

BOOK REVIEWS

Allegro, John M. *The Chosen People*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972. xiii + 320 pp. \$10.00.

No other people has suffered so much slander and misrepresentation by historians, theologians, and philosophers as the Jews. The defamation continues in Allegro's latest work, *The Chosen People*, a history of the Jews from the period of the Babylonian Exile in the 6th century B.C.E. to the Bar-Kochba revolt of the 2nd century C.E. Allegro develops the theory, of which he already provided a sketch in his *The Sacred Mushroom and the Cross* (1970), that the Hebrew civilization is a reasonable development from the older, cruder Sumerian fertility cults whose supreme god was the sacred mushroom, the *Amanita muscaria*. The ecstatic religious experiences of Judaism cryptically presented in the Bible are ultimately derived from the hallucinogenic drug effects of the *Amanita muscaria* whose original devotees were subjugated and driven underground by the enemies of the mushroom cult.

Beyond his preoccupation with mushroom worshipers, Allegro is concerned with early Jewish origins. The Sabbath and circumcision are, according to him, aspects of a fertility cult which the exiled Jews in Babylon observed as an expression of their imagined tribal-racial memories of Israel's early experiences. The superiority of Yahweh over the gods of other nations developed in response to the continued persecution which threatened to eliminate Jewish group solidarity. The Torah, for the most part a product of the Exile, is viewed as the blueprint of the eventual Jewish dominion over the world. Such a view of history portrays the Maccabees as heinous tyrants, the Pharisees as clannish, the zealots of Masada as knaves and fools, the Romans as innocent, and the Babylonian Jews as responsible for unleashing the pretense for anti-Semitism which henceforth was to blot the pages of history.

The outcome of Allegro's efforts is phenomenal, problematic and frightening. The Jews, not their persecutors, are responsible for the "Jewish problem"; they are being called by Allegro before the bar of public opinion on charges which in their very nature could not be disproved. For it is impossible to answer accusations which either have no basis in fact or are founded on generalizations drawn from a few unrelated actual instances. The author almost exclusively overlooks the importance of the historical sources that he utilizes (e.g., he quotes Dio Cassius in regard to the Bar-Kochba rebellion and acknowledges that the historian's information is not firsthand), and his investigation shifts unashamedly between a scientific, popular, and polemical presentation.

The basic method of Allegro's work leaves much to be desired. One is unimpressed by his curious system of speculative etymology which in the main lacks philological support to arrive at the meaning of Yahweh, messiah, zealot, and other cultic terms where he finds phallic Sumerian fertility symbolism. Hardly does he offer adequate source critical and form critical analysis

of crucial passages. The thesis that Judaism purged from its racial memory all traces of its pristine mushroom beginnings goes unattested and unproved and flies in the face of the biblical taboo against idolatry and Canaanite Baalism. To cite oneself in support of a number of hastily executed statements is indeed speculative and amateurish.

This study by Allegro, who was until recently a lecturer in Old Testament and Inter-Testamental Studies at the University of Manchester, will be criticized as verbose and over-generalized, but it is not without its redeeming features. His theory that there were serious doubts in Jewish attitudes of the time, contra Jewish tradition, towards Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers deserves further consideration. His chapters on John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus represent a convincing description of Jewish despotism. Especially illuminating is his survey of the Herodian period and its plots and counterplots. There is a generous sprinkling of source material from Josephus, adequate plates, a good but limited bibliography, and no indices of subjects, names, and references.

Our objection to Allegro's findings may be due to innate conservatism which screams at scholarship that attempts to evaluate the ancient Jewish psyche without an honest and accurate understanding of the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the oral traditions of the Mishnaic period, the chronology of which is the time span of the book under review. Allegro has a right to his opinion, and he has stated fully in a circular manner the grounds on which that judgment rests. But we suspect that a diet of mushrooms is necessary to satisfy the scholarly palate.

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ZEV GARBER

Aron, Robert. *The Jewish Jesus*. Transl. by A. H. Forsyth and A.-M. de Commaile, and in collaboration with H. T. Allen, Jr. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1971. vii + 183 pp. \$4.95.

Robert Aron, the decorated French writer of history and politics and the author of *Jesus of Nazareth: The Hidden Years* (1960; English ed., 1962), writes on the Jewishness of Jesus as reflected in the Jewish customs, prayers, and rituals he knew in his home, in the synagogue, and in the Temple. Written in a brisk, translucent, and absorbing style that often characterizes a good historical novel, this work could appeal to an audience with little knowledge of Jewish liturgy or with an ignorance of the cultural and religious world of Palestinian Judaism in the time of Jesus. The knowledgeable student and scholar, however, will find the work a gross disappointment. There is no attempt to grasp the origin and history of the noble ideas of liturgy presented. A critical appreciation of the structure and content of the liturgical cycle for the Sabbath, holidays, and weekdays is noticeably lacking. The reader is not exposed to the sources used in the author's recording of historical events in the life of Jesus and of Palestinian Jewry. A summary of the content of a prayer and often its relevance to the contemporary man of faith are given, but technical and scholarly comments are a scarcity. The book abounds in misinterpreted rabbinic sources, mistransliterated Hebrew, anachronisms, and popular ignorance of Jewish religious customs and observances.