History and point of view: understanding the Sadducees

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ABSTRACT
Portrayals of the Sadducees as the villains of early Judaism usually follow from the failure to realise that historical understanding is more than quoting from ancient sources. The sources should be carefully interpreted so that we recognise their points of view and avoid making the ancients unreal reflections of our preferences. A discussion of relevant sources is followed by a contextual consideration of the possible social roles, beliefs and values of the Sadducees.

1 INTRODUCTION
The Sadducees? Yes, we know about them:

Their name is connected to the name of Sadok, the priest of David. They come from the aristocratic and wealthy priestly families (cf Ac 5:17). They associate conservative religion with strongman politics. Due to political skill they achieve the important offices in Jerusalem. Their political position makes them vulnerable to Hellenistic influences. They are more rigoristic than the Pharisees when it comes to things like observing the sabbath. When the Romans conquer the country, they support the new rulers and thereby maintain their power. The centre of their power is the temple; so that with the destruction of the temple they also disappear. They accept only the Torah and not the oral law of the Pharisees. They deny the resurrection of the dead (Mk 12:18–27; [Ac] 4:1–2; 23:6–8) and furthermore believe that there are no angels or spirits. ... Josephus also writes that the Sadducees believe that the soul dies with the body (Van Aarde 1994:120—my translation).

This description excellently summarises conventional wisdom concerning the Sadducees. However, even this brief overview causes some perplexity. The first problem is the patent contradiction in the report: the Sadducees are scrupulous adherents to the Law, the Law which undeniably teaches about angels. Furthermore, a brief look at the sources—particularly at Josephus—reveals that most discussions concerning the Sadducees are mere paraphrases. That is, scholars take the ancient references at face value, equating data with evidence. A look at the sources also reminds us that the voices of the Sadducees have been effectively silenced. The very little we know about them demands rigorous 'objectivity' from us, the New Testament scholars. Who, after all, will speak for them?
The very offhand way the Sadducees are usually dealt with and the abrupt rejection of their views in discussions about them should rouse any scholar's conscience. We are prompted to ask: who is saying what about them, and why. To me, the question, who or what the Sadducees are, elicits a very tentative statement: 'Actually, we don't really know'. And from this realisation a quest ensues: what can we discover? Our quest will not lead to the final word about the Sadducees, but may lead to insight and understanding, to better knowledge, and some awareness of the importance of self-reflection. The 'Sadducees have tended to be the whipping boys of most writers, whether Jewish or Christian. In addition, the little information extant is very skimpy and tends to be overinterpreted by most who write on them' (Grabbe 1992:484; cf Porton 1992:892).

2 WHAT WE DO KNOW: A LOOK AT OUR SOURCES

The summary cited above is noticeably representative. What is said about the Sadducees is very much what we find in our sources. Most presentations are simply summaries of the reports from Josephus and the New Testament, which are all terse and prejudiced. A remark made by Neusner (with regard to rabbinic literature) is apposite: 'But the time in which we may collect, arrange, interpret, and reflect upon essentially unanalyzed stories and sayings and declare them to be history—that time is over' (Neusner 1982:iii). In order to learn the historical 'truth' about an ancient group like the Sadducees we must grasp something of how our sources want us to see them.

2.1 Josephus

2.1.1 In his Jewish War Josephus mentions that there are three 'schools of thought' (θηλασοφείται) among the Judeans (BJ 2.119). This is obviously an oversimplification: he has just informed us about a Galilean named Judas

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who was a rabbi with his own followers (his own 'school') which was quite
unlike the 'others' (ἡ δὲ οὖτος σοφιστὴς ἴδιας αἱρέσεως οὐδὲν τοῖς ἄλλοις
προσεοικῶς, BJ 2.118). Anyway, Josephus proceeds to give a detailed exposition
(BJ 2.120-161) of the customs and views of the 'Essenes' who profess a
'more rigorous discipline'. The Pharisees, 'the leading school', are then dis­
cussed in a brief paragraph after which the Sadducees are dealt with in three
short remarks.

The Sadducees, the second order, deny Destiny altogether and hold that God is
beyond not only commissioning sin but even of seeing it; they say that humans are
free to choose between good and evil, and each individual must decide which of
them one will follow. The survival (τὴν διαμονήν) of the soul, punishments in
Hades, and rewards they deny completely (BJ 2.164).

The context of Josephus' remarks is important for the interpretation of
his observations. Josephus is explaining that the great majority of Judaeans
were, and still are positive towards the Romans, who now rule because God
decided so. Rebellion is actually strange to the true Jewish nature. At the end
of his description of Herod the Great's reign, when Judaean politics became
very messy, Josephus makes clear that it is the exceptions among the
Judaean who tend to revolt. These rebel leaders and false claimants to the
throne are tyrants, committed to personal enrichment whilst fighting among
themselves and terrorising other Judeans (e.g. 2.54-65). The Romans,
however, are patient and supportive of the innocent population (cf. 1.9-12).

At the point when he should be exposing the Herodian princes, he paints an
extremely attractive picture of the peaceful lifestyle of the Essenes (2.118–
166), sharply contrasting with the rebel factions. Josephus seduces his readers
to underestimate the turmoil of Judean politics and to admire the profoundly
philosophical heart and soul of Judaism.

2 The theme of the Jewish War is the fall of Jerusalem: why and how the temple
came to be destroyed. By isolating responsibility Josephus also wants to rouse
sympathy for the Jewish people. The first four books of BJ must be understood as a
prelude to BJ 5-6. That is, in BJ 1.31-2.118 Josephus indicates the fundamental roots of
dealing with the 'schools' is a digression from a digression from a digression. He starts
the section with a report of the deposition of Archelaus and the appointment of
Coponius and then narrates something like this: It was under Coponius, by the way,
that a Galilean named Judas started a revolt. This Judas, by the way, was a rabbi
(σοφιστὴς) with his own school. Now, by the way, there are three schools among the
Judaens. Then follows a lengthy description ending with 'this is all I want to say
about the schools' and only then he returns to the political settlement: Philip and
Herod Antipas continued to rule their tetrarchies (BJ 2.116–167). It is clearly an arti­
ficial insertion.
The reference to Judas the Galilean thus takes on special meaning. This man’s philosophy of freedom from all earthly masters is not in accordance with traditional Judaism. According to Josephus the Judeans do have respectable schools of thought. They discuss what is typical of cultured Romans and Greeks: fate, free will, providence, ancient traditions, piety. Judaism, in brief, does not deserve the widespread Roman denigration rampant after the war. There is elegance in Josephus’ persuasive attempts. There are a few rebels, who met their deserved fate, but true Judaism is not a menace. Jewish and Roman sympathies can meet as a coherent whole, the two nations do not have dissimilar traditions and aspirations. What he does is representing Judaism as a highly philosophical culture, comparable to the widely admired culture of the Greeks. Like theirs, Judaism has its spectrum of philosophical opinion.

Emulating other fashionable summaries of Greco-Roman philosophy, such as Diogenes Laertius’ Lives of Eminent Philosophers, the various schools are aligned by Josephus on a spectrum between two poles. The Essenes, the most balanced and meditative group represents the best amongst Jewish thought and deserves the greatest esteem. But even the description of the two opposites, the Pharisees and Sadducees, serves his portrait of a worthy, respectable nation; of people acting in acceptable, familiar ways. Beyond this Josephus seems to assume that the Sadducees are known, or at least that what he says is informative enough.

The Pharisees are friendly to one another and seek to promote concord with the community, but Sadducees have, even among themselves, a nasty attitude (τὸ ἂθος ἀγριώτερον) and in their relations with their peers are as rude as to foreigners (BJ 2.166).

This self-serving comment tells us nothing about the Sadducees themselves. We gather that Josephus thought them to be haughty (why?), and we notice his tendency to promote those who can be presented as supporting order and good relations—reflecting his own preferences. He actually tells us very little.

2.1.2 At the time of writing the Jewish War Josephus focused on the Essenes in his presentation of Jewish ‘philosophical thought’. About sixteen years later (93/94 CE, AJ 20.267), publishing the Antiquities, his interests have shifted somewhat, and a more pronounced interest in the Pharisees becomes evident. The Jewish ‘schools’ are discussed twice in the Antiquities.

The main motive for the later work is still the same as for the Jewish War: Jews are not the bizarre and anti-social people that some Greeks and Romans claim them to be. He defends Moses as a ‘law-giver’ who trained the Jews ‘in
piety and the exercise of other virtues' (*AJ* 1.5). In the Greco-Roman point of view civilisation is in search of *eudaimonia*. Various schools offered recipes for happiness: the Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, Platonists, Aristotelians, Skeptics. The Jews, according to Josephus, are no different; they too have various schools committed to virtue and the quest for happiness.

Josephus turns to the schools of Judaism in book 13 of the *Antiquities*. The context is the high priest Jonathan’s successes (161–142 BCE), particularly the friendship (φιλία) between Jews and Romans (13.163), and hence the Jews’ international respect (13.164–170). It is ‘at this time’ that there were three schools of thought among the Jews. To describe the schools Josephus mentions only the different opinions concerning Destiny. Changing his presentation in the *Jewish War*, he realigns his spectrum of philosophical diversity: the Essenes now occupy the fatalist end, opposite the Sadducees. The Pharisees assume the middle ground, for they assign some events to free will and others to fate. The Sadducees believe that all things lie within human power, we are responsible for our well-being and misfortune. Josephus abruptly ends his description, referring to his earlier work, and continues with his historical narrative (*AJ* 13.173).

Further on Josephus relates how John Hyrcanus achieved considerable success, which, as we all know, usually evokes envy (cf *BJ* 1.208). Particularly hostile to Hyrcanus were the Pharisees (13.288). Now, suddenly, the Pharisees are depicted as a school of great influence, capable of turning popular opinion against a king or high priest. Hyrcanus promptly ingratiated himself with the Pharisees, and in return was praised by them (13.289–290). A certain Eleazar, ‘who had a bad character and liked to quarrel’ then slandered Hyrcanus’ lineage. The Pharisees distanced themselves from this defamation, but a Sadducee friend of Hyrcanus, named Jonathan, suggested measuring the Pharisees’ loyalty by the severity of what the Pharisees prescribed as appropriate punishment for Eleazar. They replied that Eleazar deserved the whip and chains rather than the death penalty, as the Pharisees were ‘by nature gentle, particularly with regard to punishments.’ Such merciful tolerance (!) was unacceptable so Hyrcanus abandoned the Pharisees, joined the Sadducees and nullified the laws which the Pharisees had passed (13.293–
296). Hyrcanus and the Pharisees are depicted as exploited by opportunists. The Sadducees, initially only described in contrast to the Pharisees, are presented without profile and in a completely negative fashion.

The purpose of narrating this episode of intrigue is to explain that the Pharisees have passed on to the nation certain regulations handed down by former generations and not recorded in the laws of Moses, for which reason they are rejected by the Sadducean group, who hold that only those regulations should be considered valid which were written down, and that those which have been handed down by the fathers need not be observed. Because of these matters the two parties have come to have controversies and serious differences, the Sadducees having the confidence of the wealthy alone but no following among the common people, while the Pharisees have the support of the masses (AJ 13.297–298).

Josephus does not simply agree with the Pharisaic viewpoint, but presents them as ‘lenient’ and the Sadducees as unpopular. The distance between the two schools is due to their different attitudes toward the exegesis of scripture. Josephus actually admires the Sadducean emphasis on the laws of Moses, but grudgingly admits the popularity of the νόμους not reported in Scripture.4

In book 18 of the Antiquities the schools are mentioned once more. Though this book contains quite disparate materials, the reference (AJ 18.11–25) occurs in a position corresponding to the parallel discussion in the Jewish War, but this time about equal attention is devoted to each group. The three philosophies have now become ‘very ancient’ pertaining to the ‘things of the fathers.’

The context shows how Josephus’ motives determine his presentation of the schools. In the preceding paragraph he affirms his conviction that ‘innovation and vicissitudes in tradition’ contribute significantly to the destruction of people (AJ 18.9). The intrusive, novel and recent ‘fourth philosophy’ that appeared among the Judeans led to terrible tragedies (AJ 18.9–10).

Josephus seems to imply that from here on the three previous schools of thought, presumably traditional, ancient and legitimate, were joined by a fourth kind which led to rebellion. Josephus presents the three traditional philosophies for his gentle

4 Josephus can be critical of the Pharisees, and often laments their prominence (AJ 13.400–432, 17.41–45, 18.12–15; cf BJ 1.110; Vita 191). The focal point of his dislike is their reputed ἀνεπίθετος in the laws of Moses. Yet, his commitment to order and good government becomes clear in his elaborate characterisations: ‘He approves of the Pharisees when they are a force for stability and he disapproves of them when they challenge the dominant, traditional and stable government and way of life of Judaism’ (Saldarini 1989:129). Discussion: Mason 1991:230–245; Saldarini 1989:128–133. I very much doubt the value of claiming Josephus’ inept handling of his sources as a solution to the problem of multi-faceted depictions of groups by him.
readers as a respectable and permanent part of Judaism, but he discredits the fourth philosophy, which led to the war, here and all through his book (Saldarini 1989:108–109).

Josephus is trying to impress his audiences with the depth and variety of Judaism and to expose the 'rebels' as the true anti-social elements abandoning their admirable traditions. The three schools deal with important, universal (from a Greco-Roman point of view) human issues, whilst the rebels do not and deserve the charge of misanthropy. This is not witless praise of Judaism, or direct confrontation of slander (e.g. AJ 3.180). Josephus' rhetoric is nuanced, complex and inviting. He is also emulating Hellenistic novel writing, his anecdotes about the characters's thoughts, emotions, motives and virtues are highly entertaining. He blends moralising and history and fiction and propaganda quite admirably.

In Antiquities more than inviting admiration is at stake. Despite his criticism of them, Josephus portrays the Pharisees as an impressive group. They have extensive power and prestige, the Sadducees can do only what the Pharisees want them to. He praises the influence of the Pharisees over the masses, and particularly over women (AJ 13.298, 17.41, 12.288). Josephus promotes order and strong government, and generally speaking, this is why the Pharisees can be admired. When individuals fail, or cause dissension and anarchy Josephus is negative, no matter who is involved.

But something else also becomes evident. Who, with enough support and willing to work with the Romans, should be supported amongst the various Jewish groups?

Josephus is volunteering an answer: the Pharisees, he says again and again, have by far the greatest influence with the people. Any government which secures their support is accepted; any government which alienates them has trouble. The Sadducees, it is true, have more following among the aristocracy. (We may guess that they were better represented at the Roman court and that Josephus was trying to answer this objection.) But they have no popular following at all and, even in the old days when they were in power, they were forced by public opinion to follow the Pharisees' orders (Smith 1956:76).

5 Misanthropy, as is well known, was a common accusation against Jews in antiquity; cf. e.g., AJ 16.174–178. See also Meagher 1979:4–7; Bilde 1988:118–121; Botha 1995b:1006; Moehring 1975:155–156.

6 Josephus 'takes great pains to entertain his readers, to write excitingly and to shape his account in a dramatic and also often in a rhetorical form' (Bilde 1988:204). He appeals 'to the reader's desire to be entertained' (Moehring 1975:156–157). See also Mason 1992:70–71; Downing 1982:558. This gives special nuance to the fact that in the school passages all three schools are portrayed positively' (Mason 1991:374).
In his *Jewish War* Josephus never thought the Pharisees’ influence important enough to mention—they probably were not that influential.

2.1.3 In his autobiography Josephus claims that when he was sixteen years old—bear in mind that he also claims that at age fourteen he had won ‘universal acclaim’ (πάντως ἐπηρεάσευσε) for his love of books and the chief priests and leaders constantly consulted him for references and matters of exegesis (*Vita* 9)—he decided to personally examine the three schools into which the Jewish people are divided. He submitted to hard training and laborious exercises and passed all three courses (*Vita* 10). Not content, he then became the devoted disciple of the ascetic called Bannus for three years. During his nineteenth year he returned to the city and started to organise his life according to the rules of the Pharisees, a school with some resemblances to ‘that which the Greeks call the Stoic school’ (*Vita* 12).

With his *Vita* Josephus is persuading his audience that he is of eminent priestly and royal descent; he is a priest with immaculate knowledge of the Jewish scriptures. His discussion of his education fits in with that aim. He is not a common Jew, but a precocious lad. A knowledgeable Greco-Roman audience will immediately recognise the picture: another famous *Wunderkind*, one of those who not only surpassed their peers but their superiors too, like Homer, Aeschines, Appolonius of Rhodes, Nicolaus of Damascus, Ovid, Moses, Alexander the Great, Augustus, Titus, Appolonius of Tyana (and also Jesus of Nazareth). What we have is the story of the young aristocrat who attends the various academies and chooses a life philosophy.

In his treatise commonly called *Against Apion*, Josephus again picks up the themes of the *Jewish War* and the *Antiquities*. This ‘nation of philosophers’ (*Ap* 1.179), by obeying the laws of Moses, ‘promotes piety, proper relations with each other, and humanity towards the world at large’ (*Ap* 2.1.6).

7 Josephus probably did not become a Pharisee. *Vita* 12 says simply that Josephus began to involve himself in public affairs, generally following the Pharisaic perspective (see Mason 1991:325–356). After all, even the Sadducees had to submit to the Pharisees!


One aspect of this presentation of the attractiveness of the Mosaic code and the Jewish constitution that may assist in understanding Josephus' characterisation of the Sadducees is his own faith in continued existence after death (or, in his words, of a 'renewed existence' and at the turn of the ages 'a better life', Ap 2.217–219). To many early Christians resurrection was a very important tenet of faith; similarly Josephus harboured intense feelings about reincarnation (BJ 3.374; AJ 18.14; see Mason 1991:156–170). The convictions concerning the reality of existence after death and providence in history are the major distinctions between the schools according to Josephus. It could be that, like today, denial of existence after death generated strong feelings, something that alienated Josephus from Sadducean convictions.

2.1.4 Apart from very generalising depictions, the Sadducees feature in but a few episodes narrated by Josephus. The events involving John Hyrcanus, ex-Pharisee (AJ 13.293–298), who sided with the Sadducees for the remainder of his reign because of some criticism by one of the Pharisees has been referred to. Under Alexander Janneus opposition to the Pharisees continued but they became the dominant influence in the government of Alexandra Salome. Thereafter, strangely enough, absolutely nothing about the activities of the Sadducees in the history of Judaea for more than a century is mentioned by Josephus.

Much later, just before the war with Rome, the high priest Ananus is said to be one of the Sadducees; Josephus adds another obscure characterisation: the Sadducees 'are indeed more merciless than any of the other Jews...when they sit in judgement' (AJ 20.199).

Given their supposed importance in Judaean politics it is curious that Josephus hardly refers to individual Sadducees in any of his works at all. His generalisation about their supposed domination by the Pharisees is belied by his historical narrative.11 When he discusses their beliefs, the 'most striking feature about these lists is that no single belief appears in all of them. When Josephus enumerated the Sadducees' doctrines not one element of their system of beliefs so impressed Josephus or his source(s) that it immediately came to mind when he set down his descriptions of their concepts' (Porton 1992:892). The artificiality of his claim to have 'fully investigated' the schools of Jewish thought (Vita 10) confirms the suspicion that Josephus had, in fact, experienced very little exposure to these schools.12 Even if his descriptions of

11 Smith 1956:77–79; Grabbe 1992:485; Sanders 1985:316. The rabbis also like to tell stories in which the Sadducees are intimidated; perhaps the rabbis have 'rabbinized' Pharisaic history (cf Cohen 1984:37).
12 Cf Attridge 1984:186. Morton Smith argues that Josephus made use of a 'composite' account of the three Jewish sects as source for his portrayal—hence the
the Jewish schools are accurate, 'they certainly are not coherent' (Cohen 1987:147).

Since Josephus concedes that the Sadducees count some of the worthiest citizens among them ('men of the highest standing', AJ 18.17) one wonders why he seems so unenthusiastic about them. Many of the distinguished citizens discussed by Josephus clearly shared his moderate politics. As he does praise some of these leaders for their wisdom, why does he not admit that they belonged to the Sadducees? And when he praises a Sadducee (Ananus, BJ 4.318–320) he does not mention any Sadducean affiliation, we have to deduce that from the Antiquities, where he does not praise Ananus. It seems to me the answer lies in Josephus' religious convictions, among all the other tendencies discernible in his works.

Josephus, I suggest, is disguising his aversion to Sadducean philosophical convictions, or religious beliefs. He does not want to disclose the party affiliation of the moderate chief priests and other aristocrats: he likes their politics but despises their religio-philosophical views. In the Antiquities, furthermore, he is promoting good government and order and he suggests that, generally speaking, this lies the way of the Pharisees.

2.2 Rabbinic sources

Whereas Josephus concentrates on events and ignores socio-religious developments, the rabbinic literature ignores events and concentrates on religious matters (cf Sandmel 1969:60; Cohen 1984:41; Saldarini 1989:9). The rabbinic authors tend to identify with the Pharisees, so the Sadducees are usually bested in the arguments narrated. In these stories, the Sadducees 'are not legitimate participants in the numerous debates which go on among the sages, but an outside group to be refuted and scorned' (Saldarini 1989:301). Sometimes they are actively slandered.

Another problem is that in later rabbinic literature the name 'Sadducee' seems often to be interchangeable with 'Boethusian' or 'Samaritan'. If
'Boethusian' is a reference to the family of Boethus, a family that provided a number of high priests from the time of Herod on, the association seems understandable. Saldarini (1989:227–228) correctly cautions that 'it is far better to keep groups with distinct names separate, even if we know little about them.' Furthermore, later manuscripts and printings of rabbinic literature use the name 'Sadducee' in place of the description 'aberrant' or 'heretic' to avoid medieval Christian censors, who suspected references to Jewish Christians (Stemberger 1995:40; Guttmann 1970:160).

The Mishnah ascribes to the Sadducees nine halakhic positions (5 in contrast to those of the Pharisees); most of these (6) deal with matters of purity—clearly mirroring the interests of the later rabbis. According to the Mishna the Sadducees disagree with Pharisees who represent views affirming those of the later rabbis. The reports do not show them arguing for less lenient positions nor do they always rely on alternative biblical exegesis, but their opinions consistently challenge the authority of the rabbis and their reasoning. The debates are generally of the most technical and trivial sort, and, of critical interest, the rabbinic texts do not support Josephus' contention that the Sadducees deny the 'traditions of the fathers'—a point the rabbis would surely have exploited.

The Tosepta stories, with no fundamentally new information about the Sadducees or Boethusians, reflect 'the simple joy of storytelling' (Stemberger 1995:63). The superiority of the rabbinic points of view are depicted dramatically, and the dire consequences for those departing from them are made clear. The Talmud, in general, remains close to the Tosepta in parallel narratives concerning the Sadducees, though the versions are treated quite freely.

14 The family of Boethus is an Alexandrian clan who settled in Jerusalem (through alliances with Herod the Great). They, supposedly, 'constituted the backbone of the Sadducean party' according to Rajak (1983:55). The evidence is much more opaque than her statement suggests. For a discussion of the house of Boethus see Stern 1982:49–55.

15 Yadayim 4.6–7 (on whether Holy Scripture renders the hands unclean, on the purity of a stream of water and on whether one is culpable when servants cause damage); Erubin 6.2 (some means of extending the limits of a Sabbath day's journey was rejected by the Sadducees); Makkot 1.6 (for the Sadducees false witnesses were to be punished only after the falsely accused had received punishment—here the Sadducees are more lenient than the Pharisees); Parah 3.7 (on practices surrounding the burning of the heifer); Niddah 4.2 (the impurity of Sadducean daughters and women). Reference to the Boethusians: Menahot 10.3 (cf also Hagigah 2.4) (apparently the Sadducees/Boethusians interpreted the reference to the Sabbath in Lv 23:15–16 in its most natural sense, the 'first day' following the seventh weekly Sabbath after the wavesheaf day; they also seem to have rejected the popular customs of pouring water and beating with willow branches at the Feast of Tabernacles). I consulted Danby 1933 and Neusner 1988a.
These texts are not useful for historical analysis (Stemberger 1995:51–64). The Babylonian Talmud suggests that the Sadducees only accept what is explicitly found in the Torah.16

In the Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan, a maxim of Antigonus of Soko dealing with compensation is reported: slaves should serve their master with no thought of reward. The saying then receives a gloss in which Antigonus’ saying is criticised by his disciples as it implies that the ancestors of the Torah had no knowledge of the belief in the resurrection of the dead. Consequently these disciples withdrew from Torah (they made themselves heretics). They are identified as the Sadducees and Boethusians. In recension A a nice piece of polemic is included: the Sadducees prefer the good life (‘they would make use of silver and gold utensils all their lives’) saying of the Pharisees that they inflict suffering on themselves in this world, but in the world to come will have nothing (implying that the Sadducees at least have something in this world, ARN A5).17 In recension B, probably the older version, the exposition seems to emphasise that ‘fear and awe’ are necessary to inherit the life of the world to come (ARN B10). Additionally, the Pharisees and Sadducees do not appear diametrically opposed in recension B, like they do in A.18 Though this is ostensibly an explanation of the origins of the Sadducees (through misunderstanding their teacher, of course), it tells us nothing more than the actuality of some debate about reward after death.

What we have, then, is mostly justification and illustration of rabbinic conceptual development in the form of debate with the ‘Sadducees’—not always conflict. Lightstone (1975:217), analysing Tannaitic traditions (i.e., the earliest rabbinic references) which juxtapose both the Pharisees and the Sadducees (or Boethusians), concludes:

First, the data provide no support for the commonly proposed, general principles which are said to have divided the two sects. Moreover, on the basis of the tradi-

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16 B Sanhedrin 33b (referring to matters accepted by both the rabbis and the Sadducees, i.e. the written word; cf Schachter 1935:211) and b Horayot 4a–4b: the Sadducees do not accept the oral Torah (cf Jaffee 1987:83–91). The insinuation in b Yebamot 63b—Sadducees are fools as they say there is no God—is probably false as the reference to the ‘Sadducees’ is text-critically suspect (cf Slotki 1936:424).

17 Goldin 1955:39; Neusner 1986:47–48. This is historically a ‘worthless anecdote’ (Stemberger 1996:63; Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:406. ARN A does not actually list Zadok and Boethus as direct pupils of Antigonus, as does ARN B.

18 Saldarini 1975:85–88, esp :87–88. Brief discussion in Stemberger 1995:64–66. The starting point for this traditional discussion is the statement by Antigonus reported in m Abot 1.3. Antigonus is one of the Torah scholars linking the prophets with the rabbis. We only know his name (cf Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:360; Stemberger 1996:63).
tions...examined...I can suggest no alternative rubrics. Second, the historical veracity of even these best data is hardly unquestionable... The tendenz of most of the traditions is...to rhetoric and vilification. None are necessarily early. The most important result of our study is, therefore, a negative one. It does not appear that the road back to the nature of the pre-70 controversy between the Sadducees and the Pharisees is through Rabbinic literature.

2.3 The New Testament

In Luke’s perspective, a couple of years after Jesus’ crucifixion, the Sadducees are associated with the high priest. They are the dominant group in the Sanhedrin, although there are also Pharisees, such as Gamaliel (Ac 4:1, 5:17). Late in Paul’s career, according to Luke, the Sanhedrin appears more evenly divided between Sadducees and Pharisees. The Sadducees are able, nevertheless, to keep Paul in chains. About the Sadducees Luke tells us that they do not believe in angels nor in the resurrection, a bone of contention neatly exploited by Paul (Ac 23:6–8). Though, as Haenchen (1971:639) appropriately points out, if we read this as an historical report, the people act very strangely indeed.

The earlier report, when the chief priests and Sadducees broke in on Peter (and John) preaching in the temple, also refers to the resurrection from the dead as a point of conflict. The story in Acts 4 is

one of those lively tableaux or dramatic scenes which Luke prefers to unadorned dogmatic exposition for the purpose of bringing home to the reader the justice and obligation of preaching Christ, and showing from the example of the Apostles, those ἄνθρωποι ἀγράμματοι καὶ ἴδιωται, how the Christian, certain of divine assistance, should fearlessly bear witness for his Lord, unquelled by police, arrest or official interdiction (Haenchen 1971:223–224).

Luke wants to show that the resurrection of Jesus, and his messiahship, are not contrary to Jewish faith; the bridges between Judaism and Christianity have not been burned (cf Botha 1995a:152–153).

It is Luke’s honest conviction that fellowship between Pharisaism and Christianity is in the end possible: the Pharisees also hope for the Messiah, await the resurrection of the dead. In this they are at one with the Christians. Their mistake is only that in this hope and faith they are not consistent where Jesus is concerned (Haenchen 1971:643).

Opposition to Christianity is voiced only by one ‘group’ the αἱρεσις τῶν Σαδδουκαίων (Ac 5.17) among the Jewish people, but not by the most precise school, the Pharisees (ἀκριβεστάτη αἱρεσις, Ac 26.5; cf Haenchen 1971:214–215). The Sadducees, in the narrative of Acts, turn out to be the (only) real enemies of the Christians (Haenchen 1971:214–215, 244, 248, 273, 382).
In their Gospels, Mark and Luke mention the Sadducees only once each. Mark's mention of the Sadducees (Mk 12.18-27) is designed to show that they 'know neither the scriptures nor the power of God'—that is, the correct things to be read into the Bible is demonstrated by Mark's Jesus. Matthew both retains that reference (22:23) and inserts yet another half-dozen references to them (3:7; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 22:34). Matthew, like Luke in his Acts, intensifies the guilt of the ignorant Sadducees (note how, in Mt 22.29, Matthew changes Mark's question to a flat declaration; cf Gundry 1982:446). The 'leaven' of the Sadducees (Mt 16.5–12) is indistinguishable from that of the Pharisees.

What we learn is, once more, very little. The Gospel authors refer to the Sadducees, but they appear as mere ciphers to fill out the characterisation of Jesus' opponents. They 'never get beyond the cliché of denying the resurrection' (Stemberger 1995:37).

2.4 Sadducees in the Qumran literature?

In 1955 North published a study suggesting a relationship between the Sadducees and the Qumran literature. The major points adduced are a connection between saduq/sadduqim, Sadok and Sadducee; that priest and sadokite are practically interchangeable nomenclature and some other proximate resemblances. Though North affords the Sadducees at least an 'unprejudiced and sympathetic' hearing (1955:66), it is doubtful whether a connection can be made on these grounds.

More recently, Schiffman has argued that some important texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit traits of the Sadducees. Building on the Temple Scroll and more extensively on 4Q394–4Q399 (or 4QMMT) Schiffman believes that the Qumran sect either 'was not Essene, but was Sadducean, or

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19 We can understand what Mark is saying; we cannot say whether this is a typical Sadducean argument or possibly a representative debate. I accept Pesch's judgement: 'eine ernstende Geschichte' (1977:230). Gundry notes that 'the case looks contrived' (1993:701). Bolt (1994) suggests that the Sadducees are alluding to the Book of Tobit, and that the resurrection of Israel is under discussion. If allusions to Tobit is to be found in Mark, it is due to Mark's narrating; Bolt's interesting 'intertextual approach' does not further understanding of the historical Sadducees.

20 According to Mark Jesus warns his disciples against the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of the Herodians (Mk 8.14–21).

21 Qimron & Strugnell (1985:400) suggested as title for this halakhic letter, which has survived in six manuscripts, 'Some of the works of Torah'—Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah, hence the abbreviation MMT. García Martínez (1994:77–85) includes a translation of a 'composite text', compiled by Strugnell and Qimron, with translations of the various fragments of this halakhic letter.
that the Essene movement must be totally redefined as having emerged out of Sadducean beginnings' (1990:24).

According to Schiffman, in the aftermath of the Maccabean revolt, a small and devoted group of Sadducean priests probably formed the community that became the Qumran sect. ‘Other moderately Hellenized Sadducees remained in Jerusalem, and it was they who were termed Sadducees, in the strict sense of the word, by Josephus in his descriptions of the Hasmonean period and by the later rabbinic traditions’ (Schiffman 1991:111).

4QMMT does show some interesting agreements with supposed Pharisee/Sadducee polemic (Vanderkam 1991:46–47; Schiffman 1990:23–24, 1994:47–48, 54). There is also some consistency between Sadducean complaints about Pharisaic laxity in the sphere of purity, as reported in tannaitic texts, and laws found in the Temple Scroll (Baumgarten 1980).22 The picture is, however, very complex: Qumran halakhot cannot be clearly identified as either Pharisaic or Sadducean (Dimant 1984:525). The best we can claim with confidence is that some halakhic disputes have been an issue for a very long time: MMT shows ‘that the rabbinic interpretation of Temple and purity laws was already known and well enough established to become the target of sectarian polemics in the Hasmonean period’ (Baumgarten 1994:35).

Finding detail about the Sadducees in Qumran literature assumes more than we know at this stage. The parallels between Josephus and the Scrolls regarding the Essenes (cf Beall 1988), the difficulties in finding a ‘system’ or group Tendenz among the diversity of the Scrolls (even among the so-called explicitly sectarian texts23) and the lack of information about the Sadducees’ history, all caution against such conclusions.

On the other hand, research along these lines shows the intricacy of historical reconstruction, and ultimately leads to more sophisticated understand-

22 Schiffman, in his various relevant publications, emphasises the agreements in rulings of 4QMMT and the Temple Scroll with regard to temple worship (e.g. Schiffman 1994:54–55). In his later study Baumgarten speaks of the ‘congruity between the Sadducee and Qumran exegetes’ but (convincingly) points to opposite theological views and the lack of other significant indications of agreement or congruity (1994:34). He maintains his ‘rather conservative’ assessment of the similarities, speculating that perhaps they are the result of converging approaches (1994:36). Strugnell also advances a tentative explanation: ‘MMT could have been earlier than they [the standard Qumran texts] or stood on another branch of the Sadducean family tree’ (1994:68).

23 Use of Qumran literature (whether for historical interpretation or comparisons) cannot simply be done on the mere basis of a text being part of the Scrolls. That is, the identification of which texts specifically reflect the views of ‘the’ Qumran community is in fact quite complex; it is absurd to equate ownership with agreement—many scholars ‘have been surprisingly slow to address this question’ (Vanderkam 1991:44). See also Newsom 1990:168–179; Cohen 1987:151.
ing. In short, such research provides just another mandate for the ‘task of rewriting the history of Judaism in the second commonwealth’ (Lightstone 1983:40).

3 WHAT WE DO KNOW: AN OVERVIEW

It has become clear that the evidence on the Sadducees is far more complicated than many discussions let on. What can we say at this stage?

3.1 Common Judaism

The first, crucial point to realise is that any focus on the so-called ‘parties’ of first century Judaism must seriously distort our impression of ‘being Jewish’ in antiquity. This is an important point. There is something profoundly wrong with a depiction of early Judaism in terms of its supposed four sects or schools.

It is not only a question of recognising diversity, but particularly of not misconstruing the variety. All of these groups believed themselves to be Jews. Normative (or standard, or general) Judaism of the time is not that of the Pharisees. The great, overwhelming majority of Palestinian Jews were not members of any sect. For most of these people ‘religion’ consisted of some compromise or configuration between tradition (including Torah), the temple and ‘charity’. In the words of the famous high priest, Simon the Righteous: ‘The world stands on three things, on the Torah, on the temple service, and on acts of kindness’ (m Aboth 1.2).

The majority of Jews were ordinary peasants, who entertained a popular and equivocal, but at times also deeply religious, loyalty to the divinely ordained institutions of Israel—the temple, the law, the holy city, the holy land and religio-national festivals. ‘Among these common people were smaller groups exhibiting a variety of charismatic, communal, and political characteristics’ (Rhoads 1976:33)—among these groups we find our Sadducees and Pharisees. The groups were small but—in Josephus’ presentation—the Pharisees appear to be the largest group, followed by the Essenes and then Sadducees.

24 Josephus claims that there were only a few Sadducees and, at the time of Herod at least, about 6 000 Pharisees. The references are: AJ 13.298, 17.42 (I should add that AJ 17.41-45 is a confusing passage, and various scholars have tried to solve its contradictions, mostly by alluding to Josephus’ sources; see, e g, the note ad loc in the Loeb ed). In AJ 18.20 Josephus informs us that ‘more than 4 000’ practise the Essene way of life. This number is also mentioned by Philo Quod omnis probus liber 18.75. It is clear that the sects had very few members within the context of the population, cf Baumgarten 1987:77 n 56.

25 That we have a source (Josephus in this instance)—important and valuable as his
It is clear that being a 'sectarian' was not a fulltime vocation. Persons identifying with one of these 'schools of thought' were first of all artisans or priests or aristocrats or council members (or even generals; cf, e.g., BJ 3.11, AJ 20.199, Vita 191). That sectarian life was mostly a secondary pursuit is evident in serious situations (like the war against the Romans) when one would expect such differences to play important roles, but they never did: the divisions among Judaeans (like over the war issue) did not run along sectarian lines. 'Although the role of the sects in this historical period was very important, the allegiance to or influence of social class, geographic origin, priestly affiliation, or vocational economic group may have been stronger than sectarian ties' (Rhoads 1976:33; cf Smith 1956:71-2, 81; Cohen 1987:172-173; Kraft 1975:188-189; Sanders 1992:47-51).

It is within the context of common Judaism that some people, small groups, devoted themselves to some peculiar practices, and attempted to maintain differences. At some stages a few, at others many Jews could support a 'school' for a variety of reasons. Most of the time the multitudes did not bother.

3.2 School, party, sect?

Given this context, it becomes difficult to determine exactly how one should characterise the Sadducees as a group. Were they a school, a sect, a religious group, a faction, a political party? For Mantel (1977) they are basically a political party with a nonreligious orientation, Smith (1958) sees them as a 'philosophy', McCready (1992:91) describes them as a small fraternity spending their energies in the formation and maintenance of state and cult, and to Harvey (1982:43) they 'constituted less a religious party than a social class'.

The description 'party' is wholly inappropriate for a number of reasons. Judaeans were not members of 'parties' or 'denominations' at all. We, today, are so familiar with democratic countries where virtually all voters have primary party allegiances—'The electoral systems of modern states force us into

 literature does not refer to the Essenes, so dear to Josephus, at all; nor does it seem very aware of the Christians. The Talmud knows of '24 groups of heretics' at the time of the overthrow of the temple (p Sanhedrin 10.6 29c,57-62; cf Wevers 1981:293-294). The New Testament knows about Pharisees and Sadducees, but is completely ignorant of the Essenes. Philo, another first century contemporary, recounts somewhat about the Essenes (Quad omnis probus liber sit 12.75-87; Hypothetica 11.1-18), but does not mention Pharisees or Sadducees. Even the connection between Pharisees and the rabbis is highly complex (Saldarini 1989:8; Cohen 1984). The diversity in early Judaism has become a well established fact (cf, from a vast literature, Kraft 1975) and need not be discussed here. We know tantalisingly little of the many 'schools of thought' (sects or parties) of early Judaism.
thinking of nations as consisting of parties' (Sanders 1992:19)—that we ignore the simple fact that in antiquity this was not so. 'The notion that a population should distribute itself among a few parties, with competing platforms, had not arisen, nor did it arise during the period that we study' (Sanders 1992:19).

The term 'sect' can also be misleading; though it quite correctly carries a religious connotation it suggests an aberrant group deviating from the normative group. Who or what would the dominant or normative point of view be, against which the Sadducean sect stood? More to the point, in its technical sense, 'sect' refers to an organised (i.e., with an administrative structure, including a process of initiation and rules of conduct), separate group that asserts an exclusive claim on understanding God's will (see Cohen 1987:125–127; Saldarini 1989:305). In this sense, only the Essenes and the early Christians can be described as Jewish sects of the first century (cf. Cohen 1987:172).

Josephus uses the word αἱρετικός to describe the various philosophies of Judaism; he does this to find a connection with his Greek readers.26 He evokes the idea of 'academies', schools formed by teachers or philosophers. 'The αἱρετικός of the philosopher, which in antiquity always includes the choice of a distinctive Bios, is related to δόγματος to which others give their πρόσκλησις' (Schlier 1964:181). It could be, of course, that Josephus is not that far off the mark, particularly with regard to the Essenes and the Pharisees.

Luke too makes use of the term αἱρετικός, and like Josephus it is in the sense of school: the Sadducean school (Ac 5.17) and the Pharisaic school (Ac 15.5). Christianity too can be seen as a school (Ac 24.5, 28.22 and esp 24.14): until all Jews recognise Jesus as the way, he is quite willing to accept that Christianity is 'a school' of Judaism.

It seems as if at least some of the Sadducees were cultural and social leaders, who sometimes played a more active role in politics. But their identity is broadly based on political, economic, and societal factors with which their religious beliefs are inextricably interlaced.

The point of asking about their group identity is to clarify their relationship to Jewish society. It seems best to characterise them as a 'school of

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26 Morton Smith demonstrates how Josephus, in his description of the Essenes, inclines towards Greco-Roman piety (1958:288), he 'adapted his account to the prejudices of his expected pagan readers' (288). Schurer, Vermes & Millar (1979:393) too emphasise that we have to deal with a strongly Hellenised presentation. Josephus compares the Pharisees to the Stoics (Vita 12), the Sadducees to the Epicureans (AJ 10.277, 13.172) and the Essenes to the Pythagoreans (AJ 15.371).
thought': they were Jews who had some distinct ideas on some of the important issues that concerned several interest groups in early Judaism. The issues that led to diversity in the Judaism of the time were purity decisions, the calendar, the exegetical process, temple ritual, and views on God's responsibility for human affairs (Smith 1961, esp:359; Daube 1969:9; Sanders 1992:13–29).

Making use of the—by now almost conventional—social-scientific analysis of agrarian societies, Saldarini (1989:35–75) refers to the class system as developed by G Lenski and suggests that this provides a general structure for understanding the positions and interactions of a group such as the Sadducees (39). He notes that the upper classes (the ruler, the governing class, retainer class, merchant class, and priestly class) consist of about 1–2% of the population (40). The Hasmonean families, Herod and his descendants, and the Roman governors are of this class. 'To some extent the chief priests functioned as part of this class, but they were not as Hellenized nor as accepted in Roman society as Herod and his successors' (41).

The Sadducees are, seen this way, members of the governing class and priestly class. Though the priestly class often controlled great wealth, its wealth was insecure. Only the leaders of the priestly class were part of the governing class; generally the priestly class was subordinate to rulers and governing groups. They tended to develop an independent power base (often claiming independent, divine authority) and then compete with the political governing class and ruler.

This is a useful way of gaining an overview and seeing how different parts of the society interacted. The evidence does suggest that much of the Sadducees activities should be located at the overlap of the priestly and governing classes. But Lenski's analysis is not without problems and, as Saldarini reminds us, the particularities of Judean/Palestinian society in the Greco-Roman world is very incompletely covered by such a model.

Saldarini prefers to see the Sadducees as a group representing 'a mode of living Judaism popular among the governing class' (305). A way of living Jewish life, certainly, but the phrase 'among the governing class' needs a closer look.

Josephus says that only a few men are cognisant of Sadducean doctrine (ἐίς ὀλίγους ἄνδρας), but they are men of the highest standing (AJ 18.17).

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27 Space prohibits a proper discussion, but see Grabb 1984:125–130 on the difficulties in Lenski's conception of class.

28 Saldarini emphasises the influence of Josephus on our views, and (45) stresses that this class analysis does not comprise watertight categories nor is it adequate to explain all the complexities of ancient society.
Now we must ask, if Josephus, in his presentation of Jewish thought, could select from a much larger number of schools, why the Sadducees? Why choose them in particular if their thought represents but a very small minority who accomplishes practically nothing? Can it really be that we are talking only about the prominent males of four or five families ('chief priests')?

We must beware of overrating (or underrating) any one group in Judaean society.

Most reconstructions see second Temple society in simple terms, with a few groups vying for power. This simplification is based on a naive reading of the sources. Neither the priests nor the aristocracy enjoyed serene dominance during the Greco-Roman period (Saldarini 1989:307).

How influential was the Sadducean way of looking at things? We really do not know—we do not even know exactly what the Sadducean way of looking at things was! But, reading somewhat between Josephus' lines, it seems as if, from his point of view, they were influential and, particularly at the time of the Antiquities, needed to be underrated in order to establish a specific outlook. Josephus also does not want to let on that there could be widespread disbelief in life after death among Judaeans.

It seems best to picture the situation as one of Sadducean leaders among the chief priests, with a number of prominent followers and an indeterminate number of more or less committed disciples among the priests and levites. The priests and levites numbered, according to Jeremias (1969:205), with their families, about 50,000. Furthermore, the Sadducees' impact among the urban residual groups (the majority of urbanites, Saldarini 1989:46-47) is unknown, but it could not have been non-existent; these groups existed as functionaries of the powerful and one can hardly imagine that loyalty in a strict patron-client society was manifested at cross purposes economically and religiously.

3.3 The history of the Sadducees

Usually, the history of the Sadducees is presented in a narrative of political involvement, a programme comprising three phases: (1) Since the Persian period the 'priestly upper classes' were in charge of conducting political affairs. These leading priests, though not exclusively Sadducean, gradually became estranged from 'Jewish religious interests'. The leading priests collaborated with foreign powers in order to maintain their positions of eminence.

McCready (1992) also proposes that the 'Sadducees were of far greater consequence than researchers frequently are led to believe' (82).
(2) Under the Maccabees the Sadducean aristocracy and allies retreated ‘of necessity’ into the background. After the revolt the office of the high priest remained vacant until Jonathan Maccabeus was appointed and a new dynasty (the Hasmonaeans) was founded. Some limited compromise was reached between the Hasmonaeans and the Sadducean aristocracy (i.e., some seats in the Gerousia), and such was the situation until John Hyrcanus. (3) ‘From then on, however, the Sadducees became once more the real ruling party’ (Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:413). A brief interruption under Alexandra did not last long. ‘Despite the growth of Pharisee spiritual authority, in politics the Sadducean aristocracy was able to retain their hold, and that notwithstanding the fall of the Hasmonaeans and notwithstanding Herod’s proscription of the old pro-Hasmonean nobility’ (413). This position of dominance was retained until the downfall of the Jewish state in 70 CE. ‘Political leadership was their main function, and when national independence came to an end, so did they’ (414).

In other words: the Sadducees rose to power and influence by accepting Hellenization, this was interrupted by the revolt, but then they returned to full control under John Hyrcanus as ruler; thereafter they remained in power until the war with Rome.

However, despite the pleasing plot line suggested by such a presentation, we simply do not know as much. An emphasis on supposed political matters is also an uncritical adoption of Josephus’ point of view. The few statements made by Josephus, furthermore, cannot be combined into a coherent history of the Sadducees. The typical presentation reduces the Sadducees as one-dimensionally involved with the temple, and overemphasises the finality of the events of 70 CE.

It is naive to think that, bereft of the temple the Sadducees ‘conveniently rolled over and died,’ as Cohen (1984:28) warns us. They relied for their ‘identity’ on particular ideas—theological and/or halakhic—and ideas, as Goodman (1994:351) reminds us, ‘are hard to wipe out by military action.’ The cessation of the temple cult—only temporarily from the Sadducees’ point of view (it was after all standard practice in the Roman world to rebuild temples)—is no reason for the cessation of Sadducean thought. ‘Like the rabbinic sages they had every reason to preserve and develop their own ideas about the cult through the second and third centuries’ (Goodman 1994:351; cf Cohen 1984:33, 42).

3.4 Review

What are the main points of our investigation thus far that we can summarise?
3.4.1 The group appeared to be an entity with some political influence at the beginning of the Hasmonean era and continued to exist probably well into the second century.30

3.4.2 Some form of involvement of Sadducees with the priestly establishment seems to have existed: the possible connection between the name 'Sadducee' and 'Zadok'31, the family that held the high priestly line until the Hasmoneans; the possible association with the family of Boethus; Josephus' single reference to one high priest that was a Sadducee, without suggesting that it was unique; and Acts 5 suggesting that the Sadducees were the high priestly party.

To this we may also add that the rabbinic debates involving Sadducees seem to point to priestly practices.

3.4.3 An association with the priestly establishment and membership on the Sanhedrin points to the upper socio-economic groups and the governing class.

The important point, however, is to realise that not all priests or upper-class individuals were Sadducees, nor were all Sadducees priests or even wealthy (cf Grabbe 1992:487; Saldarini 1989:307; Buehler 1974:96–101). It would be realistic to assume that the Sadducean way of looking of things was at times more widespread than at others, particularly among urban groups.

3.4.4 They had views on (and relationships with) the high priesthood that differed from other groups. It is not that they were the high priests, but that they were involved with the high priests, and sought, through various ways

30 The very popular cliche that the diversity in early Judaism, particularly the Sadducees, came to an end with the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, is simply that: a poorly founded cliche (cf Grabbe 1992:487; Goodman 1994). Josephus, writing several books well after the war does not even hint at the possible termination of any of the sects. The earliest statement that we have that the Sadducees and Essenes no longer exist is in Epiphanius (Panarion 19.5.6–7) and he clearly states that the seven Jewish sects to be found in Jerusalem continued after the war until due passage of time they were dispersed and obliterated. Cohen (1984) argues that the significance of Yavneh lies not in the triumphant termination of non-Pharisaic sects, but in the creation of a society which tolerates disputes without producing sects.

31 It must be emphasised that this association, though very common in scholarly literature, is not clearcut at all. Firstly, the terms 'Zadok' and 'sons of Zadok' carry a wide range of meanings and references in the literature of early Judaism and several groups claimed to be Zadokites. The supposed connection between 'Sadducees' and 'Zadokites' etymologically is also shaky. See Baumgarten 1979:233–236; Davies 1987:51–72; Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:405–407; Meyer 1971:36–41; Saldarini 1989:225–227.
to have a 'Sadducean' high priest as much as, say the Pharisees, preferred one sympathetic to their viewpoints.

We may today doubt whether all the high priests during the Persian period actually were from the family of Zadok (the priest who supported Solomon as heir to David's throne, 1 Ki 1.28-45), but, reading the scriptures, Jews thought that this had been the case: 'the sons of Zadok, who maintained the responsibilities of my sanctuary when the people of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to serve me. They shall stand before me to offer me the fat and the blood, says the Lord God' (Ezek 44.15; cf 40.46, 43.19, 48.11). 'From 520 to 175 BCE the high priest had been (or was thought to be) a descendant of Zadok. That is a very long time, and many remained fiercely loyal to the descendants of Zadok and resented other high priests' (Sanders 1992:21).

The Hasmonean uprising initially attracted people with different opinions to each other; their achievements brought these differences to the fore. The various phases of Hasmonean success satisfied the goals of some and raised the fears of others. This is the general environment that led to establishment of many of the groups in early Judaism. A major source of friction was the developments surrounding the high priesthood.

Many aspects concerning the high priest mattered: his piety, his views on the interpretation of Torah, his attitude towards Hellenization, his relationship with foreign overlords. Most of all his lineage mattered. In fact, lineage could prove more important than policy (e.g., 1 Macc 7.12-16).  

3.4.5 What furthermore characterised the Sadducees was their apparent rejection of the afterlife, their claim of radical responsibility for human actions and their (non-Pharisaic?) hermeneutics.

4 SOCIAL ROLES, BELIEFS AND MORALS

With care, it is possible to say a little more about the Sadducees. 'The scanty statements supplied by the sources cannot be easily unified. The reason for

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32 Josephus, incidentally, mentions the three schools in the Antiquities when he describes the reign of Jonathan (160–143 BCE), the first 'national' Hasmonean leader. Specific stories about the Sadducees and Pharisees only come later (the time of John Hyrcanus, 134–104 BCE). The success of Jonathan and his descendants, Simon and John Hyrcanus, contributed to the explication of the distinctiveness of the schools.

33 A number of prominent Jews (the Hasideans) trusted a legitimate priest ('of the line of Aaron') despite evidence of treason. See Collins 1981:198; Goldstein 1976:336; Sanders 1992:18. Josephus cleverly names the dupes only 'some of the people' (and not the faithful or men learned in the Torah) and Alcimus' treachery becomes only apparent much later, AJ 12.297-401).
this seems to be that the Sadducees themselves were not a consistent phenomenon like the Pharisees, but a complex one, requiring to be considered from various angles' (Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:404). To understand the information in our sources we need to 'frame' it, to engage in some historicising, contextual thinking (cf Botha 1993, 1994:110-117).

4.1 Their political involvement varied with times

4.1.1 Sadducees and high priests

'The wooing of the provincial élites was one of Rome's most successful tools' (Purcell 1988:159). This patronising and cultivation of wealthy provincials profoundly influenced provincial politics. Many discussions of the Sadducees emphasise that the chief priests and leaders of the dominant families cooperated with the Romans, mainly striving to maintain the 'status quo' upon which their influence and prosperity hinged. In particular, in this view, it is the various high priests who played the major roles in such self serving activities.

For centuries politics in Judea was fairly straightforward: while a far off king took care of 'bigger' issues the high priest ran the temple and Jerusalem. But then the Hasmoneans created a local strong man, a military leader who assumed religious leadership. In 140 BCE the people of Jerusalem, 'the Jews and their priests', decided that Simon, son of Jonathan 'should be their leader and high priest for ever' (or until a trustworthy prophet should arise), and that 'he should be obeyed by all...and that he should be clothed in purple and wear gold' (1 Mace 14.41-43).

Not all liked the idea of an (appointed!) high priest who may behave like a king. Many simply wanted peace and were satisfied with the restored temple worship. Others felt that mere restoration of the old order (since the exile) was not enough. The traditional high priestly families lost power and influence. Even worse, when Herod came to power, the high priest became a kind of political football: the ruler controlled the office and appointed whom he wished. After Herod, Jews experienced the vagaries of Roman policies and interests. Despite all this, it is very clear that the successive high priests maintained not only power over but also influence with the majority of Jews.

34 To complicate things, the Hasmoneans did not easily succeed in establishing their power, as Josephus' account of the intrigues and internal struggles abundantly illustrates. 1 Maccabees, 'the gospel according to the Hasmoneans' written about 100 BCE (Nickelsburg 1987:117), attempts to connect the Hasmoneans with the Sadokite line (and Phineas) in order to establish their legitimacy (1 Macc 2.54; cf Goldstein 1976:8; Baumgarten 1979:234).
Very instructive is the career of Joazar, son of Boethus, who cannot be described as one of the successful high priests (for the sake of understanding, I assume a connection between the Sadducees and the Boethus family). Joazar received his appointment from Herod when he (Herod) held the high priest Matthias responsible for the commotion surrounding the golden eagle put up on the temple entrance (AJ 17.164). After Herod’s death a group of people, ‘with revolutionary ideas’ according to Josephus (BJ 2.5), protested against the execution of those who took the eagle down, and called for reform, starting with the replacement of Joazar with a man of ‘greater piety and purity’ (BJ 2.5–7; ‘more scrupulous in matters of the law and purity’ in AJ 17.207). Archelaus, despite a bloody furore, kept Joazar, and went to Rome for confirmation of his own office. When he returned (as ethnarch and not king as he hoped) he promptly deposed Joazar for having supported those who objected to Archelaus (AJ 17.339). But Joazar was reappointed. When, in 6 CE Quiρinius, legate of Syria, set up a census of Judea and considerable resistance presented itself, Joazar persuaded many of the people to comply (AJ 18.3). Despite his efforts there were uprisings and Joazar was deposed by Quiρinius because he had been ‘overpowered by a popular group’ (AJ 18.26).

A number of things are clear. The high priest was expected by the powers that be (the king, Herod or Archelaus, and later, the Romans) to be in control and not to let things get out of hand. When a high priest failed to prevent the ripping down of the eagle, and another failed to prevent some uprisings, both were held responsible. The expectation that a high priest should be effective is obvious. Furthermore, all the various ‘pious and zealous’ groups thought that the high priest should, and furthermore could, identify with them. The idea of the high priest as a simple pawn is a modern fiction. When Matthias had a sensual dream, a high priest was appointed in his stead for the single day of the Fast of Esther (AJ 17.165–167): nothing about any high priest is insignificant. And a high priest who was basically loyal to the political powers could even join in agitation against those to whom he owed his office (Joazar and Archelaus, AJ 17.339). But most astoundingly, many people could be persuaded by the high priest even when he championed an unpopular cause (the census).

Most high priests, including those of Sadducean persuasion, were not capricious collaborators; rather, they were sophisticated mediators. The high priest was the person set up ‘in between’, expected from both sides, people and government, to mediate and negotiate. The high priest’s responsibilities included representing the people to the ruler and the ruler to the people. It is far too facile to claim that the high priests were corrupt (Rajak 1984:22). ‘The high priests had to be able to get along with the secular power whether Herodian or Roman: this was not an option, but a necessary condition for
holding the office' (Sanders 1992:323). That some high priests demeaned the office is true. Not all of them did, and those who did were not necessarily Sadducees.

What our evidence suggests is that the Sadducees' relationship with the high priest should be seen as that of a group of people broadly of similar mind, in contact with the governing powers, council(s) of advisors and alliances with and around the high priests, involved in a great number of diplomatic activities, as well as the prevention of disturbances. It is not a matter of 'strong man' politics, but of sensibility; to satisfy both the secular ruler and the desires of the populace—though, when pinched, they usually urged the crowds to submit and thus maintained the peace.

To drive the point home, Ananus can also be considered. Identified as a Sadducee (in AJ 20.199), Josephus, in beautiful prose, bestows the most astounding praise upon him. Though he served only a few months in 62 (deposed for convening a συνέδριον, and involved in the execution of James the brother of Jesus) he remained a popular and prominent figure. Initially chosen as part of the leadership of the war effort (BJ 2.563ff), he tried to withstand the efforts of the Zealots and Idumaeans to gain control of Jerusalem. Ananus commanded extensive support (Josephus says 8500 died defending him, BJ 4.238, 305–318). Josephus' eulogises:

A man looked up to on every occasion and of the highest integrity, Ananus, and although distinguished by birth, position and reputation, he loved to treat even the humblest as his equals. Utterly devoted to liberty and with a passion for democracy, he always put the public welfare above his own interests (BJ 4.319–320).

The adoration goes on, so much that he appears 'the veritable counterpart of Pericles' (Feldman 1965:107 n d). Clearly Josephus' own values seep through in the panygeric, but what cannot be denied is that Ananus acted in the best interest of the people and received considerable support. Josephus' judgement is that, had Ananus lived, he would have negotiated acceptable terms with Rome. The fall of Jerusalem 'began with Ananus' death... In short, had Ananus lived, hostilities would indeed have ended. He was an eloquent speaker who could determine public opinion and he had already silenced his opponents' (BJ 4.319).

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35 Josephus lists some six principal events discrediting some of the high priests, all from the period when Agrippa 2 had the power to appoint the high priest, which he did 6 times in 7 years, 69–65 CE. See AJ 20.180–214.
37 Why the different picture in Antiquities? In the Antiquities Josephus does not relate Ananus' role in the war. He says that his hero is harsh in judgement, AJ 20.197–204, typical of the Sadducees. In his later works Ananus is depicted as one of Josephus' opponents, Vita 193–204, 216, 309—hence his rash temper and unusual bold manner (AJ 199)?
It is quite within the ambit of our evidence to see most high priests as honest brokers who had the welfare of many people at heart, mediating between various power groups. To probably most of the faithful adhering to Judaism in Palestine, the office of high priest was the one that really counted. The influence of the Sadducees in the high priestly circles does not make them the enemy of the people, but first and foremost the people accountable for the theocratic leadership.38

4.1.2 Sadducees and aristocracy

The Sadducees probably played a part among the so-called chief priests, the men who belonged to the four or five families from whom the high priests were drawn.39 We can hardly claim that the common people disliked or distrusted the chief priests: they followed them into war.

Naturally, the Jewish aristocracy was far more extensive than the chief priestly families. It is, however, quite difficult to differentiate and describe the various components of the Judaean aristocracy. The aristocratic lay groups seem to be covered by terms like oi δυνατοί, the powerful or oi γνώριμοι, the notables, or the elders of the people, oi πρεσβύτεροι τού λαοῦ, mentioned in the New Testament (e.g Mt 21.23). Then there are also the leaders (πρώτοι), probably lay and priestly authorities, the magistrates or rulers (οἱ ἐρχοντες) and the eminent, those of the highest authority (οἱ ἐν τέλει).40

38 The high priestly office is of considerable importance to Josephus too. The high priests are the successors of Moses, the guardians of the teaching that was revealed to Israel. Under the direction of the high priest, the priests serve as teachers and administrators of the divinely revealed laws (AJ 4.209–210, 304; Ap 2.185). He carefully enumerates the high priests—emphasising in his conclusion to the Antiquities that he has laid out the succession of kings and high priests (AJ 20.224–251, 261). Judaism’s teachings was not invented, nor corrupted: it was handed down carefully and intact to Josephus’ day because of the high priests. Hence his doubt about the Pharisees—too often they do not keep to the authentic laws. But he criticises the Sadducees too, when adherence to the laws of Moses is suspect. That is how Josephus explains the calamities that have befallen the Jewish people, some individual high priests have acted ‘lawlessly’.

39 Discussion: Schürer, Vermes & Millar 1979:234; Jeremias 1969:194. Did these ‘chief priests’ hold special offices, such as treasurer? (BJ 4.148).

40 As illustration one can refer to a historical anecdote from Josephus (BJ 2.232–244) where, in the unfolding of an event almost all these various groups are narrated as playing a part in one way or another. Also instructive with regard to the distinctions between various aristocratic groups are the events under Florus (BJ 2.301–337). Buehler (1974:20–52) discusses some aspects of how some of these terms in Josephus’ writings relate to classes of society.
Generally speaking, the various aristocratic groups acted as did the high priests. Though only a few aristocratic priests are named by Josephus, and practically none of the important laymen, they surely played a variety of roles, socially and politically. They would not have been of one mind either. During the revolt some tried to put down the rebellion (BJ 2.301-422), others fled as soon as danger lurked (BJ 2.556), yet others executed some of their aristocratic competition. Many stayed right through the war and survived the Zealot purges, some left the city at Roman appeals. The important thing to realise is that the aristocracy cannot be seen as a static group during these centuries. ‘The sources for this period give only a glimpse at the waxing and waning fortunes of numerous individuals and families among the Jewish elite as well as insurgent groups among the people and emerging leaders’ (Saldarini 1989:308). It would be unfair to simply equate the Sadducees and the aristocracy. We can only suspect Sadducee presence among many of these aristocratic groups, and imagine most of them doing what they thought to be the right thing to do.

Often, in descriptions, the Sadducees are pictured as ‘co-operating’, as more loyal to foreigners (particularly the Romans) than to ‘their own people’. But, since such descriptions can only be deduced from evidence provided by Josephus, it is mostly a case of taking Josephus’ point of view too unequivocally and a modern democratic bias too absolutely (today, we do not think good can come of aristocratic, hierarchical values). The instances of so-called co-operation narrated by Josephus mostly serve his ideology of good government consisting of order and discipline; the troublemakers are uniformly bad. In Josephus’ treatment the eminent citizens support the governors’ harsh treatment of political terrorists and religious fanatics. They cooperate in removing troublesome individuals, for instance, when the peasant Jesus son of Ananias (BJ 6.300-309) disrupts the (already tense) festival period in Jerusalem.

Looking beyond Josephus, we should bear in mind that Rome was going to hold someone responsible if things did not go their way. Once ‘a wealthy priest became high priest, he was virtually compelled to do his best to mediate between the populace and the Roman official in Caesarea or Syria. The same is true of the chief priests and prominent lay people who took a role in public affairs’ (Sanders 1992:331).

Obviously some aristocrats were greedy and self-seeking; others used their wealth and influence for what they believed to be good causes—amongst others, keeping Jews and Roman soldiers apart. The aristocrats also tried to present the people’s side of a dispute to the procurator or prefect, and urged for moderation. Some were prepared to lay their lives on the line in such causes (cf the conflict with the Galileans and Samaritans, BJ 2.232-244).
Our sources do not provide us with substantial evidence of maltreatment of the ordinary people. Most of the unfavourable stories told by Josephus deal with infighting among the aristocracy. And more to the point, it is the aristocratic generation of 59–66 CE that was not well loved. The events during the revolt clearly show that many aristocrats, both priests and laypersons, could pass the most rigorous test of loyalty and were not suspected of being self-serving (BJ 6.114).

John the Baptist (according to Lk 3.21) challenged tax collectors (probably people not born aristocrats but in positions of power) to collect no more than was appointed them. Philo too wrote about someone who gained power:

Capito is the collector of the imperial revenues in Judaea and he is very hostile to the people of the country. When he came there he was a poor man but by plunder and extortion he has amassed enormous wealth of every imaginable description (Legatio ad Gaium 199).

Of the many stories concerning the Judaean aristocracy (including the few about the Sadducees) we do not find this kind of accusation (cf Sanders 1992:85–89, 160, 185–186). The bad things they may have done do not seem to be the kind of things they are often accused of.

Like Josephus we can only generalise: some could have been self-seeking, some were concerned for the public welfare.

4.2 Jewish faithfuls

The starting point for understanding the faith and worship of the Sadducees, as Sanders (1992:332) reminds us, should be

that they shared the essential points of common Jewish theology: God had chosen Israel, and Israelites were to obey the law. They should love God, thank him for his blessings, and treat other people decently, as the law requires... They were, on the whole, good Jews.

Given that the Sadducees were part of the governing class, but not overlapping with it, they may have been a movement reacting against the assimilationist tendencies of some leaders (Saldarini 1989:302). ‘The balance between accommodating a foreign power and protecting a cultural tradition is difficult if not impossible to maintain and it is likely that disagreements in the governing class would have spawned groups and movements with different understandings of Judaism’ (Saldarini 1989:303).

If the Sadducees were from the governing class, as Josephus says, they were probably not a protest group in the proper sense, but a small group with particular ideas about how some parts of Jewish life ought to be lived and specific beliefs to go along with those practices (Saldarini 1989:299).
We cannot say if they were reformers or revolutionaries, but it would be fair to presume that they strove to protect the Jewish way of life. A standard criticism of the Sadducees is their supposed hellenistic tendencies, but our sources do not indicate this. In a sense, all of Jewish society, thought and literature of the period under review must be seen as interwoven with and reflective of so-called Hellenism, something increasingly stressed in current research.

4.3 Priests of the Jerusalem temple

The aspects emphasised by many scholars to have been characteristic of the Sadducees are their involvement with the temple and particularly temple related priestly duties. ‘One of the important elements of Sadducean ideology was the emphasis on the centrality of the Temple and Jerusalem in the life of the nation’ (Baumgarten 1979:237). As Meyer (1971:44) describes it:

‘to have the mind of the Zadokite or Sadducee is to be sustained by the concept of a particularist temple state which along the lines of traditional eschatological hopes is the seed for...the restoration of the idealised kingdom of Israel as David once reigned over it.

If we use this as a cornerstone for speculation about ‘Sadducean religion’ we could probably say that a core value of the Sadducees was the creation of community through sacred symbols. In this type of religious life, the use of words, certain symbolic gestures, and some physical objects and places involve sacred power and thus are central to human transformation and the maintenance of ultimate meaning. About the Sadducees we can say, irrespective of individual motives—of which we know nothing—that their participation in the temple rituals expresses submission to God. To adapt Levine’s (1987:535–536) generalisation:

not ritual but rather obedience to God’s commands in all things, especially in relations “between man and man,” is the ultimate goal of religious life. ...it was the priesthood that made it possible for the individual Israelite and the community as a whole to experience the nearness and presence of God.

The idea that reality actually consists of two kinds of world, sacred and profane, was widespread in antiquity, and to many Jews an essential and revealed truth. Central to this kind of religiosity is the belief that human beings relate to divine power at particular times and places. These disclosures

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are transmitted and guaranteed by a complex system, amongst others necessitating a priesthood and sacred writings. Divine power can be released into existence through sacred words and actions, which are to be duplicated at special times and places by the priests, especially the high priest, and which provide certain (ideal) models for daily living. Notice the basic functions of second temple priests; besides cultic they had oracular functions (including divination by means of casting lots), therapeutic functions, instructional and juridical functions (cf Levine 1987:535; administration and politics should also be added).

The Sadducees often suffer disrespect in that they are depicted as embodying the ultimate form of empty, formalistic and ritualistic religion. How should we think about such priestly rituals? J Z Smith, in his important study exposes many biases inhibiting modern scholars discussing ritual. Amongst others, he shows how the inability of modern scholarship to appropriate the ‘other’ displayed in ritual, led to scholarly (!) perceptions of ritual as ‘bereft of all value’ and hence ritual (like the Jerusalem temple) has been ‘shown the reverse face of imperialism: subjection or, more likely, extirpation’ (1987:102). Therefore, rather than trying to explain their rituals, as say ‘channel of power from the sacred reality’ or as ‘symbolically repeating an action that began with God’s action by which people will be transformed’ Smith’s recognition of ritual as ‘a mode of paying attention’ impresses me more. Ritual is ‘a process for marking interest’ (1987:103).

We should realise that the temple, its architecture and its rituals signal significance without contributing signification (cf Smith 1987:108). They signify sheer difference: the series of hierarchical and hieratic transactions concerning pure/impure, sacred/profane are above all matters of difference. It is not naming things that matter, but recognising the relations between people and people and things and people. Ritual is the means for demonstrating that humans know the other part of the world, but do not participate in it. Ritual thus provides an occasion for reflection on and rationalization of the fact that what ought to have been done was not, what ought to have taken place did not. ...ritual is not best understood as congruent with something else—a magical

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42 As by, for example, by Streng. See his generally very helpful analysis in 1985:43-59.
43 Note how Neusner (1988b:164, cf :9-120) describes the development of Judaism: in the formative periods, there were a number of Judaisms whose interaction resulted in the eventual dominance of a single, definitive and normative account of things. This process can be explained as a movement from testament to torah, in which efforts were made by various groups (the family of proto-religions making up the diversity of Judaisms) to make a complete and all-encompassing system in order to explain how things were and to determine what everything meant.
imitation of desired ends, a translation of emotions, a symbolic acting out of ideas, a dramatization of a text or the like. Rituals gain force where incongruency is perceived and thought about... Ritual precises ambiguities; it neither overcomes nor relaxes them (Smith 1987:109-110).

This perspective can be illuminatingly related to the Mishnaic debate between the Pharisees and the Sadducees concerning the nisoq, the possibility of 'contamination' of water flowing from a pure to an impure container and the implications for an aqueduct (m Yadayim 4.7). It could be that there was inconsistency in the Sadducean position—water that touches the ground could become impure, but the aqueduct remain pure despite its actual passing through a graveyard—but at stake is not the outcome of the debate (the 'right' flow of water) but the process of differentiation: the endless procedure of making infinite distinctions and ascribing discriminatory values to the slightest shade of difference, the transformation of 'mere things' to a divinely ordered world, of no-thing into creation. The water (or blood or whatever) does not actually change.

Ritual is a relationship of difference between "nows"—the now of everyday life and the now of ritual place; the simultaneity, but not the coexistence, of "here" and "there". Here (in the world) blood is a major source of impurity; there (in ritual space) blood removes impurity. Here (in the world) water is the central agent by which impurity is transmitted; there (in ritual) washing with water carries away impurity. ...One is invited to think of the potentialities of the one "now" in terms of the other, but the one cannot become the other (Smith 1987:110).

Sadducean ritual is not to be seen as distinct from other rituals of emerging Judaism; it is fully part of that emergence (cf McCready 1992:85).

4.4 Sadducean teachings

4.4.1 Life after death

In the common world view of the time the general belief in divine intervention in this world cohered with speculation on continuing existence after death. The belief in life after death in Palestine from the Hellenistic period onwards has been much studied (e.g Schürer, Vermes & Millar :546 f; Goodman 1987:87-89). The matter—according to Josephus and Luke (AJ 18.14–16; Ac 23.6)—was under dispute between Pharisees and Sadducees, and the Pharisaic view seems to have been more popular. Generally speaking the assumption was that this after death existence will be pleasant and reserved.

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44 Discussion: Patrich 1982 (who suggests that the halakha at stake here relates to the Lower Aqueduct from Etam to Jerusalem built by the latter Hasmoneans); Guttmann 1970:153–154; Baumgarten 1980:162–163.
for those who have earned it in this life, although it will be postponed for some time after death. It was taken for granted that such existence was on a plane quite close to the visible world, allowing both kind and malevolent intercession in human affairs.

Exactly how these convictions and speculations affected daily life is extremely difficult to determine. It is possible that in the light of eternity, and the prospect of a Great, Ultimate Judgement current social problems paled into insignificance. Or it could be that such speculations were no more than the daydreams of the idle.

Anyway, the Sadducean denials reported in our sources are completely opaque. We simply have no idea what the Sadducees actually denied. Some scholars argue that the Sadducees' belief is the traditional biblical view (e.g. Saldarini 1989:304). Their denial could then be seen as coupled with a support of non-apocalyptic Judaism. Ideas of resurrection, immortality and afterlife became part of Judaism only late, in the second century BCE; certainly some Jews were suspicious of such newfangled ideas. In that case, the Sadducees, though they

as Jews...certainly believed in God's covenant and care for Israel, they did not believe in his apocalyptic intervention in world history and so could be presented as denying fate and stressing human control over life. ...their views of providence, as presented by Josephus, may reflect a post-exilic view of God as very transcendent and far from the affairs of the Jewish nation... (Saldarini 1989:304).

Many are convinced that the lack of belief in an afterlife is simply the consequence of the Sadducees' materialism. Because of the good life they enjoyed, their love of money and so forth, the argument apparently goes, 'the question of an after-life would not have posed itself in such stark terms for them' (Freyne 1980:103; cf. among many, Goodman 1987:79; Mulder 1973:40; Jagersma 1985:70). Even if we limit such an interpretation to the wealthy among the Sadducees, there simply is no warrant for such a contemptuous understanding. It could be that the Sadducees accepted the reality of Sheol and the associated implications (cf Ellis 1964), but challenged the belief of the reconstitution of souls in a future age. Luke could then be mistaken with his claim that λέγοντων μὴ εἶναι...πνεῦμα (Ac 23.6). However, as North (1955:58) reminds us, if "and the spirit" there added implies that even the survival of the soul, and not merely its eventual union with the body, is here denied, this gives us but little clue for the assertion that they were materialists in any modern sense'.

Could there be evidence of realist rationality in the Sadducee denial? Normally, discussions, comparisons and exchanges of different views on what happens at death would have taken place at the house of mourning (Lieberman 1977:397). Would this have been the setting for the Sadducees'
arguments? Josephus sees something of Epicurus in the Sadducean views (AJ 10.277, 13.172). The Sadducees could have been saying something like this:

It is not a young man who is the happiest (μακαριστὸς) but an old man who has lived a good life because the young in his prime is confused and is thrown about by fortune. The old man, however, has come to anchor in old age as though in harbour (Epicurus Sententiae Vaticanae 17).

This is a worthy way of looking at life; it even has scriptural roots (Eccl 7.1). The interesting thing is that there seems to be a widespread prejudice against such ‘realist’ views among modern scholars. One must choose, apparently, between being ‘faithful’ (to an ancient ‘Christian’ or ‘rabbinic’ view?) or being rational. The ‘realist’ look is usually depicted as appalling, definitely not recommended: these discussions clearly assume that repeating the mere statement of denial of life after death allows the conclusion that the Sadducees are abhorrent, or at least heretics. But they were nothing of the sort. What we have is only a proclamation of unexamined preferences.

What the Sadducees rejected related probably only to some aspects of the beliefs held dear by those whose words we do have. It is a very effective rhetorical move to expand a denial of some detail to a denial of the essence in polemic. The Pharisees, and Josephus, strongly believed in life after death. Some detail of what they believed may be helpful for surmising what the Sadducees could have disagreed with. In other words, the accusation that they deny the resurrection probably means no more than they rejected some of the points of complex dogmas.

Josephus’ views on reincarnation—humans have immortal souls, those of the wicked suffer eternal punishment while those who live good lives receive the best spots in heaven and at the turn of the ages will find new habitation in a new sacred body that will bring a better life—are not unlike those which he ascribes to the Pharisees. Was the bone of contention the issue of penalties and rewards? The different positions in heaven? The one new body?

How accurately Josephus represents Jewish doctrine is difficult to tell. We may not know exactly what the Pharisees believed about these matters, but we know a bit about what the rabbis believed. Given the power and resilience of such convictions and conventions one can readily imagine some continuity between Pharisees and rabbis in this regard.46


46 For the following impressions I rely on the discussions of Lieberman 1977; Mason 1991:156–170; Sanders 1992:298–303; Daube 1990 and the references cited by them.
A cardinal principle of ancient rabbinic Judaism was the belief in posthumous divine retribution, though it was a belief of ambiguous content. Some questioned the objective reality of the existence of Gehenna, but other rabbis could pinpoint the place and entrance to Gehenna (beyond the Mountain of Darkness in Africa, of course). There were disputes about how long the wicked would remain there—except about the very grave sinners (like apostates) who would remain there for ever. The souls of all the dead roamed the world, but usually they ended up in their resting places. The souls of the untimely dead (the stillborn, abortive babies, youngsters etc) were educated by angels. The souls of the wicked, of course, did not know where they would rest, they were punished by being slung and whirled through the air (by angels). For those who did not bow their backs in prayer worse was in store: in the grave one’s backbone could turn into a serpent. Because, in such a case, one’s backbone had disappeared, there could be no resurrection from the dead as no starting point remained. The corpse did not lose its sensitivity for a period of time: the dead heard what was said about them in their presence, but probably only until the tomb was closed and definitely not beyond the point when the flesh of the body wasted away. For the first three days after death the soul hovered over the body. The atonement for sins started from the moment the body began to feel the pains of the grave. The dead body suffered (the worms were as painful as needles to the flesh of the living) to partly atone for sins committed.

The point is not to claim this is what Pharisees believed (we do not know that much!), but to suggest that many Pharisees could have held beliefs like these, similar to their much later rabbinic descendants and that the accusations against the Sadducees could have centred around points like these.

The most plausible explanation for their denial, to me, is a deeply religious motive. In the third century Christian novel, the Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions, a polemical aside informs us that the Sadducees deny the resurrection of the dead because ‘it is unworthy that God should be worshipped under the promise of a reward’ (1.54).\(^47\) Though the context of this is a patently absurd exposition of the Jewish parties, this could be the best insight into Sadducean motives.

4.4.2 Angels

According to Acts, the Sadducees say ‘there is no angel’. We can only speculate what this entailed. Zeitlin (1964:71) feels that the Sadducees rejected the

belief in angels because the function of angels had ceased with the advent of the prophets. To Cohen (1987:147) the Sadducean saying 'that “there is no angel or spirit,”...probably means that heavenly beings do not communicate directly with people'.

The turmoil of first-century Palestinian politics, which created extensive uncertainty, can also be invoked as context for this aspect.

Unambiguous authority was also sought in another figment of the religious imagination, angels. Wherever the origin of this belief is to be sought, it is clear that angelic intermediaries between men and God were firmly established in the religious understanding of most Jews by the first century A.D. Sadducees were the exception in remaining sceptical (Goodman 1987:78).

Daube (1990) effectively points out that the Sadducees could not have denied the existence of angels as they believed scripture to be divinely revealed Torah, and angels populate it from Genesis to 2 Chronicles. No one would think that the Sadducees deny the existence of angels, except for Acts 23.8. Daube takes ‘angel’ and ‘spirit’ as synonyms, ways of talking about the interim state of the dead. The Sadducees, according to Daube, deny that the dead can return, not even in the case of deceased saints on special missions. Viviano and Taylor (1992), taking Luke’s ‘ἀλλήλους ἀλλήλων’ in its natural meaning of ‘both’ (something noted also by Daube, 1990:493) suggest that the sentence in Acts be translated as ‘the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection either in the form as an angel or in the form of a spirit but the Pharisees acknowledge them both.’ A very useful suggestion, but then, if Luke wanted to say that he could have been more explicit.

 Actually, we are stumped by Luke’s terse remark and the very little given away in our sources.

4.4.3 Use of scripture.

All Jews agreed that they should live according to the law of Moses, but that did not solve matters of interpretation and application. No Jewish group could live by scripture alone, plain and simple, so even the Sadducees had certain rules, customs and ceremonies that were not based on a literal meaning of biblical legislation (cf Baumgarten 1987:65).

It is often said that the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch as canonical, but there is in fact no evidence of this in our sources. It seems that this supposed Sadducean notion was ascribed to them on account of their rejection of angels, understood, by association, to rest on a rejection of the Book of Daniel, understood, once more by association, to mean a rejection of the Prophets and so on. Is it possible that the Sadducees, like modern biblical critics, distinguished dates and recognised metaphors (cf Sanders 1992:333)?
Most discussions of the Sadducees differentiate them from the Pharisees on the basis of their supposed insistence on literal interpretation of Scripture and their supposed rejection of the oral Torah. In this perspective a Sadducean history of the use of Scripture would be a history of decline: a growing ignorance and misconception of the nature and subject of Scripture. But neither literalism nor aversity to oral tradition feature as distinctive; neither criterion is explicit or implicit in the sources and both are misleading (Saldañarini 1989:303). No form of biblical interpretation amongst the ancients can be called ‘literal’ and all of them seem absurdly elaborate to us, today.

It is the explanatory remarks made by Josephus, namely that the Pharisees espoused certain ‘traditions of the fathers’ rejected by the Sadducees (AJ 13.297–298) that have generated extensive debate. This is surprising, as Josephus is quite clear: the Sadducees dismiss what is not among the written laws of Moses (a decision Josephus actually agrees with). Josephus says absolutely nothing about the supposed oral nature of the laws under dispute. His point in the story is the (deplorable) popularity of the Pharisees despite their violation of the all-sufficiency of the Mosaic code (Mason 1991:230–245). The real issue, among the historical persons that is, probably dealt more with matters of interpretation of Mosaic laws, a dispute on hermeneutical principles. ‘It is hard to accept the notion that the Sadducees followed “only those regulations which were written (in scripture),” since a life lived in accordance with scripture alone is a life filled with obscurities and contradictions’ (Cohen 1987:146).

The few (supposed) examples of Sadducean use of scripture available prove only that in certain cases the Pharisees are stricter, in others the Sadducees. An instance is the correct way of entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement by the high priest (cf m Yoma 5.1). Apparently the Sadducees thought that the high priest should first mix the coals and incense before opening the curtain and then carry the censer inside. The Pharisees preferred that he should hold the censer in one hand and the coals in the other, somehow managing to fold back the heavy curtains. Though closer to the instructions in the Book of Leviticus, the Pharisees’ approach clearly entailed considerable risk, while ‘the Sadducees showed prudent common sense’ (Sanders 1992:335). According to the Talmud the Sadducees did quote scripture for their practice, explaining that God appeared in a cloud upon the ark-cover (b Yoma 19b; cf Neusner 1994:63). That is, the smoke from the censer should obscure any possibility of seeing God’s face. Though the story

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48 On the latter, see for example: ‘The Sadducean rejection of oral tradition is fundamental in nature. Many of the other differences between Sadducees and Pharisees are rooted herein; this includes theological differences’ (Guttmann 1970:127).
is quite fanciful—or, if true, it suggests that the Sadducean high priests sacrificed in manners to suit themselves (Sanders 1992:397)—it could be that the fear of the awesome power of God's presence, which will surely kill one even quicker than disobedience to Pharisaic practice, made the Sadducees find a more appropriate prooftext for a very sensible approach.49

That the Sadducean hermeneutics should be explained as 'literalist' is a myth (Daube 1969:18), it is 'a common error' to consider them 'to have been literalists, rigorously sticking to the words of the written law' (Daube 1969:9). Their rejection of a whimsical argument, like Jesus' proof of resurrection from Ex 3.6, does not make them daft, intransigent or godless.

Josephus did not like them because they encouraged debate and criticism, even believing it commendable that one contradicted one's teachers—imagine that, discussing scripture as if one could argue about its meaning and even doubting one's professor; surely they had to be very rude persons! (See (AJ 18.16). There could be truth in Daube's (1949:243) suggestion that the Sadducees emulated this method of argumentation from the Hellenistic schools of philosophy.

For Josephus everything revolved around authority. Likewise for the rabbis (and the Pharisees), who patterned their authority on the ancient sages, wise and pious, inspired by God, who developed a subdued form of divine directives. 'But even this subdued form was very authoritative, it stated the course you ought to take as the course in fact taken—"One does", "One does not"—and generally without any reasoning: if you did not comply, you would be simply outside the valid order of things' (Daube 1969:9).

In contrast the Sadducees (probably) preferred to advance insights and developments of matters not covered in Scripture 'by free, rational proposal and counter-proposal, trial and error. And in matters which Scripture did pronounce on, they favoured genuine, reasonable, flexible interpretation' (Daube 1969:9).

4.4.4 Morality
From whose perspective shall we judge the morality of the Sadducees? According to Sanders (1992:338): 'That rich people were wicked seems not to

49 Lauterbach (1927) argues that the Pharisees had a 'purer God conception', in particular they were more consistent in their belief in divine omnipresence. Hence, because no one place is favoured more than others by God's presence, the Pharisees were actually combatting 'crude superstition', as exemplified by the Sadducees who appealed to folk fears by maintaining 'primitive notions' which, 'unfortunately', survived among common Jews of the time. This comprises an anachronistic and prejudicial interpretation.
have been what average first-century Jews thought. Choices made about personal loyalties during the revolt is also instructive. While some aristocrats favoured peace, one of the instigators of the revolt was an aristocratic priest, Eleazar. Other aristocratic priests served as generals. Goodman (1987) shows that members of the ruling class remained actively involved in the revolt right up to the end.

If following is an indication—and it surely is, as it shows at least acceptance—the aristocrats, and by extension the Sadducees, fared like most other groups. Some were despicable, others were admirable. Josephus' various narratives clearly show that some failed and brought dishonour to their positions; others performed remarkably well—sometimes one person could achieve both distinctions. Notably his stories make very clear that many prominent leaders enjoyed considerable support.

Josephus offers two generalisations about them (noted above): they were harsh in judgement and rude to others (BJ 2.166, AJ 20.199). Josephus' description of the harshness and unfriendliness of the Sadducees is related to his ideology of ἀμφοτέρως (unanimity)—a theological term for him, indicating the unity of thought and behaviour that characterizes genuine Jews' (Mason 1991:173). The Sadducees did not cultivate harmony. They could not have, in the face of history (according to Josephus).

About the morality of the Sadducees, we can only generalise: some could have been selfish and irreverent, others were honest and upright and admirable persons. Most were quite religious and some even deeply so.

5 INTERLUDE: HISTORY AS HERMENEUTICS

Why bother with history? Surely we should be consistent: if it is bad to trivialise others (in conversation, decisions or attitudes) it is unacceptable to make light of people of the past. Whether interacting with contemporaries or mere secondhand traditions, the principle should be to try and discern the dynamic complexity and pluriformity of their humanity.

In this study I have tried to, in a manner of speaking, turn a perspective around. Instead of us looking out to them over there, the proposal is to imagine ourselves as them. Imagine them as a group with an identity, a culture. That is, as a group whose particular way of life, which expresses genuine and worthwhile meanings and values, not only in institutions but also in art and learning and ordinary behaviour, can be described (making use of Williams's (1961:43) famous definition of culture).

The surviving evidence is fragmentary and limited, but if one is willing to risk trying to understand—and being censored—it is possible to regain a little bewilderment, and some sense of wonder about what we know or find difficult to explain. Then we can catch the scattered references in suggestive and
intriguing webs of meaning, in which conflicting actions and profoundly ambiguous human behaviour beckon us to reflection and self-criticism. Barton, discussing the extremes of the emotions of the ancient Romans, makes some hermeneutical points relevant to our study:

While writing...I have tried to keep in mind Martin Buber’s distinction between an I/Thou relationship and an I/It relationship, between a relationship that respects and confronts and one that digests and “explains away”... The Romans, in particular, have seemed surpassing strange... I am astounded by the excesses that animated them, needing simultaneously to understand and to preserve them in their alien­ness. In approaching them, therefore, I have endeavored to be at once active and passive, apathetic and engaged... (Barton 1993:7).

During the course of this investigation the powerful role of certain assumptions in standard representations of early Judaism and early Christianity has become evident. There is an amazing tendency to find our interests in their polemics. This tendency continually shifts their image out of focus. What really mattered to many of the ancient Jews—for instance—was lack of strictness with regard to female impurity (m Niddah 4.1f; cf PsSol 8; CD 4.17–5.11, 6.15–16). ‘Liberally democratic’ (supposedly the Pharisees) and ‘oppressively conservative’ (the Sadducees) are frivolously inappropriate descriptive terms in such a context. They are historical others and not like our rivals.

Some have made ‘conservatism’ the cornerstone to understanding the Sadducees. What does this description mean? Of course the Pharisees would have claimed that they were progressive and the Sadducees conservative. They probably would have included a great many others too under the label of ‘rigidly conservative’ (and all the remaining groups as dangerously liberal).

Suppose we take emphasis on ‘tradition’ or on ‘what was’ as characteristic of conservatism. We are still not saying much. Political history reveals that often a renewal or progressive adaptation of tradition turns out to be a superficial affectation, which, far from seeking to disturb the present, is very much part of it.

The conservative ‘option’ is actually very complex. It can be a conservatism which seeks to reverse history, or a conservative style which is well integrated into the present. There is also another possibility. The rescue of past traditions, even those ostensibly conservative, can itself be a radically critical act. The attempt to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it, can also be described as ‘conservative’.

We often say, appropriately, that life is a dream. But it is erroneous logic, Oakeshott (1962:196) reminds us, to argue on that basis that politics must be an encounter of dreams, on which we hope to impose our own. There is in fact a ‘shadow line’ which,
when we pass it, discloses a solid world of things, each with its fixed shape, each with its own point of balance, each with its price; a world of fact, not poetic image, in which what we have spent on one thing we cannot spend on another; a world inhabited by others besides ourselves who cannot be reduced to mere reflections of our own emotions. And coming to be at home in this commonplace world qualifies us (as no knowledge of "political science" can ever qualify us), if we are so inclined and have nothing better to think about, to engage in what the [person] of conservative disposition understands to be political activity (Oakeshott 1962:196).

Under these circumstances the recapture of past moments, or the new revival of the old, need not be purely nostalgic. It can convey a rhetoric which expresses hope, critique and, above all, argument. It may be looking back, but the aim is not to celebrate the past in a naive sense, but to 'brush history against the grain'.

Empathetic understanding is to see (something of) you in me, but also at the same time to realise that I am not you. It is trivialisation that leads to subjugation and sameness. Respect promotes understanding and recognition of otherness.

6 CONCLUSION
No one today espouses Sadducean theology—and rightly so. Their hermeneutics is undoubtedly weird. Their commitment to purity and the temple uncomfortably unfamiliar. Their probable beliefs concerning a divine covenant and other privileges are reprehensible to me. But these very statements reveal an understanding and a point of view.

Whatever differences there may be among us today, we do not share the world views of the Pharisees, Josephus, the Sadducees or even the early Christians. We do not have a cosmology even remotely connected to theirs. Our value systems have changed tremendously. It would be sheer fantasy to operate with the same point of view. We cannot occupy the same 'lookout point', we cannot see the same reality.

Thus, fundamentally we should beware of praising some group(s) in history and denigrating others on the basis of an apparent similarity of belief or preference to ours. The declaration of heroes cannot be based on our (contingent and fleeting) passions.

We should deal with our sources with skill, care, respect and suspicion. The challenge of historical understanding with sincerity and fairness is illustrated by analysing relevant sources, striving to expose the points of view involved. In many discussions of the Sadducees particular statements are taken as representative of two centuries of Sadducean history. That the Sadducees were powerful at one stage does not mean that they were always powerful. That some were of the foremost people does not mean that all of
them were. That some were corrupt does not make Sadducaism synonymous with corruption. More crucial is that the meanings of ‘foremost’, ‘powerful’ or ‘corrupt’ are linked to those using these words at a particular time in a distinctive context. Furthermore, it is important to realise that our sources do not want to talk about the Sadducees; they want to tell us about what is of interest to them. The Sadducees feature only incidentally to their own ends and means. When we ask about the Sadducees, we are forcing them to tell us what they do not want to talk about.

So, finally, the question who or what the Sadducees are, does indeed elicit a very tentative statement: ‘Actually, we don’t really know’ (although we can responsibly imagine quite a bit...).

The challenge of historical understanding with sincerity and fairness involves interpretation and understanding of relevant sources with awareness of the many points of view at stake. We are fully and completely enclosed by our history and all our knowledge is mediated knowledge. Historical exploration is not to discover the final truth, but to participate in the conversation about truth, to engage in some self-reflection and self-criticism.

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