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Pearce (S.) (ed.), *The Image and its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity*. (Journal of Jewish studies Supplement Series 2.) Oxford: Journal of Jewish Studies, 2013. Pp. x + 288 pages, 50 illustrations, £55.00 pb.

Archaeological finds over the last century, together with a number of recent literary studies, are beginning to gradually overturn the concept of the ancient Jew as being decidedly aniconic. As Sarah Pearce notes in her introduction to this work, evidence now demonstrates “the great diversity of Jewish visual culture in antiquity” (2). Yet does this stand in tension with the comprehensive prohibition of the Hebrew Bible towards the making of images and how should we understand those Jews who produced such art and images in relation to this prohibition? This is the overarching theme of Pearce’s volume, “to explore the ways in which the prohibition against images did indeed ‘interfere’ with the creation of visual art in Jewish antiquity” (2).

The book contains ten chapters divided into four sections. Section 1 (Chapters 1 & 2) begins with a study by Philip Alexander entitled ‘Reflections on word versus image as ways of mediating the divine presence in Judaism.’ Here, he offers some philosophical reflections on Jewish attitudes towards the use of images and argues that although most Jews in antiquity were perfectly capable of distinguishing between the gods and their symbolic representation, groups which took the stricter theological stance of aniconism gained positions of power which allowed them to impose this idea on the rest of Israelite society. As such, aniconism had political as well as theological ends and served to limit the influence of the artist, who was, to some extent, beyond the power and control of influential elites.

H.G.M. Williamson’s following chapter, ‘Was there an image of the Deity in the First Temple?’ probes the question of whether there was such an image given the biblical prohibition. Older assumptions which answered such a question in the negative have recently been challenged by scholars who insist that the temple may well have housed such an image. While Williamson’s textual and archaeological evidence finds no persuasive evidence for such a claim, he does note that prophetic condemnation of the use of such images, as part of the practical functioning of the temple, may warrant a note of caution. There may, for example, have been times when such images were allowed or incorporated into the periphery of temple cultic practice.

Section 2 (Chapters 3 & 4) examines late Second Temple Judaism and the conservative productions and use of religious art (as detailed in the writings of pagan authors and the Jewish historian Josephus). An example is the Letter of Aristeas, the subject of Chapter 3, in which Jane Heath explores the descriptions of artwork commissioned by king Ptolemy II for the Jerusalem temple. The letter’s author, although a conservative, is able to appreciate the craftsmanship of sacred works of art and even to revere them as sacred objects for the temple. Chapter 4, ‘Philo of Alexandria on the second commandment’ by Sarah Pearce then explores various interpretive issues related to biblical injunctions by Philo and argues that his interpretation of the commandment, drawing heavily on Greek philosophy, allows him to prove why the representation of the divine by material objects is absurd. Philo employs the example of Egyptian animal cults to assert that such behaviour is not only irrational but can do personal and universal harm, for idolatry is not only mistaken but offends the jealous nature of the one true god.

Section 3 (Chapters 5-8), focuses upon the material evidence from the second century CE onwards of figurative art in synagogues and other Jewish spaces. Margaret Williams begins with an analysis of how funerary practices of a magical nature prevalent in Graeco-Roman society were adopted by the Jews. In a world where the apotropaic use of cultic objects was extremely common, she argues that it is unsurprising that the menorah, the seven-

branched lampstand, the Jews' most distinctive cultic symbol, was pressed into use for such a purpose. The object lent itself to easy interpretation as a representation of God, the candelabrum shaft standing for his body and the seven lamps for his eyes. In consequence the menorah had the potential to become the ideal medium for indicating the presence of a watchful deity.

In Chapter 6, Tessa Rajak explores, the synagogue paintings of Dura-Europos and attempts to answer the question of how we should relate the extensive range of surviving images to their cultural setting? As these demonstrate the flouting of the second commandment, it is clear that this was taken in radically different ways in diverse circles of Jews at different times, indicative of a very marked liberalization during late antiquity as compared with the strictness prevalent in many circles of the late Second Temple period. Rajak presents a detailed study of the art of Dura, not only of the paintings themselves but how they may have functioned in the cosmopolitan setting of the town and if they may have held an implied anti-pagan ideology.

Sacha Stern follows in Chapter 7 ('Images in late antique Palestine: Jewish and Graeco-Roman views'), with an analysis of the proliferation of animal and human images in mosaics, reliefs and statues of late antique Palestine and the questions this raises about contemporary Jewish attitudes to images, especially as such images are found in synagogue mosaics and reliefs. The assumed strident aniconism of the late Second Temple period changed in the fourth century CE when architectural structures identified as synagogues appear to depict Greek mythological scenes and motifs. In the final chapter of this section, ('Images and figural representations in the urban Galilee: defining limits in times of shifting borders'), Zeev Weiss, research project director of the Sepphoris excavations in Galilee examines the artistic remains in the city and asks pertinent questions on how far the Jews in the city accommodated themselves to Greco-Roman influences. In detailing the artistic finds of an elite Jewish home in the city, particularly the significant mosaics of the roman god Dionysus evident in the dining room, he asks how far Hellenized Jews may have accommodated themselves to Greco-Roman art in general.

Section 4, the final section, has two studies which explore rabbinic literature and its attitude to images and idolatry. These probe important themes of the diversity of multivalent interpretive readings of prohibitions of images. In Chapter 9, 'The faceless idol and images of terror in rabbinic tradition on the molekh,' Laliv Clenman explores the prohibitions related to Molekh worship (Lev 18), and whether this was indeed meant to represent child sacrifice to an idol. Analysis of later rabbinic interpretations suggests competing interpretations of a visual legacy. Finally, Aron C. Sterk's study of the Letter of Annas to Seneca throws new light on the Latin-speaking Jews of the west and Jewish thinking about idolatry under Christian emperors. Sterk argues that it forms part of a literary dialogue in which its Jewish author seeks to appeal to contemporary pagan thinkers and to persuade them, in the face of a triumphant Christianity and pagan efforts to defend polytheistic cult, that the better part of wisdom is to recognize what true philosophy and Jewish truth share in common: aniconic monotheism.

This is a visually stimulating and erudite work demonstrating superlative scholarship on a wide range of topics relevant to the broad question(s) under consideration. Perhaps, at some point, I would have liked a more thorough diachronic literary-critical analysis of the biblical prohibition in order to elucidate that most central of questions: if artists were busy at work, how are we to understand the apparent tension between praxis and prohibition? And if such texts are "later artificial constructs, written to reflect what became acceptable theology in the exilic and post-exilic times" (Williamson), were biblical prohibitions held more lightly than the religious elites would have preferred (and moderns would like to think)? Such issues

aside, this is a thought-provoking, exemplary, and highly commendable work on developing our understanding of Jewish art in antiquity.

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