than the stars in heaven” (*AJ* 4.115-16). There is no sign of these ideas in the biblical text, which reads: “it is a people that dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations” (*Num.* 23:9). Thus Josephus propounded the view, found nowhere in the Bible, that the Jews’ reward for good behavior would be to possess the promised land *and* flourish among the nations. It is impossible, and therefore immaterial, to know whether this was his true belief, or one expressed out of political considerations.

<sup>7</sup> See see Philo, *Leg.* 23.155 and H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia 1960), c. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Philo, *Leg.* 132, *Flacc.* 55; *Sukk.* 51b and parallels; *Jos.*, *BJ* 2.495; *CPJ* 2.194, 200, 209, 213.

<sup>9</sup> As several articles in *CHJ* II rather over-emphasize, being too heavily influenced, as most work was in the 1970s, by Hengel, whose two contributions to the volume later became chapters in his *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians* (London 1980). For a corrective, F. Millar, “The Background to the Maccabean Revolution: Reflections on Martin Hengel’s ‘Judaism and Hellenism’”, *JJS* 29 (1978), 1-21.

<sup>10</sup> What follows is only a sketch, without any pretense to thoroughness, of a topic to be further explored, or at least taken into consideration by the ever-increasing number of historians studying the “Jewish Diaspora”.

<sup>11</sup> B. Halpern Amaru, “Land Theology in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*”, *JQR* 71 (1981), 201-29, esp. 223 on *AJ* 8.296-7.

Similarly, no longing for return to the promised land can be found in Philo, who typically allegorizes the land — given and promised — into knowledge of God and Greek virtues.<sup>12</sup> Thus “wise Abraham” receives a promise of land from God, “not meaning a piece of land, but rather the better part in ourselves” (*De Somnis* 255). And the divine promise of the entire land of Canaan as an “eternal possession” in Gen. 17:8 is interpreted by Philo to mean occupation (temporary!) of the body by the soul: “The mind of the virtuous man is a sojourner in its corporeal place rather than an inhabitant. ... [God gives the soul] authority over all earthly things as an ‘eternal possession’ ...”.<sup>13</sup> Such a philosophical struggle was ever open to a Jew residing comfortably among the intellectuals in Alexandria. Jerusalem is the “mother-city” which, as a respectable *polis*, has sent out “colonies” (ἀποικίαι) throughout the world (*Leg.* 281ff.).

The attitudes of Philo and Josephus to the promised land and the messianic future of Israel stand in stark contrast to the ideas and beliefs expressed by other Jewish authors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods, namely, the authors of the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, and those of rabbinic literature. Throughout these diverse writings, composed both in Palestine and the Diaspora, we find constant expression of the notion that the dispersion was divine punishment on Israel, and that due repentance will bring the ingathering of exiles, the re-establishment of Israel on their own land and violent treatment of the other nations, among whom the exiles had dwelled for so long. Yet the “Holy Land” is pictured as a sharply mystical place, geographically indistinct — especially since the prophetic visions are not such to mandate specific action, only patient waiting. Moreover, in pseudepigraphical literature, the greatest despair about the dispersion is found in works composed in Palestine (*inter alia*, 4 Ezra [probably], 1 Baruch, 2 Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Ps.-Philo, Life of Adam and Eve), although it has strong echoes in those compositions of a different provenance as well (e.g., 1 Orac. Sib. 387ff., 3 Orac. Sib. 265ff.; Test. Levi 10.4, Test. Asher 7.2-6, etc.; 3 Macc. 2:1ff.<sup>14</sup>).

The Rabbis of the Mishnah, Talmud and related literature were the only ones to develop a specific notion of the borders of “Eretz Israel” — a term first used in the Mishnah. Exact borders had to be debated because the Rabbis’ own sources did not supply a coherent set of borders (nor did more recent history: the Hasmonean and Herodian kingdoms at their height, and the Roman province, all had different borders).<sup>15</sup> Not only are there unclear points in the biblical accounts, but three different spaces are described: the land promised to Patriarchs, the homeland of the first generation after the Exodus and the homeland of the returning exiles from Babylon.<sup>16</sup> Yet in contrast to all other Jewish sources of the period, the Rabbis are the only ones who specifically recommended residence in Eretz Israel as religiously meritorious — or at least, some Rabbis did: it would be a mistake (in this as well as in other matters) to hold up any single rabbinic statement

<sup>12</sup> See B. Halpern Amaru, “Land Theology in Philo and Josephus”, in *The Land of Israel: Jewish Perspectives*, ed. L.A. Hoffman (Notre Dame 1986), 65-93.

<sup>13</sup> *Quaest. et Sol. in Gen.* 3.45, translated from the Armenian by Ralph Marcus in the Loeb edition (1943).

<sup>14</sup> On which see: I. Heinemann, “The Relationship between the Jewish People and Their Land in Hellenistic-Jewish Literature”, *Zion* 13-14 (1948/9), 1-9 [Hebrew].

<sup>15</sup> For what follows, see *Talmudic Encyclopedia* II (1979), 199ff. [Hebrew].

<sup>16</sup> The most detailed rabbinic description of the boundaries of Eretz Israel (*Tos.Ter.* 2.12ff.), an interpretation of the land promised to the Patriarchs, was not used for the *halakhic* definition of the land.

or set of statements as representing what “the Rabbis” thought, as their teachings were neither dogmatic nor uniform. Nonetheless, there are preserved several rabbinic traditions such as the following: “dwelling in Eretz-Israel is as meritorious as the observance of all the commandments of the Torah”.<sup>17</sup> Not only living there, but dying there was considered a great merit, especially since the resurrection in the end of days would take place there; although there was a great rabbinic controversy concerning the status of Jews buried outside the Holy Land, with the fourth-century sage Abaye maintaining that they will arrive through underground cavities (*Ket.* 111a).<sup>18</sup>

In any case, there is little reason to believe that Jews outside the immediate sphere of the Rabbis took to heart the recommendation to live only in Eretz Israel. While there are foreign Jews with graves there,<sup>19</sup> there are also Palestinian Jews buried far away from their native country,<sup>20</sup> as well as numerous epitaphs by Jews who migrated between Diaspora centers.<sup>21</sup> Jews usually did not specify their reasons for migration on their epitaphs, despite the common but groundless assumption that graves of Jews of foreign origin in Israel indicate a wish to die in the Holy Land.<sup>22</sup> We should stress the almost complete absence or mention of, much less longing for the “Holy Land”, or consciousness of “Diaspora”, in documentary evidence. All possible exceptions are ambiguous. It is difficult to judge, e.g., whether the famous “Abba” inscription from Jerusalem (in Aramaic) marks a trend or is a lone idiosyncratic case of someone who wanted to be buried in his homeland, which happened to be Jerusalem.<sup>23</sup> The *venerandum rus* in the famous Regina inscription from Rome (*Regina quae meruit sedem venerandi ruris habere: CIJ 476*)

<sup>17</sup> *Tos. AZ 5.3*, cf. *Sifre Deut.* 80 and parallels cited in E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem 1975), 999 n. 87.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. also *Sanh.* 90b-91b, *ARNA* 26; and see Urbach, *loc. cit.* and 675; L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews V* (Philadelphia 1968), 362-3 n. 344. The especially severe second-century rabbinic dicta equating leaving the Holy Land with “idolatry” may have been, as Urbach suggests, no more than an effort to consolidate the Jewish population of Palestine after the catastrophe of the Bar Kokhba revolt.

<sup>19</sup> Noted by Sh. Safrai, “Relations Between the Diaspora and the Land of Israel”, in *The Jewish People in the First Century I*, edd. Sh. Safrai and M. Stern (Assen 1974-76), 184-214, and T. Rajak, “The Jewish Community and its Boundaries” in *The Jews Among the Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, edd. J. Lieu et al. (London-New York 1992), 16; both believe the Jewish graves indicate deliberate migration. See now T. Ilan, “New Ossuary Inscriptions from Jerusalem”, *SCI* 11 (1991-92), 149-59, no. 1.

<sup>20</sup> E.g., in Rome and W. Europe: *CIJ* 25, 362, 370, 502; *CIL* XIV suppl., no. 4624; *SEG* 29 (1973), no. 969. The full list is much larger.

<sup>21</sup> Egypt: *JIGRE*, nos. 141-4. Rome: Leon (above, n. 7), 238-40. W. Europe: *CIJ* 621, 640; *AE* 1973, no. 218; G. Alföldy, *Die römischen Inschriften von Tarraco* (Berlin 1975), no. 1075. Claudius forbade migration of Jews from Syria (i.e., Palestine) to Alexandria (*CPJ* 153, ll. 96-8).

<sup>22</sup> See Rajak, 16 and Safrai, 194 (both in n. 19 above).

<sup>23</sup> “I, Abba, son of priest Eleazar, son of Aaron the high (priest), I Abba, the oppressed and the persecuted, who was born in Jerusalem, and went to exile into Babylonia and brought (back to Jerusalem) Mattathi(ah) son of Judah, and I buried him in the cave, which I acquired by the writ”: E.S. Rosenthal, “The Giv’at ha-Mivtar Inscription”, *IEJ* 23 (1973), 72-81; J. Naveh, “An Aramaic Inscription Written in Paleo-Hebrew Script”, *IEJ* 23 (1973), 82-91. The exact date, identity of persons, circumstances of exile, all unknown.

refers either to paradise or the Land of Israel during messianic age, not the Holy Land in this world. Pilgrimage dwindled to a trickle after 70.<sup>24</sup>

It should not be surprising that there was little resettlement in the Holy Land. Hasmonean propaganda, believed by many Jews in the kingdom, that the dynasty had brought certain messianic prophecies to fulfillment (discussed by Goldstein in *CHJ* II, 336, 349), had little attraction outside that Jewish kingdom. The theology of exile remained intact during the Hasmonean reign: the author of Jubilees was dreaming, in Palestine, about restoration in the midst of the Hasmonean state (1.15ff.), before many of the Hasmonean excesses would have made the state less compelling. Herod was resented by his own subjects and certainly attracted little Jewish enthusiasm from abroad. If there were particularly pious or activist (or both) Jews who transplanted to Jerusalem,<sup>25</sup> like Hillel, a Babylonian immigrant, they seem not to have been typical of the established populations who remained in their homes outside Palestine. Any Jewish entity in the Land of Israel during our period had in fact both latent and patent dangers, especially the Jewish state that arose in 66 and was suppressed in 70. The only Jews for whom there is any evidence of participation in this revolt are those from beyond the pale of the Roman empire, from Babylonia (Dio 66.4.3).

Predictably, given the diversity and non-dogmatic nature of the views of the dispersion, ancient attitudes toward the ruling powers varied considerably. The authors of the pseudepigrapha generally abominate the great empires to which the Jews have been subject, but other Diaspora Jews, most notoriously Josephus, preached accommodation in accordance with God's will. Rabbinic literature is full of condemnations of Rome and its emperors, yet also more conciliatory attitudes, especially in light of three failed revolts in 70 years and the good relations between the Patriarchs and some Roman emperors.<sup>26</sup> Mar Samuel taught that "the law of the State is law [for its Jews]" (*BK* 113b), and another tradition saw Rome as "enthroned by heaven" (*AZ* 18a), yet R. Akiba threw his great authority behind the Bar Kokhba revolt. No consistency is to be expected. Documentary evidence is also inconclusive in this matter, although several Jewish inscriptions boast of office and citizenship (see below).

## II

Reconciling all the diverse information of this sort (I have mentioned but a sample) is the task facing the historian of the "Jewish Diaspora" of Graeco-Roman antiquity. Several considerations should guide the investigation:

1) During the Graeco-Roman period, the "dispersion" was voluntary; it was not exile. At most the Romans temporarily excluded Jews from Jerusalem (after the Bar Kokhba revolt, e.g.), but never from the "Holy Land" or anything resembling such a no-

<sup>24</sup> After that date, the evidence for pilgrimage to Jewish holy sites, such as the graves of holy men, is "slim" and speculative, according to J.F. Strange, "Archaeology and the Religion of Judaism in Palestine", *ANRW* II.19.1, 646-85, pp. 667 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Sh. Safrai (above, n. 19), 198; see also M. Stern in the same anthology, 570ff., who argues that Herod brought in Babylonian and Egyptian families to strengthen his position.

<sup>26</sup> See M. Hadas-Lebel, *L'image de Rome dans la littérature juive d'époque hellénistique et romaine jusqu'au début du iv<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Ph.D. Université de Paris 1987); M.D. Herr, "The Historical Significance of the Dialogue between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries", *SH* 22 (1971), 121ff.

tion. And it was for Jerusalem that Jews showed their devotion,<sup>27</sup> especially before the Temple's destruction, in the wide voluntary compliance with religious obligation to pay Temple-tax (the Patriarchate restored this payment only partially). While some Diaspora communities were originally places of exile (Babylonia, Rome), the Jews established themselves in these centers and remained for centuries. The core of Egyptian Jewry in the Roman empire was the product of voluntary migration after Alexander's conquest. Ancient authors' observations on the ubiquity of the Jews scarcely need repeating.<sup>28</sup> The Jews were unusual in some respects, but in others they are merely the best-documented of many subject peoples.

2) The Jews living in all the empires — Hellenistic, Roman, Persian — had little religious/political incentive to move permanently away from their communities, especially not to Palestine after 70, but before that as well. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem was popular and frequent while the Temple still stood,<sup>29</sup> but the Jews were better off if they remained resident in their communities, where they enjoyed relative security, and often legal protection, wealth and status. The Jews were mobile in both the Hellenistic and Roman worlds,<sup>30</sup> although in some cases they became more place-bound by Roman law and custom, despite the fact that quite a few probably possessed Roman citizenship, if not citizenship in their individual cities.<sup>31</sup> This is illustrated by the pathetic case of the Egyptian Jew Hellenos (*CPJ* II, 151), who was bound to his city and lost even the inferior status he had there once he left the city. The Jews were more fortunate in Asia Minor, where they rose to positions of authority and importance, and enjoyed protections spelled out in a series of Roman decrees. The main point of Trebilco's book is to demonstrate and explain the success and what he calls the "rootedness" of these Jews; this central thesis is surely correct (see critique below).

3) No blanket statement is possible concerning the success or lack of success of the Jews in the "Diaspora". In an understandable irony, the Jews in the city of Rome itself were among the most restricted to their own communities (and, notoriously, were expelled from the city more than once). They were for the most part an underclass in the empire's capital — one of many ethnic groups — distinguished neither by wealth nor by public office. The Egyptian Jews stand somewhere between those of Rome and those of Asia Minor. The Ptolemies honored the Jews, used them in their armies, and supported their synagogues, which they granted "asylum" status (*JIGRE* 125, cf. 24, 25). Citizenship was probably not granted under the Ptolemies, except in individual cases (*pace* Josephus, and those who believe him). The Jews did not work their way up the ladder to high office in the Ptolemaic administrations (all *significant* offices mentioned in *JIGRE* are solely internal to the Jewish community), and their situation only deteriorated with the

<sup>27</sup> Note that "Holy Land" in 2 Macc. 1.7 means Jerusalem and the Temple.

<sup>28</sup> Sources listed by M. Stern, "The Jewish Diaspora", in Safrai and Stern (above, n. 19), 117-19. Cf. *Men.* 110a: "R. Judah said: Rav said: From Tsur to Carthage, they know Israel and Israel's God in Heaven".

<sup>29</sup> Sh. Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple* (Tel Aviv 1965) [Hebrew].

<sup>30</sup> Méléze-Modrzejewski, 69-71 overstates the case when he argues that a Jew was as mobile as any other "citizen" of the Hellenistic world; *loudaios* was not on a par with *Athenaios*.

<sup>31</sup> The evidence for the complicated question of Jewish citizenship, in individual cities and in the Roman empire, is presented in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* III, revv. and edd. G. Vermes, F. Millar *et al.* (London 1987), 126ff. (hereafter Schürer).

formation of the Roman province, when they were given the significantly lesser civic rights of Egyptians. The Romans were forced to take specific measures to protect the Jews from hostility from both Egyptians and Greeks, and guaranteed their freedom to practice Jewish customs while curtailing their civic status. The only two Jewish holders of high office from Egypt, Dositheos b. Drimylos and Tiberius Julius Alexander, are both branded in the Jewish sources as apostates, and in both cases this seems to be more than sectarian polemic.<sup>32</sup> All this, of course, is unconnected to the remarkable success, if that is the correct word, of the Egyptian Jews in integrating into the Hellenistic culture there.

4) While the imperial powers to which the Jews were subject regarded the Jews as an *ethnos*, administrative measures regarding them were usually localized, specific to region, not sweeping.<sup>33</sup> The main exception to this is the tax imposed empire-wide on all Jews by the Romans after 70.<sup>34</sup> The repeated confirmation by the Roman emperors of the Jews' rights to live according to their ancestral customs was merely the normal protection the Romans extended to all subject peoples (as *AJ* 19.283 implies), and only by an accident of the evidence do the Jews appear special in this regard.<sup>35</sup> The Hellenistic and Roman decrees in *AJ* 12-14 and 16 all pertain to Jews in specific places, and when Antiochus and Demetrius use the phrase "the *ethnos* of the Jews", they are referring to the Jews living in a politically delimited area of Palestine.<sup>36</sup> The legal and constitutional position of Jewish communities was entirely dependent on time and place.<sup>37</sup>

5) While the practices shared by all or most active Jews in the ancient world are indeed important — above all, observance of Sabbath and some festivals,<sup>38</sup> circumcision, observance of dietary and ritual laws to varying degrees, Torah-reading in communal (synagogue) services — the differences among the far-flung communities in almost every aspect of life and worship should not be neglected. These elements, while not unknown, have been underplayed in modern scholarship, but giving them new emphasis will serve both to de-institutionalize "Diaspora Judaism" and to enhance understanding of the dif-

32 *JIGRE* 27 is not necessarily a Jew (*contra* Mèlèze-Modrzejewski, 81); see the example of the synagogue benefactress Julia Severa, a pagan priestess, in Asia Minor (*MAMA* 6, 264). *JIGRE* 115 is of Eleazar the *hegemon*, but the meaning of this is disputed — Frey thought the title religious, Pilcher could not decide, and Fraser denied the inscription was Jewish (see *JIGRE* commentary *ad loc.*) — and in any case the title, which is almost certainly military, does not imply high rank, see, for comparison, H.J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions* (Toronto 1974), 150. Compare two other Jewish apostates outside Egypt: *BE* 1956, no. 121 and L. Robert, *Hellenica* III (1946), 101.

33 See esp. T. Rajak, "Was There a Roman Charter for the Jews?", *JRS* 74 (1974), 107-23; Trebilco, 10. Similarly, it is not true that Antiochus' decrees encompassed all Jews, "the Diaspora included" (M. Hengel in *CHJ* II, 73-4); Antiochus was referring to newly conquered territory and the people living in it.

34 On which see now M. Goodman, "Nerva, the *Fiscus Judaicus* and Jewish Identity", *JRS* 79 (1989), 40-4.

35 On the unreliability of the evidence for empire-wide measures regarding the Jews by Hadrian and Septimius Severus, see Schürer III, 123-4.

36 *CIJ* 741, from Smyrna, refers to the *ethnos* of the Jews as a strictly local designation.

37 In general, A.M. Rabello, "The Legal Condition of the Jews in the Roman Empire", *ANRW* II.13 (1980), 662-762; Schürer III, 107-25.

38 Sabbath observance seems to have been universal, observance of festivals less uniform. See R. Goldenberg, "The Jewish Sabbath in the Roman World up to the Time of Constantine the Great", *ANRW* II.19.1 (1979), 414-47; A.M. Rabello, "L'osservanza delle feste ebraiche nell'impero romano", *SCI* 6 (1981-82), 57-84, and in expanded form in *ANRW* II.21.2 (1984), 1288-1312, a study based on legal sources.



ferences not just in details but in Jewish self-understanding in different regions.<sup>39</sup> Even within one city, such as Rome, there seem to have been variations in the forms of Judaism.<sup>40</sup> A full review cannot be made here, but we may note some suggestive points, all of which go to the heart of Jewish identity: a) Some Jewish communities celebrated their own local festivals unknown to the Jewish calendar.<sup>41</sup> b) Different translations of the Bible were used in different communities.<sup>42</sup> c) Biblical injunctions were not always followed equally in all places, as evidenced by the invocation of pagan gods on inscriptions in some places and not others, and other smaller matters such as lending between Jews at interest (*CPJ* 20, 24). d) The internal organization of Jewish communities tended to mimic local civic structures, as has now been strongly argued for the case of *archisynagogoi*;<sup>43</sup> the organization of Jews into *politeumata*, once thought to be the most common pattern, can be proved only for the Jews of Cyrene, and there is every reason to believe it was confined to them.<sup>44</sup> e) The revolt with apparently messianic overtones in Egypt, Cyrenaica and Cyprus in 115-17 had no parallel in the other parts of the empire, where presumably the understanding of recent history and the reading of prophetic texts were different.

Sparseness of evidence impedes the interpretation of other patterns. Symbols portrayed in synagogues, different biblical verses quoted and different Jewish festivals mentioned on inscriptions in different places, and other expressions of religious sentiment such as devotion to the law or belief in after-life, reveal regional variations. Do these patterns indicate differences in belief and practice, or merely mundane reality such as, in the case of biblical verses in epitaphs, the inclination or knowledge of the local stonecutter? The liturgy of Diaspora synagogues is a particularly misty area. Although sources abound for the reading of Torah and Prophets in synagogues, as well as for the antiquity of the *Shem'a*, we are almost entirely dependent, for the development of liturgy, on rabbinic literature, which is of unclear relevance for Judaism outside the rabbinic sphere of influence in Palestine in earlier periods. The variations among the various communities — as surely there must have been — are obscured from our sight. The only source not yet fully ex-

<sup>39</sup> See Kraabel's essay, "Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues", 21-33 in the present collection, esp. 26-7. The case can also be overstated — or rather, misstated, as in the following (p. 30): "They had made the main elements of Judaism portable: the Scriptures, the symbols, and the synagogue community itself. The Diaspora was not Exile; in some sense it became a Holy Land, too."

<sup>40</sup> See now T. Rajak, "Inscription and Context: Reading the Jewish Catacombs of Rome", in *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, edd. J.W. van Henten and P.W. van der Horst (Leiden 1994), 226-41.

<sup>41</sup> For Egypt, see Philo, *Vit. Mos.* 2.42; Jos., *CA* 2.55; 3 Macc. 6:36. Some Jewish literature contains aetiologies of such celebrations (the books of Esther and Judith, for example). 2 Macc. 1:18 seems to be a concerted effort to persuade Egyptian Jewry to observe Hanukkah.

<sup>42</sup> A point brought out by R. le Déaut in a fine essay in *CHJ* II on the Targumim (563-90), to which there is not a correspondingly good essay on other Greek translations apart from the Septuagint; in this matter the cut-off at the end of the "Hellenistic" period is artificial.

<sup>43</sup> T. Rajak and D. Noy, "*Archisynagogoi*: Office, Title and Social Status in the Greco-Jewish Synagogue", *JRS* 83 (1993), 75-93.

<sup>44</sup> G. Lüderitz, "What is the *Politeuma*", in van Henten- van der Horst (above, n. 40), 183-225; cf. also C. Zuckerman, "Hellenistic *Politeumata* and the Jews — A Reconsideration", *SCI* 8-9 (1985-88), 171-85. On variations, Schürer III, 87ff.

hausted is perhaps early Christian literature,<sup>45</sup> but no surprises await, only some filling out of the picture. New textual or archaeological discoveries could be revolutionary. On the other hand, archaeologists have unearthed enough to begin making certain absences, such as of ritual baths outside Palestine, significant.<sup>46</sup>

6) The point need not be belabored that, in line with the absence of political, social or religious uniformity among Diaspora Jews, there was no such thing as Diaspora culture. There was no real corpus of Diaspora Jewish literature, and such an anthology compiled today would be artificial. Jewish literature *per se*, as recognized by both Jews and non-Jews of antiquity, remained the Bible, commentaries, compilations of law.

7) The question of the extent to which Jewish communities did influence each other in religious matters remains open. This applies also to contacts between Palestinian Sages and distant Jewish communities. It used to be commonly assumed that these Sages had great influence over the entire Jewish world. The trend lately, clearly evidenced in all the books under review, is to deny that Diaspora Judaism was "rabbinic" at all.<sup>47</sup> But this may also be an impossibly categorical position. Granted, the great Sages of Palestine did not impose uniformity on Diaspora Judaism, especially when the rabbinic teachings were themselves not consensual and did not become dominant (or "normative") even in Palestine until quite late.<sup>48</sup> But this claim is made of straw. The question is one of *influence*, not dictation, and in this matter evidence is given unequal weight. Surely the inability to identify any Rabbi on a Jewish epitaph does not outweigh the numerous reported travels by Sages as evidence for rabbinic *influence* in Diaspora centers.<sup>49</sup> By no means does Samoe's title of *sophodidaskalos* in an inscription from the Sardis synagogue reveal by itself that "Sardis was well removed from the Rabbinic sphere of influence" (Trebilco, 50); only that a teacher in that Greek-speaking Jewish community had a Greek title. The title reveals nothing about his teachings, and is not enough to cancel out the reports of repeated visits by Sages in Asia Minor, which should be taken seriously.<sup>50</sup> The fact that "not one [inscription] with a reference to a rabbi" was found in the Jewish catacombs in Rome<sup>51</sup> is not really a ringing denial of contacts or influence by rabbinic teachers from Palestine, especially in light of the numerous visits the Rabbis say they made in Rome (some undoubtedly for political purposes), and even the existence of a rabbinic academy there (*Sanh.* 32b). Thaddeus the Roman is said to have disputed with Simeon b. Shetah about Passover sacrifices (*Ber.* 19a, *yPes.* 287). This evidence is at least reliable as the details routinely culled from Acts about synagogue service in the Diaspora. Further, it seems a poor methodological practice to dismiss the many stories about the travels of

<sup>45</sup> See F. Millar, "The Jews of the Graeco-Roman Period between Paganism and Christianity", in Lieu *et al.* (above, n. 19), 97-123.

<sup>46</sup> Aside from the one at Delos. Méléze-Modrzejewski, 83 is therefore on shaky ground in his supposition that the Egyptian synagogues had them. *JIGRE* p. 198 discusses water installations and synagogues.

<sup>47</sup> S.J.D. Cohen, "Epigraphical Rabbis", *JQR* 72 (1981-82), 1-17, has been especially influential.

<sup>48</sup> M. Goodman, *State and Society in Roman Galilee, A.D. 132-212* (1983). Documents found in the Judean Desert are evidence against the normative force of rabbinic prescriptions, see now H. Cotton, "The Guardianship of Jesus Son of Babatha: Roman and Local Law in the Province of Arabia", *JRS* 83 (1993), 94-108, esp. 100 and n. 82.

<sup>49</sup> Many of the sources are collected in Sh. Safrai (above, n. 19).

<sup>50</sup> E.g., *Meg.* 18b, *Yeb.* 121a, *Sanh.* 26a; and cf. J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-Fearers at Aphrodisias: Greek Inscriptions with Commentary* (Cambridge 1987), 78ff.

<sup>51</sup> Cohen (above, n. 47), 15.

various Sages as having any real significance for Diaspora Judaism merely because there is no evidence in the Diaspora communities themselves of such influence: the most preponderant evidence for “Diaspora Judaism” is archaeological and epigraphical, two media which by their nature would not reveal much detail about religious belief, much less retain many traces of rabbinic influence.<sup>52</sup> No traces of the rabbinic academy in Yavne (Jamnia) have been found, but no one doubts its existence. On this matter, too, one should expect differences in degrees of contact and influence in different places and times.

### III

All generalities about “Diaspora Judaism” should be banned until each Jewish community is understood in its immediate context — and until the proper tools are available.<sup>53</sup> Two books under review, Méléze-Modrzejewski and Trebilco, provide regional studies, while two others, Horbury and Noy’s collection (*JIGRE*) and van der Horst’s handbook, make headway on providing a *desideratum* of top priority.

With *JIGRE*, the first fruits of an enterprise called the “Cambridge Divinity Faculty Jewish Inscriptions Project” is now in our hands. Once I.F. Fikhman’s fourth volume of *CPJ* and the new corpora of Jewish inscriptions now being compiled in several countries are completed, we should finally have a complete and reliable set of Jewish documentary material from the Graeco-Roman period. One looks forward to the day when Frey’s highly defective *CIJ* will no longer have to be cited, especially for sweeping claims about the Judaism of any area or period.<sup>54</sup>

*JIGRE* is a splendid book. I cannot do justice to such a work in a general review article. Horbury and Noy’s presentation should be followed by the editors of all the other new corpora of Jewish inscriptions (with the exception of one aspect, noted below). Each entry, cross-referenced with *CIJ*, includes essential data regarding provenance, date, medium and present location, the edited text itself, a thorough apparatus, English translation, list of publications and textual discussions, another bibliography of interpretations and other discussions (astonishingly comprehensive), commentary, and finally remarks on the nature of the stone and letter-forms. Horbury and Noy (hereafter HN) are nothing if not thorough and cautious throughout — yet also not hesitating to correct long-accepted readings and interpretations, even those of epigraphers with whom some would

<sup>52</sup> This is one of the main flaws in Goodenough’s famous claim that Diaspora Judaism was thoroughly non-rabbinic. There is not a complete absence of hints in inscriptions, but the yield is ambiguous. The *apostoloi* and *patriarchoi* (*CIJ* 611, 650, 694, 719), for example, do not necessarily come from the establishment in Palestine. The term “Rabbi” occurs in later inscriptions, but none can be positively identified with a known Sage; see Cohen (above, n. 47). On the other hand, a full comparison of religious utterances in Jewish inscriptions and rabbinic teachings has not been undertaken (for a partial study of material from Palestine, see S. Nagakubo, *Investigations into Jewish Concepts of Afterlife in the Beth She’arim Greek Inscriptions* [Ph.D. Duke University, 1974]).

<sup>53</sup> In this light, it is to be regretted that *Bulletin Épigraphique* in *REG* dropped the category “greco-juives” after L. Robert’s death.

<sup>54</sup> D. Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe I* (Cambridge 1993) arrived too late to be considered here. The current projects will not, so far as I know, cover the territory already well reported in Y. Le Bohec, “Inscriptions juives et judaisantes de l’Afrique romaine,” *Antiquités Afriques* 17 (1981), 165-207; G. Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika, mit einem Anhang von Joyce M. Reynolds* (1983); and A. Scheiber, *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary from the Third Century to 1686* (1983).

hesitate to dispute.<sup>55</sup> HN have adopted the maximalist approach in their commentary, discussing the history of each stone and (if necessary) the find-site, as well as almost every imaginable point of linguistic, onomastic and historical detail. Some of their comments could stand as mini-articles, such as: *exedra* (pp. 49-50), “faith”, “grace” and “hope” in Jewish and parallel traditions (53-4, 84-6), Jewish funerary rites (66-8), Jewish mourning customs (76-7), the name Abram (100-1), sundials and water installations at synagogues (198).

In all, *JIGRE* contains 134 inscriptions identified as Jewish, as opposed to Lewis' 123 in *CPJ* III and Frey's 116. It might have been worthwhile to deviate from the decisions of Frey and Lewis, and include the group of Aramaic inscriptions from Edfu,<sup>56</sup> so that the corpus would be inclusive of all inscriptions from Egypt up to the end of the Byzantine period. Yet in any case the net gain is more than 11 new inscriptions, for HN have eliminated six from *CPJ* III as not Jewish (Lewis himself had similar doubts), and added 16 new ones.<sup>57</sup> What is most revealing is that some of the additions were made merely by diligent work in libraries, for HN found some texts published before 1952, the date *CIJ* II came out (nos. 10-12, 18, 26, 105, 126, 134; all these were published before Frey's death in 1939: the editors of *CIJ* II did not improve much on Frey's *Nachlass*). On the other hand, it is to be noted that there is little sign that Horbury or Noy examined any stone first-hand, and much of their laborious comparison of publications, photographs, fascimiles, etc., charted in the commentary, could have been avoided with simple autopsy, which would not have required travelling to Egypt in every case (no. 57, e.g., is close-by, in the Louvre). Thus the exception mentioned above: HN also list the published text they follow in each case, which should be superfluous in an authoritative corpus.

I have not found many errors, and relatively few points to dispute, and this is not the place to list them. It might be said, however, that HN take quite a generous approach to Jewish identity. This is a notorious problem with collections of Jewish sources, unlikely ever to be solved definitively. Their criteria for Jewishness (pp. x-xi) are similar to those laid down by Tcherikover for papyri (*CPJ* I, xvii-xix) and reviewed by van der Horst in his handbook (16-18; and see discussion below). Yet the Egyptian material presents a special problem: the bulk of the corpus, 77 texts, come from one site, Leontopolis or Tell el-Yehoudieh, where Onias' temple stood. The burial ground there, on the basis of the history of the site and the large number of unmistakably Jewish inscriptions, is presumed to have been exclusively Jewish, and many inscriptions which would never even have fallen under suspicion as Jewish, are confidently included. Moreover, the assumption that Jews buried their dead with other Jews can lead to other misinterpretations. For example, *JIGRE* no. 114, by a Jew who says he died *πλησίον ἀλλογενοί* (HN: “near strangers”) does not necessarily mean, *contra* HN, that he was buried “not in his own Jewish city ... but in a smaller Jewish community”; Josephus and Philo use the term only to mean non-Jews, and it is used in the Septuagint primarily to translate *nochri* and *mamzer* (also *zur*,

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., the sensible criticism of Robert on no. 44, p. 111.

<sup>56</sup> See W. Kornfeld, *AAWW* 110 (1973), 123-37 and HN p. xi. Compare J. Barr's unhelpful statement in his essay, “Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in the Hellenistic Age”, in the new *CHJ*: “From the third century B.C.E. on, apart from the inscriptions on tombs and ossuaries and in synagogues, inscriptions in Palestine are almost entirely in Greek.” (p. 102); almost the entire *Jewish* corpus consists of epitaphs and synagogal inscriptions.

<sup>57</sup> The arithmetical discrepancy is explained by the fact that HN split *CIJ* 1435 into two inscriptions.

ambiguously). Exclusively or primarily Jewish burial-sites from antiquity are extremely rare, and the burial-ground at Leontopolis is unlike the ones at Beth She'arim and Rome, e.g., in that it is situated on open ground, not in self-contained caves or catacombs. Some of the stones were recovered from nearby villages, and others were traced to the site merely through hearsay reports. Above all, it should be remembered that there is no evidence that *only* Jews lived and died in Leontopolis, only that the population was *primarily* Jewish. It may be true, as Horbury and Noy point out, that "over 50% of the preserved names in the epitaphs are distinctively Jewish", but that still leaves almost half which are not, and the "distinctively Jewish" names include those derived from "Sabbath", which in the Roman period are not all necessarily Jewish (*CPJ* III, 43ff.). Certainty about the Jewishness of some stones would provide dramatic evidence on Hellenization; but certainty (as opposed to popular statements about Hellenism and Judaism, based on this material: see Hengel's articles in *CHJ* II as typical examples) is impossible. By my personal tally, at least 36 of the 77 inscriptions would never have been suspected of being Jewish if not for their actual or alleged find-site. This is not really a criticism of HN (but it is of van der Horst and some contributors to *CHJ*, see below), for they usually express doubts about Jewishness when appropriate, and researchers will be grateful for the inclusion of all suspect material, so as to be able to make their own judgments. Perhaps another appendix would have been useful, for inscriptions whose attribution is doubtful (and I would have included *at least* nos. 5, 7, 8, 18, 20, 23, 111-14, 116, 120, 124, 125, 130, as well as some from my personal list of 36 inscriptions from Leontopolis bearing no signs of Jewishness).

This raises another methodological problem inherent to Jewish inscriptions, and not often enough heeded: we meet in Jewish inscriptions only *Jews*, and not necessarily *Judaism* at all. For not only were many Jews, in some places more than others, too poor to erect epitaphs, but an untold number of Jews who did put up epitaphs will not have felt close enough to Judaism, or simply lacked the will, to record their identity or activities as Jews. This is one problem with van der Horst's otherwise reliable handbook on Jewish epitaphs (written for theology students with a knowledge of Greek and Latin but none of Jewish epigraphy). As his title suggests, van der Horst presents Jewish *epitaphs* (as opposed to all Jewish inscriptions) as a source on "the common Jewish man and woman, their thoughts and speech and action, their fears and hopes, their griefs and joys" (11). Yet, while it may indeed seem that epitaphs are fresher, less biased evidence than the written texts, and give us an unmediated approach to Jews as they were, they tell us only about certain individuals, not an entire religion: inscriptions by Jews who do not reveal their Jewish identity would be important data for understanding Judaism in its entirety in different areas of the Mediterranean.

Van der Horst leads the student to hope that "a thousand tomb inscriptions which give us more information than only the name of the deceased are a valuable source for the study of some aspects of ancient Jewish life and culture which should not be ignored" (21). Yet as van der Horst surely knows himself, regional variations in inscriptions can be quite telling. Some formulae, which may be taken as evidence of belief, are characteristic of specific regions:  $\chi\rho\eta\sigma\tau\acute{\epsilon}\ \chi\alpha\iota\rho\epsilon$  in Egypt,  $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \epsilon\iota\rho\acute{\eta}\nu\eta\ \eta\ \kappa\omicron\iota\mu\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$  in Rome, and, poignantly,  $\tau\acute{\omega}\ \lambda\alpha\tilde{\omega}\ \chi\alpha\iota\rho\epsilon\iota\upsilon$  in 12 epitaphs from Larissa (CII 699-708c). Inscriptions from Acmonia (including non-Jewish!) abound in citations from LXX Ex. 34:6-7 (see Trebilco 71-3). And so forth. If there is no continuity in the use of such formulae from place to place, what can they tell us about "the common Jewish man and woman"? More-

over, as one would expect, Jewish inscriptions in Greek and Latin also reflect non-Jewish epigraphic habits (e.g., ἀνὴρ καλὸς κ'ἀγαθός in several inscriptions: an expression of Jewish values, or pure mimicry? cf. p. 68). And in Semitic epitaphs, as van der Horst himself points out (63 n. 5), “virtually no epithets are to be found”. Even epithets which seem classically Jewish are not universal, such as φιλέντολος, which seems to be used primarily in Rome.<sup>58</sup>

The varieties within Judaism of the period are duly acknowledged at the end of the book (133-4), but this did not serve as a guideline for either presentation or organization of the material. The real topic at hand is Judaism as a generality, the Judaism which early Christian writers perceived as their greatest enemy. The information pulled from Jewish tombstones is to be compared to the beliefs and practices of early Christianity, especially in van der Horst’s penultimate chapter, devoted to “ancient Jewish epitaphs and the New Testament”. It is in this spirit that van der Horst counsels his readers not to believe that Christianity “gained a quick and easy victory over Judaism” in Rome, even though “the threat posed [to the Jewish community in Rome] by early Christian preaching must have been considerable” (128, citing the last chapter of Acts and the Letter to the Romans, which is no evidence of a real threat). Certainly there was conflict between Jews and Christians in various centers in the Mediterranean world (see, e.g., Trebilco 20-32 for Asia Minor), but it should be noted that Christian writings are our only source for this. The rabbinic texts, for example, and particularly the tractate *Avodah Zarah*, deal only with the danger of proximate pagan practices. By the same token, the same Jewish sources might not have conceded that there ever was a “victory”. But rabbinic texts are not much in evidence here, and when necessary the student is referred to Strack and Billerbeck’s commentary on the New Testament. Jewish inscriptions are indeed important for understanding aspects of early Christianity, but the borrowings and influence were mostly in one direction, and the documents themselves must first be understood in their own context.

Egyptian Jews are perhaps the best-documented Jewish community outside Palestine — the larger number of inscriptions from Rome are outbalanced by the papyri and literature, of both Jewish and non-Jewish authorship,<sup>59</sup> from Egypt.

As histories of Egyptian Jews go, the present one by Méléze-Modrzejewski (hereafter M-M) is highly readable, fairly up-to-date, and generally sober; heavily reliant (deceptively so) on papyri, the author’s specialty; written for a popular audience. This book has problems, the first suggested by the title: what justifies the chosen period? The end *terminus* is natural, as the author himself explains: the Jews almost entirely disappear from the evidence after the massively destructive revolt of 115-17, and the sequel — the destruction of the synagogue in Alexandria, confiscation of Jewish properties, etc. — ended early in Hadrian’s reign. The starting point is the reign of the supposed Pharaoh of the Exodus, an event which even Jewish tradition acknowledges left some Jews behind, 1400 years distant. This is an odd choice, since there was little connection between the epochs, and M-M’s heart isn’t in it, anyway: the Graeco-Roman period takes up eight of ten chapters, and one suspects that M-M chose not to begin with Alexander’s conquest — a true beginning point, rare in history — because he could not resist the rich material

<sup>58</sup> The word appears in an inscription from Malta: *SEG* 1985, no. 995.

<sup>59</sup> One aspect of this literature is discussed by E. Gabba in a fine essay in *CHJ* II (614-56) on anti-Jewish literature in Greek.

from Elephantine (c. 2). The account of Joseph and his brothers in Egypt and the Exodus (c.1) is necessarily superficial, a rather inauspicious start, but the later chapters contain more serious and expert discussion of history and sources.

M-M sketches out his history in broad strokes, preferring the poignant detail to the prosaic, and striving for the dramatic and the arresting. The style veers toward exuberant, and the danger of rhetorical excess, which constantly lurks, is not always avoided. One of my favorite examples of this reveals deeper problems. M-M declares the challenge of Hellenistic culture as “le problème numéro un du judaïsme alexandrin: comment être à la fois Juif et Grec?” (50). Replace “Grec” with “Polonais” or “Français”, and the origin of this insight may reveal itself. Yet this taste for sensational aphorism has not led to gross distortion, only overstatement, and there is something to be gained from a history told from the distance required by the style: the general lines of the story are bold and clear, and in this case correct: the heyday of the Jews in Egypt was the Hellenistic period (“le zénith”), which witnessed a flourishing Graeco-Jewish literature, a deep absorption of the local culture but (so far as can be made out) adherence to Jewish practices and customs, development of synagogue and royal patronage (cf. *JIGRE* 24, 25, 125), political rights and privileges; then there came a falling-off under the Romans (“le crépuscule”), when the Jews’ status was downgraded and the simmering conflicts with Greeks and Egyptians boiled over.<sup>60</sup> M-M argues that while under the Ptolemies the Jews were included among the “Hellenes”, they became Egyptians under the conquering Romans, losing all privileges granted to Hellenes, citizens of cities.

It might have been M-M’s interest in holding his audience’s attention that led him to use certain anachronisms, the most glaring “orthodox Judaism”, a term which occurs periodically in the book but has no meaning for the period. Even if only Palestinian rabbinic Judaism is meant, this did not exist anywhere in Egypt during the entire period covered by the book. Yet the presumed existence of “orthodox Judaism” leads to anachronistic statements about the matrilineal principle in Judaism (64)<sup>61</sup> and about the Egyptian Jewish adherence to rabbinic *halakhah* in marriage and divorce (94ff., disregarding his own disclaimer 95). Comparing the behavior of the Egyptian Jewish literary heroes Joseph and Asenath to the standards of “orthodox Judaism” is inapt (p. 64), although it *is* appropriate to view the novel as an attempt to deal with real problems — intermarriage and conversion — which would especially arise in places far from the Jewish centers of Palestine.

M-M sticks to his Egyptian material fairly faithfully, but occasionally falls into the same trap which others such as Kraabel do more regularly (see Kraabel’s “Afterword”), of generalizing about the “Diaspora” from the individual case they know best. Thus, in explaining the preference for the word *proseuche* in Egypt for synagogue (in contrast to the use of *synagoge* in the Theodotus inscription from Jerusalem), M-M suggests: “il semble que, par ce choix lexical, les Juifs de la diaspora aient voulu faire ressortir le caractère sacré de leur lieu de réunion, que le mot de *synagogé* était incapable de signifier”. What we have here is not a “Diaspora” phenomenon but an Egyptian one. For while the

<sup>60</sup> Yet on a topic on which he excels, a slip (165): it is not clear that the negative report about the Jews in Dio arises from the author’s ill will against the Jews. It seems rather to be a *topos* on atrocities during rebellion, official propaganda. M-M is probably wrong in his imputation of prejudice to Xiphilinus. There is also nothing particularly Jewish in the charges (despite similarities to past anti-Jewish slanders).

<sup>61</sup> See S.J.D. Cohen, “The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law”, *American Journal of Sociology* 10 (1985), 19-53.

term *proseuche* does occur in other places,<sup>62</sup> it also occurs in Palestine, and outside Egypt the term *synagoge* became interchangeable with *proseuche*.<sup>63</sup> Thus the *proseuche* is a phenomenon which must be studied in its narrow Egyptian context. Interestingly, it seems that the Egyptian Jews did not borrow this term from their cultural surrounding; thus the choice of the word *proseuche* would indicate that the communal building it signified was used for prayer from an early date, even the second century BCE, long before the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed.

Trebilco's main focus is on three cities in Asia Minor — Sardis, Acmonia, and Apamea — which had substantial and highly conspicuous Jewish populations, and not coincidentally have yielded the largest number of inscriptions identified as Jewish. He aims to demonstrate the Jews' success in these societies — they gained civic office outside the restricted Jewish community, occasionally even citizenship (see c. 8 for a good discussion) as well as complete freedom of religious expression, unhampered even by Christianity (Trebilco's prime illustration for this is the Sardis synagogue, the symbolism of its architecture and setting). In some cases, he claims, the Jews were not just tolerated, but admired and even emulated by their neighbors. Unlike David Noy, who calls Egypt's Jews "Egyptians first and Jews second",<sup>64</sup> Trebilco would argue that his subjects were "Jews first" but also completely comfortable Asians.

This picture is surely correct in its general outline. There are more signs of Jewish office-holding and involvement in the community, more signs of Jewish wealth, fewer signs of tension between Jews and non-Jews,<sup>65</sup> than in most other Mediterranean centers where Jews lived. "To a large extent the Jews had identified their interests with those of the city to which they belonged" (84). The big Jewish communities in Asia Minor disappear only with the invasions of the seventh century, unlike others, such as that in Egypt, which received mortal blows much earlier. Trebilco quite properly seeks similarities and parallels not between Jews in other parts of the worlds but between the Jews of Asia Minor and their neighbors there. He advises soberly that comparison of Diaspora Jewish communities is unhelpful, "owing to differences in the foundation and development of the various Diaspora communities" (p. 167). But there are problems with Trebilco's picture, which is overly optimistic about the relations between the Jews and their neighbors, and demonstrates some of the pitfalls of drawing conclusions about "Diaspora Judaism" from inscriptional evidence.

It was perhaps the very success of the Jews, and their strong desire to identify "their interests" with those of their city, which renders the historical record, consisting largely in inscriptions, ambiguous at best. Jewish names are relatively rare,<sup>66</sup> Hebrew even rarer (cf. 221 n. 119), Jewish cemeteries are only supposed,<sup>67</sup> and Jewish references have often

<sup>62</sup> Documentary and literary evidence assembled in Schürer II, 439-40 n. 61.

<sup>63</sup> In Egypt, a *synagoge* is mentioned only in *JIGRE* 20 (late Ptolemaic) and *CPJ* 138 (from the first century BCE).

<sup>64</sup> "The Jewish Communities of Leontopolis and Venosa", in van Henten-van der Horst [above, n. 40], 171-2.

<sup>65</sup> Melito stands out as exceptional, and the inscriptional evidence points in the other direction, see c. 7 on "God-worshippers"; and see Kraabel's essay on Melito in his *Festschrift*.

<sup>66</sup> The discovery of the inscription at Aphrodisias considerably added to the pool, cf. Reynolds and Tannenbaum (above, n. 50).

<sup>67</sup> See *Tituli Asiae Minoris* II.2, no. 612; *MAMA* VI, no. 316; J.H.M. Strubbe, "Curses Against Violation of the Grave in Jewish Epitaphs from Asia Minor", in van Henten-van der Horst (above, \*n. ), 101.



to be teased out. Most strikingly, Trebilco holds up certain curse formulae on epitaphs as evidence of Jewishness, or in cases of clearly pagan inscriptions, as evidence for the general knowledge of and respect for Judaism and Jewish texts by non-Jews (60-72). This is a circular argument, but there are more serious problems.

Two formulae recur on stones in Asia Minor (and elsewhere), warning against violation of the tomb: “children’s children” (τέκνα τέκνων or εἰς τέκνα τέκνων), presumably a quotation of LXX Ex. 34:7, and “curses written in Deuteronomy”. Yet the first, despite the biblical echo, required no special knowledge of Scripture since it was quite common in pagan texts,<sup>68</sup> and in any case the curse would have been understood instantly, without reference to any religious tradition. Thus a stone cannot be identified as Jewish solely because the phrase τέκνα τέκνων — by itself incoherent, requiring a cultural context — is present; *a fortiori* such a formula is no evidence, *contra* Trebilco, that Ex. 34:6-7 was a regular part of the Jews’ liturgy (which Ex. 34:6 but not verse 7 eventually became). The second formula, threatening the “curses written in Deuteronomy” for violation of the grave, is more positive evidence of Jewishness, but does not necessarily indicate immediate pagan recognition of and respect for the Jewish holy books, as Trebilco argues. In antiquity the violation of graves involved not, as in modern times, vandalism inspired by racial malice, but, as Strubbe has pointed out,<sup>69</sup> the insertion of other corpses for which the grave was not intended — in other words, an act committed only by those who were too poor to buy their own graves. It is questionable whether such people could read, much less appreciate the reference to Deuteronomy.

Nor do the Deuteronomy-curse inscriptions provide evidence for extensive knowledge and study of Scripture by Jews, any more than do the scattered verses quoted on Jewish inscriptions elsewhere (in Hebrew, where knowledge of Hebrew was slight) or in other periods. Herein lies another problem with inscriptional evidence for Diaspora Judaism. Trebilco holds up the references to “the curses as written in Deuteronomy” as evidence not only for reverence for Scripture and diligent belief in and pursuit of the commandments, curses and promises written therein, but also for the belief among Acmonian Jews that they themselves had returned to God in the way prescribed: Deut. 27-29 and 30:1-10 applied to them, they understood they were due divine reward for returning to observance of God’s commandments. But the biggest reward promised in these verses was not physical prosperity, but return to their own land, the Holy Land! It is hard to imagine self-satisfied Jews, comfortably rooted in Asia Minor, as Trebilco describes them, applying these verses seriously to themselves. Moreover, the curses are conditional (if someone breaks open a tomb, no relation to divine promises), and are not specific to Gentiles.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for the theme of this review, Trebilco repeatedly contrasts the Jews of Asia Minor with the Judaism of Palestine — i.e., the Mishnaic and Talmudic Rabbis. His case sounds like pleading: “In comparison with Palestinian Jewish communities, these Diaspora communities can therefore be seen as equally worthy and legitimate but distinctive heirs of the Old Testament faith. ... Jewish communities of Asia Minor, whilst remaining Jewish in their own eyes, probably had different religious institutions, did different things and emphasised different aspects of Judaism from the Rabbis” (188-9). Two problems: a) Trebilco’s interest throughout the book is in social and political relations between the Jews and non-Jews of Asia Minor. He does not enter

<sup>68</sup> Strubbe (preceding note), 80-2, citing texts Trebilco does not mention.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

into details of ritual and belief, because so few details are available for the Jews of this area. “The Rabbis” are preoccupied with ritual matters, internal religious questions (and surprisingly little, on a relative scale, with faith). Most of what Trebilco sets out to demonstrate about the Jewish communities of Asia Minor is not in direct conflict with rabbinic Judaism. Of course the Rabbis opposed assimilation, but Trebilco’s thesis is that the Jews retained their distinctive identity for centuries, and so successfully that their religion became an attraction for Gentiles. b) The signs of success which Trebilco holds up for examination are not unambiguous — they run up against the problem we have already identified with Jewish inscriptions, the absence of knowledge of those Jews who apostasized. Impressive synagogues, proud inscriptions, social and political success of some Jews can also be found in modern Diaspora communities where the current preoccupation is alarm at dwindling numbers and declining religious observance.

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Jews in antiquity were known (and often maligned) for exclusive and separatist habits. Certain Jewish literature strove to enforce the separation. But in reality borders between peoples, even Jews and Gentiles, were blurred, categories were indistinct. Just how indistinct is only beginning to be appreciated, as new discoveries, most famously the inscription from Aphrodisias, are forcing reassessment of old evidence.<sup>70</sup> The authors of the books reviewed here seem confident that they know a Jew when they see one, yet their criteria are uncomfortably fluid. The problem of identifying Jewishness is ancient. Domitian employed cruel methods to identify those subject to the Jewish tax (Suet., *Dom.* 12). In a more benign sphere, Jews lowered barriers far enough to admit the “God-fearers” into their communities. To a limited extent, identification depended on the observer. A Jew’s self-identification, a Jew’s identification by other Jews, and a Jew’s identification by imperial authorities or Gentile neighbors, could be different. This should make us ever watchful for ambiguities in the ancient evidence.

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<sup>70</sup> See Reynolds and Tannenbaum (above, n. 50). The editors of Kraabel’s *Festschrift* have unfortunately included two articles which propound a theory no longer tenable, namely, that the God-fearers were not a class of Judaizers or semi-Jews, but a Christian confection with theological-apologetic purposes. The argument was based — in very unKraabel-like fashion! — on an *argumentum ex silentio* from inscriptions. Bizarrely, footnotes acknowledging the Aphrodisias evidence were slipped in to the two articles (128 n. 27 and 136 n. 15), even though both were originally printed before the inscription was published (the editors’ note on p. 131 is a half-truth). Kraabel does not recant in his Afterword.