

they undermine Palestinian mythology and contrast the standing of Christianity under Muslim rule and in Israel. Taken together, these aspects of the work raise doubts about its usefulness as a reliable overview or analysis. What it does present is a strongly voiced apology for Christian Zionism's claim to Israeli and Jewish loyalty, and its dismissal of other Christian attitudes toward the State of Israel.

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JAFFEE, MARTIN S. *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 B.C.E.–400 C.E.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. xi+239 pp. \$49.95 (cloth).

Martin Jaffee addresses a subject of central significance to the literature and ideology of rabbinic Judaism: that two Torahs were revealed to and transmitted by the people of Israel from the revelation at Mt. Sinai and henceforth, one written (Scripture) and the other oral ("in the mouth," as here rendered). Jaffee's book is the fullest and most sophisticated treatment of this subject to date and promises to set the terms of future inquiry for the foreseeable future.

In the "Introduction," Jaffee sets forth the program of the book, revealing his thorough grounding in the cross-cultural perspectives of recent orality studies. These have had the effect of deconstructing the very orality-literacy duality and its assumption of the priority of the former over the latter, stressing, rather, the performative interpenetration and mutual dependency of literary and oral modes of tradition construction and transmission. In oral cultures, written texts are created in order to be orally, publicly, and interpretively performed; writing is suffused with an orality that is itself textually grounded. From this perspective, what is particularly noteworthy, and will prove unique, of early rabbinic literature is not so much its twinned "oral-literary tradition" and "oral-performative tradition" as the self-consciousness of its ideological constructions of an orality that is coterminous with the originary revelation of a written Scripture. The purpose of the chapters that follow is to understand, through social and cultural contextualizing, that rabbinic ideological self-consciousness.

Part 1, comprising the first three chapters, does a superb job of sketching the social and ideological antecedents to rabbinic Judaism in the second-temple period, from around 200 B.C.E. to 70 C.E., with particular attention to the role of scribal practices and oral teaching among the Qumran community (of the Dead Sea Scrolls) and the Pharisees. Since literacy was limited and scribal circles were closely allied with priests, whether in or out of central authority, sacred scriptures and their accompanying text-interpretive traditions, themselves committed to writing, were generally orally transmitted and aurally received. However, Jaffee finds no evidence for an oral-literary tradition conceived of as an entity distinct from written instruction; in short, no evidence for a prerabbinic "Torah in the mouth."

In Part 2, Jaffee turns his attention to his main target, rabbinic literature itself, carefully differentiating between the variegated evidence of earlier ("tannaitic") and latter ("amoraic") Palestinian rabbinic sources. In chapter 4, Jaffee focuses on the Mishnah and Tosefta for their construction of rabbinic instruction in discrete forms suitable for memorization as the prime vehicle for the

transmission of tradition, and their grounding of legal tradition (*halakhah*) in the personal teaching and practice of the rabbinic sages.

In chapter 5, he turns his attention to the so-called tannaitic midrashim, where he finds the first explicit expressions of an ideological construction of the "Torah in the mouth," especially in the delineations of a curriculum of study that not only differentiates between written Scripture (*miqra*) and "repeated tradition" (*mishnah*), but traces the latter, as companion to the former, back to Moses and Sinai, thereby assigning Sinaitic authority to rabbinic *halakhah*. Whether these different emphases of Mishnah and Tosefta, on the one hand, and the tannaitic midrashim, on the other, are, as Jaffee avers, a reflection of chronological development rather than a function of their different discursive genres remains to be argued more fully.

In chapter 6, Jaffee explores his thesis of "an orality that is at the same time a reflection and a creation of writing" (p. 124), through the close analysis of several Mishnaic passages as "scripted performance[s]" (p. 101). While arguing that written texts and their oral performances are so saturated with one another as to make their delineation an impossibility, he makes a modest attempt at just that.

Jaffee's most important contribution and climax to the preceding chapters is set out in chapter 7, where he finally explains why the "Torah in the mouth," both in ideology and praxis, is most fully and forcefully articulated in the texts of the Galilean rabbis of the third and fourth centuries (the *amora'im*). He situates their oral-performative textual practices first within the broader context of Greco-Roman and Byzantine *paideia* and then, more specifically, within the socioreligious discipleship circles of rabbinic sages and their students, wherein orally performed tradition both defined and transformed its dialogical participants: "Those who might read the texts of rabbinic teaching in isolation from the discipleship experience had neither the complete text nor any *torah*, for properly transformative knowledge could not be gained by discursive understanding of any text on its own—not even that of the Torah inscribed in Scripture. Rather, it was won existentially by living a life open to dialogue with the Sage, in whom *torah* was present as a mode of his embodied existence. For *torah* to be present, the Sage must be present as its unmediated source and embodiment in word and deed" (p. 152).

While I am, in general, in full and enthusiastic agreement with Jaffee's arguments and conclusions, I am somewhat less confident in his linear historical scheme of development and less sanguine of our ability to differentiate the literary and oral strata in the textual traditions that have reached us in written form but with oral conceits. Also, based on Jaffee's own contextualizing argument, one should expect that the Babylonian sages do more than just "iron out a few details" (p. 7) of Palestinian rabbinic conceptions, given that the social-institutional context of their instruction was significantly different from that of their Palestinian colleagues, at least by the time of the Babylonian Talmud's redaction. But that, as Jaffee accedes, remains for others to argue. These minor quibbles aside, Jaffee's book is a groundbreaking contribution to the history of rabbinic Judaism, as well as to our understanding, more generally, of the role of orality in the formation and transmission of religious tradition and identity.

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