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ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE HELLENISTIC-ROMAN PERIOD

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The complexities of the Graeco-Roman world coupled with the nature of Judaism itself produce a situation which is difficult to analyze. Anti-Semitism certainly existed and was a phenomenon of some importance in the Hellenistic world as well as in the Roman Empire, but its extent, nature, causes and results are controversial and have inspired an immense literature.1

Even the term is controversial. Anti-Semitism is a relatively modern term, apparently coined by W. Marr in the latter part of the nineteenth century and used "to designate antipathy to Jews on racial, pseudo-scientific, and often political grounds."2 There are problems with the term, and it is not fully adequate to describe the phenomenon for which it is normally used. For one thing, it suggests a racial distinction which cannot be maintained, since the theory of pure Aryan and Semitic races has little modern support.3 For another, the word Semite is broader than the word Jew, since there are other peoples (e.g., Arabs) who are just as Semitic as are the Jews.

Since this term is open to such objections, various attempts have been made to find a better one, with many modern authors preferring anti-


Judaism. This avoids the questionable racial distinction and seems at first more precise, but in fact it too is highly questionable. Judaism usually denotes "a certain way of life, thought and belief." It is not synonymous with Jewry; it can be used without referring personally to Jews, and it is possible to be Jewish without representing Judaism as the latter term is usually understood. Anti-Judaism implies then a rejection of certain kinds of thinking and living within Jewry, and seems even less adequate as a general term for the various kinds of opposition to Jews. Other terms have also been proposed; e.g., hatred of the Jews. This, however, is also open to objections. Hostility toward Jews did not always amount to hatred in the usual sense, thus such a term is less than adequate. I have seen no word or phrase suggested which is entirely satisfactory, thus I have decided to use the familiar expression, anti-Semitism, which, despite its weaknesses, is idiomatic and is in general use for all opposition to Jews.

A survey of the comments about Jews in the Hellenistic-Roman literature shows that they were almost universally disliked, or at least viewed with an amused contempt. Some modern scholars have attempted to minimize the dislike, and relatively few have recognized just how deep and widespread the anti-Semitic feelings were. The great majority of the comments in the literature are negative. This is true of serious historians (e.g., Tacitus) and also of satirists and other lesser writers (e.g., Juvenal, Martial). N. W. Goldstein speaks of "an impassable chasm between the Jews and their neighbors . . . ," a view which summarizes quite well the impression given by the literature.

This is not to say that anti-Semitism was universal in Hellenistic and Roman times, nor is it to imply that the various peoples were negative toward Jews in the same ways or to the same degree. Despite the differences in particulars, there was a pervasive anti-Semitic feeling, not unique to any given segment of the Graeco-Roman world.

4Sevenster, Roots, 1–4.
5Ibid.
7Sevenster, Roots, 1–2.
8E.g., ibid., 180; Radin, Jews Among Greek and Romans, 174, 195–96; and Sherwin-White, Racial Prejudice, 101.
9"Cultivated Pagans," 346.
10Anti-Semitism was more militant in the Greek cities of the eastern provinces; cf. Sherwin-White, Racial Prejudice, 86; and Radin, Jews Among Greeks and Romans, 201. The situation in Alexandria is especially well documented both by literary sources (esp. Philo, Legatio ad Gaium and In Flaccum; and Josephus J. W. 2.18.7–8 §487–99; Ant. 19.5.2–3 §278–85) and by the papyri (see V. Tcherikover, A. Fuks, and M. Stern [eds.], Corpus Papyrorum Judaicum [3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1957]64). Leo Fuchs (Die Juden Aegyptens in ptolemaischer und römischer Zeit [Vienna: Rath, 1924] 22), says: "Der Hass zwischen Juden und Griechen Alexandreias zieht sich wie eine chronische Krankheit durch die ganze Geschichte der römischen Kaiserzeit." Of the many treatments of Alexandrian Jewry, see esp. Heinemann, "Antisemitismus," 6–12; H. I. Bell, "Anti-Semitism in Alexandria," JRS 31 (1941) 1–18; H. S. Jones, "Claudius and the Jewish Question at Alexandria," JRS 16 (1926) 17–35; and A. Segré,
It is evident that many of the citations given in this paper reflect a benign dislike rather than an active hatred of the sort that leads to persecution. In the period under consideration, as in the modern world, not all anti-Semitic feeling took the form of overt action. Nevertheless, even the apparently harmless barbs of the satirists both reflected and contributed to the widespread distrust which prohibited any real cohesion of the races. Josephus, in his apologetic writings, was concerned to counter both anti-Semitic actions and anti-Semitic feelings.11

The complaints against Jews and Judaism are, in this study, divided into five somewhat arbitrary categories: origins, strangeness, religion and ritual, exclusiveness and proselytizing.12 There is some overlap. For example, the Jews' sense of exclusiveness grew at least in part out of their religion, and contributed to their feeling of estrangement from their neighbors; but despite this inevitable blurring of the lines, the categories are helpful and are therefore maintained.

There are, of course, occasional positive comments made by Hellenistic and Roman authors regarding Jews and their customs. Augustine quotes Varro as approving the Jews' method of imageless worship (De civ. D. 4.31); Strabo credits the forefathers of the Jews with "acting righteously and being truly pious toward God" (dikaiopragountes kat theosebeis hōs alethōs ontes, 16.2.37). The Pseudo-Longinus pays tribute to Moses' wisdom (Subl. 9.9), and Diodorus of Sicily also speaks of Moses and his institutions with respect (40.3.3). Dio Cassius admits the courage of the Jews (65.6.3), and even Tacitus, intensely negative regarding Jews, can applaud their determination (Hist. 5.10–13). According to Porphyry (Abst. 2.26), Theophrastus, though charging the Jews with human sacrifice, calls them "philosophers" (philosophoi) and seems favorably disposed toward them.13 Josephus (Ag. Ap. 1.22 §176–83) provides a quotation from the De Somno of Clearchus of Soli which represents Aristotle as having met a very Hellenized Jew who is spoken of with approval and who not only spoke Greek, but had the soul of a

"The Status of the Jews in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt," Jewish Social Studies 6 (1944) 375–400. There is also much evidence for anti-Semitic actions in the Greek cities of Asia Minor, and these actions are often seen to stem from local governments. See the decrees noted by Josephus (Ant. 14.10.8–26 §213–67). Cf. Sherwin-White, Racial Prejudice, 88–89. Christian anti-Semitism also existed, and Jews were aware of Christian as well as of pagan contempt. See Leipoldt, Antisemitismus, 16.

11 Contrast his argument for the antiquity of the Jewish race (Ag. Ap. 1.1–23 §1–218), used as an antidote for the pagan feeling that the Jews were not an ancient people, with his description of the maltreatment of the Jews at the hands of Gessius Florus (Ant. 20.11.1 §252–58).

12 J. Juster (Les Juifs dans l'empire Romain [2 vols.; New York: Burt Franklin, 1914] 1. 45–48) provides a more complete list of specific charges against the Jews. Some twenty-two separate charges are listed, with citations from both pagan and Christian sources.

Greek. Porphyry speaks well of the Essenes (Abst. 4.11–13), and, according to Jerome (Commentary on Dan 2:40), Eusebius (Praep. Evang. 9.10), and Augustine (De civ. D. 19.23), of the Jews in general. Numenius speaks appreciatively of the early part of Genesis, and it is interesting to note that Galen was strongly influenced in his scholarship by a Palestinian Jew. There is, though, despite these occasional glimpses of understanding and good will, a general trend of disparagement.

It is often stressed that Jews in the Empire enjoyed certain legal privileges and political protections, such as the well-known Roman respect for the parts of the temple where gentiles were prohibited; their honoring of the Jewish ban on images; their exempting the Jews from court on the Sabbath; and from serving in the army. This is true—in fact Rome generally tolerated and protected Jewish religion along with other cults, oppressing them only when disorderly or when they in some specific way threatened the peace or authority of Rome. It is also true that Caesar was unusually favorable to the Jews, so much so that he can be called, "dem Begründer der judenfreundlichen Politik," Augustus also proved friendly. But legal protection, and even special

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17 Ibid., 8–9.


19 Though Pilate and Caligula violated this facet of Jewish culture the Romans normally honored it, even to omitting from their coins struck in Judea “any sign or symbol that might be offensive to the religious feelings of the Jews, . . .” F. W. Madden, History of Jewish Coinage (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1864) 135.


21 Ibid., 39.

22 S. L. Guterman, Religious Toleration and Persecution in Ancient Rome (London: Aiglon, 1951) 11; H. H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero (London: Methuen, 1970) 374–75; H. R. Moehring, “The Persecution of the Jews and the Adherents of the Isis Cult at Rome A.D. 19,” NovT 73 (1959) 295–98; Juster, Les Juifs, 1. 213–42. See also D. Askowith (The Toleration of the Jews Under Julius Caesar and Augustus [New York: Columbia University, 1915] esp. pp. 5–6), whose entire thesis is that, though the Jews were despised by Roman citizens, they were legally tolerated. It should be remembered, though, that very often legal privileges were curtailed by the actions of individual officials and soldiers such as Cassius and Gessius Florus. See Heinemann, “Antisemitismus,” 14. In addition there were at times legal reprisals against the Jews; also the fiscus Judaicus, levied against all Jews following the rebellion of 66–73. See M. S. Ginsburg, “Fiscus Judaicus,” JQR 21 (1931) 281–91; and E. M. Smallwood, “Domitian’s Attitude Toward the Jews and Judaism,” Classical Philology 51 (1956) 4.


privileges, do not negate the fact of anti-Semitism. Popular feeling remained anti-Jewish, even though it was rare that legal reprisals occurred.

Since the Jews were widespread throughout the Graeco-Roman world and formed a significant part of the total population, there was, of course, much cultural interchange, leading to a degree of Hellenization (or Romanization). Of the more than 500 inscriptions found in Jewish catacombs in Rome more than three-fourths are in Greek, twenty-three per cent are in Latin, and only one per cent are Semitic or bilingual. There are numerous other evidences of Hellenization, and it is safe to say that, though not all Jews were equally Hellenized, there was a tendency in that direction, even in Palestine. Yet despite these conscious and subconscious compromises with their contemporaries, Jews remained Jews, sufficiently different to attract attention, most of which was unpleasant.

Jews were, then, similar in some ways to their neighbors, but, judging from Greek and Roman literature, the similarities were seldom perceived while the differences were quite consistently held up to ridicule. The specific areas of attack will now be considered.

I. Origins

One area commonly assailed by Greek and Latin authors is that of the origin and early history of the Jewish race. Some pagan writers simply try to demonstrate that the race is neither ancient nor noble while others attempt to connect Jewish origins with Hellenic history. The first is malicious, but the second not necessarily so, since a Hellenic connection was a compliment for most of the authors who wrote about Jews.
Tacitus mentions several possible origins of the Jews, supporting them by mere rumor, and in one case by a fanciful etymology (Hist. 5.2–3). One of his suggested origins involves the expelling of the Jews from Egypt due to hatred of the gods (invisum deis), being led by Moses to a country which they seized, and whose inhabitants they expelled. Another of his theories describes the Jews as “superfluous population of Egypt” (exundantem per Aegyptum multitudinem), led from Egypt by Hierosolymus and Iuda. Plutarch also refers to this theory, but with a more critical attitude than that of Tacitus.29

Whether acquainted with the OT or not, most gentile authors who speculate regarding Jewish origins connect them with Egypt,30 and usually in an uncomplimentary way. One of the most persistent views is that the Jews were lepers who were expelled by the Egyptians. Pompeius Trogus, quoted by Justin, says of Moses:

But the Egyptians, being troubled with scabies and leprosy and warned by an oracle, expelled (pellunt) him, with those who had the disease, out of Egypt, that the distemper (pestis) might not spread among a greater number. Becoming leader, accordingly, of the exiles, he carried off by stealth the sacred utensils of the Egyptians, who, trying to recover them by force of arms, were compelled by tempests to return home (Epit. 36.2).

That this tale, or some variant of it, had had a long history is evident from the fact that Manetho (third century B.C.) is quoted by Josephus (Ag. Ap. 1.26 §229) and by Theophilus of Antioch (ad Autol. 3.21) to the effect that the Jews were forced to leave Egypt due to leprosy. Diodorus Siculus adds that the Jews’ leprosy caused the Egyptians to drive them out as men who were “impious and detested by the gods” (asebeis kai misoumenous hypo tôn theôn).31

Many other hostile comments were made concerning Jewish origins. Celsus, e.g., is reported to have said that the Jews were “fugitives from Egypt, who never performed anything worthy of note, and never were held in any reputation or account” (ap’ Aigyptou drapetas gegonenai, mēden pōpote axiologon praxantas, ou’t en logō ou’t en arithmō autous pote gegeneomenous, Origen c. Cels. 4.31), and also that they were guilty of “rebelling against the state of Egypt” (stasiasantas pros to koīnon tôn Aigyptiōn, ibid., 3.5). Thus the ancestors of the Jews were, in the pagan mind, worthless and diseased rebels who were rejected both by gods and by men.

29Mor. De Is. et Os. 363D. Yet he recognized the Egyptian elements in the Jewish past. Mor. Quaest. conv. 670E. A. M. A. Hospers-Jansen (Tacitus over de Joden[Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1949] 192) speculates that Plutarch may have obtained his information on the Jews from Josephus.

30Cf. Strabo 16.2.35; Diodorus Siculus 1.28.3; Eusebius Praep. Evang. 9.19; and Numenius 3.23.

3134.1. The charge that the Jews were driven out because of leprosy becomes important when we remember that bodily defects, and particularly leprosy, were often seen as signs of divine disapproval. Radin, Jews Among Greeks and Romans, 102–03. Josephus (Ag. Ap. 1.32–34 §288–311; 2.2 §20–27) reports that Chaeremon, Lysimachus and Apion all perpetrated this rumor in one form or another.
Moses, in his position as the great lawgiver of the Jews, is belittled by the anti-Semitic authors, though he is spoken of with respect by a few of the moderates.  

The basic structure of the story, including the central role of Moses, remains the same in both camps, but among the anti-Jewish writers Moses' virtues have turned into vices. No longer does Moses appear as a leader of superior theological wisdom. He is pictured rather as a rebellious and polluted Egyptian priest, expelled together with a mob of impure people, who later instituted a religious and social system motivated by an undying hatred of everything non-Jewish.

Josephus reports that Apollonius Molon, Lysimachus and others charged Moses with teaching vice rather than virtue (Ag. Ap. 2.14 §145), and “lawlessness” is a frequent charge levied against Moses and the Jews.

II. Strangeness

Jews were often seen as a loathsome people, strange and unwilling to adapt their peculiar customs to the norm of contemporary society. Dio speaks of their “most peculiar (idiaitata) observances” (37.17.2–3), and stresses the fact that they are “distinguished from the rest of mankind” (kechôridatai de apo tôn loipôn anthrôpôn, ibid.). Tacitus asserts that the Jews fortified Jerusalem well, expecting wars, “due to differences in customs” (ex diversitate morum, Hist. 5.12). It has even been argued that this sense of strangeness is the most basic reason of all for pagan anti-Semitism. Gentiles continually felt that Jews were odd and that they had no intention of trying to fit gentile customs, and this led inevitably to a strong aversion for Judaism.

This repugnance must have been very widespread, to judge from numerous incidental mentions in contemporary literature. Ammianus Marcellinus (fourth century) speaks of “the malodorous and rebellious Jews” (Iudaeorum faetentium et tumultuantium, 22.5.5); Quintilian classes the Jews as a race which is “destructive (perniciosam) to others” (Inst. 3.7.21); Petronius has Habinnas complain of the two faults of his slave: “He is circumcised and he snores” (recutitus est et stertit); Martial mentions the “See the first chapter in Gager, Moses, in which he summarizes the pro-Moses comments of such authors as Strabo and Hecataeus of Abdera. Ibid., 132.

E.g., Juvenal 14.100; Diodorus Siculus 34.1.2.


Sevenster, Roots, 89. Leipoldt (Antisemitismus, 20) says: “Die religiöse Besonderheit des Juden erregte unangenehmes Aufsehen, und zwar um so mehr, als der Jude auf diese Besonderheiten stolz war.” Though not all modern scholars agree that this sense of strangeness was one of the most important factors in anti-Semitism, it is generally agreed that the Jews of this period were seen as ill-adapted and different. Cf. Raisin, Gentile Reactions, 164; and Radin, Jews Among Greeks and Romans, 209.

M. It is usually assumed that the circumcision here implies Judaism, since in Sat. 102, Petronius mentions circumcision as a distinguishing mark of Jews. Cf. Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1. 443.
“lecheries of circumcised Jews” (*recutitorum . . . inguina Iudaeorum*, 7.30); Augustine quotes Seneca to the effect that the Jews are an “accursed race” (*sceleratissimae gentis*); and Juvenal thinks of them as “gloomy of mien, severe in face and garb” (*triste habitu vultuque et veste severum*, 14.110). The fifth century author, Rutilius Namatianus, continues the same note when he speaks of the Jews as “filthy” (*obscaenae*) and calls them a “root of silliness” (*radix stultitiae*, 1.387–89). An early first century B.C. papyrus speaks of some unnamed persons “loathing the Jews” (*bdelys*[s] ontai Ioudaious*). Since the papyrus is badly mutilated it is impossible to reconstruct the situation, but it seems obvious that the Jews appear repulsive to some group in Hellenistic Egypt, a very typical reaction for several centuries to follow.

One possible reason for this severe disparagement was the prevalence of poverty among Diaspora Jews. The papyri have shown that, at least in Alexandria and the surrounding territory, Jewish people had not yet attained prowess in trade and money-matters, though some of them had, of course, become wealthy and involved in economic and political activities. The situation is similar regarding Jews in Rome. Most were slaves and freedmen, often tradesmen and artisans, though perhaps more often ordinary laborers. That they were not normally criticized for exploitation is further evidence that they did not usually hold positions which opened the door to exploitation. Max Radin concludes that of the Jews in Rome, “the majority must have formed part of the pauperized city mob, turbulent and ignorant, . . .”

Poverty and involvement in low-class occupations provided Roman authors with material for satire. Juvenal twice describes Jews in terms suggestive of riffraff, and Martial mentions “the Jew taught by his mother to beg” (*a matre doctus . . . rogare Iudaeus*, 12.57.13). Such strong terms of contempt are used that it seems certain that Jewish poverty was, if not a direct


39 Tcherikover, Fuks and Stern (eds.), *Corpus*, 1.256.

40 E.g., Tiberius Julius Alexander and Demetrius, both of whom held the office of “Controller of Customs” in Alexandria; see, Jones, “Claudius and the Jewish Question,” 22, and A. Segré, “Antisemitism in Hellenistic Alexandria,” *Jewish Social Studies* 8 (1946) 135. The Jews’ occasional economic successes caused resentment; e.g., the other tax collectors resented those Jews who entered that vocation. See Heinemann, “Antisemitismus,” 39.


cause of anti-Semitism, at least an occasion for the free expression of anti-Semitic feelings.

Roman Jews were largely illiterate, or nearly so, as is evidenced by the poor quality of the inscriptions. Both Apion and Molon make derogatory remarks about Jewish intellectual ability, and charge them with lacking inventors and sages, an assertion which Josephus counters by arguing that the excellence of the Hebrew law makes outstanding men unnecessary (Ag. Ap. 2.12, 14, 20 §135, 148, 182–83). The same kind of complaint occurs in Egypt, and a number of papyri preserve evidence of Jews who could not sign their own names. This does not prove that Jews were less literate than gentiles of like social standing, but it is certain that they were perceived to be low on the intellectual ladder, and that this fueled the fires of anti-Semitism.

Paradoxically, though the Jews revered the Torah and much of their literature is built on the presupposition that law is essential to human society, they were often seen by their neighbors as lawless and rebellious, a fact which contributed to the sense of strangeness. Glimpses of this can be seen frequently in Greek and Roman writings. Appian comments that Jews in Hadrian’s time were forced to pay a higher poll-tax than the surrounding peoples due to their many rebellions. Dio describes the race as “most bitter” (pikroatan, 49.22.3). Cicero calls Israel “a state given to suspicion and calumny” (suspiciosa ac maledica civitate, Flac. 68). Silius Italicus sees Jews as a “fierce people” (feragentis, Pun. 3.605), and Philostratus asserts that they “have long been in revolt not only against the Romans, but against all men” (palai apheustasin ou monon Hrōmaion, alla kai pantōn anthrōpōn, VA 5.33). Juvenal accuses them of a tendency to “flout the laws of Rome” (Romanas autem soliti contemnere leges), while admitting that they are law-abiding in terms of their own law (14.100–02).

A kindred slander is that the Jews were guilty of hatred of all humanity. This is a frequent charge, and one of exceptional importance, but it is treated later, in the section on Jewish exclusiveness.

In view of the above considerations it is not surprising that the Jewish people were classed as barbarians and, along with the Syrians, as “nations born to be slaves” (nationibus natis servituti, Cicero Prov. Cons. 10). The Greek and Roman attitude toward them was more one of contempt than of hatred. There were pogroms and persecutions, and occasionally adverse

44H. J. Leon, “New Material about the Jews of Ancient Rome,” JQR 20 (1930) 311. For photographs of the inscriptions see vol. 1 of Frey, CLI.
45The Boule-papyrus, e.g., seeks to prevent the Alexandrian citizens from being corrupted by men who are “uncultured and uneducated” (athreptoi kai anagōgoi) (Tcherikover, Fuks and Stern [eds.], Corpus, 2.28); and the editors (ibid., 25) believe this papyrus to refer to Jews though they are not mentioned by name.
46Ibid., 1. 190–91. 222.
47Syr. 50. From the Roman viewpoint this was a reasonable view of the Jewish people, considering their struggles against Pompey, Herod, Vespasian, and Hadrian, plus the rebellions in the Diaspora and the many struggles among themselves.
legislation, but these were not the usual forms of anti-Semitism. More often it was a simple but very deeply felt disdain. In spite of centuries of Hellenization, Jews remained different from others and this made it certain that they would be scorned by many.

III. Religion and Ritual

The strangeness described above was particularly evident in the specifics of Jewish religion and worship, providing material for satire and adding to the overall picture of anti-Semitism. Again, instances of oppression, either legislative or unofficial, are rare. Religious anti-Semitism is more often seen in an attitude of condescension than in overt repressive action.

The most obvious difference between Jewish and contemporary pagan religions is the belief in one God. The corollary view that this God is the God of the Jews, and the subsequent contempt for pagan gods, has far-reaching implications for the study of anti-Semitism, and is treated later; but the mere fact of monotheism is important and virtually unique in the ancient world. Tacitus (Hist. 5.5) and Dio (37.17.2) both mention the Jews’ view of God, and both consider it important, though Dio stops short of saying that they believed in only one God.

That most Jews were thorough-going monotheists, though, is evident from their own literature. This concept was obviously repellent to many contemporaries, but must have attracted many others, and may well have been the main thing which made it possible for the Jews to proselytize successfully, in spite of the contempt in which they were usually held.

It was a continual source of amazement to Greeks and Romans that Jews could worship their God without the aid of images, and that they, in fact, would fight to prevent the bringing of images into Jerusalem. Not only were images of the deity taboo, but many Jews of this period interpreted the second commandment so literally that they would not permit likenesses of animal or human life, including that of the emperor.

After noting that the Jews have no statue of their God, even in Jerusalem itself, Dio adds: “But believing him to be unnamable and formless, they worship him in the most extravagant fashion on earth” (αρρητὸν de dê kai

48E.g., Bel 1:5; Sib. Or., frgs. 1:1–35; 3:3–48; Sib. Or. 3:11–16.
50Leipoldt, Antisemitismus, 26.
51Josephus J.W. 2.9.2–3 §169–74; Ant. 18.3.1 §55–59. Josephus’ accounts are admittedly highly colored; e.g., his statement that the Jews surrounded Pilate’s house and remained motionless for five days and nights (J.W. 2.9.2 §171); but there is no question that the Jews of his time often reacted strongly against any intrusion of images; see esp. Philo Leg. 299–305. It is apparent, however, that not all Jews were equally opposed to images, because even in synagogues this taboo is sometimes violated. Cf. Smith, “Palestinian Judaism,” 68–69. The rigidly orthodox, though, both in the homeland and in the Diaspora, maintained this prohibition.
52Josephus Ag. Ap. 2.6 §73. Cf. also the image riots under Pontius Pilate, mentioned above (Josephus J.W. 2.9.2–3 §169–74).
Lucan notes that Jews are "given to the worship of an unknown god" (*dedita sacris incerti . . . dei*, 2.592-93), and Juvenal thinks that they "worship nothing but the clouds, and the divinity of the heavens" (*nil præter nubes et caeli numen adorant*). The strangeness of this type of worship is the thing which impressed pagan authors, though we have occasional hints that some Romans approved of it.

Particular customs of Hebrew religion elicited pagan disapproval and called forth both satire and direct calumny—especially the Sabbath, circumcision and the abstention from pork. The comments of pagan authors show that they had only a superficial understanding of these matters. The younger Seneca supposes that Jewish worship consists primarily in lighting lamps on the Sabbath; Martial (4.4) and Petronius (*Poems* 24) incorrectly assume that the Jews fast on the Sabbath; and Plutarch equates Sabbath-keeping with the worship of Sabazios-Dionysus, arguing that the Jewish use of wine on the Sabbath further confirms the connection.

Meleager can speak of "cold" (*psychrois*) Sabbaths (*Greek Anthology* 5.160), an epithet which Radin takes as a synonym for "dull." That the holy day must be observed by the cessation of usual activities must have seemed absurd, and the idea that a people would stand by and allow themselves to be defeated militarily simply to avoid profaning a rest day was a startling indication of fanaticism. The mere fact that one idle day per week is a great waste of time annoyed at least one Roman author.

Circumcision was an obscenity to the Graeco-Roman writers. Petronius clearly sees it in this way (*Poems* 24) and Martial uses "circumcised" (*verpe*) as a term of disdain four times in one epigram (94, cf. 82). There is considerable controversy as to the legal status of the rite in the Empire, and particularly regarding the ban by Hadrian and the revocation of the ban by Antoninus Pius. But whether or not Hadrian directly attacked Judaism, the normal
attitude toward circumcision was not suppression. The Romans usually felt it to be an embarrassment, unworthy of civilized people, but they were usually willing to allow the Jews to practice the rite. The Jews were not, of course, the only ancient people to practice circumcision.61

Abstention from pork was in itself of no importance in the view of the gentile authors,62 but it, like circumcision and the Sabbath, provided a vehicle for satire. Philo reports that the Emperor Gaius asked the Jewish embassy why they refused to eat pork, provoking outbursts of laughter among his attendants.63 Josephus lists this as one of the denunciations pronounced by Apion (Ag. Ap. 2.13 §137). Plutarch tells us that Cicero referred in jest to the Jewish attitude toward pork (Vit. Cic. 7.5). Juvenal mocks a “long-standing clemency [which] allows pigs to attain old age” (vetus indulget senibus clementia porcis, 6.160); and comments further that Jews “see no difference [between eating] swine’s flesh, from which their father abstained, and that of man” (distare putant humana carne suillam, qua pater abstinuit, 14.98–99). Macrobius reports the bitter jest of Augustus that “it is better to be Herod’s hog than his son” (melius est Herodis porcum esse quam filium, Sat. 2.4.11), apparently reflecting a Greek pun on the words for hog (hys) and for son (huios). Finally, both Plutarch (Mor. Quaest. conv. 669F) and Tacitus (Hist. 5.4) repeat fanciful origins of the custom, again betraying a lack of understanding of Jewish religion.64

In addition to being derided for such realities as circumcision and abstinance from pork the Jews were accused of several absurdities, e.g., human sacrifice and the worship of an ass in the temple. The former charge was made by Apion (Josephus Ag. Ap. 2.8 §93–96) and by Damocritus (Suda Damokritos). The latter is mentioned frequently (e.g., Tacitus Hist. 5.4; Plutarch Mor. Quaest. conv. 670E; Diodorus Siculus 34.1; Josephus Ag. Ap. 2.9 §112–20; Suda Damokritos), and is an attempt to make Jewish worship appear ridiculous.


62Seneca (Ep. 108.22) does, however, indicate that during the early years of Tiberius’ reign it may have been unwise to abstain from meat, for fear of being thought interested in “foreign rites” (alienigena . . . sacra). He mentions neither Jews nor pork in this connection, but it is usually assumed that the reference is to the events of A.D. 19, when Tiberius persecuted Jewish rites. Cf. Josephus Ant. 18.3.4 §65; 18.3.5 §81–84; Tacitus Ann. 2.85; Dio Cassius 57.18; Suetonius Tib. 36. For modern discussions, in addition to standard Jewish and Roman histories, see; E. M. Smallwood, “Some Notes on the Jews Under Tiberius,” Latomus 15 (1956) 314–19; E. T. Merrill, “The Expulsion of Jews from Rome Under Tiberius,” Classical Philology 14 (1919) 365–72; H. R. Moehring, “Novelistic Elements in the Writings of Flavius Josephus,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1957; and Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1. 434.


64For a good discussion of the historical reasons for the custom as opposed to the comments of Tacitus and Plutarch, see, Hovers-Jansen, Tacitus, 197–98. The swine was often honored in the Greek world (e.g., at Eleusis), thus the Greeks were understandably confused by the Hebrew attitude that the animal was unclean. See Leipoldt, Antisemitismus, 27.
Implicit in much of the above is the feeling that Judaism was a barbaric superstition, but this was voiced explicitly in many instances, so many in fact that it can be said that "the Jews were singled out by the educated to be pilloried as the very embodiment of superstition." To the modern mind this seems strange. Roman religion with its flamens, not to mention its haruspices, certainly appears more superstitious than the most mystical forms of Judaism; yet to the Romans (as well as to other contemporaries) the imageless worship of the Jews, along with circumcision, the refusal of pork, and such rituals as characterized the Sabbath, seemed "as strange and enigmatic as if they had originated on some unknown and mysterious planet." Add to these considerations the fact that some Jews, in Rome and elsewhere, dabbled in magic of various forms, and the cry of "barbaric superstition" becomes understandable.

"Barbaric superstition" (barbarae superstitione) is precisely the terminology used by Cicero as he seeks to defend Flaccus by disparaging the Jews (Flac. 67). Tacitus (Ann. 2.85; Hist. 2.4; 5.8, 13), Dio (37.16.3), Fronto (Ep. Ad. M. Caes. 2.7), Quintilian (Inst. 3.7.21), Apuleius (Flor. 6), and even Strabo (16.2.37) agree with this assessment. Horace mentions a claim which is incredible to him, then adds: "Apella, the Jew, may believe it, not I" (credat Iudaeus Apella, non ego, Sat. 1.5.100), referring evidently to the Jewish reputation for gullibility and superstition. Plutarch attributes the Jews' unwillingness to fight on the Sabbath to superstition (deisidaimonia, Mor. De superst. 169C). Juvenal remarks that "a Jew will sell you dreams of any kind you please for the minutest of coins" (aere minuto qualiacumque voles Iudaei somnia vendunt, 6.547). Lucian complains that "other fools fall for the spells of the Jews" (Ioudaios heteron mòron exqdei labôn, Trag. 173). Pliny (HN 30.11), Justin (Epit. 36.1) and Celsus (Origen c. Cels. 4.33; cf. Florus Epitome 1.40.30) assert that the ancestors of the Jewish race were practitioners of magic. It should be remembered too that Josephus cites an "ambiguous oracle" (chrēsmos amphibolos) which he claims induced the Jews to rebel since it indicated that one from their country would become ruler of the world (J.W. 6.5.4 §312–13). He applied the oracle to Vespasian, and on this basis made his famous prediction that Vespasian would become emperor. Thus even Josephus, who wants to provide as rational a basis as possible for Jewish actions, admits to a certain amount of superstition.

Jewish estrangement from the Graeco-Roman world was, then, furthered by their monotheism, by details of their ritual, and by elements which the pagans viewed as superstition. When confronted with Judaism, either in Palestine or in the Diaspora, contemporary peoples were so blinded by the "oddities" of that faith that they were unable to appreciate the wisdom or the beauty of it.

65 Goldstein, "Cultivated Pagans," 362.
66 Ibid.
67 E. R. Bevan, "The Jews," CAH 9 (1932) 422. Rabbinical writings forbade magic, witchcraft and sorcery (e.g., b. Sanh. 67a–b) but this did not, of course, curtail all such practice.
IV. Exclusiveness

As we have seen, Jewish religion was one reason for anti-Semitism, but perhaps a more basic cause was their exclusiveness, encouraged by their law and grounded in their monotheism. To the degree that Jews in a polytheistic culture tried to maintain a strong monotheism and a unique law based on monotheism, it was inevitable that they should have trouble dealing with their neighbors. Werner Förster observes:

As the whole of civil life was closely bound up at that time with (Gentile) religion, this attitude meant that a Jew in the Diaspora could hardly or only to a limited extent participate in the civil life of his city. But it meant even more that all commercial traffic between Jews and Gentiles was grievously hindered.68

This situation no doubt varied from one city to another; e.g., one would not necessarily expect it to be the same in a Roman colony as in a Greek city;69 yet the limitations were very real. The importance of this fact could hardly be overstated. Jewish faith bred an anti-social clannishness which in turn cast suspicion on them as citizens. They were perceived as snobbish, and in a particularly dangerous way. Since they could not and would not participate fully in Graeco-Roman political and economic life, and since they tended to maintain a strong unity among themselves, they were a force to be taken into account by all concerned.70 Many characteristics mentioned above caused Jews to be disliked; their monotheistic exclusiveness added the dimension of fear, which helped crystallize dislike into hatred. Exclusiveness added an element of mystery which aroused interest, but at the same time strengthened

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69 It is evident in the NT (Acts 14:1–2; 17:4, 12; 18:4) that at least in some cities there was easy contact between Greeks and Jews, and apparently even Greeks in attendance at the synagogues; though in many cases the Hellenes may be sebomenoi ton theon (“worshippers of God” or “God-fearers”), i.e., gentiles who have accepted some aspects of Judaism. Josephus (J. W. 7.3.3 §45), however, clearly indicates that gentiles in large numbers attended Jewish religious ceremonies. Cf. H. Windisch, “Hellen,” TDNT 2 (1964) 509–16.

70 Despite much diversity there remained a strong religious unity running through the bulk of Judaism, even after the Diaspora and Palestine severed political relations. Fuchs, Die Juden Aegyptiens, 24; S. K. Eddy, The King Is Dead (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1961) 237. This unity was perhaps one reason that Rome did not underestimate the Jews’ power. The Judaea capta coins show that Rome considered the wars of 66–73 and 135 to be major events. Cf. J. G. Gager, “The Dialogue of Paganism with Judaism: Bar Cochba to Julian,” HUCA 44 (1973) 91.
opposition. The results of this fear and hatred are easily seen in Alexandria and elsewhere.71

That many Jews saw themselves as the people specially chosen by God, and therefore a better and purer race, hardly needs to be demonstrated. In Jewish thought of the Hellenistic-Roman period the gentile nations would be at some unspecified time in the future reduced to serving the Jewish God (Pss. Sol. 17.32), and would receive punishment from the same quarter (Pss. Sol. 7.27). Jews were often, in their literature, forbidden to marry gentiles (Jub. 30:7-17; Tob 4:12), though such injunctions did not, of course, prevent all intermarriage.72 Some Jewish literature made it possible for gentiles to be saved, but salvation could come only through Israel (T. Benj. 9:2-5), and very often through a messianic figure who is himself a Jew (e.g., 1 Enoch 48:2-10; T. Levi 14:4). The Messiah concept is of extreme importance in understanding Judaism and the pagan reaction to it, since it occurs so frequently in Jewish literature.73 The Messiah will in many cases punish the gentiles (e.g., 2 Apoc. Bar. 70:8-9; 4 Ezra 12:32), and very often when the Messiah appears in Jewish writings he is mentioned in connection with Jewish-gentile relations.74

Jewish authors, both of Palestine and of the Diaspora, often voice severe contempt for gentiles, even to the point of claiming that the world was created on behalf of the Jews (As. Mos. 1:12; 4 Ezra 6:55), and that the pagan nations are “like spittle” (4 Ezra 6:56-57). Jews did not claim moral perfection for themselves, but they considered gentiles as sinners in a special sense (cf. Gal 2:15). This dichotomy in Jewish thought between the “chosen race” and the “gentile sinners” was bitterly resented by gentiles; Origen, e.g., indicates that this was one of Celsus’ primary complaints, and reiterates it several times (c. Cels. 5.41-42, 50).

The list of anti-gentile passages in Jewish literature could be made much longer, though it should be noted that not all Jewish writers felt equally superior to their gentile neighbors. The Letter of Aristeas is a notable exception to the general trend of bitterness, going to the point of saying that Jews and gentiles worship the same God, though by different names.75 By no means did all Jews share the attitude of superiority, but a sufficiently large number did so that it occasions no surprise for gentiles to respond in kind.76

71 As, e.g., the Alexandrian riots in a.d. 38 (Philo In Flacc. 6-8 §41-57; Leg. 132-38). Cf. Bell, “Anti-Semitism in Alexandria,” 6-8. Also the persecutions in Rome under Tiberius (above, n. 62), and Claudius (Acts 18:2; Dio Cassius 60.6.6; Suetonius Claud. 25.4).
73 Heinemann, “Antisemitismus,” 14; Schürer, Jewish People, 2. 2. 126-37.
75 Ep. Arist. 15-16. This letter is generally accepted as a Jewish writing though the author claims to be Greek (3-16).
76 For further information on Jewish expressions of superiority, both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, see; W. O. E. Oesterley, The Jews and Judaism During the Greek Period (London: Kennikat, 1941) 115-18; W. S. McCullough, The History and Literature of the Palestinian Jews from Cyrus to Herod (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1975) 180; H. A. Wolfson, Philo (2 vols.; rev. ed.; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1947) 2. 406; N. Bentwich, “The Graeco-Roman View
No attempt can be made here to assess the degree to which the Jewish attitude merely reflected similar gentile expressions. Regardless of one's conclusions as to the ultimate fault, it is evident that Jewish exclusiveness became a major factor in the poor relations between the races.

The important thing is that this attitude was an integral part of the Hebrew religion, not mere social snobbery. The Jews' feeling that they and they alone possessed truth, that they alone worshipped the true God and were particularly beloved by him, is the root of their exclusiveness. There were doubtless other contributing factors, but one of the most telling is to be found in the very essence of their faith.

Jewish monotheism led inevitably to a conflict regarding emperor worship, following the development of the imperial cult. Josephus was forced to answer the charge that Jews refused to erect statues to the emperor, which he does by pointing out that they offer daily sacrifices to him (Ag. Ap. 2.6 §73-77). It was the cessation of these sacrifices which became the immediate cause of the war with Rome in A.D. 66 (Josephus J.W. 2.17.2 §409). No doubt the Jews made a careful distinction between offering sacrifices to God on behalf of the emperor and offering sacrifices to the emperor as God, but Augustus and Tiberius, at least, allowed their practice as satisfactory. Caligula, though, utilized force to ensure that he was worshipped. He eliminated the ambiguity when he demanded that his statue be erected in the temple and sacrifices offered to it, and this the Palestinian Jews could not do. They had shown a willingness to compromise, complying with the unobjectionable parts of the law, even to the point of dedicating synagogues to the emperor; when, however, the issue was clarified and Jews were required to offer direct worship of Jesus and Judaism in the Second Century," JQR 23 (1933) 341-42; Bickerman, "Historical Foundations," 90; and Stählin, "Xenos," 12-14. Some scholars (e.g., S. W. Baron, "Second and Third Commonwealth: Parallels and Differences," Israel: Its Role in Civilization [ed. Moshe Davis; New York: Seminary Institute of the Jewish Theological Society of America, 1956] 63-64) have minimized Jewish dislike of gentiles, and it is true that both Rabbinic and Hellenistic Jews held certain gentiles in high esteem (cf. S. Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942] 75), nevertheless, the Jewish attitude was primarily a patronizing one.

77Reinach, Textes, xi; Gutbrod, "Ioudaioi," 370, n. 84.
80Cf. La Piana, "Foreign Groups," 376-79. Juster (Les Juifs, 1. 342-44) gives an interesting list of titles which the Jews were willing to apply to the emperor and those which they would not use; e.g., they normally would not use despojês, but did not hesitate to use krios. Though perhaps somewhat arbitrary, such usage shows that they were willing to compromise by applying to the emperor some terms usually applied to God.
they united in opposition, nearly precipitating the war three decades before it actually occurred.

It can be argued that opposition to emperor worship really amounted to treason, since it was a crime not only against the emperor as a man, but as a god. As such it was clearly an insoluble problem between Jew and Roman. Yet in view of the fact that Caligula and Nero were recognized aberrations, and that most of the early emperors seemingly cared little for deification,* it would be easy to exaggerate the part this matter actually played in the problem.82

There was, from the Roman viewpoint, some justification for the charge of “despising the gods” (contemnere deos),83 regardless of one’s view of Judaism in relation to the imperial cult. Jews could not enter into real worship of pagan gods, and their monotheism prevented a full entry into the social life which surrounded them, forcing them to maintain an exclusive identity which could not help annoying their neighbors. This easily led to the charge of atheism.84 Judaism stood out as an intolerant religion in a society which was generally tolerant toward divergent beliefs.

Intolerance and exclusiveness led to a charge that Jews hated all the rest of mankind. Philostratus (VA 5.33), Tacitus (Hist. 5.5), Diodorus Siculus (34.1; 40.3–4) and Juvenal (14.102–04) all concur in this accusation. Anti-Semitic writers tended to interpret even those laws which were not peculiar to Judaism in the light of a supposed enmity of the Jews toward other men; e.g., Tacitus (Hist. 5.5) felt that the purpose of circumcision was to distinguish Jews from other people, whereas this is not at all the usual Jewish interpretation of the rite.85 Pagans were so certain that Jews hated mankind that they were quick to see such evidence in virtually all Jewish attempts to maintain their purity; e.g., their attitude toward foreign women, their unwillingness to visit pagan temples, and their strict dietary laws.86

81See esp. Suetonius’ remarks about Tiberius’ attitude; Tib. 26.
83Tacitus Hist. 5.5. The elder Pliny (HN 13.9.46) calls the Jews “a race remarkable for their contempt for the divine powers” (gens contumelia numinum insignis). Tacitus (Hist. 5.4) overstates the case: “They regard as profane all that we hold sacred; on the other hand they permit all that we dishonor” (Profana illic omnia quae apud nos sacra, rursum concessa apudillos quae nobis incesta).
84Reinach, Textes, x. Domitian’s execution of Flavius Clemens and Flavia Domatilla was on a charge of atheism. It is controversial, however, as to whether they were converted to Judaism or to Christianity. See Smallwood, “Domitian’s Attitude,” 7–8.
85Despite Josephus (Ant. 1.10.5 §192), Jewish authors normally ignore this motivation for circumcision. See Heinemann, “Attitude,” 397.
The Rabbis were well aware of the pagan attitude toward Jewish exclusiveness (e.g., Lev. Rab. 13:5). They tried at times to counter such charges by insisting that Jews aid gentiles in various ways, including caring for their sick and burying their dead (b. Git. 61a, 62a); by forbidding Jews to deceive gentiles (b. Hul. 94a), or to mistreat them in any other way (e.g., b. B. Qam. 113b); by urging respect for gentile wisdom (b. Meg. 16a; b. Ber. 58a); by expressly sanctioning partnerships between Jews and gentiles (b. Hul. 133a–b; 135a–b; b. Bec. 2a–b); and sometimes by direct argument (e.g., Esth. Rab. Proem 3; Qoh. Rab. 2:17). It is clear from rabbinical writings that Judaism was not wholly guilty of the extreme exclusiveness charged by pagans; yet the fact that Jews were frequently warned not to mistreat gentiles or to hold themselves completely aloof from them indicates that there was a strong tendency in that direction.

At least in some sectors of the Diaspora many Jews lived, by choice, separate from the rest of the people. Philo (In Flacc. 8 §55) indicates that most Alexandrian Jews lived in two quarters of the city though they were allowed to live elsewhere, and some chose to do so. Living, in the main, segregated into ethnic communities contributed to the general sense of aloofness and made it even more difficult for them to interact with others.

It was inevitable that the Jews should be pictured by their neighbors as fanatics, since they were unwilling to acquiesce to Graeco-Roman views on the religious front. Both in the homeland and in the Diaspora they saw themselves as having compromised sufficiently with pagan culture, but the gentiles were blinded to the compromises by the many important areas in which Jews insisted on maintaining their uniqueness. Above all, they were blinded by Jewish exclusiveness with all its implications.

V. Proselytizing

Paradoxical as it is, it is often true that a widely unpopular religion is quite successful at proselytizing. Such was certainly the case with Judaism of the Hellenistic-Roman period and it was one source of anti-Semitism. Horace

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87Several papyri show that a definite Jewish section existed in Alexandria; Tcherikover, Fuks and Stern (eds.), Corpus, 2. 210; 3. 10–12, 29–30. The question of the legal basis for Jewish communities has received a great deal of attention. Each community, at least in Egypt, was organized along the lines of a Hellenistic politeuma, defined (W. Ruppel, “Politeuma,” Philologus 82 [1927] 309) as „eine mit bestimmten politischen Vorrechten ausgestattete Gemeinde auf ethnischer Grundlage.” Cf. Segré, “Status of the Jews in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt,” 388–91.

lampoons them for their forceful, and apparently successful, efforts to make converts (Sat. 1.4.143), and Dio gives this as Tiberius' motive for expelling the Jews from Rome. Tacitus complains about Jewish proselytizing and feels that those who accept the Jewish faith "despise the fatherland" (exuere patriam, Hist. 5.5). Plutarch expresses equally negative feelings toward proselytes (Vit. Cic. 7.5), and Rutilius Namatianus, the most savage of the anti-Semitic writers, witnesses to the effectiveness of Jewish proselytizing (1.397–98).

Jews were apparently more successful at making converts during the Hellenistic-Roman period than at any other point in history, though not all proselytes accepted every facet of the religion. The complex question of the different classes of proselytes is irrelevant here. Proselytizing was one of the factors contributing to anti-Semitism, and this regardless of the degree to which most converts accepted the strictures of the Jewish faith.

It is doubtful that Jews ever sent out missionaries in the Christian sense of the term, though there is NT evidence as to their proselytizing zeal. It has been argued that far more gentiles were influenced by Jewish superstition than by the true religious elements. One way or another, though, numerous persons were affected by Judaism, and it made inroads into all classes of society, including the very highest.

It is not surprising, then, that Greeks and Romans took notice of Jews and that they resented Jewish success in attracting converts. For a race and religion, already despised for its exclusiveness and real or alleged hatred of humanity, to attract a significant number of converts and sympathizers was a sure formula for resentment, and especially so since the Graeco-Roman world looked down on Jews as superstitious, credulous, odd, and lowly both in class and in origin. For a group of this type to propagandize successfully offered a real threat to religion, country and family.

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89 Dio Cassius 57.18.5. Smallwood ("Some Notes," 322) accepts this view and reasons that the Romans were unconcerned so long as only humiliores were being converted, but that when the wealthy began to accept Judaism, they saw it as a danger. This, coupled with the famous fraud (Josephus Ant. 18.3.5 §81–84), led to Tiberius' banishment of the Jews.

90 Heinemann, "Attitude," 385. For Jewish claims regarding proselytizing success, see, e.g., Josephus J.W. 2.20.2 §560; 7.3.3 §45. Cf. Dio Cassius 37.17.2.


96 Baron, Social and Religious History, 1. 191.
Roman law did not at most periods expressly forbid proselytizing, though the practice was often attended by a certain degree of danger, and the Hadrianic ban on circumcision was obviously an attempt at curtailing it. The proselyte was often in danger of the charge of atheism, yet it would seem that the Romans were willing to compromise, allowing all the freedom possible, while trying to limit the practice due to political considerations.97

Modern studies sometimes provide hypotheses to explain the success of Jewish propaganda in the face of general disparagement. Some theories are that Judaism addressed the sense of sin, offering a real release;98 that its claim of a divinely revealed religion "provided the only safe anchorage" for a world which had largely lost its ethical values;99 and that it offered a hope of future glory.100 Intermarriage, as always, played a part in proselytizing, and it should be noted that the Jews had a definite set of scriptures, a resource lacking in contemporary religions.

VI. Conclusion

A caution must be observed in evaluating some of the evidence of anti-Semitism given above. Some of it may be mere rhetoric, and thus less trustworthy as evidence. Commenting on Cicero's protest against the Jews in the Pro Flacco, Radin says:

These phrases show no special animus. Just as Greeks are liars if they are on the other side, and men of honor on his own, as exhibited almost in successive paragraphs of this speech, . . . so we may be sure if Cicero were prosecuting Flaccus, a few eloquent periods would extol the character of those ancient allies and firm friends of Rome, the Jews.101 This is a valid caution and it may well apply to authors other than Cicero, but in view of other considerations—the extreme bitterness of many references to Jews, the rarity of positive comments, and the fact that entire books were written "against the Jews"102—it seems fair to conclude that anti-Semitism was the norm. The frequency (and intensity) of the disparaging remarks justifies the conclusion that anti-Semitism was more deeply ingrained and more widespread than many modern scholars allow. Anti-Semitic remarks

97The Scriptores Historiae Augustae (Antoninus Caracalla 1.6; Sev. 17.2) and Dio Cassius (67.14.1–2) provide evidence regarding the danger incurred by a proselyte in the later Empire.
100Heinemann, "Attitude," 388.
102E.g., Apollonius Molon, according to Eusebius (Praep. Evang. 9.19); Damocritus, according to Suda (Damokritos); and possibly Apion, according to Clement of Alexandria (Strom. 138.94–96). Clement's claim that Apion composed a work against the Jews is challenged by some, based on the fact that Josephus mentions, instead of that work, a history of Egypt (Ag. Ap. 2.2 §9–10). See, Stern, Greek and Latin Authors, 1. 389.
range all the way from incidental mentions in the papyri to carefully composed statements in serious histories. It was not necessarily a virulent anti-Semitism; certainly not (except on occasion) persecution, but rather an enduring contempt, coupled with distrust.

It was bolstered by a feeling that Jews were strange and inferior. It was a protest against religious customs which seemed primitive and superstitious. It was a reaction against the apparent snobbery of a race which insisted on maintaining its exclusiveness, especially in regard to the one God. It was also a reaction against Jewish success in converting others to their strange religion.

If it is true that anti-Semitism was more severe than usually realized, this is important for students of any phase of Hellenistic-Roman history. In particular, it provides a clearer background for the many NT comments about Jew-gentile relations (e.g., Acts 10:1-48; 11:1-26) and perhaps enables us to see more clearly why Paul interpreted the great mystery of Christ in terms of the bringing together of Jews and gentiles (Eph 3:4-6; cf. 2:11-22). Anti-Semitism was a strong sentiment when Christianity began as a movement within Judaism, and as such has important implications for the study of the early church.