

IDUMEA AND THE IDUMEANS IN JOSEPHUS' STORY OF HELLENISTIC-EARLY ROMAN PALESTINE ("ANT." XII-XX)

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IDUMEA AND THE IDUMEANS  
IN JOSEPHUS' STORY OF HELLENISTIC-EARLY  
ROMAN PALESTINE (ANT. XII-XX)\*

**SUMMARY:** This paper offers the first ever comprehensive philological and historical commentary on Josephus' references to Idumea and the Idumeans in *Antiquitates Iudaicae* books XII-XX, that still remains our main source of knowledge on Hellenistic and early-Roman Idumea. Josephus' version of the beginnings of the Maccabean-Idumean hostilities, as well as his account of the Hasmonean final conquest of Idumea, stresses the political and military aspects of this conflict (control of mountain approaches to Judea and important trade routes in the region). Furthermore, although Josephus' accounts of the incorporation of Idumea into the Hasmonean state speak of forcible conversion, the overall message of Josephus' references to Idumea leave room for speculation that the incorporation may have been, to some extent, a result of a political agreement between the Hasmoneans and the Idumean elites, and the "conversion" was a cultural process rather than a strictly religious phenomenon.

**KEYWORDS:** Idumea; Idumeans; Josephus; Judea; Jews.

### Introduction

In recent decades, interest in the question of ethnic and cultural (including religious) diversity in ancient Palestine in Hellenistic-Roman times has grown dramatically<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, Hellenistic and Roman Palestine included many ethnic-cultural groups (*ethnē*): Judeans, Samaritans, Galileans, Itureans, Idumeans, Nabateans, and the population on the seacoast (Philistine and Phoenician settlements), as well as several Greek cities, especially located in Transjordan. Research on some of these groups, though still frequently conducted under the label of Jewish or

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\* This paper is part of my research project entitled *Idumea and the Idumeans in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Early Roman Periods: An Oriental Ethnos at the Crossroads of Semitic Cultures*. The project (no. DEC-2014/15/D/HS3/01303) is financed by the National Science Center in Poland. Within the framework of the project, several articles (intended as studies on the key literary sources) and a concluding monograph (as the overall historical synthesis) are planned. I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers of "Aevum" for their constructive feedback.

<sup>1</sup> For a good overview, especially in the context of the broad problem of Jewish identity, see MILLER 2010 and MILLER 2014.

Biblical studies, has grown in popularity to such an extent that one may perhaps see them nowadays as distinctive sub-branches of *Altertumswissenschaft* (e.g. “Samaritan studies” or “Historical Jesus/Galilee” studies).

This paper will be devoted to one such ethnos, the Idumeans. To be more precise, our attention will be paid to Josephus’s writings, which are still our main source of knowledge on ancient Idumeans. Josephus employs the terms Ἰδουμαία and Ἰδουμαῖος 65 and 74 times respectively in all his writings, including *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, *Bellum Iudaicum* and *Contra Apionem*. Other terms, such as Ἐδωμ, Ἡσαῦ, or Σηρ, which are commonly used for ancient Edom/Idumea in the Greek Bible, appear far less frequently. Josephus’ equivalent of the name Ἐδωμ (which is a direct transcription of the Hebrew עֲדוּמַיִם) is Ἄδωμος, which appears only twice (*Ant.* II 1; II 3); likewise does Σάειρα (*Ant.* I 336; II 1), while Ἡσαῦ is mentioned 17 times (*Ant.* I 265, 267, 269, 270, 272, 274, 277, 295, 326, 327, 335, 336; II 1). Interestingly, these secondary terms are all almost exclusively limited to the first two books of Josephus’ *Antiquitates Iudaicae* (the only exception is a reference to Esau in *Ant.* XII 328).

We may tentatively divide all “Idumean” references in Josephus’ writings into several groups. First of all, the first eleven books of *Antiquitates Iudaicae* retell the narrative of the Hebrew Bible, Josephus’ references in *Ant.* I–XI are important for understanding how he understood his people’s past and how he wanted to present it to his readers<sup>2</sup>. Second, all Josephus’ other references to Idumea and the Idumeans in *Antiquitates Iudaicae* and *Bellum Iudaicum* and *Contra Apionem* deal with Hellenistic and Roman history, but an essential distinction has to be made between these three works, as they were written at different times, and as such may reflect the author’s different approaches<sup>3</sup>. Third, although *Bellum Iudaicum* offers a few passages parallel to *Ant.* XIII–XX (*Bell.* I 63; 123; 266–268; 302–326; II 43; 55; 96), most of its narrative concerns the events of the Jewish uprising against Rome (66–73 CE), which is unparalleled in Josephus’ other works. Fourth, in *Contra Apionem* II 212–214, Josephus refers to Idumea and the Idumeans only once, and in a highly distinctive account, where he quotes and comments on a semi-legendary story preserved by Mnaseas of Patara. In this light, the aim of this paper is to offer a philological and historical commentary on all ‘Idumean’ passages in *Ant.* XII–XX, which is the most systematic and unparalleled narrative of the Jewish history in Hellenistic and early Roman history (ca. 165 BCE–65 CE). It should, however, be stressed that the focus will be more on Idumea and the Idumeans than on Josephus as an author (including his literary techniques and use of sources). Thus, the approach will be traditionally positivist: I will extract and critically evaluate Josephus’ information on Idumea and the Idumeans against its historical background.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The most representative studies on Josephus’ paraphrase of the Biblical narrative are FELDMAN 1998a; FELDMAN 1998b; BEGG 1993; BEGG 2000; NODET 1997; NODET 2007; NODET 2010.

<sup>3</sup> COHEN 1979; ATTRIDGE 1984.

<sup>4</sup> As part of my research project about Idumea and the Idumeans, this paper is intended as a preliminary discussion of Josephus’ *Ant.* XII–XX before an overall historical synthesis can be reached.

## Maccabean Struggles in Idumea

In Books XII and XIII of *Antiquitates Iudaicae* we find several references to the Maccabean conquests of Idumea. In his retelling, Josephus had the Greek text of 1 Macc. at his disposal, and his depiction of the Maccabean history primarily relied on it<sup>5</sup>.

In *Ant.* XII 298-312, Josephus retells the story of the battle at Emmaus (1 Macc. 3, 38-4:25). In short, according to 1 Macc. 3, 38-4:25, the Seleucid forces under Gorgias came directly from the center of the Seleucid state (which must mean Antioch and the geographical region of Syria) and reached Emmaus, where they were reinforced by δύναμις Συρίας καὶ γῆς ἀλλοφύλων (1 Macc. 3, 41). Given the fact that the main expeditionary force came from Syria, it is awkward to read that the auxiliary troops also came from Syria. Therefore, it is widely accepted that the term Συρία in 1 Macc. 3, 41 should be emendated to Ἰδουμαία, and the reason is that there must have been a paleographic misreading, either by the author of 1 Macc. or already in his sources, of two similar Hebrew/Aramaic words – Edom (אֶדוֹם), a Biblical name for the Edomites, forerunners of the Idumeans and Aram (אֲרָם) for the area around Damascus<sup>6</sup>. In turn, the expression γῆ ἀλλοφύλων is to be understood in the light of the LXX use, where it most frequently denotes the land of the Philistines<sup>7</sup>. Given the fact that the battle took place at Emmaus, both the cities of the Philistine coast and western Idumea are indeed the geographically closest areas for a supply of auxiliary military manpower. Interestingly, Josephus also speaks of Συρία, which shows that he already had a text with a changed reading in his hands, most likely the Greek text of 1 Macc. and not its Hebrew *Vorlage* or sources. At the same time, Josephus did not interpret the phrase γῆ ἀλλοφύλων in the light of the LXX, but gave it a literate and general meaning – σύμμαχοι... τῆς πέριξ χώρας meaning the «allies from the surrounding country».

According to 1 Macc. 4, 1-25, the Seleucids lost the battle, and the defeat turned into a rout which led as far as «Gazera, the plains of Idumea, Azotus and Jamnia» (1 Macc. 4, 15). In *Ant.* XII 308, Josephus accurately retells the Maccabean episode; among others, he uses the same term τὰ πεδία τῆς Ἰδουμαίας. Given the geographical context (vicinity of Gadara, Azotus [Ashdod], and Jamnia), the plains of Idumea must denote the western part of Idumea, which neighbored on coastal cities («a tongue of Idumaeian territory extended northward from Marissa, separating Judaea from the Philistine towns of Azotus and Jamnia»)<sup>8</sup>; this area was once known as the Shephelah<sup>9</sup>, or the plains of Judea<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview (with references to older literature), see GAFNI 1998; NODET 2015.

<sup>6</sup> ABEL 1961, 109; GOLDSTEIN 1976, 260.

<sup>7</sup> ABEL 1938, 67 n. 1; ABEL – STARCKY 1961, 110; GOLDSTEIN 1976, 260.

<sup>8</sup> GOLDSTEIN 1976, 265.

<sup>9</sup> See KLONER 2003, 3, who states that although the name Shephelah is occasionally used to include the coastal plain, the Shephelah proper is the region of low hills between the plain and the Judean mountains.

<sup>10</sup> ABEL 1938, 76; ABEL – STARCKY 1961, 113; By contrast, see SCHUNCK 1980, 314 n. 15, who suggests an emendation of (the plains of) Idumea into (the plains of) Judea, which (though

In *Ant.* XII 327-312, Josephus retells 1 Macc. 5, 1-68, a coherent account devoted to Judah's fights against the neighboring peoples. It is important to note that the whole account in 1 Macc. 5, 1-68 starts with providing a general explanation for the Maccabees' actions. According to 1 Macc. 5, 1-2, it was the restoration of the temple cult in Jerusalem which made the surrounding peoples angry (ὠργίσθησαν σφόδρα) and led them to try to exterminate (αἶρω, θανατόω, ἐξαίρω) the Jews in their territories. Consequently, Judah's campaigns are presented in 1 Macc. 5, 1-68 as rescue missions for fellow Jews under attack. Remarkably, Josephus modifies the explanation for the raids by the Maccabees, and, generally speaking, puts it as political and not religious in nature. Namely, according to *Ant.* XII 327 it was the revival (ἀναζωπύρησις) and strength (ἰσχύς) of the Jews which led the neighboring peoples to come out against them.

1 Macc. 5, 1-68 includes two explicit references to the hostilities between the Maccabees and the Idumeans – 1 Macc. 5, 3 and 1 Mac. 5, 65-66. Both episodes are also retold by Josephus in *Ant.* XII 328 and *Ant.* XII 353.

In short, 1 Macc. 5, 3 tells of Juda's attack against the sons of Esau in Idumea at Akrobatene (Ἀκραβατηνή). However, the identification of Akrobatene in 1 Macc. 5, 3 is disputed, and two major interpretations have been put forward. First, Akrobatene could correspond to the Edomite Ascent of Scorpions (מעלה עקרבים in Hebrew and Ἀκραβιν in LXX, see Num. 34, 4, Jos. 15, 3, Judg. 1, 36)<sup>11</sup>. Second, it has also been suggested that Akrobatene corresponds with the region known as *Acrabatena* from Pliny the Elder as one of ten districts of Palestine (also mentioned in Josephus' *Bell.* II 238, 652; III 48; IV 504-511 as Ἀκραβατηνή); this region was located on the frontier of Samaria and Judea<sup>12</sup>. Josephus' description follows 1 Macc. 5, 3 closely, and consequently he does not provide any additional details that might cast light on how he himself understood the location of Akrabattene in the context of Judah Maccabee's raid. Although the wordings are slightly different, the military activity of the Maccabees in both 1 Macc. 5, 3 and *Ant.* XII 328 meant practically the same – spreading destruction (1 Macc. 5, 3: ... ἐπάταξεν αὐτούς... συνέστειλεν αὐτούς; in *Ant.* XII 328: ... ἐπιπεσῶν... πολλοὺς αὐτῶν ἀπέκτεινε) and taking spoils (1 Macc. 5, 3: ἔλαβεν τὰ σκῦλα αὐτῶν, and *Ant.* XII 328: ... ἐσκύλευσεν...).

In turn, 1 Mac. 5, 65-66 describes the Maccabean attack on Hebron and its villages, where the Maccabees tore down Hebron's strongholds and burned its encircling towers (καθεῖλεν τὰ ὄχυράματα αὐτῆς καὶ τοὺς πύργους αὐτῆς ἐνεπύριεν κυκλόθεν). After the campaign at Hebron, the Maccabees are said to have proceeded through Marissa<sup>13</sup> to Azotus in the land of the Philistines (where they again undertook destruction and took spoils). In his paraphrase Josephus does two things: he

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present in some manuscripts) is not necessary. The Shephelah plains, also known as the plains of Judah in the Iron Age (and also in later periods), became the plains of Idumea in the Hellenistic period.

<sup>11</sup> ABEL – STARCKY 1961, 120; GOLDSTEIN 1976, 294; KASHER 1988, 26 n. 4.

<sup>12</sup> ABEL 1938, 46-47; ABEL 1949, 89 n. 3; KASHER 1988, 25-26; SCHUNCK 1980, 317-18.

<sup>13</sup> Marissa is a widely accepted emendation. All Greek manuscripts read Samaria, which is geographically impossible, the reading Marissa can be found in Latin manuscripts and Josephus. See TILLY 2015, 153.

essentially repeats the information about the Maccabean attack on Hebron – the destruction of strongholds, burning its towers and ravaging the countryside – but also includes Marissa as a target of Maccabean hostilities (τὴν τε Χεβρώνη πόλιν καταλαβόμενοι ὅσον ὄχυρον αὐτῆς καθεῖλον καὶ τοὺς πύργους ἐμπρήσαντες ἐδήουν τὴν ἀλλόφυλον χώραν καὶ Μάρισαν πόλιν). It is evident that Josephus thought that the early Maccabees had at least harmed Marissa. However, this is only an example of Josephus' far-fetched interpretation of 1 Macc. 5, 65. Namely, the mention of Marissa in 1 Macc. 5, 65-66 alone is based on the emendation of Greek manuscripts (which all have Samaria in this place) in the light of Latin readings, but this emendation is indeed necessary from a geographical point of view. Second, the expression «to pass through» (διαπορεύομαι) used with regard to Marissa in 1 Macc. 5, 65 is completely neutral, and as such should not be interpreted as implying military activities<sup>14</sup>. It is a fact that 1 Macc. 5, 66 mentions the death of certain priests in combat “at that time” (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ), but this temporal expression is vague, and may refer to hostilities both at Hebron and en route to Azotus, including the vicinity of Marissa<sup>15</sup>. And yet, 1 Macc. 5, 65-66 does not describe any siege of Marissa, and, in all historical probability, the early Maccabees were no match for Marissa, which was an important administrative and military center in Hellenistic Palestine, and was captured by the Maccabees under the command of John Hyrcanus only around 112/111-108/107 BCE<sup>16</sup>.

In two other places of his paraphrase of the Maccabean history, Josephus explicitly refers to Idumea. Namely, he mentions major attacks against Jerusalem led by Seleucid generals – Lysias and Tryphon.

In *Ant.* XII 367-376, Josephus retells Lysias's offensive against Beth-Zur and the battle near Beth-Zacharia (following 1 Macc. 6, 26-35). Essentially both descriptions agree, though the wordings are slightly different – according to 1 Macc. 6, 31, Lysias came through Idumea and encamped at Beth-Zur (... ἦλθον διὰ τῆς Ἰδουμαίας καὶ παρενέβαλον ἐπὶ Βαιθσοῦραν...), while in *Ant.* XII 367, he arrived in Idumea and from there came up to the city of Beth-Zur (... παραγενόμενος εἰς τὴν Ἰδουμαίαν ἐκεῖθεν εἰς Βηθσοῦραν ἀναβαίνει πόλιν...). Josephus' wording (especially the use of the verb ἀναβαίνω) better reflects topographical nuances, since there is a considerable difference in elevations between the plains of Idumea, or even Marissa, and Beth-Zur. It should be stressed that neither 1 Macc. 6, 26-35 nor *Ant.* XII 367-376 use ethnonyms (e.g. the Idumeans); instead, they report about the military activities of the Seleucid forces in Idumea as a geographical area.

In turn, in *Ant.* XIII 203-212 Josephus retells the episode of the Seleucid general Tryphon as well as Jonathan and Simon Maccabee, including Tryphon's approach towards Jerusalem (*Ant.* XIII 207). Here Josephus closely follows 1 Macc. 13, 12-24,

<sup>14</sup> Likewise GOLDSTEIN 1983, 446; by contrast, see KASHER 1990, 84 n. 98, who speaks of the battle of Marissa. Similarly ABEL 1949, 107 n. 67 and 443 n. 36, and BAR-KOCHVA 1989, 51-52, 82-83, 88, 240, 260, 350, 560, 571.

<sup>15</sup> ABEL 1949, 107, 67 and 443, 36; ABEL – STARCKY 1961, 128.

<sup>16</sup> ABEL 1949, 106 n. 65; see by contrast, KASHER 1988, 26, who suggests that Judah defeated Marissa according to 1 Macc. 5, 65-66. Judah's defeat of Marissa is also contradicted by 2 Macc. 12, 32, which has Gorgias finding refuge in Marissa after his defeat in battle.

although there is one noticeable difference. According to 1 Macc. 13, 20, Tryphon made a detour along the Adora road (ἐκύκλωσαν ὁδὸν τὴν εἰς Ἀδωρα), while in *Ant.* XIII 207 Josephus has Tryphon approach Jerusalem via Idumea (διὰ τῆς Ἰδουμαίας). Of course, Josephus' interpretation is correct, as Adora was located in Idumea, but his version is less precise; instead of suggesting a very specific mountain approach to Jerusalem via Adora in Idumea, he only indicates a general geographical context. At any rate, both 1 Macc. 13, 20 and *Ant.* XIII 207 refer to Idumea as a strategically important geographic area offering convenient approaches towards Jerusalem from the south<sup>17</sup>.

Concluding on Josephus' rendering of the Maccabean relations with Idumea and the Idumeans, two observations are warranted. First, in Josephus, as in 1 Macc., we can easily distinguish two kinds of references to Idumea and the Idumeans. The first group includes references to Idumea as a geographical region and the scene of military hostilities between Seleucid and Maccabean forces. In geographical terms, Idumea was an area which offered convenient approaches through mountain passes towards Judea. In military terms, Idumea was an area where cities and strongholds were built to guard such approaches. Consequently, there can be no surprise that it was used by the Seleucids, since Idumea was an integral part of their state at that time. In this context it is important to note that the military activity of the Idumeans is not even vaguely hinted at on any of these occasions. The second group of 'Idumean' references points to direct hostilities between the Maccabees and the Idumeans. It should be noted, however, that the number of such references is smaller in Josephus' *Ant.* than in 1-2 Maccabees. Namely, Josephus does not include 2 Macc. 10, 14-23 (with its strong anti-Idumean agenda). Furthermore, Josephus' rendering of the only two explicit references to the Maccabean-Idumean conflict is slightly different. Namely, it does not include any description of negative behavior which could be attributed specifically to the Idumeans (unlike 1 Macc. 5, 3). Thus, the only explanation for the outbreak of Maccabean-Idumean hostilities is formulated in *Ant.* XII 327, but this statement is extremely general, as it refers to the motivation of all peoples around the Jews in Palestine, and not specifically to the Idumeans. According to *Ant.* XII 327, the conflict arose for political reasons – the Maccabees rose in power through their victories against the Seleucids, which made non-Jewish peoples in Palestine come out against local Jews, and this in turn led to the Maccabean putative actions. All in all, there can be no doubt that Josephus presents the Jewish-Idumean relationship more positively than 1 Macc. or more positively than it was in reality. This fact fits well with two generally accepted truths in recent scholarship: first, 1 Macc. strictly reflects a political and ideological standpoint of the Hasmonean dynasty; second, Josephus did not slavishly follow 1 Macc. in his presentation of the Maccabean-Hasmonean times, but rather painted them in accordance with his own agenda<sup>18</sup>. As for the role of Idumeans in Josephus' agenda, we can only speculate as to what made Josephus more positively disposed towards them. Several factors can be tentatively suggested: the use of other sources (which were

<sup>17</sup> For approaches from the north in the early Maccabean times, see FINKELSTEIN 2010, 47.

<sup>18</sup> FELDMAN 1994; GAFNI 1989.

themselves more positive towards the Idumeans), especially Nicolaus of Damascus (Herod's court historian); the positive influence of King Agrippa II on Josephus (as King Agrippa II was himself a positive result of the Jewish-Idumean relationship, so to speak); the presence of some Idumeans in Josephus' readership; or perhaps Josephus' tendency (or that of his sources) to avoid reopening wounds of division in search of a renovated unity after 70 CE.

### Hasmonean Conquest of Idumea

With the next reference to the Idumeans in *Ant.* XIII 257, we enter the realm of the Hasmonean history in the latter half of the second century BCE, which finds no parallel in the narrative of 1-2 Macc. Therefore, we have no choice but to rely on Josephus' narrative, which can only occasionally be confronted with other written sources or archaeological data.

In *Ant.* XIII 257, Josephus refers to John Hyrcanus' (reigned ca. 135/134-104 BCE<sup>19</sup>) final conquest of Idumea – he mentions the capture of Adora and Marissa (also referred to together in the summary list of Hasmonean conquests in *Ant.* XIII 396), the submission of all Idumeans, as well as their forcible conversion to Judaism<sup>20</sup>. Josephus' episode has no parallel in 1 Macc., which ends its narrative with the death of Simon Maccabee (who reigned ca. 143/142-135/134 BCE as John Hyrcanus' predecessor)<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, for the two events – the capture of Marissa and the conversion of the Idumeans – we have parallel literary and archaeological material.

Marissa (Marisa) is located in the modern Judean Shephelah, 40 km southwest of Jerusalem and 35 km east of Ashkelon, at the site of the Iron Age city settlement Maresha<sup>22</sup>. It was archeologically excavated in 1900 by the British archaeologists Bliss and Macalister<sup>23</sup>, in 1905 by Peters and Thiersch<sup>24</sup>, as well as in 1989-2000 by Israeli archeologists under Amos Kloner<sup>25</sup>. Both archaeological and historical data make it clear that Hellenistic Marissa was the main city of western Idumea. In the Ptolemaic period, the city was the seat of governmental offices and had intensive commercial relations with Egypt and the coastal cities of Palestine<sup>26</sup>. In the Seleucid

<sup>19</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, X.

<sup>20</sup> In *Bell.* I 63, Josephus also briefly mentions John Hyrcanus' conquest of Idumea. This time, he claims that Hyrcanus captured a great many cities, but he names directly only Adoreos (Ἀδόρειος) and Marissa (Μάρισσα). It looks like both *Ant.* XIII 257 and *Bell.* I 63 are parallel – they both picture the complete conquest of Idumea, but *Ant.* XIII 257 accentuates the ethnic element more, and *Bell.* I 63 the territorial aspect. For an overview, see KASHER 1990, 121-22.

<sup>21</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, X.

<sup>22</sup> KLONER 2003, 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> BLISS – MACALISTER 1902.

<sup>24</sup> PETERS – THIERSCH 1905.

<sup>25</sup> KLONER 2003; ERLICH – KLONER 2008; KLONER – ERLICH – ESHEL – KORZAKOVA – FINKIELSZEJN 2010; STERN – ALPERT 2014.

<sup>26</sup> HENGEL 1974, 21-22; PASTOR 1997, 30; KLONER 2003, 5.



period, Marissa was an important Seleucid military base<sup>27</sup>. Archaeological excavations revealed that its local Idumean population was influenced by many cultural elements, including the Greek, Phoenician, Judean, and Nabatean cultures<sup>28</sup>.

The Hasmonean capture of Marissa is confirmed by archaeology. Excavations led by Amos Kloner revealed signs of destruction/abandonment in Marissa which allow us to date its conquest to 112/111 BCE (the latest funerary inscriptions come from 112/111 BCE) or 108/107 BCE (the dated lead weights and some local coins) as the *terminus post quem*<sup>29</sup>. At any rate, the archaeological data clearly indicates a later dating than that based on Josephus' narrative. Namely, according to *Ant.* XIII 257, on hearing of Antiochus VII's death, Hyrcanus undertook a number of campaigns against the cities of Transjordan, Samaria, and Idumea; accordingly, scholars have traditionally dated the conquest of Idumea to ca. 129 BCE<sup>30</sup>.

In turn, Adora (Adoraim) was apparently located in the mountainous area, southwest of Jerusalem and Hebron, most likely in the vicinity of the modern settlement known in Arabic as Dura (ca. 60 km from Jerusalem and ca. 10 km from Hebron)<sup>31</sup>. The ancient city has not been explored archaeologically, and, as a result, our knowledge is based on scattered literary references (esp. *Contra Apionem* II 212-214: cult of Apollo)<sup>32</sup>. Given the fact that Adora is mentioned among the cities which were restored by the Roman general Gabinius (*Ant.* XIV 87-88), it has been speculated that it must also have had a Hellenistic character<sup>33</sup>.

### Conversion of the Idumeans

The conquest of the Idumean territory was also accompanied by significant political and social measures undertaken by John Hyrcanus. According to *Ant.* XIII 257, the Idumeans were offered a choice between expulsion and (what is frequently labelled as) conversion to Judaism. Josephus' picture of a compulsory conversion of the Idumeans (including the rite of circumcision) aroused a great deal of controversy among scholars, as it is thought to be contradicted by the testimony of Strabo, but supported by that of Ptolemy the Historian.

In short, Strabo (*Geo.* XVI 2, 34), who thinks that the Idumeans were primarily the Nabateans, describes the Idumeans' conversion as a voluntary act (Josephus uses the verb προσχωρέω, «to go to, approach»)<sup>34</sup> and puts the essence of the common relationship between the Idumeans and Judeans as a communion (κοινωνέω

<sup>27</sup> BAR-KOCHVA 1989, 51-52, 82-83, 88, 240, 260, 350, 560, 571; KLONER 2003, 5; KASHER 2007, 27.

<sup>28</sup> KLONER 2011, 563-73; KLONER 2008; STERN 2007; STERN 2012.

<sup>29</sup> BARAG 1992, 4-5, 8-12; FINKIELSZTEJN 1998; KLONER – ERLICH – ESHEL – KORZAKOVA – FINKIELSZTEJN 2010, 1-2, 205, 220-221; SHATZMAN 2012, 38-40.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, BEVAN 1966, 249; MILLAR – VERMES 1973, 207-210; KASHER 1988, 46; KASHER 1990, 119-21; RAJAK 1994, 291-92; COHEN 1999, 110.

<sup>31</sup> ABEL 1938, 239; MILLAR – VERMES 1973, 207 n. 12.

<sup>32</sup> SAFRAI 2000, 68-70.

<sup>33</sup> KASHER 1988, 56-57; KASHER 1990, 174.

<sup>34</sup> KASHER 1988, 47.

– κοινωνία) of customs (νόμιμοι). By contrast, Ptolemy (*Historia Herodis*, apud Ammonius, *De Adfinium Vocabulorum Differentia* 243)<sup>35</sup>, who considers the Idumeans to be the Syrians and Phoenicians before their conversion, states that the Idumeans were subjugated by the Jews and forced to undergo circumcision (κρατηθέντες δὲ ὑπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀναγκασθέντες περιτέμνεσθαι)<sup>36</sup>.

Indeed, Josephus and Ptolemy agree on the forcible nature of the Idumeans' conversion, while it is only Strabo who sees it as voluntary. The contradiction cannot be denied. Accordingly, scholars usually tended to opt for either forcible conversion or a peaceful process of assimilation<sup>37</sup>. In the first case, scholars have attempted to dismiss Strabo's evidence by pointing to his mistakes, especially the allegedly mistaken association of the Idumeans with the Nabateans. In the second case, it has been argued that Josephus and Ptolemy were dependent on an anti-Hasmonean source(s) which exaggerated or even fabricated the fact of the forceful conversion to slander the Hasmoneans, perhaps in the eyes of a Hellenistic audience.

Another problem is that both Josephus and Ptolemy accentuates the rite of circumcision as a requirement for the Idumeans. By contrast, it is widely known that many peoples in the ancient Near East practiced circumcision, also among Jewish neighbors<sup>38</sup>. There is also direct literary evidence that the Edomites indulged in this practice, and now, after the excavations in Marissa, we know that at least some Idumeans continued this rite (finds of circumcised phalli)<sup>39</sup>. Attempts have been made to solve this problem by assuming that the Idumeans practiced a specific kind of circumcision (perhaps a sort of incomplete circumcision), which may in turn have been subject to modification by the Hasmoneans<sup>40</sup>, but the evidence from Marissa does not really support this theory, which is in fact based on a controversial reading of Jer. 9, 24-25.

What is more, a sort of middle solution has been put forward – the conversion was mainly voluntary, especially in the case of rural Idumeans, and forceful only with regard to the urban Idumean elites, which were deeply Hellenized<sup>41</sup>. While Kasher's suggestion may appear to be tempting<sup>42</sup>, one cannot apply this model too strictly – we know from archaeological data that the Hasmonean conquest of Idumea also involved the destruction of the rural countryside<sup>43</sup>.

At the same time, attention should be paid to the geographical context of the testimonies. Josephus' testimony was formulated in the context of the capture of

<sup>35</sup> Usually identified with the well-known grammarian, Ptolemy of Ascalon, who probably lived at the end of the first century BCE: see STERN 1974, 355.

<sup>36</sup> STERN 1974, 356.

<sup>37</sup> The two conflicting sides are perhaps most associated with, respectively, KOKKINOS 1998 and KASHER 1988 (also KASHER 1990); now the two alternative approaches have again been argued at great length by SHATZMAN 2005 and RAPPAPORT 2009.

<sup>38</sup> The most comprehensive collection and discussion of sources on circumcision, especially in a Jewish context, is offered by BLASCHKE 1998.

<sup>39</sup> STERN 2012; KLONER 2011, 569.

<sup>40</sup> STEINER 1999, who was followed by PASTO 2002, 195-96, and ECKHARDT 2012, 101 n. 30.

<sup>41</sup> KASHER 1988; KASHER 1990.

<sup>42</sup> It has been followed, among others, by REGEV 2013, 275, and COHEN 1999, 116-18.

<sup>43</sup> FAUST – ERLICH 2011; SHATZMAN 2012, 42-43.

the Hellenistic cities of Marissa and Adora. In this sense, it refers to western and Hellenized Idumea in the first place. The same geographical context can in fact be found in Ptolemy, who associated the Idumeans with the Phoenicians and Syrians. It is clear that a direct contact with Phoenician culture can apply only to western Idumea. The influence of Phoenician culture in western Idumea stands beyond doubt in light of the findings from Marissa (the existence of a Sidonian colony in the Hellenistic period is attested epigraphically)<sup>44</sup>. As Kasher has rightly pointed out, western Idumea was more urbanized and consequently Hellenized<sup>45</sup>. In this context, it is not surprising that some Idumeans may have ceased the practice of circumcision. At the same time, Strabo makes a connection between the Idumeans and the Nabateans, and although his view cannot be accepted in its entirety, cultural interactions between the two *ethnē* are well documented (for instance, overlap of historical territory, cult of Qos, aniconic forms of worship<sup>46</sup>). In this sense, Strabo's description points to eastern Idumea – this was a predominantly rural area, and one might suspect that the inhabitants of this area had more sympathy for kindred Jewish traditions and perhaps held some anti-Hellenistic resentment<sup>47</sup>. After all, we may solve an apparent contradiction between Strabo, on the one hand, and Josephus with Ptolemy, on the other, by contextualizing and regionalizing their testimonies.

The question also arises as to how we are to understand the notion of conversion of the Idumeans. The classic definition of conversion offered by A.D.H. Nock («the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning that implies consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right»)<sup>48</sup> obviously refers to individual conversions which resulted from personal motifs, and as such is of very little use for the understanding of a mass conversion, especially if it was, at least partly, imposed under pressure. Generally speaking, one can distinguish three main scholarly models that aim to explain the concept of Jewish identity and the process of conversion to Judaism in the Hellenistic and Roman periods.

First, according to the model of ethnicity and religion<sup>49</sup>, the advent of the Hellenistic period brought about major changes to the Jewish identity; namely, the original ethnic-geographical meaning of *Ioudaios* was supplemented by a political and religious meaning. This change was due to the political conquests of the Hasmoneans, who conquered neighboring areas and incorporated their inhabitants into their own state (*politeia*). The newly incorporated peoples became part of the Hasmonean state, but retained their own ethnic identity. Consequently, they became *Ioudaioi* in political, but not ethnic terms. Likewise, under the influence of the cultural phenomenon of Hellenism, Judaism also became available as a religion to outsiders, regardless of their political or ethnic background.

<sup>44</sup> KOKKINOS 1998, 46 n. 41; KLONER 2008, 173-79.

<sup>45</sup> KASHER 1988, 56-57.

<sup>46</sup> BARTLETT 1999; HEALEY 2001, 25, 93; BARTLETT 2007, 75.

<sup>47</sup> KASHER 1988, 56-57.

<sup>48</sup> NOCK 1933, 7.

<sup>49</sup> SMITH 1999; COHEN 1990; COHEN 1999; SCHWARTZ 1992; SCHWARTZ 2007.

Second, and by contrast, according to the second model, which can be labeled as the model of ethnicity only<sup>50</sup>, it is anachronistic to speak about religion as a category unrelated to ethnicity and race in ancient times. The concept of religion as a system of ideas and practices independent from ethnic affiliations appears in ancient sources in the fourth century CE at the earliest, and its origin can be attributed to the influence of a unique concept of Christianity (*Christianismos*). Before that shift, the Judeans were an ethnic group comparable to many other ethnic groups around the world who had their distinctive customs, laws, and traditions, including religious cults. One could therefore become an *Ioudaios* only through assimilation, or in other words, by accepting all Judean laws and customs.

Third, the next model has been labeled as “dual or multiple ethnicity”. According to Esler<sup>51</sup> one could have two or more identities (ethnicities) in ancient times – one more general, and another local or limited and nested within the larger one (otherwise known as “nested identity”). For instance, within the larger *ethnos ton Ioudaion* one could still have a nested Galilean or Idumean ethnicity. Of course, according to this model, the notion of ethnicity must be understood in a flexible and polythetic sense – it includes not only (the myth of) common ancestry, but also several other elements, such as a common proper name, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link to a homeland, and a sense of solidarity. All the elements are potentially variable, and none alone can determine ethnicity or a *sine qua non* condition for it.

Although the present study may not be placed to solve this notorious and complex problem, it should be stressed that what we find in all three sources is actually standard terminology for the laws and customs of ethnic groups. According to *Ant.* XIII 257-258, the Idumeans were expected to “circumcise and make use of the laws of the Jews” (εἰ περιτέμνουντο τὰ αἰδοῖα καὶ τοῖς Ἰουδαίων νόμοις χρῆσασθαι θέλουεν). Strabo stresses that the Idumeans voluntarily entered the communion (κοινωνέω – κοινωνία) of customs (νόμιμοι) with the Jews. Both Josephus and Ptolemy stress that after the conversion the Idumeans were considered by their contemporaries as Jews (Josephus: ... κάκεινοις αὐτοῖς χρόνος ὑπῆρχεν ὥστε εἶναι τὸ λοιπὸν Ἰουδαίους ..., Ptolemy: ... συντελεῖν εἰς τὸ ἔθνος... ἐκλήθησαν Ἰουδαῖοι). Therefore, in light of the testimony of ancient sources, only the second model (ethnicity only) and the third model (dual or multiple ethnicity) of conversion mentioned above are plausible.

### Herodian History of Idumea

In ca. 112/111-108/107 BCE, Idumea was conquered by the Jewish king John Hyrcanus and became part of the Hasmonean state. From *Ant.* XIV on, Josephus' references to Idumea are made in the context of the political and social history of the Jewish state.

<sup>50</sup> BOYARIN 2002; BOYARIN 2003; MASON 2007.

<sup>51</sup> ESLER 2003.

In *Ant.* XIV 8-10, Josephus introduces the figure of Antipater, the father of King Herod the Great, into his narrative. Two pieces of information given by Josephus are of particular importance – first, Antipater’s political role under King Alexander Jannaeus (who reigned in ca. 103-76 BCE<sup>52</sup>) and, second, Antipater’s origin (and consequently the origin of Herod the Great).

Concerning Antipater’s political role, Josephus states that Antipater was made a *strategos* of all Idumea (στρατηγός ὅλης τῆς Ἰδουμαίας), and he made an alliance (φιλία) with neighboring Arabians, Gazites and Askalonites (*Ant.* XIV 10). Two conclusions are in order. First, the attribution of Antipater’s power to all Idumea suggests that Idumea consisted of various districts which may otherwise have been ruled separately. Generally speaking, it is widely acknowledged that Idumea consisted of at least two main parts – western Idumea with Marissa as its main city, and eastern Idumea (with its main center first at Dora and next at En Gedi)<sup>53</sup>. It is also important to note that, in the reign of Alexander Jannaeus at least, Ashkelon was a distinctive political entity, and not part of Idumea<sup>54</sup>.

Second, Antipater’s range of regional contacts is also revealing. Gaza and Ashkelon neighbored Idumea in the west. In turn, the Arabians in *Ant.* XIV 10 are to be identified with the Nabateans, which controlled areas to the south and east of Idumea<sup>55</sup>. While good relations with neighbors may be realized in various spheres, economic relations in this part of southern Palestine were of great importance<sup>56</sup>. Namely, Idumea lay in the transit region of important trade routes between Arabia and coastal cities of Palestine<sup>57</sup>. Inland caravans led by the Nabateans brought both highly valued incense from Arabia and rich local production (e.g. palms, dates, Dead Sea asphalt) to the sea ports, especially Gaza. The most straightforward route for the Nabateans led via northern Idumean Negev. As we know from the later history of the family of Herod the Great, it had both family ties and personal contacts with the Nabatean royal families (including a Arabian/Nabatean mother of Herod)<sup>58</sup>, and consequently, Antipater was the right man for the job of bringing back Nabatean trade caravans to routes in Idumea after a series of hostilities between the Hasmoneans, the Nabateans and Gaza<sup>59</sup>.

As far as Antipater’s origin is concerned, Josephus relates two opposite opinions. The first is conveyed at the very beginning of Josephus’ presentation of Antipater, who is simply called Ἰδουμαῖος. No further details are given, but the second opinion is clearly stated in contrast to the first. Namely, Josephus relates Nikolaos Dameskenos’ opinion that Herod’s ancestors belonged to the principal Jews who came out of

<sup>52</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, X.

<sup>53</sup> AVI-YONAH 2000, 89-90; KASHER 1988, 56-57; KOKKINOS 1998, 61; STERN 2012, 76.

<sup>54</sup> N. Kokkinos has suggested that, in the light of 2 Macc. 12, 32, 1 Macc. 4, 15 and *Ant.* XII 308, early-Hellenistic Idumea included the third district centered on the city of Ashkelon. This is not an obvious interpretation of the passages mentioned above. See KOKKINOS 1998, 60-61. By contrast, see also KASHER 2007, 19 n. 6.

<sup>55</sup> KASHER 1988, 89-90, 110-11.

<sup>56</sup> KASHER 1988, 89-90.

<sup>57</sup> KOKKINOS 1998, 55-57.

<sup>58</sup> RICHARDSON 1996, 62-63; KASHER 2007, 18-19.

<sup>59</sup> KASHER 1988, 89-90, 110-11; DABROWA 2010, 87-97.

Babylon into Judea (εἶναι γένος ἐκ τῶν πρώτων Ἰουδαίων τῶν ἐκ Βαβυλῶνος εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν ἀφικομένων: *Ant.* XIV 9). Josephus makes it clear that Nikolaos' statement was forged to flatter King Herod.

The information given by Josephus in *Ant.* XIV 8-9 is not very revealing. The first straightforward impression is that being an Ἰδουμαῖος was different from being a socially eminent Jewish repatriate from the Babylonian diaspora, but this conclusion is of course a truism. At the same time, the implicit context of *Ant.* XIV 8-9 shows one thing – Herod was not comfortable about his ancestry<sup>60</sup>. The nature of the polemics present only implicitly in *Ant.* XIV 8-9 may be further enlightened by *Ant.* XIV 403, where Herod himself is called a ἡμιουδαῖος (half-Judean/Jew).

The context of *Ant.* XIV 403 concerns the Roman nomination of Herod as the king of the Jews. This nomination in Rome as the king of Jude in ca. 40 BCE came as a surprise to everyone, including Herod himself (*Ant.* XIV 386-387). No wonder that it also aroused fierce opposition in some Jewish circles, especially from the main claimant to the Jewish throne – Antigonos the Hasmonean. Josephus describes an important scene when Jewish opponents of Herod's nomination voice their criticism before the Romans (*Ant.* XIV 403) – Herod is an ιδιώτης (a private man)<sup>61</sup>, Ἰδουμαῖος τουτέστιν ἡμιουδαῖος (“Idumean that is semi-Judean/Jew”) and not ἐκ τοῦ γένους (of royal line).

This description, especially calling Herod a ἡμιουδαῖος, aroused a great deal of discussion among scholars, as it refers to someone whose ancestors joined the Jewish ethnos under John Hyrcanus, but, some 70 years later, was still called an Idumean (both Antipater and Herod) or a semi-Jew/Judean (Herod). The discussion of both *Ant.* XIV 8-9 and XIV 403 touches upon the complex problem of Jewish identity (see above). Essentially, two main groups of explanations of the meaning of ἡμιουδαῖος in *Ant.* XIV 403 have been suggested. First, the expression in question refers to the inferior religious status of Herod as a descendant of converts<sup>62</sup>. Second, the term was used in a geographical or ethnic meaning – Herod was religiously and politically Jewish, but his ancestors came from Idumea and/or were ethnic Idumeans<sup>63</sup>. Although the latter explanation has been advocated mainly by scholars favoring the first model of Jewish identity mentioned above (the model of ethnicity and religion), it appears that it can also work for two other models – as some members of the mainstream culture may perceive both an incomplete degree of assimilation or the persistence of regional differences in one's conduct as derogatory features, as sometimes happens even throughout modern societies. What is

<sup>60</sup> This is even the main theme of KASHER 2007.

<sup>61</sup> The translation “non-priest” has also been suggested, see COHEN 1999, 18-19. By way of contrast, see ECKHARDT 2012, 99 n. 24.

<sup>62</sup> RICHARDSON 1996, 52-53; but this point of view has been strongly opposed by many scholars as “theologically incomprehensible” see GOODMAN 1990, 194; COHEN 1999, 18-19; KASHER 1988, 76-77, 126-27; KASHER 2007, 22-23; KOKKINOS 1998, 126-30; ECKHARDT 2012, 93. At any rate, the later Rabbinic view that Jewishness was passed on through the mother should not be dated back into this period. Likewise, Herod was in all likelihood a third-generation convert (an exclusive reckoning of years is unlikely), and so the Deuteronomy 23, 8 (and its Mishnaic discussion in Yebamoth 8, 3) did not apply to him.

<sup>63</sup> COHEN 1999, 18-19; M. GOODMAN 1989, 40-44, 42; KASHER 2007, 18-24.

more, an interesting parallel can be quoted from the history of ancient Rome: in 62 BCE, Cicero was polemically designated by his opponent, Titus Manlius Torquatus, to be a “foreigner”/“peregrinus” (Cic. *Sul.* 22)<sup>64</sup>. This label apparently reflected Roman-born citizens’ prejudices about other citizens from the Italian countryside (Cicero’s native town was Arpinum, located some 110 km southeast of Rome, and was only gradually incorporated into the Roman political system)<sup>65</sup>. In this context, a geographical or ethnic meaning for ἡμουδαῖος appears to be more likely than a religious one.

The Parthian invasion of Palestine in 40 BCE which brought about the political turmoil which eventually brought Herod to royal power is described by Josephus in some detail in *Ant.* XIV 324-369. As for Idumea, we hear of several toponyms located in Idumea in the context of Herod’s escape from Jerusalem before the Parthians and their Jewish allies.

Namely, when the Parthians were approaching Jerusalem, Herod decided to flee the city with his family. According to *Ant.* XIV 351, the ultimate destination of his escape was Idumea (*Ant.* XIV 353), or, to be more precise, Masada (XIV 358). On his way to Masada, he had to face at least one major engagement with his pursuers at a place later known as Herodium (XIV 360). A turning point for Herod’s plan came when he reached a place called Thresa/Rhesa in Idumea (XIV 361)<sup>66</sup>, where he held council with his brother Joseph – they decided that Masada was too small to place all Herod’s followers there (XIV 361); thus, Herod would place only his closest family there, and dispatch most of his troops to seek refuge in other places in Idumea (XIV 362). Herod himself went first to Rome via Alexandria to seek help against the Parthians and their Jewish allies (XIV 362, 370-376).

It is the identity of Thresa/Rhesa which aroused a great deal of controversy among scholars. The manuscripts offer different readings: θρησά, θρησα, ρησά, ρύσσα, ρύσσα, *risa* (Codex Laurentianus), θρησα, θρησα, ρησα (Codex Schlesiensis)<sup>67</sup>. Neither Thresa or Rhesa are, however, attested elsewhere, and consequently it has been suggested that the toponym should be emended. Two main emendations are Marissa<sup>68</sup>, and, most frequently, ορησα<sup>69</sup>, which would be the Greek transcription of the Hebrew חרשה (Horsha). This toponym can be identified with modern Khirbet Khoreisa, located some 10 km south of Hebron<sup>70</sup>. It appears that while both emendations are possible in linguistic and paleographic terms, topographical and historical data support only the second option. Namely, it has been argued that Maresha is the right emendation, because, according to *Ant.* XIV 364, after the plunder of

<sup>64</sup> ECKHARDT 2012, 91-92.

<sup>65</sup> ECKHARDT 2012, 91-92.

<sup>66</sup> It is mainly the edition of Whiston which still confuses modern readers. Nevertheless, Oresa is an emended reading. See WHISTON 1998, 467; MARCUS 1943, 639.

<sup>67</sup> MARCUS 1943, 639; SHATZMAN 2013, 125 n. 22.

<sup>68</sup> BARTLETT 1999, 109; OREN 2013.

<sup>69</sup> MARCUS 1943, 639; SCHALIT 1969, 80 n. 88; RICHARDSON 1996, 126; KASHER 2007, 60; SHATZMAN 2013, 133.

<sup>70</sup> ABEL 1938, 350; MARCUS 1943, 639; SCHALIT 1969, 80 n. 88; MÖLLER – SCHMITT 1976, 151; RICHARDSON 1996, 154; KASHER 2007, 60; SHATZMAN 2013, 133.

Jerusalem, the Parthians “went out and ravaged the Jews’ country as well, and also destroyed the important city of Marissa”<sup>71</sup>. In this light, it has been argued that the Parthians reached Marissa in their pursuit of Herod<sup>72</sup>. However, it should be noted that the text does not explicitly connect the Parthian attack against Marissa with Herod’s prior stay there (neither does the parallel narrative in *Bell.* II 266-270). What is more, Marissa was not located on the route from Jerusalem to Masada, especially if it led via Herodium. Herod’s stop at Herodium indicates that he did not choose the route to Marissa. Furthermore, Thresa is called a χωρίον, which simply translates as a place<sup>73</sup>, and this suggests that we cannot see Thresa/Rhesa/Oresa as a large settlement, especially as a city (as was Marissa).

An important passage not only about individuals from Idumea but about Idumean culture in general can be found in *Ant.* XV 253-258, where Josephus describes the Kostobar conspiracy. Namely, Kostobar came from one of the leading Idumean families, was married by Herod to his sister Salome and given the role of *archon* of Idumea and Gaza. According to Josephus, Kostobar’s success made him arrogant, and he started to plot against Herod with Cleopatra from Egypt. Importantly, Kostobar decided to play a nationalistic card – he wanted to detach Idumea from Judea, and give up the practice of the Jewish customs by the Idumeans<sup>74</sup>.

First, the language used in *Ant.* XV 253-258 to describe the state of the Idumeans before and after the conversion is full of ethnic associations. On the one hand, John Hyrcanus is said to have changed the *politeia* of the Idumeans into the customs and laws of the Jews (Υρκανού δὲ τὴν πολιτείαν αὐτῶν εἰς τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη καὶ νόμια μεταστήσαντος: *Ant.* XV 254), and the Idumeans – to share in the customs of the Jews and to be subject to them (οὔτε τοῖς Ἰδουμαίοις τὰ Ἰουδαίων μεταλαβοῦσιν ὑπ’ ἐκεῖνοις εἶναι: *Ant.* XV 255). On the other, Kostobar is presented as Idumean by birth (γένει μὲν Ἰδουμαῖος), and as stressing the traditions of his forefathers (πρόγονοι: *Ant.* XV 253 and 256), especially the priesthood of deity Qos.

Indeed, Qos (Qaws) was the national deity of the Edomites in the Iron Age<sup>75</sup>, but his cult is also attested later. First, many theophoric names in the ostraca from Idumea (most ostraca are dated to between 363 and 311 BCE<sup>76</sup>) use the element Qos (likewise the name Kostobar)<sup>77</sup>. Second, his cult is epigraphically attested among

<sup>71</sup> MARCUS 1943, 641.

<sup>72</sup> OREN 2013.

<sup>73</sup> LIDDELL – SCOTT – JONES 1996, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Kostobar was forgiven his conspiracy due to his wife’s intervention, but was later executed, when his wife left him and revealed to Herod that Kostobar had given refuge to Herod’s enemies – the sons of Baba. Some scholars speculated that they were also Idumeans related to the Hasmoneans. In support of this identification, it has been pointed to funerary inscriptions from Marissa have been cited, which mention Babatas and Baba, a brother and a sister. It has been suggested that even if the individuals from Marissa are not to be identified as ancestors of individuals from Josephus’ narrative, the findings suggest an Idumean context of the names alone. See OREN – RAPPAPORT 1984; RONEN 1988, 218-19; MARSHAK 2012, 125-28.

<sup>75</sup> In fact, the meaning of this divine name and the nature of cult are much disputed, and in fact there is very little data to discuss. See LIPINSKI 2006, 400-04.

<sup>76</sup> STERN 2007, 211; LEVIN 2013, 32.

<sup>77</sup> For an exhaustive interpretation of the epigraphic data, see STERN 2007.



the Nabateans (especially at Khirbet et Tannur, probably 1st<sup>st</sup> century CE)<sup>78</sup>. Third, recent archaeological excavations brought into light remarkable findings in Idumea itself. Two sanctuaries built in Hebron and Mamre in the reign of Herod the Great were identified, and at Mamre a small altar with the name Qos inscribed on the back was found<sup>79</sup>. It follows that these sanctuaries may have been places of Idumean national practices<sup>80</sup>. The episode about Kostobar and the archaeological attestations of the cult of the Idumean national deity Qos clearly testify to the persistence of Idumean ancestral traditions, despite the conversion of the Idumeans to Judaism<sup>81</sup>.

Of course, the question that arises is as to how to reconcile a frequently assumed good integration of the Idumeans into the Jewish world (a substantial role of the Idumeans in the uprising against Rome is frequently quoted, see *Bell.* IV 224-353) with the persistence of Idumean ancestral traditions. Although this may not be the right place to fully answer this question, it is certainly worth quoting several circumstances which may shed light on the social complexity of the process known commonly as conversion. First, it has been suggested that the conversion of the Idumeans was a functional, political arrangement between the leaders of the Hasmonean state and the Idumean elites<sup>82</sup>. Second, the Idumean society had apparently had a tribal structure where community life was conducted locally, especially by the elders who determined forms of behavior and actions<sup>83</sup>. Third, the integration must have led to imposing some deal amount of official laws and regulations in an official context, but neither should we overestimate their amount or depth of change in an unofficial context; it appears to be unlikely that a great deal of local ancestral traditions was prohibited<sup>84</sup>. Finally, it may perhaps be speculated that the degree of the spread of specifically Judean customs and of the decline of ancestral Idumean customs varied locally.

Josephus also mentions the Idumeans several times in the context of popular unrest and revolts in Herod's (reigned in ca. 37-4 BCE<sup>85</sup>) or his descendants' territory.

According to *Ant.* XVI 285, having captured some robbers in Trachonitis, Herod settled (κατοικίζω) 3000 Idumeans there to permanently restrain robbery in this region. The same group of Idumeans is again referred to in *Ant.* XVI 292 as φρουρά, that is a garrison, a body of men destined for military service<sup>86</sup>. Settling foreign colonists by a ruler in a country whose loyalties were uncertain (or which were located in areas of strategic importance) was a common policy among Hellenistic rulers, and Herod was no exception<sup>87</sup>. We know that he also settled a military colony of Jews

<sup>78</sup> BARTLETT 1999; HEALEY 2001, 25, 59-61, 93, 126-27; BARTLETT 2007, 75.

<sup>79</sup> MAGEN 2003, 245-47; NETZER 2008, 228-31.

<sup>80</sup> LICHTENBERGER 2007; STERN 2012, 76.

<sup>81</sup> LICHTENBERGER 2007; STERN 2012, 76.

<sup>82</sup> KASHER 1988, 71-72; PASTO 2002; HORSLEY 2002; ECKHARDT 2012, 100-02.

<sup>83</sup> HORSLEY 2002; PASTO 2002; KASHER 1988, 71-72.

<sup>84</sup> KASHER 1988, 71-72; PASTO 2002; HORSLEY 2002; ECKHARDT 2012, 100-02.

<sup>85</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, X.

<sup>86</sup> LIDDELL – SCOTT – JONES 1996, 1957.

<sup>87</sup> HENGEL 1974, 14-23.

from Babylonia in Batanaea (*Ant.* XVII 23-30)<sup>88</sup>. Such colonists served militarily, but also raised families, and their sons continued their work<sup>89</sup>. Interestingly, the military colonies of the Idumean soldiers are also known from Egypt<sup>90</sup>. This shows that there must have been a military tradition among the Idumeans which made Idumean soldiers highly valued in the eyes of Hellenistic and Roman-era rulers.

Ἰδουμαῖοι are also mentioned in *Ant.* XVII 254 in the context of popular revolts which shook Palestine after Herod's death in ca. 4 BCE (*Ant.* 17, 250-299). One such revolt broke out in Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost, when a great multitude was amassed and arose against the reckless behavior of a Roman procurator in Judea, Sabinus. Interestingly, Josephus stresses that a great number of them were Galileans (Γαλιλαῖοι), Idumeans (Ἰδουμαῖοι), people from Jericho (Ἰεριχούντιοι), and those from across the Jordan river (περάσαντης Ἰορδάνην ποταμὸν). This description is remarkable, because there is a tendency to understand Ἰδουμαῖοι as an ethnic name. Indeed, among those who came to Jerusalem from Idumea there may well have been ethnic Idumeans. At the same time, ethnic connotations are not suggested for other groups mentioned in this enumeration, especially not for people from Jericho (Ἰεριχούντιοι). Thus, it appears that the Idumeans in *Ant.* XVII 254 should be interpreted as a geographical name in the first place<sup>91</sup>. After the suppression of the revolts, a new political makeup of Palestine was shaped by Caesar Augustus — Idumea with Judea and Samaria were assigned to Archelaos (*Ant.* XVII 319, who reigned in ca. 4 BCE-6 CE)<sup>92</sup>.

Two interesting proper names connected with Idumea appear in *Ant.* XVIII 147 and *Ant.* XX 5. In *Ant.* XVIII 147, in describing the turbulent fate of Herod Agrippa I (who had under his rule most of his grandfather's [Herod the Great] territories and received the royal title in 41 CE), Josephus mentions Malatha [Μάλαθα] in Idumea as a place of the contemporary stay of Agrippa<sup>93</sup>. No topographical details are given in *Ant.* 18, 147, but similar names appear in other sources, especially the *Onomasticon* of Eusebius (*Onom.* 14, 3; 88, 4 and 108, 3 uses the two forms Μαλαθα and Μαλααθα; see also Μαλιάθα Ptol. V 6, 14 and Not. Dign. Or. 34, 45, which knows of *Moleatha*)<sup>94</sup>. Eusebius' topographical data (4 miles from Arad, 20 miles from Hebron, and not far from Jattir) points to the Beer-Sheba region at large. In this region, it is the site of Tall al-Milh or Hebrew Tel Malḥatā which is most frequently suggested as the identification for Malatha<sup>95</sup>. The site is located in the north-eastern Negev, some 27 km east of Beer-Sheba, near the confluence of two wadis, the Beer-Sheba

<sup>88</sup> KASHER 1990, 160.

<sup>89</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, 14.

<sup>90</sup> RAPPAPORT 1969; FISHER-BOVET 2014, 287-90.

<sup>91</sup> FREYNE 2004, 44: «the inhabitants of these regions – Galileans, Idumeans, and Pereans – could all be designated Ioudaioi insofar as they were found at Jerusalem defending the distinctive Jewish way of life in the face of Roman provocation on the occasion of a Jewish festival (War 2: 232; *Ant.* 17: 254–68)».

<sup>92</sup> MILLAR – VERMES 1973, X.

<sup>93</sup> For the figure of Herod Agrippa I, see SCHWARTZ 1990, 45-48.

<sup>94</sup> ABEL 1938, 391-92; MÖLLER – SCHMITT 1976, 132; SCHMITT 1995, 240-41.

<sup>95</sup> ABEL 1938, 391-92; MÖLLER – SCHMITT 1976, 132; SCHMITT 1995, 240-41, but see the reservations expressed by LIPINSKI 2006, 398-400.

and Malḥatā wadis<sup>96</sup>. If this identification is correct, Malatha was one of the southernmost locations in Idumea, and as such may serve to approximately demarcate the southern border of Idumea<sup>97</sup>.

In turn, in reporting on the procurator's Fadus' fight with against robbery, Josephus mentions a certain Tholomy (Θολομαῖος) in *Ant.* XX 5 who is described as a robber active in the territory of Idumea and Arabia. The connection of the two entities – Idumea and Arabia – is interesting. It appears that he must have been referring to the part of Idumea which bordered on Arabia. Thus, in *Ant.* XX 5 we hear of eastern Idumea and can see its connection to an open frontier of Arabia – it was apparently very easy for such robbers to move between the inhabited areas for plunder<sup>98</sup>.

## Conclusions

Despite recent epigraphic discoveries (Aramaic Ostraca from Idumea) and archaeological excavations (particularly in Maresha), Josephus still remains our main source of knowledge on Hellenistic and early-Roman Idumea. Since the Maccabean conquest of most of Palestine, the history of Idumea and the Idumeans became closely connected to Judea and the region of Palestine as a whole.

Josephus' version of the beginnings of the Maccabean-Idumean hostilities, as well as his account of the Hasmonean final conquest of Idumea, stress the political and military aspects of this conflict. Namely, the conflict and conquest resulted from a vital need to control strategic strongholds and cities guarding approaches to Judea from the south (which were used by the Seleucids and would have been used by any other Jewish enemies). What is more, according to Josephus, Idumea was an important transit region for important routes between Arabia and coastal cities of Palestine. Consequently, control over Idumea could only be beneficial in economic terms.

Although Josephus' accounts of the incorporation of Idumea speak of forcible conversion, the overall message of his references to Idumea leave room for speculation that what is usually labeled as conversion may have been a result of political agreement between the Hasmoneans and the Idumean elites. At any rate, it should be stressed that Josephus' accounts of the conversion of the Idumeans to Judaism and of the Kostobar conspiracy use standard terminology for the laws and customs of ethnic groups. In this light, Josephus' contribution to the ongoing discussion on the problem of Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period appears to favor models of conversion as a cultural development rather than a strictly religious phenomenon.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> ABEL 1938, 391-92; MÖLLER – SCHMITT 1976, 132; SCHMITT 1995, 240-41.

<sup>97</sup> Archaeological surveys revealed that it played the role of a substantial fortress in the Negev in the Iron Age, but the remains from the Hellenistic period are meager, and a substantial Roman occupation («a large fortress, ca. 70 m long and 50 m wide») is dated only to the third and fourth centuries CE. See BEIT-ARIEH 2011.

<sup>98</sup> GIHON 1967, 27-29.

<sup>99</sup> Both the model of MASON 2007 and BOYARIN 2002 (BOYARIN 2003), as well as that of ESLER 2003.

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