

The ECONOMY *of*
ROMAN PALESTINE

—
ZE'EV SAFRAI



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Ze'ev Safrai



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Contents

	<i>List of figures</i>	vi
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
	<i>List of abbreviations</i>	x
	Introduction	1
1	Settlement patterns	9
	<i>Classification of settlements</i>	9
	<i>The polis</i>	10
	<i>The town</i>	22
	<i>The village</i>	37
	<i>The villa</i>	47
	<i>Spatial structure</i>	57
2	Modes of production	61
	<i>Agriculture</i>	61
	<i>Crafts and industry</i>	106
	<i>Services</i>	120
	<i>Appendix: grain consumption in the Jewish farmstead system</i>	123
3	Trade in the Land of Israel in the Roman period	125
	<i>Trade in the Land of Israel during the Second Temple period</i>	125
	<i>Local trade in the rural settlement</i>	126
	<i>Regional commerce</i>	130
	<i>Regional markets and fairs</i>	135
	<i>The nature of regional trade</i>	147
	<i>Inter-regional and international trade</i>	151
	<i>The transportation system</i>	154
	<i>Trade arrangements</i>	165
	<i>Means of payment</i>	171
	<i>Customs</i>	171
	<i>The economic utopia of Rabbinic thought</i>	172
	<i>The ethnic background of merchants</i>	178
	<i>Appendix 1: the wheat trade</i>	178
	<i>Appendix 2: trade during the Sabbatical Year</i>	181

4	The organizational framework of farming	182
	<i>Agrarian structure</i>	182
	<i>The influence of the Roman army in Judaea</i>	191
	<i>Taxes</i>	197
	<i>The rural economic system</i>	198
	<i>The structure of the farm system</i>	202
	<i>The economy of the polis</i>	209
	<i>The balance of trade</i>	215
	<i>The currency</i>	227
5	Open or closed economy in the Land of Israel during the Roman period?	237
	<i>The problem</i>	237
	<i>Surplus production</i>	237
	<i>Branches of industry</i>	240
	<i>Service network</i>	241
	<i>Appendix: price index of Judaea in the Roman period (methodology)</i>	246
6	Demographic multiplication and economic growth	249
	<i>The stages of demographic multiplication</i>	249
	<i>Economic growth</i>	255
	<i>Conclusions</i>	261
Appendix 1	Rabbinic literature: an illustrated lexicon	262
Appendix 2	Rabbinic texts: abbreviations	265
	<i>Bibliography of ancient sources</i>	267
	<i>General bibliography</i>	269
	<i>Index of places and subjects</i>	284

Figures

1	Geographic model of urban development in the Land of Israel during the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods.	16
2	Map of cities in the Land of Israel.	16
3	The size of cities in the Land of Israel.	16
4	Neapolis: city, suburbs and satellite settlements.	20
5	<i>Necropoleis</i> (ancient cemeteries) in the Jeruslaem area at the end of the Second Temple period.	20
6	The village settlement: the location of fountains.	23
7	Residential quarter of Capernaum.	25
8	The public quarter in Chorazin, Lower Galilee.	25
9	The settlement at Um-Rihan, northern Samaria.	25
10	The settlement at H.Najar, Samaria.	25
11	The settlement at H.Dan'ila, western Upper Galilee.	25
12	Security structures at Um-Rihan.	29
13	Security structures at Ali-a-Din, Carmel.	30
14	H.Tefen, western Upper Galilee.	30
15	Synagogues in the Land of Israel.	32
16	Plan of settlement at H.Ta'mur, Samaria.	33
17	Road networks in the Beth Lid area, Samaria.	33
18	H.Shema and Kh.Usha, Upper Galilee.	39
19	Plan of settlement at H.Levad, <i>shephelah</i> of Samaria.	39
20	Road network in the vicinity of the village of Thulth, Samaria.	39
21	Roads to satellite settlements.	41
22	Road network in the area of Beth Lid, near Samaria.	44
23	Villa at H.Murak.	51
24	Villa at H.Hamam, <i>shephelah</i> of Judaea.	51
25	Villa at Qsar a-Lejah, northern Samaria.	51
26	Villa at Kalandia, Judaeen mountains.	51
27	Network of wine presses in the Jezreel Valley (apparently estate of Rabbi Judah the Prince, near Nahalal).	53
28	Villa at Der Sama'an, Samaria.	56
29	Manor house or house of rich village resident in Anab a-Kabir in the southern Mt Hebron region.	57
30	Manor house at Gan Hefer.	57
31	Regional structure in the village sphere: descriptive model.	59
32	Settlement areas in the Mishnah and Talmud periods.	59
33	Production and consumption of oil in the Land of Israel.	73
34	The water systems at Jericho.	85
35	Herod's palace at Jericho.	86
36	Installations for the preparation of flax at Gaba Hippeum.	89
37	Possibilities for planting cycles including the cultivation of flax.	90
38	Profit from the cultivation and production of flax.	91
39	Fishponds near Caesarea.	94
40	Structures belonging to shepherds at Anab a-Kabir, southern Mt Hebron region.	94
41	Columbaria at Maresha, <i>shephelah</i> of Judaea.	99
42	Advanced wine press.	107
43	Advanced wine press.	107
44	Olive press.	108
45	Olive press.	108
46	Potters' kilns in Palestine.	116
47	Quarries located on the Carmel coast.	120
48	Store at H.Susiya, southern Mt Hebron region.	127

49 Street with stores.	128
50 Road network: descriptive model.	131
51 The fair at Botnah.	140
52 Fairs in central Italy.	141
53 Map of harbors and fairs in the Land of Israel.	144
54 Transport connections between village settlements: possible models.	151
55 Transport connections between village settlements and roads of Samaria.	152
56 The roads of the Land of Israel.	155
57 Sections of village road.	156
58 The schematic descriptive method of the road network.	157
59 Road networks in the vicinity of the village of Haris, Samaria.	158
60 Road networks in the area of Haja, Samaria.	158
61 Road networks in the area of Beth Lid.	158
62 Road networks in the area of Kur, Samaria.	158
63 Road networks in the area of H.Amudim, Lower Galilee.	158
64 Road networks in the area of Arab, Lower Galilee.	159
65 Road networks in the area of Cabul, Lower Galilee.	159
66 Road networks in the Gush Halav area, Upper Galilee.	159
67 Mampsis (Mamshit): the city and inn.	159
68 H.Mishkena: small village and inn.	163
69 Cities which minted coins.	172
70 Fortresses in the <i>limes</i> of the Negev.	192
71 Inscription of the 10th Legion on the aqueduct at Caesarea.	195
72 Stamps of Legio X Fretensis on bricks.	196
73 Value of lands in the Land of Israel.	201
74 Ancient division of plots at H.El-Buraq.	202
75 Division of plots at Qarawat Bene Hasan.	203
76 The sizes of plots in Galilee.	203
77 Land allotments to settlers in the Neapolis region.	203
78 Land allotments to settlers in the Neapolis region.	203
79 Ancient land division at Shufah, Samaria.	204
80 Ancient land division in the <i>shephelah</i> of Lod.	204
81 Theoretical ancient yearly work schedule in the Land of Israel.	207
82 Map of crops.	208
83 Agricultural sites in the vicinity of Gaba Hippeum.	211
84 Map of permitted areas in the Beth Shean region.	213
85 The currency in Palestine and Transjordan in the third and fourth centuries.	228
86 The currency in Jerusalem in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
87 The currency in Sebastea in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
88 The currency in Diocaesarea in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
89 The currency in Kfarnahum in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
90 The currency in Meiron in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
91 The currency in Jamanea Paralia in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
92 The currency in Mambre in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
93 The currency in Egypt in the Byzantine period.	229
94 The currency in Egypt in the Byzantine period.	229
95 The currency in Transjordan in the Roman-Byzantine period according to the treasures in the Amman Museum.	229
96 The currency in Garasa in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
97 The currency in Antiochea in the Byzantine period.	229
98 The currency in Sardis in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
99 The currency in Aphamea in the Roman-Byzantine period.	229
10 The currency in Ephesos in the Byzantine period.	229
0	
10 The currency in Tarsus in the Byzantine period.	229
1	

10 Demographic growth in the Land of Israel: archeological surveys.	250
2	
10 Demographic growth in the Land of Israel: archeological surveys.	251
3	
10 Urbanization in Palestine.	259
4	

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Abbreviations

Names of ancient authors or works, unless listed below, are abbreviated according to *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2nd edn, ed. N.G.L.Hammond and H.H.Scullard; Oxford, 1970).

Details of Rabbinic texts, and explanations of the abbreviations cited, may be found in Appendix II on pp. 463–4.

<i>AAASH</i>	<i>Acta Archaeologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae</i>
<i>AASOR</i>	<i>Annual of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i> (Berlin, 1970–)
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>
<i>BAR</i>	British Archaeological Reports (Oxford); ‘S’=supplementary (international) series
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BJ</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i> (<i>Bellum Judaicum</i>)
<i>BSA</i>	<i>Annual of the British School at Athens</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>CIL</i>	<i>Corpus inscriptionum Latinarum</i> (Berlin, 1863–)
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
<i>Cod. Just.</i>	<i>Codex Justinianus</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Classical Philology</i>
<i>CSCO</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> (Scr. Syr.)
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>CSHB</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historia Byzantinae</i>
<i>C. Th.</i>	<i>Codex Theodosianus</i>
<i>DJD</i>	see Benoit <i>et al.</i> 1961 (in Bibliography)
<i>EcHr</i>	<i>Economic Historical Journal</i>
<i>EI</i>	<i>Eretza Israel</i> (in Hebrew and English)
<i>Gr. Schr.</i>	<i>Griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<i>IGR</i>	<i>Inscriptiones Graecae ad res Romanas pertinentestestis</i> , i–iii, ed R.Cagnat <i>et al.</i> (Paris, 1906–27)
<i>INJ</i>	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JJP</i>	<i>Journal of Juristic Papyrology</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Liber annus</i> (Studium Biblicum Franciscanum)
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica</i>
<i>MGH (AA)</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
<i>NC</i>	<i>Numismatic Chronicle</i>

<i>Or.</i>	<i>Choricus, Orations</i>
<i>PBSR</i>	<i>Papers of the British School at Rome</i>
<i>PCZ</i>	<i>Zenon Papyri, i–iv, ed. C.C.Edgar (Cairo, 1925–31)</i>
<i>PEF</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Fund</i>
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia, Series Graeca (ed. Migne)</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Cursus, Series Latina (ed. Migne)</i>
<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>P.Oxy</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri (ed. B.P.Grenfell, A.S.Hunt, et al.; London, 1898–)</i>
<i>P.Ryland</i>	<i>Catalogue of Papyri in the John Rylands Library at Manchester (1911–)</i>
<i>P.Strasb.</i>	<i>Strasburg Papyri</i>
<i>PW</i>	<i>G.Wissowa et al., Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft (Stuttgart, 1893–1981)</i>
<i>QDAP</i>	<i>Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des études juives</i>
<i>RIDA</i>	<i>Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité</i>
<i>SEG</i>	<i>Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum (Leiden, 1923–)</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen</i>
<i>WA</i>	<i>World Archaeology</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDPV</i>	<i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>

Introduction

The Hasmonean kingdom was established in the Land of Israel at the end of the second century BCE and began a series of conquests which changed this small state into one of the most powerful political forces in the ancient Middle East. With the Roman conquest in 63 BCE, the Land of Israel became a vassal state which in the year 6 CE or a little before became Provincia Judaea. In 135 CE, after the Bar-Kochba revolt, the name of the province was changed to Palaestina (Palestine) or Syria-Palaestina. The boundaries of the province changed from time to time and took on a final form really only at the end of the first century CE. The province of Palestine was further divided in the fourth century CE into Palaestina Prima and Palaestina Secunda. In spite of this administrative division, both Palestines continued to be basically one geographic-historical unit (Avi-Yonah 1963).

The Land of Israel is known in the history of mankind as the source, birthplace and original sphere of action of the great monotheistic world religions and as the “Holy Land” of Judaism and Christianity. None of this, however, resulted in political importance during the Roman period. The province of Judaea or Palestine was only about 18,000 sq. km and was a small and economically unimportant province. In spite of all this, the study of the economic history of Judaea during the Roman period is different by its very nature from the study of the same topic in any other province of the Roman Empire. The unique nature of the province was in a number of spheres.

(1) Almost no remains of great wealth have been found in the province of Judaea. The various public buildings which have been discovered were apparently not particularly elegant and their level of preservation is also not very high in comparison with other areas of the Empire (Tsafir 1985). Thus, a number of farmsteads (or *villae*) have been discovered in the Land of Israel, but none as large or fancy as some of those found in other provinces such as Gaul, Germany or Britain (Chapter 1.V below). Moreover, very few inscriptions have been found in the Land of Israel which add important information to the study of the economic history of that land.

(2) In spite of all this, there has been a good deal of excavation of the rural sphere in the Land of Israel. This attention may be the result of the relatively poor amount of remains found in the city sphere.

(3) Historical-economic research in most provinces of the Roman Empire is based on the study of literary documents, inscriptions and archaeological remains. Talmudic material serves as an outstanding source of information on the Land of Israel. It is impossible to stress enough the importance of this type of literature. The nature and type of information which can be derived from this literature is what makes the study of the Land of Israel different and unique in relation to the study of any other Roman province. Usually, there is a good deal of information on the lifestyle of the rich and upper classes. The life and situation of these upper classes is what is usually reflected in literary and epigraphical source material, and archaeological remains and excavations usually reveal the dwellings of these classes and the public buildings in which they based their power.

Thus, most of the research dealing with the economy of the Roman Empire usually deals with cities (*polis*, pl. *poleis*) and with the upper classes. The Roman “village” or “rural sector” in research usually refers to farmsteads or *villae* of the rich. This is even the case regarding the papyri of Egypt which reflect the realities of the upper classes much more than those of lower classes. Syriac and Egyptian Christian material and particularly the biographies of the Church Fathers do portray local conditions, but most of this type of material is presented from the viewpoint of Christian monastic circles.

Talmudic material, however, basically reflects the realities of the rural sector. This type of literature serves as a tremendous source of information on the everyday life of the village and city in the Land of Israel, on agriculture and the crops cultivated there, and on a whole host of economic and technical problems. The combination of Talmudic sources with archaeological remains and in conjunction with the information known about economic life in general in the Roman Empire, offers a unique chance to add additional data to the socio-economic “mosaic” which makes up the study of everyday life in the Land of Israel. All of this might also add to what is known about economic life in general in the eastern provinces of the Empire.

There are, however, difficult methodological problems with the use of Talmudic material for the study of the matters mentioned above. In this we can add little and our use of Talmudic material *per se* is based on the important studies and methodologies of such scholars as Büchler, Alon, Klein, S.Safrai, Sperber, Feliks, and others. We shall refrain in the course of our present study from dealing with the details pertaining to these methodological issues.

(4) The province of Judaea may have indeed been small, but it did have a rather high population density. Jones (1971, pp. 523–62) lists fifty-one cities in both Palestines of the Byzantine period and this is more than any other eastern province such as Thracia with five, Asia with forty-eight, Lydia with twenty-eight, Caria with thirty-five and Prima and Secunda Syria with seventeen. The territory of Sicily is one-third greater than that of Palestine, but there are many fewer cities there. The density of population in the Land of Israel is reflected in the great number of villages there and in intensive use of land. This is not to say, though, that Palestine was a rich province, as we have indeed mentioned above.

The Land of Israel is shaped like a rectangle or trapezoid. Its length is approximately 225 km and its width in the south is about 130 km, and between 50–60 km in the north. The country can be divided lengthwise into zones. The westernmost zone is along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea and includes the coastal plain. Eastward is the *shephelah*, the hill or mountain region which is about 30 km wide and the desert which is about 35 kms wide in the south and becomes narrower in the north.

The Jewish settlement, whose literature serves as our main literary source, was the major ethnic and religious population component in the Land of Israel until the Bar-Kochba revolt (132–5 CE). Until this time, pagans were found only in cities. After the Bar-Kochba revolt things began to change. The Jewish population was now centered in the rural sphere of the Galilee. The cities of the Galilee as well as Lod (Diospolis) in Judaea were also basically Jewish. There were also Jewish centers of population in the coastal plain of Judaea and in southern Mt Hebron. The Jewish population began to decline from the mid-fourth century CE and the Jewish sources became silent.

Our present study deals with the Land of Israel during the Roman period, from the destruction of the Second Temple until the mid-fourth century CE. However, we have at times made use of the few available Byzantine sources which contain information on events and life in Palestine during that period (324–637 CE). Naturally, the rural and village sector will occupy most of our attention, and relatively little time will be spent on the urban sector. This does not necessarily reflect economic reality. It does, however, reflect the interest of the Talmudic source material upon which we are almost entirely dependent.

We should really begin our present study with a political and historical survey of the period under discussion. However, there is a good deal of excellent material on these matters (see, for example, Schürer 1973; Avi-Yonah 1963; Z. Baras *et al.* 1982), and we shall therefore begin our work straightaway with economic and social matters.

THE RABBINIC SOURCES

On the question of the reliability of the Talmudic texts as historical sources.

The Talmudic texts are the main basis of our study and the source of information for most of the questions, answers and hypotheses put forward. In terms of the utilization of such sources, we have added nothing new, and we confidently follow a path that has been paved by many students of Jewish history, such as Büchler (1906, 1909), Alon (1957, 1958, 1977, 1980), Epstein (1948) and others. This approach can be summarized as follows.

- (a) Every source must be thoroughly checked, examining the original version against manuscripts and quotations of the “Rishonim” (interpreters of the early Middle Ages), as well as additional evidence. After this, parallel sources are used to determine that this is really the original version of the law. Is the text different or distorted? What can be learned from the differences between the sources and from the ensuing questions and investigations?
- (b) Almost all Talmudic texts that meet the examination outlined in (a) should be accepted. However, each text should also be examined in the light of related historical sources to establish whether the picture portrayed makes sense according to all other available information.
- (c) Naturally, one should suspect texts of exaggeration and excessiveness, and of changes made to correspond with the esthetic and theoretical framework of the story and anachronistic descriptions (mainly of the Biblical period). Such exaggeration is, of course, more common in legends than in *halacha*, and the latter can be expected to be much more accurate. The researcher must identify the historical core in the text; it is this information that can serve as a source of knowledge.
- (d) After the authenticity of the source has been established, the researcher must study it and determine its significance and the conclusions that can be drawn. In this context, a number of questions will be asked, and related options will be examined. For example, does the text represent something customary or something exceptional? Is the story an exceptional example that tells us about a general occurrence, or does it refer to an isolated incident or episode? Was the decision of the *beit midrash* actually carried out? What period does the source represent? What does it incorporate from earlier times and what new elements did the rabbis of the period add? The answers to such questions, in turn, lead to further investigation.
- (e) All these tests apply to the Palestinian texts. We treated the Babylonian texts differently, as discussed below.
- (f) This method of study based on deduction and analogy serves as an alternative to two other main methods. On the one hand, there is the traditional method, which is based on absolute belief in every source. Accordingly, the research focuses

on application of the information. In addition, since all sources are considered indisputable truth, it is necessary to explain the discrepancies between them. These explanations generally ignore the constraints of reason and logic, and require a willingness to reject some other sources such as manuscripts, texts from the Geniza (the Jewish archive found in a synagogue in Cairo dating from the early Middle Ages), some of the midrashim, and the like.

In contrast, another method challenges the belief in the rabbinic literature and its use as a historical source. We discuss this below.

In the context of the present research, it is not necessary to discuss the methodological assumptions presented. After all, this is not the first study of the history of the people of Israel and of Palestine. With all due respect, this is just one of dozens of similar projects, and an extensive discussion of the issue of methodology is beyond our scope.

Nevertheless, this does not excuse us altogether from the need to address the question of method. The main conclusion that arises from this essay is likely (or liable) to seem Utopian. The summary seems too neat, and therefore it is not credible. Thus we must defend the way in which we utilized the sources, in general and in principle.

For this purpose, we consider an alternative method of studying ancient sources. Using this method, numerous respected researchers, such as Goodenough (1967), Neusner (1979, 1990), and many others, have presented arguments that question the validity of using rabbinic texts as a source of social history. The major arguments are as follows.

(1) In the Mishnah and Talmud periods, the rabbis headed isolated *batei midrash*. The laws that they developed emerged in these detached, isolated “islands” of study. Thus the rabbis neither understood nor knew the reality of their times; it was not the background to their decisions, their attitudes nor even the legends told in the *batei midrash*. Sometimes this argument is presented in an even more extreme manner. The Talmudic literature is depicted not as a summary of opinions of a group of rabbis, but as personal literary creations. Accordingly, the Mishnah is not a public text, but the work of a single editor or group of editors. Consequently, each book or part of a book has a different social background, which must be discussed separately. Obviously, this type of research does not require the knowledge of all Talmudic texts, and such study becomes simple, one-dimensional and unequivocal.

Applying this theory to our study, the image that emerges of the economy, the community and the settlement would not be true history but “literary history,” or “economics of the *beit midrash*.”

(2) The public at large did not obey the rabbis. Among the Jews, only a minority followed the rabbis, obeyed their decisions and was influenced by their sermons and moral teachings. It was also this small group that influenced the outlook of the *beit midrash*; its customs and attitudes constitute the social and historical background for the decisions made in the *beit midrash*. According to this perspective, then, the texts do not provide a true image of the community, but that of a small group, a social stratum whose ties with the wider public were few and problematic. Levine, who takes a compromise stand on this subject, calls Alon’s approach “romantic,” and sees the stratum of rabbis as an elite who claimed leadership but achieved this only partially (Levine 1985).

These two perspectives are similar, but they are also separated by significant and complex differences.

As noted, although we will not discuss these broad methodological issues, brief discussion of those subjects directly related to our field of research seems warranted. Some of the following comments are restricted to this area and some also have more general theoretical significance. Prior to the discussion, another aspect, more psychological than scientific, should be considered. The Talmudic texts pose an extremely difficult challenge to the scholar. The archaic Hebrew and Aramaic integrated with Hebrew are a primary hardship. Moreover, the texts are written in a sort of inner code, the code of the *beit midrash* (school). All the interpretive and traditional Mishnaic texts assume that this code is known to the reader, so instead of interpreting it they use it. Thus the first sentence in the Mishnah Brachot 1, 1 would be translated literally as “From when they call: listen!,” when it actually means “From when people have to pray the Prayer of Shema [a well-known prayer which every Jew must recite twice a day].” In addition, the corresponding scripture for many of the passages is not clear; sometimes the textual basis for whole chapters is not explicitly mentioned. The material is not organized by subjects and the same issue appears in numerous sources. Conflicts between the sources, errors in a version and later editing of some of the texts all create additional difficulties. Furthermore, until recently there was no lexicon (although now a number of computer programs have been distributed that partially solve this problem), and most of the essays have not yet been published in scientific, or even semi-scientific editions.

It is no wonder, then, that many scholars have erred in their understanding of the texts and made mistakes in using them. Someone who does not know the Talmudic texts intimately will have difficulty making full use of all the rabbinic literature.

Needless to say, in this respect, graduates of the Jewish religious institutions have a distinct advantage. In modern institutions of this type, two to five hours a day are devoted to studying the Talmud. In the more traditional schools, the entire day is devoted to learning the Talmud. On the other hand, students of the latter are exposed to the misleading influence of the traditional method of teaching mentioned earlier.

These “technical” difficulties must not influence our position regarding the reliability of the rabbinic sources. After all, difficulty in reading an inscription does not dissuade researchers, but actually stimulates them to make greater efforts to utilize the hidden information and to determine its implications.

For our purposes, a distinction should be made between three types of conclusions that may arise from the study of rabbinic texts.

- (a) Did the rabbis succeed in changing or influencing the social environment through their teachings? For example, did the prohibition against charging interest have an impact on lenders and borrowers? Did the rabbis’ Utopian position (and their opposition to trade and urban lifestyles) affect the public? Did their moralistic policy and their desire to help the poor and the weak influence the economic structure? We further discuss this group of questions below. These questions actually apply to only a small group of subjects, as the rabbis generally did not try to mold economic life or to pronounce Utopian commands; they did not consider it their role to decide what to grow, how to produce, how to sell or to interfere in other purely economic matters.
- (b) In the course of their writings, the rabbis refer to a certain religious-social background as though it were real. Thus, for instance, the rabbis assume that the entire public observes Kashrut, keeps the Sabbath and attends synagogue. These assumptions relate to matters that were important to the rabbis. They considered these aspects of life as their realm, and in this respect the distance between themselves, their students and the general public was prominent. After all, the whole community could not be holy. Regarding these matters, the rabbis’ writings reflect the customs only of those who were accepted in the stratum of rabbis. Accordingly, one might expect that the background described in the texts applies to the society of the *beit midrash* (school) alone. This suggestion is also discussed below.
- (c) In the course of their discussions, the rabbis relate *by the way* to the situation outside the *beit midrash*. Thus, for instance, when they discuss the obligation of tithing, they assume that in some places most of the produce is sent to market (M Maasrot 1:5; PT 11, 49c). Perhaps the laws of tithing were theoretical and most of the public paid no attention to them at all, but is there any reason to doubt that there were places where most of the harvest was sent to the market? In this case it might still be argued that the description is theoretical and is presented as a dialectic possibility alone. Even more notable an example is the rabbis’ description of the sale of a house, in which they assume that it includes a cooker and stove (M Baba Batra 4:3). We still do not know how common the sale of houses was, but there is no reason to doubt that the cooker and stove were an integral part of a residential dwelling, and it is also clear that they were considered the most characteristic components of such a house.

The decisive majority of subjects with which this work deals belong to the latter type and resemble the last example presented here. A small portion are similar to the previous example of tithing laws. In these cases we must clarify whether the background to the text is realistic, or whether it was presented for the purpose of a theoretical dialectic discussion.

Only very few of the references in this book belong to type (a) or (b) above. In general, the rabbis did not deal with *formation of the economic structure* but with *personal behaviour and lifestyle* within the economic structure of their time. The rabbis were interested in questions of ritual, ceremony, morals and social justice, and economic circumstances only served as a framework, a setting for them. It is actually because the economic, technological and agricultural subjects were not generally the focus of the rabbinic literature that it can be used as a source for the study of the economy.

A reliable historian may draw a wealth of historical information from the satires of Juvenal, or from the stories of Bernard Shaw, despite the clearly fictional nature of these works. Perhaps paradoxically, the less important a subject to the author, the more realistically it is presented as a setting, and the more reliable it is as a source for the researcher of the period.

We now review the arguments on which we base the use of rabbinic literature as a historical source for study of the Roman era.

EVIDENCE FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES

It might be expected that the historical description that emerges from rabbinic literature would be supported, echoed and confirmed by parallel external sources of information, such as Roman and Christian documents, contemporary texts, archeological findings and other sources. Before examining the external sources on this subject, it is important to consider the unique nature of the rabbinic literature as compared to all other historical and archeological sources available for the study of the Roman Empire. The Roman sources reflect the experience of the aristocracy, those people associated with the imperial and urban establishment. All Roman literature was written by members of this stratum, was intended for readers who were also members of this stratum, and was often written directly or indirectly under the patronage of the establishment. The vast majority of epigraphic literature was also written by wealthy people, such as members of the government, the army and the like. Not all the Egyptian papyri represent the leadership; some were produced by merchants or members of the ministries

that administered activity throughout the empire. However, they still contain little expression of the simple farmer or the relationships between peasants within their communities.

With the emergence of the literature of the Christian church (particularly that of the East—the Syrian, Armenian and Egyptian church), this situation was slightly altered. The clerical literature also reflects rural life to some extent, but the total knowledge that can be drawn from these sources is not great, as most of the work and writing of the fathers of the church was devoted to church matters. Even the little information that deals with the village and the masses is presented from the religious point of view, and the church perspective is influenced by the principles and views of the Christian religious establishment. The Christian literature reflects the situation from the fourth century on, and so is much later than the Talmudic literature.

The rabbinic literature reflects a completely different social stratum. These texts are the creation of a social group that was completely unknown to the authors of the other sources on the Roman Empire. This is the only literature from that period that represents the native residents, and not the establishment, which was saturated in Greek and Roman culture. The Talmudic literature emerged mostly in the rural community, out of a struggle against the imperial culture, literature and religion. It reflects an entirely different social experience; it deals with different subjects, a different type of people and a different economic, religious and social experience. It is unlikely that any external sources would deal with the rural and Jewish subjects discussed in these texts.

Nevertheless, in the course of this work we do occasionally refer to evidence derived from external sources. In general, the comparisons and parallels with non-Jewish evidence are extremely limited and cast no doubt on our conclusions. Most of the relevant external sources confirm the implications of the rabbinic literature. An example is the reference to life in a private “town” which is interpreted as dealing with a Roman villa. Similarly, the description of a “fair,” fits descriptions of the Roman market-day (see also [Chapter 3.IV.3](#) below, describing the “trade,” which is identical to the “emporium”).

In the present research we gained only little help from non-rabbinic Jewish sources. For the most part, Josephus, Philon, the evangelists in the New Testament, the Qumran texts and external literature deal with the late period of the Second Temple. This period precedes that of our study and that in which the rabbinic literature was produced. Therefore we can not expect much information regarding our subject. Moreover, without entering into a detailed discussion of each of the texts, it can be said that most do not even deal with the social aspects of the rural village. Thus there are very few parallels between these and the rabbinic literature.

THE ARCHEOLOGICAL DATA

The subject of the Palestinian village in the Roman period has recently received increased attention among researchers. Public buildings (synagogues), private buildings, agricultural facilities and a few residential neighborhoods have been excavated. A number of well-preserved settlements have been surveyed, and their buildings measured. Thus we have an additional independent source of information on the rural economy and community life at that time. This evidence has been presented and integrated throughout these pages. In general, the information derived from these remnants corroborates and supports the conclusions drawn from analysis of the texts. In addition, many inscriptions, particularly dedications from synagogues, were discovered; this information is also presented in the discussion. As noted, these findings widely agree with the rabbinic literature. For instance, (1) the inventory of rural roads fits that indicated by the rabbinic literature, revealing a large number of roads and their physical character ([Chapter 3.VII.12](#), below). The large number of roads also testifies to the organizational and communal ability of the villagers, including their ability to expropriate agricultural land, and to prevent damage to roads by farmers whose fields bordered the road (this subject is discussed in [Chapter 1.IV.2](#)). (2) Public cisterns were found on roads outside the village, at the “entrances” and in squares within the village. The same is indicated by the rabbinic literature, as we show ([Chapter 1](#), *ibid.*). The archeological finding proves, then, that the Talmudic literature does reflect the real setting. (3) In most of the rural villages no walls were discovered, and this is also indicated by our sources. On the other hand, security arrangements and installations such as those described by the rabbinic literature were found ([Chapter 1.III.2.3](#)). (4) Synagogue inscriptions reveal the custom described in the rabbinic literature of donating money to the city, or of supplying products out of goodwill to the community and the synagogue ([Chapter 1.III.2](#)). (5) Weights that were issued by Jewish agronomists (evidently in semi-independent communities) that operated in the *polis* cities were found ([Chapter 1.III.3.3](#)). (6) The evidence regarding the village of Kefar Hananiah and the trade in ceramics is clearly proven by the archeometric findings from that region (Adan Bayewitz 1985). (7) The rabbinic texts indicate a rural settlement whose residents traded intensively. This may seem exaggerated and Utopian. However, the papyri found in the Judean desert prove that land and agricultural and industrial products were indeed purchased and sold in these small villages in the Jordan Rift (Lewis 1989; Eshel 1992; 1992a). (8) The rabbinic literature contains a great deal of agricultural information, and most of it is realistic, absolutely reasonable and valuable to the study of history (Felix *et al.* 1963). (9) The rabbinic texts describe agricultural installations, such as wine presses and olive presses. The descriptions are sometimes schematic but they are credible. However, they do not express the full technological wealth of the time.

The last points presented deal with the reference in rabbinic texts to the real setting, as an aside (see section (c), p. 7 above). However, points (1) to (5) involve subjects that the rabbis addressed directly and preached about, and they also provide some evidence of the degree of public discipline regarding the instructions of the rabbis.

The general question of comparison between the rabbinic texts and archeological findings is beyond the scope of the present work. This is not a simple issue, and the circumstances are not always consistent. However, with respect to our research, the archeological findings fit well with the information derived from the rabbinic literature. This notwithstanding, it would be a mistake to go too far and accept all rabbinic texts at face value. In our discussion of the roads we showed that the Talmudic source exaggerated a little in the measurements of the width of the roads. The Talmud also refers to four roads that were paved to each estate, and this is also an exaggeration. The Talmud notes ten public installations and services that every town must have (PT Ridushin IV, 66a; BT Sanhedrin 17a, *et al.*). Of these, a synagogue and a bathhouse were found in many places. However, a lavatory has not been found in any of the settlements, although it was also included in the list. It may be, of course, that these lavatories have not yet been excavated, but it is likely that they were actually not so commonplace, or that they were not constructed facilities.

To sum up: in general, the archeological findings confirm and validate the rabbinic texts, and the use of these sources in our work. In the course of the discussion the relevant archeological evidence is of course presented.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Its importance notwithstanding, the external evidence by nature encompasses only some of the items presented in our work. The central question is whether the credibility of the rabbinic texts can be corroborated from within the texts themselves. It may seem that a source cannot be used to prove its own credibility, as it is this very evidence that must be corroborated and credited. However, we present a number of points that we believe are significant in this respect. Although they are not sufficient to eliminate any doubt regarding our sources, they do indicate that the rabbinic texts were not detached from the practical world and the real environment.

(1) There is no doubt that the rabbis were familiar with the nature of the country and its inhabitants (Klein 1939). They were familiar with the customs of the general society in Palestine, and they knew the landscape, the flora and the fruits. The discussions of technological agricultural subjects, the design of houses, graves, the wine press and the olive press are, in the majority of cases, completely realistic. Numerous books and essays dealing with this field of research testify to this (see above).

(2) *Did the public listen to the rabbis?* The rabbinic literature indicates that the wide masses in general obeyed the instructions of the rabbis. This situation was not, however, consistent. In the Talmudic literature we find evidence that the majority of the public refused to accept the rabbis' opinion in a number of areas. "Amei Ha-aretz" did not observe the laws of purification, and did not practice tithing, nor did they obey the teachings in some other areas (Oppenheimer 1977). In the Tannaic period, the masses had a particularly negative attitude toward learning the Torah. However, there is no indication that the general public did not observe Kashrut, the Sabbath, purification of the family ("Nidda"), the laws of festivals and other laws. The archeological findings testify to widespread observance of the Scriptures in several respects (such as the form of the synagogue, the number of ritual baths and more). However, these findings do not refer to the details of the laws, and this subject merits further study (Goodman 1983).

The division between the areas in which the rabbis were obeyed, and those in which compliance was limited to a specific group, is logical in terms of both the law and the society. The rabbinic literature does not present a uniform stereotypical picture. This lends it greater credibility. If this were not the true situation, the rabbis would have presented the entire public as being obedient. The lack of uniformity provides internal proof of the general reliability, although separate examination of each of the subjects of the Mishna is still warranted. Levine and Goodman devote a detailed discussion to this subject, citing many examples of disobedience of the rabbis (Goodman *ibid.*; Levine 1985). In our opinion, it is the inconsistent picture that is most realistic and is proven, in a general sense, from within.

(3) *The community in the rabbinic literature and in reality.* The description of the community and its customs that arises from the rabbinic literature is also not stereotyped. Our sources include much evidence of difficulties in enforcing procedures. Thus, for instance, the rabbis are asked to ease the sentence of people who have been ordered to destroy their houses. We hear about deviations from planning laws, dumping of garbage in public areas, planting trees too close to a built-up area, building a ledge that protrudes into public property and failure to send a child to school (Chapter 1.III below). There are also cases in which the community as a whole disobeyed the rabbis, as, for instance, when the members of the community dismissed a rabbi who refused to cut out verses in prayer, even though he acted according to the law and was supported by the other rabbis (PT Meg. IV, 75b, BT *ibid.* 22a), and other similar problems. Again, these are realistic difficulties, and it is hard to understand their inclusion if they did not really exist.

(4) *The status of the rabbis.* The rabbis assumed extensive rights, saw themselves as the leaders of the public and demanded that the masses honor them on the basis of their being scholars. It was typical of them to demand that others stand in the

presence of a rabbi, and to expect the daughter of a rabbi to be considered a preferred candidate for marriage, as well as to demand other expressions of preferred status (Levine 1985, pp. 26–32). On the other hand, their actual status in the community was modest and marginal. The rabbis in Palestine did not head the community (in contrast to the demands of the Babylonian rabbis); they did not appoint the community leaders and did not demand control of the leaders' actions. The rabbis did not consider themselves worthy of determining the customs of the state, but believed it their role to formulate and enforce the accepted custom (Elon 1988, I, pp. 740 ff.).

A typical example is their status regarding the court. This community matter, which by nature was related to the men of the Scriptures, was left quite open. In our discussion of this subject ([Chapter 1.III.2](#) below), we show that the rabbis found themselves in an uncomfortable position regarding this matter. On the one hand, they supported the community institutions and on the other they assumed the right of judgment. For this reason their stand was not clear-cut.

Once again we reach the same conclusion: the picture portrayed is not stereotypical. In the community in which they were wanted, they and those of their status enjoyed greater influence. Thus, the image of the community in this period is realistic and reflects the status of rabbis, including their limitations.

(5) *The Babylonian community as a test case.* In the following we briefly discuss the reliability of the Babylonian texts, and the nature of the Jewish community in Babylon. In this discussion we show that the community in Babylon had a different character to that in Palestine, and we point out the methodological difficulties in using the Babylonian Talmud as a source.

The Babylonian texts are similar in style and nature to those from Palestine, and accordingly they constitute a sort of test case. The conclusions that arise from the corpus of the Babylonian Talmud are different, and there is a great difference between the use of the Palestinian texts and that of the Babylonian Talmud as a historical source. This distinction reveals the quality of our research tool and criteria, and constitutes a sort of internal evidence of the reliability of the methods that we have applied.

In summary, we see the rabbinic texts as a reliable historical source. In this respect, they are as valuable as the Roman legal texts. The Roman law literature is also not an absolutely reliable historical source; here too, we can assume that not all the laws were observed to the word. Yet no researcher would consider neglecting these texts, even though he or she would try to confirm them in light of other knowledge of daily life of the time. We have adopted the same approach to the rabbinic texts. In general, we accept them as a reliable historical source, with the limitations and reservations already noted.

Different weights should be accorded theoretical law and indications of day-to-day life. A distinction should be made between a source that describes what was probably an unusual incident and one that describes a daily custom. A description in a legend should be treated differently to evidence of actual activity.

Every source requires examination and clarification, but we do not believe that there is any reason to reject the use of a Talmudic saying as a historical source without valid, proven textual, philological, historical or logical objections.

THE BABYLONIAN TALMUD AS A HISTORICAL SOURCE

To this point we have dealt with texts from Palestine. It seems that the Babylonian texts should be treated differently; their use requires particular caution. In this area we have also followed numerous scholars, and have not sought any methodological innovations. Our position on this subject is summarized by Gafni in his discussion of the Babylonian texts in general, and the Jewish community in Babylon in particular (Gafni 1991, pp. 19–30). The text of the Babylonian Talmud is a conglomeration that seems edited and complete from the outside but which is actually composed of a number of different elements, as follows:

- (1) Palestinian texts, as described above.
- (2) The Babylonian situation as known by the rabbis of Babylon.
- (3) The rabbis' utopia, that is, the reality desired by the residents of the *beit midrash* (school).
- (4) The rabbis' interpretations. The Babylonian rabbis were not always familiar with the situation in Palestine and therefore they interpreted these texts, at times, according to and inspired by the Babylonian situation, and at other times according to their own understanding and rules of interpretation. Needless to say, the result was not always realistic.
- (5) The inner dialectic of the Talmud and the objectives regarding the issue at hand, the desire to present the discussion of the law in the form of a dialogue (question and explanation), the aim of harmonization, literary needs and other rules of dialectics of the Babylonian issue.
- (6) The literary considerations of the last editor, and the last group of editors (the *Savoraim*).

Another question is: to what extent were the rabbis of Babylon involved in Jewish life of their time?

Our knowledge about Babylon refers mainly to the life of the *Amoraim*; we learn about life in the villages only from the Palestinian texts. A typical example is that a book was written about the economy of the Babylonian *Amoraim*, and this research and others were conducted on the economy in Palestine in general, but not on the economy of the rabbis.

In the course of the present work we refrain from dealing with texts that refer to life in Babylon, or the positions of the Babylonian rabbis, the editors of the Talmud. On the other hand, we do use those texts that seemed to us to fit with the Palestinian material, or quotations from the Palestinian texts that do not seem to have been altered by the editors of the Talmud. Moreover, it can be assumed that the Babylonian discussions of economic sectors that prospered in Babylon were also influenced by the situation in Babylon. Thus we limit our use of the Babylonian material that deals with such industries as flax-growing, fishing and so forth. We also consider the clear Babylonian formulations in those cases in which the Babylonian tradition differs from that in the Palestinian sources. Because of the limitations of the present work, we could not provide a detailed discussion of every case, pointing out the most prominent differences.

THEORY AND REALITY

The evidence that arises from the literary sources is to a great extent theoretical and schematic. As every researcher knows, there is a difference between the society as portrayed in literature and legal texts on the one hand, and the society in reality. In this respect the rabbinic texts do not differ greatly from every other literary stratum of the Roman era. The differences between the reality and the literary works have been dealt with extensively by researchers of the empire (MacMullen 1990, pp. 56–67). There are many examples, such as the difference in the position of women in the economy as portrayed in the Roman literary texts and the epigraphic evidence, the existence of small cities in the western empire, the vague distinction between city and village ([Chapter 1.III.4](#) below), and many other subjects.

Discrepancies of this type also appear to some extent in the Jewish texts. An example is the Utopian objection to trade and the preference for self-sufficiency. This Utopian view is expressed in the rabbis' teachings, in the works of Roman authors, as well as by the fathers of the Christian church ([Chapter 3.XI](#) below). However, in the rabbinic texts we can see that this economic system is purely Utopian.

The rabbinic literature is clearly popular literature, and it is possible to determine which sayings are theoretical and which are more realistic. Discrepancies do, however, still exist and they present the challenge that makes historical research interesting and exciting.

The rabbinic literature is literature, but this does not detract from its historical value. A book has recently been written on economics in the Mishna (Neusner 1990) as though the Mishna is an independent creation, detached from reality. It is as if a book was written on the economy according to Cicero, or the economy according only to Lucius Apuleius, or according to the body only of laws of Theodosius. Examinations of this sort are good for what they are (Millar 1981), but those interested in learning about the economics of the period should concentrate on using all the literary and archeological material to construct a full, complete picture, tested according to internal and external evidence and according to the mutual fit between all parts of the picture.

In this work, [Chapter 5](#) provides empirical evidence of the correctness of the method employed, as it presents an overall picture in which most of the building blocks we used are integrated into a single, clear, developed structure. In this chapter the evidence combines to produce a general picture of an open, developing economy, either generating, or resulting from demographic growth.

1

Settlement patterns

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SETTLEMENTS

Classical culture recognized three different levels of settlement: (1) the independent *polis*; (2) the “town” or agricultural village; (3) the “villa” or rural farmstead. Talmudic literature also dealt with the classification of the different types of settlement. The sages often refer to the tripartite distinction between town (*kerakh*), *’yr*, and village (*kfr*) (Krauss 1929, pp. 1–50). The *kerakh* was a large, fortified (walled) settlement, populated by non-Jews. Thus, one who would enter such a settlement was required to recite a special prayer in view of the dangers of a large city. In terms of settlement status, the *kerakh* was similar to the non-Jewish *polis* in Palestine, although the two need not always have been the same.

According to Krauss (*ibid.*), the *kerakh* was a walled settlement. We shall not, however, deal with this point in detail. In any event, it is clear that one of the major characteristics of this type of settlement was the great number of luxury items available there (see, for example, T Miqva’ot 4:6; T Shabbat 4:3; BT Shabbat 41b; T Eruvin 9:18; PT Eruvin VIII, 25b; T Avodah Zarah 6:6; BT Avodah Zarah 12a; T Bava Metzia 3:20; BT Bava Metzia 52a; T Berachot 7:16; BT Berachot 60a; T Avodah Zarah 1:6; T Kelim Bava Metzia 10:6; T Pesahim 1:13 and parallels; T Nidah 6:9).

The village in this context is a site, a number of buildings or a small settlement without public or communal institutions (see below). The town (*’yr*) includes all of those settlements somewhere in between the “village” and the gentile *polis*. This type of settlement complex was called *’yr* (singular), *’yyrot* (plural) and in Aramaic *krt’* (singular), *kryyt’* (plural). Talmudic traditions also distinguish between a “large *’yr*” and a “small *’yr*.” We shall return to deal with this distinction in the course of our discussion.

The Sages did not always adhere strictly to these distinctions in terminology. In addition to the tripartite division discussed above, there was also a dual division: *kerach* and village. The former was a rich and developed settlement while the latter had a much lower standard of living. The women in the *kerach* were more wont to frequent bathhouses. The bakers in the *kerach* baked more and more often than those of the village. There were many other similar distinctions (T Pesahim 1:13 and parallels; T Niddah 6:9 *et al.*). There were also distinctions between the residents of the various types of settlements. The resident of the *’yr* (*krtny*—from *krt’*) is often juxtaposed to the resident of the city. The urban dweller is accustomed to wealth and power associated with the government while the rural *krtny* is naive and ill at ease with life in the big city. The *midrash* describes how a rural bumpkin (*krtny*) came to the city and proceeded to break expensive glassware. The owner, an urban resident, did not ask for payment since the *krtny* had neither any idea of the value of the glass nor the means to pay anyway (Bereshit Rabbah 19:6, p. 175; see also T Kiddushin 2:7; BT Hagigah 13b *et al.*). It should be pointed out, however, that the Rabbinic sources were not always consistent in their use of the terminology and sometimes the village and *’yr* are interchanged.

This lack of consistency on the part of the rabbis, as well as on the part of gentile authors, can lead to a degree of confusion. *’yr* or town may refer a few times to a *polis*, to a farmstead or to a village. *Kryyt’* can refer to a small village or to large villages with thousands of inhabitants. The various phrases and concepts can even be interchanged at times in the same source.

Of course, the modern-day scholar cannot make do with the ancient and occasionally confusing system of antiquity. The ancient system may, however, still serve as the basis for the classification of settlements. This question of definition between town (village) and city will be discussed below in III.4. We should like to propose the following levels of settlement:

- (1) *polis*
 - (a) metropolis (capital of a province)
 - (b) important cities such as Joppa, Eleutheropolis, Diospolis, Neapolis (second century), Gaza, Ascalon, etc.
 - (c) smaller cities such as Jamnia, Azotus, Sebaste (from the second century), Diocletianopolis, Aelia Capitolina (in the Roman period), Nicopolis, and other cities.

This subdivision represents the varying sizes of cities, but not administrative or municipal differences.

- (2) town (a) “large town” (local center—capital of an area)
 (b) “medium-size town”—large village or local center
 (c) “small town”—small village town.

This second category is found in the sources themselves. A *baraita* in BT Ta’anit 21a explicitly differentiates between a “large town” and a “small town.” Eusebius in his *Onomasticon* differentiates between a village, large village, and town (*policne*). The Madeba Map (Avi-Yonah 1953) distinguishes between *poleis*, large towns, small towns, villages, and plain rural buildings. Essentially, the classification described here is based on an analysis of the size and transportation networks of the various settlements in the Galilee and Samaria. The major differences between the settlements are found in the levels of transportation networks pertaining to the individual settlements. The ancient sources also refer to different levels of “cities,” such as the capitals of toparchies like Jericho, Gofna, Thamna and Lod (before it became a city), or to settlements which are described as a “town and its satellite (or offshoot) settlements” such as “Sikhnin and its satellite settlements,” “Beth Hananiah and its satellite settlements” or “Ginossar and its satellite settlements” (S. and Z.Safrai 1975). It is clear, of course, that in addition to these large settlements there were medium-sized and smaller settlements, and for this reason we have proposed our own system. The differences between the settlements mentioned above (2a-c) are in respect to size and population, but not in essential matters. Therefore, in the course of our discussion we shall be able to refer to the different types of settlements cited in (2) as one basic unit.

- (3) village (a) a village composed of a small number of private houses
 (b) the private “*yr*” or Roman villa, usually a house or a number of houses belonging to a wealthy landowner.

The village is a branch, as it were, of the *yr*. Farmers whose land is far from the mother settlement and who find it difficult to return to their homes every day would build a temporary domicile outside the mother settlement. On the other hand, the rich landowner does not want at all to be connected to the mother city and prefers to maintain his distance.

The term *yr* in Talmudic literature refers at times to the private farmstead of a landowner, while the village (*kfr*) can refer to (3a–b). We shall discuss this further in the course of the book.

II. THE *POLIS*

II.1 Introduction

As in the rest of the Roman Empire, the cities in Palestine were also the backbone of the province. Municipal activities, government functions, economic affairs, the cultural and intellectual life of the provinces all revolved around the city. The Roman Empire can be defined as a system in which the cities rule the rural population. In this respect, Provincia Judaea-Palastina was no different from any other province of the Roman Empire. The economic structure of the Palestinian *polis* can, therefore, be studied within the context of the cities of the Empire.

Many studies have examined the phenomenon of the *polis* at this time. Some studies deal with the *polis* in the context of the Roman Empire in general (Jones 1971; Claude 1969) while some deal with local problems of cities in the provinces or with specific provinces (Magie 1950; Wachter 1975). There is, as yet, no complete collection of the material on Palestinian cities and, therefore, there is no purpose in dealing with these cities as a separate unit. In this chapter we shall attempt to point out the general characteristics of the city during the Roman period in Palestine.

II.2 Urbanization

II.2.1

The Hellenistic period (before the Hasmonean revolt)

The Hellenistic period begins, for our purposes, in the middle of the Persian period when the coastal cities mentioned in the description of Pseudo-Scylax first appear. It is clear that there were many changes during the Hellenistic period (lasting about

four hundred years), but it is not always possible to determine all the details regarding these urban developments. Even so, it is possible to deal with this period as one unit. The cities which were built during this time can be divided into three basic categories (Avi-Yonah 1963, pp. 17–35; Z.Safrai 1982).

II.2.1.1 Coastal cities

The Greeks established colonies along the coast from Achzib in the north to Raphia in the south. However, the ancients did not really know which were the appropriate spots in which to set up a port or harbor city. They also did not always know where such cities were unnecessary. As a result of this ignorance, many cities were founded in the Hellenistic period, but only few of these cities survived beyond that time. Cities like Achzib, Haifa (or Shiqmona), Crocodilonpolis and Adaroth disappeared after this time. The coastal cities during this period were generally established at distances of 8–16 kilometers from one another. The smallest distance is between Crocodilonpolis (at the mouth of Nahal Taninim) and Straton's Tower (later Caesarea), a mere 5 kilometers, and the 2–3 kilometers between Anthedon and Maiumas Gaza. The greatest distance between coastal cities is the 25 kilometers between Straton's Tower and Apollonia. Not all the cities were built at the same time during the Hellenistic period, nor were they all similar in size. It is clear that Straton's Tower and Apollonia were built later on. Apollonia, Shiqmona, Crocodilonpolis and Bucolonpolis were, it appears, very small (Avi-Yonah 1963, pp. 25 ff.).

Paradoxically, Beth She'an should also be added to the list of coastal cities. All the coastal cities were located on important highways and enjoyed excellent agricultural conditions. Beth She'an, throughout all the periods under discussion here, fulfilled both of these conditions and, therefore, for the purpose of our discussion, should be added to the list of coastal cities. Its commercial importance was the result of the fact that it was located at an important commercial intersection leading to the cities of the Transjordan.

II.2.1.2 Cities of the mountainous regions

At this time there were four administrative units: Galilee, Samaria, Judaea and Idumaea. The "city" need not always have been the capital of the district, or region. It is doubtful whether Beth Yerah belonged to the Galilee from an administrative point of view, but it is clear that economically speaking, it should be considered part of that district. Among the cities of the mountainous regions, only Samaria (the future Sebaste) was a large and *strong polis* and this was the case only because the government established a Macedonian colony there. Beth Yerah and Adora did not survive beyond the Hellenistic period. Jerusalem did survive, and more or less functioned as an urban center, but the Greek community there did not develop.

II.2.1.3 Cities of the inner plain

Pegai, Maresha and Geba belong to this category. All of these cities were founded after the Greek conquest of Palestine and are not listed in Pseudo-Scylax. Many of these cities tried to secure control over the mountainous regions, in spite of the difficulties (economic and political) in building cities in this area.

II.2.2 *The Hasmonean kingdom*

The Hasmoneans conquered most of the coastal cities. These cities also suffered damage as a result of this conquest. The status of these cities during the Hasmonean period is not clear, but it is certain that they all suffered difficulties during this time and it was as if urban development came to a standstill in spite of the economic growth of that period. Only Joppa continued to function as a harbor city at that time (Applebaum 1980).

Pompey and Gabinius

Pompey (63 BC) restored many Greek cities. However, it seems that he did not found or build new cities. Rather, he restored some of the Greek cities from the pre-Hasmonean days. Pompey's decision regarding individual cities can be seen as a process of selection whereby it was decided which cities were viable and could survive, and which small artificial cities could not. Another process of selection was undertaken by Gabinius a few years later. Thus a drop in the number of cities in Palestine does not indicate a drop in the level of urbanization or a halt to urban development. On the contrary, the criteria for the establishment of cities became much higher. Small cities like Pegai, Crocodilonpolis and others were not restored and

continued to function only as villages. It should be pointed out that Joppa did not become a *polis*, but remained in Jewish hands and continued to function as a Jewish port (Avi-Yonah 1963, p. 49).

Herod

Herod built three entirely new cities: Caesarea (Straton's Tower), Sebaste (Samaria) and Geba (as well as Antipatris which, however, did not become a *polis*). All three were actually ancient cities which Herod restored and built almost completely anew in elaborate and ornate form. Herod, in spite of all his building activities, never really built a completely new city. He did, however, spend a good deal of money on the construction of Sebaste and Caesarea and built an extensive harbor for that last city, providing it with an important economic base.

II.2.3

The sons of Herod (4 BCE-4 CE)

The sons of Herod ruled over Galilee and the Golan which had been considered marginal until this time in terms of geopolitical interests. Thus no cities were built there up to this time (except for Beth Yerah or Philoteria during the Hellenistic period, which did not survive beyond that time for lack of the appropriate basis for urban survival). The attention that these regions now received resulted in the construction of a number of new cities, some of which existed almost down to modern times. The building of Julias was an absolute failure. Herod Antipas apparently thought that the city could survive in a fertile agricultural region even if it was not built near major roads. Julias is near a number of secondary routes, but it seems this was not enough.

Livias, built in the Transjordan, also did not survive too long. The two cities that were built in the Galilee, however, Sepphoris and Tiberias, soon became the major settlements of their regions and continued as such till the beginning of the twentieth century. Tiberias is still the central city of the eastern Galilee. It is possible that a *polis* was established in Joppa at that time (Applebaum, unpublished), but that matter still requires further study.

II.2.4

Vespasian and Hadrian (70-135 CE)

The most far-reaching change was the destruction of Jerusalem, which had been the metropolis as well as the most important urban center of the mountainous region, in the year 70 CE during the Great Rebellion. It was rebuilt as a smaller city in about 130 CE. During this period new cities were founded. This was not the actual construction of new cities, but rather the granting of the rights and status of *polis* to already existing ones (Joppa, Schechem (Neapolis) and possibly also Antipatris). This period marked the further development of the cities of Palestine and in particular the cities of the hill or mountain region. Thus Neapolis was founded as a small city, but quickly began to grow. Sepphoris received a gentile name and the gentile aspects of the city were further stressed. At the same time, however, a number of cities declined in their fortunes or were destroyed. Such cities, for example, were Dor, Geba, Apollonia, and Sebaste, which did not lose their status of *polis*, but became much smaller. Julias and Livias ceased to exist as cities and survived only as villages.

It is possible, though, to find an explanation for this phenomenon. Dor and Apollonia declined on account of the success and growth of nearby Caesarea. The same is true regarding the decline of Sebastea and the growth of Neapolis, only nine kilometers away (Z.Safrai 1986b). Perhaps the decline of Geba is associated with the success of Legio which until now had simply been the base of a Roman legion (the Sixth), but became the city Maximianopolis by the end of the third century CE. There may be individual reasons for the decline of individual cities, but the phenomenon was general and a general reason should be found. There are two possibilities. Either there was an economic decline at this time which resulted in the decline of the small cities, or the process of selection continued, favoring and strengthening stronger cities at the expense of the weaker ones. It would seem likely that the second possibility is correct. The general economic advancements and developments there could not have taken place within the context of an urban recession. Moreover, as we shall see below, urbanization is connected to the strengthening of the non-Jewish population of Palestine and, in fact, derives its momentum from that population, which increased in strength and power at the end of the first century CE and at the beginning of the second century CE. It is thus unlikely that exactly then there was a decline in urbanization.

The Bar-Kochba revolt (132-5) also played a role in the events we have described. There is no reason to claim or assume that these cities were destroyed during that revolt. However, the difficult economic situation in the wake of the revolt may have contributed to their decline. The strong cities quickly recuperated, while the weak ones disappeared.

II.2.5

The third century

Cities built at this time in the plain include Beth Gubrin (Eleutheropolis), Emmaus (Nicopolis), Lod (Diospolis), and Legio (Maximianoupolis, built at the end of the third century). It is likely that Antipatris was also built at this time, although there is no definite proof. The common denominator of all these cities is that they serve to connect the mountain region cities (built, for the most part, earlier) and the coastal cities. We shall discuss this point further below. Some cities which had begun to decline in the second century now lost the official status of *polis* and became villages (Geba, Dor, Apollonia). This represents the end of the period of their decline which had started over a century before.

II.2.6

The Byzantine period

This period saw the rise of a great number of small cities which lacked the natural urban qualifications to survive. Diocletian was the emperor who began this urban building in Palestine. At the beginning of his reign, Maximianoupolis was built in the Jezreel Valley. This city did, apparently, have the proper natural qualifications. Next, Diocletianopolis was built, 2–3 kilometers from Ascalon. It is obvious that two cities cannot function within such a small area. Some of the cities which were built now were cities which had ceased to function or had disappeared during the second or third centuries (Dor, Apollonia and Geba). Some were the result of a bifurcation of existing cities (Azotus Paralius, Maiumas Gaza, etc.). This perhaps might explain the relationship between Ascalon, a port city, and Diocletianopolis, the corresponding inland city. Some of the cities were actually built anew (Bethulia, Helenoupolis and a number of cities whose location is unknown). All of this is the result of the hyper-urbanization which took place in the Byzantine period. Palaestina Prima became one of the most urbanized provinces in the Byzantine empire, second to Pamphilia (Koder 1986). Palaestina Secunda was a little less urbanized. Characteristic of this process is the construction of artificial cities which had no chance of survival. The new cities were, to be sure, built in economically developed regions, but they were also built in areas already dense with urban construction. It is not surprising that they ceased to exist a short time after they had been built.

Many of these new cities were built in the Gaza Strip. This phenomenon requires some explanation. Moreover, throughout the entire period, Anthedon, only 2–3 kilometers from Gaza, continued to function. The city also had a small harbor which naturally would have served to compete with the harbor of Gaza. At first glance it would seem that Anthedon should be defined as an artificial city which should not have been rebuilt during the time of Gabinius, or which should have ceased to exist in the second century. The city, however, did survive. It is true that we lack information regarding the area in the second or third centuries, and perhaps the city did suffer some type of decline. It appears, however, in all the lists of cities from the Second Temple period onwards and is certainly functioning as a city from the time of the Council of Ephesus (431) and afterwards.

This would seem to prove that the Gaza region was quite conducive to urban development. The following factors may explain this phenomenon. (1) The region contained important intersections of the routes leading from spice and gem centers (Arabia); (2) The major route from Egypt to Syria passed through this area. Needless to say, this route also had a positive effect on more northern regions; (3) This is the only region in which the shore is suitable for the construction of harbors, and the area is also quite fertile. The ground water in the Gaza region is at a particularly high level, but there is little flooding. It would seem certain that the ancients knew how to utilize this water-supply.

All of this, however, only partly explains the great degree of urbanization in that region, and actually only explains why the emperors felt (incorrectly) that this was the best region in which to build additional cities. Our discussion above perhaps partly solves the problem of Anthedon, but it is hard to believe that even in that case this is sufficient. The solution may be found in the political sphere. Maiumas was founded in order to protect the Christian inhabitants there from pressures exerted by pagan Gaza (Avi-Yonah 1963, p. 117). Based on this assumption, we can perhaps offer an additional suggestion. Gaza was certainly a non-Jewish center. Perhaps Anthedon was more of a Jewish center. Anthedon was built by Herod, perhaps to compete with non-Jewish Gaza. Gaza, it should be remembered, was connected both politically and economically to the Nabatean kingdom. Herod did not enjoy very cordial relations with the Nabateans. It is not inconceivable, then, that Herod constructed an artificial city in order to weaken Gaza. There are a number of indications that this may be so, but it cannot be proven. We have no clear-cut reason, in any event, for the continued existence and success of Anthedon during this period, and the matter warrants further study.

II.2.7
The early Arab period

We shall not really deal with this period. However, it should be pointed out that it was a period of decline and destruction in terms of the settlement history of Palestine. Most of the cities in Palestine were destroyed. Only the largest and most established continued to function. During such difficult times only those cities with natural characteristics tended to survive. Thus, the following cities were destroyed: Geba, Dor, Apollonia, Javneh-Yam, Anthedon, Antipatris, Sebaste, and others. The coastal cities suffered in particular, on account of the economic recession there due to the collapse of international sea trade. This phenomenon, however, requires separate study.

II.2.8
Summary of the geo-historical process

Urban development in Palestine was the result of two processes: economic development and internal migration (which could change or affect the balance of power in internal power struggles). Most of the cities were, in one way or another, non-Jewish (except for Jerusalem up until 70 CE and Joppa from 141 BCE–70 CE). It can be stated with a fair degree of certainty that the economic process was the most important factor in regard to urbanization, while political problems tended to hinder the natural outcome of this economic process.

The process of urbanization was almost continuous. It ceased only during the Hasmonean period. The fact that there was an urban crisis, even though there was economic development at the same time, resulted in a greater tendency towards the process of selection whereby the weaker cities were not restored. As we have seen above, crisis conditions speed up the process of urban selection and highlight the differences between cities which have the natural characteristics to survive and artificial cities.

If it were not for Pompey and Gabinius, the process of urban restoration would probably have been much slower. Political considerations of the Hasmoneans hurt the cities. Roman political considerations, however, resulted in precisely the opposite and brought about widespread restoration of the cities. Thus, except for the Hasmonean period, the process of urbanization was continuous. This was the case in spite of the occasional rebellions and difficult security conditions in Palestine. These difficult conditions may have slowed up the process, but did not entirely stop it. Thus, for instance, the period of the anarchy (230–80 CE) did not mark the construction of any new cities. The dying out of cities then must be explained in a different manner.

From a geographic point of view, there are three general characteristics of urbanization: (1) the founding of new cities; (2) the development and growth of existing cities; (3) selection. Selection is an integral part of urban development, even if it results in fewer cities. This selection is a necessary weeding-out process. Perhaps in controlled city-planning mistakes could have been avoided and artificial cities would not have been built. When the building of cities is spontaneous, however, and cities are constructed without always paying heed to geographic considerations, mistakes are inevitable. Hindsight can determine these urban mistakes, but infallibility cannot be demanded of the ancients. Moreover, it is likely that the construction of artificial cities is a necessary stage in rapid urbanization. The very existence of small urban centers is, most likely, necessary for the development of the larger urban settlements. It is difficult to know the exact situation in a city caught up in this process of selection. Did the population and level of services decrease, or did the city simply maintain its status quo while other cities grew and developed? In any event, the decision to transform a city into a *polis* is not based solely on settlement or geographic considerations. It is clear that political considerations were also important and the emperor, relying on the advice of his advisers or the requests of his friends, would decide whether to transform a city into a *polis*. This administrative decision was at times based on whim. Even so, there are a number of geographical stages evident in this stage of urbanization:

- (1) The establishment of small cities on the coast (many of which were artificial cities and many of which had been established as early as the Persian period).
 - (1a) The establishment of additional coastal cities and the strengthening of existing cities having the qualifications of survival and growth.
- (2) The process of selection among the coastal cities and the establishment of the first mountain region cities (from the Hellenistic period until the Hasmonean revolt).
 - (2a) The continuation of the process of selection among the coastal and hill cities, including the strengthening of central urban sites (from Pompey to Herod).
 - (2b) The completion of selection among the coastal cities and the re-establishment of urban hill country centers (from the end of the Herodian period to the reign of Hadrian).

- (3) The construction of cities in the transition or intermediary area (from the second to third centuries), and the further development of the hill or mountain region cities.
- (4–4a) Over-urbanization in the plain and the establishment of new cities, including many that failed in stages 2a–2b. Some cities that failed in stage 2, such as Tabor, were also restored. In this case, though, there were reasons particular to that site, apparently connected with its sanctity.

These stages are similar to the stages of urbanization as determined by scholars such as Taaffe (Taaffe and Gauthier 1973). For the sake of comparison, we shall illustrate the situation in Palestine graphically on the basis of Taaffe's model. However, in this representation, there is no relevance assigned to the individual locations of the cities or to the distances between them. This fact requires further study (Figure 1).

Taaffe's model is based on the development of the road network in relation to urban development. It is difficult to examine this model in Palestine for the following reasons. (1) It is very difficult to know exactly when each road was constructed. At best we can sometimes determine the possible time when construction began, but the road could have existed previously in some other form. (2) It is impossible to determine the individual major arteries, or to determine if there were changes in the levels of their function or technological innovations which affected their function. (3) The road network was constructed for the most part by the authorities or by the army. Usually, economic considerations dictated the necessity for construction, but sometimes there were also defense and administrative considerations. The connection, therefore, between the road network and the urban situation is not always clear. For example, Legio took on major importance in the road network already in the second century because it served as the base for the Sixth Roman Legion. The Roman army constructed roads from its base at Legio to the cities of the Galilee. Legio, however, became a city only 150 years later. Lod also occupied a central and important position in the road network by the beginning of the second century. The Via Maris, as well as a number of roads from the base *Figure 1* cont. of the hill country, also passed by that site. Lod, however, became a *polis* only much later. It is also clear that in some cases there is a direct connection between the construction of a road and the development of a nearby city, although it is not always easy to distinguish this phenomenon. Therefore, we cannot utilize the road network of Palestine to analyze or improve the model (Figure 2).

II.3

The nature of a Roman *polis*

It is very easy to define a city in the Roman period. An official city is one which received the status of *polis*, and this status was given by the emperor. This administrative definition is most precise, but it does not define the nature of a city sufficiently. The settlements which received this status were generally located near major intersections and became large and important settlements even while they were still villages (A.H.M.Jones 1971, pp. 261–94). The emperor's considerations are beyond the scope of our study. However, it is still necessary to determine the nature of the city after it had been established.

As is well known, the phrase "city" has no exact definition. Scholars have enumerated a number of urban "characteristics," and only those settlements having a great many of those were generally considered, in a geographic sense at least, to be cities. Different periods had different quantitative requirements regarding these characteristics. Thus, for example, a large population is generally considered one of the characteristics of a city. In the Biblical period, however, a large population for a settlement could be several hundred. In classical antiquity, the necessary number may be a few thousand, while in modern times a large population might number several hundred thousand, or even millions.

We shall enumerate below the characteristics of the Palestinian "polis" (apart from the Negev) during the period under discussion. The list is based on the various discussions concerning the modern city, taking into consideration those elements particular to the ancient world (Mumford 1966; Finley 1973, pp. 123–7):

- (1) Large population. It is impossible to determine exact numbers, although a small city probably had anywhere from 8,000–20,000 residents. This number is based on the estimated size of cities (see Figure 3).
- (2) Institutional structure. The city would have high-functioning and independent administrative bodies as well as a town council (*boule*). This is the major characteristic of a *polis*. Essentially, a *polis* can be defined as a self-ruled settlement possessing the necessary institutions required of the *polis*.
- (3) Control over the neighboring region. During the Roman period the *polis* ruled over the adjacent rural territory. Before that time there was a different municipal system. In that previous system, every district (*toparchy* or *nome*) had a local capital, but that capital as well as its municipal institutions did not control the entire region (Schalit 1969, pp. 100–20).
- (4) Architecture. The city had its own unique architectural nature. It had, for instance, many public or community buildings (theatre, stadium, gymnasium, etc.). It usually provided a central supply of water, bathhouses, sewage system, walls and

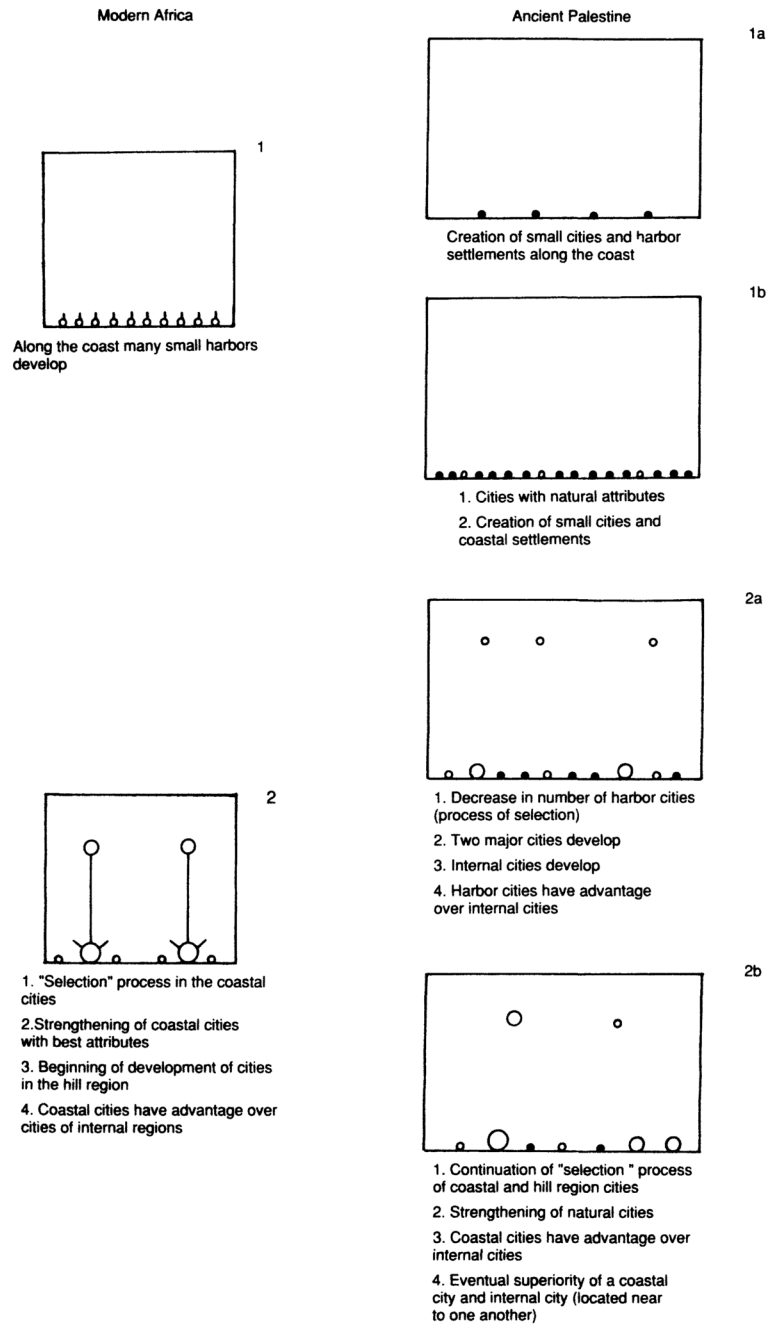
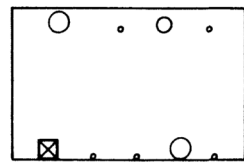


Figure 1 Geographic model of urban development in the Land of Israel during the Hellenistic, Roman and Byzantine periods.

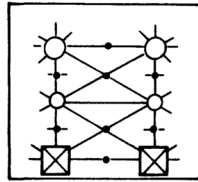
other services. It often had rather crowded residential quarters (see no. 5) and multi-storied buildings (Tsafrir 1984, pp. 59–128).

- (5) Social stratification. The city had both rich and poor, nobility and commoners. During the classical period, especially prominent were the rich landowners, their tenants and slaves.
- (6) The city was larger than the rural settlement (in accordance with nos. 1 and 4). A middle-sized city was somewhere between 200–300 dunams. The large rural settlements were between 100–120 dunams (see below).
- (7) Sources of employment. In the classical city, as well as in the village, the economic system was based on agriculture (see Chapter 4). The city differed in that it was more industrialized, relatively speaking, than the village.
- (8) Local mercantile and economic center.
- (9) The level of services was relatively high (in accordance with nos. 1, 2, 4 and 5).
- (10) Hellenistic population, whether in terms of the origins of the inhabitants or in terms of outlook or culture. This factor is listed last because it is not one of the general characteristics of a city and is particular to antiquity. It is, however, of



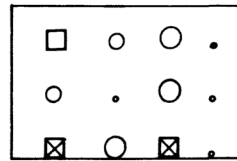
2c

1. Continuation of selection process in coastal cities and strengthening of coastal cities
2. Renewed building of hill cities
3. Increasing power of coastal cities



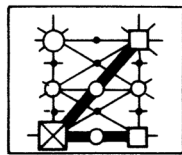
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1. Coastal cities grow. Selection process ceases
2. Internal cities grow
3. Creation of intermediate cities
4. Roads to intermediate cities and connection to a number of coastal cities. Roads to internal cities and connection to one coastal city
5. Small settlements established at intersections



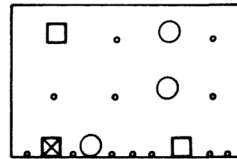
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1. Building of cities in intermediate zone. These cities usually become powerful quite quickly
2. Further development of coastal and hill cities



4

1. One coastal city achieves priority
2. One hill city achieves priority
3. High-grade roads between various urban centers
4. Superiority of coastal cities



4

1. Over-urbanization
2. Further strengthening of hill cities and cities of intermediate zone

- Settlement
- Small city
- Medium city
- Large city
- ⊗ Very large city
- Road
- Main road

- Small settlement
- Very small city
- Small city
- Medium-sized city
- Large city
- ⊗ Very large city

paramount importance in the case of the cities of Palestine. Actually, a city never existed unless it had a non-Jewish element which eventually, at least, became dominant. The gentile element, however, did not have to be a majority. Thus, for example, cities such as Sepphoris, Tiberias, Lod (Lydda), Schechem and others were established with a majority Jewish or Samaritan autochthonous population. This majority was generally hostile to the gentile (or Samaritan) minority, and opposed the establishment of Hellenistic institutions or Hellenistic practices. It was this Hellenistic population, however, which determined the nature of the city and the establishment of institutions there. Thus, for example, the coins of Sepphoris and Tiberias have imperial and pagan motifs which certainly would not have been acceptable to the Jewish population.

The cities in Palestine were built for the gentile and hellenized population. When the city was established, a gentile population was often brought *in*, even if it was not indigenous to the region. When he restored the cities in Palestine, Pompey particularly chose the Hellenistic cities which had been destroyed by the Hasmoneans. This was also the policy of Herod who developed Geba and Sebaste as gentile urban centers. This was not stated specifically regarding Caesarea, and later on the Jews of the city would actually claim that the city was theirs since, as they would state, the founder of the city (Herod) was theoretically

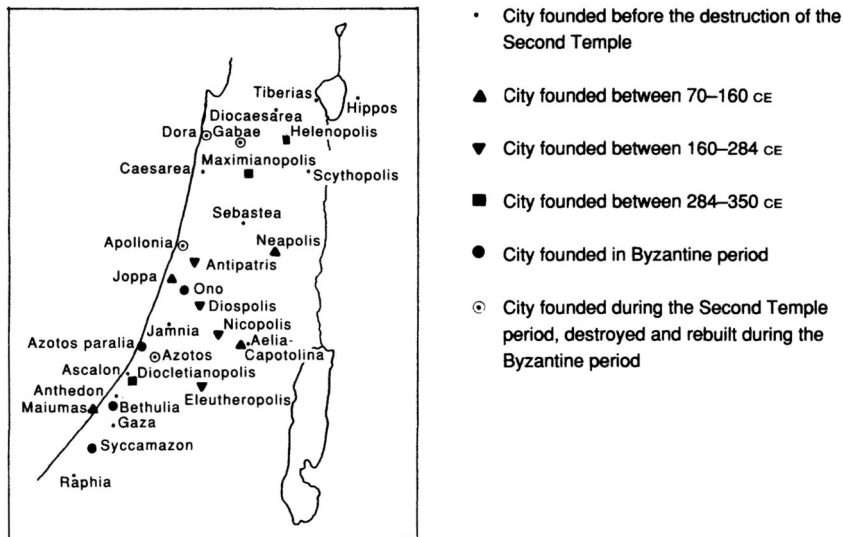


Figure 2 Map of cities in the Land of Israel.

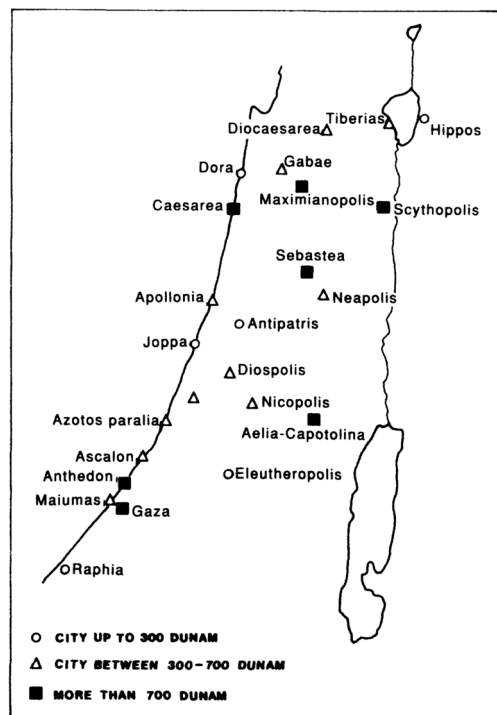


Figure 3 The size of cities in the Land of Israel.

Jewish (Josephus, *Antiquities* 20. 173, Levine 1975). In spite of this and in spite of the large Jewish population, the city was essentially non-Jewish. The growth of the foreign community constituted another factor in the openness of the *polis* (city) to the influence of the Hellenistic culture. There were many natives in the *polis*, but it was a Hellenistic settlement, like Roman cities throughout the empire. Thus the *polis* served as a channel for the penetration and dissemination of Hellenism throughout Palestine. A similar process took place, of course, throughout the empire, but in Palestine this cultural-political process also had an ethnonational aspect. It seems that this latter aspect is crucial to understanding the history of the province. In the kingdom of Herod, which was for the most part Jewish and, in fact, in all of Palestine until the Bar-Kochba revolt, the gentile population was found essentially in the cities. In the Second Temple period, however, there were a number of Jewish cities. Jerusalem until 70 CE was Jewish, although it is not clear whether it had the administrative status of a *polis*.

Centers of autochthonous population (Jews, Samaritans and perhaps Edomites) retarded the growth and development of cities and this is one of the reasons why it took so long to establish them in the hill or mountain regions, where the Jewish and

Samaritan populations were very strong. This is an example of local political interests affecting the geographic process we described above.

As stated previously, the city controlled the adjacent territory from an administrative as well as from an economic standpoint. This control, however, was not just geographic in nature. There were also social and ethnic implications to the control of the city, since the Hellenistic city, by controlling the countryside, also had control over the Jewish population. Thus, the classic conflict between city and country also took on a social and ethnic guise. This last element, however, requires separate study.

The major source of material for the study of the economy of Palestine is the corpus of Talmudic literature. This material indicates that Jewish settlements were for the most part rural. However, there were Jewish communities in the cities and Talmudic literature occasionally gives a glimpse into the life and customs of the *polis*. The majority of the material, however, deals with the rural and village economy and therefore the bulk of our discussion regarding the economy of Palestine will deal with this sector. We shall deal with the urban economy in [Chapter 4 \(VI\)](#).

As mentioned above, the city controlled the adjacent territory. The suburbs of the city may be divided into a number of different types. (1) Villas belonging to the wealthy (V.5). (2) What may be described as service suburbs, as, for example, the harbors near the coastal cities (Maiumas Gaza, Javneh-Yam, Azotus Paralius, etc.). Hamath Tiberias and Hamath Gader were of a similar nature. These sites had well-known *thermae*. (3) In the rural sector of the city there were villages, both large and small. Thus, for example, within the agricultural periphery of Neapolis were 5 major settlements and 15 satellite villages (Z.Safrai 1986, p. 106, [Figure 4](#)). This phenomenon was also especially prominent in the Jerusalem area. Hundreds of graves have been found in the area around Jerusalem. According to Jewish law, these tombs had to be outside the actual settled area. The walls of the city include within them an area of about one square kilometer. To the north and west of the city within an area of 3–4 kilometers very few graves have been found (Kloner 1980, pp. 268–96). These northern and western regions were probably the suburbs of Jerusalem and densely constructed, although not as densely as the city itself. As just stated, the necropolis of the city extended a distance of 3–4 kilometers. According to Kloner, this was the agricultural hinterland of the city. Beyond this were a large number of towns and villages. There were also additional sites within the agricultural region. Kloner (1980, pp. 320–1) counted some 16 sites, some towns and some farms or satellite settlements. In addition, reference should be made to Bethphage (Beth Pagi) which was a suburb, or possibly a neighborhood of the city (S. Safrai 1965, pp. 153–5), even if it was located some 500 meters from the city walls and a deep and steep valley separated it geographically from Jerusalem ([Figure 5](#)).

II.4

Economic services provided in the *polis*

The *polis* enjoyed, for the most part, autonomy. Even if the Roman authorities attempted in some ways to limit this privilege, the city still retained a highly developed mechanism for independent self-rule. The local administrative system was also highly efficient and encompassed many aspects of life. The involvement of the city in the economic sphere, the topic of our study, was quite pronounced and even if there are only a few clear-cut specific indications of this regarding the cities of Palestine, there is no reason to assume that the situation there was different from that in the rest of the Empire. Thus the material regarding the Empire in general, pertaining to this point, can also be used for Palestine (A.H.M.Jones 1966, pp. 211–19, 250, 259–69; 1974, pp. 35–61; Magie 1950).

II.4.1

The *polis* owned lands, in the agricultural hinterland as well as in the city. Residences or stores were often built on the municipal lands. The rents for these plots were an important source of income for the city. There are two testimonies to this practice from the Byzantine period regarding the cities of Palestine. In Ascalon, for instance, there was a law that three-quarters of the property of a landowner who was not survived by a male would be forfeited to the city (Procopius, *Anecdota* 29. 17; A.H.M.Jones 1966, p. 200). Choricus seems also to refer to municipal land in Caesarea (Or. 2. 19). There is no clear indication that the Jewish town owned land, although one source does mention that a store belonged to an 'yr (T Avodah Zarah 6(7):1). On the one hand, it is possible that the 'yr refers to a *polis*, while on the other hand it is also possible that the reference is to a Jewish town having a highly developed and independent level of self-government (pp. 46–61 below). Talmudic traditions also possibly relate an instance of the confiscation of a house for a *polis* (T Avodah Zarah 6:2).

The city, too, had a monopoly on a number of elements associated with business and trade. The selling or renting out of these monopolies was also an important source of income for the city.