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**Katell Berthelot. *Jews and Their Roman Rivals: Pagan Rome's Challenge to Israel*
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021**

Reviewed by Joseph Drew

This is a magisterial work, one which sets high the bar in the comparative study of civilizations. In it, Prof. Katell Berthelot covers the sweep of 600 years, from the second century, BCE, to the fourth century, CE, as she analyzes the extensive impact of Rome on Jewish ideas of law, religion, and peoplehood and, secondarily, the corresponding impact of their rivals, the Jews, on Roman society and history.

The author was educated at the Sorbonne and at the Orion Center for Qumran Studies at Hebrew University; her doctoral dissertation at the Sorbonne was entitled “Israel and Humanity in Jewish Thought in Hellenistic and Roman Times.” She is CNRS Professor of Ancient Judaism at Aix-Marseille University in France and a director of research at the National Center for Scientific Research. She is attached to the Paul-Albert February Center at the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'homme in Aix-en-Provence, France.

Scholars have long studied the axis of Rome – Judea, the most famous, to my mind, being Moses Hess in his work *Rome and Jerusalem: The Last National Question*, published in 1862 and a foundational work of the modern political Zionist movement. But new intellectual ground is plowed in this book, as Berthelot, to quote a title of the introduction, recontextualizes “Israel’s encounter with the Roman Empire in the Longue Durée.”

She shows that both civilizations affected fundamental intellectual, legal, religious, political, and military aspects of the other. A comparative study of two civilizations, Rome and Israel, this work examines in meticulous detail aspects of the complex interaction with, and borrowing from, each other. During the period before the Roman Empire became fully Christianized, the policy of the empire was to eradicate the Jewish religion and replace Jerusalem with Rome.

Her argument goes against the assertion by a founder and leading light of the field of the comparative study of civilizations, Arnold Toynbee, in that it shows the long unfolding of Jewish encounter with empires and civilizations and, in effect, reveals the Jewish world to be a more sophisticated, evolving and lasting society than the fossil Toynbee dismissed it as.

If Western Civilization arises from three major pillars – Greek philosophy, Jewish ethics, and Roman law and administration – perhaps it is not going too far to draw from this study that one feature underlying the refinement of what became the West has been the conflict between Rome and Israel.

Invoking an enormous amount of exegesis and intellectual debate, Dr. Berthelot proves that the Roman challenge was qualitatively different from others that Israel, a people of enduring self-consciousness, she says, had previously encountered from other conquerors.

Both Had a Mission

Why? First, unlike with other conquerors, there were clear similarities between Roman and Jewish self-definitions and, second, because Rome's policy, its goal, was to eradicate the Jewish cult and replace Jerusalem with Rome. Both the Romans and the Jews had a mission. Each claimed to be divinely selected, elected. Each side felt that their civilization had created a legal system superior to all others and a precursor to universal peace. Both rested their claims on their exceptional piety. For the two competitors, aspirations of universalism struggled with particularism.

Interestingly, Prof. Berthelot shows that both claimed to speak for the people, the *am Yisrael* and the *populus Romanus*, not for a king. So, in Rome, the Jews faced not just a royal dynasty like all the others they had experienced, but an imperial people.

The author doesn't posit a full "clash of civilizations." Rather, the Jewish encounter with Rome was ideological, shaping Rome and the Jews, ancient and modern, in many significant ways. In fact, there was a great borrowing from each other's cultures. Thus, while Israel officially rejected some Roman ideas and practices it was actually absorbing them in subtle ways.

To understand this conflict, and how each side affected the other, Prof. Berthelot utilizes, especially, many hundreds of Biblical, Greek, and Latin documents. The bibliography is 58 pages long and it is followed by an Index of Ancient Sources of 26 pages. She treats extensively Jewish literature of the era, including both religious works and essentially secular Jewish literature (often written, particularly by Josephus and Philo, in Greek). Her knowledge of the languages involved is impressive, and her understanding of the history, particularly the debates internal and external to both societies, is extensive and deep.

The book, however, assumes the reader knows something about the Bible, the books that compose it, and the arguments made therein, as well as basic Roman law and customs. To approach this new book, it helps to have some general knowledge of the languages involved and at least passing acquaintance with important events of the era and the Mediterranean world. Also, the author devotes an enormous amount of attention to exegesis and arguments between various rabbis and schools. There is much quibbling over the centuries about the appropriate, contrasting interpretation of certain Biblical passages – very Jewish practice to this day.

Since this is a work of comparative literature, anthropology, religion, history, and philosophy, reference is continually made to writings and actions of the period under review as well as to palimpsests, archaeologically uncovered artifacts, important inscriptions, coinage, sculpture, and other indicia available today. Nonetheless, she differentiates what is *Emic*, behavior that is meaningful to the actor, from what is *Etic*, behavior that is meaningful to the outside analyst.

Some of the technical language she has employed in the book may force you, as it did me, to the online dictionary frequently as you read. But this was an excellent aspect of the book, as I learned an enormous amount by constantly referencing my computer and my Bible.

If you are going to read this book, give it several weeks, at a minimum. You will learn much more here than in a typical semester-long college symposium. Although I recently wrote a chapter in a textbook for university freshmen students on the Roman Civilization, I learned much here that I didn't know before.

Relevant Facts

So, let me begin with two basic sets of facts relevant to the era under discussion.

First, there were three great Jewish revolts against the Romans within a seventy-year period:

- The Judean War (or Great Revolt) of 66-73 CE
- The Diaspora Revolt of 115-117 CE
- The Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-135 CE

Dr. Berthelot summarizes results of these three wars succinctly:

- Heavy losses of Jewish lives, in Judea and in the diaspora, with large numbers of killings of Jews in Libya, Cyprus, and Egypt
- Confiscation of lands
- Enslavement of many Jews
- Destruction of the Temple and of Jerusalem
- Partial disappearance of the scribal and priestly elites who had gravitated around the Temple
- Institution of the *Fiscus Iudaicus* (which lasted until the 4th century)
- Re-founding of Jerusalem as *Aelia Capitolina*
- The emptying of the Jewish population from Judea

Second, there were significant products of Jewish scholarship produced during the period. Here are some relevant terms, which the author seems to assume most people know.

Number One: there is the Talmud, the basic text of Rabbinic Judaism (therefore, composed after the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 CE).

There are two versions of the Talmud, and each contain two parts:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|
| <u>Babylonian Talmud (Bavli)</u> | and | <u>The Yerushalmi Talmud</u> |
| 1. The Mishnah (oral law, in order) | | 1. The same as Bavli |
| 2. Gemara (analysis on the Mishnah) | | 2. Differs from Bavli |

Number Two: it is of note that the Yerushalmi Talmud (also called the Palestinian Talmud, compiled in the fourth century in Galilee) predated the Babylonian Talmud by about 200 years.

Number Three: the term *midrash* means Jewish Biblical exegesis, often found in the Talmud, interpreting the words of the Torah, seeing beyond the text, analyzing meaning.

Number Four: there is a difference in Jewish life between Aggadah and Halakhah. Aggadah deals with man's ineffable relations to God, to other men, and to the world. It addresses the whole of life. Halakhah, on the other hand, deals with details, with each commandment separately. So, halakhah means the law, and aggadah addresses the meaning of the law.

Number Five: there are two leading groups of scholars who contributed to the Talmud. We have the Tannaitic period; the *tanna* were several hundred Jewish sages and scholars of the first and second century. After came the *amora*; the Amoraic period runs from 200 to 500 CE.

Number Six: there is yet another major collection of writings. This is called the Tosefta. The word means addition or supplement. It contains explanation for murky sections of the Mishnah, and it was also compiled from 0 to 200 AD, during the Tannaitic period. It is three times as large as the Mishnah itself.

Great Transformation

In the introduction, which presents much of her argument in overview, the author describes both societies as undergoing great transformation and great transition during these six centuries. The rise of Christianity affected both, and in the end, of course, Rome became the center of Christendom. The Romans grew to think of themselves as an entire world, with eternal law and justice central features of the empire. On the other hand, the Jews as of the late first century, CE, had become a defeated people, lacking both state and Temple.

Prof. Berthelot describes Roman civilization as actually being Graeco-Roman; in terms of power, it was Roman but in terms of culture it was Greek. The Jewish conflict, she writes, was with Greek culture. In fact, Jewish rabbinic literature is replete with objection to the culture of Alexander the Great and his successors in the Hellenistic world.

Rome was challenged militarily by the Jews from the mid-first century to the mid-second century CE. As she notes, no one else revolted on such a large scale during the rule of Trajan and Hadrian. Plus, Rome hated the Jews. Wrote Seneca:

The customs of this accursed race have gained such influence that they are now received throughout all the world. The vanquished have given laws to their victors.

Wrote Rutilius Namatianus:

And would that Judaea had never been subdued by Pompey's wars and Titus's military power. The infection of this plague, though excised, still creeps abroad the more; and it is their own conquerors that a conquered people keeps down.

Among the major events she covers in the book, one of the most significant is the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. This decree, issued by Caracalla in 212 CE, transformed the situation, making it yet more complex, by turning most free Jews in the Roman empire into citizens.

Rome challenged Israel militarily and politically, but there was an ideological challenge posed by pagan Rome to Judaism, the Jewish religion, even before the challenge that Christianity posed. At the same time, there was a growth of Romanness amongst the Jews, even including the rabbis, and this affected the impact of Roman values and cultures on Judaism, she shows.

There are five chapters and a conclusion to the book.

The first chapter looks at the empires that conquered Israel before Rome was on the scene. How many were there? This is open to dispute. The Book of Daniel's list consisted of the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, and the Macedonians (Alexander and the Seleucids). But for Josephus and the rabbis, the list was the Babylonians, the Medes and Persians taken together, the Macedonians, and the Romans.

Regardless of the number of conquerors, we witness the history of what is called a *translatio imperii* – the idea that there is a linear succession of the transfer of power, control, legitimacy, via a series of emperors. The idea of this succession of Asian empires is present in writers from Herodotus on, the author notes, and apparently Ctesias first used it in order to write a kind of universal history.

Some writers suggest that as a result of confronting these empires, the Bible may be offering an anti-imperialistic lens and a deep rejection of the imperialism that Israel encountered. Or, it might be argued, the Bible is giving us, in the prophetic books, a rival imperial vision; God will rule over the nations. In either event, the Bible itself reveals the legacies of the different empires Israel faced, although there is a question about Biblical texts, “whose redaction is generally hard to date with certainty,” as to whether scholars are able to distinguish clearly among the legacies of the different empires Israel faced.

According to Prof. Berthelot, there were four major impacts of the pre-Roman empires on Jewish thought. These were theological; they led to reflection on human power; they lent a sense of a determined course of history and an end of time; and they brought about the idea of covenant between God and Israel (including the Greek concept of conquered territories as inherited property).

The Neo-Assyrians

The Neo-Assyrians (916 to 612 BCE) were a final stage of Assyrian empire. They destroyed Israel, the northern kingdom, in 722-720 and Judah, while the southern kingdom, remained a vassal kingdom. The Assyrians claimed as far back as the end of the third millennium BCE to have established a universal empire.

Here we find a fascinating argument by Dr. Berthelot. The influence of the Assyrian politics and culture on Judah can be seen in First Isaiah (Isaiah 1 – 39) and in Amos and Deuteronomy.

Dr. Berthelot says that the Biblical idea of a universal god emerges in Deuteronomy 13. In this, she says, the God of Israel takes the place of the feared kings of Assyria. So, God’s kingdom in Isaiah actually is the transformation of a political empire into a spiritual one; the warrior king of Assyria is transposed to God, the creator king.

This is followed by yet another astounding idea, a second point. The idea that Israel must remain faithful to God’s covenant – found in Deuteronomy – parallels a treaty that the Assyrians made with their vassals. In fact, the curses upon Jews if they fall from following God’s covenant that are found in Deuteronomy 28 are in the same order as those in the Vassal Treaty of Esarhaddon (discovered in 1955). Judaism adds in Deuteronomy 28:43-44 only another idea to the list: this is that the immigrant is to rise and become more prosperous than native Israelites.

So, the Assyrian notion of a treaty gave way to, or certainly informed, the Jewish notion of a covenant between God and man. Next came the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Although they deported groups, they did not erase ethnic self-definitions.

After the people of Judah were suspected of plotting a revolt against the ruling Babylonians, the Temple was demolished by them in 587-586 BCE and the elites of the community deported to Babylon.

The book reports that from this period came the redaction of the story of Genesis (inspired by Mesopotamian mythology), the development of a theology of Zion, and the notion of the diaspora. Very importantly, the emergence of monotheism, she writes, may have been a response to the exile and the delocalization of the Judean national deity, now left without a temple.

Second Isaiah (Isaiah, 40 to 55) documents important aspects of the development of the concept of the deity, and the characterization of foreign gods as idols. Isaiah adapts the language of Neo-Babylonian royal inscriptions. The Babylonians had an idea of what the king is chosen for; in Isaiah it is the election not of the king but of a people.

The Jews are now a covenant people, a light unto the nations, with the mission to save the world, not to conquer and oppress it. The Jews, according to some scholars, became, as the people Israel, the “anointed one” destined to bring about God’s universal kingdom on earth.

Third came the rule of the mighty Persian Empire. The Bible shows little hostility to the Persians and considers Cyrus as “God’s anointed.” Likely this was because the Jews were grateful to Cyrus, the king, who allowed the Babylonian exiles to return to Israel.

From the Persians came many significant influences on Judaism, and perhaps much borrowing from Zoroastrianism. Persian imperial ideology was clearly universalistic. They had a notion of paradise, an ideal model of the world. Their religion dealt with the struggle of good against evil, so the development of Jewish monotheism in the Persian context probably led to the idea of Satan, a way to solve the problem of evil in the world (theodicy). God as creator seems also to have roots in the Persian context.

Dr. Berthelot cites the explicit claim that the Jewish god is the only god and that other gods do not exist. This is found in only a few Biblical texts, which many scholars date to the Persian period. See, for example, Deuteronomy 4:39, “So acknowledge today and take to heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath, there is no other.” Thus, it was during this time of Persian rule that Judaism evolved from monolatry (the worship of one god without the denial that there are other gods) to strict monotheism.

Dr. Berthelot summarizes that principal among the influences of the Persians on Jews were monotheistic ideas, eschatological notions, and the concept of the Torah.

Readers of this journal are familiar with the work of Dr. Laina Farhat Holzman, a writer on comparative civilizations and our former Senior Editor. One of her books, entitled *Strange Birds from Zoroaster's Nest*, examines the far-ranging Persian contributions to other monotheistic religions, including Judaism; it was reviewed in the *Comparative Civilizations Review*, No. 49, Fall, 2003, pages 155 to 157. Other scholars, as well, emphasize that the effect of Zoroastrianism upon Judaism and Christianity is extensive.

Fourth were the Hellenistic kingdoms following the conquests of Alexander the Great. The Ptolemies ruled Judea from 318 to 200 BCE and the Seleucids from the beginning of the second century BCE. During this period there was a growth of the Jewish community in Egypt, with vibrant Judeo-Greek culture, plus Jewish communities in Asia Minor and Babylonia. They were thus massively exposed to Greek culture.

The very powerful Hellenistic kings shared the universalistic ideology of the Assyrians and the Persians; world unity was a good. Although the Jews rejected the idea of a deified king, they prayed for his welfare. Then came the Maccabean revolt, 167 to 164, BCE. We can see the influence of Greek ideas about kingship through the behavior of Jewish leadership during this period.

We read in this book that Jewish messianism is a response to the Hellenistic models of kingship. First, the idea of God willing the people of Israel to receive Canaan is related to the concept of inheritance, which came from the Seleucids. The land had already belonged to their ancestors and thus had been transmitted to the Judeans by inheritance – a typical form of Greek reasoning.

In addition, the development of Jewish apocalyptic discourse was a reaction to Hellenistic rule and the Book of Daniel, says Dr. Berthelot, may be read as a response to the Seleucid rule. Behind earthly empires lie angelic forces and battles on earth reflect a heavenly struggle. Some scholars see the promise of the ultimate defeat and judgment at the hands of God as preserving the notion of a God in control of history, a contribution to religious literature from the Greek period.

Struggle between Brothers

Following this prequel, Chapter Two address the unique challenge the Romans brought to the Jews: a rivalry between two peoples unlike previous ones. So, to the Jews, this unique challenge was defined by many rabbis as a struggle between Jacob and his twin brother Esau, now the Romans.

The city and people of Rome defined themselves in ways that were surprisingly close to how Israel defined itself and the vocation of the capital city, Jerusalem. Each considered itself divinely chosen and destined for a unique history. Each was obsessed with its glorious antiquity and convinced that heaven had selected it to rule the world.

The author points out that Rome was the first empire confronting Israel to not have a king. Rather the Romans could democratically choose their own rulers; this was a concept foreign to Judea. Another was that while under the Greeks it was the lands of the king but under the Romans the empire belonged to the Roman people. The Roman people had a Guardian Spirit, *genius populi Romani*, which underscored the continuing unity and universality of the empire. Rome deified itself; it was depicted as a goddess.

There are striking parallels between the foundation myth of Rome, in Virgil's *Aeneid*, and the Biblical narrative of Abraham. Both Aeneas and Abraham were called to leave their homelands in order to receive a new land and give birth to a new people. Both people were fated to prevail over all others and to rule the world. Both were pious; the Romans boasted about their own piety like no one else in the ancient world except for the Jews. Cicero correlated this piety with the support granted by the gods to the Roman empire.

From a Jewish perspective, writes the author, the repeated claims that the Romans excelled in piety and that their empire was sustained by divine providence, added to their disparaging comments about Jewish religious practices, may have challenged the Jewish belief in the election of the people of Israel, the truly pious ones, chosen by the one, true God, whose designs the Jews understood better than did the idolaters.

Rome claimed a universal reach – *urbs* (city) and *orbs* (world); from a Biblical and Jewish perspective, the destiny of Israel also had both a universal and an eternal dimension. Like Rome, its destiny was closely associated with a city – Jerusalem. Furthermore, Rome's mission of peace, legal order, and universal rule was similar to the mission ascribed to Israel in Biblical and Jewish traditions; all nations would discover God's law, submit to God, and live in peace with one another, possibly in a messianic age to come. So, in some Jewish writings the God of Israel is called "Peace" according to Dr. Berthelot, an example of mimesis, art imitating reality, and rivalry.

The victories of Rome over the Jews, perceived as grave dangers, were major ones for the Romans, celebrated hugely by them. The book examines in detail the battles, the causes, and the results of these wars. For the Jews, they meant that the Temple was destroyed, sacrifices ended, and the tax all Jews had paid to support the Temple were converted into the *Fiscus Iudaicus*. The money now went to build Aelia Capitolina and to support the Temple of Jupiter in Rome. What an insult! The Colosseum itself was built with Judean money. Meanwhile, the province's name was changed from Judea to Syria Palestina, a miniature Rome was built there, and from 135 CE onward, all Jews were forbidden to live there or even anywhere nearby.

To the Jews, Rome showed its intent to substitute itself for Israel.

Chapter Three address the challenge of Roman power to Israel. In essence, Jewish texts display ambivalence toward Roman military power and Roman emphasis on bravery. They sometimes express admiration for Roman might and valor and at other times deride such traits. Jewish writers such as Philo saw the true king as not one with dominion over land and sea (Rome) but as the sage who serves God. True strength, wrote the rabbis, is associated with Torah and Torah study. The Torah is Israel's source of power.

Divine Design

To the Jews, Roman's power over Judea was seen as part of a divine design that could be explained by Israel's sins, as Deuteronomy had projected, even though the plan was unfair and Israel's punishment excessive.

The Talmud emphasizes that the use of force was something foreign to Israel. While the Romans prized dying, self-sacrificing, the Jews did not. Rabbinic sources describe Roman warfare as masculine, sexually aggressive. When Titus slashed the curtain and defiled the holy Temple, it was like rape, against God. Titus even raped a prostitute on a Torah scroll. Prof. Berthelot sees the Temple as a metonymy here (substituting an attribute for the thing meant) or synecdoche (a part representing the whole) for God. The slashed curtain begins to bleed, in some accounts.

Christian texts paralleled this view of Roman power, as well. Mark has a person possessed by the devil; this is the land of Israel occupied by the Romans. The Apocalypse of John describes Rome as a whore.

While Rome regularly associated Jews with defeat, and Cicero even declared that the Jews and Syrians were born to be slaves, the Jews differed in their view of victory. Josephus, of course, emphasized Jewish military success and bravery. Imitating Roman discourses, representations, and social practices related to war, he and others emphasized that Jews faced death on behalf of the laws more courageously than anyone else. Plus, Jewish military bravery is celebrated in the Hannukah story of the Maccabees, a Hellenistic context. Further, both Josephus and rabbinic commentaries put praise of Jewish military valor in the mouth of the Romans (including discussions of the fall of the Bar Kochba rebellion).

God, too, is depicted as a mighty warrior – but as a silent presence in front of his enemies. Dr. Berthelot comments that the rabbis here use a major Roman value, self-restraint, in order to subvert the supremacy of Rome itself.

In Chapter IV, the challenge of Roman law is presented. Author Berthelot says that the Romans and the Jews were the two most legally minded peoples of antiquity.

For the Romans, law was an independent field of knowledge, distinct from religion, for the Jews, a basis of it.

Cicero dismissed other nation's laws as disordered and absurd. Romans were civilizing others, bringing justice to other lands where there had been no law. But while the Greeks and the Christians admired the civilizing role of Roman law, the Jews did not. Rabbinic texts depict Rome as an evil kingdom, not one bringing legal order to the world but one stealing and oppressing while pretending to administer justice. They saw the places where Roman legal activities were performed as settings of bloodshed and the executions of people staged as a horrible spectacle.

However, writes the author, the rabbis knew about and took inspiration from certain Roman legal principles even though they never acknowledged such borrowings explicitly. So, while arguing that Israel should stick to its own laws, Jewish scribes actually were adapting parts of Roman law. This can be seen in the realm of business law that was current when the Talmud was being compiled, for example.

On a higher plane of analysis, the elaboration of Jewish law was for the purpose of making the law an end in itself. In effect, the rabbis built a portable sanctuary made up of laws as an alternative to the destroyed Temple. Thus was the Jewish religion transformed from Temple-based to rabbinic and law-based, able to be practiced anywhere.

Facing this project was a new challenge: in 212 CE, Jews became Roman citizens, with full access to Roman jurisdiction and law, via the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. Would they now no longer consider Jewish laws mandatory? Given Jewish rivalry with Rome in the legal sphere, at the ideological level, and to protect Jews from being fully integrated as Romans, there occurred the codification of Jewish law, the Mishnah and the Tosefta. The challenge was taking place within a context where both Juvenal and Tacitus were writing denunciation of Jews as individuals who despised Roman law.

Mosaic Law

So, reflecting Cicero's claim for Roman law, the Jews, Philo and Josephus in particular, argued that Mosaic law is the best. The Torah is (1) immutable (other nations are unable to preserve their laws, which are constantly modified) and (2) universal, bringing forth Jewish exceptional faithfulness to the law.

Thus, as Josephus pointed out, all nations copied the Jewish ideas of the sabbath, and many followed the lighting of sabbath lamps, piety, food prohibitions, and the fasts. Josephus further pointed to the widespread goal of concord between citizens, contempt for death in war, dedication to work in agriculture in time of peace, and piety – all of these were not Roman values but came from the law of Moses.

The rabbis emphasized that the Torah was given to Israel and was within the framework of the covenant between Israel and God. The God of Israel is in the same position as the Roman emperor, making his law known. While the Torah was the national law of Israel, there was a parallel between membership in the people of Israel (including obeying the Torah's commandments) and citizenship and law in Roman society. Both Roman and Jewish societies provided for international law, *ius gentium*, for all people, and for their own civil law applicable to themselves. However, the author says that the rise of Christianity and of Judaizing Christians "blurred the lines between Jews and gentiles and thus contributed to the redefinition of Jewishness in rabbinic terms."

Berthelot notes that the encounter with Rome prompted significant evolution in Jewish conceptions of the Torah. With the Greeks, the goal had been cultural – to show the universal, rational nature of the Torah and to argue philosophy. Against the Romans, the challenge was political and religious. Therefore, the rabbis presented the Torah as a law that belonged exclusively to Israel.

How did the Romans and the Jews consider peoplehood? Explaining this is the goal of the final, culminating chapter. Roman legal concepts on citizenship and adoption impacted Jewish thinking, with ramifications that still exist.

To the Romans, "peoplehood" was *populus* and to the Hebrews it was *am*. But, because the Jews had no civic organizations, to the Romans the Jews were not a *populus* but merely a *gens* (or, in the Greek, an *ethnos*). To be a Roman meant primarily to be a citizen. To the Jews, two Biblical models define Israel as a people. There is the family model (with Abraham, the common ancestor) and there is the group model, a people united by common laws (the covenant at Sinai).

Here Dr. Berthelot maintains that Jewish scholarship integrated Greek and Roman citizenship and adoption concepts into Jewish thought. Foreigners could be integrated into Israel using the family model, via what the author calls the legal fiction of adoption. She explains at length the role of adoption in the Roman world; it was used to confer a new lineage on a person and to put him or her under the authority of a new *pater familias*, such as the imperial family. This was the case, famously, with Caesar Augustus, Octavian.

Central to Rome was the concept of citizenship. It was an expansive concept. Roman origin myths included the generous granting of citizenship to criminals, those escaping from tyranny, the Rape of the Sabine women, and to all the people who fled to Rome for political asylum. Thus, Rome contained a heterogeneous population. Unlike with the Greeks, indigenous origin didn't count. Membership in the Roman people wasn't defined on ethnicity but rather on political and legal terms: the holding of Roman citizenship.

Policy of Enfranchisement

Modern scholars believe that this policy of enfranchisement helped to integrate conquered populations into the empire and to extend its dominion, thus co-opting provincial elites. It also brought in new taxes.

Cicero declared in 56 BCE that “what undoubtedly has done most to establish our empire and increase the renown of the Roman people is that ... this state ought to be enlarged by the admission even of enemies as citizens. Our forefathers never ceased to grant and bestow citizenship.”

Claudius wrote, “What proved fatal to Athens, in spite of their power in arms, was their policy of holding the conquered aloof as alien born. We Romans, by contrast, under founder Romulus, fought and naturalized a people in the course of the same day.”

Both Tacitus and Cicero stated that Romans valued excellence more than birth (pedigree). Dionysius agreed that Rome’s openness to foreigners was the key to its success. Like Claudius, he said about the Greeks that their unwillingness to grant citizenship to others gave them “no advantage from this haughty attitude but they suffered the greatest harm because of it.”

There were five ways to become a Roman citizen, including manumission, individual or group grants, service in the military, and service as a magistrate. To become a Roman citizen meant for the individual (1) participation in the majesty of the Roman people; (2) specific rights such as marriage and commerce, plus better judicial protection; and (3) administrative, military, fiscal and religious duties. Cities and communities sought to become Roman colonies. So desirable was Roman citizenship that the Social War (from 91 to 88 BCE) was fought by neighboring lands in order to obtain it.

Dr. Berthelot notes that enfranchisement contributed to Rome’s security and success by transforming former enemies into fellow citizens.

Jewish communities had evolved through centuries of exposure to the Greek and Roman ideas. For example, members of Jewish communities organized as a community in Egypt, and those living in Libya made their decisions by casting stones, votes.

As to membership in the group, on the one hand, in Biblical times there had been an absence of a procedure for conversion. It was a question of lineage; individuals were considered more or less Jewish having a Jewish parent, for example. On the other hand, Leviticus 19:34 declared that “the stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens. You shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Philo argued that being a Jew was a form of citizenship comparable to Roman citizenship, and he wrote that proselytes who convert to Judaism become citizens of the Mosaic community.

Josephus describes the Jews as cheerfully welcoming and granting citizenship to all who want to live under their laws (unlike the Spartans) and found that on granting citizenship, Jews and Romans indeed shared a common value. Although Roman notions of citizenship impacted rabbinic definitions of membership in Israel, the problem was that the rabbis long had seen Israel as a separate people, one that is not supposed to encompass humanity as a whole. This was an attitude sharply at odds with the Roman view. True, even if a person left the Jewish collective, he was still a Jew; you couldn't lose your citizenship. Outsiders could join, but insiders, even those who had joined from the outside, could never leave.

Notion of Adoption

How to reconcile the idea of Jews as a separate people with welcoming in others? Dr. Berthelot writes that the notion of adoption, widely practiced in Roman society, gave the rabbis the appropriate model to fully conceptualize the integration of converts into Israel. The legal fiction of adoption is precisely what makes it possible to confer on a person a new lineage (different ancestors), along with the corresponding legal and religious duties and inheritance rights, as if this person really had been born into his or her family of adoption.

Abraham was then made out to be the spiritual father of converts. The convert, writes Dr. Berthelot, is in a "fictive relationship with Abraham." Thus, the tension between (1) kinship-based and (2) covenantal-based (law) definitions of Israel is helped to be reconcilable.

At the same time, the rabbis showed an increasing discomfort with genealogical purity. We see a shift toward a more merit-based society during the period, one in which Torah learning began to outweigh lineage as a criterion for authority, leadership, and personal value.

The rabbis were fond of legal fictions, and this one kept the importance of genealogy while at the same time circumventing biological lineage. Moreover, adoption had been around in Jewish society since very ancient days. After all, Moses was adopted by the daughter of the pharaoh. Jacob promoted Ephraim and Manasseh from grandchildren to children. There is a question as to who Esther was. And, as the author says, Samuel's declaration, "I will be a father to him and he shall be a son to me," is an adoption formula. Finally, the God of Israel (unlike pagan deities and human beings) does not beget children but establishes a filial relationship with Israel through the covenant, which has legal implications.

Philo, arguing that the true bond between Jews is piety and not blood, states that Abraham left his homeland to take refuge in God, and this is a model for proselytes; Abraham is the adopted son of God. Ultimately, Maimonides declares converts to be children of Abraham.

Philo and Josephus integrated Roman notions of (growing) citizenship into their descriptions of the people of Israel, emphasizing the openness of the Jewish polity to new citizens. So, we see that an idea originally formulated by Jews in a Roman cultural context came to play a significant role in the life of Jewish communities until today and modified early Jewish law.

Dr. Berthelot concludes that there was a sense of rivalry between Israel and Rome, two peoples competing for “election” and indeed, for the leading role in history. She says that the encounter with Rome resulted in significant, long-lasting changes to Jewish discourses and self-definition. Examples include the trend to regard the Torah as the civil law of the Jews (as opposed to the claim to be universal as was common among Hellenistic Jewish authors) and the idea of the Talmud that people who convert become adopted children of the patriarch Abraham, which may have come from the Roman legal fiction of adoption.

Rome impacted Jewish history and thought greatly, especially as far as notions of power, law and peoplehood are concerned, including the conception of the Torah and the integration of proselytes. The dialectic of genealogy and adhesion to the covenant remains alive today in Israel and the diaspora. I would add that the impact of Jews on Rome was similarly important, as ultimately Rome became the center of Christendom, a Jewish offshoot.

Finally, perhaps here we trace aspects of large-scale social movement from “tribal brotherhood” to “universal otherhood,” as ISCSC president Benjamin Nelson famously put it in 1949. Karl Polyani saw this differentiation reflecting the social transition of Maine’s *status* to *contract* and Tönnies’s *community* to *society*. Certainly, in this monograph we see social, cultural, religious and intellectual change challenging, and entering, Jewish history and Western history.

Reading this book leads to endless ruminations about such topics as citizenship, religion, naturalization, xenophobia, piety, law and justice, and the ultimate shape of the Western Civilization. What a productive, thought-provoking work!