



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2016.10.10

Simon Claude Mimouni, *Jacques le Juste, frère de Jésus de Nazareth, et l'histoire de la communauté nazoréenne / chrétienne de Jérusalem du I^{er} au IV^e siècle*. Paris: Bayard, 2015. ISBN: 2227487011. Pp 616. 34.90 €. Hardcover.

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This dense and methodic monograph by Simon-Claude Mimouni offers a thorough historical analysis of the Nazoraean / Christian community in Jerusalem between the first and the fourth centuries CE. It focuses specifically on the figures of James the Just, the “brother of Jesus,” and Stephen. The community was founded by Jesus, who was succeeded by James, and had priestly characteristics, as attested by John. Maria-Luisa Rigato recently insisted on the priestly character of the Johannine Gospel and its focus on the Temple,¹ and Mimouni plausibly suggests—on the basis of the modality of his execution according to Hegesippus—that James belonged to the priestly class (11, 229, 257, and *passim*); I surmised the same, although with different arguments, in a recent essay.² Hence the “dynastic” succession between Jesus, James, and other members of Jesus’s family at the head of the Jerusalem community. James, the “brother of Jesus,” according to Mimouni must be distinguished both from James the son of Zebedee and, *pace* Jerome, also from James the son of Alphaeus; he likely did not belong to the Twelve (185 and *passim*). Mimouni thinks that the figure of James, which was pivotal in the first Jesus Movement, was subsequently obscured by Greek Christianity, from the author of Acts onwards. This book aims at the rediscovery and reevaluation of James’ figure and certainly succeeds.

Mimouni rightly values Hegesippus as an important source—which indeed I have used in a number of essays on the origins of Christianity—and considers him to have been a Judaeon author from the priestly/synagogal Judaism of Greek language and culture. The *διαδοχή* that was the focus of his work (Eusebius *HE* 4.22.3) does not designate the episcopal succession, in Mimouni’s opinion, but the transmission of teachings (45). Julius Africanus is also carefully analysed as a valuable source, with good reason (49-54). I think he might have represented the missing link between Origen and Bardaisan of Edessa, both of whom he knew, and I suggested elsewhere that he used Bardaisan as a

¹ Maria-Luisa Rigato, *Giovanni: l'enigma il Presbitero il culto il Tempio la cristologia*, Bologna: Dehoniane, 2007, reviewed in *Review of Biblical Literature* 2008: <http://www.bookreviews.org/BookDetail.asp?TitleId=6170>.

² “Jesus, James the Just, a Gate, and an Epigraph,” in *Kein Jota und kein Häkchen des Gesetzes werden vergehen* (vgl. *Q* 16,17). *Das Gesetzesverständnis der Logienquelle auf dem Hintergrund frühjüdischer Theologie* (ed. Markus Tiwald, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 203-229, reviewed by Michael Labahn, *Review of Biblical Literature* June 2016: <http://www.bookreviews.org/bookdetail.asp?TitleId=9076>.

source for the historical period from Abgar Ukkama to Abgar the Great of Edessa, i.e. from the time of James the Just to his own day.³

Critically examining Epiphanius *Panarion* 29, Mimouni argues that fourth-century Nazoraeans go back to the first disciples of Jesus and are therefore not “heretical.” The Ebionites probably derived from the Nazoraeans at the time of the succession of James the Just. Mimouni accepts the results of recent scholarship on the Ebionite – Jewish Christian origins of Islam.⁴ The Gospel according to the Nazoreans, or according to the Hebrews, was cited by both Origen and Jerome as an authoritative source; Jerome even avers to have translated it into Greek and Latin, and quotes from it a passage concerning precisely James the Just as the recipient of a special apparition of the risen Jesus (*De viris illustribus* 2). The Gospel according to the Nazoreans was a paramount reference text among so-called Judeo-Christians. The term ‘Judeo-Christian,’ which is a crucial category in all of Mimouni’s investigation, was coined in 1831 in Germany by Ferdinand Christian Baur and has had interesting developments up to contemporary scholarship.⁵

I agree with Mimouni that Jesus was condemned to death as blasphemous not only against God, but especially against the Temple. This is a pivotal point (which I have also stressed in “Jesus, James the Just”). Also, Mimouni interestingly notes that Jerusalem traditions were taken over in Edessa toward the end of the second century, which points to a close relation between the Christian communities of the two cities (156). I have indeed examined these traditions, received in the late *Doctrina Addai*, extensively elsewhere.⁶ The Addai legend, which connects Edessa with Jerusalem, may have stemmed from an original nugget revolving around the letters exchanged, for purely political reasons, between Abgar Ukkama of Edessa and emperor Tiberius.

As a historian, Mimouni understandably suspends judgment, for instance, on the historicity of the resurrection and of Jesus’s virginal birth, which pertain to theology. But his research, as he himself remarks (26), contributes to reduce the “Bultmannian” distance between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith, by considering Jesus as the founder of the Jerusalem community already during his earthly life, after his entrance into Jerusalem, and not only in the post-resurrection faith experiences of the disciples. In conversation with Richard Bauckham, Mimouni pays close attention to the question of the relatives of Jesus and the somehow difficult relationship between Jesus and his family as represented in the canonical gospels and in *Gospel of Thomas* 99. Mimouni argues that Jesus was perceived as a royal Messiah by his relatives, around James, and as a mystical Messiah by his disciples, around Peter (101, 105).

³ See my *Bardaisan of Edessa: A Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009).

⁴ To which we can add Guy Stroumsa, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts. FS Patricia Crone* (eds B. Sadeghi, A.Q. Ahmed, A. Silverstein, R. Hoyland, Leiden: Brill, 2015), 72-96; Patricia Crone, *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters* (ed. Hanna Siurua, Leiden: Brill, 2016), chs 9-10.

⁵ See now F. Stanley Jones, “Jewish Christianity and the Judeo Christian Tradition in Tolland and Baur,” in *Is There a Judeo-Christian Tradition? A European Perspective* (eds Emmanuel Nathan and Anya Topolski, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 17-30; Peter C. Hodgson, “F. C. Baur’s Interpretation of Christianity’s Relationship to Judaism,” *ibidem*, 31-52.

⁶ *Possible Historical Traces in the Doctrina Addai?* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009), and further in “The Addai-Abgar Narrative: Its Development through Literary Genres and Religious Agendas,” in *Early Christian and Jewish Narrative. The Role of Religion in Shaping Narrative Forms* (eds. Ilaria Ramelli and Judith Perkins; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 205-45.

In the rich discussion of Jesus's parents little is missing—perhaps a reference to Maria-Luisa Rigato's study.⁷ Mimouni deems it very probable that Jesus's family was of priestly origins (258 and *passim*), although membership of the tribe of Levi did not necessarily entail access to the sanctuary. A similar conclusion is reached by Rigato, *Genitori*, chapter 2, who argues that Mary was of Levitical family, belonging to the eighteenth priestly class, that of Hapizzez, located in Nazareth. Concerning the existence of brothers of Jesus who were the children of Joseph and Mary, one could ask the following questions: if Mary and Joseph had other children, why are these not mentioned in the episode of the young Jesus in the Temple in Luke 2:41-50? And why was Mary entrusted to John, instead of a child of hers, at Jesus's death? An accurate excursus is also devoted to the question of the alleged ossuary of James the Just (259-268): Mimouni rightly thinks that, while it cannot be absolutely ruled out that the ossuary was indeed of James the "brother of Jesus," this is very far from being certain and is in fact improbable.

Mimouni painstakingly analyses all the available sources concerning James the Just and his death, in particular Hegesippus' report. While he does not try to explain the reference to a "gate of Jesus," presumably in the Temple, mentioned by Hegesippus *ap. Eusebius HE 2.23*, I endeavoured to do so in "Jesus, James the Just."⁸ Epiphanius' report in *AH 29.3-4* is also examined carefully. The only thing I would add is a remarkable parallel between what Epiphanius says of James, that he was a Jewish high priest who could enter the Holy of Holies once a year, and wore the *petalon*, and what Polycrates of Ephesus states about John the disciple of Jesus: he was a priest (*ιερεύς*), and wore the *πέταλον* (*ap. Eusebius HE 3.31; 5.24*). Mimouni correctly stresses (213) the importance of Jerome's report in *Vir. ill. 2* that James' stele, close to the Temple, on the spot of his death, could be read until Titus's siege of Jerusalem in 70 CE and until that of Hadrian in 134 or 135 CE. Hegesippus reported that the stele was still standing "up to this day," which probably refers more to the time of his Palestinian source than to his own day (as I suggested in "Jesus, James the Just," while Mimouni thinks that Hegesippus himself saw the stele around 180 CE [271]).

Mimouni rightly notes (222-223) that Origen seems to have known Josephus's reports on James the Just in a different form than has been handed down to us, since he states thrice—followed by Jerome—that in Josephus the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE was traced back to the unjust killing of James. Hegesippus, shortly after Josephus, established the same connection between the murder of James and Vespasian's siege of Jerusalem, even claiming that immediately after the murder of James Vespasian began to besiege the city. And after Origen, Eusebius also remarked that Josephus connected the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE with the unjust killing of James. Now, what Origen found in his copies of Josephus and is absent from our redaction of Josephus is rather found in the Slavonic Josephus, which represents an alternative, and possibly quite ancient, tradition, as I argued in "Jesus, James the Just." Origen is likely to have had at his disposal, in his second-century manuscripts, a more complete redaction of Josephus than the one available to us, which depends on much later manuscripts. Sabrina Inowlocki also thinks that Origen did find in

⁷ Maria-Luisa Rigato, *I genitori di Gesù. Una rilettura di Matteo e Luca* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane, 2013).

⁸ Claudio Gianotto, "L'attente déçue. Quelques modèles de réaction dans les eschatologies du christianisme naissant," in *Pascha nostrum Christus. Essays in Honour of Raniero Cantalamessa* (eds. Pier Franco Beatrice, Bernard Pouderon, Paris: Beauchesne, 2016), 51-64: 54, also tries to explain this enigmatic reference. Following W. Pratscher, he surmises that the "gate of Jesus [γῶν]" was a misunderstanding for the "gate of salvation [γῶν 'h]."

his copies of Josephus a passage that disappeared from later redactions.⁹

Concerning the so-called *Testimonium Flavianum* on Jesus and Josephus' passage on James the brother of Jesus, Mimouni disagrees with those scholars who regard it as a Christian interpolation, noting that a Christian would hardly have described Jesus as "the so-called Messiah," and that it should be considered authentic until it is positively proved to be an interpolation (223). Recently, in an essay not cited by Mimouni, Ulrich Viktor suggested the integral authenticity of the *Testimonium Flavianum*, including the transmitted sentence, οὗτος ἦν ὁ Χριστός, "this was the Messiah."¹⁰ I argued for the partial authenticity, in a form very similar to the present, but with a statement such as οὗτος ἦν ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός, "this was the so-called Messiah," which perfectly corresponds to Josephus' designation of James as "the brother of Jesus the so-called Messiah / who was called Messiah [τοῦ λεγομένου Χριστοῦ]."¹¹

A dense chapter, the seventh, is devoted to the figure of Stephen in history and tradition. Like James, he was executed by order of the high priest and the Sanhedrin. While James seems to have been the chief of the "Hebrews," the Jewish Christians from Palestine, Stephen was the chief of the "Hellenists," the Jewish Christians from the Diaspora, whose enemies were some members of the synagogue of the freedmen (331). In this connection, Mimouni aptly reminds us that, even before the 70 CE destruction of the Temple, in Jerusalem there were quite a few synagogues—although the number 408 recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud *Megillah* 3.16.73b is certainly an excessive figure (332). Exactly as in the case of the death of James the Just, according to Mimouni's plausible hypothesis, the death of Stephen also took place during a vacancy of the Roman power, most probably in 36/37 CE after the destitution of Pilate by Tiberius—which is also reflected in the Syriac tradition that eventually made up the *Teaching of Addai*.¹²

Mimouni also thinks, with reason, that Stephen's discourse in Acts may contain traditional material and is not necessarily a fabrication. The only aspect that does not come to the fore in this accurate analysis is perhaps the modelling of Stephen's martyrdom to that of Jesus and the issue of the forgiveness that, like Jesus, he asks for his killers, which is not a request for forgiveness proper, given the killers' ignorance, but a request that they may not even be regarded as culpable.¹³ Beyond Stephen's speech, Mimouni does not deem Acts to be pure fiction. Neither does James Charlesworth.¹⁴ And I was glad to see Acts 3:21 translated correctly "jusqu'au temps du rétablissement de toutes choses" (29), in reference to the eventual universal restoration. This text, indeed, became paramount in ancient Christian theology as one of the most important Biblical

⁹ Sabrina Inowlocki, "Did Josephus Ascribe the Fall of Jerusalem to the Murder of James, Brother of Jesus?" *Revue des études juives* 170 (2011): 21-49.

¹⁰ Ulrich Viktor, "Das Testimonium Flavianum: Ein authentischer Text des Josephus," *Novum Testamentum* 52 (2010): 72-82.

¹¹ "Alcune osservazioni circa il *Testimonium Flavianum*," *Sileno* 24 (1998): 219-235; "Gesù e il Tempio," *Maia* 63 (2011): 107-144; and "Jesus, James the Just."

¹² See my *Possible Historical Traces in the Doctrina Addai?* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2009).

¹³ As I argued in "Unconditional forgiveness in Christianity? Some reflections on ancient Christian sources and practices," in *The Ethics of Forgiveness* (ed. Christel Fricke, London-New York: Routledge, 2011), 30-48.

¹⁴ James Charlesworth, "Should one Ignore Acts in Pauline Research and Was there a 'Parting of the Ways' before 136 CE According to Acts?" paper presented at the 7th Enoch Seminar Nangeroni Meeting, *The Early Reception of Paul the Second Temple Jew*, Rome, June 26-30, 2016.

references to the final apokatastasis.¹⁵

In a chapter on the so-called Jerusalem Council narrated in Acts 15, which Mimouni rightly considers historical (and dates to 48/9 or 49/50 rather than 42/3), he disagrees with Attila Jakab about the identity of the James mentioned in Galatians with James the brother of John: it is rather the brother of Jesus, like the James of Acts 15 (303). According to Mimouni, James played an important role in that meeting, but his importance was downplayed in both Galatians and Acts. On a different note, someone might frown upon the definition of the philosopher Celsus as “at the same time Epicurean and Platonist” (533). Origen in *Contra Celsum* called him an Epicurean with contempt, although he knew that he was a Platonist (what we would call a Middle Platonist). I suspect he did so because he was much more at ease in criticising an Epicurean than a Platonist, and not so much because Celsus was really both an Epicurean and a Platonist—two totally incompatible affiliations at least from the metaphysical point of view.

Mimouni deems, with reason, historically reliable Hegesippus’ report concerning the search for members of Jesus’ family for a trial under Domitian (507); these were the *desposynoi* also mentioned by Julius Africanus, and raised concerns because of their royal descent (512). Mimouni also takes over the interesting conclusions of an investigation into the Jewish Christian Gospels that resulted in a 2006 Paris monograph, *Les fragments évangéliques judéo-chrétiens “apocryphisés”: Recherches et perspectives* (535-536). He considers the Gospel of the Hebrews and the Gospel of the Ebionites to transmit traditions that are contemporary with, if not anterior to, the Synoptics. The Gospel of the Hebrews stems from Palestinian Nazoraeans (Jerusalem), the Gospel of Matthew from Diaspora Nazoraeans (Antioch).

The author devotes a close scrutiny to the tradition of the migration of members of the Jesus Movement from Jerusalem to Pella, which he rightly deems historically grounded. I came to similar conclusions in an essay cited by Mimouni (492).¹⁶ An examination of the canonical epistles of James and Judas brings to the conclusion that the Letter of Judas may have been penned by Judas, the brother of James and of Jesus, in Jerusalem after the return of a part of the community from Pella, and that the Letter of James may be due to the brother of Jesus, or at any rate a Christian author of Palestinian Jewish origins.¹⁷ Both letters probably issued from the Jerusalem early Christian community. Mimouni also discusses the list of the earliest Christian bishops of Jerusalem, of Jewish origins, from James himself to Judas under Hadrian, handed down by Eusebius, Epiphanius, and others. He concludes that it is grounded in an archival document possibly stemming from the Jerusalem or the Caesarea community (464). The time of Hadrian marks the watershed of the revolt of Bar Kokhba and the second destruction of Jerusalem after that of 70CE. The important monograph by Menahem Mor is worth indicating here, based on both literary and archaeological sources,¹⁸ although of course it could not possibly have been known to the author during the composition of his book.

¹⁵ See my *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

¹⁶ “The Jesus Movement’s Flight to Pella and the ‘Parting of the Ways’” *Augustinianum* 54 (2014): 35-51.

¹⁷ A useful *status quaestionis* of past and current scholarship on the Epistle of James is now offered by Pedro Giménez de Aragon Sierra, “La carta de Santiago y los orígenes del Judeocristianismo,” in *In mari via tua. Philological Studies in Honour of Antonio Piñero* (eds. Israel M. Gallarte and Jesús Peláez; Córdoba: El Almendro, 2016), 597-615.

¹⁸ Menahem Mor, *The Second Jewish Revolt: The Bar Kokhba War, 132-136 CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

In sum, Mimouni's accurate and exhaustive research is to be highly recommended to all scholars, students, and learned readers with an interest in Second Temple Judaism, the New Testament, and Early Christianity.