

This is, at least for four chapters, a vitally important book for anyone working on any aspect of ancient Judaism, including its literature; it is a highly original, compellingly gritty description of the conditions of real life in ancient Palestine. So, check the references, ignore the translations, skip the last chapters, but read the book!

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Michael Sokoloff. *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1990. 823 pp.

For decades it was a commonplace among scholars of Aramaic to decry the lack of a reliable dictionary for the varieties of Jewish Aramaic in late antiquity. The famous work of Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (1903), typically was (and still is) cited, but at the same time scholars recognized its many faults. First, it mixes Hebrew and Aramaic in the same dictionary. Second, even within Aramaic, it mixes the dialects of East (Jewish Babylonian) and West (Jewish Palestinian). And third, Jastrow relied on printed editions of his sources. To be fair, in many respects Jastrow simply was continuing time-honored traditions in Jewish lexicography (witness the *Aruch* of R. Nathan of Rome). Moreover, Jastrow's work undoubtedly met a need in its day. But as modern lexicographers uniformly realize, a project of such size and importance demands tighter control and greater accuracy.

Into this picture steps Michael Sokoloff. For the last ten years or so, Sokoloff, with the aid of sophisticated computer technology, has been preparing a dictionary that answers to each of the above criticisms. Now, after years of anxious anticipation, with the appearance of the volume under review, scholars of diverse fields can benefit from the fruit of his labor. But lest I give the impression that this dictionary is limited only to solving the three problems enumerated above, I hasten to add that it does much more. Let me expand, first with comments on the aforementioned three points, and then with comments on additional benefits inherent in this work.

First, as the title indicates, this work excludes the Hebrew material from texts otherwise written in Aramaic. Second, as also indicated in the title, this dictionary is limited to the dialect of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (called Galilean Aramaic by some) of the Byzantine period (though some later

sources also are utilized; see below). Third, for the rabbinic sources, only the most reliable manuscripts were utilized.

In addition, the dictionary is not limited to the rabbinic material. In the author's words, "Since the corpus under analysis has been defined on a linguistic and not on a literary basis, it crosses the boundaries between different text genres" (p. 1). True, the main portion of the corpus comprises the major rabbinic texts, namely, the Palestinian Talmud and the Palestinian midrashim (most of the Rabbah series, *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, etc.). But much more was utilized by Sokoloff in the compilation of the lexicon, namely, (1) epigraphic remains (inscriptions, papyri, amulets, etc.); (2) the Palestinian Targum tradition (Neophyti, etc.); (3) poetry; and (4) sundry sources such as *ketubbot*, some gaonic texts, and the masoretic notations to the Damascus Pentateuch. Some of these sources are known only from the Cairo Geniza, and in origin are post-Byzantine, but linguistically they belong to the dialect of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic. Accordingly, Sokoloff is justified in incorporating them into his corpus.

As far as the Targumim are concerned, note that several are excluded from this project. Onqelos and Jonathan are pre-Byzantine. Pseudo-Jonathan is in a poor state of preservation and contains a large number of corruptions; its inclusion, Sokoloff concludes, "would add more uncertainty than solid lexical material" (p. 20, n. 2).

Sokoloff's dictionary is rich in comparative material, especially from other Aramaic dialects, in particular the dialects of Palestine (Christian Palestinian Aramaic [CPA] and Samaritan Aramaic [SA]). He even cites, where appropriate, cognates from the modern survival of Western Aramaic, namely, the dialect of Ma'lûla. Loanwords, whether from Hebrew or Greek or another language (e.g., Akkadian), also are so indicated. An extremely helpful aid is the inclusion of bibliographic references for the etymologies. To illustrate, under *bôšîn* "lamp, light," Sokoloff notes that it is a loanword from Akkadian *bušinnu* (with reference to S. A. Kaufman, *Akkadian Influences on Aramaic*) and that it appears in both CPA and SA (with references, respectively, to the works of F. Schulthess and Z. Ben-Hayyim).

For many words, typically those of a technical nature, Sokoloff also refers the reader to more detailed studies. To use the above example again, at the end of the entry on *bôšîn*, the reader's attention is drawn to Y. Brand, *Ceramics in Talmudic Literature* (1953). Note, however, that personal names and geographic names are not treated in this volume.

The wise decision was made not to attempt a vocalization for each entry. In fact, most entries are given without vocalization, even when there is no

doubt as to how a certain word was pronounced. For example, no vocalization is given for *ḥyyṭ* “tailor,” even though Semitists would agree to the vocalization *ḥayyāṭ* (thus in Syriac, Hebrew, and Arabic [*ḥayyāṭ*]), since *nomen agentis* forms do not vary from language to language. Instead, vocalizations are given only where the sources themselves so indicate them. Thus, *bôšîn* appears as such in the Geniza fragments of the Palestinian Targum (Exod. 40:25), and so its vocalization is given by Sokoloff.

The largest section of each lexical entry is devoted to a representative sampling of references. Different morphological forms, a full range of meanings and usages, and diverse sources (Talmud, inscriptions, poetry, etc.) are listed. A very useful inclusion, in cases where the Targumim are cited, is the frequent reference to the Hebrew term being translated. Thus, for example, in the entry *zhr* “warn, be careful, avoid,” we learn at a glance that Targum Neophyti uses this root to translate Hebrew *šmr* in Gen. 31:24, etc., and Hebrew *nzr* in Lev. 22:2, etc.

Sokoloff informs us that “for the rare lexemes, all the references are usually quoted” (p. 7, n. 37), but here I must enter one minor criticism. As one works in the dictionary, there is no indication, in a given entry, when all the references are listed. A simple siglum should have been designed to notify the user of a complete listing (the standard dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew do this). For example, for the verb *b’ṭ* “kick,” about a dozen references are given; I assume that others occur. But for the noun *b’wṭ* “kick,” only one passage is cited, and one does not know if this is the sole occurrence or if there are other attestations.

A lexicographer constantly needs to make judgments, especially with rare words. Whereas Jastrow was wont to present meanings for almost all lexemes in his dictionary, Sokoloff is more willing to state that a word’s meaning is uncertain. For example, for the verb *špr*, which occurs a few times in the Palestinian Talmud, Jastrow listed “whistle” (treating the root as denominative from *šypr* “bird”), but Sokoloff writes, “The mng. of this rt. is unclear from the context, and there is no basis for the translation ‘to whistle’ given by Jast[row]” (p. 469). Sokoloff’s reticence to proffer meanings for uncertain lexemes is admirable. Nonspecialists will no doubt use this work, and it is better to lean to the side of conservatism than to lead the unsuspecting reader down the wrong path.

An additional aid to the user of this dictionary is the 224-page index of citations. But there is still one more aid that I wish had been included, namely, an English-Aramaic wordlist. Other lexicographers (e.g., Wolf Leslau in his various dictionaries of Ethiopian) have produced such lists and they are

extremely helpful. Perhaps a small supplement could be produced in the near future with a wordlist.

Sokoloff's work is a crowning achievement. It will remain the standard dictionary of this dialect of Aramaic for generations to come. Its usefulness will be enhanced even more when its entries are incorporated into the *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* currently in production at Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati) under the direction of Stephen Kaufman. Finally, with this volume now in our hands, we eagerly await the completion of Sokoloff's current project: a dictionary of Bablonian Jewish Aramaic.

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Roger Brooks. *The Spirit of the Ten Commandments: Shattering the Myth of Rabbinic Legalism*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990. xiv, 199 pp.

The early rabbis' view of the relationship between Scripture and law, or as they would have said, between written and oral Torah, was very complex, not always consistent, and not always clear. An examination of this relationship is the most fruitful available path to an understanding of rabbinic Judaism; Roger Brooks both knows this and also sees that much Christian scholarship on Judaism continues to be informed by important misperceptions of this key theme. The present volume gathers a set of interesting and relevant rabbinic materials, translates them reliably, and shapes them into a useful corrective to these misperceptions, and thus can only be welcomed.

For this reason it is unfortunate that Brooks offers this corrective in an artificial presentation that may well make it harder for some of the intended readers of his book to understand where he is trying to lead them. Brooks's study is both less and more than it claims to be. Despite the main title, it is not simply an examination of the uses of the Decalogue in early rabbinic literature. As the subtitle makes clear, it is in fact an exposition of rabbinic legalism designed to refute some widely accepted conceptions of how that legalism works; it aims in fact to present the very heart of rabbinic Judaism in a sympathetic way. The focus on the Ten Commandments was possibly a tactical decision intended to attract the attention of readers more responsive to such a subject than they would be to a book about the Talmud, but this choice of focus brings us to the ways the book is also less than it seems.

Brooks leads up to his own conclusions with a presentation that weakens