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Corrado Martone, ed.

Lettere di Bar Kokhba

Testi del Vicino Oriente antico

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In this work Corrado Martone publishes and translates into Italian the eighteen letters of Bar Kokhba, with introduction and commentary. Martone first dealt with these letters in 2006, when he provided a first translation of sixteen letters into Italian (*Studi in onore di Fabrizio Pennacchietti*, 469–74), but it was a short presentation of texts with translation. Now Martone offers a more detailed edition of the whole corpus, with two important appendices and an exhaustive and updated bibliography (10 pages).

The introduction (13–34) offers a historical presentation of the Second Revolt and a detailed discussion of the sources relevant to both the Second Revolt and Bar Kokhba, such as the Mishnah, Talmud, Tosefta, midrashim, Dione Cassio, and Eusebius. Martone also discusses the causes, background, and consequences of the revolt.

There is also a discussion on the form of the name of the leader. Before the discovery of the letters, there was no certitude on the name of Bar Kokhba (the rabbis used the form Bar Kozbah, whereas the Christian sources used the form Bar Kokhba). The letters testify to the name Šim'on Bar Kosibah, thus showing us, on the one hand, the precise form, and, on the other hand, the explication of the rabbinic rendering as a phonetic variant. The vocalization is known thanks to the Greek letter BK 17 (P. Yadin 59).

The letters (37–77) occupy the largest part of the book. Martone begins with the story of the discovery of Wadi Murabba‘at and the Naḥal Ḥever caves, as well as the story of the publication of the letters; those from Murabba‘at were published by J. T. Milik and R. de Vaux in 1961, whereas those from Naḥal Ḥever were published definitively only in 2002 by Y. Yadin, J. C. Greenfield, A. Yardeni, and B. Levine.

Martone notes that, for our knowledge of the facts, the letters do not shed new light, but they are of great importance because they are direct documents from Bar Kokhba’s administration. Furthermore, Šim‘on appears as a resolute and decisive leader, and we know the exact form of his name (40–41).

Of the eighteen letters, five are in Hebrew (1, 2, 3, 5, 18), eight in Aramaic (4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15), two in Greek (16, 17), and three uncertain (12, 13, 14) because of their fragmentary condition. Each letter is introduced by the designation of the *editio princeps* and a short survey of the language and handwriting. Martone presents the original text of each letter (Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek) according to the *editiones principes*, discussing other possible readings. The comments are exhaustive, and they deal not only with archeological, historical, and paleographical aspects of the letters but also with linguistic aspects evident in the letters. This is important because it lets us know the use of the language at the time of the second century CE.

Two appendices follow the letters. The first one is the Italian edition of the “Document from year 4 of the destruction of the house of Israel,” recently edited by E. Eshel, H. Eshel, and A. Yardeni. The document is important not only because it is a *meḥillat ketubbah* (a renunciation of marriage law) but also because it witnesses the use of dating on the basis of the Second Revolt.

The second appendix is called “La Bibbia di Bar Kokhba” (Bar Kokhba’s Bible), and it is a list of the biblical manuscripts from the caves of the Second Revolt (Masada, Wadi Murabba‘at, Wadi Sdeir, Naḥal Ḥever, Naḥal Ṣelim). Martone also summarizes the theory of D. Barthélemy on the move from the pluriformity witnessed by the Qumran manuscripts to the proto-Masoretic uniformity on the basis of 8ḤevxiiGr. Martone, however, cautions, on the basis of some examples from the very same manuscript from Naḥal Ḥever, that one must be careful about generalizing and assuming that 8ḤevxiiGr has been corrected on the basis of the Masoretic Text, as suggested by Barthélemy (84–85). A large bibliography, a concordance, and an index close the book.

Some remarks are in order. The book is very useful for specialists, but for nonspecialist readers it can be a bit difficult. Martone often in the commentary transliterates but does not translate Hebrew or Aramaic terms. At page 57 he writes that “La *yod* in seconda

posizione letta dagli editori è un semplice tratto di penna,” but the *yod* is not present in the text of the letter (BK 7). As well as at page 62 (BK 9): “Il nome infatti corrisponde etimologicamente a «Yehonatan figlio di Yehonatan»”; these examples can be hard for the nonspecialist reader. Further, Martone does not specify the material of the letters (parchment or papyrus?). Finally, the use of Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek in the letters could have been discussed in relation to the spoken language at time; for example, the use of the patronymic *bar* instead of *ben* in the Hebrew letter BK 3 might be very interesting. Martone discusses the aspect of the spoken language only *en passant* (49 n. 1, 74).

I am conscious, however, that this is a short edition of the letters, and it would have been inappropriate to go into much more detail. Italian scholars will be grateful to Corrado Martone for this helpful edition in Italian of these important documents.