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The question whether and to what extent the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. constituted a major turning point in Jewish history is widely debated amongst scholars. In this debate simple claims of either a direct continuation between Pharisaic and rabbinic Judaism or a radical change after the destruction have recently been replaced by much more complex historical analyses. In all likelihood, certain aspects of Second Temple Judaism, such as the increased focus on Torah study, would have continued amongst some sectors of the population whereas others, especially certain Temple rituals, would have ceased or been transformed to fit the new situation. The present volume, based on a Jerusalem symposium organized by the Hebrew University’s Scholion Center in 2009, is a welcome addition to this debate. The twenty papers published here deal with the question from various perspectives: sectarianism and religious leadership; sacred space, art and magic; sacred texts and liturgy; political subjugation and community. Daniel R. Schwartz’s “Introduction” sets the stage by presenting a survey of earlier scholarship on the issue. He shows that the respective views partly depended on the available sources (e.g., the discovery of the Qumran material in the 1950s) and methodology (whether and to what extent Josephus, the NT, and rabbinic literature can be considered historically trustworthy), as well as on the studies’ focus: those who dealt with the priesthood emphasized a radical break; those who focused on Torah study saw continuity. If neither the professionalized Temple service nor rabbinic scholarly expertise had much effect on the general Jewish populace, for the latter not much would have changed after 70 C.E.

The five articles of the first part deal with priests and rabbis. Martha Himmelfarb rejects a strict dichotomy between priests and Torah scholars arguing that “the ancient priesthood…was in many ways surprisingly close in its ethos or at least its ideals to the scribes of the Second Temple period and even to the rabbis” (40). Even after the destruction rabbis continued to discuss priestly and Temple-related issues—and some rabbis may have been of priestly origin themselves. Jodi Magness reviews Shaye Cohen’s argument that a rabbinic “grand coalition” replaced Jewish sectarianism after 70 C.E. Did the purity observance practiced at Qumran and elsewhere cease, was
it rabbínized, did it continue in various forms? Although a few miqva'ot and stone vessels are archaeologically attested for priestly settlement sites after 70 C.E., their evidence markedly declines, “largely disappearing in the course of the third to fourth centuries” (86), that is, after Julian’s botched effort to rebuild the Temple, when synagogues started to become the centers of local communities. Against Magness, Zeev Weiss dismisses the notion that some priests obtained leadership roles in late antique synagogues: “methodologically, there is no way to prove that the architectural appearance or artistic decorations of the synagogue originated in priestly circles” (94). Neither can the assumption be disproved, though. Therefore the categorical conclusion that “the priests…lost their influence with its [the Temple’s] destruction” (105) seems premature.

In the second part, focusing on sacred place, Noah Hacham examines attitudes toward the Temple expressed in Second and Third Maccabees and argues that Diaspora Judaism was not monolithic in its view of the Temple. Whereas Third Maccabees is highly critical of the Temple, Second Maccabees seems to be more moderate. Diaspora Jews developed various strategies to deal with the inaccessibility of the Jerusalem Temple, as Michael Tuval’s long survey article on Diaspora literature shows. They created alternatives to Temple worship, “different means of access to the divine” (237), and were generally “much less interested in the Temple and its cult” than Palestinian writings. Torah study and prayer emerged as viable alternatives to cultic practices alongside martyrdom, mysticism, and the notion of “the ‘Holy People’ that makes any place ‘holy’” (237). At least for Diaspora Jews, who had created “alternative Judaic systems” (238), the destruction of the Second Temple would not have made a major difference with regard to their religious practice and Jewish identity.

An important difference between Second Temple and “rabbinic” times is the emergence of figurative art in synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in late antiquity, outlined by Lee I. Levine, but the direct impact of the Temple destruction on this development remains negligible. Another type of art, this time linked to magic, enjoyed a certain amount of continuity from the First Temple period until late antiquity. Naama Vilotzny traces the development of various types of amulets. She argues that a great distinction existed between “private” and “official” imagery and between textual references to magic and figurative representations, a distinction which is not entirely clear and persuasive. Gideon Bohak’s survey of Jewish demonology and exorcism points to many continuities from pre-to post-70 times. Developments after 70 can be attributed “to the passage of time, and to shifts in regional influences” (286). References to exorcisms performed by “holy men” are much more frequent in late antiquity,