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Introduction: Rethinking Romanness, Provincializing Christendom

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Introduction: Rethinking Romanness, Provincializing Christendom

Abstract

In histories of ancient Jews and Judaism, the Roman Empire looms large. For all the attention to the Jewish Revolt and other conflicts, however, there has been less concern for situating Jews within Roman imperial contexts; just as Jews are frequently dismissed as atypical by scholars of Roman history, so Rome remains invisible in many studies of rabbinic and other Jewish sources written under Roman rule. Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire brings Jewish perspectives to bear on long-standing debates concerning Romanization, Christianization, and late antiquity. Focusing on the third to sixth centuries, it draws together specialists in Jewish and Christian history, law, literature, poetry, and art. Perspectives from rabbinic and patristic sources are juxtaposed with evidence from piyyutim, documentary papyri, and synagogue and church mosaics. Through these case studies, contributors highlight paradoxes, subtleties, and ironies of Romanness and imperial power.

Disciplines

Christianity | European History | History of Christianity | History of Religion | Other Religion | Religion

Sozomen, *HE* Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, GCS 50 (Berlin, 1960).
 TCH Transformation of the Classical Heritage

Abbreviations for rabbinic literature follow the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (<http://jqr.pennpress.org/PennPress/journals/jqr/styleguide.pdf>).

Abbreviations for Classics journals and book series follow *L'Année philologique* (http://www.annee-philologique.com/files/sigles_fr.pdf).

Abbreviations for other primary sources, journals, and book series follow *The SBL Handbook of Style* (Peabody, Mass., 1999).

INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Romanness, Provincializing Christendom

ANNETTE YOSHIKO REED AND NATALIE B. DOHRMANN

In memory of Alan Segal (1945–2011) and Thomas Sizgorich (1970–2011)

In histories of ancient Jews and Judaism, the Roman Empire looms large. Already in 1 and 2 Maccabees, Roman power is figured as a factor in the negotiation of *Ioudaismos* and *Hellenismos*, and at least since Flavius Josephus, the writing of Jewish history in Greek presumes a Roman gaze. Since Josephus, moreover, the first Jewish revolt against Rome (66–73 CE) has been a primary pivot and problem for recounting the fate of the Jewish people under foreign rule. The revolt serves as the stormy horizon for the *Judaean War* and *Antiquities* alike—two works that represent the culmination of Hellenistic Jewish historiography but also the last known Jewish-authored historical writings until the Middle Ages.

To be sure, much ancient Jewish literature effaces the specificity of Roman rule. In the apocalyptic imagination, Rome could be collapsed into Babylon; and in the midrashic imagination, Jewish life in the Roman Empire could be folded into the Deuteronomistic dichotomy of Israel and the nations. Among some rabbis, their relationship could even be reread as a rivalry between two commensurate powers, like the wrestling of Jacob and Esau.¹ Nevertheless, in the Sages' Edom—as in the *Kitim* of the Qumran literature and in the blurred Babylon-cum-Rome of 4 Ezra and Revelation—we glimpse hints of engagement with a distinctive imperial culture, not so neatly mapped onto biblical models or onto the historical precedents provided by Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid, Ptolemaic, or Seleucid rule.² Furthermore, as much as a fantasy of isolation envelops the literature of Palestinian rabbis, the ideal

local elites in producing the illusion of imperial stability.⁷ Such work reminds us that no text can be fully understood apart from the power relations in which its authors and readers are imbricated and implicated. At the same time, another dominant theoretical trend—the discursive or linguistic turn—has pushed us to recall the opposite: particularly for those of us who study the past, any understanding of the power at play *behind* texts is primarily accessible through engagement with the power at play *within* texts—the sticky and intricate webs woven by their poetics.⁸

Such theoretical “turns” have resulted in nothing quite so sweeping as the paradigm shifts in research on ancient Judaism and Christianity in the wake of World War II.⁹ Here, as elsewhere, the dramatic revisionism of the late twentieth century has now given way to deeper rethinkings with more gradual and incremental gains. Nevertheless, the ramifications are perhaps no less significant—not least for opening new types of conversations between social historians of Judaism and scholars of Jewish literature, as well as among specialists in ancient Judaism, Christianity, and the Roman Empire. Accordingly, our concern in this volume is not to promote, debate, or critique any one model or perspective, nor to forefront the data of any single genre, corpus, medium, or locale. What we seek to convey, rather, are multiple efforts at reorientation, in direct or indirect engagement with the hermeneutical and historiographical challenges noted above, but—above all—guided by problems in specific sets of evidence. Not only do the contributors resist romantic narratives about dramatic difference or intractable change, but they draw our attention to the textures of different relevant data for the period, evoking something of the warp and woof of Jewish and Christian life under Roman imperial rule.

As much as the chapters in this volume concern themselves with Jews, Christians, and other Romans, the reader will find little in the way of traditional modes and models of comparison, as predicated on the parallel analysis of “religions,” “identities,” or “cultures,” projected as discrete yet commentable entities. Sidestepping questions about determination of the priority and directionality of influence,¹⁰ our contributors press on to explore more subtle and surprising patterns—ambivalences and asymmetries, ironies and reversals, differences predicated on similarity and similarities predicated on difference. If contributors resist the older temptation to reduce the Jewishness of a text or group to some point along an imagined axis of reaction to a “Graeco-Roman context,” they also avoid easy recourse to more recent truisms concerning identity as constructed through the discourse of alterity.¹¹ What is here brought to the fore are case studies that reveal some of the telling tensions

of separateness may betray something of the Romanness of its motives and settings. That Roman power is implicated in rabbinic authority, after all, is suggested in the origin myths of the rabbis themselves, wherein the establishment of Yavneh is retrospectively tied to the Roman razing of Jerusalem, as Judaism resurrected—with Roman imperial ratification—from the ashes of the Second Temple.³

The present volume attends to such paradoxes, subtleties, and ironies of empire, supplementing the scholarly discussion about conflicts or contrasts between ancient Jews and Romans, with reflections on the experiences of ancient Jews as Romans.⁴ Much distinguished Jews from others in the Roman Empire, and there is no dearth of sophisticated studies exploring the ramifications of such differences for Jews and Christians in the Land of Israel as well as the Diaspora.⁵ It remains, however, that Rome is also the functioning context of almost all early Jewish and Christian literature. Recent attention to the Sasanian Persian settings of the major exceptions to this pattern—the Babylonian Talmud and Syriac Christian literature—serves to sharpen, by comparison, our sense of the Romanness of so much of the surviving evidence for ancient Judaism and Christianity.⁶

Not only is Palestinian Judaism our best-attested example of a Roman provincial culture, but the situation, stance, and strategies of Palestinian rabbis share much more than is commonly noted with Greek, Syrian, Egyptian, and other local sub-elites who simultaneously subverted, absorbed, and manipulated Roman norms. The essays in this volume address such overlaps—highlighting the Romanness of rabbis and other late antique Jews living in the empire, revisiting issues of Jewish and Christian difference in triangulation with Greek prestige and Roman power, and grappling anew with the Christianization of the Roman Empire by considering the role of Jews (real and imagined) in developments traditionally studied in terms of Christians and “pagans.”

It is a timely moment to try to make sense of the simultaneous Romanness and Jewishness of ancient Jews in the Roman Empire. It is also a timely moment to explore the implications of their typicality and exceptionalism for understanding the meaning and limits of Roman power, on the one hand, and the parallel paradox of persecuted and imperialized Christianity, on the other. In recent decades, subjects of empire have attracted fresh attention within the fields of Jewish Studies, Classics, and Late Antiquity, inspired in part by postcolonial theorists pressed by modern examples to retheorize agency, destabilize the idea of identity at center and periphery, and highlight the role of

the drama of Second Temple Judaism, the origins and spread of Christianity, and the rise of the rabbinic movement in Late Antiquity. Of course, the phrase resonates with elements of ancient experience; one might cite the serial proximity of Ptolemaic, Seleucid, and Roman imperial regimes, the topographical overlay of Roman territory with Greek building styles, the prevalence of Greek as the language of Roman provincial power and law, or the place of Hellenistic *paideia* in the making of Roman elites. Indeed, seen from some perspectives, Greek knowledge might appear to enliven Roman power, providing the cultural capital, intellectual prestige, or epistemological legitimization for the empire's military, bureaucratic, and legal mechanisms.¹⁴ Many Jewish and Christian authors seem to suggest as much: in those moments when they did not find themselves face-to-face with Roman soldiers, tax collectors, or tribunals, what they most often contest is not Roman hegemony but rather Greek culture and knowledge.¹⁵

It remains, however, that Rome did have culture and knowledge that was not Greek, and its cultural and epistemological imperialism was intimately tied to its political power.¹⁶ Nor can we imagine an ancient subject who would have perceived Greekness and Romanness as a seamless pair. Rome may have conquered and absorbed Greek territories and entrusted learned Greeks to train its elites, but Latin literature resounds with the ultimate moral superiority of Rome and its disdain for its effete precursor. Already in the first century, Valerius Maximus notes of the Romans who found methods to master both Greek and Greeks: "It was unworthy, they felt, for the weight and authority of empire to be granted to the seductive charm of literature."¹⁷ Conversely, as studies on the Second Sophistic have richly shown, ambitious intellectuals could resist Roman power precisely by performing Greekness.¹⁸ In short, the notion of "Graeco-Roman" would have been a fraught one—to the extent that it existed at all—for a Greek geographer like Strabo, a Roman satirist like Juvenal, a Jewish historian like Josephus, an Anatolian holy man like Apollonius, or Syrian priests like Iamblichus and Elagabalus.

Nevertheless, it remains common in scholarship on Judaism and Christianity to conflate Roman with Greek. Their blurring is perhaps naturalized by typological habit. As if stumbling into Nebuchadnezzar's dream, we collapse empire into empire. Such moves, after all, are widespread in our sources, beginning with the Hebrew Bible and ranging from apocalyptic traditions of the Qumran sectarians, Jesus movement, and other Second Temple Jews, to the biblical interpretation of rabbis and church fathers. The pervasiveness of the strategy may hint at its effectiveness for consolation or cognitive mastery—as if

that Romanness could produce for Jewishness and Christianness—as attested even (especially?) within those types of data most readily aligned with one or another seemingly self-contained tradition. A mishnah, liturgical poem, marriage contract, or synagogue fresco might appear to be sufficiently explained by its rabbinic or Jewish context. But, as we shall see, they may disclose another script or strategy of meaning when set alongside contemporaneous Roman or Christian evidence.¹² Likewise, the allusive Christianness of a sophist or philosopher of the third century, or the seemingly confident triumphalism of a bishop or biographer of the fourth and fifth, may disclose different dynamics to those attentive to the long shadows cast by Roman power, local politics, or the ever-present Jewish past.¹³

That so much of ancient Jewish literature emerged under Roman rule is well known. Nevertheless, just as Jews are frequently dismissed as atypical by scholars of Roman history, so Rome still remains invisible or occluded in a surprising proportion of studies on Jewish materials written under Roman rule and/or by Roman citizens. To lay the groundwork for the essays that follow, thus, we would like to reflect upon some of the reasons for Rome's marginalization in past research on Judaism and to highlight some of what is at stake in recovering a sense of its ubiquity, even in the world of late antique rabbis. The scholarly bracketing of Rome is telling—we suggest—inasmuch as it replicates the rhetorical stances and strategies found in many of our ancient sources; if the poetics of power in the Roman Empire are skewed or flattened by modern labels like "Graeco-Roman," the persistence and persuasiveness of the distortion attest the power of poetics—the continued force of those ancient Jewish and Christian writings that relativize Rome and mount totalizing claims of their own. Recognizing and contextualizing the rhetoric of our ancient literary sources may open new perspectives on even some sources that do not explicitly address, contest, or represent Rome or empire. In the process, we hope to clear the way for bringing Jewish evidence to bear both on the reciprocities of provincial Romanization and on their particular mutations in Christianization.

Rethinking Romanness

The mound of books on Jewish history containing the hyphenate "Graeco-Roman" in their titles attests a scholarly habit, whereby Hellenistic and Roman empires are often conflated to provide a seemingly stable "pagan" backdrop to

tackles questions of culture with primary reference to “the Greeks”—finding it easier, perhaps, to engage Apion’s Alexandrian pride than to grapple with the incomprehensible order of Roman political or administrative structures or legal bureaucracy.²⁶ Likewise, in modern research on Judaism and Christianity, there has been much attention to moments of clash and conflict between Jews and the Roman Empire, particularly in relation to the first Jewish Revolt and the Bar Kokhba Revolt.²⁷ Outside of studies of taxation, however, little has been done to bring the everyday workings of Roman power and culture to bear on ancient Jews and Judaism.

When situating Jews in “Graeco-Roman” cultural context, most modern scholars have largely followed the major preoccupation of our elite literary sources, exploring the challenges posed to biblical wisdom and Jewish piety by Greek *paideia*. There is no doubt, of course, that Hellenism remained a potent force in Judaism and Christianity long after Alexander, the Ptolemies, and the Seleucids.²⁸ By the time of the Roman destruction of the Second Temple, there were already ample strategies for elevating Moses over Homer or Plato—many of which would be repeated for centuries thereafter.²⁹ Likewise, the specialist trained in Jewish Studies is hardly at a loss to find accessible studies of Hellenism. Much of the field of Late Antiquity, in fact, has been dedicated to tracing the reception and transformation of a “classical world” imagined foremost in Greek terms. Studies of the self-presentation of Jews and Christians in relation to Greek culture, language, and knowledge are similarly widespread.³⁰ By contrast, questions of Romanness and Romanization prove more difficult to engage, particularly for those scholars of Jewish or Christian literature less accustomed to navigating material and documentary data.³¹

What we would like to suggest here is that much might be gained by attending to the nuanced sense of Romanness now emerging among those Classicists and ancient historians who have set aside the traditional focus on wars, resisted the reduction of the effects of colonization to the act of conquest, and grappled anew with the more mundane workings of the Roman Empire in provincial settings.³² Pushing past the conflict-of-cultures model, for instance, Greg Woolf has approached Romanization as a set of dynamic local processes, thus attempting to chart the adjustments made—asymmetrically but nevertheless reciprocally—by Rome and provincials. While “it is not to be denied that Roman imperial culture was created in the context of the extension of the domination of one state over its neighbours,” Woolf stresses, “the hegemonic relations created in that process were not equivalent to the subjugation of the culture of one ethnic group or national community to that of another.”³³ The

poetics might rewrite power. Yet the strategy’s persuasiveness also poses a special danger to modern scholars, tempting us to project homogeneity and stasis onto social and political landscapes characterized by instability, particularity, and change.

For those of us who study Jewish and Christian literature, it may be too easy to imagine a world split between “Jew” and “Greek” precisely because so many of our sources divide reality along such lines.¹⁹ The totalizing rhetoric of “Jew” and “Greek” maps readily onto earlier dichotomies (for example, Israel versus the nations, barbarian versus Greek), and it does important work even in the writings of a Roman citizen like Paul—and even when he is defending his Jewish lineage and Christ belief to a community of Romans.²⁰ Even an author with as much firsthand experience of Roman power as Josephus writes his apology for Judaism primarily against “the Greeks.”²¹ Something similar appears in Christian apologies ostensibly addressed to Roman rulers, such as those of Justin Martyr, a Samaritan émigré to Rome.²² The power of the binary “Jew”/“Greek” persists for Syrians like Tatian, Alexandrians like Clement and Origen, and North Africans like Tertullian and Augustine—all living in an increasingly Romanized world.²³

It was from third-century Carthage, for instance, that Tertullian posed his famous question: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” The question has been quoted and paraphrased by generations of scholars of Christianity and Judaism interested in the encounter of biblical and classical knowledge. Less often noted is the fact that—as Glen Bowersock remarks—“the third-century sophist . . . posed his question about Jerusalem in Rome’s own language.”²⁴ Here, as elsewhere, transhistorical and transregional continuities in the Jewish and Christian poetics of difference can distract from the workings of Roman power and its cultural effects, in particular local arenas.

Like the conflation of world empires in our ancient sources, the persistent hyphenate “Graeco-Roman” in modern scholarship can mask both the pre-eminence and the particularity of the Roman Empire. The ubiquity of empire is richly attested in non-Jewish and non-Christian sources, including, but not limited to, documentary and other material data. Yet, as Brent Shaw, Michael Peachin, and others have demonstrated, Roman rule broke from older models of rule, introducing bureaucratic and other innovations that proved inexorably effective but also incommensurate with native systems and notions of power in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East.²⁵ The modern scholar trained in Jewish Studies might thus find himself in a position like that of Josephus, who writes of Roman power and politics in relation to war but

Rome or Persia.³⁸ This reorientation is promising, in our view, not only for opening new avenues for conversation across disciplines but also for framing new questions within them. How did Palestinian rabbis, for instance, figure themselves in a multifaceted and shifting imperial landscape? Did a history of Hellenistic rule and the culture of Hellenism shade their ideas of *romanzitas*? Did Greek attempts to assert cultural continuity and ethnic identity in a Roman world have any impact on Jewish attempts to do the same?³⁹ To what degree did Christians appropriate or reconfigure these cultural poetics and strategies of power, drawing upon Jewishness, Greekness, and Romanness?⁴⁰

Provincializing Christendom

At first sight, it might seem strange to take up these questions with a focus on the third to seventh centuries CE. The modern scholarly discussion of Jews and the Roman Empire has focused on the revolts of the late first and early second centuries CE. Research on Judaism in the following centuries has tended to focus on rabbis, considered largely in isolation from Romans and Christians, while research on the Roman Empire typically turns toward questions of Christianization, looking westward and leaving the Greek East to scholars of Byzantium. By contrast, the studies in this volume address figures, texts, and events at a remove from the cataclysm of 70 CE, on either side of the conventional dividing line of Constantine's "conversion," and in both eastern and western halves of the empire. The time period covered by the volume, thus, is roughly what is familiar to scholars of Jewish Studies as the "talmudic period," though here examined with a sustained focus on the Roman Empire rather than with a trajectory toward Babylonia. Our scope also overlaps with the various sets of centuries that historians and art historians call "Late Antiquity," albeit with a focus on Jews rather than on Romans and "barbarians" or Christians and "pagans."⁴¹ By virtue of this scope, we treat Jews as no less "late antique" than Christians, and Byzantium as no less "Roman" than the Latin West.⁴²

The shape of this volume reflects its genesis in a conversation centered in Jewish Studies and engaging other disciplines from this perspective. It also builds on important precedents set by earlier collaborative projects—most notably, the three-volume exploration *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture*, edited by Peter Schäfer with Catherine Hezser, published in 1998, 2000, and 2002.⁴³ We follow Schäfer in eschewing questions of influence

conventional dichotomy of "Romans" and "natives" thus oversimplifies the process of "the emergence of a new, highly differentiated social formation incorporating a new cultural logic and a new configuration of power," whereby "all participants acquired new places in the imperial system of differences because that system itself had been transformed."^{33,34}

As the field of Classics gradually ingests the implausibility of a clean linear imposition of a civilizing Rome on the provinces, it is increasingly making room for the colonized in telling this story of Romanization. With recent interest in Roman provincials, there has also come fresh attention to the potential for Jewish evidence to be used as Roman evidence. Notable, for instance, are David J. Mattingly's comments on the issue in his 2011 monograph *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experience in the Roman Empire*: "[T]he problem is that we have little extant writing from the Roman world that explicitly explored the feelings of provincials about the process of incorporation into the empire. There is one prime exception to this general rule—the Jews."³⁵ It is perhaps symptomatic of the state of the discussion that Jews make no further appearance in Mattingly's monograph, even as he questions the rationale for their conventional omission: "While there is substantial ancient and modern literature on their relations with the empire, there is also perhaps a tendency to overstress the atypicality of the Jews. They are seen as something special in the empire, and their voices thus are used to give life to ancient Judaism rather than to form a basis for understanding the experience of other provincials under Roman rule."³⁶

Of course, almost twenty years ago, Fergus Millar articulated the significance of Jewish data for understanding the Roman Near East.³⁷ Millar's calls extended the earlier insights of Arnaldo Momigliano and were picked up and extended by historians working across the lines of Classics and Jewish Studies, such as Shaye Cohen, Hannah Cotton, Martin Goodman, Erich Gruen, Tessa Rajak, and Seth Schwartz. Yet, even as individuals have played important roles as interdisciplinary diplomats and dual citizens, much remains to be done to put the fields—as fields—into sustained conversation. Whether the Jews were any more or less typical as Roman provincials than the Gauls, for instance, remains largely unaddressed. In the majority of the field of Classics, interest or knowledge in Hebrew remains as rare as interest or knowledge in Latin among scholars of ancient Judaism.

In perhaps the most notable recent trend in the study of rabbinic literature, however, a growing number of scholars are rethinking themselves also as students of local populations and provincial sub-elites—whether of imperial

and approaching "[r]abbinic Judaism in its literary output . . . [as] part of the general 'discursive space' of the Hellenic culture of Palestine in late antiquity, not the antipode of a Hellenism to which it considered itself 'exposed,' which it would 'absorb' to a certain extent or perhaps 'repel,' but an integral component of a dense cultural network of relationships."⁴⁴ Yet, whereas Schäfer's volumes focus mainly on the rabbinic evidence,⁴⁵ we here—fifteen years later—encompass a broader range of Jewish data as well as more Christian material, both pre- and post-Constantinian, and from both eastern and western halves of the Roman Empire.

Despite the inclusion of Christian alongside Jewish evidence, we must stress that this volume is not oriented toward exploring the relationships between Christianity and Judaism, or even between Christians and Jews. Rather, it reflects an overarching attempt to rethink the place of Romanness and empire in the social environment of ancient Jews and in their literary and material cultures. It is our contention that the study of rabbis and other ancient Jews might benefit from attention to similar or parallel tensions as have been explored in research on Christianity and the Roman Empire. Indeed, many of the insights from the field of Classics noted above have already been put to work, to brilliant effect, in recent studies of early and late antique Christianity—from Laura Nasrallah's application of insights from the study of the Second Sophistic to Justin and Tatian, to Jeremy Schott's rereading of Eusebius.⁴⁶ Furthermore, just as some Christian sources may tell us something, directly or by analogy, about the experience of Jews under Roman rule, so others might shed light on the experiences of Romans ruling over Jews. Reread from the perspective of a focus on Jews and Judaism, the church's ambivalence toward Rome may reveal interesting facets of Romanness. It may also point to some elements of Christianization that extend, or capitalize upon, earlier trends or situations of Romanization.⁴⁷ In turn, a sense of the continuities, pre- and post-Constantine, may help us to understand the late antique Jewish evidence—so much of which crosses this line with surprisingly little to signal the sea change that Christian sources so vociferously proclaim.⁴⁸

Two decades ago, Averil Cameron stressed the dangers of taking the rhetoric of late antique Christian sources as simply reflective of the reality of Christianization in Late Antiquity: "[M]odern criticism still largely polarizes the issue by starting from the assumption of a great divide between Christian and pagan; this has had the effect of obscuring the real issues by implying that everything in the fourth-century literature is to be explained in terms of 'conflict.' By contrast, as anthropologists and indeed theologians have realized

in recent years, translation from one cultural system into another is not a straightforward process. . . . In our case, the still common, and only partly acknowledged, triumphalistic perspective has often led to the use of such inappropriate terms as 'victory' in reference to Christianity."⁴⁹

Reflecting on the entrenched narratives that have shaped research on Late Antiquity, Clifford Ando has extended Cameron's insights. "To identify conversion to Christianity as a feature of Late Antiquity, or name it a cause of the empire's decline," he stresses, "is subtly to remove Christianity from the classical world altogether."⁵⁰ The distorting effects of this division are evident in older studies that figure the postclassical age as an age of decline, but—Ando suggests—they have also shaped more recent narratives that emphasize elements of "newness" to refigure Late Antiquity as an age of transformation. In both cases, modern scholarly reading practices may have internalized a distinction that says more about religious rhetoric than about social reality: "Christian intellectuals across a wide spectrum constructed the relationship between Christian and pagan—and between church and state—as one of latent hostility, punctuated by persecutions and periods of conflict, not so much because that is what their data revealed, but *inter alia* because of the power and authority that had accrued to martyrdom and resistance in the development of Christian identity across the second and third centuries. In other words, [modern] historians who view the history of the church through the lens of persecution and violence do so in part because that is what they were intended to see."⁵¹

If "pagan"/Christian conflict is what late antique Christian authors intend us to see, what is thereby rendered invisible? Significantly, to tell the tale of Late Antiquity as the struggle between "Christianity" and "paganism" is also to follow Justin, Eusebius, and their heirs in dismissing Jews and Judaism as irrelevant to world history after 70 and 135—as Israel superseded and replaced, both in its perennial battle against shifting empires and in its promise eventually to triumph as a "light to the nations." To take seriously the rhetorical character of elite Christian claims about Christianization, thus, is to raise the possibility that Jews, Judaism, and Jewish evidence may have more of a place in the study of the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity than typically allowed.⁵²

As noted above, a wealth of scholarship has been dedicated to exploring the causes and effects of Jewish rebellions against Rome and to considering the ramifications for Roman history and the twin origins of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. But in research on Late Antiquity, Jews have been largely ignored. As in the case of the engagement with Hebrew and other Jewish literature in the field of Classics, individual scholars have brought materials

from and about Jews to bear on the study of Late Antiquity to brilliant effect; the present volume takes inspiration, in this regard, from such polymaths as Daniel Boyarin, Paula Fredriksen, Oded Irshai, and Hagith Sivan. Yet it also takes its impetus in the need to facilitate further engagement on the levels of fields and disciplines, where the task of reading the Jews into the broader history of Late Antiquity still remains largely undone.

As with the conflation of empires and the privileging of Hellenistic/Jewish difference noted above, there are notable premodern precedents for the erasure of Jews in the historiography of the late Roman Empire. Issues of language and genre have always complicated the inclusion of Jewish evidence, and some readers of rabbinic sources have been complicit in stressing Jewish isolationism in ways that segregate the study of rabbinic Judaism from the study of Late Antiquity. Perhaps above all, the absence of Jewish evidence mirrors the dominant structures of ecclesiastical history, which have provided the framework and categories for the modern study of the premodern West. At least since Walter Bauer, specialists in Christianity have drawn attention to the distorting effects of the dependence on Eusebius, in particular, for the study of the doctrinal and geographical diversity of Christianity.⁵³ But the implications for the study of late antique Judaism have not been pressed in this fashion. "Scholars cling to his tendentious account of early Christianity since they have little else on which to rely," Elizabeth Clark remarks, and scholars of Jewish Studies, too, may do well to heed her call to "use Eusebius to better effect by asking how his account shores up claims for the dominance of the proto-orthodox church, enhances its leaders' prestige, and justifies particular institutions and teachings."⁵⁴

This line of research on Late Antiquity further draws our attention to the effects of the analytical privileging of conflict in research on the Roman Empire.⁵⁵ In Jewish Studies, of course, the privileging of conflict has been deep and long-standing, shaping the structure and boundaries of the disciplines of its specialist study—and perhaps especially its separation from other fields. Among the implications for the study of Judaism has been the treatment of the wars of the first and second centuries as pivots for the rest of Jewish history and an emphasis on passivity, isolation, and persecution thereafter. Nineteenth-century proponents of *Wissenschaft des Judentums* told the story of the Jews after 70 and 135 as *Leidens- und Gelehrtengeschichte*.⁵⁶ In the twentieth century, this approach was interrogated, but it has had long-standing structural effects nonetheless, particularly on the disciplinary settings in which Judaism is—and is not—studied. Even when post-World War II scholarship

sought to revive the agency of post-Christian Jews, it was primarily with recourse to various types of "conflict theory."⁵⁷ Today, it is often taken as axiomatic that identity is a construct created through clashes and competition and that polemical writings can be used to posit the "reactions" even in sources that are not explicitly polemical.⁵⁸ Likewise, in post-9/11 discussions, it is not unusual to find the Huntingtonian "clash of civilizations" evoked to describe the experience of ancient Jewish subjects of Rome.⁵⁹

One certainly would not wish to downplay the depth or effects of the various conflicts with Christians and Romans on Jews in the period under discussion, nor to conjure some peaceful image of coexistence akin to modern liberal ideals of multiculturalism or religious pluralism.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, we might wonder about what voices, data, or perspectives are left out when we treat moments of conflict as typical, assuming that the ancient Jewish, Christian, and Roman experience was otherwise characterized by mutual isolation. If we imagine that all identity is a question of agon, every text and event is reduced to a single scale, as if the aggadic bagatelle and the most gruesome martyrology can be charted as stronger or weaker assertions of the same impulse to will self over other. The processes of the non-exceptional quotidian under Rome, however, may require measuring by a different cultural barometer.

Some elements of ancient experience may be conveyed by the spatial analogy of ancient cultures and religions to modern nation-states—with boundaries to be defended and invaded, civilizations to defend, wars to wage—but much is also skewed and obscured. To describe Christianization in spatial terms, as if the accretion of conquered territories, is to misread the poetics of elite Christian sources as mirroring the power at play in local landscapes.⁶¹ To treat "Judaism," "Christianity," and "Rome" as discrete entities clashing with one another is to imply that these terms encompass categories of the same sort, assuming a degree of commensurability that makes little sense from what we know of "religion" and empire in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East.⁶² To treat all interaction as struggle or "culture war," moreover, is to blunt the brutal and shocking force of those moments of religious violence that shook the cycles of local life, particularly during the process of Christianization.⁶³

If the privileging of conflict has shaped the structures of the specialist study of Judaism, Christianity, and the Roman Empire in parallel but isolated subfields, the questioning of these tendencies may further foster interdisciplinary exchange. Such exchange proves all the more promising, in our view, in light of important shifts in the study of Christianization, whereby older narratives about dramatic change are being gradually displaced by more stochastic

models of mutation.⁶⁴ Worth quoting, in this regard, is Peter Brown's reassessment of his famous 1971 study of the holy man in Late Antiquity:

[T]he oracles did not fall silent, in late antiquity, with the rise of a distinctive new "style" of relations to the supernatural associated with the Christian holy man. On such an issue, the spiritual landscape of the Mediterranean was more old-fashioned, less "style conscious" than I had thought was the case in 1971. The holy man . . . has lost much of his instant, diagnostic glamour. *He was no harbinger of a new religious order, implicitly consonant with a new style of social relations.* What little "style" he imparted to those around him was more like that of a trusted neighborhood sewing woman, letting in a little here, letting out a little there, in well-worn, serviceable clothes, inherited from a distant past.⁶⁵

The present volume seeks to illumine some scenes from this world in slow shift, with a special concern for Jewish and other materials marginalized in grand narratives about the Roman Empire. Rather than focusing upon battles, persecutions, or pivotal moments, the volume tackles the challenge of identifying imperial power at play in less dramatic circumstances—looking to the ways that local identities were articulated and defended, to the ambitious maneuverings of provincial sub-elites, to the authority claims tacit in choices of genre, to telling gaps and silences, and to the selective acts of remembering and reinterpreting the past in story, song, and image. Peering behind the ancient and modern rhetoric of "cultural wars," the contributors draw out some of the threads that bound center to periphery, majority to minority, and imperialism to locality in Late Antiquity. In the process, they lead us through the variegated terrain of different types and genres of evidence. We are accustomed to hearing the voices of moralizing Roman elites who grumble at Jewish misanthropy, church fathers who demonize "the Jews," and solipsistic sages who seemingly answer accusations with piercing silence or smug isolationism. In what follows, however, such familiar voices are set in counterpoint and polyphony to voices from other sources as well—ranging from documentary papyri to Christian biography, and encompassing iconographical, liturgical, legal, exegetical, and historical traditions as well.

Chapter Summaries

The essays in Part I, "Rabbis and Other Roman Sub-Elites," focus on the second and third centuries. In "The Afterlives of the Torah's Ethnic Language: The Sifra and Clement on Leviticus 18.1-5," Beth Berkowitz analyzes the interpretations of Lev 18.1-5 in Sifra and Clement of Alexandria's *Strōmatēis*, treating the two as counterexamples to the regnant story lines of third-century Judaism and Christianity. In these seemingly far-flung works, ethnic particularity and universality serve as centers of dynamically overlapping discourses, mirroring something of the totalizing imperial claims and the local counterclaims that together constitute Romanization.

In "The Kingdom of Edessa and the Creation of a Christian Aristocracy," William Adler takes up Edessa as an "ideal test case for the study of the stages in the Hellenization, Romanization, and Christianization of the Near East." In the first part of the essay, he considers the place of Julius Africanus and Bardaisan in the cosmopolitan court culture of early third-century Edessa, just prior to Abgar the Great's failed attempts at Romanizing the customs of the Syrian city. In the second part, he considers the fates of the two Christian sophists after Edessa's fall to Rome. Much about these two Christians, he suggests, makes more sense in comparison with "pagans" like Lucian and Longinus, than in the context of the martyrs, apologists, and polemicists who have had a disproportionate place in scholarly characterizations of Christianity.

Natalie Dohrmann's "Law and Imperial Idioms: Rabbinic Legalism in a Roman World" approaches the rabbinic legal project in toto, reading the Mishnah and other rabbinic documents as Roman as much as Jewish. Her analysis thus unsettles the standard cultural genealogies of the earliest rabbinic movement. In the tannaitic embrace of halakhah as the defining concern, discourse, and genre of rabbinic authority and religiosity, she observes a relatively radical rupture from the forms of religious and literary expression common in Second Temple Judaism. This very rupture, however, draws attention to the marked continuity with Roman legal culture and administration, as well as with the imperial pageant of just rule.

Hayim Lapin's "The Law of Moses and the Jews: Rabbis, Ethnic Marking, and Romanization" analyzes Mishnah *Ketubot* 7.6 and its parallels in the *Tosefta* and Talmud Yerushalmi to illustrate how "rabbi's" history of self-fashioning offers a specific point of entry into the contested question of provincial Romanization." The texts delimit the boundaries of acceptable

compartment, especially of women, as defined by an emergent rabbinic elite. But they also defy the modern scholar who wishes to reduce the motives of Jewish subjects of Rome to a binary of acculturation or resistance. "Debates about public bathing and the very norms of female and wifely comportment," Lapin shows, "are as significant for locating rabbis within the culture of the empire as for marking rabbinic rejection of that culture."

Part II focuses on the fourth to sixth centuries, exploring "Christianization and Other Modalities of Romanization." Rabbinic evidence from the period is first taken up by Joshua Levinson's "There Is No Place Like Home: Rabbinic Responses to the Christianization of Palestine." Noting evidence for a protracted Christianization of the Holy Land that began as early as the fourth century, Levinson wonders how Palestinian rabbis absorbed and responded to this stark new reality. Reading the midrashic *scriptio inferior*, he discovers a range of strategies to mimic, counter, and undermine Christian infiltration of Jewish space. The rabbi finds a different topography upon which to focus his gaze—Torah: "The tragic gap between the signifier (text) and the signified (reality) brings him to use the text from the past to transport his audience to the utopian future, as textual travel enables the sage to visit the places of his desire."

In "Between Gaza and Minorca: The (Un)Making of Minorities in Late Antiquity," Hagith Sivan brings us into the worlds of two fifth-century bishops: Bishop Porphyry seeks to remake a "pagan" Gaza in the image of a Christian Jerusalem, while Bishop Severus seeks to erase the powerful Jewish population from the island of Minorca. In the process, Sivan reveals the place of women and Jews in marking the difference between Roman past and Christian present in Christian discourse. If the situations in which these bishops find themselves speak to the enduring heterogeneity of the Roman Empire, they also signal the irreducibly local processes by which it was made Christian, often through the violent imposition of a Christian rhetoric of religious difference upon complex religious landscapes.

Oded Irshai's "Christian Historiographers' Reflections on Jewish-Christian Violence in Fifth-Century Alexandria" tackles the problem of religious violence by demonstrating how attention to Jews destabilizes late antique Christian as well as modern scholarly narratives. Jews show up throughout Socrates Scholasticus of Constantinople's *Historia Ecclesiastica* (ca. 439 CE). The story that he analyzes centers on an unlikely scene: a group of Jews in Alexandria who in 414–415 felt empowered to viciously attack a group of priggish Christians who came to curtail the customary entertainments of the city. Looking

to proximate urban outbreaks in North Africa and recent legal developments, Irshai shows how the bishop Cyril assumed a jurisdictional authority based not on right but on the spirit of a recent law that managed to erase the special status of Jews vis-à-vis pagans, even as it undermined traditional protections. In other words, the violence between Jews and Christians in Alexandria was very much about Cyril's assertion of imperial authority over and against a rival Christian leader.

Ophir Münz-Manor's "Narrating Salvation: Verbal Sacrifices in Late Antique Liturgical Poetry" compares the fourth-century Jewish liturgical poems for the Day of Atonement with a Christian Eucharistic prayer preserved in the *Apostolic Constitutions*. He pulls liturgical texts into the vibrant marketplace of late antique religiosity and shows how the deep structures of sacrifice in the fourth and fifth centuries also reveal a surprising reality of shared ideology and poetics. From this shared world, Münz-Manor reconstructs the ritual theory that animates his data, allowing us to see the threads of connection between the Palestinian poet, the Antiochene liturgist, the thinking of church father John Chrysostom (ca. 347–407), and even the Greek polytheist *historiōla*.

Ra'anana Boustman's "Israelite Kingship, Christian Rome, and the Jewish Imperial Imagination: Midrashic Precursors to the Medieval 'Throne of Solomon'" recovers the accreted history of the *ephraim* of King Solomon's throne, setting the relevant Jewish traditions at a crossroads in the development of one bit of Byzantine imperial ideology. Even while tracing Solomonic and related images in wide circulation across vast imperial, linguistic, and cultural realms, Boustman demonstrates that "the image of the throne indexes the wider Jewish response to the rise of Christianized notions of kingship." Boustman shows how Jewish aggadic treatments of kingship evolved and began to merge with, as well as reinforce, the broader non-Jewish imaginary of the emperor. In Jewish sources, ideas about the throne of Solomon morphed from the discourse of cautionary anti-imperialism in early midrashic tradition to celebrations of a trans-imperial, divinely authorized ruler of the world.

Part III, "Continuity and Rupture," features four studies that cover the entire period under discussion from the perspective of different types of data. In "Chains of Tradition from *Avot* to the *Avodah Piyutim*," Michael Swartz examines the discourses of continuity in midrashic, liturgical, and other materials. He begins by considering Mishnah *Avot*, the locus classicus for the "validation of rabbinic authority" in relation to the biblical and Second Temple Jewish past. Whereas the chains of tradition in *Avot* are conventionally cited as representing *the* Jewish approach to constructing continuity after 70 CE,

beyond the question of whether rhetoric reflects reality, she asks when and how Christian rhetoric shaped social reality for Jews.

Conclusion

At the outset, we noted how the preoccupations of ancient Jewish and Christian literature have guided some of the operating assumptions, governing questions, and judgments of selectivity and typicality in the modern discussion of Judaism, Christianity, and the Roman Empire. Echoing the rhetoric of apocalypses like Revelation, scholars have often described Judaism and Christianity as if they were self-contained and sovereign entities clashing with a commensurate "pagan" imperial culture. Along with Josephus and Justin, scholars have treated the first Jewish Revolt against Rome as a nexus for debating the uniqueness of the Jews; and with the rabbis, they have approached the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE as an event with the power to periodize. With the *contra Iudaeos* tradition, they have treated polemics as the central engine of both Christian and Jewish identity formation. Furthermore, following the lead of Luke-Acts and Eusebius, they have framed the Roman Empire as the natural setting and center for the story of the spread of Christianity, while writing post-70 Jews and Judaism out of a history imagined to have its center in Rome, its teleology in Christianization, and its trajectory westward.

What might it mean, then, to read the Jews back into the broader history of Late Antiquity? By means of conclusion, we would like to suggest that such a process may be less a matter of inclusion than of reorientation. In the thoughtful epilogue to his collected essays, Millar reflects upon the westward focus and trajectory of "ancient history" as traditionally practiced, from within a framework set by Greek and Latin literary materials preserved in medieval manuscripts. It remains remarkable, Millar notes, "how firm an intellectual boundary has been erected against the incorporation . . . firstly, of the vast mass of primary material preserved on papyrus or in inscriptions, and secondly, of Jewish and Christian texts."⁶⁶ He speculates about the possibility of another approach, which encompasses a broader linguistic, geographical, and evidentiary scope:

There could be a perfectly valid framework (and educational syllabus) of "ancient history" which took as its central focus the Levant or the eastern Mediterranean of (say) the first millennium BC and

Swartz reminds us of alternative versions in magical, medicinal, and liturgical Jewish literature from Late Antiquity. His focus falls on the *Avodah priyatim*—third- to seventh-century liturgical poems linked to the Day of Atonement, which retell the history of Israel to celebrate the centrality of the priesthood. He shows how these two sources present competing positions, even as each can be situated within a broader Roman context shaped by Hellenistic and Christian claims to continuity as well.

Hannah Cotton's "Change and Continuity in Late Legal Papyri from Palestine Tertia: *Nomos Hellēnikos* and *Eibos Rōmaikon*" uses four Jewish marriage documents—*P.Yadin* 18 and 65 and *P.Nessana* 18 and 20—to illumine local legal practice in the Roman Near East from the second to sixth centuries. What she argues is that these documents, "albeit written by and for Jews, can be legitimately used, not least for lack of other evidence, to trace continuity and change in legal practice and formulas in this part of the Roman world." The documentary evidence cautions against assuming that the rabbinic marriage contract was normative among all Jews, even as it illustrates the value of Jewish evidence for understanding provincial negotiations and expressions of Romanness.

With Rina Talgam's "The Representation of the Temple and Jerusalem in Jewish and Christian Houses of Prayer in the Holy Land in Late Antiquity," we turn to focus on the built spaces of Jewish and Christian worship, ranging from the earliest known synagogues to churches created in the wake of Muslim conquest. Showcasing iconographical examples of the persisting power of sacrificial imagery for centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, she uncovers the palimpsest of Tabernacle, Temple, and Jerusalem present and past, which shaped the lived experience and built environment of the Roman Near East across creedal lines. Comparison between Jewish and Christian interpretative and building practices, in turn, makes clear how "similar artistic vocabulary could be used to express opposing perceptions and positions."

The final essay in the volume follows the same sweep of centuries westward. With "Roman Christianity and the Post-Roman West: The Social Correlates of the *Contra Iudaeos* Tradition," Paula Fredriksen takes us on a tour across the full period of Late Antiquity into the making of the Middle Ages, as seen through the lens of Christian literature and legislation on Jews and Judaism. Tracing shifting balances of poetics and power, she uses a focus on Christian language about Jews to illumine Christian politics and positioning in multiple Roman and post-Roman contexts—ranging from second-century Rome to fourth-century North Africa to seventh-century Spain. Moving

looks more like the world of late antique Jews in its scope and interconnectivity, straddling the boundaries of Rome and Persia. Brown's expansive vision, like that of Millar, thus opens up the possibility of reading Jews back into the broader history of Late Antiquity not by inserting Jewish evidence into familiar non-Jewish frameworks but rather by reorienting our analyses along lines that cross and interlace what traditional disciplines divide.⁷⁰

It is our hope that the present volume points to some of the promise of such integrative approaches. Taken together, the essays in this volume offer case studies in the modalities and limits of Romanization in its various registers. They speak, moreover, to some of the insights to be gained from experiments with reorientation, recontextualization, and perspectival shifts—in this case, by rereading Jewish sources as Roman sources, by remapping Jewish and Christian peripheries as part of a constellation of Roman centers, and by “reversing the gaze” to reconsider Roman and Christian evidence from the vantage point of questions and categories in Jewish Studies.

the first millennium AD, up to the Islamic conquests, and from that perspective would incorporate the emergence of Greek literature, the rise of the Greek city-state, and the spread of Greek colonisation on the one hand, and late Pharaonic Egypt on the other, as well as Phoenicia, the Aramean kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and the Neo-Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian empires. These empires would be essential to the story, and so—and in the same way—would Alexander's conquests, the Hellenistic kingdoms, and the Roman Empire.⁶⁷

With Millar's thought experiment of reshaping the disciplinary landscape of scholarship to resist the hegemony of Hellenism and its artificial isolation from the “Semitic” Near East, we might pair Brown's reflections on rethinking the rise of Western Christendom in light of Europe's place as “only the westernmost variant of a far wider Christian world, whose center of gravity lay, rather in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Middle East.”⁶⁸ Brown thus folds Byzantium back into what constitutes the “Roman,” albeit from the other direction—reversing the modern Eurocentric perspective on the place of the Latin West in the world of Late Antiquity and pushing us to take seriously the non-European lineage, languages, and locales that shaped the Middle Ages. Brown invites us to view the Christianization of the Roman Empire and Europe from the perspective of a wider world, which stretched much farther eastward in its interconnectivity than suggested by the traditional Eusebian model of ecclesiastical history.

For rethinking the place of Jews in the historiography of the Roman Empire, it is perhaps useful to ponder both these visions. Millar's thought experiment relativizes the Greek gaze of Herodotus and Thucydides and their modern heirs by challenging us to follow the material and documentary data where they take us—along roads that cut across and stretch beyond the worlds conjured by those elite literary sources in Greek and Latin that were embraced by Renaissance thinkers as exemplifying the genius of Western culture. As the contributions to the present volume emphasize, many of the other surviving sources for antiquity happen to be Jewish. In Brown's case, he chronicles the emergence of distinctively European forms of Christianity but chooses to start his story in Edessa with Bardaisan. In asserting that “Christianity was far from being a ‘Western’ religion” in Late Antiquity,⁶⁹ Brown reminds us that the world of late antique Christians was not bounded by the Roman Empire or limited to a single western trajectory. Seen from this perspective, in fact, it