The Decline of the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt in the Roman Period

A general survey of the Jewish community in Alexandria before the Roman conquest (30 B.C.E.) would show that very seldom did Jews in the Diaspora attain to such excellent conditions of life. A most powerful and influential Jewish community; a magnificent central synagogue with several others scattered all over the city; a population including many rich merchants, capitalists as well as large numbers of artisans of all kinds, organised according to their trade; a rich literature in Greek, the language of the State and of culture, Jewish authors often being not inferior to their Greek teachers. The situation was not worse outside Alexandria, in the valley of the Nile, which extended over more than a thousand kilometers. Jewish settlements were scattered from the borders of the Libyan desert in the North, as far as Thebes in the South; a Jewish army on "Onias' Land" was under the command of Jewish officers; Jewish government officials, especially in the important fiscal branch, peasants, landowners, winegrowers, military settlers, agricultural workers, shepherds and tradesmen—all of them playing a considerable role in the economic life of the country. As for the Prolemaic Kings—they fully acknowledged the capacities of the Jewish people and showed a sincere desire to live in peace with them; so that even unavoidable clashes and misunderstandings could not poison the atmosphere in which the Egyptian Jews lived. Numerically indeed, they amounted, according to Philo, to a million.

150 years went by, and the picture was totally changed. Anyone venturing to visit Egypt at the beginning of Hadrian's rule would have found destroyed communities, burnt-down synagogues, Jewish quarters plundered, and Jewish property confiscated. Only here and there the remnants of the population gathered around some of their destroyed centres. Such was the picture immediately after the quelling of the Jewish revolt of the years 115-117 C.E. But even some 50 or 100 years later, although the sword of destruction no longer threatened the population, the situation was not substantially improved. Although separate Jewish communities had recovered, the population was much diminished; and what the sword had spared was eroded by assimilation. The Jews took no part now in the economic life of the country, nor did they play
any role in Greek cultural life. The survivors alienated themselves from other peoples and shut themselves up in a kind of spiritual ghetto. Even so, their return to their own ancestral traditions was barren and devoid of any cultural fruit. Hundreds of years passed without any change or progress, until in the Arab period fresh spirit and new strength were infused into the ancient body.

How did this happen? What events occurred in the course of these 150 years, from the time of Augustus to that of Hadrian, to cast down the Jewish Diaspora in Egypt from the height upon which it had stood, and to turn it into a despised and persecuted body, struggling for its life and hardly earning a livelihood?

In order to understand the fate of Egyptian Jewry during this period we have to bear in mind the following three facts. (1) Egypt was but a part of the Roman Empire, and therefore the situation of the Egyptian Jews depended on the general policy of Rome. (2) The Egyptian, and especially the Alexandrian Jews lived in a Greek environment and their life was therefore influenced by the attitude of the Greeks towards them.(3) Egyptian Jewry was part and parcel of the whole Jewish nation, and its fate was therefore connected with that of the Jews in other places and primarily with those in Palestine. We shall, therefore, concentrate our survey on these three major aspects: the Roman, the Greek and the Jewish.

I

After Alexandria had fallen into the victorious hands of the Roman armies, the Jews could look with more hope and certitude towards the future. The period of upheavals which had lasted in Egypt for 150 years came to an end, and the effete Ptolemaic dynasty withdrew from the historical arena. The last Ptolemaic Kings, rulers with no power and no influence, had sought the friendship of the Romans, being unable otherwise to hold on the power in the face of undisciplined soldiers and irresponsible propagandists. The Jews, being interested in a strong central government, supported the Romans since in this way they hoped to evoke a favourable attitude towards themselves on the part of the rulers; whilst the predominance of revolutionary elements in Alexandria surely presaged no good for them. Indeed, a short time after the conquest, Augustus confirmed the privileges of the Alexandrian Jews, this proclamation being engraved upon a “slab,” as was usual
with publication of important state decisions. But it was not long before the Jews became convinced that Roman rule had brought them bitter disappointment and degradation only.

The change for the worse did not come as a result of any negative Roman attitude towards the Jews—"antisemitism" was not a part of Rome's political programme. It was the new situation resulting from the conquest of the East that caused the change. In the period of the Republic, from 200 B.C.E. onwards, the Romans have been extending their rule over all the lands around the Mediterranean, and Augustus completed the conquest by annexing Egypt and the lands on the Danube. The Romans considered the territory which fell into their hands as "Roman estates" (*praedia populi Romani*) and their population as "subjects" (*dediticii*). The Roman rule was a heavy yoke weighing upon the population. High taxes, amongst them the land tax and the poll tax, caused the impoverishment of the population, especially when tax-collection was entrusted to greedy and unscrupulous Roman officials. Rome was the "lord," the highest authority; and the peoples had perforce to suffer and keep quiet. Yet among the conquered peoples there was one that demanded special attention—the Greeks. The first appearance of Rome in the East (the war against Philip, King of Macedon, 200-197 B.C.E.) was followed by a solemn proclamation of freedom for the Greeks—Rome had not come to subjugate the Greeks; on the contrary, its aim was to free them from the yoke of others. However, this sentimental Philhellenism did not last long, for real-politik soon took over and the Greeks, like all other peoples, had to give way to Rome. At the end of the period of the Republic Greece—and in particular the cities in Asia—suffered severely from the Romans because of the prolonged civil wars; the extortion of money, severe punishment, plunder and robbery were everyday occurrences. Yet, though persecuting the Greeks, the Romans had not forgotten that from the cultural point of view they were no more than disciples of the vanquished nation; and while Roman governors and the rich were squeezing all they could get out of the Greek cities, young Roman aristocrats were listening to the lectures of Athenian philosophers, and learned from them rhetoric and the foundations of science and philosophy. This cultural predominance of the Greeks caused the recognition of the

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Greek language by Rome as the official language in all the Eastern Roman provinces. Thus Rome had given up notions of the Romanization of the East; Hellenization was just as welcome to her. Nor was it only in the cultural sphere, but in political matters, too, that Rome was compelled to make concessions to the Greeks. The more it extended its conquests in the East and more nations came under its rule, the more it needed allies of its own kind to assist in the difficult task of ruling over other nations. Thus, the Greeks became, in the eyes of the Roman authorities privileged people. At the beginning of the Empire, when wars were over and the methods of administration in the provinces had improved, the extortion of money from the Greek cities came to an end, and Hellenism in the eastern lands faced a new and important stage of development.

In granting preferential treatment to the Greeks over other peoples, the Romans were confronted with the problem of what criterion should be laid down for this distinction. The Greeks in the East had long ago ceased to be a "nation" from the racial point of view. They mingled with the native inhabitants who, for their part, drew closer to them, learned their language and called themselves by Greek names. Hellenism had ceased to be an ethnic concept and had become a cultural one. It was difficult, therefore, to decide who was to be considered a Greek and who was not. To solve the problem the Romans applied a formal criterion: no one other than citizens of Greek cities were to be considered Greeks. This formal distinction suited the Greeks well enough; the Greek "polis," a political institution bearing the banner of freedom and autonomy, served as a basis for the development of civic life both in Greece proper and in the lands of emigration. A citizen of a Greek city who had the right to participate in the general assembly, to elect and be elected into public office, who received his education in philosophy and athletics in a gymnasium, was the only one to be considered "Greek." Although in the Hellenistic age no one could have dreamed of complete freedom and autonomy, the Hellenistic kings had nevertheless recognized the civic freedom of the cities, and the Romans followed suit. Several Greek cities in the East which had assisted Rome in its conquests had won the honourable title of "allies." These were considered "free" and remained untaxed (civitates liberae et immunes). Other cities did not enjoy these special privileges—they were subject to
the authority of the Roman governor of the province and had to pay taxes (civitates stipendiariae). Yet these, too, administered their city affairs according to the tradition of civic freedom. As regards fiscal arrangements, they were exempt from payment of poll tax. Since in lands such as Asia Minor and Syria the Greek population was concentrated in the cities, the division between Greeks and non-Greeks corresponded to the division between the urban and the rural population. Thus ethnic concepts changed into social ones: and if we remember that the urban population was the standard-bearer of Greek culture—which at this time was considered the only culture in the whole world—we shall see that there was added to this double division a third distinction that between men of education and culture and the common people.

In the majority of Hellenistic lands this division of the population into two parts was easily accomplished. The situation in Egypt was more complicated. There we find three Greek cities only—Alexandria, Naucratis and Ptolemais—while large numbers of Greeks lived in villages and small provincial towns, mingling with the Egyptians. What principle was to be adopted here in order to distinguish between Greeks and non-Greeks? Here, too, the Romans followed the formal criterion; they did not look for "purity of race"—pointless investigation in any case since in the course of time close contact had blurred the boundaries between the two nations. Instead, they introduced certain principles upon which the new formation of the "Greek" nation was to depend. One principle required permanent residence in one of the "metropoleis," i.e. district towns which, although not considered Greek cities were, no doubt, more imbued with the Hellenistic spirit than were the villages. The second principle required a gymnasium education, which indicated participation in the Greek culture. According to this differentiation, the Romans in Egypt established rather artificially combined groups of people, who were from now on regarded as "Greeks." Since, however, these Greeks had never been citizens of Greek cities, it was impossible to make their status equal to that of legal citizens; they were obliged to pay the poll tax and could not, of course, enjoy independent jurisdiction as the legal citizens of the Greek cities did. On the other hand, the Romans granted them some privileges, such as a reduction in the payment of poll tax. Notwithstanding the artificial categorisation of these groups, the Romans had thereby achieved something of
importance, the influence of which was felt for many generations to come. They had created a kind of local aristocracy in Egypt, educated in the spirit of Hellenism though of mixed racial origin. It was from among this new aristocracy that they recruited officials for local administration.

The Egyptian population was thus divided into two parts: the privileged Greeks on the one hand, and the subjugated mass of the population on the other. Where did the Jews belong?

It is not difficult to find the answer. Had the purpose of the Romans been the isolation of the Egyptians as the only people to bear the burden of the state taxes, then the Jews would have found themselves in the Greek camp. But since the aim of the Romans was the distinction of the Greeks through granting them privileges, it quite naturally came about that the Jews were pushed into the Egyptian camp.

Was it, then, impossible to establish a special status for Jews? We are told by Philo that Egyptian Jewry numbered a million. Even if we question this figure, it is clear that the Egyptian Jews constituted a body of considerable importance whose demands would have to be taken into consideration. And, indeed, there had for a long time existed a special juridical status with regard to the Jews. The Romans did not merely refrain from abrogating it; on the contrary, they confirmed it by new declarations. This was the prevailing status of communities that were granted the right "to live according to their ancestral laws," i.e. to organize life of the community in accordance with national customs. The privileges of Jewish communities were considerable: they included maintenance of national institutions (courts of justice and registrars' offices), election of officials (archons, elders, etc); arrangements for religious worship (construction of synagogues, observance of ancestral laws), and a certain measure of independent jurisdiction (especially in family matters, religious questions etc.). The Jewish community was a kind of Greek polis in miniature, and it might perhaps have competed with the "Polis" as to the extent of its rights. What more could the Romans have added to these privileges? Augustus confirmed the right of the Jews to "live according to their ancestral laws", and in so doing he discharged his duty towards the Jewish people in all places of their dispersion. Up to the time of Gaius Caligula and his prefect Flaccus, no Roman had doubted the privilege of the Jews to enjoy what we now call
national religious autonomy. But this privileges did not include, and
could not include, exemption from duties towards the state, such
as the payment of poll tax and other taxes. The Jews, like all the
other inhabitants of the Empire, from Spain to Syria, were con-
sidered as "subjects", and as such did not participate with Rome in
administration; only one single people—the Greeks—obtained
the privilege of such participation. Could the Jews have been
regarded by Rome and its officials as equal to the Greeks?

The door was not shut in their face. As we have mentioned
above, the "Greek" population in Egypt was in fact a product of
a mixture of various peoples; and a Jew, if he renounced his "an-
cestral laws" and abandoned the Jewish community, could
also be accepted by this society. To join the Greeks would mean
for him the possibility of entering upon a career in the imperial
administration, especially if, in addition to Alexandrian citizen-
ship, he had succeeded in acquiring that of Rome. Such a man was
Tiberius Julius Alexander, a cousin of Philo, son of Alexander, a
prominent and rich Alexandrian. 2 Tiberius was not the only one
in those days to abandon Judaism. We are told by Philo that there
were Jews who would give up their ancestral laws for Greek
customs, and the author of III Maccabees poured out his wrath
upon those who were willing to abandon Judaism in order to
obtain civic rights in Alexandria (ii: 31). A "Jewish question,"
however, would not have arisen if change of faith and assimilation
had been matters of small importance. Egyptian Jews were, in any
case, not willing to renounce their national character, betray their
religion and assimilate with the Greeks. Yet at the same time they
did not wish to sink to the level of the common mass of Egyptians.
They strove to obtain two things simultaneously—to preserve
their Judaism, and to enjoy the privileges of the Greeks. To this end
the Jews had to prove that their belonging to the Jewish people did
not hinder their being good citizens of a Greek polis and trust-
worthy officials of the emperor. Again, they had to show that they

2 Tiberius Julius Alexander had a brilliant career as a Roman official.
At first a high official (epistrategos) in the Thebais, he later succeeded in joining
the cavalry and served as Roman prefect in Judaea and Egypt. In 66 C.E.,
at the time of the Alexandrian riots, as prefect of Egypt, he quelled the Jewish
rebellion with an iron hand, as suited a Roman prefect devoted to his Emperor.
He also served as assistant and adviser to Titus at the time when Jerusalem
was under siege. We do not need the evidence of Josephus (Ant. xx, 100) to
understand that such a Jew could not have remained faithful to his "ancestral
laws".

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entertained no hostile feelings towards the Greeks, that the Law of Moses did not contradict Greek philosophy, and that they were willing to acquire the foundations of Greek culture and education as far as this did not clash with their faith in one supreme God. Thus began the hard struggle of Egyptian Jewry for their position in the Greek world.

Historians usually identify this struggle with that for obtaining Alexandrian citizenship; yet in fact it was much broader, and if we may again use modern terminology, we would call it the struggle for emancipation. This struggle was conducted both on the plane of politics and that of culture; but as far as concerned the Roman government, it was only the political side that was of actual importance. Apologetic literature took upon itself the arduous task of making clear to the Roman reader the position the Jews occupied in the Roman Empire, their rights and their claims. Unfortunately the basic document of this literary genre, Philo's own *Apologia pro Judaeis*, has not come down to us. Nevertheless, Josephus has preserved in his treatise *Against Apion* and in other works several details of this literature and echoes, amongst others, no doubt also Philo himself. Josephus tried to convince the reader that all the great emperors, among them Julius Caesar and Augustus, had highly appreciated the Jews and had been generous in granting them equal rights with the Greeks. No surviving document whatsoever confirms this doubtful assertion. As far as the Roman documents go, they speak only of the national rights of the Jews and not of their having any civic rights in a Greek *polis*. Yet the Jews badly needed such means of literary defence in order to strengthen their claims for Alexandrian citizenship. Only by such means could they have preserved both their feelings of self-respect and the few privileges obtained by them during the Ptolemaic period, which had distinguished between them and the Egyptian masses.³ Of special interest is the endeavour of the apologetic literature to vindicate the difference between the Jews and the Egyptians and by this means to prove to the Greco-Roman world that the Jews could not be put on one level with the vulgar mass of Egyptians, lacking as these did all culture and education.⁴

³ Such privilege was introduced, for instance, as regards the laws of punishments. The Jews were not subjected to be scourged—a punishment reserved for Egyptians only—but merely to chastisement with ordinary whips by special Alexandrian police. Cf. *In Flaccum*, 78.
⁴ According to Josephus, Egyptians had always been the greatest enemies
Indeed, this propaganda was of vital importance; at a sensational trial between Jews and Alexandrians, conducted in Rome before the court of the Emperor Claudius, Isidoros, the head of the antisemites accused the Jews that their way of life was similar to that of the Egyptians, since they were subjected to the payment of poll tax. With this he hit them in their vulnerable point. The poll tax, introduced in Egypt in the first years of Augustus' reign, had to be paid by the whole of the population except the citizens of the Greek poleis. The imposition of this tax was felt by the Jews in particular as a great injustice. It was worth while trying by all possible means, both lawful and unlawful, to penetrate into the ranks of Greek citizens and so to get rid of this mark of degradation.

The Alexandrian Jews courageously defended their position. Since their direct enemy was the citizens' assembly—the ecclesia—while Rome represented the supreme power upon which both adversaries depended, the struggle acquired the pattern of trials and disputes before the throne of the emperors. From Caligula to Hadrian—a period of about eighty years—representatives of both sides appeared in Rome to put forth their complaints before the supreme judge—the emperor. The emperors' verdicts did not satisfy the Greeks. They claimed that the Roman emperors were hostile towards the city of Alexandria, and were siding with the of Jews—the first to defame them (Ant. i, 223); there were no acts of violence against Jews as long as only Greeks and Macedonians lived in Alexandria, yet when the Egyptian element had increased disturbances against Jews flared up (ib. ii 69); Apion, chief of the antisemites, was not an Alexandrian but of pure Egyptian origin (ib. ii, 28 sqq., 138); of all the people under the control of Rome the Egyptians alone were denied the right to establish any civil organisations whatsoever (ib. ii, 41); the Egyptians called the Jews "strangers" (peregrini) although they themselves had never been granted citizenship by any king or emperor (ib. ii, 71-72); they had always been politically subjected to other nations (ib. ii, 128); even their religion—the cult of beasts—was foolish and senseless (ib. i, 225-6; ii, 139), and the Torah of the Jews opposed their religion more than Greek customs (ib. ii, 99). Philo's attitude towards the Egyptian religion is no better. He regards the Egyptians as ancient enemies of the Jews (in Flaccum 29). He acknowledges the wisdom of the priests, but in his eyes this ancient people serve as a symbol of corruption, of sensuality and of the materialistic element in human life in general (de poster. Caini, 156 sq.; de leg. alleg. 2, 59; de sacrif. Abeli 48, etc.; cf. also de Abrah. 107; de agricult. 62, de spec. leg. 3, 23; leg. 166, 205); the cult of beasts is an absurdity which provokes but contempt and devotion in educated men (de decal. 76 sqq.; de spec. leg. 2, 146 etc.).

Jews. And indeed there were cases when Greeks were found guilty and actually even sentenced to death by the imperial court. Nevertheless, the defeat of the Greeks did not mean a victory for the Jews. We do not know what exactly provoked the discussion which was held before Trajan and Hadrian (as far may be judged from the badly damaged papyri, the discussion touched chiefly upon current affairs). Yet the main stage of the struggle for emancipation had already been closed in the first year of Claudius’ reign (41 C.E.). It was Claudius who, under the influence of the Jewish king Agrippa and in accordance with the chief lines of his general policy, returned to the policy of Augustus and confirmed again the Jews’ right to live according to their laws. The same emperor, some months later (after the proclamation of the edicts in favour of the Jews) sent a letter to the Alexandrian citizens in which he warned the Jews not to strive for additional rights. “The Jews must behave kindly and gently and enjoy all the good things which the city, which is not their own, allows them.” Thus, in spite of the 350 years’ residence in Alexandria, the city was not to be considered “their own.” In the eyes of the Roman emperor—the supreme arbiter in Greco-Jewish affairs—Alexandria remained a “foreign city” for the Jews. This affront put an end to the struggle of the Jews for citizens’ rights, as well as to their aspirations to obtain a proper place in the Greek world. In the villages and provincial towns the struggle had been destined to end in defeat before it had even started. Citizenship, which could still have saved the Jews from decline, did not exist in the villages. Here not only Egyptians but Greeks, too, were to pay poll tax, though at a reduced rate. Was there any hope for the Jews to enter the exclusive circles of “metropoleis” citizens, graduates of the gymnasium, etc.? To that end one would necessarily have to accept Greek customs; but a Jew who lived in a village or a provincial town was far from the Hellenic spirit. He had, therefore, no reason whatsoever to claim to be distinguished from the rest of the population. And

6 The records of the dispute between the Jews and the Greeks before the Emperors were preserved in fragments of the antisemitic literature known as the Acts of Alexandrian Martyrs. The papyri containing these fragments are badly damaged. For this literature cf. my book “The Jews in Egypt in the Hellenistic-Roman age” (Hebrew) pp. 158 sqq. (C.P. Jud. ii, Section VIII).

7 See Josephus, Ant. xix, 280 sqq.

indeed we are informed by the papyri that the Jewish inhabitants of villages and provincial towns paid the poll tax exactly like their Egyptian neighbours. The situation grew worse for several other reasons, connected with the Roman conquest which brought about important changes in the social and economic structure of the Jewish population. Two of the most important sources of their livelihood—service in the army and in the civil service—became almost completely closed for them. The Romans disbanded the Ptolemaic armies as they did not need to maintain them, and put the defence of the country into the hands of the Roman army. Only a Roman citizen could (at least de jure) be enrolled into the Legions, and thus the way to military service was closed not only to the Jews but to all inhabitants of Egypt. No evidence is available about the Jewish soldiers who had served in the Ptolemaic armies or who lived in the military colonies at the time of the conquest. It may be assumed, however, that they were disbanded and became ordinary peasants. From now on there was no possibility for a Jew to earn his livelihood by military service, and thus the class of Jewish soldiers who had constituted a kind of aristocracy among the Egyptian Jews disappeared altogether. At the same time another class that also belonged to the rural aristocracy was severely stricken—the civil servants. In the Ptolemaic period, and in particular in the 2nd century B.C.E., a great many Jews entered the ranks of officialdom. Here, too, the Romans applied a new policy. The officials were taken from among the rich, who were able to give guarantees for the large sums that were concentrated in their hands through tax collection. This rich class resided mostly in the metropoleis and belonged to the Greek corporations of those possessed of a gymnasium education: and it was of course useful for the government to recruit its officials from amongst them. Although there was no formal prohibition for Jews to serve as officials, it is clear that their number was very small, since it became daily more difficult to penetrate the exclusive Greek circles of the metropoleis.

It is quite possible that the Romans had no intention of immediately drawing all the conclusions resulting from the new situation created by them. We know, for instance, that certain privileges of the Alexandrian Jews concerning corporal punishment lasted till 38 C.E., i.e. 68 years after the Roman conquest. Yet there was a

9 See supra, note 3.
class of people in Egypt who did not consider the Jewish question as a purely academic one, but who sought to make the most of the new situation. These were the Greeks. Their attitude towards the Jews may also have influenced the Romans, and have urged them to carry out with greater zeal the measures resulting from their general policy in the East.

II

The additional strength injected into Hellenism by Rome was well-timed. The burden which Alexander the Great had put upon the shoulders of the Greek people was too heavy. Vast areas, extending from the borders of India and Turkestan in the East as far as the Lybian desert in the West, opened before the Greek emigrants (in addition to Sicily, Italy, Cyrene, Asia Minor, Aegean islands and the shores of Southern Russia which had been previously opened to them.) What nation—however numerous and energetic—could have carried out such a tremendous enterprise of settlement? Small wonder that the Greek nation felt short of attainment. Numerous Greek cities were, it is true, built in eastern lands, and military settlements were founded in Asia Minor, Syria, Egypt and other places. Officials, soldiers, and Greek merchants penetrated everywhere reaching the remotest borders of the world as then known, that Hellenistic states covering huge territories arose out of the ruins of the great Persian Empire. But these achievements could not blur the fact that the eastern lands were not transformed into Greek ones but only "Hellenised," i.e. they adopted the outer shell of Hellenism whilst the kernel which they persisted in so zealously guarding was one of an ancient eastern culture. At the dawn of the era there were, it seemed, fair prospects for the success of Hellenisation; native peoples had learned to speak Greek, called themselves and their deities by Greek names, and even penetrated into Greek cities either as permanent inhabitants or as members of citizens' communities. Yet these achievements were really of small weight, and carried within themselves a danger of deterioration. Not only were the eastern peoples unable to bear the banner of true Greek civilisation but on the contrary, they brought with them their own faith and beliefs, their own customs and way of life which greatly differed from those of the Hellenes. Under the influence of the East the Greeks themselves started to sink to the level of the natives among whom they lived. Eastern deities and eastern
priests had become their own, and even the eastern languages did not remain alien to them. The East exerted more powerful influence upon the Greeks than they themselves were able to exert upon it. No doubt in lands with an original Greek population such as Greece proper, or the Aegean islands along the shores of Asia Minor etc., Hellenism retained its vitality. Yet in Syria, Mesopotamia, Egypt and the rest of the East, the Greeks mingled with the natives, and at the end of the Hellenistic age they were facing the danger of complete assimilation.

During the whole Hellenistic period the Greek city in the East defended its Hellenic culture by means of its own feeble resources. There were even cases where mixed marriages between the citizens of a polis and the local people were forbidden. Since the polis in the East was politically subject to the king, political activity no longer held any attractions for the citizen body, whose main interest now turned to the sphere of culture. A gymnasium education, military training at the Ephebeion, physical exercises, athletic games, religious services, all these had become the main contents of civic life. But here also—into the Holy of Holies of Hellenism—the East had penetrated. In the provincial towns and villages of Ptolemaic Egypt there were erected gymnasia which were open to sons of different peoples, and “Greek” ephēboi were found worshipping the Egyptian deities. Who knows how much Greek blood ran in the veins of the youths who were training at these Egyptian gymnasia?

And now the Romans came forward with the proclamation that they were willing to support Hellenism. In countries with numerous Greek cities, the distinction between Greeks and non-Greeks was, as has been stated above, one easily drawn. In Egypt, however, where the boundaries between different peoples had long since become blurred, the question presented greater difficulties. Unfortunately we have no evidence as to what attitude the Greeks took towards this important question. No doubt many an adviser came forward proferring help to the Romans, and thousands of hands were put out: some for the grasp of friendship, others to solicit for donations, and still others to point treacherously towards an allegedly hidden enemy. Some papyri deriving from the beginning of the Roman period attest a state of great confusion among the Greeks. Never before had the Greeks been so anxious about their culture, so easily offended, or so sensitive towards other nations;
and it may be asserted that their attachment to Greek culture stood in inverse proportion to the amount of Greek blood in their veins.

Gymnasium education was the most prominent and characteristic mark of the new Hellenism. In accordance with ancient Greek tradition, education in an urban gymnasium, including ephebe-training, constituted the primary condition of entering the ranks of citizenship. No doubt in Alexandria, too, this was the legal and most usual way of obtaining citizenship, the king's confirmation being a formal matter. As for the provincial towns, here a gymnasium education had served as an entrance-card into the privileged circles which, in the eyes of the Romans, were considered as "Greeks" and sometimes even called "gymnasium-graduates." (see supra, p. 11). Since attachment to this new aristocracy would pave the way for a career in the imperial administration and bring about a reduction in the payment of poll tax, the Greeks were on guard lest gymnasium education should become the privilege of many. The laxity and confusion which had prevailed in the Ptolemaic period in the sphere of gymnasium education—and subsequently in the formation of the "citizen body"—now turned into a scrupulous supervision of the purity of the new Greek race. The Roman government, the Alexandrian citizens and the Greeks in the metropoleis were all of the same opinion—that there was no place for a stranger in the gymnasium. Rigorous tests were now introduced for inscribing a youth as an Ephebos. The Greeks produced long lists proving their descent from Greek ancestors, in order to preserve their right to gymnasium education for generations to come. The papyri attest the fact that in the middle of the 3rd century, some 250 years after Augustus, in order to enroll his son as an Ephebos a Greek father had to prove his descent from "gymnasium graduates" reaching as far back as Augustus' time, and the same applied to the mother of the boy. Thus a new "race" arose in Egypt which was on the watch to preserve its purity no less than the adherents of the racial theories of our time.

There is no explicit evidence the the Jews strove to take part in gymnasium activities. Yet from many hints in the papyri and in Philo's writings, and in view of the situation in other lands of the Dispersion, we may conclude that a certain part of the Jewish population—in particular the upper classes in Alexandria—were

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anxious to give gymnasium education to their sons. This education would introduce a young Jew into the society of the educated, put him on a level with the Greeks in every day life, and open the ranks of citizenship before him. The right to give their sons a gymnasium education was thus part of the struggle for emancipation of Alexandrian Jewry. Small wonder that it was precisely regarding this question that the Jews met with the strongest opposition on the part of the Greeks. Already in Augustus' time we read in a papyrus complaints on the part of the Alexandrians about persons evading the payment of poll tax by inscribing themselves as Epheboi and defiling the Greek city by alien customs. In Claudius' time the Greeks complained before the emperor that the Jews were penetrating by deceit into the games organised by the heads of the gymnasium, and in consequence the Emperor forbade them to resort to such devious practices. It was no accident that the heads of the gymnasium (gymnasiarchs) put themselves at the head of the antisemitic movement in Alexandria. No less strong was the opposition of Alexandrians to the endeavours of the Jews to obtain citizenship. We do not know what kind of attitude the Alexandrians took towards that small group of Jews who had already, in previous periods, enjoyed citizens' rights. In any case, it is clear that every new attempt of the Jews to expand their civic rights was met by strong opposition on the part of the Alexandrians. The Roman emperors and the Ptolemaic kings before them allowed the Jews to live according to their ancestral laws, but never acknowledged their right to become legal citizens of Greek cities. As to the city of Alexandria in particular,—if here the kings did sometimes grant the Jews citizens' rights it was done in special cases only. On the other hand, Jewish claims were not without basis. The juridical status of Alexandrian citizens was rather complicated, since there existed at least three kinds of citizens, not enjoying equal rights. In addition, great confusion prevailed in the city at the end of the Ptolemaic period because of the frequent interference of the kings in city affairs, and of the equally frequent

11 This document—known as "Boule-papyrus"—is a letter to Augustus from one of the representatives of the city of Alexandria, in which the writer asks the Emperor to allow the city to set up its own council (PSI x, 1160).
12 Cf. Claudius' letter to the Alexandrians (see note 8) line 92-3.
13 The most privileged class was that of citizens registered in phyle and demos according to the status of citizens in classical Greece. The lowest class was the one called simply "Alexandrians".

15
rebellious movements on the part of the Alexandrians. On the strength of this consideration the Jews could have claimed, and perhaps justly, that their rights in the city were far more extensive than the Greeks considered them to be. The very fact that a struggle for citizens’ rights had been possible points to an ambiguous juridical situation. There was, in any case, one thing to plead in favour of the Jews; namely, that they were in actual enjoyment of certain rights which distinguished them from the Egyptians, and brought them closer to the Greeks.

In the meantime Greek antisemitism grew, and found its expression in Alexandrian literature. Antisemitism was not a new phenomenon in Egypt nor was it prevalent in that country only; yet it was in Alexandria, and precisely in this period, that it reached its peak. All the accusations and defamations of the Jews were trotted out again and systematically discussed in the literature. This abstract antisemitism went hand in hand with a practical antisemitism. Apion, the representative of literary antisemitism, had been the very man who headed the Alexandrian embassy to the Emperor Caligula, the aim of which was the accusation of the Jews. While the Jews mobilised their best men to fight for their citizens’ rights, the Greeks, too were organising themselves and aiming to make the claims of the Jews null and void. No wonder that in the literary polemic, too, the question of citizenship played a considerable part. Apion denied the Jews their right to be considered Alexandrian citizens because of their refusal to recognise the cult of the city deities. This arrow did not miss its mark, since the Jews could not recognize the pagan gods without abandoning Judaism. The claim was not only a means of propaganda; in the eyes of the Greeks disrespect of the gods constituted a serious offence to the honour of the city itself. Anyone who failed to recognise the city deities was undermining the very foundations upon which the city stood. He was to be considered a bad citizen, and his fidelity was questionable.

There is no need to-day for any special explanation in order to estimate the power of a systematic antisemitic propaganda and its influence on the masses. Though we do not possess detailed information, it is easy to imagine that more than once slight clashes took place. Yet specific political reasons were needed for an explosion on a large scale. The great change came when the emperor Gaius Caligula (37-41 C.E.) ascended the throne.
His first steps did not yet reveal the real nature of the new ruler, but towards the end of the first year of his reign the tendency of his policy became clear—the establishment of a monarchy in the spirit of eastern Hellenism, instead of the Principate which embodied the tradition of the Roman Republic. By this means he abolished with one stroke the political achievements of Augustus. In a Hellenistic monarchy the ruler was deified, and so Gaius became god upon earth. This new policy immediately provoked repercussions in the provinces. Provincial governors appointed by the previous emperor, Tiberus, were anxious about their position, and did not know how to behave in order to please the new ruler. Alexandria lifted up its head: being the centre of Hellenism she felt a certain affinity with the emperor. If, until then, Alexandria had been regarded as a rebellious city, having been in a permanent state of opposition to Rome, fair prospects now opened before her to become the spiritual leader of the Empire, if not, indeed, its capital. Alexandrian patriots—the heads of the gymnasium and all kinds of popular leaders—came into power overnight. They were not subject to Rome’s rule any more; on the contrary, the Roman prefect Flaccus, who was fearful for his post and was not sure what fate had in store for him, was ready to humiliate himself before them. And it was easy to see that the first action of the new ruler would be directed against the Jews.

In the year 38 C.E. a terrible massacre of the Jews took place in Alexandria. We know the course of events from Philo’s two works *Legatio ad Gaium* and *In Flaccum*. Philo, however, was not in duty bound to report everything: nor was it always in his interest to tell the truth and nothing but the truth. We have to read between the lines to discover the true situation. Philo directed his aim mainly against the Roman prefect Flaccus who had backed the rioters—as to the Alexandrians’ share, Philo emphasises merely the participation of the “mob” in the massacre, and the role played by irresponsible demagogues. Yet the demagogues were not insignificant personalities in the city—they were political leaders and heads of the gymnasium. Philo speaks with bitterness of the “associations and circles” where the propaganda of the demagogues was concentrated. Again it must be said that these associations which, before Gaius, had probably been forbidden in Alexandria as they had also been in Rome since Julius Caesar’s time, now

became the centres of patriotic activity in the city. Their propaganda was directed not only against the Jews but no doubt against Rome as well. It is no mere chance that the two most active demagogues, Isidoros and Lampon were executed in Rome soon after Gaius Caligula’s assassination. As to the “mob”, it was, in fact, not a mob either. We are told by Philo (in Flaccum 37) that at first the centre of the antisemitic movement was at the gymnasion, and not at the theatre—the true centre of the Alexandrian mob. From the description given by Philo himself we get the impression that the large masses played a certain role in the movement at a later stage only, when it had already passed its initial phases. It is clear that neither the mob nor, of course, the Roman prefect Flaccus had been the initiators of the riots, but rather the Alexandrian intellectuals who were concentrated round the gymnasion, and propagated the slogans of liberty and the purity of Hellenistic culture. The Jews were the victims of an intense nationalistic movement which had been suppressed by Rome for decades, and now suddenly felt free to follow an independent policy on a large scale.

Since the riots came as the result of a deliberate action, it may be assumed that there was a definite scheme. Philo does not mention anything about one. Perhaps it could not be carried through, since the movement soon attracted the large masses who did not recognise any plan, and merely saw in the Jews an easy object for plunder and abuse. It may be assumed that the heads of the antisemites hastened to carry out their designs against the Jews—a scheme surely worked out more than once in the course of the long period during which the Jews were struggling for their rights. The Jews were stirring to become legal citizens;—the Greeks, on the other hand, looked upon them as strangers because of their refusal to recognise the city gods. In the year 38 C.E. the first step of the antisemites was to proclaim the Jews to be “strangers”. This was the content of the notorious edict of Flaccus, in which he proclaimed the Jews to be “foreigners and aliens” (in Flaccum 54). It may be further concluded from Philo (ib. 172), that Flaccus did not even recognise their rights to live in the city as katoikoi, i.e. as local residents enjoying certain economic privileges, though deprived of citizens’ rights. The result of this edict ought logically to have been the expulsion of the Jews from the city; but this plan was probably not feasible, and it was therefore changed into another,
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*viz.* their isolation in a ghetto. Philo tells us of this measure immediately after mentioning the edict (*ib.* 55); it may therefore be assumed that the establishment of the ghetto followed by way of implementation of the principles proclaimed in it. The Jews had lived mainly in two of the five quarters yet they were also scattered all over the city; all were now compelled to move into a single quarter. The Alexandrians (here we may legitimately speak about the "mob") were on watch to see that no Jew should leave the ghetto. Those who dared to appear in the market-place to buy food were seized and tormented to death. The establishment of the ghetto constituted the most vivid assertion of the thesis that the Jews had no part in Alexandrian citizenship whatsoever. In order to emphasise it even more, Flaccus ordered that the heads of the Jewish community be seized and flogged with scourges—a punishment previously applied to Egyptians only (*ib.* 78). By so doing Flaccus was definitively abolishing the few privileges which had put the Jews on a level with the Alexandrians and distinguished them from the Egyptians.

If the antisemites had contented themselves with these measures they would have perhaps won some sympathy on the part of Rome even after Caligula's death. But the programme of the antisemites was much broader, and touched not only upon the civic rights of the Jews but upon their traditional privilege "to live according to their ancestral laws". They started polluting the synagogues by erecting statues of the emperor there—an action which necessarily brought about their closing. It was only in those troublous days, when an emperor was conceiving the essence of his sovereignty to inhere in the deification of his person, that it was possible to take such measures against the Jews. No other emperor, least of all Claudius, would have given his consent to the abolition of the national-religious basis upon which the existence of the Jewish community relied. The insult to the religious feelings of the Jews opposed the principles of the Roman rule, especially when it was accompanied by a violence, slaughter and torment which no well-organised government could tolerate. The forcible enclosure of the Jews into a ghetto, which had a paralysing effect upon their economic life, was not an inexorable consequence of their being declared "strangers", since every Greek city recognised its *metoikoi* and *katoikoi* who, though of alien origin, were nevertheless permitted to live in the city and to fulfill important economic functions.
It was therefore natural that Claudius in his well-known edict (*Ant.* xix 280 sqq.) should restore the previous status of the Jews and put an end to the abnormal conditions of life in Alexandria that had resulted from the antisemitic edict of Flaccus. We have, however, already seen that even in Claudius' eyes Alexandria was a foreign city for the Jews; the difference between him and Flaccus was not so very great after all. As to the civic right of Alexandrian Jews Claudius, the "philosemite", was of the same opinion as the antisemitic prefect. From the events of the years 38-41 Alexandrian Jewry emerged victorious in the sphere of national-religious autonomy, but as regards civic rights the year 41 marked a definite defeat in the struggle for emancipation.

Thus the prolonged struggle of the Alexandrian Jews to equal the Greeks in their rights ended in definite failure. Alexandrian citizens declared that their Jewish neighbours were not desirable in Greek society, and the Roman government condoned or supported their assertion. The Jews were allowed to live in the city, to get on with their business, to engage in commerce, to worship their God, and to preserve their own ancestral traditions; but they were to give up their position in Greek society. After hundreds of years of common life, Jews and Greeks found themselves in two hostile camps poised against each other. This state of affairs did not presage any good for either side, but there was no need for much political sagacity to predict whose share of suffering would be greater.

III.

At the beginning of the period of the Roman Empire a Jewish Diaspora existed in the majority of the lands of the Roman world; in Rome and Italy, in north Africa (Cyrene) and Egypt, in Syria and Asia Minor, in Greece and Macedonia. In addition, a considerable Jewish population lived beyond the borders of the Empire under the Parthians in the East. Philo speaks with satisfaction, almost with pride, about the great number of Jewish "colonies" scattered all over the world, and there is concealed in those lines some allusion to the power of Judaism 15. Yet what was the real value of this power?

The Jewish Diaspora of the Roman Empire, as at all times and in all places, was subject to the influence of the two opposite

15 *In Flaccum* 44 sqq.; *Leg. ad Gaium* 281 sqq.
trends of assimilation and tradition; and here, too, between these two extremes, Judaism had created a number of diverse middle-stages. Egyptian Jewry was the only centre of Dispersion which in those days created a rich literature and offers us the possibility of defining these different trends and of giving them historical evaluation. Already in the third century B.C.E. we know of at least one case of complete alienation from Judaism. The Letter of Aristeas, the central work of Jewish Hellenistic literature in the 2nd century B.C.E., may serve as an example of moderate assimilation. The author of the "Letter" seeks ways of compromise and synthesis between Judaism and Hellenism; he preaches to his Jewish readers on the propriety of acquiring knowledge of Greek philosophy and the showing of consideration and respect towards the Greeks, and at the same time he waxes exuberant in extolling the Law of Moses and emphasizes the vital necessity of observing the practical precepts of the Torah. From the middle of the 2nd century onwards, with the establishment of the Hasmonean Kingdom, the influence of Israel upon the Egyptian Diaspora grew stronger. The national holidays of Purim and Hanukkah found their way into Egypt and books with nationalistic tendencies ( Esther, Daniel, Ben Sira etc.) were translated into Greek. In the meantime, the position of the Jews in Egypt proper became more complicated. The great increase of the Jewish population, the power of Jewish officers and their influence upon the kings, the negative attitude of the Jewish masses towards the cults of the Gentiles—all this aroused hostile feelings. The Egyptian priests, the Greek polis in Alexandria, the courtiers and perhaps the kings themselves—all had their own reasons to oppose the rise of Jewish power. We do not as yet hear of actual persecutions, but already here and there conflicts broke out, foreboding evil. Rich Alexandrian Jews, striving to strengthen their position within the Greek society and endeavouring, therefore, to come closer to Greek culture, felt the foundations tottering under their feet.

16 I have in view Dositheos son of Drimylos, a contemporary of King Ptolemy IV Philopator (221-205) mentioned in III Maccabees (i, 3) as priest of the cult of Alexander the Great and of Ptolemaic Kings (see C. P. Jud., i, No. 127).


18 We know two events of this kind: the first in the year 145, at the beginning of the reign of the King Ptolemy VIII, and the second in the year 88 in the reign of King Ptolemy X Alexander.
the other hand the national religious movement gained strength among the common people; peasants, craftsmen, shepherds, small merchants, none of them sought contact with Hellenism, nor were they interested in Alexandrian citizenship. *III Maccabees*, composed, as I think, at the beginning of the Roman period, speaks with contempt and hatred of the renegades who preferred Alexandrian citizenship to ancestral tradition. The *Wisdom of Solomon*, a book composed about the same period, pours its bitter scorn upon the pagan cults. Thus the Egyptian Jewry enters this new period not as one national unity but divided internally, with different aims and interests working within it, and with no common programme of action or common ideal for which the whole people would be ready to fight.

The noble personality of Philo represents one segment of Egyptian Jewry—the Alexandrian intelligentsia who stood close to the Greeks and to Greek culture. This intelligentsia arose from the upper strata of the Jewish society in Alexandria, from rich and influential folk who were less immune to the influence of alien culture. It is not coincidence that Philo's brother, was a rich banker whose son, Tiberius Julius Alexander, turned renegade and rose to high rank as Roman official. It is natural that a man like Philo—a Jew by origin and religion and Greek by education—was particularly well suited to bridge the gulf between the two worlds both in the sphere of culture and on the political scene. The Philo who wrote the commentary to the Laws of Moses and the Philo who headed the embassy to Caligula to defend the rights of Alexandrian Jews is one and the same figure. Brought up in the spirit of Greek philosophy, Philo was a great admirer of Hellenism. In his eyes, as in those of every Greek, the world was divided into "Hellenes" and "Barbarians", i.e. men of culture and peoples who lacked culture. Philo had perfect mastery of the Greek language and considered it his own or even "our own" language. The elements of Greek philosophy in his doctrine are sufficiently known and we need not rehearse them. It may be said that Philo was the embodiment of the ideal towards which the Jewish Hellenistic literature had been striving from the 2nd century B.C.E.—the creation of a synthesis between Hellenism and Judaism. Here we are interested neither in the theoretical side of the synthesis nor in the methods by means of which it was accomplished, but in its

19 Cf. for instance, his work *de confusione linguarum.*
national and social significance. The question is, whether the period in which Philo lived and worked was still well-timed for such a synthesis. Or was it already too late? Did Philo not feel the deep crisis working within his people as a result of the Roman policy and antisemitic propaganda? No doubt he did, perhaps more so than anyone else; and if, nevertheless, he strove towards a synthesis, it was because his education and his views did not let him believe in the very existence of the crisis. We have seen above that it was not the Greeks, the creators of the world-culture, whom Philo had accused of hatred towards the Jews, but the Alexandrian mob and a small group of antisemites who were in his eyes noisy propaganda-mongers of the lowest order. Philo’s political programme was in harmonious correspondence to these views; persistent struggle against the antisemites, negotiations with the Roman authorities, and explanatory propaganda directed towards the Greek world. There is no hint whatsoever in Philo’s books of giving up the positions which Jews had acquired in Greek society. The struggle for civic rights was a part of his political activity. He formulated his views regarding this question in a way which admits of one interpretation only. He writes in his *Vita Mosis*: “Strangers, in my judgement, must be regarded as suppliants of those who receive them and not only suppliants, but settlers and friends who are anxious to obtain equal rights with the burgesses and are near to being citizens because they differ little from the original inhabitants.” This sentence expresses well the nature of the relations between the Jews and the Greeks in Alexandria. The Greeks constituted the “local population”. The Jews had at first come as “strangers” and were received hospitably as “suppliants” but now they were, according to Greek terminology, permanent inhabitants, *katoikoi*, there being but little difference between them and the Greeks. The Jews were therefore justified in claiming full civic rights, and the Greeks had no reason to oppose their aspirations. This was Philo’s civic programme, and if we compare it with the claims of the antisemites, who affirmed that the Jews were alien to the Greeks and on the level of the Egyptians, or with the edict of Flaccus, who proclaimed Jews to be strangers and foreigners, it will be clear that Philo’s programme hit the mark. Philo could not countenance the degradation of himself and of his people to the rank of the Egyptians who paid poll tax and were subjected to corporal punishment. He considered himself a Greek—
or almost a Greek—and demanded for himself and for his people citizens’ rights in the city which was their native place, and in which they led a dignified and cultured life.

We are much less well informed about the views of the lower strata of the Jewish population in Alexandria and all over Egypt, since no clear evidence about it has been preserved either in the documents or in the literature. Yet we cannot deny a certain “ideology” to these common people, which surely came nearer to the ancestral tradition than did the political views of the Alexandrian intelligentsia. We have seen that already in the previous period the Land of Israel exerted a considerable influence upon the Egyptian Jews, and there is no reason to think that this influence broke off after the destruction of the Hasmonean Kingdom. On the contrary, under Roman rule the connections with the Land of Israel had become more convenient and easy. A number of Alexandrian Jews lived in Jerusalem and enjoyed an independent organization, holding services in their own synagogues 20. What was the influence Palestine exerted upon the Jewry of Dispersion in those days? Already in Herod’s time the revolutionary movement against Rome and the whole of the pagan world was gaining strength, and immediately after the death of the great tyrant the Zealots gave political organisation and an ideological formulation to this movement. From this time on the Land of Israel was to influence the Dispersion by its political and religious institutions, its revolutionary enthusiasm, its extreme devotion to the cause of freedom, and finally, by its tense expectation of the Messiah. This fighting spirit of Israel would in due course put to an end all attempts at close relations between the Jews and the Greeks, every intention of “compromise” or “synthesis”, and change the dream of the Alexandrian intelligentsia of winning the pagan world for the Jewish Torah into a hope of submitting the Gentiles to the people of Israel and its Messiah.

Thus Alexandrian Jewry was divided into two parts: on the one hand, the rich and the intellectuals defending their positions in Greek society and their civic rights by means of negotiation and explanation, and on the other the common people devoted to their ancestral tradition and ready to defend it by force of arms. When the fateful year of 38 C.E. came, bringing with it calamity and suffering, both parts of the population were to undergo the

same trial. It is hard to tell whether the few Jews whose title to citizenship was legally assured succeeded in escaping persecution and in persuading the authorities that the decree which proclaimed the Jews to be "foreigners and strangers" did not apply to them. It may be assumed that the Alexandrian mob, which actually carried the antisemitic decree into effect, will not have distinguished between rich and poor, citizen and non-citizen, and that the whole of the Jewish population was shut up in the ghetto. We do not know what went on in the narrow streets of the Jewish quarter during those two years, or what discussions were held between the different social groups compelled now to live together, poor and destitute, in a close and crowded neighborhood, with the threat of a new pogrom hanging over their heads. We know merely the results of their sojourn in the ghetto: the sending of an embassy headed by Philo to Rome and the assault upon the Greeks made immediately after the death of Caligula. It is easy to recognise in these two actions two several approaches to the solution of the Jewish question in Alexandria. The moderates, i.e. the upper strata of the community, attempted, according to their lights, the way of negotiation and explanation, while the common people were dreaming of vengeance and did not draw the line even at the shedding of blood. It could not have been at all easy to make ready for such an assault, since Flaccus had confiscated all arms in Jewish hands. The problem was to get arms and more forces for the coming war. To this end, probably, messengers were sent all over Egypt and to Judaea, since we know that at the crucial moment Jews flocked from those places to help their brethren in Alexandria. Thus each part of the Jewish population in Alexandria followed its own judgement. Philo's embassy to Caligula failed altogether; and it is to say the least possible that if the news of his failure had reached Alexandria before the news of the Emperor's death, this would surely have but poured oil on the flames. After Caligula's assassination the extremists, aided by Egyptian and Palestinian Jews, made an assault upon the Greeks, although in the light of the political situation (the accession of a new emperor to the throne) this headstrong act could have but

21 Josephus speaks about this assault in Ant. xix, 278.
22 Claudius in his letter to the Alexandrians (line 96) forbade the Alexandrian Jews to permit Jews from Syria and Egypt to enter the city. Hence it may be concluded that the Greeks complained before the emperor that the Alexandrian Jews had received help from these countries.
aggravated the situation and endangered the political activity of Philo and Agrippa in Rome.

And indeed, the new emperor, Claudius, was greatly incensed. Although, in order to avoid further outbreaks, he closed his eyes to the culpability of the Alexandrian Jews in the recent bloody riots, he did not conceal from them that he was quite aware of the facts and that he would not, for the future, tolerate the revolutionary spirit which had already provoked dangerous repercussions not only in Alexandria but in other places of the Diaspora as well. At the end of his famous letter to the Alexandrians, Claudius speaks of the Jews as "fomenting something like a plague for the whole world", i.e. as people who might at any time endanger the security of the Roman Empire. In saying this he made it plain that the Roman government would be on its guard against any revolutionary tendencies which were working amongst the Jews of the Empire.

The situation was clear enough for anyone who was able to consider it coolly and objectively. Rome was on its guard, while in the Jewish camp there reigned confusion and consternation. Philo was mistaken if he thought that the Jewry of the Empire constituted a real force. It could boast but a potential strength, that could have accomplished great deeds had it been organised: but such organisation was in point of fact not feasible. A deep gulf which divided the nation in the Land of Israel was felt also in Egypt, and no doubt in other lands of the Dispersion as well. The rich and the privileged (the great priestly families, the Sadduceans and the heads of the Pharisees in the Land of Israel, the chiefs and the administrators of the communities in the Diaspora) were anxious for their position and their wealth. They did not believe in the success of rebellion and sought to remain on good terms with Rome. The poor and uneducated masses were easily influenced by the Zealots and put their hope in God and the Messiah. Agreement between the two camps was possible for a short time, but a real unity, aiming at organised and prolonged activity on the basis of a definite programme, was not. When rebellion broke out in Jerusalem in the year 66 and the rich and the intellectuals, having no other choice, were forced to support the rebels, this unity did not last long: and the political movement which had at first been directed against Rome turned also against the rich of the Jewish nation itself, and thus changed into a social revolution.

26
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The Egyptian Diaspora, connected by a thousand ties with the Land of Israel, promptly reacted to the events of the year 66. Disturbances broke out in Alexandria and even from Josephus' cautious book it is quite clear that the Jews were responsible for the riots no less than the Greeks. (Bell. ii, 490 sqq.) The renegade Jew Tiberius Julius Alexander, then Roman prefect of Egypt, ruthlessly quelled the rebellion and, according to Josephus, 50,000 Jews fell in the battle. The Jews desperately defended their quarters and the picture of the battle, as given by Josephus, shows that the fanatically courageous spirit of the Alexandrian Jews was not inferior to that of the defenders of Jerusalem. Yet the Alexandrian rebellion, if its aim was to support the Palestinian Zealots, broke out prematurely and was quite easily quelled. During the whole time of the war in Palestine Egypt kept quiet, and it was only after the destruction of the Temple that there was some feeble response to the events. The remnants of the sicarii (Jewish guerillas) having escaped from Palestine, took refuge in Alexandria and there commenced their revolutionary propaganda (Bell vii, 409 sqq.). According to Josephus the Jews, instigated by the chiefs of the community, themselves executed the revolutionary leaders as a result of the assassination of a number of community elders. The remnants of the sicarii, who succeeded in escaping to different parts of Egypt, were soon captured by the Romans. Thus there came to light in the Alexandrian community the same deep social chasm which had already existed within Palestinian Jewry and which was one of the main reasons for the defeat of the Jews in their war against Rome.

The destruction of the Temple, and the consequent abolition of the political centre of Judaism in the Land of Israel, changed the position of the Jews in the whole Roman Empire. Until then, or at least until Claudius' time, they had not been considered as revolutionaries; now they earned the reputation of rebels—a dangerous and stubborn nation against which every means of restrictive precaution was justified. Rome nevertheless did not intend to exterminate the Jewish nation or to forbid its religious cult—the ancient tradition of religious freedom, prevalent in the Greco-Roman world, was opposed to compulsory measures. But there were still other ways of breaking and oppressing the Jewish nation, such as financial pressure and moral humiliation. In order to gain these two ends Vespasian promulgated his edict, imposing
upon the Jews of the Empire the payment of a special tax, the *fiscus Judaicus*, to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. This tax, which replaced the payment of half a shekel to the Temple of Jerusalem, introduced a discrimination between the Jews and all other inhabitants of the Empire; it was a kind of punishment imposed upon the conquered, and a mocking reproof of those who dared put their own God above the deity of the nation which ruled the world. As for the Egyptian Jews, because of this tax they sank not only to the level of the Egyptians who paid poll tax but even below it, and became, no doubt, the object of derision and mockery for both Greeks and Egyptians.

Some picture of the conditions of life of Egyptian Jews from Vespasian until the great revolt under Trajan is given in the *ostraka* from Edfu (Apollinopolis Magna), on the southern border of Egypt 23. The Jewish congregation settled in one particular quarter of this provincial town seems to have occupied the whole of that quarter, since among the 235 ostraka found there, there was none that did not deal with Jews. Did the Jews of Edfu live in other quarters of the city also as was the case in Alexandria? We have no information about this; yet it is easy to imagine that the events of the year 70 and the crushing of the revolt caused the Jews to draw nearer to each other. The *ostraka* do not provide us with detailed evidence about the means of livelihood and trade of the Edfu Jews; one thing only engages our attention—viz. the very small number of people engaged in agriculture. It may be assumed that in other places, too, Jews abandoned farming, since there are only a few papyri which mention Jewish farmers at this period. The explanation should be sought in factors of a general character—life in villages became harder from day to day, and even the Egyptian peasants, deeply rooted in the soil, started to abandon their rural properties and flocked to the cities. The heavy burden of taxes caused the ruin of Jewish farming, and lowered the standard of life of the poor who earned their living by manual labour. This burden, already hard enough to bear in the Ptolemaic period, had increased at the beginning of the Roman period because of the poll tax. Now it grew still heavier because of the Jewish tax, for payment of which not only men, but women,

23 Jewish *ostraka* from the Jewish quarter in Edfu were excavated by French and Polish archeologists in the year 1937-8. See *Fouilles Franco-Polonaises, Tel Edfu* (C.P. Jud., ii, section IX).
children and slaves were liable. We have no evidence about conditions of life in Alexandria at this period but it may be assumed that there, too, the masses were short of money and only a small number of financiers and wholesale merchants escaped the economic crisis which affected their brethren.

The impoverishment of Egyptian Jewry will have increased even more the inner unrest which had taken hold of them, as it did of all Jews in the Roman Empire, since the destruction of the Temple. They referred their aspirations to God and looked forward to the coming of the "Messiah". The Zealot slogan, "God alone is our Lord", became now a source of hope and consolation; but it could at any time turn once more into a martial rallying-cry. The number of Jews ready to rise to arms against the Romans and the Greeks was by now incomparably greater than it had been in Claudius' days. The rich, the privileged and the assimilants in Alexandria had taken a hard knock in regard to their plans and aspirations under Caligula and Claudius, and the war-time events had even further shattered the ideological basis upon which they stood. It is also quite possible that their number and wealth had diminished because of political revolution and the hatred of the Greeks. It was no longer the desire to equal the Greeks and to come closer to them, but strong national feelings, imbued with a religious fanaticism, that filled the hearts of the Egyptian Jews. The messianic idea had become the central point of the national movement. When, therefore, a man appeared in Cyrene who was believed to be the Messiah, the Egyptian Jews at once followed him. Thus started the Jewish revolt of the years 115-117—those fateful three years which decided the destiny of Egyptian Jewry.

The Church Father Eusebius, in his story of the Jews' revolt in those years, depicts the Jews "as if shaken by a strong and rebellious spirit." The Greek historian Dio Cassius tells of the fierce and cruel behaviour of the Jews towards the prisoners who had fallen into their hands. One papyrus had preserved a letter of a Greek mother in which she expressed her concern as to the fate of her son should he fall into the hands of the Jews and be roasted alive. The Temple of Apollo in Cyrene and that of Nemesis near Alexandria were destroyed and burnt down by the Jews 24. Lands and settlements were devastated. It was as if a sudden madness

24 On the sources about the Jewish revolt in the reign of Trajan see my The Jews in Egypt (note 6), Chap. 6 (cf. C.P. Jud. ii, section XI).
had taken hold of the Jews of Cyrene and Egypt, and it can have but one explanation—religious fanaticism based on messianic exaltation. Hence the obstinacy of the revolt and its ferocity, hence the acts of violence against the Gentiles and their deities, and hence, also, the high price the Jews were destined to pay when the rebellion was crushed and drowned in blood.

The Jews in Alexandria suffered less from the consequences of the revolt. The papyri provide us with clear evidence that the revolt in the capital did not last long. The reasons for this lay perhaps not only in the power of the Roman legions but in the weakness of the Jews as well. A short time before the revolt started a delegation of Alexandrian Jews presented itself before Trajan and again, immediately after the end of the disturbances, another embassy was sent to Hadrian. This fact proves that negotiators and diplomats, naturally chosen from among the rich and the heads of the community, were still active in Alexandria. Thus the Alexandrian Jews were neither united nor unanimous in mind, and perhaps precisely this was the weak point and the reason why the rebels could not for long hold their ground in Alexandria. It is remarkable that not only the capital but the whole of Egypt, from Memphis to Edfu, had been the arena of bloody events—a distinct proof that the significance of the Alexandrian community had deteriorated and that the Jewish masses in the villages and provincial towns now represented Egyptian Jewry, its aspirations and hopes.

It was, indeed, these masses who paid the full price for their deeds. The revengefulness of the Gentiles was as fierce as the spirit of destruction of the Jews. Roman soldiers, the hellenised inhabitants of the metropoleis, district officials, the Egyptian population of the villages—all of them took an active part in the war. They mourned over defeats and established the days of victory as holidays for generations to come. The Jews, even in official documents, are named "impious" (ἀμπισίοι), following their destruction of pagan deities and temples. Their estates were confiscated and handed over to the local population. The communities were destroyed or totally exterminated. The ostraka from Edfu, attesting to a local Jewish population from Vespasian's time until the end of Trajan's reign, break off with the end of the revolt—a clear indication of the complete extermination of the Jewish population in this place. It is only some fifty years later that
we find a Jewish family in Edfu again, though it is hard to call it "Jewish" since all its sons bear Egyptian names. The papyri, which until Trajan attest many places with Jewish population scattered all over the country, become silent all of a sudden, and this in particular shows the dimensions of the catastrophe which had befallen the Jews. Perhaps it would not be an exaggeration to call it a complete physical extermination of the Jews in the majority of villages and provincial towns in Egypt.

The remnants of the Jewish population lacked the strength to play any role in the political and economic life. We hear no more about rebellions in Egypt, and even in Bar Kochba's days there was neither hope nor energy left in the hearts of the Jews. It is possible that here and there some traces of Jewish communities were preserved but they did not play any role in the life of the country. The Alexandrian community lost its importance and its splendour, its magnificent synagogue was destroyed and, in all probability, the High Court and the Elders' Council were closed as well. There was no more any seeking of close contact with the Gentiles. Only two roads were left open to the Jews: complete assimilation or return to the ancestral tradition. Many were those who took the first road. The Jewish family in Edfu, mentioned above, is more Egyptian than Jewish, and this was the fate of the majority of the Jews in villages and small provincial towns. Those who remained faithful to Judaism returned to the full ancestral tradition. Jewish Hellenistic literature ends with Philo and its slight echo becomes completely silenced in the 2nd century. The increase of national feelings found its expression in the change of Greek names into Hebrew ones, in the resurrection of the Hebrew tongue, in closer contact with Palestinian rabbis, etc. Egyptian Jewry takes off its Hellenistic mantle and puts on a new face—one which presages the Judaism of the Middle Ages. The particular type of the Alexandrian intellectual Jew—"a citizen of two worlds"—who seeks a synthesis between the Torah of Moses and the wisdom of Plato and, all unknowing, is laying the foundations for their fusion in the future and within the framework of a new religion, does not exist any more. Another type—the fanatic, who pours out his wrath upon the pagan deities in writings, destined to serve as propaganda pamphlets for the Gentiles, or in obstinate street battles—this type too, disappears altogether. Egyptian Jewry loses its originality; its creative faculty becomes exhausted, its
political and economic power is broken, and from now on it appears but as a faithful pupil of Palestinian Jewry.

Generations pass—and in the Byzantine age we hear once again of Jewish communities, Jewish peasants and merchants, and of the Hebrew language which is about to replace Greek in the synagogues. The Christian Church, however, with a heavy hand hinders the process of free development, and at times even stops it altogether. It is only under Arab rule that Egyptian Jewry arrives at a new period of flowering. Yet there is nothing in common between this new Jewry and that of Philo. The historic way of the Hellenistic-Roman Jewry met its end on the battlefields, soaked with blood and in the burnt-down synagogues of the years 115-117. One cannot but feel the bitter irony—perhaps, indeed, the hidden logic—of the historical fate which led the Egyptian Jewry—the Jewry which had sought ways of synthesis between Judaism and Greek philosophy and had held out its hand to make peace with the pagan world—to perish fanatically, waging a messianic war against the Gentiles and their gods.

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* The author died in 1958 and this posthumous article was prepared for publication by Professor A. Fuks of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.