

A. MÜHLING, »Blickt auf Abraham, euren Vater«. *Abraham als Identifikationsfigur des Judentums in der Zeit des Exils und des Zweiten Tempels* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 236; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

Abraham is one of the most important figures in the Bible and plays a very important role in the three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The reception of biblical figures and topics in later literature and traditions of religious communities is currently one of the most promising fields of research. Hence, Anke Mühling chose an ideal subject for her dissertation that was accepted by the Faculty of Theology of the Ruprecht-Karls-University of Heidelberg in 2008 (advisors: Jan Christian Gertz and Manfred Oeming). Mühling analyzes and demonstrates the inner- and extra-biblical development of the figure Abraham from its origins to the “father of all faithful,” the figure of identification for Jews in the time of the Second Temple. The subtitle of her work thus summarizes her thesis and the area of her study: the reception of Abraham in Jewish literature during the Hellenistic and Roman eras. The New Testament is addressed briefly in an *excursus*, though Mühling does not treat the reception of Abraham in the Qur’an. Within these delineated contours of research Mühling develops an argument that is clearly structured and amply

supported, with a sound evaluation of the available evidence. Her book provides a very helpful overview of a reasonable hypothesis about the origins of the Genesis texts about Abraham and of their reception in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple.

After a brief introduction clarifying the method and structure of her study, Mühling focuses first on the Abraham narratives in the Book of Genesis. She explores current research on this material and summarizes recent tendencies regarding the origin of the Abraham traditions. Within this chapter, Mühling identifies the Abraham-Lot narrative as the literary core and earliest part of the biblical Abraham story. The story as such, however, goes back to the work of the Priestly writer (*Priesterschrift*; P) who created a coherent narrative thread in the late exilic or early post-exilic era. This writer makes Abraham a figure of identification: Abraham is the bearer of the divine promise which holds true even through the crisis of the Exile; one of the most important signs of Jewish identity, circumcision, is associated with Abraham; and Abraham represents a kind of “ecumenical” openness toward other peoples who are not basically excluded from divine blessing. The P narrative, however, was later expanded by several texts on different stages: Gen 12:10-20; Genesis 14; 15; 18:17-19, 22b-32; Genesis 20-22; Genesis 24.

In her second chapter, Mühling analyzes the occurrences of Abraham in the other books of the Hebrew Bible. Here, Abraham is mostly used in a stereotypical and stylized manner, mainly in the Patriarchs’ triple. The great reviews of Israelite history in post-exilic times – Joshua 24, Nehemiah 9, or Psalm 105 – connect the Patriarchs’ story with the Exodus tradition: Israel’s history of salvation begins with Abraham. It is remarkable that the other books of the Hebrew Bible refer back only sporadically to the well-known stories about Abraham in Genesis.

In the third chapter, Mühling deals with Jewish writings from the Greco-Roman period that were transmitted within the Septuagint. She analyzes the reception of the figure of Abraham in the following books and texts: Judith, Tobit, 1 Maccabees, 3 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, LXX-Job, Wisdom of Solomon, Ben Sira, Psalms of Solomon, Prayer of Manasseh, Prayer of Azariah, and the prayers of Mordechai and Esther. In these “deuterocanonical” writings, Abraham becomes more and more a paradigmatic figure. The Jews in the diaspora begin to identify themselves with the first patriarch: Abraham symbolizes a new beginning and works as an example of how to behave in a “polytheistic” environment. He becomes an example for faithfulness; his behavior is representative for a life according to the divine commandments. Finally, the genealogical relationship becomes more and more important: Jews trace back their origin to Abraham as eponymous ancestor: however, Abraham is also regarded as a “father” of other peoples, especially the Spartans (see 1 Macc 12:21).

Mühling turns to the other Jewish writings from the Greco-Roman period in her fourth chapter. She deals with the para-biblical texts found in Qumran and other occurrences of Abraham in various writings and fragments. Then she analyzes the reception of the figure of Abraham in fragments of the works of Jewish and non-Jewish writers (c.g., Artapanus, Ezekiel the tragedian, Pseudo-Eupolemus, and Pseudo-Hecataios). Major sections of Mühling’s study treat the occurrences of “Abraham” in the works of Philo of Alexandria, in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (i.e., Pseudo-Philo), in the writings of Josephus, in the Apocalypse of Abraham, in the Testament of Abraham, and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. In an *excursus* of 14 pages, Mühling examines the reception of Abraham in the New Testament. The wide variety of literature that she considers underscores the many different shades and functions of the figure of Abraham in early Judaism and Christianity. In her summary she concludes that the authors generally tend to smooth over transitions between the different episodes, to clarify problems of

understanding and inconsistencies, and to fill narrative gaps of the Genesis texts. The overall tendency is to avoid misunderstandings and to revise the texts in order to produce a "positive" picture of Abraham. On the other hand, the figure of Abraham is used for theological arguments and "historical" or "genealogical" reconstructions. The "cipher" Abraham can be filled with various contents, depending on the stance of the authors toward Hellenistic philosophy: Abraham is received in a particularistic way (Abraham as father of Israel) as well as in a universalistic way (Abraham as father of many peoples). For both aspects one can find traces in the biblical texts. Although the various pictures of Abraham in these writings are not consistent with one another, in all of them he is presented as a great hero with a growing reputation and importance.

In the last chapter, Mühlhng sharpens her thesis with the help of her many observations from the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. She describes in a systematic way, how Abraham became a figure of identification for the Judaism of this era. Abraham functions as a figure of identification in an individual way (Abraham as an example for the individual believer) as well as in a collective way (Abraham as *heros eponymos* for the people of Israel). Mühlhng identifies the following topics that play important roles in this development: Abraham dissociates himself from idolatry and reaches the cognition of the one true God; Abraham is a wise man and a philosopher; he is an example for faithfulness and as a believer. In an exclusivistic-particularistic way, Abraham functions as *heros eponymos* for Israel (only!) and thus becomes a marker of identity for the Jewish in-group. Other writings show a rather inclusivistic-universalistic way of reception: here Abraham is the father of many peoples. This paradigm is especially clear in early Christian uses of Abraham (e.g., Paul in the New Testament). The migrations of Abraham throughout the whole Fertile Crescent invite the Jews in the Diaspora to identify with this figure. Regarding Genesis 14, Abraham appears as a military hero and a royal figure; but Abraham is also a prophet (Gen 20:7) and "God's friend" (Isa 41:8; 2Chr 20:7, especially in the Septuagint). A further important topic is Abraham's relationship to the law: he keeps the law even before it was revealed on Mount Sinai; he is the exemplary keeper of the Torah.

In a literary-historical perspective, Mühlhng concludes that one cannot gain decisive results from the reception history for the question of the origin of the texts about Abraham in Genesis. There is no external evidence in the non-biblical literature of any separate traditions besides the biblical texts. The occurrences of Abraham in the Jewish literature of the Second Temple period all presuppose the (to a great extent finished) biblical text of the Torah and bear no witness to any intermediate stages in the process of the growing of the biblical text. These results confirm the borders of the canon that emerged later on. The history of reception also confirms the assumed late date of Genesis 22: while this text is hardly referred to in the Hebrew Bible, it becomes one of the major reference points in the writings of the Greco-Roman period. The plausible explanation for this phenomenon points to a late post-exilic date of origin for Genesis 22. More generally, the observations from the reception of the Abraham texts in Genesis in later Jewish literature of the Second Temple period support the newer redaction-critical hypotheses about the origin and development of the Pentateuch rather than the older view of different and independent sources. The large variety of ideas about Abraham results from various successive revisions of and additions to a literary basis (*Fortschreibungen*). This process of reworking stretches from the post-exilic (Persian) to the early Hellenistic period.

Anke Mühlhng wrote her book in an accessible style and presents plausible insights and conclusions as well as an important overview over a large amount of texts. After a longer passage of demonstration, a short summary brings the results to the point; this happens several times in the book and enables the reader to keep pace. An index of

Biblical and deuterocanonical passages enables the usefulness of the book. Mühlhng's study is an important contribution to the history of religion and literature of the Second Temple period; the book is an important tool for theologians as well as for scholars in Religious Studies.

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