Disturbing Images: Reading Civic Ideals in early Judaism and ancient Christianity against the Backdrop of Roman Imperial Iconography

Harry O. Maier and Robert Daum
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This project explores how early "Jews" and "Christians" (ca. BCE 63--250 CE) developed a civic imagination in the context of the visual and material culture of the Roman Empire. A key component of that cultural situation was the way that civic ideals were promoted through visual media (imperial monuments, coins, organization of civic space, architecture, statuary, mosaics, etc). This helped to make Rome's ideals persuasive to their audiences, the majority of whom were either illiterate or otherwise disenfranchised. Jews and Christians, as inhabitants, formulated their own civic ideals by way of a range of responses, including association, resistance, rejection, accommodation, etc. The project explores how from diverse social locations "Jews" and "Christians" developed a civic imagination that reflected their socio-cultural and religious identities as colonized subjects. For example, visions of the conquered subject and the idealized city offered both Jews and Christians sites to explore a counter-imperial civic imagination; this fostered the development of ideals that were at once at home in and resistant to their imperial contexts. This project reads early Jewish and Christian civic ideals in the imperial context of the Hellenized Roman city to furnish resources for present day Jewish and Christian reflection on civic identity in our contemporary urban context.