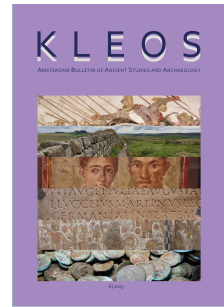




# KLEOS

AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY



Issue 6, 2023

## CONTACT

bulletin.kleos@gmail.com

[www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

---

## INFORMATION ON PUBLICATION

Full Title: A New Periodisation? Recent Innovations in Studies on the Impact of the Destruction of the Second Temple

Author: Florence Cobben

Published: Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology/Issue 6/September 2023

Pages: 10-24.

ISSN: 2468-1555

**Link to these articles:** [www.Kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.Kleos-bulletin.nl)

## RECOMMENDED CITATION:

Cobben, F., 2023: A New Periodisation? Recent Innovations in Studies on the Impact of the Destruction of the Second Temple, *Kleos - Amsterdam Bulletin of Ancient Studies and Archaeology* 6, 10-24.

---

## KLEOS - AMSTERDAM BULLETIN OF ANCIENT STUDIES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

is a peer-reviewed, open access academic online journal, launched in 2014, which publishes current research and review articles by graduate and PhD students, as well as starting independent researchers, from the fields of archaeology and ancient studies (i.e. classics and ancient History). Kleos also provides reviews of recent books, conferences and exhibitions. The journal mainly aspires to serve as a platform for starting academic careers, and help students and starting researchers to share their research, gain experience in publishing, and improve their scientific skills. At the same time the journal aims to provide an overview of the research being conducted within the fields of archaeology, ancient history and classics, and support the interdisciplinary dialogue between these adjacent academic disciplines.

## SUBMISSIONS

The editors invite submissions of original research on any topic related to ancient history, classics and archaeology. Information on the editorial policy, the submission process, as well as guidelines for authors and other matters that concern potential contributors, is to be found on our website. For further information, authors and readers are referred to:

[www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

[vu-nl.academia.edu/KLEOSBulletin](http://vu-nl.academia.edu/KLEOSBulletin)

## DISCLAIMER

The editors cannot be held responsible for errors or any consequences arising from the use of information contained in this publication. The opinions expressed in the articles and reviews published in Kleos are those of the authors and not of the editors, nor of the Amsterdam Centre for Ancient Studies and Archaeology (ACASA). The publication of advertisements in Kleos or on the website does not constitute any endorsement by the editors of the products or institutions advertised.

## COPYRIGHT AND PHOTOCOPYING

Authorisation to photocopy items for academic, educational and personal use is granted. Check for information about the terms and conditions of use: [www.kleos-bulletin.nl](http://www.kleos-bulletin.nl)

# A New Periodisation? Recent Innovations in Studies on the Impact of the Destruction of the Second Temple

Florence Cobben

## ABSTRACT

In 70 AD, after a brutal five month siege, the Romans sacked Jerusalem and destroyed the Holy Temple. While this has for centuries been seen as a decisive turning point in not only the First Jewish-Roman war, but in Jewish history as a whole, recent developments within scholarship on the topic have begun to challenge the view that Jewish history should mark the events of 70 AD as a “watershed”.

Recent works written by modern scholars, including R. Clements, D. Levine, and J. Klawans, all argue that the importance of 70 AD has been a product of either uncritical history-making influenced by subsequent ancient interpretations, or anachronistic readings of ancient attitudes. These authors have called for new approaches to the topic, which have already been successfully carried out by academics like A. Cohen. This paper summarises the debate and provides further points for consideration and discussion.

## INTRODUCTION

Periodisation is not history’s most riveting topic. Not only is it long, painstaking work to propose and defend a new historical framework, but if successful it has a tendency of sending historians back to the drawing board to reconsider everything that was taken for granted until that point. For that very reason it is also important. Historiography for assessing the importance of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD for the Jewish (and in many cases, Christian and Roman) people is no different. In recent years, the call for a new periodisation that is shifted away from the fall of the Temple has increased, and in reaction, new studies have restated with certainty the importance of 70 AD.

The study of the impact of the destruction has been well recorded, yet this most recent development (since circa 2010) has

*Florence Cobben is currently finishing her Research Master in Ancient History with a thesis on the nocturnal behaviour of Early Christians. In the meantime, she is working her way through a Master's in Archeology at Leiden University hoping to write her second thesis on the spiritual wellbeing of indigenous cultures in relation to archaeological digs and heritage sites.*

► [Profile page](#)

not yet been compiled or discussed so far.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this paper is to outline the arguments of the most significant contributions to this discussion. This new approach argues for shifting the conversation away from 70 AD towards a different year (especially towards 135 AD) and seeks to foreground the immediate reaction of Christian and Jewish people to guide critical historiography.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the impact of Christian theology on periodisation, and even the historiographical effects of the Holocaust on the study, are significant critiques lodged against this status quo. In addition to summarising the current debate, this paper aims to discuss and clarify considerations for potential future research on the topic. Therefore, the final section of this paper reviews the significant opposition that still defends the importance of the fall of the Temple in 70 AD, and discusses some of the larger issues and potential pitfalls present in this ongoing debate.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The history of the fall of the Second Temple in 70 AD and the First Jewish Revolt (66–73 AD) are recorded most extensively in Flavius Josephus' work *The Jewish War*, supplemented by Tacitus' *Histories*. Judaea lost its independence and became a client kingdom of Rome in 63 BC and came under direct Roman rule in 6 AD, following the deposition of ethnarch Herod Archelaus. Under heavy taxation and oppression (and subsequent retaliatory action by Jewish brigands), Jewish-Roman relations rapidly deteriorated, with the situation reaching a boiling point in 66 AD. The Judaeans joined forces to expel the Romans from Judaea and established a revolutionary government. The ensuing war culminated in the siege and fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, during which the Jerusalemites were massacred and the Romans sacked and burned the Holy Temple, also known as the Second Temple. With (for example) its inclusion in the meaning of Tisha B'av by rabbinic authorities sometime in the 1st century AD, the event was canonised as one if not the most notable collective trauma(s) the Jewish people suffered.<sup>3</sup> Scholars have since extensively discussed its impact: not only was the religious, legal, and social heart of the Jewish people lost in the fall of the Temple, leading the religion into a radically new and Rabbinic direction, but it also marked the birth of Christianity, which now completed its parting of the ways

---

1 For an extended summary of this previous historiography, see: Goodman 2012; Schwartz 2012; Cohen 2016.

2 135 AD marked the end of the Bar Kokhba revolt, or the Second Jewish Revolt. After this event, Jewish people were banished from entering Jerusalem, and many scholars argue that the consequences of this event marked a massive shift in Jewish history.

3 See for example Mishnah, Ta'anit 4.

with Judaism.<sup>4</sup> 70 AD's status as an epoch-making event went practically unchallenged until the last four decades.

## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

In recapping the difficulties that the founding fathers of modern Jewish history already faced when using periodization centred on the destruction of the Second Temple, D. Schwartz warns the reader of the “perils of committing oneself to an *a priori* conception,” and of “the difficulty of pinning down the significance of the destruction of the Second Temple.”<sup>5</sup> How this discussion evolved and changed in modern scholarship, starting in the last century, has been divided by Schwartz into three stages. The first stage, which lasted until the mid-1900s, held that the Pharisees were the most authoritative leaders of Judaism during the Second Temple period, the rabbis were their heirs and, therefore, the destruction of the Second Temple did not mark a major shift, other than eliminating the power base of their competitors.<sup>6</sup> However, in the light of the discovery of the *Qumran texts* in the 1940s and 1950s, the second stage was inaugurated. Now it appeared that the religious landscape of Second Temple Judaism was not as monolithic as first appeared, and that, in fact, the priests seemed to enjoy quite some popularity. Therefore, the destruction of the Second Temple, which saw the power base of the priests destroyed, was quite a watershed. The rabbis were a new and strong competitor.<sup>7</sup>

Ever since the introduction of the so-called ‘Third Stage’ of historiography on the topic (mid-1980s), the theory that the priests of the Second Temple lost their popularity after the destruction of the Temple and priestly Judaism was taken over by Rabbinic Judaism, has been challenged.<sup>8</sup> Now it appears that the

---

4 By “parting” many mean the demise of so-called “Jewish Christianity”, either by the loss of its home during the first Jewish War, when the Jerusalem Church (apparently) fled to Pella, or after the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–135 AD), when Jerusalem became closed to all Jews. Others assume that the Jewish-Christian message became obsolete, both in trying to compete with rabbinic Judaism and the Paul-centric Gentile Christianity. For further discussion on the nature of the “parting of the ways” see Reed 2007, 189–196.

5 Schwartz 2012, 2. Particularly Heinrich Graetz, one of the first historians to write a comprehensive history of the Jewish people from a Jewish perspective, struggled with placing the shift in 70 AD.

6 *Ibid.*, 6–8.

In summary, the priests were descendants of Aaron and in the Second Temple Period operated out of the Temple in Jerusalem. They had special authority to participate in sacred rituals. In contrast to the priests there were a number of influential socio-religious sects, among them the Pharisees. After the destruction of the Second Temple, Pharisaic beliefs became the basis for Rabbinic Judaism. The rabbis were considered teachers and (eventually) operated out of local synagogues.

7 *Ibid.*, 8–11.

8 For sources that provide an overview of this historiography, see footnote 1.

priests only garnered more support after the destruction. The synagogue, previously seen as the heart of Judaism after the loss of the Second Temple and the home of the rabbis, was now seen as the home of the priests.<sup>9</sup> The rabbis were, in fact, not taking over the leadership of Judaism from the priests, but were instead removed to “their ivory tower, the *bet midrash*”.<sup>10</sup> In essence, Judaism experienced religious continuity through the continued importance of the Temple priests. Meanwhile, the birth of Christianity was also no longer considered to be the result of a ‘parting of the ways’ from Judaism following the destruction – the process of their divide continued at least till 135 AD.<sup>11</sup> The current position accepted by most scholars is that the destruction of the Second Temple was met with more continuity than previously assumed, especially in terms of religious life and institutions.<sup>12</sup>

Yet, scholars have also collectively argued for the importance of the destruction. A remarkable number of lives were lost, disrupted, and even subjected to torture. As S. Schwartz argues, “if there is no Judaism without Jews, then the death of large numbers of them cannot leave ‘Judaism’ unharmed, however much theologians may strive to console themselves and others by arguing that this is not the case.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, according to Schwartz, the events of both 70 AD and 135 AD nearly ended Judaism.<sup>14</sup> The direct impact on religious institutions, while perhaps salvageable for the priests, was still considerable. Most scholars agree the loss of the Temple meant the end of sacrificial practices, and as J. Klawans has summarised, some argue that it spawned religious radicalism, or even propelled rabbis into crises of faith.<sup>15</sup> Even the rise of Gnosticism has been proposed to originate from this crisis.<sup>16</sup> Pilgrimage culture, so important to Jerusalem’s economy, also quickly stopped.<sup>17</sup>

Considering this, it is unsurprising that the question “Was the destruction of the Second Temple a watershed in Jewish history?” led to a 2009 symposium and a resulting volume of (almost) the

---

9 Schwartz 2012, 13–14.

10 Ibid., 14.

11 Most often this view is traced to Simon 1948, xiv–xvi (English translation 1986), but it was notably taken up by Dunn 1999, 239. The “start” of this process differs between sources. Dunn considers the loss of the Temple to be the most important milestone, but several have argued that the teachings of Jesus, the subsequent theologizing of Paul, and/or the “de-Judaization” of the church’s target converts after the Jewish War were the beginning of the process. For more information, see Reed 2007, 191.

12 Clements 2012, 517.

13 Schwartz 2013, 18.

14 Schwartz 2001, 108–109.

15 Schremer 2010, 29.

16 Williams 1992.

17 Goodman 2007.

same name: Was 70 CE a Watershed? This paper argues that this conference launched a new stage of the debate focused on reassessing historiographical practice and assumptions about 70 AD.

## A NEW PERIODISATION?

### *THE CONTRIBUTION OF RUTH CLEMENTS*

The importance of the events of 70 AD in historiography was challenged explicitly by R. Clements' 2012 article, presented in 2009 and printed in the volume *Was 70 CE a Watershed?* In this article Clements re-assessed the underlying Christian theology present in historiography that has maintained the importance of the fall of the Second Temple.

Clements argues that in the immediate aftermath of the destruction the role of the Second Temple in the New Testament was minimal. Similarly, in non-canonical post-70 AD literature, such as the *Didache*, the fall of the Second Temple is not mentioned.<sup>18</sup> In fact, Christian writings, like the apocrypha *Barnabas*, hint at a potential restoration of the Second Temple and portray the war and the destruction as purely political events.<sup>19</sup> Among Christians, the theological implications of the destruction were barely discussed.

It was Justin Martyr's *Apologia* and *Dialogue with Trypho*, which were written in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba revolt (132–135 AD), that argued the Roman destruction of the Second Temple was a result of the crucifixion of Jesus by the Jews and that the Bar Kokhba Revolt "validated" and "made permanent" the desolation, since after the squashing of the Revolt the Jewish community was exiled from Jerusalem and there was now no hope for the restoration of the Temple.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, the destruction was proof that the covenant between God and the Jewish people was broken, making the Christians the new chosen people of God.<sup>21</sup> These two new constructions — Jewish deicide and the new status of Christendom — were added by Justin in the light of 135 AD. Where before the loss of the Temple was not of theological importance and Christians even expressed the opinion that the Temple would be restored, after the Bar Kokhba Revolt restoration was deemed impossible and theological explanations were revised.

As the Jewish people struggled on and survived, Christians kept

---

<sup>18</sup> Clements 2012, 521. The author of the *Didache* is unknown.

<sup>19</sup> This interpretation of the texts is not necessarily new, many 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars have commented on the indications in *Barnabas* of an imminent rebuilding of the Second Temple (Gunther 1976 discusses this in more detail). The author of the *Barnabas* is unknown.

<sup>20</sup> Clements 2012, 533.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

invoking this narrative to restate the superiority of Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Through this process the theological importance of the destruction was exaggerated and indeed made permanent. Considering the evidence, Clements argues the defeat of Bar Kokhba was the real 'watershed' — the events of 70 AD were only seen as significant in the light of 135 AD's finality.<sup>23</sup> Although the interpretation that first generation Christians and even the gospels viewed the events of 70 AD as punishment for the crucifixion can be seen in historiographical works as late as those of Windisch and Schoeps, modern historiography has moved away from this interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Yet, Clements argues that it still participates in the same thinking exercise as post-135 AD Christian thinkers by trying to prove the theological impact of the events of 70 AD.<sup>25</sup>

Authors such as A. Cohen have incorporated Clements' argument in support for 135 AD and have been praised for the intriguing insights that arise from considering this direction.<sup>26</sup>

#### *OTHER SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTIONS*

##### ***David Levine***

Clements' criticism of traditional periodisation has been taken up and argued by other authors, such as D. Levine. Significant to Levine is, that in the eyes of contemporary Jews, the impact of the events of 70 AD was seen as a significant rift only after 135 AD, similar to the findings Clements found regarding the Christian tradition. Not only does the outbreak of the Bar Kokhba revolt speak strongly for the theory that the Jewish people expected the restoration of the Temple as a result of their rebellion, but, in particular, the traditions that figures recount in the texts of the rabbis indicate not only that the Second Temple did not have to

---

22 Ibid., 536.

23 Clements 2012, 522.

24 Windisch wrote, examining the first generation of Christian response to the fall of the Second Temple, that "[...] the one main idea [in the writing of the Four Gospels] is always this: the catastrophe of the year 70 was a divine judgment of wrath and it was dispensed over the great blood guilt of the Jewish people and the city of Jerusalem; above all, of course, the guilt of Golgotha [the site of Jesus' crucifixion] is emphasized." (Windisch, 1914, 19; author's translation). Similarly, Schoeps, investigating the attitudes of first century Christians, drew the same conclusions, arguing, "That the fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of the sanctuary, and the scattering of the people are to be regarded as God's judgments on the Jews for the crucifixion of Jesus, is a causal connection which is probably an early Christian belief [...] In its most popular form: The temple of the Jews was destroyed, and the Jews had to go into exile because they killed the Son of God- it is this conviction of the Christian faith which carries on down to our days." (Schoeps, 1950, 147; 150; author's translation). No current scholar would interpret the theological position of Christians pre-Justin on the meaning of the loss of the Second Temple in this way.

25 Clements 2012, 536.

26 Runesson 2018, 225, reviewing Cohen 2016 and Chilton 2017, 279–281.

exist for temple centrality, but that restoration was expected.<sup>27</sup> Only after the squashing of the Bar Kokhba revolt of 135 AD and the Jewish people were exiled from Jerusalem, when it became clear the temple would not be restored and the loss of the Second Temple was “made permanent”, did the rabbinic literature shift. Levine calls for a foregrounding of initial Jewish (and Christian) reactions to the fall of the Temple as a “control” in historiography to “avoiding circular reasoning and biased results.”<sup>28</sup>

### **Jonathan Klawans**

Finally, as recently as 2020, Klawans has again placed emphasis on the nature of Jewish reactions to the fall of the Second Temple and how this should reconfigure historiographical analysis. Unlike Levine, however, who focused on the rabbis, Klawans argued from the perspective of post-70 AD pseudepigraphal literature (2 *Baruch* and 4 *Ezra*) as well as Flavius Josephus’ *The Jewish War*, that Jewish authors mapped the fall of the Second Temple onto the First.<sup>29</sup> As a result, just as the First Temple was restored, the Jews expected the Second Temple to be restored. They sinned and were punished; they repented and could now expect restoration. Like Levine, Klawans argues that the physical Temple was not needed for Temple centrality. Crucially, according to Klawans, even though Jewish people were likely distraught at the loss of the Temple, Jewish writing was well equipped to provide them with explanation, comfort, and hope, unlike what the opposing academic narrative of theological crisis might suggest.<sup>30</sup>

Klawans attributes the narrative of theological crisis to the tendency of 1970s and 1980s historiography to relate the events of the Holocaust back to the fall of the Second Temple (seen in the works of scholars such as B.M. Bokser and others). According to these authors, the lack of and cryptic nature of Jewish sources before 135 AD bespeak a ‘shattered’ Judaism and survivors had to take time to make sense of the enormity of their experience. Similar to the response in the wake of the Holocaust, an initial silent suffering was observed, which was later followed by a vocal expression of traumatic experience.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the lack of sources discussing the fall was interpreted by these scholars as a result of profound theological trauma, rather than a sign of overall continuity. In reality, Klawans argues, collective trauma does not

---

27 Levine 2018, 172. See for example Mishnah, Eduyot 8.

28 Ibid., 173.

29 He argues this on the basis of, for example: 4 *Ezra* 10: 27, 44–59; 2 *Baruch* 32: 1–9; Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War* 6.109–110, 250; Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 10.210, 276–277.

30 Klawans 2020, 209.

31 See Bokser 1983, 60–61; Goodman 2007, 426–427.

naturally lead to silence, whether literary, artistic, or theological.<sup>32</sup> Even though this is not the reigning historical paradigm anymore, Klawans (much like Clements regarding the Christian tradition) sees any attempt to get at a *certain* interpretation of the significance of 70 AD as a lasting effect of this kind of thinking.

According to Klawans, not only should more scholars take the middle ground between “shattered Judaism” and “not much changed”, scholarship should also accept that many Jews in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Second Temple took a middle of the road position as well — they were distraught but had hope.<sup>33</sup>

### *REBUTTAL*

In the wake of this challenge, the opposing side of the debate is defended by S. Schwartz, who has argued, based on both historical as well as historiographical concerns, that the dismissal of the importance of the events of 70 AD is premature. Klawans’ 2020 paper (discussed above) was written in response to two rebuttals by Schwartz, printed in a 2013 and a 2016 paper. In particular, the 2016 paper argues for a renewed effort on the part of Judaic scholars to consult the Roman sources, and especially to review the painstaking work of Roman historians to reconstruct the tangible impact of 70 AD.<sup>34</sup> The bulk of Schwartz’s paper is dedicated to re-emphasising the toll the events of 70 AD had on the Jewish population (both in lives lost and lives displaced), the transformation of politics and the organisation of the Jewish nation, the impact on particularly the pilgrim and silver economies, the confiscation and selling of Jewish land, the destruction of cult worship, the massive theological implications of the God of Israel’s defeat, the consequent active and sustained humiliation of the Jews, and even potential exterminations as well as increase in anti-Jewish riots. It is within this wider tragedy that the loss of the Second Temple is situated and should be studied.<sup>35</sup> The evidence is sprawling and, taken together, quite compelling. Schwartz believes it took generations for Jewish people to compartmentalise the catastrophe into one of Judaism’s “chosen traumas”. Following a psychological anthropologist’s accounts of collective trauma, he believes the initial response was dominated by unresolved loss, guilt, and shame.<sup>36</sup> The call for a new periodisation is so far not a foregone conclusion, especially once Schwartz’ historiographical

---

<sup>32</sup> Klawans 2020, 213.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>34</sup> Schwartz acknowledges this is also a failing on the part of Roman historians for not considering culture and religion enough. Schwartz 2016, 234.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

and ethical critiques of the call for new periodisation are considered.

## DISCUSSION

Specifically, Schwartz brings forward two primary arguments. The first is to single out the historiographical background influencing the opposing side's argument. Schwartz states that "[Judaic scholars] are heirs of two distinct but in this case complementary intellectual tendencies, idealism and various versions of Jewish or Christian religious traditionalism. For such scholars, the important question is that of the impact of 'the Destruction' on 'Judaism'."<sup>37</sup> Within this framework, it is plausible to study works like Flavius Josephus' *The Jewish War* and *4 Ezra* as conforming to the Deuteronomistic model of sin and punishment, then repentance and restoration (seen for example in Klawans's arguments). In texts such as these moments of real grief become ritualised and turned into theological guilt and repentance.<sup>38</sup> Yet Schwartz believes this does not imply that these and other Jewish works were successful attempts to "make sense" of the destruction and gave Jewish people "radical hope".<sup>39</sup> This feeds into Schwartz's second critique — these texts were attempts by the old clergy or (sub)elite order to hold onto their remaining power and authority. In assuming these texts spoke for 'all Jews' or were able to console them, Klawans and others such as H. Najman do not actually consider the reception of these works.<sup>40</sup> It is bad practice to attribute to all victims of a tragic event the optimism found in the scholar's text of preference.

Schwartz' criticisms are difficult to rebut. The tunnel vision that inevitably appears from only considering reactions given by either Jewish or Christians writers, rather than informing your research from the wider context provided by Roman sources, means that not only are other factors related to the destruction not taken into consideration, but also, that the potential pitfalls of the literature are not critically assessed. As Schwartz rightly argues: how can you dismiss 70 AD as a watershed moment when only a handful of Jewish and Christian texts (produced by elites and clergy and carefully curated to suit their purpose) were studied for the reactions of an entire people? Levine's work probably comes closest to addressing Schwartz's concerns, although he only discusses the continuities indicated by the Roman literature, rather

---

36 Ibid., 238.

37 Ibid., 235.

38 Ibid., 236.

39 Ibid., 238.

40 Ibid., 236.

than addressing the discontinuities Schwartz describes. Likewise, Klawans has weaved some rebuttals into his 2020 paper, but fails to address the primary concern of projecting the writings of elites onto an entire population.

Schwartz' rebuttal also argues that by minimising the crisis, you invite the risk that the suffering of real people is insufficiently acknowledged. Klawans has acknowledged this and has issued the call for scholars to "think even more carefully about death and survival, and the natural inclinations of those who endure a catastrophe."<sup>41</sup> This is a rather vague request, and it remains a major ethical concern raised by this new periodisation, which is only amplified by the sensitivity of the subject for modern day Jewish people. To grapple with these issues, Klawans calls for a seemingly objective 'middle road' between a "shattered Judaism" and "not much changed". Yet, writers engaging in this discussion must wonder if in cases of massacre, dislocation, torture, and religious defeat a 'middle road' is as objective an approach as it posits itself to be.

What both Schwartz and Klawans also do not discuss is, that for centuries after the event, the destruction has certainly been understood to be epoch-making. To early Christian thinkers, as Clements has demonstrated, the loss of the Second Temple acted not only as (divine) confirmation of, but also (divine) punishment for Jewish deicide. Jewish deicide, in turn, acted as justification for *continued* punishment, now via pogroms, crusade massacres, expulsions, and torture through the centuries.<sup>42</sup> The loss of the Second Temple is also central to modern Jewish theology — the role of the Wailing Wall as the holiest place that Jewish people can worship at is one such example. The central role placed by the loss of the Second Temple in religious fasts like Tisha B'av, is another.<sup>43</sup> Even assuming that Clements and other writers are right to believe Jewish people were relatively optimistic after the fall of the Second Temple, for the rest of Jewish history the meaning the destruction has taken could justify its retroactive importance. Belated consequences of an event are still real consequences.

While all these challenges to the methodology and ethics of detractors of 70 AD are convincing and important to consider, these are strawmen for the main point they are making. Clements, and to a lesser degree, Levine and Klawans, all make clear that the issue at hand is traceable to the influence of the Judeo-Christian tradition on periodisation. Would the events of 70 AD be

---

<sup>41</sup> Klawans 2020, 209.

<sup>42</sup> See Kampling, 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Tisha B'av is a lamentation of the specific date of the Ninth of Av, as many tragedies befell the Jewish people on that date, including the loss of both Temples.

considered as important and epoch-making, if not for the influence of Judeo-Christian (religious) tradition? Schwartz' approach to defending the importance of 70 AD is to criticise those trying to find the influence of the "the Destruction' on 'Judaism'" and, instead, defend the importance of the destruction based on a practical synthetisation of Roman sources and evidence. Detractors would shift the end of the era from 70 AD in favour of 135 AD to 'correct' the impact of church fathers and rabbis alike, who had a hand in 'inflating' the importance of the destruction. But the effect is that both tiptoe around having to grapple with or properly discuss the impact of (religious) tradition on the 70 AD event, preferring instead to propose alternative solutions to reassess its importance. It is naïve to assume that an 'objective' reading of such an emotionally, politically, and religiously charged event is possible, but the solution should not be to skirt the issue. And that is assuming (religious) tradition in historiography is a problem — outsider influence, especially coming from those who are (or consider themselves) descendants of the historical participants in question, is something that at the very least should be contemplated with care, rather than assumed to be deliberately obscuring the truth. Would it necessarily mean the events of 70 AD were not epoch-making, if its notoriety did stem from theological significance?

The challenge for those arguing for a reconsideration of the periodisation is to rise to meet these criticisms.

## CONCLUSION

The primary aim of this paper was to summarise the main arguments for and against a reconsideration of the importance of the fall of the Second Temple in 70 AD, particularly in the context of periodisation. In addition, this paper aimed to discuss the primary concerns and criticisms of the new approach.

Recent calls for a reconsideration of this periodisation were in broad terms based on two concerns: that the current debate is a product of uncritical history-making influenced by ancient interpretations, or that the current interpretation came out of anachronistic readings of ancient attitudes. Therefore, the issue flows both ways — our history writing has become influenced by interpretations that were produced and made mainstream by Church fathers and rabbis writing long after the events of 70 AD, who have narrativized the event to suit their purposes. While these texts are not taken at face value or projected back earlier than their invention anymore, much of the desire to uphold 70 AD as an epoch-making event engages in the same thinking exercise. In turn, historians are also guilty of projecting anachronistic interpretations onto the event, as Klawans argues with the

projection of the experience of the Holocaust onto the loss of the Second Temple. Instead, a call for a middle road between “shattered Judaism” and “not much changed” has been proposed. However, Schwartz has argued that there cannot be any serious interpretation of a “middle ground” when Roman sources suggest that the subject at hand deals with defeat, dislocation, mass murder, and general catastrophe. Reading only the literature of the period, written by elites trying to hold onto power, minimises the collective trauma that may have been felt by the rest of the population. The argument then appears to rest on one essential question: at what point do you go from an objective reading of a calamity, into engaging with the thinking exercises of (later) ancient writers who have clear agendas?

This question is obviously not unique to this topic — scholars from all corners of history-writing come up against this issue again and again. And as in all history-writing there is no definitive answer to this question. The following proposal for future research and considerations to be kept into account is, therefore, tentative. What is clear is one of the primary problems is one of methodology, particularly of sources; every new stage in historical research calls for a “return to the sources” and this one is no different. Schwartz’s argument for situating literary interpretations within the wider political and social landscape sketched by Roman sources is an important and necessary check for discussion of this topic.

While a return to sources is called for, it is also interesting that several of our authors rely on contemporary trauma research to interpret their sources. This interdisciplinary approach to interpreting the impact of an event is promising. Jewish history studies especially have rapidly progressed in the past few decades with regards to interdisciplinary communication and such interaction has provided new and compelling insights into the topic.<sup>44</sup> However, being aware of the numerous issues in psychological research as well as the many anachronisms a researcher can invite in projecting these findings back thousands of years should be fore fronted and properly compensated for in each study.

Finally, there is something to be said for the current “post-periodisation” era of historiography that we now live in. There is now almost universal agreement that most periodisations are arbitrary but necessary to facilitate the study of history. There is no more talk of perfect overarching, all-encompassing periods — instead, most historians balance multiple periodisations, which are based on different criteria (economic, political, social, theological,

---

<sup>44</sup> For a preliminary overview, see Korbel et al. 2020, 1–4.

and so on). These both overlap and contradict each other.<sup>45</sup> The question has changed from “is such and such event a perfect marker of a universal change?” to “is it sufficiently convincing for the criterion currently being considered?” Applying a “layering” of periodisations to the topic would resolve many (but no doubt not all) of the contradictions discussed in this paper.

---

<sup>45</sup> For examples of this in historiography on the Second Temple period, see Levine 20118, 162.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bokser, B. M., 1983: Rabbinic responses to catastrophe: from continuity to discontinuity, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50, 37–61.
- Chilton, B., 2017: *Akiva Cohen Matthew and the Mishnah. Redefining Identity and Ethos in the Shadow of the Second Temple's Destruction: Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, Tübingen.
- Clements, R. A., 2012: Epilogue: 70 CE After 135 CE — The Making of a Watershed? in D.R. Schwartz/Z. Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, Leiden, 517–536.
- Cohen, A., 2016: *Matthew and the Mishnah: Redefining Identity and Ethos in the Shadow of the Second Temple's Destruction*, Tübingen.
- Dunn., J. D. G., 2006: *The Partings of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity*, 2nd Edition, London.
- Goodman, M., 2007: *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations*, New York.
- Goodman, M., 2012: Religious Reactions to 70: The Limitations of the Evidence, in D.R. Schwartz/Z. Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, Leiden, 509–516.
- Gunther, J.J., 1976: The Epistle of Barnabas and the Final Rebuilding of the Temple, *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 7 (2), 143–151.
- Kampling, R., 2005: Deicide, in R. Levy (ed.), *Antisemitism: A Historical Encyclopedia of Prejudice and Persecution*, Santa Barbara, 168–169.
- Klawans, J., 2020: Imaging Judaism after 70 CE, in N. Koltun-Fromm/ G. Kessler (eds.), *A Companion to Late Ancient Jews and Judaism: Third century BCE to Seventh Century CE*, Hoboken, 201–216.
- Korbel, S./ L. Nievoll/T. Stoppacher, 2020: Introduction: Rethinking Jewish and non-Jewish relations, *Jewish Culture and History* 21 (1), 1–4.
- Levine, D., 2018: 70 CE or 135 CE— Where was the Watershed?, in J. Schwartz/P.J. Tomson (eds.), *Jews and Christians in the First and Second Centuries: The interbellum 70–132 CE*, Leiden, 161–175.
- Najman, H., 2014: *Losing the Temple and Recovering the Future: An Analysis of 4 Ezra*, Cambridge and New York.
- Reed, A.Y., 2007: "Jewish Christianity" after the "Parting of the Ways" Approaches to Historiography and Self-Definition in the Pseudo-Clementine, in A.H. Becker/A.Y. Reed (eds), *The Ways That Never Parted Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the*

- Early Middle Ages*, Minneapolis, 189–231.
- Schwartz, D.R., 2012: Introduction: Was 70 CE A Watershed in Jewish History? Three Stages of Modern Scholarship, and a Renewed Effort, in D.R. Schwartz/Z. Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, Leiden, 1–19.
- Runesson, A., 2018: Matthew and the Mishnah: Redefining Identity and Ethos in the Shadow of the Second Temple's Destruction, *Religious Studies Review* 44 (2), 224–225.
- Schoeps, H.J., 1950: *Aus frühchristlicher Zeit*, Tübingen.
- Schremer, A. 2010: *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity*, New York.
- Schwartz, D.R., 2012: Introduction: Was 70 CE A Watershed in Jewish History? Three Stages of Modern Scholarship, and a Renewed Effort, in D.R. Schwartz/Z. Weiss (eds.), *Was 70 CE a Watershed in Jewish History? On Jews and Judaism before and after the Destruction of the Second Temple*, Leiden, 1–19.
- Schwartz, S., 2001: *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, Princeton.
- Schwartz, S., 2013: Was There a 'Common Judaism' after the Destruction?, in R. Boustani/K. Hermann, R. Leicht/A.Y. Reed/G. Velti (eds.), *Envisioning Judaism: Studies in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Tübingen, 3–21.
- Schwartz, S., 2016: The Impact of the Jewish Rebellions, 66–135 CE: Destruction or Provincialization?, in John J. Collins/J.G. Manning (eds.), *Revolt and Resistance in the Ancient Classical World and the Near East: In the Crucible of Empire*, Leiden, 234–252.
- Simon, M., 1948: *Verus Israel: Étude sur les relations entre Chrétiens et Juifs dans l'Empire Romain (135–42)*, Paris.
- Simon, M., 1986: *Verus Israel: A Study in the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire, AD 135–425*, H. McKeating (trans), Oxford.
- Williams, M.A., 1992: The demonizing of the demiurge: the innovation of Gnostic myth, in M.A. Williams/C. Cox/M.S. Jafee (eds.), *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change*, Berlin, 73–107.
- Windisch H., 1914: *Der Untergang Jerusalems (anno 70) im Urteil der Christen und Juden*, Leiden.