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The War of Images: An Artistic Approach to the Parting of the Ways

Kristin Zavislak, '09
Illinois Wesleyan University

THE WAR OF IMAGES: AN ARTISTIC APPROACH TO THE PARTING OF THE WAYS
BY KRISTIN ZAVISLAK

I. ABSTRACT

The "parting of the ways" did not occur in one isolated, climactic event; it was a slow and gradual process. When exactly the split between Judaism and Christianity was completed is a topic scholars still disagree on today. To locate the date that it happened, most rely on the scriptures and Christian historical accounts; because very little Jewish writing from the second and third centuries survives, Jewish opinion on the subject is left out entirely. Through an examination of the earliest examples of 'Jewish' and 'Christian' art, on the walls of the Christian catacombs and the buildings found at Dura-Europos, I will clarify the reasons as to when and why the split occurred. In particular, I will focus on how one motif, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, is interpreted by both Christian and Jewish artists and used within their most private spaces of worship to express their religious identities. In this paper I will argue that the threat of paganism, intensified by the expanding Roman Empire, brought about the need for Jewish art, and that the need to unite in a "war of images" against polytheism ultimately kept the "ways" together for longer than most historians postulate.

II. INTRODUCTION

Scholars disagree as to when the split between Christianity and Judaism became complete. Most say it happened some time shortly after 70 CE, when the Jewish Temple, a central component in defining Jewish identity was destroyed. Others say it was in the late first to early second century, when the first New Testament scriptures were being added to the Christian canon. There is only one matter on which most scholars agree—that Christianity began as a sect of Judaism before it came to form its own, separate religion. Shaye Cohen defines a sect as "A small organized group which separates itself from a larger religious body and asserts that it alone embodies the ideals of the larger group because it alone understands God's will."[1]

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[1] Cohen, Shaye J.D., *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah II* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 241.

Although a sect may have some different religious ideas, its members are essentially still tied to the core elements of the parent religion from which the sect developed. A sect must transform enough to have its own, distinct modes of expression to be considered a separate religious community: scripture, a building of worship, rituals, and laws.[2] In addition to these four, I propose that one more must be added—art. Art is the perfect medium for the expression of identity, both for the literate and the non-literate; it has the power to carry multiple meanings. To examine the earliest examples of Jewish and Christian art, and to locate a date when the split occurred, I will focus on Dura-Europos and the Roman catacombs. Representations of the "Sacrifice of Isaac"[3] found at Dura-Europos and the Catacombs deliberately alluded to and made iconographic comparisons with, the pagan rituals that the Jewish scriptures spoke out so fervently against.

Paganism,[4] not internal sectarianism, was the biggest competition for Judaism in the first three centuries CE; Jewish art arose as a medium, after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, for proselytizing gentiles of Rome and the Diaspora to become part of the Jewish community. Therefore, Jewish art not only was intended to inwardly articulate and affirm Jewish identity, it was also directed outwardly against paganism and sought to represent it as a false and naïve faith. I argue that as long as Christianity and Judaism were united artistically, they were united religiously. It was not until paganism and its leaders were rooted out, and monotheism made the official religion of the Empire, that Christianity was able to truly assert itself as fundamentally

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[2] Richard Bauckham, "The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why," *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993).
[3] *Genesis* 22
[4] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 347. A vague term traditionally used to describe polytheistic religions that worshiped idols meant to physically represent their Gods

different from Judaism. This occurred when Constantine came to power and made

unifying the religion his primary objective.

III. MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.[5]

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, only two major sects of Second

Temple Judaism survived: one that would eventually become Rabbinic Judaism and one

that would transform into a separate religion, Christianity.[6] Without a doubt, these two

religions grew out of the same cultural milieu, but exactly when and how Christianity

became its own distinct religion has been a matter of debate among both theologians and

historians for over a century.

The Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and

Judaism was held at the University of Durham (1989). At this symposium, twelve

religious studies scholars delivered papers aimed at answering the question of "how

Christianity, instead of remaining a mere form of Judaism…asserted itself as a separate,

independent principle, broke loose from it, and took its stand as a new enfranchised form

of religious thought and life, essentially different from all the national peculiarities of

Judaism."[7] James D.G. Dunn compiled all of their essays into a single book, *Jews and*

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[5] Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" in *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).
[6] Gabriele Boccaccini, *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 B.C.E. To 200 C.E.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 18-21. This statement is based on Boccaccini's influential model which proposes that out of the diversity of pre-70 Jewish sectarianism, two forms of Judaism survived.
[7] James D. G. Dunn, *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 367-368.

Christians: The Parting of the Ways (A.D. 70 to 135). From this collection of research papers he identified five conclusive points: (1) The parting of the ways was a long process influenced by multiple factors, (2) The 'parting of the ways' is the best model to conceptualize the separation of Christianity and Judaism, (3) This separation began sometime around 70 CE and was complete by 135 CE, (4) Christian claims in regard to Jesus were the biggest factor in the parting of the ways, (5) It is still not possible to say for certain at what point the claims that were affirmed by Christians about Jesus made their religious beliefs too intolerable to contain within *Common Judaism.*[8] Of these five, I agree with all except number three, the assumption that the split was complete by the mid-second century CE. Instead, I propose that, because the art of the Jews and "Christians" living in both Dura-Europos and Rome reflects that early "Christians" were still fundamentally Jewish, the ways were not parted by the mid-third century CE. It wasn't until Constantine came to power and made Christianity the official religion of the Empire, thus allowing for the creation of the first purely Christian art, that the religion was able to assert its independence from Judaism. Evidence in support of this claim will be addressed in the Dura-Europos and Catacomb sections of this essay.

After many years of biased and prejudiced research and flawed conceptual models, much progress has been made by scholars in understanding the 'parting of the ways', but there is still no consensus on what is the most appropriate way to

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[8] Richard Bauckham, "The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why," *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993): 139. *Common Judaism* is defined by Bauckham as what all Jews "concretely and emotively shared…what gave them their own ethnic-religious identity as Jews"— the temple, the torah, monotheism, and election.

conceptualize the phenomenon.[9] The "Y-Junction," first proposed by Boccaccini, is a model that demonstrates how Christianity and Judaism eventually came to form separate religions, and imagines the parting of the ways as two paths branching off from a single, common road.[10] He calls, this single road *Common Judaism*, or the Judaism that is characterized by the similar modes of belief, worship and tradition that had been practiced among Jews for centuries before the Maccabean revolt.[11] Although imperfect, the "Y-junction" model is slightly more plausible than the "T-junction" model, which was proposed by earlier scholars such as Harnack, who believed that Christianity stripped Judaism of everything, severed all ties with its parent religion, and eventually replaced the religion completely. In *The Expansion of Christianity*, he writes, "By their rejection of Jesus, the Jewish people disowned their calling and dealt the death blow to their own existence."[12] In his mind, the Christians took the place of the Jews and the Jews have not existed since. Thankfully, such radical accusations of post-Dura, twentieth century German scholarship have long since been retired in favor of the more contemporary perspectives offered by such historians as Judith Lieu, Richard Bauckham, James D.G. Dunn, and P.S. Alexander.

According to Judith Lieu, the 'parting of the ways' as a conceptual model really has no historical basis, but is rather a theological construct used to explain the changing relationship between Judaism and Christianity that is completely subject to one's point of view. She says:

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[9] A. Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (trans. J Moffatt; London: Williams & Norgate, 1904-1905), 81.
[10] Gabriele Boccaccini, 18-21.
[11] Many say that the Maccabean revolt was the catalyst for not only Rabbinic Judaism, but also for Christianity. Out of the revolt came a period of political, social, and religious autonomy for the people of Judea. There also arose sectarianism—the Pharisees (eventually Rabbinic Judaism), the Essenes, Sudducees, Samaritans, Christians, etc.
[12] A. Harnack, 81.

The question the model seeks to answer is how to understand an early first century in which we find Judaism and, within it, a charismatic preacher with a band of followers, and a later period (at least, let us agree, by the time of Constantine) in which Judaism and Christianity are recognizable as two separate and independent systems: a historical datum.[13]

But, according to Lieu, the present "Y-Junction" model, used by almost all historians to explain the split, fails to take into account the fact that the relationship between Judaism and Christianity was understood differently by all who were involved. The individual social and political difficulties faced by the Jews and Christians affected how each group perceived itself, the "split," and how they related to one another after.

Even this point is unclear, and can be deceiving. "Jews" and "Christians" should not be spoken of as if they were two clearly defined, separate and distinct groups of people when they initially split. There was no "coherent and uniform development within or between" Christianity and Judaism in the first three centuries CE; the problem with the model is that "it operates essentially with the abstract or universal conception of each religion…when what we know about is the specific and local."[14] Lieu points out that when we speak of Judaism and Christianity, we often fail to recognize that there never was unity among all the followers. Jews of the Diaspora dealt with the split and were affected differently than the Jews living in Jerusalem.

Philip S. Alexander identifies another problem with the "Y-junction" as a model to explain the parting of the ways. This problem is a group of 'undecided' people claiming to be part of both religious communities, continuing to practice most aspects of the Jewish faith, while simultaneously believing in the resurrection of Jesus: Jewish-Christians. Alexander notes that the existence of Jewish-Christianity complicates the

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[13] Judith Lieu, "The Parting of the Ways: Historical Reality or Theological Construct," *JSNT* 56 (1994): 108.
[14] Judith Lieu, 108.

'parting of the ways' model by continuing "to represent Christianity [as distinct] within the Jewish community even after substantial parts of the Church had become gentile. It blurred the boundaries and retarded the final separation."[15] Instead of the "Y-junction," Alexander proposes that we visualize the 'parting of the ways' as two connected circles, which were once one, slowly moving away from one another until they finally formed two completely "self-contained" and isolated circles.[16]

For Lieu and Alexander there are many faces of Judaism, and many faces of Christianity, all of which make it impossible to pin point a single, definitive date for when one religion became two. Instead, they imagine the 'parting of the ways' as a process that took many years to occur. There was no sudden break caused by one pivotal event, it was rather a slow and gradual process that began shortly after the destruction of the temple and was complete by the mid-second century CE.

Like Lieu, Richard Bauckham refutes the popular theories used to explain the 'parting of the ways' and poses another, one that blends the theories of Dunn and E.P. Sanders.[17] Rather than viewing the disunity of pre-70 Judaism as a time of "many Judaisms," and focusing on what the various sects differed on, he focuses on what they had in common.[18] This commonality is what, in the end, kept Judaism unified and

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[15] P.S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D.G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 3.

[16] P.S. Alexander, 2. Alexander's separating circles theory.

[17] Richard Bauckham, 139. E.P. Sanders' and James D.G. Dunn were among the first to identify the common denominators of Judaism (temple, torah, monotheism, election), but it was Sanders who first identified the temple as being the most crucial element of 'common Judaism.'

[18] Richard Bauckham,135-138. The main problems Bauckham identifies with the "multiple Judaisms" theory are (a) "It encourages one to thing of the varieties of Second Temple Judaism as rather like Christian denominations;" (b) Just because they may interpret the texts differently doesn't mean Jews can't coexist in the same, unified religious community because, after all, they are still using the same texts; (c) "The talk of many Judaisms obscures the distinction between variety and separation or schism" (the differences between Pharisees and Sadducees are not the same as those between Jews and Samaritans); (d) "the model of many

allowed Christianity to break off. He says, *Common Judaism* "makes the parting of the ways a real issue…Sanders' model makes it meaningful to ask what could exclude a group of Jews from this common Judaism, in the eyes of other Jews."[19]

To Bauckham, the answers to all the questions posed by the 'parting of the ways' lie in turning one's complete attention to the Temple. Borrowing from James D.G. Dunn's theory, he believes that "Christians…inherited the same common heritage (what Dunn calls 'the four pillars of Judaism') in their own way, but did so in such a distinctive way that other Jews saw it not as interpretation but as [complete] denial [of the Jewish faith]."[20] These four pillars of common identity in Jewish belief that were 'inherited' by the Christians are (1) monotheism, (2) election, (3) Torah or law, and (4) the Temple. In "The Parting of the Ways" Bauckham writes, "The Christian reinterpretation of one of the 'four pillars' of Judaism (the temple) made possible the Christian reinterpretation of the three other pillars (election, torah, and monotheism) in ways which were in the end decisive to the parting of the ways."[21]

Through this reinterpretation, Christians took what all Jews had in common and changed it, making it their own, ultimately "unrecognizable" and "un-Jewish" to those still maintaining their Jewish identities in *Common Judaism*.[22] According to Bauckham, the one thing that that could exclude the Christians and divide them from their Jewish roots was their differing perspectives concerning the sanctity of the temple.

Judaisms…makes it impossible to trace any roots of the parting of the ways before 70, in case there may be such roots."
[19] Richard Bauckham, 139.
[20] Richard Bauckham, 138.
[21] Richard Bauckham, 148.
[22] Richard Bauckham, 142.

Because the temple had held the Ark of the Covenant, it was believed to be the one true place where God resided.[23] When it was destroyed in 70 CE, the central concern for Jews became how they could access God and worship according to Jewish Law, if they did not have a place to offer sacrifices. Disagreement over what was to be done about the Temple in the aftermath of the Jewish War was the chief argument amongst the different sects of Judaism.[24] For Bauckham, Christianity began as one of these sects.

For Christians, the destruction of the Temple meant redefining the Temple. Rather than a physical building, Christians re-conceptualized the "temple" as the community, and eventually considered the early Jerusalem church to be the "new, eschatological temple of God."[25] Evidence of this view can be seen in Hebrews 9:

> Now the first covenant had regulations for worship and also an earthly sanctuary. A tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the lamp-stand, the table and the consecrated bread; this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden altar of incense and the gold-covered ark of the covenant…only the high priest entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance. The Holy Spirit was showing by this that the way into the Most Holy place had not yet been disclosed as long as the first tabernacle was still standing…When Christ came as high priest…he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation.[26]

Viewing their Church as the new temple may have been enough to set Christian ideology apart from Jewish thought enough for the religions to go their separate ways. After all, the followers of common Judaism did not move on to build synagogues immediately; many tried desperately to have the Temple rebuilt at first, as is evidenced by the Bar Kokhba revolt.[27]

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[23] Richard Bauckham, 148.
[24] Richard Bauckham, 148.
[25] Richard Bauckham, 143.
[26] Hebrews 9:1-11.
[27] Richard Bauckham, 146. He writes that the Christians' "non-participation in the Bar Kokhba revolt probably sealed their exclusion from common Judaism and removed the rabbis' main rivals for dominance

When the second Jewish Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 CE, the ways did not just part in one isolated climactic event; it was a long process influenced by multiple social, cultural, geographical, and political factors. James D.G. Dunn agrees. To him, "we must beware of thinking of a clear or single 'trajectory' for either Christianity or Judaism; and we should also avoid using imagery which necessarily implies and ever widening gap between Christianity and Judaism…[but] 'Christianity' *did* emerge from a Jewish matrix, and 'Christianity' and 'Judaism' did become separate and distinct."[28] Therefore, he says the most appropriate way to imagine the break between Christianity and Judaism is as "The Parting of the Ways."

Although the Temple was central to Jewish identity, it was not everything. For some scholars, the most important indicator for the official split of Christianity from Judaism is the Christians' writing of their own scriptures and the alterations they made to the Hebrew Bible. L.M. McDonald writes, "The literature that was held to be sacred and authoritative in the pre-70 CE Judaism of Palestine, especially in Pharisaism, was adopted by early Christianity as its sacred literature," but the canon was by no means fixed at this point;[29] "Israel's tripartite canon[30] was only *beginning* to close when the Evangelists were writing their Gospels, that is, at the time when Christianity had

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in Palestinian Judaism." But many Jews didn't participate in the revolt, especially those in the Diaspora. The ones who did were the ones who lived in Jerusalem and were probably part of the Pharisee sect.
[28] James D.G. Dunn, 367.
[29] Lee M. McDonald, "The Emergence of a Three-Part Canon," in *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 30.
[30] The Hebrew Canon is traditionally broken up into three parts: The Torah, The Prophets, and the Writings. Scholars tend to agree that the Torah was the first part to become fixed into the canon and unanimously accepted by Jews as a group of texts that were both sacred and authoritative. According to H.E. Ryle, the Torah was considered scripture no later than 400 BCE, recognition of the Prophets as scripture took place between the late third century BCE and 200 BCE, and the Writings received canonical status no later than 90 CE. The prominence of the Law in Judaism meant that canonizing the Torah was their first priority, see L.M. McDonald, "The Emergence of a Three-Part Canon," 29-30.

essentially ceased being another Jewish sect."[31] McDonald is making a significant claim. While it seems clear that the third part of the Hebrew canon was still in a fluid state during the time when the Gospels were written (c. 70-100 CE), the date when the division between Christianity and Judaism was completed cannot be accurately stated without some stronger evidence.

IV. DEFINING JEWISHNESS

> *Then took the other, as just as fair,*
> *And having perhaps the better claim,*
> *Because it was grassy and wanted wear;*
> *Though as for that the passing there*
> *Had worn them really about the same,*[32]

The Parting of the Ways as a model promotes a dualistic view of how religion could be defined in the earliest centuries CE—an "us" vs. "them" mentality. Although it seems that such a polemic would not possibly exist between people who were so culturally similar, this is exactly how Jews and Christians saw themselves in relation to the rest of the people around them in the pre-Constantinian period. In *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, however, Shaye J.D. Cohen identifies the difficulties of mutual exclusivism and any attempt to divide the world into two distinct groups of people. He says, "In their minds and actions the Jews erected a boundary between themselves and the rest of humanity—the non-Jews ("gentiles")—but the boundary was always crossable, and not always clearly marked."[33]

This crossable boundary that makes it difficult to clearly define what it means to be Jewish—or *not* Jewish— is the same one identified by Philip S. Alexander earlier in

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[31] Lee M. McDonald, "The Emergence of a Three-Part Canon," 43.

[32] Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" in *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).

[33] Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 13

this essay: *Jewish-Christianess*. When I use the term "Jewish-Christians," I mean people who blend aspects of the common Jewish faith with certain aspects of Christianity. It is a very vague term, and is not traditionally used to define 2nd and 3rd century Christians. However, for the purposes of this essay, because scholars have no way of knowing exactly what people who were practicing tenets from both religions actually believed, the best I can do is postulate that anyone who adopts an aspect of "Jewishness," as will be defined by Shaye J.D. Cohen, while simultaneously proclaiming themselves to be "Christian," ought to be considered both "Jewish" and "Christian."

According to Cohen, there are seven ways a gentile demonstrates respect and affection towards Judaism and says, although they are not "steps" or "stages," they "begin with forms that do not imply that the gentile is 'becoming a Jew,' and end with those that do."[34] These seven forms include:

1. Admiring some aspect of Judaism
2. Acknowledging the power of the God of the Jews or incorporating him into the pantheon
3. Benefiting the Jews or being conspicuously friendly to Jews
4. Practicing some or many of the rituals of the Jews
5. Venerating the God of the Jews and denying or ignoring all other gods
6. Joining the Jewish state or community
7. Converting to Judaism and 'becoming a Jew'[35]

According to Cohen, anyone who participates in one, or a combination of, the last four forms of Jewish reverence, "might be mistaken for a Jew, or might be deliberately and polemically regarded as a Jew;" even if they have not formally converted to Judaism and only participate in some Jewish rituals, "[such] practice puts the practitioner over the boundary that separates Judaism from the rest of the world."[36] We shall then assume that the same rules for crossing into Jewish cultural territory would be the same for leaving it.

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[34] Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries Varieties, Uncertainties*, 140.
[35] Shaye J.D. Cohen, 141.
[36] Shaye J.D. Cohen, 149-150.

If a gentile *becomes* Jewish with the adoption of common Jewish rituals, then this Jewishness is maintained, as long as they continue to practice and worship in accordance with Jewish customs. One's Jewishness can only be abandoned once the practice of Jewish rituals and veneration of the Jewish God have also been abandoned.[37]

V. THE ARTLESS JEW

One way scholars divided Judaism and Christianity in the past was on the point of artistic creation. It is often said that the clearest evidence of Christianity's separation from Judaism is that the former produced art in antiquity, while the latter did not.[38] Believed to be aniconic and iconophobic due to the demands of their scriptures,[39] Jews were long thought to have produced nothing of artistic or symbolic significance during their long history before the advent of Christianity that could be identified as distinctively "Jewish." Upholding the view that Jews did not create art due to the law imposed by the Second Commandment, nineteenth century scholars such as G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Schnaase[40] said there was no such thing as Jewish Art; that it was essentially a nonexistent field of study, because the Jews worshipped an "invisible god."[41] Overall, these scholars had a very negative view toward Judaism, seeing the "Jewish religion as

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[37] This essay does not take into consideration non-practicing Jews because there is no way for it to be feasibly done. They are not a group that is attested to in the art and, without many surviving Jewish literary sources from the second and third centuries CE, how many people professed to be Jewish without actually practicing Jewish rituals cannot be gauged. .

[38] Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 17.

[39] *Exod.* 20:4; *Deut.* 5:8. Both say, "You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth…"

[40] Hengel and Schnaase are summarized in Margaret Olin, *The Nation without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art,* 17. Hegel's "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" and Schnaase's *Geschichte der bildenden Künste* are both works of 19th century German scholarship.

[41] Paul Corby Finney, *The Invisible God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

only the superseded—and static—forerunner of Christianity."[42] Olin argues that, in the

early twentieth century, it certainly was not that Jews did not create art, but only that

there was no substantial evidence to suggest otherwise. Even Jewish art historians Franz

Landsberger[43] and Steven Schwartzschild[44] questioned whether there was such a thing as

"Jewish Art." Cecil Roth[45] also admitted that his studies of Jewish art were a bit of a

contradiction.

      Landsberger, Schwartzschild, and Roth all based their conclusions as to why there

was so little Jewish art on their knowledge of what God had said to the Israelites in

Exodus and Deuteronomy.[46] The Torah, for both Jews and the Christians, "had an

obvious priority and all other books took a lesser role in the canonical or the authoritative

status of ancient Judaism."[47] Olin states, "Whether or not the Torah really proscribes the

practice of the visual arts (a growing consensus holds that it does not) can be [and has

now been] disputed."[48] The presupposition that Jews were aniconic and opposed any kind

of 'idolatrous' artistic production that would display their religious identities through

visual representation was at last refuted by the most remarkable discovery in Jewish art

history—the settlement of Dura-Europos.[49]

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[42] Margaret Olin, 133.

[43] Franz Landsberger, *Einführung in die Jüd*

[44] Steven Schwartzschild, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, ed. Manachem Kellner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 116.

[45] Cecil Roth, *Jewish Art: An Illu*

[46] They made assertions that Jewish art didn't exist because there was no evidence to prove that it did, just hope for finding something in the future, see Margaret Olin, 133.

[47] Lee M. McDonald, "The Emergence of a Three-Part Canon," in *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 40.

[48] Margaret Olin, 5.

[49] Margaret Olin, 131. Late in the 1920s other ancient synagogues in Palestine, such as Beth Alpha, were discovered to provide "new evidence for the existence of Jewish figural art," but no find was nearly as significant as the murals of the synagogue at Dura in 1932.

VI. DURA-EUROPOS: THE ART OF THE SYNAGOGUE

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.[50]

It was not until the discovery of Dura-Europos that the fields of Jewish art, archaeology, and historical study really had meaning.[51] Dura-Europos was so important because it provided scholars with the earliest known synagogue, as well as the most complete narrative collection of Jewish frescoes ever discovered. The most important of these frescoes lay to the right of the Torah niche that housed the first Five Books of the Hebrew canon, the "Sacrifice of Isaac." This particular image was important because it affirmed the Jewish faith through representation of God's salvific power and the covenant he made with the Jewish people, while simultaneously criticizing the idolatrous rituals of the Durene Jews' pagan neighbors.

A Franco-American team led by Yale University's Clark Hopkins was the first to discover the 3rd century figural murals of the Dura synagogue in Syria in 1932.[52] Originally a Hellenistic settlement of Macedonian Greeks, it fell under Parthian possession before being ultimately destroyed by invading Persians in the mid-third century CE (c. 256). It was deserted, gradually buried under sand, and was a forgotten settlement until "a chance discovery by British troops in 1920 of fragments of mural

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[50] Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" in *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).
[51] Cecil Roth, *Jewish Art: An Illu*
[52] Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, ed. Bernard Goldman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). In addition to a synagogue, a painted Christian chapel and several pagan temples/ buildings were found.

paintings" allowed it to resurface again.[53] Describing the moment years later when the uncovered murals were made completely visible to him and his crew, Hopkins writes:

> We stood together in mute silence and complete astonishment…We asked ourselves, when the great series of pictures appeared so suddenly, what they all meant? Between the feet of the great figure that dominated the highest panel, there was an inscription in Aramaic. Du Mesnil slowly read it, "Moses, when he went out from Egypt and cleft the sea." A pity we could not, by some magic, tell that ancient Dura writer how much his inscription meant to us. We would not have dared to dream that those paintings of people and soldiers, those vividly portrayed events, belonged to the story of the Old Testament unless strong epigraphical proof had been given.[54]

Through numerous other inscriptions, Hopkins had his epigraphical proof. The four walls of the building they found were covered in painted images depicting stories from the Hebrew Bible— what they found was something they had no archaeological precedent for—a 3rd century Jewish Synagogue.[55]

Michael Avi-Yonah suggests that the synagogue (from the Greek συνάγω or "get together") originated during the period of the Babylonian Exile[56] as an alternative house of worship, when the Jews were separated from their Temple but were unwilling to give up their religion in the face of foreign influence.[57] Although built hundreds of years after the first synagogues, the Synagogue at Dura-Europos tells historians much more about the nature of Judaism and its relation to other religions during the time of its construction than we could ever possibly gain from the few written accounts that survive today. Carl Kraeling, in his final report of the findings at Dura, summarizes how monumental the discovery truly was:

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[53] Clark Hopkins, 1.
[54] Clark Hopkins, 131-133.
[55] In all the books I've read the consensus among scholars is that the Synagogue and its paintings were completed around 244/45 CE. See Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos;* Carl H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos Final Report VIII, Part I: The Synagogue.*
[56] 587-539 BCE.
[57] Michael Avi-Yonah, "Synagogue Architecture in the Classical Period," in *Jewish Art: An Illus History,* ed. Cecil Roth (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 155.

> The Synagogue [at Dura-Europos] brings to vivid expression the vigor and the piety, the high aspiration and the dignity of a relatively small and unimportant Jewish community of the eastern Dispersion in a frontier garrison city. Here the ancient Jewish use of art is restored to its rightful place in the total picture of ancient Judaism. Here we see in a new light the common front which Christianity and Judaism held against paganism, and the relationship between Jewish and Christian art.[58]

Perkins similarly says, "The Jews of Dura were a relatively small group in a largely pagan city; this obvious emphasis on their identity, their achievements, and their peculiar relationship with their God must have provided a strong and necessary element of reassurance."[59]

Drawing from the ideas of both these scholars, I argue that Jewish-Christian art in the Diaspora must be seen as a product of a united front of monotheists, Jews and Christians, against their polytheist neighbors. Art was how Jewish-Christians were able to maintain their religious identities in a Hellenistic world; rather than pushing Jews and Christians apart, it bound them together.

Why, however, would Jews need to "visualize" these biblical narratives, when they could simply read them? The stories of the Bible were written down in order to preserve an oral tradition in danger of being forgotten, and by the third century CE, we can assume that they had been copied and reproduced numerous times, as well as widely circulated as the religion spread across the empire. According to William Harris, however, large-scale literacy simply did not exist in antiquity. Without a widespread program of public education, literacy remained a privilege of the elite minority for centuries. He says, "The illusion that Christianity [and Judaism were] spread mainly by means of the written word is possible only for those who exaggerate the literacy of the

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[58] Carl H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos Final Report VIII, Part I: The Synagogue,* ed. A.R. Bellinger, F.E. Brown, A. Perkins, & C.B. Welles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 385.
[59] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura Europos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 58.

high Empire…In the second century the scriptures were normally *heard*."[60] Since oral transmission was still the most practical way then for the teaching of scripture, the ancients would have had to rely heavily on their memories.

One way that they could "record" the stories without written language so that people could still "read" them and understand the most important messages perpetuated by the texts was to write them down in a pictorial language. In this way, the walls of synagogues, catacombs, and churches became the scrolls and codices of the common Jew. Robin Jensen rejects this theory of "reading" the walls, and argues that the images are not meant to be read like a storybook; they are depicting symbolic themes rather than specific details.[61] She feels that each image does not convey a specific meaning, but rather that the whole corpus of repeated motifs are intended to have numerous and ambiguous meanings, allowing for open interpretation. I disagree because the artistic layout of the synagogue displays the stories of the Hebrew Bible sequentially in registers and bands that wrap around the walls, recounting the history of the Jews. Each painting is a snapshot of a significant moment that the Jewish artists felt should be included from the Canon. The images had both specific messages to convey to the practitioners of Judaism, such as election, as well as symbolic ones about piety, faith, and purity. I contend that the images on the Synagogue's wall were not open to interpretation, the artist intended to say something specifically about Judaism—that is was not only different from other religions, it was better.[62]

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[60] William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 299-305.

[61] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 1952), 11.

[62] Jaś Elsner, Jaś Elsner, "Cultural Resistance and the Visual Image: The Case of Dura Europos," *Classical Philology 96.3* (2001): 275. Elsner supports this argument with his theory of *cultural resistance* and argues that the meaning behind the Synagogue's images is not ambiguous; its messages intentionally contradict and "resist" pagan religions. *Cultural resistance* is discussed in more detail in section VIII.

Among the 28 painted panels of the Dura Synagogue, one section of one wall deserves the most attention for the purposes of this study: the niche of the west wall. According to Eric Myers, in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, no component of the Synagogue expresses "the centrality of the Hebrew scriptures" to Jewish identity more clearly than the Torah shrine."[63] On this wall, the niche was carved to house the Torah scrolls, and it was clearly considered to be the most important part of the synagogue, because it is the focal point of the entire room, and sits under a representation of the Temple at Jerusalem **(fig. 1)**. In the aftermath of the Temple's destruction, the Torah shrine became the central object of post-70 worship. It was separated from the larger space of the Synagogue into its own private niche to indicate its supreme importance; the Torah was a crucial text for the Jewish people to remain connected to their God. The image of the Temple, located directly above, served to remind all Jews worshipping in the Dura Synagogue that, even in the Diaspora they were expected to follow the same laws that applied to Jews in Palestine, to uphold the religious regulations of *Common Judaism*.[64] Clark Hopkins describes the iconographic program surrounding the niche as follows:

> In the spandrel above the niche were painted three thematic units: a columned building façade that may represent the Temple[65]; [to the left,] the seven-branched candelabrum (the *menorah*),[66] the citrus fruit (the *ethrog*) and the palm branch (the *lulah*) which stand as symbols of the Jewish

[63] Eric M. Myers, "The Torah Shrine in the Ancient Synagogue," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 201.
[64] Richard Bauckham, 139.
[65] Clark Hopkins, 144. According to Hopkins, although the other two representations of the Temple at Dura show it as having a pitched roof, this representation might be showing the Temple as it's described in 1 Kings 6:9: "So he built the house, and finished it and covered the house with beams and boards of cedar." Either way, it clearly represents a "supreme sanctuary."
[66] A seven-branched candlestick is mentioned in *Gen.* 37:17-19. "And he made the candlestick of pure gold... And six branches going out of the sides thereof; three branches of the candlestick out of the one side thereof, and three branches of the candlestick out of the other side thereof..."

faith[67]; and [to the right] the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham (the *akedah*), symbolizing complete obedience to the will of God.[68]

Out of all 58 episodes represented on 28 separate panels inside the Synagogue, the "Sacrifice of Isaac" is undoubtedly the most important image for conveying the message that the artists wanted to send to the people; they read the images on the walls as though they were picture books, retelling the most meaningful stories of the Hebrew Bible. The scene that the figures are intended to portray in this particular image is that of Genesis 22, when God commanded his servant, Abraham, to sacrifice his only son in order to test his allegiance to God and his commands.[69]

    Beginning with the covenant made between Abraham and God, the panels follow the sequence of the Hebrew Canon, from Genesis and Exodus, to Numbers, 1 & 2 Kings, and 1 & 2 Samuel, showing how in the narratives the covenantal relationship passes down from generation to generation, and that its pretences never change. It starts with the stories of the patriarchs, such as Abraham and Moses, and continues to the re-establishment of the Jewish people, following the Exile, in the Promised Land; it is clearly concerned with telling the long history of God's "chosen people."[70] The Sacrifice of Isaac stands out, though, not only because of its prominent placement, but also because it was one of the most commonly represented images by both Jews, and later Christians,

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[67] Carl H. Kraeling, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos Final Report VIII, Part I: The Synagogue,* ed. A.R. Bellinger, F.E. Brown, A. Perkins, & C.B. Welles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956), 59. He says it is impossible to fix the significance of these symbols in the context of the synagogue at Dura, because they were so popularly represented and many-sided in terms of meaning on most monuments of Jewish art. Kraeling does say, though, that they were "a reminder of the Temple and of the cult which the Lord himself ordained as the instrument of man's forgiveness before Him."

[68] Clark Hopkins, 144.

[69] *Gen.* 22:9-14.

[70] Clark Hopkins, 149.

Fig. 1—Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, Torah shrine. Fresco of the menorah, the Temple, and the Sacrifice of Isaac. Center, the niche that housed the scrolls of the Torah. Early third century CE. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection.
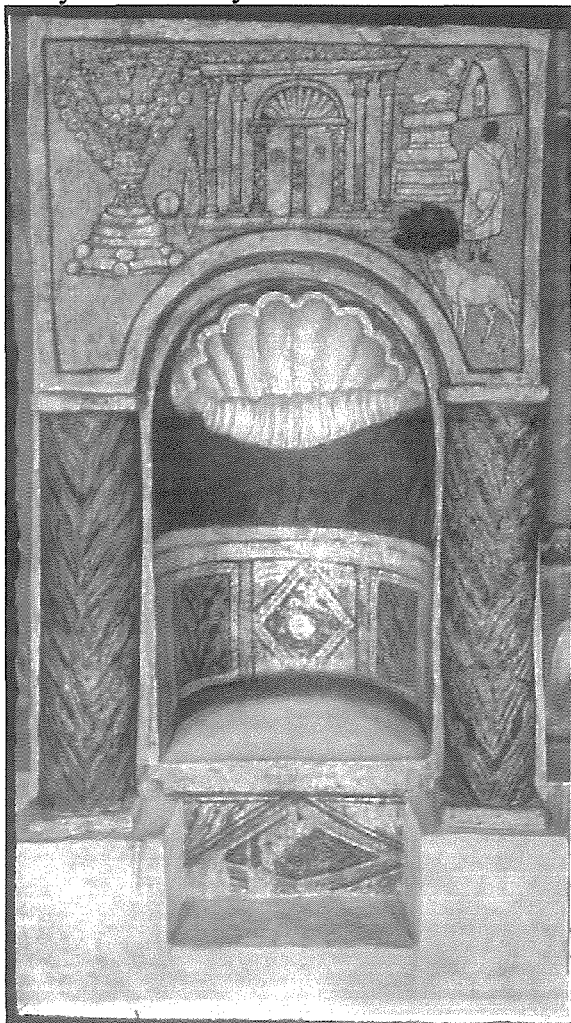
in their spaces of worship.[71] The themes that the artists of the Synagogue wished to convey to the Jewish viewers through their carefully planned pictorial program all centered on the importance of keeping their Jewish faith, as Abraham had done, in times of external resistance. Despite being severely outnumbered by pagan believers in the Dura settlement,[72] the Synagogue provided the Jews a place to convene, to worship in their own ways, enabling them to keep their ancestral customs and the Sabbath, while also protecting them from the temptation of worshipping local pagan gods—practices essential to maintaining *Jewishness*.[73]

In the foreground of the *akedah,* or 'binding of Isaac' image, only the rear of Abraham can be seen; he stands with his right hand outstretched, holding a large knife **(fig. 2)**. To the left, above Abraham, sits a large white altar, and upon this altar, lying over a mass of sticks, is Isaac, shown also from behind. The story signifies a deep, abiding trust in God and his divine plan, and the willingness to do anything for God. In exchange, a loyal servant could expect to find favor in the Lord's sight as well as redemption.

According to Kraeling, the purpose of portraying the backs of Abraham and Isaac (showing only their black hair, rather than their faces) was to keep them from being the

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[71] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 69. According to Jensen the most popularly represented themes and figures in Jewish-Christian art from before the fourth century are: (1) Jonah (100+ representations), (2) Noah's ark (about 12), and (3) Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac (about 10).

[72] Robin M. Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue,* ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 174.

[73] The temptation to worship other Gods is something that is addressed over and over again in the Old Testament. Losing his following was the God of the Jews' chief concern because it meant breaking the First Commandment and losing one of the central tenets of Judaism, monotheism. Finagling with other Gods was seen as a deed similar to prostitution; other Prophets of non-Jewish Gods were believed to seduce people to join their pagan cults through lies and deceitful magic. For examples, see *Hos.* 4:10, *Lev.* 20:6, *Num.* 25.

most important elements of the scene.[74] The more important element of the viewers'

focus was the Hand of God which appears to be floating above the altar. He says, this

Hand "represents the intervention of God in world affairs—particularly, if not

exclusively, when a "miracle" is involved. Its appearance in this context is motivated, not

so much by the divine command to Abraham, as by the miraculous appearance of the ram

in the thicket."[75] The image of this ram appears below Abraham and it is the most

stylistically refined representation of the entire pictorial narrative.[76] The ram is portrayed

in the foreground so that the viewer is made explicitly aware of God's intervening

presence. It would have reminded Jews worshipping at the Synagogue, who saw this

image every time they entered the Holy precinct, that God is most powerful and controls

everything.

In the upper right corner of the painting is a rather curious image that has been

identified as a tent with a tiny figure dressed in white inside.[77] Interpretation of this figure

differs, but since he is also dressed in white and seen from the back as a mass of black

hair, I am in agreement with Hopkins that this figure in the tent is intended to represent

Isaac, free from his bonds and saved by the Hand of God.[78]

Since the narrative program of the Dura Synagogue is meant to display the close

relationship of God to the Jewish people, we must ask the question of what necessitated

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[74] Carl Kraeling, 57.

[75] Carl Kraeling, 57.

[76] The fact that the ram is portrayed with more detail may not be for any particular artistic reason other than the low skill level of the artisans who created it; in the Synagogue all human figures are rather crudely drawn.

[77] Carl Kraeling, 57-58.

[78] Clark Hopkins, 144. In *The Final Report VIII*, Kraeling contends that the figure is probably one the two young men mentioned in *Gen.* 22:5 who accompanied Abraham to the land of Moriah, but were instructed to remain behind when Abraham went off to perform the sacrifice, 58. In *Jewish Symbols*, E.R. Goodenough argues, unconvincingly, that the figure in the tent is Sarah; however, Sarah was not mentioned in the Genesis story as being present for the sacrifice and the figure is dressed in clothing typically worn by men, 72-73.

Fig. 2— Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, right of the Torah shrine. Detail, "The Sacrifice of Isaac." Early third century CE. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection.

Insert Page 21

these images. Why did the Jews suddenly need to visualize their previously "invisible God?" According to Hopkins, "The Jews, proud of their history and religion, were eager to surpass all rivals in the richness of their pictorial design."[79] Indeed, through the beautiful images of their new Synagogue, the Jews of Dura wanted to show the world that their religion and their God were superior to those of their pagan neighbors. Furthermore, the Jews wished to create their own, distinctively "Jewish" art to rival pagan competitors for gentile converts.

Goodenough and his followers argue, however, that the images found in the Synagogue reflect nothing even close to "normative Judaism," and that at Dura there existed instead a Hellenistic-Jewish mystic cult.[80] By saying that Jewish art must have relied on the precedents set by Hellenistic and Ancient Near Eastern styles, scholars detract from the Jewish people's originality when it came to creating their own art. I emphasize that the *Jewish* Synagogue presents *Jewish* stories on the walls of a building, in which *Jewish* rituals were performed with sacred *Jewish* objects, such as the *menorah* and the *ethrog* and the *lulah*. The Jews did not have to borrow from the Hellenistic culture around them, they brought their Jewish one with them when they migrated west.

Settlement in the Diaspora was most likely originally caused by the Persian Empire and, later, the conquests of Alexander the Great, "who for the first time brought part of Asia and part of Europe under one power," making it possible to connect Palestine with the Greek-speaking world.[81] Although it is unclear why the Jewish people began to migrate west, other groups such as the Persians and Syrians did the same, sticking

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[79] Clark Hopkins, 143.
[80] Edwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 9: Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue, Part I* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 6-7.
[81] E.P. Sanders, "Common Judaism and the Synagogue in the First Century," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 1.

together in small groups with those who shared their same religious beliefs.[82] So, even abroad, the Jews formed religious associations similar to what they would have experienced back in Jerusalem, presumably for the purpose of worship. Originally, religious worship took place in private houses, but later these houses, as the groups expanded, were remodeled and converted for public use, and took on many characteristics of the Temple in Palestine.[83]

Such was the case for the Synagogue at Dura-Europos, as well as most of the other religious cult buildings found at the site.[84] According to Kraeling, however, "Dura was never a prominent center of ancient Jewish life and played no important role in the history of contemporary Judaism."[85] Robin Jensen, on the other hand, argues exactly the opposite. According to her, it was a thriving military and commercial center under both Parthian and Roman occupation, definitely capable of influencing future Jewish artistic programs.[86] I agree with Kraeling that the Synagogue at Dura-Europos could not have been the predominant influence in the creation of Jewish art after the third century CE. This is because, after being destroyed by Persians in 256, the Synagogue was buried and left untouched for almost two thousand years. Under mounds of sand, the artistic styles and iconographic content of Durene Jewish art could not be seen. Instead, it was the Jewish culture, its scriptures, and its ritual practices that influenced the content of Jewish art from the most populated cities to the most desolate frontiers.

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[82] E.P. Sanders, 1
[83] E.P. Sanders, 7.
[84] It is believed that the Synagogue was converted from its original private-house form in three phases, beginning in the 2nd century and completed by the mid-third. It was in the third phase (c. 240s) that the wall paintings were added.
[85] Carl Kraeling, 321.
[86] Robin M. Jensen, 174.

Many scholars, following the theories of Goodenough,[87] continue to contend that the archaeological findings of Dura-Europos show, without a doubt, that Jews built the Synagogue, but that their iconographic style and content were not fundamentally "Jewish," but rather modeled on Hellenistic influences.[88] Others, such as Herbert Kessler, argue that the Dura Synagogue paintings were part of a Jewish propaganda program, set up against Christians, to compete for Gentile converts.[89] He points out that the art emerged during a time of "intense debate" between Jews and Christians and that "Throughout the empire and frequently in public, Jews found themselves defending their own Scriptures and history under challenge from Christians."[90] As evidence for such polemic, Kessler cites Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*.[91] I am skeptical, however, of trusting Justin as a source; almost all of the surviving information comes from purely Christian sources. I argue that art and architecture are "texts" that demand as rigorous a study as written sources. Let us compare the art of the Dura Synagogue with another religious building uncovered at the settlement: the Christian Baptistery.

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[87] Edwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 9* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).

[88] Joseph M. Baumgarten, "Art in the Synagogue: Some Talmudic Views." In *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue,* ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 75.

[89] Herbert L. Kessler, "Part II: Program and Structure," in *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann & Herbert L. Kessler (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 178-183.

[90] Herbert Kessler, 178-179.

[91] Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," *The Fathers of the Church: Writings of Saint Justin Martyr*, trans. Thomas B. Falls (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 139-147. The "Dialogue with Trypho" reports a discussion that supposedly took place between Justin and the Jew, Trypho, shortly after the Bar Kokhba revolt (c. 135 CE), but was actually written sometime between 155 and 161 CE. It is a defense of Christianity against Judaism and a large portion is spent explaining why Christians don't follow the laws of Moses. "Christian" art from after 161 CE shows, however, that most professed Christians are still very attached to the Torah.

VII. DURA-EUROPOS: THE BAPTISTERY

One year before they found the Synagogue, Clark Hopkins and his team revealed a building that, to them, was undoubtedly Christian, because the ornamentation of its walls and the inscriptions found there were dedicated the most important figure of Christian religious ideology that is not recognized by Jews—Jesus Christ. It is believed that this building was remodeled from a private house to a church in the early 240s CE, around the same time that the paintings were added to the walls of the Synagogue. This would seem to support Kessler's theory that the need for distinctively Christian and Jewish art arose in public buildings as propaganda against each other.[92] However, according to Robin Jensen, "The city plan drawn by the archaeological teams reveals that a fairly mixed population lived together in relative harmony...Contrary to some scholars' [beliefs,] nothing like a Jewish or Christian "quarter" can be discerned."[93]

The only inscription in the chapel that was part of the original construction sits on the south wall, between two doors, just above the painting of David and Goliath and below the niche; it reads, "Jesus Christ is yours, Proclus."[94] This inscription gives us two names, that of the dedicant and Jesus Christ, as well as the purpose of this building—the performance of Christian religious rituals. For Clark Hopkins, this inscription, coupled with the niche and the scene of David and Goliath is the focal point of the entire baptistery. Inside the niche, Kraeling proposes, would have been kept a bowl of holy oil, which would have been used for anointing the receiver of the baptism both "before and

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[92] Herbert L. Kessler, 178-183.
[93] Robin Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 180.
[94] Clark Hopkins, 115.

after the immersion."[95] The Christian building has the earliest known room for an indoor baptismal chamber, and, to make an argument for the split having occurred at approximately this time, beliefs concerning the ritual of Baptism could have been the most important point of difference between the Synagogue and the Church—the matter upon which the two differed so much that they could no longer worship in the same building.[96] The entire building was comparatively small, though, only slightly larger than the Synagogue's assembly hall; the baptistery is just one room of the 13.72m by 7.62m Synagogue.

It is possible that the Christians used this building to perform baptistery rites but still continued to worship in the Synagogue, which was significantly larger—a necessary feature if it was to accommodate more people. Several factors give this theory greater plausibility. First, the Baptistery is the only room painted in the entire Christian building, and almost all the images point to the "typology, liturgy, and theology" of Baptism, not to other ritual differences of Christianity that could have occurred at this time.[97] According to Jensen, "Baptism is both a healing rite and a celebration of death, resurrection, and restoration of original creation—thus the logic of including images of the healing of the paralytic, the women at the tomb [of Jesus], and Adam and Eve."[98] Ann Perkins agrees,

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[95] Clark Hopkins, 116.

[96] Although we know from *Mark* 3:9-11, *Matt.* 3:13-17, and *Luke* 3:21-22 that the Jews performed Baptism rites too since John the Baptist baptized Jesus, as well as other Jews, in the Jordan, the New Testament scriptures indicate that to Christians baptism became something more. At his baptism, Jesus' identity as God's son was established when the heavens opened up and a voice addressed him as "my beloved son." Eventually, baptism became a rite practiced by all Christians to affirm their identities as children of God.

[97] Robin Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 182.

[98] Robin Jensen, 182.

arguing that the artist intended to juxtapose Adam and Eve with the image of the Good

Shepherd, contrasting the Fall of man with the salvific power of Christ.[99]

Jensen says that this particular program of images was carefully chosen by the

Christian community to illustrate the benefits of going through the baptismal rite, and

adds that although no similar building survives for comparison, we can assume that all

baptisteries would have displayed similar images.[100] But, this is not a wise assumption.

Without architectural evidence, we can not assume what other 2nd and 3rd century

baptisteries, if any others existed, would have looked like. In the Dura Baptistery, New

Testament scenes greatly outnumber ones from the Hebrew Bible (the only ones are

Adam and Eve and David and Goliath). In order to explain why this is so and why the

room was so lavishly decorated, Hopkins suggests that the niche, the focal point of the

entire Baptistery, contained scrolls of the Hebrew Bible, "on the analogy with the

Synagogue, where the Torah shrine is located in the center of the wall of the room."[101] If

he is correct, Hopkins's theory would supplement my own that the Jewish-Christian

inhabitants of Dura used the Baptistery solely for performing Baptisms, but continued to

do the majority of their worshipping at the Synagogue.

Hopkins' theory is more sensible than Kraeling's argument that the niche

contained baptismal anointing oils because Hopkins had a precedent for his claim—how

a similar niche was used in the Synagogue to house the Jewish Law scrolls—and he knew

that the Torah was revered by all Jewish sects to be the holiest of texts.[102] If this theory

holds true, then apart from the images representing the life and miracles of Jesus, the

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[99] Ann Perkins, *The Art of Dura-Europos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 53.
[100] Robin Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 182.
[101] Clark Hopkins, 116.
[102] Lee M. McDonald, "The Emergence of a Three-Part Canon," 40.

Baptistery could have been modeled on earlier Synagogue prototypes. No matter how many New Testament images are portrayed, the fact that the supremacy of the Torah, over all other religious texts, is made apparent through the artwork in Baptistery, means that those who worshipped within its walls were still fundamentally Jewish.[103] Through its prominent presence on the main wall, worshippers in the Baptistery would have been reminded that regardless, the Torah took precedence over all other aspects of their faith.

Hopkins states that, "Christians had already been expelled from the synagogues by the third century and were meeting in private houses, so a building openly dedicated to Christian use was a rarity indeed."[104] It was in fact so rare that even though early church fathers mention Christian worship taking place in private houses, the Christian chapel at Dura is the only archaeological remnant of what Hopkins supposes is over three centuries of Christian house-to-chapel conversion. Alternatively, contemporary research provides evidence contrary to what Hopkins and his team once thought about Christianity and Judaism being completely separate religions at Dura.[105]

VIII. ART AS PROPAGANDA: CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO THE ROMANIZATION OF DURA-EUROPOS

In the third century, Judaism was still practiced by most people who professed to be Christian. Christians were still deeply attached and attracted to the majority of their parent religion's teachings, and there resulted a religious group of people that could only be described as Jewish-Christians: people who "went to synagogue on Saturday and

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[103] See Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries Varieties, Uncertainties*, 141.
[104] Clark Hopkins, 92.
[105] Robin Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early-Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 180.

church on Sunday."[106] Despite the fact that these so-called Christians who were responsible for the decoration of the Baptistery painted the walls with popular scenes from the Hebrew Bible, and placed the Torah prominently in the center of their sacred space, Kessler maintains that the iconographic programs of the Christian building "served to polarize the two religions;" moreover, he suggests that the decorations "were directed toward the Jews, conveying to them the continuity of biblical covenants, prophecies, and future restoration."[107] Although I agree with Kessler that the artistic programs of both the Synagogue and the Christian building at Dura are propaganda schemes directed against some external religious threat, because the Jews and Christians are believed to have peacefully coexisted at Dura, it appears that Christianity did not pose a threat to Judaism in the third century CE or vice-versa. I instead suggest, building off the theories of Jaś Elsner, that the threat both religions were trying to eliminate and wage a war of images against was the paganism that loomed in their backyards.

Jewish art historian Jaś Elsner purports a theory contrary to that of Goodenough that suggests the Jews were not practicing any kind of religious syncretism, they were fighting against it. Elsner calls his theory *cultural resistance* and he defines it as "the internal friction—whether potential or actualized—generated within the culture against its Romanness or Romanization."[108] Elsner writes, "Since the elite both wrote the majority of our textual sources and saw to it that most of what it disapproved did not survive, neither popular religion nor cultural resistance is particularly well attested in the

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[106] Herbert Kessler, 181.
[107] Herbert Kessler, 181.
[108] Jaś Elsner, "Cultural Resistance and the Visual Image: The Case of Dura Europos," *Classical Philology* 96.3 (2001): 271.

texts."[109] For this reason, my research for finding a date for the parting of the ways

mostly relies on the archaeological archive that is available; unfortunately, however, that

is limited to one synagogue and one church, those found at Dura Europos. According to

Elsner, the fact that we have to rely so much on what the archaeology says, rather than

texts, isn't as limiting as one might think. He says, "The imaginative space offered by

images—perhaps because of their very ambivalence and richness of possible meaning—

offers the potential to incorporate and even encourage self affirmations that may, in their

different ways, challenge the different levels of domination and power in a society."[110]

Shortly before the houses of Dura were converted into the Synagogue and the

Christian building, c. 210 CE, the city underwent a major period of "Romanization," as

the large number of soldiers who were already stationed within the city was considerably

increased.[111] This meant that more space was occupied by the military for residences and

camps, and that more temples were erected for the worshipping of Roman gods as well as

the emperor cult.[112] The fact that the Synagogue and Christian building were converted

from private homes to buildings of public worship just 30 years after the city experienced

a major influx of pagans is not mere coincidence. The "Romanization" of the city must

have been the catalyst for these constructions, because it would have posed a threat to the

preservation of Judaism and Christianity in this area. The pictorial program on the walls

of the Dura Synagogue and the Christian building could have been intended as a reaction

against the sinful "idolatry" of the Romans and an expression the Jewish-Christians'

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[109] Jaś Elsner, 273.
[110] Jaś Elsner, 269.
[110] Jaś Elsner, 278.
[111] Clark Hopkins, 124. According to Hopkins, between 211 and 212 CE, a Praetorium (Roman military headquarters) was added to the northeast corner of the Dura settlement. Around that same time, the Roman camps were expanded and a bath house was built, all in response to growing Roman occupation of the land.
[112] Ann Perkins, 25-27. Dedicatory inscriptions were found mentioning Caracalla (188-217 CE) and Geta (189-211 CE), sons of the emperor Septimius Severus (145-211 CE).

staunch refusal to worship the emperor cult.[113] Symbols such as the floating Hand of

God, reveal a constant emphasis on the special relationship that God has with the Jewish

people, and almost every episode displayed is an instance from Jewish history when God

intercedes and helps his chosen people to triumph over the gentiles. Although it is an

indirect representation of this triumph, the Sacrifice of Isaac, as portrayed in the

Synagogue, may have been intended to juxtapose a successful sacrifice with two failed

pagan sacrifices. It was an attempt by the Jews, from within, to influence other members

of the Jewish community to resist paganism. Using art as a means to combat conversion

to idolatrous religions, the Jewish community at Dura sought to control its members and

deter them from breaking the First Commandment by painting visual reminders on the

walls of their sacred spaces.

By looking at the art as a form of *cultural resistance,* we can discern what kind of

relationship the Jews in this area had with their Christian and Pagan neighbors—whether

or not the Jewish people felt they were completely separate from the new Christian

ideology (ways parted), or if they still thought of themselves as essentially being part of

the same religion. Art is a highly effective means of resistance and self-affirmation

because it has the potential to (1) possess multiple meanings and (2) portray the

opposition in a negative light in ways more subtle than oral or written polemic.[114] The

images used at Dura-Europos to affirm and define Judeo-Christian cult identities within

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[113] As early as 111 CE we see a reference to a religious group, called the "Christians," by Pliny in a letter to Trajan. He is writing to the emperor on a question he has concerning the persecution of Christians and says that his method for putting them on "trial" and testing their guilt involves ordering them to worship the image of the emperor. He knew that anyone who was truly a faithful Christian would never agree to such a demand. See Pliny, Letter 47.
[114] Jaś Elsner, 274.

the powerful Roman world can be seen on the walls of the Synagogue and the Christian Baptistery.

Such 'self affirmations' bring attention to the unique attributes of a particular culture or religion and help them to assert their identities in a world where they may feel alienated. In the case of Dura, the groups "affirming" themselves through art were the Jews and the Jewish-Christians; those alienating them were the Romans and other pagans. Through art as a means of *cultural resistance*, Jews and Jewish-Christians were able to assert their identities positively, while negatively representing the religions of those different from them (the pagan religions of Hellenism and the Roman Empire in the third century CE). Their images of the Sacrifice of Isaac represent the successes of their monotheistic mode of worship, juxtaposed with the failures and punishments experienced by the pagans, seen in the images of the sacrifices to Dagon and Baal.

A1. IMAGES OF SACRIFICE: DURA-EUROPOS

Beyond affirming their Jewish or Christian identities, the people who commissioned the wall paintings of the Synagogue and Baptistery at Dura and the Catacombs at Rome chose to portray negatively the ritual practices of the pagans, using their art to make a case for why worshippers of Baal, Dagon, and the imperial cults were worshipping false gods in sacrilegious ways.[115] For example, in the pagan temples of Dura, such as the temple of Bel, the main way pagans "affirmed" their religion was by portraying images of their most important ritual practice—sacrifice.[116] How is this pagan

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[115] Jaś Elsner, 282-283.
[116] Jaś Elsner, 276-278. In the temple of Bel (Zeus), no fewer than five frescoes depict sacrifice. Similar decorative programs, with the image of sacrifice as the focal point, appear in the Dura temples of Adonis,

image of sacrifice different from the Sacrifice of Isaac scene the Synagogue? Instead of depicting their *actual* rituals, the Jews and Christians of Dura displayed their own mythologies (those of their biblical narratives), which were *symbolic* of their rituals and beliefs. In other words, while pagan imagery at Dura shows the actual sacrifices of animal flesh and bones made by the prophets of Baal and Dagon to their idols, the image of the Sacrifice of Isaac was meant to portray the symbolic sacrifice demanded by the Hebrew God—the Jews' unquestioning faith in him, a spiritual sacrifice best manifested through Abraham.

With the exception of the Sacrifice of Isaac, depictions of sacrifice in the Baptistery or Synagogue were rare. Most of the pagan representations of sacrifice at Dura had two motifs in common: (1) the ritual was performed by priests and (2) the offering was made to an image, usually a statue, of the deity being worshipped.[117] The visual programs of the pagan temples do not imply cultural resistance, only their religious affiliation. The image of sacrifice used by the Durene Jews, however, does imply visual resistance by showing that, for the Jews, there was no need to make offerings to graven images for God to hear their prayers. The gods of the pagans were lifeless statues; the God of the Hebrews was "alive" and all-powerful, as evidenced by his interceding Hand. According to Elsner:

> These initiate mythologies, which, unlike the sacrificial images, demand some kind of exegetic key for their viewers to understand them, take the space of viewer-identification away from a local god and the actions performed locally in his or her honor, to a more universalizing deity with salvific implications, and an exclusive focus that denied the value of other religious cults.[118]

Zeus Theos, Gaddé, and Aphlad. In the article, Elsner goes into great detail discussing the visual programs of these temples and says, unlike in the Baptistery and Synagogue, "none of these images implies 'resistance'…all imply a certain element of religious affiliation to broadly local gods, as opposed to, say, the imperial cult."
[117] Jaś Elsner, 277.
[118] Jaś Elsner, 278.

This means that only someone who was part of these initiate groups, either a Christian or a Jew, could understand the meaning of the images. The mythologies are located in the set of texts we know today as the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, and the stories from these scriptures are the ones that can be seen on the Baptistery and Synagogue walls.

In the Synagogue, more so than in the Christian Baptistery, there exists and is a strong emphasis on what Elsner calls "actively antipagan imagery."[119] Rather than simply showing those who entered the Synagogue that Jewish practices are the *only* way to reach god, Elsner argues that other rituals, pagan sacrifice rituals, are portrayed in juxtaposition with Jewish rituals to both mock pagan practices and show that they are ineffective. Near the Sacrifice of Isaac, where the all-powerful Hand of God is the most significant message of the entire image, are two images of sacrifice that serve to counterbalance this miracle: The Ark of the Covenant in the temple of Dagon and Elijah's defeat of the prophets of Baal.

The image of the broken statues in the temple of Dagon[120] **(fig. 3)** recounts the story from 1 Samuel 4-5 of when the Israelites went into battle against the Philistines, were defeated, and the Ark of the Covenant was taken from them. According to the narrative, when the Philistines brought the Ark into their temple, the statue of Dagon fell twice in the presence of the Ark; the second time, both his hands and head were dismembered. The iconoclasm of the image shows, undeniably, that the God of the Jews *and Christians* is more powerful than any of the gods to whom the Durene pagans were paying homage. Elsner points out that on the west wall fresco:

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[119] Jaś Elsner, 281.

[120] In the Hebrew Bible he is traditionally named as a God of the Philistines, see. Samuel 5:2-7 and Joshua 19:27).

> The fallen statues of Dagon [resemble] some of the pagan paintings of deities from Dura itself…and that the poses of the broken statues of Dagon with arms raised resemble those of imperial images from the idolatrous imperial cult.[121]

Such imperial images could have been seen in the Roman military camps that had recently been built in Dura, perhaps honoring Geta and Caracalla as previously suggested by Perkins, and would have provided models for the Jewish artists to help render their critical comparisons.[122]

The second example of pagan sacrifice being portrayed in a negative light through Jewish art given by Elsner is of the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal located on the south wall **(figs. 4 & 5)**. The painting depicts, on two panels, the story from 1 Kings 18 of when the prophet Elijah challenges the 450 prophets of Baal to a contest of prayers to see whose God is mightier. Both parties were required to sacrifice a bull and lay it upon an unlit altar; whoever successfully prayed to their God and was answered by his lighting of the fire was worshipping the true God. Despite crying out his name, Baal did not answer his prophets. God did answer Elijah, though, by burning not only the offering, but the entire altar. For Elsner, "It is hardly impossible that the defeat of the prophets of Baal would summon to Jewish minds at Dura the sacrificial activities of the temple of Bel, which are so emphasized in its visual propaganda."[123] The image seems to suggest that just as there was no Baal to ignite and accept the prophets' sacrifice, there is no Bel to accept whatever the prophets of Dura had been ignorantly offering to him. Thus, it is no mistake that the sacrifice of Isaac is then the image chosen to be the focal point of the whole Synagogue—it portrays a successful sacrifice alongside two failed ones.

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[121] Jaś Elsner, 282-283.
[122] Ann Perkins, 25-27.
[123] Jás Elsner, 283.

Fig. 3— Dura Europos. Synagogue, west wall, central tier, far right of Torah shrine. Fresco of the Ark of the Covenant in the Land of the Philistines and the fallen statue of Dagon in the Temple of Dagon. C. 240 CE. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection.
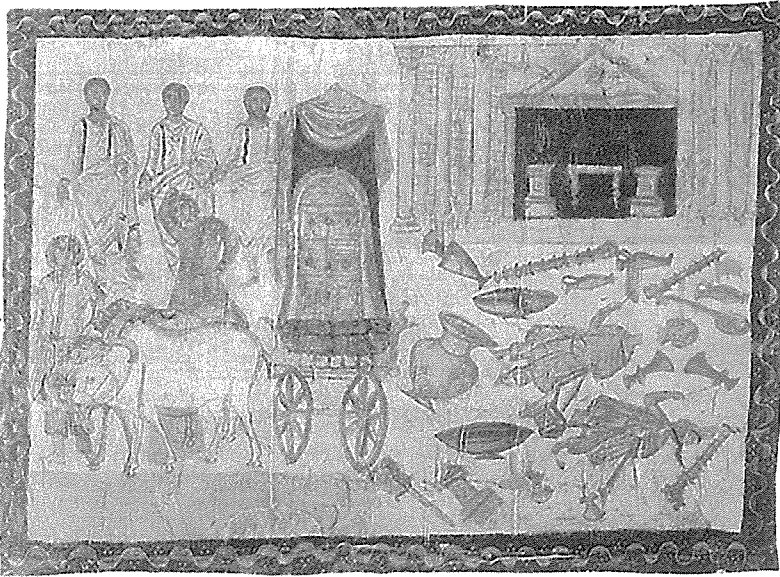

Fig. 4— Dura Europos. Synagogue, south wall, lower tier. Fresco depicting the prophets of Baal making a sacrifice on Mount Carmel. C. 240 CE. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection.
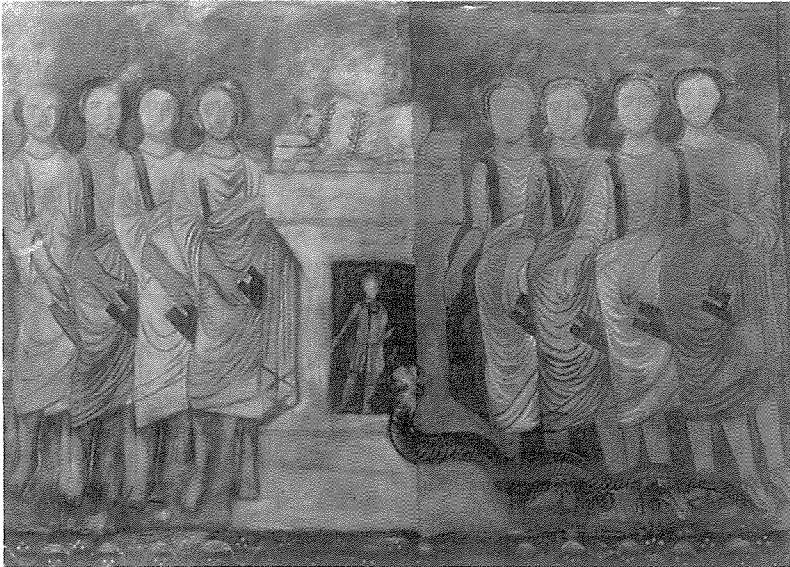
Fig. 5— Dura Europos. Synagogue, south wall, lower tier. Fresco depicting Elijah making a sacrifice, with God's help, on Mount Carmel. C. 240 CE. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Dura-Europos Collection.

Unlike most of the paintings on the Synagogue's walls, which were added in the third phase of its transition from a private house to public place of worship, the Sacrifice of Isaac was added in the first stage, suggesting that it was of primary importance.[124] It is the focal point because it "alludes to nothing outside Judaism" and should be taken as an "affirmation of Jewish identity" because it shows the replacing of human sacrifice for an animal one, a central Jewish tenet, as well as God's actual involvement in the ritual.[125] The sacrifice of Isaac, juxtaposed with the images of idolatry in the forms of statuary worship and cult sacrifice, serves as Jewish commentary on the social setting of Dura Europos. While critical of pagan practices, though, the art says nothing to discredit the Christians living in the area at that time. This suggests that they, as a group, really were not conceived of as being so different from the Jews that they should be targets of *cultural resistance.*

A2. IMAGES OF SACRIFICE: THE CATACOMBS

According to Robin Jensen, the Sacrifice of Isaac was also one of the most commonly used motifs in the Roman Catacombs, with now fewer than ten pre-Constantinian representations, and all differ from the way the sacrifice is portrayed in the Synagogue.[126] She writes:

> In nearly all versions [represented in the catacombs], Abraham grasps his son's hair with his left
> hand to pull his head back and expose his neck; he holds the knife high in his right hand about to

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[124] Jaś Elsner, 283.

[125] Jaś Elsner, 283.

[126] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 69. According to Jensen, Jonah is the most popular figure to represent (100+ figures found in the catacombs and on sarcophagi that are pre-Constantinian). In second place is Noah in the ark with about a dozen. Moses striking the rock, Adam and Eve, Daniel in the lion's den, and Abraham's sacrifice all tie for third with around 10 representations each from the pre-Constantinian era. Of the NT images, the most popular are Jesus' baptism and the raising of Lazarus, with around 6 representations each.

deliver the deadly blow. The child sometimes looks back at his father with an expression of fear or pity, but more often stoically downward. The flame is already kindled on the altar, ready to receive the sacrifice. God's hand reaches down from the sky, representing the voice that stops the action just in time, and the ram appears as the substitute victim.[127]

This is how the Sacrifice appears in Cubiculum C of the Via Latina Catacomb from the fourth century CE (**fig. 6**), but it is not a common way to represent the sacrifice in images of Abraham and Isaac from the second and third century catacomb paintings. In her essay, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Christian Art," Alison Moore Smith describes three different scenarios of portraying the Abraham's Sacrifice in the catacomb frescoes: "The first of these contains paintings showing the approach to the Sacrifice in which Abraham leads Isaac, bearing a bundle of sticks, towards the altar…or Isaac approaches with a bundle of sticks, Abraham having preceded him to the place of offering."[128] Such an example of this can be seen in the Priscilla Catacomb (**fig. 7**). The second division of frescoes includes the version of the sacrifice seen in the St. Callixtus catacomb. In this image, Isaac and Abraham are portrayed as orants,[129] with a ram and bundle of sticks pictured to "indicate a scene of immolation."[130] According to Moore Smith, the features of the third division are the same that were described by Jensen, "Abraham is shown about to sacrifice Isaac while the latter stands or kneels on the ground beside the altar. Sometimes Abraham grasps Isaac by the hair. Occasionally the ram is added to the scene and in the later paintings the Hand of God emerges from

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[127] Robin M. Jensen, "Early Christian Images and Exegesis," 78.
[128] Alison Moore Smith, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Isaac in Early Christian Art," *American Journal of Archaeology* 26 (1922): 160-161.
[129] In Christian art, an orant is a figure in a position of prayer, usually with arms upraised to the heavens. It was particularly popular in early Christian artistic representation, and here the motif most likely shows Abraham and Isaac giving thanks to God for their salvation.
[130] Alison Moore Smith, 160-161.

Insert page 37
Fig. 6—Rome. Via Latina Catacomb, Cubiculum C. Fresco portraying the Sacrifice of Isaac. C. Fourth Century. Photo courtesy: Dr. Joseph Byrne, Belmont University.

Fig. 7— Rome. Pricilla Catacomb, Cubiculum of the "Velatio." Sacrifice of Isaac. C. Late 3rd Century. Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, Harold Attridge Slide Collection.
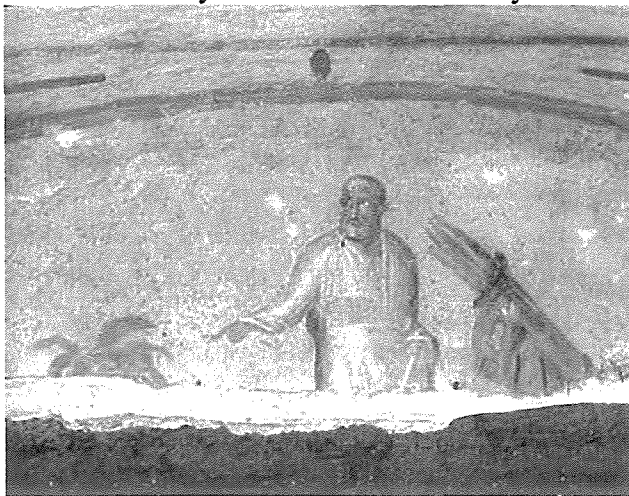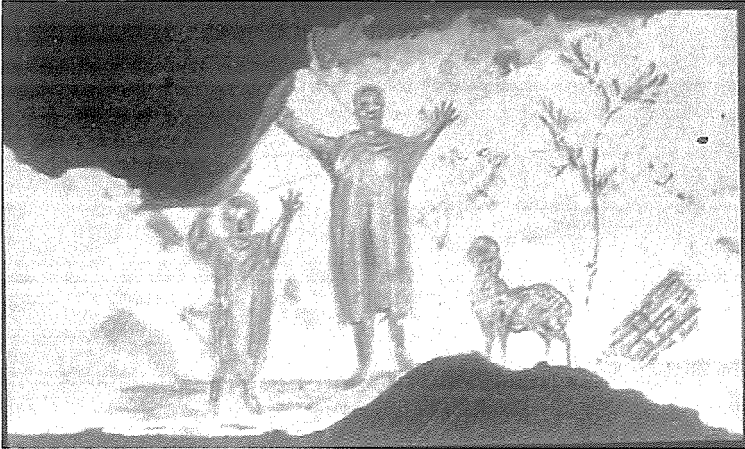

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Fig. 8— Rome. Callixtus Catacomb, Cubiculum 3 of the "Gallery of Sacraments." The Sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham and Isaac as orants. C. Early 3rd Century. Photo courtesy: Dr. Joseph Byrne, Belmont University.

above."[131] In the Dura version, Isaac is already lying across the altar upon the sticks; Abraham stands some distance off with his back to the viewer wielding a knife. Similar to the third group of sacrifice images, the ram appears in the thicket as an alternative and reward for Abraham's obedience and the viewer is reminded of God's saving power by the image of the Hand floating above. But why exactly did the way the Sacrifice was portrayed change, and why was this particular story so important to the early Christians that they chose to portray it again and again and multiple ways?

The answer perhaps lies in looking at what the ancient exegetes had to say on the subject. Describing his viewing of the image of the Sacrifice of Isaac, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 372 CE) wrote, "Many times I have seen this tragic event depicted in pictures and I could not pass by the sight without shedding tears so clearly and evidently did the art present it to my eyes."[132] If we believe Nyssa's sentiments, some stories are simply more moving when "pictured" than the words of the Bible are when read or heard. Jensen supports this view, saying, "Early Christian art interpreted sacred narratives visually…Often using a sacred story or text as a springboard, both modes (image and word) drew out the meaning and drove home the relevance of their story-sources by means of symbols, metaphors, and analogies."[133] According to Herbert Kessler, the message these Christian artists wanted to drive home was the New Covenant they had formed with God, They wanted to show that what Abraham started had been passed to them and that Isaac was now the Christians' ancestor.[134]

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[131] Ibid.
[132] Gregory of Nyssa, *Oratio de deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, trans. Robin Jensen, "Early Chirstian Images and Exegesis," in *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art*, ed. Jeffrey Spier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 80.
[133] Robin Jensen, "Early Christian Images and Exegesis," 84.
[134] Herbert L. Kessler, 156-157.

It has been suggested by Alison Moore Smith that, for the Christians, this well-known image of Abraham about to sacrifice his only son was a metaphor for God's sacrifice of his only son, Jesus Christ.[135] This would imply an adaptation of the Jewish use of the symbol as a representation of the salvific powers of God and, if true, would mean that Christians were asserting their religious identity as being separate from Judaism. Jensen agrees, arguing that "the offering of Isaac is the prefigurement of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and Moses striking the rock in the wilderness probably should be understood as a type of Christian baptism."[136]

Although this is one of the Bible's more shocking stories, for both Jews and "Christians," Abraham was understood as the perfect symbol of total faith in God. In 200 CE, when the images of Abraham sacrificing Isaac were added to the catacombs, the New Testament canon remained unfixed and "early" Christians were divided on the issue of the divinity of Christ.[137] At that time, many saw him as a prophet, not necessarily the son of God. "Early" Christians still adhered to many aspects of the Jewish faith and therefore, the images on the walls of the catacombs, cannot be viewed as pure expressions of the Christian faith. This is a complicated issue, though. Clearly, the use of New Testament images is Christian; but, because Christians adopted the Hebrew Bible into their new canon, Old Testament images are not always Jewish. Without epigraphical proof, we cannot know for certain what Christians intended to convey when they used Old Testament images. I postulate, however, that if Jewish rituals are represented in Christian

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[135] Alison Moore Smith, 159. She identifies several parallels between the sacrifice of Isaac and the passion of Christ: "The place of sacrifice in both instances was upon a hill. The thorns of the bush in which the ram was caught represented the thorns of Christ...The ram in the bush was Christ on the Cross, Isaac was Christ in the Eucharist."
[136] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 71.
[137] L.M. McDonald, "Factors Limiting the Scope of the New Testament Canon," 183; Justin Martyr, "Dialogue with Trypho," 139-147.

spaces, such as the Baptistery and the catacombs, then it is highly likely that second and third century Christians were practicing these rituals. Thus, following the theory of Shaye Cohen, they must be considered Jewish-Christians. Because they are still clearly enveloped by the Jewish culture and their iconographic programs closely resemble those found in the Dura Synagogue, I contend that the group who painted the walls of the catacombs, like the group who designed the Baptistery at Dura, were Jewish-Christians. Rather than a representation of Christ's death, the images of sacrifice in the catacombs mean the same thing as they do on the walls of the Synagogue.

Graydon Snyder also denies a relationship between the images of the Sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Christ in pre-Constantinian art. In catacomb figures dated from before the fourth century, Isaac never appears bound to the altar or a bundle of sticks, a fact that, according to Snyder, nullifies the claim that the binding of Isaac was intended to represent Christ on the cross.[138] Instead, as in the St. Callixtus Catacomb, they are often depicted as orants, praising God for their release. He concludes:

> None [of the symbols from the second and third centuries CE signify] suffering, death, or immolation. All stress victory, peace, and security in the face of adversity….There is no place in the third century for a crucified Christ, or a symbol of divine death. Only when Christ was all powerful, as in the iconography of the Emperor, could that strength be used for redemption and salvation as well as deliverance.[139]

Instead of being a prefiguration of what would happen to Christ, the Sacrifice of Isaac was an example of salvation through faith for both Jewish-Christians in Rome and at Dura. The image was meant as propaganda to affirm the benefits of the Jewish faith to encourage people tempted to join in worshipping the image of the Emperor and afraid of

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[138] Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem: Archaeological Evidence of Church Life Before Constantine* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 51-52.
[139] Graydon Snyder, 29.

persecution to hold fast in their beliefs because they would be saved by the one, true God. Speyart Van Woerden says:

> During the age of persecutions [the Sacrifice of Isaac] has been a symbol of deliverance; from 313 onwards it appears transformed into a dramatic scene with allegorical bynotes; from the early Middle Ages onwards, it becomes the principal prototype of Christ's death on the cross.[140]

The catacombs seem to portray the broad theme of deliverance in general; their decoration reflects a community dealing with persecution in a pagan world, and they quite possibly relied on these symbols of salvation to give them hope. For Jews and Jewish-Christians, the sacrifice of Isaac meant the same thing. It represented a true sacrifice to the one and only God. Although he laid the groundwork for defining the key aspects of Judaism earlier in section three of this essay, Bauckham's suggestion that the Temple was the most important aspect of Jewishness is contradicted by the images. The most important aspect of Jewishness is not the Temple, their special status as "chosen people," or even the scriptures—it's their monotheism. I propose that, stressing their monotheism through art, in an attempt to ward of the threats of polytheism, is what ultimately kept Judaism and Christianity together, long after all the other sects disappeared.

B. IMAGES OF MIRACLES

It seems that, just as the Synagogue did not use its art to discredit the Christians, Christians did not use their art to criticize Judaism; they used it as a visual means to affirm their religious affiliation and define their separateness from paganism. On the north wall of the Baptistery, images portraying the miracles of Christ can be found, such

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[140] Speyart Van Woerden, "The Iconography of the Sacrifice of Abraham," *Vigiliae Christianae* 15 (1961): 242.

as the healing of the paralytic[141] and Peter and Jesus walking on water.[142] If this is a correct identification of the iconography (and it is reasonable to accept because there is an inscription on the wall that uses Jesus' name),[143] then this series of images tells a story that goes beyond retelling the events of Christ's life. The theme of the Baptistery's artistic program is miracles; specifically, the ones that best display Jesus' magical powers. According to Thomas F. Mathews, "The images of Christ's miracles were part of an ongoing war against non-Christian magic…Like advertising slogans, they repeated to the point of saturation the startling message that Christ the Magician had out-tricked all the magicians of the pagans."[144] Although not as blatantly critical as the synagogue paintings, the resistance program of the Baptistery shows that although Christians were different from Jews in light of how they viewed Baptism, they were still the same in enough respects, because they continued to hold the same core beliefs of the Jewish faith in common—that they fought on the same side in the image war against paganism.

C. ARTISTIC STYLE

Clark Hopkins notes that in the scenes painted on the walls of the Chapel, "There is little in the drawing that would seem out of place in the early Christian paintings of the catacombs, except perhaps on the insistence of frontality and the broad, open foregrounds," both of which could be considered minor stylistic influences of the period that have nothing to do with the meaning behind the images.[145] But Jensen asserts, "the

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[141] *Matt.* 9:1-8
[142] *Matt.* 14:22-33
[143] Clark Hopkins, 115.
[144] Thomas F. Mathews, Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art (Pinceton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 65-66.
[145] Clark Hopkins, 117.

Christian and Jewish iconographic programs must be seen as discrete—each having been theologically, liturgically, and exegetically unrelated to the other."[146] How is this possible when Jews and Christians are drawing inspiration for their images from the same scriptures? The Jews responsible for the Dura Synagogue and the Jewish-Christians who built the Baptistery were adherents of *Common Judaism* and undoubtedly considered themselves to be pious and faithful followers of their scriptures. There is no indication that the kind of Judaism practiced here was not the exact same as that in Rome, Jerusalem, or Egypt.[147] "One can only postulate that, despite the strictures of their rabbis, there was an acceptance of pictorial religious art in Judaism."[148]

According to Jensen, there are several theories that "have tried to account for the prevalence of Old Testament subjects, including the hypothetical existence of an earlier or synchronous Jewish iconographic tradition that could have served as a prototype for Christian artistic output."[149] Some scholars, such as E.R. Goodenough, explain why Christian and Jewish art at Dura looks so much like the paintings in the catacombs in terms of content and style, postulating that Jewish art must have influenced Christian art.[150] In his thirteen volume work, *Jewish Symbols*, Goodenough pointed to Jewish art, specifically the Dura Synagogue paintings, as the source of Christian catacomb content and stylistic inspiration. Kurt Weitzmann, building off this idea, suggested that the common source of Jewish and Christian art was a collection of illustrated manuscripts that both Jews and Christians used as models to base the images seen on the walls of the

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[146] Robin Jensen, 184.
[147] Jacob Neusner, "Judaism at Dura-Europos" in *The Dura-Europos Synagogue: A Re-evaluation (1932-1992)*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1992), 156.
[148] Ann Perkins, 56.
[149] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 69.
[150] Edwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 9: Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue, Part I* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 6-7.

Synagogue, Baptistery, and catacombs on.[151] Such a theory explains why the frescoes of Dura, a relatively remote town in the Diaspora, so closely resemble those found in the catacombs, as well as why the same images recur so frequently; but there is a big problem. No surviving evidence of such books has been uncovered. I would like to suggest an alternative interpretation. Perhaps the catacomb frescoes resemble those found in the Synagogue so much because they were created by people who adhered to the same basic principles of the Jewish faith, and thus painted stories of their shared scriptures that best illustrated their more important beliefs. The earliest Christians, the Jewish-Christians, were more comfortable with these stories from the Hebrew canon since they'd been ingrained in their history for much longer. Because Christianity was not a unified religion, and members of the Christian community remained culturally divided, they were able to find common ground and resolve some issues of their debate by reverting back to the familiarity of Judaism and the core set of beliefs they still agreed upon. This is explains why in the catacombs, just as we saw in the Dura Synagogue and Baptistery, certain biblical motifs are repeated consistently.

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[151] Kurt Weitzmann, "Part I: Conclusions," *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, ed. Kurt Weitzmann & Herbert L. Kessler, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1990), 146. He believes that illustrated copies of the Septuagint are a likely source as well as midrashic and targumic writings.

IX. CHRISTIANITY AND CONSTANTINE

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.[152]

Like Judaism, Christianity was long-thought to have been an aniconic religion. Historians, such as Theodore Klauser, who literally interpreted Judeo-Christian texts, explained this "iconophobia" as being part of early Christian belief. He identified iconoclasm as just one of many demands made by their scriptures; Christians, like Jews, were believed to have been particularly critical of Roman idolatry and did not want any aspects of "Romanness" to penetrate their sacred spaces.[153] According to Jensen, another possible explanation for the "relative lateness of an art that was distinctively Christian" could be that, at first, Christians lacked the financial capital necessary to produce art, implying that the earliest Christians belonged in the lower social strata during the first and second centuries.[154] Most scholars are in agreement that the earliest evidence of a "distinctively Christian" art emerged around 200 CE.[155] For Jensen, art that can be considered "distinctively Christian" must communicate identifiable aspects of the Christian faith. Therefore, rather than focusing on style, technique, and materials, characteristics that rendered Christian and Jewish art undistinguishable from religiously

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[152] Robert Frost, "The Road Not Taken" in *Mountain Interval* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1920).
[153] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 1952), 14.
[154] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 14.
[155] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 13; André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 7.

neutral or pagan art, she believes the difference separating "Christian" art from all other

types of art, including Jewish art, lies in the content of its iconography.[156]

But what content is specifically "Christian" is not always clear, since Christians

share much of the same scriptures as Jews. Although they added their own collection, the

New Testament, onto the Hebrew Bible, in the third century, the Christian canon was not

completely fixed at this period.[157] As a result, the majority of the images found on the

walls of "Christian" buildings, such as the Baptistery and catacombs, were drawn from

the "canonized" stories of the Hebrew Bible.

At Dura, the primary target of this anti-pagan imagery seems to have been the

worshippers of Bel and Dagon; in Rome, it was those who tried to force Jewish-

Christians to worship the Emperor cult. It is no coincidence that the murals were added to

the Dura Synagogue and Baptistery around the same time that paintings were made to

decorate the walls of Christian burial chambers.[158] Jewish-Christian art went from being

non-existent to emerging in the form of highly-stylized mural art seemingly overnight.

Hidden several meters underground, the images found in the catacombs, like those at

Dura, affirm the benefits of worshipping God while simultaneously challenging and

criticizing the beliefs of the Roman pagans around them in a subtle and discrete way.

According to Robin Jensen, part of the reason why Dura-Europos was such a

special discovery was that it gave art historians "a different kind of Christian setting" to

which they could compare "the style and content of paintings in the Roman

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[156] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 15-16.
[157] Lee M. McDonald, "The Emergence of Christian Writings as Scripture," in *The Formation of the Christian Biblical Canon* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 137.
[158] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 9. Like Jewish art, Christian art "cannot be dated any earlier than the end of the second or beginning of the third century."

catacombs."[159] In the Baptistery, although influence of the Jewish faith on the artistic content of the decorative program is clearly present, images representing stories or figures from the New Testament outnumbered those from the Hebrew Bible, possibly suggesting that the Old Testament had been superseded by the New.[160] In the catacombs, though, scenes from the Hebrew Bible surprisingly outnumber images from the stories of the New Testament almost 6:1.[161] This is so surprising because, if Christianity was truly an independent religion at the time the catacombs were painted, we could reasonably expect these artists to display themselves as a distinct group of people who felt they were thoroughly broken off from their Jewish roots, inheritors of a new covenant with God that would be fulfilled through their worship of the divine Trinity.[162]

In general, Jensen identifies four groupings into which the subjects of Christian art can fall: (1) Adaptations of figures represented in pagan art, (2) Religiously neutral images used purely as decoration, but which may have symbolic Christian significance, (3) images based on biblical narratives, and (4) portraits depicting Jesus Christ or the saints.[163] The first group she identifies we have already shown in the previous section does not exist. Although many have argued and proved that Jews and Christians derived

[159] Robin M. Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue,* ed. Steven Fine (London: Routledge, 1999), 176.

[160] Robin M. Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 176. This is Jensen's argument, not mine. Because the architectural layout of the Baptistery keeps the Torah niche as the focal point of the entire building, it's clear that Christians at Dura still felt that the first five books of the Hebrew Bible were the most important religious texts since they established God's law. See L.M. McDonald, "The Emergence of Christian Writings as Scripture," for evidence of Christian adoption of the legal codes established by the Torah.

[161] Robin M. Jensen, "The Dura Europos Synagogue, Early Christian Art, and Religious Life in Dura Europos," 176. In a much earlier work, *Understanding Christian Art*, Jensen cited the ratio of OT images to NT images in "Christian" art as being 4:1 during the second to fourth centuries CE. New discoveries must have allowed for her to adjust her statistics.

[162] André Grabar, 112-113. There were no attempts made to "visualize" Christian dogma in a single image, the Trinity, until late antiquity. The first was about 430 CE at the Santa Maria Maggiore church in Rome.

[163] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 10.

the style of their art from earlier, pagan models,[164] Jewish-Christian art was based on the content of its own scriptures and began as a counter-movement to suppress the threats polytheism and the emperor cult posed to the faithfulness of Judeo-Christian adherents. We saw this at Dura-Europos with the propaganda program in the Synagogue that juxtaposed a perfect sacrifice with two failed sacrifices and in the St. Callixtus Catacomb. According to Jensen, the first three groupings of images were the subjects of art primarily during the second and third centuries; the fourth grouping didn't come about until after the time of Constantine.[165]

Both this need to affirm their religious faith and the fact that early Jewish-Christian images were hidden so far underground once again suggests that Jews and early Christians were not "late artistic bloomers" due to the alleged aniconism of their scriptures; rather, they did not create art until their religion and its members felt threatened. From the beginning, Roman Jews and Jewish-Christians were outcasts living in a disproportionately larger, pagan world at a time when it was not safe or smart to openly express (through such glaringly obvious mediums as art) that they were a fundamentally new and different people, rebelling against the norm of imperial cult worship. To speak out against this persecution, Jews and Christians used their texts and art to make negative comments about paganism in subtle ways. Only when they gained economic and social power, could they speak out and assert their identities, as we saw in the relatively peaceful community at Dura Europos. For fear of possible persecution,[166] Jewish-Christians were forced to keep their faith and religious practices quiet; this is

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[164] Edwin R. Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period, Vol. 9: Symbolism in the Dura Synagogue, Part I* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964).
[165] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 10.
[166] See Pliny, Letter 10. According to Trajan, all people who professed to be Christian or were proved Christian by means of trial were supposed to be executed.

possibly reflected by the fact that the earliest forms of Jewish-Christian art are hidden in underground burial chambers.

Things did not change until Constantine came to power. Because there was "a strong desire in Roman society for unity and conforming," Constantine sought to Christianize the entire Empire just as emperors before him, such as Diocletian, sought to Paganize it.[167] Constantine wanted the canon fixed, so that it was clear to all which scriptures would be considered authoritative, and which would not, and the doctrines written that he deemed unorthodox were burned and their writers exiled.[168] Constantine's conversion meant many changes for Roman Christians. Due to the Edict of Milan (313 CE) all Romans were given religious freedom, but to be "Christian" was to be an orthodox Christian. In the earlier period, before Constantine, the definitive characteristic of "Christian" art and what visually kept it almost undistinguishable from Jewish art was its iconographic content. Because it relied so heavily on narrative subjects and themes derived from the Hebrew Bible, Christianity was still a part of the larger Jewish religion. It wasn't until the fourth century, when the content and function of Christian art changed, that the religion became so separated and different from Judaism that it ceased to be a sect and became its own religion.[169] Christ was originally represented in a "historical" sense as a healer, teacher, and miracle worker, images that recalled "facts" about his life purported by the Gospels. After Constantine, new scriptural themes such as the passion

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[167] Lee M. McDonald, "Factors Limiting the Scope of the NT Canon," 182.

[168] Ibid., 184. According to McDonald, it's possible that our current NT canon was influenced by Constantine who may have included the twenty-seven books we accept today in the fifty copies of the scriptures (334-336) that he asked Eusebius to make.

[169] Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Christian Art*, 101. The Council of Nicaea (325) called by Constantine sought to resolve the question of Christ's full divinity. The issue of whether Christ was more man or God was at the forefront of the Christian ideological debate and the contrasting views were expressed in art. In the end, Christ as fully divine Son of God won and representations of him changed from stories of the "historical" Jesus (i.e. images of his Baptism) to portraits portraying him as a "self-sacrificing savior."

and nativity narratives replaced the Good Shepherd, Noah, and Jonah, and Christ began to be represented as the savior, son of God, and king of heaven.[170] Jensen adds, "In the meantime, saints, martyrs, and apostles began to figure more prominently in post-Constantinian art, especially Peter and Paul."[171] When it was made the official religion of the Empire, Christianity changed so much socially that it became, for the first time, truly distinguishable from Jewish art. In the fourth century, because it is so easily manipulated for propaganda purposes, "Christian" art ceased to be "Jewish-Christian" art and became "Christian-Imperial" art. Instead of affirming religious identity through representations of biblical narrative, art became "a tool to advance secular political interests."[172] In presenting his argument, Goodenough failed to take into account the scriptures that influenced the content of the images. Jewish art was not a precursor to Christian art; for the first two hundred years, they were the same thing. After that, Christian art became virtually unrecognizable from its "original" form. The fourth century ushered in an age when the rudimentary Old Testament narrative images were almost completely replaced by portraits of Christ, his disciples, and saints, looking very much like imperial leaders.[173]

X. CONCLUSION

The Roman Empire, in the first three centuries CE, was a place of intense religious fervor and disunity. Pagan cults, Judaism, and Christianity were all competing with one another for followers, but there was no fixed "Christian Bible" or churches to

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[170] Ibid., 20.

[171] Ibid.

[172] Ibid., 14.

[173] See André Grabar, 31-54. It has been argued, and there is some disagreement, that after the fourth century Christian art resembles and is modeled on imperial imagery, most commonly with the image of Christ seated in his heavenly throne as an Emperor.

give the newly forming sect the strength it needed to fully break away from its Jewish roots. In the face of religious persecution, I argued that, in order to assure the survival of their religions, Christians and Jews delayed the schism and turned to an anti-pagan, iconographic program of *cultural resistance*. Rather than being driven apart by their differences, external pressures posed by paganism kept the sects united and forced them to recognize that they still held the most important aspect of their religions in common, their monotheism. Only when the threat of paganism was eliminated, and Christianity made the official religion of the Roman Empire, were the two sects able to form two religions. As in Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken," two, distinct roads formed from one; once completely divided, both cannot be taken.

Other "Parting of the Ways" scholars use primary source accounts in conjunction with New Testament scriptures to identify the date for when the split occurred. My contribution to the debate suggests that art be brought into the discussion. When the art first created by the Christians and Jews is interpreted alongside second and third century texts, the historical context of the Roman Empire's expansion and the pervasiveness of its imperial cult, and the developing New Testament scriptures (both canonized and non-canonized), more light can be shed on when, how, and why Christianity and Judaism went their separate ways. Only when all these aspects are put together, can scholars have any hope of locating the true date for when Christianity became its own religion.

XI. APPENDIX

As it now stands, my argument is incomplete. Some things need to be further clarified; others need to be tightened up, or just left out entirely.

Art deserves a place among the evidence used to determine when and why the Parting of the Ways occurred. Although I made this clear in my paper and it was the central point of my thesis, I failed to explain the methodology I used while "reading" the art as a text. Everything I learned about how to read the iconographic program at Dura-Europos came from the scholarship of Clark Hopkins. He knows the Bible way better than I do and was among the first to realize that the Synagogue's panels wound around the walls sequentially, telling the history of the Jewish people. In his report of the excavations he oversaw at Dura, he also says that, because the niches lie on the walls directly across from the main entrances of both the Synagogue and the Christian Baptistery, they were intended to capture the focus of viewers who entered the rooms. Where the eye is first lead while visually taking in all the images that decorate the walls is how the "focal point" is determined (this can be seen best by actually being present in the building, and therefore I must rely on Hopkins' first-hand experience). The fact that the images surrounding the niches were the intended foci of the buildings is the reason I made them a central point of discussion in my paper; however, it would have been beneficial to my argument to focus on some of the other images in the Baptistery and Synagogue, such as the water miracles of Jesus or the other representations of the Temple.

When reading images such as these, there are many possible interpretations that can be made, and no single one is necessarily more correct than another. Without

inscriptions explaining what exactly the Jews, Christians, and Pagans meant when they were creating their art, the best historians can do is pose theories. Building off the theories of Clark Hopkins, the Sacrifice of Isaac must be interpreted in light of its specific meaning: a portrayal of the "good faith" Abraham had to show before God established the covenant with him. According to Robin Jensen, though, art can be read in a symbolic way too. For her, and many other scholars, the Sacrifice of Isaac was a motif commonly used to make allusion to the promises made by Judaism and Christianity of salvation, deliverance, and the rewards of faithfulness. From these two scholars we can see how art can be read in both specific and symbolic ways, but Jas Elsner offers a different methodology with his theory of *cultural resistance.* In his view, we must read the art of the Synagogue as visual propaganda, against Paganism. He believes that by portraying the images of failed pagan sacrifice (that of the prophets of Dagon and Baal) alongside images retelling stories from the Hebrew Bible of successful sacrifices, made possible by God' intervening presence (Elijah's and Abraham's), that anyone who viewed the pictures would have been able to see a ridicule and negative critique of pagan rituals and a suggestion that they are all fruitless failures. Jews, Pagans, and Christians would have all seen these images, and I should have described further in my paper how they would have used and interpreted them. The meaning behind the images can be political, cultural, or religious. From the theories of Elsner, Jensen, and Hopkins, we can see how an image can be all three (political, cultural, and religious) at the same time. The various meanings iconography can hold are limitless; without texts to offer any kind of explanation as to what the Jews and Christians who were decorating the Synagogue, Catacombs, and

Baptistery intended to say by creating these images, the intended message is forever left ambiguous.

While I believe art can be used as a significant indicator of one's religious identity, the fact that my paper utilizes examples from only one religious community weakens my argument (this is because there is nothing like it that survived, if anything comparable even existed, from the 2nd-3rd centuries CE). To strengthen my theory, other texts must be used in conjunction and interpreted alongside the art. When I rewrite this paper one day, these texts will include such New Testament works as Galatians and Hebrews (because they address question of Christianity's link to Judaism), and the primary source accounts of Philo, Apion, and Apollonius. Apion, Apollonius, and their successors were pagans who wrote scathing accounts of the Jews and portrayed them as worshippers of Ass heads and sacrificers of Greek men. Through their writings, I could juxtapose accounts of pagan *cultural resistance* against Judaism with artistic examples from Dura of Jewish *cultural resistance* against paganism. To Jews all over the empire, the Imperial cult was not their only enemy; paganism at large was a threat to the preservation of their religious community. Through the juxtaposition of these pagan texts and Durene Jewish imagery, I would have shown that both groups used the arts to discredit each other, and these negative portrayals, in both cases were manifested through depictions of flawed sacrificial practices. If I were to add this information, though, I would have to take out some extra information I put into my essay. To shorten and tighten it up, I think it would be for the best if I removed the catacombs section. Out of everything, it seems to be the least pertinent to my argument; it's just another example of how the Sacrifice of Isaac motif was used.

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