

ANDREAS LEHNARDT. *Qaddish: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Rezeption eines rabbinischen Gebetes*. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 87. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002. Pp. xiv + 386.

The ubiquity and elasticity of the Kaddish (alt. Qaddish) within Jewish liturgical practice has made this brief, but enigmatic prayer a perennial object of both scholarly and popular interest. It is our great fortune that we now have a study that has done justice to the complexity and specificity of the historical development of the Kaddish. In a monograph that is focused and sweeping in equal measure, Andreas Lehnardt sets out to explain both how and why the Kaddish emerged as a major structuring element within the Jewish liturgy at the same time that it attracted a diverse range of liturgical applications.

Lehnardt's study is grounded in the methodological insight that the histories of (Jewish) prayers such as the Kaddish, with their fluctuating textual identities and heterogeneous liturgical functions, must integrate text-historical, literary-historical, and reception-historical considerations. Studies of early Jewish worship in particular are constrained by the decentralized nature of Jewish religious practice as well as the complex process of Jewish textual transmission. By employing such tools, Lehnardt turns obstacles into opportunities for illuminating key moments in the dynamic history of the Kaddish, while acknowledging the epistemological limits imposed by the evidence. It is thus no coincidence that his account begins in the Middle Ages with the oldest extant textual witnesses for the Kaddish, then backs up into Late Antiquity to explore earlier, indirect testimonies about its language and function, and finally moves forward in time again to describe the various medieval appropriations of this late antique prayer.

Lehnardt argues in chapter one (pp. 15–77) that the Kaddish, in both its earliest and its fully crystallized forms, is characterized by generic and linguistic hybridity. Despite this high degree of textual variation, all versions of the Kaddish are characterized by a distinctive admixture of Hebrew and Aramaic juxtaposed within single sentences and even clauses. Numerous earlier scholars suggested that this peculiar linguistic feature reflects the process of translation from a Hebrew original to an

artificial Aramaic “school language.” Through careful linguistic comparison of the Kaddish with contemporaneous Hebrew and Aramaic sources, especially Targumic Aramaic, Lehnardt concludes that the prayer cannot be assigned to a specific linguistic-institutional context, but exhibits the general (Hebrew and Aramaic) linguistic features of rabbinic literature. Moreover, the Hebrew units of the Kaddish, which are interwoven with its Aramaic building-blocks, cannot be accounted for as mere back-borrowings. The inseparability of Hebrew and Aramaic within the Kaddish indicates that it was a linguistic hybrid (“ein Mischprodukt”) from its earliest stages of development and never existed in a “pure” linguistic form in either Hebrew or Aramaic.

According to Lehnardt, the bilingual character of the Kaddish has its counterpart in the prayer’s hybrid generic form. The Kaddish resists generic definition, although it employs doxological formulae (i.e. *yebe sheme raba mevarakh*) and formally resembles certain features of prayers linked to public Scriptural reading (e.g., the *’al ha-kol* prayer and the *Yekum purkan*). Lehnardt rejects the findings of Joseph Heinemann’s form-critical method, which placed the Kaddish squarely within the rabbinic study-house (*bet ha-midrash*). Instead, he argues that, from a formal perspective, the Kaddish cannot be assigned to a single *Sitz-im-Leben*, and proposes that its generic and linguistic hybridity result from its shifting application in various institutional settings—synagogue as well as study-house.

In chapter two (pp. 79–142), Lehnardt analyzes rabbinic sources that provide evidence for the liturgical function of the Kaddish or illuminate the ways in which its meaning and power were conceived in Late Antiquity. The linguistic and formal flexibility of the Kaddish corresponds to its varied reception within classical rabbinic literature. The Kaddish did not develop along a single, linear trajectory from pre-rabbinic prayers such as the Lord’s Prayer found in the New Testament, but emerged through an unsystematic process of expansion, reinterpretation, and redeployment.

Indeed, the Kaddish is nowhere attested as a fully crystallized composition in classical rabbinic literature. The basic doxological formula *yebe sheme raba mevarakh* and other closely related forms may have served as a short-hand designation for the Kaddish. But Lehnardt cautions that we must also entertain the possibility that in some passages this formula refers to prayer practices that are wholly distinct (e.g., *Sifre Deuteronomy* 306). Yet, despite their palpable lack of consensus concerning the meaning and function of the doxology, rabbinic sources uniformly accord it enormous reverence, offering precise prescriptions for the manner and

circumstances in which the formula is to be recited. Significantly, most early rabbinic sources draw an explicit link between the doxology and the liturgical setting of the synagogue. Contra Heinemann, the image of the Kaddish as a prayer recited following the reading and interpretation of Scripture in the “study house” is based, with the notable exception of *bSot* 49a, on late midrashic texts from the post-talmudic period. The daily liturgical use of the doxology described in Babylonian sources corresponds well with the cosmic or eschatological framework within which they situate it: the doxology is variously presented as an essential element in the proper maintenance of the cosmos or as a means by which Israel may atone for its sins at the end of days. This interpretation seems to have developed first among Babylonian Jews; the formula is absent from earlier Palestinian rabbinic corpora such as the Mishnah and the halakhic midrashim. Nonetheless, the future-oriented emphasis on the atoning or redemptive function of the doxology intensified over time and is most prominent in late Palestinian midrashic and apocalyptic sources.

The very partial picture that emerges from classical rabbinic literature raises important questions: if the Kaddish as a fully crystallized literary composition is not yet attested in classical rabbinic sources, when and under what conditions did the prayer assume its canonical form(s) and function(s)? Beginning with Philip Bloch at the end of the nineteenth century, scholars have noted the formal similarities between the Kaddish and the hymnic material found in Hekhalot literature, in particular their common use of a poetic style that is characterized by lexical and grammatical redundancy. Lehnardt (pp. 143–79) offers a compelling refutation of this claim. In fact, the Hekhalot corpus does not contain a single example of the Kaddish aside from a passage in the so-called “David Apocalypse,” which is more properly classified as a midrash-apocalypse than as a Hekhalot composition proper. Lehnardt suggests that the Hekhalot authors, who absorbed many elements of the synagogue liturgy, were disinterested in or perhaps even hostile to the Kaddish because they felt its eschatological significance conflicted with their own present-oriented mysticism. In fact, Lehnardt is able to demonstrate that the poetic style of the Kaddish is shared by a wide range of Jewish liturgical compositions, many of them considerably older than the Hekhalot corpus. This style has no essential affinity to mystical practice or experience, but is a conventional feature of Hebrew hymnology. Only in the High Middle Ages (eleventh to thirteenth century) did Jewish scholars develop a “mystical” interpretation of the Kaddish and belatedly incorporate it into older layers of the mystical tradition.

In a lengthy fourth chapter (pp. 181–276), Lehnardt challenges the

thesis—most recently advocated by Lawrence Hoffman—that the Kaddish, along with much of the rest of the Jewish liturgy, was standardized in top-down fashion under the influence of the Geonim, the leaders of the Babylonian and Palestinian rabbinic academies. Although the wording of the Kaddish was gradually standardized in this period, and although numerous Geonic responsa do take a firm stand on the proper formulation of the Kaddish, Lehnardt rightly cautions that it cannot be assumed that the recipients of this legal correspondence automatically embraced the rulings contained therein. On the contrary, persistent variation in the wording of the Kaddish suggests that local custom (*minhag*) served as the primary criterion for determining acceptable (local) practice. Following recent research that emphasizes the relative autonomy of local communities and the limits of Babylonian hegemony, Lehnardt concludes that the Geonim exerted less influence on existing local religious practices than has been thought.

Alongside various formal considerations, novel liturgical applications of the Kaddish more often than not were generated by the exegetical or symbolic meanings that adhered to it. Thus, the eschatological dimensions of the Kaddish already explored in earlier rabbinic literature (esp. bBer 3a) may explain why it is so often used in later midrashic sources as an expression of God's grief for his people Israel and Israel's own messianic expectations. Indeed, the fact that the Kaddish was the only daily prayer that continued to be recited in Aramaic in the post-Geonic period seemed to medieval Jews to demand explanation. The traditional use of Aramaic as the language of lamentation—and not only as the language of study—suggested to many, especially in Ashkenaz, that the Kaddish was eminently suitable for both private and public mourning.

In a brief final chapter (pp. 277–305), Lehnardt argues that this renewed emphasis on the eschatological dimension of the Kaddish served as the primary literary context for the development of the mourner's Kaddish. Here, too, liturgical innovation occurred largely within the domain of custom and folktale—and outside the formal channels of Geonic influence. Against the stated opposition of some rabbis and their Geonic successors, the recitation of prayers for the dead took hold among various Jewish communities, eventually spreading throughout the Jewish world. Lehnardt shows that the idea that the living can atone for the sins of the dead through prayer preceded the concrete practice. It seems that this function was initially linked to the addition of an extra *Barkhu* prayer, but was eventually transferred to the Kaddish. Yet, despite its belated standardization, the mourner's Kaddish was in no way “invented” by the

Ashkenazi Pietists, who were simply receiving and transmitting a long-standing local practice.

A study such as Lehnardt's implicitly asserts—rightly in my view—that, despite its extreme brevity, the Kaddish still merits an entire monograph of its own. Indeed, it is not so much the centrality of the Kaddish within Jewish liturgical practice that justifies such sustained scholarly analysis, but the potential for such a history to expose the larger literary and institutional dynamics that shaped the Jewish liturgy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. For this reason, one might have wished that Lehnardt had more explicitly addressed the significance of his study for larger problems in the history of Jewish liturgy. For example, Lehnardt's exclusive emphasis on inner-Jewish cultural processes seems to preclude comparative historical analysis. Might the ambient Christian culture of central Europe—especially the doctrine of purgatory and its attendant practices—account, at least in part, for the cultivation of the mourner's Kaddish in Ashkenaz? And how might we determine the nature and extent of such influences?

Ultimately, however, Lehnardt's study does considerably more than just offer a series of vivid, if intermittent, glimpses into the development of the Kaddish. It models an analytical sensibility that is well suited to the difficult task of coming to grips with the precarious and contingent process of liturgical innovation—and the gaps and ruptures left in its wake. But this is not a quick read. Most readers will want to consult specific sections relevant to their particular interests, mining it for the often obscure sources it presents (both in the original language and in careful translation). In any event, Lehnardt's *Qaddish* serves not only as a major contribution to our knowledge of a single Jewish prayer, but as a benchmark for future research on the development of the Jewish liturgy in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.