
**Martin Goodman**


The second part of Shmuel Safrai's major handbook of Talmudic literature, to contain Midrash, Aggada, Targum and prayer, has not yet appeared, and it will be in order to consider them fully together. It will also be necessary to assess the overall contribution made by the enormous Compendia project as a whole. In the meantime, the particular character of this volume should not go unrecorded.

It should be said first that it is, like the rest of the series, something of a hybrid—in part introduction and guide, in part an in-depth study raising fundamental conceptual and literary issues and presenting individual viewpoints. It is rich in information, but this is not always systematically distributed and is not necessarily comprehensive. It is often interesting and stimulating, but rarely leaves one fully satisfied that all sides of a question have been explored.

The editor has himself written two major sections: a very long, somewhat theoretical discussion of the character and principles of 'Oral Tora', and a survey of the origins of *Halakha*. Abraham Goldberg contributes chapters on Mishna, Tosefta (disappointingly short) and both Talmudim. M. B. Lerner writes on Avot and on the 'External Tractates'. An opening chapter by I. Gafni sets the historical stage, skilfully Surveying the whole period from the point of view of the role and activities of the sages. He too could have written at greater length. We are told that there are 'marked differences' of opinion within the different contributions and that the editor has not sought to unify them. One is struck most, however, by the underlying common assumptions. Though insistently 'scientific' in their approach to text (an approach heavily influenced by the methods of German Classical philology), the
studies tend to take an insider's view of the historical context of the 'Oral Tora', accepting the sages on their own valuation and readily concluding that already in the Second Temple period 'the teachings of the Sages embodied the social, cultural and religious traditions adhered to by a majority' (p. 36). *Halakhot* are regarded as 'legal innovations made by the community as a whole' (p. 175). With regard to *Avot*, it is maintained that 'a relatively large number of teachings ... have been shown to stem from the personal teaching of the sage in question'. This underlying position has to be borne in mind when the book is used, since there are moments when it influences even some of the highly technical discussions.

There are various pointers towards a more innovative literary approach, as in some scattered comparative remarks on the nature of orality in literature. These deserve to be followed up. The volume stands in various ways at a crossroads in Talmudic studies, and as such, whatever signposting it offers, both backwards and forwards, is welcome. It is not, however, encouraging to the reader to be told, as he is at one point, that the pre-eminent literary qualities of the *bavli* are only to be perceived by the true expert.

**Tessa Rajak**


Alexander Scheiber (1913–1985) was the last scion of the illustrious line of Semitists and Judaica scholars (Goldziher, Bacher, Blau, to name but a few) who were associated with the Jewish Theological Seminary of Budapest. After the ravages of the Second World War, almost single-handedly, he breathed new life into this venerable institution, and transformed it into the only international seat of Rabbinic learning functioning beyond what used to be the Iron Curtain. In 1977, he had the pleasure of presiding over the festivities which marked the centenary of a school originally named after the Emperor Franz Josef. To fulfil the role of faithful guardian of a precious heritage he was willing to pay a heavy price: he unhesitatingly turned down many an attractive invitation to take up high appointments in England, the United States and Israel.

The colossal burden of organization and fund-raising did not prevent him from attaining an eminent position in the international world of scholarship in areas as varied as medieval Hebrew and Judaic-Arabic studies, Hungarian Jewish epigraphy, codicology and history, Genizah research, comparative folklore and straight Hungarian literature. Among his most important publications in languages other than Hungarian may be listed the massive *G1niza Studies* (1981) and *Jewish Inscriptions in Hungary from the Third Century to 1686* (1983). To these should be added his collection of Hebrew Codex fragments discovered in book bindings from Hungary (*Héber kódexmaradványok*, 1969), the numerous tomes of the Hungarian Jewish archives (*Monumenta Hungariae Judaica*) and the three volumes of his folklore and literary studies (*Folklór és tárgytörténet*, 1974–84). The latter include his complete bibliography from 1933 to 1983, amounting to 1569 titles.

A much valued friend of, and contributor to, *JJS*, he frequently visited Oxford. We were expecting him to read a paper at the Second Congress of the European Association for Jewish Studies at Hertford College in the summer of 1984, but he