Chapter Fourteen

Rabbinic and Other Judaisms, from 70 to ca. 250

The war of 66-70 was as much a turning point for Judaism as it was for Christianity. In the aftermath of the war and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple Judaeans went in several religious directions. In the long run, the most significant by far was the movement toward rabbinic Judaism, on which the source-material is vast but narrow and of dubious reliability. Other than the Mishnah, Tosefta and three *midrashim*, almost all rabbinic sources were written no earlier than the fifth century (and many of them much later), long after the events discussed in this chapter. Our information on non-rabbinic Judaism in the centuries immediately following the destruction of the temple is scanty: here we must depend especially on archaeology, because textual traditions are almost totally lacking. This is especially regrettable when we recognize that two non-rabbinic traditions of Judaism were very widespread at the time. Through at least the fourth century the Hellenistic Diaspora and the non-rabbinic Aramaic Diaspora each seem to have included several million Judaeans. Also of interest, although they were a tiny community, are Jewish Gnostics of the late first and second centuries.

The end of the Jerusalem temple meant also the end of the Sadducees, for whom the worship of Adonai had been limited to sacrifices at the temple. The great crowds of pilgrims who traditionally came to the city for the feasts of Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles were no longer to be seen, and the temple tax from the Diaspora that had previously poured into Jerusalem was now diverted to the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome. Although the evidence is maddeningly ambiguous, it appears that after 70 CE sacrifices were no longer performed.[1] The priesthood - the thousand priests who had served at the temple under the high priest - in any case lost most of its importance, although priests (*kohanim*) performed a few sacerdotal functions in the synagogues, especially on the holy days that had once been the pilgrim feasts.[2]

It is often assumed that the Essenes too disappeared in the war of 66-70, but here again the evidence is ambiguous. Describing Judaea in the 70s Pliny the Elder spoke of the Essenes in the present tense: a community of Essenes was at that time living along the Dead Sea coast and just to the north of the ruins of Ein Gedi, one of the cities destroyed by the Roman legions.[3] Josephus too, writing his *Bellum Judaicum* in the 70s, gave a long description of the Essenes, with no indication that they had been wiped out in the war.[4] If the sect did survive the war of 66-70, it must have done so for only a generation or two. Perhaps the last of the Essenes perished in the Bar Kochba revolt of 132-35.

The roots of rabbinic Judaism: the Pharisees and the pursuit of holiness

The Pharisees not only survived the war of 66-70, but prospered in its aftermath: from the oldest of the Pharisaic schools came the institutions essential for rabbinic Judaism. The roots of rabbinic Judaism are complex, but one of the most important was the pursuit of holiness. Like

every other modern language, English retains the adjectives “holy” and “sacred,” but they belong to a semantic field that has largely disappeared from the world in which we live. The opposite of “holiness” or of “the sacred” is “the profane” or “the ordinary.” The ancient dichotomy of the sacred and the profane was based on a separation of the material world into that which belongs to one or more of the gods (the sacred) and that which does not (the profane). What belongs to a god must be not only respected but scrupulously avoided by humans: it must be “pure” lest the deity be offended and punish the community that worships him or her. The Latin adjectives *sacrum* and *profanum* meant, respectively, something like “set aside for a god” and “outside the limits of the sanctuary.” In iconic cults the statue of the god was the holiest object imaginable, and the home of the god - the temple - was next. Sacrificial victims that were offered to the god, or rituals performed for the god, were sacred, and to violate any of them (or to make them impure) was to commit sacrilege.

In ancient Hebrew the “holiness” words were built on the consonants . The verb *qodash* meant “to be pure or holy,” or transitively “to make pure or holy.” The concrete noun *qodēsh* denoted “a consecrated or devoted one” and an abstract noun *qdĕsh* meant “holiness” or “sanctity.” The concern for holiness is nicely illustrated in the architecture of the Jerusalem temple. The innermost part of the temple - the room in which Adonai himself (or, later on, his name) resided - was the *qdĕsh ha-qodashim*, the “holy of holies.” This room was accessible only to the high priest, and only on the holy days. The temple itself was off-limits to everyone except priests in their proper vestments. The four courtyards surrounding the temple were of descending holiness, from the inner (priests only, and again in their vestments) to the outermost, which was open to everyone, Judaean or Gentile, except menstruating women.

Like the temple in Jerusalem, the *torah* was holy, and in order to avoid trespassing upon it some overachievers - certainly the Pharisees of Judaea and their counterparts in Mesopotamia - had by the second century BC begun erecting “fences” or barriers that would prevent a person from coming anywhere near to breaking one of Adonai’s commandments. These “fences” were elaborated in the oral law of the Pharisees. So, for example, the Pentateuch (Lev 19:19; Deut 22:11) forbade the “impure combination” of linen and wool in the same garment. An oral “fence” around this prohibition went further, and forbade the simultaneous wearing of two garments, one linen and the other woolen.[5] While the average Judaean was satisfied with keeping the written *torah*, the man intent upon holiness was guided by the much more elaborate oral *torah*.

The roots of rabbinic Judaism: the scribes and the administration of justice

Almost as important as the Pharisees for the rise of rabbinic Judaism were the scribes, or *soferim*. Expert in the *torah*, the scribes were the lawyers of Judaea: their advice was indispensable in those legal cases in which both the plaintiff and the defendant were Judaeans. Unlike Greek and Roman law, which was seen to be secular and was therefore subject to change and amendment, law in Judaea (as earlier in Israel) was not regarded as a human institution. Adonai himself, it was believed, had prescribed what the rules for civil society should be, and what penalties should apply when the rules were broken. So, for example, the man who knocks out his slave’s tooth must manumit that slave, and the man who digs a pit and does not cover it

adequately must reimburse the ox-owner whose animal falls into the pit and breaks its legs.[6] Because Judaean law was Adonai's law, an authority on the *torah* was not only a "lawyer" but also a custodian of Adonai's covenant. Until 70, many scribes were members of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, where they served as judges and also advised the high priests on legal matters. Although the Pharisees had not been so much interested in the "practical" aspects of the *torah* as were the scribes, many Pharisees sat in the Sanhedrin. With the abolition of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin in 70, the administration of justice in Judaea became more and more the responsibility of those who best knew the *torah*: those who had been schooled by the great rabbis.

From the Pharisaic schools in Jerusalem to the Jamnia (Jabneh) court and school

In Judaea itself, if not earlier in Mesopotamia, the men who strove for ritual holiness or purity were the Pharisees. They were a small minority in Judaea, and contrasted themselves with the *am ha-aretz*, the "people of the land," who were no holier than the written law required them to be. A Pharisee who kept a ritually pure house was careful whenever persons of the *am ha-aretz* entered it, lest they defile the house and its contents. The Pharisees constituted a religious elite, and although they were resented or criticized by some - Jesus the Christ was supposed to have called them "whitewashed sepulchres"[7] - most of the *am ha-aretz* held them in great respect. The Pharisees also had at least the beginnings of a corporate character, with little schools in Jerusalem for the study of the oral *torah*. Established during the reign of Herodes the Great by the famous teachers Hillel and Shammai, the schools - the Beth Hillel and Beth Shammai - remained vigorous long after their founders' deaths and right up to the rebellion of 66-70. A man who had learned the oral *torah* and then taught it was a *tanna* ("teacher," plural *tannaim*), but by his students he was also called *rabbi*, which meant "my lord" or "my master" and connoted both affection and respect.

The Beth Shammai, outspokenly anti-Roman, came to an end in the rebellion of 66-70. The head or *nasi* ("prince") of the Beth Hillel in the 50s and 60s was Shimon (Simeon, in Greek), a son of Gamaliel I. According to Josephus, Shimon was also sympathetic to the Zealots' cause and he too perished in the disaster of 70. But one of the most respected members of the Beth Hillel survived and served as the bridge from the Pharisees of Jerusalem to the rabbinic schools of the post-temple period. This man was Jochanan ben Zakkai, an elderly Pharisee and a *tanna*, who in his youth had been a student of Hillel himself. Although not necessarily more pro-Roman than other Pharisees, Jochanan ben Zakkai was opposed to the armed rebellion and counseled his students not to join themselves to it. According to an unlikely rabbinic legend, when Vespasian (*sic*) was besieging Jerusalem Jochanan's nephew devised an escape for his uncle: the rabbi pretended to be dead, was carried out of Jerusalem on a bier, and was brought to Vespasian.[8] However it was done, Rabbi Jochanan secured either Vespasian's or Titus's permission to establish a Pharisaic center in Jamnia. This small Palestinian city (known as Jabneh or Yavneh in Aramaic) lay an hour's walk from the sea and about ten miles north of Ashdod, and in 66 served as an asylum for Judaeans of the "peace party."[9] It was not much affected by the revolt and so was a suitable place for the Pharisees' project. The destruction of the temple and the end of the sacrificial cult was seen by Jochanan as a demonstration that the *torah* was more important than the temple, and that what Adonai - or *ha-Shem* ("the Name") - most wanted from his worshipers was holiness in the conduct of their everyday lives.

Whether it was Vespasian or Titus who approved the establishment of a Pharisaic school in Jamnia, it is clear that the Romans found it wise to allow the Jamnia institution much of the same authority that until 70 had rested with the high priest and the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. The Nasi, or "prince," of the Pharisees at Jamnia was treated by the Romans as in some ways a replacement for the high priest in Jerusalem. The first Nasi at Jamnia was evidently Jochanan, but soon the post was assigned to Gamaliel II. According to Smallwood, "the appointments of the Nasi after 70 were ratified by the Roman authorities, who could thus ensure that Jewish leadership remained in the hands of politically acceptable men."[10] The Nasi took over from the high priest the responsibility for fixing the religious calendar. Passover, Weeks, and Tabernacles were no longer great pilgrim festivals: while some Judaeans continued to celebrate them in Jerusalem, even without a temple and a high priest, most inhabitants of Judaea began to follow the example of Diaspora Judaeans and celebrated the festivals in their local synagogues. Thus was one of the inducements to revolt - the gathering of massive crowds in Jersualem - removed from the concerns of the Roman governors.

With the end of the high priesthood and of the Jerusalem Sanhedrin, the Pharisees at Jamnia set up a council or court of their own, again with Roman approval. This court, the *beth din*, was intended to play the role of the old Sanhedrin as the highest court in administering traditional Judaean law, and the presiding officer was the Nasi. Because the *beth din* consisted entirely of Pharisees, its administration of justice rested as much on the oral as on the written *torah*, since both had been given by Adonai. For some time after its establishment the *beth din* did not enjoy the same respect in which the old Jerusalem Sanhedrin had been held. It was, however, the highest court in which Judaeans could be judged according to Judaean law, and so it gradually won acceptance throughout Judaea.

Perhaps even more important than the court was the school (the *beth ha-midrash*, or "house of study") at Jamnia, whose purpose was to produce rabbis. In the late first century CE a rabbi was not yet a professional and certainly was not yet the leader of a synagogue. Instead, the rabbi was a teacher, an expert in the oral *torah* and a role model for those in the *am ha-aretz* who wished to follow God's laws more exactly than was done in perfunctory Judaism. Although small at the beginning, in the late second century - by which time it was located in Galilee - the *beth ha-midrash* enrolled a thousand students. These ranged from boys of six or seven to young men in their twenties, all learning from the *tannaim* the oral law. Because both the written and the oral law were in Hebrew, the learning and transmission of the sacred language were central to the school's mission. Jochanan's school was an extraordinary innovation. The Beth Hillel and Beth Shammai in Jerusalem had been small and informal groups centered around one distinguished authority, somewhat in the manner of Plato and his students in the Athenian Academy. The Jamnia school was founded by Jochanan but was not centered on him or any other individual: its goal was to teach the *torah* and for that purpose Jochanan assembled a staff of *tannaim*.

Rabbi Akiba and the Midrashic and Mishnaic methods

The *beth ha-midrash* was, as its name so plainly stated, devoted to study. The verb *darash* meant "to study," and the noun *midrash* denoted the result of study. The Jamnia school and its

successors are often called “Tannaitic academies,” but they offered little that we would recognize as “academic.” Initially the school at Jamnia included a course in Greek literature but that was soon dropped and thenceforth the *tannaim* devoted themselves entirely to indoctrinating their students in the *torah*. The assumption was, of course, that the *torah* was not understandable without study. The literal meaning of a written text, so the *tannaim* explained, was seldom its most important meaning. Finding the *halakah* or instruction hidden beneath the literal meaning of the text was the rabbi’s science. The Midrashic method was especially important after the destruction of the temple. A great part of the Hebrew Bible was devoted to sacrifice, to celebration of the temple, and to Mt. Zion, on which a Roman legion was posted after 70. How could texts like Leviticus or Ezra or the Psalms be relevant to a post-temple Judaism? The Pharisees of Jamnia found a way: in even the most unpromising passages their *midrashim* detected *halakoth* - the instructions for conduct that were conveyed in the oral *torah* - and so rescued the Hebrew Bible from irrelevance. The *beth ha-midrash* launched rabbinic Judaism, and served as a pattern for the Christian catechetical school and for the Muslim *madrasa*.

The head of the school, as of the *beth din*, was at first Jochanan ben Zakkai, but perhaps because of Jochanan’s age the formal leadership passed to Gamaliel II, son of Shimon and grandson of Gamaliel I. According to rabbinic tradition, notoriously unreliable, Gamaliel II remained the *nasi* (“prince”) of the Jamnia court and school from ca. 80 until the early stages of the Bar Kochba war. At the same time, the school’s most respected *tanna* after the death of Jochanan ben Zakkai seems to have been Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph. Akiba was born ca. 45 CE, the son of a shepherd. From those humble beginnings he retained his habit of poverty and austerity, while becoming renowned for his knowledge of the oral law. He himself had memorized what seemed to be the whole of it - in the various interpretations taught by Shammai, Hillel and other renowned Pharisees - and insisted that his students learn as much of it by heart as they were able to do. His instruction to them was, *shanah*!, which meant “repeat,” and the matter that was repeated was the *mishnah*. Rabbi Akiba remained a venerated figure at Jamnia until his execution by the Romans in 135, and was undoubtedly one of the most important and influential figures in the development of rabbinic Judaism. The *mishnah* that Akiba drummed into his students at Jamnia formed the basis of the Mishnah that was published sixty or seventy years after Akiba’s death, and that became the core around which the Talmuds would take shape.

The canonizing of the Hebrew Bible

By the end of the first century CE the Judaean literary tradition, which had begun almost four hundred years earlier, included several hundred books. Many of these - for example, the thirty books written by Josephus - were never intended to be read in the synagogues and evidently never were. On the other hand, the synagogues at the time did make use of a fair number of books that few people today would regard as “sacred.” The various sects had various ideas about what books were or were not appropriate in worship. The Qumran scrolls reveal a relatively wide latitude, while the Sadducees seem to have regarded only the Pentateuch as sacred.

As the Pharisees saw it, the Sadducean list was far too narrow, while other sects were not discriminating enough. The Pharisaic list included what they called twenty-four books, all in Hebrew, and at Jamnia these twenty-four were canonized as the books that “defile the hands.”

These were the books in which appeared the holy Hebrew tetragrammaton, YHWH, a name too sacred to be vocalized.[11] An Aramaic *targum* or a Greek translation, neither of which included the tetragrammaton, was not so sacred as the Hebrew original. The twenty-four sacred books included the five "books of Moses," which were *torah* par excellence, eight books of "the prophets" (*nebiim*), and eleven of a somewhat less prestigious category called "the writings" (*kethubim*).[12] From these three divisions - *torah*, *nebiim*, *kethubim* - evolved the acronym *tanakh*. The Pharisees and their successors at Jamnia thus defined what today is often called the Hebrew Bible, what Christians call the Old Testament, but which here will usually be called the Tanakh.

The Tanakh omitted many books that were great favorites in the first century. The romances of Judith and Tobit did not defile the hands, nor did the Maccabee literature, which by the first century CE had proliferated to four books. The Jamnia scholars were intent upon dampening messianism, and were happy to cull from the "holy" category almost all of the apocalyptic books (Daniel was the exception, but was demoted from the "prophets" category to the "writings"). For good measure Gamaliel II, as we have seen, added to the *Shemoneh Esreh* prayer the twelfth benediction, which was not a benediction at all but a curse upon the *Nazirim* and other heretics.[13] The rabbis regarded as secular, and so of little value, not only new pseudepigrapha such as II and III Baruch and the War Scroll, but also such venerable texts as Jubilees and the Book of the Watchers. What books met the standards of the Pharisees and the teachers at Jamnia did not immediately interest the synagogues, especially those of the Greek-speaking Diaspora. There it seems that the old favorites continued to be read until Late Antiquity. In the Aramaic-speaking world, however, synagogues were more likely to take their cue from the *tannaim*. As the Greek-speaking Diaspora dwindled in the late fourth and the fifth centuries, the rabbinical Tanakh became synonymous with "the Bible of the Hebrews." When Jerome produced his *versio vulgata* (a fine Latin translation of the Bible), his Old Testament mirrored the selection made by the rabbis. The books that had been part of the Septuagint but which had been rejected at Jamnia were grouped by Jerome in a separate category: the *apocrypha*, which belonged neither to the Old nor to the New Testament. The "apocryphal" books continued to be read in all Christian churches in the Middle Ages. Although discarded by Martin Luther and not included in most Protestant Bibles, the apocrypha continue to be regarded as holy scripture in the Catholic and Orthodox traditions of Christianity.

The selection of sacred books made by the Pharisees and the *tannaim* at Jamnia reflected their preoccupation with the *torah*, both written and oral. The resulting Hebrew Bible was perhaps less appealing to worshipers than was the Septuagint, but that does not seem to have been of much concern to the teachers. They believed, first of all, that the oral *torah* was as important as the written texts. They also knew - after the destruction of the temple and the end of sacrifice at Jerusalem - that long stretches of the Tanakh were no longer meaningful on the literal level, and they believed that to understand the "true" meaning of these texts long years of study were required.

The last blooms of Messianic Judaism

Although the rabbis at Jamnia discouraged Messianism, apocalyptic predictions and Messianic hopes long survived the war of 66-70. The fanaticism was dulled, however, and many

Judaeans resigned themselves to the likelihood that the Messianic Age was far in the future. That Jesus *Nazoraios* was to be the Messiah of Israel now seemed improbable to all but a few. Some of these became the Judaean Christians known as Ebionites, devout in their adherence to the *torah* and awaiting Jesus' return and his salvation of Israel. Many other Judaeans focused their hopes on some other deliverer, either one of the heroes of old (Moses or Elijah) whom Adonai had taken to himself in heaven or a savior yet to be revealed.

A favorite prophetic figure in the aftermath of 70 was Baruch, the scribe or secretary famed for having written down the words of Jeremiah as the prophet uttered them (Jer 36:4-5). Because Jeremiah had prophesied in the aftermath of the original temple's destruction (587 BC), Jeremiah and Baruch were appropriate prophets to console Judaeans after the Romans destroyed the second temple. The text known as I Baruch may have been extant in some form as early as the second century BC, but it was now updated, with a confession to Adonai that the temple was in ruins because of the sins of the author's contemporaries: "And the house that was called by your name you have made it as it is today, because of the wickedness of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah" (I Baruch 2:26 Goodspeed).

Toward the end of the first century CE a Pharisaic writer composed II Baruch, otherwise known as the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch (although it survives only in a Syriac translation, it was composed in Hebrew and a few Hebrew phrases from it are preserved in rabbinic sources). The author of II Baruch exhorts the reader to remain steadfast in following the law of God, and promises that all will be made right at the End of Time. That dreadful period is described in lavish detail in Chapter 27, with disasters overwhelming the world in twelve distinct installments. Only then, with the world in ruins, will the Messiah begin to be revealed. Earth will bring forth fruit ten thousandfold, and each cluster on the vine will have a thousand grapes. "And it shall come to pass after these things, when the time of the advent of the Messiah is fulfilled, that He shall return in glory. Then all who have fallen asleep in hope of Him shall rise again" (Chap. 30, Charles). Yet another Baruch Apocalypse (III Baruch), this one surviving in a Greek manuscript, may have been composed soon after II Baruch, perhaps early in the second century.

Ezra was another figure exploited by apocalyptic writers after 70. The text known as IV Ezra (or 2nd Esdras, or the Apocalypse of Ezra), put into the mouth of Ezra prophecies explaining why the Jerusalem temple would be destroyed, and predicting world calamities after which

> the city which now is not seen shall appear, and the land which now is hidden shall be disclosed. And every one who has been delivered from the evils that I have foretold shall see my wonders. For my son the Messiah shall be revealed with those who are with him, and those who remain shall rejoice four hundred years (IV Ezra 7:26-28).

But this 400-year reign of the Messiah will be only a happy prelude to a universal death and then a Day of Judgement, when all are resurrected and the righteous will be rewarded and those who denied the True God will be sent to the fires of hell:

> [29] And after these years my son the Messiah shall die, and all who draw human breath.
> [30] And the world shall be turned back to primeval silence for seven days, as it was at the

first beginnings; so that no one shall be left.

[31] And after seven days the world, which is not yet awake, shall be roused, and that which is corruptible shall perish.

[32] And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it, and the dust those who dwell silently in it; and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them.

[33] And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment, and compassion shall pass away, and patience shall be withdrawn;

[34] but only judgment shall remain, truth shall stand, and faithfulness shall grow strong.

[35] And recompense shall follow, and the reward shall be manifested; righteous deeds shall awake, and unrighteous deeds shall not sleep.

[36] Then the pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be disclosed, and opposite it the paradise of delight.

[37] Then the Most High will say to the nations that have been raised from the dead, `Look now, and understand whom you have denied, whom you have not served, whose commandments you have despised!

[38] Look on this side and on that; here are delight and rest, and there are fire and torments!' Thus he will speak to them on the day of judgment --

[39] a day that has no sun or moon or stars. (RSV translation)

Apocalyptic and Messianic hopes were still a significant factor in the reign of Hadrian, when Bar Kochba led Judaea in its second revolt against Rome. But when that revolt was crushed in 135 the prophetic voices stopped. The apocalypses known as III Baruch and IV Ezra were the last of the genre by Judaean authors. Christians continued to compose occasional apocalypses, attributing yet more prophecies to Baruch and Ezra, but Judaeans evidently lost heart for the genre as a result of the three disasters that they suffered within a single lifetime. Parts of the so-called Sibylline Oracles (and especially Books 3-5) were evidently composed by Judaeans, and it may be that a few of these prophecies were added during the second or even the third century. But the Sibylline Oracles were aimed at Hellenes and at Judaeans of the Hellenistic Diaspora, and although they were replete with dire warnings about the End of Time, they were not especially messianic.

Expectations of the Messiah have continued into modern times, and occasionally have erupted into enthusiasm, but these outbursts were greatly tempered by past disappointments. In the feverous religious atmosphere of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, the pretensions of Shlomo Molcho and Sabbatai Zvi generated much excitement in the synagogues. The most recent episode of Jewish messianism centered upon the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, who headed the Lubavitcher Hasidic community in Brooklyn from 1950 until he suffered a stroke in 1992 and died in 1994. Many Lubavitchers, banking on the prophecy in the Book of Daniel, expect that the Rebbe will be resurrected and will come down from heaven on a cloud to usher in the End of Time. But messianic movements in medieval, Renaissance, and modern Judaism were pale reflections of the bloody episodes in the first and second century.

In any event, after the Bar Kochba revolt few Judaeans had illusions about the imminent destruction of the Roman empire and indeed of the entire world. Thus ended three hundred years of Judaean apocalypticism. It had begun with the euphoria kindled by small Maccabean successes

against the crippled Seleukids. It ended when the fantasies collided against the stark reality of Roman power.

Josephus, Justus of Tiberias, and the end of Judaean apologetic literature

Early in the second century another long Judaean tradition came to an end: the composition in Greek of *apologiai* for Judaism (so far as I know, no Judaean apology was written in Latin, unless one counts a Christian paraphrase of Josephus' *Judaean War* which in Late Antiquity began to circulate under the authorship of "Egesippus").[14] The texts written by Judaean apologists had been addressed to Hellenes and were intended to convince Hellenes that Judaism was ancient, correct, and noble: a religious and cultural tradition that was older than Hellenism and that was either superior to or compatible with Hellenism (although not with its gods, whom even the Hellenes who loved them acknowledged to be somewhat silly). As we have seen, this apologetic literature had begun in the third century BC, when a Judaean with the very Hellenic name of Demetrios published his *On the Kings in Judaea*, of which only a few fragmentary citations survive. In the second century BC it had continued with Eupolemos, Philo the Elder, Aristoboulos and Pseudo-Aristeas. Some time before ca. 50 BC a Judaean with the Hellenized Persian name of Artapanos carried the praise of Judaean tradition to absurd lengths: so Moses was the teacher of the Greeks' Orpheus, was also the original lawgiver for the Egyptians, and taught the Ethiopians to circumcise their boy babies.[15] Philo of Alexandria was more sober than Artapanos and more widely read, and his voluminous writings are preserved because Christians made use of them in their polemics against Greek culture and the Greek gods. It was Philo's hope to show that Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato, fit perfectly with the sacred books of the Judaeans.

The last and in some ways the best equipped of the Judaean apologists was Josephus. Joseph ben Matthiah was born in 37 CE, the son of a priest. Although familiar with the three "schools" of Judaism, as he liked to call them, Joseph found the Pharisees most persuasive. As we have seen, during the war of 66-70 he was appointed as the Judaeans' commander in Galilee, but early in the war was captured by the Romans and thereafter was assigned several minor duties by Vespasian and Titus. After arriving in Rome in 71 he was given Roman citizenship by Vespasian, and as a client of the Flavian family he became Titus Flavius Josephus. Josephus set to work writing the history of the war of 66-70 in the Aramaic language. This was intended, he says (*BJ* 1.3), for Judaeans in Mesopotamia, although he must also have supposed that the history would be of great interest to many Aramaic-speaking Judaeans in the Roman empire. With the help of collaborators who had a Greek education he finished the Greek version of the *Judaean War* (in seven books) before Vespasian died in 79. He then set about writing the *Judaean Antiquities*, a twenty-book opus which he finished in 93. Some time soon after 100, and shortly before his death, he wrote the *Against Apion.* This is a short but well-constructed work, perhaps the most effective apologia for Judaism that survives from antiquity. Josephus' autobiography (*Vita*) may incorporate much material that he wrote while holding his commission in Galilee in 67, but was composed and published early in the second century.

By that time - soon after 100 - another history of the war of 66-70 had been published, this one written by a Judaean named Justus of Tiberias. Josephus' *Life* is therefore in large part a

refutation of Justus' account of the war, and an attack upon Justus' character. Justus too had held a command in the war, and was evidently a severe critic of Josephus both as the overall commander in Galilee and as a historian of the war.[16] Justus was an accomplished writer, and in addition to his own *History of the Judaean War* he wrote a *Chronicle of the Judaean Kings*, which began with the Exodus from Egypt and ended with Agrippa II. Justus' apologetic aims were to put in a good light both Judaism at large and his native city of Tiberias, which he claimed would never have revolted from the Romans had not Josephus incited it to do so.

But Justus' works had few readers, and Josephus made a far greater and a lasting impression. The rabbis did not find his work of much interest, but the fledgling Christian church did. In the early fourth century Eusebius assumed that most of his readers were familiar with Josephus' major works, and Christians translated the *Judaean War* into Latin, Syriac and Old Church Slavonic. Although they are histories, Josephus' *Judaean War* and *Judaean Antiquities* are just as much defenses of Judaism as is the *Against Apion*. In that last work, however, the apologetic form is most obvious. By the time he wrote the *Against Apion* Josephus had read much of Classical and Hellenistic Greek literature. He made good use of his reading to refute Apion as well as writers who had denigrated the Judaeans.

While holding the Egyptians in utter contempt, especially because of their worship of animals, Josephus also took the offensive against aspects of Greek culture. Although he spared the Greek historians and philosophers he ridiculed the Greek gods and their myths. The One True God, he argued, was the one whom the Judaeans worshiped, and whom Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Plato and the Stoics had also perceived, although less clearly and less correctly.[17] Like Philo, then, Josephus presented the Judaeans' Adonai as the realization of the philosophers' God, an equation that was soon to become as important for Christian apologists as it had been for the apologists of Hellenistic Judaism.

Josephus' denunciation of the gods in popular Greek religion shows that in the early second century one could make fun of these gods without unduly offending the Roman emperors, on whose patronage Josephus had so much relied for almost thirty years. Most importantly, Josephus wrote under the assumption that although many of his readers would be Judaeans, more of them would be Hellenes. He was thus as fully engaged with the educated classes of the Greco-Roman world as had been his apologetic predecessors. He cared deeply that the Hellenes (and the Romans) should have a high opinion of himself and of the broad mass of Judaeans.

By the middle of the second century the entire apologetic project seems to have been abandoned. Justus of Tiberias and Josephus are the last known Judaean authors who wrote - in Greek - as much for Hellenes as for Judaeans. It is possible that in the second century a few Judaean writers did continue the dialogue with Greco-Roman society, just as did the Christian apologists, but if so their names and efforts have been forgotten. So ended a debate that Hellenistic Judaism had begun soon after the days of Alexander the Great, and that had continued for four hundred years.

Why Jewish apology stopped with Justus and Josephus can be explained in several ways. Rabbinic Judaism had no interest in a debate with the Hellenes and Romans. The rabbinical

schools were conducted in Aramaic rather than in Greek, and in any case were focused on holiness, on their own tradition, and on avoiding defilement by contact with Gentiles. What the Greek world thought of them was of no concern to the rabbis. In contrast, Hellenistic Judaeans must have been concerned about Gentile opinion. But by the middle of the second century, as we shall see, a Hellenistic Judaean who wrote an apology for Judaism would have been engaging in a project with that entailed some risk: by encouraging Gentiles to convert to Judaism he would have set himself against imperial edicts.

The Diaspora massacres of 115-117

We do not know to what extent Messianic hopes and prophecies played a role in the violence by Diaspora Judaeans that devastated several lands of the eastern Mediterranean during the reign of Trajan (98-117). More likely is that Diaspora Judaeans turned to violence in a desperate attempt to create a more ordinary (or less apocalyptic) kind of state, whether monarchical or republican. Whatever was the cause of the tumults, they apparently took the lives of close to a million people, the casualties being almost equal among Gentiles and Judaeans. By the time the violence ended, late in 117, Judaism was virtually extinguished in two of the Roman empire's eastern provinces and drastically reduced in a third. This was not, however, a general revolt of the Diaspora. The massacres were almost entirely confined to those few areas in which Judaeans were numerous enough to challenge their Gentile rulers. Cities such as Corinth, Ephesus, Smyrna and Rome itself, where Judaeans were a relatively small minority in an otherwise Gentile population, were apparently not affected.

Unlike the revolt of 66-70, which Josephus described in great detail, our sources on the Diaspora massacres of 115-117 are late and sketchy. Rabbinic sources say almost nothing about the massacres, nor - more surprisingly - do Christian writers of the second and third century. The church history of Eusebius, written two hundred years after the event, includes a brief account, as does a paragraph from the Roman history written by Dio Cassius. The story must be pieced together from these brief mentions, from archaeological evidence, and from papyri found in Egypt.[18]

The episode occurred during Trajan's great expedition against the Parthian empire, ruled by the Arsacid dynasty. In 113 the new Parthian king Chosroes (Khushrau), largely to give a potential rival for the throne something else to do, incited his nephew to take over the throne of Armenia. Armenia had long been a neutral buffer state between the Roman and Parthian empires, and Trajan was determined not to let the Parthians make it their own client. He not only ordered the Arsacid pretender in Armenia to step down, but in 114 declared Armenia a Roman province and entered it with his army. This meant war with Parthia. In 115 Trajan crossed into northern Mesopotamia with a massive force and took over most of it. For the winter of 115-16 he returned to Antioch, where he was almost killed when a catastrophic earthquake ruined much of Antioch and other Syrian cities (Trajan himself had to crawl through a window when the building in which he was lodging began to collapse).[19] Returning to Mesopotamia in spring of 116, he crossed the Tigris into Media Atropatene, and then with parallel columns marched down the Tigris to the Parthian capital at Ctesiphon, which he captured. By 117 Trajan claimed as Roman all of Mesopotamia, down to the Persian Gulf, but his death in late summer of that year ended the

expedition. His successor, Hadrian (117-138), abandoned Mesopotamia to the Parthians and restored sovereignty to Armenia, insisting only that the Arsacid who ruled Armenia be appointed and crowned by the Romans.

It was during this great Parthian campaign that the Diaspora massacres began and ended. One important factor that triggered them was certainly the fierce resistance with which the Judaeans in Parthian lands fought against Trajan's expeditionary army. Judaeans had for a very long time regarded the Parthians as benefactors and protectors. The Arsacid rulers of Parthia had traditionally been solicitous of their many Judaean subjects. By the end of the first century CE a Judaean official known as the *Exilarch* was regularly appointed by the Arsacid king to look after the million or so Judaeans in the Parthian empire. While they were well disposed to Chosroes and earlier Parthian kings, the Judaeans of Mesopotamia looked upon Rome as an enemy. The Romans not only had destroyed the Jerusalem temple, but also had set up a *fiscus Iudaicus,* a "Judaean treasury," into which Judaeans everywhere in the Roman empire were required to pay an annual tax of two drachmas. Adding insult to this tax was Vespasian's decision that revenues from the *fiscus Iudaicus* be devoted to the temple and cult of Jupiter Capitolinus in Rome.[20]

Although almost totally obscure, another factor in provoking the massacres may have been Trajan's threat to, and conquest of, the last sovereign state under Judaean control. This was Adiabene, the small kingdom just east of the Tigris, where the ruling family and apparently many of the subjects had converted to Judaism in the 40s CE. We have seen (toward the end of Chapter 4) that King Izates and his mother, Queen Helenē, were staunch supporters of the Jerusalem temple until their deaths in 58, and that Helenē's bones were buried in a spectacular tomb just outside Jerusalem. Although the kingdom of Adiabene was of no importance compared to the great powers of Parthia and Rome, it may have been treasured by many Judaeans simply because it was the only sovereign Judaean state left after the death of Agrippa II (from 48 until his death in the 90s Agrippa II had ruled the tiny territory of Chalkis, between the Lebanon and Antilebanon mountain ranges). After his conquests in 115 and 116 Trajan abolished the kingdom of Adiabene, sweeping it into the new province that he called *Assyria provincia*.

Local factors in the Hellenistic Diaspora may also have played a part in the Judaean uprising. One of the legions that Trajan took with him to Mesopotamia was Legio III Cyrenaica, ordinarily stationed in Egypt. Perhaps it was because the Roman military presence in Egypt was at half strength that the Judaean inhabitants of Alexandria were emboldened to attack their Greek neighbors. The violence broke out in Egypt well before October of 115. A papyrus fragment of that date indicates that the Judaeans of Alexandria had revolted and that the Roman prefect of Egypt, probably M. Rutilius Lupus, had sent his one remaining legion against the rebels and had evidently defeated them. In the aftermath of this rebellion, however, the Hellenes of Alexandria were attacking the Judaeans and their property, and the prefect orders the Hellenes to stop their actions immediately.[21] As will be recalled, several hundred thousand Alexandrians were Judaean, almost matching the city's Gentile population. Although the violence may have been temporarily checked in Alexandria, it had by then spread to the Nile valley in both Lower and Upper Egypt.

The course of the civil war here is known in part from papyri, and especially from an archive of letters of Apollonios of Hermoupolis, a town in Upper Egypt. Apollonios was the general

(*strategos*) of an Egyptian nome, or district, and the letters are his correspondence with his sister-wife Aline. Elizabeth Smallwood reports some details about Aline:

> In a letter to her husband probably written in September 115 she tells him how she cannot eat or sleep for anxiety after his sudden departure and was too miserable to take part in the New Year's Day celebrations, and begs him not to expose himself to danger without a guard. Their mother Eudaimonis heard tales of Jewish atrocities and in a fragment of a letter to her son records her prayer to 'the gods, especially the invincible Hermes, that they may not roast you.'[22]

Other letters tell of hopes that the massed forces of Egyptian villagers will be able to defeat the Judaeans. They could not, and Judaean marauders entered Hermoupolis and plundered Apollonios' estates. By late 116 the Nile valley as far south as Thebes was in turmoil. What happened in Alexandria is less clear, but certainly much blood was shed. It was at this time that the Judaeans of Alexandria took their vengeance - delayed for almost 180 years - on Pompeius, the Roman proconsul who had entered the Jerusalem temple in 63 BC. They broke into and desecrated Pompeius' tomb in Alexandria, and threw his bones into the sea. By the end of 117 Roman legions - under Marcius Turbo - had quelled the disorder in Alexandria and elsewhere in Egypt.

The Judaean *politeuma* in Alexandria may have survived the massacres of 115-117, but in the rest of Lower Egypt and throughout Upper Egypt the evidence indicates that only a tiny fraction of the Judaean population survived. Papyri dating from the period after 117 show that few men in any of the Nile towns and villages paid the "Jewish tax," and persons with Judaean names scarcely show up in legal or business transactions. If more than a million Egyptians were indeed Judaean in the time of Philo, many hundred thousand must have been killed during the massacres.[23]

From Egypt the Diaspora violence spread to the North African city of Cyrene and other towns of Cyrenaica, in which a large part of the population was Judaean. Here the Judaeans seem to have hoped to establish a Judaean state, whether a kingdom or a theocratic republic. They were led by a "king," whose name was either Lukuas or Andreas. Dio Cassius says that the Judaeans of the province slew 220,000 Hellenes and dealt savagely with them, mutilating, gutting and skinning their victims. Whether Dio was reporting facts or allegations is uncertain. For perhaps the better part of a year the Judaeans of Cyrenaica controlled the province, and the Hellenes who survived fled to Egypt in order to save their lives. Archeological evidence from Cyrenaica shows that the center of Cyrene was in great part destroyed by the Judaeans. The public baths and a basilica were burned to the ground. The temples were chief targets for Judaean anger: the temples of the Greek gods Apollo, Zeus, Hekate, and the Dioskouroi were destroyed, as may have been temples of Demeter and Artemis. Special fury was vented on the Caesareum, where the Imperial Cult was housed.

When Trajan in Mesopotamia learned what was happening in Egypt and Cyrenaica he detached part of his expeditionary force and sent it under the command of a legate, Q. Marcius Turbo, to crush the insurgents and recover the province. The Judaeans tore up the road that led from the city of Cyrene to the harbor-town of Apollonia, evidently to make it more difficult for the legions to bring up a siege train from the port to the city. Turbo's legions do not seem to have met resistance in the field, however, and were able to take Cyrene after a relatively short siege. They must have killed

most of the Judaeans who held the city, and those who were captured (many may have fled westward, to other North African cities) were enslaved and shipped to other parts of the empire. The massacres of 115-116 marked the virtual end of Judaism in Cyrenaica, where it had thrived for more than four hundred years. They also ended the ancient prosperity of Cyrenaica, which had begun in the seventh century BC. The province was left so depopulated that Hadrian issued a call for colonists to go to Cyrenaica and take over the fields that had gone to weeds since the slaughter of the farmers who had previously tilled them.

The infection of the civil war in Alexandria and Cyrene spread also to Cyprus. In the preceding chapter reference was made to the Cypriote synagogues that were visited by Paul and Barnabas. By the early second century the urban population on that island seems to have been almost evenly split between Hellenes and Judaeans. According to Dio's questionable account, in the massacres of 115-117 the Judaeans of the island slew 240,000 Hellenes. The coastal city of Salamis was almost entirely destroyed.[24] On Cyprus too the objective of the Judaeans may have been the creation of a Judaean state. In the end, however, Roman military force combined with the Hellenic civilian population overwhelmed the Judaeans. As in Cyrenaica, when finally the violence ended there were no longer Judaeans on the island, and Dio says that in his day any Judaean who came to the island - even if on a ship that had been blown off course - was put to death.

In Mesopotamia, where the episode had begun, Judaeans were in the forefront of the battle against Trajan. After the emperor and his army had passed through northern Mesopotamia and were operating near the Persian Gulf, the Judaeans led Edessa, Nisibis and other cities of the north (and as far south as Seleukeia-on-Tigris) to revolt: the rebels overpowered and slew the Roman garrisons that Trajan had placed in the cities. From southern Mesopotamia Trajan sent north another of his trusted generals, Lusius Quietus, by birth a Mauretanian ("Moor"). Quietus recaptured Nisibis, and burned Edessa and Seleukeia.[25] The retribution fell especially on the Judaean population of the rebellious cities.

In Judaea itself a small rebellion may have begun in 117, perhaps because the rebels who had been defeated in Cyrenaica and Egypt took refuge in Judaea. After Lusius Quietus had completed his pacification of northern Mesopotamia, Trajan sent him to Judaea to put down the rebels there and govern the province. Very late and unreliable rabbinic sources about "Kitos' War" suggest that Quietus may have besieged Lydda, between Jerusalem and the sea, and that after capturing the city he may have ordered the execution of the Judaean leaders. The city of Lydda was at some point renamed *Diospolis*, "the city of Zeus." Lusius Quietus, or "Kitos," did not last long as governor of Judaea. When Trajan died of a stroke in 117 he was succeeded by Hadrian, who was married to Trajan's niece and whom Trajan on his deathbed adopted as his son. Quietus was one of several generals who were displeased with the succession, or were angry that they had been passed over. When Hadrian learned of a conspiracy he ordered the execution of Quietus and three other men of consular rank. In the confused rabbinic traditions, it is sometimes Trajan himself who is executed, as Adonai takes vengeance on the wicked emperor.[26]

So ended the massacres of 115-117. They were as costly, in terms of lives lost, as the revolt of Judaea in 66-70. They are poorly documented, however, and have received little attention from historians, whether secular, Jewish, or Christian. They deserve far more study because - together with

the war of 66-70 and the Bar Kochba revolt - they help to explain why much of the burden shifted from Judaism to Christianity in the ancient world's millennium-long turn from the gods to God.

The revolt of Bar Kochba, 132-35

The last of the three disastrous wars that Judaeans fought against the Roman empire and its Gentile inhabitants was the revolt of Bar Kochba. The Bar Kochba war was fought in Judaea itself, but its consequences were felt both in Judaea and in the Diaspora. The revolt occurred in the reign of Hadrian (117-138), one of the "five good emperors" who presided over the Roman empire from 98 through 180. The main rabbinic source on this war is a chapter in the *Midrash Rabbah on Lamentations*, composed in the fifth or sixth century. Almost everything said in *Lamentations Rabbah* 2, however, is fantastic: each of Bar Kozeba's men was strong enough to uproot a mature cedar tree from Mt. Lebanon, and Bar Kozeba himself, on his knees, caught the boulders launched by enemy catapults and hurled them back at the Romans, killing many. More useful accounts, although very brief, are provided at Dio Cassius 69.12-14 and Eusebius *HE* 4.6. The most direct evidence comes - on the Roman side - from inscriptions revealing the deployment of legions, and - for the Judaeans - from papyri found at Wadi Murabba'at and from the legends that the rebels stamped on their coins.[27]

In contrast with Trajan, his warlike predecessor, Hadrian had no desire to extend the already enormous empire. Instead, he focused his energies on strengthening the empire's defenses and streamlining its administration. Another of his favorite projects was the revival of Hellenism, especially as it had been in the days before Alexander the Great. Hadrian's classical Hellenism expressed itself personally in his beard, which revived the bearded fashion of pre-Alexander Greece, and in his devotion to his young male lover, Antinous. Hadrian built extensively in Athens, which was still - despite Alexandria - the educational center of the Greek-speaking world, and he established an association called the *Panhellenion*, in which all of the old Greek cities (those founded before the time of Alexander the Great) were enrolled.

Hadrian was also an indefatigable traveler, and during a visit to Jerusalem in 129 he seems to have conceived the idea that he could promote Hellenism among the Judaeans by refounding and rebuilding Jerusalem as a Roman colony. The colony was to be called "Aelia" after himself (Hadrian's full name was P. Aelius Hadrianus), and was to include a temple to Jupiter. The city had housed much of a Roman legion (X Fretensis) since the end of the 66-70 revolt,[28] and certainly must since that date have had shrines and altars on which the troops made sacrifices to their gods. But Hadrian's decision to rebuild and rename the city and to build a proper temple to Jupiter was obviously a daring departure. Perhaps the emperor, like Antiochos Epiphanes three hundred years earlier, fondly imagined that the Judaeans would equate Jupiter with Adonai and actually take pride in a splendid Roman temple. The more likely alternative is that Hadrian knew that his project would provoke violence.

Serious work on the city and temple began in 131. Not surprisingly, it ignited in Judaea (the Judaeans of Galilee did not much participate) a firestorm of resistance and revolt.[29] The revolt broke out in 132 and was led by Simeon bar Kosiba, who had a magnificent physique and was also a shrewd commander. After the revolt was already under way and succeeding, Simeon bar Kosiba was hailed

by Rabbi Akiba as a messiah and as *Bar Kochba*, or "son of the star." Akiba's salutation alluded to the prophecy at Numbers 24:17: "There shall come forth a star out of Jacob." Simeon accepted the messianic prophecy and "Bar Kochba" is the name by which many in later generations remembered him.

The province of Judaea was at the time governed by a proconsul, Q. Tineius Rufus, but Rufus' two legions could not prevent Bar Kochba and the rebels from taking Jerusalem, at which Hadrian's grand new design was just beginning to take shape. Once in control of Jerusalem Bar Kochba ordered that sacrifices to Adonai be resumed, under the direction of a priest named Eleazar, who was Bar Kochba's uncle. Evidently most of the Judaean countryside joined the revolt, because Dio Cassius indicates that the Romans had to besiege and take fifty fortified places (*phrouria*). One entire legion - Legio XXII Deiotariana, brought up from Egypt - seems to have been wiped out in the early stages of the revolt. Coins minted by Bar Kochba proclaimed "Year One of the Redemption of Israel" and - in 133 - "Year Two of the Freedom of Israel." The legend on coins of the following year were less optimistic: "Year Three: For the Freedom of Jerusalem."[30]

In 133 command against the rebels was assumed by S. Julius Severus, whom Hadrian transferred from Britain to Judaea, and men from no less than seven legions fought under Severus' command.[31] His forces must have been too formidable to be met in the open field by the guerillas, and after his arrival the rebels were restricted to hit-and-run attacks on Roman units moving through the hill country, while the Romans methodically reduced the cities by sieges. As in the revolt of 66-70, the Roman strategy was to starve out the rebels and the populations that they controlled. Jerusalem itself seems to have fallen to Severus by early summer of 135, and the end came in August of that year, at a fortress called Bethar: as the crow flies, Bethar lay six miles to the southwest of Jerusalem. A sizeable force of rebels held out there for some time, but they were eventually overwhelmed by Severus' legions. Bar Kochba perished with all of his army.[32] Rabbi Akiba, over ninety years old, was executed on Hadrian's orders, and his death was thereafter mourned every year on Yom Kippur.

Consequences of the Bar Kochba revolt

According to the statistics given by Dio Cassius (69.14), in the course of the Bar Kochba war the Romans destroyed - in addition to the fifty fortified places - 985 villages of Judaea. In battle, either at the fortresses or in the field, 580,000 Judaean men lost their lives, and even more Judaeans died from starvation or disease. Although we have no way of knowing how inflated Dio's figures are, we must suppose that in terms of human life the revolt of 132-35 may have been almost as calamitous for Judaea as had been the revolt of 66-70. And the consequences of the second revolt, although not quite so great as those of the first, were profound.

One enduring consequence of the revolt was demographic: the disappearance from central Judaea of its traditional Judaean population. In large part this was simply the result of the demolition of the area's villages and the slaughter of its inhabitants. What the violence did not achieve was completed by the policy upon which Hadrian embarked in the wake of the war. He decided, that is, to exclude Judaeans not only from Jerusalem itself but also from its surrounding territory. After putting down the rebellion Hadrian changed the name of the province from *Judaea* to *Palaestina*, the name by

which Greek-speakers had always referred to the land south of Mt Carmel, and which - like "Israel" and "Judaea" - went back at least as far as the thirteenth century BC. And he went on to build on Mt. Zion a temple to Jupiter Capitolinus. The project was no longer, however, to encourage the Judaeans to come to terms with Greco-Roman culture, but was instead to punish them for their intransigence. The very name, Jerusalem, was officially dropped and the city was refounded as a thoroughly Greco-Roman city. Its new name, Aelia Capitolina, honored Jupiter Capitolinus as well as the emperor himself.

From the refounded city and its *territorium* all Judaeans were excluded. If after 70 some pilgrims had continued to come to Jerusalem for the great festivals, they could no longer do so after 135. Two generations later, Tertullian (*Adversus Iudaeos* 13.3) noted that Judaeans were still not permitted to live in Bethlehem. In the fourth century Eusebius took pleasure in detailing Hadrian's order and its consequences:

> From that time on the entire race has been forbidden to set foot anywhere in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, under the terms and ordinances of a law of Hadrian, which ensured that not even from a distance might Jews have a view of their ancestral soil. Aristo of Pella tells the whole story. When in this way the city was closed to the Jewish race and suffered the total destruction of its former inhabitants, it was colonized by an alien race.[33]

Jerome adds to this that Hadrian's successors lifted the ban only to the extent that they allowed Judaeans to assemble on the Mt. of Olives one day a year, to mourn their fate.[34] The facts, as usual, are less clear than these texts would suggest. Although there is no evidence for Judaeans in Aelia Capitolina in the second century the ban seems to have been revised by Septimius Severus: it appears that under the Severan emperors Judaeans were allowed to visit the city.[35] For at least two hundred years, however, Judaean habitation in what had been the heart of Judaea virtually disappeared. After 135 the Judaeans of the southern Levant were concentrated in Idumaea and in Galilee, regions that were mostly unscathed by the war, and much of what had been Judaea proper was now essentially a Gentile and a pagan land.[36]

Under Constantine the name "Aelia" began to lapse, in favor - once again - of "Jerusalem," although as late as the seventh century some texts refer to the city as "Aelia." Constantine's building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and of other churches made the city a destination for Christian pilgrims, and in the fifth and sixth centuries Jerusalem became once more a great city. But it was essentially Christian.

The emperors' ban on circumcision and their attempt to end proselytizing

Finally, Hadrian issued an edict forbidding circumcision. Undoubtedly he intended that the ban would, after a few decades, put an end to Judaism. The original edict was in effect for only a few years, however, and was then modified by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius (138-161). The revision allowed Judaeans to circumcise their sons, but circumcision of a Gentile proselyte remained a crime:

> By the rescript of the Divine Pius circumcision is permitted only to the Judaeans for their own sons; the punishment for circumcising anyone who does not belong to the Judaean nation is

the same as the punishment for castration.[37]

As observed by Smallwood, "(t)hese penalties were severe: a non-Jew who had himself or his slaves circumcised was condemned to life exile and the confiscation of his property, the doctor responsible was executed; and Jews who circumcised gentile slaves were deported or executed."[38] In effect, the edict as revised by Antoninus allowed Judaism to continue, recognizing it as a *religio licita* (legal religion). Perhaps the substantial revenues received annually by the *fiscus Iudaicus* persuaded Antoninus that trying to eliminate Judaism was not in the empire's best interest. At the same time, the revised edict kept it illegal for Gentile males to convert to Judaism, although enforcement of the edict seems to have been unusual. Proselytizing of women may have remained fairly common, although sons born to a Judaean wife and her Gentile husband could not have been circumcised and raised as Judaeans without violating the imperial edict.

Although the ban on circumcising Gentiles was certainly intended to prevent male proselytizing, it hardly accomplished so much. Smallwood suggests that the synagogues may have permitted "a ritual bath as the symbol of a convert's reception into Judaism."[39] Such a remedy, however, would almost certainly have been objectionable to many Judaeans, and so the overall effect of the revised edict must have been to discourage conversion to Judaism. For poor Gentiles another disincentive was of course the "Jewish tax," the obligation of all Judaeans - male and female - to pay two drachmas every year to the *fiscus Iudaicus*. This tax remained in effect at least into the third century, and possibly long thereafter.[40]

The emperors' relations with rabbinic Judaism

The Roman government's attitude toward rabbinic Judaism was generally benign. This was a Judaism neither bent on revolt nor likely to attract Gentile proselytes, and it therefore posed no danger to the Roman empire. When we consider the scale of calamity in the Bar Kochba revolt, it is surprising that except for *Lamentations Rabbah* 2 the rabbinic tradition has little to say about it. Although Rabbi Akiba played a significant and an unfortunate role in the war other rabbis criticized his venture into messianism. By and large the Pharisees of Jamnia may have steered clear of the revolt, because most of them survived it. Gamaliel II, formal head (*nasi*) of the *beth din* and the *beth ha-midrash* evidently did not survive the revolt, but he is supposed to have died a natural death in its early stages. At that point the Jamnia center must have closed, perhaps for the rest of Hadrian's reign: Shimon (Simeon) II, said to have been Gamaliel's son, fled for safety to Mesopotamia. After Hadrian's death and Antoninus Pius' accession, however, Shimon II returned and Antoninus granted him permission to reopen the school and the *beth din*. As Elizabeth Smallwood concluded, Shimon "was now evidently regarded by the Roman authorities ... as a safe figure who could be trusted to co-operate with their administration."[41]

The rabbinic institutions, however, would no longer be located at Jamnia. After 135 the Judaean populace in the southern Levant was concentrated in Galilee, and it was in Galilee that the teachers and their students reassembled. With Antoninus' blessing Shimon II set up a school and a court in the small town of Usha, in the shadow of Mt. Carmel. Not many years later the center moved again, this time from Usha to the neighboring town of Beth Shearim. Shimon's tenure (supposedly ca. 138-ca. 175) as head of the court and the Tannaitic academy was peaceful. Insofar as there were at

this time Judaean institutions with at least contacts if not authority over a wide area, they were under Shimon's leadership. Emperor Antoninus treated Shimon as the spokesman for all Judaeans, not only of Palaestina but also of the Diaspora. Like his father, Shimon II had the honorific title *nasi*, or "prince." Greek-speakers came to refer to him as the "patriarch" (πατριάρχης).

How to get along with the Romans may not have been a question that much interested most of the Pharisees, but in retrospect it was perhaps the most important both for themselves and for Judaism at large. After fighting three terrible wars in less than seventy years, Judaeans had to find a *modus vivendi* with their Gentile neighbors and with the Roman empire. The *tannaim* found it by dispelling the messianic dreams that had fueled the violence, and by devoting themselves single-mindedly to the fine points of personal holiness. The patriarchate, essentially a rabbinic institution, lasted for three hundred years and was remarkably successful in presenting to the Roman emperors a face of Judaism that threatened neither the emperors nor the Gentile population. One of the ways in which the rabbis dampened anti-Romanism was by inventing stories telling how Adonai himself had punished those emperors who had been enemies of the Judaeans. Some of the rabbis recalled, for example, how divine vengeance struck down Titus, punishing him for burning the temple in Jerusalem. A gnat, so these rabbis remembered, flew into Titus' nose, made its home in Titus' head, and grew there for seven years. The excruciating pain and hammering eventually killed Titus, and when the notables of Rome opened his skull they found that the gnat weighed two selas (= four shekels, about one pound), with beak of brass and claws of iron.[42] Other rabbinic fantasies described the death of Trajan's general, "Kitos" (Lusius Quietus) or of Trajan himself.[43] The lesson was that Judaeans need not attack the Roman empire, because God himself strikes down those few emperors and their minions who wrong his people.

One of the revered *tannaim* at Usha and Beth Shearim may have been a very shadowy Rabbi Meir. The name *meir* meant "the enlightener," and was obviously an honorific nickname. Another was "the wonder-worker," as later generations of rabbis invented one story after another of miracles performed by Rabbi Meir. More prosaically, he is supposed to have learned everything that Rabbi Akiba had taught and was therefore the successor to Rabbi Akiba as the final authority on what the oral *torah* was and what it meant. If there is some substance to that report, Rabbi Meir formed a personal bridge between Akiba and Judah ha-Nasi.

Shimon II remained the Nasi (or patriarch) until his death ca. 175. He was succeeded by his son, Judah, perhaps the greatest of all the Jewish patriarchs and remembered simply as Judah ha-Nasi. Like his father, Judah ha-Nasi stayed on excellent terms with the Roman government. Various rabbinic stories are about "Antoninus and Rabbi."[44] Scholars tend to identify the "Antoninus" in these stories, none of them true, not as Antoninus Pius but as his adopted son, Marcus Aurelius, who ruled the empire from 161 to 180 and whose official name after his adoption was Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. The most likely candidate for "Rabbi" is Judah ha-Nasi. The stories belong to a popular genre featuring a sage and a king, and always redound to the credit of the sage. In the "Antoninus and Rabbi" stories the emperor is so impressed by the wisdom of Rabbi that finally he converts to Judaism. Although the stories are fictions, they probably reflect a memory that the Antonine emperors (including Commodus, son of Marcus Aurelius) were well disposed to the patriarchate and to the rest of the rabbinic establishment.

The Severan emperors and Judaism

Cooperation between the rabbinic center in Galilee and the Roman government continued under the Severan emperors. Septimius Severus (ruled 193-211) was an able general and administrator. His son Antoninus, nicknamed "Caracalla," was neither, and was one of the most despotic of all the emperors. In 199, as a ten-year-old boy Caracalla became co-emperor with his father, and after Septimius' death in 211 Caracalla killed his brother with his own hand and then ruled alone until his own assassination in 217. Septimius certainly and Caracalla probably enjoyed some popularity among Judaeans in the province now called *Palaestina*. As we shall see, the rabbinic academy in Galilee flourished under the Severan emperors and it was in the late second or early third century that the Mishnah was written. Jerome states that Septimius and Caracalla "were very fond of the Judaeans," and an inscription set up in a building - possibly a synagogue - in Galilee proclaims that "the Judaeans... pray for the safety" of the Severan co-emperors.[45] The *Digest* of Justinian includes a law issued by Septimius Severus and Caracalla allowing "those who follow the Judaean superstition" to hold municipal offices, while excusing such people from duties incompatible with their "superstition."[46] The expression, *qui Iudaicam superstitionem sequuntur*, seems to include proselytes as well as native Judaeans, and suggests that although Septimius regarded Judaism as an unfortunate superstition his policy was not to bring criminal charges against men and women who had already converted to Judaism.

Evidently he did, however, attempt to reduce further conversions, if not to halt them. That we learn from a late and notoriously unreliable source, but a source that occasionally transmits valuable information. According to the biography of Septimius Severus in the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* Septimius banned conversion either to Judaism or to Christianity:

> He forbade, under heavy penalty, people to become Judaeans. He even decreed the same thing about Christians.[47]

Possibly the information in the *SHA* is simply false, but plenty of evidence shows that at least the second sentence (something of an afterthought) is correct. Although Septimius did not try to eradicate Christianity he did try to stop its growth: he issued an edict or a rescript ordering the arrest and punishment of persons who were in the process of conversion to Christianity.[48] It may well be, then, that Septimius accepted as a fait accompli the presence of millions of Judaeans and Christians in the empire, but that he did what he could to prevent the further expansion of either religion. Everyone who turned from the gods to God was in important ways alienating himself or herself from Greco-Roman civilization and from the Roman empire itself.

If this reconstruction of Septimius Severus' religious policies is correct, he gave his blessing to Aramaic-speaking Judaeans in Palaestina and to their leadership in Galilee. That he made concessions to Judaeans in their "barbarian" homeland is fairly clear. As mentioned above, the Severans evidently relaxed Hadrian's edict forbidding Judaeans from setting foot in what had once been Jerusalem but was now Aelia Capitolina. And all of the Severan emperors evidently supported the rabbis in Galilee and treated the *nasi* of the rabbinic academy as the patriarch of Judaeans everywhere. At the same time, however, Septimius was wary of Hellenistic Judaism and attempted - as Antoninus Pius had done - to stop the growth of Judaism in the Diaspora.

Judah ha-Nasi and the redaction of the Mishnah

As patriarch, Judah ha-Nasi was given imperial approval to move the entire rabbinic complex again, this time to Sepphoris, a much larger Galilean city than Usha and Beth Shearim. At Sepphoris the quarters occupied by Judah ha-Nasi were grand, and his office was sufficiently distinguished that for his personal protection he employed a unit of Keltic or Germanic bodyguards. Like his ancestors, Judah ha-Nasi was suspiciously long-lived.[49] He is said to have presided over the court and school for forty-four years (ca. 175-219), and he too enjoyed the confidence of successive Roman emperors, from Marcus Aurelius to Elagabalus.

The historic achievement of Judah ha-Nasi was his redaction and writing down of the oral *torah*, the Mishnah. Like the written *torah*, the oral *torah* was in Hebrew, although not the Hebrew of the Pentateuch. Mishnaic Hebrew was something of an artificial language, because for a long time the vernacular in Galilee and in much of the rural Levant had been Aramaic, or more precisely the western dialect of Aramaic. The role of Hebrew in second-century Galilee may therefore be loosely paralleled to the role of Latin in eighth-century Ireland. To what extent Judah personally wrote down what had until then been an oral tradition is unknown: one would suppose that under Judah's supervision most of the school's *tannaim* contributed to the effort. The written Mishnah, like its oral predecessor, comprised sixty-three tractates, grouped in six *sedarim* or "orders." Each *seder* nominally dealt with a single aspect of life, but in fact included much law that was not obviously related to the main heading. The six *sedarim* are as follows:

Zera'im ("seeds")
Mo'ed ("appointed season")
Nashim ("women")
Nezikin ("damages")
Qodashim ("holy things")
Tohoroth ("cleannesses")

The laws presented in the Mishnah do seem to reflect quite faithfully traditions that were many centuries old. The *seder Qodashim*, for example, specifies the minute details of sacrifices at the Jerusalem temple, and these sacrifices had mostly or even entirely come to an end more than a hundred years before Judah ha-Nasi became the patriarch. The rabbis carefully memorized the details, so that when the temple was rebuilt the sacrifices could once again be performed exactly as Adonai had commanded.

As is apparent from the headings, the Mishnah included both practical law and the instructions for ritual purity. The two topics fascinated the Tannaitic schools both in Galilee and Mesopotamia. Discussion and debate about almost every item in the sixty-three tractates had begun with Shammai and Hillel and continued after Rabbi Judah committed the Mishnah to writing. These discussions and debates were eventually published in the form of a commentary, or *gemara* ("completion"). The *gemara* was in Aramaic, and together the Hebrew Mishnah and the Aramaic *gemara* formed the Talmud. The Palestinian or "Jerusalem" (*Yerushalmi*) Talmud (written down ca. 400) attaches to the Mishnah the tradition of the debates in Galilee, while the "Babylonian" (*Babli*) Talmud (written down

ca. 500) presents the Mishnah along with the somewhat fuller Mesopotamian tradition of debates.

Criminal and civil law in the Mishnah

Although criminal law in Galilee had been in Roman hands since the death of Herodes Agrippa, the Mishnah laid out in detail what penalties were to be applied for what crimes. Neither Rabbi Judah nor his Sanhedrin at Sepphoris had the authority to impose capital punishment, but the *Sanhedrin* tractate nevertheless specifies four different modes of execution for a wide range of capital offenses. For lesser crimes two other corporal punishments - flogging and banishment - were assigned.

Civil law was within the jurisdiction of the Sepphoris Sanhedrin, and here we may begin with an example from the *seder Nashim*. A famous written law (Deut 25:5-6) on "levirate marriage" stipulated that when a husband died without a male heir, the husband's brother should take the widow as his own wife and beget by her a son, who would inherit the dead man's property. In a simple case this is clear enough, but cases are often not simple, and so it was left to the Mishnah to clarify what should happen when things were much more complicated. Suppose that after a husband dies his father begets another son: the baby boy is indeed the brother of the deceased man. When the baby reaches adulthood must he therefore marry the widow of his long-deceased brother? No, said the Mishnah, the levirate marriage law does not apply to two brothers who were not contemporaries.[50]

Let us look next at damages, and the *seder Nezikin*. The written *torah* stated (Exodus 21:35, OSB): "When one man's ox butts another's and kills it, they must sell the live ox, share the price, and also share the dead beast." This is simple and straightforward, but is again not detailed enough to cover many cases of injury to livestock. What should happen, for instance, when an ox gores a cow, and although it does not kill the cow herself it kills her (possibly unborn) calf? The Mishnah provides the law in such a case:

> If an ox has gored a cow and its [newly-born] calf is found [dead] near by, and it is unknown whether the birth of the calf preceded the goring or followed the goring, half damages will be paid for [the injuries inflicted upon the cow], but [only] quarter damages will be paid for [the loss of] the calf.[51]

The Mishnaic laws likewise made as precise as possible the laws about "a bull in a china shop." It was clear enough that if an ox walking along a road wandered off the road and broke the wares at a potter's shop the owner of the ox in effect bought the broken pottery. But what about "peripheral damage"? The *seder Nezikin* specified that if the ox "trod upon a utensil, and broke it, and a fragment [of it] fell upon another utensil, which was also broken, for the first utensil full compensation must be paid, but for the second, [only] half damages."[52]

In this way the Mishnah supplied the law for hundreds of injuries and torts that were not covered in the written *torah*, or were not dealt with clearly enough. These laws were indispensable for the smooth functioning of civil society. The goal of this part of the Mishnah was, in the words of Jacob Neusner, "to maintain perfect stasis, to preserve the prevailing situation and to secure the stability of all relationships. To this end, in the interchange of buying and selling, giving and taking,

borrowing and lending, it is important that there be an essential equality of exchange. No party in the end should have more than what he had at the outset, and none should be the victim of a sizable shift in fortune and circumstance."[53] The administration of justice was at the lowest (village or synagogue) level in the hands of a *beth din* consisting of three men, all learned in the Torah. The next level was the Court of 23, which in theory (although not in fact) could pronounce capital sentences. At the highest level was the *beth din* at Sepphoris, presided over by the Nasi himself.

As in other societies, the Mishnaic remedies had arisen over the centuries from common law and ultimately from a common sense of what was fair. But while in other societies such refinements and clarifications were easily incorporated into written codes, this could hardly be done by Judaeans, because they saw their written code as sacred: Moses had written it down exactly as Adonai himself had delivered it to him on Mt. Sinai. Adding a codicil to Exodus or Deuteronomy would have been sacrilege, and the fiction was therefore required that the oral *torah* too had been delivered to Moses by Adonai, but instead of writing it down Moses had recited it orally to Aaron and Joshua. Thus the oral form of the *torah*, as the rabbis saw it, had from the time of its revelation been handed down just as faithfully as the written law: the written law in the form of a text, and the oral law through word of mouth.

Holiness and purity in the Mishnah

In addition to the practical law, the oral *torah* included a host of holiness or purity regulations. The prominence of holiness law in the Mishnah is no surprise, since this was the aspect of the *torah* that the Pharisees had been most keen about. These regulations are especially concentrated in the second, fifth and sixth *sedarim*: *Mo'ed* ("appointed season"), *Qodashim* ("holy things") and *Tohoroth* ("cleannesses"). While the laws spelled out in *Qodoshim* were of little concern, because they dealt with sacrifices and sacrifices were no longer performed in the third century, one needed to pay close attention to the laws in the second and sixth *sedarim*. More holiness laws are scattered through the other orders. The very first entry in the Mishnah gives instruction about the evening recitation of the *shĕmā*, the prayer that incorporates Deut 6:4-9, Deut 11:13-21, and Num 15:37-41:

.

> From what time may one recite the *shema* in the evening? From the time that the priests enter [their houses] in order to eat their *terumah* until the end of the first watch. These are the words of Eliezer. The sages say: until midnight. R. Gamaliel says: until the dawn comes up. Once it happened that his sons came home (late) from a wedding feast and they said to him, We have not yet recited the [evening] *shema*. He said to them: if the dawn has not yet come up you are still bound to recite.[54]

A prayer even more important than the *shĕmā* was the *shemoneh esreh* ("The Eighteen"). An alternate name for this prayer, to be recited immediately after the *shĕmā* three times daily, is "Standing" (*amidah*), because when reciting this prayer a person is not only required to stand but is in great detail instructed how and where to stand. Like the *shĕmā*, the *shemoneh esreh* was to be spoken in Hebrew. The third of the three daily prayers was the *kadish*, spoken in Aramaic.

In addition to praying, the scrupulous follower of the Mishnah expended a great deal of effort in keeping himself clean and in cleaning up after having been contaminated. The sixth order of the

Mishnah, *Tohoroth*, furnished the rules for avoiding contact with unclean matter (a corpse, carrion, spit, bodily excretions and secretions, fluids of uncertain origin) and with unclean foods. The tractate *Niddah* of this *seder* is devoted entirely to the uncleanness of the menstruating woman, there being five varieties of menstrual blood, all unclean. Another tractate, which like the *seder* itself bears the name *Tohoroth*, specifies three grades of uncleanness in food (the first being the worst and the third the mildest) and shows how contagious uncleanness is:

> If to a piece of dough that was suffering first grade of uncleanness others were made to adhere, they all become unclean in the first grade. And if it was separated, it still remains unclean in the first grade but the others are regarded as suffering only second grade of uncleanness.[55]

If a Pharisee (*haber*) had contact with a non-Pharisee - whether a Gentile, a Samaritan, or an ordinary Judaean - he became unclean and had to make a *terumah* ("uplifting") offering to Adonai. Even indirect contact with an ordinary person was defiling:

> If the wife of a *haber* left the wife of an *am ha-arez* grinding grain in her house the house is deemed unclean if she ceased from turning the handmill. But if she did not cease from turning the handmill, only that part of the house is deemed unclean to which she can stretch out her hand and touch it. If there were two women the house is unclean in either case, since while the one is grinding the other can go about touching. So R. Meir. But the sages ruled: only that part of the house is unclean to which they can stretch out their hands and touch it.[56]

For the *tannaim* and the rabbis of Galilee the fine points of the oral *torah* were a source of almost endless interest and delight. Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai declares in the tractate *Berakoth* that God's three great gifts to Israel were Paradise, the land of Israel, and the *torah*.[57] For some of the rabbis the oral *torah* seems to have become an object of more devotion than Adonai himself. In many folios of the Talmuds "the Holy One" makes no appearance at all, as attention focuses exclusively on the rabbis' opinions and disagreements about the point of law in question. In one Talmudic anecdote Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Jeremiah go so far as to say that a majority opinion of the rabbinic sages could not be invalidated even by a voice from heaven.[58]

Non-rabbinic Judaism

Because the Talmudic traditions provide us with such voluminous detail about the rabbis in the Galilean and Mesopotamian schools, while on non-rabbinic Judaism we have scarcely any textual evidence at all, it is easy to assume that in the second and third centuries CE Judaeans everywhere were eager to learn what *halakoth* the rabbis were finding in their *midrashim*. That would be, however, a very erroneous assumption. The archaeological evidence indicates that in the second and third centuries rabbinic Judaism had a narrow appeal, and that as late as the fourth and even the fifth centuries most Judaeans would have neither known nor cared very much about the disputes of the *tannaim*. Inscriptions also suggest that in the early third century synagogues were once again attracting many Gentiles in the Greek-speaking world. That pattern must have displeased not only the Roman authorities, by whom proselytism to Judaism was officially proscribed, but also some of the rabbis in the Tannaitic academies.

If one can judge from the remains of synagogues that have been found there, even in Galilee itself most Judaeans for a long time took the *torah* with a grain of salt. Galilean synagogues in Late Antiquity were decorated with representational art, and a favorite scene was the sun-chariot surrounded by a zodiac. Such things were not permitted in the rabbinic interpretation of Exodus 20:4. The first certain reference to the Talmuds in a Galilean synagogue comes from a seventh-century synagogue at Beisan (Beth-Shean), south of the Sea of Galilee: excavators found that the building's central mosaic included a passage (concerning tithes) taken from the Palestinian Talmud. Earlier synagogues, such as the large synagogue at Sepphoris (rebuilt and lavishly decorated ca. 400), had nothing overtly rabbinic about them. In these congregations, Shaye Cohen concluded, rabbis could not yet have had much influence:

> Furthermore, many of the synagogues contained inscriptions that record donations or name the officers of the congregation. Rabbis seldom figure in these inscriptions, and when they do they invariably are donors, not officers. Therefore, it is unlikely that the rabbis were in control of the synagogues of Palestine in the second to sixth centuries.[59]

In Palestine, as in the Diaspora, the typical synagogue in the third and fourth centuries continued to be led by its *archisynagogos*, assisted by a group of *presbyteroi* ("elders").

The Aramaic Diaspora in Mesopotamia

Aramaic was the vernacular in Mesopotamia, and communication between Judaeans in Mesopotamia and the Tannaitic schools in Galilee may therefore have been relatively easy. Among some Judaeans in the Aramaic Diaspora observation of the oral *torah* seems to have been well established at a very early date and it may have been here that the sect of the Pharisees began. Already in the Second Temple period some sort of Tannaitic academy seems to have been located at Nisibis, now Nusaybin on the Turkish side of the Turkish-Syrian border and about sixty miles west of the Tigris river. Although little is known about the school, the rabbinic tradition preserved various stories about its head, Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra.

Two other academies, much more famous and influential than the one at Nisibis, were established by students of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. The first of these, supposed to have been founded in 212 by Rabbi Samuel (Shmuel), was located at Nehardea, on the Euphrates forty miles upstream from the ruins of Babylon. When Nehardea was sacked by a Palmyrene army in 259, the school was moved to Pumbeditha, the ancient name of the city that is now Fallujah. Even more successful than the Nehardea-Pumbeditha academy was a school at Sura, another two hundred miles upstream from Pumbeditha. The guiding spirit at Sura was Rabbi Abba Arika. In rabbinic texts from Mesopotamia Abba Arika was the first of the *amoraim*, and is simply called "Rav." After studying in Galilee , Rav returned to Mesopotamia in 219 and led the Sura academy until his death in 247. Both Samuel and Abba Arika focused their instruction on the Mishnah redacted by their teacher, Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. In Late Antiquity Judaeans who were so minded came from many cities of eastern Syria and Mesopotamia to Sura and Pumbeditha in order to attend the twice-yearly gatherings - in the months of Adar (February/March) and Elul (August/September) - where one could hear the most learned rabbis dispute the details of the oral *torah*.[60] And of course it was in Mesopotamia that the most intense

work on the gemara was done, culminating ca. 500 in the Babylonian Talmud.

Because the Talmud Babli evolved in Mesopotamia, it is not surprising that almost all of our evidence on Judaism in Mesopotamia comes from the Talmud and other rabbinic sources. Despite the great importance of Mesopotamia for rabbinic Judaism, however, it is unlikely that the majority of Judaeans in the Aramaic Diaspora were guided by the oral *torah* in the time of Judah ha-Nasi or of his immediate successors. In the early third century some two million people in Mesopotamia may have been Judaean. Considering only central and southern Mesopotamia, Jacob Neusner estimated that in the early third century more than half a million Judaeans lived in the villages and slightly more than that in the cities of the region. He therefore suggested that "central and southern Babylonia may have held approximately one million, two hundred thousand Jews in all."[61] When we add that many people in northern Mesopotamia and in northwestern Iran were also Judaean, we may guess that the Judaean subjects of the early Sassanid rulers numbered well over two million. How many of these people were concerned about ritual purity is an open question. Relevant here is Neusner's comment on what the rabbinic sources have to say about one of the most important commandments of the rabbis: the prohibition of intermarriage with Gentiles. "While the rabbis laid great stress upon proper genealogies, holding that the descendants of illegitimate unions might not marry Jews, as we have seen, the people in whole provinces paid no attention whatever to their views, and were declared heretics."[62]

One of the best preserved synagogues that archaeologists have found anywhere in the ancient world was excavated at Europos, later called Dura, on the middle Euphrates.[63] Europos had been founded as a Hellenistic city by Seleukos I early in the third century BC. In 256 CE the synagogue, along with the rest of the city of Europos, was destroyed by Shapur and his Sassanid army, and because the site was thereafter abandoned the building and the city were "preserved" for twentieth-century archaeologists to explore. Excavations showed that a private house at Dura-Europos had been converted to serve as a small synagogue, perhaps as early as the first century BC. About 245 this structure was doubled in size, and its interior walls were covered with paintings of Biblical scenes, the grandest being Adonai's resurrection of the dry bones for Ezekiel.

Evidently the synagogue at Europos was thriving in the middle of the third century, but it belonged to a branch of Judaism quite different from that of the Galilean rabbis: taking pleasure in their synagogue's paintings, the members of the Europos congregation could not have been in the Pharisaic tradition. Nor are the themes of the paintings those encouraged by the rabbis. The prayers said at Dura-Europos and elsewhere in Aramaic-speaking lands were said in Aramaic. Readings from the Tanakh were possibly from Hebrew scrolls, but if so would have been accompanied by readings from a targum, an Aramaic translation.[64]

The congregation at Europos looked forward to the End of Time, still nourishing messianic expectations, and "it was in this spirit that the artists of the Dura-Europos synagogue depict Moses and Enoch, who were said to have ascended to heaven, and Ezra, who was credited with apocalyptic visions."[65] The painters' vernacular was Aramaic and the clothes worn by the painted figures are Iranian and Mesopotamian. In any case, many Aramaic-speaking Judaeans of Mesopotamia must have had interests quite different from those of the Galilean *tannaim*. Because Josephus wrote the first edition of his *Judaean War* in Aramaic for the Judaeans of Mesopotamia, he must have assumed

that they shared his engagement with the Gentile world. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that it was in Iraq that Karaite Judaism - which rejected the Talmud - began in the eighth century and flourished for three hundred years.

The spread of Judaism to North Africa and to Spain

It was evidently in the late first or the second century that Judaism first appeared in North Africa: the land that is today northern Libya, Tunisia, northern Algeria, and Morocco. Until the early 1950s Judaism remained important in North Africa, even though from the seventh century onward the land had been under Muslim control. In Arabic the North African littoral west of Egypt is called the *maghreb* ("the west"). Today fewer than twenty thousand people in all of the *maghreb* identify themselves as Jewish. But in the early twentieth century, before the Muslim majority's violence against the Jewish minority and the mass exodus to the State of Israel, the number was close to a million. Five hundred years ago the number was considerably higher.

As is true for the Diaspora elsewhere, the Judaeans of the Maghreb have for a very long time considered themselves the descendants of Israelites or Judahites mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. One of their self-complimentary stories has been that they are descended from warriors who had come to North Africa with Joshua and had stayed on as a conquering elite.[66] In a second story, when Nebuchadnezzar was about to besiege Jerusalem many of the city's inhabitants fled to the Maghreb and prospered. Another story, unrelated to the Bible but attached to an event famous from secular history and from Vergil's *Aeneid*, claims that when Dido and the Phoenicians sailed to the west to build the great city of Carthage, many Judahites had come along to help with the foundation.

All of these stories must be set aside as aetiological myths.[67] In the most recent critical study of the beginnings of Judaism in North Africa, Claudia Setzer writes as follows:

> The earliest evidence of Jews in Carthage and the surrounding area appears in inscriptions dated to the second century. Although some have suggested that Jews were there as early as the Punic period, there is no archaeological evidence or literary reference before the second century to support the idea.[68]

Setzer relied in part on epigraphic studies done in the 1980s by Yann Le Bohec, focusing on Judaean inscriptions and personal names in ancient North Africa:

> Le Bohec draws some general conclusions from the evidence he gathers. First, attempts to place Jews in North Africa before the late first or early second century have no material support. The reliable evidence comes from the second to fourth centuries, therefore the hypothesis of Jewish immigration to Africa in the Punic period should be abandoned.[69]

Not surprisingly, the Judaeans of North Africa follow a pattern seen throughout much of the Judaean Diaspora. They have not, that is, seen themselves as descended from North Africans (who before their conversion would have been heathen Gentiles), and instead describe themselves as the offspring of "pure Jews" who on some momentous occasion came directly from the Land of Israel.

It is of course very likely that the arrival of Judaeans from elsewhere - some of them probably from Cyrene and Alexandria during the massacres in Trajan's reign - planted the seeds of the North African Diaspora. The immigrants, in any case, came late and were unconnected with any Biblical saga. They must have numbered at least in the hundreds, but their fertility could not have accounted for the considerable number of North Africans who in Late Antiquity identified themselves as Judaeans. The growth of Judaism in North Africa, as elsewhere, was the result of the great appeal that the new religion had for proselytes in an age when polytheism was losing its credibility. Tertullian explains that he wrote his *Adversus Iudaeos* to clarify and extend a street-corner argument that he overheard, evidently in Carthage, between a Judaean proselyte and a Christian. As described by Tertullian, the argument lasted all afternoon and attracted the attention of many passersby, whose kibitzing supported the one side or the other of the debate. Tertullian then takes the opportunity to scoff at the Judaeans' claim that they are virtually all descendants of Jacob and that in their synagogues proselytes are a mere "drop in the bucket" or are like "dust on the threshing floor."[70]

Thus far the earliest remains of a synagogue discovered in North Africa are the beautiful mosaics found in 1883 at what is now Hammam Lif (the ancient Phoenician city of Naro), in Tunisia.[71] Latin inscriptions in mosaics identified the building as a synagogue. The mosaics and the accompanying inscriptions seem to date from the fifth or even the sixth century, but the synagogue from which they came may have been built considerably earlier. According to the drawings made under the direction of Capt. Ernest de Prudhomme, the French military officer whose men "excavated" what was left of the synagogue, it may have been built as a private villa and was subsequently modified to serve as a synagogue. The largest of its dozen rooms measured 5.25 x 9 m, and an apse on its western side indicates that this was the assembly hall. The floors of several rooms were covered with mosaics, depicting menorahs and perhaps an open Torah scroll, but also much fauna and flora, each figure separated from the next by vines with acanthus leaves: baskets of fruit, a palm tree, fish, ducks, peacocks, guinea fowl, a rooster, and even a lion. In the main room, exactly in the middle of the mosaic floor, was an inscription in not very good Latin. The inscription read, "At the holy synagogue at Naro, your maidservant Juliana p (?), for her own salvation, paid for the mosaic out of her own money (*de suo propium teselavit*)."

The congregation that gathered at this house in ancient Naro must have taken great pleasure in its elegance, and was either unconcerned or perhaps even unaware that the "graven images" on the floor would have angered the rabbis and their students in the Tannaitic academy in Galilee. Far from the rabbinic strictures, the Judaeans of Naro seem to have had much in common with the Gentiles of the larger society. In his definitive book on the ancient synagogue, Lee Levine remarks that the Hammam Lif mosaics "display some remarkable parallels with mosaics from contemporary Christian churches in North Africa."[72]

Although we have nothing from the second and third centuries to match the mosaics of the later synagogue at Hammam Lif, inscriptions do attest to the existence of synagogues in North Africa at this time. These early inscriptions make mention of a "chief" of a synagogue (*archisynagogos*) and a "father" of another (*pater synagogae*). So we may assume that North African Judaeans congregated in synagogues from the outset. The list is long of North African cities and towns from which at least some evidence of a Judaean presence in the Roman imperial period has been found.[73] Some of the most extensive archaeological evidence comes from a necropolis or cemetery at Gamart, just to the

north of ancient Carthage and now lying within the city of Tunis. Iconography and inscriptions identify a fair number of burials here as Jewish, and the earliest of these seem to date from the third century.[74] The cemetery had room for some fifteen hundred burials. Scholars a century ago regarded the entire cemetery as Jewish. Although that may be unlikely, it would be wise to admit the possibility that already in the third century a community of several hundred Judaeans was worshiping near Carthage..

The material evidence for North African Judaism comes almost entirely from cities or smaller settlements. We know, however, that the new religion also attracted proselytes from the nomadic and Berber-speaking tribes, and that by the seventh century several tribes identified themselves as Judaean and followed at least the most obvious precepts of Judaism (worship of God and hostility to idols, circumcision, abstention from "unclean" meats, and possibly some rest on the Sabbath). Although Berber proselytizing is likely to have begun soon after the arrival of Judaism in western North Africa, it did not become important until Late Antiquity and we shall return to the topic in Chapter Eighteen.

It is worth noting that the appearance and initial growth of Judaism in North Africa coincides precisely with the rise of North African Christianity. Tertullian, the Christian polemicist writing in Carthage ca. 200, seems to have been influenced by Latin-speaking Judaeans.[75] After summarizing Tertullian's polemic against Judaeans, Claudia Setzer suggests that "some of Tertullian's remarks seem to spring from competition with Jews for proselytes."[76] Judaism may have preceded Christianity in North Africa by a few decades, but whether Judaism or New Covenant Christianity came first is not a very important question. They arrived at about the same time and both were very attractive, as a sizeable minority of the urban population in North Africa began abandoning the gods and turning to God. Whether Judaean or Christian, a woman in North Africa found comfort in praying to God and identifying herself as "your handmaid" (*ancilla tua*), a term made popular by the *Magnificat*, used frequently by Augustine in describing his devoutly Christian mother, but also used by Juliana the Judaean at Hammam Lif.

In their appeal to proselytes and converts the churches enjoyed an advantage in having their scriptures in a Latin translation. The Christians' "old African" translations of the Bible into Latin were serviceable, although not elegant, and evidently were used in the churches already by the later decades of the second century. Individual Judaeans may have acquired copies of the Christians' Latin translations of the "Old Testament," but the synagogues made no translation of their own. Greek may have been used in some of the North African synagogues, as it was in some Christian churches (Valerius, who was Augustine's predecessor as bishop at Hippo Regius, evidently conducted worship in Greek). In the synagogues the Law and the Prophets were probably read in Greek, whether from the Septuagint or from Aquila's or Theodotion's Greek version, and the text was then translated into Latin for those in the synagogue who could not understand Greek.

One of the synagogues' great advantages over the churches was Judaism's status as a legal religion, while Christianity continued to be officially banned. From time to time Christians were rounded up and sent to be killed in the amphitheaters. The martyrdoms of Perpetua and Felicitas took place at Carthage in 203 or 204, and the empire-wide persecutions in 250 under Decius and in the late 250s under Valerian (in which Cyprian of Carthage was martyred) shattered many Christian congregations. Until Constantine and Licinius issued their Edict of Milan in 313, Judaism would

have been the much safer alternative for North African pagans who had finally decided to forsake the idols and to worship God.

Whether Judaism spread to Spain before 250 is uncertain. Paul's ambition to go to Spain has long suggested the presence of Judaeans there as early as the first century. Extensive archaeological work done at the ancient Roman cities of Spain, however, has not yet produced a clear indication of Judaeans before the third century.[77] Nevertheless, by the early fourth century the number of Judaeans in Spain must have been sufficient to worry the Christian bishops who met at the Council of Elvira. The bishops were concerned lest their parishioners Judaize, and therefore forbade not only intermarriage but even dining with Judaeans.[78] They also took the trouble to decide that although committing adultery with anyone was a sin, to commit adultery with a Judaean was especially heinous. Another indication that the Judaean Diaspora may have spread to the westernmost parts of the Mediterranean is the fact that in the early fifth century a sizeable synagogue stood on the island of Minorca. That Minorcans converted to Judaism after Constantine came to power is possible, but it is easier to imagine this happening in the third century than in the fourth.

Judaism in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

Still more obscure than the spread of Judaism in North Africa is its spread southward from Egypt to the highlands that were called Aethiopia in Greek and Abyssinia in Arabic. For almost seventeen hundred years Ethiopia has been a largely Christian country, and the Ethiopic is therefore one of the oldest of the several Christian churches. Before King Ezana was converted (ca. 340) to Christianity, however, many of his subjects were probably Judaeans.

This is a controversial topic, about which opinions vary drastically. What is not debated is that until recently a Jewish minority was living in a mostly Christian Ethiopia. The "black Jews" who belonged to this community called themselves *Beta Israel* ("House of Israel") but were called *Falashas* ("exiles") by other Ethiopians and by the outside world.[79] In 1984 the Israeli government launched Operation Moses, bringing by air and sea some 15,000 Falashas from Ethiopia to Israel, and in 1991 about the same number were brought in during Operation Solomon. These population transfers virtually ended a long history of Ethiopian Judaism.

When and how Judaism came to Ethiopia is the subject of increasing interest and debate, with some in Israel claiming that the black-skinned Falashas are not "real Jews" and others (including the Falashas themselves) insisting that they are. According to Ethiopian legend the connection with Israel and Judah began in the reign of King Solomon:

> The chief work of Ethiopic literature, the *Kebra Nagast*, has as its centre-piece the legend of the Queen of Sheba (based on the narrative in I Kings x. 1-13 and liberally amplified and embellished), how she visited Solomon, accepted his religion, bore him a son (Menelik I), and how the son visited his father and abducted the Ark of the Covenant, which was taken to Aksum, the new Zion.[80]

The Ark of the Covenant, so it is believed by both Falashas and Ethiopian Christians, has ever since Menelik's ruse been kept under guard at Aksum, the city that in ancient times was the capital of the

Aksumite kingdom and that now lies close to Ethiopia's northern border. All of this is sheer aetiogical invention, as Ethiopians searched the scriptures to find a plausible setting for the beginning of Judaism in their land.

At the other extreme, some writers have proposed that Judaism in Ethiopia did not begin until the fifteenth century, when a prince named Abba Saga rebelled against his father, converted to Judaism, and then introduced a number of reforms in Jewish worship. Although the story of Abba Saba's defection from Christianity is evidently true, and although some innovations in Falasha Judaism (especially in its liturgy and sacred music) seem to date to the fifteenth century, that Abba Saga's conversion marked the beginning of Judaism in Ethiopia is out of the question. References to Falashas appear in Ethiopic literature several centuries before Abba Saga's time.

Most importantly, Ethiopic Judaism reflects a pre-Talmudic stage of the religion. The Hebrew language was not used in prayer and worship, and the oral Law was evidently never a part of the Falashas' religious tradition. Their sacred canon includes the books of Enoch and Jubilees, both of which were popular in Hellenistic Judaism but were rejected by the rabbinic academies, along with other apocryphal religious texts. These peculiarities indicate that the roots of Judaism in Ethiopia go back further than the fifth and sixth centuries, when the Talmuds became normative. In one of his early publications Edward Ullendorff - who for the last sixty years has contributed much to Ethiopic studies - presented an impressive array of arguments that Ethiopic Christianity is a superstrate that was overlaid upon a substrate of Judaism.[81] The Christians of Ethiopia, for example, practiced circumcision when Christians elsewhere were instructed not to do so. They also distinguished between clean and unclean foods, followed the levirate law of marriage, and proudly called themselves "Children of Israel." In other words, Ullendorff concluded, before the middle of the fourth century - when Christianity became the kingdom's established religion - Judaism must have been widespread in Ethiopia.[82] Ullendorff supposed that Judaism came to Ethiopia from Saba, across the strait of Bab al-Mandab, but that no longer seems likely. It now appears that Judaism spread to Ethiopia from Upper Egypt, very likely before the massacres of 115-117 (when Judaism in Egypt came close to extinction) and possibly before the end of the Ptolemaic period.[83] As is well known, already in the first century Luke told a story of an Ethiopian eunuch, who was in charge of Queen Kandake's treasury, coming to Judaea in order to worship at the Jerusalem temple (Acts 8:27).

The language of most modern Ethiopians is Amharic, but in antiquity it was Ge'ez.[84] Like Amharic, Ge'ez is a South Semitic language and so is only remotely related to such Northwest Semitic languages as Arabic, Aramaic and Hebrew. Although no longer spoken, it is still used in worship both by the Falashas and by Ethiopic Christians. A writing system for Ge'ez cannot be documented before the fourth century. Only a few dozen Ge'ez inscriptions survive, the most important of which are those of King Ezana. The earliest of these are polytheistic, several others are vaguely monotheistic, and one is firmly trinitarian Christian.[85] The earliest known manuscripts in Ge'ez date from the twelfth century.

For as far back as they can be traced, the Falashas have used a Tanakh written in Ge'ez. This version was apparently translated not from the Hebrew originals but from the Greek Septuagint. When this was done, and by whom, is uncertain, but most specialists believe that it was begun by Christians not long after King Ezana's conversion (it may not have been completed until the fifth or

even the sixth century). If translation into Ge'ez did not begin until after Ezana's conversion to Christianity, Judaeans in Ethiopia during the Ptolemaic and early Roman imperial periods must have used the Septuagint, and in Sabbath worship orally translated the passage into Ge'ez. At least some ancient Ethiopians knew Greek as a second language: six Greek inscriptions from the Aksumite kingdom have been found. Although Christians may well have translated all of their Old Testament as well as their New Testament from Greek into Ge'ez, it is not impossible that after the creation of a Ge'ez alphabet parts of the Septuagint were put into Ge'ez by Judaized Ethiopians.[86]

Hellenistic Judaism from 70 to ca. 250

In this period the Judaism of the Greek-speaking Diaspora seems to have continued to be what it had always been. Judaeans here were distinguished by their worship of "the Lord God" (in Greek, κύριος ὁ θεός), and by their dismissal of the iconic gods of the Greeks and Romans. Banking on their monotheism and their worship of the Lord God, Hellenistic Judaeans seem to have been little interested in the oral *torah* of the Mesopotamian and Galilean rabbis. For most Greek-speaking Judaeans both Hebrew and Aramaic were unintelligible, as they used Greek both in their daily lives and in their synagogue worship. A telling bit of evidence for this monolingualism comes from the New Testament: because Greek-speaking Judaeans were seldom able to distinguish between the Aramaic and the Hebrew language, we may suppose that they knew neither, and that for ears accustomed only to Greek the two Semitic languages sounded the same.[87]

That among some Greek-speaking Judaeans the oral *torah* was passed down in Greek from one generation to the next is a theoretical but remote possibility. What is more certain is that the written text of Rabbi Judah's Mishnah was not translated into Greek, and that with rare exceptions the Judaeans of the Greek Diaspora would not have been able to read the redacted Hebrew text. As Shaye Cohen has concluded, "outside the rabbinic pale altogether were the Greek-speaking Jews of the diaspora who had minimal contacts with the rabbis of Palestine and were well established in their own communities with their own religious traditions."[88]

Until well after Constantine's time the Greek Diaspora seems to have been numerically greater than its Aramaic counterpart. In the fourth century some of the synagogues in Greek-speaking cities were large buildings, decorated with figurative art. We have very little information about Hellenistic Judaism in the Roman empire, despite the fact that several million people embraced it. The rabbinic sources provide almost nothing on the subject, synagogue inscriptions are rarely helpful,[89] and our textual evidence is limited to the few aspersions cast by Christian writers (when the Greek-speaking Diaspora died out, its literary tradition died with it). Fortunately, archaeology occasionally illuminates what the situation was in a given city. Information is unusually full for the city of Rome itself.[90] From at least the second to the fifth century the Judaeans of Rome buried their dead in six catacombs alongside the Via Appia, about a mile outside the city's wall.[91] A handful of inscriptions in these catacombs are in Hebrew and Aramaic, more are in Latin, but of all 570 inscriptions almost three fourths are in Greek. Rome's Judaeans must have been able to speak some Latin, but their synagogue services were conducted in Greek and were centered on the Septuagint. Eleven Roman synagogues are mentioned in the inscriptions and evidence for some of these synagogues has been found. They stood in the newer part of Rome, on the Tiber's right bank (the Trastevere district). It is estimated that in the third century between 30,000 and 50,000 people in Rome were Judaean.

Rome was an exception, and Judaeans in a small city could gather in a single synagogue. Salvage excavations in 1981 revealed that at Philippopolis (today Plovdiv, in central Bulgaria) a substantial synagogue was built shortly before 250.[92] This was a rectangular structure (13.5m x 14.2m), with a colonnade and a forecourt slightly larger than the building itself. The mosaic floor of the main hall displayed various figures, including a menorah, and three Greek inscriptions. The inscriptions inform the reader that the mosaic decorations were paid for by "Kosmianos also called Joseph" and by "Hell[.....] also called Isaac." The Biblical by-names suggest that both Kosmianos and Hell[.....] were wealthy proselytes, who after joining the congregation added Judaic names to their original Greek names.[93] From Hadrian to Septimius Severus attempts had been made to eliminate or at least reduce proselytism to Judaism, but by the middle of the third century imperial edicts on that topic must not have been taken very seriously.

Sabbath worship of the Lord God consisted largely of the recitation of set prayers, the chanting of psalms, and the reading of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. All of this was conducted in the Greek language. The sacred scriptures were either the Septuagint or one of the later and more literal translations (the Aquila or Theodotion versions). On days other than the Sabbath some members of the congregation would gather thrice daily in order to say together the morning, afternoon and evening prayers. On the Sabbath, when the entire congregation was in attendance, portions of the scriptures were read, and over the course of a year the congregation might hear all of the Pentateuch. The reader was usually a knowledgeable man – either a member of the congregation or a distinguished visitor - who read the text aloud and then in a short sermon expounded the meaning of the text and showed its relevance for the congregation. An elaborate and dignified liturgy surrounded the unrolling of the sacred scroll, the reading of the text, and the rolling up of the scroll. Musical chants were much loved, and in the larger synagogues a skilled cantor led them. Prayers, however, were at the heart of Sabbath worship. A synonym for the word *synagogē* was *proseuchē*, which literally meant "prayer" but conventionally was understood as "house of prayer." Prayers were recited by the entire congregation and were led by the cantor or another man with a strong and pleasing voice. The "Hear, O Israel!" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) introduced the prayers, chief of which was the long *Eighteen Benedictions* (said while standing and facing Jerusalem).

Worship in the synagogues, unlike in the Christian churches, included no sacraments. For this and other reasons the ancient Judaean synagogues had no need to separate a clergy out from the laity. To govern itself the congregation selected a small panel of elders (*presbyteroi*) and chose a leader, usually a wealthy man, to act as its *archisynagogos.* This official moderated disputes between members of the congregation, and presided when communal decisions were to be made. The absence of a clergy made the Hellenistic synagogues unusually egalitarian and tolerant. Gentile visitors to the synagogue were welcomed and numerous, and although the elders of the congregation were likely to take note of egregious behavior by one of the members, it seems that conformity to the Laws of Moses was seldom closely monitored. The absence of a religious hierarchy, again in contrast to the Christian churches with their bishops and metropolitans, made each synagogue more or less autonomous. What kept the hundreds of Hellenistic synagogues from going each their own way was the centrality of "the scriptures" (αἱ γραφαί) and of the Lord God whom they celebrated. The scriptures were undoubtedly understood in different ways, from the literal meaning favored by the uneducated to the allegorical meanings advocated by Philo and his readers. It is also true that many of the apocryphal books

disdained by the Galilean rabbis were favorites in the Hellenistic synagogues. Nevertheless, the Lord God and the writings about him gave the synagogues an identity distinct from the Gentile world, and also provided a bond that loosely held them together.

Coexistence of Judaeans and Gentiles: the evidence from Aphrodisias

Two inscriptions found in 1976 in the modest city of Aphrodisias, in southwest Anatolia, are uniquely informative about the Greek-speaking Diaspora. Although their dates are uncertain, they have been tentatively assigned to the very early third century.[94] These inscriptions - the longest of any Greek inscriptions dealing with Judaeans - show not only that both Judaeans and Gentiles of the city had forgotten the fears and antagonism that may have been felt during the Diaspora uprising, but also that a significant number of people at Aphrodisias were either members or frequenters of the local synagogue. The briefer of the two inscriptions records the generosity of seventeen of the city's Judaeans and "God-fearers" in setting up some sort of soup kitchen for the city's poor. Fifteen of the donors were Judaeans (three of them identified as proselytes) and two were "God-fearers" (θεοσεβεῖς). That Judaeans should have undertaken such a charitable project, to benefit Gentiles as well as Judaeans, is remarkable and shows that the Judaeans played a significant role in the wider society of Aphrodisias. That five of the seventeen donors were either proselytes or "God-fearers" also indicates how attractive the synagogue was to the Gentile population of the city, and how indifferent the local authorities were to imperial edicts banning proselytism.

The second inscription from Aphrodisias, partially destroyed, is another list of some kind, naming 105 men: of these, 53 were Judaeans and 52 were "God-fearers." Except for one Eusabbathios, the "God-fearers" have more or less traditional Greek names: Zenon, Stratonikos, Diogenes, Athenagoras, and so forth. Among the Judaeans biblical names predominate - Judas, Joseph, Reuben, Manasseh, Jacob - and three men bear the Judaeo-Greek name of Eusabbathios, but others have purely Greek names such as Amantios, Zenon, Jason and Leontios. Occupations are listed for a few of the Judaeans and for all of the "God-fearers." Many are identified as tradesmen - stone-cutters, smiths, grocers, ink-makers, fullers - but heading the list of "God-fearers" are nine members of the city council. We may assume that these nine were among the wealthiest men in Aphrodisias. There may also have been Christians at Aphrodisias, but it is unlikely that before Constantine's reign they were either as numerous or as conspicuous as the city's Judaeans.

The Aphrodisias inscriptions and the archaeological evidence for synagogues give us a picture very different from those presented by Christian and rabbinic sources. Except for the provinces devastated by the massacres of 115-117 - Cyrenaica, Cyprus and Egypt - the Greek-speaking Diaspora seems to have been flourishing in the third century CE. Whatever flight of "God-fearers" from the synagogues may have occurred during and after the massacres, by the third century the synagogues were again attracting Gentiles - some of them affluent Hellenes - to Judaism. In 250, when the emperor Decius and his advisor Valerian were conducting an empire-wide persecution to eradicate Christianity, no one could have imagined that within a century and a half the world would look entirely different: the Roman empire would be officially Christian, and the Judaeans' Greek-speaking Diaspora would be entering its perilous and final period, when much of it was abolished by Christians and what survived was transformed into the Judaism of the Galilean rabbis.

1. That sacrifices were a thing of the past is indicated not only by the general silence on the subject in rabbinic sources, but also by explicit statements to that effect. One such is II Baruch 35:4-5, where the author laments, "in that place where I am now prostrate, Of old the high priest offered sacrifices, And placed thereon an incense of fragrant odours. But now our glorying has been made into dust, And the desire of our soul into sand" (Charles). On the other hand, when writing in the early second century Josephus uses the present tense in describing the priests and their sacrificial rituals (*Contra Apionem* 2.193-98), as does Clement at I Clement 18:18-20. A Judaean writing ca. 100 CE may have assumed that the temple was soon to be rebuilt and that the traditional practices were soon to be resumed, and he may therefore have used the present tense in describing them. Smallwood 1981, pp. 346-48, has a good discussion of the problem.

2. In Second Temple times the high priest delivered the priestly blessing ("The Lord bless thee and keep thee") of Num 6:24-26 to the throngs that surrounded the temple at the great pilgrim feasts or on the Day of Atonement. It is likely that in the Diaspora synagogues during Second Temple times and everywhere after 70 CE the priestly blessing was on the holy days given wherever a priest (*kohēn*) was available to give it. The service of a priest also remained essential for a Judaean father at the birth of his first-born son: the father redeems his first-born son by paying the redemption price to a priest. The priests (*kohanim*) in post-temple times remained under the traditional holiness requirements. These requirements were spelled out in the fifth order (*Qodashim*) of the Mishnah, which is devoted entirely to the Jerusalem temple, the priests, and the sacrifices.

3. *Nat. Hist*. 5. 15.73

4. *BJ* 2.120-161.

5. BT, Tractate *Shabbath*, Folio 27a.

6. Exodus 21:27 and 33.

7. Matt 23:27; cf. Luke 11:39.

8. BT, Tractate *Gittin*, Folio 56a-b.

9. Smallwood 1981, p. 348.

10. Smallwood 1981, p. 349.

11. The divine name does not appear in the Book of Esther, and accordingly there was much debate whether or not that book "defiled the hands."

12. For the total of 24 books see 4th Ezra 14:45. The five "books of Moses" are of course Genesis

through Deuteronomy. The eight books of "the prophets" included six of what were called "the former prophets" (Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, and I and II Kings), one of the "major prophets" (Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel all together, in one book), and one that included all of the minor prophets. The eleven books of "writings" were Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Ruth, Esther, Job, Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel. The Book of Ruth had in earlier times been included among "the former prophets" but was relegated to "the writings" by the Jamnia rabbis, perhaps because it celebrated the marriage of the Judahite Boaz to the Gentile Ruth. Josephus (*Contra Apionem* 1.38-40) counted 22 books: five of Moses, 13 of the prophets after Moses, and four books of "hymns and advice for daily life."

13. JT, Tractate *Berakoth*, Folio 28a. See also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon the Judaean* 16: Justin berates the Judaeans for the then-current practice of "cursing in the synagogues those who believe in the Christ."

14. For a valiant attempt to identify two possible relics of Diaspora literature in Latin see Rutgers 1998, pp. 235-84.

15. For the three fragments of Artapanos' *Concerning the Judaeans* and for commentary see Carl Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. I (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 189-243.

16. On Justus see Holladay 1983, pp. 371-89.

17. *Contra Apionem* 2.167-69; cf. 2.190-91; for Josephus' ridicule of the gods and myths of popular Greek religion see 2.236-54.

18. Eusebius *HE* 4.2.1-2; Dio Cassius 68.32. A monograph on the Diaspora turmoil has now appeared: see Pucci Ben Zeev 2005. For a thorough presentation of all the evidence see Elizabeth Smallwood's chapter, "The Jewish Revolt of A.D. 115-117," pp. 389-427 in Smallwood 1981. Much of my account is based on Smallwood's chapter. The proposal that the Judaeans of Cyprus and Cyrene aimed to establish Judaean states, however, is mine and not Smallwood's.

19. Dio Cassius 68.25.5

20. On this tax, instituted by Vespasian in 70, see Smallwood 1981, pp. 371-76. A tax of two drachmas annually was levied on all Judaeans, male and female. The temple of Jupiter Capitolinus had been destroyed in the Roman civil war in 69, and initially the *fiscus Iudaicus* supplied funds for the rebuilding of that temple. By the early second century the money received by the *fiscus Iudaicus* "was presumably merged in general funds with its nominal destination forgotten" (Smallwood 1981, p. 375).

21. Smallwood 1981, p. 395. Eusebius seems to have been unaware that the massacres occurred during Trajan's campaign into Mesopotamia, or even that there was such a campaign.

22. Smallwood 1981, pp. 400-01.

23. Allen Kerkeslager, writing in the *Cambridge History of Judaism*, concludes that not even in Alexandria are Judaeans likely to have survived the bloodbaths. "No Jewish inscriptions can be dated with certainty between 117 and the early fourth century" (Kerkeslager 2006, p. 63).

24. Orosius 7.12.8.

25. Dio Cassius 68.30. Dio (who knew much about Trajan's campaign against the Parthians) gives us the information about these cities, but does not indicate that the rebels were Judaeans. Eusebius and Orosius (7.12.7), contrarily, describe Trajan's actions against the Judaeans of Mesopotamia but do not seem to have known that the risings occurred during Trajan's war against the Parthians.

26. Smallwood 1981, pp. 425-26. In the *Megillath Ta'anith* ("Scroll of Fasting") 18b the Aramaic text identifies the 12th day of Adar as "the day of Tyrian" (*sic*). The medieval Hebrew scholium on this entry explains that the day commemorated the death of Trajan, who had ordered the execution of Jewish martyrs at Laodicea. Smallwood reconstructs an event out of this and several other rabbinic traditions.

27. Smallwood 1981, pp. 446-49.

28. Smallwood 1981, p. 333.

29. Dio Cassius 69.12.1-2 reports that the war began because of Hadrian's building plans. See Smallwood 1981, pp. 431-33. The *Historia Augusta*, a whimsical "history" written in the late fourth century, reports (*de vita Hadriani* 14.2) that the war was the result of Hadrian's issuing an edict that banned circumcision. The *HA* has nothing else to say about the war, and does not mention Hadrian's project to build Aelia with its temple to Jupiter Capitolinus. Although none of our other sources mention an edict proscribing circumcision, it is likely that such an edict was issued *after* the war, and as a punishment for it. If so, it was soon tempered by Hadrian's successor, Antoninus Pius (138-161), who forbade the circumcision of anyone who was *not* a Judaean (see Smallwood 1981, p. 429).

30. On the evidence of coins see Grant 1984, pp. 251-53.

31. Smallwood 1981, p. 447, presents the evidence. Several of the legions were represented only by detachments.

32. According to the fantasies of *Lamentations Rabbah* 2 the forces of Bar Kozeba at Bethar included 200,000 men with an "amputated finger" (*i.e.*, circumcised), and when Bethar finally fell the blood of the vanquished ran deep enough to reach the nostrils of the Romans' horses.

33. Eusebius, *HE* 4.6, Williamson. For Eusebius' elaboration of the theme see his *Demonstatio Evangelica* 8.3.10-12.

34. Jerome, *Commentarius in Sophoniam Prophetam* 1.15-16. The Day of Mourning was the 9th day of Ab in the Hebrew calendar, which came to be thought of as the day on which five disasters occurred, including the fall of Bethar to Severus' forces. The Jewish custom of prayer at the so-called Wailing Wall (actually the "Western Wall" of the Temple Mount) is not attested until the 11th century. The term, "Wailing Wall," was unknown in antiquity, and in fact may have been coined in the 19th or early 20th century.

35. Smallwood 1981, pp. 499-500.

36. On this see Millar 1993, pp. 348-50.

37. *Digesta Iustiniani* XLVIII, viii, 11.1: Circumcidere Iudaeis filios suos tantum rescripto divi Pii permittitur; in non eiusdem nationis qui hoc fecerit, castrantis poena irrogatur. For the text see Smallwood 1981, p. 429, n. 4.

38. Smallwood 1981, p. 469; for the Latin text on the penalties (from Julius Paulus) see her note 7 on that page.

39. Smallwood 1981, p. 472.

40. Smallwood 1981, pp. 515-16, gathers the very sparse evidence for the "Jewish tax" in later centuries. She suggests that "it perhaps survived, in the East at any rate, into the Byzantine period."

41. Smallwood 1981, p. 475.

42. BT, Tractate *Gittin* (in seder *Nashim*), folio 56b.

43. On rabbinic sources referring to "Kitos' War" see Pucci Ben Zeev 2005, pp. 234-44.

44. Smallwood 1981, pp. 485-86.

45. Jerome's comment appears in his commentary on Daniel 11:34. For the prayer inscription see Smallwood 1981, p. 497, note 48. Whether the building in which it was found was a synagogue is uncertain.

46. *Digesta Iustiniani* 50.2.3: Eis qui Iudaicam superstitionem sequuntur divi Severus et Antoninus honores adipisci permiserunt, sed et necessitates eis imposuerunt quae superstitionem eorum non laederent. See Smallwood 1981, p. 513, note 33.

47. *SHA, Septimius Severus* 17.1: Iudaeos fieri sub gravi poena vetuit. idem etiam de Christianis sanxit. For evaluation of this evidence see Feldman 1993, p. 386.

48. Keresztes 1970, p. 578. According to the *Passio Perpetuae* the victims of the persecution at Carthage in March of 203 were catechumens and neophytes.

49. It is likely that some patriarchs were in office each for only a few years, too briefly to be remembered, and that they simply dropped out of rabbinic traditions. In those traditions, Gamaliel II was the *nasi* for about fifty years (ca. 80-132 CE), his son Simeon II for almost forty (to ca. 175 CE), and Simeon's son Judah for almost forty-five (ca. 175-219).

50. BT, Tractate *Yebamoth*, Folio 17a.

51. BT, Tractate *Baba Qamma*, Folio 46a.

52. BT, Tractate *Baba Qamma*, Folio 17a.

53. Jacob Neusner, *The Oral Torah: The Sacred Books of Judaism, an Introduction* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 10.

54. BT, Tractate *Berakoth*, Folio 2a.

55. BT, Tractate *Tohoroth* (from the like-named *seder Tohoroth*), Folio 1.

56. BT, Tractate *Tohoroth*, Folio 7.

57. BT, Tractate *Berakoth*, Folio 5a.

58. BT, Tractate *Baba Mezi'a*, Folio 59b: Rabbi Eliezer, disputing with his fellow scholars, has at this point already worked two miracles to convince his opponents that he had the true understanding of the *halakoth*. "Again he said to them: 'If the *halachah* agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!' Whereupon a Heavenly Voice cried out: 'Why do ye dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the *halachah* agrees with him!' But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: 'It is not in heaven.' What did he mean by this? Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai, we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, After the majority must one incline." I thank Jon Torodash for pointing out this passage to me.

59. Cohen 1987, pp. 223-24.

60. Epstein 1959, pp. 126-27.

[61] Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia*, vol. II: *The Early Sasanian Period* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), p. 249.

[62] Neusner 1966, p. 257.

63. White 1997, pp. 176-77. For the full report see Kraeling 1956.

64. The so-called "Onqelos" targum was probably not produced until well after 250 CE (it includes phrasing from some of the Tannaitic *midrashim*). The "Jonathan targum" of the *neviim* (Prophets, from Joshua through the Minor Prophets) seems to have been available at an earlier

date, and it presupposes the existence of still earlier targums of the Torah (Pentateuch). At Qumran various targum fragments were found, along with a complete targum of Job.

65. Grant 1984, p. 275.

66. The Phoenician (Punic) language was still commonly spoken in the North African countryside in the fifth and sixth centuries, and the villagers who spoke it still referred to themselves as "Canaanites." It was therefore not difficult for the Judaeans of North Africa to contrive the story that after Joshua, successor to Moses and scourge of the Canaanites, had taken Jericho and other nearby cities in Canaan itself, he had in his later years carried his campaign into North Africa.

67. The stories are treated with unwarranted respect by Chouraqi 1968, pp. 3-5.

68. Setzer 2006, p. 69.

69. Setzer 2006, p. 71. For the epigraphical studies see Yann Le Bohec, "Inscriptions juives et judaisant de l'Afrique romaine," pp.165-207 in *Antiquités africaines* 17 (1981), and "Juifs et Judaisants dans l'Afrique romaine: remarques onomastique," pp, 209-229 in same volume.

70. Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos* 1.1-2.

71. On this see Levine 2000, pp. 279-81. For an early description of the mosaics see Franklin Biebel, "The Mosaics of Hammam Lif," *Art Bulletin* 18 (1936), pp. 541-51. For a recent presentation with color illustrations see Edward Bleiberg, *Tree of Paradise: Jewish Mosaics from the Roman Empire* (Brooklyn: Brooklyn Museum, 2005).

72. Levine 2006, p. 281.

73. Chouraqui 1968, pp. 12-13.

74. Setzer 2006, pp. 69-70; Chouraqui 1968, p. 15.

75. Aziza 1977 showed that Tertullian was quite familiar with Judaeans and with contemporary Judaism.

76. Setzer 2006, p. 72

77. Bradbury 2006, p. 508. Bradbury notes that a dozen inscriptions, dating from the third to the sixth century, attest to Judaeans in Spain (the inscriptions are in Latin, Greek and Hebrew). Otherwise, the only evidence for the Diaspora in Spain before Late Antiquity comes from Christian sources.

78. Bradbury 2006, p. 510.

79. See David Kessler, *The Falashas: A Short History of the Ethiopian Jews*, third edition (New

York: Frank Cass & Co., 1996. The first edition of this book was published in 1982 as *The Falashas: The Forgotten Jews of Ethiopia*.

80. Ullendorff 1956, p. 231.

81. Edward Ullendorff, "Hebraic-Jewish Elements in Abyssinian (Monophysite) Christianity," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956), pp. 216-261.

82. Ullendorff 1956, p. 227: P. 227: "It is clear that these and other traditions, in particular that of the Ark of the Covenant at Aksum, must have been an integral part of the Abyssinian national heritage long before the introduction of Christianity in the fourth century; for it is inconceivable that a people recently converted from paganism to Christianity (not by a Christian Jew but by the Syrian missionary Frumentius) should thereafter have begun to boast of Jewish descent and to insist on Israelite connexions, customs, and institutions."

83. Kessler 1996, p. xxv, came to the tentative conclusion that "Hebrew influences could have spread into Axum in the Ptolemaic period and led to the conversion of a substantial section of the indigenous Agaw population."

84. On the Ge'ez language see Gene Gragg, "Ge'ez (Ethiopic)," pp. 242-262, in Robert Hetzron, editor, *The Semitic Languages* (London: Routledge, 1997).

85. See Gragg 1997, pp. 242-43: "The earliest inscriptions of Ezana are pagan, while the last few attest to the introduction of monotheism (presumably Christian) to the court at Aksum." An explicitly Christian inscription, written in Greek, was published in 1970. See Kaplan 1982, p. 103.

86. On the translation of the entire Bible into Ge'ez see H. J. Polotsky, "Aramaic, Syriac and Ge'ez," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 9 (1964), pp. 1-10. When the Bible was translated into Ge'ez, some of the words used by the translators were Aramaic rather than Ge'ez. These Aramaic words were neither Syriac in origin nor specifically Christian, and so do not attest to a Syriac missionary bringing them in. Polotsky, p. 10, found that "none of these words is distinctively Christian in meaning. What they denote belongs to the Judaic leaven in Christianity." Concerning the Septuagint as the source for the translators Polotsky commented (p. 2): "On *a priori* grounds it is unlikely that the Bible should have been translated very much later than the introduction of Christianity; and on internal evidence it is clear that the Ethiopic Bible was, in the first instance, translated directly from the Greek. I am aware that some scholars are not yet convinced that such was really the case. I can only say that all the evidence known to me leads to this conclusion."

87. The word ˙ἑβραϊστί occurs in the New Testament, but regularly means "in Aramaic" rather than "in Hebrew." See, for example, John 19:13 and 19:20, and Acts 21:40. On the topic see especially Fitzmyer 1979, p. 43: "When ... Greek writers of the first century refer to the native language of Palestine, they use ˙εβραϊστί, ˙εβραὶς διάλεκτος, or ˙εβράϊζων. As far as I can see,

no one has yet found the adverb *aramaïsti*. The adverb ˙εβραϊστί (and its related expressions) seems to mean 'in Hebrew,' and it has often been argued that it means this and nothing more. As is well known, it is used at times with words and expressions that are clearly Aramaic. Thus in John 19:13 ˙εβραϊστί δὲ Γαββαθᾶ is given as an explanation of the Lithostrotos, and γαββαθᾶ is a Grecized form of the Aramaic word *gabbĕtā*, 'raised place'."

88. Cohen 1987, p. 226.

66. Louis Feldman, *Studies in Hellenistic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 579 notes that although inscriptions identify the synagogue's leaders and donors, they do not tell us what took place in the synagogues.

90. Feldman and Reinhold 1996, pp. 64-67.

91. For a full description of the Jewish catacombs see Leon 1996. These Catacombs lie just beyond the predominantly Christian catacombs of San Callisto. Although the dates of the burials and the inscriptions are problematic, a fair number seem to date from the third century CE.

92. Panayotov 2004, pp. 38-52.

93. For a Judaean by-name taken by a proselyte see, for example, Feldman and Reinhold 1996, no. 3.18 (p. 67), a funerary epitaph: "Veturia Paulla, happily placed in the eternal home. She lived eighty-six years, proselyte for sixteen years; she was also named Sara. Mother of the synagogue of the Campenses and of the Volumnians. May she rest in peace!"

94. For translation of the inscriptions, cut into two faces of the same stele but by different hands and perhaps at different times, see Feldman and Reinhold 1996, pp. 142-43. Neither inscription includes a solid criterion for dating, and in publishing the inscriptions Reynolds and Tannenbaum 1987, pp. 19-23, canvassed various possibilities, from the second century to the sixth. They concluded, however (p. 22), that "in the circumstances it seems that a third-century date can be proposed" for both inscriptions.