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**Migration (Forced and Voluntary), Communication  
and the Transformation of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period:  
Prolegomena**

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**ABSTRACT**

It is still commonplace among many scholars and even more "lay" readers to view the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the failed Bar Kokhba Rebellion in Roman Palestine and the resulting formation of the early Rabbinic movement as the most potent forces in the transformation of Judaism from a Temple-based sacrificial cult to a rabbinic-systematized religion centered on communal prayer in synagogues, scriptural study and scripturally inspired ritual (now detached from their Temple-cultic context). This implicit or explicit Palestinian focus misrepresents the role of the Rabbis and misconstrues their social formation; it also continues to focus the attention of many early Christian scholars exclusively on transformations in Palestinian Judaism in their attempts to shed light on early Christianity. But more important, this 'Palestinian-centrism' leads to misconstruals of the context, impetus and character of so-called "post-biblical" Judaism.

The purpose of this paper is to refocus attention on the evidence indicating that the one most significant factor in aforementioned transformation of Judaism in the Greco-Roman are not the events in Roman Palestine, but patterns of Jewish migration out and outside of their "homeland." The paper argues that before and apart from events bringing about the demise of the sacrificial cult, Jewish migration throughout the Roman Mediterranean engendered new shared perceptions of the world, forms of organization and institutionalized Judaic practice. Moreover, the relative consistency among Jews of these forms across the Mediterranean world likely bespeaks both of an ongoing mobility of Jews within the Diaspora and/or the type of social contact which would result from pilgrimage to common Holy sites.

## I. Preliminary remarks<sup>1</sup>

It is both commonplace and accurate to view the increased intensity (and security) of travel by land and by sea as a feature of the Roman Empire, even in its early phase of development. In the last years of the Republic, Pompey's early career as a military commander focused in large part on reducing the incidence of piracy in the Mediterranean in the interests of facilitating trade between Italy and the rest of the Mediterranean lands and moving armies. The early Empire's interest in good roads and open sea lanes for their military, political and financial benefits is well known. Import and export by private enterprise of surplus production of both staples and luxury goods flourished around the Mediterranean. Italian wine was shipped east; Egyptian grain and Palestinian balsam were shipped west, along with silks which had arrive at the eastern Mediterranean trading cities from points still farther east.

Rome marched or shipped enslaved conquered peoples around the Empire as trophies, as labor, or, in some instances, as more-elevated hostages. But for the most part over the long haul the movements of people more or less permanently out of their homelands across the Roman world was the result of one of two enterprises: military service; and trade and commerce.

Both prior to and during the Roman imperial period Judeans traveled and migrated out of their homeland, and for the very same reasons that others did. In addition, Judeans too seem to have had a reputation as fierce warriors, since, largely in pre-Roman Hellenistic times, many pursued military careers abroad in Judean mercenary brigades and settled in new lands, which they helped garrison.

Just as had happened in earlier military conflicts with the Babylonians and Ptolemy I when they conquered the Land of Yahud, Pompey, Sosimus, Titus and Vespasian, Trajan and Hadrian all deported Judean captives. And in most cases they or their children seem to have been freed from servitude and settled in the lands of their earlier captivity.

Forced migration of captives, however, can hardly explain the presence of major (organized?) Jewish communities in almost every major economic urban center of the Mediterranean basin by the middle of the 1st century CE, a fact to which lists in both Philo's writings and Acts attest. Economic opportunity, not captivity, is by far the most likely factor accounting for out-migration from the Land of Israel during both the Hellenistic and the Roman periods. And economic activity is also the probable driving force behind continued travel and communication among these "dispersed" communities in Hellenistic and Roman times, with one significant exception, also well documented by Josephus, Acts, Cicero and others. That exception was (a) pilgrimage to Jerusalem (and to Hebron) and (b) the travel required annually to amass funds from the "dispersed" Jewish communities and to send them to Jerusalem until the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE. (Later, near the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> C CE, the collection of these funds supported the administration of the Palestinian Jewish Patriarch. This practice continued until the early 5<sup>th</sup> C.)

All this being said, this paper is *not* an exploration of migration and related trade and communication in Judaic sources. I have no doubt that such a study could be done. If

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Philip Harland kindly read an earlier draft of this paper. I am indebted to his constructive criticisms, which I have only partly addressed in this version of the paper, pleading that it would take a whole other paper to address is quite legitimate comments.

one considers just evidence proffered by early rabbinic texts, Mishnah contains a number of pericopae exploring the application of various rabbinic ordinances to those who are aboard ship or to produce that are in ships' holds. Tosefta Advodah Zarah, Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah, and Bavli Avodah Zarah all offer legal analyses dealing with real or imagined issues arising from extended over-land travel, usually for commercial ventures, and sojourns in inns along the way. At times important rabbinic figures are depicted as having traveled on (diplomatic?) missions to the west, including to Rome. A study of such sources might well be interesting, although I have no intuitive sense at this time of what they would show. In this paper, by contrast, the extensive and continuous flow of people, goods and information among the Jewish communities of the Greco-Roman Diaspora is not so much an object of study, but (a) the inferred conclusion from other evidence about Jews and Judaism in the Roman world and (b) the inferred explanation for characteristic features of Jews' religious and communal lives in the urban settings that ringed the Roman Mediterranean.

Because what this paper has specifically to say about migration, travel and communication in the Roman Mediterranean is a inference from other evidence, it is only at the very end of the paper (in section VI) that I remark on these matters; they are, as it were, conclusions from discussions in sections II through V. I beg the reader's indulgence and ask for his or her patience, in so far as the topic of this seminar hardly receives mention until the last paragraphs of this contribution.

## **II. Introduction: the problem of Palestinian-/rabbinic- centrisim**

Scholars rightfully point out that a thesis is not made more cogent by reason of its being more frequently repeated. In response, I offer the words of Morton Smith, whom, in reaction to a particular piece of scholarly writing, I overheard say: a good idea deserves more than one sentence. Following on Smith, it seems to be the case that a good thesis not only *merits* more than one sentence, but also *needs* more than one telling. So it is with the subject matter of this paper, because of an often repeated, but fundamentally flawed set of assertions. Here is why.

How many scholarly volumes on early Christianity published in the last 20 years, when dealing with the Judaic background of early Christianity, focus all or nearly all of their attention on Late-Second-Temple Palestinian Judaism(s)? How many academic treatments of early Rabbinic Judaism, originally a Palestinian phenomenon, continue to credit "the rabbis," "heirs of the Pharisees," and their "Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism" with the invention and promulgation of a Judaism without a Temple in the aftermath of its destruction in 70CE during the Great Revolt and as a consequence of the corroborating catastrophe of the failed Bar Kokhba rebellion of 132-35 CE? The answer is, too many. Permit me give one, particularly illustrative example.

Personally, I consider D.H. Akenson to be one of the most skilled epitomizers of modern scholarship on Ancient and Early Rabbinic Judaism in his *Surpassing Wonder*. Yet as late as 1998 (in the case of *Surpassing Wonder*), he writes:

In strikingly parallel fashion, both the Rabbinic Jewish faith and the Christian religion, to use the names they later acquired, were to re-invent the religion of the Temple, without a physical Temple being present. . . . One of the paradoxes of history—and one which all our instincts lead us to resist—is that Christianity is much quicker in using the pieces of the old

Judahistic religion [i.e., Second Temple Palestinian Judaism] to invent a temple-religion-without-a-temple than were the founders [i.e., the rabbis] of what became known as the Jewish faith [i.e., Rabbinic Judaism] (p. 212).

Similarly, when introducing the section of *Surpassing Wonder* that focuses on early Rabbinic Judaism, he drives home the same points:

The two direct heirs of the Yahweh-faith, Christianity and the Jewish faith (frequently called "Rabbinic Judaism" by scholars), are sister religions: their roots in shared historical narratives take believers back before time. Their immediate common heritage was the plenteous religious culture of late Second Temple Judaism and its sudden dispersal and apparent decimation following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. . . . Other fragments of Late Second Temple Judaism also survived, relatively briefly, but Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity were the ones that count. These two exhibit a mixture of great inventiveness, aggressiveness, and durability. These characteristics assured their survival, when all around them the multiple Judahisms of the Second Temple desiccated and died (p. 273).

With respect to the history and development of Judaism in particular, two things are striking about Akenson's remarks:

- (a) its "Palestinian-Juda(h)ic-centrism" in general, and
- (b) its "Pharisaic[sic!]-Rabbinic centrism" with respect both to the "invention" of a Judaism-without-a-Temple and the emergence of a "normative" "Jewish faith" from a plurality of "Judahisms" extant in late Second Temple Palestine.

Akenson's almost exclusive focus on Second-Temple-Palestinian "Judahisms" in looking to the antecedents of early Christianity, and his oft repeated declaration that early Christianity and early Rabbinic Judaism are *the* two "sister" developments of "temple-religion-without-a-temple," derive from his views about the history of Judahisms and their transformation into the "Jewish faith" by the early rabbis in the aftermath of the events in Palestine following 70CE and 135CE.

Akenson has forcefully driven home his thesis, and lest his reader miss the point, he has, as Morton Smith would counsel, dedicated to that thesis more than one sentence, and this at a number of junctures in his work. Nor is Akenson's thesis an aberration among scholars. Indeed, I picked him because of his skill as an epitomizer of others who are specialists in the field, and in the main respected others. But his almost exclusive focus on Palestinian Second Temple "Judahism(s)" as the antecedent(s) to early Christianity and the post-Second Temple "Jewish faith" (by which he means early Rabbinism) is myopic. And his assertions that these two social formations invented in the aftermath of 70 CE and 135 CE "temple-religion-without-a-temple" are simply false, and in their effects (even not in their intentions) polemical and apologetic.

With respect to his claims about early Rabbinism's role in particular in fashioning the core elements of the new "Jewish faith's" "temple-religion-without-a-Temple," Mishnah, the first literary magnum opus produced by the early rabbis (c. 200 CE) and, after the Pentateuch, its most authoritative document for the next three-and-half-centuries, for the most part ignores the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. Mishnah is a legal study of aspects of an ideal Judaic life still centered upon Yahweh's one-and-only

Temple. And at those junctures where, alternatively, Mishnah admits of non-Temple-based communal devotions, such as a synagogue-based communal liturgy, Mishnah pretty much assumes the latter's longstanding existence as an institution operating in parallel to, or subsumed within, Temple centered religious life (see, e.g., m. tractates Megilah and Rosh HaShanah). The early rabbis do not claim "authorship" of synagogue-based Judaic religious practice, just as they do not claim (indeed, cannot claim) authorship of Temple-centered practice. Rather they implicitly claim mastery of Yahweh's law as it pertains to both.

Just as one cannot attribute to early rabbinic creativity and inventiveness the emergence of a Judaic religion without a Temple, so too one cannot say that the Jerusalem Temple's destruction (and/or the failed Bar Kokhba rebellion) spurred the development in Judaism of a "temple-religion-without-temple." Not a single ancient source of Jewish provenance (early rabbinic documents included) makes such a claim. Rather these fundamental developments in the Juda(h)ism(s) of the Greco-Roman period are the "inventions," to use Akenson's term, of Diaspora Jewry (especially in the Greco-Roman Diaspora), and they *predate* the demise of the Temple Cult in Jerusalem, a dating which early rabbinic sources in the main do not dispute.

Moreover, the precise nature of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism is probably attributable to the transmutation of "biblical Judaism" as a result of two factors:

- (a) the specific cultural and social forces and institutions of urban environments in the Greco-Roman world, and
- (b) high levels of migration, mobility, communication and contact across this constellation of urban centres, especially as they came under Roman hegemony, and largely as a function of trade and commercial opportunity—

matters I return to later in the paper.

Finally, when the early Jesus movement disappeared in the face of the emergence of early Christianity, it was specifically Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism that provided early Christian communities with a template for their religious and communal life as "Yahwehists"—and this within the same urban environment, situated within the same Roman-ruled Mediterranean world characterized by the same high levels of migration, mobility, communication and contact. Concentrating specifically on Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism, these are the claims which I explore in the remainder of this paper.

Before proceeding, however, I should point out, that some elements of these claims are not new at all. But they obviously bear repeating, since they do not seem to have "stuck." Other elements, to be developed in the body of this paper, have not been much articulated before, but seem to me to be almost obvious, once one permits oneself a perspective shift. That shift comes from asking a simple question: Is there a Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism (in the singular), and if there is, how does one account for it? But first a reminder of what is not new.

### **III. When the news is not new: refocusing on urban settings around the Mediterranean basin**

As stated, it is in Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism, a phenomenon of the cities of the Roman empire, that the Judaic background to early Christianity is more likely to be

found. And what in early Christianity is not specifically beholden to Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism is directly dependent upon the same urban environment which shaped the evolution of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism, as well as upon the same levels of communication and migration across these urban settings that continued to shape Diaspora Judaism. Wayne Meeks made this point in his treatment of the early "Pauline" churches in *The First Urban Christians*, published in 1983. At the outset of the book he states:

Paul was a city person . . . . This preoccupation with cities was not peculiar to Paul. Before Paul's conversion the believers in the Messiah Jesus [i.e., members of the Jesus movement?] had already carried their sectarian message into the *Jewish communities of the Greco-Roman cities* [my emphasis] . . . . In those early years, then, within a decade of the crucifixion of Jesus, the village culture of Palestine had been left behind, and the *Greco-Roman city became the dominant environment* [my emphasis] of the Christian movement (pp. 9-11).

Meeks goes on in the following pages to say something of Roman-period urban culture and society in contrast to rural society. He notes that rural society across the Empire was culturally and social conservative. Therefore, rural areas preserved much of their regional or local distinctiveness, culturally and socially (p. 15). By contrast, "changes in the city were in the direction of an emerging, common, Greco-Roman culture" (p. 15).

What are the artifacts of this drift in the direction of a common urban culture across the Imperial Mediterranean? Again Meeks captures it best in an economy of words:

. . . Greek was the universal urban language of the eastern Roman provinces, but not far beyond the city walls. . . . Not only the language was shared. City folk used common forms in many areas of life. Inscriptions from all over the East use stereotyped phrases: city councils announced decrees, clubs honored their patrons, the bereaved commemorated their dead in like fashion from Alexandria to Thessalonica. Students from Athens to Antioch learned style from the same rhetorical handbooks. Styles of pottery and glassware, of furniture, of floor and wall decoration, of sculpture and painting also spread from city to city. . . . To be sure, these similarities did not override important differences. . . . But in each of those cities . . . [one] would have little difficulty recognizing the important temples, the government buildings, the agora or forum, the gymnasium and palaestra, the theater, the baths, and even inns, taverns and shops (pp. 15-16).

This drift toward a common urban culture Meeks associates with mobility both "physical and social" (p. 16). Physical mobility was both by land and by sea, and for reasons of commerce, profession, education, entertainment, sightseeing, and religious pilgrimage.

In 1981, just two years before the publication of Meeks's influential work, I had delivered a paper in the Anti-Judaism Seminar of the CSBS in which I argued that the foil against which early Christianity had to define itself was above all Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism. That paper was published in 1986 (as "Christian Anti-Judaism in its Judaic Mirrors: the Judaic Context of Early Christianity Revised," in S. Wilson, ed. *Anti-*

*Judaism in Early Christianity. Vol. 2. Separation and Polemic.* Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 1986. 103-132). I made the same point in a book published in 1984 (*The Commerce of the Sacred: Mediation of the Divine among Greco-Roman Jews*, Chico : Scholars Press, 1984, about to appear in a New Edition with a foreword by Willi Brown and published by Columbia University Press).

More recently in 2003, the much acclaimed book by Phil Harland (*Synagogues, Associations and Congregations*) takes much further Meeks's claims about the urban-ness of early Christianity. He argues that just about everywhere one looks at the early Christian congregations (and the contemporary synagogue communities) in the Roman Mediterranean, they look like typical Greco-Roman associations and seem to aspire to the same type of interrelatedness the latter had with urban life. In similar fashion, I have just written an extended essay in which I argue that consistently across the Greco-Roman world outside the Jewish homeland, what characterized the 'strategy' of the development of Judaism was to excise bits and pieces of biblical religion from the Judaic scriptures and to insert these into a religious and communal life the basic structure of which imitated the urban landscape as it was religiously and organizationally structured ("Roman Diaspora Judaism," in *Blackwell Companion to the Ancient World, Vol. 9: Roman Religion*, Jörg Rüpke ed. Oxford: Blackwell, forthcoming in 2006 or 2007).

#### **IV. When the news just looks like its "old:" Judaisms vs. Judaism of the Greco-Roman world**

The reader will by now have made the observation that I have begun to talk about Greco-Roman Diaspora *Judaism* not only as a phenomenon the main features of which emerged before the Jerusalem Temple's demise and quite apart from any early rabbinic (or pharisaic) inventiveness, but also as if Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism were substantially *one* thing. This might seem like a "throw-back" to scholarship before the 1970s, when it was commonplace to talk of Ancient Judaism (in the singular) and of "normative Judaism." These "older" scholarly views, associated, for example, with Moore, Kraeling, Urbach, and later with Safrai and Stern, were fiercely debated by persons like Goodenough, Morton Smith, A.T. Kraabel, and especially Jacob Neusner, who propounded a radically different view.

The debate is well summarized by Rutgers (1998: 24-27). The dominant scholarly view for first two-thirds of the twentieth century was that a highly unified Judaism characterized the Diaspora as a whole after 70 CE, as the rabbis took control of defining what was normative for Jews both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora. Jacob Neusner and A. Thomas Kraabel, following Erwin R. Goodenough, asserted that the known and emerging archaeological, inscriptional and epigraphic evidence showed no such rabbinic influence either in the Diaspora or the Land of Israel for this period. And Lee I. Levine argued that the rabbis' wherewithal to impose their "rabbinic Judaism" on the population of even the Land of Israel developed very slowly over the course of Late Antiquity. It is in this context that Jacob Neusner and others began talking about the Judaisms of Late Antiquity; the plural forcefully made the point. And because of their methodological criticisms of the "older" dominant view, it has become almost commonplace in some circles to talk not of Ancient Judaism, but of ancient Judaisms (and in Akenson's formulation of Late Second Temple Palestine Judaic forms, of "Juda(h)isms").

I do not wish to rehearse this debate, beyond saying that Neusner and others were entirely correct in asserting that early rabbinic Judaism and Ancient Judaism could no longer be seen as synonyms or near synonyms, and that something or somethings quite different than the Judaism of the early Talmudic literature was or were evinced in the evidence both before and after 70 CE. Moreover, no amount of scholarly gymnastics can square early rabbinic teachings and law with the evidence at hand for Late Antique Palestine or the Diaspora in the period under study.

To my mind, however, the use of the term "Judaisms" (in the plural) has gone far beyond what the likes of Goodenough or Neusner wished to convey (or what the evidence supports). Again in some circles, it has become a kind of scholarly dogma or ideology, a normative claim imposed on the evidence like an academic orthodoxy. Ironically, this is exactly what Neusner wished to free himself from, when he adopted *Judaisms* (in the plural) in the first place. He wanted *not* to impose pre-conceived, *a priori* notions of the existence of a ubiquitous "normative," or "pharisaic-rabbinic" Judaism on all ancient evidence. Neusner did not support automatically and uncritically reading early rabbinic legal texts as evidence for earlier pharisaic, normative Judaism, as did Moore and Urbach. He did not support Urbach-like arguments that the frescos of the Dura-Europas synagogue had to be *mere* decoration, without religious significance as symbols, because they otherwise would contravene early rabbinic interpretations of the second commandment. He believed that a classification of *Judaisms* must be allowed to develop more inductively from the evidence as an exercise in empirical scholarly taxonomy.

It is precisely in this methodological and conceptual frame that I talk about Greco-Roman Diaspora *Judaism* (in the singular). In my mind, the evidence supports just such a taxonomy for the early 1<sup>st</sup> century CE (if not earlier) until sometime around the reign of Justinian. In this period, the evidence shows that Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews had much in common socially, cultural, institutionally, and with respect to belief and practice. Indeed, I would also say that at some point in these centuries, the basic features of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism appear as well in Roman Palestine, especially in urban settings, which by the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries CE exhibit much the same patterns of urbanization, socially, culturally and administratively, as the rest of the Roman Mediterranean world. To say this does not belie the points made by Neusner (1993), Kraabel (1982), and others (among them myself). And to say that the evidence shows the existence of a fairly consistent model of Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism during these centuries is *not* to revert back to the "older" scholarly consensus about the unity of ancient Judaism (under supposed rabbinic influence). Indeed, it might be helpful to state matters in another fashion: the early rabbis did not so much influence, let alone determine, the character of Jewish life and religious practice in the Diaspora (or the Land of Israel, for that matter), as they were influenced by it. Perhaps in the end, the rabbis were more "diasporized" than the Diaspora was "rabbinized." But that is an argument for another paper.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All this being said, the notion that early Rabbinic Judaism reflects the historical norm against which all Jewish belief and practice of the Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews can be compared in order to establish loyalty to, or deviation from, 'Judaism' in the face of assimilationist tendencies of "Hellenization" or "Romanization" continued in the 1990s to mark the work of scholarship. Barclay (1996: 82-88) demonstrates that such notions are at the heart of the otherwise exceedingly learned work of Feldman (1993).

At this point, the reader has a choice to make. Continue with section V, if one wishes an account of the basic features that, in my view, characterize Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism. As an alternative, the reader may proceed directly to section VI, in which I discuss possible alternative explanations for how this *Judaism* in the singular might have emerged. It is specifically section VI that raises issues of population migration, trade and communication.

#### **V. The identification of a taxon, "Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism"**

Near the beginning of a forthcoming chapter entitled "Roman Diaspora Judaism" (to appear in *Blackwell Companion to the Ancient World. Volume 9: Roman Religion*. Jörg Rüpke ed. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006 or 07), I attempt to define and justify parameters of my analyses. What I wrote indicates, at least in brief, that evidence makes useful and justifiable the specification of "Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism" as a specific taxon among other taxa within the larger category of Ancient Judaisms. Let me cite some relevant paragraphs (with their footnotes) from that chapter, since they succinctly make the point.

. . . . Jews and Judaism in the Greco-Roman Diaspora—more specifically, of the Italian peninsula, Greece-Macedonia, Asia Minor, the Northern Levant, and Roman North Africa<sup>3</sup>—share so many traits, structures and institutions, all within so similar a context, that it is useful to see them as adherents of a single religion, despite what must have been varying degrees of local variation. All these Jews shared the experience of living as an (a) *ethnic-religious minority*, (b) in (so-called) *pagan urban environment*, which (c) *had been substantially Hellenized* with an overlay of Romanization over a Hellenistic foundation. In fact, Schwartz has argued (1998) that east of the Italian peninsula, Rome, more so than the Hellenistic kingdoms it replaced, promoted Hellenization, rather than "Latinization," as a means of uniting the empire (see also MacMullen 1984). Indeed, the inscriptional evidence for Roman and Italian Jews during the Roman period indicates that while some Jews or Jewish communities may have functioned in Latin in their "inner-group" lives together, most did not. In this period, Greek seems to have been the 'insider' language of the vast majority of even Roman and Italian Jews for social, cultural and religious purposes (see Noy 1998). As to the ancestral language of the homeland, Hebrew, it is limited to a

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On other ways in which the early rabbis were "diasporized" see my "Urban (Re-)Organization in Late Roman Palestine and the Early Rabbinic Guild: What Toseftan Evidence Indicates about the City and its Institutions as an Emerging Salient Category in the Early Rabbinic Legal (Re-) Classification of Space," forthcoming in *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses*.

<sup>3</sup> I have excluded from explicit consideration Jews in Spain and Gaul during this period, only because the heaviest Jewish populations seem to be in the eastern half of the Mediterranean basin and in Italy (see Smallwood 2001: 120ff). I do not intend to imply that the Judaism of Jews in Gaul and Spain was substantially different. Of the more than one hundred documented synagogues from the Diaspora of Antiquity and Late Antiquity, one is from Spain, four from France (although they date from as late as the sixth century CE), one from Germany (of unknown date), five, of which one is first century CE, are from North Africa (excluding Egypt). By contrast, fifteen are from Egypt, the oldest being mid-third century BCE. Another fifteen ancient synagogues were on the Italian peninsula and associated islands; thirteen in Greece and the Aegean islands; twenty-two in Asia Minor, the Black Sea Coast and Cyprus; fourteen from the Northern Levant (Syria and Lebanon). For a convenient listing of all ancient synagogues, the consensus about their dating and the type of evidence which attests to each, see Rutgers (1998: 127-130).

few vestiges in utterly formulaic usages, such as wishes at the end of funerary inscriptions, otherwise devoid of Hebrew, that *shalom* ("peace") be bestowed upon the departed.

With the retention of Greek for 'insider' social, cultural and religious communication came the sharing among Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews of well established cultural products, such as several 'standard' translations of the biblical scriptures into Greek . . . . In addition to sharing scriptural texts, I have little doubt that Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews shared liturgical compositions, as well as a number of extra-canonical works, again circulating in Greek.

. . . Jews across Italy, Greece-Macedonia, Asia Minor, the Northern Levant, and Roman Africa seem to have *formally* organized their lives together as a community in much the same fashion (Williams 1998; see also Rutgers 1998: 171-98). They did so in service of what appears to be much the same ends, and they required and received from non-Jewish authorities much the same social, cultural and legal "space" to so organize their lives together. Writing at the close of the first century CE, Josephus argues this point extensively throughout *Antiquities* XIV by reproducing (or forging—it matters little for our purposes) edicts from Roman authorities at the end of the Republic and beginning of the Imperial Period. He thereby intends to help assure that this "space" will continue to be there. Sanders (1999:2) summarizes the list of rights and privileges which according to *Antiquities* XIV (cf. *Antiquities* XVI) were granted Roman Diaspora Jews by Roman edicts. Moreover, he documents the number of times each right or privilege is mentioned. These include the right: to gather and have a place, that is, a synagogue, in which to do so (5 times); to observe the Sabbath, including dispensations from Roman and or civic service to do so (5 times); to have appropriate ('ancestral') food, including shops offering meat not only from "clean" species and appropriately slaughtered, but also from animals that do not come from the pagan-Temple-based cattle market (3 times); to administer themselves, that is, to have their own councils and to be subject to their decisions (2 times); and, lastly, to levy taxes for communal use and services, as well as to send to the Land of Israel (2 times) (Smallwood 2001: 133-43; Seutonius, *Julius Caesar* 42, 3; Josephus, *Antiquities* XIV 213-16, 241-46, 256-64; see also Josephus, *Antiquities* XIV 235, XVI 27-57, 162-65; 172-73, Philo, *Legatio* 158.)

In sum, there is ample reason, for seeing Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews and Judaism as a relatively coherent and consistent social construct with respect to social and communal organization, culture and religion, inevitable local variation notwithstanding (see Kippenberg 1995). And it is upon this larger general common construct that this chapter focuses.

The remainder of the chapter just cited elaborates on many of these claims. Two such elaborations are worth special mention.

First, Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews, unable to implement Biblical Judaism (that is, the religion enjoined in the their biblical scriptures) or any of the forms of Jerusalem-cultic religion (that is, those religions, based in these same scriptures, which were actually practiced in the Jerusalem Temple over the course of the Second Commonwealth), selected elements from Biblical Judaism in service of constructing for themselves a coherent religio-ethnic identity and culture in the urban environments of the

Greco-Roman Mediterranean. While the evidence is far from comprehensive for this geographical area, what evidence exists seems quite consistent; wherever one looks, be it Rome or Alexandria, it would appear that the same core set of these elements are in evidence. Again, permit me to cite a summary list from the chapter.

It is also clear that Roman Diaspora Jews

1. understood their identity in terms of the biblical tradition's basic narrative,
2. inherited the late-biblical tradition's monotheism,
3. depended upon biblical law for family law,
4. life cycle rites,
5. dietary law, and
6. for their calendar of weekly Sabbaths and festivals.

The biblical literature, and especially the Psalms,

7. provided the texts for prayer.

And the biblical tradition lay at the centre of

8. Diaspora Jews' continued relation with and support for the institutions of the Land of Israel, especially the Jerusalem Temple until its destruction in 70 AD, although, as we discuss at length below . . . , Diaspora Jews had especially to re-conceptualize and re-contextualize their "world's" relationship to the Jerusalem Temple, as defined in biblical Judaism.

Second, Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews wherever we encounter them have made the public reading (in Greek) of sections of the Torah and of Prophets a core element of their public communal liturgy.

Third, the elements selected from Biblical Judaism were re-embedded in a new whole, a socially constructed perception of the architecture of the "world" of holy and ordinary, sacred and profane space that differed considerably from that of biblical Judaism. Although our evidence is episodic, it would appear that Greco-Roman Diaspora Jews similarly constructed that new whole. It was an architecture of the sacred which closely resembled that of their urban pagan neighbours.

Fourth, the chapter elaborated considerably upon the organization of the Greco-Roman Diaspora Jewish communities, and its institutions and institutionalized roles. These are, on the one hand, remarkable consistent in type and often nomenclature from Diaspora Jewish community to Diaspora Jewish community (e.g., synagogue/proseuche, gerousia, archisynagogos, gerousiarch, grammateus, patersynagogos, matersynagogos, etc.), and, on the other hand, highly reflective both of other non-Jewish urban associations and of the city's institutions themselves. Moreover, the mode of interaction between organized Jewish communities and their host cities seems fairly consistent.

## **VI. Accounting for the taxon, "Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism:" the inferred central role of continuous migration, trade and communication**

How does one account for the emergence and persistence of the taxon, "Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism" across the urban centres of the Mediterranean basin over these 5 or more centuries. There are several logical possibilities only, operating singly or in combination:

- 1) dissemination from single point of origin;
- 2) parallel developments emerging in similar urban environments;

- 3) co-developments emerging from and maintained by significant ongoing communication and exchange.

The nature and persistence of the taxon around the Mediterranean basin over half a millennium suggests that *all three* will probably have come into play in varying degrees at various times.

The first, dissemination from a single point of origin, is the most intriguing for a number of reasons. In some respects, all Greco-Roman Diaspora Jewish culture has its origins in Judea and its culture. Moreover, ongoing travel between the communities of the "dispersion" and Jerusalem were commonplace until 70 CE as a result of both pilgrimage and the collection and remittance via agents of funds for Jerusalem. But as we have argued, while Biblical Judaism, a Palestinian (literary) phenomenon, is the source from which Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism excises elements, both the precise selectivity and the new "whole" into which those elements are placed, seem not to be exports of the Land of Israel to the Diaspora communities. Rather, at some point, they were imported from the Diaspora into the Land of Israel. *If* some early version of the Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism was exported from a single point of origin where it had developed, then one of the Diaspora communities themselves would be a more likely candidate—like Alexandria, Damascus or Antioch, all of which seem to have had extensive, Hellenized, organized, Jewish communities quite early on. All three were major trading cities in the eastern Mediterranean, and it is likely that many Jewish merchants from elsewhere regularly traded with these cities, and that many Jewish merchants in these cities established subsidiary operations elsewhere staffed by family and associates. In this manner a specific model for a religio-ethnic social formation could have spread across the basin. Indeed, one might argue that this is what in part happened with early Gentile Christianity and from the Hellenized Northern Levantine coastal cities.

Dissemination from a point of origin, wherever that might be, could account for the shared characteristics of the taxon across a wide geographical stage. But *if* this happened, it cannot explain the persistence of shared characteristics beyond the first century or so. In the absence of other factors, individual communities would eventually drift in their own directions.

Second, the persistence of a shared model among Diaspora Jews will probably have benefited from the similarity of the urban contexts encountered by Diaspora Jews around Rome's Sea. Meeks, in the passage cited earlier, unequivocally claims that cities around the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, despite their differences, where substantially similar socio-cultural institutions. And Harland documents this point quite stunningly, although it is not the primary objective of his book. Had some specific religio-ethnic model for Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism been transplanted in many, *quite different* socio-cultural environments, we would certainly not expect to find the evidence in hand for Greco-Roman Jewish Diaspora communities after half of a millennium of separate existence.

On the other hand, appealing to common urban patterns as the environment for Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism cannot itself bear the weight of the taxon's emergence, and only, *in part*, of its persistence. No matter how similar many environments may be, many quite different social-cultural Judaic forms will have evolved, each based on biblical Judaism, perhaps, and each equally well adapted to these similar environments.

So the similarity of urban environments, while likely an important factor, can be but part of the story.

Finally, and most significantly, appealing to similar urban environments around the Greco-Roman Mediterranean world, begs a fundamental question. How is it that over the half-millennium or so under consideration, these urban environments themselves will have *remained* so similar? For this too is the upshot of both Meeks' and Harland's claims and evidence. The obvious response, of course, is that these urban settings did not operate in splendid isolation of one another other this period, but within a political, economic, cultural and social frame and network characterized, among other things, by relatively intense, ongoing, communication effected by trade, travel and communications.

Consequently, and third, we are forced to entertain this same factor, namely relatively intense, ongoing, communication across Diaspora Jewish communities, through trade, travel and communications, and perhaps pilgrimage, as part and parcel of any account of the emergence and persistence for some 500 years of a highly shared model constituting Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism. Certainly Jews were no less mobile and no less engaged in long-distance trade and communications than any other urban dwellers of this region, and perhaps more so than many of their fellow urbanites. (As my teacher, Jacob Neusner once said about American Jews, Jews are like everyone else, except more so.)

In the final analysis, we are left with a number of closely related claims about migration, travel and trade by Jews. These claims are the inferred conclusions from the identification and range of geographical prevalence of a socio-cultural taxon, Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism. Where can we go from here? To what research might this paper be prolegomena such that these claims might become more than inferred conclusions from the traits and location of the taxon?

Literary, inscriptional and archaeological evidence, looked at with a new set of questions flowing from these claims, might provide some evidence of the pattern of dissemination of the taxon. It may well be possible to identify the one or several communities from which the taxon in its primitive form initially spread. Moreover, the same evidence may alert us to patterns of migration, trade and communication among those Jewish communities conforming to the traits of the taxon—an exercise of economic and demographic sociometry, the science of who communicates with whom, how, and for what purpose. We need not guess that upper-crust Jews, belonging to the decurial classes of both their cities and their Jewish communities, were personally involved in shipping and overland transport demanding not only their investment but also their dislocation. How so? Among other evidence, there is a surviving legal edict from the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE confirming what is claimed to be an ancient exemption from "imperial transports" for those Jews who occupy certain designated positions in the formal structures of the Jewish community, since their physical dislocation would cause inordinate disruption to the administration of the community. Evidence about the collection of funds in the Jewish communities of the Anatolian peninsula to be sent annually to Jerusalem may tell us something of what Jewish communities were effectively subordinate to other Jewish communities in the region. This is so, because the evidence in question seems to point to an 'hierarchical' funneling of monies from many Jewish communities in the region by collection agents to one or two principal Jewish

communities, whence the funds were sent to the Land of Israel. Surely, a careful, systematic perusal of the evidence will yield other evidence.

The methodological hurdles to be surmounted in such an exercise will be many. Most important among them are the episodic and fragmentary nature of the inscriptional and archaeological evidence, and the tendentious character of literary evidence whether Jewish, Christian or pagan. Since the earliest church seemed to have used Jewish networks to disseminate its message and win adherents, the first steps of Christianity out of the Land of Israel may divulge something of this Jewish sociometry, at least in the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

It would be nice to have something akin to the Cairo Geniza documents for Jews of the Greco-Roman period, since these documents preserve in considerable richness direct testimony of trade and business dealings among Jews ringing the Mediterranean basin during the medieval period. Italian Jewish traders shipped to and from Jewish associates in Egypt, who transported goods overland to the Red Sea, and shipped to and from relatives in Yemen and India. In many instances, we have their letters, their manifests, and their accounts (see S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 2 volumes). Inscriptions will not give us this type of evidence. But inscriptions, archeological remains, and literary evidence might give us other types of hints of a sociometric nature, were we to look for them with a new set of questions in mind: Who interacted with whom, when, and for what purposes?

## **VII. Afterward: some sample steps forward**

What I wanted to do in this paper was to introduce an argument or hypothesis about travel as a key factor in the development of Diaspora Judaism. What I have not actually done is to undertake the work that would substantiate the hypothesis. That would be another, very long paper—a paper that I, or someone else, might well be induced to write. However, to what concrete preliminary evidence might I point in order to furnish some warrant for undertaking the work?

Among the inscriptions from or about Jews and Judaism in the Late Roman world are not a few in which a person or persons are explicitly identified with a particular place. A particular sub-category of these inscriptions may prove valuable, given our agenda. In some inscriptions the place-name with which the person is somehow associated is *other* than the provenance of inscription. Why should this be important for our purposes? I often tell my students that one thing we know about the second century rabbi Yose the Galilean is that he did not operate in the Galilee when he bore this name. Rather Yose, or his family before him, migrated from the Galilee. The inscriptions of the type just mentioned would offer similar evidence of migration.

I have already a quick look at this sub-group among inscriptional evidence, using D. Noy's indices to find instances where someone is explicitly said to be from somewhere else, or is the son, daughter, or spouse of someone who has come from somewhere else. In most cases, these indicate migration and settlement in a new community—if not by the person in question than by his or her parent or spouse. In a few instances, such migrants seem to have become leaders in their new communal settings, exercising a degree of authority in their adoptive home albeit having been raised themselves or by parents whose socialization occurred elsewhere. A brief perusal of the evidence indicates that there may be as many as 30 inscriptions of this nature, and perhaps as many as 50. But

they span a long timeframe and many are 4th or 5th C.

There seem to be two patterns easily perceived in this evidence: permanent migrants from relatively *nearby* communities—that is, migration as an element of *regional* sharing and regional cultural integration; and permanent *trans-regional* migrants from place far away—for example, from Alexandria to Rome, or from Ascalon to Rome, and forming the basis of a degree of trans-regional sharing of cultural and social forms. As part of this initial heuristic exercise, permit me to cite several of the latter type.

A mid-third-century honorific inscription in Latin from Ostia (Noy 1993 #15 = Frey-Lifshitz I #534a, trans. Noy) proffers an example of a Jew practicing his arts in Italy after he (and/or his father) immigrated from the Levantine region, where he/they fulfilled curial responsibilities in several cities.

For Marcus Aurelius Pylades, son of . . . ., of the Terentine tribe, . . . . from Scythopolis, the first *pantomimes* of his time in . . . ., and approved by the Emperors Valerian and Gallienus . . . . from the province of Judaea . . . . after the death of his father Juda. Also a decurion of the cities of Ascalon and Damascus. To him, second, the order of the Augustales not only in memory of his father, but also because of his own consummate skill, with all the citizens demanding it equally, . . . .

Similarly, the late-fourth or early-fifth-century Latin epitaph from Concordia (Italy) (Noy 1993 #6 = Frey-Lifshitz I #640, trans. Noy) that memorializes one Flavia Optata identifies her spouse as an Emesene Jew.

Flavia Optata (wife?) of a soldier from the troop of the royal Emesene Jews. If anyone after my decease wants to open my tomb, s/he will pay to the resources of the treasury one pound of gold.

In like fashion, a fifth-century Hebrew-Latin epitaph from Milan Noy 1993 #2 = Frey-Lifshitz I #644, trans. Noy) memorializes one Joses the Alexandrian.

Peace. Here rests in peace Joses (?) the Alexandrian, of good memory, who lived more or less . . . years.

In all three examples—and many more may be cited—travel involved long-term or permanent resettlement from relatively distant locations of the empire, in these instances from the eastern regions of the empire to the Italian peninsula. Flavia Optata's husband (?) migrated as a result of his career in the military. Marcus Aurelius Pylades was a famous entertainer, a member of a typically well-traveled, itinerant profession. But he (and or his father) seem to have settled in Italy, after playing municipal leadership roles in Ascalon and Damascus. Although, admittedly, Joses the Alexandrian's epitaph tells nothing of Joses' profession or family, the inscriptions concerning Flavia Optata and Marcus Aurelius Pylades serve to indicate that one feature of at least some Jewish resettled migrants, and perhaps part and parcel of the impetus to migrate, is their high level integration into Roman imperial and municipal culture and society: here the arts, municipal government, and the military. These Jews at least seem not the progeny of any recent forced migrations, or migrants by reason of servitude.

As stated, at the very least several dozen such inscriptions are extant, and like the three cited, they give indication of migration by Jews, and provide us with some sociometric evidence shedding light on the those factors which favored the emergence of a relatively coherent Greco-Roman Diaspora Judaism. Here at least is one point of departure (among others that might be devised) to build evidentiary warrant for our

hypothesis. Now, in the words attributed to Hillel, "Go study."