

KARL-GUSTAV SANDELIN

Attraction and Danger of Alien Religion

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament
290*

Mohr Siebeck

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Attraction and Danger of Alien Religion

Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity

Mohr Siebeck

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Karl-Gustav Sandelin

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Abbreviations

AB	The Anchor Bible
BNTC	Black's New Testament
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	The Catholic Biblical Quarterly
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HTR	The Harvard Theological Review
ICC	International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JSJ	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KJV	See: The Bible in English
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library
NCBC	The New Century Bible Commentary
NEB	See: The Bible in English
NEchB	Die Neue Echter Bibel
NICNT	The New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	The New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	See: The Bible in English
NT	Novum Testamentum
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTS	The New Testament Studies
ÖTNT	Ökumenischer Taschenbuchkommentar zum Neuen Testament
PAPM	<i>Les œuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie</i> , French edition of the works of Philo of Alexandria under the general editorship of Alexandria under the general editorship of R. Arnaldez, C. Mondésert, and J. Polloux (1961–1992).
PFES	Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society
REG	Revue des Études Grecques
RHPPhR	Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses
RQ	Revue de Qumran
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SEG	Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum, Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben [etc.] 1923–

SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SNTS	Society for New Testament Studies
SPh	Studia Philonica
SPhA	Studia Philonica Annual
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
THNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
VChr	Vigiliae Christianae
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche

Preface

Sometimes in the spring of 1987 I received a phone call to my home in Turku/Åbo, Finland; a ring which turned out to be one of the most important ones in my life. It was from Professor *Peder Borgen* in Trondheim, Norway, who asked me if I would be interested in participating in a research project together with him and two other scholars. I, of course, answered in the positive as I was well aware of Borgen's renown as a specialist in Philo and Hellenistic Judaism. I had met him a couple of times, but at that time he was not one of my closest Scandinavian acquaintances. Professor Borgen's initiative resulted in an Inter-Scandinavian project on Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity (1988–1993). Other participants were Professor Lars Hartman (Uppsala, Sweden), the Reverend Per-Jarle Bekken (Oslo, Norway) and I. Professor Hartman was familiar from before and I highly respected his sharp and analytical mind. The Reverend Bekken was unknown to me. At the time I served as a lecturer in exegetics at the Åbo Akademi University. As members of the project we used to gather a couple of times each year, often in connection with the general meetings of the *Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*. Our work resulted in several articles and books. Of the latter, the dissertation of Per Jarle Bekken, *The Word Is Near You* (published 2007), deserves special mention.

The research group decided to work within different sectors of the basic area that consisted of Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity without excluding occasional intrusions in one another's fields. Having been working with Philo and Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians for many years, I decided to turn my interest towards a specific theme pertinent to both Philo and Paul, i.e. the statements concerning people who were either interested in or were understood to be in danger of transgressing the border between, on the one hand their Jewish or Christian communities and, on the other, the sphere of religious activity in the surrounding world. For my part the work resulted in a series of articles which now are published together in this volume. Many of them have been written after the years of the aforementioned project. Two of them are published here for the first time.

The historical problems discussed in this volume arise from the fact that both Judaism and Early Christianity shared a similar situation in the Hellenistic-Roman world. In both cases the societies in which the Jewish and

Christian communities lived were characterized by religious activities manifested in temples, art, priestly hierarchies, rituals, banquets, processions and ways of life. For many early Christians that world formed a mission-field. Those who were converted to the new religion were mostly supposed to look at their former life critically as a life that was morally and religiously depraved (e.g. 1 Cor 12:2; 1 Pet 4:3–4). The danger lay in a relapse into the religious behaviour which preceded the conversion. Warnings against idolatry are therefore most understandable (e.g. 1 Cor 10:14; 1 John 5:21). On the Jewish side the situation had similar traits. But among the Jews a relapse into Hellenistic religion could, of course, concern only a small minority. The documentation presented in this volume shows, however, that Hellenistic religion did also attract individuals who had been brought up as Jews.

The first three articles attempt to show how some Jews were attracted to Hellenistic religion or certain aspects of it, and also, how such an attraction was handled by themselves or by their coreligionists. Philo of Alexandria is an important author to consult here. An analogous problem articulated by Christians in the New Testament becomes manifest in Paul, especially in 1 Cor, and in the Revelation of John.

The question that interested me was what could be said about the relationship between the Jewish and the Christian way of handling the problem of the attraction and danger of alien religion. I began my study of Paul's views at this point by presuming three things: (1) Some Christian Corinthians somehow attended cultic activities connected to the local religious life. (2) The Apostle, though still being critical to some extent, accepted such participation. (3) Paul's way of arguing ought to have ties to his Jewish frame of reference.

In the course of my research I had to revise the first two presumptions. In the case of the third I think the article *Philo and Paul on Alien Religion: A Comparison* gives some answers. It conveys the essentials of the research presented in this volume on Philo and Paul. The results of my investigations also had some influence in responding to whether Paul and John in the Revelation agreed, or whether they differed in their way of evaluation of Christian participation in Hellenistic religious activities.

In order to somewhat broaden the perspective of my research at a certain point in time, I also decided to see if one could say something about how the question of Hellenistic Religion was looked upon in the Jesus-tradition.

The essays do not follow in chronological order but are arranged in a more logical way. The year of initial publication is inserted within parentheses after each title. The bibliography gives details concerning volumes and places of publication.

A systematic up-dating of each essay would have required too much, but I have made occasional additions to the notes when I, after publication, have come across contributions of special interest by other authors. The circumstance that the Pauline passage 1 Cor 8:1–11:1 is treated in several articles has led to some overlapping. I hope this does not cause too much irritation in the mind of the attentive reader.

With some exceptions the proper names of authors I have cited or to whom I have referred are spelled out in the bibliography. My way of referring to scholarly contributions in the notes has often been called the *Harvard system*. When my articles were first published they followed very different systems and have therefore been reworked for the sake of uniformity in this volume. In my text I have, when possible, also given the first names of such authors whose viewpoints are cited verbally or presented in substance when they appear for the first time in each article. In such cases the names are italicized. I have tried to follow the British way of spelling and the use of inverted commas.

Åbo, Finland
March 2012

Karl-Gustav Sandelin

Jews and Alien Religious Practices During the Hellenistic Age (2006)

Even prior to the Exile, Israelites lived in a world in which religions other than their own were proximate realities. The narratives concerning King Ahab and Queen Jezebel describe a syncretistic religion containing both Canaanite and Israelite elements. According to the biblical account, Elijah the prophet vehemently condemned such wavering “between two opinions” (1 Kgs 18:21) and he had many followers in this respect among the Israelite prophets (e.g. Hos 2, Isa 2 and 48, Jer 16). The uncompromising formulation in Deuteronomy is consistent with the prophetic stress on exclusive worship of the God of Israel: “If your brother ... or your son ... or your dearest friend should entice you secretly to go and worship other gods ... then you shall not consent or listen ... you shall put him to death ...” (13:6–9).¹ But despite this forceful prohibition against participation in alien cults, we can identify traces of Canaanite ideas and religious practice in the ancient Israelite religion.²

It is probable that Mesopotamian and Iranian religion had some effect upon the religious ideas of the Jews during and after the Babylonian Exile.³ But we have very few records of a confrontation between Jewish and Iranian religious interests from the period of more than two hundred years during which the Jews lived under Persian rule.⁴ The situation changes however in

¹ The general picture is of course far more complex. See Goldenberg 1998, 9–27. For the question of the originality of the Masoretic reading *בִּי הָרִיג תְּהַרְגֵנּוּ*, see Weinfeld 1972, 94–95. On the basis of an analysis of texts pertaining to the so called Deuteronomistic history and with reference to archaeological evidence *Juba Pakkala* (1999, 239) states, however: “... it would seem that intolerant monolatry and the explicit demand to worship Yahwe exclusively are late ideas that first appeared during the exile.”

² Ringgren 1963, 84–85, de Vaux 1965, 440–441, Albetz 1994, 62–65, 172–175. See also articles by different authors in Dietrich/Klopfenstein 1994, 181–326 and Pakkala 1999, 225–231. For history of research and different aspects of the religion of ancient Israel, see Janowski/Köckert 1999.

³ For Mesopotamian influence, see e.g. Niehr 2003, 136–155. For Iranian influence, see e.g. Riley 1999, 244–249, esp. 245–246. Cf. Watson 1992, vol. 2, 183–184 and Colpe 2003, 597.

⁴ See Stern 1992, 115–116, Becking 1999, 1–8, esp. 7, and Runesson 2001, 259–303. For cult-objects found from the Persian period in Palestine see *Ephraïm Stern* 1983, 158–195. Cf. the words of the same author: “... during the Persian period, we find a very strange

this respect during the following era, i.e., the time of the Greek rulers. The peak of a religious clash occurred about thirty-five years after the conquest of the land of the Jews around 200 B.C.E. by the Seleucid rulers of Syria from the Ptolemies governing Egypt. The religion of the Jews during the succeeding Maccabean rule and thereafter, and particularly after the destruction of the Temple, differed in many respects from Israelite religion before the Exile.⁵

In this article I concentrate on the Jew's daily confrontation with the complex phenomenon described by the term "Hellenistic religion". I confine myself to religious practices and related questions and with some exceptions disregard issues of religious ideology. I therefore do not discuss, e.g., how the Book of Wisdom or Philo of Alexandria used Hellenistic philosophical or religious concepts when they articulated their theological or anthropological ideas.⁶ I also ignore the very interesting but controversial question of Jewish attempts to win proselytes or to do missionary work in the Hellenistic world.⁷ My focus lies in the opposite direction: how much is documented regarding how non-Jewish religious activities attracted Jews in the Hellenistic world and in the early Roman Empire.⁸ The material discussed derives from the Eastern Mediterranean area and in only a few cases is later than the first century C.E.⁹

I begin with some theoretical reflections. *Peder Borgen*, in the title of one of his articles, summarized the situation in which a Jew in antiquity found himself when confronting alien religions.¹⁰ A Jew could say "no" or "yes" to non-Jewish religious practices. In the former case the traditional requirement of the Bible was met whereas the latter option was a threat to Jewish identity, if the standard was set by the biblical prohibitions. But these

phenomenon: in the area of the country occupied by the Jews, *not a single cultic figurine* has been found! ... How can we explain the complete absence of sanctuaries and, even more significantly, the complete absence of these common cultic figurines in areas of Judaeans (and Samaritans ...). Apparently, pagan cults ceased to exist among the Judaeans who purified their their worship and Jewish monotheism was at last consolidated." (Stern 1999, 254f.). But cf. *Rüdiger Schmitt* (2003, 190): "Der Befund ist – gemessen an den übrigen Mengen – zwar schmal, zeigt aber die Präsenz und damit auch den Gebrauch von Tonplastik in Yehud." In opposition to a theory by Ulrich Hübner, he states: "Die Terrakottafigurinen aus Yehud zeugen von der traditionellen Frömmigkeitspraxis der Judäer, nicht aber von einem Bildersturm nach dem Exil." (Schmitt 2003, 198).

⁵ Cf. Neusner 1984, 90.

⁶ See for instance Winston 1981b, 33–40, 59–63, Mack 1973, 133–154.

⁷ Compare Feldman 1993, 288–341 with the very different standpoint presented by Riesner 2000, 211–250. See also Wander 1998, 29–32, 218–227 and Dickson 2003.

⁸ For a broader perspective see Goldenberg 1998, *passim*.

⁹ For references to Rabbinic material, see Winter 1990, 209–226, esp. 215–219 and Borgen 1995, 30–59, esp. 35, 41–44.

¹⁰ Borgen 1995, 40–41, 47–48.

two possibilities also raised a question: was it possible to conform to alien religious practice and still remain a Jew? “How far” could a Jew go without imperiling his status as a Jew and how far did Jews actually go? How did Jews react when some of their co-religionists participated in Greco-Roman religious cults?

Why was participation in alien cults an issue in the first place? Why should a Jew participate in such activity at all? Did some Jews find Greco-Roman cults attractive? The Hellenistic kings invested massive material and spiritual resources in religion. As examples we could mention the religious policy of the Seleucid Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the building of temples and the cult of Sarapis in the Ptolemaic kingdom.¹¹ Many Jews were confronted with non-Jewish cults simply because they were part of everyday life in the world around them. In the Hellenistic world such phenomena as theatre, sports, and education had religious overtones, and rituals were normally performed in such contexts.¹²

In our discussion a distinction could be made between active, direct participation on the one hand and passive, indirect participation on the other. The latter could have occurred whenever a Jew was present when Greco-Roman rituals were performed. Such participation is very difficult to document, however, and therefore the distinction between active and passive participation is implied only in section 2.1., when we discuss the dangerous world in which Jews lived. An easier question concerns the extent to which Jewish participation in alien religious practices, when it happened, was wholly voluntary. The opportunities for and modes of participation in Hellenistic cults must have been different in the Holy Land and in the Diaspora. In the former case the Maccabean revolt naturally caused a dramatic change in the religious situation. In the Diaspora, on the other hand, the Jews were witnesses to religious activity for centuries but rarely in such dangerous circumstances as in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. In the following I distinguish between witnesses in which the participation is documented by way of explicit statements, and those in which a weaker evidence survives. By the latter I mean for instance prohibitions against attendance at alien religious activities. Such injunctions could be signs of actual transgressions of biblical commandments but could also be just warnings against involvement with alien cults.

¹¹ Cf. Hengel 1996, 286, Tcherikover 1982, 178–182.

¹² See for instance Feldman 1993, 57–63.

1. Participation in Greco-Roman Religion in the Holy Land

1.1. Documentation through Direct Statements

The history of the Jews in the land of Israel after Alexander the Great until the Roman conquest of Syria and Egypt is closely connected with the political, administrative, cultural and religious development in the Ptolemaic and Seleucid kingdoms.¹³ A Jewish interest in Greek culture and life-style is reported from the period after 200 B.C.E. when the Jewish area had been annexed to the Seleucid dominions. Documents explicitly mention Jewish participation in alien cults in the region during this time. Yet there is no independent documentation of the voice of those who were attracted to Hellenistic culture.¹⁴ The First and Second Books of the Maccabees for instance represent the attitudes of those who were critical of the Greek influence. 1 Maccabees states that there appeared in Israel some “lawless men” (ἄνομοι) who misled many, suggesting that a covenant should be made with the gentiles. The argument allegedly put forward for such an action was that many evils had come upon the Jews after they had separated themselves from the surrounding peoples (1 Macc 1:11). Some Israelites thereupon are said to have applied to the Syrian King Antiochus Epiphanes, who “granted them to observe the practices of the gentiles (δικαιώματα τῶν ἔθνῶν)” (v. 13). A *gymnasium* in gentile style was built in Jerusalem. According to 2 Macc 4:7–9 the initiative to this was taken by Jason, who succeeded in seizing the office of the High Priest from his brother Onias III.¹⁵ The Jewish participation in athletics vividly described by 2 Macc 4:14 as highly appreciated by the Jerusalemite priests may explain the attempt to reverse the sign of circumcision. Such behaviour is seen by 1 Macc 1:15 as a rebellion against the Covenant. The idea in the same verse that the apostates “joined (ἔζευγίσθησαν) with the Gentiles” could mean sexual association.¹⁶ Jason even sent a sum of money to Tyre at the time of the quinquennial games there, to be used for the sacrifice to Heracles. But the delegates chosen for the mission were able to divert the money to the building of ships instead (2 Macc 4:18–20). From a Jewish perspective Jason’s attempt must have seemed idolatrous, although it was unsuccessful. It is understandable therefore that he is designated “the blackguard” (ὁ μαρδός) in 2 Macc 4:19.¹⁷

¹³ See Hengel 1996, 6–57.

¹⁴ Cf. *John Barclay* (1996, 246), who states: “The complex currents of Jewish opinion, and the alliances of political interest groups, are now barely detectable through the filter of the Maccabean literature.”

¹⁵ Different aspects of the establishment and education at the *gymnasium* in Jerusalem are illustrated by Doran 2001, 94–115.

¹⁶ Goldstein 1977, 201.

¹⁷ Cf. *Jonathan A. Goldstein* 1984 *ad loc.* Goldstein thinks, however, that the “sweeping

The prelude of the dramatic fight for Jewish independence from Syrian rule as described in 1 Maccabees consists in the decree promulgated by Antiochus Epiphanes concerning juridical and religious uniformity in his realm (1 Macc 1:43). The implementation of the decree in the land of the Jews is colourfully described as the prohibition of circumcision, certain sacrifices in the Temple, the building of altars and “idolatrous temples”, and in addition the sacrificing of swine and other unclean animals, the establishment of the “abomination of desolation” upon the altar in Jerusalem and the destruction of scrolls of the Law. The penalty for disobedience was death (1 Macc 1:44–61). 2 Maccabees adds various details, maintaining that the Temple was dedicated to the Olympian Zeus and that on the feast of Dionysos the Jews “were forced to wear ivy-wreaths and join the procession” in honour of the god (2 Macc 6:2, 7).¹⁸ Irrespective of the historicity of the decree, or the real intentions of Antiochus,¹⁹ the Syrian measures in matters of religion no doubt constituted a dynamic factor in the course of events finally leading to the establishment of the Hasmonean rule.

With the exception of Jason’s unsuccessful attempt to sponsor the sacrifices to Heracles at Tyre nothing is explicitly stated in 1 and 2 Maccabees concerning Jewish involvement in non-Jewish religion before the implementation of the dictate of Antiochus.²⁰ But after it many in Israel are said to have approved of the worship introduced by the king (εὐδόκησαν τῇ λατρείᾳ αὐτοῦ), they “sacrificed to the idols (ἔθυσαν τοῖς εἰδώλοις)” and profaned the Sabbath (1 Macc 1:43).²¹ The picture conveyed by 1 and 2 Macc is not, therefore, exclusively that of an aggressive power pursuing a policy of cultural imperialism resulting in the subjugation of the Jews, who lacked the power to resist foreign religious influence. According to the sources there

accusation” of idolatry in 1 Macc 1:43, is an exaggeration because if “Jason or his associates had participated directly in idol worship, the author would have said so, loudly” (Goldstein 1984, 233).

¹⁸ From a strictly historical point of view, the mention of Dionysos is problematic in 2 Macc 6:7. According to the documentation presented by *Martin Hengel*, Antiochus Epiphanes rather favoured the Olympian Zeus and Apollo. See Hengel 1996, 285–86, cf. 296, 298–99.

¹⁹ Cf. Goldstein 1977, 119–120, 140–160, who holds that Antiochus, having been impressed by Roman ways of handling the infiltration of new religious practices, thought of reforming Judaism along more original lines. See also Hengel 1996, 294–96. Barclay (1996, 248), for his part sees the presentation among Greeks of Antiochus as a champion of civilization, who attempted to “eradicate the misanthropic customs of the Jews”, as a part of “anti-Jewish propaganda”.

²⁰ Cf. Goldstein 1977, 199.

²¹ For the use of the word εἶδωλον in the Greek-speaking world, early Judaism and Christianity see *Terry Griffith* (2002, 28–57), Griffith concludes: “... the Greeks were capable of using *eidolon* of cultic images. The innovation that the Jews introduced was in line with their understanding of idolatry in which they identified the statue of the god with the god itself. It is the extension of the term to include the god itself that is the innovation.”

existed strong internal tensions among the Jews in matters of assimilation to non-Jewish customs including religious ones.²² The actions of the political authorities to enforce apostasy among the Jews therefore did not meet with unified resistance. This is demonstrated by the episode with the priest Mattathias. When he refused to sacrifice at a non-Jewish ritual, another Jew came forward “in the sight of all to offer on the altar in Modein in accordance with the king’s decree” (1 Macc 2:23).²³ The reaction of Mattathias, who killed the Jew and the administering officer and in addition cast down the altar is understood by 1 Macc 2:26 as zeal for the Law in analogy with the act of Phinehas described in Num 25.

A detail in 2 Macc strengthens the impression that the religious identity of the Jews during the transition from Seleucid to Hasmonean rule was not always clear. In 2 Macc 12 we are told how the troops under Judas Maccabaeus defeated the Greeks under Gorgias. When the Jews went to recover the bodies of their fallen soldiers after their victory they found that all of these had “objects which had been consecrated to the idols of Jamnia” (ἑρῶματα τῶν ἀπὸ Ιαμυνείας εἰδώλων 12:40). Such sacred objects among the Jews can be explained as loot from an earlier attack on Jamnia (2 Macc 12:9). It is a moot point whether they should be understood as amulets with protecting power or just votive offerings plundered from the Jamnian shrines.²⁴ In any case 2 Maccabees sees them as forbidden by the Torah and thus finds an explanation for the fate of the slain. The conduct of the latter was a sin (v. 42) punished by God, “the righteous judge, who exposes what has been concealed” (12:41).

King Herod the Great is one of the best known, and to many also one of the most fascinating, characters of the Imperial Era. Herod was an Idumean on his father’s side while his mother was a Nabatean, probably connected

²² Cf. Hengel 1996, 286–92.

²³ The question of the different dimensions of the pre-Maccabean Hellenization is discussed by *John J. Collins* 2001, 48–52. Collins is critical of the idea defended for instance by *Elias Bickerman* (1979, 83–88), and *Martin Hengel* (1996, 304–305), that leading Jews in the Holy Land also welcomed alien religious ideas and practice. According to Collins, a sharp distinction must be drawn “between the Hellenistic reform of Jason, on the other hand, and the religious persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes on the other” (p. 52). Cf. also *Louis H. Feldman* (2002, 295), who in a review article on Collins/Sterling 2001, asks how we can explain the fact that the “political-religious identity of the Jews became stronger and that idol-worship, certainly an integral element in Hellenization under Antiochus Epiphanes, ceased to be a danger”, if Hellenization had started much earlier and was deep seated. But, on the other hand, if 1 Macc 1:14 (cf. 2: 23) reflects historical reality, some Jews seem willingly to have accepted the religious innovations, which indicates that they were less inclined to insist on strict observance of the tradition. Cf. the review of the scholarly discussion concerning the degree of Hellenization, the sequence of events and the motivations of the actors involved given by *Schäfer* 2003, 42–44.

²⁴ See *Goldstein* 1984, 448–449. Cf. *Barclay* 1996, 123.

with the royal family.²⁵ Herod's religious affiliation was Jewish. He was a "full Jew".²⁶ Nevertheless his close ties to the Roman rulers and the Nabatean kingdom and his cultural interests could lead him into very close contact with non-Jewish cults outside the Holy Land.²⁷ I discuss him here because he cannot be regarded as a diaspora Jew. When Herod was appointed king of the Jews in the presence of the Senate in the year 40 B.C.E. the ceremony, according to Flavius Josephus (Jos.), concluded with a procession in which Antony and Octavian, with Herod between them, went up to the Capitol where they offered sacrifices (*B.J.* I 285, *A.J.* XIV 388). Although Herod seems to have observed the Law in the strictly Jewish parts of his domain he still erected temples in honour of the Emperor (*B.J.* I 404, *A.J.* XV 292, 328–329, 363–364). Some of the remains of the temples in Samaria (Sebaste), Pnias (Caesarea Philippi) and Caesarea Maritima have been excavated in modern times.²⁸ In Caesarea Maritima the magnificent temple founded by Herod had statues of Augustus modelled after the Olympian Zeus and of Rome in the shape of Hera of Argos (*B.J.* I 414). Josephus describes the great festival of the dedication of Caesarea sponsored by the Emperor Augustus and his wife Julia. But Josephus does not directly touch on the ritual aspects of the festivals although he mentions meals and "feasts" (*A.J.* XVI 136–141). Still it is logical to assume that sacrifices were offered on that occasion. It is of course impossible to say how many Jews attended and how many participated actively in the non-Jewish rituals in these temples. But it is reasonable to imagine that there were at least some Jews present.²⁹ Herod also sponsored the Olympic games and erected the Pythian temple at Rhodes at his own expense (*A.J.* XVI 147–149). Both actions had, no doubt, religious significance.³⁰ When defending himself against Jewish reproaches he declared, according to Josephus, that he did not act in these matters on his own account, but by "command and order". To the Romans on the other hand he said that he did it in their honour rather than in order to observe the customs of his own nation (*A.J.* XV 330).

²⁵ See for instance Richardson 1996, 54, 62–63. *Nikos Kokkinos* (1998, 101–128) tries to demonstrate that the Herodian family had a Hellenized Phoenician (Tyrian/Sidonian) origin with an initial establishment at Ascalon (esp. p. 111 f.).

²⁶ Richardson 1996, 52–53.

²⁷ See Schürer 1973–1989, vol. I, 311–314. Herod's possible Ascalonite religious ties are presented by Kokkinos 1998, 117–122.

²⁸ See Stern *et al.* 1993, vol. 1, 140, 283, vol. 4, 1307.

²⁹ *Peter Richardson* 1996, 184, states: "All of these cities must have had a substantial number of Jews, who accommodated themselves, presumably, to this homage of the Emperor."

³⁰ Cf. Richardson 1996, 185. Kokkinos 1998, 122, notes that Apollo, whom Herod honoured by building the temple at Rhodes, also was the god of his patron Augustus.

Herod's name has been found on a plinth close to the right of the entrance to the Nabatean temple of Ba'al Shamim at Si'a. The inscription reads as follows: "To King Herod, master (κυρίῳ), Obaisatos, son of Saodos placed the statue (ἀνδριάντα) at his own expense."³¹ Richardson states: "... Herod accepted representational statues of himself ... and was willing to locate them in association with foreign gods."³² Herod may have contributed to the cost of the building. His relations with the Nabatean kingdom were not always the best possible, but apparently he enjoyed some goodwill among the Nabateans in the thirties B.C.E. when the temple at Si'a was erected.³³ Still the statue and the inscription tell us more about Obaisatos than about Herod.³⁴

We may now conclude this part of our investigation. 1 and 2 Maccabees present participation in non-Jewish cult in the Holy Land in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes as one aspect of assimilation to Greek culture. The motivation for such assimilation is described in general terms as a striving for prosperity and good relations with the neighbouring peoples. There were therefore those who willingly participated in the non-Jewish cult required by the Syrian king, whereas others took part only because they were forced to do so. But 1 and 2 Maccabees do not explicitly speak of emotional attraction to a specific cult. The counter-reaction of Jews who wanted to be faithful to Jewish tradition is described as fierce. Participation in alien rituals is condemned as apostasy and violent actions against such participation are justified by reference to biblical prototypes. As a concluding remark on Herod's religious attitudes and praxis concerning alien religion we may cite Richardson: "Herod had few compunctions about supporting other deities outside the Jewish homeland."³⁵ Moreover Herod occasionally took part personally in non-Jewish religious rituals. At the same time he made great efforts to promote Jewish religion. If he can be seen as a religious personality, he was a very complex one.

1.2. Indirect Documentation from the Holy Land

The place and the time of composition of the Epistle of Jeremy with its savage attack on alien religion are not known. But if we think hypothetically of its provenance in the Holy Land during the Hellenistic era the EpJer could

³¹ Dittenberger 1960 (1905): vol. I, 415, Richardson 1996, 206–207.

³² Richardson 1996, 66.

³³ See Richardson 1996, 66, 126–127, 168, 206–207.

³⁴ As for the successors of Herod, Kokkinos (1998, 122) refers to two inscriptions outside the Holy Land connected with the cult of Apollo and dedicated in honour of Antipas and for the safety of Agrippa I. See Dittenberger 1960 (1905), vol. I, 629, numbers 417 and 418. These inscriptions give us some information on the religion of the donors but do not necessarily reveal much concerning the religious ideas or behaviour of Antipas or Agrippa.

³⁵ Richardson 1996, 67. Cf. p. 186.

be indirect, not very strong evidence of Jewish participation in alien cults in the area and the time investigated here.³⁶ The main target of the EpJer is the cult of, and confidence in, the Babylonian gods, made of silver, gold, and wood that fill their worshippers with awe. The Jewish addressees are enjoined not to imitate the foreigners (ἄλλόφυλοι) in their fear and worship of these gods (v. 4), a warning repeated four times (vv. 14, 22, 28 and 64). Instead the Jews should worship the Lord alone (v. 5). These warnings do not of course prove that Jews had actively participated in alien cults. But the repeated warning may indicate such participation and not only a fear of a possible future behaviour by the addressees.

2. Jewish Participation in Greco-Roman Religion in the Diaspora

2.1. A Dangerous World for Jews

Before discussing Jewish participation in non-Jewish religion in the diaspora let us characterize the cultural environment that surrounded the Jews outside the Holy Land in the relevant period.³⁷ Public life in antiquity could imply membership in different administrative bodies, attendance at athletic events, and theatrical performances. All these were associated with religious rituals.³⁸ Such a personage as Philo of Alexandria was very well acquainted with sports as well as with the theatre.³⁹ I here exemplify the contact between Jews and society by presenting one single feature which is fairly well documented: *gymnasium* education.

Hellenistic culture from classical Greece had inherited a desire to refine both the human being and the human environment. In the Hellenistic cities, boys and young men belonging to the Greek elite were educated in the *gymnasia*, where they received physical and intellectual training.⁴⁰ As a rule, the exercise of a person's citizen rights in a Greek *polis* did not begin

³⁶ See Carey A. Moore (1977, 329) who does not deny that the "idolatry attacked by the Epistle was also a reality of the author's own time and place, namely, the late fourth- or early third-century Palestine". For a detailed presentation of the evidence, see Flusser 1974, 1065–1100. For Hellenistic cities in the area, see Schürer 1973–1989, vol. II, 85–183.

³⁷ In the sections above I discussed Jewish participation in alien cults in the Holy Land without taking into account other aspects of the Graeco-Roman culture, such as education and visual art. But I do not think that, for instance, the *gymnasium* in Jerusalem (1 Macc 1:14, 2 Macc 4:12) or the portraits of members of the Herodian family (Jos. A.J. XIX 359) had direct Greco-Roman religious connotations. It may have been different with coins minted in the reign of Herod Agrippa bearing the image of the Emperor. Cf. Schürer 1973–1989, vol 1, 451. For different aspects of interaction between Jews and non-Jews, see Rutgers 1998, 73–95.

³⁸ See Reynolds/Tannenbaum 1987, 58, 66, and Feldman 1993, 59–63.

³⁹ Sandelin 1991, 109–150, esp. 125–128, Feldman 1993, 59–63.

⁴⁰ See Nilsson 1955a, 42–53.

until he had completed a year at a *gymnasium* at the age of fourteen (the *ephebeia*).⁴¹ A *gymnasium* education no doubt promoted Jewish attempts to attain a position in society.⁴²

Greco-Roman culture, both the material and the spiritual aspect thereof, had strong religious elements. The syllabus taught at the *gymnasia* naturally contained large portions of ancient religious tradition, e.g. from Homer.⁴³ *Gymnasia* were often dedicated to gods or demigods like Hermes and Heracles, and celebrations including sacrifices were held in their honour.⁴⁴ It is easy to imagine that Jewish families who wished their sons to achieve a high position in society were faced with a problem because of this religious side of the life in the *gymnasia*.⁴⁵ How should the Jewish young men behave when confronted with this aspect? Should Jews abstain from giving their boys *gymnasium* education and thereby bar their advancement in society?

Philo's thorough knowledge of Greek and Hellenistic culture indicates that he had attended a *gymnasium*. Instead of warning people against a *gymnasium* education he even commends it (*Spec.* 2.229–230), which shows his positive attitude towards Jewish attendance at the *gymnasia*.⁴⁶ That there were several Jews who sought *gymnasium* education in Alexandria is probable because Emperor Claudius in his well known letter to the Alexandrians bans Jews from the games which were part of such training.⁴⁷ That Jews in fact attended *gymnasia* in different parts of the Greco-Roman world can be seen from lists of *ephebes* containing Jewish names. In Cyrene two such inscriptions have been found, belonging to *gymnasia* both of which were dedicated to Hermes and Heracles. One of the lists, dated towards the end of the first century B.C.E., has an *ephebe* Jesus son of Antiphilos and the other, dated to 3/4 C.E., also has some Jewish names, e.g., Eleazar son of Eleazar.⁴⁸ Asia Minor also offers some evidence.⁴⁹ From Jasus an inscription is known with at least one *ephebe* with a Jewish name, Joudas son of Euodos.⁵⁰ A late,

⁴¹ *Diana Delia* 1991, 75, cf. Nilsson 1955a, 85ff. Delia (p. 55, n. 26) challenges the common opinion that ephebic training was a prerequisite for Alexandrian citizenship and that Alexandrian citizenship in turn was a condition for Roman citizenship (pp. 39–45).

⁴² See for instance Tcherikover 1957, vol. I, 38, and Barclay 1996, 42, 68.

⁴³ See Nilsson 1955a, 51–52, 61.

⁴⁴ Nilsson 1955a, 62–63.

⁴⁵ Cf. Delia 1991, 86, n. 69.

⁴⁶ See the discussion in Sandelin 1991, 126–129. Cf. Feldman 1993, 57–59, Barclay 1996 160–161, and *Torrey Seland* 1996, 110–127, esp. 121–124. According to Seland, Philo warned against the misuse of institutions like *gymnasia*.

⁴⁷ Tcherikover 1957, vol. II, No 153 pp. 36–60, esp. 53.

⁴⁸ See Lüderitz 1983, 11–21, esp. 11 and 15, cf. Barclay 1996, 234–235.

⁴⁹ See Trebilco 1992, 176–177.

⁵⁰ The inscription was published by *Louis Robert* (1937, 85–86) in a review article on Frey 1936.

fragmentary inscription from Hypaepa south of Sardis also gives the name Joudas.⁵¹

We may conclude that although there were dangers connected with *gymnasium* education, Jews did not necessarily feel that attendance implied a break with Judaism and its monotheism. This is most clearly demonstrated by the case of Philo. How Jews behaved if they were present when rituals were performed in *gymnasia* is difficult to say because of lack of documentation.

2.2. Direct Documentation of Participation in Greco-Roman Cults in the Diaspora

From regions outside the Holy Land a long list of Jewish names or other Jewish affiliations are documented. Many of these accounts reveal different degrees of influence from non-Jewish religious praxis.

A commonly used religious phrase or formula occurs in a letter belonging to the so-called Zeno Papyri found at Dura Europos and written 257 B.C.E. by Toubias,⁵² a Jew mentioned by Josephus. Toubias had married the sister of the high priest Onias II (*A.J.* XII 160) and appears in the Zeno Papyri as a Ptolemaic military commander in Ammanitis. Toubias became the grandfather to Hyrcanus, a prominent figure in the Hellenistic party at Jerusalem (*A.J.* XII 186–236). Regardless of his close affiliation with the most respected Jewish families the conduct of Toubias seems to have been characterized by indifference to the Jewish law. This attitude may also be manifest in the said letter, which is addressed to one of his superiors, the Ptolemaic minister Apollonios. The letter concerns a group of slaves, perhaps including two Jewish boys, sent from Palestine to Egypt.⁵³ Toubias writes: “If all goes well with you and all your affairs, and all else (goes) according to your (wishes), many thanks be to the gods (πολλή χάρις τοῖς θεοῖς).” *Victor Tcherikover* states that “we do not expect to find this pagan formula in a letter written by a Jew”. He admits that the letter was written by a Greek secretary, but also says that “Toubias was responsible for its contents”.⁵⁴ If this was the case, Toubias did not take Jewish monotheism very seriously, at least not in his own verbal behaviour. What he intended when he formulated or approved of this thanksgiving to the gods is of course impossible to say. A common phrase like the one in question may conceal an indifferent attitude to any kind of religion.

⁵¹ See *Jean-Baptiste Frey* 1952, 19–20, No 755. Frey states: “Il s’agit sans doute d’un collège des éphèbes ...”

⁵² *Tcherikover* 1957, vol. I, 125–127.

⁵³ See *Hengel* 1996, 268.

⁵⁴ *Tcherikover* 1957, vol. I, 127 n. 2.

If we move to Greece and Asia Minor we also find some documentation of Jewish assimilation to alien religious behaviour. An inscription from Oropus on the border between Attica and Boeotia in Greece, dated to the first half of the third century B.C.E., records the manumission of a slave Μόσχος Μοσχίωνος, a Jew (Ἰουδαῖος). In a dream, the gods Amphiaros and Hygieia had instructed him to erect the inscription on a slab near the altar (of their shrine).⁵⁵ *Baruch Lifshitz* calls Moschos the “earliest known Jew from the Greek mainland and the first Hellenized Jew”.⁵⁶ No doubt Moschos was committed to non-Jewish religion in Greece. Otherwise he would not have obeyed a demand from Greek gods. How strong or consistent his commitment was is impossible to say.⁵⁷ He may have acted, in the words of *Robert Goldenberg*, “at the instruction or at least under the influence of his masters”.⁵⁸

An inscription found in the ruins of the theatre of Jasus in Asia Minor from the middle of the second century B.C.E. tells us of a certain Nicetas, son of Jason, a man from Jerusalem (Ἱεροσολυμίτης) and a foreigner (μέτοικος) in Jasus who paid a small sum (100 drachmae) to a Dionysiac festival.⁵⁹ I think it is fairly clear that he was of Jewish descent. Both the name of his father and of his original home-town so indicate.⁶⁰ Tcherikover notes that the contribution of Nicetas to the festival mentioned was made in the same period when the high priest Jason sent donations from Jerusalem for the sacrifices to the Tyrian Heracles (2 Macc 4:18–20).⁶¹ It is of course difficult to state anything specific concerning the religious commitment of Nicetas.

In an inscription from Acmonia in Phrygia we meet a certain Tyrronius Rapon.⁶² He may have been a Jew, because another person named P. Tyrro-nios Klados was an ἀρχισυνάγωγος in the city, according to a contemporary inscription.⁶³ Both inscriptions also mention Iulia Severa, a Greco-Roman priestess during the reign of Nero, an ἀρχιέρεια of the Imperial cult in Acmonia.⁶⁴ It is somewhat extraordinary that she built the synagogue later

⁵⁵ See Woodland 1984, 79 n. 293.

⁵⁶ Frey 1975, 82. Cf. Millar in Schürer 1973–1989, vol. III.1, 65.

⁵⁷ *J. & L. Robert* find in him an “exemple frappant de denationalisation”. See Robert/Robert 1956, 130. Cf. Barclay 1996, 321 f.

⁵⁸ Goldenberg 1998, 63.

⁵⁹ See Frey 1952, 15, No 749.

⁶⁰ *Fergus Millar* in Schürer 1973–1989, vol. III.1, 25, raises doubts whether Nicetas was a Jew, but does not offer any arguments.

⁶¹ Tcherikover 1982, 352.

⁶² Ramsay 1897, 637, Buckler/Calder 1939, 97–98, No 265, Franz 1977, 14 and 1091, No 3858. See also Groag 1917, 947.

⁶³ Ramsay 1897, 649–50, Frey 1952, 766, Buckler/Calder 1939, 97 No 264, cf. *SEG*, vol. XXXII, 1266. The text is also presented by Trebilco 1992, 58–59.

⁶⁴ See the documentation presented in Schürer 1973–1989, vol. III.1, 31.

conducted by Tyrronios Klados, who contributed to its restoration.⁶⁵ *Paul Trebilco* regards Julia Severa as a “gentile sympathizer”.⁶⁶ The inscription that mentions both Tyrronios Rapon and Julia Severa gives them a function in a context of athletic games. Another person, Nikias, also named Lucius, honoured in the inscription, is said to have served meritoriously as a *gymnasiarch* for two five-year periods under (ἐπι) Julia Severa and Tyrronios Rapon. The words have also been taken as evidence of the latter’s status as a priest.⁶⁷ This may be correct, but I find it doubtful.⁶⁸ Still, the official status of Tyrronios Rapon probably entailed attendance and even active participation at non-Jewish ritual performances. We therefore seem to have here, in the words of Applebaum, a case of “mutual rapprochement and interpenetration in an atmosphere of complete tolerance”.⁶⁹

There are further inscriptions from Asia Minor that include names of persons who may have been both Jews and Greco-Roman priests: Flavius son of Moschios and Cornelia Secunda from Thyatira.⁷⁰ Ramsay also mentions a person named Alexander from Apameia.⁷¹

An inscription from Gorgippia (Anape) near the Bosphorus from the year 41 C.E., recording a manumission of slaves belonging to Pothos the son of Straton, contains a text beginning with the words θεῶ ὑψίστῳ παντοκράτορι εὐλογητῶ.⁷² This title could very well signify the God of Israel.⁷³ This interpretation is supported by the fact that the manumission took place in the προσευχή, a word often used of buildings where Jews gather.⁷⁴ But the text ends with a phrase meaning “under (the protection of the divine

⁶⁵ Frey 1952, 766. *William Mitchell Ramsay* (1897, 650) tries to demonstrate that Julia Severa was Jewish.

⁶⁶ Trebilco 1992, 59.

⁶⁷ See Ramsay 1897, 639. Ramsay even thinks Tyrronios and Julia were married. Ramsay is followed by *Shim'on Applebaum* 1974, 443. Applebaum also mentions the possibility that her family was distantly related to the Herods. For a more skeptical view of Julia Severa’s being Jewish and married to Tyrronios Rapon, see Trebilco 1992, 59. Cf. Buckler/Calder 1939, 98.

⁶⁸ *Edmund Groag* (1917, 947) does not find more in the inscription than that Tyrronios and Julia had the same local status during two subsequent *lustra*. Cf. Buckler/Calder 1939, 98 and Blanchetière 1974, 379.

⁶⁹ Applebaum 1974, 443.

⁷⁰ Boeckhius 1977, 3495.

⁷¹ Ramsay 1897, 672.

⁷² Frey 1936, 500, No 690. The inscription is found today in St Petersburg, Russia. Another inscription with similar contents and the same phrases but with different personal names is also attested, but known today only through a copy, because it was destroyed in a bombardment. A fragment exists in St Petersburg. See Frey 1975, 67–68, No 690a.

⁷³ See the presentation of the Jewish inscriptions in Asia Minor referring to θεός ὑψίστος by Trebilco 1992, 133–137. Concerning the theory of Jewish syncretism in Asia Minor Trebilco (1992, 142) states: “No evidence has arisen from this study to suggest that Judaism in Asia Minor was syncretistic or had been compromised by paganism.”

⁷⁴ See Runesson 1992, 229–236. Cf. Trebilco 1992, 136.

powers) Zeus, the Earth and the Sun”.⁷⁵ This seems to be a deviation from strict Jewish monotheism. But it could be that for the sake of convenience Pothos made a compromise with his tradition in adjusting to legal requirements connected with the juridical act of manumission.⁷⁶ A non-Jewish religious phrase in a document certifying such an act has little relevance to the religious commitment of the person involved.⁷⁷ In any case Pothos, like Toubias whom we discussed above, was responsible for the phrase.

In the rock face west of the temple of the god Pan Euodus at El-Kanis in Egypt two inscriptions whose dedicators, Ptolemaios son of Dionysius and Theodotus son of Dorion, identify themselves as Jews offer thanksgiving to God.⁷⁸ The terms used in the expressions are in conformity with Jewish usage in other Jewish inscriptions and in the Septuagint: θεοῦ εὐλογία and εὐλογεῖ τὸν θεόν.⁷⁹ Irrespective of the question of whether the God of Israel is meant here it is worth noting that the thanksgiving is presented at a non-Jewish shrine. Still the question remains why the men emphasize their Jewishness. Did they think that the god Pan was identical with the God of Israel?⁸⁰ Were they monotheists? If so their view is similar to that found in Aristobulos, the Letter to Aristaeas (15–16), and perhaps in the Jewish historian Eupolemus.⁸¹ It is also possible that Ptolemaios and Theodotus had no intentions of being associated with the god Pan at all.⁸² Thus it is difficult to draw definite conclusions in this case.

From an inscription in Cyrene we know of a Jew, Eleazar son of Jason, who in the year 60 C.E. held the position of guardian of the laws (νομοφύλαξ).⁸³ This meant an appointment to “a highly responsible government board, for whose work men of knowledge commanding the public con-

⁷⁵ “ὑπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιον”. In 690a the phrase may have been [ἀφιημι ἐλευθέρ]ους ὑπὸ Δία, Γῆν, Ἥλιον ... See Frey 1975, 67.

⁷⁶ Cf. Millar in Schürer 1973–1989, vol. III.1, 37, who refers to non-Jewish oath-formulas in the Elephantine papyri.

⁷⁷ Cf. Frey (1936, 501) who says: “Il est probable que les Juifs de la diaspora n’attachaient pas grande importance à ces formalités.”

⁷⁸ Frey 1952, 444–445, Nos 1537 and 1538.

⁷⁹ See Horbury/Noy 1992, 207–210. The dating of the inscriptions is difficult. Suggestions range from the mid second century B.C.E. to the Roman period.

⁸⁰ Cf. Millar, who states: “Whether this was Pan or Yahweh seems not to have been of great importance to them.” (Schürer 1973–1989, 58). *Robert Goldenberg* (1998, 64) finds this view unwarranted: “The ambiguity of the inscription can easily be the fruit of discretion as of indifference; a Jew thanking his God in someone else’s shrine will naturally have done so with calculated vagueness.”

⁸¹ See Holladay 1995, 172–173, Hengel 1996, 92–95, 263–266. Cf. Collins 2001, 40–41, 45.

⁸² For comments and questions regarding their motives, see Frey 1952, 445, Horbury/Noy 1992, 208, and Barclay 1996, 99–100.

⁸³ *SEG* XX, 737. Cf. Lüderitz 1983, 21–24.