<https://helda.helsinki.fi>

Nazarenes, Sect of

Luomanen, Petri Tuomo Jaakko

Brill

2019-09-08

Luomanen , P T J 2019 , Nazarenes, Sect of . in D G Hunter , P J J van Geest & B J L Peerbolte (eds) , Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity . Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online , Brill , Leiden . https://doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00002349

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/326001>

https://doi.org/10.1163/2589-7993_EECO_SIM_00002349

unspecified

acceptedVersion

Downloaded from Helda, University of Helsinki institutional repository.

This is an electronic reprint of the original article.

This reprint may differ from the original in pagination and typographic detail.

Please cite the original version.

Historiography

A heretical “sect” of Nazarenes was first described by Epiphanius of Salamis in his *Panarion* (ca. 377). In Epiphanius’ view the Nazarenes were predecessors of the Ebionites. F.C. Baur’s critical study challenged this traditional picture by claiming that the Ebionites were the genuine successors of the first Christians in Jerusalem and the Nazarenes were their more orthodox followers (Baur 1966 [= 1860], 174), while A. Ritschl defended the traditional order (Ritschl, 1857, 152–154). Both these options have received support in later research (e.g. Pritz, 1988, 108–110; Lüdemann, 1996, 52–56). More recent research has emphasized the necessity to read the testimonies of the church fathers in their historical setting paying attention to the way the fathers relied on their predecessors heresiological treatises, before making any conclusions about the actual course of events (e.g. Luomanen, 2012 and 2017).

Terminology(H1)

In scholarly literature, the sect discussed in this entry is most often termed either *Nazoreans* or *Nazarenes*. *Nazoreans* is closer to the Greek form of the name in patristic sources, *Ναζωραῖοι*/*Nazōraioi*. On the other hand, most English translations use the form *Nazarene*/*Nazarenes* when referring to Jesus’ byname derived from his hometown (Matt 2:23) and to the “sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Because the surviving literary sources link the name of the sect to Jesus’ hometown (see below), the form *Nazarenes* (reflecting the Latin *Nazareus*/*Nazarei*) is used here.

A word of caution is in order concerning the term *sect*. Patristic authors regarded the Nazarenes as heretics, but in the present context the term does not imply any value judgment. It is used in a neutral and comparative sense, denoting a religious movement that is either resisting or promoting change in relation to its more institutionalized parent body (Stark & Bainbridge, 1987, 16–17).

The etymology of the term *Nazarenes* has been much debated (for *nazir* see Zuckschwerdt, 1977; Berger, 1996; Bockmuehl, 2000, 36–48. For *netser*, see Pritz, 1988, 11–14; Kinzig, 2007, 468–4. For *natsar*, see Mimouni, 1998a), but the most obvious explanation, supported by Acts (24:5; also 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 26:9) as well as Epiphanius (*Pan.* 29.5.6–29.6.1) and Jerome (*Sit.* 143, ed. de Lagarde; see, however, *Comm. Isa.* 11.1–3), is probably the best: Jesus was given the byname

Nazarene after his hometown, and that also became the name for his followers, first in Palestine among the Aramaic-speaking Jewish population and later more widely in the East. Subsequently, scribal exegesis may have started to search for additional meanings from Isa 11:1 (Bauckham, 2003b). In the West, Christian became the standard name, starting from Antioch (Acts 11:26).

Sources(H1)

In Acts the apostle Paul is called, in a polemical context, as “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Three hundred years later, Epiphanius of Salamis devoted a whole chapter to the “heresy” of the Nazarenes in his *Panarion* (*Adversus haereses*; *Pan.* 29). In both cases the Nazarenes are pictured as a sectarian group, in Acts a Jewish sect, in *Panarion* as a Christian one. Jerome, for his part, claimed that he had received the original Hebrew text of the Gospel of Matthew from some Nazarenes (Jer. *Vir. ill.* 3). He also maintained that he was offered an apocryphal book of Jeremiah by a member of the sect of the Nazarenes (Jer. *Comm. Matt.* 27.9–10) and that he consulted the Nazarenes’ commentary for his *Commentary on Isaiah* (see below). Scholars have debated whether the Nazarenes known to the later patristic writers were somehow related to the 1st-century CE Nazarenes mentioned in the Acts, and whether the term should be understood as a title for all Christ-followers, especially in the sphere of Syriac Christianity, or as a term referring to a smaller group of sectarians. The reconstructed contents of the Nazarenes’ gospel have also been debated (**Nazarenes, the Gospel of**).

In the sphere of eastern Christianity, the term Nazarenes – with its indigenous linguistic variants, for instance, in Syriac, Armenian, Persian, and Arabic – was applied to all followers of Christ (Schaeder, 1967). Several early Christian writers also inform that followers of Christ were called Nazarenes before they were called Christians (Eus. *Onom.* 138.24–25; Epiph. *Pan.* 29.1.3; 29.6.2; Jer. *Sit.* 143). Jews, in particular, are reported to have applied this name to followers of Christ (Tert. *Marc.* 4.8); according to Jerome and Epiphanius, they did this with a derogatory intent (Jer. *Sit.* 143; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19; see also *Ep.* 112.13; Epiph. *Pan.* 29.9.2).

This information is supported by Jewish sources. Especially the versions of Amidah, the Jewish Eighteen Benedictions prayer, that were found in the Cairo Genizah, include several examples of the 12th benediction, actually a curse, where נוצרים/*notsrim* and מינים/*minim* are targeted (of the 96 analyzed manuscripts, *notsrim* and *minim* appear in 56). *Minim* refers to heretics in general, not excluding Christians, while *notsrim* targets “Nazarenes,” that is, Christians (or Jewish Christians). U. Ehrlich and R. Langer’s detailed analysis shows that the curse of both *notsrim* and *minim* probably belonged to the earliest versions of the prayer. (Ehrlich & Langer, 2005; for discussion, see also Kimelman, 1975; Schäfer, 1975; Horbury, 1982; Boer, 1998; Marcus, 2009; Mimouni, 2012, 139–157). Talmudic tradition also includes some references to *notsrim* (*b. ‘Abod. Zar.* 6a; *b. Ta’an.* 27b), and cognate terms appear in Mandaic and Manichaean texts as well as in Quran (for overviews, see F. de Blois 2002; Crone 2015 and 2016).

Although the above sources cast some light on what kind of groups were labelled Nazarenes and are therefore important for discussion concerning various uses of the term, this entry focuses on early Christian sources where almost all of the information that can be explicitly linked to a possibly historical sect of Nazarenes comes from Acts, Epiphanius, and Jerome. There are some references to Nazarenes in later Christian sources, but many of them depend on Epiphanius and Jerome (for references, see Klijn & Reinink 1973; Klijn 1992). Some scholars have also found implicit references in Origen’s and Eusebius’ texts but these are questionable (see below).

Epiphanius presents his reconstruction of the history of the Nazarenes in *Epiph. Pan.* 29. He places them between Cerinthians (*Pan.* 28) and Ebionites (*Pan.* 30), trying to sketch a historical line of development from one heresy to another. He has difficulties determining when the heresy began, obviously because the sources he used to feed his imagination, namely Acts and Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*, allowed several contradictory beginnings (Luomanen, 2012, 54–57). Epiphanius’ overall judgment of the Nazarenes is as follows:

<quote>They disagree with Jews because they have come to faith in Christ; but since they are still fettered by the Law – circumcision, the Sabbath, and the rest – they are not in accord with Christians. (*Epiph. Pan.* 29.7.5; trans. Williams, 1987)</quote>

Epiphanius also presents some details about the Nazarenes' beliefs and the locations where they lived, many of which find parallels in Acts and Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*: (*Pan.* 29.7.2–8; Acts 2:24, 32; 3:13–15, 26; 4:10, 24, 27, 30; 24:14–15, 20–21). However, Epiphanius does not know whether the Nazarenes believed in the immaculate conception (*Pan.* 29.7.6).

For Jerome, the Nazarenes were important primarily because they provided him with information about Hebrew scriptures with which he was able to back up his program of *Hebraica veritas*. Jerome's information about the Nazarenes can be divided into three categories:

- (1) occasional references to Nazarene beliefs and practices (Jer. *Sit.* 143; *Comm. Am.* 1.11–12; *Comm. Isa.* 5.18–19; 49.7; 52.4–6; *Vir. ill.* 3; *Comm. Matt.* 27.9–10; *Ep.* 112.13);
- (2) explicit descriptions of the Nazarenes' Isaiah exegesis in *Commentary on Isaiah* (Jer. *Comm. Isa.* 8.11–15, 19–22; 9.1; 29.17–21; 31.6–9), and;
- (3) quotations from a gospel used by the Nazarenes (**Nazarenes, the Gospel of**).

In principle, Jerome shared Epiphanius' view of the Nazarenes as heretics who were neither Jews nor Christians (Jer. *Ep.* 112.13). In practice, however, excluding some general references, he did not polemicize against them.

Critical Research(H1)

Critical research on the Nazarenes has been occupied with the question of how to reconstruct their "history" before their appearance in Epiphanius' *Panarion*. Because the only earlier explicit reference to the Nazarenes is in Acts, there is almost a 300-year gap to fill. Three classic solutions have been presented, all related to a larger picture of early Jewish Christianity for which scholars have argued.

- (1) F.C. Baur argued that the Ebionites were the genuine successors of the first Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. The Nazarenes represented a later, more lenient branch of Jewish Christianity, which had given up its strict anti-Pauline stance (Baur 1966 [= 1860], 174; see also Goulder, 1994, 107–113; Lüdemann, 1996, 52–56.)
- (2) In contrast to F.C. Baur, A. Ritschl claimed that the Nazarenes, not the Ebionites, were the successors of the early Jerusalem community (Ritschl, 1857, 152–154). R.A. Pritz has later argued for this solution in more detail. According to R.A. Pritz, the

Nazarenes existed from the 1st century CE onward, but they were mistakenly labeled as Ebionites by Origen and Eusebius, who knew two kinds of Ebionites: those who accepted Jesus' virginal conception and those who denied it (Or. *Comm. Matt.* 16.12; *Cels.* 5.61; Eus. *Hist. eccl.* 3.27.1–3). In R.A. Pritz's view, the more orthodox ones were actually the Nazarenes. (Pritz, 1988, 108–110; Mimouni, 1998b, 82–86; Blanchetière, 2001, 145, 183, 238–239, 521; Bauckham, 2003a, 162–181, esp. 162; for criticism, see Carleton Paget, 2010, 356; Luomanen, 2017).

(3) A. Schmidtke argued that the Nazarenes were a local phenomenon. They were originally a part of the Catholic community in Beroia, but they departed in order to be better able to follow their Jewish customs. In spite of this, they still felt part of the worldwide *ekklesia* (Schmidtke, 1911, 41–52, 105, 124–125, 301–302; followed by Schoeps, 1949, 19–20). More recently P. Luomanen has argued, by comparing Epiph. *Pan.* 29 with Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* and Acts, that Epiphanius' description of the Nazarenes is a fiction, created in order to provide a stereotyped model for "heretical" Jewish Christianity. On the other hand, P. Luomanen argues that Jerome had met a group of Syriac Christians, who were called Nazarenes, and received from them some excerpts from the Gospel of Matthew in Aramaic or Syriac and some expositions of Hebrew scriptures. These traditions, especially the Nazarenes' exposition of Isaiah, show that these Nazarenes/Christians did not differ much from contemporary "Catholic" Christianity (Luomanen, 2007, 102–117; 2012, 49–81). In contrast to P. Luomanen, E. Broadhead continues to emphasize the historicity of the core of the patristic representation of the Nazarenes (Broadhead, 2010, 187; similarly Mimouni, 2012, 41, drawing on Pourkier, 1992, 415–475).

Historical sources that can be reasonably linked to the sect of Nazarenes are meager, and scholars' reconstructions of the history of the Nazarenes have often reflected their overall understanding of the development of early Jewish Christianity. Detailed comparisons and assessments of the literary history of the available patristic references have brought up some new observations for critical review and discussion. A wider application of social-scientific approaches and the study of rhetoric is also likely to open new insights for future research, for instance, by illuminating the typical social psychology of outgroup categorizations and heresiological rhetoric operative in the church fathers' descriptions of outgroups.

Bibliography(H1)

- Bauckham, R., "The Origin of the Ebionites," in: P. J. Tomson & D. Lambers-Petry, eds., *The Image of the Judaeo-Christians in Ancient Jewish and Christian Literature*, WUNT 158, Tübingen, 2003a, 162–181.
- Bauckham, R., "Why Were the Early Christians Called Nazarenes?" *Mishkan* 38, 2003b, 80–85.
- Baur, F.C., *Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, AWE.FCB, vol. III, Stuttgart, 1966, 1860.
- Berger, K., "Jesus als Nasoräer/Nasiräer," *NT* 38, 1996, 323–335.
- Blanchetière, F., *Enquête sur les racines juives du mouvement chrétien (30–135)*, Initiations, Paris, 2001.
- Blois de, F., Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἑθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam," *BSOAS* 65, 2002, 1–30.
- Bockmuehl, M., *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics*. Edinburgh, 2000.
- Boer, M.C. de, "The Nazoreans: Living at the Boundary of Judaism and Christianity," in: G.N. Stanton & G.G. Stroumsa, eds., *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity*, Cambridge UK, 1998, 239–262.
- Broadhead, E., *Jewish Ways of Following Jesus*, WUNT 266, Tübingen, 2010.
- Carleton Paget, J., *Jews, Christians and Jewish Christians in Antiquity*, WUNT 251, Tübingen, 2010.
- Crone, P., "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān (Part One)," *JNES* 74, 2015, 225–253.
- Crone, P., "Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān (Part Two)," *JNES* 75, 2016, 1–21.
- Dorival, G., "Le regard d'Origène sur les judéo-chrétiens," in: S.C. Mimouni & F.S. Jones, eds., *Le judéo-christianisme dans tous ses états*, Paris, 2001, 257–273.
- Ehrlich, U., & R. Langer, "The Earliest Texts of the Birkat Haminim," *HUCA* 76, 2005, 63–112.
- Goulder, M.D., *A Tale of Two Missions*, London, 1994.
- Horbury, W., "The Benediction of the Minim and Early Jewish Christian Controversy," *JThS* 33, 1982, 19–61.
- Kimelman, R., "Birkat ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in: E.P. Sanders, ed., *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition*, vol. II: *Aspects of Judaism in the Greco-Roman Period*, London, 1975.

- Kinzig, W., "The Nazoreans," in: O. Skarsaune & R. Hvalvik, eds., *Jewish Believers in Jesus: The Early Centuries*, Peabody, 2007, 463–487.
- Klijn, A.F.J., *Jewish-Christian Gospel Tradition*, SVigChr 17, Leiden, 1992.
- Klijn, A.F.J., & G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects*, NT.S 36, Leiden, 1973.
- Luomanen, P., "Ebionites and Nazarenes," in: M. Jackson-McCabe, ed., *Jewish Christianity Reconsidered: Rethinking Ancient Groups and Texts*, Minneapolis, 2007, 81–118.
- Luomanen, P., *Recovering Jewish-Christian Sects and Gospels*, SVigChr 110, Leiden, 2012.
- Luomanen, P., "The Nazarenes: Orthodox Heretics with an Apocryphal Canonical Gospel?" in: T. Nicklas, C. Moss, C. Tuckett & J. Verheyden, eds., *The Other Side: Apocryphal Perspectives on Ancient Christian "Orthodoxies"*, NTOA/StUNT 117, Göttingen, 2017, 55–74.
- Lüdemann, G., *Ketzer: Die andere Seite des frühen Christentums*, Stuttgart, 1997, ET: J. Bowden, *Heretics: The Other Side of Early Christianity*, Louisville, 1996.
- Marcus, J., "Birkat Ha-Minim Revisited," *NTS* 55, 2009, 523–551.
- Mimouni, S.C., "Les Nazoréens: Recherche étymologique et historique," *RB* 105, 1998a, 208–262.
- Mimouni, S.C., *Le judéo-christianisme ancien: Essais historiques*, Paris, 1998b, ET: R. Fréchet, *Early Judaeo-Christianity: Historical Essays*, ISACR 13, Leuven, 2012.
- Pourkier, A., *L' Hérésiologie chez Épiphrane de Salamine*, CHRA 4, Paris, 1992.
- Pritz, R.A., *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century*, StPB 37, Leiden, 1988.
- Ritschl, A., *Die Entstehung der altkatholischen Kirche: Eine kirchen- und dogmengeschichtliche Monographie*, Bonn, 1857.
- Schaeder, H.H., "Ναζαρηνοϋ, Ναζωραϊος," in: *TDNT*, Grand Rapids, 1967, 874–879.
- Schmidtke, A., *Neue Fragmente und Untersuchungen zu den Judenchristlichen Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Literatur und Geschichte der Judenchristen*, TU 3.7.1, Leipzig, 1911.
- Schoeps, H. J., *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums*, Tübingen, 1949.
- Schäfer, P., "Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne: Zur Trennung von Juden und Christen im ersten/zweiten Jh. n. Chr.," *Jud.* 31, 1975, 54–64, 116–124.

Stark, R., & W. Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*, TSR, New York, 1987.

Williams, F., trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1–46)*, NHC 35, Leiden, 1987.

Zuckschwerdt, E., “Das Naziräat des Herrenbruders Jakobus nach Hegesipp (Euseb, H E II 23:5–6),” *ZNW* 68, 1977, 276–28

Petri Luomanen