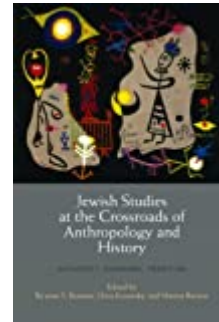


Ra'anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, Marina Rustow, eds. *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*. Jewish Culture and Contexts Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. 424 pp. \$69.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8122-4303-1.



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Deconstruction without Destruction: Reimagining Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History

Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History is an ambitious edited volume that includes a number of rich and important essays. I call it ambitious because—as outlined in the extensive introduction—it seeks to address and overcome a number of the theoretical problems that have long dogged Jewish studies as a discipline. These include homogenizing and essentializing the “Jewish” object and subject of Jewish studies; the reification and simplification of insider-outsider divides and relationships; the focus on text and textual analysis over a more embedded approach that examines the lived experiences that enable textual production, circulation, and interpretation; and approaches to diaspora that project certain kinds of contemporary Israeli concerns (center versus periphery, homeland versus exile, civilized Westerners versus primitive orientals) onto very differently organized worlds. These are important critiques of contemporary Jewish studies that deserve considerable attention and reflection. Ra’anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow seek to overcome these

limitations by combining textual and cultural, synchronic and diachronic, and top-down and bottom-up analyses that represent the best possible fusion of contemporary historical and anthropological approaches. The volume is thus organized around three large themes—“Authority,” “Diaspora,” and “Tradition”—rather than by historical period, geographical region, research question, or disciplinary approach.

As Harvey Goldberg’s brilliant volume epilogue illustrates, the sheer diversity of materials and approaches included in the volume can lead to some fruitful comparisons. Goldberg notes, for example, that a number of the essays in the work suggest that there are “building blocks,” or tropes, that continuously reappear in new arrangements across history and geography in the Jewish world. One such trope is what Goldberg calls the “enduring power of the image of Temple rites as they have been variously refigured over time and across space” (p. 325). Boustan’s essay “The Dislocation of the Temple Vessels” (chapter 5) refutes the notion that the destruc-

tion of the Second Temple and the advent of rabbinic Judaism marked a clear transition from *âculticâ* practice to a *âscriptural communityâ*, instead suggesting that for many rabbis in the late antique period seeing and experiencing objects that had been associated with the Temple outside Jerusalem was part and parcel of an ongoing dialectic between *âthe centering discourse of the traditional cult and the new spatial mobility of the sacred that characterized the post-Temple eraâ* (pp. 137, 139). Jumping forward in time several millennia and returning to Israel, Tamar El-Orâs essay entitled *âA Temple in Your Kitchenâ* (chapter 12) also looks at the centrality of the Temple and discourses about sacrifice in contexts where they might be least expected: in a womenâs *techouva* movement that encourages the resurrection of a long-abandoned domestic ritual, *hafrashat hallah*, which involves the *âsacrificeâ* of a piece of homemade Sabbath bread (*hallah*). She argues that the use of the synagogue to teach this domestic rite calls on and inverts the categories associated with the Temple sacrifice: *âThe placement of the Temple and the kitchen side by side in the public hafrashat hallah ceremony challenges the division between the public and the private, between male and female.... The biblical commandment [to sacrifice], which is meant to be carried out in the public space of the Temple, moves into the home. The hands of male priests are replaced by the arms of women. The culturing of the dough into food, the elevation of the bread into a means of *tiqqun âolam* [world healing], is made a duty of the daughters of Eve. Instead of a private act accomplished by each woman inside her house, the ceremony offers a public spiritual event. The synagogue becomes, for a time, a Temple and a kitchenâ* (pp. 290-291).

And finally, returning again to the antique post-Temple period, Michael Swartzâs essay *âJudaism and the Idea of Ancient Ritual Theoryâ* (chapter 13) explores the ways in which the Mishnah and the *Piyyutim*âs commentaries on sacrificial rituals offer divergent takes on priestly power and authority. The former emphasizes the sanctity and sagacity of the rabbis over the foibles and failings of the priest and the latter highlights the holy aspects of the priests themselves. Both texts, however, also have performative aspects that allow for the survival of sacrificial ritual within the context of diasporic, rabbinic Judaism. *âThus a remarkable transformation occurred: an act of discourse about sacrifice became a virtual form of sacrifice itselfâ* (p. 316). These arguments all show the surprising ways in which Temple images and practices have continuously shaped even rabbinic Judaism. However, Goldbergâs discussion of this theme defies the

bookâs organizational structure, thus requiring considerable interpretative work that is not facilitated by the volume itself. While both El-Orâs and Swartzâs essays are in the section called *âTraditionâ*, Boustaniâs essay is under the rubric *âDiasporaâ*. In fact, almost all of Goldbergâs highly syncretic insights do precisely this, crossing the bookâs classificatory boundaries and thus highlighting the ways in which those boundaries often fail to create internal dialogue among materials that do not obviously lend themselves to such conversations. Another example: Goldberg notes that a number of essays deal directly or indirectly with the production, circulation, interpretation, and use of texts, rather than just with the texts themselves. These include Ephraim Karonfogelâs essay *âPrayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory in the Jewish Communities of Medieval Europeâ* (chapter 11), which uses rabbinical debates to argue that there was both widespread literacy and a generalized ability to recite large portions of the prayer service by memory among males in medieval Ashkenaz; Albert Baumgarten and Rustowâs essay *âJudaism and Tradition, Continuity and Changeâ* (chapter 9), which looks at the role of changing print technology in both the valorization of oral knowledge and its transformation to written form; Lucia Raspeâs essay *âSacred Space, Local History, and Diasporic Identityâ* (chapter 6), which reevaluates the medieval responsa that condemn pilgrimage to *âsaintlyâ* graves in light of the spatial practices of medieval burial; and finally J. H. Chajesâs essay *âRabbis and Their (In)famous magicâ* (chapter 2), which defies the conventional assumption that magic was a nonelite, exclusively oral practice condemned in texts by looking at biographical rabbinical writings that embrace magic in certain instances while condemning it in others. Once again, these essays are scattered across the volumeâs internal divisions, which obscures the ways in which they might be put in dialogue with one another.

I do not mean to suggest that one cannot make useful comparisons across texts within any one of the bookâs three rubrics. The *âDiasporaâ* section, which not incidentally contains the smallest number of essays found in any of the three rubrics, lends itself to this rather nicely by complicating both the Zionist ideal of a Jewish homeland seamlessly reproduced across the millennia and the argument that post-Temple Judaism made home fundamentally local. At least two of the essays in the *âDiasporaâ* section, Andrea Schatzâs *âDetours in a âHidden Landâ: Samuel Romanelliâs Masaâbaâravâ* (chapter 7) and Tamar Katrielâs *âThe Rhetoric of Rescue: âSalvage Immigrationâ Narratives in Israeli Cultureâ* (chapter 8),

also raise questions about what and who counts as part of Jewish community for the purposes of socio-spatial belonging, thus hinting at the ways in which diaspora itself may be a problematic category.

But the other two categories—authority and tradition—are so broad and include such a range of materials that it is much harder to see them as having any kind of internal coherence. As a result, like many edited volumes, despite the high quality of many of the individual contributions, this work seems to be struggling for a unified theme that would make it an effective book. It is thus hard to imagine a setting in which the book as a book would actually be useful. In addition, while the editors insist that the volume pushes back against ten-

dencies toward essentialism in Jewish studies, the only thing that many of these essays have in common is that they are about Jews. (Goldberg tellingly notes that only one writer—Chajes—refers to Judaism in the plural [p. 328]). Unfortunately, this seems to reinscribe aspects of the thinking that the editors suggest has long ghettoized Jewish studies. But that does not detract from the work's great features. Almost all of the individual contributions to the volume offer wonderful examples of the ways in which cutting edge analytical tools from the humanities and social sciences can deepen and complicate scholarly understandings of Jewish lives and cultures. This makes the book a fabulous resource for those interested in seeing the best of what anthropological and historical analyses can offer Jewish studies.

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