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**Méndez, Hugo: *The Cult of Stephen in Jerusalem*.** Inventing a Patron Martyr. – Oxford: Oxford University Press 2022. (xiv) 175 S. (Oxford Early Christian Studies), brosch. £ 76,00 ISBN: 978-0-19-284699-0

Hugo Méndez's monograph on the fifth-century phenomenon of the developing cult of the first martyr Stephen brings together various liturgical, hagiographical, and homiletic texts, as well as archaeological and architectural evidence, focusing on Jerusalem. Previous discussions of the competition of the cult of martyrs in Late Antiquity often focused on other cities and regions—such as Rome, Constantinople, North Africa, or Asia Minor—which makes this monograph on Jerusalem a welcome contribution.

The six chap.s (three of which incorporate material the author previously published as journal articles) of this slender, well-written vol. discuss the prestige of Stephen as the first martyr and his priority over other biblical figures such as Peter, James, and John (chap. 1); the place of Stephen in the sequence of Christmas/Epiphany and commemorations of martyred apostles in December and January (chap. 2); Stephen's role as a patron of Jerusalem, as presented in a homily by Hesychius of Jerusalem (chap. 3); the account of the "fabricated" invention of Stephen's relics in 415 in the *Revelatio Sancti Stephani*, "authenticated by dubious visionary claims and produced by local actors" (59, chap. 4); the development of the sanctoral cycle in Jerusalem with additional commemorations of Stephen in later centuries (chap. 5); and the churches and shrines where the protomartyr's relics were deposited, venerated, and commemorated liturgically (chap. 6).

Stephen's priority in early liturgical calendars is highlighted by his presence at the beginning of the year in the Syriac Martyrology from 411, revealing a time when "the stature of Stephen was so great that his feast anchored the liturgical year itself" (25). M. corrects theories of origins, pointing out that Jerusalem was a latecomer to the cult of Stephen—a cult that was already known in the second half of the fourth century in parts of Asia, Syria, and Palestine. Thus, Jerusalem had to play catch-up and obtain the saint's relics. Before 415, the saint's cult was centred around a place—the Church of Holy Sion—so that the greatest of all martyrs could be honoured at the mother of all the churches. After 439, the cult focused on the Martyrion Church of St Stephen, which M. identifies as the impressive edifice arising from a joint venture of the city's bishop Juvenal financed by the empress Eudocia (130–140). The psalm and lection texts of Stephen's three feasts in the Armenian Lectionary—27 December, the second day of Epiphany, and the third day of the Paschal octave—are presented and analysed, showing how the first martyr was commemorated in the rhythm of Jerusalem's solemn feasts (120–128). After the "Jerusalem-oriented Stephen piety," manifested in the lives of Melania and

Eudocia (151), began to wane, Jerusalem's attention shifted to churches dedicated to the Theotokos Mary in later centuries and Stephen became a "symbol of one moment in the city's life" (153).

Throughout this book, the Armenian Lectionary is employed as one of the primary sources for tracing the liturgical cult of Stephen in Late Antique Jerusalem. While M. mentions that the liturgical content of its twelfth-century manuscript sources is dated between 456 and 479 (51 and 103–106), he does not make it altogether clear to the uninitiated reader until the end of the book (142–148) that this is a new dating. In effect, in his *Journal of Early Christian Studies* article from 2021, M. overturns the dating of the Armenian Lectionary to 417–439 by Charles Renoux, its editor, that had been previously accepted among scholars. M. argues for the later date based on various factors, one of the major ones being the identification of the Martyrion of St Stephen with the magnificent church of Juvenal and Eudocia dedicated on 15 May 439, and not the diakonikon of the Church of Sion. Nevertheless, despite the captivating prose of his narrative, M. wisely exercises caution in his conclusions: "In the face of our fragmentary data, we are as ill-advised to stop considering possibilities as we are to confidently embrace any of them" (150).

A few other possible minor enhancements to the book are worth noting. Chap. two presents a helpful analysis of the impact of the introduction of Christmas on 25 December and subsequent commemorations. However, it does not discuss the feasts of 26 December. Likewise, this book omits the work of Sever J. Voicu<sup>1</sup>, which presents the alternate tradition of the martyrdom of John the Theologian that better explains his place among feasts of other martyred apostles in Jerusalem's calendar at the end of December, after Christmas (55–58). In a similar vein, certain churches, shrines, or villages (i. e. Kephars Gamala/Jemmala) often mentioned in the book are absent from, or not easily identifiable, on the book's two maps (xiii–xiv).

This monograph appeared a year after the publication of the over six-hundred-page doctoral thesis of Damien Labadie.<sup>2</sup> Labadie's history of the cult of Stephen in the first six centuries of Christianity is accompanied by a florilegium of related accounts in French translation and a *clavis* to an inventory of all texts known in the dossier of Stephen (495–516), which M. acknowledges and discusses. Labadie's substantial tome has the advantage of providing the reader with more primary texts related to Stephen (443–493), rather than a few selected excerpts; nevertheless, M. is able to develop an analysis of the commemoration of Stephen in the fifth century, with greater attention to liturgical studies.

Overall, however, one is justified to ask if the focus on Jerusalem's cult of martyrs might not be exaggerating the centrality of Stephen as the *laus urbis* (62), sidelining the main reason for the martyrdom of Stephen, the construction of numerous churches and shrines by empresses, emperors, and bishops, the pilgrimages to the city, and the development of its stationary liturgy—namely, Jesus Christ and the events of his life, death, and resurrection described in the Gospels and central to Christian worship in Jerusalem from the fourth century onward.

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<sup>1</sup> Vgl. Sever J. VOICU: „Feste di Apostoli alla fine di dicembre“, in: *Studi sull'Oriente Cristiano* 8/2 (2004), 47–77.

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. Damien LABADIE: *L'invention du protomartyr Étienne*. Sainteté, pouvoir et controverse dans l'Antiquité (I<sup>er</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> s.), Brepols 2021 (Judaïsme ancien et origines du christianisme, 21).