Royal Converts from Adiabene and Jewish Identity in the Second Temple Period*

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Summary: The aim of this paper is to contribute to the question of Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period through the perspective of the conversion of the royal dynasty from Adiabene. In this context, several conclusions are suggested. First, the main ancient account about the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty ("the Adiabene Narrative": A.J. 20:17-96) perfectly fits the model of ethnicity (D. Boyarin, S. Mason). Although the model of dual (multiple/nested) ethnicity trips over the "breaking motif" of the Adiabene Narrative, it remains a very plausible option, especially in the light of other sources that show how the Adiabenean kings continued to properly function in the Parthian kingdom. Finally, the available sources do not contain direct evidence to support the model of conversion as a purely religious process.

Keywords: Adiabene, Conversion, Jewish Identity

Introduction

In recent decades, scholarly interest in the question of Jewish identity in Hellenistic-Roman times has grown dramatically.[1] Many questions have been posed: Who was considered a Jew in ancient times? Was there one concept of "Judaism," many concepts of "Judaism," or is the term not relevant at all? Further, would an ancient descendant of Moses prefer to call himself or herself a Jew/Judean (Ioudaios, Yehudi, Yehudai), an Israelite, or a Hebrew? Did each of these different designations convey a different identity? What is there to say

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1 For an excellent overview, see D.M. Miller, "The Meaning of Ioudaios and Its Relationship to Other Group Labels in Ancient Judaism", *CRB* 9 (2010) 98-126 and D.M. Miller, "Ethnicity, Religion and the Meaning of Ioudaios in Ancient Judaism", *CRB* 12 (2014) 216-265.

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about other ethnonyms that appear in *Jewish*[2] sources such as Galilean, Idumean, and Adiabenean? Thus, were Jesus of Nazareth and Herod the Great Jews, or just a Galilean and an Idumean, respectively?

This paper may not be the place to answer all of the questions posed above. Its aim is much more modest but concrete – to test the main models explaining Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period[3] against the available data on the conversion of the royal family from Adiabene.[4]

It seems that we may tentatively distinguish four main models explaining Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period. Although the first model in fact goes back to M. Smith,[5] it is currently more associated with scholars such as S.J.D. Cohen[6] and D.R. Schwartz,[7] who greatly contributed to its spread. According to this model, the term *Ioudaios* (*Yehudi*, *Yehudai*) had a primarily ethnic-geographical meaning: being a *Ioudaios* was a matter of where a person lived or was born (or where his ancestors came from). However, the advent of

2 The term *Jewish* is used throughout the paper for convenience only. The discussion of the translation of the term *Ioudaios* is not of direct relevance to this paper.

3 See Miller, "The Meaning of Ioudaios", 98-126 and Miller, "Ethnicity", 216-265.

4 Two PhD dissertations were recently devoted to the royal converts from Adiabene – D. Barish, *Adiabene: Royal Converts to Judaism in the First Century C.E.: A Study of Sources* (Doctoral Dissertation; Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College 1983) and M. Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene. A Study on Literary Traditions and History* (Philippika 66; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2014); unfortunately, only the latter came out. See its reviews by K. Atkinson, "Review of M. Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *Biblica* 96 (2015) 635-638; D.M. Jacobson, "Review of M. Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *PEQ* 147 (2015) 169-170; E. Kettenhofen, "Rezension zu M.Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *Anabasis. Studia Classica et Orientalia* 6 (2015) 297-307; E. Lipiński, "Review of M.Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *PJBR* 14 (2015) 201-207; D.M. Downing, "Review of M. Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *JAOS* 137 (2017) 428-430; E. Nodet, "Compte-rendu de M. Marciak, Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene: A Study on Literary Traditions and History", *RB* 122-124 (2015) 634-635. For a very short overview of the history of the royal converts from Adiabene, see also M. Marciak, "Das Königreich Adiabene in hellenistisch-parthischer Zeit", *Gymnasium. Zeitschrift für Kultur der Antike und humanistische Bildung* 122 (2015) 57-74.

5 M. Smith, "The Gentiles in Judaism 125 BCE-CE 66", *The Cambridge History of Judaism. Vol. 3: The Early Roman Period* (ed. W. Horbury – W.D. Davies – J. Sturdy) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 192-249.

6 S.J.D. Cohen, "Religion, Ethnicity and 'Hellenism' in the Emergence of Jewish Identity in Maccabean Palestine", *Religion and Religious Practice in the Seleucid Kingdom* (ed. P. Bilde) (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1990) 204-223; S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Hellenistic Culture and Society 31; Berkeley: University of California Press 1999) 1-197.

7 D.R. Schwartz, *Studies in the Jewish Background of Christianity* (WUNT 60; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1992) 5-26; D.R. Schwartz, "'Judaean' Or 'Jew'? How Should We Translate Ioudaios in Josephus?", *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (ed. J. Frey – D.R. Schwartz – S. Gripentrog) (AJEC 71; Leiden: Brill 2007) 3-27.

the Hellenistic period brought about major changes to the Jewish identity; namely, the original ethnic-geographical meaning of *Ioudaios* was supplemented by a political and religious meaning. This change was due to the political conquests of the Hasmoneans, who conquered neighboring areas and incorporated their inhabitants into their own state. The newly incorporated peoples became part of the Hasmonean state, but retained their own ethnic identity. Consequently, they became *Ioudaioi* in political, but not ethnic, terms. Likewise, under the influence of the cultural phenomenon of Hellenism (when one, allegedly, could truly be Greek by virtue of education only, without any Greek blood or connection to Greece), Judaism also became available as a religion to outsiders, regardless of their political or ethnic background.

The second model arose in opposition to the first one, and can perhaps be labeled as the model of ethnicity only. Its strongest advocates are D. Boyarin[8] and S. Mason,[9] who maintain that it is anachronistic to speak about religion as a category unrelated to ethnicity and race in ancient times. The concept of religion as a system of ideas and practices independent from ethnic affiliations appears in ancient sources much later than in the first century CE, and its origin can be attributed to the influence of the unique concept of Christianity (*Christianismos*). Before that shift, the Jews were an ethnic group comparable to many other ethnic groups around the world who had their distinctive customs, laws, and traditions (including religious cults). One could therefore become a *Ioudaios* only through assimilation, or, in other words, by accepting all Jewish laws and customs.

The third model has been labeled as "dual" or "multiple" (or "nested") ethnicity. Like the second model, it also takes issue with the first model, but proposes a different solution. According to P.F. Esler,[10] one could have two or more identities (ethnicities) in ancient times, one more general and another local or limited and nested within the larger one (otherwise known as a "nested identity"). For instance, the Galileans were distinctive, but also Jewish. As far as their distinctiveness is concerned, they were a named group with specific local customs, including a local accent (see Matt 26:73). They also had their own small homeland in Galilee, distinct from Judea. At the same time, the Galileans

8 D. Boyarin, "Semantic Differences, or, 'Judaism'/'Christianity'", *The Ways that Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (ed. A.H Becker – A.Y. Reed) (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003) 65-85; D. Boyarin, "The IOUDAIOI in John and the Prehistory of 'Judaism'", *Pauline Conversations in Context: Essays in Honour of Calvin J. Roetzel* (ed. J.C. Anderson – P. Sellew – C. Setzer) (JSOTSup 221; London: Sheffield Academic Press 2002) 216-239.

9 S. Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History", *JSJ* 38 (2007) 457-512.

10 P.F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2003) 1-76, 366-377; P.F. Esler, "Identity Matters: Judean Ethnic Identity in the First Century CE", *The Bible and Interpretation 2012*.

participated in festivals in Jerusalem, and their material culture featured several elements in common with the Jews in Judea (such as the use of stone vessels, immersion in ritual baths, abstinence from pork, etc.) that were perceived by non-Jewish outsiders as being typically Jewish.

Scholars who have recently taken a stand on the views of the "classic" scholars and have contributed interesting insights to the discussion could perhaps be tentatively discussed under the label of the fourth model ("eclectic"). For instance, there is currently a tendency to understand the notion of ethnicity in a flexible and polythetic sense.[11] From this perspective, ethnicity includes not only (the myth of) common ancestry, but also several other elements such as a common proper name, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link to a homeland, and a sense of solidarity.[12] All of these elements are potentially variable, and none alone can determine ethnicity or a *sine qua non* condition for it.[13] Furthermore, it has been argued, most emphatically by S. Schwartz,[14] that although in general it is indeed anachronistic to speak about religion as a comprehensive system in ancient times, the Jews were different from other peoples in that they were famous for being distinctively religious. In other words, something like what is today called religion started to emerge slowly and subtly among the Jews of the Hellenistic-Roman period even before formal language existed to describe it.

2. Royal Converts from Adiabene in Ancient Sources

It is not without reason to choose the royal concerts from Adiabene as a study case for the notorious question of Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period. Namely, the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty has rightly been labeled as "the most fully narrated incident of conversion to Judaism in the ancient world."[15] In fact, this label goes back to Josephus' account – *Antiquitates judaicae* 20:17-96, also known as the Adiabene Narrative – where Josephus, in a kind of excursus, takes on the history of the Adiabenean royalty in a very detailed manner. This is the only account that explicitly describes the process of the conversion of royal converts from Adiabene. At the same time, the royal converts from Adiabene

11 Miller, "The Meaning of Ioudaios", 98-126 and Miller, "Ethnicity", 216-265.
12 Miller, "The Meaning of Ioudaios", 117 and Miller, "Ethnicity", 225.
13 Miller, "Ethnicity", 234.
14 S. Schwartz, "How Many Judaisms Were There? A Critique of Neusner and Smith on Definition and Mason and Boyarin on Categorization", *JAJ* 2 (2011) 208-238.
15 M. Goodman, *Who Was a Jew?* (Oxford: Yarnton Trust for Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies 1989) 11.

are also known to us from a number of other ancient sources written by both Jewish and non-Jewish authors (Josephus' A.J. 20:101 and *Bellum judaicum*; rabbinic accounts; and several non-Jewish writers including Pausanias, Eusebius, Jerome, Tacitus, and Dio Cassius), and these sources are also very useful as they show the royal converts from Adiabene in a larger historical perspective. In this study, both A.J. 20:17-96 and all of the other sources will be taken into account; however, due to its importance, A.J. 20:17-96 will be given special attention.

2.1. The Adiabene Narrative

The Adiabene Narrative (A.J. 20:17-96) is a self-contained literary unit, placed by Josephus within his narrative about the procuratorship of Fadus (A.J. 20:2-99).[16] This unit at large is organized by Josephus as a biography (ancient βίος) for Izates (the formal principle, with many biographical elements for his mother, Queen Helena, too).[17] What is more, the thematic principle behind the whole span of the Adiabene Narrative is that of God's providence (always given to humans and best manifested as divine help in troubles) and human piety (which enables humans to be receptive to providence).[18] As a result, the conversion (placed as the climax of the whole story) is presented as part of a theological idea about the interaction between human piety and God's providence.[19]

There are several places in the Adiabene Narrative where Josephus directly touches on the conversion of the royal converts of Adiabene (Queen Helena, King Izates II, and King Monobazos II) and uses very specific terminology: A.J. 20:17, 20:34-35, 20:38-48, 20:81.

A.J. 20:17 is a short introduction that subsumes the whole passage (20:17-96) under the topic of the conversion of Helena and Izates. To be precise, what we call the conversion (as a modern *etic* term) is conveyed by Josephus with the phrase εἰς τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη τὸν βίον μετέβαλον. It should be noted that the key term here is the customs of the Jews (τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη) and not, for instance, Judaism (Ἰουδαϊσμός), and that for Josephus (which will also become evident

16 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 25-40.

17 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 41-51. See, however, Kettenhofen, "Rezension", 298: "Ich würde eher von Passagen mit einer starken biographischen Tendenz sprechen, denn der Biographie eigentümliche Elemente wie charakteristische Aussprüche der Hauptperson, oder *omina mortis*, wie sie in den Biographien Plutarchs und Suetons so zahlreich zu finden sind, fehlen hier völlig."

18 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 97-116.

19 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 75-96.

from later descriptions) the conversion is a process involving the entire life of the individual (μεταβολή).[20]

In A.J. 20:35, Queen Helena's conversion is presented with only one sentence: Helena "was taught and brought over to the laws (of the Jews)" (διδαχθεῖσαν εἰς τοὺς ἐκείνων μετακεκομίσθαι νόμους).[21]

Unlike Helena's conversion, Josephus presents the conversion of Izates II in steps, and its relevant descriptions can be found in two subunits of the Adiabene Narrative – A.J. 20:34-35 and A.J. 20:38-48. In A.J. 20:34-35, we witness only the preliminary stages of Izates' interest in Jewish traditions when he resided in Charakene and before he came to the throne of Adiabene after the death of his father, Monobazos I.[22] According to A.J. 20:34-35, the wives of the king of Charakene were taught to "worship God according to the Jewish paternal traditions" (τὸν θεὸν σέβειν ὡς Ἰουδαίοις πάτριον ἦν) by a Jewish merchant, Ananias (A.J. 20:34), and these women drew Ananias to the attention of Izates II, who Ananias "similarly urged to persuade" (ὁμοίως συνανέπεισεν – A.J. 20:35). Izates' actual conversion occurred only after his move to Adiabene. We learn in A.J. 20:38 that when Izates II learned that his mother enjoyed (the practice) of Jewish customs (τοῖς Ἰουδαίων ἔθεσιν χαίρειν), he desired to "be brought over to these laws" (εἰς ἐκεῖνα μεταθέσθαι), including circumcision, as "if not circumcised, he will not be genuinely Jewish" (μὴ ἂν εἶναι βεβαίως Ἰουδαῖος εἰ μὴ περιτέμνοιτο). After a time of hesitation (because of the fear of the reaction of his subjects, see below), Izates' conversion was completed – another Jew, Eleazar, persuaded Izates II to have the circumcision performed (A.J. 20:42-46).

Not only did Queen Helena's example lead to Izates II's conversion, but Izates II's example also influenced his brother, Monobazos II. According to A.J. 20:75, Monobazos II and his relatives, seeing the prosperity that Izates achieved through his piety (εὐσέβεια), desired "to leave their paternal traditions and adopt (use) the Jewish customs" (αὐτοὶ τὰ πάτρια καταλιπόντες ἔθεσι χρῆσθαι τοῖς Ἰουδαίων).[23]

20 The verb used here is μεταβάλλω, which may be translated as "to change, to turn about" and refers to any change, both of a trivial or dramatic nature, the latter including politics (e.g., Themistocles' pro-Persian switch in Herodotus, *Hist*. 8.109) and cults (Acts 28:6: Paul turning from a murderer to a god in the eyes of the people of Melita). See H.G. Liddell – R. Scott – H.S. Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1968) 1112 and Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 78.

21 The verb employed in both A.J. 20:35 and 20:38 is μετακομίζω, which expresses the idea of movement and transport. See Liddell – Scott – Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1112.

22 In contrast to J. Neusner, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism. A New Perspective", *JBL* 83 (1964) 61 and G. Gilbert, "The Making of a Jew", *USQR* 44 (1991) 307-308, who attributed Izates II's conversion to his stay in Charakene.

23 Unlike in A.J. 20:35 (Helena's conversion) and 20:38 (Izates II's conversion), the verb used here, χράομαι, means to "to use, employ."

Josephus clearly presents the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty as the adoption and practice (the two verbs used are μετακομίζω and χράομαι) of the distinctive laws (termed ἔθη in particular, but also νόμοι and πάτρια) of the Jewish ἔθνος. This becomes even more evident if we take a look at what became labeled as the *breaking motif* of the conversion story in Josephus' A.J. 20:17-96:[24] negative reactions to the conversion among the subjects of the Adiabenean royalty. Namely, Izates is dissuaded by his mother and Ananias from the circumcision for fear of the reaction of his subjects: for them, Jewish customs (ἔθη) are foreign and strange (ἀλλότρια, ξένα: A.J. 20:39.41.81), of ill reputation (ἀπρεπής: A.J. 20:41), and simply different (ἑτέρα: A.J. 20:47). Furthermore, after his conversion, Izates is also accused of hating the customs of the population of Adiabene (μισήσαντος τὰ παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἔθη: A.J. 20:77) and destroying the paternal customs (and becoming a lover of foreign customs – καταλύσαντες μὲν τὰ πάτρια ξένων δ᾽ ἐραστὴν ἐθῶν γενόμενος: A.J. 20:81).

2.2. Other References in Josephus' Writings

Next to the Adiabene Narrative (A.J. 20:17-96), the Adiabenean royalty are also mentioned by Josephus in A.J. 20:101 and *Bellum judaicum* (B.J. 2:520, 5:55, 5:119, 5:147, 5:474, 6:356-357).

In A.J. 20:101, Josephus very briefly mentions Queen Helena's help to the inhabitants of Jerusalem during the great famine that took place in ca. 44-48 CE.[25] A.J. 20:101 is parallel in its content to A.J. 20:49-53 – both passages present Queen Helena's royal *euergetism* (the ancient practice of offering benefactions of various kinds for public benefit, especially by socially prominent and wealthy individuals). While in A.J. 20:53 Josephus explicitly tells us that in this way Helena left a most excellent memorial behind her in the entire nation, A.J. 20:101 confirms this fact indirectly by the way Josephus refers to Queen Helena's act of *euergetism* in Jerusalem – it became a fixed reference point in Jewish history, useful for dating other events (such as the tenure of one of the Roman procurators, Tiberius Alexander, in A.J. 20:101).

In turn, Josephus' references to the Adiabeni in *Bellum judaicum* are scattered and in fact made only in passing (B.J. 2:520, 5:55, 5:119, 5:147, 5:474, 6:356-357). Nevertheless, they turn out to be very useful in shedding light on the long-term consequences of the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty. They can be divided

24 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 84-85.

25 For dating, see Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 241-242 or M. Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene: Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia Between East and West* (Impact of Empire 26; Leiden – Boston: Brill 2017) 352-354.

into two groups: the first one includes references to monumental structures built in Jerusalem by the Adiabenean royalty, including three palaces and a grand mausoleum; the second is comprised of references to the Adiabeni taking part in the Jewish Uprising against Rome in 66-70 CE.

As for the monumental structures built on behalf of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem, these were three palaces located in the Lower City of David (each belonged to a distinctive group of the royal dynasty – Grapte [from the line of Izates II; B.J. 4:567], Queen Helena [B.J. 5:253 and B.J. 6:355], and Monobazos II [B.J. 5:252]) and a grand mausoleum, usually referred to as Helena's Monuments (μνημεῖα), intended as a family sepulcher of the royal dynasty. Josephus' references make clear that these structures accounted for some of the most eye-catching landmarks of Jerusalem's landscape in the first century CE (A.J. 20:95; B.J. 5:55, 5:119, 5:147). What is more, historically speaking, Hellenistic-Roman palaces played very *special* roles.[26] First, building a palace was connected with an investment of resources that provided local people with work (both during construction and in its daily use through services). Second, the palaces served the royalty as vehicles of shaping their royal image among the population. Likewise, building a grand tomb had a very special symbolism in ancient societies, too: it aimed to recall the achievements of the inferred, consequently showing their imperishable importance in the social memory.[27] Indeed, it is known that Jewish tombs, associated with heroes and ancestors, attracted visitors and pilgrims in the Second Temple Period and as such served "to reaffirm and express relationships of kingship and national identity."[28] All in all, there can be no doubt that Josephus' references to the buildings of the Adiabenean royalty in Jerusalem show the deeply legitimized presence of the royal converts from Adiabene in the Jewish traditions of the first century CE.[29]

Although attempts to find the archaeological remains of the Adiabenean palaces in Jerusalem have not been successful so far,[30] it is a different matter with the royal sepulcher of the Adiabenean royalty, which is widely identified with the structure

26 See I. Nielsen, *Hellenistic Palaces: Tradition and Renewal* (Studies in Hellenistic Civilization 5; Aarhus: Aarhus University Press 1994) 13-26.

27 S. Schwartz, "Euergetism in Josephus and the Epigraphic Culture of First-Century Jerusalem", *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (ed. H.M. Cotton) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009) 84; Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 140-141.

28 A. Kerkeslager, "Jewish Pilgrimage and Jewish Identity", *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt* (ed. D. Frankfurter) (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 134; Leiden – Boston: Brill 1998) 139.

29 Schwartz, "Euergetism in Josephus", 86 (briefly observed); Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 166 (analyzed in detail).

30 For an overview, see Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 163-168.

known today as *Le Tombeau des Rois* in Jerusalem.[31] This identification rests on general architectural, geographical, and topographical grounds. *Le Tombeau des Rois* is the most significant (in terms of size and ornamentation) sepulchral structure located north of the Old City of Jerusalem, which is where Helena's Monuments should be located, with some approximation.[32] What is more, one additional object that was found inside the structure in the nineteenth century strengthens this identification: it is sarcophagus no. 5029, which features a two-line inscription written in two different scripts, known as the Seleucid-Aramaic script (the upper line) and the Aramaic "square" (or Jewish formal) script (the lower line).[33] If, methodologically speaking, any geographical attribution of the epigraphical data is to be allowed, the paleographical character of the upper line indicates the region of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia (while the lower line points to Jewish Palestine). The nature of this finding corresponds very well with the geographically mixed heritage of the royal converts, who came from Adiabene but chose to live in Jerusalem (see A.J. 20:71 for Izates II sending his children to Jerusalem to learn the Jewish language and culture).

Josephus' references to the Adiabeni taking part in the Jewish Uprising against Rome cannot be underestimated. Although they testify only to the engagement of individuals and royal family circles,[34] they present the Adiabeni as the "most

31 For an overview, see M. Küchler, M., *Jerusalem. Ein Handbuch und Studienreiseführer zur Heiligen Stadt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2007) 985-995; A. Kloner – B. Zissu, *The Necropolis of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period* (Leuven: Peeters 2007) 231-234; Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 139-162.

32 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 139-162. The inscription refers to one person called queen: the first line reads *ṣdn mlkt'*, and the second one reads *ṣdh mlkth*. The name *ṣdn / ṣdh* is in no way equivalent to Helena (Ἑλένη and הלני); what is more, given the results of the anthropological analysis (the skeleton belonged to a young woman), there is no possibility that the person inferred in this sarcophagus could have been Queen Helena. It likely belonged to one of the female members of the courts of Izates II or Monobazos II, probably to one of their wives. See Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 161-162; R.S. Notley – J.P.García, "Queen Helena's Palace – In a Parking Lot?", *Biblical Archaeology Review* May/June (2014) 38; Lipiński, "Review", 202.

33 A. Yardeni – J. Price – H. Misgav, "Sarcophagus of Queen Ṣadan from the 'Tomb of the Kings' with Aramaic Inscription, 1 c. CE", *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae I/1* (ed. H.M. Cotton et al.) (Berlin: De Gruyter 2010) 165-167; Lipiński, "Review", 202.

34 In contrast to J. Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia. Vol. I: The Parthian Period* (Brown Judaic Studies 62; Leiden: Brill 1969) 64-66, who claimed that "auxiliary troops from Adiabene" supported the Jewish insurgents. This idea in fact goes back to at least G. Widengren, *Quelques rapports entre juifs et iraniens a l'époque des Parthes* (VTSup 4; Leiden: Brill 1957) 200-201, and sometimes still resurfaces in modern scholarship, see, e.g., M. Zehnder, "Aramäische Texte", *Quellen zur Geschichte des Partherreiches. Textsammlung mit Übere setzungen und Kommentaren. Bd. 3: Keilschriftliche Texte, Aramäische Texte, Armenische Texte, Arabische Texte, Chinesische Texte* (ed. U. Hackl – B. Jacobs – D. Weber) (NTOA 85; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2010) 270, 282. It is especially the evidence of *B.J.*. 2: 345-407 that goes against this speculation. See Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene*, 363-365.

ardent supporters of the revolution."[35] Namely, in reporting the Jewish ambush on the Roman forces under Celsius in 66 CE, Josephus mentions the names of the most distinguished in the Jewish ranks, among others, "Monobazos and Kenedaios, kinsmen of Monobazos, king of Adiabene" (B.J. 2:520). Further, in B.J. 5:474, Josephus recalls one of the most daring undertakings of the Jewish insurgents during the Roman siege of Jerusalem – an attack on the Roman siege machines. The attack was instigated by only three Jewish warriors (though, due to their success, they were followed by other fighters rushing out of the city walls in enthusiasm), one of whom was Chagiras, apparently a non-royal warrior from Adiabene. Lastly, in B.J. 6:356 Josephus confesses that among the last fighters in Jerusalem who surrendered to Titus (as late as after the capture of the Temple Mount by the Romans) were the children and relatives of Izates II (called οἱ Ἰζάτου βασιλέως υἱοὶ καὶ ἀδελφοί in B.J. 6:356 and τοῦ βασιλέως παῖδες καὶ συγγενεῖς in B.J. 6:357).

2.3. Rabbinic Sources

Queen Helena and King Munbaz are also mentioned in several rabbinic sources:[36] *m. Nazir* 3.6, *t. Sukkah* 1.1 (*BT* 2b, *PT* 1.1 [51d]), and *m. Yoma* 3.10 (*t. Kippurim* 2.3), *t. Pe'ah* 4.18 (*BT Baba Batra* 11a, *PT Pe'ah* 1.1 [15b]), *Genesis Rabbah* 46.11.[37]

35 J.J. Price, *Jerusalem under Siege. The Collapse of the Jewish State 66-70 C.E.* (Leiden: Brill 1992) 173. Likewise, W.R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus. An Inquiry into Jewish Nationalism in the Greco-Roman Period* (New York: Columbia University Press 1956) 72, n. 64.

36 The following editions and translations have been consulted: Ch. Albeck, ששה סדרי משנה (Jerusalem: Bialik 1952-58); H. Danby, *The Mishnah*, *Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1933); S. Lieberman, תוספתא כפשוטה (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1955-73); J. Neusner, *The Tosefta. Translated from the Hebrew* (New York: Ktav, 1977-78); J. Neusner, *The Talmud of the Land of Israel: A Preliminary Translation and Explanation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1982-1994); J. Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: the Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation. Vol. II: Parashiyyot thirty-four through sixty-seven on Genesis 8:15 to 28:9* (Brown Judaic Studies 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press 1985); I. Epstein, *The Babylonian Talmud. Translated into English with Notes, Glossary, Indices under the Editorship of Rabbi I. Epstein* (London: Soncino Press 1935-1952).

37 Rabbinic traditions on *Rabbi* Munbaz (t. *Šhebu'ot* 8.5 [*BT* 68b-69a]) and *the house* of Munbaz (t. *Megillah* 3[4].30 [*BT Menaḥot* 32b [44a], *PT Megillah* 4.12 [75c]], and *BT Niddah* 17a) are frequently assumed to belong to this group (for the most recent and detailed presentation, see R. Kalmin, "The Adiabenian Royal Family in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity", *Tiferet leYisrael, Jubilee Volume in Honor of Israel Francus* (ed. J. Roth – M. Schmelzer – Y. Francus) (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary 2010) 61-77, but the connection is in fact speculative and has been called into question for several reasons by Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 132, n. 22. The main link is the name Munbaz, but this name is not as rare as is perhaps frequently assumed [for its attestations, see F. Justi, *Iranisches Namenbuch*

Queen Helena appears in the background of rabbinic discussions on the validity of certain customs (*Nazir* 3.6: validity of Nazirite laws outside the Land of Israel; *t. Sukka* 1.1: height of *sukkah*), and her example of observance is usually quoted as a model to be followed or at least to be seriously considered. In turn, in describing different Temple vessels, *m. Yoma* 3.10 (*t. Kippurim* 2.3) recall their donors, including Helena and her son King Munbaz.[38] The charity of King Munbaz is also echoed in *t. Pe'ah* 4.18 (*BT Baba Batra* 11a, *PT Pe'ah* 1.1 [15b]), which is, however, a haggadic poem, full of literary devices.[39] Finally, the midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 46.11, tells the story of the circumcision of two brothers, Munbaz and Zoitos, sons of King Ptolemy. This story is obviously parallel to A.J. 20:34-48, perhaps based on common tradition or sources, but it has been convincingly shown that its rabbinic authors/redactors no longer understood it in its original context.[40] To be precise, they did not know that they were dealing with the royalty from Adiabene, but instead placed the setting at the Ptolemaic court.[41] All in all, it should be stressed that Queen Helena and King Munbaz appear only in the background of rabbinic discussions, and their history is not of independent interest to the rabbis.[42] In this sense, the value of rabbinic accounts as a repository of historical or chronological details is mostly irrelevant.[43] At the same time, rabbinic references clearly show the very deep level of integration of the royal Adiabeni into the Jewish world.[44] In particular, it should be mentioned that in no place in the rabbinic discussions are the Adiabeni

(Hildesheim: Georg Olms 1963) 189; M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature, Compiled by Marcus Jastrow; with an Index of Scriptural Quotations. Vols. 1-2* (New York: Judaica Press 1975) 744; B. Aggoula, *Inscriptions et graffites Arameens d'Assour* (Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli 43; Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale 1985) 34-35 [no. 12]; K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Inschriften aus Assur, Hatra und dem übrigen Ostmesopotamien (datiert 44 v. Chr. bis 238 n. Chr.)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1998) 13 [no. 12]; T. Ilan, *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity. Part I: Palestine 330 BCE-300 CE* (TSAJ 91; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2002) 352]. At any rate, had these accounts been acknowledged as being directly connected with the royal converts from Adiabene, no changes to the present argument would follow.

38 Helena is connected with the donation of a golden candlestick made over the door of the *hekal* and a golden tablet with the biblical verses pertaining to the *soṭah,* while Munbaz is connected with the donation of the golden handles of the vessels for the Day of Atonement (according to *m. Yoma* 3.10) or the golden handles of the knives for the same occasion (according to *t. Kippurim* 2.3).

39 L.H. Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene in Josephus and Rabbinic Sources", *Josephus, Judaism and Christianity* (ed. L.H. Feldman – G. Hata) (Leiden: Brill 1987) 2299 and 310, n. 18.

40 T. Ilan, *Mine and Yours are Hers. Retrieving Women's History from Rabbinic Literature* (AGJU 41; Leiden: Brill 1997) 280-282.

41 Schiffman, "The Conversion of the Royal House of Adiabene", 301.

42 For a detailed discussion, see Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 129-138.

43 See Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 129-138.

44 T. Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (TSAJ 76; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1999) 26; Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 138.

explicitly presented as converts; to the contrary, they "appear to be as Jewish as Rabbi Akiva."[45] In this light, it is tempting to see the Rabbinic accounts on the Adiabeni as an indication that it was not so much genealogical criteria (which the royal converts from Adiabene obviously could not fulfill), but rather pious conduct that counted for the rabbis as a sign of Jewishness.

2.4. Non-Jewish Authors

The royal converts from Adiabene also appear in non-Jewish sources, which may tentatively be divided into two groups: the first group includes references to the royal sepulcher in Jerusalem (Pausanias, *Graeciae descriptio* 8.16.4-5; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.12.3; Jerome, *Epistulae* 108), and the second comprises the Roman sources that mention Adiabene in the context of the Roman policy in the Near East in the first century CE (Tacitus *Annales* 12.10-14, 15.1-15 and Cassius Dio's *Historia Romana* 62.20.2-3, 62.23.4, 63.1.2).

In the first group, it is Pausanias whose testimony (*Graeciae descriptio* 8.16.4-5, which was a sort of ancient travel guide with interesting and miraculous stories that would catch the interest of its audience) is particularly interesting as it reveals the outlook of an outsider who visited Palestine in the second century CE and gathered local information (unlike both Eusebius and Jerome, who based their knowledge on biblical sources).[46] Namely, Pausanias mentions the grave (τάφος) of Helena, a native woman (ἐπιχώρια), in Jerusalem, which he considers to be one of the two most wonderful tombs of the ancient world (next to the Mausoleum). According to Pausanias, Helena's grave had a very special mechanism that attracted his attention: at an appointed time, the doors to the grave opened on their own (only once a year) and closed again in the same way after a short time; it was not possible to open them on any other day without using force. It is clear that Pausanias could not verify the functioning of the secret mechanism personally (as this would have involved a sort of constant guard on every day and night at the grave through at least twelve consecutive months).[47]

45 Ilan, *Integrating Women*, 26.

46 For an overview, see J.G. Frazer, *Pausanias's description of Greece, Translated [from the Greek] with a Commentary by J.G. Frazer. Vol. 1* (London: Macmillan 1913) XX-XXI, LXXVI-LXXVII; M. Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Edited with Introductions, Translations and Commentary by M. Stern. Vol. 2* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities 1980) 191-200; Ch. Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1998) 17-21; C.P. Jones, "Pausanias and his Guides", *Pausanias. Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (ed. S.E. Alcock – J.F. Cherry – J. Elsner) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001) 33-39.

47 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 142-144.

Instead, he must have relied on local tradition for the details of his report.[48] If we treat Pausanias as a transmitter of local knowledge, a highly interesting state of the development of the local tradition becomes evident – the details as to who Helena was were lost or irrelevant, but "the memory of her as a local heroine lived on, and even was enriched by folklore."[49]

Both Izates II and Monobazos II appear in Tacitus' *Annales* (Tac. *Ann*. 12.10-14, 15.1-15) and Dio's *Historia Romana* (Cass. Dio 62.20.2-3, 62.23.4, 63.1.2) in the context of the Roman-Parthian wars.

To be precise, Izates II is mentioned as a member of the coalition of the Parthian magnates, who, with Roman support, tried to establish Meherdates on the Parthian throne in place of the current Parthian king, Gotarzes (Tac. *Ann*. 12.10-14). The campaign took place in the winter of 49/50 CE and ended with a fiasco due to internal strife in Meherdates' camp (including Izates II switching sides).[50] It should be stressed that Tacitus does not show any signs of knowledge about the Jewish connections of Izates II. Tacitus' entire passage is instead deeply permeated with his highly stereotyped outlook on the Parthian world, and in Tacitus' eyes Izates II is an integral part of this world (the main feature of which is "perfidia" – *Ann*. 12.12; the Parthians are "unreliable, untrustworthy and disloyal in their commitments," and as such are not to be trusted).[51]

In turn, Monobazos II appears in ancient sources in the context of the Roman-Parthian war in 54-63 CE, frequently labeled as the "Corbulo Wars'' (Tac. *Ann*. 15.1-15; Cass. Dio 62.20.2-3, 62.23.4, 63.1.2).[52] The object of the conflict was control over Armenia. It ended with a kind of compromise: a Parthian nominee to the Armenian crown was to always be confirmed by the Roman Emperor. In this context, Monobazos II is mentioned as one of the most important political leaders of the Parthian kingdom,[53] but, again, there is not the slightest hint at

48 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 160-161.

49 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 142-144, 169.

50 For the historical context, see N.C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1938) 72-73; L. Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents: Contribution à la géographie historique de la région, du Ve s. avant l'ère chrétienne au VIe s. de cette ère* (Bibliothèque Archéologique et Historique de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie de Beyrouth LXXII; Paris: Geuthner 1962) 188; K.H. Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Völkerrechts* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner 1964) 65-66; Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene*, 358-359.

51 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 249.

52 For the historical context, see Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, 179-202; Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie*, 268-272; Ziegler, *Die Beziehungen zwischen Rom und dem Partherreich*, 67-68; Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene*, 359-361.

53 For the discussion of the nature of the Parthian kingdom, which included many lesser kings under suzerainty of the Arsacid King of Kings, see M.-L. Chaumont, "Etats vassaux dans l'empire des premiers Sassanides" *Monumentum H.S. Nyberg* (ed. J. Duchesne-Guillemin) (Acta Iranica 4; Leiden – Teheran – Liège: Édition Bibliothèque Pahlavi – Brill 1975) 89-156;

his Jewish connection. This is all the more striking if we take into account the fact that the two conflicts – the Roman-Parthian conflict over Armenia in 54-63 CE and the Jewish Uprising against Rome in 66-73 CE – have frequently been suspected by scholars to be connected on political grounds (even assuming some background cooperation between the Jews and Adiabene).[54]

In summary, the Roman authors who mentioned Izates II and Monobazos II did not connect them with the Jewish world in any way, but instead saw them as integral members of the Parthian cultural and political world.

3. Conclusions

It appears that, given the high number of available sources about the royal converts from Adiabene, several conclusions can be suggested for scholarly discussion about Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period.

First, given its language, which is full of ethnic connotations, the Adiabene Narrative (A.J. 20:17-96) fits perfectly with the model of ethnicity (D. Boyarin, S. Mason). At the same time, the long-term results of the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty, evident in both Jewish and non-Jewish sources, show that crossing the cultural boundary with very good results was definitely possible. In this context, it also follows that the notion of ethnicity cannot be reduced to race and should instead be understood in a flexible and polythetic sense (following D. Miller).

Second, the "breaking motif" of the Adiabene Narrative (that is, the radically negative reactions of the Adiabenean *ethnos* against the customs of the Jewish *ethnos*) is the main serious obstacle for the model of dual (multiple/nested) ethnicity. However, this model could be well argued for if we could get past the literal meaning of the Adiabene Narrative and turn to other sources, especially non-Jewish ones. Namely, the material culture of Adiabene has been shown to be "a typically polytheistic environment that does not make for a fertile soil for religious intolerance,"[55] and in this light, Josephus' "breaking motif" has been suspected as "only a literary topos of the resentment against foreign customs

A. de Jong, "Hatra and the Parthian Commonwealth", *Hatra: Politics, Culture and Religion between Parthia and Rome* (ed. L. Dirven) (Oriens et Occidens 21; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner 2013) 143-160; S. Hauser, "The Arsacids (Parthians)" *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran* (ed. D.T. Potts) (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013) 734-739; and Marciak, Sophene, 257-434 (especially in the context of Adiabene).

54 See Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia*, 196-197; Widengren, *Quelques rapports*, 200-201; Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, 64-66. For critique, see Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene*, 362-365.

55 For the material culture of Adiabene, see Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene*, 272-343.

that serves in the narrative to emphasize the greatness of Izates' commitment."[56] Furthermore, the Roman authors present both Izates II and Monobazos II as political leaders who were very well integrated into the Parthian kingdom (even after their conversion). This is particularly striking considering their relations with the strong Parthian king, Vologases I (ca. 51-79 CE). While, according to Josephus, Vologases attacked Izates II (under the influence of Izates II's subjects, who acted on anti-Jewish resentment; see A.J. 20:81-91), he remained in very good relations with Izates II's immediate successor, Monobazos II (although the latter was also a Jewish convert). Furthermore, tangible data on the daily life of the royal converts from Adiabene is virtually non-existent, and the only meaningful object is a two-line inscription from sarcophagus no. 5029. The nature of this two-line inscription, especially the paleographic character of the upper line (distinctive for the geographic area of Syria and Northern Mesopotamia), shows that despite a very deep integration into the Jewish world, some regional characteristics may have remained in the daily conduct of the royal converts from Adiabene. In this sense, the model of dual (multiple/nested) ethnicity is still a very plausible option for the conversion of the Adiabenean royalty.

Third, there can be no doubt that the language of the Adiabene Narrative strongly contradicts the main principle of the model of conversion as a religious process unrelated to cultural phenomena and ethnic issues. At the same time, it should be noted that S. Schwartz's observations have some merits and can even be attributed to the Adiabene Narrative. Namely, although Josephus understands the conversion as the adoption of distinctively Jewish laws and customs, he also presents Izates II's long journey to the conversion, and this is marked by the human practice of piety. To be precise, in A.J. 20:17-96 piety is also present among non-Jews, and by living a pious life Izates moves along a continuum of different stages of piety until he finally gets to know the highest stage of piety, which is the Jewish one.[57] This universalistic tone of the Adiabene Narrative is something that comes close to S. Schwartz's thesis.

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56 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 271.

57 Marciak, *Izates, Helena, and Monobazos of Adiabene*, 97-116.

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