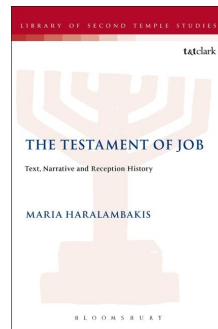


The Testament of Job: Text, Narrative and Reception History, by Maria Haralambakis

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For a work of such intrinsic interest, the Testament of Job has been comparatively neglected in scholarship. Most likely, the reason is that a significant part of the manuscript tradition is in Slavonic, a language that is itself under-represented in graduate education in biblical studies and the history of Christianity. Thus the field has every reason to be grateful when a scholar such as Maria Haralambakis not only brings significant linguistic skill but also careful analytical judgment to bear on important issues concerning this work and the way it has been received in medieval Christianity.



Haralambakis's work is a revision of her doctoral thesis, supervised by Prof. George Brooke of the University of Manchester. Although the book is quite wide-ranging (perhaps too wide-ranging), its major contribution is in its treatment of the Slavonic manuscript tradition and in its redirection of attention away from the attempt to reconstruct an "original" version of the Testament of Job and towards attending more carefully to what the individual manuscripts can tell us about how the Testament of Job was read and received in the Coptic, Greek, and especially Slavonic traditions.

Following a review of recent research in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 provides substantial information on each of the major manuscripts, focusing not just on the text of the Testament of Job itself but on the contents of the other works included in those manuscripts, as well as any other features of significance. This codicological focus represents an important new direction, though Haralambakis is cautious in drawing conclusions about what can be said about the Testament of Job from the company it keeps. In previous scholarship more attention has been given to the fourth-century Coptic manuscript and to the Greek manuscripts, so Haralambakis focuses on the nine Slavonic manuscripts. In addition to general information, she provides a selection of textual variants, organized as case studies (see Appendix A), a diplomatic edition of the first five chapters (see Appendix B), and a translation of the Slavonic Testament of Job (see Appendix C). She concludes that the Slavonic manuscript tradition is less homogeneous than it has typically been characterized, though it appears that the Testament of Job was translated from the Greek only once. Some of the differences from the Greek reflect an attempt to improve the story.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on literary issues: structure, genre, and narratology. In my opinion these are the least satisfying portions of the book, though certainly not without value. Haralambakis provides an extremely detailed structural outline for the Testament of Job and provides extensive justifications for her analysis of the structure. Though the analysis supports her contention that the book is not a mish-mash to be explained through clumsy editing together of sources, it is not clear to me that the conclusion requires so much sometimes tedious discussion. Similarly, the discussion of genre, and of the various suggestions made by previous scholars, serves largely to demonstrate how poorly biblical scholarship has dealt with the notion of genre. In my opinion, Haralambakis underappreciates the value of understanding the Testament of Job through the lens of testament. Her own preference is for "example story." She actually provides more nuanced in-

sight into the way genre functions in a later chapter, when she attempts to discern the narrative conventions by which medieval audiences were reading the work—likely as hagiography. The concept of genre may function in many ways: as a template for an author attempting to compose a certain sort of writing, as a reference point for a reader attempting to figure out what sort of thing one is reading, or as a tool for a critic attempting to devise a pragmatic way of grouping and sorting texts for particular purposes. Sorting out which of these notions one is working with is a good first step towards making the term useful.

Haralambakis's narratological analysis in Chapter 4 does provide a welcome rebuttal of older critics who denigrated the Testament of Job and explained its apparent deficiencies as evidence for clumsy composition and redaction from a variety of component sources. Instead, Haralambakis makes a strong case for the sophistication of its various narratological strategies, especially the complex use of embedded narrative. More disappointing is the very superficial treatment of character, which only briefly discusses Job and completely neglects the fascinating characters of Job's wife and Satan, not to mention the radical reworking of the character of Elihu. In these chapters, I think one sees the problem of focus that afflicts the book. Is it a study of manuscript traditions and what one can learn about reception through studying each manuscript? Or is it an attempt to study the story of the Testament of Job? It is too much to attempt both. The literary aspect is, at any rate, shortchanged in the process.

Chapter 5 returns to the focus on manuscripts and reception. Haralambakis reviews the attempts to characterize the function of the original composition (i.e., as devotional literature, missionary literature, martyr literature) and finds them all problematic, though they do point to features in the text that facilitated its being *read as* such literature in later contexts of reception. While it is not possible to say much regarding how the Testament of Job was read in the Coptic context, Haralambakis makes a cautious but persuasive case that in the Byzantine and later Eastern Christian contexts "the Testament of Job came to be perceived as a kind of saint's life" (151). Although, as she notes, hagiography is a varied type of literature, she demonstrates an impressive number of similarities between features in the Testament of Job and those that regularly appear in narratives of saints' lives. Some changes in the Slavonic textual traditions as compared with the Greek also suggest an assimilation of Job to the norms of hagiography. The manuscripts within

which the text is preserved are not definitive, however, for indicating how the narrative was understood.

Chapter 6 surveys the conclusions of the work and suggests directions for further research. Though in my opinion the work would have been even better if Haralambakis had minimized the aspects of literary analysis and devoted the space and attention to further issues in the codicology of the Slavonic tradition and the evidence for reception in the Eastern Church, one has to conclude with admiration and appreciation for what she has accomplished. One hopes that she will continue her work both with the Testament of Job and more broadly with Jewish pseudepigraphical works that were preserved and developed in Slavonic literature.

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