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Introduction

The conversion of the royal house of Adiabene was once called by Emil Schürer “der höchste Triumph des jüdischen Bekehrungseifers” in his elaborate work, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*¹; this sentence aptly exemplifies the importance of this topic for research on the literature and history of Jewish Palestine in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Likewise, the topic of the Adiabene royalty often appeared on the front pages of archaeological news, in the 19th c. due to the exploration of *Le Tombeau des Rois* (considered ever since to be the burial place of the Adiabene royalty) by F. de Saulcy², as well as in more recent times. Indeed, in 2007 the topic of the Adiabene royalty hit the headlines of archaeological news in Israel due to the discovery of a palace in the Lower City of David, which, according to its excavators, might have been one of several palaces belonging to the Adiabene royal family³. Again, in 2008 and 2009 archaeologists from the *École Biblique et Archéologique Française* in Jerusalem undertook a new excavation of the terrace around the courtyard of *Le Tombeau des Rois*⁴. Likewise, the loan of a sarcophagus, once discovered in *Le Tombeau des Rois* and associated with Queen Helena, from the *Louvre Museum* to the *Israel Museum*, and its display in 2010 in Jerusalem attracting crowds of visitors contributed to the great revival of interest in the Adiabene royalty.

Given the importance of the topic, illustrated by Schürer’s statement and its presence in many archaeological adventures and surveys, the question arises as to how much attention, and in what shape, has been paid to the 1st century CE Adiabene royal family in academic research. Here we surprisingly notice two things. First, we possess only detailed studies on some aspects of Adiabene and its royalty, but no comprehensive study has ever been published. Secondly, while detailed studies do cover some areas of interest well, there are some other research fields connected with Adiabene and its royalty that remain hardly researched. Let us briefly expound on both observations.

There are four research fields connected with the Adiabene royalty that have attracted, relatively, a lot of attention from scholars, though, in some cases, the research results have some deficiencies. First, the issue that has been most extensively dealt with in research is the problem of the source/sources underlying Josephus’ narrative in Ant. 20:17-96 (known as the “Adiabene narrative”, being the most extensive account from ancient literature on the Adiabene royalty)⁵. However, research in this regard has clearly been influenced by the ideological presumptions of its own time. Namely, the most recent contributions were written between the 1960s and the 1980s, when Josephus was seen not as a creative writer but as a compiler of sources⁶. What is more, as T. Rajak rightly remarks, all attempts to unambiguously establish the provenance of the sources for Ant. 20:17-96 “have yielded little more than speculation” (for the state of research on Josephus’ sources see *conclusions to part I*)⁷.

Secondly, many scholars writing about Jewish identity and conversions to Judaism in general referred to the Adiabene royalty in passing, often using its example to illustrate or back up

¹ Schürer 1909: 169.

² De Saulcy 1865: 310-345.

³ Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b.

⁴ Murphy-O’Connor 2010: 18-19.

⁵ Täubler 1904: 62-65; Schalit 1965: 163-188 (esp. 171-176); Schalit 1973: 367-400 (esp. 381-392); N.G. Cohen 1975/76: 30-37; Schiffman 1987: 293-312; Frenschkowski 1990: 213-233; D.R. Schwartz 1996: 241-268; Broer 1994: 133-162.

⁶ The most important publications that contributed to a new understanding of Josephus’ writings are Cohen 1979; Rajak 1983; Bilde 1988; Mason 1991; Feldman 1998a; Feldman 1998b. On the ongoing methodological discussion about Josephus’ writings, see D.R. Schwartz 1983: 157-171; D.R. Schwartz 1990; Mason 2003: 145-188 (reacting to D.R. Schwartz 1983 and D.R. Schwartz 1990); D.R. Schwartz 2007: 125-146 (reacting to Mason 2003); Grabbe 1992; Mason 1995: 463-472 (reacting to Grabbe 1992); Grabbe 2000: 35-47 (reacting to Mason 1995).

⁷ Rajak 1998: 321-322.

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their own line of reasoning. To be more precise, the example of the conversion of the Adiabene royalty has been used to address a few issues – the existence of the class of God-fearers⁸, the role of circumcision in the process of conversion⁹, and the existence of Jewish missionaries¹⁰ (for this aspect of the state of research on Ant. 20:17-96 see chapter 4.2.).

Thirdly, we possess a few publications about Rabbinic references to the Adiabene royalty¹¹. Here, however, most contributors tended to treat Rabbinic accounts as a repository of historical information and accept them at face value.

Fourthly, archaeology is certainly one of the research fields where the topic of the Adiabene royalty has clearly had its own place since the exploration of the burial complex on Nablus Road in the 19th century¹². The burial complex has been named *Le Tombeau des Rois* by its first explorer, F. de Saulcy¹³, and is widely regarded as the burial place mentioned by ancient sources as the resting place of the Adiabene royalty ever since¹⁴. However, this identification has always had its critics, too¹⁵, and it seems that it is nowadays accepted without giving much thought to its theoretical deficiencies (for this aspect of the state of research see chapter 7.2.4.2., esp. nn. 675-679). Likewise, archaeological work in Jerusalem since 1967 yielded much data on the 1st c. CE inhabitants of the City of David and consequently led to tentative attempts of correlating Josephus' references to palaces of the Adiabene royalty to the archaeological data (for this aspect of the state of research see chapter 7.3.3.)¹⁶.

Furthermore, some other research fields on Adiabene and its royalty have attracted considerably less attention than those mentioned above. First, the issue of the Adiabene narrative as Josephus' skillful literary product has evoked very little scholarly interest¹⁷, especially compared to the issue of the sources of Ant. 20:17-96 or the issue of the conversion in Ant. 20:34-48.

Secondly, Josephus' brief references to various Adiabeneans and Adiabene in *De Bello Judaico* in the context of the Jewish uprising against Rome have often been disparaged as

⁸ E.g. Lake 1933: 74-96; Kuhn/Stegeman 1962: 1263-1264; Siegert 1973: 128-129; Feldman 1986: 61; McKnight 1991: 96-97; Feldman 1993: 332-333, 350-351; Wander 1997: 175; Wander 1998: 62-64, 78-79, 148-149.

⁹ E.g. Klausner 1944: 38-40; McEleney 1974: 323-324; Nolland 1981: 192-194; Collins 1985: 179; Schiffman 1987: 303-305; Gilbert 1990/1991: 299-313; McKnight 1991:80; Feldman 1993: 157-158; D.R. Schwartz 1996: 263-282; Borgen 1996: 53; Wander 1997: 169-170, 238-239; R. Goldenberg 1998: 60.

¹⁰ E.g. Harnack 1924: 5-6, n. 2; Moore 1927a: 349; Moore 1927b: 91-92; Bamberger 1939: 21-22, 225-228; Kasting 1969: 13, 16, 24-25; McKnight 1991: 56; Feldman 1992a: 376-378; Goodman 1992: 53-54, 68, 73; Feldman 1993: 329-330, 332-333; Will/Orrieux 1993: 194-195; Goodman 1994: 84-85; Wander 1998: 224; Blaschke 1998: 234; Dickson 2003: 33-37.

¹¹ Derenbourg 1867: 224-229; Brüll 1874: 74-80; Gafni 1970/71: 204-212; Barish 1983: 97-157; Schiffman 1987: 298-302; Kalmin 2010. See also encyclopedia entries that frequently utilize Rabbinic references: Hamburger 1883: 373-374, 556-557, 802; Gafni 2007; Rappaport 2007; Schalit 2007; Schalit/Gibson 2007.

¹² Bieberstein/Blodhoern 1994a: 153-157 contains an exhaustive list of publications up to their own time. More recently, see Jacoby 1998; Hachlili 2005: 121, 168-170; Küchler 2006: 985-995; Kloner/Zissu 2007: 231-234.

¹³ De Saulcy 1866: 105-113.

¹⁴ Creuzer 1853: 906-930; Robinson 1857: 327-330; Renan 1865: 550-570; Sepp 1879: 307-317; Clermont-Ganneau 1883: 415-418; Clermont-Ganneau 1884/1885: 89-100; Euting 1885: 669-688; Schick 1897: 182-183; Pfenningsdorf 1904: 173-187; Dussaud 1912: 43-44; Clarke 1938: 88-89; Kon 1947; Vincent/Steve 1954: 346-362; Kutscher 1958: 23-24; Vermes/Millar/Goodman 1986: 164, n. 6; Naveh 1975: 117-123; Rahmani 1982: 48-49; Jacoby 1998: 460-462; Hachlili 2005: 121, 168-170; Kloner/Zissu 2007: 231-234.

¹⁵ Quatèmère 1852a: 92-113; Quatèmère 1852b: 157-169; Tobler 1853: 297-322; Gell 1901: 413-419; Slousch 1921: 49-51.

¹⁶ Mazar 1978: 236-237; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2007; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011a; Ben-Ami/Tchekhanovetz 2011b.

¹⁷ Broer 1994: 149-156; Gnuse 1996: 196-197; Jonquière 2007: 202-207. Very brief observations on the matter can be found in Täubler 1904: 63, n. 3; Graetz, 1906: 786; Frenschkowski 1990: 229, n. 66; Schiffman 1987: 295, 297; Thackeray's observations in Feldman 1965: 11, n. "d"; Marciak 2011a: 63-83.

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“incidental remarks and anecdotes”¹⁸ and consequently were not subjected to a comprehensive analysis.

Thirdly, Josephus’ references to Adiabenean palaces in Jerusalem have been covered under the topic of archaeology¹⁹, but have not really been given much thought as reflecting the socio-historical context of the conversion of the Adiabene royalty.

Similarly and fourthly, Latin sources in which members of the Adiabene royalty appear were only treated as repositories of historical and chronological information²⁰, but not as products revealing Roman popular views concerning the Adiabeneans as Eastern peoples²¹.

Fifthly, the topic of the Adiabene dynasty naturally touches on issues connected with the country of its origin and in this case we may only speak of some pioneering studies. It is J. Reade, in the first place, who through a number of studies based mainly on the findings from Nineveh introduced the topic of Adiabene’s material culture into modern research²².

Next, there is also a number of publications devoted to numismatic and epigraphical evidence from the region²³.

Lastly, the subject of Adiabene in the political context of the 1st c. CE relations between Rome and Parthia, is sometimes touched on by scholars dealing with the history of Rome and Parthia²⁴, and was also the subject of a number of J. Neusner’s publications²⁵.

Above all, there has been only one attempt to deliver a large-scale study on the ancient Adiabene royalty by D. Barish under the title, *Adiabene: Royal Converts to Judaism in the First Century C.E.: a Study of the Sources*. But his dissertation, defended at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1983, has never been published and as such has had very little influence on scholarship²⁶. Barish’s study was divided into three parts: “Josephus, Rabbinic literature and archaeology”. The first part discussed only Josephus’ Ant. 20:17-96, its sources and Josephus’ editorial input, the second delivered a basic presentation of Rabbinic accounts, the aim of the third part was to verify three identifications of “the physical remains” of the Adiabene royalty: the statue of a king named ‘tlw as depicting king Izates II from Hatra (negative identification), *Le Tombeau des Rois* as the resting place of the Adiabene royalty (positive identification), the sarcophagus found in *Le Tombeau des Rois* as belonging to Queen Helena (negative identification). Thus, it is evident that the focus of Barish’s study was in fact placed on the Jewish setting, and, except for the one statue from Hatra and its comparative material, it did not concern the material and political environment of Adiabene as one of Parthian *regna minora*.

In the light of the present state of research on Adiabene and its royalty, the aim of this study is to deliver the first monographic study on the family of royal converts from Adiabene including

¹⁸ Barish 1983: 13.

¹⁹ Most systematic treatments of literary sources concerning the palaces can be found in Vincent/Steve 1954: 235-236 and Bieberstein/Bloedhorn 1998b: 397.

²⁰ Barish 1983: 6-7; M. Stern 1980: 86.

²¹ Although similar studies have been conducted about Roman views concerning the Parthians in general: see Walser 1951: 67-74, 136-160; Sonnabend 1986: 157-311; Lerouge 2007.

²² Reade 1998; Reade 1998-2001; Reade 1999; Reade 2001. See also Eiland 1998; Marciak 2011b, and the following encyclopedia entries: Fränkel 1894; Otto 1912; Weissbach 1919; Geyer 1933; Sourdel 1978; Sellwood 1985; Hansman 1987; Oelsner 1996; Ego 1996.

²³ Edmonds 1931: 350-355; Milik 1962: 51-58; Le Rider 1967: 4-20, pl. III-IV; Teixidor 1967: 1-11; Aggoula 1985: 34-35 (no. 12); de Callataÿ 1996: 135-145; Beyer 1998: 13 (no. 12); Huyse 1999a: 20; Hendin 2001: 453-455; Tameanko 2005: 16-25; Hoover 2009: 161-165.

²⁴ Debevoise 1938: 51, 71, 75, 165-178, 196-197, 225-233; Dillemann 1962: 112, 268-272; 276-286; Pigulevskaja 1963: 64-70; Ziegler 1964: 45-96; Colpe 1974: 97-108; Widengren 1957: 200-201; Dąbrowa 1983: 118-124; Rajak 1983: 309-324; Schottky 1991: 110-111; Wolski 1993: 88-89, 115-116, 126-127, 179-180; Olbrycht 1997a: 81-100 (esp. 84-85 and n. 13); Olbrycht 1998a: 177-178; Olbrycht 1998c: 125-126; Fowler 2010: 72-73.

²⁵ Neusner 1964a; Neusner 1964b; Neusner 1966; Neusner 1969: 61-73. See also Delitzsch 1877.

²⁶ To my knowledge, it is quoted only by Kalmin 2010.

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the broader perspective of the material and political environment of Hellenistic and Parthian Adiabene.

Our study will consist of three main parts. Part 1 will be devoted to the longest ancient account on the Adiabene royalty from all ancient literature – Josephus, *Ant.* 20:17-96 (“the Adiabene Narrative”). Our aim will be to understand the Adiabene narrative as Josephus’ conscious literary product with all its rhetorical features and ideological agendas. Therefore, we will first see how Josephus arranged his narrative, and how this arrangement reveals the most vital points Josephus wants to convey to his readers/listeners²⁷ (chapter 1). Next, following the results of the first analysis, we will examine the essential features of *Ant.* 20:17-96 as a piece of ancient biographical literature in both its formal features (chapter 2: the elements of birth and death as the most essential points of every biography) and thematic content (three themes: Izates as a political leader, the conversion, human piety and God’s providence in chapters 3-5 respectively). In the conclusions to part 1 we will relate the previous understanding of *Ant.* 20:17-96 with the results of our own analysis.

Part 2 will analyse all sources that convey the picture of the Adiabene dynasty as good royalty for the Jewish people. First, we will discuss Josephus’ short reference to Queen Helena in *Ant.* 20:101 and Rabbinic traditions about Queen Helena and King Munbaz (chapter 6), since both Josephus and the Rabbis picture the Adiabene royalty as great benefactors to the Jewish people and models of utmost piety. Our aim will not be to extract historical information from the texts alone but to understand them as cultural phenomena, that is, as witnesses of the significance of the royal Adiabeneans to the authors themselves (chapter 6). Secondly, we will discuss all Jewish and non-Jewish sources that refer to the resting place of Queen Helena and the palaces of the Adiabene royalty (chapter 7). In this case, our aim will be to first highlight the sources in their literary and historical context and only then to glean all archaeologically relevant information from them. This will lead us to another level of reflection – a discussion of the archaeological context where we will first present and discuss the archaeological data (suggested by archaeologists as physical remains of the Adiabene royalty), and only then confront the archaeological data with the knowledge gained from the literary sources in order to attempt archaeological identifications.

In part 3 we will sketch the material and political environment of Adiabene from the 3rd c. BCE to the 3rd c. CE. To get valuable insight into the material culture of Adiabene, one has to include all available kinds of sources: geographical and ethnographical texts (chapter 8), archaeological findings (chapter 9), epigraphic and numismatic material (chapter 10), as well as onomastic evidence (chapter 11). Further, we will present a basic chronology of the Adiabene royalty in the Hellenistic and Parthian periods (chapter 12). Lastly, we will turn our attention to the political environment of Adiabene and Judea in the context of the international relations between Rome and Parthia (chapter 13), which will include four stages: the presentation of how the Romans perceived the Parthians (among whom they clearly counted the Adiabeneans – chapter 13.1.), the discussion of evidence for the presence of Jews in Adiabene (chapter 13.2.), Josephus’ references in *Bell.* to the Adiabeneans taking part in the Jewish uprising against Rome (chapter 13.3.), and finally Josephus’ general remarks in *Bell.* on the Jewish uprising and Adiabene in the context of the relations between Rome and Parthia (chapter 13.4.).

All these parts help us understand the meaning and development of literary traditions concerning the Adiabene royalty in their literary and historical context and, by including archaeological and historical data from both Jerusalem and Adiabene, help us gain a broader perspective on ancient traditions concerning the 1st c. CE Adiabene royalty.

²⁷ Josephus wrote for a relatively small number of Roman elites who belonged to his company (including some Hellenized Jews) and personally took part in the process of production of his writings (oral recitation and distribution of partial drafts). That is why we speak about both readers and listeners as Josephus’ audience. See Mason 2005.