CHAPTER TWO
ARKHEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

A. THE DIASPORA

Although this study is concerned with the knowledge of Greek among the Jews in Palestine, it need hardly be said that an inquiry into the knowledge of that language among the Jews outside the Jewish country can throw significant light on the subject, particularly since there were close and frequent contacts between both groups.

A well-known fact is that Jews lived practically everywhere in the Roman empire at the beginning of the Christian era, and new archaological findings regularly supply additional proof of this. It appears that the written testimonials about their wide dissemination were not exaggerated. The brief comment of the author of the Oracula Sibyllina,1 probably from the middle of the second century A.D., that the entire earth and the entire sea were full of this people, is confirmed by diverse concrete facts given by other authors. Strabo (1st century A.D.) is said by Josephus to write as follows about the Jews: "This people has already made its way into every city, and it is not easy to find any place in the habitable world which has not received this nation and in which it has not made its power felt (or: in which it has not become dominant, or: which has not been occupied by it)."2

Philo likewise describes various times how widely dispersed the Jews were in the world of that day and how closely bound they were to Jerusalem. Somewhere he writes: "...so populous are the Jews that no one country can hold them, and therefore they settle in very many of the most prosperous countries in Europe and Asia both in the islands and on the mainland, and while they hold the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God to be their mother city, yet those which are theirs by inheritance from their fathers, grandfathers, and ancestors even further back, are

2 Ant. XIV: 115.
in each case accounted by them to be their fatherland, in which they were born and reared, while to some of them they have come at the time of their foundation as immigrants to the satisfaction of the founders”.¹

In Philo, too, is to be found the letter which Agrippa I wrote to Caligula containing among other things a list of the lands and towns where the Jews resided: “. . . it (the Holy City) is the capital not of the single country of Judaea but of most other countries also, because of the colonies which it has sent out from time to time to the neighbouring lands of Egypt, Phoenicia and Syria (the so-called Coele Syria as well as Syria proper), to the distant countries of Pamphylia, Cilicia, most of Asia as far as Bithynia and the remote corners of Pontus, and in the same way to Europe, to Thessaly, Boeotia, Macedonia, Aetolia, Attica, Argos, Corinth, and most of the best parts of the Peloponnese. It is not only the continents that are full of Jewish colonies. So are the best known of the islands, Euboea, Cyprus and Crete. I say nothing about the regions beyond the Euphrates. With the exception of a small district, all of them, Babylon and those of the other satrapies which have fertile land around them, have Jewish settlers”.²

Josephus also gives clear indications that the Jews were to be found everywhere in the world of that time. “There is not a people in the world which does not contain a portion of our race”.³ Elsewhere he testifies of the Jewish race that it is “densely interspersed among the native populations of the world”.⁴ And proudly he states: “The masses have long since shown a keen desire to adopt our religious observances; and there is not one city, Greek or barbarian, nor a single nation, to which our custom of abstaining from work on the seventh day has not spread, and where the fasts and the lighting of lamps and many of our prohibitions in the matter of food are not observed”.⁵ This information given by Josephus might appear to be greatly exaggerated did not another source, which can hardly be suspected of biassed exaggeration, contain a statement which accords in essence with that of Josephus. To be precise, Seneca mentions, though bitterly as is to be expected, that

¹ In Flaccum 45 et seq. (trans. Loeb Classical Library)
² Legatio ad Gajum 281-282 (trans. E. Mary Smallwood, Philonis Alexandrini Legatio ad Gajum, 1961, p. 124)
³ B.J. II:398.
⁴ B.J. VII:43
⁵ Contra Ap. II:282