

University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Department of History  
Semester 1, 1983-84

History 572: Judaism and Hellenism

Mr. Sacks

Meetings I and II:

1. What are the types of institutions and cultural values important to the Greek and Jewish experiences?
2. What are the potential areas of harmony and conflict?

Meeting III:

1. What do we mean by Hellenistic Culture? What was its relationship to the indigenous populations of the Near East during the Third Century, B.C.?
2. How were the Jews affected by Seleucid and Ptolemaic policies and actions? Were the Jews forced to take sides, and, if so, which sides did they take?
3. Who were the Tobiads, and what was their role in understanding Third and Century Palestine and her relationship to Hellenistic culture?
4. How did Antiochus III treat the Jews of Palestine and why?

Meeting IV:

1. What are the dating and circumstances of the composition of Ecclesiastes?
2. What is its relationship to Hebrew, Egyptian and Near Eastern Wisdom literature? Is there a new departure within Koheleth's philosophy?
3. Is Koheleth influenced by Greek thought? If so, how? Does he seem to accept Greek ideas or is there evidence of rejection and/or syncretism?
4. Is Koheleth a hedonist? Is his philosophy a dead end or does he express reason for hope?

First Paper Topic: What are the types of institutions important to the Greek and Hebrew experience which, by the Third Century B.C., could potentially result in general harmony and/or conflict between the two civilizations? Pay particular attention to cultural values which could result in philosophical/religious syncretisms or reactions.

Meeting V:

1. What is "wisdom" to ben Sira and to the author(s) of Proverbs? How does it compare to that understood by Koholeth?
2. In general in Judaism, have there been to his time any changes in the notion of wisdom and in the teaching of wisdom?
3. What is Sira's advice to the Jewish gentleman?
4. How threatening is Hellenism to ben Sira? Does the threat loom larger for him than for Koheleth?
5. How does ben Sira reflect the cultural crisis of the early Second Century, B.C., in Palestine?

Meeting VI:

1. What is the political and economic status of Jews in Alexandria down to c. 150? How does their position compare to that of the Egyptians and Greeks?
2. Is there any evidence of Egyptian or Greek anti-Semitism or racial tension during this period? Include any evidence of negative portrayals of the Jews in Greco-Egyptian literature.
3. If so, what conditions and factors are the cause of such a situation?

## Meeting VII:

1. What kinds of materials compose the Jewish apologetics and what are their main purposes?
2. How does Jewish apologetic literature relate to the sacred literature in the Bible?  
Is it factually consistent with Biblical writings?  
Does it represent a continuation of the "holy word"?
3. Are there any indications that this material reflects the influence of Hellenism? In what way?

Second Paper Topic: Compare and contrast the lives (as we conjecture them) and works of Koheleth and ben Sira: what do they perceive to be the main social and cultural problems of their day and how do they propose to deal with them.

## Meeting VIII:

1. What are the circumstances in which the Septuagint was created? What is the purpose of the LXX: who was it aimed at, and what, if any, was its immediate effect?
2. How accurately does Aristeas describe the process of the creation of the LXX?
3. What are the circumstances and purpose of the Letter of Aristeas? What is his message and who is he aiming it at?

## Meeting IX:

1. What is the chronology of 170-167, and why is the order of events important for our understanding of the responsibility for the war? Do the Book of Daniel and material in Josephus affect the interpretation of the events recounted in I and II Maccabees?
2. Why did Antiochus IV impose his policy of Hellenisation on the Jews of Palestine?
3. What did Judah Maccabee hope to accomplish from the time of Lysias' concessions in 163/2 until his own death in 161? Who were his friends, and who were his enemies?

## Meeting X:

1. What was the aim of Hasmonean imperialism and what was the Hasmonean policy toward the Seleucid monarch?
2. What were the sources for Jewish support of and antagonism towards the Hasmonean monarchy?
3. How lasting were the anti-Hellenistic reforms in Palestine? What evidence of Hellenistic influence can be found within the Hasmonean dynasty?

Third Paper Topic: It states in Deuteronomy that, because of the enslavement of the Hebrews by Pharaoh, the Jews are subsequently forbidden to go to Egypt. Yet by the third and second centuries, B.C., they are back in great numbers--why? From the material that we've read, did they consider themselves well off in Egypt, spiritually and materially? What attempts did they make to convince themselves and others that they were?

## Meeting XI:

1. What is the meaning of Daniel's work?
2. What is apocalyptic and how does it differ from prophetic literature and thought?
3. What, if any, is the influence of Near Eastern and/or Greek thought on Jewish apocalyptic thought?
4. What are the historical circumstances which give rise to such thinking in Daniel's time?

## Meeting XII:

1. From our reading of the past two meetings on the Maccabees and from this week on the Pharisees, who were the Hasidim and what role did they play in the rebellion during the decade of the 160's?
2. What are the main tenants of the Pharisees?--
  - their social composition
  - their religious and philosophical outlooks
  - how do these compare for those of the Sadducees?
3. From the readings for last meeting (X) and this week, what roles do the Pharisees and Sadducees play in Jewish history during the second half of the Second Century, B.C.?
4. How did the Hellenistic reforms of 175-167 and the subsequent Maccabean rebellion affect the major outlooks of Judaism?
  - Who carried on with Hellenism and how?
  - Who opposed Hellenism and how?
  - Were the issues the same for the period of 160-104 as there were for earlier decade of the 160's?

## Questions for Week XIII:

1. What is the main purposes of the Wisdom of Solomon?
2. How does the concept of wisdom within this work compare with that in Koheleth and ben Sira?
3. How does the concept(s) of resurrection and/or apocalypse compare with such thoughts in Daniel?
4. What, if any, are the main lines of Greek influence on the work?

Last Paper Topic:

You are a Jew named Mattathias, living in Palestine in 100 B.C. and writing to your long-lost cousin, Aristobulus, who lives in Alexandria. Aristobulus' family moved to Egypt in about 200 B.C., and his sons now attend the gymnasium. He has written you because your fellow Jews of Palestine are asking Alexandrian Jews to celebrate the holiday commemorating Judah Maccabee's rededication of the Temple on 25 Kislev, 164 (the modern holiday of Hanukkah). He has doubts about this new holiday and wants to know from you why Jews should be celebrating a victory over Hellenism---for the Greek way has been good to him. He does not understand why you don't simply say blessings on behalf of the emperor and read your Bible in Greek as he does. He has also heard that Palestinian Judaism has changed in strange ways since his grandfather left for Egypt---such as the establishment of peculiar sects and the belief in an apocalypse. He does not understand these or why they should have arisen. In short, he does not know why you are so openly resisting of Hellenism and why you've changed your religion so much. What do you tell him?