

CROSSING THE BOUNDARY AND BECOMING A JEW

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Who was a Jew in antiquity? How was “Jewishness” defined? How did a non-Jew become a Jew, and how did a Jew become a non-Jew? In their minds and actions the Jews erected a boundary between themselves and the rest of humanity, the gentiles, but the boundary was always crossable and not always clearly marked. A gentile might associate with Jews and observe Jewish practices, or might “convert” to Judaism and become a proselyte. A Jew might avoid contact with Jews and cease to observe Jewish practices, or might deny Judaism outright and become an “apostate.” Or the boundary could be blurred through the marriage of a Jew with a gentile.

Conversions to Judaism, conversions from Judaism, and intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews were not unusual occurrences in antiquity, and the “Jewishness” of these boundary-crossers had to be determined by various jurisdictions and groups. The organized Jewish community, the municipal or provincial governments, and the imperial government, each had an interest in determining whether a given individual was a Jew. For example, if in the year 80 CE a gentile in Ephesus converted, or claimed to have converted, to Judaism, the local Jewish community would have had to determine whether it would accept

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Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (3 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences, 1974–84), is cited throughout as “Stern, *Authors*.” I am grateful to the *HTR* editorial board for permitting me to cite the English titles of the works of Philo, Josephus, and other Greek and Latin writers.

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him or her as a member; the municipal government would have had to determine whether this person could now enjoy the privileges that traditionally had been extended to Jews; and the imperial government would have had to determine whether this person was now subject to the Jewish tax (levied upon all Jews in the Roman empire as punishment for the war of 66–70 CE). There is no reason to assume that all these jurisdictions would necessarily have reached identical conclusions in every case, or to assume that the boundary definition used by the Jewish community of Ephesus would necessarily have been identical with that which was operative in the other organized Jewish communities of Asia Minor, or, for that matter, of Italy, Syria, Egypt, North Africa, Palestine, and Babylonia.

The proselyte's social status too was subject to conflicting judgments. How did this person, born a gentile, see himself (or herself)? How was this person seen by his/her spouse, relatives, friends, and other gentiles? How was this person seen by native-born Jews? Once again, there is no reason to assume that these questions will have received uniform answers. A gentile who engaged in "judaizing" behavior may have been regarded as a Jew by gentiles, but as a gentile by Jews. A gentile who was accepted as a proselyte by one community may not have been so regarded by another. Nor should we assume that the proselytes of one community were necessarily treated like those of another, because the Jews of antiquity held a wide range of opinions about the degree to which the proselyte became just like the native born.

In this essay I hope to illustrate some of these generalizations by studying the process by which a gentile in antiquity (mid-second century BCE to the fifth century CE) became less a gentile and more a Jew. How did a gentile cross the boundary that separates "the nations of the world" from Judaism? How did a gentile "become a Jew" in the eyes of the gentile him/herself, in the eyes of contemporary gentiles and in the eyes of contemporary Jews? I propose to describe and classify seven forms of behavior by which a gentile demonstrates respect or affection for Judaism. I begin with forms that do not imply that the gentile is "becoming a Jew," and I end with those that do. These forms are not necessarily sequential; they are not "stages" in a process. Nor are these forms mutually exclusive; a gentile might easily behave in such a way so as to be able to be classified in more than one category simultaneously. I freely admit that the paucity of evidence, and the frequent obscurity of the meager evidence that does exist, give a tentative character to my analysis; my seven categories are chiefly of heuristic value. The essay concludes with a discussion of "God-fearers," "Judaizers," and converts. In order to reflect a pagan's perspective, throughout this essay I write the word "god" with a lower-case "g" no matter which divinity is intended.

A gentile can show respect or affection for Judaism in seven ways, by: (1) admiring some aspect of Judaism; (2) acknowledging the power of the god of

the Jews or incorporating him into the pagan pantheon; (3) benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews; (4) practicing some or many of the rituals of the Jews; (5) venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods; (6) joining the Jewish community; (7) converting to Judaism and "becoming a Jew."

1) *Admiring some aspect of Judaism*

Some pagans admired various aspects of Judaism. Josephus writes (but of course he probably is exaggerating) that throughout the world gentiles "attempt to imitate our unanimity, our liberal charities, our devoted labor in the crafts, our endurance under persecution on behalf of our laws" (*Against Apion* 2.39 §283)—and this is aside from the adoption of Jewish customs (see below). Many Greek and Roman writers describe Judaism or Jewish heroes in positive terms. In a passage preserved by Augustine, Varro states that the aniconic worship of the Jews accurately reflects the original and admirable piety of humanity, before the vulgar turned to images that could be seen and felt. An intellectual of the first century CE cited the opening verse of the Septuagint as an example of high or noble style. Moses was widely believed to have been a distinguished legislator.¹ Such admiration, easily paralleled in the Greek and Roman reactions to other oriental or exotic religions, is unexceptional and does not necessarily indicate any peculiar closeness to Judaism.

2) *Acknowledging the power of the god of the Jews*

Many gentiles in antiquity recognized that the god of the Jews was a powerful god. The authors of the magical papyri routinely invoke the "god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," "Iao Sabaoth," etc. In the second century CE one intellectual, a disciple of the orator Herodes Atticus, quoted two verses from Deuteronomy 28 in the warning curse he included in the epitaph for his son. The pagan knew that a curse backed by the authority of the god of the Jews would likely be effective.² Greco-Jewish literature is filled with stories about gentiles,

¹Stern, *Authors*, #72 (Varro) and #148 (*On the Sublime*). Cf. too Stern, *Authors*, #115 (Strabo). On the figure of Moses, see John Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (SBLMS 16; Nashville: Abingdon, 1972). For a brief survey of the image of Judaism in classical authors, see Menahem Stern, "The Jews in Greek and Latin Literature," in Samuel Safrai et al., eds., *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum Section I: The Jewish People in the First Century* (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 2. 1101–59.

²Louis Robert, "Malédiction funéraires grecques," *CRAIBL* (1978) 241–89, esp. 244–52. I am not convinced by Robert's argument that the orator, one Flavius Amphicles, was a monotheist. It is possible that the curse inscriptions from Rheneia were written by a pagan who, like Amphicles, used the language of the Septuagint to make his curse effective; this possibility is not sufficiently appreciated by Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Doran, 1927) 413–24.

usually kings or other dignitaries, who witness some manifestation of the power of the god of the Jews and as a result venerate the god and acknowledge his power.³ The most spectacular example is Heliodorus, an emissary of Seleucus IV, who tried to seize the treasury of the Jerusalem temple but was thwarted by a miraculous display of divine might. Heliodorus learned an important lesson; “he bore testimony to all men of the deeds of the supreme god, which he had seen with his own eyes” (2 Macc 3:35–39).

The reverent gentile appears in the Hebrew Bible too. Jethro hears the story of the miraculous exodus from Egypt and declares “Blessed be the lord. . . . Now I know that the lord is greater than all gods” (Exod 12:10–11). Hiram king of Tyre is so impressed by Solomon that he declares “Blessed be the lord god of Israel who made heaven and earth” (2 Chr 2:11).⁴ In the book of Daniel king Nebuchadnezzar addresses the seer and proclaims, “Truly your god is god of gods and lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries” (Dan 2:47; cf. 3:28 and 4:34–37). Even bolder proclamations are put in the mouths of Cyrus (Bel and the Dragon 41) and Darius (Dan 6:25–27).

In a somewhat different vein, many gentiles incorporated the god of the Jews into the pagan pantheon. In the Hellenistic and early Roman periods numerous pagan dignitaries offered sacrifices or gifts to the god of the Jews at his temple in Jerusalem. Even Alexander the Great was said to have done so. If the dignitary was the ruler of the Jews, the political meaning of his gesture was clear: by sacrificing to the god of the Jews, he confirmed his sovereignty over the Jews because he represented the people before their god.⁵ The theological meaning of the gesture was clear as well. The Jews are a respectable nation, and their god is a respectable deity. An empire has many nations and many gods.

The destruction of the temple in 70 CE meant that gentiles (like Jews!) could no longer sacrifice in Jerusalem to the god of the Jews, but they still could recognize the god as one of the supreme deities of the world. The early third century CE provides two spectacular (and perhaps fictional) examples of this trend: the emperor Elagabalus included Judaism and Christianity among the religions to be incorporated in the cult of the god Heliogabalus on the Palatine Hill, and the emperor Alexander Severus maintained a private chapel for Apollonius, Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus, each of whom pointed the way to the supreme god.⁶ Private individuals could adopt the same theology. Many Neoplatonists identified the god of the Jews with the father of all the gods; Numenius even argued that the teachings of Plato were basically the same as those of Moses, and frequently supported his arguments by quotations from the

³See “Alexander the Great,” 56–60, and “Respect for Judaism,” 412–15.

⁴The passage in Chronicles is an expansion of 1 Kgs 5:21 (Hebrew verse numeration).

⁵See “Alexander the Great,” 46 n. 13 and 58 n. 48; “Respect for Judaism,” 413 n. 14.

⁶Stern, *Authors*, ## 518, 522.

works of Moses and the prophets.⁷ Of course, the identification of the Jewish god with the supreme god long antedates the syncretism of the high Roman empire. Herodotus had already sought Greek equivalents for the oriental deities he encountered, and after the Jews became part of the Hellenistic world, their god too had to be fitted to the Greek pantheon. For who was this god if not Zeus or Dionysus with another name (or with no name at all)?⁸

The conceptual distinction between gentiles who acknowledge the power of the god of the Jews and/or incorporate him into the pantheon (category 2) and gentiles who venerate the god of the Jews and deny or ignore the pagan gods (category 5) is clear. The gentiles of category 2 do not stand in any special relationship with the god of the Jews. They behave as “normal” pagans behave when confronted by a foreign god and a foreign religion. Their behavior is easily paralleled by the attitudes of the pagans of antiquity towards other gods. Jethro in spite of his declaration, Alexander the Great in spite of his sacrifice, and Numenius in spite of his theology, remain pagans and polytheists. Augustine comments that Alexander the Great “did indeed offer sacrifices in the temple of god, not because he was converted to his worship through true piety, but because he thought through impious vanity that god ought to be worshipped together with false gods.”⁹ Even Heliodorus, in spite of his “conversion” experience, remains a pagan and a polytheist. In contrast, the gentiles of category 5 have adopted some degree of exclusive loyalty to the one god, the god of the Jews.

3) *Benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews*

From the sixth century BCE to the twentieth century CE the Jews have lived, with a few relatively brief exceptions, under the dominion of gentile powers. Many of these powers in antiquity were benevolently disposed towards the Jews. Monarchs, generals, and dignitaries bestowed favors on the Jews, protected their rights, and granted their requests. In many cases the benefaction was preceded by the offering of a sacrifice at the temple in Jerusalem (see above). Jewish storytellers told elaborate tales about dramatic meetings of Jewish sages with gentile kings in which the king honors the sage and grants the Jews a variety of favors: a high priest with Alexander, Yohanan ben Zakkai with Vespasian, Rabbi Judah the Patriarch with Antoninus, and Samuel with

⁷Ibid., ## 363–69.

⁸Identification with Zeus: *Letter of Aristeas* §§ 15–16; cf. Celsus in Origen *Against Celsus* 5.41 = Stern, *Authors*, # 375 (p. 256 in the Greek, p. 286 in the English). Identification with Dionysus: Plutarch in Stern, *Authors*, # 258 and Tacitus *Histories* 5.5.5 = Stern, *Authors*, # 281. Anonymous god: see Lucan and Numenius in Stern, *Authors*, ## 191, 367.

⁹*The City of God* 18.45.2.

Shapur.¹⁰ The Jews of Berenice (Cyrenaica) honored a local Roman official named M. Tittius for executing his responsibilities in a manner "well-disposed toward the Jews of our community."¹¹ Mirroring the actions of the public officials, private individuals might support the Jews in their political struggles or benefit the Jews through gifts to the community (for example, erecting a synagogue).¹²

Clearly these gentiles respected Judaism, but there is no reason to assume that they had any special affection for it. Tolerant monarchs routinely benefited many of the native populations that together constituted the polyethnic empires of antiquity. Private individuals might have had any of a number of reasons to associate with Jews, support them, or bestow a gift on the local Jewish community.¹³

From a theological perspective gentiles who acknowledge the power of the god of the Jews (category 2) are closer to Judaism than those who simply treat the Jews kindly (category 3), but from a social perspective the gentiles of category 3 are closer because they have a friendly relationship with the Jewish community. As a result, both gentiles and Jews could regard these gentiles as

¹⁰High priest with Alexander: see my "Alexander the Great." The bibliography on Yohanan ben Zakkai and Vespasian is immense; see, e.g., Jacob Neusner, *Development of a Legend. Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* (Leiden: Brill, 1970). The fullest collection of the Antoninus material remains David Z. Hoffman, "Die Antoninus-Agadat im Talmud und Midrasch," *Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 19 (1892) 33–55, 245–55; see too Bernard J. Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period* (1939; reprinted New York: Ktav, 1968) 248–50, and Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the II–IV Centuries C.E.* (1942; reprinted New York: Feldheim, 1965) 78–80. On Shapur see G. Wewers, "Israel zwischen den Mächten: Die rabbinischen Traditionen über König Schabhor," *Kairos* 22 (1980) 77–100. On the motif in general see Moshe D. Herr, "The Historical Significance of the Dialogue between Jewish Sages and Roman Dignitaries," in Joseph Heinemann, ed., *Scripta Hierosolymitana 22: Studies in Aggadah and Folk Literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1971) 123–50 (who seems not to realize that he is studying not history but a literary motif).

¹¹Gert Lüderitz, *Corpus jüdischer Zeugnisse aus der Cyrenaika* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1983) #71; for discussion see Martha W. B. Bowsky, "M. Tittius Sex. F. Aem. and the Jews of Berenice," *AJP* 108 (1987) 495–510.

¹²See *CIJ* 2. 766 = Baruch Lifshitz, *Donateurs et fondateurs dans les synagogues juives* (Paris: Gabalda, 1967) #33 (a synagogue erected by Julia Severa for the Jewish community of Akmonia in Phrygia). See too Lifshitz #18 and Luke 7:5.

¹³A. Thomas Kraabel correctly notes that the donation of a synagogue does not necessarily make Julia Severa a "God-fearer"; see his "The Roman Diaspora: Six Questionable Assumptions," *JJS* 33 (1982) 447–64, esp. 456. Here is a parallel from a much later time. At some point prior to 1611 (perhaps in the fifteenth century) a Christian woman donated a vegetable garden to the Jewish community of Worms. Obviously this woman did not have any animosity towards the Jews, but her gift was the result more of her own charitable inclinations (she also donated a pond to the Christian poor of the town) than of any "judaizing." See Benjamin Hamburger and Erich Zimmer, eds., *Wormser Minhagbuch des R. Jousep (Juspa) Schammes* (Jerusalem: Mifal Torat Chachme Aschkenas, 1988) § 192 (p. 228 with n. 6).

“pro-Jewish” even if they had no real evidence that such was the case. The Alexandrian nationalists who regarded imperial rule as (among other evils) too pro-Jewish, because the Romans consistently supported Jewish rights, called one Roman emperor “the cast-off son of the Jewess Salome,” and suggested that another was overly influenced by his senate which was packed with “impious Jews.”¹⁴ We may doubt whether either of these claims was true.

The Jews too tended to regard gentile benefactors as motivated by some special affection for, or devotion to, Judaism, but we may doubt whether this conclusion is necessarily correct. The point is demonstrated already by the biblical account of Cyrus. The founder of the Persian empire had his own good reasons for benefiting the Jews, just as he had his own good reasons for benefiting the temple of Marduk in Babylon. But in the eyes of the Jews the only way that Cyrus’s actions could be understood was to imagine that the king recognized that he was enjoying the largess of “the god of heaven” and was commanded by the god to build him a temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2).¹⁵ Centuries later, Philo suggested that Petronius, the governor of Syria who refused to follow Caligula’s instructions to erect a statue in the temple, was motivated not only by his innate kindness and gentleness but also by his affection for Judaism:

He had himself, apparently, some glimmerings of Jewish philosophy and religion. He may have studied it in the past because of his interest in culture, or after his appointment as governor of those countries which have large numbers of Jews in all their cities, namely Asia and Syria; or his mind may have been so disposed through some voluntary, instinctive, and spontaneous inclination of its own towards things worthy of serious attention. (Philo *Legation to Gaius* 33 § 245, trans. Smallwood)

It is most unlikely that Cyrus permitted the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple because he feared the god of heaven, the god of the Jews. It is also unlikely, or at least completely unnecessary to believe, that Petronius protected the Jews because he felt some special attraction to the Jewish religion.¹⁶ The culmination of this understandable but unhistorical Jewish perspective is the statement of

¹⁴Victor Tcherikover, *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957–64) 2. # 156d line 12 and # 157 lines 42–50. Numerous modern analogies suggest themselves. Alexander Severus was vilified by his opponents as “a Syrian archisynagogue,” perhaps because of his pro-Jewish leanings (Stern, *Authors*, # 521).

¹⁵Of course, it is possible that the Hebrew version of the Cyrus decree in Ezra 1:2–4 is inspired by propaganda issued directly by Cyrus’s court. In either case, the author of Ezra 1 chose to believe not only that Cyrus was working under divine direction but also that Cyrus himself recognized this fact.

¹⁶Some scholars seem to accept Philo’s suggestion; see Smallwood’s commentary and Stern’s commentary on *Authors*, # 435. Contrast the cautious doubts of Folker Siegert, “Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten,” *JSJ* 4 (1973) 109–64, esp. 149.

some storytellers that the gentile kings who benefited the Jews (Alexander the Great, for example) converted to Judaism!¹⁷

4) *Practicing some or many of the rituals of the Jews*

In a series of passages, Philo and Josephus boast that gentiles throughout the world, from ancient times to the present, have adopted Jewish practices and display "a devotion to our religion." Josephus adds, "There is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed."¹⁸ Seneca laments that "the customs of this accursed race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors."¹⁹ For all the obvious exaggeration of the boast and the lament, they reflect some measure of reality. In the city of Rome, at least, in the latter part of the first century BCE and throughout the first century CE, pagans of both the upper and lower classes observed the Sabbath by lighting lamps and fasting. In the following centuries Sabbath observance extended to gentiles in Egypt and Asia Minor as well.²⁰ Some gentiles in Asia Minor frequented synagogues on the Sabbath and perhaps observed other Jewish laws as well. Josephus has a cryptic reference to "Greeks who honor our practices because they are unable to refute them" (*Jewish Antiquities* 3.8.9 § 217). And, of course, later centuries provide abundant evidence for the observance of Jewish rituals in the churches of Syria and Asia Minor.

Some Jewish practices (for example, attendance at synagogues and public ceremonies, the consumption of kosher food) inevitably bring their practitioner into contact with the Jewish community, while other rituals (for example, fasting, lighting lamps, abstention from pork, refraining from work on the Sabbath) do not. Therefore gentiles who observed practices of the first sort were perhaps "more Jewish" than those who observed practices of the second, but no ancient evidence confirms this assumption. On the contrary, in the eyes of gentiles, a non-Jew who observes any of the Jewish laws, even those that have no social component, is engaging in Jewish behavior. In a well-known passage, the Roman poet Juvenal in 127 or 128 CE writes of a father who, because of his "fear" of the Sabbath and abstention from pork, is apt to have a son who turns

¹⁷On the conversion of Alexander to Judaism (or is it Christianity?), see my "Alexander the Great," 59–60, and esp. Gerhard Dellling, "Alexander der Grosse als Bekenner des jüdischen Gottesglaubens," *JSJ* 12 (1981) 1–51.

¹⁸Philo *Life of Moses* 2.4 §§ 17–24 and *Hypothetica*; Josephus *Against Apion* 1.22 §§ 162–67 and 2.39 §§ 281–84.

¹⁹Stern, *Authors*, #186.

²⁰Tcherikover, *Corpus*, 3. 43–87.

to Judaism (see below). Plutarch and Dio Cassius go even further. In his life of Cicero, the biographer reports an anecdote according to which the orator asked a suspected “judaizer” why he, “a Jew,” involved himself in a case featuring a *verres* (a pig).²¹ For Plutarch someone who observes Jewish rituals (a “judaizer”) can be called a Jew. Dio Cassius, a historian of the early third century CE, makes this point explicitly. He writes, “[the citizens of the country] have been named Jews (*Ioudaioi*). I do not know how this title came to be given them, but it applies also to all the rest of mankind, although of alien race, who are devoted to their customs.”²² Dio is not necessarily talking about “converts”—he does not even mention circumcision. For Dio anyone devoted to Jewish ways is called a Jew. The members of the Jewish community and the gentile practitioners of Jewish rituals probably would have disputed this liberal use of the name Jew. They would have said that a pagan who follows Jewish ways is nothing more than a pagan who follows Jewish ways, just as other pagans affected the ways of Isis, Mithras, or one of the philosophical schools without actually “converting” (see below). But in the eyes of outsiders like Dio the practice of Jewish rituals puts the practitioner over the boundary that separates Judaism from the rest of the world.

5) *Venerating the god of the Jews and denying or ignoring the pagan gods*

Some Jewish texts describe a category of gentiles who were so devoted to the god of the Jews that they venerated him (almost) exclusively even if they did not observe his laws. Philo’s obscure and much debated discussion of uncircumcised “proselytes” (or “epelytes”) probably refers to gentiles of this type. The proselyte “is one who circumcises not his uncircumcision but his desires and sensual pleasures and the other passions of the soul. . . . But what is the mind of the proselyte if not alienation from belief in many gods and familiarity with honoring the one god and father of all?” (*Questions and Answers on Exodus* 2.2, trans. Marcus, slightly modified). These proselytes apparently do not observe the Jewish laws (they remain uncircumcised); instead they renounce polytheism, worship the one god, and follow a philosophic way of life. The romance *Joseph and Asenath*, probably written in Egypt by a contemporary of Philo, describes Asenath as a proselyte of this type. She destroys her idols (9.2; 10.13–14), renounces polytheism, and becomes a servant of the one god (12–13). The text says nothing about her observance of Jewish laws (except for her abstention from sacrifices offered to idols). Numerous legends recount how Abraham, the archetype for all proselytes, destroyed his father’s idols and was the first to recognize the one god. Practically all these legends discuss

²¹Stern, *Authors*, #263.

²²*Ibid.*, #406.

Abraham's monotheism, not his observance of Jewish rituals.²³ The author of Second Maccabees gleefully imagines Antiochus Epiphanes on his deathbed beseeching god for assistance in return for a promise that "he would become a Jew (*ioudaion esesthai*) and would visit every inhabited place to proclaim the power of god" (2 Macc 9:17). For Antiochus "being a Jew" means proclaiming the power of the god of the Jews. Various strands of rabbinic tradition seem to be familiar with this "monotheistic proselyte." "Anyone who denies idolatry acknowledges the entire Torah" is a widely repeated rabbinic statement. One version of it reads, "Anyone who denies idolatry is called a Jew."²⁴ According to one opinion, at least, a gentile attains the status of a "resident alien" (*gēr tôšāb*) and may live in the land of Israel only after renouncing idolatry.²⁵ Similarly, most versions of the "Noahide laws," the practices that a gentile must avoid in order to be reckoned a "righteous gentile," include the prohibition of idolatry. By avoiding idolatry and by observing some ethical norms a gentile fulfills all that (one strand of) (rabbinic) Judaism requires of him or her.²⁶ Perhaps the polemic against idolatry, which recurs with some regularity in Greco-Jewish literature, and the appeal to the gentiles to lay aside their images, which appears only seldom, are connected with this ideology.²⁷

None of these texts, not even Philo's account of these "proselytes," implies that gentiles of this sort were granted membership in the Jewish community.²⁸ If

²³ Abraham as model proselyte: Philo *On the Virtues* 39 § 219; *p. Bik.* 1.4 64a. Abraham destroys his father's idols and believes in the one god: *Jubilees* 12; *Apocalypse of Abraham* 1–8; cf. *Testament of Job* 2–5; and numerous other versions. Abraham's "philosophic" recognition of god: Philo *On the Virtues* 39 §§ 212–18; Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 1.7.1 §§ 154–57. For a discussion of these passages see W. L. Knox, "Abraham and the Quest for God," *HTR* 28 (1935) 55–60; Louis H. Feldman, "Abraham the Greek Philosopher in Josephus," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 143–56; and Dieter Georgi, *The Opponents of Paul in Second Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 49–60.

²⁴ *B. Meg.* 13a ("is called a Jew"); *p. Ned.* 3.4 38a and *b. Ned.* 25a (and parallels); *Sifre Numbers* § 111 p. 116 (ed. Horovitz); *Sifre Deuteronomy* § 54 p. 122 (ed. Finkelstein); cf. *Mekilta Shirah* § 8 on Exod 15:11, p. 142 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin).

²⁵ *p. Yeb.* 8.1 8d and *b. Abod. Zar.* 64b.

²⁶ *T. Abod. Zar.* 8.4; *b. Sanh.* 56b; David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1983) esp. 3–51, 107–65.

²⁷ Polemic against idolatry: see esp. *Sibylline Oracles* 3.8–45 and 545–72; 5.484–500; 12.291–92; and Wisdom of Solomon 12:23–15:19, with the commentary of David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon* (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1979); and the Abraham traditions listed in n. 23 above. The problems raised by the "apostolic decree" in Acts 15, by Paul's concept of "law" and "justification," and by the ethical maxims of Ps.-Phocylides and the *Sibylline Oracles*, cannot be discussed here.

²⁸ Peder Borgen suggests that the Philonic passage quoted above is answering the question, "When does a person receive status as a proselyte in the Jewish community and cease to be a heathen? . . . Philo uses an ethical criterion for deciding who has the status of a proselyte within the Jewish community. This ethical conversion of the heathen also meant a sociological change from a pagan context to a Jewish one." I see none of this in the text of the *Questions on Exodus*. Elsewhere Philo does discuss the sociological aspect of conversion (see below), but not here. See Bor-

a gentile destroyed his ancestral gods and declared exclusive loyalty to the god of the Jews, his neighbors might have regarded him as a Jew, but there is no sign that the Jews did the same. When the Babylonians heard that Daniel, with the king's approval, had destroyed the great dragon whom they revered, they concluded that "the king has become a Jew" (*ioudaios gegonen ho basileus*), for "he has destroyed Bel, and slain the dragon, and slaughtered the priests" (Bel and the Dragon 28).²⁹ But neither the narrator of the story nor Daniel regarded the Persian king as a Jew. He was a Persian king with a peculiar devotion to the Jewish god. The princes of the royal house of Adiabene are said by Josephus "to have venerated god" (*to theon sebein*, *Jewish Antiquities* 20.2.3 § 34 and 20.2.4 § 41) before converting to Judaism and practicing the Jewish laws (20.2.1 § 17, 20.2.3 § 35, and 20.2.4 § 38). Before their circumcision and conversion, the princes studied the Torah but did not practice it (this is the implication of 20.2.4 § 44), and it is only after the circumcision and conversion that the princes ran the risk of being regarded by their subjects as devotees of foreign customs (20.2.4 § 47, 20.4.1 §§ 75–77).³⁰ Here, then, are gentiles who were devoted to the god of the Jews but who were not devoted to his laws.

The line between the polytheists of category 2 and the monotheists (or near monotheists) of category 5 is clear in theory, as I discussed above, but is not always clear in practice. In Pergamon a gentile erected an altar to "god the lord, the eternal existent one"; was this gentile a monotheist devoted to the one god, the god of the Jews, or was he a pagan who incorporated that god into his pantheon?³¹ Some gentiles who declare their respect for the god of the Jews use language which caused some interpreters in antiquity to assume that these are declarations of monotheism.³² Gentiles who worshiped in the Jerusalem temple, or sent money to support it, also are difficult to classify. Conduct that was normal or expected of an enlightened and benevolent monarch was thoroughly

gen, "The Early Church and the Hellenistic Synagogue," *ST* 37 (1983) 55–78, esp. 66–67 (with bibliography on the passage) = *Philo, John and Paul* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987) 207–32, esp. 219–20.

²⁹For the Greek text see Joseph Ziegler, *Susanna, Daniel, Bel et Draco* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954) 220, and Angelo Geissen, *Der Septuaginta Text des Buches Daniel Kap. 5–12 zusammen mit Susanna, Bel et Draco* (Bonn: Habelt, 1968) 274. I am grateful to George Nickelsburg for reminding me of this passage from Bel and the Dragon.

³⁰See "Respect for Judaism," 420 n. 34, and Joyce Reynolds and Robert Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-fearers at Aphrodisias* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987) 50.

³¹Gerhard Delling, "Die Altarinschrift eines Gottesfürchtigen in Pergamon," *NovT* 7 (1964) 73–80. See the discussion in Siegert, "Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten," 143–44.

³²E.g., many rabbis in the midrash argue that Jethro was a proselyte; see Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, 182–91, and Judith R. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counsellors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (BJS 47; Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) 45–74. The same opinion was occasionally advanced regarding Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus.

exceptional for a private citizen.³³ The gentiles from across the Euphrates who came to the temple to bring a sacrifice (*Jewish Antiquities* 3.15.3 §§ 318–19), and the god-venerating gentiles from Asia and Europe who enriched the temple with their donations (*Jewish Antiquities* 14.7.2 § 110), perhaps belong to category 2, perhaps to category 5.

6) *Joining the Jewish community*

Some gentiles became members of, or at least achieved an intimate status within, the Jewish community, without undergoing a religious “conversion.” Perhaps they underwent a nominal conversion, but their conversion was not the result of a religious experience or of a newly gained devotion to the god of the Jews. They are of several types.

a) Early Christianity grew in part through the conversions of entire households to the new faith. The conversion of a master or mistress would bring along the conversion of children, slaves, retainers, and perhaps the spouse.³⁴ We may be sure that the involuntary members of the household (*oikia*) had substantially less enthusiasm, at least at first, for the new religion than did the chieftain who initiated the conversion, but all alike became members of the new community. Judaism in the Byzantine period benefited from several mass conversions, led by the princes of various tribes, but ancient Judaism provides no parallel.³⁵ As far as I know the only attested conversion of an entire *oikia* to Judaism is the case of Valeria described in several rabbinic accounts. She converted to Judaism with her female slaves; because of a legal technicality some of her slaves became free upon their conversion, but they continued to serve her nevertheless.³⁶

b) More common is the simple case of the acquisition of a gentile slave by a Jew. A male slave would be circumcised and, upon manumission, attain the status of a proselyte. That the Jews of late antiquity actually followed this practice is strongly suggested by the imperial legislation which, beginning with Antoninus Pius, repeatedly forbade the practice.³⁷ A female slave too would attain the status of a proselyte upon manumission. These slaves, even if they

³³See “Josephus,” 427.

³⁴Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 75–77.

³⁵Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957) 3. 63–72, 196–206, 323–30. Aryeh Kasher suggests a parallel in the conversion of the Itureans, but this is conjectural; see Kasher, “Jews and Itureans in the Hasmonean Period,” *Cathedra* 33 (1984) 18–41, esp. 30–31 (in Hebrew).

³⁶*Mekilta Pisha* 15 on Exod 12:48, p. 57 (ed. Horovitz-Rabin) and parallels. See Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, 104 n. 193, 234.

³⁷See Stern’s commentary on *Authors*, #511, and Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987) 80–82.

assented to their conversion (as the Talmud requires them to do), cannot have been motivated by a deep or sincere love for the god of Abraham. They were converted to Judaism for the religious convenience of their owners. And yet they were accepted as proselytes after their manumission, and even before that they were regarded, by rabbinic law at least, as proselytes-in-the-making.

c) Some gentiles endured conversion for the sake of marriage with a Jew. Josephus records that Azizus king of Emesa was circumcised (that is, converted) for the sake of marriage with Drusilla (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.7.1 § 139), and Polemo king of Cilicia for the sake of marriage with Berenice (*Jewish Antiquities* 20.7.3 §§ 145–46).³⁸ The sincerity of these conversions can be gauged by subsequent events: Berenice abandoned Polemo and he therefore abandoned his Judaism. A very different case of conversion of convenience is attested in the war of 66–70 CE. Upon being captured by the rebels, the commander of the Roman garrison in Jerusalem, one Metilius, saved his life by promising “to judaize as far as circumcision” (*Jewish War* 2.17.10 § 454).³⁹ If Josephus is to be believed, the Idumeans and Itureans were compelled by their Maccabean conquerors to accept circumcision and Judaism, thus providing two clear examples of forced conversions. (But Josephus is not to be believed.)⁴⁰ In their discussions of conversion, the rabbis prohibit conversion for the sake of marriage, gain, or any other non-religious consideration, but it is safe to assume that such conversions were not rare.

d) The social consequences of intermarriage between a Jew and a non-Jew will have varied. In all likelihood, if a gentile man married a Jewish woman, he would not thereby enter the Jewish community. In most such cases, at least before the second century CE, the offspring of the union took the status of the father and would not have become members of the Jewish community. In contrast, if a gentile woman was married to a Jewish man, she was supposed to abandon her pagan gods and follow the same religion as her husband. There was no ritual of conversion; the act of marriage to a Jewish husband was *de facto* an act of conversion. By association with her husband she joined the Jewish community in some way, although she probably would have been regarded by her contemporaries, and probably would have regarded herself as well, not as a Jew but as a gentile. Her children of course were Jewish, because they were the offspring of a Jewish father.

³⁸In contrast Syllacus the Nabatean (*Jewish Antiquities* 16.7.6 § 225) and Epiphanes the son of the king of Commagene (*Jewish Antiquities* 19.9.1 § 355, 20.7.1 § 139) refused circumcision and therefore were denied permission to marry princesses of the Herodian house.

³⁹Dio Cassius reports that in the war of 66–70 some Roman soldiers went over to the Jewish side and were received kindly by the Jews, and that in the war of 132–35 many foreigners joined the Jews “through eagerness for gain” (Dio Cassius 66.5.4 and 69.13.2 = Stern, *Authors*, ## 430, 440), but there is no indication that conversion is meant.

⁴⁰See “Respect for Judaism,” 422–24.

This system is presumed by various sources of the first century CE (Josephus, Philo, New Testament), but the rabbis of the second century CE presume a different system entirely. According to rabbinic law, the status of the offspring of intermarriage followed that of the mother. The rabbis did have a ritual for the conversion of women: if a gentile wife converted to Judaism, then she and the children she would bear after her conversion would be Jewish. If she did not convert, neither she nor her children were Jewish. What impelled the rabbis to introduce these changes is not known.⁴¹

7) *Converting to Judaism and "becoming a Jew"*

Conversion to Judaism entails three elements: practice of the Jewish laws (category 4); exclusive devotion to the god of the Jews (category 5); and integration into the Jewish community (category 6). The three elements are stated forthrightly by the book of Judith. When Achior the Ammonite "saw all that the god of Israel had done, he believed firmly in god, and was circumcised, and joined the house of Israel, remaining so to this day" (Jdt 14:10). Tacitus writes that the Jews "instituted the circumcision of the genitalia in order to be recognizable by their difference. Those who cross over into their manner of life adopt the same practice, and, before anything else, are instructed to despise the gods, disown their native land, and regard their parents, children, and brothers as of little account."⁴² Juvenal too sees in conversion the denial of the pagan gods (the worship of nothing but the clouds), the practice of the Jewish laws (notably circumcision), and hostility towards all non-Jews.⁴³

Most descriptions of conversion, however, mention only one or two of the three elements. In several passages, Philo praises the proselytes (or epeytes) for having the courage to abandon "their kinsfolk by blood, their country, their customs, and the temples and the images of their gods, and the tributes and honors paid to them," and to undertake the "journey to a better home, from idle fables to the clear vision of truth and the worship of the one and truly existing god." Moses "commands all members of the nation to love the incomers, not only as friends and kinsfolk but as themselves in body and soul." For Philo, then, the crucial elements of conversion are the denial of the pagan gods, the belief in the god of Israel, and integration into the Israelite polity (*politeia*).⁴⁴ It is striking that Philo does not explicitly associate the process of conversion with

⁴¹For evidence and discussion, see "Origins of the Matrilineal Principle," and "Was Timothy Jewish?" A particularly obscure point is the status of women who converted to Judaism but remained married to their gentile husbands. See my brief discussion in "Respect for Judaism," 430.

⁴²*Histories* 5.5.2 = Stern, *Authors*, # 281.

⁴³*Satires* 14.96–106 = Stern, *Authors*, # 301.

⁴⁴*On the Virtues* 20–21 §§ 102–8; 34 § 182; 39 §§ 212–19; *On the Special Laws* 1.9 §§ 51–55; 4.34 § 178.

the observance of the special laws, notably circumcision; we may presume that Philo would have required the proselyte, upon acquiring membership in the Israelite polity, to observe all the laws observed by the Israelites.⁴⁵ In a much briefer description the author of the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (41.1–5 and 42.4–5) sees proselytes as “people who have left their vanities to take refuge under your wings” and “those who began by not knowing and who then knew life, and mixed themselves in the race apart among the peoples.”

Josephus nowhere says explicitly that conversion to Judaism entails the rejection of the pagan gods. Only one passage refers explicitly to the social integration of the convert: the Jews of Antioch “always drew to their religious ceremonies a great multitude of Greeks whom they made in some way a part of themselves” (*Jewish War* 7.3.3 § 45). In general Josephus defines conversion to mean the adoption of the practices and customs of the Jews. And of all the practices and customs of the Jews Josephus singles out circumcision. For him “to adopt the customs of the Jews” and “to be circumcised” are synonymous expressions (cf. *Vita* 23 § 113 with 31 § 149).⁴⁶ In the second century BCE circumcision achieved prominence, for Jews and gentiles alike, as *the* Jewish ritual, and in subsequent centuries many gentile writers (for example, Tacitus and Juvenal) confirmed Josephus’s (and Paul’s!) view that the acceptance of circumcision is the acceptance of Judaism. Although they knew that circumcision was practiced by other nations too, these writers persisted in regarding the ritual as quintessentially Jewish, probably because the Jews themselves so regarded it. The Greek-speaking Jews of the second temple period and the Hebrew- (and Aramaic-) speaking Jews after 70 CE debated the meaning of circumcision and the ritual’s exact place in the conversion process, but as far as is known no (non-Christian) Jewish community in antiquity accepted male proselytes who were not circumcised. Perhaps the god of the Jews would be pleased with gentiles who venerated him and practiced some of his laws, and perhaps in the day of the eschaton gentiles would not need to be circumcised to be part of god’s holy people; but if those gentiles wanted to join the Jewish community in the here and now, they had to accept circumcision.⁴⁷

⁴⁵Contrast the passage cited above from the *Questions on Exodus*, which explicitly says that the proselyte is not circumcised and says nothing about abandoning his previous family and integration into the community. As always in Philo, it is difficult to determine when Philo is giving exegesis and when he is reflecting the practices of Alexandrian Jewry.

⁴⁶For further references see “Respect for Judaism,” 419–21.

⁴⁷For discussions of the meaning of circumcision see Philo *On the Special Laws* 1.1–2 §§ 1–11, and *b. Ned.* 31b–32a (and parallels). On the Philonic passage see Richard Hecht, “The Exegetical Contexts of Philo’s Interpretation of Circumcision,” in Frederick E. Greenspahn, Earle Hilgert, and Burton L. Mack, eds., *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1984) 51–79. On the place of circumcision in the conversion process see Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 20.2.5 §§ 39–46 and *b. Yeb.* 47a–b (and parallels). These texts (with Philo’s piece on proselytes in the *Questions on Exodus*) have suggested to some modern schol-

The third element of the conversion process is the integration of the proselyte into the Jewish community.⁴⁸ This integration would be manifest in various ways. Whatever separation the Jews observed in their dealings with gentiles would no longer affect the proselyte. The proselyte would be counted as a member of the synagogue, would be allowed to participate in the sacred meals,⁴⁹ would be expected to bring his or her legal cases before the communal authorities and to pay his or her share of the communal taxes (both the local impositions and the offerings to the central institutions in the land of Israel, the temple and the patriarchs),⁵⁰ would be allowed to sit with the Jews in the theater, and after death would be buried in proximity to other Jews. In sum, the proselyte was just like the native born.

In the eyes of outsiders a proselyte "became" and could be called a Jew. In the *Acts of Pilate*, upon being asked by Pilate to define "proselyte," the high priests reply, "They were born children of Greeks, and now have become Jews" (*Hellenon tekna egennethesan kai nun gegonasin loudaioi*).⁵¹ The *Life of Septimius Severus* reports that the emperor prohibited his subjects from "becoming Jews" (*Iudaeos fieri sub gravi poena vetuit*). Ambrosiaster writes that "proselytes" are those "who have been made Jews" (*fieri Iudaeos*).⁵² Epictetus says of a convert to Judaism that he is "a Jew in fact and is also called

ars that some proselytes might have been allowed to remain uncircumcised. I am not convinced. For a partial rebuttal of Neil McEleney, "Conversion, Circumcision, and the Law," *NTS* 20 (1974) 328–33, see John Nolland, "Uncircumcised Proselytes?" *JSJ* 12 (1981) 173–94, and Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986) 40–41. The importance of circumcision is highlighted in a remarkable way by Petronius (Stern, *Authors*, #195). In general see John J. Collins, "A Symbol of Otherness: Circumcision and Salvation in the First Century," in Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs, eds., "To See Ourselves as Others See Us": *Christians, Jews, 'Others' in Late Antiquity* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985) 163–86.

⁴⁸Two imperial laws of the fourth century see conversion primarily in terms of social integration. See Theodosian Code 16.8.1 (18 October 315): *si quis vero ex populo ad eorum [i.e., Iudaeorum] nefariam sectam accesserit et conciliabulis eorum se adplicaverit*, and Theodosian Code 16.8.7 (3 July 357[?]): *si quis . . . ex Christiano Iudaeus effectus sacrilegis coetibus adgregetur*. See Linder, *Jews in Imperial Legislation*, #8, 12.

⁴⁹Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 14.10.8 §§215–16. See Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (3 vols.; rev. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, et al.; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973–86) 3. 145.

⁵⁰Sara Mandell asks an excellent question in her article, "Who Paid the Temple Tax When the Jews Were Under Roman Rule?" *HTR* 77 (1984) 223–32. Unfortunately she makes many unwarranted assumptions (e.g., she assumes that only Pharisees and rabbis observed the ancestral laws) and does not appreciate the social dynamics of the question.

⁵¹*Acts of Pilate* 2.1–4. For the Greek text see Constantinus Tischendorf, *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Avenarius et Mendelssohn, 1853) 214–16. For a translation *NTApoc* 1. 453–54; cf. too Montague Rhodes James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (1924; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 98–99.

⁵²Stern, *Authors*, #515. Ps.-Augustine *Questions on the Old and New Testament* 81 (CSEL 50. 137). On the identity of Ps.-Augustine with Ambrosiaster, see my "Was Timothy Jewish," 259. Cf. Tertullian *Apology* 18: *fiunt non nascuntur Christiani* ("Christians are made, not born").

one" (*esti to onti kai kaleitai Ioudaios*).⁵³ In the eyes of outsiders even those who have not "converted" to Judaism can be said to have "become Jews." Gentiles with an unusual attachment to the god of the Jews can be said by their neighbors to have become Jews (see category 5 above). Gentiles who practice Jewish rituals can be called "Jews" by other gentiles (see category 4 above). Tacitus and Juvenal do not use this terminology but clearly regard proselytes as gentiles who have rejected gentile society and joined the sinister and tight-knit group of the Jews. In the eyes of outsiders, then, a proselyte "was called" or "became" a Jew.

Proselytes became citizens or "members" of the Jewish polity, but in the eyes of the Jews did the proselytes "become" Jews? Apparently not. Jewish sources put this locution exclusively in the mouths of gentiles; otherwise, Jewish texts, in both Hebrew and Greek, use other terms to describe the process of conversion.⁵⁴ Numerous passages in Philo and in rabbinic literature praise the proselyte and enjoin upon Jews the equitable treatment of those who have entered their midst.⁵⁵ Josephus writes that "kinship is created not only through birth but also through the choice of the manner of life" (*Against Apion* 2.28 § 210). The rabbis state that when the conversion ceremony is complete the proselyte is "like an Israelite in all respects."⁵⁶ But none of these passages demonstrates that the proselyte achieved real equality with the native born. The proselyte probably had an ambiguous status in the Jewish community. Many epitaphs and synagogue inscriptions attach the label "proselyte" after the name of the person being commemorated.⁵⁷ This practice highlights the ambiguity. On the one hand, the Jewish community accorded "membership" status to the proselyte; he or she could obtain honor and power in his or her adopted

⁵³Stern, *Authors*, #254.

⁵⁴In Esth 8:17 the verb *mityahadim* means not "became Jews" but "pretended to be Jews" or "played the Jew." The Septuagint translates *perietemnonito kai Ioudaizon*, "they were circumcised and they judaized," but this translation is ambiguous. ("They judaized" might mean "they followed Jewish practices," or "they supported the Jews"; it might, but need not, mean "they converted to Judaism.") The two verbs are also juxtaposed by Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.22.5, but that text is similarly ambiguous and does not necessarily preserve the language of Eusebius's ultimate source, the Jewish author Theodotus.)

⁵⁵See above, n. 44. Love for incomers is also endorsed by Ps.-Phocylides 39; see the discussion of Peter van der Horst, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (Leiden: Brill, 1978) 139–40. For a survey of rabbinic attitudes towards proselytes see Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, 149–73.

⁵⁶B. *Yeb* 47b.

⁵⁷The Aphrodisias inscription lists three proselytes; Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome*, #21. 68, 202, 222, 256, 462, 523 (Rome); *CII*, 576 (Venosa); Lüderitz, *Corpus*, #12 (Cyrene); Pau Figueras, *Decorated Jewish Ossuaries* (Leiden: Brill, 1983) 16 nn. 135–36 (Jerusalem); Dura: Joseph Naveh, *On Stone and Mosaic. The Aramaic and Hebrew Inscriptions from Ancient Synagogues* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1978) #88.

community. On the other hand, the membership status of the proselyte was anomalous, and the proselyte felt obligated (was obligated?) to call attention to this fact. According to the *Acts of Pilate* the high priests, who have just explained that proselytes "have become Jews," take it as obvious that the testimony of native-born Jews is more reliable than that of the incomers. In the communities that produced and preserved the Qumran scrolls and rabbinic literature, proselytes did not attain equality with the native born. One Qumran text prohibits the proselyte (*gēr*) from entering the temple;⁵⁸ another records that the people of Israel are divided into four groups: priests, Levites, Israelites, and proselytes.⁵⁹ According to the Mishnah, a proselyte should not say "Our god and god of our fathers" in his prayers, nor should he recite the Deuteronomic formula, "from the land you have sworn unto our fathers to give us" (*m. Bik.* 1.4).⁶⁰ After all, his fathers and our fathers were worlds apart! The status of the proselyte in rabbinic law is filled with contradictions and ambiguities, because in some respects, this person, born a gentile, is indeed "like an Israelite," but in other respects is decidedly different or inferior.⁶¹ Even Philo clearly implies in one passage that proselytes are decidedly inferior to natives (*Life of Moses* 1.27 § 147).

In the eyes of outsiders a proselyte or convert was a gentile who became a Jew. But in the eyes of (some?) Jews, a gentile who converted to Judaism became not a Jew but a proselyte, that is, a Jew of a peculiar sort. According to rabbinic law the peculiarity was inherited; the son of a proselyte had the legal status of his father (*t. Qid.* 4.15) unless his mother was a native-born Jew. How the proselytes saw themselves is unknown. If they voluntarily added "the proselyte" on their inscriptions, they knew that they were different from the native Jews. Some proselytes assumed Jewish names upon their conversion, indicating a real desire to adopt a new identity and to "become Jews."⁶²

⁵⁸John M. Allegro, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert of Jordan V. Qumran Cave 4*, 53–57 #174 and *Temple Scroll* 39.5; 40.6; see "Prohibition of Inter-marriage," 32.

⁵⁹*Damascus Covenant* 14.3–6; cf. *m. Qid.* 4.1 and *Sifre Deuteronomy* 247, p. 276 (ed. Finkelstein).

⁶⁰The fact that the Palestinian Talmud reverses the Mishnah here does not affect my point.

⁶¹See Bamberger, *Proselytism in the Talmudic Period*, 60–123. A new, methodologically sophisticated discussion is needed.

⁶²Explicit evidence for change of name: Leon, *Jews of Ancient Rome*, #462 (Felicita becomes Peregrina) and #523 (Veturia Paula becomes Sarra). Implicit evidence is provided by the inscriptions that commemorate a proselyte with a Jewish name; in all likelihood the proselyte received the Jewish name after conversion. See the inscriptions from Aphrodisias, Cyrene, and Jerusalem listed in n. 57 above.

CONCLUSIONS: "GOD-FEARERS," JUDAIZERS, SYMPATHIZERS, AND CONVERTS

A convert or proselyte "becomes a Jew" by believing in the god of the Jews, by abstaining from actions prohibited by the god and by performing other actions mandated by the god, and by joining the Jewish community. But converts were not the only gentiles who expressed interest in, or sympathy for, Jews and Judaism. Gentiles could extend some measure of recognition to the god of the Jews (categories 2 and 5), could observe some of his precepts (category 4), could befriend or benefit the Jews (category 3), or, at the most basic level, could simply admire one aspect or another of Judaism (category 1)—all without any intention or desire to convert to Judaism. The boundary that separates Jews and Judaism from pagans and paganism is distinct but broad. The gentiles who straddled the boundary or who lived in its proximity represent a wide variety of behavior and belief, and should not be lumped together indiscriminately. If we need to designate all these gentiles with one term, the modern term "sympathizers" seems best precisely because it is so vague and does not imply the existence of a homogeneous category. Gentiles of categories 4 and 5 can be called "adherents," a term introduced by A. D. Nock. In contrast with a "convert," an "adherent" accepted a new system of ritual and belief as a useful supplement to, and not as a substitute for, his old way of life.⁶³ Jews and Judaism in antiquity were hardly unique in their ability to attract sympathizers and adherents. Such categories are amply attested in the history of religions. In Rome in the first century BCE the goddess Isis exerted a powerful attraction on many poets and intellectuals who remained under her spell but did not undergo conversion.⁶⁴ Similarly, philosophical schools in antiquity won souls through "conversion" but more often attracted "hangers-on" who adopted some but not all of the tenets of the school.⁶⁵

The Jews of antiquity in both Greek and Hebrew termed these gentiles, or at least some of them, "fearers of god" or "venerators of god" (*theosebeis, sebomenoi ton theon, phoboumenoi ton theon; yirē šamayim*), a usage attested in Josephus, Acts, rabbinic literature, the Aphrodisias inscription, and perhaps in other Jewish inscriptions.⁶⁶ (The fact that *Jewish* venerators of the Jewish god

⁶³Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (1933; London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 6–7. Nock's term is "adhesion"; see "Respect for Judaism," 410.

⁶⁴Friedrich Solmsen, *Isis among the Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) 83: "There is an acceptance of the cult of Isis which falls short of conversion. For want of a better name we may think of it as an emotional conquest."

⁶⁵Paul Veyne, *A History of Private Life*, vol. 1: *From Pagan Rome to Byzantium* (trans. A. Goldhammer; Cambridge: Belknap, 1987) 225–26. For the phrase "to become a Pythagorean" (*pythagoreios genesthai*), see Diodorus of Sicily 10.11.1.

⁶⁶For a full collection of material see Siegert, "Gottesfurchtige und Sympathisanten," and Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-fearers*, esp. 48–66. A comparable use of the Latin term

could also be designated *theosebeis* merely introduces some uncertainty in the interpretation of certain inscriptions, but the basic point remains.) These terms are primarily theological; the gentiles "venerate god," but the manner in which they express their veneration, and the depth of their veneration (do they belong to category 2 or 5?), can be deduced only from the context of each attestation, and often not at all. There is absolutely no reason to assume that all "venerators of god" throughout the Roman empire over the course of several centuries followed a single fixed pattern of practice and belief.

In some Jewish communities gentile "venerators of god" attained status within, or "belonged" to, the community. The recently published inscription from Aphrodisias lists fifty-two *theosebeis*, who stand in some relationship with another group that consists of eighteen people, of whom three are proselytes, two are *theosebeis*, and the rest (we presume) native-born Jews. At Miletus a section of the theater was reserved for "Jews and *theosebeis*."⁶⁷ An inscription from Panticapaeum (in the Bosporus) refers to "the synagogue of the Jews and the *theosebeis*."⁶⁸ The Jewish communities of these Greek cities allowed outsiders either to join as members (to become proselytes) or to affiliate loosely (to become *theosebeis*). Such an arrangement is hardly unusual; in a public inscription a professional corporation of Ravenna at the time of Diocletian listed the members (*ordo*) and officers (*patroni, matres*) of the group as well as the "affiliated members" or "sympathizers" (*amatores*).⁶⁹ But the examples of Aphrodisias and Miletus hardly prove that everywhere gentile "venerators of god" could "join" the Jewish community. In Aphrodisias, Miletus, and in other cities of western Asia Minor, the Jewish communities saw themselves, and, by the second century CE at least, were seen by their gentile neighbors as part of general society. These communities attracted sympathizers of all sorts and accorded them some recognition under the title "venerators of god." In other cities the relations between the Jewish community and the general society were not nearly so open and friendly, and in these communities we may doubt whether sympathizers attained membership of any kind. In some communities, as in Alexandria in the first century, the tension between the Jews and the gen-

metuens is poorly attested. Christians too could use the term *theosebes*; see Ernest Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1961) #2953.

⁶⁷Hildebrecht Hommel, "Juden und Christen im kaiserzeitlichen Milet," *Mitteilungen des deutschen archaologischen Instituts zu Istanbul* 25 (1975) 167-95, esp. 184-87. The exact rendering of the inscription is debated; see Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-fearers*, 54.

⁶⁸Heinz Bellen, "Synagoge ton loudaton kai theosebion Die Aussage einer bosporanischen Freilassunginschrift," *JAC* 8/9 (1965-66) 171-76.

⁶⁹A. Donati, *Epigraphica* 39 (1977) 27-40 = *L'année épigraphique* (1977) #265.

tiles was so great that virtually no gentiles became adherents or proselytes—at least none is attested.⁷⁰

How the gentiles of Aphrodisias, Miletus, and Panticapaeum “venerated god” is unknown. In the eyes of the Jewish community any gentile benefactor, any gentile well disposed towards Jews or Judaism, might be called a “venerator of god.” Whether they really were venerators of the god of the Jews, and whether they saw themselves as venerators of the god of the Jews, are questions that remain unanswered. The Jews of antiquity are entitled to view their friends and benefactors in any way they choose, but we do not have to believe them. (Cf. the Jewish interpretations of Cyrus and Petronius, discussed above.) That *theosebeia* can have a non-theological meaning is confirmed by analogy with the word “judaize” (*ioudaizein*). The word is best known from its usage in Paul where it means “to adopt the rituals of the Jews” (category 4), especially “to live a Jewish mode of life, specifically to adopt circumcision” (category 7). This usage is found elsewhere, to be sure, but in one passage Josephus uses the participle “judaizers” to describe those gentiles who mingle with the Jews and support them in their political struggles in the cities of Syria (*Jewish War* 2.18.2 § 463).⁷¹ The ambiguity of both terms is well illustrated by a passage in the *Acts of Pilate*. The Roman governor tells the Jews that “you know that my wife venerates god (or: is a god-venerator, *theosebes estin*) and judaizes rather much with you (*kai mallon ioudaizei sun humin*).” Does Pilate mean that his wife supports the Jews in their political struggles (category 3), or that she practices some Jewish rituals (category 4), or that she believes in the Jewish god more fervently than in all the other gods (category 5), or all three?⁷² If we seek to produce a single definition of a “judaizer” or a “god-fearer,” and if we limit that definition to the realm of Jewish practices alone, we labor in vain.⁷³

⁷⁰Neither Philo nor any of the Jewish works commonly ascribed to Alexandrian provenance is able to name a specific individual who was a “god-fearer,” a “judaizer,” or a proselyte. I do not discuss here the relative numbers of “god-fearers” or the role of “god-fearers” in the book of Acts.

⁷¹See “Respect for Judaism,” 416, 418, and n. 54 above.

⁷²The exact force of *sun humin* eludes me. For the text see n. 51 above.

⁷³Contrast the discussion of Tannenbaum in Reynolds and Tannenbaum, *Jews and God-fearers*, 48–66 and the conclusion of Siegert, “Gottesfürchtige und Sympathisanten,” 163.

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