REFLECTIONS ON THE STATUS OF THE EARLY ENOCHIC WRITINGS

Michael A. Knibb

My aim in this study is to try to address in the case of 1 Enoch some of the questions raised by Mladen Popović in his prospectus for this symposium and to consider what evidence exists for the view that the early Enochic writings (the Astronomical Book and the Book of Watchers, the Book of Dreams and the Epistle) were regarded as authoritative by the community at Qumran and by other Jews, in what respects they were so regarded, and what are the implications.

Evidence for the status of the early Enochic writings at Qumran has been outlined by James VanderKam, who has suggested that the commonplace claim made within the Enochic writings that their contents were divinely revealed was in this case—as in the case of Jubilees—apparently accepted by the community at Qumran as is indicated by the relatively large number of manuscripts of Enoch found there, the influence in other Qumran texts of the central Enochic story of the Watchers, and the importance of its calendrical teachings as a model for Qumran calendars. The number of copies of the individual sections of the book taken in isolation is perhaps not that great: the Book of Watchers is attested by six manuscripts (4QEnᵃʳᵉ, XQpapEnoch), the Astronomical Book and the Book of Dreams by four each (4QEnᵃʳᵇ⁻ᵈ; 4QEnᵃ⁻⁴), and the Epistle only by two (4QEn⁴ᵃ). But the total number of manuscripts (twelve) is impressive. These range in date, in the case of the Astronomical Book, from the end of the third or the beginning of the second century B.C.E. (4QEnᵃʳᵇ) to the turn of the era (4QEnᵃʳ⁵) and, in the case of the other sections, from the first half of the second century B.C.E. (4QEn⁵) to the last third of the first century B.C.E.

¹ In this short study I have deliberately not attempted to consider the Christian evidence that bears on this subject.

(4QEn^c,d). The dates of 4QEnastr^b and of 4QEn^c,d indicate that the early Enochic writings continued to be regarded as sufficiently important as to be worth copying throughout much of the time that the Qumran site was occupied, and Józef Milik’s suggestion of a declining interest at Qumran in the writings attributed to Enoch seems unconvincing.\(^3\) There can in any case be no doubt about the influence of the story of the Watchers in a wide range of other Qumran writings\(^4\) or about the importance of the calendar attested by the *Astronomical Book*.

Evidence from other scrolls also supports the view that the early Enochic writings were regarded as authoritative texts at Qumran. VanderKam himself refers to the suggestion made by Milik and adopted by Magen Broshi, the editor of the text, that the fragment known as 4Q247 is a kind of commentary or pesher on the *Apocalypse of Weeks*. If true, this would imply that the *Apocalypse*—but presumably not just the *Apocalypse*—enjoyed a status similar to that of the prophetic books and the Psalms for which pesharim were otherwise composed.\(^5\) In addition, in *Jub.* 7:38–39 Enoch’s instructions to Methuselah, and in *Jub.* 21:10 what was found “written in the book of my ancestors, in the words of Enoch and the words of Noah,” are mentioned as an ultimate source of authority in halakic matters,\(^6\) and although these are clearly not references to the Enochic books themselves, they point to the status of Enoch and the writings attributed to him.\(^7\) An implicit claim to an authoritative status for Enoch’s writings is also made in 4Q227 (4QPseudo-Jubilees) 2 1–4, which records that

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\(^6\) *Jubilees* 7:38–39 comes at the end of a passage concerning the growing and eating of fruit, *Jub.* 21:10 deals with the eating of meat offered in sacrifice.

\(^7\) Similarly, although the references to a “writing of Enoch” in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* cannot be taken as an allusion to the Enochic books themselves, they do provide a further indication of the authority attributed to Enoch and the writings attached to his name—but in this case in relation to the future; see *T. Sim.* 5:4; *T. Levi* 10:5; 14:1; 16:1; *T. Jud.* 18:1; *T. Dan* 5:6; *T. Naph.* 4:1; *T. Benj.* 9:1; cf. H.W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 122.