Art and Judaism in the Greco–Roman World: Toward a New Jewish Archaeology explores the Jewish experience with art from the Hellenistic era through the rise of Islam. It starts from the premise that Jewish art in antiquity was a “minority” or “ethnic” art and surveys ways that Jews fully participated in, transformed, and at times rejected the art of their general environment. Art and Judaism focuses on the politics of identity in the Greco–Roman world, even as it discusses ways that modern identity issues have sometimes distorted and at other times refined scholarly discussion of ancient Jewish material culture. Art and Judaism, the first historical monograph on ancient Jewish art in the English language in fifty years, evaluates earlier scholarship as it sets out in new directions. Placing literary sources in careful dialogue with archaeological discoveries, this “New Jewish Archaeology” is an important contribution to Judaic studies, religious studies, art history, and classics.

Steven Fine is Jewish Foundation Professor of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati, where he specializes in the history of Judaism during the Greco–Roman period. His particular interest is the relationship between ancient Jewish literature (particularly rabbinic literature) and archaeology and art.
ART AND JUDAISM IN THE
GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

TOWARD A NEW JEWISH ARCHAEOLOGY

STEVEN FINE
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For Leah

A lamp shines on the holy menorah,
and a beautiful face on an upright figure.

Ben Sirah 26
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In deference to readers from numerous disciplines who might use this volume, abbreviations have been kept to a bare minimum.


b. *Babylonian Talmud*.


m. *Mishnah*.


ABBREVIATIONS

OCD  

OENEA  

t.  
Tosefta. Unless otherwise noted, ed. S. Lieberman (New York and Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992) is cited through tractate Baba Batta, ed. M. S. Zuckermandel (Jerusalem: Wahrman, 1970) is cited from Sanhedrin through Uqtsin.

y.  
Jerusalem (or Palestinian) Talmud.
PREFACE

On a sunny January afternoon in the year 2000, I boarded a white tram for the descent from the elegantly situated J. Paul Getty Center above Los Angeles to Sepulveda Canyon below. My mind was racing. I had just met with Catherine Soussloff, editor of Jewish Identity in Modern Art History (1999),1 and Margaret Olin, whose The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art2 was nearing completion. Both were then Fellows at the Getty. It was an eventful lunch. Soussloff and Olin were studying the difficult attitude of modern scholarship toward Jewish visuality. I, by contrast, had lived it. They researched the giants of Jewish art scholarship, whereas I had studied with some of them, met others late in their lives, or known their students. They articulated the disdain toward this material in much of the scholarly discourse, whereas as a young student I had been stung by the arrogance of scholars who “knew” that Jewish art was inferior – or even nonexistent. This situation had so perplexed me that after completing my M.A. in art history in 1984, I left this discipline behind to try my luck in the study of ancient Judaism – where years later I realized that this attitude had also left its mark. Taking my leave of Olin and Soussloff and energized by their postmodern perspective, I decided that the time was finally right to write the volume that you hold in your hands – a project for which I had been preparing myself since my first visit to Israel as a high school student. Since those days during the mid-1970s, I have worked to gain some of the skills necessary to interpret Jewish history, rabbinic literature, the history of art, and the history of religions. More recently, I have focused on developing some of the professional maturity and sophistication necessary to integrate these disciplines.3

Before presenting the results of this study, I am pleased to thank all those who have supported this project. I thank the Society of Biblical Literature for support of my visit to study Jewish remains in Rome and vicinity and Robert O. Freedman of Baltimore Hebrew University for my sabbatical in 2001–2, which I spent in Israel. The Charles Phelps Taft Memorial Fund at the University of Cincinnati awarded me a Faculty Research Fellowship for study in Israel during the summer of 2004 that allowed for some last-minute tuning of this manuscript. Libraries, museums, and archives have been extremely generous with their time and resources. In Baltimore I thank the Joseph Meyerhoff Library of Baltimore Hebrew University, the Milton S. Eisenhower Library at Johns Hopkins University, and the library of the Walters Art Museum. Israeli institutions include the A-B Institute of Samaritan Studies, the Central Zionist Archive, the Hebrew University Archives, Genazim: The Archives of the Hebrew Writers’ Association in Israel, the Hebrew University Institute of Archaeology Library and Slide Library, the Israel Antiquities Authority Archives, the Israel Exploration Society, the Israel Film
PREFACE

Archive–Jerusalem Cinematheque, the Israel Museum, the Israel State Archives, the Jewish National and University Library, the Shalom Hartman Institute, the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive, and the Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi Institute Library. In Cincinnati, I am most grateful to the University of Cincinnati Library System, the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion’s Klau Library, the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, and the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. I also thank the Semitic Museum at Harvard University, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and the Palestine Exploration Fund in London for their assistance. This volume was published with the help of the Charles Phelps Taft Memorial Fund of the University of Cincinnati.

My students in Baltimore, Jerusalem, and Cincinnati have greatly contributed to this volume. I especially thank Bonnie Gracer, Sara Lewis, Heather Murphy, J. Renee Dunnagan, Gerdy Trachtman, Derika Wellington, and Libby White for their challenges and insights. More than I can recount, colleagues, friends, and teachers near and far have helped to make this a better book. I particularly thank Dan Barag, Albert Baumgarten, Joseph Baumgarten, George Berlin, John Brolley, Isaiah Gafni, Stephen A. Kaufman, Lee I. Levine, Eric M. Meyers, Gila Naveh, Jacob Neusner, Benyamim Tsedaka, Steven M. Wasserstrom, and Anthony D. York for their assistance at various stages. Steven Bowman, David Ellenson, Louis Feldman, Elka Klein, Frederic Krome, Ruth Langer, Stuart S. Miller, Rachel Neu, Margaret Olin, Tesa Rajak, Richard S. Sarason, Jonathan D. Sarna, and the late Joseph Guttman read and commented on specific chapters, adding much to my process. Mark Chancey, Jat Elner, Yaacov M. Moses, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Ziony Zevit read the entire manuscript, for which I am especially grateful. Andrew Beck and his staff at Cambridge and Eleanor Umali and the people of Techbooks have made the final stages of this project most pleasant, for which I owe them much. J. Renee Dunnagan prepared the Index of Primary Sources. I would be remiss if I were not to thank my teachers, many of whose footprints may be felt throughout this volume. I particularly thank Yeal E. Schwartz, Richard D. Hecht, Bezalel Narkiss, Dov Noi, Dov Berkowitz, Selma Holo, Pratapaditya Pal, Bruce Zuckerman, Daniel Landes, Elieser Slomovic, Arie Strikovsky, Lee I. Levine, Avigdor Shinan, and Lawrence H. Schiffman, and remember the late Stephen S. Kayser, Amos Funkenstein, and Menahem Stern.

Most of all, I thank my wife, Leah Bierman Fine, for her loving and constant support, for her unwavering concern for all that I find exciting – and for pushing me to keep my writing “interesting.” The reader will decide if I have succeeded in this task. Our elder son, Elisha Nir Fine, now thirteen, is my tireless travel companion, discussion partner, and sometimes research assistant. The contribution of our preschooler, Yaakov Meir Fine, to this project resides in his ability to effortlessly interrupt my deepest concentration with a giggle and with a glimmer of his shining eyes to teach me what is really important. Leah, Elisha, and Koby are my constant reminders that human beings, created in the image of the Divine, are the only true “Jewish symbols.”

Jerusalem, Israel
Tammuz, 5764
July 2004

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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND TRANSLATION