ACADEMIES IN PALESTINE:

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According to an oft-quoted tradition of Hoshayah (a collector of Tannaite traditions, who lived in Cæsarea in the first half of the third century), there existed in Jerusalem 480 synagogues, all of which were destroyed with the Temple. Each of these synagogues was provided with a school for Biblical instruction, as well as one for instruction in the oral law. Besides these schools of the lower and middle grades mentioned by the tradition (which is not to be too readily discredited, though it may have exaggerated their number for the sake of a good round figure), there existed in Jerusalem a sort of university or academy—an institution composed of the scribes (sages and teachers), whose pupils, having out-grown the schools, gathered around them for further instruction and were called, therefore, talmide ḥakamim ("disciples of the wise"). There is, however, no certain information as to the organization of this institute, or of the relation in which it stood to the Great Sanhedrin, whose Pharisee members certainly belonged to it. The most important details of its activity are afforded by the accounts concerning the schools ("houses") of Hillel and Shammai, whose controversies and debates belong to the last century of the period of the Second Temple, and relate not only to the Halakah, but also to questions of Biblical exegesis and religious philosophy. For example, it is said that the schools of Shammai and Hillel occupied two and a half years in discussing the question whether it had been better for man not to have been created ('Er. 13b).

Jabneh, Temporary Center of the Jewish Nation.

The destruction of Jerusalem put as abrupt an end to the disputes of the schools as it did to the contests between political parties. It was then that a disciple of Hillel, the venerable Johanan ben Zakkai, founded a new home for Jewish Law in Jabneh (Jamnia), and thus evoked a new intellectual life from the ruins of a fallen political existence. The college at Jabneh, which at once constituted itself the successor of the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem by putting into practise the ordinances of that body as far as was necessary and practicable, attract all those who had escaped the national catastrophe and who had become prominent by their character and the learning. Moreover, it reared a new generation of similarly gifted men, whose task it became to overcome the evil results of still another dire catastrophe—the unfortunate Bar Kokba war with its melancholy ending. Dur the interval between these two disasters (56-117), or, more accurately, until the "War of Quietus" under Trajan,
the school at Jabneh was the recognized tribunal that gathered the traditions of the past and confirmed them; that ruled and regulated existing conditions; and that sowed the seeds for future development. Next to its founder, it owed its splendor and its undisputed supremacy especially to the energetic Gamaliel, a great-grandson of Hillel, called Gamaliel II., or Gamaliel of Jabneh, in order to distinguish him from his grandfather, Gamaliel I. To him flocked the pupils of Johanan ben Zakkaia and other masters and students of the law and of Biblical interpretation. Though some of them taught and labored in other places—Eliezer ben Hycranus in Lydda; Joshua ben Hananiah in Bekiu; Ishmael ben Elisa in Kefar Aziz, Akiba in Bene Berak; Hananiah (Hanina) ben Teradyon in Siknin—Jabneh remained the center; and in "the vineyard" of Jabneh, as they called their place of meeting, they used to assemble for joint action.

Palestinian Judaism Restored.

In the fertile ground of the Jabneh Academy the roots of the literature of tradition—Midrash and Mishnah, Talmud and Haggadah—were nourished and strengthened. There, too, the way was paved for a systematic treatment of Halakah and exegesis. In Jabneh were held the decisive debates upon the canonicity of certain Biblical books; there the prayer-liturgy received its permanent form; and there, probably, was edited the Targum on the Pentateuch, which became the foundation for the later Targum called after Onkelos. It was Jabneh that inspired and sanctioned the new Greek version of the Bible—that of Akylas (Aquila). The events that preceded and followed the great civil revolution under Bar Kokba (from the year 117 to about 140) resulted in the decay and death of the school at Jabneh. According to tradition (R. H. 31b), the Sanhedrin was removed from Jabneh to Usha, from Usha back to Jabneh, and a second time from Jabneh to Usha. This final settlement in Usha indicates the ultimate spiritual supremacy of Galilee over Judea, the latter having become depopulated by the war of Hadrian. Usha remained for a long time the seat of the academy; its importance being due to the pupils of Akiba, one of whom, Judah ben Ilai, had his home in Usha. Here was undertaken the great work of the restoration of Palestinian Judaism after its disintegration under Hadrian. The study of the Law flourished anew; and Simon, a son of Gamaliel, was invested with the rank that had been his father's in Jabneh. With him the rank of patriarch became hereditary in the house of Hillel, and the seat of the academy was made identical with that of the patriarch.

Movements of the Sanhedrin.

In the time of Simon ben Gamaliel the seat of the Sanhedrin was frequently changed: its first move being from Usha to Shefar'am (the modern Shefa 'Amr, a village about twelve miles eastward of Haifa); thence, under Simon's son and successor, Judah I., to Bet Shearim; and finally to Sephoris (Zipporin), the modern Sefoorieh, where celebrated disciple of Akiba, Jose ben Halaffa, had been teaching. Only with great difficulty could Simon ben Gamaliel establish his authority over this pupil of Akiba, who far outshone him in learning. Simon's son, Judah I., however, was fortunate enough to unite with his inherited rank the indisputable reputation of a distinguished scholar, a combination of great importance under the circumstances. Judah, in whom "Torah and dignity" were combined, was the man appointed to close an important epoch and to lay the foundation of a new one. The academy at Sephoris, to which eminent students from Babylonia also flocked, erected an indestructible monument to itself through Judah's activity in editing the Mishnah, which attained to canonical standing as the authentic collection of the legal traditions of religious practise. In the Mishnah, the completion of which was accomplished soon after the death of its author or editor (about 219), the schools both of Palestine and of Babylonia received a recognized text-book, upon which the lectures and the debates of the students were thenceforward founded. The recognition of Rabbi Judah's Mishnah marks a strong dividing line in the history of the Academies and their teachers: it indicates the transition from the age of the Tannaim to that of the Amoraim.

Centers of Learning.

After Judah's death Sephoris did not long remain the seat of the patriarch and the Academy. Gamaliel III., the unpretentious son of a distinguished father, became patriarch; but Hanina ben Hamo succeeded him as head of the school, and introduced the new order of things that commenced with the completion of the Mishnah. In Hanina's lifetime the last migration of the Sanhedrin occurred. His pupil, Johanan b. Nappaḥa, settled in Tiberias; and the patriarch Judah II. (grandson of Judah I.) soon found himself compelled to remove to that city. The
imposing personality and unexampled learning of Johanan rendered Tiberias for a long period the undisputed center of Palestinian Judaism, the magnet which attracted Babylonian students.

When Johanan died in 279—this is the only settled date in the whole chronology of the Palestinian amoraim—the renown of the Tiberias Academy was so firmly established that it suffered no deterioration under his successors, although none of them equaled him in learning. For a time, indeed, Caesarea came into prominence, owing solely to the influence of Hoshaya, who lived there in the first half of the third century, and exercised the duties of a teacher contemporaneously with the Church father, Origen, with whom he had personal intercourse. After Johanan's death the school at Caesarea attained a new standing under his pupil Abbahu; and throughout the whole of the fourth century the opinions of the "sages of Caesarea" were taken into respectful account, even in Tiberias. Sepphoris also resumed its former importance as a seat of learning; and eminent men worked there in the fourth century, long after the disaster to the city wrought by the forces of the emperor Gallus. From the beginning of the third century there had been an academy at Lydda in Judea, or "the South," as Judea was then called. This academy now gained a new reputation as a school of traditional learning. From it came the teacher to whom Jerome owed his knowledge of Hebrew and his insight into the "Hebraea Veritas." But neither Caesarea, Sepphoris, nor Lydda could detract from the renown of Tiberias.

Tiberias accordingly remained the abode of the official head of Judaism in Palestine and, in a certain sense, of the Judaism of the whole Roman empire, as well as the seat of the Academy, which considered itself the successor of the ancient Sanhedrin. The right of ordination which, since Simon ben Gamaliel, the patriarch alone had exercised (either with or without the consent of the Council of Sages), was later on so regulated that the degree could only be conferred by the patriarch and council conjointly. The patriarchal dignity had meanwhile become worldly, as it were; for exceptional learning was by no means held to be an essential attribute of its possessor. The Academy of Tiberias, whose unordained members were called haberman (associates), never lacked men, of more or less ability, who labored and taught in the manner of Johanan. Among these may be mentioned Eleazar b. Pedat, Ami and Assi, Hyya bar Abba, Zeira, Samuel b. Isaac, Jonah, Jose, Jeremiah, Mani, the son of Jonah, and Jose b. Abin, who constitute a series of brilliant names in the field of the Halakah. In the department of the Haggadah—always highly prized and popular in Palestine—the renown of Tiberias was also greatly augmented by many prominent and productive workers, from the contemporaries and pupils of Johanan down to Tanhumah b. Abba, who was illustrious as a collector and an editor of haggadic literature.

The Jerusalem Talmud.

The imperishable monument to the school of Tiberias is the Palestinian or, as it is commonly called, the Jerusalem Talmud, of which Johanan b. Nappa laid the foundation; for which reason he is generally styled, although erroneously, its redactor or author. In point of fact, however, this work was not completed until nearly a century and a half after Johanan's death; and its close is undoubtedly connected with the extinction of the patriarchal office (about 425). But Tiberias did not therefore cease to be a seat of learning, although very little of its subsequent activity is known. According to a Babylonian legend, a scion of the Babylonian exilarch's house fled to Tiberias in the first third of the sixth century, and there became a resh pirka (ἀρχιφερεχίτης = head of the school); a hundred years later a Syrian bishop made an appeal to the sages of Tiberias for the purpose of inducing Du Nuwas, the Jewish king of South Arabia, to cease his persecution of the Christians there.

The Tiberian Punctuation.

Further importance was gained by Tiberias as the seat of the Masoretic traditions and innovations; for there in the seventh century was introduced that system of punctuation which was destined to aid so efficiently in the proper reading and understanding of the Biblical text. This system, which achieved universal recognition, is called the "Tiberian punctuation." At Tiberias flourished, about the middle of the eighth century, the Masorite Phinehas, called also Rosh Yeshibah ("Head of the Academy"), and Asher the Ancient, or the Great, forefathers five generations of Masorites (Nehemiah, Moses, Asher, Moses, and Aaron), was to a certain extent his contemporary. The last-named Aaron ben Moses ben Asher (briefly called Ben Asher), a contemporary of Saadia, brought the Tiberian school of Masorites to a distinguished end. Tiberias thereafter ceased to play any part in Jewish learning, until, in the twelfth century, it emerged for a brief period, and again in the sixteenth century, when it became the object of the pious ambition of Don Joseph Nasi of Naxos.