

WILLIAMS, BENJAMIN, *Commentary on Midrash Rabba in the Sixteenth Century: The Or ha-Sekhel of Abraham ben Asher* (Oxford Oriental Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 240. £60.00. ISBN 978-0-1987-5923-2.

This well-researched monograph, the published version of the author's Oxford thesis (supervised by Joanna Weinberg), deals with Abraham ben Asher's commentary on Midrash Rabba. W. opens his discussion by situating ben Asher's commentary within its historical and geographical context of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century CE. Two key factors contributed to its publication, namely the arrival of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula and the advances in book publication made by the printing press. Ben Asher's commentary, categorized among so-called homiletic expositions of midrashic material, testifies to the growing popularity of midrash, combined with the endeavour to accord it the same status as the (Babylonian) Talmud. W. explores the particular circumstances that led to the publication of the work of the Safed-based ben Asher by the Venetian printing press of Giovanni Griffio. The rest of W.'s book is devoted to the character of ben Asher's commentary. Using key texts as illustrating examples, W. highlights the characteristics of ben Asher's comments, in comparison with other interpreters of midrash from the same time period. For instance, common to all of them is a reluctance to appeal to the insights of the mediaeval Jewish commentators, instead conveying the impression that the midrash itself contains all keys to its interpretation. Finally, W. highlights how the addition of Pseudo-Rashi to the commentary both increased its authority yet also may have inadvertently led to its lack of general acceptance in the Jewish community. The book ends with seven helpful appendixes containing all the key primary texts under scrutiny.

LENA-SOFIA TIEMEYER

WILSON, IAN, *Kingship and Memory in Ancient Judah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. xi + 308. £64. ISBN 978-0-1904-9990-7.

Based on a 2015 Alberta dissertation supervised by Ehud Ben Zvi, this engaging study blends competent handling of the biblical texts and methodological deftness with attractive argumentation. The opening chapter makes it immediately plain that the 'Ancient Judah' in question is post-monarchic Yehud. The literati of 5th- to 3rd-century BCE Jerusalem had been a tiny element within a small settlement, one that was hardly home to several rival schools. Given radical divergence over kingship in books such as Isaiah or Judges or Samuel, W. prefers to stress tolerance of multivocality *within* groups. He explains key differences between his approach and that of Jan Assmann. Four chapters discuss Torah and its guardians (Moses and Joshua); transition(s) to Monarchy (Judges and Samuel); remembering/forgetting David (Samuel–Kings and Chronicles)—Kings ending with an actual Davidide alive and doing well but without prospect of rule, and Chronicles with Cyrus (a 'Davidized foreigner') ruling (p. 173); and the remembered future in prophetic literature (the prominent themes of Yahweh as king and 'seemingly superhuman kings' are interlaced with 'diverse images of Davidides'). In his concluding chapter, W. notes the 'rhyming pattern' of 'no king→king→no king again→king again' (p. 226); and submits 'that the prophetic book, via its discursive relationship with historiographical literature and its key function in Judah's socio-mnemonics of kingship, participated in what we might call "metahistoriography"' (p. 231).

A. GRAEME AULD