

# Augustine as Revolutionary? Reflections on Continuity and Rupture in Jewish–Christian Relations in Paula Fredriksen’s *Augustine and the Jews*

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PAULA FREDRIKSEN. *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism*. New York: Doubleday, 2008. Pp. 488.

THIRTY OR FORTY YEARS AGO, the most divisive issue in the study of ancient Jewish society and culture was the degree to which Judaism in the Second Temple and talmudic periods (circa 450 B.C.E. to 650 C.E.) operated within the bounds of a single unified authoritative framework. Some scholars explained the conspicuous variation in Jewish belief and practice attested in the sources as relatively minor deviations from a more or less cohesive system of religious norms (as reflected perhaps in the writings of the rabbis). Others, however, viewed this diversity and even pluralism as the original and enduring condition of Jewish religious practice in antiquity, despite the strident insistence of a handful of ancient sectarians to the contrary. At this point, all but a very few have abandoned the proposition that ancient Jews functioned within or even had the notion of a “normative Judaism” governed by a systematic set of theological beliefs—though many now would also wisely refrain from speaking of multiple “Judaisms” as wholly discrete cultural or sociological systems.<sup>1</sup>

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I would like to thank Paula Fredriksen for her willingness to share the unpublished manuscript of her book with me as well as with the other participants in a panel discussion of the book, which was held by the “Early Jewish–Christian Relations Group” at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2007. This essay builds upon my remarks delivered at that session.

1. I find persuasive the important critique of the term “Judaisms” (associated above all with Jacob Neusner) and the analytical assumptions underlying this notion in Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.*

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The current generation of scholars, by contrast, is far more riven by a different, though equally perennial, historiographical conundrum, namely, the problem of historical continuity, change, and rupture. The past ten years have seen increasingly heated debates concerning the degree to which Jewish institutions, practices, and discursive categories were repeatedly and fundamentally transformed in antiquity at key moments of historical disjuncture. Can we indeed still speak usefully of Judaism as an essentially continuous, if always evolving, phenomenon? Thus, we find in recent—especially North American—scholarship the conspicuous recurrence of such terms as “beginnings,” “rupture,” “making,” and “invention.” Novel forms of Jewish identity are called—or “interpellated”—into existence. Rather than forming the fabric of a continuous religious and cultural system known as Judaism, “Jewish tradition” is unmasked as a discursive strategy, the name under which historical change masquerades.<sup>2</sup>

To take two prominent recent examples: in a series of books and articles, Daniel Boyarin has argued that the gradual consolidation of a Christian orthodox establishment and the concomitant production of the specifically Christian discourses of “orthodoxy,” “heresy,” and “religion” did not merely provide the background for the emergence of Judaism as formulated by the rabbis of Late Antiquity but were the prime engines in this process.<sup>3</sup> According to Boyarin, at least from a certain analytical van-

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(Princeton, N.J., 2001), esp. 9–11, 49–99. Schwartz instead emphasizes integrative as well as centrifugal forces that shaped ancient Jewish society and culture, preferring to characterize ancient Judaism as “complex, capacious, and rather frayed at the edges” (9). Yet Schwartz still cautions strongly against privileging difference to the exclusion of patterns of similarity and against an atomizing approach to the textual data that neglects the “political, demographic, and social realities” (10) within which literary production took place.

2. See the penetrating analysis of the discourse of “tradition” in ancient Judaism as an index of historical change in Albert I. Baumgarten and Marina Rustow, “Judaism and Tradition: Continuity, Change and Innovation,” in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of History and Anthropology: Tradition, Authority, Diaspora*, ed. R. S. Boustan, O. Kosansky, and M. Rustow (Philadelphia, under review).

3. Most comprehensively in *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, 2004). But see also his series of related studies, especially idem, “The Christian Invention of Judaism: The Theodosian Empire and the Rabbinic Refusal of Religion,” *Representations* 85 (2004): 21–57; idem, “Semantic Differences; or, ‘Judaism’/‘Christianity,’” in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (Tübingen, 2003; repr., Minneapolis, Minn., 2007), 65–86; idem, “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” *Church History* 70 (2001): 427–61; idem, “The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John,” *Harvard Theological Re-*

tage point, we can productively say that rabbinic Judaism was “invented” by Christianity as Jewish elites, over the course of Late Antiquity, engaged with—and, ultimately, refused—the hegemonic logic of imperial, orthodox Christianity. Complementarily, though in a rather different academic idiom, Seth Schwartz has advanced the equally provocative thesis that, from the second to fourth centuries, Jewishness formed at best a “vestigial” element in the social identities of the now highly Romanized and provincialized ethnic Jews of the Mediterranean basin, but under the often heavy-handed auspices of imperial Christianity its fragments were—somewhat paradoxically—reconstituted into a new and newly robust form of communal identity.<sup>4</sup> In Schwartz’s analysis, the disembedding of the Jews from the increasingly Christianized Roman imperial system of the late fourth to sixth centuries was critical to the emergence of Judaism as a radically new type of religious, social, and cultural formation.

Of course, not all historians of ancient Judaism would endorse such sweeping, even extravagant narratives of social and cultural rupture.<sup>5</sup> The work of Lee Levine may offer a particularly useful counterpoint, since he is himself hardly a “traditionalist.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Like Boyarin and Schwartz, not to mention Jacob Neusner and Shaye Cohen, Levine has consistently questioned the existence of a unified “normative” Judaism in antiquity as well as the centrality of rabbinic authority and power within Jewish society.<sup>7</sup> Yet his work has also tended to stress the thoroughgoing localism of

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*view* 94 (2001): 243–84; idem, “A Tale of Two Synods: Nicaea, Yavneh, and the Early History of Orthodox Judaism,” *Exemplaria* 12 (2000): 21–62; idem, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, Calif., 1999).

4. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*. The characterization of Jewish identity between the mid-second and mid-fourth centuries as “vestigial” appears on p. 15.

5. See, for example, the sharply critical review of this historiographic trend in Stuart S. Miller, “Roman Imperialism, Jewish Self-Definition, and Rabbinic Society: Belayche’s *Iudaea Palaestina*, Schwartz’s *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, and Boyarin’s *Border Lines* Reconsidered,” *AJS Review* 31 (2007): 329–62.

6. See especially Lee I. Levine, “Between Rome and Byzantium in Jewish History: Documentation, Reality, and the Issue of Periodization” (Hebrew), in *Continuity and Renewal: Jews and Judaism in Byzantine-Christian Palestine*, ed. L. I. Levine (Jerusalem, 2004), 7–48; idem, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years*, 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), esp. 210–49, 466–98, 519–29.

7. See the history of research presented in Steven Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge, 2005), 41–44, which groups Schwartz and Levine, along with Jacob Neusner and Shaye Cohen, within a single historiographic tradition emanating from Columbia Uni-

Jewish literary and material culture, a factor that, I think, runs against the grain of both Boyarin's near-exclusive focus on the discursive practices of rabbinic and patristic elites, with its epistemic breaks, and Schwartz's "imperial" perspective, with its empirewide, structural shifts. Where Boyarin and Schwartz diagnose moments of profound rupture, Levine perceives considerably more incremental—and more internally directed—processes of historical development.

Levine seeks to strike a careful balance between continuity and change. Thus, on the one hand, he affirms both the heuristic utility and historical accuracy of delineating a significant shift in Jewish society and culture from the world of the high empire to what he himself labels the "Byzantine-period" of Jewish history. It was precisely during this transition between the "late Roman" and the "Byzantine" periods, as Christian piety and imperial power became increasingly aligned, that talmudic composition in Palestine came to an end and, with it, the last generation of named Palestinian rabbis; and, at this same moment, local Jewish communities commissioned the first figural mosaics for synagogue floors and witnessed the rough beginnings of a totally new form of Hebrew liturgical poetry (*piyut*), the resurgence of apocalyptic writing in Hebrew, and the creation of new mystical and magical genres, all of which would flourish over the subsequent several centuries.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Levine's approach to periodization places equal emphasis on the profound continuities of Byzantine-period Judaism with its earlier Hellenistic and Roman counterparts. Jews in the Graeco-Roman world had always engaged with and, in many cases, adopted for their own purposes the regnant norms and forms of the dominant culture.<sup>9</sup> Byzantine-period Judaism, while perhaps

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versity and the Jewish Theological Seminary that has sought (wrongly in Fine's opinion) to minimize the role of the rabbis in the communal life of the Jewish communities of Roman-Byzantine Palestine. It is worth noting, however, that in Fine's account the central problematic remains the synchronic analysis of socio-cultural diversity versus unity—and not the diachronic problem of continuity versus rupture. For an attempt to reformulate and nuance the traditional rabbinocentric portrait of Jewish society in Roman Palestine, see especially Stuart S. Miller, *Sages and Commoners in Late Antique 'Erez Israel: A Philological Inquiry into Local Traditions in Talmud Yerushalmi* (Tübingen, 2006); idem, "'Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?" *Jewish Quarterly Review* 94.1 (2004): 27–76.

8. For an important survey of these distinctively "Byzantine" material and literary artifacts, see Levine, "Between Rome and Byzantium," 27–49.

9. For Levine's similar approach to the earlier Hellenistic and Roman periods, see his *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Seattle, Wash., 1998).

assuming highly distinctive features in the course of its intensive encounter with the new imperial Christianity, was neither a novel entity nor a novel (type of) identity. Rather, Byzantine Jews built their Judaism—in fits and starts and always at the local level—on the robust foundations provided by significant continuities in Roman imperial policy toward the practice of the Jewish religion by ethnic Jews, by long-standing institutions such as the synagogue, and by preexisting, if still fluid, liturgical practices such as communal prayer and the public reading of Scripture.<sup>10</sup>

Levine's more cautious account of the historical development of Judaism in Late Antiquity shares numerous affinities with the recent work of Boyarin and Schwartz, especially insofar as all of these scholars highlight the enduring diversity of Jewish religious and cultural practice. But these approaches differ in more than just their rhetoric. For Schwartz and Boyarin, Judaism is not a stable religious system that is variously "influenced" by proximate historical forces; rather, throughout antiquity, the very nature of Jewishness—the type of entity that it is—remained continually and quite radically under construction, at least until the early Islamic/geonic period (c. 650–950 C.E.) saw rabbinic discourse and authority belatedly succeed in assuming hegemonic status within Jewish culture and society.

How shall we gain perspective on this subtle, yet genuinely significant, difference in historiographic orientation toward the *pace*, *scale*, and *quality* of the undeniably momentous historical changes in Jewish culture and society during this crucial period from the fourth to sixth centuries? I think, if we are to make progress in this debate, it will be necessary to situate the Jewish case as fully as possible within the context of the social, political, and cultural changes that transformed late antique Mediterranean society more generally.

While no single scholar or book could possibly resolve this problem, Paula Fredriksen's gracefully written and persuasively argued new book on the changing attitudes toward Jews and Judaism in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430 C.E.) is destined to make an important and lasting contribution to this conversation concerning the transformation of Jewish-Christian relations—and, hence, also the transformation of Judaism—during the formative period in which that greatest of Latin church-

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10. See, for example, Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, 530–92, which offers a gradual, though "far from linear" (530), account of the evolution of the synagogue liturgy from the Second Temple period to the end of Late Antiquity; also idem, "The Development of Synagogue Liturgy in Late Antiquity," in *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures*, ed. E. M. Meyers (Winona Lake, Ind., 1999), 123–44.

men lived.<sup>11</sup> Fredriksen's study is many things: an empathetic portrait of an ancient intellectual and communal leader; a nuanced investigation of the reciprocal influences of theology, rhetoric, and hermeneutics; an astute analysis of the shifting role of the *contra Iudaeos* tradition in intra-Christian polemics; and, of course, a study of the representation of Jews and Judaism in Augustine's voluminous writings. But the book is also a sustained meditation on the nature of theological and intellectual innovation in the ancient world that raises significant questions about—and may open new avenues for studying—the nature of continuity and change in religious identity in Late Antiquity. For Fredriksen, Augustine was simultaneously a deeply rooted product of elite Christian learning and, at the same time, a “revolutionary” thinker (p. 244 and *passim*) who formulated breathtakingly original solutions to long-standing problems in ancient philosophy and Christian theology.

The structure of Fredriksen's *Augustine and the Jews* reflects this tension between the status quo of a traditional society and the unnerving innovations that characterized Augustine's often feverish theological thinking. The first third of the book offers a compelling and vivid portrait of the Greco-Roman city and especially of the place of religious allegiance and practice within it. The prevailing climate in these urban agglomerations was one of “pragmatic religious pluralism” in which rigorous obligation to ancestral custom did not preclude full participation in the common public life of the city or an active interest in the gods of one's neighbors. Jews and Judaism were no exception, notwithstanding anachronistic modern views of biblical monotheism as inherently intolerant. Cultural integration, coupled now and again with strategic accommodation, characterized the social experience of Mediterranean Jews for most of the millennium since Alexander the Great and his armies had arrived in the Near East. Fredriksen embeds Augustine deep within this shared space

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11. *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, forthcoming 2008). This book builds upon and synthesizes more than two decades of specialist studies published by Fredriksen on the subject of Augustine and the Jews as well as on the place of Jews within the ancient Mediterranean world more generally, especially: Paula Fredriksen, “What ‘Parting of the Ways?’ Jews and Gentiles in the Ancient Mediterranean City,” in *The Ways That Never Parted*, 35–63; idem, “Augustine and Israel: *Interpretatio ad litteram*, Jews, and Judaism in Augustine's Theology of History,” *Studia Patristica* 38 (2001): 119–35; idem, “*Secundum Carnem*: History and Israel in the Theology of St. Augustine,” in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, ed. W. Klingshirn and M. Vessey (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1999), 26–41; idem, “*Excaecati Occulta Iustitia Dei*: Augustine on Jews and Judaism,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 299–324.

of Mediterranean urban life and especially its elite cultural traditions. She rightly insists that we always measure the bishop's often troublingly flat representation of Jews and Judaism against the background of the multi-dimensional and, in fact, rather high-functioning social reality experienced by the Jews of the Greco-Roman world.

In addition to the vigorous and remarkably stable *modus vivendi* that had for so long characterized the social world of the Roman empire, Augustine also internalized the almost equally enduring structures of Christian rhetorical education, among which were the tropes of the *contra Judaeos* tradition. From Justin Martyr in the second century to Tertullian in the third and down to Jerome in the fourth, the Jews had been aligned in Christian discourse with the bloody sacrificial cult of the Jerusalem Temple; with a recalcitrance that led to their repeated rejection and even murder of God's messengers to his people; with a blinkered attachment to a literalist hermeneutics that led to preposterously faulty interpretations of Scripture; and, perhaps most damningly, with the baser aspects of the human self. This slow-moving glacier of icy language formed the contours of Augustine's thinking about both biblical Israel and contemporary Jews, even if he could use its grammar to articulate a stunningly original theory of sin and salvation.

Significantly, in Fredriksen's account, these two massive sources of continuity—the life of the Greco-Roman city and the *contra Judaeos* tradition—are strictly bracketed one from the other. On the one hand, the actual day-to-day lives of the Jews of the empire and the larger structures that shaped them impinged little, if at all, on the uses to which “rhetorical Jews” were put within the discursive universe of Christian writers. These Christian intellectuals were rather more concerned with discrediting their own coreligionists and thereby persuading their audience of their own bona fides than with engaging their Jewish neighbors in direct debate. On the other hand, for Fredriksen, the biting denunciation and at times demonization of Jews and Judaism in early Christian rhetoric tell us little to nothing about the historical experience of the Jews in the Greco-Roman world or even their relations with their Christian fellow-citizens. In Augustine's writings, as in other Christian texts, charges of acting or thinking “Jewishly” are a kind of code: they can refer to just about anyone—heretics, pagans, or even fellow orthodox Christians like Jerome—except actual Jews. This methodologically principled treatment of the “Jews” in intra-Christian writings as first and foremost a product of rhetorical exigency differentiates Fredriksen's analysis from earlier generations of scholarship—and raises it head and shoulders above the work of predecessors like Bernhard Blumenkranz, Marcel Simon, and others,

who understood the *contra Judaeos* tradition as the product of extended personal encounters between Jews and Christians in competition with each other for converts.

Fredriksen's careful attention to the hulking structures of continuity from which Augustine emerged and against which we must understand him sets the stage for her characterization of his teachings on Jews and Judaism as "innovative" and even "idiosyncratic." She argues that neither his social reality nor his rhetorical training sufficiently prepare the way for the distinctive positions he takes concerning the relationship of the Christian community to both biblical Israel and those Jews who continue to practice its God-given Law. Rather, in order to grasp the dynamics that generated this rupture—this odd but significant caesura in the massive continuities of early Christian thought—the reader is led away from the world as it was, both real and rhetorical, and deep into Augustine's own personal evolution as a reader and writer.

Consequently, the great majority of the book concerns itself with the trajectory—sometimes halting or retreating, but always searching—of Augustine's own thinking. And here is the great payoff of Fredriksen's book and of the numerous specialized studies on whose foundations it is built. Her core contention is that Augustine's novel and surprisingly irenic theology of Judaism was in large measure driven by his ongoing struggle with the powerful intellectual clarity of his Manichaean past and the immediate rhetorical needs of his present disputations with his Manichaean adversaries. In the final analysis, the primary subject of the book is the monumental Augustinian corpus and the dynamics of theological innovation visible in it—and decidedly not the bishop's interactions with or knowledge of actual living Jews.

What made Faustus the Manichee a particularly difficult—and thus, ultimately, such a valuable—conversation partner was that he had cleverly occupied the rhetorical ground normally held by the "orthodox" *contra Judaeos* tradition. According to venerable proto-orthodox writers like Justin and Tertullian, the Law given by God to the Jews was not a blessing but a curse. The proper, often allegorical reading of Scripture disclosed this truth, though the carnal Jews remained stubbornly blind to it. Faustus could not agree more. But he took the argument to its next logical step: for him, the contempt for the teachings and practices of Judaism that he shared with orthodox Christians only highlighted the profound hypocrisy of those who would dilute and degrade the salvific significance of Christ's mission with the Old Testament and what they agreed is its despicable Law. With Faustus having appropriated the *contra Judaeos* tradition for his own anti-orthodox ends, Augustine found himself

in a corner out of which he would need to fight. It is in no small measure due to the brilliance of his interlocutor that Augustine was driven to formulate his innovative position on the biblical past and the Jewish present.

Fredriksen argues that Augustine was also now armed, after many years of frustrating and sometimes fruitless intellectual toil, with a historicizing hermeneutic that imbued the actual events of the biblical past with significance for Christian salvation history. History was unified into a single, continuous narrative that led all of humanity as well as each individual from existence under the Law (*sub lege*) to a condition of grace (*sub gratia*). The Law of the Old Testament was, in itself, a blessing and was practiced as such by biblical Israel all the way up to the first generation of Christians, including Jesus and his apostle Paul. Jewish observance of the Law was not the problem, only their failure to recognize that the Law had been fulfilled in Christ. And, ironically, those who, like the Manichees, would deny that the Law and Christ are really one are themselves no different from the blinkered Jews!

Augustine had thus succeeded in turning the tables on Faustus. But in so doing, he left himself with a poignant question: did those Jews who clung to this so-called blessed Law of God differ in any way from the rest of the unredeemed mass of sinful humanity? The answer seems to be both yes and no. Insofar as Jews remained *sub lege*, they belonged squarely on the wrong side of the massive and stark divide between the saved and the damned, which, for Augustine, was the only boundary that truly mattered. But insofar as the Jews served as God's vehicle for the transmission and authentication of his revelation inscribed in the Law and Prophets as well as offering reliable witness to Christ's saving death, they had—and would continue to have—a unique historical mission that set them apart from all others. The perduring integrity of Jewish religious identity, both before and after the coming of Christ, offered indisputable and indispensable verification of Christian truth as well as of the unfolding but fundamentally continuous nature of Christian salvation history.

In Fredriksen's account, it is essential that Augustine had achieved his remarkably innovative theology of Jews and Jewish practice by the late 390s. In so doing, she emphasizes the immediate and highly specific intellectual and rhetorical contexts out of which it grew. This analysis stands as a corrective to the argument advanced by the medieval Jewish historian Jeremy Cohen, who insists that Augustine's thinking about the Jews did not reach full "maturity" until he had come to conceptualize a radical "disjunction between the realms of the sacred and profane" in his later works, especially the *City of God*.<sup>12</sup> Then and only then, according to

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12. *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999), 23–64, here 54.

Cohen, would the historical-typological relationship between the figure of Cain and the Jews that played such a central role in the *Contra Faustum* be hardened into prescriptive formulations intended to delimit strictly the power of the imperfect institutions of the earthly city to convert the Jews to Christianity by force. By contrast, Fredriksen argues that the formula “Slay them not” of Ps 59.11 (LXX), which is so prominent in book 18 of the *City of God*, was little more than a scriptural hook on which Augustine belatedly hung what she views as the fully realized reassessment of Judaism he had achieved in earlier decades.

Yet, Fredriksen’s decision to privilege the *Contra Faustum* and the other writings of the 390s raises important questions. Did Augustine’s post-410 reflections on the utterly indeterminate relationship between the terrestrial empire of Christian Rome and the heavenly city of God contribute in some significant way to both why and how the Jew of the earlier Augustine was transformed, if always only in theory, from an abstract biblical type into a socially rooted actor on the stage of Christian history? Was the evolution of Augustine’s theology of Judaism affected by the various broader structural transformations that seem to be occurring at precisely this historical juncture, as instantiated in his own growing real-world experience with the uses and limits of coercive power, both local and imperial?

In an epilogue to the book, Fredriksen addresses these thorny questions head-on by exploring the sociopolitical anatomy of three seminal episodes of violent religious repression that unfolded during Augustine’s career as bishop of Hippo, as he was grappling with the issues that would lead him to compose *The City of God*: (1) the imperially sponsored coercion of North African pagans in 399 that built upon the legal categorization of “heretics” and “pagans” as enemies of the state; (2) the coordinated effort by the “catholic” ecclesiastical hierarchy of North Africa and the imperial military to suppress “dissident” Donatist communities, culminating in the disastrous showdown at the Donatist basilica in Timgad in 419/20; and (3) the forced conversion to Christianity of the sizeable and socially prominent Jews of Minorca in 418. Augustine himself played a pivotal role in bringing to a head the conflict between the imperial church and the regional Donatist church.<sup>13</sup> But the mass conversion of the 540 Jews

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13. For a brilliant historical reconstruction of this conflict, see Brent D. Shaw, “African Christianity: Disputes, Definitions, and ‘Donatists,’” in *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Religious Movements: Discipline and Dissent*, ed. M. R. Greenshields and T. A. Robinson (Lewiston, 1992), 4–34; and the now classic historiographic review in R. A. Markus, “Christianity and Dissent in Roman North Africa: Changing Perspectives in Recent Work,” in *Schiism, Heresy and Religious Protest*, ed. D. Baker (Cambridge, 1972), 21–36.

of the Minorcan city of Magona, recounted in an encyclical letter written by the bishop of the island, Severus, with the help of a retired priest named Consentius, offers an equally striking example of the novel discourses and practices of religious coercion that were developing in this period.<sup>14</sup> Fredriksen dissects these events in great detail (pp. 358–62). Even if Severus’s text draws on the highly embellished tropes of contemporaneous conversion narratives, the events on Minorca were apparently real enough that report of them reached Augustine in North Africa. As the correspondence of 419 between Consentius and Augustine attests, the bishop of Hippo not only heard in considerable detail about the conflict between the Christian and Jewish communities of Minorca but was even aware of the significant role that Consentius had played in the composition of the account (see Divjak Letters 11 and 12, esp. 12.13.3–6). Yet, Augustine apparently never read Severus’s letter in public to his own congregation, as other leaders did elsewhere in North African towns—to resounding approval. Nor did Augustine ever echo in his sermons or other writings the text’s barely concealed general call for the use of coercive force against the Jewish communities of the empire. Indeed, the defensive tone adopted by Consentius in his correspondence with Augustine strongly suggests that Augustine advocated reserving such treatment for “heretics” and “pagans” alone.

Moreover, while evidence might be marshaled to support the claim that a fundamental transformation occurred in this period in the place of the Jews in Roman public life, there are equally powerful indications that, on the ground, little had in fact changed. Thus, Fredriksen can point to Augustine’s intervention on behalf of a local Jew named Licinius in a property dispute with another orthodox bishop, about which she comments: “The single most striking thing about this episode—which is the *only* clearly-attested instance we have of a substantial encounter between Augustine and a Jew—is that Licinius’ being Jewish seems not to have mattered in the least” (p. 314). If basic changes in the very nature of religious identity and affiliation had begun to alter the old and venerable structures of Greco-Roman urban life, they had not yet affected the lived reality of this one early-fourth-century North African Jew. The data for Jewish-Christian relations are at best thin and, at times, even contradictory, especially when local events are placed in empirewide perspective.

Still, Augustine’s novel account of the central and ultimately decisive

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14. A critical edition and translation of the letter, along with an extremely thorough historical and literary introduction, appear in Scott Bradbury, ed. and trans., *Severus of Minorca: Letter on the Conversion of the Jews* (Oxford, 1996).

role of Jews and Judaism in Christian salvation history aimed not only at clarifying the puzzling logic of God's cosmic plan but also seemingly at formulating a principled defense of contemporary Jews and of their freedom to engage in Jewish practice. He may have intended this formulation primarily as a theological argument—and not as the operative juridical injunction it would subsequently become in the Middle Ages. Yet it surely did not escape his notice that a number of his fellow bishops, like Severus, advocated the application of coercive force to Jews using the very same justifications that Augustine had invoked in the case of “heretics” and “pagans.” Augustine may have opted to differentiate Jews from other dissident populations of the empire; and he may have done so in response to the specific arguments of his Christian and Manichaean interlocutors rather than because of any preoccupation with real Jews. Yet Augustine's conception of the divinely guided disciplinary function of the Law in the history of Israel directly informed his reflections on the attractions and dangers presented by the newly minted forms of imperially sponsored religious repression.<sup>15</sup> I thus suspect that Fredriksen has underestimated the degree to which Augustine's construction of Jews as a permanent and protected, if reviled, population within a Christian society, while in large part a solution to philosophical and hermeneutical problems, was also inflected by the emergent problematic of religious coercion in Late Antiquity.

Fredriksen's methodological bracketing of rhetoric from reality offers a crucial antidote to the flat-footed historicism of Blumenkranz and others, in which Augustine's theology of Judaism and the *contra Iudaeos* tradition as a whole are imagined to arise out of face-to-face debates between Christians and Jews sharing the same urban spaces. But how might historians of late antique Jewish society and culture most productively engage with Fredriksen's emphasis on the purely theoretical dimension of Augustine's theological revolution? Would it be safer for them to leave the relationship between Augustinian theology and Jewish social history to their medievalist colleagues, in whose period Augustine's legacy would belatedly acquire real juridical teeth?

These questions are especially pressing since Augustine's intellectual career and episcopal tenure intersected so intimately with those processes through which, according to Boyarin and Schwartz, Jews came to be constituted within Christian imperial discourse and practice as “a discrete

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15. See Peter Brown, “*Disciplina*,” in *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, Calif., 2000), 229–39.

category of humanity.”<sup>16</sup> And Boyarin and Schwartz are not alone in seeing the last decades of the fourth century and the first decades of the fifth century as particularly pivotal for the emergence of a novel alliance between ecclesiastical and imperial power. Fergus Millar has likewise stressed the extraordinarily rapid crystallization, in precisely this period, of the ideological desire *and* institutional capacity of both Church and State to classify, manage—and, in some cases, subject to targeted acts of violence—the various dissident religious groupings against whom Christians felt themselves to be in constant conflict.<sup>17</sup> In this regard, the punctuated episodes of religious violence examined by Fredriksen represent only the most obvious and blatant dimension of what was in fact a sea change in the organization of religious identity in the late Roman world. As Megan Williams has observed, the theology of Judaism that emerged in the writings of such figures as Augustine had a precise correspondence in the imperial enactments of this period that marked Jews out as a marginalized and reviled (but protected) minority.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, neither theological nor juridical innovations represent straightforward indices of actual social practice. I would not wish to be misunderstood as suggesting that Augustine’s theology of Judaism was the inevitable product of a radically transformed society that had, in one fell swoop, adopted an authoritarian and coercive posture toward its newly demarcated religious minorities. Rather, I believe that Augustine represents a particularly pivotal, if highly complex, figure through which to assess the dynamics of continuity and rupture in late antique Jewish society and culture.

Indeed, Augustine’s intellectual and pastoral career defies, in ways that I think are particularly revealing, both the gradualist narrative of local continuity advocated by Levine and the diagnosis of structural rupture proposed by Boyarin and Schwartz. The various and varied documents produced by Augustine do not attest a clear-cut and thorough transformation in the nature of religious identity during this period nor, despite

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16. The phrase is found at Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, 187.

17. Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II, 408–450* (Berkeley, Calif., 2006), 116–29. See also Peter Brown, *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianization of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. 11–26; R. A. Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge, 1990), 27–43, esp. 27–29.

18. Megan Hale Williams, “Lessons from Jerome’s Jewish Teachers: Exegesis and Cultural Interaction in Late Antique Palestine,” in *Jewish Biblical Interpretation and Cultural Exchange: Comparative Exegesis in Context*, ed. N. B. Dohrmann and D. Stern (Philadelphia, 2008), 66–86, esp. 69–77.

the enormous influence they would eventually exert, especially in the medieval Latin West, can they be credited with affecting such a revolution in their own day. Nevertheless, his discourse bears the unmistakable traces of the complex and often conflicting social processes out of which it emerged. Thus, Augustine's intense preoccupation with the challenge of religious difference within the new Christian polity—pagan, heretical, and Jewish—links him directly to the ambitious social, political, and religious vision advocated by an emergent network of Christian elites who were increasingly disenchanted with the techniques of governance that had characterized an older, less sharply delineated Roman order. At the same time, Augustine's correspondence with the Jew Licinius shows him operating like a rather typical power-broker within his immediate North African context, instinctively upholding the long-established system of Roman social relations in which at least some Jews still seem quite comfortably embedded.

And these seemingly contradictory historical vectors—the local and the systemic, the theoretical and the practical—could also converge at certain, especially telling moments. Augustine's apparent aversion to the equally local outbursts of forced conversion that had so seriously disrupted the fabric of Jewish-Christians social relations on Minorca was fully of a piece with his novel irenic reformulation of the *contra Iudaeos* tradition. In this period, the centuries-old rhetoric of Christian anti-Judaism could quite easily tip over into radically new forms of intercommunal violence, and theological innovation could just as easily buttress existing social practices as call into existence new forms of religious identity. If historians of late antique Judaism are to arrive at a properly complex assessment of the impact that a distinctively imperial Christianity had on Jewish life in the late fourth and fifth centuries, they will have to attend to the tense and often paradoxical interplay between traditionalism and innovation—at various levels of operation—that left such deep marks on the discourse of elites such as Augustine.

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