

Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus. How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton – Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012). Pp. 349. \$ 30. ISBN 978-0-691-15390-2

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The new book by Peter Schäfer – Professor of Judaic Studies and Director of the Program in Judaic Studies at Princeton University is to be warmly welcomed by many scholars. Prof. Schäfer is well known for his previous publications: *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: University Press, 2002); *Jesus in Talmud* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007); *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009).

The main thesis of his new book is very challenging for scholars dealing with Jewish-Christian relations in the first centuries. It reads as follows: “Not only the emerging Christianity drew on contemporary Judaism but the rabbinic Judaism, too, tapped into ideas and concepts of Christianity to shape its own identity... the two sister religions engaged in a profound interaction during late antiquity” (p. 1). The German version of the title of this book was provocatively called *The Birth of Judaism from the Spirit of Christianity*. P. Schäfer in his investigation tries to take a stand between the attitude of Travers Herford (*Christianity in Talmud and Midrash* [London: Williams & Norgate] 1903) who recognized Christianity as the main target of rabbinical Judaism and the attitude of Daniel Boyarin (*Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Press] 2004) who regards Christianity as an integral part of the rabbinic Judaism mind-set. In his research P. Schäfer also makes reference (often in a critical way) to the three important monographs which deal with this issue: Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2007) and Adiel

Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Heresy, Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: University Press, 2010).

Schäfer in his new book focuses on the debates about the rabbinic concept of God, his unity and uniqueness, and his relationship with other divine powers (Metatron, the angels, Adam, David, the Messiah) which have been assigned a place within Judaism similar to the role Jesus played in Christianity. These discussions are shaped by the confrontation with the main opponents of the rabbis. On the one hand, there were pagans (with Greco-Roman polytheism) and the other Christians (with Trinitarian theology). The reaction of the rabbis was two-fold: repulsion and attraction. Analyzing the rabbinic sources the author makes a chronological (tannaitic and amoraic texts) and geographical (Palestine and Babylonia) distinction.

The book itself, apart from the Introduction (pp. 1-20), consists of nine chapters. The first chapter (pp. 21-54) deals with the different names of God. The author in a very instructive way quotes the texts from Sifre Numbers, Bereshit Rabba, Jerusalem and Babylonian Talmud which contain discussions about the variety of names used for God (YHWH, Elohim, El, Shaddai, Host). In these texts the heretics (*minim*) ask the rabbis for the explanations about grammatical and stylistic characteristics of the Hebrew Bible. One can recognize here a polemic and discussion about the heavenly powers in these texts. In this chapter the author discussing question of binarian or trinitarian presence of God is inspired by the previous studies of Burton L. Visotzky (though sometimes also expressing his disagreement). The author quotes the texts of the Church fathers in order to add viewpoints to the overall picture. In this analysis there is no reference to New Testament texts (except Jn 1:1-4 – p. 53) which would seem to be a serious lack in the full presentation of the discussion of monotheism between Jews and Christians. It also seems that P. Schäfer in his interpretation of rabbinical texts overestimates the influence of the cultural and religious context of the Roman Empire.

The second chapter entitled: *The young and the old God* (pp. 55-67), contains the analysis of the Mekhilta – the midrash to Exodus. The rabbinic text commenting Ex 20:2 rejects the thesis of the heretics (*minim*) that there are two powers. Although God does make different and conflicting appearances in the Bible (as a warrior – Ex 15,3 and as an old man – Ex 24:10; Dn 7:9-10) the anonymous rabbinic author stresses the point that he is always the one and the same God. P. Schäfer, putting together biblical, rabbinic and targumic texts, clearly explains the polemic between the rabbinic Judaism and the heresy of the “two powers”.

In the third chapter, *God and David* (pp. 68-102), the author deals with a discussion between the rabbis of three second-generation tannaim of the

early second century C.E. (R. Aqiva, R. Yose and R. Eleazar b. Azariah) about two thrones in heaven (bT San 38b). P. Schäfer in his analysis about the Davidic Messiah – Son of Man makes clear exposition of tradition detected in the Old Testament – the Similitudes of the Ethiopic Book of Enoch – the Fourth Book of Ezra – Rabbinic Literature and the New Testament. Entering into this chain of tradition one can understand a firm rejection by the other rabbis of the view of R. Aqiva that one throne is for God and the other one for David (archetype of the Messiah). In this chapter the problem of the “two thrones” is well illustrated, not only by the textual sources but also by the pictures of frescos of the synagogue discovered at Dura Europos.

The fourth chapter, *God and Metatron* (pp. 103-149), deals with the enigmatic figure of Metatron who appears in the rabbinic, targumic and enochic literature as the highest angel in heaven. P. Schäfer evaluates all the relevant Metatron evidence in both the Palestinian and Babylonian texts. In contrast to the previous studies on this subject, he gives us a clear picture of the characteristics associated with Metatron and the similarities as well as the differences between the Palestinian and Babylonian sources. He places emphasis on the significance and function of Metatron in Babylonia and he describes his parallels in Christian literature.

In a short fifth chapter, *Has God a Father, a Son, or a Brother?* (pp. 150-159), the author analyzes the Palestinian midrashim referring to God’s family background. He shows that the rabbinic texts reflect the discussion with the nascent Christology.

In the sixth chapter, *The Angels* (pp. 160-196), Schäfer resumes the discussion presented in his previous book entitled *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen: Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung* (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1975). The author, analyzing the early Palestinian sources shows that the function of angels was limited to the task of praising God and acting as his messengers. However certain Jewish groups in Babylonia developed the view about Metatron – the second divine power after God worshiped by the other angels in heaven. The author convincingly indicates the potential danger of this view in the discussion between Judaism and Christianity.

The seventh chapter, *Adam* (pp. 197-213), as its starting point emphasizes the tensions and inconsistencies between the two creation accounts in Gen 1:1–2:3 and Gen 2:4-25. The author, analyzing early rabbinic texts (the Mishna and Tosefta) shows that some people called “heretics” (*minim*) must have also held the view that Adam was a divine power who participated in God’s creation of the world. In a fascinating way P. Schäfer interprets the rabbinic texts in the light of Palestinian sources (*The Life of Adam and Eve*),

the writings of Philo, and New Testament texts. His view that the rabbinic polemic against Adam as a supernatural and divine being was aimed at Christological interpretation is very convincing.

The last two chapters deal with the Messiah. In the eighth chapter, *The Birth of the Messiah, or Why did Baby Messiah Disappear?* (pp. 214-235), the author examines one of the midrashim in the Jerusalem Talmud (jT Ber XI,4.12-14) about the disappearance of the new born Messiah. Interpreting this midrash in the light of the Gospels, he regards it as a parodistic inversion of the New Testament description about the birth of Jesus. He concludes that this motif reveals a very early relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The latter is still regarded as part of Judaism and, at the same time, as the more dangerous threat. The ninth chapter, *The Suffering Messiah Ephraim* (pp. 236-271), deals with the concept of the Messiah as the redeemer of Israel. The author examines the Jewish and Christian sources and concludes that this concept was originally Jewish. It was then usurped by Christianity, and as result of this, was suppressed by Judaism. Later, it made its way back into rabbinic Judaism. In this chapter he refers to the idea of the suffering Messiah that evolved from the suffering servant in Isaiah. He shows that this idea was adopted by the New Testament and reappeared in a series of midrashim in rabbinic literature. At the end of the book there is a Bibliography (pp. 329-342) and Index (pp. 343-349).

Schäfer's book is very illuminating and fascinating. The author examines a rich collection of rabbinic texts which shed light and better understanding on many concepts included in the Old and New Testaments. His emphasis on the geographical distinction between Palestine and Babylonia, in the evaluation of the rabbinic sources is worthy of attention. However, in explaining how the two sister religions engaged in profound interaction during late antiquity, he sometimes seems to abolish the borders and distinctions between them and at times the reader is unable to recognized clearly their own Christian or Jewish identity. This seems to be the weak point of this book. Also, the emphasis on the period after Diocletian's reform as the background for the discussion between Judaism and Christianity seems to be subjective and exaggerated. According to P. Schäfer, the imperial structure of the Roman Empire influences the development of a binitarian and trinitarian Christian theology. But the content of the rabbinical texts deals more with theological issues than political or sociological. Nevertheless, the book is an excellent presentation of the mutual interaction between the sister religions and deserves an important place amongst the studies about early Judaism and Christianity.