

**THE TERM Ἰουδαϊσμός (*IOUDAISMOS*), A STUDY IN  
JEWISH-HELLENISTIC SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

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There should be no need to justify the choice of our topic at a Congress of Jewish Studies for we are discussing the first appearance of that very term Judaism about which the entire Congress revolves. Indeed, it is astonishing that generations of scholars have engaged in Judaic Studies, and have not yet sufficiently examined the circumstances under which a group of the Jewish People arrived, for the first time, at a conception of the entire complex of facts and problems to which our field of study is devoted, grasping it as an entity which can be expressed in a single word.

That event occurred among the Hellenistic Jews, the term being Ἰουδαϊσμός (*Ioudaismos*).<sup>1</sup> In order to ascertain its meaning, we must first free ourselves from the habits of modern speech, in which appellations for outlooks, faiths, and opinions quite frequently end in "ism." One of the surprising conclusions which I shall endeavor to demonstrate in this paper is that that very habit of speech is in no small way the product of the term *Ioudaismos*, used by Hellenistic Jewry.

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1. Cf. M. Hengel, "Die Synagogeninschrift von Stobi," *ZNW* 57 (1966), p. 178, who also discusses the material presented here.

Therefore, the first section of my paper must be a study in Greek philology, situating the word under discussion within the vocabulary of the age. In the second section I shall attempt to derive conclusions from the usage of that word concerning the self-consciousness of the Hellenistic Jews. The third section sums up the principal Greek categories in which the Hellenistic Jew expressed his *Ioudaismos*.

My first task must be to present the material upon which this paper is based. As, for reasons which will be explained below, I wish to limit my discussion to those cases in which the term *Ioudaismos* is used by Jews, my primary sources are extremely limited. The following is a list of those passages known to me:

(1) II Maccabees 8:1: “Then Judas... and they that were with him,... called together their kinsfolk, and... all such as stood on in Judaism...” (τούς μεμενηχότας ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ).

(2) Ibid., 14:38: “And one Razis, one of the elders of Jerusalem,... brought proof of his Judaism, and did boldly jeopardize his body and life with all vehemency for Judaism.” (κρίσιν εἰσηνεγμένους Ἰουδαισμοῦ καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊσμοῦ παραβεβλημένους μετὰ πάσης ἐκτενίας).

(3) Ibid., 2:21: “who behaved themselves manfully to their honor for Judaism.” (τοὶς ὑπὲρ τοῦ Ἰουδαϊσμοῦ φιλοτίμως ἀνδραγαθήσασιν).

(4) IV Maccabees, 4:26: “The King forced every member of the nation to taste forbidden foods and thus to betray Judaism.” (ἐξόμνησθαι τὸν Ἰουδαϊσμόν).

(5) In the New Testament, II Galatians 1:13–14: “For have you not heard of my former way in Judaism... and I outstripped many of my contemporaries in my devotion to Judaism...” (τὴν ἐμὴν ἀναστροφὴν ποτε ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ... καὶ προέκοπτον ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ ὑπὲρ πολλοῦς...)

(6) In the dedicatory inscription of the synagogue in Stobi (today in Yugoslavia), apparently from the third century BCE<sup>2</sup>, the donor says of himself that “in all his public life he acted according to Judaism” (πολιτευσάμενος πᾶσαν πολιτείαν κατὰ τὸν Ἰουδαϊσμόν) apparently meaning simply that he conscientiously carried out the commandments of the Torah.

(7) A funerary inscription from the cemetery at Porto, in Italy<sup>3</sup>, praising a

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2. First published in *ZNW* 32 (1933), pp. 93–94.

3. Frey, I, 537.

woman “who lived with her spouse for thirty four years a gracious life inside Judaism” (καλῶς βίωσασα ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαϊσμῷ).

These then are the sources known to me. Their wide dispersal, both in time and space, would seem to indicate that the use of the word was far more common than in the evidence which has come down to us by chance. That impression shall become stronger as we proceed.

Preliminary examination of the sources as given above would appear to lead to the conclusion that our word denotes the complex of behavior which is entailed by the fact that someone is a Jew, and that that behavior is held to be of such value that it is worthy to fight, even to die, for its sake.

Now we must take up our first question: how does a word bearing that meaning fit into the Greek vocabulary?

## I

Words ending in ἰσμός (*-ismos*) are very common in Greek. According to the *Kraetzschmar Rückläufiges Wörterbuch der griechischen Sprach* there are more than a thousand of them (to which number should be added a considerable number of words in which the ending is expanded to -ιασμός [*-iasmos*]). This nounal form is related to the verbal suffix -ίζω (*idzo*), and also to the suffix indicating an agent, -ιστής (*-istes*), as in the following example:

to supply = πορίζω (*porizo*)  
supplies = πορισμός (*porismos*)  
a supplier = ποριστής (*poristes*)

Moreover, the process of the living language is liable to produce a word ending in -ισμός (*ismos*) spontaneously, without implying the weight of a technical term, which is what the modern man feels when he hears his “-isms.” Use of those forms is particularly widespread in Hellenistic Greek. For example, the author from whom we have taken part of our material, the editor of II Maccabees, in the very sentence in which he speaks of those “who behaved themselves manfully to their honor for Judaism,” mentions the purification of the Temple and the Dedication of the Altar. He terms the purification καθαρισμός (*katharismos*) and the dedication ἔγκαινισμός (*engkainismos*). In addition to the noun *Ioudaismos* we find the verb Ἰουδαίζω (*ioudaizo*) in the Septuagint translation of Esther 8:17, “and many of the people became Jews,” or, as an interesting addition of the translator has it, “many of the people were circumcised and became Jewish” (ἰουδαίζον — *ioudaizon*). Thus, we see that the language creates a noun derived from a verb like that with such ease that we may safely assume that it arises spontaneously. Such a situation does not support suppositions such as that of Zeitlin in his English edition of II Maccabees, which attempts to demonstrate the ex-

istence of a particular political and social background of a distinctively local character on the basis of the appearance of our term in that document.<sup>4</sup>

Among all the words ending in *-ismos*, those which derive from a proper noun are a class unto themselves, whether it be the name of a person or of a nation. Among them, the semantic process of deriving a verb from a noun and then once again deriving a noun from the verb, as above, deserves particular attention. We may distinguish the following cases:<sup>5</sup>

(1) The most ancient example of such words is represented by the word μηδισμός (*medismos*), meaning the adoption of a political stance in favor of the kingdom of the Persians and the Medes. In the same manner, in later historical circumstances, we find, for example, φιλιππισμός (*Philippismos*) or Μιθραδατισμός (*Mithradatismos*). Such a term as *Medismos* can clearly be used only in reference to one who is not himself a Mede, and in general that word has pejorative meaning, accusing someone of betraying his own nation and leaning towards the Medes. Thus this type is quite distant from the attributes of the term *Ioudaismos*.

(2) The word Κανωβισμός (*Kanobismos*) offers an example of the second type: people from the city Κάνωπος (*Kanopos*) in Egypt gained a reputation for gluttony and drunkenness, and thus this term became a popular one for over-eating. Similarly, since the people of Laconia were known for their ability to give short, fitting answers, that talent became known as Λαχωνισμός (*Lachonismos*). These appellations too were generally used to describe foreigners who behave like local residents. In any case, they refer to the personal attribute of the man who is thus denominated.

(3) Both of the above types can be combined together if, for example, we read that those Athenians who sympathized with Sparta used to demonstrate their political leaning by imitating Spartan manners.

(4) In one of his comedies, Alexis makes the Pythagoreans the butt of his humorous bards. The name of that comedy is Πυθαγοριζουσα (*Pythagoridzusa*), that is to say, the woman who behaves in Pythagorean manner. In this case we are much closer to the type of Ἰουδαϊσμός (*Ioudaismos*), for the woman apparently belongs to the Pythagorean sect itself, and the Pythagorean manners which she takes on are by no means restricted, as in the previous examples, to a single isolated trait, but are, rather, a full way of life as well as a theoretical outlook. Nevertheless, when Alexis speaks of that behavior, he does not call it

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4. S. Zeitlin, ed., *The Second Book of Maccabees*, Philadelphia, 1954, p. 21.

5. These examples are drawn from the material quoted in the Greek dictionary of Liddell and Scott.

Πυθαγορισμός (*Pythagorismos*) but Πυθαγορισμοί (*Pythagorismoí*), in the plural<sup>6</sup>. Thus, it would appear that in this case as well, the appellation ending with the suffix *-ismos* is not used to indicate a body of acts and beliefs.

(5) The term Ἑλληνισμός (*Hellenismos*) merits special attention. As used by members of the Greek (i.e., Hellenistic) culture, that term indicates nothing more than the correct use of the Greek language according to those rules which are considered to be permanent and immutable. *Hellenismos* in that sense is a much sought after ideal. An intellectual must struggle all his life to attain it, for linguistic Hellenism demands the strict observance of thousands of minute rules. Thus, as opposed to the examples so far adduced, in this case there is a converse concept: Βαρβαρισμός (*Barbarismos*). One who does not work diligently in the name of *Hellenismos* is caught in the pitfall of *Barbarismos*. Nevertheless, there is still a great gap between that formal ideal and a comprehensive concept such as *Ioudaismos*.

What then is the origin of the term Hellenism as a general name for the whole period of Greek culture following Alexander the Great, as it is commonly used by us today? It was coined during the nineteenth century by the German historian Johann Gustav Droysen (1808–1884), who took it from II Maccabees. For it was that *Jewish* writer who used the term in a way that we have found no pagan Greek source using it. In II Maccabees 4:12, the gymnasium and the athletic hat are treated as symbols of *Hellenismos*, thus referring to *Jews* who adopted Greek ways and forced foreign practices upon their coreligionists. *Hellenismos* therefore does not refer to the practices of Hellenic people who live according to the usages of their culture, but rather to non-Hellenic people who imitate a culture which is not theirs. It is the Jew rather than the Greek who requires an appellation which includes all the manifestations of Hellenistic culture in a single unit. And why is that? Because his *Ioudaismos* entails its converse, that which is not *Ioudaismos*. The same author (v. II Maccabees, 4:13), uses an additional term to express the converse notion, a term which forces the Greek language, ἀλλοφυλισμός (*allophylismos*), an exact translation of which would be, “the ways of a foreign nation.” This word might be considered a translation of the Hebrew “*nokhriut*” or “*goyut*”.

From our survey of Greek vocabulary it would seem that in the entire Hellenistic-Roman cultural realm, to the extent of our present knowledge, not a single nation, ethnic, or other group saw the need of creating a general term for all the practical and ideological consequences entailed by belonging to that group, with the exception of the Jewish people. Of course this generalization refers only to the *pagan* world of Hellenism. For as soon as Christianity arose and became separate from

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6. In his comedy *Tarentini*, frg. 2, line 1.

its Jewish origins, it coined the concept Χριστιανισμός (*Christianismos*) as antithetical to Ἰουδαϊσμός (*Judaismos*). That antithetical relationship is clearly evident, for example, in Tertullian's statement that from John the Baptist onwards, Judaism ceased and Christianity began (ad quem desinit Iudaismus et a quo incipit Christianismus).<sup>7</sup> Christianity in its struggle with enemies both external and internal later populated the entire world with religious factions, each of which called itself an *-ismos*, such as Φαρισαϊσμός (*Pharisaismos*), the Pharisees, or Ἀριανισμός (*Arianismos*).<sup>8</sup> When the process of secularisation began in modern European culture, all of those terms such as utopianisms, idealism, and socialism were built on that model, and have remained in force ever since.

## II

The term *Judaismos*, which we have shown to be unique in the Hellenistic-Roman world, also has no equivalent in the usage of the Jews of Eretz Israel. Rather than "those who battle with devotion and bravely for their Judaism," the Hebrew-speaking Jew might have spoken of a war "for our nation and for the cities of our God" (II Sam. 10:12), or "for the sake of the Name" or "for our holy Torah," and the like. The expression "*dat Moshe ve-Yehudii*" (the religion of Moses and of the Jews — Mishnah Ket. 7:6) does not convey such a comprehensive meaning. Thus, the term is peculiar to Hellenistic Jewry. Even if it does become clear to us that we are not dealing here with a "term" which was intentionally created, but rather with a word which the living language created spontaneously, as it were, we are nevertheless justified in assuming that the use of that term will reveal an aspect of the self-consciousness of the community which coined it.

In order to do so we must investigate the syntactic contexts in which our word appears in the sentences presented above. In the funerary inscription we read of a woman who lived "in Judaim," and in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians the writer recalls the days during which he lived inside Judaism. Thus, Judaism would appear to be a sort of fenced off area in which Jewish lives are led. The very same image emerges from the author of Second Maccabees who speaks of these who "remained in Judaism." The verb ἐμμένω (*Emmeno*) which he uses there is commonly used to indicate keeping an oath, a covenant, a contract, or a law.

Thus it follows that a well known metaphor is at work here, one connected with the way that the Jews of Eretz Israel conceived the halakha: "The four ells of the halakha," "within the limits of the law," "transgression," and the like. Although both branches of Judaism share the consciousness of being within an area, there is a difference between them in the way that they conceive of what is outside. For

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7. *Tertull. adv. Marc.* IV, 338.

8. Epiphanius, *Panarion haer.*, passim.

the Hellenistic Jew, that outside presents itself as a real alternative. the world of the gentiles. Thus the author of Second Maccabees speaks of “going over from the laws of the fathers” (6:1), and the precise meaning of the verb he uses, μεταβαίνω (*metabaino*) is to step from one area to another. The author of Fourth Maccabees refers to the evil intentions of the renegades by means of verbs to which he has added the prefix ἐχ- (*ech-*), meaning outwards: ἐχδιαιτάω (*echdiatao*) — to remove from a way of life — 4:19; ἐχπολιτεύω (*echpoliteuo*) — a *hapax legomenon* meaning to outlaw — *ibid.*; ἐξόμνυμαι (*exomnumai*) — to swear to leave — 4:26; and one must add the adjective Ἐχθροσμός (*echthesmos*) — outlawed — 5:14. The fact that one of the preceding words is apparently a coinage of the author emphasizes even more strongly the powerful emotions which accompanied the condemnation of the deeds of the renegades, who broke the bounds of *Ioudaismos*.

We have found that the Jew lived in the Hellenistic world not as an individual who is exposed to every influence exerted upon him from any quarter of that world-wide culture, for his Judaism united him with the other members of his ethnic group within invisible boundaries which divided an inner region of the world from an external one. Defending that boundary and maintaining himself within it became of utmost value to him, and he was ready to fight and even to sacrifice himself for its sake.

The value of that inner realm is first expressed above in the synagogue inscription, whose author lauds himself for living his life “according to Judaism,” that is to say, his Judaism is seen by him as a standard for judging the value of his actions. And, of course, that value is especially conspicuous in the praises lavished by the author of Second Maccabees upon those who battled “for the sake of Judaism.”

This testimony emerges from a small but varied group of sources, both geographically and in time, so that there could be no possible mutual literary influence among them. Therefore we assert the right of saying that that evidence represents more than a small degree of the self-consciousness of Hellenistic Jewry.

### III

I can only indicate very briefly the chief Greek categories in which the Hellenistic Jew presented the contents of *Ioudaismos*. The first one of these has already emerged from most of the material which we have presented here: Judaism is a νόμος (*nomos*), that is the law of the Torah. That much was already established in the translation of the Septuagint, which translates Torah as *nomos*. When the author of II Maccabees describes in detail that Judaism which was the object of Greek wrath, he says: “It was not permitted to observe the Sabbath, nor to keep

the holidays which had been kept for generations, nor in general to admit that one was a Jew” (6:6). However, Judaism did not consist in any one particular law but rather in a system of laws which made up a single entity. That is what the Jews termed with the lofty appellation πολιτεία (*politeia*), meaning “constitution” in general, or even “state.” It is on the basis of that usage that we interpreted the statement of the author of the synagogue inscription above, claiming that he behaved in all *politeia* according to Judaism. That conception also guides Josephus in his work *Contra Apion*<sup>9</sup> when he addresses the question of the place of the “state” of Moses in the political theories of Greece, and he established a special category for it, unknown in Greek, for which he boldly coined the term Θεοκρατία (*theochratia*).

Along with that legal conception of *Ioudaismos*, there developed another, parallel one, which sees it as φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*). In point of fact, it was not a Jew but rather a Greek author who first conceived of the Jewish people as a sect of philosophers.<sup>10</sup> Philo’s attempt to interpret the Torah of Moses as a philosophical system which fulfills and complements all the true discoveries of Greek philosophy is but the crowning achievement of the prolonged effort of the Hellenistic Jews to present the Jewish tradition in intellectual terms borrowed from Greece, as a theoretical system which provided ultimate answers to ultimate questions.

Both of these aspects of the development of the content of the term *Ioudaismos* are apparent when the author of Fourth Maccabees bursts forth in admiration for the heroism of Eleazar the Priest, who sacrifices his life in sanctification of the Name, “You whose life was according to the *nomos*, you, the philosopher of the Godly life” (ὃ σὺμφωνε νόμου, ὃ φιλόσοφε Φείου βίου).

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9. Jos., *c. Ap.*, 2, 165.

10. Hecataios Abd. ap. *Jos. c. Ap.* I, 179.