

ANCIENT JUDAISM
AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Judaism in the Roman World

Collected Essays



MARTIN GOODMAN

brill

Judaism in the Roman World

Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity

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PREFACE

The studies reprinted here originally appeared in diverse publications between 1990 and 2006, and in many cases they are not easily available. They were written for a variety of purposes, but they reflect a consistent approach in the study of Judaism from the late Second Temple period to the end of antiquity and I hope that reissuing them in a single volume may prove useful.

It is largely by accident that I have written on so many aspects of the religious lives of ancient Jews. I was trained as a Roman historian and came to the study of Jewish texts originally as a source for social, cultural and administrative history; for such purposes, it was necessary to analyse the religious milieu and meaning of these texts only to the extent that this clarified their value as evidence for other aspects of Jewish and Roman history. However, I discovered early in my teaching career that many colleagues simply assumed that anyone who works on Jewish texts must be interested in religious history for its own sake, and after a while I succumbed. In any case, it proved impossible to give lectures on Roman Palestine without taking a view on numerous contentious issues in the study of Judaism, and the provision of lectures for the Theology faculty in Oxford on 'Varieties of Judaism' encouraged a re-examination of received opinion on many aspects.

The studies reprinted here reflect these origins. They are not the work of a theologian: they deal with the religious lives of ancient Jews rather than with religious ideas in the abstract. Those lives are situated, explicitly or implicitly, against the background of the wider history of the Roman world. Throughout there is a strong concern to clarify the limitations of the surviving evidence for ancient Judaism and to encourage gentle scepticism about some of the later myths about Judaism in the early centuries—myths which were created already by the end of antiquity, within the rabbinic and Christian traditions, but which have in many cases survived to the present.

The texts of the essays are republished here unchanged from their original form except for the correction of a few misprints, since reference to more recent discussions of the issues they raise would not have changed the arguments and would have impaired the clarity

of the presentation. But readers may find it helpful to know about a few of the most significant later works relevant to the articles written in the 1990s: for Chapter 2, Shaye Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: boundaries, varieties, uncertainties* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1999); for Chapter 7, Christine Schams, *Jewish Scribes in the Second-Temple Period* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1998); for Chapter 8, Martin Goodman, *Mission and Conversion: Proselytising in the Religious History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994); for Chapter 18, Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the Synagogue During the Greco-Roman Period* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 1998).

Martin Goodman

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‘Josephus and Variety in First Century Judaism’, *The Israel Academy of Science and Humanities. Proceedings. Vol. VII No. 6*. Jerusalem, 2000, 201–13.

‘The Temple in First Century CE Judaism’, in J. Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (T. & T. Clark, London and New York, 2005), 459–68.

‘The pilgrimage economy of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period’, in L. I. Levine, ed., *Jerusalem: its sanctity and centrality to Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Continuum, New York, 1999), 69–76.

‘Sacred scripture and “defiling the hands”’, *Journal of Theological Studies* 41 (1990), 99–107.

‘Texts, scribes and power in Roman Judaea,’ in A.K. Bowman and G. D. Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), 99–108.

‘Jewish proselytising in the first century A.D.’, in T. Rajak, J.M. Lieu and J. North (eds.), *Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (Methuen, London, 1992), 53–78.

‘A note on Josephus, the Pharisees and ancestral tradition’, *JJS* 50 (1999), 17–20.

‘The place of the Sadducees in First-Century Judaism’, in M. Gregory, S. Heschel and F. Udoh (eds.), *Festschrift for E.P. Sanders* (University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Ind., 2006).

‘A note on the Qumran sectarians, the Essenes and Josephus’, *JJS* 46 (1995), 161–6.

‘The persecution of Paul by diaspora Jews,’ in J. Pastor and M. Mor (eds.), *The Beginnings of Christianity* (Yad ben Zvi, Jerusalem, 2005), 379–387.

‘Sadducees and Essenes after 70 CE’, in S.E. Porter, P. Joyce and D.E. Orton (eds.), *Crossing the Boundaries. Essays in Biblical Interpretation in honour of Michael D. Goulder* (Brill, Leiden, 1994), 347–56.

‘The function of *minim* in early rabbinic Judaism’, in H. Cancik, H. Lichtenberger and P. Schäfer (eds.), *Geschichte-Tradition-Reflexion. (Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag)* (J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 1996), vol. 1, 501–10.

‘Modeling the “Parting of the Ways”’, in A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed, *The Ways that Never Parted* (J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen, 2003), 119–29.

‘Kosher olive oil in antiquity’, in P.R. Davies and R.T. White (eds.), *A Tribute to Geza Vermes* (Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1990), 227–45.

‘The Jewish Image of God in Late Antiquity’, in R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz (eds.), *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (Peeters and JTS Press, Leuven, 2003), 133–45.

‘Sacred Space in Diaspora Judaism’, in B. Isaac and A. Oppenheimer (eds.), *Studies on the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (*Téuda* volume 12; Tel Aviv University and Ramot Publishing, Tel Aviv, 1996), 1–16.

'Jews and Judaism in the Mediterranean Diaspora in the late-Roman period: the limitations of evidence', in Carol Bakhos (ed.), *Ancient Judaism in its Hellenistic Context*, (Brill, Leiden, 2005), 177–203.

I am grateful to the publishers of each of these articles for permission to republish them in this volume.

CHAPTER ONE

EARLY JUDAISM

In a chapter dedicated to the discussion of changing scholarly perspectives during a century of endeavour, it is appropriate to begin with the observation that any decision as to what to include under the rubric of ‘Early Judaism’ must itself be the product of a distinctive perspective. I shall discuss in this chapter the work that has been done on Judaism in the late Second Temple period and in late antiquity down to the closure of the Talmud—that is, roughly from 200 BCE to *c.* 500 CE. Descriptions of this Judaism as ‘early’, though common in British scholarship, is not universal. In the eyes of orthodox Jews who trace the origins of Judaism to the giving of the Torah to Moses on Mt Sinai, the late Second Temple period lies a long way down the continuous stream of halakha. In contrast, scholars who view Second Temple Judaism as a prelude to Christianity and rabbinic Judaism after 70 CE as theologically insignificant may describe the last days of the Temple as ‘Spätjudentum’. A well-meaning effort to mediate between these attitudes by describing this period as ‘Middle Judaism’ has not proven popular.¹

It may justify my retention of the term ‘Early Judaism’ for this chapter to note that I am thereby reflecting the mainstream perspective of British scholars in Second Temple Judaism over the past century, since most still come from a background in biblical studies, in which a sharp break between the Israelite religion of the First Temple and Judaism of the Second Temple is taken for granted.² That late Second Temple Judaism is seen as ‘early’ is testimony to the appreciation among such scholars that there were to be authentic later forms of Judaism from the early rabbis down to the modern day.

¹ G. Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 BCE–200 CE* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1991).

² Note, for instance, the implications of the decision to begin the *Cambridge History of Judaism* with the Persian period (vol. 1, ed. L. Finkelstein and W.D. Davies, Cambridge, 1984). Vol. 2 (1989) of the *Cambridge History* covers the Hellenistic period; vol. 3 (1999), jointly edited by W.D. Davies, W. Horbury and John Sturdy, covers the early Roman period.

In contrast to Britain, in the world of scholarship outside the United Kingdom the main institutional changes influencing approaches to early Judaism have been the creation of two new academic contexts for such study, namely Jewish studies and religious studies. Neither context was known at the beginning of the twentieth century but there are now numerous departments, courses, periodicals and academic posts dedicated to Jewish studies, particularly in the great centres in the United States and Israel. Departments of religious studies have similarly been established in many universities in the United States, with Judaism of all periods studied in the context of other faiths and religion in general.

Academic study of Jewish culture began in nineteenth-century Germany as a form of affirmation of the place of Jews within European culture. These pioneers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* were all themselves Jews and wrote for a Jewish readership. Almost all were either independent scholars or based in Jewish theological institutions. In the United Kingdom, University College London appointed a Jew as Goldsmid Professor of Hebrew in the mid-nineteenth century, and Cambridge had a lecturer in rabbinics soon after, but it was only in the twentieth century that Oxford established the Cowley Lectureship in Post-biblical Hebrew and then, in 1939, the Readership in Jewish Studies. In this respect British universities differed little from other Western institutions, with the notable exception of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which had been established in the 1920s as a university 'for the Jewish people'.

There was to be drastic change with the general expansion of university teaching in Western Europe and the United States in the 1960s. This general expansion coincided, especially in the United States, with a demand for greater attention to be paid to study of previously ignored social groups, in particular women and ethnic minorities. The incorporation of Jewish studies into the curricula of many American universities over the past forty years has owed much to the search by American Jews for a Jewish identity, both in the case of the students who take these courses and the donors through whose munificence academic posts have been established. Hence their academic concentration has generally been in the history of the Jews in comparatively modern times. Nonetheless, study of early Judaism, particularly the story of the last days of the Second Temple and its aftermath, has much contemporary resonance and exerts a strong hold on many students and teachers in these departments.

The United Kingdom has not witnessed a similar explosion in Jewish studies in universities. Anglo-Jewry is among the larger populations of diaspora Jews but the size of the community is dwarfed by the number of Jews in the United States, even allowing for the considerable difficulties inherent in establishing precise figures when the definition of Jewish identity is itself disputed. English Jews have been less inclined than Jews in North America to stress their Jewishness as part of their identity, preferring instead a low profile within English society. There is only one university department in the United Kingdom devoted to Hebrew and Jewish Studies, in University College London. In recent years some universities have established centres or programmes as a way to coordinate the teaching of staff already in post with an interest in Jewish subjects but, with the exception of the privately funded Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, the initiatives have been fuelled less by the interests of donors or potential students than by the desire of university authorities to make a gesture towards incorporation of a new academic field made fashionable by its popularity in the United States.

The pattern for university teaching of religious studies is also set in the United States, where to some extent it is the product of the institutionalised separation of church and state. Since state-funded universities are forbidden to teach Christian theology, study of religions has to be carried out in a more neutral fashion than is standard in the divinity schools or in European universities, and this separation has led quite naturally to study of religions other than Christianity, including Judaism. A similar pattern has begun to spread in the United Kingdom in recent years, but only slowly. For a long time the Religions Department in the University of Lancaster provided a rare British example of the teaching of religions on the model of departments in the United States. Much more common has been the accretion of religious studies to existing departments of Christian theology, with the self-evident risk that non-Christian religions, studied dispassionately from the outside, would emerge as pale and formulaic in comparison with the Christian doctrines discussed with committed passion by adherents from within the Christian tradition.

These institutional changes have affected in different ways the study of Second Temple Judaism and the study of Judaism in the early rabbinic period. In 1900 most scholarship on Second Temple Jews was written by New Testament scholars whose primary interest lay in the background to Jesus. In 2000 this motivation remained strong

among many in the field and has, if anything, been increased over the past quarter-century by awareness of the Jewishness of Jesus and many aspects of the early church (see below). But there are also more and more scholars from within Jewish studies who view this period of Judaism in the light of the history of Judaism as a whole, and some (though few in the United Kingdom) who take the quite abundant evidence for the religion of Jews in this period as a starting point for wider explanations of the nature of religion as a whole. The century has also seen incursions into this field by classicists aware that the Jewish material, apart from its intrinsic interest, provides particularly abundant insights into themes of change, acculturation and resistance which are prominent issues elsewhere in the Mediterranean world in the late Hellenistic and early Roman imperial period.

The later period of 'early Judaism', from *c.* 70–500 CE, has concerned classicists less, for the simple reason that too much of the evidence is in Hebrew or Aramaic. In 1900 most New Testament scholars lost interest in the history of Judaism after the end of the first century CE: in terms of Christian theology, the history of Judaism ceased to be a concern once the history of Israel was safely in the hands of the church. The third/fourth edition of Emil Schürer's *Geschichte*, published in 1901–11, took the story of Judaism to the defeat of Bar Kokhba in 135 CE, after which, he implied, nothing of any importance occurred.³ The efforts of the pioneers of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* to study early rabbinic Judaism as a theological system comparable to the great monuments of systematic Christian theology of the patristic period were continued for the most part only in Jewish theological seminaries and were largely ignored in the universities. In this respect the position has much changed. First, the Jewish theological colleges of 1900 were almost entirely based in Europe and were destroyed in the Holocaust along with much of the rest of European Jewry; those that survived, including Jews' College in London (later renamed the London School of Jewish Studies), did not exert in later years the same influence in this field that they did in the first thirty years of the twentieth century. Secondly, there has been a concerted effort, mostly (but not only) in departments

³ E. Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, 3rd/4th edn. (Leipzig, 1901–11).

of religious studies in the United States, to build on the pioneering efforts made by early twentieth-century scholars to subject rabbinic materials to the same sort of critical scrutiny as other religious texts, by the publication of translations of the texts into European languages and the application to the texts of techniques originally used to analyse other literatures.⁴ The essentially pietistic approach to these writings, which was almost universal in the Jewish seminaries in 1900, is still to be found in some current scholarship,⁵ but many rabbinic scholars in universities now come to the subject without the benefit (and drawbacks) of previous immersion in a traditional *yeshiva* training in study of the Talmud, which is almost indispensable for real familiarity with these very complex texts but brings with it a tendency to ahistorical conflation. This lack of traditional training is itself a symptom of the deepening division between religious and secular Jewish society, particularly in Israel, where those devoted to Talmud study often see no value at all in an academic approach to the texts. The upheavals of the twentieth century produced a series of great scholars who, after a traditional training, left orthodoxy behind on their entry into the university world.⁶ Such transitions are of course still possible, but they are increasingly rare. It is worth noting how many of the leading Jewish scholars in this field in the United Kingdom have been émigrés from elsewhere in Europe.

Change over the twentieth century has largely been a product of a change of perspective: different sorts of scholars are tackling the field, for different reasons. But this change has been fuelled by a series of remarkable new finds over the course of the century, which have themselves led research in new directions.

In the first half of the twentieth century, the bulk of the new documents to have had such an impact were all found in Egypt,

⁴ Earlier in the twentieth century, much of this work was carried out in Germany by H. Albeck and others, but note, in particular, the voluminous studies in more recent years by Jacob Neusner, in some of which, e.g. *Torah from our Sages, Pirke Avot: A New American Translation and Explanation* (Dallas, Tex., 1984), the location of this approach in the United States is specifically stressed.

⁵ For a current critique, see S. Schwartz and C. Hezser in M. Goodman (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Studies* (Oxford, 2002) pp. 79–140.

⁶ For an illuminating and reflective description of this process in his own case, see the autobiography of David Halivni, *The Book and the Sword: A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction* (Boulder, Col., 1998). Halivni, a Holocaust survivor, teaches at Columbia University in New York.

preserved by the dry climate. Near the beginning of the twentieth century the most important finds were of material composed after antiquity, which nonetheless had an importance for study of this period also. These were the documents from the Cairo Geniza, of which the bulk were brought from Egypt to Cambridge in the 1890s. These texts had all been deposited in the Cairo synagogue between the ninth and twelfth centuries CE, and revolutionised study of the medieval Mediterranean world, but it seemed clear quite early in their study that some of the texts were based on much older materials, some of them from late antiquity. Already in 1910, Schechter published as *Fragments of a Zadokite Work* what turned out to be a late copy of the Damascus Rule eventually to be found in Qumran.⁷

The same period of discovery around 1900 unearthed a great number of papyrus documents from Egypt, which, although not religious texts themselves, shed much new light on the religious lives of Egyptian Jews. In the 1920s, Sir Arthur Cowley published the Aramaic texts from Elephantine which revealed the distinctive religious customs of a Jewish military garrison in Egypt from c. 610 to c.390 BCE, shedding much light on the varied nature of Judaism at the very end of the biblical period,⁸ and over the course of the century plentiful Egyptian Jewish papyri from later periods down to the upheavals in the Egyptian Jewish community in the early second century ce, most of them unearthed in the course of excavations at the beginning of the century, were published as they were deciphered, culminating in the magisterial corpus published by Tcherikover, Fuks and Stern,⁹ with an appendix on the Egyptian Jewish inscriptions on stone by David Lewis.

Many of the Egyptian documents were concerned with the social, legal and political status of Jews rather than Judaism, but the same was not true of the great cache of religious documents found in the caves above Qumran by the Dead Sea in the late 1940s.¹⁰ Here was a mass of biblical texts, hymns, rules, prayers and psalms, hidden for safekeeping in antiquity and never recovered until accidentally

⁷ S. Schechter, *Documents of Jewish Sectaries*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1910).

⁸ A.E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri from the Fifth Century BC* (Oxford, 1923).

⁹ V. Tcherikover, A. Fuks and M. Stern (eds.), *Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum*, 3 vols. (Harvard, Mass., 1957–64).

¹⁰ See the influential translation by G. Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London, 1997).

discovered by bedouin in 1947. Initial disputes over the dates when the documents were written were resolved in the 1990s by carbon-14 dating of the leather and papyrus, so that no scholar doubts any longer that they were written by Jews in the late Hellenistic or early Roman period.

Publication of the scrolls languished during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, both because of the difficulty inherent in their decipherment and because of the political volatility of the region where they were found, which made it hard to put pressure on recalcitrant editors. Conspiracy theories about the reason for delay abounded in the popular press but have proven groundless now that the final fragments have been made fully available both on CD-Rom and in the official series of the *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* published by Oxford University Press.

The Qumran texts have generally been taken as evidence for the history of late Second Temple Judaism up to 70 CE. In contrast, the private legal documents found further south in the Judaean Desert and in Jericho have had an important role in reassessments of Judaism in the years following the destruction of the Temple. These papyri, discovered partly by accident in the 1950s and partly through controlled archaeological searches in the early 1960s (and, to a lesser extent, also since then),¹¹ contain marriage contracts, divorce deeds, records of debt and property transfers and other documents clearly of great importance to the individuals who, apparently during the Bar Kokhba war of 132–5, secreted them away in the caves where they were found. Their significance for the history of Judaea lies in the eclectic systems of law apparently adopted by these Jews in central areas of their personal lives, and the discrepancies between the law they used and that advocated in the rabbinic corpus.¹²

The enterprising and energetic approach exhibited in the search for documents in the Judaean Desert caves by Yigael Yadin in the early 1960s has characterised Israeli archaeology more generally

¹¹ Most of the documents are now available in *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert*, vols. 2, 27 and 38; see *DJD* 39, published in 2002, for the definitive guide to publication details of all these texts. For an account of the archaeological explorations of the early 1960s, see Y. Yadin, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem, 1963).

¹² See H.M. Cotton, 'The Rabbis and the Documents', in M. Goodman (ed.), *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 167–79.