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BENJAMIN ISAAC, YUVAL SHAHAR (EDS.), *JUDAEA-PALAESTINA, BABYLON AND ROME: JEWS IN ANTIQUITY* (TEXTS AND STUDIES IN ANCIENT JUDAISM 147), TÜBINGEN: MOHR SIEBECK, 2012. (PP. IX, 324 PAGES; ISBN 978-3-16-151697-9)

The book under review contains 17 contributions, most of which originated as papers read at a conference held in Tel Aviv in 2009 in honor of Prof. Aharon Oppenheimer, a distinguished Israeli scholar perhaps best known for his scholarship on Jewish Babylonia.

The main thematic thread behind all papers is, generally speaking, that about Jewish identity in the Roman Period – a topic that has in recent decades enjoyed growing interest in scholarship. Accordingly, the papers were divided into three main parts. Part 1 is entitled "The Image of Jews among Non-Jews," Part 2 collects papers focused on "The Image of Non-Jews among Jews," Part 3 is devoted to select issues of Jewish "Social History" (predominantly in the Greco-Roman period), while Part 4 concerns some important methodological "Issues in Modern Scholarship." The volume includes a Preface and Introduction by Benjamin Isaac and Yuval Shahar, and is rounded off by an index of Aharon Oppenheimer's publications.

Part 1 opens with Albert Baumgarten's paper ("The 'Outreach' Campaign of the Ancient Pharisees: There is no such thing as a Free Lunch"), which goes back to a long-debated issue of Jewish missionary activity, focusing specifically on the picture of the Pharisees in three passages from the gospel of Luke: 14:1–9; 7:36–39; 11:37–41. Baumgarten proposes to read the passages in a double context – "one ancient, the other in the light of modern social science" (which he also calls "the 'double filter' reading", pp. 13 and 27). According to Baumgarten, the aim of Luke's passages was to show that the Pharisaic claim of moderation, flexibility and outreach to the larger world was not genuine; quite to the contrary,

Luke's Pharisees are shown to be "hypercritical, unwilling to tolerate any deviation from their demands, and utterly disdainful of their non-Pharisaic neighbours". At the same time, Baumgarten suggests that it is perhaps possible to say something about historical Pharisees (or at least about the historical writer of Luke and his audience) by using methods of socio-historical reflection – in his view, the Pharisees attempted to gain social importance by building a network of subtle social connections – e.g. by inviting someone socially important for dinner and then expecting a return invitation. In turn, Shaye Cohen ("Dancing, Clapping, Meditating: Jewish and Christian Observance of the Sabbath in Pseudo-Ignatius") presents how a passage from the 4th-c. CE pseudo-Ignatius understands the contrast between the Christian and Jewish observance of the Sabbath – while the Jewish way is more carnal (focused on physical relaxation, food, drinking and joy – dancing and clapping), the Christian is more spiritual (mediation). Remarkably, Cohen asserts that (setting aside pseudo-Ignatius' negative comments), this description probably reflects reality well.

In Part 2, in his paper ("How Jewish to be Jewish? Self-Identity and Jewish Christians in First Century CE Palestine") Joshua Schwartz brings up the topic of the relationship between Jews and Jewish Christians in the context of the discussion as to how much diversity there was in Judaism in the early Roman period. In Schwartz's view, there was nothing inherent in Jewish identity within the Second Temple Judaism that would inevitably have led to the two groups parting ways. Schwartz suggests that it was politics which drove these groups apart. Likewise, Günter Stemberger ("The *birkat ha-minim* and the separation of Christians and Jews") takes issue with a common claim that the late–1st-c. CE *birkat ha-minim* was formulated with the explicit purpose of excluding Jewish-Christians from synagogue services. Firstly, Stemberger claims, it is not certain that the text referred exclusively to Christians; secondly, the application of this restriction did not have to have been widespread, since its promulgator, Rabban Gamaliel, did not necessarily enjoy such wide esteem at his time as is commonly assumed in modern scholarship. In turn, in her paper ("Another Look at the Rabbinic Conception of Gentiles from the Perspective of Impurity Laws") Vered Noam brings up the question of gentile impurity in Talmudic literature, arguing that according to tannaitic traditions gentiles cannot become impure by corpse impurity since they do not fall under the rubric of the Hebrew *'adam* and consequently can neither contract corpse impurity nor be purified. Next, in his paper entitled "The Evil Eye in Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity," Richard Kalmin offers an overview of diversified views of Talmudic traditions on the evil eye. In short, while Palestinian rabbis saw the evil eye as a non-Jewish and negative phenomenon, Babylonian rabbis "domesticated it" – it also belonged to the world of the Jews and rabbis and could be used by Jews and lesser rabbis among

each other. Next, Peter Schäfer ("Jesus' Origin, Birth, and Childhood according to the Toledot Yeshu and the Talmud") analyzes the Jewish medieval traditions on the origin of Jesus and accentuates that Miriam, Jesus' mother (perhaps in contrast to what is commonly believed) is presented without hostility – only as a victim of rape, as someone not to be blamed for what happened, even as the carrying mother.

Part 3 starts with Tessa Rajak's paper ("Reflections on Jewish Resistance and the Discourse of Martyrdom in Josephus"), which gives a brief overview of Jewish ideology on martyrdom in the Greco-Roman period, especially in Josephus. This paper shows that (perhaps in contrast to popular views on Judaism) we can find a well-developed tradition of martyrdom in Jewish literature of the Greco-Roman period. Next, Martin Goodman devotes his paper ("Titus, Berenice and Agrippa: the Last Days of the Temple in Jerusalem") to a small number of Jewish elites (Agrippa II, Berenice and Tiberius Julius Alexander) who were allied with the Romans during the Jewish-Roman conflict of 66–70 CE and speculates as to how these individuals, on the eve of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, struggled with their loyalty to their Roman friends and the commitment to the Jewish people. In turn, Yuval Shahar ("Why a quarter? The *Siqariqon* ruling and Roman Law") deals with the *Siqariqon* ruling (which allowed a Jew in Eretz Israel to buy a field which had earlier been confiscated from another Jew) and especially focuses on one aspect of this law – why a quarter had to be given to the original owner. According to Shahar, the origin of this ruling can be attributed to the influence of the Roman law of succession and its implementation aimed at reducing the difference between Jewish and Roman legal traditions in Roman Palestine. Another paper in Part 3, by Susan Weingarten, is devoted to the origins of *haroset* (one of the traditional Jewish foods served at Passover), and concludes that it probably took its origin from a Greco-Roman dipping sauces which served to counter bitterness and/or the ill effects of lettuce and endives. In turn, Jonathan Price ("The Necropolis at Jaffa and its Relation to Beth She'arim") presents and compares two contemporary Jewish necropoleis in the Roman Period – in Jaffa and Beth Shearim. One of the interesting things shown by Price is that in both locations there is a considerable number of epitaphs indicating the origin of the deceased outside the Land of Israel (in the case of Jaffa – esp. Egypt, in Beth-Shearim – various locations in the Near East). This data indeed gives "a lively impression of the mobility of Jews in the Near East under Roman rule" (p. 6). In his paper entitled "Captives and Redeeming Captives: the Law and the Community," Youval Rotman contrasts Roman and Jewish-Christian approaches towards ransoming captives. While the Romans considered ransoming as shameful (at least after Cannae in 216 BCE), the Jews and Christians practiced it and considered as a moral and

religious obligation. The last paper of Part 3 ("The Jewish Community in Cologne from Roman Times to the Early Middle Age"), by Werner Eck, presents the evidence for a Jewish presence in the Roman period in Cologne, the German city with which Prof. Oppenheimer has strong academic connections.

Part 4 ("Issues in Modern Scholarship") contains three papers. First, David Goodblatt surveys the limited evidence for a Jewish presence in the Parthian kingdom ("The Jews in the Parthian Empire: What We Don't Know"). Next, Yoram Tsafrir ("The Finds in Cave 2001–2002 and Burial at Masada") takes on a subject of long-debated controversy – the identification of human skeletons uncovered in Cave no. 2001–2002 (and another skeleton from Cave 2051) on the southern slope of Masada. In Tsafrir's view, the remains belonged to Jews (and not to Roman soldiers) and the caves were used by Jewish fighters during the siege as a "temporary place of rest for the deceased" (p. 292). Lastly, in his paper entitled "Will the 'Real' Rabbis Please Stand Up: On the Repackaging of the Rabbinic Model in Modern Times," Isaiah Gafni surveys scholarly views on the role and position of the rabbis in "the post-Temple Judaism" (p. 295) from the 19th c. until now, and shows not only how different these views were but how deeply they were affected by contemporary ideological tendencies.

Let me focus in more detail on Goodblatt's paper, which particularly caught my eye. It tersely comments on limited evidence for the presence of Jews in the Parthian kingdom. The evidence is discussed in two groups – evidence for the presence of Jews in Babylonia (esp. Josephus on Zamaris, Asinaios and Anilaios; rabbinic sources on Hillel, Nehardea, Hananyah, the nephew of Rabbi Yehoshu'a, the Babylonian Exilarchate) and outside Babylonia (the Book of Tobit, Acts 2:9 and rabbinic references on Jews from Media; Josephus' Ant. 18 and rabbinic references to Nisibis (or to Rabbi Judah, son of Batera), sources regarding Trajan's campaign (Eusebius and Dio Cassius), the Syriac Doctrine of Addai, funerary inscriptions from the vicinity of Edessa, Josephus' remarks on the dynasty of royal converts from Adiabene). In all these cases, Goodblatt notes gaps in the evidence, points to the lack of certainty as to the dating of Rabbinic traditions, raises doubts about identifications of toponyms and protagonists, and, generally speaking, shows how meager our evidence frequently is. In particular, Goodblatt stresses that the modern approach became more critical towards the historical value of Rabbinic sources and consequently limited our use of them in the reconstruction of Jewish history in the Parthian kingdom. All of this is, generally speaking, true, and not new to scholars – we do not know much about the Jews in the Parthian kingdom.

One may wonder, however, if Goodblatt's approach (marked by his negative statement: what we *don't* know) does not additionally enhances this negative picture of the state of research. Does it make a difference if one assumes a slight-

ly more positive approach? By contrast, let us assume that "even as our sources are meager and the potential significance of each source is thereby enhanced, it is incumbent upon the historian to carefully appraise the quality of each and every source".[1] If we follow this kind of approach and reconsider Goodblatt's discussion of the evidence for 1st-c. CE Adiabene, there indeed appears to be a difference.

Let us give a few examples. According to Goodblatt, all Josephus' references to specific Adiabeneans concern only members of the royal family and consequently "we know nothing about a Jewish community there beyond the palace."[2] However, there should no doubt that another Adiabenean, Chagiras, the son of Nabataios, who belonged to Simon's radical group of insurgents in 66–70 CE Jerusalem, was not of royal background (Bell. 5.474). Likewise, in Goodblatt's view, the reference in Bell. 1.6 "to 'our *homophulon* beyond the Euphrates and the inhabitants of Adiabene' can be interpreted to exclude the Adiabenians from the *homophulon*." Indeed, the sentence in Bell. 1.6 is grammatically difficult, especially the relationship between the Greek καί and τέ. Yet, if we understand the particle καί as conjunctive, and τέ as adjunctive, then "καί introduces something new under the same aspect yet as an external addition, whereas τέ marks it as having an inner connection with what precedes."[3] Accordingly, we can translate Bell. 1.6 as follows: "the Parthians and (καί) the Babylonians with the Arabs (τέ), and (καί) our kinsmen beyond the Euphrates with (τέ) the Adiabeneans."[4] In this light, the Adiabeneans appear to be a distinctive Jewish group among all other Jews east of the Euphrates. What's more, this particular understanding is further corroborated by Bell. 2.388 (not quoted by Goodblatt) where Josephus explicitly speaks (through the mouth of King Agrippa II) about "your kinsmen from Adiabene" (τοὺς ἐκ τῆς Ἀδιαβηνῆς ὁμοφύλους).

Lastly, let us turn our attention to Ant. 20.17–96, where we read that Helena converted in Adiabene (Ant. 20.35), and that she enjoyed the practice of Jewish customs so much that it inspired Izates to undergo circumcision (Ant. 20.38). How could "a certain Jew" have access to Helena (being the Queen of Adia-

[1] G. Herman, 'The Jews of Parthian Babylonia' in P. Wick, M. Zehnder (Hrsg.): *The Parthian Empire and its Religions. Studies in the Dynamics of Religious Diversity. Das Partherreich und seine Religionen*. Studien zu Dynamiken religiöser Pluralität (= Pietas 5). Gutenberg: Computus 2012, 141.

[2] Let me add, to avoid misconstruing the author's thoughts, that in footnote 26 (in referring to Josephus' *De Bello Judaico*) Goodblatt says, "Admittedly, 5, 474 may be an exception."

[3] J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti: Numerically Coded to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance*, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979, 616.

[4] M. Marciak, *Izates and Helena of Adiabene. A Study on Literary Traditions and History*, Proefschrift Universiteit Leiden, Leiden 2012, 211.

bene!) if he had been a complete stranger in Adiabene and Jewish customs had previously been unknown in Adiabene? How could Helena practice and enjoy Jewish customs without any Jewish environment around her in Adiabene? It seems first that the above-mentioned sources indirectly show that there must have been a Jewish presence in Adiabene prior to the conversion of its royal house. Secondly, although we can precisely estimate neither its size nor character, it could not have been completely insignificant, since its members had access to members of the royal dynasty.[5] Thus, although our evidence on the Jews in the Parthian kingdom is scant, as Goodblatt rightly remarks, we can learn much more from it if only we have a more positive attitude.

To sum up, this book is certainly an interesting publication worthy of recommendation to all interested in the problem of Jewish identity (especially in the Roman period).

[5] M. Marciak, *Izates and Helena of Adiabene*, 203.