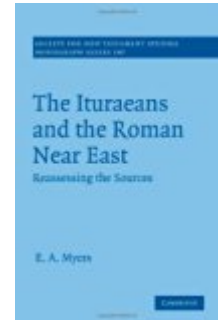


E. A. Myers. *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East: Reassessing the Sources.*
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Reviewed by Mordechai Aviam

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Commissioned by Jason Kalman (Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion)

This book will be especially helpful to scholars looking for a “handbook” for the sources and bibliography concerning the Ituraeans, the “mysterious” tribe, usually identified as “Arabs,” who are supposed to have dwelt in the Hermon Ridge and the Lebanese Beqa’. It deals with one of the more important and complex issues of interest to scholars of antiquity: the ethnic identity of the Ituraeans and their identification in historical sources and archaeological finds. *The Ituraeans and the Roman Near East*, an adaptation of E. A. Myers’s PhD dissertation, aims to provide an overview, as well as to reevaluate and reassess the historical and archaeological data and information concerning the Ituraeans. Like other books attempting a “reassessment,” this work relies on evaluating a large body of secondary material, and Myers has successfully compiled studies that were published almost to the minute when her own book appeared. Myers surveys the historical sources and analyzes them in light of previous studies but does not provide independent analy-

sis, likely because the discussion of historical sources has been exhausted.

Throughout the book, the author struggles with the problem of defining and identifying various groups mentioned in historical sources and discussed in previous studies as Ituraeans. In particular, proving that the Ituraeans were not Arabs is the implicit goal of Myers’s work. The theme that runs throughout the book is the problematic designation of the origin of the Ituraeans as “Arabs” together with “bandits,” “robbers,” or “brigands.” The author urges the reader to avoid the title “Arab” as she cannot identify any evidence for such a title in the historical sources. Some modern as well as earlier scholars support her view, others still keep the traditional view.

Like all other researchers of this field since the 1970s, Myers clearly understands that it is impossible to discuss these issues without relating them to the archaeological evidence, which is divided into three categories: inscriptions (most of which lack stratigraphic context or are tomb-

stones of Ituraean archers in the Roman army that do not provide any significant information about their homeland); coins (most of which are now in private collections and are of unknown provenance); and finally, sites and their components (buildings, pottery, and other “small finds”) discovered in surveys and excavations, especially those from Mt. Hermon and northern Golan. In this context, the data concerning the main questions comes together. Has the name “Yatur” been defined as an ethos of self-identity? What is its origin? Did this “group” have a territory and if so, where was it situated? These issues highlight the problem created by the disagreement between the two disciplines of history and archaeology.

Following a brief introduction and review of previous work about the Ituraeans, the author discusses the historical sources. Her extensive survey treats all known sources for twenty-nine pages. In the following sixty pages, she deals with archaeology, and includes six pages about Ituraean pottery and GCW (Galilean Coarse Ware) ceramics, five pages about Horvat Zemel, and nineteen pages about Mt. Senaim. The remaining pages are devoted to the archaeology of the temples located in the Lebanese Beqa'. While the geographic association is highly relevant, here it contributes nothing to our discussion, as the author herself notes, “these first-century CE temples began to appear after the end of the Ituraean principality,” making this discussion almost unnecessary (p. 101). The temple most important to this discussion has undergone excavation in the last ten years and is at the foot of Mt. Hermon at Horvat Omrit; yet this temple is not mentioned at all in Myers's discussion despite an early publication about it, in which the excavators suggest that this is the site of the temple of Augustus, which Herod the Great built “near the place called Paneon,” the area that belonged earlier to the Ituraean ruler Zenodorus. This article was published before the discovery of another shrine in the heart of the temple dated to the mid-first century BC.[1]

The book suffers from a number of problems. Given the discussion of archaeological sites and structures, the book would have benefited from more illustrations and maps. The few that do appear are of inadequate quality and are simply insufficient. Thus, the reader does not receive the intended impression or comprehensive information. Good examples are the black-and-white landscape photographs, such as figure 1, which are intended to provide a sense of the Golan Heights. However, in a discussion about the Lebanese Beqa', Mt. Hermon, and the Golan Heights, as well as the rivers, wadis, and mountains, regional maps serve an important role but are completely missing. Figures 5b and 5e show round pillars from the “Sacred Compound” on Mt. Senaim. For the ordinary reader, historian, or archaeologist, who is not familiar with the site, these images are meaningless, especially if one cannot see the “pillars/mazzevot” in Figure 5a together with their context on the previous page.

The book is also edited peculiarly. The font size of the headings does not always show the correct division between paragraphs, which can confuse the reader. Thus, in the chapter “Literary Text,” the title is the main heading, followed by the names of sources in regular font size, but in bold. On page 38, the heading “Roman Historians” is exactly the same font size in bold as the following source name. These are just a few examples. In the chapter on archaeology following the very detailed “archaeological” descriptions of the sites of Mt. Senaim and Horvat Zemel, the author moves on to Chalkis, and almost all of page 83 deals with the historical identification of the site. This is not the place for such a discussion. Similarly, in a short section dealing with recent excavations, after a description of the archaeological activity on pages 88-89, the discussion turns sharply to history.

There are redundancies in the names of places and rivers, which appear in both Hebrew and Arabic. For example, on page 45, “the deep

wadi of the Nahal Ruqqad,” the word “wadi” describes the geographical phenomenon; there is no need to use “wadi” (Arabic or international) and “*nahal*” (Hebrew) for the same place. The Ruqqad is best described by using the proper geographical term, which is “canyon” or “gorge.” Another example of mixed geographical and geological terminology appears in the short discussion on seasonal manmade reservoirs on page 46, in which the author includes Birket Ram, a completely different geological phenomenon. An unnecessarily detailed discussion is made by the author about the excavation at Mt. Senaim. On page 73, she tells us about Structure No. 7 and Locus 17, and the dimensions of the rooms and of the round stones. The description adds nothing to the author’s argument and is an unfortunate example of failing to synthesize the archaeological data in order to concentrate on the main issues. If the author thinks these details have importance, she should have more clearly articulated her reason for their inclusion. In light of the significance played by GCW ceramics in any thorough discussion of the Ituraeans and for establishing that they did or did not dominate the Galilee, the author’s choice to treat the GCW in two pages, “Excursus,” is strange. The discussion itself is insufficient, especially in light of the plethora of material related to the subject that has been published.

In 2005 archaeologist Moshe Hartal published a book called *The Land of the Ituraeans*. Although the book is in Hebrew, the author should not have ignored it. One cannot reevaluate the Ituraeans without treating the most substantial recent work on the topic which elaborately examines the archaeological data. As a result of neglecting this book, Myers does not succeed in her attempt to reevaluate the archaeological data. Each new archaeological excavation uncovers new data about ancient peoples and the periods in which they lived, but in contrast, historical sources do not change over time—our information pertaining to them is what changes. Her collection of historical records is impressive and treated well, but I can-

not say the same for the archaeological data. This book was clearly written by someone trained as a historian who has minimal experience with archaeological fieldwork.

I cannot avoid the feeling, perhaps more than a feeling, that, behind Myers’s vigorous opposition to describing the Ituraeans as “Arabs,” “bandits,” or “robbers” is a result of bias rather than an argument made strictly from the evidence. Indeed, the author herself states on page 174 (as well as on other pages), “these words are always used in association with Ituraeans as being Arabs or an Arab tribe. Such a subjective approach to an unknown people is unacceptable, especially in light of modern-day attitudes.” For some reason, the author perceives the word “Arabs” as derogatory, probably due to the connotations that prevail in our time. However, this is not the case within the Arab nations and the Arab world. There are Middle Eastern nations that take great pride in identifying themselves as Arabs and are proud of their origins from the Bedouin nomadic tribes. They take pride in the Bedouin legacy as masters of the desert, the trade routes, and even their history as robbers.

If we consider that the Nabataean Arabs wrote in Aramaic script, had a strong sense of identity, were wealthy, minted their own coins, had their own dynasty of kings and queens, and created their own types of pottery vessels, there is no reason why this was not the case with the Ituraeans. Who were the “Arabs” who served with the Roman troops during the battles of the First Jewish Revolt, using their slings against the Jewish defenders? Bedouins? Nabataeans? Ituraeans? I was not convinced that there is any reason to see them as Aramites rather than Arabs.

This book will be a great help for students and scholars interested in the history of the Ituraeans. The book includes an almost complete list of ancient sources as well as the Roman inscription, which in itself is an important contribution.

Note

[1]. J. Andrew Overman, Jack Olive and Michael Nelson, "Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus," *Biblical Archeology Review* 29, no. 2 (2008): 41–49.

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