THE ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF JUDEA IN THE ROMAN AND BYZANTINE PERIODS

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The administrative division of Palestine in the Mishnaic-Talmudic period is of great importance for the study of the country during this period. The administrative boundaries were also economic in nature. The central settlement in a given area was also the economic centre, with regional boundaries serving as the boundaries of economic units. Furthermore, administrative boundaries were sometimes ethnic boundaries as well. We may say that if, in a given region, there was a boundary line between Jewish and Samaritan settlements, or Jewish and Gentile ones, then this line would serve also as an administrative boundary. For example, the limits of the expansion of Gentile settlement (until the Bar Kokhba rebellion) were identical with the administrative limits of the Gentile cities. The boundaries of the main Samaritan concentration were those of the Samaria region.

In this discussion, we will attempt to follow the administrative changes in the region of Judea and Idumea from the end of the Second Temple period until the Arab conquest. Our basic assumption is that all of Palestine was divided into administrative blocs. This division was fixed throughout the period under consideration, and in fact remained intact from the Persian-Hellenistic period. The boundaries of the administrative blocs remained unchanged, although their status changed from time to time. For example, the Timna region might be independent or appended to Lod or Jerusalem. The "capital" of the region might shift from Ramataim to Timna or vice versa — but the essential geographic identity of the region remained unchanged; its boundaries remained fixed throughout the entire period.

Principles of the Administrative Division

During the Hellenistic period, and later during the Roman period, two principal systems of administration were used in the Empire.

A. The system of regions and toparchies, dating from the time of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The Empire was divided into provinces, with each province being divided into regions (μερί'ς or μερίδες); each *meris was divided into nomoi* (sing. Νόμος). This system remained unchanged in the Roman period, although the terminology was changed. We do not know the later term for "region", but the term *nomos* was replaced by toparchy (τοπαρχία). This terminological change had no administrative or legal significance.

The main village of each *nomos* (or toparchy) served as its capital. Of course, if the area contained a city (*polis*) it fulfilled this function. The capital of the toparchy was the principal settlement from an administrative and economic standpoint. On the other hand, it did not rule over the surrounding area, serving only as the local government's seat.

B. The system of municipal administration. In this system, the province was divided into municipal areas, with each city ruling over its area (*territorium*). The city inherited the role of the toparchy, making the division into regions no longer operative. In this system the city *per se* ruled over its *territorium*, with the city council also serving as the territorial council. Taxes from the rural area were brought to the city, feeding its economy in a natural way. This system was used in Syria as well as the other provinces of the Empire.

There is a substantial difference between these two systems as under the first, the capital of the toparchy has no preferential legal status — as compared with the other settlements. According to the second system, a hierarchy is created: the city enjoys legal and administrative privileges as a matter of law, and consequently enjoys numerous economic advantages as well. It is obvious that this system gives expression to the government's preferential treatment of the urban community. In fact, the Hellenistic elements who were closest to the government were

31

concentrated in the cities. They ruled over, and even tyrannized, the indigenous rural population. This situation existed throughout the Empire, but it was particularly evident in Palestine. The urban population was composed primarily of Gentiles, who hated the Jewish inhabitants over whom they ruled. The transition from the first to the second system was marked by the granting of legal and economic power to the Gentile *polis* which had a higher standing than the rural Jewish settlement.

The first system prevailed in Palestine until the destruction of the Temple. True, Shalit contends[1] that in Samaria there were no toparchies, and the second system of administration prevailed — yet there is no evidence for this theory. Furthermore, in an inscription recently discovered in Asia Minor, Neopolis (Nablus) is described as a city in "Samaria". Samaria was one of the "regions", and attributing a city to a "region" in an official document would have been possible only under the first system.[2]

The second system of administration was undoubtedly in effect in Palestine by the beginning of the fourth century. The question is: when was the system changed? Various scholars who dealt with this question thought that the change took place during the reign of Vespasian — after the rebellion which ended in the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). This supposition was based primarily on the lack of administrative records dating from the period between 70 CE and Eusebius' lifetime (3rd–4th centuries CE). The inscription previously mentioned, as well as one of the letters from the Judean desert,[3] prove that the toparchial system operated at least until the time of the Bar-Kokhba rebellion.

We argue that the change took place only in the third century, at the time of the Severan dynasty or Emperor Diocletian. The basic reason is that before this time, Eretz Yisrael did not have a sufficient number of cities to serve as the foundation for a municipal system of administration. Furthermore, as we shall see, until Diocletian's time, rural settlements were at the heart of several administrative divisions. It is true that even under the second system there were occasionally rural administrative divisions. But in the second and third centuries CE, most of the administrative divisions were rural — a strange and perplexing fact.

The list of regions in Palestine included the following: the coastal region, Idumea, Judea, Samaria, the Galilee, the Golan,[4] and Transjordan. We will restrict our

1.   A. Shalit, *The Roman Order in Eretz Israel* (Hebrew), Jerusalem, 1937, pp. 1–16.

2.   *L'Année Epigraphique* (Paris), 1972, pp. 178–179.

3.   P. Benoit, J.T. Milik and R. de Vaux, *Discoveries in the Judean Desert* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1961), Vol. 2, no. 115.

4.   Cf. Z. Safrai, *Jewish Settlement in the Golan* (Hebrew), 1978, pp. 5–13.

discussion to the administrative division of Judea and Idumea. As mentioned, Judea ceased to function as a "region" in the Byzantine period; we will treat this term as it was understood in the Roman period before the shift in administrative systems. During the Temple period, this was a region inhabited by Jews. Idumea was inhabited at the time by the Idumeans. After the conquests of John Hyrcanus, the Idumeans were converted to Judaism, and their ethnic singularity was gradually dissipated. By the end of the Temple period they were identified as Idumeans — but for all practical purposes were actually Jews.

As we have stated, administrative continuity was preserved in Eretz Yisrael. The division of the Persian period became a *nomos*, or toparchy, and its central settlement became a city; otherwise, the entire district was appended to the territory of the nearest city. Examples will follow.

We have two full descriptions of the administrative division dating from the end of the Temple period — the list of Judean toparchies provided by Josephus (*Wars* III, 3), and the list of toparchies given by Pliny the Elder (*Natural History* V, XIV, 70). These are complete lists which their authors intended to present a complete picture of the administrative system of Judea in particular, and of Palestine in general. The two lists are very similar. That part common to both of them includes the toparchies of Jerusalem, Gofna, Aqraba, Timna, Lod, Emmaus, Beit Netofa, Herodion and Jericho. But there are several differences. Pliny considers Jaffa an integral part of Judea, while Josephus regards Jaffa and Jamnia as appended to Judea. Josephus also lists two more names: Idumea and Ein Gedi. There is little doubt that both lists are precise, and the slight differences between them reflect their different dates.

After due consideration of the various theories to be found in the scholarly literature, this author has concluded that Josephus' list reflects a number of administrative changes instituted by Vespasian, immediately after the destruction of the Temple. Jaffa's new status as a colony explains why it is no longer considered an integral part of Judea; seemingly, this was the case with Jamnia as well. As for "Idumea", it is certainly not to be seen as a regular toparchy. This region is extremely large, covering an area larger than all the other toparchies combined. Furthermore, it would be hard to explain why "Idumea" is missing from Pliny's list. Later on we will see that there were additional toparchies in southern Judea. We must ask why they are missing from both Pliny's and Josephus' lists.

We suggest that Idumea was not a toparchy, but a region parallel to Judea. As Stern pointed out,[5] Idumea was considered an independent region throughout the

5.   M. Stern, "The Description of Eretz Israel by Pliny the Elder and the Administrative Division of Judea at the End of the Sedond Temple Period," (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 37 (1978), pp. 215–229.

Second Commonwealth. As far as the internal division of Idumea is concerned, we will see later on that it included the toparchies of Beit Zur, Nezib, Hebron, Adoraim and Daroma. It is very possible that there were additional toparchies, whose names have not been preserved in the literary sources at our disposal.

The Administrative Reforms of Vespasian

As we have noted, Vespasian did not revise the principles governing administrative division in Palestine. In fact, the system of toparchies was modified only slightly. The changes he instituted stemmed from the new situation created in Judea after the destruction of the Temples, and the political aims of the Roman government. They may be summarized as follows: Jaffa became a city, ceasing to be an integral part of Judea, though it remained connected to Judea. Similarly, Jamnia was appended to Judea. The motive for this change was to enable the Christian cities to develop independently on the one hand, while influencing the rural toparchies on the other. Ein Gedi was detached from Jericho,[6] presumably because of the destruction of Jericho during the rebellion. The status of Ein Gedi during the rest of this period is problematic.

A number of additional changes were instituted later on, and therefore are not reflected in Josephus' list. Concerning Jerusalem, it is unclear whether it remained an administrative capital, since it was destroyed in the rebellion. Its place may have been taken by Betar, or by the colony which was founded in Moṣa.[7] Antipatris was founded in Herod's time, but did not become an independent administrative centre at that time. Apparently Vespasian granted it this status in order to weaken the Jewish city of Lod. This intention becomes clear in light of the archeological finds, which show that Antipatris was largely destroyed at this time. The other toparchies remained unchanged.

Administrative Changes after the Bar-Kokhba Rebellion: The Administrative System as it appears in Eusebius' *Onomasticon*

A further wave of changes in the administrative structure took place in the time of Hadrian. Our knowledge of these changes depends on Eusebius' *Onomasticon*. Therefore, we will begin with a discussion of this work.

Eusebius' *Onomasticon* is a list of the place-names (toponyms) found in the Bible. Occasionally a name is accompanied by a description of the place, and its status in the author's time. The author is the church father Eusebius, a native of

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6.   In my opinion, there is no justification for the claims of Avi-Yonah, Stern and other scholars that Ein Gedi was part of Idumea. From a geographical point of view, there is no connection between Ein Gedi and the Idumean mountains. Furthermore, it is clear that during many periods Ein Gedi was included in the Jericho region.

7.   The location of the colony is unclear, and we have no information about its administrative status.

Pamphilia, who served as bishop in Caesarea at the beginning of the fourth century. When the Christian administrative system was established in Palestine, he also functioned as head of the Church there (*metropolitan*). To describe the current locations of the biblical sites, the author uses several modes of depiction:

1) In a particular district (ἐν ὁρίοις). In fact, Avi-Yonah showed that the use of the term "district" indicates that an administrative division is being referred to.

2) On the road from A to B, sometimes with the distance specified. Here too, one can demonstrate that the roads mentioned ran from one administrative centre to another.

3) At a given distance from place X; here too, X is the local administrative centre.

4) Next to (παράκεται) or near (περι πλησιον) place X is the capital of an administrative division.

5) Between places A and B, Avi-Yonah thought that this referred to a site on the border between two administrative divisions. In our opinion this term is imprecise and unrelated to the administrative divisions.

A close study of Eusebius' descriptions reveals that he was quite precise, and related to the administrative system prevailing in his day. Where the status of an area had been changed, Eusebius knew of its earlier status as is shown in his descriptions. The more time that had passed since a particular change, the less clearly was that change remembered. Therefore, we may distinguish between several stages of administrative change — depending on the degree to which the original administrative status is reflected in our sources. Our inquiry yielded the following classification:

1) Administrative divisions which completely disappeared, e.g. Herodion, Beit Netofa.

2) Divisions which were remembered to some extent, but were not recalled precisely. The old administrative division is recalled with respect to only some of the sites it contained. Thus we find that Hebron and Daroma were independent at one time, being appended to the district of Eleutheropolis, and that Bethel was appended to Jerusalem.

2a) It is possible that at an earlier stage Hebron and Daroma were united, but this impression may derive from a lack of precision on Eusebius' part.

3) Divisions which were no longer functional, but were still accurately known to Eusebius. All the settlements in such a division are described twice, according to the old classification, and once again according to the new. This group includes: Aqraba which was appended to Neapolis, Timna which was appended to Lod, and Gofna which was appended to Jerusalem. These changes were part of the dismantling of the rural division, and the assignment of rural areas to cities, within the framework of a transition to an administrative system based on the cities.

Claudius Ptolemaeus' List of Cities

Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy the Geographer) lived in the second century C.E., being particularly active in the period 135–160. His work lists the regions of Palestine, and the major settlements in each region. In particular, he lists the important settlements of Judea. This list dates from after the Bar-Kokhba rebellion, as may be seen from an analysis of its various components. The list of Judean cities is not an administrative one, but it is clear that there is a direct connection between the list of administrative centres, and that of major settlements. Close study of the former list shows that it fills in the gaps in our knowledge of administrative developments in Judea, enabling us to fill in the gaps between the various periods. For example, Ptolemaeus mentions Beit Zur. This was an independent settlement in the Persian period. It was included in the administrative district of Idumea, and is therefore missing from Josephus' list, though it is to be found in Ptolemaeus' list. Likewise, the Qeila area was independent in the Persian period. It was also included in the administrative district of Idumea, and therefore does not appear in the lists of Josephus and Pliny. This area, independent in the second century (Ptolemaeus), was later appended to the district of Beit Gubrin (cf. above). In the Byzantine period, it once again achieved independence, with the village cluster Tarqumieh as regional capital. In this case, the capital moved from Qeila to nearby Nezib, and thence to Tarqumieh, located about two kilometres from Nezib.

In light of Ptolemaeus' and Eusebius' lists, we can outline several waves of administrative changes:

1) The period of Vaspasian: changes in the status of Jaffa, Jamnia and possibly Jerusalem; the founding of Antipatras.
2) Immediately after the Bar-Kokhba rebellion: the districts of Herodian and Netofa lost their independent status, and were appended to Jerusalem. The capital of the Shahlaim district was moved to Beit Gubrin, and of the Botna district to Hebron. Aqrabim was appended to the Samaria region.
3) After Hadrian (Severan period, end of the second century), Beit Zur was appended to Jerusalem, Qeila-Nezib and Adoraim to Eleutheropolis. Netofa was transferred from Jerusalem to Eleutheropolis. None of these changes are reflected in Eusebius *Onomasticon*.
3a) Unification of Hebron and Daroma.
3b) Annexation of Hebron-Daroma to Eleutheropolis; final annexation of Bethel to Jerusalem.
4) Annexation of Gofna to Jerusalem, Timna to Lod and Aqrabim to Neapolis.

There were also several changes not connected with these waves. For example, Ono achieved independence, and possibly urban status, by the end of the third

The Changes in the Administrative Structure of Judea and Idumea

Name of the Unit-City toparchy/Nomos	Persian Period	Hellenistic Period	End of Second Commonwealth	Vespasian's Reforms	Stage I— After the Bar Kokhba Rebellion	Stage II— Before 200	Stage III— After 200	Stage IV— Diocletian	End of Byzantine Period
Aqrabia	Bethel? Mitzpeh?	Ephraim	Aqrabim	Aqrabim	Taana	Aqrabim	Aqrabim	Neopolis	Neopolis
			BELONGING TO SAMARIA						
Timna	?	Ramataim	Timna	Timna	Timna	Timna	Timna	Lod	Lod
Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	DIOPOLIS		
Ono	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	Lod	ONO	
Antipatris	Lod	Lod	Lod	ANTIPATRIS					
Emmaus	Gezer?◆	Gezer★	Emmaus	Emmaus	Emmaus	Emmaus	NIKOPOLIS		
Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho
Ein Gedi	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Ein Gedi	Ein Gedi? Jericho?	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho	Jericho
Gofna	?	Ramataim	Gofna	Gofna	Gofna	Gofna	Gofna	Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	AELIA CAPITOLINA					
Herodion	Bet Hakerem	Bet Hakerem	Herodion	Herodion	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Bet Zur	Bet Zur	Bet Zur	Bet Zur★	Bet Zur★	Bet Zur? Jerusalem?	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jerusalem
Bet Netofa	Zenoah	Bet Netofa	Bet Netofa	Bet Netofa	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	ELEUTHEROPOLIS		
Bet Gubrin	Marasha★	Marasha★	Shahlaim★	Bet Gubrin★	Bet Gubrin	Bet Gubrin	ELEUTHEROPOLIS		
Qeila/Nezib	Qeila	Qeila	Qeila★	Qeila?★ Kfar Bish	Nezib★	Jerusalem? Bet Gubrin?			Trichomea
Hebron	Botna★	Botna★	Hebron?★ Botna?	Hebron★	Hebron★	Hebron			
Daroma	?★	?★	?★	Daroma★	Daroma★	Daroma	ELEUTHEROPOLIS		
Adoraim	Adoraim★	Adoraim★	?★	?★	?★	?			
Jaffa	Jaffa◆	Jaffa◆	Jaffa	FLAVIA JOFFA					
Yavneh	Yavneh◆	Jamnia◆	JAMNIA						

Key: ▨ Appended area   ◆ Belonging to the coastal plain   ★ Belonging to Idumea

century.[8] During the Byzantine period, the administrative structure remained stable; the only change was the establishment of a new rural division (Trikomia) in place of the earlier toparchy of Qeila-Nezib. We also know of the establishment of an additional ecclesiastical district in the area of Jericho, which represented a sort of revival of the Roman district of Ein Gedi. The nature of the relationship between the civil and ecclesiastical administrative structures requires detailed study, which cannot be undertaken here. The status of the administrative districts in the various periods is graphically represented in the table appended to this article.

Klein attempted to reconstruct the administrative structure of Eretz Yisrael in such a way as to include twenty-four toparchies which would correspond to the twenty-four priestly courses. Later on, Shalit made a similar attempt.[9] In our opinion, this is not a viable approach; there were more than twenty-four toparchies in the entire country — and the administrative structure was flexible. Furthermore, it is clear that the priestly courses were not evenly distributed among the various districts. Therefore, it seems that the connection between the various regions and the priestly courses was never crystallized, having no precise or formal character.

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8.   Ono is listed as a city in administrative lists of the sixth century. But a member of the city council (Βυλευτοῦ) is mentioned already in the year 295 C.E. Seemingly, this would show that it had already achieved urban status. But now we know that large villages we well (including those in Syria) had councils. Therefore, we cannot reach the conclusion that Ono was already a city. There is no other evidence for a date on which a city was established at this site.

9.   A Shalit, *König Herodes: Der Mann und Sein Werk* (Berlin: 1969), p. 206.