

JEWISH ASSOCIATIONS IN ROMAN PALESTINE:
EVIDENCE FROM THE MISHNAH

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Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed increased interest on the part of scholars of diaspora Judaism and early Christianity in the many unofficial groups, guilds or associations that could be found in the cities where Jews lived throughout the Roman Empire. In particular, Peter Richardson, Anders Runesson and others stress that, in many cases and in several respects, Jewish gatherings or synagogues would be viewed as associations (*collegia*, *thiasoi*, *koina* and *sunodoi*) by their neighbours and by any local or imperial authorities, and may have often understood themselves as such.¹ Thus, for instance, in one of the letters preserved by Josephus, a Roman official refers to the Jews of Sardis approaching him about their own ‘association’ (*sunodos*), and an inscription from

1. Peter Richardson, ‘Early Synagogues as Collegia in the Diaspora and Palestine’, in John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations in the Graeco-Roman World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 90-109; Peter Richardson, *Building Jewish in the Roman East* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004); Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-Historical Study* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 2001). Cf. A.T. Kraabel, ‘Unity and Diversity among Diaspora Synagogues’, in Lee I. Levine (ed.), *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987), pp. 49-60; L. Michael White, ‘The Delos Synagogue Revisited: Recent Fieldwork in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora’, *HTR* 80 (1987), pp. 133-60; L. Michael White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture: Building God’s House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (2 vols.; Harvard Theological Studies, 42; Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1997); other articles in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations*; and Philip A. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Nysa shows that the Jews there used this common self-designation for their group (likely first century BCE).²

Yet seldom have scholars given due attention to Jewish guilds and associations in Palestine itself and to the importance of these small, informal gatherings that served interconnected social and religious purposes at the local level.³ Nor has adequate attention been given to the ways in which rabbinic sources may provide glimpses into Jewish associational tendencies beyond the issue of synagogues proper. This paper begins to address this lacuna by investigating some suggestive rabbinic evidence regarding Jewish guilds and informal banqueting associations and by placing this evidence within the broader framework of association life in Roman Palestine and in the Empire. Moreover, passages in Mishnah provide important glimpses into Jewish banqueting associations, including some that met together in the first century. They show that Jews followed many of the customs found in other associations, including meals in communal halls, eating sacrifices and reclining at *triclinia*, but they did not necessarily follow the custom of after-dinner drinking parties.

2. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.235; *Inscriptiones judaicae orientis (IJO)*: II. *Kleinasien* (TASC, 99; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck] 2004), no. 26. Cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.215-216; Philo, *Leg. Gai.* 312, 316 and *Virt.* 33.178. For references to the early followers of Jesus using association terminology see, for instance, Pliny the Younger, *Ep.* 10. 97.7-8; Lucian of Samosata, *Peregr.* 11; Celsus in Origen, *Cels.* 1.1; 3.23; 8.17; Ignatius, *Eph.* 12.2; 19.1; Tertullian, *Apol.* 38-39. Inscriptions pertaining to Jewish groups in Asia Minor use the following terminology that is also used by other associations: 'synagogue', 'synod' (*sunodos*), 'household' (*oikos*), 'settlement' (*katoikountes*), and 'nation' (*ethnos*) (cf. *IJO* II 26, 36, 43, 168, 205). For associations that use the term 'synagogue' see, for example, the inscription of the 'synagogue of Zeus' (Thomas Corsten, *Die Inschriften von Apameia [Bithynien] und Pylai* [Bonn: Rudolf Habelt, 1987], no. 35).

3. But do see the studies by Bruno W. Dombrowski, 'Hayyahad and τὸ κοινόν: An Instance of Early Greek and Jewish Synthesis', *HTR* 59 (1966), pp. 293-307, and Moshe Weinfeld, *The Organizational Pattern and the Penal Code of the Qumran Sect: A Comparison with Guilds and Religious Associations of the Hellenistic-Roman Period* (Freiburg: Editions Universitaires, 1986), which employ evidence from associations to shed light on Jewish groups in Palestine.

Defining Greco-Roman (and Jewish) Associations

A few words are in order regarding what is meant by ‘associations’ here and regarding the status of these groups in relation to civic and imperial authorities, something that is dealt with at length and with more extensive support in a publication by Philip A. Harland.⁴ This brief overview will set the stage for understanding the context of rabbinic evidence for Jewish associations in Palestine.

Greco-Roman associations were relatively small (often fifteen to thirty members) unofficial groups that met together regularly to engage in a variety of social and banqueting activities that, inextricably, were also aimed at honouring gods and goddesses. These groups went by a variety of self-designations, including *collegium*, *koinon*, *sunodos*, *thiasos*, *mustai* and *sunergasia*. A traditional typology, focusing on the supposed principal *purposes* of associations, speaks of (1) religious associations in distinction from (2) occupational guilds and (3) burial associations. This is, for a variety of reasons, problematic, including the fact that associations of various kinds served some burial-related functions and all were also concerned with honouring the gods (or God). Festivals in honour of such deities, in particular, were very common occasions for associations to gather together for banquets and other rituals and activities, and dining facilities including *triclinia* were common within the association meeting-places that have been excavated.⁵ Recent studies emphasize the importance of meals and *sumposia* (drinking-parties) in the social and religious lives of associations of various kinds.⁶

In light of the problems with such a purpose-driven typology of associations, a more useful—though not to be rigidly applied—typology speaks of associations in terms of the principal social networks that contributed to their membership rather than some ostensible principal purpose.⁷ In areas like Asia Minor there were groups whose memberships were drawn principally from social connections associated with

4. See Harland, *Associations*, pp. 25-167.

5. See Harland, *Associations*, pp. 74-83.

6. Cf. Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaftsmahl und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke, 1996); Dennis E. Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 87-132; Harland, *Associations*, pp. 55-87.

7. Cf. Harland, *Associations*, pp. 25-54.

(1) household networks, (2) occupational networks, (3) neighbourhood networks, (4) ethnic (or geographic origin) networks and (5) networks centred on a particular sanctuary or temple devoted to a specific deity. Thus, in Asia Minor, for instance, we encounter: (1) the household-based association devoted to Zeus, Agdistis, and other deities at Philadelphia, consisting of men and women, freemen and slaves; (2) guilds organized by persons of a common profession, such as the silversmiths and the physicians at Ephesus; (3) groups consisting of members from a common street or neighbourhood who met regularly for banquets and other activities, as attested in many towns of Phrygia and elsewhere; (4) ethnic-based associations of Romans, Syrians, Judeans and others; and (5) groups formed by those who frequented a specific temple or sanctuary, as with the *therapeutai* of Zeus at Sardis.⁸

Notwithstanding the oddity of their monotheism in a polytheistic context, it seems that diaspora Jewish groups (as well as Christian congregations) were often viewed by neighbouring Greeks and Romans, including the authorities, as associations.

Jewish synagogues, though obviously based primarily on ethnic connections, could also reflect other membership bases mentioned above. Thus, in Rome there were at least thirteen synagogues in the first centuries, some of whose membership drew on neighbourhood and other networks. Of the eleven attested synagogues in Rome (some of which existed simultaneously), it appears that three derived their names from the district where they lived (the Calcaresians, the Campesians and the Siburesians) and two others derived their names from a common diaspora city of origin (the Tripolitans and the 'synagogue of Elaia').⁹ Neighbourhood factors also played a subsidiary role in the organization of the Jewish population at Alexandria in Egypt (cf. Philo, *Flacc.* 55; *CPJ* III 454, 468). Finally, there is evidence that Jews

8. For many other examples of each see Harland, *Associations*, pp. 25-54. Household-based: *IlydiaKP* III 18. Silversmiths: *IEph* 547, 585, 586, 636, 2212, 2441; *NewDocs* I 3. Physicians: *IEph* 946; *NewDocs* II 2. Neighbourhood- or street-based: *IGR* IV 548, 788-91; *TAM* V 90. Romans: *Therapeutai* of Zeus: *NewDocs* I 3.

9. See Harry J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2nd edn, 1995), pp. 135-66.

organized themselves along occupational lines or even formed guilds in Palestine and in Egypt, for instance.¹⁰

Associations, Jewish Gatherings, and Relations with Authorities

Despite scholarly traditions to the contrary, most of these associations in the first two centuries generally lived their lives without any significant or sustained interference from civic or Roman authorities, and this includes Jewish gatherings *as associations*. Generally speaking, Roman imperial actions in relation to associations of various types in this era, whether positive or negative, were *ad hoc* and did not focus on the establishment of clearly defined or enforced laws or exceptions to those laws.¹¹

On the positive side of relations with authorities, many associations could offer honours to benefactors and officials at various levels of society, and some could even maintain diplomatic relations with civic institutions and Roman provincial functionaries or the emperor.¹² Those associations that did engage in direct contacts or diplomacy with Roman administrators or the emperor were not seeking permission to exist, but rather trying to establish or maintain positive connections that might offer them certain benefits in return, including the prestige of contacts with important officials who recognized their activities. Thus,

10. See I. Mendelsohn, 'Guilds in Ancient Palestine', *BASOR* 80 (1940), pp. 17-21; S. Applebaum, 'The Organization of the Jewish Communities in the Diaspora', in S. Safrai and M. Stern (eds.), *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions* (CRINT, 1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), pp. 464-503 (476); Aryeh Kasher, *The Jews in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1985), pp. 352-53; E. Miranda, 'La comunità Giudaica di Hierapolis di Frigia', *EA* 31 (1999), pp. 109-55 (142-44); Philip A. Harland, 'Acculturation and Identity in the Diaspora: A Jewish Family and "Pagan" Guilds at Hierapolis', *JJS* 57 (2006), pp. 222-44; *t. Hul.* 3.2; *b. Meg.* 26a; cf. *t. Suk.* 51b.

11. See Ilias N. Arnaoutoglou, 'Roman Law and *Collegia* in Asia Minor', *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité* 49 (2002), pp. 27-44; Harland, *Associations*, pp. 137-76. Both independently refute the traditional view as most recently restated by Wendy Cotter, 'The Collegia and Roman Law: State Restrictions on Voluntary Associations, 64 BCE–200 CE', in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations*, pp. 74-89.

12. Harland, *Associations*, pp. 137-60; Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 BC–AD 337)* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 456-63.

for instance, the initiates of Dionysos Breseus at Smyrna sent word of their honorary festival at the birth of the son of the consul (soon to be the emperor Marcus Aurelius); the consul responded by thanking the association for their goodwill, even though his son had since died, and the association had the response set up as a monument (*ISmyrna* 600; c. 158 CE). Positive relations with officials and judicial powers, from a local legal advocate to the provincial governor himself, could also be translated into tangible benefits, as when associations were in need of legal decisions in their favour.¹³

Imperial responses to such requests for recognition of the group or for specific protections were *ad hoc* and would need to be renewed. It is within this context of diplomatic practices involving associations, as established by Tessa Rajak and confirmed by Harland, that we can partially understand connections between Jewish groups and the Roman authorities as recorded in Josephus's *Antiquities*, which should *not* be understood as some sort of legal 'Jewish Magna Carta'.¹⁴

Sometimes associations found it necessary to deal with local civic authorities as well. In Greek cities of Asia Minor, for instance, associations might approach the local authorities for permission to establish a meeting place or to set up honorary monuments. In some more exceptional cases, a local association might, over time, seek greater acknowledgement within the city with the ultimate end of being recognized as a city-supported cult in some way. But this highest level of amicable relations with, or support from, the city was not the norm. The series of decrees preserved by Josephus reflects a variety of local circumstances in the late first century BCE in the relationship between specific Jewish associations and their cities of residence, for instance, with some more positive and others clearly negative (*Ant.* 14.301-323; 16.160-178, 185-267), due in part to the general instability of this specific period.¹⁵

On the negative side of relations with authorities, from time to time specific associations in particular places might become involved in social or political disturbances that could reach the attention of the imperial authorities (if not sufficiently dealt with at the local level).

13. Cf. Harland, *Associations*, pp. 152-55.

14. Cf. Tessa Rajak, 'Was There a Roman Charter for the Jews?', *JRS* 74 (1984), pp. 107-23; Harland, *Associations*, pp. 219-23.

15. John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), pp. 279-81.

Most of the evidence for the occasional control of associations (*collegia*) by Roman authorities relates to Rome and nearby regions of Italy. Even then, it pertains to broader concerns regarding the maintenance of public order or other political issues, not the ongoing legal control of associations, as such, in the provinces.¹⁶

In some cases, when controlling action was considered warranted, Roman administrators or emperors made a distinction between the specific politically troublesome *collegia* that were to be disbanded and those considered legitimate in their pursuits. Thus, when Cicero and C. Antonius defeated Cataline in elections for consul (64 BCE), the senate passed a decree abolishing ‘all guilds which appeared to conflict with public interest’, namely, any that supported Cataline and other political opponents of the new consuls.¹⁷ In some cases the authorities expressly included Jewish gatherings among those to be left undisturbed by such actions, as seems to have been the case with Julius Caesar’s dissolution of ‘all *collegia* except those of ancient foundation’ while securing his power in 47-46 BCE. The latter action, according to Josephus, included Jews among those considered ‘ancient’.¹⁸ As the legal historian Jerzy Linderski argues, this action involved disbanding particular groups viewed as a threat to Caesar’s maintenance of power in Rome. It did not involve a law that henceforth ensured the strict control of associations—nor exceptions for certain groups, such as Jews—throughout the Empire.¹⁹ Even the *senatus consultum* cited in some inscriptions of the second century and later does not represent a consistently enforced law requiring permission for associations to exist throughout the Empire.²⁰ Thus, controlling actions against associations were not the norm, and both associations and Jewish groups lived their lives largely unbothered by civic and imperial authorities.

16. Cf. Arnaoutoglou, ‘Roman Law and *Collegia*’; Harland, *Associations*, pp. 161-75.

17. Asconius, *Commentary on Against Piso* 7; cf. Cicero, *Pis.* 9; *Res. sen.* 33; c. 57 BCE.

18. Suetonius, *Jul.* 42; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.217-267; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.213-216; 16.160-161; Dio Cassius, *History of Rome* 60.6.6.

19. Jerzy Linderski, ‘Der Senat und die Vereine’, in Linderski, *Roman Questions: Selected Papers* (Heidelberger Althistorische Beiträge und Epigraphische Studien, 20; Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1995 [1968]), pp. 165-203; cf. Zwi Yavetz, *Julius Caesar and his Public Image* (Aspects of Greek and Roman Life; London: Thames & Hudson, 1983), pp. 86, 94-95.

20. E.g. *CIL* XIV 2112; cf. Harland, *Associations*, pp. 168-69.

Now that we have outlined some important aspects of association life, we turn our attention to rabbinic sources that may provide fresh glimpses into some of the associational tendencies of Jews in Palestine and elsewhere.

Associations in Rabbinic Sources

When we look for evidence of associations in early rabbinic literature, we face two problems. First, it has been difficult to reliably identify early rabbinic traditions, and secondly, the vocabulary relating to associations is confusing.

Rabbinic traditions were not committed to writing till the Mishnah, the earliest compilation of rabbinic *halakhot* (legal rulings), was edited around 200 CE. The traditions in these compilations are largely anonymous but many are attributed to rabbis whose dates are fairly well established. Until the detailed analysis carried out during the last few decades by scholars such as Jacob Neusner, it had been impossible to know how much we could rely on these attributions. Painstaking and detailed work has now established that the relative order of rulings, as determined by their internal logic and form, is reflected in the chronological order suggested by the attributions. This makes it much more likely that later rabbis preserved the opinions of former generations accurately. They did not necessarily preserve the original wording of former generations, but they were keen to preserve former legal concepts and opinions, because their own case law was built on this foundation.

Dating rabbinic traditions by attributions has to be done carefully, with many caveats and exceptions,²¹ but in general we can now begin to identify a set of traditions that date back to the first century. On the basis of this material, many anonymous rulings can also be dated when they can be shown to be earlier than a dateable ruling, either because they are cited in it or because the later ruling interacts with it. These methods for dating rabbinic legal traditions are now well established and have been used successfully for producing coherent accounts of

21. The most important exception is that we cannot generally rely on attributions for dating *aggadot* (non-legal traditions), which include most of the biographical details for the individuals who transmitted these rulings.

first-century Judaism.²² They are now being applied systematically to early Jewish legal literature to produce a corpus of traditions that are likely to predate 70 CE and much of the rabbinic material cited here depends on that work.²³

The term ‘association’ in Mishnaic Hebrew is related to a complex and rich vocabulary of words from the root *חבר*. The verb ‘to associate’ (*chavar*) and masculine noun ‘an associate’ (*chaver*) are used in very general ways for being a ‘neighbour’ or ‘friend’ or ‘colleague’.²⁴ As well as this general meaning, the noun also has a technical meaning, ‘an Associate’ (often signalled in English by using an upper case ‘A’), which refers to a member of a carefully defined group of people, ‘the Associates’.²⁵ The Associates, who can be regarded as an ultra-strict group within Judaism, followed deliberately more restrictive rules for tithing and cleanliness than the rest of their society. To this end, they avoided commercial and social interaction with outsiders as much as possible.²⁶ The feminine noun *chaberah* is used almost exclusively for female members of these ‘Associates’. Other nouns from this verb also have specialist meanings—the masculine noun *chever* refers to a large ‘congregation’,²⁷ and the feminine noun, *chavurah* refers to an ‘association’ of people who meet together for a ceremonial meal. We

22. Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. Markus N.A. Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), pp. 57, 133, who is usually cautious about such things, regards these two dating methods as well established. These principles have been used to study first-century Judaism in several studies, e.g. E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992) and Ze’ev W. Falk, *Introduction to Jewish Law of the Second Commonwealth* (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1972, 1978).

23. D. Instone-Brewer, *Traditions of the Rabbis in the Era of the New Testament (TRENT)* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

24. It can mean a ‘friend’ (e.g. *m. Ber.* 9.5), a ‘neighbour’ in a social or moral sense (e.g. *m. Pe’ah* 1.1, *m. ‘Erub.* 2.6) or merely the person who happens to live next door (e.g. *m. Šeb.* 3.6; 4.1, 4; *m. ‘Erub.* 4.6). It can also mean simply the person standing next to another person (e.g. *m. ‘Erub.* 10.2; *m. Pes.* 5.6) or a thing next to another thing (e.g. *m. Šab.* 8.7; 11.5; *m. ‘Erub.* 1.9, 10).

25. In later Talmudic writings, it also bore the meaning of a ‘fellow scholar’ who was not yet ordained—cf. the saying of R. Simeon b. Abba (start of fourth century) in *b. Qidd.* 33b.

26. See especially *m. Dem.* 2.2-3; *t. Dem.* 2.2, 12, but also some later traditions such as *m. Dem.* 6.8; *m. Šeb.* 5.9; *m. Bikk.* 3.12; *m. Soṭ.* 9.15.

27. E.g. *m. Ber.* 4.7

therefore have the confusing situation in early rabbinic sources that the word *chaver* has two completely separate meanings ('friend' and 'Associate'), and the two similar nouns (*chever* and *chavurah*) can both refer to a group that meets for fellowship (a 'congregation' and an 'association'). Neither meaning of the word 'associate' ('friend' and 'Associate') relates specifically to either of the two groups, because both congregations and associations could be formed from any Jews (whether or not they were members of the Associates), and they could include people who were not normally called 'friends' (such as household slaves or an orphan child under the care of a fellow guest, cf. *m. Pes.* 8.1).

This study cannot encompass all uses of the root חבַר, but is concerned particularly with the term *chavurah*, when it is used for a small 'association'. This is the consistent meaning of *chavurah* in Mishnah, which uses it to refer to those who have met for a Passover meal (e.g. *m. Pes.* 7.3, 13; 8.7; 9.8-10), for eating a peace offering on a high festival day (a *yom tov*, e.g. *m. Beṣ.* 2.2-3), or for unspecified ceremonial meals (e.g. *m. Ber.* 7.5), including ones on a Sabbath (*m. 'Erub.* 6.6).

These 'associations' were made up of perhaps fifteen to thirty individuals²⁸ who met to eat together on a special occasion. They were normally formed from a family or a friendship group, but even people who had formerly been strangers could join the group (e.g. *m. Pes.* 9.10). The number of people at any formal meal had to consist of at least ten men, who made a religious quorum.²⁹ Women, household slaves and probably children could also share in the meal, though they may not have eaten at the same table.³⁰ This means that the number of

28. The concept of a group of one hundred at *m. Pes.* 8.7 is an absurd example in order to make the point that there had to be at least an olive-bulk of lamb for each person.

29. At a meal including ten or more individuals, it was compulsory to share the Grace after Meals together, but with fewer than this number this formality could be omitted and everyone said their own Grace (*m. Ber.* 7.3). We cannot be sure that there was a *halakhah* requiring ten men at this time, but Josephus assumes there was (*War* 6.423-427 = 9.3).

30. Women and children were exempt from some daily prayers, but they were not exempt from joining in with Grace after Meals (*m. Ber.* 3.3), which indicates that they were important members of even formal meals. Women were not obligated to attend Passover, though they were expected to (*t. Pes.* 8.10). The presence of circumcised slaves at Passover was mandated by the Law of Moses (Exod.

people at the meal would be about fifteen to thirty individuals. The membership of such associations was determined by three things: eating together, avoiding interaction with other associations during the meal, and registering for the meal beforehand. Each member of the association had to physically attend and join in with the meal, and this was defined by meeting with the others to eat at least a mouthful of food ('an olive's volume', e.g. *m. Pes.* 8.7). More than one association could meet in the same hall, though in this situation the groups were expected to avoid contact with each other by making sure that no individual from one group was physically facing an individual from another (see *m. Pes.* 7.13; *m. 'Erub.* 6.6).

A separation between groups was considered very important so that each person knew which group to join for the Grace after Meals when they had all finished eating. If two groups had not remained separate, they should retrospectively become one association for the Grace after Meals:

Two associations which were eating in one house—
If some [members of each association] face one another,
lo, they combine [for the Grace after Meals] (*m. Ber.* 7.5).³¹

The membership of a Passover association was later defined by a system of registration. Each individual had to register before the meal started. We do not know the purpose of this registration but it was clearly important, because there were many regulations about it: registration of someone implied registration of his brothers (*m. Pes.* 8.3); if there was confusion over registration at two associations, you must remain provisionally registered at the one you did not attend (*m. Pes.* 9.9-11); you must be registered before the meat is slaughtered (*m. Pes.* 8.3; *t. Pes.* 7.3); and if a guest invites some friends or members of another association he already belongs to, they too should be registered (*m. Pes.* 8.4; *t. Pes.* 7.7). We do not know the manner of this registration, and we can only guess that it consisted of a list kept by a leader of the meal.

12.43-48), and it was customary for new Gentile slaves to be circumcised especially for this event (*t. Pes.* 7.14; 8.18).

31. This appears to be contradicted by *m. Pes.* 8.4, but the situation envisioned there is someone who takes part of the offering for a separate association meal elsewhere.

What was the purpose of registration? We do not know, but we can make a guess. We have already seen that although there were no empire-wide legal requirements concerning associations, local traditions developed that did sometimes require associations to interact with authorities. In some exceptional conditions, a Roman official might attempt to limit certain activities of the associations, such as nocturnal meetings. This seems to be the case when Pliny was assigned as special legate of Bithynia–Pontus in connection with political and economic difficulties in the cities of the region at that time (*Ep.* 10.96). During the increasingly troubled decades before the revolt in Palestine, the gathering of so many people at Jerusalem during a festival such as Passover was always a potential threat, so association leaders may have been required to keep a list of participants in case of later enquiries by the local authorities. It is significant that although the details concerning registration often assume that the Temple was still standing (i.e. they refer to eating temple offerings), no rabbinic regulations concerning registration have been preserved in the name of rabbis who were active before the Temple was destroyed.³² This may imply that registration was originally a non-religious requirement and later became a religious tradition. It must be emphasized that this point is a conjecture for which we have little evidence.

Although most of the texts referring to an ‘association’ (*chavurah*) cited above can be dated before 200 CE, only one of them (*m. ‘Erub.*

32. Registration is not mentioned in any tradition that can be dated before 70 CE (*m. Pes.* 5.3; 6.3, 6; 7.3, 13; 8.3-4; 9.10-11; *t. Pes.* 5.2; 7.3-8, 16; 9.1, 9, 16-17), so it is possible that it was introduced later. However, it is likely that it was introduced before the Temple was destroyed, because whenever registration is referred to in Mishnah and Tosefta it is related to the consumption of the Passover meat, and not attendance at the meal—though the two are intimately related because anyone who was registered was obliged to attend long enough to eat at least ‘an olive’s bulk’ of the meat (*m. Pes.* 8.3; *t. Pes.* 7.3). More significantly, the latest time of registration for a Passover meal was defined as the time when the offering was slaughtered (see *m. Pes.* 5.3; 8.3). This may, of course, have been a way to tie the procedure to the Temple era (cf. *m. Pes.* 8.3), but it was likely to cause confusion because there was nothing equivalent to this time when there was no longer a Passover lamb, so this particular ruling was effectively meaningless after 70 CE. It is therefore likely that the concept of registration was introduced some time shortly before the Temple was destroyed, and that it was continued after this time as a matter of tradition. The absence of any traditions concerning registration for other ceremonial meals may be because Passover was the only ‘sacrificial’ meal that continued after 70 CE.

6.6) contains evidence that it originated before 70 CE. Most of them are undateable, so they could have originated from later legal discussions. The mere fact that they are concerned with Passover offerings (which could not be sacrificed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE) does not necessarily imply that they originated in Temple times. The rabbis after 70 CE were just as interested in discussing sacrifices as those who actually practised them. This was partly because they hoped that the Temple would be rebuilt, and partly because a discussion about Temple practices was regarded as a kind of substitute for performing the rites themselves.³³ This does not mean that these second-century discussions are irrelevant for understanding what happened in Temple times, but it does mean that much care must be exercised when trying to infer practices in Temple times from these later traditions.

The rest of this paper will concentrate on the implications of two traditions that contain material originating before 70 CE, in *m. 'Erub.* 6.6 and *m. Pes.* 10.8. The first employs the term *chavurah* ('association') and the second is an early rejection of drinking parties after an association banquet. Detailed justification for the dating of each is found in *TRENT*,³⁴ and the parts of the traditions that are judged to originate before 70 CE are marked here in bold.

Associations Meeting in a Communal Hall (m. 'Erubim 6.6)

Five associations [*chavurot*] who sabbathed (*shabtu*) in one dining hall (*triqlin*): the School of Shammai say: [they need] an '*eruv*' for each association. But the School of Hillel say: [they only need] one '*eruv*' for all of them. And they agree that in the situation where some of the group are in [different] rooms or in attics, then they need an '*eruv*' for each association.

The main subject of this text is not associations, but the '*eruv*', which is the subject of this whole section of Mishnah. An '*eruv*', meaning literally something like 'admixture' or 'conjunction', is used in the sense of a 'community marker'. It is a portion of food that becomes a legally valid way of linking together an area as if it were one household community. In practice the food was normally a single loaf that the

33. E.g. *b. Ta'an.* 27b; *b. Sanh.* 51b; *b. Men.* 110a.

34. For principles of dating, see Instone-Brewer, *TRENT*, I, 'Introduction'. For details about this passage see II A (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming), *ad loc.*

households paid for jointly and shared during the evening meal on the Sabbath (*m. 'Erub.* 7.11). A group of households would wish to be united during a Sabbath or other days when labour was forbidden, in order to extend the distance over which objects could be carried.

There were two main types of *'eruv*: an *'eruv hatzerot* ('courtyard community marker') and *'eruv hatserot* ('a [Sabbath] limit community marker'). You may not carry objects into and out of private domains on a Sabbath, but if all the households round one courtyard were united by a courtyard community marker, they could all carry objects within that extended area. This was very important because the shared courtyard (which was considered to be a private domain owned by everyone) was likely to include the only water source (a well, or a communal water pipe) and a refuse site (equivalent to a combined cesspit and compost heap). Without a community marker to unite the households, it would be forbidden on a Sabbath to carry the night-time slops out of the house or to carry fresh water into the house. Outside a domain you could not move more than four cubits unless you set up a Sabbath limit community marker, which enabled you to walk 2000 cubits in any direction.³⁵

This particular ruling at *m. 'Erub.* 6.6 relates to a somewhat different situation where people from separate households were coming together to eat in a single public area. The tradition recorded here concerns a situation where more than one group was meeting in the same hall, and the debate concerned whether they should all contribute towards a single community marker or whether each group had to have a separate community marker. This tradition records that the two schools of Hillel and Shammai came to different conclusions.

This debate can be dated before 70 CE with a relatively high degree of confidence because almost no Shammaites survived the destruction of 70 CE, and no more debates between the schools took place after this time. The form in which this debate is recorded is exactly the form in which the majority of other debates between them have been preserved and it shows no sign of later re-editing, so this tradition appears to have been well preserved. We can be less certain about the introduction to the debate ('Five associations who sabbathed in one dining hall')

35. The earliest dateable discussion concerning a Sabbath limit community marker is by Simeon b. Yohai (*m. 'Erub.* 10.1-2; beginning of second century) but the principle is referred to in non-rabbinic documents of the first century and older (CD 10.21-22; 11.4b-6; Acts 1.12).

because it was easy for later generations to alter an introduction without changing the form of the debate. However, the unusual vocabulary ('sabbathed' and 'dining hall') became the subject of later debates (*b. Erub. 72a*), which indicates that later generations were uncertain about their meaning. The fact that later generations considered this wording to be archaic makes it likely that the original wording has been preserved.

We cannot now know whether this ruling was the result of an actual occurrence that was brought to a rabbinic court for adjudication, or whether it was a fiction invented for the sake of rabbinic discussion of legal principles. It certainly has features of a legal fiction (only details necessary for the legal assessment are recorded, and the number 'five' is the minimum number that causes the additional problems discussed below), but it is equally possible that this discussion was occasioned by an actual event and the record preserves only the necessary details.

The situation described here was interpreted in Talmudic times as referring to families who were living together in a single large room. This is suggested by the verb *shavat*, 'to rest', i.e. 'to spend the Sabbath', which implies living there as well as eating there.³⁶ However, there are some problems with this interpretation, not least the very verb which inspires it, because it begs the question as to why we are told they spent the Sabbath there, instead of being told that they lived there. Another more difficult problem for this interpretation is the term used for the place where they were meeting—the 'dining hall' (*triklin*, טַרְקְלִין). This is not a Hebrew word but a transliteration of the Latin *triclinium* hence the translation 'dining room'.

A *triclinium* is named after the three couches at which people reclined for eating meals, which were normally laid out in a 'C' shaped arrangement. People reclined on the couches facing into the middle, so that everyone in the group could see each other. Reclining at meals was considered to be the height of culture, and Lucian even said that the ability to drink while reclining was what distinguished man from the animals (Lucian, *Asin.* 48). We know from excavations that some Greco-Roman associations used this arrangement for their meals. We also know that Jews commonly copied this style of eating, as reflected in the many Gospel references to 'reclining' at meals.³⁷ It is likely that

36. Cf. Chanoch Albeck, *Shishah sidre Mishnah* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1953–1959), *ad loc.*

37. Reclining at meals is seen at Herod's party (Mk 6.26), a king's banquet (Mt. 22.10-11), a Jewish leader's formal meal (Mt. 9.10; 26.7; Lk. 7.36), a wedding

for formal festival meals in the first century, reclining was considered compulsory, and certainly for Passover meals,³⁸ but we do not know why. The explanation in Talmud by later rabbis is that reclining at Passover demonstrated they were no longer slaves (*b. Pes.* 108a), but this was written at a time when Passover was the only ‘sacrificial’ meal that remained,³⁹ and the only meal at which reclining was still considered compulsory.

Wives, children and slaves are not referred to in this tradition though it is possible that they were attending. When such associations met in homes, it was normal for the whole household to attend, especially for Passover meals, because this occasion mirrored the events of the first Passover. The youngest child of the household had a special role to play in a section of the liturgy that almost certainly predates 70 CE.⁴⁰ It is therefore very likely that the whole family was also present when the Passover meal was celebrated at a communal hall.

However, for similar reasons, it would be unlikely that a Passover meal would be celebrated outside the home, so the associations in this tradition were probably meeting for some other meal. They may have met to eat a fellowship offering or festival offering or peace offering, which had to be consumed within two days (*Lev.* 7.16). It could be

(*Lk.* 14.8), eating with Mary and Martha (*Jn* 12.2), the Last Supper (*Mt.* 26.20; *Mk* 14.18; *Lk.* 22.27; *Jn* 13.23, 28), and post-resurrection meals (*Mk* 16.14; *Lk.* 24.30). All of these can be regarded as ‘special’ meals, except perhaps the post-resurrection meals—though these may have been influenced by parallels with the Last Supper. The rich probably emulated this Greek custom at every meal, as they had done for a few centuries (*Amos* 3.12; 6.4; cf. *Sir.* 41.19), but normal families probably only reclined during special meals. For a recent discussion of Jewish meals in the context of Greco-Roman banquet traditions, see Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist*, pp. 133-72.

38. Reclining at Passover was already compulsory at a relatively early time. The earliest evidence is in *m. Pes.* 10.1, which is difficult to date but is probably late first century. In later rabbinic literature we only find references to reclining at Passover, but Philo records that the Therapeutae reclined at a non-Passover formal meal (*Vit. Cont.* 9, 69), and the fact that they normally avoided all such signs of easy living, and had to use boxes and blankets to approximate to couches, suggests that they regarded this as compulsory.

39. After 70 CE there was no sacrifice, but a bare lamb bone was put on the table to symbolize that offering.

40. The questions asked by the youngest son comes in various versions, the earliest of which (*m. Pes.* 10.4) includes a question about roasting the lamb—which indicates that this version originated before the Jerusalem Temple was destroyed.

offered and cooked on the day before the Sabbath, then eaten by the association group on the Sabbath when everyone had free time to attend. In this case there would be no need for other household members to attend, though presumably they could if they wished. It could therefore be an all-male meal, as was common for other association meals in the Greco-Roman world.

This tradition is therefore describing a large hall with five groups of diners, presumably all eating at separate sets of couches, each arranged as a *triclinium*. It is pertinent to ask why the ruling concerns ‘five’ groups and not ‘some’ groups or ‘two’ groups. The question of whether or not an *‘eruv* can be shared would apply equally well to two groups as to a larger number, and rabbinic debates are normally careful to address the simplest situation so that the ruling can be applied to more complex cases. It is possible, of course, that this debate is the result of a specific case that was brought to a rabbinic court, but even in this situation one would expect the final ruling to be preserved in a form that applies to the maximum number of similar cases. So we have to consider what was the difference between four *triclinia* in one dining hall and five *triclinia*.

The specific problem addressed in this ruling probably relates to whether or not the groups are separate, because an *‘eruv* is a legal way of defining unity in a group. As discussed above, one aspect that separated associations from each other was the fact that they did not face each other. If individuals happened to face each other during the meal, the associations could (and probably *should*) amalgamate at the end of the meal and join together for the closing Grace after Meals. In a dining hall, the *triclinia* would be arranged so that waiters could move around the room and serve any diner, while preserving the privacy of each group as much as possible. The best arrangement would be to have the head of each *triclinium* in the centre of the room, with the open ends facing the walls, so that the waiters could bring food and drink to each group from the outside of the room without going past any other group, and so that no individual at any of the *triclinia* was facing an individual from another *triclinium*. Such separation is possible for up to four *triclinia* in a single room, but as soon as a fifth is introduced, some individuals will be able to see each other while they eat. In this situation, one way to re-assert the separateness of the five groups would be to employ a separate *‘eruv* for each group. The groups would then be

defined by this symbol of their unity rather than by their physical separation during the meal.

Therefore the significance of this ruling may be that four or fewer associations in a single room could be regarded as separate, but when there were five or more they each needed an *'eruv* to help assert a separation between them, which was important for religious reasons.

While this explanation is reasonable, we should recognize that we cannot be certain about the reasoning behind this dispute. However, the most significant aspects of this debate for the present paper are the uncontroversial features accepted and assumed by both the schools of Hillel and Shammai: that banqueting associations could meet outside the home in community rooms; that more than one association could meet in the same room; and that they employed a *triclinium*. These features mirror what we know of associations in the wider Greco-Roman world.

Rejection of Association Drinking Parties (m. Pesachim 10.8)

One custom of Greco-Roman banquets that appears to have been consciously rejected by these Jewish associations, at least in one Mishnaic tradition, was the drinking parties (*sumposia*) that often followed association meals. A reference to this has been preserved in a tradition at *m. Pes.* 10.8 concerning the end of the Passover meal: ‘One should not depart after the Passover for revelry’ (אִפְיִקוֹמָן, *apikoman*).⁴¹

The interpretation of the word *apikoman* varies among Talmudic rabbis and this engendered a great deal of debate (see *b. Pes.* 119b; *y. Pes.* 10.8; cf. *t. Pes.* 10.11), which probably indicates that they no longer knew what the word meant. It was traditionally understood as ‘One should not *eat dainties* after eating the Passover meat’, which meant something like: ‘One should not eat anything after the Passover meal is finished’. The rest of this tradition in Mishnah assumes that the phrase means something like this, because it discusses how to define the end of the meal. It says that if the meal had not ended formally, but everyone had fallen asleep, they should assume that the meal had

41. The pronunciation is uncertain, because vowels were not added to Mishnah till later editions. The verb ‘depart’ (*patar*) can also be used for ‘dismissal’ e.g. at the end of a class, so it can be understood as ‘to end’. Hence the modern interpretation of the phrase is ‘One should not end the Passover after the *apikoman*’, i.e. the *apikoman* should end the meal.

ended, so they must not start eating again when they woke up. Other meanings proposed for *apikoman* by later rabbis included ‘join another group’ and ‘types of music’, but most rabbis thought it meant ‘eat desserts’ or other various kinds of tasty snacks. There was considerable debate about which type of desserts were referred to, and some suggested that the prohibition only related to Temple times, or that any dessert could be consumed so long as it was followed by a piece of unleavened bread. These various suggestions were presumably inspired by a memory that some kinds of desserts had been allowed, but they were confused about what or why.

The main problem is that *apikoman* is not a Hebrew word and presumably, like many other non-Hebrew words in Mishnah, it is a transliteration of a Greek or Latin word. The most likely candidate is *epikōmos* (ἐπίκωμος), ‘revelry’.⁴² Although *kōmos* (κῶμος) is a common word for a revelling or a raucous celebration at a festival or after a victory at the games, the word *epikōmos* is relatively rare, and it is not surprising that the rabbis were not sure what it meant. There are only two instances of it in first century literature. In one, an *epikōmos* is referred to as a time of ‘drinking and enjoyment’,⁴³ and the other mentions ‘an ignorant man who comes by night’ and is ‘knocking unseasonably’ in search of an *epikōmos*.⁴⁴

This identification of the word suggests that the ruling meant one should not depart at the end of a Passover meal in order to go to a drinking party. This meaning makes sense at the end of the Passover meal, because it is followed by a ruling that the meal should end with a

42. First proposed by Saul Lieberman in *Hayerushalmi Kifshuto* (Jerusalem: Hotsa’at Darom, 1934), p. 521. It is assumed by Joseph Tabory in the outline of his PhD thesis given in ‘The Passover Eve Ceremony: An Historical Outline’, *Immanuel* 12 (1981), pp. 32-43. Arguments for it are summarized well by Lawrence Hoffman, ‘A Symbol of Salvation in the Passover Seder’, in Paul F. Bradshaw and Lawrence A. Hoffman (eds.), *Passover and Easter* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), pp. 109-131, esp. pp. 112-13, 126. Previous explanations included James Rendel Harris, ‘What Was the Afikoman?’, in Harris, *Woodbrooke Essays*, II (Cambridge: Heffer, 1927–1928), pp. 24-36, who argued that it was a symbol of the scattered broken Osiris who was recovered; and David Daube, ‘The Significance of the Afikoman’, in Calum Varmichael (ed.), *New Testament Judaism: Collected Works of David Daube*, I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 425-28, who said it signified the departed and returning Messiah.

43. Plutarch, *Mor.* 148B.

44. Plutarch, *Mor.* 784B.

single cup of wine called the ‘fourth cup’. The four cups were each associated with a special point in the meal (*m. Pes.* 10.1-6). The three earlier cups could be interspersed with more wine, if people wished (*m. Pes.* 10.7), but the ‘fourth cup’ was a single cup of wine that marked the end of the meal. This was presumably based on the assumption that drinking during a meal would not result in drunkenness, in contrast to drinking after a meal.⁴⁵

This limitation of after-dinner drinking to a single cup of wine seems to be a conscious rejection of the Greco-Roman custom of an after-dinner drinking party. Philo complained that some Jews were emulating this Roman style of banqueting:

Some perhaps may approve the method of banqueting now prevalent everywhere through hankering for the Italian expensiveness and luxury emulated both by Greeks and non-Greeks who make their arrangements for ostentation rather than festivity. Sets of three or many *triclinia* made of tortoise shell or ivory...a host of drinking cups...slaves of the utmost comeliness and beauty, giving the idea that they have come not so much to render service as to give pleasure... The last tables brought in are reserved for the drinking bouts and the after-dinners as they call them.⁴⁶

As Torrey Seland discusses at length, Philo also complains of the drinking that took place in Greco-Egyptian associations specifically, and seems to see a danger in Jews participating:

In the city there are associations (*thiasoi*) with a large membership, whose fellowship is founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence, and their offspring, wantonness. ‘Synods’ (*sunodoi*) and ‘banqueting-couches’ (*klinai*) are the particular names given to them by the people of the country (*Flacc.* 136; trans. LCL with adaptations).⁴⁷

45. ‘Wine after the meal causes drunkenness; that which is in the midst of the meal does not cause drunkenness’ (*y. Pes.* 10.8).

46. Philo, *Vit. Cont.* 6.48-54, translation by F.H. Colson in LCL Philo IX. Bruce Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), pp. 83-85, suggests that ‘after dinners’ may be a euphemistic reference to the sexual entertainment that normally followed a Greco-Roman meal.

47. Torrey Seland, ‘Philo and the Clubs and Associations of Alexandria’, in Kloppenborg and Wilson (eds.), *Voluntary Associations*, 110-27.

It is in relation to this Jewish moralistic critique of typical association activities, especially the drinking parties (*sumposia*), that we can understand the Mishnaic prohibition.

This ruling in the Mishnah says that one should not ‘depart’ in order to join such a party held elsewhere, which suggests that some people were doing just that—they were rejecting the restrictions at the end of the Passover meal and going to a more liberal venue to conclude their feasting. The various meanings of this ruling, which were half remembered and half inferred by later generations, fit this context fairly well, because at an after-dinner drinking session one would expect to have music and a variety of salty snacks to promote thirst. However, they forgot the meaning of the Greek term *epikōmos* behind the Hebrew word *apikoman*, and after they had distanced themselves from these Greco-Roman habits for a few generations, they forgot the original problem that had prompted this ruling.

Conclusions

Scholars have paid little attention to Mishnaic evidence for informal banqueting associations in Palestine, due partly to difficulties in dating this material. There are several references in rabbinic traditions to ‘associations’ that met for religious meals, most of which refer to Passover meals, but other meals are also mentioned. One of these (*m. Erub.* 6.6) can be dated before 70 CE, when all sacrifices were terminated by the destruction of the Temple. This tradition demonstrates that associations could meet in communal halls (as well as homes, as assumed in other traditions), that they reclined at a *triclinium* for the meal, and that they had servants (or household members) who served them. From other traditions we can infer that such groups normally numbered about fifteen to thirty individuals and sometimes included family members (wives, children and household slaves), though this was not necessary at all association meals such as the consumption of a fellowship offering. The particular tradition about associations meeting at a communal hall can be understood within the broader framework of Greco-Roman banqueting associations that met for meals in a local temple. Another early tradition that does not actually use the word ‘association’ indicates a rejection of the after-dinner revelry (*epikōmos*), characteristic of the Greco-Roman *sumposia*, which was an important activity in many ‘pagan’ associations.

It is difficult to know whether Jews were consciously mimicking the customs of their neighbours or whether these customs were absorbed unconsciously. The latter is more likely, because although reclining was regarded as a decadent practice in Israel in the time of Amos (cf. Amos 3.12; 6.4), the many references to it in the Gospels indicate that it had been accepted as a Jewish custom. Indeed, it became so much part of the Jewish traditions that it was later regarded as a compulsory part of the celebration of Passover. Therefore, if the origins had been influenced by the surrounding culture, Jews no longer perceived this to be the case, and by the first century they had made the practice of association banquets a thoroughly Jewish aspect of religious and community life. They did not absorb these customs without modifying them, however, as demonstrated by their rejection of the after-dinner drinking parties that were so characteristic of many other associations in the ancient Mediterranean world.