

his goal. Parallel literary motifs found in the first part of the Epic and in the first part of the Acts of Thomas are also given (p. 315), to suggest that the Epic of Gilgamesh was known to the Syrian Church, as it was indeed known to Judaism (Qumran), Manichaeism, and Islam, as reflected in the *1001 Nights*. The author also outlines the life of the ancient Mesopotamian *naditus*, as known best from the Shamash temple archives in Sippar, where these alleged "ascetes" lived in "cloisters." After an initiation ritual, the *naditu* "had to keep her virginity intact" (p. 316) and to dedicate herself to a specific Mesopotamian deity. AbouZayd also describes the role of the *šerkūs*, an order of both males and females in the service of various Babylonian deities (p. 317).

Searching for parallels between early and late cultural traditions in Mesopotamia is a very useful way to assess the survival of ancient Mesopotamian literature in later local cultures. In the case of the Epic of Gilgamesh, however, it is hard to speak of any kind of literary influence it may have had on Syriac ascetic tradition, let alone the survival of some of its particular themes anywhere in Syriac literature. Moreover, the question of life and death always fascinated the people of Mesopotamia, as it has surely fascinated any other people in any time and place. As for the *naditu* institution, the links between it and Syriac asceticism are even more questionable, because current research on these women and associated terminology is fraught with difficulties. In his attempt to link *naditu* practice with Syriac asceticism, the author may have been influenced by modern renderings of Sumerian and Akkadian terms that are loaded with Judaeo-Christian connotations. Thus, Babylonian priestesses (*entu*, *ugbaltu*, and *igišitu*), mentioned in the Old-Babylonian version of Atra-ḫasis (tablet III vii 6–9), are said to have been pledged by a "vow of chastity," and Akkadian *gagû*, from Sumerian *gá.gi₄.a*, lit. "the locked house" (in which a *naditu* lived) was rendered by "cloister," a term reminiscent of the Christian "convent" (see B. Landsberger, *Symbolae Iuridicae et Historicae Martino David Dedicatae*, Iura Orientis Antiqui [Leiden, 1969], 2: 41ff.; R. Harris, in *Studies Presented to A. Leo Oppenheim* [Chicago, 1964], 106–37; U. Jeyes, in *Images of Women in Antiquity*, ed. A. Cameron and A. Kuhrt [London, 1983], 260–68).

Nevertheless, one should be careful not to force ancient texts to say what they did not mean to. For example, when the priestesses in Atra-ḫasis were ordered not to bear children, it was not to exhibit total devotion to a deity by vowing chastity, but to reduce the world's population. Moreover, not bearing children does not mean abstinence from sexual intercourse, since the priestesses could have had an active sexual life while using contraception, a practice known in ancient cultures (see J. Finkelstein, *JAOS* 90 [1970]: 246). As for the *naditu*, there is a lexical list which identifies her with the *šamuktum* "prostitute" (Mal'ku I 131f.; cf. *CAD*, N/1: 63), in the context of her religious duty (see W. G. Lambert, "Prostitution," in *Aussenseiter und Randgruppen: Beiträge zu einer Sozialgeschichte des Alten Orients*, ed. V. Haas, Xenia, vol. 32 [Konstanz: Univ.-Verl. Konstanz,

1992], 137, 154 n. 18y). Although this list is dated later than the Old Babylonian period, it nonetheless carries an ancient opinion that *naditus* were far from being "virgins."

While cuneiform sources do not seem even to hint at the practice of perpetual virginity in Babylonian society, AbouZayd's sources, which make up the bulk of his book, clearly point to biblical and new-testamental origins of Syriac *iḥidhayutha*. He is to be thanked for gathering these sources, and for providing the reader with stimulating commentaries, insights (the meaning of *iḥidhaya* [pp. 260ff.] is of particular interest), and extensive bibliographical references.

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Legal Documents of the Hellenistic World: Papers from a Seminar Arranged by the Institute of Classical Studies, the Institute of Jewish Studies and the Warburg Institute, University of London, February to May 1986. Edited by MARKHAM J. GELLER and HERWIG MAEHLER, in collaboration with A. D. E. Lewis. London: THE WARBURG INSTITUTE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, 1995. Pp. xiv + 254 (paper).

The editors of this volume wish to contribute to the comparative study of the several legal systems current in the Hellenistic period. The seminar papers published here were given in spring, 1986. No explanation of the delay in publication is offered, and those authors who remark on the matter indicate that only their footnotes have been altered since writing. This is thus something of a time capsule, a feeling strengthened by the frontispiece showing most of the authors, plus other participants (the latter nowhere fully listed, and in the caption given only surnames). Although Joseph Méléze-Modrzejewski's opening paper was invited as a broad introduction, he disclaims any such attempt, and no other synthesis or response is provided, not to speak of any sense of the discussion at the seminars or at the concluding conference. What we have, therefore, is the separate papers (plus indexes: subjects, persons, sources); anything more is up to the reader.

These papers are no doubt less homogeneous than the organizers intended. To the extent they do what they were supposed to, they consist of descriptions and printed examples of actual documents of various types, along with some analysis. Papers like this mainly present acquired knowledge and generally held views rather than original insights, but they have perhaps aged less than the other papers, even though the latter are inherently more interesting as scholarly articles. To take the papers seriatim:

Méléze-Modrzejewski describes the Ptolemaic situation as consciously pluralistic, with the kings protecting their subjects' legal heritage. The Demotic "code" of Hermopolis (he thinks

"priestly casebook" the best description) is one key example, the Septuagint's translation of the Torah the other. They are, he argues, alike in being collections used for particular communities in Egypt.

Family law, in a broad sense, occupies most of the other papers concerned with Egypt. Ranon Katzoff uses four contracts connected with marriage to illustrate the basic persistence of Greek classical norms into the Roman period, albeit with some significant changes, perhaps most notably the effective replacement of *ekdosis* in most cases with the woman's direct role in contracting the marriage. He also discusses *P. Yadin* 18 as a basically Jewish marriage described with Hellenistic formulae—an admittedly controversial view, on which he provides a brief bibliography up to 1991.

H. S. Smith and Cary J. Martin, in a two-part paper, treat Egyptian, especially Demotic, legal transactions relevant to marriage and family handling of property. Smith provides a synthetic discussion of the Egyptian background, ending with a description of the main types of matrimonial property (husband's gift for maintenance, wife's endowment). Cary Martin then provides examples with commentary on the formulas. Smith's comment (p. 57) is central to much of what is said in other articles, too: "Egyptian law was about titles to property, not specifically about social institutions like matrimony."

One example of the same phenomenon is the virtual absence of Egyptian wills, testamentary purposes being carried out by other means (p. 59). Willy Clarysse's article pursues this aspect, covering the Greek *diathekai* (which he thinks existed largely for non-standard situations), then matrimonial and donation texts with testamentary purpose, and finally Egyptian documents used to transfer estates or parts of estates to intended heirs. This discussion leads into the preceding paper, P. W. Pestman's, the essential lesson of which is the formalism of Egyptian legal instruments. Pestman shows that one must not infer the social setting of an isolated legal act at face value from the type of act and obvious actors, who are not always the true source of initiative and whose involvement may have been entirely passive. Pestman particularly warns against the assumption that all documents with women as parties reflect a truly independent economic role.

The final Ptolemaic contribution is Reinhold Scholl's on slave law. This paper has two very different parts. The first is a sketch of the known—useful but just a summary and not new. The second is a detailed discussion of *P. Harris* 61, so fantastically restored by Heichelheim (cf. my remarks in *Text* 4 [1988]: 111–12). Scholl argues that this text refers to a general registration procedure for the whole population, "eine Art ptolemäische Epikrisis." Space does not permit me to go into detail, but this is an important, original, and valuable contribution.

Three papers treat various aspects of the law of the cuneiform tablets of Hellenistic Mesopotamia, although all stress that the Hellenistic period is not a meaningful unit in the legal history of Babylonia. G. J. P. McEwan, on family law, begins from the

difficult point that the main events of life—marriage, divorce, adoption—are not reflected directly in the cuneiform tablets. Rather, he thinks, they must have been on papyrus or parchment, and probably in Greek. The parallel of demotic makes one wonder if instead there were no contracts specific to these transactions, the necessary property transfers being accomplished through the known document types (dowry settlements, property divisions, and the like). McEwan thinks that women's relatively independent position in earlier eras (especially Old Babylonian) had been eroded by mid-Hellenistic times, an evolution not initiated under Greek influence but perhaps accelerated by it.

Robartus J. van der Spek, on land ownership, summarizes his dissertation on this subject. Attention is focused above all on an argument that the Babylonians did—contrary to some views—have a notion of absolute private ownership. This is a long and detailed discussion, perhaps a bit too attached to bringing Romanistic categories into play. Here again cuneiform sources are scarce, probably the result of the use of Greek on perishable materials (only the clay sealings survive) from 275 on. Although van der Spek believes parties were free to choose language, the creation of a royally backed (and taxed) registration procedure for Greek documents created incentives for the choice of the new method.

Joachim Oelsner's rich and well-documented article treats other areas of cuneiform texts: the life of the temples, slavery, and business transactions broadly described as belonging to the law of obligations. He too stresses the continuity and autonomy of the cuneiform tradition, if also its decline (along with that of the temples) in the face of competition from documentation in not only Greek but also Aramaic. A balancing contribution on the Egyptian side to Oelsner's concern with the temples would have been welcome.

Oelsner calls attention (p. 124) to a body of material not treated anywhere in this volume, the small groups of texts from Dura, Avroman, and elsewhere. This omission is regrettable, as it undermines what (limited—see already Méléze-Modrzejewski on p. 1) prospect there is of escaping a purely bifocal Egypto-Babylonian approach to the subject of Hellenistic legal systems.

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The Furniture of Western Asia, Ancient and Traditional. Edited by GEORGINA HERRMANN. Mainz am Rhein: PHILIPP VON ZABERN, 1996. Pp. xxviii + 301, 143 illustrations, 92 plates. DM 248.

My first encounter with ancient furniture was with the beautiful artifacts, wood and bronze, brilliantly revealed after some