

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

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The Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) consists of a collection of writings dating from approximately the 13th - 3rd centuries BCE. These books were included in the Jewish canon by the Talmudic sages at Yavneh around the end of the first century CE, after the destruction of the Second Temple. However, there are many other Jewish writings from the Second Temple Period which were excluded from the Tanakh; these are known as the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha.

The Apocrypha (Greek, "hidden books") are Jewish books from that period not preserved in the Tanakh, but included in the Latin (Vulgate) and Greek (Septuagint) Old Testaments. The Apocrypha are still regarded as part of the canon of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, and as such, their number is fixed.

The term Pseudepigrapha (Greek, "falsely attributed") was given to Jewish writings of the same period, which were attributed to authors who did not actually write them. This was widespread in Greco-Roman antiquity - in Jewish, Christian, and pagan circles alike. Books were attributed to pagan authors, and names drawn from the repertoire of biblical personalities, such as Adam, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Ezekiel, Baruch, and Jeremiah. The Pseudepigrapha resemble the Apocrypha in general character, yet were not included in the Bible, Apocrypha, or rabbinic literature.

All the Apocrypha and most of the Pseudepigrapha are Jewish works (some contain Christianizing additions). They provide essential evidence of Jewish literature and thought during the period between the end of biblical writing (ca. 400 BCE) and the beginning of substantial rabbinic literature in the latter part of the first century CE. They have aroused much scholarly interest, since they provide information about Judaism at the turn of the era between the Bible and the Mishna (Biblical Law and Oral Law), and help explain how Rabbinic Judaism and Christianity came into being.

When were they written

The oldest known Jewish work not included in the Bible is the Book of Enoch. This is a complex work, written in the third (or perhaps even the late fourth) century BCE, after the return from the Babylonian Exile and the establishment of the Second Jewish Commonwealth (6th-5th centuries BCE) and before the Maccabean revolt in 172 BCE. The oldest copies of the Book of Enoch, dating from the third century BCE, were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls (see below).

The latest of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are the Apocalypses of Ezra and Baruch, written in the decades following the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. These works, contemporary with those of the early Rabbinic school

of Yavneh, reflect the theological and ethical struggles and dilemmas aroused by the Roman conquest of Judea and the destruction of the Temple.

Most of these works were written in the Land of Israel, in Aramaic or Hebrew. However, some of them, such as *The Wisdom of Solomon*, were written in Greek. These Jewish Greek writings were produced in the widespread Jewish Diaspora of the time, mainly in Egypt (Alexandria) and in North Africa. Although most of the Hebrew and Aramaic texts have been lost over the centuries, many of them, translated into Greek or Oriental Christian languages (such as Ethiopic, Syriac or Armenian) have been found. Early Christianity showed great interest in Jewish traditions and stories about biblical figures and events, and as a result scholars now have access to a substantial library of Jewish writing, created during a crucial period of Jewish history, but preserved only within the Christian tradition.

The Development of Biblical scholarship

Certain of the apocryphal works were known in Jewish tradition throughout the Middle Ages, not necessarily in their full texts, but in shortened and retold versions, or in translations back into Hebrew or Aramaic from Christian languages. Thus forms of the Books of Judith, Maccabees and Ben Sira, as well as parts of *Wisdom of Solomon* were familiar to Jewish scholars. But these works never achieved wide acceptance in Judaism and remained, to a greater or lesser extent, curiosities.

During the Renaissance in Europe and in the following centuries, an interest in various Oriental languages developed in Christian circles. First Hebrew, then Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic, Syriac and more took their place alongside Greek and Latin in the scholarly purview. At the same time, Christian scholars began to be interested in rabbinic sources (preserved in Hebrew) and Jewish biblical exegesis. This combined interest in language and rabbinics was an important component in the complex development that, by the end of the eighteenth century, provided the basis for "modern" critical biblical scholarship.

Other developments contributed to and stemmed from this process: the beginnings of archeology, the deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphs and Babylonian cuneiform, and antiquarian and scholarly study of the Holy Land. In this context, interest developed in Jewish documents which could help illuminate the New Testament. Many works were discovered, published, translated and studied, and they came to be called the Pseudepigrapha. An English translation of works known by the early twentieth century was prepared under the guidance of the renowned English scholar R. H. Charles and entitled *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, published in 1913. To modern Jewish scholars, these works are known as the *Sefarim Hitsonim* ("External Books"). Two major annotated translations into Modern Hebrew have been published, one edited by Abraham Kahana (most recently re-issued in 1959) and one by A.S. Hartom (1969).

The Dead Sea Scrolls

Scholarly interest was renewed after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. In the eleven caves near Qumran north-west of the Dead Sea, parts of more than 700 ancient Jewish manuscripts were discovered. These had been written in the same period as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, mostly in Hebrew, with a lesser

number in Aramaic and even fewer in Greek. The Dead Sea Scrolls, as they came to be known, are assumed to have been the library of a sectarian community at Qumran. The scrolls survived the Roman ravaging of Judea in the years 68-70 CE, because they were hidden in caves. They have been a major focus of scholarly and general interest for the last half-century.

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls were a number of manuscripts of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, including ten manuscripts of the Book of Enoch in the original Aramaic (until then copies were extant only in an Ethiopic translation of a Greek translation of a Semitic original), which were vital to answering many questions about its origins. Dating of the manuscripts by their script shows that certain parts of Enoch are at least as old as the third century BCE. Fragments of Ben Sira in Hebrew, Tobit in Aramaic, the Epistle of Jeremiah in Greek, and others were also found at Qumran.

In addition to these discoveries, the scrolls included other, similar writings that were previously unknown. In a Psalms Scroll from Qumran, a number of additional compositions were discovered, thereby increasing the corpus of texts already known. They also assisted in understanding a literary genre - the later Psalms - which happen to be poorly represented in the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha. These prayerful poems provide a deep insight into the religious feelings and sentiments of their authors. The knowledge that a lively literary production of Psalms existed at that time means that any study of ancient Jewish literature must now take these apocryphal Psalms very seriously into account.

A third important aspect of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that they were discovered in a known archeological and sociological context, firmly fixing them in the Second Temple period. Before 1947, only medieval, Christian manuscripts of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were known, and they could be dated only on the basis of details contained in them. This is not always a dependable procedure. The Dead Sea Scrolls, stemming from a clearly established archeological context, are vital in dating the writings accurately.

What do these texts teach us about ancient Judaism?

In addition to the discoveries at Qumran, a substantial number of ancient Pseudepigrapha have been found elsewhere. Some of them were preserved in Greek and Latin; others in translations from Greek and Latin into various Oriental Christian languages - Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic, Church Slavonic, Armenian and Georgian, among others. The most prominent of these are the Book of Enoch (Ethiopic and Greek); the Book of Jubilees, also preserved in Ethiopic; Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in Greek; The Apocalypse of Baruch in Syriac; the Book of the Secrets of Enoch in Old Church Slavonic; and the Books of Adam and Eve in Latin, Greek, Slavonic, Armenian and Georgian.

Among this literature are works of varied character. Some are histories: the main source for knowledge of the Maccabean wars are the apocryphal First and Second Books of Maccabees. Other works, called apocalypses, present visions of heavenly and earthly secrets, of God and his angels. The concern with heavenly realities is a very prominent development in the Second Temple Period. In these works central religious questions dominate, above all the issue of the justice of God. Such visions are attributed to Enoch, Ezra, Baruch and Abraham.

A substantial number of works transmit proverbial teaching about religious and practical issues. These numerous wisdom or sapiential books are a continuation of the tradition of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Bible. The Wisdom of Ben Sira is a record of the teachings of Ben Sira, the head of an academy in Jerusalem in the early decades of the second century BCE. In addition, the Jews of the Second Temple period composed many psalms and prayers, expressing their love for God, their yearning to be close to Him, and their anguish over the fate of individuals and of Israel.

The manuscripts demonstrate that Jewish thought of this period was orientated between poles: Israel and mankind; the earthly and heavenly world; the righteous and the wicked. The people at that time lived in a consciousness of these dualities and in tension created by them. A certainty of Gods just and merciful providence was challenged by the turbulent and violent events of their times. These books are different from the rabbinic literature; they deal only peripherally with traditions of a legal (halakhic) character, which dominated the next, rabbinic stage of Jewish creativity.

What is their importance?

When these books were first studied, scholars realized that they could help to provide a context for the understanding of the origins of Christianity. No longer was rabbinic Judaism to form the primary basis for comparison with the earliest Christian literature, but rather the Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period, and particularly the Pseudepigrapha, could contribute much insight, making the Jewish origin of Christianity more comprehensible.

The contribution of the study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha to the understanding of the New Testament should not be underrated. The approach to Jesus that is typified by Schweitzers Quest of the Historical Jesus (1964) - using the context of "Jewish apocalyptic" to help understand his activity - would not have been possible without the discovery of the Pseudepigrapha. As a result of these studies, we now have insight into types of Judaism and religious ideas within the Jewish tradition that would otherwise have remained lost.

Here we move closer to answering a central question: why study this literature at all? The general answer is that the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha should be studied because they embody an expression of the human spirit, and the historian is enjoined to study the human past. But, for scholars of the so-called "Judeo-Christian culture", a particular interest is inherent in the investigation of that segment of the past in which Judaism took on the form it still has and in which Christianity emerged. Yet this very agenda, when formulated thus, bears within it potentialities for the perversion of truth and the misconception of reality. The historical enterprise is an interpretative one; there is a great danger inherent in the study of the origins of ones own tradition. Modern and medieval "orthodoxies" tend to interpret the time before they existed in terms of themselves. It has only been in the last generation of scholarship of Judaism in the Second Temple Period, that the implications of this way of seeing the world have begun to penetrate the fabric of historical thinking and writing.

This is an extremely important development, for it permits the Jewish literature of the Second Temple Period, and the people who produced and cherished these works, to step outside the giant shadows cast by the twin colossi of the Talmud and the New Testament. It then becomes possible to start to delineate what appear to have been central aspects of Judaism in the Second Temple Period. New features of Jewish life and thought become evident and the task of their detailed description and integration into an overall picture can be broached. Only such an endeavor will, in the final analysis, make it possible for us to advance our understanding of the development of rabbinic Judaism and of Christianity. This is a weighty labor but a very important one, and it is the Pseudepigrapha that provide us with evidence of vital aspects of Judaism that would otherwise have remained unknown.

This aspect of the study of the pseudepigraphical literature is in its very infancy. By pursuing it, we are able to trace the influence of ancient Jewish traditions and documents down the centuries. There have been one or two researches that have shown the way (Satran 1980; Stone 2001); other associated investigations have looked at the way Jewish apocryphal traditions were taken up and developed by medieval Judaism and Christianity (Bousset 1896; Stone 1982, Stone 1996). These two avenues of investigation seem likely to produce real results in the direct study of the texts, in the evaluation of their character and function, as well as in the differentiation of Jewish and Christian materials, not always an easy task. From this particular perspective, the study of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha teaches us to understand significant aspects of medieval culture, of Jewish history and of Christian origins.

List of Apocrypha

- Tobit
- Judith
- The Additions to the Book of Esther
- Wisdom of Solomon
- Ecclesiasticus, or the Wisdom of Joshua ben Sira
- Baruch
- The Letter of Jeremiah
- The Additions to the Book of Daniel
- The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews
- Susanna
- Bel and the Dragon
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- In addition, the following books are in the Greek and Slavonic Bibles but not in the Roman Catholic Canon, though some of them occur in Latin:
 - 1 Esdras
 - 2 Esdras
 - 3 Maccabees
 - 4 Maccabees
 - Prayer of Manasseh
 - Psalm 151, following Psalm 150 in the Greek Bible

Select List of Pseudepigrapha with some Notes

Apocalypse of Abraham: A Jewish writing presenting a vision seen by Abraham as well as legends about him. Surviving only in Old Church Slavonic, it was probably written in the second century C.E.

Books of Adam and Eve: A number of closely related versions of a writing dealing with the story of the protoplasts. All of these might derive from a Jewish source document, the language and date of which are unknown.

Apocalypse of Adam: An apparently Sethian gnostic revelation received by Adam and transmitted to Seth. Perhaps first or second century C.E. in date, it occurs in Nag Hammadi Codex 5.

Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch: An apocalypse written in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple by the Romans, it is closely related to the Fourth Book of Ezra. Its chief subjects are the theological issues raised by the destruction.

Biblical Antiquities: Sometimes also called Pseudo-Philo, this is a biblical history from the creation to the monarchy and seems to have been written before the destruction of the Temple by the Romans.

Book of Enoch: A compendium of five Jewish apocalypses all of which were composed before the destruction of the Second Temple. These come from diverse periods and social sects, the oldest being the first and third parts. The whole book is found only in Ethiopic, but parts of it have been discovered in Greek and in the original Aramaic from Qumran.

Book of the Secrets of Enoch: (2 Enoch or Slavonic Enoch). A Jewish apocalypse from the time before the destruction of the Temple, relating Enoch's ascent to the heavens and the revelations received by him there, as well as the history of the antediluvian generations.

Fourth Book of Ezra (2 Esdras): An apocalypse written after the destruction of the Second Temple, probably between 95 and 100 C.E. It deals with the theological problems that arose from the destruction of the Temple.

Books of Giants: A writing associated with the Enoch cycle, relating the deeds of the giants who were born of the union of the "sons of God and human women" (Genesis 6:1-4). It is known from fragments found at Qumran and was written before 100 B.C.E.

Book of Jubilees: A retelling and expansion of the biblical history from the Creation to Moses. It was originally written in Hebrew early in the second century B.C.E.

Lives of the Prophets: A collection of biographical notes relating details of the lives and deeds of various prophets. It was circulated widely among Christians and probably reflects Jewish sources. Written in the early centuries C.E.

Fourth Book of Maccabees: A book written in Greek by a Hellenized Jew to show the rule of reason over the passions. The martyrs of the Maccabean revolt serve as his chief examples.

Testament of Moses (Assumption of Moses): This writing relates Moses' last charge to Joshua. Its present form dates from early in the first century C.E. It contains much important eschatological teaching.

Sibylline Oracles: Collection of oracles fabricated by Jewish and Christian propagandists in the early centuries C.E. They were attributed to the Sibyl, a pagan prophetess.

Testament of Solomon: A Greek work, Christian in its present form, containing extensive legendary and magical traditions associated with Solomon.

Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A work listing the last wills and testaments of the twelve sons of Jacob. It survives in Greek in a Christian form but clearly contains many older, Jewish sectarian sources. It is important for the study of Jewish ethical and eschatological teaching.

