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Review of Steven Fine's *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Towards a New Jewish Archeology* (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

Steven Fine's *Art and Judaism in the Greco-Roman World: Towards a New Jewish Archeology* is an impressive introduction not only to Jewish attitudes towards the visual in antiquity but also to the scholarly and cultural cross-currents that have led to the re-evaluation of the maxim that Jews were "the most unmonumental people in the world" (5). Fine utilizes an array of literary and material sources in his study. He marshals disparate evidence to suggest that Jews were active participants in the visual culture of the Greco-Roman world, adopting and modifying the dominant cultural art forms and creating "minority art" (5).

Fine attempts to synthesize information and "read [it] holistically" (165); he is interested in "Jewish koiné" (3), the commonalities between all forms of Jewish culture. Fine is thus opposed to the sharp divide between rabbis and commons for which there has been some scholarly argument, particularly in the influential work of Jacob Nuesner. Referring to "the broad agreement of theology and praxis" (7) between all Jews of antiquity, he argues against the anti-Semitism of 19th century approaches, which saw Jews as being artless and thus not a real people, and against the "anti-rabbinic" (2) tendencies of scholars who saw Jewish art as reflecting a distinctly non-rabbinic ethos.

The first chapter deals with the re-assessment of Jewish art that began in the early part of the 20th century. The prior consensus was that Jews were essentially artless. This was accepted by anti-Semitic scholars but also by Jews, who echoed it in such works as the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1906), which, paradoxically, affirmed Jewish artlessness in pages lavishly illustrated with Jewish symbols.

Against this notion, Zionist archeologists were unearthing evidence of Jewish

artistry in their attempts to re-envision the Jewish people. Fine examines the excavations of several archeologists, most notably Eleazer Sukenik. He notes that Sukenik initially saw continuity between rabbinic texts and artifacts. Later scholars did not follow Sukenik's lead. Rather, 20th century scholars, notably Edwin Goodenough, marked a shift: instead of all Jews being an-iconic, artlessness was seen as being a legacy of rabbinic culture. Fine accuses Goodenough both of a-historicism, since his work was highly influenced by the Jungian concept of archetypes, and of creating a false dichotomy between mysticism and rabbinic legalism.

Nevertheless, Fine recognizes Goodenough's work as being a turning point in scholarship since it made accessible a wealth of Jewish images and challenged the monolithic category of normative Judaism. Further, Goodenough, through his close friendship with Morton Smith, proved to be extremely influential to present-day Jewish scholarship. Seminal scholars, notably Lee Levine, Jacob Neusner and Shaye Cohen, studied at Columbia during Smith's tenure there, and all three subsequently dedicated their careers to "sorting out the place of the rabbinic community in Jewish culture" (42). Reflecting their own Conservative Jewish agenda, they attempted to create a counter-history which downplayed tensions between Jews and the majority culture and focused instead on harmonious interactions. Even as Fine elucidates this pattern, which he suggests partially reflects American Jewry's own attempt to negotiate its own identity, he maintains that he is part of this same scholarly community.

In the second section, Fine charts a trajectory that begins with an-iconism amongst Second Temple Jews and continues to the rise of imagery in the 6th century and then the repudiation of this imagery in the Islamic period. Here Fine argues against Avi-Yonah who sees the flourishing of the visual as a popular phenomenon in conflict with rabbinic proscriptions. Fine produces a convincing catalogue of the diversity of rabbinic attitudes towards art in order to show that there is "no evidence that a unified community of rabbi iconophobes ever really existed" (121). Rather, the rabbis were "anti-idolic" and had no objection to imagery if it did not represent deities.

Fine suggests an alternate scenario for understanding Jewish art during this period. When nationalistic sentiment was at its peak, in the Second Temple Period, visual iconography was mostly non-figurative. During the gradual colonization of Palestine by non-Jews after the Bar Kochba revolt, Jewish participation in the visual flourished and Jews began creating figurative art. This reaches its peak in the synagogues of the 5th and 6th centuries. Fine examines closely the synagogue at Na'aran because it represents “both the rise of a more ‘iconic’ stance in Byzantine Palestine and its demise during the Islamic period” (85). The mosaic pavement of this synagogue contains many of the visual elements that were predominant in synagogues of the period. At some point, the heads of the human and animal figures were removed. The care with which they were excised suggests to Fine that Jews, who continued to use the synagogue afterwards, were responsible for this defacement. Thus the synagogue reveals that Jewish attitudes towards art were refracted through their surrounding culture: figurative art flourished during the Byzantine period, but was rejected under Islam.

Part three examines Jewish symbols, namely, the date palm and menorah. The former, a symbol of Palestine's fecundity, was initially popularized by the Romans, who put the date palm on coins in an attempt to avoid offending Jewish anti-figurative sensibilities. Fine presents the menorah as being the ultimate Jewish symbol. Biblical in its origin, the menorah is ubiquitous in ancient Jewish material culture, often indentifying spaces that cannot otherwise be recognized as Jewish. Fine suggests that the symbol is multivalent, but that sometimes it represented hope for a restored temple and acted as an identity marker.

In the final section Fine attempts to synthesize literature with the visual elements of the synagogue. Here Fine astutely notes that within the discipline of art history there exists a tendency to catalogue individual works of art and to divorce images from their immediate context. Such an approach is highly inappropriate to liturgical space wherein images work in tandem with liturgy to create a communal experience. Fine recognizes that churches lend themselves more easily to holistic interpretation than do ancient synagogues, as many of the former are still in use and tend to be better preserved. He thus employs the technique of looking at ancient

churches still in use today in order to reconstruct how the synagogue functioned. This approach fits within Fine's theory that the art and liturgy of the synagogue tended to reflect the surrounding dominant culture, but it is also methodologically problematic, as we cannot be sure that the service in these churches has not undergone considerable innovation, nor can we know what was borrowed by Jews from the dominant culture.

Fortunately, this element makes up only a small part of Fine's approach. More fruitful is his attempt to read liturgical literature in light of synagogue remains. Of particular interest is his discussion of the synagogue at Dura Europas, whose grand visual representations might seem to be discontinuous with rabbinic mentality, but which Fine still locates within "Jewish koiné." Fine looks at a liturgical text found at Dura in order to suggest that this community, while not rabbinic, was "firmly rooted within a religious world that was shared by the rabbis" (183).

In the penultimate chapter, Fine interprets synagogue art, in particular zodiacs, in light of liturgical poetry. The zodiac, Fine maintains, while not a uniquely Jewish symbol, is nonetheless an excellent example of how Jews created minority art. Adopted from the surrounding culture, it was used by Jews long after it had fallen out of favor with that culture. Fine suggests that the zodiac represents uniquely Jewish concerns with time, including awareness of using a separate calendar. Fine's reading is thoughtful and plausible.

The final chapter of the book quotes extensively from Fine's previous book. Fine reasserts his previous conclusion, namely that the synagogue in antiquity was viewed as sacred, but recognizes that his previous work was too tied up with how Jews would have "verbalized" (208) this sanctity. Such an approach was not able to account for why certain images would have been considered holy. By attempting to understand how images and liturgies worked in tandem, Fine has nuanced his prior claim.

While Fine's book is an impressive introduction to Jewish art in antiquity, a few caveats must be mentioned. Firstly, part of Fine's argument that Jews in antiquity had a strong appreciation for the visual is based on the fact that Jews af-

firmed the visual in writing, particularly in their descriptions of the temple. This argument would have been strengthened by engaging with the lavish descriptions of the temple in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in the Hekhalot literature. A discussion of the importance of the sectarian calendar in the Scrolls would have also added to Fine's discussion of the importance of the calendar to Jewish identity. Since Fine is interested in "Jewish koiné," and touches on almost every manifestation of Judaism in antiquity, it is surprising that both these bodies of literature are neglected. This is perhaps because Fine focuses on the commonalities amongst Jews in antiquity and so devoting too much attention on the literature of what some would call fringe groups might undermine his central theme. Secondly, in his presentation of the basic correspondence between the murals at Dura Europas and rabbinic literature, Fine never really accounts for how the visual representation of God's hands fits with the "anti-idolic" tendencies he ascribes to the rabbis.

Despite these minor criticisms, the book stands as an essential contribution to the study of Early Judaism and ancient material culture.

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