

^ In general usage, "The Sanhedrin" without qualifier normally refers to the Great Sanhedrin.

^ Numbers 27:23

^ Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 13b-14a

^ Commentary on Mishnah Sota, chapter 9, Mishnah 11.

^ Tosofoth Yom Tov and the Maharal.

^ Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews, Chaim Potok, Knopf, New York, p. 191.

^ Wanderings: Chaim Potok's History of the Jews, Chaim Potok, Knopf, New York, p. 191.

^ "Sanhedrin". CUNY.

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/economic/friedman/sanhedrin.htm>.

^ Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin 2a.

^ See also Council of Jamnia.

^ Mishnayot Beitzah, chapter 5 Mishnah 2. This can also be found in the Talmud, tractate Beitzah, daf 36b.

^ Jewish Encyclopedia: Sanhedrin: "The Great Sanhedrin is designated in the Talmudic sources as "Sanhedrin Gedolah hayoshebet be-lishkat ha-gazit" = "the Great Sanhedrin which sits in the hall of hewn stone"(Sifra, Wayikra, ed. Weiss, 19a). The mention of "sanhedrin" without the epithet "gedolah" (Yer. Sanh. i. 19c) seems to presuppose another body than the Great Sanhedrin that met in the hall of hewn stone. For neither Josephus nor the Gospels in speaking of the Sanhedrin report any of its decisions or discussions referring to the priests or to the Temple service, or touching in any way upon the religious law, but they refer to the Sanhedrin exclusively in matters connected with legal procedure, verdicts, and decrees of a political nature; whereas the Sanhedrin in the hall of hewn stone dealt, according to the Talmudic sources, with questions relating to the Temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, and matters of a kindred nature. Adolf Büchler assumes indeed that there were in Jerusalem two magistracies, which were entirely different in character and functions and which officiated side by side at the same time. That to which the Gospels and Josephus refer was the highest political authority, and at the same time the supreme court; this alone was empowered to deal with criminal cases and to impose the sentence of capital punishment. The other, sitting in the hall of hewn stone, was the highest court dealing with the religious law, being in charge also of the religious instruction of the people (Sanh. xi. 2-4)."

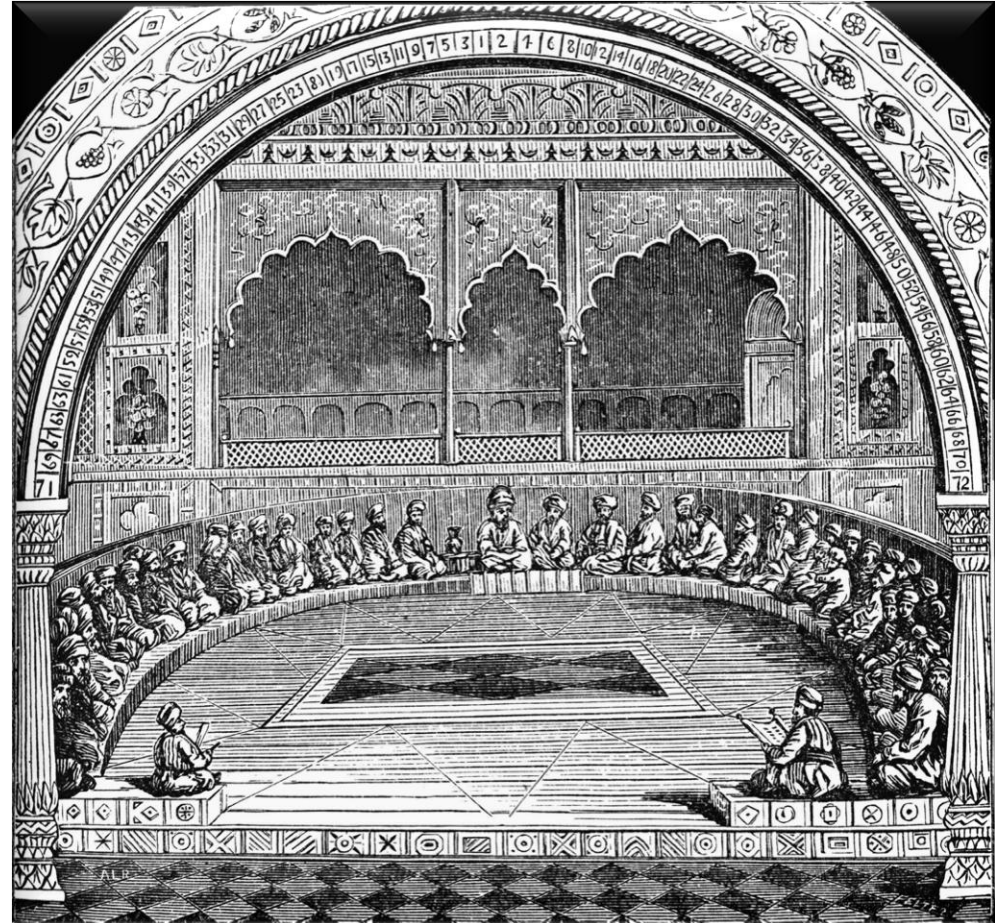
^ The Persian conquest of Jerusalem in 614 compared with Islamic conquest of 638

^ *ibid*.

^ Sefer Yuchsin, cf. Yarchei Kallah, Rabbi Nassan describes "the seventy judges who comprise the Sanhedrin".

^ The dissolution of the Sanhedrin, in terms of its power to give binding universal decisions, is usually dated to 358 when Hillel II's Jewish Calendar was adopted. This marked the last universally accepted decision made by that body.

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanhedrim>



תּוֹרַת הַסַּנְהֶדְרִין



The Sanhedrin (Hebrew: סנהדרין; Greek: συνέδριον,[1] synedrion, "sitting together," hence "assembly" or "council") was an assembly of twenty-three judges appointed in every city in the Land of Israel.[2]

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 37a) states: GEMARA. Whence is this derived? — R. Aha Haninah said: Scripture states, Thy navel is like a round goblet [‘aggan ha-Sahar] wherein no mingled wine is wanting.⁸ ‘Thy navel’ — that is the Sanhedrin. Why was it called ‘navel’? — Because it sat at the navel-point⁹ of the world. [Why] ‘aggan?¹⁰ — Because it protects [meggin] the whole world. [Why] ha-Sahar? — Because it was moon-shaped.¹¹ [Why] in which no mingled wine is wanting? — I.e., if one of them had to leave, it had to be ascertained if twenty-three, corresponding to the number of the minor Sanhedrin, were left,¹² in which case he might go out; if not, he might not depart.

Thy belly is like a heap of wheat:¹³ Just as all benefit from a heap of wheat, so do all benefit from the deliberations of the Sanhedrin.

(8) Cant. VII, 3. (9) I.e., the centre. According to Midrashic legend the Temple was situated in the centre of the world. Cf. Tanhuma, Wayikra. XVIII,23. (10) idt akin to idn — ‘to enclose’. Hence, shield, protect. (11) rvx=moon. I.e., they were seated in circular form like a moon. (12) The actual number required for capital cases is twenty-three, roughly a third of seventy-one, the remaining two-thirds being for completion purposes. The Aggadists therefore compare the court to mingled wine, a mixture of one-third of wine and two-thirds of water. Cf. B M. 60a; Tanhuma. Bamidbar IV. (13) Cant. VII ,3.

The Great Sanhedrin was the supreme court of ancient Israel. In total there were 71 members. The Great Sanhedrin was made up of a Chief/Prince/Leader called Nasi (at some times this position may have been held by the Kohen Gadol or the High Priest), a vice chief justice (Av Beit Din), and sixty-nine general members.[3] In the Second Temple period, the Great Sanhedrin met in the Hall of Hewn Stones in the Temple in Jerusalem. The court convened every day except festivals and Shabbat. In the late 3rd century, to avoid persecution, its authoritative decisions were issued under the name of Beth HaMidrash.

The last binding decision of the Sanhedrin was in 358, when the Hebrew Calendar was adopted. The Sanhedrin was dissolved after continued persecution by the Roman Empire. Over the centuries, there have been attempts to revive the institution, such as the Grand Sanhedrin convened by Napoleon Bonaparte.

The Sanhedrin is mentioned in the Gospels in relation to the Sanhedrin Trial of Jesus.

Origins and etymology

The term *Sanhedrin* is Greek and dates from the Hellenistic period, but the concept is one that goes back to the Bible. In the Torah, God commands Moses to "Assemble for Me [*Espah-Li*] seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the people's elders and officers, and you shall take them to the Tent of Meeting, and they shall stand there with you." (Numbers 11:16)

Further, God commanded Moses to lay hands on Joshua son of Nun.[4] It is from this point, classical Rabbinic tradition holds, the Sanhedrin began: with seventy elders, headed by Moses, for a total of seventy-one. As individuals within the Sanhedrin died, or otherwise became unfit for service, new members underwent ordination, or

tradition and reinvesting it with the same authority it had in former years. There have been several attempts to implement Maimonides' recommendations, the latest being in modern times.

There have been rabbinical attempts to renew Semicha and re-establish a Sanhedrin by Rabbi Jacob Berab in 1538, Rabbi Yisroel Shklover in 1830, Rabbi Aharon Mendel haCohen in 1901, Rabbi Zvi Kovsker in 1940 and Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon in 1949.

In October 2004 (Tishrei 5765), a group of rabbis representing varied Orthodox communities in Israel undertook a ceremony in Tiberias, where the original Sanhedrin was disbanded, which is claimed to re-establish the body according to the proposal of Maimonides and the Jewish legal rulings of Rabbi Yosef Karo. The controversial attempt has been subject to debate within different Jewish communities.

Christian sects in Israel

There is a relatively small group of Messianic Jews in Israel today (estimates are 20,000–50,000) who believe Jesus, or ישוע ("Yeshua") as they call him by his Hebrew name, was the Messiah (from Hebrew משיח — "Mashiach" — , literally: Anointed One), the one chosen redeemer in ancient prophecies (Isaiah 9:1–7) and God. There is debate among them about when and how the Sanhedrin should be reinstated as the Old Testament prophecies about the re-establishment of the state of Israel (Isaiah 43:5 onward) have, according to them, been fulfilled and, like many Christians, they believe, since the live times of Jesus teachings, mankind is progressing towards the end times. Their reasoning is that, (1) as the Sanhedrin is the Jewish legislative authority that has originally condemned Jesus, and (2) the Jews are — according to their belief — all to become believers in Jesus as their saviour and God, (Zechariah 12:10–14) the Sanhedrin is the only authority that has the power to reverse the judgment made nearly 2,000 years ago to condemn Jesus to be crucified.

Among this group, there is also debate about how it would be possible to fit a system of a council of 71 wise men, who are the highest legislative authority of Israel, into the judicial system of a modern, western, secular democracy. The same debate took place among secular scholars and politicians around 1948, the year the state of Israel was re-established. The idea of reinstalling the Sanhedrin was then discarded because there were too many practical difficulties found on the way, although this decision might have also been taken because the majority of Jews who were leaders in the founding of the modern state of Israel were not religious.

Synedrion, a general term for judiciary organs of
Greek and Hellenistic city states and treaty organisations.

References

[^] Lexicon Results for sunedrion (Strong's 4892)

[^] The Mishnah (Sanhedrin 1:1) arrives at the number twenty-three based on an exegetical derivation: It must be possible for a "community" to vote for both conviction and exoneration (Numbers 35:24-5). The minimum size of a "community" is 10 (Numbers 14:27; i.e. the 10 spies). One more is required to achieve a majority (11–10), but a simple majority cannot convict (Exodus 23:2), and so an additional judge is required (12–10). Finally, a court should not have an even number of judges to prevent deadlocks; thus 23.

As a reaction to the emperor Julian's pro-Jewish stance, Theodosius I forbade the Sanhedrin to assemble and declared ordination illegal. (Roman law prescribed capital punishment for any Rabbi who received ordination and complete destruction of the town where the ordination occurred).

However, since the Hebrew calendar was based on witnesses' testimony, that had become far too dangerous to collect, Hillel II recommended change to a mathematically-based calendar that was adopted at a clandestine, and maybe final, meeting in 358. This marked the last universal decision made by that body.

Gamaliel VI (400–425) was the Sanhedrin's last president. With his death in 425, executed by Theodosius II for erecting new synagogues contrary to the imperial decree, the title *Nasi*, the last remains of the ancient Sanhedrin, became illegal. An imperial decree of 426 diverted the patriarchs' tax (*post excessum patriarchorum*) into the imperial treasury.

Revival attempts

The Sanhedrin is seen as the last institution that commanded universal Jewish authority among the Jewish people in the long chain of tradition from Moses until the present day. Since its dissolution in 358 by imperial decree, there have been several attempts to re-establish this body either as a self-governing body, or as a puppet of a sovereign government.

There are records of what may have been of attempts to reform the Sanhedrin in Arabia,[15] in Jerusalem under the Caliph 'Umar,[16] and in Babylon (Iraq),[17] but none of these attempts were given any attention by Rabbinic authorities and little information is available about them.

Napoleon Bonaparte's "Grand Sanhedrin"

The "Grand Sanhedrin" was a Jewish high court convened by Napoleon I to give legal sanction to the principles expressed by the Assembly of Notables in answer to the twelve questions submitted to it by the government (see *Jew. Encyc.* v. 468, s.v. France).

On October 6, 1806, the Assembly of Notables issued a proclamation to all the Jewish communities of Europe, inviting them to send delegates to the Sanhedrin, to convene on October 20. This proclamation, written in Hebrew, French, German, and Italian, speaks in extravagant terms of the importance of this revived institution and of the greatness of its imperial protector. While the action of Napoleon aroused in many Jews of Germany the hope that, influenced by it, their governments also would grant them the rights of citizenship, others looked upon it as a political contrivance. When in the war against Prussia (1806–7) the emperor invaded Poland and the Jews rendered great services to his army, he remarked, laughing, "The sanhedrin is at least useful to me." David Friedländer and his friends in Berlin described it as a spectacle that Napoleon offered to the Parisians.

Modern attempts in Israel

Since the dissolution of the Sanhedrin in 358,[18] there has been no universally recognized authority within Jewish law. Maimonides (1135–1204) was one of the greatest scholars of the Middle Ages, and is arguably one of the most widely accepted scholars among the Jewish people since the closing of the Talmud in 500. Influenced by the rationalist school of thought and generally showing a preference for a natural (as opposed to miraculous) redemption for the Jewish people, Maimonides proposed a rationalist solution for achieving the goal of re-establishing the highest court in Jewish

Semicha.[5] These ordinations continued, in an unbroken line: from Moses to Joshua, the Israelite elders, the prophets (including Ezra, Nehemiah) on to all the sages of the Sanhedrin. It was in the year 191 BC that the sanhedrin was established. It was not until sometime after the destruction of the Second Temple the Sanhedrin dissolved.

Jewish tradition proposes non-Greek derivations of the term *Sanhedrin*. *P'siqta D'Rav Kahana* (chapter 25) teaches that the first letter of the word, *sin*, referring to the Torah that was received at Mount *Sin-ai*, was combined with the second part of the word, *hadrin*, meaning, "glorification," to express the Great Court's role, the glorification of God's Torah through its application. Rabbi Ovadia Bartenura suggests an alternative meaning, also taking the term as a combination of two words to mean "*son'im hadarath pan'im b'din*," "foes (opposing litigants) give respect and honor to its judgment." [6] Other commentators confirm his interpretation, suggesting further that the first letter was changed from "*sin*" to "*samekh*," at a later date. [7]

Early Sanhedrin

The Hasmonean court in the Land of Israel, presided over by Alexander Jannaeus, king of Judea until 76 BC, followed by his wife, Salome Alexandra in 76 or 75 BC, bore all the trappings of Hellenistic royalty: ministers, courtiers, a bureaucracy and bodyguards. The former Council of Elders was renamed *Synhedrion* or *Sanhedrin*. [8] The exact nature of this early Sanhedrin is not clear. It may have been a body of sages and/or priests, or a political, legislative and judicial institution. Only after the destruction of the Second Temple was the Sanhedrin made up only of sages. [9]

Great and Lesser Sanhedrin

The Talmud (tractate Sanhedrin) identifies two classes of rabbinical courts called Sanhedrin, a Great Sanhedrin and a Lesser Sanhedrin. Each city could have its own lesser Sanhedrin of 23 judges, but there could be only one Great Sanhedrin of 71 (in where), which among other roles acted as a sort of Supreme Court, taking appeals from cases decided by lesser courts.

Function and procedures

The Sanhedrin as a body claimed powers that lesser Jewish courts did not have. As such, they were the only ones who could try the king, extend the boundaries of the Temple and Jerusalem, and were the ones to whom all questions of law were finally put.

Before 191 BC the High Priest acted as the *ex officio* head of the Sanhedrin, but in 191 BC, when the Sanhedrin lost confidence in the High Priest, the office of *Nasi* was created. After the time of Hillel the Elder (late 1st century BC and early 1st century AD), the *Nasi* was almost invariably a descendant of Hillel. The second highest-ranking member of the Sanhedrin was called the *Av Beit Din*, or "Head of the Court" (literally, *Beit Din* = "house of law"), who presided over the Sanhedrin when it sat as a criminal court. [10]

The Sanhedrin met in a building known as the Hall of Hewn Stones (*Lishkat Ha-Gazith*), which has been placed by the Talmud and many scholars as built into the north wall of the Temple Mount, half inside the sanctuary and half outside, with doors providing access both to the Temple and to the outside. The name presumably arises to distinguish it from the buildings in the Temple complex used for ritual purposes, which had to be constructed of stones unhewn by any iron implements.

In some cases, it was only necessary for a 23-member panel (functioning as a Lesser Sanhedrin) to convene. In general, the full panel of 71 judges was only convened on

matters of national significance (e.g., a declaration of war) or in the event that the 23-member panel could not reach a conclusive verdict.[11]

Sanhedrin in Christianity

In the Gospels

The Sanhedrin is mentioned frequently in the Gospels. According to the Gospels, the council conspired to have Jesus killed by paying one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, thirty pieces of silver in exchange for delivery of Jesus into their hands. When the Sanhedrin was unable to provide evidence that Jesus had committed a capital crime, the Gospels state that witnesses came forward and accused the Nazarene of blasphemy — a capital crime under Mosaic law. But, because the Sanhedrin was not of Roman authority, it could not condemn criminals to death, according to John 18:31. This did not prevent them from doing so at other times; Acts 6:12 records them ordering the stoning of Saint Stephen and also Jesus half-brother, James the Just according to Antiquities of the Jews 20.9.1.

Circa 30, the Gospels continue, Jesus was brought before the Roman governor of Iudaea Province, Pontius Pilate, for decision. The Christian account says that Pilate disagreed with the Sanhedrin's decision, and found no fault — but that the crowd demanded crucifixion. Pilate, it is speculated, gave in because he was concerned about his career and about revolt — and conveyed the death sentence of crucifixion on Jesus. For more information on this subject, see Jesus' Roman Trial.

The New Testament also speaks of specific members of the Sanhedrin who were sympathetic towards Jesus, if not His followers. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea are two such men that are named in the Gospels. They both played a role in the burial of Jesus, according to John 19:38-42.

The Christian accounts of the Sanhedrin, and the role the council played in the crucifixion of Jesus, is frequently cited as a cause of Christian anti-Semitism, and is thus normally considered a sensitive topic.

A Sanhedrin also appears in Acts 4–7 and, perhaps the one led by Gamaliel.

Opposition to Christian historical accounts

Although the New Testament's account of the Sanhedrin's involvement in Jesus' crucifixion is detailed, the factual accuracy is disputed. Some scholars believe that these passages present a caricature of the Pharisees and were not written during Jesus' lifetime but rather some time after the destruction of the Temple in 70 — a time when it had become clear that most Jews did not consider Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah, see also Rejection of Jesus. Also, this was a time Christians sought most new converts from among the Gentiles — thus adding to the likelihood that the New Testament's account would be more sympathetic to Romans than to the Jews. In addition, it was around this time that the Pharisaic sect had begun to grow into what is now known as Rabbinic Judaism, a growth that would have been seen by the early Christians as a direct challenge to the fledgling Church.[12]

The opposition continues by saying that in order for the Christian leaders of the time to present Christianity as the legitimate heir to the Hebrew Scriptures, they had to devalue Rabbinic Judaism. In addition to the New Testament, other Christian writings relate that the Apostles Peter, John, and Paul, as well as Stephen (one of the first deacons), were all brought before the Sanhedrin for the blasphemous crime — from the Jewish perspective — of spreading their Gospel. Others point out that this is speculative. However, the Gospels exist, and they do give an account of events that happened well before the destruction of the Temple in 70, although many scholars

consider them to have been penned after the Temple was destroyed (however, see Gospel of Mark and Gospel of Matthew for views on earlier historical dating). Those scholars may believe them to have been based on earlier sources, rather than giving a first-person account; though the Gospels are not entirely dismissed, they are presumed to be biased rather than factual.

However, Streeter and others of the Tuebingen school hold that Christian New Testament writings that discuss the Sanhedrin actually may date much earlier than previously thought, so supporters claim that the NT accounts quite possibly are more accurate than thought heretofore.

According to Jewish law,[13] it is forbidden to convene a court of justice on a holy day, such as Pesach (Passover), making it highly unusual that religious Jews would have come together to hand down a death sentence on the stated day.

According to the gospel of Matthew however, (considered by some to have been a religious Jew) the religious authorities in that time might have been sufficiently agitated to make them break their own rules and judge him even on the feast of Passover (Pesach); according to the gospel, Jesus was a very popular figure among the ordinary people, and he publicly dismissed the Pharisees as hypocrites (Matthew 15:12–14). In Jesus' time, the Sanhedrin was the highest Jewish authority, as the Roman empire occupied the land at the time, and it was exerting the highest authority in every field except in religious legislature — this was left to the Sanhedrin. Christians as well as Messianic Jews say this is also in line with the history of Pesach, which was, in their vision, the historical predecessor of the death and resurrection of Jesus, being the fulfillment of Pesach. The transition of being delivered out of a land of slavery into freedom (Exodus 3:7–10) is being paralleled by them to being delivered from a life of sin into holiness (Colossians 1:13–14).

Additionally, Josephus seems to imply that there was a 'political' sanhedrin of Sadducee collaborators with the Roman rule of Iudaea province.[14] Since proclaiming oneself Moshiach is not forbidden under halakha (there were many springing up at the time), but was illegal under Roman law as a challenge to imperial authority, perhaps this may be a more likely alternative. However, John 19:12 cites the religious Sanhedrin using this argument to sway Pilate.

Hyam Maccoby's book "The Mythmaker" presents an interesting account of a different historical interpretation.

Dissolution

By the end of the Second Temple period, the Sanhedrin achieved its quintessential position, legislating on all aspects of Jewish religious and political life within the parameters laid down by Biblical and Rabbinic tradition.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70, the Sanhedrin was re-established in Yavneh with reduced authority. The imperial Roman government and legislation still recognized it as the ultimate authority in Jewish religious matters.

It moved to Usha under the presidency of Gamaliel II in 80. In 116 it moved back to Yavneh, and again back to Usha. It moved in 140 to Shefaram under the presidency of Shimon ben Gamliel II, and to Beth Shearim and Sephoris in 163, under the presidency of Yehudah I. Finally, it moved to Tiberias in 193, under the presidency of Gamaliel III (193–220) ben Judah haNasi, where it became more of a consistory, but still retained, under the presidency of Judah II (220–270), the power of excommunication.

During the presidency of Gamaliel IV (270–290), due to persecution of an increasingly Christianized Rome, it dropped the name Sanhedrin, and its authoritative decisions were subsequently issued under the name of *Beth HaMidrash*.