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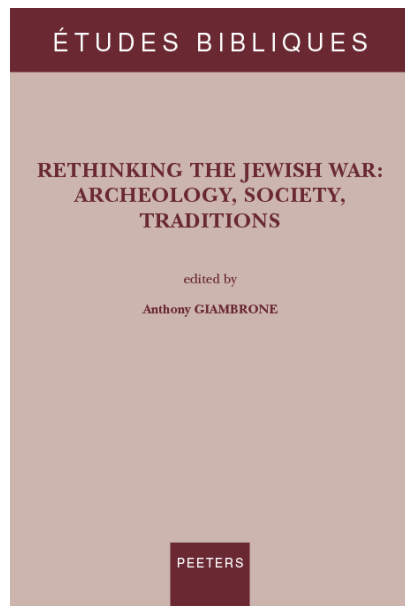
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Anthony Giambrone, ed.

Rethinking the Jewish War: Archeology, Society, Traditions

Études Bibliques NS 84

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Steve Mason's 2016 *A History of the Jewish War* is indisputably thought-provoking. Mason's views on the small scope of the conflict and on the absence of any "religious" motivation in the sense we mean today by term are controversial, to say the least. In order not to challenge these views but to offer a place for a conversation between specialists, Anthony Giambrone organized in October 2018 a three-day conference at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem. Sixteen presentations were made in four languages (English, French, German, Italian). This book is the product of the debates.

Some formal aspects must be quickly summarized. One cannot but be surprised, given the scale of the discussions on the topic of the Judeo-Roman relations in antiquity, by the brevity of the bibliography (313–40). I mention this is not so I can list the missing books or papers but to note that a few essays are built on old data and do not engage in discussion with the current scholarship. In some cases works referred to in notes do not appear in the bibliography, making it difficult to find them. More intriguingly, the architecture of the book is unclear. Even the number of the contributions is unclear. There were seventeen presentations during the conference. The back cover refers to a "collection of fifteen papers." Fourteen of them were published, including a very welcome response from Steve Mason, plus the introduction, which is not counted as a paper. Mason responds to only some of them: only six chapters are discussed, the only ones, according to him, that engage his work (I will return to this point later). He also discusses the presentations of

Mordechai Aviam, Donald Ariel, and Tessa Rajak, three scholars who did not finally publish their works in the volume. One regrets having their positions solely by the bias of the criticisms they aroused. However, the last word is given to the editor of the book, who already responded in the introduction to the responses Steve Mason made to the responses given to his original book! This multiscale and incomplete discussion is surprising, however laudable the idea of discussion was.

In the introduction (1–31), Anthony Giambrone presents Mason’s theories, then summarizes the different contributions and uses them for a full examination of the motivations of the war. After his reading of the 2016 book and Mason’s observations here, Giambrone concludes that the conflict was indeed a proper war and that it was religiously motivated. The essays are organized into three parts: archaeology (five essays), society (five essays), and the traditions (or memories) of the war (three essays). This sounds judicious in order to put an order into such a multidirectional matter, even if some affectations are a bit unexpected.

“Grande guerre et petite guerre en Judée de 66 a 74” (35–60) offers the observations of a specialist of the Roman warfare, Yann Le Bohec. Summarizing the military events in the *Bellum Judaicum*, he concludes that, from a Roman point of view, the conflict was a proper war. He even finds a naval battle (often neglected) and some elements of a psychological war. In “Destructions dans la ville haute au début de la première révolte juive” (63–71), Émile Puech proposes that two graffiti published in 2017, found in the Upper City on the drums of two broken columns, were not mason’s marks and a proper name but an expression of some partisans of peace who had found refuge here and were indignant by the acts of the rebels. Dominique-Marie Cabaret’s ““Le siège de la forteresse Antonia: Le récit de la *Guerre des Juifs* au crible des dernières recherches archéologiques” (72–80) propounds some new elements of topography concerning the juncture between the Antonia fortress and the temple enclosure, then defends the idea that the climax of the battle found place at the northwest tower of the stronghold, on a bridge built on the Struthion Pool. According to him, the Ecce Homo arc was the “Eastern Gate” of the second wall. For their part, Haim Goldfus and Benny Arubas, in “Mind the Gap: Flavius Josephus and the Roman Assault Ramp at Masada” (81–90), engage against a paper by Gwyn Davies and Jodi Magness.¹ They explain once more their conclusions, that the Roman ramp was never completed and that the edifying narrative of Josephus cannot be true. In his response, Mason does not take sides concerning the archaeological disputations and underlines the fact that his book only proposed a few possible scenarios. On another topic, our knowledge on Flavian propaganda is probably not yet complete, as shown by Marialetizia Buonfiglio’s “The Arch of Titus at the Circus Maximus: The Architecture of a Triumph” (91–119). She presents the arch that the Senate raised to Titus in 81 CE in the Circus

1. Gwyn Davies and Jodi Magness, “Recovering Josephus: Mason’s *History of the Jewish War* and the Siege of Masada,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 36 (2017): 55–65.

Maximus as well as its great visibility and explains interesting elements concerning the celebration of this victory in the city of Rome.

In, “Judäa als Teil der Provinz Syrien im Spannungsfeld zwischen den Legaten von Syrien und den ritterlichen Funktionsträgern in Judäa von 6-66 n.Chr.” (132–37), the first essay in the “Society” part of the volumes, Werner Eck offers a rigorous analysis of the status of Judea between the years 6 and 66 CE. He establishes once again that the Syrian legates were the proper governors of Judea, which was not an independent province. Nevertheless, Josephus blamed the low-rank officers for the misgovernment and exonerated senatorial (and so, influential) legates, since his position in the Flavian Rome impelled him not to make powerful enemies. Mason acknowledges the great work of Eck in his response. The famous speech of Agrippa II on the eve of the uprising interests is the subject of Giovanni Brizzi’s “Il discorso di Agrippa II (B.J. 2.345–401): Regole della guerra a confronto?” (138–54). He defends the idea that it was entirely Roman in its inspiration and not Jewish, with some concepts, such as *fides*, opposed to the *bellum iustum* dear to the Romans. The author (Agrippa/Josephus) answered to the competing vision, a religious vision by definition. According to Brizzi, the rebels were persuaded to fight for a holy war. After this essay, both Mireille Hadas-Lebel, in “‘Pas d’autre maitre que Dieu’: La ‘quatrième philosophie’, politique et mystique” (155–63), and Nadav Sharon, in “Rome and the Future of Its Empire in Second Temple and Post-destruction Jewish Texts” (164–81), defend the fact that Jews did have some grievances against the Romans and that a significant part of the animosity was religious by nature. One can note that Sharon abundantly uses the relevant chapters of a recent book about the diverse perceptions of the “future of Rome” for proposing a subtle analysis of the subversive hope of the future fall of its domination.² The animosity seems to him quite widespread. After him, Joseph Sievers notes the near omnipresence of “Religious Language in Josephus’s *Judean War*” (182–96), where the Jewish author expressed his personal judgement on the events. To these three scholars, Steve Mason responds that *religion* is an anachronistic term and that the evidences of religion and messianic expectations in the sources are only a few and “would not help much with the problems [he] was investigating” (306).

The third and last part of the book, “Traditions,” opens with Meir Ben-Shahar’s “Memories of the *Destruction: Between Priests and Rabbis*” (199–235). He finds two parts in the (very late) Avot of Rabbi Nathan that reflect, according to him, two competing memories of the traumatic event of 70 CE: a hagiography of Yohanan ben Zakkai celebrating his friendship with Vespasian, and a hostile chronicle of the siege. The combination of both unified the multiple memories, offering to the people a consolation for his lost. The same competition gives the matter to Étienne Nodet, “On the Destruction of the Jerusalem Temple,” to challenge the idea that the “abomination of desolation” announced by Jesus according to Mark and Matthew referred to the destruction of 70 CE. He

2. See Jonathan J. Price and Katell Berthelot, eds., *The Future of Rome. Roman, Greek, Jewish and Christian Visions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

defends the idea that the destruction did not end the worship, but the true break would be the desecration of 135 CE, when Hadrian founded Aelia Capitolina on the ruins of the Jewish city. Finally, in “Temple Arsons and Murder of the Prophets: Early Christian Responses to Jews and the Jewish Revolt(s)” (249–75), Anthony Giambrone challenges Mason’s assertion that the charge of the Christians against the Jews was a charge of deicide. For him, the “Christian” traditions were numerous, and they were “Jewish” in the sense that they inherited the “prepackaged Jewish response to national calamity” (251), that is, the death of the prophets as the proper cause of the catastrophe. Mason responds that his goal “was limited to showing that positions concerning Jerusalem that would become central in later Christian teaching were already inscribed in the canonical texts” (308). In his response, besides the arguments I already summarized, Mason gives some interesting elements on his formation, methodology, and point of view on the necessity of doubt in studying history. Not a destructive doubt, he explains, but one “that clears away the fog of misunderstanding so that we may imagine new possibilities, which might take us closer to the truth of the ancient past” (284). The bibliography (313–40) and a short index (341–47) close the book.

All in all, I find two aims to this book. The first one is the discussion (without proper support) for Mason’s book. His response is a great strength for the collection. But, as Mason says, only six essays really interact with his work (maybe we could have wished a response to Le Bohec on the scope of the conflict or to Brizzi on the religious aspects). The other aim is larger, to “rethink the Jewish War.” Maybe we have here the material for two different books. For this purpose, the scholars invited to discuss are indisputably among the best, and their contributions are interesting and useful. However, they often have already published their arguments and conclusions elsewhere (sometime during the editorial work of this book), and for this reason the book does not seem particularly innovative. This seems to be its major weakness.