

ALEXANDER KULIK, *3 Baruch. Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch*. Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature – CEJL, Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010, pp. xi + 447, ISBN 978-3-11-021248-8.

In the recent volume of the series *Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature* (CEJL) Alexander Kulik (thereafter K.) deals with the Greek-Slavonic Apocalypse of Baruch, also called 3Baruch. Recognizing that this apocalypse is definitely the most neglected among the six major Jewish apocalypses – according to K. these are 1Enoch, 2Enoch, Apocalypse of Abraham, 2Baruch, 3Baruch and 4Ezra – K. intends to stimulate awareness of the book at all and to motivate further research in order to provide further insights into its world. Probably, 3Baruch is one of the most mysterious and enigmatic Jewish Hellenistic texts so that a comprehensive commentary as provided by K. is very much welcome. K. successfully unveils some of the myths around and within this peculiar apocalypse. By doing so, K.'s work will serve as a milestone study for further research for a considerable period of time.

After a brief general introduction (3-6) K. deals with the manuscript evidence (7-8), provides a rather short history of research on two pages only (9-10), discusses the issues of original language (11), date (12) and provenance (13-15) of 3Baruch and its content (16-33) and message (34-37). Consequently, he reflects upon the traditions and transmission of the apocalypse, Biblical citations and allusions, Christian interpolations, explanatory expansions, and other textual phenomena, the relationship between Slavonic Version (S) and its Greek "Vorlage" (R^s) and between other recensions and traditions. The section on 'content' is more or less a summary of the main narrative of 3Baruch. The text's main topics are retribution and afterlife, and cosmology. The heading 'method' (38-50) represents a discussion of the *Sitz im Leben* of 3Baruch, of a potential differentiation between "canonical biblical texts and popular apocalyptic writings outside the canon" (41), and, again, cosmology. Next is 'worldview' (51-59) with the keywords 'god', 'angels', 'demons', 'physical world', 'history', 'moral', 'retribution', 'afterlife', and 'numeric symbolism'. Finally, K. summarizes his observations on just one page (60) as 'general conclusions'. A thematic bibliography with a list of abbreviations included (61-85) enables readers to trace references in the following main section of the book, i.e. the translation and commentary. Another helping hand is provided by means of indices at the end of the book (389-447; references, names and subjects, and authors).

Individual textual passages are presented and dealt with as follows: first comes English translations of the Greek and Slavonic arranged next to each other so that readers can easily spot overlap, missing sections, parallels and differences. Then there are notes in which K. presents alternative readings, which are given in their original language (Greek and Slavonic), and comments on them.

Eventually a detailed commentary is provided with lexicographical, semantic and hermeneutic notes. The richness of text references is almost overwhelming and will serve as a treasure box for further research into specific passage. In addition, there are four excursuses: dimensions of heaven (132-136), cosmic hydrology (180-186), tree of knowledge (187-222), and cosmic hydrology continued (298-303). The term excursus, however, is misleading as these four sections do not primarily offer additional in-depth information and so are not “asides”. They are presented in an identical manner as the other textual units. Thus, the sections could also have been presented without the heading ‘excursus’.

It is not the place to check and discuss every detail in this rich commentary, which, so to speak, represents a pioneer work on 3Baruch. K.’s depiction of the so-called ‘celestial bestiary in 4.1-5G (Greek) and 4.1-3aS (Slavonic) can be proof enough for his meticulous and comprehensive treatment of special issues. As usual K. provides a rich number of relevant references and at the same time carefully analyses the textual unit the bestiary is embedded into (155-178 with conclusions on 177-178). Of course, terms like ‘serpent’, ‘Hades’, the notorious ‘Leviathan’ and ‘Behemoth’ and their traditions are addressed (interestingly, Shakespeare’s Sonnet CXLVI is also referred to). K. concludes that the “‘triadic’ appearance of Beasts”, as he coins it, links 3Baruch here with early Jewish traditions and similar ones in the Near East. Without doubt, it is impossible for K. to be comprehensive in every section of the book. The commentary would have become a massive volume that would be hard to handle at all. But, as a suggestion, the ‘bestiary’ in the Hebrew and Greek Psalms of the Bible could also serve to illuminate the meaning and background of the beasts in 3Baruch. Therefore, an explicit excursus in that respect could have been and still is of interest.

Be that as it may and leaving this and other minor aspects aside, K. is to be thanked for the hard work he did. With this fine commentary the complex and occasionally hard to understand apocalypse is now more easily available and accessible to a wider circle of scholars that is larger than the exclusive group of researchers who have the skill to read and translate Slavonic texts just so. It is to be hoped that K.’s meticulous studies will promote knowledge of 3Baruch and at the same time initiate further research into this and other fascinating writings of that kind.

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