The affirmation of the roman power in Judaea

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The step by step expansion of Roman power in the East Mediterranean and the culture of the region have been richly described by Millar and Sartre (*The Roman Near East: 31 B.C.–A.D. 337*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993; *The Middle East under Rome*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004). For the sources and account of developments in Roman Palestine, we have the still fundamental first volume of Schürer’s handbook, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, extensively revised by Vermes, Millar, and Black (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973, pp. 243-573). Yet, the progress in epigraphic, prosopographical, papyrological discoveries and in their interpretation amply justifies new synthetic studies of this vast, disputed field. Labbé’s massive, enormously impressive, and erudite book on the nature and evolution of the Roman military and administrative organization in Judaea provides one such study. Client kings and Roman officials in Judaea—their titles, functions, means and effectiveness—are presented and analyzed in exhaustive detail on the basis of all the available literary, epigraphic, papyrological, and numismatic evidence. The relevant interpretations found in the considerable modern literature—a little over sixteen hundred titles in the bibliography—are evenhandedly summarized, contextualized, and assessed.

The book is organized into three main chronological parts and is further divided into nine chapters. The results of the analysis are summarized at the end of each of each chapter, collected again at the end of each of the three parts, and a general summary concludes the book (493-504). The work includes maps, lists of
officials, genealogies of the Herods, a general chronology, a list of auxiliary units, a very complete bibliography (537-606), and several indices (officers, topics, fiscal matters, military units, sources).

The first part examines the military, administrative, and political relationship between Rome, represented by the governors of Syria, and the allied princes in Palestine. After the initial conquest, Judaea saw some improvement of its situation under Caesar, though this relaxation did not imply any change in the basic situation of subjection for a conquered people. While the chronological order is followed, important, disputed questions are reviewed, such as the exact role of Quirinius and the possibility, eventually rejected, of direct Roman administration upon Herod the Great's death. In conclusion to this part, the author sees a strict dependence at the beginning of the period and insists that the role of the governor of Syria was weightier throughout than usually thought. The second part, considerably longer than the other two, looks at the titles, role and means of the governors of Judaea, and their relationship to the governors of Syria, from 6 C.E. to the end of the first Jewish war in 70. It entails a complete reexamination of all related literary and epigraphic sources, and especially an exhaustive, protracted discussion of the famous Pontius Pilate inscription discovered in 1961 at Caesarea, which established that the governors of Judaea were prefects until perhaps Claudius, when they were called procurators. In the third part, the author uses different sources—especially papyrological and epigraphic—and an abundant stream of recent publications on an array of technical questions, to ascertain the status, organization, and administration of the new praetorian province. He follows the careers of the legates, including those of consular rank from ca. 116, and their role and power during the Bar Kokhba war, right to the creation of the provincia Syria Palaestina in 135.
One great benefit of this book is that it enables readers to see in detail the administrative, military, fiscal, judicial, economic, and cultural mechanisms of Roman power in the area, regarding issues that are often looked at from the conquered people's putative point of view. I believe that this structural study, by going beyond a bipolar irenic or anti-imperialist vision, makes it possible to understand better the exacting burden Roman dominion implied, and the causes of the rebellions. Readers interested in a social analysis of labor, rents, debt, and tribute will be able to appreciate and rely on the precision in the analysis of military and administrative positions, whether from the Roman point of view or the local elites, and specify further the extent of the burden inflicted on conquered peoples, as well as the constraints.

The book updates, nuances, and supplements the first volume of the second edition of Schürer mentioned above. The fact that it makes available the full literary, epigraphic, papyrological, and numismatic evidence of the period, quotes it in extenso, and provides excellent, reasoned translations, in and of itself greatly facilitates future research and turns it instantly into an essential resource. Furthermore, it clarifies a number of issues or brings an exceptionally nuanced judgment to bear on others. For instance, it specifies the continuing importance of the governor of Syria and the nature of the relationship between this magistrate and Judaean authorities long after Pompey. It elucidates the precise status of allied kings, and the exact nature of Herod’s kingship, while the question regarding the payment of the tribute under Herod the Great remains open. It further defines the titles of prefects and procurators, and the prosopography of praetorian and consular governors after 70. It delineates the evolving size, role, and cost of military units throughout the period, the nature of the tribute and taxation, and especially the probably complex composition of the fiscus iudaicus after 70. Finally, it explains
the causes of the Bar Kokhba war, the extraordinary military measures taken by Rome, and discusses the date of its end (in 136, following Eck).

Particularly useful is the analysis of the last period, the Bar Kokhba war, on which the research in papyrology, epigraphy, and archaeology (especially of Aelia Capitolina) is bringing new questions and occasions the need for a new synthesis. Even though the available archaeological evidence might have been used more extensively in this third part regarding the Bar Kokhba war, Labbé does give a clear, nuanced assessment of all of the research about the chronology of the war, the previous transformation of the province in consular governorship (with two legions and other reinforcements, sometime ca. 116-17), the prosopography of governors (we have very little on the equestrian procurators of that time), their roles, the exact strength and nature of the military forces, taxation issues, the war proper and the forces involved, and its administrative consequences.

The book’s strict focus on the structural aspects of Roman power in Judaea makes one wish for developments on related issues. For instance, the study does not provide an analysis of the ways Roman officials handled the temple authorities, especially the priesthood, but only briefly mentions it. The fact that it leaves open the question of the continuation of a payment of tribute after Herod the Great’s death leads to questions regarding the exact role of priestly authorities in taxation and tribute at that time, given their interested knowledge of economic resources based on the older tithing system. Related to this is the author’s tendency to present the religious aspects of Judaean Judaism from a Roman viewpoint. He interprets the Roman decisions under Caesar, Herod, and even the governors until 66, as a compromise favoring the “autonomy of this singular people.” This is somewhat confusing, as it misses the religious nature of Jewish resistance to empire and is in contradiction with several other passages of the book about
the burden the empire placed on subject people. The book's clarity of goal and method, however, and its thoroughness and fairness, encourage the vibrant pursuit of this and other questions and put scholarship in the author’s debt.

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