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RELIGIOUS RIVALRIES AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SUCCESS IN SARDIS AND SMYRNA

Richard S. Ascough, editor

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1

Interaction among Religious Groups in Sardis and Smyrna

Richard S. Ascough

Introduction

Building on a long-standing tradition of focused New Testament seminars dating back to 1977, in 1995 the Canadian Society of Biblical Studies inaugurated a new seminar under the title "Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success: Jews, Christians, and Other Religious Groups in Local Settings in the First Two Centuries CE." It is a complex and perhaps overly lengthy title, but one chosen carefully and with not a little debate in order to convey the full scope of our project. There are things in the title that many participants would now change as a result of the work done in the seminar—a good sign that the seminar did not remain static vis-à-vis the problematic as first conceived. The seminar's purpose was to explore the relationships and rivalries among Jews, Christians, and Greco-Roman religious groups in the context of local urban settings and *realia*, in the first few centuries of the Common Era. Although the intent was to limit the time frame to the first and second centuries CE, that was an aim difficult to achieve, in part because the available literary and archaeological data were limited, in part because interests of seminar members expanded.

Terry Donaldson laid out the foci, or "interconnected sets of issues," of the seminar in the initial seminar proposal. First, the seminar was identified as undertaking "urban studies." At the foundational level we were interested in the "concrete urban realities of the Roman empire" from the perspective of particular cities. We began with a focus on a single city, Caesarea Maritima (1995–97), followed by a pair of geographically proximate cities, Sardis and Smyrna (1998–2001), and concluded with a region, North Africa (2002–3). For each city or region we sought to inform ourselves about the current state of knowledge (including architectural, social, economic,

Notes to chapter 1 start on page 253

regional, and political aspects) available through the evidence (e.g., archaeological, literary, numismatic, and inscriptional).

Our second interconnected issue was that of religious groups. Having set the context of a city or region, we aimed to investigate religious groups as one aspect of urban reality. The urban context was important, for, as Jack Lightstone notes, the social structure of the urban setting defines much of how a city's inhabitants understand themselves (2003, 2). Peter Richardson frames it thus: "Careful attention to the architecture and urban design of cities, especially religious structures, will tell modern students important things about past cultures" (2002, 160). The seminar gave attention to this urban context by examining "the roles of religious groups in the life of the city, the way in which religions as social entities are shaped by the realities of their urban settings, and in the relationships…among religious groups" (Donaldson 1995, 1).

Richardson has been a constant and consistent resource in orienting the seminar to the *realia* of the urban sites under investigation. His presentations constantly reinforced the notion that the concrete urban realities of our chosen sites revealed the importance of studying "precise local expressions" far more successfully than would simply leaping to "generalizations" (Richardson 2003, 9). Donaldson makes a similar point in his introduction to the book he edited on Caesarea Maritima: "As urban phenomena, then, religious groups cannot be understood apart from the cities in which they are embedded, nor can the relationships between and among them be understood without an understanding of the social dynamic of their urban mix" (2000, 3).

Finally, the seminar was interested in what was first conceived of as the struggle for "success" among religious groups (see Vaage 1995). We attempted to mine our textual and physical resources for information that revealed the degree to which these religious groups were engaged in competition and/or co-operation. We wanted to know how religious groups competed in their appeal to the same people within the public arena, defining for ourselves the concept of "success" as garnering sympathy, support, respect, status, new members, influence, and power. In doing so, we hoped to learn what factors might be identified in specific contexts that led to the eventual dominance of Christianity over other religious expressions within the late Roman Empire. We wanted to know, as Leif Vaage put it in 1995, "what is at stake in getting the chronicle of Christianity's 'rise,' Judaism's on-going development, and 'paganism's' prolonged displacement cum resistance, 'right' or 'better' or at least endeavouring to make sure that 'all the facts' are laid out on the scholarly tableau" (1995, 23). Our greatest hope and expectation for the seminar lay in the third of the three interconnected issues. Religious groups of interest, we expected, *were* attempt-

ing to appeal to the same people and thus would be thrust into direct competition with one another.

Even after looking at a single site, although with considerable methodological reflection on the way, Donaldson was able to conclude that the evidence for a range of possible interrelationships, "from peaceful co-existence, through competition implicit and explicit, to confrontation and conflict," demands that the interpretive model be well thought out and move beyond simplistic dichotomies (Donaldson 2000, 5). It is to this end that the seminar members wrestled with a number of papers that tackled the issue of how one understands the scholarly enterprise of reconstructing relationships among Greco-Roman religious groups (see Vaage, 2005).

Like many of the CSBS seminars before it, the Religious Rivalries seminar has been a highly productive one, with one book of essays published (Donaldson 2000), two others in production (Vaage; Muir), and one "spin-off" book already out (Richardson 2002).[1] As a result of the seminar's three years of work on Sardis and Smyrna, we identified a need for the publication of a number of papers of high scholarly calibre that made a distinctive contribution to the field. The result is this volume of essays. Most of the essays were first presented in draft form during the seminar sessions, and all have since been revised. A couple of essays (Marshall, chap. 7; Aasgaard, chap. 11) were commissioned for this volume as a result of the respective authors' interest in the cities of Sardis and Smyra. It is not the intention of this volume to undertake a comprehensive overview of either city. Rather, the goal is to make some contributions to the refinement of our understanding of both cities. Nevertheless, it is worth a brief overview of salient features of the civic sites themselves.

Overview of Sardis

The city of Sardis is located at the foot of the Tmolos mountain range, where the Pactolus River runs through the Hermus plain. It has a long history, extending well before the eighth century BCE.[2] According to ancient sources, the rise of the Mermnadae dynasty came about in the seventh century through the exploits of Gyges, who, at the urging of the Heraclid king Candaules, spied on the naked body of the king's wife but, when she caught him, he was compelled to kill the king. Gyges' descendant Croesus, famous for his wealth, was later defeated by the Persian king Cyrus (546 BCE) when he wrongly interpreted a Delphic oracle (see Herodotus 1.76–84).[3] Cyrus had Croesus placed on a pyre and set it alight. However, when Croesus prayed to Apollo for help, a downpour from the clear sky extinguished the flames! Although such stories are of doubtful historicity, it is clear that Persia played an important role in the history of Sardis. It

was during the Persian occupation that the Royal Road was constructed linking Susa in Persia to Sardis, where the road ended.

Political control of Sardis changed hands a number of times, beginning with the coming of Alexander the Great, who ordered the building of a temple to Zeus Olympios[4] and who allowed the Sardians to use their ancestral laws (Hanfmann 1983, 113). The rule of the Pergamene kings followed, beginning in 213 BCE. The city finally passed into the hands of the Romans in 133 BCE when the Pergamene king Attalus III willed it to them. It was during this time that a temple to Artemis was built, and she became a national goddess for Seleucid Asia Minor (Hanfmann 1983, 129; Pausanias 7.6.6; Xenophon, *An.* 1.6.6–7). The priesthood of Roma became the major priesthood of the city itself, although other religions continued to flourish. During the Hellenistic period, the deities at Sardis, and in Lydia generally, were never completely Hellenized but retained characteristics of their historical development in the local context—their Lydian and Persian forerunners. Nevertheless, most of the material from Sardis is in Greek and reflects Hellenistic practices (Hanfmann 1983, 134).

For the most part, any sort of architectural continuity in religious sites at Sardis will date only from 17 CE, since the city suffered an earthquake in that year.[5] The emperor Tiberius gave generous aid to Sardis in the form of the direct payment of 10 million sesterces and remission of taxes for five years.[6] The Roman authorities had almost the entire city levelled, and thus earlier Hellenistic structures have disappeared (Mierse 1983, 109). Nevertheless, the city was soon revived with new Roman buildings (see Foss 1976, 2; Yegül 1987, 59),[7] and it became part of a strategic network of highways that connected it with all parts of the province (Hanfmann and Waldbaum 1975, 19).

The shift that occurred at Sardis after 17 CE was perhaps more dramatic than elsewhere in Asia Minor because the earthquake was so devastating. Some religious groups still maintained vestiges of their Lydian and Hellenistic forerunners. In fact, by the second century CE there was a renaissance of older Persian and Anatolian cults.[8] Hanfmann attributes this resurgence to an attempt "to rediscover their ancient and mythical past as a source of pride and superiority toward the Romans" (1983, 135). By the second century CE, Sardis was a large, prosperous city, with a population of between sixty thousand and one hundred thousand people (Aune 1997, 218), including a flourishing Jewish community (see Seager and Kraabel 1983, 168–90; Hammer and Murray, chap. 12 of this volume).[9]

There is quite a bit of helpful material available for a study of Greco-Roman religions at Sardis. One source is the collection of ancient literary references to Sardis by John Pedley (1972). Pedley has set out these sources in chronological order in relation to the development of the city (rather

than the chronological order of the writers themselves). Each text is given in the original language, followed by a translation into English (although sometimes longer texts are only partially given and then summarized in English). While many are not pertinent to the topic of religions at Sardis, a few do touch on the topic (esp. 73–75, nos. 270–74). However, for the most part, these texts inform us more about the religious structures of the city during the fifth to second century BCE.

Early inscriptional finds from Sardis have been collected in Buckler and Robinson (1932 = *ISardBR*). Robert's volume (1964 = *ISardRobert*) publishes further inscriptional finds but also offers a critique of Buckler and Robinson's collection (cf. Pedley 1972, 62). More inscriptions have been published by Gauthier (1989 = *ISardGauthier*), although he is concerned primarily with royal documents from the time of Antiochus III (III–II BCE). Hermann (1995; 1996) has published some inscriptions not appearing elsewhere.

The secondary material on religions at Sardis is fairly plentiful, much of it arising from the work of the Harvard-Cornell expeditions of 1958–75 and continuing to today.[10] The most comprehensive overview is that edited by George Hanfmann, *Sardis from Prehistoric to Roman Times* (1983). This is really a collection of survey articles jointly written by a number of those involved in the digs at Sardis. It is a good starting point to become acquainted with the religious milieu of Sardis. Other, more specialized studies are also readily available, particularly the reports and monographs in the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis series.[11]

Overview of Smyrna

Smyrna, traditional birthplace of Homer, has a long history. It was founded by the Aeolians in the tenth century BCE and by the ninth had become a thriving commercial centre. The city's name comes from the goddess Myrina, a local variety of Cybele, known as the Sipylene Mother (Cadoux 1938, 215; Ramsay 1994, 192). Ionian Greeks settled in the area at the end of the eighth century and soon occupied the city (Strabo 14.1.4; Pausanias 7.5.1). Herodotus (1.150) tells the story of how, sometime before 688 BCE, the Ionians seized the city while the Aeolians were outside the walls celebrating a festival of Dionysos (see Potter 1992, 73). The Lydians destroyed the city in the sixth century. However, it was refounded again on Mt. Pagos (Strabo 14.1.37) as the result of a dream Alexander the Great had in 334 BCE while resting at the temple of Nemeseis. But work on the new city did not begin until 323 BCE.[12]

During the 190s BCE the city of Smyrna defied the Seleucid king Antiochus III and aligned itself with Rome, building a temple to Roma in

195 BCE (Tacitus, *Ann*. 4.56; Potter 1992, 74). In fact, Smyrna was the first city of Asia Minor to build such a temple (ibid.). Later, this cult was closely aligned with the worship of the emperors (Cadoux 1938, 224). As a provincial centre for the Roman imperial cult, Smyrna vied for the title "first of Asia" with other prominent cities such as Pergamum and Ephesus. In 29 CE the city competed for the right to build a temple to Tiberius and was chosen to be a *neōkoros*, "temple warden" (Tacitus, *Ann*. 4.15; Friesen 1993, 15–21) on the basis of its long years of loyalty (Tacitus, *Ann*. 4.37–38, 55–56).[13] Later, it acquired another Temple under Hadrian (117–38 CE) and another under Caracalla (211–17 CE).

By the first century BCE Smyrna had become a bustling, cosmopolitan port city of about one hundred thousand. Strabo describes the city of the late first century BCE in the following terms: "Their city is now the most beautiful of all.... The division into streets is exceptionally good, in straight lines as far as possible; and the streets are paved with stone; and there are large quadrangular porticoes, with both upper and lower stories" (14.1.37, LCL).

Of great pride to the Smyrneans was the "crown of Smyrna," a street lined with public buildings that encircled the top of Mt. Pagos.[14] A frequent image on Smyrnean coins is the patron goddess of the city, Cybele, seated on a throne and wearing a crown of battlements and towers (Ramsay 1994, 188). As such, she is representative of the city itself. The philosopher Apollonius of Tyana plays on this image when advising the Smyrneans that it would be better to take pride in a "crown of persons" (Philostratus, *Vit. Ap*. 4.7; see further Ramsay 1994, 189).

Christianity was introduced at Smyrna early, perhaps by Paul or one of his companions (see Acts 19:10, 26; Pseudo-Pionius, *Life of Polycarp* 1.2.1). By end of the first century CE a small Christian community was solidly in place. The writer of Revelation encourages them through the words of the risen Jesus, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10–11).[15] This image of the "crown" contrasts with the "crown of Smyrna" composed of public buildings. For the Christians of the city, a "crown of life" is to be preferred. Here, we have our first indication of "rivalry" between Christians and their non-Christian neighbours at Smyrna (see further the essays by Hegedus and Marshall in this volume, summarized below).

Early in the second century, Ignatius, bishop of Syrian Antioch, was escorted through Smyrna while en route to his martyrdom in Rome. While there, he encouraged the local Christians, including their bishop, Polycarp. He also met with representatives from churches in nearby cities. After his departure, Ignatius sent two letters back to Smyrna, one to the church and one to Polycarp, thanking them for their hospitality and addressing a number of important issues facing the Asian churches (e.g.,

the role of a bishop; heterodox teachings, and contact with the Antiochian church).

In 156 CE, Polycarp was arrested by the authorities and brought before the proconsul in the arena during a festival. When ordered to deny his faith. Polycarp responded, "For eighty and six years have I been his servant, and he has done me no wrong, and how can I blaspheme my King who has saved me" (*Mart. Pol.* 9.3, LCL). For his faithfulness Polycarp was placed on a pyre and burned to death (see further McCready, chap. 10 in this volume).

The ancient city of Smyrna was renowned for its beauty among ancient writers (see, for example, Aelius Aristides, *Or.* 17, 18, 19, 20, 21).[16] It was also highly regarded for its fine wines, its beautiful buildings, and its wealth, and it was viewed by the Romans as a centre for science and medicine (Strabo 14.1.15). In the mid–third century CE, a civic honorific inscription for an athlete proclaims Smyrna "first city in Asia for beauty and size, most glorious, mother city of Asia, adornment of Ionia" (*CIG* 3202).[17]

The ancient site of Smyrna is now occupied by the modern Turkish city of Izmir. As the third-largest city in Turkey, and as one of the country's major ports, it has the feel of a fast-paced, prosperous city. Unfortunately, so much of what is of primary interest to the ancient historian remains buried under the modern city or has been destroyed by war, fire, and earthquake. However, Smyrna is slowly revealing its secrets through literary texts and the archaeologist's spade. Today, the most prominent archaeological site in Smyrna is the agora. Built in the fourth century BCE by Alexander, it was destroyed by an earthquake in 178 CE. The emperor Marcus Aurelius rebuilt it, along with much of the town, soon afterwards. Also visible today are traces of the Roman theatre and the Roman aqueducts. The archaeological museum is an excellent place to appreciate the richness of Greco-Roman antiquity, both in Smyrna, and in Asia Minor generally.

In contrast to Sardis, there is less primary and secondary source material for the study of religions at Smyrna. The main source of primary material is the three volumes of inscriptions in the IGSK series (Petzl 1982–90). These make the inscriptional finds up to 1990 readily available, with brief descriptions given in German. In total, just over nine hundred inscriptions of varying lengths, types, and dates are available.

The secondary literature is even more sparse. Despite its publication date at the early part of the last century (1938), the primary starting point for a study of religions at Smyrna is Cecil J. Cadoux's *Ancient Smyrna: A History of the City from the Earliest Times to 324 A.D.* He includes a comprehensive bibliography of earlier works on Smyrna. There is, in addition, the collection of essays and inscriptions in *Mouseion ḳai Bibliothēḳ tēs Euangeliḳēs Sxolēs* (see Cadoux 1938, xxxviii, for a description; see also Broughton 1938, 750–52; Cook 1958/59).

Outline of the Volume

The opening section of this volume contains four essays that together provide an "Overview of Religious Groups in Sardis and Smyrna." Lloyd Gaston surveys Jewish communities (chap. 2), Dietmar Neufeld notes the evidence for Christian groups (chap. 3), and Richard Ascough examines Greco-Roman religions (chap. 4). The order in which these essays appear follows that set out in the subtitle of the Religious Rivalries seminar: "Jews, Christians, and Other Religious Groups in Local Settings in the First Two Centuries CE." All three essays make the case, however, that the time frame for the examination of religious interaction at Sardis and Smyrna needs to be extended into the beginning of the fourth century CE. Indeed, this is what occurs in the subsequent essays that examine particular topics.

These three essays are complemented by Philip Harland's study of rivalries among voluntary associations in Sardis and Smyrna (chap. 5). While noting that there was a high degree of co-operation among associations, Harland gives attention to evidence that reveals associations competing for benefaction and membership. However, Harland also draws attention to the important notion of what he terms the "rhetoric of rivalry," which, in many cases, may not accurately reflect the actual situation. This becomes an important rubric for understanding the Jewish, Christian, and polytheist texts and examined in the subsequent essays, all of which eschew a simplistic understanding of the historical circumstances behind the rhetorical flourishes of the sources.

The second section of the book, "Indirect Contact among Jews and Christians in Sardis and Smyrna," examines in detail some aspects of the New Testament book of Revelation. This book, probably written somewhere between 90 and 135 CE, names among its intended audience seven Christian communities at different locales in Asia Minor, including Sardis and Smyrna. Thus, it provides us with one of the earliest references to Christian communities in these cities. At the same time, the book makes reference to other religious groups, both Jewish and polytheistic. The three essays in this section all explore the nature of the interaction among Christians, Jews, and polytheists reflected in the text. Tim Hegedus (chap. 6) demonstrates how astrological motifs are used in Revelation in a manner that maintains much of its traditional religious significance in polytheism. John Marshall's essay (chap. 7) similarly looks at astrological motifs in Revelation, showing how the Jewish integration of their patriarchal narratives with the zodiac is reflected in Revelation. Together these two essays show that, despite the "rhetoric of rivalry" found in the texts, the book of Revelation reveals a considerable amount of uncritical, if indirect, integration of the practices of Judaism and polytheism.

James Knight balances out this section with a study of the identity of the prostitute portrayed in Revelation 17. His study raises important hermeneutical questions about how one understands the cult of the goddess Roma in antiquity (chap. 8). Knight cogently argues that the common scholarly assumption that the worship of Roma was "just" political are mistaken, since there was no separation of religion and state in antiquity. Thus, the book of Revelation's critique of Roma worship was not only "religious rhetoric" but has embedded in it a critique of the empire itself.

"Interaction among Religious Groups at Sardis and Smyrna" is the third section of the book. The four essays in this section challenge the prevailing scholarly understanding of ancient texts that sees in the "rhetoric of rivalry" actual and direct conflict among Jews, Christians, and polytheists. These four essays are presented according to the chronology of the texts and artifacts that they treat. The first, by Steven Muir, examines how natural and human disasters in the second and third century provided opportunities for religious groups in Sardis and Smyrna to provide charity to others (chap. 9). This becomes a test case for examining Rodney Stark's controversial theory that Christianity grew exponentially because of its charitable work (1996). Muir concludes that while there is no evidence to contradict this claim, the evidence in support of it is not widespread at Sardis or Smyrna. For the most part, Christian charity, like that of the healing cult of Asclepius, focused on its own adherents.

Wayne McCready's close examination of the text of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, which is set in Smyrna, reveals that the "rhetoric of rivalry" therein is no more than one would expect from two sibling religious groups (chap. 10). Indeed, the literary production of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* has much more to do with the formation of a Christian identity distinct from Judaism. Thus, while "the Jews" are vilified in the text, this rhetoric tells us more about the need to assert Christian identity within Christian ranks than it reveals about actual Christian–Jewish conflict in the city of Smyrna. Reidar Aasgaard's treatment of Melito of Sardis (chap. 11) comes to a surprisingly similar conclusion. Looking at the works of the Christian bishop Melito, particularly his *Peri Pascha*, Aasgaard shows that the "rhetoric of rivalry" likely reflects Melito's sense that Christians need to assert for themselves a distinct self-identity—namely, his particular version of it—within their urban environment.

The final paper in this section moves from text to artifact by examining the physical evidence for the interactions among Jews, Christians, and polytheists in Sardis in the third to sixth centuries. Keir Hammer and Michele Murray (chap. 12) show that when one does not *a priori* assume a theory of religious conflict, it is possible to interpret the archaeological evidence from the Sardis synagogue and the Byzantine shops adjacent to it in

a way that shows coexistence rather than competition among the adherents of various religions.

The two essays in the final section, "Broadening the Context," set the volume within the larger Greco-Roman context by examining Jewish, Christian, and polytheist interactions in different locales, inside and outside Asia Minor. These essays not only function to fill in the context but also provide important points of comparison for the detailed studies of Sardis and Smyrna while raising important methodological issues.

Michele Murray (chap. 13) provides a description of religious interaction at the ancient city of Priene as a point of comparison for understanding Sardis and Smyrna. Although other comparative sites could have been selected, perhaps one of the five other sites mentioned in the book of Revelation (Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Philadelphia, and Laodicea), Priene is a fitting choice because "it may be that the second-century Sardian Jewish community resembled…the neighboring one in Priene" (Cohick 1999, 127). Given this similarity, perhaps the evidence from fourth-century Sardis for the location of a Christian domicile surrounded by Jewish shops and residences and backing onto the synagogue (see Hammer and Murray, chap. 12) reflects earlier interactions among the Jewish, Christian, and polytheist inhabitants of Sardis. More significant, from the methodological viewpoint, is Murray's demonstration that when one assumes a "conflict" model for religious interaction, it affects how archaeological and literary evidence is interpreted. Questioning the assumption of conflict when one religious group reuses the religious artifacts of another, Murray sounds a warning bell when we approach the study of religious rivalry.

Jack Lightstone's essay (chap. 14) provides a thick description of the nature of Roman urbanization, particularly in the eastern part of the empire (Palestine and adjacent areas), and its effect on Jewish and Christian communities across the empire. He gives due attention to the relevance of the transformations that took place during the Roman Empire for understanding inter- and intra-religious relations. Of particular importance is the challenge that Jewish and, especially, Christian groups eventually posed to the Romans' sense of a highly structured urban social map. Lightstone concludes with a call for any study of religious rivalries to pay due attention to the reality of Roman urbanization throughout antiquity—the very thing that the volume's studies of Sardis and Smyrna have done. Furthermore, undertaking a study of a specific point of comparison (Murray) and a broader analysis of the urban phenomenon in antiquity (Lightstone) not only sheds further light on Sardis and Smyrna, it also prepares the way for the next volume of essays arising out of the CSBS's religious rivalries seminar, which will focus on methodological issues explored during the nine-year duration of the seminar (Vaage 2005).

This volume's concluding essay, by Richard Ascough (chap. 15), attempts to draw together the conclusions of the essays around the rubric of religious coexistence, co-operation, competition, and conflict at Sardis and Smyrna. Ascough shows that, together, the essays reveal a considerable amount of coexistence and co-operation among Jews, Christians, and polytheists and a surprising lack of competition and conflict. What evidence there is for competition and conflict more often than not reflects inner-group conflict rather than inter-group conflict.

All of the essays in the volume are not only linked thematically but are substantially integrated through the use of cross-references that show how the arguments of individual essays interact with one another to form a cohesive study of religious rivalries at Sardis and Smyrna.

2

Jewish Communities in Sardis and Smyrna

Lloyd Gaston

Introduction

In approaching the question of Jewish communities in Sardis and Smyrna during the first two centuries CE, my first task was to try to find primary source material—literary, archaeological, or inscriptional. However, I could find very little within the given limits of place and time.[1] It was necessary then to colour outside the temporal lines. There is some secondary material, largely Christian literature, and it was a useful exercise in itself to evaluate what light it could cast on our subject. As a general rule, lack of evidence is usually supplemented by unwarranted assumptions, and I freely admit approaching the task fully warned by Tom Kraabel's "Six Questionable Assumptions" (Kraabel 1982, 445–64).

Jewish Communities in Sardis

I begin with the city of Sardis, where the evidence for "rivalry" is somewhat richer than in the city of Smyrna. Settlement of Jews in Sardis occurred at least as early as ca. 210 BCE when Antiochus III brought 2,000 Jewish families from Babylon to keep order in Phrygia and Lydia, whose capitol was Sardis.[2] Antiochus writes also that "they should…use their own laws. And when you have brought them to the places mentioned, you shall give each of them a place to build a home and land to cultivate and plant with vines" (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.150–51, LCL).

Very important for understanding the situation of Jews in various Asian cities is a series of decrees and letters supposedly collected and cited by Josephus. Unfortunately, their authenticity is questionable, and there is some corruption in the texts, whether deliberate or not.[3] I cite in full those concerning Sardis specifically:

Notes to chapter 2 start on page 254

1. Lucius Antonius, son of Marcus, proquaestor and propraetor, to the magistrates, council and people of Sardis, greeting. Jewish citizens (*politai*) of ours have come to me and pointed out that from the earliest times they have had an association (*synodos*) in accordance with their native laws and a place of their own (*topon idion*), in which they decide their affairs and controversies with one another; and upon their request that it be permitted to do these things, I decided that they might be maintained, and permitted them to do so. (*Ant*. 14.235, LCL)
2. Decree of the people of Sardis. "The following decree was passed by the council and people on the motion of the magistrates. Whereas the Jewish citizens (*politai*) living in our city have continually received many great privileges from the people and have now come before the council and the people and have pleaded that as their laws and freedom have been restored to them by the Roman Senate and people, they may, in accordance with their accepted customs, come together (*synagōntai*) and have a communal life (*politeuōntai*) and adjudicate suits among themselves, and that a place (*topos*) be given them in which they may gather together with their wives and children and offer their ancestral prayers and sacrifices to God,[4] it has therefore been decreed by the council and people that permission shall be given them to come together on stated days to do those things which are in accordance with their laws, and also that a place (*topos*) shall be set apart by the magistrates for them to build and inhabit, such as they may consider suitable for this purpose, and that the market-officials of the city shall be charged with the duty of having suitable food for them brought in." (*Ant*. 14.259–61, LCL)
3. Gaius Norbanus Flaccus, proconsul, to the magistrates and council of Sardis, greeting. Caesar has written to me, ordering that the Jews shall not be prevented from collecting sums of money, however great they may be, in accordance with their ancestral custom, and sending them up to Jerusalem. I have therefore written to you in order that you may know that Caesar and I wish this to be done. (*Ant*. 16.171)

If it is permitted to take these three texts at (almost) face value, we learn much about Jews living in Sardis.[5] First, some Jews who were Roman citizens, perhaps not from Sardis, reported that Jews living in Sardis had from earliest times (at least 210 BCE, and probably earlier) an "association" of their own, a voluntary association (Richardson 1996a). In addition, they also had their own "place" to meet, whether a separate building or a designated area in a public structure. They had their native laws and decided their own affairs. In other words, they formed an independent *politeuma* within the Greek city of Sardis.[6]

Second, the response of the people of Sardis was to confirm the situation of the Sardian Jews. They will continue to come together in their association or synagogue, to exercise their functions as a *politeuma* and to offer prayers and worship to God. They come together on Sabbaths and holidays ("stated days") and live according to their own laws.[7] Again, they have a "place," but here it is a place "set apart for them to build and inhabit," surely a building of some kind. Provision is made for them to have their own licensed market, presumably so that kosher food will be available. Finally, the collection of the temple tax is protected.

Jews in the cities of Asia, if I may generalize, seemed to be very much at home in those cities, having lived there for centuries (in the case of Sardis, at least). At the same time, they appeared to be faithful to the traditions of their ancestors. They lived and governed themselves according to their own laws and customs, including keeping the Sabbath and abstaining from prohibited food. They tried to keep all the biblical commandments that applied in their situation. What specifically these were we do not know, for we do not have a Diaspora Mishnah.[8] But they still remained loyal to the temple and Judea and contributed the temple tax.

While there were definitely Jews who were Roman citizens, it is doubtful that any were citizens of the Greek cities in which they lived before the end of the second century (Applebaum 1974, 440–44). When we hear that the decree of Sardis called the Jews there both citizens (*politoi*) and inhabitants (*katoikontes*) of the city, there seems to be a basic contradiction in terms. Either "citizens" is an interpolation, by Josephus or his sources, or the word is used imprecisely for members of a *politeuma*. One debated issue, which need not be resolved here, is the question raised by decrees other than those found in Sardis whether all Jews in Asia were exempt from military service or only those who were Roman citizens (Applebaum 1974, 458–60).

The curtain now closes for two-and-a-half centuries on the Jews of Sardis. We do not know how they survived the major earthquake of 17 CE, or whether or not their synagogue was rebuilt afterward. We do not know what they thought about the three great revolts, 66–70 and 132–35 in Judea and 115–17 in Egypt, Cyrenaica, and Cyprus, although we can assume that they did not participate, since there is no sign of Roman hostility to Asian Jews (Smallwood 1976, 356–57; Trebilco 1991, 32–33). Presumably, they paid the *fiscus Judaicus* like all other Jews in the empire. We can, however, extrapolate forwards and backwards into the middle, since the evidence of the decrees of the last century BCE is corroborated by the extraordinary evidence of the excavated synagogue from the third and fourth centuries CE.

The synagogue was converted from part of a large civic complex in the heart of the city, probably in the second half of the third century.[9] It was a large

building, with a capacity of over a thousand people, and it was richly decorated. A large marble table, probably used for the reading of the Torah, was supported by two (formerly Roman) eagles and flanked by two (formerly Lydian) lions. There are over eighty inscriptions on tablets, which had been attached to the walls, dealing with donations or vows (Kraabel 1992f, 229). Many donors call themselves "Sardinians," and at least eight are members of the city council (*bouleutēs*). There is also one former procurator, one count, and one official of the city archives. One refers to Samoe, "priest and teacher," probably more like Philo than a rabbi. The synagogue was never converted into a church but continued as the centre of Sardian Jewish life until the whole city was destroyed by the Sassanian armies in 616 CE.

It is doubtful whether Melito of Sardis can tell us very much at all about Jews in Sardis. Kraabel once thought he was able to present a vivid contrast between Melito's bitter attack and the powerful and prosperous Jewish community in their new synagogue (see Kraabel 1992c, 197–207).[10] But it now appears quite impossible to make Melito's sermon and the refurbishing of the civic building contemporary events.

There is no evidence that the Sardis Jews knew of Melito's wrath; indeed, later evidence indicates that Jews and Gentiles here were generally on better terms than Christian leaders like Melito might wish. The *Peri Pascha* does not mean a Jewish–Christian conflict in late second-century Sardis; there is no evidence from the Jewish side for that, and in addition, Jewish wealth and influence at Sardis in this period suggest Christian envy of the Jews from afar rather than an actual confrontation with them. There is no firm evidence that Sardis Jews were even aware of Melito, or that a direct hostility on their part provoked his attacks (Kraabel 1992e, 264).[11] Important as Melito is in the self-definition of the early church and his place in the development of Christian anti-Judaism,[12] he cannot be used as a source for Jews and Judaism in Sardis.

Jewish Communities in Smyrna

There is much less evidence of "rivalry" at Smyrna than there is for Sardis, although it is possible to uncover some traces. There certainly was rivalry between Christians and Jews in ancient Smyrna, if we can believe a classic work on the history of the city. In 1938 Cadoux published a lengthy and loving work on the city of his birth, in which he claims to know about "the bitter hatred of the Jews. There was a considerable Jewish community at Smyrna; and we have seen in the 'Apocalypse' of John evidence of their feelings toward the Christians" (Cadoux 1938, 348; cf. also 318, 378).

He also knows how their hatred contributed to the death of Polycarp: "Uncontrolled by the police and assisted by the degenerate Jews (who

showed their usual bitter hostility to the Christians), the crowd collected timber and faggots from the neighbouring workshops and baths" (Cadoux 1938, 361). Part of the reason for this hostility must lie in the (undocumented!) fact that the church at Smyrna "consisted largely of converted Jews" (Cadoux 1938, 319).

Such myths about ancient Diaspora Jews continue in later writers. A respected work published in 1986 claims that Revelation 2:9 refers to Jews who were actively persecuting Christians in Smyrna and suggests that indeed they were the cause of Christian poverty there (Hemer 1986, 66–68). That same author seems to find no contradiction when he says that ancient Diaspora Jews were "particularly unpopular in a Greek city, and the Jews in turn hated their pagan environment" and later that ancient Diaspora Jews had a "long-standing accommodation to surrounding pagan culture" (Hemer 1986, 151). We need to sort out the evidence and our assumptions more carefully than that.

I argued some years ago that those who say that they are Jews but are not (Revelation 2:9; 3:9) and those uncircumcised people who preach Judaism (Ignatius, *Phil.* 6.1) are Gentile Judaizers and not Jews at all. I will not repeat those arguments here (Gaston 1986a, 33–44). With respect to Jewish Christians in Smyrna, the only argument (as opposed to assertion) I have seen is based on Ignatius, *Smyrneans* 1.2: "his saints and believers, whether among the Jews or among the Gentiles in the one body of his church" (Thompson 1990, 126, 143).[13] But the phrase is part of a creedal formula and says nothing about the church in Smyrna specifically (Schoedel 1985, 220–24). Some of the Christian apocryphal Acts probably come from Asia Minor but, differing from the canonical Acts, contain no reference to Jews at all.

It is remarkable how widespread the idea has become among church historians that Jews were the instigators of the persecution of Christians in the ancient world,[14] when there is so little evidence to support the claim.[15] Since the only martyr Acts that mention Jews come from Smyrna, we need to look at them carefully to see what they can tell us about the Jews of Smyrna.[16] The *Martyrdom of Polycarp* begins by speaking of "blessed Polycarp who put a stop to the persecution by his own martyrdom as though he were putting a seal upon it. For practically everything that had gone before took place that the Lord might show us from heaven a witness in accordance with the Gospel. Just as the Lord did, he too waited that he might be delivered up" (1.1–2). It ends by saying, "He was not only a great teacher but also a conspicuous martyr, whose testimony, following the Gospel of Christ, everyone desires to imitate" (19.1). His martyrdom is then told in such a way as to show conformity to the pattern of Christ's passion in the Gospels (see Simon 1986, 122).

Many of the details confirm this parallel. Polycarp had his Gethsemane also outside the city but refused to escape, praying that God's will be done (7.1). He was arrested by a police captain named "Herod"(!),[17] having been betrayed by those of his own household, and destiny decreed that "those who betrayed him might receive the punishment of Judas" (6.2). The arresting party set out "as though against a brigand" (7.1; cf. Matthew 26:55). Polycarp was led back into the city riding on a donkey (8.1). The mob shouted for his death (12:2), and he was pierced in his side (16.1). Clearly, the martyr Polycarp died as a faithful follower of the martyr Jesus.

On the other hand, what is said of the Jews is most improbable. When the "mob of pagans and Jews" shout for his death, calling him "the destroyer of our gods," it seems the Jews are not so much part of history but added from the Gospels (12.2). When Polycarp was to be burned, "the mob swiftly collected logs and brushwood from workshops and baths, and the Jews (as is their custom) zealously helped them with this" (13.1); and yet this happened on the "great Sabbath" (8.1, 21). Much effort has gone into the identification of which Sabbath the Jews of Smyrna would call "great,"[18] but the designation simply comes from John 19:31 (it is found also in Pionius 2.1; 3.6). It "was at the suggestion and insistence of the Jewish people" that the governor was petitioned not to give up the body of Polycarp, but their reason is given as: "Otherwise…they may abandon the Crucified and begin to worship this man" (17:2). In my opinion, one cannot learn anything about Jews in Smyrna from the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.[19]

Some ninety-five years later came the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, also on the Great Sabbath, an event worth mentioning here because of the vivid retelling of the story and the vigorous defence of its authenticity by Fox (1986, 450–92). But the (mostly biblical) Jews appear only in Pionius's two impressive speeches (4–6; 12.4–14.16) and are not part of the story of the martyrdom at all. These martyrdom Acts then are a good example of Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric but do not inform us very much about Smyrnian Jews. Fox makes the interesting and somewhat romantic claim that the "Great Sabbath" refers to the coincidence of the city's Dionysia and Purim when the large crowd of "Greeks, Jews, and women" all were on holiday together and were free to attend Pionius's hearing. But it is not certain that the Jews of Asia Minor celebrated Purim at all in this period.[20] Although it has become traditional to speak of the Jews as instigating polytheists to persecute Christians, it seems that we shall have to add this "questionable assumption" to Kraabel's list. It did not happen and cannot be cited as evidence of rivalry.

We turn now to inscriptional evidence. One such piece, probably from the second century, includes among the donors *hoi pote Ioudaioi*, who gave 10,000 *drachmai* for the public good (*ISmyrna* 697; 124 CE). According to

Frend, this indicates "outright apostasy" (1965, 148), while according to Cadoux this refers to "erstwhile Jews, presumably polytheists who, after conversion to Judaism, had reverted to their former beliefs and wished to advertise the fact" (1938, 348). But it is much more natural to translate the phrase as "former Judeans," who had perhaps emigrated to Smyrna after the Bar Kochba troubles.[21] *Ioudaioi* is a political or ethnic category and only occasionally (in the case of converts) purely a religious one (see further Harland, chap. 5).

There are four Jewish inscriptions, to be sure from the third or fourth century, that give evidence for a synagogue (Goodenough 1953, 79–81). One refers to two presbyters, father and son, who donated seven gold coins for the pavement. One refers to "L. Lollius Justus, a scribe of the people in Smyrna." The most interesting provides the starting point for Bernadette Brooten's important *Women Leaders* (1982): "Rufina, a Jewess, head of the synagogue (*archisynagōgos*) built this tomb for her freed slaves and the slaves raised in her house. No one else has the right to bury anyone (here). If someone should dare to do, he or she will pay 1500 denars to the sacred treasury and 1000 denars to the Jewish people. A copy of this inscription has been placed in the (public) archives (*CIL* 741, translation in Brooten 1982, 5).

Here is a woman head of a synagogue, rich enough to own slaves and integrated enough into the community to have part of the fine paid to the Jewish people and part to the Smyrna treasury. Although we have no evidence for it, I assume that there was a synagogue in Smyrna also in the second century. I also assume that the Jewish community there was similar to that of other Asian cities.

There is one further matter that needs to be discussed about religious rivalry for Smyrna, that of competing missionary activity. The only possible evidence comes from the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, when he says, "I understand also that the Jews have been inviting some of you to their synagogues" (13.1). This shows that some Smyrnian Christians were interested in Judaism and that Smyrnian Jews were hospitable, but it does not necessarily refer to missionary activity at all. That Judaism was characterized by missionary zeal is one of Kraabel's "questionable assumptions," and recently McKnight (1991) and Goodman (1994) have argued persuasively that it was not (but see Feldman 1992, 1993a; cf. Carleton-Paget 1996).

Conclusion

In this brief overview of Jewish communities in Sardis and Smyrna in the first two centuries CE, I find nothing that could be called a "rivalry." Barclay has argued that Josephus' decrees show evidence of tension between Jews and Greek cities in Asia in the first century BCE (Barclay 1996, 276).

While he may be correct, and while there were major conflicts in Alexandria in the first century CE, one cannot say anything similar about the Jews in Asia in the first two centuries CE.[22] Particularly, the Sardis excavations show a large Jewish community living in peace with their polytheist neighbours and as far as we know also later with Christian neighbours.[23] They were at home there and continued to be at home as long as the city stood. At the same time, there is no evidence of syncretism or lack of loyalty to Torah or Temple or Judaism as they understood it. They felt no need to persecute Christians or to make proselytes of polytheists. In short, I do not believe that the Jews of Smyrna and Sardis were in competition with any of their neighbours. The best way to understand relations among Jews, Christians, and polytheists in antiquity is probably not through the perspective of "conflict theory" at all.[24]

3

Christian Communities in Sardis and Smyrna

Dietmar Neufeld

Introduction

While obtaining information about religious practices of Christians in the first two centuries of the Common Era in Smyrna and Sardis is difficult, enough exists to reconstruct how polytheists, Jews, and Christians there coexisted and co-operated during the first three centuries CE. The "conflict model" of defining relationships between these groups has buried within it assumptions of group antagonism and a struggle for survival vis-à-vis the other. The question, however, of religious rivalries and relationships must first be set into the much larger context of the realities of urban life and the characteristics of Sardis and Smyrna that made them "receptive" or conducive to Christianization. This will lead to more accurate descriptions of the nature of the relationships and rivalries among polytheists, Jews, and Christians in the cities of Sardis and Smyrna.

This essay will highlight some of the distinctive features of Christianity in Sardis and Smyrna and will raise questions of method related to the interests in this volume: "religious rivalries and the struggle for success." I have included (1) a description of some of the primary source material that is available for both Sardis and Smyrna, noting that most of what we do have that is of interest to us is from a later period, (2) a brief overview of the history and development of the Christian communities in Sardis and Smyrna, although once again, the task is difficult because of the paucity of material evidence from the first 200 years CE, and (3) a description of several cases, texts, and issues that might be investigated in greater detail.

The relationships and rivalries of Jews, Christians, and polytheists is complex and difficult to determine, complicated because of the self-imposed time constraints of the current book and because sources are

Notes to chapter 3 start on page 255

relatively scarce from the early period (Kraemer 1992, 311–329). For the most part, the question of *Adversus Judaeus* traditions has dominated the discussions. It is generally assumed that the polemic in Christian texts (Matthew, Mark, John, Apocalypse, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, Melito's *Peri Pascha*, etc.) reflects an external environment of mutual hostility and hatred. Recent scholarship, however, has questioned the idea of a direct line of development of anti-Judaism from the first century CE through to the fourth century CE. Instead, the sources are examined in their own contexts and on their own merits, with the result that a different picture emerges (Millar 1992; Olster 1994; Setzer 1994; Rutgers 1995; Lieu 1996, 4–19; Limor and Stroumsa 1996; Robbins 1996a; Lieu 1998; Cohn-Sherbok and Court 2001). Very different social conditions in the third century CE, provoked by invasions, economic crisis, and changes in organization of cities in various parts of the empire, shaped factors internal to Christianity and Judaism: thoughts, attitudes, literature, responses, composition, and structure. All of these factors must be considered as components within the larger Greco-Roman world.

Christian literature or discourse played a significant role in the second century in giving shape to the inner structures of Christianity. It was not a straight line of progression and perpetuation from the first through to the third century, but rather a mosaic of opinion and attitude, determined by the local context (Wilson 1995; Lieu 1996, 4–19). Cameron has demonstrated that many features of Christian discourse fitted the circumstances of society at large very well (1991, 14–46). Religious literature became the vehicle of competition and choice, set within a context of religious vitality and choice (Cohen 1996). Nowhere was this function of religious literature more visible than in the cities of Smyrna and Sardis. Situated in Asia Minor, they benefited from both a literary and cultural vibrancy while also being home to a variety of Christian groups and literature.

One of the great puzzles of the *Adversus Judaeus* tradition is that there is no solid evidence that any of this literature was answered or even provoked by Jews who had come into contact with early Christians. Evidence for Jewish polemic against Christianity is vaporous, apart from, perhaps, the occasional banning of books (prohibited *sifre minim*), occasional expulsion, and liturgical malediction (*Birkat ha-minim*; Kimmelman in Sanders 1980, 226–44; Wilson 1995, 169–95). The same appears to be true of polytheist attitudes that run from benign neglect to indifference, at least in the early period (MacMullen 1973; Fox 1986; Foss 1976, 27–34). The view of Judaism or polytheism meeting Christianity blow for blow well into the fourth century is difficult to maintain. Scholarship has sought to paint Judaism as well as polytheism, for that matter, as real and vital contenders with Christianity.

Part of the problem lies in trying to define Greco-Roman Judaism and polytheism with Christian criteria. For example, when it comes to Judaism, the question of mission and proselytizing is often considered. If Jews proselytized aggressively, their action might help to explain the hostility in some of the Christian texts. While there may be some evidence for a Jewish mission in the late fourth century, there is no firm evidence in the Jewish sources to indicate a Jewish mission to non-Jews in the early period (Feldman 1993b, Feldman and Reinhold 1996, 123–335; Goodman 1994; Stark 1996, 49–71). Why some Christians were preoccupied with Judaism and things Jewish and the hostility it appeared to generate might not necessarily find its answer in the traditional assumption of mutual animosity and antagonism. Instead, what emerges from our texts is a varied picture of Christianity. It is not until the end of the third century CE that we see the foreshadowing of what would in later centuries become a focused stance against Judaism (Lieu et al. 1992, 1996).

While there are numerous literary sources pertinent to Sardis and Smyrna, they do not give us the direct information needed to establish the nature of the relationships between Jews, Christians, and various Greco-Roman religious groups. These sources, however, do reveal many fascinating aspects of the life of a city and its people. Nevertheless, the textual sources usually used to reconstruct the rivalries and relationships of Jews, Christians, and polytheists must be set within a historical context that is chronological, geographical, and social, taking into account the commerce and economic development of the cities, the patronage system, wealth, upward mobility of polytheists, Jews, and Christians, industry, architecture (White 1990 and 1997), guilds, and politics. Important texts include Revelation (ca. 100 CE),[1] Ignatius' letter to the Smyrneans and to Polycarp (ca. 115),[2] Polycarp's letter to Philippi (ca. 115), the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (ca. 160),[3] Melito's *Peri Pascha* (ca. 150), and the *Martyrdom of Pionius and His Companions* (ca. 250).

Traditional questions of place, date, and authorship of these works, although important, are often driven by historiographical and theological interests that are idealized and harmonized. While such questions are important, we also require an awareness of both the archaeological and sociographic data available. Such information is crucial in our efforts to understand and describe the relationships among the inhabitants of Sardis and Smyrna. For example, it is important to note that rivalries and internal wrangling in Sardis and Smyrna appear to be normal features of urban life; Apollonius of Tyana wrote to Sardis, drawing attention to its internal struggles (Apollonius of Tyana, *Epistles* 75; 76). Setting the question of *rivalries* into a larger context of internal strife, city disturbances, and public disorder that erupted around issues of rights, privileges, and influence will help to nuance and clarify the nature of the conflict among polytheists, Jews, and Christians.

Christianity in Sardis

Of the authors who contribute to our knowledge of Sardis at the turn of the era, two are of paramount importance: Strabo and Nicolas of Damascus. Strabo gives us a detailed description of Sardis's geography, landmarks, and political history. During the first and second centuries CE, a number of other authors contribute important knowledge of Sardis (Pedley 1972, 3–5). The works pertinent to an understanding of the origins and development of the Christian community in Sardis and Smyrna include Revelation 2:8–11 and 3:1–6, Ignatius' *Letter to the Smyrneans*, Melito's *Peri Pascha*, and Eusebius' *Historiae ecclesiasticae*. On the basis of these sources it is possible to reconstruct a profile of Sardis.

The history and origins of the Christian community are difficult to determine, and the suggestions of an origin in a synagogue, in a Pauline mission, or in the unrecorded activity of the other evangelists are conjectural (Hansen 1968; Kraabel 1992f, 233). The name of the founder of the Christian community at Sardis may be preserved in a tradition of the Greek church. One of the Greek calendars names a certain Clement as the first Gentile to believe in Christ, later to become bishop of Sardis. This Clement is sometimes identified as one of Paul's fellow workers, mentioned in the Epistle to the Philippians (Phil 4:3; *Synaxarium* 621). His identity, however, has never been clearly established.

Whatever the origins of the church in Sardis, the writer of Revelation considers the church in Sardis important enough to mention it. In the last decade of the first century CE the writer of Revelation addresses the Christian community there as once having a reputation that it no longer deserves:

> And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars: "I know your works; you have a name of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God. Remember then what you received and heard; obey it, and repent. If you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you. Yet you have still a few persons in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes; they will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. If you conquer, you will be clothed like them in white robes, and I will not blot your name out of the book of life; I will confess your name before my Father and before his angels. (Revelation 3:1–5, NRSV)

The language seems to imply that certain members of the community had lapsed from an earlier stronger state, while others had not defiled their gar-

ments, i.e., they had not lapsed into polytheism or heterodoxy (Revelation 1:11, 3:1–6; Johnson 1961, 81–90).

By the middle of the second century CE the Christian community in Sardis appears to be flourishing, for it produced an apologist and writer, the bishop Melito, who presided during the time of Antonius Pius and Marcus Aurelius (Rescript of Antonius Pius, ca. 139 CE [Petzl 1990], Eusebius, *HE* 4.13.8, III–IV CE). While Melito was a prolific writer, only one of his works survives almost complete, the *Peri Pascha* (Foss 1976; Hall 1979; Wilson 1995). The following has been established about Melito and his community:

1. He is numbered with the disciples of Philip and John and the martyr bishop Polycarp of Smyrna as one of the "great luminaries" of the church in Asia Minor: "Melito the eunuch who lived entirely in the Holy Spirit and who lies in Sardis"—according to Polycrates of Ephesus (ca. 195 CE) as quoted by Eusebius (*HE* 5.24.8 [trans. by Williamson 1965]).
2. As bishop, Melito addressed an apology to the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (fragments in *HE* 4.26.5–11) in which for the first time it is argued that the empire should support the church because they began together in the time of Augustus, prospered when together, and thus belong together: "Our philosophy first grew among the barbarians, but its full flower came among our nations during the glorious reign of your ancestor Augustus; and became a good omen for your empire, since from that time the power of the Romans has grown mightily and magnificent" (*HE* 4.26.7). This apology may have been presented to Lucius Verus, who passed through Asia in 166 CE; a statue was erected in the Sardis gymnasium, and a Hebrew inscription may have been put up in his honour in the synagogue as well.
3. Melito was an accomplished orator, a man of fine oratorical genius (*elegans et declamatorium ingenium*—according to Tertullian (as quoted by Jerome in *Lives of Illustrious Men*, 24 [trans. NPNF]). His rhetoric resembles the Asian style of the second Sophistic (Wilson 1995, 241–57).
4. Melito is the first Christian known to have made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (*HE* 4.26.13). The purpose of the trip was to secure an accurate canon of the books of Jewish scriptures (Wilson 1995, 253).
5. Melito was a Quartodeciman: like many other Anatolian Christians of his time, he celebrated Easter on the day the Jewish people celebrated Passover (14 Nisan), no matter what day of the week it might be (other Christians, those in the west, celebrated Easter on the Sunday following Passover). He was probably a celibate and was noted for his prophetic powers (Wilson 1995, 241–57).

Melito's *Peri Pascha* is often regarded as the result of conflict between a large, well-established, and prosperous Jewish community and a small, somewhat lesser Christian community. Some would argue, however, that this projected image of a small and struggling Christian community is erroneous. Melito's rhetorical flair may in fact betray an established educational and social background not inferior to that of the Jewish contemporaries (Norris 1986; Taylor 1995; Lieu 1996, 207). Lieu writes, "The strength of Melito's rhetoric need not imply the strength of the Jewish community at the time. It is only scholarly imagination that makes Melito's major motivation the Jewish community of Sardis, vibrant, self-confident and influential, while the Christians struggled with poverty of members, poor self-image and insecurity" (1996, 228).[4] Melito's rhetoric is more about the desire to create reality than a response to reality.

To some extent the idea of the *Peri Pascha* as rhetoric is found in Wilson's excellent discussions of Melito. But privilege is nevertheless given to the historical reality of the piece as representing the tensions and animosities between the communities. While it is likely that the text reflects a certain historical reality of interaction between communities, it is Melito's own concerns, the logic of his arguments, and the traditions from which he draws, especially the Hebrew Bible, that helped to create and cast the terms within which he spoke. His rhetorical flourish helped to create a stereotyped image of the other. This representation or image then became reality for later generations. Such literature has a clear rhetorical function, a world-creating rhetoric, and the details serve to produce a stereotyped image of the other (Lieu et al. 1996, 5–13).[5]

Melito's *Peri Pascha* was written in relative isolation, from within a particular community, attempting both to encourage members of the community to stay and to discourage others from defecting. It was not intended directly to criticize the Jewish community of Sardis (Seager and Kraabel 1983, 179; Kraabel 1991, 237–55). A number of complex issues and forces collectively motivated him to shape the vehemence of his attack: Marcion, the Quartodeciman controversy, his Christological heritage, and scriptural tradition (Wilson 1995, 285–301). Kraabel suggests that "Melito's vituperation may be a backfire set to defend himself from the charge by fellow Christians that, as a Quartodeciman who followed the Jewish calendar annually in setting the date of Easter, he was *Judaizing*" (Kraabel 1992a, 348).

An indication of the size and vitality of the Christian community in Sardis is that it is said to have produced two martyrs in the persecutions of the third century: a priest from Sardis, executed at Satala at Lydia under Valerian (*Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, May 26, ca. 257) and Apollonius, about whom virtually nothing is known (*Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ca. III CE [?]).

While the names of the bishops of Sardis are recorded for the early period, few of them achieve distinction. The following is a list of the metropolitan bishops of Sardis from the first century CE through to fifth century CE (Germanos 1928; Laurent 1928; Foss 1976, 135–36):

Clement	I CE
The "Angel" of the Apocalypse	I CE
Melito	160–180 CE
Artemidorus	325 CE
Leontius	359 CE
Heortasius	360 CE
Candidus (Arian)	363 CE
Maeonius	431 CE
Florentius	448–451 CE
Aetherius	457 CE
Julianus	553 CE

The bishops of the fourth century CE were preoccupied with the controversies on the nature of Christ and the Trinity and, hence, are not helpful for understanding the early period.

Byzantine Sardis (early Byzantine, ca. 395–616 CE) with its shops and large synagogue provide good evidence that its inhabitants enjoyed a high standard of living. Restaurants, probably owned by Christians, have been excavated by the Harvard-Cornell Sardis Expedition. A plate decorated with a cross was discovered along with the presence of pig bones and shellfish, as well as a graffito on a shard showing a Latin cross and the name *Kyriak... (os)*. He may have been the restaurant owner. An ampulla with a Latin cross has been found. The residence/restaurant had a Latin cross with a *rho* top carved on a door jamb. A residence/wine shop with mussel shells in it has also been discovered and may have been owned by either Christians or polytheists (Crawford 1996, 17–18). The Byzantine shops on the main highway adjacent to the gymnasium signal an active commercial life. Archaeological evidence points to Jews, Christians, and polytheists living, moving, and working in close proximity and cooperatively, manufacturing and selling a large variety of goods, including metal tools, utensils, glass vessels, and jewellery (Foss 1974, 18; Crawford 1996, 38–70). Many individuals could also afford to set up dedicatory monuments and memorials in marble and engage in generous acts of benefaction.

One of the significant discoveries in Sardis is the synagogue, a very large building built in several phases from the third to the seventh centuries CE. The synagogue revealed approximately eighty inscriptions mainly having to do with donations of wealthy citizens and office-holders of some status—city council members, a count, a procurator, an assistant in the state

archives (Kraabel 1992f, 229). The first Jewish settlers in Sardis may have arrived shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. The book of Obadiah mentions exiles from Jerusalem who lived in *Sepharad*—the Semitic name for Sardis. By the first century CE they had become wealthy and influential with a place of worship (Josephus, *Ant*.14.235; 259–612; 16.171), with the right to send the temple tax to Jerusalem (Josephus, *Ant*. 16.171), and were assured the provision of ritually pure food (Josephus, *Ant*. 14.261).

A letter from the proconsul of Asia, Gaius Norbanus Flaccus, conveying the decision of the Caesar that the Jewish practice of collecting money and sending it to Jerusalem should not be hindered, seems to indicate the influence of the community (Pedley 1968, 212). On the basis of the decrees and the synagogue, Kraabel concludes (not uncontested) that the decrees are a sign "not of the community's need for protection, but of its prestige," and that the "Sardis synagogue reflects a self-confident Judaism, bold enough to appropriate polytheist shapes and symbols for itself," (Kraabel 1978b, 242–44). At Sardis, proximity of Jews to polytheist culture, rather than producing syncretism and capitulation to polytheism, produced clarity and the enjoyment of a Gentile culture (Kraabel 1978, 255).[6]

It also appears that Sardis was an intellectual centre of some importance in the fourth to fifth centuries CE. Rhetoric and philosophy flourished and are perhaps best exemplified by the *Lives of the Sophists* written around 400 by Eunapius. Chrysanthius appears to have been the founder of one such school in Sardis. He came from a family of senatorial rank. He studied Plato and Aristotle, the gods, Pythagoras, and Apollonius of Tyana, and eventually practised theurgy. In due time, he attracted the attention of the young Julian, who came to the throne in 361 CE. Chrysanthius was appointed by Julian to restore polytheism in Sardis, and he did that, not by persecuting Christians or building new temples, but by restoring existing temples (Eunapius, *Vitae Sophistarum* 503, ca. 375).

Tangible marks of early Christianity are difficult to trace because little or no archaeological remains survive. White (1997) points out that the followers of Jesus met in homes of members. He argues that recent studies show that the house church setting conditioned the nature of worship, assembly, and communal organization, as did its urban context: "The social location of the Pauline communities reflected the character and conditions of urban households and other private domestic activities" (White 1990, 4). The place in which the community met remained long unchanged from its basic domestic function, but within three centuries this was to change. These private houses were eventually renovated, in what White calls architectural adaptation, to become Christian house churches in the early period, approximately 240 CE. With time, in stark contrast to the loosely organized house church, the monumental church building arose. The one was ran-

dom and informal, the other hieratic and formal. From the fourth century CE onward, the basilica epitomized Christian architecture, and under the patronage of Constantine and his mother Helena Augusta, monumental church structures proliferated in the Roman Empire.

Christianity in Smyrna

The book of Revelation indicates the presence of a Christian community in Smyrna sometime before the end of the first century CE, but nothing is known of the origin of the Christian community there. In Revelation 2:8–10 we find these words:

> And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life: "I know your affliction and your poverty, even though you are rich. I know the slander on the part of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Beware, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison so that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have affliction. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life."

The mention of Jews and of the "synagogue of Satan" also indicates the presence of Jews in Smyrna at this time.

This Jewish presence in Smyrna is confirmed by a number of inscriptions. A famous inscription 123–24 CE, during the reign of Hadrian, refers to a contribution of 10,000 drachmae for some unknown public works project by *hoi pote Ioudaioi* (*CIJ* 2.742.29; *CIG* 3148). The phrase is sometimes translated as "former Jews," but Kraabel has argued that the phrase should be translated "people formerly of Judaea," and thus probably immigrants from Palestine (1982, 455). Many of the Christian inscriptions are dated to the fifth and sixth centuries CE and, hence, beyond the scope of this overview (Petzl 1982, 263–71).

During Ignatius's stay in Smyrna in the early second century CE he wrote four of his seven letters. From Troas, he wrote two letters to Smyrna, one to the church itself, and the other to its bishop, Polycarp. In these letters, Ignatius comments briefly on Jews and Judaism. In his letter to the Smyrneans he makes one brief mention of the Jews occurs in a formulaic expression of praise: "…for all ages, through his resurrection, for his saints and the believers, whether among the Jews, or among the heathen, in one body of his church" (*en Ioudaiois eite en ethnesin*; 7.1.2).[7] In his letters to the Philadelphians and Magnesians several passages are frequently taken to indicate the social relationships between Jews and Christians. He wrote to the church at Magnesia while staying at Smyrna, where he was visited by their bishop, two elders, and a deacon.

> *Magnesians* 10.1.3 reads, "For this cause let us be his disciples, and let us learn to lead Christian lives [*christianismos*]. For whoever is called by any name other than this is not of God.…It is monstrous to talk of Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism. For Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism [*ioudaismos*], but Judaism on Christianity."
>
> *Philadelphians* 6.1 reads, "But if anyone interpret Judaism to you do not listen to him; for it is better to hear Christianity from the circumcised than Judaism from the uncircumcised. But both of them, unless they speak of Jesus Christ, are to me tombstones and sepulchers."
>
> *Magnesians* 8.1–2 reads, "Be not led astray by strange doctines [*heterodoxia*] or by old fables which are profitless [*mutheuma*]. For if we are living until now according to Judaism, we confess that we have not received grace. For the divine prophets lived according to Jesus Christ. Therefore they were also persecuted, being inspired by his grace, to convince the disobedient that there is one God, who manifested himself through Jesus Christ his son, who is his Word proceeding from silence, who in all respects was well-pleasing to him that sent him."
>
> And *Magnesians* 9.1 reads, "If then those who walked in ancient customs came to a new hope, no longer living for the Sabbath [*sabbatizontes*], but for the Lord's Day, on which also our life sprang up through him and his death—though some deny him—and by this mystery we received faith, and for this reason also we suffer, that we may be found disciples of Jesus Christ our only teacher; if these things be so, how then shall we be able to live without him of whom even the prophets were disciples in the Spirit and to whom they looked forward as their teacher?"

These passages have caused a great deal of speculation about the identity of these uncircumcised interpreters of Judaism. A number of options have been examined without a consensus of opinion (Lieu 1996, 35). Some suggest that they are Gentile converts who have been attracted to Judaism. Others suggest they are God-worshippers who are imposing their Jewish practices on other Christians. Still others think that they are docetic teachers who have adopted Jewish themes. Ultimately, there is probably more rhetoric than reality in these passages. Nevertheless, the rhetoric not only clearly denigrates a system but also excludes it, because anyone who lives according to Judaism puts himself outside the compass of salvation that the Gospel offers. In the world of the text, it would appear that Ignatius pays little attention to the Jews as a group outside the Christian community. For him, the relationship between the two is necessary but is one that permits movement in one direction only—from Judaism to Christianity. For Ignatius, this one-way relationship hinges on the question of the place and interpretation of the Hebrew Bible—to whom do the scriptures belong?

For Ignatius, there is no need to understand the scriptures outside of a Christocentric perspective.

Thus, as Lieu points out, nothing can be concluded with any certainty about Christian–Jewish relations at that time from Ignatius's letters (1996, 70–79). Indeed, argues Lieu, Ignatius's letters are clearly driven by several concerns that shape the attitudes, manner of presentation, and content, against which the role of the Jews should be understood. Ignatius's intense preoccupation with his journey to Rome and impending death colours the letter and renders it opaque when it comes to answering questions of relationships and rivalries.

By the end of the second century CE the Christian community at Smyrna could boast of having a bishop who was eventually martyred. Polycarp's martyrdom and the appearance of Jews at dramatic points in the story are taken to illustrate the growing tension between the Christian community and the powerful local Jewish community. The text is often simplistically seen as an early example of anti-Semitism or as an example of the pervasive presence in second-century Asia Minor of Jews who were bent on persecuting early Christians (Lieu 1996, 94). In *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 12.2 a whole crowd of Gentiles and Jews (*hapan to plēthos ethnōn te kai Ioudaiōn*) with uncontrollable rage shout that Polycarp should be done away with. Traditionally this outbreak has been taken to demonstrate that the Jews played some historical role in early Christian persecution.

In *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 13.1, a mass of Smyrneans, Gentiles, and Jews are pictured boiling over with anger and shouting for Polycarp's life ("the crowds [*ochloi*] immediately gathering from the workshops and baths wood and firewood, with the Jews assisting at this particularly enthusiastically [*malista Ioudaiōn prothumōn*] as is their custom"). The crowds rush about seeking fuel for the pyre, with the author commenting that the "Jews as usual joining in with more enthusiasm than anyone" (Eusebius, *HE* 4.15.23).

In *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17.1–18.1 the Jews are once more pictured as eager and hostile. "And this with the Jews inciting and urging, who also kept watch, as we were about to take him from the fire. For they did not know that we would never be able to abandon the Christ. . . . When the centurion saw the contentiousness of the Jews that took place, he placed him in the midst and burnt him." This text in particular, along with Revelation 2:9 ("synagogue of Satan"), is understood by many scholars to demonstrate tensions between Jews and Christians in Smyrna.

A number of issues, however, have thrown into doubt this traditional assumption that these texts reflect an actual conflict and rivalry between Christians and Jews in Smyrna. Though Polycarp is thought to have been martyred in 155 (Eusebius, *HE* 4.14.8–4.16.3), the date of the literary text concerning the event is problematic. In two different contexts of the Poly-

carp narrative the text mentions the "great Sabbath" (*sabbatos megalos*) and the feast of the Passover (*Mart. Pol.* 8.1; 21.1; Lieu 1996, 70–79). Rather than see these two references simply as part of the theological thought world of the narrative, as does Conzelmann (1978, 41–58), or as indicative of Christian–Jewish conflict, one should understand them as reflecting a conflict about dates and calendars that takes place *within* the Christian community at the time of writing of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.[8]

An additional important early and celebrated martyr, according to Eusebius, was Pionius (died in 250 CE; Eusebius, *HE* 4.16.3). Historians and scholars doubt the text's authenticity and reliability, not least because it presents a textual challenge. The earliest Greek text dates ca. XII CE. Earlier versions appear in a variety of languages: Latin, Armenian, and Slavonic, each confirming the tone and detail of the Greek manuscript (Cadoux 1938, 374ff.; Fox 1986, 460). Fox argues, however, that the various texts, for the most part, match in detail and, if carefully analyzed, illustrate Pionius's views of polytheist culture, the great city of Smyrna, and its sophists and Jews (Fox 1986, 460–92).

The conflicts and rivalries during Pionius's time are contrived and artificially accentuated because of the Decian persecution and, thus, do not give us an accurate picture of what everyday relationships were like among Pionius, polytheists, and Jews. Pionius showed disdain for the learned polytheists, chastised the city for its vanity, warned the Jews not to gloat over the Christians who had apostacized. He pointed to the scriptures to show that many Jews had sinned of their own free will, that they had killed their prophets, that they had also murdered Christ. In a prison diary, he lamented the state of disarray of the church because of the quarrels and disputes within it and then once again turned his attention to the Jews. Quite significantly he pointed out that he had heard that the Jews were inviting some Christians into their synagogues. He attacked them for this practice, suggesting that they were using "crisis" and fear of death as a pretext to recruit. Apparently, the Jews believed that Christians would rather belong to the synagogue than eat "demonic" polytheist meat. Pionius was of the opinion that once in the Jewish community, Christians would be exposed to slander about Jesus and the Resurrection. In a counterattack, he argued that Christians must remember the history of the Jews; they killed Jesus and the prophets. He labelled them as "rulers of Sodom and the host of Gomorrah" (Fox 1986, 479). Fox concludes that here we are being treated to a rare glimpse of ongoing Jewish missionary interest, one that the Christians were no longer willing to tolerate.

Fox is of the opinion that Pionius's words fit the context at Smyrna only too well. While no synagogue has been found in Smyrna, inscriptional remains suggest a Jewish community of some size and influence. Accord-

ing to Fox, even as early as the 150s Jewish mobs and individuals had had a direct involvement in the death of Polycarp (Fox 1986, 481–82). One wonders whether Pionius's diary captures an actual state of affairs or whether his rhetoric gets away from him in much the same way as it does from Melito in his homily. It seems to me that the influence and social rank of a religion, Jewish or polytheist, in society need not necessarily imply the existence of animosity and conflict but may imply rather an attitude of benign indifference.

Indeed, the greater the rank, influence, and power of a community, the less the need to recognize the other. Hence, it is possible that the Christian community was not openly or maliciously harassed by its Jewish neighbours (MacLennan 1990, 107; Wilson 1995, 298).

To protect themselves, and to dissuade members of the Christian community from defecting to the dynamic and more attractive Jewish community, leaders of the Christian community erected elaborate, artificial rhetorical edifices (Melito is often regarded as the first poet of deicide). These rhetorical edifices of slander and opprobrium tell us more about the internal dynamics of establishing identity than they do about the establishment and existence of conflict (Gaston 1986a; Satran 1996; Limor and Stroumsa 1996). These writings, though arising within the shadow of a respectable Judaism, were not addressed to the Jews but to both polytheists and Christians.

Conclusion

In very few of the descriptions of Sardis and Smyrna offered to date in commentaries, monographs, books, and journal articles is much made of the economical, political, archaeological, architectural, and commercial enterprises, and numerous other factors that define daily life in large, prosperous urban centres. Generally, it is acknowledged that these cities were prosperous, powerful, and influential and that the decadence associated with power and wealth probably corrupted the churches in Sardis and Smyrna in some way (Caird 1984, 47–50). But there has been little investigation into how such urban realities specifically shaped the inhabitants, religious groups, and other social institutions. Studies are, however, beginning to appear that take seriously how a city's urban realities, its commerce, economy, and trade, determine how its inhabitants, communities, groups, and associations relate to each other, to the governing powers, and to institutions, religious or otherwise (Kraybill 1996).

A contextual study ("thick" description; Geertz 1973, 3–30) of both Smyrna and Sardis in terms of conflicts, economics, the military, political and religious conditions, and special relationships nuances the nature of the

rivalries and relationships between Christians, polytheists, and Jews. The urban realities of Sardis and Smyrna are read as kinds of texts for clues to these issues (MacLennan 1990, 17; Satran 1996, 57–58). The available archaeological evidence, literature from the cities, ancient writings about the cities, and descriptions of special places such as libraries, graves, buildings, and synagogues in the cities of Sardis and Smyrna, reveal that the reasons for rivalries or cooperation were complex and invariably related to difficult urban problems (Foss 1976; Pedley 1972).

The category of *Adversus Judaeus* is problematic because there are many assumptions about rivalries and relationships implicit within it. The interaction of Jews and Christians should not be seen in isolation but as part of a vital religious life and activity in Asia Minor. Epigraphic conventions and formulae indicate that there was far more interaction of an amicable kind between Jews, Christians, and polytheists than the literary sources would lead us to expect. Lieu argues that as late as the sermons of Chrysostom, *Against the Jews*, ordinary church members thought it quite acceptable to attend a synagogue service, to join in the celebration of Jewish festivities, and to regard the synagogue as a sacred place in which to take oaths (Lieu 1996, 24; Mitchell 1993, 40–51). Moreover, it would be beneficial to use the categories of *image* and *reality* in the way Lieu has done when analyzing Melito, Polycarp, and other writers.

The conflict often posited between Jews and Christians is implicitly based on the assumption that Jews from the early period were preoccupied with polytheists and Christians, actively seeking to convert them for fear of being converted themselves. Moreover, a “conflict model” has encouraged the perception that Christian documents reveal a climate of hostility, competition, and conflict between Christianity and a Judaism that had not lost its combativeness and dynamism (Taylor 1995; Seager and Kraabel 1983, 178). As pointed out, some regard Melito’s *Peri Pascha* as indicative of the social relations between Christians and Jews in the city of Sardis during the second century (Johnson 1961; Frend 1984; Kraabel 1992f). While the documents are polemical, their tone and content need not necessarily imply the existence of external conflict. The hostile tone was also the result of the dynamics of internal debate relative to the group and not only the result of open, mutual hostility between the Christians and Jews. In the words of Gaston, the rivalries and debates between Christians and Jews “arise out of an inner-Christian theological debate rather than out of rivalry with a living Judaism” (Gaston 1986b, 163; see also Gaston’s essay in this volume).

To view this literature, however, as belonging mainly to the Christian discourse of self-definition would be misleading. Such a model is too static, for it does not take into consideration the dynamic character of religious identity in the Greco-Roman world. In order for Christianity to construct

an identity, it constructed the identity of "the other," of Judaism and of polytheism (Lieu 1996, 1). This literature, at its heart, is not about Judaism per se but about those who articulated those views. In giving expression to them, an image was created that was drawn from a particular social, cultural, and religious milieu. Jews and polytheists were presented in particular ways by particular authors in particular contexts. Literary presentations of "the other," therefore, cannot be taken to accurately reflect or mirror the external reality from which they arose. Needs that were both internal and external to the literature itself shaped the presentation of the image of the other, which, though arising out of the reality of Jews and polytheists in Sardis and Smyrna, did not directly address the situation implied.