

SUMMARIES

BURIAL PRACTICES IN BETH SHE'ARIM AND THE DATE OF THE PATRIARCHAL NECROPOLIS

by Zeev Weiss (pp. 265–290)

The Beth She'arim necropolis holds a central place in the study of Jewish society in late antiquity. Its uniqueness lies in the number of graves, their variety, and the quality of the finds, which include many burial inscriptions in Aramaic and Greek, as well as artistic portrayals in stone and in relief. This rich inventory enables us to sketch in broader strokes the burial customs of the Jews in this period and the scope of influence of the surrounding world on them. This article suggests that the choice of a specific type of grave in Beth She'arim was determined by the socio-economic status of the deceased or his family. As such, it offers an opportunity to look at the social stratification of the Jews in late antiquity from a different perspective.

The variety of graves and the basic structure of the necropolis were determined in the days of Rabbi Judah I or immediately after his death. Beth She'arim continued to function actively as the burial estate for the patriarchal family and its close circles, at least until the abolition of the Patriarchate in 429 C.E. It is difficult to determine exactly when burial ceased at Beth She'arim. It is clear that it did not end after the Gallus Revolt in the mid-fourth century, but continued on a large scale also in the fifth and sixth centuries. It seems, in fact, that the cessation of burial was not the result of a single event but rather a gradual process that came to a close some time at the end of the Byzantine period. It is also evident that when grave-robbers had penetrated the necropolis in the early Arab period, there was no one there to supervise the patriarchal cemetery, guard its treasures, or prevent destruction.

JEWISH PEASANTS IN THE MIDDLE AGES?
AGRICULTURE AND JEWISH LANDOWNERSHIP
IN 8TH TO 12TH CENTURY EUROPE

by Michael Toch (pp. 291-312)

Jewish landholding in medieval Europe is in clear and abundant evidence but has never been explored in its entirety. Landed property appears in numerous places in the earliest extant sources; in some it is the sole proof for a Jewish presence. The most substantial documentation comes from southern Europe, from the Iberian peninsula, from Italy, and from southern and central France. No similar record exists for Northern France and Germany. Still, as indicated by early Ashkenazic sources from the northern regions, in all probability landholding was also substantial there, mainly in winegrowing areas. Altogether, landholding by Jews and agricultural pursuits were a widespread phenomenon. This article examines the common features associated with landholding, the economic or other functions it fulfilled, and its impact on the status of Jews in society. Most holdings were small ones, mainly family vineyards, and usually located in the immediate vicinity of towns. The main economic function seems to have been, therefore, the supply of homegrown wine. There was also some trade in agricultural products. There were quite a few agricultural entrepreneurs riding the tide of a growing demand for foodstuffs. By extending credit against landed possessions and spreading mortgaging in the countryside, these entrepreneurs played a certain role in the development of a market economy, thus contributing at least indirectly to the Commercial Revolution of the High Middle Ages. In contrast to a commonly held view, money-lending, backed up by landed property, belongs to the earliest occupations of Jews. It was definitely not a purely urban phenomenon. There is no evidence for the pioneering role in agricultural modernization which has been attributed to medieval European Jews. Neither is there evidence for the 'stout Jewish peasantry' seen by an earlier generation of romanticizing historians.

THE STATUS OF *AGUDAT HARABBANIM* IN LITHUANIA

by Ben-Tsiyon Klibansky (pp. 313-346)

The problematic status of communal rabbis in the Lithuanian provinces at the turn of the 20th century revealed a need for the establishment of a strong rabbinical association. The foundation of *Agudat HaRabbanim* (the Association of Rabbis) in the newly established Lithuania in 1919 was therefore considered an important achievement. This new association defined its goals as concern for the traditional character of life in the country and the diffusion of faith and religion among the Jews.

Due to a paucity of source material there has hitherto been no systematic study on *Agudat HaRabbanim*. This article, through the analysis of two independent test cases which occurred in Lithuania in the twenties to middle thirties of the 20th century, offers an examination of the power of the rabbinical association, the use and limitation of its authority, and the nature of its relationship with the Lithuanian ministries. These test cases were essentially local disputes over rabbinic appointments – in the town of Shaki in south-western Lithuania and in Slabodka, a suburb of Kovna. In both cases, groups of residents insisted upon the election of rabbis that accorded with their view, leading to a profound split in their communities and even to the concurrent appointment of two communal rabbis. The puzzling involvement of *Agudat HaRabbanim* in these controversies reveals a feeble and particularly indecisive association. Its approach, however, and the steps it undertook need to be considered in view of the political position of the Jews in Lithuania.

In the early twenties, the state enabled the Jews to maintain national autonomy with independent institutions including local councils, a Central Committee and even a Jewish minister. During this period all communal affairs, including rabbinical appointments, were under the authority of the local autonomous councils, and the Central Committee considered *Agudat Harabbanim* solely as an advisory organization for religious matters. Its power was thus very limited and it could not intervene in communal disputes. In the mid-twenties, the attitude of the Lithuanians to Jewish national autonomy changed markedly. They soon annulled the autonomy and transferred part of its institutions to the Lithuanian rabbis and to *Agudat Harabbanim*. Nevertheless, the Lithuanian authorities avoided granting the rabbinical association an independent status and the capacity to operate freely. Thus, during most of its existence *Agudat Harabbanim* lacked significant power, and its jurisdiction was actually reduced to within the boundaries of a professional body limited only to its membership.

