

HELLENISTIC CIVILIZATION AND THE JEWS

ment of material, forces, although there is of course no indication that the Jews ceased to be a nation and became a religious community, as most of the theologians have thought. Ezra's religious reform itself arose from the need to strengthen the national group; and facts such as the building of the wall of Jerusalem, the dispute with the Samaritans, and the attempts to strengthen the power of the High Priests, evidence very clear political aspirations among those who had returned to Zion.

But the very political situation in which the Jews were placed to a large extent resulted in cultural concentration at the expense of political development. The small country of Judaea was surrounded on all sides by diverse peoples who shut it off from the wide world and denied it the ability to develop freely, especially from the economic viewpoint. The seacoast and the fertile belt of country near it, the Shephelah of Philistia and the Plain of Sharon, were in the possession of the Syrian cities, and all the trade of the maritime states was gathered in the same hands or in those of the Phoenicians. The latter ruled the waves through the power of their large navy, and in the Persian period enjoyed almost complete independence, controlling also the Palestinian coast, as the sources testify.³

The north of the country was in the hands of various indigenous peoples, the Jews' nearest neighbors on this side being the Samaritans, who were the offspring of intermarriage between the Israelites and other peoples settled there by Sargon of Assyria; they accepted Jewish religious laws, but did not recognize the nation's religious center at Jerusalem and had built their own temple to the God of Israel on Mount Gerizim. The disputes between the Samaritans and the Jews run like a continuous thread through Jewish history from the period of Nehemiah down to the Jewish rebellion against Rome. In Transjordan dwelt the Nabataeans, a strong Arab tribe engaged in commerce; while the south of the country was in the hands of the Idumaeans. Thus Judaea was surrounded on every side by various peoples who barred the tiny Jewish population from access to the broad world of international relations.

Palestine had known the Greeks long before Alexander the Great appeared there at the head of his host of Greeks and Macedonians. The excavations carried out during the last thirty years at various places in the country and in Transjordan have revealed that Greek influence

began to penetrate as early as the seventh century B.C.E., while in the fifth and fourth centuries it reached very wide proportions. Greek commerce embraced the whole Near East, and as the trade-routes between Greece and South Arabia (the source of the spice and incense trade) passed through southern Palestine, it is not surprising to find Greek remains even at Elat.⁴ Demosthenes evidences a settlement of Greek merchants from Athens at Acco in the middle of the fourth century,⁵ and sherds of Greek pottery, sometimes painted in the Greek style, have been found in a large number of excavations and even in localities in the Jerusalem area.⁶ Athenian coins bearing the figure of an owl were current throughout the country, and under their influence the local authorities also began to strike coins on the Athenian model.⁷ Various Greek myths were also known in Palestine, and as early as the middle of the fourth century the city of Jaffa is mentioned in Greek literature in connection with the well-known Greek legend of Perseus and Andromeda.⁸ The name of the Greeks was therefore familiar to the inhabitants of Palestine, especially to those of them who dwelt on the seacoast, but there existed as yet no reciprocal influence between the two peoples and their brief encounters led to no cultural fusion. The new period began in the summer of 332, when Alexander the Great entered Palestine on his way from Tyre to Egypt.

The Greek and Roman writers who relate the life and deeds of Alexander—Arrian, Diodorus, Plutarch and Curtius—pass over the short period which Alexander spent in Palestine in almost complete silence; they mention only his hostilities with the city of Gaza, which was under the command of a Persian general and resisted Alexander continuously for two months (Diod.XVII,48,7; Arrian II,26-7; Curt. IV, 6,7ff.). This silence reflects historical reality. Alexander did not linger in Palestine, but went down to Egypt immediately after he had taken Gaza (Arrian III,1,1). Nor on his return from Egypt did he stay long in the country, but went straight from Egypt to Tyre and thence to North Syria and to Mesopotamia.⁹ Palestine itself did not arouse his special interest; he considered one thing only as important, namely, that the country should remain under his control; and this he secured by placing Macedonian garrisons at Gaza and, perhaps, in other coastal cities. The conquest of the country itself was carried out by his commanders, probably by Parmenion, who was sent to Syria after the battle of Issus and brought Damascus under Macedonian dominion (Arrian II,11,10). No close relationship was created