

# Antiquity in Antiquity

Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World

Edited by

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importance of the Land of Israel is thus restricted to anytime but the present.<sup>66</sup>

The Bavli shifts the historical focus from Palestine, the place of arrival, to Mesopotamia, the place of departure; the immigration has become an emigration. With Rava's view, it conceives of the entire project of immigration as an act centered on the maintenance of genealogical purity in the Babylonian community.<sup>67</sup> The Talmud's underlying assumption is that there is nothing inevitable or requisite in the immigration to the Promised Land. Even in the second interpretation of the Rava-Abaye dispute, we learn that one makes *aliyah* when there is no other, or no better choice: the prohibited classes have emigrated to Palestine either because they were forced to ("Rava") or because having been marked as prohibited by their community's leadership they could not marry ("Abaye"). Immigration to Palestine becomes unnecessary as the Talmud legitimizes exile; the hegemony of the Land of Israel as the ultimate destination for Jews becomes irrelevant. The action the Bavli takes with respect to geographical matters is similar to the one it took with respect to ethnic matters: it decentralizes the Jewish world not only genealogically but geographically by allowing multiple communities. The extensive discussion regarding the borders of Babylonia (71b–72b) echoes the other tradition of rabbinic territorial mapping, the mapping of the Land of Israel.

In order to realize a different image of the nation, replacing the images of its elements and of the space in which it exists, the Bavli turns to the moment with which those images are most associated. It offers a re-interpretation of that moment and presents an image of the Jewish people very much at variance with that which Ezra epitomizes: it is a dispersed, heterogeneous people whose genealogical identity is contested and flexible and, to return to the topic of this volume, historically contingent.

<sup>66</sup> While Deut 17:8 is used in this way already in Tannaitic literature (see, e.g., *Sifre Deut* §37), its conjunction with Jer 23:7–8 and their appearance together is unique to the Bavli (in *Sifre*, the verse appears after a series of verses adduced to teach the merit of Palestine, and its interpretation emphasizes that "everything which is higher than the something, is better than something"; *ibid.*). Aside from our passage, this appears only in *b. San.* 87a, which is comparable to *Sifre Deut* §152, but ends with the comment on Jer 23 that appears in our *stam*.

<sup>67</sup> This is perhaps Rashi's intention when he explains the first association between R. Eleazar's dictum and the Mishnah: "Ezra's lone intention was to cleanse Babylonia."

## The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople

Jewish Counter-Geography in a Christianizing Empire

RA'ANAN S. BOUSTAN

### I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The *Apocalypse of Baruch* (*2 Baruch*), set during the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians in 586/7 B.C.E. but written in response to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans more than 600 years later, addresses quite candidly the anxieties of its grieving audience.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Preliminary work on this project was undertaken during a Fellowship at University of Pennsylvania's Center for Advanced Judaic Studies (2003–2004), whose support I gratefully acknowledge. Portions of this essay were delivered at the Association for Jewish Studies, December 18, 2005; at Princeton University, January 22, 2006; at University of Minnesota, February 6, 2006; and at University of California, Los Angeles, November 5, 2006. I would like to thank all those who offered insightful comments and mid-course corrections on those occasions, many of which have significantly enhanced the final product. I am especially grateful to Andrea Schatz for opening up my thinking on travel literature and Jewish culture, to Peter Brown, Gregg Gardner, Ron Mellor, David Myers, Kevin Osterloh, and Claudia Rapp for their valuable advice as the paper came to fruition, and to Leah Platt Boustan for passing her skilled editorial eye over the near-finished version. Needless to say, I alone am to blame for any remaining errors, imperfections, and infelicities.

<sup>2</sup> On the basis for dating *2 Baruch* to the period between the fall of Jerusalem (70 C.E.) and the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135/6 C.E.) and, more specifically, between 100–130 C.E., see A. F. J. Klijn, "2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1983–1985), 615–52, esp. 616–17. Rivka Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Early Judaism and its Literature 20; Leiden: Brill, 2003), has recently argued that *2 Baruch* was penned by a Christian author. However, Nir's dichotomy between Judaism and Christianity, her highly selective conception of what constitutes Judaism, and her assumption that rabbinic literature reflects "earlier" Jewish tradition are all methodologically unsound. For a detailed refutation of Nir's thesis, see James R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 105; Leiden: Brill, 2005), esp. 126–31, which affirms that *2 Baruch* was most likely written "by a Torah-observant author with a Jewish ethnic identity" (131). While I generally agree with Davila's assessment, I would place more stress on the unsuitability

Foremost among these concerns are the fate of the Temple vessels and the bearing of their fate on the shrine's eventual restoration. Will these mobile repositories of sanctity fall into enemy hands? And will God permit these artifacts to serve as material testimony to the superiority of the conqueror?

As the earthly army surrounds the city, the seer has a vision of four angels stationed at the four corners of the besieged city holding the torches they will use to set it ablaze. But their hands are momentarily stayed by a fifth angel, who will first collect from the Holy of Holies the cult objects stored there. The angel then invokes the earth to guard them for a future time:

"Earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the mighty God, and receive the things which I commit to you, and guard them until the last times, so that you may restore them when you are ordered, so that strangers may not get possession of them. For the time has arrived when Jerusalem will also be delivered up for a time, until the moment that it will be said that it will be restored forever." And the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up.<sup>3</sup>

This evocative image of the sacred vessels from the Jerusalem Temple secreted away in or near the land of Israel in preparation for the future renewal of the cult echoes a long-standing literary tradition from the Second Temple period. According to its earliest extant formulation, found in 2 Maccabees, the prophet Jeremiah is said to have sealed the Tent of Meeting and the Ark of the Covenant from the First Temple in a cave on the mountain in trans-Jordan from which Moses had surveyed the Promised Land at the end of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness.<sup>4</sup> In resistance to the centrifugal forces of exile that had scattered the Judean population, the vessels are saved from the sacrilege of falling into the impure hands of the enemy. Their hidden presence – in both sacred earth and sacred narra-

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of applying to many pseudepigrapha – including 2 *Baruch* – the categories of "Christian" or "Jewish" as mutually exclusive labels. See David Frankfurter, "Beyond 'Jewish Christianity': Continuous Religious Sub-Cultures of the Second and Third Centuries and their Documents," in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (ed. A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed; Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 95; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 131–43.

<sup>3</sup> 2 *Baruch* 6:8 (Klijn, "2 *Baruch*," 623).

<sup>4</sup> 2 Macc 2:1–8. Close parallels also appear in 4 *Baruch* (*Paraleipomena Jeremioi*) 3:7–20; *Vit. Proph.* 2:11–14. In all versions, except 2 *Baruch*, it is the prophet Jeremiah – and not an angel – who acts as the agent. On the interrelationship of these sources and their relationship to 2 Maccabees, see George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Narrative Traditions in the *Paralipomena of Jeremiah* and 2 *Baruch*," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35 (1973): 60–68. For general discussion of this theme, see Isaac Kalimi and James D. Purvis, "The Hiding of the Temple Vessels in Jewish and Samaritan Literature," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 56 (1994): 679–85.

tive – stands as a promise of the auspicious restoration of the Jerusalem cult.<sup>5</sup>

The author of 2 *Baruch* seems to refuse to acknowledge the fact that Titus and his victorious armies had in very recent memory paraded the sacred implements of the Jerusalem cult through the streets of Rome in triumphal procession, enshrined this celebration in monumental public art on the Arch of Titus, and even placed some of these items on display in the newly built Temple of Peace (*Templum Pacis*).<sup>6</sup> Perhaps this reality was simply too troubling. But Steven Weitzman has convincingly argued in his rich study of the various tactics and strategies that made possible the persistence of Jewish cultural identity in antiquity that, by side-stepping its own present reality, 2 *Baruch* offers its reader the hope, however attenuated, that the "real" Temple vessels – those from the First Temple – remain ready at hand in the soil of the Land of Israel.<sup>7</sup> According to Weitzman, this impulse to transform the temple vessels imaginatively into a kind of hidden treasure was not unique to 2 *Baruch*, but represented a broader cultural pattern. Thus, he argues that texts such as the *Copper Scroll* literally veiled the temple artifacts in language and symbol in the hopes that, in this cryptic form, they might transcend the vagaries of political circumstance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> It is worth noting, however, that this tradition is in considerable tension with the explicit discussion in various biblical texts of the removal of the temple vessels to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (esp. 2 Kgs 24:13–17, 25:12–17; Jer 52:17–23; 2 Chron 36:18–19; Dan 1:2), their pollution by the Babylonians and the subsequent need for their purification (Dan 5:2–4, 22–23), and their eventual return from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 1:6–11; Neh 13:5–9).

<sup>6</sup> On the public display of the vessels during the triumph and, later, in the *Templum Pacis*, see Section II below.

<sup>7</sup> Steven Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 108, suggests that the tactic employed in 2 *Baruch* "was to wait the enemy out – to surrender control over the real contents of the Second Temple and cling to the hope that the lost contents of the First Temple will, with God's help, be recovered one day."

<sup>8</sup> Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege*, 96–117; also idem, "Myth, History, and Mystery in the Copper Scroll," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (ed. H. Najman and J. H. Newman; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 239–55. Weitzman here builds upon and nuances the pioneering "mythologizing" interpretation of the scroll formulated by Józef Milik in M. Baillet, J. T. Milik, and R. de Vaux, *Les 'petites grottes' de Qunrân* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert III; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 198–302, esp. 282–83. For a polar opposite analysis of the text, which views it not as "legend" but as an abstract of a longer catalogue of actual valuables and their hiding places, see especially Judah K. Lefkovits, *The Copper Scroll–3Q15: A Reevaluation: A New Reading, Translation, and Commentary* (Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 25; Leiden: Brill, 2000); also the studies of Lefkovits, Hanan Eshel, Meir Bar Ilan, Ruth

The present paper builds upon the important work that has been done by Weitzman and others on how this “continuity theme” operates within Second Temple Jewish sources.<sup>9</sup> I analyze the subsequent transformations in the theme of the Temple implements as it evolved within Jewish literary culture immediately following the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans (70 C.E.) and subsequently throughout Late Antiquity (c. 200–750 C.E.). Indeed, Second Temple literature represents only one moment in a larger history of the “styles of continuity” that characterize Jewish culture, to borrow a phrase from Benedict Anderson.<sup>10</sup> Like Anderson, I take as my fundamental premise that change happens where it is said to happen, and also where it is not. As we shall see, the often self-appointed guardians of continuity within the “native tradition” of the colonized – in our case, drawn from the various groups of Jewish elites or sub-elites who produced late antique Jewish writings – are, ironically, as much agents of rupture as were the imperial conquerors themselves.

The history of Jewish approaches to the problem of destruction and restoration, as seen through the particular theme of the Temple vessels, discloses a dialectical tension between “centrifugal” and “centripetal” conceptions of space in Jewish culture – with both tendencies deployed in the service of “continuity.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, we find that biblical sources from the Persian and early Hellenistic periods carefully stage-manage the ideological implications of the historical fact that the Babylonians had carried off the Temple treasure from Jerusalem not by asserting that these objects had in fact never been displaced, but instead by emphasizing the inherent invi-

Fidler, Israel Knohl, and Piotr Muchowski in *Copper Scroll Studies* (ed. G. J. Brooke and P. R. Davies; Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha: Supplement Series 40; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), although it must be stressed that these scholars are not of one mind concerning whether the valuables belonged to the Qumran community, the Jerusalem Temple, a rival priestly group, or another constituency entirely.

<sup>9</sup> The phrase “a continuity theme” was coined by P. R. Ackroyd over 30 years ago to characterize the palpable effort exerted by the biblical authors, following the destruction of the First Temple, to develop narrative traditions – and an ideological framework – that would help safeguard the future validity and viability of Israel’s sacrificial cult (“The Temple Vessels: A Continuity Theme,” in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel* [Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 23; Leiden: Brill, 1972], 166–81).

<sup>10</sup> *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (rev. ed.; London: Verso, 1991), 11.

<sup>11</sup> I plan to pursue in a future essay the general insights outlined here. On the important recent contributions of the new “critical geography” to the study of Jewish history and culture, see Charlotte E. Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov, “Introduction: Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space,” *Jewish Social Studies* 11 (2005): 1–8, and the essays contained in this special issue of the journal.

olability of these moveable objects.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, Jewish texts produced in the Hasmonean and early Roman periods – from 2 Maccabees to 2 *Baruch* (c. 150 B.C.E.–100 C.E.) – came to insist that the cult vessels had, in fact, always remained hidden near the center of the nation’s devotional life. And, after 70 C.E., we observe precisely the opposite trend, as the initial emphasis on the fundamental immovability of the sacred vessels in texts like 2 *Baruch* gives way to a rich and multifaceted tradition concerning the historical and religious meanings of their dislocated presence in the imperial capital of Rome. In fact, over time, Jewish sources not only accepted that the relics of the Second Temple were now in exile, but increasingly embraced the paradoxical symbolic potential of this notion. As we shall see, by the end of Late Antiquity, the image of the Temple vessels stockpiled at Rome would be absorbed into a robust eschatological discourse that might have puzzled the author of 2 *Baruch*, but would also surely have made him proud.

It will thus be my contention in this paper that the trajectory of Jewish traditions concerning the vessels of the destroyed Second Temple can be mapped against broader developments in the Jewish response to the changing nature of Roman imperial discourse and practice. I trace the shifting functions of the motif of the Temple vessels in contemporaneous Jewish and Roman (and later Roman-Christian) sources. I show that this potent literary theme, as it was deployed over the course of Late Antiquity in these rival discursive traditions, indexes broader patterns in the politico-theological contest between Jews and Romans concerning the meaning of imperial conquest and power. Moreover, I locate a major shift in the way that Jewish sources deploy the theme of the Temple implements in the particular context of the emergent interest in sacred relics in the Byzantine world during the fifth- and especially sixth-centuries. Perhaps not surprisingly, included among those relics are the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple, which reappear in this period in Greek and Latin historiography after a more than 400 year absence. It is precisely at this historical juncture that the Temple vessels came to serve as a highly charged theme within a novel Jewish messianic discourse – now directed against a specifically Christian Roman Empire.

Central to the argument of this paper is the claim that the Roman-Christian remapping of Palestine as the Christian Holy Land, which already began during the lifetime of the Emperor Constantine,<sup>13</sup> finds a direct counterpart in a group of contemporaneous Jewish texts that imagi-

<sup>12</sup> Ackroyd, “Temple Vessels,” 166–81.

<sup>13</sup> Jaś Elsner, “The *Itinerarium Burdigalense*: Politics and Salvation in the Geography of Constantine’s Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 90 (2000): 181–95.

natively inverts this process of travel, discovery, and ideological appropriation. These texts explore the fate of a wide variety of objects from the biblical or Jewish past – not only the Temple implements, but also the clothing of the First Man, the throne of King Solomon, and even relics of Jewish martyrs. Although these sources locate Jewish artifacts from earlier Roman persecutions or conquests in the heart of the Empire – the city of Rome itself – they resoundingly reject the notion that the Roman capture and possession of objects from Israel's glorious past constitute numinous physical proof of the legitimacy of Christian imperial power. Rather, the Jewish sources situate these physical artifacts within an alternative narrative of Jewish triumph and redemption, which treats the dominant Roman-Christian interpretation of the current religious and political order as deceptive and transitory. By imagining late antique Jews – rabbis among them – in the act of discovering the remains of the Jewish past at Rome, in the heart of the Empire, these texts reverse the direction of travel and exploration, turning Christian sacred space inside-out. They thereby map out what I will call a “counter-geography” within which a resistant Jewish identity could be fashioned.

My notion of “counter-geography” draws especially from David Biale's concept of “counter-history,” which he has applied to the particular mode of oppositional discourse that was generated by Jews within the Christianizing cultural of the late Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> In Biale's usage, “counter-history” refers to the ways that Jewish literary artifacts such as the seventh-century Hebrew apocalypse *Sefer Zerubavel* and the Jewish anti-gospels, the *Toldot Yeshu* tradition, which present Jesus as a demonic miracle-worker, simultaneously draw from and invert the dominant historical paradigm articulated by Christian writers and theologians. This strategy resists the dominant narrative of Christian triumphalism by manipulating elements of Christian salvation history for its own ends. In the resulting cultural artifacts, polemical and apologetic aims jostle against each other precariously. My exploration of a Jewish “counter-geography” aims to contribute to our understanding of the precise idioms through which the shared discourses and practices of Jews and Christians were fashioned into rival cultural forms.

<sup>14</sup> David Biale, “Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*,” *Jewish Social Studies* n.s. 6 (1999): 130–45. On the notion of “counter-history,” see also Amos Funkenstein, “History, Counter-History and Memory,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation* (ed. S. Friedlander; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 66–81; idem, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), esp. 169–201.

A number of recent studies, especially those of Jaś Elsner, Blake Leyerle, and Andrew Jacobs, have explored the role that Christian pilgrimage to Palestine and the literature that grew up around it had begun, already by the late fourth century, to play in the transformation of the “Holy Land” from a locus of biblical and Jewish history into a site for the construction of Christian imperial ideology.<sup>15</sup> And, over the subsequent two centuries (400–600 C.E.), the Roman-Christian state – assisted by a host of Christian writers, travelers, and ecclesiastical authorities – gradually consolidated its hold over both the conceptual and the concrete geography of Palestine. This scholarship reflects a renewed interest in the political dimensions of religious discourse and practice in general and in the role of imperialism and colonialism in the formation of early Christianity in particular. Moreover, this work has increasingly drawn on the theoretical framework of postcolonial studies, in which the colonial encounter is understood to generate common, if highly asymmetrical, cultural domains within which both colonizer and colonized are constrained to speak and act.<sup>16</sup>

For this reason, scholars working in this mode have speculated about and even posited the existence of Jewish cultural products that contested the hegemonic claims of the emergent Christian discourse of empire. But the challenge of locating and analyzing these voices has fallen outside the scope of these studies, which principally focus on Greek and Latin Patristic sources. Nor have scholars yet systematically addressed the evolution of late antique Jewish conceptions of imperial geography in response to the process of Christianization.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while a great deal of scholarly atten-

<sup>15</sup> Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), esp. 174–99; Elsner, “*Itinerarium Burdigalense*,” 181–95; Blake Leyerle, “Pilgrims to the Land: Early Christian Perceptions of the Galilee,” in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (ed. E. M. Meyers; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 345–57; idem, “Landscape as Cartography in Early Christian Pilgrimage Narratives,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1996): 119–43. On pilgrimage to the “Holy Land” in the early Christian period more generally, see Edward David Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Late Roman Empire, AD 312–460* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); also the important recent study of Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 38; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> See especially the influential foundational formulations in Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), esp. 191–281; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> But see the discussion of Jewish-Christian competition over the “Holy Land” at Oded Irshai, “Confronting a Christian Empire: Jewish Culture in the World of Byzantium,” in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* (ed. D. Biale; New York: Schocken Books,

tion has been paid to the efforts of Christian writers to conceptualize and legitimate Christian imperial power, Jewish resistance to and accommodation of the new political dispensation have not received comparable attention. This paper seeks to redress this significant lacuna.

## II. The Limits of Positivism: The Temple Vessels at Rome, 71–192 C.E.

It is a widely attested historical fact that the Roman army under the command of Titus transported a variety of cultic implements from the Jerusalem Temple to Rome following the protracted, but ultimately successful siege of the city. Whether or not the Romans had initially intended to destroy the temple complex and take its sacred vessels as war-spoils,<sup>18</sup> these symbolically potent items were readily incorporated into the joint triumph celebrated by Vespasian and Titus at Rome circa June 71 C.E. for their victory in the (first) Jewish War.<sup>19</sup> This dramatic scene of the conquering Roman army parading the temple vessels through the streets of Rome would subsequently be etched in stone for all time on the triumphal

2002), 187. Irshai's observations build on the path-breaking analysis of the sacralization by Jews of the Galilean landscape in the early and especially high Middle Ages in Elchanan Reiner, "From Joshua to Jesus: The Transformation of Biblical Story to a Local Myth—A Chapter in the Religious Life of the Galilean Jew," in *Sharing the Sacred: Religious Contacts and Conflicts in the Holy Land* (ed. A. Kofsky and G. G. Stroumsa; Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1998), 223–71. On the impact of Christian imperialism on late antique Judaism more generally, see Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Divinations; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Josephus, *BJ* 6.387–388, famously maintains that Titus did not wish the Temple to be burned; the cultic vessels were not so much plundered as handed over to the Romans for safe-keeping. See, however, James Rives, "Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. J. Edmondson, S. Mason, and J. Rives; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145–66, which argues that the destruction of the Jerusalem cult by the Romans was in fact an intentional strategy for dispiriting and thus subduing the rebellious population of Judea. Rives situates the removal of the cult vessels within the context of the Roman practice of *evocatio*, "whereby the Roman general would summon deities away from the enemy city and offer them a home among the Romans" (149).

<sup>19</sup> The fullest source on the triumphal procession is Josephus, *BJ* 7.118–162. For comparative assessment of the triumph within the broader Roman tradition, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 14–17.

arch erected soon after the death of Titus in 81 C.E.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, ancient sources report that Vespasian vowed – perhaps already during the triumphal ceremonies – to construct a temple to Peace in which the vessels would be placed on permanent public display alongside a wide range of other works of art collected at Rome.<sup>21</sup> This grand architectural project, intended to reinforce the emperor's claim that he had established peace throughout the entire empire, was dedicated in 75 C.E.<sup>22</sup> Fergus Millar has recently emphasized how significant this series of commemorative gestures, which quite literally enshrined the Roman conquest of Judea within the public space of the imperial capital, were in legitimating the political aspirations of the new Flavian dynasty.<sup>23</sup>

By far our most detailed ancient source for this series of events is, of course, the Jewish historian and polemicist Flavius Josephus, himself resident at Rome under Flavian sponsorship and supervision in the decades after the war (died c. 100 C.E.).<sup>24</sup> Josephus discusses the multi-step process of the transfer of the Temple vessels to Rome in a variety of literary contexts within the *Jewish War*, published circa 75 C.E. soon after the events it describes.<sup>25</sup> But, for the purposes of tracing the subsequent fate of the Temple implements at Rome, no passage is more informative than

<sup>20</sup> I follow the date for the erection of the arch given in Michael Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Mainz: Philip von Zabern, 1983), 91–92. For the most comprehensive discussion of the spoils panel of the arch, see Leon Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: A Re-investigation* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Suetonius, *Ves.* 9.1; Josephus, *BJ* 7.158.

<sup>22</sup> Cassius Dio 65.15.1; Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 9.7 and *Epit. de Caes.* 9.8. For the phases of the construction of the *Templum Pacis*, its shifting relationship to the wider topography of various imperial fora, and the numerous artistic treasures that it held, I am dependent upon: James C. Anderson, Jr., *The Historical Topography of the Imperial Fora* (Brussels: Latomus, 1984), 101–18; idem, "Domitian, the Argiletum and the Temple of Peace," *American Journal of Archaeology* 86 (1982), 101–10; Eva Margareta Steinby, ed., *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae* (6 vols.; Rome: Quasar, 1993–2000), 4:67–70; Lawrence Richardson, Jr., *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 286–87.

<sup>23</sup> Fergus Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. J. Edmondson, S. Mason, and J. Rives; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101–28.

<sup>24</sup> On Josephus' evolution as a historian and the historical reliability of his various works, see the (sometimes opposing) assessments in Tessa Rajak, *Josephus: The Historian and His Society* (London: Duckworth, 1983), and Shaye J. D. Cohen, *Josephus in Galilee and Rome: His Vita and Development as a Historian* (Leiden: Brill, 1979).

<sup>25</sup> See especially Josephus' account of the delivery of the vessels to the Romans by the personnel of the Jerusalem Temple (*BJ* 6.387–391) and of the display of the vessels during the triumphal procession (*BJ* 7.148–152).

Josephus' detailed report concerning the division of the spoils between the newly constructed Temple of Peace and the imperial palace:

The triumphal ceremonies being concluded and the empire of the Romans established on the firmest foundations, Vespasian decided to erect a Temple of Peace (*temenos Eirênês*). This was very speedily completed and in a style surpassing all human conception. For, besides having prodigious resources of wealth on which to draw he also embellished it with ancient masterpieces of painting and sculpture; indeed, into that shrine were accumulated and stored all objects for the sight of which man had once wandered over the whole world, eager to see them severally while they lay in various countries. Here, too, he laid up the vessels of gold from the temple of the Jews, on which he prided himself; but their Law (*ton de nomon autôn*) and the purple hangings of the sanctuary (*ta porphura tou sêkou katapetasmata*) he ordered to be deposited and kept in the Palace (*en tois basileiois*).<sup>26</sup>

At least according to Josephus, only those Temple implements made from metal were displayed by Vespasian in the Temple of Peace, apparently preferring to place the sacred fabrics and scrolls in his official – and almost-equally public – imperial residence at Rome.<sup>27</sup>

Other contemporary Greek and Latin writers certainly shared Josephus' wide-eyed estimation of this architectural monument and its spectacular artistic contents.<sup>28</sup> But it is Josephus alone who catalogues the specific vessels on display and offers precise details concerning their distribution in multiple locations. No other source accords pride of place to the vessels from the Jewish Temple among this impressive exhibition of imperial largess – and most do not so much as give them a passing mention. It would seem that the attention Josephus lavishes on the Temple spoils likely reflects his own distinctive historiographic and ideological interests. Indeed, without Josephus and the Arch of Titus to remind us of the distinc-

<sup>26</sup> *B.J.* 7.158–162. All citations of Josephus refer to the edition and translation in the Loeb Classical Library, Henry St. John Thackeray, Ralph Marcus, Allen Wikgren, and Louis H. Feldman, ed. and trans., *Josephus Flavius: The Complete Works* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926–65).

<sup>27</sup> The passage likely refers to what later became the *Templum Gentis Flaviae*, which Domitian built on the site of the house of his father Vespasian and his brother Titus (i.e. the *Domus Titi imperatoris*). According to Pliny, *Natural History* 36.37, the famous Laocoon and other works of art were on public display here – and so perhaps also the temple veil and Torah scroll. On possible public access to items displayed in private imperial residences, see Fergus Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World, 31 BC–AD 337* (2d ed.; London: Duckworth, 1992), 144–46.

<sup>28</sup> On the impressive architectural quality of the *Templum Pacis*, see Pliny, *Natural History* 36.102. More than a century later, various authors could offer equally glowing reports: Herodian 1.14.2–3; Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.14; *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Trig. tyr.* 31.10. For a succinct list of the ancient sources that identify the works of art held in the temple, see Anderson, *Historical Topography*, 106 n. 14.

tive ceremonial role that the Temple vessels played in legitimating the dramatic rise of the Flavian dynasty, we might easily come to the conclusion that these seemingly symbolically-laden artifacts simply slipped through the cracks of Roman consciousness.

Indeed, in the century following the reign of Domitian (81–96 C.E.), Greek and Latin sources are surprisingly silent concerning the Temple vessels. There are only three extant references to the *Templum Pacis* found in works produced in the second century. The traveler and geographer Pausanias (c. 115–180 C.E.) briefly comments that a statue of the Olympic victor Cheimon was on display there.<sup>29</sup> The two other brief notices are both found in the *Attic Nights* of Aulus Gellius (c. 125–192 C.E.), an eclectic collection of learned notes on grammar, law, history, philosophy, and numerous other disciplines.<sup>30</sup> What is most notable for our purposes is that, in his comments on the *Templum Pacis*, this Roman gentleman praises the vast contents of the public library (*bibliotheca Pacis*) that had been incorporated into the complex, but passes over the artistic works that had so impressed Pliny and Josephus in total silence. He makes no mention of the Jewish patrimony installed at Rome.

More significant still, not a single one of the sources that describe the massive fire that devastated the Temple of Peace and its surroundings in 192 C.E., during the waning days of the emperor Commodus, remarks upon the fate of the Temple implements.<sup>31</sup> And when the temple complex was subsequently restored – most likely under Septimius Severus in the early third century – and once again merited the heated praise of Roman

<sup>29</sup> Pausanias 2.9.3. For Pausanias' dates, I follow Christian Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 8–12.

<sup>30</sup> Aulus Gellius 5.21.9; 16.8.2. The dates for Aulus Gellius are highly speculative. I here follow the relatively generous range suggested in Leofranc Holford-Strevens, *Aulus Gellius: An Antonine Scholar and his Achievement* (rev. ed.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 11–21.

<sup>31</sup> Cassius Dio 72(73).24.1, emphasizes the destruction of State records. By contrast, Herodian 1.14, after commenting on the almost total destruction of both public property and private wealth deposited in the temple, chooses to highlight the damage caused to the neighboring Temple of Vesta and the scandalous exposure of the statue of Pallas. The medical writer Galen (*De comp. med.* 1.1; Kühn 13.362), bemoans the destruction of the library, which contained copies of his own works. Historical information concerning the fire also entered the Christian chronographic tradition through the notice in Eusebius, *Chronicon* 2.174, repeated with some changes by his transmitters and translators (e.g., Jerome's *Chronicle* places the event under the year 191 A.D.). None of these sources so much as mentions either the destruction or the survival of the Temple vessels. Modern scholarly assertions concerning the survival of the vessels (e.g., Yarden, *Spoils of Jerusalem*, 64) are entirely speculative.

authors,<sup>32</sup> the physical remains of the Jerusalem cult never come back into view. As we shall presently see, the spoils taken by Titus from Jerusalem are not mentioned again in either Roman or Christian-Roman historiographic writings until the time of Justinian in the sixth century, approximately 200 years after the death of Constantine.<sup>33</sup>

How might we explain the fact that, although the defeat of the Jews by the founders of the Flavian dynasty had quite literally become enshrined at the heart of imperial Rome through commemorative monumental architecture, surviving Roman sources show so little interest in the Temple vessels? A well-known dedicatory inscription from the Colosseum, recently reconstructed by Géza Alföldy, strongly suggests that the creation of this most ambitious of Flavian building-projects was funded by booty from the Jewish war.<sup>34</sup> Might we, then, explain the disappearance of the Temple vessels from Roman sources by positing that the Flavians simply melted down the Temple implements for their metallic value? It is, of course,

<sup>32</sup> See especially Ammianus 16.10.14; also the more oblique comments in *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Trig. tyr.* 31.10. For consideration of the sources for the dating of the fire, its disastrous impact on the affected part of the city, and the restoration of the temple complex under Severus, see Anderson, *Historical Topography*, 113–18.

<sup>33</sup> On the total silence of Greek and Latin sources written between 100 and 475 C.E. concerning the fate of the actual vessels from the Jerusalem Temple, see Martin Harrison, "From Jerusalem and Back Again: The Fate of the Treasures of Solomon," in *Churches Built in Ancient Times* (London: Society of Antiquaries of London; Accordia Research Centre, University of London, 1994), 239–48; also Yohanan (Hans) Lewy, "The Fate of the Temple Implements after the Destruction of the Second Temple" (Hebrew), in *Studies in Jewish Hellenism* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1960), 255–58. For both practical and methodological reasons, I have exempted from the present consideration Christian exegetical treatments of biblical passages concerning the vessels found in the wilderness Tabernacle (e.g., Exod 25–34) or in the Temple of Solomon (e.g., 1 Kgs 7–8; 2 Chron 2–4). This vast exegetical corpus primarily reflects the ongoing interest among Christian writers in the appurtenances of the Temple cult as strictly textual objects from Scripture rather than as actual historical artifacts – and much care is needed in order to discern the difference between the two. Still, these exegetical sources may contain still unexplored sources that might further illuminate Christian knowledge of and interest in the Temple vessels prior to the sixth century and may very well repay further exploration. It is interesting to note, however, that no extended *verse-by-verse* commentary on the sacred architecture described in the Hebrew Bible was produced by a Christian exegete until Venerable Bede in the eighth century. For discussion of Bede's place in the Christian exegetical tradition, see Arthur G. Holder, trans., *Bede: On the Tabernacle* (Texts Translated for Historians 18; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), esp. xv–xvii.

<sup>34</sup> For Alföldy's original reconstruction of the inscription, see "Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 109 (1995): 195–226. For further discussion, see Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem," 117–19; Louis H. Feldman, "Financing the Colosseum," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27.4 (2001): 20–31, 60–61. I would like to thank Ron Mellor for discussing the inscription with me.

theoretically conceivable that the phrase used in the inscription, "from the spoils of war" (*ex manubi[i]s*), is meant to encompass *all* of the spoils from the Jewish War, including the specific sacred objects from the Jerusalem Temple that had been displayed before the Roman populace. At the same time, nothing in the inscription itself or in our other sources necessitates such an inference; there may well have been sufficient spoils from the war without the Flavians' resorting to the "liquidation" of what they clearly viewed as the most impressive symbols of their victory. In the absence of further evidence, I think it is safer to assume that the Temple vessels remained at Rome for some time, but simply fascinated second-century Roman writers far less than they did their later Byzantine counterparts – or than they do us moderns. It would seem that, despite their continuing presence in stone on the Arch of Titus and their enduring significance for Jewish authors throughout Late Antiquity, the Temple vessels failed to lodge themselves firmly within the Roman historiographic tradition.

In the face of this deafening silence on the Roman side, historians of ancient Judaism have frequently turned to Jewish sources to establish positive information concerning the fate of the Temple vessels. Thus, for example, David Noy has recently argued that a series of rabbinic narratives concerning the visit of rabbis to Rome suggest that the Temple vessels on display in the *Templum Pacis* served as a "pilgrimage" destination for Jewish travelers.<sup>35</sup> Like all rabbinic literature, these sources, to which I will presently return, were crystallized as written traditions well after the second-century events they narrate. In the hopes of counteracting the regnant skepticism among rabbinicists concerning the historical value of such traditions, Noy advances the following claim: "There are various references in rabbinic texts to some of the objects from Jerusalem being seen, but always with reference to one visitor, R. Eleazar ben Jose. There is no obvious reason why he is *the only one mentioned*."<sup>36</sup> This assertion, on which Noy bases his subsequent historical reconstruction of this pilgrimage practice, is not in fact correct. Parallel rabbinic traditions – similar in both form and function – exist concerning R. Eleazar (sometimes Eliezer or Leazar)<sup>37</sup> ben (R.) Yose's near contemporary, R. Simeon ben Yoḥai,

<sup>35</sup> David Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome: A Jewish Pilgrimage in Reverse?" in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (ed. J. Elsner and I. Rutherford; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373–85.

<sup>36</sup> Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome," 382. The italics are mine.

<sup>37</sup> I refer to this figure as R. Eleazar ben Yose throughout my exposition, although my translations of specific passages follow the orthography of the best editions or manuscripts available.



who likewise is reported to have visited Rome and seen the Temple vessels there.<sup>38</sup>

In a similar – though considerably more careful – spirit, Steven Fine has pointed to some general similarities between the Temple implements listed or described in the rabbinic sources, on the one hand, and those mentioned in Josephus and depicted on the Arch of Titus, on the other. Fine suggests that these similarities be taken as an indication of the relative historical reliability of the rabbinic sources.<sup>39</sup> Yet Fine himself acknowledges that the correlation between the two sets of data is far from perfect: rabbinic sources discuss items that find no echo in the first-century evidence. And even more fundamental questions must be asked. Did the rabbis in these sources see the Temple vessels themselves or merely their likeness on the triumphal arch? Or perhaps the later composers or codifiers of rabbinic literature simply integrated first- or second-hand knowledge of this monument into these narrative creations. Here, too, the historian runs up against insurmountable epistemological challenges in using these sources as positive evidence for Jewish reactions to the public display of the Temple vessels.

Of course, it is hardly implausible that, over the course of the second century, Jews from the Roman east – perhaps Palestinian “rabbis” among them – had occasion to travel to Rome and view the actual Temple implements on display in the Temple of Peace. The new and very tangible monuments of Flavian Rome surely had an impact on both residents of and visitors to the capital. Indeed, in a provocative article, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken has argued that the New Testament Epistle to the Hebrews, with its theologically potent image of an inviolable heavenly shrine as the locus of the eternal cult of Christ, represents an attempt on the part of a Christian community in Rome to subvert the triumphalism of the Flavian propaganda with which they were surrounded.<sup>40</sup> In this reading, the spiritualization of

<sup>38</sup> E.g., *t.Kippurim* 2:16; *Yoma* 57a. I analyze these sources in depth below in the next section of the paper.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Fine, “When I Went to Rome... There I Saw the Menorah...”: The Jerusalem Temple Implements During the Second Century CE,” in *The Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the “Other” in Antiquity, Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers* (ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCullough; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2007). I would like to thank Steven Fine for sharing his paper with me in advance of its publication.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, “Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text: The Arch of Titus and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Religious Texts and Material Contexts* (ed. J. Neusner and J. F. Strange; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2001), 73–88; reprinted in *Sewanee Theological Review* 45 (2002): 135–51; and in *Hebrews: Contem-*

the biblical cult and especially its implements (Heb 9:1–10) that is so characteristic of Hebrews is at least as much a response to imperial domination as it is a general critique of now-superseded Jewish cultic practices.

Yet, while I do not wish to deny the very real power of the Flavian architectural program, I would caution against reading third-, fourth-, and early fifth-century rabbinic sources as transparent travelogues that record the actual experiences of second-century rabbis in the capital. We are certainly not well served by trying to harmonize these strikingly similar episodes in the biographies of R. Eleazar and R. Simeon – and, in any case, later rabbinic tradition would see to that (see my discussion of *Bavli Me‘ilah* 17a–b below). Instead, rabbinic traditions concerning the fate of the Temple implements should be read both within their immediate *literary* contexts as well as against the sweeping changes that reconfigured the landscape of Jewish cultural memory over the course of Late Antiquity.

### III. The Fate of the Temple Implements in Rabbinic Literature, c. 200–450 C.E.

I have already remarked on the total silence of Greek and Latin sources written between 100 and 500 C.E. concerning the fate of the implements from the Jerusalem Temple. By contrast, the vast corpus of rabbinic writings produced during this same period includes a variety of traditions that not only acknowledge that the Temple vessels are in Rome, but explore in considerable detail their precise location and physical form. Rabbinic texts of the third, fourth, and early fifth centuries do not yet thematize the discovery of the Temple vessels in the imperial storehouses of Rome and their repatriation to Jerusalem as a decisive stage in the salvation of Israel, as will subsequent Jewish writings from the Byzantine world. Rather, these sources typically embed “eye-witness” testimonies concerning the cultic vessels within the legal-exegetical discourse characteristic of rabbinic literature, employing these reports as a narrative validation of specific points of *halakhah*. In this way, the rabbis drew the vessels within the domain of rabbinic authority and expertise.

At the same time, however, I would like to suggest that these sources are not pursuing what is often taken as the relatively straightforward rabbinic agenda of supplanting the physical cult with an edifice of learned

*porary Methods – New Insights* (ed. G. Gelardini; Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 131–48.

discourse and pious prayer.<sup>41</sup> Rather, these texts are marked by a palpable tension between appropriation of the Temple cult, on the one hand, and its preservation as a privileged site of religious meaning and experience, on the other. They explicitly juxtapose scripturally-derived knowledge with experientially-derived knowledge, often preferring visual confirmation to exegesis. These sources thus forge a powerful link between rabbinic expertise concerning the Temple vessels and the act of visualization itself. I will argue that this linkage builds upon widespread traditions concerning the public viewing of the Temple vessels by the laity during pilgrimage festivals. While these rabbinic “memories” of the Jerusalem cult likely do not reflect historical practice *per se*, they shaped rabbinic speculation concerning the fate of the Temple vessels. In this respect, these rabbinic traditions betray an abiding fascination with the unique and inimitable power embodied in the concrete remains of a ritual system over which the rabbis are not quite able – or willing – to assert complete control.

In this portion of the paper, I analyze the attitudes expressed specifically in early rabbinic literature toward the presence of the Temple vessels in Rome. I restrict my discussion here to material found in rabbinic compilations dating from approximately 200–450 C.E. (Mishnah, Tosefta, the so-called halakhic midrashim, the Palestinian Talmud, and the earliest exegetical and homiletical midrashim).<sup>42</sup> In a number of cases, I include material whose dating is uncertain but which seems to belong to this earlier cultural context or sheds light upon its subsequent reception in rabbinic literature. I reserve discussion of material found in later Palestinian midrashim until the final portions of the paper, where I describe what I believe is a significant shift in the attitudes of Jewish authors in the Byzantine world toward physical relics in general and toward the Temple vessels in particular.

<sup>41</sup> For a classic description of this project and its importance for understanding rabbinic Judaism as a whole, see Jacob Neusner, *Judaism: The Evidence of the Mishnah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), esp. 25–44; also Baruch M. Bokser, “Approaching Sacred Space,” *Harvard Theological Review* 78 (1985): 279–99. Compare, however, Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 175–212, which offers a thorough-going critique of this traditionalist account of the role of the rabbis in fashioning post-sacrificial Judaism as well as a more nuanced and gradualist analysis of this process that situates it within the larger context of developments across the ancient Mediterranean world.

<sup>42</sup> Except where otherwise indicated, I follow the dating and provenance of specific rabbinic compilations as expressed in H. L. Strack and Günther Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash* (trans. and ed. M. Bockmuehl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

It should perhaps also be stressed up front that rabbinic writings are hardly alone in their ongoing interest in the Temple implements. Jewish material culture – coins, architectural elements, synagogue mosaics, and other artifacts of daily Jewish life – likewise attests to the potent religious-nationalist valence these objects continued to carry in the Jewish imagination after the destruction of the Temple and throughout Late Antiquity.<sup>43</sup> Implements associated with the Jerusalem cult constituted one of the most pervasive figural motifs in late antique Jewish art; these symbolically-laden images appear not only on synagogue mosaics but also in a variety of other media, such as coins, lead coffins, tombstones, and glass “pilgrim” vessels.<sup>44</sup> The precise meaning of this cultic imagery, however, remains hotly debated among historians and archaeologists. Thus, scholars do not agree on whether, at what historical point, and in precisely which contexts the figure of the *menorah* might have carried explicit messianic resonances.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, while some have argued that the images of the Jerusalem Temple and its cultic paraphernalia decorating various late antique synagogue mosaics are central components of a larger message of eschato-

<sup>43</sup> The bibliography on representations of the Jerusalem Temple and its vessels in late antique Jewish art is vast. For synthetic consideration and bibliography, see Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 146–63; Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (2d ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 230–36, 602–8. See also Herbert L. Kessler, “Through the Temple Veil: The Holy Image in Judaism and Christianity,” *Kairos* 32–33 (1990/91): 53–77.

<sup>44</sup> For a systematic catalogue of figural uses of the *menorah* and other Temple vessels in the full range of media (except coins), see Rachel Hachlili, *The Menorah, The Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form, and Significance* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 68; Leiden: Brill, 2001), 285–480. For interpretation of the Jewish coins minted during the Bar-Kokhba revolt, which are stamped with images of the façade of the Jerusalem Temple, the showbread table, and other cultic items such as the *lulav* and *etrog*, as an expression of Jewish aspirations for renewal of the cult, see Dan Barag, “The Table of the Showbread and the Façade of the Temple on Coins of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed* (ed. H. Geva; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 272–76; also appears as *idem*, “The Table of the Showbread and the Temple on the Bar-Kokhba Coins” (Hebrew), *Qadmoniot* 20 (1987): 59–62. On the “afterlife” of the Temple vessels in medieval Byzantium, see Elisabeth Revel-Neher, *Le témoignage de l'absence: Les objets du sanctuaire à Byzance et dans l'art juif du XI<sup>e</sup> au XV<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: De Boccard, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> Unlike scholars who offer one or another interpretation of the *menorah*, Rachel Hachlili suggests that it ought to be viewed as a multivalent symbol: while in some cases it could specifically signify Jewish yearning for religious or national restoration, it often functioned as an emblem of Jewish (in contradistinction to Christian or pagan) identity (*Menorah*, 204–9, and scholarship cited there).

logical “promise and redemption,”<sup>46</sup> others have raised important questions – both empirical and methodological – about the very possibility of reconstructing a single, fixed interpretation of these compositions in stone, either as a unified group or as independent compositions.<sup>47</sup>

It is not my aim in this paper to resolve all of these quite fundamental interpretative questions concerning the meaning(s) of late antique Jewish iconography at various points in time, in various locations, and in various media. Rather, I hope to add to this discussion by focusing primarily on the textual tradition, which will enable me to trace the literary processes through which the shifting Jewish discourse concerning the Temple implements was fashioned. Where I find it productive, I use material artifacts to illuminate specific texts. But I leave for subsequent research the ultimate task of drawing the literary and material data together into a unified account of the cultural significance of the Temple and its vessels for late antique Jews.

The motif of the presence of the Temple vessels in Rome already makes its appearance in the earliest strata of rabbinic literature. These sources present rabbinic visual testimonials concerning the physical form of a variety of Temple vessels, including the seven-branch candelabrum (*menorah*), the Temple veil (*parokhet*), and various vestments of the High Priest. In the earliest of these sources, these reports stand as isolated rabbinic dicta without a larger narrative, exegetical, or dialectical context. But, relatively quickly, these statements came to be used as definitive evidence to resolve debates over cultic practice. Thus, for example, we read in the Tosefta that R. Eleazar ben R. Yose saw the Temple veil during a visit to Rome:<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> See especially the interpretation of the Sepphoris mosaic in Zeev Weiss and Ehud Netzer, *Promise and Redemption: The Synagogue Mosaic of Sepphoris* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1996), from which I take the phrase.

<sup>47</sup> See Seth Schwartz's assessment of the reading offered by Weiss and Netzer in his *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 248–59. Schwartz's “minimalist” interpretation, which he believes allows for more fluidity of meaning, downplays the eschatological dimension of the Sepphoris mosaic, arguing instead that it should be read in cosmological and hieratic terms as a reflection of the increasing sacralization of the space, liturgy, and community of the synagogue in the fifth and sixth centuries.

<sup>48</sup> The transfer of the Temple veil to Rome at the time of the destruction is reported in a wide variety of rabbinic sources. Most famously, the veil plays a central role in lurid rabbinic narratives concerning Titus' desecration of the Holy of Holies at the time of the destruction (*LevR* 22:3; *b.Git* 56b; *NumR* 18:22; shorter and probably early forms of the narrative appear in *SifreiDeut* §328; *PRK* 26; *LevR* 20:5; *GenR* 10:7; *DeutR* 21 (Lieberman); *Tan*, *aḥare mot* 4; *TanB*, *aḥare mot* 5; *EcclR* 5:8; brief allusions to the narrative appear in *PRE* 49; *MidrPs* 121:3). For a reading of this narrative within the Roman culture of spectacle, see Joshua Levinson, “Tragedies Naturally Performed: Fatal Cha-

And thus did he (the High Priest) count (when sprinkling the sacrificial blood during the expiatory ritual on the Day of Atonement): “One, one and one, one and two, one and three, one and four, one and five, one and six, one and seven.” R. Judah said in the name of R. Eliezer: “One, one and one, two and one, three and one, four and one, five and one, six and one, seven and one.” He went out to his left, along the veil (*parokhet*). And he did not touch the veil. But if he touched it, he touched it. R. Eleazar b. R. Yose said: “I myself saw it (i.e. the veil) in Rome and there were drops of blood on it (אני ראיתייה ברומי והיו עליה טיפי דמים). And they told me:<sup>49</sup> These (drops) are from the blood of the Day of Atonement (אמי) (לי אילו מדמים של יום הכפורים).”<sup>50</sup>

R. Eleazar's testimony is here appended to a series of relatively disconnected rabbinic dicta concerning the precise dynamics of the Yom Kippur ritual: mention of the *parokhet* seems to have prompted the redactor to include the R. Eleazar tradition, which does not otherwise substantiate or refute an argument.<sup>51</sup>

By contrast, when R. Eleazar's testimony is found in both the Palestinian and the Babylonian Talmuds, it is used explicitly as evidence to settle a matter of ritual law.<sup>52</sup> As we might expect, the Babylonian Talmud is particularly aggressive in its modification and application of R. Eleazar's dictum. In order to demonstrate the later fate of this unit of tradition, I analyze its elaboration in the Bavli. I have broken down this complex passage into its two main building-blocks, both of which are further divided into a series of parallel sub-units:

rades, *Parodia Sacra*, and the Death of Titus,” in *Jewish Culture and Society under the Christian Roman Empire* (ed. R. Kalmin and S. Schwartz; Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 349–82. On the narrative as an anti-Christian polemic concerning the destruction of the Temple, especially in response to New Testament traditions concerning the rending of the Temple veil at Jesus' death (Mark 15:38; Matt 27:51), see Israel Yuval, “The Lord Will Take Vengeance, Vengeance for His Temple” (Hebrew), *Zion* 59 (1994): 362–73. But see Menahem Kister's critical assessment of Yuval's argument in “Legends of the Destruction of the Temple in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*” (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 67 (1998): 483–529, esp. 508.

<sup>49</sup> The version in *y.Yoma* 5,5 (42d) offers a slightly different version of this phrase, in which it is R. Eleazar who is the speaker: “I said: These (drops) are from the blood that they would sprinkle upon it on the Day of Atonement” (אמרתי אילו מן הדמים שהיו) (מזין עליה ביום הכיפורים).

<sup>50</sup> *t.Kippurim* 2:16 (Lieberman). My translation.

<sup>51</sup> R. Eleazar's testimony is absent in the Mishnah's parallel description of the sacrificial ritual carried out by the high priest on the Day of Atonement.

<sup>52</sup> *y.Yoma* 5,5 (42d); *b.Yoma* 57a.

## UNIT A

A1: It was taught (תנא): When he (the High Priest) sprinkled (the blood), he did not sprinkle directly upon the veil (על הפרוכת), but rather toward the veil (הפרוכת כנגד).

A2: R. Eleazar b. R. Yose said: "I saw it in Rome (אני ראיתיה ברומי), and there were upon it many drops of blood of the bullock and of the goat of the Day of Atonement (והיו עליה כמה טיפי דמים של פר ושעיר של יום הכפורים)." פר העלם דבר של צבור or of the goats (offered as expiation) for idolatry (שעירי עבודה זרה)?

A3: Perhaps (the drops) were those of the bullock offered up for an error of the community (דפר העלם דבר של צבור) or of the goats (offered as expiation) for idolatry (שעירי עבודה זרה)?

A4: He saw that they were made in their regular pattern (דעבידי כסדרן).

## UNIT B

B1: Also we have learned (ותנן) in connection with the bullock offered up for an error of the community: When he (the High Priest) sprinkled (the blood), the drops were not to reach the veil, but if they did, they just did (i.e. the ritual was not thereby annulled).

B2: And R. Eleazar b. R. Yose said: "I saw it in Rome and there were upon it many drops of blood of the bullock offered up for an error of the congregation and of the goats offered up for idolatry (והיו עליה כמה טיפי דמים של פר העלם דבר של צבור ושעירי עבודה זרה)." פר העלם דבר של צבור ושעירי עבודה זרה.

B3: But perhaps they came from the bullock and goat of the Day of Atonement?

B4: He saw that they were *not* made in their regular pattern (דעבידי שלא כסדרן).<sup>53</sup>

R. Eleazar's testimony appears in two different forms in the two structurally parallel sections of the passage. And, in both cases, the testimony differs from its previous formulations, which do not specify the particular species of sacrificial animal from which the blood has come. I have underlined this added element in the citations above. The creators of this passage clearly realized that, in order for R. Eleazar's testimony to carry binding force in determining how the priest actually carried out the ritual dispersal of the blood, his statement must specifically refer to the spatter-pattern created by a particular type of sacrificial practice – *either* the Yom Kippur offerings *or* the various purification offerings for communal sins.<sup>54</sup> The passage plays out both possibilities: not only do the authors amend R. Eleazar's

statement to suit the logical need of the immediate argument, but also append an Aramaic addendum to each of the two main units that correspondingly states whether the blood was or was not in the standardized spatter-pattern of the Yom Kippur sacrifice.<sup>55</sup> The alleged historical event is now quite firmly ensconced in legal dialectic.

But traditions concerning R. Eleazar's sighting of the Temple vessels in Rome were not only expanded and reframed *over* time with developments in rabbinic literary culture – from the Tosefta to the Palestinian Talmud and eventually to the Babylonian Talmud. We also find significant variation in the basic content of this tradition *across* the rabbinic corpora of the third and fourth centuries. Thus, R. Eleazar elsewhere testifies that, while in Rome, he saw the head-plate (*tzitz*) of the High Priest – and not the Temple veil. More significantly, this tradition, which is found twice in the Jerusalem Talmud, likewise situates R. Eleazar's testimony within the context of halakhic debate regarding the precise appearance of the sacred object:

On the head-plate (צִיץ) was written "Holy unto the Lord" (קודש ליי). "Holy unto" (was written) below, while the Divine Name was above. Just as a king sits on his throne (קתדרין), so one (part of the phrase) is below and the Divine Name is above. But R. Eleazar b. R. Yose said: "I myself saw it in the city of Rome (אני ראיתיה ברומי), and it was actually engraved upon it on one line, "Holy unto the Lord" (ולא היה כתוב עליו אלא שיטה אחת קודש ליי).<sup>56</sup>

The anonymous authority cited in this passage is apparently in possession of a tradition that asserts that the words "Holy unto the Lord" were engraved upon the head-plate on two separate rows, with the Divine Name on top. This anonymous tradition does not rest on either an exegetical or an experiential rationale, but instead appeals to the obvious iconic function of the phrase: the vertical configuration not only embodies the elevated position of God, but also signifies the logical relationship between the priestly head-plate and God's divine kingship. By contrast, R. Eleazar grounds his conflicting position that the entire phrase was written on a single line in eye-witness testimony, which, while perhaps less graphically apt, carries with it the authority of experience. I would suggest that this debate concerning the proper configuration of the inscription – to the exclusion of all other features of the head-plate – dramatizes what is implicit in the text,

<sup>53</sup> *b.Yoma* 57a. I have slightly adapted the Soncino translation.

<sup>54</sup> The biblical laws concerning purification offerings for errors of the congregation differ between Lev 4:13–21 and Num 15:22–26. For rabbinic attempts to sort out these sources, see, e.g., *b.Hor* 8a, 13b. On the nature of these sacrifices, see Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (Anchor Bible 3; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1991), 253–69.

<sup>55</sup> What exactly this pattern was is uncertain. Rashi, loc. cit. (s.v. כסדרן), probably basing himself directly on the description of the motion used by the High Priest in *m.Yoma* 5:3, suggests that the pattern was a vertical series of spots – "from above to below" (מלמעלה למטה) – as would be formed by the flicking of a "whip" (כמצלית).

<sup>56</sup> *y.Yoma* 4,1 (41c); cf. *y.Meg* 1,9 (71d); *b.Shab* 63b. My translation.

namely, the assertion that verbal testimony and debate displace the very *sancta* that are here the explicit objects of rabbinic discourse.

How shall we square the existence of these various alternative traditions concerning R. Eleazar reviewed above? Of course, we might wish to speculate that the historical R. Eleazar either saw both the veil and the head-plate during a single trip to Rome. Or that he saw each object on two separate occasions. I would suggest instead that the motif of the sighting of the Temple vessels remained quite flexible and could be adapted to new textual settings. It is, I believe, impossible to determine the original form of the statement – and foolish to try. What is important is that the figure of R. Eleazar functions like a magnet, attracting more than one Temple vessel.

Indeed, other *tannaitic* figures could similarly attract various cultic objects to their names. We find in the fragmentarily preserved halakhic midrash *Sifrei Zuta* a statement attributed to R. Simeon ben Yoḥai concerning the form of the *menorah* from the Jerusalem Temple, which he claims to have spent a good, long time inspecting while in Rome. But, unlike what is probably the earliest form of the R. Eleazar statement found in the *Tosefta*, R. Simeon's report is here already embedded in a *halakhic* context and juxtaposed to an exegetical argument:

From where [in Scripture do we know] that all the lamps [of the *menorah*] must be turned inward toward the middle lamp ( ומניין שיהיו כל הנרות מוסטרין כנגד נר ) (האמצעי). Thus Scripture teaches: (When you set up the lamps, let the seven lamps give light) toward the front of the lampstand (אל מול פני המנורה); Num 8:2). And [elsewhere] it says: (There is a people that came out of Egypt; it hides the earth from view) and it is settled next to me (והוא יושב ממולי); Num 22:5). R. Simeon said: "When I went to Rome and saw there the *menorah* (כשהלכתי לרומי וראיתי) (היו כל הנרות מוסטרין כנגד נר האמצעי)." <sup>57</sup>

It is worth noting that the specific form of the *menorah* described here as well as in a number of other rabbinic texts,<sup>58</sup> with the six outer flames oriented inward toward the central one, bears a striking resemblance to a number – though certainly not all or even most – of the artistic representations of the *menorah* on mosaic floors of synagogues from late antique

<sup>57</sup> *Sifrei Zuta, be-ha'alotekha*, 8:2 (Horovitz, 255). My translation.

<sup>58</sup> The view that the middle flame serves as the focal point of the arrangement is associated with the name of R. Nathan in *SifreiNum* 59 (Horovitz, 57), *b.Meg* 21b, and *b.Men* 98b, where he comments: "This shows that the middle one is especially prized." In the tannaitic source cited in both of the *Bavli* passages, an anonymous sage teaches instead that all seven of the lamps faced in a single direction toward the western-most lamp and thus in the direction of the *Shekhinah*.

Palestine.<sup>59</sup> This shared iconographic tradition suggests that rabbinic literature participated in the creation or preservation of a relatively wide-spread artistic idiom common to other late antique Jews.

Perhaps not surprisingly, however, the discussion in *Sifrei Zuta* does not appeal to the authority of contemporary synagogue iconography. Instead, it substantiates its claim that the outer six lamps of the *menorah* were oriented toward the central lamp through midrashic exegesis. The passage notes the echo of the verbal element מול ("in front of") in two unrelated verses from the Pentateuch – one stipulating how Aaron should arrange the lamps of the *menorah* and the other relating how the Moabite king Balak feared he was being encircled by the people of Israel. The physical arrangement conjured up in the former verse is not, however, self-evident. The midrashist reasons that, just as in the Balak story, this element of the prepositional phrase implies encirclement, so should it be understood in the description of the *menorah*. The passage thus determines that the three candles on each side of the *menorah* were oriented inwards toward the central flame. Unlike R. Eleazar's report concerning the head-plate, R. Simeon's testimony confirms, rather than contravenes the received tradition cited anonymously by the text.

In addition to the direct testimonials attributed to R. Eleazar and R. Simeon, the motif of the Temple vessels can also appear in another type of rabbinic text, the "canonical" inventory or list.<sup>60</sup> We find such examples of *Listenwissenschaft* in the relatively late rabbinic tractate *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* in a passage that juxtaposes a variety of originally independent traditions concerning the hidden or lost patrimony of the Jewish people:

There are five things that were made and later hidden away: the Tent of Meeting and the vessels contained therein (אהל מועד וכלים שבו), the ark and the broken tablets, the jar of manna, the staff [of Moses], the flask of anointing oil, Aaron's rod with its almonds and blossoms, the robes of the priesthood, the robes of the anointed [High] Priest; but the mortar (*makhteshet*) of the House of Avtinas, the table (*shulḥan*), the lampstand (*menorah*), the veil (*parokhet*), and the [High

<sup>59</sup> Most notably, the two *menorot* on the upper panel of the mosaic floor from the Hammath Tiberias synagogue (reproduced in Hachlili, *Menorah*, 53\*); also the left-hand *menorah* on the Huseifa mosaic (reproduced in Rachel Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Land of Israel* [Leiden: Brill, 1988], pl. 56a). On the relationship between the depictions in the synagogue mosaics and in rabbinic literature, see Zeev Weiss, *The Sepphoris Synagogue: Deciphering an Ancient Message in Its Archaeological and Socio-Historical Contexts* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society; Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2005), 74–75.

<sup>60</sup> On numerical lists as an organizing principle within rabbinic literature, see Wayne Sibley Towner, *The Rabbinic Enumeration of Scriptural Examples* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), although here primarily with reference to the rabbinic penchant for collecting a series of scriptural examples of various phenomena.

Priest's] head-plate (*tzitz*) remain deposited in Rome (אבל מכתשת של בית (אבטינס שלחן ומנורה ופרוכת וציץ עדיין מונחין ברומי).<sup>61</sup>

The list of four or five objects “that were made and later hidden away” appears in a variety of other rabbinic sources, although, in no other case, is it paired with the list of the vessels from the Second Temple that were taken to Rome.<sup>62</sup> This passage expands the inventory of Temple implements kept at Rome to five: along with the three vessels mentioned in the “eye-witness” reports of R. Eleazar and R. Simeon – variously the veil, the *menorah*, and the head-plate – it also mentions the mortar used by the priestly Avtinas family to crush the incense-offering and the golden table upon which the bread-offering was laid out. While it is interesting to note, as does Fine,<sup>63</sup> that the veil, *menorah*, and showbread table likewise appear in either the spoils-panel of the Arch of Titus or in Josephus or in both, the relative independence of the rabbinic tradition is equally apparent. There are no extra-rabbinic sources that mention either the High-priest's head-plate found in some R. Eleazar traditions or the incense mortar included in the list in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan*.

In sum, the “eye-witness” testimonies concerning the Temple vessels form a tiny sub-genre of their own. In each example, a rabbinic authority – either Rabbi Eleazar ben Yose or Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai, both of whom lived in the second century C.E. – reports having seen one or another of the Temple implement during a visit to Rome. The formulation of the tradition is almost identical for both rabbis: the only difference is that, while R. Eleazar merely reports what he “saw” in Rome, R. Simeon adds a verb of motion (“When I went...”) at the front of his report. The motif of the “eye-witness” testimony generally functions within its immediate literary setting to resolve a legal (*halakhic*) dispute concerning either the precise design of one of the Temple implements or some sacrificial practice that would have left a physical mark upon one of these vessels.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* A 41 (ed. S. Schechter, *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Edited from Manuscripts with an Introduction, Notes, and Appendices* [3rd ed.; New York: Feldheim, 1967], 67). The translation is from Judah Goldin, trans., *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 173. On the dating of the text and its various versions, see Menahem Kister, *Studies in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan: Text, Redaction, and Interpretation* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1998), 214–19; M. B. Lerner, “The External Tractates,” in *The Literature of the Sages I* (ed. S. Safrai; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 367–409, esp. 378.

<sup>62</sup> See the parallels at *b. Hor* 12a; *b. Ker* 5b; *b. Yoma* 52b.

<sup>63</sup> Fine, “When I Went to Rome.”

<sup>64</sup> On the legal function of such eye-witness testimonials in rabbinic discourse, see Dina Stein, “Believing is Seeing: *Baba Batra* 73a–75b” (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Hebrew Literature* 17 (1999), 9–32.

But beyond their immediate halakhic aims, I believe that these “eye-witness” testimonies participate in what seems to be a broader cultural tradition – common in both early Judaism and early Christianity – that acknowledges how contentious visual access to the Temple vessels was. To report that one has laid eyes on the sacred objects from the Temple cult was no insignificant claim. Thus, for example, an otherwise unknown non-canonical gospel (P. Oxyrhynchus 840), likely composed before the end of the second century C.E. not long before the motif will emerge in the *Tosefta*, relates that the High Priest rebuked Jesus and his disciples for having entered the Temple sanctuary and gazed upon the Temple vessels in an impure state:

And having taken them, he (Jesus) brought them (the disciples) into the place of purification (*eis auto to hagneutêrion*) and was walking in the temple. And having approached, a certain Pharisee, a chief priest, whose name was Levi, joined them and said to the Savior: “Who gave you permission to enter this place of purification and to see these holy vessels (*tauta ta hagia skeuê*) when you have not washed yourself, nor have your disciples surely washed their feet? But you, in a defiled state, you have entered this temple, which is a pure place that no one enters nor dares to view these holy vessels without first having washed themselves and changed their clothes.”<sup>65</sup>

Much about this passage remains obscure, not least of which the question of whether the author of this gospel was familiar with the actual functioning of the by-then defunct Jerusalem cult. Daniel Schwartz has rightly noted that, in its equal emphasis on prohibitions against both visual and physical violation of the cult, the passage is perfectly consistent with other Second Temple sources that likewise proscribe the improper *viewing* of the Temple utensils.<sup>66</sup> Here, of course, the author understands the actions of Jesus and his disciples as an out-and-out rejection of the exclusivist posture of the Jerusalem priesthood. Schwartz suggests that the anti-priestly

<sup>65</sup> P. Ox. 840, 2:1–3. I have followed the text and translation in François Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 705–28, esp. 714–15. Compare the old-fashioned translation in Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 1:94–95. The fragment was originally published in Bernard P. Greenfell and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, vol. 5 (London/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908), no. 840.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel R. Schwartz, “Viewing the Holy Utensils (P Ox V,840),” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 153–59. For example, Schwartz cites Josephus' report that, when Pompey and his men entered the Temple and saw various cultic vessels, they “saw what it was unlawful for any but the high priest to see” (*A.J.* 14.71–72).

impulse in this text was also shared by both the pharisaic and rabbinic movements.

François Bovon has recently raised questions concerning Schwartz's mutually reinforcing assumptions that (1) the gospel fragment reflects, however obliquely, the *realia* of ancient Judaism, that (2) rabbinic traditions concerning the Pharisees can readily be used to reconstruct Pharisaic practice, that (3) there is a fundamental continuity between pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism, and that (4) both movements embraced "liberalizing" views concerning access to the Jerusalem cult. Bovon thus points out that Schwartz's reading depends on the contradictory assertions that, on the one hand, the designation of the High Priest as a "Pharisee" likely reflects later Christian criticism of Pharisaism rather than an accurate historical memory of the priest's identity, while, on the other, the document provides reliable insight into actual Pharisaic practice.

Bovon instead argues, convincingly to my mind, that the gospel fragment should be read in the context of second-century Christian controversies concerning the need for purification during water baptism rather than as evidence for first-century Judaism or the historical Jesus.<sup>67</sup> He points out that the expression "the holy vessels" (*ta hagia skeuē*) is precisely the same language used by early Christians to describe the liturgical utensils employed in the ritual of the Eucharist. On this reading, the lost gospel tells us not about the history or fate of the actual Temple vessels, but about how their memory could be appropriated in early Christian culture.

Unlike Second Temple Jewish sources – but very much in the spirit of P. Oxyrhynchus 840 – rabbinic literature nowhere places restrictions on the viewing of the Temple vessels.<sup>68</sup> In a fascinating article, Israel Knohl has analyzed a variety of rabbinic sources that represent the act of viewing the Temple vessels by the laity during the Second Temple period as a sacred rite, one almost akin to a theophany.<sup>69</sup> Knohl's argument largely hinges on later rabbinic reports concerning sectarian controversy surrounding the display of the showbread table and the *menorah* on pilgrimage

<sup>67</sup> For his assessment of Schwartz's argument, see Bovon, "Christian Controversy over Purity," 711–12.

<sup>68</sup> This fact was already stressed by Abraham Sulzbach, "Zum Oxyrhynchus-Fragment," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche* 9 (1908): 175–76.

<sup>69</sup> Israel Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism and Priestly Schools of the Pentateuch: The Issue of Popular Participation in the Temple Cult on Festivals," *The Madrid Qumran Congress* (ed. J. T. Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 2:601–9; also published as "Participation of the People in the Temple Worship – Second Temple Sectarian Conflict and the Biblical Tradition" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 60 (1991): 139–46.

festivals outside the inner-sanctuary of the Temple.<sup>70</sup> While I am myself not persuaded by Knohl that these rabbinic sources can be used to reconstruct the history of actual cultic practice in the Jerusalem Temple in so straightforward a fashion,<sup>71</sup> I do think he is fundamentally correct in identifying a strong "democratizing" or "popularizing" impulse within rabbinic literature itself. Quite clearly, the rabbinic authors of these texts wished to present the Temple vessels as the patrimony of all Israel – and not just the priesthood.

Yet, paradoxically, these diverse rabbinic traditions, including the "eyewitness" testimonies that I have analyzed at length above, are marked by a provocative emphasis on the visual power of the Temple vessels. They carry within them a powerful interest in the very materiality of the cult. Of course, unlike early Christianity, late antique Judaism was relatively slow to develop liturgical practices and personnel that could be understood, however provisionally, to replace the Jerusalem cult; indeed, it was most likely not until the Byzantine period that the synagogue was gradually transformed, under considerable Christian influence, into a kind of surrogate temple.<sup>72</sup> But, while third- and fourth-century rabbinic sources do not

<sup>70</sup> This material is found in increasingly expansive forms at *m.Hag* 3:8; *t.Hag* 3:35; *y.Hag* 3,8 (79d); *b.Hag* 26b. Knohl finds echoes of the debate between the Pharisees and Sadducees described in these sources with an ordinance found in the *Qumran Temple Scroll* column 3, lines 10–12. Knohl's view is in keeping with the interpretation of the rabbinic sources in Ya'akov Sussman, "The History of the Halakhah and the Dead Sea Scrolls: Preliminary Talmudic Observations on *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah*," Appendix 1 in Elisha Qimron and John Strugnell, *Qumran Cave 4*, vol. 5: *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah* (Discoveries in the Judaean Desert 10; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 199; Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Kifshutah* (10 vols; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1973), 5:1336. But for a contradictory interpretation, see Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Immunity to Impurity and the Menorah," *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 5 (2006): 141–45, which attributes Sadducean ridicule of the Pharisaic practice of purifying the menorah not to their rejection of Pharisaic liberalism (i.e. allowing the public to come into contact with the vessel) but to their conviction that the menorah was itself immune to impurity because of "the purifying power of its radiance" (145).

<sup>71</sup> For a principled critique of (1) the tendency in secondary scholarship to treat *all* of halakhic texts found at Qumran (even the *Temple Scroll*) as belonging to a single sectarian halakhic system and (2) overly facile attempts to harmonize the halakhic traditions found in the Qumran documents with rabbinic traditions concerning Second Temple sectarian halakhah, see Yaakov Elman, "Some Remarks on 4QMMT and the Rabbinic Tradition: or, When Is a Parallel Not a Parallel?" in *Reading 4QMMT: New Perspectives on Qumran Law and History* (ed. J. Kampen and M. J. Bernstein; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 99–128.

<sup>72</sup> Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, esp. 236–49, 630–32. But a higher degree of continuity with earlier periods is emphasized in Steven Fine, *This Holy Place: On the Sanctity of the*



provide the lost Temple implements with a tangible new referent comparable to the Christian Eucharist, rabbinic claims of special knowledge about their appearance and function paradoxically reaffirms their continuing cultural, religious, and political significance. In this small regard, while the attitude toward the Temple vessels in early rabbinic literature is still a long way from their integration into the emerging Jewish messianic discourse of the Byzantine period, the rabbis have gone far toward establishing them yet again as a major "continuity theme" in late antique Judaism.

As an aside, it is worth observing that later rabbinic authors likewise took note of the replication of this motif in earlier rabbinic literature. An elaborate literary complex found in the Babylonian Talmud at *Me'ilah* 17a-b, but not elsewhere in classical rabbinic literature, develops these atomized traditions concerning R. Eleazar b. Yose and R. Simeon b. Yoḥai into a highly imaginative and integrated travel narrative.<sup>73</sup> This unique composition bears many of the literary features characteristic of the extended narratives found in the Babylonian Talmud – most notably, its harmonization of disparate earlier traditions, distinctive shift from Hebrew core to Aramaic addendum, elaborate length, and use of vocabulary not found in Palestinian sources – and is thus likely the product of this document's anonymous redactors (the *stammaim*).<sup>74</sup>

According to the story, the two sages, after having been selected by their fellow sages for the task of petitioning the imperial government to annul its harsh decrees (apparently during the Hadrianic persecutions), set off together on their embassy to Rome. On the way, while debating fine points of *halakhah*, they encounter a demon named Ben Temalion,<sup>75</sup> who has been sent by God to help them deliver the Jewish people from persecu-

*Synagogue during the Greco-Roman Period* (Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity Series 11; Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> Versions of this tradition also appear in a number of later sources: the apocalyptic composition "The Prayer of R. Simon b. Yoḥai" (Adolf Jellinek, ed., *Beit ha-Midrash*, [6 vols.; Leipzig: Fridrikh Nies, 1853–1877; repr., Jerusalem: Wahrman Books, 1967], 4:117–18); the medieval compilation *Yalqut Shim'oni* (to the *Pentateuch* §537). A closely related narrative, although with different protagonists and historical setting, is found in Benjamin Klar, ed., *Megillat Aḥima'ats* (Jerusalem: Tarshish, 1974), 18–20. For discussion of the relationship of this story to its talmudic precursor and its development within the Byzantine context, see Stephen Benin, "Megillat Aḥima'ats and its Place within Byzantine Literature" (Hebrew), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 4 (1985): 237–50.

<sup>74</sup> On the formal, textual, and linguistic features that characterize the aggadic compositions of the *stammaim*, see Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, "Criteria of Stammaitic Intervention in Aggada," in *Creation and Composition: The Contribution of the Bavli Redactors (Stammaim) to the Aggada* (ed. J. L. Rubenstein; Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 114; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 417–40, as well as the other studies in this volume.

<sup>75</sup> The demonic name Ben Temalion is not otherwise attested in rabbinic literature.

tion. Ben Temalion explains that he will take possession of the Roman Emperor's daughter, so that she will require the "miraculous" intervention of the visiting rabbis. When the rabbis call out Ben Temalion's "personal" name, which he has taught them, he will be compelled to leave the girl.<sup>76</sup> The indebted Emperor will then reward them for their services by granting any request they make. Although Simeon would prefer to have merited the help of an angel, as did even Abraham's maid-servant Hagar, he nonetheless accedes to the demon's offer of assistance. Ben Temalion proceeds to Rome ahead of the sages, takes possession of the Emperor's daughter, and awaits their arrival. R. Simeon succeeds in exorcising the demon by whispering the demon's name in the girl's ear. The story then arrives at its denouement:

[The Emperor] said to them: "(In return for having healed my daughter) request whatever you desire." They were led into his treasure house (לגנוזיה) to take whatever they wished. They found the document (announcing the decree) (אשכחו) (ההיא איגרתא (שקלוה וקרעוה)). It is in reference to this that R. Eleazar bar R. Yose related: "I saw it in the city [of Rome] (אני [רומי] ראייתה בעיר [רומי]),<sup>77</sup> and on it were several drops of blood (הוה עליה כמה) (טיפי דמי)."<sup>78</sup>

Although the narrative explicitly authenticates only R. Eleazar's testimony, it offers a plausible "historical" context in which the two sages might have traveled together to Rome and visited the Temple vessels. R. Simeon, who emerges as the hero of the tale, may in part have been chosen because of his wide renown as a miracle-working sage: the passage attributes his selection to his status as "learned in miracles" (מלומד בנסים).<sup>79</sup> Yet, the juxtaposition of these two figures, both known to have seen the Temple vessels in Rome, cannot be a coincidence. The narrative harmonizes and, thereby, authorizes these seemingly repetitive or even contradictory sources.

More significantly, the creators of this story embedded R. Eleazar's viewing of the Temple implements within a narrative that thematizes the role played by the imperial storehouse at Rome in the deliverance of the

<sup>76</sup> The use of angelic or demonic names in exorcism was widespread in antiquity in general and in Jewish and rabbinic sources in particular. On the centrality of names in the rabbinic conception of exorcism, see especially Meir Bar-Ilan, "Exorcism by the Rabbis: Talmudic Sages and Magic" (Hebrew), *Da'at* 34 (1995): 17–31.

<sup>77</sup> The deletion of the word "Rome" is due to either internal or external censorship.

<sup>78</sup> I have slightly modified the Soncino translation.

<sup>79</sup> On R. Simeon ben Yoḥai as a "wonder-worker" or "magician" in rabbinic literature, see Ben-Zion Rosenfeld, "Simeon b. Yoḥai – Wonder Worker and Magician Scholar, *Saddiq and Hasid*," *Revue des études juives* 158 (1999): 349–84, esp. 362–64 for treatment of this story.



Jewish people from Roman oppression. Of course, the motif of the Temple implements is an addendum; it does not directly advance the plot. Indeed, the linkage between divine intervention on behalf of the Jewish people and travel to the imperial capital is relatively undeveloped in this narrative produced in the Sasanian east. Yet, as we shall presently see, more-or-less contemporary Jewish sources from the Byzantine west developed the theme of the hidden contents of the Roman treasury into an absolutely pivotal theme in their anti-imperial discourse – and they did so in a future-oriented, eschatological key.

#### IV. The *Inventio*(n) of the Temple Vessels in the Byzantine Period

We will presently see that various types of Jewish texts produced under Christian Rome after around the year 500 C.E. – midrashic as well as apocalyptic – situated the theme of the Temple implements within a highly-developed eschatological discourse, which found increasingly vibrant expression during this period. But this renewed interest in the Temple vessels was hardly an isolated Jewish phenomenon. Rather, this impulse belongs to a much broader cultural development in the Byzantine west, where sacred relics from the biblical, Jewish, and Christian pasts came to play an increasingly important role in conferring authority, legitimacy, and power on specific people, practices, places, and institutions. Indeed, Roman-Christian sources from the late fifth century onwards attest to a similar, if not even more powerful, fascination with imagery from the Jerusalem Temple in general and with the fate of the Temple vessels in particular.

It would, of course, be impracticable for me to review in any substantial detail the well-known story of the rise of the cult of relics – and, somewhat later, icons – over the course of the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.<sup>80</sup> Nor

<sup>80</sup> The scholarly literature on the rise and function of relics in late antique Christian culture is vast, but see especially Patricia Cox Miller, “Differential Networks”: Relics and Other Fragments in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 113–38; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), esp. 78–81. See also the following classic considerations of the rise of icons: Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (trans. E. Jephcott; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Averil Cameron, “Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium,” *Past and Present* 84 (1979): 3–35; repr. in Averil Cameron, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London: Variorum, 1981), XVIII; Peter Brown, “A Dark-Age Crisis: Aspects of the Iconoclastic Controversy,” *English Historical Review* 88

can I do justice to the central role that the translation of sacred objects to the city of Constantinople played in its formation as a specifically Christian imperial capital.<sup>81</sup> But, as we approach the Byzantine textual traditions concerning the Temple vessels, we must bear in mind just how significant an impact the image of Jerusalem, both earthly and heavenly, had on the urban landscape and architecture of Constantinople. Indeed, Martin Harrison has shown that, already in the generation before the Emperor Justinian (527–565 C.E.) began the ambitious building projects that would famously be compared to those of King Solomon, Byzantine architects and their imperial patrons were making self-conscious use of the imagery and scale of Solomon’s legendary Temple in designing the new monumental churches of Constantinople.<sup>82</sup> It is within this cultural and religious framework that we must place the unexpected resurfacing of the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple in sixth-century Christian sources.

In a now classic article that has been cited approvingly by Jewish historians ever since, Yohanan Lewy called attention to the claim found in a number of places in the histories of Procopius of Caesarea (c. 500–565 C.E.) that the Byzantine general Belisarius recaptured the Temple implements from the Vandal tribes in North Africa and subsequently relocated them to Constantinople, where they were paraded through the streets on the occasion of the Vandalic triumph in 534.<sup>83</sup> Procopius then reports that, on the advice of a Jew, Justinian elected to deprive his capital of these powerful objects, lest they cause him and his regime harm, returning them instead to the Holy Land for safe keeping in a church. Although this act of repatriation is rather uncharacteristic for Byzantine emperors, who were otherwise busy importing sacred relics from throughout the Empire, Lewy seems to have been eager for whatever scant information regarding the vessels he could find. Thus, he accorded this account positive historical

(1973): 1–34; Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age before Iconoclasm,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954): 85–150.

<sup>81</sup> See Bernard Flusin, “Construire une nouvelle Jérusalem: Constantinople et les reliques,” in *Orient dans l’histoire religieuse de l’Europe: l’invention des origines* (ed. M. A. Amir-Moezzi and J. Scheid; Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), 51–70; Cyril Mango, “Constantine’s Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 83 (1990): 51–62. Compare Sarah Bassett, *The Urban Image of Late Antique Constantinople* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), which in my view accords relics too minor a role in the development of Constantinople’s urban identity, only mentioning them in passing at the very end (135–36).

<sup>82</sup> Martin Harrison, *A Temple for Byzantium: The Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana’s Palace-Church in Istanbul* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 1989); idem, “From Jerusalem and Back Again,” 239–48.

<sup>83</sup> Lewy, “Fate of the Temple Implements,” 255–58.

value and used it as a basic reference point for tracking the faint traces of the Temple *sancta* in subsequent Jewish and Christian sources. Indeed, in order to trace the history of the Temple vessels beyond Procopius' sixth-century sighting, Lewy even tries to determine which church in Jerusalem might have been the lucky recipient of this valuable horde.<sup>84</sup>

In what follows, I argue, *contra* Lewy, that the narrative of rediscovery presented by Procopius has no factual basis in reality whatsoever. I show, rather, that the various passages in the Procopius' histories that discuss the Temple vessels are mutually contradictory. Moreover, Procopius' reconstruction of how various barbarian groups came to possess the Temple vessels in the first place is not corroborated by a number of late fifth-century sources that are far closer to the events in question. Instead, I argue that the supposed transfer of the Temple vessels to Constantinople seems to have been motivated by Procopius' larger objective of modeling the Vandalic triumph on the triumph celebrated by Vespasian and Titus almost 500 years earlier. But I believe that, beyond this immediate rhetorical aim, the re-emergence of the Temple vessels reflects the much broader conjunction between the prestige of Solomon and the fascination with sacred relics that is so characteristic of mid-sixth-century Byzantine culture. As we will see, Byzantine Jewish writers also participated in many of these same highly distinctive cultural impulses.

Before proceeding, I cite at considerable length Procopius' account of Belisarius' triumphant return to Constantinople after his defeat of Gelimer and his Vandal army:

Belisarius, upon reaching Byzantium with Gelimer and the Vandals, was counted worthy to receive such honors as in former times were assigned to those generals of the Romans who had won the greatest and most noteworthy victories. And a period of about 600 years had now passed since anyone had attained these honors, except, indeed, Titus and Trajan, and such other emperors as had led armies against some barbarian nation and had been victorious. For he displayed the spoils and slaves from the war in the midst of the city and led a procession which the Romans call a "triumph" (*thriambon*), not, however, in the ancient manner, but going on foot from his own house to the hippodrome and then again from the barriers until he reached the place where the imperial throne is. And there was booty – first of all, whatever articles were wont to be set apart for the royal service – thrones of gold and carriages in which it is customary for a king's consort to ride, and much jewelry made of precious stones, and golden drinking cups, and all the other things which are useful for the royal table. And there was also silver weighing many thousands of talents and all the royal treasure amounting to an excee-

<sup>84</sup> Lewy, "Fate of the Temple Implements," 256–57, speculates that the church that served as the repository was the "New" Church that Justinian dedicated to Mary in 543 C.E. Lewy provides no concrete evidence for his "educated guess" (השערה) other than Justinian's sponsorship of the project.

dingly great sum (for Geiseric had despoiled the Palatium in Rome, as has been said in the preceding narrative). And among these were the treasures of the Jews (*ta loudaiōn keimēlia*), which Titus the son of Vespasian, together with certain others, had brought to Rome after the capture of Jerusalem. And one of the Jews, seeing these things, approached one of those known to the Emperor and said: "These treasures I think it inexpedient to carry into the palace in Byzantium. Indeed, it is not possible for them to be elsewhere than in the place where Solomon, the king of the Jews, formerly placed them. For it is because of these that Geiseric captured the palace of the Romans, and that now the Roman army has captured that of the Vandals." When this had been brought to the attention of the Emperor, he became afraid and quickly sent everything to the sanctuaries of the Christians in Jerusalem (*es tōn Xristianōn ta en Hierosolymois hiera*).<sup>85</sup>

It is perhaps worth stressing that no independent confirmation of this remarkable account exists in contemporaneous sixth-century sources. And, while we can certainly find the same or similar accounts in the later Byzantine historical and chronographic tradition, it seems that all of these sources – without obvious exception – are dependent on Procopius himself, either directly or indirectly. Thus, for example, Theophanes' account of the events of 533/4 is embedded in what amounts to nothing other than "a lengthy précis of the whole of the two books of the *Vandal Wars*," in the words of his English translators.<sup>86</sup>

But, in the absence of corroborating witnesses, how shall we assess the historical value of this passage? The account of the Vandal triumph is a well-known crux in historians' attempts to parse Procopius' enormously complex relationship to the imperial household, especially with respect to his view of the obvious tensions between the Emperor Justinian and his general Belisarius.<sup>87</sup> The scene of Belisarius walking "on foot" to the hippodrome and there paying obeisance to Justinian is often understood in light of Procopius' pointed, if not entirely consistent, attempt to contrast

<sup>85</sup> Procopius, *History of the Wars* 4.9.1–9. Citations of Procopius refer to the edition and translation in H. B. Dewing, trans., *Procopius* (7 vols.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1914–1940).

<sup>86</sup> Cyril Mango and Roger Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of Theophanes the Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284–813* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xciii; the relevant passage is found on page 295.

<sup>87</sup> For the most important general assessments of Procopius' political allegiances and how these shaped his writings, see the differing accounts in Anthony Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea: Tyranny, History, and Philosophy and the End of Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), and Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 10; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

the general's humility with the Emperor's despotic tendencies.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, despite his intricate negotiation of competing allegiances, this "engaged" historian also clearly wished to cast the celebration of the victory over the Vandals in the most glorious terms he could muster.

Averil Cameron has pointed out the palpable artificiality of Justinian's celebration, which "took the form of an archaizing revival of the old Roman triumph."<sup>89</sup> I would go a step further and argue that this self-conscious "archaizing" impulse did not only shape the triumph itself as an actual public event, but also informed Procopius' ideologically potent representation of it. Indeed, his account of the supposed "reappearance" of the Temple vessels and their almost immediate "repatriation" to a church in the Holy Land where they are secreted away is suspiciously convenient. It offers Procopius an effective rhetorical strategy for linking the triumph to the glorious victories of the Flavians over an earlier "internal enemy" – in their case, the Jews rather than the Vandals – but without actually having to contend with the inconvenient traces that the vessels might have left behind in the capital.

Similarly striking is Procopius' curious deployment of the figure of an anonymous Jew, who succeeds in persuading the Emperor to rid himself of these enormously powerful objects because their sanctity is dangerously "out of place" everywhere except "the place where Solomon, the king of the Jews, formerly placed them." Cameron's own more recent work, which emphasizes the complex way that Jews and Judaism are used as rhetorical tropes in Byzantine literature, might be productively applied to this passage in order to raise the possibility, at least, that we are dealing here with literary representation rather than with positive history.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, this passage is reminiscent of the ways that earlier Christian accounts of the discovery and authentication of relics make particular use of Jews as authorizing devices, as Ora Limor has so compellingly shown.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century*, 137–42. Contrast Kaldellis, *Procopius of Caesarea*, 141–42, which places almost exclusive emphasis on the polemical quality of the passage.

<sup>89</sup> Cameron, "Images of Authority," 8–9. See also the important analysis of the ceremony in Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 125–29.

<sup>90</sup> See especially Averil Cameron, "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 249–74.

<sup>91</sup> Ora Limor, "Christian Sacred Space and the Jew," in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought* (ed. J. Cohen; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 55–77; see also Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 174–91.

But beyond these internal literary considerations, I believe that a range of external evidence also supports my skeptical reading of this account. Most significantly, Procopius' other discussions of the Temple vessels elsewhere in the *History of the Wars* provide no corroborating evidence for his account here – and is at times even at odds with it. Thus, when Procopius recounts Geiseric's original sack of Rome, he discusses the "great amount of gold and other imperial treasures" taken and even the fact that he plundered the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, but nowhere does he mention the Temple vessels.<sup>92</sup> More curious still, Procopius also reports in his *History of the Wars* that the Temple vessels had, in fact, been taken from Rome to southern Gaul (Gallia Narbonensis = modern Carcassonne) by Alaric in 410, rather than to Carthage by the Vandal Geiseric in 455.<sup>93</sup> This claim stands in marked contrast to Procopius' earlier account of Alaric's sack of Rome, where he makes no mention of the Temple implements.<sup>94</sup> Nor do we ever again hear about the fate of those vessels that supposedly found their way to France. Lewy, of course, makes sense of this seeming contradiction by positing that the Temple treasure must have been divided up into a number of separate hoards – in a manner akin to the multiplication of the fragments of the True Cross.<sup>95</sup> This image of multiple stashes of Temple implements circulating in barbarian hands throughout the fifth and sixth centuries offers Lewy a foolproof, though wholly unverifiable, strategy for harmonizing the various strands of Procopius.

Yet, when we turn to our other contemporary historical sources for the Gothic wars, we find something fascinating: none mentions the Temple implements! Jordanes, author of the *Gothic History* written around 551, describes Geiseric as "very well known" for his sack of Rome, but does not mention that he took the Temple vessels.<sup>96</sup> Later in the work, Jordanes discusses the Vandalic triumph of 534, but again – no mention of the vessels.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Victor of Vita, the pious author of a late-fifth-century chronicle of the Vandalic persecution of the North African Christian community, offers a highly unsympathetic account of Geiseric's plunder of Rome. But, although he is writing only decades after these events and has an obvious motivation to have included this detail in his otherwise damning portrait of Geiseric, he, too, says nothing of the Temple vessels. As for

<sup>92</sup> *History of the Wars*, 3.5.1–7.

<sup>93</sup> *History of the Wars*, 5.12.41–42.

<sup>94</sup> *History of the Wars* 3.2.1–7.

<sup>95</sup> Lewy, "Fate of the Temple Implements," 257–58.

<sup>96</sup> Jordanes, *Gothic History* §168. Translated in Charles Christopher Mierow, *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (Cambridge, U.K.: Speculum Historiale; New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960), 98.

<sup>97</sup> Jordanes, *Gothic History* §307 (Mierow, *Gothic History*, 139–40).

the nature of the plunder, Victor reports merely that, when Geiseric seized Rome “he took into captivity the wealth of many kings, as well as people.”<sup>98</sup>

It seems to me, then, that the lack of independent corroboration from earlier, contemporary, or later sources – in combination with my assessment of Procopius’ rhetorical aims and inner-contradictions – speaks strongly against the historical “reappearance” of the Temple vessels at Constantinople in the middle of the sixth century. Rather, I would suggest that the *sancta* from the Jerusalem Temple presented Procopius with a highly appealing motif through which he might heighten the drama of Byzantine ascendance during the age of Justinian. This relatively minor authorial decision would be of a piece with the much larger processes that were then giving shape to the city of Constantinople. Like the Justinianic building projects and the intensive acquisition of relics, the Temple implements would have served to embed the new power, wealth, and sanctity that were flowing into the imperial capital within long-standing biblical and Roman narratives. Indeed, the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple were in many respects unique in their ability to embody simultaneously the glories of both the Solomonic and Roman pasts.

### V. Jewish Relics at “Rome” in the Jewish Messianic Discourse of the Byzantine Period

Before I address the function of the Temple vessels in the Jewish messianic discourse of the early Byzantine period (the fifth to seventh centuries), a few general words about the central role that the capital of the Roman Empire played in Jewish anti-Roman rhetoric are in order. First, it is essential that we bear in mind that late antique Jewish sources – both rabbinic and non-rabbinic – do not appear to draw a clear distinction between the cities of Rome and Constantinople, stubbornly adhering to an anti-Roman vocabulary of opposition first developed in an earlier age.<sup>99</sup> Thus, well into the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, Jewish sources speak about the Roman Empire in timeless terms, as if its emperors were still “pagan” and

<sup>98</sup> Victor of Vita, *History of the Vandal Persecution*, 24. Translated in John Moorhead, trans., *Victor of Vita: History of the Vandal Persecution* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1992), 139–40.

<sup>99</sup> On the symbolism of Edom/Esau as Rome in Jewish culture, see the classic study of Gerson D. Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (ed. A. Altmann; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 19–48; see also Yuval, *Two Nations*, 16–33.

continued to be housed at old Rome. We can, however, sometimes detect, beneath this insistent rhetorical continuity, changing conceptions of the emperor or his imperial capital within Jewish sources.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, I will argue below that the transformation in the uses and meaning of the motif of the Temple vessels provides us with a parade example of how processes of Christianization shaped the ways that Jews imaginatively remapped their salvation history against the shifting geography of empire. I, therefore, bracket the question of which of the two capital cities serves as the precise referent in any given text in favor of a more general assessment of the changing nature of the Jewish anti-imperial rhetoric.

A number of sources from the later Roman/Byzantine period absorbed aspects of the motif of the Temple vessels from its earlier, oblique legal contexts into increasingly elaborate narrative structures. And, among these sources, those that come from later Roman or Byzantine Palestine consistently place the Temple implements within an eschatological framework. Within this messianic discourse, the physical movement of these artifacts traces the historical trajectory of divine favor, from Israel’s glorious past to Roman ascendancy and, finally, to Israel’s future vindication. I would suggest that this distinctive emphasis on “sacred relics” within this discourse was shaped in large measure as part of a dialogue with Byzantine Christian culture.

A passage in the midrashic commentary on the book of Esther from Byzantine Palestine traces the fate of the throne of Solomon.<sup>101</sup> According to the text, the fate of Solomon’s throne indexes the political fortunes of the numerous great empires that have shaped the history of Israel from its earliest beginnings; it embodies divine favor itself, as it is passed from Egypt to Ethiopia to Babylonia to Persia to Greece to Rome.

It is related that when Solomon died, Shishak, king of Egypt came up and took it [the throne] from them. R. Samuel b. Nahman said: “Shishak is the same as Pharaoh.” And why was he called Shishak? Because he came impelled by greed (*she-qiqut*) against Israel, saying, “I am taking it in lieu of my daughter’s marriage settlement.” He made war with Zerah the Ethiopian, who took it from him. Then Asa made war with Zerah the Ethiopian and he conquered him and took it from him; it has been taught that Asa and all the kings of Judah sat upon it. And when Nebuchadnezzar came up and sacked Jerusalem he carried it off to Babylon. From Babylon it was taken to Media and from Media to Greece and from Greece to

<sup>100</sup> See my preliminary observations on this matter in *From Martyr to Mystic: Rabbinic Martyrology and the Making of Merkavah Mysticism* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 82–84, esp. fn. 110.

<sup>101</sup> This passage comes from the first part of *Esther Rabbah* (sections 1–6), which may date as early as the sixth century (Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction*, 318–19).

Edom. R. Eleazar b. Yose said: I saw its fragments in Rome (א"ר אלעזר ברי יוסי) (אני ראיתי שבריו ברומי).<sup>102</sup>

Perhaps most interesting for our purposes is the direct transposition of R. Eleazar ben Yose's eye-witness testimony from its original referent, one of the Temple implements, to a novel literary context. The object he reports having seen in Rome, Solomon's throne, belongs to a far more distant past. Here the conflict between Israel and Rome is not depicted as a family drama, the story of the fraternal conflict between Jacob and Esau, as in other texts we have examined. Rather, the motif of the sacred relic has been assimilated to a variant on the eschatological four-empire scheme of Daniel.<sup>103</sup> In this branch of Jewish anti-Roman rhetoric, Rome is just the next manifestation of God's punishing rod with which he chastises His unruly people.

The incorporation of the theme of the Temple vessels at Rome into Jewish messianic discourse reaches its fullest realization in a work known as *'Otot ha-Mashiah* (*The Portents of the Messiah*). This text is not a single, coherent composition. Rather, this loose cluster of early medieval Hebrew apocalypses is organized as a catalogue of the ten "signs" that will herald the coming of the Jewish Messiah.<sup>104</sup> The dating of *'Otot ha-Mashiah* or its component parts is extraordinarily difficult to determine: several versions of this "ten portents" literature exist and their textual history has not yet been satisfactorily studied. But whatever the precise literary history of the various forms of this work, the section with which I am concerned here does not bear clear markings of the fully distinct Islamic cultural context that crystallized only gradually over the course of the late seventh and eighth centuries, such as explicit references to Muslim rulers or the use of the figure of Ishmael as a symbol for Islamic rule.<sup>105</sup> I think it quite likely that this textual complex derives from the penumbral period of the late sixth and seventh centuries when apocalyptic forms and eschatological expectations served as a common idiom for various – and, in some cases, overlapping – groups of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>102</sup> *EsthR* 1:12. I use Mirkin's edition of the text. The translation follows M. Simon, trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Esther and Song of Songs* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 28.

<sup>103</sup> On the use and adaptation of the "four empires" scheme in rabbinic literature, see Rivka Raviv, "The Talmudic Formulation of the Prophecies of the Four Kingdoms in the Book of Daniel" (Hebrew), *Jewish Studies Internet Journal* 5 (2006): 1–20.

<sup>104</sup> John C. Reeves, *Trajectories in Near Eastern Apocalypses: A Postrabbinic Jewish Apocalypse Reader* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 106–10.

<sup>105</sup> Reeves, *Trajectories*, 106–10.

<sup>106</sup> For discussion of early Islamic apocalyptic sources within the context of late antique Jewish and Christian sources, see the path-breaking study of David Cook, *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002).

In the "sixth portent" of one version of *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, we find an elaborate eschatological scenario that narrates the ascendance and subsequent fall of Rome. The discovery of the Temple vessels in the heart of the Empire and their transfer back to the Holy Land play central roles in this narrative of messianic redemption. It should be noted, however, that, unlike the passage from *Esther Rabbah*, this text does not explicitly link the motif of the Temple vessels to a rabbinic figure like R. Eleazar and need not be understood as a direct adaptation of earlier rabbinic literary traditions. Simply put, this is not an overtly "rabbinized" form of discourse. Nevertheless, the pervasive interweaving of scriptural citation in this work separates it from earlier Jewish apocalyptic writings from the Second Temple period and marks it as a distinctively post-rabbinic form of Jewish apocalyptic literature.<sup>107</sup> I cite the passage at length:

The sixth sign: The Holy One, blessed be He, establishes evil Edom (i.e., Rome) as ruler of the entire world. And a king shall arise in Rome and rule the entire world for nine months. He will devastate numerous lands. He shall become enraged with Israel and levy a heavy tax upon them. Israel shall be in great distress at that time because of the numerous decrees and depredations, which shall be renewed each day against them. And, at that time, Israel shall become weak and feeble and shall have no helper. It is concerning that time that Isaiah prophesied, saying, *He saw that there was no man, and he gazed long*, etc. (Isa 59:16). At the end of nine months, the Messiah son of Joseph will be revealed; his name is Nehemiah son of Hushiel from the tribes of Ephraim, Menasheh, Benjamin, and – for a small part – from the sons of Gad. And Israel shall hear that, in every province into which the Messiah of God comes, only very few people gather to him from each province and each city, as it is written in Jeremiah, *Turn back, rebellious children – declares the Lord. Since I have espoused you, I will take you, one from a town and two from a clan, and bring you to Zion* (Jer 3:14). And the Messiah son of Joseph shall come and wage war against the king of Edom and he shall defeat Edom, and he shall slaughter heaps and mounds of them (ויהרוג מהם תילי) and he shall kill the king of Edom. And he shall destroy the province of Rome and take some of the implements of the Temple, which are hidden in the household of Julius Caesar<sup>108</sup> (ויוציא קצת כלי בית המקדש שהם גנוזים בבית)

<sup>107</sup> On the uses of Scripture in later Jewish apocalyptic literature – in contrast to Second Temple apocalyptic – see Reeves, *Trajectories*, 5–7.

<sup>108</sup> I have translated the Emperor's name (יוליוס קיסר) as "Julius Caesar" because I believe it is used here as a generic designation for the Roman Emperor. It is, however, conceivable that the name should be identified with a more recent figure, such as the fourth-century Emperor Julian (the Apostate); the passage could then be understood to provide positive evidence for Jewish knowledge of Julian's plans for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem during his short reign (361–363 C.E.), which might help explain its deployment in Jewish messianic discourse. But, as David Levenson has so convincingly documented, Julian does not make an appearance in Jewish sources until the early modern period ("Julian's Attempt to Rebuild the Temple: An Inventory of Ancient and Medieval Source," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertesta-*

(יוליינוס קיסר) and he will come to Jerusalem. And Israel shall hear [of his deeds] and gather to him.<sup>109</sup>

This tableau of divine vengeance is quite familiar from numerous other Jewish messianic sources from Late Antiquity: Rome identified as wicked Edom; the idiom of holy war applied to the final battle between Israel and its foes; the figure of Nehemiah the Messiah son of Joseph.<sup>110</sup> Even the notion that some of the *sancta* were stored (*genuzim*) in the “household of Julius Caesar” may perhaps be explained as a faint reflex of Josephus’ account of the division of the spoils between the *Templum Pacis* and the imperial palace in Rome.<sup>111</sup>

What is distinctive in this passage, however, is the integration of the Temple vessels into an eschatological scenario. The Romans misrecognize their possession of these relics as physical confirmation of their divine election. Despite having been swallowed up into the maw of the Empire, the Temple vessels remain fundamentally inviolable. Indeed, this passage celebrates the very condition of dispersal that serves as the precondition for the construction of restoration, in spatialized terms, as triumphant return.

Not every Jewish source that situates the Temple vessels within a messianic framework links this theme *explicitly* to anti-Roman sentiment. A notable exception is the elusive medieval text known as *Massekhet Kelim*, which presents a catalogue of cultic vessels hidden before the destruction of the First Temple whose locations will be kept secret until the King Messiah “David son of David” will redeem Israel.<sup>112</sup> The author of this

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*mental Judaism, and Christian Origins, Presented to John Strugnell on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday* [ed. H. W. Attridge, J. J. Collins and T. H. Tobin; Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990], 261–79.

<sup>109</sup> Yehudah Even Shmuel, ed., *Midreshei Ge'ulah* (2nd ed.; Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1954), 320. Translation mine. Compare the text in Eisenstein, *Otzar ha-Midrashim*, 202. This passage is translated by Reeves in his *Trajectories*, 124–25.

<sup>110</sup> For a useful survey of messianic themes in rabbinic and non-rabbinic Jewish sources, see Jacob Neusner, “Messianic Themes in Formative Judaism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 52 (1984): 357–74. On the Messiah son of Joseph, see David Berger, “Three Typological Themes in Early Jewish Messianism: Messiah Son of Joseph, Rabbinic Calculations, and the Figure of Armilus,” *AJS Review* 10 (1985): 141–64; cf. Joseph Heinemann, “The Messiah Son of Joseph,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 1–15.

<sup>111</sup> Compare *B.J.* 7.162.

<sup>112</sup> Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:88–91, here 91. In addition to the medieval version printed by Jellinek, in the mid-twentieth century Jean Starcky discovered a variant of this text in Beirut inscribed on two marble plaques. For a critical edition and French translation of this text, see József Milik, “Notes d’épigraphie et de topographie palestiniennes,” *Revue Biblique* 66 (1959): 567–75, esp. 567–68. Milik here argues that *Massekhet Kelim*

composition does not relate its cryptic geography to the space of the Roman Empire, but rather quite logically maps the hiding places of the sacred treasure onto the world of the First Temple during Babylonian ascendancy. It is uncertain whether we are entitled to understand its references to Babylon as a cryptic critique of Rome or if it should be read in an entirely different context. Indeed, *Massekhet Kelim* remains a puzzle; it, too, deserves further attention. Still, it is certainly significant that this text emphasizes the dispersal of the vessels and their spatial restoration: “At that time, a great river will flow out from within the Holy of Holies – the name of which is the Gihon (Tigris?). It will wash across the great and terrible desert and mix with the River Perat (Euphrates?). And immediately the vessels will rise and be revealed.”<sup>113</sup> With this vision of the Temple implements being reassembled in Jerusalem from the heart of the ruling Empire, *Massekhet Kelim* is in line with the late antique Jewish source we have surveyed here, but departs fundamentally from earlier apocalyptic sources like *2 Baruch* and their insistence on the immovability of the *sancta*.

The incorporation of the motif of the Temple vessels in Rome into Jewish messianic discourse belongs to the much broader resurgence of messianic elements in the Jewish literature of the early Byzantine period.<sup>114</sup> As I have elsewhere argued, the notion that redemption is to begin in the heart of empire, which is so central to the texts just discussed, is likewise formulated in the graphic and concrete idiom of sacred relics in the Byzantine-period rabbinic martyrological anthology *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*.<sup>115</sup> This work relates that Jewish martyr-relics remained in Roman hands after the supposed Roman persecutions of the Jews during the first half of the second century. This rich and complicated narrative reports that, following the death of one of the rabbinic martyrs, R. Ishmael ben Elisha, the re-

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provides the missing link for understanding the *Copper Scroll* as a “legend” rather than “history.” But see the critical assessment of this connection in Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege*, 103.

<sup>113</sup> Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:91.

<sup>114</sup> For general discussion of this phenomenon, see Moshe Idel, “Jewish Apocalypticism: 670–1670,” in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* (ed. J. J. Collins, B. McGinn, and S. J. Stein; 3 vols.; New York: Continuum, 1998), 2:204–37; Robert L. Wilken, “The Restoration of Israel in Biblical Prophecy: Christian and Jewish Responses in the Early Byzantine Period,” in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, and “Others” in Late Antiquity* (ed. J. Neusner and E. S. Frerichs; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 443–71, esp. 453–61. For a thorough discussion of the corpus of Hebrew apocalypses from the Byzantine period, see Philip S. Alexander, “Late Hebrew Apocalyptic: A Preliminary Survey,” *Apocrypha* 1 (1990) 197–217.

<sup>115</sup> *From Martyr to Mystic*, 125–30. On the provenance of the martyrology, see ch. 2.

mains of his face were preserved in the imperial treasury at Rome in defiance of the forces of decay. According to the narrative, the Romans themselves make use of this relic in a public ritual performed in the capital every seventy years.<sup>116</sup>

I have suggested that this passage playfully parodies the way that the relics of a “vanishing” biblical and Jewish past in the Holy Land were pressed into service within Christian supersessionist discourse. Within the context of the martyrology, the Jewish “discovery” of the physical remains of the rabbinic martyr R. Ishmael in the treasury at Rome mimics the Christian cult of relics. Just as local Jews figure heavily in narratives that authenticate Christian holy sites and sacred relics, here, too, Roman spectacles performed in the heart of the metropolis are appropriated for the articulation of a competing history of salvation. The creators of this scene reversed the spatial directionality of conquest and travel. Indeed, the passage insists that the present structure of power relations is not theologically meaningful, since history will only disclose its true, divinely-sanctioned meaning at a future time. The narrative thus neatly destabilizes and subverts Roman-Christian triumphalism.

Perhaps better known is that rich vein of rabbinic traditions that describes the Jewish Messiah as a despised and leprous beggar who dwells at the gates of Rome biding his time until God summons him to action.<sup>117</sup> Much like Christian messianic discourse, sources such as the Byzantine-period Hebrew apocalypse *Sefer Zerubavel* imagine the Messiah as a downtrodden figure destined to rise from the bottom of the Roman social order and take command of God’s kingdom.<sup>118</sup> In this text, the pseudonymous visionary Zerubbabel is instructed by God to travel to Rome, where he finds the Messiah:

Then He (God) said to me, “Go to the house of disgrace, to the house of meritment.” I went as He commanded. “Turn yourself this way,” He said. When I turned, He touched me and I saw a man, despised and wounded, lowly and in pain. Now that despised man said to me, “Zerubbabel, what is your business here? Who brought you here?” “The spirit of the Lord lifted me up,” I answered, “and depo-

<sup>116</sup> Gottfried Reeg, ed., *Die Geschichte von den Zehn Märtyrern* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 10; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1985), 22.65–73; 54.1–6 (the passage appears in a number of different forms in the various recensions); cf. *b.AZ* 11b.

<sup>117</sup> See Abraham Berger, “Captive at the Gate of Rome: The Story of a Messianic Motif,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 44 (1977): 1–17.

<sup>118</sup> The *locus classicus* for this motif in rabbinic literature is in the Babylonian Talmud, *b.San* 98a. But the redactors of the *Bavli* have placed this passage in a context that subtly criticizes the notion that the messianic age is imminent and instead emphasizes the individual Jew’s ethical and *halakhic* responsibility in the pre-messianic age. For this reason I cite the version in the eschatological context of *Sefer Zerubavel*.

sited me in this place.” “Fear not,” he said, “for you have been brought here in order to show you.” When I heard his words, I took comfort, and my mind was at rest. “My lord,” I asked, “what is the name of this place?” “This is Rome the Great, in which I am imprisoned,” he said. My Lord, who are you,” I asked, “and what is your name? What do you seek here? What are you doing in this place?” “I am the Lord’s anointed, the son of Hezekiah,” he answered, “and I am imprisoned until the time of the end.”<sup>119</sup>

The image of the Jewish Messiah as a captive of the imperial capital reverses the spatial trajectory of Christian salvation-history found in such classic texts as Luke-Acts, in which the narrative movement traces the path of the Holy Spirit from Jerusalem to Rome. By contrast, the Jewish Messiah of *Sefer Zerubavel* will begin his itinerary in the heart of the Empire rather than in provincial Palestine.

More provocatively, just as Christians incorporated into their theology the notion that the Christian Messiah had issued forth from Israel, late antique Jews speculated about the possibility that the Jewish Messiah would be reared among the Romans as a Roman. Thus, we find in the medieval homiletical midrash *Exodus Rabbah* the following interpretation of Exodus 2:10, *She* (Miriam) brought him (Moses) to Pharaoh’s daughter:

Pharaoh’s daughter used to kiss and hug him (Moses), loved him as if he were her own son, and would not allow him out of the royal palace. Because he was so handsome, everyone was eager to see him, and whoever saw him could not tear himself away from him. Pharaoh also used to kiss and hug him, and he (Moses) used to take the crown of Pharaoh and place it upon his own head, as he was destined to do when he became great. It was this which God said to Hiram (king of Tyre): *So I made a fire issue from you*, etc. (Ezek 28:18), and even so did the daughter of Pharaoh bring up him who was destined to exact retribution from her father. The Messianic king, too, who will one day exact retribution from Edom (יִשָּׁב עִמּוֹהֶם), dwells among them in that province (שְׁעֵתִיד לִפְרַע מֵאֲדוֹם), as it is said, (*For the fortified city* [i.e. Rome] *is solitary*); *there shall the calf feed, and there shall he lie down* (Isa 27:10).<sup>120</sup>

The typological idiom of this passage establishes the figure of Moses as the archetype for the Jewish Messiah. This particular text does not specify the precise nature of the familial or ethnic relationship between the Jewish

<sup>119</sup> The translation is from Martha Himmelfarb, “Sefer Zerubbabel,” in *Rabbinic Fantasies* (ed. D. Stern and M. J. Mirsky; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 71–72. Himmelfarb follows the edition in Israel Lévi, “L’apocalypse de Zorobabel et le roi de Perse Siroès,” *Revue des études juives* 68 (1914): 129–60; compare Lévi’s French translation in *Revue des études juives* 69 (1919): 108–21. The text is also printed in Even Shmuel, *Midreshei Ge’ulah*, 55–88; Jellinek, *Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:54–47.

<sup>120</sup> *ExodR* 1.26. I have slightly modified the translation in S. M. Lehrman, trans., *Midrash Rabbah: Exodus* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), 33.



Messiah and his Roman overlords. But it does express nicely the following double paradox: the Messiah will not only usher in a profound historical reversal in Israel and Rome's political fortunes, but will initiate that process from within the ranks of the Romans. Its skillful juxtaposition of intimacy and antagonism, so appropriate to family-relations, adds yet another dimension to the general pattern of Jewish political speculation in this period, which takes the sibling rivalry of Jacob and Esau as its primary image of Israel and Rome competing with each other over the tokens of divine favor.

With texts like *'Otot ha-Mashiah*, *The Story of the Ten Martyrs*, and Byzantine midrashim like *Esther Rabbah*, we have come full circle to the forms of eschatological discourse employed to such dramatic effect in apocalypses like 2 *Baruch*, albeit with a significant difference. Unlike the Second Temple fixation on fixity, these later texts stress the possibility of continuity in the face of spatial dislocation. Indeed, it is through the process of their textualization that the scattered remains of the Jewish past – the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple in some sources, the shards of Solomon's throne in others, and the royal and temple treasures of ancient Israel in yet others – are transfigured into mobile and thus endlessly resistant repositories of the sacred.

### Conclusion

The Jerusalem Temple, in the wake of its destruction, became a site for articulating a particular Jewish account of the historical conflict between Israel and Rome, past, present, and future. In my view, the production of Jewish “collective memories” of the Temple should not be read as an attempt either to reconstitute a ruptured Jewish past or to transmit seamlessly a fixed body of traditions. Rather, this process belonged to the shifting circumstances of Roman imperial domination. In particular, those sources that were composed in the post-Constantinian period constitute part of the broader ideological response of late antique Jews to the emergent Christian discourse of empire.

I have argued in this paper that the late antique Jewish writers we have been reading both mocked and mirrored Roman imperial ideology and the narratives that underwrote it. The memorialization of the Temple vessels and other relics of the Jewish past functioned as a targeted strategy aimed at critiquing Roman (and later Roman-Christian) political power. But this process did not entail the out-and-out rejection of the Christian discourse of sacred relics, which emerged as a dominant mode of Christian religious piety in the fifth and sixth centuries. I have argued instead that Jewish

writers and story-tellers – bound in complex relations of power with their Christian rulers and neighbors – appropriated the idioms associated with the cult of relics for their own ends, simultaneously contesting and replicating Christian forms of religious discourse and practice.

After reviewing the information found in Greek and Latin authors, including Josephus, concerning the transfer of the vessels from the Jerusalem Temple to the city of Rome and their potent symbolic role within Flavian imperial ideology, I considered the variety of functions that the image of the captured Temple vessels serves within early rabbinic literature (c. 200–450 C.E.). In these early rabbinic writings, the Temple vessels are generally embedded within the eternal present of rabbinic legal discourse, safely outside the flow of a Jewish salvation history that leads inevitably from a ruptured past to future redemption. Yet, while these sources clearly wish to assert rabbinic authority over the remains of the Jerusalem cult, they also acknowledge the status of these objects as fundamentally irreplaceable embodiments of divine presence.

The Temple vessels only return to view in Roman imperial sources in the sixth century, at a time when Christians throughout the Byzantine east were developing a deepening fascination with the production and dissemination of physical repositories of the sacred in the form of saints' relics and later icons. Jewish literature from this period likewise reflects this interest in the power of physical objects to intervene in human affairs. These “literary relics” served as an idiom through which Jewish writers could articulate an alternative to the triumphalism of Christian imperial discourse.

Perhaps most importantly, I have suggested that the mode of cultural dialogue in which these Jewish sources are engaged cannot be properly understood within an analytical framework governed by notions of passive cultural influence.<sup>121</sup> Nor, I think, is it even sufficient to explain this Jewish counter-discourse of sacred relics as an example of active cultural borrowing or imitation in which Jews both replicated the cultural practices of the Christian majority and internalized them as their own. Rather, we must recognize in this discourse those ambivalent and often ironic forms of mimicry that post-colonial critics have identified as a hallmark of colonial

<sup>121</sup> For recent discussion of the serious methodological pitfalls inherent in “influence-based” models of cultural change in Jewish history, see David N. Myers, *Resisting History: Historicism and Its Discontents in German-Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 157–72; Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 229–35.



situations.<sup>122</sup> Through such gestures, Jews in the Byzantine world of the fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries deployed what had, by then, become distinctively Christian idioms of pilgrimage and sacred space to comment sardonically on the dynamics of imperial power, simultaneously drawing themselves into and distancing themselves from a whole universe of discursive practices that they shared with their Christian neighbors.

But we must bear in mind that this fusion of apologetic and polemical aims was as precarious as it was productive. By formulating Jewish religious and political aspirations in diametrical opposition to the discursive figure of "Rome," these writers in many ways permanently enshrined a particular understanding of Judaism's relationship with the emergent Christian empire. Jewish fortunes would forever be yoked within the Jewish imagination in counter-cyclical fashion to the historical rise and fall of Western Christendom.

## A Debate about the Rebuilding of the Temple in Sixth-Century Byzantium

YANNIS PAPADOYANNAKIS

Because both the Jews and the majority of Christians claim this, that their city [i.e. Jerusalem] can be rebuilt and their temple can be erected and that they can celebrate the law and that 'had God not wanted to accept their sacrifices, He would not have enjoined Abraham to sacrifice' and [because] they say that 'Romans conquered us by force, they wished to put an end to our feasts and by taking away our city and everything'. We however keep everything to do with the Law and we [keep] the feasts and we sacrifice. Both the city and the temple must be restored and returned to us'. Because they boast these [things] and [because] the majority of our church agree with them, we beseech you to refute them extensively, and put them to shame by using a plethora of scriptural testimonies since in no way do they want to refrain from this hope. (*Dial.* IV 218, 1–11)<sup>1</sup>

Surprisingly, this text has escaped the notice of almost all scholars,<sup>2</sup> despite the considerable amount of work and attention devoted to the discussions among Christian thinkers about the potential, dangerous resumption of Jewish power in the late sixth-century Byzantine world.<sup>3</sup> The request outlined in the above excerpt may in fact preserve an original inquiry (or so the author wants us to believe) from the second half of the sixth century,

<sup>1</sup> The edition is by Rudolf Riedinger, ed., *Caesarii Dialogi quatuor. Die Erotapokriseis / pseudo-Kaisarios* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989). All references will be to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Absent from Heinz Schreckenberg, *Die christlichen Adversus-Judaeos-Texte und ihr literarisches und historisches Umfeld (1.–11. Jh.)* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1990) and Andreas Külzer, *Disputationes graecae contra Iudaeos: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen antijüdischen Dialogliteratur und ihrem Judenbild* (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1999). A passing mention in Vincent Déroche, "Iudaizantes," *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 19:130–42, esp. 139.

<sup>3</sup> See Vincent Déroche, "La polémique anti-judaïque au VI<sup>e</sup> et au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle: un mémento inédit, les Képhalaia," *Travaux et Mémoires* 11 (1991): 275–311. For a review of the literature see Averil Cameron "Byzantines and Jews: Some Recent Work on Early Byzantium," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 20 (1996): 249–74. Also Vincent Déroche, "À propos des sources byzantines sur les Juifs," *Byzantinorossica* 3 (2005): 75–84.

<sup>122</sup> On the notions of "mimicry" and "ambivalence" as applied to the colonial context, see Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, esp. 121–31, and the helpful discussion of Bhabha's distinctive critical vocabulary within the broader field of postcolonial and subaltern studies in Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), 159–66. But see also the important refinements to Bhabha's theoretical framework offered in Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), 61–71.