

Katell Berthelot, *Jews and Their Roman Rivals: Pagan Rome's Challenge to Israel*.

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This monumental book, which is the outcome of a five-year ERC Consolidator Grant, is an excellent synthesis of recent scholarship on the impact of Roman imperialism on the Jewish inhabitants of the Roman empire. The 58-page bibliography as well as the numerous summaries and references to other scholars' work indicate the immense amount of reading that constitutes the basis of this study. The author reemphasizes the *communis opinio* on Jewish reactions to Rome: the ambiguity of responses that shifted between rejection, adaptation, and mimicry, attitudes that could be held at the same time and by the same set of people. She argues that rivalry governed the relationship between Jews and Rome and that this rivalry sparked a variety of responses that included the imitation of Roman concepts of peoplehood (ch. 2), manliness based on military strength (ch. 3), civil law (ch. 4), and citizenship (ch. 5). Since her expertise lies especially in Greek Jewish literature, including Philo and Josephus, these sources are treated very thoroughly and might sometimes overshadow the later rabbinic responses. Altogether, Berthelot sets out to examine the Jewish encounter with Rome in the *Longue Durée*, in comparison with earlier (Assyria to Hellenistic kingdoms) and later (Byzantine Christian) foreign dominions.

In the Introduction the author argues that "engagement with the Roman empire posed a unique ideological challenge for Jews" (2) that differed from other confrontations. Whereas scholars have recently focused on the Jewish "competition" with (Byzantine) Christianity, the pre-Christian Roman challenge to Judaism allegedly received less attention. One may challenge this claim and point to earlier studies such as Martin Goodman's equally monumental work, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (2007), which deals with the same topic but is not properly refereed here, and Seth Schwartz's book on *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (2001), whose main argument concerns the impact of Christianization on Jews but who also treats the earlier Roman period, and Peter Schäfer's (ed.) 3 volumes on *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture* (1998–2002), of which only Hayes' article is mentioned.¹ The alleged dearth of studies on the encounter between Jews and Rome is already contradicted by the lengthy

1 Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, 1st ed. (London: Allen Lane, 2007); S.R. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Peter Schäfer and Catherine Hezser, eds., *The Talmud*

bibliography, which nevertheless lacks acknowledgment of studies such as David Goodblatt's *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (2006) and Doron Mendels' *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism* (1992),² which address issues of ethnicity and identity that Berthelot also deals with here when claiming that the Roman "imperialism of a people" was countered by a reassertion of Jewish peoplehood and self-definition as "citizens of Israel."

In contrast to the political-historical focus of some of these earlier studies, Berthelot is mainly interested in ideology, that is, the way in which Jewish self-understanding expressed in the literary sources changed with and adapted to Roman imperial representation. Politically, the Jewish inhabitants of a distant eastern client kingdom and province could hardly be considered "rivals" to Rome. The literary sources pose a particular problem: the majority of Jewish writings from before 70 C.E. were written in Greek, many of them in Egypt, and exhibit a "universal" claim of the Torah's ethical relevance for all humankind in line with Hellenistic notions of morality, whereas post-70 rabbinic literature stems from the Land of Israel, is written in Hebrew-Aramaic, and considers the Torah a specifically Jewish heritage. Furthermore, it is not so much biblical laws but the Oral Torah developed by rabbis that came to constitute a local "indigenous" alternative to Roman law. Philo, Josephus, and the rabbis all responded to Roman rule but in very different political circumstances and in disparate ways. Unfortunately, the responses of (the majority?) of non-rabbinic, Greek-speaking, and Diaspora-dwelling Jews after 70 C.E. are not available to us. Therefore the picture must remain one-sided and incomplete.

The author admits that various features of Roman imperialism had earlier precedents, namely, universalistic claims and the notion of the emperor as righteous judge and divinely chosen tool to create peace in the world. Hellenistic Jewish literature responded to these claims already. Nevertheless, "these features received a new meaning in the Roman context or were perceived in a new way" (85). The emperor's self-presentation as a divinely chosen leader who brought about the Pax Romana "may have challenged the Jewish belief in the election of the people of Israel" (120) and led to an emphasis on "the universal and eternal dimension" of Israel's destiny. The statement that "Israel and Rome are rivals in universal vocation" (136) is mainly based on Josephus and biblical messianism, however, and does not properly represent rabbinic notions of the Torah as the exclusive inheritance of Jews.

Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture (3 Vols.), Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

2 Doron Mendels, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); David M. Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Mimesis in the context of rivalry is most obvious in the legal realm. Rabbis developed a specifically Jewish corpus of civil law that not only covered areas that were also part of Roman law but adapted and imitated Roman legal principles, values, and case decision. Especially after 212 C.E., when the *Constitutio Antoniana* offered citizenship to all inhabitants of the Roman empire, the mere availability of Roman jurisdiction must have constituted a challenge to rabbinically minded Jews who would have recognized law as “an instrument of empire” (267). The Jewish, or rather rabbinic response was the creation of rabbinic law that was “both idiosyncratic and very much in tune with Roman legal thinking” (283).

The most interesting but perhaps also controversial chapter is the final one on the challenge posed by Roman citizenship, which further develops ideas expressed by Hayes, Wilfand, and Irshai. Although “no Jewish source documents Jewish reactions to Caracalla’s edict” (341), indirect responses can be deduced from rabbinic texts that deal with proselytes, captives, and manumitted slaves and are interpreted as adoptions of the Roman citizenship model. Proselytes are either seen “as new citizens in Israel’s body politic” (343) in analogy to the Roman populace as a “melting pot” or as adoptive children integrated in the Israelite family that is based on kinship ties. Manumitted slaves and redeemed captives can be considered proper Jews. This integrative stance allegedly mimics the Roman “policy of enfranchisement” (357) with its aim of unifying the collective.

An aspect one would have expected to be discussed here that is missing is Roman polytheism with its religious mythology, temple and family rituals, and presence in the public sphere. Responses to (Graeco-)Roman religious practices and ideas can be found both in Greek Jewish literature and in rabbinic texts, especially in the tractate *Avodah Zarah*. The claimed rivalry was also a rivalry of the gods and a resistance against the simple inclusion of the Jewish God into the pagan pantheon.

The book is destined to constitute one of the main bases of discussion on Jews and Rome for years to come. It is recommended not only to students and scholars of ancient Judaism but also to those interested in Greek, Roman and early Christian history, literature, and religion. While the volume has an index of sources, a subject index is unfortunately missing.

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