

Hecataeus of Abdera and Jewish ‘misanthropy’

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Hecataeus of Abdera, Judaism, misanthropy, anti-Jewish stereotypes, Egypt, Hellenistic period.

Abstract

This article shows that the first text accusing the Jews of misanthropy (Hecataeus of Abdera, quoted by Diodorus) can only be properly understood if one keeps in mind the Greek origin of this notion, as well as its meaning in Greek literature, particularly theatre.



The accusation of misanthropy directed against the Jews in Antiquity is probably the only specific anti-Jewish bias to be found in the Greco-Roman world, together with the accusation of atheism. Other charges may be considered stereotypes that were applied to other peoples as well.¹ While many scholars have thought that the accusation of *misanthrôpia* first came from Egyptian writers who were hostile to Jews² – because of the association of Jews with the Persian and Greek conquerors of Egypt, of the events that took place in the military colony at Elephantine at the end of the 5th century BCE,³ and above all of Manetho’s slanderous account of Jewish origins, as known to us through Josephus’ *Against Apion* –, I would like to argue that the very idea of *misanthrôpia* is a Greek notion, and that the accusation of misanthropy levelled against the Jews can only be understood in a Greek cultural context, at least originally, as in the case of Hecataeus of Abdera,⁴ who wrote at the end of the 4th century BCE and was the first writer to describe the Jewish way of life as misanthropic.⁵

¹ See already I. Heinemann, “Antisemitismus”, *R.E. Suppl.* V, 1931, col. 3-43; J. Isaac, *Genèse de l’antisémitisme*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1956, p. 75; and more recently G. Bohak, “The Ibis and the Jewish Question: Ancient ‘Anti-Semitism’ in Historical Perspective”, in *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land in the Days of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud*, ed. by M. Mor (*et al.*), Jerusalem, Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2003, p. 27-43. L. H. Feldman writes: “The main, most serious and most recurrent charge by intellectuals against Jews is that they hate Gentiles” (*Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 125). On ethnic stereotypes in the Greco-Roman world, see now B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004.

² See for example J. Yoyotte, “L’Egypte ancienne et les origines de l’antijudaïsme”, *Bulletin de la société E. Renan, RHR* 163, 1963, p. 133-143; and more recently P. Schäfer, *Judeophobia. Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient World*, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 167-169, who nuances this view, since he writes that: “(...) one must reckon with the possibility that the xenophobia motif indeed belongs more to the Greek adaptation of the expulsion story than to its original Egyptian background” (p. 168).

³ See the standard edition of the papyri pertaining to this crisis, by A. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923; B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt*, Winona Lake, Eisenbrauns, 1986-1993, 3 vol. (see vol.1, p. 53-79). See also B. Porten, *Archives from Elephantine. The Life of an Ancient Military Colony*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968; J. Méléze-Modrzejewski, *Les Juifs d’Egypte de Ramsès II à Hadrien*, Paris, PUF-Quadrige, 1997 (first edition Paris, Errance, 1991; english translation *The Jews of Egypt: From Ramses II to Emperor Hadrian*, Philadelphia – Jerusalem, Jewish Publication Society, 1995), p. 56-67.

⁴ On Hecataeus, see F. Jacoby, “Hekataios”, *R.E.* VII.2, 1912, col. 2750-2751; O. Murray, “Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship”, *JEA* 56, 1970, p. 144-145; W. Spoerri, “Hekataios von Abdera”, *RAC* 14, 1988, col. 278-279; G. E. Sterling, *Historiography and Self-Definition – Josephus, Luke-Acts and Apologetic Historiography*, Leiden, Brill, 1992,

Hecataeus' excursus (*apud Diodorus Siculus, Bibliotheca Historica 40.3*)

The first part of the text deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

"1. When in ancient times a pestilence arose in Egypt, the common people ascribed their troubles to the workings of a divine agency; for indeed with many strangers of all sorts dwelling in their midst and practising different rites of religion and sacrifice, their own traditional observances in honour of the gods had fallen into disuse. 2. Hence the natives of the land surmised that unless they removed the foreigners, their troubles would never be resolved. At once, therefore, the aliens were driven from the country, and the most outstanding and active among them banded together and, as some say, were cast ashore in Greece and certain other regions; their leaders were notable men, chief among them being Danaus and Cadmus. But the greater number were driven into what is now called Judaea, which is not far distant from Egypt and was at that time utterly uninhabited. 3. The colony was headed by a man called Moses, outstanding both for his wisdom and for his courage. On taking possession of the land he founded, beside other cities, one that is now the most renowned of all, called Jerusalem. In addition he established the temple that they hold in chief veneration, instituted their forms of worship and ritual, drew up their laws and ordered their political institutions. He also divided them into twelve tribes, since this is regarded as the most perfect number and corresponds to the number of months that make up a year. 4. But he had no images whatsoever of the gods made for them, being of the opinion that God is not in human form; rather the Heaven that surrounds the earth is alone divine, and rules the universe. The sacrifices that he established differ from those of other nations, as does their way of living, for as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt he introduced a kind of misanthropic and inhospitable way of life (*ἀπάνθρωπόν τινα καὶ μισόξενον βίον*) (...)."⁶

Originally, this text may have belonged to Hecataeus' ethnographical treatise on Egypt, the *Aigyptiaka*. The passage on the Jews is itself a short but typical ethnographical excursus, that includes a lot of well-known *topoi* such as the expulsion of foreigners who are defiling the country because of their foreign religious practices, the notion of *ἀποικία* ("colony") and the description of Moses as a *κτίστης* ("founder"), the idea that the customs of the Jews differ from those of other nations, and so on.⁷ On the whole, the excursus praises Moses and is a rather positive account of Jewish history and laws, although it should be underlined that "the most outstanding and active men" among the foreigners are those who settle in Greece. The text displays a clearly Greek, ethnocentric vision of the world.⁸

Most scholars consider Hecataeus to depend on an Egyptian story that presents the Jews as a band of impious lepers who defiled the country and were finally expelled from Egypt – a story that would be found slightly later on in Manetho.⁹ The idea that invaders or intruders from an Asian background polluted the country, that they somehow carried a disease and had to be expelled is a well-known literary motif in Egyptian literature.¹⁰ The question of when exactly it was applied to Jews is still debated.¹¹ In any case, I would like to argue that

p. 59-61, 74; B. Bar-Kochva, *Pseudo-Hecataeus, "On the Jews"*. *Legitimizing the Jewish Diaspora*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996, p. 7-43.

⁵ For a comprehensive study of the accusation of misanthropy, see my book *Philanthrôpia judaica. Le débat autour de la 'misanthropie' des lois juives dans l'Antiquité* (Leiden, Brill, 2003, SJSJ 76).

⁶ Translation by F. R. Walton, LCL, 1967, p. 281-283, slightly modified.

⁷ See W. Jaeger, "Greeks and Jews", *Journal of Religion* 18/2, 1938, p. 127-143; E. Will and Cl. Orrieux, *Ioudaïsmos-Hellénismos. Essai sur le judaïsme judéen à l'époque hellénistique*, Nancy, Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1986, p. 83-93; Bar-Kochva, *Pseudo-Hecataeus, "On the Jews"*, p. 22-26, 28, 30-35. G. E. Sterling considers that Hecataeus' excursus belongs both to ethnography and apologetic historiography (see *Historiography and Self-Definition*, p. 74-75).

⁸ As already underlined by J. Mélèze-Modrzejewski in "L'image du Juif dans la pensée grecque vers 300 avant notre ère", in *Greece and Rome in Eretz Israel. Collected Essays*, ed. by A. Kasher, U. Rappaport and G. Fuks, Jerusalem, Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi – The Israel Exploration Society, 1990, p. 105-118. See also Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, p. 16; E. S. Gruen, "The Use and Abuse of the Exodus Story", in *Heritage and Hellenism, the Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1998, p. 51-53.

⁹ On the date of Hecataeus' work, see O. Murray, "The Date of Hecataeus' work on Egypt", *JEA* 59, 1973, p. 163-168, who proposes a date before 315 BCE. See also the different opinion of M. Stern, who suggests a date after 305 ("The Chronological Sequence of the First References to Jews in Greek Literature", *JEA* 59, 1973, p. 159-163; *GLAJJ* 1, p. 8-9). B. Bar-Kochva also favors a date between 306 and 301 BCE (see *Pseudo-Hecataeus On the Jews*, p. 15-16). On the relationship between Hecataeus' work and Manetho's, see below.

¹⁰ See Yoyotte, "L'Égypte ancienne et les origines de l'antijudaïsme" (quoted n.2); see also the analysis by J. Assmann, in *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 1997, p. 25-34.

¹¹ According to Schäfer (as well as other scholars), Josephus' account is reliable; it is Manetho himself who wrote about the expulsion of Jews from Egypt, not a later Egyptian writer (generally called pseudo-Manetho); as a consequence, the merging

Hecataeus is in no way dependent on this Egyptian tradition. In my opinion, his excursus inspires itself mainly from Greek sources. First, one should note that according to §1, it is the Egyptians who did not keep the ancestral religious rites, and they are the ones who are punished by the gods and who become sick. Second, the people expelled are clearly described as foreigners,¹² not as Egyptian lepers, as the later anti-Jewish story would have it. Third, the Jews are not accused of impiety at all, whereas this is the most prominent feature in Manetho's account. These discrepancies are not simply variants, they are to be explained by the influence of a different literary tradition, the Greek ethnographic discourse on Egypt.

The first book of Diodorus' *Bibliotheca Historica*, which deals with Egypt, is said to depend heavily on Herodotus, but also on Hecataeus' *Aigyptiaka*. Diodorus even mentions Hecataeus by name in 1.46.8.¹³ A comparison between the excursus in book 40 and what is written about Jews and Egypt in book 1 may thus be illuminating. In 1.28.1-4, one reads:

“Now the Egyptians say (φασι) that also after these events a great number of colonies (ἀποικίας) were spread from Egypt over all the inhabited world. To Babylon, for instance, colonists were led by Belus, who was held to be the son of Poseidon and Libya (...) 2. They say (λέγουσι) also that those who set forth with Danaus, likewise from Egypt, settled what is practically the oldest city of Greece, Argos, and that the nation of the Colchi in Pontus and that of the Jews, which lies between Arabia and Syria, were founded as colonies by certain emigrants from their country (οἰκίσαι τινὰς ὀρμηθέντας παρ' ἑαυτῶν). 3. And this is the reason why it is a long-established institution among these two peoples to circumcise their male children, the custom having been brought over from Egypt. 4. Even the Athenians, they say (φασιν), are colonists from Saïs in Egypt, and they undertake to offer proofs of such a relationship (...).”¹⁴

This passage, as well as 1.55.5, which also deals with the Egyptian origin of Jews and Colchi, is generally attributed to Hecataeus,¹⁵ although he is not mentioned by name in this context. A clear Herodotean influence is discernible too.¹⁶ It shares many common features with the story in book 40, but also reveals some differences. The main discrepancy is that Danaos and the Jews are presented in book 1 as Egyptian settlers, whereas in book 40, they are foreigners expelled from Egypt. It has led Daniel Schwartz to consider that Diodorus' account in book 40 actually depends on a Jewish work, another “Pseudo-Hecataeus”.¹⁷ But even in book 40, the emigration of the foreigners is called ἀποικία (40.3.3), which is a classical term in Greek to designate a colony. It normally implies that those who depart in order to settle in a new place belong to the city which they are leaving. Thus, it seems that even in book 40, Hecataeus' account is still influenced by the story told by “the Egyptians.” The whole idea of Egyptians settling all over the world and being the very root of all civilizations is, in fact, a well-known Egyptian claim, frequently referred to by Herodotus.¹⁸ If we accept the hypothesis that Hecataeus is

of the expulsion story and the hostility towards the Jews would date at least from the beginning of the third century BCE. But the reliability of Josephus' account is still a debated issue. See E. Meyer, *Aegyptische Chronologie*, Berlin, Verlag der Königl. Akademie, 1904, p. 71-79; M. Braun, *History and Romance in Graeco-Oriental Literature*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1938, p. 27; A. Momigliano, “Intorno al *Contra Apione*”, in *Quinto contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, Rome, Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1975, p. 765-784; E. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 224; C. Aziza, “L'utilisation polémique du récit de l'Exode chez les écrivains alexandrins”, *ANRW II.20.1*, 1987, p. 50; E. Gabba, “The Growth of Anti-Judaism or the Greek Attitude Towards the Jews”, in *Cambridge History of Judaism*, vol.2, ed. by W. D. Davies *et al.*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 633; E. Gruen, “The Use and Abuse of the Exodus Story”, p. 56-59.

¹² Successively named *κατοικούντοί ξένοι*, *ἀλλοφύλοι*, *ἀλλοεθνείς*.

¹³ On this issue, see A. Burton, *Diodorus Siculus. Book I. A Commentary*, Leiden, Brill, 1972; W. Spoerri, “Hekataios von Abdera”, *RAC* 14, 1988, col. 279-280.

¹⁴ 1.28.1-4, translation by C. H. Oldfather, LCL, 1960, p. 91.

¹⁵ See Jacoby, *FGH III a*, Kommentar, p. 75-87, above all p. 80-81; W. Jaeger, “Greeks and Jews”, p. 137; E. Schwartz, *Griechische Geschichtschreiber*, Leipzig, Koehler & Amelang, 1957, p. 47; O. Murray, “Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship”, p. 145 and 152; B. Z. Wacholder, *Eupolemus. A Study of Judaeo-Greek Literature*, Cincinnati – New York, Hebrew Union College & Jewish Institute of Religion, 1974, p. 89; B. Bar-Kochva, *Pseudo-Hecataeus*, “On the Jews”, p. 208-210.

¹⁶ See Herodotus 2.104, and the remarks below.

¹⁷ See D. Schwartz, “Diodorus Siculus 40.3 – Hecataeus or Pseudo-Hecataeus?”, in *Jews and Gentiles in the Holy Land in the Days of the Second Temple, the Mishnah and the Talmud*, ed. by M. Mor *et al.*, Jerusalem, Yad Ben-Zvi, 2003, p. 181-197. The idea was already formulated by J. C. H. Lebram, “Der Idealstaat der Juden”, in *Josephus-Studien. Untersuchungen zu Josephus, dem antiken Judentum und dem Neuen Testament*, ed. by O. Betz, K. Haacker and M. Hengel, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974, p. 233-253.

¹⁸ See Book 2, §§2, 4, 51, 54-58, 82, 109, 177 etc., where the Egyptian origin of many customs and inventions is stated.

Diodorus' main source in 1.28.1-4,¹⁹ it means that Hecataeus quoted this typical Egyptian discourse at some point in his work, just as Herodotus did. The fact that we are dealing with a quotation is clearly shown by the verbs *λέγουσιν* and *φασιν*. But these verbs simultaneously indicate that Hecataeus distances himself from the Egyptian assertions. Thus, there would be nothing surprising if, while dealing with the Jews, he had chosen to present his own version of the connection between Egypt and the Jews. The reasons for modifying the Egyptian account were numerous. In so far as it implied Greeks too, who were presented as stemming from an Egyptian background, it hurted Greek "national" pride. Aeschylus, for instance, found it offensive. In the *Suppliant Maidens*, he has the daughters of Danaos – who have fled from Egypt to Argos – claim to be of Greek ancestry through their father, who is himself a descendant of Epaphos, son of Io and Zeus.²⁰ Several centuries later, Plutarch still blames Herodotus for having presented Danaos and his descendants as Egyptians, and forgotten Epaphos and Io.²¹ When Hecataeus (according to Diodorus 40.3) modifies the Egyptian account of the origins of Danaos and his companions (and secondarily of the Jews), he simply echoes the more widespread Greek understanding of the link between Danaos and Egypt. Although he is influenced by the Herodotean description of Egypt, as the remarks about the Colchi make clear,²² he may have been more critical than Herodotus of the Egyptian sayings,²³ and have sided with Aeschylus (at least to a certain extent). In sum, the apparent contradictions between the two passages in Diodorus (1.28.1-4 and 40.3.1-3) are perfectly understandable when the difference between the Egyptian sayings and the Greek point of view about them is properly taken into account.²⁴

Moreover, another Greek *topos* seems to play a role in Hecataeus' excursus. The very expulsion of foreigners whose rites have influenced the natives and disturbed the legal order and the traditional cult – in other words, whose foreign customs have interfered with the ancestral laws of the natives –, an expulsion characterized as *ξενηλασία* (*xenèlasia*), may be explained by the reference to Sparta that pervades the text. Apart from an opinion ascribed to Eratosthenes, according to whom *ξενηλασία* is a barbarian practice (see Strabo 17.1.19), *ξενηλασία* (or the corresponding verb, *ξενηλατέω*) is used in Greek literature mainly concerning Spartians.²⁵ Thus, the use of the term shows that the reaction of the Egyptians to the corruption of their ancestral laws is understood by Hecataeus as something analogical to the Spartan way of dealing with foreigners, and shows the pervasiveness of the references to Greek models and narratives in Hecataeus' text.

Still, a Jewish influence on Hecataeus' excursus is not to be completely excluded. He probably met Jews in Alexandria, and may have heard of the Biblical story of the Exodus. According to the Biblical account, Jews were indeed foreigners in Egypt, and the divine anger against the Egyptians arose because of them. Moreover,

¹⁹ Cautiousness is required, since contemporary commentators of Diodorus' work tend to consider him less dependent on his sources than was previously thought. See for example the introduction to the French edition of Diodorus' Book 1 in C.U.F., by François Chamoux, p. XXV-XXXII. Diodorus, who travelled himself to Egypt, was sometimes critical of what other Greek writers reported about this land (see for example 1.69.7, where he criticizes Herodotus; and also 3.11.1-3, where he mentions the Egyptian priests with whom he talked during his visit in Egypt). Moreover, Diodorus used several sources, not just one, and certainly mingled them. Concerning his use of Hecataeus' work, Anne Burton writes: "It is too easy to attribute to an author, the major part of whose work has been lost, passages for which an alternative source is not immediately apparent. Moreover, it cannot be ignored that certain passages may well have had their origins in authors considerably later than Hecataeus, and that Diodorus is himself responsible for others. It is safer then to conclude that in Book I Diodorus drew upon Agatharchides or Artemidorus for chs. 37-41 and possibly for part of chs. 30-36; while for the rest of the book he undoubtedly made some use of Hecataeus of Abdera, at the same time incorporating material from other widely different authors into the framework of his own construction" (*Diodorus Siculus. Book I. A Commentary*, p. 34).

²⁰ See Aeschylus, *Suppliants* 40-48; 277-323; 329-331; *Prometheus Bound* 567, 590, 850-856; Euripides, *Phoenician Maidens* 676-682 (concerning Cadmos). Cf. "Epaphos", in *RE* 5.2, 1905, col. 2708-2709 (that deal with his genealogy), by Escher, and "Danaos", in *RE* 4.2, 1901, col. 2094-2098, by Waser. There were different traditions on Epaphos, Danaos and Cadmos, which contradicted each other. Some Athenian writers accepted the idea of a mixed or a fully barbarian origin for Danaos and Cadmos, that, according to them, contrasted with the purely Greek origin of the Athenians (see for example Plato, *Menexenus* 245 d, and Isocrates, *Helen* 67-68).

²¹ See *On the Malice of Herodotus* 857 e.

²² Compare with Herodotus 2.104. Obviously, it could also be an Herodotean influence on Diodorus. But it is obvious that Hecataeus had read Herodotus too, so that an Herodotean influence on Hecataeus is probable as well.

²³ But Herodotus himself, even if somehow fascinated by Egypt, remained critical to a certain extent (see for example 2.2, and also the way he expresses himself on his work in 2.104).

²⁴ On the Greek perceptions of Egypt, see Cl. Préaux, "La singularité de l'Égypte dans le monde gréco-romain", *Chronique d'Égypte* 49, 1950, p. 110-123; Fr. Hartog, "Les Grecs Egyptologues", *Annales* 5, 1986, p. 953-967; A. B. Lloyd, "Herodotus on Egyptians and Libyans", *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* XXXV, 1990, p. 215-253.

²⁵ See Plato (*Protagoras* 342 c, *Laws* 950 b and 953 e), Aristotle (*Politics* 1272 b), Thucydides (1.144.2 and 2.39.1-2), Xenophon (*Constitution of Lacedaemon* 14.4), Dionysos of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 2.17.1), Plutarch (*Life of Lycurgus* 9.4, *Life of Agis* 10.3, *Apophthegmata Laconica* 226 d, 237 a, 238 d), Philostratus (*Life of Apollonius of Tyana* 6.20, *Epistulae et dialexeis* 1.28), and the *Suda*, where, at ξ, one finds *ξενηλατέιν*, which is explained exclusively by reference to the Spartan practice, with a quotation from Aristophanes' *Birds* (1012). One exception is Polybius 9.29.4, where the verb is used in a non-Spartan (but Greek) context.

just as in Hecataeus' account, the Jews were spared the plagues that afflicted the Egyptians. Of course, there are also many discrepancies between the Biblical story and the account in Diodorus 40.3.1-3: in the Bible, the god who became angry was the God of Israel, not the Egyptian divinities; his anger was motivated by Pharaoh's refusal to let the Hebrews leave Egypt, not by the disruption of the Egyptian religious rites; and so on. But if Hecataeus heard about the Biblical story, he might have realized that it shared common features with his "graecocentric" scenario.²⁶

To sum up, a close reading of the first book of Diodorus' *Bibliotheca Historica* shows that it contains no hints of the Egyptian traditions that deal with impure lepers who join foreign invaders and desecrate Egypt. Thus, it is probable that Hecataeus nowhere referred to these stories, and he may even have ignored them completely. As far as the narrative in book 40 is concerned, I am led to conclude that there is no connection at all between Hecataeus' account and the Egyptian traditions later to be found in Manetho. Hecataeus simply combined Greek traditions about Egypt, such as Herodotus' *Histories* – who already echo the Egyptian claim to be the origin of humankind and of all other cultures –, the Greek image of Egypt as an inhospitable country, and the connection between Danaos and Egypt. He might have heard of the Biblical story of the Exodus (after all, he heard about Moses!), but his version of the departure from Egypt can also be understood without presupposing a reference to the Biblical account. This conclusion reflects what Elias Bickerman showed in an important article on the Greek discourse about "the origins of peoples." This discourse is characterized by a tendency to integrate all barbarian peoples into a Greek system of *archaiologia*, where the discourse of the autochthons on their own origins is disqualified and replaced by the *interpretatio graeca*.²⁷

But if Hecataeus was not aware of, or at least not influenced by the Egyptian stories concerning the lepers and the foreign invaders, where does the accusation of Jewish misanthropy come from? A different kind of explanation is required. As a first step, let us now analyze Hecataeus' sentence in §4 more closely.

The accusation of misanthropy formulated in §4

Although the perception of the Jews in the excursus is generally positive, a slightly more negative tone is to be noticed at the end of §4 (which is not the end of the excursus itself): "(...) as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt, he (Moses) introduced a kind of misanthropic (*apanthrôpos*) and inhospitable (*miso xenos*) way of life."²⁸ *Apanthrôpos* literally means "one who turns away from men / from the society of human beings," and in many cases it is the equivalent of *misanthrôpos*.²⁹ Moreover, the term *apanthrôpos* appears for the first time in Greek literature in Aeschylus' *Prometheus* (v.20), where one also finds for the first time the term *philanthrôpos* (vv.7 and 28) (whereas *misanthrôpos* appears a little later). And a careful study of these terms shows that from the 5th to the 3^d century BCE at least the term *apanthrôpos* functioned as the opposite of *philanthrôpos* much more than *misanthrôpos*, whose use was more limited.³⁰ As for the term *miso xenos*, it seems to have been coined here for the first time, and apart from two late Jewish texts,³¹ one finds it only twice in Greek literature, in both cases in Diodorus' work (34/35.1.3; 40.3.4), and in connection to the Jews. I think that it should be understood as the contrary of *philoxenos*, as "inhospitable" (versus the stronger translation "hostile to foreigners"). One of the reasons for translating it in such a way is that *philanthrôpia* itself has to do with hospitality.³²

Several scholars have underlined that Hecataeus tends to describe the Jews in a "Spartan light",³³ and this may be a first clue to explain why the Jewish way of life is described as misanthropic.³⁴ As mentioned above,

²⁶ As already suggested by I. Heinemann, "Hekataios", col.25; see also Troiani, *Commento storico*, p. 42.

²⁷ Cf. E. Bickerman, "Origines Gentium", *Classical Philology* 47, 1952, p. 65-81 (republished in *Religions and Politics in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods*, ed. by E. Gabba and M. Smith, Como, Edizioni New Press, 1985, p. 401-417). I disagree with both D. Schwartz and E. Gruen, who attribute the originality of Hecataeus' account to a Jewish author or to a Jewish reshaping of the Exodus story (even if I agree with Gruen that Jews occasionally refashioned their own past in the most creative way). I am not convinced either by the explanation put forward by D. Mendels ("Hecataeus of Abdera and a Jewish *Patrios Politeia* of the Persian Period (Diodorus Siculus 40.3)", *ZAW* 95/1, 1983, p. 96-110), according to whom Hecataeus' information came from Jewish priestly circles in the late 4th century BCE; see the remarks by E. Gruen in *ibid.*, p. 54, n.46. It seems quite obvious that Hecataeus had contacts with Egyptian Jews, but his account is understandable without presupposing a strong Jewish influence of the kind advocated (in different ways) by Schwartz, Gruen and Mendels.

²⁸ The word *tis*, which most translators link to *apanthrôpos*, more probably refers to *bios*, "way of life".

²⁹ Cf. P. Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1968, vol.1, p. 90.

³⁰ See for example Menander, *Dyskolos* 6; cf. K. Berthelot, *Philanthrôpia judaica*, p. 72-77.

³¹ *Wisdom* 19:13 (where it is applied to the Egyptians) and Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 1.194 (in connection with the Sodomites).

³² See for example Diodorus 5.33-38, especially 5.34.1 (one of the very few examples of a barbarian people described as *philanthropôs*). Cf. K. Berthelot, *Philanthrôpia judaica*, p. 44 and 47-52.

³³ Cf. Jaeger, "Greeks and Jews", p. 142; Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, p. 465 (*Judaism and Hellenism* vol.1, p. 256); Murray, "Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship", p. 158; Stern, *GLAJJ* 1, p. 32; Will and Orrieux, *Ioudaïsmos-Hellênismos*, p. 87; Méléze-Modrzejewski, "L'image du Juif", p. 108-109; E. Gruen, "The Purported Jewish-Spartan Affiliation", in *Transitions to Empire. Essays in Greco-Roman History, 360-146 B.C., in Honor of E. Badian*, ed. by R. W.

Spartans were renowned for their practice of expelling foreigners, and thus for their inhospitable mentality and customs. The reason why they expelled foreigners was their concern for the respect of their ancestral laws, that could have been altered if too many foreigners were to stay in the city of Sparta and the surrounding territory. The same reasoning is at work in the Hebrew Bible, where the Israelites are forbidden to intermarry with the Canaanites because they could be driven to idolatry.³⁵ According to *Deuteronomy*, the Hebrews are even commanded to exterminate the seven nations of Canaan, so that the danger be eradicated, and the Law of God not forsaken. The books from *Judges* to *2 Kings*, on the contrary, illustrate the disasters brought by the corruption of the Israelites and their kings, who did not remain faithful to the Mosaic Law. From this point of view, the parallel between Jews and Spartans could make sense, as was obvious to Josephus himself, who, in the *Against Apion*, justifies Jewish “separatism” by invoking the Spartan example.³⁶

Thus, the implicit comparison between Jews and Spartans that pervades the text helps us to understand what Hecataeus means by “a kind of misanthropic and inhospitable way of life.” But the Spartans are never accused of being a *misanthropic* people. The Jews are actually the only people or nation ever accused of being misanthropic (*misanthrōpos*, *apanthrōpos*) and inhospitable (*misoxenos*) in the whole corpus of Greek literature. Why is that so? In order to answer this question, one needs to understand what misanthropy meant in Greek culture.

Misanthropy in Greek culture

One should first underline the connection between misanthropy and theater, especially comedy. In Plato’s *Protagoras*, when the sophist wants to defend the idea that virtue can be taught through education, he says:

“(…) you must regard any man who appears to you the most unjust person ever reared among human laws and society as a just man and a craftsman of justice, if he had to stand comparison with people who lacked education and law courts and laws and any constant compulsion to the pursuit of virtue, but were a kind of wild folk (*ἄγριοί*) such as Pherecrates the poet brought on the scene at last year’s Lenaeum. Sure enough, if you found yourself among such people, as did the misanthropes (*μισάνθρωποι*) among his chorus, you would be very glad to meet with Eurybatus and Phrynonidas, and would bewail yourself with longing for the wickedness of the people here”.³⁷

The misanthropes are those who have run away from the life in the *polis*. But instead of finding men who live a philosophical life by following the law of nature, they meet frightening savage people. Thus, through the comedy, the law of the city is being rehabilitated. From this text one learns that at the time of Plato, misanthropes were already comedy characters, and that they were seen as people who mistrusted their fellow human beings (probably considered perverted and thus intrinsically bad) but also the laws of the city (considered artificial, and opposed to the law of nature), and, as a consequence, tended to set themselves apart from the life of the city.

Jacqueline de Romilly, in a book intitled *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*, gives other examples of comedies involving one or several misanthropic characters, whose texts are now lost. One of them is a play by Diphilos intitled *The Misanthropes*.³⁸ Before this one, however, one finds the *Dyskolos*, one of Menander’s fairly well-preserved plays, an alternative title of which was *The Misanthrope (Misanthrōpos)*. In the *Dyskolos* the misanthrope is called Knemon, and although he lives in the proximity of a shrine dedicated to Pan and the Nymphs, he refuses to greet people who pass by, to talk with them or to help those who are lost or need something for the sacrifice. He lives completely alone except for the company of his daughter and an old servant. As Menander writes, Knemon is “a hermit of a man (*ἀπάνθρωπός τις ἄνθρωπος σφόδρα*), peevish to everybody (*δύσκολος πρὸς ἅπαντας*), loathing crowds.”³⁹

Some scholars think that Menander may have been inspired by a well-known misanthropic character in Antiquity, called Timon.⁴⁰ We have evidence for the existence of this character in the theater as early as Aristophanes. Although he does not use the word *apanthrōpos* or *misanthrōpos*, Aristophanes clearly presents

Wallace & E. M. Harris, Norman – London, University of Oklahoma Press, 1997, p. 260; C. P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World*, Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press, 1999, p. 73-79.

³⁴ Cf. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus*, p. 133-134; Murray, “Hecataeus of Abdera and Pharaonic Kingship”, p. 158; Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age*, p. 18.

³⁵ See for example *Deuteronomy* 7:1-6.

³⁶ See *Against Apion* 2.258-261. The apologetic character of the argument is obvious, but the comparison with Sparta remains significant.

³⁷ *Protagoras* 327 d, translation by W. R. M. Lamb, LCL, p. 149.

³⁸ See *La douceur dans la pensée grecque*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1979, p. 206; on Diphilos’ play, dated around 256 BCE, see also E. Capps, “Misanthropoi or Philanthropoi”, *Hesperia* 11/4, 1942, p. 325-328, and L. Robert, *Bulletin Epigraphique* 1938, n°54 et 1944, n°74.

³⁹ *Dyskolos* vv.6-7, translation by W. G. Arnott, LCL, p. 185.

⁴⁰ See W. Schmid, “Menanders *Dyskolos* und die Timonlegende”, *RhM* N.S. 102, 1959, p. 157-182.

Timon as a misanthrope, be it in the *Birds* (v.1549) or in the *Lysistrata* (vv.808ss). In literature in general, from the 5th century BCE until late Antiquity, Timon is always referred to as a misanthrope. Alexandrian poets were very fond of this character, as several epigrams show. Callimachus for example writes: “Timon (for you are no more), which is hateful to thee – Darkness or Light? The Darkness, for there are more of you in Hades.”⁴¹ The association of Timon with misanthropy can also be found later on in Cicero, Plutarch, Lucian, and so on.⁴²

So at the time of Hecataeus, the misanthrope was a well-known comedy character. Interestingly enough, the increasing attention given to this character from the fourth century onwards, with the parallel development of the adequate terminology (*apanthrôpos*, *misanthrôpos* and so on), coincides in a way with the creation of the Peripatetic school. Now Aristotle did not only write that humans were political animals, but also – and he seems to be the first philosopher to formulate this idea explicitly – that there is a natural friendship, *philia*, between human beings, just because they belong to the same specie:

“And the affection of parents for offspring and of offspring for parents seems to be a natural instinct, not only in man but also in birds and in most animals; as also is friendship between members of the same species; and this is especially strong in the human race; for which reason we praise those who love their fellow men (τοὺς φιλανθρώπους). Even when travelling abroad one can observe that a natural affinity and friendship exist between man and man universally (ὡς οἰκείον ἅπας ἄνθρωπος ἀνθρώπῳ καὶ φίλον).”⁴³

Aristotle’s disciple, Theophrastus, further elaborated the notion of *οἰκειότης* (*oikeiôtês*) or kinship between human beings,⁴⁴ and we know from his *Characters* that he condemned surliness (XV, *αὐθάδεια*), penuriousness (X, *μικρολογία*), querulousness (XVII, *μεμψιμορία*) and distrustfulness (XVIII, *ἄπιστία*). Nearly all these traits characterize the misanthrope to a certain extent. Actually, many scholars have gone so far as to consider that Menander was influenced by Theophrastus. But one should rather speak of a common intellectual background, which may have been influenced to a certain extent by Peripatetic philosophy.⁴⁵

Why people are misanthropic

Now we need to ask ourselves the question: were people born misanthropes? If not, then how and why did they become misanthropes? In the *Phaedo*, Plato gives a nice psychological explanation of misanthropy:

“(…) misanthropy (*μισανθρωπία*) arises from trusting someone implicitly without sufficient knowledge. You think the man is perfectly true and sound and trustworthy, and afterwards you find him base and false. Then you have the same experience with another person. By the time this has happened to a man a good many times, especially if it happens among those whom he might regard as his nearest and dearest friends, he ends by being in continual quarrels and by hating everybody and thinking there is nothing sound in anyone at all.”⁴⁶

When somebody who strongly trusted another person has been deceived by that person, and when this bad experience reproduces itself, he or she becomes a misanthrope, somebody who avoids the company of others and tends to abhor his or her fellow human beings. Plato himself, having been very disappointed by Dionysus the tyrant, writes that he is going to become slightly misanthropic!⁴⁷

This etiology of misanthropy can be found again and again in Greek literature. In Menander’s *Dyskolos*, Knemon is not born a misanthrope, he has become such because he has been disappointed by human beings, as scene 5 in act 4 makes clear.⁴⁸ Plutarch writes in his *Life of Antony* that Antony “was contentedly imitating the life of Timon, since, indeed, his experiences had been like Timon’s; for he himself also had been wronged and treated with ingratitude by his friends, and therefore hated and distrusted all mankind.”⁴⁹ Lucian too, in his work on Timon, explains that Timon became a misanthrope because he was betrayed by friends to whom he had lent money, and who did not return it to him. After having become rich again thanks to Zeus’ intervention, Timon speaks about himself in the following way: “His favourite name shall be ‘the Misanthrope,’ and his characteristic

⁴¹ Callimachus, *Epigrams* 5, translation by A. W. Mair, LCL, p. 141.

⁴² See Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.10.23-11.25 and 4.11.27; Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 70.8; *Life of Alcibiades* 16.9; *Life of Antony* 69.7 and 70.2; Lucian, *Timon, the Misanthrope*, ed. by A. M. Harmon, LCL, 1968⁶, vol.2, p.326-393; Stobaeus, *Anthology* 3.10.53.

⁴³ *Nicomachean Ethics* 8.1, 1155 a, translation by H. Rackham, LCL, p. 451-453.

⁴⁴ See Porphyry, *De Abstinencia* 2.22.1-3 and 3.25.1-4.

⁴⁵ See A. Barigazzi, “Il *Dyskolos* di Menandro o la commedia della solidarietà umana”, *Athenaeum* 37, 1959, p.184-195; F. Wehrli, “Menander und die Philosophie”, *Entretiens Fondation Hardt* 16, 1970, p.147-152; P. Grimal, “Térence et Aristote à propos de l’«Héautontimorouménos»”, *Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé* 1979, p.175-187.

⁴⁶ *Phaedo* 89 d, translation by H. North Fowler, LCL, p. 309-311.

⁴⁷ See *Letters* 1, 309 b.

⁴⁸ See in particular vv.718-721.

⁴⁹ *Life of Antony* 69.4, translation B. Perrin, LCL, p. 297.

traits shall be testiness, acerbity, rudeness, wrathfulness and inhumanity (*ἀπανθρωπία*).⁵⁰ This etiology seems to belong to the very significance of misanthropy in the Greek world.

Back to Hecataeus' text

What are the implications of all this for the understanding of Hecataeus' text? First, one should pay attention to the fact that Hecataeus describes the Jewish way of life as “a kind of misanthropic and inhospitable way of life” (because of the Greek word *τίς* used in this sentence). This shows that Hecataeus himself was somehow surprised by the Jewish behaviour and aware of how strange it was to speak of a whole people as behaving in a misanthropic way. As I have said and as the above-mentioned texts should have made clear, misanthropy always characterizes individuals, not a people as a whole. So what we have here is an image, or if you prefer, an analogy. Look at these people who behave like the misanthrope of the comedies!

The reasons why Hecataeus saw the Jews as behaving like misanthropes can be guessed from what we know of Jews in Alexandria at the beginning of the 3^d century BCE and what we have understood about misanthropy through the texts mentioned above. The misanthrope is not a foreigner; he is even probably a citizen (Knemon for example is a citizen). It is the very fact that he has a place in the city, and that he is supposed to be involved in its social and political life, which makes his attitude so strange and reprehensible.

Now if we think about Jews in Alexandria or even in Egypt in general (where Hecataeus might have met them, or where at least he heard about them), a parallel can be drawn: because they served in Alexander's armies and the Ptolemies' armies in general, the Jews were considered Hellenes, not Egyptians, which meant that they shared in (at least some of) the privileges of the Hellenes.⁵¹ They certainly spoke Greek. Greek writers who were contemporaries of Hecataeus, such as Megasthenes or Clearchus of Soli, considered the Jews a philosophical group, very Greek indeed. Clearchus for example reports an imaginary conversation between Aristotle and a Jew, whom Aristotle describes as having “the soul of a Greek.”⁵² But on the other hand, the Mosaic laws did not allow Jews to eat the food of the non-Jews, to intermarry or to partake in pagan religious ceremonies. This meant that they had to stay away from the political life of the Greek *polis*, since that life was based on civic religious acts such as sacrifices and ritual meals. Banquets, be they public or private, were a very central feature of social life in a *polis*.⁵³ So by remaining faithful to their laws, Jews excluded themselves from the social and political life of the *polis*, at least to a certain extent.⁵⁴ In the eyes of a Greek, they somehow behaved like the misanthropes.

Actually, Hecataeus' explanation of Jewish misanthropy reminds us of what Plato and others wrote on that subject. Hecataeus writes: “(...) as a result of their own expulsion from Egypt (Moses) introduced a way of life which was somewhat misanthropic and inhospitable.” In other words, because they suffered at the hand of their fellow human beings in whose country they were hosts, the Jews (following Moses) decided to avoid intercourse with other peoples. This explanation corresponds to the traditional Greek etiology of misanthropy (as shown in §4).

⁵⁰ *Timon, or the Misanthrope*, §44, translation by A. M. Harmon, LCL.

⁵¹ See J. Mélèze-Modrzejewski, “Le statut des Hellènes dans l’Égypte Lagide : bilan et perspectives de recherches”, *REG* 96, 1983, p. 241-268; *id.*, *Les Juifs d’Égypte*, p. 107-120; J. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CCE)*, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1996, p. 20-34; E. Gruen, *Diaspora. Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 68-70.

⁵² See Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.180; B. Bar-Kochva, “The Wisdom of the Jew and the Wisdom of Aristotle”, in *Internationales Josephus-Kolloquium Brüssel 1998 (MJSSt 4)*, ed. by F. Siegert and J. U. Kalms, Münster, Lit, 1999, p. 241-250.

⁵³ On the importance of banquets in Greek public life, see P. Schmitt-Pantel, *La cité au banquet*, Rome, Ecole Française de Rome (diffusion E. de Boccard), 1992. On Jews and banquets, see S. R. Shimoff, “Banquets: The Limits of Hellenization”, *JSJ* 27/4, 1996, p. 440-452.

⁵⁴ See the comment by E. Will and Cl. Orrieux, concerning Hecataeus' remark in §4: “(...) il est bien évident que si les Juifs évitent le contact des *goyim* au point qu'un Grec du début du III^e s. voit en eux des *apanthrôpoi*, des gens qui ‘se détournent du genre humain’, c'est à cause de la rigoureuse minutie des préceptes de la Loi, à cause, pourrait-on dire, du rempart de tabous que cette Loi avait dressé autour d'eux et que le contact avec les *goyim* risquait de les contraindre à enfreindre” (*Ioudaïsmos-Hellénismos*, p. 92). However, as underlined by E. Gruen, we have several testimonies concerning Jews who took part in the socio-political life of the *polis* in which they lived, and even took upon themselves political responsibilities (cf. *Diaspora*, p. 68-70, 105-132, etc.). What we do not know is whether they managed to keep observing the commandments faithfully. Dositheos son of Drimilos, who is mentioned in the Zeno papyri as secretary to the king, and even became a priest of the cult of Alexander and the Ptolemies under Ptolemy III (in 223/222 BCE), was probably considered an “apostate” (see Mélèze-Modrzejewski, *Les Juifs d’Égypte*, p. 82-90). Tiberius Julius Alexander (Philo's nephew), who became prefect of Egypt, and *magister militum* under Titus during the siege of Jerusalem, does not seem to have been an observant Jew (A. Terian even calls him an apostate, cf. *Alexander*, Paris, Cerf, 1988, p. 40). So the problem remains, and it must have been crucial in social relationships too. On Jewish observance of the dietary laws, see for example J. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, p. 434-437.

In conclusion, one must insist on the fact that misanthropy differs from savagery. A misanthrope is not a barbarian or a non-civilized person. Many barbarian peoples were considered hostile to foreigners, eventually engaging in such practices as killing or sacrificing strangers, or at least expelling them. In the first book of Diodorus' *Bibliotheca Historica*, as well as in 40.3, we read about the Egyptian practice of expelling foreigners, an attitude described as *axenia*.⁵⁵ In a very different way, Jews are said to have misanthropic customs, because they were already considered part of the community of the Hellenes, and were expected to take part in at least some aspects of its cultic and social life. Because the Jews, for religious reasons, refused to enter into this religious and political *koinônia*, they were perceived by Hecataeus as behaving like misanthropes. Although their attitude was considered strange and not very nice, in the eyes of a fourth/third century Greek writer like Hecataeus it was not yet as reprehensible as it happened to be at the end of the 2nd century BCE, when, in a completely different political context, Jewish separatism was understood as an expression of deep hatred against all non-Jews.

Finally, I wish to underline that this interpretation of the accusation of misanthropy in Hecataeus' text allows us to understand why other peoples who had strange dietary laws or practiced circumcision (such as the Egyptians themselves, to a certain extent) were not accused of being misanthropic peoples. Although they had peculiar customs, these customs did not prevent them from participating in the life of the Greek community, when they had the opportunity to do so. As a consequence, they would not have been perceived the way the Jews were.



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⁵⁵ See Diodorus 1.67.9-11.