The religious history of Palestine has not yet been studied as that of an ordinary, Roman province. Until now, scholars have mainly highlighted the two, monotheistic religions, Judaism and Christianism. If Palestinian uniqueness comes actually from them, pagan Palestine little differed from the rest of the Roman – especially eastern – world and was in fact a real religious mix due to its history in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Nicole Belayche examines the pagan part, quantitatively the majority, of the Palestinian population between 135 and the fourth century. As a consequence of the two revolts of 66–70 and 132–135, pagan peoples had been settled all over the territory and pagan cults – avodah zarah to speak as a Mishnah – spread with them. Data of various natures and religious origins allow one to reconstruct the ritual aspects of the pagan cults. The collection of gods is varied and their origins recall local history, Semitic but above all Graeco-Hellenistic and then Roman. They prove the adherence of the province to the main religious trends of the imperial, Graeco-eastern ensemble. The pagan religious life is studied for itself and in the relationship of the pagans to the Jewish population, since monotheistic and polytheistic communities did not live in closed worlds. The general plan of the book follows them city by city in order to respect the juridical status of the communities and their cultural personality. Second to fourth century Judaea-Palestine offers a good short cut to the religious procedures at work in the already Hellenized Roman provinces, perhaps the best one due to local history. The mechanics of cohabitation in the system of Graeco-Roman cultural representation functioned here as elsewhere because the monotheistic communities, Jewish then Christian, from the third century on, did not risk intermixing. As in the rest of the Empire, Constantine’s reign was not an effective turning point and pagan cults still flourished until the end of the fourth century at least.

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