

## Origins and Development of Diaspora, 600 BCE –100 CE

October 11, 2006

- Origins and Spread
- Three significant examples: Elephantine, Sardis, Alexandria
- Cultural Dimensions

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## Origins and Spread of the Diaspora

- Geographical distribution: Map and Chronology
- Where did all the Jews come from?

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## Geographical Distribution

- Babylonian and Persian periods (6th–4th BCE)  
*Babylonia, Egypt*
- Hellenistic and early Roman periods (4th BCE–1st CE)  
*Babylonia, Egypt, Cyrene, Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy*
- By late antiquity (ca 500 CE)  
*Above + Carthage, Spain, Gaul*

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Diaspora: 4th BCE–1st CE

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Diaspora: 1st CE–5th (Not 3rd!) CE

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## Where did all the Jews come from?

- Earliest examples show the following:
  - Displacement by war (i): refugees
    - Egypt (Jeremiah)
    - Later, presumed as well
  - Displacement by war (ii): captives and slaves
    - Babylonia (Jeremiah, Kings)
    - Later: Hellenistic Egypt; Syria
  - Military colonies
    - Egypt (Elephantine) (papyri from 5th C BCE)
    - Later: Hellenistic Asia Minor, Egypt
- Presumably “opportunity.” **But** do not confuse with modern economic opportunities.
- For demographic reasons, perhaps have to assume: conversion, adherence, and/or intermarriage?

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## Three Significant Examples

- Elephantine: 5th C. BCE
- Sardis: 1st C BCE
- Alexandria: 1st C CE

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## Elephantine: 5th C. BCE

- Egypt: one of the two earliest known Diaspora areas of Judaeans (other is Mesopotamia).
- History: When first appear already a military colony of Judaeans under Persians; claim that served under Egyptian kings as well.
- Had functioning sacrificial temple.
- Some documents suggest polytheism
- Clashes with Egyptian priests of Khnum on island (destroy the temple, 410)
- Note: Complain (407) that they had written to both Jerusalem and Samaria for support.

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Elephantine: Papyrus (petition to restore Temple) and Temple

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## Sardis: 1st C BCE

### Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.259–261

Decree of the people of Sardis:... [that] they may, in accordance with their accepted customs, come together and have a communal life and adjudicate suits among themselves, and that a place be given them which they may gather together ... and offer **prayers and sacrifices (thysiai)** to God... and that the market officials of the city shall be charged with the duty of having suitable food for them brought in.

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## Alexandria: 1st C CE

- Alexandria: chief city of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt; single largest Jewish community in first C
- Long history of settlement (claimed: from time of Alexander)
- Simmering ethnic tensions: Greeks, native Egyptians, Jews
- Jews' claim of special status (citizenship—a privilege, not a right), but exemptions.
- Roman provincial policies (registration of non Greeks for a poll tax) may have precipitated violence
- Claudius' ruling may have quieted matters, but two generations later (115–117) many (most?) Jews were killed in revolt and massacre.

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## Cultural Dimensions

- Highly varied histories, levels of communal centralization
- "Hellenization": Conflict or cultural enrichment?
  - Greek language, translation of Bible
  - First synagogues attested in diaspora, look like voluntary religious associations
  - Differing strategies, standards, on participating in wider Greek civic culture

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