This course will survey the history of the Jews during the Second Temple and Rabbinic periods (515BCE-600CE). This period is witness to the development of many aspects of Judaism as we know it today, such as, the holidays of Purim and Hanukkah, the fast days, the canonization of Tanakh, the publication of the Mishnah and Talmud, and the rise of the Rabbis. But this period is also interesting for the variety of forms of Judaism and groups of Jews that did not gain hegemony: Samaritans, Hellenists, Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and the Dead Sea sect, among others. Each of these groups had to respond to and find a way to survive two destructions and exiles, many wars and revolts, strong influences from foreign cultures, and internal strife while at the same time remaining committed to monotheism and the Biblical tradition. Not all of these groups were successful; we will try to figure out why. The relevance of this material for understanding our own identities and for evaluating the current state of Judaism and its future prospects will become obvious.

In addition to these themes and questions, class discussion will focus on historical analysis and critical evaluation of primary sources. We will learn to think and write like historians. By identifying all relevant literary and archeological sources, recognizing the interpretive difficulties presented by these sources, and evaluating the methodological issues confronting the modern historian, we will be able to formulate not only what we know, but also how we know it, how sure we are of it, and what gaps are there in the historical record. As with everything in life, you’ll only get as much from this course as you put into it, so let’s dig in!

Required text books: (available on Amazon or B&N)

Requirements:
1) Attendance, prompt arrival and class participation are assumed. Anything more than two absences will lower your grade. Two lates are equivalent to one absence.
2) Preparation and Participation: Homework assignments and quizzes based on readings to prepare may be given throughout the semester. The purpose of these is to make sure you keep up with the preparation. Students may be selected randomly each class to read and explain the required texts or to summarize the assigned reading. (10%)
3) Exams. A midterm (40%) and a final (45%) will assess your grasp and retention of material as well as give the class an opportunity to review and notice patterns that recur through many topics.
4) Oral presentation: Students will be required to give one oral presentation during the semester. The presentation will focus on one ancient document used as a primary source for history. You will need to research the following: who wrote it, when, where, in what language was it written, who read/used it, relationship to similar documents, oldest extant versions, summarize the contents, and bring in copies of a selection from the work that you found particularly interesting. You should also prepare a handout that outlines your talk and summarizes the essential content (5%). Material from all student presentation may be on the tests.
Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 3:00-4:00PM or by appointment. Please email rhidary@yu.edu with any questions or concerns.

Unit I - Introduction
1. T. January 25 - Slides
Periods and Sources
When Did Exodus Happen? - Slides
Reading:
   COJS - http://cojs.org/cojswiki/Overview:_Jews_and_Judaism_in_the_Greco-Roman_Period
   • Overview of the periods and topics to be covered
   • What primary sources can we use to reconstruct history and how do we evaluate those sources?

2. Th. January 27 - Slides for classes 2-4
The Babylonian Period and Chronology
Reading:
   FTTT 1-32
   Read 2 Kings 24-25 and Jer 52 carefully. Make note of dates. Bring a Tanakh.
   Read Wikipedia on “Neo-Assyrian Empire” and “Neo-Babylonian Empire”
   • How do historians calculate when important events happened? Where do the dates of our fast days come from?
   • What are the events at the end of the First Temple that set the stage for the Second Temple period?

Unit II – Persian Period
3. T. February 1
Return from Exile, Counting 70
Reading:
   FTTT 33-45
   T&T 65-73
   Ezra 1-6, 2 Chron 36, Haggai 1, Is 44:28-45:1, Jeremiah 29, Zechariah 7-8, Daniel 9
   Bring a Tanakh
   Wikipedia on “Achaemenid Empire”
   Menachem Leibtag article - http://tanach.org/special/purim.doc
Recommended Reading at COJS
Oral Presentation - Haggai
   Zechariah
   • How did the exile end and what happened when the Jews were allowed to return to Israel?
   • How do you count the 70 years prophesied by Jeremiah?
   • What is the historical setting of Megilat Esther and how can history help us better understand Purim?

4. Th. February 3
Activities of Ezra and Nehemiah
Reading:
   FTTT 47-59
Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah whole book especially chs. 8 and 10. Bring a Tanakh
T&T 80-92, 104-5
Recommended Reading: T&T 103-116 and COJS
*Oral Presentation: Book of Ezra

- What did Ezra and Nehemiah do to ensure the survival and growth of the Jews and Judaism?
- How do they turn to for guidance when the age of prophecy ends?

5. T. February 8 - Slides

Samaritans
Reading:
FTTT 45-47
T&T 92-103
2 Kings 17, Ezra 4
Recommended Readings at COJS
Encyclopedia Judaica - "Samaritans" and "Samaritan Pentateuch"
On DNA research of Samaritans
*Oral Presentation: Samaritan Joshua or Tibat Marqe, both found at Anderson, Robert and Terry Giles.

- Who are the Samaritans and where did they come from?
- What are their beliefs and practices?
- What has been their relationship with the Jews?
- Where are they today?

6. Th. February 10 - Slides

Elephantine Papyri
Reading:
Purvis and Meyers, "Exile and Return: From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the
Jewish State," in Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple.
T&T 74-79
Recommended Reading:
Period, pp. 378-400.

- Why are there Jews making sacrifices in Egypt?
- What can we learn about these documents about Judaism during this period?

Unit III – Hellenistic Period
7. T. February 15 - Slides

Alexander the Great, Hellenism
Reading:
FTTT 60-79
Recommended Reading T&T 121-150 and at COJS
*Oral Presentation: Ezekial the Tragedian, “The Exodus” printed in H. Jacobson, The Exagogé of Ezekiel,
- Did Alexander the Great visit Israel?
- What is Hellenism and how did it effect Judaism?
- How did Israel get stuck between two warring empires again?

8. Th. February 17
**Maccabees, Hanukkah, Hasmonean Dynasty**
Reading:
- T&T 151-169
Recommended Reading at COJS
*Oral presentation: Book of Maccabees I
  Book of Maccabees II

- Why did Antiochus IV issue decrees against the Jews?
- What does this incident reflect about varying degrees of Hellenization among the Jews?
- Did everyone accept Hasmonean rule?
- How did Hannukah develop into what it is today?

9. T. February 22
**The Legacy of the Hasmoneans**
"Hellenism." in Encyclopedia Judaica.

- What were the lasting effects of Hellenism on Judaism?
- How have the Maccabees been remembered through the centuries?
- How were the Maccabees used by Zionists?
- Why is our basketball team called the Maccabees? And what about the Maccabeats?

**Sectarianism and the Dead Sea Scrolls**
Reading:
- Magen Broshi, A Day in the Life of Hananiah Nothos: A Story"
  FTTT 98-119, 120-138
  T&T 266-299, 340-1, 363-6
*Oral Presentation: Community Rule
  Copper Scroll
  Pesher Habakkuk
  War Scroll
  Thanksgiving Scroll
  Temple Scroll


- What were the major sects competing during the late Second Temple?
- What were they fighting about?
- Did they all share a common Judaism or were these sects multiple “Judaisms”?
- What can we learn from the library of a long-extinct group of isolationist Jews with strange practices who lived near the Dead Sea?

13. T. March 8
**Midterm**

14. Th. March 10
Septuagint – “The Most Important Translation Ever Made”
Reading:
  FTTT 80-94
  T&T 211-220
  Letter of Aristeas, BT Megillah 9a-b
*Oral Presentation: Ben Sira
  Judith
  Suzzana
  Bel and the Dragon

- Why does Elias Bickerman call the Septuagint, “the most important translation ever made”?
- What are the differences between the Septuagint and the Hebrew Massoretic Text?
- What was the status of the Septuagint in the eyes of the Rabbis?

15. T. March 15
Apocrypha – Tobit and Esther Additions
Reading:
  FTTT 120-130
  T&T 306-307, 330-333
Recommended Reading at COJS
*Oral Presentation: 1 Enoch

- What can we learn from the Apocryphal books about the religion and culture of the Jews in Judea and in the diaspora?
- What was the view of the Rabbis towards the Apocrypha?

Philo Judaeus
Reading:
  FTTT 94-97
  T&T 220-230
*Oral Presentation: Allegorical Interpretations or Special Laws

- Who was Philo, how Jewish was he, and did he even read Hebrew?
- Why did the Christians preserve his writings?
- What can we learn from his writings?
- What shul would Philo go to if he were alive today?

Unit V – Roman Period
16. T. March 22
Herod, Roman rule - [Slides](#)
Reading:
  FTTT 139-149
  T&T pp. 369-407, esp. 385-395
*Oral Presentation: Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XV
  Josephus, *Life of Flavius Josephus*

- What was life like in Judea under the Herod and the Roman procurators?
• What is the historical background for the Jesus movement?
• Did Jesus ever intend to start a new religion?
• Who really killed Jesus?

17. Th. March 24
The Beginnings of Christianity (Slides)
Reading: T&T 407-414
*Oral Presentation: Mark, Mathew, Luke, John

Christian Schism
Reading:
FTTT 149-156
T&T 414-427
*Oral Presentation: Book of Acts

• When and how did Christianity become a separate religion?
• How were the early Christians treated by the Roman empire?
• How antagonistic were relations between Jews and Christians?

18. T. March 29
Destruction of Temple II (Slides)
Reading:
FTTT 157-164
T&T pp. 429-469, esp. 446-457
Recommended Reading:
*Oral Presentation: Josephus, Jewish War, Book VI

• What were the different views about the revolt among the Jews?
• How does Josephus describe his own experiences during the war?
• How do the Rabbis recall these events and what lesson do they take from them?

19. Th. March 31
Reactions to Destruction
Development of the Synagogue
Reading:
FTTT 164-171
T&T 118-120, 469-479
*Oral Presentation: Beresheet Rabbah, Vayikra Rabbah

• What were the economic, political, religious, and theological reactions to the destruction of the Temple?
• How did the decision of the Rabbis at Yavneh ensure the continuity of Judaism without a Temple?
• What institutions and rituals replaced the functions of the Temple?
20. T. April 5

**Roman Attitudes Towards Judaism**

Reading:
- T&T 568-570
- [http://www.livius.org/am-ao/antisemitism/antisemitism01.html](http://www.livius.org/am-ao/antisemitism/antisemitism01.html) - and continue to page two and read especially [http://www.livius.org/am-ao/antisemitism/antisemitism-t.html](http://www.livius.org/am-ao/antisemitism/antisemitism-t.html)

- What did Romans think of Judaism? What were their popular stereotypes? Which of these were true?
- What did Roman writers admire and despise about Jews and Judaism?

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**Unit VI – Tannaitic Period**

21. Th. April 7

**Bar Kokhba Revolt (Slides)**

Reading:
- FTTT 171-176
- T&T 487-495

*Oral Presentation: Tosefta, Mekhilta, Sifre

- Why did the Jews decide to revolt again?
- What was the opinion of the Rabbis about the revolt?
- What were the effects of the revolt’s failure on Jewish society and where they lived?

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22. T. April 12

**The Publication of the Mishnah and the Patriarch**

**History of Palestine until the Muslim Conquest (Slides)**(last year)

Reading:
- FTTT 177-213
- T&T 537-559, 609-612, esp. 537-543

Recommended Reading: T&T 571-596 and at [COJS](http://www.cojs.org)

*Oral Presentation: Iggeret haRav Sherira Gaon

- What literature did the Tannaim produce?
- What was the leadership structure of the Jews?

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23. Th. April 14

**Passover Haggadah**

**Sanhedrin**

Reading:
- T&T 497-504, 507-514

Recommended Reading:

- What did the Sanhedrin look like before the destruction of the Temple?
- Was there a Sanhedrin after the destruction? Where was it?
• Were the Houses of Shammi and Hillel an example of sectarianism? What kept them from splitting apart?

Unit VI - Amoraic Period

24. Th. April 28
Jews in Babylonia and the Exilarch (Slides)
Readings: FTTT 214-219
T&T 596-617, esp. 605-609

• How were the Jews treated under Parthian and Sassanian Empires?
• How much interaction was there between the Jews and their Zoroastrian and Christian neighbors?

25. T. May 3
The Talmuds and the Yeshivot
Reading:
FTTT 220-239
T&T 605-609, 613-616
Recommended Reading at COJS

• What do we know about the Amoraim and the literature that they produced?
• Where did the Rabbis study?
• How were the Talmuds composed and what are the differences between the Yerushalmi and the Bavli?

26. Th. May 5
Conclusions and Looking Forward
Reading:
FTTT 240-269

Final Review (from last year)
Final – Thursday May 19th at 9:30AM
ANCIENT ISRAEL
From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple
Revised and Expanded Edition
Edited by Hershel Shanks

BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY SOCIETY
WASHINGTON, D.C.
Exile and Return

From the Babylonian Destruction to the Reconstruction of the Jewish State

JAMES D. PURVIS

revised by Eric M. Meyers

The Exile to Babylonia

The rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, were carried into exile by Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and plowmen.

(2 Kings 25:11-12)

The calamities that befall Judah when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon crushed Zedekiah’s rebellion and destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. are stated concisely but poignantly in the narrative prose accounts in the books of Kings and Jeremiah. The king’s sons were executed before his eyes; then Zedekiah himself was blinded and imprisoned. The Temple was burned; the Temple officials, military commanders and noblemen were executed; and, finally, the survivors were exiled (2 Kings 25:7-21; Jeremiah 39:1-10 and 52:1-16).

Following this, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor. Gedaliah established his administrative center at Mizpah. Although the biblical account does not indicate the extent of Gedaliah’s authority, there was apparently some hope for peace and economic recovery under his leadership. This hope was thwarted, however, by the assassination of Gedaliah and the flight of his supporters and others to Egypt. Thus, in addition to the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of its leaders to Babylonia, this dispersion to Egypt further weakened...
the nation (2 Kings 25:22–26; Jeremiah 40:1–44:30). All these developments profoundly affected the course of Jewish life in Palestine and abroad, that is, in the Diaspora.

In reprisal for Gedaliah’s assassination, the Babylonians deported still more Jews to Babylon. According to Jeremiah, 745 people were deported in 582 B.C.E. (Jeremiah tells us that, previously, 832 people had been deported in 586 B.C.E. and 3,023 in 597 B.C.E., when King Jehoiachin was defeated (Jeremiah 52:28–30)).

There are several surprises in Jeremiah’s figures. First, the number of deportees to Babylon at the time of Gedaliah’s assassination was not much smaller than the number of those taken into exile at the destruction of Jerusalem (only 87 fewer). Second, the number deported in the exile of 586 B.C.E. is itself not very large (832). And third, neither of these deportations was as large as the exile of 597 B.C.E.: Of the total number of deportees (4,600), virtually two-thirds (3,023) went into exile with the captivity of King Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E.

No figures are given in 2 Kings for the number of deportees in 586 B.C.E. (when Jerusalem was destroyed), and no reference is made to a deportation following Gedaliah’s assassination. Numbers are given, however, for the first deportation under Jehoiachin. According to 2 Kings 24:14, 10,000 people were exiled at that time (including 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 craftsmen and smiths). This number greatly exceeds the figure given in Jeremiah. Whatever the true figures, it is clear enough that it was the leadership of society that was removed and that about 90 percent of the population remained in Palestine.

The lack of specific figures in 2 Kings for the exile of 586 B.C.E. is not surprising; the writer wished to stress the destruction of the city and its Temple and the fate of the survivors. But one thing is clear: For the writer of 2 Kings, as for the editor of Jeremiah, the Babylonian Exile began in 597 B.C.E., when Nebuchadnezzar removed and imprisoned King Jehoiachin and appointed Zedekiah as a puppet-king to reign in his stead.

Neither is it surprising then that the concluding words of 2 Kings concern King Jehoiachin. There we learn that in the 37th year of his exile (561 B.C.E.), the king was released from prison and granted a position of status by the Babylonian king Evil-merodach (Amel-Marduk in Babylonian records) (2 Kings 25:27–30; see also Jeremiah 52:31–34). Why was this important to the biblical writers? Because their hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty (the divine election of which played such an important role in their theology of history) lay with Jehoiachin, not with Zedekiah. Zedekiah had been appointed king by the Babylonians only after Jehoiachin had been taken hostage; Zedekiah’s reign was viewed by many as only temporary. In Babylonia, Jehoiachin was regarded as the exiled Judahite king, both before and after the deportation of 586 B.C.E. It was certainly not accidental that the leader of the first wave of Jewish exiles to return to Jerusalem was Jehoiachin’s son, Sheshbazzar, and that the builder of the Second Temple was his grandson, Zerubbabel.

In short, according to the editors of 2 Kings and Jeremiah, the Exile to Babylonia began in 597 B.C.E. when King Jehoiachin was taken hostage by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:12–17, Jeremiah 52:28–30). This was the first and largest of three separate deportations; a second deportation occurred at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:8–12; Jeremiah 52:12–16) and, according to Jeremiah, a third occurred after the assassination of Gedaliah in 582 B.C.E. (Jeremiah 52:30).

The Book of Chronicles presents quite a different picture: Here there is only one deportation, at the time of the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C.E., and indeed very little is said about it (2 Chronicles 36:20–21). Although the Chronicler records the deportation of Jehoiachin himself in 597 B.C.E. (2 Chronicles 36:10), he does not associate the beginning of the national Exile with that event. Rather, the Chronicler states that “the precious vessels of the house of the Lord” were removed to Babylon with the exile of Jehoiachin; the removal of the Temple vessels is what is important, not the removal of the people.

Second Chronicles is a simplified retelling of the story in which the historian has stressed what he considers most significant. The Temple—its plan, construction, furnishings, administration and service—is of paramount importance throughout the Chronicler’s history. In Ezra 1–6 (a continuation of the narrative of 2 Chronicles 36), the Chronicler regards the return of the Temple vessels at the end of the Exile as an important link in establishing continuity between the cultic establishment of the First and Second Temples (Ezra 1:7–11, 5:14–15, 6:5). For the Chronicler, when the Jews returned from Exile, they returned not with a king to reestablish the older political order, but with the Temple vessels to continue the cultic order that had allegedly existed in ancient times.

Equally important for the Chronicler is his claim that the Exile resulted in the land becoming desolate and lying fallow (in effect keeping its own sabbath) (2 Chronicles 36:21). This description of the land seems to have been derived from a tradition (Leviticus 26:1–39) preserved in the Holiness Code; the code states that the punishment for idolatry is banishment to a foreign land, with the result that the land lies fallow:

And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheath the sword after you; and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbaths.

(Leviticus 26:33–34)
The Chronicler also made use of Jeremiah's prophecy of an exile of 70 years (Jeremiah 25:11, 29:10), not simply to indicate that this would be the duration of the Exile, but to stress that the land would have a tenfold (seven years times ten) sabbath rest:

He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword to fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

(2 Chronicles 36:21)

The prophet Zechariah also uses the 70-year designation to characterize the period of divine anger (Zechariah 1:12; 7:3,5) and is also certainly dependent on Jeremiah. If the number 70 was important, one had to begin counting at some point. Both Zechariah and the Chronicler chose to begin with the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., not the captivity of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C.E.

The Chronicler's account of the Exile appears to have been shaped by his editorial concerns. It is thus less useful for historical reconstruction than the traditions in 2 Kings and Jeremiah, especially when Chronicles is in disagreement with these two sources. What does seem fairly certain, however, is that the Babylonian Exile began before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. When the deportees in 586 B.C.E., and at any subsequent time, reached Babylonia they joined a Jewish community that was already established. Given that the Judahite leaders were among the last to be deported, the task of reestablishing the community began in earnest after 586 B.C.E.

Moreover, in the late eighth century B.C.E., exiles from Israelite Samaria had been settled by the Assyrians in western Syria, Mesopotamia and Media (see 2 Kings 15:29, 17:6; 1 Chronicles 5:26). The annals of Sargon II indicate a deportation/settlement (and also military conscription) of about 27,000 Israelites. The preaching of Ezekiel shows that not all of these communities had been assimilated by pagan cultures; much of this biblical book is concerned with the reunification of the Judahite and Israelite branches of the nation after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Indeed, some passages in Ezekiel read as if they were actually directed at specific Israelite—that is, northern—communities in exile. The Jews of the military colony at Elephantine in Egypt (see below) may also have been of northern, Israelite origin.

Thus, while we may date the Babylonian Exile from 597 and 586 B.C.E., this event was but part of a long process of establishing Israelite/Judahite settlements in Mesopotamia and Babylonia, a process that had begun earlier and that would continue. Most of Israel was not deported, and many of the descendants of the exiles never returned; the Jewish people had become a people both in their ancestral homeland and in the Diaspora.

"By the Waters of Babylon": The Jewish Exiles in Babylonia

The familiar words of Psalm 137, "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion," are often cited as expressing the mood of the Babylonian exiles. This is not surprising; the psalm is a poem of great beauty, in which plaintive lyricism is mixed both with frustration ("How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?") and with nostalgia and loyalty ("If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!"). What it expresses was certainly part of the experience of Exile for many of the deportees. But it falls short of conveying all we know of Jewish life in Babylonia and thus ought not to be taken as characteristic of the Exile experience as a whole. A more representative text—certainly the social and economic dimensions of life by the waters of Babylon—is found in a letter written by Jeremiah to the deportees after 597 B.C.E.:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage. That they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

(Jeremiah 29:5–7)

Indeed, this seems to be how things worked out, though hardly in deference to the prophet's appeal.

Although our knowledge of Jewish life in Babylonia is fragmentary, we are nonetheless able to put together a general picture of the situation from allusions in contemporary biblical texts, from later biblical texts and from extrabiblical sources.

With the exception of some members of the royal Judahite family and aristocracy, the people did not live in "captivity"; they were settled on deserted agricultural land where they were free, as Jeremiah says, to "build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce." Their status probably did not permit them to be landowners; more likely, they were land-tenants on royal estates. We know that some Jews were settled beside "the river Chebar" (Ezekiel 1:1–3, 3:15, 23), an irrigation canal of the Euphrates (Akkadian, nāru habari) that flowed through Nippur. One Jewish settlement beside the Chebar was known as Tel-abib (Ezekiel 3:15); if this settlement was even then a tell, or mound containing a buried ancient city, it might be evidence that the Babylonians settled the Jewish deportees at or near the sites of ruined, abandoned cities, perhaps as part of a program to develop unused land resources. Further support for this suggestion comes from the fact that Jewish exiles were apparently also settled at Tel-melah and Life in Babylonia
The recognized leader of the Jewish community during the Babylonian Exile was the Davidic monarch Jehoiachin. Although his leadership was only titular, it was nonetheless significant. From the very beginning of Jehoiachin’s captivity in 597 B.C.E., there was apparently hope for his restoration to power, even though the prophet Jeremiah counseled against a naive optimism in this regard (Jeremiah 28-29). Ezekiel indicated his own loyalty to the hostage king by dating events from the year 597 B.C.E. and expressing the hope that Jehoiachin’s family would again shepherd the people in their native land (Ezekiel 34:20-31, 37:24-28). In addition to the biblical texts, two sets of epigraphic data may testify to the status of Jehoiachin in exile: First, a number of seal impressions found throughout Judah bear the inscription “Belonging to Eliakim, steward of Yaukin”; second, a cuneiform document from the official archives in Babylon lists rations of foods to be supplied from the royal storehouses to King Yaukin of Judah, his five sons and other Judahite officials. William F Albright, who discovered of the first of the Yaukin seals at Tell Beit Mirsim, suggested that Yaukin was a leader in exile.

Tel-harsha (Ezra 2:59). Other places of Jewish settlement mentioned by name are Cherub, Addan/Addon, Immer (Ezra 2:59; Nehemiah 7:61), and Casiphia (Ezra 8:17). The locations of these cities are not known. Some Jews were probably also conscripted into military and other imperial services, as was the custom both of the Assyrians and of the Babylonians in their dealings with deportees.

Evidence of Jews in the názur kabari (Chebar) region also comes from a number of cuneiform documents discovered in excavations at Nippur. The so-called Murashu texts contain the records of a large Babylonian family banking firm. Copies of contracts made by Jews and other documents concerning Jews testify to the existence of Jewish communities in 28 settlements in the Nippur area. Although dating from the Persian period (fifth century B.C.E.), these records indicate that Jews had prospered in agriculture, trade and banking during the century after their settlement there. There appears to be no discrimination against the Jews even though they were descendants of foreigners. Jews made the same kinds of contracts at the same interest rates as others. Several held positions of prestige, one in the Murashu firm itself, another in government service. One Jew held a military fief, for which he was obliged to render military services or to furnish a substitute.10

Indications that some of the Jews of the Exile managed to accumulate wealth also appear in Ezra 1:5-6 and 2:68-69, which speak of contributions in gold, silver and precious goods for the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezra 2:65 mentions male and female slaves who returned with their Jewish masters. Not only were Jews permitted to own slaves, some were financially able to do so.
form of Jehoiachin and that Eliakim was the Judahite administrator of the crown properties of Jehoiachin following the king’s deportation. Recently, however, scholars have questioned this identification. Albright argued that Zedekiah, the puppet-king appointed by the Babylonians, decided not to confiscate Jehoiachin’s wealth because he was insecure in his own position. Zedekiah was unsure whether Jehoiachin would be restored. As for the significance of the ration for Jehoiachin in the Babylonian cuneiform archives, we may cite Albright:

Now we know that Jehoiachin was not only the legitimate king of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, but also the legitimate king of Judah, whom they held in reserve for possible restoration to power if circumstances should seem to favor it. Jehoiachin was released from prison in 561 B.C.E. by Nebuchadnezzar’s successor, Amel-Marduk, and thereafter received provisions by royal allowance (2 Kings 25:27-30 and the Babylonian cuneiform archives). Thus, the exiled king and his family enjoyed some measure of freedom in Babylon. This did not, however, result in Jehoiachin’s restoration to power in his native land. We do not know what prompted Jehoiachin’s release, and we can only guess at how this action may have related to internal Babylonian politics. All we know is that Jehoiachin spent the remainder of his life in Babylon as the recognized head of the exile Jewish community.

The release of Jehoiachin and the attendant hopes at re-establishing the monarchy could well have inspired the contemporary, the incumbent chief priest Jehozadak, to embark on the task of editing the authoritative texts of the emerging Bible: the Pentateuch and Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings). The task of compiling and redacting these texts was certainly the most significant accomplishment of the exiled community. It is impossible to conceive of this activity without the involvement of the learned priestly stratum of Babylonian Jewish society.

Jewish communal leadership in Babylon appears to have been in the hands of officials known as “elders”—the elders of the Exile, of Judah and of Israel (Jeremiah 29:1; Ezekiel 8:1, 14:1, 20:1). Texts concerning the return to Jerusalem also mention “the heads of families” (e.g., Ezra 2:68, 8:1). The family was apparently the basic unit of social organization in Babylon. Whether families kept the strict genealogical records indicated in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 is moot; one group of priests was chided (and subsequently disenfranchised) for not having done so (Ezra 2:59–63; Nehemiah 7:61–65). The genealogical tables in Ezra 2:36–58 and Nehemiah 7:39–60 show a keen interest in the families of the cultic orders, that is, the priests, Levites, neethinim (temple servants), and a group known as the “sons of Solomon’s servants.”

A passage in Ezra 8:15–20 indicates that these families were concentrated in particular places; Ezra secured a number of Levites and neethinim from “the place Casiphia.”

This raises the question of cultic or religious activities among the exiles in Babylonia. From a hoard of papyri known as the Elephantine papyri, we know that a Jewish temple existed in Egypt at Elephantine (Yeh) during the fifth century B.C.E. From Josephus we know that in the Hellenistic period another Jewish temple was built in Egypt at Leontopolis. We also learn from Josephus of a Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim. The Deuteronomic restriction on multiple shrines and the command to make pilgrimage to and perform cultic rites at only one place (Deuteronomy 12) was interpreted as applying only to worship in the land of Canaan, not outside. It thus leaves open the question of worship in the Diaspora.

It is sometimes suggested that the synagogue (as a substitute for the temple) came into being at this time. There is no specific evidence for this, and the question has been debated with no clear resolution. Part of the difficulty stems from the lack of agreement on exactly what is meant by synagogue: Is it the institution known from later times, with clearly defined functions relating to the reading of the law and prayers, or is it simply a meeting place for community activities? Whichever, the origins of the synagogue are obscure. Nor is it clear that its original purpose, functionally speaking, was to provide a place of worship for those who either did not have a temple or found it inconvenient to get to a temple. There were, for example, synagogues in Jerusalem during the Roman period, before the destruction of the Second Temple; such synagogues clearly were not needed as substitutes for the nearby Temple and its rituals. Hence, many of the functions associated with later synagogues (dating after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 C.E.), such as Torah study, law, charity and hospitality, may also be associated with the Second Temple equivalent. From the earliest periods (the sixth century B.C.E. to the Hellenistic period), typical gathering places around city gates and other open areas could well have served as models for the later closed and architecturally discrete entity known as the synagogue.

The question of how and where Jews may have worshiped in Babylonia needs to be addressed in the context of the communal character of Jewish prayer. Prayer may be offered in solitude, as was the case with Daniel in Babylon; Daniel prayed seven times daily in his chamber, facing a window that opened toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10-11). But the experience of prayer in Israel was rooted in community worship. It is through the shared experience of worship that one becomes accustomed to a specific number of daily prayers (the reference in Daniel is the earliest to the thrice-daily practice that later...
became standard in Judaism), and it is through group conditioning that prayers come to have a standard form: in the case of Daniel's prayer, thanksgiving, petition and supplication (Daniel 6:11).

A shared experience similarly influences religious rites of fasting. It inculcates the custom of observance, determines the dates on which one fasts and sets the standards of what is appropriate for fasting (from what one abstains, conditions of sorrow and mortification, penitential prayers, personal adornment, etc.). We learn from Zechariah 7:1-6 that it had become the custom during the 70 years of the Exile to fast in the fifth and seventh months, that is, in the month in which the Temple had been burned (the seventh day of the fifth month, according to 2 Kings 25:8, although in Jeremiah 52:12 it is the tenth day of the fifth month) and the month in which Gedaliah had been assassinated (the seventh month [2 Kings 25:25; Jeremiah 41:1-2]).

A longer catalogue of fast days appears in Zechariah 8:18-19. It includes fasts in the fourth and tenth months, that is, in those months in which the wall of Jerusalem had first been breached by the Chaldeans/Babylonians (the ninth day of the fourth month [2 Kings 25:3-4; Jeremiah 52:6]) and during the previous year, in the month in which the siege of Jerusalem had begun (the tenth day of the tenth month [2 Kings 25:1; Jeremiah 52:4]). Zechariah's consideration of fast days was clearly inspired by a delegation from Beth El, which questioned the appropriateness of fasting during the time of joy and celebration signaled by Cyrus's Edict of Return and the imminence of the rededication of the Second Temple, but the fact that some Judehites were concerned about the continuation of fast days indicates that fast days were observed in many quarters of Judahite society on the eve of the restoration of the Temple.

If Jews in Babylonia observed these fasts, they must have had some place to convene. Esther 4:16 indicates that fasting was a communal phenomenon among Jews in the Exile: "Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do." But neither a temple with sacred precincts nor a public house of prayer would have been necessary for such gatherings; any open place with adequate space would have sufficed. "The place (maqôm) Casiphia," with its concentration of Levites and temple servants, skilled in liturgy, could have been such a place of gathering; if so, it was certainly not the only place. In this connection, Psalm 137 speaks of weeping (rites of mourning) beside the waters (that is, water canals) of Babylon. Ezekiel 1:1-3:15 mentions the banks of the river Chebar (the canal nāru habari) as the place of the prophet's "visions of God" (appropriately so, if it was a place of community worship). Later texts dealing with the Jewish Diaspora of the Greco-Roman world testify to the existence of public places of prayer by the seaside or beside rivers.

One such witness comes from the New Testament, in the story of Paul in Philippi:

"We remained in this city some days; and on the sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer. (Acts 16:12-13)"

Thus, while there may have been special places of public assembly, such as the area around a city gate, where religious rituals were performed, it is clear that there were no buildings associated with these places.

We may assume that not all Jews were faithful to the religion of their parents; some may have assimilated into Babylonian culture. But of this we have no direct evidence. We do know that Ezekiel was concerned with Jews adopting Babylonian cults (Ezekiel 8:14). But his concern was directed primarily at the situation in the Jewish homeland rather than in the Exile. Deutero-Isaiah's oracles against idol
wolship (Isaiah 44:9-17, 46:1-13), Zechariah’s vision of the Woman in the Ephah (Zechariah 5:5-11) and the oracles on the End of False Prophecy (Zechariah 13:2-6) all point to the lure of paganism during the period of the Exile and the severe threat to Yahwism that it represented. The attraction of idols was, and remained, a problem for spiritual leaders in the Jewish Diaspora, as may be seen from later writings, including the letter of Jeremiah and the Wisdom of Solomon 13-15 (from the Apocrypha). In addition, we know that some Jews adopted Babylonian names. Others, while using Hebrew/Aramaic names, replaced the more traditional Israelite/jewish element yahu (a form of Yahweh) with the more general divine element el. This indicates a degree of assimilation, but not an abandonment of traditional Jewish religion.

Members of the house of Jehoiachin had Babylonian names, probably out of deference to their royal patrons. Nahman Avigad has published a seal of a woman who had a traditional Jewish name, but whose father bore a Babylonian name, perhaps reflecting the renewal of national aspirations among Babylonian Jews of the second generation in Exile—to which the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah also bear witness. Most notable in this connection are the names of Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8, 5:14) and Zerubbabel (Haggai 1:1, 14; Zechariah 4:6-10a), both members of the Davidic family and governors of Judah, whose names clearly reflect the pagan milieu of Babylonia.

In short, the Jewish deportees were settled in Babylonia as land­tenants of royal estates in undeveloped areas. As such, they joined other ethnic minorities in the Mesopotamian/Babylonian region, including some previously settled Israelite communities. With the exception of some members of the royal family, the Judeans were not imprisoned or held as captives. They were free to engage in agriculture and commerce and to accumulate wealth, although on a modest scale. They were not coerced to abandon their traditional cultural ways or social organization. The imprisoned (and later freed) king Jehoiachin was their titular head, although de facto leadership was in the hands of elders, priests and/or heads of families. Their major pragmatic challenge was compiling their sacred writings, the Torah and the Former Prophets. Their corporate life included religious observances of prayer and public fasting. We have no evidence that they erected public buildings for such communal activities. Some Jews were assimilated into Babylonian culture; others were not. When the opportunity arose, a number of Jewish families returned to their homeland to reconstruct a national life there. Many, however, remained in Babylonia, where the Jewish Diaspora continued as an important cultural phenomenon for more than two millennia.

The fate of the Jewish exiles in Babylonia would probably be of little concern to us if the restoration of the Jewish state in the late sixth­early fifth century had not been the work of Jewish leaders who came from Babylonia. These leaders led the initial return to Jerusalem, the subsequent rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and, finally, the cultic/national reforms and the reconstruction of the city under Ezra and Nehemiah. In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the local Judean population (which had not been exiled) is regarded with contempt; the only citizens who seem to matter (and the only Temple personnel allowed to function) are those with proper genealogical records brought from Babylonia. Nonetheless, there were Jews who never left the land, and there were Jewish Diaspora communities in places other than Babylonia—most notably in Egypt.

The books of Ezra and Nehemiah mention no return of Egyptian Jews to Judah during this period. This may have been because there were none, or none worth mentioning, or none the Babylonian Jews wished to acknowledge. Nevertheless, we are reminded of the words of Jeremiah “concerning all the Jews that dwelt in the land of Egypt, at Migdol, at Taḥpanhes, at Memphis, and in the land of Pathros ...” (Jeremiah 44:1-14):

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I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt, as I have punished Jerusalem, with the sword, with famine, and with pestilence, so that none of the remnant of Judah who have come to live in the land of Egypt shall escape or survive or return to the land of Judah, to which they desire to return to dwell there; for they shall not return, except some fugitives. (Jeremiah 44:13-14)

On the other hand, Deutero-Isaiah, a prophet active among the exiles in Babylonia, included the Jews of Egypt among those he envisioned as returning to Zion: “Lo, these shall come from afar, and lo, these from the north and from the west, and these from the land of Syene” (Isaiah 44:12).

“The land of Syene” was the southern frontier of Egypt at the first cataract of the Nile (modern Aswan), as in the formulaic expression “the land of Egypt ... from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia [or Nubia]” (Ezekiel 29:10). Syene was located at the southern border, and Migdol was on the northeastern frontier. The military encampments at both of these sites had settlements of foreign mercenaries and their families.

The existence of a Jewish community at Syene is known from the Elephantine papyri (the major fortress at Syene was on an island in the

And These from the Land of Syene: The Jewish Diaspora in Egypt
Elephantine papyrus. Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., a Jewish community thrived on Elephantine Island, in the Upper Nile River. This well-preserved papyrus—folded several times, bound with a string, sealed with a bulla and endorsed—was discovered among a hoard of letters, deeds and other documents belonging to the community. According to the papyrus, a Jewish temple, oriented toward Jerusalem, stood on Elephantine Island in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.

Nile later called Elephantine; Jewish troops stationed there referred to it as Yeb).

The existence of Jews in the Migdol area, on the northeastern border of Egypt, may also be alluded to in the Elephantine documents. Jeremiah, as we have seen, speaks of Jews at Migdol and at nearby Taophanes (later called Daphni, modern Tel Dafneh) and also at Noph (Memphis) and Pathros (Nubia). According to Jeremiah, Johanan ben Kareah led his group of refugees to the area of Migdol and Taophanes after Gedaliah's assassination disrupted the political and social order (Jeremiah 43:8-13).

Excavations east of the Suez Canal under the direction of Eliezer Oren of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev have revealed that, in the early sixth century B.C.E., this area was fertile and densely populated, and had a navigable water system, as well as irrigation and drainage canals. Migdol was not only an Egyptian military center but a commercial and industrial area. Imported pottery types testify to the existence of a large foreign element in the population, which is not surprising because the Egyptians had, since the reign of Psammetichus I (664-610 B.C.E.), come to rely on foreign mercenaries to garrison their border stations and to fill the ranks of their regular army. Nor is it surprising that Jeremiah's catalogue of areas of Jewish residence follows a line of defense systems established by the Egyptians, from the northeast border (Migdol) to Nubia (Pathros). It was in these centers that Jewish soldiers and their families lived, and so it was to these centers that their compatriots would have come when settling in Egypt.26

A good deal of information concerning life in the Jewish settlement at the border station of Syene/Yeb during the fifth century B.C.E. comes from the Elephantine papyri. The papyri—Aramaic archival documents, including copies of correspondence, memoranda, contracts and other legal materials—first came to light at the end of the 19th century and were published by numerous scholars over a 60-year period (1906-1966). They have recently been the subject of intensive investigation (with corrections of some mistakes made by earlier scholars) by Bezalel Porten of Hebrew University.27 The documents date from 495 to 399 B.C.E. and are thus roughly contemporaneous with the reconstruction of the Jewish state under Ezra and Nehemiah; but the Jewish community at Elephantine had existed for at least a century before the earliest Elephantine documents.

The most intriguing aspect of Jewish communal life at Elephantine was a temple dedicated to the Hebrew God Yahu (YHW, a variant form of YHWH). According to the papyri, the temple had been destroyed by the Egyptians at the instigation of the priests of the local cult of Kimura in the 14th year of Darius II (410 B.C.E.). Exactly when the Temple was built is unknown, but it was sometime prior to the Persian conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C.E. Jedaniah, the Jewish communal leader at Elephantine, wrote to Bagohi, the Persian governor of Judah, requesting assistance in rebuilding the Elephantine temple. Jedaniah also wrote to Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons and successors of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, with the same request. Other correspondence with Jerusalem included requests for information on the correct procedure for observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) and on matters of cultic purity.

Although Jedaniah represented his Elephantine temple as a regular Jewish sanctuary, just like the Jerusalem Temple, scholars have tended to regard the cult of Yahu at Elephantine as a syncretistic mixture of Yahwism and Canaanite (especially northern Canaanite) cults of Bethel, Anat-Bethel, Eshem, Eshem-Bethel, Herem-Bethel and Anath-YHW. This is because the names of these deities are referred to in judicial oaths and salutations used by Jews in the Elephantine documents. Accordingly, a northern, Israelite origin of these colonists has been suggested. Porten, on the other hand, contends that “the evidence for a syncretistic communal cult of the Jewish deity dissipates upon close inspection” (although “individual Jewish contact with paganism remains”). According to Porten, the temple was established by priests from Jerusalem who had gone into self-imposed exile in Egypt during the reign of King Manasseh (c. 650 B.C.E.) to establish a purer Yahwistic temple there.28

Whether or not the cult of Yahu at Elephantine was syncretistic, or the Jews of Elephantine were themselves syncretistic, one thing remains clear: Pagan religion was more influential in the life of the Jews of
Upper Egypt than it was in the life of Jews in Babylonia. The tradition preserved in Jeremiah 44:15–30 records the worship of a goddess called “the Queen of Heaven” (compare Jeremiah 7:18) by the Jews of Johanan ben Kareah’s community in the Pathros-Migdol area of Egypt. Similar tendencies probably prevailed among the Jews in Upper Egypt. This may explain why Jeremiah judges the Jews of Egypt so harshly. This may also be why we read nothing of the Jews of Egypt playing any sort of role in the reconstruction of the Jewish nation during the Persian period.

Return and Restoration Under the Persians

For we are bondmen; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended to us his steadfast love before the kings of Persia, to grant us some reviving to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us protection in Judea and Jerusalem.

(Ezra 9:9)

When Cyrus the Great, the Achaemenid ruler of Persia, conquered Babylon in 539 B.C.E., the Persians succeeded the Babylonians as the major imperial power of the Near East. In contrast to their Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors, the Achaemenid Persians presented themselves to their subject states as a benevolent power concerned not just with garnering taxes but also with maintaining peace and order throughout the empire. The territories formerly administered by the Assyrians and Babylonians were reorganized into a system of satrapies and provinces; local governments were strengthened; roads and systems of communication were developed; and—most important for the Jews—displaced and exiled peoples were encouraged to return to their ancestral homelands and to reestablish local religious and political institutions in order to play supportive roles in this new concept of empire.

This is the political background of the decree of Cyrus preserved in 2 Chronicles 36:23 and Ezra 1:2-3:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, “The Lord, the God of Heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and has charged me to build Him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people—may His God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the House of the Lord God of Israel—He is the God who is in Jerusalem; and let each survivor, in whatever place he sojourns, be assisted by the men of his place with silver and gold, with goods, and with beasts besides freewill offering(s) for the house of God that is in Jerusalem.”

(Ezra 1:2-4)

Although the text of this decree is preserved only in the Bible, it is not dissimilar in spirit and style to an edict of Cyrus known as the Cyrus Cylinder. In this document, Cyrus credits his accomplishments to the Babylonian deity Marduk for the benefit of his Babylonian subjects, just as in the Bible he is said to have acknowledged the assistance of Yahweh; his policy of rebuilding ruined sanctuaries and resettling dispersed populations is also reflected in the Cyrus Cylinder:

To the cities of Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the cities of Zamban, Metuma, Der, as far as the region of Gutium, the holy cities beyond the Tigris whose sanctuaries had been in ruins over a long period, the gods whose abode is in the midst of them, I returned to their places and housed in lasting abodes, I gathered together all their inhabitants and restored to their dwellings. The exiled Jewish community of Babylonia greeted Cyrus as a liberator and saw his work as fulfilling a divine purpose in national redemption:

Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb: “I am the Lord, who made all things, who stretched out the heavens alone ...” who says of Cyrus, “He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose”; saying of Jerusalem, “She shall be built,” and of the Temple, “Your foundation shall be laid.”

(Isaiah 44:24,28)

But the task of national reconstruction was not without difficulties. The returning exiles found that their hopes conflicted with the new
According to biblical sources, there were successive waves of Jewish repatriation under Persian rule. The first was led by Sheshbazzar, the son of King Jehoiachin, who had been taken into captivity in 597 B.C.E. (Sheshbazzar is called Shenazzar in 1 Chronicles 3:18). This first return occurred not long after 539 B.C.E., when Cyrus conquered Babylon and subsequently issued a decree that provided for the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple (Ezra 1:1–11). Sheshbazzar was entrusted with the Temple vessels (Ezra 1:7–8, 5:14–15) and is reported to have laid the foundation for the rebuilt Temple (Ezra 5:16). The rebuilding of the Temple becomes a centerpiece of the Book of Haggai and First Zechariah (chapters 1–8), which presumes that this took place in the time of Zerubbabel (520 B.C.E.), the son of Shealtiel and grandson of Jehoiachin. The nature of the actual work done at the time of the first return, however, remains a mystery. No figures are given for those who returned under Sheshbazzar; it was at best a modest and unpretentious beginning.

A major wave of returning exiles was led by Zerubbabel, and by the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, apparently during the early years of the administration of Darius (522–486 B.C.E.; see Ezra 2.2, 3, 2.8, 4, 2–3, 5.1–2; Nehemiah 7.7, 11, 14, 7.16; Haggai 1.1, 2.2, Zechariah 3.1–4.14). A census of the returnees, who numbered 42,360 people, plus 7,337 servants and 200 singers, is given in Ezra 2.1–67 and Nehemiah 7:6–73. Zerubbabel and Joshua apparently first established an altar on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and then began to construct the Temple in the second year of Darius's reign (520 B.C.E.). The foundations of the Second Temple were laid on December 18, 520 B.C.E. to much fanfare and celebration. The involvement of Zerubbabel as a key player in the actual refoundation ceremony no doubt caused intense messianic expectation; he was hailed by Haggai as "servant" and "signet" (Haggai 2:23) and by Zechariah as "my servant the Branch (or shoot)" (Zechariah 3:8). The Temple was completed in the sixth year of Darius (516 B.C.E.), with the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the support of the Persian court, despite strong local resistance (Ezra 6.1–15).

This repatriation and restoration should be understood against the background of Darius's career. When Darius came to power in 522 B.C.E., he suppressed rebellions throughout his realm, including revolts in Babylon led by Nebuchadnezzar III (522 B.C.E.) and Nebuchadnezzar IV (521 B.C.E.). Darius also reorganized the satrapies and provinces and the command of the armies. He introduced imperial coinage, a road and postal system, and royal building projects. The return of the Jewish exiles and the appointment of Zerubbabel as governor over Judah was part of Darius's reform of the empire's political structure.

Though some of Zerubbabel’s supporters saw in these circumstances the opportunity for the restoration of monarchy under Davidic rule, the majority of Judahites clearly understood that the dual leadership of priest and governor was the only form of local rule that would be tolerated by the Persians. The dual messianic sentiments concerning Zerubbabel expressed by the prophet Zechariah (“and he will bear royal majesty, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. A priest will be on his throne, and there will be peaceful counsel between the two of them” [Zechariah 6:13]) unequivocally express the eschatological hopes of the community that were acceptable to the Persians.

It is commonly thought that Darius removed Zerubbabel from office because of the messianic claims that were supported by those who wanted to reinstate the office of kingship. But there is no evidence of this. The argument is based primarily on the low state of Jewish affairs at the next wave of immigration and on the silence of our sources concerning Zerubbabel after the Temple construction began. It is not clear whether he was still in office in 516 B.C.E., when the work was completed. But Zerubbabel was not the only person in the post-Exilic history of Ezra-Nehemiah who vanished from the scene without explanation. True, Zerubbabel was no ordinary figure; he was the last active claimant to the Davidic throne of whom we have knowledge from the Hebrew Scriptures. Naturally, we speculate on what may have happened to him. But the evidence for any clear conclusion is absent.

Equally intriguing, and subject to speculation, is the figure of Joshua, the high priest who led the return with Zerubbabel. He receives as much attention as Zerubbabel (perhaps even more) in Zechariah 3–6. He and Zerubbabel are linked together as "the two anointed who stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Zechariah 4:14). Joshua's authority was focused primarily on religious affairs; the coronation scene in Zechariah 3 underscores his significance at the center of the Temple. Whether or not his working relationship with Zerubbabel survived the rededication of the Temple, the pattern of leadership involving a high priest and governor survived for many years to come.

Unfortunately, Judah’s Samaritan neighbors sought to influence the Persians to limit the development of the renascent Jewish community. Initially, “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin” (that is, the rulers of Samaria) offered to assist Zerubbabel in rebuilding the Temple of Yahweh, claiming that they too were worshipers of the Hebrew God and had been since they were settled in the land by the Assyrians. Zerubbabel rebuffed the Samaritans’ proffered assistance,
The Babylonians succeeded in breaking away from the Persian satrapy of Beyond-the-River (which stretched from the Euphrates river in the east to the Mediterranean in the west and included Judah) in 481 B.C.E., and Egypt began its satrapal revolt in 464 B.C.E., sensing an opportune moment to reassert its power. The Egyptian attempt at independence was unsuccessfully supported by the Greek military.

The end result of these activities was the reassertion in several ways of Persian military control over local areas. First, the Persians constructed numerous fortresses on both sides of the Jordan River to control the major trade routes that linked Mesopotamia and Egypt. The fortresses were maintained by imperial garrisons charged with preventing the local populace from joining the Greek forces. Second, the existing road system was also strengthened to serve the political needs of the Persian government. Some of the most important reverberations of these momentous events are reflected in the oracles of Second Zechariah (Zechariah 9–14) envisioning the destruction of Israel's enemies and the restoration of Zion. In the Greek tragedy *The Persians*, Aeschylus captures the poignant response of the Greeks to these events.

The prophetic responses collected in the books of Second Zechariah, and to some degree in Malachi, also reflect the unusual demographic conditions that predominated in Yehud at least until the mid-fifth century B.C.E., and perhaps until the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Recent excavations and archaeological surveys have revealed that Yehud was relatively impoverished and modestly settled in the early post-Exilic era (c. 520–450 B.C.E.). This contrasts strongly with the contemporaneous urban settlements along the coastal plain and the Shephelah, which shared in the prosperity generated by the vibrant commercial activity of the day. Such cities as Dor, Jaffa and Shiqmona and the Philistine cities of Ashkelon and Gaza were clearly brought fully into the mainstream of east Mediterranean trade; their material culture reflects the finest imports of Greek origin, attested only a bit later in the interior. The expectations of the restoration community, therefore, were clearly not met in this first period of Persian dominance of the Levant. Hence, Second Zechariah's concerns with the gathering of the dispersed (Zechariah 9:11–17, 10), the repopulation of greater Israel (Zechariah 9:1–10), and the full repopulation of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14) reflect the eschatological yearnings of Israel at a critical time in its history, the first half of the fifth century B.C.E.

These developments bring us down to the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. Ezra came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of the reign of Artaxerxes (458 B.C.E.; see Ezra 7:7). Nehemiah came to Jerusalem in...
the 20th year of Artaxerxes' reign (445 B.C.E.; Nehemiah 2:1) and was governor until Artaxerxes' 32nd year (433 B.C.E.; Nehemiah 5:14). Nehemiah also served a second term as governor sometime before Artaxerxes' death (424 B.C.E.). This follows the chronological sequence of Ezra and Nehemiah suggested by the current arrangement of the biblical materials.

From the late 19th century until fairly recently, the prevailing opinion had been that Nehemiah actually preceded Ezra (based on the understanding that the Artaxerxes of Ezra 7:7 was Artaxerxes II (404–358 B.C.E.) and that the two were never contemporaries. An alternative opinion was that Ezra came to Jerusalem during the reign of Artaxerxes (465–424 B.C.E.), but that he was preceded by Nehemiah, of whom he was later a contemporary (the date “the seventh year of Artaxerxes” of Ezra 7:7 being understood as a scribal corruption, probably of “thirty-seven”). More recently these views have been challenged and historical reconstructions proposed in which the traditional order of Ezra and Nehemiah has been restored. These historical reconstructions have resulted, in part, from recent archaeological data, including comparative information on the ruling house of Samaria (the Samaritan papyri of Wadi Dāliyeh). The whole matter remains problematic, however.

Ezra According to the biblical record, the most dramatic and long-lasting cultural and political changes in the post-Exilic Jewish state occurred during the tenure of Ezra and Nehemiah. From the biblical perspective, Ezra's accomplishments were primarily in the religious sphere, although these should be understood within the larger context of the Persian policy of fostering local religio-legal traditions for the purpose of social stability within the provinces. Ezra arrived in Jerusalem not as a governor but as a “scribe skilled in the law of Moses,” with a copy of the law (Ezra 7:6,10) and with a commission from Artaxerxes to establish magistrates and judges in order to enact and teach that law (Ezra 7:11–14,25–26). Ezra was also given funds and precious goods to revitalize religious rites in Jerusalem (Ezra 7:15–20, 8:21–34). This may have required some rebuilding. According to Ezra 6:14, the rebuilding of the Temple was accomplished by the royal decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes, so Ezra may well have participated in it. Nehemiah's rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3) may also be understood in the larger context of Persian imperial aims to control their Levantine holdings more tightly. Eventually, under Ezra's leadership, and after Nehemiah's arrival (Nehemiah 8:9, 10:1), the law was accepted as the constitutional basis of Jewish life. This was done in a formal public ceremony and by contractual agreement (Ezra 9:1–10; Nehemiah 8:1–10:39). The prohibition of intermarriage with non-Jews was an especially important dimension of the acceptance of Jewish law. The missions of Ezra and Nehemiah do not demonstrate that the local community was being rewarded for its loyalty; rather, their missions represented the efforts of the empire to develop economic and social relationships that would tie the fortunes of Yehud to the future of the imperial system.

It has been widely assumed that the “law of Moses” that Ezra brought to Jerusalem was the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) or, if not the Pentateuch in its entirety, then one of the law codes incorporated in the Pentateuch. One suggestion is that he brought the so-called Priestly source (P) of the Pentateuch (P is one of the sources of the Pentateuch according to the documentary hypothesis, which divides the Pentateuch into four different narrative strands). Ezra has thus been credited with a major role in the development of the canon of Jewish Scripture and/or in the editorial process that produced the Pentateuch in the form in which it is now known. As noted, however, the process of editing the major portions of the Hebrew Bible, the Pentateuch and Former Prophets, had probably begun a full century earlier. It is quite possible that by the end of the fifth century the Prophets, both major and minor, were organized and promulgated, as were the Chronicler's history (1 and 2 Chronicles) and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

What is curious about the assumption that Ezra played such a major role in organizing scripture, however, is that not one of the quotations from Ezra's law code in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah agrees with any specific passage of the Pentateuch (see, for example, Ezra 9:10–12; Nehemiah 8:14–15). Instead, Ezra's reform measures agree in general with dicta contained in various parts of the Pentateuch (although Ezra's prohibition against intermarriage is far more specific than any command in the Pentateuch). Ezra's law code may have been simply a précis or compendium of Jewish law in a form suitable for deposit in the Persian court archives. In sum, we know that Ezra came as a scribe of the law of Moses commissioned by Artaxerxes to be the promulgator and enforcer of that law. We do not know the particular form of that law, however, or how that law relates to the Pentateuch as it has come down to us in its canonical form.

Ezra is frequently referred to as “the father of Judaism," that is, the father of Judaism as a religious system based upon Torah, or law. He was certainly an important person in the history of Judaism and played a significant role in the revitalization of Jewish life based upon Torah. Without diminishing Ezra's importance, however, we must remember that he was not the originator of Judaism as a legal system. This legal system can be traced to the religious reforms of King Josiah in 622 B.C.E.
Nehemiah's principal accomplishments are described in the Book of Nehemiah. He rebuilt the gates and walls of Jerusalem, despite the concerted resistance of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, Tobiah, governor of Ammon, and Geshem, the leader of the Arab Kedarite confederacy (Nehemiah 1–4, 6, 12:27–43). Nehemiah also enforced legislation on mortgages, loans and interest for the betterment of the economic life of the Judahite citizens (Nehemiah 5). He repopulated Jerusalem by means of a public lottery in which one-tenth of the Jewish population was moved into the city (Nehemiah 11). He established Jewish control over the cultural and economic life of the city (Nehemiah 13:15–22). He established cultic reforms to ensure that the Levites and Temple singers would not disperse to the countryside (Nehemiah 13:10–14). Finally, he enforced Ezra's legislation concerning intermarriage, especially as it affected the priestly orders (Nehemiah 13:1–9,23–29). Of Nehemiah's varied accomplishments, the greatest attention is given to his work of Persian concerns for tighter regulation of local affairs. This is consistent with what we now know about administrative changes allowing more autonomy in the western Persian provinces in the late fifth century B.C.E. The hostility of Nehemiah's neighboring governors also reflects this situation. Each maneuvered for greater control over his own area and entered into alliances (in this case against Judah) aimed at establishing his own hegemony. The positioning of the Samaritan governor Sanballat as leader of the conspiracy against Nehemiah reflects the history of Samaritan desire for hegemony over Judah after its collapse in 586 B.C.E. and the assassination of the puppet governor Gedaliah. Let us survey what is known about this period from archaeological sources.

Until fairly recently, the Persian period was characterized as the dark age of Israelite history. This is no longer true, partly because of the availability of newer materials, but especially because of the work of Ephraim Stern of Hebrew University and other archaeologists in Israel whose surveys and discoveries have opened new vistas for study of this era of profound change and development.

Stern has made a number of pertinent observations: During the Persian period, the land of Israel was divided into two culturally distinct regions. The separation was as definite as that between two countries. One region consisted of the hill country of Judah and Transjordan (and to a lesser extent Samaria); the other included Galilee and the Mediterranean coastal plain. Judah's local culture was a continuation of its earlier culture (as noted by William F. Albright, who called the Persian period Iron Age III), although its culture also reflected Assyrian, Babylonian and Egyptian influence. Galilee and the Mediterranean coast, on the other hand, were influenced by Greek and Phoenician cultures. Strangely, the material culture of the Persian period reflects almost no influence of the ruling Persians—the exceptions being a few pottery types and some Persian-style jewelry manufactured by Phoenicians. The major influence of the Persians on Israelite culture seems to relate to government, military organization, economic life and taxation. The reorganization of the empire by Darius I—who installed local leaders and requested that local laws be collated and religious laws implemented—no doubt greatly influenced the pace and level of literary activities in the conquered territories during his reign. The most direct influence can be seen in coins and seals. Changes in seals impressed on the handles of jars used in connection with the collection of taxes indicate administrative reforms—leading to increased local control—at the end of the fifth century. Imperial Achaemenid motifs in seals and seal impressions gradually are replaced by designs in local Aramaic script. A similar change is noted in coins, where we find the gradual appearance of the province name in Aramaic. Sometimes we even find coins with the governor's name in Aramaic.

The extent of Judahite hegemony in the time of Nehemiah—that is, the borders of the province of Yehud—is reflected in several topographical references in Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as in the distribution of Yehud seal impressions and coins found in the area. Ezra
(2:21-35) and Nehemiah (7:25-38, 3:2-22, 12:28-29) list names of places in the territory of Benjamin, the Jordan Valley from Jericho to Ein Gedi, the Judahite hills from Jerusalem to Beth Zur, and the districts of Lod and Adulam in the Shephelah. These areas, as Stern has noted, correspond approximately to the region where Yehud seals, seal impressions and coins have been found—from Tel en-Nasbeh in the north to Beth Zur in the south and from Jericho and Ein Gedi in the east to Gezer in the west. Evidence of the borders also comes from archaeological surveys conducted by Moshe Kochavi, Israel Finkelstein and Avi Ofer; these archaeologists have discovered lines of forts erected by the Jews during the Persian period as defenses against the province of Ashdod in the west and Edomite territories in the south. The lines of demarcation of the province of Judah on the south established by these forts correspond to the borders indicated in the biblical lists cited above and to the distribution of Yehud seals and impressions.

A list in Nehemiah 11:23–35, however, gives much wider boundaries for Judah. This may not be a description of the actual borders of Judah, but rather a statement of the territory that Judah considered its own, an idealization based on older biblical boundaries. The actual borders probably were much smaller.

The size of the province of Judah and its capital city, Jerusalem, were limited not simply by the amount of power Nehemiah and his successors could arrogate but also by the available Jewish population. Excavations in Judah and Jerusalem have shown that the city grew significantly in the Persian period, as did the province of Judah. The population nearly doubled to about 17,000 and Jerusalem's size increased approximately fourfold. There is no doubt that the population of Judah decreased significantly in the Exilic period and that in the restoration period the population remained small. By the time of Nehemiah, however, there was significant and important growth and change in the demographics of Judah. The biblical tradition that the land was denuded of its people in the early sixth century B.C.E. is not simply an overstatement by the editors of 2 Kings and Jeremiah or a fiction imposed by the Chronicler to promote the idea of sabbatical rest for the land. The rebuilding of the Jewish population took several hundred years; it was not until the second century B.C.E. that there was a sizable Jewish population in Judah and Jerusalem.

With the work of Nehemiah, biblical historiography ends. Our knowledge of Jewish life during the remainder of the Persian period (until the conquest of the area by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E.) is sketchy at best. From the Elephantine papyri we learn that the governor of Yehud in the year 408 B.C.E. was Bagohi and that in the same
year Samaria was governed by Delaiah and Shelemaiah, sons of Nehemiah's adversary, Sanballat. The Jews of Yeb (Elephantine) wrote to these Samaritan and Judahite leaders seeking assistance in rebuilding their temple. Josephus records an incident from the time of Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.E.) in which the Persians "defiled the sanctuary and imposed tribute on the Jews" (and also that "the people were made slaves") for a period of seven years. This, he says, resulted from the interference of Artaxerxes' general Bagoses who tried to appoint Jesus (that is, Joshua/Jeshua) son of Eliashib as high priest and became enraged when Jesus was murdered by his brother, the high priest Joannes (Johanan). Some scholars believe the Bagoses of this story is Bagohi, the governor of Judah known from the Elephantine papyri. The last Persian period incident recorded by Josephus occurred on the eve of Alexander's conquest of the area. According to Josephus, the Samaritans led by Sanballat built a temple on Mt. Gerizim. The reference is to Sanballat III, grandson of the earlier Sanballat who had opposed Nehemiah's rebuilding of Judah. The building of a Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim around 332 B.C.E. is evident not only from Josephus and the sources he used, but also from the archaeological evidence. Foundations of a temple at Tel er-Ras, on Mt. Gerizim, have recently been excavated. Josephus claimed that this temple was built when expelled priests from the Jerusalem Temple and other malcontents from Jewish society took refuge with the Samaritans. This may or may not have been the case. It is more likely that this temple was an expression of the Samaritans' own national identity as a Hebrew people who claimed descent from the old Joseph tribes of the north (Ephraim and Manasseh) and who desired to worship God at the ancient and (from their understanding) true sanctuary at Shechem.

Because Josephus's account bears certain similarities to a brief note in Nehemiah 13:28 concerning Nehemiah's expulsion of a son-in-law of Sanballat I from Jerusalem, some scholars have been inclined to date the building of the Samaritan sanctuary (and the alleged schism) to that earlier time (about 425 B.C.E.). Others have dated the event to the time of Ezra (about 450 B.C.E.), although the biblical traditions on Ezra make no reference at all to the Samaritans, even in cases of intermarriage. In fact, the biblical record does not mention a Samaritan schism during the time of Ezra or Nehemiah. The history of the Samaritans as an autonomous religious community residing at Shechem belongs to a later time, no earlier than 332 B.C.E.

In sum, the restoration of the Jewish nation in the land of Israel following Cyrus's edict of return was accomplished through successive waves of immigration of both leaders and their followers from the Babylonian Exile. We are not told of any role played by those who had remained in the land or by returnees from the Diaspora in Egypt. Although the biblical record covers a period of about 115 years (from 538 to 423 B.C.E.), or longer if Ezra was active during the reign of Artaxerxes II, the reporting of the period is episodic, focusing on the specific actions of five leaders: the return of the Temple vessels under Sheshbazzar; the rebuilding of the Temple under Zerubbabel and Joshua; the renewal of the cult and establishment of Mosaic law as the constitutional basis of society, with the prohibition of mixed marriages, by Ezra; and the rebuilding of the gates and walls of Jerusalem and the development of its economic and religious life by Nehemiah. Of these five leaders, Nehemiah is credited with the greatest specific political and social accomplishments. Resistance to the development of a Jewish state came primarily from Samaria because of cultural differences aggravated by political conditions. The biblical account may be understood against a dual background: the political history of the Persian Empire and the archaeology of the land to which they returned. From the latter, we gain a clearer picture of the political realignments and the development of Judah as a semi-autonomous province in the late sixth century B.C.E., under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua together with subsequent governors and high priests until the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah in the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. Without these developments, it would be difficult to imagine the subsequent evolution of Judaism as a religion that would survive the loss of the Second Temple and have so great an influence on Western religions.
VI. Exile and Return

On the economic dimensions of Gedaliah’s governorship, note Jeremiah 40:10, “As for me I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand for you before the Chaldeans who will come to us; but as for you, gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and store them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.” A recent study by J.N. Graham using seal impressions (including a seal of “Gedaliah who is over the household”) and other archaeological data argues that Gedaliah was established as governor to oversee a state-managed agrarian system intended to generate tribute for the Babylonians and also contribute to the local welfare. It is further argued that the “vinedressers and plowmen” (2 Kings 25:12 and Jeremiah 52:16) were technical terms for those in compulsory service in state industries. See Graham, “Vinedressers and Plowmen,” BA 47 (1984), pp. 55–58.

It is extremely difficult to estimate actual population on the basis of ancient sources. For a general discussion of this and related issues see Magen Broshi, “Demography” in OEANE vol. 2, pp. 142–144; Norman R. Gottwald (The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985], p. 423), estimates that 95 percent of the population of Judah remained in Palestine.


This is based on the understanding that the Shemazzur of 1 Chronicles 3:18 is Sheshbazzar. For a more detailed discussion of this question see Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, Haggai, Zechariah 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary Anchor Bible 25B (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1987), pp. 10–11.


* The Chronicler was followed in this interpretation by the author of 1 Esdras, who cites only one deportation at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, with reference to the removal of the sacred Temple vessels and without reference to the exile of Zedekiah (1 Esdras 1:52–58). Josephus, writing at a later time and conflating all of the biblical traditions (including 1 Esdras), gives the three exiles of 2 Kings and Jeremiah (Ant. 10:101,149–150, 181–182) and includes a fourth deportation not mentioned in the Bible: the removal of 3,000 Jews to Babylonia on the death of Jehoiakim and the accession of Jehoachin (Ant. 10:98).


This was first suggested by A. Van Hoonacker, Une communauté juif-arameene a Elephantine en Egypte Schweich Lectures, 1914 (London: British Academy, 1915).


14 An interesting scenario is presented by James D. Newsome, Jr. (By the Waters of Babylon: An Introduction to the History and Theology of the Exile [Atlanta: John Knox, 1979], pp. 92–97).


17 Antiq. 12.3881.

18 Antiq. 11.346–347.


Gottwald (Hebrew Bible [see endnote 2], p. 427) and Yehezkel Kaulmann (History of the Religion of Israel, from the Babylonian Captivity to the End of Prophecy 4.1–2, [New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970], pp. 41–43) argue for and against synagogal origins in Babylonia on the basis of the differing criteria of what made a synagogue.


See endnote 35. In the same volume see also the discussion of Joshua and the Priestly Vestments (Zechariah 3:1–10), pp. 178–227, and especially the notes to verse 7, pp. 194–197, which elaborate on the expanded priestly functions added to Joshua's duties as high priest.

See Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Jewish Community in Palestine in the Persian Period," CHJ, vol. 1, pp. 141–143. The complicated "opposition" narratives in Ezra convey a sense of the difficulties the Jewish community met in the rebuilding endeavor. The Aramaic source referred to here (Ezra 5:5–18) is the same as that in Hagga and First Zechariah, attributing their composition and dating to the year of the rededication of the temple in the sixth year of Darius.


The impetus for such views was surely the pioneering work of Julius Wellhausen, who formulated the "documentary hypothesis," in which significant portions of the Hebrew Bible were assigned to the Exilic and post-Exilic periods, especially D and E, the so-called Deutero- and Prewestern strata. In recent times it has become fashionable to assign most of the historical writings to the Persian period too, leading to a strident attack on the whole question of Israelite origins. Typical of these attacks are Philip R. Davies, In Search of Ancient Israel, JSOT Supplements Series 148 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), and Niels Peter Lemche, "Early History Revisited," Currents in Research: Biblical Studies 4 (1996), pp. 9–34. In denigrating the reliability of much of the Hebrew Bible as a source for understanding post-Exilic Israelite history, they have wilfully proposed the Persian period as the most creative epoch in ancient Israel's literary history. While we believe that the intensity of literary activity is great in this period, even inspired by Darius, it is call to collect local traditions (so Cook, Persian Empire [see endnote 38], pp. 72ff.), we believe such scholarly attacks are motivated by prejudice and narrow-mindedness. See William G. Dever's response to these debates in "Will the Real Israel Please Stand Up? Archæological and Historical Perspectives," BASOR 297 (1992), pp. 61–80—and the bibliography there.


See C. Meyers and E. Meyers, Zechariah 9–1 (see endnote 30), pp. 20–21; Hoglund, Achaemenid Imperial Administration (see endnote 41), p. 143ff.

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C. Meyers and E. Meyers, Zechariah 9–14 (see endnote 30), pp. 20–21; Hoglund, Achaemenid Imperial Administration (see endnote 41), p. 143ff.

Hoglund, Achaemenid Imperial Administration (see endnote 41), pp. 165ff., and figs. 1–4.

See Stern, Material Culture (see endnote 47), The Archaeology of Persian Palestine, in CHJ, vol. 1, pp. 70–88. Also see Carter, "Social and Demographic Study" (see endnote 44), and C. Meyers and E. Meyers, Zechariah 9–14 (see endnote 30), p. 23 and bibliography there.

See Cook, Persian Empire (see endnote 38), pp. 72ff.; C. Meyers and E. Meyers, Hagga, Zechariah 1–8 (see endnote 4), pp. 277–279, 281–279. Zerubbabel's image of the "flying scroll" (5:1–6) captures the essence of the intimate of literary activity in this period. This unparalleled image surely has to do with the emergence of a fixed body of law in Judaism at this time.

See Stern, Material Culture (see endnote 47), p. 236–237.

See Hoglund Achaemenid Imperial Administration (see endnote 41), pp. 165ff., and Carter, Social and Demographic Study (see endnote 44).

See Stern, Material Culture (see endnote 47), pp. 245–248; "The Persian Empire" (see endnote 34), pp. 82–86.


Angyl 11:297–301.

Others see this story as alluding to the Persians' punitive actions in suppressing a revolt in the satrapy of Abar Nahara during...
the time of Anaxerxes III (Ochus as he is
surnamed by modern authorities) (358–336
B.C.E.). Specifically, in 351/350 B.C.E. a
rebellion led by Tennes, king of Sidon, was
put down by Ochus’s general Bagoas. The
memory of Bagoas’s campaign in Syria-
Palestine may be preserved in the apocryphal
Book of Judith (with Holofernes representing
Bagoas). See Dan Barag, “The Effects of the
Tennes Rebellion on Palestine,” BASOR 183
(1966), pp. 6–12.

Cross, “Aspects of Samaritan and Jewish
History in Late Persian and Hellenistic
Times,” HTR 59 (1966), pp. 201–211,
“Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from
Dāliyeh: A Preliminary Report on Their
Discovery and Significance,” in New Directions
in Biblical Archaeology, ed. David Noel
Freedman and Jonas C. Greenfield (Garden

61 Antiq. 11.304–347.

62 James D. Purvis, The Samaritan Pentateuch
and the Origin of the Samaritan Sect, Harvard
Semitic Monographs 2 (Cambridge, MA:

63 Purvis, “The Samaritan Problem: A Case
Study in Jewish Sectarianism in the Roman
Era,” in Traditions in Transformation: Turning
Points in Biblical Faith, ed. Renuch Halpern and
Jon Levenson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns,
HELLENISM, term generally used by historians to refer to the period from the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.E.) to the death of Cleopatra and the incorporation of Egypt in the Roman Empire in 30 B.C.E. Egypt was the last important survivor of the political system which had developed as a consequence both of the victories of Alexander and of his premature death. The word Hellenism is also used to indicate more generically the cultural tradition of the Greek-speaking part of the Roman Empire between Augustus and Justinian and/or the influence of Greek civilization on Rome, Carthage, India, and other regions which were never part of the empire of Alexander. Finally, Hellenization is used with reference to Judea, Persia, etc. to indicate the penetration of elements of Greek civilization into territories which, though subject to Greco-Macedonian rule for a certain period of time, preserved their national culture with conspicuous success.

The words Hellenism and Hellenistic have a long history in which the text of the Acts of the Apostles 6:1 plays a central part because it opposes Ἰησοῦν καὶ τὴν Μαγδαληνὴν Ἡλενίστην At least from the 16th century onward (J. Scaliger) this text was interpreted to imply a contrast between Jews who used Hebrew and Jews who used Greek in the synagogue service. D. Heinsius developed the notion that Jewish Ἡλενίσται used a special Greek dialect (lingua hellenistica), which is reflected in the Septuagint translation of the Bible. C. Salmasius denied the existence of such a special dialect (1643), but the notion of a special lingua hellenistica to indicate the Greek of the Old and New Testaments remained in circulation until the middle of the 19th century. In the 18th century in Germany, J.G. Herder used Hellenismus to indicate the way of thinking of Jews and other Orientals who spoke Greek. In 1820 in France J. Matter specifically connected the word Hellénisme with the thought of the Greek-speaking Jews of Egypt. J.G. Droysen stretched the meaning of the word to signify the period of transition from the pagan to the Christian world which started with Alexander. He intended to continue his work in further volumes, but never did so, and it is not quite clear from what he says whether his original intention was to reach the age of Muhammad or to stop with Augustus. In 1877–78 he published a second (considerably modified) edition of these three volumes under the title of Geschichte des Hellenismus (which now included the reign of Alexander). The second edition, both in the German text and in the French translation by A. Bouché-Leclercq, became authoritative, and consolidated the notion of Hellenism as a special period of the history of antiquity characterized by a mixture of Greek and Oriental elements. Since Droysen, many historians have reexamined the political and constitutional history of this period; they include B. Niese, K.J. Beloch, A. Bouché-Leclercq, J. Kaerst, W.W. Tarn, E. Bickerman, and E. Will. But research has been particularly intense and productive in the field of the history of religions (F. Cumont, R. Reitzenstein, H. Usener, P. Wendland, W. Bousset, A.D. Nock, and M.P. Nilsson). Droysen’s notion of Hellenism has also deeply influenced the work of literary historians such as U. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, F. Susemihl, F. Leo, E. Norden, and R. Pfeiffer.

The study of Greek influence on Judaism has developed into a special branch of research on which E. Bickerman, H. Lewy, S. Lieberman, V. Tcherikover, and M. Hengel, among others, have written with distinction. Research on Hellenism has been helped by archaeological discoveries, new inscriptions, and the constitution of a new branch of research, papyrology, since the beginning of the 20th century. Papyrology is especially relevant to the study of the Hellenistic period because a considerable portion of the papyri discovered in Egypt belongs to the last three centuries B.C.E.

However, a knowledge of the political history of Hellenism is hampered by the fragmentary nature of the surviving sources. The works of the great historians of the Hellenistic age (Hieronymus of Cardia, Duris, Timaeus, Agatharchidas, Phylarchus, and Posidonius) are all lost, with the exception of Polybius, and only fragments of his work remain. The only continuous account of the Hellenistic age is found in the short summary of the Historiae Philippicae by *Pompeius Trogus (end of the first century B.C.E.) written by Justinus in the second century C.E. Plutarch’s Lives of some Hellenistic kings and politicians are of the utmost importance. Books I, II, and III of Maccabees are invaluable for Jewish history and must be supplemented by the relevant sections of Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities. Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Pausanias, Galen, Athenaeus, and Diogenes Laertius, though all writing in the Roman Empire, provide essential information on Hellenistic science, social life, and customs.

The empire of Alexander the Great was the result of the military and intellectual cooperation of Greeks and Macedonians, who constituted the ruling class in the states emerging from the struggles of Alexander’s successors. This collaboration was precarious in Greece alone, where consequently there was no political stability. The rivalries between Greek cities and the interference of the great Hellenistic states in Greek affairs led to Roman intervention at the end of the third century and ultimately contributed to the transformation of Greece into a direct Roman dependency in 146 B.C.E. The great Hellenistic states – Macedonia, Syria, Egypt, Thrace (for the brief period until 281 B.C.E.), Pergamum (at least after 240 B.C.E.) – though much stronger, had other sources of difficulty: they were faced by dynastic struggles in their midst, by frequent wars with their neighbors, and above all they had large native populations to control. The third century was the period of the greatest power and prosperity of these kingdoms. Almost everywhere during the second century B.C.E. the increasing inability of the Greco-Macedonian ruling class to prevent internal dissolution is noticeable. The Romans took full advantage of the difficulties of the Hellenistic states, played on the fear of social revolution among the wealthy Greeks, and exploited rivalries and native rebellions, with the result that
they defeated and ultimately absorbed all the Hellenistic states. Macedonia, first defeated in 197, was reduced to impotence in 168 and transformed into a province in 149. Syria (the Seleucid state) was first deprived of some of its best Oriental regions by native rebellions (such as those leading to the creation of the Parthian and Bactrian states about 250 B.C.E.). Later it was defeated and mutilated by the Romans (188). The Jewish rebellion of the Maccabees contributed to the further decline of the Seleucid state, which was transformed into a Roman province in 64 B.C.E. Pergamum became a Roman province (province of Asia) in 129 B.C.E., Bithynia in 74, Egypt (the kingdom of the Ptolemies), as already noted, was incorporated by the Romans in 30 B.C.E. The last strong resistance of the Macedonian-Greek elements against the Romans was provoked and supported by Mithridates VI Eupator about 80 B.C.E. and ended in violent repression by the Romans. The last act of resistance against the Romans during the Hellenistic period in the East was not Greek, but Jewish.

In all the Hellenistic states Greek was the language of the aristocracy and the administration. The foundation of new cities (especially in the Seleucid kingdom) and of new villages (particularly in Egypt) contributed to the spread of Greek, but the peasants and the native priests kept the indigenous languages alive. Except in Judea, which had an original literature in Hebrew and Aramaic even under Greek rule, the important developments in literature were all in Greek. Even natives of Egypt and Babylonia wrote their histories in Greek (Manetho, Berossus; cf. Fabius Pictor in Rome). The schools and the gymnasias were organized according to Greek tradition: Homer, the tragedians of the fifth century (especially Euripides), and the orators and historians of the fourth century were the models of the new classicism. Erudition developed for its own sake and, notably in Alexandria and Pergamum, was under royal protection. The libraries of Alexandria were centers of research, besides containing extraordinary collections of manuscripts (apparently not confined to texts in Greek). Classicism notwithstanding, literature and art developed new styles, characterized by realism of detail and a tendency toward the idyllic and the pathetic. Modern scholars have recognized local trends not only in literature but also in art. They are, however, not so important as the essential unity of Hellenistic culture. Philosophy remained centered in Athens, but the great philosophic schools of the academy (Platonists), Peripatos (Aristotelians), Stoa (disciples of Zeno), and Porch (Epicureans) spread everywhere. There was also a revival (perhaps a transformation) of Pythagorean groups, which began to look like a religious sect. Natural sciences made enormous progress, and so did mathematics. Euclid, Apollonius of Perge, and Archimedes represent the culmination of Greek research in geometry and mechanics. Eratosthenes applied mathematics to geography and Aristarchus developed the heliocentric theory, but Hipparchus (who made fundamental discoveries in astronomy) persuaded the succeeding generations with his new version of the geocentric system. Scientific medicine flourished in Alexandria and elsewhere: The advances in anatomy (Herophilus), physiology (Erasistratus), etc., remained unsurpassed until the Renaissance. Pytheas explored new regions in the north. The philosopher Posidonius explained the tides.

Everywhere the new literature and art interested large strata of the Greek-speaking public, which was predominantly middle-class. If some poets were obscure and full of subtle allusions to the literature of the past (Callimachus, Lycoephron, Euphorion, and to a certain extent Theocritus), others were easily comprehensible (Menander, Herodas, and perhaps Apollonius Rhodius). New prose genres, such as the erotic novel, were meant to appeal to a large public. There are signs that much of the literature now lost was fairly popular in character. Figurative art certainly had a wide appeal, as can be deduced from the amount of cheap, but graceful, figurines of this period. Improved techniques of work affected the lives of the many, and town-planning together with the easier economic conditions of private persons produced better housing in many places. But neither philosophy nor science meant much even to the middle class in the Greek-speaking cities. In religion the stronger influences came from the native populations, not from the upper (Greek or Hellenized) stratum. There was no sign that the gods of the Greek Olympus were dying: they went on performing miracles and acquiring new festivals and new sanctuaries. However, a progressive transformation of the old city cults was noticeable, with a new emphasis on free associations of devotees of a specific god, on mysteries, on spiritual notions such as philanthropy and purification. Dionysus became distinctly popular. At the same time Oriental gods – either with their original names (Osiris, Isis) or by identification with Greek gods (Hermes – Thot; Jupiter – Dolichenus) – were widely worshiped outside their original countries, with appropriate modifications of their cults. A curious case of a new god with old Egyptian roots was Serapis. Babylonian astrology gained many believers, even among philosophically educated Greeks. The Greek idea of Fortune (Tyche) increased in importance and was worshiped as a goddess, partly owing to Oriental influences. No doubt there were educated people who cared little for gods, either Greek or Oriental. Epicurus preached the indifference of gods to human events and Euhemerus reduced the gods to ancient human benefactors; yet the climate of the age was religious.

With all its regional and chronological differences, Hellenism is a cultural unity which corresponds to the existence of a uniform upper stratum of society and is reflected in the remarkable uniformity of the Greek language (the so-called koine) from India to Gaul, wherever there was a Greek settlement. International trade both favored, and was favored by, this uniform upper stratum; Greek-speaking traders moved round the world. They were joined by more or less Hellenized Orientals and later by Italians. The slaves, the native peasants, and the Greek proletariat neither contributed much to, nor enjoyed the advantages of, this civilization.

It is much more difficult to speak of Hellenism as a political and institutional phenomenon, because conditions var-
Hellenism and the Jews

Contact between Greeks and Semites, probably including Jews, seems likely to have occurred in Mycenaean times, as remains of Greek pottery in Palestine and Syria testify. Several interesting parallels between early Greek, especially that of Homer, and biblical vocabulary have been suggested, such as Homeric ἀνυμῶν ("without blemish") and biblical mum ("blemish"), Homeric machaira (“sword”) and biblical mekhēra (Gen. 49:5), Homeric erebos ("darkness") and biblical erev ("evening") and ma'alir ("west"), and Greek kados ("pitcher," in Archilochus) and Hebrew kad ("pitcher"). Parallels between Homeric and biblical motifs are generally less striking. The possibility of a link between the even earlier Minoan civilization and Jews, or at any rate Semites, suggested by the presence of Minoan pottery at Ugarit and supported by bilingual (Greek and Northwest Semitic) inscriptions in Crete dating from 600 to 300 B.C.E., awaits the decipherment of Linear A.

It was not until the time of Alexander the Great, however, that the contacts between Greeks and Jews were revived and intensified. The fact that for two centuries Palestine was part of Hellenistic kingdoms, first of Ptolemaic Egypt and then of Seleucid Syria, made Greek influence on Jewish thought and life inevitable. In the first third of the second century B.C.E., a group of Hellenizing Jews came to power in Jerusalem. They were led by wealthy Jewish aristocrats such as Joseph son of Tobiah, and his son Hyrcanus, who were apparently attracted to the externals of Hellenism; their Hellenization was, at first, primarily social rather than cultural and religious. *Jason the high priest carried his Hellenizing to the extent of establishing Greek educational institutions, the gymnasium and ephebeion, and of founding Jerusalem as a Greek city, Antioch-at-Jerusalem. But Jason was only a moderate Hellenizer compared with *Menelaus, whose succession as high priest occasioned a civil war between their factions, with the *Tobiads supporting Menelaus and the masses of the people standing behind Jason. As the scholars Bickermann, Tcherikover, and Hengel have shown, it was the Hellenizers, notably Menelaus and his followers, who influenced Antiochus Epiphanes to undertake his persecutions of Judaism so as to put down the rebellion of the *Hassideans, who were supported by the masses of Jerusalem and who rebelled against the Hellenizers. Perhaps the account in the *Dead Sea Scrolls of the war between the sons of light and the sons of darkness reflects this struggle.

In the following year the fight of the Maccabees against the Hellenizers began. This struggle highlights the antagonism between the rich and highborn in the towns, who believed in finding a modus vivendi with Hellenism, and the peasants and urban masses, who could brook no compromise with their religious traditions. In victory the Maccabees were particularly ruthless toward the Greek cities of Palestine (of which there were 30) and their inhabitants, but their struggle was against the Greek cities as a political rather than as a cultural force. It is a mistake to regard the Hellenization of the Palestinian Jews as so deep that they would have been absorbed had not
Antiochus’ persecution aroused a fanatic reaction. Similarly it is a mistake to look upon the Maccabees as despisers of Greek culture. In point of fact, Jonathan the Hasmonean, far from hating Greek culture, renewed the treaty of friendship with Sparta (Jos., Ant., 13:164–170) that the high priest *Onias I is said to have negotiated about 300 B.C.E. Alexander Yannai employed Greek mercenaries in his army (ibid., 13:387), and from his time onward coins are inscribed with Greek as well as with Hebrew. The very Aristobulus who forced the Iureans to become Jews called himself “philhellen” (ibid., 13:318). The rise of the Pharisees may be seen, to some degree, as a reaction against the Greco-Roman culture favored by the Sadducees, who were allied with the phil-Hellenic Hasmonaeans. The Hellenic influence increased under Herod, who built a Greek theater, an amphitheater where Jews wrestled naked with Greeks, and a hippodrome in or near Jerusalem. Even Agrippa I, who is so highly regarded in rabbinic sources (Bik. 2:4, etc.), built a theater and amphitheater at Berytus (Jos., Ant., 19:335) and himself attended the theater at Caesarea (ibid., 19:332–4).

Jews came to Egypt just before the end of the sixth century B.C.E. and fought as mercenaries, in all probability side by side with Greeks who had come for the same purpose. But large-scale emigration began with *Ptolemy I after the death of Alexander. Philo (In Flaccum, 43) reports that in his day the Jews in Egypt numbered a million. By that time there were large Jewish communities in Syria, especially Antioch (Jos., Wars, 7:43), Greece proper (Philo, Legatio ad Caesarem, 281–2), Asia Minor (Jos., Ant., 14:213, 255–64; Philo, op. cit., 245), Cyprus (Jos., Ant., 13:284), Rome (Cicero, Pro Flacco, 67), and Cyrene (Jos., Ant., 14:115), all of which were primarily Greek speaking.

The Hellenization of the Jews, both in Palestine and the Diaspora, consists in the substitution of the Greek language for Hebrew and Aramaic, the adoption of Greek personal names, the adoption of Greek educational institutions, the growth of a Jewish Hellenistic literature and philosophy, and religious deviation and syncretism as seen in legal institutions and in art (see *Diaspora). In Palestine, the predominance of Greek in ossuary inscriptions (the dates vary) so that of 168, 114 are in Greek only, the discovery of Greek papyri in the Dead Sea caves, and of Greek letters from leaders of the Bar Kokkha rebellion, and the presence of perhaps as many as 2,500–3,000 Greek words in the talmudic corpus, especially in the homiletic Midrashim composed for popular consumption, testify to what degree the Greek language had gained currency (see Rabbinical Knowledge of *Greek and Latin). The contact with Greek influenced, moreover, a number of developments in Hebrew phonology and syntax and led to the establishment of a number of Hebrew roots derived from Greek. Simeon b. Gamaliel went so far as to praise Greek as the only language into which the Torah could be perfectly translated (Esth. R. 4:12). Judah ha-Nasi remarked, “Why talk Syriac in Palestine? Talk either Hebrew or Greek” (Sot. 49b). It was said (Hag. 19b) of the second-century rabbi Elisha ben Avuyah, that he never ceased reciting Greek poetry. In the next century R. Abbahu knew Greek so well that he was able to pun in it (Gen. R. 14:2), and justified teaching his daughters Greek since it served as an ornament (TJ, Pehah 1:1, 15c). The fact that the Mishnah (Sot. end) records that during the war of Lusius *Quietus (117 C.E.) a decree was passed banning the teaching of Greek to one’s son indicates that the rabbis regarded the use of Greek as a real danger, but the language continued in vogue.

It can hardly be maintained that Greek was used only by the upper classes and was restricted to commerce, or that it was restricted to those who needed it to communicate with the governing authorities; the Christian Hellenizers (Acts, 6:1), who apparently spoke Greek only and were thus more deeply affected by Hellenization, were not restricted to the higher classes. Josephus (Ant., 20:264) clearly indicates that ordinary freemen and even slaves in Palestine had learned many languages. However, his statement (ibid., 20:263) that it had proven difficult for him to master Greek, especially the pronunciation, and the faulty Greek in many inscriptions indicate that the level of knowledge of Greek was not high. Even Josephus (Apion, 1:50) had to employ assistants to polish the Greek of his *De Bello Judaico. The knowledge of Greek possessed by Jewish Christians in Palestine, however, because of their closer contact with Diaspora Jews and with non-Jews outside Palestine, must have been better; and recent scholarship has concluded that it is probable that Jesus himself sometimes spoke Greek.

In the Diaspora, the earliest Jewish inhabitants of Alexandria in the fourth century B.C.E., to judge from the papyri, spoke Aramaic; but so thoroughgoing was the victory of the Greek over the Hebrew language that after the third century B.C.E., with the exception of the Nash Papyrus, until 400 C.E., all papyri from Egypt pertaining to the Jews are in Greek. Similarly, of the 116 Jewish inscriptions from Egypt only five are in Hebrew, and they are, it appears, of late date (see *Alexandria; “Egypt, Hellenistic Period; *Zeno Papyri). Even in the Jewish community of Rome, which seems to have had a stronger identification with Judaism, only five of the 534 inscriptions are in Hebrew or Aramaic. Because the *Septuagint was regarded as divinely inspired, there appeared to be no need to learn Hebrew. Indeed, there is a very real question as to whether Philo, by far the greatest of the Alexandrian Jewish writers, knew more than a modicum of Hebrew; it is surely significant that whereas he tells so much of his Greek education he tells nothing about his Hebrew education.

Another aspect of Hellenization is the choice of Greek personal names. In Palestine the percentage is much lower than in the Diaspora, but the names of rabbis such as Abt-lemus, Alexander, Antigonus, Symmachus, and Theodosius indicate that the process was at work even there. The fact that at least three-fourths of the personal names of the Jews of Hellenistic Egypt are of Greek origin is striking. The Jews often tried to choose Greek names similar in meaning or sound to their Hebrew names, but names derived from those of Greek or Egyptian deities are common. In Rome about half of the names of the Jews in inscriptions are of Latin origin, about a
third are of Greek origin, and only about a sixth are derived from Hebrew or Aramaic.

Education was a key area of Greek impact. After the establishment of the gymnasium and *ephebeion by Jason the high priest in pre-Maccabean times, there is no further information on Greek educational institutions established by Jews. However, in the first century Rabban Gamaliel had 500 students of Greek wisdom in addition to 500 students of Torah (Sot. 49b, et al.), although this permission to study Greek was granted to the house of Rabban Gamaliel only because of their special relationship with the Roman government. In Egypt the only known schools with Jewish content were the Sabbath schools, intended for adults, which, according to Philo (Spec., 1:62), taught the traditional Greek four cardinal virtues. On the other hand, there is mention of the eagerness of Jews to enroll their children of secondary school age in Greek gymnasias; and apparently, until they were excluded by the Emperor Claudius in 41, they had succeeded in their efforts. Such an education initiated youths into the Greek way of life, especially athletics, its most characteristic feature. No Jew could have attended a Greek gymnasium without making serious compromises with his religion, for the gymnasias had numerous busts of deities, held religious processions, sponsored sacrifices, and participated in the athletic games associated with the festivals. Similarly, the fact that the 72 translators recommended that King Ptolemy watch plays (Letter of Aristaeas, 284) and that Philo himself often attended the theater (Ebr., 177) shows that Hellenization had made deep inroads. It is not surprising that the rabbis (Av. Zar. 18b) forbade attendance at theaters, for ancient dramas were performed only at festivals of the gods in the presence of the altar and priests of the gods.

The most obvious instances of Greek influence are to be seen in Jewish literature of the Hellenistic period. In Palestine, even Ben Sira, whose opposition to Hellenism before the Maccabean rebellion is manifest, has a number of aphorisms which seem to be derived from Aesop, Theognis, and Euripides. The Testament of Joseph and the Book of Judith show Greek influence in the introduction of erotic motifs found in Greek romances. Similarly, the Book of Tobit, composed either in Palestine or Antioch in the second century B.C.E., shows Hellenistic influence in the form of its romance. Aside from Justus of Tiberias and Josephus, no Palestinian author is known who definitely wrote in Greek, and indeed there is no apparent Greek influence in the first century B.C.E. "Biblical Antiquities" of Pseudo-Philo. But in his paraphrase of the Bible, Josephus, in his eagerness to answer antisemitic charges, makes numerous changes. Thus his Abraham is presented as a kind of Jewish Achilles; and Solomon a kind of Jewish Oedipus. Finally, Josephus' portraits of Moses and of Esther are in the tradition of Hellenistic romance, with emphasis on erotic elements. Indeed, the life of Moses used by Artapanus, Philo, and Josephus contained details borrowed from the legendary life of Pythagoras.

There has been much debate on the degree of Hellenic influence on the rabbis themselves. A number of tales about Hillel recall Socratic and Cynic anecdotes. Joshua b. Hananiah's discussions with Athenians, Alexandrians, and Roman philosophers (Bek. 8b; Nid. 69b; Sanh. 90b), Meir's reported disputations with the Cynic "Onomaios of Gadara (Gen. R. 68:20) -- a city a little east of the Jordan which also produced three other famous ancient Greek writers, Menippus the satirist, Meleager the poet, and Philodemus the Epicurean philosopher and poet -- as well as Judah ha-Nasi's discussions with "Antoninus; Av. Zar. 10a–11a, etc.) and rabbinic condemnation of Epicureanism (Mish. Sanh. 11:1; Avot, 1:3; etc.), all reflect rabbinic interest in and concern about Hellenism (see Classical "Greek Literature"). We know of only one rabbi, however, Elisha b. Avuyah, upon whom Greek influence was so great that he actually became a Gnostic heretic.

It has been suggested that Platonism influenced the rabbis with its theory of ideas, the notion that the soul possesses perfect knowledge before birth, and, above all, the method of dialectic. Moreover, a number of striking parallels in content and form between the Epicureans and the rabbis have been noted. The Stoic ideal of the sage, as well as Stoic techniques of allegorizing and expounding law, influenced Philo, but it is doubtful to what extent they influenced the rabbis. The rabbis mention only two philosophers -- Epicurus and Oenomaus -- by name, and they do not use any Greek philosophical terms. The fact that they never mention Plato, Aristotle, or Philo would indicate that their information was probably drawn second-hand. Similarly the proverbs in rabbinic literature which have classical parallels probably represent contact not with Greek literature but with Greek speakers. The alleged influence of Hellenistic rhetoric upon rabbinic methods of interpretation is in the realm of terminology rather than of substance. The "fence" which the rabbis created around the Torah (see Avot 1:1) succeeded, on the whole, in keeping the masses of the Jews from succumbing to Greek culture, as the complaints about Jewish religious and social separateness (cf., e.g., Tacitus, Histories, 5:4) indicate. As to sectarian groups, it has been argued, with some degree of probability, that the communal organization and the strict rules for the administration of the Essenes and the Dead Sea brotherhood were directly influenced by Pythagoreanism and its revival, neo-Pythagoreanism. Josephus (Ant., 15:371), in any case, remarks that the Essenes followed the Pythagorean way of life.

The influence of Greek thought on Diaspora Jews starts with the Septuagint (the alleged meeting of a Jew with Aristotle (Jos. Apion, 1:76–82) is fictitious). Recent investigators, on the whole, agree that there is no systematic pattern of Hellenizing, and that the Greek elements tend to be superficial and decorative rather than deep-seated and significant. Again, it was formerly thought that the language of the Septuagint was a kind of Jewish Greek which would be unintelligible to
Among the most obvious instances of Greek influence on Jewish writers are *Philo the Elder's epic poem On Jerusalem (c. 100 B.C.E.) in Homeric hexameters, and that of his presumed contemporary *Theodotus, a Samaritan, on the rape of Dinah. Ezekiel the poet, at about the same time, composed tragedies, of which a portion of one, The Exodos, is extant, a veritable exercise in Euripidean trimeters. Among Apocryphal books the Wisdom of Ben Sira, dating from perhaps the second century B.C.E., uses a number of technical terms drawn from Platonic and Stoic philosophy; and such a view as the preexistence of the soul is apparently drawn from Plato. It and its presumed contemporary, IV *Maccabees, are reminiscent of Cynic-Stoic diatribes. Furthermore, the latter shows Greek influence in its presentation of the Torah as teaching the four cardinal virtues; the arguments are pervasively Stoic, and the form of the disputation is modeled on Plato's Gorgias. Of Philo it was said already by Jerome (De Viris Illustribus, 11), "Either Plato philonizes or Philo platonizes." That his Hellenization transcends mere language can be seen in his description of Moses' education, which is presumably held up as an ideal. His Egyptian instructors are said to have taught him arithmetic, geometry, harmonics, and philosophy (De Vita Mosis, 1:23–24), the very subjects which constitute the higher education of Plato's philosopher-king (Republic, 521c–535a), while his Greek teachers are said to have taught him the rest of the regular school course — presumably, grammar, rhetoric, and logic. In his profound debt to Platonism Philo is similar to the author of IV Maccabees, his presumed contemporary.

Evidence of Greek influence on Jews of the middle and lower classes is largely dependent upon *papyri and art objects that have been discovered. The papyri show many instances of Jews using common Hellenistic law in their business life. The documents are drawn up as Hellenistic documents in a government notary's office. The most obvious violations of halakhah are seen in the loan documents: of the 11 that have come down only two do not charge direct interest. One of them is in a highly fragmentary condition and the other is subject to the interest of 24% if not repaid within a year. The one divorce document follows non-Jewish formulas completely; and, in direct violation of halakhah, there is no statement that it is the husband who is divorcing the wife.

Greek influence, as Goodenough has amply shown, is clearly to be seen in Hellenistic Jewish art and architecture. Thus Josephus tells that the courts and colonnades of the Temple built by Herod in Jerusalem were in the Greek style. Pagan and syncretistic art has been discovered in the synagogues of both Palestine and the Diaspora (especially at *Dura-Europos in Mesopotamia), in direct violation of stringent bibli-cal and rabbinic prohibitions. It cannot be argued that these motifs were merely decorative, since they were employed in a similar way by earlier and contemporarypagans and by contemporary and later Christians. Goodenough has concluded that these figures had meaning as symbols; that these symbols constituted a sub-rational lingua franca among Jews and non-Jews alike, just as the Greek language provided a rational bond.
among them; and that they represented a kind of allegorization through art, of the sort that Philo had attempted through philosophy. Additional evidence that some Jews adopted certain pagan elements can be seen in the charms (that is, verbal incantations) and apotropaic amulets (or the material objects themselves containing graphic symbols used to ward off evil) which Goodenough has collected.

It is not surprising that contact with Hellenism should have produced deviations from Jewish observance. Philo (Post., 35–40) mentions the extreme allegorists, who insisted on interpreting the ceremonial laws as only a parable: these are undoubtedly forerunners of Pauline antinomianism. Others relaxed their Jewish observance in order to become citizens of Alexandria, an act that involved worship of the city gods. Actual apostasy was apparently rare, though there is mention of the case of Philo’s nephew, *Tiberius Julius Alexander, as well as those of Dositheos and Helicon, all of whom pursued careers at the imperial court. Philo on one occasion (Spec., 3:29) does attack intermarriage, but the virulent *antisemitism in Alexandria must have served as a deterrent. A more common reaction to the challenge of secularism was for Jews to cease religious observance except on the Day of Atonement (Philo, Spec. 1:186). Finally, there is some evidence that the one city where Christianity seems to have made real inroads in converting Jews was the one most deeply influenced by Hellenism, Alexandria.

See also *Bible (in Hellenistic Judaism); *Hellenistic Jewish Literature; *Cynics and Cynicism.

[Louis Harry Feldman]

**Spiritual Resistance**

One aspect of the contact between Hellenism (and Rome) and Judaism deserves special treatment, the spiritual resistance against their rule. The struggle of the Jewish people against Greek and Roman domination was accompanied by a literature which encouraged and intensified resistance. After military defeat it became frequently the only weapon, an important instrument of hope and survival. A significant trend in recent scholarship considers much of Jewish literature between Alexander the Great and the conquest of Islam as spiritual or religious resistance.

Resistance of this type was found among all the larger nations of the ancient Near East: the Babylonians and Egyptians under the Persians and the Egyptians and Persians under the Greeks who, in turn, developed a preponderantly cultural resistance under the Romans. The eastern pattern, however, was religious: foreign conquest destroys the sacred and just world order by which native king, cult, nature, and people function under the ruling god, a belief which was strengthened by the frequent misrule of the conqueror. A future cataclysmic reestablishment under a kingly redeemer must therefore right all wrongs. Meanwhile, a hereafter would punish or reward the individual. This apocalyptic scheme existed throughout the Near East: e.g., the *Oracle of Hystaspes* and the later *Bahman Yasht* (Persian), Sesostris and Ramses legends, *Demotic Chronicle, Oracle of the Potter* (Egyptian), *Babylonian Chronicle, Ninos-Semiramis legend* (Babylonian). Archaizing styles (e.g., script and literature, cf. *Coins, *Dead Sea Scrolls), clerical organization, and proselytism were also aspects of resistance.

Jewish spiritual resistance differed in some respects from this general pattern; here it was the weapon of a small people lacking the glory of an imperial past. It differed, further, in its intensity and perpetuity, its monotheism (though dangerously attenuated in the apocalypse) and, at times, its appeal to all classes from aristocracy to peasantry. It differed in a stronger stress on social justice inherited from biblical prophecy and the constant reference to past liberations in sacred scriptures. In his glorification of the Augustan restoration *Virgil may have combined classical concepts with eastern "Empire" apocalyptic ones (Eclogue 4; cf. Horace, *Epode* 16; Dan. 2 and 7). Oppression created obscure allusions (to Antiochus, Pompey, Nero, etc.) and secret code words in both *apocalypse and Talmud (e.g., Edom or Babylon for Rome adopted from here by Christian apocalyptic writers (Rev. 16:5) and perhaps in the Dead Sea Scrolls (*"Kittim") in the Habakkuk Pesher)). Finally, Jewish resistance created an incommensurably greater variety of literary sources and forms. Alongside the detailed apocalypse, with its violent cosmic vision, the psalm remained popular as a vehicle of resistance (Dan. 9:4–19; 11 Macc. 1:24–29; Psalms of Solomon, perhaps the heading of Ps. 30, et al.). Martyrology emerged, and many of its features were borrowed by emerging Christianity (11 Macc.; IV Macc.; talmudic examples collected in *Midrash Emeal Eshkerah*, cf. H.A. Fischel, in JQR, 37 (1946/47), 265–80, 363–86). Alongside Diaspora historiographies, Palestinian works treated both biblical and contemporary history in the spirit of religious resistance (1 Macc.; *Jub.; Pseudo-Philo*). Many talmudic dialogues (“Antoninus” versus Rabbi Hadrian and the Athenian wise men versus Joshua b. Hananiah), Alexander legends (Talm. 31b ff., et al.), parables, and fables (Akiva, fox and fishes, Ber. 61b) have resistance aspects. Spiritual resistance is also manifest in the Hebrew examples of the erotic Greco-Oriental romance (Eshth., Judith, Testament of Joseph, 111 Macc., Moses Romance). The talmudic sermon interpreted biblical passages, such as those of the unclean animals, as referring to Greece and Rome (Lev. R. 13, 5, et al.). The resistance aspects of liturgy, still little explored, may be considerable. Resistance is obvious and probably intentional in the symposiastic seder ritual (cf. S. Stein, in *JJS, 8* [1957], 13–44).

The resistant writer freely added materials from foreign literature. Judith, some details of the Greek Lindus chronicle and Daniel and the Sibylline Oracle (Oriental prophecies) are among prominent examples. Similarly, the Midrash seems to have been acquainted with the Hellenistic critique of Rome’s materialism and cruelty (cf. Shab. 33b and Cicer, *Academica* 21, 137; Meg. 6b; Pes. 119b, et al., and Dio. 13, 16, 31, 41ff., 121) and its “scandalous” foundation legend (Shab. 56b; Esth. R. 3, 5 and Justin 28:2, 8ff.; Horace, *Epode*, 16). Occasionally, resistance consisted in quietism, and the talmudic sage resembled (and was acquainted with) the Greco-Roman philosopher-
rhetor who also often had to choose between martyrdom and withdrawal. The rabbis created much *halakhah of decisive resistance value, especially legislation against emperor worship, later used by Tertullian among others. Naturally, resistance never excluded periods of accommodation, objective insights into the virtues of Greece and Rome (Avot 3, 2; Av. Zar. 2b; 18a; Gen. R. 9 end, 16, 4, et al.), and useful borrowings. Strangely enough, much earlier non-Jewish scholarship condemns Jewish resistance, totally oblivious to the fact that without it there would be no Western civilization as we know it.

[Henry Albert Fischel]


**HELENISTIC JEWISH LITERATURE.** To a general historian the term “Hellenistic” describes the literature of the period from the death of Alexander the Great (323 B.C.E.) until Rome’s predominance in the Mediterranean (c. 30 B.C.E.). Sometimes the same general term is used to refer to Jewish material as well; thus, the Book of Ecclesiastes, early rabbinic literature, and the *Dead Sea Scrolls* are sometimes referred to as “Hellenistic.” More precisely, however, the term Hellenistic Jewish literature does not describe a historical period – nor even characterize a movement – but rather applies to a specific body of literature that was written in the Greek language; was transmitted only in the Greek language; or was preserved in one or more secondary versions derived from the Greek (though a number of these works have now been found in the original). Its two main centers were Palestine and Alexandria (Egypt), although other localities of the Diaspora may have contributed (see *Jason of Cyrene*). Its temporal limits extend into the second century C.E., for the educated classes of the major cities of the Roman period continued to use Greek rather than Latin as the language of culture. Since the term Hellenistic Jewish literature refers to a subclass of the literature of a period, it is difficult to discuss it historically or in terms of genres in isolation from the rest of the literature of the same period. Traditionally, the material of this literature has been divided into Apocrypha, *Pseudepigrapha*, and individual authors. Schuerer presents the material as either Palestinian or as Diaspora literature. Only recently, in the works of Joshua Gutmann, has there been an attempt at a systematic historical presentation.

The fundamental book of this literature is the Greek translation of the Bible, the *Septuagint*. Although the story of its origin as told in the Letter of *Aristeas* is probably propaganda, in fact an early date for this translation, at least of the Pentateuch, is very probable (the reign of *Ptolemy Philadelphus*, 285–246 B.C.E.), testifying to the rapid loss of knowledge of the Hebrew language by the Alexandria Jewish community. The rest of the literature is greatly dependent on this text. In historical writing, for example, retelling of biblical history is found in the fragments of *Demetrius*, *Eupolemus*, *Artapanus*, *Aristeas*, *Cleodemus*, and *Thallus*, in *Pseudo-Philo’s Biblical Antiquities*, and in the first half of the *Antiquities* of *Josephus*, all couched in the language of the Greek translation with little or no reference to the Hebrew original. In more contemporaneous histories, such as 1 and 11 *Maccabees*, *Philo’s Embassy to Gaius*, and *Josephus’ Jewish War*, there is an obvious debt to the models of Thucydides and Polybius. With the exception of 1 Maccabees (probably), *Pseudo-Philo*, and the original of *Josephus’ Jewish War*, all these histories were composed in Greek. The folkloristic elaborations on the biblical text found in this literature are more often translations from a Semitic original. Some are insertions into the biblical text, perhaps stemming from the original copy, such as the story of the three youths in 1 *Esdras* 3:1–5:6 or the insertions in the Greek *Esther*; others are additions, such as *Susanna* or *Bel and the Dragon*, to the biblical Book of Daniel; still others, separate books in themselves, such as *Jubilees*, *Tobit*, *Judith*, and the Ascension of *Isaiah*, are further examples of stories told in a biblical manner. Artapanus and 11 and 111 Maccabees come closer to the dramatic manner of a Greek romance.

Books such as the Wisdom of *Ben Sira* (Ecclesiasticus) continue the tradition of biblical wisdom literature. Little or no direct influence of Greek philosophy can be discerned in them; but in books like the Wisdom of *Solomon*, especially in the latter half, and in 11v Maccabees, Platonic and Stoic terminology and ideas are present. *Aristobulus* and Philo explain Mosaic law as an anticipation of Greek philosophy, and they employ the Greek technique of allegory to reconcile these two traditions. Apocalyptic literature, as found in *Enoch*, *Assumption of Moses*, 11v *Esdras*, the Syrian and Greek *Baruch,
TOBIT 1.1-1.7

This book tells the story of Tobit son of Tobiel son of Hananiel son of Aduel son of Gabacl son of Raphael son of Raguel of the descendants' of Asiel, of the tribe of Naphtali, 2 who in the days of King Shalmaneser of the Assyrians was taken into captivity from Thibisce, which is to the south of Kedesh Naphtali in Upper Galilee, above Ascher toward the west, and north of Phosphorus.

1 I, Tobit, walked in the ways of truth and righteousness all the days of my life. I performed many acts of charity for my kindred and my people who had gone with me in exile to Nineveh in the land of the Assyrians. 2 When I was in my own country, in the land of Israel, while I was still a young man, the whole tribe of my ancestor Naphtali deserted the house of David and Jerusalem. This city had been chosen from among the tribes of Israel should offer sacrifice and where the temple, the dwelling of God, had been consecrated and established for all generations forever.

5 All my kindred and our ancestral house of Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan and on all the mountains of Galilee. 6 But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree. I would hurry off to Jerusalem with the first fruits of the crops and the firstlings of the flock, the tithes of the cattle, and the first shearings of the sheep. 7 I would give these to the priests, the sons of Aaron, at the altar; likewise the tenth of the grain, wine, oil, pomegranates, figs, and the rest of the fruits to the sons of Levi who ministered at Jerusalem. Also for six years I would save up a second tenth in money and go and distribute it in Jerusalem. 8 A third tenth I would give to the orphans and widows and to the converts who had attached themselves to Israel. I would bring it and give it to them in the third year, and we would eat it according to the ordinance decreed concerning it in the law of Moses and according to the instructions of Deborah, the mother of my father Tobiel, a Rabbin for my father had died and left me an orphan. 9 When I became a man I married a woman, a member of our own family, and by her I became the father of a son whom I named Tobias.

10 After I was carried away captive to Assyria and came as a captive to Nineveh, everyone of my kindred and my people ate the food of the Gentiles, 11 but I kept myself from eating the food of the Gentiles. 12 Because I was mindful of God with all my heart, 13 the Most High gave me favor and established my name and set me high above my kindred and my people. 14 And I, the son and grandson of Asher, was exalted in my kindred and in the land of Assyria. 15 On my kindred and my people I was settled and decorated with honor, and I, a captive of the Gentiles, was brought up in the house of Solomon the king. 16 And because my kindred and my people had been exiled to Assyria, their property was confiscated; nothing was left to me to eat. 17 Then the king of the Assyrians had me in his palace, and I was kept there as a captive for the king's amusement. 18 And I was given the bread of the king with which he amused himself. And I would eat my bread and drink my wine and would come into the king's presence and sit at the king's table.
two of Sennacherib's sons killed him, and he fled to the mountains of Ararat, and his son Esar-haddon reigned after him. He appointed Ahikar, the son of his brother Hanan'el over all the accounts of his kingdom, and he had authority over the entire administration. Ahikar interceded for me, and I returned to Nineveh. Now Ahikar was chief cupbearer, keeper of the signet, and in charge of administration of the accounts under King Sennacherib of Assyria; so Esar-haddon reappointed him. He was my nephew and so a close relative.

Then during the reign of Esar-haddon I returned home, and my wife Anna and my son Tobias were restored to me. At our festival of Pentecost, which is the sacred festival of weeks, a good dinner was prepared for me and I reclined to eat. When the table was set for me and an abundance of food placed before me, I said to my son Tobias, "Go, my child, and bring whatever you may find of our people among the exiles in Nineveh, who is wholeheartedly mindful of God, and he shall eat together with me. I will wait for you, until you come back." So Tobias went to look for some poor person of our people. When he had returned he said, "Father!"

And I replied, "Here I am, my child." Then he went on to say, "Look, father, one of our own people has been murdered and thrown into the marketplace, and now he lies there strangled." Then I sprang up, left the dinner before even tasting it, and removed the body from the square and laid it in one of the rooms until sunset when I might bury it. When I returned, I washed myself and ate my food in sorrow.

Then I remembered the prophecy of Amos, how he said against Bethel, "Your festivals shall be turned into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation." And I wept. When the sun had set, I went and dug a grave and buried him. And my neighbors laughed and said, "Is he still not afraid? He has already been hunted down to be put to death for doing this, and he ran away; yet here he is again burying the dead!" That same night I washed myself and went into my courtyard and slept by the wall of the courtyard; and my face was uncovered because of the heat. Did not know that there were sparrows on the wall; their fresh droppings fell into my eyes and produced white films. I went to physicians to be healed, but the more they treated me with ointments the more my vision was obscured by the white films, until I became completely blind. For four years I remained unable to see. All my kindred were sorry for me, and Ahikar took care of me for two years before he went to Elymais.

At that time, also, my wife Anna earned money at women's work. She used to send what she made to the owners and they would pay wages to her. One day, when she had finished her work, she came to me and said, "Father!"

And I replied, "Here I am, my child." Then she went on to say, "Look, father, one of our own people has been murdered and thrown into the marketplace, and now he lies there strangled." Then I sprang up, left the dinner before even tasting it, and removed the body from the square and laid it in one of the rooms until sunset when I might bury it.

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So now deal with me as you will; command my spirit to be taken from me, so that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have had to listen to undeserved insults, and great is the sorrow within me. Command, O Lord, that I be released from this distress; release me to go to the eternal home, and do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me. For it is better for me to die than to see so much distress in my life and to listen to insults.

On the same day, at Ecbatana in Media, Sarah and Tobias were together with their son Tobias in the temple of Ecbatana. Sarah washed her face and back and was about to come to the temple. Tobias said to her, "Mother!"

And she said, "What is it, my son?"

Then she replied to me, "Where are your acts of charity? Where are your righteous deeds? These things are known about you!"

Then with much grief and anguish of heart I wept, and with groaning began to pray:

"You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are just; all your ways are mercy and truth; you judge the world. And now, O Lord, remember me and look favorably upon me. Do not punish me for my sins and for my unwrting offenses and those that my ancestors committed before you. They sinned against you, and disobeyed your commandments. So you gave me over to plunder, exile, and death, to become the talk, the byword, and an object of reproach among all the nations among whom you have dispersed us. And now your many judgments are true in exacting penalty from me for my sins. For we have not kept your commandments and have not walked in accordance with truth before you.

So now deal with me as you will; command my spirit to be taken from me, so that I may be released from the face of the earth and become dust. For it is better for me to die than to live, because I have had to listen to undeserved insults, and great is the sorrow within me. Command, O Lord, that I be released from this distress; release me to go to the eternal home, and do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me. For it is better for me to die than to see so much distress in my life and to listen to insults."

The outburst nuances Tobit's claims of righteousness and may also reflect his disgrace in being supported by a woman (Sir 25.22). Like Job's wife (Job 2.9), Anna questions the relationship between good deeds and a good life. The outburst nuances Tobit's claims of righteousness and may also reflect his disgrace in being supported by a woman (Sir 25.22). Like Job's wife (Job 2.9), Anna questions the relationship between good deeds and a good life. The outburst nuances Tobit's claims of righteousness and may also reflect his disgrace in being supported by a woman (Sir 25.22). Like Job's wife (Job 2.9), Anna questions the relationship between good deeds and a good life.
and not listen to such reproaches any more.

14 You know, O Master, that I am innocent of any defilement with a man,

and that I have not disgraced my name or the name of my father in the

land of my exile. I am my father's only child; he has no other child to be his heir;

and he has no close relative or other kindred

for whom I should keep myself as wife.

Already seven husbands of mine have died.

Why should I still live?

But if it is not pleasing to you, O Lord, to take my life, hear me in my disgrace.

16 At that very moment, the prayers of both of them were heard in the glorious presence of God. 17 So Raphael was sent to heal both of them: Tobias, by removing the white films from his eyes, so that he might see God's light with his eyes; and Sarah, daughter of Raguel, by giving her in marriage to Tobias son of Tobit, and by setting her free from the wicked demon Asmodeus. For Tobias was entitled to have her before all others who had desired to marry her. At the same time that Tobit returned from the courtyard into his house, Sarah daughter of

a Other ancient authorities read stragglers b Other ancient authorities read have had no benefit from c Other ancient authorities lack Lord

Raguel came down from her upper room.

That same day Tobit remembered the money that he had left in trust with Gabacl at Ragages in Media, 3 and he said to himself, "Now I have asked for death. Why do I not call my son Tobias and explain to him about the money before I die?" 4 Then he called his son Tobias, and when he came to him he said, "My son, when I die, give me a proper burial. Honor your mother and do not abandon her all the days of her life. Do whatever pleases her, and do not grieve her in anything. 5 Remember her, my son, because she faced many dangers for you while you were in her womb. And when she dies, bury her beside me in the same grave.

5 "Revere the Lord all your days, my son, and refuse to sin or to transgress his commandments. Live uprightly all the days of your life, and do not walk in the ways of wrongdoing; 6 for those who act in accordance with truth will prosper in all their activities. To all those who practice righteousness 7 give alms from your possessions, and do not let your eye begrudge the gift when you make it. Do not turn your face away from anyone who is poor, and the face of God will not be turned away from you. 8 If you have many possessions, make your gift from them in proportion; if few, do not be afraid to give according to the little you have. 9 So you will be laying up a good treasure for yourself against the day of necessity. 10 For almsgiving delivers from death and keeps you from going into the darkness. 11 Indeed, almsgiving, for a who practice it, is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High.

12 "Beware, my son, of every kind of fornication. First of all, marry a woman from among the descendants of your ancestors; do not marry a foreign woman, who not of your father's tribe; for we are the descendants of the prophet. Remember my son, that Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our ancestors of old, all took wives from among their kindred. They were blessed in their children, and their posterity will inherit the land. 13 So now, my son, love your kindred, and in your heart do not disdain your kindred, the sons and daughters of your people, by refusing to take wife for yourself from among them. For in pride there is ruin and great confusion. An in idleness there is loss and dire poverty; because idleness is the mother of famine.

14 "Do not keep over until the next day the wages of those who work for you, but pay them at once. If you serve God you will receive payment. Watch yourself, my son, not to keep over until the next day the wages of those who work for you, but pay them at once. If you serve God you will receive payment.

13 Command that I be released from the earth

parallels that of Tobit. 7: Reproacheth, like Sarah of Gen 16.4–6, this Sarah also has no children and bears her tormentor. 8: The earliest literary mention of Asmodeus, who will become a stock villain in later Jewish legend. 10: Sarah intended to hang herself, but concern for her father prevents suicide. Hades, i.e., Sheol, the abode of the dead; cf Gen 42.38; 44.29; 31. Like Tobit, Sarah seeks to escape a woman's reproaches, but unlike Tobit, she does not issue a retort to her tormentors. 11: Hands outstretched is a common posture for prayer (Ezra 9.5; Dan 6.10). Blessed are you is the traditional opening of Jewish prayers (8.5.15; Jdt 13.17). 13: Sarah more quickly than Tobit pleads for death, in contrast to Tobit, she does not confess sin. 14–15: Women's sexual purity and honor are also prominent themes of the stories of Judith and Susanna. A close relative suggests levirate law (Deut 25.5–10); Sarah is not aware that another relative and thus a potential husband, Tobias, exists.

3.16–17: Divine response. The fate of the supplicants are intertwined by Raphael's dual mission. 17: Raphael's name means "God has healed." Entitled, by being a near relation (6.12; 3.14–15n.).

4.1–13: Tobit's advice on the family. Tobit offers a testament, a common literary genre in early (Ge 49 as well as Hellenistic times (1 Esdras 81; Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs), in which a father offers his children ethical advice and prophetic insight. Chapter 14 provides a second example. 1: Money, as 1. 14. Rages is just east of modern Teheran. 3: Burial, Tobit asks for what he provided others (on familial responsibility, see also Lk 9.39). Honoring one's mother is commanded in the Decalogue (E 20.12; Deut 5.16; Prov 23.22; Sir 3.12–16; 7.27). 6–7: Tobit's circumstances (temporarily) conflict wit the comments typical of wisdom literature (e.g., Prov 10.27–30). 8: Giving what one can is a prominent motif in Jewish-Hellenistic (Testament of Isachar), early Christian (Lk 21.1–4; 2 Cor 8.12), and rabbin (b. Git. 7a) writing. 10: Delivers from death probably suggests a long life, or an eternal one. 1: Almsgiving is consistently emphasized (12.8–9; 14.10–11; Lev 23.22; Ps 112.9; Prov 14.21.31; Is 58.6–9; Sir 3.30–31; 35.4). 12–13: Consistent with the instructions of wisdom literature (Prov 5.26.24), Tobit warns about the evils of sexual sin and fornication. Fornication refers to any intercourse outside of marriage. On indulgence, see 1.9n. Genesis does not record the ancestry of Noah's wife although the Book of Jubilees (4.33), an early Second Temple text, does. The reference to praise echo Prov 16.18.

4.14–19: Popular wisdom. Following instructions on marriage, Tobit returns to the conventions advice begin in 4.3–10. 14: Do not keep over; see Lev 19.13; Deut 24.15. 15: The "golden rule" appears
in everything you do, and discipline yourself in all your conduct. 15 And what you hate, do not do to anyone. Do not drink wine to excess or let drunkenness go with you on your way. 16 Give some of your food to the hungry, and some of your clothing to the naked. Give all your surplus as alms, and do not let your eye begrudge your giving of alms. 17 Place your bread on the grave of the righteous, but give none to sinners. 18 Seek advice from every wise person and do not despise any useful counsel.

19 At all times bless the Lord God, and ask him, "I can go with him; I will go with him to Medea, and we will pay him wages until you return. But get back the money from Gabaël." 20 So Tobias went out to look for a man to go with him to Medea, someone who was acquainted with the way. He went out and found the angel Raphael standing in front of him; 21 but he did not perceive that he was an angel of God. 22 Tobias said to him, "Where do you come from, young man?" 23 "From your kindred, the Israelites," he replied, "and I have come here to work." Then Tobias said to him, "Do you know the way to go to Media?" 24 "Yes," he replied, "I have been there many times; I am acquainted with it and know all the roads. I have often traveled to Media, and would stay with our kinsman Gabaël who lives in Rages of Media. It is a journey of two days from Ecbatana to Rages; for it lies in a mountainous area, while Ecbatana is in the middle of the plains, and I am familiar with its mountains and all of its roads." 25 Then Tobias answered his son Tobit, "I will do everything that you have commanded me, father; 26 but how can I obtain the money from him, since he does not know me and I do not know him?"

What evidence am I to give him so that he will recognize and trust me, and give me the money? Also, I do not know the roads to Media, or how to get there." 27 Then Tobit answered his son Tobias. He gave me his bond and I gave him mine. I divided his in two; we each took one part, and I put one with the money. And now twenty years have passed since I left this money in trust. So now, my son, find yourself a trustworthy man to go with you, and we will pay him wages until you return. But get back the money from Gabaël."

14 Then Tobit said to him, "Welcome! God save you, brother. Do not feel bitter toward me, brother, because I wanted to be sure about your ancestry. It turns out that you are a kinsman, and of good and noble lineage. For I knew Hananiah and Nathanael, the two sons of Shemeliah, and they used to go with me to Jerusalem and worshiped with me there, and were not led astray. Your kindred are good people; you come of good stock. Heartly welcome!"

15 Then he added, "I will pay you a drachma a day as wages, as well as expenses for yourself and my son. So go with my son, and I will add something to your wages." Raphael answered, "I will go with him; so do not fear. We shall leave in good health and return to you in good health, because the way is safe." 16 So Tobit said to him, "Blessings be upon you, brother."

Then he called his son and said to him, "Son, prepare supplies for the journey and set out with your brother. May God in heaven bring you safely there and return you in good health to me; and may his angel, my son, accompany you both for your safety."

Before he went out to start his journey, he kissed his father and mother. Tobit then said to him, "Have a safe journey."

18 But his mother began to weep, and said to Tobit, "Why is it that you have sent my child away? Is he not the staff of our hand, as he goes in and out before us? 19 Do not heap money upon money, but let it be a ransom for our child. 20 For the life that is perceived himself as among the dead. The reference to divine healing recollects Raphael's name (see 3.17n.). 13: Azariah is Hebrew for "God has helped"; Hananiah means "God has had mercy." 14: Reference to the righteous sons of Shemeliah belies Tobit's claim (1.5-6) that he alone was faithful. 17: Tobit's prayer for angelic companion (also 5.22) is already answered. See also Gen 24.40. Tobit's journey will resemble earlier quests for brides, although he does not yet know this. 5.18-6.1a: Anna's lament. The couple alternate between practical observations and theological reflection. They will display similar attitudes as their wait continues (10.1-7). 19: Ransom likely suggests the
given to us by the Lord is enough for us." 21Tobit" said to her, "Do not worry; our child will leave in good health and return to us in good health. Your eyes will see him on the day when he returns to you in good health. Say no more! Do not fear for them, my sister." 22For a good angel will accompany him; his journey will be successful, and he will come back in good health." 6So she stopped weeping.

The young man went out and the angel went with him; 2and the dog came out with him and went along with them. So they both journeyed along, and when the first night overtook them they camped by the Tigris river. 3Then the young man went down to wash his feet in the Tigris river. Suddenly a large fish leaped up from the water and tried to swallow the young man's foot, and he cried out. 4But the angel said to the young man, "Catch hold of the fish and hang on to it!" So the young man grasped the fish and drew it up on the land. 5Then the angel said to him, "Cut open the fish, and take out its gall, heart, and liver. Keep them with you, but throw away the intestines. For its gall, heart, and liver are useful as medicine." 6So after cutting open the fish the young man gathered together the gall, heart, and liver; then he roasted and ate some of the fish, and kept some to be salted.

The two continued on their way together until they were near Media. 7Then the young man questioned the angel and said to him, "Brother Azariah, what medicinal value is there in the fish's heart and liver, and in the gall?" 8He replied, "As for the fish's heart and liver, you must burn them to make a smoke in the presence of a man or woman afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, and every affliction will flee away and never remain with that person any longer. 9And as for the gall, anoint a person's eyes where white films have appeared on them; blow upon them, upon the white films, and the eyes' will be healed." 10When he entered Media and already was approaching Ecbatanā, 11Raphael said to the young man, "Brother Tobias." 12"Here I am," he answered. Then Raphael said to him, "We must stay this night in the home of Raguel. He is your relative, and he has a daughter named Sarah. 13He has no male heir and no daughter except Sarah only, and you, as next of kin to her, have before all other men a hereditary claim on her. Also it is right for you to inherit her father's possessions. Moreover, the girl is sensible, brave, and very beautiful, and her father is a good man." 14He continued, "You have every right to take her in marriage. So listen to me, brother; tonight I will speak to her father about the girl, so that we may take her to be your bride. When we return from Rages we will celebrate her marriage. For I know that Raguel can by no means keep her from you or promise her to another man without incurring the penalty of death according to the decree of the book of Moses. Indeed he knows that you, rather than any other man, are entitled to marry his daughter. So now listen to me, brother, and tonight we shall speak concerning the girl and arrange her engagement to you. And when we return from Rages we will take her to bring her back with us to your house."

14 Then Tobias said in answer to Raphael, "Brother Azariah, I have heard that she already has been married to seven husbands and that they died in the bridal chamber. On the night when they went in to her, they would die. I have heard people saying that it was a demon that killed them. 15It does not harm her, but it kills anyone who desires to approach her. So now, since I am the only son my father has, I am afraid that I may die and bring my father's and mother's life down to their grave, grieving for me—and they have no other son to bury them."

16 But Raphael" said to him, "Do you not remember your father's orders when he commanded you to take a wife from your father's house? Now listen to me, brother, and say no more about this demon. Take her. I know that this very night she will be given to you in marriage. 17When you enter the bridal chamber, take some of the fish's liver and heart, and put them on the embers of the incense. An odor will be given off; 18the demon will smell it and flee, and will never be seen near her any more. Now when you are about to go to bed with her, both of you must first stand up and pray, imploring the Lord of heaven that mercy and safety may be granted to you. Do not be afraid, for she was set apart for you before the world was made. You will save her, and she will go with you. I presume that you will have children by her, and they will be as brothers to you. Now say no more!" 19When Tobias heard the words of Raphael and learned that she was his kinswoman, 5related through his father's lineage, he loved her very much, and his heart was drawn to her.

7Now when they entered Ecbatanā, Tobias said to him, "Brother Azariah, take me straight to our brother Raguel." So he took him to Raguel's house, where they found him sitting beside the courtyard door. They greeted him first, and he replied, "Joyous greetings, brothers; welcome and good health!" Then he brought them into his house. 2He said to his wife Edna: "How much the young man resembles my kinsman Tobias." 3Then Edna questioned them, saying, "Where are you from, brothers?" They answered, "We belong to the descendants of Naphtali who are exile in Nineveh." 4She said to them, "Do you know our kinsman Tobit?" And they replied, "Yes, we know him." Then she asked them, "Is he in good health?" 5They replied, "He is alive and in good health." And Tobias added, "He is my father! At
that Raguel jumped up and kissed him and wept. 7 He also spoke to him as follows, "Blessings on you, my child, son of a good and noble father!" O most miserable of calamities that such an upright and benefi-cent man has become blind!" He then embraced his kinsman Tobias and wept. 8 His wife Edna also wept for him, and their daughter Sarah likewise wept. 9 Then Raguel slughtered a ram from the flock and received them very warmly.

When they had bathed and washed themselves and had reclined to dine, Tobias said to Raphael, "Brother Azariah, ask Raguel to give me my kinswoman Sarah." 10 But Raguel overheard it and said to the lad, "Eat and drink, and be merry tonight. For no one except you, brother, has the right to marry my daughter Sarah. Likewise I am not at liberty to give her to any other man than yourself, because you are my nearest relative. But let me explain to you the true situation more fully, my child. 11 I have given her to seven men of our kinsmen, and all died on the night when they went to her. But eat and drink, and the Lord will act on behalf of you both." But Tobias said, "I will neither eat nor drink anything until you settle the things that pertain to me." So Raguel said, "I will do so. She is given to you in accordance with the decree in the book of Moses, and it has been decreed from heaven that she be given to you. Take your kinswoman; from now on you are her brother and she is your sister. She is given to you from today and forever. May the Lord of heaven, my child, guide and prosper you both this night and grant you mercy and peace." 12 Then Raguel summoned his daughter Sarah. When she came to him he took her by the hand and gave her to Tobias, saying, "Take her to be your wife in accordance with the law and decree written in the book of Moses. Take her and bring her safely to your father. And may the God of heaven prosper your journey with his peace." 13 Then he called her mother and told her to bring writing material; and he wrote out a copy of a marriage contract, to the effect that he gave her to him as wife according to the decree of the law of Moses. 14 Then they began to eat and drink. 15 Raguel called his wife Edna and said to her, "Sister, get the other room ready, and take her there." 16 So she went and made the bed in the room as he had told her, and brought Sarah there. She wept for her daughter. Then, wiping away the tears, she said to her, "Take courage, my daughter; the Lord of heaven grant you joy in place of your sorrow. Take courage, my daughter." Then she went out.

8 When they had finished eating and drinking they wanted to retire; so they took the young man and brought him into the bedroom. 2 Then Tobias remembered the words of Raphael, and he took the fish's liver and heart out of the bag where he had them and put them on the embers of the incense. 3 The odor of the fish so repelled the demon that he fled to the remotest parts of Egypt. But Raphael followed him, and at once bound him there hand and foot.

4 When the parents had gone out and shut the door of the room, Tobias got out of bed and said to Sarah, "Sister, get up, and let us pray and implore our Lord that he grant us mercy and safety." So she got up, and they began to pray and implore that they might be kept safe. Tobias began by saying, "Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors, and blessed is your name in all generations forever.

Let the heavens and the whole creation bless you forever.

You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support.

From the two of them the human race has sprung.

You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.'

7 I now am taking this kinswoman of mine, not because of lust, but with sincerity.

Grant that she and I may find mercy and that we may grow old together.

And they both said, 'Amen, Amen.'

9 Then they went to sleep for the night.

But Raguel arose and called his servants to him, and they went and dug a grave, the couple's praying contrasts with both Raguel's gravedigging (8.9-11) and the descriptions of ardent love-making found in non-Jewish Hellenistic romances. 5-7: Prayers are frequently attributed to character in Second Temple Jewish literature (Jdt 9; Add Ezhith; Sus; Song of Thr). 5: God of our ancestors, see Ex 5.13, Deut 4.1. 6: Adam and Eve, one of the earliest biblical references to these figures outside Genesis. In the Septuagint, Eve is mentioned by name only here and in Gen 3.20. 4.1. You said, introducing quotation of Gen 2.18. 7: Not because of lust, chastity becomes a popular motif in Jewish-Hellenistic literature. 8: Amen, Amen Sarah is Tobit's only words aside from her prayer (3.11-15).

8b-10: Raguel's fears are assuaged. 9-10: Raguel's morbid planning contrasts with Tobias's piety, unlike Tobit, Raguel prepares a grave before finding a corpse. 10: Ridicule and derision, Raguel fears for his reputation, not his daughter's happiness or his son-in-law's life; Sarah had already become an object of derision (3.7-9). 12: Without anyone knowing ignores the presence of Azariah/Raphael, as well as the maids and the servants. 15-17: The prayer continues Raguel's somewhat wry perspective: He praises God for his own good fortune before mentioning the mercy extended to the couple.
19 After this he asked his wife to bake many loaves of bread; and he went out to the herd and brought two steers and four rams and ordered them to be slaughtered. So they began to make preparations. Then he called for Tobias and swore on oath to him in these words: “You shall not leave here for fourteen days, but shall stay here eating and drinking with me; and you shall cheer up my daughter, who has been depressed. Take at once of all that I own and return in safety to your father; the other half will be yours when my wife and I die. Take courage, my child. I am your father and Edna is your mother, and we belong to you as well as to your wife now and forever. Take courage, my child.”

9 Then Tobias called Raphael and said to him, “Brother Azariah, take four servants and two camels with you and travel to Rages. Go to the home of Gabael, give him the bond, get the money, and then bring him with you to the wedding celebration. For you know that my father must be counting the days, and if I delay even one day I will upset him very much. You are witness to the oath Gabriel has sworn, and I cannot violate my oath.” So Raphael with the four servants and two camels went to Rages in Media and stayed with Gabael. Gabael gave him the bond and informed him that Tobit’s son had married and was inviting him to the wedding celebration. So Gabael got up and counted out to him the money bags, with their seals intact; then they loaded them on the camels.

10 Now, day by day, Tobit kept counting how many days Tobias’ would need for going and for returning. And when the days had passed and his son did not appear, he said, “Is it possible that he has been detained? Or that Gabael has died, and there is no one to give him the money?” And he began to worry. His wife Anna said, “My child has perished and is no longer among the living.” And she began to weep and mourn for her son, saying, “Woe to me, my child, the light of my eyes.” But Tobit kept saying to her, “Be quiet and stop worrying, my dear; he is all right. Probably something unexpected has happened there. The man who went with him is trustworthy and is one of our own kin. Do not grieve for him, my dear; he will soon be back.”

11 When they came near to Kaserin, which is opposite Nineveh, Raphael said, “You are aware of how we left your father. Let us run ahead of your wife and prepare the house while they are still on the way.” As they went on together Raphael said to him, “Have the gang ready.” And the dog went along behind them. Meanwhile Anna sat looking intently down the road by which her son would come. When she caught sight of him coming, she said to his father, “Look, your son
d Edna said to Tobias, “My child and dear brother, the Lord of heaven bring you back safely, and may I live long enough to see children of you and of my daughter Sarah before I die. In the sight of the Lord I entrust my daughter to you; do nothing to grieve her all the days of your life. Go in peace, my child. From now on I am your mother and Sarah is your beloved wife. May God grant to us together all the days of our lives.” Then she kissed them both and saw them safely off. Tobias parted from Raguel with happiness and joy, praising the Lord of heaven and earth, King over all, because he had made his journey a success. Finally, he blessed Raguel and his wife Edna, and said, “I have been commanded by the Lord to honor you all the days of my life.”

12 Then Raphael took Tobias and Sarah to Nineveh. While they were still on the way, he said, “Father, mother, and friends, I have returned with Tobit, and am bringing Sarah the daughter he has married.”

13 Meanwhile Anna sat looking intently down the road by which her son would come. When she caught sight of him coming, she said to his father, “Look, your son

[24 ΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΑ | [25 ΑΠΟΚΡΥΦΑ]
Tobit is healed. 8: on that day there was rejoicing; I know that his eyes will be opened. 8 Smear the gall of the fish on his eyes; the medicine will make the white films shrink and peel off from his eyes, and your father will regain his sight and see the light.

9 Then Anna ran up to her son and threw her arms around him, saying, “Now that I have seen you, my child, I am ready to die.” And she wept. 10 Then Tobit got up and came stumbling out through the courtyard door. Tobias went up to him, 11 with the gall of the fish in his hand, and holding him firmly, he blew into his eyes, saying, “Take courage, father.” With this he applied the medicine on his eyes, 12 and it made them smart. 13 Next, with both his hands he peeled off the white films from the corners of his eyes. Then Tobit saw his son and threw his arms around him, 14 and he wept and said to him, “I see you, my son, the light of my eyes!” Then he said, “Blessed be God, and blessed be his great name, and blessed be all his holy angels. May his holy name be blessed throughout all the ages. 15 Though he afflicted me, he has had mercy upon me. Now I see my son Tobias!”

So Tobit went in rejoicing and praising God at the top of his voice. Tobias reported to his father that his journey had been successful, that he had brought the money, and the fee had already been determined (5.15-16). Since Raphael has not revealed his identity, he continued to avoid women (11.3n). Raphael continues to dwell in his house, and his “mysterious” ways are a universalistic expression of a timeless divine power, which becomes more important in the postexilic period, see 1 Mace 3.44-48; Esth 4.1-3,15; 7b-10: Proverbial sayings continue the emphasis on charitable deeds (4.6-11); for fasting, which becomes more important in the postexilic period, see 1 Macc 3.44-48; Esth 4.1-3,15; Mt 6.16-18. 12-13: The angelic task of conveying prayers and good deeds is mentioned in other Second Temple Jewish literature, such as 1 Enoch. 14: To test indicates that Tobit’s blindness and his subsequent trials resulted from God’s active effort (Gen 22.1-22; Job 1-2); it is unmentioned whether Sarah’s trials were also tests. 15: Seven angels do not appear in earlier biblical material; Daniel mentions Gabriel (8.16; 9.21; cf. Lk 1.19,26) and Michael (Dan 10.13,21; 12.1; cf. Jude 9; Rev 12.7). 16-17: Fear and prostration are standard reactions to epiphanies (Dan 10.1-12), as is the response; Do not be afraid. 19: I really did not eat reflects the traditional view that angels do not require food (Jdg 13.16). 20-21: Jesus’ ascension in Acts 1.9 (cf. Jn 16.5) shares several motifs with this scene.

“Father, how much shall I pay him? It would do no harm to give him half of the possessions brought back with me. 3 For he has led me back to you safely, he cured my wife, he brought the money back with me, and he healed you. How much extra shall I give him as a bonus?” 4 Tobit said, “He deserves, my child, to receive half of all that he brought back, and farewell.” 5 So Tobias’ called him and said, “Take for your wages half of all that you brought back, and farewell.”

6 Then Raphael called the two of them privately and said to them, “Bless God and acknowledge him in the presence of all the living for the good things he has done for you. Bless and sing praise to his name. With fitting honor declare to all people the deeds of God. Do not be slow to acknowledge him. 7 It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to acknowledge and reveal the works of God, and with fitting honor to acknowledge him. Do good and evil will not overtake you. 8 Prayer with fasting is good, but better than both is almsgiving with righteousness. A little with righteousness is better than wealth with wrongdoing. 9 It is better to give alms than to lay up gold. 10 For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies. 11 I will now declare the whole truth to you and will conceal nothing from you. Already I have declared it to you when I said, ‘It is good to conceal the secret of a king, but to reveal to due honor the works of God.’ 12 So now when you and Sarah prayed, it was I who brought and read the record of your prayer before the glory of the Lord, and likewise whenever you would bury the dead. 13 And that time when you did not hesitate to get up and leave your dinner to go and bury the dead, 14 was sent to you to test you. And at the same time God sent me to heal you and Sarah your daughter-in-law. 15 I am Raphael, one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord.”

16 The two of them were shaken; they fell face down, for they were afraid. 17 But he said to them, “Do not be afraid; peace be with you. Bless God forevermore. 18 As for me, when I was with you, I was not acting on my own will, but by the will of God. Bless him each and every day; sing his praises. 19 Although you were watching me, I really did not eat or drink anything—but what you saw was a vision. 20 So now get up from the ground, and acknowledge God. See, I am ascending to him who sent me. Write down all these things that have happened to you.” And he ascended. 21 Then they stood up, and could see him no more. 22 They kept blessing God and singing his praises, and they acknowledged God for these marvelous deeds of his, when an angel of God had appeared to them.

11.7-18: Tobit is healed. 8: Gall, a bitter digestive juice, bile, was recognized as having medicinal properties. 11-13: See Acts 9.18; the magic properties of the gall work, though physicians’ attempts were not successful (2.10). 14: Light of my eyes, fulfilling v. 8, has both metaphorical and literal implications. 14-15: Tobit’s doxology resembles those of Tobias (8.5-7) and Raguel (8.15-17). Holy angels is ironic, since Raphael has not revealed his identity. Afflicted (lit., scoured) and had mercy, conventional terms for divine punishment and reconciliation upon the community’s repentance, are applied to Israel in 13.2,5 (see 2 Macc 6.12-16). 16: Amazement is the standard reaction to a miraculous healing. 17: My daughter is a repeated phrase, echoes the familial language of Raguel and Edna; Tobit greets the daughter-in-law for whom he had prayed (4.12-13).

12.1-22: Raphael’s revelations. Bringing the major plot events to a conclusion, Raphael explains his role in testing Tobit and exhorts Tobit and his son to good deeds and piety. 2: How much shall I pay him? The fee had already been determined (5.15-16). Half of the possessions is one-quarter of Raguel’s estate plus half the loan. The generosity is consistent with Tobit’s insistence on almsgiving. 6: Privately, since only the language of God is known to the angels (Jn 16.13).
Then Tobit said: “Blessed be God who lives forever, because his kingdom lasts throughout all ages.

2 For he afflicts, and he shows mercy; he leads down to Hades in the lowest regions of the earth, and he brings up from the great abyss; and there is nothing that can escape his hand.

3 Acknowledge him before the nations, O children of Israel; for he has scattered you among them.

4 He has shown you his greatness even there. Exalt him in the presence of every living being, because he is our Lord and he is our God; he is our Father and he is God forever.

5 He will afflict you for your iniquities, but he will again show mercy on all of you. He will gather you from all the nations among whom you have been scattered.

6 If you turn to him with all your heart and with all your soul, to do what is true before him, then he will turn to you and will no longer hide his face from you.

So now see what he has done for you; acknowledge him at the top of your voice.

Bless the Lord of righteousness, and exalt the King of the ages.

In the land of my exile I acknowledge him, and show his power and majesty to a nation of sinners:

‘Turn back, you sinners, and do what is right before him; perhaps he may look with favor upon you and show you mercy.’

As for me, I exalt my God, and my soul rejoices in the King of heaven.

Let all people speak of his majesty, and acknowledge him in Jerusalem.

O Jerusalem, the holy city, he afflicted you for the deeds of your hands, but will again have mercy on the children of the righteous.

Acknowledge the Lord, for he is good, and bless the King of the ages, so that his tent may be rebuilt in you in joy.

May he cheer all those within you who are captives, and love all those within you who are distressed, to all generations forever.

11 A bright light will shine to all the ends of the earth; many nations will come to you from far away, the inhabitants of the remotest parts of the earth to your holy name, bearing gifts in their hands for the King of heaven.

Generation after generation will give joyful praise in you; the name of the chosen city will endure forever.

Cursed are all who speak a harsh word against you; cursed are all who conquer you and pull down your walls, all who overthrow your towers and set your homes on fire. But blessed forever will be all who revere you.

Go, then, and rejoice over the children of the righteous, for they will be gathered together and will praise the Lord of the ages.

Happy are those who love you, and happy are those who rejoice in your prosperity.

Happy also are all people who grieve because of your afflictions; for they will rejoice with you and witness all your glory forever.

My soul blesses the Lord, the great King!

For Jerusalem will be built as his house for all ages.

How happy I will be if a remnant of my descendants should survive to see your glory and acknowledge the King of heaven.

The gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald, and all your walls with precious stones.

The towers of Jerusalem will be built with gold, and their battlements with pure gold.

The streets of Jerusalem will be paved with ruby and with stones of Ophir.

So ended Tobit’s words of praise. Tobit died in peace when he was one hundred twelve years old, and was buried with great honor in Nineveh. He was sixty-two years old when he lost his eyesight, and after regaining it he lived in prosperity, giving alms and continually blessing God and acknowledging God’s majesty.

3 When he was about to die, he called his son Tobias and the seven sons of Tobit as and gave this command: “My son, take your children and hurry off to Media, for I believe the word of God that Nahum spoke about Nineveh, that all these things will take place and overtake Assyria and Nineveh. Indeed, everything that was spoken by the prophets of Israel, whom God
sent, will occur. None of all their words will fail, but all will come true at their appointed times. So it will be safer in Media than in Assyria and Babylon. For I know and believe that whatever God has said will be fulfilled and will come true; not a single word of the prophecies will fail. All of our kindred, inhabitants of the land of Israel, will be scattered and taken as captives from the good land; and the whole land of Israel will be desolate, even Samaria and Jerusalem will be desolate. And the temple of God in it will be burned to the ground, and it will be desolate for a while."

5 "But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth. They will all abandon their idols, which deceitfully have led them into their error; and in righteousness they will praise the eternal God. All the Israelites who are saved will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth. 8 So now, my children, I command you, serve God faithfully and do what is pleasing in his sight. Your children are also to be commanded to do what is right and to give alms, and to be mindful of God and to bless his name at all times with sincerity and with all their strength. So now, my son, leave Nineveh; do not remain here. 10 On whatever day you bury your mother beside me, do not stay overnight within the confines of the city. For I see that there is much wickedness within it, and that much deceit is practiced within it, while the people are without shame. See, my son, what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar. Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself, and was destroyed. 11 So now, my children, see what almsgiving accomplishes, and what injustice does—it brings death! But now my breath fails me."

Then they laid him on his bed, and he died, and he received an honorable funeral. 12 When Tobias's mother died, he buried her beside his father. Then he and his wife and children returned to Media and settled in Ecbatana with Raguel his father-in-law. 13 He treated his parents-in-law with great respect in their old age, and buried them in Ecbatana of Media. He inherited both the property of Raguel and that of his father Tobit. 14 He died highly respected at the age of one hundred seventeen years. 15 Before he died he heard of the destruction of Nineveh, and he saw its prisoners being led into Media, those whom King Cyrus of Media had taken captive. Tobias praised God for all he had done to the people of Nineveh and Assyria; before he died he rejoiced over Nineveh, and he blessed the Lord God forever and even Amen."
CHRISTIANITY AND RABBINIC JUDAISM
A Parallel History of Their Origins and Early Development

Edited by Hershel Shanks

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WHAT CAME TO BE KNOWN AS CHRISTIANITY, A NEW RELIGION that would spread throughout the world, began in a very modest way, among the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish prophet, teacher and healer. Jesus lived from approximately 4 B.C.E. to 30 C.E. He came to be regarded as the Messiah by his followers—the anointed one whom many Jews expected to come and to restore Israel. "Anointed" is messiah in Hebrew and christos in Greek, whence the English words "messiah," "Christ" and "Christianity." At an early date, within about 15 years of Jesus' death, some Greek-speaking Christians began to use the title "anointed" as if it were a proper name, and thus Jesus became "Jesus Christ" or "Christ Jesus." Christians have regarded him as the inaugurator of a new era. By the sixth century after his birth, they had begun to date events either B.C. (Before Christ) or A.D., Anno Domini (in the year of our Lord). It is now customary in many circles to use the abbreviations B.C.E. and C.E., "Before the Common Era" and "Common Era," since these allow non-Christians to employ the dates of the Christian division of time. Thus 4 B.C.E. is the same year as 4 B.C., but put in terms acceptable to all.

That Jesus was born before the beginning of the era that starts with his birth is one of the minor curiosities of history. In the sixth century a Scythian monk who was resident in Rome, Dionysius
Exiguus, introduced a calendar based on the division before Christ and after Christ, but he miscalculated the year of the death of Herod the Great, putting it four years too late. Since Jesus was born near the time of Herod’s death, his birth was also misdated by four years. When subsequent research established the correct year of Herod’s death, the calendar was not revised: year 1 was kept where Dionysius had placed it, and both Herod’s death and Jesus’ birth were dated to 4 B.C.E.

The story of Jesus is found in the four canonical Gospels in the New Testament. These books were written anonymously, but in the second century Christians began to attribute them to four men: Matthew and John (Jesus’ followers) and Mark and Luke (early Christians, but not direct disciples of Jesus). Early Christians wrote many other accounts of Jesus, some of which survive as the apocryphal gospels (“hidden,” or “secret,” noncanonical gospels). Historians have repeatedly studied these in the hope of finding solid information about Jesus, but without much success. The Gospel of Thomas, which is known from a manuscript found at Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt, has interesting versions of some of the sayings of Jesus that are also in the canonical Gospels, and it is possible that in a few cases its version is earlier than the one in the New Testament. In general, however, our knowledge of Jesus is limited to the information in the New Testament.

A few non-Christian authors who wrote in the first or second century mention Jesus, but only as the originator of a movement that came to their attention. They add no new information to that given in the Gospels.

Although the canonical Gospels contain almost the only worthwhile information about Jesus, they are by no means straightforward histories or biographies in the modern sense. The material in them was passed on orally for some years, being modified in the process. Further, the authors of the Gospels were more interested in theological truth than in bare historical accuracy, and their theological concerns sometimes shaped the material.

Even if the Gospels were academic histories, full of well-researched information, we would still be faced with problems in describing the life of Jesus. They do not provide us with a simple, consistent portrait of him. Moreover, there are large gaps—things we would like to know about which the Gospels say little or nothing. They tell us virtually nothing, for example, about Jesus’ appearance and upbringing, only the name of his village and the names of his parents.

On the other hand, if we are content with a broad outline, we do know a lot about his life and teaching. Let us begin by considering the kind of man he was.

The Jesus who exercises the greatest hold on the public imagination is the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). This is the Jesus who blessed the poor in spirit and the meek, who told his followers to “turn the other cheek” and to pray for their persecutors. This portrait of Jesus has served to bolster social and ecclesiastical reform. It supports criticism of those who are preoccupied by worldly concerns, and it helps shape the conscience of countless individuals who are moved by Jesus’ example to examine themselves and moderate their behavior.

But we can also find numerous other miniportraits in the Gospels. Around the turn of the present century, Christianity was surprised and shocked by the discovery of the eschatological Jesus, the wild-eyed proclaimer that the end (in Greek, eschaton) was near, who predicted that

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds...”  

This Jesus also promised that some of his hearers would not die before the kingdom of God arrived (Mark 9:1).

We can also find a portrait of Jesus as a kind of revolutionary: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). Perhaps this is the Jesus who was executed by Rome for claiming to be “king of the Jews” (Matthew 27:11,29,37).

There is, of course, more than one side to anyone’s character. We should not be surprised that this is true of Jesus. Nevertheless, competition among these and other portraits does leave the reader wondering: What was the essence of the man? Where was the center?

Scholars have been writing answers to that question for 200 years. Only toward the end of the 18th century did scholars begin to apply the critical method of historical research to the Gospels. Even today, there is some reluctance among many Christian scholars to use this methodology as vigorously when studying the Gospels as they do when studying other material. Most scholars who deal with the Gospels have a belief about Jesus that is not subject to historical scrutiny. One of the consequences is that Jesus usually gets a very good press. Put crudely, people tend to project their own ideals—whatever they happen to be—onto him.

In the end, Jesus remains a more shadowy figure than his greatest apostle, Paul. In Paul’s case, we have some of his own letters.
There is no mistaking the driving force, the cut and thrust of his mind. We would like to get as close to Jesus as to Paul. It is a disappointment that it cannot be done, since we do not have equally good sources.

Naturally, in reconstructing the life of Jesus, in searching for his essence, scholars look for the most reliable material. For several decades they have progressively reduced the range of the literature in which he is sought. The earliest source to be excluded was the Gospel of John. This was done partly because the other three Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—line up against John, and the scholar is frequently forced to choose one or the other. This is especially the case in studying the teaching of Jesus, as we shall see below.

Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic Gospels because they can be studied in a synopsis. This does not refer to a précis (although that is the common meaning of the word now), but to a book in which similar accounts can be viewed together (synoptō in Greek means "see together"). This is done by arranging Matthew, Mark and Luke in parallel columns. Here is one example, Jesus' prediction of his arrest. Although the texts are parallel, there are numerous variations in detail.

Matthew 17:22-23
As they were gathering in Galilee,
Jesus said to them, "The Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day."

Mark 9:30-31
They went on from there and passed through Galilee.
And he would not have any one know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he is killed, after three days he will rise."

Luke 9:43b-44
But while they were all marveling at everything he did, he said to his disciples, "Let these words sink into your ears, for the Son of man is to be delivered into the hands of men."

A study of all the Gospel parallels makes it obvious that these three Gospels, the synoptics, relate very closely to one another. They tell basically the same story, according to the same outline, placing the same events at the same point in the outline, often using identical wording. There are exceptions to these rules, but the most striking single feature of the synoptics is their similarity. They are especially close together when they give the same teaching material. As in the example above, the synoptics vary more in describing the setting of Jesus' teaching than in giving the teaching itself.

John's Gospel, on the other hand, cannot be fitted into the synoptic scheme in any way. The outline of events is different, and there is little agreement between John and the synoptics with regard to content.

Moreover, the differences between John and the synoptics are not such that the accounts are complementary; rather, the accounts are contradictory to a very great degree. We may consider some examples: According to the synoptics, during Jesus' public career he went to Jerusalem for Passover once; according to John, twice. In the synoptics Jesus "cleanses" the Temple at the end of his ministry; in John at the beginning. The synoptic Jesus is an exorcist (for example, Mark 3:22-27); the Johannine Jesus performs no exorcisms.

There are even more striking differences between John and the synoptics. In the synoptics, Jesus declines to say who he is; he even refuses to give "a sign," and he rebukes those who seek one (Mark 8:11-12 and parallels; cf. Mark 8:29f.). In John, on the other hand, Jesus talks almost exclusively about himself, and he provides several specific signs. (Note the prominence of the "I am" sayings in John, e.g., 6:35-51, 8:12, 10:7. For "signs," see John 2:11, 4:54, for example.) The Jesus of the synoptics preaches the kingdom of God, while the Johannine Jesus discourses about himself.

Moreover, the style and manner of speech are entirely different. In the synoptics, Jesus speaks in short, pithy sentences, parables, similes and metaphors. In John, Jesus offers long allegorical monologues. For example, we may compare the synoptic parable on sheep (Matthew 18:12-13) with the Johannine allegorical discourse on sheep (John 10:1-18). Matthew's parable is short, only two verses:

"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray."

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The problem of the sources

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Thus, in Matthew Jesus uses the story to describe an aspect of God and his kingdom: the inclusion of the lost; a single point is made by telling a short, illustrative story: John, on the other hand, places in Jesus' mouth a long, allegorical monologue; on the surface it is about sheep, but beneath the surface it is about the person and work of Christ, including his death and resurrection (John 10:18). In John's long monologue, we are intended to understand Jesus as being both the shepherd and the door to God's fold—which does not make sense, even in the allegorical terms of the parable.

These and other factors resulted in a still-held scholarly consensus: The historical Jesus is to be sought in the synoptics, not in John. The Johannine Jesus is the Christ of faith. That is not to say that John is "fiction"; somewhere behind John's Gospel there are traditions. The author probably knew one or more of the synoptics; he may have had independent access to other information about Jesus. Some parts of John's narrative (as distinct from the discourses) are intrinsically more probable than the synoptic account. Since Jesus was a law-abiding Jew, and since the Bible commands attendance at the pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuoth, Sukkoth), Jesus probably did go to Jerusalem for more than one festival. (In John, Jesus goes four times, twice for Passover [John 2:13, 12:1] and twice for other festivals [John 5:1, 7:10]. In the synoptics, he makes only one pilgrimage [Mark 11:11 and parallels].) John's view of Jesus' trial before two of the chief priests is also intrinsically more probable than the synoptic trial scene (see below). Despite these and similar points in favor of John, the overall portrait of the synoptics must be preferred.

As we shall see, the synoptics' description of Jesus makes sense in context, while it would be impossible to explain early Christian eschatology if the historical Jesus was like the Johannine Christ. John is better read as a series of meditations on the theological significance of Jesus' coming that the author chose to write in the first person, as if Jesus had said them.

Since the middle of the 19th century, John has been mostly ignored in the search for the historical Jesus. But even the Synoptic Gospels pose difficulties for historical research. As we noted above, they are not biographies or histories in the modern sense. The most important point to consider is the nature of the material they contain.

The problems of context

The Synoptic Gospels are composed of independent compositional units with very little context. We probably owe such context as there is to the Evangelists. We may think of each unit as a snapshot, with the individual snapshots arranged and introduced by the Evangelists (or Christian preachers and teachers before them).

If we want to explain what someone was like—not to give a few random facts about him or her, but to get to the heart of the matter—we aim for intention, cause and effect and an understanding of the circumstances. "Abraham Lincoln wanted all along to free the slaves; he waited until relatively late in the war because of tactical considerations." Such a statement requires that we know the sequence of events and that we have enough knowledge of what Mr. Lincoln thought—in addition to what he did—to allow us to weave desire, external action and the force of circumstances into a coherent whole. How can we do this with Jesus, since we have (1) snapshots that (2) have been transmitted for a generation or so in a language other than Jesus' own and in a variety of contexts? (Jesus spoke Aramaic, the Gospels are in Greek.) Unfortunately, we cannot know as much about Jesus as about Paul (or Lincoln or Churchill). On the other hand, we do not remain entirely in the dark, as we shall see.

That what we have are isolated incidents, quite probably rearranged and reset in unoriginal contexts, is easily shown: The settings of individual passages sometimes vary from Gospel to Gospel. We must assume that, during the period of oral transmission, Christian teachers exercised this kind of freedom. That is, the material was used, not embalmed; when used, it had to meet a current issue, and thus the context changed. If this were not so, the material would not have sustained the early Christian communities.

The Evangelists not only arranged the material, they added new introductions and conclusions. We may consider a few examples. Both Matthew and Luke include Jesus' lament over Jerusalem, and they have virtually identical wording in a passage that in Greek is just over 50 words long. Thus they used the same tradition, not a generally remembered Aramaic saying of Jesus that was passed down and translated in various ways. The lament contains this prediction: "You will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.' " Luke places this passage early (Luke 13:34-35), and it is fulfilled in Luke 19:38, when the crowd cries out, as Jesus enters Jerusalem, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." In Matthew, however, the prediction that people will not see Jesus again until they make the appropriate proclamation comes after his entry into Jerusalem: the entry into Jerusalem is in Matthew 21:9, the prediction in Matthew 23:37-39. This means that, when the Gospel of Matthew closes, the prediction is still unfulfilled, and the saying, "You will not see me until . . .," points forward to the post-resurrection return of the Lord. Thus we must ask: Did Jesus predict his triumphant entry into Jerusalem (Luke) or his own return after his death (Matthew)?
The setting or immediate context of an individual unit is also frequently different from Gospel to Gospel. An example is the parable of the lost sheep quoted above. A shepherd leaves 99 safe sheep to search for the one that is lost. In Matthew's setting, Jesus tells the parable to the disciples; the meaning is that they should act accordingly (Matthew 18:12-14) and seek the lost. In Luke, the parable is directed against the Pharisees; it defends Jesus' own action in mingling with "tax collectors and sinners" (Luke 15:3-6).

Sometimes scholars reach a consensus in favor of one arrangement or setting, but sometimes there is no consensus. In the two examples I have given, most scholars now favor Matthew's setting for the saying "You will not see me again." Jesus probably had in mind the future kingdom rather than his next trip to Jerusalem. On the other hand, most scholars accept Luke's setting for the parable of the lost sheep and take it to be a rebuke to the Pharisees for not seeking the lost. Occasionally someone is bold enough to doubt both settings. The correct decision is not self-evident. The answer depends on an overall view of Jesus, and it requires a reconstruction of the larger context of his life and work. Yet since the larger context is provided by other passages that were transmitted by the very same sources, it is difficult to avoid circular argument.

The problem is even more difficult. Not all the material goes back to the historical Jesus. Besides being arranged and set in new contexts, much of it was revised and some was even created. To illustrate how this occurred, we may consider a passage in one of Paul's letters. Paul wrote that he besought the Lord in prayer that his "thorn in the flesh" be removed. The Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). From Paul's letter, we know that the Lord who spoke this saying was not the historical Jesus, but either the risen Lord or God himself, speaking through the Spirit. If Paul had used the saying in a sermon, however, and it was then quoted and used in different contexts, it would be unlikely that everyone would maintain the nice distinction between the historical Jesus and the Lord who answers prayer.

Christians believed that the Lord still spoke to them, and that sometimes the Holy Spirit spoke through Christian prophets. Paul and other Christians held that they knew the mind of God and that they spoke "in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit" (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). Since "the Lord is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17), words that were "taught by the Spirit" were often attributed to Jesus (whom the Christians called "Lord") when the Gospels were composed. From the point of view of the first Christians, why not? The same Lord spoke. Yet the result was that they created sayings that were then placed in the mouth of the historical Jesus.

A second source of newly created material was the Jewish Scriptures, which the Christians accepted as their own. Christians believed that Jesus had fulfilled the biblical prophecies, and this view led them sometimes to draw on those prophecies for information about him. An example is Matthew's statement that, when Jesus entered Jerusalem shortly before his death, he sat on both an ass and a colt. Matthew derived this "information" from the Scripture that he thought Jesus fulfilled:

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." Zechariah 9:9, cited in Matthew 21:5

Hebrew poetry makes extensive use of parallelism, and in this case "a colt the foal of an ass" is a parallel that defines "an ass" in the previous line. Matthew, studying the Scripture, decided that Jesus had fulfilled this prophecy in a very literal way, by riding on both an ass and a colt.

So there are two problems: unknown context and uncertain contents. If we knew enough about the overall thrust of Jesus' life and work—the context of his own life—we could better control the contents, since some things would fit in the context and some would not. Or if we had a completely reliable list of things Jesus said and did, we could search them to try to determine what context they fit best.

Scholars have addressed both problems, context and content. Drawing partly on general knowledge of the period and partly on more particular knowledge of what happened before and after Jesus' life, they have studied the context in which he worked. To a fair degree these efforts have been successful. Recent studies of religious, social and political currents in Palestine have clarified the general context of Jesus' life. Judaism is now much better understood than it was before World War II. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls—which are still being published, ever so slowly—has provided new information. Rabbinic literature—in its present form compiled 200 years or more after Jesus' death—was once considered to represent "first-century Judaism." Jewish society is no longer viewed as having been dominated by the rabbis, and this permits a more realistic assessment of the role of charismatic teachers and healers. Good progress has also been made in the chronological
stratification of rabbinic literature, with the result that we can now confidently assign some of it to the period before 70 C.E. This material is useful for our purposes.

The criteria of content
The contents of the synoptic material itself remain difficult. A lot of careful academic effort has gone into establishing criteria of authenticity to test the sayings. Paradoxically, the more the criteria have been refined the less certain we are about which sayings are authentic. In the early days of sifting the sayings, scholars tended to apply the criteria of authenticity mechanically: If saying x is contrary to later Christian opinion, Jesus really said it, since a Christian author would not have invented something with which he disagreed. We do not always know what a later Christian author would or would not have invented, and consequently the criteria themselves are subject to doubt. The result of three decades of study is that we know less than we used to think we knew.

Nevertheless, some things are securely known. No one doubts most of the “framework” of the story of Jesus:
- He was born about 4 B.C.E., near the end of Herod’s reign.
- He grew into manhood in Nazareth, a Galilean village.
- He was baptized by John the Baptist.
- He called disciples.
- He taught in the towns, villages and open areas (apparently not cities) of Galilee.
- He preached “the kingdom of God.”
- About the year 30 he went to Jerusalem for Passover.
- He created a disturbance in the Temple area.
- He had a final meal with his disciples.
- He was arrested and interrogated by Jewish authorities, specifically the high priest.
- He was executed on the orders of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.
- His disciples at first fled; they saw him (in what sense is not certain) after his death; as a consequence, they came to believe that he would return to found the kingdom. They formed a community to await his return and sought to win others to believe in him as God’s Messiah.

The context of Jesus’ career and the framework of his ministry
Jesus’ public ministry was bracketed by the preaching of John the Baptist, at its beginning, and the missionary activity of the early Church, after his death and resurrection.

We may be confident that Jesus was baptized by John because of the way the Gospels handle the subject. They all have the Baptist predict that he will be succeeded by one who is greater than he (Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16; John 1:26-27), and Matthew and John both have him explicitly acknowledge Jesus (Matthew 3:14; John 1:29-31,36). The Baptist was widely regarded as a prophet—probably more widely than Jesus. The early Christians were no doubt embarrassed that Jesus began his work by accepting John’s baptism. The Christian insistence that Jesus’ baptism did not imply his subordination to John shows that he was in fact baptized by him. The authors of the Gospels would not have invented a story which they found embarrassing. John’s explicit acknowledgement that Jesus was his greater successor is probably a bit of early Christian apologetics. More likely to be authentic is John’s question to Jesus from prison, “Are you he who is to come?” (Matthew 11:3).

From this we learn that Jesus began his mission by accepting baptism at the hands of a man who expected God to establish his kingdom in the immediate future.

Paul, whose letters are our best evidence for early Christian preaching, expected the same thing. He had told his Gentile converts in Thessalonica that they would still be alive when the Lord returned. When some of them died, the survivors wondered about the fate of those who were gone. In answer, Paul promised that the dead converts would not lose out. Quoting a “word of the Lord,” Paul predicted that when the Lord returned the “dead in Christ” would rise and that both the dead and the living Christians would be caught up “in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Later, when Paul was in prison, he began to think that he might not live to see the day (Philippians 1:22f.), but he still expected the imminent return of the Lord and the establishment of his “commonwealth” (Philippians 3:20f.; Romans 13:11-14). This was not a point of contention between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles: Early Christians in general thought that the day was at hand.

Jesus, too, no doubt had this expectation. Since John the Baptist had it before him and Paul, his apostle, had it after him, it would be very difficult to leapfrog over Jesus’ own conviction, especially since sayings very much like 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 are attributed to him: “Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 9:1; see further Matthew 16:27-28, 24:31). Precisely what Jesus thought about the kingdom is less certain. This depends on close exegesis of sayings in the Gospels, which may have been modified or even invented. That Jesus held some sort of expectation about the arrival of “the kingdom” is secure. Nuance and precision, however, can be postulated with less certainty.

This is one of the points that proves that the synoptic Jesus is
closer to the historical Jesus than is the Johannine Christ. The
synoptic sayings just cited are very close to what Paul thought that
Jesus had said, and there are no comparable sayings in John.

The role of the disciples

The next part of the secure framework of Jesus' life is that he
called disciples. Both the Gospels and Paul (quoting an earlier
tradition) specify that there were 12 special followers (1 Cori-
thians 15:5; Matthew 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; John
6:67-71). The synoptics, however, name a total of 13, 11 of them
in common (Luke disagrees with Matthew and Mark about the
name of the 12th, thus providing a 13th name). John's Gospel
names another disciple, Nathanael (John 1:45-51), who is not men-
tioned in the synoptics. The early Christians seem to have had 12
as a firm number, but they were not certain who should be in-
cluded. It is probable that Jesus himself spoke of "the twelve," though he was not necessarily followed all the time by precisely
12, nor by precisely the same people. If this is right, the value of
the number was symbolic: "the twelve" represented the 12 tribes
of Israel. Jesus promised the disciples that "in the new world, when
the Son of man shall sit on his glorious throne, you who have
followed me will also sit on 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of
Israel" (Matthew 19:28). This has the effect of "enthroning" Judas,
who was one of the 12 on everyone's reckoning, despite the fact
that Judas betrayed Jesus. The early Church, knowing of Judas'
betrayal, would not have invented a promise from Jesus that would
give Judas a place in the new age, and thus we may accept the
saying as authentic.

The use of 12 as a symbolic number and the explicit reference
to the 12 tribes points to a very concrete expectation: that the 12
tribes of Israel would be restored. Centuries earlier the Assyrians
had scattered ten of the tribes. Obviously it would take an act of
God to get them all back together. Numerous Jewish authors hoped
that this would happen. Ben Sira (c. 200 B.C.E.) looked to God to
"gather all the tribes of Jacob" and "to give them their inheritance,
as at the beginning." The sect associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls
(probably a branch of the Essene party) expected the reassembly
of the 12 tribes. This same expectation appears in the pseudo-
epigraphical Psalms of Solomon 11, 17:28-31,50 and elsewhere. The
tradition was continued in early Christianity (Revelation 21:12).

Jesus himself was a Bible-believing Jew, and like many others
he thought that God would honor his promises to the patriarchs
and restore the 12 tribes in the last days—just as God had previ-
ously wrought miracles on behalf of Israel.

Apparently the disciples thought that they would play an im-
portant role in the kingdom that God would establish. In the pas-
sage quoted above (Matthew 19:28), Jesus promised to enthrone
them in the role of judges. In another passage the disciples debate
among themselves about who is greatest. Jesus rebukes them by
saying that those who wish to be first should be last (Mark 9:33-
35). More significantly, James and John (who, with Peter, were
leading disciples) asked if they could sit at Jesus' right and left in
his "glory" (Mark 10:35-45). It seems that there was some dispute
among disciples about who would have the leading places in the
kingdom.

The other concrete expectation we can attribute to Jesus is the
hope for a renewed Temple. This is reflected in an act and in two
sayings. Jesus went to the Temple, where he overturned the tables
of the money changers and the stalls of those who sold pigeons
(Mark 11:15). When challenged, he justified his action by saying
that the Temple, which should be "a house of prayer for all the
nations [Gentiles]" (quoting Isaiah 56:7), had been turned into "a
den of robbers" (Mark 11:17; quoting Jeremiah 7:11).

Later, Jesus predicted that "there will not be left here [in the
Temple] one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down"
(Matthew 24:1-2; Mark 13:1-2; Luke 21:5-6). According to Mark,
this prediction was made privately, to one disciple, while accord-
ing to Matthew the disciples in general heard it.

After Jesus was arrested, witnesses at his trial before the high
priest accused him of making a different statement about the fate
of the Temple: "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this Temple that
is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not
made with hands.' " (Mark 14:58; Matthew 26:61 lacks the phrases
"made with hands" and "not made with hands"). The Gospels main-
tain that this testimony was false (Matthew 26:59-60; Mark 14:56-
59). Nevertheless, when Jesus was on the cross, passers-by taunted
him by saying "Abai You who would destroy the Temple and build
it in three days, save yourself..." (Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29-30).

Thus we have an action at the Temple accompanied by a saying
in favor of Gentiles; a prediction that not one stone would be left
on another; and "false testimony" that Jesus threatened to destroy
the Temple. It is difficult to see how these traditions fit together—if
they do fit together. Why would Jesus both prepare the Temple for
Gentile use and predict its destruction? Did he both threaten to
destroy the Temple and predict that it would be destroyed? We
begin with the prediction and the threat and consider first the
probable early Christian view of them.

By the time the Gospels were written, Christianity had spent
several decades making its way in the Roman world. The domi-
nant thrust of the movement was toward acceptance of Roman
rule. The Christians' kingdom, they said reassuringly, was not of
this world (John 18:36); they posed no threat to Rome, civilization
and good order (all of which were more-or-less synonymous). In
fact, Christianity was potentially revolutionary, both politically
and socially. In some parts of Christianity there was fierce hatred for
Rome. In the following passage, "Babylon" is a code word for Rome:

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great! It has become a dwelling
place of demons, a haunt of every foul spirit" (Revelation 18:2).

Christian leaders and spokesmen spent considerable effort try-
ing to convince the rest of society that they posed no threat. On
the whole, they were successful. The author of Luke and Acts (both
were written by the same man) was especially concerned with this
problem. Acts is filled with stories designed to show that Jews
made trouble, but the early Christian apostles were completely
law-abiding and were always found to be so when tried by a Ro-
man official (e.g., Acts 18:12-17). Not surprisingly, then, the Gos-
pel of Luke does not contain either of the two passages in which
Jesus is accused of threatening the Temple. The accusation was
known to the author of Luke from his source, or sources (Mark
and Matthew), but he simply deleted it.

One way to test the Gospel material for reliability is to ask
whether or not it is "against the grain" of the authors or of early
Christianity. If it is, it is probably reliable, since an author would
not invent a passage that was "against the grain." With regard to
the Temple, all three synoptics want the reader to believe that
Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple but did not threat-
en it. We should suspect that in reality it was the other way around:
Whatever he did and said with regard to the Temple, it could
easily have been taken as a threat of its destruction. We may put
this another way: If originally the traditions about Jesus contained
a mere prediction of destruction, why would the Christian Church
convert the prediction into a threat and then attribute it to false
witnesses? The answer is that it would not have done so. The
passages in Mark and Matthew about a threat to destroy the Temple
are probably there because the accusation was actually made, either
at Jesus' trial or when he was on the cross, or both. The Gospels
defend him: that was false testimony; Jesus merely predicted, he
did not threaten. By the time the Gospels were written, the predic-
tion had been fulfilled: The Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E. A
prediction that was fulfilled increased the stature of the prophet.

We can understand why the tradition would have moved from
some sort of threatening word or deed to the accusation of making
a threat, and then to the Christian reply that the accusers were
false witnesses and that Jesus merely predicted. It is difficult, how-
ever, to understand the reverse development: A simple prediction,
made privately to one or more of his disciples, that had no public
consequences would not have resulted in the presence of the threat
theme in the Gospels. The authors would have preferred that the
threat disappeared entirely. In Luke it does disappear, while in
Matthew and Mark it is called "false testimony." It is probable that
Jesus really was accused of threatening to destroy the Temple, and
Christianity had to answer the accusation.

We may conclude that the accusation that Jesus threatened the
Temple is earlier than the claim that he only predicted its destruc-
tion. Two reservations must be lodged. First, we cannot hope to
know "what Jesus really said." It is possible that he merely pre-
dicted and that his words were taken to constitute a threat.

The second reservation is that Jesus did not think, nor could
his accusers have thought, that he and his followers could pull
down the stones of the Temple or do any serious damage to it.
Herod's Temple was enormous, and the stones were monumental.
Many of these stones still stand where Herod's workmen laid them.
When the high priest and his council heard that Jesus threatened
the Temple, they would not have taken it to be a boast of military
and engineering skill. However he worded his threat, he would
have meant that God would destroy the Temple. The leaders of
Jerusalem were not physically afraid of Jesus and his few follow-
wors, nor would they have believed that he knew what God would
do. They were probably anxious lest his prediction of coming up-
heaval and the intervention of God should touch off riots.

We now turn from what he said about the Temple's destruction to
what he did: overthrowing the tables of money changers and the
seats of dove sellers. Biblical law required that sacrifices be of-
fered for numerous reasons and that they be unblemished. This
necessitated an inspection of the animal or bird to be sacrificed,
an inspection that was carried out by high-ranking priests. At the
time of pilgrimage festivals—Jesus was there at Passover—the Temple
was full of people wishing to offer sacrifices, and the problem of
inspecting the large number of sacrificial victims on the spot would
have been considerable. Most offerings were of birds; the solution
to the problem was to inspect a lot of doves or pigeons in advance
and offer them for sale. Presumably the Temple and its dealers
turned a profit on this, but there is no reason for thinking that it
was exorbitant.

The Bible also required that adult males give to the Temple
each year the Temple tax of one-half shekel, or two drachmas. The
Temple demanded that this tax be paid in a standard and reliable
coinage, and so pilgrims would need to change their money. Again,
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there are no accusations of unreasonable charges. In this case, the evidence is against it. Although the Temple tax could be paid at the Temple, it could also be paid in one's own community. If pilgrims found the fees of the money changers too high, news would spread, money would be changed elsewhere and the Temple money changers would be out of business.

What was Jesus doing when he upset the tables and stalls of these worthy citizens who were helping pilgrims to fulfill their biblical obligations? The action of turning over tables and seats was symbolic. The space in which people exchanged money and bought sacrificial birds was large, and just before Passover it would have been crowded. Jesus' action did not seriously disrupt the Temple's business. What did he intend to symbolize? According to the Gospels, he was "cleansing" the Temple for suitable worship. The quotation from Jeremiah in Mark 11:17 (the Temple had become a "den of robbers") gives the tone to the whole: either the charges were unfair, or the entirety of the trade was wrong and should be removed. A supplementary explanation is based on the quotation from Isaiah, "a house of prayer for all peoples [i.e., Gentiles]." This leads to the view that Jesus wanted to break down the barriers built into Temple practice that separated Jew from Gentile. Jesus' attack on money changers and dove sellers was really an attack on the cult itself, or on the Temple's separation of people into a hierarchy of purity—priests, Levites, laymen, women and Gentiles, in descending order.

Although these views are readily derived from the Gospels, we must look on them with doubt. It is most unlikely that Jesus attacked sacrificial practice or purity distinctions, and very improbable that he sought Gentile equality in the Temple. After his death and resurrection, the disciples worshiped in the Temple. They knew nothing of Gentile equality. Paul's letters indicate that full commonality between Jews and Gentiles developed in Christian circles outside of Palestine (although Acts assigns this dramatic innovation to a series of visions seen by Peter [Acts 10]). In any case, the earliest Church did not attribute to Jesus the idea that there was to be no separation of Jew from Gentile. The quotation from Isaiah in Mark 11:17 probably reflects a desire on the part of second-generation Gentile churches to ground their own practice in a statement by Jesus himself.

What about the authenticity of the phrase from Jeremiah, "den of robbers" (also Mark 11:17)? This does not suggest that Jesus wanted to overturn the cult, only to purify it of dishonesty. Many scholars, however, delete it from the earliest tradition, and I am inclined to do so as well. The phrase could have been lifted from Jeremiah by anyone. Putting it on Jesus' lips allowed the Christians to depict him as a moral reformer against abuse in high places.

It is probable, then, that we owe both of the quotations in Mark 11:17 (house of prayer for Gentiles; den of robbers) to the later Church. If we delete this verse entirely, Jesus' action in the Temple takes on a different coloration. The symbolic action of overturning seats and tables, in and of itself, points at least as readily to destruction as to cleansing. Had Jesus wished to announce symbolically a coming destruction, there is little else that he could have done. A hammer and a carpenter's chisel could have taken out a small hunk of wall, but turning over some tables would have been more public and obvious. This interpretation has the advantage of making sense of both the action and the saying about the Temple's destruction. It is reasonable to think that what he did and what he said ("not one stone left on another") go together. The most likely explanation of this complex of material is that Jesus expected the kingdom to come in the immediate future, at which time the Temple would be destroyed and then rebuilt or transformed. It remains possible, however, that he thought only that the current Temple practice should be reformed for the new age.

To sum up thus far, we have placed Jesus and his message securely in a context of eschatological expectation. He, no less than John the Baptist, Peter and Paul, looked for the arrival of the kingdom in some decisive or final sense. The evidence that has been examined points not to the end of the world, but to a new world, one with leaders (himself and the 12) and a restored or rebuilt Temple.

We should pause to clarify the important term "eschatology." Many people today think that when ancient Jews thought about the end-time (eschaton in Greek) they had in mind the last moment before the physical dissolution of the universe. Jewish eschatology, however, usually looked forward to a new world in the sense of a new order. Peace and justice will prevail, the lion will lie down with the lamb, life will be easy and food abundant. Jesus and his followers probably shared this general view. Paul thought that Christ, when he returned, would reign for a while before turning the kingdom over to God (1 Corinthians 15:23-28).

The best evidence for Jesus' expectation consists of (1) the saying that the disciples will judge the 12 tribes, (2) the disciples' debates about who will be greatest, (3) Jesus' promise to drink wine with his followers in the kingdom (Mark 14:25) and (4) the material that shows that he expected a renewed or new Temple. All this material is at least basically authentic, and it converges on the same point: the future establishment of the kingdom of God as a new order on earth. "Eschatological expectation" in some sense or other is certain; "new order" is less certain but still highly probable.
The word “kingdom” has a diversity of meaning in the Gospels, a diversity that probably goes back to Jesus himself. We may distinguish five sometimes overlapping meanings.

1. The kingdom is a transcendent reality that people enter one by one. Here the kingdom is a sovereignty, or reign, that individuals may accept; acceptance guarantees admission:

   “Unless you turn and become as children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:15).

   “It is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven” (Mark 10:23).

   “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

2. The kingdom is a future reality that will come, but how it will come and what it will be like are not specified:

   “Thy kingdom come!” (Matthew 6:10, in the Lord’s prayer).

3. The kingdom will be established by God’s angels, or by the Son of Man, and its arrival will be accompanied by cosmic signs.

   Many of the passages that reflect this view do not actually contain the word “kingdom,” but the establishment of God’s rule is the subject. How the end-time figure came to be called the Son of Man is not clear. Even murkier is Jesus’ own view of the relationship between himself and the Son of Man—assuming that he actually predicted the coming of the Son of Man. These are two of the principal passages:

   “Whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, also the Son of man will be ashamed of him when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels . . . . There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power” (Mark 8:38-9:1 and parallels).

   “But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven” (Mark 13:24-27 and parallels).

4. The kingdom will be a new order on earth.

   Several passages already discussed belong in this category: Matthew 19:28 (the disciples judge the tribes of Israel); Mark 9:33-35 (who is greatest?); Mark 10:35-45 (who will sit at Jesus’ right hand?). There is one further passage that is difficult to assess. According to Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus told Peter that he was “Rock,” and that on this rock he would build his Church. The saying continues, promising that what Peter binds or loosens on earth is bound or loosed in heaven, a promise that is made to the disciples in general in Matthew 18:18.

   All scholars agree that Jesus did not foresee an institutional Church with a professional priesthood that would have authority to absolve sins. If that is what the saying means, it is so anachronistic that it cannot be authentic. On the other hand, the nickname “Rock” shows that something authentic lies behind the passage. The name of the disciple whom we call Peter was actually Simon son of Jonas (Matthew 16:17). Paul, however, called him not Simon, but either Cephas (1 Corinthians 1:12, 3:22, 9:5, 15:5; Galatians 1:18, 2:9,11,14) or Peter (Galatians 2:7-8). “Cephas” is the Aramaic word for “rock,” while “Peter” is the corresponding Greek word. In other words, Simon son of Jonas went by the nickname “Rock” in both languages. The Gospels were written in Greek for readers of Greek in the second and third generations after Jesus. The synoptic authors felt no need to refer to Simon’s Aramaic nickname: he was “Simon” (Mark 1:16 and elsewhere), “Simon called Peter” (Matthew 4:18, 10:2) or simply “Peter” (Mark 5:37 and elsewhere). Paul, however, had met the man in Jerusalem and knew by what name he actually went: Cephas, which Paul turned into Greek (Peter) in only one passage.

   The importance of this is that the meaning of Simon’s Aramaic nickname was preserved in Greek. It is as if the popular Munich beer were called “Lion’s Brew” in the English-speaking world, except by people who had been to Munich and who knew some German, who called it “Löwenbräu.” If the brewer wanted to emphasize the “lion-ness” of the beer, he would change its name from country to country: in English it would be “Lion’s Brew,” in French “Bière de lion,” in Hebrew “birah shel ‘ari” and so forth. In fact, this is not what the brewer has done. What matters to the brewer and the advertising agencies is that it be identified as German: its lion-ness is not important. The case of Simon’s name, however, fits the hypothetical situation in which Löwenbräu becomes “Lion’s Brew.” What mattered was the meaning of Simon’s nickname, “Rock.”

   From this we should infer that Jesus really did give Simon the name “Rock” or “Rocky” and that the meaning of the nickname was significant. Presumably it did not refer to craggy features, and probably not to strong nerves and emotional stability. Jesus made use of symbols, as we saw in discussing “the twelve.” It is a reason-
able hypothesis that “rock” was symbolic. If so, “foundation stone,” or “cornerstone,” as suggested by Matthew 16:18, is a reasonable translation.11

Foundation or cornerstone of what? Matthew proposes “Church,” certainly meaning thereby the Christian Church that he knew (cf. Matthew 18:17). This is the anachronistic part of the saying, which we cannot attribute to Jesus. Jesus could well have thought of Peter as the symbolic cornerstone of the eschatological people of God, including both the reassembled 12 tribes and the Gentiles (for Gentiles, see Matthew 8:11).

I have spent this many lines on a difficult passage for a reason. This is one of the numerous sayings in the synoptics that will never yield secure results. We first establish the Aramaic word that Jesus said, and this can be done with certainty. But what did it mean? Did Jesus actually name Simon “Rock” after a messianic confession (so the setting in Matthew)? Was the name symbolic? If so, of what? We may infer here, suggest there, sometimes guess.

Although certainty eludes us, I suspect that the name “Rock” fits some way or other into Jesus’ expectation that there would be a new order in which he and his disciples would have the major roles. Beyond this we cannot reasonably go.

5. The kingdom is present in Jesus’ words and deeds.

“Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, ‘The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:20-21).

“Now when John [the Baptist] heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him [Jesus], ‘Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me’” (Matthew 11:6).

Some said that Jesus “casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” In his reply Jesus said, among other things,

“If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Luke 11:15-20 || Matthew 12:24-28).

These passages have convinced a majority of New Testament scholars during the past few decades that Jesus taught that the kingdom was “somehow” present in his teaching and healing. Although this view is passionately held by many, the evidence for it is not very good. The first passage, “the kingdom . . . is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21), may also be translated “the kingdom . . . is within you.” Apart from the question of authenticity, the passage does not attribute the presence of the kingdom to Jesus’ words and deeds. It is, rather, a denial that the kingdom will be seen in any one place, so that one can point to it. In other words, the kingdom is omnipresent, not a penumbra around Jesus.

Nor does the second passage (Matthew 11:2-6) claim that “the kingdom” is present in Jesus’ words and deeds. It is an answer to the question, “Are you the one who is to come?” not “Is the kingdom present wherever you are?” Jesus certainly thought that he was “the one”: if his disciples would be the judges of Israel, he presumably would have a higher rank. He may very well have offered his healings and teaching as “signs” to John the Baptist (though to others he said that he would give no signs [Mark 8:11-12]). We noted above that the question of the Baptist is more likely to be authentic than his explicit acknowledgement of Jesus (p. 51-52). It does not, however, show that Jesus thought that the kingdom was present, but rather that in his own view something crucial was happening in his ministry.

The third passage (Luke 11:20 || Matthew 12:28) states that the kingdom has come upon “you” if Jesus’ claim is true, namely that he casts out demons by the power of God, rather than by black magic. Luke does not identify “you,” but according to Matthew Jesus’ saying is addressed to Pharisees; in any case, it is directed to people who doubted that he acted by the power of God. What does it mean that the kingdom has “come upon” his opponents? Perhaps that they have run into its power and condemned themselves by not accepting Jesus? In this case, the saying would recall Mark 8:38: “For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” This saying makes crucial one’s response to Jesus in the present, but puts the kingdom (the glory of his Father) in the future.

The proponents of the view that these passages show that Jesus thought that the kingdom was present are pushed into saying “present in some sense.” But in what sense? It was not present in the sense that God’s enemies were defeated. Tiberius, Pilate, Antipas and Caiaphas still ruled. God’s will was not yet done “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

Admittedly, there is nothing inherently impossible about Jesus’
having thought that the kingdom was in some way present, while in another way future. Paul could say that the kingdom of God is found where there is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14:17). The Lord, however, did not yet reign as king; his enemies were not yet defeated. Only after he defeated them would he hand over the kingdom to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). By analogy, Jesus could have said that the kingdom of God exists wherever people accept it and live accordingly, but that it would fully come only in the future. He could have thought that the kingdom of God was proleptically (that is, anticipating a future state as though it already existed) and selectively present whenever people encountered him, or that it was omnipresent but unseen. The problem is that the passages about the kingdom do not prove that he thought this. We may accept that he thought that his own work was crucial, and that response to him would determine what happened to the individual when the kingdom arrived; yet it appears that he did not use "kingdom" to refer to the present situation of confrontation and acceptance or rejection. This remains only an intriguing possibility.

What conclusions may we draw about the meaning of the "kingdom of God" as Jesus understood it? The material we have examined neither excludes nor proves any particular meaning beyond doubt. They are all harmonizable: Jesus could have thought that in his own work the kingdom was present by anticipation; that it would come in the future; that it would be marked with cosmic signs and the appearance of the Son of Man with angels; that he and his disciples would have the most prominent places in it; that individual commitment would determine who would enter it when it arrived; and that people could enter it in the present time, in the sense of accepting God's reign in their lives and living in accord with his Spirit.

If, however, we ask what is certain, we must answer only that he believed that the moment of decisive change was near and that God was about to establish a new order on earth. This view of the kingdom has sayings in its favor, as do other views. What moves the expectation of a new order from being a mere possibility to a higher status, a meaning that we may confidently attribute to Jesus, is that this is what John the Baptist thought and this is what Jesus' followers thought after his death. Jesus must fit his context; his followers could not have misunderstood him entirely.

This is not to say, however, that Jesus thought only what is common to John the Baptist and Paul. One can make distinctions. The descriptions of John the Baptist, both in the Gospels and in Josephus, indicate that he called all Israel to repent and to live righteously. By contrast, Jesus seems not to have been primarily a preacher of repentance, and the Gospels do not attribute to him a call for national repentance. John issued a general appeal for repentance, but Jesus conducted a more personal ministry. John sounds like Billy Graham, but Jesus does not. Many of Jesus' most striking sayings are directed not to crowds, but to a few interlocutors or followers.

It was very much "with the grain" of the Christian movement for Jesus to preach repentance. Both Matthew and Mark summarize Jesus' message as being similar to John's: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15; cf. Matthew 4:17), but they give no particular occasion on which he called on "the crowds" to repent. The absence of particular events is especially striking in view of the preference of both authors. Presumably they would have included more passages about repentance if they had them. Luke has several passages on repentance, but the majority of these are best viewed as Luke's own creations. In none of the Gospels do we hear anything of a mass response in which people renounced their sins (as in the case of John the Baptist), craved God's forgiveness and turned over a new leaf. I am not arguing that Jesus was opposed to general repentance, but rather that his particular message was more than that of the mass revivalist.

The thrust of Jesus' ministry—its distinctive character—was that the kingdom would include even sinners if they accepted him—not if they reform. Accepting him may have implied reform, but his message was more the promise of inclusion, especially of sinners, than the requirement of general repentance.

The Gospels several times mention Jesus' association with "toll collectors and sinners" (e.g., Matthew 11:19). We may consider the meaning of each term. In Galilee, toll collectors worked for Herod's son, Antipas. He paid tribute to Rome, but his toll collectors did not directly serve a foreign power. Nevertheless, people assumed that, as a class, the collectors abused their positions by overcharging. In Jesus' view, even they were to be included in the kingdom.

"Sinners" was not a term for ordinary people who, in the normal course of life, sometimes transgressed. The word, rather, represents the Aramaic or Hebrew word that would better be translated as "the wicked"—those who were generally regarded as being beyond God's mercy. People who transgressed and made atonement were not wicked. In the Psalms and subsequent Jewish literature the term is reserved for those who did not attempt to live in accord with God's law. It is these with whom Jesus associated and whom he included in the coming kingdom of God.

Jesus' critics, rather than Jesus himself, used the term "wicked"
of some of his followers. Jesus called them by more revealing terms, such as "the lost" (Matthew 10:6, 15:24) and "the poor" (Matthew 11:5 || Luke 4:18). It is intrinsically likely that Jesus' followers were on the whole from the lower socioeconomic orders. Those who were well placed in the present kingdom were less likely to look for another than were the poor. In the ancient world large numbers of people had little stake in the social order, and it was they who could be mobilized by charismatic leaders. The crowds who followed Jesus, hoping for healings, probably consisted largely of such people.

On the other hand, some of the leading disciples seem to have been fishermen who owned their own boats (Mark 1:16-20) and toll collectors, who were not financially impoverished. Luke indicates that some of Jesus' supporters were women of means (Luke 8:2-3).

Thus "poor," and probably other terms such as "meek" (Matthew 5:5) and "lowly of heart" (Matthew 11:29), may be partially accurate and partially misleading if taken as a socioeconomic description of those whom Jesus especially sought. On the one hand, he did not seek out the prosperous burghers and the aristocratic priests. The major cities of the Galilee (Tiberias, Sepphoris and Scythopolis) are not mentioned in the Gospels, and Jesus may never have gone to one of them. In the towns and villages where he did go he would not have met the elite. The crowds he attracted consisted mostly of the economically poor. Yet on the other hand at least some of his followers were economically above the level of day laborers, and the one group of "sinners" that is identified, the toll collectors, was not financially poor.

Perhaps it is a mistake to try to identify too closely the people to whom he directed his message. We certainly cannot correlate his offer of the kingdom to the sinners with a socioeconomic group. The overwhelming impression of the teaching attributed to him is that it was inclusive. He proclaimed the kingdom, and he included even sinners in it. We can now say that he did not go to the cities; this may not have been policy on his part, a rejection of urbanism. Perhaps he simply spoke to those who were at hand, the villagers of his native Galilee.*

The inclusive character of his teaching comes out best in the parables that describe the kingdom as standing the expected order of things on its head. Laborers who work a short period of time are rewarded as much as those who work all day (Matthew 20:16); the lost sheep that is found causes more rejoicing than the ninety-nine that did not stray (Matthew 18:12-13 || Luke 15:4-7); the prodigal who returns is feasted, not the obedient and faithful son (Luke 15:25-32). In a word, "many that are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:31, cf. 9:35; Luke 22:26).

What did Jesus expect his followers to do? The usual problems of authenticity are especially severe in the area of ethics, but there are two even greater difficulties. One is the audience: Did he give ethical admonitions to the populace in general (that is, to all those who would listen), or only to the relatively few who actually followed him? The second problem is the relationship of ethical instruction to his expectation that the kingdom would soon come: Did he envisage a very short period during which exceptional moral standards should be maintained?

We turn first to the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the most famous collection of teachings attributed to Jesus. The admonitions of this sermon have three characteristics: they are pacifist, they are perfectionist and they are interiorized. "Interiorization" is seen most clearly in two of the so-called antitheses: murder and adultery can be committed in the heart (Matthew 5:22,27-30).

Perfection is a main theme. The disciples are to observe every commandment in the Law and Prophets and to leave none out (Matthew 5:17-19); to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20); to be perfect as God is perfect, loving enemies as well as friends (Matthew 5:44,48). Perfection is implied in many of the individual commands, such as not to take oaths (the perfectly upright do not need to back up their statements); to fast without appearing to do so (avoiding calling attention to oneself); not to pile up wealth (Matthew 5:34-37, 6:16-18, 6:19-21).

Pacifism is one of the hallmarks of the perfect: they pray for their persecutors and are blessed when they are persecuted (Matthew 5:43,44); they "turn the other cheek," give to their legal adversaries more than their suit demands and, if coerced into labor, do more than is required (Matthew 5:39-42).

The admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount are hothouse ethics: They require a special environment and do not do well in the everyday world. The hothouse could be a small sect that partially withdraws from the world, to which members make long-term commitments. They are to grit their teeth, take any manner of abuse and do without all but the bare necessities, knowing that at the end of this life they will gain the eternal kingdom. Or the sect could be eschatological, made up of people living from hand
to mouth while they wait for the end of the age. This requires less organization and discipline than the previous possibility and is inherently less stable.

Albert Schweitzer proposed that Jesus taught "interim ethics," that is, ethics valid only for the short period before the arrival of the kingdom, which Jesus expected (according to Schweitzer) within a very few months. Schweitzer's view has generally been rejected, usually because it seems to make Jesus' teaching irrelevant to the ongoing world. There is another objection. Apart from the petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), there is not a whiff of eschatology in the Sermon on the Mount. There is a threat of individual destruction at the end (Matthew 7:24-27), but nothing about the arrival of the kingdom or about a looming decisive change.

The perfection required by the Sermon on the Mount is not short-term, buoyed by the expectation of the end, nor is it pneumatological, based on participation in the Spirit of God. Pharisaic daily practice is the model (Matthew 5:20). The differences between Pharisaism and the sermon are interiorization and perfection. One grinds it out, hoping for reward from God (Matthew 6:4, 6, 18).

Is this the teaching of Jesus? Certain details suggest that it is not. The legal perfection required in Matthew 5:17-20 is counter to the theme that Jesus was not overly strict with regard to the Law, as we shall see below. The sermon's requirement to fast is curious in view of the complaint against Jesus that his disciples did not fast (Mark 2:18-22). The ascetic tone is quite different from Jesus' reputation as one who ate and drank, and who associated with toll gatherers and sinners (Matthew 11:19). Toll gatherers, heroes of other passages, are outsiders according to the sermon (Matthew 5:46).

The conflict of individual passages does not, however, constitute irreconcilable contradiction. We must remember the occasional character of Jesus' teaching and also the fact that we can never know whether or not we have the original context—even if we do not doubt the saying itself. He could have said one thing on one occasion but another in different circumstances.

The problem of the Sermon on the Mount

There is a more fundamental problem with the Sermon on the Mount. Considered as a unit, it does not seem to catch the spirit of Jesus' teaching. He expected the kingdom to come in a climactic sense in the near future. If this is correct, the Sermon on the Mount must be seen as striking the wrong note. Expectation of the end of the present order is such a strong factor that it would color everything. Jesus probably taught a perfectionist ethic, but we should view it in the context of eschatological expectation rather than strict intracommunity discipline and practice.

The best evidence for perfectionism is the prohibition of divorce or remarriage. Paul attributes a saying on divorce to Jesus (1 Corinthians 7:10f.), as do four passages in the Gospels. A short form of the prohibition appears in Matthew 5:31-32 (|| Luke 16:18) and a long form in Mark 10:2-12 (|| Matthew 19:3-9). Paul's version and the short form in the synoptics basically prohibit remarriage after divorce, though Matthew's version assumes that divorce makes the woman commit adultery because she will have no means of support unless she remarries. Thus Matthew's short form is tantamount to a prohibition of divorce. The long form, on the other hand, forbids divorce on the basis of biblical interpretation: God originally "made them male and female"; and the Bible states that, when he marries, a man leaves father and mother and becomes "one flesh" with his wife. "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mark 10:6-9 || Matthew 19:6).

This, the best attested of all Jesus' teachings, perfectly illustrates how uncertain we are of precisely what he said. Was it "no remarriage after divorce" (Luke and Paul)? "no divorce because it requires remarriage, which is adultery" (Matthew's short form)? or "no divorce because it is contrary to God's intention when he created humans" (the long form)? All the versions are stricter than biblical and common Jewish law, which allowed a man to divorce his wife and permitted both parties to remarry. While we cannot know which of these strict views was Jesus' own, we should nevertheless point out that the long form is probably eschatological. Many people who expected a new order thought that it would be a reestablishment of the original order of creation. The two biblical passages quoted in the long form, "male and female he created them" and "the two become one flesh," are from Genesis (1:27, 2:24), and thus they were read as referring to the paradisal state. The long form of the passage on divorce, by referring back to the time of creation, implicitly points forward to the new age and requires Jesus' followers to start living as if the new age has arrived.

Once we accept one perfectionist teaching, shall we accept them all? Or should we doubt that the "winebibber and glutton, the friend of toll collectors and sinners" required a superhuman perfection of his followers? What counts against the perfectionism of the Sermon on the Mount is its hothouse and noneschatological character. The impression of a small group, striving heroically to be more righteous than the Pharisees, is too communitarian to correspond to the historical circumstances of Jesus and his movement. Perfectionism requires either intense eschatological expectation or a small, disciplined community, or both (as in the sect
This judgment does not decide which individual sayings within the sermon are authentic. These have to be studied one by one. We shall consider a few examples.

The numerous admonitions not to be self-seeking fit well into Jesus' own lifetime. The long passage in Matthew (6:25-34) on not being anxious about material possessions is a case in point. For example:

"Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns . . . Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin . . . If God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith?" (Matthew 6:26-30).

Jesus and his closest followers did leave their homes, families and possessions, at least for a short period (according to 1 Corinthians 9:5, Peter traveled with his wife), and these verses fit that context. But Jesus was not a 1960s hippie, he was a first-century proclaimer of the kingdom of God. What fueled this passage (assuming that it is his) and the action based on it was eschatological expectation, not childish irresponsibility.

In early Christian literature we can see the Church struggling with this aspect of Jesus' eschatological ethic. Paul urged his converts to "deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it"; the basis for this was the belief that it was "passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). Yet this did not mean that they should quit their jobs and beg on the street. Paul had to admonish the Thessalonian Christians to live quietly, mind their own affairs and work with their hands, so that they would be "dependent on nobody" (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). According to Acts, the members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem sold their possessions and lived in common (Acts 4:32-37). Using capital for daily expenses had the result that we should expect: the funds were soon exhausted. Paul spent a considerable portion of his career taking up a collection for Jerusalem from his hard-working Gentile converts. (On the collection, see Galatians 2:10; 2 Corinthians 8-9; Romans 15:25-27.)

From these difficulties over money and work in the early Church, we may infer that the admonition to give up one's possessions and family does go back to Jesus' own teaching, especially his call to follow him (see Mark 8:34-37, 10:29-30; Matthew 10:37-39). It is probable that Jesus did not expect, or even want, many to "follow" him in this way. He proclaimed the good news of the coming kingdom to more people than he directly called into discipleship. He almost certainly thought of surrender of home, property and family as being for a short period only, until the kingdom arrived. In the Sermon on the Mount the admonition to "give to the one who begs from you" (Matthew 5:42) and the implied admonition to live like the lilies of the field are probably authentic sayings, but they have been separated from their original eschatological context. We do not see, on the basis of these chapters, how the Christian community could give practical effect to these sayings. From Acts and Paul we learn more: Share until the money and food run out, then appeal for aid.

Thus in the Sermon on the Mount we have sayings which, individually judged, may be deemed authentic (as well as some that are unauthentic), but which have been transferred from their original context. Originally, they probably applied to a small number of followers for what Jesus thought would be a short period of time.

If we generalize on the basis of this analysis, we shall conclude that Jesus probably did expect "perfection" of his immediate followers: They gave up everything for his sake and the sake of the kingdom. It is, however, doubtful that this was his message to the crowds. Even Matthew 5:1 depicts the Sermon on the Mount as being directed to the disciples, not the multitude. In Luke's parallel (the Sermon on the Plain), Jesus heals many in the crowd, but he delivers the sermon to his disciples (Luke 6:19ff.). We further note that in many of the other crowd scenes there is little or no teaching, and no perfectionist teaching at all (Mark 2:4, 3:9, 20, 4:1-9 et al.).

In short, Jesus proclaimed the kingdom to all who would hear; he called only a few to a special life of discipleship. To oversimplify only slightly: Parables of the kingdom were directed to the crowds, perfectionist ethics to the disciples.

Jesus told the crowds that God loves the lost and that they would be in the kingdom. What did he expect them to do? Presumably to act accordingly. If God treated them with mercy and tolerance, they should treat others in the same way. If Jesus gave them detailed instructions, we do not have them. He seems to have worked on the basis of a principle that was formulated some decades later:

"In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us . . .
Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:10-11).

"Love" is the central word in the "two greatest" commandments that Jesus selected from the Hebrew Bible: Love God, love your neighbor (Mark 12:28-34, quoting Deuteronomy 6:4; Leviticus 19:18). He could summarize the entire Scripture using only the second of these commandments:

"So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do so to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

This is not, however, ethical instruction, since it is not sufficiently detailed to determine individual decisions, especially when there are competing claims on one's love. But the main element of Jesus' teaching was the all-encompassing love of God that motivates and inspires those who receive it. We may, after all, find the heart of his ethical teaching in the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies . . . , so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:44-45). Human perfection is based on God's love of all, both the good and the evil.

**The Law**

Several stories in the Gospels concern Jesus' relationship to the Jewish Law. These passages create the impression that Jesus was lax about observance of the Law, but on closer examination we shall see that there are no clear instances of actual transgression. Most of the legal debates concern the Sabbath. In some cases, he was questioned for healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17, 14:1-6). According to one passage, he defended his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). He is depicted as debating handwashing and vows of gifts to the Temple (Mark 7:1-13). One saying seems to be directed against the food laws: "There is nothing outside a person which by going in can defile; but the things that come out are what defile" (Mark 7:14-19). He discussed which are the greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-34). In a section of the Sermon on the Mount called the antitheses, he appears to set his own teaching over against the Law (Matthew 5:21-47). We shall begin with the last section.

The format of the antitheses is this: an opening statement, "you have heard that it was said . . . " (or "it was said"); a biblical quotation; the response "but I say to you . . . . " Many scholars have understood "but I say to you" as anti-ethical to the biblical passage and thus as showing that Jesus opposed the Mosaic Law. We saw above that one of these passages, the saying on divorce, is doubtless authentic, at least with regard to general contents:

"It was also said [in the law], 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife . . . makes her an adulteress . . . " (Matthew 5:31-32).

Many scholars think that here Jesus sets his own authority directly against the Law. This is, however, incorrect. The antitheses are not actually antithetical to the Law; they are rather interpretations of the law, as the terminology indicates. In traditional Jewish legal debate, the verb "say" means "interpret." "Concerning this we say" in the Dead Sea Scrolls means "this is our interpretation." In rabbinic literature, "Rabbi X says" is used in the same way. The terminology in the antitheses does not imply that Jesus directly opposed the Law of Moses.

In the prohibition of divorce, Jesus' view is stricter than that of the Law, but it is not against the Law. If one never divorces, one will not transgress the Mosaic stipulations (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). A second example is the saying on murder and anger:

"You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill . . .' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment . . . " (Matthew 5:21f).

Here "You shall not be angry" is "the revelation of a fuller meaning [of the commandment] for a new age. The second statement unfolds rather than sweeps away the first."18 Jesus is the interpreter of the Law, not its opponent. This was certainly the understanding of the earliest known student of these sayings, the person who put together the Sermon on the Mount, where the antitheses are not against the law, but rather exemplify the preceding passage: "I have not come to abolish [the Law and the Prophets] but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17)—fulfill them by going beyond them in some instances.

Going beyond the law may imply a kind of criticism of it: it is not rigorous enough, or it is not adequate for the new age. We have already noted this point in discussing the pericope on divorce, and it may be accepted as true of Jesus' teaching to his close followers.

Did he at any point actually oppose the Law? The only passage that says this is Mark 7:19, "He declared all foods clean." This is Mark's interpretation of the saying that it is not what goes in that defiles, but what comes out. The Mosaic Law explicitly forbids the consumption of some foods (Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14). If Jesus said, and literally meant, "what goes in does not defile," he opposed the Law. It is, however, more likely that this is an example of hyperbolic antithesis, a well-known device for making a rhetorical point, frequently used in the Bible and subsequent Jewish
ish literature. Hyperbolic antithesis uses "not ... but" in an exaggerated way to mean "less ... more." When Moses told the Israelites that their murmuring was not against Aaron and himself but against the Lord, they had just been complaining to him (Exodus 16:2-8). The sentence means, "Your murmuring directed against us is in reality, and more importantly, against the Lord, since we do his will." When the author of the Letter of Aristeas wrote that Jews "honor God" "not with gifts or sacrifices but with purity of heart and of devout disposition," he did not mean that sacrifices were not brought, nor that he was against them (he approved of sacrifices), but rather that what matters most is what they symbolize. Similarly Mark 9:37, "Whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me," means "receiving me is tantamount to receiving God." Not what goes in but what comes out" in Mark 7:15, then, could well mean, "What comes out—the wickedness of a person's heart—is what really matters," leaving the food laws as such untouched. If this interpretation is correct, there is no conflict with the law.

There is a very good reason for doubting that Mark's comment ("he declared all foods clean") correctly describes Jesus' view. The first generation of Christians did not know that Jesus had "canceled" the food laws. According to Acts 10, Peter was first told in a repeated vision that all foods are clean. He found this so hard to accept that, after seeing the vision three times, he was still "inwardly perplexed" (Acts 10:17). In view of this ignorance, we must conclude that Jesus did not command his disciples to ignore the food laws. The saying is either unauthentic or hyperbolic. In either case, Mark's interpretation does not give Jesus' own view.

The other passages on the Law do not even represent Jesus as opposing it. In Mark 2:23-28 he justifies a minor transgression on the part of his disciples by arguing that the Sabbath was made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath; therefore, since they had no food, they were justified in plucking grain. In Luke 13:10-17 he justifies healing a woman on the Sabbath by laying his hands on her, again arguing that human need overrides the Sabbath law. Most Jews agreed with this principle, though there were disagreements about when to apply it, some holding that life must be at risk. In any case, the justification of minor transgressions by means of legal argument shows basic respect for the Law. A person who defends minor transgression does not oppose the Law itself.

The controversies over handwashing and the use of the word korban (given to God) in vows to the Temple do not touch the written Law, but are (as Mark 7:3 correctly notes) only against the traditions of the scribes and Pharisees.

We must also note that the settings of many of these passages are contrived and appear unreal. Pharisees did not really post themselves around Galilean cornfields on the Sabbath hoping to catch a transgressor (Mark 2:23-24), nor did scribes and Pharisees make special trips from Jerusalem to Galilee to check on the state of people's hands when they ate (Mark 7:1). Further, in both cases it is the disciples who were criticized, not Jesus himself; he only springs to the defence. The likeliest explanation of these passages, as Rudolf Bultmann proposed long ago, is that the settings derive from the post-resurrection Christian Church, sections of which had stopped observing the Sabbath and food laws. They utilized sayings in new contexts to defend their own departure from the Law. Jesus may have said "the Sabbath is made for humans, not humans for the Sabbath," but only the Marcan context makes it a justification for transgressing the Law.

Finally, while in some few instances Jesus is represented as a kind of legal expert—most notably in the antitheses—this was by no means his primary role. Jesus was a charismatic teacher and healer, not a legal teacher. The contrast between a charismatic, individualistic and populist teacher and a legal expert should be emphasized. Jesus is sometimes called "rabbi" in the Gospels (Mark 9:3, 14:45) or "teacher" (Matthew 8:19, 12:38), and often he is said to "teach" (Mark 1:21, 2:13). Consequently modern scholars sometimes write about Jesus the Rabbi. In such books he is thought of as sitting down with his listeners, opening the Bible (or recalling a passage from memory), laying out competing interpretations and offering his own. Jewish "parties" or "schools" disagreed about interpretation of the Law, and Jesus is often seen in this context: he studied the Law, adopted distinctive legal positions and schooled disciples.

Following this model, one would expect the primary topic of his teaching to be the Law. But the whole model is, I think, wrong. If Jesus' teaching had been of this sort, we should have more material like the antitheses, where he is depicted as taking up a biblical passage and offering his interpretation of it.

The great bulk of his teaching, however, is about the kingdom, and the characteristic style is the parable or brief saying. The focus is on what God is like (he includes the lost and is surprisingly merciful) and on what the kingdom will be like (values will be reversed; those who are last will be first). Outside the antitheses, there is virtually no legal exegesis.

We misconceive Jesus if we think of him primarily as a teacher of the law—a rabbi in that sense. Rather, he preached the kingdom and God's love of the lost; he expected the end to come soon; he urged some to give up everything and follow him; he taught love of the neighbor. His message did not have primarily to do with how the law should be obeyed.
We can better understand the kind of man Jesus was, and how he attracted crowds and followers, if we focus on his miracles. People flocked to him seeking to be healed (see, for example, the summary in Mark 1:32-34).

Neither he nor others thought that his miracles showed that he was a supernatural being. They were evidence, rather, that he had the Spirit of God. Some doubted even that. His opponents charged that he cast out demons with the help of the Prince of Demons (Mark 3:22). He replied, in effect, that it was the Spirit of God that empowered him (Matthew 12:28).

The miracles attributed to Jesus are not significantly different from those attributed to pagan deities, especially the Greek god Asclepius, and to other miracle workers. We glimpse this even within the Gospels. When the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the Prince of Demons, Jesus asked, “By whom do your sons cast them out?” (Matthew 12:27), thus acknowledging that the “sons” of the Pharisees—that is, members of the Pharisaic party—could also exorcise. In another instance, someone who was not a follower of Jesus was nevertheless casting out demons in his name (Mark 9:38-41). This probably shows the consciousness of the early Christians that they had competition.

Jesus and his followers, like most other ancients, believed in spiritual powers, some demonic, and they attributed many illnesses, as well as antisocial behavior, to them (see, for example, Mark 5:1-13, where Jesus sent the evil spirits that inhabited a demoniac into 2,000 swine, which rushed into the Sea of Galilee and drowned). They also believed that God sent sickness and death as punishment for sins; this is reflected in the story of Jesus healing a man by telling him that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:1-12 || Matthew 9:1-8).

Jesus’ followers, and possibly Jesus himself, besides seeing the miracles as proof that he had the Spirit of God, saw in them the fulfillment of prophecy. When John the Baptist sent a message to Jesus, asking, “Are you he who is to come?” Jesus appealed to the miracles:

“Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them” (Matthew 11:4-5).

This answer draws on both Isaiah 35:5f. and 61:1. There is a very good possibility that this reply is authentic. We noted above that the later Christian Church, which held that from the outset John had recognized Jesus as “the one who is to come,” would probably not have invented a question by John on that point. If the question is authentic, the answer may well be also. Jesus responds that his miracles fulfill prophecy and show that he is “the one who is to come.” The precise definition of “the one,” however, is left open.

During his ministry, at least according to the account in the synoptics, Jesus made only one trip from Galilee to Jerusalem; within a week of entering the city he was dead. The trip moved him not only from one geographical region to another, but also from one political sphere to another. Galilee was ruled by Antipas, one of Herod’s sons. Although he reigned at Rome’s pleasure, he was Jewish. He had his own troops and his own system of justice. When Jesus entered Judea, he moved into a Roman province, in which a Roman held full military and legal authority.

In Jesus’ day the Roman prefect was Pontius Pilate. Pilate, like other Roman administrators, used local leaders to handle day-to-day affairs. In Jerusalem, the high priest, surrounded by a council of other aristocrats, governed. He had at his disposal a very large armed police force. The high priest was the man in the middle. If he failed to control the local population and Roman troops had to be used, more blood would be shed than if he maintained order. The Roman troops hardly loved the Jewish population, and we may be sure that the Jews were not fond of them. It was the high priest and his guards who kept the two sides apart, by maintaining order and suppressing unrest.

Jesus came to Jerusalem at Passover time—one of the three pilgrimage festivals of the Jewish year, and the most popular. Jews came from far and near to worship and to eat the Paschal lamb in or near the holy city. Tents were set up in a substantial area outside the city walls; inside the streets were packed. Passover commemorated the Exodus from Egypt, the time of Israel’s liberation from bondage. Thus it was charged with political significance, and many doubtless felt anger and resentment at the Romans, whom they saw as the current equivalent of pharaoh. The bondage of Israel was light, as bondage goes, but still it was not freedom. Since trouble was likelier to break out at a pilgrimage festival than at any other time, it was the custom of the prefect to come to Jerusalem from Caesarea, bringing extra troops.

The scene changes in another sense. The scribes and Pharisees, so prominent in the story until now, almost vanish. In Mark, after Jesus enters Jerusalem, Pharisees are mentioned only in 12:13 (|| Matthew 22:15-22), where they join with others to question Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar. In Luke, they are numbered among the multitude watching Jesus enter, and they offer him advice (Luke...
Jesus' last week

There are five major events in the story of Jesus' last week.

1. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey; people welcomed him by shouting:

   "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming" (Mark 11:9-10).


2. He went to the Temple, where he turned over the tables of money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons (Mark 11:15-19).

3. He shared a last supper with his disciples, saying that he would not drink wine again "until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:22-25).

4. The high priest's guards arrested him and took him before the high priest and his council. Witnesses accused him of having threatened to destroy the Temple, but he was not convicted. He admitted to the high priest, however, that he was both "Christ" (in Hebrew, "meshia'h") and "son of God," and he was convicted of blasphemy (Mark 14:43-64).

5. His captors sent him to Pilate, who interrogated him and then ordered that he be crucified for claiming to be "king of the Jews" (Mark 15:1-5,15,18,26).

   There are two principal questions: "Why was he arrested?" and "On what charge was he executed?" The second question, which leads to the discussion of Christology (the Christian doctrine of who Jesus was), has drawn a great deal of attention. The first, however, the motive for his arrest, is historically more illuminating. The formal charge against him could have been trumped up, but there must have been some explanation for his arrest.

   Some light is shed on the topic by the account of his arrest. Jesus and his disciples shared what would be their last supper, apparently on Passover evening (Matthew 26:17-29; Mark 14:12-25; Luke 22:7-20). After the meal, probably around midnight, he went to Gethsemane (usually placed on the Mount of Olives, a hill east of the Temple) to pray. After some time, but still well before dawn, he was arrested. Matthew gives what is doubtless the right explanation of the time of the arrest: The high priest ordered that
all colonial powers. Especially in Jerusalem at Passover, talk about David's kingdom and a new or renewed Temple could inspire the populace to think that redemption was at hand. They might rise to strike a blow to hasten it, as they in fact did some 30 years later.

Jesus' arrest reveals that he was regarded as potentially dangerous. Why was he not merely flogged as a warning and released? Josephus tells of another Jesus, the son of Ananias, about 30 years later. At the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkoth), in a period that was otherwise peaceful, Jesus son of Ananias went to the Temple, where he cried,

“A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people.”

This prediction of destruction—that it was such is clear from the reference to the bridegroom and the bride, taken from Jeremiah 7:34—led to his being interrogated and flogged, first by the Jewish authorities, then by the Romans. He answered questions by "unceasingly reiterating his dirge over the city," and was finally released as a maniac. He kept up his cries for seven years, especially at the festivals, but otherwise not addressing the populace. Finally, a stone from a Roman catapult killed him.

Our Jesus' offense was worse than that of Jesus son of Ananias. Jesus of Nazareth had a following, perhaps not very large, but nevertheless a following. He had taught about "the kingdom" for some time. He had taken physical action in the Temple. He was not a madman. Thus he was potentially dangerous. Conceivably he could have talked his way out of execution had he promised to take his disciples, return to Galilee and keep his mouth shut. He seems not to have tried.

The Life of Jesus

The trial of Jesus

In Matthew and Mark there are two hearings before Jewish authorities, but only one in Luke (Matthew 26:57-75, 27:1-2; Mark 14:53-72, 15:1, Luke 22:54-71). It is very likely that the long trial scene of Matthew and Mark is simply an expansion of the short one. In this case, the original report was simply that the chief priests and others consulted about Jesus, bound him and turned him over to Pilate.

It is the longer scene, however, that has always attracted attention. According to Mark's version, witnesses testified that Jesus had threatened the Temple, but they did not agree (presumably on details), and so the charge failed. The high priest then asked Jesus, "Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed?" Jesus admitted that he was, but immediately predicted that the Son of Man would come on clouds of glory. The high priest cried, "Blasphemy," and the council condemned Jesus (Mark 14:53-72).

In a Jewish context, it is difficult to construe either "son of the Blessed [that is, God]" or "Christ" as blasphemy. Neither denigrates God. On the other hand, "Christ" and "son of God" became the two favorite Christian titles for Jesus, and some Christians understood them in a way that Jews might have regarded as blasphemous. That is, the combination "Christ," "son of God" and "blasphemy" fits the post-resurrection Church better than the lifetime of Jesus. The "false" charge that he threatened the Temple, on the other hand, is very close to what the Gospels tell us he did. If the trial scene is in any way accurate, it is more likely that the charge about the Temple was the telling one. Jesus was taunted with that accusation while on the cross (Mark 15:29£.), not with claiming to be the son of God. The authors of the Gospels, in a period when the Church was making its way in the Roman empire, did not want Jesus to appear as a rabble-rouser or as someone who threatened peace and good order. They toned down the threat to the Temple to a mere prediction (Mark 13:2 and parallels) and said that the accusation that he threatened it was false. His physical act against it they interpreted as "cleansing," as if the Temple personnel were corrupt ("a den of robbers," Mark 11:17). They preferred that he die for professing the Christology of the Church.

As we saw above, it is probable that we should reverse their preference: He was executed because he posed a threat to public order, not because he applied to himself the titles "Christ" and "son of God."

Our understanding of how it was that Jesus came to die does not, however, depend on a reconstruction of Mark 14:55-65. It is more instructive to focus on the main movement of events: Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, his demonstration against the Temple, his stealthy arrest by the high priest's guards, his crucifixion and the taunts about the Temple. One can understand the sequence of events without entering into the details of the trial scene.

The attack on the Temple seems to have been crucial in persuading Caiaphas and Pilate that Jesus should die. It confirmed his potential to make trouble, and it showed that he might use physical violence, even if of a very minor kind.

Since Jesus' action in the Temple had such drastic consequences, we need to return to the question of why he did it. We have seen

* Matthew has an interesting variant: After the high priest asks, "Are you the Christ, the son of God?" Jesus replies, "You have said so, but I tell you that you will see the Son of Man ..." (Matthew 26:63-64). It is not certain whether "you have said so" means yes or no.
that it was a symbolic gesture, as were some of his other deeds. If we consider them as a group, we may be able to better understand Jesus' intention.

As did many prophets before him, Jesus communicated by symbolic acts as well as by words. He called 12 disciples, apparently to represent the coming restoration of the 12 tribes of Israel. He ate with sinners, in order to indicate that they would be included in the kingdom. He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, perhaps to remind his followers of Zechariah 9:9 (cited at Matthew 21:5: “your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on an ass”). When he overturned tables and stalls in the Temple area, he was probably also acting symbolically, perhaps indicating that the Temple would be renewed. His last meal with the disciples seems also to have been a symbol, one that pointed toward the coming kingdom, which would be like a banquet. (On the kingdom as banquet, see also the parables in Matthew 22:1-14 and Luke 14:15-24.)

Since the other symbolic acts reflect Jesus' expectation of a coming kingdom, it is probable that his demonstration in the Temple was intended in the same way. By both word and deed he proclaimed that the kingdom would come, that Israel would be restored, that the Temple would be rebuilt (or renewed), that he and his disciples would be leading figures in the kingdom and that people previously regarded as “last” (sinners and toll gatherers) would become the “first.”

These expectations, however, were not fulfilled, at least not in any obvious way. What did happen was a surprise.

When Jesus was executed, his disciples, reasonably thinking that they would be next, hid. Some of his women followers—who were safer than the men and possibly braver—cared for his body. When they returned to the tomb a day and a half later (he died and was buried on Friday; they returned Sunday morning), they found that the tomb was empty. Jesus appeared to them and then later to the disciples in Galilee. The result of this was that they gathered in Jerusalem to wait for his return, which they expected soon. That is, they did not give up his idea that the kingdom would come; they now expected him to return from heaven to establish it. The movement grew and spread geographically. Twenty-five or more years later Paul—a convert, not an original disciple—still expected Jesus to return within his own lifetime. But the Lord tarried.

The “delay” led to creative and stimulating theological reflection, seen for example in the Gospel of John. Meanwhile, the man behind it all became remote. The synoptic material was by no means immune from this kind of development. The consequence is that it takes patient spadework to dig through the layers of Christian devotion and to recover the historical core. Historical reconstruction is never absolutely certain, and in the case of Jesus it is often highly uncertain. Despite this, we have a good idea of the main lines of his ministry and his message.

A discussion of the resurrection is not, strictly speaking, part of the story of “the historical Jesus,” but part of the aftermath of his life. A few words about the different resurrection accounts may nevertheless be useful. According to Matthew and Mark, the disciples went to Galilee and saw Jesus there; according to Luke they did not leave the environs of Jerusalem. The story of Jesus’ ascension into heaven is slightly different in Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-11, though written by the same author. Equally striking are the differences between the stories of Jesus’ appearances. In Matthew he appears only twice, once to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matthew 28:1-10), once to the surviving 11 disciples (Matthew 28:16-20)—11 because Judas had committed suicide. In Luke, however, he does not appear to the women (see Luke 24:8-11), but comes first to two unnamed disciples (Luke 24:13-35) and then to all the disciples, before whom he ate (Luke 24:36-49). According to Acts, he was with the disciples for 40 days, appearing off and on (Acts 1:3f.).

The earliest evidence, however, is not in the Gospels, but in one of Paul’s letters. He offers, as part of what had been “handed down” to him, a list of appearances of the risen Lord: He appeared first to Cephas (Peter), then to the 12 (not the 11!), then to more than 500, then to James (Jesus’ brother), then to “all the apostles” (apparently not just the 12), then to Paul himself (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

Before commenting on the problems raised by these divergent accounts, let us first consider what the risen Jesus was like. According to Luke, he was not immediately recognizable; the first two disciples to whom he appeared walked and talked with him for some time without knowing who he was; he was made known “in the breaking of the bread,” when they ate together (Luke 24:35). Although he could appear and disappear, he was not a ghost. Luke is very insistent about that. The risen Lord could be touched, and he could eat (Luke 24:39-43).

When Paul was engaged in a debate with his Corinthian converts about whether or not dead Christians will be raised, body and all, he tried to describe what the coming resurrection will be like. His answer is presumably based on his own firsthand experience when he saw the risen Lord (“Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” [1 Corinthians 9:1]; God “reveal[ed] his Son to me” [Galatians 1:16]). In the resurrection, Paul explained, each individual will have a body, but it will be transformed: not a physical
body, but a spiritual body. One fact is clear: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; in the resurrection, there will be no flesh and blood. This is directly applied to Jesus: "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:42-50). Paul repeated: Everyone will be changed; when they are like the "man of heaven," they will no longer have their perishable bodies, but rather imperishable ones (1 Corinthians 15:51-54).

In the first century people knew about two experiences similar to resurrection. Luke and Paul both intend to exclude the possibility that the risen Jesus was either a resuscitated corpse or a ghost. A ghost then was what a ghost is now, or what a ghost was to Shakespeare: a phantasm, especially one that appears late at night. Sophisticated ancients, like their modern counterparts, dismissed ghosts as creatures of dreams, figments of the imagination. The less sophisticated, naturally, were credulous. Both Paul and Luke opposed the idea that the risen Lord was a ghost, Luke explicitly ("a ghost has not flesh and bones as you see that I have," Luke 24:39), Paul by implication: what is raised is a body. Yet they equally oppose the idea that Jesus was a resuscitated corpse. These were more common then than now, because embalming is now so widespread. It is, however, possible for a person to be dead to all appearances, and later to "regain" life. There are several such stories in ancient literature, some in the Bible and some elsewhere. Paul and Luke, however, deny that the risen Lord was simply resuscitated. In Paul's view, he had been transformed, changed from a "physical" or "natural" body to a "spiritual body." Luke thought that he had flesh and could eat, but also that he had been changed. He was not obviously recognizable to people who saw him, and he could appear and disappear.

Both authors were trying to describe—Paul at firsthand, Luke at second or third hand—an experience that does not fit a known category. What they deny is much clearer than what they affirm.

Faced with accounts of this nature—sharply diverging stories of where and to whom Jesus appeared, lack of agreement and clarity on what he was like (except agreement on negatives)—we cannot reconstruct what really happened. We can, however, make some very general comments.

One is that the authors of the Gospels wanted to give narrative stories about the resurrection. They were probably not too worried about agreement or consistency. This may readily and convincingly be illustrated. In Acts there are three accounts of the Lord's appearance to Paul and the immediate aftermath, which differ at various points (Acts 9:1-30, 22:3-21, 26:12-20). For example, in one story (Acts 22:17-21), after the Lord first appeared to Paul,
The synagogue is among the most influential religious institutions in the history of Western civilization. In this place of “coming together” (Greek synagoge, Hebrew beit ha-knesset), Judaism created a communal religious experience that previously was almost unknown. Within the ancient synagogue believers assembled to read the Sacred Scripture, to pray, and to form community with their God. This “democratic” notion of religious experience is in stark contrast with the great and small temples of the ancient world, including the Jerusalem Temple, where professional priests performed religious acts on behalf of a community that stood by piously. The synagogue was an important model for the early church. In fact, it was within synagogues that the message of Christianity was first preached. Centuries later the synagogue and the church were the models Mohammed and his followers used for their new “place of prayer” and scriptural reading, the mosque. This chapter traces the ideological development of the synagogue from the earliest evidence of its existence through the rise of Islam. What are the origins of the synagogue, and how did it become a Sacred Realm?

A "PLACE OF MEETING": THE SECOND TEMPLE PERIOD

No one knows when and where the synagogue first developed. Some trace its origins to the Babylonian captivity (586–16 B.C.E.), during which time Judeans distant from their homeland are said to have assembled to “sing the Lord’s song in a strange land.” Others see its beginnings in a series of third-century Greek inscriptions from Egypt that describe Jewish “prayer places.” Some first-century Jews traced its origins to Moses himself. Yet the origins
of the synagogue may never be known—it was not an institution that developed in a revolu-
tionary way, breaking away from an established religious institution, as did Luther at
Wittenberg Cathedral. Rather, the synagogue seems to have begun as a "still, small voice,"
as a simple place where Jews came together to read Scripture. Joining in synagogue life in
no way dampened Jewish allegiance and dedication to the great "house of God," the
Temple of Jerusalem. In fact, by the first century C.E. numerous synagogues existed in
Jerusalem itself, including gatherings of Jews from lands as distant as Cyrene and
Alexandria in North Africa and the provinces of Cilicia and Asia in Asia Minor. An
inscription found within the shadow of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem portrays the reli-
gious life of a first-century synagogue. Called the Theodotos inscription (see Fig. 1.6), it
tells us that the synagogue was endowed by three generations of the family of an individual
called Theodotos. There the Torah was read and the commandments were studied.
Pilgrims stayed there when they visited Jerusalem and perhaps purified themselves in rit-
ual baths for their ascent to the Temple. Philo, the philosopher and communal leader of
Alexandrian Jewry during the first century C.E., describes synagogues, often elegantly deco-
rated, as being common in Roman Alexandria. There, he wrote,

The Jews every seventh day occupy themselves with their ancestral philosophy, dedicating
that time to acquiring knowledge and the study of the truths of nature. For what are our
prayer places throughout the cities but schools of prudence and bravery and control and jus-
tice, as well as of piety and holiness and virtue as a whole, by which one comes to recognize
and perform what is due to men and God? (The Life of Moses, 2. 216)

Missing from this description and from many others that we might cite is the one element
of synagogue service that may be taken for granted: prayer. This is particularly odd, since
the name recorded in literary and epigraphic sources for most Diaspora synagogues (and one Palestinian synagogue) is *prosēuche*, which means “prayer place.” Possibly these sources stress that element of Jewish liturgy which is uniquely Jewish, taking for granted the aspect that was shared with other religious groups, communal prayer. Yet the overwhelming impression gained from extant sources is that early synagogues were places of communal Scripture reading and instruction. Besides the Theodotos inscription, two synagogue buildings have been discovered in Israel: one on Masada, the other at Gamla in the Golan Heights. The Masada synagogue (Fig. 2.1) was built at the time of the first Jewish Revolt against Rome (66–74 C.E.) during the rebels’ defiant and ill-fated occupation of this crag in the desert. The room that has been identified as a synagogue is 11.5 × 10.5 meters, with a small room measuring 3.6 × 5.5 meters at its northwestern corner. The hall was lined with benches. Fragments of the books of Ezekiel (Fig. 2.2) and Deuteronomy were uncovered. Other religious texts were found scattered on Masada, many within a short distance from the synagogue. The meeting hall on Masada seems to have been a place of public Scripture reading, by definition a synagogue. Philo uses the word “synagogue” to describe the religious gathering places of the Essenes earlier in the century:

> For that day has been set apart to be kept holy and on it they abstain from all other work and proceed to sacred places (*hierous...topous*) which they call synagogues (*sunagogai*). There, arranged in rows according to their ages, the younger below the elder, they sit decorously as befits the occasion with attentive ears. Then one takes the books (*biblous*) and reads aloud and another of especial proficiency comes forward and expounds what is not understood... (*Every Good Man Is Free, 81–82*).

Particularly important for us is the term Philo used to describe these synagogues: “sacred places” (*hierous...topous*). His is the first text to explicitly call these places sacred. What is the source of this holiness? It is apparently the “Sacred Scripture” (a term used in contemporary literature) that was studied within the synagogue.

Evidence of communal prayer in places of religious meeting before 70 C.E. is found in one source, the so-called Damascus Document. First discovered in the Cairo Genizah and then among the Qumran scrolls, the document states:

> And all who enter the house of prostration, let him not come in a state of uncleanness requiring washing... Prostration, most likely prayer in general, in a specific place seems to have been essential to the ritual life of this community. Just as purity was required for entry to the Temple of Jerusalem, it was required for participation in this sectarian “house of prostration.” This attitude was the result of the Qumran sect’s perception that the Temple had been profaned by the authorities in Jerusalem. The sect thus went into the desert and behaved as if the Temple had been destroyed, applying Temple imagery to themselves, praying together, and rejecting the “pro-
faned" Temple. This response to the loss of the Temple foreshadows the program of the Rabbinic Sages after 70 C.E., a period when the Temple was, in fact, lost.

70 C.E.–C. 220 C.E.: SANCTITY WITHOUT THE TEMPLE

From these modest beginnings synagogues, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E., developed as the single most important institution in Jewish life, a position they have held ever since. As the institution grew, its importance was expressed through an ever-increasing attribution of sanctity. The earliest evidence for this appears in the writings of the Sages of the Mishnah, the Tannaim. After the destruction of the Temple the Tannaitic Sages took it upon themselves to reformulate Judaism for an age in which the Temple could no longer be the focal point of religious experience. While waiting for the messianic reconstruction of the Temple, the Sages reconstructed religious practice to emphasize the elements of Judaism that had survived the destruction. At the center of this development stood the Holy Scriptures. While the Temple was gone and the Jewish hold on the Land of Israel was increasingly tenuous, the Torah and its study were left intact by the great national tragedy. The place where Scripture had been studied and community wrought for generations before 70 C.E., the synagogue, became the institutional focal point for the Rabbinic reconstruction of Judaism.

As before 70 C.E., the importance of Scripture in synagogues was stressed by the Sages, who ascribed a certain amount of holiness to the synagogue because of this relationship. This is stated in terms of case law in the Mishnah, the most important corpus of early Rabbinic tradition. The text sets forth the conditions under which the people of a town might sell their communal religious properties:

The people of a town who sold their town square:
they must buy a synagogue with its proceeds;
If they sell a synagogue, they must acquire a scroll chest.
If they sell a scroll chest, they must acquire cloths [to wrap sacred scrolls].
If they sell cloths, they must acquire books [of the Prophets and Writings]
If they sell books, they must acquire a Torah [scroll].
But, if they sell a Torah [scroll], they may not acquire books.
And if they sell books, they may not acquire cloths.
And if they sell cloths, they may not acquire a chest,
And if they sell a chest, they may not acquire a synagogue.
And if they sell a synagogue, they may not acquire a town square.
So too, with the left-over [money].
They may not sell public property to an individual, because they are lowering its holiness, so Rabbi Meir.

They [the Sages] said to him: If so, then they cannot sell from a larger town to a smaller town. (Mishnah Megillah 3:1)

The source of holiness in this text is the Torah scroll. Places or objects physically closest to or resembling the Torah scroll are considered to be more holy. Thus the town square, where Scripture was read publicly but infrequently, has a small amount of holiness. Scrolls of the Prophets and Writings that look like Torah scrolls are just one step less holy than the Torah scroll. In a world in which the Temple did not exist, the Torah came to be seen as the supreme source of holiness, the embodiment of the Divine Presence. Other sources suggest that the entire congregation was gathered before the Torah chest and that various
items, including lamps, bore dedicatory inscriptions. In some synagogues the Torah cabinet (teva) had an arched lid and stood upon a stand or was placed on a carpet. The scrolls were wrapped in fine, colored cloths (metzuyarot) adorned with bells and placed upon a specially designated table (Fig. 2.3). Communities taxed themselves in order to build synagogues and to procure Torah scrolls.

While most synagogues in second-century Palestine were probably not very impressive buildings and may even have been converted houses, the Tannaitic Sages projected their vision of a grand synagogue on a synagogue in the rich Diaspora community of first-century Alexandria:

Said Rabbi Judah: Whosoever never saw the (double stoa) of Alexandria of Egypt never saw the great honor of Israel his entire life.

It was a kind of large basilica, a portico within a portico. Sometimes there were there twice as many people as those who went out of Egypt.

There were seventy-one thrones within it, equal (in number) to the seventy-one elders, each one made of twenty-five myriad. A wooden platform [bema] was in the center.

The hazan ha-knesset [leader] stood at the horn [of the altar], with the flags in his hand. When one began to read, the other would wave the flags and all the people would answer “amen” for each and every blessing. Then the other waved the flags and all of the people answered “amen.”

They did not sit in a jumble, but the goldsmiths sat by themselves, the silversmiths by themselves, the blacksmiths by themselves, the common weavers by themselves, and the fine weavers by themselves.

So that when a traveler would come he would be taken care of by his [fellow] craftsmen, and from that [interchange] a living could be procured. (Tosefta Sukkah 4:6).

In describing the synagogue in such intense and extravagant hues, this text illustrates the “great glory of Israel.” It is brighter than life. What is to be
noted here, however, is the importance of reading the Torah to this synagogue. As in the Second Temple period literature, synagogue prayer is not to be seen.

A second notable feature of this text is the terminology used to describe the architecture, furnishings, and liturgy of the synagogue. All are drawn from Tannaitic descriptions of the Temple: the Temple Mount is said to have been built as “a portico within a portico”; the members of the Sanhedrin sit in seventy-one chairs; the daily sacrifice is orchestrated by a *hazzan ha-knesset*; and prayer is offered accompanied by the waving of flags. The Alexandria synagogue, in all its glory, was to be something like the Temple.

The attribution of Temple motifs to synagogues was an important way in which their sanctity was expressed. Thus we see in Mishnah Megillah 3:3:

> Additionally, Rabbi Judah said:
> A synagogue that was destroyed:
> eulogies are not said in it,
> ropes are not twisted in it,
> nets are not stretched in it,
> fruit is not spread on its roof [to dry].
> It is not used as a shortcut, for it is written:
> “I will destroy your sanctuaries” (Lev. 26:31)—
> they are sacred even when they are destroyed.
> Grasses grow within them:
> They must not be picked [so as to provoke] sadness.

In this text the source of sanctity differs from that seen in Megillah 3:1. Synagogues are holy because they share in the sanctity of the Temple. This tradition suggests that a synagogue that has been destroyed through no fault of its community is still to be treated as holy—expressed graphically in prohibition against using a synagogue ruin as a shortcut. In Mishnah Berakhot 9:5 the use of the Temple Mount for this purpose is also forbidden. Both destroyed religious centers are to be treated, according to the Mishnah, with residual sanctity. Through creative exegesis of Leviticus 26:31 some of the sanctity of the Jerusalem Temple is ascribed to synagogues.12

Other Tannaitic texts apply Temple motifs in more direct ways. Tosefta Megillah 3:23–25 focuses on the internal arrangement of the synagogue community toward the Holy City of Jerusalem, suggesting that synagogue doors should open toward the east, like those in the Temple. The text further asserts that the ideal synagogue should be built on the acropolis of a town like a (or, the) temple. Other texts hint that synagogues were furnished with seven-branched menorahs, reminiscent of the Temple. Such large lamp stands would have more than ideological significance. They provided lighting necessary for the public reading of Scripture.

The period after the destruction of the Temple saw an explosion in the types of religious activities carried out in synagogues. The most important were liturgical. For the first time, prayer became an important feature of synagogue life. The Mishnah ascribes the beginning of this development to the single most influential Sage of the years immediately after 70 C.E., Rabbi Johanan son of Zakkai (Fig. 2.4):

> At first the * lulav [palm frond, willow and myrtle] was taken up in the Temple seven [days]
> and in the countryside [medinah] one. When the Temple was destroyed, Rabbi Johanan son
> of Zakkai decreed that the * lulav be taken up in the countryside seven [days] in memory of
> the Temple. (Mishnah Sukkah 3:12)
The taking up of a palm frond, tied together with twigs of willow and myrtle and held with a citron, in the "countryside," that is, the synagogues, was intended to preserve the "memory of the Temple."

Other examples of Temple rites the Sages introduced to synagogues are shofar blowing, prayer offered at the same times as it had been in the Temple, and the recitation of blessings at the reading of the Torah. All became synagogue functions under the influence of the Tannaitic Sages. Prayer modeled on Temple liturgy was an essential factor in the sanctification of the synagogue from the late first to the early third century C.E. This phenomenon is well expressed in a tradition that appears in a late Tannaitic collection, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael:

In every place [where I cause My name to be remembered I will come to you and I will bless you] (Exod. 20:21). Where I reveal Myself to you, in the Temple. From here they said: The Tetragrammaton may not be pronounced in the outlying areas [ba-gevulin].

Rabbi Eliezer son of Jacob says: If you will come to my house I will come to yours. To the place which my heart loves my feet will lead me.

From here they said: Whenever ten people congregate in the synagogue the divine presence is with them, for it is written, "God [Elohim] stands in the congregation of God [El]" (Ps. 82:1) ...

Just as the Temple is a place where the Divine can be found, God is present when a quorum assembles for prayer in the synagogue. The synagogue becomes a place where, through prayer, the believer can come into communion with the Divine. The Mekhilta is the first text to describe the synagogue as something more than a temple-like study hall. It has become a place of theophany through prayer.

For the early Rabbinic Sages, synagogues were the institutional focal point for the reconstruction of Judaism. In their hands the meeting house in which Scripture was studied before 70 C.E. became an institution infused with Temple qualities. It became the sacred place of the time when the Temple did not exist. During the first centuries of the Common Era the basic contours of this institution were drawn. Synagogues became places in which the Divine could be encountered through communal acts of Torah study and prayer.

SYNAGOGUES IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL, C. 220–700 C.E.

During the late Roman and Byzantine periods the synagogue blossomed. Archaeological evidence suggests that synagogues could be found throughout Jewish areas of the Land of Israel during late antiquity. In fact, an easy way to distinguish a Jewish district from a Christian area during the Byzantine period is to chart the locations of the more than one hundred synagogue ruins in Israel and to compare this map with known discoveries of churches. Jews were concentrated in the eastern Galilee (particularly the Upper Galilee), the Golan, and areas of Judea surrounding Jerusalem. Christians were most numerous in the western Galilee, the coastal plain, and Judea.
Palestinian Jews saw the synagogue as the essential institution of the Jewish community during late antiquity. Jewish communal self-identity was clearly invested in their synagogues, as expressed in the ever grander synagogues found throughout the Land of Israel. This new significance is expressed in the development of homiletical literature, the *midrashim*, much of which was based upon homilies delivered in synagogues and study houses. The liturgy of the synagogue became more complex during the Byzantine period. Intricate liturgical compositions, called *piyyutim*, were recited by celebrated authors. These *piyyutim* (Fig. 2.5) also followed the weekly and festival scriptural and liturgical cycles. Finally, building upon a tradition that can be traced to the Second Temple period, homiletical renditions of Scripture into Aramaic (*targumim*) were composed for the benefit of Aramaic-speaking Jews. Most Jews in the Land of Israel spoke Aramaic and Greek in their daily lives. Hebrew, the language of Scripture and hence of most liturgy, came to be restricted to the synagogue context. In *targumim* and in an Aramaic *piyyut* the synagogue was called the "language of the holy house," the "holy house" being the synagogue. In archaeological remains as well we find synagogues called "holy places" in numerous inscriptions. Based upon models first seen in Tannaitic literature, synagogues became for the Sages the Jewish "holy places" of late antique Palestine. The sanctity of the synagogue became so great that the institution was projected into sacred time. It would continue to be important, they thought, even in messianic time when the Temple would be in full operation.

We will begin our survey with the successors of the Tannaim, the Amoraim in the Land of Israel and those generally anonymous scholars who followed them. By the third century the Sages were widely accepted as the intellectual and religious elite of Palestinian Jewry. Under the able leadership of Rabbi Judah the Prince, the status of the Sages was accepted by both Jews and the Roman authorities. The developing Rabbinic elite attempted to exert broad influence within Jewish society while claiming special status for itself.

A text representative of Rabbinic attention to synagogues is preserved in the Jerusalem Talmud (Fig. 2.6). This tradition strongly advocates synagogue attendance, presenting this institution in the most vivid tones:

A.  Huna said: He who prays behind the synagogue is called evil, for it is said: "The evil will go around [when baseness is exalted among the children of men]" (Ps. 12:9).

B.  Rav Huna said: Anyone who does not enter a synagogue in this world will not enter a synagogue in the world to come.

   What is the [scriptural] basis?

   "The evil will go around [when baseness is exalted among the children of men]" (Ps. 12:9).

C.  Rabbi Johanan said: He who prays at home it is as if he is surrounded by a wall of iron . . .

D.  Rabbi Phineas in the name of Rabbi Hoshaya: He who prays in the synagogue is like one who sacrifices a pure meal offering [*minhah*].

   What is the [scriptural] basis?

   "God [Elohim] stands in the congregation of God [El]" (Ps. 82:1).

E.  Rabbi Jeremiah in the name of Rabbi Abbahu: “Seek out the Lord where He may be found” (Isa. 55:6).

   Where may He be found?

   In the synagogues and study houses.

   “Call upon Him when He is near” (ibid.).

   Where is He near?

   [In the synagogues and study houses].
F. Said Rabbi Isaac son of Rabbi Eleazar: Not only that, but their God stands behind them.
What is the [scriptural] basis?
"God [Elohim] stands in the congregation of God [EI]" (Ps. 82:1). . .

G. It is a firm promise [berit kerutah] that he who toils at his study in the synagogue will not quickly forget it [that is, his learning]. . . (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 5:1, 8d–9a)

Each of these traditions is intended to strengthen the position of the synagogue within Jewish communal life. Taken together, this medley of Rabbinic sayings constitutes an extremely powerful statement. Let us analyze each section to see what is new in this document.

Section F is reminiscent of the text Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael and thus follows upon that Tannaitic precedent. Similar sentiments are often represented in Amoramic literature. We find it, for example, in a homiletical comment on Song of Songs 2:9 preserved in a sixth–seventh-century collection, the Pesiqte de Rav Kahane:

"My beloved is like a gazelle or a young hart" (Song of Songs 2:9). Said Rabbi Isaac: As a gazelle leaps and skips from tree to tree, from thicket to thicket, and from grove to grove, so the Holy One leaps from synagogue to synagogue, from study house to study house.

Why?
In order to bless Israel. . . 18

The playful image of God as a "young hart" deals with the problem of how God can be in more than one holy place at a time. Similarly, we find in a tradition in the Jerusalem
Talmud that synagogues were seen as places where individuals could commune with God. Having described the vast distances separating the earth from each of the seven heavens and the vast size of the hoofs of the beasts of heaven, the mystery of Divine Immanence is asserted in this text:

See how high above His world He is! Yet a person can go into a synagogue and stand behind a column and pray in a whisper, and the Holy One, Blessed be He, listens to his prayer.

For it is said: “Hannah was speaking in her heart; only her lips moved, and her voice was not heard” (1 Sam. 1:13).

Yet the Holy One, Blessed be He, heard her prayer. (Jerusalem Talmud, Berakhot 9:1, 13a)

Here the synagogue is a place where the prayer of a single individual can traverse the expanses of the heavens, and God himself will receive it. The model of Hannah is important because “speaking in her heart” became the model for the recitation of Rabbinic prayer, and the synagogue is subtly equated with the Tabernacle at Shilo where she prayed to God for her son Samuel.

Sections A and C go so far as to decry those who avoid synagogue worship. They are “evil,” says Rav Huna, because they sneak around, avoiding the synagogue at prayer time. Even more threatening is Rabbi Johanan’s statement warning the person who does not pray in community that his prayers will not be heard by God. We know, for example, of two scholars of the generation following Rabbi Johanan—Rabbi Ami and Rabbi Assi—who chose not to attend any of the “thirteen” synagogues in Tiberias, “praying between the pillars [of the study house] where they were studying.”2 A practical inducement is promised by this text for those who choose to study in synagogues. In section G Rabbi Johanan promises that their studies within synagogues will be retained longer. This appears to be a clear attempt to lure the Sages and their followers away from their study houses and into the synagogues for prayer.

Section D makes explicit a trend nascent in Tannaitic sources. While the Tannaim established the thrice daily prayer services at the times when sacrifices took place in the Jerusalem Temple, the Amoraim made this phenomenon explicit. While the Temple lay in ruin, synagogue prayer is a temporary replacement for the Temple service.

The application of Temple motifs to synagogues and to synagogue prayer was expanded greatly by the Amoraim, without concern that synagogues could ever really take the place of the Temple. As we will see, they were actually read into the cosmic order, effectively neutralizing any possibility of supercession. Synagogues came to be called “small temples,” based upon an interpretation of Ezekiel 11:16:

Rabbi Samuel b. Isaac: “I will be unto them a small sanctuary [miqdash me’at]” (Ez. 11:16): These are synagogues and study houses.20 (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 29a)

In later literature this theme is developed further, where specific rituals derived from the Temple were transferred to synagogues. Synagogue poetry focuses on such Temple rites as the service of the high priest in the service on the Day of Atonement and the priestly courses described in 1 Chronicles 24:7–18. A late midrash discovered in the Cairo Genizah asserts this phenomenon explicitly:

As long as the Temple existed, perpetual sacrifices and offerings would atone for the sins of Israel.

Now synagogues are to Israel in the place of the Temple. As long as Israel prays in them, their prayers are in place of the perpetual sacrifices and offerings.

[By reciting] prayers at their proper time and directing their hearts, they merit and will see the
rebuilding of the Temple and [the reestablishment of] the perpetual sacrifices and offerings, as it is said: “And I will bring them to my holy mountain and I will rejoice in my house of Prayer” (Isa. 56:7) their sacrifices and offerings will be received well on my altar, “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all of the nations.”

The “templization” of prayer was instrumental to the “templization” of synagogues.

In section B Rav Huna suggests a status for synagogues that is unknown in Tannaitic literature. The synagogue is projected into “the world to come.” It is unclear whether the world to come refers to a postmortem reward or to the eschatological future. What we can know, however, is that synagogues will be there to serve the needs of the pious. This notion is expressed in a select number of Rabbinic sources. It is stated explicitly in a later collection of midrashim, Deuteronomy Rabban:

Anyone who enters synagogues and study houses in this world merits to enter synagogues and study houses in the world to come.

Whence this?
For it is said: “Happy are those who dwell in your house, they will again praise you, selah” (Ps. 84:6).

The promise of heavenly synagogue and study houses attendance is here based on the exegesis of Psalm 84:6: “Those who dwell in your house ... will again praise you.” When will this “again” happen? In the world to come. Other sources project synagogues into the biblical past. King Solomon, for example, not only built the Temple, he built synagogues in Jerusalem! The meeting house of earlier generations has become a part of Jewish sacred time. Another point worthy of attention is the mention of the study house. Rabbinic study houses came into their own during the third century, taking on many attributes of synagogues. Some Sages, in fact, considered the study house to be holier than the synagogue.

The Rabbinic Sages provide a detailed description of the interior of a third-century synagogue. As in Mishnah Megillah 3:1, closer proximity to the biblical scrolls occasions greater holiness:

All of the furnishings of the synagogue are like [in holiness to] the synagogue.
All of the furnishings of the synagogue are like [in holiness to] its bench [safsal] and its couch [qaltara].
The curtain [kila] on the ark [aron] is like [in holiness to] the ark [which was seen as more sacred than the synagogue building because the biblical scrolls were stored in it]. Rabbi Abbahu put a cloak [golta] under the curtain [bilan] [of the ark].
Rav Judah in the name of Samuel: the bema and planks [levahin] do not have the sanctity of the ark, and do have the sanctity of the synagogue.
The reading table [ingalin] does not have the sanctity of the ark, and does have the sanctity of the synagogue. (Jerusalem Talmud, Megillah 3:1–3, 73d–74a)

Those synagogue fixtures that have the sanctity of the synagogue but not the greater sanctity of the ark are the benches, the sofa, the bema, the planks, and the reading table. Only those furnishings that are in constant, close proximity to the ark—the curtain and the cloak—have the sanctity of the ark. For the ancient reader of this text the identification of the various appurtenances of the synagogue was self-evident. A third-century Jew, we may assume, knew exactly what a qaltara looked like and just what a bilan was. For us, however, it is hard to know what each of the terms denotes. Scholars since the Middle Ages have struggled with them, and I have provided what appears to me to be reasonable identifications. The identity of the ingalin as a reading table is clear from parallels in contempo-
raneous non-Jewish literature in Greek. It becomes even clearer when we know that the table upon which the Gospel book is placed in modern Greek Orthodox churches is called an analogein. Here we see that another of the surviving forms of late antique religion preserves the denotation of this term in Talmudic literature.

The traditional term to describe the Torah Shrine, the arona, is particularly important for understanding the ideological development of the synagogue. In Amoraic literature this term generally replaces the Tannaitic teva (chest). Arona bears biblical resonances referring not just to a big cabinet but to the biblical Ark of the Covenant. This relationship is made clear in a tradition attributed to Rabbi Huna the Great of Sepphoris, a major city in the Lower Galilee recently excavated by American and Israeli archaeologists. Rabbi Huna the Great of Sepphoris is said to have lamented on the occasion of a public fast that Our fathers covered it [the Ark of the Covenant] with gold, and we cover it [the Torah ark] with ashes. (Jerusalem Talmud, Ta'anit 2:1, 65a)

The Torah Shrine was covered with ashes as a sign of mourning. The ark is here cast as the Ark of the Covenant, which stood in the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle and the Solomonic Temple. The curtain before the ark is called the parokhta in another tradition, reminiscent of the Temple parokhet (curtain). The ark and the parokhet thus join the menorah as synagogue vessels bearing the names of Temple appurtenances.

The relation between synagogues and the Temple became so basic to Jewish conceptions that sources go as far as to treat the biblical Tabernacle as a kind of big synagogue and the Ark of the Covenant as a Torah Shrine:
When Moses told Bezalel to make the Tabernacle
Bezalel said: “What is the purpose of the Tabernacle?”
He said to him: “To cause the Divine Presence to dwell there and to teach Israel Torah.”
Said Bezalel: “Where is the Torah put?”
He said to him: “When we make the Tabernacle, we will make an ark…”

The intimate relationship between the Torah scroll and its ark expressed in this text is transferred metaphorically in the Jerusalem Talmud to a Sage who has lost his knowledge of Torah:

Rabbi Jacob son of Abaye in the name of Rabbi Aha: An elder [zaken] who forgets his learning through no fault of his own is treated with the sanctity of the ark. (Moed Qatan 3:1, 81d)

The body of the Sage is to be treated as an ark for the knowledge of Jewish tradition, the “oral Torah,” which this scholar has stored in it.

The Torah Shrine was considered by some to be a place of considerable power. This is expressed in an amulet discovered in the Genizah which instructs that it be buried “under the ark of the synagogue.” In fact, nineteen bronze amulets (Fig. 2.7), wrapped in cloth and inscribed in Aramaic and Hebrew, were discovered among remains of the Torah Shrine and other appurtenances in the apse of the sixth-century synagogue at Maon (Nirim), near Gaza. Scholars hypothesize that “some of the amulets were suspended from the wall near or behind the Ark of the Law, or even from the ark itself.”

Why were the amulets kept near the Torah Shrine? Their contents provide part of the answer. The opened examples appeal for healing and divine protection and contain formulae that are reminiscent of both liturgical texts and synagogue inscriptions. It is apparent that the power of these amulets derived both from their literary similarity to Scripture and liturgy and from their proximity to the Torah Shrine. Like synagogue inscriptions today, the terminology used in extant amulets often draws on biblical and liturgical formulations. For example, Amen, Amen Selah, a phrase similar to biblical formulae, appears both in amulets and in synagogue inscriptions. The formulae of these amulets (Fig. 2.8) closely parallel other amulets discovered in the Cairo Genizah.

Liturgically, the end of this period saw the development of complex rituals for the reading of Torah that clearly express that the scroll was the manifestation of godliness within its community. Thus we find the lifting of the scroll by the leader with the proclamation:
"One is our God, Great is our Master, holy and awesome eternally."

He begins pleasantly and says: “The Lord is God” (1 Kings 18:39), the Lord is His name.
The people respond after him as he says it twice, and they respond after him two times.
Immediately he unrolls the Torah scroll a space of three columns, elevates it and shows the surface of its script to the people standing to his right and left.
Then he turns it [the raised scroll] in front and behind him, for it is a precept for all men and women to see the script, to bow (or prostrate themselves) and exclaim: “This is the Torah which Moses set before the Children of Israel” (Deut. 4:4).
He further exclaims: “The Torah of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul...”

Literary sources from the third to the seventh century and beyond treat the synagogue as a place of Torah par excellence. It has become a place of prayer as well, one that is projected into both the messianic future and the biblical past. The synagogue has become so essential to Rabbinic conceptions of Judaism that it awaits the pious in the “world to come.”

Contemporaneous archaeological sources parallel literary sources in many ways. Synagogues of various architectural forms developed throughout the Land of Israel, based on regional types. North of the Sea of Galilee the “Galilean type” was most popular, while in the Jordan Rift Valley the apsidal basilica became the norm. The architecture of these buildings is discussed by R. Hachlili in Chapter 5. Synagogues throughout the Holy Land were called “holy places” in their Aramaic and Greek dedicatory inscriptions—in Kefar Hananyah in the Western Galilee; at Hammath Tiberias, Beth Shean, and Naaran in the Jordan Rift Valley; in...
Gerasa in modern Jordan; and in Gaza and Ashkelon on the coastal plain. We will discuss just a few examples of the Jewish holy places that have been recovered by archaeologists.

The idea of placing dedicatory inscriptions (Figs. 2.9 and 2.10) within public contexts was by no means unique to Jews. This form of public benefaction was central to Greek, Roman, and Byzantine social contexts, as it is within the churches and synagogues of the modern followers of eastern forms of Christianity and Judaism. Tannaitic and Amoraic sources mention synagogue dedicatory inscriptions, though the earliest extant inscriptions from the post-destruction era date to the fourth century. As among Christians, each synagogue donor contributed a portion of the synagogue and its decoration, with no individual donating the entire building. Through this type of benefaction the donor received prestige within the community, and presumably in the eyes of God as well. While the phrase “holy place” is quite rare in Christian inscriptions, other attributions of sanctity—“holy monastery,” “holy church,” and the like—are common.

The term “holy place” (atra qedisha in Aramaic, hagios topos in Greek) appears for the first time in two inscriptions from the fourth-century mosaic pavement of Hammath Tiberias B. The inscriptions, in Aramaic and Greek, are quite similar. The Aramaic text reads:

May peace be unto all those who gave charity in this holy place, and who in the future will give charity. May he have His blessing Amen, Amen, Shalom.

And the Greek text (Fig. 2.11):

Remembered for good and for blessing Profuturos the elder who made this stoa of the holy place. Blessing upon him, Amen, Shalom.
How did the congregation at Hammath Tiberias decorate its "holy place"? Located on a bluff overlooking the Sea of Galilee, the building was constructed as a basilica on a north-south axis with a broad side aisle in which the Aramaic inscription was laid. The ornate floor is reminiscent of high-quality mosaic pavements from Antioch on the Orontes, to the north in Syria. While only the floor and a few architectural features are extant, the excavator has suggested a plausible reconstruction of this basilica (see Fig. 5.3). The central nave was laid with a panel containing a dedicatory inscription flanked by rampant lions on its northern end. In the center of the room is a zodiac wheel. Opposite the platform upon which the Torah Shrine undoubtedly stood is the image of a shrine flanked by two menorahs and some smaller ritual objects.

According to the excavator's reconstruction, the Shrine stood on the southern, Jerusalem-facing, side of the building and looked much like that illustrated in the mosaic. Christians, too, made images of the sacred precinct of the church on church pavements (Plate IX). Excavation has shown that orientation of Torah Shrines on the Jerusalem wall of
synagogues was virtually the rule in the Land of Israel. This factor, together with the presence of the menorahs, clearly reflects an attempt to associate the synagogue with the Temple. Images of Torah Shrines appear on mosaics and in other media at a number of sites. The upper part of a stone aedicula uncovered at Nabratein in the Upper Galilee bears a close resemblance to the image of a Torah Shrine (see Plate XXXII) in the Beth Alpha mosaic. Large seven-branched menorahs (see Plate XXV) were uncovered in another synagogue in Hammath Tiberias, at Maon (Fig. 2.12) in Judea, and elsewhere. Flanking menorahs within the former were reminiscent of the Temple and served to illuminate the synagogue hall. Christian altars were also lighted with many lamps that, as in the synagogue, focused attention on the bema. In an image of a menorah from Naaran (sixth century, near Jericho) the desire to provide additional light is even clearer. An additional lamp is shown hanging from each side of each of the two menorahs.

The zodiac wheel at Hammath Tiberias B is reminiscent of the months of the Jewish year, which begin with each new moon. This relationship was made in a recently discovered synagogue mosaic from Sepphoris, where both the names of the months and the zodiac signs are listed in each segment of the wheel (Plate VIII). The image of the sun god Helios at the center of the composition is harder to explain. It appears, however, that Jews and Christians alike used this image to symbolize the sun. The image of this pagan god (no matter how neutered or “reinterpreted”) would certainly have been disliked by the Rabbis. This dislike might account for the pillar, rather than Helios, that sits in the chariot in the synagogue mosaic from Sepphoris.

Hammath Tiberias seems not to have been controlled by the Sages. Twice in the dedicatory inscriptions we hear of “Severos, student of the illustrious patriarch,” who apparently had considerable power. The relationship between Severos and the patriarch is particularly illuminating. During the first two centuries after the destruction of the Temple a Rabbinic family that traced its lineage to the first-century Sage Hillel became the leaders of the Tannaitic community. By the late second century the leader of this dynasty, Rabbi Judah the Prince (c. 140–225), combined religious authority with political prestige acquired from the Roman authorities that was unmatched among late antique Jews. One well-known adage has it that “from the days of Moses until Rabbi [Judah] we have not found Torah and [worldly] prominence in one place (that is, in one person).” By the fourth century the Rabbis differed greatly with the patriarchate, upon whom they were dependent both economically and for their social position. The patriarchate aligned itself increasingly with the wealthy urban aristocracy rather than with the Rabbinic community. Hammath Tiberias was a synagogue of this urban aristocracy. While not “Rabbinic” in the sense that the Rabbis might have preferred, the community there articulated its “holy place” as a ritual space where Torah and Torah reading were central, where prayer was recited, and where Temple motifs were used in the decoration. Within its walls one could strive and hope, as the inscription says, for “His blessing, amen, amen selah . . . .” Prayer in synagogue inscriptions appears to have been extremely important in Palestinian synagogues. Such biblical phrases as “Amen, Selah” and “Peace unto Israel” appear in Aramaic and in Greek inscriptions at numerous sites and in extant liturgy.
The importance of the Torah within synagogues is reflected in a number of ways. Apses containing the Shrine, often enclosed by chancel screens, developed during the fifth and sixth centuries. The function of these screens is unclear, although they clearly served to demarcate the bema and the ark as a realm of Torah. At Naaran (Fig. 2.13), near Jericho, the sixth-century synagogue is called “holy place” in four inscriptions. The most expansive of these reads:

Remembered for good everyone who donates and contributes, or will [in the future] give in this holy place, whether gold, silver or anything else. Amen. Their portion is in this holy place. Amen.

Three of the inscriptions at Naaran were laid near the Torah Shrine and the fourth inside the main entrance, in line with the Shrine. Located as they were, these inscriptions were most likely to be seen by the community. The cramped accumulation of inscriptions in the ark panel of the mosaic may suggest a pious desire to be near the ark, and possibly near the image of Daniel, who appears in a prayer position before the ark. Daniel’s position in prayer, with hands lifted up to heaven, was common in the ancient world. He appears in this “orans” position in an image from En Samsam in the Golan, and perhaps in the Susiya synagogue mosaic in Judea. The fact that the biblical ancestor is illustrated praying in the synagogue before the ark on the Jerusalem side of the building is significant, emphasizing the importance of prayer there. His position is also important, since we have no images of late antique Jews per se praying. It is quite likely that the image of Daniel parallels a prayer stance that was taken up by Jews in late antique Palestine within their synagogues.

The image of Daniel is but one biblical scene that appears in synagogue art from the Land of Israel. The Binding of Isaac appears at Beth Alpha, Noah’s Ark at Gerasa, and David Playing His Harp at Gaza. Each of these images parallels themes common to Jewish liturgical poetry from late antiquity. These scenes are also well known in contemporary Christian art.

Most of the archaeological sources for synagogues in the Land of Israel are either floor pavements or large architectural members. Few liturgical appurtenances are extant. One of the most important of these is a lamp found near Kefar Maher, a village 5 kilometers east of Acre. (It is now in the Musée de Mariemont in Belgium. This is the first time the piece has been exhibited outside Belgium.) This fifth–sixth-century bronze polycandelon (Fig. 2.14) bears a long dedicatory inscription in Aramaic to the “holy place” of Kefar Hananyah:

This polycandelon [kelilah] . . . to the holy place of Kefar Hananyah. . . . May they be remembered for good. Amen selah, shalom, ptp t.44

Kefar Hananyah is a village on the border of the Upper and Lower Galilee. Dedicatory inscriptions on church lamps such as this were common.45 “Amen, selah, shalom” is reminiscent of floor inscriptions, liturgical texts, and amulet formulae. The two menorahs that appear on the lamp, each flanked by a lulav and a shofar, are also common in ancient Jewish art. Jews used the menorah as a symbol for their minority group, much as Christians used the sign of the cross during this period. It was a reminder of the Temple and of actual synagogue furnishings. An unusual feature of the inscription is the formula “ptp t.”46
Joseph Naveh suggests that it has a parallel in an amulet from the Cairo Genizah that also says "ptp t." If he is right, the lamp (or perhaps the synagogue) seems to be imbued with magic, or perhaps to need protection from it.

Archaeological and literary sources, read together, present a clear portrait of synagogues in the Land of Israel during the late Roman and Byzantine periods. These community centers were ascribed by Jewish communities throughout the Land of Israel with sanctity. The Torah scroll and Temple imagery are ultimately the sources of this sanctity. The sanctity of the synagogue, the Sacred Realm, is an expression of the centrality of this institution in Jewish life during this period.

**DIASPORA SYNAGOGUES, C. 200-700 C.E.**

A Palestinian traveler arriving at one of the Diaspora communities of the Mediterranean basin or perhaps of Babylonia was likely to find numerous powerful and often wealthy communities. Synagogues speckled the landscape, each building reflecting both the uniqueness of the community and those elements that bound all Jews together. Archaeological and literary sources suggest that synagogues served local communities from Spain in the west to North Africa, Bulgaria, and the lands of the Fertile Crescent to the east. Synagogues took various architectural forms during this period, ranging from large basilicas to remodeled houses. The evidence is amazingly uniform in its portrayal of synagogues as places of scriptural study. Temple motifs were very important in the articulation of these ritual spaces, which served as the focal points for often wealthy and acculturated Diaspora communities.
Synagogues often reflected the power of a local community. The synagogues of Philo’s Alexandria during the first century are one example. The massive fourth-sixth-century synagogue of Sardis (Fig. 2.15) in Turkey (Asia Minor) is another. This was no doubt the case in Antioch on the Orontes as well, where Jews had been a powerful minority since Seleucid times. In fact, the synagogue was so powerful in fourth-century Antioch that it drew the vitriolic attention of a major leader of the Christian community, John Chrysostom, who apparently perceived the Jews as a danger to the spiritual well-being of his flock. In a series of eight sermons, this Church Father attempted to dissuade his followers from attending the synagogue during the Jewish New Year (Rosh ha-Shanah), the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and the Festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot) and from participating in other Jewish religious rituals.

John polemicized against those who considered synagogues “holy places” (topon hagion). His diatribe is particularly enlightening since it reflects accurately what we know of synagogues both from the Rabbinic Sages and from archaeological evidence from the Diaspora. His congregation thought the synagogue to be holy for two reasons: because the sacred scrolls that were kept and stored there and because synagogues bore the sanctity of the Jerusalem Temple. So we read:

But since there are some of you who consider the synagogue to be a holy place, we must say a few things to them as well.
Why do you revere this place when you should disdain it, despise it and avoid it?
“The Law and the books of the Prophets can be found there,” you say.
What of it?
You say, “Is it not the case that the books make the place holy?”
Certainly not! This is the reason I especially hate the synagogue and avoid it, that they have the prophets but do not believe in them, that they read these books but do not accept their testimonies. . . .

In fact, synagogue inscriptions from throughout the Mediterranean basin call the synagogue a “holy place.” The earliest, in Greek, which dates to 280–81 C.E., was erected in Stobi in Macedonia. Others have been discovered in Philadelphia and Side in Asia Minor. In Philadelphia in Lydia we hear of the “most holy synagogue of the Hebrews,” and in
Side in Pamphylia the synagogue is called “the most holy first synagogue.” A synagogue at Naro (Hamman Lif) in Tunisia is called a “holy synagogue” in a Latin inscription.

The presence of biblical scrolls within the Jewish holy place was, as John knew, an important feature of the synagogue. Torah Shrines were important elements of Diaspora synagogue architecture from at least the third century. The Torah Shrine of the synagogue at Dura Europos, dated 244–45 C.E., is the keystone of this synagogue, with its beautifully preserved wall paintings that retell Jewish sacred history visually. No doubt similar programmatic painting existed in other synagogues elsewhere in the ancient world. Images of Torah Shrines often appear in Jewish funerary art in ancient Rome, where the doors of the Shrine are often open to reveal the sacred scrolls. A Torah Shrine that originally must have looked much like these images has been excavated in the synagogue of Ostia, the port of Rome.

Particularly important for interpreting John’s remarks is the ancient synagogue of Sardis, northwest of Antioch (Asia Minor). During the second half of the third century a monumental building in the gymnasium complex at Sardis had been handed over to the Jewish community to serve as a synagogue—the largest synagogue to be preserved from antiquity. A model of the structure as it might have looked during the fourth century was made especially for this exhibition by the Sardis Expedition team (see Fig. 2.15). The present interior plan of the building dates to the fourth century, when Jewish renovators installed two shrines on the eastern (Jerusalem) end of the building. An inscription found within the hall refers to the nomophylakion, “the place that protects the Torah.” A second inscription demands pious behavior toward the Scriptures: “Find, open, read, observe.” One scholar argues that this inscription was originally attached to the Torah Shrine.

In fact, the image of a Torah Shrine with its doors open, showing scrolls within, was also uncovered at Sardis. A reproduction of this piece is exhibited in “Sacred Realm” (Cat. 23). A mosaic inscription laid next to a large bema in the center of the hall mentions “a priest [heuron] and sophodidaskalos” (teacher of wisdom, or wise teacher). This synagogue was a place where the teaching of wisdom, undoubtedly Scripture, took place.

Surprisingly, only one biblical verse appears in an inscription stemming from a Diaspora synagogue. Psalm 136:25 is inscribed on a large ashlar discovered in Iznik in ancient Nicaea in Asia Minor (Fig. 2.16). The verse “He who gives bread to all flesh, for his mercy endures forever” was an important element of the liturgy among the Rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia. It is possible that its appearance here is also liturgical. If so, it is the only archaeological confirmation of John’s claim that Jews pronounced a liturgy in Diaspora synagogues at this time.

The associations his parishioners made between synagogues and the Jerusalem Temple were particularly upsetting to John. New Testament texts reflect great respect for and interaction with the Jerusalem Temple by Jesus and his early followers. Christians, beginning with the third-cen-
tury father Eusebius of Caesarea in Palestine, had expressed the sanctity of church build­
ings through resort to Jerusalem Temple imagery. Unlike pagan temples, which were eas­
ily disdained, the Jerusalem Temple was an integral part of Christian tradition. Some
within John’s congregation transferred this attachment to the Temple to synagogues; and
John polemicized against their error, asking:

What sort of ark [kibotos] is it that the Jews now have, where we find no propitiatory, no
tables of the law, no Holy of Holies, no veil, no high priests, no incense, no holocaust, no
sacrifice, none of the things that made the ark of old holy and august?
The relationship that John attacks between the synagogue Torah Shrine and the Ark of the Covenant might have been readily understood by Palestinian Jews, who themselves used Temple imagery without fully equating the Torah ark and the Temple ark. Diaspora Jews might have "pledged guilty" to this notion as well. A third-century Torah Shrine (Fig. 2.17) in the synagogue of Ostia was called a kiebotos in its dedicatory inscription (Fig. 2.18)—the same term John used. At Dura the Torah Shrine is called a beit arona (literally, house of the ark) in one of its dedicatory inscriptions. As in the Land of Israel, arona (ark) here hearkens to the biblical Ark of the Covenant. This relationship is reinforced through the image of the Temple on the upper facade of the shrine and through images of the Ark of the Covenant throughout the wall paintings that look like Torah Shrines. Further substantiating John's testimony is the title of "the priest [heuron] and teacher of wisdom" from Sardis. A priest named Samuel was instrumental in refurbishing the Dura synagogue in 244-45 C.E.. While there were, as John suggests, "no high priests" in ancient synagogues, Jews who traced their lineage back to the Temple priesthood did frequent synagogues.

A relationship between synagogues and the Temple that John does not mention is the presence of seven-branched lamps, reminiscent of the Temple menorah. Inscriptions mark the donation of a seven-branched menorah (heptamyxion in Greek) at both Side and Sardis. In fact, a large fragment of a menorah (Plate X) that was once a meter in breadth was discovered in the Sardis synagogue. Other images of menorahs (Fig. 2.19) from throughout the empire suggest that synagogues were often illuminated and decorated with seven-branched lamp stands.

John considered synagogues to be places of magic. He noted with disdain how sick Christians turned to Jews to be healed by "charms, incantations and amulets." In truth, the accusation of magic is a kind of name calling, part of John's "rhetoric of abuse." Nevertheless, Jews during late antiquity were known for their magical prowess. Terminology drawn from Jewish contexts even became part of the repertoire of interna-
Fig. 2.19. (a) Menorah plaque from Priene (Cat. 25). (b) Plaque with a menorah from the synagogue at Sardis (Cat. 24). (c) Plaque with aedicula with a menorah from Asia Minor (Cat. 26).

tional magical lore. We have seen that amulets were known within Palestinian synagogues during late antiquity. This was true in the Diaspora as well, at least in one synagogue. Two plaques (Fig. 2.20) showing magical eyes decorated the synagogue’s ceiling. E.R. Goodenough describes the iconography of one of these tiles:

[The eye is] being attacked by snakes and three daggers, above which du Mesnil was certain that he could make out the letters IAO. A beetle or scorpion advances to attack the eye from below, while lines down from the eye apparently indicate two streams of tears.  

Goodenough suggests that “labeled Iao, it certainly is not itself the ‘evil eye,’ but a good eye, suffering and hence potent against the evil eye.” The synagogue at Dura Europos seems to have been a place of magical power.
More startling are remains of human "finger" bones that were deposited under the door sill of the synagogue's main door and its right door—its only entrances. Such foundation deposits were also discovered in pagan structures at the site. The synagogue was treated by its community as a kind of Jewish temple. This discovery, which has generally been ignored or downplayed by scholars, is striking in light of biblical purity prohibitions against contact with the dead. According to these laws, which were scrupulously observed by the ancient Rabbis in Palestine and Babylonia, barred priests like Samuel the synagogue leader would have been forbidden from entering the building! Clearly, a notion of sanctity that would have been foreign to the ancient Rabbis is at play here. Though there is a great similarity between the Dura synagogue's wall paintings and Rabbinic tradition, the Jews of Dura lived a religious lifestyle that was not synonymous with that of the Rabbis.

To conclude, the image of synagogues portrayed in the polemics of John Chrysostom accurately reflects the nature of the institution during his time. Synagogues in the Greek- and Latin-speaking Diaspora were often "holy places" where Scripture was read and Temple imagery employed. At least some were places of prayer where magic was carried out. The bones discovered at Dura remind us, however, how little is known about these synagogues and their communities. While the remains and the polemics bear striking similarities, the particulars of each community, and its distinctive religious approach, are virtually unknown to us.

**THE SANCTITY OF BABYLONIAN SYNAGOGUES**

The largest and most powerful Diaspora community during late antiquity resided between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers in a land Jews called Babylonia and we today call Iraq. The origins of this community are traceable to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Nebuchadnezer in 586 B.C.E., when Judeans were taken into the Babylonian Captivity. With the ending of this forced exile by Cyrus in 538 B.C.E., a small number of stalwarts returned to their homeland and rebuilt the Temple. Most, however, remained to build a Jewry that continued to thrive until the 1950s. No archaeological evidence for the history of the synagogue has yet been unearthed in Iraq, and our knowledge of synagogues in Babylonia, which begins during the third century C.E., is dependent almost entirely upon sources preserved in the Babylonia Talmud. Late antique Babylonian synagogues are repre-
sented in this exhibition by early manuscript and printed editions of the Babylonian Talmud
and are our only link to this ancient and important Jewish community.

During the third to fifth century most Babylonian synagogues seem to have been very
much like those that existed in the Land of Israel. They were places where Jews came together
to study Scripture and to pray. Some synagogues, for example, Hutsal and Shaf ve-Yativ in
Nehardea, seem to have had a more central position in the religious lives of Babylonian Jews
than did any of their Palestinian counterparts. It was said that the Divine Presence could be
encountered in these synagogues with greater intensity than anywhere else in the world.

These synagogues are presented in the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 28a–29a, a text
with a polemical intention. It is part of a continuing rivalry between the Palestinian and
Babylonian Rabbis for hegemony within the Jewish world during late antiquity. The first
shot in this discussion is made by a Palestinian Sage, Rabbi Assi, who claims that the sancti-
ity of “synagogues in Babylonia is contingent” upon their continued use. This is in con-
tradistinction to Palestinian synagogues that are destroyed against the will of their commu-
nity, whose “sanctity stands” even when destroyed (Mishnah Megillah 3:3). The
Babylonian retort opens with a claim that the divine presence is no longer in the Land of
Israel at all. It has gone to Babylonia:

It has been taught: Rabbi Simeon son of Yohai said: “Come and see how beloved are Israel in the sight of God; in that in every place to which they were exiled the Shekhinah (Divine Presence) went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, the Shekhinah went with them, as it says: Did I reveal myself to the house of your father in Egypt (1 Sam. 2:27).
They were exiled to Babylonia, the Shekhinah went with them, as it says: For your sake I was sent to Babylon (Isa. 43:14).”
It does not say “He will cause to return,” but “He will return.”
This teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return from the exile.

The anonymous voice of the Talmud then asks: In Babylonia, where is the Divine Presence?

In Babylon where is it?
Rav said: In the synagogue of Hutsal.
Samuel said: In the synagogue of Shaf ve-Yativ in Nehardea...

Having some difficulty with the idea of a movable Divine Presence, the anonymous voice explains “[Both] here and there? Rather, it is sometimes in one, and sometimes in the other.” The text continues with stories of Rabbinic holy men and their experiences within the Divine at Shaf ve-Yativ:

The father of Samuel and Levi were sitting in the synagogue of Shaf ve-Yativ in Nehardea.
The Shekhinah came, they heard the tumult and they rose and left.
Rav Sheshet [who was blind] was once sitting in the synagogue of Shaf ve-Yativ and the Shekhinah came.
He did not leave, and the ministering angels came and threatened him.
He turned to Him and said: Sovereign of the Universe, if one is afflicted and one is not afflicted, who gives way to whom? God therupon said to them: leave him.

The pericope continues with a medley of traditions on the significance of synagogues in Babylonia:

“I have been to them a small sanctuary” (Ez. 11:16).
Rabbi Samuel son of Isaac said: This refers to the synagogues and study houses [which are in Babylonia]...
Rava expounded: "Why is it written: 'Lord you were a habitation [ma'on] for us' (Ps. 90:1)?
Rava said: At first I would study at home and pray in the synagogue. Once I heard this which
David said: "Lord, I love the habitation [ma'on] of your house" (Ps. 26:8). I have studied
only in the synagogue.
Rabbi Eleazar son of Qappar said: In the [messianic] future the synagogues in Babylonia will
be set in place in the Land of Israel. . . .

With this, the Babylonian Talmud has trounced to its own satisfaction Rabbi Assi's claim of
Palestinian superiority. Synagogues in Babylonia are not less holy than their Palestinian
counterparts, and two synagogues are places of special contact with the Divine. In fact, one who
wants to come close to God must come to Babylonia. He is no longer "housed" in Palestine.

This special status of Shaf ve-Yativ within Babylonian Jewry during the eighth and
ninth centuries is expressed in a tradition preserved in the Epistle of Rav Sherira Gaon (d.
998) that reflects upon the origins of Babylonian Jewry during the Babylonian Captivity:

Know that at first, when Israel was exiled in the exile of Jehoiakim and the "craftsmen and
the smiths (2 Kings 24:16)" and a few prophets among them, they came to Nehardea.
Jehoiakim the king of Judea and his company built the synagogue and built its foundations
with stones and dust that they brought with them from the Temple to fulfill that which is
said (in Psalms 102:15): "For your servants hold her stones dear, and cherish her very dust."
They called that synagogue "Shaf ve-Yativ in Nehardea." That is to say that the Temple trav­
eled [from Jerusalem] and rested here.

Babylonian Jews came to see this synagogue as the connecting thread between their lives
in Babylonia and the ancient Temple. A different sort of synagogue than any we have seen
in this study, it is literally built of materials brought from the Temple and in some sym­
bolic way has become the Temple. This mythological depiction reflects a very nonmytho­
logical reality. The synagogue of Shaf ve-Yativ is an incarnation of the power and confi­
dence of the Babylonian Diaspora as it left antiquity behind and entered the Middle Ages.

CONCLUSION

With the close of antiquity the synagogue was the undisputed Sacred Realm for Jews
throughout the Greco-Roman world. Its democratic focus upon community as the locus of
holiness had helped Judaism not only to weather the destruction of the Temple but to
flourish. The focus within the synagogue was the sacred scroll, and the application of
Temple metaphors to synagogues was of central importance in their sacralization.
Through the recitation of elaborate prayers the worshipper could transcend this world and,
for a moment, stand in communion with the Divine. We have interwoven the various
threads representing geographically and chronologically distant Jewish communities dur­
ing antiquity to create a picture of the development of this institution. These threads came
together in a fine tapestry of numerous colors and textures as antiquity came to a close.
S.D. Goitein, the great scholar of the Cairo Genizah, describes popular attitudes toward
the synagogue and Scripture in early medieval (Fatamid) Egypt. In his description we can
sense the success of the ancient synagogue and its legacy to later generations:

For the popular religion . . . the synagogue was a house of meeting both with God and with
one's fellowmen. When the holy ark was opened and the Torah scrolls were exposed to the
eyes of the worshipper, he felt himself transported to the presence of God. . . . 63
LEE I. LEVINE

The Rabbinic Class of Roman Palestine in Late Antiquity

YAD IZHAK BEN-ZVI
JERUSALEM

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
OF AMERICA
Foreword

An in-depth analysis is always the work of a master and the present volume is no exception. Lee I. Levine, Professor of Jewish History and Archaeology at the Hebrew University, has ordered a bewildering mass of scholarship from many fields and languages into a comprehensive study of the rabbinic elite of Palestine in its period of ascent to national religious leadership. Never before had the rabbinic elite of the third and fourth centuries been so fully drawn as to yield a portrait graced by the majestic blend of all available sources—primary and secondary, literary and archeological, Jewish and non-Jewish. The simplicity and incisiveness of the text conceal the end process of distillation. This blend will undoubtedly become the reference point for the generation of scholars to come.

The Jewish Theological Seminary of America is delighted to join hands with Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, one of Israel's leading institutions for research into the history of Eretz Israel, bringing this revised and updated volume to English-reading public only four years after its first appearance in Hebrew. The translation of the best of Israeli scholarship into English contributes handsomely to the cross-fertilization so vital to the burgeoning field of Jewish studies in America. Beyond that, the Seminary has long been in forefront of the scholarly effort to 'disenchant' the study of rabbinics. The practice of undogmatic scholarship lies at the core of its quest for truth and piety.

And finally, Professor Levine is 'vintage Seminary.' A 1965 graduate of its rabbinic school, he learned the philological and comparative approach to rabbinic texts and institutions from the late Professor Saul Lieberman from Chancellor Emeritus Gerson D. Cohen. Onto that solid trunk of textual competence, he later grafted a deep knowledge of Israeli archeology and Greco-Roman history to become the model of a well-rounded scholar of ancient Judaism. Today he serves as the Seminary's Vice Chancellor for Israel Affairs and the Dean of its Seminary of Judaic Studies in Jerusalem. Yet his integrative scholarship continues apace, shedding ever new light on the elusive contours of rabbinic Judaism. The end result is a multidimensional career of bracing productivity and admirable balance.

June 1989

Ismar Schor
The Jewish Theological Seminary, New York
maintained such a central body in the third century is unknown. After R. Judah I (or perhaps his son, Rabban Gamaliel III), there is no mention of such convocations; either the Nasi did not convene his colleagues or rabbinic literature simply omitted all such references, perhaps because the sages no longer played a dominant role in them. The latter alternative is possible, but we cannot be sure.

IX. WAS THERE A SANHEDRIN IN PALESTINE DURING THE TALMUDIC ERA?

It has generally been assumed that during the talmudic period there was a central council of sages that met on a regular basis and wielded significant authority on a countrywide scale. Mantel, for example, presents this view in the following manner:

After the destruction of the Temple, the religious Sanhedrin was reconvened in Jabneh, and under the presidency of the nasi it also became the supreme political instrument for all the Jews of the Roman Empire. When Judaea was destroyed as a result of the failure of Bar Kochba, the Sanhedrin moved to Galilee. At first it met in Usha, then in nearby Shefaram, subsequently in Judah ha-Nasi’s time in Bet She’arim and Sepphoris, and in the end in Tiberias. The Romans apparently withdrew their recognition of the Sanhedrin when they dissolved the patriarchate. 165

However, in contrast to the pre-70 era, for which there is a wealth of material regarding an institution called the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, 166 data concerning such a body in the post-Bar-Kokhba era is virtually non-existent. The name “Sanhedrin” almost never appears in accounts of this later period. Terms which may conceivably reflect such an institution are rare, even when limited to the late first or early second centuries, i.e., the period of Yavneh. Under Rabban Gamaliel, Yavneh was clearly a center of rabbinic and Patriarchal activity, although the scope and degree of authority wielded there are far from clear. 167 In the post-Bar-Kokhba era, we read of conclaves held at Usha and Beth Rimmon, but these were apparently emergency meetings only and the authority of those assembled was at most of a moral and religious nature. Contrary to what is often maintained in scholarly literature, such gatherings and a supposed national institution representing the entire Jewish community have little in common.

With regard to the talmudic period, our sources make no mention of any kind of supreme political, religious or judicial (rabbinic) body. Terms such as va’ad, bet ha-va’ad, metivta, yeshiva, bet midrash, or even pirqa and havura (and its many derivatives) are often understood as synonymous with such an amoraic institution. 168 In fact, they appear to be nothing more than terms referring to local academies, courts or study groups. 169 In his will, R. Judah I referred to a Patriarchal council. The judiciary appointments mentioned in several sources were either on the local level or were connected with the Patriarch. They had nothing to do with an all-encompassing political-


166. See Mantel, Studies, pp. 180-181, n. 34: “We have noted above that in every other respect the authority of the Sanhedrin remained intact in Jabneh, and, no doubt, in Usha, and elsewhere, until the death of the last Nasi of the House of Hillel, and even afterwards, as long as there were ordained rabbis and the Sanhedrin survived, even under other names, such as yeshibah, pirka and habarah...” See also Schwartz, “Appeals,” pp. 191-193, 197-197.


168. See Mantel, Studies, pp. 180-181, n. 34: “We have noted above that in every other respect the authority of the Sanhedrin remained intact in Jabneh, and, no doubt, in Usha, and elsewhere, until the death of the last Nasi of the House of Hillel, and even afterwards, as long as there were ordained rabbis and the Sanhedrin survived, even under other names, such as yeshibah, pirka and habarah...” See also Schwartz, “Appeals,” pp. 191-193, 197-197.


See also B Sanhedrin 31b; J Sanhedrin 3, 2, 21a; and the comments of the Tosafot in B Bav a Qamma 112b, beginning תשתוע. The use of the terms bet din gadol and bet din qatan by R. Yose regarding Tiberias proves that the reference is to two local institutions and his preference for one over the other, the reason for which is not at all clear. See also Sh. Albeck, Law Courts in Talmudic Times (Ramat Gan, 1980), pp. 117-122, esp. p. 118 (Hebrew).
judicial rabbinic institution. Throughout the third and fourth centuries, there is no allusion either to a convocation of leading sages or to any kind of officially recognized body. In short, there is simply no evidence of a countrywide rabbinic framework with a recognized leadership, a clearly defined organizational structure or authoritative prerogatives.

Terms such as sanhedrin or bet din gadol (supreme or high court) are never used with regard to a third- or fourth-century institution. The only exceptions to this rule are two closely related sources which are invariably invoked to "confirm" the existence of such an institution. In reality, however, these sources are irrelevant and only serve to reinforce our assertion. Use of the term sanhedrin here is anachronistic and tendentious, and has no historical basis whatsoever in the third century:

"...six exiles, as it is written (Isaiah 26:5): 'For he has brought low those who dwell high up. He has humbled the secure city, humbled it to the ground, levelled it with the dust.'"

R. Judah b. Idi quoted R. Yohanan: "The Divine presence traveled ten journeys as learned from Scripture and corresponding to them the Sanhedrin was exiled (ten times) as learned from tradition..."

170. According to S. Hoenig, The Great Sanhedrin (Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 10-11; idem, "The Sanhedrin," JQR 52 (1962), 339-340. A possible exception to this rule is the statement of R. Abba referring to the existence of a bet din which made judiciary appointments together with the Nasi (J Sanhedrin 1, 2, 19a). However, it is unclear whether this body was an independent rabbinic group or, as appears more likely, a semi-autonomous court operating under Patriarchal auspices.

171. On the terms sanhedrin or bet din gadol (supreme or high court) are never used with regard to a third- or fourth-century institution. The only exceptions to this rule are two closely related sources which are invariably invoked to "confirm" the existence of such an institution. In reality, however, these sources are irrelevant and only serve to reinforce our assertion. Use of the term sanhedrin here is anachronistic and tendentious, and has no historical basis whatsoever in the third century.

172. For a recent suggestion identifying "Hanut" with the basilica on the Temple Mount, see B. Mazar, "The Royal Stoa in the Southern Part of the Temple Mount," PAAJR 46-47 (1979-80), 381-386.

173. See Mantel, Studies, pp. 140-174.
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Yohanan says: “And thence they are destined to be redeemed, as it is written (Isaiah 52:2): ‘Arise, shake off the dust, sit (on your throne, Jerusalem).’”174

Migrations of the Sanhedrin in the post-70 era are mentioned in a second source as well. In addressing the question as to why Zebulun was destined to be uprooted from Judah and reestablished in Zebulun:

יַבּוֹלֵין לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (רָאשָׁית הַמִּסְרָא) וְרַמְצָתוֹ וְיֵשָׁרָאֵל, חוּדֶּשׁ וּקְשָׁרָאֵל. זהignal סֶפֶרֶךְ זְבוּלֻן זָאדָר נֵכָל אֲשֶׁר קָשָׁרָאֵל, נָהֲלָי יֵשָׁרָאֵל וְזְבוּלֻן שִׁלָּוְתֶל. דֶּא וְרַמְצָתוֹ לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲשֶׁר קָשָׁרָאֵל נָהֲלָי יֵשָׁרָאֵל וְלָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי לִפְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נָהֲלָי לָי L

“Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore” (Genesis 49:13) in his commerce, and Issachar in his Torah. Together they are in partnership in this world and the next. Another interpretation: “Zebulun by the seashore,” why did Jacob first bless Zebulun and only afterwards Issachar? Was not Issachar older and thus worthy of being blessed first? Rather (God) foresaw that the Temple would be destroyed and the Sanhedrin would be uprooted from the tribe of Judah and would be relocated in that of Zebulun. At first when the Sanhedrin was exiled, it resided in Yavneh, and from Yavneh to Usha, and from Usha to Shefar'am, and from Shefar'am to Beth She'arim, and from Beth She'arim to Sepphoris, and Sepphoris was located in the portion of Zebulun. Only afterward did it move to Tiberias.175

Thus, our only evidence for the existence of a third-century Sanhedrin comes from the above sources and from two contemporary Tiberian sages who claimed that such an institution currently existed in their city. Despite the fact that these lists of centers and of the seats of the Patriarch are significant and precise, the use of the title sanhedrin to describe such institutional frameworks is historically worthless and should be viewed as a polemical assertion regarding the superiority of the local Tiberian academy. Such a conclusion is based on the following considerations:

1. The two traditions disagree with respect to the number of “exiles” (six or ten).176
2. The numbers six and ten are suspect; in point of fact, they are typological and midrashic and, as such, appear extensively throughout ancient Jewish literature.177
3. R. Yohanan’s statement is distinctly homiletical: the journeys of the Sanhedrin are intentionally parallel to those of the Shekhina (Divine presence) in the desert.
4. The locales mentioned are more indicative of the seats of the Patriarch than of any specific rabbinic body. Rabbis may have gathered in these places from time to time, but usually only at the behest of the Patriarch.178
5. In the absence of other references to a sanhedrin in the talmudic period, it would appear likely that both R. Yohanan and R. Elazar were not arguing that there was in fact a “Sanhedrin” in Tiberias in their day, but rather that the authority of the Sanhedrin of old was now transferred effectively to their academy in Tiberias.179 In fact, they saw themselves as the legitimate successors of the religious leadership among the Jews in the post-70 period and that the Tiberian academy is the continuation and rightful heir of the

174. B Rosh Hashana 31a-b.

176. Moreover, even the number “10” in the B Rosh Hashana tradition is problematic. In the Munich ms. as well as in Yalqut, the phrase “from Usha to Yavneh and from Yavneh to Usha” is omitted; cf. DS, IV, p. 88. Epstein (Introduction to the Mishnah, II, p. 1198), following Aggadot ha-Talmud, suggests adding two other stages for the pre-70 period—Hammam and Hel—a suggestion not without its own difficulties. See Mantel’s proposed reconstruction, Studies, p. 144.
178. The notable exception to this rule was Usha, important since it was the home of R. Judah b. Ilai (Song of Songs Rabba 2, 5). The Nasi’s move to Tiberias in the mid-third century was probably due to political and communal considerations and not to a preference for one academy over another. On this issue, see Y. Cohen, “The Time and Cause of the Transfer of the Patriarchate to Tiberias,” Zion 39 (1974), 114-122 (Hebrew).
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Jerusalem Sanhedrin. More than this cannot be derived from what is, in actuality, a single isolated tradition preserved in two versions.

(6) Finally, several sources originating in the late second-early third centuries make very explicit reference to the termination of the Sanhedrin in 70. The Mishna states: “When the Sanhedrin disappeared, singing ceased at wedding feasts.”\(^{180}\) Here the Mishna speaks neither of migration nor of banishment, but of cessation. No less explicit is the comment of R. Hiyya:

םירש שוחיט בן המקדש את על פ_sdkל ממדירא, ראבך מירחת לא בטל.

Since the Temple was destroyed, even though the Sanhedrin was abolished, the four types of death penalties remained in force.\(^{181}\)

These sources clearly attest to the fact that the Sanhedrin was no longer functional, not even in an altered form, in the second and third centuries.

One other, later source ought to be noted in this regard. The Theodosian Code (16, 8, 29, dated May 30, 429) preserves the following decree:

The same Augustuses to Johannes, Count of the Sacred Imperial Largesses.

The primates of the Jews, who are appointed in the sanhedrins of the two Palestines or who live in the other provinces, shall be compelled to pay what they have received as tribute after the extinction of the patriarchate. But in the future, annual tribute shall be collected at the peril of the primates from all synagogues, under compulsion of the palatines and in the amount that the patriarchs formerly demanded in the name of crown gold. By skilful inquiry you shall ascertain what that amount is, and whatever was accustomed to be contributed to the patriarchs in the western part of the Empire shall now be paid to Our largesses.\(^{182}\)

Clearly, two institutions called sanhedrin existed in mid-fifth century Palestine, however their nature and connection with earlier institutions of the same name are unclear. Even if there had been some sort of rabbinic sanhedrin earlier, its functions would have been far different from those described in our fifth-century source. The appointment of a community administrator by the sages, for example, would have been almost inconceivable before (see below), as this prerogative belonged to the Patriarch from the second or third to the fifth centuries. Now, with the disappearance of the office, this responsibility was transferred to the local sanhedrins, which ought not be associated with any presumed convocation of sages.\(^{183}\)

X. PLURALISM AND TENSION AMONG THE SAGES

The talmudic period is generally characterized by the emergence of a number of foci of rabbinic activity. The main centers were located in four of the larger cities of Roman Palestine—Tiberias, Sepphoris, Caesarea, and Lydda (Diospolis).\(^{184}\) Most of the known sages were associated with one of these cities, as are various groups of rabbis known by a generic name, e.g., the Rabbis of Caesarea\(^{185}\) or the Elders of the South (i.e., Lydda).\(^{186}\) Even groups of sages in smaller communities might be similarly designated, as, for example, the Rabbis of Naveh,\(^{187}\) or Those of the Academy of R. Yannai.\(^{188}\) Such designations were unknown in tannaitic times. It would appear that following the death of R. Judah 1, a number of his disciples-colleagues established permanent academies in various locales: R. Hanina b. Hama

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183. See Linder, Jews and Judaism, pp. 233-234; idem, “Roman Imperial Government,” pp. 118-126. The reference to a sixth-century sanhedrin in the medieval tract Seder 'Olam Zutta is likewise of little value to our discussion. In this source (as opposed to the Theodosian Code) it is not even clear whether such an institution existed in the late Byzantine period; the use of the term sanhedrin in medieval Babylonian and Palestinian academies is well known, and these terms may very well be anachronistic. See S. Poznanski, “Éphraim ben Schemaria de Fostat et l’académie Palestinienne,” REJ 48 (1904), 148. Finally, some have interpreted the reference to bet din in R. Abba’s reconstruction of the history of appointments (J Sanhedrin 1, 19a) as a sanhedrin. It is more likely that this is a reference to a court under Patriarchal auspices with significant rabbinic participation. Cf. below, Levine, “The Jewish Patriarch,” pp. 666-668.
185. Levine, Caesarea, pp. 95-97.
CULTURES of the JEWS
A New History
EDITED BY
David Biale
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In the context of a lengthy discussion on the nature, merits, and handicaps associated with the ongoing scattering of the Jewish people, a dispersion for which no imminent conclusion was visible on the horizon, the Babylonian Talmud offers an ingenious observation on its own community's unique predicament. More than a millennium prior to the redaction of the Babylonian rabbinic corpus, vast numbers of Judeans had been transplanted to lands east of the Euphrates River. The majority of these were captives, a consequence of the initial Babylonian capture of Jerusalem in 597 B.C.E. and the deportation to Babylonia at that time of the Judaean king Yehoyakhin. Another wave of captives arrived shortly afterward, following the second conquest and final destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple by King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C.E. Why, the Talmud innocently asks, were the Israelites exiled to Babylonia rather than to any other land? Of course, the modern historian's response to such a question would simply be to point to precisely those events just cited. But in the context of rabbinic theodicy and an interpretation of history as the stage upon which a saga of providential causality was being played out, it made all the sense in the world to inquire as to the implications of a Babylonian setting for Jewish captivity and communal rebuilding. And thus the Talmud proceeds to explain why, in fact, it was Babylonia that was chosen: "Because He [God] sent them [back] to their mother’s house. To what might this be likened? To a man angered at his wife. To where does he send her—to her mother’s house!" (BT Pesahim 87b).

The Jewish people, we are thus informed, were not merely removed to a random land of captivity but were benevolently transferred to what might be considered their original homeland, inasmuch as their patriarch, Abraham, had his roots in those very same lands east of the Euphrates. Implicit in this statement is not merely the theodetic observation that God did not randomly exile the nation for its sins, but also that they were granted haven in the one territory uniquely qualified to receive them in light of their ancient roots therein, thereby affording them, even while uprooted, a sense of comfort and familiarity rather than the expected alienation of captivity.

Familiarity with an ancient "homeland," however, need not presuppose an as-
similatory process resulting from an identification with the local culture or civilization. Ironically, it would be precisely in this land of ancient roots, albeit imagined ones, that the Jewish community would evince the greatest degree of cultural autonomy, certainly when compared with parallel processes played out in communities west of the Euphrates, namely those situated within the political and cultural boundaries of the Hellenistic-Roman world. In time the sages of Babylonia would come to be recognized as the outstanding Jewish intellectuals of their day, vying with and ultimately surpassing their colleagues in Palestine. The achievements of this community would determine for almost a millennium central elements of a Jewish self-identity and religious expression, as well as the basic literary curriculum and legal code embraced by Jews throughout the world. If ever there were a communal success story in the annals of Jewish history, it was the meteoric ascendancy of the Babylonian rabbinic community in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages to a position of primacy within the Jewish world. It is to this story that the present chapter addresses itself.

A good place to begin our tale—and certainly one that the sages of Babylonia themselves would have recommended—is an event that took place some 800 years prior to the first appearance of a “rabbinic community” there. In the fourth year of the reign of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah (i.e., 594 B.C.E.), and just a few years before the final Babylonian onslaught and destruction of First-Temple Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter to those of his countrymen who had already been exiled to Babylon some years earlier. In that letter, God, through the prophet, beseeches them:

Build houses and settle down. Plant gardens and eat their produce. Marry and beget sons and daughters, in order that you may increase in number there rather than decrease. Seek the welfare of the country to which I have deported you, and pray on its behalf to God, for on its welfare your own depends. (Jeremiah 29:5-7)

One would be hard pressed to find another example in ancient Israelite history in which a community heeded the words of the prophet so scrupulously and in such detail. Not only were Jews destined to thrive demographically and economically in this new land of captivity, but ultimately even the latter part of Jeremiah’s exhortation, bearing a decidedly political significance, would achieve a fruition of sorts with the formulation by Samuel, a third-century Babylonian sage, of the well-known statement that “the law of the kingdom is law” (dina demalkhuta dina). Although that principle appears in the Babylonian Talmud within a more narrowly defined legal context, recognizing the government’s le-
gitimate right to enforce the collection of taxes and customs and to determine legal frameworks for establishing land-ownership, the fact is that it ultimately attained a sweeping political significance for the totality of Jewish Diaspora life. In rabbinc eyes, however, past and present tend to coalesce, and thus in time the rabbinc community of Babylonia would point to those earliest biblical days of captivity as the first links in an unbroken chain of enhanced Jewish existence “by the rivers of Babylon,” claiming that all the requisite trappings of a vital and self-sufficient community were transported from Jerusalem to Babylon even prior to the destruction of the First Temple.

And yet, if the great success story begins at that earliest of stages, one cannot ignore the fact that the very same story also represents one of the great riddles of Jewish history. To be sure, only a small portion of the Babylonian Jewish community participated in the “return to Zion” during the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E., while the vast majority remained in the eastern Diaspora and ultimately grew to become second in size only to Palestinian Jewry among all the other concentrations of Jews throughout the world. But though they grew into a community of “countless myriads whose number cannot be ascertained,” the Jews of Babylonia would at the same time recede into a shadowy background, with practically nothing to be heard from them for almost 750 years. Throughout the Second Temple period (516 B.C.E.-70 C.E.), and indeed for the entire tannaitic era of post-Temple Palestine as well (70-220 C.E.), this community provides us with no meaningful information on its inner development, nor do we possess any significant literary product from its midst. Inasmuch as Jewish historiography in Second Temple times focuses almost exclusively on the affairs of Jews situated within the Hellenistic-Roman spheres of influence (primarily in Judaea, but also in major Jewish centers such as Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt), allusions to Jews beyond the Euphrates are almost always linked to events in the west: thus, for example, we hear only fleetingly of the reception granted the captured high priest of Jerusalem, Hyrcanus II, by the Jews of Babylonia in the wake of the Parthian invasion of Judaea in 40 B.C.E. Expressions of the commitment of Babylonian Jewry to the Temple of Jerusalem, exemplified by their annual monetary contributions as well as by their potential for armed intervention in the face of any perceived Roman tampering with the nature of the Jewish cultic center (as evinced in the days of Gaius Caligula), all find their way into the writings of Josephus and Philo, but even this information does not really shed any light on the communal structures and cultural character of the Babylonian community.

Nor does the appearance on the Judaean scene, beginning with the reign of King Herod (37-4 B.C.E.), of various Babylonian personalities such as Hillel the
Elder, really inform us about the nature of contemporaneous Babylonian Jewry, notwithstanding the claims of numerous Jewish historians of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The historical Hillel, it appears, is just one of the casualties of the vigorous controversy between liberal and traditional representatives of nineteenth-century Jewish Wissenschaft, many of whom frequently rendered ancient Jewish history a battleground for their own contemporary disputes. In the case of Babylonia, the paucity of any hard information from Second Temple times enabled liberal opponents of Jewish Orthodoxy to claim that the Babylonian Talmud—the ultimate legal authority in traditionalist eyes—was in fact conceived in a land at first devoid of ancient Jewish tradition and instead caught up in the “superstitions” of the Persian East. Orthodox Jewish historiography would respond by projecting a “Torah-oriented” society among Babylonian Jews as far back as the earliest days of captivity.

In similar fashion, Hillel was cited by nineteenth-century writers as proof either of Babylonia’s deep-rooted Torah orientation or of the total lack of Torah-knowledge in that land, which therefore required that Hillel “come up” to Palestine if he wished to engage in the study of Torah. In truth, nothing on the nature of Second Temple Babylonian Jewry can really be gleaned from the Hillel stories. It was precisely this lack of any real information that enabled both sides to play fast and loose with it. All this, then, tends to enhance the riddle. What were the objective political and social conditions that contributed to the fashioning of the Babylonian Jewish community, even as it remained out of close touch with the rest of world Jewry, and what were the factors that rendered the community so special in its own eyes, affording it a self-assuredness that determined its behavior toward surrounding cultures, on the one hand, and a distinct assertiveness in its relations with other Jewish communities—most notably that of Palestine—on the other?

In strictly political terms, the Jews of Babylonia were ruled over and influenced by a succession of kingdoms, each of which cultivated its own unique cultural environment. The Babylonian kingdom that originally transported the Judaean captives to their new surroundings was conquered shortly afterward by the Persian Achaemenid monarchy, under whose rule those Judeans who so desired were allowed to return to the areas around Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple. We have, however, no substantial information on the nature of Jewish life under the Persians, and the same holds true for the subsequent period, when the bulk of Alexander the Great’s eastern conquests came under Hellenistic-Selucid rule (ca. 323–140 B.C.E.). What is noteworthy, however, is that this Seleucid rule over Babylonia marks the last chapter in ancient history during which the Jews of Palestine and their brethren east of the Euphrates were ruled by the same
BABYLONIAN RABBINIC CULTURE

monarchy, a political reality to be reestablished only in the wake of the Islamic conquests of the East. The prolonged disintegration of the Seleucid Empire, beginning in the mid-second century b.c.e., would ultimately find the two Jewish centers separated again: Babylonian Jewry found itself under Parthian rule for over 300 years, until the fall of the Parthian kingdom to the Sassanian rulers in the early third century c.e.—that is, precisely at the dawn of the Babylonian rabbinic era. The Jews of Palestine, meanwhile, would experience two generations of political independence under the Hasmonaean priests (141–63 B.C.E.), to be followed by the Roman conquest of the land and the establishment therein of successive regimes, all ultimately controlled by the Roman state.

It was arguably in this prolonged state of communal separation that much of the self-image of Babylonian Jewry may have been determined. The Parthian Empire differed both from its Achaemenid and Seleucid predecessors, and even more so from its Sassanian successor, in that it never constituted a unified empire under strong central rule. Instead it functioned as a weak confederation of vassal states whose loyalty to the Parthian sovereign was put to the test only during major confrontations with external threats, primarily in the form of Roman legions. But though usually successful in amassing great military force to thwart Roman designs, the Parthians evinced no zeal for the establishment of a unified social and political order, based on foundations that might have served to create a more homogeneous society. Particularly noteworthy is the lack of a formal state religion under the Parthians. While they did recognize Iranian deities and also fostered Zoroastrianism, this was never cultivated to the extent and with the dedication shown by their Sassanian successors. In fact, Hellenistic culture also served as a counter-influence in the Parthian court, and although this may have been a superficial legacy from the Seleucid period, it nevertheless testifies to the lack of any predominant political or cultural enterprise on the part of the Parthian monarchy. What emerged was a loosely knit confederation with a decidedly feudal nature, and although this tended to weaken the kingdom as a whole, it also served as a unifying and strengthening factor for the individual ethnic groups within the empire, allowing them to cultivate a sort of tribal autonomy as long as the sovereignty of the Parthian ruler was officially recognized.

Moreover, if the various ethnic communities managed to achieve a significant degree of political and military potency, they were in the advantageous position of being able to offer their services to the king should these be required for purposes of subduing rebellious elements within the empire. Josephus provides us with two stories relating to Jews or the Jewish community in first-century Parthia. In both cases, the king was willing to grant elements within the community—be they renegade Jewish brothers who set up a short-lived pirate...
state, or recent converts to Judaism from among a local royal dynasty—an enhanced degree of regional autonomy in exchange for their support against all sorts of local satraps and strongmen who might be harboring mutinous aspirations. Although the novelistic and fictionalized elements in both narratives are apparent, they nevertheless represent an accurate picture of a decentralized environment, in which Jews were free to run their own lives unhindered by external political pressures and, even more important, were not engulfed by a pervasive, attractive, and assimilatory cultural presence so familiar to the Jews of the Hellenistic world. Given such an atmosphere, we can appreciate the concern expressed by representatives of the early rabbinic community with the fall of the Parthian kingdom and the ascendancy of the Sassanians. Upon the death of the last Parthian king, Artabanus V (ca. 224 C.E.), we are told that the renowned sage Rav proclaimed: “The bond is snapped” (BT Avodah Zara 10b).

**RABBINIC BABYLONIA: THE INTERSECTION OF PAST AND PRESENT**

It was upon this extended period of communal autonomy that the rabbis of talmudic Babylonia would graft their own unique contribution to the social and cultural self-image of Babylonian Jewry. On the most basic level, Babylonian Jews even mildly conversant with biblical tradition would be aware that they dwelt not only in one of the ancient lands of the Bible but literally in the cradle of earliest biblical civilization. For instance, they were able to identify in their midst two of the four tributaries of the river that flowed out of Eden, namely the Tigris “which flows east of Assyria” (Genesis 2:14) and the Euphrates. It is hardly surprising that rabbis residing in the very setting of the opening chapters of Genesis identified sites mentioned in that book with Babylonian or Persian cities of their own day. Thus Genesis 10:11 tells us: “From that land [Bavel] he [Nimrod] went into Assyria [Ashur] and built Nineveh and Rehovoth-Ir and Kalah,” and the Talmud records: “Rav Joseph taught: ‘Ashur is Sileq [Seleucia]... Nineveh is what it says, Rehovoth-Ir is Perat de-Meshan, Kalah is Perat de-Borsif’” (BT Yoma 10a). Another example relates, “And the mainstays of his [Nimrod’s] kingdom were Babylon, Ereke, Akkad and Kalneh” (Genesis 10:10)—[they are] Edessa and Nisbis and Ktesiphon.”

In similar fashion, even though the giants Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai lived, according to Numbers 13:22, in the vicinity of Hebron, this did not prevent the sages in Babylonia from pointing to three islands in the Euphrates as having been built by them: “Ahiman built Anat, Sheshai built Alush, Talmai built Talbush” (BT Yoma 10a).
The game of identifying ancient biblical cities with nearby and familiar sites thus transcended a simple form of geographical exegesis, because it effectively put the exegete himself—together with his audience—on the biblical map as well. But this was not just a process of biblical “immersion”; the intersecting of past and present took on a far greater significance when the past was not merely “biblical” but related to ancient Israelite (i.e., “Jewish”) history as well. If, as we noted in the opening to this chapter, Abraham was perceived as being not just the first Hebrew but also a “Babylonian,” how much more meaningful were those attempts at identifying sites connected with King Nimrod—inasmuch as rabbinic lore described how that ruler was responsible for the incarceration of “our patriarch” Abraham. A heightened sense of continuity with the biblical narrative, as well as an immediate link to the historical arena of that narrative, was the natural consequence. Nothing could now prevent the rabbis from identifying the very location of our patriarch’s incarceration: “Rav said: ‘Our father Abraham was imprisoned ten years, three in Kuta and seven in Kartu.’ ... Rav Hisda said: ‘Ibra ze’ira [the small crossing] de Kuta—that is the Ur of the Chaldeans.’ ”

Once these ancient biblical sites became “known” to the rabbis, this information could be introduced into their halakhic discourse as well: “Rav Hamnuna said: He who sees the lion’s den or the furnace should say: Blessed is the one who performed miracles to our fathers on this spot” (BT Berakhot 57b).

Of course, the sages were well aware of the events that introduced the descendants of Abraham into the lands east of the Euphrates. Here, too, the attempt would be made to juxtapose past and present:

R. Abba b. Kahana said: What is meant by “and the King of Assyria exiled Israel to Assyria and he settled them in Halah and along the Havor, and the River Gozan and the towns of Media” (2 Kings 18:11)? Halah is Helwan, Havor is Hadyab [Adiabene], the River Gozan is Ginzak, the towns of Media—this is Hamadan and its neighbors, and some say Nehavand and its neighbors. (BT Kiddushin 72a; BT Yevamot 16b–17a)

The focus of all this exegetical activity, if our analysis is correct, was not the Bible and a need for up-to-date knowledge of its geography but rather the self-image of the Jewish community of Babylonia in Late Antiquity. What we have seen up to now suggests yet another way for Jews to understand their position and status in a “foreign” land, where they are engulfed by an alien society and culture. Erich Gruen in his chapter in this volume has described the unique coming to terms of Hellenistic Judaism with the various strains of Greek culture. The
nature of that environment, however, was totally different from what we have encountered in the East. The role of Hellenistic culture was so overpowering in countries such as Egypt that Jews—even if they were to preserve and perpetuate their culture—would have to do this through the media and the methods of that pervasive culture. A Jewish author in Egypt such as Artapanus (second century B.C.E.) would attempt to straddle both worlds—that of his Jewish roots alongside his Egyptian cultural environment—by evincing what the eminent classical historian Arnaldo Momigliano has referred to as "something like Egyptian patriotism." Artapanus could thus recognize that the land of Egypt is the cradle of civilization but would claim that much of that culture was brought there by his Hebraic progenitors: Abraham taught astrology to the Egyptian king, Joseph introduced order into the country's economy, and Moses "the teacher of Orpheus... invented boats and bricklaying machines, weapons for Egypt and tools for irrigation and war, philosophy, and also divided the land into thirty-six districts, assigning to each its own deity[!]... and thus Moses came to be loved by the masses and respected by the priests, and came to be known by the name of Hermes."

The rabbis of Babylonia seem to have taken a different approach. For them, "belonging" did not so much require a cultural accommodation, and certainly this was not the legacy they received from the Parthian period and its decidedly amenable atmosphere of cultural and ethnic diversity. To be sure, that atmosphere would undergo definite changes during the Sassanian period, and we will address these shortly. But the first order of business seems to have been affording the local Jewish community a sense of "home while abroad," and this was achieved at least in part by creating a sense of familiarity with the physical environment. Jews have roots there that go back to their ultimate patriarch, and possess a literary tradition in which the surrounding geography plays a major role. In total contradistinction to the path taken by Hellenistic Judaism in Egypt, this sort of "belonging" does not require an accommodation with the surrounding culture or a meaningful social interaction, and it might even encourage a certain insularity. With such impeccable documentation of their inherent links to their surroundings, the urgency of evincing cultural ties toward that same end was significantly reduced.

ANTiquity AND CONTINuity: INTERCOMMUNAL RABBINIC IMPLICATIONS

Creating a sense of local antiquity for Babylonian Jews may have been only part of the rabbinic agenda, because the Babylonian rabbis were involved in a different confrontation with their contemporaries in Palestine. The stakes here were
particularly high: of all the Diaspora communities in Late Antiquity, only the Babylonian one embraced the new (post-70 C.E.) Jewish devotion to Torah-study as a religious value and personal calling, a process frequently attributed to the sages at Yavneh following the destruction of the Second Temple and considered by some to be their singular greatest achievement. By the third century C.E., a parallel movement appears in Babylonia, probably drawing at first on the emigration of central rabbinic figures from Palestine but ultimately claiming to be on a par with their colleagues in the Holy Land. But that of course was precisely the problem: Babylonia was not “the Holy Land,” and would that fact alone not automatically relegate its spiritual leadership to a secondary or subservient role within the rabbinic world?

It was precisely in this context that the Babylonian Jews’ links with antiquity would come to play a second major role. To be sure, this process did not take place overnight, and the vigor with which the Babylonian rabbis asserted themselves vis-à-vis their Palestinian counterparts hinged to no small degree on political and religious developments over which the sages had no control whatsoever. The earliest roots of the community, we have been told, were to be found not only in the patriarchal biblical narrative but, more immediately, in the mass removal of the Judaean population just prior to, and in the direct aftermath of, the destruction of the First Temple. These two waves of captives, we have already seen, were the recipients of Jeremiah’s instructions regarding proper behavior while abroad, but just prior to the text of that communication the author of Jeremiah 29 actually spells out precisely the addressees of his letter: “To the priests, the prophets, the rest of the elders of the exile community, and to all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had exiled from Jerusalem to Babylon—after King Yekhoniah, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the officials of Judah and Jerusalem, and the craftsmen and the smiths had left Jerusalem” (29:1–2). This, then, was no rabble or riffraff that set up shop in Babylonia but rather the most cultivated and esteemed strata of Judaean society. Centuries later, this fact was crucial, for it suggested that the captivity was the ancient repository of Judaean tradition as well. To the rabbinic ear, the term “elders” (zekenim) implied sagacity, and in similar fashion the “craftsmen and the smiths” of Jerusalem would be taken as an allusion to Torah scholars who were deported with providential care that a foundation for learning be established in Babylonia at the earliest stages of captivity.”

Indeed, this projection of the present into the past went even beyond the world of Torah and came to encompass all the communal institutions of Babylonian Jewry. The most prominent beneficiary of this process would be the Babylonian exilarch (resh galuta). Although we possess no hard evidence for the existence of this office prior to the late second or early third century C.E.,”
the exilarchate could now claim that its Davidic pedigree went all the way back to the exiled House of Yehoyakhin (Yekhoniah). Even the synagogues of Babylonia would benefit from this bestowal of antiquity on communal institutions. Having established that the captives found solace in the fact that they were accompanied into exile by the shekhinah (divine spirit), the rabbis naturally inquired as to the precise location of God's presence: "Abaye said: In the synagogue of Huzal and in the synagogue of Shaf ve-Yatib in Nehardea" (BT Megillah 29a). By post-talmudic times, claims for such continuity were enhanced even more, and Rav Sherira Gaon (tenth century) informs us that the synagogue of Shaf ve-Yatib in Nehardea was actually built from the rubble of the destroyed First Temple, brought to Babylonia by the earliest wave of captives.22

It should be apparent, by now, how different the cultivation in Babylonia of this perception of “belonging” to the local environment was from that employed by the Jews of the Hellenistic world. But these same processes could be adapted by the rabbis of Babylonia in their contest over spiritual and legal authority with the sages of Palestine. The Babylonian position would be enhanced even more by claims to a purity of national pedigree that exceeded even that of Palestinian Jewry (the rest of world Jewry was of course a distant third).23 The most blatant statement to this effect was the claim that Ezra rendered Babylonia “like pure sifted flour” by taking with him to the Land of Israel all the doubtful or not-quite-pure elements of the Jewish population.24 It is for this reason, we are told, that “all countries are an admixture (with impure lineage) in comparison to Eretz Israel, and Eretz Israel is an admixture (in comparison) to Babylonia.”25 Indeed, to be sure one was marrying a “pure” Babylonian Jew, a person would have to make inquiries on the geographical background of a potential spouse, and this procedure actually led to the talmudic demarcation of boundaries for “Jewish Babylonia.”26 What ensued was an enhanced reverence for the physical “land” of Babylonia, a thinly disguised replication of the very attitude maintained by the Jews of Palestine toward their “Holy Land.” Indeed, if burial in the Land of Israel had become by the third century yet another expression of devotion and religious piety,27 can we be surprised at finding those who claim that even burial in Babylonia is equivalent to burial in the Land of Israel?28

What was being played out here was not only an exercise in ethnic and religious survival abroad but also a reimagining of the Babylonian community into something radically removed from any other communal context in the Jewish world. The ultimate conclusion—if not the original goal—of this exercise would be the Babylonian rabbinic statement, attributed already to a late-third-century sage, to the effect that “we have made ourselves in Babylonia the equivalent of Eretz Israel” (BT Gitin 6a; BT Bava Kamma 80a).
“IN THE SHADOW OF GOD”:
JEWISH PROSPERITY IN A NON-ROMAN WORLD

We have yet to address the question of whether the reimaging of their community and its history for internal (i.e., local and inter-Jewish) purposes had a direct impact on the Babylonian rabbis’ attitudes toward the political and cultural behavior of the gentile world in whose midst they also functioned.

Notwithstanding all the advantages of an unequaled communal antiquity, whether based on fact or fancy, the Jews of Babylonia were absolutely certain of one critical political and cultural reality: unlike their brethren in Palestine and the entire Hellenistic-Roman world, they were able to function beyond the political reach of the Roman state. For the sages, this was an object of considerable reflection; it touched directly not only on the degree of practical autonomy enjoyed by their community but, even more important, on the significance of Jewish removal beyond the all-embracing influence of Hellenistic culture. With the acceptance of Christianity by the Roman Empire in the fourth century, a major new component was added to this equation, because it now also placed the Jews of Babylonia and their spiritual leadership beyond the constant need to respond to theological confrontations with the Church, a new reality that would become increasingly apparent in the statements—to say nothing of the biblical exegesis—of the sages of Byzantine Palestine.

The following anecdote expresses in no uncertain terms the Babylonian rabbis’ awareness that their position was radically different from that of the Palestinians:

Rabbah bar bar Hanna was ill, and Rav Judah and the disciples entered to inquire about him... meanwhile one of the habarim [Persian priests] came and took the candle from them. [Rabbah bar bar Hanna] said: “Merciful One [God]! [Let us live] either in your shade or the shade of the son of Esau [Rome]!” Does this imply that the Romans are preferable to the Persians? Did not R. Hiyya teach: “What is the inference of the scripture ‘God understands the way to it, He knows its source’ (Job 28:23)—God knew that Israel could not survive the decrees of the Romans and so he exiled them to Babylonia.” This [seeming contradiction between the two rabbis] does not pose a difficulty: The [teaching of Rav Hiyya preferring Babylonia] was before the habarim came to Babylonia, the [statement of Rabbah bar bar Hanna]—after they came to Babylonia.”
All of the political acumen, as well as the doubts and fears, of the Babylonian rabbinic movement appear to be wrapped up in this anecdote. Indeed, we could not ask for a keener appreciation of the historical vicissitudes that transpired precisely as the leadership of that movement began to emerge and to compete for communal control with their counterparts in Roman Palestine.

Rabbi Hyya’s pronouncement seems to reflect the reality of his day (the late second and early third centuries C.E.). With the attractive possibilities for communal autonomy still available under a feudal Parthian regime, on the one hand, and, on the other, harsh memories of the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba rebellion and the ensuing religious persecution still fresh in the mind, a preference for Parthian Babylonia was only to be expected. Moreover, Jews throughout the world could never forget that it was the Roman army that was responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Although the political situation in late-second-century Palestine was about to undergo a temporary improvement, with the appearance on the scene of Judah the Patriarch and the improved relationship between Jews and the new Severan imperial dynasty, Hyya (a Babylonian by birth who immigrated to Palestine) seems to reflect the established political wisdom born of decades of strained relations with Rome. The third decade of the third century, however, presented the Jews of Babylonia with a new and threatening political reality of their own: the Parthian Arsacid rulers had just been defeated by the armies of a family of Mazdean priests from the district of Fars in southeastern Persia. The new Sassanian dynasty that succeeded the Arsacids would be characterized by a more centralized political regime, imagining itself as the new coming of the ancient Achaemenids, and even more important by a new commitment to the old Zoroastrian religion. This zeal manifested itself in the appearance of an assertive and revitalized state church, and the removal of a flame from among the rabbis in the talmudic anecdote is one of numerous allusions to the fire-priests (Jabarim) who at first seem to pose a threat to the established freedoms of the local Jewish community. These same priests are cited in the Babylonian Talmud as the reason that rabbis granted permission to move Hanukkah candles on the Sabbath; keeping the candles out of sight would, they hoped, preclude any hostile action by the fire-priests (BT Shabbat 45a).

The dilemma for the Babylonian sages was acute and somewhat ironic. If, indeed, their community had taken comfort in its relatively favorable political situation, compared to that of the Jews under Roman rule, now it too was confronted with a new situation that threatened to undermine those advantages. The fears related to political as well as religious winds of change. A frequently examined story in the Babylonian Talmud (Bava Kamma 117a) reports that Rav—
a Babylonian sage who spent part of his youth in Palestine but returned to Babylonia to witness the changing of the guard in his homeland—advised his disciple Kahana to flee Babylonia after the latter had apparently taken the law into his hands and executed a potential informer: "Until now [ruled] the Greeks [an allusion to the Hellenistic influences manifest at the Parthian court] who were not strict about bloodshed, now there are the Persians [a clear reference to the neo-Persian self-image of the Sassanian dynasty] who are strict about bloodshed—go up to the Land of Israel."

Ultimately these fears of forceful interference in the communal life of the Jews would be proven exaggerated, and the modus vivendi formulated by Samuel—the law of the kingdom is law—seems to be reflected in the amicable relationship between a number of Sassanian Kings and Jewish sages, at least according to stories recorded in the Babylonian Talmud. Samuel is described in four talmudic traditions as having maintained a decidedly courteous relationship with King Shapur I. Thus we are told that

King Shapur once said to Samuel: "You [Jews] profess to be very clever; tell me what I shall see in my dream." He [Samuel] said to him: "You will see the Romans coming and taking you captive, and making you grind date-stones in a golden mill!" He [Shapur] thought about it all day, and in the night saw it in his dream."

Another anecdote describes Samuel juggling eight glasses of wine before the king. A century later, we encounter a certain Ifra Hormiz, mother of Shapur II (309–79 C.E.) according to talmudic accounts, not only befriending some of the sages but actually intervening on their behalf with her son. When a rabbi (Rava) was suspected of having overstepped the bounds of recognized legal authority granted the Jews, she declared: "Have no dealings with [i.e., do not punish] the Jews, for whatever they ask of their master He gives to them."

Another anecdote describes three fifth-century sages at the court of King Yazdagird I (399–420 C.E.) and again suggests a friendly context. A number of factors might have contributed to this atmosphere, not the least being the fact that Jews under Persian rule would hardly be suspected of harboring loyalties toward the mutually despised Roman Empire. With the embracing of Christianity by Rome in the fourth century, any such suspicion would have been further alleviated; if any elements of society were suspected of constituting a potential fifth column in Sassanian Persia, these would more likely have been adherents of the Christian faith. The very fact that the Sassanian dynasty conjured up memories of a "Persian" monarchy might have made it even easier for the sages to attach to
them the favorable memories of an earlier "Persia," and thus we encounter a uniquely rabbinic approach to the laws that govern the unfolding of historical processes:

Rabbah bar bar Hanna, in the name of R. Yohanan, following a tradition from R. Yehuda b. Ilai, said: "Rome is destined to fall to Persia, kal va-homer [even more so]: If the First Temple, built by the sons of Shem [Israel] was destroyed by the Chaldeans [Babylonians], and the Chaldeans were defeated by the Persians, [and] the Persians built the Second Temple [through permission granted by Cyrus] [only to have it] destroyed by the Romans—is it not fitting that the Romans should fall to the Persians?"

In another source, the Talmud actually appears to go out of its way to absolve the Persian king Shapur I of complicity, or at least of intentional malice, in the deaths of 12,000 Jews in Mazaca of Cappadocia during the wars of the mid-third century between the Sassanian Empire and Rome. Nor do we hear of masses of Jews beyond the Euphrates rising up in support of the invading armies of Emperor Julian in the mid-fourth century, notwithstanding that ruler's promises regarding the rebuilding of the Jewish Temple. Politically, it would appear, the Jews of Babylonia did not suffer inordinately under the new Sassanian regime and probably fared significantly better under the new rulers than did their Christian contemporaries. In a total reversal of roles when compared to Palestine, it is striking to encounter the fourth-century Christian Father Aphraates, living in close proximity to the Jews of Ktesiphon, describe how the Jews mock the Christians in their midst for their lowly status and for the fact that God does not come to their aid!

Even more striking than the absence of any significant deterioration of the political status of Jews under the Sassanian monarchy was the lack of a systematic religious persecution at the hands of the new state church. Although the Talmud alludes to pressures felt as a result of action taken by the Zoroastrian clergy, a closer examination suggests that this was not a product of a coordinated persecution of Jews, nor even of any missionary zeal on the part of the local priests. Robert Brody has conclusively shown that, inasmuch as Zoroastrianism maintained a position of indifference toward conversion, there is no reason to believe that the actions described in the Babylonian Talmud, such as limiting certain Jewish practices, were the result of a concerted attempt at bringing over to the Persian religion—by force, if necessary—large numbers of Jews. If, as we have seen, fire-priests intervened in Jewish life when they discovered the latter producing flames, this was a result of the clergy's wish to preserve the sanctity of
fire, one of the central tenets of the Zoroastrian religion. Being Jewish or adhering to Jewish tradition was not the issue here; maintaining the purity of fire was. The same holds true for another Babylonian talmudic tradition that has been interpreted as referring to “persecution”:

They [the Zoroastrian clergy] decreed three because of three: they decreed concerning meat because of the [priestly] gifts, they decreed concerning bathhouses because of ritual immersion, they exhume the dead because of [Jewish] rejoicing on their [Zoroastrian] holidays. (BT Yevamot 63b)

The source here appears to be saying that Jewish neglect of their religious ordinances (not granting the requisite portions of slaughtered animals to priests, laxity in the laws of purity and immersion, etc.) was the cause of their mistreatment at the hands of the Zoroastrian priesthood. The question is, does all this fall under the heading of religious persecution?

To be sure, the terminology—“they decreed” (gazTu)—is the common talmudic allusion to religious persecution, more frequently found in the context of Roman Palestine. What we apparently have here, however, is a reference to those areas of daily Jewish life that might be affected by the more activist Zoroastrian clergy that appeared on the scene with the rise of the Sassanians. The source indeed alludes to three areas in which a uniquely Zoroastrian religious sensitivity would have caused new difficulties for ongoing Jewish behavior. Thus, for example, the exhuming of the dead by Zoroastrians is a clear consequence of that religion’s unique concept of the earth’s sanctity, which required that the dead be exposed rather than buried: “Where then shall we carry the body of a dead man, where lay it down? Then said Ahuara Mazda: ‘On the highest places, so that corpse-eating beasts and birds will most readily perceive it.’”

It is precisely in light of such beliefs that the following talmudic tale conforms so naturally with the surrounding religious environment:

A magus used to exhume corpses. When he came to the [burial] cave of Rav Tuvi bar Matna, [the latter] seized him by his [the priest’s] beard. Abaye happened by and said to him [Rav Tuvi]: I beg you, release him. The following year he [the priest] returned. He [Rav Tuvi] seized him by his beard; Abaye came—but [Rav Tuvi] would not release him, until they brought scissors and cut off his beard. (BT Bava Bathra 58a)

In a similar manner, the immersion of menstruant women in waters deemed pure would be equally offensive to Zoroastrian believers. And yet, all this
notwithstanding, one fails to sense an ongoing confrontation in rabbinic literature between Jews and representatives of the government or officials of the state church. To be sure, gaonic chronicles such as Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon describe a series of anti-Jewish persecutions during the fifth century, beginning with the reign of Yazdagird II (438–57 C.E.) and continuing under his son Peroz (459–84 C.E.). Sabbath observance was forbidden, synagogues were closed, and Jewish children were seized to become servants in fire-temples. All sorts of explanations have been offered for this radical departure from the earlier atmosphere of relative tolerance; some point to the religious zeal evinced by Yazdagird II in his relations with Christians as well as Jews, whereas others have searched for factors that may have weakened the central government and thereby enabled the more extreme elements within the church to consolidate their power through the use of terror and persecution. In truth, no single explanation has proven totally convincing, and the very need to provide some sort of rationale for an abrupt change of policy points to the predominantly favorable relationship between the Jewish and Iranian communities.

CROSSCURRENTS OF INFLUENCE: CULTURAL CONTACTS BETWEEN JEWS AND PERSIANS

Charting the twisted and circular paths of cultural dissemination among communities of the ancient world is one of the more speculative undertakings of historians. Attempts at uncovering ancient Iranian influences on the formative stages of Judaism are no exception, and the question of the degree—and indeed the very existence—of a significant Zoroastrian impact on Judaism dating back hundreds of years prior to the rabbinic era finds scholars divided into diametrically opposed camps: “One of these [camps] emphatically denies the actual existence or possibility of Persian cultural influence on Judaism as a factor affecting Jewish thought. . . . [T]he other position is the one which would explain almost everything in the development of post-biblical Judaism as stemming directly from Iran.” To be sure, the Iranian and Jewish worlds of religious thought contain similar notions relating to a wide variety of themes. These include aspects of dualism, angelology and demonology, the destiny of the world and the duration of its existence, as well as various eschatological images and beliefs. What is striking, however, is that almost none of these expressions can be found in any extant pre-talmudic Babylonian Jewish literature, but instead they survived almost exclusively in the Palestinian Jewish writings of the Second Temple period. Given the known policies of the Persian government in Achaemenid times, it would be difficult to attribute such influences to a concerted effort on the part of
the Persian administrators of Palestine during the first centuries of the Second Temple period. A more likely scenario would be to assume an initial Jewish exposure to Iranian ideas within the boundaries of Persia and Mesopotamia, where Jews lived among a predominantly Persian population, and thus "the most likely carriers of this new set of ideas may have been Jews from that Diaspora who had constant communication with their brethren in Palestine through pilgrimage and immigration."

Though addressing an earlier stage of Persian-Jewish contacts within Iran, this proposal might nevertheless contribute to our understanding of the nature and degree of cross-cultural influences in rabbinic Babylonia as well. To begin, it is doubtful to what degree the feudalization within Iran, in Parthian as well as Sassanian times, effected—as claimed by Salo Baron—a "mutual segregation of all corporate groups, and particularly the ethnic-religious communities." If anything, the feudalization of the Persian Empire, which contributed toward the maintenance of distinct tribal and ethnic identities, probably also produced a sense of self-assuredness that would have allowed rabbis to loosen their reins and enabled them to permit a significant degree of interaction with the surrounding society. If we nevertheless encounter numerous Babylonian talmudic discussions that, in the context of attitudes toward idolatry, seek to erect barriers between Jews and non-Jews by prohibiting access, among other things, to gentile bread, wine, and other foods, we should note that almost all these "Babylonian" discussions are based directly on the Palestinian Mishnah and the ensuing halakhic traditions that are also of Palestinian provenance. And so, just as certain Persian concepts and attitudes might have been introduced into Palestinian Jewish society through the mediation of Jews traveling from Iran to western lands, we may note in rabbinic times a reverse phenomenon: the rabbis of Babylonia were almost certainly the recipients of certain religious and social attitudes that were spawned in a decidedly Hellenistic-Roman and ultimately Christian environment, one that demanded a heightened degree of caution in light of constant and even conscious efforts at cultural and religious assimilation. Moreover, even in certain spheres of "popular" cultural activity, such as magical incantations so frequently attributed to a Persian environment, we may in fact be confronted by behavior with decidedly Palestinian roots that found its way to Babylonia through some sort of internal Jewish pipeline:

A comparison of the metal amulets from Palestine and surrounding countries to the magic bowls from Mesopotamia shows in several cases clear Palestinian influences and only rarely if ever can one detect influences in the other direction... When formulae from the two geographical areas converge, it may be
invariably established that the origin of the theme is Palestinian, rather than Babylonian.  

All this notwithstanding, the Jews of Babylonia lived in proximity to non-Jewish centers of population and maintained ties on a daily basis with those communities. Indeed, we find gentiles living in the same courtyards with Jews (BT Eruvin 65b), and we even encounter a Jew and a gentile living in the same house: "the Israelite in the upper story and the gentile in the lower" (BT Avodah Zara 70a). Jews and non-Jews would greet one another in passing (BT Gitin 62a) and would even offer a hand to the elderly of the other community (Kiddushin 33a). To be sure, our information on such matters is incidental and appears primarily within the context of some legal issue. Thus, for example, we find Samuel in the house of a gentile on Shabbat, wondering whether he may make personal use of a flame lit by the owner on the Sabbath—if the fire was not lit for Samuel’s benefit.  

We also encounter a reverse reality, in which gentiles can be found in the houses of Jews on Jewish holidays (BT Bezah 21b). We even hear of Jews and gentiles exchanging gifts on the respective holidays of the two communities: a non-Jew dedicated a candle to the synagogue of the third-century leader Rav Judah (BT Arakhin 6b), and the same rabbi is supposed to have sent a gift to a gentile on that person's holiday (BT Avodah Zara 64b–65a). In fact, Rav Judah actually permitted the sages to conduct business with gentiles on their holidays (BT Avodah Zara 11b). In sum, one senses, at least in this respect, a far more flexible and cordial stance toward the surrounding community than the rigid and indeed at times suspicious attitude evinced by the Palestinian rabbis. The same holds true for a significant amount of commercial cooperation between the communities. Jews and gentiles worked the same fields and even took each other’s place as watchmen on the respective holidays of their partner (BT Avodah Zara 22a). We find Jews and gentiles pressing grapes together in the city of Nehardea (BT Avodah Zara 56b) and a Jew renting his boat to a gentile for the purpose of shipping wine (BT Avodah Zara 26b). What is striking is that the rabbis of Babylonia are frequently named as maintaining a variety of business relations with gentiles; they buy and sell fields from them, and one story even has Rav Ashi selling trees to “a house of fire”—which to the Talmud sounds suspiciously close to indirectly lending a hand to some sort of idolatrous enterprise (BT Avodah Zara 62b). Clearly the segregation of ethnic communities is not the dominant reality emerging from a wealth of talmudic anecdotes.

Even the most casual mingling of Jews and gentiles in Babylonia required a common language of discourse, and such a tool most certainly existed. The daily
language of almost all the local Jews was undoubtedly Babylonian Aramaic, a
dialect of eastern Aramaic that served the Jewish community at least until the
end of the gaonic period in the eleventh century. Rav Hai Gaon, head of the
Pumbedita rabbinic academy at the beginning of the eleventh century, declares
that "from long ago Babylonia was the locus for the Aramaic and Chaldean lan-
guage, and until our time all [local] towns speak in the Aramaic and Chaldean
tongue, both Jews and gentiles." The Babylonian geonim (heads of the acade-
 mies) refer to Aramaic as "our language," the one to be found "even in the mouths
of women and youngsters." By this statement the Babylonians did not wish to
deny or ignore their obvious knowledge and literary use of the Hebrew lan-
guage, but in all fairness it must be noted that, by talmudic times, Hebrew had
reverted even in Palestine more into a literary vehicle within the Jewish commu-
nity rather than a means of daily communication."

Babylonian Jews were clearly aware that other languages were also in use in
their immediate vicinity, most significantly the Parthian and Pahlavi dialects of
what is commonly called "Middle Persian." Although the literary heritage of this
dialect was preserved primarily in Zoroastrian writings rooted in the Sassanian
period but surviving primarily in products of the ninth and tenth centuries," it
did serve as the vernacular of the Sassanians and would probably have been
identified by the Babylonian rabbis as the language of the Iranian government
and clergy. As such, the rabbis apparently attained some degree of familiarity
with Middle Persian and even introduced it into their exegetical activity:

Rava said: "On what basis [i.e., what is the biblical analogy] do the Persians call
a scribe 'debir'? From this [scripture]: 'Now the name of [the city] Devir was
originally Kiriath-Sefer.' " (BT Avodah Zara 24b)

The exegesis here is based on the Hebrew letters SPR, which can be read as either
"book" (sefer) or "scribe" (sofer). The fact that the biblical city of Kiriath-SPR
was originally called "debir," which is also the Persian word for "scribe," facil-
itated the rabbinc etymological link—tenuous as it may be—of a familiar con-
temporary Persian word with a statement in biblical Hebrew."

In the continuation of the same portion of the Babylonian Talmud, we find
Rav Ashi explaining the Pahlavi word for menstrual blood—dashtan—on the
basis of a contraction of Rachel's words in Genesis 31:35, "For the manner of
women [derekh nashim] is upon me."

Such explicit allusions to "Persian," however, are sporadic at best and hardly
represent an indication of the nature and extent of cultural ties or influence. The
number of Persian loanwords found in the Babylonian Talmud, while consider-
able, is dramatically less than the thousands of Greek and Latin words found throughout the parallel rabbinic corpus of Palestine. Moreover, the study or knowledge of “Persian” never assumed the ideological significance that accompanied a parallel pursuit of Greek in Palestine and that caused fathers to address rabbis with questions regarding the permissibility of teaching their sons (and daughters) Greek. Nor were the qualities of the Persian language extolled in the manner that Palestinian sources refer to the Greek language, such as its being the only language into which the Torah might be accurately translated. Indeed, the statement by Rav Joseph—“Why [speak] the Aramaic language in Babylonia, [better] either the Sacred Tongue [Hebrew] or the Persian language” (BT Sotah 49b)—can hardly be taken as a serious attempt at abandoning Aramaic in favor of a Persian dialect. The statement is no more than an artificial replication of a declaration attributed to the Palestinian patriarch Judah (180–220 C.E.): “Why speak Syriac [i.e., Aramaic] in Palestine? Talk either Hebrew or Greek” (BT Sotah 49b). Both statements recognize that Jews in Late Antiquity were interacting with three languages: the sacred Hebrew language of Scripture and synagogue liturgical activity; the vernacular (Aramaic); and the “official” language of the government and surrounding elements of the indigenous aristocracy or clergy. But the comparison ends here, and Persian among Babylonian Jews never assumed the position evinced by Greek among the Jewish populations of Palestine and the Roman Empire. The latter were surrounded by broad sections of a gentile society for whom the Greek language was not just a vehicle for daily discourse but the ultimate underpinning of an all-embracing culture. This was not the case in Babylonia; here no such equation between the “official” language of government and the vernacular of the cultured masses existed. Persian was far more limited to government and the Iranian church, whereas Aramaic served as the vernacular—both for Jews and for the indigenous non-Jewish population.

If, however, Middle Persian was perceived by the rabbis as primarily a language of the Iranian government and clergy, the use—or at least passive knowledge—of words in that dialect by Babylonian Jews might nevertheless serve to indicate the areas of cultural interaction between the latter and certain representative elements of Iranian society. Sure enough, of those Persian words that found their way into the Babylonian Talmud, a significant number relate precisely to those spheres of public behavior where Jews and Persian officials came into actual contact. These include state administration, official titles of office, the administration of justice and forms of punishment, and military terms.

Similarly, it is not at all surprising to find rabbinic allusions to the festivals of “the Persians.” The main reference in the Babylonian Talmud (Avodah Zara 11b)
lists four “Persian ones” alongside “four Babylonian ones,” and this distinction—to say nothing of the actual names of the festivals cited for each group by the Talmud—is far from clear. The parallel discussion in the Palestinian Talmud (Avodah Zara 1:1 39c) quotes Rav as saying that “three holidays are in Babylonia and three holidays are in Media.” In both cases the names of the holidays were corrupted by copyists over the generations and thus prove nothing regarding the original familiarity of the talmudic rabbis with Iranian festivals. But the vast scholarship on these lists has succeeded at least in identifying two well-known Iranian holidays in both versions. They are “Noruz” (“Musardi” in manuscript versions of the BT; Noroz in the PT), which signified the coming of the spring or the summer, and “Mihragan” (“Muharnekai” in the BT), which designated the onset of the rainy season. The halakhic context for the preservation of these lists was the Palestinian rabbinic prohibition on conducting business transactions with the heathen on their festivals (Mishnah Avodah Zara 1:1–2). Whereas the Mishnah proscribed such transactions “on the three days preceding the festivities,” the Babylonian sage Samuel declared that “in the diaspora [Babylonia] it is only forbidden on the actual festival day” (BT Avodah Zara 1:1). This would tend to dovetail with those sources cited already, relating to the interference of the Persian priests in the daily life of Jews, such as by the removal of fire from their midst. This sort of activity apparently also took place on specific days of the Persian calendar, and so—as in the case of tax collection—rabbinic awareness of particular components of Iranian culture need not necessarily reflect an internalizing process of acculturation but instead might point at times to a more prosaic reality of Jewish life being affected by the proclivities of the surrounding—and ruling—local administration.

Yet when all is said and done, it would be impossible to deny some obvious similarities between certain Iranian and Babylonian rabbinic aspects of theology that manifest themselves not only in parallel terminology but also in actual expressions of popular belief and concomitant behavior. To be sure, not all “simi-
larities" necessarily point to an Iranian influence upon Babylonian Jewry, but the fact that we possess the literary product of two parallel rabbinic communities, those of Babylonia and Palestine, affords us with at least some degree of control. Consequently, when we encounter fairly obvious affinities of expression or behavior between Babylonian Jews and their Persian neighbors, with no parallel expression anywhere in Palestinian rabbinic literature, the likelihood of an internal Iranian process of acculturation is at least partially enhanced.

One seemingly obvious example of contact between popular Iranian culture and statements recorded in the Babylonian Talmud relates to the realm of demons and demonology. To be sure, a belief in the existence of vast armies of demons and spirits existing alongside human beings and constantly interacting with them was shared by all the peoples of the Ancient Near East. Among the biblical sins of ancient Israel was their recurrent sacrificing to shedim, a Hebrew term translated in the Septuagint as daimones (demons). Second Temple Jewish literature is replete with allusions to a variety of such forces of evil, and Josephus even claims that King Solomon was trained in the ways of fighting evil spirits, and that he "composed incantations . . . and left behind forms of exorcisms with which those possessed by demons drive them out, never to return." Josephus himself testifies to witnessing the activity of an exorciser in the presence of Vespasian and his soldiers, and of course the New Testament is replete with stories of people possessed by a variety of evil spirits. Scholars have even noted distinct similarities in the import assigned to some terms that refer to a variety of spiritual forces in Palestinian sectarian literature with those found in Iranian terminology, suggesting some sort of Iranian cultural impact on the religious thought and imagery embraced by certain Palestinian Jewish circles.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the Palestinian rabbis were also party to this widespread belief in spirits; according to one opinion in the Mishnah, "the harmful spirits" (mazikin) were among the 10 things created on Sabbath eve at twilight. Rabbi Shimon b. Yohai interpreted the word "all" in a particular scripture ("And all people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord"—Deuteronomy 28:10) to refer "even to spirits and even to demons." Such beliefs found their way into halakhic discourse as well, and thus, for example, the Tosefta addresses the permissibility of whispering an incantation "about demons" on the Sabbath.

The universality of belief in demons and spirits notwithstanding, it is nevertheless in the Babylonian rabbinic corpus that we sense a true affinity to specific demonological images prominent in Iranian religious thought. The pervasiveness of demons so common in Pahlavi literature resonates clearly in the Babylonian Talmud.
It has been taught: Abba Benjamin says: “If the eye had the power to see them, no creature could endure the demons.” Abaye said: “They are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge around a field.” Rav Huna says: “Every one among us has a thousand on his left hand and ten thousand on his right hand.” Rav Huna says: “The crushing in the Kallah [i.e., the gatherings for public learning among the Babylonian rabbis] is from them. The wearing out of the clothes of scholars is due to their rubbing against them. . . . If one wants to discover them, let him take sifted ashes and sprinkle them around his bed, and in the morning he will see something like the footprints of a cock.”

Another talmudic tradition describes the queen of demons—Igrath, the daughter of Mahalath—at the head of 180,000 “destructive angels.” Originally, we are told, these forces had unbridled permission to wreak destruction, but their powers were curtailed following the decree of one of the rabbis ordering her never to pass through settled regions. “I beg you”—she pleaded—“leave me a little room;” so he left her the nights of Sabbath and of Wednesdays. It is for this reason, the Babylonian Talmud warns, that “one should not go out alone . . . on the nights of either Wednesday or Sabbath” (BT Pesahim 112b). Yet another sage—Abaye—succeeded in limiting the activities of these angels to isolated areas, removing them by his decree from settled regions (BT Pesahim 112b). Not only are these allusions to such demonic forces introduced into the talmudic discourse without any sign of skepticism or inferred disbelief, but they actually suggest that the most noted legal scholars of the rabbinic world accepted the existence of such forces; however, the scholars were able to overcome their destructive powers either by some specific knowledge they possessed or by virtue of their own pious behavior. Prayer, we can assume, would be a particularly potent weapon in this confrontation, and thus we read the following story about “a demon” that haunted the schoolhouse of Abaye, so that whenever two disciples would enter the premises, even during daytime, they would be harmed. Upon the arrival of another sage—Rabbi Aha b.Jacob—in town, Abaye saw to it that none of the townspeople offered him hospitality, thereby requiring the rabbi to spend the night in the schoolhouse:

The demon appeared to him in the guise of a seven-headed dragon. Every time he [Aha] fell on his knees [in prayer] one head fell off. The next day he reproached [the men of the schoolhouse]: “Had not a miracle occurred, you would have endangered my life.” (BT Kiddushin 29b)

Legal discussions and allusions to demons seem to merge effortlessly in the Babylonian Talmud, hardly leaving an impression that the world of halakhah—
rather than that of devils and spirits—is the "real" and exclusive environment in
which rabbis function. The long discussion of demons, magic, and the like
found in the Babylonian Talmud (Pesahim 109b-112b) is introduced through a
question relating to the mishnaic stipulation that at the Passover seder one must
drink four cups of wine: "How could our Rabbis enact something whereby one
is led into danger? Surely it was taught: A man must not eat in pairs [i.e., eat an
even-numbered amount of dishes] nor drink in pairs nor cleanse himself twice
nor perform his requirements [a euphemism for intimacy] twice." All this, we
are ultimately informed, is because—as the demon Joseph once told Rabbi
Joseph—"Ashmedai" the king of the demons is appointed over all pairs" (BT Pe­
sahim 11oa).

What is striking, however, is not merely the credulity evinced by the Babylo­
nian rabbis toward these phenomena but also their knowledge that such beliefs
were not always shared by their Palestinian counterparts: "In the West [Pales­
tine] they are not particular about 'pairs' " (BT Pesahim 110b). Moreover, it
appears that all sorts of Babylonian rabbinic customs are related to fears well es­
tablished in Iranian demonology. For example, the care that the rabbis demand
in not randomly discarding the parings of human fingernails—"One who buries
them is righteous, one who burns them is pious, and one who throws them away
is a villain"—derives directly from Iranian fears about the powerful potential,
for good as well as evil, found in nail-parings. According to the Vendidad (17.9),
nail-parings should be dedicated to a particularly fabulous bird (known as
"Asho.zushta" and identified as the owl) renowned for uttering holy words in its
own unique tongue, thereby causing devils to flee. This bird was charged with
guarding the parings, lest they fall into the hands of the devils who then turn
them into hostile weapons."

The rabbis of Babylonia were aware of potential danger lurking wherever the
demons and their kind might be found, which was just about everywhere. Par­
ticularly susceptible moments were during the various functions connected
with eating and drinking:

Abaye said: "At first I thought the reason why the last washing [of the hands
after a meal] may not be performed over the ground [but only over a vessel]
was that it made a mess, but now my master [Rabbah bar Nahman] has told
me it is because an evil spirit rests upon it [i.e., the water]." (BT Hullin 105b)

Abaye was also advised by his mentor not to drink water from the mouth of a
jug but to pour off some water first and then drink, "because of evil waters"—
that is, the fear that demons may have drunk from the water at the top of the jug
In general, demons rendered the drinking of water a potentially dangerous activity, and one had to know precisely when and where it was advisable to refrain from drinking: “A man should not drink water from rivers and pools at night, and if he drinks, his blood is on his own head, because of the danger.”

What is the danger?—the Talmud asks, and responds by citing the name “Shaberiri,” apparently the demon that causes blindness. Fortunately, the rabbis were also privy to the effective incantation that might ward off this particular spirit: “O So-and-so, my mother told me: ‘Beware of Shaberire, berire, rire, ire, re; I am thirsty for water in a white glass’” (BT Pesahim 112a).

Here too it was Zoroastrian literature that also warned against drinking water at night. In a collection of Zoroastrian traditions known as Sad Dar (lit. “The Hundred Subjects”), we read that “it is not proper to swallow water at night, because it is a sin.” A Pahlavi fragment alludes to the contamination of well-water at night, and yet another text explicitly relates to the presence of demons and fiends who seize upon the wisdom of one who eats or drinks in the dark.

For Zoroastrians, however, demons did not only lurk in various locations and wait to pounce on some hapless innocent. Just as one’s physical being might be assaulted by these forces, so others might lay siege to a person’s moral nature and behavior. Pahlavi texts describe various spirits taking over a man’s personality: “A man whose body is inhabited by Akoman [Evil Mind], this is his mark: He is cool as regards good works, has bad relationships with the good, is difficult [in] making peace, is an advocate of the destitute good and is himself [miserly].” The same text goes on to describe a man “whose body is inhabited by Xesm [Anger]” and the negative impact on his behavior: “It is impossible to talk to him, when people talk to him he does not listen. . . . He tells many lies to people and inflicts much chastisement on an innocent person.”

This being the case, we can understand how all sorts of actions might be attributed to such demons who take control of a man’s faculties, thereby controlling his deeds as well. Not only was this sort of compulsion known to the Babylonian rabbis, but they even attempted to define the legal ramifications of such behavior. In this context the Talmud cites the following halakhah: “If a man is compelled by force to eat unleavened bread [on Passover], he thereby performs his religious duty.” The nature of this compulsion, however, is immediately addressed: “Compelled by whom? Shall I say by an evil spirit?” (BT Rosh Hashanah 28a). The conclusion, of course, might be to consider “sin” as well the result of various powers that have taken control of one’s being, thereby possibly alleviating any moral culpability for such action. Although this was not ad-
dressed directly by the Babylonian rabbis, they nevertheless appear to have been familiar with the image of one whose actions seem to be directed, and indeed coerced, by some sort of invading demon. When asked why her children are so beautiful, a woman attributes it to her husband’s modesty, describing how her husband cohabits with her only at midnight, and even then “uncovers a handbreadth and covers a handbreadth, and is as though he were compelled by a demon” (BT Nedarim 20b).104

The belief in demons and spirits demanded a powerful arsenal of protective measures to ward off potential dangers, and the ancient world produced an enormous variety of them. The Jews of Babylonia were no different in this respect from their brethren in Palestine and elsewhere, nor from the non-Jewish environment in which they lived. Amulets, incantations, and other measures were employed universally, but certain discoveries relating to this community would appear to shed some interesting light on one particular aspect of the relationship between Jews and gentiles east of the Euphrates River.

During the past 150 years, hundreds of earthenware bowls, containing incantations primarily in Jewish Aramaic but also in Syriac and Mandaic, have been discovered in Mesopotamia and Iran, the areas that in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages constituted the regions of talmudic and gaonic Babylonia.105 These bowls are usually dated between the fourth and seventh centuries C.E.—that is, the second half of the talmudic era and the immediate post-talmudic period. The vessels are inscribed in ink, usually on the concave side in spiral concentric circles, but there are various exceptions to this pattern.106 (See p. 250.) A large number of such bowls were found in 1888–89 at excavations at Nippur, where they were discovered in situ in private dwellings, usually in what is assumed to be their original position, upside down. Scholars have assumed that, positioned in such a manner, and given their contents, the bowls were intended to trap and imprison various demons. Although this interpretation is reinforced by the language frequently found in the bowls (“bound and sealed are all demons and evil spirits”),107 other such vessels were intended to rid a person or a house of some evil spirit (“now flee and go forth and do not trouble Komes b. Mahlaphta in her house and her dwelling”).108 The removal of the spirit or demon was effected in a manner very similar to the dispatching of a writ of divorce, and indeed some of the bowls actually use the terminology of a Jewish get, except that in place of a woman being divorced, we encounter Lilith or some other demon as the object of the process:

I, Komes bat Mahlaphta, have divorced, separated, missed thee, thou Lilith, Lilith of the Desert. . . . It is announced to you, whose mother is Palhan and whose father [Pe]lahdad, ye Liliths: Hear and go forth and do not trouble
Kames bat Mahlaphta in her house. Go ye forth altogether from her house and her dwelling and from Kaletha and Artasria her children . . . for so has spoken to thee Joshua ben Perahya: A divorce has come to thee from across the sea."

Even more striking is the fact that these “deeds of divorce” frequently adhere not only to the terminology of a get but to legal stipulations as well, such as the requirement that the document cite explicitly the full name of the intended divorcée, as well as the person charging the particular spirit with removal. Indeed, one bowl actually alludes to a previous case where the banned spirit was not named, thus rendering that earlier document invalid: “Just as there was a Lilith who strangled human beings, and Rabbi Yehoshua bar Perahya sent a ban against her, but she did not accept it because he did not know her name.”

The numerous references in the bowls to Yehoshua ben Perahya, the “rabbi” we encountered in a talmudic confrontation with “the queen of demons,” is just one of many factors that support the widely—although not universally—accepted theory that these bowls were inscribed not only by Jews but indeed by those Jews who had at least some access to rabbinic legal formulae. The language in many of the bowls has been definitively identified as Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, and the frequent quotation of biblical scripture in Hebrew lends further support for assuming that before us are the products of Jewish practitioners of magic.

But if the language and content all point to Jewish magicians, one factor in many of the bowls almost certainly suggests a non-Jewish involvement as well: the clients on whose behalf the bowls were produced very frequently go by decidedly Persian names, at times even Zoroastrian theophoric ones. Some Jews may have adopted Persian names, but the preponderance of otherwise Jewish components in the vast majority of magic bowls found to date, alongside a decidedly non-Jewish nomenclature for the beneficiaries of the bowls, seems to point to a fascinating social and cultural reality in talmudic Babylonia. As a minority group, however self-assured, the Jews may have been considered by the indigenous population of Babylonia not only as “different” and even “outsiders” but, more important, as “others” who nevertheless have access to certain knowledge, or powers, that “we” locals are not privy to. In fact, societies frequently attribute such extraordinary talents precisely to groups living outside the mainstream, or on the fringes of society. It may very well be that the Jews of Babylonia were willing to offer their services in connecting with certain forces or spirits not readily accessible to the masses. And while this activity might have been frowned upon—at least in principle—by the rabbis themselves, they could not prevent their coreligionists from providing a service in great demand by neighboring groups who were not party to the same misgivings.

This last observation deserves some further explication. On the one hand, the
rabbis evinced enormous discomfort with all sorts of magical activities, considering them an attempt at circumventing proper channels of prayer and behavior in the process of seeking certain benefits, and thereby constituting a denial of the exclusive role of "the heavenly familia" in the granting of such rewards. Yet, on the other hand, it is clear from what we have seen that the belief in an army of demons and spirits was deeply embedded in the rabbinic mind and that the rabbis did not shy away from addressing this "reality" with their own unique recourse to a wide array of incantations and other activities, all aimed directly at the threatening entity and forgoing supplication to the divine protector or benefactor.

This seeming inconsistency characterizes the rabbinic position vis-à-vis all sorts of popular beliefs and their attendant behavior. Among the most obvious examples of such fence straddling are the numerous rabbinic statements addressing astrology. Here, of course, the barriers between Babylonia and the rest of the Jewish world had long ago been removed. While the very phrase
“Chaldean” served in ancient times to link the land of Babylonia with a propensity for astrological activity,\textsuperscript{7} astrology had become so popular by the Greco-Roman period that “scarcely anybody made a distinction between astronomy and its illegitimate sister.”\textsuperscript{8} For the rabbis, however, recognition of the efficacy of astrology placed in question not only man’s freedom of choice but also the whole concept of Divine providence and its critical link with the principle of free will.\textsuperscript{9} Recourse to astrological divination was tantamount to recognition that events were predetermined in the stars and not dependent on God’s will, which properly should be influenced by man’s behavior. Consequently the third-century sage Rav, in the name of one of the few second-century rabbinic authorities also of Babylonian origins (Rabbi Yosi of Huzai), declared: “How do we know that you must not consult Chaldeans [astrologers]? Because it says: ‘Thou shalt be whole-hearted with the Lord thy God’ (Deuteronomy 8:13).”\textsuperscript{10}

But neither in Babylonia nor in Palestine could the rabbis bring themselves to deny outright the “science” of their day, “a science recognized and acknowledged by all the civilized ancient world.”\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, just as Jewish authors of the Second Temple period had already identified Abraham as one who “sought and obtained the knowledge of astrology and the Chaldean craft,”\textsuperscript{12} so too did the Babylonian sages attribute to Abraham a belief in planetary influence. When he is promised by God that he will have an heir, he replies:

Sovereign of the Universe, I have looked at my constellation and find that I am not fated to beget a child. He [God] told him: “Leave your astrological calculation, for Israel is not subject to planetary influence [lit. ‘there is no planet—mazal—for Israel’].”\textsuperscript{13}

God’s response does not deny the power of the stars but claims that Israel—unlike the rest of humankind—has been removed from planetary control. Though clearly striving to maintain the theological purity of Israel’s relationship with Divine providence, this somewhat contrived rabbinic compromise never really convinced the Babylonian sages that there was nothing in the stars for them. A passage in the Babylonian Talmud elaborates precisely what characteristics will adhere to people born on each of the seven days of the week (BT Shabbat 156a). The continuation of that same text notes how being born under the various planets also determines one’s behavior:

He who was born under Venus will be wealthy and an adulterer. . . . He who was born under Mercury will be of a retentive memory and wise. . . . He who was born under Mars will be a shedder of blood. Rav Ashi said: “Either a surgeon, a thief, a slayer of life or a circumciser.”
Elsewhere, Rava declares that "life, children, and livelihood" are not the consequence of one's merits but are "dependent on the planet" (BT Mo'ed Katan 28a). Yet another sage, Rav Papa, suggests that one should plan various activities in accordance with the planetary constellation. Thus, for example, a person should avoid litigation during the month of Av, "whose planet is pernicious," and prefer instead the month of Adar, "whose planet is favorable" (BT Ta'anit 29b).

Even more telling is the foresight that the rabbis attribute to the various "Chaldeans" that they themselves solicited for advice. Rav Joseph turned down an offer to serve as head of the rabbinical academy "because the astrologers had told him that he would be head for only two years." And so his colleague Rabbah filled the position for 22 years, ultimately to be succeeded by Rav Joseph who indeed served for only two and a half years (BT Berakhot 64a). Interestingly, a later (tenth-century) version of this same story claims that it was Rav Joseph's mother who had contact with the astrologers, and we can only wonder if this latter rendition is not something of a cleansed version intended to distance the sage himself from behavior that does not quite conform to the standards set by the rabbis themselves. Elsewhere in the Babylonian Talmud we do, in fact, find a story describing contacts between the mother of a sage and Chaldeans, and there, too, the prophesies of the astrologer are proven correct:

Rav Nahman b. Isaac's mother was told by Chaldeans [astrologers]: "Your son will be a thief." She did not permit him to go bareheaded, telling him: "Cover your head so that the fear of heaven may be upon you, and pray [for mercy]." He did not know why she said this.

One day when he was sitting and studying under a palm tree, his garment fell from over his head. He raised his eyes, saw the palm tree, and temptation overcame him. He climbed up and bit off a cluster of dates with his teeth. (BT Shabbat 156b)

The Talmud cites this story to prove that Israel is not given to the influence of planets, but, inasmuch as Rav Nahman's behavior until his "fall" overcame the Chaldeans' prophesy, the bottom line of the story would appear to prove just the opposite. Moreover, this is not an isolated case of a sage interacting with an astrologer, and in those other cases as well the pronouncements of the "Chaldeans" invariably prove to be accurate.

In sum, all of these sources seem to suggest a unique social and cultural reality. The Babylonian sages knew quite well what a "perfect" Jewish world ought to look like, and we would do well to interpret many of their programmatic declarations as just that: idyllic guidelines for a world that could not possibly exist given the cultural milieu in which these rabbis functioned. And so,
theoretical declarations notwithstanding, in practice both the rabbis and their flock functioned as part of their social and cultural environment. Did these beliefs and their consequential behavior render the rabbis themselves "non-rabbinic"? Not really, if we accept the multiplicity of cultural influences all contributing to the uniquely Babylonian version of rabbinic society. In Jewish terms, much of their learning was nothing if not a continuation and intensification of Palestinian rabbinic teaching. Even here, however, they almost certainly grafted at least some aspects of the local Sassanian legal process to the mass of Palestinian material that they succeeded in co-opting and making their own. As for popular culture, here too they forged an amalgam between ideas passed on from Palestine through the same rabbinic pipeline that transmitted legal materials and the surrounding Iranian environment that supplied them with a wealth of religious and spiritual imagery.

The genius of Babylonian rabbinic leadership, however, was not so much in the melding of such variegated influences into a broad cultural mosaic but rather in the creation and propagation of a self-image that would project this culture as being the embodiment of the one unique and ancient model of true, unadulterated Israelite tradition, with uncontaminated roots going back to First-Temple Jerusalem and the days of the prophets. Given all that we know about the diverse influences that left their mark on Babylonian Jewish culture prior to their establishment as a literary corpus, one undeniable fact remains. By post-talmudic times, the sages of Babylonia would not only assume the upper hand within the rabbinic world of their day but also ultimately succeed in securing a near-universal acceptance of their Talmud as the definitive expression of rabbinic Judaism. Having emerged out of almost total obscurity only a few centuries earlier, the communal success story of Babylonian Jewry would now be complete.

NOTES

1. The import of the names "Babylon" and "Babylonia" is far from consistent. Whereas the former is commonly employed as a designation of the ancient city, it (as well as "Babylonia") frequently refers to the vast territories between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, south of Baghdad and constituting much of the southeastern areas of modern-day Iraq. In "Jewish geography," however, talmudic "Babylonia" usually includes all the Jewish communities east of the Euphrates, i.e., not only southeastern Iraq but also Mesopotamia to the northwest, as well as the Iranian territories east of the Tigris, such as Assyria, Media, and Elam (Khusistan).

2. For surveys of the early Jewish captive community in Babylonia, see R. Zadok, The Jews in Babylonia During the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods According to the Babyl-

3. The Munich manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud reads “to her father’s home,” probably influenced by the allusion to the patriarch Abraham.

4. The date of the letter does not appear in chapter 29 of Jeremiah, but the passage seems to belong to the same historical context as the two previous chapters; see J. Bright, Jeremiah, 2d ed. (New York, 1984) 210–11.


7. This statement by Josephus (Antiquities, 11:133) seems to reflect a common general impression shared by other Jews in the west (see, e.g., Philo, Legatio ad Gaium, 216, 282) of vast numbers of Jews populating the lands beyond the Euphrates; in a way it also seems to highlight a shared ignorance of any real internal communal structures and cultural activities among those Jews.

8. Josephus, Antiquities, 15:14–15; here again Josephus relates that Hyrcanus II settled in Babylonia “where there was a great number of Jews.”


10. The formal reckoning of Parthian history begins with the uprising of Arsaces I and his brother Thiridates against the Seleucid Empire, circa 247 B.C.E. In effect, the beginning of Parthian rule in portions of Babylonia overlaps with the Seleucid era, but the main thrust of Parthian expansion at the expense of the Seleucid Empire, under King Mithridates I (171–138 B.C.E.) coincides with the Hasmonaean brother’s rebellion against those very same Hellenistic rulers.

11. Parthian kings frequently attached titles such as “Philhellene,” “Epiphanes,” or “Euergetes” to their names, and Plutarch (Crassus 33) describes how one of Euripides’ plays was being presented at the Parthian court when word was received there about the victory over Crassus at Charrae. Interestingly, the Babylonian Talmud (Bava Kamma 12a, according to most manuscripts) has the third-century sage Rav describe the Parthians—who had just


13. Antiquities, 18:310-79 (the story of the brothers Asinaeus and Anilaeus); Antiquities 20:17-69 (the conversion of the royal family of Adiabene). Here, too, various nineteenth-century Jewish writers thought they might derive from these narratives solid information on the cultural and religious fabric of the Babylonian Jewish community in pre-talmudic times; however, see Gafni, "Talmudic Research," 144-45, esp. n. 59.

14. These identifications are in fact untenable. Borsip has been identified with the Burs mentioned by Yaqut and other Arabic sources (present-day Birs Nimrud) and is situated southwest of Babylonia, whereas the biblical text clearly refers to cities in Assyria; see A. Oppenheimer, Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period (Wiesbaden, 1983), 104. The same is true for Perat de-Meshan, clearly in the vicinity of the Shatt al-Arab and consequently far removed from any Assyrian locality (ibid., 348).

15. BT Yoma 10a; Gen. Rabbah 37:4.

16. Yaqut and other Arab geographers have identified the three as islands in the Euphrates; see Oppenheimer, Babylonia Judaica, 28, 446.

17. BT Bava Bathra 91a; Kuta, or Kuta Rabbah, is the present-day Tall Ibrahim on the Habl Ibrahim canal, 30 kilometers northeast of Babylon; see Oppenheimer, Babylonia Judaica, 175, who notes that Arab sources also connect Kuta with Abraham.


19. Apud Eusebius, Praeparatio Evangelica, 9.27.4.

20. BT Gitin 88a; see also Tanhuma Noah 3: "He [God] acted righteously with Israel in that He had the exile of Yehoniah precede the exile of Zedekiah, in order that the Oral Torah not be forgotten by them."

21. All the attempts at identifying an exilarch in Babylonia prior to the third century C.E. are based on late and insufficient evidence; see J. Liver, Toldat bet David mi-Hurban Mamlekheth Yehudah ve-ad le-ahar Hurban ha-Bayit ha-Sheni (Jerusalem, 1959), 41-46, and other literature cited in I. Gafni, Land, Center and Diaspora: Jewish Constructs in Late Antiquity (Sheffield, Eng., 1997), 55 n. 37. To be sure, given the overall paucity of information on the Babylonian Jewish community prior to the talmudic era, the existence of an early exilarchate cannot be dismissed out of hand and may actually have made sense within the political and social frameworks of the Parthian Empire.

22. Iggeret Rav Sherira Gaon, ed. B. M. Lewin (Haifa, 1921), 72-73. The antiquity of synagogues played a major role in Babylonian historical consciousness; see A. Oppen-
23. BT Kiddushin 69b, 71a; BT Ketubot 11a.
24. BT Kiddushin 69b.
25. Ibid.
29. Of course, the historicity of the story itself is not the issue here, but rather the self-image and political awareness that it reflects.
30. A frequent talmudic rendition of "herbad" or "erbad," one of several Persian titles for priests of the Zoroastrian church.
34. BT Yevamot 63b.
35. See n. 11 above.
36. The text is quoted here according to almost all the important manuscripts of BT Bava Kamma and has undergone extensive scrutiny because of its obvious reference to the major political changes of the day. See Rosenthal, "For the Talmudic Dictionary," 54–58, 87, and D. Sperber, "On the Unfortunate Adventures of Rav Kahana: A Passage of Saboraic Polemic from Sasanian Persia," in Shaked, ed., Iran-Judaica, 1: 83–100.
37. BT Berakhot 56a; BT Sukkah 53a; BT Mo'ed Katan 26a; BT Sanhedrin 98a.
38. BT Berakhot 56a.
39. BT Sukkah 53a.
41. BT Ta'anit 24b; for the other stories, see J. Neusner, Jews in Babylonia, 4: 35–39.
42. BT Ketubot 61a–b.
43. BT Yoma 10a. Not all the Babylonians concurred with this prognosis, and in the continuation of this same source Rav predicts the opposite: Rome will defeat Persia. When asked how the destroyers will emerge victorious, the Talmud—anonymously—suggests that the latter were also guilty of destroying synagogues. (Rav himself is simply quoted as stating that this was God’s wish—without elaborating.) This vague allusion to religious pressure on the part of the Sassanians might reflect the harsh reactions to some of the behavior attributed to the Zoroastrian priests, or possibly it was formulated during the few periods of outright persecution in Persia of minorities in general, not only Jews. These occurred in the late third century and again in the tumultuous days of the fifth century. For brief surveys of the attitude toward Jews under the Sassanians, see G. Widengren, “The Status of the Jews in the Sassanian Empire,” Iranica Antiqua 1 (1961): 117–62; J. Neusner, “Jews in Iran,” in Yarshater, ed., The Cambridge History of Iran, 3(2): 909–23.
44. BT Mo’ed Katan 26a.
49. From Vendidad 6. The Vendidad, consisting of 22 sections, was most probably compiled in the Parthian period. It deals with a variety of legal topics and contains elaborate laws relating to purity. The translation here is from M. Boyce, ed. and trans., Textual Sources for the Study of Zoroastrianism (Manchester, 1984), 65.
50. The “Persians,” in rabbinic imagery, “grow hair like bears” (BT Megillah 11a; BT Kiddushin 72a; BT Avodah Zara 2b), and in fact Sasanian art (coins and rock-carvings) almost always portray Persian rulers with grown beards, frequently in contradistinction to the Roman rulers shown in those same depictions.
51. It is not absolutely clear what aroused Zoroastrians to prohibit the slaughtering of animals by Jews; see Beer, “Notes on Three Edicts,” 29–31. S. Shaked, “Zoroastrian Polemics Against Jews in the Sasanian and Early Islamic Period,” in Shaked and Netzer, eds., Iran-Judaica, 2: 93, quotes certain Zoroastrian texts that advise “not to kill cattle before they reach
maturity” and claim that “Dahag”—the mythical representative of the negative views that oppose the true faith—“taught to kill cattle freely, according to the custom of the Jews.”


57. BT Shabbat 122b; Palestinian Talmud (henceforth: PT) Shabbat 16:15d. It is interesting to note that the gentile is referred to in the PT as “a Persian,” whereas in the BT simply as “nokhri”—a gentile. It appears that the PT uses “Persian” as a generic term for gentiles in Babylonia, whereas the BT reserves the use of “Persian” to government or church officials (see Gafni, *Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud* 153 and n. 18).

58. See also BT Avodah Zara 65a: Rabah sent a gift to one bar Sheshak.

59. Most of the relevant information has been gathered by M. Beer, *Amona'i Bavlit Perakim be-Haye ha-Kalkalaih* (Ramat Gan, 1974), 207–11.

60. For the various Aramaic dialects found in Iran from the Achaemenid period and down to the talmudic era, see *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 2 (London, 1987), 251–56. On the use of Aramaic by Jews, from late biblical times and down to the present, see the concise overview by J. C. Greenfield, “Aramaic and the Jews,” in M. J. Geller et al., eds., *Studia Aramaica*. New Sources and Approaches (Oxford, 1995), 1–18.

61. From a responsa of Rav Hai, published by A. E. Harkavy in *Hakedem* vol. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1908), 82.


63. The question of Hebrew as a commonly spoken vernacular even in Second Temple Palestine, as well as the first centuries of the Common Era, has been heatedly debated for over 150 years, with accusations of “Zionistically inclined” Hebraism and tendentious romanticism frequently introduced into the polemic. See, for a brief discussion, E. Y. Kutcher,
A History of the Hebrew Language (Jerusalem, 1982), 115-19; much of the relevant research has been cited by S. D. Fraade, "Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third-Sixth Centuries," in L. I. Levine, The Galilee in Late Antiquity (New York, 1992), 253-86. For one historian's perspective of the debate, see S. Schwartz, "Language, Power and Identity in Ancient Palestine," Past and Present 148 (1995): 23-47. Whatever the reality might have been in Palestine, few would argue for any widespread use of Hebrew as a vernacular among Jews of the Babylonian Diaspora in Late Antiquity.


65. This tendency to provide biblical etymologies for Persian words fits nicely with the rabbinic propensity in the Babylonian Talmud of linking biblical place-names with contemporary cities in the Iranian countryside.

66. Only 130 examples of Iranian loanwords were noted by S. Telegdi, "Essai sur la phonétique des emprunts iraniens en araméen Talmudique," Journal Asiatique 226 (1935): 177-256; see also S. Shaked, "Iranian Loanwords in Middle Aramaic," Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2: 259-61. Shaked notes that many of the Iranian loanwords that appear in Middle Aramaic (i.e., the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud) may have entered that language over a protracted period of time and would thus not necessarily attest to contacts between Jews and Iranians during the talmudic period alone. In contradistinction to the Babylonian Talmud, over 3,000 Greek and Latin loanwords were cited by S. Krauss, Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrash und Targum, vols. 1-3 (Berlin, 1898-99). Notwithstanding the problems involved in portions of Krauss's lists (see D. Sperber, "Greek and Latin Words in Rabbinic Literature," Bar Ilan 14-15 [1977]: 9-20 [English sec.]), the discrepancy between the scope and nature of the influence of surrounding "official" languages on the literary production of the Jews of Palestine and Babylonia is undeniable.

67. See S. Lieberman, Hellenism in Jewish Palestine (New York, 1950), 100-114.

68. PT Megillah 12:2, 71c; see S. Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine (New York, 1942), 17.

69. See A. Christensen, L'Iran sous les Sassanides (Copenhagen, 1944), 45.


73. See Gafni, Yehudei Bavel bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud 157 n. 33.

74. In Achaemenian times, Noruz (lit. "new day") was celebrated in spring (March/April); in the early Sasanian period it was also celebrated in autumn, thus leading to a dual celebration. However, with the establishment by the first Sasanian king, Ardashir I, of a 365-day year with no intercalation, Noruz crept backward every year by one quarter of a day, and thus the autumn festival of Noruz was actually being celebrated by the fifth cen-


79. See Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:37.

80. *Antiquities*, 8:45; compare the Wisdom of Solomon 7:20 as well as rabbinic statements linked to Solomon in connection with Ecclesiastes 2:8. See also L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia, 1956), 291 and nn. 488–89.

81. *Antiquities*, 8:46; Josephus describes in great detail how a demon was removed “through the nostrils” of a man possessed, who proceeded to “speak Solomon’s name and recite the incantations he had composed.”


83. The various Palestinian uses of the Hebrew term ruah (spirit), especially those found at Qumran, dovetail with parallel meanings applied to the Iranian term meneg: see Shaked, “Qumran and Iran,” 434–37.

84. Scholars long ago recognized the similar use of the word “heaven” as a reference to the deity in both Iranian and rabbinic literature; see E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, vol. I (Jerusalem, 1975), 70 and n. 11. Yet another parallel has been noted between the Pahlavi concept of “wrath” and the the rabbinic concept of midut ha-din (the attribute of justice), whereby a concept well established in Zoroastrian dualism was adapted by the rabbis as a means of attributing man’s suffering to the omnipotent God; see S. Pines, “Wrath and Creatures of Wrath in Pahlavi, Jewish and New Testament Sources,” in Shaked, ed., *Iran-Judaica*, 1: 76–82, and Urbach, *The Sages*, 1: 451, 460–61.

86. PT Berakhot 39a.
87. Tosefta Shabbat 2:23; see BT Sanhedrin 101a.
88. See Boyce, A History of Zoroastrianism, 1: 85.
89. For some of the relevant sources and a brief discussion, see Neusner, Jews in Babylonia, 4: 334-38, and 5: 183-86.
90. BT Berakhot 6a. Iranian demonology in fact assigned the form of various birds to a number of fabulous creatures that composed the vast army of supernatural forces existing alongside human beings and playing destructive as well as beneficial roles in this world; see Boyce, A History of Zoroastrianism, 88-90.
92. This particular demonic figure never appears by name in Iranian sources, although it is apparently a derivation of the Zoroastrian Aeshma Daeua (the demon of wrath); the Greek form—Asmodeus—appears in the Book of Tobit (3:8), a Second Temple apocryphal work likely to have been written in Babylonia and in an obvious Iranian environment. See R. N. Frey, “Qumran and Iran,” in J. Neusner, ed., Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults (Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty), vol. 3 (Leiden, 1975), 270. “Ashmedai King of Demons” is known only to the Babylonian Talmud, most notably in a highly detailed account of his relationship with King Solomon (BT Gitin 68a-b); parallel traditions in Palestinian rabbinic sources (BT Sanhedrin 2:20c) talk only about “an angel” who appeared in the image of King Solomon.
93. Scholars have in fact noted an Iranian propensity for considering odd numbers favorable and even numbers dangerous; see Scheftelowitz, Die Alpersiche Religion, 88-91. See also BT Gitin 68a for another example where the Babylonian Talmud admits to a demon-connected interpretation of scripture (Eccles. 2:8) while acknowledging that the Palestinian exegetes understood the same text differently.
94. BT Mo'ed Katan 18a.
95. Boyce, A History of Zoroastrianism, 1: 90. Boyce notes that the practice of dedicating nail-parings to this bird while uttering appropriate words from the Vendidad is still observed by strictly orthodox Zoroastrians.
96. Rabbis not only knew how to limit the danger from demons but at times even knew how to get them to do one's bidding. A demon employed by Rav Papa "once went to fetch water from the river but was away a long time. When he returned he was asked: 'Why were you so long?' He replied: '[I waited] until the evil waters [i.e., the water from which demons had drunk] had passed.' But when he saw them [R. Papa and friends] pouring off [some water] from the mouth of the jug, he exclaimed: 'Had I known you were in the habit of doing this I would not have taken so long' " (BT Hullin 105b-106a).
97. The demon is apparently overcome by hearing his name diminish letter by letter.
99. Ibid., 292. In another tradition on the same page we are told that "it is not proper to pour away water at night, especially from the northern side which would be the worst"; the reason for this is that demons are supposed to come from the north, and anything thrown out northward might be of use to them.
100. See Sacred Books of the East, vol. 37, part IV, 3d ed. (Delhi, 1969), 471.
104. Although the woman referred to is 'Inuma Shalom, wife of the late-first-century Palestinian sage Rabbi Elezer b. Hycarus, the story and language are definitely of Babylonian rabbinic provenance. The Babylonian Talmud frequently tells stories using well-known Palestinian figures as its heroes, but these are frequently couched in local Babylonian reality as well as terminology and have no parallels in Palestinian rabbinic literature.
106. See Naveh and Shaked, Amulets and Magic Bowls, 15 n. 1.
107. Ibid., 135.
110. Naveh and Shaked, Amulets and Magic Bowls, 159; see also Alexander, "Incantation Bowls," 354 n. 24, for an attempt at recreating the halakhic context for the situation described on the bowl.
111. The major doubt was cast by Montgomery, Aramaic Incantation Texts, 112–13, who claimed that the use of names such as "Moses" and "Yehoshua ben Perahya" had already found its way into an eclectic magical environment, thereby removing the certainty of a Jewish connection. Many of Montgomery's readings, as well as conclusions regarding the Jewish origins of the bowls, were challenged in a brilliant review essay by J. N. Epstein,


114. BT Sanhedrin 67b; for a brief overview of rabbinic attitudes toward magic, see Urbach, The Sages, 97-101. Urbach senses the fuzzy demarcation in rabbinic tradition between those statements that appear to prohibit any recourse to magic and others that clearly suggest the sages' own involvement in a variety of such magical practices (see 101-2). Note the statement by L. H. Schiffman, "A Forty-two Letter Divine Name in the Aramaic Magic Bowls," Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies 1 (1973): 97: "It is also clear that these incantations and the attendant magical practices could not have had the approval of the rabbinic authorities." To this, Greenfield ("Notes on Some Aramaic and Mandaic Magic-Bowls," 150 n. 10) responded—accurately, to my mind—"But even if there was no approval, these practices were condoned and tolerated." For a brief survey on the growing scholarly recognition of "the extent to which magic was ingrained in the rabbinic milieu," see M. D. Swartz, Scholastic Magic (Princeton, 1996), 18-22 and the bibliography in nn. 58 and 63. See also the comments and literature cited in Y. Harari, "If You Wish to Kill a Person: Harmful Magic and Protection from It in Early Jewish Magic" (Hebrew), Jewish Studies 37 (1997): 111-42.

115. And thus Cicero felt required to point out that "Chaldaei" was not the designation for practitioners of a specific training, but rather the name of a tribe (De Divinatione I, 1, 2). Indeed, the Third Sybiline Oracle (227; see also J. H. Charlesworth, ed., The Old Testament Pseudepigraphy, 2 vols. [Garden City, N.Y., 1983-85], 1: 367) praises Israel as a race of righteous men who "do not practice the astrological predictions of the Chaldean nor astronomy" (cited in S. Lieberman, Greek in Jewish Palestine [New York, 1942], 97-98).


117. See Urbach, The Sages, 277.

118. BT Pesahim 113b.

119. Lieberman, Greek, 98.

121. BT Shabbat 156a and parallels; later midrashim leave even less to the imagination: "You are Jews, the words of the astrologers do not apply to you, for you are Jews" (Tanhuma, Shoftim 10).

122. The reference to "Chaldeans" is missing in some manuscript versions and also in the parallel version in BT Horayot 14a.


124. BT Yeomot 11b; BT Sanhedrin 95a.

125. The degree of Iranian legal knowledge possessed by the rabbis, and their willingness to apply this knowledge to their own deliberations, is still open to debate, but for one recent attempt to prove the feasibility of such a process, see M. Macuch, "Iranian Legal Terminology in the Babylonian Talmud in the Light of Sasanian Jurisprudence," in S. Shaked and A. Netzer, eds., *Iran-Judaica*, vol. 4 (Jerusalem, 1999), 91–101.

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