

RBL 03/2005



Alkier, Stefan, and Markus Witte, eds.

Die Griechen und das antike Israel: Interdisziplinäre Studien zur Religions- und Kulturgeschichte des Heiligen Landes

Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 201

Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg: Academic Press, 2004. Pp. x + 199. Hardcover. EUR 46.90. ISBN 3525530587.

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The volume under review contains the papers presented at an interdisciplinary symposium on “The Influence of Greece on the Religion and Culture of Ancient Israel,” held on April 29, 2003, at the Evangelical Theology Faculty of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-University in Frankfurt am Main.

In the opening article of the volume (“Israel unmittelbar vor und nach Alexander dem Grossen. Geschichtlicher Wandel und archäologischer Befund” [1–27]), Hans-Peter Kuhnen discusses the extent of Greek cultural penetration into “Israel,” that is, the space of geographic Palestine. After having set the historical and geographical stage of the evolution that has taken place between the end of the Persian period and the first half-century of Hellenistic rule, Kuhnen imagines and describes the two journeys—along the same itinerary—accomplished by a presumed Greek business traveler around 350 B.C.E. and by his grandson a century later. The way takes them first along the coast from Tyre to Gaza, then back over the mountain road through Jerusalem and Samaria to Hazor. In 250 B.C.E. it is on the coast that the changes are the most visible: new fortifications, temples and public buildings in the coastal towns, a new economic organization of the plains, big plantations having replaced the small-scale, old family-run farms. In the mountains, with the exception of Jerusalem and Samaria, the habitat and way of life have stayed much closer to what they had been since Iron II times. Embarking his reader on a pleasant trip,

Kuhnen manages to give one a fairly complete and precise update on the archaeological, epigraphical, and anthropological exploration of Palestine during that crucial period.

Robert Wenning, in a major contribution to the volume (“Griechischer Einfluss auf Palästina in vorhellenistischer Zeit?” [29–60]), tries to assess the impact of archaeology on our knowledge of what could amount to Greek presence in Palestine before the time of Alexander. Archaic geometric ceramic (imported through the channel of the North-Syrian ports) is to be found in Palestine mainly in the second half of the eighth century. Greek mercenaries are attested by the middle of the seventh century, first in the service of Psammetich I and later undoubtedly also in the service of Judean kings (especially Yoyaqim, whom Wenning connects with the Greek cooking pots of Metsad Hashavyahu). But these mercenaries are not considered as likely communicators of culture. The most obvious sign of Greek influence is the massive import of Attic pottery: more than five thousand pieces have been itemized by Wenning for the fifth and fourth centuries. The geographical dispersion of this type of imported pottery shows a concentration in Sidon and Akko and the other cities of the coastal plain, but it is found also in the mountains (more abundantly so in the north than in Judea). Wenning nevertheless argues that this obvious demand for Greek ware does not imply the establishment of Greek markets, colonies, or cities in the Orient before the time of Alexander. Greek epigraphical traces, however slight, are practically nonexistent, and the iconographical motives—many Dionysian motives, figures of Herakles/Gilgamesh, sphinxes, but practically none of the mythological scenes that would require knowledge of mythology and nearly no Greek gods or goddesses—suggest that the buyers of the ware indeed were Orientals and not expatriate Greeks. Greek cultural influence, moreover, seems to have been mediated by the Phoenicians. Concluding his impressively documented enquiry, Wenning suggests that, instead of “Protohellenism,” one should speak rather of an extensive “Phoenicization” of Palestinian culture. In a second contribution (“Nachweis der attischen Keramik aus Palästina. Aktualisierter Zwischenbericht” [61–72]) Wenning gives the bibliographic reference to all the Attic ware found in Palestine known to him.

The longest contribution to the volume has been written by Monika Bernett: “Polis and Politeia. Zur politischen Organisation Jerusalems und Jehuds in der Perserzeit” (73–129). Bernett’s aim is to determine to what degree the political organization and structure of Achaemenid Yehud was influenced by the ideology and nature of the Greek *polis*. In constant debate with the main representatives of twentieth-century research—and most notably with Max Weber—Bernett tries to establish that the province of Yehud was an autonomous province since the beginning of the Persian era; in fact, it had existed as such already under Babylonian rule. It was not, however, as Weber had suggested, a “theocracy” (amounting to a “hierocracy,” a political entity ruled by the priests) or a “temple state.” The main problem is to know how that society functioned and how it

understood itself: Was it a purely religious association, akin to the “Bürger-Tempel-Gemeinde” defined by Joel Weinberg, or was it a more pluralistic political structure (an *ethnos*, following Frank Crüsemann), comprising a land-owning elite (the *horîm* or the *zeqenîm*) and a conglomerate of priestly classes, as the correspondence of Elephantine seems to suggest? The originality of Bennett’s approach is to compare what we know of Yehud’s constitution with the Greek *polis*. In both instances the interaction between a central place and the surrounding *chora* (countryside) is a vital element. The reaffirmation or specification of certain rules in times of crisis—rather than the publication of complete codes of law—is well attested also in Greece. Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s injunctions against mixed marriages (Ezra 9–10; Neh 10:31; 13:23–30) have their analogy in the regulations concerning citizenship edicted by Perikles in Athens in 451 B.C.E.: only the one whose parents were both of Athenian origin could claim citizenship. Both in Jerusalem and in Athens these rules were addressed to the aristocracy rather than to the peasants and small folks; their aim was to prevent the “internationalization” of the ruling circles. In spite of these analogies, Bennett shows that the evolution of Yehud and the Greek *poleis* went in very different directions. If Yehud was a city-state, it had no *agora* and did not develop a democracy. The circle of the decision-makers became ever narrower until, at the beginning of the Hellenistic period, Yehud indeed had become a hierocracy, headed by a hereditary high priest who also served as the Ptolemaic governor of the province. How and in what sense did Achaemenid Yehud and Greek city-states influence each other? One can invoke some kind of a primitive Mediterranean *koinè*, or one can think of Phoenician mediation, but Bennett admits that these links remain an open question.

In a very thoroughly researched paper (“Esra 7 im Kontext hellenistischer Politik. Der königliche Euergetismus in hellenistischer Zeit als ideeller Hintergrund von Esr 7,12–26” [131–54]), Sebastian Grätz tries to throw light on the historical background of Artaxerxes’ purported letter of empowerment to Ezra. Before Peter Frei, in 1984, launched his thesis of the “imperial authorization” as the original stimulus to the formation of the Pentateuch, the authenticity of the document of Ezra 7 had long been doubted, but in recent years the confidence in the possibility of an Achaemenid document of this kind has been rising again. In the eyes of Grätz, this optimism is premature and ill-founded. Everything in the style and substance of Ezra 7L12–26 points to the model of Hellenistic evergetism (public patronage). Known examples of lavish public donations to religious institutions, including the grant of fiscal exemption or judiciary autonomy, start only with the beginning of the Hellenistic epoch. The oft-quoted parallels from Achaemenid times (the letter of Gadatas, the inscription of Udjahorresnet) do not refer to an analogous situation, and no document attests the public subsidizing of temples or religious institutions by the Persian court, neither in Egypt nor elsewhere in the empire.

The Achaemenid concern and ideological endeavor was rather to ensure the collection of tribute. Ezra 7, moreover, is concerned less with the temple and its maintenance than it is with the Torah. The claim of the letter is that the Torah and its implementation have been entrusted to the authority of Ezra (i.e., the Gola) and that it is applicable to the Jews residing in all of Transeuphratene. Ezra 7 should therefore be interpreted, according to Grätz, as a retrojection on Persian times of the claims of a worried Jerusalemite leadership in the beginning of the Hellenistic era. The thesis presents a set of good arguments, but one would wish that Grätz had done more to elaborate on the concrete “early Hellenistic” historical setting he envisions.

Contributed by Dieter Georgi, the last article in the volume (“Jüdischer Synkretismus” [155–83]) deals only marginally with what one normally would call syncretism. It offers instead a majestic panorama of Judean/Jewish Diaspora in its self-understanding, its relationship with the surrounding cultures and philosophies, and in its sometimes conflictual relationship with the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. The period under consideration starts with the end of the Persian era and extends to the first century C.E. Georgi reminds us that it was the Hasmoneans who tried to impose their control on the Jewish Diaspora and that the Romans supported that endeavor, thus contributing their part to the victory of Jerusalemite Judaism over Galilean or Samaritan Judaism. What we know of the Torah-community in Antioch in the second century B.C.E. shows that the Maccabean/Hasmonean initiatives could be deeply resented, but then again this resentment could also be felt within opposing parties in Jerusalem itself. In fact, “Judaism” had become a world religion already in Persian times, and Georgi opens interesting perspectives on the growth of that religion and the role of (active or tolerative) proselytism. As in the volume’s opening chapter, the reader is here invited to a journey around the Jewish world of Hellenistic and Roman times, from Greece to Rome, from Asia Minor to Babylonia, from Syria to Egypt. Cultural contacts are intense, philosophical enquiry thrives (Gnosticism!), and theological speculations on God (God of Heaven, El Elyon, Theos Hysistos, Sebastos, Seba’ot, Shabbat, etc.) abound, but does that really amount to syncretism? Is it not Judaism itself, Judaism in its astounding vitality?

The Greeks and ancient Israel! The subject has been approached in the present volume from widely different angles, and the last three chapters may give the impression that they have been groping with some of the classical problems in the history of ancient Judaism rather than with the specific encounter between Greeks and Jews. For the reader, however, this compendium of major issues in current research makes for a very readable, rewarding, and stimulating volume.

P.S. The elusive Eph Jal, mentioned on pages 108 and 116, is in fact none other than the well-known Israeli author Israel Eph’al.