Book Reviews

Christian Blumenthal

Allweiser Schöpfer und durchsetzungsstarker Gesetzgeber. Eine Studie zur erzählerischen Entfaltung im 4 Makkabäerbuch (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 35), Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016. Pp. 217. €79,95. ISBN 978-3-11046655-3.

The book—published in the excellent series for Deuterocanonical and Cognate Scriptural literature at De Gruyter—engages in an extensive narrative reading of 4 Maccabees. It is a thorough reading of 4 Maccabees in comparison with 2 Maccabees, with a particular focus on the role of God as omniscient creator and forceful giver of the law. The book is comprised of four chapters, of which chapter three constitutes the bulk of the text (pp. 65-186). A brief introductory chapter of twenty pages presents the state of research with respect to the image of God in 4 Maccabees, the method applied as well as the approach and problem of the study. The second chapter (pp. 21-64) delves on the structure of 4 Maccabees, the locations of the statements on God in the development of the text, statistical findings as regards the various parts of the text, reflections on the situation of communication underlying the book, and deliberations relating to respectively dynamic and static representations of God in relation to the recounted world of the text. This is followed by the extensive third chapter which comprises twenty-six sub-sections pertaining to different parts of the text. The chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the different representations of God in relation to the progress of the story-world. Finally, Blumenthal concludes his study with nine pages of concluding reflections (pp. 187-95). The volume has an overview of text editions and translations of 4 Maccabees in English, French, German, and Spanish (but not Italian or other relevant European languages) as well as indices of sources and topics.

The virtue of the book lies in its intensive reading of 4 Maccabees and in this regard its distinct focus on the representations of God throughout the book. Through a variety of tables in which 4 Maccabees is contrasted with 2 Maccabees, the relationship between the two becomes evident, but strangely enough the author does not enter into discussions of 4 Maccabees as a piece of

rewritten Scripture on 2 Maccabees. This would have been obvious in particular with respect to the question of the authoritative relationship between two writings. Was 4 Maccabees, for instance, deliberately meant to correct the representations of God conveyed by 2 Maccabees, and if so where does that leave the textual predecessor in terms of authoritative writing? Was it rather thought of as a supplementary elaboration of 2 Maccabees in a philosophical mode, and when affirmatively, what would that imply for the understanding of the two texts, both from an actor's and an observer's level of analysis?

Such questions are not dealt with in Blumenthal's book despite their obviousness. Even more puzzling, however, is the fact that although the book is meant to be a study of the narrative unfolding of the image of God, it hardly has recourse to narrative theory. The narratology provided in the theoretical and methodological parts of the book originates with Wolf Schmid,¹ but I would expect from someone working extensively on narratology to use classic narrative theory such as Claude Bremond and Greimas, for instance. The lack of thorough familiarity with narrative theory is evident from the book, which to a great extent remains at the level of recounting. The significance of transitions from discourse to narrative both within the story-world (the narrate) as well as in the enunciation (the narration) and their importance for the intended addressees are not highlighted, nor is the important discussion of 4 Maccabees as a discourse rather than a narrative dealt with in any depth. This is a pity. Personally, I would expect a study aimed to provide (*eine*) *erzählerische Entfaltung* of a text which is categorically not a narrative to engage in a discussion of this important issue. Thereby I do not mean to say that one should refrain from narrative analyses of discourses. On the contrary, but the reader has a legitimate claim for an explanation.

My criticism of the book pertains in particular to its theoretical shortcomings, but needless to say they are replicated in the actual analysis in which I think much more could have been and ought to have been said. This criticism aside, the book is certainly not without merits. It does provide, as I initially said, a careful study of all the representations of God within the book with a special eye to their distribution in the text. That is certainly valuable. Any future study on these issues will have to engage with Blumenthal's findings; but far more can also be said on the special nature of the type of religion/philosophy represented by 4 Maccabees.

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1 Wolf Schmid, *Elemente der Narratologie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008).