

*Het vroege jodendom van A tot Z: Een kleine encyclopedie over de eerste duizend jaar (ca. 350 v. Chr.-650 n. Chr.)* [Early Judaism from A to Z: A Brief Encyclopedia of the First Thousand Years, ca. 350 B.C.E.-650 C.E.]. By Pieter W. van der Horst. Zoetermeer, Meinema 2006. Pp. 181. Paperback. € 18,50. ISBN 90-211-4096-9.

In this elegant single-authored reference work, written in Dutch, Pieter van der Horst has deftly succeeded in condensing his prodigious knowledge of early Judaism into approximately 450 carefully selected alphabetical entries (not counting the numerous cross-references to more general terms or to Hebrew or Dutch equivalents). This concise and highly affordable encyclopedia spans the full range of literary and material artifacts, formative events and social movements, and significant historical personae that illuminate the history of Jewish society and culture from the late Persian period until the rise of Islam (ca. 350 B.C.E.-650 C.E.). The main body of the book is preceded by a brief introduction that orients the user to its aims, organizational principles, and technical terminology. It is followed by an annotated bibliography that judiciously describes and assesses—from the perspective of the beginner—twenty-six standard works on early Judaism and lists seven of the most useful web-resources currently available.

Van der Horst has set out to provide his Dutch-speaking audience with a basic resource to help ease entry into the complex and at-times puzzling study of ancient Jewish history, culture, and society. His ideal user is not only to be found among the relatively large educated lay-audience in the Netherlands, which takes a perennial interest in the various forms of post-biblical Judaism and its relationship to the New Testament and early Christianity. The volume is also intended for the numerous Dutch university students in departments of theology and religion—some of them at quite advanced stages in their studies—who may have only recently begun to explore the multifaceted relationship between early Judaism and the larger Greco-Roman world. Such readers, when confronted by unfamiliar terminology or nomenclature in modern scholarship on early Judaism, will be able to take great comfort in this handy little guide. It should be stressed, however, that, while the book is plainly not intended for the specialist, the admirable clarity of the definitions would no doubt help even the most learned of scholars focus in on the essential attributes and significance of overly familiar material, especially when preparing to communicate with students or the general public.

Moreover, the scope and depth of the entries is stunning. I was—with one major exception discussed below—hard pressed to come up with terms that were missing their own entries or could not at least be found under other related entries. Yet, the entries do not consist merely of skeletal definitions. In many cases, the author has risen to the challenge of producing thoughtful and rich entries, which, despite their brevity, explore such theologically or philosophically knotty issues as Jewish conceptions of the body, death, and martyrdom, Jewish strategies of textual interpretation, or Jewish attitudes toward Greek culture. Indeed, some topics, like

the Mishnah (113-16), merit what amounts to a multi-page mini-essay that incorporates all the detail and precision one might expect from a far more cumbersome book. At the same time, alongside extensive entries on obvious topics like the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jesus of Nazareth, the figure of the Rabbi, and the Jerusalem Temple, the reader will also find excellent introductory material on such relatively obscure but still important items as Babata and her personal archive, the practice of book-divination (bibliomancy), the literary genre of the Florilegium, the Jewish anti-Gospel narratives of the Toledot Yeshu literature, and the Byzantine-period liturgical poet Yannai. If any of these terms are less than familiar to you—dear Dutch reader—*tolle lege!*

Of course, no book of this type can strive for comprehensiveness—nor should it. And, by and large, the author's choices of inclusion and omission seem eminently reasonable to me. Thus, van der Horst has rightly elected not to provide the multitude of minor or fragmentary texts found at Qumran with separate entries of their own, but rather restricts his discussion only to the major genres and works represented among the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., peshet literature, *Temple Scroll*, *Damascus Document*, and *Hodayot*).

I did, however, detect one major area in which the author has applied his principles of selection without sufficient care. Although the encyclopedia takes the career of the Prophet Mohammed in the first half of the seventh century as its stated end-point (7), it does not sufficiently highlight the central role that Jewish culture and society played in the fundamental transformations that reshaped the social, political, and religious landscape of the ancient Mediterranean world in the late-sixth and early-seventh centuries. Thus, van der Horst passes over in total silence such highly significant topics as the re-emergence of Jewish apocalyptic writings in the Byzantine period, especially in response to the successive wars that shook the Near East during the first-half of the seventh centuries (e.g., *Sefer Zerubabel*, for which there is no entry). Nor does the book anywhere discuss the Jewish matrix of early Islamic religiosity and tradition or the relationship between Mohammed (for whom there is no entry!) and the Jewish communities of Arabia. And while the book does include an entry for "Arabia" (25), it restricts discussion of this region to the period prior to the life of Mohammed. The book does not even include an entry for the biblical figure of Ishmael, who already in this period came to be identified in both the Jewish and Islamic imagination with the Arab/Muslim polity. These omissions are especially striking when one considers the inclusion of contemporaneous and, in some cases, considerably later material, such as the Islamic-period midrashic compilation *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* (131).

If we are to follow the apparent logic of these particular choices, it would seem that van der Horst is suggesting that the category of "early Judaism" should somehow be segregated from the nexus of historical factors that played such a seminal role in the formation of earliest Islam. In my view, it would have been far preferable in an expansive and wide-ranging reference work of this sort if the reader had

been given greater insight into the significant continuities and sharp ruptures that characterize this process.

Still, van der Horst should be commended for having pulled off a rare academic feat: he has provided a general audience with ready access to a vast field of highly specialized scholarly knowledge, all without sacrificing accuracy or sophistication to the limits of space. One can only hope that this brief but encyclopedic survey of early Judaism will soon be translated into (or replicated in) other more widely accessible languages.

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