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Jews and Barbarians – Defining Ethnic Identities in Ancient Ethnography

„Anthropogeography“, the idea that national characteristics are conditioned by the geographical and, sometimes, astrological situation of the land of a people, is a very popular approach in Greek and Roman ethnography. This paper deals with the fact that this ethnographic *topos* is missing in practically all the ethnographic descriptions of the Jews and argues that this lacuna is connected to the diasporic living of the Jews. The geography of Judaea could not be brought into relationship with the customs, character, or the physical appearance of the Jews, because they were not living in one specific place only. Diaspora transcends geographical territory and boundaries. The fact that classical authors do not give us any information about clothing, language, living, appearance, and occupations of the Jews – some of the most fundamental ethnographic *topoi* – might also be explained by the ethnographic impact of the diasporic condition and diversity of Greco-Roman Judaism. Another consequence of the dispersion of the Jews is that, with only a few exceptions, there is no evidence for any pagan author calling the Jews „barbarians“. The Jews apparently did not fit into this dualistic scheme.

My thesis is that on the one hand the diasporic condition of the Jews had a significant impact on the description of the Jews and that on the other hand Jewish Diaspora was never fully conceptualized and never became an ethnographic *idion*.