INTRODUCTION

Any attempt to reconstruct the history of an ancient city is dependent upon the extant archeological and literary sources. The abundance and quality of these sources will, of course, have a direct bearing upon the emerging picture. Oftentimes, even a wealth of archeological or literary evidence will not yield a comprehensive account, and a more limited discussion of a city's history must be settled for. What follows is not urban history in the usual sense; the studies presented in this work are in no way intended to chronicle the day-to-day life of an ancient city within a given chronological framework. Instead, a more modest inquiry into some of the rabbinic traditions pertaining to Sepphoris, an important academic and administrative center in Greco-Roman Galilee, is attempted. The purpose is to illustrate how a critical examination of the relevant traditions, taking into consideration recent advances in talmudic studies, can provide some insight into selected aspects of the history of Sepphoris. A brief discussion of what is known about the city will precede a fuller consideration of the methodology employed and the reasons for its use.

Historical Data

The mound upon which the ancient city of Sepphoris once stood rises some 115 meters above the Bet Netofah valley in Lower Galilee.[1] The site, which is located approximately five kilometers (three miles) northwest of Nazareth, was known to the Arabs as *Saffuriye.*[2] The city is usually referred to as "*Ẓipporin*" in the Palestinian Talmud and as "*Ẓippori*" in other rabbinic sources.[3] Josephus

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[1] L. Waterman *et al., Preliminary Report of the University of Michigan Excavation at Sepphoris, Palestine, in* 1931 (1937), p. 1.

[2] Pronounced *Saffuri.* See W. F. Albright's review of the Waterman report (see n. 1) in *Classical Weekly* 21 (1938), 148. The village known by that name fell to the Israeli army in 1948. A *moshav* was established at the foot of the *tell* in 1949. See M. Avi-Yonah, "Sepphoris," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 14 (1971), col. 1178. The location of the city is generally accepted. See S. Krauss, "Sepphoris," *The Jewish Encyclopedia* 11 (1905), 200.

[3] The name also appears sometimes as צפורים. See S. Klein, "*Ẓippori*" in his *Ma'amarim Shonim La-Ḥaqirat 'Ereẓ Yisrael* (1924), pp. 47f. Cf. Z. Frankel, *Mevo' Ha-Yerushalmi* (1870), p. 3b and E. Y. Kutscher, *Studies in Galilean Aramaic* (1976), p. 36. According to Yeivin, the final ין or ים is a locative case ending. Yeivin maintains that the name צפורים or צפורין belonged to an earlier, pre-exilic settlement since the usual form in rabbinic sources is צפורי. See S. Yeivin, "Historical and Archaeological Notes," in Waterman, *Report*, pp. 17f. This explanation seems unlikely, however, since the forms צפורים and especially צפורין are well attested in the rabbinic sources.

The Babylonian Talmud (*Meg.* 6a) identifies Sepphoris with Qitron (Judges 1:30). This possibility is discussed below, pp. 25ff. The Talmud (*ad loc.*) also explains that the city is called *Ẓippori* because it sits on top of a mountain like a bird (Hebrew: *ẓippor*).

calls the city "Sepphoris" (Σέπφωρις), a name evidently derived from the Semitic designations.[4]

Most of what is known about Sepphoris comes from the writings of Josephus, the church fathers, and rabbinic literature. Sepphoris first enters history in the *Antiquities* of Josephus. The historian describes Ptolemy Lathyrus' unsuccessful attempt to capture the city when the Hasmonean Alexander Yannai became king (ca. 100 B.C.E.).[5] Josephus next mentions the city in connection with the events following the Roman conquest of Palestine. Gabinius, the proconsul of Syria (ca. 57-55 B.C.E.), dissolved the central government and divided the country into five districts, each having its own administrative council (*synedria*).[6] The fact that Sepphoris was chosen as the site of the Galilean council suggests that the city had already become the capital of Galilee.

Josephus also portrays Sepphoris as the foremost city of Galilee during the Herodian period. After the death of Herod (ca. 4 B.C.E.), the rebel Judas and his gang attacked the royal palace (τῷ Βασιλείῳ) at Sepphoris in order to obtain arms.[7] Herod had evidently considered the city important enough to be fortified. In any event, Varus, the legate of Syria, quelled the rebellion by destroying the city and selling its inhabitants into slavery. Sepphoris was soon rebuilt by Herod Antipas, who, according to Josephus, made the city "the ornament of all Galilee" and called it "Autokratoris."[8]

Sepphoris seems to have lost some of its prestige when Antipas later moved to Tiberias, but the city again became the capital of Galilee under the procurator Felix (52-60 C.E.).[9] During the First Revolt, the residents of Sepphoris appear to have wavered before taking a pro-Roman stand.[10] Josephus reports that he

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[4] On the Greek and Latin forms of the name see E. Schürer, *Geschichte des jüdischen Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* (1901-9) II, 209f.

[5] *Ant.* XIII, 338.

[6] *Ant.* XIV, 91 and *War* I, 170.

[7] *Ant.* XVII, 271 and *War* II, 56.

[8] *Ant.* XVIII, 27. The rebuilding probably began shortly after the city's destruction by Varus and continued into the early years C.E. See Yeivin, "Notes," p. 19, n. 14. According to Schürer, the title "Autokratoris" indicates that the city was granted autonomy. See Schürer, *Geschichte* II, 211, n. 496 and cf. S. Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian* 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: *A Study of Second Temple Judaism* (1980), p. 148, n. 50. Hoehner suggests that αὐτοκράτωρ may mean "Imperator" and could have been intended in honor of Augustus. The title may also suggest that Sepphoris was a capital city. See H. W. Hoehner, *Herod Antipas* (1972), p. 86, n. 1.

[9] *Life* 38. The passage is discussed below, pp. 54f.

[10] In *War* II, 574 Josephus says that he permitted the residents of Sepphoris to erect walls around their city because they were affluent and "eager for war." In *War* III, 61, Josephus claims that he fortified the city before it had abandoned the Galilean effort. The city eventually asked the Romans for military support. See *Life* 373 and 394; *War* III, 30-34. According to Cohen, Sepphoris was pro-Roman as early as the time of Felix (ca. 52-60 C.E., see *Life* 38) and remained so during the First Revolt, as indicated by numismatic evidence (discussed below, n. 12). Cohen suggests that the Sephoreans may have originally fortified their city but only to protect themselves from hostile Galileans living in the environs, not in preparation for war with the Romans. Josephus' claim that he was responsible for the fortification of Sepphoris, when at most he only *permitted* the erection of walls, may be the result of the historian's hyperbolic style. See S. J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development As a Historian* (1979), pp. 246ff.

himself led assaults against the city.[11] Independent testimony to the position of Sepphoris during the war comes from coins bearing the designation "City of Peace" (Eirenopolis), which were struck at Sepphoris in 67-68 C.E.[12]

Several of the church fathers refer to Sepphoris as Diocaesarea (Διοκαισάρεια), a title which the city seems to have received under Hadrian (ca. 130).[13] The church fathers, however, were interested in the later history of the city. Thus Epiphanius describes how an apostate from Judaism named Josephus received authorization from the Emperor Constantine (306-337 C.E.) to build a church in Sepphoris.[14] Jerome reports on the revolt under Gallus (ca. 351) which began

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[11] In *Life* 82 Josephus claims to have captured Sepphoris twice. Cohen notes, however, that Josephus' own account does not seem to support this contention. In *Life* 373-380 Josephus' assault appears to have been terminated by a rumor of Roman intervention. Elsewhere, in *Life* 394-396 and in *War* III, 59-61, Josephus admits of other instances where he was forced to retreat. According to Cohen, Josephus attempts to show in his autobiography that he made every effort to prevent Sepphoris from remaining pro-Roman but, at the same time, did not deal with the city severely. See Cohen, *Josephus*, pp. 122, 151f. and 216.

[12] Y. Meshorer, following M. Narkis, understands Eirenopolis (εἰρηνόπολις) as a reference to the pro-Roman stance of Sepphoris. Meshorer notes that Josephus refers to the Sepphoreans who welcomed Vespasian at Ptolemais in 67 C.E. (*War* III, 30-31) as "people who think peace" (εἰρηνικὰ φρονοῦντες). See Y. Meshorer, "Sepphoris and Rome," *Greek Numismatics and Archaeology, Essays in Honor of Margaret Thompson* (1979), p. 160 and *idem*, "*Mathbe'ot Ẓippori Ke-Maqor Histori*," *Ẓion* 43 (1978), 186. Cf. M. Narkis, "*'Anshei Ẓippori Ve-'Espasianos*," *Yedi'ot Ha-Ḥevrah Ha-'Ivrit La-Ḥaqirat 'Ereẓ Yisrael Va-'Atiqoteha* 17 (1953), 119. Cf. Cohen, *Josephus*, p. 246. Cohen claims that the coins under discussion, which also refer to Sepphoris as "Neronias," reflect pro-Roman sentiment which prevailed in the city even before 67-68 C.E. (see above, n. 10). H. Seyrig, who first established the readings Eirenopolis and Neronias, has suggested that Sepphoris received the surname Eirenopolis in connection with the closing of the temple of Janus in Rome, an act of *pax Romana* carried out under Nero in 64 C.E. See H. Seyrig, "Irenopolis-Neronias-Sepphoris," *Numismatic Chronicle* 10 (1950), 289. The fact that the coins mention Vespasian and were issued in 67-68 C.E. would seem to support the view that the name Eirenopolis was bestowed upon Sepphoris with the arrival of the military commander in Palestine. Various explanations have been proposed for the pro-Roman stance of Sepphoris. Yeivin suggests ("Notes," pp. 23f.) that the dependence of the city on external water sources made an anti-Roman posture impossible, as Sepphoris would never have been able to withstand a siege once its water supply had been cut off. This explanation has been questioned by Hoehner (*Herod Antipas*, p. 87). Cf. Cohen, *Josephus*, p. 244. Perhaps the havoc wrought by Varus upon Sepphoris in 4 B.C.E. was remembered resulting in a disinclination to challenge the Romans. See Yeivin, "Notes," p. 19 and Freyne, *Galilee*, p. 68. More likely, however, is the suggestion that Sepphoris realized that its status as capital of Galilee was dependent upon the good graces of the Romans. See Cohen, p. 244, n. 4 and Freyne, p. 128.

[13] Coins bearing the name first appear under Antoninus Pius, but a milestone from 130 C.E. indicates that the city was known as Diocaesarea already in the time of Hadrian. See B. Lifschitz, "*Sur la date du transfert de la legio VI Ferrata en Palestine*," *Latomus* 19 (1960), 110f. and M. Hecker, "*Kevish Roma'i Legio-Ẓippori*," *Yedi'ot Ha-Ḥevrah La-Ḥaqirat 'Ereẓ Yisrael Va-'Atiqoteha* 25 (1961), 183f. The new name would have been in honor of Hadrian who had adopted the title Zeus, Olympus (= Dio). See E. M. Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule* (1976), p. 432.

[14] The text from Epiphanius' *Panarion* (30) is reproduced in S. Klein, *Sefer Ha-Yishuv* I (1939), pp. 68ff. There is no way of determining the earliest date for the settlement of Christians at Sepphoris. In 1926, however, S. J. Case published an article entitled "Jesus and Sepphoris" (*JBL* 45 (1925), 14-22). In this study, Case argued that Jesus, who was from the nearby village of Nazareth, must have frequently visited Sepphoris where he was exposed to a more cosmopolitan environment. Case tries to show that events in the history of Sepphoris deeply affected Jesus. While Case's study is suggestive, it is not based upon any concrete evidence. Moreover, A. Alt has shown that the orientation

when the Jews killed some Roman soldiers during the night and stole their weapons. Gallus, relates Jerome, subdued the rebels and burned Diocaesarea (Sepphoris), Tiberias and Diospolis (Lydda).[15] Sozomenus, Socrates, and others single out Sepphoris as the center of the revolt and note that the city was destroyed by Gallus.[16] While the extent of the revolt and the resulting destruction has been questioned,[17] the participation of Sepphoris in the insurrection is certain. Still, Sepphoris seems to have recovered quickly as Theodoretus states that the city was completely Jewish in the time of Valens (364-378).[18] An inscription found at Sepphoris also suggests that the Christians had succeeded in establishing a community there sometime during the fifth century.[19]

The numerous references to Sepphoris (*Ẓippori*) in rabbinic literature provide much insight into periods and aspects of the city's history which would otherwise remain obscure. The general picture which emerges is that of an important tannaitic and amoraic center. The city had already become the home of leading scholars well before Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi moved there ca. 200 C.E.[20] It continued to be an important academic center until the close of the Palestinian Talmud.[21] Rabbinic literature preserves many details concerning the social, economic and political life of Sepphoris. Since the rabbis were not interested in the city *per se*, this information is not presented within any kind of chronological or historical context. For this reason, the mere collating of the references to Sepphoris would only result in a general, rabbinic account of questionable historical reliability.[22] A more analytical approach to the material will be suggested below.

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of Nazareth was southward rather than northward to Sepphoris from which it was separated by the contour of the land. See A. Alt, "*Die Stätten des Wirkens Jesu in Galiläa territorialgeschichtlich betrachtet*" in *idem, Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (1953-64), II, 441ff. Cf. F. W. Boelter, "Sepphoris—Seat of the Galilean Sanhedrin," *Explor* 3 (Winter, 1977), 41f.

[15] Jerome, *Chronicon, Olymp.* 282.

[16] Sozomenus, *Hist. eccl.* IV, 7; Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* II, 33. For others, see S. Lieberman, "Palestine in the Third and Fourth Centuries," reprinted in *idem, Texts and Studies* (1974), p. 121 and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Jews of Palestine* (1976), p. 184, n. 76.

[17] By Lieberman, in the article mentioned in the previous note.

[18] Theodoretus, *Hist. eccl.* IV, 22.

[19] The inscription is actually from the early sixth century, but it reports the renewal of an earlier church. See M. Avi-Yonah, "A Sixth Century Inscription from Sepphoris," *IEJ* 11 (1961), 184-187 and below, p. 6. The establishment of a Christian community at Sepphoris during the fifth century appears to have been more successful than the earlier attempts to do the same. Cf. M. Schwabe, "*Eine griechische Inschrift aus Sepphoris*," *JPOS* 15 (1935), 95ff.

[20] P. *Kila'yim* 9, 32b and P. *Ketubot* 12, 35a report that Judah lived in Sepphoris the last seventeen years of his life. See A. Guttmann, "The Patriarch Judah I—His Birth and His Death," reprinted in *idem, Studies in Rabbinic Judaism* (1976), pp. 239ff. On the scholars who lived in Sepphoris see Klein, "*Ẓippori*," pp. 57ff. During Judah's time, the Sanhedrin was probably located at Sepphoris. See B. *Rosh Ha-Shanah* 31a-b.

[21] The Palestinian Talmud is generally believed to have been edited in the early fifth century. Much of its material emanated from the discussions in the academy at Sepphoris. See H. L. Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (1931), p. 65.

[22] Klein's article "*Ẓippori*" represents such a collation. It is discussed below, p. 7.

Archeological Findings

The *tell* upon which the ancient city of Sepphoris is located was partially excavated in 1931 by L. Waterman of the University of Michigan in collaboration with S. Yeivin, N. E. Manasseh and C. S. Fisher.[23] On the northwest slope, the excavators uncovered part of a Roman theater which, according to W. F. Albright, belongs to the late second or third century.[24] The theater had a seating capacity of between 4000 and 5000 persons.[25] Part of a 2.4 meters thick wall, perhaps from the Crusader period, was found over the ruins of the theater. This wall seems to have at one time encompassed the entire acropolis (Other traces can be seen on the eastern edge of the *tell*.), forming a citadel approximately 180 meters long and 90 meters wide.[26] Not far from the theater, but about twenty-four meters below it, an oil press was found.[27] On the northwest end of the summit the excavators discovered what they believed to be a Christian basilica, but M. Avi-Yonah has since contended that it was a Roman villa.[28] To the east, an extensive aqueduct was examined, but its relationship to the many cisterns on the *tell* could not be determined.[29]

A small fort standing on the summit of the *tell* was also inspected. Its construction testifies to several different periods of occupation at Sepphoris. While the walls of the upper story were built by Abdul Hamid (1876-1909),[30] the western corner and the lower courses belong to the period of the Crusades. Many of the cornerstones are really Roman sarcophagi adapted for building purposes. Traces of a building which may go back to the early centuries C.E. were found below the fort.[31]

Among the artifacts discovered were a Rhodian jar handle and fragments of Arretine ware.[32] Most of the potsherds belong to the Hellenistic through the Byzantine periods, but one jar rim has been dated to Early Iron II (1000-900

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[23] The results of this excavation were published in the Waterman report referred to in n. 1. In the Spring of 1979, the present writer, under a grant from the Lane Cooper Fund, surveyed many of the ruins including the theater and the fort reported on here.

[24] Both Waterman and Yeivin had concluded that the theater was built by either Herod or Antipas. See Yeivin, "Notes," p. 29. Albright, however, contends in his review of the Waterman report (*Classical Weekly* 21 (1938), 148) that the masonry and ornamentation are Roman, not Herodian. He, therefore, prefers a late second or third century dating.

[25] See N. E. Manasseh, "Architecture and Topography," in Waterman, *Report*, p. 6.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

[28] The view of the excavators is reported by Manasseh, *ibid.*, pp. 4ff. See, however, M. Avi-Yonah, "Sepphoris," *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* 4 (1978), 1053f.

[29] Manasseh, "Architecture," p. 15. The aqueduct seems to have irrigated the local fields besides providing water for the city. See Z. Gorodazki, "*ʿOreq Ha-Ḥayyim Shel-Ẓippori*," *Ha-Tevaʿ Ve-Ha-ʾAreẓ* 19 (July-August, 1977), 226-229.

[30] He appears to have built upon earlier construction belonging to the period of Zahir al-ʿAmr, the governor of Galilee in the beginning of the eighteenth century. See Manasseh, "Architecture," p. 3.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 3f.

[32] Yeivin, "Notes," pp. 26f. and Avi-Yonah, "Sepphoris," p. 1053.

B.C.E.).[33] Many coins were found in the theater. The earliest of these are four Seleucid issues and eight of Alexander Yannai. There are also coins of the Herodian dynasty, Bar Kokhba (one), several from the cities of Ashkelon, Tyre, Sidon and Dor, and other Roman, Byzantine and Arab issues.[34]

Several inscriptions have been found in the vicinity of the *tell.* In 1909 a mosaic believed to be part of a synagogue floor was accidentally uncovered. The mosaic contains the words: "Remembered be for good Rabbi Yudan, the son of Tanḥum, the son ... who gave...."[35] In 1930-31 E. L. Sukenik conducted excavations in behalf of the Hebrew University. Sukenik devoted his attention to the burial caves in the area, one of which also contained an inscription referring to a Rabbi Yudan.[36] Another grave, known locally as the Tomb of Jacob's Daughters, has been assigned to the second or third century C.E.[37] Some Greek inscriptions have also been found, including one which describes the refurbishing of a church by the bishop Marcellinus (ca. 518 C.E.).[38]

Sepphoris in Rabbinic Literature

The value of rabbinic literature as a source for the history of Sepphoris has long been acknowledged. In 1909, A. Büchler published *The Political and the Social Leaders of the Jewish Community of Sepphoris in the Second and Third Centuries.* Büchler posited the existence of a conflict between the rabbis and the official (Jewish) leaders of Sepphoris. The rabbis attacked the character of the leaders who often took advantage of the people, especially in matters of taxation. In return, the wealthy leaders spread malicious slander concerning the scholars and refused to support the rabbinical students.[39] Büchler assumed that statements attributed to rabbis who lived in Sepphoris could be used as evidence regardless of whether they specifically mention the city. Büchler argues that general statements regarding life in Galilee certainly apply to Sepphoris, the greatest city of that region.[40] While this assumption may at times be correct, in most cases there is no way of

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[33] Yeivin, "Notes," p. 24.

[34] The coins have been catalogued by C. S. Bunnel in Waterman, *Report*, pp. 35ff. Cf. Avi-Yonah, "Sepphoris," pp. 1053f.

[35] Translation is that of Avi-Jonah, *ibid.*, p. 1055. On the mosaic and its inscription, see C. Clermont-Ganneau, "*Mosaique juive a inscription de Sepphoris*," *CRAIBL* (1909), pp. 677ff. and J. Naveh, *ʿAl Peseifas Ve-ʾEven* (1978), pp. 51f.

[36] See E. L. Sukenik, "*Mi-Seridei Ẓippori*," *Tarbiz*, 3 (1931), 107f.

[37] See N. Avigad, "*Qever Benot Yaʿaqov She-Le-Yad Ẓippori*," *ʾEreẓ Yisrael* 11 (1973), 41ff. Cf. Sukenik, "*Mi-Seridei Ẓippori*," pp. 108f. and Avi-Yonah, "Sepphoris," pp. 1154f.
Sukenik has also published two short inscriptions found on tombstones at Sepphoris. These refer to rabbis. See E. L. Sukenik, "*Shetei Mazevot Yehudiyot Mi-Ẓippori*," *Yediʿot Ha-Ḥevrah Ha-ʿIvrit La-Ḥaqirat ʾEreẓ Yisrael Va-ʿAtiqoteha*, 12 (1945-6), 62ff.

[38] See Avi-Yonah, "Sixth Century Inscription," pp. 184-187.

[39] A more lengthy summary of Büchler's findings appears on pp. 77f. of his book. Some other evidence regarding the social conflict has been studied by M. Beer in "*ʿAl Manhigim Shel Yehudei Ẓippori Be-Meʾah Ha-Shelishit*," *Sinai* 74 (1974), 133-138.

[40] Büchler, *Political and Social Leaders*, p. 4.

knowing whether the statement of a Sepphorean rabbi refers to his hometown unless he explicitly says so. Generalities concerning Galilean life may apply to Sepphoris, but then again, they may not. Furthermore, many of the halakhic concerns and aggadic interpretations of the rabbis could very well have been of purely academic interest. In his "*Familienreinheit und Sittlichkeit in Sepphoris im zweiten Jahrhundert*" (1934),[41] Büchler examined the composition of the Jewish community of Sepphoris and relations among its social groupings. Here again undue consideration is given to statements which may not have referred to Sepphoris. Büchler wrote one other study of interest here, "*Über die Minim von Sepphoris und Tiberias im zweiten und dritten Jahrhundert*" (1912).[42] In this work he attempted to identify those *minim* who were reported to have conversed with Sepphorean (and Tiberian) rabbis. Unfortunately, Büchler assumed that these conversations took place in Sepphoris. His conclusion that most of the *minim* concerned were "Bible reading heathen" probably reveals more about the *minim* in general than about those living in Sepphoris. To be sure, Büchler's compilation of evidence in the three works mentioned is impressive, but it is difficult to discern how much of it is relevant.

Unlike Büchler, S. Klein concentrated on rabbinic traditions and reports which specifically refer to Sepphoris (*Ṣippori*). In his article, "*Ṣippori*" (1924),[43] Klein collated many of these references and attempted a topical study of their substance. Klein deals with such subjects as the structure of the city, its environs, history and social composition. His considerable knowledge of Galilee serves him well in his elucidation of topographical and geographical matters.

Both Büchler and Klein are to be credited with emphasizing the importance of rabbinic literature for any inquiry into the history of Sepphoris.[44] The question to be addressed here, however, is how the information provided in rabbinic literature is to be used for such an inquiry. We have already pointed out the difficulties with Büchler's approach. Klein's study provides much useful information, but the general reliability of the sources is taken for granted. The Tosefta, Mishnah, Talmudim and Midrashim do not pretend to offer a historical profile of Sepphoris or for that matter any other city in ancient Palestine.[45] The rabbis,

[41] *MGWJ* 78 (1934), 126-164.

[42] In *Festschrift zu Hermann Cohens Siebzigstem Geburtstage* (1912), pp. 271-295. The article reappeared in English as "The Minim of Sepphoris and Tiberias in the Second and Third Centuries," in A. Büchler, *Studies in Jewish History* (1956), pp. 245-274.

[43] Referred to above, n. 3. Klein also collected many of the rabbinic references to Sepphoris in his *Sefer Ha-Yishuv* I, pp. 130-141. Cf. the article on Sepphoris by I. Z. Horowitz in the encyclopedia *ʾOẓar Yisrael* 9 (1913), 51-54.

[44] For a recent attempt to collate the rabbinic material and integrate it with the archeological data, see K. Mukhtar, "*Ṣippori Bi-Yemei Bayit Sheni, Ha-Mishnah Ve-Ha-Talmud*" (M. A. Thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1974).

[45] In his *Caesarea Under Roman Rule* (1975), L. I. Levine has utilized rabbinic literature in addition to archeological, numismatic and classical sources to reconstruct the history of Caesarea. The variety of sources available to Levine enabled him to clarify many aspects of the city's history. The sources for the history of Sepphoris are more limited resulting in a greater dependence upon the rabbinic material.

after all, were not historians; their incidental references to Sepphoris are usually made in the context of other halakhic and aggadic concerns.[46] As such, the rabbinic evidence must be utilized with extreme caution.

Attempts to extrapolate historical information from rabbinic literature are made even more complicated by the nature of the sources. Seemingly relevant information can often be found in contexts which give no obvious indication of the time or place intended. Or else, the composite nature of the material may suggest several different possibilities. Even when the text or its contents can be reasonably assigned to a particular period or locale, it is by no means certain that the historical information it provides is original to it. Very often, parallels found in other collections lack the information, expand upon it, or contradict it altogether. As much of the material was redacted long after the time it reflects, it is difficult to discern what constitutes an editorial gloss and what is germane to the text. Finally, we are dependent upon those manuscripts and editions available to us.[47] Indeed the obstacles to fruitful historical inquiry seem formidable.

Several attempts, however, have been made to investigate historical topics using the rabbinic sources critically. S. Lieberman, in several works, has shown how philological considerations and knowledge of the Greco-Roman milieu can contribute immeasurably to our understanding of Palestinian life as portrayed in rabbinic literature.[48] He has especially noted the importance of papyri and inscriptions.[49] With regard to the usage of rabbinic sources, Lieberman has stated, "Every single passage of Talmudic literature must be investigated both in the light of the whole context and as a separate unit in regard to its correct reading, meaning, time and place."[50] According to Lieberman, much of the material appearing in the Palestinian Talmud and early Midrashim belongs to the third and

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[46] In his "Preface to the Second Printing" of *There We Sat Down* (1978), p. xvii, J. Neusner states: "A study of rabbinic sources will not provide much, if any, evidence that we have eyewitness accounts of great events or stenographic records of what people actually said. On the contrary, it is anachronistic to suppose the Talmudic rabbis cared to supply such information to begin with." On the disinterest of the rabbis in history cf. Cohen, *Josephus*, pp. 253ff.

[47] For many a rabbinic work, a critical edition has yet to appear. A survey of some of the available editions and manuscripts appears in I. Meiseles, "Talmud, Recent Research," *Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook* 1974, pp. 266f. Also, B. M. Bokser, "An Annotated Bibliographical Guide to the Study of the Palestinian Talmud," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* pt. 2, vol. 19.2 (1974), 139-256, and in the same volume, D. Goodblatt, "The Babylonian Talmud," pp. 265f. and 267f.

[48] Some of Lieberman's historical studies appear in his *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (1962); *Greek in Jewish Palestine* (1965) and *Texts and Studies* (1974). Also, see his "The Martyrs of Caesarea," *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves* 7 (1939-44), 395-445 and "*Redifat Dat Yisrael*," in the *Salo Baron Jubilee Volumes* (1975), III, 213-245.

[49] See Lieberman's *Greek in Jewish Palestine*, p. 5. By way of comparison see G. Allon, *Meḥqarim Be-Toledot Yisrael* I (1967) and II (1970). These volumes contain articles by Allon which originally appeared elsewhere. Allon fully understood the value of rabbinic literature for historical inquiries and, like Lieberman, was adept at using external sources.

[50] "Martyrs of Caesarea," p. 395.

fourth centuries and is, therefore, particularly valuable for the history of Palestine during that period.[51]

Also relevant to our discussion are the recent works of D. Sperber, *Roman Palestine* 200-400: *Money and Prices* (1974) and *Roman Palestine* 200-400: *The Land* (1978). In these studies, Sperber is cognizant of the difficulties involved in the use of rabbinic literature for historical inquiries. He pays particular attention to the variants found in parallel texts and recognizes the need to determine whether these were part of the original text. As Sperber explains, "...it is crucial to distinguish the original authentic form of a statement (as far as is possible) from its re-edited or reworded form. Likewise, it must be seen whether a term belongs historically to its own chronological stratum, or whether it is merely being used as a literary device, an archaism, etc."[52] In many cases, Sperber's reconstruction of the monetary system and agrarian life of Palestine in the Roman period is aided by his critical examination of the sources.[53]

Although primarily interested in Midrash, R. Bloch has formulated an approach to aggadic traditions which is helpful with regard to rabbinic material in general. In her "*Note Méthodologique pour l'étude de la littérature rabbinique*,"[54] Bloch suggests a two stage approach beginning with an "external" comparison of the traditions with others appearing in writings outside of Palestinian rabbinic Judaism. Since the dates of many of the external sources are known, they can help establish a *terminus ad quem* for rabbinic traditions. The second stage is an "internal" comparison which would trace a single tradition through the various documents in which it appears. According to Bloch, the purpose of this stage is "to distinguish the most primitive elements and the variants, the developments, the additions and the revisions; it takes account of the diversity of literary genres and historical situations."[55] Although Bloch fails to recognize the importance of the context from which the traditions are drawn,[56] her articulation of the problem and her suggested solution are instructive.

Perhaps the most ambitious attempt to formulate an epistemological framework for historical inquiries into rabbinic literature has been made by J. Neusner. In his *Development of a Legend: Studies on the Traditions Concerning Yohanan ben Zakkai* (1970), Neusner compares different versions of stories and shows that those appearing in later collections are in fact dependent upon those found in

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[51] *Ibid.*

[52] *Money and Prices*, p. 21.

[53] Sperber, however, relegates much of his textual analysis to the notes. For a chapter in which he does not, see "Underselling and the Law of *ʾOnaʾah*," in *The Land*, pp. 136-159.

[54] *Researches de Science Religieuse*, 43 (1955), pp. 194-227. This article has recently been translated into English by W. S. Green and W. J. Sullivan in *Approaches to Ancient Judaism: Theory and Practice*, ed. W. S. Green (1978), pp. 51-76. The English translation will be referred to here.

[55] *Approaches*, p. 60.

[56] Cf. Green's remarks in his introduction to *Approaches*, p. 4. For some of the difficulties of Bloch's approach with regard to Midrash see E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), pp. 26f.

earlier collections. They are, therefore, later in origin.[57] In *The Rabbinic Traditions about the Pharisees Before 70* (three volumes, 1971), Neusner proposes a method for dating traditions attributed to a given rabbi. Neusner considers a tradition to be verified if it is quoted or alluded to by a later authority. The period in which the later authority taught can be regarded as a firm *terminus ante quem* for the tradition. Before that time, the substance and form of the tradition must have been known.[58] In his *Eliezer Ben Hyrcanus: The Tradition and the Man* (two volumes, 1973), Neusner claims that those traditions attested to at Yavneh (70-120 C.E.) and Usha (140-165 C.E.) bring us closest to the Eliezer of history.[59] The later the tradition, the less likely it is to reflect the concerns of Eliezer. Those traditions which are first attested to in amoraic materials probably reflect the Eliezer of legend.[60]

Neusner refined his approach in *A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities* III, *Kelim* (1974). In this work, he pays particular attention to laws attributed to named *tannaim* but unattested to by later authorities. Neusner found that, as a rule, these laws do not rely upon traditions attributed to later authorities. As such, they can be dated to the period of the scholar in whose name they appear. Anonymous traditions which are related to or contradict these dated laws can then be assigned to the same period. By investigating the relationship of anonymous traditions to those which have been dated, Neusner attempts to assign the former to either Yavneh or Usha.[61]

Other methods of verifying traditions can, of course, be suggested. As mentioned earlier, parallels found in sources external to rabbinic literature can be used to verify a particular tradition.[62] Unfortunately, this type of information is not always available. The date of compilation of a collection in which a tradition appears can also be used to establish a *terminus ante quem* for that tradition. This approach, however, does not always permit as precise a dating as possible. Thus Neusner's method provides a useful alternative.[63]

Neusner, of course, realized that rabbinic literature does not permit the writing of history in the ordinary sense. It is for this reason that he turned instead to the analysis of individual traditions. By studying the development and forms of these traditions, and applying his method of "attestations" to them,

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[57] *Development*, p. 265.

[58] See Neusner's *Rabbinic Traditions* III, 180ff. Cf. his *From Politics to Piety* (1973), pp. 92ff.

[59] Eliezer himself lived during the Yavnean period, but a contemporary could also attest to his words.

It should be noted that Neusner originally used the terms "verify/verification" but later adopted "attest/attestation." They are, therefore, used interchangeably in the discussion here.

[60] *Eliezer* II, 92ff.

[61] See *Purities* III, 237-249.

[62] See p. 9.

[63] Neusner considers the other methods in *Rabbinic Traditions* III, 180ff. and *From Politics to Piety*, 92ff.

Neusner was better able to discern their historical reliability and implications.[64]

Any historical inquiry which utilizes rabbinic literature as its main source must consider the problems addressed by Lieberman, Bloch, Sperber and Neusner. The mere collating of data and harmonization of divergent sources can no longer be considered a valid approach to this type of inquiry. The studies presented below attempt to illustrate how philological, literary, textual and historical considerations can help elucidate some of the rabbinic traditions pertaining to Sepphoris.[65]

The point of departure is, of course, the text of each relevant tradition. Each passage has been translated taking into consideration significant variants found in the available manuscripts and editions. Parallels appearing in other collections are considered individually. Although traditions appearing in later collections are generally presumed to be late, the variants they contain must still be examined carefully. The *amoraim*, in particular, preserved earlier tannaitic material in the form of *baraitot*. It is not always clear when a variant belongs to the original text and when it has been interpolated into a *baraita*. Parallels also offer useful information as to when a tradition circulated and how it was understood by other rabbis or schools.[66] Since the context of a passage is likewise helpful in this regard, it too has been fully elucidated.

Traditional commentaries to rabbinic literature have been routinely consulted. The Geonim and *rishonim*[67] in particular often provide invaluable insight into a passage and its context. When the plain meaning is not apparent, these commentators often provide relevant information from other rabbinic sources. Sometimes a commentary will even preserve a reading not found in the extant manuscripts. Although the commentaries must be read critically to avoid interpretations which have been read into the text, they should not be overlooked.[68]

While philological, literary and textual considerations are invaluable for establishing the correctness and meaning of a tradition, they do not guarantee its veracity. After all, the best form of a tradition may only represent what a later editor wanted us to know.[69] Only after the best text is recovered, however, can

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[64] For a more in-depth discussion of Neusner's methodology, see A. J. Saldarini, "'Form Criticism' of Rabbinic Literature," *JBL* 96 (1977), pp. 262ff.

[65] The intention here, of course, is not to subject each tradition or rabbinic passage to all of the considerations mentioned. Such an effort is beyond the limits of this study. Philological, literary, textual and historical considerations are taken into account only insofar as to determine the historical value of a passage.

[66] Or, in many cases, how it was understood by the editor(s) of the text, who is (are) often responsible for the way a parallel is used in a later context.

[67] The *rishonim* are commentators who lived between the end of the Geonic period (eleventh century) and the middle of the fifteenth century. See I. M. Ta-Shma, "*Rishonim*," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 14 (1971), cols. 192f.

[68] On the importance of traditional commentaries, cf. L. H. Schiffman, *The Halakhah at Qumran* (1975), pp. 16f.

[69] Cf. Neusner, *There We Sat Down*, pp. xv-xvi.

the historicity of a tradition be discussed. Because of the difficulties with the usage of statements made by Sepphorean rabbis,[70] only traditions containing direct references to Sepphoris (*Ẓippori*) will be considered in the studies presented below. Most of the evidence will consist of incidental realia and data in need of interpretation vis-à-vis the known historical evidence (literary sources, archeology, etc.). Passages preserving events in the history of Sepphoris are considered, but usually because they contain other pertinent information. When the event itself is important, an attempt is made to verify it using external sources.[71] Even when the historicity of an event cannot be determined, the tradition is still elucidated since it may reveal the attitude or perspective of those who preserved it.

The primary purpose, of course, is to learn something about the Sepphoris with which the *tannaim* and *amoraim* were familiar. Two subjects will be investigated here. Part One focuses on an institution, the military encampment or *castra* which rabbinic sources report was located at Sepphoris. According to the Mishnah (*ʿArakhin* 9:6), the *castra* of Sepphoris was in existence since the days of Joshua bin Nun. This and other traditions concerning the *castra* will be elucidated in order to determine the nature and importance of this institution. An attempt is also made to ascertain the various periods in which the *castra* functioned and to relate its history to that of the city itself.

Part Two deals with a particular segment of Sepphorean society, the priests. It is commonly accepted that the priestly course of *Yedaʿyah* settled at Sepphoris. Indeed, priests are reported to have resided in Sepphoris as early as the Second Temple period. All those traditions which seem to be of importance for the history of priestly settlement at Sepphoris will be discussed below.

Although the subjects themselves suggest various lines of inquiry, in the end, each tradition is permitted to speak for itself. The intent is not to look for some predetermined information but to listen to whatever the sources have to say. Only then can their historical value be fully appreciated. Finally, it should be noted that the choice of subjects was necessarily selective; the application of the methodology adopted here to all of the rabbinic references to "*Ẓippori*" would have required several volumes.

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[70] See above, pp. 6f.

[71] See the discussion of the Joseph ben Elim material below, pp. 74ff.