

SHORT NOTES

JONGKYUNG LEE, *A Redactional Study of the Book of Isaiah 13–23* (Oxford Theology & Religion Monographs). Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018. Pp. 216. Price: £65.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-881676-8.

Lee's fine monograph, based on his Oxford D.Phil., investigates the tension in Isaiah 13–23 between the Gentiles' future submission to Israel and their inclusion within Yhwh's people. Rather than seeing these aspects as the result of gradual textual growth, however, Lee argues that the germane verses all belong to one single redaction. The redactor responsible for it, identified with the author of Isaiah 40–55, made a series of late-exilic additions that outline the *dual* fate of the nations: to join with Yhwh's people (14:1–4a; 14:32b; 16:1–4a; 18:7) and to humble themselves before Yhwh (14:26–7; 19:16–17; and 23:8–9, 11). This claim is supported by the thematic affinity between the two sets of texts. Lee further postulates two post-exilic additions in Isa 19:18–25 and 23:15–18, identifiable due to their references to the (rebuilt) temple in Jerusalem. After a detailed history of research in chapter 1, the following chapters 2–8 explore the redaction history of the pertinent oracles, with the aim not only to identify the different redactional layers but also to ascertain how the later material transforms the message of the earlier texts. The volume concludes with a helpful summary. This is a very well-researched monograph that deserves a full hearing. My one concern is the monolithic view of Isaiah 40–55 as the work of a single, late-exilic author. It will be interesting to integrate the insights of this volume with more recent redaction-critical work on Isaiah 40–55.

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GEOFFREY HERMAN and JEFFREY RUBENSTEIN (eds), *The Aggada of the Bavli and Its Cultural World* (Brown Judaic Studies 362). Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2018. Pp. xxxv + 393. Price: \$56.95 paperback. ISBN: 978-1-94652-708-0.

When I first saw the title of this volume, and knowing that the Babylonian Talmud ('the Bavli' of the title) is usually characterized as being preoccupied with law, I thought this was another contribution to the important subject of the inter-relation between law (*nomos*) and narrative in ancient rabbinic literature. And while this inter-relation does come in for discussion in the course of the twelve excellent studies that comprise this volume (following the editors' helpful 'introduction'), it is not the main focus or point. Rather, the purpose of the volume is to locate the stories of the Babylonian Talmud within the matrix of narratives and myths that circulated in the broad and richly multi-cultural context of Sasanian Babylonia, including its Mesopotamian, Syriac (Eastern Christian), Zoroastrian, Manichaean and Mandaean strands, in a rich embroidery of cultures. The over-arching argument of the book is that we do best by situating the talmudic stories in the warp and weave of this rich multi-, inter-, and transcultural embroidery rather than looking for discrete, unidirectional arrows of 'influence'.

The volume's divisions and contributors highlight the following 'contexts': 1. Mesopotamian (Sara Ronis, Reuven Kiperwasser and Yakir Paz); 2. Sasanian (Geoffrey Herman, Jason Mokhtarian and Shai Secunda); Syriac and Christian (Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, Simcha Gross and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal); Zoroastrian (Yaakov Elman, Yishai Kiel and David Brodsky). As an indication of the newness (and energy) of this contextual approach to the Babylonian Talmud, the contributors tend to be young (comparatively) and mid-career, but not entirely. The noticeable gender imbalance (two women out of twelve contributors) may simply reflect the participants in the June 2015 conference at New York University from which the book's chapters derive, and/or the larger field that they represent.

Just a couple of things of which I would have liked to have seen more: Erwin Goodenough is reported (apocryphally perhaps) to have said that parallel lines remain parallel (and disconnected) until a bridging line connects them. While I do not mean to invoke the scourge of Samuel Sandmel's 'parallelomania', which can lead to its obverse and equally regrettable 'parallelophobia', it is fair to ask about the nature and extent of the social and cultural networks by which the cultural interactions considered herein would or could have taken place. Mention is made in the introduction of the overlapping rabbinic and Christian 'academies' at Nisibis. But such comparative scholasticism, as critically important as it is, is hardly sufficient to ground a much more extensive (as well as geographically dispersed and linguistically diverse) range of narratives as herein valuably displayed and analysed.

Finally, the word 'aggada' in the volume's title, which can be loosely translated as 'narrative' or 'story' or even 'myth', is usually contrasted, as indicated at the outset of this review, with 'halakha' or (for want of a better equivalent) 'law'. Almost entirely, the 'aggada' (or plural, 'aggadot') of this volume is that of stories about rabbinic sages and their contemporaries, whether pietistic or demonic. Yet in rabbinic parlance, such aggada (and aggadot) also comprises the exegetically retellings of scriptural (Hebrew biblical) narratives (e.g., the 'binding of Isaac'). While these aggadot may have less ground for comparison with Sasanian stories of 'holy men', the Syriac homilies and biblical commentaries offer a rich, largely unmined ground for comparison and contextualization, not the least for their linguistic, chronological, and geographical proximity. But then again, the art (and aesthetics) of narrative or story telling is not bounded for comparative purposes by the subjects (whether biblical or rabbinic) of the narratives.

All in all, the conceivers and editors of this volume, Geoffrey Herman and Jeffrey Rubenstein, are to be commended for having produced a collection of consistently high quality and overall cohesion (not common for such conference volumes). It is an excellent set of snapshots of the rich interplay between the stories of the Babylonian Talmud and their rich variety of cultural analogues.

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