

General Introduction

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The so-called Pseudepigrapha

In the companion volume to this series, *The Jewish and Christian World 200 BC to AD 200*, A. R. C. Leaney has given a short history of the origin of Law, Prophets and Writings as an authoritative Hebrew canon of Scripture. He has also pointed to the existence of the Apocrypha of the Greek and Latin Bible and of Pseudepigrapha, a term used to denote a number of writings, other than the canonical books and the apocrypha, that profess to give genuine information about important biblical figures and to convey, through them, teaching relevant to later generations.

The word 'pseudepigraphon', in the strict sense of 'a writing with false superscription or title' (Liddell–Scott–Jones, *Greek-English Lexicon*), can only be applied to a certain number of these writings. The Testament (Assumption) of Moses, for example, gives the last words of Moses (in a narrative setting) and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs give the parting words of the sons of Jacob; the apocalypses 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch record visions seen by Enoch and Baruch, again in a narrative setting. But other narratives are in the first place narratives about biblical figures (so, for example, Joseph and Aseneth, the Martyrdom of Isaiah, the *Paraleipomena Jeremiou* and the Testament of Job) in which the words of the central figures function within the story about them. There, too, it is of course supposed that what they did and said is of the utmost importance for the readers in their own situation.

The twelve writings introduced here form a representative selection of the much larger group of writings briefly introduced in Leaney's volume. 4 Ezra (2 Esdras) is not included here because this book, belonging to the Apocrypha of the English Bible, has already received its commentary by M. A. Knibb in R. J. Coggins and M. A. Knibb, *The First and Second Books of Esdras*, in the CBC series, Cambridge, 1979. It is important in connection with 2Bar and PJ.

Pseudepigraphy

It is necessary to say something here about pseudepigraphy, a very varied and complex phenomenon by no means confined to the so-called Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament. The following considerations may be relevant:

(a) In a difficult period in the life of the people or of a group within Israel, pseudepigraphy served to transmit guidance from authoritative figures in the past. It is assumed that what is true and relevant in the present time, must have been true and relevant from of old. The heroes of the past must have experienced and taught much more than what is handed down in those writings which have gradually become authoritative. The essence of pseudepigraphy is not the false attribution of writings to people who have nothing to do with them, but the keen awareness of some sort of ongoing revelation and of the task of continuous reinterpretation of the truth and wisdom transmitted in God's history with his people.

(b) Some figures in the past had and have specific functions. Moses received the revelation of the 'written Torah' (as well as of the 'oral Torah', according to the scribes) on Mount Sinai. It does not come as a surprise, then, that Jubilees, a rewritten version of Genesis and part of Exodus, tries to bring a number of points about beliefs and practices home to his readers in the form of a revelation transmitted to Moses by an angel. Moses and the angel are the authorities behind this view of Israel's earliest history and this particular interpretation of its *halakah* (binding regulations). Another example: if a number of psalms, sung or read in certain Jewish circles, give voice to certain significant common experiences, they are collected and ascribed to Solomon, one of the composers of psalms and hymns in Scripture. Or, if the Jews are disoriented because of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, some circles attempt to reconcile this disaster with the belief in God's guidance of Israel and to sustain hope in a new beginning, and for that purpose they invoke the authority of Jeremiah and his secretary Baruch, unwavering servants of God at the time of the destruction of the city before the Babylonian exile.

(c) Pseudepigraphy as a means of appeal to the authorities of the past is used for different purposes. As the introductions to the individual writings in this volume show, it is very difficult to define certain genres in this literature. Four of them, for instance, bear the title 'testament' but almost the only common element seems to be the connection with the death of an important person. It is equally difficult to describe the

characteristics of apocalyptic writings – such as 1 Enoch and 2 Baruch, introduced here – because ‘apocalyptic’ passages or elements are also found in other documents.

Yet it may be useful to say something about the purpose of pseud-epigraphy in a writing rightly regarded as a collection of testaments: the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. The sons of Jacob transmit certain exhortations to their sons with the command to hand them down to future generations. Biographical examples and predictions concerning the future serve to underline the value and the strength of the ethical commands. The literary device of a ‘testament’ connects the readers of the present with the authorities of the past: Israel has to give heed to the wise words of its Fathers.

Pseudepigraphy in apocalyptic writings is often connected with the motif of secret tradition. Before departing from this life Ezra, under divine inspiration, commits ninety-four books to writing in forty days, with the help of five assistants. Twenty-four of these books are to be made public at once, ‘but the last seventy books are to be kept back, and given to none but the wise among your people’ (2 Esdras 14: 37–48). Apocalyptic writings are not for everyone; they have to be handed down in certain circles (cp. 1En 104: 12, 13), and are often ordered to be kept ‘sealed’ until the end of days (cp. Dan. 8: 26; 12: 9). The visions recorded in them deal with events that lie in the future for the authority who is speaking; for the readers they give guidance as to the true interpretation of what happened in the past, they assure them that what was predicted has become reality and that the events which have not yet come about will also certainly happen as predicted. In this way apocalypses transmit secret knowledge which is studied carefully in special circles occupying themselves with discerning the signs of the times and interpreting God’s instructions for life and faith to his faithful ones in a dark age.

Questions of date and provenance

In the case of these writings questions of date and provenance can often be answered only with great difficulty. Although they originated in a special situation and with a claim to speak to the condition of special groups of believers in that situation, their authors could only hint at the specific circumstances they had in mind because they took their stand in the past. Next, the history of Israel in the period between 200 BC and AD 200 may be (and often has been) described as a time of continuous crisis, testing the faithfulness and perseverance of the Jewish

people, particularly of the law-abiding pious circles in the nation. What was originally written for a particular period was equally relevant on later occasions. Writings were read and reread, perhaps also (partly) rewritten to fit the new situation. They were handed down not only because they were connected with a biblical person but also because they continued to be relevant.

Unfortunately we know very little about the circumstances of transmission in Jewish circles. Only lately fragments of 1 Enoch and Jubilees in Aramaic and Hebrew have come to light among the Qumran Scrolls so that we can gain at least some idea of the earliest form of these writings (see M. A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community*, in this series, forthcoming). On the whole, however, the pseudepigrapha have come down to us via Christian channels; the primary witnesses are late, and often we have to work with translations of translations. This means that the reconstruction of the oldest accessible text is very difficult and that we have to reckon with a long history of transmission often in remote parts of the Church, such as Ethiopia or Armenia where some writings still held a place of honour when they were forgotten, or only regarded as devotional literature, in other regions of Christianity.

It is essential to keep the history of transmission of each individual writing in mind while one tries to establish its most original form and content. Sometimes there are only few clearly Christian elements which can be set on one side easily, in other cases there must have been a more thorough Christian redaction. In all instances a considerable time has elapsed and much may have happened between the original composition and the copying by Christian scribes of the oldest witnesses at our disposal.

So far the so-called pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament have mainly been studied as documents reflecting the beliefs and convictions of various Jewish groups in the centuries around the beginning of Christianity, as a welcome addition to and correction of what was transmitted through other (particularly later rabbinic) channels. They remain important for that purpose, certainly in connection with the documents found at Qumran. Much less attention has been devoted to the answer to the question why they were taken over by the early Christians and what part they played in the Church, in the first centuries and also much later. The Christians recognized the authority of the Patriarchs, the Prophets and other great and wise men; they were thought to have spoken about Christ and about the life and faith of his followers, and their words in what had become the Old Testament of the Church were, at least to a great extent, regarded as inspired. How

the individual pseudepigrapha fitted into this general picture is very often not clear. But the fact that they were handed down and eventually reached us in sometimes very roundabout ways testifies to the abiding value they were thought to have, at least in some parts of Christianity.

Suggestions for further reading

A recent introduction to the literature under discussion is G. W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah. A Historical and Literary Introduction*, Philadelphia, 1981. It deals with Daniel, (nearly) all the Apocrypha, many Pseudepigrapha and a selection of the Dead Sea Scrolls and treats them against the background of Jewish history. This is without any doubt a very useful tool for any reader who wants to study the Pseudepigrapha in greater depth.

A very full collection of Pseudepigrapha in translation is found in James H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vols. 1–II, Garden City, N.Y., 1983–5. In Germany the 'Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit' (JSRZ), Gütersloh, 1973ff, are appearing in separate fascicles which will eventually make up five volumes. Editors are W. G. Kümmel, C. Habicht, O. Kaiser, O. Plöger and J. Schreiner. For serious study these two modern editions are indispensable. For quick reference the reader will do well to consult H. F. D. Sparks, *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, Oxford, 1984. This edition gives new translations of twenty five writings, with introductions and short notes. It appeared too late to be consulted by the contributors to the present volume.

Well-known (and often reprinted) are two older standard collections, the one edited by R. H. Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vols. 1–II, Oxford, 1913 and the other by E. Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, vols. 1–II, Tübingen, 1900.

Literature on the various individual writings can be found in Nickelsburg's book, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, *The Apocryphal Old Testament* and in JSRZ.

Further useful tools are A.-M. Denis, *Introduction aux Pseudépigraphes grecs d'ancien Testament* (StVTPs 1), Leiden, 1970; J. H. Charlesworth, *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research with Supplement* (SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies 7S), Chico, 1981, and G. Delling and M. Maser, *Bibliographie zur jüdisch-hellenistischen und intertestamentarischen Literatur: 1900–1970* (TU 106²), Berlin, 1975.

Another useful book is M. E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum, vol. II, 2), Assen-Philadelphia, 1984. It deals with the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran sectarian writings, Philo and Josephus.

In their *Faith and Piety in Early Judaism*, Philadelphia, 1983, George W. E. Nickelsburg and Michael E. Stone give a number of select passages on different topics with a view to presenting many aspects of the life and thought of early Judaism. They aim at the same audience, covering a wider range of sources than those treated in this volume. Their book may well be read in connection with

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Pseudo-Philo, *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*

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Title

This book was not written under the name of Philo, nor was *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (*LAB*) its original title. The manuscripts of *LAB* were included among the Latin translations of the writings of Philo of Alexandria. But the author made no pretence of being Philo, and so the work is not technically a pseudepigraphon. Furthermore, nothing in the theology and the treatment of the Old Testament links it to Philo of Alexandria. The ascription to Philo probably rests on its similarity in form and content to the Antiquities of Josephus. That is, since one book of Antiquities was written by Josephus, this other book of Antiquities must have been written by Philo.

The Latin title *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* (Book of Biblical Antiquities) first appeared in the 1552 edition published at Lyons by S. Gryphe. The word Antiquities appears on the label of one of the manuscripts and was taken over as part of the book's title (*Liber Antiquitatum*) in 1527 by its first editor, Johannes Sichardus.

The text

LAB exists in eighteen complete and three fragmentary manuscripts. The manuscripts are of German or Austrian origin, and date from the eleventh to the fifteenth century. All the Latin evidence is presented in my edition in *Pseudo-Philon, Les Antiquités Bibliques*, vol. 1. Parts of *LAB* appear in Hebrew form in the Chronicles of Jerahmeel, but those texts appear to be translations from Latin to mediaeval Hebrew. I have edited and translated the Hebrew texts in *The Hebrew Fragments of Pseudo-Philo* (for details see Bibliography).

The most important Latin manuscripts are Fulda-Kassel Theol. 4^o, 3 (eleventh century) and Phillipps 461 (twelfth century). But the relations among the Latin manuscripts are such that the second major group can preserve readings that reflect the earliest stage of the Latin tradition. Furthermore, there is ample evidence (see my 'The Original Language of Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*', *HTR* (1970),

503–14) that the Latin text was translated from Greek and that the Greek version was based on a Hebrew original. This complex history of transmission must be taken into account in translating and interpreting *LAB*.

Literary genre and aim

The author of *LAB* rewrote and expanded parts of the biblical story from Adam to David. In literary form, the work is closest to the Antiquities of Josephus and the Qumran Genesis Apocryphon. The literary form of those books has been described variously as midrash, targum, and rewritten Bible. But each of those terms raises as many problems as it resolves. At any rate, the author of *LAB* sought to include within the framework of the biblical story from Adam to David the exegetical traditions and theological ideas that were current in his time. Perhaps he wished to provide a kind of handbook for synagogue preachers. Or he may simply have wished to ‘bring up to date’ the biblical narratives. Attempts to narrow his audience down to a specific group (Samaritans, Hellenists, Essenes, Gnostics, Idumaeans, Galileans) have not been very convincing.

Content

The books of the Old Testament from Genesis to 1 Samuel provide the structural framework for *LAB*: Genesis (*LAB* 1–8), Exodus (*LAB* 9: 1–13: 2), Leviticus (*LAB* 13: 3–10), Numbers (*LAB* 14–18), Deuteronomy (*LAB* 19), Joshua (*LAB* 20–4), Judges (*LAB* 25–48), and 1 Samuel (*LAB* 49–65). The story breaks off rather abruptly just before the death of Saul (65: 5). The author may have intended to end on a note of repentance with Saul saying: ‘Be not mindful of my hatred or my iniquity.’ But it is also possible that the ending of the work was lost. How much was lost (one page, or half the book) cannot be known.

The author of *LAB* displays a very strong interest in Israel as God’s people and in the covenant. His other theological interests include the evil of mixed marriages, the place of women, biblical geography, angels and demons, the after-life, God’s eschatological visitation, and the relation between sin and punishment.

The seven passages selected for translation and commentary in this volume illustrate how Ps-Philo used the text of the Old Testament as a vehicle for including exegetical and other traditional material: the apocalypse of Noah (Gen. 8: 21–2), the birth of Moses (Exod. 2: 1–10), the death of Moses (Deut. 34: 1–6), the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22: 1–18),

the testament of Deborah (Judg. 5:7), the announcement of Samson's birth (Judg. 13:2–20), and the song of David the exorcist (1 Sam. 16:14–23). Each of these passages interweaves biblical texts and other materials, and each has relevance for New Testament study. They also illustrate the variety of literary forms used in *LAB*.

Date and place

The parallels between *LAB*, 4 Ezra (2 Esdras), and 2 Baruch are not sufficient to prove a date of composition after AD 70. A date prior to AD 70 (and perhaps around the time of Jesus) is suggested by the kind of Old Testament text used in the book, the free attitude towards the text, the interest in the sacrifices and other things pertaining to cult, and the silence about the destruction of the temple. These same points, as well as the likelihood that *LAB* was composed in Hebrew, indicate a Palestinian origin.

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THE APOCALYPSE OF NOAH (*LAB* 3:9–10)

God's promise to Noah not to destroy the earth again by a flood provides the occasion for a revelation or apocalypse in which a scenario of eschatological events is given. The passage illustrates some of Ps-Philo's characteristic methods of composition. He quotes from Gen. 8:21–2, gives explanations and refinements of the biblical material, and adds to it an eschatological compendium based on Jewish traditions. The scenario of events consists of the interruption of the world as we know it, the resurrection of the dead, the general

judgement, and the renewal of creation to be enjoyed by the just. It differs from the eschatological scenarios in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 13:1–37, and parallels) chiefly in its total silence about the Son of Man.

- 9 And God said: 'I will never again curse the earth on man's account, for the tendency of man's heart is foolish from his youth; and so I will never destroy all living creatures at one time as I have done. But when those inhabiting the earth sin, I will judge them by famine or by the sword or by fire or by death; and there will be earthquakes, and they will be scattered to uninhabited places. But no more will I destroy the earth by the water of the flood. And in all the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, spring and autumn will not cease day and night, until I remember those who inhabit the earth, until the appointed times are fulfilled.
- 10 But when the years appointed for the world have been fulfilled, then the light will cease and the darkness will fade away. And I will bring the dead to life and raise up those who are sleeping from the earth. And hell will pay back its debt, and the place of perdition will return its deposit so that I may render to each according to his works and according to the fruits of his own devices, until I judge between soul and flesh. And the world will cease, and death will be abolished, and hell will shut its mouth. And the earth will not be without progeny or sterile for those inhabiting it; and no one who has been pardoned by me will be tainted. And there will be another earth and another heaven, an everlasting dwelling place.'

9. *And God said. . . as I have done*: according to the quotation from Gen. 8:21, God recognized the waywardness of humanity but promised never to destroy the earth again as he did in Noah's time. *the tendency of man's heart*: the literal translation of the Hebrew text of Gen. 8:21 refers to the impulse that guides human activities along good or evil ways. *is foolish*: the Latin manuscripts read 'has left off' (*desiit*), but the conjecture 'is foolish' (*desipit*) better reflects the meaning. *in all the days*: in Gen. 8:22, God promised Noah that the natural cycle of the earth would continue. The end of that cycle depends entirely on God's decision to initiate the sequence of eschatological events. *until the appointed times are fulfilled*: compare 'until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' in Luke 21:24.

10. *But when the years . . . have been fulfilled*: the cycle ends when the period determined by God has been completed. *the light will cease*: the phrase echoes Gen. 8:21 and indicates that a new period will begin. *I will bring the dead to life*: the resurrection of the dead is a major event in the last days. *sleeping*: the idea of the dead sleeping in the earth appears in LAB 9:6; 19:12; 35:3; 51:5. See also 4 Ezra 7:32 and 2Bar 11:4; 21:24. *deposit*: the Latin *paratecem* reflects the Greek word *parathēkē*. The reading *partem* found in some Latin manuscripts substitutes a more familiar but less accurate word for the loan word *paratecem*. The idea of Sheol returning its deposit appears in LAB 33:3; 1En 51:1; 4 Ezra 4:41–3; 7:32; and 2Bar 21:23. *until I judge*: the general resurrection is the prelude to the final judgement. Until the eschatological visitation, the souls of the just are at peace (LAB 23:13; 28:10; 51:5) and the wicked undergo punishment for their sins (16:3; 23:6; 31:7; 36:4; 38:4; 44:10; 51:5; 63:4). *between soul and flesh*: perhaps the higher and lower aspects of the person are meant. *And the world will cease*: the idea of two worlds (this world and the world to come) is an apocalyptic commonplace. In the world to come, there will be no death and no punishment. The wicked will already be annihilated. *death will be abolished*: according to 1 Cor. 15:26, the last enemy is death. *another earth and another heaven*: the idea of a new earth and a new heaven appears in Isa. 65:17; 66:22. In Jewish and Christian apocalyptic writings (see 1En 45:4–5; 91:16; Jub 1:29; 2 Pet. 3:13; Rev. 21:1), it describes what things will be like after the resurrection and general judgement. The renewed creation will be abundant (*not without progeny or sterile*), secure (*no one . . . will be tainted*), and eternal (*an everlasting dwelling place*).

THE BIRTH OF MOSES (LAB 9:9–16)

Ps-Philo's account of the birth of Moses is clearly dependent on Exod. 2:1–10 for its narrative framework and for many of its phrases. But he adds to the biblical narrative some important traditions: the role of the spirit of God, the dreams of Miriam and of Pharaoh's daughter, the appearance of the angel, the announcement of Moses' mission in leading the escape from Egypt, the actual slaughter of the male children, the idea that Moses was born circumcised, and Melchiel as Moses' Hebrew name. Many of the motifs taken from Exod. 2:1–10 or added by Ps-Philo are present in Matthew's account of Jesus' birth and infancy, but there is no good reason to suppose that Matthew had LAB before him as he composed the first two chapters in his Gospel.