

Caesar's Jewish Policy according to Flavius Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities* XIV, 190-222)

With the reorganisation of the East by Pompey during the 60s and particularly with the establishment of the province of Syria in 64 B.C. (Lifshitz, 1977, 3-30), Roman power in the area was considerably reinforced as Rome was now able to exercise a direct control on the Near East. However, Roman military presence, consisting, as far as we know, of four legions only, was not yet substantial. Furthermore, the existence of powerful kingdoms, like those of Commagene and Nabataea, which had been playing an important role in the Near East since the disempowerment of Syria in the mid-2nd century B.C., constituted a factor of instability, demanding the exercise of a delicate Roman diplomacy. This could not be ignored by Julius Caesar, who, finding himself in Ephesus in the summer of 48 B.C., immediately after his victory at Pharsalus, maintained all of his enemy's arrangements, but also offered his "friendship" and that of the "Roman people" to every local community and king who had asked for it (*De Bell. Alex.*, 65, 4; Millar, 1993, 27-28), while, at the same time, he officially recognised all the privileges they used to enjoy under Pompey. Thus, Ilium was restored as a free city excepted from taxation and furthermore, it received territorial additions; Pergamum was granted its liberty too, due to the services offered to Caesar by a certain Mithridates (later on appointed tetrarch and king); Cnidos, native city of some Gaius Julius Theopompus, another friend of Caesar's, was granted liberty and exemption from taxes, privileges confirmed a bit later with a treaty of alliance (Magie, vol. I, 1988, 405-406).

Among the oriental communities that were benefitted by Caesar's diplomacy were the Jews. Their loyalty to Rome already by the mid-2nd century as well as Hyrcanus II's and his procurator's, Antipater, military support to Caesar during his campaign in Egypt (*Ant.* XIV, 127-136; cf. *Bellum*, I, 187-192), constituted certainly the best background for the renovation of the Romeo-Jewish "friendship and alliance", which had been inaugurated by Judas Maccabeus in 161 B.C. (*I Mac.* 8, 23-30; cf. *Ant.* XII, 417-418) and it was abruptly interrupted by Pompey's entry in Jerusalem in 63 B.C. (*Bellum*, I, 145-151; *Ant.* XIV, 61-71). According to Flavius Josephus, Caesar, upon his return to Syria, after his Egyptian campaign, rendered public honours to Hyrcanus, restoring him the title of high priest, while Antipater was granted Roman citizenship and he was appointed governor of Judaea (*Ant.* XIV, 143); furthermore, Hyrcanus (or Antipater, according to *Bellum*, I, 199-201) was given permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, which had been demolished in 63 (*Ant.* XIV, 144).

Although our knowledge of the Jewish situation during the brief period of Caesar (48-44 B.C.) is fragmentary and completely dependent on Josephus, it is quite often stressed by modern scholarship that, with Caesar, the Jewish legal status in the Roman world was considerably modified and a new period of Romeo-Jewish relations was inaugurated. Indeed, all Jewish traditional rights enjoyed by the Jews since the times of Alexander the Great were officially defined and confirmed by Julius Caesar, while for the first time, we can speak of an official Jewish policy, which would continue to be pursued after Caesar's assassination in 44 B.C. by his successors and to which Jews would continue to recur every time they needed protection (Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1995, 33; Rajak, 2001, 327-332).

The Caesar documents file

In book XIV of his *Jewish Antiquities* Flavius Josephus preserves a number of official documents issued by Caesar or voted with his initiative, which are considered to be of great importance for the study of the Jewish political history of this period. Dated between 49 and 44 B.C., they attest the renovation of the Romeo-Jewish “alliance and friendship” and confirm the Jewish right to live according to their ancestral laws and to benefit from all privileges derived from their religious liberty (Saulnier, 1981, 161-195; Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1998, 31-136.). The fragmentary character of these documents makes it extremely difficult to re-establish their internal relations and none of the classifications proposed by modern scholars, including mine below, can pretend to be more than a chain composed on the basis of a more or less arbitrary combination of different passages. However, the information contained in them is enough to illuminate us on to what extent the measures taken by Caesar modified the Jewish situation, not only in Judaea but also in the Diaspora.

The first of the documents issued by Caesar seems to be the one reproduced in *Antiquities* XIV 199:

Gaius Caesar, Emperor, Dictator, Consul, in recognition of the honour, virtue and benevolence of Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, and in the interest of the Senate, and people of Rome, has granted that both he and his sons shall be high priests and priests of Jerusalem and of their nation with the same rights and under the same regulations as those under which their forefathers uninterruptedly held the office of priest.

Thus, Hyrcanus II and his descendants are confirmed as high priests enjoying all the rights of and having equal power with their precursors. This document, dated possibly to the beginning of 47 B.C. (Momigliano, 1934, 193-194), constitutes the declaration of Caesar’s beneficence towards the Jews. Although the title of *ethnarch* does not appear here, the ancient dignity of high priesthood and the hereditary character of the post are explicitly restored to Hyrcanus and his sons.

The following document seems to be the “Letter of Caesar to Sidon” (Ant. XIV, 190-195), situated under the second dictatorship of Caesar, i.e. in 47, issued possibly immediately after his Egyptian campaign and during his journey by Syria (Broughton, vol. II, 1952, 284-286 and vol. III, 1986, 16-107). This is actually a compilation of two documents: a “Letter to Sidon” (§§ 190-191) and a “Decree” concerning again Hyrcanus II (§§ 192-195):

Gaius Julius Caesar, Emperor and Pontifex Maximus, Dictator for the second time, to the magistrates, council and people of Sidon, greeting. [...] I am sending you a copy of the decree, inscribed on a tablet, concerning Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, the high priest and ethnarch of the Jews, in order that it may be deposited among your public records. It is my wish that this be set up on a tablet of bronze in both Greek and Latin. It reads as follows: “I, Julius Caesar, Emperor and Pontifex Maximus, Dictator for the second time, have decided with the advice of the council. Whereas the Jew Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, both now and in the past, in time of peace as well as in war, has shown loyalty and zeal toward our state, as many commanders have testified on his behalf, and in the recent Alexandrian war came to our aid with fifteen hundred soldiers, and being sent by me to Mithridates,

surpassed in bravery all those in the ranks, for these reasons it is my wish that Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, and his children, shall be ethnarchs of the Jews and shall hold the office of high priesthood of the Jews for all time in accordance with their national customs, and that he and his sons shall be our allies and also be numbered among our particular friends; and whatever high-priestly rights or other privileges exist in accordance with their laws, these he and his children shall possess by my command. And if, during this period, any question shall arise concerning the Jews' manner of life, it is my pleasure that the decision shall rest with them. Nor do I approve of troops being given winter-quarters among them or of money being demanded of them."

Thus, Julius Caesar renders the Jews the roman friendship; however, there is no mention of the "Jewish nation", as in the case of the renovation of the treaty of 161 by the successors of Judas Maccabeus. Now it is Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, and his sons who are officially included, according to the decree, in the number of "roman friends" because of their fidelity and diligence and of the military support that Hyrcanus had offered Caesar in the Alexandrian war (§§ 192-193). We are more than sure –as he was probably Hyrcanus himself– that in a period in which Rome was presented as the ruler of the whole world, being "friend of the Romans" represented nothing more than a diplomatic courtesy; an honorary title conferred evidently on everyone who was in an inferior position and no real political impact should be expected from it.

But the decree goes further, conferring on Hyrcanus and his sons the ethnarchy and high priesthood with all capacities assigned to these offices, according to the Jewish ancestral laws, and it is certainly here that the importance of this document resides: the high priest of the Jews traditionally acquired political power too; at the same time, he represented the supreme judicial authority of the country, since, according to the Jewish religion, the Law of God concerned the religious and civic life of people equally. What is more, the Jewish traditional rights included the perception of an annual tax in the profit of the Temple. These capacities of the high priest, having been abolished by Pompey, or, more possibly, after the reform of Gabinius in 57-55 B.C. (*Bellum*, I, 169-170; *Ant.* XIV, 90-92), were now restored to Hyrcanus, implying Caesar's intention to restore in Judaea the *status quo ante Pompeium*. On the other hand, the decree defines the sphere of influence of Hyrcanus, which was no more confined within the limits of Judaea but included also the Jewish communities of the Diaspora and it has been reasonably enough suggested that, apart from this one, more copies of the decree must have been sent to all Greek cities, in which there were Jewish communities (Ginsburg, 1928, 89-91). Another interesting element is that in all documents from 47 onwards, Hyrcanus is considered "high priest of the Jews" as a "nation" referring both to the Jews of the metropolis and those of the Diaspora. Thus, what had traditionally been internal relations between the metropolis and the Diaspora communities, were now acquiring the importance of an official right conferred on the Jews by Caesar.

Therefore, Caesar established and confirmed the power of Hyrcanus in Judaea and in the Diaspora, while at the same time, by allowing him the title of *ethnarch*, a title possessed by Simon Maccabeus and Hyrcanus I, he justified his succession and emphasised the hereditary character of this office (*Ant.* XIV, 194 and 199); a symbolic action of Caesar with a great ideological significance: first of all it declares the desire of Rome to restore the

traditional “Romeo-Jewish friendship”; secondly, it emphasises the indispensable element of this friendship, residing in the Jewish recognition of Roman supremacy. For now, it is Rome and not the Jews themselves (as they used to be) that determined the relations of the Jewish leader (*archon*) with his people (*ethnos*): the appointment of the *ethnarch* of the Jews and the definition of his power constituted no more an internal Jewish issue but a product of Roman decision.

Two more noteworthy elements, very indicative of the new political situation in Rome, remain here to discuss: first, Caesar’s personalisation of Romeo-Jewish relations: the Roman friendship is conferred to “Hyrcanus, son of Alexander and his descendants” (*supra*) and not to the “nation of the Jews”, as it was the case a century earlier (cf. *I Mac.* 8, 23). Indeed, from 47 B.C. onwards the name of Hyrcanus, and after him the name of Herod, are constantly present in all official documents; a feature corresponding perfectly with the personalisation of power in Rome and the inauguration of a new foreign policy consisting mostly in personal alliances with powerful men in all countries which are included in the Roman sphere of influence (Bowersock, 1981, 10-13). The second element has to do with Roman recognition of Jewish loyalty and of services rendered to Rome. Roman friendship, like all privileges offered to Hyrcanus and the Jews in the decree in question, concerns nothing more than the expression of this recognition, which emphasises both the Roman superiority and the Jewish inferiority.

On the same line we can find another fragmented document, dated to the fourth dictatorship of Caesar, i.e. the beginning of 44 B.C. (*Ant.*, XIV, 211-212), preserving a speech of Caesar in which he praises Hyrcanus’ loyalty and asks the senate and the people of Rome to “provide that a requital be made to Hyrcanus, to the nation of the Jews, and to the sons of Hyrcanus” (§ 212).

According to Flavius Josephus, the initiative for the renovation of the “alliance and friendship” between Jews and Romans was of Hyrcanus II, who, being now the officially recognised successor of the Hasmoneans, decided to continue this tradition. Thus, in autumn of the year 47, he sent an embassy to Caesar (*Ant.*, XIV, 185). Caesar’s answer was probably the one preserved in a document dated to his third or fourth dictatorship, i.e. in 46/45, which, once again, confirms the power of Hyrcanus and his descendants and declares Caesar’s resolution to send ambassadors to discuss with him about friendship and alliance with Rome (*Ant.* XIV, 196-198):

The following are the grants, concessions and awards made by Gaius Caesar, Imperator and Consul. That his [Hyrcanus] children shall rule over the Jewish nation and enjoy the fruits of the places given them, and that the high priest, being also ethnarch, shall be the protector of those Jews who are unjustly treated. And that envoys be sent to Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, the high priest of the Jews, to discuss terms of friendship and alliance. And that a bronze tablet containing these decrees shall be set up in the Capitol and at Sidon and Tyre and Ascalon, and in the temples, engraved in Latin and Greek characters. Also that this decree shall be communicated to all the quaestors and magistrates of the several cities and to our friends, that hospitality may be shown the envoys, and that these ordinances may be published everywhere.

The economic policy of Caesar in Judaea is known to us from another document preserved by Flavius Josephus in book XIV of his *Jewish Antiquities*, namely, the “Caesar’s Decree to the Jews of Judaea” (§§ 202-206), and a couple of passages from a senate decree (§§ 207-210), voted on Caesar’s initiative (Ginsburg, 1928, 172). Both of them are dated sometime between the end of 47 and first months of 46 B.C. with the senate’s decree to have been voted a bit earlier than the Caesar’s decree (Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1998, 80).

Gaius Caesar, Imperator for the second time, has ruled that they shall pay a tax for the city of Jerusalem, Joppa excluded, every year except in the seventh year, which they call sabbatical year, because in this time they neither take fruit from the trees nor do they sow. And that in the second year they shall pay the tribute at Sidon, consisting of the fourth of the produced sown, and in addition, they shall also pay the same tithes to Hyrcanus and his sons, just as they paid to their forefathers. And that no one, whether magistrate or pro-magistrate, praetor or legate, shall rise auxiliary troops in the territories of the Jews, nor shall soldiers be allowed to exact money from them, whether for winter-quarters or on any other pretext, but they shall be free from all molestation. And whatever they may hereafter acquire or buy or possess or have assigned to them, all these they shall keep. It is also our pleasure that the city Joppa, which the Jews had held from ancient times when they made a treaty of friendship with the Romans, shall belong to them as at first; And for this city, Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, and his sons, shall pay tribute, collected from those who inhabit the territory, as a tax on the land, the harbour and exports, payable at Sidon in the amount of twenty thousand six hundred and seventy-five *modii* every year except in the seventh year, which they call the Sabbatical year, wherein they neither plow nor take fruit from the trees. As for the villages in the Great Plain, which Hyrcanus and his forefathers before him possessed, it is the pleasure of the Senate that Hyrcanus and the Jews shall retain them with the same rights as they formerly had, and that the ancient rights which the Jews and their high priests and priest had in relation to each other should continue and also the privileges which they received by vote of the people and the Senate. And that they be permitted to enjoy these rights at Lydda also. As for the places, lands and farms, the fruit of which the kings of Syria and Phoenicia, as allies of the Romans, were permitted to enjoy by their gift, these the Senate decrees that the ethnarch Hyrcanus and the Jews shall have. And that to Hyrcanus and to his children granted and to the envoys sent by him shall be given the right to sit with the members of the senatorial order as spectators of the contests of gladiators and wild beasts; and that when they request permission of the Dictator or Master of the horse to enter the Senate chamber, they shall admit them and shall give them an answer within ten days at the latest from the time when a decree is passed.

The decree begins with Caesar’s resolution concerning the payment of an annual tribute, which the Jews would be paying “for the city of Jerusalem, Joppa excluded” (§ 202). Ginsburg is definitely right when remarking that the exception of Joppa from a tribute makes sense only if the payment of this tribute concerned many cities, or even the whole of Judaea and not only Jerusalem (Ginsburg, 1928, 100; Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1998, 84-85). Therefore, Judaea remains subject to tribute but it is exempted from this obligation every seventh year, called sabbatical.

Paragraphs 203-204 are more explicit: first of all it is ordered that the Jews, on the second year, should pay to Sidon – where there were the Roman central granaries (Ginsburg,

1928, 101; Kasher, 1990, 182-183)– “the fourth part of what was sown” as a tribute; we conclude that the payment of the tribute was done in cash every year and every two years by the quarter of the harvest. At the same time, the right of Hyrcanus and his sons to receive the same tithes, which the Jews had been paying to their precursors, is once more confirmed. Furthermore, the decree, confirming the exemption of the Jews from military service, makes sure to exempt them from the contribution applied on auxiliary troupes, which was paid by the rest of the populations of the area (Ginsburg, 1928, 172; Momigliano, 1934, 203).

In the last two paragraphs (205-206), Caesar’s decisions meet Hyrcanus’ financial obligations: Hyrcanus and his sons become subjects to a tax of 20,675 *modii* payable each year –apart from the seventh year– to Sidon, for the city of Joppa (§ 206), which was annexed to Syria by Pompeius in 63 (*Bellum*, I, 156-157; *Ant.*, XIV, 76) and was now rendered to the Jews (§ 205). Thus, is explained the exemption of Joppa from the payment of the tribute “for the city of Jerusalem” (§ 202), since Joppa’s financial obligations were to be treated separately (Momigliano, 1934, 204-205). The economic importance of this city was certainly known to Caesar. His decision to render it to the Jews under the condition that Hyrcanus and his descendants would pay an annual contribution to Rome, as well as the fact that Judaea would continue to be subject to a tribute (the same tribute imposed on Judaea by Pompey) reveal a fundamental aspect of Caesar’s Jewish policy: although it was his constant practice throughout his dictatorship to present himself as the benefactor of the Jews and protector of their rights, contrasting this way Pompey’s policy, the economic and political *status quo* created by Pompey was fully maintained, while roman control over the country was emphasised on every occasion.

The second part of the document –i.e. from paragraph 207 to the end– constitutes probably extracts from a senate decree concerning the Jews of Palestine. The senate restores to Hyrcanus and the Jews their territorial possessions, as well as all the rights that they used to enjoy in earlier times (§ 207) and confirms the traditional rights of the priests (§ 208). In regard to the “places, countries, and villages, which belonged to the kings of Syria and Phoenicia, the confederates of the Romans, and which they had bestowed on them as their free gifts” (§ 209) –it concerned, as far as we know, the Syrian and Phoenician territories conquered by Alexander Jannaeus, which Jews were deprived of by Pompey in 63– they are now restored to Hyrcanus and the Jews. Finally, the senate confers to Hyrcanus, his descendants and the Jewish ambassadors the privilege reserved for representatives of free states only to have a senatorial seat in the Roman circus (§ 210). Apart from the honour entailed in such a privilege and its ideological significance, its importance resided also in the restitution to the Jews of the *ius legationis*, from which Judaea had been deprived, probably after Pompey’s reforms. Normally a state subject to Rome had no right to send embassies (Ginsburg, 1928, 102). Needless to say that this was nothing more than a diplomatic gesture of Caesar, which defined, however, the juridical situation of Judaea in the Roman Empire.

According to Flavius Josephus, Hyrcanus was given permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem in 47, during Caesar’s passage from Syria (*supra*). Therefore, the decree, dated to Caesar’s fifth consulate, i.e. the beginning of year 44, which is reproduced in the Caesar file, cannot but represent the official confirmation of this authorisation (Momigliano, 1934,

198). In the same document, Caesar, evidently resolved to facilitate even more the situation for the Jews, announces also a provisional tax reduction (*Ant.* XIV, 200-201):

Gaius Caesar, Consul for the fifth time, has decreed that these men shall receive and fortify the city of Jerusalem, and that Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, the high priest and ethnarch of the Jews, shall occupy it as he himself choose. And that in the second year of the rent-term one *kor* shall be deducted from the tax paid by the Jews, and no one shall make profit out of them, nor shall they pay the same tribute.

The roman recognition of the Jewish right “to live according to their ancestral laws” was part of the religious toleration policy, expressed in the right of free attendance of religious rites, which was conferred on all people residing within the limits of the Roman Empire. In the case of the Jews this right entailed a number of additional privileges concerning respect of the *Shabbat* and other religious feasts of the Jews, dietary laws, collection of sacred money etc.; privileges which in certain cases involved roman legislation; like, for instance, the case of Jewish exemption from Caesar’ general interdiction of the *collegia* and the exemption of the Jewish *cives romani* from military service.

As far as the Jews of Rome were concerned, their right to have congregations was recognised by Caesar in 46 (*Ant.* XIV, 215), while all associations and religious *collegia* were prohibited (Suet., *Iul.* 42, 3). This privilege, conferred on the Jewish community of Rome, served as a precedent for the protection of the Jewish right to assemble for religious reasons in oriental Roman provinces, as well as in the Greek cities allied to Rome. Four documents issued by Roman magistrates and dated to the Caesar period confirm this right attributed to the Jews, while Flavius Josephus provides us also with a number of documents representing the legislation of Greek cities regarding the Jewish question.

a) *Letter of Julius Gaius to Paros (Ant. XIV, 213-216)*

Dated around 44, this letter was issued on the occasion of a protestation expressed by the Jews of Delos against a decree of the people of Paros, preventing them from living according to their “ancestral laws” (*Ant.* XIV, 213). The praetor Julius Gaius declares his disapproval and confirms explicitly the right offered to the Jews of Rome by Julius Caesar to assemble, collect money for religious reasons and organising *Agapes* (§§ 213-216):

Julius Gaius, Praetor, Consul of Rome, to the magistrates, council and people of Parium, greeting. The Jews in Delos and some of the neighbouring Jews, some of your envoys also being present, have appealed to me and declared that you are preventing them by stature from observing their national customs and sacred rites. Now it displeases me that such statutes should be made against our friends and allies and that they should be forbidden to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals and sacred rites, for this they are not forbidden to do even in Rome. For example, Gaius Caesar, our consular praetor, by edict forbade religious societies to assemble in the city, but these people alone he did not forbid to do so or to collect contributions of money or to hold common meals. Similarly, do I forbid other religious societies but permit these people alone to assemble and feast in accordance with their native customs and ordinances. And

if you made any statutes against our friends and allies, you will do well to revoke them because of their worthy deeds on our behalf and their good will towards us.

(b) *Letter of Dolabella to Ephesus (Ant. XIV, 225-227)*

In this letter, dated probably to 43, P. Dolabella, then governor of Asia, confirms the right of the Jews of Ephesus to assemble for religious reasons. It seems that it was sent after a petition from Alexander, son of Theodorus, ambassador of Hyrcanus (*Ant. XIV, 226*) and with this opportunity Dolabella also confirms the exemption of Jews from military service because of the *Shabbat* and their dietary laws (*ibid. 226-227*):

In the presidency of Artermon, on the first day of the month Lenaeon, Dolabella, Imperator, to the magistrates, council and people of the Ephesians, greeting. Alexander, son of Theodorus, the envoy of Hyrcanus, son of Alexander, the high priest and ethnarch of the Jews, has explained to me that his co-religionists cannot undertake military service because they may not bear arms or march on the days of the Sabbath; nor can they obtain the native foods to which they are accustomed. I, therefore, like the governors before me, grant them exemption from military service and allow them to follow their native customs and to come together for sacred and holy rites in accordance with their law, and to make offerings for their sacrifices; and it is my wish that you write these instructions to the various cities.

Two more documents, which cannot be precisely dated, but they belong undoubtedly to this period, preserve two letters: one from Lucius Antonius, *proquaestor* and *propraetor* of Asia –most probably from 49 to 47 (Magie, vol. II, 1988, 1256)– to the council and people of Sardis (*Ant. XIV, 235*) and one from P. Servilius Galba –identified with P. Servilius Isauricus, *propraetor* and then *proconsul* of Asia from 46 to 44 (Broughton, vol. II, 1952, 222, 272, 298, 309-310 and vol. III, 1986, 196)– to the council and people of Miletus (§§ 244-246); both were sent, apparently on the occasion of Jewish petition against these cities. The letters defend the practice of Jewish religion in pagan cities and emphasise the Jewish right to observe their religious celebrations according to their ancestral laws:

(c) *Letter of Lucius Antonius to Sardis (Ant. XIV, 235)*

Lucius Antonius, son of Marcus, *proquaestor*, and *propraetor*, to the magistrates, council and people of the Sardis, greeting. Jewish citizens of ours have come to me and pointed out that from the earliest times they have had an association of their own in accordance with their native laws and a place of their own, in which they decide their affairs and controversies with one another; and upon their request that it be permitted them to do these things, I decide that they might be maintained, and permitted them to do so.

(d) *Letter of P. Servilius Galba to Miletus (Ant. XIV, 244-246)*

Publius Servilius Galba, son of Publius, *proconsul*, to the magistrates, council and people of Miletus, greeting. Prytanis, son of Hermas, a citizen of yours, came to me when I was holding court at Tralles and informed me that contrary to our expressed wish you are attacking the Jews and forbid them to observe Sabbaths, perform their native rites or manage their produce in accordance with the laws. I would therefore have you know that after hearing the arguments of the opposing sides, I have decided that the Jews are not to be prohibited to follow their customs.

Regarding the pursuing of the Caesar policy in the legislation of the allied Greek cities, we possess a sequence of documents dated between 47-42 B.C. (Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1998, 192-230), announcing the conferral on the Jews of the right to live according to their ancestral laws: a) a “Letter of the magistracy of Laodicea to Gaius Rabirius” – probably C. Rabirius Postumus, *proconsul* of Asia in 47 (Pucci-Ben Zeev, 1998, 194; Broughton, vol. III, 1986, 181) declaring their conforming with the Roman instructions concerning the Jews (*Ant.*, XIV, 241-243); b) three decrees conferring on the Jews the right to observe feely the *Shabbat* and, consequently, to have congregations, and, again, to live according to their ancestral laws: i. “Decree of the People of Halicarnassus” (§§ 256-258); ii. “Decree of the People of Sardis” (§§ 259-261); iii. “Decree of the People of Ephesus” (§§ 262-264). The “Decree of the People of Halicarnassus” authorises also the construction of Synagogues near the sea (§ 258), while that of Sardis confers on them “a place [...] where they may have their congregations, with their wives and children, and may offer, as did their forefathers, their prayers and sacrifices to God” (§ 260).

The exception from military service to the Jewish roman citizens in consideration of their “ancestral laws” is attested in a series of documents dated between 49-43 B.C., preserved in the Caesar file of Josephus.

The first one chronologically, seems to be a degree issued by the consul Lucius Lentulus (*Ant.*, XIV, 228-229), situated in 49. Being charged by the senate to organise two legions in the province of Asia, Lucius Lentulus exempted the Jews of Ephesus:

Those Jews who are Roman citizens and observe Jewish rites and practise them in Ephesus, I released from military service before the tribunal on the twelfth day before the Kalends of October, in consideration of their religious scruples, in the consulship of Lucius Lentulus and Caius Marcellus.

This exception was confirmed a bit later by Titus Ambius, *legatus pro praetore*, in a “Letter to Ephesus” (§ 230) and in a “Decree of the People of Delos” (§§ 231-232). It is beyond doubt that, despite the lacunar character of the relevant sources, the privilege conferred to the Jews of the province of Asia already by 49 B.C., referred to the whole of the Jewish population throughout the world. According to “Caesar’s Decree to the Jews of Judaea” (*supra*), they were even exempted from the obligation to participate in winter quarters and to pay money for them (§ 204).

Jewish exception from military service in consideration of their religion was also confirmed after Caesar’s death by Dolabella in his “Letter to Ephesus”, dated to 43 B.C. (*supra*).

Examining the available documents in Flavius Josephus, concerning the relation between Jews and Romans during the brief period of Julius Caesar, we may suggest that the legal situation of the Jews was considerably improved. The measures taken by Caesar reinforced the autonomy of Judaea as well as the links between Metropolis and Diaspora. At the same time, Caesar recognised the Jewish religion as a *religio licita* and confirmed once and for all the Jewish religious rights in the roman world. However, Judaea did not gained its independence; the tribute to Rome, symbol of the country’s subordination, continued to be

paid, while Jewish dependence to Roman authority became more concrete under Caesar, as it was being invested with a sentiment of mutual recognition: on the one hand of the loyalty demonstrated by an inferior state towards a superior, and, on the other, of the benevolence of a superior towards an inferior. It seems that Caesar's Jewish policy was dictated by the same principles which characterised all his political actions, from his victory at Pharsalus to his assassination, and it was founded on the major objective of his external policy; namely the integration of all people residing "*sub solo imperio nostro*", as Cato had put it 120 years earlier (*apud* Gellius, VI, 3, 16), for the creation of the united state he had dreamed of.

In the years that followed, and given that the roman interests in the East increased, Roman oriental policy became naturally more active; its frequent interventions in the internal affairs of the eastern kingdoms started to play a significant role in the development of the area –and of Judaea in particular. Already by 41, Rome, by the person of its representative in the East, Mark Antony, demonstrated in the most explicit way that the destiny of Judaea was not in Jewish hands any more: the delegation consisting of Jewish nationalists sent to Antony in Syria in order to complain about the increasing influence of Herod's party (*Bellum*, I, 243; *Ant.*, XIV, 324), not only achieved nothing of what it was actually aspiring of, but, on the contrary, it provided the occasion to officially confirm the already unlimited power of the Idumaeans (*Bellum*, I, 243-244; *Ant.*, XIV, 324-326); furthermore, fifteen of their political enemies, who had been participating in the delegation were arrested (*Bellum*, I, 245; *Ant.*, XIV, 326) and only Herod's intervention saved them from death. A second delegation, which arrived a bit later at Tyros, was cruelly dismissed and as the nationalistic protestations against Herod did not stop, Antony ordered the execution of the members of the first delegation, who had been kept as captives (*Bellum*, I, 247; *Ant.*, XIV, 327-329; Richardson, 1996, 122-123).

Roman role in the struggle between Herod, son of the Idumaeen Antipater, old friend of Caesar, and Antigonus, son of Aristobulus II and last descendant of the royal Hasmonean family, which tore Judaea from 41 to 37 B.C., had not been less energetic. According to Flavius Josephus, when Herod, having suffered a big defeat by his enemy, Antigonus, resorted to Rome, not only he managed to acquire a promise of help from Mark Antony and Octave, but he was even conferred with an official confirmation of the royal title (*Bellum*, I, 281-285; *Ant.*, XIV, 379-385; cf. Strabo, XIV, 765; App. *Bell. Civ.* 73; Tac. *Hist.* V, 9; Richardson, 1996, 127-128). This was indeed far beyond his expectation, being only half-Jewish and of a non-noble origin (*Ant.*, XIV, 386-387).

The last phase of this terrible struggle ended up with the full participation of Roman legions, commanded by the Roman governor of Syria (*Bellum*, I, 327; *Ant.*, XIV, 447). Thus, Herod became king of Judaea, while Antigonus was handed to the Roman and was beheaded by decision of Mark Antony in 37 (*Ant.*, XIV, 490; cf. *Bellum*, I, 357; Plut. *Antony*, XXXVI, 2; Dio Cassius, XLIX, 22). This constituted indeed the first case of execution of a foreign monarch (Strabo, *apud* Jos. *Ant.*, XV, 9; Plut. *Ibid.*); a new period in the history of roman international affairs was about to begin.

Evanthia Polyviou (M.A., PhD)

Independent scholar
evapolyviou@yahoo.fr

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