

Daniel Boyarin, Berkeley Book Chats, November 14, 2018

Timothy Hampton: Welcome to Berkeley Book Chats. I'm Timothy Hampton, director of the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Berkeley Book Chats showcase a Berkeley faculty member engaged in a public conversation about a recently completed work. This popular series highlights the richness of Berkeley's academic community.

Today's conversation features Daniel Boyarin of the Rhetoric and Near Eastern Departments discussing his book *Judaism: The Genealogy of a Modern Notion*.

He is joined by Niklaus Largier of the German and Comparative Literature Departments.

Niklaus Largier: So, we didn't really coordinate this, I guess, as it is appropriate for a Chat. And then Daniel told me, I think I'm going to first speak a little bit about the book and the project. I said, no, I read it and I took careful notes, and so I don't want these to go to waste at this point. So, I'll start with what I understood in the book, and as not surprisingly as we are used to I would want to say with Daniel, it is a provocative book and maybe in the most unlikely way it is a provocative book in its defense and engagement with philology in a very prominent way and the way it made philology strong.

Niklaus Largier: It's also a book that at moments actually reminded me in its, I don't want to say polemic tone, but in its tone of engagement of a type of scholarship that I was more familiar with in the German tradition of like German historians, philologists, and theologians of the 19th century. When you read these texts, you're usually reminded of the fact how rough they deal with each other, which is not the case in here, but a certain decidedness, I would say, of the argument along the philological line is really, I think, a great virtue of this book and reminding of a certain type of scholarship.

Niklaus Largier: Now the core idea as you pronounce it in the introduction, I think already is really that Judaism is not, as you say, it's not a Jewish term. That is, it's not used as a word or as a concept in any, as you say, in any Jewish language before modernity. And the book does work along these lines, identifying—and I'm trying just to point to a couple of what I saw as the main argumentative structures—as emphasizing and demonstrating that Juda is most, in its Greek form, is a production of early Christianity on one side. So that's one of the backgrounds. And it's a term coined, as you emphasize, in order to create and police, I think that's the word that you use, the boundaries of Christianity at that point.

Niklaus Largier: And then on the other side, Judaism turns out to be, and that's where we shift into modernity or let's say the time since the reformation, and as you argue also in, again, philologically, precise and the extensive analysis of the Yiddish Yahadus, I don't know whether I pronounced that correctly.

Daniel Boyarin: Yahadus.

Niklaus Largier: Yeah. That in these terms, the way they are used, we actually find a calk you call it on judentum, the German coinage. And that in these terms, judentum/ Judaism, we find a reframing of Jewish forms of life, and I'll come back to this term as a modern concept and as a concept that now turns into religion. And this is the third important part.

Niklaus Largier: So, the first line of argument I think is thoroughly philological even as I said, an engaged vote for the value of philology and philological work. And there are, especially the last sentence can for me, very deep resonances also with a kind of Auerbachian humanism, I would say, which actually for me resonated more at that point with Edward Said then with Talal Asad, who plays an important role in this book also in the conceptualization of what religion is. Now the second line—so the first line of argument I would say is this philological research and work in detail on the level of words and how they're used, and that's also where an authority comes into play with Wittgenstein, as somebody who does for you an important function here.

Niklaus Largier: The second line of thought or argument is the conceptual one that leads towards the question of: What does the modern form of religion at this abstract term actually do and what this is based on? And there again, you can you return to a philological analysis first, which for me was really fascinating. I found that to read how Juda is most as it is used in late antiquity, refers essentially to practices and activities. It's a way of, I mean, you also reformulate within a different context and definitely amplifying it and changing it also a little bit of the Talal Asadian argument there. So, the fascinating parts about the way in which Torah for example and Nomos come together there, I found that and I can't go into detail here and I don't want to talk too much.

Niklaus Largier: And then, the way then you demonstrate how in the especially 5th century, roughly, one could say Christianity in producing its own orthodoxy can shape that term, or reshapes that term, and produces it as a doxa, so to speak, or produces two doxi namely a Christian one and the Jewish one, and they are a (formage), I mean, again, it resonated with my obsession with Auerbach la figura I say, the way you Portray Ignatius as kind of a scharnierstelle one would say in Germany, what we call cornerstone or a moment in that history.

Niklaus Largier: What is particularly fascinating is that at that point, exegetical positions are being produced polemically against each other from within Christianity, and one is the agnostic one. You don't go into detail so much, but Marchian comes up there, and one is the Jewish one and then there is the Christian Orthodox one. And that I found that this is a really wonderful part of the book, which as a whole book is really fascinating to read. I found where this comes so clearly out and for me that was very new, and it leads then to kind of a Christian invention of another Ecclesia, which is called synagoguel in that tradition as these two moments.

Niklaus Largier: And my question there is, where, also for you or for conversation, where doxa turns into religion or where does religion start there? And the key moment is, seems to be aware the set of practices, and as you call it, the form of life that is at stake turns into what we would call belief. And I don't want to, if we call it that, that might be a little bit too simplistic.

Niklaus Largier: Now, let me just focus on one third. There's a third line of argument that I said with the emphasis on philology already something about it, and it's the way you reframe the question about these issues. And that is with the help of Wittgenstein in part or to help just in a dialogue with Wittgenstein and his notion of the use of words, and kind of building on that notion of the use of words, you connect your analysis, which would have been characterized as a history of religion

traditionally now as a philological analysis of the use of words, which helps to think these things differently.

Niklaus Largier: And you put the emphasis on something that for you seems to be like an alternative concept that we could use them. And that's where I'm always a little bit at loss. And you speak of doings. Yeah. Forms of lives and doings become the key concepts or the key moments and translation starts to play a very important role there as not so much translation from another language into our language, but translation as kind of a re-articulation or even in a new formation of all our own language in dialogue with that use of words. And this is then also what leads you to, just to point to that again, to evade this determined critique of the use of religion as an abstraction.

Niklaus Largier: Now I'd like to come back to that in a moment as a question also because the virtue of doing abstraction might be something to rethink nevertheless, in spite of the suspicion that we have. So, I'm sorry that took a little time, but maybe you have a way to tell me what I misunderstood.

Daniel Boyarin: No, thank you. I feel enlightened. That's always the case when a really brilliant and serious interlocutor describes my work at any rate. I feel like I understand it better. Yeah. So, thank you for that, first of all. And I'm partly going to reformulate some of the points that Niklaus made, just reorganize them or put different emphases. I'm going to start with the claim which will address to a certain extent your final question, that within a given layman's form, it's Wittgenstein's term but it's not at all a technical term or a unique term as has been shown. Wilhelm Von Humboldt uses it, right. Roughly equivalent to a certain kind of usage of culture in our own parlance, right? But culture is such a problematic term for us because it is so marked in different ways, and it has been more marked, and there's culture and not culture, and all the ways that is the idea that it is completely bounded.

Daniel Boyarin: The anthropological notion that our culture is a single-bounded thing in which everything holds together was a very common anthropological notion until quite recently. So, I don't love using culture even though that's the word that Wittgenstein used himself when he wrote English to translate layman's form. So, I'm going to stick with layman's form of life, partly because it is precisely de-familiarizing and more open, right?

Daniel Boyarin: So, starting from that, the essential theoretical claim is that absent a way of talking about it, and I'm not necessarily going to say a single word, but absent a way of talking about it, it is, I would say, nearly impossible to imagine a category or a concept as being an active part of a given layman's form.

Daniel Boyarin: So, if as nearly all the languages of the world, until very recently, there is no word that is equivalent—and the question of equivalence here is going to be a problem since the word religion is undefinable—even in our usage we know it's one of those things like pornography that we can't define it, but we know what it is mostly when it knocks us over the head, right?

Daniel Boyarin: So absent in virtually all the languages of the world that I'm aware of, a word that even roughly approximates our generalized notion of religion for which I'll just name a couple of characteristics, that it is opposed to something called the secular. In other words, that there are realms of life that our religion and other realms of life within the form of life that are not religion. We name them things like law, politics, economics— partly for disciplinary reasons, but more profoundly for the way that we organize our political lives in modernity, in latest

capitalism, etc., and colonialism. Secondly, that it's, yeah, that it's opposed to the secular, and that it defines one realm of life as opposed to all the other things that we do.

Daniel Boyarin: For the vast majority of cultures of the world, there was not such a delineation, not such a split. So, of course somebody would say to me, "Well that means there was religion everywhere. So why do I say there wasn't religion?" Right? I'm saying if religion as we name it doesn't pick anything particular out within that cultural system, right, if we want to say there was religion in everything, and there was no secular then there is no religion either, because it's not in opposition to anything.

Daniel Boyarin: So that is one of the fundamental claims of a book that I published with a colleague, that I wrote with a colleague that was published a few years ago called *Imagine No Religion*. There we focused on ancient Greek and Latin, trying, again with close attention to the queen of the science's, philology of course, to demonstrate that there are no words in each of those languages. It's like pleats and pants and double-breasted jackets. If you stick with something long enough, eventually it comes back into fashion. So, I've been wearing pleated pants and double-breasted jackets and professing philology for 50 years. And in fact, I was thinking of calling this book the consolations of philology at one point.

Daniel Boyarin: So yeah, that is one of the big theoretical claims, right? I modify the rigidity of it because it obviously can't be always an everywhere entirely the case because otherwise it would be impossible to imagine cultural change. So somehow before things are delineated or aggregated and named something needs to have been happening. I've found a couple of essays of Quentin Skinner's actually illuminating on this, that the general case, as he says, the general cases that without a word there isn't a category or a concept and allowing for marginal kinds of anticipations and precursors and things that are falling into place. It follows from that, and this here I think perhaps this is where we may disagree more, that the use of abstractions drawn from our notions of how the world is organized always involves and ideological imposition.

Daniel Boyarin: Now, I'm not going back to some sort of pre-postmodern vision. I was trained by German-trained philologists who were all born in the 19th century, although by the time they were teaching me, it was considerably after the 19th century. So, I'm not going back to notions of the objective truth of a Gevesenthol. Obviously, they're subject positions and perspectivism, and all of these well-developed concepts of the last 30 or 40 years have to be taken into consideration. So, it's not that. Nonetheless, a concerted effort, it seems to me, a concerted effort to attempt to describe whatever form of life we are studying and by whatever means we're studying it, whether studying ruins of ancient buildings, reading the extensive literary remains of a culture, or conversing with living members of that form of life, whatever it is.

Daniel Boyarin: And for me, in a sense, anthropology is the model of the humanities, right? The goal ought to be, I think, to describe in as much detail and as much fineness as much attention whatever we can learn in perceive about the form of life of the group of people that we're studying. If we start with abstractions, then we're frequently not going to be able to see the layman's form in that kind of a detail.

Daniel Boyarin: Let me just throw out one example. Josephus, my current paramour, writes in one place that when the Jews got together, the Judeans, got together in the temple for the Pentecost festival. That while they were there under cover of the festival, they began planning the revolt, the great revolt against Rome, right? As far as I can tell, scholars who talk about this come in two categories. The ones

who don't like the Jews say, "Oh, look how incredibly devious and hypocritical those Jews are. They pretend that they're doing something religious, but really they were doing something political" right? Those who are friendlier to the Jews, mostly Jews say, "Look how clever and wily those Jews were. They tricked the Romans, because when they were ostensibly doing something religious, they were really doing something political planning, a revolt."

Daniel Boyarin: Now, I submit to you that there is not a shred of evidence that those Judeans would've seen sacrificing in the temple or planning a revolt to get out from under the yoke of Rome as belonging to two separate spheres, two separate axiological realms or even two different sets of doings. So that's the kind of thing that I hope when we clear aside these abstractions, we can begin to see. Now, if you wish to know who the [betenwa 00:23:11] as it were of the previous book, *Imagining Religion*, in this book, it's J. Z. Smith, Jonathan Z. Smith at Chicago.

Daniel Boyarin: And I say without any irony and without any sense that I might be misleading or lying. I have enormous respect for him as a scholar. And I like him as a person. And this has nothing to do with it, but I think that he's got the project exactly upside down when he speaks about reducing the unknown to the known, right? That is how he describes the project. And for him, comparison is only via abstraction, right? So, I have to abstract something from what I know, our culture, call it religion, then I have to abstract that from whatever cultural form I'm studying. And then I've got two objects that I can compare. Right?

Daniel Boyarin: For him, religion for instance, is precisely of the same nature as language, right? We compare languages, so we can compare religions, right? By that token, I would suggest we can compare opera. Let's have a look at ancient Akkadian opera, since it's an abstraction right from a-

Niklaus Largier: Can I just intervene for a moment?

Daniel Boyarin: Yeah, sure. Please.

Niklaus Largier: So, I think I agree with you on all these points. And I think it's a fascinating point that we inhabit in that regard, because you could say, obviously we can't recognize the epistemic we inhabit, but we all feel uncomfortable at this point to work with that abstraction religion for several reasons. The other one, the first one that it ignores actually the practice aspect. It's practices, it's not beliefs in most cases, because of the fact that it is a colonial imposition, we could say in modernity, and that it goes hand in hand with a fantasy of secularism in certain incidences or at least along these negotiations, and that we need to think differently, and get rid of the term as you suggest.

Niklaus Largier: Now, that I actually find in your contribution there is something that both articulates that epistemological moment that we inhabit where we see the term as highly problematic and not practicable along these lines that Smith for example, establishes. Then at the same time you do contribute something that pushes beyond that moment I find. And that's where this, I mean philology is now in this room very prominently there, but it's a kind of a practice of thinking that you are asking for, that would be philologically informed more than it used to acknowledge. It has a little bit for me at some point, although it is different from it when in the history of philosophy, the rediscovery of Adorno and Foucault, and Adorno mainly, the rediscovery of that philosophy is a practice of thought and life. But it is also more than that because it is about religion, which as a term you see as an imposition. Now, I'd like you to maybe could say a few more

words the way you see this, because we think about religious studies' curriculum. What should it be, a religious studies department?

Daniel Boyarin: If you ever think what should be in religious studies department, it's critique of the notion of religion.

Niklaus Largier: Isn't that exactly that? You see for me, I also grew up and you must share that too. When I say the virtue of abstraction, I mean when I grew up in a Catholic context and so on, being able to identify religion abstractly in a Marxist way was an important moment for, and many would still share that, for a liberating thought. So that's what I'm mentored. And so, we can't give up on that totally. So, we have to keep that a little bit in play.

Daniel Boyarin: No. Actually, I'm not resisting the use of the term religion where it applies culturally, right? As problematic as it is already, in 1910 somebody wrote an article on 55 definitions of religion, and there's a cottage industry of defining religion. Every year two or three people get tenure with a book on redefining religion. Right. So, there is something going on in modernity that is worth talking about. Absolutely. And the politics of religion as a tool of colonialism has to be talked about. I mean, this sort of archetypical conversations between the western scholar who comes to India sometime in the 18th century and says to the pundit, "So how do you say religion in Sanskrit?" Right? The answer is, "We don't." "No, no. You must."

Daniel Boyarin: I mean, Hinduism is after all, a religion, right? Indians didn't know that until the English told them that. They thought Hinduism just meant what Indians do, right? And being Indian. One of the more appalling moments in my life at Berkeley was when certain figures to be unnamed circulated a proposal for a project that, as far as I can see, thank god never took place, in which they claim that Hinduism—and they weren't Indologists—this was underemployed scholars of soviet Russia that needed something else to do as far as I can see, promulgating the document in which they said, Hinduism is the oldest religion on earth, as if none of this critical scholarship in religious studies has been taking place. So eventually—back to our pundit, he says, "Well, we don't have a name for religion." Gets pushed and pushed and pushed and says, "Okay, dharma." Right?

Daniel Boyarin: Western scholar writes in his notebook, "I have found the Sanskrit word or the Hindi word for religion, it's dharma." And from then on, dharma gets translated as religion and the entire Indian cultural world has been transformed initially in the eyes of westerners. And then because of the reflex of effects of colonialism, ultimately, we can see some of the effects even on Indian life till now. I don't want to blame all of it entirely on my western colonialist intellectual. But I think that that is certainly a part of it. So, I really think it's a matter of [eskezis 00:31:46], as a matter of a kind of intellectual energy and rigor avoiding abstractions, we may very well build up categories empirically, but through detailed research, actually, I'd hope we would have some kind of generalizations or something to say at some point, but I don't think that we're anywhere near that. And what we need is more philology or more ethnography from this.

Niklaus Largier: It really opens up a field. What I've found also fascinating in the book also in its own kind of probing efforts with the late antiquity, with the medieval Yiddish, with the kind of German moments of modernity and the term of Judem that something I find very convincing is that the content, the particularity of that textual work which does unlock, so to speak, worlds from me from within, and addresses time and again, questions of translation as questions that are very fundamental there in how we can articulate this, because it's not just an

intercultural issue or whatever you want to call it along these lines, but it's also the work of the historian and the historical background.

Niklaus Largier: For me, somebody reading medieval texts, 13th century text is in a similar way challenging, and it is are very ... I mean, your emphasis on anthropological or there's a ... in the last sentence, maybe I will just read that. And then, expands our sense of the myriad forms of life that humans have produced and has the potential to render the imagined potentialities of our own collective human lives immeasurably richer as well.

Niklaus Largier: In investigating different languages we investigate different forms of life and imagine different possibilities, which now sounds, when you just read this, as I would call it, the Auerbachian humanist project, because it resonates with sentences in our back. But in its specificity then it is very much, let's put it that way, an inspirational turn towards a different type also of textual and hermeneutic engagement. And in that sense also a critique of this Ignatius early Christian, strong distinction between these exegetical positions. It really opens up, also theologically now speaking, a different type of conversation.

Daniel Boyarin: That's collateral damage.

Niklaus Largier: You don't really want to be a humanist.

Daniel Boyarin: I certainly don't want to be a humanist.

Niklaus Largier: But the theologians...

Daniel Boyarin: It's a good humanist, right. I'm just going to make one more point, and then I think you would like to leave some time for some conversation, because I haven't spoken about Judaism very much.

Niklaus Largier: Oh yeah. It doesn't exist.

Daniel Boyarin: It's not because I write.

Niklaus Largier: The nice thing, I have to say that just so ... Those of you who have read the David Nierenberg book, yeah, and I don't say as a joke, it sounds like, but what he identifies as anti-Judaism is actually, after reading your book, that's what Judaism is. And you refer to that.

Daniel Boyarin: Exactly. I even to people say that to him. That anti Judaism is Judas, right?

Niklaus Largier: Or Judaism is.

Daniel Boyarin: Because after all the philology is said and done as Niklaus pointed out, it turns out that in no language used by Jews on a regular basis, whether it's Judeo Arabic, Yiddish, the language that I called Judeo Hebrew as opposed to modern Israeli, Judeo Greek, and Judeo Romance, though I don't treat all the Jewish languages in the world. I stretched myself by working with Arabic, and I think, I checked with experts, but I don't know, Judeo Tajik or Judeo Taherian and or all the Jewish languages, but fairly representative sample of the most important and widely used Jewish languages. There is no word again before modernity that means Judaism the religion. It is impossible to say, and therefore I think impossible to think in any Jewish language before the 18th century, a sentence like I am a German of the Jewish faith.

Daniel Boyarin: This becomes possible in the wake of the work of Moses Mendelssohn and his fellows who insisted that the Jews have German speaking lands, need to move from speaking, Judeo German, the language that we call it today, western Yiddish, and speak standard German. Now, standard German has a whole range of semantic values that Judeo German didn't have. The word Judaism does not exist in Judeo German. But once Jews started speaking standard German, they import a whole realm of Christian conceptual apparatus's including Ludington, and the semantics of Ludington is itself a very complicated term which I treat very briefly in this fairly slim book, that enables a cultural shift of enormous import.

Daniel Boyarin: And I'm not here to judge that shift, right? I'm not here to judge that shift. It obviously did lots of good work for Jews in many ways. I'm not saying that Jews were just passive non-actors with regard to this shift, but it produces inter alia the kinds of notions that Jewishness is, and only is, membership in a faith or a religion. And you can see sermons from the German rabbis of the 19th century, American rabbis also in the late 19th and early 20th century in which this claim is made over and over again. "We are Germans and nothing but Germans. We are Americans and nothing about Americans. And nothing ties us to other Jews other than the sort of things that tie Lutherans in Scandinavia to Lutherans in Slovakia, to Lutherans in Germany." That is a certain faith commitment. Of course, while we're moving in that direction, practice, that is the whole way of life. What you eat when you eat, what you sing, what you dance, what you do at a wedding.

Daniel Boyarin: I'm not talking now about Jewish law. I'm talking about the whole form of life of Jewishness, which we call Yiddishkeit, right? Yiddishkeit, Jewishness gets simply eradicated, and now as Wainwright, the father, Max Wainwright puts it, being Jewish as opposed to being Christian means which kind of a church do you go to? A church called the church or a church called the synagogue. Or do you do it on Sunday or you do it on a Saturday.

Daniel Boyarin: And I'll just finish by saying, I don't want to reveal my effect here at all, but that whole tendency in the sermons ends up being extremely triumphalist, right? What we are here for is to be a light unto the nations because of our wonderful ethics that were given to us by the prophets and none of that accretion of all that oriental stuff, they use that term over and over again, and those ancient absurd and bizarre practices, but just the, prophetic universalism which comes down to second Isaiah, essentially, that's where you find prophetic universalism. And it consists of an eschaton in which everybody in the world is going to come and bow down to the God of Israel in Jerusalem. With universalism like that, I think I would prefer particulars. Okay, I'm going to stop there. I could keep talking for hours, but it wouldn't be fair to you.

Niklaus Largier: There's time for questions. I think there's a microphone here, and we were admonished to use the microphone even if you are-

Speaker 1: Daniel is always enormously provocative. You've given us a narrative, meta narrative of an organic form of life, undifferentiated, concrete, which then devolves into one that is basically differentiated and abstract. It's a big narrative. What I found fascinating is you begin at not with modernity, but with the Christian, in a way, transformation of a praxis to DOXA. And that's a very, very interesting move in the larger argument.

Speaker 2: I wondered, however, how you accommodate the earlier, let's say, internal conversation within the proto Jewish tradition, let's say, that produces monotheism. I mean, monotheism as Osman, other people tell us, emerges in a



context of a polytheism, which becomes, in a way, objected as a false religion, as an idolatrous religion. And the anxiety of the return of pagan or idolatrous or polytheistic, non-monotheism is evidenced in the Hebrew bible. And of course, Moses and Aaron's great battle over golden calf. So, in other words, my point would be there never was a moment of unified, absolutely undifferentiated, absolutely concrete orthopraxis, but rather from the get go, there's always an internal, other which produces a kind of differentiation, and monotheism itself, we might say, is the great part of abstraction.

Daniel Boyarin: I couldn't agree more that there was never a moment in which there was monolithic orthopraxis, of course, right. There are multiple variations within Jewish doings both chronological, historical, even at the same time, there are contests about different ways of doing things. Monotheism, I'm going to be provocative again, but not on purpose, just because this is really the way I see things was more or less invented by Immanuel Kant in the wake of serious Islamic theologians, correct me anyone who knows if I've got Islam wrong.

Daniel Boyarin: It's a construct of another abstraction, as you say, the ultimate abstraction, but a very much also, I think AN anachronistic one vis-a-vis certainly the Hebrew bible, and even more so perhaps the second temple period in late antiquity where there are a plethora of Jewish intermediaries, minor divinities I would call them, and the way you preserve monotheism. You say that none of them are god's, right. There are angels or divine powers, but they're not gods.

Daniel Boyarin: In earlier work, I think I've cited sufficient evidence that for many Jews/Judeans they were imagined as gods. Perhaps Terry Pratchett's kinds of gods, little gods, right? What's the name of his book? Little Gods, I think, Small Gods. Terry Pratchett wrote a book called Small Gods. Yeah. So, the whole notion of a single divine figure, who is the only a creator, the only God in the world is itself a historical product. And if I go too far in saying Immanuel Kant, certainly a precipitation out of medieval Aristotelian philosophy as we find it both in a Jewish and Muslim and for that matter of Christian scholastic. So that story itself is one that I read.

Speaker 3: Why not read stories with the golden calf?

Daniel Boyarin: Because that was idol. There's a difference, right? No, because they were worshiping the right God, but in the wrong way. And that's, what is it the ... There's the famous question of what superstition is, right? And who was it who said, it might be Cicero. I'm looking with terror at my friend Eric Ruin in case I'm just making an absolute cockup of this. It said that superstition is not worship of the wrong gods, but it's worship of the right god's in the wrong way. So, I think that the calf, the question of the calf-shaped god who is the form that the god took in the north, right? The same god with the same name, that that's what's being contested there, and not the question of, certainly not the abstract philosophical question of monotheism or not monotheism.

Niklaus Largier: So, but again, at the exegetical moments here and that situation. Hand on.

Speaker 4: Thank you Daniel for this as always, provocative talk. You are obviously allergic, too abstract. I am also allergic to religion, the term.

Daniel Boyarin: Yes.

Speaker 4: And now I see you are allergic to the term Judaism as well.

Daniel Boyarin: Yes.

Speaker 4: Now, let me just ask, and we converse without abstractions. Can we engage in analysis without trying to pull these threads together in some form of an expression that makes sense as a collective, even if it's a complicated one? Let me just point on this. Judaism, you have deconstructed very, very well, does not refer to what we think of as a faith or a belief. That's absolutely clear. But the term was used, could be used I think, and was used in some sense other than religion or faith or belief. And I think use in a way which you would be perfectly comfortable with, namely a kind of bundle of practices, customs, traditions, adherence to past customs and so on.

Speaker 4: When it was used, as you know very well of course in second Maccabees, long before the period where you think it was created by the Christians are, I'm exaggerating here, I know you don't think it was created by them, but it was used and it's been misunderstood as you and I, I think, would certainly agree with misunderstood at the time by subsequent scholars, but it was used. It had to mean something. It had to have some resonance. When the second Maccabees used [foreign 00:51:39] it had to have, even in your sense in which I perfectly concur with, it is a collection of traditions, practices previous [foreign 00:51:54]. Think this one as an abstraction as well. So maybe there should be some limit to your allergies.

Daniel Boyarin: No, no, no, no. It's only my fault that you haven't read my 10-page discussion of [foreign 00:52:14] into Maccabees. So, let me just very quickly say ... It's my fault because I promised you a copy of the book, and I didn't have copies, and I haven't given it you. That's why it's my fault. First of all, I want to dispel the opinion or the possible suggestion that I simply didn't know that or ignored that or something. I know you didn't intend to say that.

Speaker 4: And I both know.

Daniel Boyarin: Right. I know. So just real quick, if [foreign 00:52:49] was the generally known name for Jewish doings or the Jewish form of life, how come it only occurs in one text? Right. In one text and for Maccabees as well, but that's just copying from two Maccabees. No, I mean this is well known. That's not something I'm saying. And in no other Jewish Greek writing. How come Josephus writes Against Apion, right. He's writing a book in defense of, whatever, of the enormous of the torah never finds occasion to use the word [foreign 00:53:39]. How come Philo, hundreds and hundreds of pages talking about what we might be tempted to call Judaism never finds occasion to use the word.

Daniel Boyarin: This suggests to me, as it's suggested to my friend Steve Mason, with whom I sometimes disagree, but more of often agree, that this is a very specialized usage in a very particular political context. And I suggest that in the book, I'm not saying because I suggest therefore it's the truth, but I suggest and I argue and cite evidence that it is formed there in back formation from [foreign 00:54:31] as you and I both know, a fairly common Greek word or words referring to [foreign 00:54:43] or [foreign 00:54:46], acting like a Persian. And it simply means acting like a Judean, right?

Daniel Boyarin: Acting like a Judean is not an abstraction. It's a verbal noun. It comes from your [foreign 00:55:00], to act like ... And there are, I'm told by Amir who wrote about this, Yoshua Amir, that there were a thousand examples of this in a form in ancient Greek, including such things as [foreign 00:55:23], which means acting like [foreign 00:55:30]. So actually, a tested form. has nothing to do with religion,

and I think neither does Judaism, I think, which is the correct translation for Judaismus. That's my opinion. I've cited evidence. I've discussed it. I've discussed the problems with that argument also, and I hope I'm right.

Timothy Hampton: We hope you enjoyed this Berkeley Book Chat, and we encourage you to join us in person or via podcast for future programs in the series.