

is important — from a feminist historiographical point of view — to see what place women occupied in their fantasy.¹⁰

Tal Ilan's book raises issues which relate to the cutting edge of the broad field of rabbinic studies: what is the nature of the texts? how are we to understand their referentiality? is it possible to account for non-hegemonic views (or even 'voices') within them? More specifically, the book addresses itself to the issue of historiography and women's studies of these texts. However, most of the (explicit) questions which are raised in Ilan's study are similar to the ones long abandoned by the 'general' (patriarchal, non-feminist) historiography of rabbinics. Recently, Shaye Cohen remarked that the efforts of previous scholarship to identify the character of Antoninus in the rabbinic corpus with an actual historical figure are 'almost humorous';¹¹ one might wonder why the search for a 'real' Matrona, or Yalta, or Rabbi Akiva's wife, or Martha bat Boethus, should be any different.

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Gian Pietro Brogiolo, Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Idea and Ideal of the Town between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, Leiden: Brill, 1999. Pp. xvi, 265. \$92.00. ISBN 90 04 0901 3.

Bishop Isidore of Seville was a lucky man. He knew the difference between *urbs* and *civitas*: *urbs ipsa moenia sunt, civitas autem non saxa, sed habitatores vocantur* (*Etym.* 15.2.1). Modern scholarship is less confident about its ability to find an une-

¹⁰ Compare, for instance, her discussion on the maidservant of Rabbi Judah the Patriarch (pp. 97-107): when not measured over against (imagined) measures of reality, the semiotic potential of the different feminine characters might unfold. Ilan, however, comments that in the Babylonian Talmud — in contrast to the Palestinian tradition — 'Rabbi's maidservant was blown up into an outstanding example of wisdom and loyalty ...' (106): only if a realistic core, or in this case a reasonable measure of fantasy, is assumed can a statement like this be made. Moreover, that Palestinian tradition (99) is a complex narrative which dramatizes the anxiety of hegemonic (rabbinic) discourse: the rabbis and their discontents are fleshed out through the figure of the maid — a feminine 'other' within. Ilan, in her reading, reduces the meaning of the story to one function: demonstrating Rabbi's greatness. There is no apparent rationale for her reductive literary analysis: in the case of Rabbi's maid it seems that even Ilan does not declare her a specific historical figure. Here we are left then in the realm of literary creations (with historical functions, to be sure, e.g. praising Rabbi). Yet there is no acknowledgment of the volatile quality of the character — a well-known literary figure in Roman literature (See, recently, W. Fitzgerald, *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, 2000, and the earlier works cited there.). Again, as in the case of the matrona, despite the wealth of texts which suggest otherwise, the erotic potential of the maid, and the cultural implications of such a discursive figure, are not discussed (see, for instance, the narratives on pp. 98, 104). At this point it seems that the pleasure of the text is lost altogether.

¹¹ S.J.D. Cohen, 'The Conversion of Antoninus,' *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Greco-Roman Culture* (ed. P. Schäfer), Tübingen, 1998, p. 141.

quivocal definition of what is called 'town' or 'city' for the period from about 400 to 800 A.D. A veritable deluge of recent archaeological surveys of different sites and more general historical studies on urbanism, which has been published in recent years, has, on the one hand, presented new evidence for a great number of individual towns, but, on the other hand, accentuated regional differences and produced new theories. Scholars are now very cautious about drawing general pictures and have dismissed the opinion that the end of classical antiquity necessarily implied the end of classical cities (or *vice versa*). Recent discussion focuses on 'change' and 'transformation', on 'continuity' and 'discontinuity', with a wide range of questions being discussed: When and in which part of the Mediterranean region were the cities flourishing, and when and where were they in decline? Can we date precisely characteristic shifts in urban topography? What about the administrative role of the *civitates* in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages? Who formed the political and social elites? Were there new structures of power and patronage? How are the remains of political, religious and military architecture to be interpreted? What was the impact of Christianity? What can we say about size, wealth and infrastructure? Was urban violence an important issue? How was the idea (and ideology) of town and city reflected in literary sources?

The complexity and diversity of the lively research in late antique, early Byzantine and early medieval towns are clearly reflected in this volume which presents ten papers by international specialists who met at two conferences organized in Oxford (September 1995) and Le Bischenberg (April 1996) and sponsored by the European Science Foundation's project on the 'Transformation of the Ancient World'. Nearly all the papers face the basic problem that archaeological evidence is often difficult to interpret and to link with historical events documented in written sources, and, therefore, because so much is speculative, all the authors hesitate to draw far-reaching conclusions.

After an introduction by the editors, Gian Pietro Brogiolo and Bryan Ward-Perkins, John Haldon discusses 'The Idea of the Town in the Byzantine Empire' (pp. 1-23), i.e. the way in which larger settlements were described from the later sixth to the tenth century. For this purpose he first analyzes the use of the words *polis*, *polisma*, *polichnion*, *kômopolis* and *kastron* to depict the transformation in perceptions of towns, and then treats the relation between Constantinople and provincial centres. Smaller and larger towns are said to have continued to serve as fortified military, fiscal and administrative *foci*, but to have lost their character as autonomous or semi-autonomous units. Haldon emphasizes that the role of the city corporations was assumed by the church and by monasteries, which, by the late sixth and early seventh century, were responsible for new urban construction.

Wolfram Brandes dedicates his paper on 'Byzantine Cities in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries — Different Sources, Different Histories' (pp. 25-57) to the complex methodological problems resulting from the scattered evidence which scholars have to put together to reconstruct the development of Byzantine towns. He pleads for an interdisciplinary approach and the combination of archaeology and historical-philological research, is reluctant to advocate 'definite facts' and points out that Byzantine studies, as far as the availability of critical editions of major sources is

concerned, 'is still in a state comparable to that of (Latin) medieval studies or Ancient History (or rather Classical Philology) 150 years ago' (57).

In his article 'Anjar and Early Islamic Urbanism' (pp. 59-98) Robert Hillenbrand presents a reassessment of the Umayyad foundation of 'Anjar at the beginning of the eighth century. He argues that this small town, which apparently provided space for only about 26 families, stands outside the mainstream of early Islamic urbanism and is best understood as a failed experiment that was never completed or copied. It is said that 'Anjar was a multipurpose settlement — part palace, part market town, part administrative centre — and conjectured that there, in accordance with caliphal policy, Christians and Muslims were segregated. But indeed: 'The very fact that so many possible functions can be suggested for 'Anjar is a clear warning not to be dogmatic in explaining it' (96). We are advised to wait for new evidence and excavation reports.

Gian Pietro Brogiolo not only examines 'Ideas of the Town in Italy during the Transition from Antiquity to the Middle Ages' (pp. 99-126), but also presents a stimulating comparison between the archaeological research and literary sources from the end of the fourth to the eighth century. Brogiolo questions the Ambrosian description of an overall urban crisis in the bishop's time, has much to say about the *renovatio urbium* of Theoderic, studies the evidence for cities destroyed by war and by natural disaster in the sixth and seventh centuries and sketches the situation in Lombard Italy, where the idea of the town was 'intimately linked to the parameters of military power' (120). Brogiolo puts together much evidence and argues convincingly for geographical and chronological differentiation in Italy.

Carlo Bertrelli analyzes 'Visual Images of the Town in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages' (pp. 127-46) found on coins, ivory and silver objects, mosaics and in manuscripts. He concludes that 'the image of the town cherished in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages had very little to do with actual experience' (145) and suggests regional differences in and political implications of the visualization of towns.

Gisella Cantino Wataghin on 'The Ideology of Urban Burials' (pp. 147-80) integrates the formation of new burials into a more general process of re-using and re-structuring the urban space, summarizes the diverse archaeological evidence for Italy, where individual burials, also inside churches and cemeteries, are attested, and highlights the variety of funeral habits, something which is also supposed to correspond with the social structure of the period in question.

Alba Maria Orselli surveys 'L'idée chrétienne de la ville: quelques suggestions pour l'Antiquité Tardive et le Haut Moyen Age' (pp. 181-93). Her main concern is to locate the Christian 'holy men' in the social, political, economic and religious structure of the town. She raises the question of *bischöfliche Stadtherrschaft* in east and west and defines the important role of monks and bishops as city-patrons.

Nancy Gauthier comments briefly on 'La topographie chrétienne entre idéologie et pragmatisme' (pp. 195-209) and tries to show that 'le christianisme n'a apporté aucune évolution — ou révolution — dans l'idéologie en matière de topographie urbaine' (209). According to Nautin, the shifting monumental topography was strongly influenced by pragmatic considerations. Thus churches were built at easily

accessible places. However, Nautin would not deny ideological implications of the cult of the saints which shaped the sacred environment within Christian towns.

Paavo Castrén submits a case study on Athens: 'Paganism and Christianity in Athens during the Fourth to Sixth Centuries A.D.' (pp. 211-23). He investigates educational policy, population movement, economic shift and barbarian invasions, describes the transformation of Athens from a centre of pagan culture and learning into 'a modest Christian country town' during the period 500 to 600 and argues that the disintegration of the city was accelerated by the closure of the Platonic school in 529, the migration of the wealthy Athenians to the country, the diversion of resources to Constantinople and attacks on Athens by Slavs and Avars in about 582.

Bryan Ward-Perkins explores some specific cases of 'Re-using the Architectural Legacy of the Past, *entre idéologie et pragmatisme*' (pp. 225-44) and considers various pragmatic and ideological reasons why contemporary builders took over architectural *spolia*. He reviews the Arch of Constantine in Rome, the Aphrodision in Aphrodisia and the Parthenon in Athens and adds a fine digression into the modern restoration programme of Oxford colleges to show that a lack of craftsmanship cannot necessarily be explained by poor economic resources (231f.). Certainly, his cases of re-use of spolia 'show how very difficult, but also how endlessly fascinating it is to speculate, both about what was going on, and about what people were thinking, when, in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, they took over and adapted the buildings of the past' (244).

Gian Pietro Brogiolo has bravely undertaken the task of drawing some conclusions from this rather diverse group of papers, which tackle many different problems (pp. 245-54). No wonder, perhaps, that his remarks on 'the transformation of elites', 'physical transformations of the city' and 'ideological changes' remain somewhat vague.

From a general perspective I doubt whether the decision to divide the original group 'intended to cover together both Town and Countryside' (xiii) was well advised, since we are nowadays convinced that cities should not be studied in isolation, but that we need an integrated view of town and country. But given the scope of the volume we should be grateful to the editors and authors that they have contributed, from an interdisciplinary perspective, to the debate on the transformation of cities between 400 and 800 and to many controversial issues. This volume will certainly stimulate further research in the field and specialists in Late Antiquity, the early Middle Ages and Byzantine studies should browse — and will not be disappointed.

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R. Markner, G. Veltri (eds.), *Friedrich August Wolf, Studien, Dokumente, Bibliographie*, Palingenesia LXVII, Stuttgart 1999. 144 pp. ISBN 3 515 07637 9.

This volume contains, after a brief preface, five contributions. It will be practical to review these in the reverse order of their appearance. Markner prints, with comments, a very full and useful bibliography of Wolf, including reception (102-44). Next