Barclay, John M. G. "#####: Ethnicity and Translation." : *Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*. Ed. Katherine M Hockey and David G Horrell. London: T&T CLARK, 2018. 46–58. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780567677334.0009>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 07:07 UTC.

Copyright © Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell 2018. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Ἰουδαῖος: Ethnicity and Translation

John M. G. Barclay

In the course of his heated literary debate with Apion, Josephus issues a statement that he presents as self-evident: ‘Those who think highly of their own homelands are proud to be named after them, and censure those who improperly lay claim to that origin’ (οἱ γε μεγαλοφρονοῦντες ἐπὶ ταῖς ἑαυτῶν πατρίσι σεμνύνονται μὲν ἀπὸ τούτων αὐτοὶ χρηματίζοντες, τοὺς ἀδίκως δ’ αὐτῶν ἀντιποιουμένους ἐλέγχουσι. *Apion* 2.30; my translation). Such a declaration is rhetorically weighted. Josephus is here in the midst of claiming that Apion, because he was born in the depths of Egypt, should really call himself an ‘Egyptian’, but because he considered Egyptians ‘utterly worthless’ he ‘deserted his own people’ (τὸ γένος αὐτὸς ἔφυγεν) and passed himself off as an ‘Alexandrian’. As this argument makes clear, ethnic identity can be contestable: People can lay claim to an identity others might dispute, or disown an identity others might attribute to them. In the Egyptian context of which Josephus is speaking, such matters were both exceedingly complex and extremely important. Who was classified as a ‘Greek’, an ‘Alexandrian’, or a ‘Roman’ mattered greatly for their political rights (e.g. citizenship) and for taxation. Josephus is aware of some of the complexities and of the possibility of multiple labels: In this context he claims that some Judeans/Jews¹ have been labelled ‘Macedonians’ (2.37, probably a military title) and may be legitimately called ‘Alexandrians’ (2.38, in the sense of ‘Alexandrian citizens’). In the bitter and sometimes violent Alexandrian disputes, many Judeans were considered, in fact, ‘Egyptian’ for taxation purposes, although they vigorously contested this classification.²

Thus Josephus’ statement, for all its apparent simplicity, immerses us in a maelstrom of ancient complexity regarding the meaning of ‘ethnic’ labels. If we discuss what these labels ‘meant’ we have to ask immediately, ‘meant to whom?’ and ‘as used by whom?’ If some ‘ethnic’ labels were relatively unambiguous, others (including ‘Greek’, ‘Roman’, and ‘Alexandrian’) could have a range of senses, each open to contest. Informal usage was one thing; the precision required by law, and by the agents of taxation, was quite

¹ As will become clear, I regard these two terms as partially overlapping and use them interchangeably; the translation question will be discussed at the end of this essay.

² For translation and a commentary that explains the issues touched on here, see John M. G. Barclay, *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary, Vol. 10: Against Apion*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

another. Rhetoric could play an important role, as the variable social and moral connotations of ethnic terms gave plenty of scope for self-promotion or polemical abuse. In many cases, such rhetorical ‘play’ could both produce and be produced by the ambiguity of the terms themselves.

But Josephus’ statement also pitches us into another maelstrom, the contemporary scholarly dispute about the connotations of the term Ἰουδαῖος and its most appropriate translation into English. Josephus’ presumption is that names relate to ‘homelands’, that (at least some) ethnic labels have geographical connotations. Earlier in this treatise he had cited a snippet of text from Clearchus, who himself cited an anecdote from Aristotle encountering a ‘Judean’ man in Asia Minor. According to Aristotle, ‘this man was a Judean by descent (τὸ γένος ἦν Ἰουδαῖος) from Coele-Syria. These people are descendants of the philosophers in India. Among the Indians, they say, the philosophers are called Calanoi, and among the Syrians, Judeans, taking their name from the place (τοῦνομα λαβόντες ἀπὸ τοῦ τόπου), for the place they inhabit is called Judaea’ (*Apion* 1.179). Even here different types of label are juxtaposed, and identity is made yet more complex when Aristotle describes this Judean as ‘Greek, not only in his speech, but in his soul’ (1.180). But the Clearchus/Aristotle comment makes the territorial connection of the name Ἰουδαῖος clear. But was this clear to everyone in antiquity, in all circumstances (e.g. even for long-term residents in the Diaspora)? Where a geographical connotation was salient, was it always equally strong? And what was understood by ‘Judaea’? Would the label Ἰουδαῖος apply to those non-Jews by descent who, in Josephus’ words, ‘desire to live under the same laws as us’ (*Apion* 2.210) or ‘wish to share our customs’ (2.261), and if so, what did it mean? Such questions are now compounded by recent disputes about *translation into English*, a question entangled with the politics of translation, and the (intended or unintended) effects of translation choices on contemporary perceptions of Jews and Judaism.³ For the purposes of this essay, I will focus initially on questions regarding ‘ethnicity’ and ‘ethnic identity’, keeping discussion of translation until the end.

1 Ἰουδαῖος as *ethnikon* – and as ‘ethnic’ label?

The title of this section is meant to evoke both a thesis and a question. The thesis is that Ἰουδαῖος is so commonly associated with a people, an ancestral tradition, communal customs, and a territory that it is proper to recognize it as an *ethnikon* – a label like one given to Egyptians, Syrians, Arabs, or Cretans (‘Greek’ is a far more complex phenomenon). The question is what we mean by ‘ethnic’ and ‘ethnicity’, and whether

³ For a survey of the issues and of scholarly positions, see the trio of articles by David M. Miller: ‘The Meaning of *Ioudaios* and its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient “Judaism”’, *CBR* 9 (2010): 98–126; ‘Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for *Ioudaios*’, *CBR* 10 (2012): 293–311; ‘Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of *Ioudaios* in Ancient “Judaism”’, *CBR* 12 (2014): 216–65. Some of the heat in the entanglement of this debate with contemporary concerns can be gauged from the contributions to Timothy M. Law and Charles Halton, eds, *Jew and Judean: A MARGINALIA Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts* (Marginalia Review of Books; online publication, 2014).

the use of these terms helps or hinders our understanding of what the ancients meant by an ἔθνος. Although it has become common to refer to ‘ethnicity’ in this matter, and to apply modern definitions of this phenomenon, herein lies a trap for the unwary: certain understandings of ‘ethnicity’ can skew our perception of the ancient evidence.

Anyone who approached the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias through its magnificent portico (built in the middle of the first century CE) would have had little doubt as to the category in which to put Ἰουδαῖοι. In a display intended to represent the extent of Augustus’ imperial successes, the portico contained fifty female statues representing peoples or places recently brought into the orbit of the empire (by conquest or *clientela*). Alongside statues identified as Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily, were many representing ἔθνη, including those inscribed at their base ἔθνους Αἰγυπτίων, ἔθνους Δαρδάνων, and ἔθνους Ἰουδαίων.⁴ The Ἰουδαῖοι here are a ‘people’ (ἔθνος; Latin equivalents would be *natio* or *gens*) associated with a place.

What else might be implied by the name? Josephus’ *Contra Apionem* allows us to compile quite a precise inventory of connotations.⁵ This includes (a) descent and shared ancestry: Josephus often uses the term γένος, refers to ‘our ancestors’ (e.g. 2.289), and emphasizes the significance of the family in the ancestral heritage; (b) territory: From the very first section Josephus speaks of the ‘the land we now possess’ (1.1), and refers to ‘our own land’, the ‘ancestral land’, as ‘this land’ (1.60, 103; 132, 174, 224; 2.289) and as πατρίς (1.210, 212; 2.277), even though he writes self-consciously in the Diaspora; (c) language: Although he writes in Greek, Josephus figures the language of the Judeans as distinct from that of the Greeks (1.319; cf. 1.167; 2.27); (d) sacred texts: notably the Scriptures (1.6–56); (e) temple: Even though it was in ruins, Josephus puts the temple at the centre of the Jews’ constitution (2.193–98); and (f) constitution: Josephus figures the customs and culture of Jews/Judeans in constitutional terms, putting special emphasis on its ‘religious’ components by coining the term ‘theocracy’ (2.165).⁶ All of these factors fit well within Greek and Roman ethnographic traditions, and an ancient reader would gain the impression of a nation associated with a place and endued with a strong sense of tradition and an especially pious culture.⁷

That, of course, is Josephus, writing with his own political and cultural agenda. Is he ‘typical’ and would this resonate with what other Jews, or outsiders, would

⁴ R. R. R. Smith, ‘Simulacra Gentium: The *Ethne* from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias’, *JRS* 78 (1988): 50–77.

⁵ See Barclay, *Flavius Josephus*, lv–lxi. Cf. Philip F. Esler, ‘Judean Ethnic Identity in Josephus’ *Against Apion*’, in *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne*, ed. Zuleika Rodgers, Margaret Daly-Denton, and Anne Fitzpatrick McKinley (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 73–92.

⁶ The fact that Josephus continues to feature land and temple prominently in his definition of the Jewish people, in this his last work, puts in question the thesis of Daniel R. Schwartz that we can trace in Josephus’ work a progression from a land-based (in his terms, ‘Judean’) identity to the identity of a non-land-based religion (‘Jew’); see Daniel R. Schwartz, *Judeans and Jews: Four Faces of Dichotomy in Ancient Jewish History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 48–61. On his distinction between ‘Judean’ and ‘Jew’, see the discussion in Section 2.

⁷ There is some overlap here with the six features of ‘ethnicity’ identified by John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith in their *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6–7. They feature (i) a common proper name; (ii) a myth of common ancestry; (iii) a shared history; (iv) a common culture; (v) some link with a ‘homeland’; and (vi) a sense of communal solidarity. There is a danger, of course, in retrojecting modern indices into the ancient world, and we should be alive to the dynamic and sometimes ambiguous ways that ancient texts themselves construct identity.

associate with the name Ἰουδαῖοι? To raise that (impossibly large) question invites awareness that, at the very least, different elements of this complex compound could be foregrounded or downplayed for social purposes. This is not simply the point (made by Fredrik Barth) that groups can retain their distinctive identities, including their labels, over time, even while the contents of those identities change.⁸ It also highlights the *rhetorical* work effected by *ethnika*, and the flexibility this gave to such labels. In fact, it is only possible to use the term ‘ethnicity’ for the ancient phenomena if we are clear that this is a *polythetic*, and not a *monothetic*, category. The difference is this: A monothetic category must have at least one element that is necessary for inclusion in the category, some common feature without which a phenomenon cannot be included. Polythetic, on the other hand, means ‘relating to or sharing a number of characteristics which occur commonly in members of a group or class, but none of which is essential for membership of that group or class’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*).⁹ One would expect clusters of characteristics, or ‘family resemblances’, but there is no single item which is the *sine qua non* of membership in that category, ‘essential’ either as necessary or as ‘of the essence’.¹⁰

Returning to Josephus’ inventory, we might consider that a distinctive language is a non-necessary criterion of ‘ethnicity’, but what about ancestry or descent? The question here is not whether such descent is ‘real’ or ‘fictive’: in antiquity, as today, there were plenty of claims of fictive lines of ancestry, both by individuals and by nations.¹¹ The question I am posing is whether *any kind of claim to ancestry* (real or imagined) is a *necessary* component of ‘ethnicity’. Can we speak of shared ‘ethnicity’ even when there is no claim to shared ancestry, or is that a contradiction in terms? That is a definitional decision *we* have to make, and we must be clear that that is *our* decision.

An example of this problem is the impressively detailed philological and historical work of Shaye Cohen.¹² Cohen’s analysis works on the assumption that ‘ethnic (or ethnic-geographic) identity is immutable; non-Judeans cannot become Judeans any more than non-Egyptians can become Egyptians, or non-Syrians can become Syrian’ (109). Thus, ‘ethnicity is closed, immutable, an ascribed characteristic based on birth’ (136). Cohen then traces a trajectory by which the original ethnic identity of Ἰουδαῖοι (defined in these terms) was altered during the late Hellenistic era (from the second century BCE), under influence from Hellenism, such that people could become Ἰουδαῖοι by political affiliation (e.g. the Idumaeans) or through ‘religious’ conversion (e.g. proselytes), acquiring identities that are mutable and therefore (in his terms) non-ethnic. Thus when non-Judeans adopt the culture or ‘religion’ of the Ἰουδαῖοι, they

⁸ Fredrik Barth, ‘Introduction’, in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, ed. Fredrik Barth (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969), 9–38.

⁹ Available online: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/polythetic> (accessed 6 February 2018).

¹⁰ For the application of this distinction to related matters, see Jonathan Z. Smith, ‘Fences and Neighbours: Some Contours of Early Judaism’, in *idem, Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1–18.

¹¹ On the construction of Greek identity, see Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

¹² Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Numbers in brackets in what follows refer to page numbers in this book.

do not change their ethnicity (that is, for Cohen, an impossibility); if they become Ἰουδαῖοι that term changes from an ‘ethnic’ to a ‘religious’ label,¹³ that is, (for Cohen) from ‘Judean’ to ‘Jew’.¹⁴

We will return to the translation issue below, but must maintain our focus here on the understanding of ‘ethnicity’. If this is a monothetic category, in which shared ancestry (real or imagined) is essential, then we must grant Cohen’s claim that conversion alters the meaning of the term Ἰουδαῖος, rending it fundamentally non-ethnic. On the same assumption, many have argued that ‘Greek’ ceases to be an ethnic term in the Hellenistic era. Following Isocrates’ famous statement that Athens ‘has made the name of Greeks to seem to be no more of birth (γένος) but of thought (διάνοια), so that those who share our education (παιδεία), more than those who share a common nature (φύσις), are said to be Hellenes’ (*Panegyricus* 50), it may be argued that ‘Greek’ has lost an essential criterion of ethnicity.¹⁵ If people could claim to be ‘Greek’ without even far-fetched and fictive claims to Greek ancestry, then, on this argument, the term no longer denotes ethnicity. If, on the other hand, we determine that ‘ethnicity’ is a polythetic category, in which no one element, even ancestry, was essential, then one could claim that those who adopted Judean (or Greek) traditional customs – speaking, behaving, and (especially) worshipping the divine in distinctively Judean (or Greek) ways – had acquired Judean (or Greek) ethnicity, even though they had no claim, and made no claim, to Jewish (or Greek) ancestry, near or remote.¹⁶

That, of course, would be a decision *we* make about *our* definition of ‘ethnicity’. To get a sense of how things might look in ancient terms, we can do no better than examine Josephus’ account of the ‘conversion’ of the royal house of Adiabene (*Ant.* 20.17–96).¹⁷ Following the example of his mother, Helena, and his wives, and under the influence of the merchant Ananias, Izates, the king of Adiabene, was taught to worship God ὡς Ἰουδαίους πᾶτριον ἦν (20.34–35). Helena had been instructed by another

¹³ For Cohen, this means that Judaism becomes an ‘ethno-religion’, but the label as applied to converts can have only a religious, not an ethnic, sense (*Beginnings*, 109–39).

¹⁴ See *Beginnings*, 69–106, 29–39.

¹⁵ The issue is complex. See Irad Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Simon Goldhill, ed., *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Philip F. Esler similarly insists that ‘no one feature can be determinative of, or a sine qua non for, ethnicity’, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 44. Something similar is argued (using different concepts) by Denise Kimber Buell, *Why this New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). Speaking of ‘fixed’ and ‘fluid’ ends of a spectrum, she argues that ‘if we do not suppose that ethnicity necessarily entails a privileging of the “fixed” end of the spectrum, we can say instead that the shift Cohen identifies entails a transformation in how ethnicity/race is defined, with a greater emphasis on its fluidity’ (44). As will be clear below, rather than a narrative of ‘transformation’ (Cohen’s or Buell’s), I see in the evidence simply the clarification that these ancient *ethnika* were always polythetic, rather than monothetic, categories.

¹⁷ See also Steve Mason in his well-known article ‘Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History’, republished in his *Josephus, Judea and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009), 141–84, at 180–2. The precise terms Josephus uses in this story are given surprisingly little attention either by Shaye Cohen or by Daniel R. Schwartz, who both use this as a parade example of how, in the case of conversion, the term Ἰουδαῖος can no longer evoke ethnicity; see Daniel R. Schwartz, “‘Judean’ or ‘Jew’? How Should We Translate *ioudaios* in Josephus?”, in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripenrot (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 3–27, at 14.

Judean εἰς τοὺς ἐκείνων μετακεκομίσθαι νόμους (36), and Izates, wishing to follow suit, considered that he would not be βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος if he did not get circumcised (38). This caused great alarm on political grounds. Despite her own attraction to Judean ways, Helena tried to dissuade him, ‘for, she said, he was a king; and if his subjects should discover that he was devoted to rites that were strange and foreign to themselves, it would produce much disaffection and they would not tolerate the rule of a Jew over them’ (trans. L. H. Feldman, LCL: βασιλέα γὰρ εἶναι, καὶ καταστήσειν εἰς πολλὴν δυσμένειαν τοὺς ὑπηκόους μαθόντας, ὅτι ξένων ἐπιθυμήσειεν καὶ ἀλλοτρίων αὐτοῖς ἐθῶν, οὐκ ἀνέξεσθαι τε βασιλεύοντος αὐτῶν Ἰουδαίου, 39).

It is clear that (as Josephus interprets the story) for Izates to become a Ἰουδαῖος is not a private or (in our terms) a merely ‘religious’ decision: it identifies him fully with a ‘foreign’ people, and therefore renders questionable his fitness to rule over the people of Adiabene. Nonetheless, Izates went ahead with circumcision and his mother and Ananias were petrified lest ‘his subjects would not submit to government by a man who was a devotee of foreign practices’ (οὐκ ἀνασχομένων τῶν ὑπηκόων ἄρχειν αὐτῶν ἄνδρα τῶν παρ’ ἐτέροις ζηλωτὴν ἐθῶν, 47). In the event, there were many threats against Izates, but God (says Josephus) protected him from them all. When the cycle was repeated, and Izates’ brother, Monobazus, and his kinsmen also ‘became eager to abandon their ancestral ways and to adopt the practices of the Jews’ (καὶ αὐτοὶ τὰ πατρία καταλιπόντες ἔθεισι χρῆσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίων, 75), a plot was hatched against them, which God made sure did not succeed. The nobles of Adiabene then appealed to Parthia to intervene, ‘for, they said, they had come to loathe their own king who had overthrown their traditions and had become enamoured of foreign practices’ (μισεῖν γὰρ ἔλεγον τὸν ἑαυτῶν βασιλέα καταλύσαντα μὲν τὰ πατρία, ξένων δ’ ἐραστὴν ἐθῶν γενόμενον, 81-82). In answer to prayer, Izates was spared this threat also, and God protected his own.

The threefold repetition of the motif we have highlighted underlines an essential point: For a non-Ἰουδαῖος to become a Ἰουδαῖος is by no means distinct from ‘ethnic’ considerations. Izates’ political prominence merely amplifies what is at stake: This is about abandoning the customs, traditions, and practices of one people and adopting those of another, ‘foreign’ nation. It makes little sense to describe this change as ‘religious’ *as opposed to* ‘ethnic’. Apart from the problem of defining what we mean by ‘religion’,¹⁸ the change that Izates here undergoes concerns a package of social, cultural, and national traditions, which includes a special way of worshipping God (and of thinking about God), but only as part of a holistic shift in ethnic identity.¹⁹ Thus even in the case of ‘religious’ conversion, Ἰουδαῖος-identity concerns identification with an ἔθνος to the extent that converts could be considered to have changed their national allegiance. This is impossible if ancestry is made an essential component of

¹⁸ The category is potentially problematic, as has been shown by Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013). But for an argument that it is not an inappropriate term in relation to ancient Judaism, see Daniel R. Schwartz, *Judeans and Jews*, 93–102.

¹⁹ Pace Seth Schwartz, I am not convinced that either the special intensity with which Jews/Judeans reflected on and practised their worship of God or their tight integration of its various dimensions constitutes the emergence of something that could be distinguished or ‘disembedded’ from its larger social context; see S. Schwartz, ‘How Many Judaisms Were There?’ *JAJ* 2 (2011): 208–38.

'ethnicity', and if one cannot adopt an ethnicity to which one has no (either real or pretended) relation by birth. In Izates' case, when circumcised he could be considered 'securely a Jew/Judean': the objection was not that this was impossible, but that it was unacceptable. When he did so, he was obliged to adopt the ancestral traditions of others, while abandoning his own: In that sense, he gains a new ancestral tradition, without acquiring (through adoption) the accompanying ancestry.²⁰ Thus in the case of the Ἰουδαῖοι, the concept of 'ethnicity' must *either* be judged unhelpful (if defined monothetically) and best avoided, *or* it must be defined explicitly as a polythetic category, such that others could become *ethnic* Jews/Judeans even with no pretence of shared ancestry.²¹

The Izates story shows that Ἰουδαῖος-ethnicity was not without its geographical connotations. After his conversion Izates was considered a 'foreigner' in Adiabene, and he sent five of his sons to Judaea 'to get a thorough knowledge of our native language and culture' (γλῶτταν τὴν παρ' ἡμῖν πάτριον καὶ παιδείαν ἀκριβῶς μαθησομένους, 71). Helena, his mother, made an extended visit to Jerusalem 'to worship at the temple of God, which was famous throughout the world' (49), and while there gave famine relief to the people of Jerusalem by subsidizing imported grain (51-52); Izates also sent money to Jerusalem (53). Both of them, on death, were buried not in Adiabene, but in Jerusalem, in the three pyramids Helena had specially erected just outside Jerusalem (95). That is testimony to the extent of their identification with both nation and place. One senses that the geographical connotation of the name Ἰουδαῖοι was not always equally strong, or even always present, but it was not uncommon. No doubt the Jerusalem temple, to which Jews famously made regular large payments, cemented and made visible their orientation to Judaea. The territorial connection does not mean, of course, that a Ἰουδαῖος had to be born in Judaea or resident there: In an age when people were familiar with long-term migration and Diaspora communities, it simply meant a recognition of that land as (in a loose sense) their 'homeland'.²²

No doubt that association could be played up or down for political and polemical purposes. In the bitter disputes between Jews/Judeans and Alexandrians in 37-41 CE, exactly how Judeans played their sense of 'belonging' was a very delicate matter, and

²⁰ It is possible that some proselytes were promised Abrahamic ancestry through circumcision, if that is what Paul's opponents in Galatia offered to his converts (that they become 'children of Abraham'). But the meaning of circumcision was itself open to dispute; see Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²¹ Cf. Dio's comment that 'the label [Ἰουδαῖοι] applies also to other people who emulate their laws, even if they are of other ethnic groups' (ἡ ἐπικλήσις ... φέρει δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους, ὅσοι τὰ νόμιμα αὐτῶν, καίπερ ἄλλοεθνεῖς ὄντες, ζηλοῦσι, 37.17.1). In *Joseph and Aseneth* the heroine convert is never described as an 'Egyptian' (only as the daughter of the priest Pentephres), although she worshipped 'the gods of the Egyptians'. Instead, she is carefully introduced at the start as having 'nothing similar to the daughters of the Egyptians; she was in every respect similar to the daughters of the Hebrews; and she was as tall as Sarah and handsome as Rebecca and beautiful as Rachel' (1.5). This rhetorically assimilates Aseneth to Hebrew ancestry, without being able to erase her difference altogether.

²² Cf. Mason, 'Jews, Judeans', 183: 'The Judeans of the Greco-Roman world remained an ἔθνος, a people associated with a place and its customs – no matter how far, or how long, they had been away from Judea.'

Claudius' judgement that they were living 'in a city not their own' (ἐν ἀλλοτρίᾳ πόλει, CPJ 153, line 95) was no doubt unwelcome to them.²³ When, after the Judean War, the people of Antioch wanted to expel the Judeans from their midst, Titus did not accede to their request on the grounds that their homeland had just been destroyed (War 7.100-111). Although everyone knew that they were long-term residents in Antioch, and Titus wanted them to remain there, it was always possible, for positive or negative reasons, to associate them with another place, where they could be considered, in some sense, to 'belong'. The exact connotations of the name 'Judaea' would matter to most people in the ancient world as little as it bothers most English speakers whether Holland is the whole country (properly called The Netherlands) or only one region within it. Since 'Judaea' contained Jerusalem and the temple, that was all that mattered. Finer distinctions between 'Judaea proper' and the 'Judaea in a wider sense' (including Idumaea and Galilee) were necessary only for close-grained descriptions of peoples and events in those small strips of land (of which we happen to have plenty in Josephus and the Gospels).²⁴ But for most purposes all that mattered was that the name *could be* associated with a piece of territory known as 'Judaea'.²⁵

What may we conclude about the connotations of the label Ἰουδαῖος? The fact that others of different descent could adopt this label (as the Izates story indicates) suggests that Judean ethnicity was a cluster-formed polythetic category that did not depend on shared ancestry. Only if we define 'ethnicity' as a monothetic category which *requires* shared ancestry (real or imagined) to mean anything at all does the phenomenon of conversion prove (as Cohen and others maintain) that Ἰουδαῖος can cease to be an ethnic category, and can become something else. Within his definition of ethnicity, Cohen traced the origin of this change, as an 'ethnic definition' was supplemented, though not replaced, by a 'religious definition'.²⁶ But if we take the category to which Ἰουδαῖος belongs as polythetic, we do not have to posit some point of change, simply the emergence of clarity that there is no one essential aspect of Judean/Jewish ethnicity – even ancestry or birth. A polythetic category is, admittedly, imprecise, but imprecision is exactly what we find in many of our sources, even if certain elements of the mix, in certain contexts, gain privileged status. It was only rarely that one needed to be precise

²³ On different kinds of belonging in the Diaspora, see Eric Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). For Jerusalem as the μητρόπολις for Philo (Flacc 45–6) and other indicators of Diaspora attachment to Jerusalem and the homeland, see John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 418–23.

²⁴ Josephus' own usage is notoriously inconsistent, Ἰουδαῖοι meaning the residents sometimes of a part, and sometimes of the wider whole, of the geographical region. Where he needs to, Josephus can use expressions something like our 'Judeans properly so-called' (e.g. War 2.43: ὁ γνήσιος ἐξ αὐτῆς Ἰουδαίας λαός; Ant. 17.254: αὐτῶν Ἰουδαίων πλῆθος).

²⁵ Daniel R. Schwartz is right to point out that in some texts the link to the homeland is not particularly salient, but I doubt that this justifies a distinction in translation so that, in such cases, 'Jew' must be substituted for 'Judean' (*Judeans and Jews*, passim). By mapping these alternative translations onto his polarity between a land- and state-oriented identity (= 'Judean') and a Diasporan religious identity (= 'Jew'), relatively small differences between texts, in the dimensions of ethnicity they make situationally salient, are elevated into categorical distinctions.

²⁶ Cohen, *Beginnings*, 137. For a similar narrative of change, see Daniel R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 5–15.

in such matters (for instance, in establishing liability to the *fiscus Iudaicus*).²⁷ Thus, whether this category fits what we mean by ‘ethnicity’ depends on how we define that term, and what kind of category we take it to be; and the more self-conscious we are about that, the better.

2 The question of translation

The storm that has arisen over the preferred translation of Ἰουδαῖος (and Latin *Judaeus*) indicates not only the complexity of the problem but also its entanglement with properly sensitive concerns about the representation of Jews and Judaism both in scholarship and in the public domain. Translation, as interpretation, is never an entirely innocent matter. Some philosophies of translation favour ‘formal correspondence’ which will seek to reproduce, as closely as possible, ‘what the ancients thought and felt’.²⁸ Others, concerned for ‘dynamic equivalence’ and with a different understanding of the purpose of translation, will pay more attention to the connotations of terms for the target audience,²⁹ which means in this case special sensitivity to the ways that lexical choices might reduce or (inadvertently) increase the potential for anti-Judaism or anti-Semitism. The fact that the translation question first arose (in the 1970s) over the representation of Ἰουδαῖοι in the gospel of John makes this latter consideration particularly powerful.³⁰ The problem we face is that there are *two* possibilities for translation (for Αἰγύπτιος, and most other ancient *ethnika* there is only one), and that *both* are in some respects unsatisfactory as a translation.

Because there are two options, there is a natural tendency to draw a clear distinction between them, finding significantly different meanings in ‘Judean’ and ‘Jew’.³¹ The most common distinction is that articulated by Cohen. In his view, ‘English *Jew* is primarily a “religious” term ... as opposed to a Catholic, Lutheran, Episcopalian, Hindu, Muslim, and so on. In some contexts the designation “Jew” may also have “ethnic” overtones, although it never has a geographic meaning, and, outside of the state of Israel, seldom a political one.’ In contrast he takes ‘Judean’ to be an ‘ethnic-geographic’ term. Thus he hears in ‘Judean’ reference to ‘birth’ and ‘geography’, and in ‘Jew’ reference to ‘culture’ and ‘religion’.³² Any differentiation such as this creates categorical distinctions which discourage entertaining the possibility of semantic overlap and multiple meanings. In other cases, this would be relatively unproblematic: We translate the Latin adjective *Poenus* as either

²⁷ See Martin Goodman, ‘Nerva, the *Fiscus Iudaicus* and Jewish Identity’, *JRS* 79 (1989): 40–4.

²⁸ Mason, *Josephus*, 142; cf. 141: ‘My interests are historical and philological: to engage the mindset, values, and category formations of the ancients’.

²⁹ For the interests of ancient translations, see Sebastian Brock, ‘Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity’, *GRBS* 20 (1979): 69–87.

³⁰ Malcolm F. Lowe, ‘Who Were the ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ?’ *NovT* 18 (1976): 103–30. The debate continues: see Ruth Sheridan, ‘Issues in the Translation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel’, *JBL* 132 (2013): 671–95.

³¹ This is the stance taken by Daniel R. Schwartz, who insists that ‘writers in English ... must decide which to use, and a decision to use “Judean,” which is quite a rare term, amounts to a demonstrative statement that the other alternative, “Jew,” is not appropriate’ (*Judeans and Jews*, 7; cf. 84–5).

³² Cohen, *Beginnings*, 69–70.

‘Punic’ or ‘Carthaginian’, but there is not much at stake in the choice between them.³³ In our case, however, the alternative terms carry considerable freight. And because there are two options, the choice for one is readily heard as a choice *against* the other, and thus as a denial of the connotations that the other might evoke.

The translation ‘Judean’ maps onto Ἰουδαῖος well (not only phonetically) in certain respects: It has the appearance of an *ethnikon* parallel to ‘Egyptian’, and so on, and it signals a geographical connection. It has the disadvantage of being unfamiliar to a non-academic audience, and of seeming *over-determined* by its geographical connotations: Some hear this term as meaning *only* residents in, or emigrés from, Judaea (and thus as inapplicable to long-term Diaspora Jews) and many hear it as referring to the *specific* territory of ‘Judaea proper’, and thus as designating a sub-set of the people known as ‘Jews’. It is perfectly possible for academics to introduce new technical terms (cf. the academic introduction of CE and BCE), and they need not be overly concerned by dictionary definitions (which will change in time); but it will clearly take some time, and a lot of explanation, for the term ‘Judean’ to be heard with the set of resonances we have traced in Ἰουδαῖος.³⁴ A number of scholars have recently argued against the use of this term on the grounds that it represents a denial that the people concerned were ‘Jews’, and thus suggests a break in continuity between ‘Judeans’ of the past and ‘Jews’ of the present (though the point of transition is uncertain).³⁵ In fact, it is simple enough to explain that ‘Judeans’ is what Jews were called in the Graeco-Roman world (just as ‘Israelites’ is what Jews were called in earlier centuries).³⁶ If we refuse to allow that a decision for ‘Judean’ is a decision *against* ‘Jew’, it might be possible to take some of the heat out of this discussion. The justification for ‘Judean’ would simply be that, although the two terms overlap, for scholarly purposes this usage is academically more precise.

The translation ‘Jew’ has the advantage of familiarity, in both popular and scholarly fields, but the disadvantage that it is *under-determined* in a number of ways that might render it a poor match for Ἰουδαῖος. In the modern era the meaning of the term ‘Jew’ is often ambiguous: Whether it designates birth/ancestry or ‘religion’, or both or neither, is often unclear and in some circumstances hotly contested. The deep connection in the ancient term Ἰουδαῖος between religious practice and ancestral tradition (even for proselytes), and the ever-likely connection of both to a territory, is for some Jewish scholars, like Cohen, *not* implied by the term ‘Jew’, although for others it is.³⁷ Thus, insofar as ‘Jew’ is understood to be an *alternative* to the ancestral-cultural-geographical cluster of connotations implicit in ‘Judean’, it seems a poor translation of Ἰουδαῖος. (Whether the use of ‘Jew’ encourages or discourages ‘anti-Semitism’ is not

³³ The former alludes to the connection with the Phoenicians, but we do not have an English substantive for the people ‘the Punic’, only an adjective (‘the Punic War’).

³⁴ It is understandable that one should start from dictionary definitions of the two terms (Schwartz, *Judeans and Jews*, 3–6), but it not clear that scholars must be bound by them.

³⁵ For example, Adele Reinhartz, ‘The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity’, in *Jew and Judean*, ed. Law and Halton, 5–10.

³⁶ I cannot explore here the complex nuances of the terms ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Israelite’; see Graham Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

³⁷ For Daniel R. Schwartz, the territorial association of ‘Judean’ makes the term equivalent to the modern ‘Israeli’ (*Judeans and Jews*, x, 87–9), which complicates matters still more.

altogether clear, and could be argued either way.) Of course, it is always possible for scholars to clarify that they mean by 'Jew' the ancient connotations of Ἰουδαῖος, but the fact that scholars on both sides of the debate have taken to interpreting 'Jew' as a purely 'religious' designation does not help to make this option easy.³⁸

The issue of translation is largely a problem of the English language: Neither of the alternatives is ideal and both need explanation before they can map well onto the term Ἰουδαῖος. I regard 'Judean' and 'Jew' not as stark alternatives, but as terms with partly overlapping meanings whose relation to Ἰουδαῖος is not self-evident and needs to be spelt out carefully in each case. Otherwise, we will need to leave the Greek and Latin terms untranslated or (my preferred option) use both terms together and interchangeably.³⁹

For our purposes the problem of translation is interesting inasmuch as it sheds light on the complexities and ambiguities of what it means to be an ἔθνος, and the danger of mapping *our* definitions of 'ethnicity' onto ancient categories. Whatever the value of Hutchinson's and Smith's six-point list of the characteristics of 'ethnic identity',⁴⁰ the crucial decision is whether *ancestry* (or any other single feature) is an essential element of a monothetic category, or whether we can allow the greater ambiguity of a polythetic phenomenon which allows some variation in the definition of ethnic groups. This variation concerns not just the rhetorical inventiveness that surrounds a constructed concept, but also the fuzziness of the concept itself. If we allow the latter, we may be less inclined to adopt narratives of change (from original integrity to later ambiguity or fragmentation), or to locate 'tipping points' when originally ethnic terms changed in meaning. On this reading of the evidence, such changes represent merely the reordering of features that never had any one 'anchor' or any definitive cluster-form but were always part of an inherently malleable phenomenon.

References

- Barclay, John M. G. *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996.
- Barclay, John M. G. *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary, Vol. 10 : Against Apion*, edited by Steve Mason. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Barth, Fredrik. 'Introduction'. In *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, edited by Fredrik Barth, 9–38. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1969.
- Brock, Sebastian. 'Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity'. *GRBS* 20 (1979): 69–87.

³⁸ The translation of the extremely rare term Ἰουδαιοσύνη has also been contested, although it is not clear that it need be invoked either way in determining the sense of Ἰουδαῖος. Mason's contention that the term meant originally not 'Judaism' but 'Judaization', a transitive noun, meaning inducing oneself or others towards the adoption of Jewish customs ('Jews, Judeans', 143–58), has been rightly contested by Daniel R. Schwartz (*Judeans and Jews*, 102–12), who shows that it means simply 'Judaism', at least in the key passages in 2 and 4 Maccabees.

³⁹ The hybrid Jewdean might work in print, but is liable to please nobody!

⁴⁰ See note 7.

- Buell, Denise Kimber. *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Cohen, Shaye J. D. *The Beginnings: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Esler, Philip F. *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.
- Esler, Philip F. 'Judean Ethnic Identity in Josephus' Against Apion'. In *A Wandering Galilean: Essays in Honour of Sean Freyne*, edited by Zuleika Rodgers, Margaret Daly-Denton, and Anne Fitzpatrick McKinley, 73–92. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- Goldhill, Simon, ed. *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Goodman, Martin. 'Nerva, the Fiscus Judaicus and Jewish Identity'. *JRS* 79 (1989): 40–4.
- Gruen, Eric. *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hall, Jonathan M. *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Harvey, Graham. *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jew, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature*. Leiden: Brill, 1996.
- Hutchinson, John and Anthony Smith, eds. *Ethnicity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Law, Timothy M. and Charles Halton, eds. *Jew and Judean: A MARGINALIA Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts*. Marginalia Review of Books; online publication, 2014.
- Lowe, M. F. 'Who Were the ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ?' *NovT* 18 (1976): 103–30.
- Malkin, I., ed. *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*. Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Mason, S. 'Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History'. In *Josephus, Judea and Christian Origins: Methods and Categories*, 141–84. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009.
- Miller, David M. 'The Meaning of *Ioudaios* and Its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient "Judaism"'. *CBR* 9 (2010): 98–126.
- Miller, David M. 'Ethnicity Comes of Age: An Overview of Twentieth-Century Terms for *Ioudaios*'. *CBR* 10 (2012): 293–311.
- Miller, David M. 'Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of *Ioudaios* in Ancient "Judaism"'. *CBR* 12 (2014): 216–65.
- Nongbri, Brent. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.
- Reinhartz, Adele. 'The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity'. In *Jew and Judean: A MARGINALIA Forum on Politics and Historiography in the Translation of Ancient Texts*, edited by Timothy M. Law and Charles Halton, 5–10. Marginalia Review of Books; online publication, 2014.
- Schwartz, Daniel R. *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992.
- Schwartz, Daniel R. "'Judean' or 'Jew'? How Should We Translate *Ioudaios* in Josephus?". In *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripentrog, 3–27. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Schwartz, Daniel R. *Judeans and Jews: Four Faces of Dichotomy in Ancient Jewish History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014.
- Schwartz, Seth. 'How Many Judaismes Were There?' *JAJ* 2 (2011): 208–38.

- Sheridan, Ruth. 'Issues in the Translation of οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι in the Fourth Gospel'. *JBL* 132 (2013): 671–95.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. 'Fences and Neighbours: Some Contours of Early Judaism'. In *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, 1–18. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.
- Smith, R. R. R. 'Simulacra Gentium: The *Ethne* from the Sebasteion at Aphrodisias'. *JRS* 78 (1988): 50–77.
- Thiessen, Matthew. *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.