Dynamics of Knowledge Transfer Between Jewish and Graeco-Roman Culture: Using Insights from Cultural Studies

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The term "knowledge economy" and the investigation of knowledge systems and networks has become an important part of the sociological study of modern societies in recent years. Many of these studies are based on contemporary social media (internet, mobile phones) and the ways in which they innovated information exchange.[1] The term is broad enough to be applicable to many aspects of the use, transfer, and innovation of knowledge within society in areas such as education, finance, and governance.[2] When used as a heuristic term, knowledge economies can also be identified and studied in ancient societies. Various types and forms of knowledge were generated, circulated, and exchanged among Jews and between Jews and non-Jews in Roman Palestine in late antiquity. This knowledge was always context-specific, changeable, and adaptable to new circumstances.

In the past, Jewish culture in the Land of Israel in the first five centuries C.E. has often been juxtaposed to and compared with Graeco-Roman and early Byzantine culture as if the two were distinct entities that encountered, clashed with, or influenced each other. The notion of "knowledge economy" allows us to study the knowledge that was generated in Roman Palestine as a whole. I shall explore how insights from Cultural Studies may help us to go beyond the imagined Jewish/Graeco-Roman dichotomy. Although approaches within Cultural Studies usually focus on modern societies, there are sufficient similarities in social and cultural processes that allow us to explore ancient societies under similar parameters.

The first such context is empire-building. The Roman conquest of territories with its subsequent creation of provinces that were linked to the Roman Empire, yet, at the same time, independent in some regards, is comparable to modern empire-building, as in the cases of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires. How did the culture in the integrated territories change after they became part of a larger political unit? Can we distinguish between various native or national cultures that

1 See, e.g., Paul Cunningham et al. (eds.), *Building the Knowledge Economy: Issues, Applications, Case Studies*, Amsterdam 2003.

2 Isabel Salavisa and Margarida Fontes (eds.), *Social Networks, Innovation and the Knowledge Economy,* Abingdon and New York 2012; Rob Cross et al. (eds.), *Networks in the Knowledge Economy,* Oxford 2003.

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co-existed with an over-arching empire-wide international culture, or did political integration lead to cultural changes in the conquered territory?

The second context is the question of cultural attraction. What are the reasons behind the attractiveness of some aspects of a culture for non-natives? Even apart from political conquest, associations of political dominance and power associated with certain cultural outputs may play a role. In this regard, the impact of American culture on European cultures after World War II can be compared to Hellenization in antiquity. A few exceptions notwithstanding, in both cases attraction rather than compulsion seems to have governed the adoption of new practices and ideas.

The third context is the modern notion of cultural "hybridity". Is it possible to apply such a concept to ancient societies? Which aspects of Jewish culture would have been hybrid? To what extent did regional and social differences in hybridity exist? What would have been the impact of such differences on knowledge transfer, interaction, and communication between individuals and groups within society? In modern societies, hybridity is linked to mobility, education, and urban contexts. Were these aspects also relevant in antiquity, and how so? How would rabbis in Roman Palestine, that is, local Jewish intellectuals, fit into such a scheme?

1 Empire-Building and Cultural Change

From the late fourth century B.C.E. onwards, Jews in the Land of Israel became part of the Hellenistic and afterwards the Roman Empire. While the amount of political self-determination would have varied – periods of direct dominance by foreign rulers were interrupted by periods of quasi-independence under Hasmonean and Herodian rule – throughout this period Jews were in direct contact with Greek and Roman culture, which they adopted, assimilated, integrated, rejected, and rebelled against in various ways and to various degrees. Greek and Roman culture was present in the form of persons (Greeks and Romans who sojourned in the territory), institutions (such as temples, theatres and amphitheatres, gymnasia, bathhouses, courts, archives, philosophical, legal, and rhetorical schools), and artefacts (e.g., statues, wall paintings, pottery, imported food, wine, and spices; jewelry, amulets). It could be heard (e.g., in conversations, theatre plays, rumours, public speeches), seen (e.g., in artistic displays, pantomimes, observed customs and practices), smelled (e.g., foods, market displays), and touched (e.g., statues, textiles, experiences in bathhouses). At least for those Jews who lived in Jerusalem and the so-called Hellenistic cities in Second Temple times and in cities such as Caesarea, Bet She'an (Scythopolis) Sepphoris, and Tiberias in Late Roman times, Graeco-Roman culture would have been all-pervasive and part of their everyday life experience.[3]

3 Aryeh Kasher, *Jews and Hellenistic Cities in Eretz-Israel: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Hellenistic Cities during the Second Temple Period (332 BCE–70 CE)*, Tübingen 1990, p. vii, has already pointed out in his "Foreword" that "Eretz-Israel has never been inhabited in the entirety by a single nation". In both First and Second Temple times, under Jewish sovereignty and foreign rule, Jews would have lived alongside members of other ethnic groups. On rabbis

The editors of the volume, *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, have emphasized that these larger political systems "powerfully transformed the lives of people […] in ways quite different from other, non-imperial societies" and therefore "invite comparative analysis".[4] Even if Graeco-Roman culture was not enforced on the conquered people, it would have been associated with power, wealth, and sophistication, whereas regional traditions might have been associated with localism, submission, and inferiority. Power would have been embodied in public officials, publicly posted decrees, and military presence. Wealth was evident in the building works. Sophistication involved infrastructure, architecture, and technological changes such as the creation of urban centres, road networks, and harbours. It also concerned education, Greek *paideia*, represented by schools that offered rhetorical, philosophical, and legal instruction to provincials of a high social status who aspired to participate in empire-wide upper-class conversations.

As far as personal identity is concerned, locals' identity would be based on a variety of parameters such as gender, ethnic origin, education, wealth, office, profession. Loyalties extended to families and neighbours as well as to villages and cities. For example, both patronyms and places appear in the identification of rabbis and non-rabbis in rabbinic sources. People could and did combine several types of identity. They were both Judaeans and Hellenes, citizens of Tiberias and Romans, rabbis and aristocrats. Wealthy urbanites would have combined local and supra-local identities, identifying themselves with their provincial cities as well as with the Hellenistic or Roman Empire at large.[5] The imperial administrative structure enabled them to expand their businesses. As Greek speakers they benefited from Greek educational opportunities. Network relations to fellow-aristocrats opened them and their children doors into the empire-wide upper classes. The correspondence between a fourth-century Jewish patriarch and the rhetorician Libanius, with whom the patriarch's son allegedly studied, are an example of such beneficial connections.[6]

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and urbanization in the Roman period see Hayim Lapin, "Rabbis and Cities in Later Roman Palestine: The Literary Evidence", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50 (1999), pp. 187–207; idem, "Rabbis and Cities: Some Aspects of the Rabbinic Movement in its Graeco-Roman Environment", in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2, ed. by Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, Tübingen 2000, pp. 51–80; Aharon Oppenheimer, "Urbanisation and City Territories in Roman Palestine", in: idem, *Between Rome and Babylon: Studies in Jewish Leadership and Society*, Tübingen 2005, pp. 30–46; Jürgen Zangenberg, "Urbanization", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. by Catherine Hezser, Oxford 2010, pp. 165–88.

4 Susan E. Alcock et al. (eds.), *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History* Cambridge 2001, p. i.

5 On the combination of various identity markers, especially as far as wealthy urbanites are concerned, see Susan E. Alcock, "Reconfiguration of Memory in the Eastern Roman Empire", in: *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. by Susan E. Alcock et al., Cambridge 2001, p. 345.

6 English translations of these letters are published in Menahem Stern, *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism*, vol. 2: *From Tacitus to Simplicitus*, Jerusalem 1980, pp. 589–97. For a discussion see Martin Jacobs, *Die Institution des jüdischen Patriarchen. Eine quellen- und traditionskritische Studie zur Geschichte der Juden in der Spätantike*, Tübingen 1995, pp. 259–72.

Carla Sinopoli has pointed to the diversity of non-elites and their varied responses to empire: "For some, empires provided possibilities for social and economic enhancement", e.g., through "production of valued resources".[7] For others, empire might have meant displacement, enslavement, and heavy taxation. Although most rabbis would not have belonged to the land-owning upper strata of Palestinian Jewish society, as Jewish intellectuals they seem to have been eager to present themselves as equal to Graeco-Roman scholars. Even if they did not directly acknowledge it, they seem to have fashioned themselves in analogy to Graeco-Roman intellectuals, especially philosophers and jurists, in various regards.[8]

Rabbis would have benefited from the Roman expansion of the road network, which increased their mobility and enabled them to establish inter-regional network connections with like-minded Torah scholars elsewhere.[9] By the third century C.E. this mobility of Palestinian rabbis to Babylonia, probably primarily for business reasons, had enabled the spread of the rabbinic propagation of Torah study into Sasanian Persia.[10] Palestinian rabbis were able to find students and adherents among the Babylonian Jewish population, some of whom then decided to relocate to Roman Palestine to study with them. When they eventually returned to Babylonia they would not only bring their newly acquired Torah expertise with them, but also often returned to their homeland with the knowledge of Graeco-Roman culture they had gained in Palestine.

When focusing on the opportunities and experiences that the Hellenization and Romanization of Palestine brought about, the question arises whether the integration of the Land of Israel into these larger cultural and political realms may have been beneficial for some Jews in some regards. This is a complex question that has also been posed in connection with modern colonial empires. To what extent is empire-building negative and to what extent can it have partly positive consequences for the regions that are subjected to imperial rule? May all or some sectors of the population benefit from their incorporation into larger empires at least in some regards? Are changes that result from imperialism sometimes positive for regional developments? On the one hand, the seizure of land, exploitation of the poor, and heavy taxation would have had a negative effect on the Jewish population. On the other hand, the Hellenistic and Roman conquests widened

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7 Carla Sinopoli, "Imperial Integration and Imperial Subjects", in: *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. by Susan E. Alcock, Cambridge 2001, p. 199.

8 See Catherine Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity*, Leiden and Boston 2017; eadem, "The Codification of Legal Knowledge in Late Antiquity: The Talmud Yerushalmi and Roman Law Codes", in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 1, ed. by Peter Schäfer, Tübingen 1998, pp. 583–5; eadem, "Guidelines for the Ideal Way of Life: Rabbinic Halakhah and Hellenistic Practical Ethics", in: *From Strength to Strength: Essays in Honor of Shaye J.D. Cohen*, ed. by Michael Satlow, Providence 2018, pp. 389–404.

9 See the overview in Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Travel in Antiquity*, Tübingen 2011, pp. 54–88.

10 Catherine Hezser, "Crossing Enemy Lines: Network Connections Between Palestinian and Babylonian Sages in Late Antiquity", *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 46 (2015), pp. 224–50.

local people's horizons and introduced them to new languages (Greek and Latin), areas of knowledge, architectural techniques, food, wine, and material culture that they would not have encountered otherwise.

When focusing on the Roman Empire and its impact on Jews in Palestine after the two revolts, that is, from the later second century C.E. onwards, the so-called *Pax Romana* is noteworthy.[11] The *Pax Romana* brought "relative peace and stability" to Roman Palestine.[12] This was the heyday of the Palestinian rabbinic movement, when rabbis were able to establish themselves as the foremost Jewish religious leaders, with legal practices that resembled the adjudication of Roman jurists,[13] and disciple circles including sophists and philosophers.[14] Rabbinic study was introduced as a particularly Jewish type of higher education that substituted for Homer and Vergil the Jewish biblical heritage.[15] While rabbis may have rejected Graeco-Roman mythology, with which the provincial population became familiar through temples, statues, and theatre performances, as well as non-kosher food and libation wine, some aspects of Graeco-Roman culture seem to have been viewed positively and were imitated and adapted.[16] Namely, these aspects related to intellectual culture and scholarship. As Richard Hidary has shown in his recent study, many similarities between rabbinic, sophistic, and rhetorical study and public presentation can be found in rabbinic literary sources.[17] He points out correctly that "the definition of 'influence' of one group upon another must be broadened to include borrowing, rejecting, adopting, adapting, subverting, converting, combating and combining".[18] A similar claim can be made for rabbinic halakhic discussions in comparison with Roman civil law. Many halakhic rules found in Palestinian rabbinic documents cannot be understood properly without

11 On the *Pax Romana* see Adrian Goldsworthy, *Pax Romana: War, Peace and Conquest in the Roman World*, New Haven, 2016.

12 Richard A. Gabriel, "Review of Adrian Goldsworthy, Pax Romana: War, Peace and Conquest in the Roman World, by Adrian Goldsworthy, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2016", *HistoryNet*, available at: http://www.historynet.com/book-review-pax-romana.htm, accessed 2 June 2018.

13 See Jill Harries, "Courts and the Judicial System", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Jewish Daily Life in Roman Palestine*, ed. by Catherine Hezser, Oxford 2010, pp. 90–95.

14 Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language*, pp. 102–6.

15 See Catherine Hezser, "The Torah versus Homer: Jewish and Greco-Roman Education in Late Roman Palestine", in: *Ancient Education and Early Christianity*, ed. by Matthew R. Hauge and Andrew W. Pitts, London 2016, pp. 5–24.

16 On temples see Nicole Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine, Second to Fourth Century,* Tübingen 2001; Emmanuel Friedheim, *Rabbanisme et paganisme en Palestine Romaine: Étude historique des Realia talmudiques* (Ier-IVème siècles), Leiden 2004. On statues see Yaron Z. Eliav, "Roman Statues, Rabbis, and Graeco-Roman Culture," in: *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*, ed. by Yaron Eliav and Anita Norich, Providence 2008, pp. 99–115. On theatre performances see Zeev Weiss, *Public Spectacles in Roman and Late Antique Palestine*, Cambridge, MA 2014.

17 Richard Hidary, *Rabbis and Classical Rhetoric: Sophistic Education and Oratory in the Talmud and Midrash,* Cambridge 2018.

18 Ibid., p. 22.

the broader discursive context of Roman law.[19] It was only in this broader context of Hellenism and Romanization that Palestinian rabbis were able to establish themselves as Jewish intellectuals who preserved the Jewish biblical heritage by adopting Graeco-Roman forms of jurisdiction, moral reasoning, oral dispute, transmission of traditions, and written anthologies.

2 The Attractions of Politically Dominant Cultures

What makes some cultures so attractive that those who did not grow up in them nevertheless want to be part of them? An example of such a process is the Americanization of Europe after World War II, which also produced resistance and anti-American sentiments. After the Second World War and especially from the 1960s onwards, American culture "invaded" European societies and was eagerly adopted by young people. As Alexander Stephan has pointed out, "… postwar Europe would not be the same without the ubiquitous presence of America", although for some countries such as Germany, America had been the enemy nation until then.[20]

Like American culture, Greek culture was not forcefully imposed on Jews and other ethnic groups. The very term Hellenism, as coined by Johann Gustav Droysen, denotes a merger between Greek and various regional Near Eastern cultures and seems to imply that the local adoption and integration happened voluntarily.[21] Droysen saw Hellenistic Judaism as the seedbed of Christianity, an idea that Martin Hengel expanded in his work, *Judaism and Hellenism*.[22] What neither Droysen nor Hengel were interested or expert in is rabbinic Judaism. That even post-70 Judaism could be Hellenistic escaped their attention. Like Roman culture itself, in which the Hellenistic impact continued to play a significant role, especially as far as education, philosophy, and art are concerned,[23] rabbinic Judaism is unlikely to have developed in the way it did without the prior experience of centuries of Hellenism.

Rabbis' embeddedness in Hellenistic culture did not only concern loanwords and literary forms, which Saul Lieberman, Henry Fischel, and Samuel Krauss

19 See Catherine Hezser, "Did Palestinian Rabbis Know Roman Law? Methodological Considerations and Case Studies", forthcoming in: *Mélanges. Ecole Française de Rome*.

20 Alexander Stephan, "Cold War Alliances and the Emergence of Transatlantic Competition: An Introduction", in: *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*, ed. by Alexander Stephan, New York/Oxford 2006, p. 1.

21 On Droysen's positive understanding of Hellenism as a creative development that prevented Greek classical culture's decline see Robert Southard, *Droysen and the Prussian School of History*, Lexington 1995, pp. 11–2. The first German-language volume of Droysen's *Geschichte des Hellenismus* appeared in 1833 *(Geschichte Alexanders des Grossen)*.

22 On Droysen and Christianity see Paul Cartledge, "Introduction", in: *Hellenistic Constructs: Essays in Culture, History, and Historiography*, ed. by Paul Cartledge et al., Berkeley 1997, pp. 2–3.

23 See Geoff W. Adams, *The Roman Emperor Gaius 'Caligula' and His Hellenistic Aspirations*, Boca Raton 2007, pp. 26–7. On Greek and Hellenistic philosophy in the Roman Empire see Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*, Oxford 2015, p. 145: "… Rome itself played host to many a philosopher, including those who spoke and wrote in Greek". Obviously, Hellenistic philosophy also continued in the Near East in Roman times.

have investigated in the past.[24] It concerned the very notion of the *hakham* or wise man, surrounded by a circle of students, who personified the cultural tradition of the past and adapted it to new circumstances.[25] Rabbis' self-styling as Jewish intellectuals in accordance with the Hellenistic philosophical model involved clothing (the *tallit* equalled the *pallium*), hairstyles (statues and busts of Graeco-Roman thinkers always include the beard), demeanor (walking and talking, followed by students/clients), the dual modes of seated teaching and *perambulatio*, the interpretation of an ancient base text (the Torah instead of Homer), and the dispute form as the main literary form in which rabbinic thinking is presented in the documents, to name only a few aspects of this cultural assimilation.[26]

Even if rabbis do not mention specific philosophers, sophists, jurists, and rhetoricians, they must have been familiar with their comportment and impressed by their scholarly reputation. Joseph Geiger has shown that Graeco-Roman intellectuals were present in the so-called Hellenistic cities of Palestine from the first century B.C.E. onwards.[27] Robert Hidary has argued for the "widespread presence of rhetoric in Palestine during the first century C.E." already, as evidenced by the employment of rhetoric by Josephus and in the New Testament.[28] As informal legal adjudicators jurists would have functioned in the major cities such as Caesarea.[29] The Greek-speaking intellectuals who sojourned in Palestine would have been mobile and visible at various locations except, perhaps, the rural areas.

Although the majority of rabbis, who did not belong to the upper strata of society and had not received a Greek education, are unlikely to have known the details of these intellectuals' philosophical and legal views or rhetorical theories, they would have been able to observe their ways of walking and talking in the street and marketplace, the ways in which lay-people talked about and venerated them, their learned discourse and disputes with colleagues and students, and the advice they gave to all those who approached them. Rabbis would have known that these intellectuals considered themselves superior to the so-called unlearned

24 Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine: Studies in the Literary Transmission, Beliefs and Manners of Palestine in the I Century B.C.E. – IV Century C.E.*, 2nd ed. New York 1962; Henry A. Fischel, *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature*, New York 1977; Samuel Krauss, *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch, und Targum*, Hildesheim 1964.

25 Catherine Hezser, "Interfaces Between Rabbinic Literature and Graeco-Roman Philosophy", in: *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, vol. 2, ed. by Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, Tübingen 2000, pp. 162–6: "The Social Phenomenon of the Sage".

26 For a more detailed discussion of these similarities see Hezser, *Body Language*, pp. 26–33 (walking and talking), pp. 41–51 *(pallium)*; pp. 51–63 (beard), pp. 102–6 (study sessions). On the importance of dispute in Hellenistic and rabbinic culture see Simon Goldhill (ed.), *The End of Dialogue in Antiquity*, Cambridge 2008.

27 Joseph Geiger, "The Athens of Syria: On Greek Intellectuals in Gadara" [Hebr.], *Cathedra* 35 (1985), pp. 3–16; idem, "Greek Intellectuals of Ascalon" [Hebr.], *Cathedra* 60 (1991), pp. 5–16; idem, "Greek Rhetoricians in Eretz Israel" [Hebr.], *Cathedra* 66 (1992), pp. 47–56; idem, *Hellenism in the East: Studies on Greek intellectuals in Palestine*, Stuttgart 2014.

28 Hidary, *Rabbi*s, pp. 9–10.

29 Harries, "Courts", pp. 86–95.

and that they were seen as repositories of the most important and advanced areas of knowledge that Graeco-Roman society had to offer. Rabbis may also have been aware of these intellectuals' criticism of popular mythology and their tendency to view Zeus as the highest God.[30] Such notions would have separated them from the allegedly idolatrous practices of the common people and made it easier for rabbis to use them as (unacknowledged) role models.

While other Jews may have been attracted to Dionysiac festivals and theatre performances,[31] rabbis positioned themselves within the intellectual culture of Roman Palestine that evolved out of centuries of Greek intellectual presence in the region.[32] Their combination of theory and practice as well as their emphasis on self-control resembled Stoic guidance.[33] Their development of halakhah in areas of civil law, adjudication practices, and transmission of case stories came close to Roman jurists' activities.[34] Many of their forms of argumentation and dispute find counterparts in Graeco-Roman rhetorical and sophistic theory.[35]

What determines the attractiveness of parts of a culture for non-natives? Generally speaking, the cultural "products" must be readily available, able to beat the competition, and either subvert or adapt to local tastes. Official governmental support has ambiguous consequences: it can either help distribute and propagate its products or create a sentiment of revulsion amongst locals.[36] The Graeco-Roman cultural "products" that became widely available in Roman Palestine from the first century onwards were entertainment venues in the form of theatres, amphitheatres, hippodromes, and bathhouses, that offered cheap entertainment and socializing for the masses. In view of the scarcity of other leisure time options that were as fanciful, loud, uplifting, and open to everyone, the attractiveness of mime and pantomime performances, chariot races, gladiatorial fights, mock sea battles, physical exercise activities, games, and bath-related prostitution is not surprising. Despite rabbis' repeated admonitions to their fellow-Jews to visit synagogues and study houses instead of theatres and circuses, the attractiveness of Graeco-Roman

30 On Stoic theology see P.A. Meijer, *Stoic Theology: Proofs for the Existence of the Cosmic God and of the Traditional Gods, Including a Commentary on Cleantes' Hymn on Zeus*, Delft 2007.

31 See Weiss, *Public Spectacles*, pp. 200–8: "Jewish Attendance at the Roman Public Spectacles—Rabbinic Dicta vs. Communal Practice"; Catherine Hezser, "Towards the Study of Jewish Popular Culture in Roman Palestine", in: *'The Words of a Wise Man's Mouth are Gracious' (Qoh 10,12): Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. by Mauro Perani, Berlin/New York 2003, pp. 273–82.

32 See Catherine Hezser, "Rabbis as Intellectuals in the Context of Graeco-Roman and Byzantine Christian Scholasticism", in: *Scholastic Culture in the Hellenistic and Roman Eras: Greek, Latin, and Jewish*, ed. by Sean Adams, Berlin/New York 2019.

33 Catherine Hezser, "Self-Control in a World Controlled by Others: Palestinian Rabbinic 'Asceticism' in Late Antiquity", *Religions in the Roman Empire* 4 (2018), pp. 9–27.

34 Hezser, "Codification of Legal Knowledge", pp. 581–641.

35 Hidary, *Rabbis*, passim.

36 Günter Bischof, "Two Sides of the Coin: The Americanization of Austria and Austrian Anti-Americanism", in: *The Americanization of Europe: Culture, Diplomacy, and Anti-Americanism after 1945*, ed. by Alexander Stephan, New York and Oxford 2006, p. 165.

popular culture for Palestinian Jews can be considered uncontested. Everyone who lived in some proximity to these venues would have attended the staged events. That these performances familiarized the local population with Graeco-Roman mythology and the ever-present emperor-cult was probably the main reason for their introduction in the provinces and their financial support by the Roman authorities. They elicited the (probably ineffective) outrage of rabbis who may have attended some of these events themselves.

While Graeco-Roman popular culture would have been absorbed by the Jewish masses, the high culture of intellectual pursuits would have been something that upwardly mobile provincials would have been aspiring to. This would have concerned the acquisition of Greek *paideia* among the upper strata of Jewish society. Greek *paideia* linked local elites to their counterparts elsewhere in the Roman Empire. As Richard Miles has pointed out, "The Graeco-Roman élite, wherever they lived within the Roman empire, considered that through education they were linked with one another in a universal brotherhood … This sense of shared culture and identity … served to generate and reinforce power".[37] Josephus and the early third-century C.E. patriarch R. Yehudah ha-Nasi can be considered examples of wealthy Jewish aristocrats who possessed Greek learning and participated in this empire-wide culture.

Ordinary rabbis, on the other hand, seem to have mostly belonged to the middle strata of society. At least this is the impression that references to rabbis' professions in amoraic texts provide.[38] Members of the middle strata of society tend to imitate the mores of the upper classes without being actually considered their equals.[39] In his book on *The Ancient Middle Classes*, Emanuel Mayer has illustrated the middle classes' aspiration to emulate and imitate the behaviour and lifestyle of the upper strata of Roman society.[40] Obviously, due to a lack of sufficient resources, they could do so only on a smaller scale. This tendency to imitate the élite is evident, for example, in the way in which the more moderate houses are decorated with wall paintings. It is also evident in funerary portraits in which the probably illiterate carry book rolls and writing tablets. As Paul Zanker has shown, "the widespread adoption of the imagery of *paideia* on the funerary reliefs", which "are preserved in large numbers", indicates "the central importance of philosophy,

37 Richard Miles, "Communicating culture, identity and power", in: *Experiencing Rome: Culture, Identity and Power in the Roman Empire*, ed. by Janet Huskinson, London 2000, p. 48.

38 On rabbis' social statuses see Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine*, Tübingen 1997, p. 257–66. For second-century C.E. rabbis see Shaye J.D. Cohen, "The Place of the Rabbi in the Jewish Society of the Second Century", in: idem, *The Significance of Yavneh and Other Essays in Jewish Hellenism*, Tübingen 2010, pp. 282–96, who assumes that in tannaitic times rabbis belonged to the élite.

39 See Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, *Rome's Cultural Revolution*, Cambridge 2008.

40 Emanuel Mayer, *The Ancient Middle Classes. Urban Life and Aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE – 250 CE,* Cambridge, MA, and London 2012, p. 47.

scholarship, and learning" in ancient society of the first centuries C.E.[41] In funerary portraits men are presented as "thinkers", "with the head propped up on one hand".[42] The Roman fresco of a young woman holding a stylus and a wax tablet, found in a house in Pompeii, is well-known.[43] Such depictions do not tell us anything about the actual education or literacy of these individuals. They rather indicate the wide-spread aspiration to be counted among the learned strata of society.

Whereas rabbis were probably not interested in adorning their houses with Roman-style wall-paintings, they clearly admired the life-style of Graeco-Roman intellectuals, who belonged to the upper strata of society. Rather than having themselves portrayed with a book roll, they engaged in study and attracted disciples who could compensate for slaves in the public realm. Rabbis' comportment in public was of crucial importance for gaining recognition as scholars in late antique society.[44] By walking and talking like philosophers, by wrapping themselves in philosophers' cloaks, surrounding themselves with disciples, and advising lay people in public, by looking down on the "unlearned" and upholding the value of scholarship, that is, by fashioning themselves as particularly Jewish types of intellectuals, rabbis participated in the late antique aspiration for learning and veneration of the wise.

3 Ancient Judaism and Cultural Hybridity

Like all cultures that develop in contact with other cultures, ancient Judaism can serve as an example of cultural hybridity. The notion of cultural hybridity was introduced by Homi Bhabha in connection with colonialism. In his book, *The Location of Culture*, he argues that contacts between the colonizers and the colonized subjects, especially the subalterns, lead to hybrid identities.[45] Resistance to and appropriation of aspects of the dominating culture can be considered two sides of one and the same coin. In the more than two decades since the publication of Bhabha's programmatic essay, the study of cultural hybridity has become more complex and was carried forward by other scholars.[46] Scholars increasingly look at both sides of a cultural encounter and include pre-modern societies in hybridity studies.[47]

41 Paul Zanker, *The Mask of Socrates: The Image of the Intellectual in Antiquity*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1995, p. 190.

42 Ibid. p. 192.

43 See the image at https://www.ancient.eu/image/3840/ (5 June 2018).

44 Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language*, pp. 252–4.

45 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Abingdon and New York 1994, p. 172.

46 See, for example, Pnina Werbner and Tariq Moodod (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, London 1997; Joel Kuortti and Jopi Nyman (eds.), *Reconstructing Hybridity: Post-Colonial Studies in Transition*, Amsterdam and New York 2007; Nicolas Lemay-Hébert and Rosa Freedman (eds.), *Hybridity: Law, Culture and Development*, Abingdon/New York 2017. Numerous studies that examine particular modern and pre-modern societies under this rubric have been published since the 1990s.

47 E.g., Phillip Myers, "Hybridity and the Ancient Western Mediterranean", in: *Hybridity: Law, Culture and Development*, ed. by Nicolas Lemay-Hébert and Rosa Freedman, Abington/New

At times and places where people from different ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds encounter each other, the notion of clearly definable and bounded ethnic or national identities can hardly be maintained. Ancient societies were not less hybrid than modern ones, although widespread globalization and the ease of internet communication and travel have increased. the possibility of contact with people located beyond one's family and local sphere. In ancient cities such as Alexandria, Rome, and Caesarea people of many different ethnic, religious, and cultural origins lived side-by-side and interacted with each other in daily life. Such interactions would have left their mark on their identities and the environment. We can therefore expect to find hybrid identities, hybrid artefacts, hybrid architectural styles, hybrid institutions, and hybrid practices in Roman Palestine.[48]

Obviously, cultural hybridity needs to be understood as a spectrum rather than a concept with a fixed meaning. The frequency, range, and quality of the contacts determine the degree and nature of hybridity. A set of people that separates itself from its surroundings and has only few and superficial contacts with others, such as Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Jews nowadays, is much less hybrid than people who live close to and frequently interact with those of other ethnic and religious backgrounds. Even those who separate themselves from society and embark on a life in the desert, however, such as members of the Qumran community and the Egyptian desert monks, would have spent parts of their life amongst "ordinary" people and would continue to meet them for instruction and advice. Therefore, these communities would also be more or less hybrid, irrespective of whether the members perceived themselves as such.

As far as ancient Judaism is concerned, Michael Peppard has suggested that the concept of hybridity may help understand the relation between names and ethnic identities in the inscriptions from Bet She'arim.[49] He argues "that the onomastic data from Beth She'arim allow us to see a part of Galilee in late antiquity that was ethnically characterized by hybridity".[50] Therefore "a conception of late antique Jewish ethnicity as a well-defined, uniform, and already given category" must be dismissed.[51] Daniel Boyarin has used the term hybridity in connection with the blurred boundaries between Jews and Christians in the second century, and the Ebionites in particular.[52] With regard to the Ebionites, James Carleton Paget writes:

York 2017, pp. 105–121; John and Erica Hedges, *Creolised Bodies and Hybrid Identities: Examining the Early Roman Period in Essex and Hertfordshire*, Oxford 2006; the contributions in Katerina Zacharia (ed.), *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, Abingdon and New York 2008.

48 On these varieties of hybridity see Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, Cambridge 2009, ch. 1: "Varieties of Object".

49 Michael Peppard, "Personal Names and Ethnic Hybridity in Late Ancient Galilee", in: *Religion, Ethnicity, and Identity in Ancient Galilee: A Region in Transition*, ed. by Jürgen Zangenberg, Harold W. Attridge and Dale B. Martin, Tübingen 2007, pp. 100–1.

50 Ibid. p. 106.

51 Ibid.

52 Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia 2004, pp. 14–6.

"It is the hybridity of the sect that Epiphanius opposes and he locates that, at least in part, in the attempt to mix what he sees as Judaism and Christianity".[53] With Ivan Marcus one may argue that "Jewish hybridity characterizes much of ancient Jewish history [..] Hybridity also characterized some Jews who lived under direct Roman administrative rule from the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. to the middle of the fourth Christian century".[54]

Unlike ultra-Orthodox circles nowadays, ancient rabbis were not interested in separating themselves from their environment and in preserving the ancestral tradition as a fixed and unchangeable entity. On the contrary, they fully participated in daily life in a Roman province and adapted – and thereby renewed and innovated – traditional practices and beliefs to contemporary circumstances. One may therefore argue that rabbinic Judaism itself is a hybrid form of Judaism, based on both resistance against and adaptation of Graeco-Roman forms of argumentation, ways of thinking, identity formation, and problem-solving that are merged with the "indigenous", but also already hybrid, biblical tradition.

Interestingly, different degrees of explicitness pertain to the ways in which rabbis rejected, accommodated to, and adopted Graeco-Roman cultural practices. In rabbinic literary sources certain "idolatrous" religious customs are explicitly rejected, whereas others are ignored, side-lined, or reinterpreted. Graeco-Roman institutions could be frequented (e.g., bathhouses), criticised (e.g., theatres), or taken for granted (e.g., courts, administration). Aspects of Graeco-Roman higher education could be imitated (e.g., oral disputes, seated sessions and *perambulatio*), while the content was different. Rabbis could present themselves as particularly Jewish exemplars of ancient intellectuals without mentioning Graeco-Roman philosophers by name. They could give legal advice and devise legal rules like Roman jurists without having attended Roman law schools. The provincial context enabled rabbis to transform Judaism into a Graeco-Roman scholastic tradition while at the same time remaining truthful to Judaism's Near Eastern roots.

53 James Carleton Paget, *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity,* Tübingen 2010, p. 373.
54 Ivan G. Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage from Biblical to Modern Times,* Seattle and London 2004, p. 6.

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