



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2016.10.08

Jonathan Bourgel, *D'une identité à l'autre ? La communauté judéo-chrétienne de Jérusalem (66-135)*. Preface by Dan Jaffé. Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 2015. ISBN: 978-2-204-10068-7. Pp. 320. 35.00€.

**Stéphanie Binder
Bar-Ilan University**

Broaching a variety of topics and ancient texts, Jonathan Bourgel's monograph explores the character of the Judeo-Christian community of Jerusalem in the framework of the Judean socio-historical context from the beginning of the Jewish revolt in 66 to the end of Bar-Kokhbah's rebellion in 135 C.E. First, from the perspective of the Judeo-Christians – Jesus' followers from a Jewish background behaving mostly as Jews while awaiting their master's return – it brings together information that helps us understand the way they envisaged themselves. Second, the book examines how outsiders, such as other Jews and Romans, looked at the Judeo-Christians. In this review a summary will be provided for each of the five chapters of the book. Every chapter offers new aspects of the way Judeo-Christians were seen by themselves or by others, building on insights the reader was provided with in preceding parts of the study. However, each chapter can stand on its own as well, as several parts of the study were originally presented as independent articles.

Before detailing the content of each chapter, I want to linger on the physical appearance of Bourgel's book. When I opened the parcel containing it, I faced such a friendly and beautiful work that it looked like promising the reading of a good novel. This impression persisted: the body of the text is free of footnotes, all the notes being gathered per chapter at the end of the book (as well as the table of contents), thereby allowing an amateur-reader to enjoy the text without disruption. In addition, the vast majority of the endnotes does not develop parallel discussions but only gives practical references for further investigation making it comfortable, even for those who do look at them, to remain focused on the main text. Such features permit the outreach to a non-initiated audience, even though the topic requires a minimum of knowledge concerning ancient Judaism and the beginnings of Christianity. For instance, ancient authors and their works, when referenced, are not systematically put in context as the author relies on the reader's background or personal checking. On the other hand, the reader need not be an expert in the field of Judeo-Christianity since Bourgel does survey the traditional research concerning the points he studies and states clearly where he himself innovates.

Chapter One: The Flight to Pella

Loosely based on the scholarship on the tradition of rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai's surrender to the Roman authority, and the latter's assigning him and his fellow sages in Jamnia-Yavneh, the study accepts that the flight to Pella, scarcely alluded to in Christian sources, indeed occurred, at least partly. Bourgel claims that it would have taken place in the year 68 and the Jerusalemite Judeo-Christians would have been placed in the city of Pella that was under Roman control, and far away from the battlefield, when Vespasian was approaching Jerusalem. Since it appears to have been a widespread procedure for groups to resort to the Romans' mercy before an expected defeat, and since Jews pertaining to other streams (re. ben Zakkai) also fled Jerusalem and surrendered to the enemy, thus differentiating themselves from the Jewish extremists who wanted to confront the Romans, Bourgel concludes that the attitude of the Judeo-Christians was no different from the other Jews. From this episode, then, one cannot point at any schism between Judeo-Christians and other Jerusalemite Jews.

Chapter Two: The Judeo-Christians' Nexus to Jerusalem and its Temple 73-132

Following the destruction of the Temple, quietness came upon the city, resulting in the return of the Judeo-Christians to Jerusalem. Judeo-Christians remained as fervent as other Jews in their attachment to the Temple; they went on visiting its ruins and lived in its proximity. But their mourning was binary. The narrative of the martyrdom of James the Just, killed on the mount of the Temple, adds to the significance of the place in the eyes of the Judeo-Christian community. For them, James' death and the destruction of Jerusalem are intrinsically related; his being killed leading directly to the fall of the city. This topic is further developed in chapter Three. The present chapter studies especially Hegesippus' account of the event involving James, and compares it to parallel passages by other authors, paying special attention to the identity of the Just's enemies in each text: the scribes? The Pharisees? The priests? The crowds? The guilt of the Jews as a collective is far from being taken for granted in early sources and the attempt to attract them to Jesus' school is obvious. Later sources imply several shifts in this approach.

Chapter Three: The Image of the Oblias

The discussion surveys the different Hebrew words, which may be at the origin of the notion of the *oblias*. Maybe because of my own personal philological conditioning, I expected to get a real revelation and the final quote that solves the enigma. But the author goes no farther than collecting previous research on this point. However, he tracks the character of the *oblias* (not called that way but getting epithets echoing the role of James as an *oblias*) throughout post-destruction, apocalyptic and rabbinic Jewish literature. The *oblias* is this sage in favor of whom the cities are not destroyed, the one whose faith prevents or delays the end of the cities. Once he leaves the city, or dies/is killed, the place's ominous fate is sealed. Here again early Judeo-Christian sources seem to be written in the same vein as mainstream Jewish literature.

Chapter Four: Fiscus Iudaicus

In this chapter we follow the evolution of the nature of the people targeted by the Roman tax for Jews. At the beginning, under Vespasian, the tax replaced the one Jews, all over the Roman Empire, used to send to the Temple. Jerusalemite Judeo-Christians were among those who appeared on the lists of contributors to the Temple and then went on paying the Roman tax. Under Domitian, the lack of treasury resulted in the obligation for whomever had a former or new connection with the Jews (apostates, proselytes, etc.) to pay the tax. With Nerva the rules changed again, the tax amounting to the purchase of the liberty of cult. To be acknowledged as a Jew and gain the right to observe Jewish customs, people had to get official recognition and were required to register on lists of Jewish contributors of the *fiscus*. The new circumstances made that only observant Jews went deliberately to manifest themselves to the authorities. Apparently, Judeo-Christians used to apply for paying the *fiscus Iudaicus*, thus acquiring the official status of observant Jews in the eyes of the Romans. The consequence was that the Emperor Hadrian expelled them from Jerusalem and forbade their coming back as he did with the other Jews. Here too the conclusion is that Judeo-Christians did not differ from the other Jews and only represented one of the streams that survived the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Chapter Five: Persecutions of the Judeo-Christians by Bar-Kokhbah?

Through different Christian sources (Eusebius, Justin, and others), the last chapter investigates whether or not Bar-Kokhbah's troops persecuted the Judeo-Christians. The conclusion reached is that if they did, it was because this group refused to join in the battle against the Romans; either because they wished not fight them or because Bar-Kokhbah having acquired a status of messiah in his followers' eyes, (only) a part of the Judeo-Christians feared it would be a treason toward Jesus to side with such a messianic character (even though Bar-Kokhbah himself did not claim for this status). Therefore the rebel army treated them as deserters. Judeo-Christians also tried to warn those among them attracted by Bar-Kokhbah's charisma, as well as the other Jews, against the false prophet(s). Their opposition prevented the gathering of all the strength under one leader. Again, the controversy was an internal Jewish one, involving problems of Jewish interpretation of texts and events, not one opposing Jews and Judeo-Christians as antagonistic entities.

Bourgel also inquires into rabbinical influences on Bar-Kokhbah's behaviour and manages to detect several features that might point at a tight link between the rabbis and him. After establishing that Bar-Kokhbah's followers had rabbinically minded habits, the author goes on to state that the relations between the rabbis and the Judeo-Christians deteriorated from the period of Yavneh. He tries to deal shortly with the arduous question of the *birkat ha-minim*, opening new perspectives but leaving us curious of deeper analyses that should be undertaken to complete the researches initiated here. The conclusion is that the rabbis and the Judeo-Christians were on a competition for the (exclusive) right to interpret, and the right interpretation of Jewish developments (texts, events, Moses or Jesus' teachings, etc.). The bottom line is that the Judeo-Christians (also called proto-Nazarenes towards the end of the study) were well embedded in their Jewish identity but also had, being the heirs of Jesus' teachings, their own traditions, narratives and interpretations leading to their specific halakhah that they would have wanted to impose on the rest of the Jews. They continued to be a part of the Jewish Judean society, partaking in its dilemmas and fears.

Annex

This addition at the end of the study tracks the signs of early redactional elements in the synoptic passion narratives that would date from before the Great Revolt of the Jews. It especially points at irregularities in the reports on Jesus and James' trials, as well from a Jewish and from a Roman legal point of view. The early elements constitute mostly attacks against a class of corrupted Jewish priests and the intended audience of this textual layer included Jews who suffered from their despicable leaders as did the Christianizing redactors.

General remarks

The sources used throughout chapter One are brought in their entirety in French translations at the end of the first study. The translations are useful; however, it would have been even more useful to include also the texts in their original language. In this way the reader would be able to check easily the essential meaning of the sources and not to be dependent on a translation that cannot avoid being approximate as the well-known '*traduttore, traditore*' states. This concerns as well the quotations appearing in other chapters where only the main keywords are brought in their original languages while the rest of the passages is translated into French.

In sum, Bourgel offers an extensive overview of texts and, through them, of historical-political events allowing one to better understand the image of the early Jerusalemite Judeo-Christians, especially as they saw themselves and expected to be seen by others. Despite the feeling that sometimes certain topics might still be deepened, the studies bring many significant insights and open interesting perspectives while remaining particularly pleasant to read.