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## JEWISH EXEMPTION FROM MILITARY SERVICE, AND THE WAY THE ROMANS PERCEIVED THE JEWS AND JUDAISM IN THE LATE ROMAN REPUBLIC AND THE EARLY EMPIRE

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In 1914, Juster showed that there was some clear evidence for Jewish military service in the Roman Empire. Since then, especially in the first decade of the 21st century, others have followed suit and written articles which brought new evidence to light, in order to strengthen this assertion. However, through the ages, many scholars tried to claim that there were no such soldiers in the Roman army or at least, if there were, they were a negligible minority in Jewish society. They usually bring up Josephus' writings, where he describes Jews repeatedly being granted exemption from military service in the second half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE. But these exemptions never encompassed the entire Jewish population under Roman rule. Exemptions were given only to certain communities for a limited time. If there was a general exemption for all Jews, from all classes and all across the Empire, Josephus would have mentioned it in his writings. In addition, Josephus, who sat in Rome, with all the archives of the

empire in his disposal, could not find even one local exemption after the year 14 BCE. So one can infer that such exemptions were not in existence after the year 14 BCE. That, by itself, is the best evidence that Jewish military service existed in the armies of the early Roman Empire. More importantly, the way the writings were phrased highlights how the Romans perceived Jews and Judaism, and their ability to see the difference between Jews as individuals, and between different streams and sects in Judaism. The exemptions raise some further assumptions. Firstly, on how the Romans conducted their affairs in the east. Secondly, about the difference between the administrative staff in the provinces and the politicians in the form of the province's governor. Thirdly, about the Romans' caution in not causing any precedents and countering any of the old laws. Much more can be learned from these exemptions as will be brought forward in the lecture.

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