

Jews and Judaism in the Rabbinic era. By Isiah Gafni. (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism, 173.) Pp. x + 549 incl. 4 ills, 2 maps and 1 table. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019. €169. 978 3 16 152731 9
JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046919001362

This volume is a collection of twenty-three papers by one of the foremost historians of ancient Judaism, previously published in journals and joint volumes between 1977 and 2012. They span thirty-five years of his scholarship. Thematically, the papers deal with rabbinic Judaism in Roman Palestine and Sasanian Babylonia, the relationship between Jews in the Land of Israel and the Diaspora, and methodological questions. They have not been updated for this edition and are published in their original version. As such, they enable the reader to trace developments not only in the author's own thinking but also in approaches to ancient Judaism from the 1970s until today. As Gafni points out in his introduction, they can be considered 'historical artefacts' that do not necessarily reflect his current thinking on the topics discussed. Since some of the papers have previously appeared in Hebrew only, their publication in English will enable a broader readership to gain access to his scholarship.

The volume is comprised of four thematic parts. Within these parts, papers are arranged chronologically, from earlier to later Jewish texts. In the first part entitled 'History and historiography', Gafni presents articles that deal with Greek Jewish literature (Josephus and 1 Maccabees), rabbinic literature and the Letter of Sherira Gaon. They all address the question whether and to what extent historical information can be extrapolated from literary texts that are not historiographic in the modern sense of the term. The ways in which Josephus used 1 Maccabees as a source by making changes and additions to the text indicates the 'tendentiousness' (p. 26) of his writing and his desire to cater to a Greek readership. Similar reinterpretations are evident in the Hellenistic, Jewish and Christian representations of Jerusalem before and after the destruction of the Temple. Whereas both Jewish and non-Jewish Hellenistic writers created a pre-history for Jerusalem by associating it with Adam and Moses, the later rabbis disassociated themselves from the city and considered Hebron a better burial place for the first man. Both associations eventually entered the Christian tradition with pilgrims visiting both cities. In his survey article on rabbinic historiography, the author emphasises that rabbis not only refrained from producing historiographic literature but also 'steered away from ... a historical agenda' to be able 'to retell the biblical past in a manner that might reflect their own values and mores' (p. 46). This reinterpretation of history also concerned the Hasmoneans whom rabbis associated with rabbinic halakhah and pre-rabbinic sage figures. A different form of creativity in the adaptation of received traditions is evident in Rav Sherira Gaon's Epistle. Gafni argues that his 'talmudic narrative is no less than the attempt of a historian to forge some logical connection between otherwise disparate bits of information' (p. 157). As such Sherira Gaon can be seen as 'an innovator in the field of Jewish rabbinic historiography' (p. 159).

The papers of the second part all focus on Babylonian Jewish history. Commenting on current approaches to viewing the Babylonian Talmud in the context of Sasanian culture, Gafni points to the limitations of such an approach and advocates caution. While Babylonian rabbis would have been aware of their

surroundings (for example, Iranian festivals; belief in spirits and demons; family customs such as early marriage), a direct legal impact on rabbinic halakhah is harder to maintain, especially outside of cosmopolitan centres such as Mahoza. Through the institution of the exilarchate Babylonian Jews were able to maintain a degree of self-government, a phenomenon that would have resulted in 'local pride' and 'a self-image of parity' (p. 176) *vis-à-vis* Palestinian Jews under Rome. This 'local patriotism' (p. 247) would also have been based on other aspects such as an 'awareness that they reside ... in the cradle of earliest biblical civilization' (p. 248) and a sense of security in contrast to the 'adversarial relationship' (p. 255) between Palestinian Jews and the Byzantine rulers in late antiquity.

The relationship between Israel as the centre and the Diaspora, especially Babylonia, is the topic of the papers gathered in the third part of the volume. Especially interesting here is an article that investigates Babylonian Jews' knowledge about (Jews in) Roman Palestine. In response to Doron Mendels and Arye Edrei's argument about a split between Aramaic-speaking Middle Eastern Judaism and Greek-speaking Jews in the western Diaspora, Gafni argues that Jewish culture in Babylonia and Roman Palestine also evinced significant differences in 'cultural and social mindsets' (p. 340). This phenomenon threatens the image of an 'overly-symbiotic' (*ibid.*) rabbinic Judaism in the Middle East. A methodological problem pertaining to both approaches is the evaluation of Middle Eastern Judaism through a narrowly rabbinic literary lens. In order to reinvestigate the relationship between eastern and western Judaism in late antiquity, other types of evidence (Jewish art, epigraphy and material culture) need to be included in the comparison. A further controversial issue is the involvement of Palestinian patriarchs in Diaspora communities through letters and 'apostles'. Gafni admits that the authenticity of such letters, preserved in the Talmud, is questionable, but he maintains (with Lee I. Levine) that this should not be a reason to reject their significance altogether, especially if certain aspects are supported by Christian sources.

The fourth and final part comprises papers reflecting on Talmudic history in modern scholarship from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. While traditional *yeshiva* scholarship had focused on the Babylonian Talmud, the new historically-informed *Wissenschaft* approach with its interest in classical literature, as well as a new 'spirit of nationalism' (p. 367) among Jews, revived interest in the Talmud Yerushalmi. Reflecting on distinctions between contemporary historical-critical approaches and the earlier, more positivistic Israeli scholarship represented by Graetz, Alon and Safrai, Gafni remarks that 'the narrative itself has been rendered more elusive and distant' (p. 439). In fact, the narrative of an institutionalised rabbinic communal leadership, modelled on the Orthodox rabbinic leadership in Israel, has been dismantled in favour of a more informal, diverse and flexible rabbinic movement that was thoroughly integrated into the Graeco-Roman cultural context.

These collected papers are much more than 'historical artefacts'. This is a collection of 'classical' articles in ancient Judaism, written by one of the most

prolific and preeminent scholars in the field. It will constitute the basis of future scholarship for years to come.

SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

CATHERINE HEZSER

Jews and Christians in antiquity. A regional perspective. Edited by Pierluigi Lanfranchi and Joseph Verheyden. (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion, 18.) Pp. vi + 370 incl. 1 fig. Leuven–Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018. €84 (paper). 978 90 429 3461 0

JEH (70) 2019; doi:10.1017/S0022046919001477

Why another book on Jews and Christians in antiquity? The answer, according to the editors of this volume, lies, negatively, in a dissatisfaction with the way in which the subject as presently studied seems overly concerned with the question of establishing the reality behind ancient texts taken up with this subject; and positively by applying to the evidence what they term a set of spatial methods. The latter is not ‘simply a matter of mapping the distribution of religious groups in a specific area, but of using methods capable of accounting for the spatial and geographic variations of the religious phenomena that are analysed’. Such an approach does not have as its aim the creation of some unified theory. Precisely by concentrating on the local, and upon a range of material, literary, epigraphic and papyrological, the picture that emerges will be a varied and composite one.

Some of the essays under discussion come close to fulfilling what the subtitle of the book describes as ‘a regional perspective’. Willy Clarysse looks at some well and lesser known papyrological evidence for Jewish life in Ptolemaic Alexandria, some of which, interestingly, supports the idea of a Jewish politeuma, or special Jewish constitution within certain locations, though the discussion of Christianity, exclusively concerned with onomastic evidence and what it shows about population increase in the fourth and fifth centuries and beyond, appears almost as an appendix. Daniel Tripaldi examines the *Apocryphon of John* showing how facets of its content do not allow for a simple distinction between what is Jewish and what is Christian, and locating some of its traditions in a developing Alexandrian Jewish Hellenism; and this sense of the permeability of relations recurs in Marie-Françoise Baslez’s essay on Jewish-Christian relations as presented in the *Martyrdom of Pionios*. An emphasis on proximity rather than separation permeates the essay by Raúl Salinero on Jewish-Christian relations in Roman Spain, here reading evidence from the early fourth-century Council of Elvira and sermons of the same city’s bishop, Gregory, delivered some forty years later, as proof positive of the cordial relations between Jews and Christians on the ground. For various reasons the ecclesiastical authorities opposed this state of affairs, and by the fifth century Jewish and Christian communities ceased to interact in positive ways. The essay by Sabine Fialon on Africa is, given the evidence, necessarily sketchy and looks at the ways in which Jews are presented in a number of later (fifth- and sixth-century) martyrdom accounts from that province. These are used in part, however, to enquire as to what kind of relationship between Jews and Christians might be deduced from their presentation, a point which the editors,