

Shelf 1: Judaea before Nero

Alexander the Great seized the land of Judaea (territory around Jerusalem) from the Persians in 332 B. C. and began the Greek-inspired cultural transformation known as Hellenization. Judaea would thereafter be ruled by various dynasties – the Greek Ptolemies and Seleucids, the Jewish Maccabee/Hasmoneans, and even Antony and Cleopatra - before the Roman Empire absorbed it as part of the province of Palestine. The last stages of this process took place under Augustus Caesar, the Roman Senate appointing Herod as king.

Throughout those generations, Hellenistic multi-culturalism continued to grow in Judaea. This change can be seen in commonplace objects; traditional pottery from Israel stands in contrast to mass-produced amphorae jars with Greek factory stamps. Everyday life in Judaea became little different from the rest of the Mediterranean, from house construction, eating utensils, exercise and personal hygiene, funeral rites, and even the Koiné (common) Greek used in the writing of the Gospels.