

# The Synedrion

A **synedrion** or **synhedrion** (Greek: συνέδριον, "sitting together", hence "assembly" or "council"; Hebrew: סנהדרין, **sanhedrin**) is an assembly that holds formal sessions. The Latinized form is **synedrion**.

The supreme body of **Alexander the Great's empire** was also called "**Synedrion**". The Council was a small group formed among some of the most eminent leaders of the land, chosen by the king to assist him in the government of the kingdom. As such it was not a representative assembly, but notwithstanding that, on certain occasions, *it could be expanded with the admission of representatives of the cities and of the civic corps of the kingdom*.

The Council primarily exerted a probouleutic function -- it prepared and proposed the decisions for a higher political body to consider. It was also the first and the last authority for all the cases which did not involve capital punishment. Inside the Council ruled the democratic principles of *isegoria* (equality of word) and of *parrhesia* (freedom of speech), to which the king subjects himself like the other members.<sup>1</sup>

According to Josephus, in 57 BCE Aulus Gabinius, Governor of Roman Syria, abolished the existing form of government and divided the country into five provinces organized five *synedra*. At the head of each of the provinces a *synhedrion* was placed, and Jerusalem was the seat of one of the provinces. Gabinius was not concerned with religious affairs unless sedition was suspected.

Later, Josephus describes Herod (at the time governor of Galilee) as being summoned before the *synhedrion*, led by High Priest Hyrcanus II, due to having executed alleged criminals without permission from the *synhedrion*. Eventually, though, Herod would go on to kill many members of this *synhedrion*.

A *Synhedrion* is mentioned 22 times in the *Greek New Testament*, including in the Gospels in relation to the trial of Jesus, and in the *Acts of the Apostles*, which mentions a "Great *Synhedrion*" in chapter 5 where rabbi Gamaliel appeared, and also in chapter 7 in relation to the stoning death of Saint Stephen. This body is described as a court led by the High Priest or leading priests, as well as the "elders" and/or Pharisees.

After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the Sanhedrin was re-established in Yavneh, with reduced authority, by agreement between Yochanan ben Zakai and Roman Emperor Vespasian. Vespasian agreed in part due to the perception that the Pharisees had not participated in the first revolt to the extent that other groups had. Thus the Sanhedrin in Yavneh was comprised almost exclusively of pharisaic scholars. The imperial Roman government recognized the Sanhedrin.

The Roman's regarded the head of the Sanhedrin in Yavneh as their own paid government official with the status of a prefect. However, Roman legislation severely reduced the scope

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Synedrion>

of its authority, and confirmed the body's ultimate authority in religious matters. In an attempt to quash revolutionary elements, Rome in effect declared one form of Judaism to be the only recognized form of religion. This led to persecution of sectarian groups, and attempts by these groups to find fault with the Sanhedrin before the Roman government.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanhedrin>