

PREFACE

This study began a number of years ago as a seminar paper on the Jewish community of Caesarea under the late Empire. Jewish history after 70 C.E. has been sorely neglected by modern historiography. In part this is a result of the preference of Christian scholars for the intertestamental period, with Jewish history serving only as background for a better understanding of the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth. The necessity of almost total reliance on rabbinic sources, themselves forbidding and esoteric, also dissuades scholars from embarking on historical investigations in this period. The research conducted by such luminaries as Graetz, Dubnov, Halevi and others centered almost exclusively on the rabbis and their academies, as if these constituted the sum total of Jewish activity at the time. Allon was among the first to expand the horizons of Jewish historical research of this period, although in many ways he maintained the same emphasis. In all fairness, it should be noted that this perspective is most difficult to eschew. There is just no way of circumventing the fact that almost all literary sources stem from rabbinic circles, and the temptation to identify rabbinic history with general Jewish history at the time is unavoidable.

Even when discussing 'the rabbis,' there has been a tendency to view the group monolithically, as if one could speak of a rabbinic tradition without noting the extensive and sometimes sharply contrasting beliefs and practices within rabbinic circles. Without denying the enormous similarity in outlook and expression which united the sages, over-emphasizing this aspect is apt to blind one to the diversity within rabbinic life which also characterized this period.

As has been the case for some time in general historiography, there is urgent need, in this as well as other periods of Jewish history, to go beyond the sweeping surveys and all-encompassing studies of past masters, and to begin investigating specific phenomenon. Local histories have thus become indispensable correctives to the often over-generalized pictures heretofore offered. What is likely to emerge is that the variety of Jewish experiences and expressions so characteristic of other periods is likewise evident in 'classical' Judaism, i.e. the Talmudic era, if one but scrutinizes the sources carefully and asks the necessary probing questions.

What is becoming ever clearer is that a Jewish community in a cosmopolitan setting is invariably influenced by its immediate surroundings. The way a Jew dressed, his forms of entertainment, political views, social habits and economic pursuits were all profoundly affected by the non-Jewish world in which he found himself. Even his intellectual horizons and religious attitudes and practices were often significantly shaped by these forces. Moreover, this was true not only of the ordinary Jew, but to a great extent of the rabbis themselves.

Thus, studying the Caesarean Jewish community led of necessity to an inquiry into the city as a whole, its origin, the changes in its political status and its economic and social life. Only within such a context can the nature and uniqueness of Caesarean Jewry be properly assessed, a uniqueness vis-à-vis other Caesarean communities as well as Jewish communities elsewhere.

The present study, a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, owes much to the guidance and direction offered by Profs. Gerson D. Cohen and Morton Smith. Both have been exacting advisors, and have been instrumental in introducing me to the world of historical research and methodology. Each in his own way has demonstrated the extent to which probing questions and rigorous analysis can force even small quantities of material to yield rich dividends. Prof. Smith has opened new vistas in the study of ancient history, never failing to be provocative and stimulating. His careful readings and copious notes have sensitized me to issues and problems which otherwise might never have been so fully confronted. To Prof. Cohen I owe much more than can ever be acknowledged. It was he who first awakened me to the excitement and challenge of researching and teaching Jewish history; it was he who offered frank criticism and warm encouragement during our years of working together. He has been both teacher and friend, both mentor and colleague.

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Any work in Jewish history of this period is, as noted, heavily dependent on rabbinic literature. For this training I am profoundly indebted to the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and its

Talmud scholars with whom I have studied : Profs. S. Lieberman, M. Zucker, Z. Dimitrovsky and D. Weiss. Under these mentors I acquired the tools with which to approach the challenge of a very complex and rich treasure of historical information.

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