



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.03.01

David Hamidović, ed., *Aux origines des messianismes juifs. Actes du colloque international tenu en Sorbonne, à Paris, les 8 et 9 juin 2010. Vetus Testamentum, Supplements 158.* Leiden: Brill, 2013. Pp. xii + 240. ISBN: 9789004251663. Hardcover. €103,00/\$133.00.

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This book, edited by D. Hamidović, contains the proceedings of a conference held in Paris in June 2010. It is organized in three parts with twelve articles (eleven in French, one in English), a foreword, and an index of ancient sources.

The foreword explains the aim of the book: to raise several questions dealing with messianism, such as terminology (what is a messiah?), typology (is one messiah or several awaited?), and chronology (is it possible to detect an evolution in messianic thought?).

The structure of the book suggests an approach. The first part deals with the ideology of the divinization of the king in Near Eastern culture. It is followed by studies dealing with the evolution from Israelite royal ideology to a royal messianism. The third group of articles shows the plurality of messianism during the Second Temple period and after.

First part: Au sujet de la divinisation du roi dans le Proche-orient ancien

Pierre Grandet, “La conception égyptienne de la monarchie” (3–13). Grandet examines an Egyptian text dated from Amenhotep III (XVIII Dynasty, 1388–1350), which speaks of a rebellious humanity (the *iséfet*) who break the cosmic order (Maât). It explains that the Pharaoh was then appointed to restore the Maât by ruling humankind and offering proper worship to the gods. In a sense, Pharaoh is a messiah for the Egyptians. However, Grandet does not draw conclusions about the possible influence of this Egyptian ideology on biblical thought.

Maria Grazia Masetti-Rouault, “Le roi Mésopotamien, ou la divinité comme tentation” (15–31). Masetti-Rouault emphasizes the difficulty of speaking about Mesopotamian influence on the Bible as the first Assyriologists were themselves influenced by a biblical conception of kingship. According to her, this influence is unlikely before the Exile. Most ancient sources consider the king to be a divine gift who establishes order. The neo-Assyrian and Babylonian cultures, however, deny a divine nature to the king. Indeed, history proved that although they still have a

specific relationship to the divinity, the kings could be killed by divine wrath. So there is no messianism in this culture; order is never endangered but only disturbed and reorganized on a regular basis.

Pierre Bordreuil, “Peut-on parler de legs cananéen à propos de l’idée royale israélite?” (33–44). Bordreuil explains that studying the possible influence of Canaanite religion on the Bible is difficult since we have only the corpus of Ugarit with which to compare it. This corpus is not organized as a canon and shows no trace of messianism or even of eschatology. Moreover, the Ugaritic mythology does not witness to a divinized king. Furthermore, an administrative document shows that the descendants of a king have no more rights than any other citizens. Therefore, the king in Ugaritic literature has nothing to do with the kings of the Bible, being probably nothing more than a *primus inter pares*, holding an office that grew out of a commercial, urban environment.

Second part: De l’évolution de l’idéologie royale israélite vers le messianisme royal

Thomas Römer, “Les interrogations sur l’avenir de la dynastie davidique aux époques babylonienne et perse et les origines d’une attente messianique dans les textes de la Bible hébraïque” (47–59). In this synthetic article, Römer suggests a history of messianism from its origin up to the Hellenistic era. The roots of this history lie with the king’s claim to be the anointed of Yahweh, an understanding especially emphasized when his legitimacy was questioned. The king’s relationship with the Israelite god is so strong that he is sometimes called Elohim (Ps 45:7), whereas God is sometimes described as a king (e.g. Ps 23). However, many kings were far from perfect, leading the prophets to hope for a better one. The exile brought the Davidic dynasty to its definitive end, though responses varied. Some hoped for its restoration in the person of Zerubbabel, whereas others were entirely anti-monarchic. In that context, Deut 17:14–20 may have been a compromise text, accepting the idea of a king but limiting his power. Second Isaiah, however, by calling Cyrus the Messiah of Yahweh renounced the Davidic dynasty and promoted integration into the Persian Empire. Moreover, the same author stated that everybody could be considered by God to be a new David (Isa 55:1–3). It is only with Zechariah and thereafter during the Hasmonean period that the “eschatologization” of the messiah occurred.

André Lemaire, “Messies non-israélites d’après la tradition biblique” (61–71). Lemaire shows that some non-Israelite rulers were considered to be a messiah, or anointed ruler. Hazaël, king of Aram, is anointed by Elisha, and Cyrus is called anointed of Yahweh by Second Isaiah. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar is qualified as servant of Yahweh by Jeremiah. In all these occurrences, the reader is exhorted to accept a foreign and a more or less oppressive power. This tradition explains why Josephus declares to Vespasian that he will become emperor. (This story is also attributed to Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai.) Indeed, by this declaration, Josephus also exhorted Israel to accept the irreversible Roman power.

John J. Collins, “The Royal Psalms and Eschatological Messianism” (73–89). The royal Psalms were interpreted in a messianic way by the New Testament. Two theses have been elaborated to explain this fact. Either the psalms were written before the exile in a royal context and later reinterpreted, or they were written directly after the exile to promote messianism. By studying

how Ps 110 and Ps 2 are interpreted during the Second Temple period, Collins concludes that they were rarely interpreted in a messianic way, except in some Pseudepigrapha so as to introduce a heavenly messiah (*Similitudes of Enoch* or *4 Ezra*). These Psalms may well have been written in a royal context.

Third part: Une pluralité de messianismes juifs, une pluralité d'évolution ?

Mireille Hadas-Lebel, “Les débuts de l'idée messianique” (93–100). The idea of messianism is not to be found in the Masoretic Text. An anointing establishes a specific relationship with God but is not really salvific. When a savior arose to deliver Israel, he was never anointed (e.g. Judg 3:9, 15). In fact, the first attestation of a messiah who will save Israel is in *Pss. Sol.* 17 and 18 during the period of Herod. Josephus later relates that many people acted according to some biblical quotation (e.g. Zech 14:4) in order to be acknowledged as a messiah. In the aftermath of 70 C.E., two streams concerning messianic expectation emerge. The first one hoped for a restoration of the Israelite kingdom (*2 Baruch* and *4 Ezra*), leading to the rebellion of Bar Kokhba. The second one, strengthened by Rabbi Yohana ben Zakkai, tried to neutralize these hopes so as to let the community survive under the Roman Empire.

David Hamidović, “Peut-on penser une histoire intellectuelle du premier Messianisme juif à partir des manuscrits de Qumrân ?” (101–20). Hamidović emphasizes the difficulty in approaching the conception of the messiah in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The problems are several: 1) the texts are fragmentary; 2) all the occurrences of משיח do not necessarily mean “messiah” but sometimes “anointed”; 3) the first modern studies were influenced by Christian conceptions of messianism; 4) the messianic expectation may be expressed without using the term משיח. This is particularly the case with respect to the Royal Messiah who is described by reinterpreting Gen 49:10, Num 24:17, and Isa 11:1–6, in none of which can the term “messiah” be found. The Sacerdotal Messiah is therefore not based on biblical reinterpretation. As for the Prophetic Messiah, his descriptions are diverse. In a text dealing with Melchizedek, he comes with the Messiah of Israel and of Aaron, and is called “the Messiah of the Spirit.” Elsewhere, he is identified with the Teacher of Righteousness as a new Moses or a new Elijah. All these messianic figures, royal, sacerdotal, and prophetic, seem expected to appear at the same time, as also in *4 Ezra*. However, it is quite difficult to draw an evolution of the messianic ideas exclusively on the basis of the DSS.

Frantz Grenet, “Y a-t-il une composante iranienne dans l'apocalyptique judéo-chrétienne ? Retour sur un vieux problème” (121–44). The possible influence of Iranian thought on biblical conceptions is hard to prove, as the corpus of Iranian texts at our disposal is very late and its link with the original Avesta is uncertain. Whereas Cumont believed in such an influence, most recent scholars, who are specialists in Iranian religion, think that it was the recent Iranian corpus that was influenced by Hellenistic messianism. The debate was rekindled by the Qumran scholars who noticed some phraseology with Iranian “flavor” in the DSS. After a fresh look at the *Oracle of Hystaspes*, Grenet concludes that this text has indeed an Iranian source and argues for a possible Iranian influence on the late Second Temple period.

Simon C. Mimouni, “Jésus: Messie ‘Fils de David’ et Messie ‘Fils d’Aaron’” (145–72). Mimouni states that Jesus was not called Messiah during his life but was perceived as a prophet.

The identification of Jesus with “the Christ” was done by the first Christians in two ways. The elaboration of Jesus’ genealogy was probably done so as to present him as a descendant of David, a royal messiah, especially in Matthew. However, his role was quickly relocated to the divine sphere rather than to the political one, especially in John. Hebrews, by reinterpreting Ps 110, introduces Jesus as a priest, not as a son of Aaron, but according to Melchizedek. Jesus replaces the Temple and, as Melchizedek, belongs to the divine sphere, having no genealogy. However, as a divine priest and a mediator, Jesus is subordinated to God, which explains why this identification of Jesus was further neglected. Mimouni studies the *De sacerdotio Christi*, in which Jesus is said to have been the last priest of the Second Temple and to be both a royal and a sacerdotal messiah. This text probably belongs to a Judeo-Christian milieu and its messianic conception could be compared to the expectation of a double messiah in Qumran.

Dan Jaffé, “Croyances et conceptions messianiques dans la littérature talmudique: entre rationalisme et utopie” (173–202). Jaffé notices that messianism cannot be found in the Masoretic Text. He also observes that according to Scholem, messianism is related to preservation, restoration, or utopia. Finally he explains that in the aftermath of 70 C.E., only the rabbinic halakah survived and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai attempted to “neutralize” messianism so as to promote a realistic acceptance of the Roman Empire and to uphold the Jewish community. Some, however, hoped for a restoration of Israel. Accordingly, Simon bar Kokhba was designated as a messiah because of his military strength alone. After his defeat, messianism as attested by the rabbinic literature was more utopian, hoping for the eschatological fall of the Roman Empire with the end of the world and the establishment of a perfect cosmos.

José Costa, “Le messie judéo-chrétien et les rabbins: étude de quelques motifs” (203–27). According to Costa, the descriptions of the messiah in rabbinic literature could be roughly grouped as follows: 1) a royal messiah who will be a perfect ruler, warrior, and teacher of the Torah; 2) a suffering messiah, mainly leprous, based on the figure of Moses or on the suffering servant; and 3) a transcendent messiah for whom the world has been created. As the rabbinic literature is known to contain conceptions from many Jewish streams, Costa raises the hypotheses that the first conception may be attributed to Rabbinic Judaism, the second to Christianity, and the third to the Hellenistic Judaism. He compares a text from the Midrash *Eicha Rabba* to the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke. Both accounts consider divination positively, both deal with the name of the messiah, and both present a miraculous birth of the messiah according to a reinterpretation of Isaiah’s oracle concerning Hezekiah.

To conclude, the articles are all quite interesting and each of them adopts an original point of view on messianism. In general, conclusions are balanced. As some of the contributions date messianism rather late during the Hellenistic period (Hadas-Lebel, 96–97; Jaffé, 174), I may regret the absence of an article on the possible messianic inflections in the Septuagint. Of course, we have two recent books (M. Knibb, ed., *The Septuagint and Messianism* [BETL 195, Leuven: Peeters, 2004] and K. Hauspie, ed., *Messianism and the Septuagint: Collected Essays of J. Lust* [BETL 178, Leuven: Peeters, 2004]), but a synthesis in French would have been most welcomed. As a non-specialist, I have particularly appreciated the four articles on the influence of foreign cultures (Egyptian, Akkadian, Canaanite, and Iranian). I wonder if taking a look at the eschatological Egyptian writings from the Hellenistic period, such as the *Demotic Chronicle* would not also have been interesting.

The foreword reports tensions during the colloquium (vii–viii) and explains rightly that this was a sign of vitality. Such tension could be detected in reading the book, and this is one of its qualities. For instance, whereas Römer takes for granted that messianism comes from the royal ideology of ancient Near Eastern culture (59), the specialists in those cultures were more reticent (12–13, 29–30, 33–34). Whereas Römer sees a messianism in Zechariah (57–58), Hadas-Lebel does not see such phenomena in the Masoretic Text or anywhere else before the *Psalms of Solomon* (93–94). The plurality of messianic conceptions in the New Testament (Mimouni) and in the rabbinic literature (Jaffé and Costa) is a challenge for anyone who is willing to write a history of this conception.

In my opinion, one of the interesting features of the book is its emphasis on the controversial nature of the lemma משיח. As Hamidović rightly states, the Christian conception of *Christos* still influences scholarly debates on the correct definition of “messianism” (103–4). But, even in the Masoretic Text, only the kings whose legitimacy was questioned are said to have been anointed (47). In particular, Hazaël and Cyrus were declared as such so as to legitimize the domination of a foreign power (61–71). Even in Qumran, משיח does not always mean *messiah*, and Hamidović is obliged to justify that it is possible to speak about messianism before the New Testament (105–6). Moreover, biblical texts containing this term, like the royal psalms, are not systematically interpreted in a messianic way (see esp. Collins, 73–89), whereas those texts (like Gen 49:10, Num 24:17, or Isa 11:1–6), which are interpreted as promoting the coming of a messiah do not contain this term (94, 106–9). Therefore, this book is also a plea for further research in order to define the Hebrew and Greek terminology of messianism.

This book, as a state of current research, is essential for all scholars interested in these matters. I hope that the French language will not be an obstacle to its use in future studies on messianism. The effort of non-French speaking scholars will be rewarded.