

# Antisemitism and Early Scholarship on Ancient Antisemitism

René Bloch

The great German historian Theodor Mommsen, in the fifth volume of his magisterial *Römische Geschichte* (1885), framed a sentence that was soon after both endorsed and criticized by many other scholars. Mommsen stated there that “Jew-hatred and agitations against the Jews” (“Judenhass und die Judenhetzen”) were as old as the Jewish diaspora itself.<sup>1</sup> As soon as there was Judaism – or, at least, Diaspora Judaism – there was also anti-Judaism and, thus, antisemitism. Judaism and antisemitism had a twin birth of sorts. Mommsen’s comments on Judaism, both ancient and modern, are ambivalent, to say the least, and his sweeping remarks on the origins of antisemitism are problematic.<sup>2</sup> One could say, though, that the beginnings of the *study* of ancient antisemitism is a phenomenon contemporary with the beginnings of modern antisemitism.<sup>3</sup> In the last decades of the 19th century, ancient antisemitism became a topic of interest. It has remained so ever since.<sup>4</sup>

- 1 Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte: Fünfter Band, Die Provinzen von Caesar bis Diocletian* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1921 [1885]), 519: “Der Juden Hass und die Judenhetzen sind so alt wie die Diaspora selbst; diese privilegierten und autonomen orientalischen Gemeinden innerhalb der hellenischen mussten sie so nothwendig entwickeln wie der Sumpf die böse Luft.”
- 2 Cf. the enlightening comments on Mommsen by Christhard Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum im Werk deutscher Althistoriker des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, SJMT 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 87–132.
- 3 Rightly noted by Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum*, 222: “Der antike Antisemitismus wurde im wesentlichen erst mit dem Aufkommen des modernen Antisemitismus ein « Thema ».” Cf. also Nicolas de Lange, “The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations,” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. S.L. Gilman and S.T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 24 (21–37); Rainer Kampling, “Antike Judenfeindschaft,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 3, ed. W. Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 14.
- 4 Among the recent book-length studies on the topic are: Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) (with a good survey on the history of scholarship: 1–6); Zvi Yavetz, *Judenfeindschaft in der Antike: Die Münchener Vorträge*, With an introduction by Christian Meier, Beck’sche Reihe 1222 (München: C.H. Beck, 1997); Anton Cuffari, *Judenfeindschaft in Antike und Altem Testament:*

Greco-Roman literature voices negative statements about Jews, ranging from casual mockery to overt animosity.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, historical sources mention various expulsions (repeatedly from the city of Rome), attacks (most specifically in Alexandria, in 38 CE), and prohibition of Jewish customs (in Jerusalem under Antiochus IV). While it would be greatly exaggerated to assume that a generalized contempt, let alone oppression, characterized Jewish life in Greco-Roman antiquity, there is no doubt that at various times Jews were the target of pagan assaults. Scholarship in the last 150 years has debated three principal questions extensively. First: did Greeks and Romans treat Jews any differently from the ways that they treated other “barbarian” peoples? This question is further complicated by the fact that due to the Christian interest in Jewish-Hellenistic texts (including Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*), pagan anti-Jewish materials assumed an outsized afterlife in our evidence. Second: Did anti-Jewish rhetoric or activities reflect circumstantial conflicts, or did these relate to some “essential” aspect of Judaism? Third: which term – anti-Judaism, antisemitism or something else – best describes negative attitudes toward Jews in Greco-Roman antiquity?

Modern historiography, reflecting contemporary political impulses and cultural conflicts, has intensified the argument on these questions. Deliberations about the social and civil status of Jews in modern Europe (the so-called “Jewish question,” beginning in the 19th century); German antisemitic propaganda before and during World War II; the horrors of the Holocaust and its enduring aftermath; the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948: all these factors have contributed continually to the proliferation of very different interpretations of what – or whether – one can identify ancient hostilities toward Jews as antisemitism. (I will discuss this problematic term below.) The literature on ancient antisemitism is vast; many questions remain controversial.

The current paper continues my earlier investigations into this topic.<sup>6</sup> My question, here, is specifically What triggered scholarly interest in Greco-Roman antisemitism in the period between the late 19th century and World War II?

---

*Terminologische, historische und theologische Untersuchungen* (Hamburg: Philo, 2007). Still very valuable is John G. Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). Cf. also Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 25–102, on the origins of specifically Christian traditions *adversus Iudaeos*.

5 Here I am taking up a section from the introduction to my bibliographic entry on ancient antisemitism in *Oxford Bibliographies*, cf. René Bloch, in <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0140.xml?rskey=LrGBFr&result=6>. See the entry for a detailed survey on scholarship on ancient antisemitism from the beginnings up to recent times.

6 See previous note and René S. Bloch, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum: Der Judenexkurs des Tacitus im Rahmen der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002).

Why did ancient antisemitism suddenly present such compelling questions, both to classicists and to theologians? As a matter of fact, their respective agendas often overlapped.<sup>7</sup> Theodor Mommsen is a case in point. In his *Roman History*, he endorses and reinterprets the distinction, quite common among Christian theologians at the time (I shall come back to this) between a putative, earlier cosmopolitan Judaism and a later, misanthropic Judaism. For Mommsen, the dividing line between these two Judaisms was demarcated not so much by the temple's destruction in 70 CE, but rather by the first Jewish revolt itself. His critique of the frozen Judaism of the rabbis, which supposedly replaced the open-minded earlier religion of Israelites, thereby acquired an added, specifically political dimension. Mommsen writes:

The Jews had always been foreign, and wished to be so; but the feeling of estrangement mounted in horrifying fashion, both among them and towards them, and its hateful and pernicious consequences were extended starkly in both directions. From the disparaging satire of Horace against the importunate Jew from the Roman ghetto, it is quite a step to the solemn resentment which Tacitus harbours towards this scum of the earth for whom everything clean is unclean and everything unclean is clean; in between are those uprisings of the despised nation, the need to defeat it and perpetually expend money and people on keeping it down.<sup>8</sup>

7 In light of the main questions of this volume, I will focus on views by Christian scholars, referring only occasionally to Jewish scholars such as Isaak Heinemann. Towards the end of the 19th century Théodore Reinach's *Textes d'auteurs grecs et romains relatifs au judaïsme* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1895) became an important tool for the study of comments on Jews and Judaism in Greco-Roman literature, replacing earlier much less exhaustive studies. Similarly influential were the two volumes by Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'Empire romain: leur condition juridique, économique et sociale* (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914).

8 Theodor Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, 551: "Fremde waren die Juden immer gewesen und hatten es sein wollen; aber das Gefühl der Entfremdung steigerte sich jetzt in ihnen selbst wie gegen sie in entsetzlicher Weise und schroff zog man nach beiden Seiten hin dessen gehässige und schädliche Konsequenzen. Von dem geringschätzigen Spott des Horatius gegen den aufdringlichen Juden aus dem römischen Ghetto ist ein weiter Schritt zu dem feierlichen Groll, welchen Tacitus hegt gegen diesen Abschaum des Menschengeschlechts, dem alles Reine unrein und alles Unreine rein ist; dazwischen liegen jene Aufstände des verachteten Volkes und die Nothwendigkeit dasselbe zu besiegen und für seine Niederhaltung fortwährend Geld und Menschen aufzuwenden." English translation by David Ash from René Bloch, "Tacitus' Excursus on the Jews over the Centuries: an Overview of the History of its Reception", *Oxford Readings in Tacitus*, ed. R. Ash, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), 401. Translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

As Christhard Hoffmann has shown, Mommsen on this point was heavily influenced by Julius Wellhausen, whose views on a Judaism in steady decline (from the Persian period with Ezra and Nehemiah, accelerated even further by the rabbis) he shared. Shortly after his comparison between Horace's and Tacitus' comments on the Jews, Mommsen refers to post-70 Judaism as paralyzed to an absurd extent.<sup>9</sup> Mommsen's interpretation can indeed be read as a "secularized form of the traditional Christian template for interpretation".<sup>10</sup> As we shall see shortly, Mommsen was by no means an exception among contemporary classicists, whose historiography of ancient antisemitism reflected and reaffirmed Christian theological claims. Just how much Mommsen's reading of the Jews in the Roman empire was influenced by the *political* discourse on the role of the Jews in the modern state emerges clearly from his most infamous comment on Judaism. Commenting on the Jewish diaspora at the time of Julius Caesar in the third volume of *Roman History*, Mommsen identified Jewish "cosmopolitanism" as an important contributing factor aiding Caesar's political goal of "national decomposition."

This remarkable people, yielding and yet tenacious, was in the ancient as in the modern world everywhere and nowhere at home, and everywhere and nowhere powerful. (...) Even in the ancient world, Judaism was an effective leaven of cosmopolitan and national decomposition, and to that extent a specially privileged member in the Caesarian state, the polity of which was strictly speaking nothing but a citizenship of the world, and the nationality of which was at bottom nothing but humanity.<sup>11</sup>

The phrase "leaven of cosmopolitan and national decomposition" ("Ferment des Kosmopolitismus und der nationalen Decomposition") became an antisemitic slogan later exploited by the National Socialists, including Goebbels and Hitler.<sup>12</sup> Again, Mommsen's approach to Judaism and the Jews is ambivalent. He does endorse and repeat anti-Jewish stereotypes, but his understanding of

9 Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, *ibid.*

10 Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum*, 114.

11 Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte*, Vol. 3 (1856) 516–517: "Das merkwürdige nachgiebig zähe Volk war in der alten wie in der heutigen Welt überall und nirgends heimisch und überall und nirgends mächtig. (...) Auch in der alten Welt war das Judentum ein wirksames Ferment des Kosmopolitismus und der nationalen Decomposition und insofern ein vorzugsweise berechtigtes Mitglied in dem caesarischen Staate, dessen Politie doch eigentlich nichts als Weltbürgerthum, dessen Volksthümlichkeit eigentlich nichts als Humanität war." English translation, William P. Dickson, *History of Rome*, 5, 417–419.

12 Christhard Hoffmann, "Ancient Jewry – Modern Questions: German Historians of Antiquity on the Jewish Diaspora", *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 191–207.

the Jews' function as a ferment of decomposition for Caesar's empire, although based on the stereotype of the cosmopolitan Jew, was not meant in a necessarily negative way. During the so-called "Berliner Antisemitismus-Streit" between 1879 and 1881, Mommsen forthrightly opposed the antisemites gathered around historian Heinrich von Treitschke.<sup>13</sup> The term "Antisemitismus" as a concept and political movement was coined at this time: in September of the year 1879 the "Antisemiten-Liga", which set itself the goal of reducing a supposed Jewish influence in the German Empire, was founded in Berlin.<sup>14</sup> From that point on, "Antisemitismus" spread quickly and became a catchphrase.<sup>15</sup>

The term antisemitism is thus a problematic one. It not only, and misleadingly, uses a linguistic term – seemingly referring to Semitic languages – it also was originally a term of self-reference, coined in the late 19th-century by Germans who identified themselves as "antisemites." But it has become the term most often used, also in scholarly contexts, for any and all anti-Jewish attitudes and behaviours. Incidentally, the term "philosemitism," as Wolfram Kinzig has shown, is similarly problematic. It was created by antisemites as a term of derogation aimed against their opponents in the very same period: those who attacked the antisemites were criticized for their philosemitic fervour ("philosemitischen Eifer").<sup>16</sup>

But what about the ancient Greco-Roman world? Which term should be used to describe the negative treatment of Jews in Greco-Roman antiquity? In the late 19th century, the new term "antisemitism" was also applied to the ancient world. Konrad Zacher, a classicist based in Breslau, published an article in 1898

- 13 Cf. Theodor Mommsen, *Auch ein Wort über unser Judenthum* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880). On this debate cf. Walter Boehlich, ed., *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1965); Jürgen Malitz, "Mommsen, Caesar und die Juden," in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag, vol. II: Griechische und Römische Religion*, ed. H. Cancik et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 371–387; Stefan Rebenich, "Eine Entzweiung: Theodor Mommsen und Heinrich von Treitschke," in *Berlins wilde Energien: Portraits aus der Geschichte der Leibnizischen Wissenschaftsakademie*, ed. S. Leibfried et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 262–285.
- 14 Ulrich Wyrwa, "Antisemiten-Liga", in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 5, ed. W. Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 30–33. The adjective "antisemitisch" had been used before: cf. Alex Bein, *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990), 594.
- 15 Werner Bergmann, "Antisemitische Bewegung", in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus: Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Band 5, ed. W. Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 34–39.
- 16 Wolfram Kinzig, "Philosemitismus – was ist das?: Eine kritische Begriffsanalyse," in *Geliebter Feind – gehasster Freund: Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Julius H. Schoeps*, ed. I. Diekmann and E.V. Kotowski (Berlin: VBN-Verlag, 2009), 25–60.

entitled “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im klassischen Alterthum.” The article appeared in the *Preußische Jahrbücher*, the same monthly in which von Treitschke had published his anti-Jewish contributions twenty years earlier.<sup>17</sup> Zacher, who otherwise had a keen interest in Greek linguistics as well as in Greek comedy, may indeed have been the very first scholar to use the term “antisemitism” (“Antisemitismus”) for the ancient world.<sup>18</sup> In this essay, Zacher, whose academic career was not very successful,<sup>19</sup> does not hide his antipathy towards the Jews of his own day, complaining of their “national characteristics that emerge unpleasantly, such as the tendency to arrogance, doctrinarism and skepticism”.<sup>20</sup>

Very much like Mommsen, Zacher begins his article by stating that antisemitism was as old as Judaism.<sup>21</sup> While Zacher stresses from the beginning that antisemitism has not always been the same in all times and places; and that in Greco-Roman antiquity, unlike in 19th-century Germany, Jews were not capitalists, he does refer to some “very interesting parallels” to antisemitism of his own time. Zacher’s study obviously mirrors the debates of the days in which it was written. Towards the end of this article, Zacher explains ancient antisemitism as a consequence of Jewish, that is “Pharisaic” torpidity which, originating in Jerusalem with the Maccabees in the aftermath of the anti-Jewish edict of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, had then spread throughout the Diaspora. Antisemitism is a reaction to the religious stubbornness of the Jews, as well as (in Egypt) to their contempt of the Egyptian religion.<sup>22</sup> The first encounters of Jews and Greeks, at the time of Alexander, had been

17 Konrad Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im klassischen Alterthum,” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 94 (1898): 1–24.

18 Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum*, 222.

19 Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff argued strongly against Zacher’s promotion, cf. William M. Calder III, Alexander Košenina, ed., *Berufungspolitik innerhalb der Altertumswissenschaft im wilhelminischen Preußen* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1989), 71.160.

20 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus”, 2–3 (“unangenehm hervortretende nationale Eigenschaften, wie die Neigung zur Ueberhebung, zum Doktrinarismus und Skeptizismus”). Zacher’s stereotypical picture of modern Judaism is not only negative: he also refers to the Jews’ “intelligence”, “ambition”, and “diligence” (2: “Intelligenz”, “Ehrgeiz”, “Fleiß”) which leads to their success and then to envy and antipathy (2: “Neid und Mißgunst”).

21 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus,” 1: “Der Antisemitismus, im weitesten Sinne gefaßt als feindliche Gesinnung oder Bethätigung gegen jüdische Mitbürger, ist so alt wie das Judentum selbst und die jüdische Diaspora; aber seine Erscheinungsformen und Motive sind sehr verschieden nach Zeiten und Völkern.” Later in the article, Zacher criticizes Mommsen’s interpretation of the Jewish *privilegia*. These were not introduced by Caesar, Zacher argues, but must already have existed before in the Greek East (13–14).

22 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus,” 20–21.

fruitful and positive, Zacher claimed: Greek authors interpreted Judaism as a philosophy.<sup>23</sup> What Mommsen noticed for the time of Julius Caesar, Zacher then suggests, was already true for the period of Alexander the Great: the Jews served both men as a means to implement their respective political agendas. The Jews, adapting and adopting Hellenistic ideas, were the perfect “oriental element” facilitating the merging of Hellenism with the East.<sup>24</sup> But later on, after the Maccabean revolt and the success of the Pharisees (sic), Jewish self-confidence and exclusive presumptuousness contrasted sharply with tolerant, open Hellenism.<sup>25</sup> Thus, Greek philosemitism yielded to Greco-Roman antisemitism. Zacher ends his article with the very dichotomy that stands at the core of his argument, the same one common among theologians at the time, but clearly shared by Christian classicists: Judaism had started off well but, in its orthodox, Pharisaic form, it deteriorated into torpor (“erstarrte”). In Rome, Judaism served for some time as a “stimulating leaven” (“anregender Sauerteig”) – this language recalls Mommsen’s picture of Judaism as a “ferment” – but eventually it was replaced by Christianity, the emerging world power, which was “new,” “fresh,” and “vital.”<sup>26</sup> Zacher’s article begins with antisemitism and culminates in “das Christentum.”

A few years after Zacher’s article, in 1905, Felix – later to become professor of ancient history at the University of Basel – published the first (if brief) monograph on ancient antisemitism, like Zacher using that very term: *Der Antisemitismus des Altertums in seiner Entstehung und Entwicklung*.<sup>27</sup> Stähelin’s study is a mostly descriptive history of political conflicts involving Jews and

23 Interestingly Zacher uses the word “Philosemitismus” only in the title of his article, but this is what is meant by the term: the early Greek sympathy for the Jews.

24 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus”, 18: “Seine Absicht war ja eine Verschmelzung von Griechenthum und Orient; welches orientalische Element konnte für die Förderung dieses Planes geeigneter erscheinen als die Juden, die sich dem aufgeklärten Hellenenthum so wesentlich näher zu stellen schienen als die übrigen Orientalen?”

25 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus”, 23: “Es (sc. das Judentum) wurde orthodoxer, starrer, gegen alles Andere abgeschlossener. Das hochmüthig zur Schau getragene Selbstbewusstsein, im Besitz der allein wahren Religion zu sein, mußte das tolerante Griechenthum mehr und mehr abstoßen.” 20: “Unter der Führung der Makkabäer sammelte sich das altgläubige Judentum und errang Freiheit des Glaubens nicht nur, sondern auch des Landes. Die Folge war denn auch im Innern der völlige Sieg der pharisäischen Richtung (...).”

26 Zacher, “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus”, 24: “sein Erbe übernahm die neue, frische, lebendige welterobernde Macht – das Christentum”. Overall, Zacher’s article is not one-sided. He denounces the absurdity of some of the antisemitic accusations and calls the riot in Alexandria of 38 CE a “furchtbaren Ausbruch” (22).

27 Felix Stähelin, *Der Antisemitismus des Altertums in seiner Entstehung und Entwicklung*, (Basel: C.F. Lendorff, 1905). In its original form Stähelin published his study first in 1901

negative statements on the Jews. Stähelin, who had just filed his dissertation on the history of the Galatians, was also influenced by current theological discourse on Jews, as is clear from the beginning and the end of his book. On page one he refers to Julius Wellhausen's *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte* to recount that Jewish separatism and legalism had replaced the "fresh, religious life" of ancient Israel.<sup>28</sup> Concluding, Stähelin states that Christianity should not be accused of having invented antisemitism since antisemitism predated Christianity by centuries. It is "a pagan instinct that erupts now and then" ("ein heidnischer Instinkt, der von Zeit zu Zeit wieder hervorbricht").<sup>29</sup>

The relation of pagan, Christian, medieval and modern animosity towards Jews is much debated in scholarship. Many scholars try to avoid using "antisemitism" as a term of historical description for the ancient and medieval periods. The main argument in this instance is that modern antisemitism encompasses a racist component seemingly foreign to the earlier periods, Greco-Roman, Roman Christian, and medieval. Prominent alternative suggestions for pagan antiquity are "anti-Judaism" and "Judeophobia."<sup>30</sup> Each of these labels, however, is problematic in its own way. "Judeophobia" (used most prominently by Zvi Yavetz and Peter Schäfer)<sup>31</sup> seemingly implies psychological issues (more so than the broader term "xenophobia"). Pagans indeed mocked Jews and occasionally targeted them with violence, but "phobia" scarcely seems descriptively correct.

As for "anti-Judaism," many scholars avoid using it for pagan contexts, reserving it rather for Christianity. The study of ancient antisemitism regularly and from its beginnings revolved around the question whether or to what extent pagan polemics against the Jews should be distinguished from Christian ones. Zacher and Stähelin exemplify this issue. At times, an apologetic agenda is quite tangible: If antisemitism was already virulent in pagan antiquity, it can hardly be called a Christian invention. Or the other way around: By stressing

---

in the conservative Swiss newspaper *Allgemeine Schweizer Zeitung* (Nr. 17–19) which was printed in Basel.

28 Stähelin, *Der Antisemitismus des Altertums*, 2: „(...) den endgiltigen Triumph jener geisttötenden, peinlichen Gesetzlichkeit, zu dem sich kaum ein grellerer Gegensatz denken läßt als das frische religiöse Leben, das im alten Israel geherrscht, und der Geist, der einst die Propheten getrieben hatte.“

29 Stähelin, *Der Antisemitismus des Altertums*, 54.

30 An extensive survey on the use of different terms in Cuffari, *Judenfeindschaft in Antike und Altem Testament*, 21–56.

31 Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Zvi Yavetz, "Judeophobia in Classical Antiquity: A Different Approach", *JJS* 44 (1993): 1–22.



the origins of *Christian* antisemitism, Greco-Roman antiquity can be freed from the ugliness of Jew-hatred. The question of the extent to which pagan antisemitism differs from Christian antisemitism is central in practically all wide-ranging studies on the topic. Jules Isaac, in *Genèse de l'antisémitisme*, published in 1956 and written with great passion (and under the direct impact of the Holocaust), concludes that pagan antisemitism remained a temporary and fragmentary phenomenon, while Christian antisemitism was much more virulent and more fundamental to Christian identity.<sup>32</sup> Some thirty years later, John Gager, in his *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, also compared pagan and Christian antisemitism, stressing the differences between the two.<sup>33</sup> According to Gager, neither paganism nor early Christianity knew some kind of pervasive antisemitism. However, Gager argues, the various contributions of early Christian contribution to modern antisemitism should not be minimized by referring to selected anti-Jewish passages in Greco-Roman literature.<sup>34</sup>

Being aware of the apologetic risks inherent in this discussion, I tend to agree in principle with both Isaac and Gager. Early Christianity, at least from the time of the church fathers on, brought a new dimension to earlier pagan polemics against the Jews. Quite enlightening is a comparison between Roman historian Tacitus, in the early second century CE, and Christian writer Sulpicius Severus some three centuries later. Sulpicius Severus (ca. 363–420 CE) seems to have used a lost part of Tacitus's *Histories* to describe the Roman destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>35</sup> Whether or not he did so,<sup>36</sup> the differences between the two authors are telling. Tacitus indeed disparages Jews and Jewish customs in *Histories* 5; but outside of his long digression on Judea and Judaism, he has little else to say. He nowhere comments on the Jewish origins of figures like Tiberius Julius Alexander, King Agrippa II, or his sister Berenice. Tacitus may

32 Jules Isaac, *Genèse de l'antisémitisme: Essai historique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1956). Also James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-semitism* (London: Soncino Press, 1934), draws a sharp line between pagan polemics and Christian antisemitism: "(...) the advent of Christianity perpetuated their [sc. the Jews'] tragedy. The reasons for this have nothing to do with the old enmities. They are to be found only in the conflict of Christianity with its parent religion" (26).

33 Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*.

34 Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, 268.

35 Jacob Bernays, "Über die Chronik des Sulpicius Severus, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der classischen und biblischen Studien," in J. Bernays, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, vol. 2, ed. H. Usener (Berlin: Hertz, 1885 [1861]), 81–200.

36 Cf. the critical remarks by Eric Laupot, "Tacitus' Fragment 2: the Anti-Roman Movement of the Christiani and the Nazoreans", *VChr* 54 (2000): 233–247.

not have liked Jews, but they were of no major concern to him.<sup>37</sup> He hardly “feared” them.

Christian authors like Sulpicius Severus, however, had much more at stake. The destruction of the temple in Jerusalem for him is of fundamental theological importance:

Thus, according to the divine will, the minds of all being inflamed, the temple was destroyed, three hundred and thirty-one years ago. And this last overthrow of the temple, and final captivity of the Jews (*haec ultima templi eversio et postrema Iudaeorum captivitas*), by which, being exiles from their native land, they are beheld scattered through the whole world (*per orbem terrarum dispersi*), furnish a daily demonstration to the world, that they have been punished on no other account than for the impious hands which they laid upon Christ (*cotidie mundo testimonio sunt, non ob aliud eos quam ob illatas Christo impias manus fuisse punitos*).<sup>38</sup>

More than Christian vocabulary distinguishes Sulpicius Severus from Tacitus. Striking, for our concerns, is his deployment of *cotidie*, “daily.” For authors such as Sulpicius Severus – as centuries earlier, with Ignatius, Justin, and Tertullian – “the Jews” had become a fundamental theological category framing Christian claims to Jewish scriptures (the church’s Old Testament), thus a daily issue, so to speak.<sup>39</sup> The terms *Iudaeus* and *Iudaicus* appear fewer than a hundred times in all of pagan Roman literature (not counting the toponym *Iudaea*). Tertullian alone (who writes three generations after Tacitus, whom he read) uses *Iudaeus* and *Iudaicus* 270 times.<sup>40</sup> To the Romans, the Jews were a strange people, often viewed as foreign, but only one ethnic group among many. It is only with the arrival of Christianity that the *Iudaei* become an essential topic – although

37 Bloch, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum*.

38 Sulp. Sev. Hist. 2.30.8 (transl. A. Roberts).

39 Cf. Hubert Cancik, “Der antike Antisemitismus und seine Rezeption”, in *Das ‘bewegliche’ Vorurteil. Aspekte des internationalen Antisemitismus*, ed. C. von Braun et al. (Würzburg: Königshausen u. Neumann, 2004), 63–79 who also refers to the differences between Tacitus and Sulpicius Severus stating that with the latter “ist das Unglück der Juden zum festen Bestandteil der christlichen Heilsgeschichte und zu einem handgreiflichen Beweisstück geworden” (76).

40 Cf. René Bloch, “Jew or Judean: The Latin Evidence”, in *Torah, Temple, Land: Constructions of Judaism in Antiquity*, ed. M. Witte, J. Schröter, and V. Lepper, TSAJ 184 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 231–242.

also in the case of early Christian literature there were of course nuances with regard to each individual author's relation to the Jews.<sup>41</sup>

Christian animosity towards the Jews is thus different *in kind* from its pagan predecessor. And this seems to be a good reason to use different terms, "anti-Judaism" for Christianity and something else for the pagan phenomenon. But matters are, alas, more complicated. If anti-Judaism is a phenomenon specific to Christian antiquity (if not also already to some late first-century texts gathered in the New Testament), when does that period end? Medieval polemics against the Jews are no less theologically charged and, as is clear from our observations on Mommsen, Zacher, and Stähelin, confessional Christian agendas continued to shape modern academic discourses.

The beginnings of racist anti-Jewish discourse in the 19th century did not exclude the influence of long-lived Christian tropes. And scholars debate whether some kind of proto-racism shaped such discourse in the Middle Ages or even in Greco-Roman antiquity.<sup>42</sup> Alas, we lack a simple answer to the question what the appropriate term(s) are appropriate for which times. In my earlier research, I had avoided using "antisemitism" for those centuries before the term itself was coined in the late 19th century. Today, I hesitate less. The distinctions between the different periods that have been suggested are in my view inaccurate and rather artificial. It is true, as Nicolas de Lange wrote, that "Anti-Semitism, in the strict sense of the term, cannot be detached from the racial theories which exercised such an important influence on the ethos of Western politics and thought from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth".<sup>43</sup> The term "antisemitism" with its antisemitic origins is problematic and there were different forms and degrees of this phenomenon over time. Still, "antisemitism" has become the general denominator for any kind of anti-Jewish hostility or agitation. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it denotes "prejudice, hostility, or discrimination towards Jewish

41 As de Lange, "The Origins of Anti-Semitism", 30, rightly notes it would indeed be "an exaggeration to claim that early Christianity was uniformly hostile to the Jews and Judaism."

42 Cf. Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Rather sophisticated is Gavin I. Langmuir's distinction between anti-Judaism and antisemitism in *Toward a Definition of Anti-semitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). According to Langmuir anti-Judaism is a theologically framed precursor ("the necessary preparation") of anti-Semitism which is more irrational, but the two terms are not simply to be understood in a chronological way. Thus for Langmuir, e.g. the medieval blood libel should also be considered antisemitic. On Langmuir (and on Jules Isaac) cf. the helpful comments by Robert Chazan, *From Anti-Judaism to Anti-Semitism: Ancient and Medieval Christian Constructions of Jewish History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016), vi–xvi.

43 De Lange, "The Origins of Anti-Semitism", 22.

people on religious, cultural, or ethnic grounds; (also) the theory, action, or practice resulting from this".<sup>44</sup> This is a good working definition. Adjectives such as "religious," "racist," as well as "ancient," "Christian," "medieval," and "modern" can help clarify further what kind of antisemitism we mean. This is why I think it is legitimate to talk about ancient antisemitism, knowing that it was, then, often simply a species of Greco-Roman ethnographies that denigrated exotic "others" – and in which ancient Jews also engaged. But the fact that there are no specific modern terms for animosity against the Egyptians, Phoenicians and other ethnic groups insulted by classical authors must not preclude the historian from using a specific term for ancient anti-Jewish animosity. Finally, it hardly needs to be brought to mind that research on antisemitism post-Holocaust is haunted by that unprecedented catastrophe. Research into pre-Holocaust anti-Jewish hostility – but also into contemporary, post-Holocaust animosity – risks being belittled by comparison. In sum: ancient antisemitism was often more circumstantial than essential and the suffix -ism, often indicating some kind of greater movement or ideology, may be somewhat misleading. Ancient antisemitism does differ from later Christian and still later racial antisemitism; but Greek and Roman animosity towards Jews could be quite substantial. *Faute de mieux*, even for antiquity, antisemitism seems the most appropriate term.

Let us now return to the late 19th century's stirrings of scholarship on ancient antisemitism. A variety of causes triggered interest in the topic. Of fundamental importance, as Christhard Hoffmann writes, was

the political debate on the 'Jewish question', i.e. on the position of the Jewish minority in modern society. Against the thesis of the liberal proponents of emancipation, according to which hatred of the Jews is nothing more than a Christian religious prejudice that must be overcome, the nationalistic opponents of Jewish equality (such as Friedrich Rühs) and the intellectual sympathisers with modern antisemitism (such as Heinrich von Treitschke), which was forming in the 1870s, offered the arguments of the supposedly universal ancient antisemitism. (...) The persuasive function of this interpretation in the contemporary discussion of the 'Jewish question' is clear: If Jews have been the object of contempt, hatred and persecution wherever they appeared in world history,

---

44 OED, third Edition (2019), s.v. (the second edition (1989) had: "Theory, action, or practice directed against the Jews. Hence anti-'Semite, one who is hostile or opposed to the Jews").

then the reason must lie within themselves and not in Christian religious prejudice.<sup>45</sup>

In midst of the modern debates on the Jews' place in civic society, ancient antisemitism could serve to exemplify a seemingly eternal problem. At times, and especially in the period of National Socialism, scholars looked for historical steppingstones to their own antisemitic agendas. A very explicit example for this is the volume *Das antike Weltjudentum*, co-authored by Gerhard Kittel (professor of New Testament at the University of Tübingen) and Eugen Fischer (professor of medicine and promotor of eugenics in Nazi Germany). The book was published in 1943 as volume 7 of the *Forschungen zur Judenfrage* (FzJ). The two authors attempt to show that Jews, "whether in the first or the 20th century," had always striven for absolute world domination.<sup>46</sup> The first part of the book ends with a brief chapter on ancient antisemitism ("Antike Judengegnerschaft") which serves to validate its modern iterations.<sup>47</sup> The second and third parts of the book, mainly by Fischer, provide a racist discussion of supposedly Jewish portraits on Egyptian mummies and of terracotta figures with crooked noses, explained as anti-Jewish caricatures.<sup>48</sup> Religion is not at the core of the volume, but Kittel, also a Lutheran theologian, had already expanded his often antisemitic views on ancient Judaism in a number of earlier publications.<sup>49</sup> In the late 19th century up to the time of National Socialism, ancient antisemitism could serve as "a historical legitimization" for

45 Christhard Hoffmann, "Judaism", in *Brill's New Pauly*, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, English Edition by: Christine F. Salazar, Classical Tradition volumes edited by: Manfred Landfester, English Edition by: Francis G. Gentry . [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e1407860](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1407860). Jewish scholars, especially Isaak Heinemann and Elias Bickermann, responded to the view that ancient antisemitism was a natural precursor of the Jewish problem by putting ancient hostility towards the Jews in a historical context: cf. Hoffmann, *ibid.* and Bloch, "Ancient Anti-semitism". Heinemann explicitly rejects Mommsen's view that antisemitism is as old as the Jewish diaspora: Isaak Heinemann, "Antisemitismus," in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Supplement 5, Agamemnon bis Statilius, ed. G. Wissowa (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1931), 3–43 (19).

46 Eugen Fischer, Gerhard Kittel, *Das antike Weltjudentum: Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder*, *Forschungen zur Judenfrage* 7 (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1943), 11 ("ob im Ersten oder im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert"). Cf. Hoffmann, *Juden und Judentum*, 254–259.

47 Fischer, Kittel, *Das antike Weltjudentum*, 89–92. Interestingly the two authors avoid the term "Antisemitismus", but speak instead of "Judengegnerschaft".

48 Fischer, Kittel, *Das antike Weltjudentum*, 95–219.

49 Cf. the extensive discussion on Kittel in Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*, *Studies in Jewish History and Culture* 20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 417–530.

modern antisemitism.<sup>50</sup> Particularly attractive to early interpreters of ancient antisemitism, it seems to me, was a seemingly clear development of the phenomenon from Greco-Roman (that is, non-Christian) texts. As Zacher's work especially demonstrates, many scholars stressed the differences between a positive view on the Jews in Hellenistic texts ("Jews as philosophers" and "cosmopolitan citizens") on the one hand, and the very negative depictions of the misanthropic Jews in later Roman literature (with Tacitus in a starring role). More recently, some scholars – Erich S. Gruen, Nicholas de Lange and I, for example – have pointed out that things may be quite a bit more complicated. After all, the accusation of Jewish misanthropy shows up for the first time as early as the late 4th century BCE, with Hecataeus of Abdera.<sup>51</sup> Even when one puts the Roman evidence aside and only looks at the Greek, one arrives at the conclusion, with Bezalel Bar-Kochva, that there is no "logical, coherent line from admiration at the time of first contacts between Greeks and Jews through a cooling-off period as Greeks learned more about the Jews to extreme hostility with the rupture between Jews and the Greek world following the religious persecutions by Antiochus Epiphanes."<sup>52</sup> In short, no simple and straight development from philosemitism to antisemitism can be supported by our ancient evidence. To interpreters in the late 19th century and early 20th century, however, such a reading easily accommodated the Christian theological interpretation of a Judaism that had had a good start (and thus was praised), but that fell into depravity (and thus became the object of hatred). It was no coincidence that this developmental timeline traced an arc from the heights of Israelite prophecy to the moribund depths of "rabbinic legalism" (itself a trope of Reformation anti-Catholic polemic, with rabbis as stand-ins for Papists). Moreover, two prominent pagan authors – one Greek, the other Latin – could be pressed into service of such an interpretation. The geographer Strabo and the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus report on a dichotomy between an early, positive period of Judaism and a later time when Judaism fell into decadence.<sup>53</sup> It comes as no surprise that some scholars made use of these ancient sources to strengthen their general understanding of Judaism as a history of decline.

<sup>50</sup> Hoffmann, "Judaism".

<sup>51</sup> Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 41–53; de Lange, "The Origins of Anti-Semitism", 31–33; René Bloch, "Misanthropia," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 24 (2011), ed. G. Schöllgen et al. (Stuttgart: A. Hiersemann), 828–845; Bloch, *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum*.

<sup>52</sup> Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 517.

<sup>53</sup> Strabo, *Geog.* 16.2.35–37; Tac. *Hist.* 5.4–5.

A particularly interesting and telling exemplar of such historiography is Johannes Leipoldt. Leipoldt authored two important contributions to the study of ancient antisemitism: a 50 page article, “Antisemitismus in der alten Welt” (1933), and the entry on antisemitism in the very first volume of the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (1950).<sup>54</sup> Leipoldt, who lived from 1880 to 1965, studied Theology and *Orientalistik* in Berlin and Leipzig. His academic work ranges widely from Coptic Christianity to the historical Jesus to late Roman patristics. From 1916 until his retirement in 1959 he taught New Testament in Leipzig.<sup>55</sup> During World War II, Leipoldt was involved with the “Institute for the Study and Eradication of Jewish Influence on German Church Life”, a Protestant pro-Nazi institute that worked to “dejudaize” Christianity.<sup>56</sup> His 1933 study on antisemitism in the ancient world mixes sound scholarly assessments of ancient sources with imaginary conjurings of ancient anti-Judaism, thoroughly influenced by contemporary antisemitic discourse. Ten years before Kittel and Fischer, Leipoldt (who became Kittel’s doctoral advisor in Kiel)<sup>57</sup> refers to Egyptian mummy portraits that he claims have a Jewish look, thus proving that Jewish physiognomy had not changed since ancient times. This extraordinary stability was especially instantiated by “what appears to us today as the most striking physical peculiarity of the Jew: the curved nose”.<sup>58</sup> But it was not Jewish noses that triggered ancient antisemitism,<sup>59</sup> Leipoldt urged, but the Jews’ religion.<sup>60</sup> On this point Leipoldt enlists Strabo’s comments on Moses and his successors. Leipoldt writes:

- 
- 54 Johannes Leipoldt, *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt* (Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1933); id. “Antisemitismus”, *RAC* 1 (1950), 469–76.
- 55 Klaus-Gunther Wesseling, “Johannes Leipoldt”, *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* 4 (1992), 1391–1395.
- 56 Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus: Christian Theologians and the Bible in Nazi Germany*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 178: “Within the Institute Leipoldt was a constant presence, lecturing frequently at its conferences, including at its final meeting in March of 1944. The Institute gave him the opportunity to incorporate racial theory in his academic work, explaining the rise of Christianity in antiquity as an Aryan triumph that incorporated Teutonic ideas, as he argued in a paper on ‘The History of the Ancient Church in Racial Illumination,’ presented at an Institute conference in November 1941.”
- 57 Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism*, 419.
- 58 Leipoldt, *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt*, 17–18: “was uns heute als die auffälligste körperliche Besonderheit des Juden erscheint: die gebogene Nase (...). Die körperliche Art des Juden hat sich also von der alten Zeit bis heute ziemlich unverändert erhalten.”
- 59 Leipoldt, *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt*, 20: “Der Rassegegensatz reicht nicht aus, um den Antisemitismus der alten Welt zu erklären.”
- 60 Ibid.: “Mir scheint der religiöse Grund des Antisemitismus der wichtigste zu sein.” Two years before Heinemann, “Antisemitismus”, argued the opposite (10: “Gegen die jüdische Religion als solche hat man nichts einzuwenden”. 18: “Überblicken wir nunmehr die

Perhaps the average judgment of the educated is best rendered by the carefully weighing geographer Strabo (d. 19 CE). He does not hesitate to recognize the greatness of Moses. According to Strabo Moses rightly said that the divine being should not be thought of in animal or human form. Strabo takes anti-Semitism into account by portraying the later successors of Moses as superstitious and tyrannical: it was they who first introduced the dietary laws, circumcision and the like.<sup>61</sup>

In his long description of Judaea and the Jews in Book 16 of his *Geography*, Strabo indeed speaks of Judaism's gradual decline. Moses was an Egyptian priest who had left Egypt because he was "displeased with the state of affairs there".<sup>62</sup> Moses particularly disliked the Egyptian way of worshipping gods, their theriomorphic representations of divine being, since he rejected any production of an "image of God resembling any creature amongst us". Moses, Strabo continues, persuaded many reasonable men and led them to Jerusalem, where he installed "a kind of worship and kind of ritual which would not oppress those who adopted them either with expenses or with divine obsessions or with other absurd troubles".<sup>63</sup> But this ideal form of Mosaic Judaism eventually degenerated once Moses was gone. Strabo continues:

His successors for some time abided by the same course, acting righteously and being truly pious toward God; but afterwards, in the first place, superstitious men were appointed to the priesthood, and then tyrannical people; and from superstition arose abstinence from flesh, from which it is their custom to abstain even today, and circumcisions and excisions and other observances of the kind. And from the tyrannies arose the bands of robbers (...).<sup>64</sup>

---

politischen Verwicklungen zwischen den Juden und ihrer Umwelt im Altertum, so erkennen wir, daß es sich in der Hauptsache nicht um Religionskriege, sondern um Machtkämpfe handelt.").

61 Leipoldt, *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt*, 14: "Vielleicht wird das Durchschnittsurteil des Gebildeten am besten von dem vorsichtig abwägenden Geographen Strabon wiedergegeben (gest. 19 nach Christus). Er ist ohne weiteres bereit, die Größe des Moses anzuerkennen. Mit Recht sage Moses, das göttliche Wesen dürfe nicht in Tier- oder Menschengestalt gedacht werden. Dem Antisemitismus trägt Strabon dadurch Rechnung, daß er die späteren Nachfolger des Moses als abergläubisch und tyrannisch hinstellt: sie erst hätten die Speisegebote, die Beschneidung und dergleichen Dinge eingeführt."

62 Strab. Geog. 16.2.35: δυσχεράνας τὰ κατεσθῶτα (English translation of Strabo from LCL).

63 Strab. 16.2.36.

64 Strab. 16.2.37.



According to Strabo, who seems to have drawn from Posidonius (for whom the pattern of decline is essential), Mosaic piety (*theosebeia*) was later replaced by superstitious ritual (*deisidaimonia*) such as dietary laws and circumcision. With the religious decline came political depravation: tyrannies and robber bands.<sup>65</sup> Leipoldt does not explicitly draw a line from Strabo's description of Judaism's deterioration to his own version of such a history, but he seems to both share and endorse the geographer's antitheses, praising Strabo's astute assessment of the evidence.<sup>66</sup> Towards the end of his study on ancient antisemitism, Leipoldt discusses Christianity, very much as historians Zacher and Stähelin had done. Here Leipoldt stresses the differences between Christianity and Judaism. In these differences lay the root reason for antisemitism:

There must be significant differences between Judaism and Christianity: otherwise the mutual countercurrents would not have had such a different fate. The differences lie first and foremost in religion. Christianity does not shut itself off. It knows no ceremonial law. Jesus already disregards the Sabbath commandments when there is a need. He absolutely ignores the purity regulations. Paul coined sharp formulas. For this Christian freedom of law. Its ultimate reason is the new relationship with God that Jesus introduces. (...) the Christian feels driven and called to love his neighbor without limit and without restriction; and with this charity he can be a blessing in any economic system. Christianity has remained true to this social character to this day.<sup>67</sup>

65 Among the first who argued for Posidonius as Strabo's source was Isaak Heinemann, "Poseidonios über die Entwicklung der jüdischen Religion," *MGWJ* 63 (1919): 113–121. On Strabo on the Jews, including the question whether the argument might go back to Posidonius, cf. more recently Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews*, 355–398; René Bloch, "Posidonian thoughts-ancient and modern", *JSJ* 35 (2004): 284–292. On Strabo's reference to female circumcision (ἐκτομαί), unique in Greco-Roman ethnography on the Jews, cf. Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Why aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?" in *Gender and the Body in the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. M. Wyke (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 139–41.

66 As for Tacitus' distinction (Hist. 5.5) between ancient Jewish rituals that can be justified because of their antiquity (*antiquitate defenduntur*) and other customs that prevail because of their depravity (*pravitate valere*), which in its origins may go back to Strabo/Posidonius, it similarly went along with commentators' thoughts on a Jewish decline: cf. Bloch, "Posidonian Thoughts", 288–294.

67 Leipoldt, *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt*, 52–3: "Es muß bedeutende Unterschiede geben zwischen Judentum und Christentum: sonst hätten nicht die beiderseitigen Gegenströmungen ein so verschiedenes Schicksal. Die Unterschiede liegen zunächst und hauptsächlich auf religiösem Gebiete. Das Christentum sperrt sich nicht ab. Es kennt kein Zeremonialgesetz. Schon Jesus setzt sich über die Sabbatgebote hinweg, wenn es Not tut. Von den Reinheitsordnungen will er überhaupt nichts wissen. Paulus prägt scharfe

Leipoldt's tractate on ancient antisemitism ends with this paean to Christian love of neighbour (evidently innocent of its source, Leviticus 19). In Strabo's (Posidonius') language one could thus say that, for Leipoldt, Moses leaving Egypt, peacefully entering Jerusalem and piously worshiping God, represents the last Christian before Judaism's fall into depravity.<sup>68</sup> In his entry "Antisemitismus" for the *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* – published in 1950 but written during World War II<sup>69</sup> – Leipoldt stresses once more the religious causes of ancient antisemitism. It was Jewish separatism which led to anti-Jewish hostility. As in his earlier work on the topic, Leipoldt combines sound historical observation with standard antisemitic stereotypes, as when he writes of a "financial dominance of the Jews" (nodding to Cicero's *Flacc.*), as well as of their political and economic power (as contrasted to the early Christians, who lived in poverty).<sup>70</sup>

To conclude. The beginnings of scholarship on ancient antisemitism coincided with the invention of the term itself and with the development of a new form, modern racial antisemitism. As we have seen, the discourses of theologians and (Christian) classicists writing on the topic could overlap: Ancient Judaism, from the beginnings to the rabbinic period, is regularly viewed as a

---

Formeln. Für diese christliche Gesetzesfreiheit. Ihr letzter Grund ist das neue Verhältnis zu Gott, in das Jesus einführt. (...) der Christ fühlt sich zur Nächstenliebe getrieben und berufen, ohne Grenze und ohne Einschränkung; und mit dieser Nächstenliebe kann er in jeder Wirtschaftsordnung ein Segen sein. Diesem sozialen Zuge ist das Christentum treu geblieben bis auf den heutigen Tag."

68 Isaak Heinemann once noted that "Posidonius has, in a certain sense, become a predecessor of the interpretation of the development of the Israelite religion, today usually named after Wellhausen," cf. Heinemann, "Poseidonios über die Entwicklung der jüdischen Religion" (121: "[Poseidonios ist] in gewissem Sinne zum Vorläufer der heute meist nach Wellhausen genannten Vorstellung von der Entwicklung der israelitischen Religion geworden (...)."). In his 1940 article "The Attitude of the Ancient World toward Judaism," *The Review of Religion* 4 (1940), 385–400, Heinemann argues very much against the view, shared by Leipoldt and others, that it was "ritual difference which gave antisemitism its special stamp" (394). According to Heinemann it was "the exclusiveness of Jewish monotheism" (397) which attracted the proselytes and repelled the antisemites: "the roots of hate and love were the same" (398). Remarkably, Heinemann gives Leipoldt credit for taking some Talmudic literature in consideration (385 n.1) and otherwise does not mention him by name in his critique.

69 Cf. Theodor Klauser's introduction to the first volume of the *RAC*, published in 1950.

70 Johannes Leipoldt, "Antisemitismus," 472: "finanzielles Übergewicht der Juden"; 473–4: "daß die Juden nach politischer Macht streben und bei erster Gelegenheit sich an den Vertretern des Antisemitismus rächen. (...) So war zu befürchten, daß man die Christen als Juden ansah und mit den Waffen des Antisemitismus bekämpfte. Aber das geschah selten. Wer die Christen kannte, stellte leicht fest, daß die Vorwürfe des Antisemitismus auf sie nicht zutrafen." (...) "waren so arm, daß sie keine wirtschaftliche Macht darstellten".

Wellhausian tale of decline. The argument is not always overtly theological, but very often it is teleological, Christianity serving as Judaism's soteriological corrective. Does the history of antisemitism have articulated inflection-points? A number have been proposed but, as current scholarship has shown, all are problematic. Anti-Jewish hostility is neither specific to the Hasmonean period nor to that following the temple's destruction in 70 CE; neither was there a development from Greek philosemitism to Roman antisemitism. The view, widespread in early scholarship, that ancient antisemitism was the result of some kind of deterioration (whether religious or political) within Judaism mirrors the Christian conviction that Judaism was in decline. Pagan sources describing an earlier, pious form of Judaism and a later, superstitious, ritually overladen one were happily pressed into service. At times, the study of ancient antisemitism served simply to legitimate modern antisemitism.

Can a history of antisemitism in Greco-Roman antiquity be written? Difficult to say, and hard to imagine. It would have to be a history with many twists and turns and location-specific hotspots. Nonetheless, substantial differences mark pagan antisemitism off from that of Christian tradition. Greco-Roman hostility towards the Jews could indeed wax ferocious at times; but religiously, Jews could never occupy in paganism the central role they were forced into by Christian discourse, which was on a fundamentally different scale. Antisemitism may remain a problematic term. For the ancient world, it may require some qualifications. Nevertheless, its heuristic value abides.

### Bibliography

- Bar-Kochva, Bezalel. *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Bein, Alex. *The Jewish Question: Biography of a World Problem*. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990.
- Bergmann, Werner. "Antisemitische Bewegung." Pages 34–39 in vol. 5 of *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Edited by Wolfgang Benz. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.
- Bernays, Jacob. "Über die Chronik des Sulpicius Severus, ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der classischen und biblischen Studien." Pages 81–200 in vol. 2 of *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*. Edited by H. Usener. Berlin: Hertz, 1885.
- Bloch, René. *Antike Vorstellungen vom Judentum: Der Judenexkurs des Tacitus im Rahmen der griechisch-römischen Ethnographie*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2002.
- Bloch, René. "Posidonian thoughts-ancient and modern." *JSJ* 35 (2004): 284–292.
- Bloch, René. "Misanthropia." *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 24 (2011): 828–845.

- Bloch, René. "Tacitus' Excursus on the Jews over the Centuries: an Overview of the History of its Reception." Pages 377–409 in *Oxford Readings in Tacitus*. Edited by Rhiannon Ash. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Bloch, René. "Ancient Anti-Semitism." In *Oxford Bibliographies in Jewish Studies*. Edited by Naomi Seidman, 2016. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199840731/obo-9780199840731-0140.xml?rskey=LrGBFr&result=6>.
- Bloch, René. "Jew or Judean: The Latin Evidence." Pages 229–240 in *Torah, Temple, Land: Constructions of Judaism in Antiquity*. Edited by Markus Witte, Jens Schröter, and Verena Lepper. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021.
- Boehlich, Walter, ed. *Der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit*. Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1965.
- Calder III, William M., and Alexander Košenina, eds. *Berufungspolitik innerhalb der Altertumswissenschaft im wilhelminischen Preußen*. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989.
- Cancik, Hubert. "Der antike Antisemitismus und seine Rezeption." Pages 63–79 in *Das 'bewegliche' Vorurteil. Aspekte des internationalen Antisemitismus*. Edited by Christina von Braun and Eva M. Ziege. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004.
- Cuffari, Anton. *Judenfeindschaft in Antike und Altem Testament: Terminologische, historische und theologische Untersuchungen*. Hamburg: Philo, 2007.
- Cohen, Shaye J.D. "Why aren't Jewish Women Circumcised?" Pages 139–141 in *Gender and the Body in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Edited by Maria Wyke. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998.
- De Lange, Nicolas. "The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretations." Pages 21–37 in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*. Edited by Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz. New York: New York University Press, 1991.
- Fischer, Eugen, and Gerhard Kittel. *Das antike Weltjudentum. Tatsachen, Texte, Bilder*. Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1943.
- Gager, John G. *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Gerdmar, Anders. *Roots of Theological Anti-Semitism. German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Gruen, Erich S. *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2002.
- Heinemann, Isaak. "Poseidonios über die Entwicklung der jüdischen Religion." *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 63 (1919): 113–121.
- Heinemann, Isaak. "Antisemitismus." Pages 3–43 in *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. Supplement 5. Edited by Georg Wissowa. Stuttgart: Metzler, 1931.
- Hoffmann, Christhard. *Juden und Judentum im Werk deutscher Althistoriker des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*. Leiden: Brill, 1988.

- Hoffmann, Christhard. "Ancient Jewry – Modern Questions: German Historians of Antiquity on the Jewish Diaspora." *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 191–207.
- Isaac, Benjamin. *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Isaac, Jules. *Genèse de l'antisémitisme: Essai historique*. Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1956.
- Kamplung, Rainer. "Antike Judenfeindschaft." Pages 14–16 in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vol 3. Edited by Wolfgang Benz. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.
- Kinzig, Wolfram. "Philosemitismus – was ist das?: Eine kritische Begriffsanalyse." Pages 25–60 in *Geliebter Feind – gehasster Freund. Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Julius H. Schoeps*. Edited by Irene Diekmann and Elke-Vera Kotowski. Berlin: VBN-Verlag, 2009.
- Klauser, Theodor et al. *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*. Vol. 1. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950.
- Landfester, Manfred, Hubert Cancik, and Helmuth Schneider. *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World*. Leiden: Brill, 2006. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347\\_bnp\\_e1407860](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1574-9347_bnp_e1407860).
- Langmuir, Gavin I. *Toward a Definition of Anti-semitism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Laupot, Eric. "Tacitus' Fragment 2: the Anti-Roman Movement of the Christiani and the Nazoreans." *Vigiliae Christianae* 54 (2000): 233–247.
- Leipoldt, Johannes. *Antisemitismus in der alten Welt*. Leipzig: Dörffling & Franke, 1933.
- Malitz, Jürgen. "Mommsen, Caesar und die Juden." Pages 371–387 in *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion. Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag, vol. II: Griechische und Römische Religion*. Edited by Hubert Cancik, Hermann Lichtenberger and Peter Schäfer. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996.
- Mommsen, Theodor. *History of Rome*. Vol 3. Translated by William P. Dickson. London: Richard Bentley, 1863.
- Mommsen, Theodor. *Auch ein Wort über unser Judenthum*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1880.
- Mommsen, Theodor. *Römische Geschichte. Fünfter Band. Die Provinzen von Caesar bis Diocletian*. Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1921.
- Parkes, James. *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Anti-semitism*. London: Soncino Press, 1934.
- Rebenich, Stefan. "Eine Entzweiung. Theodor Mommsen und Heinrich von Treitschke." Pages 262–285 in *Berlins wilde Energien. Portraits aus der Geschichte der Leibnizischen Wissenschaftsakademie*. Edited by Stephan Leibfried et al. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015.
- Sevenster, Jan Nicolaas. *The Roots of Pagan Anti-Semitism in the Ancient World*. Leiden: Brill, 1975.

- Schäfer, Peter. *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Stähelin, Felix. *Der Antisemitismus des Altertums in seiner Entstehung und Entwicklung*. Basel: C.F. Lendorff, 1905.
- Bautz, Friedrich Wilhelm. *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*. 14 vols. Nordhausen: Verlag Traugott Bautz, 1975–1998.
- Wyrwa, Ulrich. “Antisemiten-Liga.” Pages 30–33 in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Judenfeindschaft in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Vol 5. Edited by Wolfgang Benz. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012.
- Yavetz, Zvi. *Judenfeindschaft in der Antike: Die Münchener Vorträge*. München: C.H. Beck, 1997.
- Yavetz, Zvi. “Judeophobia in Classical Antiquity: A Different Approach.” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993): 1–22.
- Zacher, Konrad. “Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus im klassischen Alterthum.” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 94 (1898): 1–24.