

How the Jewish and Christian communities that emerged in the early Roman Empire navigated a 'Hellenistic' world is a longstanding and unsettled question. Recent scholarship on the intellectual cultures that developed among Greek speaking subjects of Rome in the so-called Second Sophistic as well as models for culture and competition informed by mathematical and economic game theories provide new ideas to address this question. This study offers a model for a kind of culture-making that accounts for how the cultural ecosystems of the Roman Empire enabled these religious communities to win legitimacy and build discourses of self-expression by competing on the same cultural fields as other Roman subjects. By considering a range of texts and figures—including Justin Martyr, Tatian, the 'second' Paul of the Acts of the Apostles, Lucian of Samosata, 4 Maccabees, and Favorinus of Arelate—this study contends that competing for legitimacy enabled those fledgling religious communities to express coherent cultural identities and secure social credibility within the complex milieu of Roman Imperial society.

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