

Book Reviews

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SYRIAN IDENTITY IN THE GRECO- ROMAN WORLD

Nathanael J. Andrade, *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge: CUP, 2013. £70.00. pp. xxiii + 7 maps + 412. ISBN: 978-1-107-01205-9).

Andrade applies recent perspectives on imperialism to the investigation of how, in the face of the Roman Empire, Syria reinvented expressions of Greek, Roman, and Syrian identity. The study opens with a consideration of Greekness in the second century BCE to the first century CE in the Syrian context. The starting point is the edict of Antiochus IV, as reported in 1 Maccabees, with the instruction to abandon local customs. Rather than focusing exclusively on the divisions between Greeks and indigenous peoples, here the focus is on the shared elements in the cultural landscape. Here Andrade outlines the shifts that enabled Greekness to be expressed afresh over the period between the reign of Antiochus IV and Pompey's arrival. The remainder of the book explores in detail 'how Roman imperialism affected its Near Eastern territories and Greekness within them' (p. 66).

In chapter two, the cooperation between Cicero and Antiochus I is explored. It is noted that Cicero was able to provide the resources of imperial stability, and interwoven with this Antiochus 'exploited local resources and generated a royal ideology in ways that stimulated internal stability, compliance, and a regional social identification' (p. 92). In the second part of this study Andrade discusses the influence of Greek collectives in the period spanning the first to third centuries CE. The final chapter in this section takes Dura-Europos as an important case-study that reflects shifts in and

modes of performing identity. One of the key concerns is not to flatten the varied data. Instead it is noted that 'Roman imperial-era Greeks at Dura-Europos had discrepant experiences of Greekness and Syrianness, ones that interwove idioms of heterogeneous origins' (p. 240). In the final section, covering the second and third centuries CE, the focus is upon the tension between 'being Greek and being other'. In effect it examines the deviation from classical expressions of Greek identity, and instead considers provincial expressions of Greekness and the integration of aspect of indigenous Syria identity.

The richness of this study arises from its careful probing of the multiple and diverse performances of Greekness in Syria during the Roman period. Andrade illumines his study by drawing in fascinating insights from recent research into empire and identity. Given the importance of the Syrian context on emergent Christianity in the first to third centuries, this study enriches the understanding of the socio-cultural forces at play in that milieu. This is an excellent treatment that repays careful consideration.

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FOUR GOSPELS, ONE JESUS? A SYMBOLIC READING

Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading* (London: SPCK, 2013. £9.99. pp. 224. ISBN: 978-0-281-07030-5).

Originally published in 1994 by SPCK and later in the US by Eerdmans, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*

A Symbolic Reading has now been reissued by SPCK in their Classics imprint. As the book's title suggests, the focus of the book is the question of whether the four gospels included in the New Testament share a single vision of Jesus.

The book is made up of six chapters. In the first chapter, Burridge begins his argument with an overview of the genre of the gospels and the various forms of gospel criticism. Chapters 2–5 respectively examine the unique presentation of Jesus in Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. In the final chapter Burridge attempts to make sense of the tension between the unity of the gospels and their diverse depictions of Jesus. As Burridge asks, are there four *portraits* of Jesus or four Jesuses (p. 165)? In the end, he assigns significance both to the fact that the early Christians preferred four gospels rather than one and to the fact that they limited the number to four instead of a larger number (pp. 177–80). Along these lines he argues that the early church, when it comes to the gospels, embraced both plurality and limits by using the gospels as a stimulus and a control.

Although Burridge added very little new content in the revised edition or to this version of *Four Gospels, One Jesus?*, the author's expertise surely justifies its place in the SPCK classic series. The work is written for a more popular audience than Burridge's more academic *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, and is therefore best suited for beginning students, lay people in the church, as well as everyone interested in the study of the canonical gospels. The references to illuminated sacred writings (e.g., the Book of Kells) and modern literature (e.g., C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien) help in this respect. Most of the shortcomings of the book have been addressed in the revised edition of *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (2004).

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**A COMPETENT AUTOPSY ON THE
CADAVER OF ISRAELITE RELIGION**

Aaron Chalmers, *Exploring the Religion of Ancient Israel: Prophet, Priest, Sage and People* (London: SPCK, 2012. £15.00. pp. xv + 159. ISBN: 978-0-281-06481-6).

Making contemporary OT scholarship accessible to the non-specialist, this book aims to help readers 'develop a fuller and more accurate picture of the social location, training and roles of Israel's prophets, priests and sages, as well as the religious beliefs and practices of the common people' (p. xiii). In doing so, the author concentrates on the period c. 1000-586 BCE.

Adopting a refreshingly positive approach towards the OT materials as reliable evidence, Chalmers introduces his study by highlighting the practical difficulties of using biblical texts to reconstruct the social world of ancient Israel. Consequently, he draws on ancient near Eastern documents and archaeological remains, in his words, 'to correct and control historical reconstructions based on the biblical text' (p. 14). In saying this, Chalmers is critical not of the biblical text itself but of modern reconstructions that have drawn inaccurate inferences from the OT. This is an ever present danger, and Chalmers may himself occasionally be guilty of deducing too much from some OT passages. This is especially so in his discussion of the 'wise', for as he readily acknowledges the biblical evidence is sparse regarding 'a distinct class or group of people who were specifically known for their wisdom' (p. 67). To plug this gap, Chalmers overly relies on OT material that promotes 'wisdom' for everyone, not just a select few.

Overall, Chalmer's discussion is well balanced, although there are occasional lapses when generalisations about the OT are insufficiently nuanced to do justice to all of the evidence (e.g., his claim that 'the OT was produced by, and thus reflects the perspective of, urban-dwelling, male elites' [p. 98] is clearly overstated given the number of passages that are highly critical of those in positions of authority).

This is a well-performed autopsy on the cadaver of Israelite religion, but anyone interested in understanding what truly animated the religious life of ancient Israel will need to look elsewhere. While this book for the most part achieves what it sets out to do, it provides only background information on the religion (or better religions) of ancient Israel. The theological ideas of Israelite religion, which might be considered its heart and soul, are on the whole ignored. Thankfully, the OT