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Peter Schäfer, *Zwei Götter im Himmel. Gottesvorstellungen in der jüdischen Antike*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2017. ISBN: 978-3-406-704123. 200 S.

With his study of binitarian ideas in ancient Judaism before and after the destruction of the Second Temple, Peter Schäfer amends the traditional notion of a strictly monotheistic Judaism from which Christianity distinguished itself with its elevation of Jesus as the “son of God” and the creation of trinitarianism. The book is also a response to Daniel Boyarin’s scholarship on the relationship between Judaism and Christianity and a correction of Boyarin’s alleged misunderstandings of Schäfer’s prior studies on Jesus and Judaism. Methodologically, Schäfer provides close readings of the most important pre-and post-70 Jewish references to a second “power in heaven”, including Philo, texts from Qumran, the Enochic tradition, rabbinic texts, and Hekhalot literature. This is the first time that all of this material is presented together and the cumulative impact is truly astonishing. It becomes clear that even in christological matters early Christianity was firmly based on Judaism and “usurped” Jewish binitarian ideas. In later centuries Babylonian Judaism, as evident in the Babylonian Talmud and Hekhalot literature, constituted an alternative strand, which stood in a dynamic relationship with Christian theological discourse. In late antiquity and the early Middle Ages, rabbis and Jewish mystics vacillated between criticism, rejection, maintenance, and further development of binitarian ideas.

At the very beginning of Schäfer’s study of binitarian deliberations in post-exilic Judaism stands the vision of Daniel 7, where the “son of man” (7:13), whom Schäfer identifies with the archangel Michael, appears as the heavenly representative of Israel. An angel receives a quasi-divine status here. The motifs of judgment, kingdom, and dominion appear here already alongside the distinction between the “son of man” and the “ancient of days”, that is, a main/older and subordinated/younger divine figure. Schäfer shows how the motifs of Daniel’s vision were further developed in Jewish texts such as the Daniel-Apocryphon from Qumran,

where the biblical “son of man”, probably an angelic being, becomes the “son of God” expected to save his people Israel at the end of times. He argues that in Jewish literature from the Second Temple period a binitarian paradigm was created that reached its climax with Metatron in Hekhalot literature of the sixth to ninth centuries.

A problem with the focus on Daniel 7 is the neglect of messianic texts in the Bible and their impact on later Jewish messianic and binitarian ideas. Isaiah 11:1-9, for example, contains a number of elements that reappear in some of the later texts discussed here but is never mentioned. For example, the spirit of God and of wisdom and understanding is said to rest upon the Davidic messiah, who is associated with judgment over all humans and with a utopian vision of world peace. Isaiah may not present the messiah as divine, but aspects of such biblical messianic traditions were taken up, developed, and combined with other biblical and non-biblical figures and motifs in later texts that Schäfer identifies as binitarian.

It seems that in post-biblical Jewish literature the notion that a human being might be elevated to reach a quasi-divine status or that an angel ruled over other angels and became an intermediary before God was expressed in many different forms and motif-combinations. Obviously, one may disagree with Schäfer on some of his interpretations of particular words and phrases. He sees another form of Jewish binitarianism in wisdom literature, where wisdom is personified, said to have been created before the world, enthroned in heaven, and believed to rule over humankind. Rather than considering wisdom identical with the logos and holy spirit, as Schäfer does, that is, with terms that became significant in Christianity, one might point to motif connections (e.g., wisdom, spirit, judgment, righteousness) between biblical and post-biblical and amongst post-biblical Jewish texts. A so-called *Bildfeldanalyse*, an analysis of the occurrence of motifs and motif-combinations, would be called for here. Despite its believed closeness to God, wisdom differs from the “son of man” and highest angel images, not least because it was perceived as a power that emanates from heaven and is immanent in the world and human souls.

Some of the cited texts, such as the hymn of self-glorification found at Qumran, where a human (the teacher of righteousness?) presents himself as divine, are fragmentary and puzzling. Their reach within ancient Judaism may have been rather limited. This consideration also applies to some of the other texts discussed here: their very existence and survival does not necessarily tell us anything about their use and function within ancient Judaism. Where some of the more exaggerated binitarian views well-known or marginal, do they belong into the centre of ancient Jewish religiosity, whatever that is, or were they held by particular individuals and more or less small groups only?

This leads us to a statement the author makes about rabbinic Judaism. After having confirmed that binitarian views are basically absent from Palestinian rabbinic literature, he discusses a few Babylonian Talmudic texts that refute and criticise notions of a Davidic messiah sitting on a throne next to God (b. Hag. 14a par. b. Sanh. 38b). The very fact that the editors of the Bavli include a text that is critical of “two powers in heaven” does not mean that such views were held within Babylonian rabbinic circles themselves. Certainly, R. Aqiva, with whom such views are associated, cannot be viewed as a representative of binitarian rabbis. Therefore Schäfer’s claim that “the ‘heresy’ that is fought against must be located in the centre of rabbinic Judaism” (146) is not substantiated by the evidence of the sources.

Many of the Jewish and early Christian texts discussed here were created in a Hellenistic and Roman context. Therefore the question whether and to what extent Graeco-Roman ideas had an impact on the development, interpretation, and adaptation of biblical notions of the messiah, son of man, Enoch, and angels becomes crucial. For example, a Roman emperor could be called “son of the divine”. The discussion of the Jewish and Christian development of binitarian ideas can therefore not be conducted internally only but needs to take the entire intertextual context that includes Graeco-Roman mythology -- and for the Babylonian Jewish texts the Persian context -- into account. If Hekhalot literature points to sixth- to ninth-century Persia as the main context in which binitarianism developed in Judaism, then the situation shortly before and after the Islamic conquest of Iran becomes significant: not only the marginality and lack of authority

of eastern Christianity but also the increasing decline of Zoroastrianism may have played a role. Hopefully, such investigations will be carried out in future scholarship.

These questions are not meant as criticism but to stimulate further discussion on the topic. I found Schäfer's presentation of the wide range of ideas beyond the boundaries of a strictly defined Jewish monotheism fascinating and his argumentation intriguing. The book is a must-read not only for students and scholars of ancient Judaism and early Christianity but also for those interested in the wider study of religions.

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