

The Costobar Affair: Comparing Idumaism and Early Judaism*

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JJMJS No. 7 (2020): 93–115

Introduction

In the first centuries of the Common Era, a variety of ancient communities understood themselves as heirs to Israelite traditions. Scholars have customarily labeled one subset within this mélange as “Jews” and another subset as “Christians.” An immense academic literature addresses the processes by which these two subsets came to identify themselves over against one another: the famous “parting” or “partings” (or lack of partings) of the ways.¹ An ongoing

* This article is a revised version of the paper I presented in the Early Jewish-Christian Relations Section at the Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in November 2018. I thank Shira Lander and Eric Smith for accepting the proposal, the scholars present on that occasion for their feedback, and others who volunteered their time and talents to reading and commenting on it in years since, especially Michael K.W. Suh, Brent A. Strawn, and the anonymous referees. I also have the now-former dean of Sewanee’s School of Theology, Neil Alexander, to thank for appointing me to a rotation of New Testament and Greek instruction, without which tasks I would not have encountered some of the bibliography for this project. The article is a (belated) companion piece to my “What happened to Kemosh?” ZAW 128 (2016): 284–299.

¹ One early and influential application of this phrase, “parting of the ways,” to Judaism and Christianity comes from the third chapter title of James W. Parkes’s *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (London: Soncino Press, 1934), 71. A notable work that draws on this framing is James D.G. Dunn, *The Parting of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM/Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991). Significant critiques and counterproposals followed, including Judith Lieu, “The Parting of the Ways: Theological Construct or Historical Reality?” JSNT 17 (1995): 101–119; Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Adam H. Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (TSAJ 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003). Martin Goodman’s “Modeling the ‘Parting of the Ways,’” in *ibid.*, 119–129, is still a useful roadmap.

scholarly task is to test out new typologies or methods for envisioning these ancient post-Israelite communities in relation to one another.²

The present article approaches this task rather obliquely: from the vantage point of a community that did *not* trace its lineage back to Israelite traditions, and which in fact, judging from one account, resented the imposition of practices drawn from the Israelite heritage. I speak of the Costobar Affair, a narrative aside in Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* and a moment in the history of Idumeans.³ What light can this episode shed on the topic of early Jewish-Christian relations? This is the question the present article considers. But first it lays out the "facts of the case." The section that follows overviews the Costobar story as Josephus tells it. The next section then situates this story within the wider contexts of Idumean *history* and the Idumean *diaspora*. The article doubles back in closing to early Jewish-Christian relations — and a fresh way of configuring them: as species of Hellenistic Levantine cult.

The Facts of the Case

The Costobar Affair refers to events narrated in Book 15 of *Jewish Antiquities*.⁴ Book 15 focuses on the reign of Herod the Great from his capture of Jerusalem in

² This was the theme of the SBL session to which I presented the earlier form of this article: New Ways of Studying Jewish-Christian Relations. Some of the verbiage in this paragraph is taken from the call for papers: "Papers should propose new ways of talking about 'Jews' and 'Christians' in the context of early Jewish-Christian relations and the delayed partings of the ways...what new typologies and methodologies might be employed to better understand the matrix of groups who understand themselves as heirs to Israelite traditions?"

³ I find this title ("the Costobar Affair") first in Israel Ronen, "Formation of Jewish Nationalism Among the Idumeans," in Aryeh Kasher, *Jews, Idumeans, and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 BCE–70 CE)* (TSAJ 18; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 214–221, here 217, and more recently in Adam Kolman Marshak, "Rise of the Idumeans: Ethnicity and Politics in Herod's Judea," in *Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba: Groups, Normativity, and Rules* (JSJSup 155; Leiden: Brill, 2012), 117–130, here 125–128; also, in the same volume, Benedikt Eckhardt, "'An Idumean, That Is, a Half-Jew': Hasmoneans and Herodians between Ancestry and Merit," 91–115, here 102 n. 32.

⁴ For a recent, annotated translation, see Jan Willem van Henten, translation and commentary, *Judean Antiquities* 15, vol 7b of *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary*, ed. Steve Mason (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Quotations in the present article follow van Henten except where noted. For an overview of Idumeans in *Antiquities*, see Michal

37 BCE up until his renovation of the Jerusalem Temple in the year 20 or 19 BCE. Josephus relates a number of unsuccessful conspiracies against Herod that occurred within this time period. One such plot involves a man named Costobar. Josephus introduces this figure as “Idumean by origin” (ἤν γένει...Ἰδουμαίος) and a member of the most elite class of Idumeans; his ancestors had been priests of Koze, or Qos (*Ant* 15.253).⁵ Josephus provides a gloss for this deity name: “Idumeans think that this one is a god” (θεὸν δὲ τοῦτον Ἰδουμαῖοι νομίζουσιν). Jan Willem van Henten writes of Josephus’s construction here that it seeks to honor the first commandment of the Decalogue by locating Qos’s claim to divinity exclusively to the human intellect: “they *think* that this one is a god.” But the verb νομίζειν probably has less to do with intellect per se than with cult practice: “they honor this one (as) a god.”⁶ The tense of the verb in question is present (νομίζουσιν). This conjugation could suggest either a customary or “gnomic” Idumean belief — that is to say, “Idumeans as such think of/honor Qos as a god” — or it could indicate an ongoing and then-current practice among Idumeans: “Idumeans still go on thinking of/honoring Qos as a god.”⁷

Straightaway Josephus sets these two facts, of Costobar’s descent and the Idumean honoring of Qos, against the backdrop of Idumean history. “Hyrchanus,” he reminds, “had changed their way of life to the habits and customs [ἔθῃ καὶ νόμιμα] of the Jews” (*Ant* 15.254). Hyrchanus — also known as John Hyrchanus or Hyrchanus I — had annexed Idumea to Judea in 125 BCE. Josephus narrates this

Marciak, “Idumea and the Idumeans in Josephus’ Story of Hellenistic-Early Roman Palestine (*Ant*. XII–XX),” *Aev* 91 (2017): 171–194; cf. Alan Appelbaum, “The Idumaeans’ in Josephus’ *The Jewish War*,” *JSJ* 40 (2009): 1–22.

⁵ On the meaning of γένος, see Shaye J.D. Cohen, “*Ioudaios to genos* and Related Expressions in Josephus,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period: Essays in Memory of Morton Smith*, ed. Fausto Parente and Joseph Sievers (*Studia post-Biblica* 41; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 23–38; on Costobar, 32.

⁶ *Judean Antiquities* 15, 177 n. 1648; italics are mine. On the more holistic and ritual sense of νομίζειν, see Manuela Giordano-Zecharya, “As Socrates Shows, the Athenians Did Not Believe in Gods,” *Numen* 52 (2005): 325–355, here 330–333. I am grateful to an anonymous referee for directing me to this article.

⁷ Contrary to the translation by William Whiston, where the past perfect (“had esteemed”) suggests discontinuation: “Costobaros was an Idumean by birth, and one of principal dignity among them, and one whose ancestors had been priests of Koze, whom the Idumeans had [formerly] esteemed as a god” (*Jewish Antiquities* [Wordsworth Classics of World Literature; London: Bibliophile Books, 2006], 663).

annexation in Book 13 of *Antiquities* (13.254–258).⁸ There he tells that Hyrcanus captured two Idumean cities, Adora and Marisa, and subjugated “all Idumeans.” On pain of expulsion from their land, Hyrcanus had, Josephus says, compelled the Idumeans to undergo circumcision and to observe the laws of the Judeans. For love of their land, the Idumeans accepted these terms.⁹

So much for backdrop; Josephus’s account of Costobar continues. Herod appointed Costobar as governor of Idumea and Gaza and gave him his sister Salome in marriage. Costobar, however, responded to these favors with treachery: in about 34 BCE, he sent a message to Cleopatra, the Ptolemaic ruler of Egypt, and signaled his willingness to shift allegiance from Herod to her. Josephus attributes this maneuvering to Costobar’s personal ambition to rule the Idumean people as well as to a “sordid love of profit” (*αἰσχροκερδίας*; 15.257). But Josephus also points to another factor: Costobar “did not think it right...for the Idumeans, who had adopted the customs of the [Judeans], to be subject to them” (15.255; van Henten). Or, more literally:

οὐθ' αὐτῷ καλὸν ἡγούμενος ἄρχοντας Ἡρώδου τὸ προσταττόμενον ποιεῖν
οὔτε τοῖς Ἰδουμαίοις τὰ Ἰουδαίων μεταλαβούσιν ὑπ' ἐκείνοις εἶναι.¹⁰

⁸ See also *B.J.* 1.63. On Josephus’s depiction of Hyrcanus, see Clemens Thoma, “John Hyrcanus I as Seen by Josephus and Other Early Jewish Sources,” in *Josephus and the History of the Greco-Roman Period*, 127–140; on *Ant* 13.251–259, see 132–133.

⁹ The compulsoriness of the Idumeans’ assumption of Judean practices has come under scrutiny; see n. 31. The exact content of the Judean practices they adopted has also been variously developed. A lexicon dating perhaps to the second century CE and attributed to Ammonius, Ptolemy the Historian, or Hennius says that the Idumeans, who used to be Phoenicians and Syrians, “having been subjugated by the Judeans and having been forced to undergo circumcision, so as to be counted among the Judean nation [συντελεῖν εἰς τὸ ἔθνος] and keep the same customs [τὰ αὐτὰ νόμιμα ἡγεῖσθαι], they were called Judeans” (Greek is from Klaus Nickau, *Ammonii, qui dicitur liber De adfinium vocabulorum differentia* [Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana; Lipsiae: Teubner, 1966], 63–4; English translation is from Michał Marciak, “Hellenistic-Roman Idumea in the Light of Greek and Latin Non-Jewish Authors,” *Klio* 100 [2018]: 877–910, here 888). An earlier translation of this passage by Steve Mason gives these customs greater definition: “having been forced to undergo circumcision and to pay taxes into the *ethnos*, and to follow the same laws/customs, they were called Judeans” (*A History of the Jewish War, A.D. 66–74* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016], 238). But Marciak rightly criticizes this rendering of *συντελεῖν* (“Hellenistic-Roman Idumea,” 888 n. 84).

¹⁰ Van Henten notes that this phrase, *μεταλαμβάνω τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνη*, “adopt the customs of the Jews,” occurs in *Ant* 20.139 (*Judean Antiquities* 15, 179 n. 1662).

It did not seem proper to him (Costobar) to do what was commanded by ruler Herod, nor did it (seem proper to him), after the Idumeans had adopted the (customs) of the Judeans, to be under them.¹¹

This important claim can be read in two ways. First, since the Idumeans had already adopted Judean customs back in Hyrcanus's day, they had more than fulfilled their obligations to Judeans, and Costobar therefore viewed it as unjust for Judeans to demand yet more subjection from their southern neighbors.¹² On this interpretation, Idumean compliance with Judean customs is a given, and Costobar's concern is solely with the exercise of Idumean political sovereignty: the antecedent of "them" in the phrase "under them" (ὕπ' ἐκεῖνοις) is Judeans. But it is also possible to read Josephus as claiming that Costobar objected not just to Judean political domination of Idumeans but also to the Idumeans' prior assumption of Judean customs. On this second interpretation, Costobar wished to undo and even to reverse the encroachment of Judean practices: the antecedent of "them" in "under them" refers back, not to Judeans but to τὰ Ἰουδαίων, "those things of the Judeans," a shorthand recalling the more fulsome τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα from the preceding sentence — "the habits and customs of the Judeans" (15.254). This second option is the more common scholarly reading, because, in addition to the syntactic echoing, it seems to do more justice to Josephus's introduction of Costobar in the context of his priestly family and of Idumean honoring of the god named Qos.¹³ These are, for Josephus, relevant backstory to Costobar's actions, as is the change to Judean observances that Hyrcanus

¹¹ I thank one of the anonymous referees for their good suggestions about this translation, including to note that μεταλαβοῦσιν should be taken as a circumstantial participle indicating the timing of adopting the customs (either "when" or "after"); hence van Henten's rendering with a subordinate clause: "Idumeans, who had adopted." The nearest antecedent of ἐκεῖνοις is the Judeans, although the grammatical gender and number would also match τὰ, presumably short for τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθη καὶ νόμιμα from 15.254.

¹² *Judean Antiquities* 15, 179 n. 1663.

¹³ Ven Henten enumerates both interpretive possibilities, though not so exactly as here, but in the end he, too, favors the second for contextual reasons (*Judean Antiquities* 15, 179 n. 1663). Other translations build this interpretation even more directly into their rendering of the line, e.g. Whiston: "did not think it fit...that Idumeans should make use of the Jewish customs, or be subject to them"; Patrick Rogers's online translation, based on Thackeray's Greek text: "[Costobar] refused to...have the Idumaeans subjected to Jewish ways" (www.biblical.ie/); so also, *inter alia*, Ronen, "Formation of Jewish Nationalism," 214; Marshak, "Rise of the Idumeans," 125; and Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 112.

leveraged on Idumeans about 88 years beforehand. In the words of Shaye Cohen, “‘Idumaism’ was not yet dead...and Costobar was hoping that it would flourish yet again in Idumea.”¹⁴

The Wider Contexts

Thus the “facts of the case”: the Costobar Affair in Josephus’s telling. His story about Costobar goes on and eventually ends with Costobar’s execution on account of another conspiracy against Herod (*Ant* 15.266). But for the present article’s purpose, addressing the phenomenon of “Idumaism” to early Judaism and Christianity in their interrelationships, these data are already striking. Their importance can be seen when they are viewed within two wider contexts.

The first context is *longitudinal*: seen within the long arc of history, traditional Idumean cult practice shows remarkable durability. When Costobar moved to betray Herod in 34 BCE, an independent Idumean (or rather Edomite) kingdom had not existed for over half a millennium.¹⁵ Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, destroyed the Edomite kingdom during his western campaign in the years 553 through 551 BCE.¹⁶ Until that time, the god named Qos — the same about whom Josephus writes that “Idumeans think of/honor this one as a god” — had been the patron deity of Edom, or at least of its royal

¹⁴ Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 112.

¹⁵ On the relationship between Edomites and Idumeans, see Yigal Levin, “The Formation of Idumean Identity,” *Aram* 27 (2015): 187–202; also André Lemaire, “D’Édom à l’Idumée et à Rome,” in *Des Sumériens aux Romains d’Orient: La perception géographique du monde, espaces et territoires au Proche-Orient ancien*, ed. Arnaud Sérandour (*Antiquités sémitiques* 2; Paris: Jean Maisonneuve, 1997), 83–109; cf. John R. Bartlett, “Edomites and Idumaeans,” *PEQ* 131 (1999): 102–114.

¹⁶ John Lindsay (“The Babylonian Kings and Edom, 605–550 B.C.,” *PEQ* 108 [1976]: 23–29) and John R. Bartlett (“Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C.,” *PEQ* 114 [1982]: 13–24; *idem*, *Edom and the Edomites* [JSOTSup 77; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989], 147–161) first articulated this view in the 1970s and 80s. It is mainly based on fragmentary lines in the Nabonidus Chronicle as well as *ex eventu* biblical prophecies of Edom’s downfall (Isa 34; Jer 49; Lam 4:21–22; Joel 4:19; Ezek 25, 35; Obad; on the biblical data, see Bartlett, *ibid.*, 145–157; Bert Dicou, *Edom, Israel’s Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story* [JSOTSup 169; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994]). Nabonidus’s responsibility for ending Edomite sovereignty has also received recent reinforcement from the discovery and publication of a rock relief discovered at as-Sila’, on which, see Bradley L. Crowell, “Nabonidus, as-Sila’, and the Beginning of the End of Edom,” *BASOR* 348 (2007): 75–88.

administration.¹⁷ Theophoric names of Edomite kings invoke Qos for support: the Assyrian king Tiglath-Pileser III received tribute from an Edomite vassal king named *Qaus-malaku*, which translates to “Qos is king,” “Qos reigns,” or even “may Qos reign.”¹⁸ The Assyrian kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal later exacted tribute from an Edomite king named *Qaus-gabri*, meaning “Qos is powerful,” or “may Qos act powerfully.”¹⁹ Or again, an eighth-century ostrakon recovered from Ḥorvat ‘Uzza preserves a letter from one Edomite official to another, blessing the recipient by the deity Qos.²⁰ In the minds of these persons connected with the Edomite royal administration, the god Qos was the powerful divine protector and benefactor of the kingship and the realm.

Theophoric names calling on Qos persist into the Persian Period after the Edomite kingdom was no more.²¹ By the nature of the case, these names belong to non-royal individuals. But the continuance of Qos names into Edom’s post-state era is a theological achievement in its own right.²² Devotion to Qos *lasted*. Perhaps the circles where this devotion endured had already viewed Qos without reference to the monarchy, such that its downfall was no great loss for them. On the other hand, some Edomites had to adjust their theology to detach Qos from his role of supporting the kingship. What the Costobar Affair brings back into focus is the tenacity of exactly this connection: of the god Qos with the reign of a native sovereign. Josephus provides a self-serving motive for Costobar’s intention to rule over Idumea (“sordid love of profit”). But it is also possible to read Costobar’s actions as religiously motivated. Out of devotion to his ancestral

¹⁷ On the religion of Edom, see Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 187–207; Andrew J. Dearman, “Edomite Religion: A Survey and an Examination of Some Recent Contributions,” in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition* (ABS 3; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 119–136. On the deity Qos, see Th. C. Vriezen, “The Edomite Deity Qaus,” *OtSt* 14 (1965): 330–353; Ernst Axel Knauf, “Qaus,” *UF* 16 (1984): 93–95; idem, “Qôs,” *DDD*², 674–677.

¹⁸ Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 204–207. On *Qaus-malaku*, see Jaume Llop-Raduà’s entry in *The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire*, ed. Simo Parpola, 3 vols. (Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2002), 3.1 (P – Š), 1011.

¹⁹ Llop-Raduà, “Qauš-gabri” in *ibid*.

²⁰ Itzhaq Beit-Arieh and Bruce Gesson, “An Edomite Ostrakon from Horvat ‘Uza,” *TA* 12 (1985): 96–101.

²¹ Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 163–174; also 207; and André Lemaire, “Les religions du Sud de la Palestine au IVE s. av. J.-C. d’après les ostraca araméens d’Idumée,” *CRAIBL* 145 (2001): 1141–1158.

²² Compare the persistence of Chemosh-names after the downfall of Moab; see Cornell, “What happened to Kemosh?”

cult, and out of belief that the worship of Qos ideally belongs together with Idumean oversight of their own country, Costobar sought to rule.²³

There is no evidence that Idumeans or their Edomite forebears anointed their royalty, and so the word *messianic* does not, strictly speaking, apply to the Costobar Affair. But the same theological reflexes known from Judean traditions — of divine detachability from human kingship and yet also the hoped-for restoration of a native ruler — could be recognizable here.²⁴ That is: for some, though certainly not all, Judean traditions, the suspension of David’s kingship provoked a theological crisis. Consider, for example, the rhetoric of Psalm 89. The first thirty-seven verses rehearse at length YHWH’s *ḥasdê ḥāri’šōnīm*, “solicitous deeds from of old” (v. 49[50]), which consist in establishing the cosmos and the Davidic dynasty at its heart.²⁵ But then the psalm turns and accuses the Judean god (vv. 38–39[39–40]):

But you—you have cast off and rejected / you have grown
furious with your anointed.

You have voided the covenant of your servant / you profaned
his diadem to the ground.

The sense of shock and indignation are acute. No alternative, kingless future is imagined; the psalm asks only how long YHWH will permit this intolerable situation to persist (v. 46[47]). Even if the psalm represents a belated theological reflection and not, say, a prayer written rawly from the crisis, its placement at the perigee of the canonical Psalter gives it an outsize, even paradigmatic,

²³ Kings and rulers honored and loved their individual patron gods, sometimes in ways that were politically inexpedient, e.g., Nabonidus’s devotion to the moon-god Sin. Cf. the kings Hazael and Zakkur (Collin Cornell, *Divine Aggression in Psalms and Inscriptions: Vengeful Gods and Loyal Kings* [SOTS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020], 38–92, esp. 92). This is the sense of the descriptor “religiously motivated.”

²⁴ Matthew V. Novenson has rightly emphasized messianism as a language game, for which lemmata communicating “anointing” supply a basic ingredient (*The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and its Users* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017]). That said, the political dimension of a once-again native ruler — what Hugo Gressmann called “political messianism” — remains primordial, even in Novenson’s account. Compare Matthew Neujahr’s treatment in “Royal Ideology and Utopian Futures in the Akkadian *ex eventu* Prophecies,” in *Utopia and Dystopia in Prophetic Literature*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi (PFES 92; Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society; University of Helsinki, 2006), 41–54, here 49–54.

²⁵ Richard J. Clifford, “Psalm 89: A Lament Over the Davidic Ruler’s Continued Failure,” *HTR* 73 (1980): 35–47, here 36. The translations from Hebrew are mine.

prominence. Psalm 89 articulates the challenge of a fallen kingship; the rest of the Psalter, in its received form, yields a sustained response. Its Books 4 and 5 celebrate the kingship of YHWH. They do not leave hope for a restored Davidic dynasty behind, but they re-center on the worship of the Judean god. They rescale and relativize — i.e., detach somewhat from — a human sovereign, even as they keep it in view (e.g., Pss 110, 132).²⁶ Other books within the Judean scriptures attest to a broadly similar perspective: YHWH is king, and his royal human deputy, though gone, is not forgotten.²⁷

The continued worship of the god Qos, shown in theophoric names, speaks to a parallel theological conviction and during a similarly postmonarchic era: even apart from a human king, Qos is worthy of celebration as divine king. At least seven Aramaic ostraca discovered in Idumea and dating to the fourth century BCE feature names that extol Qos for just this aspect: *qwsmk* means “Qws is king.”²⁸ Greek transliterations of the same name (*κοσμάλακος*) appear in Memphis in the first century BCE.²⁹ At the same time, the Costobar Affair suggests that the worshippers of Qos did not lose sight of the rightful rule of a native dynast. Costobar’s own name is probably a Greek misspelling of the very same name as

²⁶ Gerald H. Wilson, “The Use of Royal Psalms at the ‘Seams’ of the Hebrew Psalter,” *JSOT* 35 (1986): 85–94; idem, “King, Messiah, and the Reign of God: Revisiting the Royal Psalms and the Shape of the Psalter,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (VTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 391–406; also Robert E. Wallace, “Gerald Wilson and the Characterization of David in Book 5 of the Psalter,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Book of Psalms: The Current State of Scholarship*, ed. Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford, (AIL 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 193–207, here 204–205.

²⁷ E.g., Isaiah; see Christopher R. Seitz, “Royal Promises in the Canonical Books of Isaiah and the Psalms,” in *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 155–172; or Chronicles, on which, Matthew J. Lynch, “Differentiating Human and Divine Rule,” in *Monotheism and Institutions in the Book of Chronicles: Temple, Priesthood, and Kingship in Post-Exilic Perspective* (FAT 2.64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 253–256.

²⁸ Nos. 77, 89, 108, 153, 180, 197, 198 in Israel Eph‘al and Joseph Naveh, *Aramaic Ostraca of the Fourth Century BC from Idumaea* (Jerusalem: Magnes; Hebrew University: Israel Exploration Society, 1996).

²⁹ J.G. Milne, *Greek Inscriptions* (Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire; Oxford: Hart, 1905), 35–47 (no. 9283); Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 207 (no. 55). See below for more on Idumeans in Memphis.

the Edomite king from over five centuries before: *Qos-tabar* representing *Qos-gabar*, “Qos is powerful,” or “may Qos exercise power.”³⁰

Another important moment for understanding the *longitudinal* context of the Costobar Affair occurred in 125 BCE. As Josephus describes, John Hyrcanus annexed Idumea in that year, and Idumeans adopted Judean customs. Historians debate the accuracy of Josephus’s account.³¹ What is interesting for the present article is the impact of Hyrcanus’s action on Judean self-definition. Although the Hasmoneans resisted Hellenization in certain regards, Morton Smith and Shaye Cohen argue that the idea of integrating Idumeans into a Judean League depended on a Hellenistic concept of citizenship and way of life.³² Cohen writes: “the Hasmonean period witnesses for the first time in the history of Judaism the establishment of processes by which outsiders become insiders, non-Judaeans can become Judaeans, and non-Jews can become Jews...the key to the

³⁰ Lemaire, “D’Édom à l’Idumée,” 99 n. 136; David Flusser, “Paganism in Palestine,” in *The Jewish People in the First Century*, ed. Shemuel Safrai and M. Stern (CRINT 1.2 Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 1065–1100, here 1074–1075.

³¹ See especially the overview in Eckhardt, “An Idumean, That Is, a Half-Jew,” 101–103 n. 32. Aryeh Kasher, among others, prefers Strabo’s (noncoercive) account of the Idumeans’ incorporation into the Judean state to Josephus’s (*Jews, Idumeans, and Ancient Arabs*, 44–86). But cf. Shaye Cohen’s careful negotiation of the ancient sources in *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 109–139; Steven Weitzman, “Forced Circumcision and the Shifting Role of Gentiles in Hasmonean Ideology,” *HTR* 92 (1999): 37–59; Honora Howell Chapman, “Paul, Josephus, and the Judean Nationalistic and Imperialistic Policy of Forced Circumcision,” *Ilu* 11 (2006): 131–155, here 134–143; also Uriel Rappaport, “The Conversion of the Idumaeans under John Hyrcanus,” in *Israel’s Land: Papers Presented to Israel Shatzman on his Jubilee*, ed. Joseph Geiger, Hannah M. Cotton, Guy D. Stiebel (Ra’anana: The Open University of Israel and the Israel Exploration Society, 2009), 59–74 [Hebrew with English abstract].

³² Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 125–129, 135–139; Morton S. Smith, “The Gentiles in Judaism 125 BCE – AD 66,” in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, Volume 1: *Studies in Historical Method, Ancient Israel, Ancient Judaism*, ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen (Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 130.1; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 263–319, here 319; also idem, “Rome and Maccabean Conversions: Notes on 1 Maccabees 8,” in *Donum Gentilicium: New Testament Studies in Honor of David Daube*, ed. Ernst Bammel, C.K Barrett, and W.D. Davies (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 1–7. For a reading of Hyrcanus’s annexation in terms of compensating for ebbing human capital, see Weitzman, “Forced Circumcision,” 51–58, expanding on the earlier treatment by Bezalel Bar-Kochva, “Manpower, Economics and Internal Strife in the Hasmonean State,” in *Armées et fiscalité dans le monde antique*, ed. Henri van Effenterre (Paris: Editions du Centre Nationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 1977), 167–194.

new idea of change of citizenship...is the Greek concept of *politeia*.”³³ In other words, to incorporate the Idumeans, Hyrcanus and his regime operated by a definition of peoplehood that they borrowed from Hellenistic statecraft: just as non-Greeks could adopt a Greek citizenship and “way of life,” so also could Idumeans and other peoples adopt a Judean citizenship and way of life.³⁴ In a real way, then, the annexation of Idumea moved Judean-ness from being an *ethnos*, a people plain and simple, defined primarily by shared descent, toward being what Cohen calls an “ethno-religion”: a matter of observance and not solely of birth and region. Smith writes that “Hyrcanus’s innovation...radically altered the make up [sic] of Jewry and the meaning of the word *Ioudaios*.”³⁵

This proposal by Smith and Cohen, that absorbing Idumeans into the Judean commonwealth occasioned a watershed moment in the self-concept of Judeans, has attracted criticism — especially insofar as it draws on the nomenclature of “religion.” Steve Mason specifically denies that any basic change or expansion of Judean-ness occurred in the Hasmonean period: “*Ioudaioi* were understood until late antiquity as an ethnic group comparable to other ethnic groups”³⁶ — as an *ethnos* plain and simple, that is: an extended family, anchored to a particular land, practicing the cult of their particular god.³⁷ Matthew Thiessen carries this thesis yet further by arguing that, for the book of *Jubilees* as for other roughly contemporary sources, including the apostle Paul, transferring from one

³³ Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 136.

³⁴ Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 136. Cohen glosses *politeia*: “[it] means, among other things, both ‘citizenship’ and ‘public way of life’” (ibid.).

³⁵ Smith “Gentiles,” 319. It should not be thought that “*ethnos* plain and simple” implies that ancient peoples were simply-mindedly nationalistic or devoid of love and affect for their gods (see Brent A. Strawn, “What Would (or Should) Old Testament Theology Look Like If Recent Reconstructions of Israelite Religion Were True?” in *Between Israelite Religion and Old Testament Theology: Essays on Archaeology, History, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Robert D. Miller II [CBET 80; Leuven: Peeters, 2016], 129–166), just that they defined their boundaries familiarly and territorially.

³⁶ Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512, here 457. Brent Nongbri’s influential book lifts up the Maccabean revolt as one of four moments to which scholars mistakenly attribute the emergence of “religion” (*Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013], 46–50).

³⁷ For more on ancient conceptions of *ethnos*, see Paula Fredriksen, “How Jewish Is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul’s Theology,” *JBL* 137 (2018): 193–212.

ethnos to another was an impossibility.³⁸ For them, the Judean “seed” (Ezra 9:2) was impermeable.³⁹ Taking up Judean customs such as circumcision no sooner made a gentile man Judean than wearing long hair made a man into a woman — though both practices were, and for parallel reasons, *verboden* by Paul (cf. 1 Cor 11:14).

But if this fixed and exclusionary outlook was maintained by some Judeans, it most certainly was not and could not be by Hyrcanus and his adjutants. For them, Idumeans could, through circumcision, cult, and custom, *become* Judeans. No recourse to anachronistic notions of “religion” is necessary to accommodate this fact; in Daniel Schwartz’s rejoinder to Mason, for example, “religion” serves as shorthand for those activities — “circumcision, Sabbath observance, and *kashrut*” — which, unlike birth or place, can be altered and self-undertaken.⁴⁰ This distinction, or perhaps better, this parting of ways (!), between a received ethnic identity and an identity achieved through pursuit of specific activities, was an innovation. Thiessen, among others, upholds the novelty of the porous *politeia*-thinking about Judean identity that Smith and Cohen ascribe to Hyrcanus’s conquest.⁴¹

How then did Hyrcanus’s annexation also impact the self-concept of Idumeans? Perhaps not much can be said on this point, given the limitations of the sources. But it is interesting — and telling — that Josephus describes

³⁸ Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); idem, *Paul and the Gentile Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁹ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 67–69; idem, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 23–24.

⁴⁰ Daniel R. Schwartz, “Appendix: May We Speak of ‘Religion’ and ‘Judaism’ in the Second Temple Period?” in *Judeans and Jews: Four Faces of Dichotomy in Ancient Jewish History*, (The Kenneth Michael Tanenbaum Series in Jewish Studies; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 91–112, here 112.

⁴¹ Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion*, 68–69; Thiessen also speculates that Hyrcanus might have had a biblical and a genealogical rationale for admitting Idumeans to the Judean nation (ibid., 88–89). See also Chapman, “Forced Circumcision,” 143, and John Collins, who writes that “Cohen is right that Judaism from the Maccabean [Hasmonean] period on was an ethno-religion,” though Collins argues that “it was possible to become ‘Jewish’ or ‘Judean’ in virtue of [law] observance, regardless of birth or genealogy” from the Persian period onward (*The Invention of Judaism: Torah and Jewish Identity from Deuteronomy to Paul* [Oakland: University of California Press, 2017], 18–19). Marciak also shows the impact of Cohen: “under the influence of the cultural phenomenon of Hellenism, Judaism became available as a religion to outsiders, regardless of their political or ethnic background” (“Idumea and the Idumeans,” 180).

Costobar's seditious intention with just this vocabulary: Hyrcanus "had changed their way of life" — their *politeia* — "to the habits and customs of the Jews" (τὴν πολιτείαν αὐτῶν εἰς τὰ Ἰουδαίων ἔθνη καὶ νόμιμα). But Costobar did not think it right for the Idumeans to be "under them" — to abide by their Judean practices (*Ant* 15.255). By implication, and a relatively clear implication at that, Costobar *did* think it good and right for Idumeans to follow their own customs. As van Henten writes: "[Costobar] wanted to remain faithful to Idumean practices."⁴²

It would seem, based on this narration, that Costobar's vision of being Idumean mirrored that of post-Hyrcanian early Judaism. Theirs was an identity maintained, ideally anyway, through observance of Idumean cult and custom, and not given only through birth and place. Costobar had both of the latter, after all: he was "Idumean by origin" and governor over the traditional Idumean home territory (*Ant* 15.253). But these would not suffice. Just as belonging to the Judean people had since Hyrcanus taken on a voluntary and nonhereditary dimension, so apparently, too, had belonging to the Idumean people: Idumeans who "acted Judeanly" in Hyrcanus's day had thereby been made Judean. Conversely, in Costobar's day and in his opinion, Idumean-descended Judeans needed to "act Idumeanly" to recover or reclaim their Idumean identity. Idumean-ness was no longer an *ethnos* plain and simple, but included a set of activities that one might willingly undertake (or not). It approximated an "ethno-religion." In a word, Costobar imagined "Idumaism." To be sure, this reasoning is inferential, reverse engineered from the discontent that Josephus attributes to Costobar over Idumean subjection to Judean customs. And it is possible, too, that this framing is entirely Josephus's, and it is *his* conception of "ethno-religion" that intrudes, opposing one set of "habits and customs" (Judean ones) with, implicitly, another set (Idumean). But a second consideration makes that scenario less likely.

I move here from the *longitudinal* context of the Costobar Affair to the *latitudinal*: from the arc of Idumean history to the reality of Idumean diaspora at about the same time as Costobar. As with Judeans living in other lands after the downfall of their native kingship, Idumeans, too, made a long-term life outside of their homeland in the Levant. We know of Idumean settlements in Babylonia⁴³ and also in Egypt.⁴⁴ It is unknown for how long Idumeans resided in Egypt: some scholars suppose that Idumeans relocated to Egypt at the time of Hyrcanus's

⁴² Van Henten, *Judean Antiquities* 15, 179 n. 1663. See n. 32.

⁴³ Bartlett cites two names written on a cuneiform document from Nippur (*Edom and the Edomites*, 204).

⁴⁴ Dorothy J. Thompson, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 99–103.

conquest.⁴⁵ Others note that Ptolemy Soter brought 100,000 prisoners of war from his conquests of the Levant, which may well have included Idumeans (Let. Aris., 12–13).⁴⁶

Regardless the time of their arrival, two inscriptions and several papyri attest the presence of an Idumean community living in Memphis, Egypt, during the second century BCE. These documents suggest several facts about Idumean cult practice. One papyrus (*BGU* 6.1216.10) from very late in the second century refers to a “temple of Qos” (ἱεροῦ Κώτος) within the city.⁴⁷ A limestone stele, probably from the early first century, records the dedication of a sanctuary and lists the names of its founders (*SB* 681).⁴⁸ Many of these founders bear theophoric names invoking the Idumean god named Qos; many others are Greek or Macedonian, with a special density of Apollo-names. But the inscription mentions only two god-names directly: Apollo and Zeus. These data make it probable that these expatriate Idumeans, resident in Hellenistic Egypt, were equating their native deity Qos with Greek Apollo.⁴⁹

For the purpose of the present article, the most relevant inscription is an honorific decree or *psephisma* dating to the year 112/111 BCE (*OGIS* 2.737).⁵⁰ This text enacts the will of an interesting group: a gathering — a *synagogue* — of Idumeans; more exactly, a gathering or synagogue of the corporate body — *politeuma* — of Idumeans in the upper temple of Apollo. Once more, the equation of the Idumean god Qos with Greek Apollo is apparent. The group refers to itself with two organizational concepts: *synagogue* and *politeuma*.

⁴⁵ Uriel Rappaport, “Les Iduméens en Égypte,” *RevPhil* 43 (1969): 73–82, here 75–77.

⁴⁶ Sylvie Honigman, “*Politeumata* and Ethnicity in Ptolemaic Egypt,” *AncSoc* 33 (2003): 61–102, here 66, also n. 22.

⁴⁷ http://berlpap.smb.museum/record/?result=9&Publikation=%22BGU+VI+%22&order=Nr_mit_Zusatz-ASC&columns=pubnr&lang=en

⁴⁸ Milne, *Greek Inscriptions*, 35–47 (no. 9283); for further bibliography, Thompson, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*, 100 n. 95.

⁴⁹ See Océane Henri, “Un exemple de l’*interpretatio graeca*: l’évolution du culte d’Apollon en Égypte ptolémaïque et romaine,” in *Actes du 26e Congrès international de papyrologie (Genève, 16–21 août 2010)*, ed. Paul Schubert (Recherches et rencontres 30; Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2012), 339–347; note also the intriguing equation of Qos with Zeus according to A. Kohut, “Zeus in Mishnah, Talmud and Midrash,” *JQR* 3 (1891): 552–554, here 554; also Javier Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton Legacy Library; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016 [orig. 1977]), here 90–91.

⁵⁰ See Gilles Gorre, *Les relations du clergé égyptien et des Lagides d’après les sources privées*, (*Studia Hellenistica* 45; Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 263–269 (no. 54).

Both terms describe Judean communities during the same time period. Occurrences of the word *synagogue* are well-known and widely distributed.⁵¹ Documents from Herakleopolis indicate that Jews participated there in a *politeuma*, and the *Letter of Aristeas* says that Jews in Alexandria did also.⁵² Sylvie Honigman has argued that this concept is military in origin, and the example of the honorific decree reinforces that: the Idumean *politeuma* honors the man named Dorion, and two of Dorion's titles are military.⁵³ He is a "commander" (στρατηγός) and a priest of the "saber-bearers" (ιερεὺς τοῦ πλῆθους τῶν μαχαιροφόρων), an elite infantry troop to which Idumeans evidently belonged.⁵⁴ It was in his capacities as commander and chaplain to this troop that Dorion paid for renovations to the Apollo temple, specifically its replastering and whitening. The Idumeans, both of the military unit as well as of the city more generally, call for Dorion's name to be incorporated into their sacrificial ritual as well as their hymns.

Dorion himself is known from hieroglyphic blocks within the Memphite necropolis.⁵⁵ These funerary texts show that Dorion was a priest of the Egyptian

⁵¹ See Anders Runesson, Donald D. Binder, and Birgir Olsson, *The Ancient Synagogue from its Origins to 200 C.E.: A Source Book* (AJEC 72; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁵² On the Herakleopolis archive, see James M.S. Cowey and Klaus Maresch, *Urkunden des Politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis (144/3–133/2 v. Chr.) (P. Polit. Iud.): Papyri aus den Sammlungen von Heidelberg, Köln, München und Wien* (Papyrologica Coloniensia 29; Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2001). Sylvie Honigman considers the latter data together with Letter of Aristeas 310 in "Politeumata and Ethnicity"; see also Thomas Kruse, "Das politeuma der Juden von Herakleopolis in Ägypten," in *Die Septuaginta: Texte, Kontexte, Lebenswelten*, ed. Martin Karrer und Wolfgang Kraus (WUNT 219; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 166–175.

⁵³ For an overview of Honigman's hypothesis and Rob Kugler's counterarguments, see Collins, *Invention of Judaism*, 134–158, here 144–158; also Stewart Moore, *Jewish Ethnic Identity and Relations in Hellenistic Egypt* (JSJSup 171; Leiden: Brill, 2015), 76–96.

⁵⁴ Dorothy J. Thompson Crawford, "The Idumeans of Memphis and the Ptolemaic *Politeumata*," in *Atti del XVII Congresso internazionale di papirologia*, 3 vols. (Naples: Centro Internazionale per lo Studio dei Papiri Ercolanesi, 1984), 3:1069–1075; on Dorion, see 1070–1071; also Gorre, *Les relations du clerge egyptien*, 264. On foreign mercenaries in Egypt, see Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, "Preserving the Cult of Yhwh in Judean Garrisons: Continuity from Pharaonic to Ptolemaic Times," in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, ed. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman and Eibert Tigchelaar, 2 vols. (JSJSup 175; Leiden: Brill, 2017), 1:375–408.

⁵⁵ Cairo 22179 and 22137 = Vernus, *Athribis* (Cairo, 1978), 214–218, nos. 177–178; cited in Crawford, "Idumeans," 1070 n. 7; also Thompson, *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*, 102 n. 109.

god Horus. He was not, then, Idumean by descent. The honorific inscription cites Dorion's being "piously disposed (*εὐσεβῶς*) towards the deity" — the deity Apollo, but who was also and at the same time the deity the Idumeans had brought with them from their home country: Qos. Dorion himself may have seen an overlap in his duties to the god Horus and his chaplaincy to the Apollo temple; Christelle Fischer-Bovet observes that the "Greek interpretation" of the Egyptian god Horus was Apollo.⁵⁶ But the point at issue is the Idumean perspective: how did *they* regard Dorion and his piety?

Perhaps they understood Dorion as a sympathetic outsider to their people and to their god: a "gentile" godfearer, so to speak. Other ancient inscriptions show that Judean synagogues sometimes honored gentile benefactors (e.g., Julia Severa in Phrygia; *AGRW* 145).⁵⁷ Such donors remained non-Judean, and they did not even become "honorary" or "affiliate" members of the Judean people (if this was even considered a possibility there; cf. Thiessen). But on the other hand, and especially in the wake of Hyrcanus's annexation, sometimes help "from an outsider" *did* have implications for their ethnic or religious — or "ethno-religious" — identity. Consider the centurion of Luke 7, who built a synagogue for the "Judeans" (Galileans) of Capernaum. He was not a Judean or a Jew, but by assisting in the observances proper to the Jewish deity, he came to deserve remembrance from that god: "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us" (vv. 4b–5, NRSV). Even as a member by birth of another people, his "acting Judeanly" counted for something, to the Judean god as well as to Judeans (or Jews). Matters of observance in some way came to take precedence over birth and *ethnos*, plain and simple.

Dorion's work on behalf of the Idumean synagogue fits this same understanding. He, too, even as an outsider to the Idumean community, could, by

⁵⁶ Christelle Fischer-Bovet, "Towards a Translocal Elite Culture in the Ptolemaic Empire," in *Cosmopolitanism and Empire: Universal Rulers, Local Elites, and Cultural Integration in the Ancient Near East and Mediterranean*, ed. Myles Lavan, Richard E. Payne, and John Weisweiler (Oxford Studies in Early Empires; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 103–128, here 126; Gorre, *Les relations du clerge egyptien*, 263–264.

⁵⁷ For more information about this donor inscription, see <http://philipharland.com/greco-roman-associations/145-honors-by-a-judean-synagogue-for-julia-severa-and-others/>; also Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 147 and n. 19. Compare Paula Fredriksen, "If It Looks Like a Duck, and It Quacks Like a Duck...: On Not Giving Up the Godfearers," in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kramer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al. (*BJS* 358; Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2015), 25–34; idem, *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 32–60, esp. 54–58.

assisting in the observances proper to the Idumean god, come to deserve remembrance from the Idumean god and the Idumean community; the sacrifices made to Apollo-Qos and the hymns sung in the temple would make mention of him for his whole life. Traditional Idumean ethnic practice had become more permeable to outsiders; indeed, the Memphite Idumeans call for the temple officials to “proclaim for [Dorion] a palm branch *according to ancestral custom*” (κατὰ τὸν πάτριον νόμον).⁵⁸ Even ancestral custom could be extended to this Egyptian commander and priest. This phenomenon suggests that Idumeans, too, had somewhat relativized the significance of birth and *ethnos*. Someone who by lineage and location had inherited a set of responsibilities to other god(s) could, through patronage of the Idumean god, by “acting Idumeanly” — even in Egypt — earn lifelong plaudits and prayers from the Idumean community and succor from their god. Cult and custom were already “denaturalized” for Idumeans themselves in an expatriate context: outside of their homeland, the only Idumean practices available to them were by definition those that were self-undertaken.⁵⁹ But by the same token and because of that voluntary quality, non-Idumeans like Dorion could also pursue them.

It is true, as Ross Kraemer has observed, that “participating in the cultic practices of other groups, while continuing to maintain associations and identifications with one’s own group, appears to have been widespread in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean.”⁶⁰ Many gods received worship from peoples who did not belong to the gods’ homelands: Bendis, Bacchus, Isis, Jupiter Dolichenus, Jupiter Heliopolitanus. At the same time, there were degrees of participation by persons from one *ethnos* in the cult and customs of another. Shaye Cohen outlines seven different “forms of behavior by which a gentile demonstrates respect or affection for Judaism.”⁶¹ Although these behaviors are not gradient, one leading

⁵⁸ This is Philip Harland’s translation; see previous note.

⁵⁹ Compare Schwartz’s comments on “natural religion” versus “religion of choice,” corresponding to homeland versus diaspora (*Judeans and Jews*, 21–47), esp. 46: “[T]he natural default for a baby born in Judea was to be Judean...to raise a child as Judean in Judea required only noninterference with nature; to raise a child as a Jew in Egypt, Cyprus, or Rome, or anywhere else in the Hellenistic-Roman diaspora, entailed...the *decision* to do something that was not at all natural.”

⁶⁰ Ross Kraemer, “Giving up the Godfearers,” *JAJ* 5 (2014): 61–87, here 62.

⁶¹ Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 140; cf. Thiessen, *Paul and the Gentile Problem*, 20–26; also now Katell Berthelot, “To Convert or Not to Convert: The Appropriation of Jewish Rituals, Customs and Beliefs by Non-Jews,” in *Lived Religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World: Approaching Religious Transformations from Archaeology, History and Classics*, ed. Valentino Gasparini et al. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 493–516.

successively to another, Cohen does begin with rather more superficial and sporadic activities and progress to more enduring and exclusive ones, noting that while the former “do not imply a gentile is ‘becoming a Jew,’” the latter *do*.⁶² Serious, long-term, voluntary association with Judean people and their god had the power to affect one’s identity, at least as far as some ancient communities were concerned. The same would seem to hold true for Dorion, whose benefaction “in many matters, both publicly and individually” (καὶ κοινῇ καὶ κατ’ ἰδίαν ἕκαστον) indicates the duration and cost of his contributions. The category need not be overly fixed or reified, but if the centurion of Luke 7 looks like a godfearer and quacks like a godfearer relative to the Judean god and the Judean synagogue, so, too, would the “piously disposed” Dorion vis-à-vis the Idumean god and the Idumean synagogue.⁶³

The example of Dorion suggests that traditional Idumean observances mattered as such to Idumeans, and that voluntary and nonhereditary dimensions of Idumean-ness lay open to participation by outsiders: in a diasporic context in Memphis, an ethnic outsider who showed significant devotion to the Idumean god merited approbation from Idumeans and favor from Qos. This episode adumbrates “ethno-religion.” And if this were the case in 112/111 BCE outside the Idumean homeland, it strengthens the supposition that observances might have mattered as such to Costobar some 77 years later back in Idumean home territory. Josephus need not then have been projecting his own understanding of Judaism onto Costobar’s objection to “being under” Judean law. Rather, Costobar might well have sought to reassert the worship of his ancestral god because he valued Idumean cult and customs in their own right, as a distinguishable set of activities additional and complementary to Idumean descent. Although the partition of Idumean genealogy from Idumean practice happened under different circumstances in these two texts and contexts — forced conversion versus expatriation — the resulting phenomena are convergent. They evidence Idumaism.

Conclusions

After reviewing the facts of the case, the present article situated the Costobar Affair in both its longitudinal and latitudinal contexts. Seen within Idumean history, Costobar’s ambition to rule over Idumea represents a return to an ancient Idumean sensibility, namely, the rightful coincidence of Qos-worship with the

⁶² Cohen, *Beginnings of Jewishness*, 140.

⁶³ Cf. the title and content of Fredriksen, “If It Looks Like a Duck, and It Quacks Like a Duck.”

native kingship that Qos had formerly supported. This section even raised the word *messianic* to evoke the possibly religious dimension of Costobar's hoped-for ideal of restored native sovereignty. Seen within the reality of Idumean diaspora, Costobar's high estimation of Idumean customs, as over against Judean customs, belongs to a changed definition of the Idumean heritage. No longer was Idumeanness neatly synonymous with Idumean birth and *ethnos*. Instead, "Idumaism" had moved towards being an ethno-religion: a belonging achievable by practice, and, as such, a belonging that might lie open, provisionally and partially at any rate, to non-Idumeans such as Dorion.

In all these regards, the Costobar Affair parallels early Judaism and early Christianity. Both these communities, in all their complex contrasts and commonalities, looked back on lost nations, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah as they had existed in the Iron Age over five hundred years before. They also saw their communal life *without* a native sovereign as sub-optimal: the worship of YHWH for them ideally coincided with the kingship of David. During the same era as Costobar, many initiatives among Jewish and Christian communities sought to restore native sovereignty, whether by violence or other means. In this sense a *messianic* vision characterized many if not all of the heirs to ancient Israelite traditions. So, too, as Smith and Cohen argue, the question of membership in these communities became much more complicated after Hyrcanus: birth and *ethnos* continued to play a dominant role in determining belonging within the post-Israelite commonwealth. But other factors arose, and specifically, factors of observance. Diasporic existence may have intensified the importance of such factors. It became thinkable that outsiders could, to varying degrees, participate in Judaism or Christianity by observing certain rites and practices. "Ethno-religion" emerged.

These parallels provoke us to configure early Jewish and Christian relations in a fresh way. In much scholarly discussion, these two communities are positioned in relation to one another, whether in their parting or non-parting or ongoing interrelationship; or, alternately, they are situated together and in contradistinction to "the nations" — the communities that Paula Fredriksen calls "pagans," whether in opposition to these latter or as a sort of anomalous successor to them ("ex-pagan pagans"). But if Idumaism really does resemble early Judaism and Christianity in the ways that this article identifies, it confounds these models. Idumaism does not fit within the parting or non-parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity, since its practitioners and inheritors did not trace their

descent to Israel, and its god, Qos, is not the Judean god YHWH.⁶⁴ But its structural commonalities with these two also mean that Idumaism cannot be classified within an undifferentiated “paganism.”⁶⁵ It is too much alike, too “twin-like” with respect to early Judaism.⁶⁶ As the Judean scriptures themselves acknowledge, an Idumean is not the same thing at all relative to a Judean as, say, a Phrygian or a Spaniard.⁶⁷

These considerations, and in particular the features that Idumaism shares with post-Israelite communities, suggest that a sharper conceptual apparatus is necessary: a larger category is needed that can encompass all of these postmonarchic societies (Idumaism as well as early Judaism and early Christianity) while at the same time selecting for a subset smaller than the drip-pan of “ancient Mediterranean religion.” That category is: Hellenistic Levantine cult. Within this genus, Idumaism *and* the interpenetrating early Jewish-Christian ethno-religion(s) are all species of traditional Levantine practice, centered on a formerly national deity and oftentimes also on the ideal of a restored native kingship and adapting to foreign rule and to life in diaspora.

A few further thoughts will round out this exploratory reframing. First, although the concept of Hellenistic Levantine cult is not new, the kind of revisioning toward which the present article points — of early Judaism and early Christianity positioned alongside their religious next-of-kin in “Idumaism” and other Hellenistic Levantine traditions — has never yet been pursued in depth.⁶⁸ While the relationships of early Christianity to early Judaism have received

⁶⁴ Although note the proposal of Martin Rose, “Yahweh in Israel – Qaus in Edom?” *JSOT* 4 (1977): 28–34, and the rejoinder by John R. Bartlett, “Yahweh and Qaus: A Response to Martin Rose (*JSOT* 4 [1977]: 28–34)” *JSOT* 5 (1978): 29–38.

⁶⁵ So, e.g., Joan E. Taylor, writing about Sozomen’s fifth-century C.E. account of the summer festival at Mamre, jointly celebrated by Jews, Christians, and pagans: “the pagans, who were most likely Idumaeans” (*Christians and the Holy Places: The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 88).

⁶⁶ Cornell, “What happened to Kemosh?”

⁶⁷ E.g., Dicou, *Edom, Israel’s Brother and Antagonist*. The kinship of Idumeans to Judeans is even more pronounced in Greek translations of the Judean scriptures, on which, see Michał Marciak, “From Edom to Idumea: Septuagint References to Edom and Idumea,” *Palamades* 12 (2017): 5–35.

⁶⁸ Though see Yigal Levin, “Judea, Samaria and Idumea: Three Models of Ethnicity and Administration in the Persian Period,” in *From Judah to Judaea: Socio-economic Structures and Processes in the Persian Period*, ed. Johannes Unsok Ro (HBM 43; Sheffield, Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012), 4–53; also Cornell, “What happened to Kemosh?”; and Teixidor, *The Pagan God*.

intensive coverage, and their embeddedness within the Mediterranean world is of longstanding interest, standard accounts do not describe the problems that these traditions faced as *shared* problems. But kinglessness and dispersion were experiences common to a number of antique societies in the Levant (and elsewhere) and not only to the inheritors of “Israel.”

Neither do standard accounts develop the *shared* quality of the solutions that early Judaism and early Christianity proposed. Hope for a restored native ruler is, as noted, central to many strands of post-Israelite life and worship. But it is hardly unique to the early Jewish-Christian matrix. As the present article suggests, it is also a plausible reading of the Costobar Affair, and it appears outside the Levant in, for instance, literary predictive texts from Hellenistic Babylon.⁶⁹ Participation by “gentiles,” outsiders, in ancestral cult is a reality and a quandary about which many communities must have deliberated — and not just the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). In contexts of expatriate life, historic indices of membership and belonging like place and genealogy could do only so much work; traditional practices and especially veneration of the erstwhile national god take on a new significance in defining boundaries, as can be seen in Costobar’s probable advocacy for Idumean customs and in the case of Dorion’s honors from Idumeans in Egypt.

No doubt complex reasons of disciplinary history have contributed to the relative isolation of early Judaism and early Christianity from their Levantine congeners. But the primary culprit is the Judean scriptures themselves, and their influence even on the intellectual architecture of critical scholarship on the ancient world.⁷⁰ Scriptural templates govern the treatment — by historians — of these related Levantine peoples. On the one hand, the taxonomy of humankind that these scriptures presuppose, with Judeans on one side and all the rest, “pagans,” on the other, oftentimes shapes historians’ engagement with Hellenistic

⁶⁹ See again Neujahr: “By viewing the Akkadian *ex eventu* texts as closely related functionally to early Judean messianism, the question of the Messiah (or, more properly, messiahs) can be seen in a religio-historical context far broader than the narrow band of eschatological literature to which it is usually relegated” (“Royal Ideology and Utopian Futures,” 54).

⁷⁰ Cf. Gard Granerød on the “brainwashing” of “religiohistorical” scholarship by the Deuteronomists (*Dimensions of Yahwism in the Persian Period: Studies in the Religion and Society of the Judaean Community at Elephantine* [BZAW 488; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016], 21). See also Konrad Schmid, “Overcoming the Sub-Deuteronomism and Sub-Chronicism of Historiography in Biblical Studies: The Case of the Samaritans,” in *The Bible, Qumran, and the Samaritans*, ed. Magnar Kartveit and Gary N. Knoppers (Studia Samaritana 10; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2019), 17–30.

Levantine materials. This is true of a classic work like Javier Teixidor's *The Pagan God*. It is also true of more recent research, and not only Paula Fredriksen's.⁷¹ But on the other hand, the scriptural imagination and portraiture of these Levantine peoples as ancient kindred to Israel also overcrowds their continued existence and integrity in the Hellenistic period and afterwards. It is perhaps to be expected that entries on Edom and Edomites center on their depictions within the Bible, and pay little if any attention to their "late" (relative to the Bible) *Gestalt*.⁷² But if there has been a correction to the disinterest of earlier scholarly generations in early Judaism (the diminished, "Hellenized" aftercomer to biblically attested Israelite religion — so it was thought), no such reversal has been forthcoming in the case of Idumaism.

In addition to these ways that the Judean scriptures have set the terms for historical scholarship, and have thereby contributed to the separation of other Hellenistic Levantine cults from early Judaism and early Christianity, there is also the evidentiary challenge that these writings present in and of themselves. More decisive than the *content* of these scriptures, their ideological program(s), is their very profuse *existence*: they are, quite simply, overwhelmingly abundant in comparison with the written artifacts surviving from Idumeans or other Levantine peoples of the Hellenistic period. Judaism and, latterly, Christianity produced a vast amount of literature in the centuries after the cessation of the David monarchy. True, some forms of post-Israelite religion in these centuries were nonscriptural: the witness of the archives from Elephantine in Egypt is important in this regard.⁷³ But many, maybe most, of the communities that inherited the

⁷¹ See, for example, the title of *Henoch 37* (2015): *Pagani, giudei e cristiani in conflitto: Controversie e definizioni dell'identità*. See also Collin Cornell, review of *Expressions of Cult in the Southern Levant in the Greco-Roman Period: Manifestations in Text and Material Culture, Review of Biblical Literature* by Oren Tal and Zeev Weiss, eds., www.bookreviews.org (2018).

⁷² This is true of most handbooks, whether on Edom/Edomites (e.g., Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*) or entries on the Transjordanian nations (e.g., Joel S. Burnett, "Transjordan: The Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites," in *The World around the Old Testament: The People and Places of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Bill T. Arnold and Brent A. Strawn [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016], 309–352) or yet more broadly in Brian R. Doak, *Ancient Israel's Neighbors* (Essentials of Biblical Studies; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁷³ The Aramaic-speaking mercenaries or cleruchs who wrote these documents called themselves *yehudayya*, Judeans; they bear comparison with the Moabite and Idumean mercenaries further down the Nile. The Aramaic-speaking, Egypt-dwelling community responsible for Papyrus Amherst 63 also deserves mention here; survivors from a

Israelite identity, whether Jewish and Christian, did preserve and transmit sacred writings, and for some, these writings took on a central importance. Reciting and memorizing and interpreting them — which is to say, treating them as Scripture — came to be practices that defined certain strands of post-Israelite identity. The same seems never to have occurred in the case of other Levantine traditions like Idumaism, with the result that they left far fewer data to posterity.

Here then is another and perhaps more definitive parting of ways that this article adds to the much-discussed relation of Judaism and Christianity — a parting which, instead of distinguishing these two from one another, actually unites them over against their counterparts in other Hellenistic Levantine traditions. Judeans both inside and outside of the Jesus movement shared many features in common with Idumeans, justifying their categorization together as species of Levantine cult. Indeed, they all and alike subsisted in the aftermath of Hyrcanus's annexation, and hence, in some circles anyway, with a changed and voluntarized concept of belonging to the ancestral nation. They had jointly parted, it seems, from *ethnos* plain and simple. But they parted again and from one another with the ascendancy of Scripture: those who cherished the memory of “Israel” and worshipped Israel's god did so by recourse to sacred writings, whereas those who remembered back to other Iron Age kingdoms such as Edom (or Moab) and continued to worship their gods did so without such *aides-mémoire*. Julius Wellhausen once waxed eloquent about this parting and its results:

Israel and Moab [or: Edom!] had a common origin, and their early history was similar. The people of Jehovah on the one hand, and the people of Chemosh [or: Qos!] on the other, had the same idea of the Godhead as head of the nation, and a like patriotism derived from religious belief...But with all this similarity, how different were the ultimate fates of the two! The history of the one loses itself obscurely and fruitlessly in the sand; that of the other issues in eternity.⁷⁴

conquered place called Rash, they, too, present a postmonarchic form of Levantine cult, and they transmit royal traditions.

⁷⁴ Julius Wellhausen, “Moab,” in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., 26 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1883), 16:533–536, here 535.