

# Some preliminary remarks on the "religious opposition" to the Roman Empire

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### III

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## SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS ON THE «RELIGIOUS OPPOSITION» TO THE ROMAN EMPIRE

### I

For my generation two books, both in German, and both reacting to the Fascist-Nazi world-view, determined the interest in the religious situation of the Roman Empire: H. Fuchs, *Der geistige Widerstand gegen Rom in der antiken Welt* (Berlin 1938) and E. Peterson, *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium romanum* (Leipzig 1935). After the second world war, with other preoccupations, different approaches prevailed. An attempt to revive Mommsen's legal approach to the problem of persecutions was made by Hugh Last, but, profound as it was, it had little appeal in the circumstances. Typically, race was discussed by A. N. Sherwin-White, Last's pupil, in his *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome* (Cambridge 1967). W. den Boer could easily object in his review of Sherwin-White (in *The Classical Journal* 65[1970], 184-6) that there is no conscious racism in the Roman Empire. More in keeping with the new mood has been the evaluation of the Roman State from the point of view of Christian theology as for instance in the book by

Oscar Cullmann, *Der Staat im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen 1956); of the resistance of the natives in the provinces (for instance *La résistance africaine à la romanisation* by M. Benabou [Paris 1976]); and of the relation between imperial cult and the loyalty of Roman subjects, an item which received much attention in the 1972 Entretiens of the Fondation Hardt on *Le Culte des Souverains dans l'Empire romain*. In 1966 Ramsay MacMullen produced what was perhaps the first attempt to put together these post-war tendencies in his book *Enemies of the Roman Order*. It remains a remarkable book. But other lines of research, at first sight unconcerned with the opposition to the Roman Empire as such, were destined to be of great influence on this very question of the opposition to the Roman Empire. I allude to the studies on the relations between Jews and Christians in the Empire. One can see how the two lines of research—the relations between Jews and Christians and the relations between them and the Roman State—increasingly tended to converge if one compares Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel* of 1948, with W. H. C. Frend's *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Oxford 1965). More recent products of the same trend are for instance Johann Maier, *Jüdische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Christentum in der Antike* and David Rokeah, *Jews, Pagans and Christians in Conflict*, both of 1982; Günter Stemberger, *Die römische Herrschaft im Urteil der Juden* (Darmstadt 1983); R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans (and Greeks) Saw Them*, 1984—to make an arbitrary selection among a vast literature.

I have of course no intention to climb this mountain of paper on the present occasion. There are some preliminary difficulties to sort out about the evidence we have received from Antiquity. Striking as the Roman toleration of foreign cult was, it never amounted, of course, to an ancient equivalent of the modern idea of separation between State and Church. On the other hand, our know-

ledge of what Celts, Pannonians, Punics, Egyptians etc. thought of the Roman treatment of their native cults is very vague and not comparable with what we know about the Jewish and Christian reactions to the Roman policies. I should like to illustrate three elementary points: 1) the ambiguities inherent in the Roman attitude to tolerance; 2) our profound ignorance of what the Druids, the worshippers of Iuno Caelestis, and the Egyptian priests and seers—to take three examples—thought about the behaviour of the Roman authorities; 3) the complexities of the Jewish and Christian attitudes to the Roman State, which are the only ones we can really analyse.

## II

We have of course to make some distinction between opposition to Rome by independent states and opposition to the Roman government by the subjects of the Roman State—provincials or otherwise. Those who fought against Rome to preserve their independence at best knew the Roman government from afar: they were not, or not yet, enmeshed in the peculiarities of Roman State religion. Though it may be somewhat crude to draw a line between the Druids before Caesar's conquest of Gaul and the Druids after it, we have to take into consideration the bilateral relation between subjects and sovereigns which exists after any conquest. But another distinction has to be considered. Almost invariably the Greeks of Greece felt that their disputes with Macedonian, and later with Roman, power were to be conducted as well as they could in terms of prudence, shrewdness and patience: these were disputes between men, not between gods. The Greeks after all had Demosthenes behind them and Polybius with them. Nobody, to my knowledge, has so far commented on the

paradox that Demosthenes should have become a model to Roman politicians precisely in the century in which he was being read by the Greeks who wanted to learn from him how to resist the Romans. In the East it was different. We all know the "strange stories" told by Phlegon of Tralles, a freedman of the Emperor Hadrian, about the oracles uttered by the Roman general Publius during the war between Antiochus III and the Romans. Though I was not persuaded by Jörg-Dieter Gauger in his very acute article in *Chiron* 10 (1980), 225-261 that these oracles belong to the time of Mithridates Eupator, I have no difficulty in believing that such oracles were re-used when Mithridates marched from Asia to Greece, and Athens opened her gates to him. We are not surprised either that Eunus, the organizer of the first slave war in 135-131 B.C., relied on the help of the Syrian goddess and displayed the arts of prophecy and wonder-working we expect from a desperate charismatic leader. The source of Diodorus, probably Posidonius, considered him a charlatan.

But we have also to admit that between 70 and 20 B.C. the prophets of doom seem to have prospered everywhere within the Roman Empire. Etruscan prophets at the end of the saeculum encouraged the Catilinarians (Cic. *Catil.* III 9; 19). Sallust or rather the author of the *Second Letter to Caesar* envisaged the possibility of the end of Rome, and of course Horace foresaw the bones of Romulus being scattered about the Forum and a journey for the reprieved towards the Island of the Blessed. Caesar was suspected of having entertained the notion of abandoning Rome, and Livy must have remembered something like that when he showed Camillus refusing to move away from Rome after the Gallic disaster (V 49). No doubt people felt that there were enemies of the Empire other than the visible ones beyond the borders. No wonder. Pompey introduced Judaea into the Empire; Caesar annexed Gaul; Octavian

made Egypt a province. These were regions where prophets and visionaries prospered.

### III

Such as they were in the first century B.C. and would go on being for some centuries afterwards, the members of the ruling class of Rome were ready to transact business with people who worshipped different gods and were used to different political traditions. Roman polytheism could adapt itself to, and indeed merge with, what we may call the provincial traditions. Greek and Roman gods became practically identical. Celtic, Semitic, Pannonian and African gods were either assimilated to Greco-Roman gods or accepted as respectable gods in their own right to an extent which is no less stupendous for being obvious. The lack of a priestly class in what Dumézil would like us to consider a trifunctional society gave a secular tone to the whole of private life; religious instruction was not a major item of Roman education to anyone. But there was another side to Roman tolerance. The ordinary activities of the Roman authorities both in Italy and in the provinces implied continuous attention to the approval of the gods and continuous participation of the gods in the public life of the Romans. The question of believing was seldom made explicit, but the question of performing correctly was ever present and committed the ruling class to the preservation of the religious tradition. Nor was that all. The Roman magistrates, the Roman Senate and, above all, the emperors were qualified to decide who was an enemy of the Roman State and to take consequent action. The tolerant could turn intolerant with little warning. In the second century A.D., we are told by Ulpian, there were laws condemning to death those who consulted astrologers about the health,

that is the expectation of life, of the emperors (*Mosaicarum et Romanarum legum collatio* XV 2, 2-3). As Juvenal observed (6, 562 sqq.) no *mathematicus* can claim true inspiration without being condemned. The Roman authorities either centrally or peripherally, could take steps which, to say the least, were unexpected. If we today are puzzled by the contrast between the easy-going tolerance of Roman society at large and the harshness of some Roman governmental actions, one wonders what the persons involved and affected thought.

Our difficulty in assessing the position of the Druids in the first century A.D. is partly due to this conflict in Roman attitudes and partly to the absence of texts explaining the Druidic point of view. It is perhaps worth adding that even the Roman point of view is not so easy to gather from the extant sources.

Caesar, who knew something about religion, is remarkably silent about the part of religion in the resistance of the Celts against himself. That Augustus prohibited the participation of Roman citizens in the Druidic 'religion' (Suet. *Claud.* 25, 5), that Tiberius did away with the Druids (Plin. *Nat.* XXX 13) and that Claudius confirmed the abolition of Druidic rituals is stated in our sources. It is also implied in these sources that the Roman government strongly objected to the human sacrifices which were part of the Druidic religion. Success in the abolition of human sacrifices is claimed by Strabo under Tiberius (Strab. IV 4, 5, p. 198) and by Pomponius Mela (III 18) under Claudius. What our sources forget to tell us is whether the problem of human sacrifices was exclusively Druidic or Celtic. Prohibition of human sacrifices had apparently become law in Rome by a *senatus consultum* of 97 B.C. (Plin. *Nat.* XXX 12). Even after that date we hear of several episodes of human sacrifices in Italy during the civil wars. We remember that in 46 B.C., according to Dio Cassius (XLIII 24, 4), two

enemies of Caesar were sacrificed by the pontifes and the Flamen Martialis in Campus Martius, and their heads were hung from the Regia. There may also be some reality in other stories of which S. Weinstock provides a list in his *Divus Julius* (Oxford 1971), 399. The minimum we can ask is whether the human sacrifices were an exclusive feature of the Druidic rituals. The role of the Druids as opponents of Rome is unclear. Mariccus, the *adsertor Galliarum et deus* of A.D. 69, is implicitly excluded from the Druidic aristocracy by Tacitus when he calls him *e plebe Boiorum* (*Hist.* II 61). In the story of the conquest of Britain Tacitus confines the Druids to the episode of the conquest of Mona (*Ann.* XIV 30). Only about the fire of the Capitolium in 69 does he explicitly state that it was interpreted by the Druids as a sign of the transition of power to the transalpine nations: *possessionem rerum humanarum Transalpinis gentibus portendi superstitione vana Druidae canebant* (*Tac. Hist.* IV 54). It is not surprising that three recent essays on the Druids by Cesare Letta in *Rivista Storica Italiana* 1984, by Giuseppe Zecchini, *I Druidi*, 1984, and by M. Clavel-Lévêque, *Dialogues d'Histoire ancienne* 1985 reach different conclusions from the same evidence: more particularly while Letta minimizes the political repression of the Druids by the Romans, Zecchini ascribes a part to the Druids in the *imperium Galliarum*. The role of prophetess is of course better established for A.D. 70 by the story of Veleda. That she sooner or later became a prisoner of the Romans is said by Statius, *Silv.* I 4, 90: *captivaeque preces Veledae*; but I still do not know what to do with the inscription of Veleda published by M. Guarducci, in *Rend. della Pontif. Acc. di Arch.* 21 (1944-45), 163-76 (cf. *RPAA* 25-26 [1949-51], 75-87, and G. Walser, in *RE* VIII A 1 (1955), *s.v.* "Veleda").

When we hear again of Druids, and indeed for the first time of female Druids, *dryades*, in the fourth century in the



*Historia Augusta* (with references to previous centuries) and in Ausonius they operate inside Roman Society and are no longer guilty of human sacrifices. But less than linear development is again suggested by Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* with its reference to *magi* and to at least one human sacrifice under Vortigern in the middle of the fifth century. If Nennius' *magi* are Druids, some tradition of human sacrifice had survived with them to grace the regime of Vortigern whom J.N.L. Myres in an impressive article in *JRS* 50 (1960), called a "Pelagian tyrannus" (p. 35). What a fascinating end for the supporters of independent Britain—the alliance between the followers of the Briton Pelagius and of the Druids.

#### IV

The changing position of the Druids in relation to Rome in Celtic territory could no doubt be matched by similar oscillations in other provinces—if we only knew. Let us consider briefly Dea Caelestis, who used to be Tanit in the good old days in which Carthage was powerful and, maybe, friendly to the Romans. There are hints in our tradition that the Romans, in conformity with their customs, evoked Tanit before destroying Carthage (Macr. *Sat.* III 9, 7). But Tanit as Dea Caelestis had been back in her old city since at least 122 B.C. when the Colonia Iunonia was planted in the place of Carthage. Locally the goddess was protected and even privileged by the Romans. According to a well known *regula* by Ulpian *deos heredes instituere non possumus praeter... Caelestem Salinensem Carthaginiis* (fr. 22, 6). In the third century the empress Julia Domna was identified with Caelestis in an inscription of Magontiacum (*CIL* XIII 6671); in 221 Dea Caelestis was given a place in Rome together with Sol Invictus by Elagabalus (Herodian. V 6, 4), which was apparently also a

good occasion for transferring to Rome the Carthaginian treasure of the goddess. She survived Elagabalus, for she had a temple on the Capitol in Rome from at least A.D. 259 (*ILS* [Dessau] 4438; M. Guarducci, in *Bollettino della Comm. Archeol. Comun. in Roma* 72 [1946-48], 11-25). We are assured by the *Historia Augusta* that Roman governors of Africa consulted the goddess regularly (*Opil. Macr.* 3, 1). But here trouble begins. First, because in general we do not know what value to attribute to such statements of the *Historia Augusta* (cf. T. D. Barnes, in *Journ. Theol. Studies* 21 [1970], 96-101). Secondly, and more specifically, because a statement in the *Life of Pertinax* has been interpreted to imply that Pertinax repressed rebellions in Africa which had been provoked by prophecies issued by the temple of Caelestis (*Pert.* 4, 2 sq.). In the late second century A.D., the cult of Caelestis would have been hostile to the Roman government. I do not intend here to go into the text which is probably corrupt: *multas seditiones perpessus dicitur vaticinationibus earum quae de templo Caelestis emergunt*. I shall only add that I do not feel entitled to follow G. Ch. Picard in his acute but daring emendation *canum* instead of *earum*, founded on the comparison with other texts (cf. *Rev. Hist. Rel.* 155 [1959], 41-62). What matters to me is that we can never be certain that these provincials cults could not, on certain occasions, and almost unexpectedly, turn into centres of dissatisfaction and protest against Rome.

My third case concerns Egypt. The *Potter's Oracle* is much better known since the publication of *POxy.* 2332 and its republication by L. Koenen in *Zeitschr. für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 2 (1968), 178-209 (an appendix in *ZPE* 13 [1974], 313-19). The potter's prophecy is addressed to King Amenophis and presents itself as a Greek translation from an Egyptian original; but it seems doubtful whether there ever was an Egyptian original. The potter himself was probably an incarnation of the potter-god Chnum. The

oracle, as we have it, presupposes the existence of the city of Alexandria and the cult of Serapis. It is anti-Greek and seems to foresee, and to hope for, the dissolution of Greek rule through internal struggles. Certain indications in the text seem to allude more precisely to events of the second century B.C., such as Antiochus IV's invasion of Egypt about 170-168 and the troubles with the natives of about 131-127 under Ptolemy Euergetes II. In any case, the return of a previous king, presumably a native, is promised as a gift by the sun-god Re. The *Potter's Oracle* has reached us in different versions and was still read in Roman imperial times. If so, it must have acquired an anti-Roman connotation. There can be no doubt about the anti-imperial bias of another text which is closely connected with, and possibly inspired by, the *Potter's Oracle*, namely the apocalyptic section of the so-called *Asclepius* in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. As is well known, the *Asclepius* in its original Greek form was read by Lactantius: it must be earlier than the fourth century A.D. The Latin and Coptic translations of the apocalyptic section, which alone preserve for us the text in full, have some allusions to religious persecutions of pagans which may have been interpolated after Lactantius and before St. Augustine. If we accept chapter 27 of the *Asclepius* as the conclusive part of this Apocalypse, the demiurgos is expected to restore to power the ancient Egyptian gods who had retired to a Libyan mountain while the foreigners ruled Egypt. Jewish apocalyptic influences, perhaps transmitted by Sibylline texts, combine with the tradition of Egyptian prophecy to convey an image of present desecration by barbarians which the "god first in power and demiurgos of one god" (*deus primipotens et unius gubernator dei*, chapt. 26a) will paradoxically heal by restoring the ancient gods and collecting all the right people of the world in a sort of Egyptian counterpart to Messianic Jerusalem.

The traffic between Jewish apocalyptic and Egyptian prophecy was perhaps not one way only. It has been suggested that the Lamb of St. John's *Revelation* has a predecessor in the Lamb which gives its name to another Egyptian oracle. The surviving text of the *Lamb's Oracle* is dated under Augustus (A.D. 4/5) but refers to the reign of King Bocchoris of the XXIV dynasty (about 715 B.C.). The Lamb announces that a disaster will break over Egypt after nine hundred years, and it also pronounces that ultimately God will care again for the Egyptians and will give them back the sacred objects which the Assyrians had taken away. The historical allusions may not be too clear, and the nine hundred years may just be a round figure. I am also doubtful about the connection between the Egyptian Lamb and St. John's Lamb. But it seems beyond doubt that in the Lamb's prophecy the Assyrians symbolize all the foreign invaders—and therefore also the Romans. We are reminded of the symbolic value of the Assyrians in the *Books of Judith* and *Tobit*.

We have therefore at least three texts of religious inspiration which circulated in Egypt during the Empire and expressed opposition to foreigners. Do they, however, really imply definite hostility to the Roman Empire as such? Two texts, the *Potter's Oracle* and the *Lamb's Oracle*, may simply transmit the echo of previous conflicts. The text which is in fact rooted in the conditions of the imperial age is the *Asclepius*. Before the publication of the Coptic version which happened only in 1971 (M. Krause und P. Labib, *Gnostische und hermetische Schriften aus Codex II und Codex VI* [Augustin 1971], 187-206; cf. *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [Leiden 1977], 300-307), scholars tended to take the Latin version as an interpolated text suggested by the Christian persecutions of pagans in Egypt in the fourth century. An acute judge like Professor A. S. Ferguson had, however, argued in 1936 for a date of this Apo-

calypse under Trajan or Hadrian and had connected it with the great uprising of the Jews: the text would originally have been not against the Christian emperors, but against the Jewish rebels. There is indeed a fragment of an anti-Jewish prophecy preserved by *Pap. Soc. It.* 982 (*Corp. Pap. Jud.* 520; third cent.). But the text of the *Asclepius*, which in the Coptic version definitely says that the "Egyptians will be prohibited from worshipping God", does not seem to me to fit into the context of the Jewish rebellion under Trajan. I cannot visualize the situation which the author of the original Greek text, which is lost, must have had in mind. If the Coptic and the Latin versions of the apocalyptic section of the *Asclepius* allude to a pre-Christian situation, I am also unable to guess what it was. I can only say that I do not see in the extant texts an unambiguous protest against Roman rule in Egypt. I still suspect with all reservations that the Coptic and Latin versions of the *Asclepius* are anti-Christian.

## V

When we pass from such a fragmentary information to the massive evidence about Jews and Christians we may well hope to be on more solid ground. Perhaps we are, but qualifications are required. If we look at the legal aspects of the position of the Jews within the Roman Empire before its Christianization we are struck by the large number of texts which allow the Jews to keep up their cult and to regulate their lives in the places of their residence. Some of the *Acts of the Alexandrian Martyrs* accuse Roman emperors like Hadrian and Commodus of favouring the Jews. For most of the time and the places the pagan Roman State recognized the right of the Jews to live as Jews and did not curtail their movements. Imperial cult (except under Gaius)

was no serious problem. Except in times of rebellion (that is, of war), the expulsion of Jews from Rome and other cities had to be justified in ordinary terms of public order: they were not frequent, though, like many other administrative measures of the Roman government in religious matters, both provocative and inane. The real moments of persecution and intolerance towards the Jews were subsequent to or connected with the great rebellions from Nero to Hadrian. This of course must not be confused with the widespread dislike of Jews among the educated and the uneducated, though the memory of the Jewish rebellions was used by hostile circles for anti-Jewish demonstrations, such as the annual festival still celebrated at Oxyrhynchus in the year 199 to commemorate the Roman repression of the Jewish rebellion of 116 (*Corp. Pap. Jud.* 450) or the ban of the Jews from Cyprus on the same pretext (Dio Cass. LXVIII 32). We are therefore brought back to the three Jewish rebellions as the main events in the relation between Jews and pagans. How can we explain them?

We have no ancient extended account of the two rebellions under Trajan and Hadrian. The two versions we have of the rebellion of A.D. 66-70 which led to the destruction of the Temple do not make it easy for us to assess the part played by religious convictions and expectations in this rebellion. Neither Tacitus, who speaks, so to say, for the Roman Empire, nor Josephus, who has a Jewish point of view, presents a coherent account of what happened.

It is characteristic of Tacitus, as has long been recognized, that notwithstanding his total dislike of the Jews, he is basically inclined to think that they were provoked to rebellion by the errors and misbehaviour of the Roman governors: *duravit tamen patientia Iudaeis usque ad Gessium Florum procuratorem* (*Hist.* V 10, 1). Nor is Tacitus the man to speak without some element of sympathy about people who refuse to put up statues in their towns either to their

own kings or to Roman Caesars: *non regibus haec adulatio, non Caesaribus honor*. Tacitus is well aware of the part played by prophecy in the rebellion of a *gens superstitioni obnoxia religionibus adversa*, and though he does not make it explicit may well consider an aspect of this *superstitio* the *maior vitae metus quam mortis* of such men and women. But it is not an obvious conclusion that Tacitus makes the rebellion of 66-70 a simple consequence of the Jewish *superstitio*. Tacitus is far more aware than Josephus of the general unrest in the Empire in the last years of Nero (*Hist.* IV 3, 3). He sees the crisis of the Roman Empire more clearly than the Jewish episode of it.

For different reasons the religious component of the Jewish rebellion is left undefined in our most important source, Flavius Josephus. Josephus speaks for himself alone. This is true in the deeper sense to which I shall return later that the Jews who survived the destruction of the Temple without passing over to the Roman side apparently ceased to write history. But even on a superficial level we have the paradox of a Josephus in conflict with Justus of Tiberias, though they shared full acceptance of the Roman victory. We should like to know why Justus apparently kept the text of his history of the Jewish war in his drawer for twenty years before publishing it. It is no use speculating on the precise relation between a work which is lost and a work which is extant, but we are confirmed by Justus in our impression that Josephus spoke only for himself. Josephus was obviously determined to show that there was no basic incompatibility between the Jewish religion and the Roman Empire. He plays down the apocalyptic expectations among the Jews. He even avoids talking, apropos of Daniel, of the fourth and last kingdom. He must have been aware of its identification with Rome which we find for instance in the almost contemporary *IV Ezra* (12, 11). The speech which Josephus attributes to

Agrippa II (*Bell. Jud.* II 345-401) explains why the Jews should accept Roman rule. As Emilio Gabba rightly observed (in *Riv. Stor. dell' Ant.* 6-7 [1976-77], 189-194), Josephus claims that King Agrippa read and approved his account of the war (*Vita* 364-7). He must have identified himself with Agrippa's speeches. It is therefore important that Josephus should feel obliged to recognize at least one religious element in the Jewish rebellion against the Romans. He states that the followers of Judah the Galilean, the future *sicarii*, were committed to the principle that God, and nobody else, was their ruler (*Bell. Jud.* II 118). We need go no further, and we can leave aside all the questions concerning the relations between *sicarii* and zealots. What the interpreters of Josephus must not forget is that Josephus was never of one mind. He wrote his *Bellum* in order to explain that the catastrophic conclusion of the rebellion brought about the elimination of the bad Jews. But as his ambiguous attitude to the *sicarii*, confirmed by the speeches he attributes to their leader in Masada, shows, there was another Josephus in Josephus. The other Josephus in Josephus would perhaps have liked to have died in Masada.

The evidence about the rebellions under Trajan and Hadrian is not such as to shed much light on this religious side. The new *Letters* of Bar Kokheba or Bar Chosiba show the ritual concerns of the rebels, but do not say much about their religious motivations. At most the usage of the word 'brothers' in the *Letters* may indicate that the fighters considered themselves members of a religious community. Later texts may perhaps suggest something more specific. The notion that Edom is Rome and therefore that Edom and Israel are brothers-enemies seems to have developed in the generation of the Bar Kokheba rebellion and more precisely in Rabbi Akiba's circle. It was obviously not meant to express sympathy for Rome. A good analysis of



this identification was given recently by Mireille Hadas-Label in *Rev. Hist. Relig.* 201 (1984). Most of the Talmudic texts about Edom are anti-Roman.

On the other hand, the failure of the rebellions undoubtedly brought about some changes in attitude on the Jewish side. In one passage of uncertain date in *Midrash Rabbah* of *Gen.* 9, 15 (9, 13 in the English Soncino translation), the earthly kingdom is said to be very good because it exacts justice for men: the passage seems to include a pun between Adam (man) and Edom; in any case it alludes to Rome. More significant are the dialogues between Jewish sages and Roman dignitaries studied in a well-known paper by Moshe David Herr (*Scripta Hierosolymitana* 22, 1971). These dialogues present Jewish sages, especially of the second and third centuries, engaged in discussions with Roman aristocrats, both men and women, and even with emperors. The question whether any of these conversations ever happened cannot be answered with certainty. What matters is that they were considered possible and that women are made to take part in them: the interest of women in philosophic and religious controversies is especially well documented for the second and third centuries. The tone is often friendly, and one Roman senator is presented as a proselyte who gave his life to save the Jewish people from a hostile decree of the Senate (*Deuter. Rabbah* 2, 24). The decline of militancy and a certain effort to adapt oneself to a situation in which the Jewish diaspora counted at least as much as the survivors in Palestine are altogether clear. Most of the rabbis became suspicious of apocalyptic speculations and even said that although the Messiah was sure to come in the future they would not like to be present at his arrival (*Bab. Talmud, Sanhedrin* 98a). There is also less in the Talmudic sources against the imperial cult than we would expect. The issue does not seem to be vital for the present. In the *Mekilta de-Rabbi*

*Ishmael*, tractate *Shirata*, Chap. 8 (II 61, ed. J. Lauterbach) Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar and the prince of Tyre call themselves gods. There may be prudence in avoiding any mention of the Roman emperor, but the tone is academic. We must rather remember that most of the rabbinic sayings were put together in the fourth century or later, when the imperial cult was less and less a burning issue. We would like to have the Sayings of the Sages in the form in which they were uttered, instead of the form in which they were later edited. Yet the general impression is one of reduced tension between Jews and Empire in the third century.

## VI

One suspects that these attempts at a rapprochement are not unconnected with the alliance which the Christians assumed to exist between Jews and pagans in denouncing the Christians. We shall never know how much of these accusations by Christian writers against the Jews is true; but the mere fact that these accusations were uttered contributed to the atmosphere (see for instance Hippol. *Dan.* I 15, 1-2). In any case the christianization of the Empire by Constantine and his successors forced a rapprochement between Jews and pagans and even between Jews and Christian heretics. I think that Lellia Ruggini was right in recognizing a sign of this rapprochement in the fourth-century compilation of the *Collatio Legum Mosaicarum et Romanarum*. Edoardo Volterra had already made it obvious that this text was of Jewish, not of Christian, origin. Lellia Ruggini has now pointed out (*Italia Judaica* [1983], 38-65) that in creating a sort of concordance between Biblical Law and Roman Law the *Collatio* was in fact trying to refute the Christian accusation that the Jews were hostile to Roman

Law. We must remember that this opinion, expressed by St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom, has literally been codified by Theodosius II when he calls the Jews *Romanis legibus inimici* (*Codex Theodosianus, Leges novellae* III 2 of A.D. 438). The decision of the Emperor Julian to rebuild the Temple of Jerusalem was the main consequence of this convergence of Jewish and pagan interests. The failure of Julian made the position of the Jews even more uncomfortable. The Jews had at least one advantage over the Christians in dealing with the pagans. They were not so certain of having an exclusive right to salvation. In rabbinic circles there was much weight of opinion in favour of Joshua ben Hananiah's *dictum*: "there are righteous men among the nations who have a share in the World to come" (*Tosefta, Sanhedrin* 13, 2; cf. *Sifra, Ahare Mot* 13, 13 (12) and E. E. Urbach, *Sages* [1975], 932; *Bab. Talmud, Baba Kamma* 38 a).

I shall conclude this section on the Jews with a text which has been attributed to a Jew and would express anti-Roman feelings. M. Guarducci has the great merit of having published twice a curious *tabula defixionis*, first in *Bollettino della Comm. Archeol. Comun. in Roma* 74 (1951-52), 57-70, then in *Rend. Accad. Lincei* 8, 24 (1969), 275-283. The text is exceptional in so far as the writer curses not only the doctor who killed his brother, but also the Italian land and Rome which he intends to leave soon in order to return to his own country. M. Guarducci thought that the writer was a Jew full of hatred for Rome. J. and L. Robert were quick to notice in the *Bulletin Epigraphique* of *REG* 84 (1971), 535-6 that there was nothing Jewish in the text. People cursing their doctors, Rome and Italy before returning to their native land must have been many and varied.

## VII

What exactly caused the first persecutions of the Christians, how they were legally justified and how the Christians came to be distinguished from Jews *impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis* (Suet. *Claud.* 25, 4) are questions into which I do not intend to go. According to *Luke* 22, 36 Jesus himself in the decisive moment advised his disciples to buy swords, and we are still discussing the precise meaning of this advice. The *Revelation* of St. John reflects some of the immediate apocalyptic expectations. The text presupposes the existence (albeit a precarious existence) of the Temple in Jerusalem and therefore is likely to have been written about A.D. 69-70, whatever may have been the reasons of Irenaeus for thinking otherwise. The relation of the preliminary letters to the Churches of Asia to the main text of *Revelation* may be doubtful, but the fact that the text was at a certain point so precisely addressed indicates the extent and publicity of such apocalyptic emotions.

We shall only remind ourselves of the opinion voiced by Celsus (*ap.* Orig. *Cels.* VIII 17) that the circumstance that the Christians had no image of God was a sign that they belonged to a secret society. The same accusation was still repeated by Porphyry (if Arnobius, *Nat.* VI 1 quarrels with him). Abstinence from communal festivals and doubts (confirmed by Tertullian, *De corona*) about their serving in the Roman army contributed to the unpopularity of the Christians. In moments of crisis, such as the persecution of Septimius Severus and during the Montanist predication in the early third century, many Christians expected the end of the world to come soon. Daniel became fashionable again. The chronographer Judas, interpreting Daniel, found that the Antichrist would appear in or not much after the tenth year of Septimius Severus (Eus. *HE* VI 7). About the same year 202 Hippolytus had no hesitation in saying explicitly

that the fourth beast of Daniel is Rome who tries to imitate the Christian unification of the World in a satanic style (*Dan.* IV 9). What Hippolytus discourages is the calculation of the time for the end of the fourth beast because it coincides with the arrival of the Antichrist (IV 21).

These and similar facts only make the early acceptance by the apostles and their followers of the providential character of the Roman Empire more conspicuous. Paul's *Letter to the Romans* (13, 1-7) reiterates and develops Jesus' acceptance of the imperial authority (*Mt.* 12, 17), and he is supported by *1 Petr.* 2, 13-17. Augustus had been a contemporary of Jesus; the *pax romana* was readily recognized as the main condition for the spreading of Christianity. By destroying the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem, the Romans had not only punished the Jews for their lack of faith, but had demonstrated the correctness of the claim of the Christian Church to be the legitimate successor to the Hebrew Temple. The theme of the contemporary rise of the Augustan Empire and of the Christian Church is clear in Melito of Sardis (*ap.* Eus. *HE* IV 26, 7-8). The argument from the destruction of the Jewish Temple is implicit in Justin, *I Apol.* 7, 53, in Minucius Felix, *Oct.* 33 and takes shape in Origen, *Cels.* II 30 and VII 26. It is developed by Eusebius, *Demonstr. Evang.* III 7, 140; VI 18, 286. Tertullian, *Apol.* 21, 24 had added to it the touch of Pilate *iam pro sua conscientia Christianus*. I have discussed contiguous points in an article appeared in *Classical Philology* 81 (1986), 285 ff., and shall only emphasize the very remarkable attitude of those Christians who, though persecuted by the Roman Empire, defended the notion that the Roman Empire had been providentially created to foster and support the Christian message.

One among the many factors of this attitude was (as in the case of the Jews) the genuine fear of the end of the World which it was felt was approaching and inevitable. As

long as the Roman Empire lasted, the end of the World was deferred. Even Tertullian was ready to admit that the end of time is a threat of terrible sufferings and that the Roman Empire affords us a respite from it (*Apol.* 32; *Resurr.* 24). Apart from these considerations, the coherence of which is not for us to judge, it is worth underlining that the Christian writers in the period of persecution are firm in stating that the Christians accept their obligations as citizens. The condition of a Christian as a stranger in this World does not abolish his duties as a citizen. To put it in the subtle language of the *Letter to Diognetus* (second century A.D.): "they share all things as citizens and suffer all things as strangers" (5,5).

There were evidently pagans who were ready to settle their differences with the Christians on the basis of recognition by the Christians of their obligations towards the Roman State. Even such an elaborate attack on Christianity as that by Celsus includes an invitation to the Christians not to create difficulties for the Empire by refusing to serve in the army and in the imperial administration (*Orig. Cels.* VIII 75). Furthermore the correspondence between Pliny and Trajan and the very texts of the *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* show that the Roman authorities did not find it easy to explain why they were persecuting the Christians. No doubt the mere fact of being a Christian had created a presumption of disloyalty towards the emperor. It was easy to apply tests of loyalty: *deos appellare et imagini tuae . . . ture ac vino supplicare* (*Plin. Epist.* X 96, 5). But men like Pliny were clearly embarrassed to have to do that. The *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* show Roman officials, most usually governors of provinces, very determined to apply the law against the Christians, but very vague or uncertain in explaining or supporting the law they were allegedly applying. As after all the persecution of the Christians is the main example of the systematic condemnation of a religious

group for its hostility to the Roman Empire we must register the paradox inherent in the attitude of both sides.

On the Christian side there was what we can call a predominant attitude of acceptance of, and respect for, the Roman Empire: there was even the attribution of providentiality to the Roman Empire. Perhaps it could hardly be otherwise because the Church was then and remained long afterwards interested above all in the conversion of the pagans of the Roman Empire. On the side of the Roman authorities there were preoccupations with public order, fears for the loyalty of the army and possibly the knowledge that not all Christians shared the respect for the Empire shown by their apologists. But there was no elementary incompatibility with the Christian way of life. The army and the local administration had *de facto* become careers for volunteers. The ordinary Christian did nothing which menaced his pagan neighbours. At a higher level men like Galen and perhaps Marcus Aurelius (if we accept the traditional text of *Meditations* XI 3, 1-2) had some respect for Christian attitudes. With Celsus we have some hints of the theory that would please the emperor Julian—how plurality of gods corresponded to the plurality of the nations of the Roman Empire (V 32; VII 70; VIII 35). But it was a double-edged theory which was never pursued systematically by the pagans. The Christians had the possibility of answering either that they were after all a new nation or alternatively that one god was better for one kingdom. These two arguments are already unified at the end of the *Contra Celsum* by Origen. What is perhaps most remarkable in Roman paganism is that there was no basic objection to conversion: all that was required was acceptance of the consequences of one's own conversion. This is really what Constantine, not a very sophisticated mind, understood better than anybody else. He converted.

The problem of the Christian opposition to the Empire was solved by one stroke. Or almost.

### VIII

There remains a puzzle with which I should like to end. As we all know, the Jews began to write Sibylline oracles in the style of the authentic Sibylline oracles in the second century B.C. or perhaps earlier. The precise purpose of these compositions is not necessarily always the same. The oracles were meant to express reaction (not inevitably hostile) to pagan powers, whether Hellenistic or Roman; they were also meant to express apocalyptic expectations. But perhaps, more than anything, the oracles were meant to convey to Jews, proselytes—and pagans who cared to read—a reflection on, or a reaction to, historical events. They were cheap philosophy of history supported by apocalyptic expectations. It is worth reminding ourselves that the Jews stopped writing history after A.D. 100 and the Christians did not write political history before the fifth century. The Sibylline oracles filled a historiographic gap. The oracles were, it seems, regularly attributed to a daughter or daughter-in-law of Noah: a detail which gave them a very respectable authority, a quasi-Jewish (but not a totally Jewish) character, and an endless possibility to refer to the past as if it were the future. Pagan oracles were incorporated in the Jewish texts.

In Rome consultation of the Sibylline Books was controlled by the Senate and reserved to Roman officers. A law prohibiting the consultation of Sibylline Books is obscurely mentioned by Justin in his *I Apol.* (44, 12) about the middle of the second century. But there seems to have been no serious attempt to prevent consultation and conse-



quently fabrication of Sibylline Books outside Rome. What nobody ever claimed to have seen (except, I must hasten to report, Trimalchio according to Petronius) was a Sibyl in the flesh. Therefore the Sibylline Books, whether pagan or Jewish, were in a strict sense all forged. The Jews went on forging Sibylline oracles in Greek until the seventh century, if it is true that some of the oracles of our main collection of Sibylline texts (in Book XIV) refer to the Arab conquest of Alexandria.

Now what does interest me in this familiar picture is that the Collection of Sibylline Oracles which has reached us contains both Jewish and Christian Sibylline oracles. The Collection as it is now was put together and transmitted by Christians. Here we find Christian forgers using Jewish forgeries and adding their own more or less for the same purposes: anti-Roman feeling, apocalyptic expectations and generic reflection on past history presented as future. Fathers of the Church (notably Lactantius) hurried to quote these texts; and of course the Christians went on composing their Sibylline texts (now also in Latin) throughout the Middle Ages.

There is a text outside our main Collection which precisely shows that the Christians were conscious of the Jewish interest in Sibyls. It deserves more attention than has been given to it. Paul Alexander in his volume *The Oracle of Baalbek* (Washington 1967) admirably edited a text which Silvio Giuseppe Mercati had discovered on Mount Athos, but not published. Alexander showed this text to be an expanded version put together between A.D. 502 and 506 of an earlier Greek oracle composed about A.D. 378-390. The earlier Greek text of A.D. 378-390 is still recognizable under the Latin guise of medieval Tiburtine oracles. Unlike the ordinary Jewish-Christian Sibylline oracles the Mount Athos text explains the occasion and gives the locality of the prophecy. The Sibyl is made to speak on the

Roman Capitol and to answer questions put by a hundred Roman judges. The text is definitely Christian. Yet Jewish priests intervene in the dialogue and respectfully question the Sibyl about rumours in the pagan world regarding the birth of Christ. The Sibyl, of course, gives a precise confirmation, and the Jewish priests are not heard again. What concerns us is that Jews are here shown to question a pagan Sibyl as a matter of course.

The Christians inherited and preserved many Greek texts of Jewish origin in which the Jews had lost interest, partly for linguistic reasons. Philo and Flavius Josephus are among them. But the preservation of the Jewish Sibylline books is something different because the Christian composers of Sibylline texts continued the work of their Jewish predecessors or contemporaries in the same spirit of critical evaluation of the past and visionary conjecture of the future. The very existence of the Jewish-Christian Sibylline Books is evidence for an underground reaction to the political and social events of the Roman Empire, an underground reaction which probably implies some exchange between Jews and Christians and certainly presupposes a Christian interest in what the Jews thought about the Roman Empire. Even taking into account the *Acts of the Martyrs*, whether *Alexandrian* or *Christian*, I do not know of any other set of texts which brings us nearer to an anonymous, religiously inspired, public opinion in the Roman Empire. We need further research on this conglomerate of Jewish and Christian documents—and on the way in which it was gradually put together.

This strange fact of finding Christians picking up and re-utilizing Jewish Sibylline texts must, however, also be compared with the other strange episode of Christianization of a text—namely the Christianization of the oracles of Hystaspes. These oracles predicted the destruction of the Roman Empire and the return to power of the East. The

collapse of Rome, apparently at the end of 6000 years, would be followed by wars and natural disasters. After that the world would enjoy peace and prosperity for one thousand years, presumably under Eastern kings. The prophecy of the fall of Rome took the form of a dream by a King of Media, Hystaspes, who lived before the Trojan War: the dream itself is interpreted by a child, *Romanum nomen quo nunc regitur orbis... tolletur e terra et imperium in Asiam revertetur* (Lact. *Inst.* VII 15, 11). Justin in his *Apology* knew that the circulation of the oracle of Hystaspes had been prohibited on penalty of death (*I Apol.* 44, 12). One version of the oracle had been Christianized before Clement of Alexandria. Clement in fact attributes a quotation of Hystaspes to St. Paul (*Strom.* VI 5, 43, 1). He must have found a reference to it in some apocryphal text attributed to Paul. In this Christianized version Hystaspes alludes to Christ. Lactantius, who directly or indirectly summarizes most of the oracle, had a text before him which was not interpolated by Christians, though it provided confirmation to his own Christian eschatology. In this non Christian version the text of Hystaspes may be dated at any time between the victory of Rome over Antiochus III and the publication of Justin's *Apology*. It may be due to friends of Mithridates or to friends of the Parthians either outside or inside the Roman Empire. We know from Pausanias (V 27, 5) and later from a *Letter* of St. Basil (258) that there were Persian colonies in Asia Minor with their *magi* (cf. A. Peretti, in *Wiener Studien* 69 [1956], 350-62). The original anti-Roman bias of the oracle of Hystaspes is evident. But was this oracle still used by the Christians, either in its original form or in Christianized versions, for rejoicing at the impending doom of Rome?

For the last time this morning I confess my inability to separate in each case what was precise hostility to the Roman State from what was apocalyptic expectation by

people used to thinking in apocalyptic terms about nothing definite.

[Cf. also on p. 110 R. A. MARKUS, "Pelagianism: Britain and the Continent", in *Journ. Eccles. History* 31 (1986), 191-204, and on p. 126 D. FLUSSER, "An Early Jewish-Christian Document in the Tiburtine Sibyl", in *Mélanges Marcel Simon* (Paris 1978), 153-183.]

## DISCUSSION

*M. Raaflaub:* As always when I hear or read one of Professor Momigliano's papers I am impressed by the wide range of topics and problems covered and the exceptional control of very difficult sources. What we heard, opened up a new dimension in comparison to what was discussed yesterday. I wonder, however, whether there isn't much to be said also about religious aspects of the opposition against the emperors among the society in Rome and the upper classes in particular. I emphasized yesterday that the ideas of the opposition must be examined against the background of the ideas and ideology put forward by the emperors. Now the emperors did use religion in this context: they promoted the cult of previous emperors, they showed strong preferences for specific gods, cults, and other religious phenomena, and some of them even presented themselves as gods or at least something close to divinity. How did the Roman elite react to all this? Did they in turn emphasize specific cults or religious practices? Did they use, or turn away from, specific religious connotations in their language? Moreover, Augustus had prevented certain religious developments pertaining to the cult of the emperor in Rome (presumably in order not to provoke strong negative reactions among the aristocracy), while he allowed such developments in Italy and actively promoted them in the provinces. Things changed under his successors, at least after Tiberius. I still wonder, however, whether differences continued to exist between the way such matters were handled in Rome and in the rest of the empire. If so, this might give us another clue to understand the range of resistance and opposition in Rome itself.

*M. Momigliano:* What Mr. Raaflaub says is true. I selected for my paper certain aspects of the subject in which I was more interested and on which I thought I had something to say. I have discussed elsewhere ("American Scholar" 1986) some points of the imperial cult. I share with Mr. Raaflaub the interest in the preferential treatment given by certain

emperors to certain cults. Undoubtedly one could study the reaction of the Roman upper class to such preferential treatments. The cases of Commodus and Elagabalus are the most obvious. But I wish I could understand better the meaning of *maiestas* in Roman politics.

*M. Bowersock*: It occurs to me that the great competitions (ἀγῶνες) of the Greek world in athletics, music, poetry, prose, drama, etc., with their sacrifices and delegations, provided an important religious forum that inevitably involved the Roman emperor (through encomiography and the introduction of his own competitors). Manipulation of these events, especially the so-called 'sacred' or panhellenic ones, could generate a current of opposition best viewed in the pride of competitors who boasted of winning honestly.

*M. Momigliano*: Here again I am in complete agreement with Mr. Bowersock. The role of the theatre in Roman politics deserves new study.

*Mme Levick*: With Caesar claiming that the Gallic *plebs* was "virtually enslaved" to the upper class and the exclusion by Tacitus of the rebel Mariccus from the aristocracy (*e plebe Boiorum*) one might be tempted to guess that the lower classes *remained* enslaved to their old beliefs, were left behind as Gallo-Roman culture evolved, and even felt betrayed by the aristocracy: the distinctions drawn by Caesar and the length of time the training would take both suggest that the priesthood had been the preserve of the better off.

*M. Giovannini*: Dans le contexte de l'opposition religieuse à l'Empire, il convient de considérer que la religion ou le culte impérial ont pu être exploités dans des conflits internes qui n'avaient à l'origine rien à voir avec l'Empire romain. Le meilleur exemple est, bien entendu, le conflit opposant Juifs et Grecs à Alexandrie, où les Grecs ont utilisé les convictions religieuses des Juifs pour essayer de provoquer une rupture entre eux et le pouvoir impérial. Ceci pour dire que des conflits qui nous paraissent être d'ordre religieux et qui opposaient l'Empire à un peuple

ou à un groupe religieux peuvent avoir eu pour cause des rivalités qui étaient en elles-mêmes totalement étrangères à l'Empire romain ou à l'empereur, voire à la religion.

*M. Momigliano:* In answer to Miss Levick, I admit that I have no precise idea about the relations of the Celtic priesthoods with the lower classes of Gaul and Britain in the first century A.D. My ignorance, I am afraid, extends to later centuries.

As for Giovannini's remarks, I think he is right in saying that in situations like that of the conflict between Jews and Greeks at Alexandria in the first century A.D. religion or imperial cult was probably exploited to create difficulties between the Jews and the ruling Roman power. But even in such cases we have to ask whether the basic conflict between Jews and Greeks was at least partly due to religious incompatibility. The answer is not easy because in the Hellenistic age we have clear signs of intellectual and religious sympathy between Jews and Greeks in Egypt. This is particularly evident in the Maccabean period. But, again, it is difficult to decide whether this sympathy was in turn conditioned by the common hostility of Jews and Greeks in Egypt towards Seleucid Syria and, perhaps, the native Egyptians.

*M. Timpe:* Die Definition und Abgrenzung dessen, was religiöse Opposition heissen kann, ist wahrscheinlich ebenso schwierig wie die der Opposition gegen den Prinzipat insgesamt. Ich möchte dafür an zwei Beispiele erinnern:

1) Veleda, die Sibylle der Brukterer, ist eine interessante und wichtige, auch schon den zeitgenössischen Römern denkwürdige Erscheinung, aber wahrscheinlich auch eine sehr exzeptionelle. Sie heisst zwar Genossin des Civilis und Anführerin des Aufstandes der rechtsrheinischen Stämme im Bataverkrieg, aber sie haust allein in einem Turm und verkehrt nur durch Vermittlung mit ihrer Umgebung. Es ist sehr schwer zu sagen, welche politische Rolle sie gespielt hat (und wenn eine, ob diese verallgemeinert werden kann) und in welchem Zusammenhang sie gefangen genommen wurde. Erfahrungen wie die mit Veleda stehen aber ausgesprochenermassen hinter der Generalisierung des Tacitus

(*Germ.* 8), dass die Germanen die Frauen verehrten und ihre *consilia* hochschätzten, und in diesem Zusammenhang ist von politischer oder religiöser Opposition nicht die Rede.

2) Bei den Christen besteht wahrscheinlich ein grosser Unterschied zwischen den Autoren und Lesern apokalyptischer Visionen auf der einen Seite und den hellenistisch gebildeten Intellektuellen, Philosophen, Rhetoren und Juristen, auf der anderen. Diese letzteren repräsentieren die Apologeten des 2. Jhdts. und bei ihnen findet sich (im allgemeinen) nicht nur Respekt vor dem Imperium, sondern eine weitgehende Identifikation mit der Reichszivilisation und Reichsorganisation der Zeit. Sie appellieren an den Kaiser und erwarten Gerechtigkeit von ihm gegenüber Statthaltern und städtischen Autoritäten oder sie übernehmen, wie Meliton von Sardes (*Eus. HE IV 26,7*), die Anschauung von der providentiellen Bestimmung des kaiserzeitlichen Imperiums.

*M. Momigliano*: Both your remarks are important. I wish I could understand the precise role of Veleda. It may have been exceptional, but its importance was recognized by the Roman authorities.



