

Nonetheless, these comments by no means detract from the importance of this edition, whose scope and depth obviate the necessity for any other attempts at translation and commentary on *Judith*. Gera's edition and commentary constitute a significant contribution to the field.

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Seth Schwartz, *The Ancient Jews from Alexander to Muhammad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xi + 190 pp. Online ISBN: 9781139649476; Hardback ISBN: 9781107041271; Paperback ISBN: 9781107669291.

After an introduction that sets down some of the questions and goals that underlie this little volume, its six main chapters survey and analyze, following a chronological structure, the history of the Jews in the approximately twelve centuries from Cyrus (despite the volume's title) to Muhammad. A short final chapter on the importance of the Jews' history for the study of antiquity, a 'Bibliographical Essay' that surveys scholarship for each of the chapters, and an index complete the work.

The book appears in a Cambridge series, 'Key Themes in Ancient History', which is 'designed in the first instance for students and teachers of Classics and Ancient History', and Schwartz is very well aware of that orientation. Schwartz frequently uses the term "internalist" to denote a point of view that is much more usual: one that studies the Jews in this period from the point of view of Jewish history, or from the point of view of Christian history. In contrast, Schwartz's own mission is to deal with the Jews as part of the ancient world, to present their history in the context of the history of the series of empires that ruled them, beginning with the Persians and the Hellenistic kingdoms and down through the Romans. The book's focus is on the Roman period, to which four of its six main chapters are devoted.

To illustrate just how conscientiously Schwartz hews to his mandate, I'll note two topics the book more or less ignores: apart from the introduction, it says next to nothing either about the history of Judaism, its theology or its law, or about the history of Christianity; and it says even less about the Jews who lived beyond the Euphrates—for although their history and cultural creativity in the *period* addressed by the book were of fundamental importance for Jewish history, and hence necessary for any "internalist" history of Jews in the period, they were beyond the world normally addressed by 'students and teachers of Classics and Ancient History'.

Schwartz has two other main aims as well (as he tells us in his Introduction, pp. 16-17), and they are basically complementary. The first is his concern to introduce his readers to the evidence for his reconstruction of the past, and to its problematics. Frequently he positions himself as something of an optimistic skeptic: he tells readers about "maximalist" and "minimalist" views concerning this or that topic, typically with the former being older and the latter more recent, and then he positions himself somewhere in between. That is, he is not so naïve or fundamentalist as to take his sources at face value, but neither is he so confined to literary interests and so uninterested in "what really happened" as to avoid building upon less than conclusive evidence, or discovering something of an historical "kernel" in an otherwise suspicious source. To some extent his warrant for doing so derives from his second additional aim, which is to show how reasonable application of models can help historians do their job responsibly. In taking these stands, just as in his choice of "Jews" (rather than "Judeans") to denote the people whose history he is recounting, Schwartz is adopting positions on issues that are subject to lively debate; he has participated in such debates in the past, and in his Introduction he clearly explains his views.

Turning to the body of the book, we can see that, as may be expected from such a birds-eye view of a millennium, it presents an easily grasped schematic account of the Jews' history in this period, especially insofar as it relates to the empires that ruled them. It is a story of up and down and up again.

Building on his more detailed account in his *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton University Press, 2001), Schwartz first reviews, in chapter 1 ('Beginnings to 200 BCE'), the Jews' interaction with the Persian government (focusing on Nehemiah as a "tyrant" of the type with which his readers will be familiar) and their interaction with the Ptolemies (focusing on the Tobiads as illustrating the process of Hellenization); then chapter 2, 'Maccabean Revolt and Hasmonean Dynasty', focuses on the Jews' own turn at state-making and entry into the world of Hellenistic states. This chapter is one that very clearly expresses the book's "non-internalist" stance, for although it deals with a Jewish rebellion and a Jewish sovereign state, Schwartz makes classicists and ancient historians feel right at home insofar as he builds on Tacitus's analysis of the Hasmonean state (*Historiae* 5.8) as a phenomenon made possible by the weakening of the Seleucid state and brought to an end by the arrival of Rome (p. 48). Indeed, despite the chapter's title the Hasmoneans are not even allowed the chapter to themselves; rather, the last few pages are devoted to the Roman takeover and end with Herod's ascent to the throne.

Chapter 3, 'Herod to Florus', begins with a refusal to assess Herod by moral standards. On the one hand, Schwartz emphasizes, Herod was a contemporary of Romans 'whose tendency to mass murder dwarfed anything to be found in the east', but on the other hand, maybe that is what contemporary rulers needed: 'a widely publicized potential to wreak havoc was certainly a powerful political asset for the greatest state-builder of the time, Augustus' (pp. 59-60). In any case, true to his non-internalist stance, Schwartz focuses instead on Herod's attempt to fulfill his "integrationist" mandate by seeing to the needs of both the Jews and the Romans. Here, however, Schwartz points to a paradox, which sets the stage for the next chapter. Namely, he insists that Herod could not, in fact, have it both ways: 'The competition between Roman and Jewish institutions was a zero-sum game' (p. 69); as especially the sects show, 'it seems nearly certain that a large segment of the population of Jewish Palestine, especially the Jerusalemite elites and sub-elites who played a disproportionate role in the first Jewish revolt, experienced a process of radicalization in the course of the first century (see below), and one paradoxical cause of this was the policies of the integrationist Herod' (p. 70).

Before going on, I would point out that Schwartz does not really explain what he means here. He does illustrate his point by saying (just as he cites a few other modern analogies in the book) that 'Herod may be compared to the rulers of some Arab oil states, who owe their positions to their congeniality to the western powers and do all they can to maintain their standing, but at the same time invest heavily in fundamentalist anti-western versions of Islam' (p. 70), but that only raises the question: What was it that lay at the bottom of ancient Judean resistance to Roman rule? To say that 'The more devotion to the Jerusalem Temple and the Torah Herod's investments generated, the more the Jews would experience political marginalization and maladjustment in the Roman system, however much Herod was prepared to invest in the Jews' integration in that system' (p. 69) describes, correctly I believe, the way things were, but it does not explain what made them that way. I would suggest that the Temple was a symbol of Jewish sovereignty and, accordingly, the more impressive it was, the more jarring the contradiction between it and Roman rule. But Schwartz does not offer that explanation, in so many words, and when he reverts to the topic in the next chapter he phrases things differently.

Namely, when in chapter 4 ('The Jewish Revolts, 66-135 CE') Schwartz addresses the issue head-on, he states that in chapter 3 he had 'outlined the case for the systemic unassimilability of the Jews as a corporate and localized entity in the Roman imperial state' (p. 78). The revolts surveyed in this chapter are meant to bear that out, and here too Schwartz insists on the paradox ('a familiar irony') identified in the days of Herod: after Herod's days as well, it was the prosperity and security allowed for by Roman rule, which continued to enable a flow of resources and pilgrims to the Jewish capital city, that actually exacerbated the Jews' hostility to the Roman presence and rule there (p. 80). That, added to the Roman bias in favor of the Greeks in their conflicts with Jews, conflicts which had their Judean branches, was enough to account for the eventual outbreak of violence in the three revolts surveyed in this chapter.

An important section of chapter 4 is devoted to the thesis that the year 70 should be seen as a crucial turning-point in the ancient history of the Jews. Since the chapter then turns to describing the next two revolts, which take us down to 135 CE, the effect is to interpret them as rounding out the big story, as aftershocks or mopping up. That allows the fifth chapter, 'Jews in the High Roman Empire', to begin either with 70 or with 135, and that lack of clarity is warranted, given the nature of the evidence; for at 70 Schwartz's story perforce changes from one built on sources (especially Josephus) that allow for firm dating of distinct events and instead begins to build on the rabbinic corpus; 'our ability to produce any sort of narrative history at this point fails, in particular if we are unwilling [as Schwartz is] to construct such a narrative by assembling and sifting Talmudic stories...' (p. 99). Rather, from here on Schwartz's discussion becomes much more general, much more empty. And that emptiness is, in fact, Schwartz's main point in this chapter (just as in his *Imperialism and Jewish Society*): after the major turning-point at 70, and certainly with the failure of the next two rebellions, Jews and Judaism nearly disappear until the fourth century. Building on (a) two generations of historical study of rabbinic literature, which culminate in a great respect for the late editing of rabbinic texts and, accordingly, with much skepticism concerning our ability to reconstruct early history on their basis; on (b) scholarship that argues, correspondingly, that the early rabbinic movement was very small (here he underlines, for his classicists and ancient historians, that the Jews were exceptional 'for a Roman provincial setting' insofar as what native culture survived did so 'not as a folk culture...[but] as the high culture of a kind of elite', — the rabbis, p. 114); and especially on (c) archaeological and epigraphic evidence that indicates that the "Jewish" towns and cities of Palestine in these centuries were very normal for the Roman world with little to nothing to characterize them as Jewish, Schwartz argues that these centuries saw the near disappearance of Judaism due to the destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem, which had been at its center. That is the point of the argument in chapter 4 about 70 being a crucial watershed, and the negative findings presented in chapter 5 reap its fruits.

In the limited space of a review, I will note simply that this argument is frequently reminiscent of the question whether a cup is half empty or half full. Obviously there is a lot to Schwartz's insistence that self-serving authors and editors of rabbinic texts have exaggerated the importance of rabbis in early generations and the degree of continuity in Jewish tradition. And obviously the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem, and failure of the other two revolts, were major blows, and will have engendered demoralization and turning away from Judaism. Nevertheless, one can go too far, and it may be that Schwartz has done that to some extent in order to make the moves from one period to the next more salient. Three examples: (1) Schwartz writes, at pp. 73-74, that 'the little documentary evidence that survives suggests that in [pre-66] Judea, though it was ostensibly under direct Roman rule, the Jews lived under Jewish, not Roman provincial law (Cotton 2002: 16)', a statement that turns into 'the Jews had partial autonomy within the Roman system before 66' (p. 104) and thus sets us up for a drastic change when, after 70, 'the Jews had no vestiges of autonomy' (ibid.), and so if any Jewish villagers brought their matters to Jewish judges, those 'had lost formal governmental authority, and so they would have functioned [merely] as arbitrators and advisors' (p. 106). However, in his bibliographical essay (p. 160) Schwartz notes that the view that 'Palestinian Jews before 66 CE lived for most purposes under the authority of Jewish law, administered by high priests, is merely a hypothesis, requiring a full reassessment', for which he refers us to H. Cotton's 2002 study (in *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Römische Herrschaft*, ed. M. Labahn and J. Zangenber) — where we find that, after her p. 16, Cotton in fact goes on to tend to the view that, even before 70, Jewish judges in Palestine had, in Roman eyes, only the status of private arbitration. (2) At p. 108 Schwartz notes that 'for the first post-destruction generation — long before the institutionalization of rabbinic training — we know only about thirty names [of rabbis]'. I wonder if I am the only reader who is surprised by the use of the word 'only', and who infers from the fact that there were so many 'long before the institutionalization' that later there were probably even more, just as there were

probably others apart from the thirty, whose names we do not know. (3) Similarly, when as part of his doubts about continuity between Pharisees and rabbis Schwartz notes at p. 110 that ‘The Mishnah’s single report of Pharisaic law (*Yadayim* 4.6-7), which the text seems to identify as ‘ours’, is vestigial’, we might wonder what it is of which this is a vestige and why characterizing the text that way vitiates its weight as evidence. But a debate about such details would be out of place in a book like this one.

Towards the end of chapter 5 Schwartz begins to build the upswing: the rise of the patriarchate in the third century, until it came to flourish in the fourth; here a quotation from Libanius’s correspondence with a Jewish patriarch (p. 122) functions like the reference to Tacitus in chapter 2, to make the classicist and ancient historian reading this book feel at home. For an internalist, in contrast, who has just read numerous pages full of doubts about the use of rabbinic literature for similar purposes, and even about the assumption that Rabbi Judah the Prince compiled the Mishnah (‘the text itself provides no evidence one way or another’ — p. 119), the message is just as clear. Be that as it may, in chapter 6 (‘Jews under Christian Rule’), it is the abundance of Greek and Latin sources for the eventful fourth century that makes for the fulfillment of the upswing: archaeology shows a recovery of Jewish life in Judea and elsewhere in Palestine, but also flourishing Jewish life in the western Diaspora; Roman legal texts and Christian texts refer frequently to the Jews and often indicate that they were flourishing (although Schwartz is careful to distance himself from those who would paint too rosy a picture — 129-130); there is a good bit of evidence for Jewish community life (the hallmark of medieval Judaism, for Schwartz) and cultural creativity, in various types of literature (including all the literature that was anachronistic concerning the period discussed in chapter 5, but is now, in chapter 6, of immediate and legitimate relevance). True, this chapter also emphasizes that, as the Christian empire came to stabilize its policies vis-à-vis the Jews, those policies were such that preserved the Jews but degraded them and so left them marginalized if they were to remain Jews (‘the emperors may not have been precocious Augustinians, but their constitutions and policies certainly tended in an Augustinian direction’ — p. 134), but by the time that happened the Jews were well on their way toward setting up community organizations in which they could, as Jews, survive such policies. Thus, while the story does not end with them all living happily ever after, it does end with them being equipped to survive. That this small volume does not discuss those Jews beyond the Euphrates who were producing, around the time this book breaks off its story, the work which would be the most lasting Jewish work of antiquity and would become the basis of Jewish culture in the West as well, namely the Babylonian Talmud, is, as noted at the outset of this review, simply a corollary of the work’s mandate, which is not ‘internalist’.

This is a fine book. It gives a clear story, one that is well-founded; and it introduces readers both to the ancient sources and to modern ones, including very recent, scholarly literature. It is written for intelligent readers who may know next to nothing about Jews or Jewish history, just as they are not assumed to know any ancient language (at pp. 112-113, for example, when mentioning cities named Autokratoris and Diocaesarea he glosses the names as ‘Emperorville’ and ‘Zeus-and-Caesartown’); and it is written in a lively style (chapter 3 of Zechariah is an ‘op-ed’ [p. 25], around 900 CE ‘the Torah was back in business’ [p. 101], for Heliiodorus, the episode recorded in *2 Maccabees* 3 was probably only ‘a bad day at the office’ [p. 40], etc.). Now and then Schwartz goes into debate about an issue that perhaps could have been dismissed briefly (such as the long discussion of Shu‘afat—p. 84), but then again some other times readers might want more than magisterial dismissal of others’ views without any argument (such as p. 23, n. 6; 71, n. 13), and certainly the newcomers targeted by this book cannot fill in those blanks themselves; but in a book like this it is of course impossible to make rules about such things. While one can certainly argue about some points, such as some of the major issues I broached above, and while any reader, according to his or her own favorite themes, might have hoped for more argument in support of various other statements (such as the insistence at p. 41 that *akmē* in *2 Macc* 4:13 means only incipient ‘budding,’ ‘a process, then, near its start’), or at least to learn the putative source for

other statements (such as the assertion at p. 52 that 'Aristobulus offered the Galileans the same choice his father had offered the Idumaeans', i.e., conversion or exile), in general this is an enviable piece of work. It fulfills very well its stated goals to inform its readers; to show them how the evidence can be dealt with reasonably, including with the help of appropriate models; and to give them a well-founded notion of what they will be missing if they try to study the ancient world while leaving this relatively well-documented part of it to the theologians.

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