

ETERNAL STRANGERS: ANTI-JEWISH MUSINGS THROUGHOUT HISTORY (PART I OF III)

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“For Christians, Jews were eternal strangers.”
– J. Hood¹

Poor Jews! – condemned by God and fate to be forever misunderstood, neglected, insulted, abused, envied, pitied, indeed hated by all mankind. The subject of insult, calumny, slander, nay, even beatings, torture, and all manner of physical abuse. Such an unkind destiny. How did it come to this? How is it that throughout history, Jews have come to be detested, battered, and beaten down? Is it something about Jewish culture? Religion? Ethnicity? Values? And how does this long history relate to present-day abuse and hatred heaped upon Jews worldwide, and on the Jewish state?

These are important questions, given the present state of the world and the power and influence commanded by the Jewish community generally. Part of the current animosity is based, no doubt, on the mere fact that Jews, a small minority in every nation of the world save Israel, hold grossly disproportionate power to their numbers.² People everywhere, no matter their religious or political context, understand an elemental fact of democracy: that a small, wealthy minority should not exert disproportionate influence in the life of a nation. That the Jews do this is undeniable. They would be disliked on this count alone.

But there is much more to the story. Their present level of influence is unprecedented, but Jews have had access to power for millennia. Against this backdrop have been numerous pogroms, banishments, and outright massacres. Thus it was not strictly their influence that led others to detest them. Other factors have been at work. By recounting this history, and the observations of prominent individuals, we may

¹ *Aquinas and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 22.

² The nations with the highest Jewish percentage (apart from Israel) are: (1) USA – 1.8%, (2) Canada – 1.2%, (3) France – 0.8%, (4) UK – 0.5%, (5) Australia – 0.5%. [Http://www.Jewishvirtuallibrary.org](http://www.Jewishvirtuallibrary.org)

better understand the Jewish phenomenon, and thus learn how to better deal with this most influential minority.

In the present essay I will trace the history of negative attitudes toward Jews and Jewish society, beginning in ancient times. The point is not to revel in abuse, but to give voice to the most articulate and insightful critics of Jews – and to draw plausible conclusions. In the academic literature, such a study would come under the heading “history of anti-Semitism.” There are many such works; the library database WorldCat lists 844 English-language books published in the past 10 years alone. But these books – the vast majority by Jewish authors – reflect a strongly pro-Jewish bias. Consequently the critics are nearly always the source of the problem, never the Jews or Jewish actions. The Jews themselves are almost uniformly portrayed as an innocent and beleaguered people, set upon by cruel and vindictive forces. The various “anti-Semites” are depicted as sick individuals, sadistic in nature, even downright evil. At the very least, they are severely mentally ill. Jewish theories of anti-Semitism as psychiatric disorder, such as those developed within the framework of psychoanalysis – most egregiously, the Frankfurt School, are a prominent theme of Kevin MacDonald’s *The Culture of Critique*.³

Consider this impressive statement from a recent “anatomy of anti-Semitism” by Frederick Cople Jaher:

In the 1940s and 1950s students of anti-Semitism widely regarded that phenomenon ... as a ramification of severe emotional or social disorder. They realized that Christian prejudice...could not explain the firestorm that had nearly obliterated twentieth-century European Jewry.... In the agonized post-Holocaust reassessment, ... psychohistorians, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts tended to focus on flaws in the argument that anti-Semitism sprang from christological sources.... [American postwar studies] describe anti-Semitism as an emotional disorder produced by intrapsychic tensions and sexual and social anxieties and frustrations.... Jew haters accordingly exhibit grave personality disorders. They are asocial or antisocial, alienated, isolated, inhibited, anxious, repressed, rigid, regressive, infantile, narcissis-

³ Kevin MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique* (Bloomington, IN: Authorhouse, 2002; originally published by Praeger [Westport, CT, 1998]).

tic, hostile, punitive, conformist, dependent, delusive, guilt-ridden, paranoid, irrational, aggressive, and prone to violence.⁴

Jaher all but exhausts his thesaurus in seeking pejorative appellations for the insane "Jew haters." And yet we must ask ourselves: Is this rational? Were there no other causes that might have motivated the critics of Jewry? Were all the notable "anti-Semites" in history – and there were many, as I will show – really insane? All those prominent and brilliant individuals, by all other accounts men of genius – were they closet lunatics? Or does the problem lie elsewhere? Is the psychosis, perhaps, resident in the Jewish personality, the Jewish psyche, the Jewish race? Is it a defense mechanism to reflect one's own deficiencies upon one's enemies?

In the following assessment of historical attitudes I will be seeking common and universal themes. Kevin MacDonald discusses the following themes of anti-Jewish literature throughout history: Separatism and clannishness; negative personality traits resulting in willingness of Jews to exploit non-Jews; economic, political and cultural domination, often in the service of alien ruling elites; disloyalty.⁵ Attitudes, criticisms, and other negative observations that persist over the centuries and across cultures are significant markers; they indicate a set of robust and persistent traits that are apparently embedded in the Jewish character. It is enlightening to examine such traits in an open and objective manner.

CRITIQUES FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD

Traditionally speaking, the Jewish ethnicity traces back to Abraham, circa 1500 BC. Jews spread out around the Middle East, interacting with neighboring tribes and cultures while maintaining a strong sense of racial integrity. Within two centuries they reached Egypt,

⁴ Frederic Cople Jaher. 1994. *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 10-12.

⁵ Kevin MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents: Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Anti-Semitism*, (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998; Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2002). According to MacDonald, the major outbreaks of anti-Jewish hostility (later Roman Empire, the Iberian Inquisitions, National Socialism) involved evolved psychological mechanisms interacting with resource competition between Jews and non-Jews broadly construed to include all of the previously mentioned themes, particularly economic, political, and (especially after the Enlightenment) cultural domination.

whereupon — if we believe the exodus story — they were driven out. This constituted the first “anti-Semitic” act in recorded history. Settling in Palestine, the Jews established the unified Kingdom of David by 1000 BC, and shortly thereafter built their first temple (Solomon’s Temple) in Jerusalem.⁶

The next detailed account of “Jew hatred” is documented later in the Old Testament, in the Book of Esther. Esther was the Jewish queen of Persian King Xerxes (Ahasuerus), circa 475 BC. The king’s second in command, Haman, grew to hate the Jews because of their insolence, especially that of Esther’s cousin Mordecai. Consequently, “Haman sought to destroy all the Jews” (Esther 3:6). He issued directives “to destroy, to slay, and to annihilate all Jews,” and built a monstrous gallows, 50 cubits high (about 25 m), just to hang Mordecai. Through various trickery, Esther turned the tables, and Haman himself ended up on the gallows.⁷

This of course is the Jewish version of events, and we have no independent account of this story, but still, it is reasonable to assume some factual basis at its core. And it shows that the Jews have been able to inure themselves to powerful foes for millennia.

A third anti-Jewish incident occurred in the year 410 BC, in which the Egyptian military commander Vidranga attacked and destroyed the Jewish temple at Elephantine.⁸ With these three events we find a trend beginning to emerge: where the Jews settled amongst other peoples, they seem to have made enemies.

For roughly the first millennium of their existence, no outside writers made note of the Hebrew tribe — at least, no writings have survived. We have only the internal, Old Testament account of things, which is no doubt glorified and exaggerated in turn. Of interest here is how the outsiders, the non-Jews, viewed them when they did begin to take notice.

⁶ This temple was destroyed in 586 BC by Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. The Second Temple was built in 516 BC, which in turn was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD; the western (‘Wailing’) wall is all that remains today.

⁷ The Jews then said to go on a rampage, and with the king’s backing killed over 75,000 of their “enemies” (9:16). This event is celebrated in the Jewish holiday of Purim.

⁸ For a detailed account of this event, see Peter Schafer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 132-138.

The first to comment were the Greeks. Through seafaring trade and imperial expansion they came into contact with many groups of the eastern Mediterranean, including Egyptians, Phoenicians, Syrians, and Jews. The earliest direct references come from Theophrastus and Hecateus of Abdera, but there are two preceding and suggestive passages from Plato. The first is in *Republic*, dated circa 375 BC. Amidst a discussion of justice in the polis, Plato identifies three social classes: rulers, auxiliaries (military), and the "money-makers" (businessmen). He then compares these qualities to neighboring cultures, observing that "the love of money ... is conspicuously displayed by the Phoenicians and Egyptians" (436a). We don't know if, by "Phoenicians," Plato means to include the Jews; certainly he does not mention them by name. At that time there was general confusion about the various tribes of that region.⁹ Still, it is striking that the people there were widely known as lovers of money.

A second and related reference comes from Plato's final work (ca. 350 BC), *Laws*. In Book V he discusses the virtue and value of mathematics, under the condition that we "expel the spirit of pettiness and greed" (747c) that would otherwise invite abuse of that skill. If a teacher fails to do this, he will have inadvertently produced a "twister," a dangerously corrupt person — as has happened "in the case of the Egyptians and Phoenicians, and many other races whose approach to wealth and life in general shows a narrow-minded outlook." This could reflect a general sense of Athenian elitism, but it is interesting that Plato again cites those two groups specifically.

But it is not until roughly 310 BC that we find the first explicit reference to the Jews, by Aristotle's star pupil Theophrastus. It seems he had a concern about one of their customs: "the Syrians, of whom the Jews (*Ioudaioi*) constitute a part, also now sacrifice live victims.... They were the first to institute sacrifices both of other living beings and of themselves." The Greeks, he added, would have "recoiled from the entire

⁹ Gabba notes that, at that time, "the distinctions between the various peoples of the Syrian and Phoenician regions" had yet to emerge. Herodotus (484–425 BC) refers to the "Phoenicians" and the "Syrians of Palestine" as tribes that have adopted the practice of circumcision. And the Jewish writer Josephus (ca. 37–100 AD) remarks that the Jews "spoke the Phoenician language." See Emilio Gabba, "The growth of anti-Judaism or the Greek attitude toward the Jews," in W. D. Davies and L. Finkelstein, (Eds.), *Cambridge History of Judaism*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 615, 618.

business.”¹⁰ The victims — animal and human — were not eaten, but burnt as “whole offerings” to their God, and were “quickly destroyed.” The philosopher was clearly repelled by this Jewish tradition.

And Theophrastus’ word for “whole burnt offering”? ‘Holocaust’ (*holokautountes*) — meaning a complete burning (*holos-kaustos*). Incredibly, the very first Greek reference to Jews *also* includes the very first reference to a “holocaust.” Fate works in strange ways indeed.

It was around that time that the Macedonian general Ptolemy I came to rule Egypt. His military, for various reasons, could not conscript Egyptian citizens, and so a mercenary army was necessary. Ptolemy had a ready supply at hand in the Jews. Gabba relates that the king employed 30,000 Jews, chosen from among his many prisoners of war.” Well paid and highly trustworthy, they served to keep the native population at bay, and the natives apparently retaliated against them from time to time.”¹¹

This, in addition to the cultural and religious quirks, was another basis for indigenous animosity towards Jews. It anticipates the similar use of Jewry by future leaders of Europe and Russia — with comparable results. But again this incident is revealing. It is understandable to want to get out of prison, but one must wonder at the evident readiness of the Jews to side *with the enemies of the native population*, for pay, and to do so enthusiastically, with little compunction. Indeed, alliances between Jews and alien ruling elites against the native population have been a common theme of anti-Jewish attitudes in traditional societies and were reenacted in the 20th century in the Soviet Union following the Bolshevik Revolution and in the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe following World War II.¹²

Hecateus, working somewhat after Theophrastus, wrote the first text dedicated to the subject: *On the Jews*.¹³ Two fragments survive, one by the Jewish writer Josephus and the other by Diodorus. Generally speaking both fragments are sympathetic to the Jews, and thus it is striking

¹⁰ Menahem Stern. 1974. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities), 10.

¹¹ Gabba, “The growth of anti-Judaism or the Greek attitude toward the Jews,” 635.

¹² MacDonald, *Separation and Its Discontents*, *Ibid.*; MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, Ch. 3; Kevin MacDonald, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone: Judaism as a Group Evolutionary Strategy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994; Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2002), Chapter 5.

¹³ According to Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, I. 183.

that the latter includes this observation on the story of the exodus: "as a consequence of having been driven out [of Egypt], Moses introduced a way of life which was to a certain extent misanthropic and hostile to foreigners" (*apanthropon tina kai mixoxenon bion*).¹⁴ One can certainly understand the anger of any people who have been driven from their place of residence. But why should this translate into *misanthropy* – that is, hatred of mankind in general? It is as if the Jews took out their anger on the rest of humanity. Perhaps it was a case of extreme resentment combined with extreme stubbornness. Or perhaps this was already a characteristic trait; we cannot yet tell.

But there is a second question here: why were the Jews driven out? Egyptian high priest Manetho (ca. 250 BC) tells of a group of "lepers and other polluted persons," 80,000 in number, who were exiled from Egypt and found residence in Judea. There they established Jerusalem and built a large temple. Manetho comments that the Jews kept to themselves, as it was their law "to interact with none save those of their own confederacy." As the story continues, the Jews ("Solymites") marshaled allies from among other "polluted" persons, returned to Egypt, and temporarily conquered a large territory. When in power they treated the natives "impiously and savagely," "set[ting] towns and villages on fire, pillaging the temples and mutilating images of the gods without restraint," and roasting ('holocausting') the animals held sacred by the locals.¹⁵ The degree of truthfulness here is uncertain, but once again it is reasonable to assume some factual basis.

INTO THE ROMAN ERA

The Seleucid (Macedonian) king Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled over the territory of Judea in the early second century BC. Internal Jewish disputes elevated to a general insurrection, which angered him. His army invaded Jerusalem in 168 BC, killing many Jews and plundering their great (second) temple. Greek philosopher Posidonius adds that, upon seizing the temple, Epiphanes freed a Greek citizen who was being held captive, only to be fattened up for sacrifice, and eaten. This was allegedly an annual ritual.¹⁶ He further remarks that the Jews worshipped the head of an ass, having placed one of solid gold in their temple.

¹⁴ Gabba, "The growth of anti-Judaism or the Greek attitude toward the Jews," 629.

¹⁵ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 82-83.

¹⁶ Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, II. 79, 91-97. See also Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 146-147).

Nonetheless, within a few years the Jews prevailed in the so-called Maccabean Revolt, reestablishing Jewish rule over Judea — a situation that would last until the Romans invaded in 63 BC.

The decline of the Seleucids coincided with Roman ascent. Rome was still technically a republic in the second century BC, but its power and influence were rapidly growing. Jews were attracted to the seat of power, and came to Rome in significant numbers. As before, they came to be hated. By 139 BC, the Roman praetor Hispalus found it necessary to expel them from the city: “The same Hispalus banished the Jews from Rome, who were attempting to hand over their own rites to the Romans, and he cast down their private alters from public places.”¹⁷ In even this short passage, one senses a Roman Jewry who were disproportionately prominent, obtrusive, even “pushy.”

Perhaps in part because of this incident, and in light of the Maccabean revolt some 30 years earlier, the Seleucid king Antiochus VII Sidetes was advised in 134 BC to exterminate the Jews. Referring to the account by Posidonius, Gabba explains that the king was called on

to destroy the Jews, for they alone among all peoples refused all relations with other races, and saw everyone as their enemy; their forbears, impious and cursed by the gods, had been driven out of Egypt. The counselors [cited] the Jews’ hatred of all mankind, sanctioned by their very laws, which forbade them to share their table with a Gentile or give any sign of benevolence.¹⁸

Needless to say, Sidetes did not heed his counselors’ advice.

Two or three decades after Posidonius, around the year 75 BC, prominent speaker and teacher Apollonius Molon wrote the first book to explicitly confront the Hebrew tribe, *Against the Jews*. From his early years in Caria and Rhodes he would likely have had direct contact with them, and thus was able to write from personal experience. Molon referred to Moses as a “charlatan” and “imposter,” viewing the Jews as “the very vilest of mankind.”¹⁹ Josephus adds the following:

¹⁷ Cited in Valerius Maximus, *Facta et Dicta* (1. 3. 3). In an alternate account, the Jews were only confined to their homes, not banished.

¹⁸ Gabba, “The growth of anti-Judaism or the Greek attitude toward the Jews,” 645.

¹⁹ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 155-156.

[Molon] has scattered [his accusations] here and there all over his work, reviling us in one place as atheists and misanthropes, in another reproaching us as cowards, whereas elsewhere, on the contrary, he accuses us of temerity and reckless madness. He adds that we are the most witless of all barbarians, and are consequently the only people who have contributed no useful invention to civilization.²⁰

The Jews are "atheists" in the sense that they reject the Roman gods. The "misanthrope" charge recurs, having first appeared some two centuries earlier in Hecateus. But the complaints of cowardice, villainy, and recklessness are new, as is the statement that the Jews have contributed nothing of value to civilization. The rhetoric is clearly heating up.

In 63 BC, a momentous event: Roman general Pompey takes Palestine. For most residents of the region this was nothing to be feared, and in fact promised to bring significant improvements in many areas of life. But as the formerly dominant force in Judea, the Jews were particularly incensed. And now the Romans had to face their wrath directly, in the form of an on-going insurrection.

Thus it is unsurprising that we find a quick succession of anti-Jewish comments by notable Romans. Five are of interest, beginning with Cicero. In the year 59 BC Cicero gave a speech, now titled *Pro Flacco*, that offered a defense of L.V. Flaccus, a Roman propraetor in Asia. Flaccus was charged with embezzling Jewish gold destined for Jerusalem. Strikingly, Cicero begins by noting the power and influence of the Jews:

You know what a big crowd it is, how they stick together, how influential they are in informal assemblies. So I will speak in a low voice so that only the jurors may hear; for those are not wanting who would incite them against me and against every respectable man.²¹

Shades of the Israel Lobby! It is rather shocking that Cicero, speaking near the height of Roman power, should voice this concern — if even as a mock concern.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 155. Cf. Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, II. 148.

²¹ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 197.

He continues on, noting that the senate had a long-standing policy of restricting gold exports, and that Flaccus was only enforcing this rule, not withholding the gold for himself. Here was his downfall: "But to resist this barbaric superstition (*barbarae superstitioni*) was an act of firmness, to defy the crowd of Jews (*Iudaeorum*) when sometimes in our assemblies they were hot with passion." All the gold is accounted for, Cicero hastens to add. The whole trial "is just an attempt to fix odium on him" (recalling present-day attempts to smear "anti-Semites"). The Jewish religion is "at variance with the glory of our empire, the dignity of our name, the customs of our ancestors." That the gods stand opposed to this tribe "is shown by the fact that it has been conquered, let out for taxes, made a slave" — so much for the "chosen people" of God.²²

Ten years later Diodorus Siculus wrote his *Historical Library*. Among other things, it recounts the Exodus:

[T]he ancestors of the Jews had been driven out of all Egypt as men who were impious and detested by the gods. For by way of purging the country of all persons who had white or leprous marks on their bodies had been assembled and driven across the border, as being under a curse; the refugees had occupied the territory round about Jerusalem, and having organized the nation of Jews had made their hatred of mankind into a tradition²³

The *Library* then includes a retelling of Antiochus Epiphanes' takeover of the Jewish temple in 168 — the same event found in the earlier work of Posidonius. But this is no mere duplication; it demonstrates an acceptance and endorsement of that account. Here, though, it is Antiochus Epiphanes, not his successor Sidetes, that was urged "to wipe out completely the race of Jews, since they alone of all nations avoided dealings with any other people and looked upon all men as their enemies (*polemious hypolambanein pantas*)."²⁴

Upon entering the temple Antiochus finds a statue of a bearded man on an ass — Moses, the one "who had ordained for the Jews their

²² In another work, *De Provinciis Consularibus*, Cicero adds that the Jews were a "people born to be slaves"; see Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 203.

²³ Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library*, 34,1.

²⁴ Cf. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 183.

misanthropic and lawless customs." Antiochus' advisors were "shocked by such hatred directed against all mankind," and therefore "strongly urged [him] to make an end of the race completely." In his magnanimity, he declined.

The great lyric poet Horace (65 – 8 BC) wrote his *Satires* (Latin: *Sermones*) in 35 BC, exploring Epicurean philosophy and the meaning of happiness. At one point, though, he makes a passing comment on the apparently notorious proselytizing ability of the Roman Jews – in particular their tenaciousness in winning over others. Horace is in the midst of attempting to persuade the reader of his point of view: "and if you do not wish to yield, then a great band of poets will come to my aid ... and, just like the Jews, we will compel you to concede to our crowd" (*Satires* I. 4. 143). Such power must have been legendary, or he would not have made such an allusion.

The fourth reference comes from Ptolemy the Historian, circa 25 BC. In his *History of Herod* he discusses the different ethnicities of Palestine, and comments on the people known as Idumaeans (or Edomites), a tribe living in the southern desert region of present-day Israel. They were defeated by the Hebrews in 125 BC and absorbed into the Jewish nation. Ptolemy notes that the original Jews are ethnically distinct. This is in noted contrast to the "converted" Idumaeans, who suffered genital mutilation as a mark of their incorporation:

Jews and Idumaeans differ.... Jews are those who are so by origin and nature. The Idumaeans, on the other hand, were not originally Jews, but Phoenicians and Syrians – having been subjugated by the Jews and having been forced to undergo circumcision, so as to be counted among the Jewish nation....²⁵

If the Jews are distinct by "origin" (*arches*) and "nature" (*physichoi*), this clearly points to a racial definition, in addition to the obvious religious designation. The debate about the religious/ethnic characterization of the Jews is ancient indeed.²⁶

²⁵ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 356.

²⁶ Jewish racial identity has been built up over centuries due to a quasi-eugenic inbreeding strategy, in which the brightest and most learned males were granted preferential reproductive rights. Mating outside the racial group has always been minimal, at least until recent times, resulting in a relatively "pure" ethnicity (see Kevin MacDonald, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone*, *Ibid.*, Chapters 2, 4, and 7. Population genetic research continues to indicate substantial genetic commonality for

Ptolemy was one of the first, outside the Bible, to comment on the Jewish practice of circumcision. He does not offer his opinion on it, but clearly sees it as a brutality when inflicted upon unwilling males, presumably even adolescents and adults.²⁷

The last commentator of the pre-Christian era is Lysimachus. Writing circa 20 BC, he offers a variation on the Exodus story, placing it in the reign of the pharaoh Bocchoris (or Bakenranef) of 720 BC. On his version, the Jews, "afflicted with leprosy, scurvy, and other maladies," sought refuge in Egyptian temples. The oracles advised Bocchoris to cleanse the temples, to banish the impious and impure, and "to pack the lepers into sheets of lead and sink them in the ocean" – which he did. The exiled ones, led by Moses, were instructed to "show goodwill to no man," to offer "the worst advice" to others, and to overthrow any temples or sanctuaries they might come upon. Arriving in Judea, "they maltreated the population, and plundered and set fire to the [local] temples." They then built a town called Hierosolyma (Jerusalem), and referred to themselves as Hierosolymites.²⁸ If indeed they persecuted the indigenous population, one can see in this a distant predecessor to the current Israeli atrocities in Palestine.

The charge of misanthropy, or hatred of mankind, is significant and merits further discussion. It has recurred several times already – in Hecateus, Posidonius, Molon, Diodorus, and now Lysimachus. This is striking because the Romans were notably tolerant of other sects and religions, owing in part to their polytheistic worldview. A society of many gods implicitly recognizes religious diversity; if there are many such beings, who can claim complete knowledge of the divine realm? Monotheism, in contrast, claims exclusive and absolute knowledge:

widely dispersed Jewish groups (see, e.g., Gil Atzmon et al., "Abraham's Children in the Genome Era: Major Jewish Diaspora Populations Comprise Distinct Genetic Clusters with Shared Middle Eastern Ancestry," *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 86(6), 850–859, 2010). The result is an ethnic group – a race – with highly distinct genetic characteristics. Regarding a Biblical basis for endogamy, see Exodus 34:11-12 and Deut 7:1-3, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah (reviewed in MacDonald, *A People That Shall Dwell Alone*, *Ibid.*, Ch. 3).

²⁷ This is an ancient custom, apparently originating in Egypt and neighboring tribes of the eastern Mediterranean. In the New Testament it is cited as a distinguishing marker between the circumcised Jews and non-circumcised Gentiles. Circumcision is widespread to this day. In the U. S. Rates have traditionally hovered around 55%, though it has dropped sharply in the past five years – down to about 33% of all males.

²⁸ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 384-385.

"there is only one God, and we know of his truth." Other religions with other god(s) are necessarily false. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the Jews, as the first monotheists of the Middle East, did not reciprocate Roman tolerance.

In fact this seems to have been a general rule throughout history: religious intolerance derives from the monotheistic fundamentalists (Jews, Christians, Muslims), not the polytheists or religious pluralists. In the case of the Jews, though, monotheistic arrogance was combined with racial distinctness and other cultural characteristics, resulting in a deeply-embedded misanthropic streak. For centuries Jews have been willing to serve as executors or enforcers of state power (when they had none of their own), with little evident regard for adverse effects on others. Tribal integrity, on the other hand, was always highly valued.

We see this even in the present day, with the rather simplistic but essentially valid claim that the question "Is it good for the Jews?" is the overriding factor in Jewish decisions. Others are valued only in an instrumental sense, to serve Jewish ends. Sometimes this appears explicitly, as in the recent statement by leading Orthodox Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who said, "Goyim [non-Jews] were born only to serve us. Without that, they have no place in the world – only to serve the people of Israel. They will work, they will plow, they will reap. We will sit like an effendi and eat."²⁹ It would be difficult to find a cruder statement of Jewish misanthropy.

Could there be a Biblical basis for this? If the Jews consider themselves "chosen," then clearly everyone else is second class, at best. If God gave the Jews dominion, they can feel justified in imposing on others. The Book of Exodus states, "we are distinct...from all other people that are upon the face of the earth" (33:16). Similarly, the Hebrew tribe is "a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). In Deuteronomy (15:6), Moses tells the Jews "you shall rule over many nations"; "they shall be afraid of you" (28:10). Rabbi Yosef could have quoted Genesis: "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you" (27:29); or Deuteronomy, where God promises Jews "houses full of all good things, which [they] did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which [they] did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees, which [they] did not plant" (6:11). And outside the Pentateuch, we can read in Isaiah: "Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you...that men may bring you

²⁹ *Jerusalem Post*, 18 Oct. 2010.

the wealth of the nations" (60:10-11); or again, "aliens shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers...you shall eat the wealth of the nations" (61:5-6). Is this not explicit misanthropy? And do these texts not express the essential Jewish worldview?

ROMANS OF THE CHRISTIAN ERA

The turn of the millennium was significant on several counts. Rome had formally become an empire under Augustus, as of 27 BC. Jesus of Nazareth was (allegedly) born in 4 BC. Jewish philosopher Philo was active at this time, as was perhaps the most notorious "anti-Semite" of that age, Apion. His notoriety derives not so much from his accusations – which for the most part were preexisting ones – but instead for his renown amongst the upper classes of Alexandrian society, and because the Jewish writer Josephus elected to title one of his own books *Against Apion* (or *Contra Apionem*). As Stern says, "Apion was a rather popular writer," and thus it is no wonder "that it was Apion, among all the anti-Semitic Graeco-Egyptian writers, whom Josephus chose as his main target."³⁰ A sample of the criticisms laid by Apion in his book *Against the Jews* includes:

- the leprosy-ridden exodus story;
- an etymology of the Jewish term 'Sabbath' that derives from "tumors of the groin";
- numerous tales of Jewish foolishness or naiveté;
- well-deserved mistreatment by Cleopatra (withholding of corn during a regional famine, and various conflicts with the Jewish king Herod);
- Jews' failure to erect statues of the emperors;
- tendency "to show no goodwill to a single alien, above all to Greeks";
- unjust laws;
- "erroneous" religious practices;
- failure to produce any geniuses in the arts or crafts;
- not eating pork;
- circumcision.

³⁰ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 390.

Again, little in the way of original criticisms, but apparently sufficiently influential to warrant a refutation.

Additionally, there were solid, objective reasons for the Roman public to be wary in that first century. With the Roman incorporation of Judea in 63 BC, Jews flocked to the imperial capital in ever-greater numbers. Again, the authorities took action. Emperor Tiberius expelled the Jews in the year 19 AD:

He abolished foreign cults, especially the Egyptian and Jewish rites, compelling all who were addicted to such superstitions to burn their religious vestments... [Other Jews] were banished from the city, on pain of slavery for life if they did not obey.³¹

The expulsion did not last. Eleven years later, the head of the Praetorian Guard, Sejanus, found reason to oppose them again. According to the Jewish writer Philo, Sejanus raised a series of "accusations which had been brought against the Jews who were dwelling in Rome," because "[he] was desirous to destroy our nation."³² We know few details, but this action too seems to have had little lasting effect.

Just three years later, in the year 33, a young Jew named Jesus was crucified. This would have monumental consequence for Jewish relations with the rest of the world, though it would be several decades before they began to play out.³³

In 38, another pogrom, nominally worse than that of Sejanus, was initiated by A. A. Flaccus in Alexandria.³⁴ Philo describes this event in great detail in his work *Flacco*. His many advisors urged Flaccus to curry favor with Rome "by abandoning and denouncing all the Jews" of Alexandria, lest they gain too much power. So they encouraged random attacks on synagogues and Jewish property, hoping that the pogrom would spread to other lands. Flaccus ended Jewish privilege, reducing them to stateless "foreigners and aliens." He terminated their right to run businesses, and money-lenders lost what they had

³¹ As recorded by Suetonius. See Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 112–113.

³² Philo, "On the embassy to Gaius," XXIV, 159.

³³ Nietzsche offers a particularly fascinating account of the Jewish origins of Christianity; see Thomas Dalton, "Nietzsche and the origins of Christianity" (2010; <http://www.theoccidentalobserver.net/authors/Dalton-Nietzsche.html>).

³⁴ No relation to the L. V. Flaccus defended by Cicero.

loaned. His men drove the Jews out of most areas of the city and confined them in one small quarter, effectively forming the first Jewish ghetto in history. Finally, Flaccus "allowed anyone who was inclined to proceed to exterminate the Jews as prisoners of war."

So confined, they were set upon by a murderous crowd. In a long passage that ranks with the best tales of the Holocaust, Philo describes the massacre:

And then, being immediately seized by those who had excited the seditious multitude against them, [the Jews] were treacherously put to death, and then were dragged along and trampled underfoot by the whole city, and completely destroyed, without the least portion of them being left which could possibly receive burial; and in this way their enemies, who in their savage madness had become transformed into the nature of wild beasts, slew them and thousands of others with all kinds of agony and tortures, and newly invented cruelties, for wherever they met with or caught sight of a Jew, they stoned him, or beat him with sticks, not at once delivering their blows upon mortal parts, lest they should die speedily, and so speedily escape from the sufferings which it was their design to inflict upon them.

Some persons even, going still great and greater lengths in the iniquity and license of their barbarity, disdained all blunter weapons, and took up the most efficacious arms of all, fire and iron, and slew many with the sword, and destroyed not a few with flames. And the most merciless of all their persecutors in some instances burnt whole families, husbands with their wives, and infant children with their parents, in the middle of the city, sparing neither age nor youth, nor the innocent helplessness of infants. And when they had a scarcity of fuel, they collected faggots of green wood, *and slew them by the smoke* rather than by fire, contriving a still more miserable and protracted death for those unhappy people, so that their bodies laid about promiscuously in every direction half burnt, a grievous and most miserable sight.

And if some of those who were employed in the collection of sticks were too slow, they took their own furniture, of which they had plundered them, to burn their persons, robbing them of

their most costly articles, and burning with them things of the greatest use and value, which they used as fuel instead of ordinary timber.

Many men too, who were alive, they bound by one foot, fastening them round the ankle, and thus they dragged them along and bruised them, leaping on them, designing to inflict the. Most barbarous of deaths upon them, and then when they were dead they raged no less against them with interminable hostility, and inflicted still heavier insults on their persons, dragging them, I had almost said, though all the alleys and lanes of the city, until the corpse, being lacerated in all its skin, and flesh, and muscles from the inequality and roughness of the ground, all the previously united portions of his composition being torn asunder and separated from one another, was actually torn to pieces.³⁵

Note the italicized passage (mine); this would be the first recorded incident in history of the gassing of Jews.³⁶

But Flacco was unable to finish his deed. In time-honored Jewish fashion, the Alexandrian Jews appealed to authorities in Rome and managed to get Flacco arrested, exiled, and ultimately killed. All this, however, is according to Philo — not an unbiased observer. The fact that we have no objective confirmation of this story suggests that it is exaggerated and over-dramatized.

Whether or not the Alexandrian pogrom occurred as described, there is no doubt that it was a time of ongoing friction between the Jews, on the one hand, and the Greeks and Egyptians on the other. Three years later, in the year 41, emperor Claudius issued his third edict, the *Letter to the Alexandrians*, in which he admonishes all parties for the strife; but the Jews are singled out for rebuke. They have been allowed to live "in a city which is not their own," and "they possess an abundance of all good things," but must not exacerbate the situation by continually inviting in more Jews. In abusing their privileges and sowing discord, the Jews could be blamed for "fomenting a gen-

³⁵ Philo, *Flaccus*, IX, 65–71.

³⁶ For more on the history of such gassings, see Thomas Dalton, *Debating the Holocaust* (New York, NY: Theses and Dissertations Press, 2009).

eral plague which infests the whole world" (*koinen teina tes oikoumenes noson exegeirontas*).

The threat itself is not so harsh, but what is striking here is the use, for the first time, of the notorious biological imagery against the Jews. To suggest that they are a plague infesting the whole world is to suggest a subhuman people, one that is potentially in need of 'disinfection.' Such talk recurs periodically in the following centuries, and it foreshadows the much more ominous language of World War II.

Back in Rome, anti-Jewish actions continued. In 49, Emperor Claudius once again had to expel them. In a fascinating line from Suetonius circa the year 120, we find mention of one 'Chrestus' (Latin: *Chresto*) as the leader of the rabble; this would (likely) be one of the first non-Jewish references to Jesus." Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, [Claudius] expelled them from Rome."³⁷ This is an important first distinction, between the so-called Christian Jews — all early Christians *were* Jews — and the traditional ones.

In spite of this, the beleaguered tribe still earned no sympathy. The great philosopher Seneca commented on them in his work *On Superstition*, circa 60. He was appalled not only with their "superstitious" religious beliefs, but more pragmatically with their astonishing influence in Rome and around the known world, despite repeated pogroms and banishments. Seneca first derides the Jews as lazy because they dedicate every seventh day to God: "their practice [of the Sabbath] is inexpedient, because by introducing one day of rest in every seven they lose in idleness almost a seventh of their life."³⁸ "Meanwhile," he adds,

the customs of this accursed race (*sceleratissima gens*) have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors.

Seneca is clearly indignant — jealous, perhaps? — at their reach. This little race, this *accursed* race, has earned sway across vast reaches of the civilized world. Not so much a threat, perhaps, but rather a sign of the gradual decay of the *imperium Romanum*.

³⁷ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 113.

³⁸ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 1, 431.

Writing at the same time as Seneca, Petronius took a quick stab at two Jewish customs: abstinence from pork, and circumcision. In his *Satyricon* he writes, "The Jew may worship his pig-god and clamor in the ears of high heaven, but unless he also cuts back his foreskin with the knife, he shall [not truly live as a Jew]" (frag. 37).³⁹

Then came the historic Jewish revolt in Judea, during the years 66 to 70. I won't recount the details here, but simply note that it ended in Roman victory and the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem. It was a major defeat for the Hebrews, but they would continue to resist for decades. Two further major uprisings occurred in 115 and 130, both ending in defeat. Nonetheless, Jewish influence and the nascent Judeo-Christian theology continued to grow, and to weaken the philosophical foundations of the empire.

TACITUS AND THE SECOND CENTURY AD

The second century of the Christian era saw a continued string of critical comments, for the most part reiterations of past complaints. Quintillian (circa 100) observed that, just as cities can bring together and exacerbate the problem of social undesirables, so too Moses knit together scattered individuals into a single Jewish tribe: "founders of cities are detested [when] concentrating a race which is a curse (*perniciosa* — i. e. Pernicious) to others, as for example the founder of the Jewish superstition."⁴⁰ Damocritus' book *Peri Ioudaion* (*On the Jews*) argued that "they used to worship an asinine golden head, and that every seventh year they caught a foreigner and sacrificed him"⁴¹ — in contrast to the story by Manetho in which the sacrifice was an annual event.

One new criticism came from the writings of Roman poet Martial (aka Marcus Martialis). In the fourth book of his *Epigrams* he undertakes to lambast an acquaintance of his, one Bassa, by calling attention to his evidently horrible body odor. To drive the point home, Martial compares Bassa's smell to a host of notoriously pungent things: the odor of a drained marsh, the "sulphurous waters of Albula," "the putrid stench of a marine fish-pond," someone's old shoes, and "the breath of the fasting Jews" (*quod ieiunia sabbatariarum*).⁴² It is widely

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 444.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 513.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 531.

⁴² From *Epigrams of Martial*, G. Bohn, trans. (1897; London: G. Bell).

known, even today, that fasting can produce or exacerbate bad breath, and the ancient Jews were infamous for fasting on the Sabbath day; hence the correlation is perfectly understandable. Still, Martial's point comes through quite clearly: Jewish breath was a benchmark of foul smell. More importantly, Martial established the historical precedent for the so-called *foetor Judaicus*—the “Jewish stench” critique that would recur at various times throughout history.

The renowned writer and philosopher Plutarch made several comments on Jews, mostly neutral observations but occasionally interspersed with statements about their “superstitions” and odd habit of keeping the Sabbath. His dialogue *Morals* (IV, 4) includes an examination of the nature of the Jewish God, and of the question “Whether the Jews abstain from pork because of reverence or aversion for the pig.” (He concludes that they worship the pig, in addition to the ass.)

This brings us to Tacitus — one of the great historians of the ancient world, and one of the most notable critics of the tribe from Judea. His chief work, *Histories*, is an invaluable historical study, but an initial observation comes from his other main piece, *Annals*. Amidst an examination of the great fire of Rome (64 AD), Tacitus comments on the Jews and that new Jewish cult, Christianity.

Nero ... punished with the utmost refinements ... a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians (*Chrestianos*). Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more — not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital [Rome] itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. (*Annals*, XV, 44)⁴³

The Jews, he continues, were persecuted not so much for involvement with the fire as simply because of their misanthropy, their “hatred of the human race” (*odio humani generis*). So severe was Nero that, in some cases, Jews “were burned to serve as lamps by night.” Tacitus' comments clearly indicate the low status of the Jews: loathsome, vice-ridden, pernicious, superstitious ... even, ominously, a “disease”

⁴³ M. Stern. 1980. *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities), 89.

— a striking biological metaphor that recalls Claudius. The reference to "Christus" is significant; it predates Suetonius' comment by some 20 years, and marks the earliest Roman acknowledgment of the founder of the new religion.

But it is the *Histories* — written about the year 100 — that contains an extended critique of the Jews. In Book V, Tacitus recounts historical events from the year 70 AD. Roman general Titus had been sent to subjugate Judea once and for all. He found allies in the indigenous Arabs, "who hated the Jews with all that hatred that is common among neighbors" (5.1). The enmities of that region are truly deep-seated.

Tacitus then breaks off the narrative to give an account of the origin of the Jews — that "race of men hateful to the gods" (*genus hominum invisium deis*). He offers two or three variations, apparently siding with Manetho. The religion of Moses, he adds, is diametrically opposed to that of the Romans: "The Jews regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand, they permit all that we abhor." He continues:

Whatever their origin, these rites are maintained by their antiquity: the other customs of the Jews are base and abominable (*sinistra foeda*), and owe their persistence to their depravity. For the worst rascals among other peoples ... always kept sending tribute and contributions to Jerusalem, thereby increasing the wealth of the Jews; again, the Jews are extremely loyal toward one another, and always ready to show compassion, but toward every other people they feel only hate and enmity (*hostile odium*).

"As a race," he adds, "they are prone to lust," and have "adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples" (5. 5). Tacitus notes their abstract monotheism, suggesting that this is yet another cause of friction. He closes the section with the comment that "the ways of the Jews are preposterous (*absurdus*) and mean (*sordidus*)."

In besieging Jerusalem, and later the mighty Jewish temple, Titus had the Jews trapped. There was thought of sparing the temple, but Titus opposed this option. For him, "the destruction of this temple [was] a prime necessity in order to wipe out (*tolleretur*) more completely the religion of the Jews and the Christians." These two religions, "although hostile to each other, nevertheless sprang from the same sources; the Christians had grown out of the Jews: if the root were destroyed, the

stock would easily perish" (*Fragments of the Histories*). The passage closes by noting that 600,000 Jews were killed in the war.

Such are his comments on the "obnoxious and superstitious race" (*gens superstitioni obnoxia*; 5.13) — a group who are the "most despised" (*despectissima*) of subjects and "the basest of peoples" (*taeterrimam gentum*; 5.8). Both because of his clear articulation and his general authority, Tacitus is the single most-cited ancient authority regarding criticism of the Jews. Many later scholars, including Gibbon, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, quote him on the topic.

Present-day Jewish authors, on the other hand, are hard-pressed to account for such a negative assessment; it would be a real challenge, for example, to portray Tacitus as mentally ill. Most often one finds an attempt to whitewash the whole affair, ascribing Tacitus' remarks to "the spirit of the times," or as merely reactionary. Gruen is typical. He spends several pages arguing that the poor fellow wasn't portraying his own *personal* opinion, but rather simply making a sarcastic social commentary in order to "tease" and "challenge" the reader. The *Histories* give us not Tacitus' own view, says Gruen, but "a sardonic comment on simplistic stereotypes." Tacitus omits the "far harsher assessments" of Manetho and Apion, and "does not deliver his own judgment." In sum, "we hear the voice of the sardonic historian, not the Jew hater."⁴⁴ Perhaps.

The second Jewish revolt, in 115, gave further cause for critique. Cassius Dio describes the action graphically in his *Roman History*:

Meanwhile the Jews in the region of Cyrene had put a certain Andreas at their head, and were destroying both the Romans and the Greeks. They would eat the flesh of their victims, make belts for themselves of their entrails, anoint themselves with their blood, and wear their skins for clothing; many they sawed in two, from the head downwards; others they gave to wild beasts, and still others they forced to fight as gladiators.⁴⁵

Here we have the Philo problem, in reverse: should we believe Dio's extreme statements about the vicious Jews, or is he exaggerating? We have no directly comparable account, but it is roughly con-

⁴⁴ Erich Gruen. 2011. *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 190, 192.

⁴⁵ Cassius Dio, *Roman History* (Book 68.32).

sistent with both Manetho's and Lysimachus' exodus stories and accompanying Jewish brutalities. The question remains open.

But it was perhaps such incidents that prompted Juvenal and Suetonius to comment. In his famous *Satires*, Juvenal (ca. 120) makes at least three references to Jews. The first is a jab at the allegedly incestuous relationship between the Jewish King Agrippa II and his sister Berenice, rulers of "that barbarian country ... where pigs are free to live to a ripe old age" (6.153-160). Later he remarks on a poor Jewess fortune-teller, begging for coins:

This High Priestess has to live under a tree, but she knows all the secrets of Heaven. She, too, will fill her palm, but not too full: a few coppers purchase, where Jews are concerned, fulfillment of dreams and fancies. (6.542-547)

Finally, in the 14th satire, Juvenal ridicules the Jews' customs of circumcision, worshipping a "sky god," avoiding pork, keeping the Sabbath, and the generally adverse effects on their children (14. 96-106):

Those whose lot it was that their fathers worshipped the Sabbath
Pray to nothing now but the clouds and a spirit in Heaven;
Since their fathers abstained from pork, they'd be cannibals
sooner
Than violate that taboo. Circumcised, not as the Gentiles,
They despise Roman law, but learn and observe and revere
Israel's code, and all from the sacred volume of Moses
Where the way is not shown to any but true believers,
Where the uncircumcised are never led to the fountain.
Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it lazy. The father,
Setting this day apart from life, is the cause and culprit.

Suetonius, writing on the reign of Domitian (81-96 AD), makes a passing comment on the "Jew tax" (*Iudaicus fiscus*) that was levied after the destruction of the temple in 70 AD." Besides other taxes, that on the Jews was levied with the utmost vigor."⁴⁶ Many Jews attempted to hide their race simply to avoid the tax, and it was sometimes necessary, he says, to strip men naked and check for circumcision as proof. This tax continued well into the 200s.

⁴⁶ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 2, 128.

The third and final Jewish uprising occurred just a few years later, in 132. The reasons were many, but two stand out: the construction of a Roman city on the ruins of Jerusalem, and emperor Hadrian's banning of circumcision: "At this time the Jews began war, because they were forbidden to practice genital mutilation (*mutilare genitalia*)" (*Historiae Augustae*, 14).⁴⁷

Dio describes the conflict in detail. "Jews everywhere were showing signs of hostility to the Romans, partly by secret and partly overt acts" (69. 13). They were able to bribe others to join in the uprising: "many outside nations, too, were joining them through eagerness for gain, and the whole earth, one might almost say, was being stirred up over the matter." For those today who argue that Jews were perennially the cause of wars, this would provide some early evidence. Hadrian sent one of his best generals, Severus, to put down the insurgency. Through a slow war of attrition, "he was able...to crush, exhaust, and exterminate (*ekkophai*) them. Very few of them in fact survived." Boatwright states that 580,000 Jews were killed.⁴⁸

To close this section, two final figures of this second century. Famed astronomer Ptolemy was also a bit of an astrologer, and took to using the stars to explain earthly conditions. In his *Apotelesmatica* of 150 AD, Ptolemy observes that the tribes of Palestine, including Idumaea, Syria, Judea, and Phoenicia, have some common characteristics.

These people...are more gifted in trade and exchange; they are more unscrupulous, despicable cowards, treacherous, servile, and in general fickle, on account of the stars mentioned.[The Judaeans in particular] are in general bold, godless, and scheming. (II, 3)⁴⁹

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 619.

⁴⁸ Mary Boatwright. 2008. "Hadrian," in *Lives of the Caesars* (A. Barrett, Ed.; Oxford: Blackwell). Boatwright (p. 174) is mystified that, even after all their difficulties, the Romans were still generally tolerant of other religions, including the radical Christians – all religions except, apparently, the Jews. "It is hard to reconcile Hadrian's insensitivity toward the Jews with the ample evidence for his open support of many different rituals and shrines" – hard only if one does not understand the history and context.

⁴⁹ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 2, 165.

"Born under a bad sign," as they say. Given the four centuries of conflict with the people of that region, Ptolemy can hardly be blamed for viewing them as cursed by the heavens.

Finally we have Celsus, a Greek philosopher who composed a text, *The True Word*, sometime around 178. The piece is striking as an extended and scathing critique of the newly-emerging Christian sect, which would still have been predominantly Jewish at that time.⁵⁰ It survives only as extended quotations in Origen's book of the year 248, *Contra Celsum*.

Celsus' target is clearly Christianity, but in the process he makes a number of remarks on the Jews — all negative. Beginning with Moses, the Jews "were deluded by clumsy deceits into thinking that there was only one God" (I. 23). They were "addicted to sorcery" and thus "fell into error through ignorance and were deceived." Celsus mocks "the race of Jews and Christians," comparing them all "to a cluster of bats or ants coming out of a nest, or frogs holding council round a marsh, or worms assembling in some filthy corner, disagreeing with each other about which of them are the worse sinners" (IV. 23). (More biological imagery.) "The Jews," he adds, "were runaway slaves who escaped from Egypt; they never did anything important, nor have they ever been of any significance or prominence." Fate has been justifiably harsh to them, and they are "suffering the penalty of their arrogance" (V. 41).

Judeo-Christian theology, says Celsus, is a mish-mash of mythology and absurdity. "The God of the Jews is accursed" because he created, or allowed, evil in the world — a classic statement of the problem of evil. The cosmogony of Genesis is ridiculous, as is the creation story of mankind; "Moses wrote these stories because he understood nothing... [He] put together utter trash" (VI. 49). In the long run Jewry is doomed — "they will presently perish" (VI. 80).

AN EMPIRE DECLINES, A RELIGION ASCENDS

Events turned sour for Rome during the 200s. Imperial expansion had peaked by 120 AD, and the Goths and Persians mounted increasingly successful attacks. Roman leadership became harsher and more

⁵⁰ It was written very much in the style of Lorenzo Valla's "Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine" of 1440. One can surmise that Valla took it as his inspiration.

authoritarian; suppression of foreign religions and cults increased, with particular focus on Christianity.

Dio's *Roman History*, dating to 220, made a notably grim assessment of things. Above I quoted his passages relating to the revolts in 115 and 132, but he makes a few other relevant comments. Book 37 relates the initial capture of Jerusalem by Pompey, and thus the first direct encounter with the Jews. "They are distinguished from the rest of mankind in practically every detail of life." One must proceed carefully, Dio suggests, "for the race is very bitter when aroused to anger" (49.22). Near the end of the work he mentions the "Jew tax" — "an annual tribute of two *denarii*" (65.7) — that we saw in the fragment from Suetonius.

Ten years later, the Greek sophist and writer Philostratus produced a biography of the philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, who lived about 100 years earlier. In the midst of a passage attacking the cruelty of Nero, Philostratus remarks on the Roman military's penchant for battling Jews rather than dealing with problems at home.

The Jews have long been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against all humanity (*panton anthropon*); and a race that has made its own a life apart and irreconcilable, that cannot share with the rest of mankind in the pleasures of the table nor join in their libations or prayers or sacrifices, are separated from ourselves by a greater gulf than divides us from Susa or Bactra or the more distant Indies. (V.33.4)

Dio and Philostratus are raising the stakes: not only are the Jews enemies of humanity, they are profoundly *different* than the rest — separated by a vast gulf, different in every detail.

The persistence of the charge of misanthropy is remarkable. It appears yet again in a work by Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, in his work *Adversus Christianos* (*Against the Christians*), circa 280. Writing a tract comparable to that of Celsus, Porphyry also draws in the Jews. He comments on the "foreign mythologies" of the Jews (I,2), seen as "evil report among all men." The Jews, he adds, are "the impious enemies of all nations."

Justinus — also known as Justin the Historian — composed his lengthy *Historiarum Philippicarum* in the year 300. Book 36 addresses the origin of the Jews. He reiterates the leprosy exodus story of Manetho: The Egyptians, "being troubled with scabies and leprosy ...

expelled [Moses], with those who had the disease, out of Egypt." In an interesting and benign twist, the Jews, being concerned about spreading their disease, voluntarily adopt of policy of disengagement:

And as they remembered that they had been driven from Egypt for fear of spreading infection, they took care, in order that they might not become odious, from the same cause, to the inhabitants of the country, to have no communication with strangers; a rule which, from having been adopted on that particular occasion, gradually became a custom and part of their religion. (36. 2)

After establishing themselves in Judea, they created a form of theocracy that merged religion with politics. This gave them a cohesiveness and unity of purpose that proved highly successful. As a result, "it is almost incredible how powerful they became."

TRANSITION TO A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

After 300, the empire went into steady decline and Christianity began to assert its power. Emperor Constantine converted in 312, giving the young religion official endorsement. In 380, emperor Theodosius I effectively made it the state religion. By this time there was a clear distinction between the Gentile Christian church, and the orthodox Jews. As a result of this, and due to the family feud involved with Christianity arising from Judaism and the Jews "killing Christ," conditions for the Hebrew tribe worsened.⁵¹

A series of imperial legislative actions between 329 and 438 specifically targeted the Jews. We have detailed records of many of these:

- Constantine's edict of 18 October 329 barred the Jews from punishing anyone choosing to "escape from their deadly sect." Conversely, anyone electing to join "their nefarious sect" will be punished.⁵²

⁵¹ In *Separation and Its Discontents* (Chapter 3, "Reactive Anti-Semitism in the Late Roman Empire"), Kevin MacDonald argues that the Catholic Church in the 4th century was fundamentally organized in opposition to Judaism – a collectivist response to Jewish economic power and, in particular, the common practice of Jews enslaving Christians.

⁵² Amnon Linder. 1987. *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press), 126–127.

- His successor, Constantine II, warned against Jews who proselytized women “in depravity” (*turpitudinis*).⁵³
- On 21 May 383, Gratian warned those who have “polluted themselves with the Jewish contagions” (*Iudaicis semet polluere contagiis*) that they shall be punished.⁵⁴
- Honorius decreed, on 1 April 409, that none shall “adopt the abominable and vile name of the Jews”; no one must accept “the Jewish perversity (*peruersitatem*), which is alien to the Roman Empire.”⁵⁵
- On 31 January 438, Theodosius II referred to “the blindly senseless Jews,” calling them “monstrous heretics” and an “abominable sect,” and declared that “no Jew...should accede to honors and dignities.”⁵⁶

All was not hopeless. A joint edict of 6 August 420 stated that “No one shall be destroyed for being a Jew.”⁵⁷ But it adds a warning, “lest the Jews grow perchance insolent, and elated by their security, commit something rash against the reverence of the Christian cult (*cultionis*).”

Emperor Julian (r. 355–363) was an interesting and complex character. Rather like Aurelius, he was both a great military commander and a notable writer/philosopher. Christianity had been accepted and was growing within the empire since 310, but Julian strongly opposed this. He much preferred the values and beliefs of the original Roman republic. Thus he sought to mitigate the growing power of the Christians. One way to do this was to elevate the status of their chief rival, Judaism. Julian thereby became a “friend of the Jews,” though only in so far as they served his larger purposes. In reality he had a profound dislike of the entire Judeo-Christian worldview.

This aspect of his thinking appears in his essay *Contra Galilaeus* (*Against the Galileans*), circa 361. He criticizes those who would leave Christianity for Judaism as a kind of leap from the frying pan into the fire — something no reasonable person would do.” The philosophers,” he says, “bid us to imitate the gods so far as we can. ... But what sort of imitation of God is praised among the Hebrews? Anger

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 148.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 285.

and wrath and fierce jealousy" (171d-e). God evidently does not favor the Jews, because "he bestowed on the Hebrews nothing considerable or of great value" (176a). They indeed imitate the cruelty of their god: "the most wicked and most brutal of the [Roman] generals behaved more mildly to the greatest offenders than Moses did to those who had done no wrong" (184c). Those who abandon Roman ways "emulate the rages and the bitterness of the Jews." The Jewish race has given rise to no great leaders, generals, intellectuals, artists, nor even a civilized society; government, law courts, laws, liberal arts "Were not all these things in a miserable and barbarous state among the Hebrews?" (221e). In the end, of course, Julian failed to either raise up the Jews or to halt the slide toward Christianity. He died in battle at only 32 years of age.

Julian's close confidant, Ammianus Marcellinus, was also one of the last great Roman historians of ancient times. In his *History*, Ammianus recounts the journey of emperor Aurelius through the Middle East, whereupon he encountered the Jews; it was apparently not a pleasant experience:

For Marcus [Aurelius], as he was passing through Palestine on his way to Egypt, being often disgusted with the malodorous (*fetentium*) and rebellious Jews, is reported to have cried with sorrow: "O Marcomanni, O Quadi, O Sarmatians, at last I have found a people more unruly than you."⁵⁸

As usual, the veracity of this report is questionable, as we have no confirming statements. But even if this was Ammianus' own view, it is noteworthy. The reference to "malodorous Jews" recalls Martial; and in fact both of these sources would be repeatedly cited in later centuries.

Into the 400s, we find the work of prominent Roman poet Rutilius Namatianus. His lone surviving piece, *De Reditu Suo*, casts light on many aspects of the late period of the empire. Rutilius relates a story of how he was pausing to rest beside a pond one day, on land that turned out to be owned by a Jew. The Jew demands a fee for the use of his land (I, 385-398):⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, Vol 2, 606.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 663.

We pay the abuse due to the filthy race
that famously practices circumcision;
a root of silliness they are:
chill Sabbaths are after their own heart,
yet their heart is chillier than their creed.
Each seventh day is condemned to ignoble sloth,
as 'twere an effeminate picture of the god fatigued.
The other wild ravings from their lying bazaar methinks
not even a child in his sleep could believe.
And would that Judea had never been subdued
by Pompey's wars and Titus' military power!
The infection of this plague, though excised, still creeps
abroad the more:
and 'tis their own conquerors that a conquered race keeps
down.

Again we find the biological metaphors, harsher than ever. The "infection of this plague" (*pestis contagia*) suggests the need for disinfection, if not outright extermination.

In any case, Rome's time was past. The empire fractured into two pieces in 395, just 15 years after Theodosius made Christianity the state religion. The classical (western) half would survive another 80 years, until its final collapse in 476. The Popes and the church filled the void, shepherding Europe through the Dark Ages. Antagonism toward the Jews took a decidedly theological turn, which combined with preexisting cultural, moral, and racial antipathies to produce a complex and fascinating anti-Jewish worldview. In Part II of this essay, I will begin with some comments by early church leaders but then move on to the secular critics. It is these individuals that offer the most objective insight into the Jewish character.