REVIEW OF BOOKS

Books and articles (including those written in modern Hebrew), received by the secretary of this Journal, will be reviewed as soon as possible. Authors who want to make sure that their work on Judaism in Antiquity will be currently mentioned in these reviews are kindly requested to send an off-print (or a photo copy) of their papers to the secretary of the editorial board.

P. M. BOGAERT, L. DEQUEKER, H. JAGERSMA, A. GUIGUI, J. LAMBRECHT, Abraham dans la Bible et dans la tradition juive (Publications de l'Institutum Judaicum Bruxelles, 2), Institutum Judaicum, rue des Bollandistes 40, B-1040 Bruxelles 1978, 167 pp., paper, photomechanically reproduced typescript (The present volume contains the text of the papers read at the Louvain colloquium of 24.1.1977 plus summaries in Dutch and a report of the discussions which followed the lectures. DEQuEKER deals with the call of Abraham (Gen. 12), BOGAERT discusses the character of Abraham in the Biblical Antiquities of Pseudo-Philo, JAGERSMA makes some remarks on Gen. 18:22b-23, GUIGUI treats the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22), and LAMBRECHT pays attention to the character of Abraham in the Corpus paulinum. Our readers will first of all be interested in the contribution given by BOGAERT on LAB, in which he stresses the contrast between Abraham and his contemporaries, cf. LAB ch. 6 and 8. This contrast is exemplified by such themes as the building of the Tower, the ordeal by fire, the worship of heavenly bodies, the immolation of children, inscribed stones etc.).

A. S. VAN DER WOUDE

Felix BÖHL, Aufbau und literarische Formen des aggadischen Teils im Yelammedenu-Midrasch, Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH Weisbaden 1977, xx and 122 pp., paper DM 28,- (The two types of rabbinic homily that are easily recognizable by the characteristics of their literary form offer a suitable subject for stylistic analysis. In the Proem (petitība), which served as an introduction to the homily proper and to the reading of the Torah or one of the Scrolls in the Synagogue, a verse from the Hagiographa, seemingly chosen at random, is ingeniously explained as bearing upon the first verse of the Scriptural portion that is about to be read. The Yelammedenu homily is characterised by a very typical opening in which a halakhic question is raised (“yelammedenu rabbenu”) and the answer to it is given, not for its own sake, but merely as a means of introducing the proper subject of the ensuing homily, which ultimately also leads to the first verse of the Weekly Portion. The specific literary form of the Proem early attracted the attention of scholars (J. THEODOR, MGWJ 1879, W. BACHER’s well-known study Die Prōmien der alten jüdischen Homilie, 1913 (rp. 1970), and J. HEINEMANN’s form critical approach “The Proem in the Aggadic Midrashim”, Scr. Hier. XXII, Jerusalem 1971, pp. 100-122).
The study of the Yelammedenu Midrashim has mainly concentrated, however, on the highly complex problem of the interrelationship of the Midrash collections of this type (Deut. Rabba, Tanhuma and Tanhuma Buber, Pesikta Rabbati and fragments of such compilations, either in print or is MS.). The analysis of the Yelammedenu formula and its variants was assigned a secondary and subservient role in the search by several scholars for an "Ur-Tanchuma", whereas the literary study of the aggadic main portions of these homilies has been completely neglected. Böhl in his work here under review, originally a "Habilitationsschrift" (Freiburg) encouraged by Prof. A. Goldberg (Frankfurt/M), has set himself the difficult task of describing and analysing, by means of form critical methods, the structure and literary form of these aggadic portions of the Yelammedenu Midrashim.

After an outline of the Forschungsgeschichte and a description of the possible origin and history of the Yelammedenu formula, the author, in the second part of his study, succeeds in establishing a total of fourteen different types of Yelammedenu homilies, divided into three main categories. In the third part some of the isolated literary forms (the tedal-formula, the prayer, the Gottesrede) are linked with similar forms known from Biblical literature. Also the problem of dating the Yelammedenu homilies is touched upon.

Böhl's study certainly commands respect by its competent handling of the rabbinic sources (the printed sources; how much relevant material can be found in (facsimiles of) MSS?), and as such it is a valuable contribution to the study of rabbinic literature. Its readers do not obtain their instruction cheaply, since the intricacies of the aggadic material and the author's arid style demand an unflagging attention.

This form critical study gives rise to two remarks of a methodological nature. Whatever the precise Sitz im Leben of the Yelammedenu homilies originally may have been, the form that they have now in the extant compilations was not given them on the lectern of the preacher but stems from the desk of the scholar (p. 32: "der Sitz im Leben der Form . . . ist . . . jetzt die Stube des Redaktors.") In this light the intricate classification of the different types of homilies, a classification already somewhat affected by the hue of artificiality always more or less impairing the scholarly analysis of literary texts, receives an additional touch of unreality. When the original Sitz im Leben no longer functions, the various literary forms, supposedly stemming from concrete situations, have lost their contact with reality. Therefore they are exposed to deliberate changes during the process of transmission and redaction, and their specific form may be due to pure chance.

The well-known homily of R. Tanhum of Nawe on Life and Death (bShabb. 30a-b, see now J. Heinemann (g") in Scr. Hier. XXVII, Jerusalem 1978, 52-65), probably unique in being the outline of a complete original homily, may be an example of this very process. It begins with a halakhic question, not with the Yelammedenu formula but in a quite different wording; the answer to the question is not given immediately, as usual, but only at the conclusion of an intricate discourse. In this respect also this homily is unique. The uniqueness of its structure may be due to