



Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2013.12.16

Daniel C. Olson, *A New Reading of the Animal Apocalypse of 1 Enoch: 'All Nations Shall be Blessed.'* Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha 24. Leiden: Brill, 2013. \$140. ISBN: 9789004245303.

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The main thrust of Olson's argument is that the *Animal Apocalypse* of *1 En.* 85-90 (hereafter *AnAp*) "can be read as a sophisticated theological interpretation of human history as well as a contemporary political document" (235). More specifically, Olson proposes a reading strategy for *AnAp* based on the following interrelated points. First, *AnAp* envisages salvation that is universal in scope. This comes to the fore in *1 En.* 90:37-38, which depicts all of humanity— Jew and Gentile alike – as white cattle. Second, this theological perspective is occasioned principally by Olson's understanding of the white bull in *1 En.* 90:37 as "the *true Jacob*, the patriarch of the 'true Israel'" (31, italics original). The emergence of this eschatological figure signals the complete fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise to bless all nations through his offspring (Gen 22:28; 26:4; 27:14). Third, this theological message was imbedded in *AnAp*'s historiographical allegory in order to garner political support for the "fledgling Maccabean revolt" from Jews of varying religious and political commitments (105). Having briefly laid out the constitutive components of Olson's new reading, I will now comment and critique the individual chapters of the book.

Olson's introductory chapter is a well-adjudicated and concise evaluation of fundamental questions in contemporary research on *AnAp*. As is to be expected, Olson's constant sparing partners here and throughout the volume are Patrick Tiller, George Nickelsburg, and Daniel Assefa. He also makes some use of his former work on *AnAp*, calling special attention to where his thinking has developed since his treatment in *Enoch: A New Translation: The Ethiopic Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch, Translated with Annotations and Cross-References* (in consultation with Archbishop Melkesedek Workeneh; North Richland Hills, Tex.: BIBAL Press, 2004). Olson isolates three central issues that factor significantly in the following chapters: (i) the scope and focus of the allegory's salvific vision; (ii) the relationship between human history and divine salvation; and (iii) the basis for moral responsibility within this framework (4). Olson draws the chapter to a close by situating his thesis in the stream of these open issues.

The following three chapters come together as part two of the volume, entitled "The *Animal Apocalypse* and the Offspring of Abraham." In chapter one Olson advances the case that the eschatological white bull of *1 En.* 90:37 is not to be understood as a Davidic messiah, a second Adam, or a son of man-like figure, but as the true Jacob. Since the Jacob cycle of Genesis receives little attention in the Enochic tradition, Olson proceeds through some of the Enochic booklets that now constitute Ethiopic *1 Enoch* with an eye to how Enoch's and Jacob's character portraits mirror one another. The strongest of

Olson's proposed correspondences derive from close thematic parallels between the visionary careers of these patriarchs in Genesis and the *Book of Watchers* (37-42). In this respect, I suggest that *AnAp* aligns with a trend in the Aramaic Dead Sea Scrolls for crafting new dreamers and visionaries on existing prototypes (e.g., Joseph → Daniel in Dan 2-7; Enoch → Levi in *Aramaic Levi Document*; Levi → Amram in *Visions of Amram*).

The correspondences Olson suggests for the remaining Enochic works, however, are less certain. With respect to the *Astronomical Book* (*1 En.* 72-82), Olson's proposed correspondences are based on a limited understanding of the functions of history and historiography in ancient Jewish apocalypses. Olson boldly states that by the second century B.C.E. a "specific script" had emerged for "'historical review' apocalypses," a claim he supports by a brief mention of the Enochic *Apocalypse of Weeks*, Dan 8-11, and *AnAp* (42). This understanding, then, allows him to accentuate the similarities between *1 En.* 81:1-2 and *Jub.* 32:21, both of which depict Enoch learning human history through reading heavenly tablets. Olson claims that "no other characters play this particular and carefully scripted role, so far as is known" (43). There is, however, some room for nuance here. Visionaries who read divine tablets appear in a number of ancient Aramaic pseudepigraphs. Characters often glean some insight into history (and other types of knowledge) from divine records and, in some cases, relay or inscribe their revelations (e.g. the *Genesis Apocryphon*, the *Book of Giants*, *New Jerusalem*, *Words of Michael*, *Testament of Jacob?*, *Apocryphon of Levi^b?*, and *Visions of Amram*). While many of these works are fragmentary and their full narrative settings unknown, the presence of the 'tablet/writing' motif across a host of Aramaic dream-vision literature up to and including the second century B.C.E. is a challenge to Olson's conclusion.

The family resemblances between Enoch and Jacob that Olson perceives in the *Epistle of Enoch* also tend toward the general and are based on a rather overdeveloped view of the testament genre considering the early date of his sources. Olson is correct that Jacob's final farewell in Gen 49 provides an important scriptural model for the genre (44-45), but his treatment could have benefitted from some engagement with other ancient works that have some testamentary flavour (e.g., *Aramaic Levi Document*, *Testament of Qahat*, and *Visions of Amram*). Lastly, while Olson treads lightly around the problem of the lack of evidence for the *Parables of Enoch* until at least the turn of the Common Era, he concludes that the tradent of this late Enochic booklet was also "trafficking in Jacob lore" (47). Drawing all of the cumulative evidence together, Olson sees fit to conclude that there is "a consistent undercurrent of dialogue between ongoing Jacob and Enoch traditions" (50). The *Animal Apocalypse*, he avers, is but one more voice in the choir.

In chapter two Olson explores the contents of history between Jacob of the patriarchal days and the typological 'Jacob' of the eschatological era. The core of this chapter is a blend of motif-criticism and tradition-historical work on some recurring themes and terms in *AnAp*. Building on similarities between Enoch and Jacob's visionary profiles, Olson advances the case that the motif of "open eyes" symbolizes both an authentic experience of the divine and a proper pattern of behaviour. He argues this by way of Exod 16:4-10, which reports on the Israelites seeing the glory of Yahweh in a cloud. Olson provides a fresh interpretive option to traditional understandings that associate the phrase with the giving of the law or Sinai theophany. Olson then tracks the black/white color coding of the *dramatis personae* in the allegory as well as the *leitmotif* of straying versus staying/returning. He rightly perceives that these motifs engender a theological tension between determinism and moral culpability. Olson's allowing for some interplay between these is an advisable hermeneutic (81).

The third chapter concerns the historical context of *AnAp*'s allegory. As Olson acknowledges, this section may "seem like an extended excursus from the main thesis of the study" (110). He describes several prongs of *AnAp*'s historiographical strategy and theorizes its propagandistic quality in some rather specific directions. First, Olson argues that *AnAp* was intended to have broad appeal, its author showing great care not to retreat into a group specific understanding of history and the eschaton. Olson proposes

that it “attaches no permanent or pivotal importance to the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic monarchy, or the Temple cultus, but it does not pick a fight with Jews who do” (92). However, the reverse case is equally conceivable: unhinging such central institutions from Israel’s scripture and history could have limited *AnAp*’s appeal and narrow its readership. Second, Olson argues that the allegory’s presentation of history is the result of a subtle exegetical fusion of a 490 year model with a four-kingdom chronological scheme (102). After his argument of the makings of this historiographical mechanism, Olson states, “[t]here is an odd feature to this system: *It is not obvious, and it seems deliberately so*” (104, italics original). The reason, Olson alleges, is that the allegory’s historiographical complexity was crafted with the author’s most esteemed readers in mind: “the educated leadership in Jerusalem” (105). Olson imagines that by presenting (literally, with “talking points” [105]) *AnAp*’s pseudepigraphic prognostication to this elite crowd, an Enochian scribe could lead his audience into exegetically deducing for themselves that the prophecy was reliable and authoritative. Once the upper echelon deemed the prophecy as trustworthy, “[t]heir endorsement would carry weight in synagogues and on the street” (105). To support this specific compositional theory and targeted propaganda strategy, Olson would need to conduct more detailed and directed historical-critical legwork. In the end, the core thesis mapped out in the foregoing chapters is still defensible without the proposed social location(s) advanced in this section.

Part two of the book comprises four chapters, which provide a translation and commentary on *AnAp*. After some methodological remarks in chapter four, chapter five puts the translation the reader might expect to follow immediately on hiatus and takes a detour into translation equivalences for the animals in the allegory. This information is valuable, especially the tables on pp. 122 and 129. These might now be considered in light of Bennie H. Reynold’s recent study on symbolic equivalences in ancient apocalypses (Between Symbolism and Realism: The Use of Symbolic and Non-Symbolic Language in Ancient Jewish Apocalypses 333-63 B.C.E. [Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011], 161-90). At many points Olson expertly navigates difficult philological issues in the Aramaic, Greek, and Ethiopic witnesses and advances our understanding of several details in the text. From an organizational point of view, however, this section might have been either condensed and integrated in the ensuing commentary or included in an excursus or appendix.

In chapter six Olson provides a fresh translation of *AnAp*, supplemented with textual notes and explanatory comments. Once again, while this section makes many important contributions to our understanding of the text in the *minutae*, it feels somewhat detached from the main thesis of the book. At points Olson’s comments circle back to the theological emphases put forth in chapters one and two. The commentary he offers, however, does not provide a uniform and consistent foundation for his theological reading of *AnAp* from start to finish. Despite this disconnect, Olson’s catalogue of text-critical and philological data is of great value and complements the notes in Patrick Tiller’s and George Nickelsburg’s commentaries on *AnAp*.

In part three Olson brings the study back to his main thesis and outlines some implications of his new reading for three cognate areas of research. First, he suggests that the wisdom undertones of his theological/historical interpretation of *AnAp*’s allegory provide an opportunity for rethinking the proximity of wisdom and apocalyptic thought. Second, Olson proposes that this new understanding of *AnAp* casts light on the makings of the Maccabean revolt and the encounter of Jewish thought and life with Hellenistic culture in that era. Third, as might be expected given the direction of Olson’s new reading, he calls attention to some contrasts and continuities between *AnAp*’s salvific model and that of the Apostle Paul. In schematic form Olson suggests two avenues of comparison: (i) understandings of Jew-Gentile relations in the future of Israel, and (ii) conceptions of the Messiah as both the seed of Abraham and new Adam (242).

After the formal conclusion of the study, Olson provides a worthwhile appendix on allusions to *AnAp* in the *Epistle of Barnabas* and the *Apocalypse of Elijah*. These analyses provide insightful

glimpses into the channels of reception some ancient Jewish Aramaic literature had in early Christianity. Additionally, these examples remind us that some of the earliest interpretations of *AnAp* were, like Olson's, thoroughly theological.

It is not uncommon to encounter explanations of *AnAp* that reduce the work's complicated allegory to the mere identification of its symbolic actors. However, as Olson has shown, *AnAp*'s allegory is strategically crafted in light of several theological, political, and historiographical concerns. The close consideration of these aspects opens new questions regarding the ancient contexts of *AnAp*'s writers and readers. Olson's reading provides a model of how all of these aspects of the text might come together in a single conversation. His handling of several difficult interpretive impasses and his expert navigation of the primary texts will no doubt serve as a departure point for additional fresh readings of this ancient work.