Peter Schäfer

Zwei Götter im Himmel. Gottesvorstellungen in der jüdischen Antike, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2017. Pp. 200. Hardcover. Euro 24,95. ISBN 978-3-40670412-3.

I do not hesitate to call Peter Schäfer's recent book a mile-stone in the study of late Second Temple Judaism and early Judaism (comprising the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods). The book is a supreme examination and elegantly written study of the two powers in heaven (שתי רשויות) in which Schäfer first and foremost takes issue with Daniel Boyarin's influential thinking on the topic and secondly nuances Alan Segal's classic *Two Powers in Heaven*.¹ Self-evidently, Gershom Scholem and Menahem Kister also loom in the background of the discussion as does Boccaccini's idea of an Enochic Judaism.

With its 200 pages the book is superficially an easy and manageable read, but it is time-consuming to absorb and reflect on its argument. Two central issues are at stake: (1) the larger question of Judaism and monotheism; (2) the specific question relating to the allegation of the two powers heresy in rabbinic literature and its potential precedence in earlier apocryphal and pseudepigraphal Jewish literature. Schäfer's intellectual preeminence allows him openly to correct some of his own previous arguments (e.g. 43f., 143): something that is seldom found in scholarly literature but in my view shows the token of a true academic, namely one who remains a student in his or her continuous pursuit to learn and, thereby, also to correct previously held assumptions, including one's own.

In addition to an introduction that sets the stage for the subsequent discussion (7-21), the book consists of two main parts. The first one (23-71) covering Second Temple Judaism comprises eight chapters devoted to the standard topics in the discussion: (1) the Son of man in the vision of Daniel; (2) personified wisdom in sapiential literature; (3) divinised man in the Self-Glorification Hymn; (4) the Son of God and Son of the Most High in the Aramaic Daniel Apocryphon; (5) Enoch as son of man in the Parables of the Ethiopic book of Enoch; (6) the Son of Man messiah of 4 Ezra; (7) the first-born of every living thing in the Prayer of Joseph; (8) the *logos* in Philo. The second part—bridged by a short section on the transition from pre-Christian to post-Christian Judaism (73-75)—takes issue with rabbinic Judaism and early Jewish mysticism (77-149). Finally, the book includes a brief conclusion on the two gods (151-56), notes, literature, index of names and subjects as well as a list of sources.

The book is, as I said, an excellent read for the expert. But, compared to, for instance, the tangentially related book by John Collins, *The Scepter and the*

1 Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

Star,² it is too convoluted and too esoteric in argument for students and lay people to understand what really is at stake. Given its 200 pages, Schäfer's monograph is simply too short to unfold the argument in any detail—something seen from, for example, chapters 7-8 on the first-born in the Prayer of Joseph and *logos* in the oeuvre of Philo. For the expert, however, the book presents a well-argued alternative to especially Boyarin's understanding of the development of Jewish binarism (especially evident 13, 17f., 74f., 83f., 87f., 118f., 127f., 153-56). Whereas Boyarin in various writings has argued for a continuous trajectory stretching from early Jewish apocalypics to *Bavli* and 3 Enoch with the Palestinian *Mekhilta* as decisive bridge connecting the idea of binarism in these different textual corpora, Schäfer advocates their independence (cf. 87f., 154f.). Both promulgate the view that binarism was firmly grounded in the world of ideas of Second Temple Judaism. They diverge in understanding, however, when it comes to the assessment of the subsequent development. Both agree that early Christ-religion was crucial for the later development in prompting Babylonian Talmudic Judaism to declare binarism as heresy; but whereas Boyarin sees continuity pertaining to binarism from late Second Temple Judaism to the *Bavli* and the *Hekhalot* literature, Schäfer denies this unbroken *semiōsis* of traditions:

Die Antwort (to the idea of binarism—AKP) ist eine originär jüdische Antwort, aber ich bezweifle, dass die Autoren des 3. Henoch und des *Bavli* sich bewusst in diese vor-christlich-jüdische Tradition stellten (im Klartext: diese literarisch kannten), und vermute, dass sie primär auf die Adaption dieser Tradition durch das inzwischen etablierte Christentum reagierten (156).

There are two questions of greater importance that loom behind the divergence. The first pertains to the philosophy of science, and the second to the position of early Christ-religion in the equation. At the outset Schäfer claims that he does not want to bring forward a new theory and poignant theses but to confine his reflections to be restricted to reading the sources (20). This may sound alluring, but I find it naïve verging on credulity, since there can be no unmediated access to the sources read. Any reading is necessarily theoretically dependent in as much as it presupposes a perspective through which the texts are filtered. Whether the perspective adopted is acknowledged or not is another matter. It is also obvious from reading Schäfer's book that he relies on a lens through which he sees the sources interpreted. I would prefer if Schäfer had

2 John Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature*, Anchor Bible Reference Library (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

explicitly spelled out his theoretical perspective which would have enhanced readers' possibility for finding out what he is up to—methodologically and theoretically. To avoid a likely misunderstanding, I am not in saying this implying that textual interpretation is a matter of extending or shortening texts on the Procrustean bed of theory. Quite the contrary, the whole point is to allow for a form of textual resistance that enable the texts to kick back and therefore refine one's perceptual view or *θεωρία*. Whether one agrees with Boyarin's reconstruction or not, he is hermeneutically aware of what he is doing in terms of philosophy of science. This brings me to the second point comprising two sub-points that has to do with the role of Christianity or early Christ-religion as I prefer to call it.

Schäfer argues that Boyarin's criticism of his work is fallacious, since he well acknowledges the intertwined nature of Judaism and Christianity and the fact that in the third to the fourth centuries:

dieser sich hier vollziehende Ablösungsprozess keineswegs zwischen zwei bereits fest etablierten Religionen (Judentum versus Christentum) stattfindet, sondern in der Grauzone von (noch) jüdischen Kreisen, die zwar nicht so weit gehen wollten wie die Kirchenväter, die aber doch bereit waren, Henoch auch in ihrem Judentum eine herausragende Stellung zuzugestehen (118f., cf. 11f., 156).

Well, so far, so good. Schäfer thinks himself to be misunderstood by Boyarin, when he criticises him for endorsing an “originary difference between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’” and for arguing that the Christian and Jewish parallels in relation to binarism only came into existence at the end of late Antiquity in *Bavli* and the *Hekhalot* literature (88, with reference to Boyarin).³

Some of the problems, however, could have been avoided, had Schäfer been more careful in terminology. When he talks about “Christianity usurping these binary provisional approaches (Dan 7, the sapiential literature, 1 En. 70-71, etc.—AKP) and developing them further in the context of ideas about the Son of Man and Logos” (74, cf. 21:

Trotz der Usurpation binarischer Ideen durch die Christologie des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Autoren hat das Judentum der Rabbinen und der frühen Mystiker an diesen Ideen festgehalten... Insofern konkurrierten das frühe Christentum und das rabbinische Judentum auch um den zweiten Gott neben dem Schöpfergott,

3 D. Boyarin, “Is Metatron a Converted Christian?” *Judaïsme Ancien. Ancient Judaism* 1 (2013): 13-62, 14f.

see also 149, 153), he sows doubts about his view. On the basis of such “usurpation” formulations, it is difficult to avoid the impression that ultimately Schäfer continues to subscribe to the view of Judaism and Christianity as two pristinely independent entities rather than of early Christ-religion as another current within and as intrinsic to early Judaism as any other. At the very least, his nomenclature obscures his argument.

The other sub-point is also related to the discussion with Boyarin and has a rejoinder in philosophy of science as well. It is a basic tenet in thinking about both cultural and biological evolution that nothing emerges out of nothing. The whole argument rests on a notion of continuity. Boyarin may be over-enthusiastic in his attempt to establish an unbroken chain of interpretation relating to binarism from pseudepigraphal and apocryphal literature via early Christ-religion and the *Mekhilta* to the *Bavli* and the *Hekhalot* literature. In that sense I agree with Schäfer that the binarism in Babylonian Jewish texts of late antiquity should first and foremost be seen as a response to post-Nicean Eastern Christ-religion which, in fact, during these centuries developed with respect to Judaism into an institutionally independent and culturally autonomous religion: Christianity (156, cf. 87). To make the argument, however, it is fair to include the older apocryphal and pseudepigraphal material. Otherwise, the appearance of binarism in New Testament texts becomes enigmatic and, ultimately, a floating signifier.

Despite my points of criticism, I do not hesitate to categorise Schäfer’s book as a necessary read for scholars in late Second Temple Judaism, rabbinics, New Testament studies, and the history of Christianity. The book provides a superb and cogent argument in less than 200 pages on some of the most central issues in Judaism, early Christ-religion and in our understanding of their relationship. Any immediate talk about Jewish monotheism, including early Christ-religion, should subsequent to the reading of Schäfer’s book be brought to silence. *Tolle lege!*

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