

Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

By

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Judaism in Asia Minor

Introduction

Map B VI/18 of the *Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients* (with the title *Die jüdische Diaspora bis zum 7. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*),¹ shows a considerable concentration of Jewish settlements in Asia Minor, with a higher density of Jewish communities in the West than in the East. The history of this Jewish diaspora in Asia Minor is a long one. It probably started as early as the fifth century BCE and continues till the present day.² This chapter will focus on the roughly one thousand years between the beginnings of Jewish settlement there and the end of the Talmudic period (or the rise of Islam). The literary sources at our disposal are scarce, unfortunately: we have only a handful of references in pagan literary sources, several more in Josephus and the New Testament, and also some in Church Fathers and in canons of Church Councils; on the other hand, we have no less than some 260 Jewish inscriptions, by far the most in Greek (more than 95 percent), only a handful in Hebrew.³ On the question whether or not we possess Jewish writings from Asia Minor (perhaps some of the *Or. Sib.* and *4 Macc.*) there is no scholarly consensus at all and we have to leave this question out of account.⁴ Archaeological remains are not very

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- 1 Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1992. A helpful but less complete map can be found in P.R. Trebilco, *Jewish Communities in Asia Minor* (SNTSMS 69), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991 (repr. 2006), xvi. A concise but good survey of the evidence is given by Fergus Millar in E. Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar & M. Goodman, vols. I–III, Edinburgh: Clark, 1973–1987, 3.17–36, with the additions by H. Bloedhorn in M. Hengel, “Der alte und der neue ‘Schürer,’” in his *Judaica, Hellenistica et Christiana* (Kleine Schriften II), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999, 157–199, here 195–196.
 - 2 H.Z. Hirschberg and H.J. Cohen, “Turkey,” *Enc. Jud.* 15 (1971) 1456–1462.
 - 3 All relevant material has been conveniently collected in W. Ameling, *Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis II: Kleinasien* (TSAJ 99), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004. This work will be referred to as *IJO*. On the striking similarities between the pagan and the Jewish ‘epigraphic habit’ see Ameling, “Die jüdische Diaspora Kleinasien und der ‘epigraphic habit,’” in J. Frey, D.R. Schwartz & S. Grippentrog (eds.), *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, Leiden: Brill, 2007, 253–282, *passim*.
 - 4 See Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 95–99 (on *Or. Sib.* I–II); R. Buitenwerf, *Book III of the Sibylline Oracles and its Social Setting*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, 130–133 (on *Or. Sib.* III); E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, 2 vols., Darmstadt: WBG, 1980 (= 1909), 416–420 (on *4 Macc.*). Rabbinic

numerous (apart from the epigraphic material), but some of them are spectacular (see below on Sardis).

Historical Aspects

The beginnings of Jewish presence in Asia Minor may go back to the fifth century BCE, although the evidence is controversial because of a problem in the interpretation of a Hebrew word in Obadiah 20. The prophet says there that the exiles of Jerusalem who live in Sepharad will possess the towns of the Negev. Sepharad (only in later Hebrew the designation for Spain) is a name that occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible and it is uncertain which place or region the prophet has in mind here.⁵ That uncertainty is also reflected in the ancient versions: the Septuagint renders it Ephratha (or Sephratha), the Vulgate has Bosphorus, and the Peshitta and the Targum read Spain. According to some modern scholars, however, the city of Sardis is meant here.⁶ The reason is that in 1916 an Aramaic inscription from the Persian period (KAI no. 260 from the fifth century BCE) was found in the ancient necropolis of Sardis, in which the name Sepharad (in the same spelling as in Obadiah 20: *sprd*) is used for the capital of the Persian satrapy Sparda = Sardis. And fifty years later, in 1966, another Aramaic inscription from the Persian period (ca. 450 BCE) was published from which it became apparent that in Daskyleion, not far from Sardis, a Jewish family had settled.⁷ That is to say that it is not impossible that the prophet indeed does have in mind here Jewish exiles in the Lydian capital, Sardis. But since that cannot be strictly proved, it is understandable that some scholars remain skeptical.⁸

references to Jewish communities in Asia Minor are extremely rare and have little historical value (e.g., t. *Megilla* 2.5; b. *Moed Qatan* 26a).

5 See the survey in J.D. Wineland, "Sepharad," *ABD* 5 (1992) 1089–1090.

6 See, e.g., E. Lipinski, "Obadiah 20," *VT* 23 (1973) 368–370; H.W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 3: Obadja und Jona* (BKAT XIV/3), Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1977, 47–48. Also Wineland, "Sepharad," is inclined to see a reference to Sardis here.

7 For details see the publications mentioned in the previous note.

8 E.g., Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 38; and Millar in Schürer, *History*, III/1, 20–21. The story that in the middle of the fourth century BCE Aristotle met a learned Jew in Asia Minor (Clearchus *ap.* Josephus, *C. Ap.* I 179–182) is to be regarded as non-historical but can nevertheless be regarded as a testimony for the early hellenization of Jews in Asia Minor; see V.A. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, New York: Atheneum, 1975 (= 1959), 287; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (= GLAJJ), 3 vols., Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–1984, 1. 47.

Anyway, as the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus tells us, some two centuries later, in a letter of the Seleucid king Antiochus III from 205 BCE, this ruler orders that two thousand Jewish families be transferred from Mesopotamia to serve as military colonists in the most important cities of Lydia and Phrygia in order to maintain his hold over this region (*Antiquitates Judaicae* 12.148–153), a characteristic example of the colonization methods of the Seleucids in Asia Minor.⁹ These Jews were given arable land for cultivation and a plot for building a house. So we can be reasonably sure that at least by the end of the third century BCE these two Anatolian provinces had Jewish families among their inhabitants. Most probably, these families laid the foundations of what was to become the rapidly expanding Jewish diaspora in Asia Minor.

Some six decades later (ca. 140 BCE), a letter from the authorities in Rome “to the kings and to the countries” (*1 Macc.* 15:15) urges them to refrain from harming the Jews or waging war upon them because they are “our friends and allies” (15:17); among the “countries” enumerated we find Caria, Pamphylia, Lycia, Halicarnassus, Phaselis, Side, Kos, Rhodos etc. (15:23), which implies that within two or three generations Jews had spread out over most of Asia Minor.¹⁰ Josephus preserves also a series of decrees and resolutions, taken by either the Roman rulers or the Greek city councils, concerning the rights of the Jews in Asia Minor, among other places in Ephesus, Miletus, Smyrna, Tralles, Pergamum, Halicarnassus, Laodicea, Sardis, and the islands of Paros and Cos (they all date from the period between 50 BCE–50 CE).¹¹ These documents

9 See A. Schalit, “The Letter of Antiochus III to Zeuxis Regarding the Establishment of Jewish Military Colonies in Phrygia and Lydia,” *JQR* n.s. 50 (1960) 289–318. There are some scholars, though, who doubt the authenticity of the letter of Antiochus III; see J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, Edinburgh: Clark, 1996, 261 with note 8; but see also Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization*, 287–288; H. Hegermann, “The Diaspora in the Hellenistic Age,” in W.D. Davies & L. Finkelstein (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 115–166, here 146; S. Mitchell, *Anatolia. Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor*, 2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 2. 32 n. 181.

10 Perhaps also the Jewish woman Plousia, who is mentioned in *P.Polit.Iud.* 8 (from 132 BCE) as *Gargarissa*, should be taken as a testimony of Jewish presence in Gargara (in the Troad); see J.M.S. Cowey & K. Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis*, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001, 97.

11 Most of them are in *Ant. Jud.* 14.185–267; 16.160–178; 19.278–312. On the question of the historicity of these documents as preserved in Josephus see M. Pucci ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998. On the reasons why the tensions that are apparent in these documents disappear after the first half of the first century CE see W. Ameling, “Die jüdischen Gemeinden im antiken Kleinasien,” in R. Jütte &

show that, when friction arose between the Jews and the local authorities in the early Roman period, usually the basic cause was “tension over questions concerning the civic status of the resident Diaspora communities *vis-à-vis* the Greek citizen bodies of the host cities.”¹² Apparently, at least some Jews were claiming admission to Greek citizenship, while the Greeks felt that “such admission should entail integration into pagan civic life and that the Jews could not expect to temper the privilege of citizenship with exemption from its uncongenial features.”¹³ The secure position of the Jews in the cities did not come to them automatically. Roman authorities had granted the Jewish communities certain rights and privileges (e.g., exemption from military service), and the Jews had to struggle for their maintenance, but they apparently had sufficient influence and goodwill to get things done as they wanted. On the whole, the documents leave the impression that “in a number of cities in Asia Minor, Jews often met with local opposition to their rights and privileges and had to appeal to Roman authorities who always ruled in their favour.”¹⁴ The picture we get is that of Jewish communities which are keen on the maintenance of their own identity in the midst of a pagan society, often meet with resistance on the part of pagan society, but are in the long run also enabled by that very same society to maintain their way of life without insurmountable problems (although occasionally we do get glimpses of more serious conflicts, e.g., when Josephus says that, in the time of Augustus, the Jews of Asia Minor

A.P. Kustermann (eds.), *Jüdische Gemeinden und Organisationsformen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Vienna: Böhlau, 1996, 29–55, esp. 49–50.

12 E.M. Smallwood, “The Diaspora in the Roman Period Before CE 70,” in W. Horbury, W.D. Davies, J. Sturdy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol. 3, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 177.

13 Smallwood, “The Diaspora,” 179.

14 I. Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting, 5: Diaspora Setting*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996, 143. As a good example, at pp. 141–142 Levinskaya quotes the important edict issued by the Emperor Augustus in 12 BCE stating that the Jews “may follow their own customs in accordance with the law of their fathers . . . and that their sacred monies shall be inviolable and may be sent to Jerusalem and delivered to the treasurers in Jerusalem and they need not give bond (to appear in court) on the Sabbath or on the day of preparation for it after the ninth hour; and if anyone is caught stealing their sacred books or their sacred monies from a synagogue or an ark (of the Law), he shall be regarded as sacrilegious and his property shall be confiscated to the public treasury of the Romans” (*Ant. Jud.* 16.163–164).

were mistreated by the Greeks and saw no limit to their inhuman behaviour, *Ant. Jud.* 16.161 [but see note 14 for Augustus' reaction]).¹⁵

The impression of a growing diaspora is further corroborated by Cicero, who informs us that, according to a Jewish accusation, in 62 BCE the Roman governor of Asia Minor, Flaccus, confiscated money (*i.e.* the annual half-shekel payment for the Temple in Jerusalem) from the Jewish inhabitants of Apamea, Laodicea, Adramyttium, and Pergamum (*Pro Flacco* 28.68).¹⁶ The New Testament adds further evidence, especially in the Book of Acts, where Jewish communities in Cappadocia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Pontus, Ephesus, Smyrna, Philadelphia, Pisidian Antioch, Tarsus, Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium are mentioned (2:9-10; 13:14; 14:1; 16:1-3; 19:17; also Rev. 3:9).¹⁷ Philo even states that "in every village" of Asia and Syria there are innumerable Jews (*Legat.* 245; in 281 he mentions Jewish 'colonies' in Cilicia, Pamphylia, and "most of Asia as far as Bithynia and the remote corners of Pontus"). It is clear that, according to the literary sources, by the first century CE, Jewish settlement had spread all over Asia Minor. And indeed, this is confirmed by the epigraphic evidence: we have inscriptions from at least some 75 Anatolian cities and villages, most of them from the early centuries CE.

This evidence does not permit us, however, to write a history of the Jews in ancient Asia Minor. The data are too few and probably Jewish life in Anatolian cities usually was too uneventful to make it into the books written by ancient historians. Even so, we do observe that, as compared to cities such as Alexandria and Rome, frictions and tensions between Jews and non-Jews were relatively few and it would seem that Jews gradually reached a high degree of integration into Greek city life.

Socio-Religious Aspects

There are several indications for this high degree of integration. Here only some of the most striking instances can be mentioned. In Phrygian Acmonia, we find a very intriguing inscription (*IJO* II 168) that tells us that some prominent

15 It should be kept in mind that, as Pucci Ben Zeev states, the rights given to the Jews "may not be regarded as proof of a special consideration for Jewish needs, but rather an application of common principles of Roman policy" (*Jewish Rights*, 482). On the legal status of the Jewish communities, which falls outside the scope of this article, see Ameling, "Die jüdischen Gemeinden," 34-37.

16 A.J. Marshall, "Flaccus and the Jews of Asia," *Phoenix* 29 (1975) 139-154.

17 See Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts*, 137-152.

members of the local Jewish community had the synagogue restored that had been built by Julia Severa. This woman is well known to us – she is mentioned also in other inscriptions and on coins from Acmonia – as the priestess of the local emperor cult in the middle of the first century CE. So she was certainly not Jewish but played a prominent role in an important pagan cult in the city. Even so this inscription testifies to her warm interest in the Jewish. Julia Severa was an aristocratic lady (her son later became a senator in Rome), who had close connections with the prestigious Roman emigrant family of the Turronii; one of them, Turronius Rapo, was also a priest for the emperor cult and together with Julia Severa he is mentioned on the coins of the city, while another member of the same family, Turronius Cladus, is mentioned in our inscription as the ‘head of the synagogue’ (*archisynagôgos*) that had the renovations done!¹⁸ We see here how a woman of high social standing, with a prominent role in the pagan community of Acmonia, extends a largesse to the Jewish community, which undoubtedly may be taken as a sign of the successful integration of the Jews of that city and of the sympathy they enjoyed among non-Jewish inhabitants.¹⁹

Again from Phrygia, but now two centuries later, are some inscriptions that refer to the book of Deuteronomy. They threaten anyone who buries in the tomb another one than the deceased for whom the tomb was made with “the curses which are written in Deuteronomy” (*IJO* II 173 and 174; a third instance is from Laodicea, *IJO* II 213), which is an interesting variant on the curse formulas that are so frequent on Phrygian graves.²⁰ The reference is undoubtedly to Deut. 28 in the Septuagint, the version which the authors of the inscriptions used. Vv. 28–29 of that chapter threaten the offender with blindness, a motif that occurs also in another epitaph from Acmonia where the stone says: “If someone opens this grave, he will be struck by the curses that are written against his eyes and all the rest of his body” (*IJO* II 172). Here Deuteronomy is not mentioned explicitly but the allusion is unmistakable.²¹ In this connection it is interesting to see that in another Phrygian epitaph,

18 See Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 9.

19 For other instances see L.H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, 310, although I disagree when he says that “we may conclude that she [Julia Severa] later converted to Judaism and then built the synagogue” (576 nn. 120).

20 For which see J.H.M. Strubbe, “Curses Against Violations of the Grave in Jewish Epitaphs from Asia Minor,” in J.W. van Henten & P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy*, Leiden: Brill, 1994, 70–128.

21 See P.W. van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs. An Introductory Survey of a Millennium of Jewish Funerary Epigraphy (300 BCE–700 CE)*, Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1991, 56–57.

IJO II 179 from Apamea, it is significantly said that whenever anyone dares to bury here another person, “he knows the Law of the Jews!” This formulation (“the Law of the Jews”) seems to indicate that a certain knowledge of the Torah, however partial and superficial, is presupposed here among the non-Jews of the region.²²

This suggestion is further confirmed by evidence of quite a different nature but from the same place, namely the curious Noah coins from Apamea. In this city, coins were found from the first half of the third century CE on which Noah and his wife are depicted together with the ark (and the name *Nôe* added). In a number of ancient sources the city of Apamea is also called Kibôtos (= ark).²³ (In the Septuagint, *kibôtos* is used for Noah’s ark.) There circulated a legend that Noah’s ark had landed on a hill in the neighbourhood of the city. Is this a case of Jewish influence? The coins were struck by the pagan authorities of the city, so the legend was believed anyway outside Jewish circles. And the fact that as early as the first century BCE the Greek geographer Strabo says that Apamea was also called Kibôtos (*Geogr.* 12.8.13)²⁴ would seem to be a proof that this legend was not introduced into Phrygia only by the Christians. But doubts about the Jewish origin of the legend arise when one sees that on some earlier coins of the city, from the time of Hadrian, the plural *kibôtoi* is used and that *five* chests are depicted on them. That seems to indicate that this nickname of the city had a non-Jewish origin and that only in a later stage this sobriquet gave the Jewish inhabitants the occasion to localize the landing of Noah’s ark there. However uncertain much of this remains, it is certain that a biblical scene was depicted on the city’s coins and that this is a clear case of Jewish influence upon a non-Jewish population.

Another striking example of close contacts between Jews and non-Jews is the recently discovered inscription from Aphrodisias in Caria on a huge marble block or pillar of almost three meters high and some 45 centimeters wide, inscribed on two sides with a long Greek inscription of 86 lines (IJO II 14).²⁵ It most probably – but not certainly – dates from the late fourth or fifth

22 See Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 100. Cf. an inscription from Catania on Sicily: *adiuro vos per legem quem Dominus dedit Iudaeis* (JIWE I, no. 145).

23 See for references Schürer, *History*, III, 28–30; Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 86–95.

24 In the sixties of the first century CE, Plinius Maior says the same (*Nat. Hist.* 5.29.106).

25 J. Reynolds & R. Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers at Aphrodisias* Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987; on its relevance P.W. van der Horst, “Jews and Christians in Aphrodisias in the Light of Their Relations in Other Cities of Asia Minor,” in idem, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 14), Fribourg: Universitätsverlag-Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990, 166–181.

century CE.²⁶ The greatest part of the text consists of lists of some 125 names²⁷ mentioned as donors or contributors to a local synagogue institution, which is identified tentatively by the editors as the Jewish community's soup-kitchen but which may well have been the collective burial place of that community.²⁸ The 125 or so names of the benefactors are subdivided into three categories: 68 are Jews (although they are not explicitly so described, the overwhelming preponderance of Biblical and Hebrew Jewish names leaves no room for another conclusion); 54 are called 'Godfearers,' *theosebeis*; three are proselytes. This strikingly high percentage of Godfearers, i.e., pagan sympathizers with Judaism, in a list of benefactors and contributors to a Jewish institution, is the great surprise of this inscription. We knew from the Book of Acts and from Josephus that in many cities of the ancient world synagogues had sympathizers in the form of a body of permanent or semi-permanent catechumens.²⁹ The author of Acts leaves us in no doubt about the presence of a sizeable body of Godfearers in the major cities of Asia Minor. Josephus even reports, with characteristic exaggeration, that most of the pagan women of Damascus belonged to this category, and that also in Syrian Antioch the number of sympathizers was extremely great (*Bell.* 2.560; 7.43–45).³⁰ It was among these Godfearers that, according to Acts, Paul made most of his early converts. If we leave out of account Josephus' exaggerating reports, neither from Acts nor from inscriptional evidence is it possible to gauge the exact extent of this phenomenon of pagans sympathizing in various degrees with Judaism (although the literary and epigraphic attestation for Godfearers in Asia Minor is not negligible).³¹ Now we have for the first time an indication of the degree of influence of the synagogue on local pagans in a middle-sized city of Asia Minor. And we have

26 On the problems of dating this inscription see esp. A. Chaniotis, "The Jews of Aphrodisias: New Evidence and Old Problems," *Studia Classica Israelica* 21 (2002) 209–242.

27 The uncertainty about the exact numbers of persons is due partly to the damaged state of the stone, partly to the fact that it is not certain whether or not some names are patronymics; see Reynolds, Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, 93–96.

28 See for the latter interpretation Ameling's commentary on *IJO* II 14.

29 B. Wander, *Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten. Studien zum heidnischen Umfeld von Diasporasynagogen*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998, 143–154, 180–203.

30 On these and other cases of 'adherence' and 'conversion' in Josephus see S.J.D. Cohen, "Respect for Judaism by Gentiles According to Josephus," *HTR* 80 (1987) 409–430.

31 See S. Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos Between Pagans, Jews, and Christians," in P. Athanassiadi & M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1999, 117–118; idem, "Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hypsistos," in S. Mitchell & P. van Nuffelen (eds.), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 189–196.

to bear in mind that this inscription records only the names of the contributors, that is, probably of only a part of the more well-to-do citizens among the Godfearers. Even so there are 54 of them listed. As a matter of fact we can see that the employments of the Godfearers, of which some 22 are given in the inscription, cover a wide range of occupations only very few of which indicate lower social status.³² Most remarkable is the fact that nine of them are *bouleutai*, city councillors. In the later Roman Empire, this office implied heavy financial obligations and could only be exercised by the wealthy of a city. So what we are now able to see is that, in Aphrodisias at least, the Jews attracted large numbers of local gentiles – again, the people recorded form undoubtedly only a part of the total group of Godfearers – and persons of high standing and great influence at that. When pagan local magistrates heartily support and partly pay for the foundation of a Jewish institution, one cannot but conclude that the Jewish community of that city was influential to a degree which hitherto could hardly have been imagined. Its members appear to have been self-confident, accepted in the city, and evidently able to attract the favourable attention of many gentile fellow Aphrodisians.

Godfearers, who were not full converts to Judaism, had a relative freedom in following or not following the commandments of the Jewish Bible. One of the biblical commandments was that sacrifices to the God of Israel were to be offered only in the temple of Jerusalem. Now a recent find may indicate that Godfearers felt free to sacrifice to this God also in their own hometown. *IJO* II 218 is an inscription on a small private altar found in Aspendos in Pamphylia and probably dating from the first or second century CE.³³ It reads “For the truthful god who is not made with hands (in fulfillment of) a vow” (*theôî apseudei kai acheiropoiêtôi euchên*). The interpretation of this inscription is debated.³⁴ The terminology (esp. the use of *acheiropoiêtos*) suggests a Jewish origin, but it is hard to imagine a Jewish altar outside the Jerusalem temple.³⁵ It seems much more credible to look for the origin of this altar-inscription in the circles of Godfearers. If one is in a position to decide for oneself which elements of the Jewish way of life one adopts and which one does not, then the problem of a Jewish altar outside a Jewish temple disappears. A pagan judaizer who did want to confess his belief in the one true God who is not made with hands, need certainly not have felt himself constrained by the centralization

32 Reynolds & Tannenbaum, *Jews and Godfearers*, 116–123, esp. 119–122.

33 For what follows see P.W. van der Horst, “A New Altar of a Godfearer?” in idem, *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction*, 2nd ed., Leuven: Peeters, 1998, 65–72.

34 For a survey see Ameling, *IJO* II 458–461.

35 We do know of Jewish temples elsewhere than in Jerusalem, but not of private altars.

of the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem (or the ceasing of that cult after 70, if the inscription was engraved after the destruction of the temple). As a non-Jew he was free to bring sacrifices to the God of the Jewish people wherever he wanted. A private altar, erected by himself before his house or in the backyard, was one of the possibilities. And indeed, in the soil of Pergamum a small altar was discovered with an inscription that is regarded by several scholars as having been engraved by a Godfearer.³⁶ The text runs as follows: at the top of the altar we read *theos kyrios ho ôn eis aei*,³⁷ “God the Lord is the one who is forever” (or: “God is the Lord who is forever”), and at the lower part of the altar we read: “Zopyrus (dedicated) to the Lord this altar and the lampstand with the lantern.” In this case, too, the combination of the fact that it is an altar from the second century CE and the clearly Jewish terminology is sufficient reason to regard the inscription as belonging to a pagan sympathizer or judaizer, i.e., a Godfearer. Elias Bickerman rightly remarked that throughout antiquity for a pagan Greek or Roman bringing sacrifices was essentially part and parcel of his daily life and that “rabbinic doctors of the Law approved of gentile altars to God. (...) The situation was paradoxical. While the sons of Abraham, after the destruction of the Temple, were no more able to make offerings to God, a sweet savor continued to go up to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob from sacrifices offered by God-fearing gentiles. Yet the rabbis abetted this impairment of the privileges of the chosen people.”³⁸

The best known example of Jewish integration into Graeco-Roman city life is Sardis.³⁹ In 1962, American archaeologists unearthed the greatest ancient synagogue ever in the city of Sardis, capital of ancient Lydia. The colossal basilica-shaped building measures almost 20 × 100 meters and could accommodate some 1000 people. This richly decorated basilica is an integral part of a huge

36 See M.P. Nilsson, “Zwei Altäre aus Pergamon,” *Eranos* 54 (1956) 167–173; G. Dellings, “Die Altarinschrift eines Gottesfürchtigen in Pergamon,” in idem, *Studien zum Neuen Testament und zum hellenistischen Judentum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, 32–38; E. Bickerman, “The Altars of Gentiles. A Note on the Jewish ‘ius sacrum,’” in idem, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History II*, Leiden: Brill, 1980, 324–346 (in the new edition, *AJEC* 68, Leiden: Brill, 2007, 596–617). This inscription has not been included by Ameling in *IJO II*.

37 Note the allusion to Exod. 3:14 *egô eimi ho ôn*.

38 Bickerman, “The Altars of Gentiles,” 344 (615).

39 From the abundant literature I refer *exempli gratia* only to A.R. Seager & A.T. Kraabel, “The Synagogue and the Jewish Community,” in G.M.A. Hanfmann (ed.), *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983, 168–190; and L.I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue. The First Thousand Years*, New Haven – London: Yale University Press, 2000, 242–249, where further references can be found.

municipal bath-and-gymnasium complex with a shopping mall in the city centre and as such it is a monument to the integration of the Jewish community in this Graeco-Roman city.⁴⁰ The building is one of the most prominent features of the city's urban landscape, as every modern visitor can now easily see. Even apart from the enormous size, this points to the fact that the Jewish community of Sardis was definitely not a 'quantité négligeable.' Minorities in a city do not usually get hold of a central and prestigious building if they do not have any clout and influence there. That the Jews did indeed have this influence is amply confirmed by the more than 80 inscriptions found in the synagogue, which demonstrate that no less than nine of the Jews mentioned are *bouleutai*, i.e., members of the city council (*boulê*), the highest administrative body of the city.⁴¹ Here we see Jews who have climbed up to the highest rung on the social ladder, for "the councils of Greek cities under the Late Empire were open only to the wealthier families, with membership, once purchased, being hereditary and held for life."⁴² So distinguished and well-to-do Jewish families here participated in the government of the city.⁴³ No wonder that here, unlike elsewhere in the fifth and sixth centuries, the synagogue was not expropriated by the Christians in order to be converted into a church building. This basilica could have been a magnificent church, but what happened in fact was that during the fifth and sixth centuries the Christians in Sardis had to make do with a much smaller building than the synagogue. A striking difference from the famous Aphrodisias inscription, which also mentions nine *bouleutai*, is that there the city councilors are all gentiles whereas here they are Jews. "The Sardis dossier stands out for its sheer richness and scale, and for the striking vitality of late Roman Judaism that it conveys, a vitality that appears all the more remarkable because of the growing strength of Christianity at the same period in history."⁴⁴

40 Seager & Kraabel, "The Synagogue and the Jewish Community," *passim*.

41 Note that here, again, six non-Jewish donors are explicitly called 'God-fearers' (*theosebeis*, *IJO* II 67, 68, 83, 123, 125, 132). See now the *caveat* by Martin Goodman in his "Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora."

42 J.H. Kroll, "The Greek Inscriptions of the Sardis Synagogue," *HTR* 94 (2001) 10.

43 Also elsewhere, we have evidence of the relative affluence of Jewish families, e.g., in Phrygian Acmonia; see Mitchell, *Anatolia*, 35; *IJO* II 172 and 173 are striking cases.

44 Kroll, "Greek Inscriptions," 48. That the growing strength of Christianity could also have the effect of Jews stressing more and more their distinctive Jewishness (e.g., by adopting more frequently Hebrew names) is illustrated for Cilician Corycus by M.H. Williams, "The Jews of Corycus – A Neglected Diasporan Community from Roman Times," *JSJ* 25 (1994) 274–286.

Finally, we have to discuss a very significant form of *rapprochement* between Jews and Gentiles in Asia Minor, namely the cult of Theos Hypsistos, God Most High.⁴⁵ Stephen Mitchell collected some 375 inscriptions of worshippers of this god, mostly from the second and third centuries CE,⁴⁶ mainly from the eastern Mediterranean, but especially from Asia Minor.⁴⁷ and in most cases it is impossible to determine whether the inscription is pagan, Christian, or Jewish; arguments for assigning them to either category are rarely decisive. That is so because Theos Hypsistos is a designation that was current as an epithet for the highest god in both paganism and Judaism and Christianity.⁴⁸ It is highly probable that this rather elusive cult concerned a syncretistic religious movement that did a conscious effort to bridge the gap between polytheism and monotheism. Its origins lie not in Jewish but in pagan henotheistic circles, where the attraction of Judaism was so strongly felt that one was seeking common ground. Hypsistarians chose to address their god by a name that fitted both pagan and Jewish patterns of belief. Quite often they combined their worship of Theos Hypsistos with that of angels, another trait with monotheistic, or at least henotheistic, overtones.⁴⁹ As Mitchell says, “We are evidently

45 For what follows see esp. S. Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos Between Pagans, Jews, and Christians,” in P. Athanassiadi, M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, 81–148; and idem, “Further Thoughts on the Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” in S. Mitchell & P. van Nuffelen (eds.), *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, Cambridge: CUP, 2010, 167–208. The catalogue of inscriptions is divided over these two articles.

46 It is important to realize that, whereas the epigraphic evidence is mainly from the second and third centuries, other evidence makes clear that this cult was not a development of these centuries, “but occurred at least sporadically during the late Hellenistic or early Roman periods, (...) for which there is little or no epigraphic attestation” (Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 209). Mitchell also points out that there is still evidence for the Hypsistarians in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.

47 The greatest density of inscriptions outside Asia Minor is to be found in Cyprus (32) and Athens (27). For its relatively frequent occurrence in Phrygia (26 items so far) see Th. Drew-Bear, & Ch. Naour, “Divinités de Phrygie,” *ANRW* II 18, 3, Berlin – New York: W. de Gruyter, 1990, 2032–2043.

48 See esp. M. Simon, “Theos Hypsistos,” in his *Le christianisme antique et son contexte religieux* (WUNT 23), vol. 2, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981, 495–508.

49 A.R.R. Sheppard, “Pagan Cults of Angels in Roman Asia Minor,” *Talanta* 12–13 (1980/81) 77–101; Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 102–105; P.W. van der Horst, “Hosios kai Dikaios,” in K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill – Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999, 427–428. Sheppard’s nr. 8 even mentions an “association of the lovers of angels” (*philangelôn*)

dealing with an area of belief, where Jews, Judaizers, and pagans occupied very similar territories. (...) The cult of Theos Hypsistos had room for pagans and for Jews. More than that, it shows that the principal categories into which we divide the religious groupings of late antiquity are simply inappropriate or misleading when applied to the beliefs and practices of a significant proportion of the population of the eastern Roman empire' (114–115).⁵⁰ The lack of any representations of the god and the absence of animal sacrifice from the rituals “distinguish the worship of Hypsistos from most other pagan cults in Greece, Asia Minor, and the Near East.”⁵¹ Mitchell also shows that what we know about pagan ‘Godfearers’ (*theosebeis*), or sympathizers with Judaism, is in agreement with the information we have about the worshippers of Theos Hypsistos to such a degree that both groups could very well be identical; we know that Hypsistarians often used the term ‘Godfearers’ (*theosebeis*) as a technical term to describe themselves. “Dedications to Theos Hypsistos occur at almost all the places [in Asia Minor] where Godfearers appear.”⁵² A very strong argument Mitchell adduces for identifying Hypsistarians with Godfearers is what he calls the “uncanny parallel” (120) between Josephus’ description of Godfearers and the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nazianze’s description of Hypsistarians. The first one says about the Godfearers: “The [non-Jewish] masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances, and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, not a single nation to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed.”⁵³ And Gregory says about the Hypsistarians (a sect to which his own father had belonged!):

This cult was a mixture of two elements, Hellenic error and adherence to the Jewish law. Shunning some parts of both, it was made up from others. Its followers reject the idols and sacrifices of the former and worship fire and lamplight; they revere the sabbath and are scrupulous not to touch certain foods, but have nothing to do with circumcision.⁵⁴

symbiōsis). For a hymn “for God (...) and his first angel, Jesus Christ” see Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 100–102 with n. 406.

50 For an elaborate presentation of the problems of categorization see Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 11–51.

51 Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 108.

52 Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 119 [my addition].

53 *C. Ap.* 2.282.

54 *Or.* 18.5 (PG 35:989–991). Mitchell adduces other Patristic evidence as well.

A pagan confirmation of these Jewish and Christian descriptions can be found in Juvenal's famous *Satire* 14.96–106.⁵⁵ It does not plead against the identification of Hypsistarians and Godfearers that occasionally one finds in the inscriptions other gods mentioned than Theos Hypsistos (e.g., Zeus, Helios, Men, Cybele, Larmene).⁵⁶ This apparent polytheism does not militate against the essentially henotheistic nature of the cult, since in Hypsistarian circles gods other than the Most High were often regarded as his angels, as is so clearly said in the second or third century CE inscription from Oenoanda containing a Clarian oracle in which Apollo says that he and other gods are no more than angels of the highest god (SEG 27 [1977] 933 = nr. 233 in Mitchell's list).⁵⁷ In general it can be said that in the century between 150 and 250 CE, the oracles of Apollo at Claros and Didyma forged a kind of new theology which can be seen as "a persistent effort to integrate the pantheon of paganism into a system governed by a single guiding principle or a supreme god."⁵⁸ An impressive testimony to that effort is another oracle of the Clarian Apollo, in which he says that Jahweh (Iaô) is the Highest God, who is called Hades in winter, Zeus in spring, Helios in summer, and Iakchos (= Dionysus) in autumn.⁵⁹

If Godfearers and Hypsistarians are identical, that would be another confirmation of the important role that Jewish communities in Asia Minor played in the processes of religious and social interaction. It would explain, for instance, who were the persons for whom the theatre seats in Miletus were reserved according to the much debated inscription IJO II 37. If this text – *topos eioudeôn tôn kai theoebion* [sic] = *topos Ioudaiôn tôn kai Theosebiôn* – is to be translated as 'place of the Jews who (are) also (called) Godfearers,' it may imply that the connections between Jews and Hypsistarians (*theosebeis*) were so close that Jews managed to get reserved seats in the city theatre by

55 See Stern's *GLAJJ* nr. 301, in vol. 2, 102–107.

56 Instances can be found easily in Mitchell, "The Cult of Theos Hypsistos," 129–147.

57 See also G. Zuntz, *Griechische philosophische Hymnen*, hrsgg. von H. Cancik, L. Käppel, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005, 89–94; R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, ch. 4.

58 Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 43.

59 Quoted by Cornelius Labeo, *De oraculo Apollinis Clarii*, fr. 18 Mastandrea (ap. Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.18.19–20). See P. Mastandrea, *Un neoplatonico latino: Cornelio Labeone (testimonianze e frammenti)*, Leiden: Brill, 1979, 159–192 (160–161 on the textcritical problem of the last name); Zuntz, *Griechische Philosophische Hymnen* 76. On this oracle see also my article "Porphyry on Judaism," elsewhere in the present volume.

parading as Hypsistarians, who had enough clout with the municipal authorities to provide these seat-reservations for their ‘coreligionists.’⁶⁰

Before the synod of Nicaea in 325 CE, in general Christians in Asia Minor “mingled with their non-Christian fellows without friction and confrontation in a territory which was familiar to all of them.”⁶¹ We know of Christian priests who worshipped Theos Hypsistos.⁶² As was to be expected under these circumstances, the interrelationships between Jews and non-Jews did not remain restricted to gentiles. This is apparent, among other things, from the *canones* of the synod of Laodicea (in Phrygia) from the middle of the sixties of the fourth century CE. In these decrees, Christians are warned severely against partaking in all sorts of Jewish practices.⁶³ That there was more on stake here than the sheer possibility that such things would happen is made very clear by a passage about exactly this period (namely, the year 367) in Theophanes’ *Chronographia* (p. 62 ed. De Boor) which tells us that in that year Christians in Phrygia celebrated Passover *together with the Jews* (here one is reminded strongly of the situation a couple of decades later in Antioch-on-the-Orontes, where for similar reasons the many strongly judaizing Christians were heavily castigated by John Chrysostom).⁶⁴ It is also to be noted that both Jewish and Christian epitaphs from Phrygia use as a standard warning to grave robbers the so-called Eumeneian formula (“he/they will have to reckon with God”), which often makes it very hard to distinguish one group from the other.⁶⁵ “The later fruits of this close relationship between Anatolian Jews and the Christian communities living alongside them are clear in the Judaizing strain of Novatian Christianity which is attested above all in Phrygia in the late fourth and fifth

60 See M. Baker, “Who Was Sitting at the Theatre at Miletos? An Epigraphical Application of a Novel Theory,” *JStJ* 36 (2005) 397–416.

61 Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 122. But there is anti-Jewish Christian literature from Asia Minor; see Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 27–32.

62 Mitchell, “The Cult of Theos Hypsistos,” 122–123.

63 For the texts see E.J. Jonkers, *Acta et symbola conciliorum quae saeculo quarto habita sunt*, Leiden: Brill, 1954, 86–96, esp. canons 29 (keeping Sabbath), 35 (angelolatry), 37 (festivals with Jews), and 38 (celebration of the Jewish Passover); discussion in Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 101–103.

64 See P.W. van der Horst, “Jews and Christians in Antioch at the End of the Fourth Century,” in S.E. Porter & B.W.R. Pearson (eds.), *Christian-Jewish Relations Through the Centuries*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000, 228–238. For a map showing the many sites with both Jewish and Christian presence in Phrygia see Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 42.

65 P.R. Trebilco, “The Christian and Jewish Eumeneian Formula,” in J.M.G. Barclay (ed.), *Negotiating Diaspora. Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire*, London – New York: Routledge, 2004, 66–88.

centuries.”⁶⁶ Celebrating Easter at the time of the Jewish Passover was only one of these Novatian practices. And the seventh-century *Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon* tells us that the Jews of the village of Goeleon were present at this saint’s greatest miracle of exorcism.⁶⁷

On the other hand, it should be added that there was not always a peaceful coexistence between Jews and Christians: In the *Acta Pionii* we read about the martyrdom of Pionius in Smyrna in 250 CE. In chapters 13–14, Pionius launches an attack on the Jews that is more vehement than his attack on his pagan persecutors. As it appears from his words, the Jews of Smyrna, of whom we know that they formed a prominent and influential community in the city,⁶⁸ tried to make proselytes among persecuted Christians. A conversion to Judaism was of course as efficacious in avoiding martyrdom as a sacrifice to idols. Even in the Diocletian persecution the Emperor explicitly exempted the Jews from the necessity of offering sacrifice, thus confirming an old privilege of Judaism. And, as Marcel Simon has observed, “it is very difficult to believe that Jewish attempts to convert persecuted Christians were made without the cognizance of the Roman authorities. (. . .) It looks as if the state, in its desire to eliminate Christianity by making apostates and not martyrs, accepted the two recognized religious categories, Jewish and pagan, and left to the defecting Christians themselves the choice.”⁶⁹ If Simon is right, we see here one of the most threatening consequences for the church of a Jewish-pagan coalition. And if Robin Lane Fox is right in his surmise that the ‘Great Sabbath’ (mentioned in *Acta Pionii* 2) which marked the occasion of the persecution, is the festival of Purim which the Jews in Smyrna celebrated together with the pagans who celebrated their Dionysia at the same time (!), then we see a bizarre form of that coalition in an easy relationship between a Jewish and a gentile festival, which the church had to face.⁷⁰

In spite of the many proofs of peaceful coexistence and *rapprochement* between Jews and non-Jews (both pagan and Christian) in Asia Minor, we should not doubt that many of these Jews attached great importance to

66 Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 35; cf. *ibid.* 96–108.

67 See Mitchell, *Anatolia*, II 139–143, for extensive discussion.

68 See Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 481–483, and Ameling, *IJO* II, 174–195, for the evidence. Note that almost a century earlier the Jews of Smyrna opposed Christianity according to *Mart. Polyc.* 12:2.

69 M. Simon, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135–425)*, Oxford: Littman Library, 1986, 111.

70 Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 486–487. Note that *Codex Theodosianus* XVI 8,18 (from 408 CE) prohibits the Jews to mock Christianity on Purim by burning Haman’s effigy on a cross.

maintaining their Jewish identity and singularity. This is most visible in the epigraphic material, but not only there. One finds their central institution, the synagogue, mentioned many times (sometimes as ‘most holy synagogue’);⁷¹ the functions they had in their religious community (*archisynagôgos*, *archôn*, *presbyteros*, *gerousiarchês*, *grammateus*, *diakonos*, *anagnôstês*, *hiereus*, *psalmologos*, *phrontistês*);⁷² the repeated references to their Bible (see above on the curses from Deuteronomy)⁷³ and to reading and studying the Bible (*IJO* II 14,2–5 from Aphrodisias; 131 from Sardis); the mention of their religious festivals (Pesach and Festival of Weeks in nr. 196,7 from Hierapolis); their commitment to the annual collecting of the Temple tax before 70 (see Augustus’ decree in *Ant. Jud.* 16.163–164); the regulations for kosher food in Sardis and no doubt elsewhere (see the decree in *Ant. Jud.* 14.259–261); their request for exemption from military service in order not to desecrate the sabbath (*Ant. Jud.* 16.163–164);⁷⁴ the references to God’s punishment and judgement on tombstones (see above on the curses in epitaphs); the numerous representations of the menorah; and last but not least, the frequent self-identification as *Ioudaios* (especially in Hierapolis). It is clear that for most of the Imperial period the Jews of Asia Minor formed self-conscious communities which were in intense interaction with their surroundings, both pagan and Christian. It is only from the end of the fourth century CE onwards that the anti-Jewish legislation of the Christian emperors began to make Jewish life increasingly difficult.⁷⁵

71 See *IJO* II, p. 624 s.v. Cf. also the term *sambatheion* (synagogue?) in nr. 149.

72 On the meanings of these designations (quite often obscure) see van der Horst, *Ancient Jewish Epitaphs*, 85–101; Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 387–428. Note that there is no mention of rabbis, who apparently had no influence at all in Asia Minor till the early Middle Ages (*IJO* nr. 184 is only an apparent exception; see Ameling *ad locum*). It is telling that in at least some, but probably more, places women even had leading positions in the communities (*IJO* II 14, 25, 36, 43); see B.J. Broten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue. Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, Chico: Scholars Press, 1982, and Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 104–126.

73 In *IJO* II 175 and 176 one also finds references to Zechariah 5:1–4.

74 See the discussion in Trebilco, *Jewish Communities*, 16–18.

75 Quite telling is a recently discovered inscription from the fifth or sixth century, found in a church on the island of Icaria, which says, “It is impossible that you will ever hear the truth from Jews at Icaria!” (*IJO* II 5a).