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and branchings, revealing the interplay of Jewish and outside forces in the shaping of various legal and religious institutions in Judaism, and at the same time the remarkable adaptability and flexibility of Jewish law.

It is the distinctive merit of this work that it is concerned precisely with this hitherto neglected aspect, which may be described as the legal-historical aspect, of the Responsa literature. Here we have an attempt made for the first time to trace the development of the Jewish law as reflected in the Responsa literature, from its beginnings to the present time, and to illustrate by examples how some of the foremost Rabbinical authorities, responding to the challenge of their times, have found solutions, sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent, but always within the framework of the law, to the varied problems thrown up by the constant changes in the conditions of life.

The author does not profess to have exhausted his subject, and we have yet to wait for a major work on the History of the Responsa Literature. But however that may be, the author has certainly filled a definite gap and presented us with a most useful volume, containing much information and many insights, and brightened by a liveliness of presentation and style.

I. EPSTEIN

M. BUBER, *Tales of the Hasidim: The Early Masters*. 1956. Pp. xviii + 336. (Thames and Hudson, London. Price: 18s.)

Of the two main literary streams in which the Hasidic revival expressed itself, the doctrinal and the hagiological, Martin Buber was induced both by inclination and by his philosophy of religious life to give us the result of his life-long evocative attempt to rewrite the literary legacy of the legends. In doing so the idea underlying Buber's work must have been that the hagiological literature has uncontested primacy over the doctrinal, though he nowhere deals explicitly with the great problem of scholarly method which this duality of literary traditions presents for the student of the Hasidic movement. Buber does not hint at the amazing discrepancies one finds between the legendary material surrounding any one Hasidic teacher (called "Tsadik") and the doctrinal material emanating from the same. In fact harmony between the two spheres is so rare, that discrepancy must be considered rather the rule than the exception. How did this habitual discrepancy come about? The problem of method is accentuated if, as Buber believes, the legend or "sacred anecdote" fully expresses the personality of the religious genius in a "concrete situation". Does the theoretical formulation of the religious thought of the Hasidic teachers move along such rigidly traditional lines in the continuity of literary expression that it is impenetrable to the radiation of the personality of the teacher himself or is it the authenticity of the legends which is open to doubt? Do the legends indeed reflect the inner life of the teachers more adequately than the crystallized doctrinal teachings of the same masters which came down to us in an authentic literary tradition?

The view implicit in Buber's work, though nowhere stated, is that indeed the hagiological and not the theoretical literature is the clue to the real understanding of Hasidism, or at least of Hasidic religious life.

In his kaleidoscopic introduction, Buber sets out to fathom the essence of Hasidism through the legendary biographies of its leaders in a series of striking portraits of a hagiological hue. The masters of Hasidism move

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picturesquely before the reader in their real or legendary individuality as caught by the discerning eye of Buber. In this introduction Buber mainly reproduces the preface to his earlier book *The Great Maggid and his Succession* (1921). A comparison of the two versions shows that the author has only sporadically qualified or changed his earlier views. Some of the few newly incorporated sentences indicate sudden insights of the author not only into the literary world of legends but occasionally, and quite against Buber's method, into the theoretical or doctrinal sphere also. Some such casually thrown out remarks could put to shame many a lengthy so-called scholarly investigation, e.g. what he writes in discussing (on p. 29) Shneur Zalman, the founder of the Habad school.

The telling of legends had something of a ritual significance in Hasidic circles. The material from which the volume before us is derived was in its original form an anonymous oral literature which passed from circle to circle and generation to generation. The short hagiological literary units, related originally in Yiddish, were subsequently written down to be printed in Hebrew translation (as Yiddish was even in Hasidic circles not fully accepted as a literary medium), yet in a Hebrew which patently betrayed its Yiddish original: many characteristics of the first oral stage of the legends have been retained in the later repetitive and amorphous literary fixation in the Hebrew language. The anonymity of authorship in the oral stage gives place in many cases to a specific literary authorship. Out of 650 printed books which comprise the hagiological traditions of the Hasidic masters considered in the book under review, Buber made use of 300 (as he has told in his own Hebrew edition of the present volume). Buber translated a selection of the material available, or rather rewrote it in his eloquent German. This was in turn translated by Miss Olga Marx into adequate English. Such is the remarkable history of the literary transmission of these legends, the last ramification of which is the English volume under review.

J. G. WEISS

J. B. SEGAL, *Mesopotamian Communities from Julian to the Rise of Islam*. (Proceedings of the British Academy, XL1). 1956. Pp. 32. (Oxford University Press, London. Price: 4s.)

In this interesting and valuable paper, read before the British Academy, on 2 March 1955, Dr J. B. Segal opens up a little-known field of historical study—the story of the politically, culturally, ecclesiastically and theologically divided Syrian East, partly Byzantine (mainly Monophysite in religion), partly Persian (and Nestorian), during the two and a half centuries between Julian and the conquests of Islam.

The political partition was a totally artificial one, imposing heavy burdens on a people that was one in race, historical and social tradition, and language (Syriac). The religious divisions went as deep as the ecclesiastical cleavage between Scotland and England.

Dr Segal is mainly interested to ask, What consequences did their divisions have for the character and life of the people of these two halves of Mesopotamia?

It would be an exaggeration of these differences to maintain that Western Syrian Christianity was one mainly of dialectics and ideologies, of zealots