# « Christianity », a response to Roman-Jewish Conflict

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A number of times, Jews had tested the limits of Roman power, at other times, they have used the same power for their own purposes, and often the one went along with the other.[[1]](#footnote-1) Doing so, they also tested their own ties in inner Jewish revolts and persecutions. Josephus recounts the reaction of « the inhabitants of Cesarea and Sebaste » to the death of Agrippa I.[[2]](#footnote-2) Tensions and rows amongst Jews in the city could even provoke the Roman authority’s and an Emperor’s action, as in the case of Claudian.[[3]](#footnote-3) We can think of the killing of James, the brother of Jesus during an interregnum of the Roman procurators,[[4]](#footnote-4) and Jesus’ own death at the hand of Romans, but at the instigation of his chosen, closest friend Judas (*Luke* 22:1-6. 47-8 par.). The sufferings of Jews by Jews is exemplified by Paul’s persecution of the church. Indeed, Paul mentions his attack in *Phil*. 3:6: « In my zeal for God I persecuted the church. » And he repeats it in *Gal*. 1:13: « For you have heard of my former way of life in Judaism, how I was savagely persecuting the church of God and trying to destroy it. » In 1 *Thess*. 2:14 he states that the killing of « Jesus and the prophets’ and subsequent persecutions in Judaea and Thessalonica were carried out by « Jews’ whom Paul regarded as his and the Thessalonians’ « own contrymen » (ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων συμφυλετῶν).

The year 135 CE, however, marks the end of a period of external and internal revolts, only to be the beginning of what Seth Schwartz calls « the most controversial era in Jewish history ».[[5]](#footnote-5) According to Schwartz « the core ideology of Judaism ... ceased, after the two revolts, to function as an integrating force in Palestinian Jewish society », and he adds, « the intermediaries of the Torah lost not only their legal authority but also their status as cultural ideals », « indeed, if there was anything at all holding Palestinian Jewish society together, it may have been no more than an attenuated sense of a common past, a mild feeling of separation from their neighbors that the latter, who had shared memories of their own, may have conspired to maintain«.[[6]](#footnote-6)

It was not only the « newly emerging group, the rabbis – men who had attained expertise in the Torah and in Jewish law (both civil and ritual) and were authorized to teach and judge »,[[7]](#footnote-7) who slowly made their way into history, but also, if we follow the suggestion of Guy Stroumsa, the simultaneous rise of the other teachers and proponents of the emerging twin religion. Both Rabbinism and Christianity developed a partially shared Jewish heritage,[[8]](#footnote-8) but they reacted differently to the Jewish defeats by the Romans, the ones by retreat and closing their ranks, the others by opening up and embracing the victors’ culture and language.

In what follows I would like to present Marcion of Sinope as one of those who, as a businessman and shipowner, had certainly suffered from the upheavals and instabilities of the social and economic environment of these times, but who also had seezed the opportunity to emphasise non-retribution and non-involvement by suggesting a third way between Rome and Jerusalem, drawing on both these traditions, but starting a new one.[[9]](#footnote-9) This he did explicitly by following the Messiah and Lord Jesus’ visionary experience by Paul who had formulated a spiritual Judaism in a Greco-Roman spirit. From the latter Marcion took the idea of a colonial all inclusivity, from the former the idea of salvation. In combining both he saw « salvation » reaching « everyone who believes, to the Jew and to the Greek, because the righteousness of God is revealed in it from faith unto faith ».[[10]](#footnote-10) Righteousness Marcion understood no longer confined to one form of faith, but as revealed to « the Jew » as well as « to the Greek », just as « injustice » is revealed « from heaven » by the « wrath » and « all ungodliness and injustice of people who suppress the truth by their injustice ».[[11]](#footnote-11) With Paul he developed the view that being Jewish was not a matter of « flesh », but that of a « circumcision of the heart », « in the spirit, not in the letter ».[[12]](#footnote-12) This idea of spiritual non-judgementalism which he tied to a non-aggressive, pacifist and loving nature even in the face of aggressors, foes and persecutors made him even accept the Jewish and Roman shame name of « Christians » and coin the term « Christianity » which he set in antithesis to « Judaism ».[[13]](#footnote-13)

The last of the revolts (132-135 CE) which had displaced people in Palestine and Asia Minor and made them move West like Justin (and the protagonist of his *Dialogue with Trypho*) and Marcion, was the bloodiest war a Roman Emperor had ever fought and « proved to be one of the most difficult « police actions » Rome » undertook.[[14]](#footnote-14) Dio Cassius reports about the war and, even if one might be sceptical about the mentioned numbers, the overall sense of his view of this war is clear. First he summarised the devastating results for the Jews:

Fifty of their most important outposts and nine hundred and eighty-five of their most famous villages were razed to the ground. Five hundred and eighty thousand men were slain in the various raids and battles, and the number of those that perished by famine, disease and fire was past finding out. Thus nearly the whole of Judaea was made desolate, a result of which the people had had forewarning before the war. For the tomb of Solomon, which the Jews regard as an object of veneration, fell to pieces of itself and collapsed, and many wolves and hyenas rushed howling into their cities.

And then the historian added the losses on the Roman side which seem to have outweighed those of the Jews:

Many Romans perished in this war. Therefore Hadrian in writing to the senate did not employ the opening phrase commonly affected by the emperors, « If you and our children are in health, it is well; I and the legions are in health. »[[15]](#footnote-15)

Even 30 years after these events, this « was the type of war the Romans recalled only in horror. When the Roman author Cornelius Fronto wrote a letter to the emperor Marcus Aurelius on the occasion of the destruction of a legion by the Parthians (in A.D. 162), he compared it to the Bar-Kokhba revolt, implicitly admitting that the latter had been a defeat » for the Romans.[[16]](#footnote-16) Fronto confirms that Hadrian’s address to Senate after that war was a silent admittance of defeat.[[17]](#footnote-17) This humiliation had not been forgotten in Roman memory. Jews faced a harsh punishment and a drastic situation, the loss not only of the Temple in Jerusalem (which was already burnt down in 70 by Titus, although hope survived of it being rebuilt again, one of the drivers for and during the Bar Kokhba revolt), but with the Temple gone, Jews now were expelled from Jerusalem, lost their official sacrifices and their organisation, nature and standing of the Levitic and also the high priesthood. Since then Jews were excluded from the town of Jerusalem, banned from its infrastructure for centuries (only allowed back once a year for the commemoration of the destruction of the Temple). The Temple of Jerusalem had been replaced by a Roman sanctuary as the centre of Aelia Capitolina, Hadrian’s city.

Marcion’s reconceptualization of Judaism immedately after the end of the Bar Kokhba war[[18]](#footnote-18) is reflected in his collection of the written legacy of Paul and the oral information about Jesus of Nazareth which he both gathered and used in his Roman classroom (and perhaps even before in Asia minor). The lectures seem to have been a success and Marcion’s Jesus-material became quickly of interest to other Roman teachers who saw themselves in the Jesus-tradition. What Marcion had ordered biographically and geographically (as a man in the ship trade was likely to do), was rapidly picked up by others, copied, altered and made its way into the public as Gospels according to Matthew, John, Mark and Luke (and others).[[19]](#footnote-19) Marcion himself, as Tertullian explains, reacted against these plagiarisms of his Gospel, especially as these others were published under the names of apostles (Matthew, John) and apostolic men (Mark, Luke). As a response, Marcion decided to publish his own collection as an anonymous Gospel, prefaced by his *Antitheses*, with the addition of ten Pauline letters which he had gathered, biographically and geographically arranged, and slightly edited. The entire collection he gave the title « New Testament ». It was in the preface of this work that he drew the conclusion to place « Christianity » as an antithesis to the kind of « Judaism » that he had been part of and suffered from during the latest anti-Roman revolt.[[20]](#footnote-20) For the first time, the hitherto shamename of « Christian » had been used as a self-description for the new cult, a « new covenant or testament » with no link to Judaism other than to its historical typologies, as the terms « covenant » or « testament » already indicate, a « Judaism » which Marcion called the « old covenant » of the Jews and their Creator god. Marcion, however, did not come out of the blue, but had apparently grown up in a hellenistic Jewish environment at Sinope,[[21]](#footnote-21) and we may learn from the portrayal of his contemporary proselyte co-citizen Aquila something about his own Jewish background.[[22]](#footnote-22) In addition, like him and Aquila, other authors began to collect, translate and edit the traditions of the past, Josephus had done so towards the end of the first century, and now after the Bar Kokhba war, we find the Tannaitic authors and parallel to them a soon growing number of « Christian » writers.

## Marcion, businessman and cult founder

According to the literary output that was directed to, about, and against any person in the history of Late Antiquity, Marcion of Sinope is the most spoken of, already during his lifetime, at least amongst those people who soon after him would call themselves « Christians ». The groundbreaking work of Adolf von Harnack, published in 1924, built on the studies of the other towering figure of Theodor Zahn,[[23]](#footnote-23) in the last decade scholarship seems to continue the enormous output that the contemporaries of Marcion had started in the second century CE with the books by May, Moll, Beduhn, Roth, Klinghardt and Lieu,[[24]](#footnote-24) a debate to which I have contributed myself.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Who was Marcion? In the beginning of the third century, Tertullian of Carthage spend more ink on him than on all other people and subjects together – and Tertullian has written a lot, and many of his works have been preserved.[[26]](#footnote-26) According to Tertullian, Marcion was a pretty rich businessman, an owner of ships who had made so much money that, when he moved from northern Bithynia to Rome after the end of the Bar Kokhba war, he endowed the Roman community of brethren with 200,000 sesterces.[[27]](#footnote-27) If we reckon that he paid this out of his own pockets, and if such cash donations would not exceed 5% of his wealth, he was certainly one of the richest patrons and *pater familias* of Jewish proselytes[[28]](#footnote-28) of his hometown Sinope, even though he may not have been one of the members of the upper elite of the Roman Empire.

Although it is not entirely clear why Marcion moved to Rome after the revolt, we are told by Clement of Alexandria that like many other teachers who Clement reckons belonged to the « minority ... of the Jews » who « part the hoof … [and who] the Scripture represents as clean and acceptable to God » had moved to Rome.[[29]](#footnote-29) Marcion had arrived at the Empire’s capital during the last years of the reign of Emperor Hadrian (135-138). Tertullian thinks that Marcion came to Rome during the early time of the successor of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, who reigned from 138 to 161 AD. According to Clement, Marcion was « considerably older » than all the other teachers who he mentions had arrived at the end of the Bar Kokhba war, especially Valentinus and Basilides, and that Marcion was no longer alive when Marcus Aurelius began his reign in 161 AD. Hence, Marcion seems to have come to Rome between the years 136 and 138.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Why did he, like so many other Jewish teachers who were later regarded as Christians, move to Rome after the war? A potential answer – unfortunately we have no corroborating data of how deeply affecting the Jewish revolt in Judaea was for Jews living in the Asian provinces, but we can deduce from people moving as far as Corinth and Rome from Judaea, Bithynia, Syria and Samaria[[31]](#footnote-31) that it had a wider impact and that the impact was not confined to Judaea – is the challenge and also the opportunity that the end of that revolt provided to a smart and successful entrepreneur. Roman war power was both repulsive but also attractive, particularly to people who were drawn to the centre of commerce and whose dealings depended on communication and trade with the city of Rome.

Tertullian will serve as crown witness for what I am going to present here. The fourth of his five books *Against Marcion* which he wrote at the beginning of the third century, provides us with an extensive commentary on Marcion’s Gospel, a text which only during the last five years has been thoroughly and independently reconstructed by three of the before mentioned scholars, Jason BeDuhn, Dieter T. Roth and Matthias Klinghardt. And although their reconstruction attempts differ in places,[[32]](#footnote-32) these differences do not matter for anything that follows. More important, however, is the fact which shows both the importance and standing of Marcion, that Tertullian is the first commentator on any Gospel that is preserved, only preceded by Heracleon with his lost commentary on the same Gospel, that of Marcion,[[33]](#footnote-33) of which only one fragment survived, and Heracleon’s other commentary on the Gospel of John, of which a number of fragments are preserved by Origen.[[34]](#footnote-34)

In what follows, therefore, we are dealing with a highly important and influential text, written by one of Clement’s « minority Jews » and interpreted and criticized by Tertullian in Carthage.

Unlike the canonical Gospels from the New Testament, Marcion’s Gospel begins with a political-historical and a geographical setting of the scene: the Roman Empire with mention of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, and a Roman dominated Judaea with Pontius Pilate, the governor:

3:2 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was prefect of Judea, 4:3 {Jesus} had come down from above and appeared in Capernaum, a city of Galilee, by the sea in the regions of Zaboulon and Nephthalim, and on the Sabbath, he began to teach.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Tertullian in his commentary makes a big deal of the fact that Marcion does not report, how Jesus had made his way down from above, but reports the beginning of Jesus’ biography as an appearance of a heavenly being, an angelic prophet, as Tertullian will later explain.[[36]](#footnote-36) According to Tertullian, Marcion’s choice of words when describing Jesus beginnings as an « appearance » « suggests a sudden and unexpected sight », the casting of one’s eyes « on a thing which has at that instance appeared », and so he wonders about the « sequence », the « aspect », the « sort of array », even the « speed », « move », the « time of day or of night », when Jesus « came down », who « witnessed it, and who gave assurance of a fact not easily credible even to him who gives assurance ». And because of this incredible event, Tertullian thinks that nobody could have believed it, if it had not been foretold by the Prophets of Israel.

## Romulus/Christ

Before Tertullian moves on and refers to the Jewish traditions, he takes into account that Marcion with the beginning of his Gospel does neither draw on Jewish witnesses nor did he place Jesus’ appearance into the historical frame of Israel, but used the Roman Empire as a reference point, starting his story with the « fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea ». Tertullian comments on this Roman entrance to the biographical narrative stating:

It is quite wrong in fact, that Romulus should have had Proculus to vouch for his ascent into heaven, yet that Christ should not have provided himself with a foreteller of his god’s descent from heaven – though that one must have gone up by the same ladder of lies by which this one came down.[[37]](#footnote-37)

In this comment Tertullian compares Christ with Romulus, making the case that Romulus had a witness who vouched « for his ascent into heaven », whereas Marcion denied Jesus any witness and foreteller, as for Marcion none of the Prophets of Israel, including Mose and John the Baptist, had any foreknowledge of Jesus’ sudden and unexpected appearance and divine character.

The Romulus-Proculus comparison is more than just a random example of the Latin writer Tertullian. By drawing on Livy’s *History of Rome* (1.16),[[38]](#footnote-38) Tertullian also draws on the familiarity with this literary background that he shared with his readers. In Livy we learn that the Romans had made a similarly abrupt and sudden, albeit opposite experience with Romulus, the founder of Rome, as the Jews made when experiencing Jesus. Livy narrates that when king Romulus visited his army « in the plain near the lake of Caprae, « a sudden storm » had « arisen, with great thunder and lightning » which « enveloped the king in a so dense a mist, that it took all sight of him from the assembly ». Within an instant, Romulus was no longer seen on earth. As in Jesus’ case who appeared from above out of nothing, so « the Roman youth saw the royal seat » suddenly « empty … [Romulus being] carried aloft by the storm ». The reaction of the people who attended this event, however, was mixed. First a few, then « the whole multitude » saluted « Romulus as a god, son of a god, the king and parent of the Roman city; they implore[d] his favour with prayers, that he would be pleased always propitiously to preserve his own offspring », but, as Livy states his own view: « I believe that even then there were some, who silently surmised that the king had been torn in pieces by the hands of the fathers », and as Livius admits, « this rumour also spread », even though « it was not credited ». Indeed, the critical voices became politically dangerous, « the state was … troubled with regret for the king, and felt incensed against the senators », had not « a person of weight », namely Proculus Julius, come forward to address the assembly and vouched for the former version that « Romulus, the father of this city [of Rome] » had been « suddenly descending from heaven, and appeared to » him, Proculus. It was « at daybreak », while Proculus « stood covered with awe, and filled with a religious dread », wanting and « beseeching Romulus to allow … to see him face to face ». Then Livy adds the core message of Romulus who asks his witness Proculus: « Go tell the Romans that the gods so will, that my Rome should become the capitol of the world. Therefore let them cultivate the art of war, and let them know and hand down to posterity, that no human power shall be able to withstand the Roman arms ». And Livy ends this passage by adding: « Having said this, Romulus ascended up to heaven ».

The story that Tertullian invokes to demonstrate that Christ should not be denied a foretelling of his coming, if people accepted that the founder of Rome had Proculus, conveys at the same time more elements than just this partially antithetical parallelism. It is the feature of the two founding figures of Romulus and Christ, the sudden ascent to and descent from heaven of Romulus and the descent from heaven of Jesus, the mixed reaction of the people, believers and unbelievers, the divine nature of the protagonists, both being « son of god » and « king ». Hence, Tertullian, although unspokenly, transfers on Christ the parenthood of the city of Rome. Christ is being implored with prayers to be the saving hand for his offspring, and Tertullian calls up the unbelievers who « had been torn in pieces by the hands of the fathers », which now are no longer only the Jews, but also Romans who had killed Jesus on the cross. And yet, the « regret for the king », and the incense « against the senators » is an implicit criticism of both Roman and Jewish authorities. Tertullian calls for a witness who sees Christ « face to face », instead of being faced with an angelic phantom. And he even slips into the persona of Proculus as Proculus is the one who conveys Romulus’ message, just as Tertullian conveys Christ’s message. Implied is the Romanocentrism that this city « should become the capitol of the world », linked to a cultivation of « the art of war », the task of handing down « to posterity, that no humanpower shall be able to withstand the Roman arms ».

## Marcion’s view of Rome

Tertullian who otherwise is often, though not entirely, critical of Rome,[[39]](#footnote-39) was certainly prompted to this comparison through Marcion’s opening of his Gospel that center staged the Roman Empire with the Emperor and his governor. It seems that Tertullian still knew that Marcion’s Gospel was produced as a literary reaction to the nonsensical messianic, suicidal attempt of the Jewish rebels to overturn the Romans under Bar Kokhba. Just before the above quoted opening of Marcion’s Gospel with Tertullian’s comments, our writer had related the end of Marcion’s preface to the Gospel:

Marcion lays it down that there is one Christ who in the time of Tiberius was revealed by a god formerly unknown, for the salvation of all the nations; and another Christ who is destined by God the Creator to come at some time still future for the reestablishment of the Jewish kingdom. Between these he sets up a great and absolute opposition, such as that between justice and kindness, between law and gospel, between Judaism and Christianity.[[40]](#footnote-40)

According to this report, Marcion did neither support Bar Kokhba’s messianism nor any Jewish messianic figure who, « destined by God the Creator’ was meant to come in order to re-establish the Jewish kingdom. Marcion’s Messiah was not a political rebel, but a spiritual figure « revealed by a god formerly unknown », who had come « for the salvation of all the nations », including Romans, Jews, and all others. Again, Marcion and with Marcion Tertullian, insists that this Messiah had been revealed « in the time of Tiberius ». Although Tertullian will fight against the antithesis between the Christ of an unknown god and the Christ of God the Creator, against Marcion’s antithesis between justice and kindness, between law and gospel, he will adopt Marcion’s antithesis between Judaism and Christianity, and with it, a deep Rome-orientation of the new form of worship for which Marcion had coined the term « *Christianismus* ». Just as Marcion has provided the founding testament, a title which Tertullian only takes on in his anti-Marcionite writings,[[41]](#footnote-41) Marcion had also produced the antithetical historical biography of its angelic founder which he termed « eu-angelion », using a Pauline expression to refer to a written document, the good message of an angel which, in English is only nebulously translated as « gospel ».

In this Gospel, as it seems and as I tried to show elsewhere, we are given the first text of this new genre to provide the textual foundation of scriptures in antithesis to the old edict of Moses.[[42]](#footnote-42) Marcion makes Jesus stand up for love of the enemies, and doing good to those who hate one (*Mcn* 6:27; 35), of lending money without expecting anything back (*Mcn* 6:35), « to guard from all types of greed, because one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions » (*Mcn* 12:15). His Jesus calls tax collectors (*Mcn* 5:27-32), collaborators with the Romans, and calls them « justified » (*Mcn* 18:14), he promises even the « rich », and therefore, exteriorating « chief tax collector » salvation (*Mcn* 19:1-10); and to the question of the Pharisees (*Mcn* 20:1) whether or not Jews should pay tax to the Emperor (*Mcn* 20:22), Marcion’s Jesus answers: « Show me a denarius. Whose image and inscription are on it? They said, Caesar’s. So he said to them, Then give to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s » (*Mcn* 20:24-5).[[43]](#footnote-43) Nevertheless, « the elders of the people » (*Mcn* 22:66) accuse Jesus before Pilate: « We found this man subverting the nation, dissolving the Law and the Prophets, forbidding us to pay the tribute tax, taking away women and children from us, because they are neither washed nor purified like us, and claiming that he himself is Christ, a king » (*Mcn* 23:2).[[44]](#footnote-44) Pilate, however, in Marcion’s Gospel is answering to the High Priests and the crowd: « I find no basis for an accusation against this man » (*Mcn* 23:3),[[45]](#footnote-45) and he is painted as the one who undertakes several attempts to let Jesus go free and only finally gave in to the demand of the accusers. Already early in Marcion’s Gospel, Jesus attests to the Roman centurion, who loves the nation of the Jews and has even built them a synagogue, that « by nobody in Israel » has he « found such faith! » (*Mcn* 7:9).

The Gospel’s pro-Roman and antipharisaic tendency becomes already apparent from the political-historical setting of the opening with the mention of Pilate and Tiberius.

## The historico-political setting

Tiberius was Roman Emperor from 13/4 A.D. to 36/7 A.D., and a step-son of the great Augustus, his predecessor on the throne, but he never came to the same fame in historiography or gained Augustus’ glorious memory. Although one of the great military leaders and diplomats of Rome, he is described by Pliny the Elder as the « saddest of man » (*tristissimus … hominum*).[[46]](#footnote-46) He was known and renowned for his envoy Pilate. Herod’s son Antipas who « occupied a « high place » in the circle of Tiberius’s friends »,[[47]](#footnote-47) founded and dedicated to Tiberius the city of Tiberias « on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee », « modelled in plan on Hellenistic lines, … the first Hellenistic city in the region designed for Jews ».[[48]](#footnote-48)

It is unclear from when to count Marcion’s « fifteenth year of the reign » – as we could count from the death of Augustus, Aug. 19th, A.U.C. 767 = A.D. 14, or from the time when Tiberius became « associated with Augustus as joint ruler at the end of 764 or beginning of 765 A.U.C. » = A.D. 11 or 12?[[49]](#footnote-49) Scholars are divided: While « the statements of Tacitus and Suetonius » are more consistent with the former dating, because Tiberius was joint ruler with Augustus, but never joint Emperor, and when Augustus died, « Tiberius was not regarded by himself or by others as already Emperor »,[[50]](#footnote-50) Marcion’s nomenclature of ἡγεμονία instead of μοναρχία for Tiberius’ « reign » indicates the co-rulership of the (then) Emperor Tiberius.[[51]](#footnote-51) Whichever way we have to count, Marcion seems conversant with Roman historiography and legal terminology. His ἡγεμονεύοντος for Pontius Pilate’s position is precise,[[52]](#footnote-52) as it denotes the military prefecture, the Roman *praefectus*,[[53]](#footnote-53) while the civic title *procurator* (ἐπίτροπος) was not yet in specific use in Tiberius’ time, but became introduced only by Emperor Claudius.[[54]](#footnote-54) Pontius Pilate, the fifth prefect of the Roman province of Judaea, succeeded Valerius Gratus AD 26, and « was recalled A.D. 36 or 37 by Tiberius, who died, March A.D. 37, before Pilate reached Rome ».[[55]](#footnote-55) Looking into the role of Tiberius and Pilate, the mention of the two at the beginning of Marcion’s Gospel was not only a political, but also a socio-religious and theological statement[[56]](#footnote-56) – obviously well understood by those who used his text.

After Herod I had died in 4 B.C., according to his last will, endorsed by the Emperor,[[57]](#footnote-57) his empire had been divided amongst his three Sons, Archelaus, Herod Antipas and Philip.[[58]](#footnote-58) Archelaus, Herod’s son and his Samaritan wife Malthace, became the Ethnarch of Samaria, Judea, and Idumea (and the jurisdiction over Salome’s estates), « which constituted the major portion of his [Herod’s] kingdom ».[[59]](#footnote-59) Already before Archelaus was officially installed, he was deeply involved in the struggle between Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees pressurized him to remove the Sadducean High Priest Joezer of the Boethus family and to punish the former councilors of Herod responsible for the martyrdom of the Pharisaic « scholars Judah son of Ẓipporai and Mattathias ben Margalot and their associates, who had been put to death at Herod’s command for tearing down the Roman eagle from the Temple gates ».[[60]](#footnote-60) Because of Archelaus’ delayed response, popular anger aroused against him, « and when the soldiers were stoned, Archelaus ordered them to suppress the uprising by force. In the clash which followed approximately 3,000 people were killed »[[61]](#footnote-61) in the Temple of Jerusalem. Archelaus was not a lover of Sadducees either, and he had removed several High Priests from office out of financial interests. And although he made some concessions to the Jews by not placing his image on coins, he entered into a union which Josephus saw as an incestuous relation, when after having divorced he married Glaphyra, the widow of his stepbrother Alexander, « by whom she had children » (*Lev*. 18:16-8, 20:21).[[62]](#footnote-62) According to Josephus Archelaus thus was « transgressing ancestral law » which was « abhorrent to the Jews ».[[63]](#footnote-63)

It is not quite clear from Josephus’ report who made up the delegation to Rome which eventually led to the removal of Archelaus, but it seems that this delegation was a joint approach by his own family and the leading people in Judea and Samaria. As a result, in 6 CE Archelaus was removed and the province of Judea formed, placed under direct Roman rule with from 26 CE onwards Pontius Pilate installed as its prefect – the time, as Josephus explaines in his *Antiquities*, of the Census of Quirinius which was supported by the Sadducean High Priest Joazar.[[64]](#footnote-64)

As these events highlight, to open a Gospel with reference to the reign of Tiberius and the rule of Pilate placed the story within a specific religio-political frame. Josephus relates a story which sheds more light on both Tiberius and Pilate:

2. Pilate, being sent by Tiberius as procurator to Judaea, introduced into Jerusalem by night and under cover the effigies of Caesar which are called standards. This proceeding, when day broke, aroused immense excitement among the Jews ; those on the spot were in consternation, considering their laws to have been trampled under foot, as those laws permit no image to be erected in the city ; while the indignation of the townspeople stirred the countryfolk, who flocked together in crowds. Hastening after Pilate to Caesarea, the Jews implored him to remove the standards from Jerusalem and to uphold the laws of their ancestors. When Pilate refused, they fell prostrate around his house and for five whole days and nights remained motionless in that position.

(3) On the ensuing day Pilate took his seat on his tribunal in the great stadium and summoning the multitude, with the apparent intention of answering them, gave the arranged signal to his armed soldiers to surround the Jews. Finding themselves in a ring of troops, three deep, the Jews were struck dumb at this unexpected sight. Pilate, after threatening to cut them down, if they refused to admit Caesar’s images, signalled to the soldiers to draw their swords. Thereupon the Jews, as by concerted action, flung themselves in a body on the ground, extended their necks, and exclaimed that they were ready rather to die than to transgress the law. Overcome with astonishment at such intense religious zeal, Pilate gave orders for the immediate removal of the standards from Jerusalem.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Josephus, himself of priestly descent who later joined the party of the Pharisees reports this uproar, a tumult among the Jews which can only refer to Pharisaic Jews. In contrast, the Herodian dynasty had little reluctance with regards to human images and pagan iconographies.[[66]](#footnote-66) In a catacomb at the Vigna Randanini, Rome, were Greek, Latin and some Aramaic and Hebrew Jewish inscriptions were found from the third century CE, wealthy Jews are attested,[[67]](#footnote-67) and in an inscription a synagogue is mentioned, named after Herod. As Nikolaus Müller rightly states: « The name was a programme ».[[68]](#footnote-68) Indeed, this catacomb provides murals with animals and human imageries, personifications of the seasons, Goddesses (*Abundantia*, *Victoria*), but also the painting of a young man with a victory garland. « It is well known how little offence Herod the Great and Herod Antipas took from human and animal images in their private areas of their palace, and that their love of images even offended »[[69]](#footnote-69) their people. Contrary to the Herodians, Jewish art during this period is markedly non-iconic.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Against this historical background, Marcion’s mention of Tiberius and Pilate in the opening of his Gospel indicates that he shared a Herodian-like perspective on Judaism and on the Roman empire.[[71]](#footnote-71) The Gospel seems to have been Marcion’s entrance ticket to Rome in the immediate aftermath of the Bar Kokhba war, the programme of a Jewish teacher who started a new form of Jewish cult with his endowment and a didascaleion in the capital city of Rome. His new Jewish cult with many priestly, ascetic, purity, and messianic elements was conceived of as an antithesis to the messianic movement of Bar Kokhba and to Pharisaic Judaism. Marcion draws on both with the emphasis on the prophetic teacher and messiah figure Jesus and the radicalised view that only Jesus’ oral tradition would constitute the covenant with God, a God, however, who is the antithesis to the God of Israel, as perceived by Marcion, as the judging, war-faring Creator God of the Torah, the Prophets, and apocalyptic writings like Daniel. In his place, Marcion sets the God of the new edict of peace and love of the enemies, a counter-programme to Bar Kokhba.

Reading Marcion’s Gospel one might be tempted to agree with Guy Stroumsa that Christianity, not rabbinic Judaism, was the form of worship that stood in greater continuity with the older Jewish tradition, when he contends that with the birth of « two new religions … side by side … the appearance of Rabbinic Judaism after 70 CE, and its growth in the following centuries represents a real mutation of the religion of Israel … [whereas] in a way, early Christianity, a religion centred upon a sacrificial ritual celebrated by priests, represents a more obvious continuity with the religion of Israel than the religion of the Rabbis ».[[72]](#footnote-72) If so, Marcion laid the foundation for the formation of a cult which was both in continuity with the « religion of Israel » and consciously subjugated itself to the Roman authorities.

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1. See for a survey of Jewish revolts and attempts of making use of Roman power Schwartz 2014, p. 56 (on Hyrcanus’ and Aristobulus’ appealing for Roman support of Pompey’s representative M. Aemilius Scaurus, see Joseph., *Ant.* 14.29-33). p. 75-97 (« The Jewish revolts, 66-135 CE »). On the first Jewish war, see now Popović 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Josephus, *Ant.* 19.354. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Suetonius, *De vita XII Caesarum libri*, Claudius 25,4: « Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit »; *Acts* 18:2: διὰ τὸ διατεταχέναι Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντας τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς Ῥώμης; see also Orosius VII 6,5. On these measures see Botermann 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Josephus, *Ant.* 20.200-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Schwartz 2014, p. 56. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Schwartz 2001, p. 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. On whether rather slowly, as the « minimalists » argue, or whether almost immediately as the « maximalists » suggest, see the discussion with literature in ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stroumsa 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. On the Jewishness of Marcion, Vinzent 2013, whereas in this paper here I develop elements of the complementary side of Marcion’s *Romanitas*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* V 13,2: « virtus enim dei est in salutem omni credenti, Iudaeo et Graeco, quia iustitia dei in eo revelatur ex fide in fidem » (trans. here and later E. Evans, slightly altered); compare *Rom.* 1:16-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* V 13,2: « iram dicit revelari de caelo super impietatem et iniustitiam hominum qui veritatem in iniustitia detineant »; compare *Rom.* 1:18. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* V 13,7: « Adeo autem Iudaeos incesserat, ut ingesserit propheticam increpationem: Propter vos nomen dei blasphematur. Quam ergo perversum, ut ipse blasphemaret eum cuius blasphemandi causa malos exprobrat! Praefert et circumcisionem cordis praeputiationi; apud deum legis est facta circumcisio cordis, non carnis, spiritu, non littera » (« No, his attack was as clearly against the Jews as was his introduction of the prophetic rebuke, For your sakes the name of God is blasphemed.b How preposterous then that he should himself blaspheme the God whom he rebukes evil men for causing to be blasphemed. He says also that circumcision of the heart is better than uncircumcision: it was under the God of the law that first appeared this circumcision of the heart, not of the flesh, in the spirit, not in the letter »). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See on this below. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Bloom 2010, p. 207; see also Schäfer 1981; Schäfer 2003; Eck 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Dio Cassius 69,14,1-3 (trans. Earnest Cary). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Corn. Fronto, *Ep. ad Marc. Aurel.* 2(II 20 Haines), in enumerating the Roman military desasters, he states: « avo vestro Hadriano imperium optinente quantum militum ab Iudaeis, quantum ab Britannis caesum » (« Again under the rule of your grandfather Hadrian what a number of soldiers were killed by the Jews, what a number by the Britons »); on this Bloom 2010, p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See also the Preface in Schäfer 2003, p. vii. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. While one cannot claim that Marcion’s reconceptualization is necessarily connected to the events of the Jewish revolt, I hope to show in this paper that Marcion’s Gospel, published shortly after the end of the Bar Kokhba war and opening with a religio-political setting is wanting a contextualised reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Vinzent 2014a. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See below note 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Vinzent 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. I am not arguing here that they shared the same background, on the contrary, while Aquila was concerned with establishing and correcting the text of the Greek Jewish Scriptures, Marcion undertook a very different task of collecting writings of Paul and traditions on Jesus to publish them. What, however, they shared was their knowledge of the Greek Jewish Scriptures, their reluctancy in allegorical interpretation and apparently a deep Greek learning and knowledge of textual criticism. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Zahn 1888, p. 449-529. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Harnack 1924; May – Greschat2002; Moll 2010, p. 77-106; BeDuhn 2013; Roth 2015; Klinghardt 2015; Lieu 2015. On these and more recent literature and workshops on Marcion, see Heil 2017. See also Zwierlein 2015; Klinghardt – BeDuhn – Lieu 2017, and the earlier study by Aland 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Vinzent, 2011; Vinzent 2014a; Vinzent 2014b; Vinzent 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. See now Vinzent 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. May 1989 (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The proselyte background of Marcion, already seen by Harnack, is detailed in Vinzent 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* VII 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See Vinzent 2015a. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 1: «Trypho, says he, I am called; and I am a Hebrew of the circumcision, and having escaped from the war lately carried on there, I am spending my days in Greece, and chiefly at Corinth » (trans. ANF). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. On the different methodological assumptions in the reconstruction of Marcion’s Gospel see my forthcoming study: Vinzent (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. See Heracleon, *Fragment*, in Clem. Alex., *Strom*. IV 9. On this see my blog-entry: http://markusvinzent.blogspot.de/2015/08/did-valentinian-heracleon-write.html [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. On the latter see Wucherpfennig 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For the reconstruction of Marcion’s Gospel (*Mcn*) I use Klinghard 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* IV 7,2. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* IV 7,3. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Trans. of what follows by Spillan 1853. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. See Braun 1992; Zocca 2015, p. 71-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Tert., *Adv. Marc.* IV 6,3: *Constituit Marcion alium esse Christum qui Tiberianis temporibus a deo quondam ignoto revelatus sit in salutem omnium gentium, alium qui a deo creatore in restitutionem Iudaici status sit destinatus quandoque venturus. Inter hos magnam et omnem differentiam scindit, quantam inter iustum et bonum, quantam inter legem et evangelium, quantam inter Iudaismum et Christianismum.* [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Kinzig 1994. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Vinzent 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. 20:24 Δείξατέ μοι <**δηνάριον**?> <τὸ νόμισμα?>· τίνος ἔχει **εἰκόνα** καὶ ἐπιγραϕήν; ἀποκριθέντες εἶπαν, **Καίσαρος**. 20:25 ὁ δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς, **Ἀπόδοτε τὰ** τοῦ **Καίσαρος** τῷ **Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ**. Reconstruction here and elsewhere according to Klinghardt 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. 23:2 **ἤρξαντο δὲ κατηγορεῖν** αὐτοῦ λέγοντες, **Τοῦτον εὕραμεν διαστρέϕοντα τὸ ἔθνος {καὶ καταλύοντα τὸν νόμον καὶ τοὺς προϕήτας}****καὶ κελεύοντα ϕόρους** **μὴ δοῦναι****{καὶ ἀποστρέϕοντα τὰς γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ τέκνα** <ἀπὸ ἡμῶν, οὐ γὰρ βαπτίζονται ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐδὲ καθαρίζονται?>**}**καὶ λέγοντα **ἑαυτὸν βασιλέα** **Χριστὸν****εἶναι**. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. 23:4 ὁ δὲ Πιλᾶτος εἶπεν **πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχιερεῖς** καὶ τοὺς ὄχλους, Οὐδὲν εὑρίσκω αἴτιον ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ τούτῳ. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Pliny the Elder, *Hist. nat.* XXVIII 5.23. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Richardson 1999, p. 306; see Josephus, *Ant.* XVIII 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Richardson 1999; see Josephus, *BJ* 2,168. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Plummer 1908, p. 81-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. So Plummer 1908, p. 82 with sources, see Tacitus, *Ann.* I 5-7, confirmed by Suetonius, *Tib.* XXIV. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See Wieseler 1864, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. *Pace* Plummer 1908, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. See the so-called « Pilate Stone », an inscription found in Caesarea Maritima, mentioning Pontius Pilate being prefect, Vardaman 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Tac., *Ann.* XV 44 speaks of « procurator »; when Philo, *Legatio* 299 uses ejpivtropo~ in connection with Pilalte, he seems to follow his unspecific understanding of it, see his *Legatio* 132; on the several senses that Philo gives to this Roman constitutional term to denote governor « without reference to any specific office », or to denote « legate », « prefect » and also « procurator », see Smallwood 1970, p. 219-20. See on the historical background Bond 1998, p. 12; Schürmann 1982, p. 150; Bovon 1989, p. 167-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Plummer 1908, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See Bond 1998 (although she does not look into Marcion’s Gospel). [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. On Archelaus and Antipas journey to the Emperor and the alleged support of Antipas by Jewish groups, in order to secure his, and therefore, direct Roman rule, and also another delegation who « pleaded with Augustus to unite their country to Syria and to entrust the administration to the Syrian legate », see Bond 1998, p. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See Josephus, *Ant.* 17,200-355; Richardson 1999, p. 298-314. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Schalit 2007, p. 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Schalit 2007, p. 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Schalit 2007, p. 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Schalit 2007, p. 397. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Josephus, *Ant.* 17,354; Tuval 2013, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Josephus, *Ant.* 18,1. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Josephus, *BJ* 2,169-174, trans. Thackeray. Please use the more recent Loeb translation, which is much better. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. See, for example, Müller 1912, p. 89-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See Cappelletti 2006, 178-81; Rutgers 1995; Rutgers 2000. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Müller 1912, p. 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Müller 1912, p. 90-1 with reference to Josephus, *Ant.* 15,8; id., *Vita* 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. See Vinzent 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bond 1998, p. 20-2 also points to the minting of coins by Pilate, as they show on one side (obverse or reverse) purely Jewish ritual symbols and on the other Roman ritual symbols without human representations. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. I quote from Stroumsa 2008, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)