

JUDAISM

SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF JUDAISM

The religion of most Jews was inherited from their ancestors, but non-Jews attracted to the cult were welcomed into Jewish communities not least in diaspora settlements such as in Rome, although the number who became full proselytes, rather than more loosely affiliated to Judaism, is unknown. Their religion differed from the other religions of the pre-Christian Roman Empire above all in one respect – the Jewish God was believed to demand the exclusive obedience of his Jewish worshippers, such that cult paid to any other divinity was treachery. This attitude was almost incomprehensible to polytheists, who responded to such deliberate snubbing of powerful forces sometimes with admiration but often with disgust at what they termed 'atheism'.¹

Ancient sources, both Jewish and gentile, stress the peculiarities of Jewish religious practice and belief, but it is worth noting at the outset that in some ways the religious assumptions of the Jews were the same as those of others. Thus Jews like others held a variety of views about the nature of existence after death, and Jews shared the common belief that the most efficacious form of worship was by sacrifice and libations in the temple in which the divinity was housed. Indeed, the Jerusalem Temple cult is the best attested sacrificial cult in the Roman world.

For pagans, the oddity of Judaism, apart from the refusal to worship other gods, lay primarily in the lack of a cult image for worship and in the personal behaviour required of Jews, in particular the Sabbath. Pagans regarded Jews as fanatical in their devotion to Sabbath rest and their strictness in observance of sacred time, which occasionally even led them to die rather than fight on the sacred day:

The Homeric warrior prayed to God for success in battle, but the Jews sitting unwashed on the Sabbath, when the enemy were putting up ladders to the walls and capturing them, did not get up, but remained as if bound together in a single net by superstition.
(Plutarch, *On Superstition* 8)

Other aspects of Judaism most stressed by gentile writers were food taboos and the circumcision of boys, but such external views were not always well informed, and the best evidence for the special characteristics of Judaism is to be found in the Jewish sources themselves.

Such Jewish evidence is abundant, but not always easy to interpret. The abundance is accounted for in part by the high premium placed on the written word by ancient Jews, but even more significant was the preservation of Jewish writings from this period through the continuous traditions since antiquity of Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. Both traditions placed high value on the copying of earlier writings, but each selected differently from the corpus of such writings, in accordance with the different religious preoccupations of later rabbis and Christians. The extent of such selectivity is evident from a comparison between the picture of Judaism which can be derived from a Hebrew and Aramaic works produced by the rabbis, especially the *Mishnah* (compiled c. AD 200), the *Tosefta* (c. AD 250), the *Palestinian Talmud* (c. AD 400), the *Babylonian Talmud* (c. AD 500 or later) and various *midrashim* (Bible commentaries),² with the picture to be derived from the writings in Greek, or to the Jewish Bible incorporated into the manuscripts of the Greek translation of the Bible, the Septuagint) and the *pseudepigrapha* (other Jewish translations various types considered valuable by Christians).³ The two pictures of Judaism in this period depend primarily on differing judgements on the extent to which such reconciliation is desirable. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls near Qumran in 1947 has not resolved the issue, since although these sectarian documents survive independently of both the Jewish and the Christian later traditions, and the teachings of the sect or sects who produced them do not conform precisely to anything previously known from the traditions, it remains possible (but not necessary) to interpret the evidence to make it more or less compatible with what was already known from those scrolls were discovered.⁴

This varied evidence about Judaism in the early Roman period attests above all the variety of both practice and belief which was tolerated within the religion. It is thus at first sight rather surprising to find that one of the main characteristics of Judaism singled out by Josephus in his defence of Jewish customs in *Against Apion* 2.179–81 was precisely its uniformity:

To this cause above all we owe our admirable harmony. Unity and identity of religious belief, perfect uniformity in habits and customs, produce a very beautiful concord in human character. Among us alone will be heard no contradictory statements about God, such as are common among other nations, not only on the lips of ordinary individuals under the impulse of some passing mood, but even boldly propounded by philosophers: some putting forward crushing arguments against the very existence of God, others depriving him of his providential care for mankind. Among us alone will be seen no difference in the conduct of our lives. With us all act

alike, all profess the same doctrine about God, one which is in harmony with our Law and affirms that all things are under his eye. Even our womenfolk and dependants would tell you that piety must be the motive of all our occupations in life.

The unity which Josephus praised was in fact striking in contrast to the plurality of cult practices and myths espoused by Greek polytheists; Josephus explicitly emphasized the contrast in *Against Apion*. Most Jews believed that sacrifices to the Jewish God should be carried out in only one temple, that in Jerusalem; another temple, in Leontopolis in Egypt, functioned from the mid-second century BC until it was closed down by the Romans in AD 73 (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 7.421–36), but it never rivalled the central shrine in Judaea.⁵ Thus Jews alone in the ancient world came on mass pilgrimages to a single shrine. The Bible enjoined all adult males to visit the shrine three times a year (Exodus 23.17; Deuteronomy 16.16) and, although most Jews who lived in the diaspora away from the homeland came far less often, the city of Jerusalem was packed at these pilgrim festivals, which frequently proved to be times of political unrest. Evidence for mass international pilgrimage is not to be found before the time of Herod in the late first century BC, and it can be assumed that the attraction of the journey to Jerusalem for women and children as well as men will have been much enhanced by the great rebuilding of the Temple, which began in 22 BC, and made the shrine one of the wonders of the world, and by the comparative ease and security of travel from diaspora communities within the Roman Empire. That the Temple was the religious focus of the Jewish insurgents in the war against Rome from AD 66–70 (see above, Chapter 26) is evident not only from Josephus' detailed narrative of the revolt, in which the Temple site was the centre of resistance to Roman forces, but from the rebel coinage, with its depiction of the sacred utensils and its proclamation, in archaic palaeo-Hebrew, of the holiness of Jerusalem (see Figure 35). Over 60 years later, the coinage of the rebels from AD 132–35 placed similar emphasis on the Temple, with idealized images of the destroyed sanctuary and slogans proclaiming 'freedom', 'redemption' and 'Jerusalem'.⁶



Figure 35 Silver shekel minted by the rebels in the third year of the Jewish revolt, AD 68/9. The obverse shows a vessel used in the Temple; the reverse has a stem with three pomegranates. The caption is written in Palaeo-Hebrew, a form of lettering archaic by the first century AD. The Jewish coins always avoid human images. Thicker and heavier than contemporary Roman issues, the coin is made from pure silver for payment of dues to the Temple. Photo courtesy of CNG Coins.

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INTERPRETATIONS OF THE TORAH

Josephus' claim that Jews shared common ideas about the divinity was also true in contrast to polytheists, since all religious Jews accepted the importance of the covenant between God and Israel enshrined in the *Torah*, the first five books of the Jewish Bible (the Pentateuch).⁷ The biblical books had all been composed by the mid-second century BC, but, although the notion that some books were more sacred than others was generally accepted, it is uncertain whether there was yet a fully recognized canon.⁸ Nonetheless, the religious status of the Pentateuch was exceptional; many of the manuscripts found among the Dead Sea Scrolls were fragments of the Pentateuch or commentaries on it, and the reverence shown towards scrolls of the Pentateuch or commentaries encouraged pagans to treat such scrolls as the equivalent for Jews of cult statues for pagans. In the Greek-speaking diaspora the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, was treated by some Jews as divinely inspired like the Hebrew original, although attempts to revise the Greek text to conform more closely to the Hebrew began in the first and second centuries AD. The main function of synagogues, communal meeting places sometimes (but not always) housed in purpose-built buildings, was the reading and exposition of the Pentateuch; the name *proseuche* ('prayer') ascribed to such buildings in the Egyptian diaspora from the second century BC suggests that use, and synagogues might also be used for communal prayer, but that was a secondary late Roman period: when a synagogue was attacked in Caesarea in AD 66, the local Jews did not try to protect the site but took to safety the sacred scroll (Josephus, *The Jewish War* 2.285–91).⁹

All Jews thus accepted the importance of the *Torah*: the pluralism characteristic of Judaism in the first century AD resulted from disagreement about how the text should be interpreted. Some, like the philosopher Philo, believed that the practical injunctions of the *Torah* held also more general ethical meanings to be discovered by allegorical interpretation. Others, like the Pharisees as described by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.297), taught that the law should be understood in the light of customs which had grown up over the generations. The sectarians at Qumran accepted the teachings of their Teacher of Righteousness in addition to the *Torah*.¹⁰ Some extreme allegorists believed, according to Philo (*On the Migration of Abraham* 89–93), that only the allegorical meaning of the laws mattered, so that it was not necessary to keep the laws in practice at all (but it is worth noting that such extreme allegorists were mentioned in no other Jewish literature and that Philo was at pains to insist that they were rare and lacked influence in Alexandria in his day).

The areas of greatest variety in this period in the interpretation of the *Torah* were themselves quite heterogeneous. The sacrificial cult in the Jerusalem Temple was performed by an hereditary caste of priests, but all Jews could

have ideas about the details of its performance, which were laid out in somewhat confusing and incomplete fashion in the Pentateuch. The Pharisees disagreed with Sadducees over the correct way to carry out some rituals; according to Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews* 13.298, 18.15) the views of the Pharisees usually prevailed. Copies of what appears to be a letter on this topic apparently sent from the Teacher of Righteousness to the High Priest in Jerusalem (4QMMT) were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls.¹¹ Many groups had a deep concern for the physical purity both of their own bodies and of food and drink. Pollution as a metaphor for immorality was a notion already found in the Bible but it was carried much further by Jews in this period: many ritual baths (*mikvaot*) have been excavated in the upper city of Jerusalem near the Temple site, and the prevailing assumption that purity was desirable is nicely illustrated by widespread taboos based (so far as is known) on custom rather than any biblical text or religious authority, against the consumption of gentile milk, bread or wine, or the use of olive oil produced by gentiles for washing (like soap), eating or lighting.¹² It is hard to know what connection there was, if any, between such concern for purity and the high premium put by some Jews on asceticism, as attested by Josephus' description of his time spent with a certain Bannus in the desert:

On hearing of one named Bannus, who dwelt in the wilderness, wearing only such clothing as trees provided, feeding on such things as grew of themselves, and using frequent ablutions of cold water, by day and night, for purity's sake, I became his devoted disciple. With him I spent three years. (*Life* 11)

Such asceticism was not widespread; for most Jews fasts were restricted to the Day of Atonement, a solemn annual day of repentance, to commemoration of calamities, and to times of emergency such as droughts.

HOPES AND SPECULATIONS

Other preoccupations of Jews in this period included a concern (apparently novel in Judaism from the second century BC) about the possibility of life after death. According to Josephus, some Jews affirmed that such life occurred, but Sadducees denied it (*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.14, 16), and according to Acts of the Apostles 23.6–7) the issue could lead to violent altercation:

Now Paul was well aware that one section of them [the Council] were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, so he called out in the Council, 'My brothers, I am a Pharisee, a Pharisee born and bred; and the true issue in this trial is our hope of the resurrection of the dead.' At these words the Pharisees and Sadducees fell out among themselves, and the assembly was divided.

It is more difficult to find evidence for polemic in the popularity of apocalyptic literature which portrayed the revelation by angels to Jewish sages, usually of great antiquity, of religious truths which were not often themselves

particularly unusual,¹³ but the anonymity or pseudonymity of these writings may be significant: despite attestation in the works of Josephus and elsewhere of individuals described as prophets, including Josephus himself (*The Jewish War* 3.352), there was a general agreement that at some time in the distant past there had been 'a failure of the exact succession of the prophets' (*Agony of Zion* 1.41), so that religious authors hid behind ancient names.¹⁴

Jews subscribed to a linear concept of time in which the eschatological age to come would in some way vindicate Israel with a victory by a Messiah over gentile powers and (in some formulations) a general resurrection of the dead, but the effect of this idea on behaviour varied greatly.¹⁵ The only group in antiquity derived from Judaism and known to have defined itself by its messianic beliefs was the Christians—*Christianos* means a follower of *Christos*, the Messiah — and imminent messianic expectation is little found in the writings of Philo and Josephus or the early rabbinic texts. Many Jews may have assumed that the end of the world would come in due course and that it was unnecessary or even undesirable to try to force the divine timetable, and there was much disagreement about the precise form that the messianic age would take. On the other hand, such evidence as there is for widespread eschatological expectation is not simply the effect of selection by the later Christian tradition in an attempt to bolster Christian claims, since such expectation is also a striking element of the Qumran sect, not least in the picture of the battle between the sons of light and the sons of darkness to be found in the War Scroll:

On the day when the Kittim fall, there shall be battle and terrible carnage before the God of Israel, for that shall be the day appointed from ancient times for the battle of destruction of the sons of darkness. At that time, the assembly of gods and the hosts of men shall battle, causing great carnage; on the day of calamity, the sons of light shall battle with the company of darkness amid the shouts of a mighty multitude and the clamour of gods and men to (make manifest) the might of God. And it shall be a time of [great] tribulation for the people which God shall redeem; of all afflictions none shall be as this, from its sudden beginning until its end in eternal redemption. (*IQM* 1.9–12 (Suknik))

PHARISEES, SADDUCEES AND ESSENES

It was a feature of the late Hellenistic period that within Judaism there emerged groups or philosophies which enjoyed distinct separate identities while remaining within the bounds of common Judaism. Josephus described three such types of Judaism in a set-piece passage (*The Jewish War* 2.119–61, repeated in somewhat shorter form in the *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.11–22):

The Jews, from the most ancient times, had three philosophies pertaining to their traditions, that of the Essenes, that of the Sadducees, and, thirdly, that of the group called the Pharisees. To be sure, I have spoken about them in the second book of *The Jewish War*, but nevertheless I shall dwell on them for a moment.

There is no reason to believe that most Jews belonged to any one of these groups; indeed, the whole motive for Josephus' description was to assert the existence of a fourth, anarchist philosophy, on which he tried to put the blame for the outbreak of the Jewish revolt against Rome, even though adherents of the 'fourth philosophy' are unattested in any other ancient source and play no role in the events preceding the outbreak of war as described by Josephus himself.¹⁶ On the other hand, the fact that *some* Jews could align themselves with a particular party was a distinctive development in post-biblical Judaism. The precise nature of the three groups described by Josephus is debated. Of the Pharisees, he says:

The Pharisees simplify their standard of living, making no concession to luxury. They follow the guidance of that which their doctrine has selected and transmitted as good, attaching the chief importance to the observance of those commandments which it has seen fit to dictate to them. They show respect and deference to their elders, nor do they rashly presume to contradict their proposals. Though they postulate that everything is brought about by fate, still they do not deprive the human will of the pursuit of what is in man's power, since it was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion and that the will of man with his virtue and vice should be admitted to the council-chamber of fate. They believe that souls have power to survive death and that there are rewards and punishments under the earth for those who have led lives of virtue or vice: eternal imprisonment is the lot of evil souls, while the good souls receive an easy passage to a new life. Because of these views they are, as a matter of fact, extremely influential among the townsfolk; and all prayers and sacred rites of divine worship are performed according to their exposition. This is the great tribute that the inhabitants of the cities, by practising the highest ideals both in their way of living and in their discourse, have paid to the excellence of the Pharisees.
(*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.12-15)

Josephus' evidence about Pharisees can be supplemented from the New Testament and rabbinic texts, but the testimonies of the different sources do not easily cohere.¹⁷ The Gospels have a picture of Pharisees as opponents of Jesus and as particularly zealous with regard to purity, tithing and the Sabbath (cf. Matthew 23); similar concerns are to be found ascribed by later rabbis to those named sages of the early to mid-first century AD seen by the rabbis to their forebears. However, such early sages were never described by the rabbis as Pharisees, and only one of them, Rabban Gamaliel, was described as a Pharisee in another source (Acts 5.34). When the rabbis referred specifically to Pharisees, they described their arguments against Sadducees over purity and the administration of the Temple cult. Josephus, who claimed to follow the teachings of the Pharisees with regard (at least) to public life (*Life* 12), ascribed an interest in purity and the Sabbath to Essenes, and in tithes to priests, but made no mention of such issues in his description of Pharisees. The only other writer known to have been a Pharisee at one time was St Paul (Philippians 3.5), and he also showed a striking lack of interest in purity, tithing and the Sabbath. It may be best to admit that the only certain fact

about Pharisees is that they existed as a self-conscious group and that they exercised a great deal of influence beyond the confines of that group, perhaps in part because (unlike Sadducees) they treated as sacred traditional behaviour thus in effect sanctifying and validating common custom. Of the Sadducees, Josephus writes:

The Sadducees hold that the soul perishes along with the body. They own no observance of any sort apart from the laws; in fact, they reckon it a virtue to dispute with the teachers of the path of wisdom that they pursue. There are but few men to whom this doctrine has been made known, but these are men of the highest standing. They accomplish practically nothing, however. For whenever they assume some office, though they submit unwillingly and perforce, yet submit they do to the formulas of the Pharisees, since otherwise the masses would not tolerate them.
(*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.16-17)

The name of Sadducees (in Hebrew, *tsadukim*) was connected to the name of the priest Zadok, but despite the gloss in Acts 5.17, which refers to the followers of the High Priest as Sadducees, there is no reason to suppose that most Sadducees were priests or most priests Sadducees, and the picture of the group given in rabbinic texts accords with that in Josephus: they interpreted the law without regard to custom, and hence could be harsh in their judgements (so Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 20.199, on the execution of James, the brother of Jesus).¹⁸

Josephus' description of the Essenes is huge in the version in *The Jewish War*, and disproportionately long even in the shorter version in the *Antiquities of the Jews*:

The doctrine of the Essenes is wont to leave everything in the hands of God. They regard the soul as immortal and believe that they ought to strive especially to draw near to righteousness. They send votive offerings to the Temple, but perform their sacrifices employing a different ritual of purification. ... Otherwise they are of the highest character, devoting themselves solely to agricultural labour. ... Moreover, they hold their possessions in common, and the wealthy man receives no more enjoyment from his property than the man who possesses nothing. ... Moreover, practise this way of life number more than four thousand. The men who into the community nor do they own slaves, since they believe that the latter practice contributes to injustice and that the former opens the way to a source of dissension. Instead they live by themselves and perform menial tasks for one another. They elect by show of hands good men to receive their revenues and the produce of the earth and priests to prepare bread and other food.
(*Antiquities of the Jews* 18.18-22)

The extraordinary attention paid to the Essene community by Josephus and Philo may be most plausibly ascribed to the desire of these authors to bring out the similarities between these ascetic regimes of this small group or groups and that of gentile philosophical sects such as Pythagoreans.¹⁹ The Essenes were the only Jewish group known to non-Jewish observers such as Pliny. The relationship between the Essenes and the Qumran sect which

produced the Dead Sea Scrolls is unknown: the similarities are striking, but there are also many small differences, and those who postulate identity have to allow for change over time or the existence of different kinds of Essenes (both quite plausible hypotheses, especially since in *The Jewish War* (2.160–61), Josephus referred to a second order of Essenes which countenanced the marriage of members). It may be thought preferable to treat the Qumran sect as a group previously totally unknown. It would in fact have been surprising if documents discovered by chance had fitted neatly into a full picture of Judaism in the early Roman period which itself is manufactured from a variety of very partial sources.²⁰

PHILO

In his summary of the Jewish philosophies, Josephus made no reference to Philo, although he knew of his existence – at *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.259, Philo is described as ‘not inept in philosophy’. A pious Jew from one of the leading families in the city in the first century AD, Philo was highly educated in Greek literature and Platonic philosophy. In his theological works he tried systematically to interpret the Bible as an esoteric allegory of Greek moral philosophy; he claimed this exercise to be a necessary corollary to, rather than substitute for, the literal interpretation of scripture. A brief quotation from the treatise *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, which survives mostly only in an Armenian translation of the Greek, may give a flavour of Philo’s extensive works:

(Gen. 16.2) Why does Sarah say to Abraham, ‘Behold, the Lord has closed me up so as not to bear. Go into my maidservant that thou mayest beget children from her?’

In the literal sense it is the same (as) not to be envious and jealous (but) to look out for the same wise man and husband and genuine kinsman. ... But as for the deeper meaning, it has somewhat the following argument. Those who are unable by the virtue to beget fine and praiseworthy deeds ought to pursue intermediate education, and in a certain sense produce children from the school studies, for wide learning is a sort of whetstone of the mind and reason.

Caution is, however, necessary in extrapolating from Philo’s evidence to the religion of the rest of the Jewish diaspora. Other Jewish Greek writers are known to have existed, but, of non-Christian Jewish authors, only Philo’s theology was sufficiently congenial to the Early Church to be extensively preserved; by the third century AD most of the rest of this literature was known to Clement of Alexandria and later patristic authors only in very fragmentary selective quotations from earlier, often non-Jewish, compilations, particularly that by Alexander Polyhistor.²¹ Unless the only special characteristic of Philo’s theology was the fact that it was written down, it is therefore unlikely that Philo’s theology was typical of Greek-speaking Jews.

DESTRUCTION OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE

The assumption which underlay these different forms of Judaism suffered a great jolt in AD 70 when the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed by Titus. The sacrificial cult had belonged to all Jews, hence the contribution by each adult male of an annual offering of half a shekel (see Figure 35) to pay for the purchase of sacrificial animals, a custom observed by diaspora Jews as well as those in Judaea (cf. Cicero, *In Defence of Flaccus* 28.66–69). The priests who performed the daily rituals preserved the relationship between God and Israel. The cessation of the cult was a blow even for those Jews who rarely or never visited the Temple themselves. The flood of Flavian propaganda which resulted in the destruction of the Temple, graphically displayed in the triumphal procession in Rome and later on the arch of Titus gave little hope for immediate restoration of the Temple.

And yet hope for such restoration must have been the first reaction of Jews to the disaster. The first Temple had been destroyed in 586 BC but was rebuilt uncommon in the Roman world. As Josephus’ description of Judaism in *Against Apion* makes clear, Josephus at least at the time of composition of the work (after AD 93) still assumed that sacrificial worship in Jerusalem was the main way for Jews to approach God:

We have but one temple for the one God (for like ever loveth like), common to all as God is common to all. The priests are continually engaged in his worship, under the leadership of him who for the time is head of the line. With his colleagues he will sacrifice to God, safeguard the laws, adjudicate in cases of dispute, punish those convicted of crime. Any who disobey him will pay the penalty as for impiety towards God himself. Our sacrifices are not occasions for drunken self-indulgence – such practices are abhorrent to God – but for sobriety. At these sacrifices prayers for the welfare of the community must take precedence over those for ourselves; for we are born for fellowship, and he who sets his claims above his private interests is specially acceptable to God.

(*Against Apion* 2.193–96)

Quite when such hopes began to fade is uncertain. The main reason for the refusal of Vespasian and Titus to permit such building must lie in their reliance on the capture of Jerusalem as justification to the Roman people for their seizure of power within the Roman state. Nerva and Trajan, who owed nothing to the Flavians and therefore had no need to continue their anti-Jewish policies, might have been expected to permit the rebuilding, and their refusal to do so must have been a severe blow, but even in the *Mishnah*, redacted in c. AD 200, rabbis discussed in great detail the way in which the sacrifices should be carried out, without any hint that their discussion was only theoretical.

It is also unlikely that the shock of the destruction would have brought to a sudden end the tolerance of variety within Judaism so characteristic of the

period before AD 70.²² In fact the description of the different types of Judaism given by Josephus was composed first in the AD 70s (in *The Jewish War*), but repeated in the 90s (in the *Antiquities of the Jews*), without any sign that these groups were now a thing of the past. Nothing more is heard after AD 70 of the allegorical interpretation of the Jewish texts favoured by Philo, but this silence may not be significant if it was simply a product of methods of transmission: by the end of the first century AD Jewish texts written in Greek ceased to be preserved by Christians, who now had their own literature, and since rabbis preserved only writings in Hebrew and Aramaic all further Jewish Greek literature was lost; that some such literature was composed in late antiquity is a reasonable surmise, since Greek remained the standard language of Jewish inscriptions in the western diaspora, and it is methodologically unsound to assume that any form of Judaism unmentioned in rabbinic texts cannot have existed.

RABBINIC JUDAISM

Among those who began gradually to adapt to the loss of their Temple were the rabbis. In fact this adaptation comprised a specific acceptance of changed circumstances; for instance, the rabbinic sages in the decades after AD 70 were said to have decreed that various rituals previously confined to the Temple precincts or to Jerusalem, such as the ceremonial blowing of a ram's horn on special occasions, could now be carried out elsewhere (the text in *Mishnah, Roḥ baShanah* 4.1 attributes the innovation to the leading rabbi of the first generation after the destruction, Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai), although there seems to have been no attempt to encourage sacrificial cult in places other than Jerusalem.²³ In other ways the rabbinic reaction was less direct. Rabbinic Judaism claimed descent from the revelation of the *Torah* to Moses on Mount Sinai by a continuous chain of tradition, as expressed in the programmatic introduction to the tractate *The Sayings of the Fathers* in the *Mishnah*:

Moses received the Law from Sinai and committed it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets committed it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgement, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the Law. Simeon the Just was of the remnants of the Great Synagogue. ... Antigonus of Soko received [the Law] from Simeon the Just. ... Jose ben Joezer of Zeredah and Jose ben Johanan of Jerusalem received [the Law] from them.
(*Mishnah, Aboth* chapter 1)

This claim to legitimacy through continuous tradition makes it hard to trace precisely the features of rabbinic religion which distinguished it from earlier forms of Judaism, but one of the most striking novel elements was the religious value accorded by rabbinic sages to the study of the *Torah* for its own sake: study came to be seen as a form of worship.²⁴

The early rabbinic texts are an esoteric form of literature, highly formulaic, and the records of rabbinic discussions preserved in the *Mishnah* and *Tosefta* involved only a small number of individuals in each generation of sages. It is thus debatable when rabbinic authority in the period after AD 70 spread beyond the confines of the rabbis themselves.²⁵ In the period before AD 132 after the Bar Kochba revolt mostly in Galilee. The specific cases in which rabbis were portrayed as judges almost all concerned very limited areas of religious law – issues involving purity, the food laws, the annulment of vows, the observance of fasts in time of drought, and so on – and the rabbinic texts themselves assume that rabbinic rulings were disregarded by the many Jews termed either neutrally *amnei haaretz* (those who do not fulfil rabbinic injunctions on purity and tithing) or in more hostile terms as *minim* (heretics). If rabbis had any influence at all outside their own circles, it may be because of their expertise in fixing the calendar. The task of announcing the beginning of months had been one of the functions of the Temple authorities, and the rabbis record no opposition to their arrogation of this role, which was significant for all Jews, since observance of, for instance, the Day of Atonement on the wrong day would be a grave sin. By the late fourth century AD the Roman state was to treat the most prominent of the rabbis, the patriarch (*nasi* in Hebrew, *patriarcha* in Latin), as the religious representative of all Jews within the empire, and some scholars have suggested that this recognition may have been accorded to earlier patriarchs soon after AD 70; but good evidence for such early recognition is lacking, and it is not obvious why the Roman government in AD 70, just after the destruction of the Temple, should have felt any need to treat any one Jew as the spokesman of the religion as a whole.²⁶