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Journal of the

AMERICAN ORIENTAL SOCIETY

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retire, it is difficult to foresee new positions being devoted to the material culture of daily life. Thanks to the work of Bass and his colleagues, however, it will be easier to train such specialists now that this material is made accessible in this admirable volume.

WARREN C. SCHULTZ
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Edited by JANE DAMMEN MCAULIFFE, BARRY D. WALFISH, and JOSEPH W. GOERING. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2003. Pp. xvii + 488.

The phenomenon of interpretation—conveniently labeled “exegesis” in this volume, although not without risking the misconception of harmonization, as if the diverse types of literature discussed here belonged to a single genre—is a central tenet of the three monotheistic traditions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam model their beliefs and *religia* on their own amalgamation of sacred texts, canonized over time as “Scripture” and inscribed with authoritative, perpetual, and divine status. The central incentives for those who engaged over the centuries in explicating these texts were vitality and relevance. Commentators of far-apart generations, distant geographic locales, and variegated hermeneutical prepositions and literary methodologies, all confronted this challenge, producing in the process one of the richest corpora of interpretative literature.

The current volume gathers twenty-six studies, originally delivered at a 1997 conference in Toronto, on the medieval realm of biblical interpretation. It is not a book for beginners. The editors provide short introductions to each of the religions (chapters 1, 12, and 20) but these are slim, unequal in value, and too often miss the mark. The introduction to Christian interpretation, for example, does not include in its discussion of the so-called Patristic period even a slight hint as to the rich exegetical traditions that lay outside the perimeter of the Graeco-Roman languages. Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian and others are all left out, thus undermining the introductory value of the essay. The author also asserts that “One of the unusual characteristics of the early Christian communities is their insistence, seemingly from the outset, on the importance of unity” (p. 198). He seems to buy into the image that the objects of his research wished to create, rather than dissect and understand what was likely a more complex reality.

The utmost accomplishment of the book is the contributions themselves, many of which are scholarly gems to which a short review can never do justice. In a broad sweep the authors transport us to the far-flung corners

of medieval commentary and their authors’ multiple genres of exegesis—the literary, the philosophical, the theological, the mystical, the allegorical, and so forth. Many of the articles focus on a certain persona, analyzing the cultural circumstances in which he (there appear to have been no female commentators in this period, at least not as represented in this book) operated, teasing out neglected aspects of his project, and shedding light on the cross-fertilization between the seemingly estranged religious traditions.

One cannot praise highly enough the intellectual agenda behind such a research endeavor. Many recent scholars have recognized the necessity to transcend the walls that have separated the various religions over the centuries and to study them together, not only as comparative objects but rather as cultural entities with shared foundations and substance. The implementation of such projects has proved a difficult task, which only accentuates the achievement of the current volume. Readers will also be grateful to the editors for supplying two detailed indexes of sources and topics, each very helpful for navigating the rich array of subjects, people, and texts covered in this tome.

YARON Z. ELIAV
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Die Griechen und das antike Israel. Edited by STEFAN ALKIER and MARKUS WITTE. *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, vol. 201. Freiburg: ACADEMIC PRESS, 2004. Pp. x + 199, illus. FS60.

The momentous events that transpired in the Near East in the centuries following the campaigns of the Macedonian king Alexander in the fourth century B.C.E. and their far-reaching impact on the essence of Western civilization have attracted the attention of scholars from the very beginning of academic historical inquiry. The inception of Christianity, a religious tradition that combined Semitic wisdom in Greek guise, and its ascent to the world’s helm highlighted the magnitude of the cultural transformations—normally termed “Hellenism”—that took shape in the eastern regions of the Mediterranean.

The roots of these changes clearly go back to the arrival of the Greeks in the days of Alexander. Not denying the impact of military conquests on cultural engineering (a topic that seems never to lose steam), scholars have pondered whether elements of Greek life took residence in the Middle East prior to the days of Alexander. The pendulum on this question has swung from the nineteenth-century romantic view that credited any change to political and military developments, thus associating the origins of the Greek presence in the East

with Alexander's victories, to the more recent views informed by cultural and then colonial criticism, arguing that significant Greek interaction with the East predates the Greek war machine. For a recent example of the latter view, see Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society: 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, 2001), 23–25.

The authors in this short but extremely useful collection of articles (based on a 2003 conference in Frankfurt am Main) offer a corrective to this common scholarly trend. With great insight, the authors apply a variety of research tools to reexamine the cultural arena of pre-Hellenistic, that is, Persian, Palestine. (The designation "Palestine" is quite misleading for this early stage and may be seen by some as informed by modern-day concerns.) Chief among the authors' tools are archaeology, focusing on both architecture and pottery (most notable among the latter are the potsherds of imported vessels from Attica and the information one can glean from them), numismatics, geography, epigraphy, and papyrology, as well as more traditional literary criticism and the methods stemming from the discipline of Religious Studies.

Well informed about the most current data that has emerged from archaeological excavations, most prominently those conducted by Ephraim Stern and his team at Tel Dor, a Persian city turned Hellenistic, the fresh perspective allows the authors to question some accepted models (for example, Wennig's assertion that "Griechische Keramik = Griechen ist jedoch eine einfache Gleichung"; p. 36), and to undermine convincingly the current tendency to identify Greek influence in the area as early as the fifth century. Wennig captures in a nutshell the major argument of the essays when he maintains that "[e]ine die regionale Kultur verändernde Hellenisierung sehe ich für Palästina in der Perserzeit nicht" (p. 58). Other contributors substantiate this assertion with studies of urban architecture and graves (Kuhnen), city and communal organization with strong emphasis on the utility of numismatic evidence (Bernett), literary documents, mainly the one imbedded in *Ezra 7* (Grätz), and cultural categories, particularly a deconstructive reformulation of the rubric "syncretism" (Georgi).

In accordance with the rejection of the pre-Hellenistic Greek model, the authors highlight the role of the Phoenicians as mediators between the Greeks and the residents of the Near East in the days prior to Alexander. The one major lacuna of this book is that this claim remains vague, and the reader is left wondering about the substance and mechanism of such a paradigmatic alternative. One also wishes for more photographs and diagrams to illustrate the arguments about material culture, and a better, more inclusive map than the one on p. 37. These quibbles aside, the book is exemplary for its rigorous methodology and investigative practice, and its conclusions should not be ignored by

anyone interested in the fascinating cultural dynamics that brought East and West together.

Y. Z. E.

Late Punic Epigraphy. Edited by KAREL JONGELING and ROBERT M. KERR. Tübingen: MOHR SIEBECK, 2005. Pp. x + 115. €19 (paper).

The field of late Punic epigraphy has not received substantial attention during recent years; this volume attempts to ameliorate the situation. The attempt is successful and the result is a superb volume that will be of use to scholars within the fields of ancient Near Eastern studies, Semitic epigraphy, and Classics.

Essentially, this is a small handbook of Late Punic texts. The term Late Punic is defined within this volume as denoting "those inscriptions post-dating the Roman conquest and destruction of Carthage at the end of the Third Punic War in 146 B.C." (p. 1). Phoenico-Punic is defined within the volume as a Northwest Semitic language of the Canaanite branch. This is, of course, an accurate statement and has long been the consensus of the field. The authors, however, also wish to affirm that there are some features of Phoenico-Punic that can be classified as "isoglosses with South Semitic" (p. 1). To demonstrate their point, they refer to the roots *kwn* and *p'l* as isoglosses; these roots, though, are attested in multiple Semitic languages (including North Semitic languages such as Ugaritic and Hebrew). Therefore, it would be difficult to suggest that the presence of these words in Phoenician and Punic counts as evidence for isoglosses with South Semitic.

Major older studies such as P. Schröder's *Die phönizische Sprache* (Halle, 1869), M. Lidzbarski's *Handbuch der Nordsemitischen Epigraphik* (Weimar: Emil Felber, 1898), and G. A. Cooke's *A Text-Book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903) are frequently used within this volume, and a number of the more recent seminal studies (e.g., various articles and monographs by Guzzo, Garbini, Sznyccer, Vattioni) also factor prominently. Furthermore, H. Donner and W. Röllig's *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1973–79 and 2002) is cited frequently.

The authors traveled to collections and collated some of the inscriptions discussed (e.g., some of the inscriptions in Tripoli); this is commendable. Some of the readings and discussions are based on photos (e.g., p. 75). Sometimes it was necessary for them to rely on hand-copies (e.g., p. 67). Transliterations and translations are provided for all of the inscriptions; moreover, there are often rather detailed notes about disputed readings and restorations. Nevertheless, readers might sometimes