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Review

CHRISTIAN JULIEN ROBIN, ed., *Le judaïsme de l'Arabie antique. Actes du Colloque de Jérusalem (février 2006)*

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Reviews

We must be grateful to Norbert Nebes for this insightful investigation into a text that will certainly continue to stimulate intense debate concerning several historical and linguistic issues related to the archaic Sabaean phase.

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CHRISTIAN JULIEN ROBIN, ed., *Le judaïsme de l'Arabie antique. Actes du Colloque de Jérusalem (février 2006)*, *Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme*, 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015). 567 pp., 115 illus. Price: €105.00. ISBN: 978-2-503-55115-9.

This volume edited and mainly authored by Christian Julien Robin is an indispensable contribution to the study of the history—the origin, emergence, development, character, and impact—of Judaism in Ancient Arabia. This is a classic topic for the religious history of the wider area, namely of Arabia, and South Arabia, particularly in its connection to the Roman, Persian, and even African world of Late Antiquity. The issue is of great significance, from several points of view. Judaism in South Arabia has long been understood as a decisive factor for the emergence of Islam and, as for Ethiopianists, the question might also be evaluated in the light of the emergence of Christian monotheism in fourth-century Aksum. Apart from the well-known fact that no South Arabian polytheistic dedicatory inscription was produced from the last quarter of the fourth century (c.380 CE) onwards, the importance and extent of Judaism in Ancient Arabia has gained momentum in the course of the last twenty years, as new evidence has emerged showing both the depth and pervasiveness of a phenomenon which is almost completely ignored by mainstream Talmudic Judaism.

This wonderful publication, carefully edited and rich in illustrations, is formally presented as the proceedings of a Jerusalem conference convened by Robin on 5–7 February 2006, although some of the contributions included have been substantially updated, so that they present the state of the art as of the date of publication. However, two essays are posthumous. The thick volume is divided into two sections according to the sources considered, ‘Épigraphie et archéologie’ (pp. 13–434), and a much smaller one, ‘Traditions manuscrites’ (pp. 435–538): this distribution, in and of itself, marks a paradigm that, on the one hand, reflects the state of the most recent research (no less than 50 to 100 inscriptions document Judaism in South Arabia) and, on the other hand, might also point to the need for further research of manuscript sources on a larger scale.

The volume opens with Robin's Introduction' (pp. 7–11) and extremely long essay, 'Quel judaïsme en Arabie?' (pp. 15–295). This text (a draft of which was put at the disposal of the participants during the conference) occupies more than half of the volume and, even on its own, would be a remarkable work. It is the *summa* of Robin's numerous previous contributions and provides a complete overview of Judaism in Ancient Arabia based on a scrupulous analysis of epigraphic and non-epigraphic sources: it is essential reading for anyone interested in this phenomenon, and, I dare say, in Antiquity or Judaism as well. It also includes an anthology of edited, translated, and commented inscriptions (pp. 174–200), and a critical inventory of the sources (pp. 200–204), while the synthesis (pp. 204–220, 'Deux judaïsmes en Arabie?') sketches an interpretive distinction between a first Ḥimyarite phase characterised by sacerdotal Judaism followed by a second phase which was more oriented towards rabbinic Judaism, as attested in Ḥiḡāz immediately before the rise of Islam. Yet, as is the style of the author, the depth and exhaustiveness of the presentation and the care for detail and nuance eludes any adequate summary.

The following essays in the same section focus on specific sources and issues. Maria Gorea's 'Les classes sacerdotales (*mišmarôt*) de l'inscription juive de Bayt Ḥāḏir (Yémen)' (pp. 297–329) analyses the fifth/sixth-century Jewish inscription listing sacerdotal classes, which is taken as important evidence for a non-rabbinic Judaism at the time. Alessia Prioleta's 'Le pilier de Tan'im. La plus ancienne inscription juive du Yémen? Une approche paléographique' (pp. 331–358) discusses the early dating (first century CE) of the Tan'im inscription proposed by Robin and suggests that, on palaeographic grounds, and despite contradictory features, the inscription is to be dated to the second/third century CE at the latest. Shaul Shaked's 'The 'En 'Avdat inscription revisited' (pp. 359–372) is devoted to the presumably oldest Arabic inscription (second/third century CE) and contributes to an understanding of the broader linguistic context rather than of the core issues of the volume. Yosef Yuval Tobi's 'The Jewish Community in Ḥāṣī, South Yemen, in the Light of Its Makrab Šūrī'el and Cemetery' (pp. 373–386) deals with the inscription MAFRAY-Ḥāṣī 1, considered to be the most important document on the Jewish presence in South Arabia, second only to the Greek inscription at the cemetery of Bēth-She'arīm and the *mišmarôt* list of Bayt Ḥāḏir. Paul Yule and Katharina Galor's 'Zafār, Watershed of Late Pre-Islamic Culture' (pp. 387–421) is a comprehensive analysis of the archaeological setting of the capital of Ḥimyar that challenges the established perception of the Ḥimyarite period as an age of decadence. The archaeological section is closed by Ronny Reich's 'The Ḥimyarite Tomb in the Jewish Necropolis of Beth She'arim. An Introductory Note' (pp. 423–434), and is dedicated to the most famous (ante mid-fourth century CE) Greek inscription(s) (mentioning Ομηριτων) at the necropolis of Bēt Shē'arīm, that first re-

vealed, when discovered in 1936–1940, the tight and surprising links between Palestine and South Arabian Judaism.

The smaller section ‘Traditions manuscrites’ is opened by Zeev Rubin’s (1942–2009) posthumous ‘From the Rabbanat at the court of Šarahbiʿil Yakkuf to the Tiberian Priests at the court of Yūsuf Asʿar Yathʿar’ (pp. 437–452), and examines Christian and Islamic literary sources on Judaism in South Arabia, with a special focus on the Ethiopic *Acts of Azqir*,¹ to which Rubin had already dedicated several contributions. Rubin supports—rightly in my opinion—the thesis of the actual presence of proper Judaism in fifth-century South Arabia and at the court of King Šarahbiʿil Yakkuf. José Costa’s ‘Les juifs d’Arabie dans la littérature talmudique’ (pp. 453–484) is dedicated to the difficult question of why Arabian Jews are hardly found in the Talmud and whether this is due to an intentional omission or to other factors. Gerald Hawting’s ‘Jews or Pagans? The identity of Those who Reject the Messenger in the Qurʾān’ (pp. 485–494) argues, against the prevailing Islamic tradition, that the early opponents of Islam might have been monotheists rather than pagans. Within the same historical context, Michael Lecker’s ‘Wāqidī (d. 822) vs. Zuhri (d. 742): The Fate of the Jewish Banū Abī l-Ḥuqayq’ (pp. 495–509) casts light on the traditions concerning a specific episode at the dawn of Islam, namely the conflict between Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina and the subsequent conquest of Khaybar. Robert Hoyland’s ‘The Jewish Poets of Muḥammad’s Ḥijāz’ (pp. 511–522) explores the debate on the possibility of an authentic pre-Islamic Jewish-Arabian poetic production and the reliability of the tradition. Sergio Noja’s (1931–2008) also posthumous ‘The puzzling name of the “valley of *Tuwā*” in the Qurʾān (XX.12–LXXIX.16). Is it a calque of the biblical Hebrew *Horev*?’ (pp. 523–538) approaches the question in the title from the much broader point of view of the debate on an early translation of the Arabic Bible, assembling an extensive array of evidence for the existence of an oral form of this translation, and including the question of whether Qurʾānic *Tuwā* renders Hebrew *Horev*.

¹ Rubin uses C. Conti Rossini’s edition published as long ago as 1910. As already announced by C. J. Robin, ‘Nagrān vers l’époque du massacre: notes sur l’histoire politique, économique et institutionnelle et sur l’introduction du christianisme (avec un réexamen du *Martyre d’Azqir*)’, in J. Beaucamp, F. Briquel-Chatonnet, C. J. Robin, eds, *Juifs et chrétiens en Arabie aux V^e et VI^e siècles: Regards croisés sur les sources*, Collège de France–CNRS, Centre de recherche d’Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, Monographies, 32, Le massacre de Najrān, 2 (Paris: Association des amis du Centre d’histoire et civilisation de Byzance, 2010), 39–106, p. 81, I am preparing a new edition of *Gadla ʿAzqir* based on a much broader manuscript basis (twenty-three manuscripts are available to me at this moment). The edition is forthcoming.

Reviews

An extremely detailed 'Index sélectif des noms et des notions se rapportant au judaïsme en Arabie' (pp. 539–562) closes this volume, which will surely become an indispensable reference work for all scholars dealing with Judaism in Antique Arabia.

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WOLFGANG HAHN and VINCENT WEST, *Sylloge of Aksumite Coins in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, 2016). 159 pp., 1 map. Price: £40.00. ISBN: 978-1-910807-10-1.

This volume is a systematic catalogue of the 600 Aksumite coins (excluding forgeries) held in the Heberden Coin Room of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archeology, University of Oxford. Like other coins belonging to the same period and of the same kind, part of the collection is on permanent display in the new Ashmolean (opened December 2009) for research and teaching purposes. The collection covers the whole sequence of Aksum's coin-striking kings from the third to the seventh century CE, and numismatics is one of the most important sources for this period. In 1984, the Ashmolean collection amounted to only sixty-five coins. In 2004, the private collector Bent Juel-Jensen (1922–2006) generously donated what became the most important part of the collection. Together with further donations from Juel-Jensen up to 2006, this donation has increased the Ashmolean collection that now contains over 535 coins.

The authors of this catalogue, the well-known specialists in Aksumite coinage, Wolfgang Hahn, of the University of Vienna, and Vincent West, have not always shared the same ideas and views on several questions related to Aksumite coinage. In this volume, however, they present a unified view of the state of the art in the field, not without caveats on doubtful cases. They also revise some of the arguments made in the last comprehensive monograph by Stuart Munro-Hay and the same Bent Juel-Jensen some twenty years ago, *Aksumite Coinage. A revised and enlarged edition of The Coinage of Aksum* (London: Spink, 1995). In fact, the type orders used in this latter work are adopted for the arrangement of coins in the present catalogue.

The concise Introduction (pp. 9–19, 'Aksumite Coinage Again', by Wolfgang Hahn, preceded by a map on p. 8 and with an overview table on p. 17) offers an updated guide to Aksumite numismatics and a comprehensive list with a summary of the coinage of the eighteen coin-striking Ak-