

# A clash of symbolic universes: Judeanism vs Hellenism

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## Abstract

*This article investigates how Judeans responded to Hellenism in order to maintain the integrity of their ethnic identity. Judeanism and Hellenism are regarded as alternative “symbolic universes”. It is shown that Judeans used various approaches to maintain their symbolic universe. This included Berger and Luckmann’s notions of theology, nihilation and therapy, but also accommodation, adaptation, appropriation of Hellenistic elements, collective opposition (or ethnicism) and a reinforcement of primordial sentiments.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In 587 BCE many citizens of the kingdom of Judah were exiled to Babylonia. The Persians conquered Babylonia in 539 BCE, and the Judeans<sup>2</sup> were permitted by Cyrus the Great to return to their homeland. At least two waves of Babylonian Judeans returned to Judea in the 530’s and 520’s. Alexander the Great in turn conquered Persia, introducing the Hellenistic Age, “bringing with it completely new customs and a substantially different view of the universe” (Soggin 1993:301). Indeed, Hellenism represented an alternative “symbolic universe”. As Berger & Luckmann (1967:96) explain, a symbolic universe is where all the sectors of the institutional order are integrated in an

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<sup>2</sup> Most authors referred to in this article refer to “Jew(s)” and “Judaism”. These terms are here deliberately replaced by “Judean(s)” and “Judeanism”, terms also preferred by the BDAG (2000). Here I follow the arguments of Pilch (1997) in that it is anachronistic to speak of “Jews” and “Judaism” in the first century CE. The term Judean (Ἰουδαῖος) begins as a way of identifying someone from Judea (Ἰουδαία) (Josephus, Ant 11.173). Esler (2003:63-65) also points out that it was common practice in antiquity to name ethnic groups in relation to the territory from which they came. The attachment between the people and the land is even closer in Judean sources.

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

all-embracing frame of reference. People construct a “world” for themselves, whereby all social institutions are legitimated. Berger (1973:42, 44) explains:

Israel legitimated its institutions in terms of the divinely revealed law throughout its existence as an autonomous society ... Religious legitimation purports to relate the humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal and sacred reality. The inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity are thus given the semblance of ultimate security and permanence.

Alexander the Great set the stage for the clash of symbolic universes – Judeanism vs Hellenism – which perpetuated itself for several centuries. After his unexpected death in 323 BCE, his empire was fought over and divided by his generals, known as the Diadochi (“successors”). After years of wars, in around 301 BCE, Judea became part of the kingdom of Egypt (Ptolemies). In 200 BCE Judea was in turn conquered by the kings of Syria (Seleucids). But after Alexander’s death “all the cultures of the East began to contribute to the new creation we call Hellenism. Hellenistic culture was not merely a debased version of the culture of classical Athens. Its substrate was Greek and its language of expression was Greek, but it absorbed ideas and practices from all the cultures with which it came into contact, thereby assuming many and diverse forms” (Cohen 1987:36). In non-Judean regions of Palestine, the penetration of Hellenistic culture is most evident in religion. Sometimes Hellenistic elements were fused with indigenous cults and at other times Greek cults totally took over. The worship of Apollo was common in cities such as Raphia, Gaza and Ashkelon, probably promoted by Seleucid influence. Apollo was considered as the divine ancestors of the Seleucids as Dionysus was believed to be the divine ancestor of the Ptolemies (Schürer et al 1979:29, 35).

How were the Judeans affected by Hellenism? It is said that Moses

surrounded us with unbroken palisades and iron walls to prevent our mixing with any of the other peoples in any matter, being thus kept pure in body and soul, preserved from false beliefs, and worshipping the only God omnipotent over all creation ... So, to prevent our being perverted by contact with others or mixing with bad influences, he hedged us in on all sides with strict observances connected with meat and drink and touch and hearing and sight, after the manner of the Law.

(LetAris 139-42)

So the symbolic universe of Judeanism is represented here quite idealistically as something quite impervious to foreign influence. According to Cohen (1987:37), however, all forms of Judaism, here rather called Judeanism – of both the Diaspora and in the land of Israel – were Hellenised; there was no “pure” Judeanism. “‘To Hellenize or not to Hellenize’ was not a question the [Judeans] of antiquity had to answer. They were given no choice. The questions that confronted them were ‘how?’ and ‘how far?’ ... How far could [Judeanism] go in absorbing foreign ways and ideas before it was untrue to itself and lost its identity?” (Cohen 1987:45).

The Judean symbolic universe was characterised by Yahweh (monotheism), the notion of election, the covenant, and Torah. So was it characterised by attachment to the land, the Temple, various covenantal praxis (circumcision, food laws and ritual purity, the pilgrimage festivals etc), exclusive kinship patterns, a common ancestry and a shared history. The Hellenistic symbolic universe had some strong cultural features of its own. It had its own host of gods and temples, institutions such as the gymnasium and the theatre, philosophy, a spirit of universalism and/or syncretism, and of course, the Greek language. So contact between Judeanism and Hellenism inevitably lead to the following cultural battles: Yahweh vs Zeus, Apollo, Dionysus; circumcision vs participation in the gymnasium; education in the Torah vs Greek education; territorial independence vs foreign domination; purity vs impurity; ethnic particularism vs cultural universalism and/or syncretism. More can be added. But the point is that contact with Hellenism required that Judeans maintain their “world”, and so maintain the integrity of their ethnic identity. Universe-maintenance can employ mythology, or more developed mythologies develop into more systematic theologies. When Judeanism encountered Hellenism, it already had a developed theology, but the encounter stimulated some developments, such as notions about the afterlife. Universe-maintenance also employs therapy and nihilation. “Therapy” is where methods are employed to ensure that the “inhabitants” of a universe do not “emigrate” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:113). In Judeanism this was true of the sacrificial cult and the practice of ritual immersion, by which any form of deviance (sin or impurity) can be rectified. In this manner Judeans could maintain their position within the Judean symbolic universe. The other means, “nihilation”, is to “liquidate conceptually everything outside the same universe ... nihilation denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretations of phenomena [that] do not fit into that universe” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:114). This can be achieved by giving the phenomena of the alternative world a negative ontological status. They are regarded as inferior and should not be taken seriously. Alternatively, deviant phenomena are grappled with

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

theoretically in terms of concepts belonging to your own universe. Both these examples of nihilation are evident in Judeanism due to its contact with Hellenism and are mutually complementary.

In the pages that follow it will be shown that the maintenance of the Judean symbolic universe involved other approaches as well. This includes accommodation, adaptation, and appropriation of elements of Hellenism. It also involved collective opposition (or ethnicism), and a reinforcement of primordial sentiments, particularly linking themselves to those cultural symbols or features under threat (see below). How Judeanism maintained its symbolic universe and responded to the “world” of Hellenism is therefore the focus of this article. We will begin with the Judean response to attempts of forced Hellenisation during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

## **2. THE MACCABEAN REVOLT**

When Palestine was under the control of the Ptolemies of Egypt, Judean religion and customs was allowed to continue pretty much without interference. During 202-198 BCE, the Seleucid, Antiochus III, took control of Palestine supported by the high priest Simon II, a Zadokite. It is probably this Simon who is eulogised by Ben Sira (50:1-11) and the text also indicates that the high priest enjoyed autonomy and presented the sacrifices to God on behalf of the people, and conferred God’s blessing on the people in return (Sir 50:18-21). Ben Sira 50:24 (Hebrew version) wishes for Simon the son of Onias to be blessed and that his offspring may continue to rule as priests. Ben Sira “regarded [Judean] life as it existed under the reign of Simon as the virtually complete embodiment of the nation’s highest aspirations” (Baumgarten 1997:27). Those who wanted to emphasise the separation between Israel and the nations also achieved much when Antiochus III (ca 200 BCE) issued a decree on request of the priest. The decree, cited by Josephus (Ant 12.145-146), states that foreigners are not allowed to enter the enclosure of the Temple,<sup>3</sup> neither Judeans, except those who purify themselves before hand. These demands are nowhere explicitly mentioned in the Tanak. In Gentile temples, all those who purified themselves were allowed to enter, be they natives or foreigners. In Jerusalem, however, foreigners were permanently banned (Baumgarten 1997:82). The Hellenising priests – descendants of Simon II – believed that regulations individually catering for Judeans and Gentiles were a source of disaster (1 Mac 1:11). “Perhaps these regulations were especially vulnerable to criticism, because crucial aspects of

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<sup>3</sup> In the Tanak a sacrifice may be offered by a Gentile (Lv 22:25; cf 1 Ki 8:41-43).

these rules were not found in the Bible. They could thus easily be represented as innovations, subject to reform” (Baumgarten 1997:83).

A “reform” was attempted which took on various dimensions. Just before 175 BCE there was a split in the Judean aristocracy, that is, between the Zadokite high priest Onias III and his brother Jason. The latter was in favour of Hellenisation, or more specifically, the adoption of Greek education, athletics and dress. The attempt was further made to transform Jerusalem into a Greek polis, or at least, for the citizens to be called “Antiochenes”. Jason, the “ungodly wretch, and no high priest” (2 Mac 4:13) was appointed and had support from Antiochus IV Epiphanes (“God revealed”) who came to power in Syria in 175. 1 Maccabees describes that there were “wicked men” in Israel who wanted to make a covenant with the ἔθνων, and who was granted permission by the king to observe Gentile ordinances (1 Mac 1:11-13). Having obtained permission, they returned to Jerusalem where they built a gymnasium at the foot of the Temple. According to 2 Maccabees 4:9 Jason also asked for a training centre to be built. In this manner a process was initiated whereby the Hellenistic spirit could be instilled in young Judean men. It is claimed that Antiochus further encouraged young Judean men to reject the ancestral law: “Share in the Greek style, change your mode of living, and enjoy your youth” (4 Mac 8:8).

Particularly in the gymnasium the “curious” feature of Judean ethnic identity became all too visible – the circumcision of the male foreskin, since exercises were conducted in the nude. Some Judeans underwent an epispasm by which the foreskin was restored, and so was said to have forsaken the “holy covenant” (1 Mac 1:15). No wonder the gymnasium was regarded as one of the most important abominations of Hellenism (1 Mac 1:14-15; 2 Mac 4:9-17). Jubilees 3:31 also says Adam and Eve covered their genitals, unlike the Gentiles. According to Cohen (1987:52; cf Schmidt 2001:34), there are passages in the Tanak that speak of the importance of circumcision (Jr 9:24-25; Gn 17, 34; Ex 4:24-26, 12:43-49; Jos 5:2-11) but the Bible “as a whole generally ignores it and nowhere regards it as the essential mark of [Judean] identity or as the *sine qua non* for membership in the [Judean polity]. It attained this status only in Maccabean times”. But circumcision was a primary requirement for covenant membership for males, or to put it differently, for Judean ethnic identity. Genesis 17:10-14 makes this quite clear, where God speaks to Abraham in the following terms:

This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You are to undergo circumcision, and it will be the sign

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

of the covenant between me and you ... Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.

(NIV)

To remove your circumcision was from a traditional Judean perspective wholly unthinkable (cf TLevi 6:3-6; TMos 8:1-3; Theodotus in Eusebius, PrEv 9.22.4-9; Sir 44:20).<sup>4</sup> Even the angels are created as circumcised (Jub 15:27) and so are able to participate with Israel in its rites, feasts, and Sabbath days (Jub 2:18). Also Moses was born “in the covenant of God and the covenant of the flesh” (Ps-Philo 9:13), that is, he was born circumcised (cf b.Sot 12a; ExR 1:24). In post-Biblical Hebrew “covenant” had become a technical term for circumcision (Harrington 1985:316, n o). The importance of circumcision is emphasised in Jubilees 15:25-32, and the failure to perform the rite, presumably the procedure of epispasm as well, is regarded as an “eternal error” (Jub 15:33-34). It should not come as a surprise that circumcision (along with food laws) became a major issue when Gentiles were incorporated into the Messianist community (Ac 15:1-29; Gl 2:1-10).

The influence of Hellenism, however, had impact in other areas as well. New fashions included the wearing of a Greek hat, according to 2 Maccabees 4:12, the extreme height of Hellenism. The hat in question is the *petasos*, the Greek broad-rimmed hat associated with Hermes. So the objection was mainly aimed at a Gentile religious symbol (Rubens 1973:16). One can contrast the Essenes who wore plain clothes and ate plain food (Baumgarten 1997:101). Overall, Hellenism presented a new problem for devout Judeans.

Hellenism presented itself as an alternative world-view, in the face of which it was necessary to make choices: either to remain a [Judean] or to embrace the new way of living and thinking, thus imperilling the faith. The Hellenists among the [Judeans] thought they could do both, while remaining within the bounds of good faith; according to the orthodox they had in fact chosen Hellenism and denied [Judeanism].

(Soggin 1993:317)

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<sup>4</sup> Cf m.Ned 3:11, where circumcision virtually realises a state of human ontological perfection: “Great is circumcision, for, despite all the commandments which Abraham our father carried out, he was called complete and whole only when he had circumcised himself as it is said, *Walk before me and be perfect*” (Gn 17:1). The same passage regards the foreskin as “disgusting”, and also states that was it not for circumcision (which also points to the covenant), God would not have created the world (Jr 33:25) (Neusner 1988:412).

It was especially the Judean elite, who by appropriating elements from Hellenism, allowed that the cultural differentiation between Judeans and Gentiles to become blurred. Adopting Greek fashion, the presence of a gymnasium in Jerusalem and the Hellenising priests initiated a process whereby Judean ethnic identity came under siege. But things under Antiochus IV became worse. After a failed campaign in Egypt, he besieged Jerusalem and occupied the Temple. The following year, in 167 he apparently issued decrees which aimed at the compulsory Hellenisation of Judea (1 Mac 1:29; 2 Mac 5:24). According to Jagersma (1986:52) these measures should rather be attributed to those Judeans in Jerusalem in favour of Hellenisation and the changes were aimed at giving Judean worship a more Hellenistic form. Under the high priest Menelaus, the Temple itself was transformed into a sanctuary dedicated to Zeus Olympius, instead of the “Lord of heaven”, the usual designation for God. A second altar, or perhaps a stone on the existing altar was set up, the “abomination of desolation” (1 Mac 1:54; Dn 9:27, 11:31, 12:11; cf TMos 5:3-4). This happened on 15 December 167 BCE and apparently on 25 December sacrifices were offered to Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun (Soggin 1993:322). The centre of the Judean symbolic universe, quite literally and figuratively, from a traditional perspective became dysfunctional. It destroyed the integrity and well-being of the Judean “world” as a whole.

This new form of temple cult was extended throughout Judea. Judeans were instructed to build altars (and sacred shrines for idols?) and to sacrifice pigs and unclean animals (1 Mac 1:47, 54; 2 Mac 6:4-9, 21; 7:1). If one takes 1 and 2 Maccabees at face value, many forms of Judean worship were also banned. Antiochus IV banned sacrifices (1 Mac 1:45; cf Jub 32:4-22); profaned the Sabbath and festival days (1 Mac 1:46; cf Jub 23:19, 6:37); prohibited circumcision (1 Mac 1:47; cf Jub 15:24-29); and burnt books (1 Mac 1:56; cf Jub 45:16). It is said that many Judeans conformed to these measures be it through pressure or threats, while some chose martyrdom instead (1 Mac 1:57-64; 2 Mac 6:18-19, 7:1ff; Ant 12.253ff). According to Jagersma (1986:52-53) the pro-Hasmonean 1 Maccabees would have exaggerated the persecution to bolster the Maccabean claim to the high priesthood so we must assume that the persecution was a limited one.

Whatever the scale of forced Hellenisation and the persecution that ensued, the decrees, whether they came from Antiochus or Judean Hellenists, took direct aim at those practices that separated Judeans from Gentiles (1 Mac 1:44-50). The revolt that inevitably followed was spearheaded by the Hasmonean family, beginning with the priest Mattathias, who was neither a Zadokite nor an aristocrat. The “Hasmonean” family is called after an

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

ancestor, Hashmon, but also the Maccabees, due to a nickname, “the hammerer” (Ant 12.365ff) that was given to Judas, the third son of Mattathias (Sanders 1992:17). In Modein Mattathias was requested to make a Gentile sacrifice (to sacrifice a pig to Zeus Olympius?), but refused, choosing to “walk in the covenant of our fathers” thereby not abandoning the law and ordinances (1 Mac 2:20-21). A Judean who attempted to make a Gentile sacrifice at Modein enraged Mattathias and was killed by the latter on the altar. Subsequently Mattathias called upon those who were “zealous for the law”, and who “maintain the covenant” (1 Mac 2:27) to join forces with him, and so many went to the wilderness. Many were later killed, as they refused to fight on the Sabbath (1 Mac 2:34-38), a decision that was later reversed (v 41). Mattathias was soon joined by Hasideans, those who were willing to offer themselves for the sake of the law (1 Mac 2:42). The word “Hasidean” reflects the Hebrew *hasidim*, “pious”, referring to a “group of people who wished to resist Hellenization and who were willing to fight and die” (Sanders 1992:18). Collectively their activity was principally aimed at fellow Judeans, killing “sinners” and “lawless men” (1 Mac 2:44). They also destroyed pagan altars and forcefully circumcised Judean children (1 Mac 2:45-46). Mattathias died in 166, but the call to “be zealous for the law” and to “give your lives for the covenant of your fathers” (1 Mac 2:50) was continued through his sons (Judas, Jonathan and Simon). All in all, we have to do here with Maccabean propaganda, but it must have resonated strongly with popular opinion.

The Hasmonean campaign was eventually successful. Jerusalem was captured (except for the Acra) and on 25 Chislev (around 15 December) 164 BCE the Temple was cleansed and rededicated by Judas, an event still celebrated as the feast of Hanukkah, “dedication” (1 Mac 4:59) (Soggin 1993:325). Judas also erected a wall around Mount Zion to keep the Gentiles out (1 Mac 4:60-61) – so Gentiles were not even allowed access to the Court of Gentiles that existed at the time. The Judeans eventually received religious freedom from Antiochus V (164-162 BCE) though attempts at reform probably continued in Jerusalem. In 160 the high priest, Alcimus, began to tear down the wall of the inner court of the Sanctuary. According to 1 Maccabees Alcimus was prevented from finishing his intentions by divine intervention (1 Mac 9:54-56). Thus he, like the other Hellenists, might have endeavoured to remove the barrier between Judeans and Gentiles (Baumgarten 1997:83; Schmidt 2001:105).

It is evident that the Maccabean revolt led to several questions being asked about Hellenisation, the law, the high priesthood and military control (Sanders 1992:20-21). Nevertheless, under the leadership of Judas Maccabees, the Judeans had military success against the Seleucids and the



internal strife in Syria allowed the Maccabees in time to extend their powers. Judas' brother and successor, Jonathan, was appointed high priest by Alexander Balas in 152 who contended for the Syrian throne (1 Mac 10:18-20). In response, Demetrius I offered Jonathan exemption from taxes (1 Mac 10:26-33). Jonathan received more favours from Demetrius II but was killed in 143 BCE. His brother, Simon, obtained further, yet not complete independence for the Judeans (cf Gruen 2002), and was appointed as high priest by Demetrius II (1 Mac 10:31-31). He was the one that occupied the fortress Acra (141 BCE), and so the last stronghold of the Hellenisers and their Syrian supporters were captured (1 Mac 13:51). Sanders (1992:22) explains:

The fall of the Acra terminated any lingering hopes that the Hellenizers had. [Judean] distinctiveness would be maintained, circumcision would be kept, and the Mosaic law would be enforced. Simon and his successors acted very much like other Hellenistic kings ... but there would be no further effort to break down the barriers between [Judeanism] and the rest of the Graeco-Roman world.

We can see from the above that zeal for the law was equivalent to remaining faithful to the covenant of the forefathers; it was remaining faithful to the Judean symbolic universe, or Judean ethnic identity. The Maccabean revolt can be described as a form of *ethnicism*, “a collective movement, whose activities and efforts are aimed at resisting perceived threats from outside and corrosion within, at renewing a community’s forms and traditions, and at reintegrating a community’s members and strata which have become dangerously divided by conflicting pressures ... [E]thnicism has manifested three broad aims in antiquity ... territorial restoration, genealogical restoration and cultural renewal” (Smith 1986:50-51). Further, Smith (1986:55-56) explains that ethnicism is fundamentally defensive, provoked by military threat, socio-economic challenges, and cultural contact. All these things in various ways describe the situation around the Maccabean revolt. Also, persistent interstate warfare promotes ethnic unity for agrarian folk cultures (cf Smith 1994:710-11), but this can be said for inter-cultural warfare as well.

### **3. BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU EAT**

The persecution of Judean customs and religion brought one aspect of Judean identity into focus – the Judean attitude towards food. The laws on clean and unclean foods do not hold such a central place in the Torah (Lv 11:1-23; Dt 14:3-21). Even Jacob’s sons ate Gentile food with Gentiles (Gn

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

43:32). From the time of the Maccabees, however, food laws took on increasing importance in Judean folklore and Judean self-understanding (Dunn 1990:193). The Judeans were supposedly forced to eat pork (1 Mac 1:47-48; 2 Mac 6:18-21, 7:1), but some preferred to die in order not to profane the covenant (1 Mac 1:62-63). Food not defiled by Gentiles and permissible to eat was according to 2 Maccabees 5:27 very limited. Alternatively, on a practical level the “loyalists had to take extreme steps, from armed revolt to restricting the sources of their food in order to avoid defilement” (Baumgarten 1997:84). So 2 Maccabees 5:27 explains that Judah and his companions escaped to the wilderness and ate wild food so that they might not share in the defilement (cf 1 Mac 1:62-63; Dn 1:8). Sometime around 160 BCE, 1 Enoch 91:9 used as its slogan: “all that which is (common) with the heathen shall be sundered.” Jubilees (who maybe quotes 1 En 91-108 in 4:18), in the wake of the Maccabean revolt encourages Judeans: “... keep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them ... Because their deeds are defiled, and all their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable” (Jub 22:16). Here is a classic example of the maintenance of the Judean symbolic universe through nihilation. The Maccabean martyrs were further remembered for their fidelity to the covenant. Similarly the heroes of popular stories such as Daniel, Tobit, Judith, Esther and Joseph all showed their faithfulness to God, that is, they maintained their Judean identity by refusing to eat “the food of Gentiles” (Dn 1:8-16; 10:3; Tob 1:10-13; Jdt 10:5; 12:1-20; AddEsth 14:17; JosAsen 7:1; 8:5), and no Judean abiding by the Torah eats at a Gentile table (Jub 22:16; cf Ac 11:3; Gl 2:12). These people were heroes because they are faithful Judeans, examples to emulate. The resulting pre-occupation with food has direct bearing on the constructionist approach of ethnicity theory. As a result of the Maccabean crisis, Judean ethnicity was in part (re)constructed around an intensified effort to observe food and purity laws more strictly. But overall, this is representative of a primordialist approach to ethnicity as existing practices were intensified to sharpen both the consciousness of similarity and difference, as well as the ethnic boundary vis-à-vis the nations. Scott argued that that primordial sentiments will become greater the greater the amount of *opposition* experienced by that group. He explains further “with respect to the *content* of ethnic identity, the primordial sentiments will also attach to the symbols against which the greatest opposition is expressed, whether language, territory, heroes, music, dance, cuisine, or clothing, such that they will become even more salient in the individual’s reckoning of his or her ethnicity” (Scott 1990:163; emphasis original). This is what happened to the Judean approach to food and purity laws, but also circumcision and general Torah observance.

And the greater the opposition experienced by the group, the greater its ethnic solidarity becomes, which according to Scott (1990:166), also tends to increase the lower the person's socio-economic status. During the Maccabean revolt, it was particularly the rural peasantry, galvanized by priestly leadership, that fought to restore the land and for cultural renewal (cf Brueggemann 2002:153).

The Judean preoccupation with food in order to maintain its symbolic universe continued unabated. Josephus speaks of priests who were imprisoned in Rome, who survived only on figs and nuts (Life 3.14). The eating habits of Judeans were also well known among Gentile authors. For example, Tacitus writes scathingly of Judeans and their supposed hatred of the rest of the world: "they eat separately, they sleep separately ..." (Hist 5.5). Sextus Empiricus (second century CE) commented that Judeans would rather die than eat pork (Sanders 1992:239). According to Philo, when his delegation was in conversation with Emperor Caligula, they were interrupted with the abrupt and irrelevant question: "Why do you refuse to eat pork?" (Embassy 361).

The separation between Judeans and Gentiles was made stronger based on the belief that Gentiles were unclean since they did not observe the purity laws. Although Judean purity laws were not really applicable to Gentiles they were treated as impure and any contact could lead to defilement (Ac 10:28) (cf Sanders 1992:72-76). Their houses and possessions were potential targets of ritual uncleanness, hence were regarded as impure (Schürer et al 1979:83). A number of Gentile objects could not be used by Judeans since Judeans laws were not observed during its production. Much of the most ordinary foods coming from Gentiles were forbidden to Judeans, but they were allowed to make a profit from buying and selling things such as milk, bread and oil (Schürer et al 1979:83-84).<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. JUDEANISM VERSUS HELLENISM

"Judeanism" (Ἰουδαϊσμός) as a term appears for the first time in the literature of this period in reaction to the influence of Hellenism. It speaks of those who fought bravely for Judeanism (2 Mac 2:21) and that their supporters continued

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<sup>5</sup> The schools of Shammai and Hillel apparently debated the issue of Gentile impurity. The School of Shammai (prevailing over the school of Hillel) decided on 18 measures with regards to the impurity of foreigners, and amongst others, placed a ban on Gentile bread, wine, cheese, oil, their daughters, and their sperm and urine (Schmidt 2001:240). The Shammaites placed Gentiles on the level of semen impurity, while the Hillelites believed that the Gentiles permanently had corpse impurity (m.Pes 8.8). Generally, there seems to have been no general consensus at the time on the issue of Gentile impurity (cf Sanders 1992:72-76), although according to Schmidt (2001:241), the Sages considered the impurity of the foreigner as equivalent to that of a person with discharge.

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

in Judeanism (2 Mac 8:1). One Razis, “a lover of his countrymen”, was accused of Judeanism and risked his life for it (2 Mac 14:38). Lastly, 4 Maccabees 4:26 speaks of Antiochus’ attempt to force Judeans to eat forbidden food and so renounce Judeanism. 2 Maccabees 4:13 speaks of an ἀκμή τις Ἑλληνισμοῦ (“a climax of attempts at Hellenisation”) during the time of Jason. Here Ἑλληνισμός is for the first time used in a cultural sense as the equivalent of ἀλλοφυλισμός, or “foreignness” (2 Mac 4:13, 6:24) (Hengel 1989:22). Lieu (2002:305) also points out that 2 Maccabees subverts the usual Greek/barbarian antithesis by saying that the fight for Ἰουδαϊσμός is against the “*barbaric* hordes” (2 Mac 2:21). “Foreignness” was also identifiable to the Greeks as akin to the barbarian. Similar language is found in 1 Maccabees (ἀλλόφυλος; ἀλλογενής; ἀλλότριος). But the point is that battle lines were being drawn between Judeanism and Hellenism. Judeanism is that system that is opposed to anything foreign, and that in any way detracts from being Judean. If we may adapt Dunn’s explanation:

[Judeanism] is the summary term for that system embodying national and religious identity which was the rallying point for the violent rejection by the Maccabees of the Syrian attempt to assimilate them by the abolition of their distinctive practices [particularly circumcision and food laws; cf 1 Mac 1:60-63; 4 Mac 4:26]. From the beginning, therefore [Judeanism] has a *strongly nationalistic overtone* and denotes a powerful integration of religious and national identity which marked [Judeanism] out in its *distinctiveness* from other nations and religions.

(Dunn 2003:261; emphasis original)

If we may paraphrase Dunn’s explanation, Judeanism is a summary term for that system that embodied Judean ethnicity. It requires “zeal for the law” (1 Mac 2:26, 27, 50, 58; 2 Mac 4:2; cf Gl 1:13-14). In other words, it requires zeal for being Judean, for the tradition of the forefathers, not zeal for what we understand today in a secularized world as being “religious”. According to ethnicity theory, this is what you call primordialism.

## **5. THE JUDEAN SECTS**

After the Maccabean Revolt, Judeanism experienced the rise of various sects. Cohen defines that a “sect asserts that *it alone embodies the ideals of the larger group*. In [Judean] terms this means that a sect sees itself as the true Israel ... *it alone understands God’s will*” (Cohen 1987:126, 127; emphasis

original). Baumgarten has a different but complementary approach to sectarianism. He “would define a sect as a *voluntary association of protest, which utilizes boundary marking mechanisms – the social means of differentiating between insiders and outsiders – to distinguish between its own members and those otherwise normally regarded as belonging to the same national or religious entity. Ancient [Judean] sects, accordingly, differentiated between [Judeans] who were members of their sect and those not*” (Baumgarten 1997:7; emphasis original). But why did Judean sects come to flourish in this period?

In the pre-Maccabean period no Judean faithful ever organised themselves into a socially significant movement to separate themselves from other Judeans. Josephus mentions Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes for the first time in a comment that concerns the reign of Jonathan. During this period there were a few rapid changes in Judean life: 1) the encounter with Hellenism; 2) the persecutions of Antiochus IV; 3) the cooperation of at least a few traditional leaders with those persecutions; 4) the successful revolt against Antiochus IV; 5) the rise of a new dynasty of high priests, that was soon followed by the acquisition of political independence. The last four events on the list took place over a time span of around twenty-five years (Baumgarten 1997:26).

For Cohen, sectarianism is a culmination of the democratisation of Judeanism. It wanted to bridge gap between humanity and God “through constant practice of the commandments of the Torah and total immersion in the contemplation of God and his works. Sectarian piety supplants or supplements the temple cult through prayer, scriptural study, and purifications, and rejects or dilutes the power of the priesthood” (Cohen 1987:172). Baumgarten has another approach and will be the one that we will follow here. Although there were antecedents and forerunners to Judean sects, such as is illustrated in 1 Enoch and Jubilees who focus on social action in response to Hellenism, Baumgarten proposes that

the decisive moment, which brought about the full fledged phenomenon [of sectarianism], came with the victory of the Hasmonean dynasty and their claim for the restoration of traditional rule. The successful revolt of the Maccabees, their assumption of the high priesthood, and the eventual achievement of independence, all raised hopes for a reimposition of boundaries between [Judeans] and [non-Judeans], restrictions which had suffered so much damage in the preceding decades, in particular.

(Baumgarten 1997:86)

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

Maccabean propaganda claimed that these expectations of separation were met. It explains that Judas had fortified Mount Zion with high walls and strong towers in order to keep the Gentiles out (1 Mac 4:60). Simon worked to achieve similar ends. He established peace and in his time there were no Gentiles to make the Judeans afraid (1 Mac 4:60). The decree that affirmed Simon's rule stated that he had "put the Gentiles out of the country", and he expelled the men from the citadel of Jerusalem who used to defile the areas of the Temple and so undermined its purity (1 Mac 14:36). Indeed, Simon built the walls of Jerusalem higher (1 Mac 14:37) and so continued Judas' program of keeping Gentiles out. Indeed, "zealous hatred of gentiles" pervades 1 Maccabees as a whole (Baumgarten 1997:86), since they are void of true spirituality as they gave up their own religions to follow those decreed by the king (1 Mac 1:41-43; 2:19).

Yet, the Maccabees were inconsistent in their policy towards the surrounding culture. To a degree they opposed practices associated with Gentile culture, but "the needs of government playing the international game of politics, required paying the price of adapting to the surrounding culture" (Baumgarten 1997:87). This tension is very obvious in the fact that Jonathan accepted the high priesthood from Alexander Balas as expressed in the same decree that affirmed his rule. This decree was further "formulated in Greek style, and was based on the political ideology and practice of Greek democracy" (Baumgarten 1997:88). Jonathan's appointment as high priest by the Seleucid Alexander Balas, was the first accommodation of many to foreign culture that was to cause the flourishing of Judean sects. Demetrius II similarly appointed Simon as high priest. It is also claimed by 1 Maccabees that the Judeans and their priests decided that Simon should be their "high priest for ever" (1 Mac 14:41-43), meaning that he and his descendants would be high priests, unless a prophet would arise and declare otherwise. So the rights of the family of Zadok, in charge of the Temple for centuries, have been revoked (Sanders 1992:22). Jonathan and Simon's acceptance of this post from Gentile rulers was wholly illegitimate. This led to Onias IV, a Zadokite priest, establishing a temple in Leontopolis in Egypt. The importance of the Zadokite priests in the Dead Sea sect lends support that the "Teacher of Righteousness" was a member of that family; perhaps the Sadducees also claimed the authority of the Zadokite priesthood (Sanders 1992:23-25).

Just after Simon came to power, he built a mausoleum in Hellenistic style in honour of his fathers and brothers (Hengel 1989:31). Aristobulus I even adopted the nickname φιλέλλην, "lover of Greeks" (Ant 13.318). Thus the Maccabean success in various ways undermined the borders that they were supposed to have maintained. There were many expectations when the

Maccabees came to power, but their actions provoked disappointment. Baumgarten proposes that it was “in response to this sense of disillusionment, of a mixture of blessing and curses, that sectarianism became fully mature. With the old national perimeter facing a new sort of danger ... sects flourished which established new voluntary boundaries of their own against other [Judeans]” (Baumgarten 1997:88; emphasis original). The Damascus Document (CD) gives expression to this and explains the rulers will pay the price for their sins and the Gentile kings they imitated will also be the source of their destruction (CD 8.3-21b). The walls erected by the Maccabees were found wanting, merely “daubed with plaster” (CD 8 alluding to Ezk 13:10). A real fortress was to be found in the Qumran community (1QH 6.25-27). Now those excluded are not only Gentiles, but also Judeans whose defiling presence must be avoided. The Essenes/Qumran Covenanters had sectarian “brothers” that were more important than “natural” brothers (Josephus, War 2.120, 122, 127, 134; Philo, Omnis Probus 79; Hyp 11.2; 1QH 9.35-36; 1QS 6.10, 22; CD 6.20; 7.1-2). The new kinship patterns simply superseded or supplanted natural ties (Baumgarten 1997:61-62, 90-91).

Another aspect of history is important to the understanding of the flourishing of Judean sects. In the pre-Maccabean period, Judeanism was constantly at the mercy of imperial power. Dissident Judeans who disagreed on points of *halacha*, particularly how the Temple was run, had very few options to bring about reform. This state of affairs changed, however, after independence was achieved. Now dissident voices will attempt to realise their agendas, while millenarian hopes provided further impetus (Baumgarten 1997:191-192).

The Judean sects emphasised various things in their polemics. For average Judeans the Temple was the main centre of loyalty and the most important focus of identity. As a result, the Temple would have been a perfect subject for sects to squabble over. For example, it could involve the detailed points of law concerning proper Temple ritual (Baumgarten 1997:68-69). According to Cohen (1987:127-134) in Judeanism the principle objects of sectarian polemics were three: law (marriage, Sabbath and festivals, Temple and purity), (inadequacy of priests in the) Temple, and (the correct interpretation of) scripture.

The *boundary marking* of ancient Judean sects concentrated on issues such as dress, marriage, commerce and worship, with basically all groups having regulations on food. But as Baumgarten (1997:7-8) explains, ordinary Judeans “employed boundary marking mechanisms in realms of life such as food, marriage, and worship to distinguish between themselves and [non-Judeans] ... Ordinary [Judeans], in sum, observed purity regulations more or

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

less strictly” (cf 1 Mac 1:44-50). In the Second Temple period, the burgeoning use of ritual baths and stone vessels found all over Palestine is further evidence of concern to maintain a life of purity (Sanders 1992:222-229). Priests were born into their status and kept themselves apart from other Judeans to keep their sacred status – they did this with the full consent of society. In other respects Judeans were equal and the Levitical rules of defilement did not endorse any form of social stratification. Sectarrians, however, *chose* their way of life. Secondly, “they turned the means of marking separation normally applied against [non-Judeans] against those otherwise regarded as fellow [Judeans]” as a means of protest against them/Judean society and as “a result of these actions all [Judeans] were no longer on the same footing: *sectarian [Judeans] treated other [Judeans] as outsiders of a new sort*” (Baumgarten 1997:9; emphasis original). Distinctions between sectarians and others also came about in the usage of personal names. Based on names of the earliest Pharisees and Qumran members, which are mostly Semitic, Baumgarten suggests “that those involved in sectarian activities were taken from among those less rapidly acculturated in the changing world after the conquests of Alexander” (Baumgarten 1997:46). This stands in contrast with the double names, Hebrew and Greek, of the Maccabean rulers from the time of John Hyrcanus, which is further evidence of their accommodation to influence of the outside world.

The approach to sects is helped with social scientific theory. Baumgarten follows Wilson’s (1973:18-26) distinctions between “reformist” and “introversionist” sects. One can classify Sadducees and Pharisees as reformists, the Qumran Covenanters as introversionist. Reformists have hopes of reforming the larger society and has not renounced it totally, still thinking of themselves as part of the whole. Introversionists, on the other hand, have renounced society as a whole and turned in on their own movement completely and regards those outside as irredeemable (Baumgarten 1997:13). Important for our purposes here, Baumgarten explains the sectarians “were *more extreme in their devotion to what they believed to be the proper way to be [Judean]* than other members of their contemporary society” (Baumgarten 1997:200; emphasis added). We can say they had earnest programs of their own to maintain the Judean symbolic universe in opposition to Hellenism. Smith (1986:43) makes the important observation that in pre-modern eras, “what we grasp as religious competition may equally well be understood as ethnic competition for the monopoly of symbolic domination and communication in a given population, whose ‘ethnic’ profile is as much *shaped* by priestly and scribal activities as it is reinforced” (emphasis original). So the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes (and later the Messianists



and Zealots) could be approached in a way that understands that each group had their own particular ideas of what it meant to be Judean. Each group attempted to shape Judean ethnicity in their own way, especially those of the more “reformist” bend.

Most Judeans were not attached to any particular sect,<sup>6</sup> and certainly they were also interested in living a life according to which they believed was the proper way to be Judean. According to Cohen, the average Judean

observed the Sabbath and the holidays, heard the scriptural lessons in synagogue on Sabbath, abstained from forbidden foods, purified themselves before entering the temple precincts, circumcised their sons on the eighth day, and adhered to the “ethical norms” of folk piety. Whatever they may have thought of the priests and the temple, they went on pilgrimage to the temple a few times per year and probably relied on priesthood to propitiate the deity through a constant and well-maintained sacrificial cult. If the “average” [Judean] of antiquity was anything like the “average” citizen of every other time and place, he or she was more concerned about rainfall and harvests than about theology and religion. For this “average” [Judean] the primary benefit of the democratisation of religion [e.g. regular Torah study, prayers, the development of the synagogue and purifications] was that it provided an additional means for serving God and thereby ensuring divine blessing.

(Cohen 1987:172-173)

What Cohen describes above are a people who lived out their ethnic identity. A few amendments are in order, however. First, the Judeans were not necessarily like average citizens of every other time and place, and had particular reason to be interested in their ancestral religion or traditions in particular. What is at issue here is the question of the threat to their identity posed by Hellenism, or anything foreign. The memory of the Maccabean revolt would have been strong, even though the Hasmonean rulers themselves were suspect as far as keeping foreign influences out. The encroachment of foreigners on the land – especially after the Romans invaded Palestine – with their religion and customs would have posed a new form of threat. Herod the Great, and the various Roman prefects and procurators

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<sup>6</sup> How much of the population did the sectarians represent? It is suggested that the total known membership of sects (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes/Qumran Covenanters, and the Messianists) do not reach twelve thousand. The Judean population of the time has been estimated to be at least five hundred thousand people, some estimates going as high as two million (Baumgarten 1997:43-44).

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

often showed themselves to be insensitive towards Judean religious-cultural sensibilities. We discussed the growing importance of food to Judean self-understanding from the Maccabean period onwards. In the Roman period we amongst other things encounter the growing importance of ritual immersion and the use of stone vessels. Stegemann & Stegemann (1999:143) point out the reason why Judeans ritually immersed themselves. Because of the presence of Gentiles in Palestine and the pagan or semi-pagan governing structures “the urgency of an identity-preserving delineation was not exactly small”. Schmidt (2001:239) also points out that due to the proximity of Gentiles after the Hasmonean period it led to a “transformation and reinforcement of that separation [i.e. between Judean and Gentile]. It was spatial; it becomes ritual. Because, established in the house, the foreigner is declared ‘impure’.” Certainly, ritual immersion and washings would have been a meaningful way of maintaining your own position within the Judean symbolic universe and separating yourself from alien elements. In other words, it was a form of “therapy” to keep yourself “within” while also functioning as a form of cultural resistance. And again, here any (re)constructionist elements in Judean ethnicity had its basis in primordialism. So what Cohen describes as “the democratisation of religion” should primarily be seen against the background of Judeans developing additional means to preserve their identity.

Secondly, what Cohen here fails to appreciate it would seem is that “rainfall and harvests”, or the economic and social viability of the *family on its land*, something which came under severe threat under the Romans, had everything to do with theology and religion. As Horsley (1995:34) points out “religion was inseparable from the political-economic dimensions of life”.

Since Judeanism was a wholly integrated system of thought, it provided an interesting dynamic between the sectarians, the priesthood, and the rest of the population. Collectively, however, the sectarians and priesthood formed a small minority of the population. The sectarians in particular might have been more devoted to what they thought it meant to be Judean, but this kind concern did not exclusively characterise them. For the vast majority of Judeans, being true to your identity meant living on and working the ancestral land, while being concerned with how the traditional way of life was threatened with the “foreigner being in the house”.

## **6. PALESTINE UNDER HEROD THE GREAT**

It was during the rule of the last Hasmonean king-priests that Herod the Great manoeuvred to become king over the Judeans (ruled 37-4 BCE). It is also here, where the impact of Hellenism was felt. Herod, who simply loved to build, gave the Judeans something to be really proud of by constructing the

magnificent Temple complex. Josephus boasted that the Temple was renowned and world famous, and was a feast for the eyes (War 5.222). Herod was in a way sensitive to Judean religious requirements for the predominant floral motif used in decorating the Temple was the vine with clusters of grapes, symbolic for blessing, happiness and productivity (Shanks 1990:13). Otherwise the Temple also boasted other floral and geometrical motifs (Ritmeyer & Ritmeyer 1990:44-47). But overall, the Temple complex drew heavily on Greek and Roman design principles. The Temple was located on a large terrace or esplanade. A temple located on a large terrace was a typical feature of late Republican and early Imperial Roman architecture. A further Roman feature was the colonnades that surrounded the esplanade that were integrated into a triple-aisled basilica (or “Royal Stoa”) along the southern end. There are also the Corinthian capitals of the columns, and the geometrical principles used in the design, all which came from the Roman architecture of the period (Jacobson 2002).

Unfortunately, the Temple in Jerusalem was not the only temple that Herod built. He also built temples dedicated to Caesar Augustus – known as Augusteums – in Caesarea, Sebaste in Samaria, while archaeologists have claimed to found the third at Omrit in far northern Galilee (Overman, Olive & Nelson 2003; cf Jacobson 2002:22). Josephus notes that Herod built none of these temples in Judean territory (Ant 15.328-30, 363-64; War 1.403-407). From the Herodian period Gentile games were also occurring in Palestine. In Jerusalem itself, Herod built a theatre, amphitheatre (Ant 15.268-76) and a hippodrome, and similarly to Caesarea, introduced games held in honour of Caesar every four years (Ben-Dov 1990:24). Some people were not happy about the theatre as it was decorated with human busts (Ant 15.277-9). Greek music was performed at festivals in Jerusalem under Herod, as well as games of amusement and chance, such as the throwing of dice – the latter was by rabbinic tradition condemned (Schürer et al 1979:60).

Other cities were also part of Herod’s ambitious building plans. Especially Caesarea saw a dramatic transformation, as it was transformed from a small fishing village originally known as Strato’s Tower, to the largest port in the Mediterranean basin (Ben-Dov 1990:24). The city was inaugurated in 13/12 BCE. Here Herod built a large palace, a system of aqueducts, and an amphitheatre.<sup>7</sup> The temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus that faced the harbour contained a colossal statue of the emperor (cf Bull 1990; Schürer et al 1979:46). Other Hellenistic building projects occurred in Jericho, Ptolemeis, Damascus, Tiberias and Tarichaea (Magdala). Jericho supposedly possessed

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<sup>7</sup> The hippodrome found by archaeologists has been dated to the second century (Bull 1990:114).

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

a theatre, an amphitheatre and a hippodrome (Ant 17.161; 17.178; 17.194; War 1.659, 666). Herod built a gymnasium in Ptolemeis, and both a gymnasium and theatre in Damascus (War 1.422). Mention is made of a stadium in Tiberias (War 2.618; 3.539; Life 92; 331) and Tarichaea (Magdala) apparently had a hippodrome (War 2.599; Life 132; 138). Josephus himself described the theatre and amphitheatre as things alien to Judean custom (Ant 15.268). It should come as little surprise that the opponents of Herod the Great called him a “half-Judean” because he was a descendent of the Idumeans, who were in the time of the Maccabees forcibly converted to Judeanism (Cohen 1987:54), but this was more a statement of cultural opposition.

Even Herod’s descendents continued to some degree in the spirit of their father. The construction of Sepphoris and Tiberias by Antipas saw the introduction of Roman-Hellenistic elements for the first time in Galilee (Reed 2000; Chancey 2002). Tiberias was named after the emperor, and Antipas introduced pictures of animals in the palace (Life 12.65). Apparently Antipas built the largest synagogue in Palestine in Tiberias (the prayer house?) (t.Sukk 4:6). He also allowed the city to mint its own coins, and have a Greek constitution with a *boule* under the leadership of an *archon* (Hengel 1989:39). Philip (4 BCE-34 CE) renamed Bethsaida as Julias, most probably after the wife of Augustus,<sup>8</sup> and his new capital was called Caesarea (Philippi). He was the first Judean ruler to mint coins bearing an image of himself, while the reverse depicted a temple which he maybe built in Julias and dedicated to Augustus (Brenner 2003:49; Jacobson 2002:20-21). Agrippa I, who for a period ruled over all of Palestine (41-44 CE),<sup>9</sup> combined a Judean piety with a liberal attitude where he allowed for the worship of himself outside Judean territory. He further sponsored festivals in honour of Caesar as well as theatrical and gladiatorial entertainment (Ant 19.330-37, 343-52; Ac 12:21-23). The coins minted outside of Judean territory bore his image or that of the emperor. He also put up statues of his daughters in Caesarea (Ant 19.357).

The political situation under Herod and his successors therefore facilitated the advance of Roman-Hellenistic influence in Palestine. Naturally this represented more the interests and political inclinations of the ruling elite.

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<sup>8</sup> Josephus (Ant 18.28) says that Philip renamed the city after Augustus’ daughter, Julia. She was banished in 2 BCE and died in 14 CE. Augustus’ wife died in 29 CE so Philip most likely renamed the city after her a year later (Chancey 2002:106).

<sup>9</sup> Agrippa received from the Emperor Claudius both Judea and Samaria, in addition to Galilee he had already received from Caligula. Thus all of Palestine was under a Herodian ruler as it had been under Herod the Great (War 2.215; Ant 19.274).

## 7. LANGUAGE

### 7.1 Aramaic

It is the basic scholarly convention that the principal language of Judeans in Palestine was Aramaic, at one time being the *lingua franca* of the Persian empire. Traces of it can be found in transliterated words of the New Testament<sup>10</sup> and Josephus, and sayings of early Tannaitic figures in the Mishnah. Additional archaeological findings have confirmed this conclusion. Aramaic is found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, ossuary inscriptions, and contracts and archival documents and letters found at Murabba'at, Masada and Nahal Hever (Schürer et al 1979:20-25). Scripture readings from the Torah, which was in Hebrew, was followed by a translation into Aramaic. This translation was done by a person known as the *meturgeman*, the “translator”. In time these translations were written down and are known as *targumim* (singular, *targum*) (Fitzmyer 1992).

### 7.2 Hebrew

Hebrew, the language of the Torah, might have been the tongue of creation (Jub 12:26), but the common use of Hebrew does not seem to have been widespread in our period (Fitzmyer 1992). At the same time, however, it seems that biblical Hebrew enjoyed resurgence in literary works (e.g. Ecclesiasticus, Tobit, Jubilees, Testament of Naphtali) and the Essenes seem to have tried to resurrect the “sacred language” since most of the material at Qumran was written in Hebrew (Fitzmyer 1992). The first coin to be minted by a Judean government in Jerusalem, issued by John Hyrcanus I, had a legend in paleo-Hebrew script (along with Greek). Later revolutionary Judean authorities, be it at the time of the Great Revolt (66-70 CE) or the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 CE), issued their own coins exclusively using paleo-Hebrew script (Brenner 2003:48, 50-51; Schürer et al 1979:26-27) thereby making a strong political statement (Porter 1994:137-38). In Gamla, during the revolt of 66-70 CE, coins were minted using both paleo-Hebrew and square Aramaic script (Syon 1992). Mishnaic Hebrew is said to have been used by Judeans as a secondary language in addition to Aramaic, and was occasionally used at Qumran and more frequently by those associated with Simeon Bar Kokhba during the 132-135 CE war. Mishnaic Hebrew eventually became the official

<sup>10</sup> For example when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter he spoke: *Talitha kum*, “Get up my child”, where the noun (literally meaning “little lamb”) is attested only in the Palestinian Targum. The word *mamona* (money), used in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6:24) also mostly appears in the Targums. Then there is another Targumic parallel when Jesus healed the deaf man near the Decapolis, and said in Aramaic: *Ephphetha*, “Be opened” (Mk 7:34). Lastly, there were Jesus' last words on the cross: *Eloi Eloi lama sabachtani*, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34-35) (Vermes 1973).

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

language of the Galilean academies in the second half of the second century CE (Schürer et al 1979:27-28).

### **7.3 Greek**

It was once supposed that knowledge of Greek of the people would have been incomplete – a rough familiarity was widespread, even in Galilee, while the more educated classes used it without difficulty (Schürer et al 1979:75, 77). Hengel (1989:7-8) points out, however, “that in the time of Jesus Greek had already been established as a language for more than three hundred years ... Judaea, Samaria and Galilee were bilingual (or better, trilingual) areas. While Aramaic was the vernacular of ordinary people, and Hebrew the sacred language of religious worship and of scribal discussion, Greek had largely become established as the linguistic medium for trade, commerce and administration”. The epigraphic and literary evidence does suggest that the use of Greek was relatively widespread in Palestine, including Galilee. The evidence consists of coins, papyri and literary texts, and inscriptions, especially funerary inscriptions in the case of the latter (Porter 1994:137-47). So in terms of language, the world of Judeanism for the greater part had little problem in accommodating or adapting to the use of Greek.

Already in the time of Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BCE), bilingual coins were issued, using both Greek and paleo-Hebrew script (Brenner 2003:48). Bilingual coins were also issued by the last Hasmonean king, Mattathias Antigonus (40-37 BCE). Herod the Great only used Greek in his inscriptions on Judean coins and weights, as did his sons and the Roman prefects/procurators (Hengel 1989:8; Porter 1994:137).

The influence of Greek can also be seen in the loanwords that appear in Judean texts. This is applicable to the musical instruments (lyre, harp and pipes) in Daniel (3:5, 10, 15) and the drachmae in Ezra 2:69 and Nehemiah 7:69-71. Greek loan words are attested in the Copper Scroll (3Q15) and the papyri of Murabba'at and Nahal Hever. There is also a notable amount of Greek non-biblical texts (e.g. Ezekiel the Tragedian), and additional sections to Daniel (Prayer of Azariah, Song of the Three Children, Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon) and Esther were composed in Greek. 1 Esdras and 2 Maccabees are thought to have been written in Greek in Palestine. The translations of 1 Maccabees, Esther, 2 Esdras (Ezra-Nehemiah), Lamentations, Qoheleth, Judith and Tobit, Chronicles and the Song of Songs may have been done in Palestine, and one can also mention the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll found at Nahal Hever. Jubilees, although written in Hebrew, demonstrates extensive knowledge of Greek geographical literature. One can add to the above the Palestinian and/or Judean authors who composed in Greek. These include

Justus of Tiberius, Josephus, Eupolemus and Jason of Cyrene (2 Mac), 3 and 4 Maccabees, while others may be added if their origins were in Palestine (Porter 1994:140-42; Lieu 2002:297).

Hengel (1989:25-26) points out it is inappropriate to distinguish between “Judean-Hellenistic” literature of the Diaspora and “genuine Judean” literature of Palestine. There were connections in both directions and a constant interchange. Porter (1994:142) suggests: “That Greek was used not only in the Diaspora but also in Palestine, even for composition by [Judeans] of distinctly [Judean] literature including much religious literature, indicates that Greek was an important and widely used language by a sizable portion of the Palestinian [Judean] population.”

Galilee itself was surrounded by Hellenised territories. The Gospels take for granted that Jesus could speak to the centurion in Capernaum, Pilate, and the Syro-Phoenician woman (Ἑλληνίς; Mk 7:26) (Hengel 1989:17; cf Porter 1994:148-53). Many Judeans were also given Greek names: some High Priests (Jason and Menelaus in Maccabean period; Boethus and Theophilus in Herodian era); Hasmonean and Herodian rulers (Alexander, Aristobulus, Antigonus, Herod, Archelaus, Philip, Antipas and Agrippa); also followers of Jesus (Andrew and Philip) and in the circle of rabbinic masters (see Hengel 1989:9; Schürer et al 1979:73).

The papyri found in the Judean Desert are also instructive that dates to the period between the two revolts. These documents include letters, marriage contracts, legal documents and literary texts (Fitzmyer 1992). One of these letters is addressed to a Judas at Masada, one of the last survivors of the first revolt. There are also two letters found that date to the time of the second revolt (132-135 CE). Probably from Bar-Kokhba himself, or written by one of his associates, these letters were surprisingly written in Greek and it is even stated that the “impulse/desire” was not found to write Ἑβραϊστὶ (Porter 1994:138).

Inscriptions are also often bilingual or only in Greek, but we will focus on evidence dating to no later than the first century. The ossuaries in Jerusalem and its environs testify to Greek being used on around 40 percent of them (Van der Horst 1992; Hengel 1989:10). In a first-century tomb near Jericho, a Judean family nicknamed the Goliaths used Greek in more than half of the epitaphs. In Beth-Shearim/Scythopolis (south of Galilee), most of the epitaphs were inscribed in Greek. Porter (1994:147) says that the earliest evidence (first and second century CE) are *all* in Greek, but most of the inscriptions, however, date to the late second-century CE and thereafter (Van der Horst 1992; Chancey & Meyers 2000:33). Nevertheless, the use of Greek in burial sites is significant as funerary inscriptions are the best evidence for

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

the everyday language of the people. “At the most private and final moments when a loved one was finally laid to rest, in the majority of instances, [Judeans] chose Greek as the language in which to memorialize their deceased ... [Greek] took precedence over the [Judean] sacred language, even at a moment of highly personal and religious significance” (Porter 1994:147). Porter is here commenting on the overall evidence for funerary inscriptions available across several centuries, yet there is enough evidence to suggest that even in the first century at least some Judeans spoke Greek as their everyday language. Other evidence for Greek includes the Theodotus Inscription of Jerusalem, referring to three generations of synagogue-rulers. The warning to Gentiles not to enter the inner courts of the Temple was in Greek, although this was mainly aimed at outsiders. There is also an inscription in Jerusalem honouring a man named Paris who sponsored a stone pavement on or around the Temple – presumably, many residents of Jerusalem were able to read it (Porter 1994:144-45).

Evidence in the New Testament also suggests that many Judeans who lived in Judea had Greek as a mother-tongue. Greek-speaking Judean communities had their own assemblies in Jerusalem. Acts 6:9 speaks of συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτίνων καὶ Κυρηναίων καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας. In Acts 6:1, Luke distinguishes between the Ἑλληνισταὶ, and Ἑβραῖοι, and so distinguishes between the Greek and Aramaic speaking communities of the early Messianists. All of the “Seven” men appointed to serve the Hellenist community had, not surprisingly, Greek names (Ac 6:5). Greek speaking Judeans also made pilgrimages to the holy city and real Greeks (or proselytes?) as well (Jn 12:20 ff). The festival games which Herod held in Jerusalem would also have brought in Greek-speaking foreign spectators (Ant 15.267 ff). But the use of Greek was not reserved for Jerusalem alone. Hengel (1989:14) explains

a substantial [Judean] population lived in the Hellenized cities of the coastal plain from Gaza to Dor or Ptolemais-Acco: in Caesarea they made up almost half the population, and in Jamnia certainly and Ashdod probably they outnumbered the Hellenized Gentile population ... That Greek was the principal language in these cities is again confirmed by [Judean] epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions.

## **8. RELIGIOUS INFLUENCE**

It becomes obvious that Hellenism influenced the people of Palestine in various ways, be it through architecture, governmental forms, or the use of the Greek language. The adoption of Gentile forms of religion, however, was in



general strongly resisted, yet Judeanism in its religion did not remain immune to Hellenistic influence. The Tanak was translated into Greek starting ca. 250 BCE, and so, quite ironically, the “constitution” of the Judean symbolic universe became available in the language representative of the ideological opposition. Judean religious leaders in Palestine itself were probably well exposed to Greek philosophy and culture (Glasson 1961:5-6).<sup>11</sup> The four metals of Daniel 2 (gold, silver, bronze and iron), representing ages of world history, are exactly the same as the metals in Hesiod’s *Work and days* (eighth century BCE), which also represent successive ages of world history. Therefore a measure of Greek influence in Daniel is evident, although the symbolism using four metals may originally have been Persian (Hengel 1989:46).

Other elements of Hellenistic thought were appropriated by Judeans. Quite striking is the Greek influence on the Judean notions of the afterlife. In the period of 200 BCE to 200 CE, from obscure origins, a belief in life after death emerged dramatically in Judeanism (Bauckham 1998:80-95). Judeanism also began to share with Hellenism an increasing awareness in this period in the importance of the individual, and that individual choice brings about a better hope for life after death (Hengel 1989:48-50). This value of the individual developed into the glorification of the martyr, where “dying for” the Torah and the people – already an established feature in Greek tradition – saw its appearance in Judeanism for the first time in the Maccabean period (e.g. 1 Mac 2:50; 6:44; 2 Mac 6-7) (Hengel 1989:50). Elements of Greek teaching about Hades are likewise well attested in Judean apocalyptic writings of the period, such as visions of the beyond (e.g. 1 Enoch), post-mortem discrimination with rewards and punishment in the afterlife, and divisions in Hades or the yonder world for the “good” (or initiated) and the “bad”. Generally, beliefs about life after death found its expression through a belief in the resurrection of the dead, and thereto related speculation about the current state of the departed emerged as well. In contrast to the older view, it was now seen that personality could be expressed in terms of discarnate soul (Russell 1980:359). The souls or spirits of the departed are therefore represented as fully conscious, possessing form and recognizable appearance as well.

Glasson (1961:8) makes mention that in Greek antiquity, outstanding figures were often said to have visited the realm of the dead. In Homer’s *Odyssey* (book 11), it speaks of the hero going into the underworld to meet the shades. Also in Virgil’s *Aeneid* (book 6), Aeneas does the same. This kind

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<sup>11</sup> Glasson also points to a saying of Rabban Simeon b. Gamaliel: “There were a thousand young men in my father’s house, 500 of them studied the Law, while the other 500 studied Greek wisdom.” The father in question was Gamaliel II who became Nasi in 80 CE.

### ***A clash of symbolic universes***

of Greek tradition was so familiar that it had a special name attached to it, *Nekuia*. The word *nekuia* (from νέκυς, dead body) originally meant a magical rite through which the dead were called up and questioned about the future. It eventually became a familiar title for the eleventh book of the *Odyssey* and was applied to all similar accounts of visits to the realm of the dead. This tradition according to Glasson seemed to be the inspiration for the author of Ethiopic Enoch to write about the famous Biblical figure doing the same and disclosing divine secrets. Genesis 5:24 indicated Enoch was specially adapted for this purpose. 1 Enoch 1-36 can thus be described as a *Judean Nekuia*.

Some Judean writings also understood that the righteous dead immediately entered the presence of God after death. Hellenistic philosophical ideas and language were freely borrowed as evidenced by 4 Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon. They sound Greek in the way they speak of the righteous as not dying but only seeming to die (WisSol 3:1-4; 4 Mac 7:18-19; 16:25; cf Jub 23:31). Yet, in these writings the Greek notion of life after death was qualified by Judean elements. In 4 Maccabees, the martyrs become immortal at death, but this was given to them by God and is not explained as an inherent quality of the soul. The Wisdom of Solomon also speaks of the future of the righteous within the context of a cosmic and collective eschatology (WisSol 3:7-8), a notion quite alien to Greek thinking (Bauckham 1998). But overall, the cultural contact with Hellenism allowed for the Judean symbolic universe to become a bit more “populated” and cosmologically complex, the souls of the departed being conceived as being somewhere “above” or “below”, or places that defy explanation.

## **9. SUMMARY**

As can be seen from the above, Judeans did undergo a measure of Hellenisation, but as Hengel (1989:54) points out, what is meant by “Hellenistic” should be defined more precisely; for example, does it refer to oriental syncretism, or does “it refer to technology, art, economics, politics, rhetoric and literature, philosophy or religion?” What was impossible was a Judean pagan cult, the denial of monotheism, the failure to observe the Torah and the desecration of the Temple (Hengel 1989:54). If one wants to speak of *Hellenistic* Judeanism, it should be properly qualified to avoid misrepresentation. In the ancient Mediterranean world, the Judeans remained to be a uniquely identifiable people.

So how then did Judeanism maintain its symbolic universe and respond to the “world” of Hellenism? The Maccabean revolt drew the battle lines between “Judeanism” and “Hellenism”. Any forms of Gentile worship

were banned. Gentile ways were “nihilated”. The revolt was a form of ethnicism, a collective movement that aimed at territorial restoration and cultural renewal in particular. From the Maccabean period onwards, the Judean approach to food and purity was also characterised by a strict avoidance of anything Gentile. General Torah observance intensified. Sectarian movements began to flourish, however, as the Hasmonean rulers made various accommodations to foreign influences. The sectarians were more devoted to what they believed is the proper way to be Judean, although this concern was not exclusively reserved for them. After the Roman take-over of Palestine, spacial separation was no longer possible between Judeans and Gentiles. The foreigner was in the house, or at least, very close by. Under the Herodian rulers, Roman-Hellenistic influence was present through architecture, theatres, gymnasiums and hippodromes, and Gentile games and festivals. Various cities were renamed after the emperors and their wives. Tiberias had a Greek constitution with a *boule* under the leadership of an *archon*. As a result, the separation between Judean and Gentile became a ritual affair. Rites such as ritual immersion, a form of self-applied “therapy”, grew in importance, along with the use of stone vessels. The Gentile was now regarded as “impure”. Overall, Judean ethnicity was in part (re)constructed where elements of Torah observance were intensified. Primordial sentiments increased and attached themselves to those cultural symbols or features that came under threat (monotheism, food, purity, circumcision, the land). This had the effect that existing practices were intensified to sharpen both the consciousness of similarity and difference, as well as the ethnic boundary vis-à-vis the Gentiles.

The most profound form of Hellenisation was the Judean adoption of the Greek language. Here we encounter adaptation and accommodation. Various Judean texts were produced in Greek, while the translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and apocryphal texts made the Judean world-view available in another language. The Judean understanding of the afterlife was also influenced by Greek thought. Here Hellenistic views about Hades and departed souls were appropriated but qualified by Judean elements. The Judean symbolic universe as a result became more “populated” and cosmologically complex.

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