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At the beginning of the Third Century BCE, the huge expansion of human and geographical horizons which followed Alexander’s conquests prompted a new departure in Greek ethnographic studies: in this context it is possible to understand the awakening of interest also in the Jews and their customs).

During the Third Century BCE, the attitude towards Jews and Judaism appears similar in the various sources2). Ethnologically, Jews are classified as a part of the Syrian people; theologically, the monotheistic character of their religion makes them appear a people

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1) Nothing can be said about the Greeks' attitude to Jews and Judaism in the pre-Hellenistic period. To what extent were the Greeks aware of the existence of the Jewish people as a separate and distinct ethnos, characterized by peculiar customs and religion? Both in Hellenistic and Roman times, the matter was of tremendous importance for the Jews. The issue was the Jewish claim that their civilization was older, and therefore superior, to that of the Greeks: hence their passionate search for mention of the Jewish people in Greek literature. Already in Hellenistic times, Jewish authors felt uneasy about the Greeks' delay in “discovering” Judaism, and tried to explain this silence in different ways (see for example Arist. 31 and 312-316). Similarly, Josephus made a diligent search for reference to Jews in Greek literature when he compiled his Contra Apionem. The results—in Momigliano’s words—were negligible. The same scholar observes: “Modern scholars who have tried to imitate Josephus have had no better luck” (Alien Wisdom—The Limits of Hellenization, Cambridge 1975, p. 77). No doubt, most passages by Greek authors of the pre-Hellenistic period interpreted as referring to the Jews are to be distrusted.

2) The texts are cited from M. STERN, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, I, Jerusalem 1974.
of born philosophers). Generally, and in spite of some minor
negative remarks, the picture seems one of respect, respect that
Momigliano believes is due to Platonic and Pythagorean philo-

sophy, which had prepared the Greeks to understand and appreciate
communities like the Jewish one, which he defines as rigorously
hierarchic, indeed hieratic). In this context it is also possible to
understand the fact that the traditional search for wisdom in the
East could lead Greek authors to point out features common to
Greek and Jewish cultures, so that the Jews' philosophical heritage
of wisdom could be depicted as comparable to that of the Greeks
themselves).

No significant discrepancy appears in Third Century Greek
sources, nor in modern research about them. As for the inner
significance of these sources on Jews and Judaism, that is, if we
want to define the character of this 'Interpretatio Graeca' of
Judaism, we see that what emerges from these sources is a semi-
Utopian picture (the expression is Momigliano's), which is
actually characterized by a significant 'lack of colour'. What was
interesting for the Greeks was the new and complex reality resulting
from Alexander's conquests, with all the variety of new problems
it posed. To the Greeks, the Jews in themselves were not in any way
significant).

One of the few subjects which still appear problematic in modern
research is constituted by the testimonies of Hecataeus and of
Manetho regarding the Jews.

3) Theophrastus, De Pietate, apud: Porphyrius, De Abstinentia, II, 26 = Stern,
I, n. 4; Hecataeus, Aegyptiaca, apud: Diodorus Siculus, Bibl. Hist., XL, 3 =
Stern, I, n. 11; Megasthenes, Indica, apud: Clemens Alexandrinus, Stromata, I,
15.72.5 = Stern, I, n. 14; Clearchus of Soli, De Somno, apud: Jos., C.Ap., I, 179
= Stern, I, n. 15.

4) Such as Theophrastus' remarks about sacrifices (De Pietate, apud: Por-
phyrius, De Abstinentia, II, 26 = Stern, I, n. 4) and Hecataeus' observations
about the Jews' 'unsocial and intolerant mode of life' (Aegyptiaca, apud: Diodorus
Siculus, Bibl. Hist., XL, 3 = Stern, I, n. 11).

5) Momigliano, op. cit. in n.1, p. 83.

6) See Megasthenes' and Clearchus' accounts cited above and Hermippus of

7) M. Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism, I, Philadelphia 1974, pp. 255-258;
Momigliano, op. cit. in n.1, p. 87; J. Modrzejewski, "The Image of Judaism in
Greek Thought in the Third Century BCE", Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel (ed.