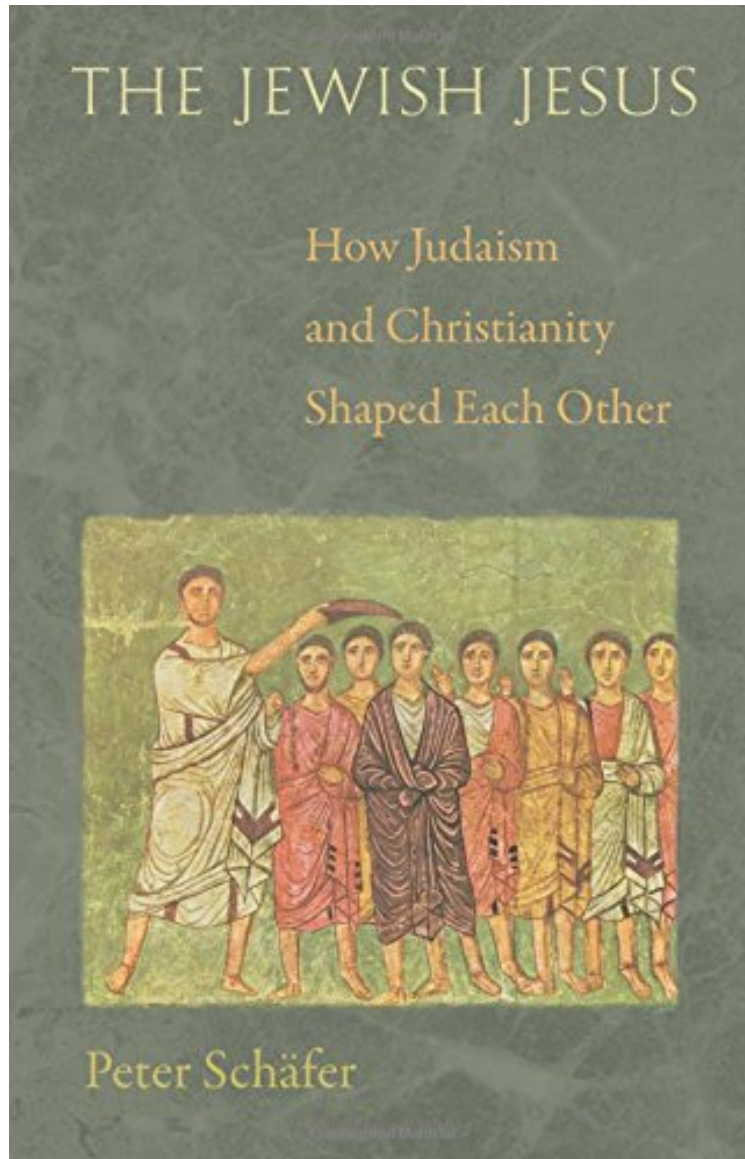


The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other

Peter Schfer

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Peter Schfer : The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other:

41 of 44 people found the following review helpful. Challenging reinterpretation By Wayne Dynes The title of this book would suggest that it is yet another monograph affirming the truism that Jesus was a Jew, standing alongside other books of this genre by John Dominic Crossan, E. P. Saunders, and especially Geza Vermes. There is no need to turn to these books to acknowledge the following points, easily derivable from the four canonical Christian Gospels. From his birth Jesus was raised a Jew. He was circumcised on the eighth day (Luke 2.21) and bore a common Jewish name, Yeshua, "he [God] saves" (Matthew 1.21). In fact, scholars have determined that Yeshua was the fifth most common male Jewish name of the time. Joseph was the second most common male name and Mary the most common among women. The child Jesus was presented to the Lord in the Jerusalem temple (Luke 2.22; cf. Deuteronomy 18.4; Exodus 13.2,12,15), A sacrifice was offered for him, a pair of doves and 2 young pigeons, indicating that his family were not wealthy (Leviticus 12.2,6,8; Luke 2.22-24). Thus Jesus was raised according to the law (Luke 2.39). These points being granted, it should be noted that Jesus belonged to pre-Rabbinical Judaism, differing in many ways from the faith of the two Talmuds (where he is sometimes denounced, as Schfer showed in another monograph). One must be wary of anachronism. Evidently, "The Jewish Jesus" essentially replicates the author's German original text, which I have not seen. In translation the title of that book is "The Birth of Judaism from the Spirit of Christianity." At all events, in this book Schfer prefers a more interactive model in which a number of ideas circulated freely among both parties. The conventional view of the contrast between Judaism and Christianity is that one is strictly monotheistic, the other tritheistic. With regard to antiquity, especially late antiquity, Peter Schfer assembles considerable evidence to undermine this view, exploring a whole range of partner-deities for the supposedly unique God of Hebraic tradition. These motifs include the duality of Elohim (literally "gods") and Yahweh in the Pentateuch; the contrast of the old god (the "ancient of days") and the young god; the use of plural verbs in the Hebrew Bible to describe divine actions; the curious figure of Metatron, ostensibly the chief of the angels; and the idea of the eternal David. All of these nominations point in the direction of binitarianism, the idea that there are two high gods. This notion finds a parallel in gnosticism, but Schfer thinks that this is not very important, for in that tradition the partner tends to have a negative connotation. Schfer showcases the binitarian concept. Here Judaism (or at least some strands of it) joins with New Testament Christianity, which basically was binitarian (with the Holy Spirit not yet admitted to full partnership). Thus Judaism was not strictly monotheistic, nor was Christianity always trinitarian. Schfer holds that binitarianism found an important support in the imperial concept, developed by Diocletian at the end of the third century CE, of the Augustus (or chief emperor) assisted by the Caesar (or junior emperor). This book, by a major scholar in the field, is carefully composed. I recommend it highly. 7 of 9 people found the following review helpful. Brave Old World By Chris Albert Wells Brave Old World Christianity was issued from a dissident faction of post-Temple Messianic Judaism that underwent powerful second century Hellenistic influences more conform to Greco-Roman ideals. We know little about 2nd-3rd-century CE Christianity tempting post-Temple Judaism and the counter-reactions. And out of academic circles, the rabbi's seventh century messianic literature and homilies cover only a restricted audience. Schaffer's book repairs these important lacunae. Schaffer's Jesus in the Talmud offers a useful preparation to tackle his present publication: it trains the reader with the rabbi's tortuous exegesis and Schaffer's enlightening interpretations. Chapter 1-2 of The Jewish Jesus posits that Christians with two divine figures, God and his Son, were provocatively pointing to all the biblical textual references that could mirror their own theology: Genesis where on several occasions God is mentioned in plural and in Exodus where God is depicted as a young warrior God in Egypt very different from the Mt. Sinai old God of justice and mercy. Using the OT as a springboard that announces Christianity, 2nd century CE church fathers could argue that even the Jewish Bible had two Gods. During the early centuries CE the rabbi's were trying to talk themselves out of such difficulties. Attempting to explain the apparent contradictions the rabbi's were in for a spell of exegetical acrobatics difficult to understand without Schaffer's clear explanations. (It would have been more realistic, on behalf of the rabbi's, to accept that early traditions were different, that several writers intervened and that dogma had evolved over the centuries BCE) I find it difficult to follow Schaffer when he believes that pre-Christian Jewish texts elaborating on Wisdom and the Logos were instrumental in establishing Christianity's divine family. The Christian bi- and Trinitarian concepts of the divine owe more to Hellenistic Docetic doctrines than to oldest Judaism. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus has no divine status and his messianic standing is very hesitant in Mark. Chapter 3. Schaffer shows that marginal factions of Judaism were attempting to promote a different Messiah-King than Jesus Christ. With the Apocalypse of David, writers in Babylonia responded to the Jesus literature as found in the Book of Revelation. The short analysis of third century CE frescoes from the Dura Europos Synagogue is a remarkable addition to Schaffer's demonstration. Chapter 4 continues with the figure of Enoch. Schaffer carefully exposes Enoch's transformation from a biblical figure walking with God into a celestial scribe then an angelic figure before becoming a Lesser God under the name of Metatron in the third Book of Enoch. All these later apocalyptic texts had BCE Jewish antecedents, essentially in Jubilees, Daniel and the Song of Songs. (Qumran literature also gave Melchizedek an outstanding messianic rank next to God and their Teacher was elevated to messianic eminence). The second to fourth century CE Babylonian texts promoting divine Messiahs that remained in the Jewish fold intended to propose an alternative to Jesus Messiah that the nations had taken out of Israel's hands. Schaffer revives the influences Christianity's divine Messiah had on Babylonian Judaism. The process was tortuous and contested, and here again

Schaffers analysis is very helpful. These local apocalyptic theologies nevertheless remained marginal. The Jewish Messiahs catching up with Jesus did not receive official theological recognition on behalf of centrist Rabbinical Judaism and only survived in fringe communities. Chapter 5. Gods family Schaffer settles scores with Maier who attempts to purify rabbinic traditions of all anti-Christian implications. Chapter 6. The Angels The Palestinian rabbis are caught in endless exegetical gossip: when were the angels created, did God consult them before creating man, do they have a higher or lower standing than Adam? The Babylonian rabbis step in to give a resolutely anti angelic version of Gods consulting them before the creation. Behind the discussions the uniqueness of God is at stake. The traditions of angels attending God and transmitting the law to Moses are contested because negatively used by Christian writers. (God didnt give the law himself because it was not the final one). Worship and sacrifice for angels are prohibited. Chapter 7. Adam This is a wonderful chapter that shows how the two creation accounts in Genesis were used to validate an earthly Jesus and a heavenly, immaterial and incorruptible Jesus. Chapter 8. The Birth of the Messiah, or Why did Baby Messiah Disappear? Interesting in this strange and wonderfully commented story that counters the NT birth narrative, the fact that this Davidic Messiah, born in Bethlehem, is a post-Temple affair, and not some 35 yrs before stretching from Herod to Pilate. Schaffer does not try to explain this oddity. But the rabbis knew that there were no Jesus traditions while the Temple was standing. Facing its destruction, all strains of Judaism had to react. To dissident Jewish factions, the Temples fall meant that God was displeased with the present day administration and was asking for things to change. The Jesus-for-Messiah forwarded by a Nazarene community was a Temple replacement answer: a Messiah that held in his hands the Holy Spirit, replacing Elijah (the prototype of the Temples Messiah) and Moses (so silent on eternal life). They started setting the contours of their new messianic party in script around 75 CE (Marks). It was expanded and completed over the following century. Chapter 9. The Suffering Messiah Ephraim We find here a tradition that derives the Messiah from the house of Joseph and not the house of David. The first homily stresses that Torah tradition is not enough if messianic expectations are neglected. The second homily reverts to a more traditional: Torah obedience leads to salvation. And then changes its course. The Messiah was created before the creation and his light hides under Gods seat. God negotiates Messiah-ship against seven years of suffering. The Messiah will take on all the sins of all generations! Salvation here is exclusively for Israel and the Messiah gains a throne of glory. During the first half of the seventh century, at a time when Christianity was better established and Islam was rapidly expanding, taking over Jerusalem, some Jewish writers were again in an apocalyptic mood, catching up with messianic expectations now coming from two sides. Contrary to much earlier texts, these homilies were not mocking the Jesus Messiah, but attempting to create a credible alternative facing Jesus and Mohamed. Schaffers book is complex and well documented. It opens a window on mutual influences between the Christian Messiah that was taken out of their hands and the rabbis conflicting attempts to restore Israels Messianic role. 10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Significant mutuality By Francis J. Moloney This is a rare book that crosses an expert knowledge of the Rabbinic literature, especially the difficult to trace midrashim, with a knowledge of early Christianity. It is unique in so far as it works in the opposite direction to most scholarly analyses of the relationship between late Judaism and early Christianity. We normally trace the impact that Jewish traditions have had upon emerging Christianity. This books devotes careful attention to the possible influence emerging Christianity - especially the concept of a triune God - had upon Rabbinic Judaism. Schaefer shows that it was something of a two-way street.

In late antiquity, as Christianity emerged from Judaism, it was not only the new religion that was being influenced by the old. The rise and revolutionary challenge of Christianity also had a profound influence on rabbinic Judaism, which was itself just emerging and, like Christianity, trying to shape its own identity. In *The Jewish Jesus*, Peter Schfer reveals the crucial ways in which various Jewish heresies, including Christianity, affected the development of rabbinic Judaism. He even shows that some of the ideas that the rabbis appropriated from Christianity were actually reappropriated Jewish ideas. The result is a demonstration of the deep mutual influence between the sister religions, one that calls into question hard and fast distinctions between orthodoxy and heresy, and even Judaism and Christianity, during the first centuries CE.

Peter Schfer, Winner of the 2007 Distinguished Achievement Award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation "This volume combines several provocative theses. Schfer suggests that arguments in the Talmud against ostensibly heretical teachings are aimed not only at opponents of the rabbis but also at circles among the ancient rabbis themselves that found such teachings attractive. . . . The author is a highly respected scholar of ancient Judaism, and the present book continues lines of thought that appeared in his earlier writings, including *Jesus in the Talmud*. This volume's presentation is erudite yet accessible. The arguments against scholars with other views are especially robust and forthright."--Choice "Schfer'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. . . . [T]he 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."--Miroslaw S. Wrbel, *Biblical Annals*"There have been a number of revelatory books in recent decades on the relations between early Christianity and Judaism, especially on how each influenced the other. This book by Peter Schafer . . . is among them."--Glenn W. Olsen, *European Legacy*From the Back Cover"Watching Peter Schfer explicate Jewish and Christian texts is like watching a great restorer work on a fresco damaged by time, wind, and water. Blurred outlines come into focus, dull colors become brilliant, and suddenly a forgotten story of exchange between the two religions comes back to dramatic life. This is great scholarship, applied to a subject so complex and difficult that nothing less could do it justice."--Anthony T. Grafton, Princeton University"The Jewish Jesus is the natural sequel to Peter Schfer's widely acclaimed *Jesus in the Talmud*. Against overly simplistic conceptions of Christian influences on Judaism, Schfer posits a dynamic dialogue between two not yet clearly demarcated communities. Christianity grew out of Judaism, but Judaism also developed and changed in constant exchange with and differentiation from Christianity. Schfer's fascinating and highly readable book offers an important change of perspective from traditional religious histories and deserves many readers."--Gnter Stemberger, author of *Jews and Christians in the Holy Land: Palestine in the Fourth Century*"Schfer's thought-provoking book challenges readers to reimagine the relationship of early Judaism and Christianity and the theological matrices in which they developed. Must reading for students and scholars alike."--Burton L. Visotzky, *Jewish Theological Seminary*"This excellent and important book will be seized on eagerly and read with attention. Peter Schfer makes his argument with great clarity and a formidable command of the sources, building his case from close readings of the texts. The scholarship is impeccable."--Philip Alexander, professor emeritus, University of Manchester

About the AuthorPeter Schfer is the Ronald O. Perelman Professor of Jewish Studies and professor of religion at Princeton University, where he directs the Program in Judaic Studies. His books include *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* and *Jesus in the Talmud* (both Princeton). He received a Distinguished Achievement Award from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2007.