CULTURAL RESISTANCE AND THE VISUAL IMAGE: THE CASE OF DURA EUROPOS

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1. ART, RELIGION, AND "RESISTANCE"

IN HIS WONDERFUL ANTHROPOLOGIST'S travel book, *Tristes Tropiques,* Claude Lévi-Strauss tells the story of the Caduveo and their traditions of body painting. He analyzes the complex patterns with which they adorn their faces and sometimes even their whole bodies as a symbolic representation of everything their culture is not:

> In the last resort the graphic art of the Caduveo women is to be interpreted, and its mysterious appeal and seemingly gratuitous complexity to be explained, as the phantasm of a society ardently and insatiably seeking a means of expressing symbolically the institutions it might have, if its interests and superstitions did not stand in the way. In this charming civilization, the female beauties trace the outlines of the collective dream with their make-up; the patterns are hieroglyphics describing an inaccessible golden age, which they extol in their ornamentation, since they have no code in which to express it, and whose mysteries they disclose as they reveal their nudity.[1]

The art of the Caduveo—unconsciously, one presumes—constructs a space in which the cultural system of their social norms and structures is reversed and in which a world other than their usual reality is imagined.

Such a space in any culture need not be an affirmation of "resistance"; but at any particular time it may be. As a visual and creative form of art, it may not serve as a challenge to the cultural system, which Clifford Geertz has argued is upheld—even to an extent created—by a society's artistic acts;[2] but it may be. Such things will depend on specific circumstances and particular conditions. My point is that the imaginative space offered by images—perhaps because of their very ambivalence and richness of possible meaning—offers the potential to incorporate and even encourage self-affirmations that may in their different ways challenge the different levels of domination and power in a society.

While the studies of resistance—especially to colonial hegemony—have been subtle and complex across a range of disciplines,[3] the potential of art

1. C. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques,* trans. J. Weightman and D. Weightman (London, 1973), 229–56, quote from p. 256.

2. See especially C. Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 412–53, esp. 448–53, and "Art as a Cultural System," in *Local Knowledge* (New York, 1983), 94–120, esp. 99.

3. In particular one might mention Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance* (Chicago, 1985), in the anthropology of religion; J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New

Classical Philology 96 (2001): 269–304
 0009-837X/01/9603-0005$02.00

to create alternative spaces, like the body painting of the Caduveo, has perhaps not been sufficiently exploited. As we come to understand the more nuanced kinds of silent resistance as forms of self-definition, the place of art as a prime means for articulating such affirmations may come to acquire a certain analytic significance. My interest here, however, is not to attempt a general theory of art as an anticultural system or to define precisely its place among the various armories of potential resistance. Rather I want to look at images in the specific context of their use within religion as self-affirming and self-defining statements of cult identity within the Roman world at the dawn of late antiquity.

Studies of religion have of course been central to our understanding of resistance, since both the modern colonial enterprise and much of the opposition to it (for instance, both 1970s and 1980s Polish Catholicism in the era of Solidarity, and 1970s and 1980s evangelical Protestant Zionism among the Tishidi of South Africa) have drawn a good deal of their energy from the Christian missionary project. But we have to be a little wary of all such (stimulating) comparative cases when we come to study the Roman empire.[4] First, its colonialism (if we may still use the word)[5] was not a religious or religiously justified exercise in any modern sense. Second, unlike any post-Renaissance colonial empire, Rome's mainstream was not only culturally colonized by one of its own conquests, but was entirely open, self-conscious, even a little embarrassed about this process. Nor was Greek influence on Roman culture the sole foreign "colonization" of the center (though it was certainly the most significant). After all, by the third century, at least one emperor, Elagabalus, attempted to impose his Syrian Baal on Rome.

In looking at religion and at art, I should say that I am not trying to define with any certainty that "resistance" was present in a given example or to quantify how much there was. Rather, I want to discuss spaces—indeed a cultural system of related spaces—in which self-definition (something that began a long time before the Roman conquest of any particular province and that continued long after the fall of Rome) was possible. During the period of Roman hegemony such self-definition offered the scope for a culture within a culture, a space for initiates (in the context of religion), which need not resist the dominating power but which—if the circumstances arose—might do so. Moreover, within the broad grip of imperial control, the various local religions of the empire were tolerated and encouraged to

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Haven, 1985), esp. 28–41 and 289–303, and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (New Haven, 1990), esp. 4–5, 108–82, in the anthropology of class struggle; S. Pile and M. Keith, eds., *Geographies of Resistance* (London, 1997), in geography. All these deal broadly, though not exclusively, with colonial circumstances.

4. For some useful discussion of such comparisons, see J. Webster, "Roman Imperialism and the 'Post-Imperial Age,'" in *Roman Imperialism: Post-Colonial Perspectives*, ed. J. Webster and N. Cooper (Leicester, 1996), 1–18, and P. Freeman, "'Romanization-Imperialism'—What Are We Talking About?" in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference* 96 (Oxford, 1997), 8–14.

5. For discussion of (post-) colonialism in the Roman imperial context, see, e.g., J. Webster, "Necessary Comparisons: A Post-Colonial Approach to Religious Syncretism in the Roman Provinces," *World Archaeology* 28 (1997): 324–38, and P. Van Dommelen, "Punic Persistence: Colonialism and Cultural Identities in Roman Sardinia," in *Cultural Identity in the Roman Empire*, ed. R. Laurence and J. Berry (London, 1998), 25–48.

compete. Such competition (which we will observe in the case of Dura Europos) was a very effective form of "segmentary opposition," which the Empire had every reason to encourage on the sound hegemonic principle of "divide and rule."[6] But it engendered in the various competing religions an element of resistance to each other—of self-definition by polemic against other cults and by reversal of other cults' practices. The risk, from the dominating state's point of view, in such a system (as it had developed by the third century C.E.) was that it needed a very small step for a cult to move from resisting the others to resisting the center (in the form of the imperial cult, for instance). This was always something that was potentially possible. Nothing proves the power of the cults as a means of engendering a strong sense of cultural identity among their followers so much as the state's decision under Constantine to harness one of the most eccentric to its own bandwagon as the new state religion.

2. "RESISTANCE" AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIDENCE

Since—at least among ancient historians—we tend to find a subtle resistance to the notion of "resistance" in the Roman Empire (often in the form of a loud silence!), let me try to define my own use of the term. Let us say that Roman culture was the range of objects, beliefs, and practices that were characteristic of people who considered themselves to be, or were widely acknowledged as, Roman, or belonged to territory controlled by the Romans and were to varying extents assimilated to Roman ways of life.[7] Cultural resistance is the internal friction—whether potential (that is, on the level of sentiments and feelings) or actualized (that is, made concrete and public in some formal sense)—generated within the culture against its Romanness or Romanization. In the case of this paper, whose concerns are with the periphery of the empire in the Roman East, the particularities of local culture—of local objects, beliefs, and practices—will to some extent have been created by tensions between local pre-Roman ways of life, imported Roman (but also Greek and Parthian) ways of being, and the various resistances of different communities to all these. In the case of Dura Europos, the town at the center of my discussion, local culture was marked by the particularity of being part of a permanent frontier. Like many other towns in this area in both the pre-Christian and early Byzantine periods, whose interest to us focuses on issues of religion and the military (I think of Hierapolis, Palmyra, Rusafa), Dura belonged to the Syrian steppe, a frontier zone between the old established Roman and Parthian (later Sasanian) empires.[8] This situation can hardly be said to reduce the complexities of local cultural identities and of cultural resistance.

6. I still find the clearest exposition of segmentary opposition to be the classic one by E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer* (Oxford, 1940), 136–50.

7. My definition is broadly borrowed from G. Woolf, *Becoming Roman: The Origins of Provincial Civilization in Gaul* (Cambridge, 1998), 11–14.

8. For an excellent account of this particular and problematic geography, focusing on the Christian period before the advent of Islam, see E. K. Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Islam* (Berkeley, 1999), esp. 1–5.

In the study of the Roman world, no one has ever had difficulties with the idea of military resistance (which is well documented).[9] But that is not my subject. Much more subtle and complex is the issue of cultural resistance,[10] which has been presented as a crucial counterpoint to the process of Romanization in studies of North Africa and Spain.[11] Now there are a number of problems with this approach,[12] not least the methodological difficulty that in the absence of strong documentary evidence in favor of "resistance," one may be seized by the temptation to identify any and every instance of indigenous culture or pre-Roman survival as an example of cultural resistance to Romanization.[13] Moreover, a series of interventions over the last decade has shown "Romanization" to be a highly complex phenomenon—varied in type across regions and social groupings within the Empire,[14] in which religion (my focus of interest here) has special and specific problematics.[15] The kinds and varieties of "resistance" were inevitably as complex as the kinds and varieties of "control."[16]

I will return to the question of evidence in a moment, but first it is worth reminding ourselves that cultural resistance—when it manifests itself as more than a set of latent feelings—may be directed against a great many other things than Romanization per se: against imperialism, or the state, or much more local forms of power, for instance. Perhaps a better way to look at the theme—at least for an art historian like me with an interest in viewing—might be to regard the establishment and governing apparatus (at any

9. For example, S. L. Dyson, "Native Revolts in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 20 (1971): 239–74, and "Native Revolt Patterns in the Roman Empire," *ANRW* 2.3 (1975): 138–75; M. R. Goodman, "Opponents of Rome: Jews and Others," in *Images of Empire,* ed. L. Alexander (Sheffield, 1991), 222–38, which includes a good discussion of the methodological problems in discovering such active opposition.

10. See, e.g., B. Kurchin, "Romans and Britons on the Northern Frontier: A Theoretical Evaluation of the Archaeology of Resistance," in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology: Second Conference Proceedings,* ed. P. Rush (Aldershot, 1995), 124–31.

11. On North Africa see M. Bénabou, *La Résistance africaine à la romanisation* (Paris, 1976), esp. 255–589, and "Résistance et romanisation en Afrique du Nord sous le Haut-Empire," in *Assimilation et résistance à la culture gréco-romaine dans le monde ancien,* ed. D. M. Pippidi (Paris, 1976), 367–75, with critiques by P. Garnsey ("Rome's African Empire under the Principate," in *Imperialism in the Ancient World,* ed. P. Garnsey and C. R. Whittaker [Cambridge, 1978], 223–54 esp. 252–54), and J. Rives (*Religion and Authority in Roman Carthage from Augustus to Constantine* [Oxford, 1995], 132–53). On Spain, see S. J. Keay, "The 'Romanisation' of Turdetania," *OJA* 11 (1992): 275–315; and L. A. Curchin, *Roman Spain: Conquest and Assimilation* (London, 1991), 180–90.

12. Woolf, *Becoming Roman* (n. 7 above), 19–23.

13. Woolf, *Becoming Roman,* 20, and, in relation to cults, 206–8; also Kurchin, "Romans and Britons" (n. 10 above), 126–27.

14. On the difficulties of interpreting Romanization, see, e.g., J. C. Barrett, "Romanization: A Critical Comment," in *Dialogues in Roman Imperialism,* ed. D. J. Mattingly, JRA Suppl. 23 (Portsmouth, R.I., 1997), 51–64; G. Woolf, "Beyond Roman and Natives," *World Archaeology* 28 (1997): 339–50; R. Häussler, "Motivations and Ideologies of Romanization," in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference 97* (Oxford, 1998), 11–19; M. Grahame, "Redefining Romanization: Material Culture and the Question of Social Continuity in Roman Britain," in *Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference 97* (Oxford, 1998), 1–10.

15. On Romanization and religions, see the essays in section C of J. Metzler, M. Millett, N. Roymans, and J. Slofstra, eds., *Integration in the Roman West: The Role of Culture and Ideology* (Luxembourg, 1995); and—on Gaul—T. Derks, *Gods, Temples, and Ritual Practices: The Transformation of Religious Ideas and Values in Roman Gaul* (Amsterdam, 1998), esp. 11–21, 73–246.

16. For some interesting comments on resistance within the Empire, see R. Hingely, "Resistance and Domination: Social Change in Roman Britain," in Mattingly, *Dialogues* (n. 14 above), 81–100; S. E. Alcock, "Greece: A Landscape of Resistance?" also in *Dialogues,* 103–15; J. Webster, "A Negotiated Syncretism: Readings on the Development of Romano-Celtic Religion," *Dialogues,* 165–84.

given time and place within the Empire) as eliciting a multiplicity of responses among the Empire's subjects and also among outsiders. Some of these responses will clearly be strongly affirmative, others strongly opposed, and plenty on any position within the range in between these two poles. Like the rainbow created by Newton's experiment of diffracting light through a prism, this spectrum of different responses is where the subjective space for different kinds of cultural resistance may be found.

The problem here is evidence. There are thousands of indigenous cults, for example, attested throughout the empire. How definitively can we say that any one of these gave rise to, or became a focus for, cultural resistance? The answer is that we cannot. Yet we must beware of the positivistic urge only to argue from certainty and only to allow definitive facts as the basis for discussion. In a parallel field to resistance studies, that of popular religion, there is a strong line held by a number of distinguished ancient historians that there was no such thing as popular religion in the Roman Empire (just as there was no such thing as resistance to its cozy control). This stems, at least in my view, from a misplaced (though methodologically rigorous) rejection of that for which there is no documentary evidence. In the early 1970s, Momigliano mounted an elegant argument against popular religious beliefs in the late Roman historians on the correct grounds that we have no popular sources.[17] By the 1980s Peter Brown had extended what was essentially an historiographic argument to a general assault on the "two-tier" theory of elite and popular religion, arguing that whatever we might wish to call "popular" reflects a case of the elite propagating particular beliefs or practices.[18] Popular religion did not exist. Now, as a subject, "popular religion" resembles "resistance" in that both describe alternative positions to those prescribed or encouraged by the dominant elite. By definition, since the elite both wrote the majority of our textual sources and saw to it that most of what it disapproved did not survive, neither popular religion nor cultural resistance is particularly well attested in the texts. But this does not amount to any kind of proof that they did not exist.

Yet the trouble with turning to the archaeological archive in the hope of finding some spaces of potential resistance is that we must necessarily deal in the messy and uncertain business of likelihood, probability, and possibility rather than the pristine clarity of fact. Instead of the strong beam of

17. A. Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians," in *Studies in Church History* 8 (1971): 1–18 (republished in *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* [Oxford, 1977], 141–60). The later essays of Momigliano, however, give the feeling of a continuing search among different kinds of historiographic materials (never archaeology or art, of course!) for evidence that would take him closer to "how people lived a faith or, to put it in a less Christian way, how they behaved according to a religious tradition." See "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion in the Roman Empire," in *On Pagans, Christians, and Jews* (Middletown, Conn., 1987), 159–77 (quote from p. 163), and, in the same volume, "Roman Religion: The Imperial Period," 178–201, esp. 191–92.

18. See especially P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (London, 1981), 12–22, 27–30, 48–49; and A. Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley, 1991), 7–8, 32, 36–39, cf. 107–8. For critiques of Brown, see R. Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles in Late Antique Gaul* (Princeton, 1993), p. 4, n. 3 with bibliography. In recent work on ancient religion, the popular has returned with a vengeance, as if it had never been dismissed—see, e.g., D. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, 1998), 37–144.

certainty, we have the diffracted spectrum of Newton's rainbow—but at least we can agree that the spectrum is both interesting and pretty! Someone who is committed to the view that the Roman Empire brooked no cultural resistance and that its subject peoples offered none, is unlikely to be persuaded by what I have to suggest in this paper. Instead he or she would be right to accuse me of starting from the axiomatic presupposition that any state or elite gives rise to various kinds of opposition. The question, at least from the art-historical standpoint, is what kinds of visual signs offer spaces where cultural resistance was possible.

Since those with whom I have presumed to disagree so far have taken their cue from Momigliano, I may as well do the same. His late essay entitled "Some Preliminary Remarks on the 'Religious Opposition' to the Roman Empire," delivered in 1986, about a year before his death, squarely places the theme of cultural resistance in the arena where I shall explore it—in the space of religion.[19] I am going to identify two forms of visual self-advertisement among religious cults, within the specific confines of second- and third-century Dura Europos in the Roman Near East, which I shall argue offer different potential models of resistance with which viewers, by whom I mean cult initiates, might identify. It is important that such images offer a *potential* reading as "culturally resistant" rather than an unambiguous one, since one of the problems of opposing a dominant state perfectly capable of religious persecution was that one always needed an alibi to avoid conviction if actually accused of opposition. The advantage of art as a means of "resistance" is that it is sufficiently open to multiple meanings for its oppositions not to be *too* obvious. To put this another way, we might say that one of the benefits of the interpretative ambivalence of images is that their viewing was always open to the casting of a blind eye. I shall leave the question of who, exactly, was resisting what in the production of visual images, until the end of section 4.

As students of late antique religion have long recognized, one key aspect of the rich plurality of cults in the Graeco-Roman world lay in their need for self-definition.[20] This is no less the case with the visual decorations of the sacred spaces that art appropriates for cult status and activities, than it is in matters of ritual, writing, theology, or initiation. While visual claims to cult identity need hardly be defined as resistant, the use of methods of sacrifice, kinds of dress, or other ritual features, specifically and structurally differentiated from those of other cults or from the state cult, offered the potential for the affirmation of identity to be more than merely a claim for attention.

19. A. Momigliano, "Some Preliminary Remarks on the 'Religious Opposition' to the Roman Empire," in *Opposition et résistance à l'empire d'Auguste à Trajan,* Entretiens Hardt 33 (Geneva, 1987), 103–29, and *On Pagans, Christians, and Jews* (n. 17 above), 120–41. For a subtle account of religions and resistance, see R. Gordon, "Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and Its Limits," in *Pagan Priests,* ed. M. Beard and J. North (London, 1990), 235–55. See also D. Edwards, "Surviving the Web of Roman Power: Religion and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles, Josephus and Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*" in Alexander, *Images of Empire* (n. 9 above), 179–201 (republished in D. Edwards, *Religion and Power: Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greek East* [Oxford, 1996], 15–27); and Webster, "Negotiated Syncretism" (n. 16 above), 165–84.

20. See for instance the three volumes of E. P. Sanders and B. F. Meyer, eds., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (London, 1980–82).

It could also be *implicitly* a comment on how being—say—a Jew or a Mithraist was different from (dare one say, better than) being the adherent of another cult. While this was partly a matter of competition for custom and even of advertising (to apply the concepts of late twentieth-century capitalism to the phenomenon), such differentiation did imply a negative commentary on (a form of resistance to) the other cults in the very act of self-affirmation.[21] Secondly, some religions went further than visual self-definition in the positive sense. They actively represented other cults in a negative light, as a kind of visual version of the polemical religious pamphlets we find written by late antique pagans, Christians, heretics, and Jews.

3. THE IMAGES OF DURA EUROPOS

Before turning to the images, a word is in order about the context of Dura Europos. Although originally founded by Greeks on the west bank of the Euphrates in about 300 B.C.E., by the later second century B.C.E. the city had come under Parthian control.[22] During the Roman Empire, the city was a complex and perhaps problematic example of the kinds of acculturation we find elsewhere in the East—its inscriptions, for instance, being attested in Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Syriac, Palmyrene, Middle Persian, and Safaitic,[23] though clearly—to judge by the preponderance of epigraphic evidence—the city's basic culture was Greek.[24] Its political affiliation changed more than once until it was seized and sacked by the Parthians in 256 or 257 and failed to recover thereafter.[25] The surviving art—both sculpture and painting—is primarily religious,[26] and the images of its different cults share a frontal style typical of the Near East.[27]

21. For the "marketplace" metaphor for religious competition in the Empire, see J. North, "The Development of Religious Pluralism," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire,* ed. J. Lieu, J. North, and T. Rajak (London, 1992), 174–93, esp. 178–79. For the invocation of the image of advertising to late antique religious art and its subject matter, see T. F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, 1993), 65. On art as a means of promulgating competing religions in the period, see A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (London, 1968), 27–30; and Mathews, *Clash of Gods,* 3–10.

22. On Parthian Dura, see F. Millar, "Dura-Europos under Parthian Rule," in *Das Partherreich und seine Zeugnisse/The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation,* ed. J. Wiesehöfer (Stuttgart, 1998), 473–92; and L. Dirven, *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos* (Leiden, 1999), 4–11.

23. See P. Arnaud, "Doura-Europos, microcosme Grec ou rouage de l'administration Arsacide?" *Syria* 63 (1986): 135–55, and F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC–AD 337* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 445–52, 467–72.

24. See Millar, "Dura-Europos" (n. 22 above), 478.

25. The history is told by M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford, 1938), 10–31; and C. Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven, 1979), 251–65. On the date of the fall, see D. MacDonald, "Dating the Fall of Dura-Europos," *Historia* 35 (1986): 45–68.

26. On the religions of Dura, see Dirven, *Palmyrenes* (n. 22 above), xviii–xxii.

27. On Durene style, see Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos* (n. 25 above), 82–86; and A. Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (Oxford, 1973), 114–26. For a critique of the uses of connoisseurship and the general orientalism of Durene art history, see A. J. Wharton, *Refiguring the Post-Classical City* (Cambridge, 1995), 15–23, 33–34. For the suggestion that not only the Christian and Jewish but also some of the pagan temples shared artists in their decoration, see R. M. Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early Christian Art and the Religious Life of Dura," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue,* ed. S. Fine (London, 1999), 174–89, esp. 184–86. For issues of Roman influence on the Synagogue paintings, at least, see W. G. Moon, "Nudity and Narrative: Observations on the Synagogue Paintings from Dura-Europos," in *Polykleitos, the Doryphoros, and Tradition,* ed. W. G. Moon (Madison, 1995), 283–316 and contra, for the

Leafing through the first (and only fundamental) publication of the main pagan temples,[28] found when Dura was discovered in 1920 and excavated in the years leading up to the Second World War,[29] one is struck by how many images represent the act of sacrifice. In what was probably a temple of Zeus (but is usually labeled the temple of Bel or the temple of the Palmyrene Gods),[30] located in the northwest corner of the city,[31] no fewer than five frescoes were excavated that depicted sacrifice (although one was in a very fragmentary state when Franz Cumont published it in 1926 and most are all but lost today). These include the image of Conon and his family making sacrifice (plate 1),[32] from the lower tier of the south wall in a room containing a shrine that the earliest excavator, James Breasted, described as "hall II" but that has subsequently come to be labeled the "naos."[33] A fragmentary Greek inscription was recorded naming several of the figures—Conon being the man with the pink turban at the far left and most of the others placed in family relationship to him. The figures in white with white caps, who stand before altars and carry sacrificial implements, appear to be priests.[34] These paintings are thought to be late second century C.E.[35] A second, fragmentary, scene of sacrifice decorated the south wall of the "pronaos," with the sacrificants here each framed between spiral columns (plate 2). Again, an inscription identifies the figures—two are called Lysias, the third, Apollophanes, and the fourth, Zenodotus, while the artist was Ilasamsos.[36] This is also likely to be a family group and has been dated slightly later, to the end of the second or early third century. On the north wall of the "pronaos" is a sacrificial scene showing Julius Terentius, the tribune of the 20th Palmyrene Cohort (stationed in Dura in the 230s),[37] in the company of various other men—perhaps his military unit—as well as the standard-bearer of the cohort (plate 3). They pour a libation to three deities represented as statues in military dress on round pedestals (the names of these

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claim that "the paintings of Dura do not constitute an example of Roman provincial art," R. Brilliant, "Painting at Dura and Roman Art," in *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-Evaluation (1932–72)*, ed. J. Gutmann (Chambersburg, Pa., 1973), 23–30, quote p. 29.

28. F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* (Paris, 1926).

29. For a history of the excavation, see Hopkins, *Discovery of Dura-Europos* (n. 25 above).

30. On the dedication, see Millar, "Dura-Europos," 482; and Dirven, *Palmyrenes*, 294.

31. Inexplicably, Cumont (*Fouilles* [n. 28 above], 30) says "northeast."

32. On the Conon fresco, now in very bad condition in Damascus, see J. Breasted, "Peintures d' époche romaine dans le désert de Syrie," *Syria* (1922): 177–211, esp. 188–99, and *Oriental Forerunners of Byzantine Painting* (Chicago, 1924), 75–88; Cumont, *Fouilles*, 41–73, Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos*, 69–70; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos* (n. 27 above), 36–41; Wharton, *Refiguring* (n. 27 above), 34–38.

33. Breasted ("Peintures" [n. 32 above], 187–88, and *Oriental Forerunners* [n. 32 above], 75–76) has "hall II" (or "salle II"); all others follow Cumont's use of "naos" (with "pronaos" for Breasted's "hall I").

34. There may have been a set of parallel scenes on the north wall opposite, but this did not survive. The west wall appears to have had a large painting of the cult deity, Zeus, of which only the right foot is preserved; see Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos*, 37.

35. See Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos*, 41; contra Breasted (*Oriental Forerunners*, 92) and Cumont (*Fouilles*, 57), who suggested c. 75 C.E.

36. On the Ilasamsos fresco, see Breasted, *Oriental Forerunners*, 90–92; Cumont, *Fouilles*, 76–84; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos*, 41–42.

37. On Terentius (who may have been killed in a Persian raid in 239), see Millar, *Roman Near East* (n. 23 above), 132 and 469.

gods are not given in the inscriptions) as well as to the Tyches of Dura and Palmyra.[38] Finally, in a room to the south of the sanctuary, there were two frescoes depicting sacrifice, of which one was hopelessly fragmentary,[39] while the other showed the eunuch Otes and the *bouleutes* Iabsymsos, accompanied by two boy acolytes, making sacrifice to five deities (in Parthian and military dress) standing on globes (plate 4).[40]

Some of the other pagan temples in Dura have still more fragmentary frescoes than those of the "Temple of Bel." Sacrificial scenes something like those we have just been looking at have been reconstructed (using the usual combination of fragments and imagination!) for the rear wall of the naos of the temple of Adonis, with the cult deity painted alongside his worshippers.[41] Likewise, the decorative program of the naos of the temple of Zeus Theos has been imaginatively visualized on the basis of what the excavators describe as "several thousand fragments" with sacrificial scenes reconstructed on the walls to the left and right of the main scene.[42] In addition to these frescoes, a number of the pagan temples also boasted limestone reliefs depicting priests making sacrifice to the temple deity. For instance, in the temple of the Gaddé, there is an inscribed slab showing the priest Hairan, the dedicant, making sacrifice to the Gad of Dura, enthroned as Zeus Olympios between two eagles, and accompanied by Seleucus Nicator, the legendary founder of the city (plate 5).[43] In the temple of Aphlad, an inscribed votive relief, very deeply cut, was discovered that shows a priest—perhaps the dedicant Adadiabos—offering incense at an altar before the cult image of the god, who is dressed in military uniform and mounted on a pair of griffins (plate 6).[44]

In all these cases we have cult sanctuaries with votive images offering visual renditions of the chief ritual activity of the temple. In the case of the Conon and possibly the Ilasamsos frescoes (the latter is incomplete, of course) only the sacrificial act is shown (plates 1 and 2), while the other images make the divine recipient visible. In the case of the Terentius and Otes images (plates 3 and 4), these deities are supplementary to the main cult god

38. On the Terentius fresco, now at Yale, see Breasted, *Oriental Forerunners,* 94–98; Cumont, *Fouilles,* 89–114; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos,* 43–45; Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 302–7.

39. See Cumont, *Fouilles,* 134–36.

40. On the Otes fresco, now lost, see Cumont, *Fouilles,* 122–34; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos,* 45–47; J. Texidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra* (Leiden, 1979), 74–75; Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 295–302.

41. On the temple of Adonis, see F. E. Brown in *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Reports of the 7th and 8th Seasons of Work,* ed. M. I. Rostovtzeff, F. E. Brown, and C. B. Welles (New Haven, 1939), 158–63.

42. On the paintings in the temple of Zeus Theos, see Brown in Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles, *Excavations* (n. 41 above), 196–210, esp. 204–8, for the side walls.

43. See Brown in Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles, *Excavations,* 258–62; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos,* 82–84; S. B. Downey, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report III.1.2: The Stone and Plaster Sculpture* (Los Angeles, 1977), 14–17; Millar, "Dura-Europos," 483–84; Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 111–13 and 245–47. Compare also the parallel relief of the Gad of Palmyra, with Downey, *Stone and Plaster Sculpture,* 17–19; and Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 247–48.

44. See C. Hopkins in *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Reports of the Fifth Season of Work,* ed. M. I. Rostovtzeff (New Haven, 1934), 107–16; Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos,* 77–79; Downey, *Stone and Plaster Sculpture* (n. 43 above), 7–9.

of the temple, while in the two reliefs and in the frescoes from the temples of Zeus Theos and Adonis, the main deity has himself been represented. The consistent insistence on inscription in all the images points to a strong assertion of personal and religious identity on the parts of the dedicators (and even, in one case, the artist). On the face of it, none of these images implies "resistance." On the other hand, all imply a certain element of religious affiliation to broadly local gods, as opposed to, say, the imperial cult or deities directly sponsored by the Roman establishment elsewhere in the empire. In this sense they establish and affirm peripherality, or the centrality of local cult and identity, in a way that ignores the Roman Empire and the distant imperial center. For Durene pagans, the center that mattered lay not in Parthia nor in Rome nor in Greece but in the very local context of the Near East—in Dura Europos itself and in several nearby cities such as Palmyra and Hierapolis, whose deities were also revered by the Durenes.[45]

This very parochial space, where the many languages of the Durenes celebrate a multicultural community, is not affirmed in the same way by the arts of the Mithraists, Jews, and Christians at Dura. One difference, in the case of all three of these religions, is that the central ritual focus of all the polytheistic cults we have been looking at, namely the act of sacrifice, is avoided.[46] Instead, the Mithraeum, Synagogue, and Christian *domus ecclesiae* turn away from representing actual ritual practice and instead depict their own—very different—initiate mythologies. These initiate mythologies, which, unlike the sacrificial images, demand some kind of exegetic key for their viewers to understand them (which is why we do not and perhaps will never fully understand the meanings of Mithraic art, despite its survival in large quantities), take the space of viewer-identification away from a local god and the actions performed locally in his or her honor, to a more universalizing deity with salvific implications,[47] and an exclusive focus that denied the value of other religious cults (especially in the case of Christians and Jews).[48]

Let us begin with the Mithraeum. Here the final stage of decoration, from the 240s C.E., offers a series of *al secco* paintings in black and red, signed by the artist Mareos, which represent images from the still-obscure sacred mythology of Mithras,[49] as well as two gypsum bas-reliefs depicting the

45. For Palmyra, see the relief of the Gad of Palmyra in Downey, *Stone and Plaster Sculpture,* 17–19, and the Tyche of Palmyra in the Terentius fresco. For Hierapolis, see the relief of Atargatis and Hadad from the temple of Atargatis (Lucian's Syrian Goddess) in Downey, *Stone and Plaster Sculpture,* 9–11, with bibliography.

46. On sacrifice as the Roman Empire's normative model of mediation between human and divine, see R. Gordon, "The Roman Empire," in Beard and North, *Pagan Priests* (n. 19 above), 177–255, esp. 201–55.

47. On Mithraic "soteriology," see R. Turcan, "Salut mithriaque et sotériologie néoplatonicienne," in *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell' impero romano,* ed. U. Bianchi and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden, 1982), 173–91; and R. Beck, "Ritual, Myth, Doctrine, and Initiation in the Mysteries of Mithras: New Evidence from a Cult Vessel," *JRS* 90 (2000): 145–80, esp. 174–78.

48. For some of the complexities of monotheism in the cults, see M. Beard, J. North, and S. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge, 1998), 286–87.

49. On the Mithraeum, see M. I. Rostovtzeff, "Das Mithraeum von Dura," *RM* 49 (1934): 180–207; F. Cumont and M. Rostovtzeff in Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles, *Excavations,* 104–16; F. Cumont, "The Dura Mithraeum," in *Mithraic Studies,* vol. 1, ed. J. R. Hinnells (Manchester, 1975), 151–214, esp. 169–94; R. Beck, "Mithraism since Franz Cumont," *ANRW* 2.17.4 (1984): 2002–115, esp. 2013–16. The most recent

central cult icon of Mithraea the length and breadth of the Roman Empire—namely, the tauroctony, or bull-slaying scene (plate 7).[50] While a number of aspects of the Mithraic decorations are unique (or at least very unusual) within the rich iconographic repertoire of Roman Mithraism, including the two figures in Persian costume described by Cumont as Magi and the scene of Mithras hunting,[51] in other respects the Dura Mithraeum reflects the relatively standard iconography of the cult throughout the Roman Empire. While the style of the Mithraic images, and the Persian dress, point towards the East and have resonances with the other arts of Dura, the stereotypical nature of the iconography aligns the Mithraeum and its worshippers with a cult that was specific to the *Roman* Empire—extending to its northern and western borders as well as to the East. Mithraism was by no means exclusively a religion of the center, but the greatest density of surviving Mithraea certainly occur in Rome and Ostia.[52] It was not an official cult, but it does appear to have been tolerated by the elite.[53] Its cult icon seems to be predicated on a set of structural reversals of normal Roman sacrificial practice—including differences in the way the animal is led to slaughter, in the way it is killed, in the place of killing, in making the god rather than his worshippers the sacrificer, and in making the image of sacrifice into a cult icon rather than a votive supplement to a self-standing cult image.[54] While never specifically commenting on the other polytheistic cults of Dura, the arts of the Mithraeum proclaim a cult allegiance that is in one sense supplementary to them within the pluralism of Roman religions in the second and third centuries, but is in another sense implicitly antagonistic. Far from affirming a parochial identity grounded in a Near-Eastern deity with a firm local base, the Mithraic images reflect adherence to a universal god (universal at least within the Roman Empire) whose mythic origins may lie in Persia but whose specially designated supreme center of cult (as Ephesus was that of Artemis, Hierapolis of Atargatis, and so forth) was nowhere.[55]

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description is in L. M. White, *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture,* Harvard Theological Studies 42 (Valley Forge, Pa., 1997), 261–71, with bibliography. A sophisticated but unpublished discussion is K. Bowes, "Prophetic Images: Mithraism and the Mithraeum at Dura-Europos," (master's thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1993). On the early Mithraeum of the 160s—reused and redesigned in the building of the 240s—see Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 260–72.

50. On the Dura examples, see L. A. Campbell and H. C. Gute in Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles, *Excavations,* 91–101; Cumont, "Dura Mithraeum" (n. 49 above), 165–69; Downey, *Stone and Plaster Sculpture,* 22–29, 217–25, 265–68; Dirven, *Palmyrenes,* 267–72.

51. See Cumont, "Dura Mithraeum," 182–92, on these paintings, with Bowes, "Prophetic Images" (n. 49 above), 5–7, 10, 18–22 on "the Magi," and 27–30 on the hunting scenes.

52. See F. Coarelli, "Topografia mitriaca di Roma," in *Mysteria Mithrae,* ed. U. Bianchi (Leiden, 1979), 69–83.

53. On the social profile of Mithraism, see R. Gordon, "Mithraism and Roman Society," *Religion* 2 (1972): 92–121; R. Beck, "The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of their Genesis," *JRS* 88 (1998): 115–28, esp. p. 119 and nn. 30–31; Beard, North, and Price, *Religions* (n. 48 above), 300–301.

54. On these issues in relation to the tauroctony, see R. Turcan, "Le sacrifice mithriaque: Innovations de sens et de modalités," in *Le Sacrifice dans l'Antiquité,* Entretiens Hardt 27 (Geneva, 1981), 341–80, esp. 352–54; R. Gordon, "Authority, Salvation, and Mystery in the Mysteries of Mithras," in *Image and Mystery in the Roman World,* ed. J. Huskinson, M. Beard, and J. Reynolds (Gloucester, 1989), 45–80, esp. 49; Gordon, "Roman Empire" (n. 46 above), 250; J. Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer* (Cambridge, 1995), 210–21.

55. On the similarities of the Dura Mithraeum images with Roman Mithraic iconography, see I. Roll, "The Mysteries of Mithras in the Roman Orient: The Problem of Origins," *Journal of Mithraic Studies* 2 (1977): 18–62, esp. 59–62.

Again, "cultural resistance" here is not explicit, but the mythology and iconography of the cult prescribe a mystic space that is neither civic-local space nor that of the imperial center.

Like the Mithraeum, the relatively crude paintings of the Christian house-church (also dating from about 240) evoke a space in initiate mythology.[56] Unlike Mithraic art, so far as we know, that mythology is not only located in a set of *texts* (which had perhaps not yet become a full canon in the mid-third century) but also in the exegesis of those texts. For instance, the juxtaposition of images of Adam and Eve and the Good Shepherd in what is clearly the most important part of the room, on the west wall beneath a barrel-vaulted aedicula (plate 8), indicates that by the mid-third century in Syria, Christian art was already given to what would become its characteristic model of typological interpretation, whereby the Old Testament (here the Fall) was set against and completed by the New (here the visual version of Christ's salvific statement in John 10:11–15 that "I am the Good Shepherd").[57] On the north wall are images of miracles—that of the paralytic (Matt. 9:1–8) and of Christ and Peter walking on water (Matt. 14:22–33)—and below these the scene of the three women at the Holy Sepulchre (Matt. 28:1–8, Mark 16:1–8.).[58] If this is a correct identification of the iconography, this is not just an abbreviated life story of Christ, but also a selective aretalogy in which the miracles and the resurrection of the man who was God become the key to the narrative. On the south wall were images of David defeating Goliath and of the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:7–28), but we should beware over-interpretation, as only about half of the paintings have survived, and some identifications are contested.

Like the Mithraeum, the Dura Christian building creates a sacred space specifically located in a cult's initiate mythology. By contrast with the Mithraeum, that mythology was locally determined by its reference to Jesus' life in nearby Palestine, but it was at the same time universalizing in its use of non-place-specific images like the Good Shepherd and its promise of salvation. Like the Mithraeum, the Christian *domus ecclesiae* ignores the other religions of the Durene context (except in its references to Jewish scripture). In the case of Christianity, we know that this turning away from polytheism (and specifically from the kinds of sacrifices celebrated in the rituals and images of the pagan temples) was a form of resistance in the

56. These frescoes, now in very poor condition, are in Yale. On the Christian *domus ecclesiae,* see C. Hopkins and P. Baur, in Roztovtzeff, *Excavations,* 238–88; and C. H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building: Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII.2* (New Haven, 1967); see also White, *Social Origins* (n. 49 above), 123–31, with bibliography.

57. On Christian typology, see Elsner, *Art* (n. 54 above), 283–87; and S. Schrenk, *Typos und Antitypos in der frühchristlichen Kunst* (Munster, 1995). For the Good Shepherd scene, see, e.g., J. Quasten, "The Painting of the Good Shepherd at Dura-Europos," *Medieval Studies* 9 (1947): 1–18.

58. The identification of this scene is contested. The excavators, followed, e.g., by A. Grabar ("La Fresque des saintes femmes au tombeau à Doura," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 8 [1956]: 9–26) argue for the Women at the Tomb. Others, notably G. Millet ("Doura et el-Bagawat," *Cahiers Archéologiques* 8 [1956]: 1–8, written in 1934–35), and J. Pijoan ("The Parable of the Virgins at Dura-Europos," *Art Bulletin* 19 [1937]: 592–95), followed, for instance, by Quasten ("Good Shepherd" [n. 57 above], 1), and Mathews (*Clash of Gods,* 152–53) interpret this scene as the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins; see the discussion by Wharton (*Refiguring,* 53–60).

sense that monotheism was exclusive and rejected other gods even at the risk of persecution.

The most elaborate of the surviving decorated temples of Dura is the Synagogue.[59] Its extensive cycle of frescoes (of which about two-thirds are extant) cover the walls of the main hall from floor to ceiling and were probably made as part of the renovations of the building in the 240s.[60] I shall not venture here into the mountainous scholarly debate about whether these images represent a concerted program or a less systematic set of myth-historical evocations, whether they are the products of mystic symbolism or of an attempt to visualize narrative history.[61] Rather I wish to emphasize that among the various biblical subjects chosen for the decoration, there is a strong emphasis on what might be called actively antipagan imagery.

In the middle tier of the three tiers of images that adorn the west wall of the Synagogue's large hall, on either side of the Torah niche, is a series of scenes that focus on temples, cult implements, and the Ark of the Covenant. To the left of the Torah Shrine is an image of the Temple of Aaron (whose name is conspicuously inscribed in Greek), often described as the Consecration of the Tabernacle (plate 9),[62] and to the right is a painting of a closed temple with a number of pagan motifs (especially on the doors), which may or may not be the Temple of Solomon (plate 10).[63] At the left of the image of Aaron's Temple, with its vivid rendition of the cult utensils of Judaism,

59. The literature is vast. See, for example, H. F. Pearson and C. H. Kraeling in *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Report of the Sixth Season of Work,* ed. M. I. Rostovtzeff, A. R. Bellinger, C. Hopkins, and C. B. Welles (New Haven, 1936), 309–83; C. H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos, Final Report VIII.1: The Synagogue* (New Haven, 1956); Gutmann, *Dura-Europos Synagogue* (n. 27 above); White, *Social Origins,* 272–87, with bibliography; Jensen, "Dura Europos Synagogue" (n. 27 above).

60. On the frescoes, in addition to the works in the previous note, see E. R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period,* vols. 9–11 (Princeton, 1964) (to be used with some caution—see M. Smith, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 [1967]: 53–68; M. Avi-Yonah, "Goodenough's Evaluation of the Dura Paintings: A Critique," in Gutmann, *Dura-Europos Synagogue,* 117–35; J. Neusner, "Studying Judaism through the Art of the Synagogue," in *Art as Religious Studies,* ed. D. Adams and D. Apostolos-Cappadona [New York, 1987], 29–57, esp. 43–57; and R. Brilliant, "Jewish Symbols: Is That Still Goodenough?" in his *Commentaries on Roman Art* [London, 1994], 233–44); Perkins, *Art of Dura-Europos,* 55–65; K. Weitzmann and H. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art* (Washington, D.C., 1990); R. Hachlili, *Ancient Jewish Art and Archaeology in the Diaspora* (Leiden, 1998), 96–197. For a useful survey of the (many) disagreements on the interpretation of the iconography, see J. Gutmann, "Early Synagogue and Jewish Catacomb Art and Its Relation to Christian Art," *ANRW* 2.21.2 (1984): 1313–42, esp. 1315–24.

61. For an elegant critical review of these issues, see Wharton, *Refiguring,* 38–51; against a Messianic reading of the frescoes, see P. V. M. Flesher, "Rereading the Reredos: David, Orpheus, and Messianism in the Dura Europos Synagogue," in *Ancient Synagogues,* vol. 2, ed. D. Urban and P. V. M. Flesher (Leiden, 1995), 346–66.

62. Kraeling, *Synagogue* (n. 59 above), 125–33; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols* (n. 60 above), 10:1–26; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes* (n. 60 above), 55–63.

63. Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 105–13, followed by most scholars; e.g., Weitzmann and Kessler (*Frescoes,* 98) identify this as the Temple; Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols,* 10:42–73, esp. 45) disagrees. R. Du Mesnil du Buisson (*Les Peintures de la Synagogue de Doura-Europos, 245–56 après J-C.* [Rome, 1939], 84–92), followed, e.g., by A. Grabar ("La Thème religieux des fresques de la synagogue de Doura," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 123 [1941]: 143–92, esp. 181, and 124 [1941]: 5–35, esp. 6–7) suggested it represented the temple of the Sun at Beth Shemesh, whither the Ark was taken after its sojourn in the temple of Dagon (1 Sam. 6:12–21). Moon ("Nudity and Narrative" [n. 27 above], 296–99) suggests it may represent the temple of Dagon itself with the Ark enclosed inside it. For a liturgical reading of the images on this tier of the Synagogue's west wall, see S. Laderman, "A New Look at the Second Register of the West Wall in Dura Europos," *CArch* 45 (1997): 5–18.

is a picture of Moses miraculously producing a well in the wilderness, from which water flows to twelve tents, one for each of the twelve tribes of Israel (plate 11). Again here, the cult implements of the Jews are strongly emphasized in the center top of the painting.[64] Counterbalancing this miracle, at the far right of the room (to the right of the closed temple scene) is a painting of the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon (plate 12). In narrative sequence, reading—as in Hebrew—from right to left, this image follows that of the Battle of Eben-Ezer, next to it, but over the corner in the middle tier of the north wall. In the battle, the Philistines defeated the Israelites and carried away the Ark to the temple of their idol, Dagon (1 Sam. 4:1–2 and 11).[65] Once the Ark had arrived in the house of Dagon, however, it caused the statues of the Philistine god to topple and break to pieces (1 Sam. 5:1–5). As a result of this miracle, which the right half of the image depicts, on the left hand side, the Ark is dispatched in a cart drawn by cattle on a journey that eventually leads it back to the Jews (1 Sam. 6:1–12, conflated here with 2 Sam. 6:1–19).[66] In terms of the visual scheme on the west wall, the positive miracle of the well (positive, that is, for the Israelites) is counterpoised against the negative miracle of the fall of Dagon (negative, that is, for the enemies of Israel). In the well image, the ritual objects of the Jews preside beneath a central aedicula representing the Tabernacle; in the Dagon scene, the cult implements of the Philistines are scattered along with their god, while the Ark walks away on its cart.

Whatever the precise identity of all these images and their relation to specific scriptural texts and the broader narrative meanings of the Dura Synagogue frescoes as a whole, they appear to present a visual meditation on temples—pagan and Jewish—and to make the case for one over the other in no uncertain terms. As Robert Du Mesnil du Buisson suggested in 1939, in the first monograph devoted to the Synagogue frescoes, it may not be too fanciful to recognize in the fallen statues of Dagon a resemblance to some of the pagan paintings of deities from Dura itself.[67] More recently, Warren Moon has suggested that the poses of the broken statues of Dagon

64. Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 118–25; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:27–41; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 63–67. Scholars disagree on the precise well in the wilderness represented here. Kraeling, followed by Weitzmann and Kessler, suggests the biblical well at Be'er (Num. 21:16–18); earlier he had suggested the legendary well of Miriam (in Rostovtzeff, Bellinger, Hopkins, and Welles, *Excavation* [n. 59 above], 353–54) followed, e.g., by Gutmann (*Dura-Europos Synagogue,* 1320–21). On the significance of the Menorah in Jewish art, see now L. I. Levine, "The History and Significance of the Menorah in Antiquity," in *From Dura to Sepphoris: Studies in Jewish Art and Society in Late Antiquity,* ed. L. I. Levine and Z. Weiss, JRA Suppl. 40 (Portsmouth, R.I., 2000), 131–53, esp. 144–45, on these two images and the Torah shrine at Dura.

65. Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 95–99; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:171–79; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 72–75.

66. Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 99–105; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:74–97; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 75–84. Scholars disagree on whether *one* statue is represented (it fell twice according to 1 Sam. 5:3–4)—so Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 103; and Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 75—or whether *two* images are intended, so Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:78–79; and Moon, "Nudity and Narrative," 299.

67. Du Mesnil, *Peintures* (n. 63 above), 77, followed by Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:75; and Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 76. The obvious attraction of this theory should be tempered by the very fragmentary survival of the image of Adonis, to which Du Mesnil was comparing Dagon! For Adonis, see Brown in Rostovtzeff, Brown, and Welles, *Excavations,* 158–63 and pl. xix. Kraeling (*Synagogue,* 103) disapproved of the introduction of the issue of resistance (what he called "short-range polemic") into the Synagogue paintings, to which Goodenough (*Jewish Symbols,* 10:78, n. 19) responded that the Synagogue frescoes were full of "'short range' references."

with arms raised resemble those of imperial images from the idolatrous imperial cult,[68] which was probably established within the Praetorium, or military camp, of Dura in a room with dedications to the emperors Geta and Caracalla.[69] This active and aggressive commentary on local religion in which the pagan Durenes—and possibly even the Romans—appear in the role of contemporary Philistines, is extended in two surviving frescoes from the story of Elijah in the lowest tier of the south wall (1 Kings 18:26, 30–38). Here two scenes of sacrifice are juxtaposed. On the left, the priests of Baal fail to summon divine fire to consume the garlanded bullock on their altar (plate 13). In the niche at the center of the altar is Hiel, who, according to Jewish legend, tried to ignite the faggots manually when Baal failed his priests supernaturally, but was destroyed by a serpent sent by the Lord. On the right, Elijah is calling down fire from heaven, standing by his altar on Mt. Carmel, while four lads bring water in amphorae to make the promised miracle more difficult (plate 14).[70] It is hardly impossible that the defeat of the prophets of Baal would summon to Jewish minds at Dura the sacrificial activities of the temple of Bel (the Philistine Baal's Durene version), which are so emphasized in its visual propaganda, as we have seen.

The last sacrificial image in the Dura Synagogue is the scene of Abraham's sacrifice in the fresco painted over the Torah Shrine (plate 15). This fresco, executed in the first stage of the Synagogue's decoration before the main mural program was added, was preserved during the second phase to become what was effectively the visual centerpiece of the redecorated building.[71] Not only is it at the heart of the west wall, but its imagery of Menorah, temple building, and sacrificial scene, conflates and summarizes key elements of the imagery we have been exploring.[72] Unlike the other sacrificial images, the sacrifice of Isaac alludes to nothing outside Judaism (at least in the explicit manner of the Elijah or Dagon scenes): it refers directly to one of the Hebrews' central myths. It is a scene of human sacrifice, but of that sacrifice aborted and replaced with animal slaying. Unlike the other, largely frontal, figures of the Dura Synagogue, Abraham and Isaac (lying prone at the altar) turn their backs on the spectator (as does the little figure in what may be a tent in the top right).[73] While the imagery has been interpreted as anti-Christian (in the sense that the Christians appropriated the Abraham and Isaac narrative as a Christian typology),[74] I think we should take it as an internal affirmation of Jewish identity. Like the Menorah and the Temple

68. Moon, "Nudity and Narrative," 299.

69. See C. Hopkins and H. T. Rowell, in Rostovtzeff, *Excavations,* 214.

70. On these images, see Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 137–43; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 10:149–59; Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 110–14; B. Narkiss, "'Living the Dead Became': The Prophet Elijah as a Holy Image in Early Jewish Art," in *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art Historical Studies in Honour of Kurt Weitzmann,* ed. D. Mouriki (Princeton, 1995), 75–78.

71. See Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 39–41; A. St. Clair, "The Torah Shrine at Dura-Europos: A Reevaluation," *JbAC* 29 (1986): 109–17, esp. 109; E. Kessler, "Art Leading the Story: The *ʿAqedah* in Early Synagogue Art," in Levine and Weiss, *Dura to Sepphoris* (n. 64 above), 73–81, esp. 75–76.

72. For discussions of the Torah Shrine, see Kraeling, *Synagogue,* 56–62; Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols,* 9:68–77; St Clair, "Torah Shrine at Dura-Europos" (n. 71 above), who wants its imagery to evoke the Feast of Tabernacles.

73. For the range of interpretations advanced of this figure (none conclusive), see Kessler, "*ʿAqedah*" (n. 71 above), 76–77.

74. See Weitzmann and Kessler, *Frescoes,* 154–57, esp. 157.

PLATE 1.—Dura Europos. "Temple of Bel," south wall of the "naos." Fresco of Conon and his family making sacrifice. Late second or early third century C.E. Now largely destroyed; fragments in the Damascus Museum. Tinted print of Breasted's photograph (1925). Photo: After F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura–Europos* (Paris, 1926), pl. XXXI

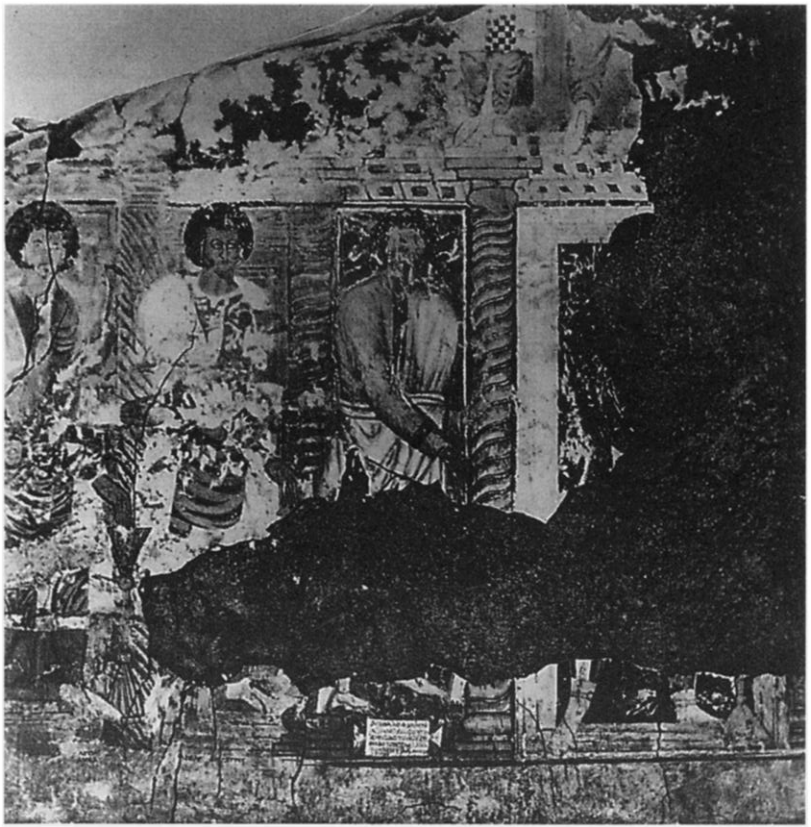

PLATE 2.—Dura Europos, "Temple of Bel," south wall of the "pronaos." Fresco of Lysias: Lysias, Apollophanes, and Zenodotus making sacrifice. Late second or early third century C.E. Fragments in the Damascus Museum. Tinted print of Cumont's photograph (1926). Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Y 339)

PLATE 3.—Dura Europos. "Temple of Bel," north wall of the "pronaos." Fresco of the tribune Julius Terentius and other members of his cohort making sacrifice to three deities (or their statues) and to the Tyches of Dura and Palmyra. 230s C.E., and certainly before 239. Actual state. Yale University Art Gallery. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Z 142)

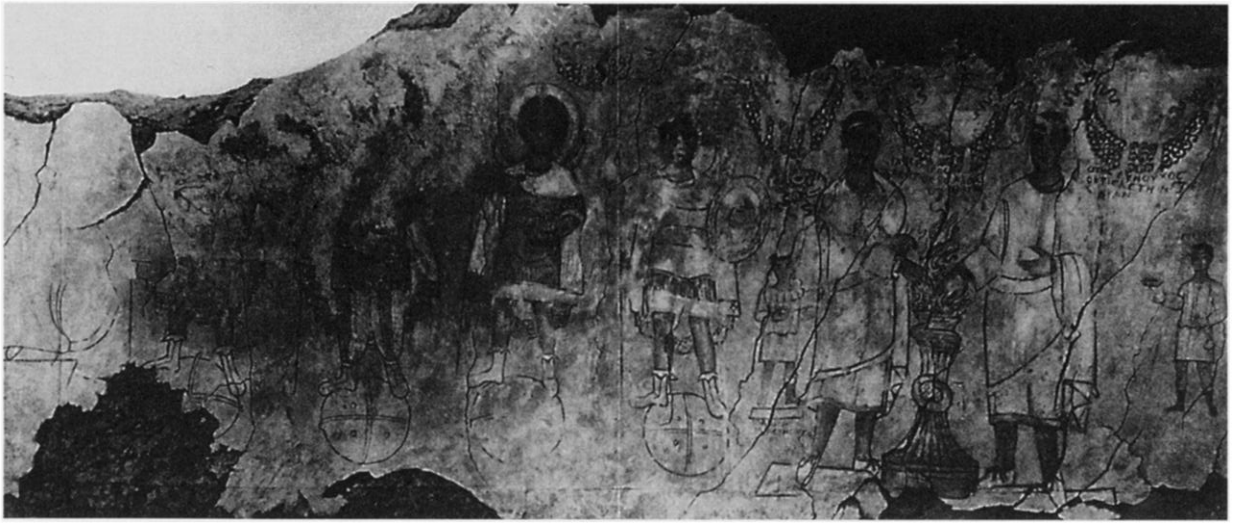

PLATE 4.—Dura Europos. "Temple of Bel," room to the south of the sanctuary ("room K"). Fresco from the façade of an aedicula, showing Otes and Iabsymsos with boy acolytes offering an incense sacrifice to five deities (or their statues), four of these standing on globes and the fifth to the far left almost obliterated. Roughly 230s C.E. Now lost. Tinted and retouched print of Cumont's photograph (1926). Photo: After F. Cumont, *Fouilles de Doura–Europos* (Paris, 1926), pl. LV

PLATE 5.—Dura Europos. "Temple of the Gaddé": from the "naos." Deep relief in Palmyrene limestone showing the priest Hairan (left) conducting sacrifice to the Gad, or Tyche, of Dura enthroned as Zeus Olympios between eagles and crowned by Seleucus Nicator, the legendary founder of Dura. The inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek identify the figures. The dedicatory inscription in Aramaic at the base identifies both the donor and the date: "The Gad of Dura made by Hairan, son of Maliku, son of Nasor, in the month of Nisan, the year 470" (159 C.E.). Now in the Yale University Art Gallery. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Y 226)

PLATE 6.—Dura Europos. Temple of Aphlad: from the "naos." Deep relief in white limestone showing the priest Adadiabos offering incense to the god Aphlad, who stands frontally on two eagle griffins, is clothed in military dress, and holds a scepter. The inscription in Greek reads: "Adadiabos, son of Zabdibol, son of Silloi, founded this branch of the sanctuary of Aphlad called god of the village of Anath of the Euphrates, in thanks for the safety of himself and his children and his whole house". Roughly C.E. 55. Now in the Damascus Museum. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Y 237), detail

PLATE 7.—Dura Europos. Mithraeum. General view of the reconstruction in Yale University Art Gallery of the main cult images. These are two gypsum cult reliefs of the bull-slaying (or tauroctony) scene, originally brightly colored, and their surrounding *al secco* painted decorations in black and red, showing scenes from the sacred mythology of Mithras. The paintings and ensemble date from the 240s C.E., the smaller relief from 168 C.E. and the larger from 170–71 C.E. Now in the Yale University Art Gallery. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Z 60), detail

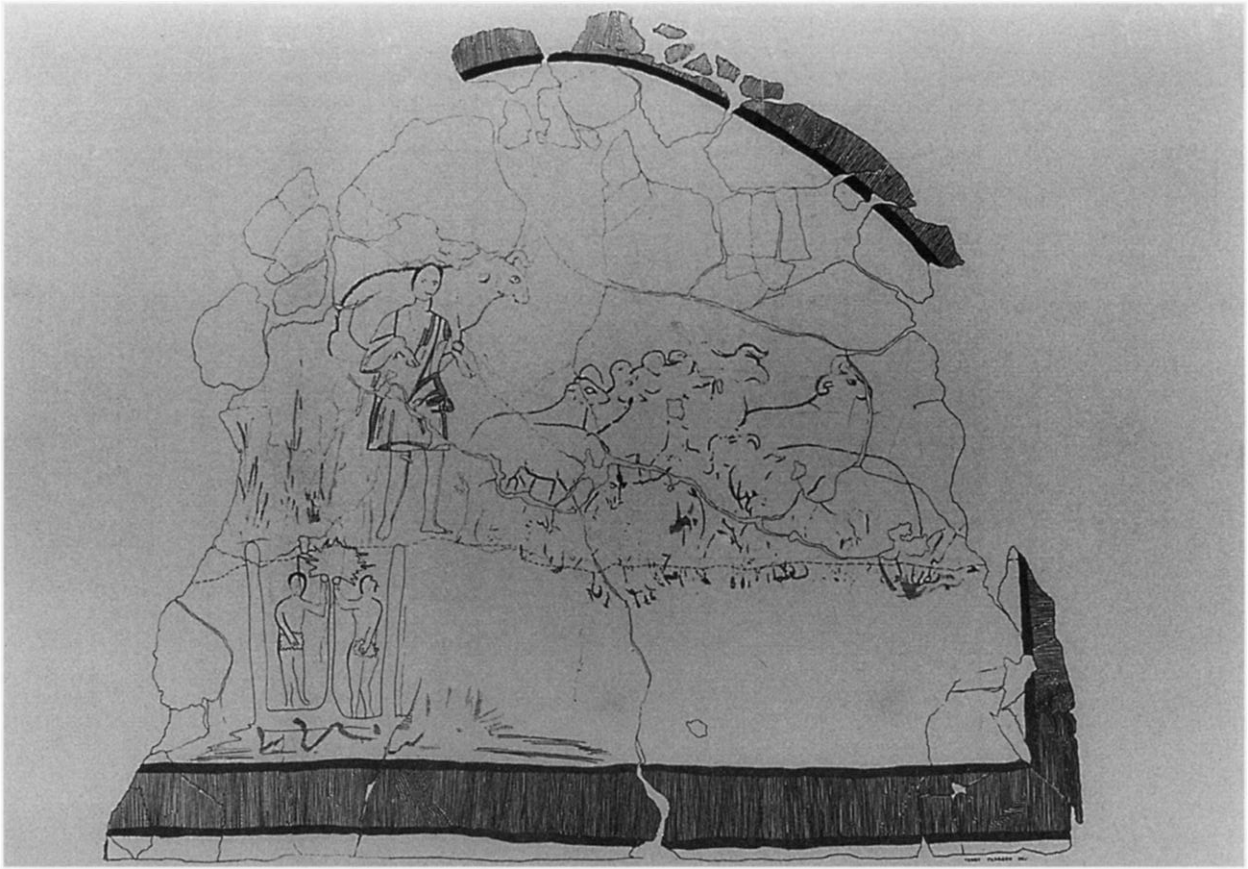

PLATE 8.—Dura Europos. Christian building, west wall. Tracing of the fresco in the lunette within the aedicula showing the good shepherd and his sheep (center) and Adam and Eve (bottom left). Roughly 240s C.E. Now in the Yale University Art Gallery. Photo: After C. H. Kraeling, *The Christian Building* (New Haven, 1967), pl. XXXI

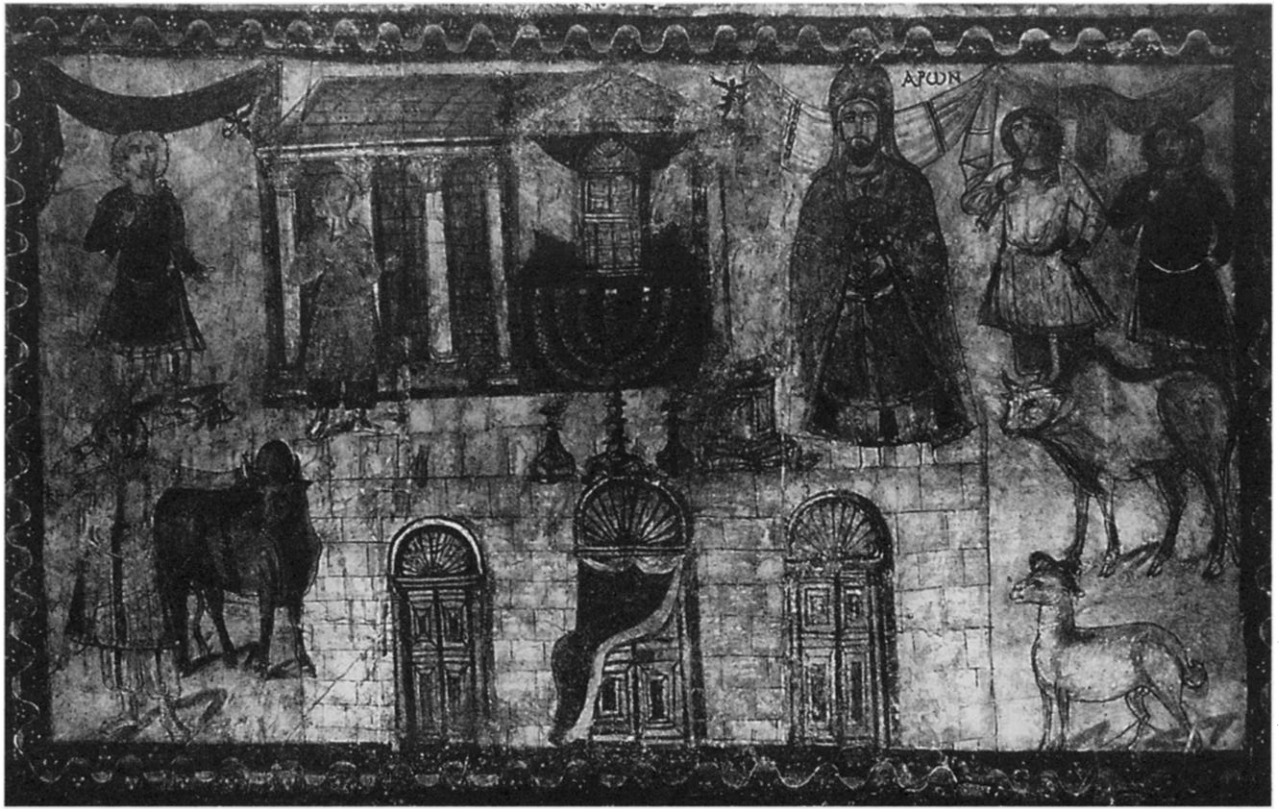

PLATE 9.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, central tier, near left of Torah shrine. Fresco of the Temple of Aaron ("The Consecration of the Tabernacle"). Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Dam 387)

PLATE 10.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, central tier, near right of Torah shrine. Fresco of a temple ("the Temple of Solomon"). Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. This photograph dates from the excavations of the 1930s. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Y 85)

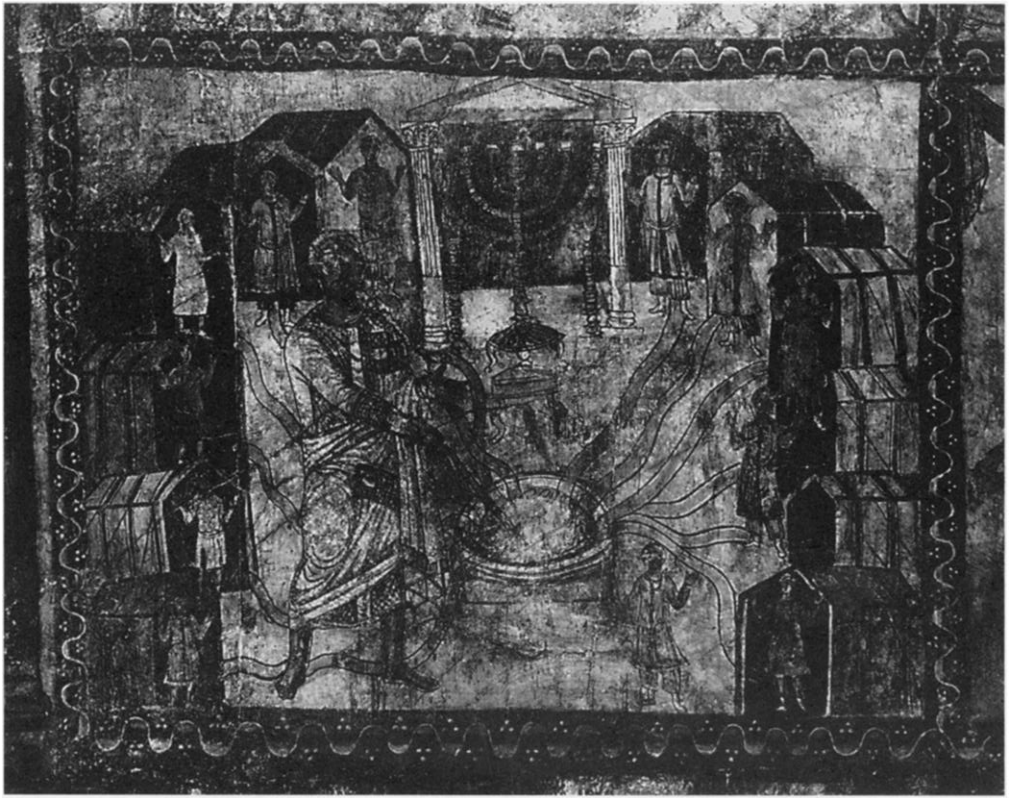

PLATE 11.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, central tier, far left of Torah shrine. Fresco of Moses producing a miraculous well in the wilderness. Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Dam 386)

PLATE 12.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, central tier, far right of Torah shrine. Fresco of the Ark of the Covenant in the land of the Philistines. Right-hand side: the fallen idol of Dagon in the temple of Dagon; left-hand side: the Ark leaving the land of the Philistines on a cart drawn by cattle. Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (1781)

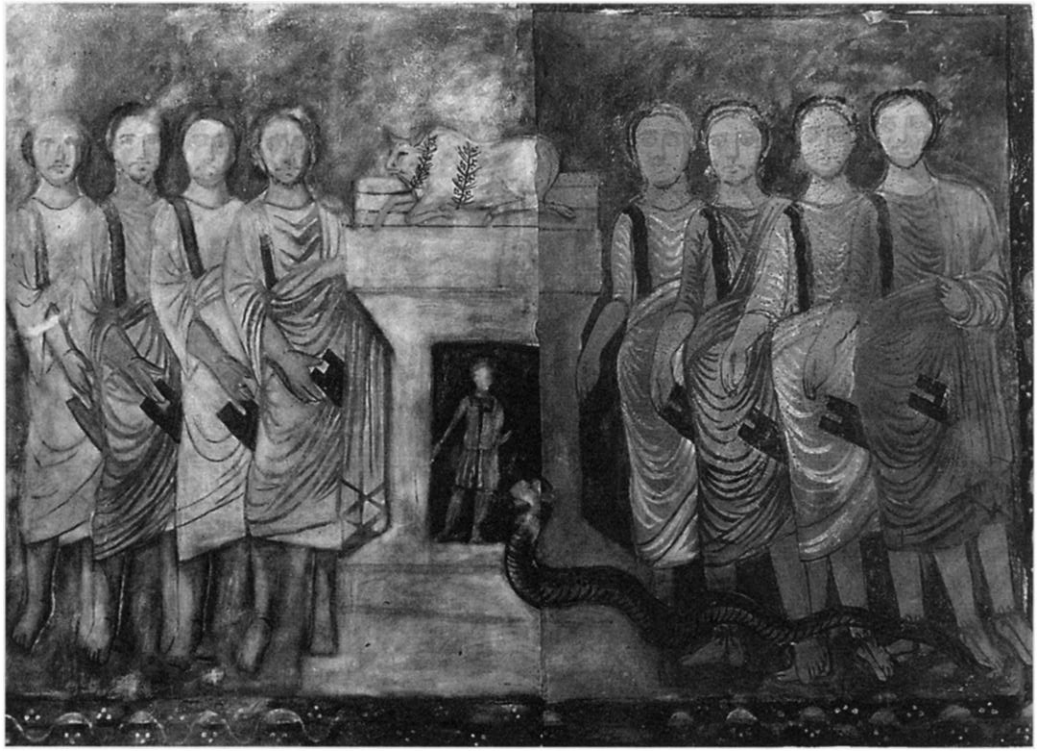

PLATE 13.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, south wall, lower tier. Fresco of the prophets of Baal making sacrifice on Mount Carmel. Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. This photograph was taken before restoration. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Y 124)

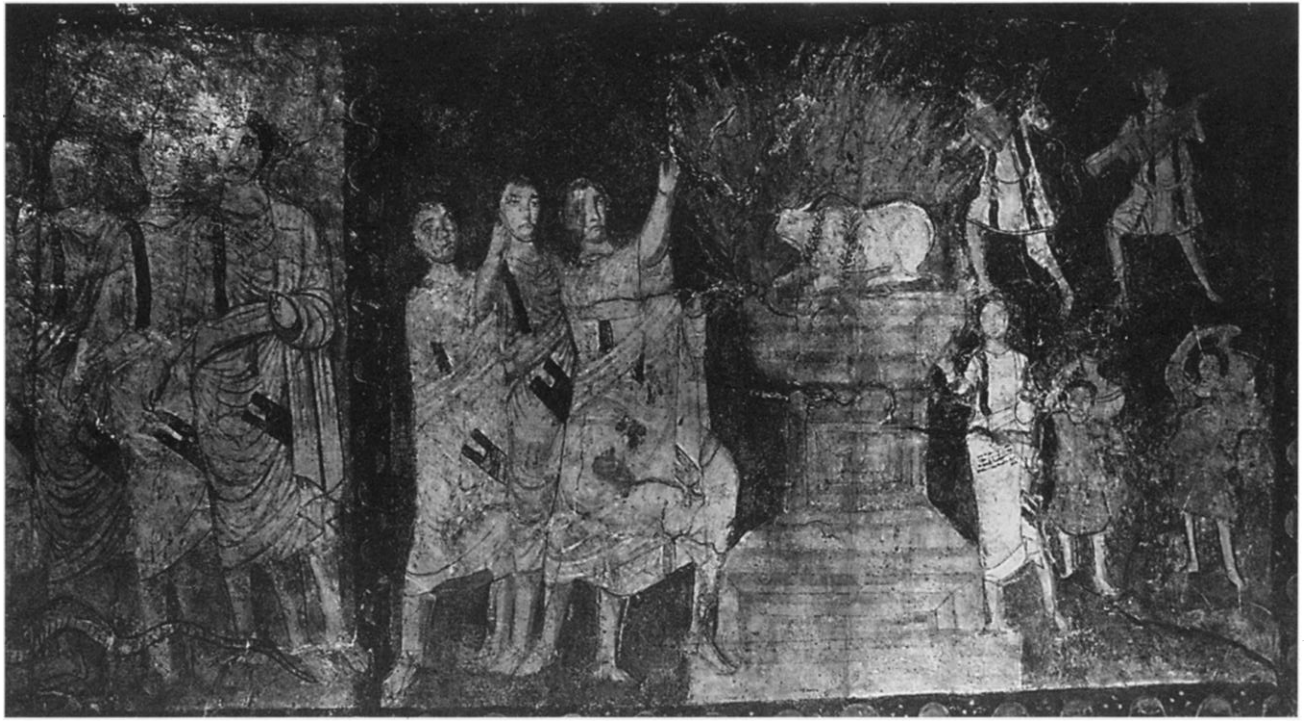

PLATE 14.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, south wall, lower tier. Fresco of Elijah making sacrifice to God on Mount Carmel. Roughly 240 C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (Dam 410)

PLATE 15.—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, niche, and Torah shrine. The imagery painted over the façade represents the Menorah, the Temple, and the sacrifice of Isaac (right). Early third century C.E. Now in the Damascus Museum. This photograph dates from the excavations in the 1930s. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection (G 1165A)

in the Torah Shrine, this fresco defines Judaism by its specific (divinely ordained) rejection of human sacrifice and its equally divinely ordained espousal of the pattern of animal sacrifice, which the Elijah panels further affirm with specific allusion to their pagan rivals. Even in their self-affirmation as Jewish through the visualizing of specifically Jewish-centered ancestral myth, the Synagogue frescoes use the sacrificial mode of critical polemic—here against a sacrificial model attempted by divine will and then rejected.

There is no doubt that the Synagogue frescoes actively promulgate Judaism by denigrating other religions. These are specifically the religions of the local Syrian environment—the worship of Baal and Dagon, as represented in Scripture, and their contemporary Durene successors such as Bel and Adonis. In particular, the Jewish frescoes strike at the two key items in pagan religious practice (at least as emphasized by the frescoes and sculptures we have looked at)—namely, the idolatrous worship of polytheistic deities in the form of statues and the specific act of sacrifice. Of course, all this can easily be explained away—if that is what one wants to do—as simply the illustrations of a text set in the distant ancestral myth-history of the Hebrews. In other words, one may reject the implication that the Synagogue frescoes are a commentary on the contemporary Durene environment. I think this view is certainly possible, but an insistence on its exclusive correctness would be naive.

4. RESISTANCE AND THE ART OF DURA

We have explored several different kinds of visual affirmations of religious affiliation, most produced within the half-century before the fall of Dura in 256 or 257. The majority of polytheistic temples produced images celebrating their own—locally based—deity through the act of sacrifice. Judaism, Mithraism, and Christianity adopted a different strategy of visual propagation, emphasizing mythologies accessible only to initiates and avoiding the normative pagan model of cult sacrifice—despite the possibility that the different cults may well have shared artistic workshops and even artists in the production of their images.[75] The frescoes of the Synagogue are unique among the arts of Dura in actively representing the failure of other cults in direct competition with its own. I think all these images offer spaces of potential resistance, but we must ask: resistance by whom and to what?

In one sense, the parochial emphasis on Near Eastern deities is a classic example of Roman religious pluralism. But equally, the single-minded focus (even by a Roman military tribune) on local gods might imply a certain provincial disdain for the center.[76] Certainly, our one Near Eastern text

75. See, e.g., Jensen, "Dura Europos Synagogue," 184–86.

76. On parochialism in Roman religion see J. Elsner, "The Origins of the Icon: Pilgrimage, Religion, and Visual Culture in the Roman East as 'Resistance' to the Centre," in *The Roman Empire in the East*, ed. S. E. Alcock (Oxford, 1997), 178–99; and Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt* (n. 18 above), esp. 65–144.

celebrating this kind of local deity, Lucian's *De dea Syria,* which describes pilgrimage to the temple of Atargatis in Hierapolis, appears actively to propagate the cult's superiority over its Graeco-Roman rivals.[77] Of course, such "resistance" (if that is the right word) was not only tolerated but perhaps even actively encouraged in a cultural context where rhetorical polemic against religions other than one's own was normal,[78] as was apologetics.[79] In a sense, Roman dominion, in this scenario, was the factor underlying the babble of tolerated, conflicting voices whose very capacity to articulate their differences from each other and from the center depended on the center's strength and well-being. The fact that the local religions of Dura all focus on the image of sacrifice demonstrates their "buying in" to the dominant sacred ideology of sacrificial mediation, which we find propagated so insistently for instance in the public monuments of Rome.[80] Moreover, the sharing of a sacrificial language of art that owed something to the ways in which sacrifice was represented by the Romans meant that even if hegemony might be contested (through the assertion of a local deity) it was at the same time being affirmed through the visual discourse used.[81]

The initiate cults were different. In a sense their "resistance" is more private—located in the exclusive and recondite mythologies visualized by their images, which simply ignore and even reverse all the norms of Graeco-Roman public religion. Yet we know that Mithraism was a cult of the army and of the petty bureaucracy; its social functions were therefore supplementary to mainstream Roman culture and not opposed to it, even if some aspects of its iconography encouraged the idea of at least a private retreat from *romanitas* into an orientally visualized initiate world. If we did not know a great deal more about Christianity, even at this period, than about any other ancient religion except Judaism, we would hardly read resistance into the frescoes of the *domus ecclesiae.* On the other hand, knowing them to be Christian and knowing that (at least some) Christians at this period were willing to make a stand against the religious hegemony of both the state and local hierarchies, it is hard to deprive the Christian paintings of at least the possibility of implying cultural resistance. Their Christian iconography is a turn to a private initiate world, like that of Mithraism, but a world that—unlike Mithraism—had in principle no space for Graeco-Roman or Syrian religious activities or beliefs, whatever compromises individual Christians may have made in practice. While the images of the Mithraeum offered a potential space for cultural resistance, which was nonetheless

77. See J. Elsner, "Describing Self in the Language of Other: Pseudo(?)-Lucian at the Temple of Hire," in *Being Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic, and the Development of Empire,* ed. S. Goldhill (Cambridge, 2001), 123–53.

78. One thinks not only of Christian writings by the likes of Clement, Origen, and Tertullian, and of the attacks on Christianity by Celsus and Porphyry, but also of Lucian's *Alexander* and *Peregrinus.*

79. See now *Apologetics in the Roman Empire: Pagans, Jews, and Christians,* ed. M. Edwards, M. Goodman, and S. Price (Oxford, 1999), for discussions of various apologetic texts, including, on the pagan side, S. Swain, "Defending Hellenism: Philostratus, *In Honour of Apollonius,*" 157–96.

80. See I. S. Ryberg, *Rites of State Religion in Roman Art* (Rome, 1955).

81. See further on this issue *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis,* ed. C. Stewart and R. Shaw (London, 1994), esp. introduction, 19–21, and, in the same volume, W. Kempf, "Ritual, Power, and Colonial Domination: Male Initiation among the Ngaing of Papua New Guinea," 108–27, esp. 114–23.

explicitly discouraged by the sociology of the cult, those of the Christian building offered a similar space whose resistant possibilities the religion actively fostered.

Ironically, given that the Christians were more frequently persecuted than the Jews, it is the images of the Synagogue that are most explicitly and unequivocally resistant. Again we have in the Synagogue a visual mythology, this time also a tribal history (less mystic perhaps than the images of the Mithraists and the Christians), but one that was in a fundamental sense predicated on the explicit rebuttal of non-Jewish gods and rituals. The direct cultural resistance of the Synagogue frescoes is against local pagan religion (something that need not necessarily be against the sanction of Roman law), but implicitly the Synagogue was asserting the monotheistic and exclusive supremacy of a God who had nothing to do with the Roman Empire.

In the single space of a relatively small frontier town—and it is worth noting that the Mithraeum, Synagogue, and Christian *domus ecclesiae* as well as the temples of Bel, Adonis, Zeus Kyrios, and Aphlad occupy buildings along what are effectively two adjacent streets running parallel with the west wall—we have seen a remarkable range of kinds of religious self-affirmation. The fact that these appear stylistically similar and that their style has tended to be dismissed as hopelessly provincial,[82] has blinded scholars to their interesting differences in this regard. I would like to suggest that, in the polyglot context of a Roman frontier town in Syria, the various sacred images of Dura evoke an interrelated set of religious definitions and propagations of cult identity through art, within which the issue of cultural resistance cannot be denied.

5. SOME GENERAL THOUGHTS ON RESISTANCE IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Since part of the purpose of this essay is to open up ways of thinking again about resistance in the Roman Empire, it may be worth drawing out a few more general entailments from the material just discussed. First, the term "resistance" may be misleading, at least if it continues to imply a particular opposing force generated by and against a subordinating and exploitative dominating power.[83] Moreover, as long as the notion of "resistance" is a strong one—implying conscious motivation and explicit articulations on the part of the "resisters," it is both too crude in relation to modern ethnographic observations and inappropriate to the phenomena in the Roman world we have been looking at. Rather, in the words of John and Jean Comaroff, "there is an analytic lesson to be taken from the fact that most historical situations are extremely murky," so that, "for the most part the ripostes of the colonized hover in the space between the tacit and the articulate, the direct and the indirect."[84]

82. See Wharton's comments (*Refiguring*, 17–25).

83. This is the strongest disadvantage of using James Scott's class-struggle model of resistance for antiquity.

84. See J. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chicago, 1991), 31; see also Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power* (n. 3 above), 191–97, 260–64.

What the cults of the Roman Empire offered—no less than the strong visual, inscriptional, and ritual assertions of civic pride and myth-history throughout the Roman East during the Second Sophistic—was a space of self-affirmation through self-definition.[85] This need by no means be "resistant" in and of itself. But the process of self-definition came with a particular and interesting mix of elements. It implied a strong sense of localism (other terms for this might be parochialism, peripheralism, or provincialism), which we have seen among the polytheistic cult images of Dura in the emphasis on local deities and dress (for instance, Conon's turban and the white capped priests), not to speak of artistic style. This localism in all matters pertaining to religion was commonplace throughout Graeco-Roman paganism, not only in the East but also in Egypt, and in Greece, in the multiplicity of cults described by Pausanias.[86] Its centrifugal tendencies and its concentration on parochial identity were in direct opposition to the state's attempts to create a religious universalism both in the polytheistic second and third centuries and in the Christian Empire thereafter.[87] Indeed, the Christians were profoundly right to emphasize the importance of local identity when they defined the multiplicity of religions opposed to theirs with the blanket term "paganism." Whatever its numerous disadvantages as a characterization of the polytheistic reality of the Mediterranean world, the etymology of the word "pagan" stresses the fundamental significance and longevity of *parochial* religious subjectivities and mythologies that would take the forces of Christianization centuries to uproot.

Moreover, self-definition through religious cult implied the use of cult-specific languages and mythologies based on initiation. The narrative pictures of the Mithraic, Christian, and Jewish places of worship at Dura are obvious examples of this—but the dress of Conon's priests or the attire of the deities in the Otes and Terentius frescoes, let alone the appearances of the lost cult deities of the Durene temples, may well have offered similar potential for initiate discourse confined to their respective cult groups. Like local identity, such languages may not be "resistant." But they offer ample space for what James Scott has termed "hidden transcripts," in which an "off-stage" or unofficial discourse could be elaborated in "relatively unmonitored physical locations."[88] That is to say, the internalized cult discourses—themselves fostering locally based collective subjectivities and identities in cult members—

85. What Gordon, "Roman Empire," 246, calls "numerous positions for the faithful in rituals and sacred buildings and in . . . collegiate organization."

86. The case of localism is well made by Frankfurter (*Religion in Roman Egypt,* 65–144), writing of polytheistic religion in Roman Egypt; briefly on Greece and the East, see Elsner, "Origins of the Icon" (n. 76 above), 191–96.

87. On universalism, see G. Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: The Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, 1993), esp. 37–60. On Trajan Decius' attempt in 249 C.E. to impose a universal (or at least Empire-wide) obligation to sacrifice on individuals in the Empire, and hence to undermine the kinds of pluralism and religious localism run rife at Dura, see J. Rives, "The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire," *JRS* 89 (1999): 135–54, esp. 144–47 and 152–54. For an interesting account of the parallelism of the imperial cult and Christianity in the second and third centuries, with the latter forming a countercultural inversion of the former, but both with increasingly universalizing tendencies, see A. Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order* (Leiden, 1999), esp. 1–16.

88. See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak* (n. 3 above), 4–5, 108–35, esp. 123.

were an ideal space for generating resistance if and when it was required. The polemical language of the Synagogue frescoes proves the point.

The kinds of resistance that might arise in these situations are more a matter of what have been called "latent identities" than of active opposition.[89] The space of cult is one that fosters a strong sense of being a subgroup. What might be described as "largely unselfconscious counter-hegemonies" or "implicit resistance"[90] may arise "when subgroups of a given society are imperfectly integrated within the larger aggregate, so that their primary sentiments of affinity remain lodged at the subgroup level while they retain correspondingly strong sentiments of estrangement from, or antipathy toward, other subgroups."[91] What is interesting in the case of Dura Europos is not only the presence of this kind of segmentary opposition but also the likelihood that it would have broadly remained the same had Dura been under Parthian rule and fallen to the Romans in the 250s, rather than the other way around. Only the Terentius fresco would have been out of place in a Parthian Dura—though its exact equivalent (of a Parthian soldier making sacrifice perhaps to the very same set of deities) would have been by no means impossible. Moreover, the subgroups defined by the images at Dura are not just (relatively) large religious communities, but may also include the more socially (rather than religiously) defined group of Terentius' cohort and the family groups of the Conon and the Ialasamsos frescoes. As diaspora Judaism was brilliantly to affirm, the ultimate initiate subgroup able to preserve a dissident identity within the private confines of its own home was the family itself.

6. THE PROOF OF THE PUDDING

What is most particular about the situation at Dura and about late antique religion within the Empire, for which I have used Dura as an emblem, is that no one of the cults existed in a vacuum.[92] What we see is a structured system of differentiated religions that evolved alongside and against each other, creating parallel (but usually exclusive) mythologies and classifications. Of course, each was influenced by the others (even if that meant by opposition or contradiction), while the cult centers of each of these religions nestled side by side in adapted domestic buildings and were conceivably decorated by the same teams of artists.[93] This intricately structured Durene model of cultic affirmations was, as we have said, able to "resist" Parthia no less than

89. On the notion of "latent identity" see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 66. This differs from the kinds of more active religious resistance offered, e.g., by the Druids as described by J. Webster ("At the End of the World: Druidic and Other Revitalization Movements in Post-Conquest Gaul and Britain," *Britannia* 30 [1999]: 1–20, esp. 13–18). But it has some affinities with (as well as numerous differences from) the options available in urban religious pluralism in second- and third-century Africa, as discussed by Rives, *Religion and Authority* (n. 11 above), 173–273.

90. These quotations are from Jean Comaroff, *Body of Power*, 260–61.

91. See B. Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (New York and Oxford, 1989), 73–74, quotation on p. 73. The significance of sentiment in issues of religion should never be underrated.

92. For discussions of the cults in the Roman Empire, see R. Turcan, *The Cults of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1996) and Beard, North, and Price, *Religions*, 246–51, 263–312.

93. For architectural and visual parallels between the different temples at Dura, see Bowes, "Prophetic Images," 24–27, 28–31; on shared artists, Jensen, *Dura Europos Synagogue*, 184–86.

Rome: a cluster of differentiated parochial self-affirmations is the key to the generation of local identities in this period, and the particular dominating or oppressing or colonizing power is largely irrelevant. On the level of art, there was a certain iconographic integration of the colonizer into the parochial model, so the Roman army appears in the Terentius fresco, just as the pre-Christian imagery of the official monuments of the Roman state was rapidly integrated into Christian art.

A glance at the post-Constantinian Empire proves the potential and effectiveness as a weapon of resistance of the system of structured and opposed differences evolved by late antique religion, and examined here through the example of Dura. The kinds of polytheistic cults that we observed emphasizing localism in Dura became the brilliant vanguard of the long fight against Christianization. In a sense, the process of Christianization may be equally well described from the pagan side as the gritty persistence on the local and popular level of a polytheistic sacred culture grounded in parochial deities whose resistance to Roman Christianity lasted for the *longue durée*.[94] That is, a system of segmentarily opposed local religions whose focus was on parochial self-definition—which, as we have seen, was already well established in third-century Dura—turned out to be a rather effective vehicle for resistance to Christianity when the need arose, as it did after the end of the fourth century. Moreover, especially in the East, Christianity itself (following the model of its early roots as a mystery cult rather than its imperially imposed form of a unified state religion) split into a variety of locally based cults whose propositions were intellectualized and objectivized by the Church Councils under grand names like "Donatism," "Arianism," "Nestorianism," "Monophysitism," and the like in order to be declared heretical and anathematized. Despite these efforts at centralization, which were inaugurated at Nicaea by Constantine himself, the local Christianities of Syria and Egypt resisted the "Orthodox" center with a persistence that outlasted even the most dogged pagans. The Jews, whose brilliant efforts at stealing Graeco-Roman culture's visual vocabularies at Dura we have already seen, were to prove the most spectacularly adaptable of all the cults. They switched from resisting the Roman Empire's pagan environment to resisting Christianity's monotheistic hegemony with appetite, aplomb, and remarkable (if low-key) success.[95]

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94. On the long survival of pagan "Hellenism," see G. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1990); P. Chuvin, *A Chronicle of the Last Pagans* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990); Beard, North, and Price, *Religions,* 387–88. For specific Egyptian examples of the persistence of local deities, see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt,* 106–11, and on the process of Christianization in Egypt, ibid., 265–84.

95. This paper was first written for the session on "resistance" organized by Sue Alcock and Mary Downs in the Roman Archaeology Conference in Durham in 1999. Subsequent versions have been given in seminars at the universities of Chicago, Glasgow, Michigan, and Oxford: I am particularly grateful to Joel Snyder and Shadi Bartsch, Geneviève Warwick, Sue Alcock, and Martin Goodman and Simon Price for their respective invitations, as well as to the audiences on all these occasions for making me think through and discuss my arguments. My thanks are due also to the Editor and anonymous readers for this journal for their comments. My especial thanks, finally, to Shadi Bartsch for her heroic hospitality over a couple of very cold days in Chicago.