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Seth Schwartz. *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. 336 pages. \$39.95.

[1] Not only is *Imperialism and Jewish Society* an original and synthetic work - covering a period in Jewish history not usually defined as a coherent historical period - but within its pages are many provocative theses, well supported by the author's rigorous style of argumentation and detailed discussions of numerous cultural artifacts from ancient Jewish history.

[2] The book is a synthesis of this particular period of Jewish history because the author wishes to challenge several prevailing assumptions about what constituted Jewish society in antiquity and how scholars study it. These are best spelled out by describing the three main parts of the book and the fundamental thesis of each. Part I covers the late Second Temple Period through the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 C.E. While most scholars currently regard this period as one of radical sectarianism (Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, etc.) - so much so that some scholars no longer speak of "Judaism" but of "Judaisms" - Professor Schwartz argues that scholars have overstated the case for sectarianism. He admits there is a diversity of perspectives reflected in the literature of this period, just as there might be in any period, but such diversity does not imply that Jewish society was fragmented. He astutely points out that scholars' dependence on literary remains has skewed their perspective. Since literacy was rare among people of antiquity, we can safely assume that all ancient Jewish literature was essentially produced by literary elites. In order to get a fuller picture of ancient Jewish society, more needs to be done than simply to compare the Dead Sea Scrolls to the writings of Philo. As Schwartz explains in his introduction, his analysis is informed by a structural-functionalist view of societies, that is, societies are "organism-like systems that can be understood by analyzing the relations of their component parts" (3), which he proceeds to do mainly by emphasizing the social, political, and religious structures disseminated throughout Mediterranean antiquity. For example, he argues that the policies of late Second Temple political leaders, culminating with Herod the Great, were expansionist and represent various attempts to unify diverse territories and peoples under the banner of Judaism, perhaps in imitation of Imperial Rome. Herod's expansion of the Jerusalem Temple, which enabled the accommodation of far more pilgrims at Jewish festivals, is evidence of Herod's interest in turning "*Judean* institutions into *Jewish* ones by

enhancing their attractiveness to non-Judean Palestinian Jews" - as Herod himself was - "and Jews of the Diaspora" (45). As for religion, Schwartz believes that the ideological system for those who identified themselves as Jewish in the first century was made up of a tripartite complex of symbols, namely, God-Temple-Torah, though he admits that there is evidence for more ideological diversity among Diaspora Jews.

[3] The radical nature of Schwartz's claims in Part I become more striking when the reader comes to Part II. In Part II Schwartz argues for the opposite situation of that depicted in Part I, namely that Jewish society barely existed in the wake of the victory of the Romans and their destruction of the Temple in 70 C.E. Although scholars have become increasingly skeptical of the picture of post-70 Judaism as being under rabbinic authority, historians have generally assumed that, while Second Temple Jewish society was fragmented, the Temple's destruction led to the demise of sectarianism and toward a gradual coalescing of Jews into a unified form of Judaism, commonly known as rabbinic Judaism, even if it took several centuries for the rabbis to be widely recognized as religious authorities. By contrast, Schwartz argues for the integrity of Jewish society and culture, at least Palestinian Jewish society, *prior* to 70, and the disintegration of that society *after* 70, until its re-emergence sometime in the fourth century. Schwartz builds a strong case by utilizing material evidence, such as inscriptions, coins, and the structure and iconography of buildings. He points out that while literary evidence gives us good reason to view the cities of Tiberias and Sepphoris as "Jewish cities," material evidence indicates that these cities looked the same as any other Greco-Roman city of late antiquity. No doubt some citizens of Tiberias and Sepphoris regarded themselves as Jewish (whatever that might have meant to them), but Tiberias and Sepphoris as communities were fully integrated into Roman Imperial culture.

[4] In Part III Schwartz again relies heavily on material evidence to describe the re-emergence of Jewish society and culture. While there were synagogues in Palestine in the second and third centuries, they do not really become distinguishable as synagogues until the fourth century, when the structure and the iconography become noticeably distinct from pagan archaeological remains. Schwartz attributes this shift to the Christianization of the Roman Empire. Indeed, his interpretation of the iconography of the synagogues of the fourth and fifth centuries points toward their similarity to the iconography of churches and an understanding of sanctity similar to that of the Christianized Roman Empire. Schwartz does not see evidence of significant rabbinic influence until the sixth and seventh centuries, the time when we begin to see archaeological evidence of stereo-typical Jewish "iconophobia;" synagogue decoration now becomes abstract, rather than iconographic, and iconography in older synagogues is defaced. Although he does not say it explicitly, he implies that it is only at this point that Judaism becomes more self-determined and resistant to imperial power.

[5] Schwartz says in his conclusion that his book is an attempt to understand the contours of ancient Judaism by considering "the effects of shifting types of imperial domination" (291), and in this endeavor he unquestionably succeeds. While the book assumes much prior knowledge about ancient Judaism and Greco-Roman antiquity and thus is written primarily for scholars, I predict that *Imperialism and Jewish Society* will be a widely discussed book, certainly among academics, and perhaps even among Jewish clergy and laity. It is too provocative not to be discussed. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Schwartz's

reconstruction, the book represents a major contribution to the understanding of ancient Judaism because it is such a masterful, comprehensive treatment. It also constitutes a contribution to the historical study of religion more generally because Schwartz demonstrates by example that understanding a religion and religious change over time necessitates understanding the larger cultural processes that impact that religion, even if those processes lie outside the boundary of that religion as we typically think of it.

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