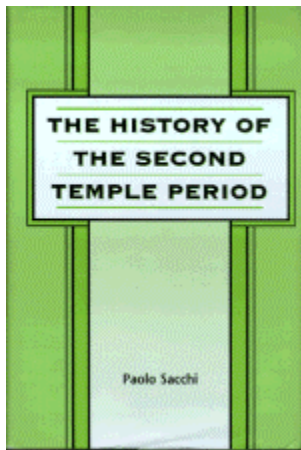


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Sacchi, Paolo

The History of the Second Temple Period

JSOTSup 285

Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000. Pp. 533, Cloth, \$95, ISBN 1850759383.

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While Lester Grabbe's *Judaism From Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992, 1994) remains the more helpful tool, Sacchi's text provides readers with an opportunity to encounter a unique synthesis provided by one of Turin's leading First Testament scholars. But potential readers should not be misled by the title. A translation (with only minor revisions) of his *Storia del mondo guidaico* (1976), the monograph is more a limited survey of Jewish thought than a reconstruction of the past events which shaped that thought.

Sacchi arranges his study into four major parts, "The Age of Exile" (Part I), "The Zadokite Period" (Part II), "Palestine from the Advent of Seleucid Domination to the Destruction of the Second Temple" (Part III) and "The Themes of Middle Judaism" (Part IV). Part I provides background to the main focus on the period of the Second Temple. By noting the chapter titles in the section ("The Events" and "The Jewish Culture of the Sixth Century") one can begin to appreciate Sacchi's approach. Part II sustains this mix between chronology and concepts (Sacchi's "themes"). Part II begins with a chapter on "Early Zadokitism (C. 520 - 400 BCE)." Following are chapters on "Nehemiah" and "The Samaritans." The section then ends with a chapter on "Late Zadokitism (C. 400 - 200 BCE)." Part III includes chapters on "Palestine under the Seleucids: The Maccabees," "The Hasmonaeans," and "Judaea at the Time of Jesus of Nazareth." Finally, after an introductory chapter, Part IV proceeds with chapters on "The Problem of Knowledge," "Predeterminism and the Problem of Evil," "Salvation," "Messianism," "The Righteous," "Life beyond Death: The Immortal Soul and the Resurrection of the Body," "The Sacred

and the Profane, The Impure and the Pure,” “The Two Calendars” and “Jesus in His Time.”

An index includes references to Scripture and other related literature as well as “Authors.” However, not all authors indexed by page are included in the bibliography (the reader is directed to the bibliography in Sacchi’s *Jewish Apocalyptic and its History*). Nor are all authors listed in the bibliography referenced in the index of authors. An index of topics would have been helpful.

Of special interest to Sacchi are what he considers the “fundamental themes of Jewish thought” (p. 27). While his concern to set Jesus in the context of the facts and ideas of his time (p. 42) might justify the scope of the study, it should be clear that the discussion of themes is largely limited to texts from within and around Palestine. Those anticipating a discussion of how those themes functioned in the Diaspora of the Second Temple period will be disappointed except for the few sections discussing the life of Alexandrian Jews.

According to the author, the book is not a “history of Palestine, nor is it simply a history of Judaism. Its aim is rather to illustrate, to place certain aspects of pre-Christian Jewish thought in their proper context in order to better understand the earliest positions of Christianity.” (p. 27) While Sacchi understands his work in line with that of Chilton and Evans, there are differences in method. Little is debated in the monograph. Sacchi’s style sets forth his views largely through declarative sentences that only occasionally allow a reader to refer to seminal, similar, or opposing points of view. While the preface (suggested by Sacchi to be read as an afterword) does show how Sacchi appreciates some more recent bibliography, there is little consideration for other important secondary literature. For example, a book considering the themes of salvation and life beyond death might be expected to engage George Nickelsburg’s *Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1972).

With respect to more specific statements, some might puzzle over Sacchi’s view that “Enochism” was “close to becoming the religion of Israel” (p. 19) or his doubt that the historian who compiled the history of the kings of Judah and Israel “ever dealt with Deuteronomy” (p. 86). Those concerned with the concepts of sacred and profane might wonder why his understanding of impurity as matter out of place is only a third notion rather than an underlying notion for his previous two. Those concerned with the theologies of the First Testament might be more inclined to see Sacchi’s “Theology of the Promise” and “Theology of the Covenant” as two possible ends of a continuum that might serve as a variable or lens through which readers might encounter a text rather than as “fundamental” ways of “conceiving religion” (p. 34) or, as “two sides of Israel’s soul” (p. 20).

Still others will rightly ask what Sacchi means when he employs the terms “religion” or “spirituality.” While readers might encounter difficulties with particular parts of the monograph, Sacchi’s work ultimately succeeds as it demonstrates how broader concepts (like “Salvation” or “Messianism”) had been reshaped or re-conceived through changing contexts and points of view. The value of the work would have been greater if there had been a greater concern to justify his perception of these various contexts. More investigation into the social locations producing various texts is needed before one can proceed with such certainty in historical reconstruction, especially if it is a reconstruction of thought. That said, Sacchi’s appreciation of the varied collections of texts which fueled the Judaism of the Second Temple period is impressive. This appreciation includes a clear awareness that a composite of texts (whether received as a First Testament, Septuagint and / or Hebrew Bible) holds competing points of view on a particular subject or theme. Also significant is his consideration for the impact of all of the texts considered. This has important, if unexpressed, implications. For example, if one were to consider 1 Enoch 37 - 71 (the Book of Parables) as a text which held notions as or more important than other (presumably) more received literature of Jesus’ day, one might be pushed to consider orthodoxy (that of Jesus or any other Jews) as more of a practical application for a particular time and place by a specific group than as a seminal idea preserved by the necessarily orthodox, elect or just.