

# *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*

*Irina Levinskaya*

**Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids,  
Michigan, & The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1993ff.**

**Reviewed by Kai Kjær-Hansen**

In Mishkan no. 24, 1/1996, pp. 78-84 there was a favorable review of the first four volumes of the series: *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*. Of the planned six volumes volume five has now appeared, written by Irina Levinskaya, a young Russian scholar, who is a lecturer in early Christian history at St. Petersburg University. The sixth and last volume in the series will focus on the Book of Acts in its theological setting.

In part one Irina Levinskaya deals with “Diaspora Jews, Proselytes and God-fearers.” Several themes with relevance for readers of Mishkan are treated.

Let me mention one example: Taking her starting point in Luke’s description of Timothy’s circumcision in Acts 16:1-3, Levinskaya concludes that it is “reasonable to suppose that it was in the Diaspora that the matrilineal principle first emerged and became widespread, probably not without some influence from Roman legislation. According to Roman law, children follow the status of the mother in case of marriage between a citizen and a non-citizen, a marriage which was treated as valid but not legal. This principle of defining ethnic Jewish identity along matrilineal lines was registered by Luke in his story of Timothy’s circumcision” (p. 17).

And with reference to the four places in the New Testament where proselytes are mentioned (Matt 23:15; Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43) Levinskaya reaches the conclusion that “the sources from the first century do not support the view that there was large scale Jewish missionary activity” (p. 49).

Part two contains an examination of the epigraphic material in important centers where the gospel was preached in the first century: Antioch, Macedonia, Achaia and Rome. Levinskaya finds that the available material supports the picture obtained from the Books of Acts, but then she adds in her conclusion: “By the time we reach Rome, the climax of the Book of Acts, the general pattern is clear, though it must be acknowledged that much of the evidence we would like to have is not available, and it is not always easy to identify specific Jewish inscriptions.”

Although there may be material in parts of the book — not least in the three appendices — which non-specialists may want to skip, there is no denying that Levinskaya has presented important epigraphic material which is unavoidable for the New Testament scholar. In that context it is not important whether the reader agrees on all theological matters with the historian Levinskaya.

And then we look forward to the last volume of the series on Theology in The Book of Acts.