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BENEDIKT ECKHARDT (ED.), *JEWISH IDENTITY AND POLITICS BETWEEN THE MACCABEES AND BAR KOKHBA. GROUPS, NORMATIVITY, AND RITUALS*, (SUPPLEMENTS TO THE JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF JUDAISM – 155), LEIDEN – BOSTON: BRILL 2012, PP. 282; ISBN 978-90-04-21046-2

The volume under review is a collection of papers delivered at a conference called “Groups, Normativity, and Rituals: Jewish Identity and Politics Between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba,” held at the University of Münster from November 18–19, 2009. The conference was founded by the “Religion and Politics” Cluster of Excellence, a research association at Münster supported by *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*.

The book is devoted to the notorious and complex debate on the Jewish identity in the Second Temple Period. The idea behind this additional publication on the topic, as pointed out by the editor B. Eckhardt in the introduction (pp. 1–10), is to tackle the issue from a different angle, going beyond the strictly religious focus of previous scholarship and to engage with a number of topics which, generally speaking, belong to the realm of politics.

In the first paper (“Varieties of Identity in Late Second Temple Judah [200 BCE – 135 CE]”, pp. 11–27), D. Goodblatt raises the question of which ethnonym (Israel, Judah, Judeans) was used by residents of the land of Israel to express their ethnic affiliation (in response to the question “Of what people are you?”). According to Goodblatt, it depended on the language used by those formulating the answer. “Judean” would usually have been the answer given by individuals speaking or writing in Greek or Aramaic, while those using Hebrew would have preferred the ethnonym “Israel.”

In his paper (“The Claim of Maccabean Leadership and the Use of Scripture,” pp. 29–49), A. van der Kooij shows how the claim of the Maccabean

Leadership is justified in 1 Macc., and how certain passages of the LXX were used to support this claim. According to A. van der Kooij, 1 Macc. as a whole (dated to about 100 BCE) reflects a slightly different view on Maccabean leadership than 1 Macc. 14 (“The Honorary Decree” from before 140 BCE). Namely, it advocates “a leader who is both a high priest and king” by portraying Judah Maccabee as a second David and Simon Maccabee as a second Solomon, while 1 Macc. 14 refrains from portraying a leader as a king. Likewise, A. van der Kooij believes that the Greek version of Sirach and LXX Ezekiel allude to a high priest who is also a “ruler” or “leader” of the people, but not a “king.”

The third paper, by J. Magness (“Toilet Practices, Purity Concerns, and Sectarianism in the Late Second Temple Period,” pp. 51–70), offers an overview of available data on toilet practices in the Roman world in general and among the Jews of Palestine in particular. Special attention is given by Magness to the habits of the Essenes in this regard. According to Magness, the Essenes differed from other Jews in their extremely negative approach – they considered excrement impure and defecation to be a ritually polluting activity. This approach was partly shared by the priests in the temple in Jerusalem, but was rejected by most rabbis.

The subject of insider-outsider relationships in Second Temple Judaism is taken on by H. Harrington (“Identity and Alterity in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” pp. 71–89), who examines two sectarian texts in this regard: the *Damascus Document* and the *Community Rule*. According to Harrington, recent claims in scholarship that both documents convey some notions of inclusivity are overstated; to the contrary, both *DS* and *CR* exhibit strong notions of alterity and identity (the designation “Israel” refers only to those who have followed the way of the sect), and the tendency of the *Damascus Document* to seek the welfare of the widow, the poor, and the *ger* may reflect an internal hierarchy of the sect rather than an external social program.

The fifth paper (“An Idumean, That Is, a Half-Jew: Hasmoneans and Herodians Between Ancestry and Merit,” pp. 91–115), B. Eckhardt examines the label of Herod the Great as “Idumean, that is, a half-Jew” (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:403) in the context of the contemporary Jewish discussion on ancestry and merit. According to Eckhardt, while the Hasmonean tradition redefined the leadership by putting emphasis on merit and not on ancestry, the opinion ascribed in *Ant.* 14:403 to the last Hasmonean at power (Antigonus Mattathias) states the opposite: it is ancestry and not merit which really matters. This redefinition of the Hasmonean tradition by its last representative in power is meant to legitimize Antigonus’ rule for the Romans, and as such cannot be informative of either Herod’s conduct (“half-Jew” = “bad Jew”) or the status of Idumeans in the first century BCE.

In the sixth paper, A. Kolman Marshak (“Rise of the Idumeans: Ethnicity and Politics in Herod’s Judea,” pp. 117–129) analyses court conflicts at the courts of Hyrcanus the Hasmonean and Herod the Great through the perspective of a social model of “courtly society.” In this light, the conflicts between Malichos and Herod, as well as between Kostobar and Herod, do not have to be seen as conflicts driven by personal enmities, but rather appear to be standard power struggles between court factions (which are found at nearly every royal court in history): each side angles for greater power and influence within the court, and the king can play factions off each other, forming a stalemate that strengthens his power in the long-term.

The paper by L.-M. Günther (“Die Hasmonäerin Alexandra – Integrationsfigur für den Widerstand gegen den neuen König Herodes?” pp. 131–155) is devoted to Alexandra, a Hasmonean princess and mother-in-law of Herod the Great. It sketches Alexandra’s history through the perspective of court relations between Herod the Great and the two remaining lines of the Hasmonean family at his royal court, the Aristobulos line and the Hyrkanos II line. In Günther’s paper, Alexandra emerges as a clever but tragic figure. She is a power player with one objective in mind – the restoration of her own Hasmonean line to the Jewish throne, first using Herod, and later using her power against him.

The eighth paper, by J. Wilker (“God is with Italy now: Pro-Roman Jews and the Jewish Revolt,” pp. 157–187), pays attention to groups of Jews who supported Roman rule in Judea in the context of the Roman-Jewish War of 66–73 CE: the Herodians, especially Agrippa II and Berenice, and their followers; members of the upper classes in Jerusalem, especially the upper-class high priests; and elites of other cities, especially Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Scythopolis in Galilee. In this context, the uprising against Rome can also be understood as a Jewish civil war fed by social conflicts and other rivalries. Wilker stresses that, next to individual interests, pro-Roman Jews could explain their stand by pointing to the anachronism of rebellion and Rome’s magnitude (also understood in an ideological way as the result of divine support).

Next, C. Leonhard (“‘Herod’s Day’ and the Development of Jewish and Christian Festivals,” pp. 189–208) deals with Persius’ enigmatic remark about “Herod’s days.” Leonhard suggests that there is no evidence to identify Herod’s days as Hanukkah, the Sabbath, or any other Biblical or later rabbinic festivals. Furthermore, according to Leonhard, it is most likely that the cycles of festivals of Jewish Diaspora communities in the Roman Empire likely had their own *locally* determined occasions for meetings and festivals which were practiced within the framework of *collegia*.

G. Stemberger (“Forbidden Gentile Food in Early Rabbinic Writings,” pp. 209–224) discusses the prohibition of gentile food (identified by later rabbis with

the eighteen *halakhot*), which, according to some scholars, was enacted around the year 66 CE, and so was in some way connected to the outbreak of the revolt. However, according to Stemberger, rabbinic disputants show no awareness of the original reasons for these prohibitions or regard them as too obvious to make them explicit. At the same time, such foodlaws certainly played an important role in maintaining the Jewish identity after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE.

The last paper in the volume, by K. Spann (“The Meaning of Circumcision for Strangers in Rabbinic Literature,” pp. 225–242), examines Rabbinic references to the circumcision of strangers. Spann concludes that although circumcision is an indispensable ingredient in the process of conversion, it is not a single differentiating ritual, and, consequently, other factors (especially the prohibition of idolatry, and dietary customs) also play a role in marking the border between Israel and strangers.

To summarize, this book contains many interesting papers, some of which offer new insights, and is certainly worthy of recommendation to all interested in the problem of Jewish identity.