CHAPTER 1

Introduction to Baruch

The book of Baruch is understudied and has been given little attention over the past century. Although this practice is beginning to change, research to date is still insufficient for the interpretive possibilities afforded by this work. As Septuagint scholarship continues to develop and interest in Second Temple Judaism burgeons, it is my hope that Baruch will be recognised as an important example of Jewish exegetical practice in the Hellenistic era.

1  Texts of Baruch

1.1  Greek Codices

The Greek text of Baruch is found in two of the three great codices, Alexandrinus (A) and Vaticanus (B), but is missing from Sinaiticus (א). There are few textual differences between the two uncial manuscripts, most of which are negligible. Similar consistency is found across the Lucianic or “Antiochian” recension(s), despite a tendency to “upgrade” the Greek. Baruch is also extant in codex Marchalianus (Q; Cozza-Luzi 1890), a sixth century uncial manuscript originally copied in Egypt and known for its Hexaplaric material, as well as Codex Venetus (V; Holmes and Parsons 1827), an eighth-ninth century manuscript. Baruch is also found in a number of miniscule texts: 26, 36, 46, 48, 49, 51, 62, 86, 87, 88, 90, 91, 96, 106, 130, 198, 231, 233, 239, 311, 393, 407, 410, 449, 490, 534, 538, 544, 567, 613, 710, 763, and 764.

This study will focus primarily on Codex Vaticanus, although there will be passing references to Alexandrinus as an important point of comparison. Vaticanus is a single codex copied by Christian scribes, of which there were likely two (Milne and Skeat 1938) rather than three (Tischendorf 1884, 360). Each page is approximately twelve inches by twelve inches, contains three columns of between 40 and 44 lines, with roughly 16–18 letters per line (O’Neill 1989, 220–221). Many believe that Vaticanus was originally written in Egypt (Bogaert 1999; Pisano 1999), probably in Alexandria (Kenyon 1912, 88; Ropes 1926, xxxiv–xxxvi), due to similarities in form between the Greek characters and Coptic (Kenyon 1912, 84; Metzger 1991, 74), although others have placed its origin in different locales, such as Rome (Hort in Westcott and Hort 1882, 264–267), or Caesarea (Skeat 1999, 604). None of these proposals regarding geographic origins has enough support for any interpretive framing built upon such assumptions to be more than speculative.
Regarding the dating of Vaticanus, there is widespread agreement that it was penned in the fourth century AD (Birdsall 2003). A more specific date has been elusive, although that has not stopped scholars from making suggestions. Skeat (1999), after having proposed a Caesarean origin, suggests that the impetus for making Vaticanus was the letter from Emperor Constantine (May AD 330) to Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea (Vit. Const. 4.36) in which 50 copies of the Holy Scriptures were commissioned. Some (e.g., Rahlfs 1899) have claimed that the parallels between the book order in Vaticanus and Athanasius’s 39th Festal Letter of AD 367 suggest that it had already been written by this date. Jellicoe (1968, 179) challenges Rahlfs’s view and claims that the textual similarities with the Festal Letter suggest that Vaticanus was written around AD 367, either before or after the Letter. Despite the difficulty of precise dating, all agree that Vaticanus originated in the fourth century and is pre-Hexaplaric in nature.

1.2 Hebrew Texts
There are no extant texts of Baruch in Hebrew: no codices, papyrological finds, or documents. Nevertheless, a number of scholars claim to see a Hebrew structure behind the Greek and on this basis posit that Greek Baruch is a translation of an earlier Hebrew Vorlage. The question of a Hebrew text for Baruch has been debated for centuries. Although Baruch’s existence in the Hebrew language and Hebrew canon was denied by Jerome, Comm. Jer. praef., Libellum autem Baruch, qui vulgo edition Septuaginta copulator nec habetur apud Hebraeos, the posited Hebrew original has greatly influenced Baruchan studies and is a major component of commentaries and monographs.

For example, German commentators, exemplified by Kneucker (1879), have expended significant energy arguing for an orginal Hebrew text. Many have provided retroverted texts, which they have used as the base text for their commentaries. Prevalent in the 19th century, the practice of retroversion continued in the 20th—most notably in the works of Tov (1975) and Burke (1982)—along with a continued consideration of Baruch’s “Hebrew language background” (hebräischen Sprachhintergrund) by many commentators (e.g., Whitehouse 1913; Steck 1993) and scholars (e.g., Marttila 2011). Unfortunately, this focus on a reconstructed Hebrew text has obstructed discussion of the Greek and has resulted in extended discussions of Hebrew features that are the scholars’s own creation.

1.3 Other Editions
Although Jerome did not translate Baruch for the Latin Vulgate (as indicated by Amiatinus, our oldest Vulgate manuscript), both Baruch and the Epistle