

ish life in Palestine. Unfortunately, the evidence is scanty. Josephus, at any rate, had a derogatory view of them, if we may judge from his comment about the woman at Masada whom he describes as superior in sagacity and training to most women, as if women can be praised only when compared with other women.⁶¹ In an addition to the Bible, he says that the testimony of women is inadmissible in Jewish law because of their levity and boldness.⁶² However, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus' presumed contemporary, has considerably greater respect for them.⁶³

Jewish sects

The Jerusalem Talmud tells us that there were 24 sects of heretics⁶⁴ at the time of the destruction of the Temple.⁶⁵ Josephus tells us about three schools of thought (the Greek word he uses, *hairesis*, has given rise to our "heresy," although it had no such connotation in the original).⁶⁶ These three schools are represented by the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. In a subsequent discussion, Josephus adds another school of thought, the Fourth Philosophy,⁶⁷ which sought to establish an independent theocratic Jewish state. Philo describes still another, the ascetic Therapeutae,⁶⁸ who flourished near Alexandria. The Herodians are mentioned in the Gospels (Mark 3:6, 12:13; Matthew 22:16) as a political party which, after the death of Herod, may have regarded him as the messiah.⁶⁹ In any event, they sought to reestablish the rule of Herod's descendants over an independent Palestine. The Samaritans constituted still another faction, and, of course, the Christians (if they may be grouped together) another. Perhaps we should add the *haverim*,⁷⁰ who, through their meticulous observance of the laws of purity and of tithes, separated themselves from the unlearned rural masses known as the *'am ha-'aretz* (people of the land) and would not eat with them.⁷¹

The views of the Pharisees have survived in the rabbinic literature. Unfortunately, we have no writings of the Sadducees or of the Essenes (unless we identify the Dead Sea sect with the latter, as most scholars do). Accordingly, we must rely on Josephus for much of our information about these movements. We also have some writings of the Samaritans, but they come from a later period.

The movements that were active in first-century Palestine may perhaps be divided into two groups: those that attempted to make a mass, egalitarian appeal (the Samaritans, Pharisees, Sadducees and the Fourth Philosophy) and those that were separatist, monastic, utopian, ascetic, esoteric and preoccupied with ethics (the Essenes and/or the Dead Sea sect and the Therapeutae). The *haverim* have some but not all of these latter qualities. Christianity would seem to have elements of both.

A major common denominator of the Samaritans and the

Sadducees was their rejection of the Oral Torah, which greatly expanded and interpreted the written Law. While a rejection of the Oral Torah made it easier for Samaritans and Sadducees to understand their religious tenets, since the Oral Torah was much more complicated than the written Torah, it also deprived them of the flexibility that the Pharisees gained through their liberal interpretation of the written Torah.

Though many of these movements originated before the first century, they seem to have flourished particularly in the period just before the destruction of Temple. All of these groups, with the exception of the Pharisees and the Christians,* apparently disappeared with the destruction of the Temple.⁷² This, then, is a clue that much of the controversy centered around the Temple, its ritual and its purity laws.

The Sadducees,⁷³ though few in number,⁷⁴ seem to have had considerable influence because their power base was the Temple⁷⁵ and because they included men of the highest standing.⁷⁶ Sadducean support of Jewish nationalism was undoubtedly a major attraction for the many influential Jews who joined the party, including the important Hasmonean ruler of Judea, John Hyrcanus, who switched his allegiance from the Pharisees to the Sadducees in the second century B.C.E.

So long as the Temple stood, its vast treasury enabled those who controlled it to exercise considerable political, economic and religious power. We may guess that one reason the high priests of the Temple had such short terms of office was that the Romans would not tolerate the nationalism that was so integral a part of their Sadducean orientation. The Pharisees, on the other hand, recognized the value of the *Pax Romana*. The first-century Pharisaeic sage Ḥanina Segan ha-Kohanim enjoined Jews to "pray for the peace of the ruling power, since but for fear of it men would have swallowed each other up alive."⁷⁷ Indeed in the year 62 C.E., the Pharisees brought a formal accusation before the Roman procurator against the Sadducean high priest Ananus, accusing him of arbitrary action in convening the Sanhedrin to condemn James, the brother of Jesus, to death;⁷⁸ the Sadducean high priest was removed from office. Eventually, it was the Pharisees' acceptance of Roman rule that caused a split in their ranks and gave birth to the Fourth Philosophy; as Josephus observes, the Fourth Philosophy agreed in all things with the Pharisees, except that they would not accept foreign rule.⁷⁹

If the relationship between the Pharisees and the Sadducees was as bitter as would seem to be the case from Josephus and from later rabbinic writings, one wonders why we never hear of

* A few hundred Samaritans still live near Tel Aviv and in Nablus.

The Rabbinic Sources

There are no written rabbinic sources dating from the first century. The oldest extant code of Jewish law is the Mishnah, edited about 200 C.E. by Rabbi Judah the Prince. It is a legal code of 63 tractates, dealing with agricultural matters, with the law of persons and property, with legal procedure and with ritual. Accordingly, we should not expect and, indeed, do not find, except very incidentally, references to contemporary or historical events. The same is true of the Tosefta, a supplementary collection of interpretations of the Oral Torah (of which the Mishnah is the core). The Tosefta was edited, according to tradition, by Rabbi Ḥiyya bar Abba, a pupil of Judah the Prince, but it never achieved the status of the Mishnah. Of the rabbis who are most frequently quoted in both the Mishnah and the Tosefta, the overwhelming majority date from the second century.¹

The traditional Jewish view of the Mishnah is that it is part of a divinely revealed Oral Law which is to be interpreted as part of a chain of tradition culminating in rabbinic discussions called the Gemara. Jacob Neusner has challenged the usefulness of the Mishnah as a historical source for any period prior to its completion in about 200 C.E.² He has argued vigorously that the Mishnah is to be viewed as an independent work by a small group of men, reflecting the age in which it was composed, and that the views ascribed to various rabbis are to be viewed not as those of the rabbis but rather as those of the redactors (editors).

The rabbinic discussions based on the Mishnah and known as the Gemara originated in both Palestine and Babylonia. The Palestinian Gemara was eventually edited about 400 C.E.; it constitutes, together with the Mishnah itself, the Jerusalem Talmud. The Palestinian Gemara on most but not all of the 63 tractates of the Mishnah has been preserved. The same is true of the Babylonian Gemara, which was edited about 500 C.E. and which, together with the Mishnah, constitutes the Babylonian Talmud.³ The Gemara in the Babylonian Talmud is fuller than that in the Jerusalem Talmud, and there are

the excommunication of the Sadducees, especially in view of the fact that they refused to accept the Oral Torah, so central in Pharisaic thinking.⁸⁰ On the contrary, the Pharisees and the Sadducees seem to have managed to serve together in the Temple and in the Sanhedrin. The fact that the Sadducees are not even mentioned in the voluminous works of Philo* or in the Apocrypha** or Pseudepigrapha† would appear to indicate that the division between them and the Pharisees was not as sharp as one would gather from Josephus. Indeed, Josephus himself hints that the division was perhaps not so great when he reports that the Sadducees “submit to the formulas of the Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them.”⁸¹

even more digressions, but there is little pertaining to historical or contemporary events.

Rabbinic tradition of a homiletic type known as *midrash* (plural, *midrashim*) consists of exegesis of biblical passages. Forerunners of *midrash* are found in the commentaries discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The golden age of *midrashim* begins with *Genesis Rabbah*, which was not edited until perhaps the fifth century.⁴ Many midrashic elements are, however, embodied in the Septuagint⁵ and in Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*.⁶ Some otherwise lost *midrashim* have been preserved by the Church Fathers, notably Origen and Jerome.⁷ Only one rabbinic work of midrashic nature even purportedly contains historical data, the *Seder Olam Rabbah*, ascribed to the second-century sage Yose ben Halafta; but it contains many late additions, and in any case is more of a chronology than a history.

As to the reliability of rabbinic sources for the history of the period before they were compiled, Shaye Cohen has argued that Josephus' traditions are older and more original than those of the rabbis, that in not a single case is there a compelling reason to assume the contrary and hence that Josephus provides a "control" for the study of rabbinic texts.⁸ However, the rabbis have at least one great advantage over Josephus, in that they represent many different points of view and present their comments only in passing, and hence with no particular historiographical mission in mind.

Two small details indicate that the rabbis in the centuries that followed the Roman destruction of the Temple at least tried to be historically accurate: (1) A talmudic saying tells us that "Whoever reports a saying in the name of its originator brings deliverance to the world."⁹ (2) A recently discovered manuscript of one of the tractates of the Talmud (*Avodah Zarah* 8b) clearly indicates that an *early* second-century sage wrote down the laws pertaining to fines;¹⁰ hence, these laws, at least, are considerably earlier than the time of the compilation of the Talmud in which they were included.

As to the Fourth Philosophy, there was apparently some connection between their ideology and that of the militant Maccabees in the second century B.C.E. Both fought against a great power (the Maccabees fought against the then-ruling power, the Syrians)

* See box, pages 30-31, concerning Philo.

** These books are considered deuterocanonical by the Roman Catholic Church and are included as part of the Catholic Bible. They are designated as apocryphal in Protestant Bibles, but are not included in Hebrew Scriptures.

† A body of Jewish religious texts written between 200 B.C.E. and 200 C.E., incorrectly attributed to people mentioned in the Bible or to authors of biblical books, similar in nature to biblical books but not recognized as part of the canon of the Bible or the Apocrypha.

in order to establish an independent state.⁸² Indeed, Josephus ascribes to the Fourth Philosophy all the troubles that eventually befell the Jews of Palestine. Those who subscribed to the Fourth Philosophy refused to pay tribute to the Romans; they advocated rebellion on the ground that they could acknowledge only God as their master. Unfortunately, Josephus provides us with hardly any history of the movement (and he is our only source), except that it began in 6 C.E. in opposition to the census of Quirinius, the Roman governor of Syria. When Josephus gives us a catalogue of the five revolutionary groups he does not even mention the Fourth Philosophy;⁸³ perhaps he regarded it as an umbrella group for all the revolutionaries, or perhaps he identified the Fourth Philosophy with the Sicarii, another militant group.⁸⁴ Until relatively late in the revolt, there appear to be no traces of intraparty conflict among the revolutionaries, although this may indicate only that the early incidents were largely spontaneous and not managed by any organized party.⁸⁵

Messianism undoubtedly played an important element in the revolt, judging from the fact that Menahem, the leader of the Sicarii, appeared in Jerusalem at the beginning of the revolt "like a veritable king"⁸⁶—that is, like a messianic leader. He was murdered while wearing royal robes.⁸⁷ Another revolutionary leader, Simon bar Giora, was captured, after the destruction of the Temple, in a white tunic with a purple (that is, royal) mantle;⁸⁸ he was said to have arisen out of the ground at the very spot where the Temple formerly stood. But Josephus appears to suppress the messianic ideals of the revolutionaries, perhaps to avoid the wrath of the Romans, who regarded a belief in a messianic ruler as treason. In the last books of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, however, Josephus mentions at least ten leaders who probably were regarded as messiahs by their adherents, though Josephus himself (except in the case of Jesus, in a passage⁸⁹ which is probably interpolated by a later editor⁹⁰) avoids calling them messiahs.

The meaning of the term "messiah" was apparently flexible enough to accommodate these various careers. Indeed, though Josephus presents Eleazer ben Dinai as a mere revolutionary,⁹¹ the rabbis call our attention to his messianic pretensions.⁹² We may also note that two later Jewish revolts against Rome, that of 115-117, led by Lukuas-Andreas in Cyrene on the North African coast* and that of 132-135, led by Bar-Kokhba in Palestine, were both definitely headed by messianic claimants.

Of the minor sects, the Essenes were of the greatest interest to Josephus. Whether the Essenes were the Dead Sea sect whose library was discovered in our own day in the cliffs of the Wadi

* See page 146 and footnote on page 195.

Qumran on the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea is still a matter of debate among scholars. But whether the Essenes and the Dead Sea sect are the same or just similar in some respects, one or both reached their height in the first century.⁹³

The Temple Scroll, the longest of the Dead Sea Scrolls, was (according to its modern editor, Yigael Yadin) regarded by the sect as a veritable Torah of the Lord. In it God Himself gives commands as part of his original revelation to Moses. The quotations from the Bible in the Temple Scroll differ somewhat from the Masoretic text (the standard Hebrew text), from the Septuagint (an early Greek translation) and from the Samaritan Pentateuch. Apparently, the author of the Temple Scroll had a different version of the Hebrew Bible.

In another text, known as MMT (for *Miqsat Ma'aseh ha-Torah*, "Some Legal Rulings Pertaining to the Torah"),⁹⁴ the sect appears to agree with the Sadducees in a number of controversies it had with the Pharisees. With many of the documents still to be published,⁹⁵ it appears more and more likely that the Dead Sea Scrolls, as they are collectively called, reflect the thinking of more than one sect or splinter group. Several of the scrolls, such as the Testaments of Levi, Judah and Naphtali, belong to the Pseudepigrapha. Some scrolls contain apocalyptic sections, as well as messianic references. Indeed, with the cessation of prophecy, according to tradition, at the time of the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.,⁹⁶ apocalyptic visions of the mysteries of creation and of the secrets of the end of days, in effect, replace prophetic visions. Books containing such visions have a close connection with the biblical Book of Daniel; like Daniel, they stress the impossibility of a rational solution to the problem of theodicy (explaining undeserved evil in light of a beneficent God) and the imminence of the day of salvation, to be preceded by terrible hardships, presumably reflecting the then-current historical setting. Such works had particular influence on early Christianity.

The question arises as to whether the Gnostic systems, some of which go back to the first and second centuries, are related to the collapse of the apocalyptic strains in Judaism when the Temple was destroyed in 70 C.E.* It is highly doubtful that there is any direct Jewish source for this Gnosticism (from the Greek, *gnosis*, "secret knowledge"); but some characteristic Gnostic doctrines are found in certain groups of apocalyptic first-century Jews, particularly the Essenes (or the Dead Sea sect). Gnostic-like doctrines are also found, to some degree, in such works as the first-century *Biblical Antiquities* of pseudo-Philo:⁹⁷ the dichotomy of body and soul and a disdain for the material world, a notion of esoteric

* On Gnosticism, see pages 173-179.

knowledge and an intense interest in angels and in problems of creation.

The effect of Hellenism on Palestinian Judaism cannot be denied. Whether it was as intense as in the Diaspora is a matter of scholarly controversy. Some scholars have gone so far as to suggest that we should stop differentiating Palestinian Judaism from Diaspora Judaism in this respect.⁹⁸ Admittedly, both show Greek influence, an influence that is said to be manifest at a much earlier point than has been previously thought—in fact, at least a century before the beginning of the Maccabean revolt in 168 B.C.E. Still, I believe there are differences between Palestine and the Diaspora in this respect. Let's look at some of the evidence.

The coins of the Hasmonean rulers of Palestine in the second and first centuries B.C.E. bear legends in Greek and Hebrew; those of the Herodians in the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. are in Greek alone—presumably because at least for commercial purposes Greek was the *lingua franca* of Palestine. Undoubtedly, the tremendous number of Greek-speaking Jews from the Diaspora who came to Jerusalem for the three annual pilgrimage festivals—Pesach (Passover), Shavuoth (Weeks) and Sukkoth (Tabernacles)—brought with them not only the Greek language but also some elements of Greek culture. In addition, the tremendous success of the Jewish proselytizing movement must have brought to Palestine many converts whose native language was Greek. Yet Greek travelers, on the whole, seem to have ignored Judea, possibly because they feared being robbed by highwaymen; they visited the coast primarily, where Jews were not concentrated.⁹⁹ Moreover, though Greek is often found in tombstone inscriptions, perhaps to deter non-Jewish passersby from molesting the graves, the level of Greek in these inscriptions is very elementary.¹⁰⁰

The fact that in the year 64, Josephus, a mere youngster of 26, was chosen for an extremely important and delicate mission to the Roman emperor, presumably because he knew Greek (and perhaps because he had connections at the imperial court), is evidence that the general knowledge of Greek was not deep. Josephus himself, never one to refrain from self-praise, admits that though he labored strenuously, he was unable to acquire a thorough knowledge of Greek because of his habitual use of his native language, Aramaic. To be proficient in other languages, principally Greek, was a skill common to freedmen and even slaves, Josephus remarks, the implication being that it was not common among free-born people.¹⁰¹

Indeed, it is clear from many sources—letters, contracts, documents, ossuary inscriptions, pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls,

**Cultural
developments
in Palestine**