

RLST 124I: Varieties of Ancient Judaism  
 Spring 2009  
 Handout #1 (March 31, 2009)  
 “Early Judaism, Middle Judaism, Late Judaism: Periods and sources”

## Periodization of Jewish History, circa 330 BCE – 500 CE

| <u>Perspectives</u>                         | <u>Periods</u>  |
|---|---|
| World History .....                         | “[Late] Ancient Judaism”<br><i>The Judaism of a long time ago</i>   |
| Christian History .....                     | “Late Judaism”<br><i>The Judaism of decline <u>right</u> before Christianity</i>  |
| Traditional Jewish History .....            | “Middle Judaism”<br><i>The Judaism between ancient Israel and modern rabbinic Judaism</i>                                   |
| Modernist Jewish History .....              | “Early Judaism”<br><i>The earliest form of Judaism (ancient Israel doesn't count), a prelude to modern rabbinic Judaism</i> |
| Other internal, Jewish history labels ..... | “Second Temple,”<br>“Second Commonwealth,”<br>“Post-Biblical,” “Rabbinic”   |

## Sources of Jewish History, circa 330 BCE – 550 CE

### Internal (Jewish) Sources

**Bible:** *circa* 500(?) BCE-100(?) CE  
 The “canonical” Scriptures of the Jews

**Apocrypha:** *circa* 300(?) BCE-100(?) CE  
 Other “biblical” books that were not deemed canonical by Jews (included in Old Testaments of some Christian groups)

**Pseudepigrapha:** *circa* 300(?) BCE-??? CE  
 Books written in a biblical “style,” often ascribed to characters from the Hebrew Bible (Adam, Ezra, Moses, etc.)

**Josephus** (*circa* 38-*circa* 100 CE), *aka* Flavius Josephus  
 Aristocrat and general who fought in the unsuccessful First Jewish War; later wrote several historical and philosophical treatises about Jews in classical Greek terms for a Roman audience

**Philo** (*circa* 20 BCE-*circa* 50 CE), *aka* Philo Judaeus  
 Upper-class Jewish philosopher from Alexandria (Egypt), who wrote many, many, many treatises on Jewish Scriptures and law from a sophisticated Greek philosophical (Platonist and Stoic) perspective

**Dead Sea Scrolls** [Sectarian writings] (*circa* 140 BCE-*circa* 70 CE)  
 Discovered at Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea in 1947, these scrolls contain copies of biblical books, interpretations of the Bible, rules for communal living, and prophecies of the messiah and apocalyptic war against the “Sons of Darkness”; written by a sectarian group, possibly the Essenes

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## Sources of Jewish History, circa 330 BCE – 550 CE (*continued*)

### Legal Documents [*Babatha Archive*] (circa 93 CE-132 CE)

An archive of 45 documents, mostly legal documents and business and private letters concerning the family and property of a woman named Babatha; presumably they were archived and hidden during the Second Jewish War; they were found in a cave that was used by Jewish rebels as a hideout during the war

### Rabbinic Literature (*Mishnah, Tosefta, Talmud, Midrash*) (circa ??? CE-500s CE)

The collected and edited writings of the elite intellectual class of Jews known as “sages” (addressed by their colleagues as *Rabbi*, i.e., “my master,” roughly equivalent to French *monsieur*). Materials are ascribed to figures before the destruction of the Second Temple; the latest layers of rabbinic texts were probably edited in the sixth century (later for Midrash).

### Liturgy

Few liturgical sources from outside the rabbinic writings survive; one source of liturgies (prayers, blessings, and so forth) is an archive of old manuscripts called the **Cairo Genizah**; a *genizah* is a synagogue “treasury” of used texts that cannot be discarded because they contain God’s name. Although most of the material found in the Cairo Genizah dates from after 1000 CE, a lot of it very clearly preserves earlier traditions.

### Poetry

Various poems survive from the period (some discovered in the **Cairo Genizah**, others preserved in other manuscripts): many deal with apocalyptic themes that reflect the political and religious tensions of the fifth and sixth centuries. A liturgical form of poem called the *piyyut* (which is just an Aramaic form of the Greek word *poiētēs*, i.e., “poet”) also survives.

### External (non-Jewish) Sources

#### Greek and Latin authors (*historians, satirists, “naturalists,” antiquarians*)

A variety of non-Jewish writers mention Jews, Judaism, and Judea (the Jewish province), usually in other contexts. Jews, stereotypically, were known for three things: circumcision, the sabbath, and not eating pork. All three were usually the source of mocking from Greeks and Romans. Examples: Tacitus, Juvenal, Martial, Pliny, Dio Cassius.

#### Christian authors (*sermons, biblical commentaries, letters, treatises*)

Christian authors, from the second century onward, wrote approximately one gazillion times more about the Jews than vice versa. Presumably Christians were more pressed to deal with Judaism because of their close relationship to it (Scriptures, origins, customs, beliefs); whereas Jews were freer to dismiss Christians as latecomers and heretics.

#### New Testament (?)

Since many of the authors of the New Testament were anonymous or pseudonymous, it’s unclear whether we can consider this a “Christian” set of documents; they do, on occasion, provide information about Jews in the first century.

#### Neutral sources (?)

##### Archaeology

Synagogues, cities, artifacts.