

G. R. S. MEAD

***SIMON
MAGUS***

G. R. S. MEAD

***SIMON
MAGUS***

G. R. S. Mead

Simon Magus

**An Essay on the Founder of Simonianism Based on
the Ancient Sources With a Re-Evaluation of His
Philosophy and Teachings**

EAN 8596547011279

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.

PART I.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

I.— The Simon of the New Testament.

II.— The Simon of the Fathers.

III.— The Simon of the Legends.

I.— The Simon of the New Testament.

II.— The Simon of the Fathers.

III.— The Simon of the Legends .

PART II.

A REVIEW OF AUTHORITIES.

PART III.

THE THEOSOPHY OF SIMON.

INTRODUCTION.

Table of Contents

Everybody in Christendom has heard of Simon, the magician, and how Peter, the apostle, rebuked him, as told in the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles*. Many also have heard the legend of how at Rome this wicked sorcerer endeavoured to fly by aid of the demons, and how Peter caused him to fall headlong and thus miserably perish. And so most think that there is an end of the matter, and either cast their mite of pity or contempt at the memory of Simon, or laugh at the whole matter as the invention of superstition or the imagination of religious fanaticism, according as their respective beliefs may be in orthodoxy or materialism. This for the general. Students of theology and church history, on the other hand, have had a more difficult task set them in comparing and arranging the materials they have at their disposal, as found in the patristic writings and legendary records; and various theories have been put forward, not the least astonishing being the supposition that Simon was an alias for Paul, and that the Simon and Peter in the accounts of the fathers and in the narrative of the legends were simply concrete symbols to represent the two sides of the Pauline and Petrine controversies.

The first reason why I have ventured on this present enquiry is that Simon Magus is invariably mentioned by the heresiologists as the founder of the first heresy of the commonly-accepted Christian era, and is believed by them to have been the originator of those systems of religio-

philosophy and theosophy which are now somewhat inaccurately classed together under the heading of Gnosticism. And though this assumption of the patristic heresiologists is entirely incorrect, as may be proved from their own works, it is nevertheless true that Simonianism is the first system that, as far as our present records go, came into conflict with what has been regarded as the orthodox stream of Christianity. A second reason is that I believe that Simon has been grossly misrepresented, and entirely misunderstood, by his orthodox opponents, whoever they were, in the first place, and also, in the second place, by those who have ignorantly and without enquiry copied from them. But my chief reason is that the present revival of theosophical enquiry throws a flood of light on Simon's teachings, whenever we can get anything approaching a first-hand statement of them, and shows that it was identical in its fundamentals with the Esoteric Philosophy of all the great religions of the world.

In this enquiry, I shall have to be slightly wearisome to some of my readers, for instead of giving a selection or even a paraphrase of the notices on Simon which we have from authenticated patristic sources, I shall furnish verbatim translations, and present a digest only of the unauthenticated legends. The growth of the Simonian legend must unfold itself before the reader in its native form as it comes from the pens of those who have constructed it. Repetitions will, therefore, be unavoidable in the marshalling of authorities, but they will be shown to be not without interest in the subsequent treatment of the subject, and at any rate we shall at least be on the sure ground of

having before us all that has been said on the matter by the Church fathers. Having cited these authorities, I shall attempt to submit them to a critical examination, and so eliminate all accretions, hearsay and controversial opinions, and thus sift out what reliable residue is possible. Finally, my task will be to show that Simon taught a system of Theosophy, which instead of deserving our condemnation should rather excite our admiration, and that, instead of being a common impostor and impious perverter of public morality, his method was in many respects of the same nature as the methods of the theosophical movement of to-day, and deserves the study and consideration of all students of Theosophy.

This essay will, therefore, be divided into the following parts:

- —Sources of Information.
- —A Review of Authorities.
- —The Theosophy of Simon.



PART I.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

[Table of Contents](#)

Our sources of information fall under three heads: I. The Simon of the *New Testament*; II. The Simon of the Fathers; III. The Simon of the Legends.

I.—*The Simon of the New Testament.*

[Table of Contents](#)

Acts (viii. 9-24); author and date unknown; commonly supposed to be "by the author of the third gospel, traditionally known as Luke";^[1] not quoted prior to A.D. 177; ^[2] earliest MS. not older than the sixth century, though some contend for the third.

II.—*The Simon of the Fathers.*

[Table of Contents](#)

i. Justinus Martyr (*Apologia*, I. 26, 56; *Apologia*, II. 15; *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 120); probable date of First Apology A.D. 141; neither the date of the birth nor death of Justin is known; MS. fourteenth century.

ii. Irenæus (*Contra Hæreses*, I. xxiii. 1-4); chief literary activity last decennium of the second century; MSS.

probably sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries; date of birth and death unknown, for the former any time from A.D. 97-147 suggested, for latter 202-3.

iii. Clemens Alexandrinus (*Stromateis*, ii. 11; vii. 17); greatest literary activity A.D. 190-203; born 150-160, date of death unknown; oldest MS. eleventh century.

iv. Tertullianus (*De Præscriptionibus adversus Hæreticos*, 46, generally attributed to a Pseudo-Tertullian); c. A.D. 199; (*De Anima*, 34, 36); c. A.D. 208-9; born 150-160, died 220-240.

v. [Hippolytus (?)] (*Philosophumena*, vi. 7-20); date unknown, probably last decade of second to third of third century; author unknown and only conjecturally Hippolytus; MS. fourteenth century.

vi. Origenes (*Contra Celsum*, i. 57; v. 62; vi. 11); born A.D. 185-6, died 254-5; MS. fourteenth century.

vii. Philastrius (*De Hæresibus*); date of birth unknown, died probably A.D. 387.

viii. Epiphanius (*Contra Hæreses*, ii. 1-6); born A.D. 310-20, died 404; MS. eleventh century.

ix. Hieronymus (*Commentarium in Evangelicum Matthæi*, IV. xxiv. 5); written A.D. 387.

x. Theodoretus (*Hereticarum Fabularum Compendium*, i. 1); born towards the end of the fourth century, died A.D. 453-58; MS. eleventh century.

III.—*The Simon of the Legends.*

[Table of Contents](#)

A. The so-called Clementine literature.

i. *Recognitiones*, 2. *Homiliae*, of which the Greek originals are lost, and the Latin translation of Rufinus (born c.A.D. 345, died 410) alone remains to us. The originals are placed by conjecture somewhere about the beginning of the third century; MS. eleventh century.

B. A mediæval account; (*Constitutiones Sanctorum Apostolorum*, VI. vii, viii, xvi); these were never heard of prior to 1546, when a Venetian, Carolus Capellus, printed an epitomized translation of them from an MS. found in Crete. They are hopelessly apocryphal.

I.—*The Simon of the New Testament.*

[Table of Contents](#)

Acts (viii. 9-24). Text: *The Greek Testament* (with the readings adopted by the revisers of the authorized version); Oxford, 1881.

Now a certain fellow by name Simon had been previously in the city practising magic and driving the people of Samaria out of their wits, saying that he was some great one; to whom all from small to great gave heed, saying: "This man is the Power of God which is called Great." And they gave heed to him, owing to his having driven them out of their wits for a long time by his magic arts. But when they believed on Philip preaching about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women. And Simon himself also believed, and after being baptized remained constantly with Philip; and was driven out of *his* wits on seeing the signs and great wonders^[3] that took place.

And the apostles in Jerusalem hearing that Samaria had received the Word of God, sent Peter and John to them. And they went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet it had not fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized unto the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, he offered them money, saying: "Give unto me also this power, in order that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit."

But Peter said unto him: "Thy silver perish with thee, in that thou didst think that the gift of God is possessed with money. There is not for thee part or lot in this Word, for thy heart is not right before God. Therefore turn from this evil of thine, and pray the Lord, if by chance the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. For I see that thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

And Simon answered and said: "Pray ye on my behalf to the Lord, that none of the things that ye have said may come upon me."

II.—*The Simon of the Fathers.*

[Table of Contents](#)

i. Justinus Martyr (*Apologia*, I. 26). Text: *Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum Sæculi Secundi* (edidit Io. Car. Th. Eques de Otto); Jenæ, 1876 (ed. tert.).

And thirdly, that even after the ascension of the Christ into heaven the daemons cast before themselves (as a shield) certain men who said that they were gods, who were not only not expelled by you,^[4] but even thought worthy of honours; a certain Samaritan, Simon, who came from a village called Gitta; who in the reign of Claudius Cæsar^[5] wrought magic wonders by the art of the daemons who possessed him, and was considered a god in your imperial city of Rome, and as a god was honoured with a statue by you, which statue was erected in the river Tiber, between the two bridges, with the following inscription in Roman: "Simoni Deo Sancto." And nearly all the Samaritans, but few among the rest of the nations, confess him to be the first god and worship him. And they speak of a certain Helen, who went round with him at that time, and who had formerly prostituted herself,^[6] but was made by him his first Thought.

ii. Irenæus (*Contra Hæreses*, I. xxiii. 1-4). Text: *Opera* (edidit Adolphus Stieren); Lipsiæ, 1848.

1. Simon was a Samaritan, the notorious magician of whom Luke the disciple and adherent of the apostles says: "But there was a fellow by name Simon, who had previously practised the art of magic in their state, and led away the people of the Samaritans, saying that he was some great one, to whom they all listened, from the small to the great, saying: 'He is the Power of God, which is called Great.' Now they gave heed to him because he had driven them out of their wits by his magical phenomena." This Simon, therefore, pretended to be a believer, thinking that the apostles also wrought their cures by magic and not by the

power of God; and supposing that their filling with the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands those who believed in God, through that Christ Jesus who was being preached by them—that this was effected by some superior magical knowledge, and offering money to the apostles, so that he also might obtain the power of giving the Holy Spirit to whomsoever he would, he received this answer from Peter: "Thy money perish with thee, since thou hast thought that the gift of God is obtained possession of with money; for thee there is neither part nor lot in this Word, for thy heart is not right before God. For I see thou art in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

And since the magician still refused to believe in God, he ambitiously strove to contend against the apostles, so that he also might be thought of great renown, by extending his investigations into universal magic still farther, so that he struck many aghast; so much so that he is said to have been honoured with a statue for his magic knowledge by Claudius Cæsar.

He, therefore, was glorified by many as a god; and he taught that it was he himself who, forsooth, appeared among the Jews as the Son, while in Samaria he descended as the Father, and in the rest of the nations he came as the Holy Spirit. That he was the highest power, to wit, the Father over all, and that he allowed himself to be called by whatever name men pleased.

2. Now the sect of the Samaritan Simon, from whom all the heresies took their origin, was composed of the following materials.