For many periods of its history, the Near East, including Palestine, was one of the most densely urbanized regions of the ancient Mediterranean. Urban centres existed especially along the Levantine coast and in the nearby fertile plains. The central hill country, on the other hand, was usually less densely built up. At the end of the Persian period, that is, in the fourth century BCE, important urban centres existed at, for example, Ashqelon, Ashdod, Dor, and Acco on the coast, and at Samaria in the hinterland. In most of these cities, Jews were in the minority. The only predominately Jewish city was Jerusalem; its size, however, did not match that of the coastal centres (Finkelstein 2008).

Phoenicians dominated the coastal strip and controlled trade posts in the hinterland (for instance, Tel Anafa in the Galilee). Through their mobility (maritime trade and colonies), the Phoenicians had introduced Western imports and Western culture since the seventh or sixth century BCE at the latest (Luke 2003; Waldbaum 1997; Wenning 1981). Furthermore, Greek colonies had existed along the coast since the seventh century BCE, and exerted a cultural influence that was picked up by local elites, such as the upper class of Persian-period Samaria, as welcome vehicles to express loyalty and status. As far as our scant evidence allows us to determine, local Jewish elites in Persian-period Jerusalem did not employ
Greek material culture to any large extent. Smaller Palestinian inland settlements mostly continued late Iron Age traditions of urban layout and material culture.

2. The Hellenistic Period: Mechanisms of Urbanization

From the third century BCE onwards, Palestine was incorporated first into the Ptolemaic and then into the Seleucid Empire: large, trans-regional and multi-ethnic political entities with a centralized government partly based on Greek elites and Greek forms of governance and culture, under rulers who traced their origins and political legitimacy back to the descendants of Alexander the Great. Although the heyday of the classical independent polis-state was over with the establishment of these Hellenistic territorial empires, much of its ideological and formal elements were deliberately continued by these rulers and exported into regions which had not had any connection to Greek culture before that time. Land was distributed and settled by colonists such as the kleruchoi (military settlers) or citizens from Greek cities.

In Palestine a major phase of urbanization and urban transformation began after the conquests of Alexander the Great (Barghouti 1982; Sartre 2005), a process that was continued by the Romans (Kennedy 1999; Millar 1993). The general settlement pattern shifted profoundly as hilltop tell sites, a feature that had dominated the landscape for millennia, were gradually abandoned or reduced to small villages, while large numbers of dispersed settlements started to appear in the plains and in previously unoccupied hilly areas during the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods. Motivations for founding such settlements varied, ranging from the wish to establish a residential centre, to the attempt to integrate recent territorial acquisitions, securing them militarily or transforming them ethnically.

Many features of urban culture remained largely unaltered over many centuries. Urban culture, where it existed, was shaped by Hellenistic architecture, legal structures, and material culture. It was often the indigenous local elites who were the most active recipients and promoters of Hellenism, which, eventually, was to affect all indigenous cultures of the region, including Judaism. At least with regard to Palestine, the number of foreign inhabitants generally remained low and was certainly not sufficient to account for the slow, but steady transformation of Palestinian society towards Hellenism. Hellenism did not level out regional differences, it provided new opportunities of expression on the basis of a new architectural, decorative, and artistic ‘language’ (on the problem see, e.g. Sartre 2005: 274–96).
2.1 Urban Life

Despite the many differences, there were certain elements common to basically all regions of the Hellenistic world, the most important being the city, the Greek *polis* or Latin *civitas*. To be a ‘city’ had territorial, architectural, legal, and social implications. Cities functioned as the prime place where non-Greeks came into contact with the correct use of the Greek language, Greek customs, and Greek education, familiarity with which was crucial for anybody who wanted to distinguish himself from a more local background, become a full citizen, and move up the social ladder to be finally accepted as a peer among the ‘Greek’ cultural elite. At the same time, only the city offered those institutions that helped preserve, cultivate, and refine one’s cultural competence and skills: schools, *gymnasia*, and theatres. Common cults, amongst them the ruler cult, the cult of the city founder or the veneration of a particular city deity, as well as local calendars and festivals greatly contributed to the creation of a ‘civic identity’ and a ‘civic consciousness’.

This status was mainly expressed in the city’s legal and administrative institutions (Sartre 2005: 156–62). Before the Hellenistic age use of the public sphere was an almost exclusive privilege of the king. Now citizens, notables, officials, artists, and philosophers could express themselves in the public sphere as well. Their ambitions took shape in the form of buildings, inscriptions, and statues. The competition of oligarchic, urban elites for reputation within the city, and of a particular city over against other cities, created an atmosphere of actively donating and sponsoring building projects. Many monumental buildings were financed by citizens who were, in turn, honoured with public recognition and lasting memory through public recommendations and dedicatory inscriptions.

Crucial for any city was a certain degree of internal self-government. Cities entered diplomatic relations with each other and with territorial and foreign rulers. Although the relationship between the territorial government and local institutions was complex and regionally diverse, most Hellenistic rulers were careful not to violate the ‘freedom’ of a city and, as far as possible, exerted their power indirectly, for example through *euergetism* and treaties with representatives of cities. On the other hand, cities often turned to the king when they felt abused by intermediate officials such as governors, and kings tended to respond swiftly, mostly in favour of the cities. Cities returned such favours by expressing their loyalty to the emperor through dedications and games in honour of the ruler.

Formally, relations between cities and rulers were not based on an equal share of mutual rights and obligations. Any freedom and prosperity that a city enjoyed resulted from the magnanimity of the ruler, who granted concessions on the basis of the city’s loyal behaviour towards him, concessions which could be revoked at any time. If burdens imposed by a ruler became too hard, cities could always desert him and side with potential usurpers. Since cities were the centres of economic power within any Hellenistic kingdom, such threats had to be taken seriously.
However, more often than not such a rebellion turned out to be futile, in which case the city had to face the wrath of the ruler it tried to dispose of. Punishment could take many different forms, ranging from the revocation of privileges (for instance taxation, urban status), to the loss of freedom for its citizens or certain groups amongst them, the confiscation of property and, not infrequently, the city’s ultimate destruction.

While the newly founded urban centres of the Levant imitated the ideology of the classical Greek polis, they were not simple copies of it. By no means does the title polis imply that all of the inhabitants of an eastern city, or even the majority, would be ethnic Greeks. Furthermore, not all inhabitants of a polis were full citizens and entitled to fully participate in political life. Women, children, slaves, foreign residents, and guests were protected by the city laws, but remained excluded from decision-making processes as well as from many aspects of public life. The Romans later distinguished between two kinds of cities: foreign cities (peregrini) in the provinces, which were allowed to maintain their own traditional rights and privileges, and cities that were founded as, or elevated to, the status of municipium or colonia, whose institutions and legal conditions more or less reflected those of Rome itself (Jacques/Scheid 1998: 240 and 244–50 on cities of peregrine status, ibid. 251–66 on communities with Roman legal status; on settlements without the status of a city, such as towns and villages, see below). Until the first coloniae were founded in Palestine after the First Jewish Revolt (66–73 CE), cities were governed according to indigenous legal conditions. Before 212 CE, when Caracalla in his Constitutio Antoniniana granted all free–born inhabitants of Roman provinces Roman citizenship, very few inhabitants of Palestine had enjoyed that privileged status.

### 2.2 Religious Life

Religion was part of the daily life of cities. Apart from their general sacred nature, cities were the home of various, often very substantial, temples and sanctuaries, and the stage for all sorts of religious activities (sacrifices, processions, etc.) both in the public and private spheres. Wayside shrines and altars of neighbourhood corporations, guilds, and other cultic associations made the divine present everywhere (Jacobs 2000). Each house in a city was considered sacred space, protected by the ancestral spirits and household gods. Each city usually had a special relationship to a tutelary god or goddess: in the Levant it was often a traditional deity in Hellenized garb (Zeus, Dionysos, Aphrodite). The city’s prosperity was personified by its Tyche or Fortuna. Rulers received cultic honours in various ways. Cities proclaimed themselves on coins or other expressions of official title as, for example, ‘holy and inviolable’ (Geiger 1990; Sartre 2005: 184f). The religious character of cities was also apparent in numerous local and regional festivals for which the city provided the social context: celebrations connected to the history of
the city (founding day), the rulers, the seasons, the army, or certain deities (cf. M. A.Z. 1:3). Despite all religious implications of urban culture, cities provided room for many different cultic activities that did not necessarily need official recognition, including Judaism (see below).

The city’s foundation itself was considered a sacred act. Any ‘foundation’—regardless of how ‘new’ it actually was—gave the ruler the opportunity to promote himself as the god-like ‘founder hero’ (heros ktistes), benefactor, and promoter of refined culture. Often a founding myth was added that served as the unifying focus of civic pride and identity. As a result, many cities started to count their years from their ‘foundation’ and adopted the name of their founder (cf. the numerous cities named after Seleukos, Antiochos, or Ptolemaios, and both the Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties’ reference to the great hero and model Alexander the Great in Pella).

2.3 Urban Planning and Public Institutions

The foundation of a city did not necessarily imply a totally new creation at a place that was previously uninhabited. Often new cities were founded close to existing settlements that could subsequently be integrated into the new entity (for example, Mabartha and Neapolis). Existing cities could also be enlarged by bringing in new settlers (colonists, veterans), several settlements could be combined into one new city, or the ‘foundation’ of a city could merely consist in elevating its status.

Urban life and civil consciousness were directly linked to the visible appearance of a city (Ball 2000: 248–306; Sartre 2005: 168–83; Sperber 1998). Urbanization undertaken by Near Eastern Hellenistic rulers featured a widespread use of monumental architecture which included an urban layout with colonnaded streets, temples of different forms and traditions, architectural styles and decoration, baths and nymphaea, etc.

In the Hellenistic period, many cities were protected by strong walls (e.g. Dor, Marissa, the acropolis at Samaria, the large temple-city on Mount Gerizim under the Ptolemies, and Jerusalem under the Hasmonaean), and could only be accessed through often impressively decorated gates. In the Roman period, many cities were without defences or existing walls were not enlarged until the political situation called for renewed fortification, for example during the latter third century CE. (Caesarea Maritima, Neapolis, Tiberias, Ashdod, Gaza, Bet Shean in the Roman period; cf. Sperber 1998: 117–27).

Characteristic for Hellenistic city foundations, but rarely fully adopted in the Levant, was the so-called ‘Hippodamian’ (‘checkerboard’) system of organizing urban space, streets, and buildings. A regular set-up of broad, parallel axes and perpendicular streets divided the city into rectangular blocks (Sperber 1998: 9–57). Because of topographical restraints, few Palestinian cities fully reflect the
Hippodamian ideal. A good example of this phenomenon is Caesarea Maritima. The main streets are often as regularly built as the local topography and conditions permitted, whereas secondary streets were more irregular (Sperber 1998: 101–16). Backstreets were often used as additional workspace by artisans.

Markets (agora/forum) served as commercial spaces and public places of communication and display (Segal 1997: 55–81), and constituted the public heart of a city. Markets could not be opened without official permission. Apart from fresh produce and common goods usually marketed close to their places of origin, markets in larger cities were also ideal places to obtain products from more distant locales (on urban and village markets, see Lapin 2001: 123–52; Rosenfeld/Menirav 2005). Since markets promised high profits through taxes and levies, local authorities supervised permits, quality of produce, and prices. The most important market official was the agoranomos or astynomos, who is frequently mentioned in rabbinic sources (Sperber 1998: 32–47).

Markets could be organized around large open spaces surrounded by colonnades with buildings containing shops and stalls or booths between the columns (Sperber 1998: 9); or they could be located along streets lined with shops and mixed with residential units (Sperber 1998: 9: Palladius-Street in Scythopolis). The open space was often paved, porches offered traders and passengers some shade, and the colonnaded streets were embellished with statues and/or inscriptions (on colonnaded streets see Segal 1997: 5–53; on the ‘sculptural environment’ of Roman Palestine and rabbinic reactions towards it, see Eliav 2002; idem 2008; Eliav/Friedland/Herbert 2008 in general; Oppenheimer 2008; Pollini 2008; Sartre 2008). Food and meat markets (macellum) sometimes formed individual architectural units (e.g. at Gerasa).

A large number of services were available at and around the markets. Donkey-drivers and porters were ready to carry goods home (Sperber 1998: 15). Craftsmen such as potters, basket makers, fullers, wine merchants, or carpenters, often organized in guilds, were concentrated in special quarters (y. M.Q. 2:4, 81b; Sperber 1998: 108). Taverns, food-shops, and pubs were never far from crowded markets and main streets, and many of them also offered the services of prostitutes. Brothels were not far either. Market days often had religious undertones, since they sometimes coincided with pagan festivals or were officially dedicated to a deity (sometimes taxes were even lifted on such days, or the revenue was donated to a charity), making it difficult, but not impossible for Torah observant Jews to participate (Graf 2002: 448–50; Veltri 2000).

Since no city can survive without water, large water storage facilities had to be built within the city walls. The transportation of water to the city was secured through aqueducts, with the earliest post-Iron Age aqueducts from Palestine dating to the Hasmonean period (Amit/Patrich/Hirschfeld, eds. 2002; Sperber 1998: 128–48). Because of the eminent significance of water, its distribution inside the city was supervised by special officials. The main aqueducts usually conducted
water to large, lavishly decorated public fountains (*nymphaea*) and to small water fountains further along the road (Segal 1997: 151–68; Sperber 1998: 133–5).

At least in the Roman period, markets, temples, private homes, latrines, and especially public and private baths of larger cities were connected to the freshwater and sewage system. On the basis of bathhouses, often located near the markets, rabbis contemplated whether and to what extent pious Jews should abstain from certain forms of public life (Eliav 2000; Jacobs 1998b: 219–311; Sperber 1998: 58–72; on bathhouses in Palestine see Hoss 2005). Rabbinic sources reflect many aspects of Hellenistic and Roman bathing culture, for example technical details (heating, hot and cold baths), decoration, personnel (vendors, attendants, anointers), available services (massages, exercises), the use of bathing utensils (*strigilis*, soap-oil, unguents), and bathing customs (see also Eliav in this volume). Rabbinic texts on bathing practices are valuable documents showing the participation of rabbinic circles in this common practice and way of life of Hellenistic and Roman society. Rabbinic bathhouse stories even share many literary aspects with similar Roman and Christian narratives (e.g. anecdotes about jokes in baths; fending off demons; sitting in a bath together with heretics; moralizing anecdotes; cf. Jacobs 1998a: 309–11).

Some aspects of ancient bathing culture, however, are rarely or never mentioned in rabbinic texts: only indirect hints can be found on prostitution, and no homoerotic undertones appear. Especially noteworthy is the silence about medical services that were available in many baths (see Hammat Gader, or a Jewish synagogue in the *palaestra* of the bath-gymnasium complex in Sardis). Just like ordinary Romans, Jews would have visited the bathhouses late in the afternoon. Nowhere do we find the request to set up a special ‘Jewish’ set of bathing regulations as opposed to the usual pagan ones. As far as baths are concerned, rabbinic standards of decency obviously did not differ much from commonly accepted ones (see the criterion of ‘modesty’: Derekh Eretz Zuta 7:2; T. Ber. 2:20 on the prohibition on greeting someone in a room where people wander around undressed). Baths were an integral part of the civic life in antiquity, and they were used in that function by rabbis just as by any other ancient person.

Another typical feature of urban life was the theatre (see also the chapter by Weiss in this volume). Ever since Herod first introduced theatres, hippodromes, and *stadia* (for example in Damascus, Sidon, Jerusalem, Caesarea Maritima, and Jericho), they were part of the urban environment of Palestine (Fiensy 1991; Jacobs 1998b; Segal 1995). After the First Jewish Revolt, the number of theatres rose dramatically (Jacobs 1998b: 328). Theatres were used for public performances of various kinds, although not necessarily for bringing complete plays to stage. Hippodromes and *stadia* were used for chariot and horse races and for running and related athletic contests (Weiss 1999; on Caesarea Maritima see Patrich 2002). Amphitheatres, which were present in Palestine from the second century CE only, were used for gladiatorial combats or animal baiting.
Although theatres and similar buildings would have been a familiar sight to any Jew living in a larger town or city, rabbinic attitudes were ambiguous because of the kind of performances that could be viewed in these institutions (y. A.Z. 17, 40a; Gen.R. 80:1). Apart from pointing to the waste of time involved in attending a play, rabbis targeted the often indirect or open pagan undertones of many performances. Nevertheless, theatres were important centres of public life and missing a show at the theatre meant missing meeting people or excluding oneself from urban society. Because of their bloody nature, gladiatorial combats were often condemned, a view with which the rabbis agreed not only with Christians, but also with many philosophically inspired pagans (Jacobs 1998b: 333–4 and 346–7). On the other hand, rabbinic literature seems to provide evidence for Jewish gladiators (see, e.g. Weiss 1999: 47–8). We must assume that with or without rabbinical consent, Jewish attendance at these urban forms of entertainment and socializing was frequent (Weiss 1999: 43–9).

2.4 Administrative Organization

The proper functioning of public life and the maintenance of public order were guaranteed by various officials who usually belonged to the local elite (on the characteristics and functions of that elite, see Jacques/Scheid 1998: 275–93). The public administration was housed in various buildings such as the city council, the meeting place of the convention, and the houses of the leading magistrates, high priests, and city officials. Archives for keeping tax or birth records supported the local administration. As local officials were authorized to incarcerate culprits, almost every city had a prison (Sperber 1998: 76f). Both public and private business (lawsuits, negotiations, leisure) was carried out in the basilica, a large, often lavishly decorated, multi-purpose hall that functioned as an indoor forum with additional administrative rooms (Schwartz 1998: 158–61; Sperber 1998: 73–7; cf. T. Toh 7:12–14).

Because of the high importance of trade for the city, the surrounding countryside, and the territorial government (levies, customs, and taxes), markets were strictly controlled by special officials (agoranomoi; see page 170 above). Temples also often had their own officials who made sure that the specific laws and practices of the cult were followed. The same applies to gymnasia or musical collegia which played an important role during festivals and processions. City officials were often organized in groups and mostly chosen by lot. Some of their tasks were considered public services, and expenses were expected to be paid by the person who fulfilled the position (leitourgiai). The sponsor’s compensation was his public recognition. Ordinary citizens contributed to the upkeep of their city by paying fees.

Many cities had kept the right to mint their own coins. Others, such as Sepphoris (66 CE) or Tiberias (around 100 CE) received that right from Rome (Meshorer 1985: 33–5; Sigismund 2007). The right to mint coins always had to be granted by the
territorial authorities (the Roman emperors or the Roman Empire as such) and therefore was a special token of loyalty (Chancey 2004). At the end of Emperor Gallienus’ reign in the second half of the third century, money in the Roman Empire had lost so much of its value that coinage had to be standardized and city coins disappeared. On the other hand, cities were subjected to a complex and variable system of taxation by the central government (Jacques/Scheid 1998: 245–6; Sartre 2005: 183–8 on ‘civic competition’). Apart from these external duties, cities had the right to levy their own taxes, grant privileges, and demand services (Jacques/Scheid 1998: 283–6).

A city’s income was mostly spent on public services, such as paying officials, funding public infrastructure and buildings, legislature and jurisdiction, defence, police, public grain supply, or maintaining diplomatic relations with the ruler(s) and other cities. Tax exemption was not an instrument of social policy, but more a reward for distinguished benefactors’ extraordinary efforts on behalf of the community. The administration of a city’s income and expenses was the responsibility of the treasurers. Temples, which employed their own officials and presented a crucial element of urban life, were also important centres of financial activity. They functioned as banks and owners of large properties, whose revenues were distributed among the cultic personnel or lent out to be invested.

Of course, considerable differences existed between cities with respect to their economic structure. Cities on major trade arteries, that is, those which were located at the sea coast or close to interregional highways, were less dependent on agriculture, and could generate large revenues from the capital flow and the production and transport of goods. Agricultural cities, mostly located in the hinterland, had less opportunity to market their goods and largely depended on income from agriculture, the resources of which were often concentrated in the hands of a few landowners.

In the Hellenistic period, when the Palestinian coastal cities underwent major transformation (Ptolemais, Jaffa, Ascalon, Gaza), a major boost in urbanization took place in the Transjordan region. From the early third century BCE onwards, archaeological evidence shows that a number of cities were founded at, or next to, existing indigenous settlements (e.g. Pella, Dion, Gadara, Gerasa, Philadelphia, as well as Philotheria on the Sea of Galilee under the Ptolemies; Scythopolis under the Seleucids; cf. Ball 2000: 181–97). The purpose of these new foundations was to channel trade and increase income (coastal cities) and, as far as Transjordan is concerned, to secure strategically important territory. The first wave of urbanization therefore affected only the flanks of Jewish Palestine, the coast, and Transjordan, territories that at the beginning were not densely populated by Jews. Only in the following phase of Hasmonean expansion did urbanization take root in Judaea with the successive integration of urban centres into a generally less urbanized central region.
Ironically, while the Maccabean uprising (second century bce) was set off to stem the tide of Hellenism, the resulting Hasmonean dynasty more and more turned into the main factor paving the ground for the development of a specific Jewish-Palestinian version of Hellenism. Under the Hasmoneans, urbanization mainly proceeded in the context of territorial expansion, as many Greek and Graeco-Phoenician cities in the coastal plain, the fertile valleys (e.g. Scythopolis), and in Transjordan were incorporated into the Hasmonean territory, and Jewish settlements were established there. The fact that urban centres of Hellenism now existed within territories under Jewish domination had profound effects on Judaism. Increasingly, elements of Graeco-Roman culture appeared in Judaea (architecture and objects), although less frequently than in later periods, for example under Herod. The only ‘city’ under Hasmonaean rule that was entirely Jewish in character was Jerusalem. Although probably not a polis in the formal sense, Jerusalem became the main focal point of a ‘Palestinian-Jewish’ version of urbanism that came to flourish under Herod.

The Hasmonaean policy of urbanization through conquest had another effect that should not be underestimated. The now greater proximity of a large number of people of ‘foreign’ culture triggered the opposition of traditional circles against the rulers and those members of the indigenous elite who embraced the ‘new fashions’. While this opposition was not a unified movement, it nevertheless shared some characteristic traits. It was inspired by indigenous, traditional values; it stressed the religiously motivated identity and way of life over against that of the ‘foreigners’; and it was often fuelled by xenophobia and the fear of losing out economically. These motivations could easily go hand in hand with internal rivalries among the elite itself, but also with the structural imbalance between city-elites and dependent villagers. In that respect, Jewish anti-Hellenistic and anti-urban opposition is not very different from what we can detect—sometimes with a much smaller textual basis—for example in Egypt (Blasius 2002; Blasius/Schipper, eds. 2002). What remained was an atmosphere of distrust and alienation between some Jewish circles and their Hellenized elites, and a Jewish population that was divided about the blessings and curses of Hellenism and the increasing urbanization of their country.

The arrival of the Roman general Pompey brought an end to Hasmonaean expansion and the ‘liberation’ of many non-Jewish cities, thereby, among other things, creating the Decapolis (Ball 2000: 181–97; Isaac 1990: 152; idem 1992: 336–40). These cities expressed their gratitude to the Roman general by beginning their calendar with the year of liberation (“Pompeian year’). Although the governor of the newly created Provincia Syria exerted military control, Palestine remained under self-governance, first under the last Hasmonaeans, then—as the chaos of the Roman civil war came to an end—under Herod, King of the Jews and socius et amicus populi Romani.
Under the *Pax Augusta*, the long rule of Herod initiated an unprecedented wave of political stability, economic recovery, and of urbanization, stimulated by Herod’s own visionary initiative, and a competitive atmosphere among eastern Mediterranean client kings, in which Herod participated (Issac 1992: 340–2; Richardson 1999). Herod was part of a world that used building projects as prime expressions of one’s loyalty toward the emperor and as documents of the ideal ruler’s benevolence toward his subjects and the prestige of his royal house. The political circumstances, and Herod’s own aspirations, required that he acted as the ruler of both Jews and non-Jews in his territory. He apparently respected the feelings of his Jewish subjects as far as possible and refrained from using human images in his Judaean building projects, thereby contributing to the development of a distinctive Jewish material culture, from the Hasmonean period to the typical ‘Herodian’ style.

Outside of the predominately Jewish areas, Herod acted like any other Hellenistic king. He founded cities, invested huge amounts of money in their infrastructure (e.g. harbours), and initiated the integration of his territory into the Roman world (see Richardson 1999: 197–202; Sartre 2005: 153–56). The influx of Graeco–Roman culture was especially visible in Herod’s new foundation, Caesarea Maritima, which was built with very innovative techniques and constituted the economic centre and pagan capital, as well as the most cosmopolitan place of his realm (Richardson 2002: 104–28; Sartre 2005: 201–2), but also in his other, less researched new cities such as Sebaste and Antipatris (see also Zangenberg 2008: 31–4).

Unfortunately, it is difficult to know how Herod’s cities were internally organized. What we do know suggests that the king followed Hellenistic models. Herod’s cosmopolitanism also introduced a number of technological innovations to Palestine such as hippodromes, theatres, domed cupolas, and the latest fashion in wall painting. The high degree of integration within the eastern Roman Empire made it also possible to invite foreign architects and artisans to carry out Herod’s ideas.

After Herod’s death his kingdom was divided amongst his sons, who continued their father’s policy of urbanization on a smaller territorial scale and in regions that were until then little affected by urbanism. Antipas transformed the Galilee by founding Tiberias and massively investing in Sepphoris, and Peraea by founding Livias on the spot of an indigenous village (Jensen 2006: 126–86). Philippus followed his father’s example by founding Julias on or near today’s et-Tell, just east of where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee, and by integrating little urbanized territories in the Hauran and Ituraea.

4. The Roman Period

When the Romans, themselves deeply Hellenized, incorporated the Near East into the Roman Empire, they made extensive use of existing Hellenistic structures, both
material and administrative (Richardson 2004: 5). Direct Roman rule, which began in Judaea under governors succeeding Herod’s incapable son, Archelaos, who were subordinate to the legatus Syriæ, was subsequently introduced in regions formerly ruled by Antipas and Philippus, and did not profoundly change this situation. Herod’s cities developed and flourished, but antagonism between Jewish and non-Jewish inhabitants grew continuously. Jews and non-Jews increasingly mistrusted each other and quarrelled about religious privileges and political influence. The governors were unable, or unwilling, to remedy the situation and prevented the development of an urban Jewish elite in the Hellenized cities of Palestine, an elite which emerged amongst the urban Jewish communities in the Diaspora under the protective edicts issued by Julius Caesar. For northern Palestine, the transformation of Berytos (between 27 and 14 BCE) and of Ptolemais (in 52/54 CE) into Roman coloniae brought about massive territorial changes at the cost of the indigenous—often Jewish—population, and provides a good example of how urbanization could contribute to the alienation of an indigenous rural population (Berlin 2002: 57–73; Berlin/Overman 2002; Isaac 1992: 318–21 and 342–4 on Berytos and 322–23 on Ptolemais; MacMullen 2000: 1–29; Sartre 2005: 155; on colonization in general see Gosden 2004; Jacques/Scheid 1998: 259–63).

The outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt dramatically halted the process of population growth that had characterized the preceding decennia (Leibner 2006). The war devastated the parts of the region populated by Jews, left the Temple destroyed, and Jewish society uprooted. A vast number of Jews were either killed or deported. Many towns and villages, especially in the predominately Jewish hill country, were destroyed, the most famous example being Jerusalem, whereas the more cosmopolitan cities in the coastal plain, such as Caesarea Maritima, Ascalon, and Ptolemais were more or less left unharmed. They were used by the Romans as bridgeheads and supply centres for the invading army. This was also the case with the Hellenized cities of the former Decapolis, now integrated into Syria, and with inland cities if they had remained loyal to Rome. Sepphoris, whose population was acquainted with the role of governmental centre of the Galilee and had not joined the revolt, received the status of polis in 67/68 CE. Sepphoris’ elevation in status is documented by the issuing of a coin bearing the name eirenopolis, ‘City of Peace’ (Sartre 2005: 154).

A new period of urbanization began after the First Jewish Revolt, but it was now dictated by external goals and funded by foreign resources. Immediately after the war Vespasian established military colonies at strategic locations between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in central Samaria (Flavia Neapolis: Pliny, Natural History 5.14.69; Justinus, 1 Apologia 1.1.1) and between Jerusalem and the coast (Emmaus: Josephus, Bell. 7.217). Joppa received the epithet Flavia (Schürer et al. 1979, vol. 2: 113–4; Isaac 1990: 154–5; idem. 1992: 344–9). Whereas the period of massive urbanization under Herod was motivated by internal factors, urbanization after 70 CE followed external reasons: it can be seen as a vigorous attempt by the Roman
government to integrate the region of Syria-Palestine into the eastern part of the Roman Empire.

Based on a massive exchange of certain parts of the population (killed and enslaved Jews were replaced by Roman veterans and colonists) and internal population movements (remaining Jews resettled in the Galilee and the south, Jerusalem was taken over by the Tenth Legion), Roman policy after 70 CE was led by strategic considerations to safeguard the vital land connection between Egypt and Mesopotamia, to colonize the region, and to prevent the native population from ever raising their arms again.

Although the new cities were Roman foundations, almost all aspects of urbanization that the Romans used had already been introduced to the region under Herod. Most obvious were the building activities connected with the Roman military presence: roads were built or repaired (the earliest milestones are dated to around 70 CE), camps and posts of army units appear, and the Sixth Legion was stationed at Legio under Trajan (Isaac 1992: 427–35; see also Isaac in this volume). On the other hand, signs of Jewish recovery remain scant for a couple of decades.

The second and third centuries, especially the period of Hadrian (Isaac 1992: 352–9) and the Severans (Isaac 1992: 359–61) constituted the climax of urbanization before the Byzantine period. Cities such as Caesarea Maritima, Bet Shean, and Gerasa were promoted in status (colonia) and extensively enlarged and embellished. Jerusalem, too, became a Roman colonia with a population of predominately military settlers and the pagan name ‘Aelia Capitolina’. The whole process was only briefly interrupted by the Bar Kokhba revolt between 132 and 135, the second and last attempt by Palestinian Jews to regain freedom from Roman occupation and to revert the growing cultural domination by foreigners (Isaac 1992: 323–5 and 352–9; Sartre 2005: 155–6 and 167).

In the second century CE, a new building type, the amphitheatre, was introduced (Neapolis, Scythopolis; see Weiss 1998: 89–91; see also Weiss in this volume). A growing number of Palestinian cities changed their name or added pagan elements to it (Sepphoris, Lydda, Bet Guvrin, Tiberias), and a pagan presence became more and more visible. The quiet years of the second and early third centuries brought enough capital to Palestine to renovate buildings and to refurbish entire cities. Under the Severans, Sebaste and, shortly afterwards, also Neapolis were embellished with new buildings. In Sebaste, for example, the old Herodian forum and other monumental buildings were extensively renovated.

In the third and fourth century recognizably Jewish art and architecture re-emerged, interestingly not as a simple continuation along the sober Herodian lines of aniconic, geometrical, or floral decorations uniquely adapted from late Hellenistic models, but much more Graeco-Roman in character. A good example of the new style is the cemetery of Bet She’arim, where the sarcophagi contained decorations with popularized forms of animals (lions), angels (Nike), and mythological
motifs. The openness to iconic art, and the creative and active adaptation of pagan imagery prepared the way for synagogue art of the fourth to sixth centuries.

5. The Relationship Between City and Countryside

Since much of the Hellenistic and Roman presence was concentrated in the larger towns and cities, and since these urban sites have often been better preserved and documented than the rural areas, the majority of available data comes from urban contexts. Scholarly interest in the character and development of the Roman city in relation to the countryside has been influenced by Marxism, by Weber’s consumer city model and Finley’s adaptation of it (Weber 1966 and 1968; Finley 1999), and by the World Systems approach of Immanuel Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1974–1989, discussed for example by Woolf 1997), who, in turn, drew on the French Annales School tradition and notably on Fernand Braudel’s work (Braudel 1972–1974). Wallerstein’s approach led to an image of the Roman world in accordance with the core and periphery model: a system of economic and cultural cores surrounded by peripheral regions.

Based on sociological models, the economic dependency between town and countryside, as well as the cultural superiority of the urban environment has been a recurring issue of studies of the Roman Empire and its provinces. This scheme has also been utilized for understanding particular regions, for example the agricultural and economic development of the Negev in the Byzantine period, which included an expansion of the settlement area and large agricultural systems with terraced wadis (on this model see in general Lapin 2001).

Through continuous financial support the Roman government encouraged the defence of the border regions by the establishment of agricultural settlements even beyond their natural capacity. Government support could prevent an economic crisis in years of drought, which might otherwise turn the poorer elements of the settled population into nomads in search of work. Such a situation would, in turn, have led to a lesser degree of governmental control (and of defence against Arab raids, an increasing phenomenon in the late Roman period). Municipal activities, government functions, economic affairs, and the cultural and intellectual life of the provinces – all revolved around the city. On the basis of the core-periphery model the city can be considered to have ruled the rural population.

Since the 1970s, and influenced by the social sciences, archaeologists have become increasingly aware of the importance of the landscape. The longue durée philosophy developed by Braudel was used by New Archaeology’s field survey archaeology, and
applied to regional research projects as a theoretical background. In addition to the physical landscape, the conceptual landscape has received growing attention (see, e.g. Horden/Purcell 2000). In the archaeology of the Near East, the development towards a ‘landscape archaeology’ meant first and foremost a re-direction of focus away from stratified tells and the urban, monumental environment to the lesser-known rural areas. This shift has resulted in the excavation of rural sites and studies of villages and small towns (for instance, Ben-Tor et al. 2003; Ben-Tor et al. 2005; Dar 1986; Grossman 1992; Hirschfeld 1997; Maeir/Dar/Safrai 2003; for general overviews see Schwartz 1986). Increasing attention has been paid to agricultural and industrial installations, dwelling houses, and material culture. This shift of focus has led to a much better understanding of the structures, activities, and lifestyles of the ordinary rural and agrarian peasants (Richardson 2004: 6).

Since cities and larger towns have dominated the historiography of the Mediterranean, they are also sometimes assumed to have dominated its landscape (Safrai 1994: 19). Most of the population, however, lived in provincial towns and villages of various sizes. During the first century CE small rural towns and villages increased both in number and in size. Similarly, the number of dwelling houses increased, covering a range of types and sizes (Richardson 2004: 25–6; cf. Hirschfeld 1995). The cultural transformation and Hellenization of smaller towns seems to have been much less influenced by Greek or Roman models. Although these models were gradually adopted, at least initially traditional influences played a larger role.

Town layout was similar to what we can detect in villages, without regular street axes or nifty monumental buildings (Sartre 2005: 167). The difference in size between Hellenistic cities and the larger traditional towns is significant, however: Aelia Capitolina or Scythopolis measured about 120 hectares, Caesarea Maritima 95 hectares and Sebaste approximately 65 hectares, whereas the towns of the Negev only measured between 4 and 17 hectares (Sartre 2005: 167).

In many ways, cities influenced life beyond their own confines. Every polis had a subordinate territory of varying size (chora), in which villages and farms existed. Graeco-Roman literature refers to three different types of settlement: the independent polis, the ‘town’ or agricultural village (kome), and the ‘villa’ or rural farmstead (agros) (Safrai 1994: 17–99; see Mark 6:56). Towns without the legal status of a polis were considered to be on the same level as villages whose inhabitants shared an inferior legal status. The city council and its officials usually exerted jurisdiction over the surrounding towns, villages, and farmsteads. In regions where such cities did not exist, smaller units were subsumed under a ‘district’ (toparchia). This district had an administrative centre which did not necessarily have to be a ‘polis’ in the stricter, legal sense (cf. Herod’s toparchies). Inhabitants of towns and villages could not gain Roman citizenship, since the citizenship of a city usually was an indispensable prerequisite (Jacques/Scheid 1998: 240).

The city and the rural countryside were connected in various ways. Citizens of cities could have property outside the city and have it administered through
stewards (cf. Mark 12:1–12 and parallels). Produce from rural territories fed the inhabitants of the cities, was marketed in the city, and was taxed by the city. The city in turn supplied services (such as space, structures, and expertise for all sorts of legal, economic, and social activities) for its rural territory (Freyne 1997: 33).

The rural population was often less Hellenized than their urban counterparts, adding a certain cultural twist to an economic and social imbalance that had the potential to create instability and to spark unrest (discussed by scholars in connection with the conditions in the Galilee before the First Jewish Revolt; see Berlin/Overman 2002; Freyne 2000: 86–113). The major factor in this asymmetrical relationship was that access to the most important resource, land and its revenue, was unequally distributed. This inequality was reflected in legal regulations and in the obligation to pay contributions and to lend often involuntary services to the urban administration. In that respect, inhabitants of the rural territories were bound to the cities and dependent on them (on the rural population in the Orient, see Jacques/Scheid 1998: 269). The occasional settlement of foreigners in a formerly rural or scantily inhabited territory (e.g. the foundation of Sebaste by Herod, and of Nicopolis and Neapolis under Vespasian) added to the traditional inequality between town and countryside. Despite all of this inequality and dependence, even towns and villages enjoyed a certain level of internal governance, often controlled by the city, but mostly exercised through traditional local elites such as clan heads or elders.

Irrespective of how unbalanced the relationship between city and countryside was at a given moment, it was nevertheless dynamic. Cities were always in danger of losing their status (e.g. Sebaste under Pertinax); important towns were upwardly mobile and could gain polis-status in the future. Hellenism spread to the countryside, and with it elements of urban culture that affected entire regions. Although this was a gradual process, people were mobile and distances short, so contact with, and knowledge of, urban culture was unavoidable. It is no wonder that eventually urban features became established in towns as well. In reality, the cultural boundaries between city and town were hardly as clear-cut as mere legal categories might suggest (Schwartz 1998: 204–6; more generally Hingley 2005; Whittaker 1997; Edwards 2007).

6. RABBIS AND THE CITY

Traditionally, scholarship assumed that there was an abysmal, everlasting, and fundamental separation between Jews and Hellenism in ancient Palestine (e.g. Feldman 1993). Hellenistic culture was frequently equated with paganism that
was believed to have reached its clearest expression in the Greek city (Eliav 2002: 411–12, summarizing Lieberman 1994; Horsley 1996).

In rabbinic texts one can indeed find a whole range of attitudes towards the urban environment: reservation, curiosity, attraction, disgust, and a lot of pragmatism based on a centuries-long coexistence between Judaism and Hellenism in Palestine and the Diaspora (Zangenberg 2009). We may, therefore, ask how ‘meaningful’ certain fourth-century rabbis’ presence in the cities actually was: perhaps late antique rabbis lived in the cities but were not precisely ‘of them’ (Schwartz 1998: 205). What one can not find, however, is a total rejection of urban culture on the assumption that the polis as such contradicts the rabbinic lifestyle. Roman and late antique cities provided enough space, both legally and politically, to let Jews practise their religion and maintain their identity (on diversity and toleration in the Mediterranean world, see Goodman 2007, esp. 122–60).

Such coexistence required a lot of compromise from rabbis due to their adherence to the biblical prohibitions of idolatry. Schwartz calls this compromise a spectacular act of (intentional) misinterpretation: rabbis allegedly defined pagan religiosity as consisting of cultic activity only; they affirmed and even extended the biblical prohibitions of idolatry, but in so doing declared the non-cultic religious aspects of urban culture acceptable (Schwartz 1998: 207–8). There may, therefore, have been a fundamental theoretical contradiction between pagan cultic practices and rabbinic observance, but ‘on the ground’ this non licet could hardly be maintained with equal rigour. The fact that rabbis and their co-religionists would constantly be confronted with expressions of paganism in urban environments did not prevent them from inhabiting cities. It could even be argued that this rabbinic pragmatism does not reflect a defensive and protective strategy but allowed them to live in cities, the very places where they could most easily accumulate wealth, social ties, and influence (Schwartz 1998: 208).

When village-based rabbis ‘came to town’, they did not enter an alien environment. At least from the third century CE onwards many rabbis lived in, or moved to, the cities. Sepphoris, Lydda, Joppa, Caesarea, and Tiberias were centres of Jewish learning. What we can see in the texts is a great amount of mobility of rabbis within Palestine (see also Hezser in this volume), and a familiarity with both the urban and the rural environment. Rabbis who resided and functioned in a rural context would also have been familiar with Hellenism and urban culture. There can be no doubt that rabbis were influenced by their environment and that their environment itself was in constant cultural, political, and social transformation.

Rabbis were probably attracted to cities because they promised a larger audience and constituted the nodal points of networks of trade, communication, patronage, and political power (Schwartz 1998: 205–6; Zangenberg/Attridge/Martin, eds. 2007). Nevertheless, rabbis did not belong to the urban elite of philosophers, officials, and lawyers who governed a polis: rather they formed and trained their own (alternative) elite which followed its own traditions and had its own clientele.
In a way, the rabbinic movement presented and promoted an alternative Jewish way of life in the city. In towns and villages, on the other hand, rabbis may have constituted at least part of the local elite and possessed a certain political influence. They also functioned as judges in matters of civil law, as administrators, advisors, and occasionally governors of a town. In a rural context they may have acquired a much broader role and carried out tasks that, in an urban context, they were allowed to fulfil for their own adherents only (Lapin 2001; Levine 1989: 25–33). This situation would have been due to the pragmatic attitude of the Roman authorities, who respected polis-constitutions (that placed rabbis in a minority position), but kept traditional local structures outside of poleis basically intact (which allowed rabbis to continue fulfilling their role as local, indigenous elites). The second century CE family archives from the Judaean Desert demonstrate that Roman and Jewish courts existed side by side and that Jews could choose which tradition to follow in their legal transactions (Cotton 2004).

Urban culture enabled rabbis to express their views in new ways. Rabbis did not only describe and comment upon many features of Hellenized urban life, they also adopted many terms (loanwords) from the Greek (and Latin) language, and concepts from Graeco-Roman intellectual life, for their own purposes (already Krauss 1898–1899; Lieberman 1994; much more sceptical Feldman 1993: 19–24). At least the urban population of Roman Palestine was probably more or less bilingual (Cotton 1991; Van der Horst 2001; see also Smelik in this volume). Despite the many structural and historical differences between the rabbinic movement and Graeco-Roman rhetorical and philosophical schools, both had functional similarities: reflecting on certain issues, teaching students, and collecting and editing school traditions.

Palestinian cities were also artistic and cultic centres. Public buildings, streets, private houses, and even necropoleis outside of the city walls were adorned with images of deities, humans, and animals. Rabbis occasionally refer to these images and were aware of the social and political dynamics associated with erecting statues in the public realm. They also knew the cultural milieu surrounding pagan images, that is, the customs, myths, and emotions revolving around them (Eliav 2002: 415–6). Rabbis were far from expressing general hostility towards statuary on the basis of a strict reading of the second commandment (Ex. 20:4–5; Deut. 5:8), which would have made living in an urban environment quite impossible. They distinguished between a strictly cultic use of images, which was, and remained, forbidden for Jews by the first commandment (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7, 9–10), and a merely decorative function, which could be tolerated (Schwartz 1998). They did not tolerate visits to pagan temples, though (Veltri 2000). We may assume that rabbis’ ‘pragmatism’ helped them to accept the urban space as one of their ‘natural habitats’ (Veltri 2000). This attitude helped rabbis define their own uniqueness within the environment of the city which was largely defined by Graeco-Roman culture (Eliav 2002:
on the heuristic distinction between ‘cult’ and ‘culture’ in Jewish literature see Collins 2001; Collins/Sterling, eds. 2001).

**Suggested Reading**


**Bibliography**


