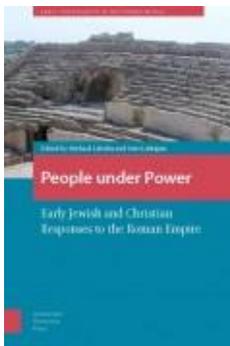




Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2017.02.01

Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, eds., *People under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Empire*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015. ISBN:9789089645890. Pp 272. € 99,00. Hardback.

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The purpose of this volume is to present a variety of ancient Jewish and Christian responses to the often-overwhelming power of the Roman Empire. According to the editors its goal “is to show that the topic is more complicated than often assumed and that relations between the empire and the Jews and Christians...cannot simply be described in terms of conflict, clash, and opposition” (p. 9). While the various chapters do not all deal with responses per se—one chapter (Van der Lans) is about the Empire’s view of, and response to, Jews and others, and another (David) deals with the beginnings of a Jewish community in a certain Roman province—all of the chapters do illustrate diverse ways in which different Jewish and Christian communities experienced the Roman Empire, and thus the book as a whole succeeds in demonstrating the complexity of the issue.

The first three essays focus on Jewish communities under Rome. George J. Brooke discusses the use of the term *Kittim* in the sectarian Qumran scrolls and points to ambivalences in its usage. Brooke begins by rightfully insisting, against recent trends, that the Qumran community’s history began no later than the mid-second century BCE. Brooke subsequently adopts the view of some scholars that although in some scrolls (i.e., Peshar Nahum and Peshar Habakkuk) the *Kittim* are clearly the Romans, in others (the War Scroll and other “war texts”) they are to be identified as the Seleucids.¹ However, Brooke’s primary purpose, and—in my view—contribution to scholarship, is his assertion of the ambivalence of the use of the term *Kittim* in the sectarian scrolls. That ambivalence is twofold. First, in Peshar Nahum and Peshar Habakkuk the *Kittim*-Romans are viewed positively, or neutrally, as divine agents to punish the wicked, but also negatively, due to the heavy price that it entails. Brooke is certainly right that we should not assume that the members of the group had consistent views and that attitudes can at times be ambiguous and can also change. I think it is important to note, however, that this “ambivalence” is an inherently biblical view.

¹ I have recently argued against this view: Sharon, “The Kittim and the Roman Conquest in the Qumran Scrolls,” *Meghillot* 11 (2016): 357–88 (Hebrew).

Thus, for example, in Isaiah 10 the Assyrians are divine agents but are also the object of divine wrath. In other words, the fact that a gentile power is viewed as a divine agent does not imply a positive or neutral attitude towards it. Rather, after fulfilling its role as divine agent, that foreign power itself must be punished. In fact, the Psalms of Solomon, which was contemporaneous with the Scrolls, sees the Romans as divine agents but at the same time abhors them and hopes for their downfall.

The second ambivalence is found in the War Scroll and other texts. This ambivalence is between the original second century BCE intention of the authors of those texts, who applied the term to the Seleucids, and the eventual understanding of those texts by their late-first century BCE readers. “There was nothing...to prevent the later reader or hearer of 1QM 1 from understanding that the text referred to the Romans” (p. 26). Regardless of the specific issue of the *Kittim*, this suggestion, to recognize both the initial authorial intention of a text as well as its understanding by its later readers, is important for the study of the scrolls as well as for many other texts.

Turning from the edge of the Roman empire to its center, Birgit van der Lans writes about expulsions of Jews from Rome, primarily the expulsions of 19 CE under Tiberius and of the 40s CE by Claudius. Whereas scholarship often viewed these acts as part of a general anti-Jewish policy, recent scholarship tends to see them as a reaction to an increase of Jewish influence in Rome, in Jewish success in winning over converts and sympathizers. Although the evidence indeed indicates that these actions were presented as concerned with the influence of Jewish practices, van der Lans rightfully asks whether such a concern was really the direct reason for those actions. Suggesting that such expulsion orders were not collectively enforced, van der Lans asserts that they are comparable to other imperial edicts and *senatus consulta* that served as instruments of public control. She then turns to an enlightening analysis of the evidence for expulsions of other groups—actors, philosophers, and astrologers—from Rome. This analysis demonstrates that expulsion orders were a rhetorical tool, used in Roman power politics, to indicate the boundaries of “proper Romanness.” Van der Lans recognizes that this does not mean that no real or imagined concern existed in Rome regarding the increasing influence of foreign cults, but only that such a concern was not the immediate reason for those actions; it is rather the justification given for the act. This chapter should transform the way we understand expulsions of Jews and others from Rome. It remains for further inquiry to determine what may have been the effects of such rhetoric on the ground, that is, to what extent was it recognized as rhetoric and to what extent did it promote anti-Jewish sentiment?

Nora David’s essay is a very well-founded and constructed examination of the evidence for the earliest presence of Jews in the Roman province of Pannonia (present-day western Hungary, eastern Austria, and parts of the Balkan states). That evidence is mainly epigraphic. David wisely reviews only those inscriptions whose Jewish origins are well-established. There are only six such inscriptions, but the Jewish origin of only two (from Aquincum and from Solva) is truly beyond any doubt, since they are accompanied by an engraving of a menorah (the second also mentions a man name Iudas). As David notes, the synagogue or *proseuche*, mentioned in three inscriptions, are not necessarily Jewish institutions. Other evidence comes from magical objects which contain Hebrew letters or Jewish divine names, and an amulet which contains the words of the Shema Israel from Deuteronomy 6:4. All of this evidence comes from the Severan period or shortly after (late 2nd century–3rd century). Coins from the Great Revolt (66–70 CE) and from the Bar Kokhba

Revolt (132–135) do not necessarily attest to a Jewish presence as they may have been brought there by Roman military personnel or by other means. In the final part of the essay, David discusses a recently found, and yet unpublished, funerary inscription, from Carnuntum, which mentions a person named Mulvius “from Judea” (*domo Iudaeus*). The mention of Judea as his place of origin indicates—according to David—that the inscription predates 135 CE, the year the province of Judea was renamed Syria-Palaestina. This is therefore the earliest evidence for Jewish presence in Pannonia, but David warns that the presence of individual Jews does not yet amount to the existence of an actual community. Regarding the use of the place-name Judea, however, I would question whether official imperial terminology was necessarily used in a personal inscription in the province of Pannonia.

The next three essays turn to the texts of the New Testament. In “Imperial Politics in Paul,” Anders Klostergaard Petersen reexamines the view of the Empire and especially the imperial cult in Paul’s letters. Petersen first argues that many of the issues debated in contemporary scholarship on the New Testament and the imperial cult are already found in the century-old work of Adolf Deissmann. Petersen questions to what extent the early Christian movement and the imperial cult were in direct rivalry. While there is indeed some linguistic parallelism between the imperial cult and the early Jesus movement, as Deissmann noted, Petersen convincingly asserts that similarity of language does not necessarily imply a direct relationship, and could rather be a consequence of belonging to the same cultural and social world. The focal part of the essay is a discussion of six Pauline passages. Beginning with five passages from 1 and 2 Corinthians and Philippians, Petersen notes that despite the fact that Paul could have explicitly polemicized against the Roman Empire or the imperial cult, such explicit polemic is not found there, or elsewhere in the Pauline letters. Nevertheless, there is some subversiveness in those passages as they undermine important aspects of the imperial cult, such as the claim that the emperor is lord of the world. Petersen’s novel suggestion is that instead of viewing a contrast between these somewhat subversive passages and Romans 13:1–7—which calls for acceptance of the governing authorities, we should actually interpret those passages in light of the latter passage. More specifically, Petersen calls for a distinction between “the concrete social level” and “the ideological level.” Ideologically, Paul asserts that the Jesus followers belong to a different celestial realm; their “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:19). But on the concrete level Paul calls for peace with society and acceptance of the governing authorities. Thus, while Jesus followers should not follow the standards of their current society, that does not amount to a call for resistance to the empire or its cult. Petersen’s suggestion is indeed thought-provoking, but one could ask whether it is at all necessary to read all of Paul’s letters together and to look for agreement between them. After all, Paul wrote these letters at slightly different times to different addressees and with different objectives.

In “Das Markusevangelium—eine ideologie—und imperiumskritische Schrift,” Martin Meiser begins with a brief survey of scholarly proposals regarding criticism of the Empire in the Gospel of Mark. Meiser’s focus, however, is not the Gospel itself but rather the history of its reception. Focusing on three pericopes—the execution of John the Baptist (6:14–29), Jesus’ teaching regarding leaders and servants (10:35–45), and the question of paying taxes to Caesar (12:13–17)—Meiser shows that they were not interpreted in political terms by early Christian authors. In conversation with Petersen’s chapter regarding Paul, Meiser asserts that the Church Fathers were not anti-Roman, and rather preached in favor of some sort of co-existence with the Empire, and that the most Empire-critical notion is the idea that the emperor is human and not divine.

Klaus Scholtissek focuses on the scene of Jesus' washing the feet of his disciples in John 13. Jesus' action is meant to set an example for the proper behavior of Christians with each other. However, in doing so, Jesus sets a counter-cultural practice to contemporaneous Roman daily social practice. In Greco-Roman culture, washing the feet was a typical task of slaves and servants, and thus denotes a distinct social hierarchy. In contrast, by washing his disciples' feet, Scholtissek explains, Jesus—the “Master”—turns that hierarchy on its head, and, as an example to be followed by his disciples and all Christians, it transforms them into a united community built upon reciprocal relationships (see 13:14–15) rather than social hierarchies.

The last three essays focus on other early Christian texts. Mark Grundeken examines the Shepherd of Hermas. As a text commonly assumed to have been composed in or near Rome between the end of the first and the middle of the second century, its views on the proper relations of Christians with the Empire are a worthy and overlooked topic. Grundeken focuses on Similitude 1, which juxtaposes the place or city in which the Christians live “now” and their own city in which they will live in the future. Presently the Christians are under the power of a master who rightfully expects them to obey his laws. Grundeken suggests that the present city is not specifically Rome, and that the master is not a specific Roman emperor; rather, the city is the present world and the master represents authorities in general. The Christians' own city is both the future world to come and the present church. Hermas urges his audience to be prepared in case the master of the city decides to expel them from the city, but Grundeken states that this does not imply clashes or persecutions and thus argues that the author is not hostile towards the authorities or the empire. However, the possibility of expulsion plainly implies that the author envisioned the potential for future persecutions, and Grundeken does not prove otherwise. On the contrary, in his later explanation, he points to other places in the work in which the threat of persecution is an actuality (pp. 194–95). Nevertheless, Grundeken's comparison with other early Christian writings illustrates that Hermas' view of the Empire and the authorities in general is indeed quite moderate, and Grundeken argues that that moderation is a matter of pragmatism. The last part of the essay deals with Hermas' attitude to the emperor cult, and, reminiscent of Meiser and especially Petersen, concludes that the author of Hermas rejected the emperor cult (although not explicitly), in order to strengthen the identity of the Christian community.

In contrast to the previous chapters, Paul Middleton's paper deals with persecution by, or confrontation with, the Roman authorities and people. Middleton examines how Christian martyrdoms were viewed by non-Christian Romans. More specifically, he tries to answer Tertullian's question: why did non-Christians not view Christian martyrdoms as at least comparable to cases of “Noble Death” which they held as exemplary (e.g., Socrates)? Middleton asserts that, despite numerous Christian attempts to present the martyrdoms as the most noble deaths, the Romans simply could not see them that way. To Romans, Christians seemed too eager for death—willingly giving themselves over to death because of an irrational belief in the afterlife—and thus their deaths were unreflective; their deaths were not noble because they died for the cause of one who was crucified by the state; and the form of their deaths was not honorable because they were too spectacular and often involved the mutilation of the body, in stark contrast with the Greco-Roman precedents of Noble Death. Besides its main argument, this essay provides a valuable review of the notions of noble death and martyrdom and their depictions in Greco-Roman and ancient Jewish literature, in addition to the early Christian literature.

The final chapter, by Marco Frenschkowski, focuses on the image of the emperor Nero in early Christian literature. Succinctly reviewing Nero's image in ancient literature in general, Frenschkowski shows that while in non-Christian sources that image is quite ambivalent, in Christian sources it becomes synonymous with evil. But Frenschkowski focuses especially on Nero's image in early Christian eschatology, in which he became a mythical Antichrist figure, though at times this Nero *redivivus* figure is distinguished from the Antichrist figure. The main point of the essay is that this eschatological scenario is part of a wider phenomenon of early Christian arcane teaching—"secret teachings," especially of eschatological matters, which were divulged only to a few select individuals. As such, early Christianity, and not only "gnostic" Christianity, looked to some degree like a "mystery cult."

One could have expected chapters on other responses to the Empire, especially more central Jewish ones (e.g., Rabbinic literature; texts from Alexandria), but obviously one volume cannot encompass all this material. Nevertheless, the essays collected in this volume present significant contributions and innovative approaches that should have an impact not only on the study of Jewish and Christian relations with the Roman Empire, but also on their specific fields (e.g., Qumran studies; studies of martyrdom).