
This revised doctoral dissertation sets the teaching ascribed to Jesus into the economic context of his day. After a sensible introduction outlining the best way to use sociological models, the first two chapters provide a lucid and thorough description of production and distribution in first-century Palestine. The analysis is intelligent and careful; the author’s impressive competence in referring to ancient units of measurement is in part explained by his specially devised computer program for the study of such material, which is published as Appendix 2.

I see little to quarrel with in the economic analysis. Oakman might have espoused a somewhat more optimistic view of the effects of taxation in coin if he had taken into account the work of Keith Hopkins (e.g. *JRS* 70 (1980)). The belief that Judaean land became *ager publicus* after A.D. 70 (p. 67) ought now surely to be dropped, not just qualified. The notion that the Jewish war was a battle for the use of the land and distribution of its products (p. 142) simplifies dangerously. The use of writings by agronomists from Italy, such as Columella, to understand Judaean peasant farming practices (p. 24) is somewhat suspect. More generally, more critical use could have been made of archaeological evidence and there could be rather more on the peculiar economic role of Jerusalem. But all this leaves a mass of material in which Oakman gives as good an account of the agrarian economy of first-century Palestine as can be found anywhere.

The second part of the book, which explores the Jesus tradition in the light of the analysis of the economy given in the first part, maintains the same cautious approach, exemplified in a long, somewhat antiquarian section on the likely behaviour of carpenters in Jewish society (pp. 176–82). Oakman’s conclusion, that Jesus did not propose redistribution of land but did call for remission of debts (p. 168), is plausible enough but smacks of a statement of faith rather than argument from evidence. Since the analysis depends on assuming that particular sayings of Jesus in the Gospels are rightly attributed to him and mean what they seem to mean on the surface of the text, not all New Testament scholars will readily assent to it. Appendix 1, ‘The nature and difficulties of the study of the historical Jesus’, comprises a resumé of past scholarship and a plea for the validity of the comparative method; it does not propose any specific methodology for isolating Jesus’ teachings from the mass of traditions about him.

MARTIN GOODMAN


This unusual book by a Danish scholar is essentially about scholarship on Josephus. In spite of this somewhat formidable agenda, however, it is individual, readable and sometimes intriguing; its author proves a humane, generous and alert guide to the subject. Moreover, the subject itself, about which one might at first sight have reservations (better, it would seem, to attend carefully to Josephus than to put arid scholarly controversies under the microscope), turns out to have its own
validity. The author not only takes us on a personal tour of what is interesting and illuminating, but also succeeds in large measure in establishing the existence of an ongoing conflict between the classic and modern conceptions of Josephus and bringing an unexpected excitement to this battle of interpretations. The (unspecified) readership envisaged must be primarily one of graduate students and researchers in kindred disciplines; Josephus is important in such diverse areas that many will be glad of its assistance. Josephus experts, while they will find some of the presentation elementary, will also discover new angles and ideas; they are likely to be grateful, too, as the reviewer was, for the conspectus in chapter 4, part 7, of major developments in the field between 1980 and 1984, years which prove to have been seminal. Because it has a theme and an argument, and is highly selective, Bilde's book is entirely different from, and in a sense complementary to, the great bibliographies of Louis Feldman. It is, of course, both short and accessible; it is only a pity that the author's strategy renders it at times repetitive. His accounts of the views of others are always clear, although occasionally their reasons for thinking as they do ought to have been spelt out. Once or twice, justice fails to be done to a problem by omitting a vital element, as with the visible dependence of some of the Contra Apionem with Philo's Hypothetica, which is just not mentioned (p. 121).

Bilde describes his approach as 'hermeneutically orientated', in explicit contrast with the reviewer's 'social and economic orientation', though his conclusions are often similar. Principally, then, he is concerned with readings of the text. The modern conception is a reading freed from the impact of the nineteenth century's moral disapproval of Josephus' career and from that intense scepticism about the quality and veracity of his writings, which was in part an illegitimate consequence of the moral judgement, in part a manifestation of the prevailing critical tendencies. This demonstration by Bilde of the impact of prejudice on supposedly objective scholarship is highly salutary (e.g. pp. 17 and 18). Recent versions of the 'classic conception', descending from Laqueur and exemplified in the work of A. Shalit and Shaye Cohen, are characterized by a stress on discrepancies in Josephus' different accounts, both of his own wartime actions (Bellum as against Vita) and of recent Jewish history (Bellum as against Antiquities). The 'modern conception' finds continuity in the career, the stance and the writings, and, by subjecting the latter to constructive rather than destructive scrutiny, interprets them as a leading voice from the Palestinian Judaism of the first century. The founding fathers were Thackeray, M. Braun (the significance of whose five pages in The Listener of 1956 may be somewhat overstated) and Farmer; Michel, Attridge (in large part), Moehring (mostly) as well as the reviewer represent later developments. The picture is a more complicated one, however, than can be indicated in this summary. Bilde himself is a fervent advocate of the 'modern view', and his feeling that the importance of the shift ought to be accurately registered appears to be one of the mainsprings of his book.

Of course, he has been able to do no more than to trap scholarship at a particular moment, and on specific points things have moved on even since the time of writing. Thus the relation of the Vita to Justus of Tiberias is now more clearly in focus (and the reviewer has modified in print her 1973 and 1983 positions); both new epigraphic evidence and a reinterpretation of the coins make it rather less certain that Agrippa II was not alive beyond A.D. 95 (p. 106), so that this matter and all that follows from it are still open questions. In other areas, satisfactory results may be said to have been achieved by the time of writing, even if more work remains to be done, and it is useful to have the advances signposted. This is particularly so in the
demolition of the ‘assistant theory’, the idea (in the development of which Thackeray was, for once, a guilty party) that Josephus’ Greek was, in *Antiquities* as much as *Bellum*, written by a team of Greeks who compensated for his inadequacies and whose idiosyncrasies are detectable. It is surprising how hard that particular notion dies.

Bilde’s own picture of Josephus unfolds through his analysis and is set forth in chapter 5. There is not a great deal that is strikingly new in it, but it is none the worse for that. One area in which a new slant does emerge is where Bilde makes the connection between Josephus as priest and prophet and his view of himself as historian (pp. 189–91). However, the interesting idea that the *Vita* is to be seen as the autobiographical self-presentation which supports his claim (as priestly man of action) to be a serious historian in the Greek mould requires more support than it receives, and some discussion of what the ancients meant by a *bios* is indispensable. The contrast on which Bilde sometimes rests, between Greek and Oriental, also requires a more searching exploration, and recent re-evaluations of Hellenism will probably necessitate a deeper revision. But this last is a difficult and complex matter, going to the heart not only of Josephus’ work but of the Greek culture of the period. It is a merit of Bilde that he alerts one to the areas which need probing and that he leaves the reader with a sense that the last word has not been said on anything. For that alone, the book would be worth recommending to our students.

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The terms in the title of this book are carefully defined by the author. ‘Narrative theology’ is not ‘narrative criticism’, or the study of the ability of narrative to carry theological meaning, but describes an examination of four New Testament narratives—the baptism of Jesus, the temptation, the feeding of five thousand and the transfiguration—in the light of Jewish exegetical tradition, with a view to eliciting the theology implicit in such a narrative; and ‘early’ Jewish Christianity is not a system or a religion but a scribal school or schools represented by, or used by, the writers of the New Testament gospels. These early Jewish Christians, though they read the Hebrew scriptures in Greek, were apparently familiar also with the Hebrew text and the Targums; and though they had ‘an apocalyptic mindset’ they seem to have included the author of the fourth gospel, or at least the source that that evangelist was using.

The author claims to be breaking new ground in interpreting these gospel narratives in the light of Jewish exegetical traditions for which there is evidence in New Testament times. This claim is strongest when he analyses the baptism narrative in terms of the Aqedah and the temptation narrative in terms of the ‘rebuke tradition’ which grew out of Deuteronomy 1:1. By doing so he can argue that the theological thrust of the baptism story is not messianic (as is usually thought when ‘You are my beloved son’ is derived from Psalm 2:7 or Isaiah 41:1), but rather a presentation of Jesus as the new Isaac, beloved of his father and prepared for sacrifice. Similarly, the temptation story can be seen as modelled not so much on Moses’ forty days on Sinai as on the whole series of ‘tests’ which Jewish tradition held to be the content of the narrative in Deuteronomy: where Israel failed and was