

A HISTORY OF THE JEWS
IN BABYLONIA

A HISTORY OF THE JEWS
IN BABYLONIA
I. The Parthian Period

by

Jacob Neusner

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401

A History of the Jews in Babylonia, Part 1
The Parthian Period
By Neusner, Jacob
Copyright©1999 by Neusner, Jacob
ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-074-0
Publication date 7/2/2008
Previously published by Scholars Press, 1999

To
Richard N. Frye
and
Morton Smith

Rātih i pat gōwišn hān kē hač har frārōn-dānišn u
ākāsih i.š mat ēstēt ō arzānikān āmōzēt...

Est généreux en parole celui qui enseigne à ceux
qui en sont dignes toute la sagesse supérieure et
toutes les connaissances qu'il a acquises.

Škand Gumanik Vičar I, 50.
Trans. P. J. de Menasce.

By the same author:

A Life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Ca. 1-80 C.E., Leiden, 1962:
E. J. Brill, *Studia Post-biblica* VI.

Fellowship in Judaism: The First Century and Today, London,
1963: Vallentine, Mitchell & Co. Ltd.

History and Torah: Essays on Jewish Learning, London, 1965:
Vallentine, Mitchell and Co. Ltd., and N.Y. 1965, 1967: Schocken
Books.

A History of the Jews in Babylonia, II. The Early Sasanian Period,
Leiden, 1966: E. J. Brill, *Studia Post-biblica* XI.

A History of the Jews in Babylonia, III. From Shapur I to Shapur
II, Leiden, 1968: E. J. Brill, *Studia Post-biblica*.

A History of the Jews in Babylonia, IV. The Age of Shapur II,
Leiden, 1968: E. J. Brill, *Studia Post-biblica* XIV.

CONTENTS

	page
Preface	IX
Preface to Second Printing, Revised	XVI
Chronology	XIX
List of Abbreviations	XXII
I From Mithridates I to Orodes II, Ca. 140-40 b.c.e.	1
i. Babylonia	1
ii. Survival of Babylonian Civilization	3
iii. Greeks in Babylonia	6
iv. Jews in Babylonia	10
v. Parthians in Babylonia	15
vi. Parthians and Jews	23
vii. Summary	31
II From Phraates IV to Vologases I, Ca. 40 b.c.e. to 79 c.e.	34
i. Herod and Babylonian Jewry	34
ii. Hillel	39
iii. Zamaris	41
iv. Babylonian Jewry and Jerusalem	44
v. Judah ben Bathyra in Nisibis	46
vi. Nehemiah of Bet Deli in Nchardea	52
vii. Jewish Self-Government in First-Century Babylonia	53
viii. The Conversion of Adiabene	61
ix. Babylonian Jewry and the War of 66-73	67
x. Summary	70
III From Pacorus II to Artabanus V, Ca. 80-227 c.e.	74
i. Babylonian Jewry and Parthian Foreign Policy	74
ii. The Revolt Against Trajan. Babylonian Jewry and Bar Kokhba's War	76
iii. Rabbi Nathan and Preparations for the Invasion of Vologases III	79
iv. The Third and Fourth "Jewish Wars Against Rome," Ca. 161-165 and 193-197	86
v. Rabbi Judah the Prince and Ardavan V, Ca. 215-216	88
vi. Babylonian Jews in International Commerce	94
vii. Babylonian Jews and Parthian Culture	100
viii. Jewish Self-Government in Second-Century Babylonia: To the Time of Rabbi Judah the Prince	103
ix. Exilarch and Patriarch at the End of the Second Century	107
x. Summary	119

IV	The Tannaitic Movement in Babylonia, 70-226 c.e.	122
i.	Ḥananiah the Nephew of Rabbi Joshua in Nehar Pekod .	122
ii.	Rabbi Judah ben Bathyra (II) in Nisibis	130
iii.	The Students of Rabbi Akiba in Nisibis	134
iv.	R. Josiah and R. Jonathan, Students of R. Ishmael, and R. Nathan in Huzal	137
v.	Babylonian Tannaitic Contemporaries of Rabbi Judah the Prince	144
vi.	Babylonian Judaism at the End of the Tannaitic Period: Schools, Courts, Curriculum	156
vii.	Summary	172

Appendix

I	Seleucid, Parthian, and Roman Rulers	178
II	Christianity East of the Euphrates	180
III	Classical Views of Tannaitic Judaism in Babylonia and a New Hypothesis	184
IV	On Rav's Ordination	188
V	Tannaim and the Davidic Line	190
VI	Literary Remnants of Huzal, Ca. 135-150 c.e.	192
VII	The Problem of Joseph the Babylonian	201
	Bibliography	204
	Index of Talmud Passages Cited	227
	Index	233

List of Maps

I	The Middle East in Parthian Times	between 12 and 13
II	Babylonia	35
III	Jewish Sites in Babylonia and Mesopotamia	between 108 and 109
IV	Jewish Sites in Babylonia (detailed map)	123

PREFACE

The study of any aspect of Near and Middle Eastern history presents formidable obstacles. The civilizations of the region exhibited both mosaic and palimpsest qualities. An extraordinary variety of peoples, languages, and cultures, both indigenous and imported, flourished side by side. In the long succession of world empires, peoples were shifted from place to place, and new political and cultural forms were superimposed upon antecedent traditions. Questions of origins, influences, and survivals from an earlier period to a much later one require consideration of three thousand and more years of continuous historical settlement. One period cannot always easily be defined apart from, or against, earlier or later ones. Furthermore, few scholars can be prepared to cope with the area over its long development, or, alas, even at a single point in it, for mastery of the languages and literatures indispensable for comparative and integrated inquiry is exceedingly difficult to attain. A careful definition of my purpose will, I hope, sufficiently limit this inquiry to render it both defensible and useful.

Here I begin the task of writing a history of the Jews in Babylonia under the Arsacid and Sasanid empires. My plan is to synthesize existing knowledge of the subject and, at a number of points, to add to that synthesis. Since the Jewish sources (apart from Josephus) are neither widely known nor, by those who know them, historically interpreted, I have not hesitated to cite extensively the relevant Talmudic documents. On the other hand, I have not revised the scholarly consensus on Parthian matters in any significant way, and therefore do not consider in detail numerous, well-known facts, e.g., of Parthian-Roman relations, of Parthian dynastic history, or Parthian and Mesopotamian-Babylonian cultural history. These are cited where relevant, with bibliographical references provided for those who want to pursue such questions further. In general, a knowledge of the works on political history of Wolski, Debevoise, Rawlinson, and (for Palestine), Schürer, and, on cultural history, of Rostovtzeff, Tarn, McDowell, Widengren, and Frye, all cited in the bibliography, will be useful to

the reader. I believe that brief citations and summaries of these and other writers will suffice for my purposes. Extensive studies on Jewish history in Parthia simply do not exist. Only a few historians have given serious attention to the Jews in the Parthian empire, and these have mainly ignored Parthian history to concentrate on internal developments. I have found very useful the writings of Yavetz, Halevy and Zuri and, on specific matters, others such as Brüll and Lazarus, cited below. Since most Jewish historians (Dubnow, Graetz, Weiss, Krauss, etc.) have taken at face value the Talmudic tradition that before Rav came to Babylonia (ca. 220 c.e.), there were no significant religious or cultural developments, and since Halevy, Zuri and Yavetz do not give coherent and detailed accounts, or discuss the Parthian background of Jewish history, I believe that a contribution to our understanding of Babylonian Jewry in the Parthian period is possible.

In general, my work is in the tradition of several scholars who began approximately thirty years ago to reconsider the whole question of Parthian political and cultural history. Echoing the attitude of the classical historians, earlier scholars had viewed the Arsacid period as one in which declining Hellenistic culture was replaced by decadent barbarism. The Parthians were, in the opinion of earlier writers, never well-governed, if they were governed at all; they added nothing to, and changed nothing in, human civilization. Likewise, Krauss said, the "uncivilized" Parthians "of course" could not influence the religion or history of the Jews in their empire. Rostovtzeff and Tarn first pointed out, however, that the Parthians played an extremely important role in Near Eastern history, and that evidences of an original and creative cultural enterprise are in fact available. (We shall return to this question in Chapter One.) Here I want to add to the consensus on Parthia that the history and culture of the Babylonian Jews reveal substantial development under the Parthians, and that Arsacid rule did not mark a period of stagnation, but of considerable creativity among the Jews.

The main reason that Parthia has fared so poorly at the hands of posterity is the paucity of sources. Our information comes mainly from Greek and Latin writers. They were interested in Parthia only at the specific points at which Parthia interested Rome. Their comments on Parthian political and cultural affairs were based not infrequently on second-hand information, occidental disdain for the alien orientals, or Roman political propaganda. Further information, from coins, archaeological remains, and the like, is frequently con-

jectural. There are long spaces of time, for example at the end of the third century b.c.e., and again in parts of the first and second centuries c.e., for which little or no clear information remains. Furthermore the Sasanid Iranians did not choose to preserve traditions on the Arsacids, and the Greek and Parthian sources were irrevocably lost, because no one saw fit to keep them. We know of substantial writings on Parthia, such as those of the "Trogus source" of Justin, Apollodorus of Artemita, Arrian, and Dio, which were available to ancient writers but are not, except in fragments, to us. Those who did preserve literature had little interest in Parthia, and the remains of Arsacid history in the Armenian and Syriac writers do not reflect clear light on Parthia, being garbled and inconsistent.

The same difficulty affects the writing of Jewish history. While I shall try to show that certain limited parts of Talmudic literature originated in Babylonian Jewry during this period, I have otherwise been unable to find any Talmudic sayings, stories, or the like, introduced into Jewish tradition in Babylonia during the Tannaitic period. I had to begin by isolating the names of all Tannaim who had any connection at all with Babylonian Jewry before 226 (in this, Halevy and Zuri were extremely helpful), and collecting all sayings related to them in Talmudic literature. On such a basis, sequential and narrative history is not easily written. Just as the later Iranian traditions denigrated the religious and political achievements of the Arsacids, so the later Amoraic traditions, both in Palestine and in Babylonia, are almost silent on Babylonian Jewry under the Arsacids, though occasionally an extravagant claim, with little to support it, is made in behalf of one or another of the Babylonian Tannaim (Hillel, Hiyya and his sons).

Religions in the Parthian period, specifically, the various types of religion within the Mazdayasnian 'idiom,' have been much discussed, particularly as they allegedly influenced Palestinian Judaism. I do not believe that the influence of Iran on Israelite religion has been definitively delineated. Distinctions between good and evil, light and dark, elaborate angelologies, emphasis on ritual purity, and the like, which we find in Palestinian Jewish sources, may have more than one point of origin. They do not by themselves indicate the presence of Iranian ideas. Furthermore, such questions are mainly important for Palestine, and not for Babylonia, during this period, simply because we know too little about Babylonian Judaism to isolate Iranian elements. Given the ambiguity of the religious evidence, the political and social reconstruction must be prior. What it yields may make possible for the first

time a reliable interpretation of religious data. Therefore, while I have consulted studies on the Jewish response to Zoroastrianism, I have not discussed this matter.

The divisions of this study were imposed by the nature of available information. For the period from the Parthians' conquest of Babylonia, ca. 140 b.c.e., to their brief rule in Jerusalem, ca. 40 b.c.e., there is not a single direct reference to Babylonian Jewry, though considerable information is available about the Parthians in Palestine. I have therefore discussed the few references to relationships between Parthians and Jews, mainly in the west, and tried to infer occasionally what the situation of Babylonian Jewry may have been. The second period, from ca. 40 b.c.e. to the end of the reign of Vologases I, 79 c.e., forms a coherent division. It was marked at the outset by political anarchy, and closed with manifest trends toward the reorganization both of the Arsacid state and of the Jewish community, the latter date coinciding approximately with the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. For the third period, from the reorganization of the Arsacid empire to its fall, we have considerable information about the Jews, and are able to follow the growth of both political and cultural-religious institutions. The final chapter traces the growth of Tannaitic Judaism in Babylonia during the same period, providing information on Tannaim who lived there for some part of their lives.

A number of major themes in Parthian-Jewish history emerge clearly. It will be useful to delineate them here, so that the reader will find it easier to follow them in the chapters in which they occur.

The first is the theme of the Parthian and Babylonian Jewish *entente cordiale*, beginning in the time of John Hyrcanus at the end of the second century b.c.e., and marked by significant action in the next three centuries. The basis for this apparent agreement is outlined, and its continuing relevance explained, in Chapter One, Section vi; Chapter Two, Section vii; and Chapter Three, Sections i, ii, iii, iv, and v. Its effects will be noted throughout. There can be no doubt whatever that the Parthian government and the Jewish community of Babylonia, and part of that in Palestine as well, worked together consistently, frequently, and in substantial and important ways to oppose Seleucid and then Roman hegemony in the Mesopotamian valley.

The second is the theme of the growth of Jewish institutions of self-government in Babylonia. I propose to date the effective beginning of the institution of the exilarchate in the years following the rise of Vologases I. Before that time, there is evidence that some Jews found a significant place in Parthian feudal politics. After it, there can be

no question that a formal and recognized position was achieved by a Jewish ethnarch. The issue is treated in Chapter Two, Section vii, and Chapter Three, Sections viii and ix, with significant material bearing on the theme in Chapter Two, Sections iii and vii, and Chapter Three, Sections vi and vii.

A third continuing theme concerns the complex relationships between the Palestinian Jewish center and the Babylonian diaspora. We must take account of the interests of both communities, both those interests held in common, such as the cult in Jerusalem, study and transmission of the Mosaic revelation, and the profitable opportunities open to an international community settled on both sides of a fluctuating and contested frontier, as well as interests tending to set one group off from the other. These latter include, on the Mesopotamian side, the need to develop autonomous instruments of politics and culture, and to preserve independence, in political matters, from the Palestinians; and on the Palestinian side, the need to enlist the power of the diaspora community in its struggle with Rome, and the absolute determination to exert as much authority and influence as was possible over world Jewry. These themes occur in Chapter Two, Sections i, iv, v, vi, ix; Chapter Three, Sections ii, iv, vi, ix; and Chapter Four, Sections ii, v, and vi.

A fourth theme, treated in Chapter One, Sections iii and iv; Chapter Two, Sections iii and viii; and Chapter Three, Sections vi and vii, is the relationship of the Jews to Parthian culture. I have been impressed by the evidences that some Jews in Mesopotamia did, in fact, assimilate aspects of Parthian culture, including its feudal politics, and have considered this evidence whenever it became available.

A fifth theme is the gradual, but in the second century c.e. extremely rapid, growth of Pharisaic-Tannaitic Judaism in Babylonia. The central issue recognized by most students of Tannaitic Judaism in Babylonia is whether there was an "Oral Torah" in Babylonia before the coming of Rav. I believe it is here answered definitively in the affirmative. The classical views are traced in Appendix III, and the parallel phenomenon of the spread of Christianity is alluded to in Chapter Two, Section v, and discussed in Appendix II. I am not certain what, exactly, was the content of Pharisaic-Tannaitic Judaism in the Babylonian academies, though in Appendix VI and in Chapter Four, Section vi, a contribution is made toward defining it where possible. There is every likelihood that further study of the legal sayings of Rav and Samuel will yield much more information, though I have postponed that study to a future volume. On the other hand, we have substantial

information on the Tannaim who brought that tradition to the east, and cultivated it there, on the institutions they developed for its transmission, and on some of the students they trained. This information is in Chapter Two, Sections v and vi; Chapter Three, Sections iii, viii, and ix; and Chapter Four, Sections i, ii, iii, iv, and v; and Appendix VI. The reader may find some biographical sections rather tedious, yet I know of no better way of presenting extant information on men than by biographical categories. I wish that it were possible better to integrate this information into the historical narrative, and, of course, considerable biographical data have been so integrated, in Chapter Two, Sections ii, v, vi; Chapter Three, Sections iii, v, vi, viii, and ix; and Chapter Four, Section vi. Yet more of it, perhaps too much, remains discrete. Finally, I must emphasize that substantial discussions are devoted to problems I have been unable adequately to solve; these occur throughout.

Having noted the recurrence of these themes, the reader will doubtless ask why the writer chose to present this history chronologically rather than thematically. The answer is that I believe the first task of the historian to be the recovery of order and sequence. An interpretive essay may follow, but at the outset of a new inquiry, one needs to find out *just what happened*, and history is best understood when we see what came first and what came afterward. Nonetheless, I recognize that the reader may not find his task simple. He will find distressingly few final and definitive statements, and a large portion of conjecture, hypothesis, and sheer *post facto* interpretation. Given the nature of the sources, I do not believe I could have done otherwise. We know, as I have said above, very little. When sources are few, conjecture multiplies, as indeed it must. Furthermore, the reader may find tedious the relatively lengthy presentation of relevant Jewish sources, followed by hypothesis and historical interpretation. I could justify no other form. There are two stages in historical inquiry, as in archaeology. The first is to uncover the site; the second, to restore it. These stages must be kept separate, so that the artifacts may be studied and then brought together again, in a state closer to their original and living condition than that in which they were uncovered. In history also one needs to uncover and examine before one is able to restore and recreate. Here I have begun the first stage. I could not have written indicatively, therefore, when my evidence was doubtful and my interpretation of it conjectural, and hence the recurrent use of the subjunctive mood in its many forms. I have tried to find language appropriate to the level of

historical knowledge which I believe to have been reached. There may be better ways, but this is the only one congruent to my understanding of the historian's craft.

I am thankful to the Philip W. Lown Institute of Advanced Judaic Studies at Brandeis University, and to its director, Professor Alexander Altmann, for providing a two-year research associateship in which I was able to complete my research. Dr. Charles Berlin of the Harvard College Library offered important bibliographical assistance, for which I am much indebted. Professors Richard N. Frye, Harvard University, and Morton Smith, Columbia University, gave many critical comments, though whatever deficiencies the study may contain are, of course, mine alone.

Finally, my wife, Suzanne, drew Map I. To her are due thanks for this, and so much else.

JACOB NEUSNER

Hanover, New Hampshire
29 Elul 5724
6 September 1964

PREFACE TO THE SECOND PRINTING, REVISED

I am deeply grateful to my publisher, E. J. Brill, for granting the opportunity to make revisions in preparation for the second printing, and to friends who have pointed out errors in the first printing. Chief among these is Professor Morton Smith, who carefully corrected and commented upon every line. Professor Saul Lieberman pointed out my egregious error of thinking that R. Jonathan b. Eliezer's conversations with R. Ḥiyya involved R. Ḥiyya the Great. The R. Ḥiyya was R. Ḥiyya b. Abba, and neither he nor R. Jonathan b. Eliezer had any connection with Parthian Babylonia. Professor Moshe Ber provided references to several articles I had not seen. I have made all the changes proposed by these gracious colleagues. In the first printing appeared numerous typographical and other errors in proof-reading and transliteration. These have been corrected to the best of my ability. Major changes include the deletion of pp. 177-8 of the first printing, "Appendix Six: The Problem of 'Our Rabbis in the South.'" Upon reflection I have decided that that appendix made no substantial contribution toward a solution of the problem, which continues to puzzle me, and did not warrant inclusion in further editions of the book. I have added summaries at the end of each chapter. These are intended not only to provide a clearer perspective on the data, but also to separate the few facts from the many conjectures and hypotheses. The summary section of Chapter Four contains a wholly new thesis. To Chapter Four section vi I have added an evaluation of the data pertaining to a possible Babylonian Jewish mystical tradition. To Appendix III is appended a new hypothesis, which suggests itself on account of later research. I have modified numerous statements; these occur throughout, but in particular in Chapter One, sections iv and vi (in the latter case on account of the excellent criticism of Professor Ben Zion Wacholder); Chapter Two, section v; Chapter Three, sections vi, viii; Chapter Four, sections i, v, vi; and Appendix III.

Professor Willard G. Oxtoby correctly points out (*JBL* 85, 1, 1966, p. 124) that I have not paid attention to the Iranian influences allegedly revealed by the Essene library of Qumran. I refrained from doing so for three reasons. First, I share the view of Professor Gershom G. Scholem that dualistic speculation may have developed as an inner

process within monotheism.¹ He states, "I still believe that a development of ethical and anthropological speculation could have occurred within Judaism. Perhaps it was a development of the rabbinical doctrine of the *Yetzer*, the good inclination and the bad inclination in men. The evidence for this theory is as good as, if not better than, the evidence for Iranian origins." Further, he points out, "The psychology of ontological dualism is Greek, not Iranian. Why for a concept of light versus darkness do we have to go further than the symbolism in Genesis and Isaiah? Could not ontological dualism have been a development of biblical theology and terminology in Jewish heretical minds, perhaps even before rabbinical Judaism took form?"² So I am not yet persuaded that the Iranian component of Qumranian religion has yet been neatly assessed. Professor David Winston, "The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran. A Review of the Evidence," *History of Religion* 5, 2, 1966, 183-216, provides a helpful discussion of the matter. Second, I believe that the researches of Professor Geo Widengren have contributed as sound a study of Iranian motifs at Qumran as we are likely to have at this time, and did not choose to repeat his efforts. These are found, most recently, in his "Iran and Israel in Parthian Times with Special Regard to the Ethiopic Book of Enoch," *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion Presented by Scholars in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden*, 2, 1966, 139-177, which supplements the earlier "Quelques rapports entre Juifs et Iraniens à l'époque des Parthes," *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 4, 1957, 197ff., and *Iranisch-semitische Kulturbegegnung in Parthischer Zeit*, Cologne, 1958, *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Forschung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen*, vol. 70. Third and most important, I have found so little evidence about the condition of Babylonian Judaism in Parthian times that I did not know what to make of supposed Palestinian-Iranian contacts. It may be convincingly argued that if Palestinian Judaism exhibited considerable Iranian influence, as may have been the case, then how much the more must Babylonian Judaism have been shaped by Parthian religion. One may thus argue, but having done so, I see no substantive consequences in the absence of literary or other sources to be illuminated by such an argument. Moreover, I am not at all persuaded that we have a clear picture of the condition of the Parthian cult and mythology. The

¹ In *Report of the 1965-1966 Seminar on Religions in Antiquity*, Comparative Studies Center, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, 1966, pp. 139-145.

² *Ibid.*, 143-4.

noteworthy absence of a noon-hour in Zaehner's excellent *Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* (London, 1961) is hardly an accident, given the searching and thorough character of his researches. It is rather that our present evidence permits few significant judgments. Whether the Parthians were Zurvanites, as Widengren proposes in *Die Religionen Irans* (Stuttgart, 1965 pp. 222-229, and see further pp. 174-242), I cannot say. In any event, I have focused upon a narrow period in the history of Babylonian Jewry and Judaism, and believe the present advantages of such a limitation greatly outweigh the disadvantages.

Free time for preparing this revised edition was provided by the Dartmouth College Faculty Fellowship which I held in 1966-1967. That Fellowship is but one of the very many ways in which Dartmouth College has facilitated my studies. I take this occasion to express my thanks.

Thanks are due to my student, Rabbi Robert Goldenberg, who kindly helped in the correction of proofs.

J. N.

14 Nisan 5727

24 April 1967

CHRONOLOGY

I. To the End of the First Century c.e.

- 141 b.c.e. – Mithridates I took Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.
129 b.c.e. – John Hyrcanus fought Parthia as an ally of Antiochus VII Sidetes.
122 b.c.e. – Mithridates II established permanently the rule of Parthia in Babylonia.
Ca. 85 b.c.e. – Parthian embassy came to Jerusalem to make an alliance with Alexander Jannaeus against Tigranes II of Armenia.
Ca. 83-69 b.c.e. – Palestine a tributary dependency of Armenia. Tigranes deported Jews from Palestine to Tigranocerta.
53 b.c.e. – Romans defeated decisively by Parthia at Carrhae.
53-50 b.c.e. – Parthian raids on Syria.
40-37 b.c.e. – Parthians took Jerusalem, drove out Herod, and established Antigonus on the throne.
Ca. 35-30 b.c.e. – Hyrcanus returned to Jerusalem from Parthia; Herod appointed a Babylonian Jew as high priest.
Ca. 20-10 b.c.e. – Hillel migrated from Babylonia to Palestine.
Ca. 20-10 b.c.e. – Zamaris and his retainers fled from Parthia, were resettled by Herod in Trachanea, and founded Bathyra.
Ca. 20-35 c.e. – Anileus and Asineus established a Jewish state in Babylonia.¹
Ca. 30-40 c.e. – Conversion of Adiabene's royal family to Judaism.
Ca. 30-70 c.e. – Judah ben Bathyra (I) lived in Nisibis, collected Temple offerings in northern Mesopotamia as agent of Jerusalem authorities.
Ca. 50 c.e. – Nehemiah of Bet Deli settled in Babylonia.
60 c.e. – Death of Izates, coronation of Monobazes II.
70 c.e. – Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.
79 c.e. – Death of Vologases I.

II. Political Events in the Second Century c.e.

- 114-117 – Trajan's invasion of Parthia, resisted by Jews throughout northern Mesopotamia, including Adiabene.
129 – Hadrian pacified the Parthian frontier.
132-135 – Bar Kokhba War.

¹ See pp. 54-55.

- Ca. 150-155 – Conspiracy of R. Nathan and R. Meir against the Patriarch R. Simeon b. Gamaliel.
 161-165 – Vologases III fought a war against Rome, lost Ctesiphon.
 193-199 – War of Parthia against Rome.
 Ca. 190-200 – R. Ishmael b. R. Yosi and R. Eleazar b. R. Simeon handed over to the Romans Palestinian Jewish “brigands”.

III. The Exilarchate in the Second Century c.e.

- Ca. 50-79 – Parthian reorganization of the empire, including consideration of the “Jewish question.”
 Ca. 100-135 – R. Nathan’s father acted as Jewish authority, wearing the kamara.
 Ca. 145 – R. Hananiah intercalated the Jewish calendar in Babylonia, forced to retract by the Palestinian patriarch supported by Babylonians.
 Ca. 155 – R. Yosi b. Kefar and R. Dosethai b. R. Yannai were forced to submit to the authority of Babylonian Jewish officials bearing Iranian names and wearing Iranian dress.
 Ca. 140-170 – Exilarchate of Nahum/Nehemiah/Yoḥanan/Shafat.
 Ca. 170-210 – Exilarchate of R. Huna/‘Anan.

IV. Religious and Cultural Events in the Second Century c.e.

[All dates are approximate]

- Ca. 70-130 — R. Hananiah the nephew of R. Joshua and R. Judah b. Bathyra (II) in Mesopotamia-Babylonia, the former in Nehardea, the latter in Nisibis.
 Ca. 135 – Students of R. Akiba fled to Nisibis, studied with R. Judah b. Bathyra for approximately a decade, returned to Palestine
 Ca. 140-145, participated in the consistory of Usha.
 Ca. 135 – Students of R. Ishmael, R. Josiah, R. Jonathan fled to Babylonia, settled in Huṣal and founded an academy there.
 Ca. 135-150 – R. Josiah, R. Jonathan, and R. Nathan studied together in Huṣal; beginning of the Mekhilta tractates Pisha and Nezikin.
 150-160 – Death of R. Hananiah the nephew of R. Joshua.
 160-170 – Death of R. Judah b. Bathyra (II).
 160-220 – Huṣal academy continued to flourish; students included

- R. Aḥai b. Josiah, Isi b. Judah, possibly also Yosi b. Kefar, Dosethai b. R. Yannai, R. Ḥiyya, Rav, and Samuel.¹
- 180 – R. Ḥiyya, sons Ḥezekiah and Judah, nephews Rav and Rabba b. Ḥana migrated to Palestine.
- 180-230 – Levi b. Sisi and Abba b. Abba, father of Samuel, flourished.
- 180-190 – R. Ḥanina b. Ḥama studied in Babylonia with R. Hamnuna the Scribe of Babylonia.
- 217 – Death of R. Judah the Prince.
- 220-230 – Permanent settlement of Rav in Babylonia.

¹ I must stress that these dates are approximate, and by no means satisfactory. They would suggest that the Tannaim lived on the average of seventy or eighty years, which would be remarkable. They should, therefore, be understood as the years *within which* the several Tannaim were likely to have lived, but I can offer no better chronologies at this time.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AJSL	=	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures
AO	=	Acta Orientalia
ArcO	=	Archiv Orientalni
Bab. Talmud	=	Babylonian Talmud (sometimes, TB)
BOR	=	Babylonian and Oriental Record
BSOS	=	Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies, London
CAH	=	Cambridge Ancient History
CPJ	=	Corpus Papyrorum Judaicorum, ed. Tcherikover and Fuks
HUCA	=	Hebrew Union College Annual
IA	=	Iranica Antiqua
IEJ	=	Israel Exploration Journal
JA	=	Journal Asiatique
JaJGL	=	Jahrbücher für Jüdische Geschichte und Literatur
JaJLG	=	Jahrbuch der jüdisch. Literatur Gesellschaft
JAOS	=	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	=	Journal of Biblical Literature
JE	=	Jewish Encyclopedia
JJS	=	Journal of Jewish Studies
JNES	=	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JQR	=	Jewish Quarterly Review
JR	=	Journal of Religion
JRAS	=	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society
JRS	=	Journal of Roman Studies
MDO	=	Mitteil. der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
MGWJ	=	Monatschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums
MO	=	Monde Oriental
MWJ	=	Magazin für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums
PAAJR	=	Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research
Pope	=	A. U. Pope, <i>Survey of Persian Art</i> , New York, 1938, Vol. I.
REJ	=	Revue des Etudes Juives
RHR	=	Revue de l'Histoire de Religions
RSO	=	Revista degli Studi Orientali
WDOG	=	Wissenschaftliche Veröffentl. der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft
WZKM	=	Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes
Yer. Talmud	=	Palestinian Talmud (sometimes, TP)
ZDMG	=	Zeitschrift der deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft
ZNW	=	Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft

All Hebrew articles are listed by English title, the journal notation indicating that the article appeared in Hebrew. Hebrew journals quoted include the following:

Bizaron
Horeb
Sinai
Tarbiz
Zion (Ziyyon)

The translation of titles of Hebrew books is listed immediately afterward in brackets.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM MITHRIDATES I TO ORODES II

Ca. 140-40 b.c.e.

I. BABYLONIA

Babylonia was one of the most prosperous regions of the ancient Middle East. The Euphrates-Tigris river system, rising in the Armenian highlands of Asia Minor, assured a constant, if, in the case of the Tigris, turbulent, supply of water. The current of both rivers was swift, the Euphrates dropping 800 feet between Anatolia and the Seleucia-Ctesiphon (Baghdad) region, and the Tigris, nearly 1,000. Both rivers are at their lowest in September and October, and rise from December to the summer months. The lower Mesopotamian valley is extremely flat, alternating between marshland and low mud plains. Much of the region is now undisturbed swamp. Shallow lakes cover a large part of the Babylonian land-area. The climate is intensely hot in summer (May-October), and relatively cold and damp in winter (December-March). During the summer, shade temperatures range from 95 to 120 degrees F., although away from the rivers and lakes, the air is not particularly humid. Rainfall occurs only during the winter.¹

Agriculture in the area was very prosperous. Babylonia was the granary of the Achemenids, according to Herodotus returning 3000-fold on plantings of barley, and 50 to 150-fold of wheat. It produced in addition millet, sesame, and abundant, nourishing dates. (Today Iraq produces about 80 per cent of the world's supply of dates.) Under the early Achemenids, when the food of the court was supplied by the satrapies in rotation for a fixed portion of the year, Babylonia was assigned four months, and thus was reckoned to produce one third of the entire surplus agricultural yield of the empire.²

From the earliest times, the flow of water was controlled for agricultural purposes by an elaborate system of canals, sluices, dams,

¹ W. B. Fisher, *The Middle East, A Physical, Social, and Regional Geography* (London, 1961), pp. 357-71.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 371-76. George Rawlinson, *Sixth Great Oriental Monarchy* (New York; 1873), pp. 14, 79; and J. Newman, *Agricultural Life of the Jews in Babylonia Between the Years 200 C.E. and 500 C.E.* (London, 1932), *passim*.

embankments, and dikes. Variation in relative level between Tigris and Euphrates made it easy to lead water from the Euphrates to the Tigris in the Babylonian region. Because of spring flooding, the water could not be allowed merely to inundate the land, as in Egypt, but had to be controlled within the river banks by levees. An ancient, elaborate canal system irrigated arid areas, drained water-logged zones, and washed away excessive salinity in the soil.¹

Natural prosperity resulting from fertile, alluvial soil and abundant water was, moreover, greatly enhanced by the geographical advantages of Babylonia. Numerous trade routes centered in the relatively thin neck of land between the Tigris and Euphrates at Babylon-Seleucia-Ctesiphon. One route emerged from the north-west Euphrates valley, beginning in the Syrian ports and extending over the fertile crescent to Babylonia, and from there to the Iranian plateau and thence to China. Other routes extended to Babylonia from the southern ports on the Indian Ocean. The rivers were navigable for hundreds of miles, though with difficulty during the spring floods, and upstream navigation was not ever possible because of the swift current. Beyond Dura, therefore, the trade routes branched off into the desert, or through Circesium, Nisibis, and Edessa further north. More important, the only really convenient crossing place was at Babylon, for here the extent of marshland was somewhat reduced, and the flat and firm steppe provided a useful east-west route. Further, the passes of the Zagros mountains led naturally to the south, where movement was easier, rather than through mountainous Armenia. Thus the Seleucia-Ctesiphon region was particularly important as the junction of east-west, and north, north-east, and southern routes. From the most ancient times, one city after another grew up in succession within a limited area, each serving in its time as emporium and entrepot for great commercial routes.² The area was rich in treasure and well watered (Jeremiah 51.13), and supported a large population in conditions of prosperity.

Because of its antiquity and changing fortunes, the region was, by the second century b.c.e., a mosaic of peoples, languages, and cultures.³ In addition to Jews, who had been exiled there in the sixth century

¹ Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-80.

² Commercial matters relating to the Jews will be discussed below, Ch. Three, sec. vi. In general, see Fisher, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-87; and for the Jews, J. Newman, *Commercial Life of the Jews in Babylonia Between the Years 200 and 500 C.E.* (London, n.d.).

³ Victor Chapot, *La Frontière de l'Euphrate de Pompée à la Conquête Arabe* (Paris, 1907), p. 28.

b.c.e., and remained in large numbers, the Babylonian region contained numerous Babylonians, who spoke Aramaic and also (through their priests) preserved Akkadian; Macedonians and Greeks; Syrians, Arabs, and other Semites; Armenians and Iranians; and occasional Indians and Chinese. Many of the cities had largely Hellenized populations, particularly Seleucia, Charax-Spasinu and Artemita; others, particularly Babylon and Uruk, were centers of the ancient Babylonian cuneiform civilization; while still others, particularly Ctesiphon, were populated by great numbers of Parthian government officials, troops and traders. Yet few cities were inhabited by a single ethnic or religious group, and all exhibited a measure of Hellenistic culture; Susa, far to the east, conducted its municipal affairs according to accepted Seleucid forms and in the Greek language long into the Parthian period, while Babylonians, Syrians, Jews, and Greeks mingled in the streets of Seleucia. We know, moreover, that the Greek and native Babylonian elements were intimately intertwined.¹

II. SURVIVAL OF BABYLONIAN CIVILIZATION

Of the cultural and ethnic groups in Babylonia, the Babylonian-Akkadian was oldest and best established. Numerous business documents, almost all dealing with cultic matters, indicate that the ancient temples preserved the old life, served the ancestral gods, and continued to collect the offerings of the faithful for the support of priests. The city of Babylon itself had gone into a long period of decline after the founding of Seleucia at the end of the fourth century b.c.e., for trade and population centered in the new capital. Yet Babylon itself was inhabited, and Temple priests continued to sacrifice to Bel and Beltis, pray for the king and his sons, and make astronomical observations until the first century c.e. Cuneiform writing was preserved, the last inscription dating from the first century c.e. Chaldean astronomical schools flourished, attracting Greek students as well as others. These schools of Chaldean learning persisted in Hipparene, Orchene, and elsewhere long after the decline of Babylon itself, and the final ruin of the place may be dated no earlier than the first century c.e. One cannot, however, describe the surviving Akkadian civilization as

¹ M. Rostovtzeff, "Seleucid Babylonia," *Yale Classical Studies III* (New Haven, 1932), p. 22. The seal impressions exhibit such a mixture of native and Greek elements, for example. See in particular J. Bidez, "Les Ecoles chaldéennes sous Alexandre et les Seleucides," *Mélanges Capart*, Brussels, 1935.

vigorous. It mainly consisted of some priests sitting on the ruins in Babylon and Uruk, observing astronomical phenomena and preserving other genres of cuneiform literature. But the contribution of Babylon to the syncretistic civilization of the Middle East was significant. Babylonian astronomy, astrology, mathematics, and medicine were studied and developed by Greek inhabitants of the region, and Babylonian astrology flooded the western world. Jews acquired knowledge of Babylonian law, astronomy, and medicine, and some were impressed also (see below, Chapter Four) with astrology. Palmyra and Dura, in the western desert, exhibited considerable Babylonian influence in architecture and even more in religion. Adad and Nanaia were the chief deities of Dura, Bel reached Ecbatana, Palmyra, and Cappadocia, the Babylonian New Year was celebrated at Assur, and popular Mazdaism was influenced by Babylonian ideas. Ahura Mazda was equated with Bel as, elsewhere, he was equated with Zeus. Babylonian culture was also affected by Parthian, for at Uruk, attached to the temple of Anu, was a Parthian chapel, and we know that Antiochus Epiphanes founded a Greek colony, with a theater and gymnasium, and was called "Founder of the City" and "The Savior of Asia," in neo-Babylonian cuneiform texts. Thus he apparently tried to Hellenize Babylon as he did Jerusalem, with what success we do not know. In all, however, Babylon gave more than she received. The Babylonian for the most part preserved his civilization, language, and religion unmodified by Greece or Iran. His was the law in western Asia which was least touched by Greek law, and that law still governed internal commerce. While the Greek system of registration of documents was accepted by Babylonians, Greek commercial vocabulary did not supplant that of Babylon. On the whole, neither Greece nor Iran gave very much to Babylonia, and, though both were in some measure affected by her, the total effect was not great, outside of astrology and other religious matters.¹ When Babylonian civilization at last faded

¹ On Babylonian culture in the Parthian period, see M. Rostovtzeff, "Syria and the East," *Cambridge Ancient History* [hereafter, *CAH*] (Cambridge, 1928), VII, 163-64; Henri Seyrig, "Palmyra and the East," *Journal of Roman Studies*, XL, 1950, pp. 1-8, surveying the Babylonian influence on Palmyrene culture; Theophilus G. Pinches, *The Old Testament* (London, 1902), pp. 474-86; S. A. Pallis, *The Antiquity of Iraq, A Handbook of Assyriology*, pp. 35-6, and on Antiochus' Hellenistic establishment, p. 31; W. W. Tarn, "Parthia," in *CAH*, IX, pp. 596-97; on excavations for the Parthian period, see Oscar Reuther, *Die Innenstadt von Babylon (Merkes)*, WDOG, 47 (Leipzig, 1926); Maximilian Streck, "Seleucia and Ktesiphon," *Der Alte Orient*, XVI, 3/4, 1917, p. 9; R. Koldewey, *Das wiedererstehende Babylon* (Leipzig, 1925); E. Bickerman, *Institutions des Séleucides* (Paris, 1938), p. 176,