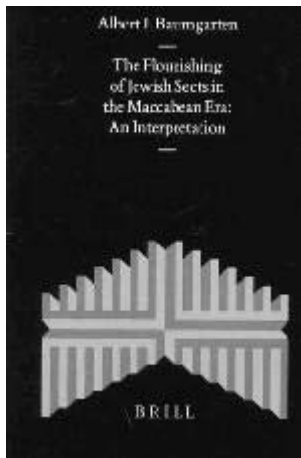


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**Baumgarten, Albert I.**

***The Flourishing of Jewish Sects in the Maccabean Era:  
An Interpretation***

Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 55

Leiden: Brill, 1997. Pp. xiv + 240, Cloth, \$84.50, ISBN  
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Albert Baumgarten's articles on many aspects of Second-Temple Judaism have long been influential, but this is the first time he has put forward an overall explanation of the prominence of sectarian groups such as Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the Qumran community in the religious history of this period. The result is a study of great significance. With an uncommonly consistent sensitivity to the inherent uncertainties of historiography, he claims only to offer "an interpretation," and it is doubtless true that many of his suggestions must remain hypothetical, but the depth and vigor of his enquiry are so impressive that many of his multifarious observations may well become standard.

Baumgarten's method is (wisely) to concentrate not on speculation about the earlier origins of Jewish sects but on the Maccabean age, on the grounds that this was a period of rapid political, social, and cultural change in which these groups are known to have flourished. This enables him to use the extensive evidence in the writings of Josephus and in 4QMMT, but he also derives much insight from analogies with sectarianism in other places and times, above all in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England and in modern Israel. Many different themes emerge--on a general level, the encounter with Hellenism, the impact of literacy and urbanization, the effects of political independence, and the influence of eschatological ideas; more specifically, issues such as the role of food, dress, and marriage patterns as boundary markers for sectarian groups. Baumgarten's broad conclusion is that disappointment with the ambivalent attitude of the Hasmonaeans to Hellenism, coinciding with increased literacy and urbanization, encouraged dissent among individuals socially and economically quite firmly embedded within Judaeans

society, and that these dissenters formed groups (only loosely termed "sects") under the impact of millenarian expectation fostered at a time of Jewish self-rule. But Baumgarten is so cautious in this proposal, and has so many other things to say (for instance, about the difference between "victorious" millenarianism and the millenarianism of despair [pp. 156-85]), that this summary is far too simplistic to do justice to the sophistication of his argument.

In fact the book has interesting ideas of widely varying kinds on almost every page. Nothing is asserted without a reason being provided. The steps of each argument are laid out with exemplary clarity, commonsense, and open-mindedness. This book impels the reader to think, its enthusiastic approach reminiscent of the writings of the late Morton Smith.

An excellent work, then, but Baumgarten would be the last to claim that it exhausts its topic. On the contrary, he specifically invites others to take up and extend the discussion on the basis of new insights (p. 200). There is much more to do on the literary reasons for the preservation of the evidence on which Baumgarten's reconstruction relies: for instance, it is not enough to assert that sectarianism dominated Second-Temple Judaism "as evidenced by the excursuses Josephus wrote" (p. 16); after all, in his summary of Jewish theology in *Against Apion* 2.179-81 Josephus explicitly excluded sectarianism, claiming that Jews agreed on all matters of theology and worship. Similarly, Baumgarten's brief discussions of Judaism after 70 CE as "the other side of the coin" (pp. 134-35, 150, 186-87) take too much at face value the later rabbinic account of the early history of their movement; for instance, was there really a "return to orality in the Yarmean period" (p. 135) and, if so, by how many Jews and in which aspects of their lives? Something here needs to be said about the Judaeen Desert documents from the Bar Kochba period. Nor is it likely that many colleagues will follow Baumgarten in his disinclination to treat Christianity as part of the history of Judaeen Judaism except in passing. For Baumgarten, this is of course in principle justified by his choice of period to study, but it is unsatisfactory that the early church, which is so much better attested from within than most of the groups with which Baumgarten deals, is dismissed as "something of an exception to the patterns of ancient Jewish sectarianism" (p. 45, n. 19). It is doubtless true that this is "a point which would require a separate monograph to discuss in full" (*ibid.*), but even a partial justification of the assertion would have been welcome.

Such issues will doubtless be raised by other scholars or by Baumgarten himself, since his long cogitation on this topic is unlikely to stop here. Smaller imperfections in the book, such as the peculiar Hebrew typesetting on p. 4, should be put right in the next edition. This is an important book to which both students and scholars will turn for stimulation and enlightenment.