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JUDEO-PERSIAN COMMUNITIES OF IRAN

iii. THE PARTHIAN AND SASANIAN PERIODS

After the fall of the kingdom of Judah to the Babylonians in 586 BCE, large numbers of Jews were deported to Babylon, in keeping with common ancient Near Eastern custom (cf. DEPORTATION i). When the Achaemenid king Cyrus II (see CYRUS iii) conquered Babylon in 539, he employed a new policy and reversed this practice, as recorded in the inscription of the Cyrus cylinder (see CYRUS iv): he sent back to their own lands both the gods and their peoples who had been held in Babylonia. This included the Jews, many of whom returned to re-establish their religion in Achaemenid Yahud (i.e., the Land of Israel) in the satrapy of Syria (see ʿEZRĀ, BOOK OF).

Many others chose to remain in Babylonia, but little is known about Babylonian Jewry during the remainder of the Achaemenid period. For the period of Seleucid rule (312-63 BCE), few references survive relating to the Jews in the trans-Euphrates territories generally. Even less is known about Jews in Iran proper in this early time (cf. the conflicting traditions about the founding of the town Yahudiya; see ISFAHAN iii). More information begins to

become available by the first century BCE, under the rule of the Parthian Arsacids (q.v.).

THE PARTHIAN PERIOD, CA. 240 BCE TO 226 CE

By the time the Parthians reached Babylonia, Jews had lived there, under Babylonian, Achaemenid, and Seleucid rule for more than four and a half centuries. Every territory in the plain of the Tigris and Euphrates, from Armenia to the Persian gulf, as well as northeastward to the Caspian Sea, and eastward to Media, contained Jewish populations, and in some of these places, particularly Babylonia and Adiabene, these settlements were populous and strong. This is a point repeatedly made by Josephus and Philo in their dealings with Rome, partly of course for political reasons. The fact that neither Pliny nor Strabo mention the existence of Jewish communities in the Tigris-Euphrates valley indicates that from the perspective of the ethnography of the region as a whole, the Jews were not a dominant group. They were certainly not a majority in any one place, including Babylonia itself, although doubtless some towns and villages, such as Nehardea, Huzal, and Nehar Pekod, were mainly Jewish. The Jews were probably fewer in numbers than Iranians, most certainly fewer than Greeks and Babylonians and possibly also than the smaller Semitic ethnic groups (“Syrians”) viewed as a whole. But they were settled over a far greater geographical area than any other group.

While the Greeks were mainly living in a few major cities, the Babylonians around Babylon itself, and the Parthians were a small governing class in many places, being a majority population in only a few cities outside of Iran proper, the Jews must have formed minority communities in almost every city of the Euphrates valley and throughout the western satrapies of Parthia. (Some were in the east as well, in Afghanistan, and in India, but we do not know when they reached there.) Further, the Jews occupied large tracts of farmland outside of the major cities in Babylonia. Thus while they were nowhere the majority of a region, they were everywhere a significant group. Their numbers were constantly augmented by migration from Palestine (particularly in the second century CE), conversion, and natural increase. They doubtless grew in relative demographic importance and, even more so, in economic and political power. But it must be emphasized that when the Parthians reached Babylonia, the Jews were one—and not the most powerful—group among several in the area that had to be conciliated.

The Parthians did not bring great changes to Babylonia. They were, to begin

with, a military aristocracy, intent upon building an empire, not upon effecting a religious-cultural program like the Macedonians earlier, or the Sasanians afterward. Their fortunes, like those of the Maccabees, at first were tied up with the fate of the Seleucid empire. As the Seleucids' power waned, theirs waxed, and within a century of their first appearance upon the scene, they had reached the Tigris. A century later, they stood on the shores of the Mediterranean. A great, varied, and culturally heterogeneous region had fallen into their hands. Their task was, first of all, to establish effective government, and second, to secure the frontiers. These fundamental necessities preoccupied them throughout the four and one half centuries of their dynasty, and they had neither time nor taste to do much else. So they quite naturally preserved whatever stable communities or groups they found. They acquired Seleucia by treaty, and until the Seleucians broke the treaty in the first century CE, they scrupulously observed its provisions.

We know of no equivalent treaty with Babylonian Jewry, which hardly constituted a similar political entity. But if we may infer from the stable and friendly relationships that characterized the entire period, we may suppose that a hypothetical treaty would have contained the following provisions: the Parthian government will protect as best it can—and this proved to be not too well at any time—the civil peace; it will assure the Jews of the right to live by their own laws in all details; it will in no way interfere with the free exercise of their religion, nor will it seek to impose requirements upon the Jews which they find religiously repugnant. In exchange, the Jews will loyally uphold the Arsacid throne (whoever might be in possession of it at any given time) and will serve the best interests of the new regime, both at home and abroad. They will use their international influence in ways beneficial to the Parthian government, and seek to cultivate Jewish friendship in other lands for the home regime. Such a treaty would have served the vital requirements of both parties. The Jews had no intention of fighting for the Seleucids or against the Parthians. Like everyone else in the Middle East, they were prepared to accept the more powerful of two contending forces, once it became clear which one that might be. As the Greeks of Seleucia simply could not afford to oppose whoever controlled the trade routes to the east across the Iranian plateau, so the Jews of the region were in no position to rebel, and had no reason to.

The Parthians, for their part, had no interest whatsoever in stirring up unrest in the newly acquired territories, but rather wished to pacify them as easily and bloodlessly as possible. They accepted the cultural datum, whatever it

was, and since it was mostly Greek, they called themselves friends of the Greeks; but where it was Jewish, they proved equally amiable. So, whether or not a Jewish regime existed with which such a treaty might be concluded, in fact the two parties accommodated comfortably to one another's presence. At no time in the succeeding centuries did either side fail to live up to the requirements of a stable and friendly relationship.

Babylonia remained mostly peaceful, in the sense that no international armies ravaged its soil during the first two centuries of Parthian rule. The more difficult trials were posed by the open frontiers, which were crossed easily and regularly by raiding tribes from the desert and the Gulf. Whenever the central government was distracted, it was likely that such incursions would be made. The minority of the Sasanian king Shapur II (Šāpur II), from ca. 309 to 325, provides a paradigm for the difficult situation before and afterward. After sixteen years of a distracted and divided regency, Shapur took power, and his first task was simply to put down the Arab tribes that had made life miserable for the settled peoples of Babylonia. In consequence, he undertook several long and sharp campaigns, and so ferociously pacified the Euphrates frontier and the Persian Gulf that long afterward his "cruelty" was a byword among the local tribes. The longlasting Parthian regime, unlike the Sasanians, never imposed close and strict government throughout its frontiers or developed the bureaucracy that might have done so; and it was frequently preoccupied with dynastic wars, on the one hand, and eastern or western razzias on the other. The chief problem for ordinary people during that age must have been the normal insecurity of everyday life.

The dominant culture in Babylonia during this period was Hellenistic. Greek merchants controlled most trade; Greek cities provided the markets for the Semitic hinterland; Greek lawyers served the normal business needs of most of the population. While cuneiform records testify to some economic and astronomical facts, we have no reason to suppose that the ancient cuneiform culture exhibited very much vitality. Iranian influences are difficult to assess, though in time these became significant.

EARLY SASANIAN TIMES, 226-72 CE

Under Ardashir (Ardašir) and Shapur I, the new regime, first of all, annulled Jewish legal autonomy and made it clear that the government would supervise the activities of the autonomous, local Jewish courts as the Parthians never had. Formerly, these courts had exercised complete authority over the Jews, so

far as we can tell from the slender evidence available to us, perhaps including the right to inflict capital punishment. The change under the Sasanians was immediate and far-reaching, according to the following:

A certain man who desired to reveal another's straw [for taxation?] appeared before Rab, who said, Do not show it! Do not show it! He replied, I certainly will show it! Rab Kahana, who was then sitting before Rab, tore his windpipe out of him [lit.; Jastrow: forced him to give up the threatened information against his neighbor]. Rab thereupon cited the Scripture, 'Thy sons have fainted, they lie at the heads of all the streets as a wild bull in a net' (Is. 51.20). Just as a wild bull falls into a net and none has mercy upon it, so when the property of an Israelite falls into the hands of pagan oppressors, no mercy is shown towards it. Rab thereupon said to him, Kahana, until now, the Greeks who did not punish bloodshed were [here] but now the Persians, who punish bloodshed are [here] and (they will certainly cry, Rebellion, rebellion!). Arise, therefore, and go up to the land of Israel. (Bavli Baba Qamma 117a)The change in the political status of the Jewish community in the early decades of Sasanian rule was accompanied by a similarly disastrous modification of the position of Judaism. The Arsacids certainly never persecuted the Jewish religion, even though in the unrest of the first century CE, Jewish political figures, such as Zamaris, Anileus, and Asineus (see ASINAEUS AND ANILAEUS), suffered a fall from favor. Whatever the religious attitudes of the Parthian government, Jews never found difficulty in exercising their religion in the four centuries of Arsacid rule. Under Ardashir, by contrast, they complained very bitterly against the government's decrees concerning their religion, decrees which were, as we have seen, part of a broader policy of repression of competing cults in favor of the Mazdean state-church. One must therefore keep in mind the profound contrast between the former and the new regime, in order to appreciate how grave a crisis confronted Jewry.

What the Mazdean Mobads did was simply to forbid those Jewish religious practices which offended their sensibilities:

They decreed thrice on account of three things. They decreed concerning meat because of the priestly gifts. They decreed concerning the baths on account of ritual immersion. They exhumed the dead, because they [the Jews] rejoiced on their festivals, as it is said (I Sam. 12.15): 'Then shall the hand of the Lord be against you and against your fathers [RSV: king].' For Rabbah b. Samuel said, That [against the fathers] referred to exhumation of the dead, for the master said, 'For the sins of the living are the dead exhumed.' (Bavli Yebamot 63b)The

context of the prophet Samuel's speech, exhorting the Jews not to follow the ways of the gentiles, suggests that we are dealing with a sermon, rather than a strictly historical report. In each instance the sin of the Jews was contrasted with the appropriate decree of the Mazdeans, an attitude expressed by Samuel, for instance, when he taught that the pagan government can enact an oppressive measure effectively only when Israel disregards the words of the Torah (Lamentations Rabbah Proem II). One cannot, nonetheless, deny that the Persians in fact prohibited ritual preparation of meat, use of ritual baths, and burial of the dead, for the homily depends upon the existence of such prohibitions, taking them for granted and building upon the peoples' reaction to them.

There can be no doubt, moreover, that the Persians made decrees to protect the sanctity of fire: "Rab was asked, Is it permitted to move the Hanukah lamp on account of the Magi (HBRYM) on the Sabbath, and he answered, It is well" (Bavli Shabbat 45a, compare Git. 17a). The Jewish practice, to kindle the Hanukah lamp near the street, would now have to change. Significantly, the Talmudic tradition regarded Rab's ruling as one for a time of troubles only, which may reflect the liberalization of Sasanian religious and cultural policies under Shapur and afterward. (The Geonim had a tradition that "the Persians" forbade the reading of a prophetic lesson on the afternoon of the Sabbath, but this was certainly not in the early period, for Rab discussed the practice without indicating that it was threatened or prohibited, and there is no clear evidence to indicate when such a decree was issued.)

The Persians nonetheless made life miserable for the Jews, for not only did they impose petty inconveniences, such as those noted above, but in fact destroyed synagogues, probably in the first flush of conquest:

Rab said, Persia will fall into the hands of Rome. Thereupon R. Kahana and R. Assi asked Rab, Shall builders [of the Second Temple] fall into the hands of the destroyers [thereof]? He said to them, Yes, it is the decree of the king. Others say, he replied to them, They too are guilty, for they destroyed synagogues. It has also been taught by a Tanna: Persia will fall into the hands of the Romans, first, because they destroyed synagogues, second, because it is the king's decree that the builders shall fall into the hands of the destroyers. Rab further said, The son of David will not come until the wicked kingdom of Rome will have spread over the whole world for nine months, as it is said (Micah 5.2), 'Therefore will he give them up until the time that she who travaileth hath brought forth, then the residue of his brethren shall return with the children

of Israel. (Bavli Yoma' 10a; cf. Sanhedrin 98b)Rab, who likewise described the horrible fate of R. Akiba as the king's decree, which must not be challenged, here clearly stated that the Persians destroyed synagogues. Further, there may have been specific public persecutions directed against individual Jews, for Rab warned (b. Sanh. 74b) that if it is a royal decree to transgress the faith, one must not even change his shoelace. The Magi, likewise, were described by Levi b. Sisi to R. Judah the Prince, probably before their political establishment by the Sasanians, as "destroying angels" (b. Qiddushin 72a). Further, Rab stated: "Raba b. Mehasia in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in the name of Rab said: Under an Ishmaelite but not under a Roman [Edomite], under a Roman but not under a Magus, under a Magus but not under a scholar, under a scholar but not under a widow or an orphan. . . . If all the seas were ink, all the reeds were pens, all the heavens parchment, and all men were scribes, they would not suffice to write down the intricacies of the government" (Bavli Shabbat 11a). The preference for the rule of Rome rather than that of the Magi reflects the fact that in this period, the Jews in the Roman Orient lived at peace, as we have noted, by contrast with the unhappy condition of their Babylonian brethren.

Of greatest importance, Samuel and the exilarch (q.v.) both decreed that the law of the government is law. This saying, which has a long history in the development of Jewish law, and has been subjected to many varying interpretations throughout that history, meant originally that Persian law must be observed among the Jews, a meaning emergent in the several contexts in which the saying is cited. In consequence Persian law could not be ignored or evaded, as R. Shila had tried to do; Persian taxes must be paid; Persian rules on land tenure and transfer must be observed; all bills and conveyances drawn up by Persian courts had to be accepted by the Jews, even though they could not read Pahlavi (although they understood Middle Persian when it was spoken). One can hardly overestimate the importance of this dictum, both for Samuel's lifetime and in the following generations. It was, first of all, a politically significant statement. Under the Parthians, the Jews were, so far as we can ascertain, governed by their own courts and under their own laws. In saying that the 'law of the land is law,' Samuel instructed the Jewish courts to conform to the new circumstances, and to accept the overlordship of the Iranian officials. Second, it represented the recognition that the Iranians did possess just courts and just laws, and should not be regarded as barbarians. It regularized, moreover, the status of such laws in Jewish communal affairs, and prevented Jews from claiming that by rights they should attempt to evade taxes and obedience to the government, contrary to the Palestinian view. By

this dictum, subsequent Jewries accepted the legal authority of their respective governments, and thus quite directly conformed to the policy of Samuel enunciated when the Babylonian Jews confronted for the first time a government that was both hostile and insistent upon supervising their internal affairs.

FROM SHAPUR I TO SHAPUR II, 272-309 CE

In the four decades, from Shapur I to Shapur II, Babylonian Jewry found itself in the midst of a lingering crisis. The Iranian government had by no means fallen into capable hands. Under the Bahrams (q.v.), Shapur's stable and benign settlement, by which minorities, including the Jews, were permitted to live in peace and conduct their own affairs without extensive government interference, was upset. Indeed, in the case of the Manicheans, it was overthrown. Mani (q.v.) was martyred and his followers banished from Babylonia. The Christians continued to gain in numbers, and some Jews now went over to the new faith, in part out of resentment for rabbinical rule, or because of disappointment in the way history was working itself out.

Unsettled conditions at home found a counterpart in unsatisfactory circumstances on the frontiers. Recovering from the disasters of the middle of the third century, the Romans proved a formidable foe. The formerly weakened frontier lines were reestablished, and in place of a distracted enemy, the Sasanian regime faced a powerful and determined one, under effective leadership. The old boundary settlement, so favorable to Iran, was set aside, and in one invasion after another, the Romans proved themselves superior to the Persian forces. The capital fell time and again, as central Babylonia witnessed the incursion of enemy armies, not once but several times. Even Narseh (see SASANIAN DYNASTY), in whom so many, remembering the glorious reign of his father, placed their hopes, proved a disappointment, most of all to himself. He had, at least, restored the normal rights of the minorities, but his failures upon the frontiers and in battle proved his undoing. Nonetheless, it became quite clear that the Sasanians would retain the throne, and would find the resources to sustain the empire's integrity. The disasters of these decades did not result in the fall of the dynasty, nor did the Romans succeed in establishing a permanent foothold in Babylonia. Such negative results cannot be viewed as insignificant, given the military and political situation. But the death of Hormizd II (see HORMOZD II) found the Romans in an impregnable position in Armenia, most of which they now controlled, and in command of the Adiabenian highlands, the most direct

and convenient invasion route into central Babylonia. One would have to look backward to the time of Trajan (q.v.) and Hadrian to find a situation so perilous for Iran.

For the Jews, domestic politics proved no more favorable. They suffered, though not so gravely as others, in the reaction against Shapur's liberalism which set in after his death. Kartir's "opposition" must have represented a deep disappointment to those who thought that the Sasanians would in the end behave as graciously as had the Arsacids. The Magi impinged upon the religious life of Jewry, preventing Jews from lighting lamps on Mazdean festivals, and perhaps also restricting the public observance of Judaism in other ways. They may have ignored the conversion of Jews to Christianity, thinking that passage from one to another Jewish sect mattered very little, but they prohibited conversion of Mazdeans to other faiths, and severely punished recalcitrant sinners. Jews were no longer appointed to the bureaucracy. Jewish ritual objects may have been desecrated. A later reference would suggest that some Jews were martyred at this time, though no contemporary evidence supports it. Whether or not the persecutions of Kartir amounted to very much, they did represent a substantial change from formerly acceptable circumstances, and it was that change, more than any specific complaint, which must have proved most bothersome to the Jewish community. In consequence, some of the rabbis continued speculation on when the Messiah might come; and yet, in all, 'exiles in Babylonia' were as "serene as sons," and seen to be "far away" from the hope of returning to Zion. Taxes, and resulting enslavement, more than political and religious repression, proved in the long run the most grievous complaint. The rabbis regarded those who were enslaved on account of the poll tax as the property of the government, and treated them without compassion. But that taxation and slavery were serious problems testifies to the normality of Jewish life, for these were the bane of everyone's existence, and not directed specifically against the Jews.

What were the chief concerns of the Jewish community's leaders? First of all, to maintain peace and order; it was no easy task, but, on the whole, it was achieved. Second, the Jews were living in the midst of advanced and civilized peoples, under a government of considerable culture and sophistication. It was natural that they would admire, even emulate, their neighbors, and as we have seen, at least some left Judaism for competing religions. The difficulty of maintaining separate group existence in such a situation led the rabbis to erect, as best they could, very high walls to separate Jews from intercourse

with their gentile neighbors. To prevent intermarriage, they sought to forbid commensality, and prohibited the use of pagan magic, though they themselves, or some of them, mastered the arts of incantation and sorcery.

The rabbis of Babylonia believed that the “Ten Tribes” had in time become pagans, and they did not want the same fate to overtake those for whom they held themselves responsible. Hence they used their mastery of the common culture of the region in the service of the separate existence of the Jewish people and tradition. They knew whatever gentiles did, so they wanted people to believe, but they knew far more about God and his revelation to Israel. Difficult though the task of the Palestinian rabbis was, that in Babylonia proved more complicated still, because of the Jews’ different attitude toward the land and toward themselves in it. In Palestine gentiles were seen as interlopers who would in time be expelled. In Babylonia, Jews did not regard themselves as permanent residents, but after nine centuries still called themselves exiles, and looked for the Messiah to carry them back “home.” In Palestine Jewish culture was conceived to be normative, and in many areas was dominant. In Babylonia, except for some towns and smaller districts, the Jews were a distinct minority. In Palestine the Jews saw the superior culture as their own, which had been rooted in the land for centuries. In Babylonia the dominant culture was shaped by others. Palestine itself had been a battleground, for which Jews had shed their blood. No Jew would fight a holy war for Babylonia. And, in this period, Palestinian Jews lived in peace, and Babylonian Jews did not.

THE AGE OF SHAPUR II, 309-372 CEJewry both profited and suffered from the contest for the Middle East which occupied most of the age of Shapur II. On the one hand, both sides were eager to avoid creating new enemies. On the other, they sought to subvert the enemy’s population. So in preparation for his Persian campaign, the emperor Julian (r. 361-63; q.v.) very likely made an effort to win over the Jewish communities of Palestine, Syria, and Mesopotamia, first, by freeing them from the onerous and apparently unwanted burden of supporting the Palestinian patriarchate as well as by refraining from demanding discriminatory taxes levied upon Jews alone, and second, by promising to rebuild the Temple. It is possible, however, that the earlier “anti-Semitic” decrees of Constantine and Constantius, when separated from the nasty language the emperors used when speaking of the Jews, must have been of less consequence than has heretofore been supposed. The prohibitions against conversions, against circumcising slaves and even

holding non-Jewish ones, and the like were of no substantial consequence in the life of ordinary Jews. Slaveholding and converting gentiles were of importance mainly to two groups, the former to rich people, the latter to religious virtuosi. It would stand to reason that the normal life of the Jewish community was not greatly disrupted, and moreover, that the factors which motivated Julian could not have been irrelevant to the Christian emperors. However pious and faithful to the new religion, they had still to consider the effects of their decrees upon the international position of the Roman empire in the east and the strategic position of the Jews, straddling a contested frontier.

In the Sasanian empire, Jewry enjoyed a no less favorable position. Among the inhabitants of Babylonia, they must have supported Shapur's first efforts to pacify the region and reestablish a strong frontier against the desert tribes. Like others, they found the burden of an efficient collection of taxes to be onerous, but not unbearable, particularly since they sought means of evading them when possible. If, as is alleged in the *Seder Olam Zuta* (repr. New York, 1952), there was a persecution of the Jews in 313, then it must have been some local, perhaps private, matter involving a small group, for in the unrest and disorder of the years from 309 to 325, no central administration was sufficiently effective to undertake a large-scale persecution of any minority community. The rabbis in Babylonia enjoyed a reputation as exceptionally sage and powerful wonder-workers. They could make rain, Ifra Hormizd believed, and she allegedly warned her son, the emperor, "Whatever they ask of their Master, he gives them." These stories preserve a quite accurate picture of the rabbis—among other holy men—as theurgies to be cultivated. If so, the Jews would have been seen as a community not to be trifled with, for among them were men who could enlist the favor of heaven. That consideration did not, of course, prevent the government from overseeing the Jewish courts as before or from collecting taxes despite the evasive behavior of the rabbis; but it would have provided a safeguard against gratuitous persecution. Traditions relating to Shapur II do not contain a hint of "anti-Semitism" or of any hostile action whatsoever. He supposedly respected the religious practices of some rabbis and made inquiries about the biblical foundations of burial, a rite abhorrent to Zoroastrian sensibilities. We have no evidence that a decree against burial of the dead, such as was mentioned in earlier times, was now under consideration, despite the emperor's interest in building a strong state-church. It is true that some generalized references to "harsh decrees" and "persecutions" can be located in the stratum of traditions relating to this period. Nothing comparable to the stories pertaining to Ardashir's time or to

the boast of Kartir appeared in traditions on the age of Shapur II.

On the other hand, the Jews preserved hostile attitudes toward the Persians, by contrast, first, to Parthian times, and second to the stories about Shapur I and Samuel. One may suppose that by R. Joseph's time—he died about 330—the long years of unstable government eroded whatever good will had developed within Jewry in the years of Shapur I. R. Papa's comment reveals that the local gendarmes continued to be bitterly resented by the Jews, no more so, however, than "the proud" among their own group. By contrast, both Abbaye and Raba remarked about the lawfulness of the government and admitted that the Persian courts did not take bribes once a decree had been issued, a sure sign of a relatively uncorrupted court-system. On balance, one can surmise that Shapur II did establish a system of fair and even-handed administration, but that the Jews, like other communities in Babylonia, nonetheless objected to the high taxes and the petty indignities inflicted by both the wars of the day and the normal, everyday activities of alien local authorities.

Jewry shared not only the cost of the wars but, in 363, the enormous damage to life and property that followed as their consequence. The invasion of that year devastated precisely the lands in which Babylonian Jews were settled. Towns were destroyed by Romans or Persians; the fields ravaged; and as the armies moved across central Babylonia, scorching the crops and flooding the fields, one Jewish village after another must have met the fate of the unnamed town whose burning was described by Ammianus Marcellinus. On the other hand, there is no evidence that large numbers of people died in the invasion, and as soon as it had passed, most people must have been able to return to their villages and fields and undertake the task of reconstruction. We do not have any evidence concerning what the Jews actually did in the invasion. We know that villagers fled out of the line of war. But we do not know whether Jews or others in Babylonia joined in the armies of Shapur or supported those of Julian. Some have supposed that the Jews remained loyal to Shapur, and that in consequence he recognized their loyalty and rewarded it. I think it unlikely that they actually did anything at all. The wars were wars of pagan powers (Gog and Magog, so far as anyone knew) and not the affair of Israel. It is a perfect anachronism to speak of the "loyalty" of the "Persian" Jews to "their" government. The Jews were not Persians, but Jews. They neither rebelled against the Sasanian government nor went over to the enemy, because they had no reason to do either. But they supported Shapur no more

than did the many towns and fortresses along the Euphrates that silently watched the Roman army and armada pass by unopposed and unaided. If Rome triumphed, they promised their support. For the meanwhile they remained quite neutral. Whether Shapur had given orders to that effect or not we do not know. A very few Persians joined the Roman army, as a few Romans had earlier gone over to Shapur, generally for private reasons. As a group, the Jews did neither; it was only Julian's memories of Trajan's invasion that aroused in his mind a contrary expectation. Shapur's later deportations of Jews from Armenia to Isfahan and Susiana, moreover, are not to be interpreted as hostile to the Jews. Population represented wealth, and just as Shapur I resettled Roman captives in his empire to enhance its economic life, so his namesake later on both prevented emigration and forced immigration when he could. The Jewish population of the Sasanian empire grew not because of either hatred or love for Jews. Rather, the Jews were a useful group who did nothing of a subversive nature in Shapur's reign, and new groups of Jews therefore could be safely moved to developing regions of the empire.

Jewry may have maintained neutrality in international politics but not in religion. The Christians remained in the eyes of Judaism apostates, as indeed some must have been. All other forms of religion were called "worship of stars." Distinctions were not made among them. Jews had, the rabbis thought, to be kept quite separate from "pagans." Strict laws about the preservation of wine from contact with gentiles continued to be widely enforced. Whether the increase in the number of instances of law enforcement reflected a vast improvement in the rabbis' power to enforce the laws pertaining to wine, one cannot say. It may be that the cases, most of which arose in Raba's court, have come down because of some peculiarity of literary history. It is possible that the numerous civil law cases of R. Nahman reached us because his court records were preserved, and those of other courts were not, and that the reason for their preservation was his high position in the exilarchate and the consequent probative value of his precedents. So we cannot be certain that the laws about wine were kept to a greater degree in the fourth century than in the third; but we may be fairly sure that they were widely enforced where rabbinical courts and market-supervisors were located. The taboo concerning gentile contact with wine would constantly have reminded ordinary Jews of the importance of keeping their distance from other people. The revelation at Sinai had implanted an undying hatred between Israel and the pagan world, so the rabbis believed, and it was the rabbis' task to ensure, that social separation would preserve the purity of the faith.

That did not mean that ordinary people avoided workaday contact with gentiles, or that they could have had they wanted to. On the contrary, the evidence suggests both close economic and intimate social contacts. Decrees against attending pagans' wedding celebrations, even against coming to their homes within thirty days, or a whole year, of such celebrations, had to be made probably because common people did what they forbade. Stories were told of most distinguished rabbis who believed that exceptional gentiles "do not worship idols" and might therefore be trusted and honored. One might suppose that gifts might even be given to such trustworthy gentiles. But this is not so. Even the best of gentiles are lewd and have evil intent, so the story said. It would suggest that people even in rabbinical circles thought the contrary was the case. The viewpoint of Deuteronomy shaped that of the rabbis of this period, as of earlier times, but it did not necessarily conform to the realities of daily life. Indeed, had the Jews widely observed the strict letter of the law as interpreted by the rabbis and behaved toward "pagans" as the rabbis said they ought, stable community life could not have been sustained for very long. If there is little, if any, evidence of government persecution of the Jews, there is none at all of popular feeling against them in Babylonia (unlike Edessa and other Christian centers). One reason for the absence of widespread popular hatred of the Jews is that the Jews probably did little, if anything, to keep the rabbis' laws about how one must behave toward "paganism" and toward "pagans." On the contrary, the Christian hagiographic literature repeatedly preserves stories about how Jews and Magi worked hand in hand in persecuting the Christians, in particular. Whether these stories are true or not, they suggest that the Christians discerned little if any enmity between Jewry and the Iranian political or religious leaders.

For the seven decades of Shapur II's rule, the Middle East thus was in turmoil. First came a period of ineffective government, lasting from ca, 309 to ca, 325, when the conditions of daily life must have proved difficult. Arab tribes seized land and took people captive for ransom; trade must have been disrupted. The government, in the hands of regents, scarcely controlled the powerful local magnates. The empire seemed to be disintegrating, and for the common people of Babylonia, life became dangerous. When Shapur took power, he organized an effective army controlled by the central government. The new army, and the campaigns it fought, first in the south to recover the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates and to reestablish command of the Persian Gulf, and finally in the west and north, required enormous sums of money. Along with the army, a more effective bureaucracy and a unified state-church were

established, and these ensured more efficient control of the population and collection of taxes. In place of the ransom paid to marauders by unfortunate people came levies which everyone had to pay. From 337 to 363, moreover, annual campaigns brought the emperor and his army into the field. After the great triumph of 363, Shapur turned to Armenia and made a number of political and military ventures in the north and northwest. Throughout these years, therefore, the farmers and artisans of Babylonia must have found life a succession of trials, some imposed by foreigners, others by the imperial government. One group, the Christians, suffered disaster when the government imposed special taxes which they could not pay, then demanded that Christians worship the sun and the stars and give up monotheism.

Against this background, one must interpret the limited information deriving from Jewish sources concerning the condition of the Jewish community. The data presents a mostly negative picture. That is to say, the rabbis did not preserve traditions about persecution. They certainly had to pay no abnormally high taxes on account of their religion. They were not singled out for punishment by the chiliarchs (q.v.) and gendarmes whom they hated. Life was difficult for them, to be sure, but it was far more difficult for the Christians, and it was no easier for others in the Sasanian empire. It was a time of troubles, but better the troubles coming on account of the campaigns of a strong and eventually victorious empire than those caused by the weak and distracted reigns that separated Shapur I from Shapur II. Many generations would enjoy peace and security on account of the temporary difficulties of the age of Shapur II. His victory settled for centuries the fate of Mesopotamia and ensured for as long the stable and placid life of Babylonia.

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