It hardly needs demonstration that one of the most important shifts in the last few years with respect to the study of early Christianity has been the application of colonial-critical perspectives to the socio-cultural context of early Christianity, both to its historical situation and to the development of its literary traditions and ideological/theological discourses. One would immediately think of Richard Horsley, as well as a myriad of others, who have sought, in one way or another, to demonstrate the palpable effects of Roman imperium on the Eastern provinces and the subsequent results of imperial formations on native literary traditions and constructs of identity, especially with respect to the development of (mostly) discursive counter-resistance in a variety of forms.¹ In these readings, early Christian writers—Paul, John, Luke, Matthew, John the Seer—are all seen as largely developing theological categories that resist empire, proffering Christos as an alternative authority to the Roman emperor, and Pax Christi as a “truly” peaceful resolution to the tyranny of the Pax Romana.² True, some scholars, drawing more explicitly on post-colonial criticism have pointed out the powerful nature of mimicry in early Christian responses to empire and the reinscription of colonial violence, often parlayed in and through representations of


Jews and Judaism in early Christian literature. Either way, empire is everywhere in scholarship on early Christianity these days, almost to the point of becoming a colonizing focus of the modern historical gaze.

One certainly cannot deny the importance of “empire” as a category of interpretation. One of the more important turns in recent studies on the ancient world has in fact been the engagement of the dominant iconic image and spectacle that Rome—as reality, illusion, fiction—played in the Greek East. Tim Whitmarsh’s oft-cited and highly influential study, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire,* set the tone for much of the subsequent scholarly agenda. In a nuanced and substantive analysis, Whitmarsh directed our attention to the construction of identity among Greek elites of the Second Sophistic, especially with respect to negotiating Roman power precisely through a cultivation and (re)performance of a Greek past, redeployed in innovative and diverse ways so as to reposition these select philosophers, rhetoricians, and littérature on their own regional scene and in empire. One might equally examine the Greek novels for divergent (although also similar in many respects) interactions with empire.

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