

Markus Mülke, *Aristobulos in Alexandria. Jüdische Bibelexegese zwischen Griechen und Ägyptern unter Ptolemaios VI Philometor, Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte 126*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018. ISBN 978-3-11-053323-1. Hardcover, pp. ix + 604. €119.95.

- [1] This massive and—almost—comprehensive study of the fragments attributed to Aristobulos (of Alexandria or also called, inappropriately, the Peripatetic) is Markus Mülke's slightly revised *Habilitationsschrift* at the Department 8 of History and Philosophy of the *Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität* in Münster from 2015/2016. Mülke specializes on a sometimes overlooked Jewish biblical scholar and his work addressed to the king Ptolemy VI Philometor (180–145 BCE) by taking a rather philological attitude towards the fragments instead of a primarily inner Jewish perspective. All in all, Mülke's learned, extremely informative, and precise study will stand as a, if not as *the*, standard reference tool for years to come, though there are a few pending questions that should be considered in more detail and clarified in the near future. Nevertheless, the book will also be highly beneficial to anyone interested in biblical exegesis, because Mülke focuses on how Aristobulos dealt with the correct interpretation of the Pentateuch in a period of time two hundred years prior to Philo of Alexandria.
- [2] In his introduction (pp. 1–5), Mülke provides the conceptual framework and names the assumptions that serve as orientation and limits for the chapters to follow. But it is exactly this precise and at the same time too brief introduction that ultimately raises decisive questions: Mülke rightly refers to Nikolaus Walter's *Der Thoraausleger Aristobulos: Untersuchungen zu seinen Fragmenten und zu pseudepigraphischen Resten der jüdisch-hellenistischen Literatur* (Akademie Verlag, 1964), who finally dispelled doubts about the authenticity of Aristobulos as the author of the fragments and whose line of argument is generally accepted today. These doubts, however, might have been of interest to readers who are not specialists in the discussion about Aristobulos.
- [3] Moreover, Mülke almost *en passant* states that Clement of Alexandria is the less reliable witness in comparison to Eusebius of Caesarea when it comes to deal with the quotations both preserved in their writings. Although, this is an *opinio communis* (cf. the references Mülke provides in n. 8 on p. 2), the attentive reader might have benefited from a short discussion of the pros and cons and a critical evaluation of the criteria for preferring the one to the other author. Of course, Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, volume 3: *Aristobulos* (Scholars Press, 1995) has them all, and Mülke deals with the differences between Clement and Eusebius when they overlap, but for a study of the fragments the decision taken for and against a witness should at least be given briefly. It might have been really efficient and informative for the reader to have had a reference the sources of Holladay's edition, that is, the GCS editions by Karl Mraz (*Die Praeparatio Evangelica*, 2 parts, *Eusebius Werke* 8, 2nd ed. [Akademie-Verlag, 1982–1983]) and Eduard Schwartz (*Eusebius Kirchengeschichte*, 3 parts, *Eusebius Werke* 2 [Hinrichs, 1903–1909]). For a book published in 2018 it might have been possible to be referred to *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha* and the current state of establishing a critical text of Aristobulos (official reference: Ken M. Penner and Ian W. Scott, eds. *Aristobulos [Fragments]*, ed. 1.0, in *The Online Critical Pseudepigrapha*, ed. by Ken M. Penner, David M. Miller, and Ian W. Scott [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006; <http://www.purl.org/net/ocp/Aristob>]).
- [4] A third critical remark is made about the exclusion of several fragments: fragment 1 (according to the numbering by Holladay) retelling the Passover section, the Orphic and, thus, not fragment 4, and fragment 5 on the holiness of the sabbath that has been so

widely dealt with elsewhere. Mülke is right that fragment 5 would require a study on its own in respect of its complexity and its history of research. But, on the one hand, a short summarizing state of the art for each of the excluded fragments might have been useful for everybody interested in their discussion. On the other hand, an interested reader will certainly expect from a book of this length that it is or that its author at least tries to be comprehensive in his coverage of the topic, that is, an inclusion of all the five fragments might be regarded as crucial.

- [5] The nine chapters to follow are of uneven length and depth, a matter depending on the subject matter to be discussed. Mülke offers two thematic excursions after the first and the sixth main chapter and a concluding chapter. Furthermore, there is a comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature (451–532) but none with primary texts or critical editions. A little bit odd is the section with bibliographic supplements, that is, studies that are not to be found in the bibliography, but which have nevertheless been incorporated into the discussions within the chapters of the book (533–37). Indices of biblical texts, ancient authors (without Clement and Eusebius), Greek words, and names, words, and subjects (here some ancient authors are listed again and Clement and Eusebius are mentioned, too) facilitate navigation in the book.
- [6] The first main chapter (no. 2 according to Mülke who counts his introduction as chapter 1) deals with a quotation from the Greek didactic and astronomical poem *Phainomena*. Aristobulos justifies the omnipresence of God by referring to Pythagoras, Socrates, Platon, Orpheus, and Aratus and by identifying the holiness of the seventh day already in Homer's and Hesiod's works. Besides, he just leaves the introductory hymn to Zeus as it is but alters the name to "God." Interestingly, and this is what Mülke, after a long-winded explanatory section on the history and development of the *Phainomena*, introduces as an aside, Aristobulos could have had a Greek text available that might have differed from what we know today as Septuagint (46–52). Here it is striking that Mülke uses Rahlfs's *Handausgabe* (Ra) and not the critical specific *Göttingen* editions (Gö), and the ambivalent confusion of Septuagint and Vulgate ("Vulgata der LXX" or "Septuaginta-Vulgata," 51) represents an unnecessary inaccuracy. The chapter is supplemented by an excursus ("Fragen und Antworten im Dialog," 53–59), which helps to understand Aristobulos's strategy of structuring his work along a question and answer scheme (cf. ζητήματα καὶ λύσεις, Aristotle, *Poet.* 1460B6). Reality, however, proves that Ptolemy VI Philometor might have offered an interest in certain subjects and had specific ζητήματα but that we have now is Aristobulos's own textbook, in which the λύσεις play a decisive role. Mülke is right in referring to the Letter of Aristeas as a parallel case. It is rather peculiar and extraordinary that Aristobulos dedicates his writings to laws.
- [7] In the next chapter (no. 3), Mülke directs the reader to Aristobulos's claim that the Greeks derived everything from Moses so that the writer himself just naturally was familiar with a wide array of Greek literature. Consequently, it might have been a special and exclusive minority group within Alexandrian society Aristobulos wrote for (69). Surprisingly, Aristobulos is the first known Jewish writer who deliberately quotes from Greek poets in order to illustrate his own interpretation of the *nomos* (71). To Mülke, there is no such thing as a natural theology in Aristobulos's texts (120–24).
- [8] The following chapter (no. 4) deals with the position Aristobulos had in between the Greeks and Egyptians, who definitely phrased his sentences with an implicit anti-Egyptian tone. Thus, he might have been one of the representatives of Jewish writers who composed Hellenistic literature for both, the Jews and the Greeks in his days. Consequently (chapter 5), Mülke readdresses the issue of anthropomorphism and metaphoric

interpretation when he identifies Aristobulos's inclination of moving towards the conceptions of Greek philosophy. Of course, to the ancient author God is king, but he frankly acknowledges Ptolemy VI Philometor's kingship, too. With this difficulty approximation Aristobulos obviously suggests "a special relationship between him [Ptolemy] and his Jewish subjects" (199; "ein besonderes Verhältnis zwischen ihm [Ptolemy; author's note] und seinen jüdischen Untertanen").

- [9] In the next chapter (no. 6), the focus is put on the *nomos*, that is, on the Mosaic *nomos* as understood by Aristobulos (cf. νόμος and νομοθεσία for the five books of Moses), who draws a comparison between that (as law) and Greek philosophy, referring to both as wisdom. Mülke correctly concludes that "if it was probable that a classic like Plato could fall back on νόμοι of the Greeks and barbarians, which were available in written form, why should the Mosaic *nomos* not have been among them?" (247; "Wenn es also wahrscheinlich war, daß ein Klassiker wie Platon auf längst schriftlich vorliegende νόμοι von Griechen und Barbaren zurückgreifen konnte, warum sollte unter diesen nicht auch der mosaische *Nomos* gewesen sein?"). Here a reference to Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 1.15.66–73) and Tatian (*Oratio ad Graecos* 1) might have been rewarding who both follow a similar line of argument but with another strategic and rhetorical objective.
- [10] In chapter 7 Mülke develops his line of argument further: if Plato could use the books of Moses, they must have been available in Greek (263). This is the more astounding, as Aristobulos marks the first statement on the translation of the Hebrew Bible (at least the Pentateuch) into Greek and that some time before the Letter of Aristeas. An additional excursus sheds more light on philological issues and allows further insights into the terminology and tenses used by Aristobulos (313–19).
- [11] Chapter 8 is dedicated to the crucial introductory questions ("Autor, Exeget und Publikum," 321–56). Again the key terms are "Moses," "wisdom," "inspiration," and their meaning to and understanding by Greek readers. Close connected that is chapter 9 with a more detailed look at Aristobulos's metaphorical interpretation of the Bible than it has been taken into the fragments so far in the previous chapters. To Mülke Aristobulos more likely drew on Aristotle than on the Stoics. Also Homer was interpreted metaphorically by Greeks, a close similarity to the way Jews read and understood the books of Moses. This issue is unfolded in more details and by referring to quite a number of examples in the next chapter (no. 10; "Die Würde der mosaischen Metaphern").
- [12] The final chapter (no. 11) does not really summarize the findings of the other ten chapters but offers some additional observations that—so Mülke's hope—initiate further research into Aristobulos in the (near) future (425). For the reviewer the following four (of twelve) desiderata of research are of major interest: first, Mülke (once more, underlines the importance of basic philological research. Second, the reception of Aristobulos by Philo of Alexandria and Flavius Josephus should be investigated into in more detail as had been possible in the present book. Third, Clement of Alexandria started to call Aristobulos a περιπατητικός or a περιπατητικός φιλόσοφος, but where does this come from and why was such an attribute used thereafter. Fourth, a comparison of the early Jewish interpretation of the Bible and the upcoming tendency in the Greek philosophy in Hellenistic times to rely more heavily on authorities such as Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus might be a rewarding task just as.
- [13] Mülke's studies are the product of diligent, strenuous, and meticulous work for which the author has to be admired and thanked, and the book will be the starting point for all the scholars familiar with and patient enough to plunge into the few but fascinating fragments that come from a time of which we do not have much available as that. On the one

hand, it is to be feared that the very detailed book, which sometimes seems overflowing in its writing style and sometimes might cover too many topics, will at best be read and really received by experts and only a handful of specialized scholars. On the other hand, a longer first chapter with a survey of research and a repetition of introductory issues (see [2] to [4] above) might have attracted a broader readership and, possibly, motivated some readers to plunge deeper into the world and texts of Aristobulos. But it is to be hoped that Mülke's theses, though not always to be accepted in sum, provoke controversial discussions to follow hopefully. Be that as it may, Mülke composed a milestone in research on Aristobulus and indicated the directions research has to take in the future.

Thomas J. Kraus
University of Zürich