
The title promises social history but this is really a book about religious practices as revealed in tannaitic and amorico texts. Terms related to the 'am ha-aretz such as talmid hakham, 'Pharisee' and 'haver' as well as 'am ha-aretz' itself are carefully analysed and a clear account is given both of them and of the halakha surrounding purity and tithing. That account is O.'s primary task but he goes on to attempt an explanation of the terms by positing, often highly speculatively, social trends that caused and were caused by them. Much of the account is useful and impressively comprehensible, but, in contrast, the explanations do not convince.

It is in a way surprising that this should be so, for O. begins with a thoroughly satisfactory refutation of the theories of Zeitlin and others on the 'am ha-aretz (though Buchler's insistence on the Ushan dating of most, if not all, the tannaitic material should be allowed to stand). It is disappointing, then, to find O. falling into much the same traps as ensnared Zeitlin. Too much schematising leads him to see 'ammei ha-aretz as, at times, if not a separate class, at least a separate stratum of society even though the term is only used in fact to refer to non-observance of religious precepts. Similarly, rabbinc assumptions of the rectitude of their behaviour lead O. to believe that their preoccupations are normative and that the 'ammei ha-aretz, though the 'ordinary masses', are exceptional. Finally, O.'s reluctance to confess ignorance even when the nature of the evidence makes it inevitable leads to quite hypothetical dating of rabbinc ideas and occasionally to uninformative vagueness. Few will be prepared to accept his discussion of the Pharisees, identified simply with perushim, though the analysis of the role of the haverim and their associations is more reliable.

On one question in particular it will prove necessary for many scholars to decide whether or not to accept O.'s argument all the way. O. claims that Galilee was essentially 'orthodox' before 132. It is an important assertion for students of Jewish and Church history alike and O. is all too accurate in his description of the polemic that underlies many discussions of this and other topics concerning the 'am ha-aretz. O.'s new method is in fact a revival of Klein's. O. lists all the passages he can find in rabbinc texts to exhibit tithe collection, the sabbatical year, purity observance, Torah study and so on in operation in Galilee between 70 and 132; he concludes (p.217) that 'the study of the Torah and the observance of the commandments were to be found alike in Judaea and in Galilee during the entire period of the Mishnah and of the Talmud'. At its weakest the proposition cannot be faulted, but what really matters is the extent of such observance. Nothing that O. presents would preclude the more extreme interests of the Judaean rabbinc academies in purity and tithing being confined in Galilee to those few rabbinc figures like R. Yose Ha-Galili of whom the texts tell. Yose's very name attests to the rarity of Galileans in rabbinc circles. O. has very few passages to cite of Galilean communities expressing interest before 132 in purity, tithing or the sabbatical year and even of those that are given not all are safe: the text cited of tShabi 4:13 is given in a significantly different version by Lieberman, and tMikv 6:3 does not, according to Klein, refer to Galilee at all. What is left? Some Galileans joined Judaean rabbinc schools before 132 (p. 210) and a few issued halakha on return to Galilee to a more or less indifferent populace.
Some Judaean rabbis visited Galilee in the same period for reasons unspecified (p. 213). Certainly Galileans were Jews, and the Gospels and Josephus confirm their use of synagogues and conformity to the control of the Temple before 70. But O.'s need to claim any more than that comes only from his own apologetic: the assertion that before 132 Palestinian Jews considered the rabbinic Judaism of the sages whose words are recorded in the Mishnah as in some sense an 'orthodoxy' accepted by all as an essential part of being Jewish.

There are things to be learnt from this book and the author has presented his material clearly and accessibly. Though the work pales alongside Neusner's more rigorous discussion of the same purity materials it is useful nonetheless; even when, as with the discussion of Galilee, O.'s conclusions do not hold, this work should at least engender greater caution in those who assert the opposite thesis.

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Hebrew liturgical poetry, known as Piyyut, flourished between the fifth and thirteenth centuries in Palestine, Babylonia and Europe. It is so voluminous that Israel Davidson in his Thesaurus of Medieval Hebrew Poetry devotes more than two thousand pages to a mere bibliographical listing of the poems, while the names of their authors, the Payyetanim, occupy no less than twelve pages of the new Encyclopaedia Judaica.

As a literary genre, Piyyut displays a number of interesting features, including the gradual development of rhyme and a syllabic metre, the employment of acrostic in simple and complex forms, and the introduction of a wide range of linguistic coinage. It is national in character, and much of the subject matter concerns the relationship of God and Israel. The most noticeable characteristic, however, lies in its propensity for emblems, utilised at first, perhaps, for esoteric reasons, but later serving as a literary device. As literary obscurity became stylised and abstruse reference an end in itself, Piyyut came to resemble the clues of a crossword puzzle. For the modern synagogue-worshipper, no longer familiar with the conventions, it is frequently baffling, although once the difficulties have been overcome, it exerts a considerable appeal.

The importance of Theology and Poetry stems from the author's examination of the material as a vehicle for the expression of theological ideas. By a detailed scrutiny of eleven poems spanning some eight centuries, Dr. Petuchowski demonstrates how Piyyut enabled unconventional and daring views, at times bordering on the heretical, to find their way — not altogether without opposition — into the standard liturgy. Provided, however, that certain halakhic specifications were met, the theology of the Piyyutim could usually be tolerated.

Chapter one contains a short but helpful survey of the growth and function of Piyyut, although no reference is made to the extraordinary sequences of Piyyutim in cyclic form which gradually developed. The subsequent chapters are each devoted to a particular theological problem, and comprise an introduction, the poem in the original together with an English translation, and a commentary on the poem. Each