

While the political usefulness of the myth might be gone, the historical side effects will negatively impact scholarship, in many different fields, for generations. The idea of two- or three-year siege of Masada has indeed corrupted a number of scholarly discussions. For example, in his influential work *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire*, Edward Luttwak took the idea of a three-year siege of Masada as a fundamental datum in his discussion of Roman strategic thinking (3-4). Since Luttwak is a military historian, he certainly should have known better, but scholars in other disciplines quite innocently take up this idea, with unfortunate results. For example, a recent discussion in a scholarly journal on mass suicide turns on the question of the psychological impact of being besieged for years (*Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*, 24/2 (1994) 204, 6). A ethnobotanist devotes serious study to how farming was possible on top of Masada to try and explain how the defenders survived years of siege (*Discover* 15/12 (Dec. 1994) 14). The historical reality of a short siege of Masada seriously affects the assumptions on which these, and other, scholarly discussions are based. The only remedy to the continued effect of historical myths is the exactly sort of vigorous questioning which characterizes Ben-Yehuda's work.

Jonathan Roth

San José State University

*Studies on the Jewish Diaspora in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods, Te'uda XII*, edd. B. Isaac and A. Oppenheimer, Tel Aviv, 1996, 254 pp.

The fourteen papers in this volume were delivered at a conference at Tel Aviv University in January 1991. Modern historians who, like some of their ancient Greek predecessors, look for the deeper meanings in strange historical conjunctions, will find a rich example in a conference on the Jewish Diaspora held in Israel on the eve of the Gulf War. The editors appropriately thank the foreign participants 'who joined the conference as if nothing at all untoward was happening'. They themselves are to be thanked for focusing attention on a vital and complex topic which until recently has received scant attention and only formulaic treatment. There is a good deal of literary, documentary and archaeological evidence which awaits detailed scrutiny, as well as a number of questions which have not been asked honestly, such as why and how — and whether — we may talk about a 'Jewish Diaspora' as an undifferentiated phenomenon. Most of the scholars who spoke at the Tel Aviv conference appreciate the minute evidentiary matters and the larger methodological questions. That the papers published here are of uneven quality is unavoidable in conference proceedings, and the bane of well-intentioned editors.

The first three papers (in Hebrew with English summaries) study the relationship between the Jewish establishment in Palestine and Diaspora communities in different periods. Uriel Rappaport, 'The Jews of Eretz-Israel and the Jews of the Diaspora during the Hellenistic and Hasmonean Periods', argues that the locus of authority and the source of social and political initiatives shifts from Babylonia to Palestine, especially under the self-assertive Hasmoneans. According to Shmuel Safrai, 'Contact Between the Leadership of the Land of Israel and the Hellenistic and Eastern Diasporas in the First and Second Centuries', the Palestinian focus of Jewish activity, at least from a rabbinic point of view, continued into the early second century CE but shifted back to Babylonia after the Bar Kokhba revolt. (To complete the chronological continuum, Aryeh Kasher, 'Herod

and the Jewish Diaspora', examines the way the king used Diaspora Jews to strengthen his own rule.)

Safrai's basic observation is insufficient in itself; it requires expansion and nuance. Isaiah Gafni partly provides this in one of the best pieces of the collection, 'Talmudic Babylonia and the Land of Israel: Between Subservience and Assertiveness'. This small article fits into a series of studies by Gafni concentrating on the Jewish Diaspora in Babylonia. Here he deals with a difficult but essential question, namely the contrast between the Babyonian Jews' elevated conception of the authority in Palestine and their actual independent practice, which they justified by declaring themselves agents of Palestinian judges and by finding reasons to sanctify their own place of residence outside the Holy Land.

In addition to Gafni's study, there are five others which concentrate on Jewish communities in specific areas: Asher Ovadiah on Macedonia and Thrace (in Hebrew with English summary), Irina Levinskaya and Sergei Tokhtas'yev on the Bosphorus, A. Thomas Kraabel on Sardis, Alfredo M. Rabello on Roman Spain and Arie Kindler on numismatic evidence for a *possible* settlement in North-Eastern Spain (the argument is a bit tenuous). Levinskaya and Tokhtas'yev, in particular, have produced an absorbing and learned piece on Jewish nomenclature in the Bosporan kingdom. They are fully aware of the pitfalls and previous failures in Jewish onomastic studies, but are able to suggest a strong Jewish influence behind the monotheistic tendencies in the local religion, especially the cult of θεὸς ὕψιστος, which in turn explains the rapid spread of Christianity there.

There remain five papers on topical themes. Martin Goodman, 'Sacred Space in Diaspora Judaism', argues speculatively that Diaspora synagogues acquired a holiness whose source is to be found in Gentile attitudes toward temples and holy places in general. Tessa Rajak, 'Jews as Benefactors', reviews epigraphical euergetic texts from throughout the Mediterranean world and concludes that the language of Jewish euergetism differs from that of non-Jewish benefaction in that it avoids drawing excessive attention to the honor personally due the donor. Miriam Pucci Ben-Zeev, 'Jewish Rights in the Roman World: New Perspectives', offers not so much 'new perspectives' as a review of scholarship on the documents in Josephus, *AJ* XIV and a (not entirely original) argument that these texts represent *de iure* recognition of rights which the Jews throughout the Diaspora enjoyed *de facto*; in this she comes perilously close to suggesting a 'Jewish charter' which Rajak argued forcefully against in two celebrated articles (which are praised extravagantly by Ben-Zeev herself, pp. 46-7). Finally, Nicholas De Lange, 'The Hebrew Language in the European Diaspora', tries to coax conclusions out of the very fragmentary evidence for knowledge of Hebrew before the ninth century (but the state of the evidence does not necessarily reflect European Jews' Hebrew knowledge), and Lee I. Levine, 'Diaspora Judaism of Late Antiquity and its Relationship to Palestine: Evidence from the Ancient Synagogue', answers the question implied in his title by asserting that Diaspora synagogues, despite their diversity and wide differences, also reveal universally shared elements which in turn reflect 'a common thread of Judaism which affected and influenced Jews everywhere'.

The editors apply a light hand to their task. This is the preferred policy for such volumes, but one wishes for more active intervention in certain places. For example, Safrai's reference to the 'Hellenistic West' should have been changed; Levine's first footnote identifying the conference in which he delivered the paper should have been deleted; and

pages 166-8 in Rabello's article are garbled. Similarly, the computer should not have been allowed to decide page breaks and lay-out (Kraabel's piece particularly suffers).

Jonathan Price

Tel Aviv University

Giuseppe Veltri, *Magie und Halakha: Ansätze zu einem empirischen Wissenschaftsbegriff im spätantiken und frühmittelalterlichen Judentum* (Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum, 62), Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebek), 1997, xii + 293 pp.

This book is a careful study of the relationship between the disorderly realm of magic, which flourished in antiquity, and the orderly, almost compulsive world of Jewish law — halakha. The realm of Magic is an enormous, untracked country, which has for generations been, in Veltri's words the 'Stiefkind' (stepson) of scholarly investigation in Jewish as in non-Jewish research. The reason for this has undoubtedly been the fact that research is a mirror of its authors, and nineteenth — and early twentieth — century scholars in the humanities, who desired to distance themselves from the irrational and superstitious, in the hope of presenting themselves as scientists in the true sense of the word, found themselves portraying their predecessors, for example the rabbis, as philosophers, rational thinkers and believers in a pure religion, rather than as magicians or quacks.

Veltri's book is an indication that this trend has now been reversed. Scholars today doubt the existence of pure, rational, objective, unbiased thinking and endeavour to incorporate what in the past would have been considered as superstition into a world which is less clearly defined and compartmentalised. It is a well worked out book, which resists the temptation to discuss all expressions of Jewish magic, and concentrates instead on the question of how the rabbis of the mishnaic and talmudic period came to grips with the existence and practice of customs which could be broadly defined as magic.

The book is divided into 6 chapters. Chapter 1 is an introduction in which the author discusses the state of research, the terminology (magic, science and halakha) and his approach to these topics. Veltri's discussion of previous research (as also his selected bibliography at the end and the very learned footnotes throughout) shows an impressive, in-depth familiarity with the material at hand. His choice of significant terms to discuss, particularly 'magic' and 'science', indicates that for this scholar the two are not contradictory fields of research, but certainly in antiquity, and to a certain extent even today, represent variations on a common theme, which is a wish to understand nature and employ it for the benefit of humankind.

Chapter 2 discusses the magician (מכשף). It is divided into a text analysis of the relevant traditions in rabbinic literature, the biblical (capital) punishment of the magician according to the Hebrew Bible and its development in rabbinic literature, the definition of magic, the female magician (or sorceress — מכשפה), the necromantic and finally the development of the concept of the magician and magic in the Jewish world of the middle ages. The main development which Veltri identifies in the definition of the magician is that the talmudic rabbis distinguished between one who creates illusions of wonder working (אחזיוז עיניים), and one who actually does something (עושה מעשה). Only the latter, according to the rabbis' system, is guilty of a violation of the biblical law and accountable to a court of law, because he interferes with the element of creation, which is an attribute reserved for God alone. Notice of this rabbinic innovation is particularly