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Ritual purity practices among ancient Jews have received much attention lately. This is largely as a result of the association of the archaeological phenomena of stepped pools and stone vessels, found frequently in excavations in Israel, with such textually attested practices. With some recent exceptions, this evidence has primarily been used in discussions of how this all affected Jewish life in the late Second Temple period. The book under review adds significantly to our knowledge by, instead, examining the lingering of ritual purity practices in the centuries following 70 CE, as well as by freeing the archaeological phenomena from the prevailing tendency to link them to specific groups, whether before (e.g. Essenic, Pharisaic) or after the destruction (e.g. rabbinic, priestly).

The book's main argument runs as follows: material evidence of some stepped pools and a few stone vessels dating to the post-destruction period suggest that ritual purity practices remained important in Jewish society of that time. None of this evidence, however, can be assigned to one Jewish group in particular, not even the rabbis, but instead reflects the general persistence of interest in purity rites as derived from the Torah. Ultimately, building upon previous work, the book concludes that post-70 CE Jewish society in Palestine is best described as part of a biblically derived 'complex common Judaism'. The book is skilfully prepared; footnotes are copious and illuminating, and the volume closes with thorough indices of 45 pages covering primary sources, places, foreign terms and subjects.

After outlining the research question in the introduction, Chapter 1 argues from an examination of the diverse understandings of the terms *miqweh* and *bet tevilah* in rabbinic sources that the ritual bath was not a well-defined and uniform institution. Instead, as pointed out in Chapter 2, it enjoyed a long period of development, during which its function and form was dynamic and gradually evolved over time. Miller argues that practices other than ritual bathing – whether unknown, ignored or disapproved by the rabbis – were likely quite common. Chapter 3, then, focuses on sectarian and other perceptions of ritual bathing, in which Miller first convincingly argues against associating certain architectural elements of stepped pools to differences between Jewish groups (e.g. divided stairways, *'ôṣār*, *niṣṣoq*). This is followed by a case study showing how the Qumran Sect's purity rites differed from later, rabbinic ones, while still being informed by similar biblical notions of ritual purity. Chapter 4 discusses at length the idea that the fourth-century P.Oxy. 840, understood by some as describing a first-century *miqweh*, actually reflects the circumstances of later centuries.

The subsequent two chapters emphasize more the archaeological evidence. Chapter 5 argues initially that, though in severely diminished numbers, stone vessels continued to be used after 70 CE, possibly up to the Byzantine period. However, while rabbinic sources deem these vessels insusceptible to ritual impurity, Miller asserts that it was instead their relation to the Herodian building industry in Jerusalem that triggered their popularity among Jews and others. Hence, ultimately such vessels are not necessarily evidence for Jews' observance of purity rites. However, as argued from the evidence of Sepphoris's western acropolis (Ch. 6), stepped pools *are* indicative of Jewish purity practices and some very likely continued to be used up to the early fourth century CE. Aiming to explain this persistence of stepped pools in the post-destruction period, Chapters 7 and 8 focus on how and in which ways biblical traditions of ritual purity gained popularity among Jews in this period within their households, thereby compensating to some extent for the void left by the temple's destruction. That priests

were not directly involved in the survival of purity rites, nor associated with the stepped pools on Sepphoris's western acropolis, is the focus of Chapter 9. Moreover, as a discussion of popular purity practices among Jewish women in medieval Spain, Egypt and Byzantium in Chapter 10 shows, such practices after 70 CE were probably not always in keeping with rabbinic ideas. The book closes with a conclusion (Ch. 11) and a postscript introducing a recently-excavated nineteenth-century *miqweh* in Chesterfield, Connecticut, that nicely recaptures one of the book's main point: contemporary written accounts, whether ancient or early modern urban rabbis, are always only part of the story.

Overall, the book provides a careful and fascinating case for the persistence of ritual purity practices among Jews in the centuries after the temple's destruction. It is filled with insights and analyses that repeatedly challenge long-held ideas and assumptions. For example, the claim (pp. 87–8) that the amount of water required for ritual immersion may have been debated makes the forty *sē'ā* known from rabbinic writings of little help in determining a stepped pool's validity as ritual bath. Another example is Miller's fascinating analysis (pp. 189–97), taking into account evidence from nearby features like plastered vats and cisterns, of the possible ways in which two stepped pools at Sepphoris may have been used, not necessarily in compliance with rabbinic *halakha*. It is the hope of this reader that future scholarship would indeed take a household's or settlement's overall water management – the water flow from source to end user – into greater consideration, because it may give further insights into the diverse workings of individual stepped pools.

While there is much in this volume to commend, two points of criticism as regards the use of archaeological evidence of stone vessels and stepped pools, central to the book's main argument, should be addressed. First, despite the claim that stone vessels are not indicative for Jews' observance of purity rites (pp. 177, 329–30), the book continues to interpret the slim evidence of post-70 CE stone vessels as supporting the lingering of such rites among Jews (pp.

180, 202, 248). The second critique is perhaps more substantial. Miller often stresses that some stepped pools – how many is never made clear – found on Sepphoris’s western acropolis continued to be in use long after 70 CE (pp. 156, 185, 224), and in fact remained of significance to their users (pp. 186, 202, 248). While he asserts that numbers are not relevant to his study of the persistence of these features after 70, I would argue otherwise. For example, the fact that it appears that no new stepped pools were constructed in the period 135–300 CE sheds a considerably different light on those few that did survive. Can we still understand this as the ‘persistence’ of these features, or perhaps rather as a ‘slow decline’? According to Miller the absence of pools from the period 135–300 is to be explained by extensive later refurbishing activity in the area. Following the same reasoning, however, the exposed pre-70 CE stepped pools in this area should also not have been found. Furthermore, considering their importance for Miller’s main argument, one would have expected more discussion on how the actual usage of these pools after 70 CE, let alone their importance to potential users at that time, was archaeologically determined (e.g. evidence of re-plastering, evidence from a pool’s deposit). Is it perhaps not conceivable that at least some were given a different function, unrelated to purity rites, later on in their use life? Finally, without properly contextualizing these finds within the changing urban environment of post-destruction Sepphoris, with its bath-houses, theatre and *temenos* temple, it seems impossible to show the actual significance for any potential user of the post-70 CE stepped pools still lingering there.

The above criticism, however, in no way diminish this reviewer’s earlier praise for this volume, which opens up new avenues of research that have hitherto been largely untouched.

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