

## BOOK REVIEWS

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Javier Teixidor, *The Pantheon of Palmyra*, (Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'empire romain, tome 79), Leiden, Brill, 1979, pp. XIX and 137, 35 plates.

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JAVIER TEIXIDOR has already outlined his views on the Semitic religions, especially in the Graeco-Roman period, in a book more general in scope (*The Pagan God. Popular Religion in the Graeco-Roman Near East*, Princeton University Press, 1977). With this new book, he develops his ideas as far as the cults of Palmyra are concerned.

Teixidor has an intimate knowledge of Palmyrene inscriptions, being the editor of over 200 texts and the author of the very valuable "Bulletin d'épigraphie sémitique" (*Syria*, since 1967). Accordingly, his arguments are mainly based on epigraphical evidence, often quoted *in extenso*, with English translations, but the figurative monuments are not neglected. Extensive use is also made of writings by authors as diverse as Plato, Cicero, Apuleius, Julian, Tertullian, St. Augustine, and others, although they are often quoted more for a literary purpose than as actual evidence.

The approach through epigraphy is a sound one, but the inscriptions are generally not very informative in themselves. There is a large element of conjecture in any attempt at a systematic presentation of the Palmyrene beliefs, so much so that the present reviewer, using the same evidence, has arrived at many different conclusions in an independent account on the same subject ("Les dieux de Palmyre", to be published shortly in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II 18, Tübingen). Consequently, I am tempted to consider Teixidor's general approach, and discuss some of his arguments.

Teixidor intended his book to be "a guide for the historian of the ancient religions and not an inventory of divine names". In his opinion, the variety of names and epithets relates only to a few deities, whose different epiphanies and cultic circumstances they represent. There is supposed to be a monotheistic tendency behind the outwardly complex pantheon of Palmyra and of Roman Syria in general. Actually, the belief in one supreme god and only one goddess is

acknowledged, whereas minor deities are sometimes considered as angels of the divine power. When the independent existence of several other gods is admitted, it is explained as the result of various ethnic traditions, viz. Babylonian, Phoenician, Aramaic, and Arab, tending anyway to assimilation.

The very title of the first chapter, "The Cult of the Supreme God" (pp. 1-28), reflects the author's understanding of the religious situation; under this heading, four different cults are treated: those of Bel, Belḥammôn, Baal Shamin, and Poseidon.

When discussing the figure of Bel, Teixidor follows in general the accepted views on the name, the cosmic role, and the triad of this god, as formulated by Seyrig. Personally, I find it difficult to speak of a triad when in most cases there are more than three associated gods, with Bel in the foremost position. The name Bôl'astar is considered by Teixidor as a "cultic formula" representing the association of Bôl/Bel and a goddess: "the union of Bel and his companion became an object of cult, as is manifested in an altar inscription..." (p. 8); the inscription, however, calls Bôl'astar a god and contains nothing to support this view. The deity seems to be a particular aspect of Bel, and the comparison with some Catholic theological notions, as Trinity, Assumption, etc., is simply irrelevant.

Teixidor implicitly rejects the notion of a triad as applied to the cult of Baal Shamin (refuted already in his *Pagan God*, pp. 141-142), and accepts the opinion of Starcky about Duraḥlûn as just another aspect of the Lord of Heaven; both positions are, in any opinion, justified. It is also likely that Bel and Baal Shamin were considered by distinct groups of the population as two different theophanies of the supreme god. However, such a quality can hardly be attributed to Belḥammôn and Poseidon; the latter is "hardly noticeable" at Palmyra, while Belḥammôn is a special aspect of Bel, as Teixidor himself acknowledges. The explanation of the name as Bel Ḥamôn, "Lord of Mt. Amanus" (p. 12), should not be given as obvious, when at least two other etymologies are possible (cf. J.T. Milik, *Dédicaces faites par des dieux*, Paris 1972, p. 424, and M. Gawlikowski, *Le temple palmyrénien*, Varsovie 1972, p. 85). Besides, I can see no ground for the statement that the temple of this god, located on a hilltop, reflects the influence of ziggurats.

The chapter on "The Cult of the Sun and the Moon" (pp. 29-52) contains in the first place a discussion of Yarḥibôl, the oracular god of the source Efca, and later a Sun-god associated with Bel. The problem of the evolution of this cult is stated clearly, with an illuminating comparison of the Babylonian Shamash as the god of justice. Next comes the pair of 'Aglibôl and Malakbel, worshipped in the "Holy Garden". Teixidor thinks that the senior rank given to 'Aglibôl in this association is a reflection of the North-Syrian beliefs of older times as known from Sam'al, Harran, and Nerab. This, and the explanation of the name 'Aglibôl as "Chariot of Bôl", a meaning comparable to that of Rakib-El, the dynastic god

of Sam'al, is given as a proof of the North-Syrian origin of the Palmyrene god. The name was also explained, however, as meaning "Calf of Bôl," in reference to the horns of the crescent, and the precedence of the Moon over the Sun in Palmyra is real only so far as Malakbel can be considered a Sun-god; he can, but this seems to be a secondary development.

On the question of the "four tribes" and their sanctuaries, including that of Baal Shamin, the "Holy Garden", and the temples of Arşû and of Atargatis, Teixidor agrees with Schlumberger that the four tribes "presumably formed the nucleus of early Palmyra", while rejecting the opinion, expressed independently by Milik and myself, that they are a late creation, reforming a traditional tribal society into four territorial *phylai* on a well-known Hellenistic pattern. He says that "the sanctuaries were shrines of ancestral gods whose preeminence in the life of the city could not have been the result of an issue settled by decree." This is certainly true, and was never in doubt. The sanctuaries existed long before the four tribes appear in the texts during the II century A.D., and were chosen as the religious centers of the newly formed tribes as Milik's and my own argument goes, because of their ancient preeminence.

In Teixidor's view, "The Goddess of Palmyra" (p. 53 f.) was one single deity known under many different names; she would be, basically, Allat, but could also be called 'Ashtart, Belti, Ba'altak, etc. I can see no evidence for this opinion, stated repeatedly in no uncertain terms, for instance (p. 56): "Whereas Allat was invoked as the Fortune of Yedi'ebel in the temple of Baal Shamin, in the temple of Bel she seems to have concealed her personality under other names and epithets", or: "Allat is given the name Astarte" (on the tessera RTP 124). The iconography of Allat is quite different from that of 'Ashtart, and we can say nothing about some of the other female deities except for etymological conjectures concerning their names.

The starting point of the argument is a remark by Herodotus (III, 8), repeated much later by Origen (*Contra Celsum*, V, 37), to the effect that the Arabs worshipped only one god and one goddess. It remains to be seen whether the latter statement is not dependent on the former, but even if not, the appearance of the Palmyrene pantheon in the Roman period was manifestly very different. Reflection about the actual identity of various deities may have occurred in some learned circles, but certainly did not belong to the practice of cult and popular belief as known from inscriptions and figurative monuments. A profusion of cults which, apparently, do not form one coherent system, correspond to the complex pattern of settlement in the oasis, and to influences to which the society was subjected. Allat, Belti, 'Ashtart, etc., do not "conceal one sole goddess, the female deity of heaven" (p. 61) in whose cult the Palmyrenes of various extractions would have been united, and this supposed deity can hardly be compared to the Virgin Mary with her numerous aspects in Catholic practice.

If some Palmyrenes tended to identify all the goddesses, and there is no evidence they did, it would be just the opposite phenomenon.

Teixidor's reading  $\text{C}\alpha\mu\alpha\beta\omega\lambda\omega$  in a Greek inscription (p. 58) seems to me a happy one, and its explanation as "Name of Bôl", by analogy to the punic Phanebalos, convincing. I would not compare, however, this divine name with personal names from the Amarna period, concluding that the dedicant's family came from Southern Palestine. In general, it is rather risky to look for such indications in proper names: names of Arab, Aramaic, or other origins are quite often to be found in the same family, and hint at cultural contacts, but not necessarily at migrations.

When reading the account on the Arab cults (Allat, Shamash, and Raḥim) in the Western quarter of Palmyra, it is good to remember that the inscriptions of the Traverse Colonnade mentioning these gods (p. 62) do not relate to a temple but to the Colonnade itself. While this architectural feature stood not far from the Allat sanctuary, it was distinct from it.

The chapter on the tutelary deities discusses a category of minor gods called *ginnayê* (Arabic *jinn*), and deities described by the term *Gad* ("Fortune") which stresses their providential qualities. Some of them correspond to important gods of the pantheon in their special function of protectors of a clan or of a locality. Others may have been indeed agents of a major deity; but do they all express "God's providence through his ministers"? (p. 95) Can the monotheistic tendency be taken for granted?

The last chapter, "The Anonymous God", restates the author's opinion already expressed in his former book (*The Pagan God*, p. 122-130). The periphrase "One whose name is blessed for ever", he says, does not, as generally held, refer to a form of Baal Shamin, but represents a cultic formula which might have been applied to different gods, in particular to Yarḥibôl as the oracular god in his sanctuary at the Efca source. It is true that many altars dedicated with the anonymous formula were found at this spring, although not in place, and many others come from various parts of the city, in particular from the Western quarter, where another spring was recently identified in the excavations. The idea of the same form of address employed in several cults does not seem likely, however, even if this is in accordance with the general outlook of this book. Moreover, there are striking parallels with some dedications which actually mention the name of Baal Shamin. The traditional opinion seems sound enough to me.

The book is, as intended, a valuable guide to the maze of Palmyrene religious epigraphy, and Palmyrene religion in general. It would be easier to use, had the author made a clear distinction between the commonly accepted views and

his own, but I would not appreciate a book without personal opinions in it. Some of them seem right, some may be proven right by new evidence, but all will certainly give a stimulus to further research on the still uncertain ground of the religion of Palmyra.

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