

REVIEW

Heavenly Priesthood in the Apocalypse of Abraham. By ANDREI A. ORLOV. Pp. xii + 214. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. ISBN 978 1 107 03907 0. £55/\$99.

THE *Apocalypse of Abraham* belongs to a group of texts among the so-called Old Testament Pseudepigrapha which is preserved exclusively in Slavonic translation. It mirrors a religious milieu fascinated by mystical piety but reluctant towards all kinds of anthropomorphic speculations about God's appearance. For a long time scholars have noted relations between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and texts like *2 Enoch* or the *Ladder of Jacob*, which offer a similar mixture of apocalyptic and mystical traditions. But until now there had been little effort to study their special theological profile. Usually the *ApcAbr* has only served as a source for items like polemics against idololatry, heavenly ascent, or the figure of Abraham in general.

It is the great merit of Andrei Orlov to have asked in his recent book about the red thread or the main interest which holds the two parts of the *ApcAbr* (1–8 / 9–32) together. Is there any overarching perspective which could help one to understand the concerns of this text a little better? Orlov finds such a thread in the plethora of sacerdotal motifs throughout the whole book. It is the idea of true priesthood which serves as the link between the first haggadic and the second apocalyptic part. The picture is developed in some corresponding oppositions: the false earthly and the eternal celestial sanctuary, the idols and the Mighty one—but most of all the question of how to worship God properly. An answer is due to the 'picture' man has of God: here the text marks a sharp contrast between a visual pattern and an aural one. In a series of exhaustive analyses Orlov follows this line. He reads the *ApcAbr* in the wide horizon of apocalyptic, targumic, rabbinic, and mystic sources and looks for related motifs.

The book is divided into two parts, each consisting of three chapters. Part I is dedicated to 'Sanctuaries', dealing with the different types of 'temple' throughout the text. Part II is dedicated to 'Rituals', asking about the function these sanctuaries have. Here Orlov picks up his previous hypothesis of two fundamental paradigms in apocalyptic literature: the *Kavod* and the *Shem* paradigm. Whereas the first is focused on a visual

encounter with the divine body, the second describes the aural encounter with the divine voice, closely connected with a theology of the divine name (cf. Orlov, *Divine Manifestations in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha* [Piscataway, NJ, 2009], 1–18). The *ApcAbr* can be understood as the most elaborated example of such a non-visual, mostly aural mystical pattern.

This approach is developed in six chapters. Chapter 1, ‘The anthropomorphism of the earthly Temple: The idols of Terah’s family’, demonstrates that, already here in the first part, priestly concerns are a leading interest. Orlov perceives polemics not primarily with a polytheistic setting but first of all with divine body ideologies. So it is much more an internal Jewish controversy formulating a strictly anti-anthropomorphic theology. Many details observed here are very instructive. Orlov reads, for example, the rough story of the idol Barisat falling into the fire in the context of the much wider tradition of ‘testing by fire’ as proof of someone’s true divine nature; the name of Mar-Umath is linked to the claim of Kavod; the wooden idols are associated with the tale of the fallen tree; and still others. Chapter 2, ‘The aniconism of the celestial Temple: The abode of the divine Voice’, deepens and substantiates the Shem-paradigm in the *ApcAbr* rooted in biblical tradition, specially in Deuteronomic theology. Interestingly, Orlov interprets Abraham’s ascent mediated by his song as a sign of ‘spatial dynamics of the aural mysticism’. In this context there are some intriguing observations concerning the griffin-like shape of the angel Yahoel and his bird-like adversary Azazel, which function as strategy to avoid all anthropomorphic associations.

Chapter 3, ‘The corporealism of the demonic Temple: The *Kavod* of Azazel’, further investigates the true character of the divine mirrored by its negative counterpart. How far is it possible to speak here about a dualistic structure? Relating Azazel to the fall of the protoplasts again establishes a link to Part I and to the theme of idolatry. Chapter 4, ‘The priestly settings of the text: The Yom Kippur ceremony’, argues that the *ApcAbr* ‘might reflect a Yom Kippur liturgical setting’. That is principally due to some Mosaic allusions in Abraham’s priestly initiations. But the main link is between the scapegoat motif and the figure of Azazel in the *ApcAbr* as well as in the idea of two different ‘lots’. ‘The hero’s transition from the polluted and destroyed sanctuary, depicted in the first part of the story, to the true place of worship shown him by the Deity, in the second part of the story, is mediated by the atoning ritual’ (p. 118). Chapter 5, ‘The transformation of the celebrants’, deals with

the motif of attire and garments as symbols of glory gained or lost. Again the Garden of Eden and the fall of men appears in the background. Lastly, chapter 6, 'The mysteries of the throne room', illuminates the strategy of revelation Abraham is honoured with. This chapter gives a detailed analysis of the enigmatic pargot, which functions like a screen on which the patriarch can watch the history of the world and its recent state simultaneously. Here one finds vast material which proves once more the affinity of *ApcAbr* with the Merkavah texts of the mystical tradition. The 'Conclusion' is in short the following: the book has proven the 'significance of the *ApcAbr* for the history of early Jewish mystical developments'; it is 'a manifestation of an important religious paradigm shift, considering it to be a conceptual bridge between the worlds of Jewish apocalypticism and Early Jewish mysticism' (p. 190).

Orlov's book stimulates many questions. I want to ask only two. Does the 'priestly profile' also betray a special sociological setting? Secondly, what could be the interest of recipients in the Slavonic countries in reading the book and including it—for example—in the Paleja? Perhaps these studies are able to shed light also on related texts like *2 Enoch* and *Ladder of Jacob*. Nevertheless, the reader will find a rich repository of texts and observations which offer him solid ground. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* remains an enigmatic text. But thanks to the author some riddles may be solved.

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CHRISTFRIED BÖTTRICH
Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität
 chr.boettrich@uni-greifswald.de