

The book could have profited from more careful editing, though. The stylistic and sometimes grammatical deficiencies make the German text difficult to understand.

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MICHAEL L. SATLOW, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*. Princeton University Press, Princeton/Oxford, 2001. 434 pp. £40.00. ISBN 0-691-00255-X.

This book constitutes the first detailed examination of the institution of marriage amongst Jews in antiquity. The author aims at a 'thick' description of Jewish marriage, based on the extensive literary, epigraphic and papyrological sources and a selective application of sociological and anthropological theories. He hopes that his work will contribute to the study of the family in antiquity and the Jewish family in particular. The book is organised thematically, in accordance with the development of a marriage: I. Thinking about Marriage, II. Marrying, III. Staying Married. The advantage of this structure is the coherence of the narrative; the disadvantage is the chronological and geographical fracture of the material. The chronological arrangement of the conclusions compensates for this deficiency.

Satlow states his three main arguments at the outset. Firstly, one can discern different understandings of marriage in Palestine and Babylonia. Secondly, there is nothing essentially Jewish about Jewish marriage. Thirdly, one has to reckon with a gap between theory and practice, between reality and the ideal (p. xvi). Except for the second point, which is qualified somewhat in the following discussion, these conclusions do not surprise us at all but rather confirm what one would have assumed at the outset. Palestinian and Babylonian Jews lived in different cultural, social, and political contexts which would have had a direct impact on their family life. That the literary depictions of marriage (and other issues) do not necessarily reflect the reality of ancient Jews' practice has become a commonplace amongst ancient historians and Talmudists.

Since the available sources on ancient Jewish marriage are scarce and eclectic, they necessitate the use of different methodological approaches. Satlow's basic stance is positivistic in that he assumes that the editors did not change their sources much and that the attributions are generally reliable, at least as far as the generation and provenance are concerned. He admits that this approach is not methodologically 'rigorous', but it serves his goal, namely, 'to "model" Jewish marriage, to create a multidimensional picture of the interaction between a set of complex forces' (p. xix). Altogether, then, the approach is impressionistic, and the resulting work is a mosaic of textual quotations and readings intermixed with small doses of sociological theories and the author's own hypotheses.

The first part, 'Thinking about Marriage', starts with delineating the different views of marriage in Palestine and Babylonia as reflected in a long *sugya* in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Yeb.* 61b–64a). Whereas Palestinian rabbis allegedly had a positive attitude toward marriage, which served to form a household as the smallest unit of the civic body, Babylonians saw marriage in negative terms, as a necessary evil which would detract men from Torah study but nevertheless had to be done for purposes of procreation and to channel the sexual drive. The Palestinian view is understandable against the background of Graeco-Roman attitudes towards marriage, especially as represented by the Stoics: marriage was meant to create an *oikos* as the basic reproductive unit by which a man would gain a respectable place within society. Among Babylonian rabbis, on the other hand, ambivalence towards marriage was the rule.

Satlow argues that Palestinian rabbis' positive depiction of marriage was supposed to encourage people to marry in a society where marriage was endangered, whereas the Babylonian rabbinic view was possible because marriage was a stable and uncontested institution within Babylonian Jewish society: 'Continuation of the social and economic fabric of the elite Jewish community depended on the society's ability to persuade its sons to "buy in" by marrying and establishing *oikoi* of their own' (p. 39). He assumes that there was an 'attack on the *oikos*' which rabbis set out to defend (*ibid.*). This assumption, which is nothing more than a hypothesis deduced from the positive literary depiction, is then 'explained' by a socio-economic theory which is not based on evidence but merely surmised itself. Satlow reckons with a far-ranging economic change from farming to commerce as a consequence of urbanisation. It is unlikely, however, that the gradual process of urbanisation of Palestine would have led to fundamental changes in an ancient society based on farming and agriculture, except for the lifestyle of the urban elite. The new family structure, which Satlow claims was necessary at that stage, will similarly have affected the elite only. But why would the elite contest marriage rather than viewing it as a firm basis for guarding and transferring its property from one generation to the next? Satlow's socio-economic hypotheses do not really explain why the institution of marriage should have been under attack amongst the Jewish population of Roman Palestine. Nor does he provide convincing arguments why Babylonian Jews should have accepted marriage in an uncontested way.

In the second part of his book Satlow connects his theory about a different Palestinian and Babylonian view of marriage with speculations about the marriage age in these two ancient societies. He assumes that in Babylonia Jews married at a younger age, whereas Palestinian Jews waited until they had reached a rather more mature age. He argues that the idealising texts and Palestinian rabbis' recommendations to marry young need to be seen against the background of 'cultural danger' (p. 104) caused by the phenomenon of young men postponing marriage. But can this postponing of marriage be assumed for everyone? In all likelihood, it concerned a small group of Torah scholars only, who—like Babylonian rabbis—may have considered that marriage interfered with scholarship. In addition, the statistical life-table data supplied by Satlow (p. 110) seem rather strange: if the average life expectancy was 25 years, how can the average age of male marriage have been 30, i.e. five years after the average man would have died?! If this was the case, the Jewish population of Roman Palestine would have decreased rather quickly and disappeared eventually.

In the third part of his book Satlow addresses the issue of the economics of marriage and discusses the various types of marriage payment practised by Jews in antiquity. He argues that the biblical *mohar*, where the groom gives money to the father of the bride, was not continuously practised by Jews in post-biblical times (*cf.* p. 204). Jews of the Persian and Hellenistic period adopted the Greek custom of the dowry, where the bride's family would bring property into the marriage, partly in order to compensate the groom for the maintenance of his wife. The *ketubba* payment of the papyri and rabbinic sources is seen as a delayed endowment pledge from the groom, not associated with the biblical *mohar* but with the dowry of post-biblical times: 'Rabbinic law often uses the term *ketubba* to mean a dowry' (p. 213). When the tannaim do identify the *ketubba* with the *mohar*, this identification 'is a manifest fiction, for the *ketubba* payment is fundamentally different from the biblical bride price' (p. 214). Would it not have been even more different from the dowry, where the initiative comes from the family of the bride? Or were *mohar* and dowry already treated as a single entity at an early stage of Jewish practice, as Bernard S. Jackson has argued recently? The entire issue of the different customs of marriage payments needs to be reexamined, both on the basis of the available sources and in the context of similar customs in other ancient societies.

Other topics addressed by Satlow, such as the metaphorical use of marriage, can only be mentioned briefly here. Satlow argues that post-biblical Jews were uncomfortable with the biblical metaphor of a marriage between God and Israel because it did not fit their view of marriage as the basis for forming an *oikos*, and that the Biblical covenant with its mutual obligations may have been 'too egalitarian' for Jewish men in Hellenistic and Roman times (cf. p. 47). But should biblical society have been less patriarchal and more egalitarian than later Jewish society? Other arguments brought forth in this connection are the intimate bond between God and Israel envisioned in the marriage metaphor and the possible discomfort with applying the metaphor to contexts other than the relationship between two individuals, in contrast to early Christians who saw the church as Christ's bride. The metaphor rarely appears in rabbinic texts except in a number of parables.

At the end of the study, the question of what made ancient Jewish marriage Jewish is taken up again. Satlow suggests that ancient Jews marked their practices as Jewish 'through a complex process of reading their own traditional texts and practices through the lens of their host cultures. Traditional texts, customs, and rituals served as a kind of "toolbox" ... Through the use and adaptation of these tools, Jewish communities made marriage Jewish' (p. 268).

Despite the methodological and argumentative shortcomings mentioned above, the book is a very good introduction to the various issues connected with Jewish marriage in antiquity, especially for the non-specialist reader, and will certainly engender comparisons with marriage in modern society.

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CARLOS DEL VALLE RODRÍGUEZ, *Historia de la gramática hebrea en España*, vol. 1: *Los orígenes (Menahem, Dunas y los Discípulos)* (España Judía, serie Gramática hebrea). Aben Ezra Ediciones, Madrid, 2002. 665 pp. No price given. ISBN 84-88324-15-4.

In undertaking to write a *Historia de la gramática hebrea en España*, Carlos del Valle Rodríguez has taken upon him, as he himself acknowledges (p. 11), 'una ardua labor', an arduous task. In the intended *History* del Valle aims to give an exhaustive description-cum-analysis of what he deems to be the most prominent Jewish contribution to Western culture: medieval Hebrew grammar. Over the past few decades, the author has devoted numerous books, editions and articles to this chapter in the history of linguistics, including a monograph on the early Hebrew School in Umayyad Cordoba. It is with a description of this tenth-century corpus, in which the basis for a scientific grammar of Hebrew was laid, that he opens his *Historia*.

Though ultimately concentrating on the School of Cordoba in the period between 940 and the early 990s, del Valle takes ample time to contextualise this movement, which of course did not originate out of the blue. In order to better highlight its particularities and dependencies, he offers background information on foreign (i.e. the classical, Syriac and Arabic) grammatical traditions, as well as on internal Jewish developments elsewhere in the Diaspora (i.e. the writings of the Masoretes, Saadia Gaon in Baghdad and the tenth-century North African Hebrew linguists). These chapters (1–6, pp. 29–210) take the form of more or less independent literary histories, which do not always appear to have explicit relevance for our understanding of the Cordoban School. The same can be said of chapter 7 (pp. 211–47), where the immediate cultural