THE IDENTITY AND FUNCTION OF THE 'ΙΟΥΔΑΙΟΙ IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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Within the past decade have appeared in the pages of this journal two important articles by Malcolm Lowe on the identity of οἱ 'Ιουδαιοί in early Christian literature. It is the first of these, focused primarily on the Fourth Gospel, that furnished the starting-point of the following reflections.

There are in fact three questions that arise in connection with the Johannine 'Ιουδαιοί; two belong to exegesis, the third to history. The first asks who they are, the second what role or function they fulfil, the third why the evangelist regards them with such hostility. Always a puzzle, this third question has become even more teasingly problematic in recent years, as scholars have come to recognize the fundamental Jewishness of the Johannine group. The three questions are obviously closely linked, and in spite of the fact that the third takes us out of the realm of textual understanding into that of historical explanation, it hangs upon the answers to the other two because it cannot be correctly formulated without them. This article is written in the first place as an exegetical study in the belief that there are still some strands left to be unravelled in this densely

1 "Who were the 'Ιουδαιοί?", NT 18 (1976) 101-130; "'Ιουδαιοί of the Apocrypha", NT 23 (1981) 56-90.
2 Hence the prima facie absurdity of any theory that sees the Gospel as a Missionsschrift written with the aim of gaining Jewish converts. So W. C. van Unnik, "The Purpose of St. John's Gospel", Studia Evangelica I [= Texte und Untersuchungen 73] (Berlin, 1959) 382-411, reprinted in W. C. van Unnik, Sparsa Collecta I Supplements to Novum Testamentum 29 (Leiden, 1973) 35-63; J. A. T. Robinson, "The Destination and Purpose of St. John's Gospel", NTS 6 (1959/60) 117-131. K. Bornhäuser some years earlier had provided a better basis of discussion by distinguishing six possible references of Ιουδαιοί, five of which he detected in the Gospel: Das Johannesevangelium: eine Missionsschrift für Israel (Gütersloh, 1928). As the most widely appropriate rendering of the term, Bornhäuser proposed "die Fanatiker der Tora" (p. 140).
woven skein. But in disentangling the first two questions I hope to expose the third more clearly.

If the Gospel were indeed the ungenahter Leibrock Strauss thought it to be this programme could be carried through quite straightforwardly. Here I assume that Strauss was wrong; and I shall be arguing that certain passages of particular difficulty are best explained as the result of a process of redaction. (Which means utilizing some arguments of a historical kind to help in elucidating what are essentially exegetical questions.) This can be illustrated from the very first occurrence of 'Ιουδαίοι in the Gospel, at Jn. 1:19, which is an example of a relatively late editorial insertion.3 From the interpreter’s point of view this instance is not very important: the most that can be said is that the introduction of the 'Ιουδαίοι thus early bestows a somewhat hostile flavouring on the interrogation of John by the priests and Levites. Other passages present more problems.

I. Identity

Lowe sets out to tackle the first of our questions, concerning the identity of the 'Ιουδαίοι. His answer, shorn of frills, is that they were inhabitants of the province of Judea, not Jews, but Judeans.

This solution has on the whole been poorly received by professional Neutestamentler. Hartwig Thyen’s verdict is milder than some others. He concedes that “M. Lowe im ganzen wohl zutreffend urteilt, daß die Wendung 'Ιουδαίοι fast überall mit 'die Judäer' und nicht mit 'die Juden' zu übersetzen ist.” But then he adds, unsurprisingly, that “für Johannes ist Judäa nicht eine beliebige geographische Provinz. Als Gottes und seines Gesandten ‘Eigentum’ ist Judäa vielmehr eine eminent theologische Provinz.” 4 In fact Lowe himself acknowledges this possibility, or something like it, in an anticipatory summary of his conclusions with a curiously self-contradictory ring to it: “We shall see that the everyday meanings suffice, so that there is no need to see in John’s Gospel some fantastic allegorical meaning of the word (though its author may have intended to convey an allegorical meaning too).” 5 Since it is the “allegorical meaning” that most interpreters of the Gospel,

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5 “Ιουδαίοι”, p. 110.