

**BENEDIKT ECKHARDT (ED.), *JEWISH IDENTITY AND POLITICS BETWEEN THE MACCABEES AND BAR KOKHBA. GROUPS, NORMATIVITY, AND RITUALS* (SUPPLEMENTS TO THE JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF JUDAISM – 155), BRILL, LEIDEN – BOSTON 2012, PP. 282; ISBN 978-90-04-21046-2**

The period of history of Judaea and Judaism between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE is among the better known owing to the large number of surviving historical sources, which means that a fuller analysis can be carried out of the various social, political and religious phenomena which took place at the time. However, since the majority of the texts from this period are religious in character, scholars are interested especially in religious issues. Despite this, the analyses and interpretations of these texts are interesting not only for theologians and specialists interested in the history of Judaism, but also for scholars studying the history of ancient Palestine. This is because the even greater knowledge of religious problems means that they are also more able to understand social and political phenomena. One such attempt to take a different look at the issues of the period of the history of Judaea between the outbreak of the Maccabee uprising and the Bar Kokhba revolt was the conference “Groups, Normativity, and Rituals. Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba”, which took place in Münster in November 2009. The conference was attended by scholars from Austria, Israel, Germany and the USA giving 13 papers, 11 of which were published in the book *Jewish Identity and Politics between the Maccabees and Bar Kokhba*: D. Goodblatt, *Varieties of Identity in Late Second Temple Judah (200 B.C.E. – 135 C.E.)*, pp. 11-27; A. van der Kooij, *The Claim of Maccabean Leadership and the Use of Scripture*, pp. 29-49; J. Magness, *Toilet Practices, Purity Concerns, and Sectarianism in the Late Second Temple Period*, pp. 51-70; H.K. Harrington, *Identity and Alterity in the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 71-89; B. Eckhardt, ‘*An Idumean, That Is, a Half-Jew*’. *Hasmoneans and Herodians between Ancestry and Merit*, pp. 91-115; A.K. Marshak, *Rise of the Idumeans: Ethnicity and Politics In Herod’s Judea*, pp. 117-129; L.-M. Günther, *Die Hasmonäerin Alexandra – Integrationsfigur für den Widerstand gegen den neuen König Herodes?*, pp. 131-155; J. Wilker, ‘*God is with Italy now*’. *Pro-Roman Jews and the Jewish Revolt*, pp. 157-187; C. Leonhard, ‘*Herod’s Day*’ and the Development of Jewish and Christian Festivals, pp. 189-208; G. Stemberger, *Forbidden Gentile Food in Early Rabbinic Writings*, p. 209-224; K. Spann, *The Meaning of Circumcision for Strangers in Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 225-242).

As the book’s title shows, the main theme of the conference was the issue of Jewish identity and political life in the period in question. Both issues have interested many scholars for some time. Yet although this conference was part of the same research current, it was also somewhat different. The main reason was that the participants attempted to present these problems from a different perspective. The essence of this new view is presented by Benedikt Eckhardt (“Introduction: Yet Another Book on the Jewish Identity on Antiquity”, pp. 1-10), the conference organiser and editor of its proceedings, who em-

phasises the difficulties that come with using such concepts of “identity” and “politics” with reference to the inhabitants of ancient Judaea. The most common way of conceiving Jewish identity is equating with this notion all the manifestations and aspects of the historical reality of Judaea in the period of the Second Temple. This conference sought to contribute to overcoming this stereotypical approach. Its main idea was to go beyond the strictly religious framework of Jewish identity by taking into account all those aspects included in the concept of “politics.” Since this can be understood in very broad terms, the discussion during the conference was supposed to concentrate mostly on three of its aspects: groups, normativity and rituals, seen in the context of the historical realities changing since the times of the Maccabees after the Bar Kokhba revolt. Although all of these aspects has a distinctly religious hue, their usefulness in reconstructing historical images is undeniable. Notable among the texts in which these issues are tackled is D. Goodblatt’s article, which accurately points out that the manner of expressing Jewish identity is to a great extent dependent on the character of the source text, the author’s origin, and even the language that was used. The influence of these factors on the way in which this identity is expressed is especially clear in the Hasmonean era. In Goodblatt’s summary, he states: “...the identity was one we today would call ethnic or national. It involved belief in a common descent and shared culture. Which ethnonym was chosen ultimately was secondary” (p. 27). B. Eckhardt and A.K. Marshak’s analysis looks at the question of the ethnic otherness of the Idumeans from a religious point of view in the context of the Hasmoneans’ political struggle with Herod. However, the conference organiser himself states that its objective was only achieved to a limited extent, since many of the authors approached issues of Jewish identity in a traditional way, examining them in particular from the angle of the norms and religious practices binding at the time. Yet the fact that the conference did not fulfil all the hopes vested in it does not mean that the proceedings are undeserving of closer attention. Their merit comes from the thematic diversity of the texts themselves. The fact that over half the articles in the collection are on the Hasmonean and Herod’s times means that it can be recommended especially to scholars specialising in these periods of Judaea’s history. They will without doubt find many interesting interpretations and observations concerning this period.

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