Michael Tuval  

*From Jerusalem Priest to Roman Jew: On Josephus and the Paradigms of Ancient Judaism*

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The present volume is a “slightly revised version” (v) of the author’s ambitious and substantial 2012 Hebrew University dissertation, directed by Daniel R. Schwartz. The volume puts forward two main theses. First, Tuval argues that Josephus’s *Antiquities* differs from the earlier *War* in no small respect, especially when matters of the temple and Judaism are concerned. According to Tuval, *Antiquities* has been thoroughly influenced by Josephus’s Diaspora context: in this later work, Josephus writes as a Roman Jew. The earlier *War*, however, reflects various temple-centered perspectives characteristic of Josephus’s background as a Jerusalem priest. Tuval’s second argument is broader: Josephus’s transition—from Jerusalem priest to Roman Jew—is taken to be characteristic of broader shifts in the Judaism of his day, from the temple-centered paradigm of Jerusalem before 70 CE to the Torah-centered paradigm evident in the diaspora before 70, and everywhere soon thereafter.

The introduction to the book (1–28) sets the stage by covering some basics concerning Josephus, Judea, and the diaspora. In Tuval’s view, the “common, non-sectarian Judaism of the land of Israel” was “constituted around the Temple and its cult; to be a Judean was—more than anything else—to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem” (6). The Judaism of the diaspora, by contrast, was “framed by the Torah; to be a Jew in the Diaspora was to
obey the commandments of Moses … or at least to learn the book and think about its contents” (6–7). Diaspora Judaism valorized “the praying congregation, holy martyrs, or heavenly semi-divine biblical heroes” as “better intercessors with God” than “the contemporary flesh-and-blood priests in Jerusalem” (6). Reading further in this chapter, we learn that Tuval considers the post-70 CE rabbinic literature “to be representative of a Diaspora of a kind,” for once the temple was destroyed, the diaspora-Jerusalem contrast dissipates, at least for all practical purposes (11). The same holds true for the sectarian literature from Qumran: the sect’s exilic self-conception (e.g., 1QM I, 2–3) deems these Jews to be diasporic in their own way, before the destruction, in their own corner of Judea (11 n. 33; see also 32 n. 16). Tuval does not explicitly place early Christian literature, though readers of page 6 (selections quoted above) will no doubt think of Hebrews and surmise, correctly, that Christian sources will be deemed to be diasporic here as well. With these large swaths of ancient Jewish literature set aside, Josephus, a Jerusalemite in Rome, safely stands out as a “unique and priceless human test-case” (8) for probing the two paradigms of ancient Judaism that Tuval has isolated.

Chapter 1 (“Doing without the Temple: Paradigms in Judaic Literature of the Diaspora”; 29–89) presents a fuller description of Tuval’s understanding of the creative Jewish response to the challenge of diaspora life. He begins with a brief sketch of the common (again, nonsectarian), temple-centered Judaism of Judea (29–36). This was a religion of cult and sacrifices, priests and politics. The bulk of the chapter presents a sympathetic, detailed analysis of other side of this duality: the diaspora Judaism that moved beyond the temple and its cult. A wide array of texts are covered, including the “Fragments of Hellenistic Jewish Authors” (41–43), Joseph and Aseneth, Prayer of Joseph, and 2 Enoch (44–51), 2 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees (55–60), and, of course, Philo (71–78). Some of these texts are covered under synthetic headings, such as “Prayer as Sacrifice” (51, introducing the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers and Wisdom of Solomon), and “You Shall Purse the Right Cause Righteously” (60, introducing Testament of Job, Testament of Abraham, Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides). Along the way, two texts are singled out as representing the views of “Diaspora Radicals” (Sibylline Oracles 4, Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 [68–71]). Toward the end of the chapter Tuval identifies three exceptions, diaspora writers for whom literal temples and real sacrifices continue to play a key role: Letter of Aristeas, and Sibylline Oracles 3 and 5 (78–86; Onias’s temple at Leontopolis figures briefly on 83–84). The whole picture is summarized: “most of these writings offer something in place of the Temple and its cult; along with not mentioning the latter, they propagate coherent Judaic worldviews and identities and deal with such essential matters as worship, ethics, atonement for sins, mediation of the divine powers, God’s presence, salvation, conversion, eschatology, and life after death” (87).
Chapter 2 (“Temple, Cult, Sins, and the Bible in the Judean War”; 90–128) is briefer, for its agenda is more limited. Here Tuval establishes the general temple-centeredness of Josephus’s first work, War. Granting its overall pro-Roman agenda, and following those who view book 7 as a later addition (91–99), Tuval accurately notes that the older core of War (books 1–6) begins and ends with the temple, includes discussions of the temple’s ritual and cosmic significance (99–110), and revolves around crimes committed in the sacred precincts, leading to its destruction (110–115). Recognizing the basic biblical (especially Jeremian) precedents, Tuval shrewdly identifies a number of interesting disparities between War’s discussions of biblical material and the biblical material itself (115–25). Because Josephus’s knowledge of the Hebrew Bible seems rather limited in War, especially in comparison to Antiquities, Tuval surmises that War’s quasi-biblical material was drawn from the priestly traditions of Josephus’s youth (125–28).

Chapter 3 (“The Law Triumphant, Judaism in the Antiquities”; 129–259) is by far the longest of the book, and it is also the most important. It is here that Tuval systematically makes the case for a diasporic reading of Josephus’s magnum opus. After treating some key basics on this work (structure, audience, sources, etc.; 129–54), Tuval proceeds through Antiquities, from Abraham to Agrippa II, accentuating instances where Josephus’s Torah-centered diasporism is on display. When it comes to the biblical material, Tuval emphasizes two themes above all. First, Josephus has now acquired a thorough knowledge of prior, written biblical and postbiblical Jewish source material (something he finds lacking in War). Second, Tuval establishes a pattern of diversion from said prior source texts, whereby the Roman historian periodically downplays cultic themes, often replacing references to cult with references to “the law.” Telling examples include Josephus’s “spiritualizing” paraphrase of Solomon’s speech (174–76; see 1 Kgs 8:1–66 // Ant. 8.106–129), expansive treatment of Abijah’s speech (177–79; see 2 Chr 13:4–12 // Ant. 8.274–281), and consistently law-concerned paraphrasing of 1 Maccabees (194–201; see, e.g., 1 Macc 2:7–13 // Ant. 12.267). As Tuval moves into later periods, he draws some additional contrasts between War and Antiquities (e.g., Pompey’s conquest; Herod’s reign; Josephus on the Pharisees; Caligula’s evil designs). In a variety of ways—some readily apparent, others rather subtle—Tuval builds his case for a diasporic reading of Antiquities vis-à-vis War. This can be seen in the historian’s “loss of interest in the temple and its cult, the elimination of the covenant idea … his emphasis on Divine providence and retribution … the valorization of martyrdom, his blurring of territorial and political aspects of Judaism” (258).

Chapter 4 (“A Jewish Priest in Rome”; 260–74) constitutes a brief muddying of the waters. Here Tuval grants that certain priestly and cultic concerns remain constant for Josephus. Such themes include the importance of priestly political leadership in Josephus’s historical narratives, as well as their mandated religious roles, as evident both
in his narrative and his self-presentation; 260–72). Tuval understands these continuities in light of the confluence of Josephus’s priestly self-confidence, on the one hand, and the Roman valorization of priests, on the other (270–74). So those priestly cultic concerns that do continue for Josephus do so for social and political motivations, not religious concerns. These points aside, Josephus “consistently marginalized the Temple and its sacrifices in his later writings” (274).

The book concludes with a cumulative summary (275–87), given a telling subtitle: “The Torah Shall Come Forth from Rome.” The end matter consists of a full bibliography (289–311) and indices of ancient sources (313–26), modern authors (327–32), and names, subjects, and terms (333–45).

There are, I believe, two main merits of this book. The first concerns its portrait of a vital, flourishing Diaspora Judaism. Surely many readers will agree with this reviewer that Tuval overstates the case when he supposes (granted, tentatively) that “nothing much changed on the morning of the eleventh of Ab in 70 CE” (89). Nevertheless, Tuval’s work correctly stands against those who would suppose that the Jewish religion completely collapsed in 70 CE. A second central merit of this book lies in its careful presentation of the diachronic Josephus. Here, too, not all will be convinced, but Josephus harmonizers must make note: the possible presence of diasporic themes, principally in Antiquities, will remain a premise to be pondered.

The main weakness of this book stems from the fact that Tuval’s construction of ancient Judaism—dividing it neatly into priestly and diasporic forms—is presented in a decidedly one-sided fashion. To my ear—and perhaps mine is overly sensitive?—Tuval’s book is as antipriestly as Max Weber. Priestly religion comes off as purely cultic, dryly political, and spiritually impoverished. There is a dose of Sigmund Freud here also as well: for priestly Judeans, the temple was not just an overriding concern; it was an “obsession” (18, 104, 119). More curious is Tuval’s endorsement of Christian critiques: he occasionally uses the word “spiritualize” (in various forms: 36, 68–78, 175, 277, 344, but never of priests). At one point he even quotes, favorably, from Heb 9:22: “without the shedding of blood there [was] no pardon” (30).

Tuval’s presentation is not only one-sided in this attitudinal way; his presentation is also one-sided evidentially. The image he conjures of Judean priestly Judaism is deemed so obvious that hardly any analysis of it is presented. Of course, one reason for this is that Tuval defined a great deal of the evidence away (recall: Qumran and the rabbis are diasporic). At one point we are directed—in a footnote—to a list of texts that promise insight into priestly concerns (32 n. 15, which lists 1 Esdras, Aramaic Levi Document, Baruch, Sirach, Dan 7–12, Jubilees, 1 Maccabees, Psalms of Solomon, 1 Enoch, and
others). But these are barely examined. Consider Ben Sira: here we have, by all accounts, a work produced in Judea, by a priestly sage. Yet does not most of the book focus on other concerns? Also on Tuval’s list is 1 Maccabees—but do not these warriors also pray on their way to recover the temple? What of Jubilees and the Psalms of Solomon? Forty years ago E. P. Sanders was able to discern a great deal of religious meanings in these texts, in his classic *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*. Tuval is so convinced that priestly Judaism was single-mindedly cult-obsessed that he feels no need to argue with those who might think otherwise.

It is not only that Tuval has underestimated the diversity of concerns we find in predestruction Jewish literature from Judea. To my mind, Tuval has also problematically maximized the contrasts between Josephus’s *War* and *Antiquities* by constructing his comparisons too narrowly. Even if we grant every instance that Tuval has assembled demonstrating the eliding of priestly and cultic matters in *Antiquities*, it remains equally important that the very opposite could be demonstrated other times as well. Does not *War’s* detailed portrait of the Essenes (2.119–161) speak to Josephus’s early sympathy for these prayerful ascetics who suffered martyrdom and believed in immortality (see 87 for Tuval’s identification of these themes as diasporic)? As for *Antiquities*, an author who really wanted to downplay cultic and sacrificial concerns could have argued for the end of priestly authority altogether (cf. Hebrews), or such an author could have summarized Leviticus less and Isaiah more or perhaps have said less about the priests and more about the wisdom tradition. Had Tuval operated with a fuller data set, he might have reckoned with the possibility that Josephus’s *Antiquities* is arguably more priestly than the Jewish Bible, precisely because it says relatively little—by its author’s choice, we have to allow—about the prophetic tradition and even less about wisdom. At one point—granted, in a note—Tuval observes: “The Temple is not even mentioned in Josephus’s introduction to *AJ*” (261 n. 5). What this seemingly self-evident argument overlooks is the fact that Genesis does not mention the temple either.

I want to reiterate that I do believe there is enduring value to this book, above all in its precise presentation of the diachronic readings of Josephus’s two major works. When softened, the author’s arguments for Josephus’s increasing emphasis on certain diasporic interests will persevere. What is unfortunate—and unnecessary—is that Tuval’s presentation of Josephus’s later literary accomplishments rides on the back of a reified stereotype of the Jerusalem priesthood. Such, I suppose, is the danger of any binary construction of ancient Judaism: the achievement of one paradigm depends on the failure of another. At the end of the day, readers of this book will have to consider carefully whether it is helpful to view the history of Judaism as a two-sided zero-sum game played between priests and exiles. Readers with sympathy for priests and cult will also be left with an irony: Tuval’s Roman Jewish Josephus turns out to be a priestly turncoat after all.