

a way that implies knowledge of Yavnean rabbis. Albert Baumgarten looks again at the much-discussed subject of Celsus' Jew, arguing for his 'real' character, and then showing how consideration of the words attributed to him impact on current debates about Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity. In particular Baumgarten highlights the fact that the Jew in question assumes an absolute division between Judaism and Christianity and rather than concentrating upon issues of ritual as central to that difference, chooses to highlight issues of doctrine. In the final essay of the volume Ushay Rosen-Zvi looks at the way in which Jewish ideas of the evil inclination and Christian ideas of demonology coincide (here concentrating on rabbinic and monastic material). The similarities outlined are, however, to be considered as a witness to what the author terms 'a shared discursive space' rather than actual contact.

As is always the case with collective volumes, it would be difficult to draw a particular conclusion from the various essays. Some seem more favourable to the general rationale of the volume as set out by its editors, that is, taking more seriously the shared character of Jewish and Christian history in this period (one thinks especially of the essays by Fredriksen, de Sandt and Tomson), while others are not (see Barclay's and Baumgarten's contributions). Some bypass the question of a shared history, arguing for something more complex (Rosen-Zvi), and some barely engage with the subject at all (Schwartz, Safrai, Mason and Goldsworthy), their essays, one assumes, forming a kind of helpful background to discussion. The revolts do loom large, but aside from Overman's piece, and by a different route, de Sandt's and Tomson's, there is little direct engagement with the problem of the effect of these events upon Jewish-Christian relations. The editors are aware of these matters, and indeed some might think that the presence of variant perspectives and methodologies is preferable to a more monochrome product. Certainly many of the essays bear closer inspection in their own right, whatever we might think of the coherence of the volume in which they are found.

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Jésus dans le Talmud et la littérature rabbinique ancienne. By Thierry Murcia. (Judaïsme Ancien et Origines du Christianisme.) Pp. 810. Turnhout: Brepols, 2014. €120 (paper). 978 2 403 55215 6
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In recent times, and building on scholarship of an earlier period, there has been much interest in the question of the figure of Jesus in ancient Jewish literature, in both the Talmud and the *Toledot Yeshu*. One thinks in particular of works by Dan Jaffé and most especially of Peter Schäfer. Joining these now is this massive work of scholarship by Thierry Murcia, stretching to nearly 700 pages of text, many of which are dominated by ample footnotes.

Murcia's work, as the title suggests, is exclusively concerned with the Talmud understood broadly as inclusive of the Mishnah, Tosefta, Palestinian and Babylonian Talmudim and Midrashim. All of the most important passages, laid out originally with great care by Travers-Herford in 1906, whose work is regularly cited, are discussed; and many of the discussions have an almost

encyclopaedic quality to them, with the opinions of a range of scholars discussed at length and with care. Nothing strikingly distinctive emerges from the volume, however, with Murcia often defending an already extant theory about a particular passage rather than introducing a new one.

Emerging from the book are a number of conclusions. In the vast majority of cases, the material under discussion does not elucidate the life of the historical Jesus (Murcia mentions just two possible exceptions to this view, first the idea that Jesus was related to someone called Panthera, possibly the father of Joseph, and the idea, found in the earliest Jewish sources, associated with the Tosefta, that Jesus and his followers were effective healers, a thesis emerging from Murcia's interesting opinion that attacks on Jesus' healing as magic are relatively late). By and large, it can be argued that the Talmudic sources give evidence primarily of the period in which they were written (in the case of the Babylonian Talmud, largely from the sixth century onward, at least in terms of its editing). In this context Murcia makes some illuminating observations on the highly contextual character of a number of well-known traditions about Jesus, including those relating to his execution found in bSanh 43a and to his activity in Egypt as a magician and idolator in bSanh 107b (so, for instance, the reference in the last of these passages to Jesus worshipping a brick has more to do with Byzantine Christians as lovers of icons than it does with anything else, and the reference in Babylonian Jewish sources to Jesus as *Jesus ha-nozri* is simply another way of saying Jesus the Christian rather than Jesus the Nazarene or Jesus from Nazareth). Such a contextual reading of the traditions, wedded to a clear view of the creators of the Talmudim as much more than simply compilers, is related to another major claim of the book, namely that there is very little evidence in any of these traditions of knowledge of the Gospels. Here Murcia, following a number of other scholars, is highly critical of Peter Schäfer's theory that many of the rabbinic traditions about Jesus, though late, and mainly Babylonian in origin, betray a kind of parodic interaction with the Gospels, and give evidence of an evolving Jewish anti-Gospel (possibly based upon John). The arguments here are detailed (and many have to do not just with a critique of the specific arguments of Schäfer but also with the claim that a contextual reading better explains their distinctive elements) and succeed in showing up the questionable speculativeness of Schäfer's approach, which on occasions can be said *a priori* to assume knowledge of the Gospels on the part of the authors of the Talmudim rather than actually demonstrating it. More often than not, Murcia argues, we should assume that the rabbis gained their knowledge from stories and legends about Jesus in general circulation (they knew a discourse, not a text) rather than from a close reading of the New Testament Gospels (so, for instance, the claim in bSanh 43a that Jesus was executed by the Jews with no involvement of the Romans is explained by assuming that Jews were responding to the general claim of Christians that responsibility for Jesus' death lay exclusively with the Jews as well as accounting for the fact that at the time of the writing of the passage [post-Constantine] the Romans had become Christians). Consistent with this, Murcia disputes the view that most of the references in rabbinic passages to 'gilyonim', found first in a number of passages in the Tosefta, are in fact references to the Gospels, preferring in most instances to see them as referring to apocalyptic

works or margins of a scroll on which there was writing. Even the passage in bShabb 116b, which seems to refer to Matthew v.17, is unlikely to have arisen straightforwardly from a reading of that Gospel. Because Murcia believes that many of the traditions about Jesus belong to the latest levels of the redaction of the Talmud, at least in their final form, he is more open than some to contemplate the idea that rather than the *Toledoth Yeshu* being dependent upon rabbinic material, on occasion evidence of dependence is reversed.

Much more could be said about this book, not least about its author's understanding of the relationship of the figure of Ben Stada to Jesus (possibly important in the development of the idea of Jesus as someone who misleads the people and is a magician) and the biblical figure of Balaam, too, on his fascinating views on the character of rabbinic polemic against Jesus and on the character of the coded language used by the Talmud's authors to engage in anti-Christian polemic; and on the complex development of these traditions. One hopes that this book will be the subject of longer and more detailed reviews than this one.

The book has no over-arching theory about the Talmud's view of Jesus. The facts that references to Jesus remain scattered, rare and always incidental (they are always part of a wider halakhic discussion), and that the rabbis never sought to oppose the figure of Jesus (at least ostensibly) in a detailed way, remain unresolved. The appeal of Schäfer's view, irrespective of its precise details, is that it can be seen to assume that these scattered references are part of a larger engagement with the life of Jesus, which one might think by the time of the writing down of the Talmudim, was likely (and indeed Murcia is clear that the nature of the attacks upon Christianity are bitter and sarcastic in the face of a heresy [minut] that the rabbis regard as a threat). But this merely begs the question about the level of interaction between rabbis and Christians, not least those living in Babylon, away from ostensible Christian influence. From the Christian side, it is, I would contend, a striking feature of *adversus Judaeos* literature that rarely are subjects relating to Jesus' life explicitly discussed – in fact most of the discussion relates to the Tanak or the Christian Old Testament. But Murcia's avoidance of a theory about Jesus in the Talmud, in spite of some bold proposals along the way, is a sober reflection of the difficulty of the sources. After reading this book, what is clear is that any future student of the subject of Jesus in the Talmud, and many other subjects related to the development of rabbinic literature and Jewish-Christian relations, will be compelled to take account of this monumental work.

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Matthaeus Adversus Christianos. The use of the Gospel of Matthew in Jewish polemics against the divinity of Jesus. By Christoph Ochs. (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2. Reihe, 350.) Pp. xvii + 423. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. €94 (paper). 978 3 16 152615 2; 0340 9570
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Christopher Ochs has enriched the scholarly world with a medieval Jewish reception history of the Gospel of Matthew. I invite scholars from a broad range of