

Henryk Drawnel

"Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic : an Intertextual Reading", Helge S. Kvanvig, Leiden 2011 : [recenzja]

The Biblical Annals 2/1, 355-361

2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej bazhum.muzhp.pl, gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Helge S. Kvanvig, *Primeval History: Babylonian, Biblical, and Enochic. An Intertextual Reading* (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 148; Leiden: Brill, 2011). Pp. xvi, 610. € 184, \$ 251. ISBN 978-90-04-16380-5

HENRYK DRAWNEL SDB

Institute of Biblical Studies, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
address: Aleje Racławickie 14, 20-950 Lublin, Poland, e-mail: hdrawnel@kul.pl

Famous for his research into the roots of apocalyptic, Kvanvig produced a monumental monograph on primeval history attested in Babylonian, biblical, and Enochic texts. His reading of these ancient texts that contain traditions about the origin of the world, humanity, and evil is termed intertextual. In his short Introduction (pp. 1-9) Kvanvig explains that since all three basic stories deal with primeval times, it is possible to do a triangular reading of these narratives, while paying close attention to different literary contexts in which each one of these stories appears. Additionally, Atrahasis, the priestly material in Genesis, and the descent of the Watchers are all foundational narratives for their respective cultures with a communicative function that goes beyond their cultural limits. They also explain that the conditions of human life were formed by the events that occurred in primeval times. Kvanvig stresses the necessity of the diachronic reading of ancient texts, but affirms that he seeks the literary universe of the text, not its underlying sources. He further explains that for him the diachronic reading consists not so much in finding cause-effect relationship between the texts, but rather in the analysis of the ways according to which different cultural imprints are stored in their literary structures.

The monograph is divided into three parts. The first one (pp. 13-181) is dedicated to Mesopotamian literature with a special attention dedicated to the Epic of Atrahasis, primeval lists and stories, traditions about *apkallus*, that is primeval mythic beings. The analysis of the *Poem of Erra* closes the chapter. The next section (pp. 185-316) is exclusively dedicated to the Genesis primeval traditions set in the context of the theology of the Priestly source and compared with Mesopotamian antecedents. The third part (pp. 319-529) concentrates on the Watchers story in *1 En.* 6-16 that makes part of the *Book of Watchers* (*1 Enoch* 1-36). It is divided into three parts: 1. general presentation of the *Book of Watchers*, its literary sources, division and

diffusion; 2. growth of the literary tradition and its date, comparison between Genesis 1-9 and the Watchers story, its literary structure, the meaning of the flood, rebellion of the Watchers, Enoch as the main protagonist of the story; 3 concluding remarks. A large Appendix (pp. 531-573) contains a synoptic presentation of the primeval story in Genesis and in the Watchers story. The biblical text is cited in Hebrew and Greek translation, then in the next column there come fragmentary Qumran manuscripts. The Ethiopic text is cited in English translation, and the last two columns contain the Greek text of the Cairo manuscript and Sycellus' *Chronography*. Bibliography, index of sources, index of names and subjects, and index of modern authors (pp. 575-610) form the final part of the monograph.

The book contains a wealth of information concerning three large areas of scholarly research and the reader is impressed by the breadth of learning and large perspective of comparison. It is not possible to discuss here all the issues raised by Kvanvig, the best we can do therefore is to concentrate on the third section of the book that focuses on the fall of the Watchers and uses some of its conclusions from part one and two of the monograph in order to explain the pseudepigraphic text. The reader is surprised to find in Kvanvig's terminology the use of "the Aramaic Testament of Levi" (e.g. pp. 323, 326) in relation of Levi apocryphon found in the Cairo Geniza and at Qumran. Since the middle of the 1960s there is a growing conviction of those acquainted with the subject that Levi apocryphon is not a "testament" in its literary form. Kvanvig (pp. 326-328) sees a similarity between the Watchers story and Levi apocryphon in their treatment of sexuality. One should note, however, that in what we call the *Visions of Levi* Levi is instructed by Isaac in marital law (endogamy), while the Watchers transgress the marital law in a different respect (union between the heavenly and earthly, eternal versus perishable). The fall of the Watchers is couched in a mythic and literary form, while the *Visions of Levi* as a whole cannot be easily classified as belonging to the apocalyptic genre. Additionally, Kvanvig notices that both Levi and Enoch are visionaries and both of them receive their vision in the place called Abel Main, close to Mount Hermon. Since the Aramaic text of the *Visions of Levi* is fragmentary, it is not certain that Levi actually *has* his vision in Abel Main (cf. *VLev* 1b, line 13). It is also far from certain that the Aramaic toponym in the *Visions of Levi* was located close to Mt. Hermon. It is surprising that Kvanvig did not point to the didactic character of Levi's instruction by Isaac (*VLev.* 13-61) and didactic activity of the Watchers. Additionally, from the formal point of view, short sentences with fraction notations and Babylonian background are found both in *VLev.* 31-36; 37-48 on the one hand and in 4Q208 and 4Q209 (*Aramaic Astronomical Book*)

on the other. There exist, therefore, thematic and literary links between the oldest part of the Enochic lore and the *Visions of Levi*.

One of the most interesting results of Kvanvig's intertextual reading of the Akkadian, biblical and Enochic text is the identification of the "Watchers" (עִרְיָן) in Dan 4 and in the Book of Watchers with the Akkadian *apkallu*. These mythological beings are presented in cuneiform sources (*Bīt Mēseri*, Uruk tablet) and in the Berossus' account as originating in the subterranean ocean *apsû* and bringing to humanity civilized arts. Kvanvig claims that the "Watcher and Holy one" in Dan 4:10, 14, 20 is the same kind of being as those designated in the same way in the Watcher Story (p. 431). He claims that the cosmic tree in Dan 4 symbolizes Nebuchadnezzar and then identifies the Watcher that appears in the king's dream as the Babylonian mythological being, *apkallu*, that often is represented in Babylonian art as protector of the king's royal status (pp. 440-441). The *apkallus* were also considered as the spirits who guard people from demonic attacks and were invoked in the rituals protecting the house (*Šēp Lemutti* ritual) or in the exorcisms curing an illness (*Bīt Mēseri* ritual). Their protective figurines were buried beneath inhabited houses and they were repeatedly invoked with the sentence: "You are the statues of the *apkallus*, the watchers (*mašsarī*)". Kvanvig then explains that the Akkadian term *maššaru* "watcher" has both the connotation "guard, watchman, be awake" and "someone who watches for an astronomical observation." Since the corresponding verb in Aramaic "to guard" (נָטַר) cannot mean "stay awake", the Jewish writer chose the root עִיר as more appropriate to the Akkadian correspondent. Since the Watchers were in charge of the cosmic order all the time, they never departed from their duty (pp. 442-443). Although there is an enigmatic statement in *Bīt Mēseri* about the *apkallus* that angered the gods, Mesopotamian traditions never depict any rebellion of the *apkallus*. On the other hand the latter could act in a way that interrupted the divine order they were set to guard (pp. 450-451). Finally, the *Bīt Mēseri* ritual and the Uruk tablet attest the existence of the *apkallus* before the flood, after the flood the texts give the list of the *apkallus* of human descent (*Bīt Mēseri*), or the list of famous scholars (*ummanus*; Uruk tablet). In the *Poem of Erra* Marduk sends the pre-diluvian *apkallus* to the underground ocean, *apsû*, and their role in the human realm is ended (pp. 451-452).

It is extremely difficult to accept Kvanvig's identification of the rebellious Watchers with the Babylonian *apkallus* for reasons Kvanvig himself notices. The *apkallus* are never presented as rebellious beings that descend from heaven. They may anger the gods, but they are never described as causing the desolation of the earth. Secondly, the Watchers come down from heaven while the *apkallus* go up from the depths of the primeval ocean

where they eventually return. The *apkallus* never marry, have children, or defile themselves with the women; they always remain pure mythical beings. Additionally, Watchers' teaching is easily correlated with the activity of the Mesopotamian *ummânu*s (scholars), but not with the teaching of the *apkallus*, the fact that Kvanvig himself confesses openly (p. 469). The number of the *apkallus* is nowhere set for two hundred, and they are never divided into groups of ten with a chief of each group (*1 En.* 6:7). Their going back to the *apsû* is not interpreted as a punishment for their misdemeanor, but as a result of the passage from the pre-diluvian to post-diluvian times.

Since the prediluvian times in Babylonian sources are peopled by the mythic sages, *apkallus*, coupled with primeval kings, some interpreters of the Enochic lore identified the descendants of the Watchers, the giants, with the pre-diluvian Mesopotamian kings. A similar interpretation was proposed also by Milik (*The Books of Enoch*, 1976, 29) who claims that the Enochic myth presents Shemihazah as a king and Asael as a sage, thus drawing on the Babylonian model of antediluvian kings and sages. Except for the sheer statement of the supposed parallelism, Milik does not cite any argument in favor of his interpretation. Kvanvig extensively discusses Mesopotamian antediluvian kings (pp. 83-99) focusing on Ziusudra and Enmeduranki (pp. 99-106). He also stresses that the association of some historical kings with the divine wisdom of the *apkallu* is related to the fact that in order to rule a king had to have scholars at his side who represented wisdom going back to the seven *apkallus* from before the flood (pp. 141-143). Such a historical situation of the scholars working for the king is well attested in the correspondence between scholars and Assyrian kings in the Neo-Assyrian period. When discussing the origin of the giants in the Enochic myth Kvanvig draws a parallel with the Atrahasis epic where the creation of antediluvian humans is split into two kinds of creatures. "The one kind is ordinary humans, who are ordained to toil for the gods, represented by the king; the other kind is the kings, belonging to a different kind of creation, with divine equipment, immediate access to the gods, and the task of doing battle for the gods" (p. 417). Then Kvanvig cites Gen 10:8-12 where Nimrod is presented as a giant (גִּבּוֹר), hunter and king who founded Babylonian and Assyrian kingdoms. Since Kvanvig interprets Gen 6:1-4 as an abbreviated form of the Shemihazah narrative (cf. p. 519), he claims that by mentioning the giants in verse 4 (גִּבּוֹרִים) the Genesis text conflates the tradition of the primeval giants and *nephilim* of Canaan and the tradition of warrior-kings in Mesopotamia with the Shemihazah narrative about the birth of giants in antediluvian times. An additional analogy with the giants is Ezek 32:20-26 that depicts the mighty warriors from primeval time, resting in the underworld (p. 419-420). Kvanvig

also adds a cautionary note observing that the perspective in the Watcher Story is drastically different when compared with the Babylonian primeval traditions. "In *Enoch* the warrior-kings are not heroes who perform the duties of the gods; they are savages who ruin the whole creation" (p. 522). He, however, remains convinced that "there were three kinds of inhabitants of the earth in antediluvian times in the Watcher Story: the human beings, the giants, and the watchers. This corresponds to the three kinds of inhabitants in the Babylonian primeval traditions: the human beings, the kings, and the *apkallus*" (p. 524).

Kvanvig's explanation of the giants' origin is based on rather dubious arguments. The epic of *Atrahasis* that describes the creation of two different kinds of human beings does not relate to the Enochic giants that are not created as a second type of human beings, but are born of the union between the Watchers and women. The giants in the myth do not bear any signs of divine equipment, they do not have an immediate access to God (quite the contrary), and they do not undertake any battle for the gods. While in Gen 6:4 the "giants" are presented in a positive perspective, their role in the myth is decisively negative, they consume enormous quantity of fruits of human labor (7:3), drink blood (7:5), and finally devour animals and human beings (7:4-5). All these elements are absent in Mesopotamian primeval traditions about the antediluvian kings. Consequently, Kvanvig's interpretation utterly fails to convince for it does not explain essential elements of the giants' activity in the myth.

When reading the discussed monograph the reviewer had the impression that its author omitted in his discussion of the Enochic myth these texts that do not fit into his interpretation of the Watchers understood as the Babylonian *apkallus*. For example, *1 En.* 8:1 that presents Asael as a smith that busies himself with metals is treated in the monograph only marginally and mainly in the context of literary criticism (pp. 349, 351, 356, 454). Kvanvig (p. 454-455) indicates that the art of the smith and the knowledge about jewellery and cosmetics were combined with magic; additionally, the anti-witchcraft ritual *Maqlû* claims that witches belong to the guild of the smiths. However, he does not indicate any connection between Asael's crafts and the *apkallu* simply because there is none. Similarly, the punishment of Asael in *1 En.* 10:4-8 entails his binding, burial and burning; Babylonian sources about the antediluvian *apkallus* do not have anything similar simply because the *apkallus* do not commit any sin or do not cause the desolation of the earth. Thus these four Enochic verses are treated in the monograph only marginally (p. 347, 349, 353, 356, 495), and their incompatibility with the *apkallu* tradition is not pointed out.

Following Nickelsburg, Kvanvig (p. 461) accepts the reading אשפור instead of Milik's כש[פחה] (4Q201 frg. 1 iv 2; 8:3), but the reading כש[פחה] "witchcraft" is unequivocally attested in 4Q202 frg. 1 ii 19 (7:1); hence Milik's restoration should be retained. It is hard to understand on which grounds Kvanvig identifies the knowledge of the signs of the earth (4Q202 frg. 1 iii 4) with Mesopotamian *bārûtu* (p. 463); the omens from the signs of the earth are collected in the series *Šumma ālu ina mele šākin*, which does not belong to the haruspex tradition. Additionally, his association of the herbalist profession with the Babylonian *asûtu* (p. 463) does not correspond to Late Babylonian sources which attest that the *asû* profession was taken over by the *āšipu*. Kvanvig is convinced that the Enochic writer is critical of Watchers' didactic activity concerning astronomy because they taught the omens of the heavenly phenomena. One should, however, object that the astronomical calculations of the movements of the moon in 4Q208 and 4Q209 are modeled on Tablet XIV of the astrological series *Enūma Anu Enlil* and it is not at all certain that the use of these calculations in the Enochic tradition had exclusively calendaric purpose. The teaching of the Watchers causes much distress on the earth mainly because it is transmitted by the rebellious heavenly beings that are stained by the sexual relations with the women (7:1). Additionally, all available cuneiform sources from Late Babylonian period unanimously attest that astrology was strictly connected with astronomy, and our modern separation between them is nothing less than a good example of modern anachronism.

It is surprising that Kvanvig's close reading of the Akkadian mythological traditions is restricted to the literary texts without taking into consideration the social background of the Enochic lore. Given the fact that the lunar calculations in 4Q208 and 4Q209 are related to Babylonian astrological literature, the question about the practitioners of this kind of knowledge in Persian and Hellenistic periods in Babylonia urgently imposes itself. It is unlikely that the myth of the fallen Watchers was written in the Neo-Assyrian times when the royal ideology was strongly proposed in the cuneiform sources. The myth was written not earlier than in the Persian period when Babylonia ceased to be an independent political entity with its royal prerogatives. It is much more evident that the myth describes not the mythological *apkallus* who protected the king but actual scholars-*āšipu* who practiced their craft in Babylonia in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Arsacid periods, and cultivated not only their magico-medical crafts but astrology and astronomy as well, all of that in strong connection with the Babylonian temple (cf. Drawnel, *Between Akkadian tupšarrûtu and Aramaic ספר RevQ 24* [2010] 373-403). The crafts of Asael and his punishment also correspond to the situation of

the Babylonian temple in Late Babylonian period together with the division of the Watchers into groups of ten with a chief responsible for each group (cf. Drawnel, "The Crafts of Asael," forthcoming).

When Kvanvig's book was about to appear Amar Annus published a lengthy article that proposes to interpret the Watchers in the Enochic myth as the mythological *apkallu* ("On the Origin of Watchers: A Comparative Study of the Antediluvian Wisdom in Mesopotamian and Jewish Traditions" *JSP* 19.4 [2010] 277-320). Although his article is extremely well researched, the analysis of the Enochic text is not done on the original texts but is mainly based on the opinion of other scholars. Since Annus is an Assyriologist, his relying on the research of Enochic scholars is not surprising, but the results of his interpretations of the Enochic myth often lack precision or are quite shocking. He claims that the flood punished Watchers and Nephilim (p. 282), the role of the flood, however in the myth is not so evident. The punishment of the Watchers consists in their binding, burial (Asael) and burning, while the giants are killed in a fratricide war. Annus claims that Watchers reveal divine secrets to earthly women in exchange for sex (p. 291), which is a gross distortion of the meaning of the Watchers' sin and its connection with the transmission of knowledge. Annus' general argumentation concerning the interpretation of the Watchers as Babylonian *apkallus* is similar to Kvanvig's and the same objections raised against Kvanvig are also valid for Annus' article.