

# Jew or Judaeans?

MICHAEL L. SATLOW

*Brown University*

What's in a name? The question of how best to translate the ancient Greek term *Ἰουδαῖος* and its cognates is hardly new, although it has recently sustained renewed attention.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars, most notably Steve Mason, insist that, when used prior to the third century c.e. the term always connotes geographic origin or "ethnicity" and thus should best be translated as "Judaeans."<sup>2</sup> Others, though, while not denying that such a

---

Special thanks to my colleagues David Konstan and Ross Kraemer for their help with this paper.

1. While the scholarly discussion has a long history, the roots of the present debate are in a series of studies from the 1980s–1990s. See A. Thomas Kraabel, "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions," *JJS* 33 (1982): 445–64; Peter J. Tomson, "The Names Israel and Jews in Ancient Judaism and in the New Testament," *Tijdschrift voor filosofie en theologie* 47 (1986): 120–40, 266–89; Ross S. Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew' in Greco-Roman Inscriptions," *HTR* 82 (1989): 35–53; Margaret H. Williams, "The Meaning and Function of *Ἰουδαῖος* in Graeco-Roman Inscriptions," *ZPE* 116 (1997): 249–62; Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

2. Steve Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512. Many scholars have adopted this terminology. See, e.g., J. H. Elliott, "Jesus the Israelite was Neither a 'Jew' nor a 'Christian': On Correcting Misleading Nomenclature," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 5 (2007): 119–54; Philip F. Esler, "Judean Ethnic Identity in Josephus' *Against Apion*," in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Seán Freyne* (ed. Zuleika Rodgers with Margaret Daly-Denton and Anne Fitzpatrick McKinley; *JSJSup* 132; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 73–91; idem, "From Ioudaioi to Children of God: The Development of a Non-Ethnic Group Identity in the Gospel of John," in *In Other Words: Essays on Social Science Methods and the New Testament in Honor of Jerome H. Neyrey* (ed. Anselm C. Hagedorn, Zeba A. Crook and Eric Stewart; *Social World of Biblical Antiquity* 2/1; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2007), 106–37; idem, "Judean Ethnic Identity and the Purpose of Hebrews," in *Method & Meaning: Essays on New Testament Interpretation in Honor of Harold W. Attridge* (ed. Andrew B. McGowan and Kent Harold Richards; *SBLRBS* 67; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 469–89; Philip A. Harland, *The Dynamics of Identity in the World of*

translation is appropriate at times, point to other instances where the term has a “religious” rather than “ethnic” or “ethnic-geographic” sense, and thus they prefer the translation “Jew.”<sup>3</sup>

There are two issues at the core of this disagreement, one theoretical and one empirical. The theoretical argument is about the applicability of modern categories to antiquity. There is wide agreement that “religion” in the sense that it is most commonly understood today was not a comprehensible category in antiquity; practices that we would call “religious” were not typically disembedded from a wider cultural framework. On the other hand, some maintain, this does not mean that such practices, and in a loose way the identities associated with them, could move between “cultures” or “ethnicities.” The empirical issue is more straightforward. Were there ancient uses of the term *Ἰουδαῖος* that patently cannot be understood as denoting ethnic-geographic origins?

Despite the occasional sharpness of the debates between these positions, they mostly share the understanding that there is a choice to be made: choosing between “Judaean” or “Jew” is a choice about the nuance that the ancient author put on the original Greek, ethnic-geographical or religious. To be a *Ἰουδαῖος* meant to be understood (by self and/or others) as a member of a defined group, as against other groups defined along similar criteria. The question, then, is the nature of those criteria. A significant part of Steve Mason’s somewhat reductionist position, for example, rests on the argument that since “religion” did not exist as a comprehensible criterion of identity in antiquity, *Ἰουδαῖος* must be understood as an ethnic designation.<sup>4</sup>

Yet did “ethnicity” exist in antiquity? A growing body of scholarship suggests that we rethink the very nature of “ethnicity.” Ethnicity, this scholarship argues, is fluid and perspectival rather than composed of fixed group boundaries.<sup>5</sup> It is fluid in the sense that every evocation of the language of ethnicity performs and creates it anew. It is perspectival in the sense that every participant in this performance, as well as its audience,

---

*the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (New York: T&T Clark, 2009); Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 193–200.

3. For reviews of where the argument stands, see especially Cynthia Baker, “A ‘Jew’ by Any Other Name?” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 (2011): 153–80; Seth Schwartz, “How Many Judaisms Were There? A Critique of Neusner and Smith on Definition and Mason and Boyarin on Categorization,” *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 (2011): 208–38.

4. Mason, “Jews,” 510.

5. See Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 22–30; Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17–33; idem, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1–29.

might understand it differently.<sup>6</sup> The implications of this position, which radically change the way we might understand the application of the category “ethnicity” to antiquity, are only just beginning to be felt.

This article is a preliminary attempt to reassess understandings of ethnicity among Greek writers in the second century B.C.E. to the second century C.E., and to suggest how this reassessment might contribute to the discussion of whether to translate *ιουδαῖος* as “Judaeen” or “Jew.” The primary argument of this essay is that “ethnicity,” as a category for understanding ancient Jewish identity is no less problematic than religion. *Ἰουδαῖος* is neither a “religious” nor an “ethnic” term. It is also not usefully understood as a hybrid of the two. It is, rather, largely a flexible, ethnographic trope—a term that, like the modern “Jew” or “Jews,” is inherently ambiguous.

There were a variety of Greek terms in antiquity to indicate what we would term “ethnicity,” but the two most prominent are *ἔθνος* and *γένος*.<sup>7</sup> This study is structured around an analysis of two ancient and influential Greek historian/ethnographers, Polybius and Diodorus Siculus. How did these two authors deploy the language of *ἔθνος* and *γένος*? Were the two terms interchangeable? How do they relate to the way that individuals presented their own identity? Do they represent hardened or porous group boundaries (i.e., could people easily move or “convert” from one group to another)? These writers provide us with a vantage point for understanding the ways in which such categories were used in antiquity.

One of our primary ancient witnesses for the instability of “ethnicity” and its susceptibility to manipulation is Paul.<sup>8</sup> The distinguished scholars in this volume are far more qualified than I to make sense of Paul’s tangled discussion of ethnicity and descent. This Festschrift does, however, provide me with an opportunity to express my gratitude to one of our generation’s primary expositors of Paul, my colleague Stanley Stowers. I write this article as a token of appreciation for all he has taught me.

---

6. See Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judaeen’ or ‘Jew’? How Should We Translate *ιουδαῖος* in Josephus,” in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World/Jüdische Identität in der griechisch-römischen Welt* (ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripentrog; Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 71; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 3–27, esp. 7–10.

7. See P. M. Fraser, *Greek Ethnic Terminology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009), 1–11.

8. For this approach, see in particular Denise K. Buell, *“Why This New Race”: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

## Ἔθνος, Groups, and Territory

Ancient ethnographers most commonly use the language of ἔθνος to refer to a politically organized community residing in a particular territory. In this meaning, whether the members of the ἔθνος are connected by descent (real or fictive) or share a set of ancestral customs is largely immaterial. Herodotus, for example, uses the term to denote “a geographical, political or cultural entity, often in relation to the time of the narrative context.”<sup>9</sup> As C. P. Jones notes, Herodotus’s choice of representing a group as an ἔθνος is “determined not only by the object referred to or ‘referent’ (‘extension’) but by the way he wishes to present them (‘intension’).”<sup>10</sup> That is, the narrative context determines how a group is designated.

The major historians/ethnographers of the Hellenistic period, Polybius (second half of the second century B.C.E.) and Diodorus of Siculus (about a century later), continue this use of the term ἔθνος. In scores of passages, Polybius identifies a territory according to those who inhabit it, for example, the Nucarians (*Hist.* 3.91.5). Polybius identifies no fewer than eighteen ἔθνη, and there is no indication that he uses any criteria for the use of the term other than territory.<sup>11</sup> Individuals, however, are never identified as being members of an ἔθνος; as discussed below, they are identified by γένος.

The same literary pattern can be found in the writings of Diodorus Siculus, whose massive ethnography, *Bibliotheca historica*, written in the mid-first century B.C.E., circulated widely. Diodorus repeatedly uses the term ἔθνος to refer to groups that reside in their own territory.<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, he continues this usage in his mention of the *ἰουδαῖοι* as an ἔθνος, having originated in Egypt (1.28.2; 1.55.5; 1.94.2; 24/25.1.2). Also like Polybius, Diodorus tends to use the term γένος when he mentions individuals, with only a few of those mentioned matching with a group that he calls an ἔθνος.

The *ἰουδαῖοι*, then, are an ἔθνος in this very specific sense of being a politically organized group that occupies the territory known as *Ioudaia*. As Clearchus of Soli (ca. 300 B.C.E.) states, they are called *ἰουδαῖοι*, “for they inhabit the place called *Ioudaia*.”<sup>13</sup>

Prior to the second century C.E., papyri and inscriptions rarely refer to

9. C. P. Jones, “ἔθνος and γένος in Herodotus,” *CQ* n.s. 46 (1996): 315–20, here 317.

10. *Ibid.*, 315.

11. E.g., Aetolians (20.5.3); Numideans (1.31.2).

12. Diodorus labels as ἔθνη, among others, Kolchi and Judeans (1.28.2; 1.55.1) and Ethiopians (1.44.3; 1.55.1; 3.3.1; 3.18.4).

13. Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 1.179 (translation from Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* [2 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, 1976], no. 7).

individuals as *ιουδαῖοι*, and when they do, it seems almost always to be in this sense as one from the territory of *Ioudaia*.<sup>14</sup>

The most significant trove of documentary and epigraphic evidence on the use of *ιουδαῖος* (and cognates) prior to the second century C.E. can be found in Egypt, where the term appears to designate land of origin.<sup>15</sup> Egyptian papyri before the second century B.C.E. also use *ιουδαῖος* to identify individuals who appear to have migrated from Judaea.<sup>16</sup>

In this sense, then, *ἔθνος* is an unstable term. From the perspective of these writers, it did not matter whether one was born to parents who were born in the territory, or even necessarily whether one oneself was born there. All that mattered was that one lived in the territory at that moment, presumably in a way that could be seen reasonably as part of the polity.

### Ἔθνος and “Ancestral Customs”

Ethnicity today, according to many modern theorists, is not a static entity: it is socially constructed through public performance.<sup>17</sup> This is not significantly different from how “ethnicity” was constructed and utilized in antiquity as well. While ancient authors used the term *ἔθνος* to denote a specific territory, they also used it with a different meaning to indicate a group with a set of distinctive norms (*νόμοι*) or customs (*ἔθη* or *πάτρια*). In this sense, too, *ἔθνος* becomes a highly flexible term.

The notion that “culture,” broadly understood, can be a primary factor in determining ethnicity goes back to Herodotus and Thucydides. According to Jonathan Hall, Herodotus defines “Greekness” (“Hellenicity” in Hall’s term) in a way that “promotes cultural criteria (including language and religion) to the same level as kinship.”<sup>18</sup> Herodotus thus lays the ground for defining an “ethnic” identity that is divorced from both land and descent. A further movement in this respect can be seen in Thucydides, in whose account the Athenian general Nikias addresses his men: “Though you are not really Athenian, you are deemed as such [*νομιζόμενοι*] because of your understanding of our dialect and your imitation of our way of life [*τρόποι*]” (7.63.3).<sup>19</sup> “Hellenes,” according to Isocrates in 430

14. *P.Yadin* 10; 12. See Naphtali Lewis et al., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and the Hebrew University, 1989).

15. William Horbury and David Noy, *Jewish Inscriptions of Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), nos. 121, 122.

16. See Gideon Bohak, “Ethnic Continuity in the Jewish Diaspora in Antiquity,” in *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities* (ed. John R. Bartlett; London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 175–92, here 187 and 192.

17. See n. 5 above.

18. Hall, *Hellenicity*, 193.

19. Translation from Hall, *Hellenicity*, 205.

B.C.E., “are those who share our culture [παίδευσίς] rather than a common biological inheritance [φύσις]” (*Panegyrikos* 4.50).<sup>20</sup>

The Greek “leagues” or political alliances illustrate this use of the term ἔθνος. The Greek word here that is frequently translated as “league” is ἔθνος. According to Polybius, for example, the Achaean ἔθνος, located in the Peloponnesians, was a confederation of peoples who share “laws, weights, measures, and coinage, as well as the same magistrates, senate, and courts of justice” and a central temple of Zeus (*Hist.* 2.37.10).<sup>21</sup> Polybius describes this “Achaean ἔθνος” as being made from other ἔθνη, and wonders why greater ἔθνη, such as the Arcadians and Laconians, sacrificed their own political institutions and name for the lesser Achaeans (2.38.3–4). He goes on to say that “while some of the Peloponnesians chose to join it of their own free will, it won many others by persuasion and argument, and for those whom it forced to adhere to it when the occasion presented itself suddenly underwent a change became quite reconciled to their position” (2.38.7).

Shaye J. D. Cohen has pointed to the relevance of this passage for interpreting the ἔθνος of the *Ἰουδαῖοι*. According to Josephus, John Hyrcanus subdued the Idumaeans and allowed them to continue living in their land if they were circumcised and agreed to live according to the ways of the Jews (τοῖς Ἰουδαίων νόμοις) (*Antiquities* 13.257). Despite the pains that Josephus takes in this passage to assimilate Idumaeans to *Ἰουδαῖοι*, one can sense his own confusion in his avoidance of either the term ἔθνος or the term γένος. Following a suggestion of Morton Smith, Cohen has proposed that the confederation of lands conquered by the Hasmoneans be thought of as a “Judean League,” or ἔθνος, analogous to the Achaean ἔθνος discussed by Polybius.<sup>22</sup> In this context I am less interested in whether the Hasmonean confederation had a “Greek character” than in how it was seen as described by these later authors. “Ἐθνος” was kind of the right word to describe it, a loose confederation of ἔθνη who can in some contexts use the same name.

An otherwise unknown author named Ptolemy confirms this usage:

*Ἰουδαῖοι* are those who are so by origin and nature (ἀρχῆς φυσικοί). The Idumaeans, on the other hand, were not originally *Ἰουδαῖοι*, but Phoenicians and Syrians; having been subjugated by the *Ἰουδαῖοι*, and having been forced to undergo circumcision, so as to be counted among the Jewish nation (ἔθνος) and keep the same customs, they were called *Ἰουδαῖοι*.<sup>23</sup>

20. Translation from Hall, *Hellenicity*, 209.

21. Translations of Polybius are by W. R. Paton, LCL.

22. Morton Smith, “The Gentiles,” in idem, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen; 2 vols.; Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 130; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1:263–319, esp. 280–81; Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 127–29.

23. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:356.

Are Idumaeans part of the ἔθνος of the *ιουδαῖοι*? Ptolemy is not entirely sure. It is clear that they are not of the γένος (indicated here by the term *φυσικοί*). Like Josephus, he observes that Idumaeans are (sometimes) called *ιουδαῖοι*. This, along with conformance to the practices of the *ιουδαῖοι*, seems to make them part of the same ἔθνος.

In his discussion of the royal house of Adiabene, Josephus also understands the community of *ιουδαῖοι* in cultural terms. According to Josephus's account, both the queen of Adiabene, Helena, and her son, the king Izates, *εἰς τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνη τὸν βίον μετέβαλον*. L. H. Feldman (LCL) translates this as "became converts to Judaism" (*Antiquities* 20.17). While this translation is not entirely unjustified, the difficulty of rendering this clause into English illustrates the very problem of balancing our categories of "religion" and "ethnicity." The verb *μετέβαλον* is not commonly used in this fashion in ancient Greek writings, and where it does appear it addresses the taking on of inappropriate gender roles.<sup>24</sup> Elsewhere in his account, Josephus refers to the "ancestral custom" (*πάτριον*) of the *ιουδαῖοι*, as well as their *νόμοι*, laws or customs (20.34-35). Later, when Izates' brother Monobazus and his family seek to follow Izates' example, he is described as "leaving [his] ancestral customs to adopt the ἔθει of the *ιουδαῖοι*" (20.75). The customs themselves are not detailed, except for circumcision: Izates thinks that he needs to be circumcised in order "to be surely a *ιουδαῖος*" (*εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος*) (20.38).

Josephus's different ways of describing what it means to "become" a *ιουδαῖος* are difficult to parse. It is probably safe to say that Josephus does not mean to say that Izates became a *ιουδαῖος* by γένος. Did he (and his mother and brother), though, join the ἔθνος of the *ιουδαῖοι*? Unlike the situation with the Idumaeans, for whom Josephus does use ἔθνος language, Izates and his relatives are individuals rather than a community. To "be" a *ιουδαῖος* in this case (as for Nikias, in Thucydides' account, "being" an Athenian) means to adopt "traditional practices" (which are undoubtedly themselves not particularly stable), not necessarily to "join the ἔθνος" of the *ιουδαῖοι*. Philo also subscribes to a notion that *ιουδαῖος* is connected to behaviors rather than to land or birth (*De virtutibus* 198).

*Ἰουδαῖος*, then, can be used to describe both a local identity and a super-identity. That is, the very same writers can deploy the term to indicate an ἔθνος as traditionally understood—the polity occupying a territory—or a group of people, living hither and yon, who share a set of common practices.

There is nothing particularly unique about this dual usage. By the first century B.C.E. the terms "Greek" and "Roman" could be used in this way.<sup>25</sup> It is in this sense that ἔθνος becomes a fluid heuristic, both to the writers

24. Dio Chrysostom, *Oration* 4.105; *Suda*, s.v. *Sesostris*.

25. For a discussion of the notion of cosmopolitanism in Philo and other ancient sources,

who deploy it and, to the extent that it reflected more common understandings, to those who lived it.

## Ἔθνος and Γένος

The word ἔθνος is almost uniformly applied to collectives rather than individuals. Ancient authors almost always identified individuals by their γένος, birth, whether by lineage or location. One's γένος was understood to be largely immutable, a fact of life that does not allow for change.<sup>26</sup> Both Polybius and Diodorus use the term in this way. In only a few cases do these authors mention a single group as both an ἔθνος and a γένος.<sup>27</sup>

Ancient writers also sometimes used γένος to refer to something like a distinct "class" of people. Writing about Alexandria, for example, Polybius says, "it is inhabited by three γένη of people, first the native Egyptians, an acute and civilized race; secondly by the mercenaries, a numerous, rough, and uncultivated set . . . thirdly there is the γένος of the Alexandrians, a people not genuinely civilized" (*Hist* 34.14.4).<sup>28</sup> Diodorus notes that there is a special γένος of people, Satyrs, who live in Ethiopia (1.18.4); the Colchi are of Egyptian γένος because that is where they originated, and so on.<sup>29</sup>

When living outside of Judaea, Ἰουδαῖοι too could be classified as a γένος in this way. Strabo of Amaseia, writing in the late first century B.C.E.—early first century C.E., provides a good example of how these usages could be combined and deployed:

There were four [classes] in the state of Cyrene; the first consisted of citizens, the second of farmers, the third of resident aliens (metics), and the fourth of Jews. This people has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation [φῦλον] and in which it has not made its power felt. And it has come about that Cyrene, which had the same rulers as Egypt, has imitated it in many respects, particularly in notably encouraging and aiding the expansion of the organized groups of Jews, which observe the national Jewish laws [τοῖς πατρίοις τῶν Ἰουδαίων νόμοις]. In Egypt, for exam-

see David Konstan, "Cosmopolitan Traditions," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought* (ed. Ryan K. Balot; Chichester/Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 473–84.

26. An exception is the first line of Euripides' play *Phrixus*, but this is almost certainly meant to shock. See Augustus Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: Teubner, 1889), Euripides, frag. 819 (p. 627).

27. E.g., the Veneti, in Polybius, *Hist.* 2.17.5–6.

28. Polybius *apud* Strabo 17.1.12. Translation modified from Paton, *LCL*. Polybius also uses γένος to refer to a "kind" of person, as, for example, the miscreants who flocked to Nabis in Sparta (*Hist.* 13.6.4).

29. For Colchi, see Diodorus 1.55.4–5; for Romans, 8.26.1.



ple, territory has been set apart for a Jewish settlement [χωρίς], and in Alexandria a great part of the city has been allocated to this nation [τῶι ἔθνει]. And an ethnarch of their own has been installed, who governs the people [ἔθνος] and adjudicates suites and supervises contracts and ordinances, just as if he were the head of a sovereign state [πολιτείας ἄρχων ἀποτελοῦς].<sup>30</sup>

The word γένος is missing from this passage but implied in the description of Cyrene. There the *ιουδαῖοι* form an organized political group like the citizens, farmers (better, rustics or noncitizens), and metics. This is a group that, like Diodorus's Diaspora Boetians, maintains "ancestral customs" away from its native land while also asserting its common descent, as implied in the term φύλον. Strabo's discussion does seem to mirror the extant evidence for πολιτεύματα of *ιουδαῖοι* in Cyrene.<sup>31</sup>

In describing the *ιουδαῖοι* of Egypt, though, Strabo switches to ἔθνος language. Here Strabo clearly wants to emphasize that the *ιουδαῖοι* formed a "state within a state" rather than a loose political organization based on descent. Whether the *ιουδαῖοι* of Egypt actually functioned in this manner is less important in this context than the fact that that is how Strabo wished to portray them.<sup>32</sup> They even have their own designated territory. For Strabo, the *ιουδαῖοι* of Cyrene and Egypt clearly overlap but also subtly differ.

It was through γένος rather than ἔθνος (at least on the local level) that individual *ιουδαῖοι* seemed to identify. Josephus and Paul are here instructive. Both use the term *ιουδαῖος* and its cognates scores of times. Yet when they represent themselves, they use other terms.

Josephus identifies himself twice. In *War* (1.3), he calls himself "son of Matthias, by γένος a Hebrew, a priest from Jerusalem."<sup>33</sup> Josephus passes over his credentials at the beginning of *Antiquities* but dwells on his noble lineage at the beginning of *Life*: here he emphasizes his γένος as a priest but says nothing about being a Hebrew or *ιουδαῖος*. When considering the ἔθνος of the *ιουδαῖοι* as a group, Josephus would, of course, consider himself a member. When discussing himself as an individual, however, his language changes.<sup>34</sup>

30. Quoted by Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.115–17 (trans. Marcus, *LCL*; bracketed material added).

31. See the discussion and sources in Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors*, 1:279.

32. Note that Josephus (*Antiquities* 13.63) more predictably presents them as a γένος. On Egyptian Jewry and Jewish law, see Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (trans. Robert Cornman; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), esp. 99–119.

33. Note that the term "by *genos* a Hebrew" is absent in some witnesses.

34. See Shaye J. D. Cohen, "ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΣ ΤΟ ΓΕΝΟΣ and Related Expressions in Jose-

Given the central importance of the ἔθνος of the ἰουδαῖοι in the letters of Paul, it is surprising that he never explicitly labels himself a ἰουδαῖος.<sup>35</sup> “I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe [φυλῆς] of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1 NRSV), he declares in the middle of a long and convoluted discussion of the place of the ἰουδαῖοι in the new divine economy.<sup>36</sup> “A member of the people [γένους] of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews,” he declares himself elsewhere (Phil 3:5 NRSV; cf. 2 Cor 11:22). When it comes to self-description, Paul avoids the language of ἔθνος and ἰουδαῖος that pervades his letters.

The closest that Paul comes to calling himself a ἰουδαῖος is in Galatians. After calling Peter (Cephas) a ἰουδαῖος, Paul states, “we are by nature [φύσει] ἰουδαῖοι, not sinners from the ἐθνῶν” (Gal. 2:15). Paul applies the appellation ἰουδαῖος to Peter not simply because he was in fact born in Judaea but also because he has a literary need to do so. He uses the first person plural in order to draw a communal contrast between two communities, the ἰουδαῖοι and everybody else. His point is not to signify individual ethnic identity as much as it is to create for the sake of argument two ethnic communities that he goes on to reconcile (Gal 2:16-21). The language of “nature,” φύσει, echoes Ptolemy’s usage, cited above, as signifying birth.

## Jew or Judaeen?

What’s in a name? Somewhat less than meets the eye.

There are two primary issues at stake in deciding whether to translate ἰουδαῖος as “Jew” or “Judaeen.” The first is that of deciphering the message—ethnic or religious—that ancient users of the term were trying to convey. The second, somewhat related issue is that of uniqueness. Were the ἰουδαῖοι like every other ἔθνος? The answers to these questions have been thought to have especially sticky ramifications for study of the New Testament and Christian origins.<sup>37</sup>

I have argued here that this issue should be reframed. Most Greek and Roman ethnographers who mention ἰουδαῖοι treat them like Istrians or Siceli, a population with its own political structure located within a particular territory; this comes the closest to what we would translate as “Judaeen.” For ancient ethnographers who focused more attention on the ἰουδαῖοι, though, “ethnicity” was hardly a stable category. The writers

---

phus,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith* (ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers; Studia Post-Biblica 41; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 23–38.

35. See Buell, “Why This New Race”; Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*.

36. See Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 50.

37. See Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, “The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul,” *JBL* 123 (2004): 235–51.

themselves recognized the inherent, emic looseness of the category of ἔθνος and manipulated it for their own ends; this is how the Idumaeans can both be and not be part of the ἔθνος of the ἰουδαῖοι, depending on the writer's perspective. This is also a construction of ἔθνος that privileges ancestral customs and thus can sever ἔθνος from γένος. This, however, is a construction of "outsiders," even when they, like Josephus and Paul, might be considered ἰουδαῖοι. When referring to themselves, ἰουδαῖοι chose the language of γένος. The unqualified substantive noun ἰουδαῖος, without further specification, was inherently vague. It could refer to a worshiper of the God of Israel born in Judaea, a member of a particular organized polity in places such as Egypt and Cyrene, one who adopted practices and customs that were identified with ἰουδαῖοι, or a worshiper of traditional Greek or Roman gods born in Judaea.<sup>38</sup> My own preference, largely following past practice and Ross Kraemer's early suggestion, would be flexibility in translation that attempts to convey the meaning of the term as implied in its context or, when it is meant to be vague, perhaps to leave ἰουδαῖος untranslated.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, though, except in specific cases of substantive disagreement, this becomes a semantic and aesthetic choice, not one of substance.

---

38. This last example is more theoretical than real. I know of no evidence denoting such a person as a ἰουδαῖος.

39. Kraemer, "On the Meaning of the Term 'Jew.'" For concurring opinions, see Schwartz, "'Judaeian' or 'Jew'?"; Fraser, *Greek Ethnic Terminology*, 236. Recently Kraemer has stepped back from this position, preferring the standard translation "Judean" for this time period (*Unreliable Witnesses*, 193–200). Kraemer raises important issues about the relationship of gender to "ethnicity," although they seem to depend on a rather static understanding of "ethnicity."

