Rabbinic Judaism in the Making

Alexander Guttmann

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was not necessarily a direct successor to Simon and may have lived at a somewhat later time. The Hebrew term qibbel can be used, in a spiritual sense, as is the case with the term “disciple.”

According to the testimony of ARN II the schism of the Sadducees originated with some of Antigonos’ disciples. This implies that Antigonos lived some time prior to this schism. Unfortunately, the exact date of the schism cannot be established. According to Josephus (Ant. XIII.V.9), the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes existed as distinct groups at the time of Jonathan, the brother of Judas Maccabeus, and there is no reason to doubt the veracity of Josephus’ statement. This prompts the conclusion that the schism must have occurred earlier. Therefore, it is not probable that Antigonos extended his activities much beyond 200 B.C.E., if at all.

**THE GEROUSIA**

The possible role of the Gerousia in the history of the Halakhah is obscure. As an institution, Gerousia is not mentioned in talmudic literature. The Hebrew designation "elders" does not denote a body or an institution, but refers to elders as individuals and corresponds to the later “sages.”

Josephus refers to the Gerousia when relating the events of the times prior to the establishment of the Hasmonean rule. This is taken by some scholars to mean that at the establishment of the Hasmonean rule the Gerousia was changed into an institution called Sanhedrin. However, Gerousia is mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 5:21) together with the Sanhedrin, both summoned by the high priest. Yet, Gerousia here could mean “elders,” i.e., Pharisaic elders whom he invited to join his Sanhedrin. This conjecture is supported by the fact that the Septuagint translates ἄρχοντες in the Pentateuch and Joshua (not in the other books of the Bible) as “Gerousia.” II Macc. 4:44 mentions a Gerousia as existing at the time of Judas Maccabeus. Here it is obviously the designation of a
body. There are many more references to Gerousia in non-talmudic literature, but they contain no information of distinct value for the history of the Halakhah and shall not be discussed here.

Why the institution of Gerousia is not mentioned in talmudic literature is a matter of conjecture. It is possible that the Gerousia is identical with an institution mentioned in talmudic literature by another name.

For example, some scholars believe that the Gerousia is identical with the Sanhedrin. However, this identification meets with several difficulties which make it unacceptable. The most weighty of these is that no halakhic-legislative activities of the Gerousia are transmitted, though this was the most important function of the Sanhedrin. The only thing that is certain is that the Gerousia possessed administrative functions and some political influence, and was the officially recognized representative body of the Jewish people as evidenced in II Macc. 11:27 by the official letter sent by Antiochus V to the Jewish Gerousia in 165–164 B.C.E.; and in Ant. XII,iii,3, where Josephus relates that after his victory at Panea (198 B.C.E.) Antiochus III wrote a letter to his general Ptolemy in which he ordains that the Gerousia, the priests and the scribes of the Temple, and the Temple-singers, be exempted from “the poll-tax and the crown-tax and the salt-tax.”

A more plausible explanation for the absence of the Gerousia in talmudic literature is the assumption that it was an institution that played no role of any significance in the history of Pharisaic-Rabbinic Judaism. During the Hellenistic period it was the council headed by the high priest and recognized by the foreign overlords as the official representative of the Jewish people. It is possible that at a later period a smaller council of the high priests also bore the name “Gerousia,” functioning in a capacity different from that of the high priestly Sanhedrin. Acts 5:21 may have reference to these two bodies of the high priest.

Jewish councils bearing the name “Gerousia” existed also in Egypt, and probably also in Asia Minor, but these Gerousias possess no importance.