

find much to absorb and interest them, however, in Weiss's scrupulous analysis of the material upon which he has decided to focus. Those who have neither the time nor the inclination to read the book in its entirety are recommended to consult the lengthy synopsis of the Sabbath among Jews and Christians, which forms the subject matter of Weiss's concluding chapter.

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MICHAEL SOKOLOFF, *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*. Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat-Gan, Israel and The Johns Hopkins Press, Baltimore / London, 2002. 1582 pp. \$144.70. ISBN 965-226-260-9.

MICHAEL SOKOLOFF, *A Dictionary of Judean Aramaic*. Bar Ilan University Press, Ramat-Gan, Israel, 2003. 88 pp. \$25.00. ISBN 965-226-261-7.

These two dictionaries differ greatly in size but they share the same basic approach, and should be considered together with the first one produced by Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic* (1990; 2nd edn 2002).

The *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* is aimed at readers of the Babylonian Talmud and Geonic literature, and also at the comparative philologist investigating the Eastern Aramaic dialects of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic (JBA), Syriac and Mandaic. Sokoloff convincingly defends his decision to hive off JBA from the Rabbinic Hebrew with which it is entwined in the Talmud by pointing out that the Hebrew of the Talmud should first receive its own separate lexical treatment before being considered together with JBA. From the reader's perspective, this alone makes Sokoloff's volume far easier to consult than earlier ones, including Levy's *Neuhebräisches und Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim* (1876), Dalman's *Aramäisch-Neuhebräisches Wörterbuch zu Targum, Talmud und Midrasch* (1901), and Jastrow's *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1926), in which Rabbinic Hebrew and several types of Aramaic are effectively jumbled together.

The corpus covered also differs from these earlier dictionaries. It covers not just the Babylonian Talmud and the Geonic literature of the sixth to eleventh centuries, but also the writings of Anan ben David, the founder of a pre-Karaite sect of the eighth century, the Babylonian Masora, and the very different Jewish magical texts found on bowls from Iraq and Iran and in the work called 'The Sword of Moses'. By incorporating all these texts Sokoloff can present users with a thorough overview of the whole of the surviving lexicon of JBA, along with its links to other Aramaic dialects of Babylonia.

The focus of the *Dictionary of Judean Aramaic* is much narrower, since it relates only to the written Aramaic of non-literary texts from c. 165 BCE until 200 CE. These include inscriptions from the Jerusalem area, legal texts and letters from the Dead Sea region, short Aramaic citations embedded in Tannaitic Hebrew texts, and *Megillat Ta'anith*. Sokoloff provides a useful list of epigraphic texts and their place of publication.

Like their predecessor, these two dictionaries are models of typographical clarity. The Aramaic lemmata and their basic definitions in modern English stand out, there are clear and well-chosen examples of each meaning, comparable words in other Aramaic dialects are briefly cited, and at the end of each entry in the *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* one can find equivalent words in the Palestinian Talmud, Geonic or Arabic explanations, and references to any relevant scholarly literature. The layout makes the dictionaries a real pleasure to use, in addition to the confidence that

Sokoloff's methodology inspires. The *Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic* in particular is a must for anyone working with the Babylonian Talmud, the magic bowls, Syriac or Mandaic.

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JEFFREY L. RUBENSTEIN, *The Culture of the Babylonian Talmud*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore / London, 2003. xii, 232 pp. £31.00. ISBN 0-8018-7388-6.

This is a sequel to Rubenstein's *Talmudic Stories: Narrative Art, Composition, and Culture* (1999). There he argued that the aggadic sections of the Babylonian Talmud, similarly to its halakhic sections, were created by the anonymous authors of the Talmud (the 'Stammaim'): they reflected not only a range of distinctively Stammaitic editorial techniques, but also an ideology specific to the post-Amoraic period. This ideology was shaped by the social setting of the Babylonian academies (*yeshivot*) which—as Rubenstein convincingly argued—were instituted precisely in the Stammaitic period (fifth or sixth centuries). Indeed, the institution of the academies would have marked the end of the Amoraic period, and would account for the development of the anonymous layer—halakhic and aggadic—of the Babylonian Talmud.

Here Rubenstein sets out to study in more detail the ideology, ethos or 'culture' of the Stammaim, and their academies, as reflected in the aggadic sections of the Babylonian Talmud. He considers the centrality of the academy in Stammaitic culture (ch. 1) and the importance accorded in this context to argumentation and dialectics (ch. 2)—themselves a distinctive feature of the Stammaitic, halakhic layer of the Babylonian Talmud. Stammaitic academies were far from serene: debates frequently verged on violence (ch. 3) and sages were constantly exposed to the risk of public shame (ch. 4).

The social organisation of the academies is similarly reflected, according to Rubenstein, in the Talmudic *aggadot*. Pedigree and lineage are given far more prominence in the Babylonian Talmud than in Palestinian sources, and this says something of the hierarchy and leadership of the Stammaitic academies (ch. 5). Rubenstein considers further the attitude of Talmudic sages towards their wives—who appear, in many cases, as impediments to their careers in the academies (ch. 6)—and towards non-rabbis, the *amei ha'arets*, whom the Babylonian sages revile. Their elitism, according to Rubenstein, can again be attributed to the institutional reclusiveness of the Stammaitic academies (ch. 7).

Unlike Rubenstein's earlier work *Talmudic Stories*, which had the merit of restricting itself to literary analysis and made only limited historical claims (see my review in *JJS*, lii.2 (2001), pp. 379–81—I remain as enthusiastic about it as ever), the programme of this work is primarily historical. Its fundamental premise is that the society and culture of the Stammaim are reflected in, and hence inferable from, Talmudic *aggadot*. In many cases this assumption is vindicated, but often it is taken to extremes. For example, referring to an aggadic story in *b. Ketubot* 103a–b, Rubenstein writes: 'Rabbi bequeaths the positions of Nasi and sage to his two sons, suggesting that a combination of heredity and testamentary designation determined succession to the highest academic offices' (p. 96). This inference appears unwarranted: why should such a literary work, albeit Stammaitic, reflect the real-life practices of the Stammaitic academies? To some extent Rubenstein is lapsing here into old-school historicism, with the only difference that his history has been displaced from the Tannaic and Amoraic periods to that of the Stammaim.