

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that in the Hellenistic and Roman eras there were Jewish communities throughout the then civilised world. This study is devoted to the investigation of one part of the Jewish Diaspora, Asia Minor. In this area Jewish communities were established at a quite early date and seem to have flourished. The decrees given in *Jewish Antiquities* 14 and 16, which are largely from Asia Minor, were understood by Josephus as setting important precedents showing that the situation of the Jewish communities in Asia Minor was significant for Diaspora Judaism in general. From some time in the third century CE until the seventh century the community at Sardis owned the largest and most impressive synagogue yet discovered. Many other factors suggest that these communities have a significant place in the history of the Jewish Diaspora. Further, an understanding of the Jewish communities in Asia Minor is important for the study of early Christianity. Paul travelled extensively in Asia Minor, lived for a lengthy period in Ephesus, founded significant churches in the area, and engaged in debate with both Jew and Gentile there. It is therefore arguable that, in addition to the Jewish communities in Palestine, those in Asia Minor are an important context within which to view Paul's mission and theology.¹ Other documents in the New Testament can also be located in Asia Minor, and it is to be hoped that a greater understanding of Jewish communities in this area will further elucidate these works. Early Christian communities flourished in Asia Minor throughout the first three centuries CE and beyond, and our understanding of their development and the literature they produced will be enriched by a greater understanding of Jewish communities in Asia Minor.²

Even though the focus of scholarly attention has generally been elsewhere in the Diaspora, most notably in Rome and Egypt, there have been significant studies of Jewish communities in Asia Minor. On a number of occasions Ramsay drew together the evidence

available to him on this topic.³ Although other useful studies followed,⁴ it was not until 1968 that the first lengthy treatment of this area was written by Kraabel. All subsequent research has been indebted to him, although unfortunately his work has remained unpublished.⁵ Further studies, either of the whole area or of particular communities, have followed.⁶ However, despite the fact that a significant amount of attention has been devoted to this area, we still lack a detailed analysis of the evidence and its synthesis, as far as this is possible, into a description of Jewish life in Asia Minor. It is this task which is carried forward here.

The material available to us in this investigation is diverse. Whilst, unfortunately, we do not have a substantial literary corpus from Jews in Asia Minor, some literary sources are of help.⁷ Further, a number of Jewish inscriptions from a variety of places have been found, and archaeological evidence is provided by the synagogues discovered at Sardis and Priene. Reliance on inscriptional and archaeological evidence has both advantages and disadvantages and these need to be noted here. Inscriptions provide us with direct access to people in their contexts, to the language they used and to what they did, thought and valued, which is often information we cannot gain from any other source. In addition, inscriptions continue to be discovered and so provide completely new areas of knowledge and fresh insight into old problems.

However, there are a number of difficulties which arise from the nature of inscriptional evidence.⁸ Firstly, this evidence is only partial. Inscriptions tend to be formal, public documents of a limited nature, and only events or honours which were considered sufficiently important were commemorated on stone, which was not inexpensive. Thus, a limited range of human activity and experience formed the subject matter of inscriptions. Further, only some inscriptions happen to have survived, and only some of what has survived has been found and published. Many of these inscriptions are fragmentary or damaged and the problems of establishing the text can be substantial. The evidence available to us, then, is a minute sub-category of the potential evidence for ancient life. In the case of Jewish inscriptions from Asia Minor these factors limit the range of our knowledge substantially. Whole areas of life do not appear at all in the inscriptions or do so only tangentially. For example, no inscription gives a summary of a synagogue sermon and we have no record of detailed Biblical exegesis on stone nor any statement of how Jewish communities educated their children. The partial nature of what was

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inscribed and the accidents of survival and discovery mean that the results of epigraphic studies will always be partial.⁹

Secondly, inscriptions are often short and provide little by way of a context for interpretation. Often other evidence provided by archaeology, numismatics or literary sources must be used to provide an intelligible framework. Yet, this framework may be misleading or less suitable than another possibility. This is particularly difficult in the present case since we do not have a substantial body of documents from Jewish communities in Asia Minor. This problem means that inscriptions need to be studied in groups, generally by locality or theme, in order to gain a sufficient concentration of evidence, and this is the approach followed here. Thirdly, there is the problem of dating. Some inscriptions contain a date, given according to a known system; others can be dated approximately through letter-forms, nomenclature or from their archaeological context. However, dates are often uncertain and this makes discussions of chronology difficult. Fourthly, the Jewish inscriptions available to us are very 'local' in nature and often make no reference to the wider events of a period. This makes it difficult to determine how broader historical events and changing circumstances affected the Jewish communities. Finally, the collection of Jewish inscriptions, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum*, edited by Frey, is both inaccurate and incomplete and must be emended and supplemented by other studies.¹⁰

There are obvious advantages in the use of archaeological evidence: the directness and immediacy of access to ancient life and culture, the independence of archaeological method and the fact that new evidence is constantly being discovered. However, there are also difficulties. Foremost is the problem of interpretation. Is the proposed interpretation of these 'mute stones' the only possible historical reconstruction, or has the evidence been misunderstood by, for example, forcing a connection with known historical events, imposing the wrong framework or asking the wrong questions? Other difficulties include the problem of dating and establishing a chronology, the relative weighting of conflicting evidence and the problem of incomplete excavation or of excavation done before the development of more sophisticated archaeological methods.¹¹ These factors have had to be borne in mind during this study.

In this work, an examination of the evidence for Jewish communities in Asia Minor provided by literary sources is followed by three studies of Jewish communities for which the concentration of evidence enables a picture of Jewish life in context to emerge. Four

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thematic studies of issues which were significant in a number of different communities follow.¹² The temporal parameters of this investigation correspond with those of the evidence. Thus, most attention is devoted to the period from the late third century BCE to the third and fourth centuries CE.

I have sought to describe and to understand the available evidence in its own terms and for its own sake and to let the issues addressed arise from the material itself. Thus, I have sought to avoid approaching the evidence with an agenda from research in the NT or in Rabbinic literature in mind, but have endeavoured to assess and investigate the patterns and issues which are germane and central to the evidence itself.¹³ Accordingly, a number of questions raised by the evidence have been kept in view throughout. For example, what was the nature of Jewish community life in Asia Minor? What can we know of the 'Jewish identity' of these Jewish communities? What sort of relationship existed between the cities and the Jewish communities? How did they respond to the influence of the predominant culture? It is to be hoped that this will lead to the description of Jewish communities in Asia Minor on their own terms as far as this is possible within the confines of the evidence.

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**JEWISH COMMUNITIES OF ASIA MINOR
IN LITERARY SOURCES**

Josephus, Philo, Cicero, the New Testament and Patristic sources provide us with information concerning the foundation and developing life of Jewish communities in Asia Minor. They will be dealt with here.

1 Antiochus III and the transportation of Jews to Phrygia and Lydia

Josephus quotes three documents ascribed to Antiochus III, the third of which is a letter to Zeuxis, the governor of Lydia (Ant 12:148–53), written by Antiochus III whilst he was in the East between 212 and 205/4 BCE. He wrote to his strategos Zeuxis with instructions concerning the settlement of 2,000 Jewish families in Lydia and Phrygia in an attempt to maintain internal security in the region, which was beset by unrest.¹ The Seleucids, like other Hellenistic dynasties, founded a large number of colonies or cities throughout their Empire. These foundations began as civilian colonies, garrisons of active soldiers or settlements of retired or reserve soldiers. The particular interests which led to the founding of colonies included the need to protect lines of communication, trade routes or frontier zones and the desire to halt rebellion.² The transportation of the Jews to Lydia and Phrygia fits into this general pattern.

The authenticity of the letter has been both impugned and defended.³ We can note the following points in the debate which favour authenticity. Firstly, the letter is in keeping with the conventional Hellenistic form employed by a king writing to an individual and conforms stylistically to Seleucid documents of the period. Secondly, there is nothing unusual in the arrangements which suggests a forgery; the normal procedure followed by the Seleucids when founding a colony is adhered to. Thirdly, none of the objections which have been raised against authenticity stand up to examination.⁴

Since many scholars now think that the letter is authentic, we can proceed to use it as evidence for the settlement of Jews in Asia Minor.⁵

The following details emerge from the letter. Firstly, 2,000 Jewish families were sent to Lydia and Phrygia, which means that the total number of people probably exceeded 10,000. They were distributed among an unspecified number of sites, so we cannot estimate the size of any one settlement.⁶ Secondly, the choice of Jews from Mesopotamia and Babylonia was probably prompted by a number of considerations. The Jews of this region were known (at least later) for their effectiveness as soldiers. Moreover, Antiochus was in the East at the time and he knew that the Jews were loyal to his interests. Thus the Jews were to maintain a pro-Seleucid presence at or near various strategically located τόποι and φρούρια in order to establish Seleucid rule in the area and thus hopefully to guarantee the peace.⁷ Thirdly, the colonists were to be allowed to use their own laws and to have a degree of separate organisation, arrangements which would have made the prospect of colonisation much more attractive to the Jews.⁸ They were also granted land for homes, farming and viticulture, very favourable exemptions from tax and as much grain as was needed to ensure that the settlements flourished and became permanent. Antiochus seems to have been eager to win the colonists' good will. These favourable terms probably meant that the Jewish communities concerned began well; this would have had a decisive influence on the character of the communities. Fourthly, the letter shows that the first large settlement of Jews in Asia Minor for which we have evidence came from another part of the Diaspora, that is, from Babylonia and Mesopotamia, and this is significant. We can infer that these Jews would already have adjusted to Diaspora life and would not have found the issues which faced them in Lydia and Phrygia (such as their remoteness from Jerusalem, the need to adjust to life in a pagan land and matters of internal organisation) as difficult as new settlers from Palestine would have done. This may have led to the early establishment of strong, confident Jewish communities in Asia Minor.

Other evidence suggests that Jewish communities were established in a number of cities in Asia Minor by 139–8 BCE. In 1 Macc. 15:16–23 we have a circular letter written by the Roman Senate at this time in support of the Jews and sent to a number of places. The list of recipients is not just the names of allies but areas and cities where Jews were living and were in need of support.⁹ Within Asia

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Minor letters were sent to Attalus II, king of Pergamum and Ariarathes V, king of Cappadocia and to the cities of Myndos, Halicarnassus and Cnidus in Caria, Phaselis in Lycia and Side in Pamphylia, which were all independent cities at this time. Copies were also sent to the areas of Caria, Lycia and Pamphylia.¹⁰ We can conclude that there were Jews in these kingdoms, cities and areas in 139–8 BCE. Jewish settlement seems to have continued as time went on, so that in the first century CE Philo could report in Flacc. 281–2 that there were Jewish colonies in most countries, including ‘Pamphylia, Cilicia, most of Asia as far as Bithynia and the remote corners of Pontus.’ We know of Jewish communities in over fifty places in Asia Minor during the Imperial period; doubtless there were many more.¹¹

2 The decree of Pergamum

Josephus cites a number of documents which deal with Jewish rights and privileges. These documents present numerous technical problems relating to the state of the texts, their dating and the puzzling order in which they are arranged. Although the authenticity of the decrees to be examined here has been recently questioned by Moehring, his case against their authenticity rests on minor aberrations in the text which can be satisfactorily explained by the history of transmission of the documents. As Rajak notes, detailed investigation confirms ‘that the formal features of the documents are correct for genre and period to a degree which makes it very difficult to conceive of them as forgeries’.¹² Thus, most recent investigators have accepted the authenticity of the decrees,¹³ which can therefore be used here as evidence for the Jewish communities in Asia Minor.

Ant 14:247–55, a decree of the people of Pergamum to be dated in the time of Antiochus VII Sidetes (138–129 BCE) or Antiochus IX Cyzicenus (113–95 BCE), explains that Jewish envoys had arrived in the city after receiving a favourable ruling on the affairs of Hyrcanus I from the Roman Senate. The people of Pergamum stated that they would take care that the Senate’s decree was fulfilled and that they would do everything possible on behalf of the Jews. A copy of Pergamum’s decree was to be sent to Hyrcanus along with envoys to assure him of ‘the friendly interest of our people’.¹⁴

It is probable that Jews were actually resident in Pergamum at this time. Two generations after this event Cicero mentions that Flaccus seized a small amount of gold destined for Jerusalem from Pergamum;

some of it almost certainly came from Jews resident in the city itself. Hence, the envoys travelling from Rome to Jerusalem probably made the detour to Pergamum, not only because it was an important city, but also in order to visit the Jewish community there.¹⁵ The decree suggests that the city of Pergamum would have had a positive attitude towards the Jewish community living in its midst. It would be surprising for the city to be positive towards the Jews of Palestine (as the decree shows), yet hostile towards its own Jewish community.¹⁶ Josephus preserves no later documents from Pergamum, which suggests that in the first century BCE the Jewish community's relations with the city were good.

The decree mentions one Theodorus who was not an envoy of Hyrcanus but was admitted to the council and assembly of Pergamum carrying the letter and decree of the Senate. His name appears suddenly in the text without introduction, which suggests that he was already known because he was an inhabitant of Pergamum. He spoke of the virtues and generosity of Hyrcanus, which suggests he was a Jew. Perhaps he was an important member of the Jewish community of the city, who was sufficiently respected to be allowed to speak to the council and assembly and who was able to convince them to adopt his recommendations.¹⁷ This suggests that the Jewish community in Pergamum, at some point during the last three decades of the second century BCE, enjoyed good relations in the city.

3 Roman support for the privileges of the Jewish communities in Asia Minor

The other documents Josephus cites show that on a number of occasions the Roman authorities granted various privileges to different Jewish communities. These included the right to be organised as a community, to administer their own finances, to observe the Sabbath and to be exempt from duties such as military service that conflicted with the full observance of Jewish Law. This grant of privileges for the Jewish communities in Asia Minor and elsewhere was often made in the face of local opposition from the cities in which the Jews lived. Thus, Roman support was vital and enabled these Jewish communities to continue as self-supporting communities that observed various Jewish customs.¹⁸

One way of explaining the fact that the Romans supported the position of the Jews is to say that Judaism was placed in the formal category of a *religio licita*. This, of course, would include the Jewish

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communities in Asia Minor. Consequently, a number of scholars speak of the documents associated with Julius Caesar as a 'charter of Jewish rights' that enshrined their special privileges.¹⁹ However, Rajak has recently shown that this model is inappropriate for the Roman world.²⁰ Behind the model of a charter is the concept that the Jews were an intrinsically exclusive group within the homogeneous city and hence required different treatment from other groups. However, the Jews were not completely alien, and the Hellenistic polis accommodated considerable diversity of population without demanding uniformity. Thus:

What Jewish communities needed was not the award of a special status, but, more simply, public backing with muscle behind it ... For the most part, I would suggest, Jewish *nomoi* were not formally incompatible with city requirements, though they could become contentious if the populace or the officials wanted to make life awkward ... But it was not in the very nature of the *polis* to exclude such activities and in the normal course of events they must have proceeded without question. It is for this reason that it is unsatisfactory to talk of the permanent need for *privilegia* from Rome, while it is right to stress the repeated necessity for outside, i.e. Roman help.²¹

It has been thought that the Hellenistic kings established Jewish communities on the basis of just this sort of charter. However, apart from statements in Josephus, which do not actually prove the existence of a charter, little can be known of the status of Jews in this earlier period. The permission to live 'according to their ancestral laws' was granted by Antiochus III to Jews in Coele-Syria and in Phrygia and Lydia, but this does not amount to a charter, which would have required legal precision.²² We cannot extrapolate from these two specific situations to formulate conclusions about the terms on which Jews lived in new or established cities. Although the Romans inherited this principle of toleration from the Seleucids, it seems that the position of Jewish communities was not clearly defined before Roman rule. At Ephesus and elsewhere in Ionia it was over two generations after the beginning of Roman rule in the area that we first hear of Roman intervention on the question of Jewish status. This is probably because formal arrangements were not at issue since there had not been any generally understood settlement of the question in the past.²³ The Romans, then, did not inherit a 'Jewish charter'.

It has often been thought that the legislation associated with Julius Caesar formed the 'Jewish Magna Carta'. However, the documents do not provide an overall definition of Jewish religious liberty.²⁴ It is important to consider whether, in the *Romans'* perception, the documents had a general application or any validity as a precedent beyond the specific context in which they were issued. Pliny's correspondence (admittedly somewhat later) shows that Trajan distinguished clearly between universally applicable imperial rulings and those intended for certain provinces.²⁵ Although Josephus at times introduces the documents as if they concerned Jewish status universally, none of the texts themselves have an entirely general reference.²⁶ What happened in provinces where Jews had not appealed to the authorities was undetermined; we are not able to generalise. Even when we do have evidence for the grant of privileges in a certain number of cities, there is considerable variation in the constituent elements of the grant from city to city. Rome responded to the needs of the moment according to the prevailing political situation, making ad hoc decisions with differing details rather than following the predetermined guidelines of a charter.²⁷

It was Claudius who for the first time made a sweeping pronouncement in 41/42 CE applying to the whole empire.²⁸ Faced with Greek–Jewish crises in Palestine, Alexandria and perhaps Antioch, he formulated a general policy of toleration for Jewish observances throughout the Empire in an attempt to circumvent any planned trouble in other cities. Thus Claudius wrote: 'It is right therefore that Jews throughout the whole world under our sway should also observe the customs of their fathers without let or hindrance' (Ant 19:290). Yet, even this general grant was of a limited nature. The policy was not spelt out in detail but expressed in general phrases of intent. Indeed, Claudius seems to have stressed his goodwill towards the practice of the Jewish cult but to have left it up to the Greek cities to act in accordance with his will. This arrangement was neither systematic nor precise and falls well short of being a 'charter of Jewish rights'. We conclude, therefore, that Jewish communities in Asia Minor did not have their privileges enshrined in a 'charter'.

However, it is nonetheless clear that the Roman authorities, whether Emperors or proconsuls, were willing to support privileges for Jewish communities, including communities in Asia Minor, on an ad hoc basis even if this support was not in the form of a charter. We may suggest a number of reasons for this support. Firstly, as far as we know, the Hellenistic monarchies generally supported the Jews