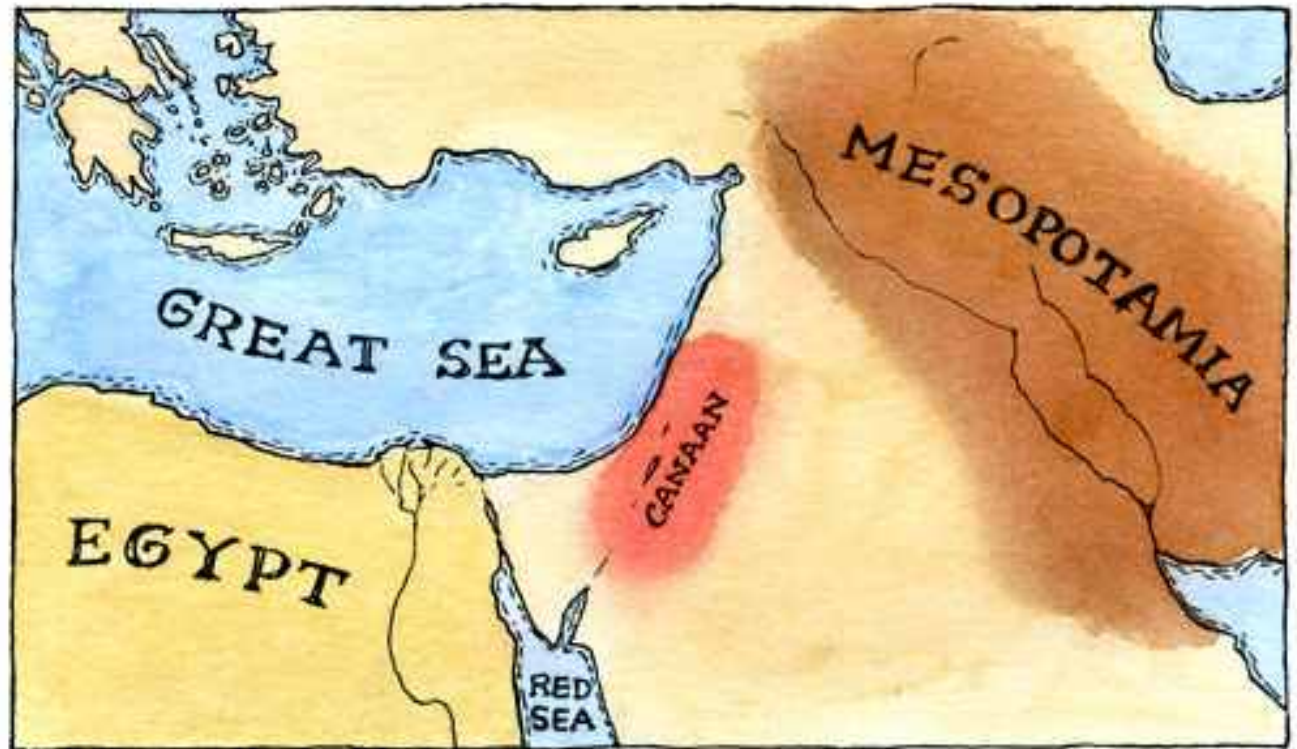


Competing Narratives of Jewish Historiography

Class 5

The strip between Egypt and Mesopotamia



God, Abraham, Isaac



Nomadism

- The Jews were a small band of nomads, inserted among such mighty empires as Babylonia, Assyria, Phoenicia, Egypt, Persia.
- Abraham's encounter with God who proposes a covenant

The paradox

- Those people who left monuments behind as a record of their existence have vanished with time, whereas the Jews who left ideas, have survived.
- Babylonians
- Persians
- Hettites
- Philistins
- Ancient Egyptians, Greek, Romans

The script

- Wandering
- Enslavement
- Decimation
- Exile
- Discrimination
- Fragmentation
- Dispersion
- Return

Character traits

- Adaptability
- Flexibility
- Intelligence
- Quickness
- Readiness to decide
- Abstraction
- Idealism
- Critical spirit

Early History (From 2000 BC to 136 CE)

- The period of wanderings (2000-1200)
- Egypt period (enslavement) 1200-1100
- Independence (1100-800)
- Assirian conquest (800-700)
- Restoration of the law (Josiah) (700-600)
- Babylonian imprisonment (600-500)
- First return to Palestine, The Temple rebuilt(500-400)
- Second return to Palestine, Persian supremacy (400-334)
- Hellenistic period (privileged position) (334-200)
- Roman rule, destruction of the Temple, devastation of Palestine (200-132-136)
- Dispersal (136-

The Second Temple



Narrative 1: The miracle of the Jews

- Miracle of the Jews: Up to the destruction of Jerusalem AD 70 as late as the rebellion of Bar Kochba, the Jewish nation was in no wise different from other normally constituted nations, such as the Roman or the Greek. The wars between the Romans and the Jews resulted in diasporing the Jewish nation to the four corners of the world. In the diaspora the Jews fiercely resisted national and religious assimilation

Narrative 2: Diaspora as inevitability

- The diaspora of the Jews does not all date from the fall of Jerusalem. Several centuries before this event, the great majority of Jews were already spread over the four corners of the world. Well before the fall of Jerusalem, more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Jews no longer lived in Palestine. The fundamental reason for Jewish emigration must be sought in the geographical conditions of Palestine. (Mountainous country, bridge position between the Euphrates and the Nile.) The geographical conditions of Palestine therefore explain both the Jewish migration and its commercial character.

Counter-identification with Egypt (Jan Assmann)

- Egypt

Politheism

Figures (visibility)

State

Speech

Authority

Statism

Work

Diet

Israel

Monotheism

Ban on figures (invisibility)

Statelessness

Scriptures

Rebellion

Movement

Communication

Reverse

(exception: circumcision)

Jewish innovations in antiquity

- Invisible one and eternal God
- No rites of resurrection rites
- Communication with Him in writing (Bible)
- Praying
- Establishment of the Mosaic Code
- Commentaries, interpretations (Talmud)
- The concept of sin (internalization of control)
- Prohibition of human sacrifice
- Synagogues (instead of temples)

Jews and Greeks in the Roman Empire

- Hellenistic world (Roman might, Greek culture)
- The need for import
- Traders, foreigners (Greeks, Jews)
- Roman contempt of trade
- Jewish privileges, Greek jealousy
- Greek resentment (loss of status, disorganization of Greek civilization)
- Competition (for citizenship)
- Mutual contempt (Greeks regarded the Jews as barbarians, Jews regarded Greeks as heathens without morals)

Means of survival in diaspora

- Independent communal life (Jews in antiquity had jurisdiction over their own community)
- Synagogue (place of prayer and assembly)
- Family
- Study (Tora, Talmud, Mishna)

Ethnocentric misrepresentation of peculiar Jewish religious observances

- Monotheism (atheism)
- Idea of the chosen people (separation)
- Sabbath (lack of respect)
- Dietary rules
- Kosher rules
- Ritual slaughter of animals (cruelty)
- Circumcision (stubbornness)
- Ban on pictures (lack of creativity)

Anti-Jewish propaganda

- Greek pattern-Roman transmission
- Political accusations (illoyalty, rebelliousness, disrespect of the Emperor)
- Character killing (cruelty, cheating)
- Chimerical allegations (lepers, blood libel))

Apion

Born between 20 and 30 BC, died
between 45 and 48

Egyptian origin

Lived in Alexandria, later in Rome

Carrierist

Vanity, versatility, superficiality

Defender of Greek mythology

Defamation of Jews

- Representation of the Jews having been led out of Egypt as a horde of lepers, blind and lame
- Falsification („when the 1100 lepers expelled from Egypt had traveled for six days, they developed buboes in their groins, and so they rested on the seventh day for their recuperation.”
- Slanders concerning the Temple (ass’head, made of gold)
- Slanders concerning human sacrifice of Greek foreigners
- „The Jews swear by God, the Maker of heaven, earth and sea, to bear no good-will to any foreigner, and particularly to none of the Greeks”

Roman reechoing

- Aspersions against the Jewish race
- Derogatory political statements
- Malicious misrepresentations of the Jewish religious beliefs and rites

Contra Apionem

- Jewish counter-attacks
- Dissemination of knowledge
- Translation of the Bible to Greek
- Persuasion based on rational arguments
- Josephus wrote a polemical work defending the Jews

The first blood libel

- „...he was a Greek and that is he went over this province, in order to get his living, he was seized upon by foreigners, on a sudden, and brought to this temple, and shut up therein, and was seen by nobody, but was fattened by these curious provisions thus set before him, and that truly at the first such unexpected advantages seemed to him matter of great joy, that after a while, he inquired of the servants that came to him and was by them informed that it was in order to fulfilling a law of the Jews, which they must not tell him that he was thus fed, and that they did the same at a set time every year, and they used to catch a Greek foreigner, and fat him thus up every year, and then lead him to a certain wood, and kill him, and sacrifice with their accustomed solemnities, as taste of his entrails, and take an oath upon this sacrificing a Greek, that they would be at enmity with the Greeks, and that then they threw the remaining parts of the miserable wretch in a certain pit” (Apion according to Josephus)

Self- defense

- Refuting the accusation of blood sacrifice
- „Now this is such a most tragical fable as is full of nothing but cruelty and impudence, how comes it about that we taken oath. And conspire only against the Grecians, and that by the effusion of their blood also? Or how is it possible that all the Jews should get together to these sacrifices, and the entrails of one man should be sufficient for so many thousands to taste of them, as Apion pretends?”

Epistemological defense

- Distribution of knowledge (translation of the Bible to Greek)
- Priority of disputes over aggression
- Truth as a force of persuasion
- Falsification of false evidence
- Insisting to historical facts (ancient origins)
- Cult of heroes (Abraham, Moses, Salomon)
- Claimed universalism and superiority
- Self-pride