

# The Failed Jewish Reform at the Time of Antiochus IV. and Paul's Missionary Strategy

*Prof. Dr. Erasmus Gäß*

Lehrstuhl für die Exegese des Alten Testaments, Theologische Fakultät Trier,  
Universität Trier, Universitätsring 19, 54296 Trier, Deutschland  
*gass@uni-trier.de*

## Abstract

The reform at the time of Antiochus IV. Epiphanes was a serious intervention in the religious system of the Jews. Though being judged as anachronistic and archaic from the outside, the Jewish identity markers could not be given up at that time since they were theologically loaded. Paul and the emerging Christian communities took over the Seleucid-Maccabean challenge and sustainably reformed the Jewish identity markers. Circumcision was good for Jews, but irrelevant for Gentile believers. The abomination of swine was no longer useful since purity had to be understood in an ethical sense. Last but not least, the Sabbath commandment was accepted because this rule was explained by creation theology and, thus, had social implications. The requirements of the failed reform at the time of Antiochus worked about 200 years later, in a different context (Syria) and in an eschatological setting (imminent *parousia*).

## Keywords

Antiochus IV. Epiphanes – Maccabees – Seleucids – Paul – circumcision – pork – Sabbath

The religious reform of Judaism attempted by different circles at the time of Antiochus IV. Epiphanes was a serious intervention in the religious system of the Jews. Whereas all former rulers had granted some privileges to the Jews so that they could live according to *Torah*, the specific Jewish way of life was fundamentally questioned in the context of the reform instigated by Antiochus. For Judaism to be relatable to the surrounding world and fit Hellenistic customs,

certain changes were necessary. A distinguished openness to the outside was especially necessary for the worldwide acceptance of Judaism. In that respect, some typical Jewish identity markers representing Jewish otherness needed to be removed.

It is not surprising that Paul faced similar problems two centuries later. However, his apostolic training in Syria (especially in Damascus and Antioch-on-Orontes) helped him to open effectively the Christian movement to the Gentiles. Thus, the missionary strategy of Paul has to be evaluated against the backdrop of the Syrian Jewish community. It stands to reason that the Seleucid background of Syria emerging in the 2nd–1st century BC had a lasting impact on the Jewish diaspora in Syria.

In the first part, the failed reform of Antiochus will be reevaluated. It appears that the time was not yet ripe for such revolutionary changes. Though being judged as anachronistic and archaic from the outside, some specific Jewish identity markers could not be given up at that time. In the second part, Paul's understanding of these identity markers should be sketched in order to see how he built upon the Hellenistic understanding of Judaism. Since salvation should be open to everybody, the good tidings of Christ had to be preached all over the world. Rapid missionary success was very important because the end of the world was near. Therefore, the eschatological time pressure pushed Paul to adopt some modifications of Judaism to succeed in his worldwide mission since Judaism was more attractive to Gentiles without its archaic traits.

## I The Failed Jewish Reform at the Time of Antiochus IV

First of all, the historical circumstances leading to the reform by Antiochus should be outlined before the sanctions can be properly evaluated. Since the former high priest Jason thought that Antiochus was killed during the Egyptian campaign,<sup>1</sup> he took the opportunity to get rid of Menelaos, the current high priest appointed by the Seleucids. Coming back from Egypt, Antiochus severely punished the rebels and started the religious reform afterwards. It

---

1 See *O. Keel*, *Die kultischen Massnahmen Antiochus' IV. in Jerusalem*, in: J. Krašovec (ed.), *Interpretation of the Bible*, Sheffield 1998, 217–244, 220. The correct dating of Antiochus' punitive actions against Jerusalem is the subject of controversial discussion. For this problem see *D. R. Schwartz*, *Antiochus IV Epiphanes in Jerusalem*, in: D. Goodblatt (ed.), *Historical Perspectives (StTDJ 37)*, Leiden 2001, 45–56, 45–48. *S. Honigman*, *Tales of High Priests and Taxes*, Oakland, CA 2014, 382, gives arguments for the starting of the revolt after Antiochus' second Egyptian campaign.

seems plausible that the pillaging of the Jerusalem temple (1 Macc 1:21–24),<sup>2</sup> the slaughter of the Jerusalemites (1 Macc 1:24)<sup>3</sup> and the deployment of non-Jewish soldiers at the Akra (1 Macc 1:33–36)<sup>4</sup> happened before the actual reform. Therefore, the religious reform of Antiochus started at some time after the punitive measures following Jason's revolt at Jerusalem.

However, there are two nearly identical descriptions of punitive actions of Antiochus against Jerusalem so that the proper dating of the events leading finally to the Maccabean revolt is problematic.<sup>5</sup> While the description of the two visits of Antiochus to Jerusalem might be the result of a literary doubling of a single operation, it seems likely that Antiochus actually came twice to Jerusalem after his Egyptian campaigns with different motivations and objectives for each visit. This is in line with Flavius Josephus who also reports about two visits of Antiochus in Jerusalem in 169 BC and 167 BC. During the first visit, Antiochus robbed the city and killed his opponents (Jos Ant XII 246f.). Only during the second visit did he loot the temple. Furthermore, he massacred and enslaved a great part of the population of Jerusalem (Jos Ant XII 248–251).<sup>6</sup>

---

2 According to *O. Mørkholm*, Antiochus IV., in: W. D. Davies (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism II. The Hellenistic Age*, Cambridge 1989, 278–291, 283, the plunder of the temple treasure was only an administrative measure to get the remaining tribute promised by Menelaos. Similarly *P. F. Mittag*, Antiochos IV. Epiphanes (Klio. Beiträge zur Alten Geschichte 11), Berlin 2006, 250f.

3 But see *D. R. Schwartz*, Antiochus IV (see note 1) 48f., who translates *φονοκτονία* as “pollution, impurity” and not as “slaughter, bloodshed”.

4 For the localization of the Akra see *P. F. Mittag*, Antiochos IV (see note 2) 253 n. 105; *M. Tilly*, 1 Makkabäer (HThKAT), Freiburg i.Br. 2015, 79. According to *J. Ma*, *Relire les Institutions des Séleucides de Bikerman*, in: S. Benoist (ed.), *Rome, a City and Its Empire in Perspective*, Leiden 2012, 59–84, 77–81, Antiochus IV. punished Judah by the appropriation of the temple by the Antiochene polis and the subjugation of the Judean towns.

5 According to *K. Bringmann*, *Hellenistische Reform und Religionsverfolgung in Judäa*, Göttingen 1983, 126; *E. Haag*, *Das hellenistische Zeitalter* (BE 9), Stuttgart 2003, 64, Antiochus robbed the temple already after his first Egyptian campaign in 169 BC. After his second Egyptian campaign he punished severely the rebels around Jason in 168 BC and founded a military colony. For punishing the rebels already after the first Egyptian campaign see *J. D. Grainger*, *The Wars of the Maccabees*, Barnsley 2011, 5.

6 See also *D. M. Jacobson*, *Antioch and Jerusalem*, London 2015, 37. Maybe Antiochus dedicated the curtain of the Jerusalem temple (1 Macc 1:22) to the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia (Paus V 12,4), see *W. M. Thiel*, *Überlegungen zur Kultur- und Religionspolitik König Antiochos' IV. Epiphanes am Beispiel der Entwicklung des Heiligtums des Zeus Olympios/Akraios von Nysa-Skythopolis*, in: C. Frevel (ed.), *Kult und Kommunikation* (Schriften des Lehr- und Forschungszentrums für die antiken Kulturen des Mittelmeerraumes 4), Wiesbaden 2007, 121–163, 126; *D. M. Jacobson*, Antioch (see above) 45. According to *M. Broshi / E. Eshel*, *The Greek King is Antiochus IV* (4QHistorical Text=4Q248), in: *JJS* 48 (1997) 120–129, 128, the historical text 4Q248:7 might indicate that the capture and looting of the temple took place between the two Egyptian campaigns.

Most probably, the author of 1 Maccabees related the looting of the temple to Antiochus' first visit to demonize the Seleucid ruler. Furthermore, he either skipped the second visit (or perhaps combined the visits) since the severe punitive actions of Antiochus generated anti-Seleucid resistance other than the Maccabean movement during the first visit. By way of contrast, the Maccabees alone were credited with the rebellion and not the aristocratic priestly elite.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the various descriptions in 1 Macc vs. 2 Macc could be easily explained on literary reasons. In sum, there were two visits of Antiochus that had different objectives and caused different reactions (priestly and Maccabean resistance).

After the suppression of the priestly revolt, the Akra opposite the temple mountain was newly built.<sup>8</sup> What is even more, the Akra was manned with military colonists perhaps from Asia Minor since the commander Philippos was from Phrygia (2 Macc 5:22).<sup>9</sup> Usually these military colonists were allowed to live according to their own rules and religions which was rather offensive to orthodox Jews,<sup>10</sup> since the Akra was close to the Jerusalem temple. It was rather obvious that a non-Jewish settlement south of the temple precincts might cause riots since the new settlers definitively polluted the land of Israel and especially the temple.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these military colonists confiscated the agricultural hinterland of Jerusalem, where they might set up pagan altars for their own use.<sup>12</sup> In this regard, perhaps the Akra was a Hellenistic *polis* supervising the temple. In that respect, the Jewish hierocratic constitution was

---

7 See *D. R. Schwartz*, Antiochus IV (see note 1) 54.

8 For the Akra as residence of military colonists, see *K. Bringmann*, *Geschichte der Juden im Altertum vom babylonischen Exil bis zur arabischen Eroberung*, Stuttgart 2005, 108f.; *Y. Tchekhanov / D. Ben-Ami*, "Then they built up the City of David with a high, strong wall and strong towers, and it became their citadel" (1 Maccabees 1:33), in: *City of David Studies of Ancient Jerusalem* 11 (2016) 19\*-29\*, 20-28; *M. Peetz*, *Das biblische Israel*, Freiburg i.Br. 2018, 222.

9 According to *R. Doran*, *2 Maccabees. A Critical Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis, MN 2012, 132, Phrygians served as mercenaries in Hellenistic armies. *K. Bringmann*, *Reform* (see note 5) 128, maintains that the military settlers were no longer Greeks since already Antiochus III. started to resettle oriental people. *F. Daubner*, *Makedonische Götter in Syrien und Kleinasien*, in: *R. Raja* (ed.), *Contextualizing the Sacred in the Hellenistic and Roman Near East*, Turnhout 2017, 49-61, 57f., assumes that Macedonians settled mainly in Asia Minor, but not in Syria.

10 See *E. Haag*, *Zeitalter* (see note 5) 68.

11 See *K. Bringmann*, *Geschichte* (see note 8) 109; *G. G. Aperghis*, Antiochus IV and his Jewish Subjects, in: *K. Erickson / G. Ramsey* (ed.), *Seleucid Dissolution* (Philippika 50), Wiesbaden 2011, 67-84, 72; *C. Frevel*, *Geschichte Israels* (Kohlhammer Studienbücher Theologie 2), Stuttgart 2018, 389f.

12 See *S. Honigman*, *Tales* (see note 1) 401.

remarkably altered.<sup>13</sup> However, it is far from secure whether the Akra was permanently manned with military colonists<sup>14</sup> or whether renegade Jews adherent to the Hellenization policy settled in the Akra as well.<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, the Akra with foreign mercenaries was a major threat and grave offense to the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple.

In contrast to the background of Maccabees, the reform of Antiochus had a clear program. It seems that the reform of Judaism was well-planned by Antiochus and supervised by inspectors (1 Macc 1:51).<sup>16</sup> According to 2 Macc 6:1, Antiochus sent a civil servant to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors. The designation γέροντα Ἀθηναίων can be interpreted in different ways. Perhaps the word γέρων should be understood as “senator” or “old” resulting in Antiochus being sent either as an “Athenian senator” or an “old Athenian” or the “senator Athenaios”.<sup>17</sup> However, γέρων could also be the name of the Athenian official because 2 Maccabees always quotes the name of the persecutors.<sup>18</sup> In that respect, a certain “Geron” might be the officer in charge for the reform. Moreover, letters have been delivered by messengers to

- 
- 13 For this problem see already *E. J. Bickermann*, *Der Gott der Makkabäer*, Berlin 1937, 71–80; *O. Mørkholm*, *Antiochus IV.* (see note 2) 285; *G. P. Melloni*, *Die historischen Wurzeln des (Ur-)Christentums*, in: *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel* 43 (2007) 12–18, 15–17.
- 14 Maybe the Akra housed only a foreign garrison see *P. F. Mittag*, *Antiochos IV* (see note 2) 255; *W. Oswald / M. Tilly*, *Geschichte Israels von den Anfängen bis zum 3. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Geschichte Kompakt), Wiesbaden 2016, 118f.; *D. Engels*, *Benefactors, Kings, Rulers. Studies on the Seleukid Empire between East and West* (Studia Hellenistica 57), Leuven 2017, 378; *B. U. Schipper*, *Geschichte Israels in der Antike* (C.H. Beck Wissen 2887), München 2018, 106. In contrast *M. Hengel*, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (WUNT 10), Tübingen 21973, 513, thinks that the Akra was a Jewish-pagan colony with mixed population.
- 15 See the debate of *T. Fischer*, *Seleukiden und Makkabäer*, Bochum 1980, 32, in contrast to *K. Bringmann*, *Reform* (see note 5) 127 n. 28. Maybe even a new system of taxation was introduced to curb the resistance and to reach more profit, see *O. Mørkholm*, *Antiochus IV.* (see note 2) 285. However, there is no direct evidence for the transfer of the tax system under Antiochus, see *P. F. Mittag*, *Antiochos IV* (see note 2) 256 n. 115.
- 16 Though the reform appears to be a harsh treatment of the Jews, there is no indication that it is typical of the unpredictable character of Antiochus. *J. Whitehorne*, *Art. Antiochus (Person)*, in: *ABD I* (1992) 269–272, 270; *G. G. Aperghis*, *Antiochus IV* (see note 11) 76, refer to the nickname *epimanes* („eccentric“) which was given to Antiochus IV. by Polyb XXVI 1,1. But see the positive treatment of *O. Keel*, *Massnahmen* (see note 1) 219f., who sees Antiochus as energetic organizer and capable general. See also the favorable judgement of Polyb XXVIII 18,1. According to *D. M. Jacobson*, *Antioch* (see note 6) 35, Antiochus adopted the title *theos epiphanes* “god manifest” from 173 BC onwards and took the epithet *nikephoros* “victorious” after his Egyptian campaign in 170 BC.
- 17 *G. G. Aperghis*, *Antiochus IV* (see note 11) 72, thinks that the senator was named Athenaeus.
- 18 See *O. Keel*, *Massnahmen* (see note 1) 227; *R. Doran*, *2 Macc* (see note 9) 133.

Jerusalem and to the towns of Judah by which the Seleucid king directed the Jews to follow foreign customs (1 Macc 1:44). Furthermore, the commands are implemented not only by force, but also by persuasion (2 Macc 7:24).

Since the biblical writers most probably denigrate the real reform by adding further elements which were not part of the reform, only the objectives mentioned by at least two of the written sources (Daniel, 1 and 2 Maccabees) could really belong to the reform program undertaken by Antiochus.<sup>19</sup> Whereas the Book of Daniel is a contemporary treatment, 2 Maccabees is rather close to the events and seems to be more trustworthy than 1 Maccabees which is mainly an exaggeration. The following measures might be historically reliable:

- 1) It is ordered twice that *Torah* as a guideline for Jewish life should be forsaken (1 Macc 1:49; 2 Macc 6:1). This seems to be an exaggeration. However, in Daniel it is indicated that *Torah* should be altered substantially (Dan 7:25). The changes regarding *Torah* might be restricted to the temple cult,<sup>20</sup> since the instructions following 2 Macc 6:1 refer explicitly to the Jerusalem temple which should be dedicated to Zeus Olympios (2 Macc 6:2). Since the Jews had to celebrate the birthday of Antiochus (2 Macc 6:7),<sup>21</sup> they might have had to participate in the cult for the Seleucid ruler Antiochus who acted as *theos epiphanes* (god manifest). The sacralization of Antiochus' reign might be related to the missing legitimation and the gradual decline of his acceptance. The veneration of Antiochus as *theos epiphanes* might be demanded from his subjects as an act of loyalty.<sup>22</sup>
- 2) The cult at the altar for the burnt offerings should be changed in the temple of Jerusalem. This new cult form is called *happæša' šomem* "abomination that desolates" (Dan 8:13; similarly, Dan 9:27; 12:11). A "desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering" was erected (1 Macc 1:54) on which they offered a sacrifice (1 Macc 1:59). Thus, the altar was covered with abominable offerings that were forbidden by the laws (2 Macc 6:5). In this way, the altar was profaned (1 Macc 4:38). The "abomination of desolation" was most probably an installation on top of the altar for the

---

19 See O. Keel, *Die Geschichte Jerusalems und die Entstehung des Monotheismus* (OLB 4/1), Göttingen 2007, 1186. In contrast E. A. Knauf / P. Guillaume, *A History of Biblical Israel* (Worlds of the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean), Sheffield 2016, 206f., see the revolt mainly as a communal uprising against the ruling local elite and not as a conflict between traditionalists and Hellenizers.

20 See O. Keel, *Massnahmen* (see note 1) 221.

21 See J. G. Bunge, *Die sogenannte Religionsverfolgung Antiochos' IV Epiphanes und die griechischen Städte*, in: JSJ 10 (1979) 155–165, 162f.

22 See J. C. Bernhardt, *Die Jüdische Revolution* (Klio.B.NF 22), Berlin 2017, 273f.

offering of swine.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the altar of YHWH was desecrated and profaned in the eyes of orthodox Jews. However, proper worship was already no longer possible because of the cultic facilities in the Jerusalem temple were destroyed or desecrated after the military assault by Antiochus in 169 BC.<sup>24</sup> Since the Seleucids took care of sanctuaries in their territory to get sacrifices on their behalf and to safeguard their subjects' loyalty, Antiochus might have arranged for rebuilding the altar after its damage. However, even the restoration by a high priest like Menelaos, whose legitimacy was questionable, could not improve the miserable situation and offenses against the traditionalistic Jews. The reconstruction of the Jerusalem temple by an unauthorized person (either by Antiochus or Menelaos) was unacceptable.

- 3) Circumcision was forbidden (1 Macc 1:48), infringement against this prohibition was punishable by death (1 Macc 1:60f.; 2 Macc 6:10). Most probably only a few women and their children were killed because they practiced circumcision. This death sentence may have been universalized from a single incident. In the region of Acco, two women let their children become circumcised and were hence hurled down the city wall (2 Macc 4:6). Most probably this was only a particular case that was indicative of the outrage of the Hellenists at Acco against the local Jewish community.
- 4) Sacrifice of swine and other unclean animals was mandated (1 Macc 1:47). However, it is a debatable point whether Jews really had to eat unlawful swine's flesh (2 Macc 6:18; 7:1). Maybe Antiochus tried to eliminate the Jewish distinction between clean and unclean animals. The swine may have been the *pars pro toto* for unclean animals.<sup>25</sup>
- 5) Sabbath should be profaned (1 Macc 1:43,45) and other holy days should be abandoned (Dan 7:25). These restrictions in cultic life actually did not allow for a distinctive Jewish life (2 Macc 6:6). It is pointed out that

---

23 See the discussion in *O. Keel*, Massnahmen (see note 1) 229–233; *O. Keel*, Geschichte (see note 19) 1193–1197; *M. Tilly*, 1 Makk (see note 4) 86. *E. Blum*, Der „Schiququz Schomem“ und die Jehud-Drachme BMC Palestine S. 181, Nr. 29, in: BN 90 (1997) 13–27, 25–27, thinks that this abomination was a statue of Baalshamem. *É. Nodet*, La Crise Maccabéenne, Paris 2005, 306, assumes that it was a dedicatory inscription on the entry of the temple. According to *J. Whitehorne*, Antiochus (see note 16) 270, the first pagan sacrifice was performed on 25. Kislev 167 BC (1 Macc 1:54,59). He also thinks that the temple of Jerusalem was dedicated to the Olympian Zeus (2 Macc 6:2).

24 See *S. Honigman*, Tales (see note 1) 401.

25 See *O. Keel*, Massnahmen (see note 1) 234.



transgressions against these new mandates were punished severely (2 Macc 6:11).

Whereas the Books of Maccabees mention some additional religious innovations, the book of Daniel refers only to the cult at the Jerusalem temple.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the legitimate cult at the temple was replaced by an illegitimate cult form. It is extremely unlikely that the Jews had to worship a new and foreign god, though 1 Maccabees claims that the Jews had to sacrifice to idols (1 Macc 1:43) and build accompanying altars, sacred precincts and shrines (1 Macc 1:47). It appears that the author of 1 Maccabees already equated the abandonment of the Jewish identity markers with idolatry. All in all, it seems rather unlikely that Antiochus tried to install a new Hellenistic god in Jerusalem and its environs to suppress Judaism.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the reform of Antiochus was confined to the Jewish *ethnos* living around Jerusalem. It was not part of a religious reform for his whole multi-ethnic kingdom though the biblical author maintained that the Seleucid king wanted all his subjects to be one people and to give up their particular customs (1 Macc 1:41f.). At least no uniform official state religion was targeted since the iconography on locally minted coins released after 169 BC at a time when Antiochus tried to enforce his cultic reform features numerous local cult forms and not a unified Hellenistic cult.<sup>28</sup> The reverse of these coins was decorated with Zeus Nikephoros (Adana/Nisibis), Zeus (Issos), Poseidon (Laodikea) and the respective city goddess (Sidon and Byblos).<sup>29</sup> The iconographic program on these coins demonstrates the fact that Antiochus showed respect to local cult forms. Maybe this reference to the local cult was intended to demand

---

26 See *O. Keel*, *Massnahmen* (see note 1) 220f. According to *E. Dąbrowa*, *The Hasmoneans and Their State*, Krakau 2010, 16f., the Jewish Hellenizers introduced Greek practices in social life and removed monotheistic worship from the temple in order to replace it with polytheistic Greek cults.

27 In contrast *E. Baltrusch*, „So sollten sie das Gesetz vergessen und alle Satzungen abschaffen“. *Das Judentum im Hellenismus*, in: R. Gross et al. (ed.), *Im Licht der Menora*, Frankfurt a.M. 2014, 407–417, 415f., assumes that Antiochus IV. tried to ban Judaism and to install a new pagan cult. According to *R. Doran*, *The Persecution of Judeans by Antiochus IV.*, in: D. C. Harlow (ed.), *The “Other” in Second Temple Judaism. Essays in Honor of J. J. Collins*, Grand Rapids, MI 2011, 423–433, 432, Antiochus IV. abrogated circumcision, Sabbath observance and kosher regulations since these affected citizenship, civic economy and cultic meals.

28 See *K. Bringmann*, *Reform* (see note 5) 133; *E. Haag*, *Zeitalter* (see note 5) 69f.; *O. Keel*, *Geschichte* (see note 19) 1187; *A. Lichtenberger*, *Die Jerusalemer Religionsreform im Kontext*, in: F. Avemarie et al. (ed.), *Die Makkabäer* (WUNT 382), Tübingen 2017, 1–20, 6f.; *C. Frevel*, *Geschichte* (see note 11) 390. But see the critical objections by *J. Ma*, *Institutions* (see note 4) 82f.

29 See already *E. J. Bickermann*, *Gott* (see note 13) 47f.



loyalty from the citizens.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a polytheist like Antiochus had no reason to impose his own form of religion in an exclusive sense to his subjects. In that respect, the Jewish god  $\text{YHWH}$  could be one manifestation of the universal Zeus Olympios, at least from the perspective of Antiochus.<sup>31</sup>

It is not surprising that the decrees of Antiochus were only applied in Jerusalem and in Judaea and not in the Jewish diaspora.<sup>32</sup> However, since Jerusalem was the center of the Jewish world, changes there might also have affected the diaspora. It is not unexpected that the Hellenistic citizens of Acco and its surroundings have adopted a similar treatment of the Jewish inhabitants (2 Macc 6:8f.).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the Samaritans had to resist the reform of Antiochus as well. Their request to live according to their rules was established so that they could celebrate Sabbath.<sup>34</sup> Since their temple on Garizim was dedicated to a nameless god, they wished to dedicate it to the Hellenistic Zeus Xenios (2 Macc 6:2) which seems to be an *interpretatio graeca* of  $\text{YHWH}$ . This Greek interpretation of God's name does not influence the ancestral cult which still remained the same.<sup>35</sup> Though the Samaritans still kept *Torah*, they were not persecuted by Antiochus. Clearly, the Seleucid king did not try to wipe out the Jewish cult in all its different forms.

Thus, Antiochus IV. was in line with his father Antiochus III. who allowed the Jews to live according to the laws of the fathers without great limitations (at least outside Judaea).<sup>36</sup> In that respect the Seleucid policy was

---

30 See *A. Lichtenberger*, Religionsreform (see note 28) 7. In contrast *M. Pertz*, Israel (see note 8) 220f., thinks that Antiochus IV. tried to consolidate his empire by Hellenization.

31 On a metaphysical level there was no great difference between Zeus and  $\text{YHWH}$  whereas on a concrete physical level Zeus acted in different ways and enjoyed various forms of veneration, see *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. Hellenism or Reform?, in: *JSJ* 31 (2000) 125–161, 129.

32 See *E. J. Bickermann*, Gott (see note 13) 120–126; *M. Hengel*, Judentum (see note 14) 524; *K. Bringmann*, Reform (see note 5) 102; *O. Keel*, Geschichte (see note 19) 1189; *G. P. Melloni*, Wurzeln (see note 13) 17; *G. G. Aperghis*, Antiochus IV (see note 11) 78f.; *W. Oswald / M. Tilly*, Geschichte (see note 14) 119.

33 For the policy in Acco see *J. G. Bunge*, Religionsverfolgung (see note 21) 155–158.

34 See *Jos Ant XII* 259–261. For the Samaritan approach see *O. Mørkholm*, Antiochus IV. (see note 2) 286f.

35 See especially *E. J. Bickerman*, A Document Concerning the Persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, in: *A. Tropper* (ed.), *Bickermann, Elias J. – Studies in Jewish and Christian History I*, Leiden 2007, 376–407, 399; *C. Frevel*, Geschichte (see note 11) 390f. According to *A. Lichtenberger*, Religionsreform (see note 28) 7–13, the Seleucids – and especially Antiochus IV. – have promoted the cult of Zeus Olympios. See also *W. M. Thiel*, Überlegungen (see note 6) 150–153; *J. Ma*, Institutions (see note 4) 82; *F. Daubner*, Götter (see note 9) 55. *D. M. Jacobson*, Antioch (see note 6) 45f., supposes that the divine epithet *theos epiphanes* refers to Antiochus IV. as embodiment of Zeus.

36 See *Jos Ant XII* 142. For the laws that guarantee inner autonomy see *R. Hanhart*, Zur Vorgeschichte von Israels status confessionis in hellenistischer Zeit, in: *R. G. Kratz* (ed.),

favorable to Judaism. This overall privilege was granted because the Jews assisted Antiochus III. in his takeover of the southern Levant from the Ptolemies. There is no reason that Antiochus IV. would have altered his father's policy of relative autonomy for local cults without an obvious rationale.<sup>37</sup>

However, shortly before the revolt, Antiochus IV. did allow Hellenistic everyday living practices in Jerusalem at the request of Jason the high priest who wanted to establish a Hellenistic *gymnasion* and *ephebeion* in Jerusalem to foster Hellenistic civilization and culture.<sup>38</sup> By his proactive policy, Jason tried to strengthen the political and economic power of Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Jason asked Antiochus to enroll the people of Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch (2 Macc 4:9). This concession was a rather controversial issue:<sup>40</sup>

- 1) It has been sometimes suggested that Jason might have asked for setting up an Antiochene republic in Judea with special privileges for citizens. However, the Seleucids maintained local diversity and were not interested in constitutional changes in conquered territories.<sup>41</sup>

---

Studien zur Septuaginta und zum hellenistischen Judentum (FAT 24), Tübingen 1999, 179–193, 184; C. Habicht, Hellenism and Judaism in the Age of Judas Maccabaeus, in: Id. (ed.), The Hellenistic Monarchies, Ann Arbor, MI 2006, 91–105, 96; D. Gera, The Seleucid Road towards the Religious Persecution of the Jews, in: M.-F. Baslez / O. Munnich (ed.), La Mémoire des Persécutions (Collection de la revue des études juives 56), Paris 2014, 21–57, 23–26; W. Oswald / M. Tilly, Geschichte (see note 14) 115. The granted privileges are similar to those of Darius I. and Artaxerxes I., see E. Haag, Zeitalter (see note 5) 55. According to E. A. Knauf / P. Guillaume, History (see note 19) 203, this policy is in full accord with measures Antiochus III. took to relieve other war-damaged cities. According to J. Ma, Institutions (see note 4) 74f.; D. Gera, Seleucid Road (see above) 55–57, already Seleukos IV. installed a high priest in Coele-Syria and Phoenicia who was in charge of all the sanctuaries so that the religious autonomy given by Antiochus III. to the Jews was fundamentally questioned. This new policy led to the weakening of the Jewish high priest and the aristocratic priestly class.

- 37 See C. Frevel, Geschichte (see note 11) 390. According to J. G. Bunge, Religionsverfolgung (see note 21) 163f., Antiochus IV. changed the pro-Jewish attitude of his father, since the Jews have renounced their privileges (2 Macc 4:11). Only the Seleucid king had the right to withdraw these concessions.
- 38 According to P. F. Mittag, Antiochos IV (see note 2) 235f. n. 41, both institutions did not change the Jewish cult, but were just cultural and political changes. For both institutions see J. D. Grainger, Wars (see note 5) 2; R. Doran, 2 Macc (see note 9) 101f.
- 39 See C. Frevel, Geschichte (see note 11) 387.
- 40 For this problem see especially R. Doran, 2 Macc (see note 9) 96–102; D. Engels, Benefactors (see note 14) 359–362.
- 41 See R. Doran, 2 Macc (see note 9) 98.

- 2) Maybe Jason intended to establish a corporation (*politeuma*) alongside the local population.<sup>42</sup> But such corporations were usually military colonies to support the Seleucid power.<sup>43</sup>
- 3) Jerusalem might have been redesigned as a Greek *polis* and as a new Antioch.<sup>44</sup> The Hellenistic citizenry would henceforth control the fate of the temple state of Jerusalem.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, such a status of *polis* granted greater self-government and protection from fiscal exploitation by the Seleucids. This was especially necessary since the Seleucids tried to access the temple treasure.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the project of a Antiochene *polis* in Jerusalem might have generated additional income since the membership was most probably linked to special charges.<sup>47</sup> However, the following indications contradict the view that a real Hellenistic *polis* was established in Jerusalem. The Jewish *gerousia* consisting of the aristocratic Elders was not changed to a democratically elected council like in other Hellenistic cities.<sup>48</sup> The position of the high priest remained unchanged even after the constitution of the Hellenistic *polis* at Jerusalem. In contrast to other Hellenistic cities, the high priest as the superior representative of the Jewish community was not elected, but appointed by the Seleucids.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, the acceptance of Jerusalem as a Hellenistic *polis* depended on an *archeion*, a *gymnasion*, a theatre and an *agora*. Most of that is missing in Jerusalem so that it is doubtful whether Jerusalem

---

42 See already E. J. Bickermann, *Gott* (see note 13) 59–65; M. Hengel, *Judentum* (see note 14) 507; É. Nodet, *Crise* (see note 23) 229; G. G. Aperghis, *Antiochus IV* (see note 11) 70.

43 See R. Doran, *2 Macc* (see note 9) 98.

44 See O. Mørkholm, *Antiochus IV*. (see note 2) 279; R. Doran, *2 Macc* (see note 9) 99; M. Peetz, *Israel* (see note 8) 221. This re-designation of Jerusalem as *polis* might be related to the general policy of re-foundations of cities by Antiochus, see S. Honigman, *Tales* (see note 1) 349. According to J. Ma, *Institutions* (see note 4) 75–77, the Jerusalem *polis* might have existed side by side to the temple as parallels in Tyriaion and Babylon show.

45 See E. Haag, *Zeitalter* (see note 5) 57. According to T. Fischer, *Seleukiden* (see note 15) 20, the city of Antioch was a cultic community venerating the deified Seleucid ruler in contrast to the Jewish community of Jerusalem.

46 See E. A. Knauf / P. Guillaume, *History* (see note 19) 206. S. Honigman, *Tales* (see note 1) 350, thinks that Jason was pressed to accept the increase of tribute whereas Onias III. refused to do so.

47 See P. F. Mittag, *Antiochos IV* (see note 2) 239; G. G. Aperghis, *Antiochus IV* (see note 11) 68. According to J. D. Grainger, *Wars* (see note 5) 2, there might have been Hellenistic immigration in Jerusalem and a fair number of Jews with Greek education.

48 For the Jewish *gerousia* see 2 Macc 11:27.

49 See E. Haag, *Zeitalter* (see note 5) 61.

was ever constituted as a Hellenistic *polis*.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, Antiochus was rather reserved in conferring the title of *polis*.<sup>51</sup>

All in all, it is a rather debatable point what exactly Jason intended (republic, politeuma, polis?) and what he finally received. The enrollment of the Jerusalemites as Antiochens (2 Macc 4:9) cannot be untangled.

Though Jason's reforms (*gymnasion*, *ephebeion* and enrollment as Antiochens) were not related to an explicit pagan cult, they were part of a self-Hellenization of the Jewish elite which led to a decline of Jewish identity.<sup>52</sup> Jason's request shows at least the beginning of Hellenization in Jerusalem. This might be connected to a local elite aspiring the status of Greeks.<sup>53</sup> The Jewish community in Jerusalem was soon divided in two opposing parties due to this project of Hellenization. It appears that the reformists sided with Antiochus to fight the traditionalistic Jews.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Antiochus was supported by the influential local elite headed by the high priests Jason and Menelaos who tried to reform Judaism to a cult form acceptable to the Hellenistic world. Moreover, they planned to abandon reactionary cultic rites. However, changes in the orthopraxy were strongly opposed by traditionalistic Jews. Thus, Antiochus could only rely on the powerful local elite.

It is not surprising that the biblical sources sketch Antiochus as the ideal and exemplary enemy of God.<sup>55</sup> Since the biblical report describes the persecution according to this literary paradigm it has to be evaluated critically. Though Antiochus might have behaved in a similar way, a proper historic interpretation is concealed by literary conventions. In spite of all that, the motifs for the reform of Antiochus might be multifaceted:<sup>56</sup>

- 1) The tension between a Hellenistic and an anti-Hellenistic traditionalistic party at Jerusalem might have led to political, religious and social stress. On the one hand, the reformers were attracted to the Hellenistic way of

---

50 For these problems see also *P. F. Mittag*, Antiochos IV (see note 2) 236 n. 42.

51 See *P. F. Mittag*, Antiochos IV (see note 2) 242.

52 See *A. Lichtenberger*, Religionsreform (see note 28) 5.

53 See *D. Engels*, Benefactors (see note 14) 362.

54 See *G. P. Melloni*, Wurzeln (see note 13) 17f.; *B. U. Schipper*, Geschichte (see note 14) 106.

55 See *H. Lichtenberger*, Der Feind Gottes in der frühjüdischen Literatur, in: M. Tilly et al. (ed.), *L'adversaire de Dieu – Der Widersacher Gottes* (WUNT 364), Tübingen 2016, 53–74, 71. According to *S. Weitzman*, Plotting Antiochus's Persecution, in: *JBL* 123 (2004) 219–234, 227, Antiochus was portrayed like certain Babylonian kings committing sacrileges, thus, typifying the impiety of bad rulers. Therefore, Antiochus was a wicked king acting as an agent of ritual discontinuity and destroying the link between past and present.

56 For this problem see *T. Fischer*, Seleukiden (see note 15) 50f. For a discussion of scholarly literature see *M. Marciak*, Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Jews, in: *The Polish Journal of Biblical Research* 9 (2006) 61–74, 62–73.

life so that they tried to appeal to the Seleucids consolidating their political voice. Therefore, the conflict had religious and political motivations.<sup>57</sup> On the other hand, Antiochus strengthened his position in Jerusalem by supporting the Hellenistic party. In that respect, the religious reform might have been a reaction to the anti-Hellenistic movement against the policy of the Judean high priest Menelaos. Moreover, Antiochus might have demanded a sign of loyalty of his Judean subjects living on the border of Ptolemaic Egypt. This might have been manifested in the monthly sacrifices on the occasion of the birthday of Antiochus.

- 2) The revolt of Jason against the pro-Seleucid high priest Menelaos had to be severely punished and further resistance had to be destroyed. Maybe Antiochus chose to punish the Jews in the same way like the senate did to suppress the Bacchanalia in Rome in 186 BC. Since Antiochus was held hostage in Rome at that time, he could have been inspired by the forceful oppression of the Roman Bacchanalia.<sup>58</sup> However, the Bacchanalia were totally repressed, whereas changes to Judaism were undertaken only in Judea and not in the diaspora.<sup>59</sup> His target was not to eliminate Judaism in its entirety.
- 3) Perhaps Antiochus tried to assimilate local cult forms in Jerusalem in a Hellenistic way.<sup>60</sup> Accordingly, the dedication to Zeus Olympios might be an *interpretatio graeca* of the Jewish religion.<sup>61</sup> However, worshipping YHWH under the name of Zeus was the same as venerating a foreign god, at least for the orthodox Jew.<sup>62</sup>
- 4) Maybe the Hellenistic understanding of Judaism as a philosophical monotheism being diluted by archaic customs might have led to the reform program. Hellenistic philosophers in Athens have dealt with Judaism for a long time. Antiochus was in Athens in 176/175 BC, so that he could come along with the philosophical perception of Judaism which was Janus-faced. On the one hand, the Jews were appreciated as a people of philosophers with a pure understanding of only one God conceived by

---

57 See *E. Regev*, *The Hasmoneans* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 10), Göttingen 2013, 20. According to *M. Marciak*, *Antiochus IV* (see note 56) 73, the scholarly discussion moves nowadays from the ideological, religious, cultural to the political, civic, economic sphere though the religious factor is still present.

58 See Liv XXXIX 18.

59 See *J. C. Bernhardt*, *Revolution* (see note 22) 501.

60 See *A. Lichtenberger*, *Religionsreform* (see note 28) 12f.

61 See *B. U. Schipper*, *Geschichte* (see note 14) 106f.

62 See *S. Honigman*, *Tales* (see note 1) 400.

the mind alone.<sup>63</sup> On the other hand, they had a lot of perceived disgusting and abominable customs which hampered normal contact with other people.<sup>64</sup> It is not surprising that Tacitus stressed that Antiochus endeavored to abolish Jewish superstition and to introduce Greek civilization.<sup>65</sup>

- 5) The Seleucids obviously venerated not only Apollo and Zeus Olympios, but also Dionysius.<sup>66</sup> The ancestors of Antiochus placed their own statues in subordinate cities next to an altar or a statue of Dionysius.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the Seleucids featured Dionysic elements on their coinage. Furthermore, Antiochus used Dionysic rites and imagery at the festival of Daphne.<sup>68</sup> At last, Antiochus styled himself as saviour of Asia like Dionysius.<sup>69</sup> Even Dan 11:37 might indicate that Antiochus has left not only the gods of his ancestors like Apollo and Zeus, but also the “desired by women” which might refer to Dionysius.<sup>70</sup> Since Nicanor threatened to level the Jerusalem temple to the ground, to tear down the altar, and to build a splendid temple to Dionysius if the rebels did not hand over their leader Judas Maccabeus (2 Macc 14:33), there might have been a Dionysic agenda on the side of the Seleucids.<sup>71</sup> Several Dionysic elements can be found in Judaism as well so that the reform could unveil a Dionysic trait of Judaism. Greek and Roman authors discuss the Dionysic elements within Judaism at length. Especially Plutarch stressed the many similarities between the Jewish cult and the Dionysic rites so that the Jewish cult could be interpreted as Dionysic.<sup>72</sup> Tacitus pointed out several Dionysic elements in Judaism like the observation that the Jewish priests used to chant to the accompaniment of pipes and cymbals, that they wear garlands of ivy and that a golden vine was found in the temple of Jerusalem.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the wine cup at the celebration of Sabbath might indicate

---

63 See *M. Hengel*, *Judentum* (see note 14) 464–473. For a positive treatment of Judaism in the Hellenistic world see also *E. Baltrusch*, *Gesetz* (see note 27) 414.

64 See Tac Hist V 5.

65 See Tac Hist V 8.

66 See *B. E. Scolnic*, *The Festival of Dionysus in 2 Macc 6:7b*, in: *JSJ* 49 (2018) 153–164, 155–157.

67 See *B. E. Scolnic*, *Festival* (see note 66) 157f.

68 See *R. Strootman*, *Antiochos IV and Rome*, in: *A. Coşkun / D. Engels* (ed.), *Rome and the Seleucid East* (Collection Latomus 360), Brussels 2019, 173–216, 194–196.

69 For the Dionysic stylization of Antiochus see *R. Strootman*, *Antiochos IV* (see note 68) 200–202.

70 See *B. E. Scolnic*, *Festival* (see note 66) 158f.

71 See *B. E. Scolnic*, *Festival* (see note 66) 159f.

72 See *Plut*, *Quaest Conv IV 6.2*. For the dionysic interpretation of Judaism see also *É. Nodet*, *Crise* (see note 23) 320–337.

73 See Tac Hist V 5.

a Dionysic function. Moreover, the procession at Sukkoth might evoke the parade during the Dionysic festivities and the *lulav* might be compared to the Dionysic *thyrsos* bouquet. At last, the little bells on the vestments of the high priest could be inspired by Dionysic rites. All in all, Antiochus might have revived Dionysic cult forms in Jerusalem (2 Macc 6:4,7). Furthermore, the theonym YHWH *Ṣᵉbāʾôt* might conceivably be (secondarily) associated to the Phrygian-Thrakian god Sabazios which is a local form of Dionysius. Maybe YHWH *Ṣᵉbāʾôt* was identified by homonymy with Jupiter Sabazios since YHWH in the form of *Iao* recalls *Juve* and the epithet *Ṣᵉbāʾôt* might be related to the Phrygian-Thrakian god Sabazios. *Ṣᵉbāʾôt* could also be linked to a stem *SB'* "to drink", so that this epithet would point to the god of wine.<sup>74</sup> Since Dionysius was especially friendly to women, it is difficult – at least in the eyes of Antiochus – to explain the proscription for women not to enter the inner court of the temple precincts in Jerusalem. This sort of perceived Jewish misogyny was rather offensive to a god who was particularly happy with female worshippers.<sup>75</sup> Due to the difference between fact (at the Jerusalem temple) and theory (the veneration of Dionysius) Antiochus may have felt strongly that something had to be changed. Perhaps Antiochus tried to stress the Dionysic character of Judaism. This might also be the reason for the sacrifice of swine on the altar of burnt offering since the Egyptians offered pigs for Osiris, the local equivalent of Dionysius. The sacrifice of swine to Osiris resembles the Passover the Jews have first celebrated in Egypt<sup>76</sup> so that this parallel is striking for Gentiles. Moreover, the Jews were regarded as runaway Egyptians so that this kind of sacrifice to Osiris could have been understood as a proper reform, at least in the eyes of Antiochus.<sup>77</sup> However, it is unclear whether Antiochus had a clear understanding of the distinctiveness of Jewish religion<sup>78</sup> since he lived as a hostage in Rome before ascending the Seleucid throne. Thus, his kingly advisors have to be blamed for not being sensitive enough to the Jewish worldview.

---

74 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 143.

75 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 148–150.

76 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 146f.

77 See also *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 142.

78 See *O. Mørkholm*, Antiochus IV. (see note 2) 280.



It is unclear who was ultimately responsible for the cultic reform in Jerusalem.<sup>79</sup> It appears that there is no reason to blame a single person for the cultic changes. Following the pacification of Judea, interaction was only possible when all responsible parties came to an agreement.<sup>80</sup> This would have included Antiochus, the Seleucid administration settling the Akra and the local elite under the high priest Menelaos. Maybe the Athenian Geron was in charge of introducing a Dionysic cult in Jerusalem since the date of the desecration of the temple coincided with a festival of Dionysius in the month of Kislev around the winter solstice.<sup>81</sup> According to 2 Macc 6:4, sexual and orgiastic rites have been committed within the temple precinct which bring Dionysic cult orgies in mind.

All in all, the reform program of Antiochus was a frontal attack on Jewish life and practice. The measures undertaken by the reformists called the covenant with God into question since the main identity markers of Jewish belief (circumcision, purity laws, Sabbath) needed to be abandoned, though orthodox Jews were not allowed to call God's commandments into question. They had to adhere to all rules given by God though even if some of these regulations seem to have had little rationale. Since the rules were divinely inspired and given only to the Jews, there was no means or need for the orthodox to communicate the rules to Gentiles.<sup>82</sup> Compared with this, the particular rules and customs were regarded by orthodox Jews as the best way of life. Since these regulations were connected to the direct command of God, these obligations were sacrosanct.

At least three innovations suggested by Antiochus and the Jewish elite would have been unbearable for Jewish believers: the ban on circumcision, the sacrifice of swine and the profaning of Sabbath.<sup>83</sup> However, the reforming of particular Jewish customs could make Judaism acceptable to the Hellenistic world. Below, these identity markers will be evaluated.

---

79 According to *J. D. Grainger*, Wars (see note 5) 6f., the Hellenizers in Jerusalem were responsible for the reform and Antiochus only agreed. For the practice of changing the ancestral laws in conquered cities see *R. Doran*, Persecution (see note 27) 426–439.

80 See *P. F. Mittag*, Antiochos IV (see note 2) 259–268.

81 See *B. E. Scolnic*, Festival (see note 66) 159. Perhaps Antiochus has just issued some form of religious persecution to punish the rebellious Jews and Geron has chosen the rustic Dionysia which were celebrated at that time. For the religious reform as punitive measure against the rebellion see *C. Habicht*, Hellenism (see note 36) 96f.

82 See *O. Keel*, Geschichte (see note 19) 1205f.

83 Later, Antiochus IV. changed his decision and permitted the Jews to live according to their customs (2 Macc 11:31), see *R. Doran*, Persecution (see note 27) 425f. *G. G. Aperghis*, Antiochus IV (see note 11) 80, thinks that the Hellenizing reform only refers to traditional observances of the Jewish faith and not fundamental beliefs. But this is hardly the case since the identity markers are loaded with religious importance.

## 1 *Circumcision*

Circumcision was done on males either as incision in the *glans penis* or as total removal of the foreskin. The later practice was followed in Israel.<sup>84</sup> *Torah* demands the circumcision of every male infant on the eighth day after birth (Gen 17:12). Furthermore, slaves and strangers residing permanently in Israel had to be circumcised. Whereas circumcision was a *status confessionis* for orthodox Jews, there are no indications in *Torah* that gentiles and foreigners have to be circumcised as well.<sup>85</sup> Only in full conversion to Judaism was circumcision obligatory. Even in the end of time, the gentiles only had to observe the Sabbath and to renounce idolatry and immorality.<sup>86</sup>

Circumcision seems to be a rather old rite since it was done with a flint knife (Josh 5:2f.).<sup>87</sup> Most probably not infants, but teenagers have been circumcised so that this custom is a *rite de passage* for becoming mature. Thus, circumcision is a sign for a later relationship by marriage. It is not surprising that the Hebrew nouns for son-in-law (*ḥātān*) and father-in-law (*ḥoten*) are etymologically related to Arabic *ḥatana* “to circumcise”.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, circumcision originally seems to be a marital or puberty rite.<sup>89</sup> This interpretation might be strengthened by the enigmatic story of Moses and Zipporah (Exod 4:24–26) where Zipporah redeems Moses from danger by circumcising their son. Though being initially a puberty rite, reasons for circumcision might be manifold. It can be interpreted as an apotropaic rite, a hygienic custom, a resource to increase fertility, an act of purity<sup>90</sup> or a ritual for the devotion to a certain god.<sup>91</sup>

---

84 For the practice of circumcision see *W. Kornfeld*, Art. Beschneidung, in: NBL I (1991) 276–279, 276; *P.J. King*, Circumcision, who did it and why circumcision, in: BARr 32,4 (2006) 48–55, 51; *O. Keel*, Geschichte (see note 19) 1201. According to *P.J. King*, Circumcision (see above) 53, some Israelites of the Exodus generation were circumcised in the Egyptian way which made a second circumcision necessary to remove the whole foreskin (Josh 5:2).

85 Except for Gen 34 to weaken the indigenous people.

86 See *K.-W. Niebuhr*, Offene Fragen zur Gesetzespraxis bei Paulus und seinen Gemeinden (Sabbat, Speisegebote, Beschneidung), in: BThZ 25 (2008) 16–51, 46.

87 See *W. Kornfeld*, Beschneidung (see note 84) 276.

88 See *P.J. King*, Circumcision (see note 84) 51; *O. Keel*, Geschichte (see note 19) 1202.

89 See *W. Kornfeld*, Beschneidung (see note 84) 277. Therefore, the practice of circumcision could have internal reasons related to fertility and marriage, see *A. Faust*, The Bible, Archaeology, and the Practice of Circumcision in Israelite and Philistine Societies, in: JBL 134 (2015) 273–290, 278. A man was made fit for sexual life by this rite, see *P.J. King*, Circumcision (see note 84) 51.

90 Circumcision makes sure that remains of seminal emission cannot pollute the genitals.

91 See *A. Ruwe*, Beschneidung als interkultureller Brauch und Friedenszeichen Israels, in: ThZ 64 (2008) 309–342, 311.

According to Herodotus, circumcision has originated in Egypt.<sup>92</sup> However, there is archaeological evidence that circumcision was practiced before by Northwest Semites and extended afterwards to Egypt.<sup>93</sup> Circumcision was common in Israel, in Egypt, in Arabia and in Transjordan (Jer 9:25), whereas the Philistines remained mainly uncircumcised though some sea peoples have been circumcised according to Egyptian sources.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, circumcision was not a useful ethnic marker for Israel since some of the neighbors of Israel also carried out circumcision.

There are no indications in the available sources that the Assyrians and Babylonians were circumcised as well.<sup>95</sup> Thus, circumcision might become a separating identity marker in the exilic period.<sup>96</sup> However, there are some good arguments that circumcision was not invented in the Babylonian exile:

- 1) There is no inner biblical indication for dating the acceptance of circumcision as an identity marker to the exilic period.
- 2) Moreover, the Babylonian Gola settled separately from the Babylonians so that this identity marker was not necessary.
- 3) Furthermore, circumcised persons only differentiated when naked, but the Babylonians wore cloths.

Be that as it may, circumcision was sacralized only late as a sign of affiliation to the cultic community of Israel for there are no early textual witnesses testifying to that practice in the pre-exilic period.<sup>97</sup> Maybe this process of sacralization of circumcision took place when other people gave up this practice.<sup>98</sup>

---

92 See Hdt II 104. For this tradition see *P. Schäfer*, *Judenhass und Judenfurcht*, Berlin 2010, 140–142. It seems that circumcision was practiced in Egypt not only for hygienic and medical reasons, but was also a cultic *rite de passage*, see *F. J. Marx / F. H. Moll*, *Die Zirkumzision von der Antike bis heute*, in: *Zeitschrift für medizinische Ethik* 60 (2014) 3–19, 4f.

93 See *M. L. Soards*, Art. Circumcision, in: *NIDB I* (2006) 667–669, 668.

94 See *P. Machinist*, *Biblical Traditions. The Philistines and Israelite History*, in: *E. D. Oren* (ed.), *The Sea Peoples and Their World* (University Museum Monograph 108), Philadelphia, PA 2000, 53–83, 68; *P. J. King*, *Circumcision* (see note 84) 50; *A. Faust*, *Bible* (see note 89) 279. Maybe even the Philistines have adopted circumcision from the Egyptians, see *A. Faust*, *Bible* (see note 89) 280f., who refers to Hdt II 104.

95 See *W. Kornfeld*, *Beschneidung* (see note 84) 276f. Ezek 32:21f. might indicate that the Assyrians were uncircumcised.

96 See also *V. Wagner*, *Profanität und Sakralisierung der Beschneidung im Alten Testament*, in: *VT* 60 (2010) 447–464, 455–457.

97 See *V. Wagner*, *Profanität* (see note 96) 462. According to *K.-W. Niebuhr*, *Fragen* (see note 86) 44, the biblical foundation for circumcision is meager at best.

98 See *A. Ruwe*, *Beschneidung* (see note 91) 312.

At the very latest, the rite of circumcision became a defining identity marker in the Hellenistic period.<sup>99</sup>

According to the Hellenistic-Roman worldview, circumcision was one of the most depraved customs in Judaism since it was equated with mutilation. The lack of the *preputium* was regarded as disfiguring and humiliating since the foreskin was an ornament designed by nature.<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, it was only removed due to superstition.<sup>101</sup> It is not surprising that circumcised persons had to suffer social disadvantages in public baths or sports facilities within a Hellenistic-Roman context.<sup>102</sup>

However, since circumcision was a sign for the covenant with YHWH (Gen 17,9–14), it is not only a rite for the initiation in the Jewish *ethnos*, but it also had religious value. Refraining from it meant leaving the covenant with YHWH.<sup>103</sup> Thus, there was no way for observant Jews to abandon it. Since circumcision was an indispensable sign for being Jewish, it was worth dying for.<sup>104</sup> Circumcision was a sign for each male Jewish individual reminding him of his covenantal obligations.

In contrast, some Hellenistic Jews might have restored their foreskin by a painful operation called *epispasm* so that it looked like before in its natural state (1 Macc 1:15).<sup>105</sup> The chirurgic treatment of *epispasm* restored the foreskin by traction and extension of the remaining skin.<sup>106</sup> This practice was rebuked by orthodox Jews as abandonment of the holy covenant with YHWH. However, *epispasm* was done in increased numbers only in later times to avoid the *fiscus Judaicus*, thus, it is questionable whether this surgery was already done in the time of Antiochus.<sup>107</sup>

## 2 Prohibition of Swine

The date of the legal prohibition of swine is not known though it is indicative that in Biblical times the inhabitants of the hill country were mostly

---

99 See A. Ruwe, Beschneidung (see note 91) 314.

100 See Gal XI 13.

101 See Strabo XVI 2,37.

102 See F. J. Marx / F. H. Moll, Zirkumzision (see note 92) 7.

103 According to J. J. Krause, Circumcision and Covenant in Genesis 17, in: Bib. 99 (2018) 151–165, 162, Gen 17 is concerned how to stay in the covenant with YHWH.

104 See M. L. Soards, Circumcision (see note 93) 669.

105 See also Jos Ant XII 241.

106 For the surgical procedure of *epispasm* see P. J. King, Circumcision (see note 84) 54; F. J. Marx / F. H. Moll, Zirkumzision (see note 92) 7f.; M. Tilly, 1 Makk (see note 4) 72; D. Engels, Benefactors (see note 14) 367f.

107 See M. Tilly, 1 Makk (see note 4) 72.

abstinent from swine<sup>108</sup> whereas the Philistines in the coastal plain consumed pork. However, the epithet pig is used in personal names from Ugarit so that this animal does not seem to be abominable to the indigenous population.<sup>109</sup> But the sacrifice of swine was unusual in the Levant though there might have been some examples at times. In Phoenicia, pigs were used as sacrificial animals. Likewise, the Egyptians offered pigs to the Moon god and to Osiris. The Egyptians also ate pork,<sup>110</sup> though this animal and its flesh were usually impure and abominable. Maybe the observation that pigs swallow up their piglets might have led to the overall negative image of swine in Egypt.<sup>111</sup> Most probably pigs were offered to Osiris in Egypt since they were associated to Seth, Osiris' enemy.<sup>112</sup> Despite all reservations, pork production and consumption was normal in the domestic economy of Egypt, even on the property of temple estates.<sup>113</sup> Therefore, swine appears to be a holy and an impure animal at the same time.<sup>114</sup>

Reasons for the impurity of swine are manifold.<sup>115</sup> The Bible mentions a social criterion. Since swine do not chew the cud, it lacked an important attribute for clean animals and, thus, it was unclean (Lev 11:7). In the postexilic period, eating pork was related to a syncretistic cult form which had to be dismissed (Isa 65:2–4; 66:3f.,17).<sup>116</sup> In sum, the Jews decided that swine was impure and dangerous to cultic activities since it endangered the contact with

- 
- 108 There is some evidence for pig husbandry in Israel in pre-exilic times at least in low ratio so that *P. Riede*, Art. Schwein, in: NBL III (2001) 542–544, 542, thinks that the prohibition must be dated to the post-exilic period. Pigs were used for consumption and for the production of fat, leather and bristles. Moreover, they could care for the disposal of waste. See also *U. Hübner*, Schweine, Schweineknochen und ein Speiseverbot im alten Israel, in: VT 39 (1989) 225–236, 228.
- 109 For the Levantine perception of swine see *F.J. Stendebach*, Das Schweineopfer im Alten Orient, in: BZ 18 (1974) 263–271, 266f.
- 110 See Hdt II 47. For the cultic use of swine see *F.J. Stendebach*, Schweineopfer (see note 109) 265f.
- 111 See *F.J. Stendebach*, Schweineopfer (see note 109) 266.
- 112 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 160f.
- 113 See *E. Firmage*, Art. Zoology (Animal Profiles), in: ABD VI (1992) 1119–1167, 1134f.
- 114 See *F.J. Stendebach*, Schweineopfer (see note 109) 269.
- 115 *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1133, mentions religious and hygienic reasons. But these approaches have very little to recommend them. For the biblical prohibition against pork consumption see *C. McKinny*, Pig Husbandry in Israel during the New Testament, in: B. J. Beitzel (ed.), Lexham Geographic Commentary on the Gospels, Bellingham 2018, 183–195, 183–185.
- 116 See *F.J. Stendebach*, Schweineopfer (see note 109) 270f. *G. Sauer*, Art. Schwein, in: BHH III (1966) 1748–1749, 1749, relates swine to rites linked to demons.

ΥΗΩΗ. Therefore, pigs had to be banned from Jewish life. There are many reasons why pigs were regarded as problematic:

- 1) According to Philo, swine live a life, in no respect pure, but confused and disorderly. Moreover, they are devoted to the basest habits.<sup>117</sup> Since pigs are sensitive to heat, they have to cool by mud which gives the impression that they are unclean.<sup>118</sup> Moreover, pigs are scavengers being contaminated with death so that they are impure animals.<sup>119</sup>
- 2) Contrary to ruminants, swine are not able to digest green stuff, but they are omnivorous and their diet depends on what is available in their area of life.<sup>120</sup> Thus, they are rivals to man. Maybe this food rivalry is the basic reason for the discredit of swine.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, swine only deliver flesh, but no other goods like wool, milk, eggs, etc. so that the surplus value is limited. Moreover, pigs are not capable of working with the plough.
- 3) Swine herding is practiced in settled communities, and was not suitable for pastoral communities like early Israel. In contrast, the swine herd was sent to the surrounding forests and fields outside the settled community which would explain the separation of swine and man. The different areas of life combined with dirt might explain the prohibition against pigs and swineherds and not the impurity of pigs themselves.<sup>122</sup>

All in all, pig avoidance might be related to the pastoral background of the highland settlers.<sup>123</sup> Thus, swine was alien to sheep and goat pastoralists and was treated with disgust.<sup>124</sup> However, the situation of pork consumption is much more complex than previously assumed.<sup>125</sup> The ban on swine might indicate that it was common at some time to domesticate pigs in Ancient Israel since

---

117 See Philo Agric 144.

118 See *M. Harris*, The Abominable Pig, in: C. E. Carter (ed.), *Community, Identity, and Ideology* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 6), Winona Lake, IN 1996, 135–151, 140. For ecological arguments against pig husbandry see *M. Harris*, Wohlgeschmack und Widerwillen, Stuttgart 1988, 72–77; *M. Harris*, Pig (see note 118) 138–143. According to *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1130, pigs are not well suited for transhumance.

119 See *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1131.

120 See *M. Harris*, Wohlgeschmack (see note 118) 72; *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1130; *M. Harris*, Pig (see note 118) 140.

121 See *M. Harris*, Pig (see note 118) 139. But see the criticism of *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1133, since pigs could be held with a minimum of expense and could even survive in very inhospitable conditions.

122 See *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1130. *G. Sauer*, Schwein (see note 116) 1748, refers to Prov 11:22 which discredited swine on aesthetic grounds.

123 See *L. Sapir-Hen / G. Bar-Oz / Y. Gadot / I. Finkelstein*, Pig Husbandry in Iron Age Israel and Judah, in: ZDPV 129 (2013) 1–20, 13.

124 See *E. Firmage*, Zoology (see note 113) 1134.

125 See especially *L. Sapir-Hen / G. Bar-Oz / Y. Gadot / I. Finkelstein*, Pig (see note 123) 11–13.

every interdiction needs a certain occasion.<sup>126</sup> It is not surprising that pigs do appear especially in the lowlands of the Northern kingdom. This might be due to the increase of population and a decrease of open spaces which forced the Israelites to change the meat production to smaller herds of sheep and goats and to raise pigs. Therefore, the ban on pork consumption might reflect the Judean resistance to the practice of Israelites who moved to Judah after the collapse of the Northern kingdom.<sup>127</sup>

Since pigs were sacrificial animals in the Hellenistic-Roman world,<sup>128</sup> the Jewish ban on swine could not have been understood. This particularistic prohibition built a wall against the western world and was judged to be misanthropic. Moreover, the ban on swine challenged the Hellenistic-Roman worldview altogether since sacrificing swine was popular in the cult of Demeter and the deified Arsinoë. Furthermore, pigs were offered after the ratification of contracts.<sup>129</sup> Pigs were also used effectively in elimination rites to ensure purification.<sup>130</sup> Besides, pig offerings were associated with chthonic rites for the promotion of harvest.<sup>131</sup> It is hardly surprising that many anti-Semitic statements on Judaism focus especially on swine,<sup>132</sup> since the Jewish disgust of swine was not understandable by outsiders.

Most probably, Antiochus had two objectives with his mandate for sacrificing swine. On the one hand, he wanted to punish the Jews since this is a massive intervention in and alteration of the Jewish cult. On the other hand, he might have tried to remove an archaic and misanthropic cultic prohibition which could not be understood from a western perspective. In that respect, he attempted to revive the earlier pure roots of Judaism which had been obscured by later legislation. Furthermore, the sacrifice of swine had a purifying character in the Greek world<sup>133</sup> so that it was well-suited for atonement contrary to the Jewish belief. The offering of pigs might not contradict the Biblical laws,

---

126 See *U. Hübner*, *Schweine* (see note 108) 225–228.

127 See *L. Sapir-Hen / G. Bar-Oz / Y. Gadot / I. Finkelstein*, *Pig* (see note 123) 13.

128 *E. Firmage*, *Zoology* (see note 113) 1132, thinks that the usage of pigs was due to the fact that they were cheap and easily available.

129 See *O. Keel*, *Geschichte* (see note 19) 1199.

130 See *E. Firmage*, *Zoology* (see note 113) 1132.

131 See *E. Firmage*, *Zoology* (see note 113) 1132.

132 Petronius thinks that the Jews worship a *porcinum numen*; see *P. Schäfer*, *Judenhass* (see note 92) 117; *H. Lichtenberger*, *Jüdisches Essen*, in: *D. Hellholm / D. Sänger* (ed.), *The Eucharist – Its Origins and Context I* (WUNT 376), Tübingen 2017, 61–76, 63. According to *P. Schäfer*, *Judenhass* (see note 92) 116f., most Hellenistic-Roman authors explain the Jewish pig taboo ethnographically and regard it principally positive. According to *Tac Hist V 4.1*, the prohibition of pork brings to mind a former infection with leprosy.

133 See *G. Sauer*, *Schwein* (see note 116) 1749.



at least in the perception of the outsider since the prohibition of a profane consumption of pork might indicate that this kind of flesh was reserved exclusively for the divine. Therefore, the Jewish abstinence of pork might be interpreted as reverence for swine.<sup>134</sup>

Maybe Antiochus did not understand that purity carried enormous theological weight in early Judaism. Purity was not only a value that separated Jews from Gentiles, but it was a prerequisite for the relationship with God. Whoever has contact to unclean animals is not suited for any contact with God and drops out of the covenant with YHWH. Therefore, it is not an emotional decision to refrain from sacrificing swine, but a religious choice since this law is highly charged with religious energy.<sup>135</sup>

### 3 *Sabbath*

The Jewish observance of Sabbath has a long and complicated history. The most important attribute is the rest from work every seventh day. The Commandment of the Sabbath is part of both versions of the Decalogue (Exod 20:8–11; Deut 5:12–15), but it is motivated differently though both commandments are orientated in a humanitarian way. According to Deut 5:15 the rest from work is explained by the freedom from the burden of work in Egypt since the Israelites were released by YHWH. In Exod 20:11, the Sabbath is justified by God's rest from creation on the seventh day. According to the priestly writings, the observance of Sabbath was a sign between God and the Israelites. Disregard for it was sanctioned by death (Exod 31:13f.). It seems that especially during the harvest period (Exod 23:11; 34:21) there was a day of rest in order to honor God as the giver of all good things and to provide a break for the people.<sup>136</sup> The Biblical commandment to celebrate Sabbath is related to Jews and pagans alike residing in Israel (Exod 20:8–10; Deut 5:12–14). Thus, even the stranger in Israel who was not committed to obey the commandments of *Torah* can enjoy the benefits of a single day off work.<sup>137</sup>

The Sabbath is comparable to Old Babylonian contracts of employment demanding one day of rest on the tenth day. Moreover, Assyrian astrologists held the view that every seventh day was regarded as a day of misfortune so that every work was accursed. Accordingly, it was not sensible to work on the seventh day. However, these *ûmê lemnûti* "evil days" also occur on the 19th day

---

134 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 148.

135 For Jewish perspectives on pigs and pork consumption see *C. McKinny*, Pig (see note 115) 185f.

136 See *A. Schuele*, Art. Sabbath, in: NIDB V (2009) 3–10, 4.

137 See *K.-W. Niebuhr*, Fragen (see note 86) 24f.

of the month which does not fit in the seven-day scheme.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the biblical Sabbath is often related to the term *šabattum*, a Babylonian feast of the full moon on the 15th day of the lunar month.<sup>139</sup> However, the biblical word Sabbath cannot be linked etymologically with the Akk. *šabattum* due to the different doubling of consonants. Moreover, this *šabattum* never was related to the institution of “evil days”.<sup>140</sup> All these parallels fail to explain the biblical Sabbath. It appears that the biblical Sabbath was originally the feast of the full moon which was most probably not a day of rest.<sup>141</sup> Maybe already in the pre-Exilic period both institutions of the feast of the full moon and the day of rest on every seventh day might have been combined to the biblical Sabbath legislation.<sup>142</sup> However, all theories to provide the origin of the Sabbath have encountered unsurmountable problems. A direct link to extrabiblical prototypes cannot be yet established.<sup>143</sup>

Especially in the intertestamental period, the Sabbath legislation became very important.<sup>144</sup> The observance of the Sabbath was adhered to differently by Jewish groups. According to Philo of Alexandria, Sabbath was the “birthday of the world” and older than creation. The feast of Sabbath will be celebrated also by foreign people in the end of time which means that Gentiles were not obliged to observe the Sabbath in present times.<sup>145</sup> According to the book of Jubilees, fighting, hunting, traveling, lighting a fire, preparation of food and sexual intercourse are forbidden (Jub L:8–12). Sexual intercourse seems to be forbidden due to reasons of purity whereas later rabbinic discussions see it as expression of joy which was appropriate for the Sabbath.<sup>146</sup> The Sabbath was to be kept only by the Israelites, whereas for other groups the Sabbath had no legal binding force (Jub II:31). Any transgression of the Sabbath was

138 See G. F. Hasel, Art. Sabbath, in: ABD V (1992) 849–856, 850. For these “evil days” see A. Lemaire, Art. Sabbat, in: NBL III (2001) 388–391, 389.

139 See, A. Lemaire, Sabbat (see note 138) 388.

140 See G. F. Hasel, Sabbath (see note 138) 850; A. Lemaire, Sabbat (see note 138) 389.

141 See A. Schuele, Sabbath (see note 136) 3f.

142 See O. Keel, Geschichte (see note 19) 1205. Contrary to A. Lemaire, Sabbat (see note 138) 389f., who thinks that the reform of the calendar took place under Babylonian dominion at about 604 BC when priestly circles have reformed the Israelite calendar to fit with the foreign cultural environment. In that respect, one has reformed and systemized the calendar of the “evil days”. Similarly, M. Tilly, 1 Makk (see note 4) 80, who thinks that Sabbath got unifying character in the Exile to secure social and religious identity.

143 See G. F. Hasel, Sabbath (see note 138) 851.

144 For the Sabbath *halakha* see L. Doering, Schabbat. Sabbathalacha und -praxis im antiken Judentum und Urchristentum (TSAJ 78), Tübingen 1999.

145 See K.-W. Niebuhr, Fragen (see note 86) 25.

146 See A. Schuele, Sabbath (see note 136) 8.

punishable by death (Jub II:27).<sup>147</sup> The death penalty for Sabbath profanation (Exod 31:14) was sometimes suspended. Someone who desecrated the Sabbath through mental aberration was not to be put to death (CD XII:3f.) though otherwise the Sabbath observance was kept strictly (CD X:1–XI:18). The Essenes were even stricter with the observance of Sabbath since they even did not allow stool (Jos Bell II 147). However, some Aramean ostraca show that there have been likewise less strict views on Sabbath since the delivery of goods might have been possible on Sabbath.<sup>148</sup>

The law of Sabbath was criticized by Roman-Hellenistic authors as organized laziness and therefore not acceptable.<sup>149</sup> However, foreign powers sometimes took advantage of the Jewish refusal of fighting on Sabbath.<sup>150</sup> Since the Jewish rebels did not fight back on Sabbath, they could be slaughtered easily by Seleucid troops (1 Macc 2:33–38).<sup>151</sup> Therefore, the Maccabees decided that self-defense was allowed on Sabbath (1 Macc 2:40f.). Later on, this decision of the Maccabees was modified with three restrictions: no bearing of arms (outside of self-defense), no pursuing of foes, no reaction or secondary measures of war.<sup>152</sup> In sum, Sabbath observance was not a private matter for Jews, but a sign of the covenant with God detaching the orthodox from the cultural environment. Thus, being Jewish always depended on foreign rulers adopting a favorable attitude towards Jews.<sup>153</sup>

## II Paul's Attitude to the Identity Markers

About 200 years after the Seleucid-Maccabean conflict, the question of proper Jewishness emerged again with a new eschatologically orientated religious group that came out of Judaism.<sup>154</sup> The early believers in Christ faced

---

147 For the concept of Sabbath in the book of Jubilees see *L. Doering*, *Schabbat* (see note 144) 43–118.

148 See *L. Doering*, *Schabbat* (see note 144) 387–397.

149 See *J. A. Scurlock*, 167 BCE. (see note 31) 138; *P. Schäfer*, *Judenhass* (see note 92) 130–132.

150 According to *G. F. Hasel*, *Sabbath* (see note 138) 853, several defeats were dated to Sabbath: the capture of Lachish by Sennacherib (701 BC), the fall of Jerusalem (597 BC), the sack of Jerusalem (587 BC).

151 According to Flavius Josephus some Jews could flee the massacre (Jos Ant XII 275). For the Jewish discussion of that problem see *L. Doering*, *Schabbat* (see note 144) 537–565.

152 See *L. Doering*, *Schabbat* (see note 144) 565.

153 See *A. Schuele*, *Sabbath* (see note 136) 8.

154 *C. Habicht*, *Hellenism* (see note 36) 103, sees the Jewish revolts in 66–73 CE and 132–135 CE as long-time repercussions of the religious reform of Antiochus IV.

the problem of whether it was still necessary for Gentiles to observe *Torah* as strictly as orthodox Jews. Since there was only a little time left until the second advent of Christ, the cultic and religious ceremonial rituals could be made easier for proselytes. Especially in Syria with its Hellenistic-Roman environment, the Jewish Christian communities had to develop distinct ways how to cope with Gentiles. This special challenge reopens the earlier discussion above. Against this backdrop, the mission strategy of Paul can be understood. The three Jewish identity markers which were scrutinized at the time of Antiochus were readjusted. Whereas the failed reform of Antiochus led to a stricter observance of *Torah* and a starker separation of Judaism from the outside world,<sup>155</sup> Paul's missionary strategy made the Christian faith acceptable to the Gentiles. It seems that Antioch was the theological substrate for Paul's new concept of Judaism.<sup>156</sup> In Antioch, the Gentile Christians had a special status different from the god-fearers being not a part of the Jewish congregation. Thus, a mixed community emerged as a separate branch from Judaism which was called "Christians" from the outside (Acts 11:26). It is unclear if this new community was regarded either as part of the Antiochene Jewish body or not.<sup>157</sup>

## 1 *Circumcision*

Circumcision was not undisputed in the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah especially challenged the concept of a physical circumcision since he regarded Israel as having uncircumcised ears which were not able to listen to the commandments of God. Jeremiah called for removing the foreskin of the hearts of the Israelites (Jer 4:4) and regarded Israel uncircumcised in heart (Jer 9:25). Therefore, Israel might be physically circumcised, but it lacked a clear commitment to God.

However, the practice of circumcision was nearly unchallenged as a clear identity marker in Palestinian Judaism at the time of Jesus.<sup>158</sup> Only certain Jews interpreted the circumcision in a spiritual way since they related this

---

155 See *C. Habicht*, Hellenism (see note 36) 103.

156 See *F. W. Horn*, Der Verzicht auf die Beschneidung im frühen Christentum, in: NTS 42 (1996) 479–505, 484. Whereas Gentile Christians had to abstain more and more from pagan practices they were not regarded equal Jews in the full sense by everybody, since they lacked circumcision. For this emerging group of Gentile Christians, see *K. Hedner Zetterholm*, Jewishly-Behaving Gentiles and the Emergence of a Jewish Rabbinic Identity, in: JSQ 25 (2018) 321–344, 329.

157 For the problem see *R. Schäfer*, Paulus bis zum Apostelkonzil (WUNT II/179), Tübingen 2004, 445f.

158 See *N. J. McEleney*, Conversion, Circumcision and the Law, in: NTS 20 (1974) 319–341, 323; *F. W. Horn*, Verzicht (see note 156) 480.

commandment to lust and desire.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, some Jews even abrogated circumcision and propagated *epipasm*.<sup>160</sup> The Jewish community at Antioch not only attracted Greeks to their religious ceremonies, but incorporated them.<sup>161</sup> Unfortunately, it is still an open question whether the Greeks remained in the status of god-fearers or whether they were accepted like proselytes with or without circumcision. Likewise, King Izates of Adiabene received the advice of his spiritual mentor, Ananias, that he could worship God without circumcision and still be a part of Judaism.<sup>162</sup> Thus, the practice of circumcision was dispensable at times.<sup>163</sup> It seems that the liberal form of Judaism in the diaspora was not inclined to demand circumcision as *conditio sine qua non*. The ethical commitment to the Law was more important than circumcision. However, in times of religious and political crisis the precept of circumcision was stressed to separate distinctly from the Gentiles.<sup>164</sup> It is a debatable point whether the community of Gentile Christians was integrated within the Jewish synagogal organization in Antioch since they did not practice circumcision and the Jewish dietary laws.<sup>165</sup>

The early Christians struggled intensely with the problem of whether circumcision was necessary for all Christians to inherit the blessings given to Abraham (Gen 17:10f.). This question was related to the evaluation of God's work in Christ which could surpass the wonderful blessings given to Abraham so that circumcision was no longer relevant. Furthermore, another option would be to circumcise only the Jewish part of the community and not the Gentiles.

According to Paul, only faith in Christ led to righteousness and assures acceptance by God. Therefore, "faith" was the opposite of the "works of the Law" which might be interpreted as the Jewish identity markers and not as

---

159 See Philo Migr Abr 89–93. However, this should not argue against the overall practice of circumcision; see *K.-W. Niebuhr*, Jesus, Paulus und die Pharisäer, in: RCatT 34 (2009) 317–346, 336 n. 50.

160 AssMos 8:2–3, which is an apocalypse dated to the turn of the eras, complains about certain Jews who oppose circumcision.

161 See Jos Bell VII 45.

162 See Jos Ant XX 42.

163 For the discussion of the necessity of circumcision in Jewish circles of the 1st century CE see *N.J. McElenev*, Conversion (see note 158) 328–333.

164 See *N.J. McElenev*, Conversion (see note 158) 340f.

165 See *M. Wolter*, Paulus, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2011, 34. In a time of national and political crisis the identity markers were especially stressed and the pressure on Gentile Christians heightened; see *F. John*, Gal 2,11–21. Eine Ritual- und Identitätskrise, in: D. Hellholm / D. Sänger (ed.), The Eucharist – Its Origins and Context I (WUNT 376), Tübingen 2017, 603–624, 615f.

a means to merit self-justification.<sup>166</sup> This distinction of “faith” vs. “works of the Law” applies to Gentiles and Jewish Christians alike since their covenant status does not rely any longer on the identity markers, but on new criteria for covenant membership for all Christians.<sup>167</sup> Christ alone sets Christians free from the present evil age (Gal 1:4) and establishes a new creation. Thus, circumcision was irrelevant (Gal 6:15), though circumcision had a value in itself (Rom 3:1f.) and was a sign of acceptance by God. Similarly, Abraham received the sign of circumcision as a seal of his righteousness he already had by faith while still being uncircumcised (Rom 4:11). Whereas circumcision was only a profane act, observing God’s commandments (1 Cor 7:19), faith (Gal 5:6) and the new creation (Gal 6:15) were much more important.<sup>168</sup> It seems that the Jewish concept of circumcision was internalized as “circumcision by heart” by Paul.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, circumcision had only a metaphorical meaning (Phil 3:2–3).<sup>170</sup> Moreover, Paul removed all separating borders between Jews and Gentiles since everybody was one in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:28). The new creation of the baptized in Christ overruled all disparities.<sup>171</sup> In that respect, everybody could remain in the status in which God had called them (1 Cor 7:18). All differences within the Christian community that still subsisted were overcome in this concept of a new creation which had implications in handling normal conflicts.<sup>172</sup> In sum, Paul differentiated in Rom 2:25–29 between a human and a divine perception of Jewishness with circumcision being only a human way to become Jewish whereas God had another understanding of Judaism.<sup>173</sup>

However, the position of Paul was not based on an overall consensus since he faced opponents several times. His adversaries tried to Judaize converts completely. Some Jewish Christians and former Pharisees favored to circumcise everybody since this sign of the covenant was necessary for salvation (Acts 15:1,5).

---

166 For this problem see *P. du Toit*, Galatians 3 and the Redefinition of the Criteria of Covenant Membership in the New Faith-Era in Christ, in: *Neotest.* 52 (2018) 41–67, 42.

167 See *P. du Toit*, Galatians (see note 166) 63.

168 See *F. W. Horn*, Verzicht (see note 156) 485.

169 In his argument in Rom 2:29 he might have used the ideas developed in Deut 30:6 and Ezek 11:19; see *R. Bergmeier*, Gesetzeserfüllung ohne Gesetz und Beschneidung, in: *D. Sänger* (ed.), *Das Gesetz im frühen Judentum und im Neuen Testament*, Festschrift für C. Burchard (NTOA 57), Göttingen 2006, 26–40, 37.

170 See *M. Wolter*, Ethnizität und Identität bei Paulus, in: *Early Christianity* 8 (2017) 336–353, 344.

171 See *R. Schäfer*, Paulus (see note 157) 182f.

172 *M. Wolter*, Der Kompromiss bei Paulus, in: *Ders.* (ed.), *Theologie und Ethos im frühen Christentum* (WUNT 236), Tübingen 2009, 170–180, 179f.

173 See *M. Wolter*, Paulus (see note 165) 382; *M. Wolter*, Kompromiss (see note 172) 344f.

But there was also the possibility of a mediating position. Jews as Jews being circumcised and Gentiles as Gentiles being not circumcised are part of the new plan of God.<sup>174</sup> Even Paul had to circumcise Timothy since he had Jewish ancestors and therefore he had to be circumcised (Acts 16:3). Paul was even blamed for teaching Jews not to circumcise their sons (Acts 21:21) which seems to be a major offense for Jewish Christians. It appears that Paul who regarded circumcision as irrelevant had only a mandate that Gentiles need not be circumcised.

To sum up, one can say that the Hellenistic-Roman abhorrence from circumcision which was regarded as mutilation was addressed by Paul's missionary strategy. Gentiles were especially considered to be free from the law of circumcision. Therefore, this part of the Hellenistic reform at the time of Antiochus was partly taken into account. Though Paul was circumcised himself (Phil 3:5), it was no longer a prerequisite to join the community of believers in Christ. It was not surprising that circumcision was given up soon in the growing Christian community. Thus, the freedom from circumcision that was postulated already by Antiochus was carried through by the new religious group of Gentile Christians who increasingly marginalized the Jewish Christians. It seems that Paul relied on a missionary concept without the demand of circumcision.<sup>175</sup> At least, there was no necessity for him to circumcise baptized non-Jews.<sup>176</sup>

## 2 *Prohibition on Swine*

Paul linked the biblical food taboos only with the consumption of food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8:1–13). In that respect, Paul was dependent on the apostolic decree developed in Jerusalem (Acts 15:20): Gentiles who turned to God were to abstain from things polluted by idols. Other food which might contaminate the community was not mentioned so that the taboo on swine and other unclean animals was no longer in force.<sup>177</sup> Thus the Apostolic decree dealt

---

174 *F. John*, Gal 2,11–21 (see note 165) 613f., indicates that the Judaic adversaries of Paul in Galatia did not demand circumcision, but only prohibited commensality of Jewish and Gentile Christians. However, circumcision of Gentiles was the logical consequence of this prohibition.

175 See *F. W. Horn*, *Verzicht* (see note 156) 486. According to *T. Witulski*, *Das sogenannte „Apostelkonzil“ in Jerusalem (Gal 2,1–10) und seine Ergebnisse*, in: *BN 174 (2017)* 53–72, 67, the Jerusalem authorities accepted the missionary concept of Paul without further restrictions since Gal 2:7–9 is a later redactional addition.

176 See *K.-W. Niebuhr*, *Jesus* (see note 159) 337.

177 Maybe pig consumption was allowed by the Apostolic decree. For the problem see *F. Avemarie*, *Die jüdischen Wurzeln des Aposteldekrets*, in: *M. Öhler* (ed.), *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen (WUNT 280)*, Tübingen 2011, 5–32, 30.



with the question of purity and demanded a minimum of cultic purity (Acts 15:28–29). Gentiles had only to abstain from meat offered to idols, from eating blood or meat from strangled animals, and from fornication. Thus, they had to abrogate pagan practices that were incompatible with the God of Israel.<sup>178</sup> However, Paul considered every food inherently clean since righteousness was not based on purity laws, but on faith in Christ alone (Gal 2:16).<sup>179</sup> However, believers should not offend the sensibilities of other Christians who still observed the strict purity laws (Rom 14:14,20).<sup>180</sup> It is a matter of debate whether Paul knew the Apostolic decree since he never cited it though he had to handle similar problems in his communities.<sup>181</sup>

The freedom from the purity laws was in accord with the Synoptic Jesus who maintains that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile since it enters not the heart, but the stomach, and goes out thereafter (Mark 7:18f.). Therefore, the differentiation of clean and unclean food was implicitly abandoned. Moreover, the concept of purity was transferred from the cultic to the ethical level, so that the cleanness of the heart was more important than other things (Matt 5:8). Thus, the teaching of the synoptic Jesus centered mainly on moral purity since the spirit can become unclean. Nevertheless, Peter still upheld the commandments of the biblical purity laws and denied eating unclean or profane food (Acts 10:14) so that he seems to have known nothing of Jesus' abrogation of food taboos. Thus, Jesus either did not preach on an ethical understanding of purity or Peter was afraid to offend Jewish Christians.

---

178 See *M. Neubrand*, *Israel, die Völker und die Kirche* (SBB 55), Stuttgart 2006, 246f.; *B. Rost*, *Das Aposteldekret im Verhältnis zur Mosestora*, in: J. Frey et al. (ed.), *Die Apostelgeschichte im Kontext antiker und frühchristlicher Historiographie* (BZNW 162), Berlin 2009, 563–604, 603f.

179 For the antithesis “faith in Christ” – “law” see also *F. E. Udoh*, *Paul's Views on the Law*, in: *NT 42* (2000) 214–237, 237.

180 The four rules for abstention formulated in the Apostolic decree might be related to the targumic version of Lev 17f. and not to the Noachitic or rabbinic laws; see *J. Wehnert*, *Die Reinheit des ‚christlichen Gottesvolkes‘ aus Juden und Heiden* (FRLANT 173), Göttingen 1997, 236–238. Similarly *F. Avemarie*, *Wurzeln* (see note 177) 8f.; *F. Avemarie*, *The Apostolic Decree and the Jewishness of Luke's Paul*, in: K.-P. Adam et al. (ed.), *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighbouring Ancient Cultures* (FAT II/54), Tübingen 2012, 373–392, 385. But see the critical remarks in *B. Rost*, *Aposteldekret* (see note 178) 570–576, who thinks that these rules are universalistic and generally binding principles that can be derived from the monotheistic biblical concept of the Creator God. For the Apostolic decree not necessarily being rooted in Lev 17f. and *Torah* see *R. Deines*, *The Apostolic Decree. Halakhah for Gentile Christians or Christian Concession to Jewish Taboos?*, in: C. Ochs (ed.), *Acts of God in History* (WUNT 317), Tübingen 2013, 121–188, 148–159.

181 See *F. Avemarie*, *Wurzeln* (see note 177) 27–29.

All in all, the biblical purity laws concerning the food taboos were overruled by an ethical understanding of purity. Therefore, all food – even meat offered to idols – was allowed to Christians unless other believers took offense from it. In that way, Christians could take part in society since they had overcome the particularistic tendencies of the Jewish dietary laws which were regarded as archaic and misanthropic by Hellenistic-Roman authors. Though Paul lived as an observant Pharisee before his vocation (Phil 3:5f.), he changed his attitude to *Torah*. It appears that his vocation and training in Syria played a role in this shift in religious practice though he never wanted to leave Judaism.<sup>182</sup> Finally, it seems that the Seleucid ideas of a reformed Judaism worked especially in the Jewish-Hellenistic setting in Syria with Gentiles being sympathetic to Jewishness, but without taking over archaic traits.

### 3 *Sabbath*

Whereas Paul was silent on Sabbath in his letters, he seems to have maintained to the Jewish rules for Sabbath.<sup>183</sup> As his usual custom was, Paul went to the synagogue on Sabbath to use the opportunity for preaching and mission for Jews and proselytes (Acts 17:2; 18:4). It is hardly surprising that the establishment of new Christian communities was related to the Sabbath since the Jewish congregation gathered on that day to read and study the Bible: Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14); Philippi (Acts 16:11); Thessalonica (Acts 17:2); Corinth (Acts 18:4). Therefore, these gatherings provide plenty of possibilities to find new believers in Christ. For that reason, it was not necessary for Paul to abrogate the Sabbath observance. Since the Sabbath was not restricted to Israel alone according to the biblical reasoning of the creation story, it could be interpreted in an universalistic way.<sup>184</sup> It is a matter of debate why the Apostolic degree of Acts 15 does not mention Sabbath observance which is mandatory for those living permanently with Jews.<sup>185</sup>

Though there is only little direct evidence, it appears that Jews of the diaspora observed Sabbath. Mainly Graeco-Roman authors mention the keeping of the Sabbath as characteristic for Jews.<sup>186</sup> Saul, the former Pharisee from Tarsus,

---

182 See K.-W. Niebuhr, Paulus im Judentum seiner Zeit, in: IKaZ 38 (2009) 108–118, 117. Paul himself never acted contrary to the *Torah* according to Acts 16–21. Moreover, he always stressed his loyal Jewishness; see F. Avemarie, Decree (see note 180) 387–389.

183 See K.-W. Niebuhr, Jesus (see note 159) 335f. Maybe Rom 14:5 might be related to Sabbath observance. Paul adopted a mediating position between those who judge one day to be better than another and others who judge all days to be alike.

184 See K.-W. Niebuhr, Jesus (see note 159) 336.

185 See F. Avemarie, Wurzeln (see note 177) 30.

186 See L. Doering, Schabbat (see note 144) 383.

most probably was a fervent Sabbath observer. In Antioch, where Paul was trained to a missionary to the Gentiles the Jews usually rested from work on the seventh day to sanctify Sabbath.<sup>187</sup> Therefore, Paul had nothing to change in his missionary concept.

According to the synoptic tradition Jesus went to the synagogue, as his custom was (Luke 4:16) and continued to worship on Sabbath. His practice of attending the synagogue each Sabbath most probably had a lasting impression on his disciples. However, Jesus rejected the strict Sabbath *halakha* of his contemporaries and reformed it to its proper place within creation since the Sabbath is made for all mankind and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). In that respect, Jesus refused to accept the Jewish casuistry. The proper sense of Sabbath was to bring rest and blessing to mankind. Jesus, the Son of Man, was even the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28) so that the man-made Sabbath *halakha* with all its restrictions should be rejected.<sup>188</sup> Likewise, the Sabbath as a special day of rest was kept by the disciples after the resurrection (Mark 16:1). Thus, there was no indication that Jesus himself tried to remove the Sabbath. Since the Sabbath was motivated with social explanations of rest and joy which could be universally understood, there was no need to get rid of this Jewish identity marker by the emerging Christian community.<sup>189</sup>

To sum up, Paul and the emerging Christian communities took over the Seleucid-Maccabean challenge and sustainably reformed the Jewish identity markers. Circumcision was good for Jews, but irrelevant for Gentile believers. The abomination of swine was no longer useful since purity has to be understood in an ethical sense. Last but not least, the Sabbath commandment was accepted because this rule was explained by creation theology and had social implications. All things considered, the requirements of the failed reform at the time of Antiochus worked about 200 years later, in a different context (Syria) and in an eschatological setting (imminent *parousia*).<sup>190</sup> Therefore, the question of how the Syrian and Seleucid context had an impact on the Jewish

---

187 Jos Bell VII 52.

188 For the Sabbath in the synoptic tradition see also *L. Doering*, Schabbat (see note 144) 398–478; *L. Doering*, „Der Sabbat ist um des Menschen willen geworden“. Beobachtungen zu Toraverständnis, Halacha und Ethik in der synoptischen Jesustradition, in: *Jahrbuch für Moralthologie* 2 (2018) 47–66.

189 See *O. Keel*, *Geschichte* (see note 19) 1209.

190 *J. Wehnert*, *Reinheit* (see note 180) 263 n. 2, thinks that the renunciation of the circumcision has provoked the Antiochean crisis at a time, when the Gentile Christians became a sizeable crowd that discomfited the Jewish Christians and when the expectation of the *parousia* diminished so that ways of a communal life have to be developed.

diaspora has still to be resolved.<sup>191</sup> It is still unclear whether Paul purposefully followed the Seleucid plan. However, the patterns are similar.

### Acknowledgement

Many thanks to Chris McKinny for improving my English.

---

191 *F. E. Udoh*, *Views* (see note 179) 228f., mentions some speculative explanations for a law-free mission: 1) a matter of practical expediency to facilitate Gentile conversion; 2) allegorization of the actual practice of the Law; 3) Gentile Christians were also God-fearers; 4) Gentiles as equal witnesses to the powerful works within the community; 5) inclusion (not conversion) of Gentiles in the eschatological time.