

# Jewish Identities in Antiquity

Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern

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## The Temple as a Marker of Jewish Identity Before and After 70 CE: The Role of the Holy Vessels in Rabbinic Memory and Imagination<sup>1</sup>

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When first asked to address the overarching topic, “Was the Destruction of the Temple in 70 CE a Turning Point in Jewish Identity?,” I immediately agreed, since my interests have always focused on the history and literature of Judaism both before and after that catastrophic event and on the transitional period between them. As I began to think more specifically about what I could contribute to a discussion of this broad topic, I became increasingly uncomfortable with it, for two reasons: the conception of the question and the nature of the sources available to address it.

First, can we speak of “Jewish identity” in such broad terms, either “before” or “after” 70 CE? The former period is marked by a multitude of Jewish social and religious groupings, and those that we can confidently identify may represent only the tip of the iceberg. Jewish identity in the latter period

<sup>1</sup> Many colleagues from diverse fields and disciplines contributed in manners large and small to this essay, by responding either to earlier versions or to my queries. To say I bear sole responsibility for the result is not to diminish the collaborative nature of the effort. My thanks to the generosity of Gary Anderson, Harry Attridge, Beth Berkowitz, Robert Brody, Joshua Burns, Naftali Cohn, Stephen Davis, Yaron Eliav, Steven Fine, Paula Fredriksen, Joseph Geiger, Martin Goodman, Martha Himmelfarb, Peter Jeffrey, Richard Kalmin, Joshua Levinson, Lee Levine, Jodi Magness, Dale Martin, Wayne Meeks, Stuart Miller, Shlomo Naeh, Hindy Najman, Rachel Neis, Vered Noam, Margaret Olin, Judith Resnick, Ishay Rosen-Zvi, Jim Sleeper, Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, and David Stern. In addition to presenting this paper originally in tribute to Menahem Stern at the conference in his memory in Jerusalem of 2007, I had the advantage of presenting revised versions to participants in Yale’s Ancient Judaism Workshop and to the University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Advanced Judaic Studies fellowship on “Jewish and Other Imperial Cultures in Late Antiquity.” I wish particularly to thank Ra’anana Boustán for sharing with me his important article, “The Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple at Rome and Constantinople: Jewish Counter-Geography in a Christianizing Empire,” prior to its publication in *Antiquity in Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Pasts in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. G. Gardner and K. Osterloh, TSAJ 123 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 327–72. Although his article reached me when mine was already complete, our thrusts, while very different, are remarkably complementary.

of two-or-so centuries is no easier to characterize. We can no longer assume that most of the pre-70 social and religious groupings evaporated in the wake of the destruction so as to allow what remained of Jewish society and religion to coalesce around rabbinic leadership. The opposite view, that Jewish religious identity largely collapsed (except for the small number of socially marginal rabbis) between 135 and 350 CE, is likewise difficult to sustain.<sup>2</sup> The available direct evidence, either literary or archaeological, for the period immediately after 70 is too scant to say what it meant for Jews to identify themselves as such, except in some very general terms.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the evidence that we do have for both “before” and “after” is problematic for charting Jewish identity. Most of the extant literary evidence for the Second Temple period has reached us through two channels of preservation. There are the Dead Sea Scrolls, which, plenteous as they are, were collected and / or produced by a relatively small sectarian community in accordance with its own particular “reading” habits; and there are the rest, which, for the most part, were selected for copying, translating, and editing by a variety of Christian communities in accord with their particular “reading” habits. How representative either is of Jewish society in late Second Temple times is open to question and most likely indeterminable. For the period following the destruction of the Temple, we face a relative dearth of literary sources for the first century and a half, and a relative dearth of archaeological remains for another century more. While our earliest rabbinic sources (Mishnah, Tosefta, tannaitic *midrashim*, and early traditions embedded in the two Talmuds) are an invaluable historical asset, how they should be employed for historical or social reconstruction beyond the confines of rabbinic society, whether for their own time or for earlier times, is a difficult question with which scholars of the period and the literature are very well aware.

I wish to focus on only one aspect of the larger question – the role of the Jerusalem Temple, as experienced and as imagined, in shaping Jewish identity both in its presence (pre-70) and in its absence (post-70). I shall

<sup>2</sup> For this view, see S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 BCE–640 CE* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 101–76. Compare S.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,” *AJSR* 31 (2007), 329–62, esp. 336–50; idem, “‘Epigraphical’ Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19: Were the Synagogues of Archaeology and the Synagogues of the Sages One and the Same?” *JQR* 94 (2004), 27–76.

<sup>3</sup> For recent attempts to delineate the main components of ancient Jewish identity, both pre- and post-70 CE, see S.J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); D. Goodblatt, *Elements of Ancient Jewish Nationalism* (Cambridge, Eng. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*.

narrow this focus even further, to the symbolic role of the Temple’s sacred furnishings, for which, historiographically, the employment of early rabbinic literature is especially problematic. On the one hand, that literature contains a wealth of details (and debates) regarding the Temple and its sacred vessels, sacrificial worship, rules of ritual purity, and the conduct and qualifications of the priesthood – details that are often absent from the Bible and Second Temple period literature. On the other hand, it is difficult to determine to what extent rabbinic texts, dating, at the earliest, 150 years after the destruction of the Temple, preserve accurate memories of what was, or imaginative constructions of what might or should have been. In other words, to what extent do rabbinic rules and accounts provide a window into Second Temple ritual practices, and to what extent into late-antique rabbinic study practices?

This dilemma is particularly significant if, in trying to compare “before” and “after” pictures of Jewish religious practice and social identity, we are uncertain within which historical context to “read” the relevant early rabbinic texts. We are increasingly aware that just because the rabbinic subject matter is Temple worship, rules of ritual purity, or priestly conduct, we cannot automatically assume that we are dealing with “old” traditions that are merely preserved in later rabbinic textual settings, so as to be incorporated into narratives of the Second Temple period. Perhaps later rabbinic sages were engaged in reconstructing the Temple and its ritual practices (and narratives) as a central component of their own ritual practice of *talmud Torah*, both as it transcended history and as it impinged upon their own historical times and socio-religious identities. Stated baldly, when we employ rabbinic texts that are, in part at least, products of their times, to fill in the narrative gaps of pre-rabbinic times, we vitiate our ability to critically and meaningfully compare “before” and “after.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For a similar assessment, see I. Rosen-Zvi, “Bodies and Temple: The List of Priestly Bodily Defects in Mishna Bekhorot, Chapter 7,” *Jewish Studies* 43 (2005–2006), 49–87 (Hebrew); idem, *The Rite That Was Not: Temple, Midrash and Gender in Tractate Sotah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008) (Hebrew). For a broader treatment of the performativity of mishnaic Temple ritual narratives within the context of rabbinic cultural production and consumption, see N.S. Cohn, “The Ritual Narrative Genre in the Mishnah: The Invention of the Rabbinic Past in the Representation of Temple Ritual,” Ph.D. dissertation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

## The Temple and Its Holy Vessels in Late Second Temple Times

By all accounts, the centrality of Jerusalem in Jewish ethnic and religious identity in Second Temple times was determined by the Temple at its conceptional, if not geographic, “center,” whether as a divisive or unifying symbol of God’s continual covenantal relation to Israel. That is, whether as contested reality or romanticized ideal, or as a complex intersection of the two, the Jerusalem Temple stood at the center of Jewish national, ethnic, and religious self-understanding. In emphasizing Jerusalem’s central role as “mother city” (*mētropolis*) to the numerous and far-flung Jewish “colonies,” Philo of Alexandria refers to it as “the Holy City where stands the sacred Temple of the most high God.”<sup>5</sup>

Similarly noting the large and far-flung Jewish population, Hecataeus of Abdera (ca. 300 BCE),<sup>6</sup> as cited by Josephus, focuses his description of Judaea on Jerusalem, which Josephus refers to as “the city which we have inhabited from remote ages, [with] its great beauty and extent, its numerous population, and the Temple buildings.” Josephus resumes his quotation of Hecataeus with the latter’s description of Jerusalem, at the center of which stands the outer Temple wall, within which is a square stone altar, and beside which

stands a great edifice, containing an altar and a lampstand, both made of gold, and weighing two talents; upon these is a light which is never extinguished by night or day.<sup>7</sup> There is not a single statue or votive offering, no trace of a plant, in the form of a sacred grove or the like.<sup>8</sup> Here priests pass their nights and days performing certain rites of purification, and abstaining altogether from wine while in the Temple.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Philo *In Flacc.* 46 (LCL, IX, 326–29); *Leg.* 278, 281, in which he “quotes” Agrippa’s speech to Gaius Caligula. For recent scholarship, see P. W. van der Horst, *Philo’s Flaccus: The First Pogyrom: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Philo of Alexandria Commentary Series 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 140–43. For an excellent discussion, see M. Niehoff, *Philo on Jewish Identity and Culture*, TSAJ 86 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 33–44.

<sup>6</sup> Opinion is divided as to whether the attribution here to Hecataeus is authentic or pseudepigraphic. See J. M. G. Barclay, “Appendix 2: Pseudo-Hecataeus,” in idem, *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary, X: Against Apion* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 338–40; C. T. R. Hayward, *The Jewish Temple: A Non-Biblical Sourcebook* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 18–20. Even if the attribution is pseudepigraphic and the dating is more likely mid-second century BCE, it would not affect my argument.

<sup>7</sup> This is based on an understanding of *תמיד* in Exod. 27:20 (for the menorah) and 30:8 (for the incense altar) as meaning “continuous” rather than “regularly.” Cf. Exod. 25:30 (for the shewbread) and Lev. 6:6 (for the sacrificial altar). See N. M. Sarna, *JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 176.

<sup>8</sup> For this absence of a statue or image of the Jewish deity, see Jos. *Ag. Apion* 2.73–78, 190–92; Hecataeus in Diod. 40.3.4. See also below, n. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Cited in Jos. *Ag. Apion* 1.194–99 (*GLAJ*), I, 36–37, 38–39). See also the commentary of Barclay, “Appendix 2,” 113–15. Hecataeus makes no mention here of the shewbread

Moving rapidly from the outside into the sanctuary proper, Hecataeus directs our attention to the incense altar and the menorah, whose fires burn continually. Contrary to what might be expected, he then notes, the innermost *sanctum* lacks a cultic statue (of the deity) or plant. This sacred space is the domain of the priests, who alone minister there in purity and sobriety.<sup>10</sup>

However, as central as Jerusalem and its Temple were to Jewish identity, and as numerous were its pilgrims during the thrice-annual festivals,<sup>11</sup> we must assume that most Jews, certainly the vast majority in the Diaspora, never set eyes upon the Temple, while those who did never penetrated beyond its outer walls and courtyards. Figural representations of the Temple and its sacred vessels in Second Temple times were very few and far between; only one such image, appearing on a late Hasmonean coin, was publicly visible, and then not for very long.<sup>12</sup>

Both the Hebrew Bible and the writings of Josephus reinforce the notion that the sacred vessels of the Temple, especially those located within the sanctuary (*heikhal*), were to be viewed only by the priests whose assigned task and training it was to minister to them. Thus, Num. 4:5–20 stresses that the Kohathites, a branch of the Levites responsible for transporting the

table, perhaps so as to better emphasize the uninterrupted flames of the incense altar and the menorah, but Josephus regularly mentions it elsewhere, together with the incense altar and the menorah: *Ag. Apion* 2.106; *War* 5.216–18; 7.148; *Ant.* 8.90, 104; 12.250; 14.72.

<sup>10</sup> The most holy region, the innermost Holy of Holies, would have been empty in the Second Temple, since the ark of the covenant was captured / lost / destroyed / hidden with the destruction of the First Temple and never restored. See Jer. 3:16; 2 Macc. 2:4–8; Eupolemus in Euseb. *Praep. Ev.* 9.39; Tac. *Hist.* 5.9.1; Jos. *War* 5.219; M Yoma 5, 2; M Sheqalim 6, 1–2 (see below, n. 57); T Sotah 13, 1. For discussion and additional references, see J. A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 41A (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 182–84; D. R. Schwartz, *The Second Book of Maccabees: Introduction, Hebrew Translation, and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2004), 88–90 (Hebrew).

<sup>11</sup> See Jos. *War* 6.420–25; Philo, *Spec.* 1.69. For a discussion of this aspect, see M. Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 61–62.

<sup>12</sup> For a description and discussion of the evidence, see L. I. Levine, “The History and Significance of the Menorah in Antiquity,” in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity*, ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss, JRSup 40 (Portsmouth, RI, 2000), 134–39. See also R. Hachlili, *The Menorah: The Ancient Seven-Armed Candelabrum: Origin, Form and Significance*, JSJSup 68 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 42–46. Most likely to have been publicly viewed are the coins issued by Mattathias Antigonus (40–37 BCE), our earliest datable depictions of the shewbread table (obverse) and the menorah (reverse). However, they would not have been in circulation for very long, presumably having been removed with Herod’s ascent to power. See Y. Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage, I: Persian Period through Hasmonaeans* (Dix Hills, NY: Amphora Books, 1982), 87–97. In an oral response to an earlier version of this paper, Steven Fine (see also below, n. 34) argued that, notwithstanding the limited number of figural representations of the menorah that survive from Second Temple times, they reflect wide diffusion and hence popular familiarity with the menorah’s appearance.

*sancta* (including the ark of the covenant, the shewbread table, the menorah, and the incense altar, all located within the sacred precinct of the sanctuary), were not permitted either to view or come into contact with the uncovered vessels lest they die (4:15, 20).<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Num. 18:1–7, 22–23 ensures that non-priests will not encroach on the *sancta*; the Levites were assigned guard duties outside the perimeter and entrances to the sacred precincts, but they themselves avoided having “any contact with the furnishings of the Shrine (כְּלֵי הַקֹּדֶשׁ) or with the altar,” again on penalty of death (v. 3). Likewise, v. 7 reads: וְאַתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ אֶחָד תִּשְׁמְרוּ אֵת כְּהֵנֶחֱכֶם לְכָל דְּבַר הַמִּצְוָה וְלִמְבִיט לַפְּרִכֶּת וְעַבְדָּתָם: (“You [Aaron] and your sons shall be careful to perform your priestly duties in everything pertaining to the altar and to what is behind the curtain. I make your priesthood a service of dedication; any outsider who encroaches shall be put to death”).<sup>14</sup>

In several accounts, Josephus states that the contents of the Temple’s holy precincts, and the Wilderness Tabernacle upon which it was conceptually, if not architecturally, modeled, were forbidden to be viewed by anyone but the high priests. Josephus’s account of Pompey’s conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE is particularly suggestive in this regard:

Of all the calamities of that time none so deeply affected the nation as the exposure to alien eyes of the Holy Place, hitherto screened from view. Pompey indeed, along with his staff, penetrated to the sanctuary, entry to which was permitted to none but the high priest, and beheld what it contained: the candelabrum and lamps, the table, the vessels for libation and censers, all of solid gold, an accumulation of spices and the store of sacred money amounting to two thousand talents. However, he touched neither these nor any other of the sacred treasures and, the very day after the capture of the Temple, gave orders to the custodians to cleanse it and to resume the customary sacrifices.<sup>15</sup>

It would appear that the greatest offense was not Pompey’s entry into the sacred precinct of the Temple, nor his physical contact with anything, but rather his gazing upon it, in particular upon the sacred vessels contained therein. Although a large part of the offense was undoubtedly the exposure of the *heikhal* and its *sancta* to Pompey’s “alien (*alophuloi*) eyes,” Josephus emphasizes that the *heikhal*, and thereby its *sancta*, were to be kept from view by all but the high priest. In a parallel account, Josephus states that prior to this incident the sanctuary “had never been entered or seen,” not

<sup>13</sup> There is disagreement among traditional commentators whether the Kohathites were prohibited from touching or seeing the *sancta* under any circumstances or only when being removed from the sanctuary for transport. See Ibn Ezra to Num. 4:20.

<sup>14</sup> See also Num. 1:51; 3:10, 38; Sifre–Numbers 116 (Horovitz, pp. 131–32); Sifre Zuta, Num. 18:2 (Horovitz, p. 291); M Middot 1, 1. For elaboration, see Excursuses 5 and 40 in J. Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 342–43, 423–24.

<sup>15</sup> *War* 1.152–53 (LCL, II, 70–71). Cf. Cic. *Flac.* 28.67–68. See above, n. 10.

just by non-Jews but by Jewish non-priests as well, since Pompey and his men “saw what was unlawful for any but the high priests to see.” Josephus furnishes details of the *sancta* contained therein.<sup>16</sup> This presumably represents the practice not just in Pompey’s time, but also as Josephus knew it to be in his own lifetime. He thus describes Titus, upon conquering the Temple in 70 CE, gazing upon the “holy place of the sanctuary and all that it contained – things far exceeding the reports current among foreigners and not inferior to their proud reputation among ourselves.”<sup>17</sup> Most Jews, like non-Jews, knew of the glory of the *heikhal*’s holy contents from reports and reputation alone. In sum, Josephus repeatedly stresses that the inner parts of the Temple and their sacred vessels, were not seen by anyone but the priests (and the occasional pagan conqueror).<sup>18</sup>

The Temple Scroll from Qumran (11Q19 III, 10–12) contains a few fragmentary lines that are relevant to our discussion. In a section commanding the construction of the Temple and its main vessels, after mention of the incense altar and the table (presumably of the shewbread), we read: לֹא יִבּוּשׁ

<sup>16</sup> *Ant.* 14.71–72 (LCL, VII, 483–85). Josephus similarly stresses the Wilderness Tabernacle’s sacred precinct being “invisible to the eyes of any,” while its next less-sacred area being “assigned to the priests alone.” *Ant.* 3.122, 123, 125 (LCL IV, 272–75). See also his account of Herod’s efforts to keep (Roman) “aliens” (*alophuloi*) from seeing the “holy contents of the sanctuary,” “objects not open to public view” (*War* 1.354–55), or “things forbidden to men’s eyes” (*Ant.* 14.482–83). Note as well Josephus’s account (*Ant.* 20.189–96) of Agrippa’s view of the sacrificial rites in the Temple from his palace, which so bothered the priestly authorities that they built a wall to block his view. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.128; cf. Exod. 26:36–37) describes an outer linen curtain-screen to the wilderness sanctuary, possibly a retrojection from the Second Temple, which would be pulled back on certain days, “in order that it should not intercept the view, above all on the great days,” presumably referring to the view of the high priest or priests on sacred days.

<sup>17</sup> *War* 6.260 (LCL, III, 450–51). Of course Titus’s regard for the Temple *sancta* is portrayed very differently on the Arch of Titus in Rome, on which the shewbread table and menorah are triumphantly displayed as spoils of Titus’s conquest of Jerusalem and, by extension, the Jewish nation. See below, n. 28. Compare Sifre–Deuteronomy 328 (Finkelstein, pp. 378–79, with later rabbinic parallels and expansions listed in Finkelstein’s note ad loc.) attributed to R. Nehemiah (ca. 150 CE): “Titus entered the Holy of Holies, cut the two curtains (of the ark) with his sword, and said, ‘If He is God, let him come and interfere.’” For an early parallel, with slight variations, from the (previously lost) Mekhilta, Deut. 32:37, see M. I. Kahana, *The Geniza Fragments of Halakhic Midrashim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005), 354 (Hebrew).

<sup>18</sup> For other passages that stress the inaccessibility and invisibility of the inner sanctuary to all but the high priest, see 3 Macc. 1:9–2:24 (with which cf. 2 Macc. 3:13–28); Jos. *Ant.* 12.145; 15:419–20; Philo *Spec.* 1.72 (where even the high priest’s view is obstructed). There is no evidence from Josephus that he, as a priest, ever saw the contents of the *heikhal*. Compare M Middot 4, 5, according to which workers who needed to perform repair work on the Holy of Holies were lowered from the roof in specially constructed, enclosed boxes, “so that they should not feast their eyes on the Holy of Holies, כְּדִי שְׂלֵא יִזְנוּ אוֹת עֵינֵיהֶן מִבֵּית קוֹדֶשׁ הַקֹּדֶשִׁים.”

בן המקדש ([it] shall not be removed / lacking<sup>19</sup> from the Temple”). However, the half line-or-so between השולחן (“the table”) and לא ימוש בן המקדש (“shall not be removed / lacking from the Temple”) is missing from the manuscript and might be restored in various ways.<sup>20</sup> Since what precedes (incense altar) and follows (bowls, censers, and menorah) deal with the Temple vessels, presumably what is not to “be removed / lacking” is the table itself, although it is possible that the missing words referred to the shewbread (לחם הפנים).<sup>21</sup> The text here is most likely an exegetical paraphrase of Exod. 25:30 (with which cf. Num. 4:7), ונתת על השולחן לחם פנים לפני תמיד (“And on the table you shall set the bread of display, to be before Me always” [NJPS]), with the last two words paraphrased by the Temple Scroll as לא ימוש בן המקדש (“[it] shall not be removed / lacking from the Temple”). This preserves the same ambiguity (but enhanced by the lacuna) as to whether it is the table or the bread, or both, that is to be perpetually present in the Temple. If the shewbread is what is referred to in the lacuna, then the Temple Scroll could be intending that although the shewbread is changed weekly, there is always (תמיד) to be bread on the table in the Temple.<sup>22</sup>

In either case, I see no reason to view this, as some have, as a polemic against a contrary group or practice (removing the table with its loaves of bread from the Temple for public display, according to significantly later talmudic statements).<sup>23</sup> Rather, it should be understood as a clarification of the ambiguous expression, לפני תמיד (“before Me always”) with תמיד (“al-

<sup>19</sup> For the former, transitive, meaning of the verb מוש in Scripture, see Exod. 13:22; 33:11; Num. 14:44. For the latter, intransitive, meaning, see Josh. 1:8. The latter is also the meaning in 1QS 6, 3, 6.

<sup>20</sup> For text and comment, including a possible restoration of the missing words, see Y. Yadin, *The Temple Scroll, II: Text and Commentary* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1983), 7. For another possible restoration of the missing words, see E. Qimron, *The Temple Scroll: A Critical Edition with Extensive Reconstructions* (Beersheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 1996), 12.

<sup>21</sup> See Yadin’s note, ad loc.

<sup>22</sup> The Temple Scroll’s paraphrase may also reflect the influence of 1 Sam. 21:7 (“the bread of the presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away”, לחם הפנים המוסרים מלפני ה’ לשום לחם הם ביום הלקחו), which could suggest a temporal gap between when the old bread was removed and the new bread replaced it every Sabbath day. The English translation of 1 Sam. 21:7 that I have provided is from the NRSV. However, the NJPS renders the end of the verse as, “as soon as it was taken,” allowing no time for the table to be without bread. Both of these translations reflect the ambiguity of the scriptural verse; consider also Num. 4:7: לחם התמיד: 12.

<sup>23</sup> See I. Knohl, “Post-Biblical Sectarianism and the Priestly Schools of the Pentateuch: The Issue of Popular Participation in the Temple Cult on Festivals,” in *The Madrid Qumran Congress: Proceedings of the International Congress on the Dead Sea Scrolls – Madrid, 18–21 March, 1991*, ed. J. Trebolle Barrera and L. Vegas Montaner, 2 vols., STDJ 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), II, 605–606; idem, “Participation of the People in the Temple Worship – Second Temple Sectarian Conflict and the Biblical Tradition,” *Tarbiz* 60 (1991–92), 143–44 (Hebrew). See also below, n. 31.

ways”) to be understood to mean “continually” rather than “regularly” (as in Exod. 27:20 for the menorah). Given this explanation, the table with its shewbread loaves are to be continually and perpetually לפני (“before Me”), i. e., in the Temple proper, and are never to be removed / lacking therefrom. Even if we presume that the text of the Temple Scroll prohibits specifically the removal of the shewbread table from the Temple, it is not at all clear from the text for what purposes the table would have been so removed.<sup>24</sup> In any case, the fragmentary nature of the extant Temple Scroll text makes it impossible to know for certain.

Thus, we find no evidence in Second Temple sources that anyone other than the priests had access to the principal holy vessels within the *heikhal*, or that they were ever removed from there to be viewed by anyone other than the priests. Indeed, a fair amount of evidence mitigates against such possibilities. If they did so at all, the great majority of Jews would have visualized the Temple, and especially its inner contents, based on either oral reports or detailed textual representations, both biblical and post-biblical.<sup>25</sup>

Yet, it is even more difficult to evaluate the impact of the visual depiction of the menorah and shewbread table as the spoils of Roman triumph on the surviving Arch of Titus in Rome on the Velia, dating from shortly

<sup>24</sup> For example, M Hagigah 3, 7–8 (to be treated below) appears to forbid priestly touching of the shewbread table and menorah for purposes of purification, which would have required their removal from the *heikhal* for immersion after the pilgrimage festivals. Similarly, T Hagigah 3, 35 (also to be treated below) refers to the immersion of the shewbread table for purposes of purification, and to a dispute between the Pharisees and the Sadducees as to whether the menorah required such immersion. I shall argue that neither of these passages suggests the removal of the shewbread table (or menorah) for purposes of public display during the festivals, as has been presumed on the basis of later talmudic traditions. If we are to elucidate the Temple Scroll with a later rabbinic text, it would be better to do so with the Mishnah and Tosefta than with significantly later talmudic texts, as some have done (see above, n. 23). For further elucidation, see below my treatment of the relevant rabbinic passages. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Shlomo Naeh in clarifying my thinking about this passage.

<sup>25</sup> For the biblical representations of the Temple and its worship as visualizations, see G. Anderson, “‘As We Have Heard So We Have Seen’: The Iconography of Zion,” *Conservative Judaism* 54 (2002), 50–59; idem, “Towards a Theology of the Tabernacle and its Furniture,” Ninth Orion International Symposium: Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity, January 11–13, 2004, <<http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/symposiums/9th/papers/AndersonPaper.pdf>>. See also P. R. Ackroyd, “The Temple Vessels: A Continuity Theme,” in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VTSup 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1972): 166–81. For Second Temple astral interpretations of the meaning of the menorah, see Philo *Her.* 225; *Mos.* 2.102, 105; *Jos.*, *War* 5.217; *Ant.* 3.145–46. For the spiritualization of the earthly Sanctuary / Temple and its sacred implements, requiring their inaccessibility to all but priests, see Heb. 9:1–22. For a good collection of Second Temple sources relevant to the Temple, see Hayward, *Jewish Temple*. For literary representations of the Second Temple as intended to both attract and elude the “eyes” of foreigners (Romans), see S. Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege: Cultural Persistence in Jewish Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 79–95.

after Titus's death in 81 CE,<sup>26</sup> as well as their display in the Temple of Peace (*Templum Pacis*).<sup>27</sup> It is uncertain how much of an impression these would have made on Jews outside of Rome, as the Arch of Titus is never mentioned in rabbinic sources. While there are several references to second-century rabbinic viewings of captured Temple objects in Rome, it is unclear whether they would have been viewable after the Temple of Peace was largely destroyed by fire in 192 CE.<sup>28</sup>

### A Late Second Temple Narrative Based on Later Rabbinic Sources

Notwithstanding a lack of evidence in Second Temple sources, and based on significantly later rabbinic sources, a contrary narrative has been adduced by a long list of distinguished scholars of ancient Jewish history and rabbinic literature: In late Second Temple times, at the initiative of the Pharisees but with opposition from the Sadducees, efforts were made to make Tem-

<sup>26</sup> For a description of the triumphal pageant, see Jos. *War* 7.146–52. See also *ibid.*, 6.387–91.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.158–62. For the possible hope that Rome would restore these, see Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege*, 94–95. For the belief that the sacred contents of the Temple (both First and Second) had been spared foreign capture and violation by being hidden away until their eschatological restoration, see 2 Macc. 2:1–8; 2 Bar. 6:4–10. See also above, n. 10.

<sup>28</sup> There was another, slightly earlier, triumphal Arch of Titus on the hemicycle of the Circus Maximus, dedicated in early 81 CE and similarly commemorating Titus's vanquishing of Jerusalem, but it has not survived. It is, therefore, unknown whether it would have contained similar representations of the Temple spoils. See F. Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome*, ed. J. Edmondson et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101–28. On the symbolic meaning of the Arch of Titus's depiction of the capture of the Temple *sancta*, see most recently, J. Magness, "The Arch of Titus at Rome and the Fate of the God of Israel," *JJS* 59/2 (2008), 201–217; Weitzman, *Surviving Sacrilege*, 93–95. On viewing and knowledge of Temple *sancta* in Rome in rabbinic literature, see S. Fine, "When I Went to Rome ... There I Saw the Menorah ...": The Jerusalem Temple Implements during the Second Century C.E.," in *Archaeology of Difference: Gender, Ethnicity, Class and the "Other" in Antiquity: Studies in Honor of Eric M. Meyers*, ed. D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough, AASOR 60/61 (Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2007), 171–82; D. Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome: A Jewish Pilgrimage in Reverse?" in *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods*, ed. J. Elsner and I. Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373–85; Boustán, "Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple," 327–72. On the subsequent fate of the Temple *sancta*, whether in reality or in imagination, see L. Yarden, *The Spoils of Jerusalem on the Arch of Titus: a Re-investigation* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1991), 64–65; Noy, "Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome," 383–84; M. Beard, *The Roman Triumph* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 152–53; and Boustán, "Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple," 356–62. On Bar Kokhba coinage with respect to the shewbread table, see below, n. 85.

ple worship more accessible to the laity, especially during the pilgrimage festivals. In order for all of Israel to worship as one, the normal rules of ritual purity and graded holiness<sup>29</sup> had to be relaxed so as to allow greater social, religious, and economic intercourse between those who were strict (the *haberim*) and those who were lax (the '*ammei ha-'aretz*') in their purity practices. On such occasions, the Temple *sancta*, especially the shewbread table and the menorah, would be brought from the *heikhal*, either into the courtyard of the priests, to which access by the laity was now allowed, or into the entrance to the *heikhal* that separated the two, so that the lay worshippers who thronged to the Temple would be able to see and marvel at these sacred vessels and be religiously inspired by the experience of what was otherwise inaccessible to them. Following the festival, the Temple *sancta* would require ritual purification due to their contact with either the laity or lax priests.<sup>30</sup>

Here are a few of the most recent expressions of this narrative: "The dominant tendency of Pharisee custom is the removal of barriers on the festival days, to allow the people to experience proximity to the holy. This tendency is realized through a two-way movement: the sanctified ritual objects move from the holy area – the sanctuary – outwards, while the people penetrate the inner sanctified area where they may not set foot during the rest of the year."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, "The Pharisees' primary goal was to enable the general public to participate as extensively as possible in Temple life and religious worship ... [but the Sadducees were shocked] when they saw how the candelabrum was defiled by the ignorant common people, who were seemingly encouraged by the Pharisees."<sup>32</sup> Likewise, "On the three yearly feasts ... the custom was observed of taking the holy vessels (the menorah and shewbread table) out to the Temple court. This was done so that the

<sup>29</sup> For the term and concept, see P. P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*, JSOTSup 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992). Cf. Jos. *Ag. Apion* 2.102–109; M. Kelim 1, 8–9.

<sup>30</sup> This narrative is vaguely reminiscent of Josephus's account of the High Priest's sacred vestments, which were stored away in the Antonia and only removed so as to be worn (and publicly viewed?) during the three pilgrimage festivals and the Day of Atonement. According to Josephus, Herod, Archelaus, and the subsequent Roman procurators, from 6 until 37 CE, kept the vestments from the high priests, except during the festivals and Day of Atonement, as a way of maintaining control over the Temple and priesthood. The high priest's sacred vestments would be delivered by the Romans one week prior to their use so they could be purified, having been in gentile custody; see *Ant.* 15.407; 18.90–95; 20.6–14.

<sup>31</sup> Knohl, "Post-Biblical Sectarianism," 602; *idem*, "Participation of the People in the Temple Worship," 140 (Hebrew).

<sup>32</sup> Y. Sussmann, "The History of *Halakha* and the Dead Sea Scrolls – Preliminary Observations on *Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah* (4QMMT)," *Tarbiz* 59 (1989–90), 65–68 (Hebrew). For an English translation, but without all of the notes, see *Qumran Cave 4: V. Miqsat Ma'ase Ha-Torah*, ed. E. Qimron and J. Strugnell, DJD 10 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), Appendix 1: "The History of the *Halakha* and the Dead Sea Scrolls," 198–99.



people who came for the celebrations of the feast could approach them and gaze on them ... These customs were not particularly connected to the pilgrimage itself but were intended more to show the people the splendour of the sanctuary and its vessels."<sup>33</sup> And most recently, "the Temple vessels were seen by large numbers of Jews in first-century Judaea. Their forms were far from being esoteric knowledge."<sup>34</sup> As far as I can tell, only one scholar has questioned this narrative on evidentiary grounds, but only in a footnote.<sup>35</sup>

This tradition is based on two tannaitic texts, one from the Mishnah and one from the Tosefta, both of which are usually read in light of later talmudic traditions, but neither of which necessarily requires to be so read. Mishnah Ḥagigah, chapter 3, contains rules relating to degrees of ritual purity for various kinds of foods and sacrificial offerings, along with determinations of who may be considered trustworthy with regard to the handling of such foods and offerings. Therein we find *mishnayot* 7–8, according to our best manuscript evidence:

[7] משעבר הרגל היו מעבירין על שחרת עזרה. עבר הרגל ביום (חמישי) [השישי] לא היו מעבירין מפני כבוד השבת. רבי יהודה אומר, אף לא ביום חמישי שאין הכהנים פנויים.  
[8] כיצד מעבירין על שחרת עזרה. משבילין את הכלים שהיו במקדש ואומין להם. והדרו שלא תגעו בשלחן ובמנורה. כל הכלים שהיו במקדש היו להם שניים ושלישים. שאם נטמו הראשונים יביא

<sup>33</sup> Hachlili, *Menorah*, 178.

<sup>34</sup> S. Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology* (Cambridge, Eng. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150. For other scholarly endorsements of this view, in chronological order, see: S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judaean State: A Political, Social and Religious History of the Second Commonwealth*, I: 332–37 B.C.E. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), 179–81; S. Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah: A Comprehensive Commentary on the Tosefta*, V: *Order Mo'ed* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962), 1335–36, esp. 1335 n. 72 (Hebrew); S. Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple* (Tel Aviv: Am Hasefer, 1965), 143–44, 179–80 (Hebrew); E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 582–83; D. R. Schwartz, "Viewing the Holy Utensils (P Ox V, 840)," *NTS* 32 (1986), 156, 158 nn. 28, 29; A. Grossberg, "On D. Barag, 'The Table for Shewbread and the Façade of the Temple on the Bar Kokhba Coins,'" *Qadmoniot* 21 (1988), 56–57 (Hebrew); S. Naeh, "Did the Tannaim Interpret the Script of the Torah Differently from the Authorized Reading?" *Tarbiz* 61 (1992), 417 n. 50 (Hebrew); H. Maccoby, "Pharisee and Sadducee Interpretation of the Menorah as 'Tamid,'" *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 3 (1994), 5–13; E. Regev, "Pure Individualism: The Idea of Non-Priestly Purity in Ancient Judaism," *JSJ* 31 (2000), 194–95; Anderson, "Towards a Theology," 13–24; E. Regev, *The Sadducees and their Halakhah: Religion and Society in the Second Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2005), 198–200 (Hebrew).

<sup>35</sup> Levine, "History and Significance of the Menorah," 137 n. 32: "The lateness of these sources and the fact that they became more and more embellished as time went by raises serious questions as to their historicity, particularly that of the Yerushalmi." See also D. Barag's response to A. Grossberg (above, n. 34), in *Qadmoniot* 21 (1988), 57. Most recently, see Boustain, "Spoils of the Jerusalem Temple," 342: "While these rabbinic 'memories' of the Jerusalem cult likely do not reflect historical practice per se, they shaped rabbinic speculation concerning the fate of the Temple vessels." See also *ibid.*, 25–26.

שניים חתיהם. כל הכלים שהיו במקדש טעונים טבילה חוץ ממזבח הזהב ומזבח הנחשת. מפני שהן כקרקע. דברי ר' אליעזר וחכמי אומין. מפני שהן מצופים.<sup>36</sup>

- [7] After the festival was finished, they attended<sup>37</sup> to the purification of the [Temple] court. If the festival was finished on Friday, they did not attend [to it on Friday] because of the honor of the Sabbath. R. Judah says: Also not on Thursday, for the priests would not [yet] be free [from their other duties].
- [8] How do they attend to the purification of the court? They immerse the vessels that were in the Temple, and they say to them [the priests]: "Be careful lest you touch the [shewbread] table and the menorah."<sup>38</sup> All of the vessels that were in the Temple had seconds and thirds, so that if the originals were rendered impure, they would bring the seconds in their place. All of the vessels that were in the Temple require immersion, except for the altar of gold and the altar of bronze, because they are [considered] as earth. These are the words of R. Eliezer. But the sages say: Because they are plated [with metal].

Many details in these two *mishnayot* demand clarification, and much has been written on them. For our purposes, the Mishnah either remembers or imagines a situation in which following the three pilgrimage festivals, in conjunction with the purification of the Temple courtyard, the Temple vessels needed to be immersed for purposes of ritual purification. This was presumably out of concern that in the course of the festival they could have been handled by persons, presumably priests, who had or might have contracted ritual impurity. There is no reason to assume from this concern that the vessels would have come into direct contact with the laity. Such fears of defilement would have been particularly appropriate to the festivals because of the vastly larger number of worshippers and sacrifices, and the participation of a larger number of non-regular priests, making it all the more difficult to maintain normal purity standards, regardless of whether they were somewhat relaxed for the festival.<sup>39</sup>

Of particular interest to us, in the present context, is the way in which the shewbread table and the menorah, the two holiest items in the inner sacred precinct, the *heikhal*, are singled out for special attention. The simplest un-

<sup>36</sup> The text is that of MS Kaufmann, with punctuation following the database of the Academy of the Hebrew Language. Except for minor orthographic differences, it agrees with that of MS Parma. The correction in 3, 7, suggested also by the database of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, agrees with the printed editions and how the Mishnah is generally understood, the last day of the festival being Thursday, having been completed by Friday.

<sup>37</sup> For various understandings of the meaning of מעבירין, see Albeck's addenda, 515; and the commentary of the Meiri (R. Menahem ben Solomon, 1249–1316), ad loc.

<sup>38</sup> The Hebrew word "and the menorah" appears in MSS Kaufmann and Parma but not in MS Cambridge or in the Mishnah as cited in the Babylonian Talmud, however it appears in a *baraita* in B Ḥagigah 26b.

<sup>39</sup> On another tannaitic tradition of lay Israelites being allowed to enter the priestly courtyard for some pilgrimage festivities, see below, n. 66.

derstanding, according to the mishnaic sequence, is that the priests purifying the Temple courtyard following the festival were warned not to touch those two sacred items within the *beikhal*.<sup>40</sup> Although some Mishnah witnesses add, as an explanatory gloss, that they should not touch it (the table) והטמאוהו (“and [thereby] render it impure”), this gloss need not be required of the mishnaic text in its best Palestinian witnesses.<sup>41</sup> As several commentators suggest, the shewbread table and the menorah – unlike the other, lesser vessels – were unsusceptible to contracting impurity, as a function of either their physical composition or immovability; even if susceptible to ritual contamination, they were not to be removed from their fixed places for the purpose of immersion.<sup>42</sup> In any case, there is no reason to assume that the mishnaic text presumes or requires a narrative (only evidenced much later) of these sacred ritual items’ having been removed from their normal places in the *beikhal* for purposes of public viewing during the festival.

The following Tosefta (Ḥagigah 3, 35) discusses the same subject as the Mishnah, but in somewhat different terms, and therefore need not fully accord with it:

שלחן שנתמא מטבילין אותו בזמנו ואפילו בשבת. מעשה והטבילו את המנורה ביום טוב והיו צ(ר)[ד]וקין אותו. בואו וראו פרושין שמשבילין מאור הלכנה.<sup>43</sup>

A [shewbread] table which is rendered ritually impure is immersed at its appropriate time, even on the Sabbath. It once happened that when they immersed the menorah during the festival, the Sadducees said: “Come and see, the Pharisees immerse the light of the moon.”

<sup>40</sup> Others understand this to be a warning issued to the priests during the festival not to defile the shewbread table and the menorah while handling them, or to the lax laity (*‘ammei ha-‘arets*) not to touch them during the festival. For the latter, see the reworking of our Mishnah in Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Metam’ei Mishkav u’Moshav Laws* 11, 11, with which see *Mishneh La-Melekh*, ad loc. However, the order of the mishnaic text would favor seeing this as a warning to the priests engaged in purifying the Temple courtyard following the festival.

<sup>41</sup> This does not appear in MSS Kaufmann and Parma, but does appear in MS Cambridge, where the word has a singular pronominal suffix since it is preceded by the table alone and not the menorah. The same reading is the basis of the commentary in the Babylonian Talmud.

<sup>42</sup> See the comments of the Meiri, who, in his *Beit Ha-behirah*, ad loc., offers both possibilities, and who is also cited approvingly by R. Rabbinovitz in *Diqduqei Soferim*, facsimile of 1868 ed. (Jerusalem: Or Hahokhma, 2002), ad loc.; see also Maccoby, “Pharisee and Sadducee Interpretation.” For the shewbread (or shewbread table) as *tamid*, see Exod. 25:30; Lev. 24:8; Num. 4:7. For the menorah as *tamid*, see Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2. See also Maimonides’s commentary ad loc. and Albeck’s addenda, 515. If the meaning of the Mishnah is that the shewbread table and menorah are not to be purified, then they would be excluded from the following inclusive language, “all of the vessels that were in the Temple ...” (twice).

<sup>43</sup> The text is that of MS Vienna, with punctuation following the database of the Academy of the Hebrew Language.

Once again, there are difficulties here that have occasioned much exertion at explanation on the part of commentators. We are not told when or how, during normal use, the shewbread table might be defiled, but only that it should be immersed at its proper time, which is commonly understood to refer to the brief period on the Sabbath between the removal of the previous week’s loaves and the placing of the new ones on the table.<sup>44</sup> The intent would seem to be to cause the least possible disruption to the loaves’ continual presence within the Temple (לְפָנֵי הַכֹּהֲנִים).<sup>45</sup> With respect to the menorah, the specific incident reported here was presumably one of its defilement during a festival, without any indication of how or by whom, and with its purification occurring during the festival as well. The Pharisees, here imagined to have directed Temple affairs, are assumed to have ordered or overseen the immersion over the objection of the Sadducees. Some scholars have suggested that the objection of the Sadducees concerned the source of ritual impurity (liquids), while others have argued that the disagreement was over whether the menorah was ever susceptible to ritual impurity, thereby rendering its immersion superfluous.<sup>46</sup> At stake both here and in the previously discussed *mishnayot* is the question of whether or in what circumstances the shewbread table and the menorah were considered “vessels” with respect to ritual impurity. However understood, there is no reason to presume that behind this Tosefta lies a narrative of the shewbread table and/or the menorah having been defiled as a result of their public display during the festival.

Where, then, does this tradition originate? It is first mentioned in the Palestinian Talmud (Ḥagigah 3, 8, 79d), as an aside, in elaborating on the mishnaic disagreement between R. Eliezer and the sages regarding the insusceptibility of the two altars to impurity:

<sup>44</sup> Alternatively, and perhaps preferably, בזמנו could mean that the shewbread table is to be immersed immediately upon being rendered impure, that is, without delay, even on the Sabbath. For purposes of my argument, it makes no difference which understanding is preferred.

<sup>45</sup> See Exod. 25:30; Lev. 24:8; Num. 4:7; as well as my discussion of the Temple Scroll (11Q19 III, 10–12), above, nn. 19–24.

<sup>46</sup> For the former, see Lieberman, following David Pardo, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah*, 1336. For the latter, see J. Baumgarten, “Immunity to Impurity and the Menorah,” *Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal* 5 (2006), 141–45. Maccoby (“Pharisee and Sadducee Interpretation,” 5–13) argues that the Sadducees considered the menorah to be as immovable (*tamid*) as the moon (or sun, according to the variant in Y Ḥagigah 3, 8, 79d). Sussmann (“History of Halakha,” 65–68) has argued that the Sadducees were protesting Pharisaic “liberalism” in allowing popular access to the *sancta*, which caused the defilement of the menorah. However, this explanation seems extraneous to the Tosefta itself, as noted by Baumgarten.



לא כן אמר ר' אמי בשם ר' שמעון בן לקיש. השולחן למה טמא. לא מפני שמוציאין אותו ומראין אותו לעולי רגלים. וזה לא במקומו הוא עומד.<sup>47</sup>

Is it not that R. Ammi said in the name of R. Shim'on b. Laqish: Why is the [shewbread] table susceptible to impurity? Is it not because they take it out and show it to the pilgrims for the festival? And as to this one [the incense altar], does it not stay in its place?

Behind this statement, attributed to Resh Laqish who flourished in mid-third-century Tiberias, lies the question, already suggested by the Mishnah and the Tosefta, as to which of the Temple *sancta* were susceptible to ritual impurity and which were not, apparently there having been disagreements with regard to the shewbread table and the menorah in particular. Resh Laqish's view is that the shewbread table would not have been susceptible to impurity had it remained in its fixed place in the *heikhal*, but became susceptible when it was removed to be shown to the pilgrims during the festival. While a larger tradition lies behind this citation, we have no way of knowing from the Palestinian Talmud whether the tradition originated before Resh Laqish or how and why the shewbread table was removed from its fixed place in the *heikhal* during the festival.

Some of that larger Palestinian tradition may be gleaned from the Babylonian Talmud. However, it is just as possible that the fuller version of the tradition in the Babylonian Talmud is the product of continuous elaboration and interpretation, whether Palestinian or Babylonian, or both, of the laconic tradition first attributed to Resh Laqish in the Palestinian Talmud and of its relation to the passages in Mishnah and Tosefta Ḥagigah previously considered. B Ḥagigah 26b, in discussing the meaning of the mishnaic “be careful lest you touch the [shewbread] table,”<sup>48</sup> provides arguments for the insusceptibility of the shewbread table to impurity on the grounds that a stationary wooden vessel does not contract impurity, and then cites an exegetical tradition to the contrary, once again in the name of Resh Laqish:

דאמר ריש לקיש: מאי דכתיב “על השולחן הטהור” – מכלל שהוא טמא. ואמאי? כלי עץ העשוי לנחת הוא, ואינו מקבל טומאה! אלא מלמד שמנביחין אותו, ומראין בו לעולי רגלים לחם הפנים, ואומרים להם: ראו חיבתכם לפני המקום, סילוקו כסידורו. דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: נס גדול נעשה בלחם הפנים – כסידורו כך סילוקו, שנאמר “לשום לחם חם ביום הלקחו.”<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The text is according to MS Leiden, as represented and punctuated by Y. Sussmann, *Talmud Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem: Academy of the Hebrew Language, 2001), col. 800.

<sup>48</sup> The Bavli, while having before it the shorter version (without the menorah), knows of a variant *baraita* that includes the menorah, which it cites for comparison.

<sup>49</sup> The text here follows the standard Vilna printed edition, as represented in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project database. I have compared the printed text with that of MS Munich, whose variants are insignificant for present purposes.

For Resh Laqish said: What is the meaning of the verse, “Upon the pure table” (Lev. 24:6)? From the general condition that it is susceptible to impurity.<sup>50</sup> Why? It is a wooden vessel that is stationary, and therefore does not contract impurity. Rather, this teaches that they [the priests] would lift it and display to the festival pilgrims the shewbread upon it. And they would say to them: “See how beloved you are to the Omnipresent. It is [as fresh] in its removal as it is in its setting down.” As R. Joshua b. Levi (ca. 235) said: A great miracle was performed with the shewbread, it was [as fresh] in its setting down as it was in its removal, as it is said, “To place warm bread on the day of its being taken away” (1 Sam. 21:7).<sup>51</sup>

Here we are told that in order to impress upon the pilgrims God's love for Israel – as manifested in the miracle of the shewbread that remained unchanged (perhaps an interpretation of *תָּמִיד*<sup>52</sup>) for one week after baking – the priests would lift the shewbread table with the warm bread upon it, presumably bringing it to the entrance of the *heikhal*, to show it to the throng of worshippers in the courtyard outside. It is unclear, however, whether the narrative of the moving of the table and the display of the shewbread, sandwiched between Resh Laqish's interpretation of Lev. 24:6 (the table is susceptible to impurity) and R. Joshua b. Levi's interpretation of 1 Sam. 21:7 (the miracle of the bread), can be attributed to either or dated to their time and place in the early- to mid-third-century Palestine.<sup>53</sup>

As the text is presently assembled, the idea of the miracle of the unchanged bread, which when brought to the view of the assembled worshippers would impress them as a sign of God's love for them, seems a bit strange and perhaps contrived, notwithstanding the exegetical issues that it resolves. But it takes on deeper meaning when compared to the following *sugyah* in B Yoma 54a–b, in which the named sages are all third- and fourth-century Babylonian *amoraim*, except for Resh Laqish at the end; perhaps this reflects more of a Babylonian reworking of Palestinian traditions in a Persian cultural context:

ויאמר רב קטינא: בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מנללין להם את הפרוכת, ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה, ואומרים להן: ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה. מתיב רב חסדא: “ולא יבאו לראות כבלע את הקדש”, ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: בשעת הכנסת כלים לנרתיק

<sup>50</sup> MS Munich has: “The pure is pure because of its general condition of (susceptibility to) being impure.” That is, it is only called “pure” because of the possibility of its being impure.

<sup>51</sup> Understood as, “To place bread [which will still be warm] on the day that it is taken away.” Alternatively, perhaps *ביום* is being read as *כיום*: “To place bread [which is as] warm as on the day that it is taken away.”

<sup>52</sup> See above, n. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Compare B Menaḥot 29a, 96b, and B Yoma 21a–b, where the same three elements (Resh Laqish, R. Joshua b. Levi, and the removal and display of the shewbread table) are combined, with somewhat different emphases and in a different order in B Yoma 21a–b; see also Yalqut Shim'on, 1 Sam., 130.

שלהם! – אמר רב נחמן: משל לכלה, כל זמן שהיא בבית אביה – צנועה מבעלה, כיון שבאה לבית חמיה – אינה צנועה מבעלה. מתיב רב חנא בר רב קטינא: מעשה בכהן אחד שהיה מחפסק וכו'! – אמר ליה: נתגרשה קא אמרת, נתגרשה – חזרו לחיבתה הראשונה. במאי עסקינן? אי נימא במקדש ראשון – מי הוא פרוכת? אלא במקדש שני – מי הוא כרובים? – לעולם במקדש ראשון, ומאי פרוכת – פרוכת דבבי. דאמר רבי זורא אמר רב: שלשה עשר פרוכות היו במקדש... רב אחא בר יעקב אמר: לעולם במקדש שני, וכרובים דצורחא הוא קיימין. דכתיב: "ואת כל קירות הבית מסב קלע... כרובים ותמורה..." אמר ריש לקיש: בשעה שנכנסו נכרים להיכל ראו כרובים המעורין זה בזה, הוציאו לשוב ואמרו: ישראל הללו, שברכתן ברכה וקללתן קללה, יעסקו ברברים הללו? מיד הוילום, שנאמר "כל מכבדיה הוילוח כי ראו ערותה".<sup>54</sup>

Rav Qattina (ca. 250) said: Whenever Israel came up [to the Temple] for the festival, they [the priests] would roll back the curtain [before the ark] for them and would show them the [two] cherubim, whose bodies were intertwined one with the other, and would say to them: "See how beloved you are to the Omnipresent, as the love between male and female." Rav H̄isda (ca. 300) objected: "They shall not enter to look at the sacred objects even for a moment [lest they die]" (Num. 4:20), in connection with which Rav Judah (ca. 250) said in the name of Rav (ca. 230): At the time when the vessels were being put in their cases. Rav Naḥman (ca. 300) said: This may be compared to a bride. So long as she is in her father's house, she acts modestly with respect to her husband.<sup>55</sup> But when she comes to her father-in-law's house, she no longer acts modestly with respect to her husband.<sup>56</sup> Rav son of Rav Qattina (ca. 300) objected: It once happened that a priest who was busying himself, etc.<sup>57</sup> He [Rav Naḥman] responded to him: You speak of a woman who is divorced. When she is divorced, she returns to her first level of intimacy [modesty].<sup>58</sup> Of what circumstances are we speaking [when the curtain was rolled back]? If we say the reference is to the First Temple, was there a curtain [in front of the ark]? But if the reference is to the Second Temple, were there cherubim (as there was no ark)?<sup>59</sup> The reference must be to the First Temple, and "curtain" must refer to the curtain of the gates, as R. Zeira (ca. 300) said in the name of Rav: There were thirteen curtains in the Temple... Rab Aḥa b. Jacob (ca. 350) said: The reference must be to the Second Temple, wherein were painted cherubim, as it is written, "And he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved figures of cherubim and palms..." (1 Kings 6:29, 35; 7:36)... Resh Laqish said:<sup>60</sup> When the gentiles entered the *beikhal* and saw the cherubim, whose bodies were intertwined one with the other, they brought them

<sup>54</sup> The text here follows the standard Vilna printed edition, as represented in the Bar-Ilan Responsa Project database. I have compared the printed text with that of MS Munich, whose variants are insignificant for present purposes.

<sup>55</sup> That is, before the First Temple is built the *sancta* are not to be viewed.

<sup>56</sup> That is, once the First Temple is built the *sancta* could be viewed.

<sup>57</sup> This refers to a story previously told (see also M Sheqalim 6, 2) of a priest who accidentally glanced upon a part of the floor in the Second Temple compound where the First Temple's ark was hidden, and was instantly killed for the disrespect that he showed toward it.

<sup>58</sup> The Jews of Second Temple times, following the Babylonian exile, are like divorcees from God, returning to their pre-marital modesty, and are thus unable to view the Temple *sancta*.

<sup>59</sup> See above, n. 10.

<sup>60</sup> See Lamentations Rabbah, proem 9 (Buber, p. 8); Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 19, 1 (Mandelbaum, p. 301).

out into the market and said: These Israelites, whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, occupy themselves with such things? And immediately they [the gentiles] despised them, as it is said, "All who honored her despised her, for they saw her nakedness" (Lam. 1:8).

Here again we find the motif of the Temple *sancta* being displayed to the festival pilgrims. In this tradition, however, the innermost curtain is pulled back to reveal to the people the intertwined cherubim above the holy ark, thus proclaiming, once again, God's complete and exclusive love for them. But now the memory or imagination has taken a turn to the truly fantastic and erotic, with the cherubim representing God and Israel as male and female, husband and wife, in unobstructed and unabashed physical embrace. This image is particularly striking, considering that the scriptural descriptions of the sanctuary cherubim do not portray them as being of opposite genders; they simply face each other, with, at most, their extended wings touching but with nothing to suggest a bodily, sexual embrace. The rabbinic imagining of what is otherwise concealed (and lost) would seem to evoke a fantasy of cultic eroticism.<sup>61</sup> No sooner does this erotic scene make its impression on the pilgrim worshippers (and talmudic onlookers) than the rabbinic sages interrupt it (as if awaking suddenly from a dream) to debate whether such a public viewing of the erotic *sancta* (note the marital analogy) were indeed possible and, if so, which Temple is being remembered or imagined. Was it the curtain to the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple, or only to the outer gates of the First Temple? Were they the cherubim themselves in the First Temple, or perhaps only images of them in the Second Temple? Finally, as if returning full circle to the Palestinian origins of the tradition of publicly displaying the *sancta*, the denouement, attributed to Resh Laqish, is a scene drenched in pathos. The cherubim, whose display to the Jewish pilgrims within the Temple is a powerful and erotically charged identity marker of Israel (alone) as God's beloved, in the usurpative sight of the gentile conquerors, are now brought out from the veiled inner sanctum of the Temple into the public and contested space of the market, becoming a marker of Israel's despised and (sexually) violated identity under the cruel hegemony of the non-Jewish nations. How different is this sardonic scene of gentile conquerors publicly displaying and deriding the erotically imagined Temple cherubim from the irenic scenes evoked by Josephus centuries earlier, of the conquering Pompey and Titus, who, upon entering the closed

<sup>61</sup> Note the immediately preceding tradition attributed to Rav Judah, who compares the staves of the ark, protruding from the curtain, to the two breasts of a woman, already attested in T Yoma 2, 15; see also T Yoma 2, 16. This talmudic passage is understood by Rachel Elior (*The Three Temples: On the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* [Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004], 67–68, 157–58) to reflect a mythical mystical tradition of sacred union going back to Second Temple times.

*sanctum* of the Temple, respectfully and solemnly gaze upon (but do not touch) that which is otherwise hidden from all but priestly sight within!<sup>62</sup>

### An Early Christian Piece of the Puzzle

Several scholars who argue for the historicity of the above talmudic narratives of the public display of the Temple *sancta* in late Second Temple times draw their support from a fragment of a lost, non-canonical gospel, written on a small parchment leaf and published among the Oxyrhynchus papyri. Referred to as P. Oxyrhynchus 840, it was discovered in 1905 and first published in 1908.<sup>63</sup> Although the parchment is dated to the fourth or fifth century, the text itself is more difficult to date, perhaps to the second or third century. Lacking any sort of heading, its beginning is not well preserved, making the context difficult to determine.<sup>64</sup> Its narrative may be summarized as follows: After a polemical speech by Jesus (never mentioned by name), which is not preserved, he passes with his disciples through the “place of purification” into the Temple (ἱερόν = holy place). He is met by “a certain Pharisee, a chief priest, whose name was Levi,” who reprimands Jesus (referred to only as “the Savior”) for having entered without permission “this place of purification and to see these holy vessels, when you have not washed yourself, nor have your disciples surely bathed their feet. But you, in a defiled state, have entered this Temple, which is a pure place that no one enters nor dares to view these holy vessels without having first washed themselves and changed their clothes.”<sup>65</sup> Jesus turns the charge back on the priest, arguing that having immersed in a pool and put on pure white gar-

<sup>62</sup> Compare, however, the Arch of Titus in this regard and other rabbinic passages, above, nn. 17 and 26.

<sup>63</sup> B.P. Greenfell and A.S. Hunt (eds.), *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, V: Texts 840–844* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1908), 1–10. For recent studies that treat P. Oxyrhynchus 840 with regard to its possible first-century Jewish context, see Fine, *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World*, 150, 238 n. 23; Knohl, “Post-Biblical Sectarianism,” 604 n. 9; idem, “Participation of the People in the Temple Worship,” 142 n. 14; S. Lieberman, “Notes,” in *P’raqim: Yearbook of the Schocken Institute for Jewish Research of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America*, I, ed. E.S. Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mercator, 1967–68), 97–98 (Hebrew); Regev, *Sadducees and their Halakhah*, 198–200; R. Reich, “Mishnah Sheqalim 8:2 and the Archaeological Evidence,” in *Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period: Abraham Schalit Memorial Volume*, ed. A. Oppenheimer et al. (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1980), 225–56 (Hebrew); Safrai, *Pilgrimage at the Time of the Second Temple*, 143–44, 179–80 (Hebrew); Schwartz, “Viewing the Holy Utensils,” 153–59.

<sup>64</sup> Here and in what follows I have been influenced by the most recent extensive study of the fragment, which begins with a review of the history of its scholarship: F. Bovon, “Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840’, Fragment of a Lost Gospel, Witness of an Early Christian Controversy over Purity,” *JBL* 119 (2000), 705–28.

<sup>65</sup> I am citing the translation of Bovon, “‘Fragment Oxyrhynchus 840’,” 714–15.

ments before viewing the “holy vessels,” is, in fact, no purification at all, since the waters are polluted and the priest has only cleansed his outside skin. By contrast, Jesus and his disciples “have bathed in waters of eternal life, which come down from the God of Heaven.”

François Bovon has recently argued, I believe most convincingly, that notwithstanding elements of the story that ring true to a first-century setting (e.g., Jewish ritual baths), this text is best viewed in its own historical setting in the second–third centuries. Bovon demonstrates that the exchange between the Pharisaic high priest and Jesus is better understood as a reflection of second- and third-century internal Christian disputes, sometimes violent, over the requirement of physical baptism as a precondition to the Eucharist and to the spiritual visual contemplation of its “holy vessels.” This was a period of increased emphasis on the viewing of such vessels (as the Cross) as a religious discipline and experience of the divine realm, giving rise to increasing conflicts over who controls and who has access to the “holy vessels” stored in the sacristy. Thus, the text of P. Oxyrhynchus 840 is better understood as a “window into the author’s Christian community” (either gnostic or Manichaean) than as a source for the life and teachings of the “historical Jesus.” I suggest that the same is true of the talmudic texts that imagine the popular viewing of the Temple *sancta* in Temple times, i.e., that they be viewed within their historical context in late antiquity.

### Contexts and Conclusions

My immediate conclusion is negative: the commonly repeated historical narrative of non-priestly Jewish worshippers in late Second Temple times, having had direct visual access to the *sancta* of the Temple, particularly the menorah and the shewbread table, is without textual (or archaeological) basis. The tradition, attributed to a mid-third-century *amora*, first appears faintly in the Palestinian Talmud and more robustly in the Babylonian Talmud, with attributions to Palestinian and Babylonian *amoraim* of the third and fourth centuries. The tannaitic texts that are often thought to be the basis of this tradition, and may, in fact, be the basis for its exegesis, do not, in themselves, attest to such a practice. At most, tannaitic sources remember or imagine the laity being permitted to enter the priestly court for certain festival celebrations, but nothing more.<sup>66</sup> As we have seen, Second Temple

<sup>66</sup> Such lay participation in the priestly court is presumed from M Sukkah 4, 5; cf. T Sukkah 4, 1. In the absence of any evidence from Second Temple sources either to confirm or contradict these accounts (as understood), it is impossible to determine whether they reflect historical memory or retrojected imagination. Given the very large numbers of lay Israelites who participated in the pilgrimage sacrificial rites, it is difficult to know how



visual representations whose public display conveyed to their viewers simple messages; they were also performative enactments that created communities of worshippers who, through the experiential portals of shared sacred symbols, were able to transcend their time and place so as to enter wider networks of collective experience that extended to other times and places, indeed, to another, numinous, realm.<sup>74</sup> For Christian worshippers and pilgrims, the cross and the vessels of the Eucharist, laden with their redemptive sacrificial meanings that claimed to supersede the Jewish sacrificial system, played this role, proclaiming and enacting exclusive divine favor for those who gazed at and contemplated them.<sup>75</sup> The rabbinic discursive and Jew-

J. F. Baldwin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stational Liturgy*, OrChrAn 228 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987); N. Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture: Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 78–104 and passim; J. Elsner, “The Origins of the Icon: Pilgrimage, Religion and Visual Culture in the Roman East as ‘Resistance’ to the Centre,” in *The Early Roman Empire in the East*, ed. S. E. Alcock (Oxford: Oxbow, 1997), 178–99; idem, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100–450* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42–44; idem and I. Rutherford (eds.), *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity*, 24–30; D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 37–65. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Joseph Geiger and Yaron Eliav with this section.

<sup>74</sup> See R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 102–67 (“Seeing the Gods”); H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 30–46; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer: The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88–155, esp. 144–52; P. Brown, “Images as a Substitute for Writing,” in *East and West: Modes of Communication. Proceedings of the First Plenary Conference at Merida*, ed. E. Chrysos and I. Wood, *The Transformation of the Roman World 5* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 15–34; I. Wood, “Images as a Substitute for Writing: A Reply,” in Chrysos and Wood, *East and West*, 35–46, 98–115; G. Frank, “The Pilgrim’s Gaze in the Age Before Icons,” in *Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw*, ed. R. S. Nelson (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98–115. The emphasis on pilgrimage as an experience of *communitas* was best articulated by V. and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives*, *Lectures on the History of Religions 6* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979). However, more recent work has tended to stress pilgrimage as a contested arena for the negotiation of religious and social identities. See J. Eade and M. J. Sallnow (eds.), *Contesting the Sacred: The Anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991); S. Coleman and J. Eade (eds.), *Reframing Pilgrimage: Cultures in Motion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> From the second century on, the priest would pronounce upon presenting the Eucharist, *ta hagia tois hagiois* (“the holy things for the holy people”). Might the talmudic emphasis on the display of the miraculous loaves of shewbread, as a sign of God’s exclusive love of Israel, be connected to the central, sacrificial role of the display of the Eucharistic bread as the “body of Christ” (*hoc est corpus meum*), thereby incorporating the Divine Presence for Christian worshippers? Apropos the last Babylonian talmudic text that we examined (Yoma 54a), Eusebius (*Dem. Ev.* 6.18.20–23, written around 318–323) describes Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem who would visit the site of the Temple to view the place of the devastation of the Jews, as proof of God’s covenant with Israel having passed to

ish artistic deployments of Temple *sancta*, while playing somewhat similar, perhaps even mimicking, roles as shapers of religious identity, fall short of a Christian cult of relics. Nevertheless, they performatively function along proximate, if not quite converging, trajectories of identity definition and differentiation.

Interpreters of ancient synagogues and their symbolic repertoires have increasingly sought to place them within this wider context of late-antique symbolic art and architecture, both Christian and pagan.<sup>76</sup> The late-antique surge in Jewish viewing of representations of the Temple *sancta*, especially in the public spaces of synagogues and in funerary and daily-life contexts, served similar symbolic, even compensatory, functions as did the viewing of sacred icons in pagan and Christian settings of worship and pilgrimage.<sup>77</sup> We can now relate imaginative rabbinic narratives such as those we have examined to the abundant archaeological remains of late-antique Jewish cultic imagery, on the one hand, and to the broader context of cultural accommodation and resistance to late-antique pagan and Christian iconism, on the other, without necessarily reducing those narratives to deterministic

them, as prophetically foretold. On Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and to the Temple site in particular, in relation to its Jewish past, see R. L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 143–48; A. S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 103–38; Y. Z. Eliav, *God’s Mountain: The Temple Mount in Time, Place, and Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 150–88; B. Bitton-Ashkelony, *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 174–83 (on Theodoret of Cyrillus, 393–466 CE). Note in particular the account of the Christian pilgrim Egeria, the highlight of whose visit to the Holy Land in 381–383 is the bishop’s removal of the “wood of the Cross” from a special box in Jerusalem on Good Friday and its viewing as a means of “attaining salvation.” The pilgrims touch the cross with their foreheads and their eyes before kissing it. See *Itinerarium Egeriae* 36–37; J. Wilkinson, *Egeria’s Travels*, 3rd ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1999), 154–56; E. D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Late Roman Empire AD 312–460* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 116, 128–32. For the view that the menorah occupies a similar place of symbolic significance in Jewish iconography as does the cross in Christian iconography, see Levine, “History and Significance of the Menorah,” 151. I wish to acknowledge the assistance of Joshua Burns, Stephen Davis, Peter Jeffrey, Wayne Meeks, and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal with this section.

<sup>76</sup> See in particular Levine, “History and Significance of the Menorah,” 149–53; J. Magness, “Heaven on Earth: Helios and the Zodiac Cycle in Ancient Palestinian Synagogues,” *DOP* 59 (2005), 45–48, 49–52.

<sup>77</sup> I see no reason necessarily to privilege either pagan or Christian manifestations of this broad phenomenon as being of primary influence or causality, since either and both would have been chronologically and geographically proximate in Syro-Palestine and since they were culturally intertwined with one another. That being said, the pagan manifestations extend back further in time, well into the Second Temple/Hellenistic period, whereas the Christian manifestations might have exerted greater pressure given the “sibling-rivalry” nature of Jewish-Christian relations.



reflexes of either of those broader cultural contexts. As we have seen, those narratives can, at least in part, be understood as rabbinic attempts to make sense of and interpret earlier (tannaitic) traditions of uncertain meaning. As with all profound historical and cultural shifts, it would be a serious mistake and a misconstrual of the historian's task to seek simply (and self-satisfyingly) the genesis of change in either internal or external propellants rather than in the complex dialectic of their intersection and interaction.<sup>78</sup> Neither should we think that the purpose of historical contextualization is to uncover external causality alone; it must also understand how local cultural practices, whatever their genesis, would have been internally received within a broader cross-cultural context.

For too long the question has been asked: how much influence did the rabbis exert on the synagogue? Perhaps we might more fruitfully ask instead: how much influence did the synagogue exert on the rabbis? I would suggest that the above-examined narratives about Temple *sancta* being displayed to Jewish worshippers with the message, "See how beloved you are to the Omnipresent," may be, at least in part, as much about the spiritual universe created by and experienced through the viewing of symbolic *sancta* in the third- to seventh-century synagogues (and elsewhere) as it is about the imagined practices of Temple worship centuries earlier, onto which it is projected.<sup>79</sup> Rabbis of the third and fourth centuries most likely did not control the symbolic repertoire of the synagogues, but neither could they have been oblivious to or unaffected by it. The above-cited passage from the Palestinian Talmud suggests that, at the very least, they were pressed to respond to it, however ambivalently, and perhaps appropriate it for their own constructions of collective Jewish memory. Whatever the lines of affection, both the textual and artistic exhibition of the Temple *sancta* respond to a collective desire to experience the numinous realm of the sacred at a time when pilgrimage to and worship within a centralized Jewish Temple had long been historically impossible; hence, it was all the more necessary to construct it imaginatively and sensorially. While the Jerusalem Temple

<sup>78</sup> For similar cautions and conclusions in other recent studies of mine, see S. D. Fraade, "Moses and the Commandments: Can Hermeneutics, History, and Rhetoric Be Disentangled?" in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. H. Najman and J. H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 420–22; idem, "Rabbinic Polysemy and Pluralism Revisited: Between Praxis and Thematization." *AJSR* 37 (2007), 39–40. For the tendency to presume that similarities between rabbinic and Christian interpretive traditions reflect a unidirectional response of the former to the latter, see I. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>79</sup> For similar tendencies of rabbinic literature to retroject later "memories" of the Temple Mount onto earlier Temple times, see Eliav, *God's Mountain*, 189–236.

did not contain any statues or images of its deity,<sup>80</sup> it did contain sacred appurtenances whose imagined viewing could continue to induce a heightened sense of the intersection of numinous realm and collective identity, even (perhaps particularly) in their historical absence.<sup>81</sup>

In conclusion, let us return to our opening thematic question. For the minority of Jews in Second Temple times who participated in Temple worship with any regularity, it must have been a deeply meaningful ritual experience that powerfully and performatively confirmed their identities as God's elect, even though they could not enter the inner *sanctum* of the Temple proper.<sup>82</sup> For most Jews, especially the majority in the Diaspora, the Temple, its rituals, and, most significantly, its hidden inner mysteries could be accessed only through biblical accounts and their post-biblical textual elaborations and interpretations, which is not to belittle their importance to a sense of collective identity.<sup>83</sup> Although figural representations of the *sancta* were sparse,<sup>84</sup> visualization of the sacred was available to most Jews, to the extent that they sought it through the iconic contemplation of texts, whether written or oral in their apperception. For most, we must presume, the Jerusalem Temple at the center of Jewish collective identity was much more of a powerful idea than a regularly and directly lived experience.

It is not clear to what extent this changed, immediately at least, with the destruction of the Temple. For those within the orbit of the early rabbinic sages, as perhaps in apocalyptic- and *heikhalot*-minded circles, the textualization of the cult, with its attendant textual visualization, likely continued rather than ceased, and perhaps even intensified. In a bitter irony of history, it took the Temple's destruction at the hand of pagan conquerors, and its symbolic usurpation by early Christianity, to allow for the visualization of the Temple and its worship to envelop increasing numbers of Jewish synagogue worshippers, both in the Land of Israel and in the Diaspora. While this did not evolve immediately, and probably not for centuries, through ritualized discourse and figural *realia*, the *sancta*, especially the menorah, became accessible symbolic markers and reinforcers of Jewish identity, ubiquitously visible in a way that had not been possible so long as

<sup>80</sup> This is deemed noteworthy already by Hecataeus of Abdera, as quoted by Josephus; see above, nn. 8 and 10.

<sup>81</sup> For a similar argument seeking to relate, complexly, rabbinic textual to contemporaneous non-rabbinic synagogue artistic expressions, see Miller, "'Epigraphical' Rabbis, Helios, and Psalm 19."

<sup>82</sup> For the symbolic meaning of Temple worship in Second Temple times, see J. Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 103–44.

<sup>83</sup> See above, n. 25.

<sup>84</sup> See above, n. 12.



the Second Temple physically stood and functioned with its *sancta* hidden from public view.<sup>85</sup>

By this account, the Temple, with its associations of priestly-mediated worship, was a central component of collective Jewish identity – even as contested – whether experienced or imagined before 70 or experienced as imagined after 70. However, the manner in which it was so encountered

<sup>85</sup> Why it took so long after the destruction of the Temple for this change to fully emerge, whether due to internal or external propellants or their combination, is a question upon which we can only speculate. However, an important intermediary point that needs to be included in such considerations is represented by the Bar Kokhba coins from ca. 135 CE that show the Temple façade, between the central columns of which is a rectangular object, representing the ark of the covenant, the shewbread table, or something else, there appearing to be no consensus as to its identification. See Barag, “Table for Shewbread,” 22–25; idem, “The Table of the Showbread and the Facade of the Temple on Coins of the Bar-Kokhba Revolt,” in *Ancient Jerusalem Revealed*, ed. H. Geva (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 272–76; J. Patrich, “The Golden Vine, the Sanctuary Portal, and its Depiction on the Bar-Kokhba Coins,” *Jewish Art* 19–20 (1993–94): 56–61; Y. Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Nyack, NY and Jerusalem: Amphora Books and Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 2001), 143–45, 152–53, 158–59. Whatever the object depicted between the central columns, the coins follow standard Roman numismatic practice of the time, showing a central cultic object (e.g., statue or bust of a deified ruler) that resided within the temple, and not the view of such an object that would have been available to those facing the temple façade from without. Since the Jerusalem Temple, whether past or future, would not have contained a figural representation of the Israelite God, some other central cultic object (the ark of the covenant or the shewbread table) that “resided” within the Temple is presumably depicted in the same space occupied by a pagan cult statue on contemporary Roman coins. S. R. F. Price (*Rituals and Power*, 180), speaking of Roman coins in Asia Minor, states: “Within the temples there is often revealed, through the parting or the omission of a number of columns at the front of the temple, a figure which is a copy of the cult statue. In general the representations are fairly consistent over time; it is, however, not always possible, because of the size of the figure or the state of preservation of the coin, to discern how it is portrayed”; and in *ibid.*, n. 52, “the figure is a symbolic representation of the epiphany of the deity.” For photos of such coins, see *ibid.*, the plates between pp. 198 and 199. See also P. Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society: Representation and Response* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 208–14 (“Statues on Coins”). Barag, who is the strongest advocate of an identification of the shewbread table on the Bar Kokhba coins, in a response to A. Grossberg, strongly denies that they represent the public display of that table according to later talmudic sources, the latter view apparently also endorsed by I. Knohl. See above, nn. 31 and 35. Similarly, depictions of *menorot* on oil lamps are attested from the second century CE on, but these, being intended for private use, are of uncertain symbolic meaning. See V. Sussman, *Ornamented Jewish Oil-Lamps: From the Destruction of the Second Temple through the Bar-Kokhba Revolt* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982), 20, 31–33; Levine, “History and Significance of the Menorah,” 142–43. For Roman depictions of deities on oil lamps (among a wide array of artistic representations, including erotic scenes) in much the same position, see Stewart, *Statues in Roman Society*, 195–207 (“Gods on Lamps”). For Christian depictions of the cross in the same place on such lamps, see above, n. 75. For a survey of the great variety of understandings of the menorah as a religious symbol and a marker of Jewish identity in antiquity, see Hachlili, *Menorah*, 204–209.

changed radically and dramatically, beginning faintly in the mid-third century and accelerating a century thereafter, with the intersecting visualizations of Temple-related words (whether narrative, legal, or liturgical) and images in performative ways that would help define Judaism and aspects of Jewish identity for centuries, if not millennia, to come. Ironic or not, it was precisely through this historical discontinuity between Temple and post-Temple times that Jews of late antiquity were able to experience a transcending symbolic continuity with the Temple, its worship, and *sancta*, despite their ignominious destruction or capture (and triumphalist display<sup>86</sup>) by pagan Rome and the supersessionist claims – no less performatively via symbolic sacrificial, visual media – of ascendant Christendom.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>86</sup> See above, n. 28.

<sup>87</sup> For my refusal/inability to choose between the two for the primary generative influence in the third–fourth centuries, as to isolate internal from external propellants, see above, nn. 77 and 78. For the profound adaptability of Jewish religious art from resistance to the hegemony of polytheistic Rome to that of monotheistic Christendom, see J. Elsner, “Viewing and Resistance: Art and Religion in Dura Europos,” in *idem, Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 253–87, especially his conclusion, 283–87. Since the completion of this essay, I have become familiar with the recently begun excavation of the synagogue at Khirbet Hamam in the eastern Lower Galilee, thanks to the generosity of its lead archaeologist, Uzi Leibner. If the identification of one of its major floor mosaics as a depiction of the construction of Solomon’s Temple, dated to the late third century, holds up, this would lend further support to my argument. See [http://archaeology.huji.ac.il/depart/classical/uzil/Kh\\_Hamam.pdf](http://archaeology.huji.ac.il/depart/classical/uzil/Kh_Hamam.pdf) and <http://hunews.huji.ac.il/articles.asp?cat=6&artID=827> – both of which were most recently accessed on June 8, 2009.