

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Ghetto and the Jews of Rome*, by FERDINAND GREGOROVIVUS (New York: Schocken Books, 1967).

*Reviewed by Carl Cohen*

This book throws an interesting light on the approach of a well-meaning Christian to a relatively small sector of Jewish history and the Jewish situation.

Written by a German scholar in 1853, it shows the amazement this man experienced when he realized on the one hand the age and suffering of the Jewish community in Rome, and its endurance and courageous optimism on the other.

In reading this book I was reminded of a small incident which happened many years ago. A young journalist of Jewish descent but communist persuasion had visited one of the great Hasidic Rebbes in Galicia. Before he left he asked, with typical arrogance, the question, "What do you think about the future of Jewish orthodoxy?" The Rebbe unperturbedly answered, "Jewish orthodoxy has no past, Jewish orthodoxy has no present, Jewish orthodoxy has no future, Jewish orthodoxy is eternal. And now young man, you go."

A lengthy beautiful poem is the beginning of this book in the translation by Jarrell, while the larger part in prose was masterfully translated by Moses Hadas. A number of good pictures enliven the book, and the last part consists of comments by Hadas where he corrects a few mistakes of the author and gives a useful timetable about the events that happened to Roman Jewry from 161 B.C.E. until 1870. Gregorovius traces this history in his report, talks about conversion sermons, into the attendance of which the Jews were literally whipped, and calls the situation of the ghetto "a dark page in the annals of Christian humanity."

Gregorovius note that with the perpetual changes of the popes the fate of the Jews in Rome changed every so often for better or worse. He recounts that they had been forced to decorate the Arch of Titus — perhaps the deepest humiliation ever wrought on our people. He describes the ghetto as "a corner of filth and poverty," where 3,800 Jews were forced to live in

## Book Reviews

an area about one-fifth of that of a normal town of 3,000 people. But he sees the bright sides also, records the service of the synagogue as "admirable in its absolute simplicity," talks about the strong family ties and the charities of the Jews. Interesting are his remarks on

the *ius gazaga* which he calls a valuable dowry for a girl.

This attractive little book seems to be well suited as a text for adult education or high school classes. The present reviewer plans to try it out.

---

*Studia Post-Biblica, Edidit P.A.H. Boer, Volumen Sextum, A Life of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, Ca. 1-80 C.E.,* by JACOB NEUSNER (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1962).

*Reviewed by* David S. Shapiro

Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai lives on in the memory of the Jewish people as one of its greatest heroes. He has been credited with the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people because of his successful intercession with the Roman Emperor Vespasian for the establishment of a spiritual center in Yavneh which took the place of the destroyed Temple. Already in his own lifetime he was known as "the light of Israel, the righthanded pillar, the mighty hammer". Historians have, on the whole, concurred with the traditional estimate of the position of R. Yohanan in the annals of Israel. Nevertheless, to the modern Jew the name of this great historical personality is less than familiar, and he knows about his achievements not much more than he knows about his biography. Strangely enough, since the inception of the "Science of Judaism" over a century and a half ago, no scholar had ventured to write a volume describing the life, teachings, and deeds of this great sage.

Jewish scholarship owes a debt of gratitude to one of the younger men in the field, Professor Jacob Neusner, presently of the department of Judaic studies at Brown University, for his work on the life and contribution of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai.

Professor Neusner is a thorough scholar and has studied his subject in depth. Not only has he achieved great proficiency in handling the primary sources, but has left almost no stone unturned in consulting secondary sources in different languages dealing with the man and the age in which he flourished. It is not out of place to mention here that since the publication of the work under consideration Doctor Neusner has published other volumes on the History of the Jewish People in Babylonia, as well as numerous papers in various periodicals, both of scholarly and publicistic character. For sheer prolificacy Doctor Neusner hardly has an equal.

Doctor Neusner has synthesized all the material available on Rabban Yohanan in the Rabbinic

## TRADITION: A Journal of Orthodox Thought

sources. Every statement attributed to Rabban Yohanan has been studied thoroughly and its significance in the light of the political, economic, and spiritual realities of the age evaluated. The panorama of one of the most critical periods of Jewish history is seen as reflected in the great sage's dicta, observations, admonitions, Biblical interpretations, halakhic enactments and activities. One may not always agree with Doctor Neusner's interpretations, but the earnestness and reverence with which he has approached his task is evident throughout the work.

It would be an overstatement to say that Doctor Neusner has made significant discoveries relative either to the age or to the sage, or that he has made new insights available on the life and career of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai. But the reader is impressed with the synoptic view that the author has presented to us of an era and a man whose life was the embodiment of the highest principles and ideals of Pharisaic Judaism.

No scholarly work is free of errors and inaccuracies, and it is oftentimes important to call attention to errors both for the sake of later editions as well as for the guidance of the reader who may not have access to the sources himself. There are, of course, typographical errors in the volume here and there, references to footnotes apparently based on the manuscript rather than on the printed text (e.g., p. 31, note 1), an overabundance of parallel references, and also faulty references (e.g. p. 21, note 3, should be *Keritot*, 25a rather than

*Baba Batra* 4a). A few other noteworthy inaccuracies should be pointed out here.

On p. 7, Doctor Neusner speaks of the "multitudinous tithes and offerings" whose rationale was "perhaps" the support of a large priestly administration. Of the three types of tithes (*maaser rishon*, *maaser sheni*, *maaser ani*), only one went to the Levites (on the problem of *maaser rishon* during the Second Temple see *Yevamot* 86b). The other two were intended either for the poor (*maaser ani*), or for the proprietor himself who brought his tithe to Jerusalem and consumed it there or shared it with the poor and the Levite, if he wished. The *terumah* which went to the priests was generally 1/50 of the crop. In the Sabbatical year there were no priestly or Levitical gifts. Except for the sin and guilt-offerings all others were voluntary. Hence, the sacrificial system could not have been devised to support a priestly government. The priests, of course, received other emoluments, such as the first-born of clean animals and a sheep in lieu of a first-born donkey, and certain portions of the sacrifices, the first shearings of the wool, and portions of beef and mutton. A number of these gifts were purely voluntary. There were even legal ways of circumventing the obligations of the tithes, the *terumah* and the first-born. It is incorrect to assume that the tithes and offerings had anything to do with supporting a priestly government. At best they normally provided a meager sustenance for those who were to be the servants of their people.

## Book Reviews

Likewise Doctor Neusner's statement (p. 7) that the priests got these gifts from the majority of Jews with the help of the Romans is to this reviewer highly questionable. In the criticisms leveled against those priests of the Second Temple who desecrated their office by seizing the priestly gifts by force for themselves, there is no mention (to my knowledge) of collusion with Roman officials for this purpose.

On p. 8: "The land did not produce precious metals; it had been praised in Scripture for its good wheat, oil, dates, wine, and honey." However, Scripture strangely enough also praises the land for its precious metals. See Deut. 8:9: "a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass."

On p. 18: "The only common element one can discern in the teachings of Shammai and Yohanan is a superficial similarity of emphasis on cheerfulness and study of the Torah, common to all sages of this period. Thus Shammai said, 'Fix a period for thy study of the Torah. Say little and do much, and receive all men with a cheerful countenance' and Yohanan taught likewise." That Yohanan taught likewise is very possible, except that in the long note on this subject there is no reference to anything that Yohanan said on this matter.

On p. 25: "As Hillel lay dying." Text is in Jerusalem Talmud, *Nedarim* 5, 6 (not cited in footnote). However, all that text says is: "Once (Hillel) took sick." The inference that Hillel was on his deathbed is much exaggerated.

The discussion of Rabban Yohanan's sojourn in Arav (a town in Galilee) and his relationship with R. Hanina ben Dosa (p. 27) is very confusing. That the events referred to in *Berakhot* 34b took place in Arav is nowhere intimated in the text, although Doctor Neusner takes it for granted, and on p. 31 even translates the text with the additional phrase "in Arav" which is not found in any Talmudic text. On the other hand, the passage "When R. Hanina ben Dosa went to study Torah with Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai" implies that R. Hanina did not study with the master in Arav, but traveled to where the master lived and taught. That R. Hanina ben Dosa lived in Arav is borne out by Jerusalem Talmud *Berakhot* 4, 1, which Doctor Neusner does not cite till p. 31, note 1, leaving the reader in utter confusion for four pages as to how Arav got into the picture of Rabban Yohanan's relation to R. Hanina ben Dosa in the first place. Surprisingly, Doctor Neusner also makes a strange statement on p. 28, note 1, that for a man in his seventies or eighties to father a child is a miraculous event. It is, of course, not true. Moreover, what evidence is there that if we are to assume that the incident about R. Hanina ben Dosa praying for the son of Rabban Yohanan took place after the Destruction that the son was born after the Destruction. He might have been in his teens or even an adult. Wouldn't Rabban Yohanan have asked R. Hanina to pray for a mature son if he were ill?

On p. 28 Professor Neusner equates the act of hunting on the

## TRADITION: *A Journal of Orthodox Thought*

Sabbath with the destruction of life. Actually, hunting (*tzedah*) and destruction of life (*netilat neshamah*) are two separate categories of activities prohibited on the Sabbath.

On p. 33, the Mishnah in *Gittin* 4, 3 is cited as vitiating Rabban Yohanan's decision stated in *Mishnah Ketuvot* 13, 1. Actually the enactment of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder to abolish the oath of the widow was not intended as a rejection of Rabban Yohanan's view. It was merely the substitution of a vow for the oath, for the reasons given in both the Babylonian and the Jerusalem Talmuds.

On p. 39 in note 3, the tradition of the prognostication of the destruction of the Temple is declared by Doctor Neusner to be part of a confused tradition, since R. Hanina the Deputy-Priest also reports it. Actually the additional report is not evidence of confusion, but rather a confirmation of the veracity of the tradition. Moreover, the story is not actually the same, as

Doctor Neusner suggests. R. Hanina simply reported the event. R. Yohanan was said to have addressed himself to the gates of the Temple with words of rebuke.

On p. 42, note 1, *neta revai* is wrongly translated as *fourth planting*. The reference is to a sapling in the fourth year after planting, when its fruits become edible through redemption.

On p. 94, *mazikin* in the famous statement found in *Tosephta* 7,6 is translated as "demons." The term in this context simply means "destructive powers" of all kinds. See identical passage at the end of *Mekhilta, Bahhodesh*, as cited by Doctor Neusner himself on p. 92.

It is noteworthy that Doctor Neusner has skilfully employed the various epithets by which Rabban Yohanan was known throughout his lifetime as headings of the different chapters. The author has manifested not only an unusual degree of scholarship, but also the ability to write well and clearly.

---

### REVIEWERS IN THIS ISSUE

DAVID S. SHAPIRO is rabbi of Congregation Anshe Sfard in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and teaches the History of Jewish Civilization at the University of Wisconsin.

CARL COHEN teaches mathematics at the University of Massachusetts.

PESACH SCHINDLER is the Assistant National Director of Education of the United Synagogue of America.