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Book Reviews



Joshua Schwartz and Peter J. Tomson, eds. *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The Interbellum 70–132 CE*, CRINT 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

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This book is a second volume of a set with a shared main title. The subtitle of the first volume was “How to Write Their History.”¹ The current volume focuses on the period between the two Jewish wars (66-70 CE and 132-136 CE, a.k.a. the “Bar Kokhba” revolt). The “extended” date, 136 CE instead of the usual 135, is due to Werner Eck, who established that the revolt lasted until the beginning of the year 136 in chapter 4. The premises expressed for the two conferences, from which these books issued, are that the histories of Judaism and Christianity are in fact one “shared history,” and that the two religions separated, not because of theological differences, but rather because of external factors, mainly the three Jewish revolts against Rome, the Roman repression and occupation, and the Jewish response (1). Given the last premise, it can be expected that the “watershed” of the Bar Kokhba revolt was more decisive than that of the fall of the temple. These premises, the editors admit, are not shared unanimously by all the authors in the book. Some even disagree emphatically (see below, Carleton Paget).

The topic of the second conference, held in 2015 in Ramat Gan was: “Yavne Revisited: The Historical Rabbis and the Rabbis of History.” The reason for the different title of the present book is a growing change of insight (4), i.e., that Yavne is mostly relevant for rabbinic sources. Contributions that deal, e.g., with archaeology or Roman sources, are less concerned with the place or the concept “Yavne.” Indeed, “Yavne” has become a sign that hints at various realities, whether or not historically correct: the emergence of rabbinic Judaism, the institution of the new-style Sanhedrin, the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai,

1 Peter J. Tomson and Joshua J. Schwartz, eds., *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: How to Write Their History*, CRINT 13 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

the “canonization” of the Tanakh, and the growing distance between Jews and Jewish-Christians. A “less rabbinic-centric title” (4) was required. The “interbellum” is a more neutral category that is recognized by all ancient and modern parties involved.

The book is divided in five sections, reflecting the various approaches engaged in the study of the interbellum period. The first part is “Archaeology.” To start, Boaz Zissu gives an archaeological perspective on Judea in the interbellum. In line with literary sources (rabbinic, Dead Sea Scrolls, Cassius Dio), the archaeology of villages and larger settlements in the area has confirmed that, whereas Jerusalem was razed during the first Jewish war, the rural areas of Judea recovered quickly and a considerable population remained there during the interbellum. Following Zissu, the military government that was installed in that period may have been the reason for the unrest among the rural population that led to the Bar Kokhba revolt. After the Bar Kokhba war, the Jewish presence in the Judea settlements all but disappeared.

The second study, by Eyal Baruch, deals with the reception of the Roman triclinium and the practices of the meals that were conducted therein, in second-century Judaism. This interesting study is only of limited relevance to the main question of the volume, notably because the author admits that most of the literary sources are “somewhat later than Yavne” (74).

The third study in this part, by Joshua Schwartz, focuses on the question as to whether Yavne deserved to have a period named after it. Lod was at least as important, and it was a more Jewish place at that. As in an earlier study in the first volume,² he distinguishes between “household Judaism,” for which Lod is the main place, and “institutional Judaism,” which is represented by Yavne. Based on rabbinic sources, Lod also became the center of “institutional Judaism” toward the end of the interbellum period. According to Schwartz, the experiment to move “institutional Judaism” to Yavne from Jerusalem, essentially failed, for various reasons. However, the term “Yavne period” stuck.

The absence of a study about the archaeology of Roman-time Yavne in this book may seem remarkable, but it is not, because not much seems to have been found there. This is first mentioned by Zissu, who claims that Pliny mentions Jamnia as a toparchy (31, reference to Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 5.70). He states that “as for the other seats of toparchies, the archaeological record is almost totally missing” (34). Schwartz (81), who agrees that no relevant archaeological data of Roman-time Yavne exist, however, states correctly that Pliny “does not include it in his list of toparchies of Judaea (*Nat. Hist.* 5.68).” That such a flagrant

² Joshua Schwartz, “Yavne Revisited: Jewish ‘Survival’ in the Wake of the War of Destruction,” in Tomson and Schwartz, ed., *How to Write Their History*, 238-252.

contradiction could remain in the same section of a book is an editorial flaw.³ In his chapter in the next part, Benjamin Isaac also discusses the sources, notably Josephus, *J.W.* 3.54 and *Ant.* 18.31, where Yavne is mentioned, both times in connection to the word toparchy. Isaac (in chapter 5!) is also the first in the book to describe what a toparchy is, i.e., “a large settlement without city-status, but with some administrative functions” (108). Isaac relativizes the import of the term toparchy in “that it is used quite freely in various related contexts” (109). The fact that three authors discuss the same term, with only the third of them explaining what it actually means, again marks a lack of a strong editorial hand. In view of the origins of the chapters as conference papers by independent authors, this is understandable. Yet for one who wants to use the book as a reference work about Yavne or the Interbellum, for which it is otherwise very suitable, this lack of an over-all perspective is a pity.

We already made an advance on the discussion of part 2, “The Roman Perspective,” comprised of five articles. In chapter 4, Werner Eck shows that Judaea was a province like the others with the same “top” administration and tailor-made lower forms of administration. Judaea became an independent province (it had been part of the province of Syria since 6 CE),⁴ during the first Jewish revolt in 66/67, and came under the government of the former consul Vespasianus. The latter was not only the governor, but also the legate of the tenth legion Fretensis. Later, a second army legion was stationed in the province, which may have been due to unrest among the population (or that may have led to unrest, as Boaz Zissu suggests in his study, see above). The governor would possibly have held court in a local *conventus*. The end of the article is a bit confusing, because apparently, only during the final edit, was proof for the existence of this *conventus* system in Judaea given in a publication by Hannah Cotton.⁵ As to Yavne, the author merely concludes that “Rome certainly never gave the opportunity to rebuild a new power base from which it would be possible to threaten Roman supremacy. This consideration applies equally to Yavne and whatever it was that was allowed to develop there” (105). One has the impression that Yavne is a bit pulled by the hair to give it a place in the last sentence of the study. Eck’s study nevertheless serves as a good basis for the other, more detailed, studies in this part.

3 In a private conversation Zissu admitted his mistake and referred to Josephus, *Ant.* 18. 31.

4 Conversely, on p. 146, Ben-Zion Rosenfeld suggests that Judea had already been a separate province: “The Romans maintained Judaea without changing its size, and did not combine it with the province of Syria.”

5 Hannah M. Cotton-Paltiel, A. Ecker, and D. Gera, “Juxtaposing Literary and Documentary Evidence: A New Copy of the So-called Heliodoros Stele and the Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae (CIIP),” *BICS* 60(1) (2017), 1-15, <https://doi.org/10.1111/2041-5370.12044>.

Chapter 5, by Benjamin Isaac, deals with the changes in organization of Judaea before and after 70. He first discusses the system of toparchies (already referenced above) that disappeared after the Bar Kokhba revolt. Isaac suggests that the fact that Yavne was an imperial estate (because of its palm groves), could have been the reason why Yohanan ben Zakkai chose it as the seat of his leadership (112), because “he would be less subject to the authority of the legate of the province” (n. 34). He then discusses the *concilium*, an organizing body that, among other things arbitrated between cities and maintained the imperial cult. There is no evidence that such *concilia* ever existed in Judaea, and the imperial cult was something the Jewish leaders obviously “avoided ... like the plague” (117). But the model of the council, which was “based on the foundation of nationality,”⁶ which Isaac reads as “ethnic identity,” could have been implemented in “whatever the Jewish leadership represented in Yavne” (117).

Chapter 6 is a brief study by Marco Rizzi that connects the martyr death of Ignatius of Antioch with the Jewish diaspora revolt(s) in 115-117 CE, mainly in Antioch and Alexandria. He gives a (admittedly hypothetical) historical reconstruction of the connection between an earthquake in Antioch in 115 CE, apocalyptic interpretations of that natural disaster, the revolts of Jews in various places in the diaspora, the residence of Emperor Trajan in Antioch at the time of the earthquake (according to an “underestimated piece of information” in the *Chronographia* by John Malalas), and the capture and eventual execution of Ignace as “leader of a religious group close to the Jews” (125). Some of the connections could have been fleshed out a bit more, such as the fact that Jews could be punished by the execution of a (Christian) bishop “even though Trajan ... seemed conscious of their differences” (125-26), and the effects of an earthquake in Antioch on Jews in Alexandria.

Francesco Ziosi, in chapter 7, deals with the way that Emperor Hadrian, whose reign spanned the period between the diaspora revolt and the Bar Kokhba revolt, was perceived by the Jews. He expands on various kinds of archaeological and literary sources (notably the Sybilline Oracles and rabbinic texts), which show that the Jewish perception of Hadrian was not particularly negative from the start. Only after Hadrian issued his plans to turn the destroyed Jerusalem into Aelia Capitolina, the Jews became disappointed in him.

The last piece in this part is by Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, and deals with the “liminal” period just after the destruction of the temple, from the installation of Yohanan ben Zakkai until his succession by Rabban Gamliel (ca. 70-85 CE). He emphasizes that Ben Zakkai and Gamliel were exclusively religious leaders. In fact, following Rives, the Romans were not against the Jewish religion but

6 Isaac quotes from Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Staatsrecht*. Vol 3.1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1887), 744.

only against the temple.⁷ Their “destruction of the Temple would change to [*sic*] nature of the Jewish religion to be similar to the ‘civic cults’ of the Roman Empire that did not come at the expense of the loyalty to Rome” (148). This is an interesting perspective because one can conclude from this that the Romans deliberately helped shape Judaism as we have it now. After the destruction, all fractions that had competed before the war had disappeared, and most Jews accepted the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai to take care of the “pan-Jewish religious needs” (153). A crucial element in this was the establishment of a common calendar which was the topic of many of the *takkanot* issued by Ben Zakkai (e.g., b. Roš Haš. 21b).

Part 3, “Historiography,” contains three studies that discuss whether rabbinic literature can be used for historiography. In chapter 9, David Levine argues that the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 was only perceived as epoch-making after the failure of the Bar Kokhba revolt. On the basis of Yavnean traditions, among which the enactments (*takkanot*) of Yohanan ben Zakkai and halakhic anecdotes of Yavnean rabbis, he shows that the rabbis are still oriented towards the temple and expect its rebuilding in the near future. Rabbinic traditions about the Bar Kokhba revolt, in contrast, express an awareness of the permanency of the temple’s destruction after 135. With this conclusion, Levine aims to question the post-temple worldview that previous scholarship attributed to the rabbis in Yavneh: the watershed did not occur at 70 but rather at 135.

In chapter 10, Catherine Hezser discusses the reception history of Yavne in the Talmud Yerushalmi. Among others, she shows that the Yerushalmi highlights the halakhic authority of the House of Hillel and of Rabban Gamliel II, while it forgets—or perhaps downplays—Yavne traditions relating to Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. Besides, the variety of institutions associated with Yavne in the Yerushalmi makes clear that their actual nature was unclear to the editors of the Yerushalmi, even if it continued to have symbolic power for them. On the basis of this reception-historical study, Hezser emphasizes that it is impossible to draw any conclusions about the historical Yavne or the historicity of halakhic teachings and decisions attributed to Yavnean rabbis from the Yerushalmi.

The final study in this section, by Moshe Simon-Shoshan, consists of a detailed comparative discussion of the narrative about Rabban Gamliel’s deposition as head of the academy, as represented in the Yerushalmi (y. Ber. 4:1, 7c-d) and the Bavli (b. Ber. 27b-28a). A large part of Simon-Shoshan’s study is devoted to show that the talmudic Deposition narratives are a hybrid form of “textual” and “performative” modes of transmission and redaction. In their reworkings

7 Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives, eds., *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 164f.

of the tannaitic Yavnean traditions, the Talmudim express a divergent criticism on the authority of the *beit midrash* of Yavne, with the *Bavli* being more ambivalent about its aristocratic basis than the *Yerushalmi*. With his article, Simon-Shoshan aims to show that the rabbinic transmission of essential elements of a narrative left room “for the creativity of individual story-tellers in succeeding generations and different milieus” (222).

Together, these articles demonstrate that rabbinic sources contain history, but that the way this history is remembered is influenced by the social circumstances and perspectives of the rabbis in later periods. In light of this conclusion, it is noteworthy that the contributions of Hezser and Simon-Shoshan focus predominantly on amoraic sources. A systematic examination of references to Yavne in tannaitic sources would have enabled the reader to gain a better understanding of how the rabbinic memory of Yavne evolved over time.

The fourth part of the volume focuses on historical developments during the Interbellum, primarily on the basis of literary sources. In chapter 12, Christine Hayes opposes the view of prior scholarship that the tannaim regarded the Noahide commandments as a set of rational, ethical obligations of universal validity, much like Graeco-Roman conceptions of divine law. She holds that tannaitic texts (esp. t. ‘Abod. Zar. 8:4-9) show that the Noahide commandments were seen as positivist laws, inferior to the Law revealed at Sinai, that needed to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews. According to Hayes, the central ideas of this non-universal conception of the Noahide commandments were presumably already present in the formative stages of the rabbinic movement, given that tannaitic sources (esp. *Sifra* Ahare Mot 9:13) reject and even undermine the prevailing Graeco-Roman conception of divine law. When contextualizing tannaitic negotiations of Graeco-Roman conceptions of divine and human law, Hayes also draws from contemporaneous New Testament depictions of perceived particularistic habits of, e.g., Pharisees.

In chapter 13, Lee Levine examines the role of Yavne in the development of the *Amida*. Distinguishing himself from scholars who minimize the contribution of the Yavnean sages to the development of the *Amida*, Levine argues that these sages had a central role in the development of the prayer. This argument is based on the discussions, reflected in various tannaitic and amoraic sources, between Yavnean rabbis as to the *Amida*’s form and recitation. These suggest that the *Amida* was being introduced and standardized in the Yavnean period. In support, Levine adduces yet other arguments, the most important one being his consideration that obligatory communal prayer was virtually unknown in pre-70 Judea. Levine implies that the creation of the *Amida* can be situated in a general attempt of the Yavnean rabbis to use public prayer as a substitution for the temple liturgy.

In the next article, James Carleton Paget turns his attention to the issue of how the three Jewish revolts against Rome affected Jewish-Christian relations. He shows that, in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt, the destruction of the temple in 70 came to be exploited by Christians in anti-Jewish polemics. This is in line with David Levine's argument (chapter 9, cf. *supra*) that the rabbis also only started to regard the temple's destruction in 70 as epoch-making after the Bar Kokhba revolt. He points out that evidence for tensions between Jews and Christians often drew upon theological arguments rather than the revolutionary activities of the Jews. Thus, Carleton Paget not only criticizes scholarship that argues for the importance of the revolts in explaining the separation between Jews and Christians, but he also opposes the underlying claim—advocated by, among others, the editors of the present volume—that social and political factors are more adequate to explain the separation between Jews and Christians than theological arguments.

The parting of the ways continues to be a topic of interest in the subsequent contribution, written by Shaye Cohen. Contrary to Carleton Paget, Cohen starts with the assumption that the separation between Jews and Christians was “about people, societies, and institutions, not about disembodied truth claims or the abstractions ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’” (307). On the basis of Roman, Christian, and Jewish (esp. rabbinic) evidence, Cohen argues that, by the early second century CE, Jews and Christians inhabited separate communities. He also shows that the parting of the ways is expressed differently in Jewish and Christian literature from the early second century. While Christian sources express this parting in hostile anti-Jewish polemics, the limited rabbinic evidence (on the *minim* and *minut*) suggests that the rabbis basically ignored gentile Christians and attempted to avoid Jewish Christians. The result of this parting of the ways is that “Jewish Christians did not fit in anywhere” (338).

The final contribution of this section aims to examine the possible influence of Jewish teachings on Christian Gnosticism in the early second century. Christoph Marksches limits his discussion to a few individuals and groups from this period that are commonly labelled as “Gnostics”: Cerinthus, Simon Magus and the Simonians, Menander, and Saturninus. His examination makes clear that our evidence is too limited—and mostly derived from later, anti-Gnostic authors—to prove a specific Jewish influence on Gnostic teachings in the early phase. Parallels with Jewish ideas, such as a division between the supreme God and the divine forces involved in creation, can be explained by a shared influence of contemporary popular philosophy. Throughout his article, Marksches focuses on theological ideas, but in his conclusion he briefly reflects on the possibility of explaining the origins of Gnosticism as a response to intellectual, political, or religious crises in Judaism, in particular the revolts.

It may catch the eye that the three contributions on the parting of the ways (Carleton Paget, Cohen, and Marksches) all address social factors. This seems to be a direct influence of the editors of the volume who postulated that “the separation between the two religions was not the result of ‘essential’ theological differences, but caused by external factors such as wars” (1). Interestingly, this hypothesis is explicitly questioned by the contributions of Carleton Paget and Marksches; both scholars mainly refer to theological debates in early Christian sources. One wonders therefore whether a more nuanced interplay between theological and social factors might explain the separation between Jews and Christians. While the adduced sources in Cohen’s contribution attribute divergent interpretations of Law and theological viewpoints to the *minim*, Hayes’s study implies that conceptions of the law interrelate with the praxis of it.

The fifth and final section of the book explores the import of non-rabbinic literary sources in our understanding of the Yavne period. In the first article of this section, Jan Willem van Henten attempts to reread Josephus’s passages on the temple from a post-70 perspective. Discussing Josephus’s description of the temple in *J.W.* 5.136-247; *Ant.* 15.380-425; *Ag. Ap.* 2.102-109 and a few minor passages, Van Henten argues that Josephus’s perspective on the temple changes over time. In the *Jewish War*, the temple is the focal point of Josephus’s description of the war and he seems to express his hope for its rebuilding. In *Jewish Antiquities* and *Against Apion*, the temple is presented as a building of the past, but the frequent use of the present tense suggests that the sacrificial cult is still functioning. A possible explanation for this change is that Josephus responds to events in Palestine, such as the emergence of the rabbinic leadership in Yavne or elsewhere. With his emphasis on the continuing relevance of the temple in his later writings, Josephus “may have wanted to indicate that the priests were the obvious leaders of the Jewish nation, as the faithful executors of the ever relevant sacrificial cult” (377).

In the subsequent contribution, Eric Ottenheim addresses the question of what sort of “Yavne” is reflected in the Gospel of Matthew. Focusing on Jesus’s polemic against the scribes and Pharisees in Matt 23:1-12, he assesses how this criticism reflects the dynamics of social interaction with a neighborhood elite. Four practices are examined: broad phylacteries, long tassels, the seat of Moses, and the title “rabbi.” His examination leads Ottenheim to assume that the sectarian landscape of the Second Temple period continued to exist in the first decades after the temple’s destruction. In this situation, Matthew’s late first-century Jewish-Christian community would have competed with the post-70 Pharisees, thus witnessing “a closed [*sic*], rival elite, a ‘Yavne’ in the making” (400).

In a third study, Ze'ev Safrai adduces *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* (LAB) as “a para-rabbinic Jewish source” (401). On the basis of, among others, veiled references to the temple's destruction and parallels with tannaitic sources, Safrai argues that LAB was written and edited around the time of the Bar Kokhba revolt. In addition, he contends that LAB is close to the world of the rabbinic sages. The doubtful status of the priests in LAB is one of Safrai's arguments, since it reflects, in his view, a struggle between the Pharisees/sages and the priests over hegemony. Even if Safrai continually points to parallels with rabbinic sources, he does not go so far as to regard LAB as part of rabbinic literature (424). He rather sees it as a witness of the importance of rabbinic ideas within a pluralistic second-century Jewish society (425).

In the final article of this section, Peter Tomson examines Josephus and Luke-Acts in view of the political circumstances in Rome and Judea around 100 CE. He specifically focuses on the favorable portrayal of the Pharisees, Rabban Gamliel, and Agrippa II and Bernice in both writings. Among others, Tomson concludes that it was opportune for Luke to highlight Agrippa II's sympathy towards his characters (notably Paul in Luke-Acts) and for Josephus to do so with regard to himself. Also, the prominent mentioning of Gamliel the Elder in Luke's Acts, and of his son Simon in Josephus's *Life*, may reflect the ascendancy of this family in Roman Palestine, which was a prolongation of pre-66 circumstances. Luke-Acts and Josephus converge with rabbinic stories about the rise of Gamliel the Younger at this point.

The attention to non-rabbinic sources is a valuable contribution of the present volume, since it leads to a more nuanced understanding of the Yavne period. Taken together, the articles in part five suggest that Jewish society in the Yavne period was pluralistic rather than monolithic; that pre-66 social circumstances partly persisted; and that the emergent rabbinic movement may have had a broader influence on Jewish groups and individuals.

The Interbellum serves as a multi-focal reference work of a hitherto understudied period in Jewish antiquity. The individual articles, although not always lined up in all details, complement each other and together make a valuable contribution to the ongoing CRINT series.

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