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## REVIEWS

H.I.J. VANSTIPHOUT, *All those Nations ... Cultural Encounters within and with the Near East*. COMERS/ICOG Communications 2. Groningen, the Netherlands: Styx Publications, 1999. ISBN 90-5693-032-X. Pp. x, 174. Hfl. 110.

This work is a *festschrift* in honor of HJW Drijvers, the well-known student of the Syriac Near East and biographer of Bardaisan. Its sixteen essays concentrate, appropriately, on Syriac literature. Each essay has footnotes and an individual bibliography. Sections and subsections are numbered.

The first essay, 'Reconstruction of Yiddish Colloquial in Winschoten,' by Wout Jack. van Bekkum is an exception. It deals broadly with how Jews in Europe acquired and used local vernacular languages, and how Jewish vernaculars were affected by the languages of scholarship, Hebrew and Aramaic. It concentrates on one pre-Holocaust Jewish community in the Netherlands and includes a list of Yiddish words used in Winschoten, including their ultimate origins. This essay may be useful to students of Yiddish.

'The Delusion of Identification: The term Madhab in Arabic grammatical tradition' by Monique Bernards traces the history of the two traditional schools of Arabic grammar, of Basra and of Kufa, concluding that while everyone talks about them, they do not seem to have existed in reality.

'Achilles Tattius and Heliodorus in Christian Early Syria' by Jan N. Bremmer is closer to HJW Drijvers' interests and argues that the Greek novel *Cleitophon and Luceippe* by Achilles Tattius used Bardaisan's *Indica* as a source. This is somewhat surprising, since Bardaisan wrote primarily in Syriac, not Greek, and Greek intellectuals did not usually learn Semitic dialects. The prototype for the *Clementine Recognitions* and the *Clementine Homilies* also came from the same Near Eastern milieu, in which Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* was also read. In all, this is a stimulating essay for those

interested in the history of the Greek romance or the broader aspects of intellectual life in the Hellenized Near East.

'The Syriac Julian Romance. Aspects of the Jewish-Christian Controversy in Late Antiquity' by Jan Willem Drijvers deals with history as well as literature. It introduces a little-known work of fiction, probably stemming from Edessa in the fourth century AD, which tells how Julian the Apostate and the Jews of Edessa conspired to restore the Jewish Temple. The Romance, the author argues, illustrates the rising anti-Jewish sentiments among Christians in Late Antiquity, especially after Julian's reign. The article reminds historians of the wealth of historical information to be found in Syriac literature.

'An Arabic Version of John Chrysostom's Commentary on Genesis' by Adriana Drint gives a detailed bibliographic description of a manuscript newly acquired by the University of Groningen's library. While the translation dates to the eleventh century AD, the manuscript was copied in the nineteenth century. This article is useful mostly to librarians.

'DIY F: For Camels, Swords and Nabataeans: A Nabataean Centre in Arabic Sources' by Geert Jan van Gelder explains an obscure epithet in Ummayyad poetry, *Diy f*, *Diy fi*. The author traces its use in Ummayyad literature, both as a synonym for wealth and as an insult implying non-Arab origin. Ultimately it refers to a town in Roman Syria, *Diafenes* in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.

'Persuasion and Persecution: Establishing Church Unity in the Sixth Century' by Jan van Ginkel surveys the ways that Late Roman emperors tried to persuade or force Monophysite clerics to conform with Chalcedonian orthodoxy. There were alternating periods of theological debate and political persecution. Persecution was mild by Medieval standards: people were deprived of their influence by exile or prison, but not of their lives. The end result was that Monophysitism ceased to be part of public life, but retreated to the private sphere.

'A Substratum as a Cultured Weapon' by Karel Jongeling discusses the similarities between Afro-Asiatic and Celtic languages, concentrating on how early modern Welsh scholars used the clear similarities between Welsh and Hebrew to promote Welsh ethnic pride and nationalism.

'6 Ezra 15, 28-33 and the Historical Events in the Middle of the

Third Century' by AFJ Klijn uses a late apocalyptic text as a source for historical information on the rise of the Sasanian dynasty. 6 Ezra is a Christian addition dating to the fourth century AD to 4 Ezra, an older Jewish apocalypse; chapters 15 and 16 in most manuscripts. Verses 28-33 refer to fighting between Odenathus, ruler of Palmyra and Shapur I, of the new Sasanian Persian dynasty. Probably it applies to Shapur's second campaign, in which he was injured near Emesa.

'As if from Another World. Narsai's Memra 'Bad is the time' by Corrie Molenberg is a brief discussion and analysis of a Syriac theological poem. The time and date of composition cannot be deduced from internal evidence, although Narsai lived during the fifth century AD. In general, the work tells of Narsai's unhappiness at being exiled and details the problems of the contemporary church.

'Numbers 27, 21: the Priestly Oracle Urim and Tummim [*sic*] and the History of Reception' by Ed Noort discusses various scholarly interpretations of just what the mysterious fortune-telling devices of the Hebrew Bible, the Urim and Thumim were, without reaching a conclusion.

'A New Textual Witness of the Dialogue Poem 'The Cherub and the Repentant Thief' in the University Library, Groningen' by Gerrit J. Reinink announces a manuscript, newly bought by the University Library of Groningen, of a well-known Syriac liturgical text. Attributed to Narsai, and probably dating to the fifth century AD, it tells of how the Repentant Thief whom Jesus said would dine with him in Paradise (Luke 23:42-3) persuades the Cherub set to guard Paradise to let him enter (Gen. 3:24). The author believes that this manuscript will be useful in establishing a critical text of an important Syriac poem.

'An Early Syriac Reference to Qur' n 112?' by Gerrit J. Reinink analyzes a verse in a commentary on Matthew 1:18-25, in which Mary's pregnancy is explained to Joseph by an angel. The commentary attacks certain people who deny the miraculous birth of Jesus. Reinink explains why he believes that the commentary is by Aba of Kashkar (641-751 AD) and that it refers to Qur' n 112, which traditionally is interpreted to deny the deity of Jesus. Abd al-Malik used this verse on his coins and on the Dome of the Rock as part of the decorations and Aba is reacting to this Muslim doctrinal assertiveness, perhaps the first Christian thinker to so react.

'Jewish-Christian Debate in a Muslim Context: Ibn al-Mahr ma's notes to Ibn Kamm ma's 'Examination' of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths' by Barbara Roggema is a rather complex article since it examines comments upon an apologetic work. Ibn Kamm ma wrote 'Examination' in the thirteenth century to defend Judaism against the polemics of Christians and Muslims. Ibn al-Mahr ma in the fourteenth century wrote a lengthy series of marginal annotations in one of the manuscripts of 'Examination', answering Kamm ma's critiques of Christianity and refuting his defenses of Judaism. Both largely use Muslim arguments!

'The Twin Tongues. Theory, Technique, and Practice of Bilingualism in Ancient Mesopotamia' by Herman Vanstiphout is probably the most original essay in the festschrift. The author demonstrates that Mesopotamia was a bilingual society not only in the usual sense that two languages were widely spoken in it, which strongly affected one another, but that cuneiform was inherently a bilingual writing system. From early times to the last dated tablet, Sumerograms could always be read as words in Akkadian.

'Reading the Signs' by Nick Veldhuis deals with Mesopotamian omens, the different kinds of texts (*compendia*, models, scholarly reports to the kings), how they were used (diviners' reports never use the *compendia*, it seems), and what was the overall function of scholarly omen-collecting in Mesopotamian society.

This is a mediocre festschrift, neither extraordinarily awful nor extraordinarily good. Most of the essays deal with very narrow topics, and are not very analytical. Two of them are bibliographic descriptions, not analytical at all. HJW Drijvers is far from a mediocre scholar and it is a shame that he could not be honored with a better work.

Lester Ness