

From the Herodians to Hadrian
The Shifting Status of Judean Religion in Post-Flavian Rome

Heidi Wendt

This paper builds on the work of scholars who have attempted to theorize the complex and shifting negotiations of Jewish or Judean and Christian as categories of self-identification and opposition with a view to key historical developments that occurred between the Judean War and the Bar Kokhba Revolt. Elsewhere I have argued that despite the considerable tolls of the war, it created a pretext for widespread interest in the religion of Judeans—at least particular forms, namely ones rooted in Judean texts and their specialized exegesis, especially for prophetic or esoteric purposes—and for specialists claiming expertise therein. The favorable status of Judaic texts and practices in these decades has been overshadowed, and understandably so, by the events of the Judean War and Flavians’ roles in the destruction and decommissioning of the temples of Jerusalem and Leontopolis, respectively, among other factors. Notwithstanding, the Flavian period holds important implications for theorizing the heightened, and not wholly negative, profile of Judean religion—which I will define momentarily—at this time, as well as Christian outgrowths of the specific form of religious activity that I have in mind.¹

Against this backdrop, I will examine Bar Kokhba’s revolt as an event that precipitated a shift in the status of Judean religion among Roman audiences, and with this, the more pointedly adversarial positions toward Judeans that begin to appear in “Christian” writings of the mid-second century. Whereas the latter have been read as symptomatic of Christianity’s move away from Judaism in light of its increasingly gentile profile and the dilemma posed by Bar Kokhba’s alleged messianic pretensions, I redescribe this anti-Judean rhetoric as a tandem effort on the part of Christians to distance their religious offerings from problematic connotations of Judean-ness, while also laying claim to exclusive interpretive authority over the Judean writings. While such efforts predate Bar Kokhba, the revolt created an opportunity, and maybe also a

¹ To be clear from the outset, I am not using the language of Judean and Christian in an essentializing way, to denote distinct ethnic or religious identities. In the pages that follow I will explain “Judean” and “Judean religion,” and one that largely reflects the perspective of Roman audiences, broadly construed, and ideas that held about the religious practices of this province and the people who traced their ancestry to it. Thus, where the terms appear in this paper, I use them to capture either those sort of notional expectations about Judeans, and later Christians, or else the discursive constructions of these categories by writers such as Justin Martyr.

necessity, for stronger strategies of differentiation. Setting these developments within the wider, competitive field of freelance expertise, however, both localizes them among particular kinds of religious actors and also provides fresh comparanda for the negotiation of ethnic categories or ethnically coded practices among other participants in this sort of religious activity.

The Religion of Freelance Experts

In order to frame the investigation that follows, allow me to briefly summarize a forthcoming monograph in which I argue for the expansion and diversification of the religion of “freelance” experts in the first two centuries of the Roman Empire. By “freelance,” I intend to capture any self-authorized purveyor of specialized skills, teachings, and related services who drew upon such abilities in the pursuit of status and prestige, and even more transparent forms of profit. Unlike, say, the officiants of civic temples whose religious authority was a matter of institutional affiliation self-authorized experts were responsible for generating their own recognition, legitimacy, and perceived value, often through demonstrations of skill and learning, and/or by offering services that purportedly exceeded ordinary or familiar religious activities.²

There are many indications in our evidence that from the early decades of the empire these religious actors grew increasingly influential, more diverse with respect to the skills or methods in which they claimed expertise, and more global in the ethnic coding of their wisdom and practices. I am inclined to think that they also increased in number, with due caution given the relative scarcity of earlier evidence. The same sources bear witness to an escalation in both the frequency and severity of efforts intended to counteract their influence, particularly throughout the first century CE.³ And while the full landscape of freelance experts active in the early Roman Empire included specialists in philosophy, medicine, jurisprudence, and rhetoric, I am most interested in experts in religion, that is, ones who directly enlisted in their practices gods and similar beings (daimones, divine *pneuma*, or spirits of the dead), including astrologers, who typically held anthropomorphic understandings of celestial bodies and their relevance to human affairs.⁴ That being said, the boundaries between these putative areas were both porous and also secondary to deeper field dynamics that all freelance experts negotiated: the challenges of constructing one’s own authority and legitimacy,

² Cf. James B. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007), 168.

³ Frederick H. Cramer, “Expulsion of Astrologers from Ancient Rome,” *C & M* 12 (1951): 9–50; Pauline Ripat, “Expelling Misconceptions: Astrologers at Rome,” *CP* 106 (2011): 115–54.

⁴ See, e.g., Stanley K. Stowers, “The Ontology of Religion,” in *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith* (ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon; London and Oakville: Equinox, 2008), 434–49.

competition, the problematic connotations of interest and profit, and opportunities for niche forms of prestige (e.g., writing and intellectual demonstrations).⁵

Given the dramatically changing territory and population demographics of the early Roman Empire, as well as the networks of trade and connectivity that enabled its administration, it is unsurprising that a large number of participants in the specialist phenomenon were foreigners who capitalized on interest in wisdom, teachings, rites, and techniques perceived to be novel or exotic among Roman audiences. Moreover, a number of conditions—both ones cultivated consciously as part of the Roman imperial project, and also those that arose circumstantially, for instance, through voluntary and involuntary migration and the increasing heterogeneity of cities throughout the empire—promoted the basic recognition of and interest in foreign peoples, as well as their distinctive cultural practices and institutions.⁶ Inhabitants of the Roman Empire were broadly acquainted with such concepts, of foreign religion in particular, and they seem to have presented opportunities for complex and strategic acts of identification. Indeed, many specialists utilized ethnic or provincial caricatures to their advantage by claiming expertise in what I call ethnically coded skills, practices, wisdom traditions, and artifacts, including texts, that were strongly associated with a particular people or region. We inherit numerous examples of specialists in foreign religion who operated independently of existing institutions (e.g., cults, private temples, voluntary associations, religious communities)—although they might cooperate or overlap with other religious phenomena in complex ways⁷—and utilized ethnic coding to gain recognition as legitimate purveyors of offerings framed within a given ethnic or geographic idiom.

⁵ See, e.g., Elizabeth Rawson, *Intellectual Life in the Late Roman Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985); Kendra Eshleman, *The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁶ See, e.g., Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, “*Mutatas Formas*: The Augustan Transformation of Roman Knowledge,” in Karl Galinsky, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Augustus* (2005), 55–84.

⁷ If we consider the evidence for other foreign freelance experts, for example, we learn that some formed networks with one another, while others attempted to establish groups with regular contours and institutional characteristics, and others still overlapped with existing religious groups or institutions such as voluntary associations and temples. See Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 109–43. There are several examples of experts who maintained positive and regular relationships with religious institutions in the city of Rome, even civic institutions. The most notable example is the collaboration between the city’s temple of Asclepius on Tiber Island and freelance doctors who often treated patients there. See, e.g., G. Renberg, “Public and Private Places of Worship in the Cult of Asclepius at Rome,” *MAAR* 51/52 (2006/2007): 87–172.

This exotic dimension of freelance expertise is particularly relevant to theorizing later Christian diversity insofar as Judeans regularly appear among other specialists in ethnically coded skills, types of knowledge, practices, and paraphernalia,⁸ or else in contexts that were deeply resonant of this class of religious activity (e.g., expulsions and proscriptions).⁹ I should clarify that when I use the language “Judean religion” in this paper, I do so in one of two senses: either in reference to the assorted religious practices, actors, groups, and institutions associated with this particular ethnic population or geographic/cultural area of the empire, or else to capture general and widespread ideas *about* the religion of Judea/Judeans held by non-Judean audiences (e.g., that the religion of Judeans entailed the worship of one god, a body of authoritative texts, and distinctive bodily and eating practices). To be clear, I am neither setting Judean experts in absolute contrast to other Judean religious actors or phenomena, nor presuming a normative version of Judean religion upon which they innovated or from which they departed. Rather, I am proposing yet another dimension of an increasingly differentiated picture of Judean religion, and one that is comparable in its diversity to the assorted actors, groups, and institutions apparent in our evidence for other examples of foreign religion attested throughout the empire.¹⁰

There is considerable evidence that Judeans were notable participants in the wider phenomenon of freelance expertise, both as kinds of teachers or philosophers and as religious specialists, in my sense.¹¹ Nevertheless, when such figures appear in our sources, their “freelance” status is typically overlooked on the assumption either of authorial bias or error, or else that they were “proselytizers” acting on behalf of a larger corporate entity, Judaism or a Jewish community. Many of the examples I have in mind are likely familiar to many of you. Writing of an expulsion of “Rome’s Judaic population” (παῖν τὸ Ἰουδαϊκὸν τῆς Ῥώμης) under Tiberius, for example, Josephus

⁸ By “ethnic coding” I mean the range of practices were strongly associated with certain peoples or regions for particular audiences, irrespective of how faithfully such associations resembled religion in native contexts. See, e.g., John Scheid, “*Graeco Ritu*: A Typically Roman Way of Honoring the Gods,” *HSCP* 97 (1995): 15-31; Grant Parker, “*Ex Oriente Luxuria*: Indian Commodities and Roman Experience,” *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient* 45 (2002): 40-95.

⁹ See Heidi Wendt, “Iudaica Romana: Rereading Judean Expulsions from Rome,” *JAJ* 6 (2015): 97-126.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Tessa Rajak and David Noy, “*Archisynagogoi*,” 75-93; Steve Mason, “*Philosophiai*: Greco-Roman, Judean and Christian,” in *Voluntary Association in Greco-Roman World* (ed. John S. Kloppenborg and Stephen G. Wilson; London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 31-58; Philip Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations*; idem, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians*.

¹¹ Heidi Wendt, “Iudaica Romana: A Rereading of Judean Expulsions from Rome,” *JAJ* 6 (2015): 97-126.

attributes the incident to tandem acts of deception perpetrated by the priests of an Isis temple, who facilitated the seduction of one Roman noblewoman, and a disreputable Judean and his accomplices, who posed as experts in Mosaic law instruction in order to swindle another, Fulvia, interested in his wisdom (*AJ* 18.65–84). Josephus' writings also contain references to numerous 'false-prophets' (ψευδοπροφηται) and 'charlatans' or 'imposters' (γοήτες) who drew popular followings in Judea on the basis of fraudulent claims and unrealized promises: John, son of Levi, always ready to indulge great expectations, who incited the inhabitants of a small Galilean town to rebel during the Judean War (*BJ* 4.84–5); Theudas, who, styling himself a prophet, rallied thousands to the banks of the Jordan River where he intended to part its waters (*AJ* 20.97–99); and the unnamed Egyptian who led thirty thousand to the Mount of Olives where he revealed plans to force entry into Jerusalem—in the *Antiquities* Josephus adds that the city walls were to fall at his command—where he would assume power for himself (*BJ* 2.261–2; *AJ* 20.169–171).

These 'imposters' join unnamed ones who feature in most of the uprisings or calamitous events Josephus chronicles, especially as the events of the Judean War escalated. He blames the deaths of women and children taking refuge in the Jerusalem temple at the time of its siege, for example, on some 'false-prophet' who had urged them to go up to the court to receive signs of their salvation (τὰ σημεῖα τῆς σωτηρίας, *BJ* 6.285–6). He was but one of the many "rogues and pretenders of God who beguiled [the people] at this time" (οἱ μὲν ἀπατεῶνες καὶ καταψευδόμενοι τοῦ θεοῦ τηνικαῦτα παρέπειθον, 6.288).¹² Philo, too, warns, "If anyone cloaking himself under the name and guise of a prophet and claiming to be possessed by inspiration lead us on to the worship of the gods recognized in the different cities, we ought not to listen to him and be deceived by the name of a prophet. For such a one is no prophet, but a *goēs*, since his oracles and pronouncements are falsehoods invented by himself" (*Spec. Leg.* 1.315).

Speaking to a slightly later context, Juvenal deplores the infelicitous pastimes of Roman women, foremost of which is *superstitio*. As he speculates about what wives do when their husbands are away, the poet introduces a revolving door of exotic visitors who include a masked "professor of obscenities" (*professus obscenum*; 346–65) with saffron robes and soot-rimmed eyes, on whose authority women marry or divorce; a eunuch of Bellona (512–21), who warns them of impending disasters defrayed only through the purifications he offers in exchange for old dresses; the man clad as Anubis (532–41), who, with a silver asp and thronged by his linen-clad troupe, issues sexual prescriptions and extracts fines from wives who have unwittingly violated them; and a

¹² Cf. Joseph. *BJ* 2.264. For a brief discussion of some of these references, see David E. Aune, "The Use of ΠΡΟΦΗΤΗΣ in Josephus," *JBL* 101 (1982): 419–21.

trembling Judean woman (342–5), who “begs into the ear” (*mendicat in aurem*), revealing herself to be a high priestess (*magna sacerdos*) and faithful intermediary of the highest heaven (*summi fida internuntia caeli*), as well as an interpreter of the laws of Jerusalem (*interpretes legum Solymarum*). “She too gets her hand filled, though with less,” Juvenal explains, “because Judeans will sell you whatever dreams you like for the tiniest copper coin” (546–7).

Lucian, to the contrary, knows of a Syrian exorcist from Palestine who has cured countless people afflicted by *daimones*, albeit for huge fees (*Philops.* 16). In another text he quips that one man purges himself with sacred medicine, while another is mocked by the incantations of imposters, and another still falls for the spells of a Judean (*Trag.* 171–3). Josephus both admits and takes pride in Judea’s reputation for this particular skill, recalling with approval the exorcisms and healings that he witnessed a Judean man named Eleazar perform before the Flavians and their armies, aided by the wisdom of Solomon.¹³ Indeed, it is because God taught Solomon “the art concerning *daimones*” (τὴν κατὰ τῶν δαιμόνων τέχνην) that Judeans have such effective techniques (8.44–49). Acts mentions itinerant Judean exorcists who begin to adjure *daimones* in the name of the Jesus proclaimed by Paul (19:13), while Justin Martyr boasts that throughout the whole world—“even in your own city!”—Christians have exorcised many who were possessed by demons in the name of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ “And they healed them,” he insists, “though they had not been healed by all the others: exorcists and enchanters and healers” (ὕπὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων ἐπορκιστῶν καὶ ἐπαστῶν καὶ φαρμακευτῶν μὴ ἰαθέντας, 2 *Apol.* 5.6).

Despite how they are portrayed and to what ends, it is apparent that some of these actors were favorably received in Judea and in other parts of the empire. Whereas scholars have tended to discount sources that depict Judeans as diviners, wisdom instructors, and exorcists (among other specialist guises), to take this evidence seriously on its own terms locates some Judeans within a class of religious activity that is well attested for specialists in other foreign offerings thus counteracting the tendency to render Judeans religiously unique. Elsewhere I have argued that “Judean” even seems to function in certain contexts as an ethnic or geographic metonym connoting expertise in

¹³ On Judean exorcism in the Second Temple period, see Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 105–12; David Frankfurter, “The Great, the Little, and the Authoritative Tradition in Magic of the Ancient World,” *ARG* 16 (2015), 20–21 (page numbers provisional). Frankfurter also characterizes Eleazar as one of the “freelance experts who drew on [Solomon’s name] for such ritual performances,” thus contributing to his status as the preeminent authority in this domain of expertise (21).

¹⁴ Not to mention Jesus’ own talent at exorcism, which he passes on to his disciples. One wonders whether the gospels do not themselves reflect awareness of the particular skills for which Judeans were renowned.

the fairly regular assortment of practices for which Judeans seem to have been especially well known (exorcism, prophecy, dream interpretation, divination or wisdom instruction from the Judean writings), not unlike how “Chaldaean” was a term synonymous with astrology, or “magus” referred specifically to Persian wisdom and religious expertise until its semantic range broadened to include any self-authorized religious actor.¹⁵

Given the tendencies toward innovation that many specialists exhibited, I suspect that these shifting taxonomies—that is, the renegotiation, expansion, or dilution of ethnic categories as they operated within this particular context—correlate with the geographic and cultural expansion of the empire, as well as increasingly rife competition among experts capable of offering comprehensive programs that comprised a number of appealing practices (e.g., divination, healing, initiation, moral progress, etc.) framed within different ethnic idioms. I would provisionally suggest that “Judean” underwent comparable processes of ethnic decoding with respect to the precise range of practices and skills that the term implied in the context of religious expertise, particularly in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, when Judaic connotations became (even) more fraught. I will, of course, say much more about this momentarily.

As many have shown, the early imperial period was time of fertile cultural and intellectual experimentation, wherein novel forms of religion abounded and competition for followers was rife. While these conditions are not identical with the phenomenon of freelance expertise, self-authorized specialists capitalized on and contributed substantially to this climate, and that their activities in the first and second centuries planted the seeds for religious phenomena that are better, or more institutionally, attested in the third (e.g., Christian, Jewish, and Mithras groups). And although Judean experts appear throughout the first century of the empire, I turn now to how the events of the Judean War might have galvanized their activities from this period onward.

Judean Texts and Textual Experts

Many of the Judean experts I mentioned in the preceding section seem to have somehow linked their authority, teachings, and other practices, to the famed Judean writings. The role of these texts might range from notional or symbolic appeals to the identification and interpretation of written prophecies to even more technical exegesis. I am most interested in the latter two applications, but wish to note that in this regard Judean experts were not alone. The past decade has witnessed a surge of interest in literary

¹⁵ See James B. Rives, “Magus and its Cognates in Classical Latin,” in *Magical Practice in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference Held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept.–1 Oct. 2005* (ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón; RGRW168; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 53–77.

interpretation employed in the context of religious activity, foremost in the work of Peter Struck, Stanley Stowers, and, more recently, John T. Fitzgerald.¹⁶ These practices were predicated on a shared attitude toward certain writings, namely, that they were divinely inspired, harbored concealed knowledge or mysteries, and could be elucidated through skillful exegesis, often in conjunction with the imagined aid of divine beings. The interpretation of *these* writings had grander consequences than mere literary criticism: the secrets they encoded pertained to the gods, and their decipherment was a form of divination.

Intellectualizing religious experts—among whom I would include the author of the Derveni Papyrus, the authors of the *Hermetica*, the authors of some Pythagorean pseudepigrapha, and the apostle Paul, to whom we will return in the next section—are evident already in the late classical world but seem to have flourished in Roman times, when many applied their interpretive skills to ancient writings culled from the empire's diverse territories or even farther afield. Although wisdom traditions or literary corpora were often ethnically coded, recent scholarship has emphasized that many books and teachings that were presented as Persian, Egyptian, Judean, and Chaldean reflected a common intellectual milieu.¹⁷ Since intellectualizing practices and texts transected ethnic or geographic specificity, it is unsurprising that rivalries among writer-intellectuals with similar skills and interests likewise crossed putative ethnic or geographic boundaries. Nevertheless, rivalries were the most acute among specialists of like ability operating within the same ethnic idioms and claiming interpretive authority over the same texts.¹⁸

I will return to the implications of this setting for the rivalries that appear in the Pauline epistles and the writings of second century "Christ experts." First, however, it is

¹⁶ Peter T. Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); David Konstan, "Introduction," in *Heraclitus: Homeric Problems*. Writings from the Greco-Roman World 18 (ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell and David Konstan; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), xi–xxx; John T. Fitzgerald, "Myth, Allegory, and the Derveni Papyrus," in *Myth and Scripture: Contemporary Perspectives on Religion, Language, and Imagination* (ed. Dexter E. Callender, Jr.; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014), 229–42; idem, "The Derveni Papyrus and Its Relevance for Biblical and Patristic Studies." *EC* 6 (2015): 157–78.

¹⁷ Stanley Stowers, "The Dilemma of Paul's Physics: Features Stoic-Platonist or Platonist-Stoic," (forthcoming) 16.

¹⁸ E.g., the author of the Derveni papyrus, a self-styled priest, interprets a theogonic poem that he characterizes as "as a repository of great (and even sacred) hidden truths, which are conveyed in riddles" (Struck, *Birth of the Symbol*, 38; cf. Rom 2:5–16). Much of the exegesis pertains to the proper understanding of an initiation rite and he is clear that literal—really, any other—readings of this poem fail to disclose its true message. Thus, is precisely through such demonstrations of skill that he claims unparalleled expertise as an Orphic initiator, and always with a view to similarly self-authorized rivals with whose practices his own overlap (cf. Fitzgerald, "The Derveni Papyrus," 19–21).

important to appreciate the extent to which Judean texts and their specialized interpreters were at home in this broader phenomenon of literary divination. There are circumstantial indications that these texts were at least familiar, if not also appealing, to Roman audiences from the earliest decades of the empire. A handful of scholars have argued for their literary influence on famous Latin poets like Virgil, which would suggest fairly broad awareness of the Judean writings at least among the producers and consumers of other texts.¹⁹ Alternatively, in his biography of Augustus, Suetonius recalls that upon assuming the office of Pontifex Maximus the emperor confiscated whatever prophetic writings were in private circulation at Rome, some of which were attributed to the Sibyl, while others, some two thousand of them, were either anonymous, or else attributed to authors of little repute.²⁰ That the production and interpretation of such prophetic corpora were the purview of freelance experts is clear, I think. What is less clear in Suetonius' account, as well as comparable ones of Tiberius repeating his predecessor's actions, is that Judean writings might have fallen within the category of prophetic texts confiscated on these occasions. Justin Martyr alleges that by the second century death was decreed for anyone caught with books of (Persian) Hystaspes, the Sibyl, or the Judean prophets,²¹ while Porphyry relates, "The law of the Judeans [once] flourished only in a small region of Syria, though later, indeed, it was gradually extended to the confines of Italy; yet this happened after Gaius Caesar and certainly not before his reign."²²

Regardless of the history of these writings at Rome in the early part of the first century, or even in the final years of the republic, the reputation of their oracular character and potency must have been bolstered considerably by the role they were said to have played in both the events of the Judean War and the dynastic transformation that occurred in its wake. Regarding the former, Josephus reports that Judean rebels had been provoked in part by interpreting an "ambiguous oracle in their holy writings" (χρησιμὸς ἀμφίβολου ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς εὐρημένους γράμμασιν) to mean that one from their country was about to become the king of the world." He notes, and not without satisfaction, that many wise men were led astray concerning its interpretation (πολλοὶ τῶν σοφῶν ἐπλανήθησαν περὶ τὴν κρίσιν), since the oracle referred not to a Judean but rather to Vespasian, as Josephus correctly ascertained.²³ Never reticent about his abilities, he boasts: "Thus Josephus won his freedom as the reward for his predictions

¹⁹ See, e.g., Nicholas Horsfall, "Virgil and the Jews," *Vergilius* 58 (2012): 67–80; Jan N. Bremmer, "Post Scriptum: Virgil and Jewish Literature," *Vergilius* 59 (2013): 157–64.

²⁰ Suet. *Aug.* 31.1.

²¹ Justin, *1 Apol.* 44.10–3.

²² Porph. *Adv. Christ.* apud August. *Ep.* 102.8.

²³ Joseph. *BJ* 6.310–313.

(τῶν προειρημένων) and his power of insight into the future was no longer discredited.”²⁴ Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio, and Appian all reproduce the tradition about the oracle though only the latter two mention Josephus directly.²⁵

Elsewhere Josephus claims that these texts foretell the entirety of world history, including the rise and fall of nations.²⁶ For their predictive value, then, I submit that, from a Roman perspective, Judean writings were on a par with Rome’s Sibylline books and other prophetic corpora that they had amassed in their state collection.²⁷ I have even raised the possibility that the copy of the law that served as the parade item of spolia in the Flavian triumph may have been incorporated into the collection of prophetic writings curated within the Temple of Apollo Palatinus, or else its adjacent library.²⁸ That the scrolls met with such a fate is more likely since Judean writings were widely recognized for having predicted Rome’s new dynastic arrangement.²⁹

The importance of Egyptian religion in legitimating Flavian rule has received ample treatment. As Albert Henrichs argued, Vespasian’s visit to the Serapeion of Alexandria, where he performed miraculous healings, underscored the security of his new position; the god’s approval of the general-turned-emperor was signaled not only by the enablement of these abilities, but also by the confirmation of the Egyptian priest, Basilides.³⁰ Of the event, Mary Beard writes, “Someone must have taken care to disseminate ‘news’ of Vespasian’s Egyptian miracles, with all their allure of divinity that

²⁴ Joseph. *BJ* 4.629.

²⁵ Tac. *Hist.* 5.13; Suet. *Vesp.* 4.5–6; Cass. Dio 66.1.1–4; Appian 11.16, *apud* Zonaras.

²⁶ E.g., Joseph. *AJ* 10.266–281; 11.1–3, 331–339. See Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament*, 103; Heidi Wendt, “Galatians 3:1 As An Allusion to Textual Prophecy,” *JBL* (forthcoming).

²⁷ The references are scattered and include Livy, 25.23; Servius on *Aen.* 6.72; Lact. *Div. Instit.* 1.6.12. Writers who include a Judean Sibyl among those of other regions or cities seem to presume as much (Ael. *VH* 12.35; Paus. 10.12.9; Origen, *C. Cels.* 7.3).

²⁸ As opposed to the imperial residence, a scenario that connotes the treatment of these texts as mere war booty. Heidi Wendt, “‘Entrusted With the Oracles of God: The Fate of the Judean Writings in Flavian Rome,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer* (Atlanta: SBL, 2015), 101–109.

²⁹ It is not inconceivable that the temple veil, which, according to Josephus, was embroidered with complex astrological symbols (*BJ* 5.212–13), was considered a valuable divinatory instrument or object of study in its own right. David Noy notes a reference to Rabbi Eleazar ben Jose visiting Rome, presumably sometime in the mid-second century, where he saw the veil on public display (“Rabbi Aqiba Comes to Rome: A Jewish Pilgrimage in Reverse?” in *Pilgrimage in Greco-Roman and Early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (ed. Jaś Elsner and Ian Rutherford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373–85, at 382). Where Eleazar encountered it (if he did at all) is unclear to Noy, although he finds it highly unlikely that a Jewish sightseer would have been allowed into the imperial palace and speculates that it was taken to the *Templum Pacis* sometime after the Flavian triumph.

³⁰ Albert Henrichs, “Vespasian’s Visit to Alexandria.” *ZPE* 3 (1968): 51–80.

would have gone down well in some quarters.”³¹ The same scholars who thus characterize the role of Egyptian religion, however, view the ideological significance of Judea exclusively through the lens of military conquest given Vespasian and Titus’ service in the Judean War and their actions against the temples in Jerusalem and Leontopolis.³²

In my view, the dichotomy of religious versus military legitimacy is a false one and rooted, I suspect, in the assumption that ‘Judaism’ could not, like Egyptian religion or astrology, lend credibility to a ‘pagan’ emperor. In the absence of a differentiated picture of Judean religiosity it is inevitable that efforts to dismantle these institutions, especially the former temple, are equivalent to a dismantling of Judaism as a whole.³³ The matter stands to be enriched, however, by consideration of a more complex landscape of Judean religion, one that includes the activities of freelance experts as well as the widespread recognition of Judean texts as sources of religious wisdom and prophecies. While the Flavians might have struck strategic blows against a particular form of Judean religion—civic institutions in or associated with Judea—this did not stop them from simultaneously enlisting the prophecy of Josephus, a Judean of priestly ancestry, as well as oracles in the Judean writings, among other divine signs that universally corroborated Vespasian’s acclamation. Judea lent as much if not more religious legitimacy to the new dynasty as Egypt, even if the exact mechanisms of legitimation were *à propos* of each ethnic idiom: dream interpretation, literary divination, and the pronouncements of Josephus, on the one hand, and signs issued at an oracular healing sanctuary and interpreted by Basilides, on the other.

One can imagine how a renewed focus on Judea, and Judean divination, in the mid- to late-first century fomented interest in Judean religion that had already existed at Rome for some time. Josephus also affirms several times that God was instrumental in the Romans’ victory over the Judeans and even credits Titus with recognizing and honoring his assistance.³⁴ His claim that God had already departed from the temple

³¹ Mary Beard, “The Triumph of Flavius Josephus,” in *Flavian Rome: Culture, Images, Text* (ed. A.J. Boyle and W.J. Dominik; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 541–58, at 557.

³² Hence, to the extent that Judean religion receives any attention in discussions of Flavian ideology, the characterization is negative. Martin Goodman concludes that the Flavians’ war “waged on Judaism” was a permanent feature of their propaganda (*Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* [New York: Vintage Books, 2007], 432).

³³ E.g., James B. Rives, “Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple,” in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James B. Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 145–66.

³⁴ On God foreordaining and bringing about both the Roman Empire and the Flavian dynasty, see *BJ* 2.390–91; 3.351; 4.623; 5.367, 412; 6.109, 300–2, 312–13, 411–12. On Titus’ acknowledgement of God, see *BJ* 5.519.

prior to its destruction has even prompted speculation about whether the removal of Jerusalem cult paraphernalia to Rome was conceived as a sort of *evocatio*.³⁵ It may be impossible to know if anyone actually thought that the god of Judea had been incorporated into the Roman pantheon and now received cult in the capital city; at the very least, Josephus himself supplies ample evidence for the kinds of claims that a professed expert in Judean religious *might* make for the benefit of Roman audiences.

Additionally, the Flavians evoked both Egypt and Judea vividly in Rome's cityscape.³⁶ Beyond the Colosseum, with the Judea inscription it bore, two monuments in particular—the Arch of Titus, famous for its inner relief depicting the triumphal procession of the offering table and golden candelabrum of the Jerusalem Temple, and the Templum Pacis, where these instruments were permanently installed—underscored the centrality of the province—its religion above all—to the new Flavian dynasty.³⁷ While allusions to Judea are far less obvious than the Egyptian-themed material attested so amply throughout the empire, the impact of Judean monuments, objects, and images ought not be discounted for subtlety. The public displays of the Flavian triumph and of the spaces designed to proclaim a new Roman dynasty were visible reminders of Judean culture, stimulating interest in Judean religion.

Another important factor contributing to the recognition and attractiveness of Judean religion among Roman audience may have been the social status of people said to embrace such practices to varying degrees: members of the imperial family and other royal houses, provincial governors, and other social elites. Regarding *aegyptiaca* in the late Republic, Diana E. E. Kleiner has argued that Italian fascination with Egypt quickened with the increasingly intimate relationship between Alexandria and Rome, as well as Julius Caesar and Cleopatra. Caesar's favorable impression of Alexandria and his Nilotic travels encouraged him to reorient his own city along the Tiber, while the Ptolemaic queen's sojourn at his Roman villa had a palpable influence on everything, Kleiner argues, from Roman women's hairstyles to the popularity of Egyptian motifs in

³⁵ Joseph. *BJ* 299-300. For a discussion of this interpretation, see James B. Rives, "Flavian Religious Policy and the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James B. Rives; New York and Oxford: 2005), 145-166.

³⁶ C. Brian Rose, "The Egyptianizing of Rome in the Wake of Actium," (forthcoming); Fergus Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James B. Rives; New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101-128.

³⁷ Carlos Noreña, "Medium and Message in Vespasian's Templum Pacis," *MAAR* 48 (2003): 25-43; Fergus Millar, "Last Year in Jerusalem: Monuments of the Jewish War in Rome," in *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (ed. Jonathan Edmondson, Steve Mason, and James Rives; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101-28.

Roman art. Roger Beck posits similar effects with respect to the presence of the former royal *familia* of Commagene—whose members took up residence at the capital following the deposition of Antiochus IV in 72 CE—and the emergence of the mysteries of Mithras shortly thereafter.³⁸ Regardless of whether one is persuaded by his exact theory of Mithraic origins, it may shed light on why Persian-themed forms of religion, which had apparently been present at Rome in one form or another for some time, became more popular toward the end of the first century and began to coalesce around a particular divine figure affiliated with the eastern kingdom.

What has received considerably less attention is the possibility of a similar dynamic with respect to another prominent royal family, the Herodians, whose members also resided at Rome in for much of the first century and whose presence correlates with and reasonably contributed to an apparent increase in enthusiasm for Judaic practices. Josephus reports frequent and favorable dealings between the Herodian and Julio-Claudian royals, and, on occasion, between the latter and Jerusalem priests. Following Kleiner's analysis of the captivating, widespread effects of Cleopatra's time at Rome, it even stands to reason that Berenice, Herodian queen and companion of Titus, stimulated popular imagination much as Caesar's consort had over a century earlier.³⁹

While the relationship between elite and popular trends at Rome was often dialectic, interest in Judean religion among notable Romans likely corresponded, either as a catalyst or a reflection, to the habits of wider audiences. Trivial though some of these details may seem, they contribute to a fuller case for the heightened profile of Judea and Judean religion in Rome and throughout the empire. The Flavian period did not engender but accentuated or amplified a trend apparent in earlier historical sources. Importantly, however, the burden of interest in the post-Flavian period seems to have fallen on forms of religion that involved Judean texts and textual interpretation, especially for oracular or esoteric purposes.

³⁸ Roger Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of their Genesis," *JRS* 88 (1998): 115–28.

³⁹ See Kleiner, *Cleopatra and Rome*; Sarolta Takács, "Alexandria in Rome," *HSCP* 97 (1995): 263–276. On Berenice, see Ross Shepard Kraemer, "Typical and Atypical Jewish Family Dynamics: The Cases of Babatha and Berenice," in *Early Christian Families in Context* (ed. David Balch and Carolyn Osiek; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 114–139.

Paul, A Kind of Freelance Expert in Judean Religion

In the preceding section I argued that, despite the tolls of the Judean War, the prominence of literary oracles and their specialist interpreters in its principal events formed a pretext for Roman interest in Judean religion and anyone claiming expertise therein. This argument holds important implications, I think, for theorizing widespread interest in Judean texts, teachings, and other practices in the last quarter of the first century, and to Christian outgrowths thereof in subsequent decades. Before turning my attention to this pivotal period, however, I would like to return to Paul with a view to redescribing him as a kind of freelance expert in Judean religion.

Like other specialists, the self-proclaimed apostle to the gentiles did not inherit legitimacy by virtue of his social status or relationship to an existing religious institution. Given an admittedly tenuous history with the assembly of God,⁴⁰ his situation was quite the opposite. Hence Paul's challenge was to locate himself both intelligibly and also exclusively in a competitive field of specialized offerings, a twofold prerogative that he pursued by demonstrating facility with multiple skills and practices for which first-century specialists were known. In particular, Paul presents himself to his audiences and seems to be recognized by them as an credible authority on religious practices associated with Judeans, as well as certain kinds of intellectual practices that were not mutually exclusive with Judean expertise but gestured beyond that frame of reference. At the same time, he labors to differentiate his own authority and program from those of similar actors and offerings, especially Judeans but also non-Judean experts whose benefits resemble the ones Paul promises to his audiences (e.g., philosophers and their techniques for self-mastery).⁴¹

With respect to the first concern, gaining recognition, Paul adopts tactics consonant with what we have seen of other Judean experts. He speaks authoritatively about law observance, dietary restrictions, and circumcision; he alleges to have undergone dedicated training in ancestral teachings, even aligning himself with a specific interpretive group by claiming to be a Pharisee in matters of the law; he cites or references prophecies from Judean writings that he interprets in light of his teachings about Christ; he offers allegorical exegesis of episodes from Israelite or Judean myth; and he alleges the ability to perform any sign or wonder, even if he refrains from doing so. Also in keeping with Judean experts are Paul's persistent efforts to forge a

⁴⁰ Esp. Gal 1:13, 22, 2:11–4.

⁴¹ Of course, the roles of Judean religious expert and writer-intellectual were not mutually exclusive. However, Paul's practices would have had multiple resonances among his audiences, depending on their own skills and reference points; some might have been more attuned to his intellectual demonstrations than his Judean-ness.

connection with illustrious figures from Judean tradition, especially Moses.⁴² Not unlike Eleazar and Theudas—or, for that matter, Greek specialists who claimed Orpheus as the architect of their religious offerings—Paul traces his skills to a religious figure of unequalled stature within his ethnic idiom.

Even if they differ at the level of particulars from the offerings of other Judean experts (e.g., his contrary stances on circumcision and law observance), the elements of Paul's religious program trade on familiar and widespread expectations about Judean religion, foremost of which was intimate familiarity with the inspired writings at its core. In Romans 3:1–2 he affirms their oracular character and also acknowledges that Judeans as inherently beneficial or skillful on account of possessing them. "What advantage has the Judean?" (Τί οὖν τὸ περισσὸν τοῦ Ἰουδαίου) he asks, "Much, in every way. For in the first place they were entrusted with the oracles of God" (μὲν γὰρ ὅτι ἐπιστεύθησαν τὰ λόγια τοῦ θεοῦ).⁴³ Although he goes on to explain that a "hardening" (πώρωσις, 11:25) has come upon some that prevents them from interpreting these oracles to the same ends as he, Paul grants that they have been chosen by God to be the principal stewards and exegetes of his prophecies.

In light of the considerable interest that accompanied Judean texts in the first century, an interest that only grew in the Flavian period, it is fitting that Paul appeals on no fewer than thirty-one occasions to "what is written" (καθὼς γέγραπται), to the authority of "the law and the prophets" (ὑπὸ τοῦ νόμου καὶ τῶν προφητῶν), and to things foretold through the prophets in the holy writings (διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις). Tellingly, the preponderance of these phrases occurs in Romans, where he also makes the most explicit claims about having identified and explicated oracles hidden in these texts.⁴⁴ Some—e.g., his citation of Habakkuk 2:4 in Romans 1:17—seem to be ciphers for his religious program writ large, keys that he has extrapolated and imbued with special meanings that explain his present activities.⁴⁵ In

⁴² For Paul's cultivated self-presentation as a figure akin to Moses, see, e.g., M. David Litwa, "Paul's Mosaic Ascent: An Interpretation of 2 Corinthians 12.7–9," *NTS* (2011): 238–257; idem, "Transformation through a Mirror: Moses in 2 Cor. 3.18," *JSNT* 34 (2012): 286–297.

⁴³ The word *prasson* in 3:1, which I have translated as "advantage" following the NRSV, might also be rendered as "extraordinary quality or capability." Elsewhere Paul seems to use this word to denote extraordinary specialized skills or benefits (i.e., Gal 1:13–14, see discussion below). This sense fits well with widely held ideas about the distinctive religious practices of ethnic peoples of the sort examined in chapter 2. In other words, in asking what extraordinary quality has the Judeans, Paul seems to confirm that Judeans are, in fact, thought to have some extraordinary benefit on account of their ethnic status and distinctive religious practices.

⁴⁴ Sixteen occurrences, compared to eleven in the combined Corinthian epistles and only four in Galatians.

⁴⁵ Cf. Rom 15:20–21, where Paul, citing Isa 51:15, makes it his ambition "to proclaim the *evangelion* not where Christ has already been named so that he does not build upon someone

general, the majority of verses that Paul cites and the episodes from which he adduces novel interpretations either arise from a text authored by a prophet or are extrapolated from a story rich in miracles and prophecies: the Abraham cycle or the wilderness period. That he favors texts whose oracular potential is pronounced suggests continuity with a broader trend in their divinatory application.

The indispensability of the Judean writings, or at least the traditions they contained, for communicating the significance of his practices is underscored by Paul's highly specific and purposive exegeses of myths about well-known Judean figures (Adam, Abraham, and Moses) that explicate fundamental elements of his salvation scheme (reversing human mortality, acquiring Judean ancestry, and the transformation of baptism, respectively).⁴⁶ While the content and application of his interpretations might have been somewhat novel, he was hardly unique among first-century Judeans in adducing literary mysteries, prophecies, and eschatological narratives from Judean writings, nor, for that matter, in receiving messages from God through revelations, dreams, or other methods of divination.

What I wish to suggest is that Paul's basic recognition and credibility as an expert in Judean religion, and Judean writings in particular, was inseparable from his ethnicity in a way that will no longer be true for second-century exegetes of the Judean writings. This is nowhere clearer than in his emphatic professions of Judean ancestry. "If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh," (Phil 3:4–6) Paul has more. Whatever permutation of Judean one might claim—Hebrew, Israelite, membership in an Israelite tribe, descent from Abraham (cf. 2 Cor 11:21–22)—he, too, can boast of that.⁴⁷ For the defensive contexts in which these statements appear they are rightly understood to be embroiled in competition over religious authority and legitimacy, his own versus that of 'false'- or 'super-apostles'.

else's foundation (Rom 15:20–21). For a similar relationship between 'prophetic' injunction and religious practice, see the interpretation of Isa 40:2 in 1QS 8:11–16 as a command to retreat to the wilderness for eschatological preparation.

⁴⁶ For Paul's mythmaking, see Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 67–91; Ryan S. Schellenberg, "Does Paul Call Adam a 'Type' of Christ? An Exegetical Note on Romans 5:14," *ZNW* 105 (2014): 54–63; Stanley K. Stowers, "Kinds of Myth, Meals, and Power," *passim*; Litwa, "Transformation Through a Mirror," 253–254.

⁴⁷ Interestingly, while Paul does on occasion use the language of Judean inclusively (e.g., Gal 2.15: Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι), he is far more likely to frame his ancestry using language and categories with a textual, and maybe more consciously antique, basis: he is an *Israelite*, a *Benjaminite*. That is, Paul might have thus articulated his ancestry in combination with his other exegetical interests.

These and other statements about the law, Israelites, and Judaizing are best understood, however, not as evidence of Paul negotiating a complex relationship to Judaism or Judean ancestry but as position-takings among freelance experts competing for followers. So, too, was Paul's initiation scheme still oriented, as Caroline Johnson Hodge has shown, toward drawing gentiles into the line of Abraham through the genetic link of a divinized Judean man. In other words, even when Paul takes contrary positions on elements of Judean religion—as such a concept would have been anticipated by his gentile audiences—I see him as simultaneously locating himself within this subfield of expertise while also differentiating himself from other kinds of Judean experts with whom he was in competition. Moreover, nearly all of the other Christ experts mentioned in his letters—Cephas, Peter (who may or may not be one and the same as Cephas), James, and others in Jerusalem, Barnabas, Aquila, Apollos (if Acts 18:24 is trustworthy on this point), and at least some of the people to whom he sends greetings in Romans 16—are Judeans. Although Paul predates the Judean War, I also wonder whether his eschatological teachings about Christ and other practices, supported as they were by evidence from the Judean writings, did not enjoy the same sort of boost in the Flavian period as these texts as a whole.

Competition Among 'Judean Experts' of the Second Century

What is the benefit of positing a more favorable climate for the reception of Judean religion in the aftermath of the Judean War? I would suggest that it holds at least three important areas of relevance for thinking about dynamics of differentiation among Judean experts, and experts in wisdom, prophecies, teachings, and other practices involving Christ as a subset of this set of actors. First, I submit that these conditions accrued value to Judean religious offerings, especially ones predicated on literary prophecies and exegesis, thus stimulating the demand for would-be experts therein. Juvenal's "high priestess of Jerusalem" should be taken with a grain of salt, but one also wonders whether the temple's destruction did not to some extent embolden pretensions to Judean religious expertise, insofar as the destabilization of the priesthood likely introduced an element of confusion into expectations, at least among non-Judean audiences, about where, or with whom, its former authority now resided. Of course, there were certainly non-priestly groups of specialists involved in the temple's administration while it was still in operation, but it stands to reason that the plausibility of claims to possess skills or knowledge traditionally associated with either the priesthood or the Sadducees and Pharisees expanded considerably in its absence.

Second, insofar as all signs point to early "Christ experts" such as Paul and his associates fitting this mold of Judean religious expertise—that is, affirming the oracular character of Judean writings, deducing from them prophecies about Christ and his

eschatological significance and precedents for contemporary religious practices, enlisting philosophical discourses—such developments seem to have contributed to the momentum that they seem to have gathered around the same period. The fervent insistence of second-century writers such as Justin that Christ fulfilled all prophecies in the Judean writings might be seen to capitalize deliberately on the intrigue surrounding these texts, as does his strategic characterization of their proto-philosophical character. Indeed, echoes of Vespasian's oracle are unmistakable when he attributes to Moses the prophecy, "A ruler shall not fail from Judah.... And he shall be the expectation of the nations, binding his foal to the vine, washing his garment in the blood of the grape."⁴⁸ Only, now, it is Justin, not Josephus, who assumes the role of its superiorly skilled interpreter, and Christ to whom it points. Naturally, previous interpreters of these verses "did not accurately understand the things they heard through the prophets, but imitated in erring fashion the things concerning our Christ."

Third, this framework contributes to our understanding of the processes of mutual differentiation and rivalry among second-century Judeans and Christians, more specifically, Judean and Christian writer-intellectuals. For, as was the case with Paul and his associates or rivals, this context localizes or circumscribes arguments about Israel, Judean practices, Judeans, and Judean writings where they occur in the writings of or are attributed to Christ experts" of the second century: Marcion, Justin, Valentinus, Irenaeus, and so on. Whereas such statements are often evaluated for indications of how these authors or figures were negotiating a complex relationship to Judaism—either a personal one, in Paul's case, or else "Christianity's" relationship to the religion from which it arose—they make more sense as position-takings among rival experts operating within a wider field of freelance expertise, and a niche subset thereof; the same can be said about the use of philosophical discourse and other practices (astrology, numerology, other forms of divination) that were characteristic of various participants in this sort of activity.

Furthermore, since many freelance religious experts were foreigners who invested considerable energy in the ethnic coding of their wisdom, texts, and practices, situating our second-century Christian evidence within this milieu allows new comparisons to be made between the dilution of other ethnically coded forms of expertise—e.g., Persian, Chaldean, Egyptian—and the evolution of 'Christian' offerings from Judean ones. Here I would like to simply raise the possibility that the perceived tensions with "Judaism" evident in many of our early Christian sources capture the sort of complex category negotiations whose effects are observable for other ethnic idioms (e.g., Persian and Chaldaean), but whose exact processes and stakes are not attested for

⁴⁸ Justin, *1 Apol.* 54.2–6 (trans. Parvis and Minn).

lack of the same quality of evidence. Indeed, second-century “Christian” evidence may offer a rare firsthand perspective on such processes, that is, for the tendency of the strong ethnic or geographic connotations of certain practices to wane in inverse proportion to the number of specialists offering them, and in different configurations.

Again, I am not suggesting that “Judean religion” in this context was anything more than a generic and fairly fluid set of ideas held by non-native audiences regarding in what the religion of this region consisted. For the other ethnic or regional frameworks that I mentioned, however, there is evidence of experts enlisting ethnic coding to greater and lesser degrees, as more and less central components of their offerings. It is on account of these tandem dynamics of competition and innovation, I think, that the figure of the *magus* loses its Persian connotations toward the end of the first century CE, and around the same time that Chaldean fragments into *astrologus* and *mathematicus*, forms of expertise marked by the same skills and practices, but absent ethnic specificity. In other words, as experts enlisted within their programs an increasingly robust set of skills and practices, it became more difficult to categorize them in meaningful ways. Although it would require a detailed study, I proposed earlier that the same period might witness a similar shift away from the strong ethnic connotations of *ioudaios* (Ἰουδαῖος) and *ioudaikos* (Ἰουδαϊκός) to forms of religion that involved writings, techniques, and practices for which Judeans were once notable, but whose ethnic dimension was either deemphasized or had become obscure.⁴⁹ Since parallel developments were occurring for other ethnic categories within this context of religious activity, it is reasonable to surmise that these intra-ethnic negotiations, such as they were, were shaped by predictable, though not necessarily inevitable, dynamics (e.g., competition, innovation).

At the same time, much had taken place in Judea in the decades that separated Paul from writer-intellectuals like Marcion and Justin who took, or allegedly took, differing positions on Judean texts and practices in the middle decades of the second century. In particular, it appears that oracles in the Judean writings had been enlisted once again, and in a very high-profile way, to legitimate a leader coming forth from Judea, this time Simon bar Kokhba. If the admittedly later and problematic rabbinic sources contain kernels of historicity, two things are striking about his assumption of this role. The first is that authority was conferred upon Simon by a religious specialist, Rabbi Aqiba, but who appears to have been participating in the same general form of Judean religious activity—literary divination from Judean writings put to the task of legitimating a contemporary actor—as the Judean wise men who, according to Josephus,

⁴⁹ For example, in the practices of Marcion, who is said to have deliberately excised prophecies and other conspicuously Judean elements from the letters of Paul and his interpretation of Jesus Christ. Read in this way, early Christian writings might furnish an intimate sightline into the sort of ethnic deparicularization that Rives observes.

propelled the events of the Judean War, or even as Josephus himself. The second is that the particular prophecy, Numbers 24:17–9, whence Aqiba is said to have derived Simon's significance and epithet also crops up in the *Rule of War*, not unlike Isaiah 40:3, which appears in both the *Rule of the Community* and the Gospels, or the Flavian prophecy, albeit all with different applications.⁵⁰

What this suggests is that within the broader phenomenon of specialized exegetes using the Judean writings as predictive resources, certain oracles—whether verses clearly marked as such in their original literary contexts or ones imbued with oracular significance—were potent for different experts, and not always in messianic or overtly eschatological frameworks. Just as the author of the Derveni papyrus had staked his religious authority on superior exegesis of Orphic poetry and the 'truths' it disclosed about initiation rites with a view to rival initiators,⁵¹ so, too, can we observe exegetes of these prophecies asserting *the* explication of cryptic oracles found within them and, likewise, for purposes of competition and differentiation from other experts (including some philosophers), foremost ones whose offerings were informed by the same texts.

By the middle decades of the second century, and maybe as we would expect given an intensified interest in Judean writings from the final decades of the first, it seems that the contours of "Judean religion" within this specific context have broadened—or else narrowed, depending on how one looks at it—with contestations among would-be experts occurring primarily along the lines of literary exegesis and production. This is not, in my view, the same degree of ethnic coding that one finds in the Pauline epistles, where Paul's Judean ancestry is indispensable to the expertise he claims; rather, exegesis of Judean writings seems to have become a thing unto its own, irrespective of the interpreter's own ethnic credentials, so to speak; the texts themselves might be the only ethnicizing element of a specialist's offering.⁵² It is at this time, I would suggest, that the phenomenon I have theorized converges with a growing body of scholarship on the discursive production of difference through writing, literary interpretation, and other intellectual practices.

In his groundbreaking 2005 study, for example, Daniel Boyarin locates within this window the emergence of Christianity and, then, Judaism as separate and distinct *religions*, or at least the discursive conditions that would soon give rise to these

⁵⁰ See *y.Ta'an.* 4.5–8, 68d; 1QM 6:11; 1QS 8:10–6; Mk 1:3, Mt 3:3, Lk 3:4, Jn 1:23.

⁵¹ See n. 18 above.

⁵² Cf. Bruce Chilton, "Justin and Israelite Prophecy," in *Justin Martyr and His Worlds* (ed. Sara Parvis and Paul Foster; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 77–87; Tessa Rajak, "Talking at Trypho: Christian Apologetic as Anti-Judaism in Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*," in *The Jewish Dialogue with Greece and Rome. Studies in Cultural and Social Interaction* (AGJU 48; Lieden: Brill, 2001), 511–33.

developments. After the time of Justin Martyr, he argues, “becoming a Christian (or a follower of Christ) meant something different—it no longer entailed becoming a Jew—, and once becoming a Christian became identified with ‘entering [the true] Israel’ the whole semantic/social field shifted. The boundary between Greek and Jew, the definition of Jewishness as national or ethnic identity, was breached or gravely threatened by the self-definition of Gentile Christianity as ‘Israel’, leading to a reconfiguration of the cultural features that signal the boundary, indeed a reconfiguration of the understanding of the substance of the boundary itself from the genealogical to the religious. Hence, orthodoxy/heresy came to function as a boundary marker, because the boundaries had indeed become blurred.”⁵³ Hence we begin to observe the literary assertion of “Christianity” as an exclusive category, with “Judaism,” formed in opposition to such notions of Christianity, soon to follow. Such contestations were not limited to textual interpretation but might, as Judith M. Lieu notes, even be brought to bear on the integrity of one’s text.⁵⁴ “This further illustrates,” she writes, “[how] texts have a social function apart from questions of literacy and of the structures of power.”⁵⁵ They may articulate the exercise of power by their authors or interpreters.

I find these arguments compelling and would suggest that the context of freelance expertise fleshes out a precise setting of religious activity in which these discursive efforts, as well as intra-Christian constructions of “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” were undertaken. Such rivalries were typical neither of ordinary religious practitioners nor of existing religious institutions, but of self-authorized religious experts and fledgling groups of followers contending within a competitive field of overlapping religious offerings. Boyarin’s argument gains further plausibility from two dimensions that are lacking in his study, but that this particular context supplies: first, to employ his metaphor, an exact territory whose borders were being drawn through such discursive tactics; and, second, a shift in focus from Jewish/Judean and Christian *groups* to individual experts, some working cooperatively, who enjoyed considerable latitude in constructing and situating their own offerings, as well as, at the discursive level, those of whatever opponents they had in view. Moreover, I do not share Lieu’s view that these

⁵³ Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 73; idem, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity: An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category (to which is Appended a Correction of my *Border Lines*),” *JQR* (2009): 7–36.

⁵⁴ Judith M. Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), esp. 38ff.

⁵⁵ Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 59.

dynamics, with respect either to second century writers or to Paul, reflect a struggle over Jewish identity.⁵⁶

I would propose that the context of freelance expertise—more specifically, the subset of Judean religion dominated by writer-intellectuals whose programs were centered on the specialized interpretation of Judean writings—was precisely the territory whose discursive demarcation is ably demonstrated by both of these scholars. This localization has the advantage of allowing us to conceptualize “Christian” and “Jewish” difference non-essentially, as a matter of practices (discursive, intellectual, religious) taken up within a specific but porous set of specialists couched within a wider field of expertise.⁵⁷ Our considerations need not be limited to Judeans, and Christians as a subset thereof. What is often noted but not sufficiently explained is how many other—non-Judean and non-philosophical, that is—kinds of freelance actors are in the cross-hairs of our second-century authors: magi, astrologers, various diviners, followers of Mithras, and so forth. In the *Dialogue*, Justine even explains to Trypho how Jesus’ birth in a cave in Bethlehem fulfills an aforementioned prophecy in Isaiah, to which he adds, “By these same words those who transmit the mysteries of Mithras were urged by the Devil to declare that they were initiated by Mithras himself in a place they call a cave.”⁵⁸ What are we to make of this implied ‘appropriation’ of Judean oracles by literate specialists who read them in relation to Mithras or, elsewhere, Dionysus? Since they are germane to Justin’s claim that Moses is older than all other writers, the image of Mithras initiators finding in Isaiah evidence for the cosmogony of their god and the rite to which it lent meaning is suspicious. Yet, they may betray actual interactions between Judean, Greek, and Persian corpora for the purpose of contemporary mythmaking.

What is remarkable about our first- and second-century sources is that we can see position-takings within “Judean religion” occurring firsthand in a way that we cannot for other ethnically coded categories of freelance expertise that underwent similar expansions or evolutions. Unlike those other categories, however, negotiations of Judean-ness were impelled by the extenuating circumstances, and maybe opportunities, of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. We can theorize these circumstances in at least two ways. On the one hand, it is entirely possible, if not somewhat likely, that the event occasioned a

⁵⁶ Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, 129.

⁵⁷ Cf. Boyarin, “Rethinking Jewish Christianity,” 28: “I suggest, therefore, that there is no nontheological or nonanachronistic way at all to distinguish Christianity from Judaism until institutions are in place that make and enforce this distinction.” I do not disagree with Boyarin’s point about the institutional codification of difference but think that a focus on arrangements of practice, which include the discourses of difference that he foregrounds in his work, allows us to draw some productive distinctions without resorting to theology or anachronism.

⁵⁸ Justin, *Dial.* 78.6.

change in the status of Judean religion among Roman audiences. Although more favorable in pre-Hadrianic years than is typically presumed, enthusiasm for Judean religion may have declined sharply as the result of an aggressive Roman response to yet another conflict in Judea, as well as Simon's prophetic legitimation by a specialist and the many other religious images and plans that comprised his ideology. On the other, the apparent plight of Jesus followers in Judea might have prompted sharper position-takings against ethnic or national connotations of "Judean" religious practices and the interpretive authority of Judean texts.

Hadrian's attitude toward Judea prior to the revolt has received ample treatment in recent years. Some have argued that the seriousness with which the emperor responded to the revolt is indicative of a more general antipathy toward the province and all associated with it.⁵⁹ Others have characterized the emperor's religious policies as more accommodating, irrespective of the fraught political and military situation that the revolt engendered. In this vein, Peter Schäfer has proposed that many inhabitants of Judea may have supported the emperor's policies in the region, with some Judeans helping to suppress the revolt once it erupted.⁶⁰

Regardless of how we construe Hadrian's attitude and motivations, it is easy to envisage how a forceful Roman response to the revolt would have made connotations of Judean-ness less desirable in its aftermath, and, for the severe measures taken against inhabitants of Judea who refused to acknowledge Simon bar Kokhba as the Christ in lieu of Jesus, all the more so among freelance experts in "Christian" forms of religion. Justin's apparent knowledge of the plight of (Jesus) Christ followers during the revolt is a case in point.⁶¹ As Boyarin notes, his writings seem to mark an important shift in how certain specialists in Judean religion began to present their religious offerings in a manner that excluded Judean ethnicity as a meaningful criterion for expertise.⁶² In both the *Apologies* and the *Dialogue*, for example, Justin reorients the terms of the competition to privilege skillful exegesis of ethnically coded writings. Of his "ethnic reasoning," Denise Kimber Buell concludes, "We should not envision Justin drawing on an established Jewish framework or social formation as a foil for his own process of

⁵⁹ Eck, "The Bar Kokhba Revolt," 89.

⁶⁰ Both Peter Schäfer ("Hadrian's Policy in Judea and the Bar Kokhba Revolt: A Reassessment," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History* [JSOT Supplement Series 100; ed., Philip R. Davies and Richard T. White; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990], 281–303, esp. 281–303) and Giovanni Battista Bazzana ("The Bar Kokhba Revolt and Hadrian's Religious Policy," in *Hadrian and the Christians* [Millennium–Studien 30; ed. Marco Rizzi; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010], 85–109) have argued for a more accommodating view of Hadrian's religious policy leading up to and in the aftermath of the revolt.

⁶¹ *1 Apol.* 31.6.

⁶² Daniel Boyarin, "Justin Martyr Invents Judaism," *Church History* 70 (2001): 427–61.

Christian self-definition.... Both 'Jews' and 'Christians' could draw upon the same scriptures, symbols, and surrounding social institutions to craft themselves."⁶³ That Justin was not himself Judean is all the more interesting, for the cataclysmic events of the revolt might have presented him with an opportunity to redefine expertise in Judean religion to his own advantage, more decisively in terms of intellectual skills for which a thoroughgoing mastery of philosophy was more relevant than one's ancestry.

Lest too much emphasis fall on Justin's ethnic disentanglements, it is also worth recalling that competition among writer-intellectuals was acute under Hadrian, whose emphases on philosophy and antiquity incentivized religious offerings framed in compatible terms. As Marco Rizzi has argued, it was in this climate that apologists such as Justin began to present Christians as a kind of philosophical school, distinct from and superior to not only the so-called Judean philosophies, but also to any other philosophical group or school of thought.⁶⁴ Such dynamics are not absent from earlier "Christian" texts: Paul, of course, positions himself among other intellectual rivals, including other Judeans, while also demonstrating the superiority of his religious program. But Paul's rivalries are not, on my reading, implicated in the suppression of Judean-ness in the ways that are apparent for Justin and his contemporaries. Whatever Hadrian's attitude toward Judean religion, texts, or *paideia*, I would suggest that Christian authors wishing to distinguish themselves from Judean experts with whose practices and literary foundations theirs overlapped capitalized on the Bar Kokhba Revolt deliberately, as a highly effective tactic for furthering competitive strategies otherwise entirely characteristic of freelance expertise.

It may be impossible to know whether there was an actual shift in the status of Judean religion from the time of the Flavians to that of Hadrian, or whether the impression of such a change depends entirely on Christian polemic. What can be said with greater certainty, however, is that the revolt supplied a number of plausible expediencies or incentives for freelance experts in Judean religion—in the modest sense of experts who enlisted any practice or *instrumentum* (including texts) that evoked Judea—to distance themselves from connotations of Judean-ness, even as they retained these elements. There were few constraints on the discursive tactics that might further these aims, especially in the nuanced and capacious medium of literary production. Certainly Justin's writings and other second-century apologetic and heresiological texts are parade examples of the dynamics that I am postulating, but they may not be the only ones.

⁶³ Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 97.

⁶⁴ Marco Rizzi, "Hadrian and the Christians," in *Hadrian and the Christians* (Millennium-Studien 30; ed. Marco Rizzi; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 7–20.

An expanding body of scholarship has begun to chip away at traditional premises about the dates, social settings, and contingent social formations that gave rise to the canonical gospels. Among other contributions, two recent volumes have strengthened the case for Pauline influence on the Gospel of Mark,⁶⁵ an argument that need not but may affect the dating of the first gospel, while a growing number of scholars has accepted the arguments of Richard I. Pervo and Steve Mason, among others, for an early second-century date for Luke–Acts.⁶⁶ Joseph B. Tyson has attempted to push the timeframe even further to the time of Marcion—which also requires a slightly earlier date of Marcion’s arrival at Rome—to support his reading of these texts as consciously engaged in anti-Marcionite polemic.⁶⁷ More recently, Jason D. BeDuhn has argued for the effects of Marcion’s textual practices and canon formation on contemporaneous Christian writer-intellectuals, many of whom would be coopted retroactively into orthodox traditions.⁶⁸ In a separate yet complementary vein, Stanley Stowers has proposed situating the composition of the Gospels first and foremost among networks of self-authorized literate specialists rather than ill-defined religious communities, whose beliefs they passively reflected and reinforced.⁶⁹ Likewise, Richard Last has situated the gospel authors among contemporary non-Christian groups and networks of writers, comparanda that broaden the kinds of social formations and intellectual settings that might explain the composition and particular features of the former’s texts.⁷⁰

Altogether these publications invite reconsideration of a plausible historical context for the composition and content of the Gospels, at least in the forms that we have received them. Although making the case for a second-century setting would require a

⁶⁵ Oda Wischmeyer, David Sims, and Ian J. Elmer, eds., *Paul and Mark: Two Authors at the Beginnings of Christianity* (BZBW 198; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013); Eve-Marie Becker, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Mogens Müller, eds., *Mark and Paul: Comparative Essays Part II, For and Against Pauline Influence on Mark* (BZBW 199; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014).

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Richard I. Pervo, *Dating Acts: Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2006), esp. 15–28; Steve Mason, *Josephus and the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), esp. 251–96.

⁶⁷ Joseph B. Tyson, *Marcion and Luke-Acts: A Defining Struggle* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006); cf. Matthias Klinghardt, “The Marcionite Gospel and the Synoptic Problem,” *NT 50* (2008): 1–27.

⁶⁸ Jason D. BeDuhn, *The First New Testament: Marcion’s Scriptural Canon* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge Press, 2013).

⁶⁹ Stanley Stowers, “The Concept of ‘Community’ and the History of Early Christianity,” *MTSR 23* (2011): 238–56.

⁷⁰ Richard Last, “The Social Relationship of Gospel Writers: New Insights from Inscriptions Commending Greek Historiographers,” *JSNT 37* (2015): 223–52; idem, “Communities that Write: Christ-Groups, Associations, and Gospel Communities,” *NTS 58* (2012): 173–98.

far more extensive and cautious treatment of the evidence than this paper allows, I would like to suggest how the framework that I have proposed above may open new avenues for research in this vein.

A handful of scholars have identified particular verses or themes in the Gospels that suggest awareness of the Bar Kokhba Revolt. The commonest example is the so-called Synoptic Apocalypse (*SynApoc*) of Mark 13, Matthew 24, and Luke 21, with Matthew's highly detailed and specific version offering the strongest support for this reading. In addition to its general warnings about 'false prophets' (ψευδοπροφήται) the many who will come in Jesus' name, saying, "I am the Christ," and who will lead people astray (v. 24), Hermann pu has noted the seemingly more pointed warning about anyone who might say, "'Look! Here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!'" (v. 23).⁷¹ This verse is then taken with the subsequent dismissal of the great signs and wonders that forthcoming "false Christs" (ψευδόχριστοι)—or even "lying Christs," a possible allusion to a pun on Bar Kosiba ("son of a star") as Bar Koziba ("son of a liar") that appears in later rabbinic tradition—and false prophets will perform to persuade people, even some of the elect, of their legitimacy (v. 24).⁷² Not only is Simon bar Kokhba seen by Detering as the strongest candidate for such explicit messianic pretensions but he also glimpses in the predictions of torture, death, and hatred by all nations because of Jesus' name (or epithet) of v. 9–13 the plight of Christ followers in Judea who were punished for their refusal to disavow Jesus' messianic status for that of Simon.⁷³ Additional evidence offered for Bar Kokhba's relevance to the Gospels includes indications that Daniel, a text whose significance to the Synoptic authors needs no defense, was being read with particular fervor in the context of the revolt—possibly for Hadrian's alleged imitation of, or, at least, perceived parallels to, Antiochus IV Epiphanes⁷⁴—as well as the unsuitability of other events proposed for the *SynApoc*, the "Caligula Crisis" or the Judean War.⁷⁵

It is also worth restating a point that Detering makes at the beginning of his argument, that "while elsewhere New Testament scholars bring to bear on particular exegetical questions an extravagant richness and admirable knowledge of historical details, they become remarkably curt with regard to the dating of the Synoptic Gospels."⁷⁶ Maintaining that 70 CE is the only reliable *terminus a quo* for these texts,

⁷¹ Hermann Detering, "The Synoptic Apocalypse (Mark 13 Par): A Document from the Time of Bar Kokhba," *JHC* 7 (2000): 161–210 (trans. Michael Conley and Darrell Doughty).

⁷² For the "deceitful wonders" attributed to Bar Kokhba, see, e.g., Jerome, *Adv. Rufin.* 3.31; Peter Schäfer, *Bar Kokhba-Aufstand*, 58, 144; Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 191.

⁷³ Just. *1 Apol.* 1.31.36; cf. Euseb. *EH* 4.8.41; *Chron.* 2.168ff.

⁷⁴ See Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 187–8.

⁷⁵ For discussion of the unviability of these alternatives, see Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 177–85.

⁷⁶ Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 161.

Detering draws attention to how the scholarly tendency has been to elide the gospels authors' apparent knowledge of the temple's destruction with their actual historical situation. And yet, the leap from *terminus a quo* to "around when" need not be axiomatic, all the more so since, in his view, further evidence cannot be put forward to justify a c. 70 date. In sum, for Detering, nothing about a first century *terminus a quo* precludes a later setting for the composition of these texts. "[It] is altogether possible and permissible," he writes, "to drop apriori chronological stipulations so as to direct one's view out beyond the boundary of the first century and investigate whether or not in some later time an historical situation might possibly be found that would produce a more adequate understanding of the text."⁷⁷

To these remarks I would add that where non-canonical texts are concerned—with respect to both general matters of dating and literary relationship, and also awareness of Bar Kokhba more specifically—scholars are more amenable to second-century dates. The *Apocalypse of Peter*, whose warnings in a discussion about the *parousia* of the 'true' Christ and the parable of the fig-tree (ch. 1–2) about a "false Christ" who will persecute Christians and make them martyrs are read more comfortably as a reflection on the Bar Kokhba Revolt, and therefore as evidence for the text's mid-second century date.⁷⁸ In support of this reading, Richard Bauckham notes that the 'false' messiah is someone who does not demand worship, but who merely claims the epithet; those who are deceived by and eventually reject him, as well as Jesus, are all Jews/Judeans.⁷⁹ The text may also furnish additional insight into a major point of contention between Jesus and Simon "Christ followers," namely, Bar Kokhba's plan to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple and restore its regular religious activities.⁸⁰ Bauckham sees this dynamic undergirding the transfiguration scene, in which Jesus sharply rebukes Peter and accuses him of veiled understanding for having offered to build three (earthly) dwelling-places, and then reveals a vision of a heavenly temple that God has created for

⁷⁷ Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 164.

⁷⁸ See Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha II* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 622; Detering, "Synoptic Apocalypse," 175–6 and nn. 24–5; Richard Bauckham, "The Apocalypse of Peter: An Account of Research," *ANRW II* 25/6 (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1988), 4712–50, with bibliography, and below. A notable exception to this interpretation is Peter Schäfer (*Der Bar Kochba Aufstand* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981], 61f), whose objections Detering finds weak.

⁷⁹ Richard Bauckham, "Jews and Jewish Christians in Israel," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. Graham Stanton and Guy Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 228–38, 230.

⁸⁰ For the religious dimensions of Bar Kokhba's political ideology, see Schäfer, "Hadrian's Policy in Judaea," 290–1.

his true messiah.⁸¹ Insofar as the temple's destruction may have galvanized freelance experts in Judean religion, one can imagine how, messianic rivalries aside, Bar Kokhba's intention to reinvest Judean religious authority in the temple and its priesthood, under the cryptic "Eleazar the Priest," would have provoked ambivalence among "Christian" experts.⁸²

There is insufficient space in the present paper to engage more than a few examples of the technical scholarship on these matters of dating and source and textual criticism for canonical and non-canonical gospel literature. Nevertheless, the above propositions offer a preliminary starting point for thinking about the implications of the Bar Kokhba as a plausible social setting for the composition of Matthew, and maybe also Mark and Luke, depending on one's sensibilities about the relative priority of these texts and whether Mark 13 reflects these exact historical circumstances. And while the Gospel of John lacks material equivalent to the *SynApoc*, other pronounced features of the text—for instance, its pronounced anti-Judean rhetoric and more favorable depiction of Samaritans—may be in keeping with non-literary dynamics that we have considered above. Even if one is willing to accept that Bar Kokhba allusions in Matthew 24 are a later redaction, the plausibility of the reading may not depend so narrowly on these verses.

Regarding the depiction of Judeans in the canonical gospels, for example, one wonders whether their complex negotiations of Jesus' relationship to Judean religion, to other Judean religious experts, institutional and non-institutional, and other anti-Judean stances even make sense before the time of Bar Kokhba. Paul's statement about the culpability of Judeans in Christ's death in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–5 might be seen as an earlier example of the sort of anti-Judean sentiments found in the Gospels. The NRSV translates, "For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." The translation is misleading, however; a literal rendering of the Greek is not "the Jews, who killed...the Lord Jesus" but rather "the ones *from* the Judeans who killed both the lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out (αὐτοὶ ὑπὸ τῶν Ἰουδαίων, καὶ τῶ τὸν κύριον ἀποκτεινάντων Ἰησοῦν καὶ τοὺς προφῆτας, καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐκδιωξάντων). As Abraham J. Malherbe explains, "The term therefore does not describe a race or a people with a particular history, but persons who are known from

⁸¹ See Bauckham, "Jews and Jewish Christians in Israel," 232–3.

⁸² It is tempting to read Luke-Acts' efforts to connect Jesus and the disciples with the temple in this vein; with the temple no longer standing there was, for this author, no doubt regarding who had inherited its former authority.

the particular actions Paul details. For Paul, the immediately defining action is their violent obstruction of his efforts to preach the gospel.”⁸³

Elsewhere I have argued that Paul’s professions to have endured suffering and punishments fit a pattern of legislation issued against freelance experts that was escalating in both frequency and severity over the course of the first century.⁸⁴ It is important to note that these remarks arise in one such context: Paul is speaking specifically of having been banished or expelled from Judea, the administrative territory wherein Jesus was also put to death. All available comparanda suggest that the kinds of punishments he mentions (expulsions, imprisonment, beatings, death) were meted out not by indiscriminate religious groups, but by local or provincial officials. That people involved in the execution and expulsion of Jesus and Paul, respectively, were Judeans should hardly be surprising; who else, if not certain Judeans, and likely ones working in cooperation with Roman magistrates, would be responsible for these actions? The implication that assemblies in Judea attracted negative attention from the same sort of people also make sense within this interpretive framework, for punishments intended for freelance experts regularly encompassed followers or related groups. Moreover, by connecting these punishments with Judean traditions about the killing of prophets, Paul places himself within this illustrious line.

Here and elsewhere he mentions punishments endured for the sake of his gospel, Paul refers not to persecution by Judeans in the sense that the Gospels and Acts imagine—or, if their authors indeed have knowledge of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, as they quite consciously imply—but to being on the receiving end of actions that were entirely typical of the sort of religious activity in which he engaged. Nor do I read his statements in Galatians 1:13–4 through the lens of persecution but as references to the sort of strident disagreements and attempts at impeachment that were typical for rival specialists in intellectualizing offerings.⁸⁵ In short, the epistles do not disclose anything

⁸³ See Abraham J. Malherbe’s discussion of the verses in *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. Anchor Bible Commentary Series (New York: Doubleday, 200), 173–6, at 174.

⁸⁴ Heidi Wendt, “‘*Ea Superstitione*’: Christian Martyrdom and the Religion of Self-Authorized Experts,” *JRS* 105 (2015): 183–202, esp. 189–93.

⁸⁵ I am inclined to read Paul’s statement about having “persecuted the assembly of God” not as evidence of inter-religious tension or the top-down suppression of a new religious movement but of competition between like specialists. The sense of *διώκειν*—the translation of which as “to persecute” is reserved exclusively for NT occurrences—might be construed instead as “to impeach,” “to discredit,” or “to accuse.” This fits well with the image of Paul trying to undermine the teachings or claims of a rival group of Judean specialists during his earlier time “in Judaizing” (*ἐν Ἰουδαϊσμῶ*), which he describes using language highly suggestive of textual study, philosophical progress, and the conscious adoption or intensification of Judaic practices. His additional emphasis on having tried to destroy or ruin (*πορθέω*) the assembly does not weaken this reading; the DSS authors use similarly polemical language to denounce perceived

that resembles the Gospels' more pointedly negative, though more and less so, and collective portrayals of Judeans; instead, all signs point to Paul working cooperatively with other Judean authorities on Christ whose teachings differed from but were still compatible with his own, even if occasional disagreements or rivalries might arise between them.

In the middle decades of the second century, however, conscious efforts to decouple Judean writings, the figure of Jesus, and his religious legacy from Judea and Judean ethnicity henceforth make a good deal of sense. I even wonder whether the prominence (and geographical confusion) of the Galilee—a region beyond Bar Kokhba's state, apparently untouched by the revolt—in the Gospels might reflect such efforts. Accusations of Jewish persecution of Christians ring clearly in the writings of Justin,⁸⁶ who projects them meticulously, with 'proof' from Isaiah, back onto the crucifixion of Jesus, as they do in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.⁸⁷ For lack of space I can only broach the possibility that similar dynamics might be at work in the Gospels, whether as post-Bar Kokhba redactions of earlier versions of these texts, or because they, like so much non-canonical literature that we place more comfortably in the second century, are only taking shape in this period. Regardless of whether one entertains these narrower possibilities, I hope that at the very least I have demonstrated some advantages of localizing discursive negotiations of Judean religion, in my sense, within a particular class of religious activity that includes both ethnic Judeans and non-Judean experts whose religious programs nevertheless centered on Christ and prophecies in the Judean writings, but is not limited to either of these examples.

opponents (e.g., 1QS 9.16–8) and also in the context of religious activity involving specialized exegesis.

⁸⁶ E.g., Justin, *Dial.* 16.4.

⁸⁷ Cf. Lieu, "Jewish involvement in Christian suffering is an important element in delegitimizing not only any Jewish appeal to scriptural fulfillment but also Jewish suffering itself" ("Accusations of Jewish Persecution in early Christian sources, with particular reference to Justin Martyr," in *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* [ed. Graham Stanton and Guy Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998], 279–95, 84.