

and are refereed in the same way as printed journals (See "Networked Resources for Religious Studies").

As mentioned above, I opened an e-mail account some years ago with the sole intention of communicating with one colleague as we collaborated on an article. Since then I have subscribed to a number of discussion groups distributed through LISTSERV programs, and have even founded a discussion group on Buddhist studies that now has over two hundred members. I use e-mail extensively in communicating with colleagues at other universities, and even with colleagues at McGill. It has been an effective way to communicate with graduate students and teaching assistants working under my supervision. So what began as a rather specialized tool has now become an important part of nearly every aspect of my life as a scholar and teacher. As more and more academics begin using e-mail around the world as part of their daily routines, it is likely, whether one fully approves of it or not, to become an almost indispensable item in a contemporary scholar's research kit.

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### A LISTSERV Case Study: IOUDAIOS@YORKVMI

IOUDAIOS (the hellenistic Greek word for "Jew") is a LISTSERV whose coordinating computer is at York University (Toronto). It has over 300 members from about a dozen countries including Australia, Asia and Middle East. IOUDAIOS began in April 1990 at the initiative of Steve Mason, a Josephus and New Testament scholar at York University who continues to oversee the list.

The focus of the group is first century Judaism, especially the writings of Flavius Josephus and Philo of Alexandria. In practice, discussion is much more wide-ranging with topics occasionally running from the Israelite Iron Age (c. 1000 BCE) to the Rabbinic writings of the Talmud (c. CE 500). In July 1991, the *IOUDAIOS Review*, a fully edited "publication" began under the auspices of IOUDAIOS.

The group's technical operations are taken care of by dedicated software (LISTSERV) which maintains a subscription list of electronic mail addresses. Messages addressed to the group come to LISTSERV for redistribution to subscribers. The turn-around time from the message leaving the contributor's screen until it arrives on a list member's

machine—even for those a half-a-world away—can be as fast as five minutes. The same software also makes it possible to store files that are available for list members to retrieve. In the case of IOUDAIOS this includes weekly log-books (which store all past discussions), pre-publication papers, specialized bibliographies, teaching aids, and more.

The heart of IOUDAIOS, though, is the ongoing conversation that ebbs and flows as questions or comments seize the imagination or pique the interest of members. The process has the nature of a conversation, but differs in significant ways. Like a conversation, contributions are spontaneous; unlike a faculty lounge chat, though, books and sources are available for consultation and messages can thus be more considered and substantial. In any conversation misunderstandings arise, but with log-books at hand, or saved messages, the reply “But I didn’t say that!” is now verifiable. Communication on the list is not as ephemeral as the spoken word and encourages careful listening.

Over the two-year history of the group, many topics have received serious discussion. One of the earliest concerned the development of the Hebrew and Greek canons: how early did the tripartite canon arise? is it legitimate to apply the term “canon” to Jewish scriptures in the same way the word is used in a Christian context? what are the methodological issues involved in assessing these questions? (When printed, this sprawling debate fills 110 single-spaced pages!) Other subjects have included: the relationship of Paul to Judaism; the nature of prophecy in Josephus; the languages spoken in Palestine at the turn of the era; method in historical research; the role of social-scientific analysis for students of ancient documents; and the status of the pseudepigrapha in Jewish and Christian transmission. Not surprisingly, problems surrounding the Dead Sea Scrolls run like a leitmotif through IOUDAIOS discussions, and the group does include several who are close to the heart of Scrolls research.

From the beginning of IOUDAIOS operations to date there have been 2,450 messages, yielding on average four postings each day. When a topic takes hold, the number of incoming messages may be much greater (there are occasional lulls in conversation—especially in late August). Despite such volume, only once has a misunderstanding turned into something that necessitated action from the list coordinator. The wide range of contributors includes those whose specialties lie far away from the study of first-century Judaism, to those who are at the top of the field. The tolerance level seems to be as high as the learning is deep.

IOUDAIOS has been one of the more fruitful LISTSERV groups in which I have participated. At least four factors can be cited to account for its success. First, the group began in response to a expressed need for a forum in which issues of first-century Judaism could be discussed. There was, then, a ready-made constituency to launch discussions. Some LISTSERV groups have appeared out of someone's good initiative only to discover that the number of willing participants are in short supply.

Second, the small group of two dozen or so with which IOUDAIOS began had the "right" ingredients. There were senior scholars to give the group legitimacy; there were younger scholars with energy to give to the endeavour; and there were people who were willing to speak from their learning and share their insights. Even fairly sizeable groups can cast about in the doldrums when too few members participate. IOUDAIOS has its share who simply "listen"; but a critical mass of group members were active and engaging participants from the beginning.

Third, the focus of IOUDAIOS on first century-Judaism is narrow enough to provide a centre for the group. No matter what specialties are to be found among members, this interest at least is shared. From this base-line, discussions can range chronologically and methodologically. This focus gave the group and immediate momentum.

A fourth reason for the success of IOUDAIOS is the way it is constituted. The group is "unmoderated." A LISTSERV can be set to forward contributions to a list editor who screens, and later forwards messages "manually" to the rest of the group. Sometimes this is necessary due to the sheer volume of e-mail, or to the diversified nature of the postings. But "moderation" also means a potentially deadly time-lag between the contribution of a message by one member, and its reception by the rest of the group. In spite of the volume of IOUDAIOS mail, "moderation" has been avoided. Spontaneity has been the key to vital and engaging debates.

IOUDAIOS has forged an international community of scholars. Participation in "list life" has been a valuable stimulus to my own thinking. As enjoyable as the "annual conference" can be, the ongoing nature of electronic communication makes it an important complement to meeting face-to-face.