

assumptions, I firmly believe that he has produced a very valuable study here. It is so full of original ideas and sharp insights that I shall be surprised if it does not prove to be a powerful catalyst for renewed research into Romano-Jewish relations in classical antiquity.

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A NEW VIEW OF THE DIASPORA

E. S. GRUEN: *Diaspora. Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Pp. xiv + 386. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002. Cased, £27.95. ISBN: 0-674-00750-6.

Specialists in Graeco-Jewish literature rejoiced when Professor Gruen turned his renowned skills in Graeco-Roman history and literature to the Jewish subset of these. This book is the fullest harvest (so far) from that shift of focus, and scholars from all related sub-disciplines will welcome it. Against the long-established tendency of experts on the Jewish Diaspora to assume and stress the precariousness of life among gentiles, at least for those who remained true to their heritage, G. constructs a picture of startling ordinariness. Jews constructed no theory of Diaspora because they needed none. Most of them lived in the cities of the eastern empire voluntarily and happily enough, neither facing constant danger nor needing (much less receiving) special Roman protection. The pervasive ethos of this study is one of healthy participation: confident and usually unmolested in their chosen places of residence, Jews got on with life, with greater or lesser degrees of individual success.

The former half of the book treats the historical situation of those Diaspora communities for which substantial evidence remains: Rome, Alexandria, and Asia Minor. In each case, G. works crisply and elegantly through the evidence, dismissing reconstructions that depend on unfamiliarity with general conditions in the Roman empire, along with those that generalize unique situations (notably the reported expulsions of Jews from Rome, the *acta* supporting Jewish rights in Asia from the forties B.C., and the Alexandrian pogrom of A.D. 38). Only someone with G.'s knowledge of what was plausible in Roman politics and of Roman prosopography could have written these chapters. With a minimum of clutter, in stark contrast to the tradition of ponderous analysis, he demolishes, reconstructs, poses new questions, and dispenses light everywhere. This first part ends with a chapter on civic institutions in which Diaspora Jews participated, both their own (especially the synagogue) and those of the cities in which they lived.

The latter half of the book turns to Jewish literary responses to the Diaspora experience. The first two chapters survey Jewish literature that circulated in the Diaspora, paying attention to a largely neglected feature: humour and wit. According to G., this jocular disposition, even in serious writing, reflects the comfort and confidence of the Diaspora communities. A synthetic chapter on Jewish constructions of the Greeks—Jews neither hated nor uncritically admired the Greeks, but adopted and adapted Greek culture wherever they thought it would enhance their own—recalls G.'s work on the Roman encounter with Greek culture. The closing chapter deals with the problem of 'Diaspora and Homeland', again dismissing scholarly theories that would offer these as alternative poles in Diaspora thought, arguing rather that most Diaspora Jews appear to have maintained their love and respect for Jerusalem without opting to live there. Diaspora texts do not expound a doctrine of displacement from

the homeland or a yearning for 'return'; nor, indeed, do they even recognize the category 'Diaspora'. G. refrains utterly from any modern application of his results.

The genius of this book derives from G.'s *auctoritas*. Since neither the historical evidence nor the import of the Jewish literature speaks for itself, one requires a guide with sufficient knowledge to put the pieces together against a plausible background. Paradoxically, this situation is at once the book's towering advantage and its greatest limitation. One can only follow G.'s conclusions through such a vast range of material if one shares his *empeiria* and resulting sense of the plausible, or—rather more likely—if one is willing to trust or defer to G.'s instincts. Although he is often able to share enough of a basis for his reasons that the reader too may feel confidence, in some cases a critical audience might suspect special pleading. Examples from each half of the book illustrate the reader's plight.

In the historical half, G. constantly reminds us that the evidence is at best scanty, lacunose, and biased, rendering historical conclusions hazardous. Yet that ignorance occasionally appears to count only against the positions he rejects. Thus, careful analysis of Josephus' dossier of decrees protecting Jewish rights in Asia Minor shows that most were *pro forma* and initiated by community leaders as symbolic statements, while a few exempted the Jews from specific operations during the Roman civil wars; only two provide direct evidence of harassment by either local Greeks or the Roman state. Therefore, sweeping judgements about Jewish vulnerability should be avoided (e.g. p. 101). Oddly, however, G. appears to treat the documents rather positivistically, as if they mapped the terrain of Jewish life in a representative way. He even observes that 'the events do not show repeated friction or long-standing enmity between Greek and Jew in Asia' (p. 100). Of course, we do not have access to the events, and since G. has already shown the extreme selectivity of Josephus' documents (p. 86), one might have thought that we should resist any general conclusions about the period. Yet, having painstakingly restricted the evidence for Jewish discomfort in Asia, G. uses the lack of further evidence in support of the opposite interpretation: general concord.

The expulsion of Jews from Rome by Tiberius in A.D. 19 enjoys independent attestation by five reporters: Seneca, Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Cassius Dio (references in G.). Josephus explains it as a consequence of financial fraud by a small gang of unscrupulous Jews against a senator's wife who had converted to Judaism. Seneca recalls the suppression of foreign rites in his youth, which caused him to abandon vegetarianism to avoid suspicion. Tacitus claims that 4,000 of those 'infected' by that superstition were sent to Sardinia, while the others were ordered to leave Italy unless they had abandoned these practices. Suetonius is similar, whereas Dio claims pointedly that most Jews were expelled because they were persuading many of the Romans to adopt their customs.

What to make of all this? Especially because the scant evidence for Jewish life in Rome conspicuously features conversion and missionary activity throughout two centuries, other scholars have held this to be the best explanation of the evidence: that a particular case of fraud against a high-status convert prompted Tiberius to act against the general problem, which would recur under Claudius and Domitian. Such a hypothesis would seem to explain economically the various comments by the mainly independent reporters. G., however, brings his *auctoritas* to bear. Having argued that Roman expulsions were typically more symbolic than practical (p. 18; cf. pp. 40–1), he further invokes that well-earned sense of the plausible thus: any basis for the hypothesis of missionary activity is 'thin and brittle'; only Dio presents it clearly as a reason—and his fragment is a late Byzantine excerpt ('The others say nothing about proselytizing, and it won't do to try to wring out of their texts', p. 31); finally, 'The idea

that Tiberius would penalize every Jew in Rome for the misbehavior of four Jewish rascals cannot be taken seriously. Among other things, it would be wildly out of character for that emperor . . .' (p. 31). Indeed, G. goes on to reject the whole notion that conversion to Judaism and proselytizing were significant issues in Rome, arguing, for example, that people accused of laziness cannot have been so active, that there is no evidence for 'organized and determined missionary activity' (but are the adjectives necessary?), and that those usually accused of keeping to their own kind can hardly have been active among gentiles (but compare evangelical Christian missionaries).

In the case of A.D. 19, while rejecting the common hypothesis on the basis of insufficient evidence, G. develops another that he considers plausible, though it lacks any evidentiary basis. He notes that A.D. 19 was the year of Germanicus' death, the blame for which was notoriously assigned to Tiberius, with overtones of black magic and poison. An expulsion of foreigners—Egyptians faced the same penalty—might help the *princeps* deflect suspicion from himself. Inconveniently, G. concedes, Germanicus died in early October, leaving little time for the expulsion in the same year, but rumours of Germanicus' condition would have reached Rome much earlier. It is also inconvenient that Tacitus, though reporting both Germanicus' death and the expulsion in 19 in proximity, draws no link between the two. In short, there is not a shred of evidence for G.'s conjecture. Yet for reasons that remain opaque to the reader, that conjecture remains worthy of consideration for G., even though it is not asked to explain any of the reports. Is evidence, then, the governing criterion?

In the latter half of the book, G. adduces such texts as biblical Esther, Tobit, Judith, Susanna, and 2 Maccabees (these under 'historical fiction') as products of the robust sense of humour among Diaspora Jews, where these works circulated, which in turn shows the normalcy of Diaspora lives—by no means a 'smiling through tears'. Whereas these stories have commonly been read as earnest tales of moral and theological didacticism, G. finds also in their wit and even farcical elements more ordinary, everyday concerns with entertainment. He demonstrates the humour in large part by showing that the stories often create unrealistic, wildly exaggerated, unhistorical, and geographically arbitrary scenarios. Problems with his analysis include the tenuous links between several of these texts and the Diaspora (especially the Graeco-Roman), the related issue of authors' intentions for particular audiences, the question whether the narrative strategies uncovered by G. are much different from those of the main biblical narratives (where humour is also increasingly detected), or, conversely, the tradition of *terpsis* in Graeco-Roman historiography and novel. G. does not deal directly with such parallels or their possible consequences, but if humour and irony were valued by many subcultures across the Mediterranean, why are such traits noteworthy in literature read in (but not necessarily written for) the Jewish Diaspora?

At the bottom lie two fundamental issues: whether the reader agrees with G. that the stories are as funny as he argues, and whether their many exaggerations and errors reflect wit—or mere crudeness. On the former: treating Esther as 'comic historical novel' seems a challenge in view of the *dénouement*, where the Jews who had been threatened with extinction are permitted to kill more than 75,000 of their enemies, prompting mass conversions, a conclusion that readers might consider a sign of deep bitterness avenged. But for G., this is 'as much drollery as savagery', for 'a festive quality prevails' (p. 147); it is all 'witty parody and healthy hilarity'. On the latter: if geographical and historical errors as well as implausible situations betray comic intent rather than mere crudity, should one consider also Daniel and the gospels witty and healthy-minded texts? These questions in turn prompt one to question the tight logical coherence between the former and latter halves of G.'s book. However that may be,

even if the latter half were read as a separate book (note the significant parallels with G.'s 1998 study, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reimvention of Jewish Tradition*, though G. does not self-plagiarize), it would still be a stimulating study in its own right.

G. has written a *tour de force*, a synthesis that will be required reading for anyone interested in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean. If one seeks a coherent interpretation of Diaspora-Jewish life, one cannot find a better guide than G. Even where one might disagree, his carefully wrought and well-documented analysis will provide a reference point for some time to come.

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VARIA JUDAICA

J. R. BARTLETT (ed.): *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*. Pp. xi + 249, ills. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Cased, £50. ISBN: 0-415-18638-2.

Time was when the Jewish Diaspora of the Graeco-Roman period commanded little scholarly attention. For reasons that need not be discussed here, there was a complete change in the 1980s. That decade saw a dramatic upsurge in interest, and in the 1990s not a year went by without several books connected with the subject, some of them of major importance, entering the public domain. While a few of these were individually authored (e.g. David Noy's *Jewish Inscriptions of Western Europe* [Cambridge, 1993 and 1995], John Barclay's *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora* [Edinburgh, 1996] and Isaiah Gafni's *Land, Center and Diaspora* [Sheffield, 1997]), several were edited collections of seminar and conference papers—e.g. J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak's *The Jews among Pagans and Christians* (London and New York, 1992), J. W. van Henten and P. W. van der Horst's *Studies in Early Jewish Epigraphy* (Leiden, 1994), B. Isaac and A. Oppenheimer's *Studies on the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Tel-Aviv, 1996), M. Goodman's *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford, 1998), and S. Jones and S. Pearce's *Jewish Local Patriotism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (Sheffield, 1998). The peak years of activity were 1996–8, and it was during that period that Sean Freyne conceived the idea for a conference in Dublin entitled *Jews in the Hellenistic and Roman Cities*. Although that meeting took place in 1997, it was not until 2002 that the papers and lectures delivered at it were finally published. Briefly introduced by Sean Freyne himself (Chapter 1), they form the contents of the book under review.

I think that it would be helpful to the would-be purchaser and/or reader if I started by stating what this volume is not. It is not, despite its title, particularly concerned with Jews in an urban context. The city figures very little in most of these papers, and in some (most notably the chapter on the Essenes) not at all. Nor do these essays make much use of the new epigraphic and archaeological data for the Jewish Diaspora, although one of the main reasons for holding this conference (p. 1) was the desire to see this fresh material exploited and given greater prominence! As for the important questions raised by Freyne (pp. 3–4) about 'acculturation, enculturation, assimilation and strategies of ethnic-identity maintenance that are particularly acute in the case of the Jews', these remain largely unaddressed in this volume.

So if we do not have here either what the title states or what the prime mover behind the whole project wanted, what do we have? The answer is an extremely heterogeneous collection of papers, most, but not all, of them relating in some way or other to the