The

Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization

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Deborah Dash Moore, *Editor in Chief*

Volume 2: Emerging Judaism, 332 BCE–600 CE

Carol Bakhos, *Editor*

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Introduction to Volume 2

Carol Bakhos and Seth Schwartz

Covering nearly a thousand-year span, this volume endeavors to give readers a sense of Jewish life in the ancient world as it emerged out of the biblical period. The task before us is at once daunting and exhilarating. It is daunting given the nature of our sources, which are often fragmentary and difficult to date or to contextualize. They are also relatively meager; we will never be able to present thoroughly and evenly all aspects of ancient Jewish culture and civilization. Nevertheless, the material we do have is rich, diverse, and evocative. It is exhilarating to have the opportunity to present here, in one volume, our best attempt at a comprehensive collection of texts and images from the ancient Jewish world.

Recent scholarly developments—new theoretical paradigms, increased interest in interdisciplinary studies, advancements in cognate fields—as well as new archaeological finds have thrown renewed light on this period. Digitization has made our sources more readily accessible than ever before. This is not to say that we can now resolve perennial problems in the field or paint a detailed portrait, but we are in a position to look afresh at Jewish life in the ancient world.

This volume is divided into seven broad categories: History and Memory, Communal Identities, Institutional Transformations, Life, Visual and Material Culture, Literature, and The Rabbinic Legacy. Each section begins with a substantive introduction that helps readers navigate and contextualize the sources and explains the relevant scholarly debates and concerns. For those interested in pursuing additional information, a bibliography appears at the end of this introduction.

As one might imagine, the potential ways of arranging the sources in this volume are endless. What we have before us is the result of numerous robust conversations with members of the advisory board and colleagues about the organization of the volume's contents. As we have conceived it, this volume affords an unmatched opportunity to discover the forms and varieties of ancient Judaism and the institutions around which Jews centered their lives. Historical events shape all aspects of culture

and society. To provide a framework for understanding the exigencies that shaped Jewish culture and civilization, we begin the volume with an overview of Jewish history in this period. We then see the impact of that history on Jewish identity and institutions, with the rise of sectarianism, the expansion of the concept of Torah, the shift from Temple to synagogue, the disappearance of the priesthood and the emergence of the rabbis, and the development of new forms of liturgy. From there, we turn our focus to various aspects of Jewish life and society—education, labor, rituals and festivals, and personal and religious beliefs—and its literary output. The final section gives an overview of the varieties of rabbinic tradition.

In organizing this volume, we have also been able to highlight how later generations of Jews understood historical events. There are fascinating parallels, for example, between the accounts of the Roman-period Jewish historian Josephus and those in later rabbinic literature. Were the rabbis familiar with the writings of Josephus? Did they draw on a later work that was based on his? Or did they both tap into a common reserve of traditions? Readers interested in how the rabbis saw the Hasmonean and Bar Kokhba revolts or the destruction of the Second Temple should read the subsection RABBINIC CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE PAST. By placing rabbinic sources about historical personages and events within the category of HISTORY AND MEMORY, we present readers with an opportunity to make comparisons between the writings of ancient historians (Jewish and non-Jewish) and the reception of that history, without conflating the two.

The rich textual sources of this period reflect the diversity of Jewish identities, as Judaism developed multiple strands of tradition, one of which, Christianity, split off to become an entirely new religion, with massive historical impact. These changes also manifest in changing institutions, as the social and religious landscapes of Judaism respond to historical events, in particular the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Jewish people around the Mediterranean and across the Near East.

The distribution of the archaeological, epigraphic, and literary sources assembled in this volume reflects our interdisciplinary approach to the study of ancient Jewish culture and civilization. For example, recent archaeological excavations around the Mediterranean, especially in Israel, have contributed much to our understanding of ancient Jewish daily life. To aid in contextualization—and to illustrate some of the diversity of the sources at our disposal—we have included black-and-white images of some of these material remains in sections otherwise populated with textual sources. The section on visual and material culture, however, is entirely devoted to capturing the history and culture of Jews through color images of artifacts. And again, selections from Jewish (and some non-Jewish) writings are used throughout the volume to illuminate aspects of daily life, rituals, and practices, but the literature section introduces sources as *literary* products, including apocalypses, biblical interpretation, and parabiblical literature. Similarly, all the sections of the volume teem with texts from rabbinic literature, which includes writing that is theological, philosophical, sociological, and anthropological, but the final section on rabbinic legacy serves in particular to introduce readers to the various corpora of rabbinic texts. Premodern literature may be an elite and/or clerical product to

some extent, but Jewish literature of the Second Temple period is so varied in language, genre, and subject matter that it is highly informative, even if it does not tell us absolutely everything we want to know.

In light of the quality of our sources and the specific set of methodological concerns and demands that accompany this volume, we have needed to take a hard look at how we talk about culture in the ancient world, specifically in the case of the ancient Jewish world.

What Is Culture?

Culture is a highly ambiguous term. It often has, at least residually, the sense of "great achievements of the human spirit." A democratizing view may regard the products of the modest or the disenfranchised as also worthy of collection and scrutiny. Popular culture may have a place together with high culture, because it, too, may be aesthetically worthy or valuable. But even this version of "culture" may have a romantic tinge, as it is still committed to ascribing aesthetic value of some sort. These value-laden versions of "culture" are of questionable analytic utility in general and, when applied to antiquity, are so anachronistic and raise so many questions that we are forced to rethink the concept altogether.

There is no question that some classical Greeks elaborated a highly self-conscious type of aesthetic appreciation, especially for spoken or written expression and the plastic arts, so that sensual pleasure in the visual and the aural was, as most people thought, part of what it meant to be Greek, or at any rate, Athenian. And because both the theory and the practice of Greek aesthetics came to be profoundly influential in Europe, they are familiar to us in ways that tend to disguise the fundamental otherness of their world.

But did other peoples—including Jews—in the ancient world have an aesthetics? We can only guess. The very wide distribution of archaic (800–500 BCE) and classical (500–300 BCE) Greek painted pottery and, to a lesser extent, statuary throughout the Mediterranean and Black Sea basins and north into Europe demonstrates that people in those places liked possessing pretty things. In most cases, however, such items were either dedicated to temples or deposited in graves; they were, above all, expensive imported goods that marked the status of the dedicant or the deceased. Their beauty was likely part of their value, but it is noteworthy that no local artisans in Syria or Tunisia seem to have ever tried to imitate such items, nor did they become a regular part of the fabric of life in non-Greek cities.

The existence of an oral/aural—and eventually also a literary—aesthetic is also very difficult to judge. Certainly, no ancient Jewish text to our knowledge reflects self-consciously on literary or rhetorical beauty. While the Greek literary tradition regularly alludes to *Hellenism* in terms of a good spoken and literary style, the ancient Jewish tradition contains nothing of the sort. Some portions of the biblical canon may be beautiful (the David cycle in 1–2 Samuel or Isaiah 40–49), charming (Ruth, Tobit), suspenseful (Esther), or attractively bleak (Ecclesiastes, Job), but we can also be fairly certain that these qualities were not the primary reason they were copied and preserved. There is in fact no

evidence that ancient Jews ever made linguistic excellence a central societal value, that anyone studied Hebrew grammar, or, for that matter, that the concept of Hebrew grammar even existed before the medieval period.

If, therefore, we are going to understand the ancient Jews properly, we must not make the mistake of selecting from their largely literary cultural production items we happen to find pleasing. Nor should we simply highlight only those texts of the Jewish tradition that later generations found valuable. In what follows, then, *culture* will be used in its anthropological sense, to denote human social behavior in general—the socially transmitted knowledge and behavior patterns shared by a group of people. In other words, it is the set of ideas, rituals, beliefs, and attitudes that underlies the various relationships constituting society.

So defined, however, culture may seem to be a poor basis upon which to construct an anthology; culture is *everything* people do, and anthologies normally, and by definition, deploy criteria for selection. Whatever the values they embody, they are necessarily value-laden. Instead, let us imagine *this* anthology as a kind of random (but very large) sampling of a society as a whole that may, if successfully presented, provide the reader with a fuller view of Jewish society in antiquity because of its many vantage points. The material in this volume—and the particular framework in which we have set it—will thus afford the reader an unparalleled opportunity to appreciate ancient Jewish life as fully as possible.

One important goal of this volume, as we see it, is to let the reader share in the creative work of scholars who have labored to understand what being Jewish meant in the period of the formation of the Jewish people. It is therefore helpful to begin with a brief introduction to the historical sources, followed by a survey of the period under consideration. (For more information on specific works that appear in this volume, see Introduction to the Sources.) The synopsis that follows outlines key moments of the period and sets the stage for our treatment of Jewish culture throughout the volume.* It will also serve to introduce readers to three central questions that scholars of ancient Jewish history have debated over the years and that underlie our discussion directly and indirectly: first, the relation of Judaism and Hellenism, especially in the context of the Maccabean revolt; second, the reasons for the collapse of Roman-Jewish relations in the late first and second centuries; and third, the emergence of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism and the impact of the two on each other.

Sources

Given what little we know about Jews of the period, we have devoted a great deal of attention to historical sources, especially in and about Judaea, by both Jewish and non-Jewish authors. The primary Jewish source for the history of the Jews during the Hellenistic and early Roman periods is the explicitly historiographical writing of Josephus (37–100 CE). As valuable as his work is, however, it

*Reference notes throughout the volume will be used sparingly. For additional literature about the period, please see the bibliography at the end of the introduction.

must be read judiciously. His treatment of periods before his own is unreliable, and in general his presentation of historical events is tendentious, at times even becoming outright fabrication. Nevertheless, a careful critical reading of his work can produce a fairly accurate broad outline of events. And when all is said and done, Josephus's *Jewish War* is the fullest account that exists of a native rebellion against Rome, not to mention of one of the great turning points in Jewish history.

Much like those of ancient Greek and Roman historians, Josephus' working assumptions diverged from those of the modern historian. Ancient historians often wrote history with an explicitly polemical agenda, to support a new political regime or to influence theological belief. Like them, Josephus wrote history as he saw it, with no attempt to avoid personal bias. But despite the limitations of Josephus' work, it is thanks to him that we can cautiously construct a historical narrative of the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

Philo of Alexandria, another source for Jewish history in the Roman period, was a member of the leading Jewish family of Alexandria and had strong connections both to the imperial household and to the leading families of Roman Judaea. His brother, Alexander, was the *alabarch*, the leading financial official in Roman Egypt. When the Judean king Agrippa I, Herod's grandson, visited Alexandria in 38 CE, Philo's family hosted him, and the families established a connection by marriage as well. Alexander's son, Tiberius Julius Alexander, was prefect (governor) of Egypt under Nero and praetorian prefect under Vespasian. These were the highest positions in the Roman Empire available to someone who was not a senator.

Philo was surely the greatest literary figure Alexandrian Jewry produced. As a writer, he was master of a classical Greek style without equal among Jewish and Christian writers of antiquity and deserves to be considered in the first rank of imperial Greek writers. Philo's surviving writings, preserved primarily by Christians and unknown to medieval Jews, include treatises on general philosophical topics, but most are essays in which he reads the stories and laws of the Hebrew Bible allegorically, with the intention of bringing them into line with Platonic and Stoic ideas. At the time of Philo's birth, Hellenism as a political position was already dead among the Jews of Alexandria, and Philo himself was a vociferous enemy of the politicized and strongly anti-Jewish Hellenism preached by some Alexandrian civic officials. He may well have been the last gasp of Jewish Hellenism in Alexandria.

Although the high and late Roman periods are among the best-known eras in premodern human history, for the Jews this is not the case. The two books of Maccabees and most importantly the writings of Josephus give us a reasonably good idea of the internal history of the Jews, mainly but not only in Palestine, during the culmination of the Second Temple period, from the Maccabean revolt, ca. 170 BCE, until the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in the summer of 70 CE. First and Second Maccabees is the title attached in Christian tradition to two unrelated pieces of historiography written by Jews in the later second century BCE. First Maccabees was written in Hebrew—although the book survives only in an early Greek translation—in imitation of the historical books of the Bible. It promotes the interests of the Hasmonean family and has little to say about the causes or earliest stages of the Maccabean revolt, devoting its attention instead to the establishment of the Hasmonean dynasty after the revolt and carrying its story down to the accession of John Hyrcanus I, the son of Simon, brother of Judah Maccabee. By contrast, 2 Maccabees

was written in Greek, and its two great themes are the heroism of Judah Maccabee and God's protection of the Temple. It is not interested in the Hasmonean dynasty. Its story begins with the first Seleucid threat to the Temple (probably unhistorical) by the royal minister Heliodoros, ca. 178 BCE, culminates with the story of the purification and rededication of the Temple by Judah and his men in December 164 BCE (the first Hanukkah), and ends with Judah's surprising defeat of the Seleucid general Nicanor, who had threatened to destroy the Temple, in 160 BCE. Josephus provides only hints about what happened after the destruction of the Temple, and as far as we know, no one took up his mantle as historian of the Jewish people. A long-standing tradition in Jewish scholarship has attempted to write history by collecting historical-sounding anecdotes in rabbinic literature, trimming away their miraculous and homiletic elements and patching them together into the semblance of a historical narrative. In the 1970s, however, Jacob Neusner demonstrated through rigorous analysis, by tracing rabbinic stories and laws in chronological order, that these brief narrative units had their own histories and were affected, often in unpredictable ways, by the interests of the rabbis who transmitted and edited them. The stories thus tell us much about the concerns of the transmitters and editors of rabbinic doctrine and lore but sadly little about actual historical events.

Older scholarship also subjected rabbinic anecdotes to readings that did them considerable violence. Rabbinic texts commonly assumed that some post–70 CE Jews accepted the rabbis' judicial authority. This became a claim that the rabbis had *political* authority, recognized by the Romans. Similarly, scholars read stories about events and developments within the rabbinic movement as if they were stories about the Jews in general (e.g., the famous story of the deposition of Rabban Gamaliel II, commonly understood to reflect his removal as the Jews' prime minister by a kind of rabbinic parliament). But rabbinic stories, if read cautiously, never make such maximalist claims about rabbinic authority. So the traditional *Wissenschaft* or Zionist reconstruction of a Jewish political history after 70 CE is based not only on insufficiently rigorous attention to the internal history of and ideology behind rabbinic texts and traditions but also on a kind of aspirational, romantic view that there was an ancient and authentic Jewish statecraft, relatively uncompromised by collaboration with Rome, which could serve, if appropriately updated, as a model for modern Jewish politics.

How, then, can we reconstruct an internal Jewish history after 70? The truth is, we cannot. We have much raw information, but it is scattered, hard to situate chronologically, and difficult to interpret. Indeed, the absence of a marginally reliable running historical narrative, such as that provided by Josephus for the later Second Temple period, makes any such effort futile a priori. But this does not mean that there is nothing to say: we can certainly reconstruct some important developments and thus get a broad overview of history—and of Jewish perceptions of that history.

Rabbinic Literature

All that survives of Jewish literary production between 200 and 500 CE consists of a group of rabbinic texts, which share a language (Aramaized rabbinic Hebrew, which is mixed with Jewish Aramaic in later texts), a small set of concerns, genre, and much content.

The Mishnah is a compendium of rabbinic dicta and teachings divided into six sections, called *orders*, each subdivided into *tractates*. Its redaction (ca. 200 CE) is traditionally attributed to Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi (the Prince) in Galilee. Corresponding to the Mishnah's form, the Tosefta (supplementary writings) is also an early collection of rabbinic teachings.[1] In an attempt to understand the laws found in the Mishnah, later generations of rabbis produced intricate arguments and further amplified many of the teachings; their words were eventually compiled, through a complex series of steps, into the Talmuds: the Palestinian Talmud (sometimes also called the Jerusalem Talmud, or Yerushalmi) and the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli). Both works comprise rabbinic deliberations over mishnaic teachings, as well as stories, biblical exegesis, and folklore. Over time the Babylonian Talmud gained greater authority and prominence over the Palestinian Talmud.

The Babylonian Talmud is a very long work indeed (somewhat more than two million words), and it is also one of the hardest texts to contextualize. Debates about its dating persist, and—despite intensive and impressive research over the past fifteen years—we are still generally ignorant about life in Sasanian Mesopotamia, where the work was for the most part written.

In many respects, the Babylonian Talmud is arguably the greatest literary production of ancient Jews. To this day, Jews read the Talmud for a host of reasons: to derive Jewish law, to participate in Jewish tradition through the act of study, or as an act of piety. Throughout the world, on any given day, in religious and secular settings, men and women participate in *daf yomi* (page-a-day) programs or meet with study partners (*ḥavruta*) to engage in talmudic learning. It is, perhaps, impossible to convey here the content and significance of the Babylonian Talmud. Still, while the intricacies of rabbinic argumentation are best understood through rigorous study, we attempt to give readers a substantive introduction to the Talmud.

It would be misguided to think of the Talmud only or predominantly vis-à-vis halakhah (Jewish law), for while halakhah was its raison d'être, the Talmud is filled with sage advice (even a few medical cures), as well as narratives, scriptural exegesis, and accounts of the miraculous; snippets from it appear in nearly all sections of this volume.

Rabbinic texts are thus of fundamental importance. They are also highly distinctive cultural products. The Palestinian rabbis were a tiny group, probably numbering no more than one hundred at their demographic peak, in around 300 CE. Yet they succeeded over the course of a few generations in producing an utterly distinctive set of texts, both unparalleled in their own environment and unprecedented in Jewish tradition.

Although there is indeed evidence in these Palestinian rabbinic texts of some level of "Hellenization" (to which we shall return), the texts themselves are utterly unclassical. Unlike their Christian contemporaries, the rabbis eschewed the Greek language and the familiar Greco-Roman categories of thought that came with it. Much of the Mishnah seems barely cognizant of the presence of Rome in its world, and those tractates that do engage with the implications of Roman rule do so with marked hostility. Later texts, especially the Palestinian Talmud, reflect greater rabbinic engagement with the political and cultural environment and are therefore more informative about the realities of late Roman provincial life. Only slightly more reconciled to the fact of Rome's presence, they have not

abandoned their fundamentally anti-Roman stance, nor have they softened their rejection of Greco-Roman literary and intellectual norms.

Rabbinic texts present themselves and have long been popularly understood as the traditional Jewish texts par excellence, even more so than the Hebrew Bible. At the time of their writing, however, they represented a literary, religious, and intellectual revolution. The first fundamental innovation of the rabbis is the concept of halakhah. As embodied in the Mishnah, Tosefta, and Talmuds, halakhah is a totalizing, rationalizing, and systematic approach to Jewish law, based on the notion of Jewish law as the primary or even sole determinant of Jewish behavior, as encompassing every imaginable area of life and culture, and as the sole, or nearly sole, subject of pious (and analytic) contemplation. For examples of this, see RABBINIC HALAKHAH.

There was Jewish law in the Second Temple period, and there were priests who elaborated the laws of sacrifice and purity to a fairly high degree. There were scribes and officials who developed institutions of civil law that sometimes, but not always, rested on the laws of the Torah. But the idea that the law as law, in its entirety, should be the subject of a large-scale, ever-evolving project of refinement, study, and elaboration, and that this and this alone (or nearly alone) was the concern of the Jewish "great tradition," is unattested before the Mishnah. Perhaps it was the eccentric consequence of the unmooring of the old priestly and scribal class from practical responsibility, combined with a deep sense of loss; their project was one of preservation, entailing intense attention to detail and to problems of taxonomy and systematization. Perhaps it was, at the same time, a product of a sensibility akin to that which shaped Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the thirty-seven-volume encyclopedia (77–79 CE) of the natural resources of the Roman Empire, or the church fathers' baroque elaborations of Christian theology.

Halakhah eventually became one of the dominant components of traditional Jewish practice, social behavior, thought, and writing, but in antiquity it was still under construction. This does not mean that Jews failed to rest on the Sabbath, that they consumed pork, or that they refrained from circumcising their sons on the eighth day. But the halakhic sensibility cannot be assumed to have been widespread outside the rabbinic movement.

Midrashim—rabbinic compilations of biblical interpretation—are vast treasure troves of scriptural exegesis. But much more than this, they convey narratives replete with insights into human nature; they present a full range of rabbinic ingenuity, humor, worship, and wisdom. Midrashic literature is vast and varied. These compilations are often categorized according to three descriptive binaries: halakhic or aggadic; tannaitic (70–200 CE) or amoraic (200–500 CE); and exegetical or homiletical (see MIDRASH). The term *midrash* indicates both the process—an attempt to understand laconic or obscure biblical verses so as to make meaning—and the fruit of that process. Although the term applies specifically to rabbinic biblical interpretation, it is sometimes used more broadly as a synonym for *aggadah*, which is a term that includes rabbinic stories, maxims, and parables. Midrash is the means by which the rabbis made biblical ordinances relevant, taught moral lessons, told stories, and maintained the Jewish metanarrative that shaped and continues to sustain the Jewish people. Compendia of midrashim not only preserve interpretations and teachings but also reveal a curiously postmodern, multivoiced approach to scriptural exegesis.

The rabbinic period also saw the development of prayer from a mostly narrative element—individual prayers spoken by characters in a story—to a set of scripted elements placed together into a set liturgy. Although these prayers drew on biblical forms, they also developed in new and particular ways as a response to the period. Laments and petitions became increasingly common, as did the form of Jewish liturgical poetry traditionally called *piyyut*—an Aramaization of the Greek *poietes* ("poet"), the same word from which we derive *poetry*. Although the origins of piyyut remain a mystery, one can safely assert that the form grew out of a Jewish liturgical context. The writing of piyyut, in fact, flourished well through the medieval period. Early on, Palestinian-rite piyyutim did not supplement the liturgy but *were* the liturgy; later this practice was stamped out and replaced by the fixed liturgy of the Babylonian *yeshivot* (rabbinic academies). But that is a tale for a later volume.

Survey of Ancient Jewish History

It was during the period covered by this volume that ancient Judaism—the Judaism of Temple, sacrifice, pilgrimage, and Torah—achieved its most fully developed form. Over the course of these centuries (from the fourth century BCE to the seventh century CE), the classical Judaism of Temple and Torah was transformed into the Judaism of synagogues, rabbis, and the Talmud. In the mid-fourth century BCE, there were settlements of Jews in central Mesopotamia and possibly, in very small numbers, in Egypt, but Jews on the whole still lived in Judaea, no part of which was much more than a day's walk from Jerusalem. Judean Jews constituted a small and overwhelmingly rural population. But there were two growing centers of Jewish population in this period as well, one in Babylonia and one in Egypt, both of which had experienced a significant influx with the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 587 BCE.

The Hellenistic and Roman periods saw the continued settlement of Jews all around the Mediterranean, where they established sizable enclaves in cities like Antioch and Cyrene. But tensions with Rome led to a series of revolts in the first and second centuries CE, resulting in additional dispersions as the unrest was quashed. Revolt, assimilation, and conversion did their work, and the Hellenistic Jewish diaspora all but disappeared, eventually giving way to the rabbinic Judaism developing to the east. By the seventh century CE, Palestinian Jewry was confined to some areas of Galilee and some of the Greek cities of the Mediterranean coast.[2] Once-significant centers of Jewish life in Asia Minor—in the increasingly oppressive grip of the Byzantine state—were in decline. By contrast, Babylonian (Iraqi) Jewry had grown in importance (although we remain ignorant about their numbers), and some communities in North Africa and Europe, previously peripheral, were beginning to move to center stage.

The End of the Persian Period and the Arrival of Alexander the Great

The Achaemenid (Persian) Empire, which had dominated the Near East since the mid-sixth century BCE, created the little district of Yehud out of the northern half of the historical Kingdom of Judah. According to accounts in the biblical books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the

Persian emperors permitted or even encouraged the restoration of the central Temple of the old kingdom in Jerusalem, the return of a segment of its traditional priesthood and other officials from their exile in Babylonia (Mesopotamia), and the restoration of the Law of Moses, which some Judahites, both before and after the exile (587 BCE), had regarded as authoritative.[3]

The regime thus nurtured by the Persians was in effect almost entirely new, the discontinuities more conspicuous than the continuities. Before 587 BCE, Israelites had worshiped their God Yahweh in a variety of temples and shrines, not just at Jerusalem, and for most of the history of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, as reported in the books of Kings, they worshiped other gods as well, as part of a regional pantheon. But there is no evidence for the public worship in Achaemenid Yehud (after 539 BCE) of any god but Yahweh. The chief priest of the first Jerusalem Temple had been one important functionary among many, but under the Persians, he was the governor of the province, with no competition from a native king or a royal bureaucracy. The first mention of a compiled law collection, *sefer torah* (book of the law), which the high priest Hilkiah supposedly discovered in the Jerusalem Temple during the reign of the pre-exilic king Josiah (r. 640–609 BCE) according to 2 Kings 22, was a short scroll containing probably a part, or early version, of what we call Deuteronomy.[4] The laws endorsed directly or indirectly by the Persians, also called *sefer torah* or *sefer torat Moshe* (Nehemiah 8:1), appear to have contained more than just that Deuteronomic material. In other words, the Torah that became the binding law code and constitution of the Jews after the exile had not previously existed. Achaemenid Yehud was a very different place from the pre-exilic kingdom of Judah. It was also much poorer and more sparsely populated.

The Macedonian conqueror Alexander never set foot in Judaea, contrary to later legends, but that tiny district did yield to him, as far as we can tell, without significant struggle. To understand fully what Judaea (as it had begun to be called) was like at the moment it submitted to Alexander, we are obliged to consider demographic shifts. These shifts, which are routinely ignored, tremendously enrich and complicate our understanding of events and texts. They also provide a useful frame in which to set an entire complex of changes, both internal and external to Jewish history per se, that forms the main topic of the narrative of the following pages.

At the time of Alexander's conquest, which marks the beginning of the Hellenistic period (350 BCE–50 CE), the town of Jerusalem comprised only a small section of the current Old City and perhaps part of the small ridge stretching south from the Dung Gate, an area today called the City of David. It has been argued that in the time of Nehemiah (mid-fifth century BCE), about a century before Alexander's arrival, only five hundred people lived in Jerusalem, suggesting that the entire province of Yehud held a population of no more than ten thousand. At the beginning of the second century BCE, the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt suggest considerable growth from that low number. Although we can barely guess at plausible figures, the area—that is, Cisjordanian Palestine—as a whole may have reached a population close to its carrying capacity of about 500,000 to 1,000,000, including perhaps 250,000 to 500,000 Jews, with 100,000 to 150,000 in the district of Judaea, by about the turn of the era. It may be worth noting that such sustained high rates of average population growth are conceivable when there are few pressures on natural resources, few health problems associated with dense urban settlement, and, when all is said and done, surprisingly little

damage from war. Such circumstances may have allowed for unusually low mortality rates, especially for infants.[5] Most likely, population growth was very high early on, perhaps until around 180 BCE, when environmental pressures were few and the country was at peace. This would allow us to posit a population of approximately 50,000 to 60,000 at the time of the Maccabean revolt, which would explain the availability of substantial numbers of Judean fighters in that war and the flow of immigration to Egypt. Slowing growth rates or even a decline in population might have followed unstable conditions and the constant warfare of the later Hellenistic period. Last, another period of explosive growth may have taken place in the century before the Great Revolt (the first century CE), when Jerusalem became a wealthy city, under Roman rule, at the center of a large religio-economic network. At that point, Jerusalem may have drawn some of its population from elsewhere and continued to increase in size. In comparison, over precisely the same period, the city of Rome grew from a moderate-sized town of several thousand to a city whose inhabitants have been supposed to number nearly a million—although these numbers, too, are admittedly guesses. To the best of our knowledge, Rome experienced a growth rate that far surpassed that of Judaea.

By any reasonable calculation, then, Judaea's population—and its wealth, its presence on the world stage, and its notoriety—all experienced unprecedented growth in the centuries after Alexander's conquest of the region (see *Hellenistic Conquest*) and, as it happened, all drastically contracted during the height of the Roman Empire.

Hellenization under the Ptolemies and Seleucids

The year 332 BCE began a span of nearly a millennium during which most Jews were ruled by states whose normative culture was, in some sense, Greek. This is arguably true even for Mesopotamia before the arrival of the Sasanians (the last pre-Muslim Middle Eastern empire, founded as an Iranian dynasty) around 224 CE. It has often been claimed that, during the period between Alexander and Muhammad, Greek culture exerted an influence on the Jews, that Jews became Hellenized or, alternatively, resisted Hellenization. More recently, scholars have come to understand that this sort of analysis is something of a blunt instrument. It is all too easy to explain developments in Jewish culture in such terms and all too easy, too, to link such analysis to value judgments. The renowned German Protestant scholar Martin Hengel (1926–2009), for example, admired what he took to be the vibrant hybridity (not his term, of course) of Hellenized Judaism and condemned cultural resisters as champions of a static and ossified religion—although he admired Jewish *political* opposition to Rome.[6] By contrast, the celebrated talmudist Saul Lieberman (1898–1983), who uncovered Greek and Roman influence in rabbinic texts, condemned the conscious Hellenization of Alexandrian Jewry as inauthentic and the main factor in that community's demise but praised the barely conscious and relatively superficial Hellenization of the Palestinian rabbis as a successful adaptive strategy.[7] Some Zionist scholars, following the lead of older generations, simply regarded the history of the Jews of Palestine as internal and took for granted their isolation from broader cultural developments.[8]

Although Hengel's account had a barely concealed Christian supersessionist agenda (Hellenized Judaism became a living Christianity, while rabbinic resistance to it was spiritually dead), he did succeed in demonstrating the importance of Greek culture to Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Palestine and Syria—a fact earlier scholarship had tended to ignore. Palestinian Jews may not have been as "Hellenized" as those in Alexandria or in urban Asia Minor (Turkey), but they still had to come to terms with the omnipresence of Greek culture.

Culture here is not a static abstraction; it was an important part of the political tool kit of Palestine's rulers. The Macedonian kings were themselves just barely Greek by ethno-cultural background, but they were adamantly Greek in their personal lives and in much of their political behavior. Outside of Egypt, there was no official legal or civic disadvantage to being a non-Greek, but kings—and officials above the level of the village scribe—cared to interact only with people who could speak Greek and comport themselves as Greeks, no matter their descent or status as citizens of a Greek city.

Peasants and small landholders, who probably made up the majority of the population in an agricultural society, might not have experienced any particular political or social pressure to learn Greek or act like Greeks, and scribes at village registry offices and tax-farming subcontractors were presumably Aramaic-speaking locals. But many larger landowners and more prosperous city dwellers, who had more regular and higher-level interactions with the state, could not share their nonchalance. Hellenism had a certain glamour, evident in the self-regard of all who partook of it as well as in the pride of the citizens of new eastern Greek cities, and there were substantial practical advantages to having access to the networks of cultural and material exchange that crisscrossed the Mediterranean basin—and extended into western and even central Asia—not to mention the prestige of enhanced royal patronage. All this favored Greek and Greeks. One of the peculiarities of Hellenistic as opposed to classical (i.e., post- versus pre-Alexandrian) Greekness was that it was relatively easily acquired; one could become Greek, although of course there was a social hierarchy of Greekness, and being an "old" Greek was "better" than being a new one.

Important economic and cultural developments accompanied the rise of Hellenism: the spread of the Greek language, an accelerated trade in and production of Greek and Greek-style artifacts, a growing tendency for non-Greek cities to reconstitute themselves as Greek cities, and, for many individuals, a deeper change, of values and symbolic worlds. All these shifts took time to establish themselves, but their impact was profound and enduring.

What did this mean for Jews? We can give substantive answers for only two locations, Egypt and Judaea, although we can be certain that by the middle of the Hellenistic period—around 150 BCE—there were also Jews in Asia Minor (Turkey), Cyrenaica (Libya), Syria, and Mesopotamia.

Egypt is the best-known Jewish settlement outside Judaea, because people who in the Greek language were called *Ioudaioi* or who bore distinctively Jewish names are solidly attested in the documentary papyri that have taught historians so much about the administration, daily life, and culture of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Jewish settlements in Egypt are attested as early as the fifth century

BCE, in the wake of the Babylonian and Persian conquests of Judah. Egypt had always been, and long remained, the center for immigrants from Syria, Palestine, and eastern Asia Minor, areas dependent mainly on dry farming in a climate prone to drought and crop failure. The flooding- and irrigation-based economy of the Nile Valley was known to be a relatively reliable source of food, a fact familiar to every reader of the book of Genesis. The Hellenistic kings of Egypt (Alexander and his successors, the Ptolemies, who ruled Egypt after Alexander's death in 323 BCE) exploited this and actively encouraged immigration, granting immigrants favorable legal or fiscal status (they were regarded as "Hellenes," that is, Greeks) and, if they came as soldiers, large grants of land. It is unsurprising that there were many Judeans among the immigrants, which may in turn tell us something about the consequences of the high rate of population growth back home in Judaea.

From the papyri, we learn that Judean immigrants, at least the military settlers, who tended to be more prosperous, not only were "Greek" by legal convention but also came to identify with Greek language and culture, instead of native Egyptian language and culture, while still retaining a sense of their Jewishness. We can say little about what this combination meant in practice: on the "Jewish" side, we know that some Jews gave their children distinctively Israelite or biblical names, sometimes mildly adapted to Greek linguistic conventions, thus, Iosepos for Joseph, Simon for Shim'on, Ioudas for Yehudah, Rachelis for Rachel. When using Greek names, which, like Hebrew names, often contained a religious message, they slightly preferred neutral names like Theodoros (gift of god) over more specific ones like Apollodoros (gift of Apollo) or Isidoros (gift of Isis). But the latter were definitely used as well; we cannot avoid the conclusion that sometimes the religious content was intentional, not an accidental by-product of an effort to fit in.

Jews in Egypt had the constitutional right to use their own "civic" (i.e., native or traditional) laws. Until quite recently, scholars thought that they usually waived this right, except in the large community of Alexandria, and used instead the standard type of Greek-based law attested in the Hellenistic Egyptian papyri in general. But in 2001, the papyrologists James M. S. Cowey and Klaus Maresch published a small collection of papyri from the village of Herakleopolis, written in Greek in the second century BCE, which appeared to be the records of a kind of Jewish communal court that evidently used the civic laws of the Jews. Strangely, although some of the content of these texts is markedly Jewish—for example a divorce document is called *biblion apostasiou*, the precise Greek translation of the biblical *sefer keritut* ("bill of divorcement": Deuteronomy 24:1; cf. Matthew 5:31; 19:7)—much of it is identical with Greco-Egyptian common law.

Did Jews in Hellenistic Egypt observe the Sabbath and festivals, keep kosher, avoid marriage with non-Jews, even avoid idolatry? Aside from the spotty evidence from naming practices, which indicates at least a certain tolerance for Greek gods, the papyri, mainly tax receipts, leases, and similar documents, provide little relevant information.

From inscriptions, we know that in some of the larger villages Jews cooperated in the construction of what they called "prayer (houses)," *proseuchai* (sg., *proseuchē*). These buildings were constructed through communal efforts, were usually dedicated to the Most High God, and were places where Jews prayed. Little else is known about them, but the very fact of their existence is significant. Other

immigrant groups built temples dedicated to their gods, as did the Jews led by the priest Onias, who built a temple in the Egyptian city of Leontopolis in the mid-second century BCE (see "The Temple of Onias at Leontopolis"). But most Jews seem to have eschewed the idea of building a Temple outside of Jerusalem. Somewhere in the background may be the insistence of the book of Deuteronomy that God may be worshiped through sacrifice only at the one central (Jerusalem) Temple.

Paradoxically, we know much more about the small Jewish settlements in Hellenistic rural Egypt than we do about the much larger one in Alexandria. We have had to rely on the evidence of ancient Jewish writing in Greek, much of which has been assumed, possibly incorrectly, to have been composed at Alexandria.

Like the Jews in rural Egypt, Jews in Alexandria quickly abandoned Hebrew and Aramaic for Greek, although the constant trickle of Judean immigration meant that there would always have been Aramaic-speaking Jews there, as there were still in Philo's day, in the first century CE. However, Alexandrian Jews mainly used Greek and, as they remained strongly committed to the Torah, translated that book into Greek (the Septuagint) as early as the third century BCE.

Much Jewish writing in the last centuries BCE consisted of adaptations of biblical material to Greek literary genres (see BIBLICAL CHARACTERS AND STORIES). Theodotos, for example, retold in Homeric language and meter the tale of Dinah, an appropriately Iliad-like biblical text. One Jewish author, Ezekiel, composed a tragedy based on the story of the Exodus from Egypt; it is the only surviving postclassical tragedy. Others composed philosophical treatments of topics in Jewish theology, anticipating the much better-preserved writings of Philo of Alexandria. And Artapanus composed, somewhere in Egypt, a curious mythographic rewriting of the Joseph and Moses stories, both of which are set primarily in Egypt. Most of these books survive only in the form of brief excerpts quoted by much later Christian writers, and few of them can be located or dated with any certainty. Our texts attest to Jewish literary creativity in general, but they do not tell us a great deal about elite Alexandrian Jewish culture.

For one thing, some members of the elite may well have been less "Hellenized," or even less literate, than these texts might suggest. Some may have been more so; they may have opted out of Judaism altogether. But the preserved texts remain suggestive. Their authors were committed both to a recognizable version of Judaism (all engage with the contents of the Pentateuch or the Hebrew Bible more generally) and to certain Greek cultural norms. The view that these texts were intended to convince a Greek audience of the excellence of Judaism has long since been abandoned. It was the Jews themselves who needed reassurance that Judaism was as good—as ancient, as beautiful, *as Greek*—as Hellenism. In this sense, these texts—which represent internal Jewish discourse—are as "authentically" Jewish as any other.

In Judaea, too, factors encouraging Hellenization were at work: the resolutely particularistic Greekness of the rulers and the resulting administrative pressures, as well as the more intangible prestige of Greekness. But other, more conservative government policies exerted a countervailing force. After Alexander's death in 323 BCE, a struggle over who would succeed him ended in two of his generals, Ptolemy and Seleucus, dividing the eastern Mediterranean between themselves. Ptolemy established

his dynasty in Egypt, and the Seleucids took control of western Asia, including Asia Minor and Palestine. The Macedonian kings did not generally tamper with institutions already in place—indeed, they often supported them. In Judaea, the two central institutions that had been established under Persian rule were the Jerusalem Temple, controlled by a hereditary priesthood, and the Torah as the law of the land. And it is in the Hellenistic period that the evidence for the growing power and influence of these institutions—and for the coalescing of a short-lived opposition to them—begins to mount.

The Hasmonean Period

One of the most famous episodes of ancient Jewish history is the Maccabean revolt. Many scholars have seen it as a civil war between priestly elites. On the one hand were those priests who wanted full integration into the Hellenistic world, even at the cost of certain elements of Judaism, like worship of God alone, the distinctive food and purity laws, and the avoidance of marriage and other ties to foreigners—in sum, of the Torah. On the other hand were priestly elites who were, in broad terms, traditionalists. As the story goes, when the Seleucid king Antiochus IV intervened on behalf of the Hellenists, the traditionalists led an armed resistance. This story was a reaction to an older view, based on the account in 1 Maccabees, according to which the Hellenizing initiatives came from the king. In this view, the king's Jewish collaborators were a small group of quislings with no popular support, and Judah Maccabee and his family were true leaders of the Jewish people. A revisionist version—first proposed in 1937 by Elias Bickerman in his book *The God of the Maccabees*—imagined that Hellenization had made deep inroads in Judaea by about 200 BCE. Having already acquired a high level of Greek culture, the leaders of the reformist party—the priests Jason and Menelaus and their followers—aspired to be proper Greek *kalokagathoi* (cultured, wellborn gentlemen).

Over eighty years later, historians have arrived at a grittier and less high-minded understanding of what Hellenization usually entailed outside the great urban centers. Classical texts were not necessarily popular. Settlements—either non-Greek cities making a switch, or nonurban Greek settlements looking to improve their status—lobbying for Greek constitutions might have been very modest places; some needed advice from royal officials on how the inhabitants of a newly constituted Greek city ought to behave.[9]

As for Jewish support for the Hellenizing reforms, 2 Maccabees makes it clear that it was substantial among the elites and even beyond. A first wave of these reforms took place around 175 BCE, and another—more radical still and this time royally sponsored—was enacted a few years later, in 168 BCE. The high priest Jason (the Greek form of the name Joshua) took a few initial steps toward establishing a Greek city at Jerusalem but did nothing to alter the cult of the Jerusalem Temple, placing his priestly supporters in a strange position; they regarded themselves as partly free of the laws of the Torah yet found themselves still administering the central institution where those laws were preserved, followed, and interpreted.

Second Maccabees next tells a poignant story: Jason and the "Antiochenes," that is, the members of the Greek faction in Jerusalem, wished to pay their respects to the city of Tyre, which was then hosting Panhellenic games on the model of the Olympic games. Jason sent envoys with offerings to the city's patron god, Herakles, but when the envoys, probably all Jerusalem priests, arrived at Tyre, they could not bring themselves to commit so great a sin.

The royal decrees that followed were brutally simple. The Torah was abrogated, its laws were declared illegal on pain of death, and the Temple was rededicated to Zeus Olympios. The high priest was to be Menelaus, an adaptable scoundrel who had offered Antiochus IV a large bribe to be allowed to replace Jason. It seems certain that these decrees were less popular than Jason's reforms, and there is no special reason to think they were initiated by Jason or Menelaus or any other Jewish authority. Yet even now the king had Jewish supporters, and the majority of Judeans submitted to the decrees, however unhappily. Whatever the Jews' attitude may have been to the Torah, these royal decrees constituted an unusual and harsh intervention in local practice.

A small armed resistance developed, led by a family, the Hasmoneans (popularly but wrongly called the Maccabees), of obscure background. Ancient sources and later traditions have declared them to be priests, but it should be noted that their family seat in Modi'in was quite remote from Jerusalem. Their patriarch, Mattathias, was a village strongman, and their concerns, in the end, had much more to do with their own political advancement than with preservation of tradition.

Nevertheless, the Hasmoneans were traditionalists and soon formed a coalition of pro-tradition backers, initially very small. The king paid them little notice, but the rebels, now led by Mattathias' son Judah, nicknamed Maccabee (the meaning of the word is unknown), enjoyed a few victories. Meanwhile, Menelaus, sensing the turning of the tide, alerted Antiochus to his strategic error in issuing such unpopular decrees, and they were gradually revoked.

It was at this point, *after* the king had canceled the persecutory decrees, that the events memorialized in the Hanukkah story took place—the seizure and purification of the Temple by Judah Maccabee (not the miracle of the oil, which was a much later invention; see "Hasmonean Victory and Hanukkah"). While the Temple did not remain in Judah's hands—the repentant Menelaus resumed his high priesthood—Judah grew in influence and continued to challenge the royal forces. Antiochus IV died, and as Judah likely understood at the time, a succession crisis made it difficult for the Seleucids to commit large forces in Judaea.

Nevertheless, Judah's military activity, now aimed primarily at his own advancement, made the Seleucid leadership uneasy. They began to send armies against him. The first major force, commanded by Nicanor, was defeated,[10] but the next one, under Bacchides, crushed Judah and his faction in 160 BCE. The survivors fled across the Jordan and for the next eight years seem to have survived by robbing caravans in the Syrian desert while trying to reestablish a foothold in Judaea.

Judah was essentially a military figure or guerrilla fighter, but his brothers Jonathan and Simon were adept at Hellenistic court politics and indeed proved happy to embrace Hellenism, provided it stopped short of outright idolatry and abrogation of the Torah. As courtiers in the unraveling Seleucid state, they, like other prominent local families, slalomed skillfully through the Seleucid

civil wars. The flow of new claimants to the throne and their constant need for manpower opened multifarious opportunities for such people, provided they were not paralyzed by ideology. The Hasmoneans, while traditionalists, were not paralyzed; on the contrary, they were creative and adaptive. While they were certainly not members of the traditional high priestly family, if they were priests at all, they won the high priesthood as a concession from a pretender to the throne. More important, they retained it by compromising effectively and, in fact, by not hesitating to violate Jewish laws and traditions. They embraced what modern scholars call hybridity, as did many similar local dynasts during the collapse of the Seleucid dynasty, emphasizing local loyalties but also participating in the world of late Hellenistic politics. For example, the Hasmonean rulers eventually bore two dynastic names, one reflecting their Hasmonean/Jewish heritage and one connecting them with the prestige of Alexander the Great and his generals. Thus, rulers had names like Judah Aristobulus (reigned 104/3 BCE; a great-nephew of Judah Maccabee, who was named after a companion of Alexander the Great), Jonathan (Yannai) Alexander (reigned 103–76 BCE; Judah's brother), and Mattathias Antigonos (reigned 40–37 BCE; Yannai's grandson, named after Alexander's greatest general, Antigonos Monophthalmos).

Beginning in 110 BCE, the Hasmonean rulers conquered almost all of Cisjordanian Palestine, a factor that eventually contributed to the complexity of Palestinian Jewish life under Roman rule. In some places, the inhabitants had traditional connections with the Judeans. Idumeans claimed descent from Edom/Esau, twin of the biblical patriarch Jacob; Samaritans were Israelites though not Jews; and while Galileans may have regarded themselves as descendants of Israelites and their rulers, the Itureans could claim descent from Abraham through Ishmael. To the inhabitants of these conquered areas, the Hasmoneans offered the choice between adopting Jewish laws and becoming Jews, or leaving the country.[11]

These were the first historical episodes of conversion, not forced, to Judaism, and they notably fail to fit later models. Kinship with Israelites was a prerequisite, and the "change of mind/heart" we sometimes think of as essential to conversion was not required, though it is attested in contemporaneous literary portrayals of conversion. This was closer to adoption into a family, and yet there were powerful social and religious consequences as well. Local temples were closed, priesthoods were disbanded, and the people were expected to be loyal to the Jerusalem Temple and to obey Jewish law.

The Hasmoneans did not achieve this goal by force alone. The Hasmoneans offered the leading families of the conquered districts friendship and protection in a world that was quickly unraveling, as well as a chance to share power and wealth. Leading families relied on their retainers and clients for crucial labor, so the dependent classes also had an opportunity to benefit. It is perhaps not too surprising that forced conversion took hold in both Idumea and Galilee. In contrast, Samaritans, who already regarded themselves as Israelites, opposed the closing of their Yahwistic temple on Mount Gerizim and eventually ended up in a state of resentful separation. It is uncertain whether the coastal Greek cities were converted to Judaism too, but if they were, the move was unpopular and soon overturned.

Roman Rule in Palestine

The Hasmonean period was one of political unease, and the dynasty's struggles over succession ultimately led the Roman general Pompey to intervene and conquer Palestine in 63 BCE. This was a period of both Roman and Hasmonean civil war. Pompey installed a Hasmonean puppet, Hyrcanus II, who was consistently recognized by what would become the Caesarian faction, but not always by their opponents. Indeed, Pompey's successor removed Hyrcanus from power altogether, although he was restored and saw his stock rise immensely as a result of the help he provided to Caesar during the Alexandrian War of 47 BCE. In 40 BCE, the Parthians conquered Palestine and installed Antigonos, Hyrcanus' nephew, on the throne; Hyrcanus was taken captive by the Parthians. Herod was crowned by the Roman Senate in 40 BCE but for three years was a king without a realm.

The arrival of Rome in Palestine changed everything, though not at first. The Roman Republic was crumbling. Its partly democratic, partly oligarchic constitution had been developed in and for a midsize city-state and could not withstand the stresses associated with empire. The practice of entrusting military campaigns to senators—elected from a small number of wealthy Roman landowners—and their retainers had been workable when campaigns were small-scale local affairs but was disastrous when the stakes were raised. Some senators became dangerously wealthy and powerful, and competition among them grew violent. There was little oversight in foreign provinces, where locals were subject to oppressive misadministration. Pompey himself, who conquered Syria and Palestine between 65 and 63 BCE, stood at the center of one of the leading senatorial factions, and Julius Caesar led the other.

Caesar defeated Pompey at Pharsalus in 48 BCE, but the civil wars persisted until the decisive victory of Caesar's great-nephew and adopted son, Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, over Caesar's most aggressive general, Marc Antony, off Cape Actium in 31 BCE. By 27 BCE, Octavian, by then Imperator Caesar Augustus, had set in place most of the institutional framework of the Roman Empire.[12]

While the Romans were unprecedentedly brutal in war, as peacetime provincial rulers they made some effort to rule rationally, if not always gently. Tax rates were unusually low. Provincials were fully entitled to file formal complaints against governors, complaints that the emperors were not above actually addressing. Some even recalled and put on trial violent or greedy governors. Private citizens could petition the emperor and expect some sort of response. Centuries later, even the rabbis, despite their strong anti-Roman bias, acknowledged and grudgingly admired the rule of law under the Romans.

Nevertheless, Rome was always and everywhere far more aggressively interventionist than its predecessors. The Persians and Macedonians, while trying to systematize and rationalize their empire-wide administrative practices, had kept local elites in power by supporting native political and religious institutions. By contrast, the Romans favored standardization all the way down the power pyramid. Out of the ineffably complex mosaic of states, cities, tribal regions, and kingdoms that they had conquered, they tried to produce an integrated imperial state. And due to deeply ingrained

cultural prejudices, they moved much more quickly and aggressively in the "barbarian" west than among the ancient civilizations of the east.

In the east, the Romans continued to govern in part through institutions created by the Hellenistic kings. First Mark Antony, and then Augustus, imposed a new dynasty on the Jews, founded by Herod. Herod was an Idumean courtier of the Hasmoneans. His family had enjoyed a generations-long friendship with the old dynasty, but having fallen out of power, they were gradually being massacred by Herod himself.

Herod's reign, which lasted from 37 to 4 BCE, began a new era. The Mediterranean and Near Eastern Jewish communities attained a measure of wealth, importance, and visibility on the regional stage probably not seen again until Europe between the French Revolution and the Holocaust. To judge from both archaeological evidence and literary sources, there were probably also a greater number of Jews than ever before. Our best guess is that 250,000 to 500,000 Jews were living in Palestine. Outside Palestine, however, we cannot even hazard a guess.

Jerusalem Transformed

Herod rebuilt and massively enlarged the Jerusalem Temple and transformed it into a magnet for pilgrimage and general tourism, religious and otherwise. He lavished money on other settlements as well, transforming the moribund seaside town called Strato's Tower into Caesarea Maritima, the most modern and attractive harbor on the southeastern Mediterranean coast.

One should not automatically ascribe rational economic motives to Herod's activities. Josephus claimed that Herod built in order to glorify himself, his Roman patrons, and his family members (to whom his new towns and fortresses were usually dedicated)—and, in the case of the Jerusalem Temple, to put his otherwise dubious Jewish piety on display.

Combined with his desire to cultivate the main diaspora Jewish communities and the relative ease of communications during the Pax Romana that followed the establishment of the Principate under Augustus in 27 BCE, Herod's building program had an immense impact. It turned Palestine into a proper temple state, still under Roman protection. Capital—human, material, and cultural—flowed into Judaea from all corners, with enriching, stimulating, but also destabilizing effects.

Jerusalem became a sprawling and overcrowded multilingual city, part of the Roman system but also irreducibly alien—its foreignness only accentuated by the construction work and promotional efforts of the ardently pro-Roman Herod. The Temple itself was the main economic engine for the city.

Jerusalem also benefited from euergetism, the modern name for the ancient practice whereby a city's wealthy citizens were expected to bear a disproportionate share of the financial burden of support for their cities. In return, they received honor, deference, and commemoration from the citizens. Some of the most conspicuous and best-known features of Hellenistic Greek and Greco-Roman cities—theaters, amphitheaters, bathhouses, the thousands of honorary statues and decrees, and dedicatory inscriptions—are the result of the euergetistic economy.

Jerusalem had its own Judaized version of a euergetistic economy: the wealthy were to be pious and to pay for care for the poor and infirm, and in return they were commemorated not usually by honorary inscriptions, and certainly not by statues, but by oral recitations. Herod attempted to introduce a standard euergetistic economy into Jerusalem, but it enjoyed, at best, a mixed reception. The Judeans were evidently more suited to the laissez-faire Persian and Macedonian Empires than they were to the Roman Empire.

A hereditary priesthood played a disproportionate role in local affairs, just one way in which Jerusalem was different from other cities of the Roman east. In every other Greco-Roman city, the public market was flanked by temples and filled with statues of the city's benefactors and monuments to the emperors and their friends and families. Jerusalem, too, had a public market, but there was no public figurative imagery of any sort. In the Roman east, all public writing on buildings and monuments was in Greek, even in non-Greek-speaking provinces like Egypt and Syria. In Jerusalem, there was little public writing, but burial-related inscriptions were mainly in Aramaic, secondarily in Greek, and occasionally in Hebrew. Finally, there were no public baths in Jerusalem at all; private baths served the needs of a populace who needed to be ritually pure in order to enter the Temple complex.

The population of Jerusalem, and of Judaea as a whole, was also highly unusual. Rising land prices, a direct result of an economy inflated by the influx of great quantities of cash, meant that old patterns of land tenure were dead. In Judaea, few free small landholders still subsisted on the "Mediterranean triad" of grain, olives, and grapes, as they did in Galilee. Instead, the needs of the Temple, and the population it had attracted, drove the local economy. Small farmers had probably become tenant farmers or found work somewhere within the Temple economy. Josephus' oft-quoted statement that the conclusion of construction work on the Temple, only a few years before its destruction, put eighteen thousand laborers out of work, should certainly not be taken at face value, but it does give one an idea of the sorts of opportunities available to the peasantry, and of their economic fragility.

In cultural terms, Jerusalem was not a center of Hellenism, although it was not closed to it either. Jerusalemite aristocrats approximated aspects of their lifestyle to that of the wealthy citizens of Greco-Roman cities in general. The townhouses of Jerusalem are directly comparable in design and decoration to those of Pompeii, near Naples, although the Jewish houses lack figurative wall-painting and floor mosaics. Some Jerusalemites used Greek for their relatives' epitaphs, and presumably they did not find some level of Greek education entirely useless. But in making Jerusalem the central node of an economic and cultural network that was overwhelmingly Jewish, Herod guaranteed that the truly important cultural norms in Jerusalem and Judaea would be specifically Jewish ones.

Sectarianism in the Roman Period

The term *sectarianism*, in the ancient Jewish context, refers to the establishment of separate, small organizations based on some type of ideological difference from the Jewish mainstream, usually implying or articulating the conviction that the organization's version of Judaism is holier, less

compromised, than that promulgated in mainstream institutions. As we will see, not all ancient Jewish sects were sectarian in precisely this sense.

One of the most fortunate aspects for historians of the Second Temple period is that a great body of Jewish writing was preserved outside Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls introduce us to a variety of Judaism at whose existence the standard literary texts barely hinted and of which the rabbis preserved no memory at all. Khirbet Qumran, where the sectarian authors of the scrolls may have lived, could never have been home to more than a few dozen devotees at any one time, although it may have been a communal center for sectarians scattered around the vicinity. And yet the discovery of the scrolls dramatically altered our understanding of ancient Judaism.

It was once common to think of the main Jewish sects—the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes—who were mentioned repeatedly by Josephus and other ancient writers, as what we might now call "denominations." Modern scholars applied their contemporary understandings of differences within the Jewish community to these ancient groups. According to this view, it was unusual for a male Jew, especially in Palestine, not to have a sectarian affiliation. It was supposed, first, that the Sadducees—usually described by ancient texts as aristocratic—played the role of early twentieth-century American Reform Judaism; they were acculturated (i.e., "Hellenized"), assimilationist, more dedicated to principles of good citizenship (and so tending to collaborate with Rome) than to the specifics of the Torah's laws. Second, the Pharisees were like the more progressive branches of Orthodoxy, unswervingly devoted to tradition yet alive to the interests and needs of the common folk and respectful of their practices and traditions. They were not resolutely opposed to all forms of Hellenism but would go only so far. And third, the Essenes were thought to be akin to the ultra-Orthodox, shutting out the larger world from their enclaves and devoted to practices that were, to earlier twentieth-century scholarship, frankly incomprehensible.[13]

The discovery of the scrolls necessitated a thorough revision of this picture. The debate over whether the Dead Sea sect was a group of Essenes or not continues to rage; it was at the very least closely related. But however this issue may be resolved, the contents of the scrolls put an end to any simplifying characterization of the sects, complicating our view not only of the variety of Jewish sectarianism in the period but also of the variety of Jewish literary and even scriptural tradition.

The Dead Sea sect was a sect in the strict sense, its members seeing themselves as a pious few chosen from the sinful house of Israel. They were dedicated to the study of *Sefer he-hago* (The Book of Contemplation), probably their name for the Torah, and developed a distinctive form of Hebrew for writing their sacred texts. They also had an idiosyncratic approach to Jewish law; they assumed that laws originally written in the Torah required supplementation in the form of renewed revelation to the authorized leadership of the sect. For example, the so-called Temple Scroll, a rewriting of Deuteronomy, was an important source of sectarian law; the sect preserved it side by side with the actual book of Deuteronomy.

The Dead Sea sect preserved and copied literature otherwise known to us only through Christian translations, like the books of Jubilees and Enoch, or that were completely unknown to us, like the

Genesis Apocryphon and some astrological and magical texts. Only some of their texts were specifically sectarian. These included liturgies, psalms, hymns, visions of the imminent end of days, biblical commentaries (called *pesharim*) that interpreted prophetic texts as referring to the history of the sect, polemics against other sects and against the Jerusalem establishment, and instructional guides for life in a sectarian community, similar to Christian monastic rules, among many other items. The level of elaboration and sophistication is striking.

Even more striking is the sect's reliance on a very high level of literacy. Almost all the truly sectarian writing is in the sect's intentionally peculiar version of biblical Hebrew, reflecting the work of an intelligentsia thoroughly, intelligently, and creatively engaged with a wide range of Israelite and Jewish literary traditions. In addition to the Hebrew texts, the sect copied and preserved several texts in Aramaic.

Greek is strikingly absent from the sectarian texts,[14] most likely reflecting a conscious decision by the sect. Still, hostility to Hellenism or to Rome is not a prominent theme, perhaps because it did not need to be spelled out or was irrelevant. It should, however, be noted that one of the seven scrolls first discovered, the Habbakuk *pesher*, depicts a period in which the Jews were threatened by a foreign force, the Kittim, a term that originally referred to Cyprus but that in the Dead Sea Scrolls became a code word for Rome. The sect's lifestyle—immersion in the sect's peculiar versions of Judaism and Jewish culture—was demanding, totalizing, and complete. It is hard to imagine that a particular attitude to Hellenism required articulation.

The members of the Dead Sea sect were men, though there is evidence that women and children were also present in the community. Scholars debate the role women played there and whether celibacy was required to belong. Although some subgroups seem to have permitted marriage, others frowned on it or forbade it altogether. This complicated the chances of reproducing by natural means; sectarians needed to draw on a constant flow of novices. Most of these novices, we assume, came from the ranks of well-to-do Jerusalemites and Judeans, especially priests. Josephus wrote that during his late adolescence he experimented with the various sects and at some point attached himself to a desert hermit named Bannus, who reminds us of John the Baptist.

Other Jewish teachers in the first century attracted groups of followers, and not necessarily always from the upper classes. Josephus names seven such figures, all of whom seem to have made strong claims about themselves. Normally, the Romans took a much dimmer view of such teachers and their disciples than they did of the established sects—such teachers were quickly caught and killed. In most cases, we have no idea what became of their followers, but those of Jesus of Nazareth constituted an enduring organization. For a brief time after the crucifixion, Jesus' followers could be characterized as a Jewish sect, although very little is known about this period in the history of Christianity. Some Christian groups, such as that associated with Jesus' brother James, executed ca. 62 CE, remained exclusively and piously Jewish, distinguished from other observant Jews only by their belief in the messianic and/or divine status of Jesus. But the apostle Paul (Saul of Tarsus), himself Jewish, made it his life's work to bring gentiles into the congregation (in Greek, *ekklesia*, "church") of believers in Christ, and at some point, Jewish Christian groups became a small minority; they eventually

came to be regarded as heretical. It is a rich and complex story, to which it is impossible to do justice here. For this reason, we have included texts from the New Testament, especially from the Gospels, in this volume.

First-century Jerusalem was dominated by the Temple and was saturated with piety. For the well-to-do, this piety had a strongly intellectual character and concerned itself with contemplation and interpretation of the holy books and associated traditions. Religious exploration was apparently de rigueur for young men of the Jerusalem upper classes, just as exploration of the various philosophical sects was considered a normal part of the life of upper-class teenage boys in the Greco-Roman world—a comparison Josephus makes explicit. In these circles, sectarian affiliation was very common indeed. Jewish affiliations were already structurally similar to those prevalent in the Greco-Roman world. Young men might opt for a more Greek style of education and set of affiliations, but both Jewish sectarian and Greek philosophical experimentation and affiliation were tokens of an elite connection to a broader set of values—for the former, the Jewish ethnos, and for the latter, the classical city. However countercultural the Dead Sea sectarians were, they were inextricably tied to a cultural mainstream that was not only Jewish but also part of a wider set of associations.

All this was, for the time being, controlled and manipulated by the Roman state. The situation might have persisted for centuries had the Romans been different types of rulers. But early Roman Judaea was, as mentioned earlier, anomalously complicated. It was populated not only by Jews but also by "Greeks," "Syrians," "Arabs," and Samaritans. And power was split—even the participants cannot have been certain precisely how—among a Roman procurator, a high priest, one or more members of the Herodian family, and the powerful Roman governor of the garrisoned imperial province of Syria.

Jews were probably expected to live by the laws of the Torah, but there was no unanimity among Jews about how Jewish law was to be observed, even aside from the usual local differences among Galileans, Judeans, and Idumeans and the sectarian divisions just discussed. Furthermore, by the first century, some smaller groups of intensely dedicated Jews gathered around charismatic individuals like John the Baptist or Jesus of Nazareth. It should be noted that much of the sectarian disagreement over Jewish law concerned matters of purity and cult, of interest only to a priestly and pietistic minority, though this was, admittedly, a very large minority in Judaea. Judean civil law was probably in most places determined by local convention.

The Roman Empire was moving toward standardization, however, and in the east as elsewhere the bedrock of this standardization was the city. The Persians had had a predilection for temple establishments, and the Macedonians had been happy to support both city and temple. In the east, cities were by definition Greek. The damaging Roman policies already encountered by Jews in Egypt and Alexandria would soon spread.

Meanwhile, some Jews in Palestine and elsewhere were becoming radicalized. What should have particularly alarmed the Romans was the involvement of the upper classes. Even the most solid representatives of the Judean establishment had only shaky friendships with Rome, and as the first century progressed, Rome's disfavor toward them became ever more evident. Josephus relates the

reluctance of the last procurators of Judaea to work with the high priests; he also hints that the Jewish authorities, for their part, were not handing over taxes.

Herod had aimed to glorify himself by uniting the Jews around a great center and projecting them onto the world stage, making them, and so himself and his descendants, indispensable to the Roman state. His project backfired. He had poured resources into institutions that embodied devotion to values almost irreconcilable with Roman political interests and had thus turned the Jews into a political problem: the only politically integrated and self-consciously important group of non-Greek subjects in the east.

Revolts

The failed Jewish rebellions against Rome constitute possibly the most clearly defined turning point in Jewish history. Jerusalem fell in 70 CE, the Temple was burned on the tenth (not the ninth) of the Hebrew month of Av, and the city as a whole was razed in early autumn of that year. Some rebel-held fortresses held out. The last of them, Masada, fell to the Romans in either 73 or 74. In 115, a struggle between the Jews of Egypt and Cyrene on the one hand and their neighbors on the other turned into a full-blown, two-year war with the Roman Empire, resulting in the ruination of a once spectacularly vibrant North African Jewish community. Finally, the failure of the Bar Kokhba rebellion, which lasted from 132 to 135, further stripped Judaea of Jews—and of their ancestral ways. The forms of Jewish life that had taken shape under the older Mediterranean empires thus came to a violent end. It took centuries for a new version of Judaism to emerge out of the ashes.

The Great Revolt (66–73/74 CE)

In many places where Jews and Greeks lived side by side, including the coastal cities of Palestine, the mid-60s was a period of turbulence and rioting. While Roman officials usually tried to maintain a semblance of order, their political preference for Greeks pushed Jews in many places into a corner. In overwhelmingly Jewish districts, like Judaea and Galilee, this was hardly an issue, but Jewish leaders even there were keenly aware both of crystallizing Roman policy and of the activities of the Roman procurators of Palestine.

In 66 CE, when Gessius Florus, then procurator of Judaea, visited Jerusalem to insist that the Jews hand over unpaid taxes, news of a near-war in Caesarea Maritima and of Florus' ineptitude in handling it led to mass demonstrations in the city. Around the same time, a group of young priests decided to cease offering the daily sacrifice on behalf of the emperor. These events might have remained a temporary local disturbance, however, if not for a single decision by a Roman general. Cestius Gallus, the Roman governor of Syria, marched on Jerusalem with one of his three legions, but after arriving he decided to return home without intervening in an increasingly tense situation.[15] His retreating legion was attacked and many of its members massacred by Judean guerrillas; Roman rule in Palestine simply collapsed. The Great Revolt was, it seems, hardly a revolt at all. The priestly

authorities in Jerusalem attempted to patch together a state, Josephus writes, but this seems to have been successful only in Judaea proper;[16] Galilee and Idumaea had their own leadership and their own social structures.

It took Nero a year to realize that he had lost a province and to assemble an army, led by a distinguished elderly senator, Titus Flavius Vespasianus, to reconquer it. The army turned out to be exceedingly large: three full legions, an equal number of auxiliaries, and a large force drawn from the private armies of the local client kings, including that of the Jewish king Agrippa II (the great-grandson of Herod and last ruler of the Herodian dynasty). There were, in total, as many as sixty thousand troops.

When Vespasian's forces landed at the southern Phoenician port of Ptolemais-Akko in 67, the countryside of Galilee quickly yielded. Those hill fortresses that offered resistance, especially Iotapata and Gamala, were quickly reduced. Significantly, Vespasian made no attempt to come to terms with local grandees, like John of Gischala, from upper Galilee; he regarded them as enemies of Rome. John, who was probably not initially anti-Roman, took his followers and fled to Jerusalem. The same pattern was repeated throughout the country.

Vespasian's progress was slow. The highly unstable situation at Rome, following the suicide of Nero, was irresistibly distracting to him. He spent at least a year of nearly complete inactivity in Palestine before deciding to leave the province in the charge of his son, Titus. He then assembled more troops at Alexandria and marched on the capital to seize the imperial throne in the summer of 69.

By 69, all but Judaea was back under Roman control. Rebel groups from all over and Judeans from the countryside, fleeing the renewed Roman advance, crowded into Jerusalem, where the Roman siege began in the spring of 70. Although even now the rebel groups could not join forces, they offered fierce resistance to the Romans. But the city was ill equipped to withstand a long siege, especially when so disastrously packed with refugees. The besieged soon began to starve. By midsummer, the sacrificial cult came to a halt. The Romans soon breached the walls, but even so they continued to meet fierce resistance. Finally overcoming the city, they burned down the Temple.[17] The war was over.

In other provinces, rebellions were often a matter of local, partly Romanized, aristocrats having one last fling before settling down to a privileged place within the Roman system. No one ever mistook the Romans for gentle. The Romans treated the Jews with unusual harshness. In Jewish Palestine, members of the aristocratic stratum were mainly *not* on the road to successful Romanization, and Rome had no interest in rehabilitating them. No local aristocrats returned to Rome's embrace; instead, they were slaughtered or taken into captivity and put on the slave market or put to work in Rome's silver mines or as rowers in the fleet. Even the impeccably pro-Roman Agrippa II, whose sister Berenice was said to have been Titus' lover, gradually faded from view, and he was never absorbed into the Roman senatorial aristocracy.

In the wake of the revolt, the province was completely reorganized. It received a legionary garrison and along with it a proper Roman senatorial governor. The Roman state had expropriated all land from Jews, though some were in the position to repurchase it. Others, if they had survived the war and avoided captivity, were presumably reduced to tenancy on their own land. Jews throughout

the empire were required to pay a special tax: the two denarii per annum they had previously been allowed to send to the Jerusalem Temple were now paid into a fund, the *fiscus Iudaicus*, dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, chief god of the Roman pantheon. Jerusalem remained desolate, with a Roman legion encamped near its ruins. The entire structure of late Second Temple Judaism was swept away. The Romans slaughtered and enslaved the Jewish leadership. Judaea was now a Roman province, with Roman officials, Roman courts, and Roman cities of Hellenic culture. Many Jews remained, even in Judaea, but they were expected to live not under their own alternative constitution (the Torah), as before 66, but simply as Roman subjects.

The destruction of the Temple was traumatic for the Jews of Roman Palestine, so much so that the tannaitic rabbis active at the time had almost nothing to say about it directly. Strikingly, the Mishnah is enmeshed in the Temple, sacrifice, and related concerns, barely reflecting the Temple's destruction. Nevertheless, festivals, sacrifices, and other observances that had previously been centered on the Temple shifted to new forms and settings after 70 CE. Communal worship and synagogues emerged as the locus of this new Judaism. Many of the Jewish sects that had existed in the first century CE simply disappeared. But in addition to the early rabbis, groups with messianic hopes also persisted into the second century, waiting for an opportunity to rebuild the Temple.

Bar Kokhba (132–135)

In 129, the emperor Hadrian began a tour of the eastern provinces of the empire, a cultural and linguistic mosaic bound together by a network of Greek cities. Roman philhellenism saw the city as *the* essential political entity. In an effort to support its institutions—at the expense of other, less Hellenic, institutions and populations—Hadrian lavished gifts on Greek cities and institutions wherever he went. When visiting Judaea, whose central district contained no Greek cities, he announced the refoundation of Jerusalem as a new Roman city, to be called Aelia Capitolina and dedicated to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Our most reliable source, Dio Cassius, views this, not unconvincingly, as the proximate cause of the last Jewish revolt against Rome. Any hope the Jews may have had for the restoration of the old regime was now crushed.

The Bar Kokhba revolt, about which we know relatively little, differed in character sharply from the Great Revolt. It seems to have been a large-scale, popular guerrilla uprising, with strikingly effective mass resistance by the Jews. Judaea, nevertheless, was reduced by the Romans, village by village, with many casualties on the Roman side and immense loss of life on the Jewish side. Archaeologists tell us that some construction had begun at Aelia even before Hadrian's visit, and Dio Cassius adds that the Jews had been stockpiling weapons for years. A significant amount of time would have been needed to prepare the system of tunnels and hiding places that they dug into the bedrock under every still-inhabited Judean village. Rumors of change may have been afoot long before Hadrian's arrival.

The only leader we hear of is Simeon ben Kosiba. Dio Cassius does not mention him, but he appears in Christian sources as Bar Kokhba and in Jewish sources as Bar Koziba. And, as it happens, the most fortunate of all Israeli archaeologists, Yigael Yadin, discovered Simeon ben Kosiba's correspondence in a cave near the Dead Sea in 1960. The partial portrait that emerges from these letters

is one not of a powerful leader but rather of a somewhat ineffective micromanager (see Bar Kokhba Letters).

The results of the Bar Kokhba revolt were at least as devastating as those of the Great Revolt. The district of Judaea lay in ruins. Aelia Capitolina was built, but at a high cost. The hinterland had been destroyed. It thus remained a poor and marginal city. Most Galilean Jews had never fully joined the revolt and so were not directly affected by its outcome, but there is no escaping the fact that the province—by then renamed Syria Palaestina—was partly de-Judaized.

In the wake of the Great Revolt, the Diaspora Revolt—which had devastated Jewish settlements in Egypt and Libya in 116–117—and the Bar Kokhba revolt, Jews entered the high imperial period (ca. 100–300 CE) much reduced numerically, their once-powerful institutions destroyed, and their short-lived political greatness a bittersweet memory.

Egyptian Riots

Roman intervention in the affairs of the Jews of Egypt stirred local conflicts and ended in disaster. Initially, however, Alexandria prospered under the Julio-Claudian dynasty (from Augustus, starting in 31 BCE, to Nero, assassinated in 68 CE), and for a time the Jews there did so as well.

This is the only period in antiquity for which we have detailed information about Alexandrian Jewry, thanks to the writings of Philo of Alexandria. He devoted two impassioned essays to the Alexandrian riots of 38/39 CE, which were due both to disastrous Roman administrative tinkering and to long-simmering tensions between Jews and Greeks in the city. The Hellenistic kings had classified all non-Egyptians as Hellenes, including those who were not ethnically Greek, such as the Jews. The Romans classified all people not of ethnic Greek background as Egyptians. The emperor's personal friendships with leading Jews of the eastern empire notwithstanding, Alexandrian Greeks no longer had to tolerate the Jews' Hellenic aspirations.

Tensions flared again in 69–70 and 116–117. Although there was some bloodshed in the riots of 38–39 and 69–70, the Jews suffered defeats that were largely political in those cases. On the last occasion, all-out war erupted in Alexandria and other areas of Egypt, in Libya, and on Cyprus, quite possibly annihilating their Jewish communities. Although the revolts in Palestine and Egypt were distinct events with distinct effects on their populations, they were nevertheless part of a single larger phenomenon. Events in Egypt may not have directly involved the Jews of Palestine, but they affected Roman policy toward Jews throughout the empire. With the destruction of the Jewish community in Egypt, the last revolt and final act of dispersion in Palestine could not be far behind.

Jewish Life

Jewish life grew and changed in remarkable ways during the period of Roman rule. The familiar structures of modern Jewish life—such as community synagogues led by rabbis—were emerging and assuming recognizable form. The Talmuds, both Babylonian and Palestinian, were growing in

influence, as was the political importance of the Babylonian yeshivot, where the Babylonian Talmud was being edited and aggressively promoted.

Daily Life in Palestine

For the ancient Jews, much of the information anthropologists, sociologists, and social historians are typically concerned with is either completely unknown or can be reconstructed only in very speculative ways. Much of our evidence for topics like education, labor, health, and even specific beliefs and practices is indirect. We can, however, draw some important negative conclusions.

Despite biblical prohibitions, priests owned land in Palestine and may well have been among the most important landowners there. The biblical law of the Jubilee Year requires all land to revert to its original "tribal" owners every fifty years. This has long been recognized as impracticable, and there is no evidence that ancient Jews ever followed the rule. The priests, it would seem, either simply ignored some biblical laws or found ways to evade them.

In Palestine, the coastal plain is flat but not terribly fertile. The best land in the country, the Jezreel Valley grain belt and the great balsam and date plantations near Jericho, were owned by whoever ruled the country. The hilly topography of the remaining land guaranteed that plots of farmland were small; one became rich by accumulating plots, not by buying contiguous properties. This had important implications for social structure: the Italian-style latifundium (comparable to the plantations of the pre–Civil War American South), farmed by huge teams of agricultural slaves, was largely impossible.[18] The small free farmer would have been a more common figure.

As Judean landholding became concentrated in fewer hands during the latter part of the period, free farmers were replaced by or transformed into tenants or sharecroppers. Such small landholders as remained were, as always, highly vulnerable to crop failure and drought, both of which were very common occurrences in the southeastern Mediterranean basin. Farmers would necessarily have sought protection from neighbors, relatives, and friends. It is often asserted that in the Second Temple period clan structures first declined in importance and then broke down completely, being replaced by the nuclear family. But it seems likely that extended family still had an important role to play.

As far as we know, Jews ate, dressed, and comported themselves the same way as most other people in their environments. There is no evidence yet for the fully elaborated rabbinic laws of kashrut, but Jews were known for not eating pigs. Few people in the pre-Hellenistic Near East did. Like most people in the area, most Palestinian Jews combined farming with small-scale herding. Domestic livestock might have been fit for consumption but—alive—represented a significant economic asset. Most people were therefore nearly vegetarian, subsisting on grain, olive oil, and legumes. Pigeons were raised extensively in Judaea, perhaps for sacrifice but also for the occasional jolt of animal protein for those who could afford it. There is also archaeological evidence for the widespread consumption of (probably pickled or dried and salted) freshwater fish. The most common of these, to extrapolate from archaeological finds, was, somewhat surprisingly, catfish, regarded by later Jewish tradition as not kosher.

We await systematic pathological analysis of human remains from Jewish sites in Palestine, but that from other sites in the Roman Empire tells a rather grim story: many people—though by no means everyone and everywhere—were chronically malnourished and suffered diseases caused by malnutrition. In addition, by the first century, malaria had spread around the Mediterranean basin, with devastating impact, although it was presumably less prevalent in the Jewish highlands of Palestine than along the Greek coast.[19] In the crowded conditions of the first century, all these factors, and more, eventually produced very high mortality rates, especially for infants and women. In the Roman Empire, life expectancy at birth is estimated to have been merely twenty to twenty-five years; there is no reason to think the Jews in Palestine were much better off.

Indeed, some ancient writers thought that the Jews were, in fact, worse off. They were said to refrain from exposing their unwanted children, as a means to increase their numbers—although how widespread the practice of exposure really was among other groups in the Roman Empire is a matter of intense modern debate.[20] They also allowed one day in seven to pass in idleness, thus—it was thought—decreasing their ability to be productive.

Like avoidance of pork and the practice of male circumcision, Sabbath observance was something "everyone" knew was a Jewish custom. Then as now, Jews refrained from work on that day. Josephus cites documents that indicate that Jews tried to avoid public official activity—like court appearances and tax payment—on the Sabbath. Aside from that, we do not know which specific actions were considered work for these purposes, at least not before 70 CE, when rabbis began to discuss the question.[21] And even then, rabbis disagreed with one another. Moreover, it remains uncertain how many Jews would have followed their advice.

What, then, aside from not working, did Sabbath observance consist of? Meals were celebrated, for one. Roman writers poked fun at the poor Jews' fish dinners on the Sabbath eve, and rabbis would later require the expenditure of special effort for Sabbath meals, as also for dress. (It is worth remembering that relatively few people could afford to have more than one or two sets of clothes at a time.) And, by the first century, Sabbath observance might involve a visit to a synagogue, where, Josephus, Philo, and the New Testament authors agree, the holy books were read and studied and where, probably, some sort of prayer took place, although we have no idea about the contents of those prayers. But the larger point should not be lost behind all the details. Jews had developed a distinctive way of organizing time. We take the seven-day "week" for granted, but—before Christians took it over—only the Jews had the week.

In addition to the Sabbath, Jews observed a variety of festivals and life-cycle rituals. Pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem was still possible until the Temple's destruction in 70 CE and features prominently in the literature of this period. As in the biblical period, evidence for what marriage rites looked like is scant, but marriage and divorce contracts became fairly common, and so we can glean considerable information about the various exchanges that accompanied them and what those reveal about women's status. These contracts were frequently written by hired scribes, as literacy was still not widespread. Children received some kind of informal education at home, and some might also

have learned to read or write from a local scribe. The development of the synagogue as a place where the Torah was read aloud created demand for people able to read it. This skill, in turn, might lead a young man to a rabbinic education, although members of the social elites might opt for a more traditional Greek education instead.

Magic and medicine were also household practices and were often closely related, as reflected in the use of magical amulets against illness caused by evil spirits. But there was also medicine as a distinct category, focused on diagnosis and physical healing. The modern distinction between magic and medicine might not always be apparent in antiquity, but it is also a mistake to see ancient Jewish medicine as essentially a category of magical or superstitious practice. Recipes for pharmaceutical remedies are attested in rabbinic and other literature.

Likewise, the category of wisdom literature is a modern one, not one ancient Jews would have recognized. This category includes a variety of ideas, from the practical household wisdom embodied in aphorisms and proverbs to the "big questions," theological conundrums considering the existence of evil and the very nature of human existence. This period also saw significant developments in Jewish beliefs around death, including resurrection, afterlife, and the immortality of the soul.

The little we know about high and late Roman imperial Jews from outside rabbinic literature tells a story of successful integration into the Roman system, at long last. The Jewish cities of Galilee, while remaining demographically Jewish, now became standard Roman cities, complete not only with bathhouses, theaters, and marketplaces but even with temples and gods. We are hardly in a position to know, however, whether this was merely a thin veneer of sensible Romanization protecting a still thoroughly Jewish private sphere or whether the leading Jewish landowners of northern Palestine had concluded that the time had come to become Romans in a deep and serious way.

Jewish Life outside Palestine

Almost everything we know about Jews in Asia Minor and in Italy comes from inscriptions, the overwhelming majority of which are funerary. Until the very end of antiquity, almost all such texts are either in Greek (Asia) or in Greek or Latin (Italy). Almost none are in Hebrew or Aramaic. Some of the texts attest to normative types of communal organization. For example, in fourth-century Rome, Jews were often buried in exclusively Jewish catacombs, and the epitaphs disproportionately commemorate communal officials: *archisynagogoi* (heads of synagogues/communities), *archontes* (rulers), *grammateis* (scribes/secretaries), *pateres* and *meteres tes synagoges* (fathers and mothers of the synagogues/community), and so on. These titles did not remain part of the Jewish lexicon in the medieval and modern periods, but in antiquity they were distinctively Jewish.

No fewer than eleven synagogues—either buildings or communal organizations which may or may not have possessed a specific building to pray in—are attested in late imperial Rome. We can say very little about the *content* of Roman Jewish communal life—there is no sign of a rabbi, even—yet the very fact of its firm establishment is of great interest.

The evidence from Asia Minor points to less familiar forms of organization, especially before the sixth century, when the standardized community seems to have become more common. Some peculiar features are worth noting: in several cities the only trace of Jewish corporate organization takes the form of rows of seats reserved for the Jews in the local theater (attendance at which the rabbis of course prohibited). In other places, Jewish corporate existence may have been expressed through institutions like trade guilds (a peculiar anticipation of certain modes of Jewish identification in early twentieth-century cities where trade unions played important social roles). Most remarkable is a long Greek epitaph from Hierapolis, Phrygia, in the third century CE, in which the decedent leaves an endowment to the local textile workers' guild with instructions to have feasts and to crown his grave on Passover, Shavuot, and the Kalends of January each year.

Probably the most famous Jewish inscription from Asia Minor was discovered in the 1980s at Aphrodisias, Caria, in southwestern Turkey. It is commonly known as "the God-fearers' inscription." This text—actually two separate but related texts—commemorates donations by two separate groups, Jews and "God-fearers," to apparently Jewish but otherwise unattested institutions. One seems to be a burial society, the other may be called *patella*, and its meaning and function remain a matter of controversy. "God-fearers" are attested elsewhere, especially in Asia—at Aphrodisias some of them were very distinguished citizens—but their precise identity is uncertain. The possibilities range from people who were fundamentally members of the Jewish community but had not yet taken the step of formally converting, to conventional pagans who, out of generalized piety, or because of social or economic ties to Jews, made donations to Jewish communal institutions and so could be said by Jews to have revered ("feared") their God. Also curious is an inscription from second-century Smyrna listing a donation for a set of public construction projects made by "the former Jews." Why and how "former Jews" continued to constitute a group has long baffled scholars.

The End of Antiquity

The Edict of Toleration, issued by Emperor Constantine at Milan in 312 CE, brought to an end almost three centuries of official persecution of Christianity. It signaled the beginning of the gradual conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity, a momentous development for Jews. On the one hand, the Christianizing Roman state of late antiquity once again recognized the corporate existence of the Jews, something the pagan Roman state had not done since 70 CE, and granted official recognition to Jewish communal and religious institutions and leadership.[22] On the other hand, from the end of the fourth century on, there was an attempt, both in the Roman government in general and on the local level, to comb the Jews out of their previous condition of integration into local social and political structures.

Jewish laws and institutions were authorized or even supported by the state, but Jews were expected to maintain their separation and to avoid exercising power or influence over non-Jews. They were to enjoy a sort of citizenship, but of decidedly second rank. At the same time, bishops and monks occasionally conducted campaigns of intimidation against local Jews, to the point, occasionally but rarely, of forcing them to convert to Christianity; powerful churchmen did not always see

eye to eye with the emperors on how the Jews should be treated. The state's position, interestingly, received important theological support from the greatest western church father of all, Augustine (354–430 CE), bishop of Hippo, who argued that Jews should be sustained and supported, though in a degraded position, because they alone testified to the antiquity and veracity of the Gospel, as foreshadowed in the Hebrew Bible.

Jews in the Roman Empire responded with a kind of organizational standardization. The synagogue-centered community gradually became the norm everywhere in the Roman Jewish world. In both Palestine and the diaspora, Jewish communities were routinely prepared to expend considerable resources on this type of reorganization. Inscriptions found in such structures inform us that a new language of communal identity was emerging, which eventually became standard throughout the Jewish world and has endured to the present. The local organization called itself *kehala kadisha* ("holy assembly") in Aramaic, or *kehilah kedoshah* in Hebrew, and was dedicated to the performance of mitzvot, at this point meaning primarily donations to charity and to the community. We cannot be certain, but it is possible that some such communities were beginning to function as organizations that sought to provide for the social welfare of local Jews, enabling help with marriage, burial, redemption of captives, and so on.

What the late antique communities lacked, though, were communal rabbis, until the sixth century, when they appear sporadically in a few texts. Instead, wealthy members seem to have made the religious decisions and may have played some judicial role, for which they may have had some sort of Jewish education.[23]

Extrarabbinic texts such as the Codex Theodosianus and other Latin and Greek texts, especially the writings of Libanius, St. Jerome, and Epiphanius of Salamis, affirm the emergence and brief florescence of the patriarchate, a trans-local Jewish institutional structure with earlier origins. The "patriarchs" of Tiberias (in Hebrew, *nasi*; pl., *nesi'im*) appear in the Palestinian Talmud as leaders of the rabbinic organization and as increasingly influential among Jews in Palestine and even beyond. The patriarchs claimed descent from King David and from Rabbi Judah the Prince, purportedly the redactor of the Mishnah, who flourished around the year 200 CE. In addition to bearing responsibility for setting the liturgical calendar, they were rich and could easily place their clients in communal positions.

Rabbinic texts say very little about the existence of an actual patriarchal office before Judah's time but have much to say about Judah and his immediate successors. Curiously, they do not mention the later patriarchs, surely a sign of the rabbis' growing alienation from their patrons. Only in the fourth century, however, did the position of the patriarchs become fully institutionalized.[24] They rose into the high ranks of the eastern Roman aristocracy and were recognized by the state as leaders of the Jews, with the right to collect taxes from Jews throughout the empire. Of course, they lacked a coercive apparatus—this the emperors never granted—so their taxation was closer to what we would call fundraising, but this does not diminish the significance of the concession. The patriarchs' fortunes, it would seem, depended on their friendships in the imperial court, and these began to falter under the increasingly pious Theodosius II. In 415, the patriarchs' privileges were drastically reduced, and by 429, the institution was gone.

Let us turn to the Persian Empire. The Babylonian exile ended when the Persian ruler Cyrus the Great defeated the Babylonians in 539 BCE and permitted the Jews to return to Judaea. Even after that, however, a small group of Jews (it is unknown how many) remained in Babylonia (Iraq). Between the sixth century BCE and the third century CE, little is known about the Jewish community living there, but during the Sasanian period (224–651 CE), the Jewish community in Babylonia gained prominence and influence. The Sasanians, named after an Iranian dynasty that had defeated the Parthians in 224 CE, made Zoroastrianism (more precisely, Mazdaism) the official religion of the empire, but the Sasanian state was nonetheless a multiconfessional polity. Over the centuries, several religions flourished to varying degrees throughout the empire. Early on, Christians faced difficulties, but by the fifth century they had established themselves as a strong presence, growing in number and influence; the king even established a Persian church that attracted members of the nobility. Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian names are found on magic bowls from the western region of the empire. And it was Jews living within the orbit of the Sasanians who produced the Talmud, in which one finds encounters (real or imagined) between rabbis on the one hand and Persian kings and Zoroastrian religious functionaries on the other.

Jews were presented with the opportunity to integrate into Persian life. Some took Persian names, dressed in Persian garb, embraced elitist Persian mores, and acted like citizens of the empire. Others did not. In general, it would appear that the multiconfessional, accommodating dimension of the Sasanian Empire was salutary for the Jews.

The affairs of the Jewish community in Babylon were administered by the exilarch (Aramaic *resh galuta*; lit., "head of the exile"). Very little, unfortunately, can be said about this office. Rabbinic sources—tendentious and uneven—affirm that it was associated with Davidic lineage and that the exilarch held some juridical authority. The Christian *catholicos*, about which there is greater information, provides a point of comparison. Still, all we can safely say is that the exilarch was an affluent official recognized by the Sasanian government as a leader of the Jewish community.

By the fifth and sixth centuries, Jewish life began generally to acquire a more familiar feel. Hebrew gradually reemerged as a language of piety, and in more and more places, Jews apparently read and studied the Torah in that language, and not in Greek. Eventually Hebrew entirely replaced Greek as the Jews' liturgical language, and the end of antiquity witnessed an unprecedented burst of liturgical creativity in Hebrew. The resulting Hebrew poetry, called *piyyut*, is simultaneously completely Byzantine in form and mood and utterly reliant on the language of the Hebrew Bible and the content of rabbinic midrash.

The sources collected in the pages that follow offer a glimpse into many aspects of Jewish culture and civilization; they span centuries and traverse lands from North Africa to Babylonia. Much like the subject of this volume, they are rich and variegated and do not merely reflect Jewish culture and civilization but rather attest to it. We have assembled these texts with care and attention, provided context where we could, and highlighted the complexities of interpretation. We hope that our interdisciplinary approach will give readers an increased appreciation of the important role many of these texts have played in shaping our understanding of Jewish history and traditions. The stories, beliefs, and practices presented in this volume narrate a much grander story, that of the emergence of Judaism.

Notes

1. The relationship between the more authoritative Mishnah and the Tosefta is a matter of much scholarly debate, examples of which can be found in TOSEFTA.

2. We are using *Judaea* to designate either the small district around Jerusalem or the short-lived Roman province. The land west of the Jordan has no one ancient name, but *Palestine* is least confusing and most commonly used when discussing this period.

3. Whatever we may think of the historical accuracy of these books, the basic elements of the stories they tell conform with what we know of Persian practice elsewhere.

4. See William Schniedewind, "Diversity and Development of *tôrâ* in the Hebrew Bible," in *Torah: Functions, Meanings, and Diverse Manifestations in Early Judaism and Christianity*, ed. W. Schniedewind, J. Zurawski, and G. Boccaccini (Atlanta: SBL, 2022).

5. See the various arguments in E. A. Wrigley and R. S. Schofield, *The Population History of England 1541–1871: A Reconstruction* (London: Edward Arnold, 1981), 183; D. L. Kennedy, "Demography, The Population of Syria, and the Census of Q. Aemilius Secundus," *Levant* 38 (2006): 109–24; and Roger Bagnall and Bruce Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 81–90.

6. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, trans. John Stephen Bowden, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1974).

7. Saul Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Life and Manners of Jewish Palestine in the 2nd–4th Centuries C.E.* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1942), and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the 1st Century B.C.E.–4th Century C.E.* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950).

8. Zionist historians were nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians who posited the unity of the Jewish nation and its desire for some version of self-rule in Palestine as central features of Jewish history in general. See Michael Brenner, *Prophets of the Past: Interpreters of Jewish History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010).

9. See, for example, the Tyriaion Inscription from ca. 187 BCE, a letter from King Eumenes II to the inhabitants of Tyriaion, Phrygia, granting Tyriaion the status of polis.

10. This event was commemorated by a holiday, Yom Nikanor, which persisted into the Middle Ages. See "Mordecai's Day and Nicanor's Day."

11. That some Idumeans left in this period we know from Egyptian papyri and also (more speculatively) from the newly published excavations at Khirbet Tannur in Jordan.

12. At home, Augustus continued to present himself as a Roman senator, but a powerful one who, following the example of his father Caesar, sought to absorb all the leading senatorial magistracies into himself: thus, he was consul and censor and *pontifex maximus* and *tribunus plebis*. The senate still functioned, held elections, even ruled a few provinces (provided they were ungarrisoned), but the emperor assumed many of its legislative, executive, and even judicial functions. Nevertheless, the emperors and senate long maintained constitutional trappings—emperors still had to run for offices like the consulship and the tribunate—and for some decades, it was not clear that the new system would survive: in theory, the senate could still overturn it. In the provinces, though, Rome was experienced not as a constitutionally simplified and somewhat dictatorial republic but simply as the next in an apparently unending succession of imperial states.

13. The existence of a Dead Sea sect text—namely, the Damascus Document—among the medieval material in the Cairo Geniza only deepened the mystery. This particular mystery—how the Jews of Old Cairo came into possession of an ancient sectarian scroll, which they then preserved and recopied—has yet to be solved.

14. A few Greek texts were discovered in Qumran Cave 7, but their connection to the sect is uncertain.

15. Cestius Gallus' incompetence continues to puzzle scholars, perhaps because even hard-headed historians tend to idealize Roman military prowess, whereas in truth Roman generals constantly made fatal errors.

16. There were, to be sure, plenty of anti-Roman agitators throughout Palestine, but some ostensibly rebellious groups began as dependents seeking the protection of local grandees in the absence of a government. Others were groups of bandits with little or no ideological orientation.

17. Josephus claimed that the Temple was burned accidentally and against Titus' will, but many believe this to be a blatant lie.

18. This does not mean that there was no slavery: indeed, all sources assume that enslaved people were omnipresent in ancient Jewish society as elsewhere in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, but their ratio in the population was lower than in central and southern Italy.

19. Lower Galilee must, however, have been a disaster area; it may be added that malaria was common, even in Jerusalem, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The issue would benefit from specific investigation. See J. Cropper, "The Malarial Fevers of Jerusalem and Their Prevention," *Journal of Hygiene* 5 (1905): 460–66.

20. In most detail, Tacitus, *Histories* 5.2–5, collecting and digesting the main themes of the Hellenistic ethnographic tradition about the Jews. For the modern debate, see W. V. Harris, "Child-Exposure in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 84 (1994): 1–22.

21. A theme in ancient historiography is Jews' internal debates over whether defensive warfare is permitted on the Sabbath. Some documents from Roman Egypt, for example the apparently Jewish ostraca dated between 71 and 115 CE from Apollinopolis Magna (Edfu), in Egypt, suggest that such efforts were not always successful. Some surprising Judean documents record the receipt of large-scale food deliveries on the Sabbath, which hardly seems consistent with either rabbinic or biblical standards.

22. This recognition was withdrawn in the high Byzantine period, and, contrary to popular opinion, never really withdrawn in Christian Europe at all before the period of the expulsions (1290–1497).

23. The advantages that had once accrued in the Roman world to those possessing a rhetorical or philosophical education disintegrated as the empire became Christian, and Jewish political energies were necessarily increasingly focused inward. Scattered texts of the sixth century mention rabbis as a sporadic presence (inscription from Venusia; Acta Silvestri Papae).

24. The friendship between Judah and an emperor called Antoninus that forms the subject of several implausible stories in the Talmud most likely reflects the political circumstances of the later fourth century, near the time when the Talmud was redacted, rather than the early third century.

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