



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2013.05.08

Simon Claude Mimouni, *Le judaïsme ancien, du VI^e siècle avant notre ère au III^e siècle de notre ère: des prêtres aux rabbins*. Paris: PUF, 2012. 49 €. ISBN: 9782130563969.

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In this wide-ranging and ambitious book, Simon Claude Mimouni sets out to reexamine the evolution of ancient Judaism from a priestly cult centered on the Jerusalem sanctuary to a synagogue-centered religion headed by rabbis. Through his study, Mimouni challenges the belief that, immediately after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., Judaism became a monolithic whole withdrawn into itself. His work covers a particularly wide time period, beginning from the return of Jews from Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E. up to the late Roman era in the third century C.E. (in some places, Mimouni departs from this time frame).

This book is well structured: it is divided in four parts comprising both thematic and diachronic sections. The opening section (“Opening to sacerdotal Judaism”) together with the first part (“Prolegomena”) function as introductory chapters dealing with fundamental issues of definitions (such as “priest” and “Torah”) and terminology (for instance, Mimouni explains the reasons why he prefers speaking of Judeans rather than of Jews). Furthermore, the prolegomena is devoted to reviewing the sources of information available to scholars of ancient Judaism. This presentation exposes both literary and non-literary documentation; it puts special emphasis on the Bible and the *targumim*, Philo of Alexandria, Flavius Josephus, and Tannaitic literature. As the author admits, such a review cannot be fully comprehensive; however, his choice not to integrate neo-testamentary writings seems questionable. Nonetheless, the reader can only benefit from this clear exposition of the relevant data and the basic tools for studying ancient Judaism.

In the second part (“Introductions”), Mimouni presents the various political powers that successively ruled over Palestine during the period under discussion. This section offers a brief but helpful exploration of the Achaemenid, Hellenistic, and Roman worlds. As the author rightly points out, basic knowledge of the political and cultural surroundings of Palestinian Jews is indispensable to properly appreciate Judaism and Jewish society at the time, since their evolutions are not merely the product of internal developments. The third part, entitled “Judaism in Palestine,” considers more specifically the history of Palestinian Jews from the Persian rule up to the late Roman period. It opens with an exposition of fundamental notions of Judaism (such as

eschatology and prophetism) and with the presentation of the main Jewish streams in the Second Temple period. Mimouni then deals successively with Persian and Greek rule over Palestine, the rebellion of the Maccabees, the Hasmonean kingdom, the Herodian dynasty, Rome's direct administration of Judea, and the Judean Jews' revolts against Rome. The closing chapter of this part is noteworthy since it focuses on the Samaritan community; it addresses crucial questions such as when the Samaritans first arose as a self-contained community distinct from the Jews and in what circumstances this occurred. This chapter is a welcome addition in a study devoted to ancient Judaism for it invites scholars to reconsider older models and to reassess the borderline between Jews and Samaritans.

The fourth and last part ("Judaism in Diaspora") studies the Jewish communities of the Diaspora in the course of the discussed period. As an introduction for this section, certain basic issues are treated in order to provide the context for discussion, namely: the juridical status of the Jews in Diaspora, the nature and extent of Jewish proselytism, the origins and manifestations of judeophobia, the concepts of "Greek misanthropy" and "Jewish philanthropy," and the phenomenon of Pagan-Judaism. Mimouni then offers a good overview of the major Jewish Diasporas throughout the Roman Empire, thoroughly discussing the communities of Egypt, Cyrenaica, Syria, Italy, Africa, Gaul, Anatoly, Greece, and Bosphorus. Mimouni's treatment of Christianity's spread in these regions makes his study particularly useful. His presentation of the Babylonian Diaspora is also remarkable for its comprehensiveness in that it provides a detailed survey of the history, scope, and characteristics of this community from its origins in the sixth century B.C.E. up to the Islamic period. The two chapters that close this section respectively deal with the revolt of the Jewish Diaspora in 115–117 C.E. and with the community of the Therapeuts referred to by Philo. The last section ("Opening to Rabbinic Judaism"), which serves as an epilogue, gives Mimouni the opportunity to summarize the main points of his argument.

His conclusions may be summarized as follows:

First, the evolution of the Jewish religion during the period in question is not merely the product of internal developments. In fact, Jewish society in Late Antiquity should not be conceived as an isolated entity but as an open community subject to external influences. Accordingly, the changes that then altered the face of Judaism are also to be ascribed to Jewish contact with surrounding civilizations (pp. 565–66).

Second, Jewish society remained multi-faceted in the centuries following the destruction of the Temple. Mimouni argues specifically for a tripartite division of post-70 Judaism:

(1) The Rabbis, who were no more than a minor party. Following the work of scholars like Catherine Hezser (*The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997]), Seth Schwartz (*Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E to 640 C.E.* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001]), and others, Mimouni challenges the dominance of Rabbinic Judaism in post-destruction Judea. In his opinion, the affirmation of the Rabbinic movement as the exclusive form of Judaism was the outcome of a long process fully achieved around the seventh century C.E.

(2) The Christians of Jewish stock (Nazoreans and Ebionites), who, although a minority, fully participated in Jewish society in the post-70 period. In spite of their distinctive features, the Christian groups in Judea were not marginalized from the rest of the Jewish people before the fourth century C.E. (pp. 552–53).

(3) A third category Mimouni calls synagogal Jews, who constituted the majority group. This synagogue-centered form of Judaism would have lingered for two centuries before it was gradually swallowed by Rabbinic Judaism on the one hand and the Christian movement on the other from the fourth century C.E. onward (pp. 562–63).

Very few scholars today would disagree with Mimouni's claim that Judaism remained heterogeneous after the catastrophe of 70 C.E. Moreover, it is widely accepted that post-destruction Judaism cannot be reduced to the Rabbinic and Jewish-Christian streams only. However, Mimouni's attempt to ascribe every other form of post-70 Judaism to the so-called synagogal Judaism (p. 482) raises several questions.

As its very name implies, this category refers above all to the Jews who built monumental synagogues between the third and the sixth centuries C.E. In fact, this period saw the explosive diffusion of the synagogue in Palestine (mainly in Galilee and in south Judea). The most striking feature of the synagogal Jews is their apparent laxity toward the prohibition of figural imagery. One of the most famous illustrations of this phenomenon is the representation of the zodiac wheel with the image of *Sol Invictus* at its center that appear on the mosaic pavements of several synagogues (Hammath Tiberias, Huseifa, Na'aran, Beth 'Alpha). Mimouni is undoubtedly correct to depict the monumental synagogues builders as inclined to social, political, economic, and cultural accommodation with their Greco-Syrian neighbors.

As stated above, archaeological evidence for monumental synagogues with figurative paintings and mosaics is attested at the earliest in the mid-third century C.E. Accordingly, one wonders whether the term “synagogal Jew” refers to any historical reality before then. In other words, were there synagogal Jews (or shall we rather say proto-synagogal Jews) before the burst of monumental synagogues building in the third century?

According to Mimouni, synagogal Judaism finds its roots in the pre-70 period among the majority of Jews who did not belong to any of the Jewish sects (Sadducees, Pharisees, Nazaraeans, Essenes, and others). In the post-destruction period, this category would have encompassed all the Jews that were neither Rabbinic nor Nazaraean (pp. 476–77; 553). This class would have comprised above all the Jews who lived in close proximity to the Greek inhabitants of Palestine. They were to be found in cities like Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Lydda, all of which hosted a considerable Jewish population. Mimouni insists on the fact that inscriptions and art remains found in these locations are mainly of pagan character. Hence he deduces that the local Jews had adopted the Greek way of life and language. However, in opposition to S. Schwartz, he does not believe that the latter had ceased to think of themselves as Jews (p. 555). In addition to the Hellenized Jews, Mimouni includes further movements into synagogal Judaism. Thus, in his opinion, apocalyptic writings such as 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch (p. 478), and the Sibylline Oracles (pp. 500–01) are to be ascribed to synagogal Jews. Moreover, he deems that most of Bar Kokhba's followers (p. 527) belonged to synagogal Judaism of Aramaic language

and culture (in contradistinction with synagogal Judaism of Greek language and culture). Furthermore, Mimouni estimates that priests were to be found in the ranks of synagogal Jews (pp. 481; 556; 563) and that, from the third century onward, the patriarchs became the official representatives of synagogal Judaism (p. 549).

The grouping together of these different streams may be further questioned. Is the fact that they (seemingly) belonged neither to Rabbinic nor to Nazaraean Judaism enough to classify them together in the same category? To focus only on this single characteristic may be misleading. It may overlook those aspects that distinguish between members of this so-called class. Thus, for instance, the relation between Bar-Kokhba's supporters and the Hellenized Jews of the second century onward is not self-evident, except for the fact that they (apparently) belonged neither to Rabbinic nor Nazaraean Judaism.

Nonetheless, if the generation of a third general category is felt necessary for the purpose of illuminating our understanding of post-70 Judaism, should we not rather call this class "non-Rabbinic and non-Nazaraean Judaism(s)," synagogal Judaism being only a sub-category of it? Such nomenclature, however, might grant too much weight to Rabbinic and especially Nazaraean Judaism for defining all other forms of Jewish expression.

In conclusion, Mimouni has done a monumental work in gathering and exposing the available evidence coherently. He has succeeded in producing a comprehensive summa that greatly contributes to our understanding of the shift from Second Temple Judaism to Rabbinic Judaism. This book is thus recommended for anyone seeking a plain and readable introduction to early Judaism.