

KATELL BERTHELOT, *JEWES AND THEIR ROMAN RIVALS: PAGAN ROME'S CHALLENGE TO ISRAEL*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021. Pp. xxi + 519. ISBN 9780691199290. £35.00.

The ancient Jews experienced only a brief period (roughly 129–63 B.C.E.) when they were not under the more or less direct rule of an empire. Untangling the complexities of the impact of foreign domination on the Jews has been one of the main tasks of Judaic scholarship practically from its beginnings as an academic discipline around 1820. It is obvious that Judaeans/Jews received different rulers differently. But Katell Berthelot has now argued that for the Jews, Roman rule was different in kind from its predecessors and that the content of this difference was less political/administrative than ideological. The Romans made claims about themselves — about their chosenness, their non-autochthony, their special piety to the gods, and their unmatched dedication to law — that the Jews found particularly noisome because they made the same claims about themselves. For the Jews, possibly unlike the Romans, these claims were part of a zero-sum competition. And so, the proper model for understanding the four-century-long relationship between pagan Rome and the Jews is a one-sided rivalry, rather than domination/resistance, mimicry/creolisation, or partial and episodic integration.

Consideration of *ideological* rivalry more or less in isolation allows B. to focus on literary texts — inevitably, given the chronological limits, on rabbinic texts, though Philo and Josephus are well represented too — whose analysis entails detection of evidence for familiarity and complex negotiations with Roman ideas and values. This aspect of the book is not entirely successful despite subjecting a huge amount of material, much of it not previously well known to non-rabbinists, to scrutiny. The basic problem is the absence of any apparent methodology of comparison. Frequently texts whose content seems quite formulaic or unspecific are implausibly read as revealing detailed knowledge, and exercising subtle subversion, of Roman lore (B., for the record, also eschews post-structuralist reading, though she cites some post-structuralist rabbinists). For example, Mishnaic law prohibited business with pagans on the *Kalends* of January, among other holidays, and for three days before. The Palestinian Talmud (Avodah Zarah 1.3, 39c) struggles to understand the Mishnah's list of prohibited festivals (including also the Saturnalia, something called Kratesis, and the emperor's birthday, or accession-day), and explains the origins of the *Kalends* of January as follows: when the kingdoms of Egypt and Rome were at war (in a mythological past, not the nearer past of the Roman civil wars) they eventually decided to resolve the conflict by declaring victor the army whose commander committed suicide first. Januarius, the Roman commander, agreed to do so on the condition that his twelve sons be appointed *duces*, *eparchoi* and *stratelatai* (in Aramaic transcription: *duksin*, *iparkhin*, *ve-istratelatin*, a stereotypical phrase in later Palestinian rabbinic texts reflecting the Diocletianic reforms). Due to his heroism, the Romans continued to mourn on the anniversary of his death, and named the day *Kalendae Ianuarias*.

Berthelot (194–7) follows the tradition of scholarship that detects deep familiarity with metropolitan Roman lore in this enigmatic story, but another trend in the scholarship rejects such claims and finds in the story mainly late antique stereotype and biblical allusion. Berthelot acknowledges the existence of both approaches but never explains the hermeneutical advantages of the romanising reading — a pattern common throughout the book. To be sure on some occasions her readings are persuasive, though her hit rate is considerably higher for Philo and Josephus than for rabbinic texts. But there is a fuzzy or associative quality to much of the reading: something in a rabbinic text evokes a Roman idea and so the text's content is ascribed to Roman influence or to the formulator's rivalrous disposition towards Rome. This type of weak reading is most disappointingly a feature of the long chapter on Roman citizenship. Here the problem is perhaps that the most basic and tangible questions about the impact of Roman citizenship, especially of the *constitutio antoniniana* — which all or almost all rabbinic literature postdates — on the rabbis, on Palestinian Jews, and on the province in general, await comprehensive treatment, so that B.'s readings float unusually free of historical foundation.

There is much to praise. The book is nearly impeccable as a work of scholarship: B. may over-read or under-read texts but she never misreads them in trivial ways. Both the Jewish and the Roman elements of the book are exceedingly well informed, responsible and up to date. (The book opens with several brief chapters on the Jews' experiences under Assyrian, Babylonian, Achaemenid, Ptolemaic and Seleukid rule: 29–87.) Indeed, in this respect the book is exemplary: neither rabbinists nor Roman historians have an excuse any longer for superficial, stereotype-laden or unconsciously imperial scholarship. Some individual discussions are razor-sharp (so for example the neat demolition of Daniel Boyarin's influential claim that the Romans regarded the Jews as feminised: 205–9). In general, the book is

amazingly capacious and rich: rabbinists can learn a huge amount about the Roman Empire from it, and Roman historians and historicising classicists are introduced to piles of primary rabbinic texts absent from the standard anthologies, plus synthesising treatments of the basic interpretive issues, not to mention a huge quantity of current bibliography. This is a particularly valuable feature, given that many Palestinian rabbinic texts still lack adequate English translations.

The book's flaws are not trivial: the ascription of a state of mind — rivalry — to a collectivity (Jewish writers and intellectuals from Philo to the late antique rabbis) over centuries either lacks analytic rigour or, if intended metaphorically, conceals too much variation to be truly informative; the absence of methodological checks and balances on the act of comparison too often results in readings and arguments that are unsatisfyingly impressionistic; finally, the abstraction of ideology from its foundations in power relations and materiality detracts from the book's historical depth and hermeneutical richness. Nevertheless, big books also have their fates. This big book, with its wealth of texts, information and analysis, deserves an attentive and sympathetic, if also argumentative, reception.

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KRISTINA M. NEUMANN, *ANTIOCH IN SYRIA. A HISTORY FROM COINS (300 BCE–450 CE)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xxxvii + 410, illus. ISBN 9781108837149. £90.00.

This book is about the citizens of Antioch in Syria. Kristina M. Neumann investigates the production of coins at Antioch from the Hellenistic period to Late Antiquity, but the unifying thread is the exploration of the agency of the citizens of Antioch. N. has chosen an excellent subject in which to investigate civic agency. Antioch was the metropolis of Syria, founded by the Seleucids and thriving through to Late Antiquity. It was the capital of Seleucid Syria, seat of the Roman governors and later a major Christian centre. Coins were minted by different authorities: citizens, kings and emperors as well as provincial officials. Different authorities, which often minted at the same time, had different intentions and their coinages served specific functions within the local and eastern Mediterranean contexts. This means that the interconnectedness of these coinages allows us to construct a differentiated picture of various political agencies. One way to look at the coinages would be an analysis of the iconography and the messages on the coins. That is not, however, the focus of N.'s book, which instead takes a quantitative approach aimed at reconstructing the agencies and impact of the various minting authorities.

The statistical basis is a database of about 300,000 coins, compiled from stray finds and hoards from Antioch and from other places in the ancient world where Antiochene coins were found. These robust data allow N. to explore the frequency and distribution of Antiochene coins via an Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA). This method can be described as a commonsensical approach by which data is analysed according to a wide array of spatial and temporal research questions and plotted on graphs and distribution maps. In an appendix to her book, the method is described in detail. The data are assigned to five periods of investigation: 1) 300–129 B.C.E., the heyday of the Seleucid empire; 2) 129–31 B.C.E., encompassing the disintegration of the Seleucid empire and the Roman conquest; 3) 31 B.C.E.–C.E. 192, the Roman imperial period to the Antonines; 4) C.E. 192–284, the 'Third Century'; and 5) C.E. 284–450, Late Antiquity.

The EDA approach provides the reader with a wealth of robust observations concerning specific agencies of minting, of which I can outline only the most important. For 300–129 B.C.E., N. underlines how the Seleucid rulers first used Antioch as an important Levantine mint for silver and bronze and minted royal coins with royal imagery. What is remarkable, however, is that at the same time the citizens of Antioch started minting their own bronze coinage which can be understood as a self-conscious expression of civic agency. These civic coins were not, however, as widespread as the royal bronzes, either in Antioch or in the wider region. The diminishment of Seleucid control in the next period, 129–31 B.C.E., allowed more scope for the agency of the civic body of Antioch. The civic bronzes became more important in a regional perspective, while the