CHAPTER 4

PAUL’S PREVIOUS LIFE IN JUDAISM

In this chapter, I will discuss questions concerning Paul himself on the basis of Paul’s Letters. These questions concern Paul’s standpoint in the dialogue with his readers and in relation to the religious background of the apostle.

Focusing our attention on the first phase of Paul’s life, the formative influence of Judaism, we can reach a better general understanding of Paul’s relation to Judaism. On the basis of this general picture it will be possible to go more specifically into the question how Paul’s cultic imagery relates to the Jews and Gentiles who were converted to the faith in Christ. To be sure, Paul did not write his letters with the purpose of leaving behind an autobiography. The rhetorical situations in which Paul writes about his own position and his former Jewish life, need to be taken into account.

Paul’s former life as a Pharisee will be situated in the social context of Pharisaic traditions and the social geography of Pharisaic activity. When dealing with this social context, the problem of locating Paul’s Pharisaic study of the Law needs to be addressed. An adequate answer to the question about the presence of Jewish traditions in Paul’s Letters depends on this groundwork which aims at situating and locating his former life as a Pharisee.

1. Models for reconstructing the social world of Paul’s life

Before going into a more detailed discussion of Paul’s previous life in Judaism, it may be useful to focus on models of rhetorical and social-scientific criticism, already briefly presented in my Introduction, as well as the new perspectives on Paul’s letters which these models may generate in search of the presence and influence of Jewish tradition.

1.1 Rhetorical analysis

From first-hand information of passages in the Pauline letters – 1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 11:22; Gal 1:13-14; Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5-6 – we know certain things that Paul himself wanted his readers to know through his letters about his past life in Judaism. Through the monumental study of H.-D. Betz on Galatians, rhetorical analysis has become established in the exegesis of the Pauline letters. Thus the so-called ‘autobiographic’ accounts or testimonies, among others in Gal 1:12-2:21, also need to be reinterpreted in view of the rhetorical purpose which these accounts have in the respective Letters.1 Rhetorical analysis which takes into account the setting and the genre of Paul’s letters more carefully could even enhance the possibility to analyse with more critical precision the passages from which elements of biographical information can be derived about Paul’s position against his opponents.2

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2 The point made by J.T. Sanders and G. Lüdemann concerning the possibility of gaps and biases even in Paul’s autobiographical accounts, mentioned in R. Riesner, Paul’s Early Period (ET by D. Scott; Grand Rapids, Mich.
The search for information about Paul’s life and thought will be a matter of reading between the lines. That is, information may be derived from the reconstruction of the situations in which Paul felt prompted to write his Letters and of the matters about which Paul addresses his readers. Explaining a term coined by Lloyd F. Bitzer, Philip F. Esler has described the ‘rhetorical situation’ of a (written) communication as comprising three constituent elements: the exigence, the audience, and certain constraints. In other words, the process of persuasion involves the issues for discussion which the author has in mind; the readers who have to be persuaded, and the problems to be confronted in persuading the readers.

Rhetorical analysis of Paul’s Letters should bring out the issues of argumentation, the common ground in the dialogue with his first readers, and the social group with which Paul identified and the groups which he dissociated from and opposed. Thus, there is a rhetorical context of dissociation from ideas which Paul opposed, and of persuasion concerning the issues which Paul deemed important for his readers. In this rhetorical context, it should not surprise us to come across sharp contrasts which aim to make the readers see the conflict between Paul’s ideas and ideas which Paul opposes.

The rhetoric of dissociation and opposition which we find for example in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians is related to a rival gospel mission by Paul’s opponents (cf. Gal 1:6-9). This rival gospel mission emphasised a Jewish way of life for all converts and challenged Paul’s authority as an apostle. This context underlies the passage in Galatians 1:13-2:14 about Paul’s previous life in Judaism and his calling and early activity as an apostle of the gospel of Christ. It can, therefore, not be read as an autobiographical account, but it forms an integral part of Paul’s rhetoric of persuading his readers of the legitimacy of his gospel. Critical awareness of this rhetorical context should therefore precede an adequate attempt to retrieve biographical information about Paul from his Letters. In the conflict with his opponents, without imposing the whole Jewish law on Gentile converts, Paul identifies with Jews by birth, φυσικοὶ Ἰουδαῖοι, whose sense of belonging to Jewish tradition is wholly transformed by faith in Jesus Christ (e.g. Gal 2:15-16).

The focus on the rhetorical context in Galatians puts the purpose of Paul’s words into perspective and challenges us to approach the question of Paul’s relation to Judaism in a new way. This is also particularly true for Paul’s words about his ‘former life in Judaism’ (Gal 1:13-14). The interpretation of Paul’s ‘former life in Judaism’ is a good example of the importance of the rhetorical context of Paul’s Letters. If these words concerned Paul’s relation to Judaism in general, it would be difficult to understand why Paul identifies himself along with Peter with ‘Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners’ (Gal 2:15). Even if this self-definition serves as a mirror to confront Peter with his own behaviour, Paul starts to reformulate this self-definition of Jews by birth in the light of the faith in Christ in Gal 2:16, thereby taking away the insincerity. Paul’s assertion in Gal 2:15-16 therefore serves to bridge the gap between the Jewish self-definition of Peter and Paul self-representation.

Paul’s description of his former zeal for persecution of the church, which seems to coincide with his extreme zeal for traditions of the fathers (Gal 1:13-14), aims to provide a mirror to his readers. The counter-productive, even destructive outcome of the aim of Paul’s opponents to impose the Jewish law on every one is the underlying rhetorical message of Paul. Not Jewish tradition and Judaism per se, but this particular destructive force of

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4 Cf. Dunn, *Galatians*, 133 about Gal 2:15: “Paul was looking for common ground with his fellow Jewish believers”.

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persecution and the imposition of tradition belongs to the past for Paul. Paul’s interpretation of the Law in light of the faith in Christ in his Letter to the Galatians has the effect of putting the significance of the Law in a new perspective and thereby undermines the message of Paul’s opponents, which was probably based on the centrality of the Law.

1.2 Social-scientific approaches

Social-scientific methods may be helpful for a critical approach to the question of the meaning of Paul’s identifications with and dissociations from certain groups in relation to the message which he wanted to communicate. Bengt Holmberg has described the use of sociology for New Testament studies as a method of understanding which takes seriously “the continuous dialectic between ideas and social structures”. Holmberg relates the setting for this dialectic to a social world which embodies “the creation of a world of meaning which provided a plausibility structure for its believers”. 5

Holmberg refers to criticism of the fallacies of monocausal “social-historical” interpretation of texts and monocausal “theological” or “traditio-historical” interpretation. Thus, in the application of social-scientific methods to the study of the New Testament, it is important to avoid the pitfall of reducing religious phenomena to matters of social structure and stratification in the first century CE. On the other hand, a historical theology of Paul’s Letters cannot be separated from the social and religious issues living among the congregations which he addressed.

A good example of socio-religious issues living among his first readers to which Paul reacts in his writings can be found in the First Letter to the Corinthians 7 and 8. This section starts with the explicit reference to written questions of Paul’s audience: “now, concerning the matters about which you wrote”, Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράφησατε. Interestingly, from the perspective of rhetoric and genre in comparison with ancient Jewish epistolography, Paul has structured his discussion of issues in 1 Corinthians at various points with the introductory phrase περὶ δὲ, namely in 1 Cor 7:25, 8:1, 12:1 and 16:1. These issues concern socio-religious matters at a practical level. The issues are the position of married and unmarried persons (1 Cor 7:25-35), food offered to idols (1 Cor 8:1-13), the variety of spiritual gifts in relation to the unity of the congregation (1 Cor 12:1-11f.) and the contribution for the saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1-4).

A discussion of practical matters in relation to a socio-religious order among the community of believers also occurs in the contemporary genre of Jewish letters with halakhic instructions. An important example of this genre is the 4QMMT from the literature of Qumran. 7 In this document, the discussion of separate halakhic issues is each time introduced by the formula γάρ, 8 a preposition which is roughly equivalent to the Greek περὶ. The issues in 4QMMT concern purity regulations, most of all related to the purity of the Jerusalem Temple, which are worked out on a practical level in the form of instructions and exhortations.


6 Holmberg, Sociology and the New Testament, 143.

7 Ed.pr. by Qimron and Strugnell, DJD X. See chapter 2, section 1.1 on this document.

8 4QMMT B 8, 37, 39, 52, 55 (= 4Q394 3-7, I, 11; 8, III, 7, 9, and IV, 2, 5), 64, 75, 76 (= 4Q396, III, 4, and IV, 4, 5).
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The socio-religious issues which Paul addresses in 1 Cor 7 and 8, like the sanctification of unbelievers in mixed marriages and the issue of food offered to idols, suggest that Paul used a Jewish referential framework, while addressing converts from both Gentile and Jewish backgrounds. Paul conveyed a transformed understanding of the Jewish, biblical tradition of the worship of the one God through the gospel of Christ. The intended relation between Jewish tradition and the gospel of Christ appears to be stated at the beginning of Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. Through the gospel of Christ, coming from God, the essential socio-religious values of wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption emanate (1 Cor 1:30). The socio-religious values, centered around the presence of God as the source of human life (1 Cor 29-30), stem from the Jewish, biblical tradition of the worship of the one God. Embedded in the gospel of Christ, the source of life comes from God and the way of life of the believers is in Jesus Christ.

Philip F. Esler has recently pointed to the significance of cultural anthropology of the Mediterranean world and the sociology of sectarianism for a thorough historical interpretation of the social world reflected in the New Testament writings. With regard to cultural anthropology of the Mediterranean world, Esler has argued for the importance of models for grasping the cultural divide between our own world and ancient Mediterranean settings. In this connection, he has demonstrated “the importance of honour as a primary value” as one of the characteristic features of the surrounding Mediterranean culture. Esler relates the social value of honour to the “competitive and ‘agonistic’ nature of all social relationships other than those involving kin”. According to Esler, a sociological model of sectarianism is useful for New Testament interpretation, since it offers a focus on the process of ‘reassertion of traditional values’ of the movement, which separated from a larger institution. The analysis of the respective perspectives on boundary lines from those who have separated on the one hand and from those who stand for the larger institution on the other, is important for our understanding of the social world of Paul and his readers.

In an introduction to a collection of recent studies on ‘modelling early Christianity’, Esler has defended the use of models in New Testament interpretation as follows:

“Whenever New Testament critics discuss textual features in terms such as ‘family’, ‘class’, ‘politics’, ‘power’, ‘religion’, ‘personality’, ‘conscience’, or ‘boundary-markers’ they are employing models, although usually implicit and unrecognized ones deriving from modern experience quite remote from biblical culture, with the inevitable risk of ethnocentric and anachronistic readings”. The explicit use of models from social sciences and anthropology can therefore advance an accurate historical interpretation of issues in Paul’s letters. David G. Horrell has pointed to


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antecedents of scholarly interest in the social world of early Christianity in ‘Form Criticism’ and the revival of scholarly interest in the social context of early Christianity from the 1970s onwards. In his perspective on recent developments, Horrell discusses the links of the social-scientific approach with historical criticism and literary methods.15

My discussion of the use of social-scientific approaches and rhetorical analysis has served to introduce a critical perspective on different aspects of the direct context and setting of Paul’s Letters. Important information about Paul’s contemporary social world can be derived from this context, which also helps shed a different light on the passages concerning Paul’s previous life in Judaism. This context is indispensable for getting a sense of the dialogue between the author and his readers, and the world of meaning which is thereby created.

2. Situating Paul’s prior life as a Pharisee

2.1 ‘In regard to the Law a Pharisee’

Before Paul was called to become an apostle, his ‘former life in Judaism’ had been grounded in Pharisaic study of the Law. This can be deduced from both Paul’s Letters and the Acts of the Apostles. The term ‘Pharisee’ occurs in Philippians 3:5 and in Acts 23:6, in different contexts.16 My discussion focuses on Paul’s own words, and after a detailed discussion of evidence from Paul’s letters, I will make some considerations about the value of Luke’s information about Paul’s life, by way of epilogue.

In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul asserts that he was “in regard to the Law, a Pharisee”, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαίος. Paul mentions this fact after an enumeration of four markers of identity and descent. These are circumcision on the eighth day, belonging to the people of Israel, being part of the tribe of Benjamin and the linguistic and cultural marker of being a Hebrew born of Hebrews. Paul’s list of markers appears to shift slightly from markers of ritual and genealogical descent into markers of cultural and religious activity. Being a Hebrew and a Pharisee entailed education, training and learning. That is, the accomplishments of proficiency in Hebrew or Aramaic, as a language of sacred Scripture or as a native tongue respectively, required schooling. The understanding and observance of the Law by the Pharisees required training and learning.

Beginning with Paul’s statement about his Pharisaic past, the subsequent assertions in the list are introduced each time by the phrase κατὰ, ‘as for’ or ‘in regard to’. Thus, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαίος is followed by statements, starting with the phrases κατὰ ξῆλος, “as for zeal”, and κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ, “with regard to righteousness under the Law”. These phrases seemingly stipulate issues of importance by themselves. According to these formulas the issues enumerated in Paul’s list would be the Law, zeal and righteousness. Being embedded in the rhetoric of this passage, the sequence of assertions, however, points to a dead end rather than to living issues. The already implicit idea of the dead end of ‘having confidence in the flesh’, ἔχων πεποίησιν ἐν σαρκί in Phil 3:4, is confirmed explicitly in Phil 3:7, where Paul writes: “[but] those things which were profits for me, I have started to consider as a loss because of Christ”.

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16 In Acts 23:6 the phrase ἔγιος Φαρισαίου εἶμι, υἱὸς Φαρισαίου suggests a genealogical constitutive element for being a Pharisee. Curiously, the legal and genealogical element of Pharisaic identity are found combined in Hippolytus’ Refutation of All Heresies IX, 28, 3 κατὰ γένος καὶ κατὰ νόμους Φαρισαῖος καλοῦμενοι.
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Paul’s word for ‘confidence’, the noun πεποίθησις, is substantivised from the verb πείθω. The root from which this noun stems also expresses the rhetorical process of persuading as well as the believing and trusting ensuing from persuasion. Therefore, the question of confidence in the flesh is a matter of rhetoric which Paul gives a negative turn. Paul deals with the issue of ‘righteousness under the law’ in particular. He treats this as a very subjective sort of righteousness, μη ἔχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐξ νόμου, in contrast to the righteousness of God through faith in Christ (Phil 3:9). This negative turn might reflect a polemic against the world of meaning created by the Pharisaic teachings of unwritten laws, which probably was Paul’s referential framework in his previous way of life as a Pharisee. This does not preclude the possibility that Pharisaic teachings may have influenced Paul’s thought.

As a matter of fact, this passage, the only place where Paul speaks about his prior life as a Pharisee, conveys a sharp polemic against other Christian Jewish missionaries who would boast to Gentiles about living according to the Jewish Law. Although the items in Paul’s list up, to his assertion “in regard to the Law a Pharisee”, could be seen as a set of Jewish identity markers, the list in its entirety in Phil 3:5-6 certainly cannot be read in this way. Paul has subtly woven the negative shift to the persecution of the church, followed by the assertion about blamelessness with regard to righteousness under the Law, into the sequence of assertions, with the intention of expressing a polemic against ‘confidence in the flesh’.

Paul’s polemic against ‘confidence in the flesh’ does, however, not mean that all Jewish tradition as such would have become a dead end for the apostle. At various places, Paul identifies with the Israelites (2 Cor 11:22; Rom 9:1-5f., 11:1; Phil 3:5). Voicing his conscience and bearing witness to himself in the Holy Spirit in Romans 9:1, Paul starts a digression on the place of Israel in his theology. This rhetorical context is positive and inclusive, and Paul’s statement of conscience could be associated with the emphasis on the integrity of the author’s character, the Ἰθαυμάζετε in ancient rhetoric. Far from abandoning his sense of belonging to a Jewish, biblical tradition, Paul expresses the transformed spiritual meaning which this tradition has offered him through his faith in Christ.

In order to interpret this transformed meaning of contemporary religious traditions in Paul’s theology, we need to study these traditions by themselves and Paul’s exposure to them as formative influences during his previous Jewish existence. The negative rhetorical context of Paul’s references to a Jewish way of life was brought about by conflicts with rival missionaries about the place of Jewish tradition in Christian congregations of mixed religious backgrounds.

Returning to our passage in Philippians, Paul seems to imply with the phrase κατά νόμον Φαρισαίος that specific traditions concerning the interpretation and observance of Jewish Law formed the constitutive element of self-identification as a Pharisee. According to Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities 13.297, the Pharisees distinguished themselves from the other Jewish schools by “passing on to the people certain regulations (νομομετρία) from an ancestral succession which have not been recorded in the Laws of Moses”.

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17 About the unwritten laws of the Pharisees, see Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities 13.297, 408.
18 Cf. Phil 3:2 at the beginning of our passage, starting with warnings to look out for opponents of Paul’s mission, signified by various pejorative descriptions.
20 For a description of genres of speech in ancient rhetoric and of the threefold Aristotelian model of a speech, containing the components λόγος, ἴθως and πέθως, see G.A. Kennedy, New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism (University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill & London, 1984); on these three components, cf. more recently, R.D. Anderson, Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms Connected to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian (CBET 24; Peeters: Leuven, 2000) 61-63.
At a general level of Jewish Law in biblical tradition, which provided a common ground across sectarian boundary lines, Josephus often uses the following expressions in his works: ‘according to the Laws of Moses’, κατά τοὺς Μωσεῖους νόμους,21 ‘in accordance with their native laws’, κατά τοὺς πατρίους νόμους,22 and less frequently ‘in accordance with the laws of the Jews’, κατά τοὺς Ἰουδαίους νόμους (e.g. Ant. 13.318; 14.258). The first expression usually refers to Jewish Law in the biblical tradition from the internal perspective of socio-religious life in Israel and in Jewish communities in the Diaspora. The latter two expressions can be more hybrid and are often found in official letters, decrees and other documents from which Josephus quotes. These expressions can refer both to civil privileges and rights of legal protection in a Gentile Diaspora environment and to observance of the Jewish customs and religious rites. These religious rites comprised the observance of Sabbaths and religious festivals, and entailed the building of places of prayer, εἰς προσευχήν, according to native custom (cf. e.g. Ant. 14.258 concerning Halicarnassus).

Paul’s previous life as a Pharisee, while embedded in this general context of observance of Jewish laws and customs, needs to be interpreted in light of historical and literary information about Pharisaic teachings. Josephus’ works constitute the only contemporary historical source about Pharisaic beliefs and practices, represented as such in their own right. Apart from this, the Pharisees are mentioned in the literary contexts of the canonical Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, early rabbinic literature and patristic literature, such as the ‘philosophumena’ in Hippolytus’ Refutation of All Heresies. The information which can be derived from these texts may further illuminate the Pharisees as a group, and, in a few cases, as individuals. The context of Paul’s Letters by themselves, however, gives an important clue to the question of what relationship exists between Pharisaism and Paul’s discussion of Jewish traditions at large, in view of Paul’s previous Jewish life.

The direct context of Paul’s previous identification with Pharisaism is determined by criticism against the Pharisaic world-view as part of a polemic against Paul’s opponents who boasted of a Jewish way of life, as we have seen. Nevertheless, Paul’s polemic suggests that Jewish traditions did embody a world of meaning for Paul; albeit a meaning that was different from the views of his opponents. In the hypothetical opposite case of the absence of meaning of Jewish traditions for Paul, the elaborate discussions about the Law as an authority, for instance in 1 Cor 9:8-10 and Rom 2:12-13 and 3:31, and the theological digression on Israel in Romans 9-11, would hardly be understandable. In the following section, I will address the question what Paul’s statement about his Pharisaic past (Phil 3:5) meant in the context of his other Letters and against the background of what can be known about Pharisees and their traditions.

2.2 Paul’s former life in Judaism as a Pharisee and Pharisaic traditions

In his Letter to the Galatians, Paul writes about his “former life in Judaism”, ἥ ἐμὴ ἀναστροφὴ ποτὲ ἐν τῷ Ἰουδαίῳ (Gal 1:13). The Greek word ἀναστροφή, which stands for ‘life’ or ‘way of life’, implies choice with whom to associate and to have conversations.23 Through the social dimension of associations, this way of life is conditioned in terms of ideas about proper conduct and the like.

21 E.g. in Ant. 11.17, 76; 13.74, 79.
22 E.g. in Ant. 4.71; 12.142, and in § 145 κατὰ τὸν πατρίον νόμον in the singular; 14.235, 242; 16.163 κατὰ τὸν πατρίον αὐτῶν νόμον in the singular.
23 The verb ἀναστρέφειν together with the preposition μετὰ τινὸς meaning ‘to associate with someone’. Cf. the Vulgate translation of ἀναστροφή as conversatio.
It is my purpose here to show how Paul’s former life in Judaism, at least his formative years of exposure to Pharisaic teachings, should be understood in a paedeutic context of religious education. At the beginning of his autobiographical Life, Flavius Josephus, who grew up in Jerusalem (§ 7), writes about his progress in education: “In regard to my education, I advanced with great progress”, εἰς μεγάλην παιδείαν προάχουσιν ἐπίδοσιν (Life 8). The Greek word παιδεία for education comprises upbringing, training and instruction. Thus it includes education on primary as well as advanced levels. Josephus attained the advanced level of this spectrum of education. Paul, writing about his zeal for the “traditions of the fathers” in Gal 1:14, introduces this statement with the phrase “and I advanced (προέχοστον) in Judaism beyond many of my own age”. The analogy with Josephus’ passage may point to Paul’s advanced level of Jewish religious education.

The advances of Josephus’ education were apparently most of all related to a thorough knowledge of Jewish regulations. That is the subject about which chief priests and notables came to consult him, considering his learned erudition, τὸ φιλογράμματον (Life 9). In Josephus’ description of his progress in education, a passage of three paragraphs (Life 10-12) is devoted to his personal experience with the three Jewish schools of the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. He writes about his personal experience with them in terms of hard training, σχιλήραςαγείν, and labouring at many things, πολλὰ πονεῖν, in order to pass through the three courses, τὰς τρεῖς διέρχεσθαι (Life 11).

As Josephus writes about the Jewish schools in general, αἱ παρὰ ἡμῖν σφρακείς (Life 10), his picture of hard training and toilsome work may not be too atypical. At least, submitting oneself as a novice to any of these three Jewish schools involved a sustained effort of learning and training, possibly for a period of several years. Josephus writes that he started his training within the three Jewish schools at the age of sixteen. He began to lead his (public) life according to the school of the Pharisees, πολιτεύομαι τῇ Φαρισαίᾳ σφρακείᾳ κατὰ ταξιακολούθου, when he was nineteen years old (Life 12). The next phase in his life began at the age of twenty-six, when Josephus went up to Rome with a diplomatic mission. Josephus’ advanced education as a Pharisee, after the introductory level of a novice, could theoretically span a period of seven or eight years, while the Pharisaic way of life could in fact be a permanent condition. Paul’s assertion in Phil 3:5 to have been ‘with regard to the Law a Pharisee’, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαίος, therefore entailed prior education and training as a requirement for any novice to identify with the Pharisees.

Paul’s words about his ‘former life in Judaism’ in Galatians can also be understood in this context of Pharisaic education. Paul mentions his extreme zeal for “the traditions of my fathers”, αἱ πατρικὲς μοι παραδόσεις, in Gal 1:14. The traditions which Paul mentions here could well be related to Pharisaic study of the Law. Josephus writes in his Jewish

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24 I disagree with M. Hengel (in collaboration with R. Deines), The Pre-Christian Paul (SCM: London / Trinity Press International: Philadelphia, 1991) 41 who reads Gal 1:13 as an “autobiographical report”, since Paul’s information stands first of all in the rhetorical context of the issue of which place Jewish traditions should have in the Galatian churches. Nevertheless, Hengel rightly notes that Gal 1:13-14 “can only refer to the study of the law as practised by the Pharisees”.

25 Cf. BDAG, 748-749 for references to classical and secondary literature about training, ‘Bildung’.

26 συνυνότον ἄνει τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν τῆς πόλεως πρῶτον ὑπὲρ τὸ παρὰ ἐμοῦ περὶ τῶν νομίμων ἀρχιερευστήρων τι γνῶναι. Note the comparative degree of ἀρχιερευστῆρον about Josephus’ educational progress.

27 BDAG 27-28 notes parallels to the meaning of σφρακείς as ‘school’, namely from Hellenistic schools of philosophy, for instance that of the Stoa (cf. Josephus’ Life 12).

28 Mason, ‘Was Josephus a Pharisee? A Re-Examination of Life 10-12’, 31-45 emphasises that πολιτεύομαι refers to Josephus’ “entry into public life”; this does not preclude the influence of (previous) Pharisaic education which, to be sure, Josephus underwent from the age of sixteen years.
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*Antiquities* 13.297 and 408 that the Pharisaic teachings of unwritten laws originate ‘from the fathers’. This idea of ancestral traditions is expressed by the phrases ἐκ πατέρων διδαχῆς, ἐκ παρεδόσεως τῶν πατέρων and κατὰ τὴν πατρίφων παραδόσιν respectively. Thus, it may be inferred that Paul’s claim to be ‘with regard to the Law, a Pharisee’, κατὰ νόμον Φαρισαίος (Phil 3:5), in his time, meant study of the written Law and exposition in accordance with oral traditions, unwritten laws which had been introduced by the Pharisees. As Albert I. Baumgarten has noted in his study of Pharisaic *paradosis*, the very words which designate the source of authority of their teachings are a “self-description of the Pharisees”. Thus, these terms also served as an apologetic, legitimating purpose in the context of comparison and dispute with other Jewish groups.29

Interestingly, Paul also occasionally phrases his instructions in terms of traditions which he has received and hands down to his readers, although the source of authority comes from a revelation by Christ. This is the case in 1 Cor 11:2.23. In 1 Cor 11:2, Paul recommends the Corinthians to guarding their traditions just as he delivered these to them, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε. Paul writes in 1 Cor 11:23 that he received (παρέδωκαι) from the Lord that which he also delivered (παρεδόθη) to the Corinthians. 1 Cor 11:23 opens with a section on the Lord’s Supper, as Paul delivers it to the Corinthians in contrast to a preceding section with admonitions on this subject (1 Cor 11:17-22).

Paul’s reference in 1 Cor 11:2 to traditions which he delivered to the Corinthians comprises more issues, possibly including those he discussed in previous passages. Paul’s praise can be understood as a way in which he voices his confidence that the Corinthians, having been persuaded, act in accordance with Paul’s instructions. Thus, the traditions, παραδόσεις, in 1 Cor 11:2 may include regulations which stem from Jewish tradition, like the admonition to shun immorality and idolatry. Pharisaic *paradosis*, which has no parallel among other Jewish sects of the time, certainly not among the Sadducees,30 matches Paul’s words about traditions closely in form. Rabbinic traditions about the Pharisees further convey a parallel to the description of the transmission of teachings, as expressed by the Greek verbs παράλαμβάνειν and παραδίδοναι. *m. 'Abot* 1:1-2:8 and *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan* chapter 5 discuss the transmission of teachings across generations by the verb ἔδωκα, the equivalent of παρέλαμβάνειν, thereby putting more emphasis on the receiving end of Jewish tradition.31 Although Paul abandoned his previous zeal for the traditions of the fathers, a continuing influence of Jewish traditions through his former training as a Pharisee, may be reflected in Paul’s words about traditions.32

Paul also refers to fellow people who aimed at advancing in Judaism, that is, in their zeal for the ancestral traditions. In the first clause of Gal 1:14, he talks about his advances in Judaism beyond “many of my own age among my people”, πολλοὶ συνηλικώται ἐν τῷ


30 In *Ant.* 18.16, Josephus writes that the Sadducees have no significantly other observance apart from the laws and rather reckon it a virtue to dispute with the teachers of the wisdom which they pursue, πρὸς γὰρ τὸς διδασκάλους σοφίας, ἢ μετάσυν, ἀμφιλογεῖν ἄρετὴν ἀρίθμουσιν. Cf. *J.W.* 2.119-161 at 128 about certain Essene prayers handed down from the forefathers, πάντως τινὸς εὐχαίρ. §§ 134, 150 about the strict hierarchical order among the Essenes. *J.W.* 2.159 seems to imply that Essene traditions, surrounding the study of Scripture, concerned rites of purification and prophetic visions.

31 Significantly, *m. 'Abot* 1:1, about the transmission of the Law up to the time of Ezra, focuses on ‘handing down’, τοῦτο, whereas the subsequent paragraphs emphasise the idea of ‘receiving’, ἔδωκα.


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For Paul, these people, γένος, were the people of Israel, as the list of Philippians 3:5-6, including the phrase ἐκ γένους Ἰσραήλ, shows. The “many of my own age” probably included other students of the Pharisaic teachings of the Law and, in general, people who tried to live up to the teachings of the Law by scribes and Pharisees.

According to Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities* 18.15, 17, Pharisaic teachings concerned the rites of prayers and worship as well as regulations for political affairs and public matters. Apart from these teachings related to practical matters, in several digressions Josephus focuses his attention on the Pharisaic position in philosophical and theological issues. These issues concern fate and human will; an ethics related to observance of certain commandments, and a moral perspective on life and afterlife.

Because of the influence of their teachings among the townsfolk, οἱ δήμοι (Ant. 18.15), the Pharisees probably also had to be open to issues living in their environment and to ideas from other Jewish groups to a certain extent. Josephus describes the school of the Pharisees as a school which cultivates a state of harmony and agreement within the community, τὴν εἰς τὸ κοινὸν ὁμόνοιαν ἀσκούντες (J.W. 2.166). Their position as the most accurate interpreters of the laws, οἱ μετ’ ἀκριβείας δοκούντες ἐξηγεῖσθαι τὰ νόμιμα, and as the leading sect, ἡ πρώτη ἀδερσίς (J.W. 2.162), probably brought about involvement in disputes and debates and exposure to other ideas. Thus, through his education as a Pharisee, the influence of Jewish traditions on Paul’s thought could be pervasive and pluriiform, even after he had broken off his connections with Pharisaism. This influence is reflected, among other things, by Paul’s knowledge and use of Scripture, his use of forms and conventions from the genre of Jewish epistolography, and his use of metaphors from the Jewish Temple service.

The Pharisaic tradition about afterlife may provide a unique background to the idea of bodily resurrection *per se* in 1 Cor 15 in certain respects. In spite of the agreement between Pharisaic, Essene and certain Greek philosophical traditions about the perception that the soul is immortal, Josephus writes about bodily resurrection in a typically Pharisaic sense. Both the Pharisees and the Essenes view the afterlife in ethical or moral terms as a reward of the good and a punishment of the wicked (J.W. 2.155, 163). Josephus extensively compares the Essene view with the conception of the Greeks (J.W. 2.155-156), perhaps the more so because of their fixed belief in a total contrast between the immortality of the soul and the corruptible, impermanent nature of the body. The Pharisees, however, maintained that the soul of the good, as opposed to the souls of the wicked, passes into another body after death (J.W. 2.163). This basic idea also seems to be reflected in Paul’s figurative language about a body which is brought down in weakness and a body which is raised in power (1 Cor 15:43).

Apart from the essential Christian message of Jesus’ resurrection, the basic idea of bodily resurrection of the dead found support in Jewish tradition as conveyed by Pharisaic

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tenets. Even the ethical dimension to the Pharisaic idea that only the soul of the good passes into the body, seems to have a parallel in Paul’s admonitions concerning the inheritance of the kingdom of God. In 1 Cor 6:9 and 15:50, Paul writes that the unrighteous, flesh and blood respectively will not and cannot inherit the kingdom.

Even though the pluriform traditions of resurrection of the dead, ἀνάστασις νεκρῶν, are at the heart of the gospel of Christ, and although the very term as well as the ramifications are Christian, the Pharisaic tradition is part of the context of the religious culture from which Christian Jews spread their gospel message to the diaspora. It is important to note that the Pharisaic perception of resurrection as the passing on (μεταβαίνειν) of a soul into another body is not without a parallel in Jesus-traditions about eternal life. The saying of Jesus in John 5:24 refers to the eternal life attainable for the believer as follows: “he does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life.” The verb used in the last part of this verse is the perfect tense of μεταβαίνειν, the verb which also occurs in Josephus’ passage about the Pharisaic view on afterlife. Josephus’ digression may, however, constitute an adaptation to the Hellenistic culture of his readers. The connotation of change, in passing from one condition or state into the other, as conveyed by the verb μεταβαίνειν, also figures in Paul’s passage on traditions concerning the resurrection of the dead. In 1 Cor 15:51-52, Paul writes about the resurrection of the dead in terms of changing, ἀλλασσόμεθα, including in the ‘we-group’ all the faithful and the believers.

The difficulty encountered by the Corinthians concerning the acceptance of the very idea and the nature of resurrection of the dead (cf. 1 Cor 15:12-19, 29-36) is even the subject of a divide between the Jewish schools. For Josephus writes about the Sadducees that they plainly denied any afterlife of the soul, not to speak of the idea of bodily resurrection (J.W. 2.165; cf. Ant. 18.16). Writing about the Essene tradition concerning the afterlife, Josephus hastens to add that the Greeks hold comparable views on the abode of the afterlife and on the total dualism between the corruptible body and the immortal soul (J.W. 2.154-157). Josephus’ Hellenistic representation of the afterlife of the good soul which passes into another body, μεταβαίνειν εἰς ἐτερόν σῶμα, appears closely related to the idea of bodily resurrection. It also stands out as unique in a surrounding Hellenised culture, in which the idea of an absolute contrast between the perishable body and the immortal soul was pervasive even among several Jewish schools. In this respect, Jewish traditions about the afterlife illuminate the cultural context for the scepticism and doubts with which Paul’s message of resurrection of the dead was encountered among his Corinthian audience. The Pharisaic tradition about the afterlife, which Josephus discusses, is described as a position held by the Pharisees as a group, and not as a saying of one sage. Josephus further gives a general description of the sects of the Pharisees and the Sadducees in his Jewish War 2.162-166, summarily pointing to certain features of their ‘philosophies’. Novices who submitted themselves to Pharisaic teachings were undoubtedly somehow familiar with the traditions which Josephus outlines as characteristic of the Pharisees. Therefore, in his former life as a Pharisee, the idea of bodily resurrection would probably not have been alien to Paul.

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37 J.W. 2.163: ψυχήν τι πάσαν μὲν ἀφθαρστόν, μεταβαίνειν δὲ εἰς ἐτερόν σῶμα τὴν τῶν ἐγοθών μόνην, τὰς δὲ τῶν φαύλων ἑνίκη τυμωρίας κολοκύζοιν. Cf. the early rabbinic insistence on the resurrection of the dead in m. Sanh. 10:1 (translation H. Danby, The Mishnah, 397): “And these are they that have no share in the world to come: he that says that there is no resurrection of the dead prescribed in the Law, and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, and an Epicurean”, possibly stemming from early Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition.

38 1 Cor 6:9: Ἡ σοφία ὁδύσας ὅτι ἄνευς θεοῦ βασιλείαν ὃ γινομενόμενοι;

1 Cor 15:50: οὐκότι δὲ φημι, ὄδειλοι, ὅτι σὰρξ καὶ σῶμα βασιλείαν θεοῦ γινομενόμενον οὐ δύναται.

39 Translation from RSV.
Our example has served to show the relevance of Pharisaic education and even specific Pharisaic traditions for the contemporary context of Paul’s letters. Although Paul abandoned Pharisaism and although he seems to criticise the world-view of the Pharisees, Pharisaic teachings play a part in the context of the religious culture from which Paul communicates certain traditions to his Hellenistic readers. The leading position which Josephus ascribes to the Pharisees may also provide a background for the straightforward way in which Paul counters ‘whatever any one dares to boast of’ (2 Cor 11:21-22; cf. Phil 3:4-6). The Pharisaic paradosis had primarily provided the educational basis for Paul’s eloquent knowledge of the Law. The prominent public status of the school accounts for the strong social identity of the Pharisees\(^{40}\) as well as for Paul’s severe polemic against ‘those who boast of the flesh’.

2.3 Pharisaic traditions and the social geography of Pharisaic activity

Having discussed Paul’s former life in Pharisaism as a form of religious education, we need to focus on the question what can be known more specifically about Pharisaic education in a Palestinian Jewish context. Throughout Josephus’ works, the activity of the Pharisees is mentioned in the geographical setting of Israel,\(^{41}\) but never explicitly in connection with the Hellenistic Diaspora. The Acts of the Apostles likewise only mention the Pharisees in the contexts of speeches and deliberations which were supposedly delivered in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 5:34, 15:5, 23:6.8.9, 26:5). However, when we turn to the narrative sections on missionary voyages in the diaspora, the Pharisees have totally disappeared from the scene.

The Hellenistic Jewish author Philo of Alexandria does not even mention the Pharisees in his many treatises. The Essenes, on the other hand, are described in a comparative framework of religious movements of morality and compared with the sect of the Therapeutae, found around Philo’s own city, Alexandria.\(^{42}\) The Roman geographer Pliny the Elder (23-79 CE) also knew about the Essenes (Natural History 5.73), which is only another indication that the Essenes had a legendary name which was widely known in the Graeco-Roman world.\(^{43}\) The movement of the Pharisees, more intricately associated with the Palestinian Jewish body politic, apparently appealed less to the imagination of Hellenistic Jews who would not stay in Israel for longer periods of time. Apparently, the imagination of Hellenistic Jewish writers, who had been born and educated in a Diaspora environment, did not necessarily follow the Pharisaic traditions of interpretation of Jewish laws closely. Philo, for instance, made his own allegorical interpretation of the Law, in which ideas of Hellenistic philosophy were echoed. Even if Philo’s work cannot be taken as evidence for the influence of Pharisaic traditions in the Hellenistic Diaspora at large, the silence of our sources about permanent Pharisaic activity in the Diaspora reduces the probability of institutionalised Pharisaic education outside Israel to a hypothetical idea.

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\(^{41}\) In direct connection with the rule of Jewish sovereigns and kings over Israel or in a digression within that setting: J.W. 1.110-112, 571; 2.117-119, 162, 166; Ant. 13.171-173, 288-289, 292-298, 408-410, 415, 423; 15.370; 17.41, 44, 46. In connection with Roman rule over Israel, Ant. 18.4, 11-15, 17, 23. In connection with Jerusalem J.W. 2.411; Life 10, 12, 21, 191; Ant. 13.401, 405; 15. 3. Cf. Life 197 (Galilee).

\(^{42}\) Good Person 75f.; Contempl. Life 1-2f., 21-22.

\(^{43}\) Cf. the observation about Josephus’ extensive digression about the Essenes by Magness, The Archaeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls, 39: “like other ancient historians (going back to Herodotus), Josephus tended to focus on the different and exotic because he was writing to entertain his audience”.

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Jewish education in the Hellenistic Diaspora as well as in Israel, apart from the basic skills of reading and writing, probably entailed knowledge of the laws, τὸ περὶ τῶν νόμων, and the deeds of the forefathers, τῶν προγόνων καὶ προάξεις. This may be inferred from Josephus’ treatise Against Apion 2.204. In the same treatise, however, Josephus also writes that the administration of the laws has been entrusted to superintendents with expert knowledge of the laws, ἐπιστάταις οἱ ἐμπερίας ἔχειν τῶν νόμων ὑποχούμενοι (Ag.Ap. 2.177). This smaller group of professional legal experts could perhaps be found in various Jewish communities, both in Israel and the Diaspora. In fact, larger Jewish communities probably had assemblies and legal bodies of their own for the communal life and the adjudication of controversies and lawsuits.44

The context of Josephus’ statement about the superintendents suggests that most of the expert knowledge of the laws was concentrated in Israel. For in Against Apion 2.187, Josephus ascribes to the priests, οἱ ἱερεῖς, the appointed duties of general supervision, the adjudication of disputes and the punishment of those condemned. This description of strict superintendence of the Law could be relativised as the description of an ideal situation. However, the Jewish War 2.417 mentions priestly experts on the traditions who defended the status quo of the order of sacrifices in the Temple, including sacrifices of foreigners. Many laws were precisely related to the rites of worship of God. Laws referring to priestly functions were not limited to cultic duties in biblical law. For example, a law concerning the punishment of false witness in Deuteronomy 19:16-21 also mentions priests, next to judges, in the process of the adjudication of the case. Josephus also includes juridical matters among the duties of priests. The Pharisees maintained relations with the chief priests, as can be derived from Josephus’ Jewish War 2.411. The Pharisees formed the socio-religious establishment producing the priestly experts from their midst. The shared interests of the Pharisees and the chief priests confirms the fact that permanent Pharisaic activity was anchored in the geographical setting of the land of Israel, with Jerusalem as the holy city in which the Temple service was conducted.

Several scholars have noted that the movement of the Pharisees originated among a group of lay scribes, who were experts in religious laws.45 Among the New Testament writings, Matthew, Mark, and Luke-Acts mention scribes and Pharisees together.46 In Mark 2:16 and Acts 23:9 the respective phrases οἱ γραμματεῖς τῶν Φαρισαίων and οἱ γραμματέων τῶν μέρους τῶν Φαρισαίων further underline the relationship between scribal activity and Pharisaic teachings. Apart from lay experts, there were also priestly experts, as is suggested by the fact that the Synoptic Gospels mention chief priests and scribes together.47 Josephus’ Jewish War 2.417 describes priestly experts, οἱ ἐμπεριοὶ τῶν πατρίων ἱερεῖς, as coming from the midst of the assembly of principal citizens, chief priests, and the most distinguished Pharisees (J.W. 2.411). Although Pharisees had their lay scribes, they also elaborated influential regulations concerning the priestly rites of worship on the basis of their exposition of the laws, as is revealed in Josephus’ Jewish Antiquities 18.15.

The organisation of the Pharisees as a movement has been characterised, on the basis of the evidence of rabbinic literature, in terms of communities, קהילות, which identified themselves with literacy and a strict interpretation and observance of the laws in counter-
distinction to the ‘people of the land’, the עמי יהוֹאָרִים.⁴⁸ Although the Pharisees did, of course, have their boundary lines in terms of their beliefs and practices, it may be inferred from rabbinic as well as New Testament writings that they were relatively open-minded toward outsiders.

In certain contexts early rabbinic literature links the appeal to traditions of former generations to Pharisaic traditions. For example, *m. Yadayim* 4:3-4 comprises a discussion among the Sages about the status of certain offerings from Ammon and Moab and the question whether an Ammonite proselyte could enter the congregation. This discussion is surrounded by appeals to the authority of Scripture and traditions of teachers from former generations. These former generations are in fact those preceding the generation of Johanan ben Zakkai, a main Pharisaic leader in the aftermath of the Jewish War of 66-70 CE. The rabbinic appeal to the continuity of the ancestral tradition which allowed for a relatively open attitude toward foreigners and their contributions is comparable to the appeal to the ancestral tradition of priestly experts accepting sacrifices of foreigners, ἀλλογενεῖς (*J.W.* 2.417). These priestly experts represented the views of the principle citizens, the chief priests and the most notable Pharisees. In the rabbinic tradition of appeals to previous generations of teachers, the teachings of the Pharisees are not much divided from the discussions in *m. Yadayim*, for paragraphs 6-8 mention disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

In the New Testament, the narratives about Jesus’ contacts with individual Pharisees (Luke 7:36-50, 11:37-54 and John 3:1-21) reflect the at times open, but also questioning attitude toward views on moral purity, redemption, the Spirit and other religious subjects which diverged from the Pharisaic perspective. The questioning attitude of the Pharisees toward the Jesus-movement also becomes clear from their request to Jesus to rebuke his disciples (e.g. Luke 19:39). The attitude of the Pharisees toward people from the Hellenistic diaspora may have varied to some extent. Acts 15:5 may reflect the degrees of the Hellenising influence accepted by Pharisaic converts. Association and table fellowship with proselytes and converts from the Gentiles would only be deemed acceptable by them on the condition that they were circumcised and adhered to the Law of Moses (cf. Gal 2:11-14).

The Pharisaic boundary lines of separation from the people and foreigners were partly determined by the strict observance of purity laws, especially in relation to food (cf. Mark 7:3-4). The more severe regulations of purification, which were required for the priests⁴⁹ and to which the Essenes⁵⁰ submitted themselves, attest to the existence of gradations in strictness concerning the observance of purity laws. This is another indication that the social geography of Pharisaic activity was linked with the land of Israel.⁵¹

We may conclude from the above evidence concerning the social geography of Pharisaism that Paul’s assertion in Philippians 3:5 that to be of the people of Israel is inherently connected with being a Pharisee with regard to the Law. Pharisees were

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⁴⁹ Cf. Josephus’ *Life* 13-14 about priests as exiled prisoners in Rome, who, in keeping with the pious practices of their religion, supported themselves on figs and nuts.

⁵⁰ Cf. a comparative discussion of sectarian boundary lines in Baumgarten, *The flourishing of Jewish sects*, 99-100 at 99: “The purity boundary lines maintained by the Pharisees, as it emerges from these New Testament passages, was less extreme than that of the Essenes or the Dead Sea Scrolls”.

⁵¹ Cf. Hengel (with Deines), *The Pre-Christian Paul*, 29-34 for discussion and rejection of older scholarship (e.g. H.J. Schoeps, G. Strecker) which suggests that there is substantial evidence for the permanent settlement of ‘Diaspora Pharisees’ with their own schools.
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permanently active in the land of Israel and perhaps occasionally present in diplomatic missions or embassies at most. But as versatile as our sources are about Pharisaic presence and activity in Israel, the more significant is their silence about permanent Pharisaic activity in the Diaspora. Paul’s identification with the Israelites, who continued to play a part in his message as an apostle, fitted very well in with the social identity of the Pharisees. Thus, even an individual Pharisee like Nicodemus is addressed by Jesus in a rhetorical question as a “teacher of Israel”, ὁ διδάσκαλος τοῦ Ἰσραήλ (John 3:10). Mark 7:3-4 suggests that the teachings of the Pharisees about food and related purity laws were followed by the Jewish people in Israel. In this way, the Pharisees as a group were related to Israel.

3. Pharisaism and Palestinian-Jewish schooling

As we have discussed before, the Pharisaic ‘traditions of the fathers’ served as the means for self-definition. In their respect for the unwritten ancestral traditions the Pharisees distinguished themselves from the Sadducees. Josephus writes the following about them in his Jewish Antiquities 18.12: “They show respect and deference to their elders, nor do they rashly presume to contradict their proposals”. This respect for the elders, η̣λ̣ι̣σ̣ί̣ς προφήτων, is also reflected in rabbinic literature by the way in which certain sayings are phrased. Thus, for example in m. ‘Abot 3:9, we find the expression ‘Rabbi .. said in the name of Rabbi ..’. The emphasis throughout m. ‘Abot 1 is on the receiving end of the tradition, as expressed by the verb ἀφιέναι. In the sayings of various sages, as recorded in the first chapter of m. ‘Abot, the moral imperative to provide oneself with a teacher recurs (m. ‘Abot 1:6.12.16). Although the historical value of the information in this late (perhaps post-) Mishnah-tractate may be criticised as limited, the tractate does provide important points which corroborate the evidence of Josephus about the Pharisaic respect for the elders and their ideas.

Where were the Pharisaic communities and most of all the Pharisaic schools located? Our sources for answering this question do not only include historical and literary texts but may also be archaeological, in as much as archaeological data can be applied to the identification of infrastructures of religious education. At least, the various traces of degrees and types of Hellenisation, differing between regions, as well as the presence of Jewish institutions such as the synagogue, can tell us something about the social environment of Pharisaic education.

From the New Testament writings we can get certain clues about the spread of Pharisaic communities and the concentration of larger Pharisaic communities. Luke 5:17 mentions Pharisees and teachers of the law “having come from every village of Galilee and Judaea and from Jerusalem”, ἐληλυθότες ἐκ πόλεως καὶ ἐκ τῆς Γαλαήας καὶ Ἰουδαίας καὶ Ἰερουσαλήμ. Even though legendary traditions may underlie the Lucan description of an attendance of Jesus’ teachings by Pharisees and teachers of the law, the geographical setting provides adequate information about the spread of Pharisaic communities. It is significant that Judaea and Galilee are mentioned in general, while the naming of specific places is limited to the city of Jerusalem and while not a single place in Galilee is specified in this context. It seems that Judaea with the capital Jerusalem had the larger concentration of Pharisaic communities.

This impression is confirmed by John 4:1-3, in which the apparent opposition from the Pharisees to the baptising activity of Jesus’ disciples seems to be the reason why Jesus leaves

52 Translation from L.H. Feldman, Josephus in nine volumes IX, 11.
Judaea and departs again to Galilee. This geographical indication implicitly points to the idea that Judaea accommodated the larger concentration of Pharisees.

In his Life 197-198, Josephus writes about the Pharisees in Galilee from the context of a deputation from Jerusalem. This deputation consisted of adherents of the Pharisees, people of priestly descent and natives of Jerusalem. The high status ascribed to these identity markers indicates the dominance of the Jerusalemite leadership which imposed itself on Galilee (cf. chap. 3, section 4).

It is important to note that the adherents to Pharisaism, Jonathan and Ananias, who were of lower ranks (οἱ δημοται), took part in the deputation from Jerusalem, according to Josephus’ Life 197-198. This information suggests that schooling in the Pharisaic traditions was in principle accessible to people of various social levels and that it appears to have been concentrated in Jerusalem and Judaea. On the other hand, the spread of Pharisaic communities in Judaea and Galilee could be explained by the people’s needs for religious leadership at a local level. In synagogues or other places of religious gathering, the order of scriptural readings and exposition had to be regulated by literate, educated persons who had a proficiency in biblical Hebrew and who were learned in the study of the laws.  

In his recent article about Galilean Judaism and Judaean Judaism, Martin Goodman has critically examined a set of modern scholarly assertions about the difference between these two forms of Judaism. Two issues for discussion, ‘Torah scholarship in Galilee and in Judaea’ and ‘Observance of Torah in Galilee and in Judaea’, are in a way related to the question of the location of Pharisaic education in a Palestinian Jewish context. In his discussion of early rabbinic evidence concerning the centres of Torah scholarship, Goodman emphasises that the conclusion of the issue is not certain, even though the evidence suggests that the main centres before 70 CE were located in Judaea. According to Goodman, the Galileans “must have had some legal experts to deal with practical interpretation in civil case”.

Concerning the issue of the observance of the Torah, Goodman notes that the ‘people of the land’, the עמי הארץ, were as much a Judaean phenomenon as they were a Galilean phenomenon in juxtaposition to the group of ‘associates’, ה vàiים. However, the question about the identification of the latter group of ה vàiים is at least as important for situating and locating Pharisaic education. This question is, however, difficult to answer as there are divergent connotations to the Hebrew term, ranging from friend or associate to fellow-student and member of a religious or charitable association. Albert I. Baumgarten has noted that “doubts concerning the identification of ה vàiים and Pharisees bedevil the effort to reach firm conclusions”.

In his book on Galilee, Seán Freyne has discussed related issues concerning Pharisaic teachings, Pharisaic halakhah, and the observance of their regulations in Galilee. Freyne has pointed to the necessity of drawing a clear distinction between the pre- and post-70 situations, which also pertains to the differing connotations of the terms ה vàiים and the חברים. Freyne notes, that “the Pharisees, as a sect, were concerned with extending the holiness of the

58 Baumgarten, The flourishing of Jewish sects, 97.
60 Freyne, ‘Galilee and the Halakah’, 305-308.
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temple to the everyday life in the world”; an idea which is reflected in rabbinic literature and in New Testament passages like Mark 7:3-4. We may infer from these traditions that Pharisaic education was most likely concentrated in Judaea in the pre-70 CE period.

This assumption does not preclude that Pharisaic teachings were brought to Galilee by local Pharisees. The theory about Pharisaic education as centered in Judaea does not contradict the idea that the influence of Pharisaic traditions extended to Galilee. The Pharisees and the priestly establishment alike had an established position in Judaea and Jerusalem in particular, while Galilee was at the periphery. This would also provide a contemporary background to Judaean attitudes toward Galilee as lacking the sophisticated study of the Torah and to the perceived inapplicability of the traditions of Scripture about prophets and messianism to Galilee (John 7:40-52).

In his discussion of possible alternatives to Pharisaism in Galilee, Freyne argues about the relative success of the Pharisaic halakhah in the pre-70 CE period as follows: “As stressed more than once, the dominant ethos there was rural and peasant, and in those circumstances one can readily appreciate why Pharisaism, which had particular appeal with the townspeople according to Ant 18:15, that is, among the emerging middle class, would have had little attraction for people from the country”. 61

The persistence of indigenous local religious affiliations and practices in Galilee, after Galilee was brought under the rule of the Hasmonaeans, is a point stressed by both Freyne 62 and Richard A. Horsley. 63 Horsley, in his archaeological survey about synagogues in Galilee, refers from the outset to an emerging critical consensus that “no synagogue [buildings] have been found in Palestine for the almost two hundred years following the destruction of the Temple”. 64 Thus, the information to be derived from archaeological data about the environment for the establishment of Pharisaic education is quite limited.

From our discussion of literary, historical and archaeological evidence, we may conclude that a concentration of Pharisaic schooling in Judaea before 70 CE is more likely to have existed than an equal spread of Torah scholarship throughout Judaea and Galilee.

4. The problem: Locating Paul’s Pharisaic study of the Law

Paul does not specify the place of his prior Pharisaic study of the Law in his own Letters. However, the speech attributed to Paul by the Lucan author in Acts 22:3-21 situates this Pharisaic study in Jerusalem (Acts 22:3). This silence in Paul’s Letters is a serious problem for the study of Paul’s previous way of life as a Pharisee. It forms a gap which cannot be filled up by uncritically adding information from Acts about Paul’s Pharisaic past.

A critical methodology has been proposed by certain New Testament scholars, addressing the problem of comparing the information in Paul’s Letters and in Acts about Paul. Riesner asserted “a ‘relative’ priority of Paul’s Letters before the chronological information contained in Acts” 65 John Knox, in his book about a life of Paul, expressed this ‘relative’ priority of Paul’s Letters already with his threefold principle of testing the credibility of information only found in Acts. First, the silence in Paul’s Letters about the information in

63 Horsley, Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee, 171-175.
64 Horsley, Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee, 131-153 at 133, quoting an article of L.I. Levine from the New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Explorations in the Holy Land.
65 Riesner, Paul’s Early Period, 30.
Acts must be insignificant. Second, the author of Acts cannot be assumed to have had a special interest in framing it on the basis of a surmise. Third, the information in Acts cannot be refuted on the basis of any competing suggestion. When these three criteria are met, according to Knox, the particular item of information in Acts can be considered reliable. Knox’s study has received much critical appraisal concerning his introduction of the methodological principle of the priority of Paul’s letters for our understanding of Paul’s life and work.

Scholarly scepticism concerning the detailed information in Acts 22:3, mentioning Gamaliel as teacher, however, also entails scepticism or even a denial of Jerusalem as the place of Paul’s prior schooling in Pharisaism. The radical hypothesis of John Knox rather situates Paul’s education in Tarsus and Damascus. Knox’s hypothesis discredits the information in Acts about Paul’s former life in Judaism; information which is bound up with the story of his persecution of the church. Knox rejects the circumstantial information of Acts because of its dependence on Luke’s “interest in Christianity as the continuation and fulfillment of authentic Judaism and in the city of Jerusalem as the place where the transition took place”. According to Knox, a conception of Paul’s life as centered in Jerusalem fitted well in with the narrative strategy of the author of Luke-Acts. It must be granted that the author of Luke-Acts had a specific narrative strategy with certain interests in mind in portraying Paul. This narrative strategy amounts to internal contradictions and also to contrasts with Paul’s words which cannot be harmonised.

Other New Testament scholars have evaluated the information in Acts about Paul’s previous way of life as a Pharisee in a more positive way. For example, Jerome Murphy-O’Connor and Martin Hengel have defended the location of Paul’s Pharisaic study of the Law in Jerusalem. Murphy-O’Connor’s discussion includes references to rabbinic traditions about Torah scholarship in Jerusalem. Hengel and Murphy-O’Connor have approached the question of whether or not Paul in his previous Pharisaic way of life, supposedly located in Jerusalem, witnessed Jesus’ ministry and death in different ways. In this section, I will focus first on Paul’s own words in Gal 1:13-24 about his former Jewish life and his persecution of the church. Subsequently I will discuss Josephus’ information about the Pharisees in relation to the question of the possible locations of their schools.

68 Knox, Chapters in a Life of Paul, 33-40 rejects this story in Acts out of hand (36) and calls it the “author’s ingenious surmise” to account for Paul’s persecution and conversion in Damascus as a Jerusalemite Jew.
69 Knox, Chapters in a Life of Paul, 35.
70 J.C. Lentz, Jr., Luke’s portrait of Paul (Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 1993) 51-56 critically discusses Acts 23:6, noting that the “suggestion that Paul was from a Pharisaic family from Tarsus can hardly be accepted without serious reservations” (54), but leaves “the riddle of Paul’s formal Pharisaic background” “to others” (51).
73 Hengel (with Deines), The Pre-Christian Paul, 63-65, at 63; “it is very possible, indeed almost probable, that the younger Saul even witnessed Jesus’ death – perhaps from the distance of the Greek-speaking Jews”; however, Hengel leaves the matter whether or not 2 Cor 5:16 suggests Paul’s personal connection with the earthly Jesus an ‘open question’ (64) and stresses that a crucified Messiah constituted a religious stumbling block for the former Pharisaic Paul. Murphy-O’Connor, Paul. A Critical Life, 61-62 states that there is no guarantee that Jesus’ death “would have impinged on the attention of a Paul passionately committed to the study of the Law” and warns against presumptions about “what Paul should or should not have written” (61).
Paul’s previous life in Judaism

4.1 Interpretation of Galatians 1:13-24

4.1.1 Paul’s silence about the place of his Pharisaic education

In his discussion of Paul’s Jewish education, Knox argues that Paul’s silence about Jerusalem as the place of his education is significant, for Paul could have mentioned it on various occasions, when referring to his previous Jewish life. Paul’s silence about Jerusalem is for Knox the more significant in view of the place of Paul’s persecuting activity, which in his interpretation of Gal 1:22-23 cannot have been Jerusalem or Judaea.

By further casting doubt on the information of Acts on the basis of evidence in Gal 1:11-24, Knox emphasises that Paul writes about visits to Jerusalem, whereas he writes about Damascus that he returned there. This suggests, according to Knox, that Damascus was his home.74 It is however important to note that Paul’s references to Jerusalem and Damascus serve to give an impression of his early apostolic activity rather than a historical account about his former Jewish schooling. Damascus was the place of Paul’s conversion, his calling as an apostle. The neighbouring regions of Syria and Cilicia, in which his birthplace Tarsus was located, were probably also a home for him in terms of social support for his apostolic commission given by Christian congregations there. This can be inferred from Gal 1:17, 21.

The reason for Paul’s silence about Jerusalem in connection with his Jewish education is, in my view, to be explained precisely by his breakaway from his ‘former life in Judaism’. Paul had no interest in exhaustively informing his readers about his Jewish education, and about who exactly would have been his fellow students and his teacher(s). He had to mention some basic elements of his pre-Christian and early apostolic activity to frame his own story and to come to terms with the threat of his opponents who challenged his mission and perhaps also his integrity. Paul’s readers were also already familiar with his former activity as a persecutor (‘You have certainly heard of my former life in Judaism’, Gal 1:13a). Since the opponents derived their authority from the circle around James, that is, from an influential party within the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:12), stressing a pre-Christian connection with Jerusalem would defeat Paul’s purpose of defending his own position. Paul wanted to persuade his readers that his apostolic commission did not depend on the authority of the Jerusalem church. This is clear from Paul’s representation of his own calling as an apostle in Gal 1:15-17, where he stresses that his earliest period as an apostle was disconnected from any contacts with the Jerusalem church and the other apostles.

Furthermore, the rhetorical context of Gal 1:13-2:10 at large concerns the issue of how Paul’s mission to the Gentiles came into being after his conversion. Paul wants to stress this apostolic activity as independent from the Jerusalem church. It was neither relevant nor appropriate to Paul’s purpose to digress at length about his former life in Judaism. Such a digression would rather have served his opponents and those siding with them in their rival mission who undermined Paul’s mission and integrity (Gal 1:6-9; 5:1-12). Paul’s opponents wanted a gospel preached which was in entirely keeping with the Jewish Law. They probably had a picture of Paul in mind as a former persecutor and apostate from the Jewish Law (cf. Gal 5:10-12; Acts 21:20-22). Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish religious authority before 70 CE (cf. Josephus’ Life 7-8, 21, 190-198),76 a situation which supported the case of Paul’s opponents rather than Paul’s case in this context.

74 Knox, Chapters in a Life of Paul, 36.

75 See BDAG, 189-190; cf. Blass/Debrunner/Rehkopf, Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch, § 452.

76 Z. Safrai, ‘The Role of the Jerusalem Elite in National Leadership in the Late Second Temple Era’, in Poorthuis and Safrai (eds.), The Centrality of Jerusalem, 65-72 in spite of his critical notes about Josephus’ at times misleading Jerusalem-centered perspective, maintains that Jerusalem “was the center for the study of the Torah” (67) and that the Jerusalem council served as a ‘national council’ (71).
The difficult position in which Paul found himself, while denouncing such opponents as ‘false brothers’ (Gal 2:4; cf. 2 Cor 11:5.12-15.26), was that he also had to oppose influential circles of the Jerusalem church. According to Gal 2:11-14, the group of James had a dominant influence in preaching a Jewish way of life, which led Peter and even Paul’s fellow worker Barnabas to dissociate from Gentile converts who did not observe Jewish customs.\(^\text{77}\)

Paul’s account of subsequent events in Gal 1:12-2:21 emphasises the initial agreement between Paul and leading persons of the Christian church, whenever Jerusalem is mentioned. Paul’s discussion of visits to Jerusalem should, therefore, not be read as a complete account of how often and when for the first time in his whole life, also before his calling as apostle, Paul visited Jerusalem for a short or longer stay. Paul mentions Jerusalem in relation to his initial agreement with the other apostles about the gospel mission (Gal 2:1-10).

Apart from this agreement, Paul deliberately dissociated from any human subordination in his apostolic commission, for he writes in Galatians 1:16-17, “in order that I would preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me”. The fact that Jerusalem is mentioned here already, albeit to deny that Paul visited Jerusalem at that point, displays the importance of Jerusalem in the social world of Paul’s readers. Jerusalem was also relevant for Paul. A sense of the significance of Jerusalem continued from Paul’s former life in Judaism to his perspective as an apostle of the faith in Christ. In Romans 9:4 he writes that the worship, that is, the worship in the Temple, belongs among other things to the Israelites; a group to which Paul still reckons himself (2 Cor 11:22; Rom 11:1).

It is significant that Paul already had the plan to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, but there is no sign of agreement about this with Peter and other apostles at the first visit of Paul after his calling as an apostle (Gal 1:18-24). Only by the second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, Paul, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, explicitly mentions an agreement on their apostolic mission with James, Peter and John. On the part of the Jerusalem church, it apparently took time to recognise an apostle in the former persecutor of the church,\(^\text{78}\) and even then the initial agreement on apostolic mission was broken later on (Gal 2:11-14).

4.1.2 Gal 1:22-23 in the argument about the location of Paul’s former life as a Pharisee

Gal 1:22-23, which in Knox’ interpretation excludes both Jerusalem and Judaea as a place of Paul’s former persecuting activities, should in my view be read differently. In Gal 1:18-24, Paul contrasts his direct contact with the apostles Peter and James to his not being known by sight to the churches in Judea, who only had an impression about Paul from hearsay. Paul thus stresses that only the apostles Peter and James were involved in his first post-conversion contacts with the Jerusalem church.

Paul also opposes the Jerusalem church to the churches in Judea in another passage, Romans 15:31. Although Rom 15:31 mentions the churches of Judea and Jerusalem side by side, as they were apparently regarded older and normative among the believers in Christ in the Diaspora, there is a marked difference in Paul’s apprehension of them. He contrasts the

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\(^{77}\) Cf. Justin Taylor, S.M., ’The Jerusalem Decrees (Acts 15.20, 29 and 21.25) and the Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11-14)’, *NTS* 46 (2001) 372-380 who interprets the initial difference between Peter and James concerning (non-)association with the Gentiles as motivated by prescriptions from Lev 17-18 for conditional association with Gentiles and by ‘Noachide commandments’ about the separation between Jews and Gentiles respectively.

\(^{78}\) Cf. N. Taylor, *Paul, Antioch and Jerusalem. A Study in Relationships and Authority in Earliest Christianity* (JSNTSup 66; Sheffield AP: Sheffield, 1992) 77 who notes that Paul’s visit to the Jerusalem church would be “feasible, especially if the former community had also been victim to his persecution” (the other community being the church at Damascus).
Paul’s previous life in Judaism

‘unbelievers in Judaea’, ὦ ἕπειθούντες ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ, to the ‘saints in Jerusalem’, ὦ ἔγνω εἰς Ἰερούσαλήμ. This is an extreme difference between the two groups of Christian Jews perceived by Paul as separated from each other as holy and unholy, believers and unbelievers.

The occasion which gave rise to Paul’s polarised idea probably had to do with the challenge which other missionaries posed to Paul’s mission by insisting that every convert should observe the Jewish Law. Among those missionaries were probably also ‘unbelievers in Judaea’; a polemical term employed by Paul. Missionaries from Judaea were probably among those people who came to Antioch and insisted on a way of life according to the Jewish Law which should also be applied to converts from the Gentiles (Gal 2:11-14). As Judaea and Jerusalem were polarised in Paul’s gospel mission to the Gentiles, it is, therefore, nor self-evident to assume that Judaea and Jerusalem would have been one and the same for Paul in his former persecuting activity against the church.  

Although Paul was not known by sight to the churches of Judaea, this is not said in relation to the church of Jerusalem. Paul only writes that, on the occasion of his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, he merely saw two of the apostles, visiting, ἵστορησαν; Peter first of all (Gal 1:18). Paul’s statement about his contact with only two of the apostles does not automatically imply that he did not talk to other Christians who were not apostles. Paul’s point concerns the human authority of leading figures in the church on which, he insists, his gospel mission does not depend. It should further be noted that Gal 1:23 describes a plurality of those formerly persecuted. Because of the contrast between the Jerusalem church and the Judean churches in Paul’s Letters, it is, in my view, a premature conclusion to read Gal 1:22-23 as contradicting and excluding the idea of a Jerusalem-based persecution of the church by Paul.

4.2 Paul’s Jewish Background and his Former Persecution of the Church

As Paul’s Jewish background is bound up with the story of his former role of persecutor of the church, it is important to focus our attention on whether further specified answers can be given to the question of who were persecuted and how the persecution could be organised. In Gal 1:13, Paul writes that he persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; a stronger statement than in Phil 3:6 where he summarily writes “as to zeal a persecutor of the church”. It should be noted that both passages, Gal 1:13 and Phil 3:6, refer to the ‘church of God’, ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, in the singular. Contrary to this, Paul writes in Gal 1:22 about the ‘churches of Judaea’ in the plural. The singular could simply stand for nascent Christianity as such, but it could also denote the church of the saints in Jerusalem. This was the ‘church of churches’, of whom Paul considered James, Peter and John to be the pillars (Gal 2:9).

The hearsay reaching the churches of Judaea, “he who once persecuted us, is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy” (Gal 1:23), probably concerns formerly persecuted Christians of Jerusalem who had fled and returned. The conversion of a former persecutor to a preacher of the gospel was also good news for churches to whom Paul was not known by sight. Paul writes that the churches of Judaea glorified God for this (Gal 1:24).

79 Contra Murphy-O’Connor, Paul. A Critical Life, 54 who, in criticising Knox’ position, rather follows Knox in the assumption that the Holy City and the countryside should be considered together. He, paradoxically, refers to Rom 15:31 as precluding a distinction between Jerusalem and Judaea.

80 For the designation of James, the Lord’s brother, as an ‘apostle’ (Gal 1:19), cf. 1 Cor 15:7.
Paul’s motivation as persecutor of the church was his zeal (Phil 3:6); probably a zeal for keeping Jewish culture uncorrupted by any perceived outside threat.\(^{81}\) Paul’s zeal was different from the Pharisaic keenness for the ancestral traditions (Gal 1:14). The Pharisees are reported to have had disputes with Jesus in the Gospels (e.g. Matt 19:3f.; Luke 5:17f.), but other Gospel traditions also refer to Jesus’ connections with several Pharisees. According to Luke 7:36, a Pharisee invited Jesus to eat with him, while John 3:1f. and 7:50f. inform us that the Pharisee Nicodemus had friendly relations with Jesus. The author of Luke-Acts even attributes words of caution against persecution of the Christians to a highly reputed Pharisaic teacher of the Law, Gamaliel (Acts 5:34-39). Pharisees were not likely to be moved to zeal for persecution.

In this connection, it is important to point to the apparent internal contradiction in the narrative of Acts, which seems to postulate the prudent teacher of the Law, Gamaliel (cf. Acts 5:34-39), as the personal teacher of Paul, the former persecutor of the church, in Acts 22:3.\(^{82}\) The phrase “at the feet of” Gamaliel may, however, be a figurative expression standing for education in a school named after its most famous teacher (cf. m ‘Abot 1:4).

### 4.2.1 The Context of Persecution of the Church

What specific occasion(s) motivated Paul’s persecution of the church? Paul says nothing about this in his Letters. The narrative of Acts, which presupposes a Jerusalem-based persecution, does however give certain information about this. The evidence in Acts 8:1-3 suggests that Paul’s former persecuting activity was concentrated in Jerusalem, from which some people fled to Judea and Samaria, while others stayed. According to Acts the earliest context for large scale persecution of the church followed in the wake of Stephen’s death.\(^{83}\) The picture in Acts of the dispersion of all except the apostles may, however, be tendentious.

It is likely that the so-called Hellenists were mainly the victims of persecution, because the persecution of the church is mentioned in the aftermath of growing conflicts between ‘Hebrews’, Εβραῖοι, and ‘Hellenists’, Ἑλληνισταῖ (Acts 6:1). Paul called himself a ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’ in Phil 3:5, and his zeal or persecution of the church may well have been related to this conflict between the interests of Hebrews and Hellenists.\(^{84}\) Even though the terms Hebrews and Hellenists may reflect the schematic ideological agenda of the author of Acts, as Craig C. Hill has argued (see chap. 3, section 7.5), they may testify to a fundamental division within the early Jesus-movement about the direction and purpose of the gospel mission. Acts 11:20 explicitly mentions the presence of the Hellenists rather than the Hebrews in Antioch; the place where the gospel mission to the Gentiles became the issue of debate within the early church.

\(^{81}\) Cf. T. Seland, ‘Saul of Tarsus and Early Zealotism. Reading Gal 1,13-14 in Light of Philo’s Writings’, *Biblica* 83:4 (2002) 449-471, there p. 470 about Paul’s action as a zealot who persecuted those who were posed a threat to the “social cohesion” of Judaism, but also emphasising that “the Judaisms at the time were generally tolerant”.


\(^{83}\) Note that the earliest reference to Saul the Pharisee occurs at the point in the account of Acts when Stephen is stoned, in Acts 7:58, shortly before the account of the persecution (Acts 8:1-3, 9:1-2). Saul is called a ‘young man’ in Acts 7:58. Neither Acts nor Paul’s Letters provide conclusive evidence about the question of a personal connection of Paul with the earthly Jesus. Paul’s Letters rather provide connections with the teachings of the earthly Jesus; for a survey of this discussion, see e.g. D. Wenham, *Paul, Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Mich. / Cambridge, 1995).

\(^{84}\) Cf. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 80-81 distinguishing the churches of Judea as “likely to be more traditionally Jewish in their view of the new sect” from the Hellenists.
Paul’s previous life in Judaism

The Hellenists brought in the more Hellenising influence with elements from a Gentile cultural environment which could clash with Jewish legal perspectives. The crisis of Hellenisation during the Maccabean period had probably become part of the collective memory of Palestinian Judaism, so that negative sentiments about Hellenisation as a threat to Jewish tradition came to the surface, especially at times of aggravating tensions and conflicts. The mixture of Jewish and Gentile influences, in which incompatible interests collided, gave rise to conflicts which probably induced Paul, in his former life in Judaism, to support persecution. This is implied in Gal 1:23 with the hearsay about Paul “now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy”. This preaching of the faith addressed Jews and Gentiles (cf. Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:22-23; Gal 3:28).

Paul also writes about the radical zeal of a specific group of Jews who had an active interest in keeping the Jewish and Gentile spheres of influence apart. It can be inferred from 1 Thess 2:14 that among radical movements of zeal for the cause of the ‘Hebrews’, certain Jews had an interest in preventing Paul from saving the Gentiles by preaching the gospel to them (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι οἱ Ἰησοῦς ἐκδιώκοντες κυρίων Ἰησοῦς τοῖς ἐθνεῖσι λελήκασα υπανθρώπων). In connection with the oppressive hindrance by such a radical group of Jews, Paul mentions the sufferings of the “churches of God in Christ Jesus which are in Judaea”. Paul may have heard about the sufferings of these churches of Judaea when he was in Jerusalem having contact with Peter and James. This radical Jewish movement which had an aggressive interest in the separation between Jews and Gentiles could constitute the basis for Paul’s former persecution of the church.

The evidence provided by Flavius Josephus corroborates the idea that there was a radical Jewish movement which vied for aggressive means to achieve their goal of theocracy and independence from foreign rule with its Hellenising influence. According to Josephus’ works, priestly circles who were against Gentile and Hellenising influences on Jewish tradition as well as movements with an extreme zeal for the Law on the fringes of Pharisaism could count on a growing number of ready supporters for action. Josephus writes about this radical movement, faute de mieux called the ‘Fourth Philosophy’, that its followers, apart from their militant zeal for theocracy, “agree in all other respects with the opinions of the Pharisees”, τὰ μὲν λοιπά πάντα γνώμη τῶν Φαρισαίων ὁμολογοῦσι (Ant. 18.23).

In Josephus’ account of the events which gave rise to the Jewish War, this movement with its appeal of novelty formed an uncontrollable challenge to the body politic, ἡ πολιτεία, that is, the Jewish Sanhedrin, thereby “planting the seeds of troubles which eventually overtook it”. By siding with or joining such a radical Jewish movement in his former life in Judaism, Paul’s Pharisaic zeal for the Law could turn into zeal for religious persecution.

The last item on the list for ‘confidence in the flesh’ in Philippians 3:5-6 could also be interpreted as a polemical warning to others that the zeal for the Law, which was a dead end in Paul’s previous life as persecutor of the church, was also a dead end in the teachings of

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85 ‘Hellenising influence’ therefore did not concern the Greek language per se, since, as M. Hengel, ‘Greek-speaking Jerusalem and Greek Synagogue Education’, in idem, The Pre-Christian Paul (London & Philadelphia, 1991) 54-62 has convincingly demonstrated, the pre-Christian Paul who took pride in being a ‘Hebrew of Hebrews’ could have been exposed to Jewish Greek in the context of Greek synagogue education in Jerusalem.

86 2 Macc 4:13 ἢν δ’ οὖσις ἀσφαλὴς ἡ Ἐλληνισμὸς καὶ πρόοδος ἐλληνισμοῦ διὰ τὴν τοῦ ἀσπέριος καὶ σοῦ ἀρχιερέως Ἰσαυανοῦ ὑπερβάλλοντον ἔναρχοντας, relating this ‘adoption of foreign ways’ to neglect of the traditional cultic service in the Temple (v. 14 f.).

87 J.W. 2.409-410; Ant. 18.1-10, 23 identifies Judas the Galilean as the leader of the ‘fourth philosophy’; cf. Acts 5:37. This movement was founded in revolt against Quirinius’ census of 6/7 CE, which according to its followers would lead to ‘downright slavery’, ἐνταγμένος δουλεία (Ant. 18.4).

88 Ant. 18.9 τῶν αὐθικῶν κακῶν κατεσκεύαστές μιᾶς ἐφυτεύσαντο.
Paul and God’s Temple

Paul’s opponents. This polemical warning puts Paul’s opponents implicitly in the camp of the aggressive and radical Jewish movement designated by Josephus with the collective noun of the ‘fourth philosophy’. Moreover, Josephus states that in Judaea under the procuratorship of Felix (52-60 CE) terrorist and revolutionary movements arose.\(^{89}\) This was during a period in which Paul wrote many of his Letters.

Paul’s former zeal for religious persecution can thus be explained against the background of an aggressive and revolutionary zeal for freedom from foreign dominion and Hellenising influences perceived as the cause of all transgressions against the ancestral Jewish tradition. Perhaps the point of being blameless in the righteousness under the Law was even a serious argument in the revolutionary rhetoric: in striving aggressively for the cause of theocracy one would not get blemished under the Law.\(^{90}\) Through his conversion to the faith in Christ, Paul counted all of this as a loss (Phil 3:7-8), dissociating from his ‘former life in Judaism’ with which he could no longer identify. This does, however, not alter the fact that Paul also expresses a sense of belonging to Jewish tradition in his Letters, either explicitly (e.g. in Rom 9:1-5) or in implicit ways.

4.2.2 The reasons for persecution of the church

The question about the reasons for persecution of the church brings us also to the question about the place of Paul’s persecuting activity. J. Knox has argued that the link between Jerusalem and Damascus in Paul’s persecuting activity is part of Luke’s conception of “Christianity as the continuation and fulfillment of authentic Judaism and (of) the city of Jerusalem as the place where the transition took place”. Thus Knox finds the transition from the initial persecution in Jerusalem to the eventual conversion of Paul in Damascus in the narrative of Acts problematic. In his view the account of Acts can only be the author’s ingenious way of filling up a gap. It covers up the problematic transition by providing an answer to the question: “how did it happen that he was in Damascus at the time of his conversion?”].\(^{91}\)

Paul writes in Galatians 1:17 that he returned to Damascus after a journey into Arabia. Damascus was the home for the early period of Paul’s apostolic mission and the regions of Syria and Cilicia, mentioned side by side in Gal 1:21, were probably known to him from his youth, since he had been born in Tarsus of Cilicia. As much as there is a silence in Paul’s Letters about Jerusalem as a place for his former persecuting activity, this is also the case for Damascus. We can only infer from Paul’s words in Gal 1:15-17 that his revelation and calling as an apostle to the Gentiles are related to his stay in Damascus. The traditions of the fathers which he championed in his former life in Judaism (Gal 1:14) were, however, a matter of education.

With regard to Paul’s idea of the source for authority, there is no bigger contrast than that between human teachings and the gospel which he preached as an apostle. Paul writes in Galatians 1:11-12 that the gospel of Christ was not taught to him by others but came to him through divine revelation. Thus, Galatians 1:15-17 cannot be read as by extension also locating Paul’s ‘former life in Judaism’ (Gal 1:13-14) in Damascus.

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\(^{89}\) J.W. 2.252-260 calls the terrorists ‘Sicarii’, σικάριοι. Cf. Acts 21:38 where in the tumult around the arrest of Paul, a question out of concern for the public order is put in the mouth of the Roman tribune. He is found asking whether Paul could be the apparently fugitive Egyptian revolutionary leader of four thousand Sicarii.

\(^{90}\) Cf. the rhetoric of the ‘Fourth Philosophy’ in Ant. 18.5 about ‘necessary bloodshed’ for their cause: καὶ τὸ θέων ὁλόκληρῳ ἔτι συμπεράζει τῶν βασileμάτων εἰς τὸ κυριαρχεῖν συμπροσθεμένω μᾶλλον, ἄν μεγάλον ἐραστήν τῇ διανοίᾳ καθυστέρει μὴ ἐξερχόνται φόνον τοῦ ἐπ’ αὐτῶς.

\(^{91}\) Knox, Chapters in a Life of Paul, 38.
4.2.3 From Jerusalem to Damascus

If it is assumed that the organisation of persecution of the church started as a persecution against the Hellenists in Jerusalem, then there may be a reason why Paul would travel to Damascus. According to the narrative of Acts, the persecution in Jerusalem caused the church to become scattered, and perhaps daunted and disunited for some time. Damascus was a city with a sizeable Jewish community. The reason for Paul, in his former role of persecutor, to travel to Damascus would consist in taking precautionary measures against those who could threaten to Hellenise Jewish custom there to an impermissible extent from the viewpoint of the revolutionary Jewish groups.92

The spreading of measures against Hellenising influence in Jewish communities outside Judaea is not such a strange assumption: it can be concluded from Gal 2:4-14 that the opponents to Paul’s later apostolic mission, who probably came from Jerusalem, even reached Antioch with their mission against Gentile influence in the Christian-Jewish church.93 These opponents apparently had enough influence to persuade others into having converts from the Gentiles live according to Jewish custom or, if that was not possible, in keeping Jewish and Gentile converts separate from one another. Antioch was a city located even further to the northern part of Syria than Damascus. Damascus was, however, the place where Paul was called to become apostle of the faith in Christ, when, in Paul’s words, “He who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me” (Gal 1:15-16).

4.3 Jerusalem in Galatians 4:21-31 and Paul’s former persecution of the church

Although Paul does not explicitly mention Jerusalem in connection with his former life in Judaism in his Letter to the Galatians, Jerusalem figures in an allegory in Gal 4:21-31. Even though it is the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ (Gal 4:26), it points to the significance of Jerusalem for Paul.94 No other city is thus transfigured in an allegory. Of course, the contrast with the earthly Jerusalem (Gal 4:25) implies first of all a polemic against the influence of Christian Jews who insisted that converts in Galatia should live under the Jewish Law. This section starts with an exhortation against those who want to be under the Law (οἱ ὑπὸ νόμον θέλοντες εἶναι, Gal 4:21), whom Paul addresses here in the first place.

Paul’s polemic against the earthly Jerusalem could also point to the difference with his ‘previous life in Judaism’, that is his previous life under the Law as a Pharisee, with which Paul had broken (Gal 1:13). As he writes in 1 Cor. 9:20, μὴ ὄν σύμμαχός ὑπὸ νόμον, Paul the apostle is no longer under the Jewish Law, but under the Law of Christ (1 Cor 9:21). However, in his previous life as a Pharisee he would have had opportunities of fellowship and discussion with teachers and students of the Law most of all in Jerusalem, for Jerusalem was the place where the teaching on the ‘seat of Moses’ was concentrated and disseminated at the time.95

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94 Cf. Dunn, Galatians, 253 who discerns affinities between Paul’s concept of the ‘Jerusalem above’ and the heavenly Jerusalem in Jewish apocalyptic thought.

The slavery which revolutionary Jewish groups, who had an unconquerable passion for liberty in recognising only God as their leader and master (Ant. 18.4-5, 23), expected when Jewish and Gentile interests would mix, is freedom for Paul after his conversion to the faith in Christ. For Paul the aggressive zeal for the Law amounted to slavery. As Paul writes to the Galatians, they should not let themselves be troubled by Christian Jews who would judge them negatively (Gal 5:10), for the exhortation of Paul’s opponents probably had produced an unsettling effect among the Galatians.

The contemporary, earthly Jerusalem, which apparently was central to authoritative persuasion for Paul’s opponents in their preaching of the necessity of circumcision (Gal 1-12), is identified with slavery in Paul’s allegory. Thus, the contemporary Palestinian background of the emergence and activity of the revolutionary movement of the ‘Fourth Philosophy’ probably affects Paul’s polemic against the Christian Jews who would try to persuade Gentile converts to live under the Law. In Paul’s view, the obligation to observe the entire Law is a reason to separate such a person from faith in Christ (Gal 5:2-6).

Jerusalem nevertheless continues to have a place in Paul’s theology. In Galatians 4:26 Paul writes: “but the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother”. After a quotation from Isaiah 54:1 by way of a prooftext in Gal 4:27, Paul stresses the patrilineal descent as ‘children of promise’, κατὰ Ισαὰκ ἐπαγγελλάς τέκνα, in Gal 4:28. With this he returns to the beginning of the allegory about the two sons of Abraham in Gal 4:22. The allegory of the two sons of Abraham comprises a warning against those who would judge Gentile converts as lawless from the point of view of the Jewish Law.

Paul’s former life in Judaism, which led him to persecution of the church, serves as an implicit example for this warning. Paul applies this warning of persecution even to his reading of the biblical story in Gal 4:29-30. He refers to the rivalry between the two sons of Abraham in Gal 4:29: “but at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit”. Paul quotes from Genesis 21:10 in Galatians 4:30. Genesis 21, however, does not comprise any allusions to the persecution of one son of Abraham by the other. Paul, in his allegorical reading, refers to the contemporary predicament of two gospels, that of Paul and that of his opponents (cf. Gal 1:6-9), which cannot both be the true gospel.

On two levels, Paul’s reading of ‘persecution’ in Gal 4:29 is related to his exhortation against those who, unsettled by negative judgement, would want to be under the Law. First, Paul’s own persecution of the church in his former life in Judaism serves as an implicit example of loss for the sake of Christ. The context of the persecution appears to be connected to pressures toward the end that Hebrews and Hellenists, and Jews and Gentiles, were either both to live under the Law or to be kept separated. Paul implicitly refers to his own past road of destruction as a former persecutor, and to the fact that he had been saved by his calling to faith in Christ. Like the one ‘born according to the flesh’ in Gal 4:29, Paul himself had been born a Jew, ‘according to the flesh’, as he makes extensively clear in Phil 3:5-6. Moreover, in his ‘former life in Judaism’ he persecuted the church, which Paul later embraced as a church of converts both Jewish and Gentile. Paul’s calling as an apostle also had consequences for his idea about his own life as ‘set apart by God before he had been born’ (ὁ ἐμφάνισθη με ἐκ λαλίας μητρὸς μου).

Secondly, Paul criticises his opponents. In Gal 5:11, Paul argues that he is now persecuted himself for not preaching the circumcision but the stumbling block of the cross. Paul’s gospel is according to the Spirit (Gal 5:5). His polemic against his opponents, other Christian Jewish missionaries, is also expressed in Paul’s reading in Gal 4:29 of the biblical story of rivalry between the two sons of Abraham. In the life according to the Spirit, Jerusalem continues to have a spiritual significance in Paul’s theology as the ‘heavenly
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Jerusalem’. This is, however, another indication that Jerusalem had been a place of importance already for Paul in his ‘former life in Judaism’.

In the above reading of Gal 4:21-31, I have suggested a link between Paul’s allusion to the persecution of the church and the contrast between the earthly and the heavenly Jerusalem. This link may suggest the very different place Jerusalem had in Paul’s previous life in Judaism and in his mission as an apostle of the faith in Christ.

4.4 Contemporary Jewish evidence about the location of Pharisaic education

In their elaboration of divergent views on the place of Paul’s former life as a Pharisee, scholars have brought different literary and historical evidence into the discussion. J. Murphy-O’Connor, arguing in favour of Paul’s prior schooling in Jerusalem as a Pharisee, has convincingly shown that Paul’s birthplace, Tarsus of Cilicia, cannot have had a Pharisaic school of study of the Law at the time. Knox’s argument, which presents an alternative to locating Paul’s prior Pharisaic schooling in Jerusalem, is problematic. The schools of rabbinic theology, which according to Knox made Paul’s previous education accessible in any ‘well-established Jewish community’, were founded only later, in the Tannaitic era after 70 CE. Possible precursors in the Second Temple period, according to a consensus in rabbinic scholarship, were not directly comparable in organisation to the rabbinic school system. Thus, the projection of the rabbinic evidence about schooling back onto the pre-70 period entails a serious problem of anachronism.

Knox’s view that Paul received his Pharisaic education can be challenged. While there are many literary references to Pharisaic study of the Law in Jerusalem, there is no literary, historical or epigraphic evidence about a Pharisaic school or Pharisaic study of the Law in Damascus. Although Damascus had a sizeable Jewish community with several synagogues, Jewish education must have been exposed to the Hellenising influence of a pagan environment to a larger extent than schools with an influx of Hellenistic Jewish influence in Israel proper. Moreover, Josephus’ account of Herod’s building programme, including a theatre and a gymnasium granted to Damascus (J.W. 1.422), suggests that the Jewish community in Damascus had a predominantly Hellenistic environment. Damascus is mentioned twice by Paul in his Letters (2 Cor 11:32; Gal 1:17), in both cases in the context of

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97 Knox, Chapters in a Life of Paul, 35-40.


102 In Josephus’ account of king Herod (37-4 BCE) as benefactor to cities, in J.W. 1.401-428, Jerusalem is mentioned first of all in regard to his architectural expansion of the Temple with colonades (§ 401), while Damascus is included among other cities, like Tripolis, Ptolemais and Sidon, which benefited from Herod’s prestigious building program of public works, which included Hellenistic instutions.
the early years of his gospel mission. The basic idea of the narrative in Acts 9:1-30, which situates Paul’s conversion and eventual acceptance by certain Christian Jews from the Christian congregation in Damascus, does not appear to clash with Paul’s references to Damascus. Damascus is undeniably important for a biography of Paul’s early years after his calling as apostle, but the significance of Damascus for adherents of the Pharisaic teachings remains doubtful.

Contemporary Jewish evidence from the works of Josephus appears to confirm the importance of Jerusalem as a main centre of Torah scholarship in the pre-70 CE period. Josephus personally studied the Law according to the interpretation and practical application of the Pharisees for many years. As Josephus’ knowledge of the Pharisees is related to his own study in Jerusalem, it is less likely that Pharisaic schools of study of the Law could have been numerous beyond Jerusalem and Judaea. There is only extensive evidence, in Josephus’ works as well as early rabbinic literature, of Pharisaic study of the Law in and Pharisees originating from Jerusalem.

The prominent and leading Pharisees, οἱ τῶν Φαρισαίων γνωρίμοι and οἱ πρῶτοι τῶν Φαρισαίων in the Jewish War 2.411 and the Life 21 respectively, were in Josephus’ view to be found in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the city where one could find a large concentration of schools for the study and exposition of the Torah before 70 CE. On the basis of this circumstantial evidence, the idea of Pharisaic study in Jerusalem as a background to Paul’s previous life in Judaism is supported by external sources. The evidence gives credibility to the idea that Paul’s previous Pharisaic study of the Law can be situated in Jerusalem.

5. Summary

Reading Paul’s Letters from the point of view of a reconstruction of Paul’s social world, we may conclude that the place of Jewish traditions in the congregations in Christ was by itself an issue of discussion and polemic between Paul and his fellow missionaries and rival missionaries. The rhetorical context of exhortation and polemic determines the way in which Paul writes about his Pharisaic past in the one passage which mentions this fact: Philippians 3:5-6. Nevertheless, Jewish traditions did have an important place in Paul’s Letters, as becomes clear from Paul’s eloquent knowledge of Scripture, analogies with contemporary Jewish epistolography, and his identification with the Israelites.

In situating Paul’s prior life as a Pharisee against the background of information from Jewish sources about the Pharisees, a clearer view on Paul’s previous life in Judaism emerges. This way of life as a Pharisee must be understood in the paideutic context of religious

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103 J.W. 2.162; Life 12. Cf. Life 1, 7 in which Josephus writes that his family descent can be traced back to priestly ancestors and that he was born and brought up in Jerusalem. Therefore his ‘return to the city’, εἰς τὴν πόλιν ὑπέστρεφον (§ 12), that is, Jerusalem as his home cannot be compared to Paul’s case, who had been born in Tarsus, in a more Hellenised environment, identifying himself as ‘Jew by birth and not a Gentile sinner’ (Gal 2:15). Jerusalem was not Paul’s home by birth and had got a transformed meaning for Paul after his calling as apostle, while Damascus was home for congregational support to his apostolic mission.

104 Life 10, 12, 21, 191; m. Yadayim 4:6; b. Baba Batra 60 (about Pharisees and food laws related to the Temple cult). Cf. S. Safrai, ‘Education and the Study of the Torah’, in Safrai & Stern (eds.), The Jewish People in the First Century II (Van Gorcum: Assen / Amsterdam, 1976) 946-947; Jeremias, ‘The Pharisees’, in idem, Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus, 247-251. See also Safrai, ‘The Role of the Jerusalem Elite’, 65-72 at 67: “theologically speaking, Jerusalem was considered the source and ‘home’ of wisdom, and it was only natural that therefore anyone who wanted to study Torah had to come to Jerusalem and live there”.

105 For evidence concerning the concentration of Pharisaic schooling in Jerusalem, see Josephus, Life 12, 21, 191, 197-198; Safrai, ‘Education and the Study of the Torah’, 945-970 at 946-947 on Rabbinic tradition about pre-70 CE Jerusalem.
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education. The traditions which were taught and transmitted by the Pharisees were linked with the geography of the land of Israel.

The silence in Paul’s letters about the location of his previous Pharisaic education constitutes a serious problem. Nevertheless, certain indications about the social geography of Paul’s previous life in Judaism can be inferred from the interpretation of relevant passages in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. Circumstantial evidence from Josephus and early rabbinic literature endorses the probability that Paul’s prior Pharisaic education took place in Jerusalem.

The location of Paul’s Pharisaic education in Jerusalem has consequences for our understanding of Paul. It opens up the possibility that Paul may have been exposed to the pluriform influence of traditions circulating in Jerusalemite circles. Paul’s past as a Hebrew born of Hebrews, and educated in Jerusalem, further implies connections with Palestinian Jewish culture. It is therefore inadequate to suppose that Hellenistic Diaspora Judaism constitutes the predominant background to Paul’s previous Jewish life. This supposition unjustifiably disregards Paul’s relation to Palestinian Jewish culture.