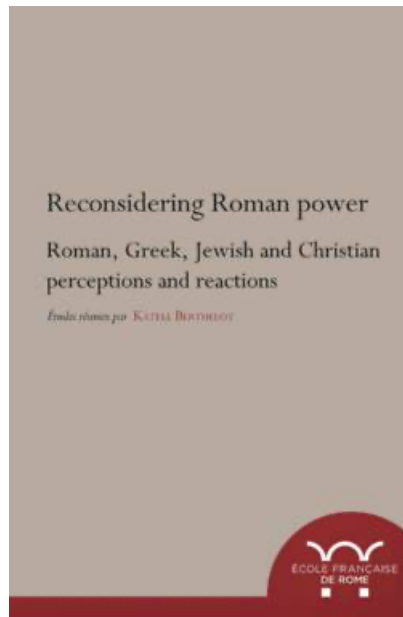


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Katell Berthelot, ed.

Reconsidering Roman Power: Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Perceptions and Reactions

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This edited collection offers a broad discussion concerning Roman imperial power as perceived by the early Jewish and Christian communities under Roman rule. Editor Katell Berthelot begins the book with an introduction to the themes as well as an overview of each chapter. Berthelot acknowledges that “power” must be further explored, especially when discussing “Roman power.” Rather than limit this term to the Roman Empire, one must expand the definition of power as something that is “dynamic, relational, and co-constructed” (3). This volume explores these three aspects of power in five sections. Instead of discussing each chapter individually, I will discuss the five sections of this work.

The first section, “Rome and Previous Empires: *Translatio Imperii* and Comparative Perspectives,” provides a historical perspective of Roman power both in the Roman view of themselves as well as how other countries viewed this empire. Frederico Russo’s “Rome as the Last Universal Empire in the Ideological Discourse of the Second Century BCE” is a discussion concerning Roman propaganda and the empire’s view that they had ruled the world completely, *summa imperii*, through military conquests and political domination. Russo suggests that Rome was viewed as the final in a succession of Eastern empires such as Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. In “Rome and the Four-Empires Scheme in Pre-rabbinic Jewish Literature,” Nadav Sharon further develops this four-empire discussion from the text of Daniel, Greco-Roman literature, and Qumran. He also explores other texts that apply Rome to the final kingdom pitting itself against

God and facing a future of divine destruction. This section concludes with Hervé Inglebert's "Comparer Rome, Alexandre et Babylone: La question de l'exceptionnalité de l'empire de Rome aux IV^e-VI^e siècles." Here Inglebert brings the previous chapters to a close, explaining Rome's comparison to Alexander the Great's empire, Babylon, and later being embraced by some in the early Christian community. Rome's power and influence was clearly understood not only by the Romans themselves but by every culture they dealt with and influenced.

The next section, "The Dynamics of Power," contains the most essays and explores the multiple expressions of Roman power through political and social influence throughout the Roman world. "The Rulers Ruled," by Greg Woolf, dives into the power dynamics *within* the ruling elite of the Roman world. Woolf suggests that rulers of Rome and other client kingdoms carried fears of how they were manipulated and ruled within a system that offered them power, while subjecting them to other authority. Onno M. van Nijf and Sam van Dijk suggest, in "Experiencing Roman Power at Greek Contests: Romaia in the Greek Festival Network," that Roman power was further developed through Roman athletic festivals, *Romaia*. These festivals and games promoted the power of Rome and extended its influence toward competing hosts for other ancient festivals and athletic contests. Emmanuelle Rosso Caponio also examines the connections between Greek elites and leaders in the East and their perceptions of Roman power in "Personnifications de Rome et du pouvoir romain en Asie Mineure: Quelques exemples." This power and influence were also displayed in Rome, against the Jewish community, as a reminder that Roman power had dominated this culture and destroyed both temple and city, as Caroline Barron's "The (Lost) Arch of Titus: The Visibility and Prominence of Victory in Flavian Rome" makes clear. Rome continued the use of oppression and power in its destruction of cities, land, and entire people groups through devastation. According to "Devastation: The Destruction of Populations and Human Landscapes and the Roman Imperial Project," by Myles Lavan, Roman rulers may have used this as a last resort but often found opportunities to communicate the powerlessness of any community resisting Roman influence. Finally, Elizabeth DePalma Digeser's "Apollo, Christ, and Mithras: Constantine in Gallia Belgica" traces the connections between Roman views of the Sun god on a continuum with the Greek and Persian gods Apollo and Mithras, along with Christ and Emperor Constantine. Her essay provides a compelling connection and use of Roman power.

Section 3, "Reflections on the Limitations of Roman Power and Its Weaknesses," discusses resistance to Roman power that placed boundaries concerning how far Roman rule could go both culturally and religiously. In "Gouverner l'empire, se gouverner soi-même: Réflexions sur la notion de maiestas dans la littérature de la République et du Principat," Julien Dubouloz explains the personal responsibilities that were expected by Roman leaders. The limits they would apply to their own actions and self-control were important to extend Roman influence and justice throughout the Empire. Jonathon J. Price's "Structural Weaknesses in Rome's Power? Greek Historians' Views on Roman Stasis" illustrates the complex Roman narrative that needed to be manifested outside Rome. Roman historians wrote that Rome was a continuation of Greek

culture, while also resisting stasis and promoting harmony. Berthelot's "Power and Piety: Roman and Jewish Perspectives" continues the theme addressing the limitations of Roman power. While Rome sought to credit the success of their empire to the blessings of the gods, Jewish authors and scholars continued to stress that Roman behavior lacked piety and would feel the judgment of God. Finally, Sébastien Morlet's "Ce que peut l'Empire: Les caractéristiques et les limites du pouvoir romain d'après l'Histoire ecclésiastique d'Eusèbe de Césarée" illustrates that, while Eusebius's view of Rome was that it protected the Christians while punishing the Jews, this empire was limited by God and an illusion of power and authority.

The essays of section 4, "Criticisms of Roman Power," explore the criticisms of Roman imperialism on outlying cultures. Marie Roux's "Animalizing the Romans: The Use of Animal Metaphors by Ancient Authors to Criticize Roman Power or Its Agents" discusses the use of "beast," "wolf," or "wild animal" to describe the corrupt and tyrannical behavior of Roman leaders as well as emperors. He writes, "Popularised by Greek philosophers, the association between tyrants and wild animals was not only based on their shared cruelty, but also on the idea that a bestial person is incapable of controlling his feelings through rational processes" (312). In "Alexander the Great in the Jerusalem Talmud and Genesis Rabbah: A Critique of Roman Power, Greed and Cruelty," Yael Wilfand explored the use of rabbinic texts to compare Roman leaders to Alexander while also challenging the Roman view that their empire promoted justice. Finally, Nathanael Andrade's "Romans and Iranians: Experiences of Imperial Governance in Roman Mesopotamia" discusses the Gospel of Thomas and its representation of Persian/Iranian culture, which was contrasted to the unjust Roman political realm.

The final section, "The Impact of Roman Power Upon Judaism," explores the tension between Roman power over Judaism before and after Bar Kochba. Seth Schwartz's "The Mishnah and the Limits of Roman Power" provides a strong discussion concerning the unique literature of the Mishnah as it carries the practice of torah post-70 CE and under the rule of a nation vastly opposed to the work of the rabbis. In "Jewish Books and Roman Readers: Censorship, Authorship, and the Rabbinic Library," Natalie B. Dohrmann continues Schwartz's thought through the adaptation of rabbinical thought, teaching, and practice. This became evident in canonization and the model of teaching and study practiced by these scholars. Christine Hayes offers further thoughts on the rabbinical school in "Roman Power through Rabbinic Eyes: Tragedy or Comedy?" These early scholars found various interpretive means to reimagine a world without immoral Roman oppression while serving their God. Finally, Markus Vinzent explores the history of Marcion in "'Christianity': A Response to Roman-Jewish Conflict." Vinzent offers a different view of Marcion than most scholars, suggesting that he paved the way for Christianity to continue supporting the Jewish faith while resisting the rule of Roman culture.

Reconsidering Roman Power is a tremendous contribution to the discussion concerning power and its representation in the ancient Roman world. In addition to this, the discussion allows

expressions from colonized communities that had the ability to criticize their oppressors, while allowing us to view into the world of the oppressed. Katell Berthelot has assembled a highly qualified team who has done thorough work, yet opened the door to more studies in this theme of power and its influence on ancient communities. I highly recommend this resource for academic work, and I look forward to the many further discussions and publications that Berthelot's team will provide in the future.