The Origins of the Apocalypse of Abraham

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The Origins of the Apocalypse of Abraham

A dissertation presented

By

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Abstract

The *Apocalypse of Abraham,* a pseudepigraphon only extant in a fourteenth century Old Church Slavonic manuscript, has not received much attention from scholars of Ancient Judaism, due in part to a lack of readily available information regarding the history and transmission of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. This dissertation examines the historical context of these works with the aim of assessing the probability that they contain ancient Jewish material. The rest of the dissertation is focused on the *Apocalypse of Abraham* specifically, discussing its date and provenance, original language, probability that it comes from Essene circles, textual unity, and Christian interpolations. This includes treatments of the issue of free will, determinism, and predestination in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as well as the methodological complexities in trying to distinguish between early Jewish and Christian works. It also provides an in-depth comparison of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* and takes up the question of the social setting for these texts based on relevant precedents set by recent scholars of midrash who seek to probe the "socio-cultural and historical situatedness" of midrashic texts. This discussion includes a survey of parallels between the content of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and rabbinic literature to support the argument that a sharp distinction between apocalyptic ideas and what later became rabbinic tradition did not exist in the time between 70 and 135 C.E. Overall, this dissertation argues that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is an early Jewish document written during the decades following the destruction of the Second Temple. While seeking to warn its readers of the dangers of idolatry in light of the apocalyptic judgment still to come, it also provides sustained exegesis of Genesis 15, which gives cohesion to the entire document.

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a fascinating and understudied Jewish response to the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE. It narrates how Abraham attempts to convince his father Terah, an idol-maker, of the folly of worshipping idols, after which he ascends to heaven with the help of an angel and is shown cosmic and eschatological secrets. While the first eight chapters closely resemble rabbinic tales regarding Abraham and his idol worshipping father, the remaining twenty-four chapters resemble ancient Jewish apocalyptic literature with what appear to be traces of nascent Jewish mysticism. The book as a whole is a response to the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, emphasizing God's control over history and holding out eschatological hope in the face of tragedy. It was not preserved by any Jewish communities that we know of and it owes its survival to the Greek Orthodox Church, at least until the ninth and tenth centuries. It only came to the attention of modern scholars in the nineteenth century when a fourteenth-century Old Church Slavonic translation of it was found in a Russian monastery. This is not the usual provenance of sources for Ancient Judaism and the lack of familiarity amongst Biblical and Jewish Studies scholars with the circumstances surrounding the history and transmission of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha has served as a barrier to the incorporation of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in many treatments of Ancient Judaism. Language presents another barrier: the putative Semitic and Greek texts of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* have been lost to history, and one must have a working knowledge of Old Church Slavonic and Russian in order to study it seriously.

In addition to these practical barriers of familiarity and linguistic access is the existence of traditional biases against apocryphal and pseudepigraphal literature in the field of Biblical

Studies. The influence of Julius Wellhausen, one of the most important biblical scholars of the nineteenth century, has played a significant role in the scholarly neglect of apocalyptic literature. Wellhausen viewed prophecy as the height of ancient Israelite religion; in his developmental schematic, Judaism constitutes a late, corrupt deviation from this ideal, thus creating the implication that apocalyptic literature represents a religious devolution. Accordingly, he devotes scarcely any room to apocalyptic literature in his well-known *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel.*[1]

There exists a similar historical Protestant bias against the Pseudepigrapha, that is, the texts that were not included either in the Christian canon or in the deutero-canonical corpus of the Apocrypha (the latter is part of the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Bibles). In fact, Johann Albert Fabricius (1668-1736), the man who coined the term "Pseudepigrapha," did so in an overt attempt to discredit these documents and expose them to "contempt" as base forgeries.[2] The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has done much to revive interest in pseudepigraphal literature and this historical bias has slowly begun to be countered in the subsequent decades.

Another factor is that some modern scholars have been put off by the supposed association of apocalypse with radical religious groups.[3] For example, John J. Collins argues that because of its popular association with "fanatical millenarian expectation," many Christian theologians are often reluctant to acknowledge that apocalyptic literature played a formative role in early

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[1] S. L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 3.

[2] Ibid., 2.

[3] This sort of thinking is reflected by, for example, David E. Aune, who writes, "Apocalypses can be broadly characterized as *protest literature*. That is, they typically represent the perspective of an oppressed minority" ["Understanding Jewish and Christian Apocalypse," *Word & World* 25, no. 3 (June 1, 2005), 235]; cf. Matthias Henze, who discusses this at length [*Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading 'Second Baruch' in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 5-6].

Christianity.[4] This supposed association of apocalypse with radical sectarianism is based on the now out-dated idea that there existed such a thing as a "normative" Judaism in the Second Temple period, against which outsiders constructed their own idiosyncratic ideologies.[5] The assumption that apocalypses were written solely for small outsider groups has been repeatedly challenged, but traces of the old bias still remain. Klaus Koch writes (in 1970) that "perplexed" and "embarrassed" best describe the prevailing scholarly attitudes towards apocalyptic literature, and he laments the fact that the primary apocalyptic texts have been inconsistently studied, if not purposefully shunned.[6] To sum up in the words of Matthias Henze, "apocalyptic literature has always been, and continues to be, the *enfant terrible* of early Jewish literature."[7]

In the decades since Koch wrote this assessment, there has been a growing interest in the Pseudepigrapha for their own sake, and not simply to round out the context for the development of Early Christianity and what later became Rabbinic Judaism. The *Apocalypse of Abraham,* however, has largely escaped the attention of scholars because of the barriers mentioned above. Of the scholars with the required linguistic skills, some have produced excellent critical editions of the text and general surveys of its content (Kulik, Philonenko, Rubinkiewicz),[8] while others

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[4] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1.

[5] James H. Charlesworth, "In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Interpretation," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (ed. James H. Charlesworth and Craig A. Evans; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 23; Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 5, 231; George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 643-645.

[6] Klaus Koch, Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970); English trans., The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic: A Polemical Work on a Neglected Area of Biblical Studies and Its Damaging Effects on Theology and Philosophy (Naperville, Ill: A.R. Allenson, 1972).

[7] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 5.

[8] Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Lit, 2004); Marc Philonenko and Belkis Philonenko-Sayar,

have focused on particular passages or themes within the text. All agree that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is an ancient Jewish text, but no one has laid out the basis for this conclusion in a detailed, in-depth way that can allow other scholars to weigh the evidence for themselves. Thus, even though there are no scholars claiming outright that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is not an ancient Jewish text, many still have doubts. For this reason I provide as thorough and detailed a case as I can for the antiquity and Jewish provenance of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in the hopes that this will help to bridge the barriers that have kept this text from being utilized as a source for Ancient Judaism.

Towards this end, Chapter 1 is devoted to the history and transmission of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha with the goal of assessing the level of probability that ancient Jewish documents could have been transmitted in such a way as to preserve ancient material. This chapter does not reach any conclusions about the *Apocalypse of Abraham* specifically; rather, it addresses the circumstances surrounding all of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. This is a necessary step before analysis of any particular text can be conducted.

Having dealt with the history of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha in general in Chapter 1, Chapter 2 is devoted exclusively to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and deals with basic, yet crucial preliminary matters, such as the probability of a Semitic original, date, provenance, manuscript evidence, textual unity, the possibility of Christian interpolations, and the history of scholarship. This involves discussions of both external and internal evidence, as well as methodological considerations for how one goes about distinguishing early Christian from Jewish works.

Chapter 3 turns to the issue of comparative evidence and considers the *Apocalypse of Abraham* alongside *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* the main representatives of apocalyptic literature from

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"L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," *Semitica* 31 (1981): 1-119; Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d' Abraham en vieux slave: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction Et Commentaire* (Lublin, 1987).

Judea after the destruction of the temple. This chapter compares the themes, overall message, and function of these three texts and argues that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* asks similar questions as *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* and that they all reflect the same provenance and socio-cultural milieu. Although each text has its own voice, a strong case can be made that they are all part of the same conversation.

An aspect of apocalyptic texts that is only beginning to be explored is their possible social setting. Chapter 4 continues the comparative analysis of *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* and takes a closer look at the challenges and methodological considerations relevant to any study of the *Sitz im Leben* of apocalyptic texts. I discuss the relevance of methodological discussions current in the field of midrash for such an endeavor and explore how they can be applied to apocalypses, with the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a test case.

Much of the scholarly conversation that has taken place in the last few decades regarding apocalyptic literature has been related to the question of genre, which has proven to be a rather contentious subject. As time has gone on and many preliminary matters have been hashed out, scholars have begun to call for more inductive studies of individual texts, which they argue are necessary in order to provide relevant data for the more abstract debates about apocalyptic literature in general.[9] They argue that considerations of genre must be grounded in detailed analyses of the texts themselves in order for the larger discussion to move forward.

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[9] In "Genre, Ideology and Social Movements in Jewish Apocalypticism," Collins writes, "There can be no consensus in the definition of the term 'apocalyptic' apart from the constraints of a specific body of evidence." Later, he writes, "At this point in time, the greater need is surely for detailed study of particular texts" [In *Mysteries and Revelations* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1991), 13, 25]; Paul D. Hanson writes similarly, "We should stop treating intertestamental literature as slavishly derivative from OT categories on the one hand, or as identical with NT and rabbinic forms on the other…Instead a functional model of genres should be adopted which moves inductively from the compositions themselves to literary types" ["Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, no. 2 (1977), 196]; see also Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 648-9 and Collins, "The Apocalyptic Technique: Setting and Function in the Book of Watchers," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 94.

This dissertation is an attempt to provide the kind of in-depth analysis that will contribute both to studies of apocalyptic literature in general and to the greater appreciation of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* for its own sake. Although it did not become a central part of any of the religious traditions that survived antiquity, at the time of its writing, its author felt his message to be both relevant and accessible. Alongside *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a rare source for the time between the revolts (70-132 CE), which is a crucial transitional moment in Jewish history about which we have frustratingly little information. As such, it is a valuable source for any attempt to reconstruct the conversations that were taking place amongst Judean Jews after the destruction of the temple.

Chapter 1

The Medieval Slavic Context for the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha

Introduction

Before we can treat the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a document of Ancient Judaism, we must first treat it as it has come down to us: a Slavic Christian document. As Robert Kraft writes regarding Pseudepigrapha preserved by Christians, "when the evidence is clear that only Christians preserved the material, the Christianity of it is the given, it is the setting, it is the starting point for delving more deeply into this literature to determine what, if anything, may be safely identified as originally Jewish."[1] The following questions in particular must be satisfactorily answered in order to assess the probability that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the other Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha contain ancient Jewish material: Can the preservation of these texts during the thousand years between Early Judaism[2] and the Middle Ages be plausibly accounted for? How, why, and for whom did the Slavs access, translate and preserve the Pseudepigrapha? To what extent did they alter the texts that passed through their hands? Is there a possibility that they authored the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha? What do we know about their translation methods and scribal practices? Who were the Bogomils and to what extent did they alter the Pseudepigrapha? What role did anti-Judaism play in medieval Slavic literature? What can we learn from other Slavonic Pseudepigrapha for which we *do* have the Greek *Vorlagen*?

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[1] Robert A. Kraft, "The Pseudepigrapha in Christianity," in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (ed. John C. Reeves; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1994), 75.

[2] The terms "Early Judaism" and "Ancient Judaism" will be used interchangeably.

Although scholars unanimously accept as reasonable the hypothesis that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is an ancient text based on the available internal and external evidence, an in-depth investigation of the medieval Slavic milieu with the concerns of the Biblical or Jewish Studies scholar in mind has not yet been published. The answer to the question of how medieval hands might have emended the Pseudepigrapha lies scattered throughout various works, many of them written in the nineteenth century by German and Russian scholars who were primarily interested in the connections between their national literature and folklore in general. Current Russian scholars are mostly concerned with the history of their own national literature, while Bulgarian scholars are interested in asserting the primacy of medieval Bulgarian literary activity, since Russians have historically downplayed the role that Bulgarians played in bringing literacy to medieval Rus. Thus, the information most precious to Biblical or Jewish Studies scholars is often mentioned secondarily or as an aside in these works.

This lack of access to relevant information has historically been a hindrance to appreciating the full value of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, especially regarding works such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that exist only in Slavonic. Many scholars, with good reason, are nervous to incorporate the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha into their analysis of Ancient Judaism because it is not clear which elements might be ancient and which might be medieval. Although complete certainty is of course elusive, I will argue that a fuller understanding of the medieval Slavic context allows for a measure of probability that can give scholars more confidence in engaging with the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. To that end, this chapter will survey the available information regarding the Pseudepigrapha in medieval Bulgaria and Kievan Rus with the questions and concerns of the Biblical or Jewish Studies scholar in mind. This chapter will treat the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha in general, which will lay the groundwork for the chapters to come that will be

concerned specifically with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. It should be noted that although this chapter is mostly concerned with the Pseudepigrapha, it will at times be appropriate to speak of the larger body of religious literature that was transmitted to Slavic lands from Byzantium as a whole; statements made about this literature, however, should not be confused with statements made specifically about the Pseudepigrapha.

Although the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was rediscovered in modern times in a fourteenth-century Russian manuscript belonging to the Aleksander-Nevskii monastery in St. Petersburg, in order to understand its history, we must start in Bulgaria, where the original translation took place. In this chapter, we will trace the transmission of Greek Christian literature from Byzantium to Bulgaria, and from there to Kievan Rus. If we want to ascertain as precisely as we can what kinds of changes might have been made to the Greek Pseudepigrapha in Slavonic, we must examine the two separate contexts of Bulgaria and then Rus in turn; they should not be confused, as the social and religious contexts of each were unique. Only by assembling the evidence we have about the fate of the Pseudepigrapha in Byzantium, Bulgaria, and then Rus in chronological order, can we paint the clearest picture possible of the journey of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* before it landed in the library of the Aleksander-Nevskii monastery.

Methodological Considerations

Before we begin, some further comments regarding methodology are necessary. First of all, I will repeat my assertion above that the available evidence makes it impossible to conclude anything with complete certainty; instead, we are dealing with degrees of probability and likelihood. But probabilities can still be useful; as James H. Charlesworth states, probability is "the level of confidence that is usually necessary for solid historical reconstructions of Early

Judaism."[3] In affirming this statement, I do not wish to minimize the serious difficulties involved in assessing the antiquity of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, especially the large period of time separating the Second Temple period and the Middle Ages, and the fact that the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha are twice removed from the putative Semitic originals. In my research, however, the strongest caution I have consistently encountered regarding the reliability of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha is related to the paucity of available information about the circumstances in which they were transmitted. It is as if this lack of information functions as a brick wall that stops all further inquiry. Only after this information is made available can we discuss the likelihood of ancient material remaining in these texts and how to distinguish it from later additions. As Kraft writes, "Once their setting in Christianity has been recognized more clearly, it may be possible to pose . . . the questions of origin and early transmission."[4] The goal of this chapter, then, is to provide as much information as possible about the medieval Slavic milieu, which will allow us to assess the probability of certain scenarios. Let me note that whatever conclusions are reached here will necessarily be generalities; how much they can be applied to an individual document must be shown through inductive analysis of each text. This chapter is meant to demonstrate whether such analysis is warranted in the first place.

In "The Uniqueness and Importance of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha," Charlesworth makes a helpful methodological statement: he writes that we can be "relatively certain that we have discovered an early Jewish stratum . . . when we find ideas or metaphors typical of Early Judaism but atypical of medieval dualism."[5] As an example of this, he cites the ancient controversy

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[3] James H. Charlesworth, "The Uniqueness and Importance of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha in the Slavonic Tradition: Continuity and Diversity* (ed. Lorenzo DiTommaso and Christfried Böttrich; Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 6.

[4] Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 63.

[5] Charlesworth, "Uniqueness," 8.

regarding the solar versus the lunar calendar, which is reflected in *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees*. Although his reasoning is sound, this is not a widely applicable approach, since there are few concrete examples that fit into such a narrow framework; most of the material in the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha neither reflects medieval dualism nor contains elements of Early Judaism that were not taken up by later Christians. Charlesworth's approach, however, is quite useful when one is assessing works as a whole. For example, Christfried Böttrich hypothesizes a date before 70 CE for *2 Enoch* based on the fact that it reflects the conflict between confrontation and conformity for Jews in the diaspora.[6] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is similar in that the entire work is focused on addressing the theological issues raised by the destruction of the Second Temple. In both these examples, one can responsibly argue that such concerns are indeed typical of Early Judaism but atypical of both early and medieval Christianity, whether dualistic or not. Thus, Charlesworth provides a useful lens through which to view these texts as a whole.

Lastly, another major obstacle to treating the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha as documents of Ancient Judaism is the lack of a sound methodology that can separate ancient material from later redaction; the task of differentiating early Jewish from Christian materials is especially challenging because of their intertwined history and overlapping beliefs.[7] The lack of any agreed-upon approach to this task is a major reason why so many scholars have felt uncomfortable engaging with the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha in any study of Ancient Judaism. The development of such a methodology, however, cannot move forward until a more detailed

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[6] Christfried Böttrich, "Recent Studies in the Slavonic Book of Enoch," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 5 (1991): 40.

[7] Charlesworth, "Uniqueness," 7; Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 57; James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament: Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 35.

knowledge of the medieval Slavic milieu is available. Let us now turn our attention to that important topic.

From Byzantium to Bulgaria

Let us begin with the basic facts of the transfer of Christian literature from Byzantium to Bulgaria. It is an established fact that the Slavs were not literate until the Greek missionaries Cyril and Methodius developed an alphabet for the Slavic peoples they worked with in Moravia and Pannonia (north and west of Bulgaria) during the years 863–885 CE. Before this, the Slavs were pagans and their traditions were oral.[8] Thus, before the advent of Christianity and the subsequent influx of literature from Byzantium, there were no indigenous Bulgarian writings. Christianity officially came to Bulgaria in 864, when Prince Boris capitulated to Byzantium and converted to Christianity as part of the terms of surrender. Soon afterwards, Greek missionaries were sent to baptize the people and establish the church there.[9] Bulgaria remained illiterate, however, until 885, when the disciples of Cyril and Methodius arrived, bringing with them the Glagolitic alphabet and some Greek Christian writings already translated into Slavonic.[10] Their

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[8] Robert Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria: A Comparative Study across the Early Medieval Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 174–76.

[9] Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1948), 71–72, 88; Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 147.

[10] Contrary to popular belief, the Cyrillic alphabet was not actually created by Cyril himself, but by one of his disciples, who based it on the Greek alphabet and retained Glagolitic letters for the sounds that had no representation in Greek. The Cyrillic alphabet was developed in Bulgaria soon after 893 because the Glagolitic alphabet was both cumbersome to use and difficult to learn. In response to this change, a Bulgarian monk named Khrabr wrote a short treatise in defense of Glagolitic and against models based on Greek. No doubt this reflected the strong anti-Greek feeling that was widespread in Bulgaria at the time (Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 176–77, 180).

translation work in Moravia had mainly focused on liturgical texts for the new converts, along with the translation of the psalms, gospels, and epistles.[11]

Due to this pragmatic approach, a full translation of the Christian Bible into Slavonic was not completed until 1499, a fact that contributed to the blurring of the lines between canonical and non-canonical books in Slavic lands.[12] In the same pragmatic spirit, only a portion of the available Greek literature from Byzantium was deemed important or useful enough to translate into Slavonic. After liturgical texts, non-liturgical passages from the law, prophets, and the New Testament were translated; church laws, the church fathers, collections of hagiographies, religious historical chronicles, and the Pseudepigrapha followed soon after.[13] No secular or classical Greek texts were translated; thus, the first Bulgarian corpus of literature was exclusively religious.[14]

Pseudepigraphal texts were translated quite early in this process, mainly due to the zeitgeist of the time. Beginning in the tenth century, there was a considerable increase in the use of the Pseudepigrapha in Byzantium, especially those works concerned with the lives of biblical figures.[15] This was due, first of all, to the fact that the Pseudepigrapha were no longer strongly

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[11] R. Zlatanova, "Prevodachi i prevodna literatura," [Translators and translated literature] in Donka Petkanova et al., *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* [Old Bulgarian literature: encyclopedic dictionary] (Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 396–97.

[12] N. S. Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia* [Essays] (Moscow: Izd. M. i S. Sabashnikovykh, 1898), 127.

[13] N. A. Meshcherskii, *Istochniki i sostav drevnei slaviano-russkoi perevodnoi pis'mennosti IX–XV vekov: uchebnoe posobie* [The sources and composition of ancient Slavo-Russian translated literature in the ninth to the fifteenth centuries: a textbook] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo leningradskogo universiteta, 1978), 12–13; Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 178.

[14] Matthias Murko, *Geschichte der älteren südslawischen litteraturen* (Leipzig: C. F. Amelang, 1908), 82; Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 181.

[15] Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 68. Kraft hypothesizes that the Pseudepigrapha were preserved in Greek monastic circles whose scholarly interests overrode the official prohibitions. In addition, many Pseudepigrapha were available in Coptic and Syriac from the fourth to the ninth centuries, which makes it even less likely that they would have disappeared entirely in Greek (Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 70).

associated with heretics, as had been the case in the third through the fifth centuries. Soon after

Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire, indices of apocryphal and

pseudepigraphal books had been compiled in order to combat the spread of heresy, especially

that of the Arians.[16] But as these heresies died out, the function of the Pseudepigrapha was

rethought, and they became popular reading material in Byzantium, both for their educational

and entertainment value.[17] Secondly, educated people in medieval Byzantium were interested in

martyrology, hagiography, world history and chronography, astronomy, popular piety

(folkloristic tales), and liturgy, all of which are present in the Pseudepigrapha.[18] The available

evidence suggests that Christian scribes in Byzantium were generally faithful in their copying of

pseudepigraphal texts.[19] They did at times insert obvious interpolations, such as the passage

about Jesus that was added to Josephus' *Antiquities* (18.3), but there is little evidence that they

Christianized Jewish Pseudepigrapha in any thoroughgoing way.[20] Rather, Byzantine scribes

were more likely to author new texts based on older Jewish compositions or piece together ideas

from Jewish works with newly-written Christian passages. For example, *4 Ezra* was the model

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[16] The earliest indices were created by Athanasius, the staunch opponent of the Arians, and Gregory the Theologian [V. M. Istrin, *Ocherk istorii drevnerusskoi literatury domoskovskogo perioda, 11–13 vv.* [A study of the history of ancient Russian literature from the Domoskovski period, 11–13 c.] (Petrograd: Nauka i shkola, 1922), 115].

[17] Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 68–69; Donka Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 45–47.

[18] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 178; Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha" 68–69, 82.

[19] Kraft, "Pseudepigrapha," 72–73.

[20] Ibid. "About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared" (Flavius Josephus, Louis H. Feldman, Ralph Marcus, H. St. J. Thackeray, and Allen Paul Wikgren, *Jewish antiquities* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015], 49, 51.

for the Christian works *Greek Apocalypse of Ezra, Vision of Ezra, Questions of Ezra,* and

Apocalypse of Sedrach.[21] The *Apocalypse of Elijah,* the *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah,* and

4 Baruch, in turn, are good examples of works consisting of Jewish and Christian materials

pieced together.[22] Thus, Byzantine Christians were more likely to author new works that betray

their Christian origin or create new works in which Jewish and Christian passages can be easily

distinguished than to rework existing Jewish documents into Christian ones.

Early Bulgarian Literary Activity

    As mentioned above, the introduction of Christianity into Bulgaria was brought about by

military might, and Byzantium was not interested in nurturing the independence of the Bulgarian

church. Prince Boris (852–889), however, was delighted when Clement and Naum, the disciples

of Cyril and Methodius, arrived with Slavonic letters in 885. Under his enthusiastic patronage,

numerous monasteries were founded at Pliska, Preslav and Okhrid, where intense literary activity

took place.[23] In the twenty years after the arrival of Clement and Naum, a massive amount of

religious works was translated into Slavonic from the Greek.[24] Education was a high priority, and

according to available sources, Clement and Naum taught 3500 pupils in Pliska, Preslav, and

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[21] Another example is the *Apocalypse of Daniel,* a Byzantine Christian work that addresses political developments in ninth-century Constantinople but contains elements that parallel much earlier works such as the *Sibylline Oracles, 2 Baruch,* and *4 Ezra* [G. T. Zervos, "Apocalypse of Daniel," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 1 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*; ed. James H. Charlesworth; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 756].

[22] O. S. Wintermute, "Apocalypse of Elijah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:725–26, 730. M. A. Knibb, "Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2:147.

[23] Seventeen monasteries were founded in Pliska and Preslav alone, and their founders worked zealously to build up their libraries [William R.Veder, *Utrum in Alterum Abiturum Erat? A Study of the Beginnings of Text Transmission in Church Slavic* (Bloomington, Ind.: Slavica, 1999), 7; Vatroslav Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury* [A history of Serbo-Croatian literature] (Kazan: V Universitestkoi tipografii, 1871), 80; Dimitur N. Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva* [A history of the Bulgarian church] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Sv. Sofia," 1910), 582].

[24] Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 88; Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 582.

Okhrid in just seven years.[25] The Bulgarians at this time were highly motivated to lift themselves

up to the cultural level of Byzantium, and translation work was highly regarded.[26] The newly

founded monasteries taught that literacy elevates the soul and that the reading of books was an

act of valor through which the individual could escape sinful thoughts and please God.[27] Since

Old Church Slavonic was a literary language and had to be learned, each monastery had a school,

and education, translation, and the copying of manuscripts were compulsory according to

Bulgarian monastic regulations. Monks were not the only ones who attended these schools;

bishops, clergy, and laymen also learned Old Church Slavonic and copied out books to give as

gifts to monasteries.[28] After the Pseudepigrapha were translated into Slavonic, they were widely

distributed and their contents were passed on orally to the people by the lower clergy and others

who had read them.[29]

The monasteries quickly came to play an important social role in Bulgaria. In the ninth and

tenth centuries, feudalism was developing and the population was becoming increasingly

oppressed and desperate.[30] The monasteries provided stable places of refuge, and as they had

been founded on landed estates, they had the means to support themselves and those who joined

their ranks.[31] Under Byzantine domination, they also became the guardians of national

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[25] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 155–56.

[26] Petar Dinekov, "Outlines of Old Bulgarian Literature," in *Kiril and Methodius: Founders of Slavonic Writing: A Collection of Sources and Critical Studies* (Boulder: Columbia University Press, 1985), 20; Zlatanova, "Prevodachi," 396.

[27] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 581.

[28] Veder, *Utrum in Alterum,* 190; Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 581–85.

[29] Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 47.

[30] Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 101.

[31] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 159.

consciousness, Bulgarian literary traditions, and worship in Slavonic, which Byzantium openly discouraged.[32] In 893, the newly crowned Prince Symeon declared Slavonic the official language of the Bulgarian church, which meant that Bulgarian clergy took the preeminent role in presiding over religious services.[33] This did not sit well with Constantinople, and when it ruled Bulgaria directly from 1018–1086, it tried to suppress worship in Slavonic.[34] Translating texts and conducting services in Slavonic thus became a way of resisting the dominance of Byzantium, with its program of Hellenization.[35]

It was under these conditions of intense literary activity, mainly taking place in monasteries, that a wide-ranging corpus of pseudepigraphal works was translated. The late ninth and early tenth century are generally considered the "Golden Age" of Bulgarian literary activity. As mentioned above, Prince Boris (852–889) was a strong supporter of Slavonic translation work, as was his son Prince Symeon (893–924). Symeon rebelled against Byzantium, which led to a period of relative independence for a time, which was conducive to the blossoming of Slavonic literature.[36] Ryszard Rubinkiewicz believes that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was most likely translated during this time.[37]

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[32] Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 104; Donka Petkanova, "Monastiri," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 291.

[33] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 158.

[34] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 996.

[35] Murko, *Geschichte,* 85.

[36] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 161; Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 93.

[37] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 1:686.

The Popularity of the Pseudepigrapha in Bulgaria

By the middle of the eleventh century, a large portion of the Pseudepigrapha known in Byzantium had been translated into Slavonic.[38] The incorporation of material from these texts into many different literary compilations attests to their popularity, as does the fact that the amount of pseudepigraphal works in Old Bulgarian literature vastly outnumbers other genres, such as philosophical or historical texts.[39] The Pseudepigrapha found a receptive audience in Bulgaria for a variety of reasons. First, they had much more in common with the folk traditions and pagan beliefs of the Bulgarian people than the canonical, liturgical, and theological material translated from Greek.[40] There were similarities between the pagan cosmogonies and some of the pseudepigraphal stories relating to creation,[41] which perhaps explains the wide dissemination of works devoted to this topic such as the *Shestodnev,* a compilation of largely pseudepigraphal material regarding the first six days of creation,[42] and the *Palaeas*, which we will discuss below. There was also a strong folk belief in demons, against which a variety of spells and magical

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[38] We know this from the earliest Slavic index of forbidden books (the Pogodinov Index), which dates to 1073, as well as from the influence of the Pseudepigrapha on the creative works of Bulgarian writers as early as the tenth century, such as the writings attributed to Jeremiah [Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 47; P. Kemp, *Healing Ritual: Studies in the Technique and Tradition of the Southern Slavs* (London: Faber and Faber limited, 1935), 172.

[39] Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 47; Dinekov, "Outlines of Old Bulgarian Literature," 14; Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 599.

[40] Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 97; V. V. Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify* [Ancient Russian Apocrypha] (Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo in-ta, 1999), 44.

[41] Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 171; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 97; Yuri Stoyanov, *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 164. Cf. especially the *Book of Enoch* and the *Vision of Isaiah.*

[42] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 179; Moses Gaster, *Greeko-Slavonic: Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature and its Relation to the Folk-Lore of Europe during the Middle Ages* (London: Trübner: Hill, 1887), 141. The *Shestodnev*, a compilation of theological, philosophical and scientific material that expounds on the first six days of creation, was written by John the Exarch and is based on the *Hexaemeron* of St. Basil (late ninth-early tenth century).

practices existed; the Pseudepigrapha, with their many tales about the devil, angels, and demons found a receptive audience in this respect.[43] Pre-Christian pagan beliefs were never successfully suppressed, and a syncretistic situation developed, with folk culture drawing inspiration and impetus from the Pseudepigrapha.[44] Much pseudepigraphal material was thus absorbed into Bulgarian popular culture, where it had a lasting influence on a variety of genres, such as ballads, legends, fairytales, and proverbs.[45]

Another major reason for the popularity of the Pseudepigrapha is that they that met the taste of the time: fantastic, mystical, and magical stories were quite popular during the Middle Ages, and Bulgaria was no exception. With their tales of miracles, visions, and encounters with angels and demons, the Pseudepigrapha had much material with which to feed this appetite for the supernatural.[46] In addition, as in every era, the Pseudepigrapha provided answers to the kinds of questions that naturally arise upon a reading of the biblical narratives. Many details that the reader would wish to know are absent, especially regarding creation, paradise, hell, the antichrist and the eschaton.[47] In addition, although they are colorful in any context, given that the corpus of literature brought to Bulgaria was quite limited, it is not surprising that the Pseudepigrapha, with

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[43] M. S. Kiseleva, *Uchenie knizhnoe: tekst i kontekst drevnerusskoi pis'mennosti* [Literary theory: text and context in ancient Russian literature] (Moscow: Indrik, 2000), 37; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 103; Murko, *Geschichte,* 87.

[44] A. N. Pypin, *Istoriia slavianskikh literatur* [The history of Slavic literatures] (Saint Petersburg: Izd. M. M. Stasiulevicha, 1879), 75; Dinekov, "Outlines of Old Bulgarian Literature," 10; Murko, *Geschichte,* 82. The Pseudepigraphal tale of the *Legend of the Cross* came to be used as the basis for popular prayers and semi-magical formulae in Bulgaria (Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 174). Testifying to the important role that superstition and magic played in Bulgarian culture, a fourteenth-century Russian manuscript quotes a Serbian preacher as saying, "I have traveled through many countries, but I never saw so many witches and sorceresses as in Bulgaria" (Murko, *Geschichte,* 87; translation mine from the German).

[45] Murko, *Geschichte,* 82; Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 47.

[46] Pypin, *Istoriia slavianskikh literatur* 75; Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 602, 607; Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 173.

[47] Murko, *Geschichte,* 82.

their vivid and captivating tales, became more popular than canonical, homiletical, and theological texts, which are rather dry in comparison.

The Indices of Forbidden Books in Bulgaria

As certain Pseudepigrapha came to be associated with popular heretical movements such as the Bogomils, the orthodox clergy in Bulgaria translated and updated the old Greek indices of forbidden books, adding condemnations of Bulgarian priests who possessed and circulated these works. Unlike the highly popular Pseudepigrapha, however, the indices were not widely disseminated and seem to have had little effect.[48] Although the earliest extant Slavonic manuscripts of the indices are fourteenth century Russian copies of Bulgarian lists, the oldest of the lists, the Pogodinov Index, was originally written in 1073.[49] One of their salient features is that they appear to be directed primarily against the literary activity of the Bogomils. Many of the Pseudepigrapha are marked with the words "*yeretik pisal*," "written by a heretic," and others that have survived have specifically Bogomil characteristics, such as *Questions of John the Theologian to the Lord and to Abraham the Patriarch, Questions of Bartholomew to God's Mother,* the *Childhood of Christ,* the *Walking of God's Mother in Misery,* and the *Debate of Christ with the Devil.*[50]

Others are marked as being written by Jeremiah, called a "Bulgarian priest" and labeled a heretic.[51] Works attributed to him include a text about Sisinios (Patriarch of Constantinople from

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[48] Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 47; Stoyanov, *The Other God,* 162.

[49] Émile Turdeanu, "Apocryphes bogomiles et apocryphes pseudo-bogomiles," *Revue De l'Histoire Des Religions* 138 (1950): 25; Istrin, *Ocherk,*115.

[50] A. Miltenova, "Indeksi," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 220; Iordan Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi i legendi* [Bogomil books and legends] (Sofiia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1970), 52–53 (translation of some of the titles mine from the Old Church Slavonic).

[51] Although he is sometimes referred to as a "Bulgarian pope," this is a misnomer, since in Old Church Slavonic, the word *pop* means *priest* ["попъ," *Polnyi tserkovno-slavianskii slovar': so vneseniem v nego*

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996 to 998), *Revelation of the Holy Trinity, How Jesus Was Made a Priest,* the *Legend of the Wood of the Cross,* and the *Word about Christ's Birth.*[52] The indices represent a serious attempt by the orthodox leadership in Bulgaria to combat heretical movements by banning their writings. It is interesting to note that since the lists were originally Greek, they contain works that most likely were never translated into Old Church Slavonic, such as *Eldad and Modad, Ascension of Moses,* the *Psalms of Solomon,* the *Vision of Elias* and others.[53] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is not mentioned in any of the indices, although the Pogodinov Index mentions "False books written in the name of Adam, Enoch, Lamech, and the Patriarchs."[54]

The Palaeas in Bulgaria

Canonical and pseudepigraphal materials were accessible in Bulgaria primarily through the two kinds of *Palaeas* that existed: the *Palaea historica* and the *Palaea interpretata.*[55] The

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vazhnieishikh drevne-russkikh slov i vyrazhenii [Complete Church Slavonic dictionary: with the most important ancient Russian words and expressions included] (ed. Grigorii D'iachenko; Moscow: Izdatel'skii otdel Moskovskogo Patriarkhata, 1993), 457]. Several scholars have written that Jeremiah was a disciple of Bogomil, but Émile Turdeanu rightly points out that the two were only linked by a Russian scribe in a late fifteenth-century manuscript of an index of forbidden books. This scribe noticed that both Bogomil and Jeremiah were linked to heretical writings and made the assumption that they were connected, but this was pure conjecture on his part. Thus, although Jeremiah has often been referred to by scholars as a Bogomil and the writings connected with him have been included in the corpus of supposed Bogomil literature, this is not supported by the sources. Some scholars have hypothesized that Jeremiah and Bogomil are the same person, but this is also not supported by any evidence (Turdeanu, "Apocryphes bogomiles," 27–38; Murko, *Geschichte,* 88).

[52] Turdeanu, "Apocryphes bogomiles," 25–26; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 100–101; Miltenova, "Indeksi," 220; Donka Petkanova, "Ieremiia," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 226.

[53] Murko, *Geschichte,* 90.

[54] Marc Philonenko and Belkis Philonenko-Sayar, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," *Semitica* 31 (1981): 9; Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi,* 52–53. Apart from some of the books mentioned above, the Pogodinov Index also lists: *The Prayer of Joseph, Psalms of Solomon, Songs of David, The Annunciation of Ilnina, the Annunciation of Sofonina, the Annunciation of Peter, Acts of the Apostles* (pseudepigraphal), *the Epistle of Barnabas, Gospel of Barnabas, Gospel of Thomas, The Vision of the Apostle Paul Which Is Called an Epistle, Paralipomena of Jeremiah, and Life of the Apostle Peter That Fish Walked on Dry Land* (translation mine from the Old Church Slavonic).

[55] Referred to as the "Commentated Palaea" in English, *tolkovaia paleia* in Russian, and *tolkovna paleia* in Bulgarian.

Palaeas are chronicles of Old Testament[56] history heavily laced with pseudepigraphal and legendary material, although the two works are quite different in tone and function.[57] *Palaea* means "old" and is a shortening of the Greek for "Old Covenant," παλαιὰ διαθήκη, referring to the Old Testament; *Palaea* is thus another way of referring to the Old Testament.[58] Applying the title used for Scripture to these collections that contained large amounts of non-canonical material created much confusion in Bulgaria as to what was or was not canonical.

Briefly, the *Palaea historica* is a continuous presentation of Old Testament history from the creation of the world to the reign of David with numerous pseudepigraphal additions that parallel material found in Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities*, the medieval Hebrew *Sefer Hayyashar,* and other sources.[59] The bulk of its material is devoted to the subject of creation and the structure of the cosmos.[60] The *Palaea historica* does not contain any material relating to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and only briefly covers the story of Terah's idolatry and Abraham's conversion, which is known from several ancient and rabbinic sources. The *Palaea interpretata*, on the other hand, is our primary source for the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* and in general, contains more pseudepigraphal stories than the *Palaea historica*.[61] While the latter is modeled on a Byzantine

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[56] The use of the term "Old Testament" is only used to distinguish the Christian use of the Hebrew Bible as opposed to the New Testament; otherwise, the term "Hebrew Bible" will be used.

[57] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 10.

[58] L. V. Levshun, *Ocherki istorii vostochnoslavianskoi srednevekovoi knizhnosti: evoliutsiia tvorcheskikh metodov* [Studies in the history of east Slavic medieval literature: the evolution of creative methods] (Minsk: Evropeiskii gumanitarnyi universitet, 2000), 69.

[59] David Flusser, "Palaea Historica – An Unknown Source of Biblical Legends," in *Studies in Aggadah and Folk-literature* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1971), 78; A. Miltenova, "Paleia," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 345.

[60] Ivan Y. Porfir'ev, *Sbornik otdeleniia russkago iazyka i slovesnosti: imperatorskoi akademii nauk* [Digest of the department of Russian language and literature: imperial academy of sciences] (t. 17; Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1877; repr., Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 7; Miltenova, "Paleia," 346.

[61] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 11.

work that is extant in Greek, the *Palaea interpretata* contains no Greek parallels and was most likely compiled in the ninth century by a Bulgarian scribe using materials translated from Greek.[62] Its narrative begins with creation, to which much of its material is devoted (the *Shestodnev* makes up its first part), and continues until the reign of Solomon, ending with a list of Old Testament prophecies believed to be about Jesus.[63] Half of its material has to do with the narratives from Genesis.[64] The stories in the *Palaea interpretata* are accompanied by anti-Jewish interpretation and commentary in a markedly polemical spirit that is completely lacking in the *Palaea historica*. It is characterized by numerous interpolations that directly address the Jews: "O wicked Jew . . . Listen, cursed Jews . . . Look, Jews . . ."[65] Thus, although the *Palaea interpretata* consists mostly of traditional material, since it is comprised mainly of material received from Byzantium, it is new both in form and as regards its anti-Jewish commentary. The goal of the work as a whole is to prove the superiority of the New Testament over the Old by showing that the latter has symbolic, Christian significance. It aims to show that the Old Testament serves to prefigure the New and reprimands the Jews for not recognizing this.[66] Although the Bogomils are not linked to the original compilation of the *Palaea interpretata*, the passages that scholars propose as Bogomil interpolations are to be found there. Given their predilection for symbolic and allegorical modes of exegesis, it is not surprising that the Bogomils

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[62] Miltenova, "Paleia," 345–46; Porfir'ev, *Sbornik,* 15; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 13.

[63] Istrin, *Ocherk,* 219; Miltenova, "Paleia," 346.

[64] Ivan Y. Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti: Drevnii period, ustnaia narodnaia i knizhnaia slovesnost' do Petra V* [The history of Russian literature: the ancient period, oral popular and literary folklore up to Peter V] (vol. 1 of *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti*; Kazan: Tip. Imper. Universiteta, 1870; repr., Kazan: Tip. Imper. Universiteta, 1913), 218.

[65] Istrin, *Ocherk,* 219.

[66] Miltenova, "Paleia," 346; Porfir'ev, *Sbornik,* 8; Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia,* 151.

were drawn to the *Palaea interpretata* with its interpretation of the Old Testament through the eyes of the New.[67]

<p style="text-align:center">*Translation Practices*</p>

Since the Greek *Vorlagen* are available for many of the Slavonic texts that survived, scholars are able to draw conclusions about the general medieval Bulgarian approach to translation. The work of Cyril laid the groundwork for later scribes and his translations are exactingly correct in relation to the Greek *Vorlagen*. His approach is mainly *verbum de verbo*, although this does not mean his translations were wooden: he does add explanatory words, restructures phrases, and takes the wider context into account.[68] According to Francis J. Thomson, the belief that sense and form are inextricably bound was the prevailing philosophy of translation in medieval Europe, including Bulgaria.[69] John the Exarch and another anonymous medieval Bulgarian writer both discuss the importance of retaining form in translation, even down to the gender of nouns in both languages. Thomson writes, "It was this theory of translation . . . which led to great importance being placed upon orthography: orthodoxy requires orthography since to destroy the form is to blaspheme against the content."[70] Obviously, this was an ideal that was impossible to achieve completely, and individual translators either leaned toward sense (free translation) or toward form (literal translation). Although both schools of thought existed in the Middle Ages, the literalist approach was predominant, which, according to Thomson, "is

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[67] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 747.

[68] Zlatanova, "Prevodachi ," 398; E. M. Vereshchagin, *Istoriia vozniknoveniia drevnego obshcheslavianskogo literaturnogo iazyka: perevodcheskaia deiatel'nost Kirilla i Mefodia i ikh uchenikov* [The history of the development of ancient Slavic literary language: the translation work of Cyril and Methodius and their disciples] (Moscow: Martis, 1997), 17, 34.

[69] Francis J. Thomson, "*Sensus* or *Proprietas Verborum*: Mediaeval Theories of Translation as Exemplified by Translations from Greek into Latin and Slavonic," *Selecta Slavica* 13 (1988): 676.

[70] Ibid.

symbolized by the fact that in the ninth century Erigena [Johannes Scotus Eriugena] feels obliged to apologize for departing from it."[71] With passages from Scripture the *verbum de verbo* approach was compulsory, since the books were undeniably sacred; for example, in the translations of the gospels by Cyril and Methodius, this method is used ninety-eight percent of the time.[72] This also applied in great measure to theological works and the works of the church fathers, whose authority was almost equally high.[73] If there was any scribal creativity at all, it was evident in narrative or legendary material, such as the Pseudepigrapha.[74]

The word-for-word approach to translation, however, was largely utilized with narrative works as well for the following reasons: first of all, other than the princely library in the capital city of Preslav, the Greek originals were not available in Bulgaria.[75] Thus, once the first translation was made and disseminated, it replaced the Greek *Vorlage* as the source text. After this, the only way to preserve its content was to remain as faithful to it as possible.[76] Secondly, as mentioned above, the copying of manuscripts was considered an important act of piety in Bulgarian monasteries, and the monks took this work seriously and carefully.[77] Thirdly, once texts written in the Glagolitic alphabet were transferred into the Cyrillic alphabet, the text largely

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[71] Ibid., 677.

[72] Zlatanova, "Prevodachi," 398; Alexander Kulik, "*Veritas Slavica*: On the Value of Slavonic Evidence for the Early Apocalyptic Tradition," *Texts and Literatures* 38 (2010): 3; Vereshchagin, *Istoriia vozniknoveniia,* 22.

[73] Zlatanova, "Prevodachi," 398; Thomson, *Sensus*, 675.

[74] Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury X–XVII vekov: [uchebnoe posobie]* [The history of Russian literature in the tenth to the seventeenth centuries: a textbook] (Moscow: Prosveshchenie, 1980), 34.

[75] Veder, *Utrum in Alterum,* 180. This is in contrast to the situation in Croatia, where there were Latin libraries in which the originals were preserved and new translations were periodically conducted [William R. Veder, "Translation – Who Cares?" in *Translation and tradition in "Slavia orthodoxa"* (ed. Valentina Izmirlieva and B. Gasparov; Zürich: LIT, 2012), 185].

[76] Veder, "Translation – Who Cares?" 185, 187. The absence of authoritative Greek *Vorlagen* made it difficult to judge the merit of one version over another, which is why none of them were discarded.

[77] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 583.

became frozen; very little lexical updating, collation of data, or glosses occurred. This means that there was a window of time for changes, most likely made in the early days of intense literary activity in Bulgaria, which was overseen by Clement and Naum.[78]

The literalist approach to translation employed by Bulgarian scribes, who had varying levels of education, resulted in one of the most salient characteristics of Slavonic texts: the frequent presence of mistranslations and corruptions on the lexical level. Since the translations were mainly mechanical, if a scribe did not understand a word, he did his best to guess its meaning, at times ignoring its context, which often resulted in an incomprehensible translation. As Thomson summarizes, "the main reason for incomprehensibility [of early Slavic texts] is, of course, literal translation, and the list of works in which whole passages are completely without meaning in Slavonic is long."[79] Slavonic translations, then, are characterized both by extreme fidelity to the source text and by corrupt readings on the lexical level.[80] This increases their critical value, however, in that it means that they are quite likely to have preserved the content of the original. And since the scribes were trying to be as accurate as possible to their source text, we can study their lexical mistakes, as Alexander Kulik has, in order to hypothesize which words in Greek they were attempting to translate.[81] Knowing that the Slavic scribes were attempting word-for-

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[78] Veder, *Utrum in Alterum,* 191.

[79] Francis J. Thomson, "The Nature of the Reception of Christian Byzantine Culture in Russia in the Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries and Its Implications to Russian Culture," *Slavica gandensia* 5 (1978): 117.

[80] Johannes Van der Tak speaks of "the well-known inaccuracy of the Slavic scribes," citing "many Slavic translators, who were inclined to produce word-to-word translations with many resulting errors in the translations" [Johannes G. van der Tak, review of Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrpaha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham, JSJ* 38 (2007): 128]. His use of the word "inaccurate" is unfortunate in that it seems to imply inaccuracy in relation to the text's *Vorlage,* although what he clearly means are corruptions on the lexical level. Scholars are generally agreed that the Slavic scribes were extremely careful to adhere to their source texts and that mistranslations of lexemes are due to lack of erudition, not sloppiness, as might be assumed from van der Tak's comments.

[81] See Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Lit, 2004).

word translations allows us to rely on the content of their manuscripts with more confidence and to study their mistakes as a way of accessing the original Greek. Although it would seem that more flexibility was allowed in the translation of pseudepigraphal works, Kulik raises a good point when he argues that one should not posit too sharp of a division between the approach to translation of canonical and non-canonical works, since the line between the two was so blurry in medieval Bulgaria.[82]

Bulgarian Literary Creativity

Old Church Slavonic was a literary language that had to be learned by the Bulgarians, which meant that a certain level of education was required to become a proficient scribe.[83] The quality of education in Bulgaria seems to have declined after the initial educational push in the late ninth century, since orthodox writers from the tenth century on lament the ignorance and coarseness of the clergy and their general disinterest in spiritual education.[84] The ability to compose or edit the content of a text required a level of erudition that few Bulgarian scribes possessed. Rather, compilation, including abbreviation, conflation, excerption, interpolation and rearrangement, was the main scribal creative outlet in Bulgaria, and "hardly any Slavonic book is entirely free of traces of compilation."[85] This is not to say that no Bulgarians ever authored original works: Clement wrote several *vitae* of prophets, apostles, and sages, John the Exarch wrote the *Shestodnev*, Constantine the Presbyter wrote a gospel commentary and an ecclesiastical treatise, and the monk Khrabr wrote his treatise defending the Glagolitic alphabet; other known authors

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[82] Kulik, *Veritas Slavica,* 3–4.

[83] Veder, *Utrum in Alterum,* 190.

[84] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 602, 606–7; Pypin, *Istoriia slavianskikh literatur,* 75.

[85] Veder, "Translation – Who Cares?" 187.

are Gregory the Presbyter and Prince Symeon. Apart from Khrabr, who wrote on a contemporary topic, all of these writers modeled their compositions on works from Byzantium.[86] Original works of the more popular type were the *Thessaloniki Legend,* the *Folk Biography of Ivan Rilski*, and *Triasavitsi* (fevers), which describes various illnesses as demons.[87] Many tales and legends about Mary circulated as well.[88]

The vast majority of texts that came out of medieval Bulgaria, however, were compilations made up of Byzantine material, much of it pseudepigraphal. William R. Veder, writing against the assertion by some scholars that the Bulgarian scribes never rose above the level of rote copying, argues that they recognized the segmentability of the texts they were transmitting, and that this allowed them to exercise literary creativity by rearranging the material for their own purposes.[89] The fact that there is a scholarly debate regarding the ability of the Slavic scribes to do anything beyond rote transcription testifies to the general lack of highly educated scribes. Those with the erudition necessary to author or edit texts were usually higher-up orthodox clergy who, if they made changes to texts, did so in the form of occasional additions, clarifications, or abridgments with the goal of making the text more accessible to the contemporary Bulgarian reader.[90]

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[86] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 179–80; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 80, 82; Zlatanova, "Prevodachi," 396.

[87] Petkanova, "Apokrifna literatura," 48; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 103.

[88] Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 109.

[89] William R. Veder, "La basse littérature du premier empire bulgare," in *Khiliada godini kato edin den: zhivotut na tekstovete v pravoslavnoto slavianstvo* [A thousand years as one day: the life of the texts of *slavia orthodoxa*] (ed. Svetlina Nikolova; Sofiia: Pechatnitsa na akademichno iz-vo "Marin Drinov," 2005), 100.

[90] Zlatanova, "Prevodachi ," 398.

Other Slavonic Pseudepigrapha

As we seek to understand what kinds of changes might have been made to the Pseudepigrapha in Bulgaria, it is helpful to look at Slavonic Pseudepigrapha for which the Greek *Vorlagen* are extant. This list includes *3* and *4 Baruch,* the *Book of Adam,* the *Life of Adam and Eve,* the *Testament of Job,* the *Testament of Abraham,* the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Joseph and Asenath,* the *Life of Moses,* and the *Ascension of Isaiah.* In 1893, Vatroslav Jagić wrote that a systematic survey of the Slavonic translations of these texts compared with their Greek counterparts had not yet been done, and it seems that this is still the case.[91] We can only speak of two works that have been analyzed in this way: *3 Baruch*, and the *Life of Adam and Eve*.

Both Kulik and H. E. Gaylord have compared the Greek and Slavonic texts of *3 Baruch* with similar results. Having studied the two Greek and twelve Slavonic manuscripts, Kulik reports that although the Slavonic texts contain some scribal errors, such as mistranslations or corruptions, the Greek versions contain some explanatory passages and biblical citations of a Christian nature that are not extant in the Slavonic manuscripts. Gaylord characterizes these elements in the Greek as "possible dependencies" on the Christian work *4 Baruch,* as well as New Testament citations and mentions of Christ.[92] The Greek texts also omit some important passages preserved in the Slavonic versions. For example, the Slavonic contains the story of the planting of the garden by angels, which is omitted in the Greek and according to Gaylord, "is worthy of consideration as original."[93] Kulik concludes that each recension was reworked independently, with the Greek recension introducing the most changes, such as Christianization,

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[91] Vatroslav Jagić, *Slavische beiträge zu den biblischen apocryphen* (Vienna: In commission bei F. Tempsky, 1893), 1.

[92] H. E. Gaylord, "3 (Greek Apocalypse of) Baruch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 1:655.

[93] Ibid.

intertextual sophistication, and explanatory expansions. While corrupt in places, the Slavonic

texts show fewer signs of editorial reworking and are thus better witnesses for the prototext

common to all the texts.[94] Gaylord comes to the same conclusion, stating that "In several

important differences, which separate the Greek from the Slavonic traditions, a strong argument

for the priority of the Slavonic exists."[95]

Michael E. Stone has compared the Slavonic *Life of Adam and Eve* with the extant Greek text

and notes that the former contains plusses not present in the latter. The additions that are not

present in the Greek, however, do occur in the Latin *Vita Adam et Evae*, showing that the

Vorlage used for the Slavonic text was similar to that for the Latin.[96] According to Stone, the

plusses of the Slavonic and Latin versions consist of definitely Jewish material known from

midrash, which makes it more likely that they are original or at least early; he concludes that the

Greek version has lost this material, and has thus deviated from the prototext more than the

Slavonic and Latin texts.[97]

Although the Greek *Vorlagen* for the Slavonic-only *Ladder of Jacob* and the *Word About

Abraham and Sarah* (part of a cycle of pseudepigraphal stories about Abraham in Slavonic) are

not extant, evidence has been found to corroborate their original existence as Jewish works: a

Hebrew fragment of the *Ladder of Jacob* has been found in the Cairo Genizah, and there is a

correspondence between the *Word About Abraham and Sarah* and a fragment from the book of

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[94] Kulik, *Veritas Slavica*, 20, 53.

[95] Gaylord, "3 Baruch," 1:655.

[96] Jagić, *Slavische beiträge,* 41.

[97] Michael E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 63.

Genesis in Aramaic at Qumran (1QG Ar).[98] This is reminiscent of the case of *1 Enoch*, the

Ethiopic text of which was only proved to be ancient after the discovery of the Dead Sea

Scrolls.[99]

Besides the *Ladder of Jacob, 2 Enoch* is the other main example of a pseudepigraphon that is

extant only in Slavonic. In addition to Böttrich's conclusion mentioned above that *2 Enoch* is an

ancient Jewish document based on its central themes and concerns, F. I. Andersen writes that

"there are many indications that 2 Enoch is derived from sources foreign to Slavonic culture"

and that the Slavonic is clearly translated from a Greek text; a Slavic author can thus be ruled

out.[100] Furthermore, although *2 Enoch* was preserved in excerpts scattered throughout various

compilations, there is no indication that any of the words were changed and the striking verbal

similarity between corresponding passages points to a common source from which they were all

translated.[101] This also indicates that the various translations were quite literal.

Regarding possible changes made by Greek Christian hands, Andersen writes that although

there are some obvious glosses that betray a Christian scribe, *2 Enoch* does not reflect "the mind

of a Christian author" and that there is "not a distinctively Christian idea in the book."[102] There is

no consensus regarding the date or provenance of *2 Enoch*, which makes it difficult to use for

historical purposes, but it does betray extensive reliance on *1 Enoch* as well as an interest in

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[98] Kulik, *Veritas Slavica*, 1; A. Miltenova, "Starobulgarska literatura" in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 41.

[99] Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament*, 8.

[100] F. I. Andersen, "2 (Slavonic Apocalypse of) Enoch," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:93.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 1:95.

Melchizedek, which is characteristic of many writings from the Second Temple Period.[103] If *2 Enoch* does have a Jewish origin, it is an important witness to the diversity of Judaism in antiquity, since it represents a Judaism that did not revolve around Torah observance. Its focus on calendrical issues, cosmology, and astrology, as well as the mention of the sectarian practice of tying the four legs of a sacrificial animal together, support the argument for its antiquity.[104] *2 Enoch* thus fits into the general pattern we see emerging of the conservative nature of the preservation of the Pseudepigrapha translated from Greek in Slavic lands.

<center>*The Origins of the Bogomils*</center>

In assessing the possibility that the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha preserve ancient Jewish material, it is important to discuss the topic of the Bogomils, a medieval "heretical" sect, since they were closely associated with the Pseudepigrapha. As mentioned above, the indices of forbidden books that were disseminated by orthodox Christians in Bulgaria were largely directed against Bogomil literary activity, and scholars have identified various passages in the Slavonic Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha that seem to reflect the Bogomils' unique dualistic beliefs, some of which appear in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Once Bogomil ideas have been identified in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* this raises the question of how extensive Bogomil editing was throughout the rest of the text, which calls into question its usefulness as a source for ancient Judaism. It is therefore important to understand who the Bogmoils were, why they were attracted to the Pseudepigrapha, and what kinds of changes they made to these texts.

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[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid., 1:96.

The figure of Bogomil himself is a shadowy one. We know that he was a member of the

lower clergy who was active during the reign of Tsar Peter (927–969).[105] One of the earliest

mentions of him is by Cosmas the Priest, who wrote in the late tenth century of a priest called

Bogomil who was preaching heresy in Bulgaria.[106] The word "Bogomil" is comprised of two

parts: *bog* (God) and *mil* (mercy, beloved). It could thus mean either "Beloved of God" or "One

on whom God has mercy,"[107] and was a positive title. Cosmas the Priest, in his *Discourse*

against the Bogomils, writes that his name should more rightly be called "Bogunemil."[108] *Ne*

negates *mil*, resulting in a translation of "*Not* beloved of God" or "One on whom God *does not*

have mercy."

Scholars are agreed that Bogomilism is best understood as a coalescing of different dualistic

teachings already in circulation that solidified into a distinct socio-religious movement when

Bulgaria was both newly Christian and chafing under Byzantine subordination.[109] Bogomil

doctrine is similar to both Paulicianism and Massalianism, two different Christian dualist sects

related to Manicheanism and Gnosticism whose adherents were already living in different parts

of Bulgaria when it became Christian.[110]

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[105] Turdeanu, "Apocryphes bogomiles," 27.

[106] "The Discourse of the Priest Cosmas against Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 116.

[107] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 116; John Sanidopoulos and Euthymius Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism and its Penetration into Constantinople: With a Complete Translation of Euthymios Zygabenos' 'Concerning Bogomilism'* (Rollinsford, N.H.: Orthodox Research Institute, 2011), 137; Turdeanu, "Apocryphes bogomiles," 26–27.

[108] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 116.

[109] Stoyanov, *The Other God,* 162; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 17, 111.

[110] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 65, 82. Armenian and Syrian Paulicians had been relocated by the Byzantine emperors to Thrace in the eighth century, and they proselytized enthusiastically in neighboring Bulgaria, in which they made deep inroads by the ninth century; Thrace later became part of Bulgaria, after which many Paulicians became incorporated into the country (Ibid., 38, 59–61).

Bogomil Beliefs

The evidence we have regarding the beliefs of the Bogomils comes primarily from their orthodox enemies, which of course must be taken with a grain of salt. But the documents we have are either letters of warning from orthodox religious leaders or are first-hand accounts from those who witnessed the questioning of prominent Bogomils. It thus seems reasonable to assume that these documents present a relatively accurate picture of what the Bogomils believed, even if they do not allow us to see how the Bogomils perceived themselves.

At the heart of Bogomil doctrine is the belief in two diametrically opposed Principles: Good and Evil.[111] Although the Bogomils were dualists, they were moderate in their dualism, since they believed that Good (God) was both chronologically prior to and stronger than Evil (the devil).[112] According to their legends, God had two sons: Satanael and Jesus. Satanael was the first-born and second only to the Father. He became prideful and plotted a rebellion to overthrow the Father, telling the angels that if they followed him, he would lessen their work load. This rebellion led to his expulsion from heaven, along with the angels he had convinced to follow him.[113] He fell to earth, but could not land, because, as related in Gen 1, it was "formless and void." Since he still had the form and vestment of God and possessed the power of creation, he decided to create a second heaven and earth, which is what is described in Gen 1.[114] The

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[111] "Theophylact Lecapenus (935–956) Writes to Tsar Peter of Bulgaria about Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 99.

[112] Dimitur Simeonov Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1987), 13; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 124.

[113] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus *Dogmatic Panoply* against the Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 183.

[114] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 184.

Bogomils thus believed, as did the ancient Marcionites, that the God of the Hebrew Bible was a lesser, evil god, in this case, the devil. It was Satan, then, who sent Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and he who gave them the Law at Mt. Sinai.[115] For this reason they rejected the Law of Moses, and much of the Hebrew Bible, although they were not always consistent in this (some of them did accept the psalms and the minor prophets).[116]

Like the Gnostics and Manichaeans before them, the Bogomils believed that, since the visible heaven and earth were created by the evil principle, all matter was inherently evil. Man,[117] however, has a dual nature, being a mixture of visible matter and invisible soul. There are multiple Bogomil versions of the story of man's creation that have come down to us. Their existence, as well as the amount of detail in them testifies to the importance of this story for Bogomil theology. These stories generally relate that Satan planted the garden of paradise and formed Adam. According to one account, Satan stole two things from God before he left heaven: the sun and the human soul. He attempted to put this soul into Adam, but it kept escaping out of his mouth and anus.[118] According to another account, after Satan molded the body of Adam, he stood him up and some moisture ran out of his big toe and became a snake. Satan then breathed life into Adam, but the breath also ran out of his big toe and went into the snake, making it

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[115] Edina Bozóky, *Le livre secret des cathares: interrogatio iohannis: apocryphe d'origine bogomile* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1980), 193; "Theophylact Lecapenus," 99.

[116] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 182.

[117] I am using the term *man* in an inclusive sense.

[118] "Euthymius of the Periblepton Condemns Bogomils (*c.* 1045), in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 151–52.

alive.[119] Both these stories arrive at the same narrative crux, which is that Satan was unable to animate Adam by himself.

According to the version in which Satan stole the human soul from heaven, he abandoned Adam's body for three hundred years, after which he made another attempt to make the soul stay in it. After eating all kinds of unclean animals, he put the soul in through Adam's mouth, placed his hand on his anus to keep it from coming out, and expelled into Adam what he had eaten, on top of the soul. This contaminated the soul, which then stayed in Adam's body and he came to life.[120] According to another version, Satan asked God to send His breath, promising that in return, man would be shared between them and that his descendents would take the places in heaven vacated by the fallen angels. God agreed, and breathed the breath of life into man; Eve was created the same way.[121] According to yet another version, when Satan asked God for help, He sent two angels down who became the souls of Adam and Eve.[122] There is an additional element of the Bogomil creation stories that is unparalleled outside of Slavonic sources: a contract made between the devil and Adam according to which Adam becomes his property.[123]

These stories all emphasize that humanity is a mixture of Evil and Good and that man is thus an inherently conflicted creature. The Bogomils considered the devil, then, to be the creator and ruler of the entire visible universe.[124] Our orthodox sources say that they honored the devil and that when they prayed the Lord's Prayer, the only biblical prayer they accepted, it was addressed

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[119] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 184.

[120] "Euthymius of the Periblepton," 152.

[121] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 184.

[122] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 11.

[123] This story is to be found in "The Confession of Eve" (Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature,* 33; Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 172).

[124] "Theophylact Lecapenus," 99.

to the devil.[125] This may be one of the times when our sources lead us astray; it seems strange that the Bogomils would reverence the devil, since they considered him to the embodiment of the evil principle and rejected everything associated with him. The reign of the devil over the earth was the Bogomil answer to the question of theodicy; they believed he actively fought against good in the world and was the source of all misery, oppression, and evil.[126] It seems likely that the orthodox took the Bogomil belief that Satan is the creator and ruler of this world and extrapolated from that they thus honored and worshipped him, although this was not the case. Another possible explanation is that although the Bogomils believed that the devil was evil, they paid him honor in order to appease him. Euthymius Zigabenus writes that the Bogomils interpreted the phrase "Love your enemies" in Matt 5:44 as follows: "They say that the devil is the enemy of man, and by a crazy interpretation, that we ought to be kindly to him and pay court to him with genuflection."[127] According to this report, the Bogomils paid honor to the devil in order to "kill him with kindness," so to speak.

According to one Bogomil legend, Satan copulated with Eve through the medium of the serpent, begetting Cain (since according to 1 John 3:12, "Cain was of the evil one"), after which he lost his divine appearance and dress and became dark and ugly.[128] This agrees with the Bogomil belief that sex, marriage, and procreation were introduced into the world by the devil

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[125] "Euthymius of the Periblepton," 152; "Letter of the Patriarch Germanus to Those in Constantinople and against the Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 272.

[126] Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature,* 20.

[127] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 199.

[128] Ibid., 185. Interestingly, this tradition appears in the Zohar as well. See the article by Yisraeli Oded, "Cain as the Scion of Satan: The Evolution of a Gnostic Myth in the Zohar," *HTR* 109, no. 1 (2016): 56-74.

and were to be avoided because they reproduced matter.[129] The same went for eating meat and

drinking wine. Although the Bogomils preached that marriage, meat, and wine were evil, it was

only an elite minority, the *perfecti,* who lived this way. The majority of the Bogomils were called

"listeners"; they were attracted by the teachings of Bogomilism, but did not adopt such an

extreme lifestyle. This kind of division between the "elect" and the "listeners" goes back to the

Manichaeans.[130] Congruent with their rejection of matter was their belief that Jesus only seemed

to appear and suffer in the flesh, but in actuality did not (docetism), and that he did not actually

perform miracles.[131] They rejected all material Christian symbols: the bread and wine of the

Eucharist meant nothing, since matter cannot be sanctified; they called icons idols and those who

venerated them idolaters. They despised the cross as the enemy of Christ and are reported as

saying, "If anyone killed the king's son with a cross of wood, would the wood be dear to the

king? The same is true of the cross for God." [132] They rejected the entire institution of the church

along with its rites, symbols, and liturgy,[133] and believed that the New Testament was the sole

source of true faith.[134] Their preferred method of biblical interpretation was allegory. Since they

rejected the material world, this was a convenient way of circumnavigating verses that caused a

problem in this respect. Euthymius Zigabenus writes that if a verse seemed to go against their

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[129] "Theophylact Lecapenus," 99; "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 128; Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, 114.

[130] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 20, 24, 26; Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 4.

[131] "Theophylact Lecapenus," 99; "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 130; Cosmas the Priest states that they said it was the devil who did the miracles in order to trick people ("Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 118).

[132] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 164; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 130; "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 188–90; "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 117–19; "Theophylact Lecapenus," 99; "The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy:* Clauses about Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 136, 138.

[133] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 122.

[134] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 140.

teaching, "straightaway in their anxiety to escape they turn to allegory."[135] Similar to the

Gnostics, they believed that they alone knew the divine mysteries written in the gospels.[136]

The gospel according to the Bogomils was not centered on the redemption of humanity by

Christ's death on the cross, since they did not believe he actually had a body that could be killed.

Instead, they believed that God, out of pity for the soul that He had given to Adam, sent His son

Jesus to break the contract Adam had made with Satan and to give teachings that would liberate

the soul from the body.[137] They believed that at the end of time, Jesus would pronounce the final

judgment and condemn Satan and his followers to eternal torment in hell, while the righteous

would enjoy eternal bliss in heaven.[138]

According to Bogomil cosmogony, there are eight heavens: seven created by God, over which

He sits enthroned, and the eighth created by Satan (the visible heaven), over which he sits.[139]

They believed the visible heaven and earth are full of demons, which are the fallen angels, and

that each man has his own demon dwelling inside of him.[140] This led to a preoccupation with the

activities of the devil and his demons and the importance of chants, spells, and exorcisms. This

was a strong point of contact with Bulgarian pagan belief, and is one of the main points at which

these two belief systems overlapped.[141]

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[135] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 182.

[136] "Euthymius of the Periblepton," 153.

[137] Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 63; Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature,* 20.

[138] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 12.

[139] "Euthymius of the Periblepton," 152; Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 11.

[140] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 189; Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 169.

[141] Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 167, 169. Euthymius of the Periblepton reports that certain Bogomils confessed that when their arguments seemed to be persuading an orthodox Christian, they would say a spell over him which would make the Holy Spirit leave him ("Euthymius of the Periblepton," 146–47).

The Spread of Bogomilism

The Bogomils were active at a time of religious transition in Bulgaria. First of all, Christianity was a new religion that had been forced on the people; after Boris surrendered in 864, the Bulgarian army was ordered to round up the people and march them to the nearest body of water where they were baptized en masse.[142] This was hardly a situation conducive to creating knowledgeable or steadfast converts. As mentioned above, no effort was made by Byzantium to adapt Christianity to the needs of the Bulgarians and services were held in Greek until 893. This created an immediate gulf between the church and the people.[143] Furthermore, the first few decades after the adoption of Christianity were full of religious confusion and inconsistency in Bulgaria. In the 860s, Boris briefly switched his allegiance to Roman Catholicism, hoping that the Catholic authorities would allow an autonomous Bulgarian church; this did not materialize, however, and he returned to the Greek Orthodox Church and Byzantium's sphere of influence.[144] Paganism was never refuted by the orthodox establishment and it continued to be a strong force in Bulgaria; syncretism abounded, and Boris' son Vladimir revived paganism as the official religion during his four-year reign from 889–893.[145] Although this was reversed when his brother Symeon took the throne, the fact that this could happen over twenty years after Boris' conversion attests to the tenuous position of Christianity in Bulgaria. The Bogomils gained ground in this

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[142] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 147.

[143] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 147, 158; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 90–91.

[144] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 76–77, 85, 87. Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 151.

[145] Francis J. Thomson, *The Reception of Byzantine Culture in Mediaeval Russia* (Aldershot, England; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1999), 11; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 87.

state of flux, and their unique blend of dualism, pseudepigraphal material, and pagan folklore held much appeal for the Bulgarians.[146]

Orthodox Christianity had three further counts against it that only increased the popularity of Bogomilism: 1. Its close association with Byzantine imperialism and the subjugation of Bulgaria,[147] 2. Its participation in the increasingly polarized feudal society in Bulgaria,[148] and 3. The negative reputation of the orthodox clergy.[149] First, Bulgaria was home to a strong independent spirit, and the Bulgarians revolted against Constantinople more than any other Byzantine province.[150] The late ninth and early tenth century under Symeon was a time of heightened nationalism and anti-Greek sentiment. As mentioned above, Symeon rebelled against Byzantium, and Bulgaria achieved a measure of independence for a time. In the tenth century, however, Byzantium asserted its dominance over Bulgaria and Tsar Peter adopted a policy of servility, which was quite unpopular with the people.[151] At the beginning of the eleventh century, Bulgaria completely lost its autonomy and Byzantium ruled it directly for 168 years.[152]

From the tenth century on, as the dominance and influence of Constantinople loomed large, it was the Bogomils who took up the torch of anti-Byzantine resistance and their followers

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[146] Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 97, 103; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 154–55; Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 162. The Bulgarian writer John the Exarch attests to this mixture of heterodoxy and paganism in Bulgaria (ca. 915) (Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 163).

[147] Murko, *Geschichte,* 85; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 137.

[148] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 10, 13; Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 161–62.

[149] Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 42. "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 122.

[150] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 195.

[151] Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 36.

[152] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 109.

increased exponentially amongst the peasantry, the urban poor, and the lower clergy.[153]

Rejection of the Greek Orthodox Church went hand in hand with rejection of the Byzantine-ruled government, since the church essentially functioned as the agent of Byzantium and as the main ideological support for the established order.[154] Bogomilism thus appears to be just as political a movement as it was a religious one.[155] Cosmas the Priest attests to the Bogomils' anti-establishment agenda when he writes towards the end of the tenth century: "They teach their followers not to obey their masters; they scorn the rich, they hate the Tsars, they ridicule their superiors, they reproach the boyars [nobles], they believe that God looks in horror on those who labour for the Tsar, and advise every serf not to work for his master."[156]

Secondly, during the tenth century, especially during the reign of Tsar Peter (927–969), the economic situation worsened; the people increasingly entered into servitude to landowners in order to escape famine and increased taxation due to war and to gain protection in case of foreign attack.[157] In addition, Bulgaria was not a money-based society, making social mobility even harder to achieve.[158] In the midst of all this misery, the Bogomils offered a solution to the question of theodicy that was easy to grasp: the world is an inherently evil place because Satan, the Evil One, created it.[159] Robert Browning puts it well when he writes that in the Bogomil heresy, the Bulgarians "developed a view of the universe which answered the hopes – and the

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[153] Ibid., 93, 96; Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 165; Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 10.

[154] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 147, 162.

[155] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 136–37.

[156] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 132.

[157] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 101.

[158] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 197.

[159] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 101; Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 34–36.

despair – of the underdogs of the feudal world better than the subtle dogma and the hierarchical structure of official Christianity."[160]

Thirdly, the behavior of the orthodox clergy did not endear them to the general populace. Since the church was one of the main landowners in Bulgaria, it was the clergy who were responsible for collecting rents from the impoverished serfs. Furthermore, they charged fees for necessary rites, such as baptism, marriage, and burial. The Orthodox Church was thus associated with the oppressive established order and the increasing exploitation of the peasantry.[161] The orthodox priests also had a reputation for being lazy, corrupt and decadent.[162] Cosmas the Priest reports that the Bogomils spoke out strongly against priests and accused them of drunkenness and theft.[163]

In contrast, the Bogomils appeared gentle, meek, and humble. They routinely fasted and prayed, and their eschewal of marriage, meat, and wine gave them an ascetic aspect.[164] They did not believe in working, and most likely begged for their livelihood (they were called "bag people" in both Bulgarian and Greek); this enabled them to be mobile, which undoubtedly contributed to their success in gaining new converts.[165] Numerous Bulgarian sources attest to the popularity of Bogomilism, especially from the tenth century on. Patriarch Cosmas (eleventh century) writes of the "The darkness of Manichaeanism," which "has secretly entered almost all

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[160] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 198.

[161] Ibid., 162.

[162] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 132.

[163] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 122.

[164] Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria,* 162; Murko, *Geschichte,* 85; "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 132; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 144; Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 42.

[165] "Discourse of the Priest Cosmas," 131; Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 48.

the country of the Bulgars."[166] Anna Comnena (1083–1153), the daughter of Emperor Alexios I Comnenos, in her account of the trial of Basil the Bogomil, describes a "vast cloud of heretics" that had existed for some time, but had gone unrecognized because of their ability to "counterfeit virtue."[167] The thirteenth-century *Synodikon of Orthodoxy* speaks of the priest Bogomil, who "stirred up this Manichaean heresy and spread it through every town and countryside."[168] By that time, Bogomilism was so widespread that it nearly became the official religion of Bulgaria.[169]

Bogomil Literary Activity

The Bogomil movement was founded mainly by poor and uneducated men with anti-clerical and anti-establishment views. Euthymius Zigabenus writes, "They say that by scribe is meant anyone who is learned, and they advise one another not to accept anyone educated among their pupils, in imitation, as they say, of Christ, who did not accept the scribe."[170] Regarding the Bogomil interpretation of Matt 5:20, which reads, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven," he writes,

> They call us the scribes, because we are trained with a scholarly education and take pride in it. They say that their righteousness exceeds ours because they teach what is truer and share a lifestyle which is more austere and pure, abstaining from meat and cheese and marriage and everything like that."[171]

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[166] "A Letter of the Patriarch Cosmas (1075–1081) against the Bogomils," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 165–66.

[167] "Anna Comnena's Account of the Trial of the Bogomil Basil (*c.* 1098)," in *Christian Dualist Heresies in the Byzantine World, c. 650–c. 1450: Selected Sources* (Janet Hamilton, Bernard Hamilton, and Yuri Stoyanov; Manchester, UK; New York: Manchester University Press, 1998), 175.

[168] "The *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*," 135.

[169] Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 161.

[170] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 202; Sanidopoulos and Zigabenus, *The Rise of Bogomilism,* 131, 155 note 182.

[171] "Extracts from Euthymius Zigabenus," 198.

According to this report, then, the Bogomils set themselves apart from those who were educated

and even mocked them.

Since they rejected the need for the church's mediation between God and man, however, it

was necessary for at least some of them to be literate in order to circumvent the church and

interpret Scripture for themselves.[172] Cosmas the Priest attests to this when he states that the

Bogomils worked zealously to interpret the literature of the church according to their own

doctrine, especially the New Testament. He writes, "What writing has not been distorted?" and

"They take the gospel in hand and interpret it incorrectly."[173] Given the traditional oral nature of

Bulgarian culture and the socio-economic class of which the Bogomils were comprised, it is

quite possible that most if not all of this exegesis was communicated orally. Indeed, most of what

we know of Bogomil doctrine and exegesis is based on reports from those who questioned or

interrogated Bogomils. For example, Euthymius Zigabenus was tasked with interrogating the

Bogomil leader Basil, which is the basis for his chapter on Bogomilism in his *Dogmatic

Panoply,* an encyclopedia of heresies.

In addition to the gospels, the Bogomils were especially drawn to the Pseudepigrapha. This

was first of all because their main interests were cosmogony, cosmology, and eschatology, which

means that they were most interested in descriptions of heaven, the creation of the world, the

creation of Adam and Eve, and the final judgment, all of which abound in the Pseudepigrapha.[174]

Secondly, many pseudepigraphal texts contain descriptions that seem to mirror the Bogomils'

own beliefs. For example, among the Pseudepigrapha we find elements that could be seen as

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[172] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 17.

[173] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 708 (translation mine from Bulgarian).

[174] Ibid., 747; Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 155. Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature,* 21; Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi,* 55–57.

confirming the Bogomils' moderate dualism, such as descriptions of Satan as Christ's brother (*Gospel of Bartholomew*), or a visionary who leaves his body on earth, which is compatible with the Bogomil dichotomy between matter and soul (*Ascension of Isaiah*).[175]

There is still some debate regarding the extent of Bogomil interpolations in the Pseudepigrapha. Because the crystallization of Bogomil doctrine took place around the same time as an influx of Pseudepigrapha from Byzantium (ninth and tenth centuries), it can at times be difficult to identify changes made by the Bogomils, who not only altered the Pseudepigrapha, but whose ideas were shaped by them as well.[176]

Regarding the scope of Bogomil editing, the scholarly consensus seems to be that the Bogomils only slightly altered the works that passed through their hands, mostly leaving them intact.[177] They draw this conclusion from the fact that the books that contain what seem to be Bogomil interpolations also contain elements that clearly contradict Bogomil doctrine. For example, the *Legend of the Wood of the Cross* is labeled as heretical in the indices, but it was not authored by a Bogomil; it is actually part of an pseudepigraphal motif that was widespread in the

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[175] Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi,* 55–57.

[176] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 709; Stoyanov, *The Other God,* 163, 165. An example that has been cited in this regard is *3 Baruch*, which relates that Satan planted the vine in paradise in order to bring harm to man through the wine that would be made from it (Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 19–20). Scholars have debated whether this is original to *3 Baruch* and possibly influenced the Bogomil rejection of wine, or whether it is actually a Bogomil interpolation. But neither the Greek nor the Slavonic version categorically denounces the drinking of wine; rather, they both relate that although the vine was cursed by God because it was planted by Satanael, it still has value. In the Slavonic version, Noah is concerned about planting the vine because God has cursed it; he is told to plant it, but to "alter its name and change it for the better" (4:15). Furthermore, he is told that it is drinking to excess that is wrong because it leads to evil. The Greek version Christianizes this explanation: although excessive drinking is also condemned, Noah is told, "Its bitterness will be changed into sweetness, and its curse will become a blessing, and its fruit will become the blood of God, and just as the race of men have been condemned through it, so through Jesus Christ Emmanuel in it (they) will receive a calling and entrance into Paradise" (4:15). Thus, this is not a good example of a possible Bogomil interpolation, since if it were, it would denounce all drinking of wine, not just drinking to excess.

[177] Murko, *Geschichte,* 89; Gaster, *Ilchester Lectures on Greeko-Slavonic Literature,* 25.

Middle Ages and reflects medieval Christian interest in miraculous tales;[178] the Bogomil version, which is part of the *Secret Book* (see below), involves Satan in the history of the tree that later became the cross, thus turning it into an instrument of evil.[179] Otherwise, the Bogomils left the text intact, including the tales about miracles, in which they did not believe. Another example of a minor Bogomil interpolation is found in the Slavonic translation of Josephus, in which John the Baptist is said to eat cane, roots, and wood shavings instead of locusts.[180] Only the Bogomils, who did not eat animals, would have any reason to make this kind of change. Otherwise, the text follows its *Vorlage*.

The only extant document that scholars believe is an actual Bogomil text is the *Secret Book*.[181] The Bogomils might have authored other works, but these have not survived, no doubt because of orthodox persecution, although the *Tiberian Sea* and the *Word about Satanil, How the Archangel Defeated Him* reflect some Bogomil ideas and might have been authored by them.[182] The *Secret Book* is extant only in a Latin version, which was preserved by the Cathars, a dualistic sect in Europe founded by Bogomil missionaries. Edina Bozóky has written a work

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[178] Barbara Baert, *A Heritage of Holy Wood: The Legend of the True Cross in the Text and Image* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 289.

[179] Dimitrinka Dimitrova-Marinova, "Kosmogonichnata legenda za Tiveriadskoto more i starobulgarskata apokrifna traditsiia" [The cosmogonic legend about the Sea of Tiberias and the medieval Bulgarian Pseudepigraphal tradition], *Starobulgarska literature* 18 (1985): 191. Other works that are attributed to the Bogomils in the indices but are actually attested before the Bogomil movement are: *How Christ Became a Priest, How Christ Ploughed with the Plough, How Christ Called Probus His Friend,* and *The Questions and Answers of How Many Particles Became Adam* [Steven Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee: A Study of the Christian Dualist Heresy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 82–83].

[180] Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee,* 84.

[181] Henri-Charles Puech, Steven Runciman, and Émile Turdeanu are of this opinion (Bozóky, *Le livre secret,* 192). Others, such as F. I. Andersen, believe the *Sea of Tiberius* is an original Bogomil work [Andersen, "Pseudepigrapha Studies in Bulgaria," *JSP* 1 (1987): 46]. But the *Sea of Tiberius* consists mainly of material from *The Secret Book*, mixed with native Bulgarian cosmogonic myths, reworked in a legendary style [Dimitrova-Marinova, "Kosmogonichnata legenda," 186, 192; A. Miltenova, "Bogomilska knizhnina," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 73].

[182] Miltenova, "Bogomilska knizhnina," 72–73; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,,* 97.

devoted to the question of the links between the Bogomils and the *Secret Book*: *Le livre secret des cathares interrogatio iohannis, apocryphe d'origine bogomile*. In it, she compares what we know of Bogomil doctrine from contemporaneous witnesses, Euthymius Zigabenus in particular, and the *Secret Book,* and concludes that the latter is most definitely of Bogomil origin. It contains elements of the creation story that are specifically Bogomil and strictly accords with Bogomil doctrine throughout.[183] The text itself reads as a dialogue between St. John the Evangelist and Jesus; it is mainly concerned with the origin of the world, but also includes the fall of Satan and the ascent of Enoch.[184] It contains materials drawn from the *Palaea interpretata* and other pseudepigraphal works, such as the *Word About Adam and Eve,* but it has been reworked in accordance with Bogomil teachings and doctrine; it could thus be roughly characterized as a compilation containing interpolations, which is consonant with the general mode of literary creativity in Bulgaria.[185]

From Bulgaria to Rus

Before we discuss the transfer of literature from Bulgaria to Rus, let us clarify what is meant by "Rus": the medieval state of Rus was a loose political association of Slavic tribes centered around the city of Kiev; this arrangement was well-established by the second half of the tenth century, but from the middle of the eleventh century, it began to disintegrate until the various tribes were defeated by the Mongols in the 1230s.[186] Until the thirteenth century, to speak of "Rus" is to speak of Kievan Rus, since Kiev was the undisputed center of Russian culture and

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[183] Bozóky, *Le livre secret,* 192–94; Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee,* 86.

[184] Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee,* 86.

[185] Dimitrova-Marinova, "Kosmogonichnata legenda," 186; Ivanov, *Bogomilski knigi,* 72.

[186] Samuel Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," in *The World History of the Jewish People* (ed. Benjamin Mazar et al.; vol. 11 of *The World History of the Jewish People,* ed. B. Netanyahu and Cecil Roth; Tel-Aviv: Jewish History Publications Ltd, 1966), 319.

learning for this period. As in Bulgaria, Rus became literate only after it was Christianized and

its first corpus of written literature consisted of translated Byzantine texts received from the

Bulgarians. [187] By the time Christianity was officially adopted in Rus in 988, literary activity in

Bulgaria had been going on for over one hundred years in earnest, and the Bulgarian provenance

of the texts extant from medieval Rus has been established on linguistic grounds, as well as from

analysis of textual families.[188] Some scholars posit that works were translated directly from

Greek in Rus, but according to Thomson, this assertion, made by some Russian scholars, is

motivated by a nationalistic desire to downplay the role of Bulgaria in bringing literacy to Rus

and there is no evidence to support it.[189]

In his introduction to the first published translation of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in English

(1919), G. H. Box does not mention the role of Bulgaria in the mediation of Christian literature

from Byzantium, and attributes the presence of the Pseudepigrapha in Rus to Russian monks

who would travel to Constantinople and Jerusalem and translate the texts they encountered there

into Slavonic.[190] He presumably derives this account from Ivan Porfir'ev, who, writing in 1870,

asserts that Russian monks regularly traveled to Jerusalem and Mt. Athos, copied texts, and sent

them back to Rus. Writing in 1877, however, Porfir'ev clarifies that this activity was not

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[187] Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury,* 32; Levshun, *Ocherki istorii,* 6; Petkanova, "Starobulgarska literatura," 489. The earliest evidence of writing dates to the tenth century.

[188] Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia*, 127; Petkanova, "Starobulgarska literatura," 489; Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify,* 18; Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury,* 34; Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture*, 69–70, 243; Veder, *Utrum in Alterum,* 184–85; Moshe Taube, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration in Medieval Slavic Translations from Hebrew," in *Translation and Tradition in "Slavia orthodoxa"* (ed. Valentina Izmirlieva and B. Gasparov; Zürich: LIT, 2012), 27; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 102; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 9.

[189] Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture,* 69–70, 214, 243.

[190] G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918), xiii.

extensive, and that most of the translated material came to Rus via Bulgaria.[191] Given how new

the study of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha was in the west at the time when Box was writing, it is

understandable that his introduction was limited, and in this case, led astray by the sources

available to him. His introduction, while a valuable resource and important step in the study of

the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, is now outdated in this regard.

There is no hard evidence to tell us exactly how and when Bulgarian texts began to arrive in

Rus, but scholars can make educated guesses: it is quite probable that monks brought liturgical

texts for church use when they went to Rus to serve the new Christian communities there, that

Christian soldiers brought texts out of Preslav during the Crusades (870–871), and that some

were sent by church authorities after the official adoption of Christianity in Rus;[192] we also know

that monasteries in Bulgaria routinely copied out texts to sell to individuals or foreign

monasteries, and no doubt some of them made their way to Rus.[193]

Literary Activity in Rus

In the same way that Bulgaria received only a fraction of the available texts from Byzantium,

not all of the texts in Bulgaria made their way to Rus. The medieval Russian corpus contained no

philosophy or dogmatic theology; rather, it consisted of the gospels, biblical passages used for

liturgy, hagiographies, the church fathers, biblical commentaries, and a large amount of

pseudepigraphal material.[194] The dialectical differences were small enough that the Russians

could understand the texts from Bulgaria, and Old Church Slavonic was adopted as the literary

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[191] Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 198.

[192] Petkanova, "Starobulgarska literatura," 490; Porfir'ev, *Sbornik,* 6–7; Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture,* 237.

[193] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva,* 585.

[194] Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture,* 3, 109; Levshun, *Ocherki istorii,* 51, 54–55; Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 202–18.

and liturgical language of the Russian church.[195] The Pseudepigrapha appeared in Rus early on

and quickly became popular, both with the educated and with the peasantry, to whom the

material was communicated orally.[196] According to V. M. Istrin, the Pseudepigrapha appear

everywhere in the earliest Russian literature: in the *Palaeas,* in historical compositions, and in

annals, the earliest exemplar being in the entry for the year 998 in the *Nestor Chronicle.*

Pseudepigraphal materials were the most popular non-liturgical type of translated literature, and

were widely disseminated.[197] Their popularity extended throughout the centuries, and new

manuscript copies continued to be made into the early nineteenth century.[198] The Pseudepigrapha

were popular in Rus for similar reasons as in Bulgaria: not only did they share common elements

with pagan folk religion, but they also answered questions that troubled people, such as the

origin of evil, the future of the world, and the fate of man after death.[199] As in Bulgaria, pagan

beliefs were never officially addressed or combated by the church authorities, and *dvoyeveriye*

(double-belief), i.e., syncretism, was widespread.[200]

Until the fourteenth century, Russian acquaintance with the Bible was limited mostly to the

prophets, psalms, gospels, and epistles.[201] Since a full translation of the Bible was not available

until the late fifteenth century, Russians, like the Bulgarians, accessed Old Testament narrative

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[195] Meshcherskii, *Istochniki i sostav,* 5; Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury,* 34; Petkanova, "Starobulgarska literatura," 490.

[196] Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia,* 127.

[197] A. Miltenova, "Apokrifi za avraam," [Apocrypha about Abraham] in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 40; Istrin, *Ocherk,* 112; Meshcherskii, *Istochniki i sostav,* 215, 224; Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 102.

[198] Murko, *Geschichte,* 94.

[199] Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify,* 8; Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury,* 42.

[200] Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture,* 11.

[201] Ibid., 108–9.

material through the *Palaeas*, which, as mentioned above, seamlessly wove together canonical and pseudepigraphal material.[202] There was thus no strongly defined sense of the canon in Rus, especially amongst the lower clergy and the populace.[203] The indices of forbidden books were transmitted to Rus, but they were not officially enforced; rather, church authorities stressed caution in confusing pseudepigraphal material with canonical, and forbade it to be read aloud in church. It would seem that this advice was widely ignored, since we know from a small memorandum in a Russian manuscript from the sixteenth century that the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was read out in a church on Charsamstag.[204] Nor were the Pseudepigrapha suppressed in any way, despite official warnings.[205] The Russian copyists of the indices lament the existence of ignorant clergy who spread *Balgarskiye basni,* "Bulgarian fables," a phrase that is used numerous times to describe the Pseudepigrapha in Russian manuscripts.[206] The fact that the Pseudepigrapha were titled "Bulgarian" seems to stem from the fact that several works were attributed to Jeremiah, whom the Russians called a 'Bulgarian priest.'[207] This appellation was then extended to apply to all the Pseudepigrapha, hence the term "*Bulgarian* fables." One scribe, in a postscript to a manuscript of John of Damascus, writes that due to the laziness of the church leadership, not even a tenth of the "teachers" have been translated; instead, he laments, the clergy

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[202] Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia,* 127.

[203] Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify,* 82; Thomson, *Reception of Byzantine Culture,* 108–9.

[204] Murko, *Geschichte,* 90.

[205] Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 242; Taube, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration," 27; Tikhonravov, *Sochineniia,* 129.

[206] Murko, *Geschichte,* 87, 90; Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 241.

[207] Murko, *Geschichte,* 87.

amuse themselves with "Bulgarian fables," and "wives tales." Various other manuscripts also contain discussions on how to combat "Bulgarian fables."[208]

The popularity of the Pseudepigrapha was accompanied by an interest in Bogomilism in Rus. As in Bulgaria, Rus was home to a feudal society and the intertwined church and government wielded much power.[209] But although Bogomilism attracted some followers in Rus, it did not proliferate to the extent that it did in Bulgaria,[210] nor were the Pseudepigrapha particularly associated with heretical movements; Russian heresies were of a different nature and did not rely on the Pseudepigrapha for their teachings.[211]

As mentioned above, there is no evidence of any translations being made directly from Greek in Rus; all the extant manuscripts were copied from Bulgarian texts. Both capable scribes and parchment were rare, but the nobility and the wealthy periodically commissioned copies of texts to be given to monasteries as acts of piety.[212] According to Porfir'ev, the copying of manuscripts was so highly valued that princes, princesses, bishops and abbots devoted themselves to it as well.[213] Although the Russian copyists were strictly faithful in their transcriptions of biblical and liturgical texts, they often ignored the original intent of other kinds of texts, rearranging, condensing, adding excerpts from other works, changing indirect speech to direct, and altering sentence structure.[214] Copyists would sometimes not preserve a whole work, but would insert

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[208] Jagić, *Istoriia serbsko-khorvatskoi literatury,* 102.

[209] Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 49.

[210] Kemp, *Healing Ritual,* 161; Angelov, *The Bogomil Movement,* 50.

[211] Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify,* 7.

[212] Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 195–97.

[213] Ibid., 197.

[214] William R. Veder, "Old Russia's 'Intellectual Silence' Reconsidered," in *Medieval Russian Culture* (ed. Henrik Birnbaum, Michael S. Flier, and Daniel B. Rowland; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 21–25;

part of it into another document.[215] This led to a breakdown of the original structure of texts from Bulgaria and a resulting lack of textual coherence. Veder calls this process "chaotization," which took place with both individual works and compilations; he hypothesizes that the goal might have been to provide the reader with raw material.[216] Changes that were made to the content were either to make abstract ideas more concrete or to adapt texts to Russian thought and the feudal system. Interpolations were also made, such as additional imagery or metaphors, flowery descriptions of nature, or the expansion of the description of battle scenes.[217] Original works authored in Rus were few and were confined mainly to homilies and hagiographies; chronicles, such as those composed by Hilarion, Nestor, and Cyril Tyrovsky, are rare and are thus exceptional.[218]

Jews in Slavic Lands

The anti-Jewish comments in the *Palaea interpretata*, which appear to be medieval Bulgarian additions to older pseudepigraphal material, raise the question of whether or not they reflect hostility toward contemporary Jews. Since Christian literature contained polemical material against the Jews from the very beginning, it is quite possible that all of the anti-Jewish sentiments in the *Palaea interpretata* are solely the result of literary influence; one thinks especially of the works of John Chrysostom, which were widely translated in Bulgaria, as were works by Clement of Alexandria, Ephrem the Syrian, and commentated collections of the psalms

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N. A. Meshcherskii, "Problemy izucheniia slaviano-russkoi perevodnoi literatury XI–XV vv.," [Problems in the study of Slavo-Russian translated literature in the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries] *Todrl* 20 (1964): 185, 213, 217.

[215] Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury,* 4.

[216] Veder, "Old Russia's 'Intellectual Silence," 25–26.

[217] Meshcherskii, "Problemy," 217.

[218] Levshun, *Ocherki istorii,* 49, 71; Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti,* 195.

and the prophets that contained a significant amount of anti-Jewish material.[219] The main

question, then, is whether these sentiments were a purely literary development or whether they

reflect a basis in social reality. This question is relevant to our study of the Slavonic

Pseudepigrapha in that we wish to understand as much as possible the motivations of the

Bulgarians and Russians who preserved them; this helps us assess what kind of changes, if any,

they were likely to introduce into these texts.

It is first necessary to establish whether Jews lived in the vicinity of Bulgaria or not.

Archaeological evidence supports Jewish settlements in the Balkans, in the Caucasus, and on the

northern shores of the Black Sea since Roman times, and in Hungary as early as the third century

CE.[220] There is also third-century evidence for the presence of Jews in northern Bulgaria.[221] In

the first century, there was a large Jewish community in Thessalonica, which also could have

spread to Macedonia and Bulgaria in ancient times. Josephus writes of Jews living on the Balkan

Peninsula, and there are scattered mentions of Jews throughout the Balkans, especially in the

cities.[222]

The most striking evidence for Jews in the general neighborhood of the Balkans is the

conversion of the Khazars to rabbinic Judaism in the ninth century.[223] The Khazars were a Turkic

people who settled north of the Black and Caspian seas in what is now southern Russia,

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[219] Istrin, *Ocherk,* 213–14; Tatiana Slavova, *Tulkovnata paleia v konteksta na starobulgarskata knizhnina* [*Palaea interpretata* in the context of Old Bulgarian literature] (Sofiia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2002), 318.

[220] Kevin Alan Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria* (2d ed.; Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 87–88. This archaeological evidence includes Jewish names carved onto stone markers, often in Latin, images of a seven-branched menorah, mentions of synagogue leaders, and the terms *Judaeus* or *Judaea* placed after personal names.

[221] Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 88.

[222] Obolensky, *The Bogomils,* 83; Slavova, *Tulkovnata paleia,* 323.

[223] Douglas Morton Dunlop, "Khazars," *EncJud*, 2d ed. 12: 108–14. For more detailed information, see "The Khazars' Conversion to Judaism," pp 87ff. in Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 2006.

Kazakhstan, and Ukraine, with Kiev at its western border. From *ca.* 650 to 965 CE, the Khazars

had control of the vast area extending from the Volga-Don steppes to the eastern Crimea and the

northern Caucasus. Khazaria bordered Byzantium in what is now Georgia, and some scholars

believe that the Khazarian conversion to Judaism was motivated by a desire to remain politically

neutral between its Christian and Muslim neighbors.[224] Khazaria was situated at a crucial point

between China, the Middle East, and European Russia, and had control of the western stretches

of the Silk Road. Jewish traders were involved in the great East-West trade, and some scholars

posit that Jewish Radhanite traders might have played a role in the conversion of the Khazars to

Judaism, since their trade route ran right through Khazaria.[225]

It is possible, however, that Jewish communities remained from earlier times and also

influenced the conversion. Between the first and third centuries of the Common Era, thousands

of Jews from Egypt, Judea, Syria, and Asia Minor migrated to the Hellenistic Kingdom of

Bosporus and settled in towns throughout the Crimean and Taman peninsulas and along the

northeastern Black Sea coast.[226] In addition, many Byzantine Jews fled to Khazaria in the

seventh and eighth centuries due to intense persecution by the emperors Basil I and Leo III.[227]

According to the *Kievan Letter,* Saadiah Gaon, the *Schechter Letter*, al-Masudi, and al-

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[224] Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 91.

[225] Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat* (2 vols.; Lund: Dept. of Slavonic Studies, Lund University, 2002), 2:119; Alexander Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy in Medieval Rus," *Viator* 39 (2008): 54; Omeljan Pritsak and Shelomo Dov Goitein believe that it was the Radhanites that brought about the conversion of the Khazars (Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 91).

[226] Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 88.

[227] Ibid., 90.

Dimashqi, Jews migrated to Khazaria from both Islamic lands and from Byzantium after Judaism became the official religion there as well.[228]

Regarding the presence of Jews in Rus, the Jewish community in Kiev is the only one that is firmly attested before 1388.[229] We know of its existence from the tenth-century *Kievan Letter* (T-S 12.122), among the oldest documents from the Cairo Genizah. The letter, written in Hebrew, is a letter of recommendation for a Jewish traveler from the representatives of the Kievan Jewish community, who appear to be the descendants of Khazarian proselytes based on their names, which are a mixture of Hebrew names and Turkic tribal names.[230] Analysis of the Turkic names, as well as one word that appears in Turkic runes, allows scholars to establish the letter as being from the tenth century.[231] The Turkic word, translated as "I have read," indicates that the letter had been read and passed on by a Khazarian official. This means that it was written while the Khazars still had control of Kiev, that is, before the 930s, and also that the Khazarian official could read Hebrew.[232] This Jewish community was no doubt affected when the Mongols laid waste to Kiev in 1237–1240, but some documentary evidence does exist of Jews in Kiev after this (see below); it is unclear whether these are remnants of the pre-Mongol-invasion Jewish community or if they represent the German-speaking Ashkenazi Jews who began moving eastward into Slavic lands from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries.[233]

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[228] Slavova, *Tulkovnata paleia,* 318; Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 54, 56; Brook, *The Jews of Khazaria,* 90.

[229] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:13.

[230] Norman Golb and Omeljan Pritsak, *Khazarian Hebrew Documents of the Tenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 27.

[231] Ibid*.,* 3–4, 6–7, 20.

[232] Ibid., 42, 44, 71; Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:16.

[233] Scholars differ in opinion regarding when this migration began to take place (Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:23; Istrin, *Ocherk,* 217; Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 53.

The main documentary evidence for the presence of Jews in Rus is summarized below:

1. The *Nestor Chronicle* (*Povest vremennyx let*) states that Khazarian Jews had a religious debate with Prince Vladimir of Kiev in the tenth century. The *Chronicle* does not state that they lived in Kiev, but it is quite likely, since we know there was an established Jewish community there under Khazarian rule earlier in the same century.

2. *Jaroslav's Charter*, a Russian legal code that was finalized *ca.* 1400 but was formulated over several centuries, mentions Jews.[234]

3. Jews from Rus who were guests in Jewish communities in Byzantium are twice mentioned in letters. One, from the eleventh century, describes an assembly of the Jewish community in Constantinople at which Jewish merchants from Rus were present; the other describes a Jew from Rus who connected with a relative from Jerusalem in Byzantium.[235]

4. The twelfth century *Primary Chronicle* mentions a "Jewish quarter" and a "Jewish gate" in Kiev under the entries for several different years; it is not clear, however, whether these names are a vestige from the time when Jewish Khazarians ruled the city, or if they refer to a contemporaneous Jewish community.[236]

5. Another medieval Russian text states that after the death of Prince Svyatopolk in 1113, the people of Kiev rose up and plundered government buildings, and attacked and robbed the Jewish Quarter; this account, however, was not written down until centuries later, and

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[234] Henrik Birnbaum, "On some Evidence of Jewish Life and Anti-Jewish Sentiments in Medieval Russia," *Viator* 4 (2008): 237.

[235] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 320; Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 57.

[236] Alexander Kulik, "The Earliest Evidence of the Jewish Presence in Western Rus," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 27 (2004): 15.

there is no indication what motivated the mob or whether Jews still lived in the Jewish Quarter.[237]

6. There was a twelfth-century Jewish scholar called R. Moses of Kiev who quoted halakhic statements in the name of Rabbenu Tam and maintained ties with the head of the yeshiva in Baghdad, R. Samuel ben 'Ali.[238]

7. Jews are mentioned in the *Galician-Volhynian (Hypatian) Chronicle* under the entry for 1289 (post-Mongol invasion).[239]

8. R. Eliezer ben Natan mentions in *Eben ha-Ezer* a peculiar custom of the Jews in Rus (which he deems idolatrous) of hanging "signs" on their gates and doors, as well as a particular type of shoes that they wore.[240]

9. There seem to have been some trade connections between the Jews of Rus and Germany, as there is a report of some German Jews who came from Russia with loaded wagons.[241]

10. There are mentions of Jews from Rus studying in France, Germany, and Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[242]

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[237] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia, 321; Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:236, 238. Birnbaum writes that these riots could be related to the Jews' role as moneylenders, but although the motive for the riots might have been economic, there is no evidence that the Jewish community in Kiev was ever involved in usury (Birnbaum, "Evidence of Jewish Life," 239; Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat*, 1:235; Istrin, *Ocherk,* 216).

[238] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 321.

[239] Birnbaum, "Evidence of Jewish Life," 242–43; Kulik, "Earliest Evidence," 15.

[240] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 321; Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 57.

[241] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 322.

[242] In Spain, a Russian Jew is reported to have studied under R. Asher b. Jehiel of Toledo (1250–1327) (Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:18–19; Taube, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration," 30).

11. A European Jewish text from the twelfth century, which describes the persecution of Jews in Western Europe during the Crusades, mentions a R. Benjamin of Volodymyr, a western Ukrainian town near the Polish border.[243]

12. In his book *Ktav Tamim,* Rabbi Moshe Taku mentions a Karaite book that went from Babylon to Rus, and from Rus to Regensburg.[244]

13. There is a legend about Theodosius, the abbot of the Pechersk monastery, who was said to rise from his bed at night, "and in utter concealment go to the Jews and taunt them with the matter of Christ, reproving and distressing them and calling them unbelievers and sinners; for it was his desire to die for Christ's faith."[245] Whether or not this actually happened, Birnbaum rightly argues that the existence of the legend presupposes the plausibility of there being local Jews with whom Theodosius could argue.[246]

14. Several documentary sources confirm the existence of an ancient Jewish community in the city of Tmutorokan' that continued into the Middle Ages. Tmutorokan' is located on the Taman Strait between the Black Sea and the Azov Sea, which borders Crimea, and was one of the most important centers in Kievan Rus. Theophanes mentions the presence of Jews there in his *Chronography* under the year 817, as does Ibn al-Faqih in the tenth century in *Kitab al-Buldan*; Kulik believes that this Jewish community was of Byzantine-Greek origin.[247]

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[243] Kulik, "Earliest Evidence," 16.

[244] Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 55.

[245] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 320.

[246] Birnbaum, "Evidence of Jewish Life," 231.

[247] Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 55–56.

In contrast with the Jewish communities that existed in Kievan Rus, Jews were not allowed to live in the medieval principality of Muscovy, which was formed in the early fourteenth century.[248] Attesting to this is the fact that in the fifteenth century Ivan the Great received a letter from his Jewish agent in Crimea written in Hebrew characters, but there was no one in Moscow who could transliterate them (the agent was instructed to write in Cyrillic characters in the future).[249] Even Jewish visitors to Moscow are not mentioned before the mid-fifteenth century.[250] The case of the "Judaizing heresy" in Novgorod in the fifteenth century is interesting: several members of Ivan the Great's family were involved and ended up being imprisoned for their participation. There is much controversy regarding the movement's theology as well as its connection to Judaism, but other than one Jew named Zacharia, no Jewish involvement has been substantiated.[251]

Having reviewed the main body of evidence for the presence of Jews in medieval Slavic territories, it seems indisputable that Jewish communities existed there. But did any kind of polemical interaction between Jews and Christians lie behind the anti-Jewish literature that survived from that time period? Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, who has written a comprehensive two-volume work on Jews in Slavic lands, cautions that we must not forget that

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[248] Taube, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration," 28; Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:236; Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 51.

[249] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:67.

[250] Ibid., 1:236.

[251] Ibid., 2:123. Based on his analysis of a number of Ruthenian fifteenth century texts in Slavonic that appear to be translated from the Hebrew, Moshe Taube hypothesizes Jewish-Christian collaboration between Jews who dictated the translation orally and Christians who wrote them down in proper literary Slavonic. Among the texts were historical narratives, such as *The Life of Moses* and excerpts from the *Josippon,* as well as philosophical texts, including some by Maimonides, Al-Ghazali, and Pseudo-Aristotle. He posits that it is quite possible that these translations were intended for non-Jews, such as the heretics in Novgorod who had in interest in Judaism and rationalism [Taube, "The Fifteenth-century Ruthenian Translations from Hebrew and the Heresy of the Judaizers: Is There a Connection?" in *Speculum Slaviae Orientalis: Muscovy, Ruthenia and Lithuania in the late Middle Ages* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2005), 185–208.

the Slavs took over Byzantine literature, theology, and rhetoric, and anti-Jewish themes have been present in Christian literature from its inception.[252] He concludes from his research that none of the anti-Jewish Slavonic texts contain anything that adds local color or that reflects anything contemporary; they are completely "traditional" in the ancient Christian theological sense.[253] He reasons that if the anti-Jewish content is traditional, meets an exegetical need, and no external stimulus is detectable, there is no reason to assign the text any additional sociological function.[254]

Istrin (1922) is of the same opinion that the traditional Christian material inherited by the Slavs is more than enough to explain any anti-Jewish content in the literature; in addition, according to him, later fifteenth-century polemical works against the Jews do not build on the earlier works from Byzantium.[255] He states that more polemics existed against Roman Catholics in the early days of Christianity in Rus, and that relations with Jews were peaceful.[256] Samuel Ettinger, however, believes that anti-Jewish texts played a more central role in the literature of Rus than in Byzantium and that this may reflect a more active hostile attitude toward Jews.[257] Whether or not this is true, the available evidence does not allow us to assign a contemporary polemical function to the early medieval texts that contain anti-Jewish material. Although there is considerable evidence for Jewish communities in Rus and Khazaria, the evidence regarding

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[252] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:4, 6–7.

[253] Ibid., 1:8, 230, 237. Birnbaum cites the writings of Hilarion of Kiev as an example, since although he wrote negatively about Jews, the content was theological and did not seem to reflect social interaction (Birnbaum, "Evidence of Jewish Life," 228–29).

[254] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:28.

[255] Istrin, *Ocherk,* 213–15.

[256] Ibid., 215.

[257] Ettinger, "Kievan Russia," 323.

Bulgaria proper is nonexistent; the most one can do is acknowledge the possibility of a Jewish presence there based on historical mentions from centuries earlier. Given that the corpus of Old Bulgarian texts containing anti-Jewish material includes only Greek Christian authors, such as John Chrysostom, and imitative comments inserted in the *Palaea interpretata*, there is no reason to think that anti-Jewish sentiments influenced the treatment of Byzantine texts in Bulgaria. And since the early Russian corpus was derived completely from Bulgaria, this applies to the situation in Rus as well. The sociological function of these texts might have been different in Rus, as Ettinger argues, especially since there is more evidence for a Jewish population there. Later anti-Jewish literary activity in Rus, however, did not involve the Pseudepigrapha and is thus irrelevant to this discussion.

If any kind of Jewish-Christian interaction is suggested by the extant texts in Old Church Slavonic, it is the introduction of midrashic and Talmudic material, most likely by Jewish converts to Christianity.[258] German M. Barats is the main scholar who has demonstrated the presence of this material.[259] Kulik also discusses a group of East Slavic translations of biblical books that were definitely translated from Greek, but possess a decidedly Jewish character, such as elements connected with Jewish liturgy as well as Jewish chapter division. He concludes these must have come through Greek-speaking Jews and that "It may be assumed that contact with the Jews – the local representatives of Byzantine culture – and access to their book collections, was at a certain stage more readily available than was contact with distant Constantinople."[260]

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[258] According to Pereswetoff-Morath, there are reports of Jews converting to Christianity in Ruthenia (*A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:80).

[259] German Markovich Barats, *Sobranie trudov po voprosu o evreiskom elementie v pamiatnikakh drvne-russkoi pis'mennosti* [Collected works on the question of Jewish elements in the monuments of ancient Russian literature] (Paris: Impr. d'Art Voltaire, 1927), 370ff.

[260] Kulik, "Judeo-Greek Legacy," 61–63.

Although the existence of these translations demonstrates that Judeo-Greek texts fell into

Christian hands at some point, it is difficult to infer much else, although Kulik's hypothesis may

well be true.

Translations from Hebrew into Slavonic?

In the fifteenth century, several historical, philosophical, scientific, and biblical texts were

translated into East Slavic from Hebrew.[261] Although some scholars try to connect these

translations with the "Judaizing heresy" in Novgorod, they were made in Vilna and Kiev and are

most likely an independent phenomenon.[262] Based on the combination of Jewish content and

correct literary Old Church Slavonic, Moshe Taube hypothesizes that these translations represent

Jewish-Christian cooperation, with a Christian scribe writing down dictated translation from the

Hebrew provided by a Jewish collaborator.[263] Whatever their provenance, these translations do

not affect our analysis of literature mediated to Slavic lands by Byzantium.

Regarding the possibility of translations made from the Hebrew before the fifteenth century,

N. A. Meshcherskii and his student A. A. Alekseev argue that the Slavonic *Book of Esther* was

translated from a Hebrew original because it follows the Masoretic Text.[264] They do not address

the alternative explanation that the translation could have been made from a Greek *Vorlage* that

follows the MT, however. Instead, Meshcherskii posits a whole cadre of Russian translators who

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[261] Renee Perelmutter, "Deictic Shifts in the Slavic Translations from Hebrew Associated with the Judaizers," in *Translation and tradition in "Slavia orthodoxa"* (ed. Valentina Izmirlieva and B. Gasparov; Zürich: LIT, 2012), 159; Liudmila Navtanovich, "*Second Enoch* and *The Tale of the Blessed Zerubbabel*: Two Different Examples of Old Testament Slavonic Pseudepigrapha," *JSP* 19 (2009): 125; Meshcherskii, *Istochniki i sostav*, 29.

[262] Birnbaum, "Evidence of Jewish Life," 251; Perelmutter, "Deictic Shifts," 159.

[263] Taube, "Jewish-Christian Collaboration," 39.

[264] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:71.

knew Hebrew, although no evidence exists that any Russians ever studied Hebrew.[265] Horace

Lunt and Moshe Taube have successfully debunked this theory, concluding that "The vision of a

school of Kievan translators from the Hebrew is a myth created almost singlehandedly by

Mescherskij," and that the Slavonic *Book of Esther* must have been translated from a lost Greek

text that follows the MT.[266] Recently, L. V. Levshun made the astounding claim that in the

twelfth century, translations of *Esther, Song of Songs, Enoch* and *Apoc. Ab.* were made directly

from the Hebrew.[267] There is no evidence to support this, however, and it would seem that

Levshun is positing translations from the Hebrew based solely on the presence of Jewish content;

since a large amount of Jewish material was mediated through Byzantium in Greek, such an

assertion does not withstand scrutiny.

Conclusions

Having surveyed the relevant material concerning the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha in the Middle

Ages, what can we conclude regarding their critical value for the scholar of Ancient Judaism?

Let us first return to the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter. First of all, *can the*

preservation of the Pseudepigrapha during the thousand years between Ancient Judaism and the

Middle Ages be plausibly accounted for? Since we know that the Slavs originally received all of

their texts from Byzantium, the question becomes whether or not it is plausible that the

Pseudepigrapha were preserved there. Knowing that the early church had access to the

Pseudepigrapha and the Greek Church is its direct descendant, it seems reasonable that it would

have preserved many such texts. The original indices of forbidden books in Greek could have led

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[265] Meshcherskii, *Problemy,* 200; Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 2:66.

[266] H. G. Lunt and Moshe Taube, "Early East Slavic Translations from Hebrew?" *Russian Linguistics* 12 (1988), 160.

[267] Levshun, *Ocherki istorii,* 67.

to the destruction of many Pseudepigrapha, but their later popularity in Byzantium confirms that they were in fact preserved despite the bans.

How, why, and for whom did the Slavs access, translate, and preserve the Pseudepigrapha? The Slavs received Greek texts of the Pseudepigrapha from Byzantium after the official adoption of Christianity in Bulgaria in the late ninth century. Why the Pseudepigrapha? First of all, we know that the Pseudepigrapha were widely read in Byzantium at the time that Bulgaria became Christian. Also, since most Bulgarians were uneducated and new converts, it is possible that the Greek clergy thought that the Pseudepigrapha would be more appealing to them, which was indeed the case. Whatever the original reasons were for their initial introduction, the Pseudepigrapha quickly became popular due to their affinity with Bulgarian pagan religion and folk culture.

For whom did the Bulgarians translate the Pseudepigrapha? First and foremost, it was for themselves. In light of what we know about the intense educational push overseen by Clement and Naum, the strong nationalistic feelings of the Bulgarians, and the discouragement of the Greek clergy towards worship in Slavonic, it seems reasonable to assume that for many Bulgarian scribes, literacy and the translation of texts was a way of asserting their patriotism and pride in their own country and language. They worked hard to reach the cultural level of Byzantium, and education was their main avenue for doing so. As for the Russians, they received Bulgarian-translated Slavonic manuscripts of the Pseudepigrapha along with Christianity, and these texts were popular in Rus for many of the same reasons as in Bulgaria.

To what extent did they alter the texts that passed through their hands? The Pseudepigrapha found a receptive audience in Bulgaria that had little sense of the line between canonical and non-canonical and that did not place a high value on strict orthodoxy. The picture that emerges is

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of a non-discriminating public that had no motive to emend the Pseudepigrapha. If anyone had

such a motive it would be the Byzantines, who had a much stronger sense of the canon.

Furthermore, the amount of people with the erudition needed to do any kind of in-depth editing

was quite small and limited largely to the early days when Clement and Naum were overseeing

the translating. The evidence itself suggests that texts were much more likely to be rearranged

than edited.

The Bulgarians were interested in the Pseudepigrapha for the stories that they provided, and

Jewish materials were not intrinsically offensive to Bulgarian sensibilities. In addition, the

allegorical mode of exegesis that we see in the *Palaea interpretata* and that was popular with the

Bogomils requires that Jewish texts remain intact; it would be difficult to allegorize Israelite or

Jewish features if they were expunged from a text. The Bulgarians thus had no motive to remove

Jewish elements, and the texts that survived attest to this. In Rus, although some additions were

made to suit the taste of the time, they did not disturb the surrounding content. The most

significant changes that the Russians introduced were related to the structure of the texts;

rearrangement, abridgment, collation, etc.

Is there a possibility that the Slavs authored the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha? Bulgarians

did author some texts, but not many. The works that we know are original either emulate

Byzantine Christian works, such as gospel commentaries and hagiographies, reflect

contemporary issues, such as Khrabr's treatise on the alphabet, or preserve folk beliefs, such as

the demonological *Triasavitsi*. Compilation, rather than composition, was the main creative

literary outlet of the time. The *Palaea interpretata,* although original to Bulgaria, is a

compilation with interpolated comments. The fact that the original comments are anti-Jewish

implies that original material was more likely to be anti-Jewish than imitative of Jewish

Pseudepigrapha. Although the Pseudepigrapha were quite popular in Bulgaria, we do not see any attempts to compose original works in the same vein; the materials were compiled into anthological works, but were not imitated. Even fewer original works were composed in Rus than in Bulgaria, and they were limited to homilies, hagiographies, and chronicles.

What do we know about their translation methods and scribal practices? Overwhelming evidence attests to the predominance of the literal approach to translation. The first translations from Greek became the source texts from that point on and strictly faithful copies were the only way to preserve the content. This word-for-word approach produced translations that contained corruptions at the lexical level, but were also conservative regarding content. As for Russian scribes, the evidence shows that when it came to the translation of textual content, they were also careful and exacting.

Who were the Bogomils and to what extent did they alter the Pseudepigrapha? The Bogomils were medieval dualists who were strongly nationalistic and anti-Byzantine. Their dualistic views and rejection of the Hebrew Bible made them more likely than other Bulgarians to alter Christian texts, and they appear to have done so. The fact that the Pseudepigrapha had become associated with Bulgarian heretics by the time the indices made their way to Rus testifies to the fact that the Bogomils both used the Pseudepigrapha and made them their own. It should be noted, however, that the pseudepigraphal works attributed to heretics were all devoted to Christian topics and either did not survive or are pre-Bogomil Christian works that were probably used, but not authored by them.

The available evidence regarding the nature of Bogomil emendations, such as the *Legend of the Wood of the Cross* and Josephus' *Antiquities,* demonstrates that the Bogomils did not edit or emend texts in a thoroughgoing way; instead, they preferred to make minor interpolations with

the goal of negating elements that went against the main points of their theology. Even the *Secret Book,* which has been identified as a Bogomil composition, is actually a compilation of various materials with Bogomil elements added. Thus, their *modus operandi* appears to consist of strategic interpolations, while leaving the rest of the text undisturbed.

What role did anti-Judaism play in medieval Slavic literature? Although it is tempting to read a social element into the anti-Jewish content of medieval Slavic Christian texts given the horrific level of anti-Semitism later displayed in these regions, there is no textual evidence upon which to base this conclusion. The anti-Jewish statements are theological in nature and virtually indistinguishable from early anti-Jewish Christian writings; nothing in them betrays any local or contemporary elements. Even later anti-Semitic texts do not seem to be based on these earlier texts. For our purposes, the evidence (or in this case, lack of it) implies that although anti-Judaism does appear in medieval Slavic writings, it does not appear to have motivated any textual emendation of the Pseudepigrapha. This is supported by the fact that much Jewish material was preserved in Slavonic manuscripts without any distortion. The Jews are admonished in the *Palaea interpretata* for not believing in the New Testament, but Jewish material was never a target.

What can we learn from other Slavonic Pseudepigrapha for which we do *have the Greek* Vorlagen? From the examples available to us, the Slavonic versions show less editorial interference and more fidelity to their source texts than other versions. As is common in Slavonic texts, there are corruptions on the lexical level, but the texts themselves are relatively intact. Although more work needs to be done with this kind of comparison, what we have gives us every reason to consider the Slavonic-only texts we have as good representations of their *Vorlagen*.

With the answers to these questions in hand, what can we conclude regarding the probability that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the other Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha contain ancient Jewish material? First of all, although this chapter is mainly concerned with the medieval evidence, I will proffer an opinion about the history of the Pseudepigrapha in Byzantium based on the following facts: the Pseudepigrapha were widely used by the early church, their use was discouraged after the fourth century, and they experienced a revival in popularity in the early Middle Ages. This pattern of use, disuse, and reuse suggests that although times changed, the Pseudepigrapha did not. This does not mean that no Christian emendations were made during those centuries; it would actually be surprising if no editing was done to "update" certain Jewish elements, especially regarding the identity of the Messiah. It does imply, however, that there was no official effort to rehabilitate the Pseudepigrapha for use in the church or to purge them of either heterodox or Jewish content; they were banned, not altered for orthodox use. Instead, from the time of the first indices until the Middle Ages, it would seem that the Pseudepigrapha mainly sat collecting dust until a time when they were less of a threat to the official church.

Once the Pseudepigrapha arrived in Bulgaria, it seems unlikely that they were emended much by orthodox scribes, since the latter saw themselves as culturally inferior to Byzantium and tried to emulate it. They adopted Christianity as it was presented to them by the Greek Orthodox Church, which included the Pseudepigrapha. If the Byzantine clergy did not object to the Pseudepigrapha as they were, there was no reason for the Bulgarians to object either. It also seems highly unlikely that the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha were authored by a medieval Bulgarian or Russian. The available evidence shows that 1. Original compositions were rare, and 2. Medieval Slavic authors only emulated Greek Christian works. The Jewish Pseudepigrapha owed their popularity primarily to the elements within them that fed the medieval interest in the

supernatural, and secondarily, to demonstrate the superiority of the New Testament over the Old; neither of these functions requires that any changes be made to originally Jewish content. Although the texts from Bulgaria lost some of their structural integrity in Rus, the evidence suggests that their content was not significantly altered there either. As in Bulgaria, translations were strictly literal, and any changes that were made appear to be additions in the style of the time or rearrangement of material.

In contrast, it is highly likely that the Bogomils did insert material into the Pseudepigrapha, because 1. They came to be closely associated with the Pseudepigrapha, and 2. Passages exist that reflect uniquely Bogomil ideas. It seems equally unlikely that they extensively emended these texts; the available evidence suggests that they preferred compilation and strategic interpolation as a way of making a text their own. By leaving the rest of the text intact, they even sometimes allowed material to remain that contradicted their own belief system. This, combined with the fact that the Bogomil movement consisted mainly of the lower socio-economic classes, leads one to believe that overhauling Christian texts to make them thoroughly Bogomil was simply not a priority for them. This is quite probable, given the newness of literacy and the traditionally oral nature of Bulgarian culture. Indeed, what function would a large library of Bogomil texts serve for its mostly illiterate membership?

Furthermore, the Bogomils are reported to have placed a low value on education and even mocked the erudite, whom they associated with the Greek Church. Literacy would have been necessary for Bogomil leaders so that they could interpret the New Testament for themselves, but the ability to read and the ability to edit texts are two different things altogether; that some Bogomils could read does not mean that they were accomplished scribes. Taking into account the popular (and probably largely oral) nature of the Bogomil movement, their disdain for the

highly educated, and the evidence of the texts themselves, the overall probability of extensive Bogomil editing is thus quite low.

Based on the evidence presented above, the probability that the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha contain ancient Jewish material seems quite high. In my opinion, a knowledge of the conditions under which the Jewish Pseudepigrapha were translated and transmitted in Slavic lands makes it much less likely than heretofore thought that they contain mostly Christian material. Slavic Christians did make changes, but not primarily to the content of these texts. Much caution should be used when it comes to the stylistic details of a text, such as indirect vs. direct speech, which we know was sometimes changed in Russia; similarly, a detailed structural analysis of these texts may not be the most fruitful avenue of research given how much material was rearranged. And close attention must be paid to each text in order to identify any added material, such as Bogomil interpolations or additions that reflect medieval interests and stylistics. But when it comes to approaching the Slavonic-only Pseudepigrapha for information regarding ancient Judaism, I believe scholars will be on firmer ground than previously thought. If a document reflects Jewish concerns in a way that makes sense in the context of Ancient Judaism, there is no reason to discount it because it was preserved by Christians. Although it is clear that Christians read and used the Pseudepigrapha throughout the centuries, no evidence exists to suggest that they extensively Christianized Jewish content; furthermore, Christian interpolations tend to stand out amidst the surrounding Jewish material.

The information given and the conclusions reached above cannot determine how much a particular text contains Christian emendation, nor do they provide a methodology for going about that task. But by examining the circumstances in which the Pseudepigrapha were preserved in

Slavic lands, we can at least make the case that such endeavors are neither unwarranted nor

foolish.

Chapter 2

Prolegomena

Original Language

Scholars have unanimously hypothesized that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, or a mixture of the two, after which it was translated into Greek, and then Old Church Slavonic. Let us briefly examine the evidence for this hypothesis. First of all, there is no question that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was translated into Slavonic from Greek. It has already been established in the previous chapter that only texts in Greek were passed on to the Slavs from the Byzantines. Secondly, the Slavonic text contains transliterated Greek words such as *ad* (Hades), *aer* (atmosphere, sphere), as well as Greek calques and other Hellenisms.[1] Regarding a possible Semitic original, scholars have pointed to phrases, idioms, calques, syntax, grammar, transliteration and orthography in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that all reflect Semitic characteristics, but they differ as to what kinds of conclusions can be drawn from them. Some of the elements that have drawn the most attention are: the simple coordination of sentences that parallels the ubiquitous use of Waw in Hebrew, the use of the phrases "Here am I," "And it came to pass," and constructions using body parts in a metaphorical sense, such as "I said to my heart" to mean "I said to myself."[2]

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[1] Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (vol. 1 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*; ed. James H. Charlesworth; Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 686; H. G. Lunt, "On the Language of the Slavonic Apocalypse of Abraham," *Slavica Hierosolymitana* 7 (1985), 56; Alexander Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction: Retroverting the Apocalypse of Abraham," *Apocrypha* 13 (2002), 206-212.

[2] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682; G. H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1918), xv; Marc Philonenko and Belkis Philonenko-Sayar, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," *Semitica* 31 (1981): 23; Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction,"

This kind of evidence is actually the weakest for a Semitic original for the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* since, as many scholars have discussed, elements of Hebraistic syntax and style are widely attested in the "biblicizing Greek" used by Hellenistic Jews, most notably in the Septuagint and the New Testament.[3] It is also the case that names with a Hebrew origin were often transferred from one language to another intact, especially in the case of divine or angelic names.[4] According to R. B. Wright, "translation Greek" can be distinguished from "biblicizing Greek" patterned after the LXX.[5] Unfortunately, this kind of analysis cannot be performed on the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* since we do not have its Greek *Vorlage,* but according to Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, its style, while strongly Semitic, is generally within the bounds of the biblical Greek used by Hellenistic Jews for original works.[6] Thus, style alone cannot decisively determine whether or not it comes from a Semitic original. Rubinkiewicz does consider the amount of Semiticisms to be significant, however: "While no decisive arguments for a Semitic original have yet been advanced, the sheer number of Semitisms is best explained by this hypothesis."[7] Lunt agrees that the vast number of Semitic features makes it more plausible to assume a Semitic original.[8]

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215. Kulik points out that the phrase *ʾamar ʾel lev* (אמר אל לב) is different from the phrase *leʾmor b'lev* (לאמור בלב) in that while the latter idiom was carried over as a calque in biblicizing Greek, the former does not appear in the LXX or an Aramaic Targums, making it a true Hebraism (Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction," 215).

[3] Lunt, "On the Language," 55-62; Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:686, Michael E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1992), 51; L. Navtanovich, "Second Enoch and The Tale of the Blessed Zerubbabel: Two Different Examples of Old Testament Slavonic Apocrypha," *JSP* 19, no. 2 (2009): 125; H. C. Kee, "Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *OTP* 1:777.

[4] Stone, *Adam and Eve,* 46.

[5] R. B. Wright, "Psalms of Solomon," *OTP* 2:640.

[6] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:686.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Lunt, "On the Language," 58, note 6.

The strongest evidence for a Semitic original lies in elements of the text that only make sense when translated into Hebrew or Aramaic. For example, both Rubinkiewicz and Arie Rubinstein discuss examples from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that reflect verb + preposition combinations that occur in Hebrew, but not in Greek. For example, the Slavonic "ruled among them" is most likely a mistranslation of the preposition *bêt* and should be translated as "ruled over them" (*rādû bāhem*; רדו בהם). Slavonic "It was heavy of a big stone" represents the Hebrew *kāvēd min* (כבד מן) and should be translated as "It was heavier than a stone" (*Apoc. Ab.* 1:5).[9] Rubinkiewicz also points out a possible mistranslation of *bêt*: The phrase "in the sins" should probably be translated "for the sins" in *Apoc. Ab.* 8:4: "Leave Terah your father…so that you too are not slain *in the sins* of your father's house" (emphasis mine).[10] He also notes that biblical citations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* sometimes conform to the Masoretic Text or Aramaic Targums as opposed to any of the extant Greek versions.[11] As a last example, N. A. Mescherskij points out that in one of the main manuscripts of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham's father's name is spelled *Tera,* the Hebrew way, not *Thara,* as it is in Greek.[12] Many more such examples are put forward by Rubinstein, Alexander Kulik, and others.[13]

Also commonly cited as strong proof of a Semitic original are the names of Terah's idols in the first part of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Although *Jubilees* and rabbinic midrashim also tell

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[9] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682.

[10] Ibid.; A. L. Rubinstein, "Hebraisms in the 'Apocalypse of Abraham,'" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 4, 3 (1953): 111.

[11] Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction," 216.

[12] Ibid.; N. A. Meshcherskii, *Istochniki i sostav drevnei slaviano-russkoi perevodnoi pis'mennosti IX–XV vekov: uchebnoe posobie* [The sources and composition of ancient Slavo-Russian translated literature in the ninth to the fifteenth centuries: a textbook] (Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo leningradskogo universiteta, 1978), 30.

[13] Rubinstein, "Hebraisms," 108-115; Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction," 215-216; Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682, 686; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 23.

the story of Abraham and his father the idol maker, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is the only text that provides the names of the idols.[14] Not only are most of these names Semitic in origin, but their meanings create humorous mockery of the idols that serves the purpose of the larger narrative. The humor is lost, however, when the names remain untranslated, as in the Slavonic text; it is completely dependent on the reader knowing the meaning of the Semitic names.[15] For this reason, Kulik writes, "An obviously Semitic origin of these names is the most striking argument in favor of the Semitic origin of the whole."[16] The names in question are: *Maroumaf(a)/Maroumat* [Reconstructed Greek: Μαρουμαφ(α)/Μαρουματ], *Varisat* [Grk: Βαρησατ/θ(α)], *Nakhon/Nakhin* (Grk: Ναχων), *Ioavan* (Grk: Ιαβον), and *Zoukh(e)* [Grk: Ζουχ(ε)].

The first, *Maroumaf(a)/Maroumat,* has been the topic of much speculation (one of the ways *tāw* can be pronounced in Aramaic is equal to *thēta*; Old Church Slavonic did not have this sound, which is why *Maroumafa* most likely represents a transliteration of *Maroumatha*). Both Hebrew and Aramaic retroversions have been suggested: G. H. Box thinks it represents the Hebrew *ʾeven mirmâ* (אבן מרמה), "stone of deceit," Rubinkiewicz posits *martāʾ romāʾ* (מרתא רומא), "Lady Rome," Marc Philonenko *mirmōt,* (מרמות), "deception(s)," and Kulik *mar ʾûmath(āʾ)* [(א)מר אומת], "lord of the nation."[17] In support of his retroversion, Kulik points to the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* describes this idol as having its head and body made of

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[14] Alexander Kulik, "The Gods of Nahor: A note on the Pantheon of the Apocalypse of Abraham," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 54 (2003): 228. Parallel ancient accounts of Abraham and Terah can be found in *Jubilees* 12, Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities* 6*, Tanna Devei Eliyahu* 2:25, *Genesis Rabba* 38:13, *Seder Eliyahu Rabba* 33, as well as in Philo and Josephus.

[15] For a treatment of the humor in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* see James H. Charlesworth, *How Barisat Bellowed: Folklore, Humor, and Iconography in the Jewish Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of John* (North Richland Hills, Tex.: Bibal Press, 1998).

[16] Kulik, "The Gods of Nahor," 232.

[17] Ibid., 230.

different stones.[18] He argues that this pattern was common for statues of Roman emperors, citing

Suetonius' *De Vita Caesarum,* which reads,

> He began from that time on to claim to divine majesty; for after giving orders that such statues of the gods as were especially famous for their sanctity or their artistic merit, including that of Jupiter of Olympia, should be brought from Greece, in order to remove their heads and put his own in their place.[19]

In ch. 1 of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham finds the idol *Maroumatha* fallen in his

temple. In the process of moving him back to his place, *Maroumatha's* head falls off, after which

Terah fashions a new body and places the head on it. In ch. 3, Abraham ruminates on this

instance:

> What is the profit of the labor which my father is doing? Is not he rather a god of his gods, since by his sculpting, carving and skill they come into being? It would be more fitting for them to worship my father, since they are his work…how then can my father's god, Mar-Umath, having a head of one stone and [the rest] being made of another stone, save a man, or hear a man's prayer and reward him? (*Apoc. Ab.* 3:2-4, 8)[20]

This reflection on the futility of idols is made more ironic if one accepts Kulik's reconstruction

of "lord of the nation," due to the implicit reference to the Roman emperor as well as the gap

between the idol's majestic name and its undignified position of being sprawled across the

temple floor. This irony remains with Rubinkiewicz's reconstruction, "Lady Rome," which

constitutes a much more explicit and pointed ridicule of the Roman emperor. If *Maroumatha*

means "deception," then it reflects biblical language regarding idols, which underscores the

narrative's message that they are in fact not gods and have no power. None of this is appreciated,

however, without an understanding of the name's meaning in either Hebrew or Aramaic.

Linguistically, Kulik's suggested retroversion of Mar-Umath(a) is the most attractive, as it

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 230-231.

[20] All quotations from the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are taken from Alexander Kulik's translation in *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Lit, 2004).

matches the Slavonic version consonant for consonant: MRMT.[21] All of the suggested

retroversions make sense within the narrative, however, which aims to highlight the futility of

worshiping idols.

Louis Ginzberg was the first to suggest the retroversion *bar ʾeshāth* (בר אשת), "son of fire" or

"fiery one," for the name Varisat, a straightforward transliteration that has been accepted ever

since.[22] This prosaic name for the fire god is parallel to the name of the Ugaritic goddess of fire,

yšt, as well as three Phoenician gods of fire, whose Greek names are given as *phōs* (Φως), *pyr*

(Πυρ), and *phlox* (Φλοξ).[23] Knowing that Varisat is the fire god is important for understanding

the nuances of the narrative in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which contains a humorous story

about him in which fire is a central element:

> And it came to pass, when I was collecting the wooden splinters, I found among them a small god, lying among the pieces of wood on my left.
> And on his forehead was written: "god Bar-Eshath."
> …after I had put the splinters on the fire, in order to cook food for my father, I went out to ask about the food and I put Bar-Eshath near the heart of fire, saying to him menacingly,
> "Bar-Eshath, make sure that the fire does not go out before I come back…
> When I came back again I found Bar-Eshath fallen backwards, his feet enveloped in fire and terribly burned.
> Laughing greatly to myself, I said, "Bar-Eshath, you certainly are able to kindle fire and cook food!"
> And it came to pass, while I was speaking laughingly, that he was gradually burned up by the fire and became ashes.
> And I brought the food to my father, [and] he ate.
> And I gave him wine and milk, and he drank and satiated himself and blessed Mar-Umath, his god.
> And I said to him, "Father Terah, do not bless your god Mar-Umath, do not praise him! Praise rather your god Bar-Eshath because, in his love for you he threw himself into the fire in order to cook your food."
> And he said to me, "And where is he now?"
> "He has been reduced to ashes in the fury of the fire and become dust." (*Apoc. Ab.* 5:17)

It is clear that the name of the god is significant in this story. First of all, it is highlighted by

being written on his forehead. Secondly, as his inability to control the fire is narrated, his name is

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[21] The long vowel *ou* in the OCS for Maroumatha/Maroumafa could reflect the consonant Aleph, which would make Kulik's reconstruction match better than that of Philonenko (MR'MT vs. MRMT).

[22] Louis Ginzberg, "Apocalypse of Abraham," in *Jewish Encyclopedia* 1, 92 (1901-1906).

[23] Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction," 214.

mentioned more often than is strictly necessary. If one accepts the retroversion Bar-Eshath, "the

Fiery One," this usage clearly functions as an aid to the mockery of the idol:

> "O Fiery One, make sure that the fire does not go out before I come back…" When I came back again I found the Fiery One fallen backwards, his feet enveloped in fire and terribly burned. Laughing greatly to myself, I said, "O Fiery One, you certainly are able to kindle fire and cook food!" (*Apoc. Ab.* 5:7-10)

James H. Charlesworth uses this narrative as one of his main examples of ancient Jewish

intellectual satire, which functions to ridicule an enemy;[24] here, that enemy is idolatry, with a

possible reference to the Roman emperor.

The names *Nakhon, Ioavan*, and *Zoukhe* do not serve any ironic purpose, but they do provide

support for a Semitic original and an ancient provenance. *Nakhon*, clearly from the Hebrew

nakhon (נכון), meaning "firm" or "stable," is descriptive of this idol, since it is at his feet that

Mar-Umath lies in ch. 1. He is not "standing firm" because he is a stronger god; his "standing

firm" is simply descriptive of what happens to him in the story: he is the idol that did not fall.

Ioavan, a silver god, and *Zoukhe*, a golden god, are described together and are said to stand side

by side (*Apoc. Ab.* 6:7-9). Rubinkiewicz understands *Ioavan* as being a "Slavonic deformation"

of the Hebrew word for Greece, *ywn* (יוון), which is consonant with his understanding of

Maroumatha as a similarly deformed form of "Lady Rome." Kulik, however, looks to Greek

magical papyri from the Hellenistic period in order to understand both names.[25] He cites a text in

which the name *Zoukhe* appears as the name of a god in a prayer to Helios along with the name

Yao, which is interchanged with the forms *Yavo, Yavou,* and *Yaou* (Ιαω, Ιαβω, Ιαβου, Ιαου).[26]

The fact that these two names appear together in the Greek text does provide an ancient, pagan

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[24] James H. Charlesworth, *How Barisat Bellowed: Folklore, Humor, and Iconography in the Jewish Apocalypses and the Apocalypse of John* (North Richland Hills, Tex.: Bibal Press, 1998), 22-23.

[25] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682; Kulik, "Gods of Nahor," 231.

[26] Kulik, "Gods of Nahor," 231.

context for these names, if nothing else. It is not clear if *Ioavan* is Semitic or not; if one relies on the magical papyri as evidence, then the likelihood is that it is not.

In conclusion, Mar-Umath, Bar-Eshath, and Nakhon are not only convincing retroversions linguistically, but each one is either descriptive of the idol's role in the narrative or furthers the mockery of the idol in an ironic and humorous way.[27] Given that this kind of word play presupposes a knowledge of Hebrew or Aramaic, it is highly unlikely that it was written by a Greek author for a Greek-speaking audience.[28] In all, given the great number of Semitisms, the presence of Hebrew calques, the use of the Masoretic text instead of the LXX, traces of Hebrew orthography, and the necessity of knowing Hebrew and Aramaic in order to understand the humor of the narrative, we must agree with Kulik that a Semitic original for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is proven "beyond a doubt."[29]

Date and Provenance

In the last chapter, we saw that a more detailed knowledge of the medieval Slavic context supports the plausibility of ancient Jewish material surviving until that time. Let us now examine the particular case of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to see what evidence exists for its antiquity aside from the general probability already established. I agree with J. R. Mueller, who writes that any discussion of date must move carefully along three lines: external evidence, internal evidence, and evidence of a shared Zeitgeist.[30] The external evidence that is most cited by

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[27] Ibid., 232.

[28] Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xv; Ginzberg, "Apocalypse of Abraham"; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 23.

[29] Kulik, "Interpretation and Reconstruction," 212.

[30] J. R. Mueller, "The Apocalypse of Abraham and the Destruction of the Second Jewish Temple," *SBLSP* 21 (1982): 343.

scholars is from the Clementine *Recognitions* (3rd-4th century CE),[31] which states that Abraham received a vision in which an angel instructed him "more fully concerning those things which he was beginning to perceive," and "shewed him also what belonged to his race and posterity."[32] The author of the *Recognitions* does not reference any source for this, but these quotes do seem to match the content of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* First of all, "those things which he was beginning to perceive" could apply to the first eight chapters, in which Abraham meditates on the futility of idol-worship and recognizes the one true God. The mention of an angel showing him the future of his descendants could apply to the angel Yahoel showing Abraham the apostasy of Israel, God's punishment in the destruction of the temple, and his future redemption and victory over Israel's oppressors. It is thus possible that the *Recognitions* could be referring to the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* The *Recognitions* also mentions, however, that Abraham was an astrologer, an element that does not appear in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* It is unclear whether everything mentioned about Abraham in the *Recognitions* is supposed to come from the same source, which makes it more difficult to determine which text, if any, it is referencing. Thus, although the *Recognitions* is usually used as the source for the *terminus ad quem* of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the links between the two are rather weak. For this reason, it is my opinion that it should not be used in determining the date of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

The other possible candidates for an ancient *terminus ad quem* are even less promising. For example, Epiphanius writes that the Gnostic sect of the Sethians possessed a book in the name of

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[31] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:683; Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta, Ga.: Society of Biblical Lit, 2004), 2-3. There has been much scholarly discussion regarding the dating of the Clementine *Recognitions,* with opinions ranging from the second to the fourth century. Recent scholarship has shown the *Recognitions* is based on an earlier *Grundschrift,* and the literary development from one to the other probably took place throughout the third and fourth centuries [Jan N. Bremmer, *The Pseudo-Clementines* (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 6-9].

[32] Clementine *Recognitions* I.32, in Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xvii.

Abraham which "they also declare to be an apocalypse" and is "full of wickedness."[33] The

fourth-century work *Apostolic Constitutions* mentions apocryphal books written in the names of

the three patriarchs that are "pernicious and repugnant to the truth."[34] The *Synopsis of Pseudo-*

Athanasius (500 CE) and the *Stichometry of Nicephorus* (850 CE) both contain the same list of

texts that includes a book in Abraham's name. The *Stichometry of Nicephorus* states that this

book of Abraham consists of 300 lines. Ginzberg has attempted to identify parts of the

Apocalypse of Abraham that were later additions in order to come up with an original work of

300 lines, but this has not convinced later scholars.[35] This leaves us without a firm *terminus ad*

quem, which means that questions of date must be decided on the basis of other factors, such as

internal evidence. The *terminus a quo* comes from *Apoc. Ab.* 27:5, which describes the

destruction of the temple by "the hordes of the heathen": "They burned the Temple with fire and

they are stealing and destroying the beautiful things which are in it." Scholars agree that this

places the work after the events of 70 CE.

Jewish or Christian?

Let us now turn to the question of whether the *Apocalypse of Abraham* reflects a Jewish or a

Christian provenance. It should first be noted that the earlier one dates a document, the more

difficult it is to distinguish between Christian and Jewish authorship given the complex history of

the "parting of the ways." This places a rather large asterisk next to the following discussion;

despite this necessary level of caution, however, I feel that it is still worth trying to analyze the

contents of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with this question of mind, even if only as a heuristic

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[33] *Haer* xxxix, 5, in Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xvii.

[34] *Apostolic Constitutions* vi. 16, in Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xviii.

[35] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 8-9.

exercise. I will base this analysis on the work of James R. Davila, who meticulously lays out the myriad of possibilities for the provenance of Pseudepigrapha of unidentified origin. To name just a few, a Jewish document could have been redacted by Christians to varying degrees, a Christian document could have been composed that contains no signature Christians features, thus making it indistinguishable from a Jewish work, or a work could have been written by Torah-observant Jewish Christians, by judaizing gentile Christians, or by Samaritans.[36] Davila argues, along with Robert Kraft, that we should work backwards from the manuscripts we have; if, as in the case of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* its earliest known context is Christian, it should be considered Christian unless *positive* evidence exists for a Jewish origin.[37] But where such positive evidence is present, he believes

> we can reasonably postulate either Jewish authorship outright or at least significant Jewish influence on the writer, however the text may have been transformed during its transmission. In some cases we may be able to postulate Jewish authorship and accurate transmission with a good deal of confidence. In other words, positive criteria may isolate texts more likely to be Jewish in origin, but negative criteria (such as lack of Christian signature features) have much less, if any weight.[38]

There are a few factors that work against identifying the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as Jewish according to Davila's rubric. First of all, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not contain clear polemical elements, which would make the task of identifying its provenance easier by showing us with whom the author was contrasting his own beliefs and identify. One exception to this statement is polemics against polytheism and idolatry; although this is a major theme in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* it does not single it out as Jewish, since early Christians also rejected

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[36] James R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 61-62.

[37] Ibid., 10. Robert A. Kraft, "The Pseudepigrapha in Christianity" in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (ed. John C. Reeves; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1994), 63, 75.

[38] Davila, *Provenance*, 63.

polytheism.[39] Another possible obstacle is that, according to Davila, "Texts set in the pre-Mosaic period may deliberately avoid reference to Torah-related issues, even if by Jews."[40] In addition, apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic and is less likely to contain concrete references to Jewish practice or *halakhah*.

Let us now compare Davila's list of Jewish signature features that constitute positive internal evidence for a text's Jewish provenance with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The features in question are: 1. "Substantial Jewish content of any kind and strong internal evidence that the work was composed in the pre-Christian era," 2. "Compelling evidence that the work was translated from Hebrew," 3. "Sympathetic concern with the Jewish ritual cult (especially priesthood, temple, ritual purity, calendar, festivals, Sabbaths, and circumcision), 4. "Sympathetic concern with Jewish law/Torah and *halakhah*," and 5. "Concern with Jewish ethnic and national interests, particularly self-identification as a Jew, polemics against gentile persecution of Jews, and internal Jewish polemics."[41] Although an in-depth analysis of the content of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has not yet been laid out, in the following chapters I will argue that it does indeed contain substantial Jewish content, that it does show a concern for cult and the temple, that it does reflect the assumption that the righteous are Torah observant, and that it is exclusively concerned with Abraham's physical descendants. Given the solid probability that it was originally written in Hebrew, this means that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* meets every one of these criteria for Jewish signature features laid out by Davila. In contrast, "early Christianity…rejected the temple and ritual cult, rejected the Torah apart from the Ten

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[39] Ibid., 66.

[40] Ibid., 70.

[41] Ibid., 65.

Commandments, and allegorized the national identity of Israel and the priesthood to apply to itself."[42]

In addition, Davila argues that Christian eschatological works are much more likely to explicitly reference Jesus than Christian rewritings of stories from the Hebrew Bible: "therefore a lack of Christian signature features in eschatological works is more interesting than their absence from rewritten scripture."[43] This applies directly to the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which is both an eschatological work and contains no such Christian signature features.[44] Lastly, Davila stresses that these criteria should be applied on a "detailed and case-by-case level."[45] As we will see, the evidence for a Jewish origin for the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which will be laid out over this and the following chapters, is considerable. For this reason, despite the theoretical complexities involved in distinguing early Jewish from Christian works, I feel the evidence is strong enough to tip the scales towards a Jewish origin for the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

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[42] Ibid., 23.

[43] Ibid., 70.

[44] Although the presence of several Jewish signature features supports the identification of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as Jewish, even if they were lacking, it would still be possible to argue for its Jewish origin. In his discussion of Christian texts on the Old Testament that incorporate Jewish material, Davila notes that "Christian authors strove, at least sometimes, to maintain the narrative integrity of the stories they retold, making the Old Testament characters speak as the author thought they really would have spoken, or presenting elements of the old dispensation sympathetically because these elements were theologically valid in Old Testament times. So a writer like Ephrem could condemn Moses' wife for not circumcising her son even though he would have been hostile to Christian Judaizers of his own time who required the circumcision of gentile Christians. It is, therefore, very important for us, when we read Old Testament pseudepigrapha, to pay close attention to what the characters of the story say, versus what the narrator says, versus what appears to be the perspective of the actual author. The three need not hold the same views, and a close and sensitive reading is sometimes necessary to tell the views apart" (Davila, *Provenance*, 116). I argue in this and following chapters that the concerns and assumptions underlying the *Apocalypse of Abraham* reveal a Jewish orientation, which does not support the hypothesis that it is a Christian document portraying Old Testament characters in a superficially Jewish way.

[45] Ibid., 70.

Both Box and Philonenko have discussed the strong likelihood that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was written by someone associated with the Essenes.[46] Before we take a closer look at their claims, it should first be noted that the information we have about the Essenes from ancient sources, such as Josephus, Philo, and Pliny the Elder, is sometimes contradictory, making it difficult to know how accurate these writers were or how much their ideology or their varying sources affected their descriptions.[47] Furthermore, the identification of the Essenes with the group who lived at Qumran, although quite likely, is still a matter of debate amongst scholars.[48] This means that the use of the community documents at Qumran as sources of information for the Essenes must be viewed with a certain amount of caution, since the link between the two is not ironclad.

Philonenko seems to assume the identification of the Essenes with the Qumran community, as we will see. Box, however, is writing long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, so his suggestion of an Essene provenance for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* refers solely to the Essenes described by ancient sources. Since Philonenko uses material from the Dead Sea Scrolls, and not

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[46] Box, writing in 1919, is referring to the Essene sect mentioned by classical sources from antiquity; Philonenko seems to be operating under the generally accepted scholarly assumption that the Essenes and the Qumran community are connected: "Within Judaism, the *Essenes* in particular had become masters in the art of making horoscopes. According to *this Qumranic doctrine*, men belong from birth either to the 'lot' of light or the 'lot' of darkness" (emphasis mine); "Au sein du judaïsme, les Esséniens, tout particulièrement, étaient passés maîtres dans l'art de faire les horoscopes. Selon la doctrine qoumrânienne, les hommes appartiennent dès leur naissance au « lot » de la lumière ou au « lot » des ténèbres" (Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 33; James C. VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today* [2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 119-120, 124-25).

[47] Josephus, *J.W.* 1.78-80; 2.111-13; 2.119-61; 2.566-68; 3.9-12; 5.142-45; *Ant.* 13.171-72; 15.371-79; 18.18-22; *Life* 10-12; Philo, *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* 75-91; *Hypothetica [Apologia pro Iudaeis]* (in Eusebius, *Praep. Evang.* 8.11.1-18); *Vita Contemplativa*; Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.73. More recently, Jonathan Klawans has argued that Josephus's descriptions of ancient Judaism are more accurate than previously thought and are currently undervalued [idem, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[48] James C. VanderKam, *Dead Sea Scrolls,* 97-125.

classical sources, to support his Essene hypothesis, I assume that he is more interested in making

a connection between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the Qumran community, which he

happens to call Essene, following the lead of the scholars who support that identification. For the

sake of clarity, then, I will discuss Box's claims in terms of the Essenes and Philonenko's in

terms of the Qumran community. I do not wish to delve into the depths of the debate regarding

the identification of the Qumran community with the Essenes; my main goal is to assess the

particular arguments of Box and Philonenko, which can be done without taking a stand on this

complicated issue.

The Determinism of the Apocalypse of Abraham

Both scholars use one particular verse in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to establish its

deterministic character, which they then use as grounds for their hypotheses. Here is the verse on

which they base their positions:

> Go, Azazel, into the untrodden parts of the earth. Since your inheritance is those who are with you, with
> men born with the stars and clouds. And *their portion is you*, and they come into being through your being.
> (*Apoc. Ab.* 14:5b-6; emphasis mine)

In his note to this verse Box writes, "The wicked are Azazel's 'portion,' *i.e.* they have been

assigned to him from the beginning. The idea seems to be predestinarian."[49] First of all, Box

confuses the content of the verse: in 14:6, *Azazel* is the portion of the men, not vice versa,

although the verse does say that the wicked are Azazel's *inheritance*, which is quite similar. This

error aside, it is important to note that Box relies solely on the word "portion" in order to

establish the determinism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* The word "portion" in and of itself,

however, does not necessarily imply determinism, nor does Box develop his position by

introducing any more evidence. His entire argument that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is

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[49] Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham*, 55.

determinist is based on the assumption that the word "portion" indicates determinism, an assumption that is unsubstantiated and significantly weakens his argument.

Philonenko bases his argument for the determinism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* on the same verse as Box, but focuses instead on the following words: "Since your inheritance is those who are with you, with *men born with the stars and clouds*" (emphasis mine). He interprets the reference to "men born with the stars and clouds" as denoting absolute determinism based on astrology:

> "Men born with the stars and clouds." This means that absolute determinism, established by the position of the stars at birth, fixes the destiny of every man. This doctrine, expressed through horoscopes, enjoyed much popularity in antiquity. Within Judaism, the Essenes in particular had become masters in the art of making horoscopes. According to this Qumranic doctrine, men belong from birth either to the "lot" of light or the "lot" of darkness.[50]

What Philonenko is referring to are the fragmentary horoscopes found at Qumran: Horoscope (4Q186), Elect of God (4Q534), and Physiognomy/Horoscope (4Q561); only the first of these has a clear astrological element in that it connects physiognomic traits to a person's birth sign according to the zodiac.[51] Many scholars make a connection between the "Instruction on the Two Spirits" in the Rule of the Community from Cave 1 and Horoscope (4Q186), arguing that they establish a connection in Qumranic thought between a person's zodiacal sign, their physiognomy, and the composition of their spirit of differing parts of light and darkness, and this

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[50] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 32-33, translation mine: « Les hommes sont nés avec les étoiles et les nuées. » Entendons qu'un déterminisme absolu, établi par la position des asters à la naissance, fixe le destin de tout homme. Cette doctrine, mise en pratique dans l'horoscope, a connu dans l'antiquité un succès immense. Au sein du judaïsme, les Esséniens, tout particulièrement, étaient passés maîtres dans l'art de faire les horoscopes. Selon la doctrine qoumrânienne, les hommes appartiennent dès leur naissance au « lot » de la lumière ou au « lot » des ténèbres. The only source he mentions in support of this is A. Dupont-Sommer, Deux documents horoscopiques esséniens découverts à Qoumrân, près de lal mer Morte, *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres,* 1966, 239-253.

[51] Jonathan Ben-Dov, *Head of All Years: Astronomy and Calendars at Qumran in Their Ancient Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); Mladen Popović, (Leiden: Brill, 2007). The famous zodiac mosaics found in synagogues dating from the fourth to the sixth centuries, although striking for their incorporation of the zodiac into traditional Jewish motifs, are not clearly astrological. Scholarly debate continues as to the meaning and significance of this phenomenon [Rachel Hachlili, "The Zodiac in Ancient Jewish Synagogal Art: A Review," *JSQ* 9 (2002): 233].

appears to be the basis for Philonenko's statement above.[52] Other scholars, however, point to the

fact that 4Q186, unlike 1QS, does not discuss issues of justice, sin, light, or living according to

the truth, and suggest that the connection between these two documents should not be considered

automatic. In addition, although astronomical/astrological speculation was common in the

Second Temple period, much of it was for calendrical purposes only; in fact, the Enochic *Book of*

the Watchers, Jubilees, and Philo all attribute the origin of astrological knowledge to the fallen

angels, and Philo and Josephus both interpret Abraham's emigration from Ur as a rejection of

astrology.[53] If there is no connection between 4Q186 and 1QS, then the former is most likely a

common astrological text similar to other Hellenistic parallels that has no bearing on the

theological orientation of the Qumran community.[54]

Although the existence of the horoscopes at Qumran reflects a general interest in astrology

and a knowledge of the zodiac, the role of astrology in the deterministic outlook of the Qumran

community cannot be firmly established by these fragments, especially given the negative view

of astrology contained in *Jubilees* and *1 Enoch,* which were influential at Qumran. Thus, for

Philonenko to say that the members of the Qumran community "had become masters in the art of

making horoscopes" is to overstate the matter, and he does not acknowledge that the significance

of the horoscope fragments found at Qumran is still a matter of debate. In addition, he does not

provide any further evidence for astrological determinism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* beyond

the statement that "men born with the stars and the clouds" means that the destiny of each

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[52] Matthias Albani, "Horoscopes in the Qumran Scrolls," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls after Fifty Years: A Comprehensive Assessment* (ed. Peter W. Flint and James C. VanderKam; vol. 2.; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 1999), 279–330; Bergmeier, R. *Glaube als Gabe nach Johannes*. Religions- und theologiegeschichtliche Studien zum prädestinationschen Dualismus im vierten Evangelium. Stuttgart 1980, 78-81.

[53] Mladen Popović, "Astronomy and Astrology," in *The Eerdman's Dictionary of Early Judaism,* 401; Albani, "Horoscopes," 279-330.

[54] Albani, "Horoscopes," 279-330.

individual is determined by the sign of the zodiac current at their birth.[55] Although this is a plausible interpretation of this phrase, it is not the only possible one, especially since an astrological basis for determinism is not indicated anywhere else in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and there are explicit statements reflecting a belief in free will throughout the text (see below). Thus, Philonenko's assertion that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is deterministic and thus most likely connected to the Qumran community is based on a number of unproven hypotheses: 1. That the fragmentary horoscopes at Qumran represent an astrological basis for the determinism of the Qumran community, 2. That "men born with the stars and the clouds" denotes astrological determinism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, and 3. That there is a correlation between this astrological determinism and that at Qumran. Although these hypotheses are intriguing, they are not presented with enough evidence to be convincing.

They do, however, raise a question: if the *Apocalypse of Abraham* were shown to be a largely determinist document on more solid grounds than Box and Philonenko have argued, how much would that strengthen the argument for an Essene/Qumranic provenance? In my opinion, in order to posit an Essene authorship for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* on the basis of this issue, one would first have to prove that the Essenes held a deterministic viewpoint distinct to themselves, and secondly, that the determinism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* can be identified with that viewpoint. If a distinctive Essene view on determinism cannot be proven and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* cannot be shown to contain the same, the argument that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is Essene based on this criterion falls apart.

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[55] Ibid.

Let us take a brief look at the relevant verses in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* on this topic.

First of all, there are several verses that point to some kind of determinism; for example, *Apoc. Ab.* 22:5 reads,

> Those on the right side of the picture are the people set apart for me of the people that are with Azazel. These are the ones I have *destined* to be born of you and to be called my people. (emphasis mine)

Earlier in the same chapter, when Abraham asks about this picture that he sees of all creation divided into two camps, God answers,

> This is my will for existence in design, and it was pleasing to me. And then, afterward, I gave them a command by my word and they came into being. And whatever I had *determined* to be had already been previously depicted and stood before me in this [picture], as you have seen, before they were created. (*Apoc. Ab.* 22:2; emphasis mine)

Elsewhere, Abraham is told,

> The Eternal One whom you have loved has *chosen* you. (*Apoc. Ab.* 14:2; emphasis mine)

At the same time, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* also contains verses that emphasize individual choice. God asks Abraham,

> 'Why did your father Terah not listen to your voice and abandon the demonic idolatry until he perished, and all his house with him?' And I said 'Eternal Mighty One! Evidently because *he did not will* to listen to me, *nor did I follow* his deeds.' And he said to me, 'Hear, Abraham! As the will of your father is in him, as your will is in you, so also the will desired by me is inevitable in coming days…' (*Apoc. Ab.* 26:3-5; emphasis mine)

In addition, Azazel is told,

> Abraham's portion is in heaven, and yours is on earth, since *you have chosen it and desired it* to be the dwelling place of your impurity. (*Apoc. Ab.* 13:7-8; emphasis mine)

And in ch. 31 Abraham is told,

> For those who do justice, *who have chosen my will* and clearly kept my commandments, will see them [the wicked in hell]. And they will rejoice with joy at the destruction of the abandoned. (*Apoc. Ab.* 31:4; emphasis mine)

The possibility of choice is also implicated in this indictment of apostate Jews:

> They joined one to whom they had not been allotted, and they abandoned the prevailing Lord. (*Apoc. Ab.* 31:8)

This last verse implies that although one may be allotted to either God or Azazel, one can still change one's allotment or portion. The idea that Abraham's descendants are destined to be God's people (*Apoc. Ab.* 22:5) apparently does not invalidate the free will of each individual descendant to remain in the covenant community or to abandon it.[56]

Given this mixture of deterministic statements and those supporting the idea of free will, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to fit quite comfortably into the category called "compatibilism" by some scholars, a category that has also been applied to the Stoics, Ben Sira, Josephus, Philo, the Pharisees (according to Josephus), the New Testament, and even the Qumran community.[57] Although compatibilism is usually used to describe any combination of deterministic statements with those that affirm human choice, Jonathan Klawans brings a much needed level of precision to this discussion, pointing out that although the term can technically be applied to all these groups, it does not do justice to the nuances and differences between them on this issue.[58]

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[56] Harlow also points out the implications in *Apoc. Ab.* 18:8-11 for angelic free will. In this passage, Yahoel is responsible for keeping the living creatures in the throne room from threatening each other, which he does by turning their faces away from each other. Harlow writes, "It implies that even heavenly creatures have a free will that must be kept in check by their fellow creatures; otherwise, fallen angels like Azazel can invade earth and infect its human creatures with idolatry" ("Idolatry and Alterity," 318).

[57] Philip S. Alexander, "Predestination and Free Will in the Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment* (ed. John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole; London: T & T Clark, 2006), 27-49; John M. G. Barclay, "'By the Grace of God I am What I am': Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul," in *Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment* (ed. J. M. G. Barclay and S. J. Gathercole; London: Clark, 2006), 140-57; P. R. Davies, G. J. Brooke and P. R. Callaway, *The Complete World of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York, NY: Thames and Hudson, 2002), 85; Jean Duhaime, "Determinism," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 194-98; Peter Frick, *Divine Providence in Philo of Alexandria* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 5-21; Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44-91; Armin Lange, *Weisheit und Prädestination: Weisheitliche Urordnung un Prädestination in den Textfunden von Qumran* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 340-354; Gerhard Maier, *Mensch und freier Wille nach den jüdischen Religionsparteien zwischen Ben Sira und Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1971), 1-400;. Corrado Martone, "Qumran and Stoicism: An Analysis of Some Common Traits," in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Fifty Years after Their Discovery, 1947-1997* (ed. L. H. Schiffman, E. Tov, and J. C. VanderKam; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2000), 617-22; Eugene H. Merrill, *Qumran and Predestination* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 16-46; J. Sellars, *Stoicism* (Chesham: Acumen, 2006), 81-106.

[58] Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 44-91.

Indeed, if all the groups named above fall under the same category, one wonders how helpful such a broadly applicable term can be. As Klawans notes,

> If the theology of both Sirach and 1QS are to be compared with the compatibilism of the Pharisees and later rabbinic Judaism, then are we not left with an undifferentiated hodgepodge of ancient Jewish compatibilisms? If all ancient Jews were compatibilists of one sort or another, with whom was Ben Sira arguing? And what was Josephus talking about when he stated repeatedly that Jews argued about such matters?[59]

The first clarification Klawans brings to this discussion is the distinction between predestination and divine election: whereas the former is "the belief that all has been determined ahead of time, including especially who will be sinful and who will be righteous," the latter is the belief that God has chosen the people of Israel and their descendents to be in covenant with him.[60] Both predestination and divine election are labeled as determinist, but making the distinction between these two types of determinism allows us to compare and contrast different viewpoints more precisely. Klawans argues that while it is difficult to imagine the Pharisees, Saduccees, and Essenes (according to Josephus) taking issue with God's divine election of the Jewish people, it was the question of personal predestination that was at the center of the debate: "the ancient Jewish theological debate was focused on the narrower question of whether one's individual actions are freely chosen or foreordained, limited by a fixed divine plan."[61] In order to avoid applying the term "compatibilism" to groups that clearly differed from each other on this issue, Klawans suggests that it be applied only to "those ancient Jews who *consciously* and *explicitly* advocated a *compromise* between the seemingly contradictory positions at either side" (author's emphasis).[62]

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[59] Ibid., 60.

[60] Ibid., 60-61.

[61] Ibid., 61, 64.

[62] Ibid., 66-67.

Klawans describes two types of Jewish compatibilism, which he calls "Fusion" and "Partial Determinism." In Fusion, fate plays a determining role in everything, but there are some actions that are decided by human beings, including whether to do good or evil.[63] This position derives from Josephus's account of the Pharisees in *Antiquities* 18.13:

> Though they postulate that everything is brought about by fate, still they do not deprive the human will of the pursuit of what is in humanity's power, since it was God's good pleasure that there should be a fusion [κρᾶσις] and that the will of humanity with its virtue and vice should be admitted into the council-chamber of fate.[64]

According to this compatibilist position, "Human will has a role, but only with regard to what humans can control, and never fully independently of the fate that pervades everything. But human beings nonetheless have the power to choose good or evil, in some manner that is fused with fate."[65] According to this position, God *is* implicated in humans' choices for good or evil; this is in contrast to the position of the Saduccees according to Josephus, who inclined more strongly towards free will in order to avoid this implication.[66]

The second compatibilist position Klawans discusses, Partial Determinism, is taken from a different passage in Josephus (*Antiquities* 13.171-73), again about the Pharisees, but describing a rather different position. In Partial Determinism, fate has control over some events, but not all; instead, in some instances, human choice is completely free to determine whether something will come to pass or not.[67] Klawans finds multiple rabbinic parallels for both Pharisaic positions described by Josephus.[68] Instead of arguing that only one of them is the "real" Pharisaic position,

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[63] Ibid., 68.

[64] Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* in Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 68.

[65] Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 68.

[66] Ibid., 64, 69.

[67] Ibid., 69-70.

[68] Ibid., 68-75.

he writes, "Tempting as it may be to attribute Josephus's inconsistencies to his sources, his biases, or his misunderstandings, it could just as likely be the case that the tensions in Josephus's account reflect tensions in Pharisaic thought (and therefore possibly his own)."[69] He contrasts these two compatibilist positions with determinism (which best describes the "deterministic Dead Sea sectarians and their compatriots, Josephus's Essenes") and libertarianism (which best describes Ben Sira and Josephus's Saduccees).[70]

Although there are some minor elements of compatibilism in these two more extreme positions, Klawans argues that categorizing them all as compatibilist obscures the differences between them.[71] Part of the reason that all three groups contain at least some elements of compatibilism is that they all agree on certain general aspects of Judaism, such as God, prophecy, divine election, and repentance, which carry with them varying implications for free will or determinism.[72] But Klawans makes what I feel is a helpful distinction by pointing out that this is different from a conscious compromise position, such as the "Fusion" and "Partial Determinism" types of Jewish compatibilism, which explicitly acknowledge the validity of both freedom and determinism.[73] For this reason, he argues that it muddies the waters to refer to the Essenes or the Sadducees, who are the most deterministic and libertarian ancient Jews that we know of, as compatibilists.[74] These categories are therefore relative, not absolute. I agree with Klawans that allowing for a certain amount of imprecision (such as calling the Qumran

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[69] Ibid., 74.

[70] Ibid., 66.

[71] Ibid., 74.

[72] Ibid., 66.

[73] Ibid., 79-80.

[74] Ibid., 80.

community determinist when its theology might contain glimmers of limited free will) actually allows for greater precision in the end by keeping obviously different positions from being placed into the same category.[75]

Applying the insights from this discussion, we find that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* falls under Klawan's category of "Partial Determinism," meaning that free will truly is free from the influence of fate in some areas, more particularly, whether one acts righteously or not. We find that all the deterministic statements in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* discussed above are concerned with divine election or God's general design for creation and history and are not concerned with one's personal choices. For example, in *Apoc. Ab.* 22:5 God describes the people on the right side of the picture as "the ones I have destined to be born of you and to be called my people," and in *Apoc. Ab.* 14:2 Yahoel says to Abraham, "The Eternal One whom you have loved has chosen you." Both of these verses speak to the special relationship God has with Abraham and his descendants, not their individual choices being predetermined. In fact, in 14:2, Abraham is described as being chosen *after* he himself has demonstrated his love for God. And in *Apoc. Ab.* 22:2, God speaks of his predetermined plan for the world, but there is nothing in this verse to indicate that it supersedes individual choice.

While we see that these more deterministic verses are concerned with divine election, we see individual choice stressed in various verses throughout the text, as discussed above. Terah and Abraham are described as having their own will, just as God does, which is responsible for their decisions to embrace or reject monotheism (*Apoc. Ab.* 26:3-5). And *Apoc. Ab.* 13:7-8 and 31:4, 8 all speak of the choice of both angels and humans to determine what their portion or lot will be: Azazel is told he has chosen his portion, while apostate Jews have "joined one to whom they had

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[75] Ibid., 81.

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not been allotted" (31:8). Taken together, these verses show a belief in divine election, i.e., that God has a predetermined plan for the world, including his election of Abraham and the people of Israel, combined with the belief that individuals have the power to choose their lot, whether it be with God on the right, or with Azazel on the left. Thus, according to Klawan's criteria, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* can truly be labeled as compatibilist, since it explicitly puts forth positions from both sides of the deterministic spectrum. This mixture of God's control over history and choice of Israel and the individual's control over his own actions thus matches Klawan's "Partial Determinism" of the Pharisees quite closely in that its determinism is limited to divine election and it simultaneously affirms the free will of the individual as it pertains to individual righteousness or wickedness.

Josephus's Essenes, however, emphasize the role of fate more strongly. According to *Antiquities* 13.172, they believe that "Fate is mistress [κυρίαν] of all things, and that nothing befalls people unless it be in accordance with her decree" and according to *Antiquities* 18.18, their belief "is wont to leave everything in the hands of God."[76] Regarding the Qumran community, based on a survey of the *Community Rule* (1QS 4.18-20), the *Damascus Document* (e.g. 2.3-10), the *War Scroll* (esp. 1QM 1.1-10), and the *Thanksgiving Hymns* (e.g., 1QH[a] 7.25-30, 9.9-22), Klawans writes,

> Of course, we cannot accurately speak of a simple identity between the theology of Josephus's Essenes and that of the Dead Sea sectarians…Yet a remarkable similarity remains: Josephus describes the Essenes as believing in the predetermination of *all* events, apparently to the exclusion of human freedom. The Dead Sea sectarians, it appears, emphasized God's omniscience and his power to such a degree that, as they understood it, all proceeds according to a divine plan, which has been put in place long ago. The wicked play their mysteriously necessary role, compelled by the powers of darkness, as they were predestined to do by God from the beginning. If this is something other than a belief in fate, it sure is close."[77]

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[76] Ibid., 50.

[77] Ibid., 51-52.

As alluded to above, several scholars have noted elements of choice within the Qumran community that imply they were not completely deterministic.[78] For example, Jean Duhaime points out that members freely volunteered to become a part of the community, and those who did not live up to its strict standards were punished, and expelled if necessary, implying that individuals were held responsible to a certain degree for their own actions.[79] E. P Sanders notes the element of repentance (and refusal by the wicked to repent) in their theology, stating that this shows "how far the sectarians were from denying [humanity's] freedom of choice."[80] Eugene H. Merrill also notes references to voluntary repentance, especially in the *Thanksgiving Hymns,* and concludes that "the Qumran sectarians found it possible to hold for the need for individual, voluntary response to divine promptings within the framework of a rigid predestinarianism."[81]

While these observations are correct, Klawans's analysis allows us to make a distinction between the explicit compatibilism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the implicit elements of compatibilism of the Qumran community. As Klawans notes, the notion of repentance is part of the biblical heritage that Torah observant Jews in the Second Temple Period inherited; for this reason, it is not the best representative for the consciously formulated theology of the Qumran community. Rather, when one compares the partial determinism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which affirms individual free will alongside divine election, there is a clear contrast with what

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[78] This view, however, is not unanimous. For more on this debate, see Duhaime, "Determinism," 194-98.

[79] Ibid.

[80] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), 263.

[81] Merrill, *Qumran and Predestination*, 16, 45, 58; see also Eileen Schuller, "Petitionary Prayer and the Religion of Qumran," in *Religion in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. John J. Collins and Robert A. Kugler; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 39-43, 45.

we know of the Essenes and the members of the Qumran community, who explicitly endorse only determinism, whether it be predestination or divine election.

Making such a distinction between texts/groups based on their explicit statements allows us to identify real differences between them that would otherwise be obscured under the broad category of compatibilism. For our purposes here, it allows us to see that the partial determinism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is qualitatively different from the determinism of the Qumran community documents and Josephus's Essenes, which is mitigated only by implicit tension created by the inclusion of such core Jewish tenets such as repentance. In addition, the determinism of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is limited to divine election, while that of the Essenes/Qumran community includes predestination as well as divine election. Given this analysis, the identification of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as most likely stemming from the Essenes or the Qumran community based on the issue of determinism, as posited by Box and Philonenko, is not supported when one takes a closer look at their respective positions.

<center>*Dualism*</center>

Box and Philonenko also point to dualism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as evidence for its Essene affiliation. Box writes, "The Book is essentially Jewish, and there are features in it which suggest Essene origin; such are its strong predestinarian doctrine, its dualistic conceptions, and its ascetic tendencies."[82] It is true that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does contain dualistic elements: there is a clear bifurcation between the lot of Abraham and Azazel, between heaven and earth, between this world and the world to come, and between the righteous and the wicked, especially in the vision in ch. 29, in which humanity is divided into two groups: the righteous on

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[82] Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xxi, xxiii; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 33.

the right and the wicked on the left.[83] The main problem with using dualism to establish an

Essene affiliation for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is that it was widespread amongst many

ancient Jewish groups.[84] In addition to the Qumran community documents, elements of dualism

are present in *4 Ezra, Jubilees,* the *Life of Adam and Eve,* and the New Testament, among others.

Furthermore, dualism is a marked characteristic of Enochic literature, which influenced much of

later Second Temple Judaism.[85] The same could be said of asceticism and angelology, the latter

of which Box cites as being "in line with Essene speculation."[86] It is line with much other

contemporary Jewish speculation as well, since a belief in angels and demons was widespread in

the Second Temple Period.[87] As for asceticism, the protagonists in Tobit, Judith, *Joseph and

Asenath*, *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and in the Greek additions to Daniel and Esther all fast as evidence of

their piety, and fasting is also mentioned as a common practice of the Pharisees in the New

Testament.[88] Thus, ascetic practices were not unique to the Qumran community.

   Philonenko, however, sees a point of connection between a particular instance of dualism in

the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the "Instruction on the Two Spirits" found at Qumran:

> In the *Apocalypse,* one never observes Yahoel and Azazel come into direct conflict: Abraham is the closed
> field of their battle. This dualism is consistent with that of the "Instruction on the Two Spirits" which
> shows the Prince of Light and the Angel of Darkness fighting, from age to age, in the heart of each
> person.[89]

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[83] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 33.

[84] Émile Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves,* 175.

[85] Bergmeier, *Glaube als Gabe,* 48-116; Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves,* 175; Klaus Berger, "Henoch" in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (ed. Ernst Dassmann; vol. 14; Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1988), cols. 473-545.

[86] Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xxi, xxiii.

[87] E. P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," OTP 1:876.

[88] Lawrence M. Wills, "Asceticism," in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism,* 391-392.

[89] Translation mine. On observer que jamais, dans *l'Apocalypse,* Jaoel et Azazel n'entrent en conflit ouvert : Abraham est le champ clos de leur affrontement. Ce dualism est tout conforme à celui de l'« Instruction sur les

Although it is true that Abraham is at the heart of the clash between Yahoel and Azazel, which does reflect a similarity with the "Instruction on the Two Spirits," there is no compelling reason to assume that any causality underlies the correlation. It must be remembered that many Jews during this period were reading and being influenced by the same texts and cultural ideas, which significantly increases the difficulty of establishing any direct connection between texts on the basis of similarities or parallels.

Mysticism

Philonenko also connects the mysticism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with the Qumran community, stating that the Angelic Liturgy found at Qumran establishes that the Divine Throne was a favored theme of theirs.[90] According to Carol Newsom, the twelfth Sabbath Song, the part of the Angelic Liturgy that mentions the Divine Throne, functions primarily as a vehicle for the community to join the angels in praising God.[91] What sets it apart from contemporaneous apocalyptic literature is that there is no element of revelation. While the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is similar to other narratives in which a man is taken up to heaven and receives a revelation through the mediation of an angel, the Sabbath Song contains neither of these elements; instead, the community joins with the angels in praising God while staying firmly on earth.[92] Although the two share the element of the Divine Throne, in genre, function, and content, they are quite different. It is thus difficult to posit a direct relationship between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the Essenes based on this correlation.

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deux Espirts » qui montre le Prince des lumières et l'Ange des ténèbres en lutte, d'âge en âge, dans le cœur d'un chacun (Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 32).

[90] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 29.

[91] Carol A. Newsom, "Merkaba Exegesis in the Qumran Sabbath Shirot," *JJS* 38, 1 (1987): 30.

[92] Newsom, "Qumran Sabbath Shirot," 30; Duhaime, "Determinism," 194-98.

Aside from the basic problem of being able to identify any of these elements as distinctively Essene or Qumranic against the backdrop of the vibrant diversity in Second Temple Judaism and the widespread diffusion of common ideas, the lists of Essene and Qumranic characteristics used by Box and Philonenko are problematic. First of all, Box ostensibly relies solely on classical sources, such as Pliny, Philo, and Josephus, since he was writing half a century before the discovery of the DSS (nowhere, however, does he specify his sources). Although Josephus's descriptions of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes based on their views of fate and determinism do not directly contradict the evidence from Qumran, scholars have advised caution, since it is quite possible that his division of Jewish groups into categories borrowed from Greek philosophy does not do them full justice.[93] It is worth noting, however, that Klawans provides a compelling argument for the general accuracy of Josephus's descriptions of these three groups.[94] Clearly, this is still a debated topic.

A particularly problematic element of Philonenko's understanding of what constitutes Essenism is that he relies on K. Kohler's conclusions about the Essene provenance of the Testament of Abraham and the Testament of Job; Kohler's list of Essene characteristics, which was compiled in 1895 was, according to E. P. Sanders, "eccentric in his own time, and should now be considered completely discredited."[95] According to Kohler, some of the salient Essene traits were hospitality, cosmopolitanism, an emphasis on angels, and universalism, the last of which is now considered to be the opposite of what the sectarian movement believed.[96] The fact

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[93] VanderKam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, 102-4.

[94] Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 1-222.

[95] E. P. Sanders, "Testament of Abraham," 876.

[96] Ibid.

that Philonenko invokes Kohler as an authority weakens the basis for his argument that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is also Essene and thus calls for a certain amount of caution in accepting his conclusions.

Conclusions

To sum up, the arguments put forth by Box and Philonenko for the Essene/Qumranic provenance of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are not convincing. Although they are correct in pointing out similarities between the Qumran community documents and the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* these similarities also extend to other contemporaneous texts and are too widespread in the Second Temple Period to be used as distinctive markers for any particular group. And although determinism is used by both Box and Philonenko to support an Essene or Qumranic origin for the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* when one takes a closer look, it becomes clear that their positions are not the same: while the Qumran community documents espouse both predestination and divine election and contain only implicit elements of free will, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* espouses only divine election and contains explicit affirmations of free will. Elements of Box's and Philonenko's arguments are also outdated, which gives one pause when assessing their conclusions. Although it is of course possible that someone within the Essene milieu penned the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* there is not enough textual evidence to substantiate such a claim; rather, the similarities point only to a shared literary and hermeneutic culture.

Text

The only manuscripts we have of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are Russian, the oldest of which dates to the fourteenth century. Linguistic analysis confirms that the extant Russian manuscripts stem from translations made in Bulgaria, some as early as the mid-tenth century.[97] For example,

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[97] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 19; Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* x-xi; Dimitur N. Tsukhlev, *Istoriia na bulgarskata tsurkva* [A history of the Bulgarian church] (Sofia: Pechatnitsa "Sv. Sofia," 1910), 1132; H.

S (Sylvester Codex), the oldest manuscript of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* contains corruptions

throughout that obviously stem from the Russian scribe's unfamiliarity with the archaic

Bulgarian vocabulary and orthography present in his *Vorlage.*[98] Thankfully, most of these

corruptions are able to be illuminated by other manuscripts.[99]

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* was preserved as an independent work in two manuscripts: S and

D.[100] All other copies are integrated into manuscripts of the *Palaea interpretata* (the most

important of which are A, B, C, and K).[101] According to Lunt, agreement of S, D, and B provide

the most reliable readings.[102] He also writes that the editors of the *Palaeas* did not modify the

base text significantly and their additions can be easily identified, making it possible to establish

with reasonable certainty the text that was available in Rus around 1300. [103] One example of this

is ch. 7, which is present only in the *Palaea* manuscripts and can thus be identified as a medieval

interpolation.[104] Apart from this interpolation, the *Palaea* texts are quite close to S and D,

although the title of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is sometimes dropped and the first person is

changed to the third in places.[105] The *Palaeas* refer to the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a "book,"

G. Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," *OTP* 1:687; A. Miltenova, "Paleia," in *Starobulgarska literatura: entsiklopedichen rechnik* (ed. Donka Petkanova et al.; Veliko Turnovo: Abagar, 2003), 345.

[98] Lunt, "On the Language," 56-57; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 16.

[99] Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:687; Lunt, "On the Language," 57-58; Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 15. Tikhonravov corrected the numerous clerical mistakes in S (Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* x-xi). Turdeanu writes that Sylvester obtained his manuscripts separately from Novgorod after which he compiled them together into a codex, including the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves*, 181). D comes from the same *Vorlage* as S, but the scribe gave up at 26:5 (Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:687).

[102] Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 687; Lunt, "On the Language," 55-56.

[103] Lunt, "On the Language," 55.

[104] Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:686-87.

[105] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 9-10; Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xii-xiii; Ivan Y. Porfir'ev, *Sbornik otdeleniia russkago iazyka i slovesnosti: imperatorskoi akademii nauk* [Digest of the department of Russian

further evidence that it was recognized as an independent work.[106] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is one of three works that appear in every extant manuscript of the *Palaea,* the other two being *Testament of the 12 Patriarchs* and *Ladder of Jacob.*[107] In some of the later *Palaeas*, only chs. 1-8 were preserved.[108]

Brief History of Scholarship

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* was rediscovered in modern times by both I. I. Sreznevskij and N. S. Tikhonravov, who independently discovered and published the fourteenth-century manuscript from the Aleksander-Nevskii monastery in St. Petersburg in the years between 1860 and 1863.[109] The impetus for this search through monastery libraries came from the fact that in the nineteenth century, ancient Russian literature was being studied by both Germans and Russians as a source for folklore.[110] The Mythological School, to which the Grimm brothers belonged, had great influence in Russia, and Russian scholars collected vast amounts of folkloric materials for purposes of comparison and analysis.[111] Writing in the 1890's, Tikhonravov changed the conversation by arguing that ancient Russian literature must be studied within its

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language and literature: imperial academy of sciences] (t. 17; Saint Petersburg: Tipografiia imperatorskoi akademii nauk, 1877; repr., Nendeln, Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1966), 56.

[106] Porfir'ev, *Sbornik,* 56.

[107] Ivan Y. Porfir'ev, *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti: Drevnii period, ustnaia narodnaia i knizhnaia slovesnost' do Petra V* [The history of Russian literature: the ancient period, oral popular and literary folklore up to Peter V] (vol. 1 of *Istoriia russkoi slovesnosti*; Kazan: Tip. Imper. Universiteta, 1870; repr., Kazan: Tip. Imper. Universiteta, 1913), 219.

[108] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682.

[109] Tsukhlev, *Istoriia*, 1132; Turdeanu, *Apocryphes slaves*, 173; H. G. D. Sparks, "The Apocalypse of Abraham," in *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (ed. H. F. D. Sparks and A. Pennington; Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1984), 361-391.

[110] D. S. Likhachev and O. V. Tvorogov, *Issledovaniia po drevnerusskoi literature* [Studies in Ancient Russian Literature] (Leningrad: Izd-vo "Nauka," Leningradskoe otd-nie, 1986), 19.

[111] V. E. Gusev, "Mythological School," in *The Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1979). Accessed online: http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Mythological+School.

particular historical context.[112] I. Y. Porfir'ev and V. M. Istrin did exactly that, publishing works

towards the end of the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century. After Istrin's death in

1937, however, almost no Russian scholarship was produced on the translated literature of

ancient Russia due to the change in the intellectual climate under Soviet rule.[113] Ancient Russian

literature, which was Christian, was not valued in a Marxist academic environment, although

scholarly summaries were still produced, as that written by Likhachev.[114] For this reason, a

comprehensive catalog of all the translated texts that were known to the ancient Russians has still

not been compiled.[115] In the years following the fall of the Soviet Union, scholarly attention has

returned to ancient Russian literature, as is evidenced by the works of L. V. Levshun and

others.[116]

The western world relied for many decades on the translations of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

by Box (English) And G. N. Bonwetsch (German). Although these were standard for some time,

it is now recognized that they were based on a rather arbitrary selection of variants from the

published texts of S, A, and K.[117] Neither Bonwetsch nor Box was completely familiar with Old

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[112] Likhachev and Tvorogov, *Issledovaniia,* 21.

[113] Alexander Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat* (2 vols.; Lund: Dept. of Slavonic Studies, Lund University, 2002), 1:13.

[114] D. S. Likhachev, *Istoriia russkoi literatury X-XVII vekov: uchebnoe posobie* [The History of Russian Literature from the 10th-17th Centuries: A Textbook] (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1980).

[115] Pereswetoff-Morath, *A Grin Without a Cat,* 1:13.

[116] L. V. Levshun, *Ocherk istorii vostochnoslavianskoi srednevekovoi knizhnosti: evoliutsiia tvorcheskikh metodov* (Minsk: Evropeiskii gumanitarnyi universitet, 2000); V. V. Milkov, *Drevnerusskie apokrify* (Sankt-Peterburg: Izd-vo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo in-ta, 1999); M. S. Kiseleva, *Uchenie knizhnoe: tekst I kontekst drevnerusskoi pis'mennosti* (Moskva: Indrik, 2000); Katia Tchérémissinoff, *Recherches sur le lexique des chroniques slaves traduites du grec au Moyen-Age* (Paris: Association Pierre Belon, 2001); V. E. Vitkovskogo, ed., *Apokrificheskie skazanie: patriarkhi, proroki i apostoly* [Apocryphal Tales: Patriarchs, Prophets and Apostles] (Sankt-Peterburg: Amfora, 2007).

[117] Lunt, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:687.

Church Slavonic and both made a number of emendations based on modern Russian.[118] As Kulik writes, "The history of the scholarship of *Apoc. Ab.* involves more than a hundred years of largely fragmentary research abounding in translations based on incomplete evidence and short surveys based on these translations."[119] For these reasons, it is best for English speakers to rely on the newer translations by Rubinkiewicz, which is included in Charlesworth's *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* and by Kulik in *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: toward the original of the Apocalypse of Abraham.* Critical editions have also been published in French by Rubinkiewicz and Philonenko.[120]

Necessarily, much of the work done in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century has been on the text and language of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* The critical editions of the text that have been published and the detailed retroversion work done by Kulik, which has further illuminated difficult words or phrases in the text, have provided a great service to future scholars, especially those who wish to focus on the content of the text as opposed to its textual and linguistic features.

Textual Unity

There is some debate regarding the relation of the first eight chapters of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to the rest of the work. Philonenko believes that these chapters must have had an independent existence in antiquity, since they appear alone in some Russian manuscripts.[121] As previously discussed, the compilers of the Palaeas freely excerpted works, even if they mainly

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[118] Ibid.

[119] Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha,* 3.

[120] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," *Semitica* 31, (1981): 1-119; Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d' Abraham en vieux slave: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction Et Commentaire* (Lublin, 1987).

[121] Philonenko, "L'Apocalypse d'Abraham," 22-23.

left their contents alone. Given that the manuscripts containing only these eight chapters are more recent (see above), it is possible that the later Russian scribes who worked on the manuscripts singled it out for their own purposes and the independent existence of chs. 1-8 does not originate in antiquity. The strongest arguments for the unity of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* however, are not based on the manuscript evidence, whose testimony is ambiguous at best.

Although there is a natural division in content between the first eight chapters and the rest of the document, the fact that both sections reference Gen 15 argues for their original unity. First of all, chs. 1-8 represent a variation on a common Jewish midrashic theme based on Gen 15:7: "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans."[122] Ur means "fire" in Hebrew, and some ancient interpreters read "Ur of the Chaldeans" as "fire of the Chaldeans," which led to the development of narratives about God bringing Abraham "out of the fire of the Chaldeans."[123] Ancient interpreters combined this reading with the information that Abraham's father worshipped idols, taken from Josh 24:2: "Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods" (RSV). These two verses became the basis for narratives in which either Terah's house or his temple filled with idols burned down, with Abraham being saved from the fire. There are several versions of this story from antiquity, showing that it circulated widely.[124]

Secondly, chs. 9-31 present a cohesive apocalyptic vision experience that is set within the narrative structure of Gen 15. In *Apoc. Ab.* 9:3-4, God tells Abraham, "Fear not, for I am the primordial and mighty God, who initially created the two luminaries of the world. I protect you

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[122] Although chs. 1-8 are here discussed as a unit, as discussed above, this excludes ch. 7, which is a medieval interpolation.

[123] James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1997), 143-4.

[124] See note 14 above.

and am your helper." This echoes Gen 15:1, which reads, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great" (RSV). The OCS for "I protect you" reads literally "I am a shield about you," which Kulik suggests reflects the Hebrew *anokhi magen alaikh* (אנכי מגן עליך), which in turn echoes *anokhi magen lakh* (אנכי מגן לך) in Gen 15:1.[125] Directly after this encouragement, God commands Abraham,

> Go, take for me a heifer in her third year, and a she-goat in her third year, and a ram in his third year, and a turtledove, and a pigeon, and set out for me a pure sacrifice.
> > And in this sacrifice I shall set before you the ages
> > and make you know secrets,
> > and you will see great things which you have not seen,
> > since you loved to search for me,
> > and I called you 'my friend.' (*Apoc. Ab.* 9:5-6)

In ch. 12, the angel further commands,

> Slaughter and cut all this, putting together the two halves, one against the other. But do not cut the birds. (*Apoc. Ab.* 12:8)

These verses reflect the exact list of animals that Abraham sacrifices in Gen 15, including the detail that the birds not be cut in half (Gen 15:10). In fact, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* provides a rationale for this command, since the birds are used to carry the angel Yahoel and Abraham to heaven in 15:2: "And the angel took me with his right hand and set me on the right wing of the pigeon and he himself sat on the left wing of the turtledove, since they both were neither slaughtered nor divided." The birds that Abraham drives away from the carcasses in Gen 15:11 are turned into a narrative in which Azazel is the "impure bird" that "flew down upon the carcasses" (*Apoc. Ab.* 13:3). Azazel attempts to dissuade Abraham from staying with his sacrifice, but Yahoel instructs Abraham how to defeat Azazel, which is by repeating a sort of malediction (*Apoc. Ab.* 13:4-14:14).

According to Gen 15:17, after the sun goes down a "smoking furnace" and a "burning torch" pass between the pieces of the split animals. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* echoes this, but with

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125 Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha*, 17.

the addition of the involvement of angels: "And it came to pass that when the sun was setting, and behold, a smoke like that of a furnace, and the angels who had the divided parts of the sacrifice ascended from the top of the furnace of smoke" (*Apoc. Ab.* 15:1). The burning torch is not mentioned, but in the next verse, Abraham and Yahoel ascend to heaven on the birds, after which they are carried up "to the edge of the fiery flame" (*Apoc. Ab.* 15:3).

Furthermore, *Apoc. Ab.* 20:1-5 is a retelling of Gen 15:5, which reads, "And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.'" *Apoc. Ab.* 20:1-5 reads,

> And the Eternal Mighty One said to me, "Abraham, Abraham!"
> And I said, "Here am I!"
> <And he said,> "look from on high at the stars which are beneath you and count them for me and tell <me> their number!"
> And I said, "Would I be able? For I am [but] a man."
> And he said to me, "As the number of the stars and their host, so shall I make your seed into a company of nations, set apart for me in my lot..."

In this retelling, Abraham has already ascended to heaven and is looking *down* upon the stars. This parallels rabbinic midrashim that argue that the Hebrew word for "look" here (*hbṭ*) is only used when one is looking *down* on something, not up. *Gen. Rab.* 44:12 reads, "R. Judah b. R. Simon in the name of R. Yohanan: 'He brought him above the vault of heaven. That is in line with the statement, "Look toward heaven and number the stars," and the meaning of the word 'look' is only 'from above to below' (אין הבטה אלא מלמעלה למטה) [Hence he looked downward from above the vault of heaven]."[126] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is not the only ancient work apart from midrash to speculate on what heavenly secrets God revealed to Abraham during this

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[126] Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: a New American Translation* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1985), 2:133. The Hebrew is from the Vilna edition of *Bereshit Rabba* and was accessed online via the Bar Ilan Responsa Project (www.responsa.co.il).

theophany. *4 Ezra,* Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities,* and *2 Baruch* mention God's revelations to Abraham, all with explicit references to Gen 15.[127]

The *Apocalypse of Abraham* ends with verses that directly parallel Gen 15:13-14, in which God tells Abraham that his descendants

> will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

The retelling in *Apoc. Ab.* 31:9-12 reads,

> Therefore, hear, Abraham, and see! Behold, your seventh generation will go with you. And they will go out into an alien land. And they will be enslaved and distressed for about one hour of the impious age. And of the people whom they will serve – I am the judge.

This retelling contains the same basic information, but adds the elements of the periodization of history that is reflected elsewhere in the work (*Apoc. Ab.*:1-29:3, 14-15).

Thus, from the beginning of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which is a midrash on Gen 15:7 ("I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans"), to the end, which is a retelling of God's prediction of the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt, the work reflects sustained reflection on and exegesis of Gen 15.[128] It would seem that since God tells Abraham what will befall his descendants in Gen 15, the author(s) of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* saw it as the ideal juncture at which God could have also informed Abraham of his plan for the unfolding of history, including the destruction of the temple and the final judgment. But whereas in Gen 15, Abraham is visited by God, and is told what will befall his descendants in the future, in the

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[127] In *4 Ezra* 3:14, Ezra says to God, "you loved [Abraham] and to him you revealed the end of the times, secretly by night"; According to *Bib. Ant.* 23:6, God "showed [Abraham] the torches of fire by which the just who have believed in me will be enlightened"; and in *2 Baruch* 4:3-4, God tells Baruch that he showed the heavenly temple "to my servant Abraham in the night between the pieces of the victims" (Quotes taken from *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 2009).

[128] According to James H. Charlesworth, many scholars tend to overemphasize the "visionary aspect" of pseudepigraphal writings, ignoring their exegetical aspects. The fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* so clearly engages with the biblical text of Gen 15 supports his statement that the Pseudepigrapha are "part of the rich exegetical tradition of Early Judaism" ("In the Crucible," 26).

Apocalypse of Abraham, Abraham himself visits God in heaven, where he receives this information.

Some have argued that since the material in the first eight chapters of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was widely known in antiquity, it most likely had an independent existence before it was joined to *Apoc. Ab.* 9-31. Although stories about Abraham and Terah were common at the time, this does not necessarily imply that these chapters of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* were *written down* by a different hand from that responsible for chs. 9-31. On the contrary, in addition to the fact that the entire work reflects a sustained exegesis of Gen 15, there are several connections between chs. 1-8 and the latter section of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that have been noticed by many scholars.[129] Whether or not chs. 1-8 were composed by the same author as chs. 9-31, it is my opinion that this larger, apocalyptic section of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was written specifically to be joined with chs. 1-8, for the reasons outlined below.

First of all, in ch. 8, God says to Abraham, "In the wisdom of your heart *you are searching* for the God of gods and the Creator. I am he!" (emphasis mine). Ch. 9 refers to Abraham's search for God in v. 6, in which God says to Abraham, "In this sacrifice I shall set before you the ages and make you know secrets…since *you loved to search for me*" (emphasis mine). In addition, *Apoc. Ab.* 10:12 references the burning of Terah's house in a speech by the angel Yahoel: "I am ordered to burn your father's house with him, for he honored the dead things."

The element of fire is also a key point of connection between the two sections. In the song that Abraham sings in ch. 17, God is called "Fiery" twice (the only other appellations that are

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[129] Box, *Apocalypse of Abraham,* xxii. H. F. D. Sparks believes that the Clementine *Recognitions* references both sections of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* He sees the quote that says that an angel instructed Abraham "more fully concerning those things which he was beginning to perceive" as referring to Abraham's coming to monotheism in the first section, while the mention that Abraham was shown "what was destined for his race and posterity" refers to the apocalyptic section. Sparks writes, "…what is significant is that in the *Recognitions* the 'legendary' and the 'apocalyptic' elements in the Abraham tradition are closely associated" (Sparks, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 361-391).

repeated are "Eternal," "Mighty," and "Holy"). This calls to mind Bar-Eshath, the "Fiery One" in ch. 5, who is unable to keep himself from burning up in the fire. In contrast to this pathetically weak "fire god," fire plays a prominent part in the descriptions of heaven and God's throne. In 15:3-6 Abraham says, "And he carried me up to the edge of the fiery flame…And I saw on the sky, on the height we had ascended, a strong light that cannot be described. And behold, in this light a fire was kindled…" And in 17:1, "Behold, a fire was coming towards us round about, and a sound was in the fire like a sound of many waters." After Abraham's song in ch. 17, 18:1-3 begins,

> While I was still reciting the song, the edge of the fire which was on the expanse rose up on high. And I heard a voice like the roaring of the sea, and it did not cease because of the fire. And as the fire rose up, soaring higher, I saw under the fire a throne made of fire and the many-eyed Wheels, and they are reciting the song. And under the throne I saw four singing fiery Living Creatures.

18:13 continues, "And above the Wheels there was the throne which I had seen. And it was covered with fire and the fire encircled it round about, and an indescribable light surrounded the fiery people." God then speaks to Abraham out of the fire: "And a voice came to me out of the midst of the fire…And I saw on the seventh firmament upon which I stood a fire spread out and light…And I saw there a multitude of incorporeal spiritual angels, carrying out the orders of the fiery angels who were on the eighth firmament, as I was standing on its suspensions" (*Apoc. Ab.* 19:1, 4, 6). Although the element of fire in theophanies reflects biblical precendent (e.g. Exod 3, 13, 19, Isa 6, Ezek 1), it is clearly an important element for the writer of this throne room vision, since fire surrounds the throne, the throne itself is made of fire, the Living Creatures are made of fire, there are angels made of fire, God speaks to Abraham out of the fire, and in the song of Abraham, God is twice called "Fiery." This emphasis on fire in Abraham's throne room vision parallels the prolonged narrative of Bar-Eshath, the ineffective fire god, who is powerless in the face of fire.

It is especially worth noting that *Apoc. Ab.* 27:5 mentions that the temple was burned with fire. The emphasis on fire throughout the text could be in response to the burning of the temple, with the powerful fire of heaven contrasted with the powerlessness of Bar-Eshath as a psychological way of combating through narrative the fire that burned the temple. This is furthered in the last chapter, in which it is said that God will burn with fire "those who mocked" his people (31:2). Vv. 3 and 5 continue, "I have destined them to be food for the fire of hell…And those who followed after the idols and after their murders will rot in the womb of the Evil One – the belly of Azazel, and they will be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue." The contrast between Bar-Eshath's powerlessness over fire and the fiery nature of God and the final efficacy of his fire of judgment functions as an effective catharsis in the face of the devastating effects of the fire that burned the temple. It also shows a clear thematic connection between the narrative and apocalyptic sections of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

Another key theme that unites both sections is idolatry. In addition to the worthlessness of idols that is highlighted in chs. 1-8, idolatry is given as the main reason for the destruction of the temple: "And he said to me, 'Listen, Abraham, all that you have seen will happen because of your seed who will provoke me, because of the idol and the murder which you saw in the picture in the temple of jealousy'" (27:7). In the description of the idolatry in the temple, Terah's idols are referenced: "I saw there the likeness of the idol of jealousy, as a likeness of a craftman's work *such as my father mad*e, and its statue was of shining copper (*Apoc. Ab.* 25:1-2; emphasis mine). Terah is mentioned by name as well in ch. 26 in connection with idolatry: "Why did your father Terah not listen to your voice and abandon the demonic idolatry until he perished, and all his house with him?"

In addition to the identification of idolatry as the catalyst for the destruction of the temple, the story of Abraham's rejection of idols in chs. 1-8 serves to underscore the contrast between faithful and apostate Jews in the rest of the book. Ch. 29 describes this division between Abraham's descendants: "And those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him [the man associated with Azazel], and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account." In the description of the final judgment in ch. 31, the punishment of the apostates is described:

> And those who followed after the idols and after their murders will rot in the womb of the Evil One – the belly of Azazel, and they will be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue. Since I waited until they came to me, and they did not want it. And they glorified an alien. And *they joined one to whom they had not been allotted, and they abandoned the prevailing Lord.* (*Apoc. Ab.* 31:5-8; emphasis mine)

The story of Abraham and Terah sets up a clear dichotomy between the monotheist and the idol worshiper, creating categories against which Abraham's later descendants can be compared and judged.

Lastly, it is worth noting again the main difference between the version of the story of Abraham and his father in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the other extant versions. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is the only narrative that gives the idols names. When chs. 1-8 are read alone, the names of the idols enhance the mockery of idols and their status as non-gods. But when in read in light of chs. 9-31, the names create associations with the destroyers of the temple, i.e., the Romans. Bar-Eshath, the fire god, could stand for the fire the Romans used to burn down the temple, and Mar-Umath, the "lord of the nations," with a head from one statue placed on the body of another, could be referring to the Roman emperor, as discussed above. When read alone, the first eight chapters constitute a variation on the traditional biblical prophetic critique of idolatry; but when read in light of chs. 9-31, they constitute a powerful critique that equates the Roman emperor with a worthless, powerless idol that is worthy of

mockery. This is possibly echoed in ch. 29, where it is the faithful Jews who mock and "shame" the emperor instead of worshiping him, according to one reading (see below). By creatively applying the traditional message of the futility of idols, the author asserts God's ultimate power over the Roman emperor and the Roman empire in a way that would have been psychologically satisfying for the Jews reeling from the destruction of the temple at the hand of the Romans.

Christian Interpolations

Scholars are agreed that ch. 7 is a medieval interpolation.[130] As mentioned above, it only appears in the *Palaea* manuscripts and does not appear when the *Apocalypse of Abraham* stands alone. It interrupts a natural flow between chs. 6 and 8, and contains material regarding the elements of fire, water, earth, and the luminaries, which is used to show why each of the elements in turn cannot be a god; rather, there is one God who created them all. Medieval scribes most likely felt that it complemented the monotheistic thrust of the first eight chapters of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which is why they inserted it in that section of the book. Rubinkiewicz writes that it appears to be taken from the legends about Abraham found elsewhere in the *Palaea*.[131]

Seven or Eight Heavens?

There is some confusion regarding the number of levels of heaven in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* Whereas 19:4 and 7 refer to Abraham standing on the seventh heaven, 19:6 refers to the eighth heaven:

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[130] Porfir'ev, *Sbornik,* 13.

[131] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:682. Although some scholars have identified this discourse on monotheism and the elements as being common amongst Greek Christians, Harlow connects it with similar material found in *Gen. Rab.* 38:13 ("Idolatry and Alterity," 309). Whether its origin is Jewish or Christian does not change the manuscript evidence, which indicates that it was a later interpolation.

[4] And while he was still speaking, and behold, the levels opened, <and> there are the heavens under me. And I saw on the *seventh* firmament upon which I stood a fire spread out and light, and dew, and a multitude of angels, and a power of the invisible glory from the Living Creatures which I had seen above. <But> I saw no one else there.
[5] And I looked from the altitude of my standing to the *sixth* expanse.
[6] And I saw there a multitude of incorporeal spiritual angels, carrying out the orders of the fiery angels who were on the *eighth* firmament, as I was standing on its suspensions.
[7] And behold, neither on this expanse was there any other power of other form, but only the spiritual angels, and they are the power which I had seen on the *seventh* firmament. (*Apoc. Ab.* 19:4-7; emphasis mine)

Although most scholars think that the mention of the eighth heaven is an emendation, J. C. Poirier believes that the reference to the eighth heaven is original and that it is necessary for understanding the narrative.[132] He argues that scholars in the past have viewed the eighth heaven as wrong only because they expect to see seven heavens; however, an eight-heaven scheme appears in Gnostic, Hermetic, early Jewish mystical writings, and in the Talmud.[133] He believes that it is the Jewish mystical tradition that is the source of the scheme of eight heavens in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* although there is no way to know whether this is actually the case.[134]

I agree with Poirier that there is no need to posit any emendation, since it is possible to understand the text as it is. In vs. 4, although Abraham is standing on the seventh heaven, he references seeing the "power of the invisible glory of the Living Creatures," something which he had "seen *above*" (emphasis mine). What had he seen above the seventh heaven? Presumably the eighth heaven, since it is mentioned in vs. 6 as a level on which Abraham had previously been. In addition, in the previous chapter, Abraham has a throne room vision that includes the Living Creatures, which matches vs. 4, which states that Abraham had seen the Living Creatures "above" the seventh heaven. If one reads this passage in context, then, it seems clear that

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[132] J. C. Poirier, "The Ouranology of the Apocalypse of Abraham," *JSJ* 35, no. 4 (2004): 393.

[133] Ibid., 395.

[134] Ibid., 404.

Abraham's throne room vision was on the eighth heaven, after which he descends to inspect the lower heavens. This is supported by what immediately follows the throne room vision in ch. 18:

> And a voice came to me out of the midst of the fire, saying, "Abraham, Abraham!"
> And I said, "Here am I!"
> And he said, "Look at *the levels which are under the expanse on which you are brought* and see that on no single level is there any other but the one whom you have searched for or who has loved you. (*Apoc. Ab.* 19:1-3; emphasis mine)

Immediately after these verses, vs. 4 describes Abraham as being on the seventh heaven. Although it does not explicitly say that he descended from the eighth heaven to the seventh, this can be reasonably inferred from the text.[135]

In vs. 6, Abraham says that he sees angels on the sixth heaven carrying out the orders of the angels from the eighth heaven, where he had previously been.[136] So far, there is no contradiction, since throughout these verses, Abraham is never described as currently standing on the eighth heaven, but only has having previously been there. In support of this reading are the two mentions of the "power (of the invisible glory of the Living Creatures)" in vv. 4 and 7. In vs. 4, Abraham sees this power on the seventh heaven, but he adds that he saw this same power "above," presumably on the eighth heaven. In vs. 7, on the sixth heaven he sees the same power, but here he describes it in terms of the power he saw on the seventh heaven. Since we know from vs. 4 that this power is also the same as Abraham saw on the eighth heaven, we can conclude that

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[135] This is also supported by the way Abraham's transition from the sixth to the fifth heaven is described. An actual descent is not explicitly mentioned, but after the sixth heaven "removes itself" (vs. 8), in vs. 9 Abraham is on the fifth heaven. Presumably, then, when the sixth heaven removed itself, Abraham descended to the fifth. We see something similar in vs 4. While Abraham is standing on the eighth heaven (which we assume based on the presence of the Living Creatures, which are said to be "above" the seventh heaven in vs. 6), vs. 4 says, "And behold, the levels opened, and there are the heavens under me." And in the next sentence Abraham is described as being on the seventh heaven. Thus, in the transitions between the eighth and seventh heavens (vs. 4) and between the sixth and fifth heavens (vv. 8-9), although Abraham's descent is not explicitly mentioned, it appears to have taken place when the levels "open" or "remove" themselves.

[136] Although it is possible to read "its suspensions" in vs. 6 as referring to the sixth heaven, which Abraham is currently on, the sixth heaven is only mentioned in vs. 5, which contains a separate sentence, and does not appear in vs. 6. Thus, the most natural way to read "its suspensions" is as referring to the eighth heaven, which means that Abraham had previously stood on the eighth heaven.

whatever this mysterious "power" is, he saw it on the eighth, seventh, and sixth heavens. In speaking of the presence of this power on the sixth heaven, the author had a choice whether to describe it as the same as Abraham saw on the eighth or the seventh heaven, but he chose to speak of it in terms of the seventh. But we know from vs. 4 that this power on the seventh heaven is the same as on the eighth heaven. Thus, this does not need to be seen as contradictory, since the passage always describes Abraham as standing on the seventh or sixth heaven and all mentions of the eighth heaven refer to an earlier episode in the text, the throne room vision during which he saw the Living Creatures and their "power." Poirier's point regarding the existence of an eight-heaven scheme in other ancient sources supports this reading, since it provides a context for what we see in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

Bogomil Interpolations

There do appear to be some minor Bogomil interpolations in the text.[137] For example in two verses God is associated *with* Azazel, which contradicts other material throughout the book. The first is 20:5, in which God says to Abraham, "As the number of the stars and their host, so shall I make your seed into a company of nations, set apart for me in my lot with Azazel."[138] The second is two verses later in 20:7, in which Abraham responds by asking God, "Behold, before you led me up, Azazel abused me. Why then, while he is now not before you, have you set

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[137] One verse I will not discuss at length is *Apoc. Ab.* 22:5, although some scholars believe it has been tampered with by the Bogomils. This verse portrays Abraham's seed as being separated out from the people with Azazel. This implies that there is a dichotomy between Abraham's descendants on the one hand and the rest of humanity, associated with Azazel, on the other. This is actually consonant with the message of the rest of the text, which portrays individuals as being associated either with the one true God or Azazel.

[138] Harlow reads the phrase "in my lot with Azazel" as original, arguing, "That God's 'lot' is with Azazel need not mean that God and Azazel are working on the same side but that they are striving toward the same goal from opposite sides. They are competing for the devotion – the worship – of human beings. Azazel's designs, however, fall completely within God's power, so in that sense they may be said to share a common lot, which is humanity at large" ("Idolatry and Alterity," 320). This reading, however, seems to be overly sophisticated given the stark duality throughout the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* God's lot is consistently contrasted as over against the lot of Azazel, and it seems unlikely that the original author would have created these oppositions, only to then to describe the two lots as one.

yourself with him?" The text records no answer, and the verses immediately following take up a new topic. The Bogomils would have reason to make it seem that the God of Abraham is a god of evil, for according to their theology, both Satan *and* the God of the Old Testament are evil, in line with their Gnostic beliefs.[139] To achieve this, only the words "with Azazel" need to be added to the end of 20:5 after the words "my lot." 20:7, however, directly addresses the association of God with Azazel in 20:5. It is impossible to know whether vv. 6 and 7 originally contained a different question asked of God by Abraham that was later emended, or whether they were composed by a Bogomil scribe. Most likely v. 7 contained a question similar to that of *Apoc. Ab.* 23:12: "Eternal Mighty One! Why then did you adjudge to this one [Azazel] such power to destroy humankind by his works on earth?" A tentative original for 20:7 might then be, "Behold, before you led me up, Azazel abused me. Why then, while he is now not before you, have you *given him power*?" (here, "given him power" replaces the current text, which reads "set yourself with him"). One can see how this verse could have been altered by changing only a few words. Throughout the rest of the text, God's lot is consistently contrasted with that of Azazel and there is no indication elsewhere that God is allied with Azazel, even in the controversial ch. 29, which mentions Azazel. The statements that God shares a lot with Azazel in *Apoc. Ab.* 20:5, 7 thus appear to be a clumsy attempt to associate God with Azazel, in contradiction to the rest of the text.

The mention of wine in *Apoc. Ab.* 9:7 is thought by some to be a Bogomil gloss: "But for forty days abstain from every food which issues from fire, and from the drinking of wine, and from anointing [yourself] with oil." It is true that the Bogomils repudiated the drinking of wine, although it is worth pointing out that in *Apoc. Ab.* 9:7, the abstention from wine is part of a

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[139] Rubinkiewicz, "Apocalypse of Abraham," 1:684.

temporary purification process as opposed to a blanket prohibition; nor are the Bogomils known for eating only raw food or prohibiting the topical use of oil. Daniel Harlow reads the prohibition against cooked food, wine, and oil together as referring to pagan priestly practices: "Because Abraham is about to carry out the services of a priest, he must consecrate himself by abstaining from three staple items that were used in pagan sacrifices."[140] He notes that other ancient Jewish heroes abstain from (Gentile) food, wine, and oil in order to avoid defilement, such as Daniel, Judith, Eliezer, and Joseph, which provides a possible Jewish context for this command to Abraham.[141] Thus, although it is possible that the Bogomils inserted the mention of wine, this is not the only reasonable explanation for its presence in the text, especially given the conditionality of the prohibition in contradistinction to Bogomil beliefs.

Wine is also given a negative connotation in ch. 23, where a bunch of grapes is identified as the forbidden fruit:

> And they [Adam and Eve] were standing under a tree of Eden, and the fruit of the tree was like the appearance of a bunch of grapes of vine
> And behind the tree was standing, as it were, a serpent in form, but having hands and feet like a man, and wings on its shoulders: six on the right side and six on the left.
> And he was holding in his hands the grapes of the tree and feeding the two whom I saw entwined with each other. (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:6, 8)

Although this passage associates grapes with the fall of Adam and Eve, this is not the same as a denunciation of wine. As Rubinkiewicz points out, the element of grapes in the story of Adam and Eve has parallels in Jewish sources, which means a Bogomil hand is not the only reasonable explanation for its presence in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* In *Genesis Rabbah,* although grapes and wine are associated with the forbidden fruit, this is not in service of an anti-wine message,

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[140] Harlow, "Idolatry and Alterity," 311.

[141] "Daniel in the book of Daniel 1; Judith in Jdt. 10:5; 12:19, where she brings her own oil and bread into Holophernes' camp; Eliezar in 2 Macc. 6:18-31; and Joseph in *Jos. & Asen.* 7:1; 8:5-7. According to Josephus, the Essenes avoided oil because they considered it defiling (*J.W.* 2.8.3). Rabbinic law regards meat, wine, and oil as vulnerable to defilement because of their possible origins in idolatrous contexts (e.g., *m. Ḥagiga* 3:4; *t. Ḥagiga* 3:30-32; *b. Ḥagiga* 251; *b. 'Aboda Zara* 36a; *b. Sanhedrin* 17b)"; Ibid., 312.

nor is it the only option given for the identity of the fruit.[142] If the presence of grapes in Chapter 23 is of Jewish origin, this may have been one of the reasons that the Bogomils were attracted to the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* even if a denunciation of wine was not the original intent of the author.

One thing that argues against the idea that the Adam and Eve passage is a Bogomil interpolation is its close connections with the rest of the chapter. Ch. 23 is focused on the figure of Azazel, which it identifies with the serpent, and his role vis-à-vis the presence of evil in the world. The chapter begins,

> Look again at the picture, who is the one who seduced Eve, and what is the fruit of the tree. And you will know what will happen, and how, to your seed among people in the last days of the age. (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:1-2)

After Abraham sees the picture of Adam and Eve he asks,

> Who are these two entwined with each other, or who is this between them, or what is the fruit which they are eating, Mighty Eternal One? (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:9)

Yahoel answers,

> This is the reason of men, this is Adam, and this is their desire on earth, this is Eve. And he who is between them is the Impiety of their pursuits for destruction, Azazel himself. (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:10-11)

Once the serpent has been identified with Azazel, Abraham asks,

> 'Eternal Mighty One! Why then did you adjudge to this one such power to destroy humankind by his works on earth?' And he said to me, 'Hear, Abraham! Those who desire evil and whom I have hated as they are doing these [works], over them I gave him power, and [he is] to be loved by them.' (*Apoc. Ab.* 23:12-13)

Ch. 23 is about origins, but with a focus on the role of Azazel in encouraging evil in the world from the very beginning. He was involved in the first act of disobedience and continues to wield

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[142] *Genesis Rabbah* on Gen 2:8-9 reads, "R. Judah bar Ilai said, 'It was grapes [that Adam and Eve ate], as it is said, "Their grapes are grapes of gall, they have clusters of bitterness"' (Deut 32:32). They were the grapes that brought bitterness into the world." (Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah,* 167). Immediately following this statement, however, are other traditions that the fruit was the *etrog* or figs based on other verses from the Torah (Ibid., 167). *Genesis Rabbah* on Gen 3:6 ("She took of its fruit and ate") reads only "Said R. Aibu, 'She squeezed some grapes and gave him the juice'" with no other comment (Ibid., 203).

power over those who desire evil. This functions to highlight the role of Azazel as related to the presence of evil in the world, which is a recurrent theme throughout the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

According to Yahoel's explanation, the picture that includes the grapes as the forbidden fruit is actually metaphorical: the serpent stands for Azazel, while Adam and Eve represent the reason and desire of men that leads them to evil. The metaphorical nature of the picture argues against its being a Bogomil interpolation meant to discourage the drinking of wine. If a Bogomil scribe wished to insert something about the evils of wine, it is unlikely that he would do so in such a veiled and sophisticated manner. It is equally unlikely that he would integrate an interpolation in such a way as to further the original thrust of the chapter. The integration of this passage into the rest of the chapter as well as the wider literary context thus argues against its being a Bogomil interpolation. Although the mention of wine in *Apoc. Ab.* 9:7 might be from a Bogomil hand, the fact that it does not match up with Bogomil beliefs (who prohibited the drinking of any wine at all times) argues against its being an interpolation as well, especially since there is an equally reasonable explanation of it as Jewish material.

The small number of possible Bogomil glosses or interpolations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is consonant with the findings of the previous chapter that the Bogomils seem to have made only minor emendations in the texts they collected, often leaving material antithetical to their beliefs intact. Although Porfir'ev writes that the Slavonic apocrypha were reworked by Bogomils in Bulgaria, Vatroslav Jagić objects to this statement, arguing that the notion of southern Slavic (i.e., Bulgarian) Bogomil reworkings has only weak support in the literary and historical evidence.[143]

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[143] Vatroslav Jagić, *Slavische beiträge zu den biblischen apocryphen* (Wien: In commission bei F. Tempsky, 1893), 3.

Apoc. *Ab.* 29 has been the topic of much discussion, since it is confusing, vague, and appears

to be contradictory. The confusion centers on the identity and characteristics of one or possibly

two male figures that are described in vv. 4-13. If only one man is being described, it is not

immediately clear whether he fits within a Jewish or Christian context. Is he a messianic figure?

Is he Jesus? Is he the Antichrist? Is he the Roman emperor? If two figures are under discussion,

there is most likely a contrast between a pseudo-Messiah and a true Messiah.[144] The passage is

divided into two sections: a vision and an interpretation. For clarity, before we walk through its

possible meanings, here is the text of the passage:

> [4] <And I looked> and saw a man going out from the left side of the heathen. Men and women and children, great crowds, went out from the side of the heathen and they worshiped him.
> [5] <And> while I was still looking, those on the right side went out, and some shamed this man, and some struck him, and some worshiped him.
> [6] <And> I saw that as they worshiped him, Azazel ran and worshiped, and having kissed his face he turned and stood behind him.
> [7] And I said, "Eternal Mighty One! Who is this shamed and struck man, worshiped by the heathen with Azazel?"
> [8] And he answered and said,
> "Hear, Abraham, the man whom you saw shamed and struck and again worshiped is the laxity of the heathen for the people who will come from you in the last days, in this twelfth hour of the age of impiety.
> [9] And in the [same] twelfth period of the close of my age I shall set up the man from your seed which you saw.
> [10] Everyone from my people will [finally] admit him, while the sayings of him who was as if called by me will be neglected in their minds.
> [11] And that you saw going out from the left side of the picture and those worshiping him, this [means that] many of the heathen will hope in him.
> [12] <And> those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him, and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account.
> [13] And he will tempt those of your seed who have worshiped him."

First of all, a key issue in understanding this passage is the translation of the word *oslaba*

(translated by Kulik as "laxity") in 29:8, which in OCS can mean "freeness, "relief," or

"benefit."[145] Here is the verse with *oslaba* untranslated: "Hear, Abraham, the man whom you

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[144] Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha,* 51.

[145] Grigorii D'iachenko, "ослаба," *Polnyi tserkovno-slavianskii slovar': so vneseniem v nego vazhnieishikh drevne-russkikh slov I vyrazhenii* (Moskva: Izdatel'skii otdel Moskovskogo Patriarkhata, 1993). Accessed online: http://www.slavdict.narod.ru/.

saw shamed and struck and again worshiped is the *oslaba* of/from the heathen for the people who will come from you in the last days" (In OCS, *oslaba* is followed by the preposition *ot,* which can mean "of" or "from"). Box and Bonwetsch understand *oslaba ot* as meaning "relief," coming from the Hebrew מנוחה מן, and read the phrase as "relief granted by" the Gentiles to the Jews because of the figure in question.[146] Rubinstein reads *oslaba ot* not as coming from מנוחה מן, but from מנחה מן, a "gift from."[147] Kulik, however, who is interested in the probable Greek text lying behind the Slavonic, suggests three Greek words that could lie behind *oslaba*: ἔκλυσις (*eklysis*; release, deliverance), παράλυσις (*paralysis*; loosening, laxity), and ἄνεσις [*anesis*; willfulness, letting loose (of the passions)].[148] Similarly, Rubinkiewicz writes that *oslaba* is the OCS translation for the Greek ἄνεσις (see above), ἔνδοσις (*endosis*; indictment, accusation), and ἄδεια (*adeia*; confidence, security).[149] If a meaning like "laxity" or "willfulness" is chosen, then the man is a figure who leads some of Abraham's descendants astray; if a meaning like "relief," "benefit," or "deliverance" is chosen, then the man is a salvific figure. There is thus a wide range of meanings that could be applied to *oslaba,* which is already in the midst of a confusing passage. Whatever role an interpreter thinks this man fills, whether it be the Messiah or the Roman Emperor, a meaning of *oslaba* can be chosen to fit. For this reason, *oslaba* cannot be used to decide the tenor of the passage.

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[146] According to Box, "Perhaps the 'relief' spoken of means the mitigation of the process of 'hardening' that has taken place in Israel (by its rejection of Jesus), which is brought about by the adhesion of some (a remnant) in Israel to the new faith...." According to this reading, then, the figure in the passage is Jesus, and the "relief" spoken of is God's mercy to those Jews who become Christians.

[147] Rubinstein, "Hebraisms," 114.

[148] Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha,* 51-52.

[149] Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse De 'Abraham,* 66.

The One-Man Theory

Those who read ch. 29 as describing only one man must deal with the fact that there is a discrepancy between the provenance of the man in the vision and its interpretation: in the vision, he is said to come from the left side of the "heathen," or Gentiles (vs. 4), while in the interpretation God says he will "set up the man from your seed" (vs. 9).

Table 2.1

The man according to the vision	The man according to the interpretation
From the left side (of the Gentiles) (vs. 4)	From Abraham's seed (vs. 9)
Great crowds of Gentiles worship him (vs. 4)	Many of the Gentiles will hope in him (vs. 11)
Some from the right side shame/strike him (vs. 5)	Some from the right side shame/strike him (vs. 12)
Some from the right side worship him (vs. 5)	Some from the right side worship him (vs. 12)
Azazel worships and then kisses him (vs. 6)	
Azazel stands behind him (vs. 6)	
	He will mislead many of Abraham's seed (vs. 12)
	He will tempt those of Abraham's seed who have worshiped him (vs. 13)

According to the One-Man Theory, the same man is being described in both the vision and the interpretation. It is clear from this chart that the only discrepancy between the two involves the origin of the man: according to the vision, he is a Gentile, but, according to the interpretation he is descended from Abraham. This theory requires that one of these pieces of contradictory information be an interpolation. The question then is: Did someone change the vision to make the man a Gentile, or did someone change the interpretation to make the man a Jew? Is it a Gentile or a Jew who causes some of Abraham's descendants to forsake their God and worship him? The main Gentile candidate is the Roman emperor, while the main Jewish candidate is Jesus of Nazareth. If the passage was originally Jewish and later changed by a Christian hand, then most likely a Christian scribe, reading *oslaba* as "relief" or "deliverance," changed the interpretation to make the figure Jewish, thus referring to Jesus. If this is the case, the Christian

scribe overlooked the fact that the figure is portrayed negatively in that he is associated with Azazel and leads Jews astray.

Hall is a proponent of the One-Man Theory with the figure identified as the Roman emperor. He writes, "Since the features conforming to Christian doctrine appear in the interpretation rather than in the vision…the vision must be original."[150] By "Christian doctrine," he is referring to a translation of *oslaba* as "deliverance," which makes the man in the vision appear as a salvific figure, and the origin of the man as Jewish. Looking solely at the vision, then, for the identity of the figure, Hall notes that the man has more in common with the beast in Rev 13 than with Jesus; both had been smitten, are supported by Satan, and are worshiped by many.[151]

This continues the theme of idolatry that runs throughout the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* especially as it relates to apostate Jews. In the vision, the man is worshiped by both Jews and non-Jews, which creates a division between faithful and apostate Jews. In a way, the appearance of the man is a test that weeds out the righteous from the wicked.[152] Vv. 12-13 at the end of the interpretation section fit this reading well: "And those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him, and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account. And he will tempt those of your seed who have worshiped him."

It is not difficult to see how a Christian would read this figure as Jesus, since he is struck/shamed and is worshiped by Jews and Gentiles in both the vision and the interpretation. Whichever changes were made by a Christian hand, however, were not thorough enough to erase the original Jewish character of the passage. From a Christian perspective, it does not fit for

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[150] Hall, *Revealed Histories*, 107.

[151] Ibid., 108.

[152] Ibid.

Jesus to be non-Jewish, to be allied with Azazel, or to "mislead" anyone, yet only the first of these was emended. It is not clear whether the putative Christian hand that portrays the man in the interpretation of the vision as descending from Abraham is also Bogomil (this only requires the addition of the three words, "of your seed" in 29:10). The only thing in favor of this is the clumsy way in which the emendation was done, leaving contradictory material alongside the new material.

In favor of the One-Man Theory with the man as the Roman emperor, Hall argues that what we know of ancient history matches the picture provided in ch. 29. For example, after the war that ended in the destruction of the temple, the Romans put more pressure on the Jews, imposing a heavy tax on them. According to Suetonius, some Jews denied being Jewish in order to avoid the tax, which would have necessitated that they worship the emperor.[153] Hall concludes, "If, as seems probable, Hadrian's plan to refound Jerusalem as Aelia Capitolina sparked the Bar Kochba revolt (Dio 69.12.1-2), the author had more than ample cause before the revolt to identify the emperor as the man worshiped with Azazel."[154] Hall concludes, "This passage is not a Christian interpolation but is thoroughly Jewish and well suits its context."[155] In my opinion, if one chooses the One-Man Theory, Hall's explanation of the figure as the Roman emperor is the most convincing.

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[153] Suetonius in *Domitian* 12, in Hall, *Revealed Histories,* 109.

[154] Hall, *Revealed Histories,* 109.

[155] Ibid., 107.

Kulik, however, suggests the possibility that there are two figures in ch. 29: a pseudo-Messiah and a true Messiah. According to this reading, the verses in 29:4-13 are divided between the two men accordingly:

Table 2.2

Verse	The Pseudo-Messiah	The True Messiah
4	From the left side of the Gentiles	
4	Great crowds of Gentiles worship him	
5	Some from the right side shame/strike him	
5	Some from the right side worship him	
6	Azazel worships and then kisses him	
6	Azazel stands behind him	
8	He is the *oslaba* (laxity)[156] of the Gentiles for Abraham's descendants	
9		From Abraham's seed
9		God will set him up
10		God's people will admit [follow] him
11	Many of the Gentiles will hope in him	
12	He will mislead many of Abraham's seed	
13	He will tempt those of Abraham's seed who have worshiped him	

According to this reading, while the vision describes only the pseudo-Messiah, the interpretation, beginning in v. 8, begins by describing the pseudo-Messiah, switches to describing the true Messiah, and then returns to the pseudo-Messiah. Textual indications are present that vv. 9 and

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[156] Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha,* 51-52. He suggests that the Greek word lying behind *oslaba* rendered the Hebrew *rifyon* (רפיון) and should be translated "laxity," as in the phrases *rifyon hatorah* (רפיון התורה), "laxity [= neglect] of the law" from *Lam. Rab.* 1,4 or *rifyon yadayim min hatorah* (רפיון ידים מן התורה) "laxity of hands in upholding the Law" from *Midrash Tanhuma, Beshalah* 25.

10 are set apart from the surrounding material, which supports this reading. First of all, v. 8, which begins the interpretation section of the passage, ends by saying that this Gentile figure will arise in the "last days, in this twelfth hour of the age of impiety." V. 9 begins, "And in the [same] twelfth period of the close of my age I shall set up the man from your seed which you saw." If the same figure is under discussion in vv. 8 and 9, there is no need to repeat the information regarding the twelfth hour/period. This is why Kulik puts the word "same" in brackets before "twelfth" in v. 9: to indicate that although the same period is under discussion, a second figure is being described. On the other side of vv. 9 and 10, v. 11 begins with the words "And that you saw going from the left side…" This seems to be in contrast to the content of v. 10. Whereas the figure in v. 10 is from Abraham's seed, "that [one] you saw going from the left side" is a Gentile. If the same figure is being discussed in vv. 10 and 11, why does v. 11 set up this contrast?

Another factor in favor of the Two-Man Theory is that a positive messianic figure is mentioned elsewhere in the text. As part of its description of the final judgment of the wicked, *Apoc. Ab.* 31:1 reads, "Then I shall sound the trumpet from the sky, and I shall send my chosen one, having in him one measure of all my power, and he will summon my people blamed among the heathen." The only possible problem with the Two-Man Theory is that 29:9 says, "I shall set up the man from your seed *which you saw*" (emphasis mine). This is problematic because this is the first time this figure is mentioned if he is indeed a separate, positive figure. He is mentioned in ch. 31, but this is at the very end of the text. This need not be too serious of a problem, however: if one assumes that two men are mentioned in the interpretation, it is possible that the true Messiah was originally part of the vision as well, but was edited out at some point during the text's history. Indeed, the most straightforward explanation regarding what Abraham "saw" is that it is describing something he saw in the vision immediately preceding the interpretation. The

ambiguous nature of ch. 29 most likely caused confusion among ancient readers as it has among modern ones, and it is possible that a scribe thought that the description of a true Messiah in the vision was describing the figure associated with Azazel, which he deemed inappropriate and therefore excised. It is also possible, as Harlow suggests, that the phrase "which you saw" is modifying Abraham's seed, not the man.[157] This is grammatically possible, although not the most intuitive reading, since it is the man who is under discussion in v. 10, not Abraham's seed.

Regarding the identity of the pseudo-Messiah, one can still understand him as referring to the Roman emperor within the Two-Man Theory. In this scenario, some apostate Jews have forsaken their faith and worshiped him, while others have taken a strong stand against him; in the mean time, the writer awaits the coming of the true Messiah, when the wicked will be judged and the righteous will be vindicated. Harlow has advocated another possibility: that the pseudo-Messiah figure in ch. 29 is an early anti-Christian polemic against the figure of Jesus. He argues that the man in the vision "bears an uncanny resemblance to Jesus of Nazareth" in that his being shamed and struck is similar to the description of Jesus' passion in the Gospel narratives.[158] Also, the fact that the man is worshiped by many Gentiles and some of Abraham's descendants matches the character of the early Christian church. Lastly, that the man is kissed by Azazel is reminiscent of Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus by a kiss as well as the Gospel traditions that Judas was possessed by Satan.[159] Harlow suggests that the characterization of the man in the vision as coming from the left, Gentile, side could be a Jewish claim that Jesus was not actually Jewish,

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[157] Daniel Harlow, "Anti-Christian Polemic in the Apocalypse of Abraham: Jesus as a Pseudo-Messiah in *Apoc. Ab.* 29.3-14," *JSP* 22.3 (2013), 174.

[158] Ibid., 175-6.

[159] Ibid., 176.

132

which he substantiates by a parallel with another ancient Jewish claim that the Apostle Paul was not Jewish quoted by Epiphanius of Salamis.[160]

Although possible, Harlow's hypothesis contains some problems. First of all, Azazel's kiss in the vision is linked with his support of the man, since he worships, kisses, and then stands behind him. It does not make sense for Azazel's kiss to be one of betrayal, since he is not opposed to the man in the vision. Harlow suggests that according to this reading, the passage implies the following scenario:

> The devil led many Gentiles and even some Jews to worship Jesus, but then engineered Jesus' death by having Judas – who initially venerated him as the messiah but was later possessed or influenced by Satan – turn him over to his captors, who beat him and mocked him. If this interpretation has merit, then what we have in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a deliberate distortion of traditions known from the New Testament.[161]

This raises the question, however, of why a Jew would portray Satan as leading many people to worship Jesus but then working to bring about his humiliation and death. This does not fit with Azazel's behavior towards the figure in the vision, which is consistently supportive. Another factor to consider is that there do not appear to be any other anti-Christian elements in the work. If one assumes that the author equates Christianity with idolatry, then one would expect other anti-Christian polemics to be present, given the importance of idolatry as a theme throughout the text. But the descriptions of pagan idolatry throughout the *Apocalypse of Abraham* do not point to Christianity as its target and there is no reason to assume that its critiques of idolatry are actually critiques of Christianity. A last factor that gives me pause in accepting Harlow's hypothesis is that the content of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a whole indicates that the Romans bear the brunt of its animus, as is the case in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* texts with which the

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[160] Ibid., 179.

[161] Ibid., 177.

133

Apocalypse of Abraham has many close connections, which I will explore in the next two

chapters.

Conclusions

Whether one subscribes to the One-Man or Two-Man Theory, one most likely ends up with a

Jewish provenance for ch. 29.[162] According to the One-Man Theory, the passage is Jewish, with

one small Christian gloss in an attempt to identify the man with Jesus by making him Jewish,

despite contradictory material in the vision and an overall negative view of the man. According

to the Two-Man Theory, the passage is Jewish and makes a contrast between a false Messiah and

a true Messiah who is yet to come. If any interpolations exist in ch. 29, there is only one

candidate, the phrase "from your seed" in v. 9, which according to the One-Man Theory, is a

Christian attempt to make the man Jewish based on the translation of *oslaba* as "deliverance" or

"relief," which portrays him as a salvific figure. But if one chooses a negative translation for

oslaba, which is warranted by the retroversion work that Kulik has done from OCS into Greek,

the figure in the vision also becomes negative, which fits well with the rest of the passage

according to the Two-Man Theory. Because of the inherent ambiguity of *Apoc. Ab.* 29:4-13, it is

impossible to say with complete certainty that it is a Jewish passage, but it is my opinion that this

hypothesis makes the most sense of the available textual evidence.

Having surveyed the range of possible Christian interpolations in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,*

one is left with two strong candidates: ch. 7, and the association of God with Azazel in 20:5, 7.

The latter clearly contradicts material in the rest of the work and reflects Bogomil Gnostic

beliefs, while the former is shown to be an interpolation by the manuscript evidence although it

is unclear whether it is of Jewish or Christian origin. The fact that Abraham avoids wine in

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[162] For a discussion of early unfounded identifications of the entire passage as a Christian interpolation, such as that of Box, see Harlow, "Anti-Christian Polemic," 170-1.

preparation for his sacrifice could be a Bogomil interpolation, but it can also be explained by ancient Jewish practices. The confusion between seven and eight heavens can actually be explained by a close reading of the text as it stands, while the mention of grapes in ch. 23 and the confusing passage in ch. 29 can be plausibly explained in the context of ancient Jewish literature, especially regarding the identification of grapes as the forbidden fruit and a belief in a false Messiah.

These few instances where it is difficult to determine whether a Christian hand is at work or not should be marked with an asterisk for scholars working with the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* and it is probably unwise to rely on them too strongly for any particular hypothesis or analysis. Apart from these questionable verses, the majority of the text does not indicate any tampering by Christians. This, combined with the positive evidence of the Jewish character of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to be discussed in the following chapters, should provide future scholars with a higher level of comfort when it comes to including it in their treatments of ancient Judaism.

Chapter 3

4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham

Introduction

Now that the likelihood that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is an early Jewish work has been

established, let us see what emerges from a comparison with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, documents

widely believed to have a similar provenance. All three texts have already been discussed

together as products of the same environment; for example, John J. Collins writes that they may

be viewed as "one cluster of Jewish responses to that national tragedy," referring to the

destruction of the Second Temple.[1] And George W. E. Nickelsburg groups them together, along

with *3 Baruch,* as apocalyptic responses to the fall of Jerusalem.[2] *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* have

historically been the main representatives of this time period, and they are closely related, as we

will discuss below. By bringing the *Apocalypse of Abraham* more fully into the conversation, I

hope to provide a new sense of perspective on all three documents, which will enrich our

understanding of the theological and intellectual atmosphere at that time.

Before we discuss these documents further as "responses" to the destruction of the Temple

and the general "situation" after 70 CE, it is worth reflecting briefly on what the situation was to

which the Jews felt they were responding. In his recent book *Josephus and the Theologies of*

Ancient Judaism, Jonathan Klawans challenges the oft-cited idea that the destruction of the

Temple was such a huge shock that it engendered a religious crisis that threatened the survival of

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[1] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 156.

[2] George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Pr, 2005), 280.

Judaism. In the past, scholars have asserted that Judaism was threatened by widespread apostasy during this period and that the dearth of extant documents represents a "shocked silence" after the "unthinkable" loss of Jerusalem and the Temple.[3] Regarding the scarcity of documents, Klawans points out that we have no way of knowing the total literary output during this time, nor is it possible to know how many documents have been lost.[4] In addition, we know of few works being authored in the decades leading up to 70 CE; for all we know, the works we have from the decades after that point represent a rise in literary production.[5]

Regarding the supposed theological crisis, Klawans argues that the destruction of the Temple was not perceived as an unprecedented event:

> Indeed, it would appear that practically all extant Jewish literature interpreting the catastrophe of 70 CE – Josephan, apocalyptic, and rabbinic – agrees on these few, not insignificant points: the destruction was orchestrated by God, to punish a sinful people, in a way that recalls earlier catastrophes, especially that of 586 BCE. So the destruction of the second temple plays out a biblical drama for a second time. General agreement on such core issues among a wide array of texts, written right after the destruction and much later, seems hardly to testify to any great theological crisis. The well-attested answer is the expected one. This chorus of theological consensus is not the sound of a religion shattering.[6]

This is a helpful corrective to past scholarship based on the evidence of the texts themselves and it challenges us to examine our own assumptions about the religious atmosphere after 70 CE. Klawans's point aids the comparative project of this chapter in that it helps us to sharpen the questions we ask of the texts. As we will see, Klawans is correct: *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* raise questions about the destruction of the Temple, but at a basic level they all provide the same answer: it was a punishment for sin that was deserved; and this topic

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[3] Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 184-6.

[4] Ibid., 186.

[5] Ibid., 186, 207.

[6] Ibid., 201. Klawans also discusses the fact that these texts are not concerned about atonement for sin apart from sacrifices. This is not surprising, since the Jews functioned without a Temple during the exile in the sixth century B.CE; again, this was not an unprecedented situation (ibid., 198-200).

takes up relatively little space compared to other material. Acknowledging that the main question

for these texts is *not* "Why was the Temple destroyed?" allows us to ask, "What else, then, *are*

these texts about?" If there was no widespread religious crisis during this time, what issues or

problems were these authors attempting to address?

What we see in these three texts are follow-up questions, so to speak, predicated on the

assumption that the destruction was a punishment from God for Israel's sins. The first of these is

"What sins in particular are to blame?" or "*Whose* sins brought this about?" *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,*

and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* all address this question, as do other contemporaneous texts.[7]

There is also the reasonable question, "If this is about sin, what about the Romans? They're

much more sinful than we are!" which we see in *4 Ezra*. *2 Baruch* raises another excellent

question: "Since there were both righteous and sinful Jews before 70 CE, why did the deeds of

the sinful outweigh those of the righteous?" But what we see most of all regarding the topic of

sin in these three documents is sustained reflection on its root cause, which makes perfect sense

in the aftermath of a *second* catastrophic destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. The second

destruction establishes a pattern, and a deeply troubling one at that. What does it say about the

human condition if no matter how hard they try, the Jews cannot deflect such devastating

punishments? Are the effects of sin so pernicious that men are doomed to failure? And what does

this say about God if he is the Creator of the world? Is he ultimately to blame for the repeated

failure of men to be righteous? Is Adam to blame? Is Satan to blame? And what about God's

mercy? Can it not bridge the gap between man's efforts and his failures?

These questions flow naturally out of the assumption that the destruction of the Temple is a

punishment from God for sin. We also see other relevant questions, such as "Where do we go

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[7] Ibid., 188-90.

from here?" and "What does the future hold?" The reason that Klawans's point is so relevant to our discussion is that it fits the evidence of the texts themselves. These texts are not focused on examining why the Temple was destroyed and they do not reflect a sense of shock. Instead, they are asking questions that naturally arise if one already has the answer to this question, which they do: it is a punishment for sin.

This chapter will thus be devoted to a systematic analysis and comparison of *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, focusing on the main themes and message of each. These will be presented in terms of categories arising from an inductive study of the documents, most of which apply to all three. They are: Structure, Theodicy, the Law, Free Will, Idolatry, Purity and Ritual, Grief, Eschatology, Knowledge, Scribalism, Creation, Asceticism, the Romans, and Function. Although I will venture some preliminary conclusions regarding their possible social setting when I discuss the function of the texts, this topic will be covered in more detail in the following chapter. I will begin by summarizing the most relevant information regarding *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* in order to enable a comparison with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

The relationship between 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch

Although it is clear that there is a relationship between *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what this is, especially regarding direction of influence.[8] The similarities exist on several levels: they both utilize the same literary genres, such as prayers, speeches, and symbolic visions that are explained by an angelic interlocutor; they are both focused on eschatology; they both contain ongoing dialogue between the protagonist and God or an angel, within which the seer questions God's ways; and in both, by the end of the work the protagonist

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[8] Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis: Fortress Pr, 1990), 39.

has undergone a transformation from skeptic to teacher and leader of the people.[9] In addition,

there are close linguistic similarities between the two, including some verbatim parallels.[10]

Various scholars have argued for the priority of each text, but no proposal has been universally

accepted; indeed the relationship between them appears to be much more complex than simple

direction of influence.[11] Most recently, Matthias Henze has proposed an appropriately nuanced

model that accounts for an oral element in the development of the texts and posits that the

parallels between the two were generated at this earlier, oral stage, while the literary redactions

took place independently.[12] Despite this shared history of development, no one doubts the

differences between the two works, both in theology and emphasis.[13] Although they contain

similar material, the texts reflect the agendas of different authors.

4 Ezra

4 Ezra is a Jewish work that consists of chs. 3-14 of the work called *2 Esdras*, which adds a

Christian beginning and ending (in chs. 1-2 and 15-16). Although it is currently extant in Latin,

Ethiopic, Syriac, and Armenian, scholars are agreed that it was originally written in either

Hebrew or Aramaic towards the end of the first century CE and that it has a Palestinian

provenance.[14]

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[9] Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading Second Baruch in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 149.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., 155.

[12] Ibid., 182-3.

[13] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 180.

[14] Ibid., 156. There is strong internal evidence that *4 Ezra* was written during the reign of Domitian (81-96 CE) (Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 10-11).

Structure

4 *Ezra* was most likely written by a single author, which allows us to speak about its message, themes, etc. as a whole without needing to delve into issues of sources or composite structure.[15] Although there was a debate in the nineteenth century regarding whether the text reflects different sources and authors, Hermann Gunkel's opinion that the inconsistencies in the text reflect a single author's use of diverse materials has been upheld by subsequent scholarship.[16] The first part of the work consists primarily of dialogues between Ezra and the angel Uriel, while the latter section is characterized by symbolic eschatological visions. Scholars agree that the text divides clearly into seven units: three dialogues followed by four visions. The text contains other genres as well, including prayers, lamentations, and speeches.

Theodicy

The dialogues between Ezra and the angel Uriel contain penetrating and incisive questions regarding the justice of God in light of the destruction of the temple. While Uriel avoids directly answering these questions, Ezra relentlessly brings the conversation back to his pressing concerns. Why, he asks, has God turned his people over to the Gentiles? (4:23-24). Why has God spared Babylon (the Romans) and given them power over Israel, which is the most virtuous nation on earth? (3:28-31). If God created the world for his people, why do they not possess it as their inheritance? (6:59). Underlying these questions is a sense of doubt regarding the fairness of God's actions as Israel's covenant partner. Although the author never says this explicitly, one gets the sense that he is wondering whether Israel's sin was pervasive enough to warrant the devastating punishment they received, or why it should cancel out God's responsibilities to his

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[15] Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 21.

[16] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 157; Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 21.

covenant people. These questions thus reflect frustration and despair regarding the covenant: even Israel, the most "virtuous" nation on earth cannot satisfy its stipulations nor enjoy its benefits.

As Collins notes, although the events of 70 CE are what prompt Ezra's questions, they are the catalyst for broader questions of theodicy.[17] Ezra consistently shows concern, not just for the Jews, but for all of mankind, the vast majority of whom will perish in sin (7:46-48, 62-69; 8:24-42; 10:9-11). For example, in 7:48, Ezra cries,

> For an evil heart has grown up in us, which has alienated us from God, and has brought us into corruption and the ways of death, and has shown us the paths of perdition and removed us far from life – and that not just a few of us but almost all who have been created!

Although not directly attributing responsibility to God for evil, Ezra boldly states,

> Yet you did not take away from them their evil heart, so that your Law might bring forth fruit in them. For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. Thus the disease became permanent; the Law was in the people's heart along with the evil root, but what was good departed, and the evil remained. (3:20-22)

The implication here is that although God gave the Law, which is good, he did not adequately address the root problem of sin, which essentially doomed his people to failure and punishment. This implies that the deck is stacked, so to speak, against humanity at large. Because Adam's sin passed on an "evil heart" to all mankind, we are all doomed at birth. If Ezra does not explicitly point out the unfairness in this scenario, he still views it as an excellent reason for God to show mercy:

> But what is man, that you are angry with him; or what is a mortal race, that you are so bitter against it? For in truth there is no one among those who have been born who has not acted wickedly, and among those who have existed there is no one who has not transgressed. For in this, O Lord, your righteousness and goodness will be declared, when you are merciful to those who have no store of good works. (8:34-36)

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[17] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 159.

The author of *4 Ezra,* then, does not shy away from the troubling implications of theodicy, both

in general, and in relation to the destruction of the temple. He calls God's justice and mercy

towards humankind into question, as well as his covenant with Israel.[18]

Answers

Many modern commentators of *4 Ezra* have noted that the angel Uriel does not provide

satisfactory answers to Ezra's questions.[19] He repeatedly says that God's ways are mysterious

and beyond human comprehension (4; 5:40); God's love for Israel is equally incomprehensible

and Ezra will never be able to understand God's purpose for them (5:33, 40).[20] He tells Ezra that

he should not worry about the masses that will perish; rather, he should rejoice with God over the

few that are saved and not be concerned with those who are damned, who are like "mist, and are

similar to a flame and smoke – they are set on fire and burn hotly, and are extinguished" (7:60-

61). Uriel emphasizes the free will of man in this respect, without addressing Ezra's point

regarding man's "handicap" – the sin that he has inherited from Adam. Instead, Uriel

underscores that those who despise God and his Law do so freely and thus deserve their

punishment:

> Therefore do not ask any more questions about the multitude of those who perish. For they also received
> freedom, but they despised the Most High, and were contemptuous of his Law, and forsook his ways.
> (8:55-56)

Uriel consistently urges Ezra to focus not on questions of theodicy, but on the future world.

He tries to shift Ezra's focus from his grief over the plight of Israel onto God's eschatological

plan. This age is passing away and to worry about its mysteries is futile.[21] By the end of the

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[18] Ibid., 160.

[19] Ibid., 167

[20] Stone, *Fourth Ezra,* 36; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 161.

[21] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 161.

work, Ezra has taken this advice and has undergone a transformation. Collins places the beginning of this transformation in the first vision, when Ezra sees a woman grieving over her dead son and advises her to broaden her perspective – she may have lost her son, but Zion has suffered much more. The woman then turns into a city with huge foundations and Ezra learns that the woman *is* Zion. Collins sees this episode as crucial because in it Ezra himself takes on the role of comforter, which provides distance from his own situation and perspective on individual versus corporate grief.[22] He does not realize at first that he is giving advice to himself,[23] but the takeaway from this encounter is that it is impossible to see our own problems in perspective and so we must "resign ourselves before the providence of God."[24]

The Law

The Law is a key theme throughout *4 Ezra*. According to the author, God's love to Israel was expressed in his gift of the Torah (5:27), and although Israel scorned God's Law (7:24; 14:30), it did not perish, but remains in its glory (9:31-37). Although Israel is the only nation that has received God's Law, Ezra seems to imply that it represents a kind of natural law and that the Gentiles are responsible for living according to it.[25] 7:72 reads,

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[22] Philip F. Esler uses a term borrowed from the Russian formalists to describe this: defamiliarization. He writes, "What Ezra experienced in his vision of the woman (just as did the original audience of the work) is precisely this process of defamiliarization. The sorrow of Israel he had always known; the destiny of Israel he had anxiously discussed. Yet when he actually sees sorrowing Israel and then the glories of her future he does not recognize her and falls into a state of deep shock. The defamiliarization of what he has always known, the replacement of knowledge with vision, is beyond his powers of assimilation. He requires the angel Uriel to explain it to him" ("The Social Function of 4 Ezra," *JSNT* 53 [1994]: 112-13).

[23] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 164-165.

[24] Ibid., 165.

[25] Fraade, "*4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* with the (Dis-) Advantage of Rabbinic Hindsight," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction After the Fall* (ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 373.

> For this reason, therefore, those who dwell on earth shall be tormented, because though they had understanding they committed iniquity, and though they received the commandments they did not keep them, and though they obtained the Law they dealt unfaithfully with what they received.

And 7:79-80, which is part of a discussion regarding "Adam and all who have come from him" (7:70) states that when persons die, if they did not keep "the way of the Most High" and "despised his Law," they will be subjected to torments. Therefore, the Law is a standard that all humankind is held to in *4 Ezra* (see also 8:12). At the end of the work, we learn that the Law has been burned, which poses a problem, not just for the Jews, but for all mankind: "For the world lies in darkness, and its inhabitants are without light. For your Law has been burned" (14:20-21). For this reason, Ezra asks for divine help to rewrite the Torah, so that "men may be able to find the path" (14:22).

We can see from this brief summary that the Law is a key theological element throughout *4 Ezra*. The book ends with Ezra ensuring that the Law will be preserved for future generations so that all mankind can be guided with regards to righteousness. The answer to the overarching question of theodicy raised in the book is that it is impossible to understand God's ways or why the presence of sin is so pernicious; all the Jews can do is follow the Law so that they can be among the saved. In his last address to the people, Ezra exhorts them,

> …our fathers…received the Law of life, which they did not keep, which you also have transgressed after them…[but] If you, then, will rule over your minds and discipline your hearts, you shall be kept alive, and after death you shall obtain mercy. For after death the judgment will come, when we shall live again; and then the names of the righteous will become manifest… (14:34)

Unanswerable questions must be put aside in order to focus on the pressing questions of the present: "What do we do now?" and "Where do we go from here?" For the author of *4 Ezra,* the way forward is clearly a Torah-based community.

Grief

Ezra's grief over the "desolation of Zion" (3:1) sets the overall tone of the book. In 5:34, he states that "every hour" he suffers "agonies of heart," and in 10:7 that he mourns over Zion's

"deep grief" and "great humiliation." 10:21-23 contains a detailed description of this

humiliation:

> Our sanctuary has been laid waste, our altar thrown down, our temple destroyed; our harp has been laid low, our song has been silenced, and our rejoicing has been ended; the light of our lampstand has been put out, the ark of our covenant has been plundered, our holy things have been polluted, and the name by which we are called has been profaned; our free men have suffered abuse, our priests have been burned to death, our Levites have gone into captivity, our virgins have been defiled, and our wives have been ravished; our righteous men have been carried off, our little ones have been cast out, our young men have been enslaved and our strong men made powerless. And, what is more than all, the seal of Zion – for she has now lost the seal of her glory, and has been given over into the hands of those that hate us.

While enough time has gone by for Zion's plight to prompt sustained theological reflection, not

so much time has gone by to blunt the suffering, pain, and humiliation, which are still fresh in

the author's mind.

Eschatology

After Ezra lays his questions to rest, the remainder of the text is focused on the revelation of

eschatological knowledge: Rome (called both Esau and Babylon) will be destroyed, the Messiah

will come, and Israel will be both redeemed and vindicated.[26] Having judged wicked Rome, the

Messiah will gather the remnant of Israel to himself and will defend them, make them joyful, and

show them wonders (12:34; 13:48-50).[27] It is worth noting that in this scenario, the righteous do

not take part in the punishment of Rome; rather, it is carried out by the Messiah alone;[28] this is in

contrast to the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* as well as other texts, such as *1 Enoch, Jubilees,* and 1-2

Maccabees.[29] The Messiah in *4 Ezra* is a semi-supernatural human figure who, after destroying

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[26] Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 36.

[27] Collins points out that the criterion for this remnant is ethnic [John J. Collins, "The Idea of Election in 4 Ezra," *JSQ* 16, no. 1 (2009): 92]. This is a separate issue from one's fate after death, which is decided on an individual basis (ibid., 90).

[28] Bruce Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra: A Consideration of Its Social Setting and Functions," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 28 (1997): 289.

[29] E.g., 1 Macc 2:40-41, 66-68; 3:3-9, 19-22, 43-44; 2 Macc 2:19-22; 8:16-24; 10:14-17, 24-38; 11:6-12; 15:21-29; Jdt 9:2-14; 13:4-10; *1 En.* 90:6-19; 91:11-12; *Jub.* 23:20, 30-31.

the Roman Empire, will usher in a 400-year messianic age.[30] He is not a king here, despite his symbolic portrayal as a lion, which is reminiscent of the Lion of Judah; rather, his role is more of a legal one. At the end of the messianic age, the Messiah will die, after which the resurrection and God's final judgment will take place (7:28-44).[31]

4 Ezra contains a strict periodization of history as part of its eschatological framework. It reinterprets Daniel's fourth kingdom as Rome, instead of Greece, and divides history into twelve parts, nine and a half of which have already passed (14:11-12).[32] Ezra asks how the ages are divided, when the end will come, and what its signs will be (4:33, 45-46; 6:7), and is given a list that is similar to the treatment of this subject in the New Testament (5:1-13).[33] This focus on eschatological secrets extends to the fate of man after death, which is discussed in detail: the souls of the righteous will be guarded by angels in "profound quiet" until the day of judgment (7:95). The wicked, on the other hand, will "wander about in torments, ever grieving and sad (7:80).

Knowledge

One of the subthemes that runs throughout *4 Ezra* is the element of knowledge, or wisdom. There is the kind of knowledge that Ezra desires to have (of God's ways), and there is the kind of apocalyptic, eschatological knowledge that is revealed to him.[34] But this knowledge is not for all. For example, after discussing the final judgment and the afterlife, the angel tells Ezra, "Therefore my judgment is now drawing near; I have not shown this to all men, but only to you and a few

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[30] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 167.

[31] Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 41, 209-10

[32] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 165.

[33] Mt 24:1; Lk 19:40; Heb 2:11.

[34] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 168-9.

like you" (8:61-62). At the end of the work, Ezra writes down seventy secret books that are only

for "the wise among your people" (14:47); "in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain

of wisdom, and the river of knowledge" (14:48). This division of exoteric versus esoteric

knowledge is consistent throughout the text, and as we will discuss below, may provide a clue

regarding the author and audience of *4 Ezra.*

Scribalism

The element of scribalism in *4 Ezra* is also noteworthy. According to 14:21, the Law was

burned during the destruction of the temple and needs to be rewritten. Ezra is commanded to

prepare writing tablets and to gather scribes who "are trained to write rapidly" so that he can

dictate the Law to them. Ezra is given a cup to drink, after which he is filled with understanding

and is able to recite the Law from memory (14:40). He then dictates the twenty-four canonical

books of the Torah, as well as the seventy secret books mentioned above. Again, this may

provide a clue as to the identity and concerns of the author.

Creation

The theme of creation is used prominently in *4 Ezra.* On the one hand, the author uses

creation to emphasize God's purposefulness, which demonstrates his power and agency.[35] In 6:6,

God says, "I planned these things, and they were made through me and not through another, just

as the end shall come through me and not through another"; this emphasizes God's complete

control over the whole of history.[36] On the other hand, after recounting the story of creation and

emphasizing that God created the world for Israel specifically (6:55), Ezra asks, "If the world has

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[35] Joan E. Cook, "Creation in 4 Ezra: The Biblical Theme in Support of Theodicy," in *Creation in the Biblical Traditions* (ed. Richard J. Clifford and John J. Collins; Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1992), 131, 138.

[36] Ibid., 138

indeed been created for us, why do we not possess our world as an inheritance?" (6:59). Here, the theme of creation is used in order to imply that God is *not* currently controlling history as he should. While God acted in accordance with his covenant with Israel by creating the world specifically for them, he has ceased to operate within that framework. Thus, the general tension that exists in *4 Ezra* between Ezra's questions and Uriel's answers is reflected in the way the theme of creation is used to reinforce opposing viewpoints. At one point it is used to underscore God's control over all of history, while at another, it is used to question God's lack of action. This thread of tension may be the reason that in his recital of creation, Ezra makes no mention of its being good; if this is intentional, then it probably reflects the author's sense of dissonance between what the Torah says and Israel's lived experience.[37]

Asceticism

Another aspect of *4 Ezra* worth noting for our comparison is the element of asceticism. Between Ezra's first two encounters with the angel Uriel, he is commanded to fast for seven days (5:20). After Ezra's first three dialogues with the angel and before his first vision, he is commanded again to prepare himself for seven days. This command contains more detail than the first seven-day fast:

> But if you will let seven days more pass – do not fast during them, however; but go into a field of flowers where no house has been built, and eat only of the flowers of the field, and taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers, and pray to the Most High continually – then I will come and talk with you. (9:23-24)

This is different from the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* in which Abraham is preparing both to make a sacrifice and to ascend to heaven, whereas here Ezra is preparing to be visited by the angel, but the general element of asceticism is a feature they have in common, as we will also see with *2 Baruch.*

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[37] Ibid.

The Romans

As is to be expected from a document written in the aftermath of 70 CE, the Romans feature prominently in *4 Ezra*. The references to Babylon and Esau refer to the Roman Empire, as does the Eagle Vision in chs. 11-12.[38] As the destroyers of the temple, the Romans are Israel's enemies, the wicked, who are opposed to God's Law (5:29; 7:79). As depicted in the Eagle Vision, the Messiah, symbolized by a lion, will announce legal judgment against the Romans and then destroy them for their many crimes (12:33), which include causing "terror" and "oppression" over the earth, afflicting the "meek" and "peaceable," and embracing lies, pride, and insolence before the Most High (11:40-44; 12:33). This vision closes with a sort of malediction from the lion against the eagle, that is, the Romans:

> Therefore you will surely disappear, you eagle, and your terrifying wings, and your most evil little wings, and your malicious heads, and your most evil talons, and your whole worthless body, so that the whole earth, freed from your violence, may be refreshed and relieved, and may hope for the judgment and mercy of him who made it. (11:45-46)

After this, the head and wings of the eagle disappear and its body is burned (12:1-3). Although the language used of the Romans is harsh, the text does not reference any action being taking against them by the Jews. As mentioned above, the Messiah alone will judge them.

Function

Taken as a whole, *4 Ezra* functions as a strong exhortation to follow and teach the Law. Although much of its material is on other topics, these are necessary in order to help its readers put aside their questions and gain the perspective they need in order to make the Law their chief focus. This helps to explain why, even though Ezra's questions are not really answered, they are still given so much space – more than half the work. In order for them to be laid to rest, they must be thoroughly aired. By repeatedly articulating them in such a striking and cogent manner,

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[38] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 156, 160, 165-6.

the text provides a sense of catharsis.[39] By allowing them to be aired so clearly, it lends them a sense of validation, even if the answer is in a shift of focus. As Collins writes,

> When Ezra finally acquiesces in this revelation, it is not because he has been given a persuasive argument but because of pastoral necessity. Ezra realizes when he is cast in the role of comforter that we must let ourselves be persuaded (10:20). We believe because we need to believe.[40]

Indeed, the logic of apocalypticism is not an intellectual one; rather, "It appealed to the imagination, and to basic emotions of hope and fear. As Plato also knew, a myth is sometimes more persuasive than an argument."[41]

4 Ezra's extensive coverage of eschatological matters provides important perspective for the reader by 1. Assuring that justice will prevail in the end, and 2. Underscoring the importance of preparing the community for the last days and the final judgment. Although past events have been catastrophic, momentous events are still to come. The Law is the light that will guide both the community and the individuals in it into this future, which is why it is so important that it be preserved and taught.

Conclusions

4 Ezra is a text that is not afraid to give space to grief, anguish, doubts, and questions. Its first half crackles with intellectual and theological tension and its scope is broad, concerning itself with all of humanity. It takes a dark view of the power of sin in man, seeing the reality after the sin of Adam as one filled with obstacles and pitfalls on the path to righteousness, both for the individual and for Israel as a whole. Few will attain righteousness and few will be saved. The book seems to be directed at these few, those who also struggle with the questions of justice and theodicy and are weighed down by doubt and despair. One could argue that the book speaks to

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[39] Ibid., 168.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Collins, "Election in Fourth Ezra," 93.

leaders, possibly scribes, since it portrays a famed scribe and leader of Israel who struggles internally, but is able to gain the perspective needed in order to be the leader the people need: one who will preserve the Law and teach it faithfully.[42] This leader has access to secret eschatological knowledge, but it serves a purpose: it enables him to find a measure of peace in the present, knowing that God will bring the Romans and the wicked to justice. The reality with which he must make peace is a harsh one, but *4 Ezra* allows him and others like him to seek the perspective they need to serve as leaders to the righteous few until the imminent end.

2 Baruch

2 Baruch is a Jewish document that scholars agree was originally written in Hebrew in the decades after 70 CE.[43] Although it shows concern for the Jews of the Diaspora, its Palestinian provenance is supported by the fact that it reflects a perspective from the land of Israel throughout.[44]

Structure

The book mixes a variety of literary genres, including a narrative framework, dialogue between God and Baruch, prayers, public speeches, symbolic dream visions, an angelic discourse, and an epistle.[45] Although most scholars agree that *2 Baruch* should be divided into seven parts, they each propose a different division of material.[46] More recently, Henze has argued that this heptadic rubric is an imported category from *4 Ezra* and is inappropriate to *2*

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[42] M. A. Knibb, "Apocalyptic and Wisdom in 4 Ezra," *JSJ* 13 (1982): 64, 72.

[43] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 18-19, 23-24. This consensus is due to its grammatical, syntactical, and lexical Hebraisms, as well as the fact that various aspects of the text are only comprehensible when retroverted into Hebrew, as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*.

[44] Ibid., 33.

[45] Ibid., 34-35.

[46] Ibid., 37-38; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 170.

Baruch.[47] He argues that the work can best be understood as a cohesive whole apart from a

seven-part structure.[48] Like *4 Ezra,* although scholars in the nineteenth century proposed various

sources for *2 Baruch* and understood it as a composite work, later scholars argued that the

tensions within the text probably reflect the complexity of the author's personality.[49] Subsequent

scholars agree that *2 Baruch* was most likely authored by a single hand, albeit one that

incorporated a diversity of prior material.[50]

Theodicy

Along with *4 Ezra* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham, 2 Baruch* is concerned with theological

questions raised by the destruction of the temple. Although the author states that Israel's sin is to

blame for the catastrophe (1:3-5; 77:8-10), he wonders why the deeds of the righteous among

Israel did not earn it clemency:

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[47] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 8, 37.

[48] Ibid., 37-68. According to Henze's analysis of how the book functions as a unit, *2 Baruch* does not contain a "single organizing principle" that is operational throughout the entire book; instead, there are a number of narrative markers that function as "signposts" for the reader, such as the phrase "After these events" or times when Baruch feels weak and needs to rest or sleep (ibid., 40). Different geographical locations also break up the text, as do the different genres, some of which are conjunctive (the continuous dialogue) and some of which are disjunctive (Baruch's prayers, vision, and public addresses) (ibid., 40-41). Henze also notes that there are structural patterns that repeat throughout the work, such as the same order of genres appearing in several instances, and motifs that appear across multiple genres, such as grief and mourning, obeying the Law, resurrection of the dead, and the Messiah (ibid., 42). A linguistic analysis of the book also confirms its unity; studies have been conducted that show a consistent usage of divine names and eschatological vocabulary throughout the work (ibid., 43). According to Klijn's analysis, the work revolves around the three visions, each of which is accompanied by complementary material and then a letter. Regarding *2 Baruch's* message, he sees the three speeches as the "nucleus" of the work and the last letter as its climax (A. F. J. Klijn, "Recent Developments in the Study of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," *JSP* 4 [1989]: 6).

[49] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 64. On the issue of sources for *2 Baruch,* Collins points out that "The basic argument for distinguishing sources in *2 Baruch* does not rest on these matters of detail but on the alleged tension between two kinds of eschatology, one optimistic and oriented toward national restoration and the other pessimistic, looking for the end of this world and a judgment beyond. These two strands of tradition were indeed distinct in origin, but we have seen that they were woven together in the dream-visions of 4 Ezra. The issue in *2 Baruch* is whether the diverse traditions were successfully assimilated or whether the author felt obliged to contradict some of the traditions that he incorporated" (Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 171).

[50] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 60-64; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 171; Klijn, "Recent Developments," 4.

> And behold, they have been diligent and, nevertheless, you had no mercy on Zion on their account. And if there are others who did evil, Zion should have been forgiven on account of the works of those who did good works and should not have been overwhelmed because of the works of those who acted unrighteously. (14:5-7)[51]

This author thus feels a certain amount of ambivalence regarding the fairness of the punishment Israel has received. Yes, there was sin amongst them, but there was also righteousness. Why did the actions of the sinners outweigh those of the righteous? Although stated differently, this question is closely related to that in *4 Ezra,* which essentially asks why the virtue present in Israel (in comparison with other nations) was not taken into consideration.

The author also wonders what the implications are for God's covenant with Israel if he treats them so harshly:

> If you destroy your city and deliver up your country to those who hate us, how will the name of Israel be remembered again? Or how shall we speak again about your glorious deeds? Or to whom again will that which is in your Law be explained? …And where is all that which you said to Moses about us? (3:5-6, 9)

In biblical fashion, the author also points to the implications for God's reputation among the nations:

> …your haters will come to this place and pollute your sanctuary, and carry off your heritage into captivity, and rule over them whom you love. And then they will go away again to the land of their idols, and boast before them. And what have you done to your great name? (5:1)

Answers

Although the author raises tough questions, they are not given the kind of prominence that they have in *4 Ezra*, and the protagonist accepts the answers he is given much more easily than Ezra.[52] *2 Baruch* states that although the destruction is a result of the actions of lawbreakers, the punishment is temporary: "This city will be delivered up for a time, and the people will be

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[51] Although the author does mention that the priests of the temple were "found to be false stewards," he does not develop this idea, but instead focuses on the sin of the people in general as the cause of the destruction (Frederick J. Murphy, "The Temple in the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch*," *JBL* 106/4 [1987]: 681).

[52] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 171, 179.

chastened for a time" (4:1; 6:9). And although Israel is currently being punished, the nations will

not escape God's judgment:

> …for the judgment of the Most High is impartial. Therefore he did not spare his own sons first, but he afflicted them as his enemies because they sinned. Therefore, they were once punished, that they might be forgiven. But now, you nations and tribes, you are guilty, because you have trodden the earth all this time, and because you have used creation unrighteously. (13:8-11)

God will avenge Israel for what it has suffered, and all the pride and power of the nations will

pass away like "vapor" and "smoke" (82:3-9).

   The loss of Jerusalem and the Temple is mitigated by a shift in focus to the heavenly city and

temple, which are more important than their earthly counterparts:

> Do you think that this is the city of which I said: 'On the palms of my hands I have carved you'? It is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed, with me, that was already prepared from the moment I decided to create Paradise. (4:2-3)[53]

As Frederick J. Murphy writes, "In *2 Apoc. Bar.* the *absence* of the Temple causes the author to

focus on the heavenly world and to *deemphasize* the rebuilding of the Temple" (author's

emphasis).[54] He writes further, "One is left with the impression that the fall of Zion, that is the

'present time,' is simply part of the corruptible world that is passing away."[55] The author also

attempts to dissolve some of the tension based on the assumption that God has promised to

protect the earthly Jerusalem and temple. The Hebrew Bible provides plenty of evidence that

God's name and reputation are tied to the existence of the earthly Temple (e.g. Deut 12; Ezek

36:22-23, 43:7-9; Pss 48, 79), yet in the tradition of Jeremiah, *2 Baruch* relativizes many of these

traditional views about the temple. For example, in 5:1-2, when Baruch raises the implication of

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[53] Ibid., 173.

[54] Murphy, "The Temple," 676.

[55] Ibid. Murphy also notes that there is no restoration of the temple in either the passages regarding the Messiah or the world to come. He writes, "It is likely that although the author did not care to deny *explicitly* the possibility of a third Temple, it was of no ultimate significance to him. If built, its value would be as relative as was that of the First and Second Temples" (author's emphasis; ibid., 682).

Israel's defeat for God's "great name" and reputation among the nations, God answers that his name and glory "shall last unto eternity," implying that these are not dependent on the status of the earthly temple.[56]

2 Baruch also makes it clear that the destruction should be viewed as a punishment from God, not an act of the Gentiles. The attackers are only able to enter Jerusalem after the angels have removed the temple vessels and broken down the walls of the city (6-7). If the destruction was initiated by God, then the Romans are simply his instruments. Israel's enemies have not driven God out of the temple; rather, as in Ezek 1-11, God has left the temple and invited them in so as to enact his punishment: "Enter, enemies, and come, adversaries, because he who guarded the house has left it" (8:2).

As in 4 Ezra, there is a "clear movement, from the distress of the early chapters to the consolation of the visions."[57] Unlike 4 Ezra, which gives equal space to Ezra's questions and theological challenges, the vast majority of the book is devoted to the eschatological revelations given to Baruch, which tend to overshadow the grief and confusion expressed by him towards the beginning of the book.[58] Although not as dramatic as that in 4 Ezra, there is still a transformation in the character of Baruch in that he "begins the book by challenging and questioning God and ends by preaching God's will to the people."[59]

The Law

The readers of 2 Baruch are exhorted not to worry about the success of their enemies in this life, but to set their sights on what is to come:

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[56] Ibid., 677-8, 683.

[57] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 171.

[58] Ibid.

[59] Murphy, "The Temple," 681.

> Why do you look for the decline of your enemies? Prepare your souls for that which is kept for you, and make ready your souls for the reward which is preserved for you. (52:6-7)

The way the readers are exhorted to prepare their souls is by obeying the Law. *2 Baruch* overwhelmingly affirms its efficacy and eternal relevance: it is a lamp (17:4; 59:2), wisdom, life (38:2-4), instruction, and guidance (77:15-16). The patriarchs followed the Law, even though it was as yet unwritten (57:1-2), and Israel is a people of the Law, set apart (48:22-24). *2 Baruch* brings together two important yet often separate strands in ancient Jewish thought: the focus on Torah, which promises life and blessing in this life, and apocalypticism, which looks forward to redemption and blessing in the world to come.[60] In *2 Baruch*, these are integrated in that Torah observance in this world ensures life and blessing in the afterlife (51:7-11; 59:2; 84).[61] It is those who obey the Law who will participate in the consolation of Zion (44:7) and inherit "the world to come" (44:13-15).

The Law is also contrasted with the absent Temple: now that the Temple is gone, all Israel has left is "the Mighty One and the Law" (85:3). And while the Temple was "corruptible," the Law is not:

> Therefore, if we direct and dispose our hearts, we shall receive everything which we lost again by many times. For that which we lost was subjected to corruption, and that which we receive will not be corruptible." (85:4-5)

The Law is the enduring, incorruptible piece of the Jews' heritage that will ensure their reward in the afterlife, making it both precious and vitally important. Although the Temple has been taken away from the Jews, they will always have the Law. This sense of desperate clinging to the Law is reflected in the scene in which the people plead with Baruch not to leave them without anyone to teach it to them:

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[60] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 9; Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 171.

[61] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 10.

> Did the Mighty One humiliate us to such an extent that he will take you away from us quickly? And shall we truly be in darkness, and will there be no light anymore for that people who are left? For where shall we again investigate the Law, or who will distinguish between death and life for us? (46:1-3)

The Law is now the sole means of obeying God and ensuring one's place in the world to come, and Baruch exhorts the leaders of the people to continue to teach the people to obey it:

> You therefore, admonish the people as much as you can. For this is our work. For, when you instruct them, you will make them alive." (45:1-2; see also 44:1-3)

Free Will

This emphasis on obeying the Law is accompanied by an affirmation of man's free will to do so:

> Although Adam sinned first and has brought death upon all who were not in his own time, yet each of them who has been born from him has prepared for himself the coming torment. And further, each of them has chosen for himself the coming glory. (54:15-16)

Although Adam and Eve brought sin to all mankind (23:4; 48:42-3; 56:5-6), this does not erase the responsibility of each person for their decisions: "Adam is, therefore, not the cause, except only for himself, but *each of us has become our own Adam*" (emphasis mine; 54:19). Those who are destroyed deserve it: "There is nothing that will be destroyed unless it acted wickedly" (48:29) and "Those who do not love your Law are justly perishing" (54:14).[62] Although there is much that is predetermined by God on a broad scale, in *2 Baruch,* this does not affect free will as it pertains to individuals. As Henze writes,

> It is important to notice that, while in 2Bar the notion of predetermination is clearly associated with the sin of Adam, predetermination serves as a measurement of time and affects only the life span of humanity collectively, not the individual. The individual is affected by the sin of Adam, to be sure, but, as the author of 2Bar stresses repeatedly, not in any deterministic way.[63]

According to *2 Baruch,* the individual should find comfort in God's strict control over the unfolding of history while he should also be vigilant regarding his own choices and actions.

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[62] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 176.

[63] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 215.

158

This seems to match Jonathan Klawans's compatibilist category of "Partial Determinism," which also characterizes the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* as we saw in the previous chapter. In this type of compatibilism, although determinism is expressed regarding creation, God's plan for history, and his election of notable individuals and the nation of Israel, this is not applied to the choices of individuals nor their fate in the afterlife.[64]

Optimism amidst grief

The tone of *2 Baruch* is generally more optimistic than that of *4 Ezra*.[65] This is partly due to the fact that the author is not overly concerned with the fate of either the Gentiles or apostate Jews and is more sanguine about the individual's power to determine his own eternal destiny.[66] While in *2 Baruch*, the choice to follow the Law is firmly within the individual's power, in *4 Ezra*, the evil in man's heart is much more of an obstacle.[67] Ezra notes how few people are able to become righteous and laments that the vast majority of mankind will perish. In contrast, *2 Baruch* states that "others not a few have been righteous" (20:11) and points its audience to God's mercy for those who are obedient:

> Ask always and pray seriously with your whole soul that the Mighty One may accept you in mercy and that he may not reckon the multitude of your sinners, but remember the integrity of your fathers. For if he judges us not according to the multitude of his grace, woe to all us who are born. (84:10-11)[68]

This optimism relative to *4 Ezra*, however, does not overshadow the author's distress and sorrow over Israel's calamities. He laments at length the disaster that has befallen Zion, and his expressions of grief set the overall tone for the work (3:2-3; 6:2; 9:2; 10:11-19; 35; 81:2).

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[64] Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 69-70.

[65] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 180.

[66] Ibid., 179; Michel Desjardins, "Law in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra," *Studies in Religion* 14, no. 1 (1985): 27.

[67] Desjardins, "Law in 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra," 33, 36.

[68] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 179.

Eschatology

Like many other apocalypses, *2 Baruch* is concerned with eschatology and the imminent end of the world (85:10). The signs that will accompany the end, the tribulation, the resurrection, and the final judgment are all discussed at some length (25:2-4; 26-27; 28:1-2; 30; 48:31-41; 50; 70; 83). As in *4 Ezra* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham, 2 Baruch* adheres to a strict periodization of history and strongly asserts God's control over the times, ages, and epochs (27; 48:2; 81:4; 83:1, 6). The Messiah also plays an important part in the eschatological drama. In *2 Baruch*, he is the one who will conquer Rome, kill the emperor and the nations that have mistreated Israel, and usher in a time of peace and abundance wherein the remnant of Israel is protected (29; 39-40; 72-74). Although *2 Baruch* is clear that evil Rome will fall at the hands of the Messiah (39-40) and will ultimately be judged (5:3; 12:1-4), the people play no role in enacting this judgment.[69] Rather, as Murphy writes, "We find that the attention of the readers is being distracted from desire for vengeance against the Romans and directed toward the care of their own souls in view of the world to come."[70]

As in *4 Ezra*, the age presided over by the Messiah belongs to this world and precedes the final judgment and the advent of the world to come.[71] Since *2 Baruch* has such an emphasis on observing the Law in order to prepare oneself for the afterlife, it is not surprising that it dwells with some length on what awaits both the righteous and the wicked after death. Whereas the wicked only have torment to look forward to (30), the righteous can look forward with great

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[69] Frederick J. Murphy, "*2 Baruch* and the Romans," *JBL* 104/4 (1985): 667.

[70] Ibid., 666.

[71] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 175-176; Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 177.

confidence and joy to great light and a crown of glory (14:12-13; 15:7-8; 48:50). They will be transformed and their souls will be kept until the end of time (51; 76:2).

<p style="text-align:center">*Creation*</p>

The theme of creation is another commonality between *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch.* In *4 Ezra,* it is used to imply that the powerful Creator is not acting in a way consistent with his purposefulness and control over creation and history. In *2 Baruch,* the same points about God's power over creation are used in a straightforward way with no sense that things are not as they should be. This is consistent with the tendency in *2 Baruch* not to push theological tension as far as *4 Ezra* does*.* In ch. 21, God is praised as the Creator in the midst of a prayer calling for him to bring the end soon, along with the vindication of Israel that will accompany it. As in *4 Ezra,* the parallel between God's creation at the beginning and his control over the end is made: "For if an end to all things had not been prepared, their beginning would have been senseless" (21:17). As God orchestrated the beginning, he will orchestrate the end as well, which Baruch is calling upon him to do. Creation is also used to highlight the importance of Torah. 3:5-7 reads, "For if you destroy your city…to whom again will that which is in your Law be explained? Or will the universe return to its nature and the world go back to its original silence?" According to Joan Cook's analysis, "This statement succinctly captures the extent of Baruch's concern regarding the study of the Mosaic laws: ending proper Torah instruction is on a par with undoing creation."[72] This is consistent with the rest of the text, which uniformly emphasizes the fundamental importance of the Torah.

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[72] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 221.

Asceticism

There is a clear ascetic element in *2 Baruch*: Baruch routinely fasts for seven-day periods, once without bread or water (12:5; 20:5; 43:3; 47:2). We will discuss this more in our discussion of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* below.

The Romans

As in *4 Ezra,* the Romans are an important subtheme of *2 Baruch*. Whereas in *4 Ezra* the Romans are Israel's enemies who will be judged by God for their wickedness and pride, in *2 Baruch,* the author deemphasizes their agency by asserting that they were only able to enter Jerusalem and take it because God allowed it. In *2 Baruch*, the angels remove the temple treasures before the Romans enter and they are the ones who tear down the walls so that the Romans cannot boast that they themselves did it (7:1; 8:2). Although both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* leave the punishment of the Romans solely to the Messiah, the author of *2 Baruch* takes more pains to detract focus from anger at Rome. In his analysis of the attitude that *2 Baruch* reflects towards the Romans, Murphy concludes that the author is urging pacifism on his audience:

He was careful to assure his readers that those who had destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in 70 CE would be punished, but at the same time he conveyed the idea that the punishment was entirely the business of God. It should play no role in the thought or action of Israel itself. Instead of concerning itself with revenge or with the judgment of the destroyers of Zion, the people should turn their attention to the other world and concern themselves with the salvation of their souls.[73]

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[73] Murphy, "*2 Baruch* and the Romans," 663.

162

He supports this argument by the fact that Baruch's attention is consistently directed to the world to come and he is told not to worry about the judgment of Israel's enemies (19:4); indeed, if God is the one responsible for the destruction of the temple, then the Romans were simply doing God's bidding.[74] Baruch heeds this advice, for in his prayer in ch. 21, he does not ask that the destroyers be punished, but focuses instead on the passing of this corruptible world.[75] In chs. 82-83, where the judgment is discussed, it is primarily regarding the sin of individuals, who will be held responsible for their innermost thoughts (83:3). This is in contrast to *4 Ezra,* which revels in the judgment that the Messiah will mete out to wicked Rome for her crimes.

Function

As a whole, *2 Baruch* functions to shift the reader's focus off the destroyed Temple and onto the continuing relevance of the Law, both for this world and the world to come. As we have seen, it seeks to delocalize revelation so that it is not dependent on any particular office or place.[76] Its (relative) optimism regarding the ability of individuals to choose righteousness serves the author's goal of impressing upon the audience both the possibility and urgency of adhering to the Law. As Collins writes,

> The primary purpose of the work is not to engage in polemics but to lay a sure foundation for trust in God and obedience to the law…The apocalypse works primarily by positive thinking and by repeated assertions of the efficacy of the law. It gives little scope to the expression of fears and doubts. For this reason it lacks the emotional power of 4 Ezra, but it was surely more acceptable to the scribal leaders, and probably to most of the people.[77]

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[74] Ibid., 664.

[75] Ibid., 665.

[76] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 210-11.

[77] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 180.

Collins also stresses the importance of the correlation between the apocalyptic framework of *2 Baruch* and its message, which applies to *4 Ezra* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as well.[78] The eschatological revelations and visions received by Baruch give him insight into the heavenly reality and God's overall plan for the future, which provides perspective on the historical plight of the Jews after 70 CE – a perspective that is necessary if the Jews are to move forward as a people.[79]

Conclusions

2 Baruch is a text that grapples with the pain of the events of 70 CE, but in a way that holds out a clear program for moving forward. The loss of the earthly temple should compel the Jews to focus all the more on the heavenly, incorruptible temple and what awaits the righteous in the afterlife. In contrast to *4 Ezra's* sense of pessimism regarding the possibility of being righteous, *2 Baruch* encourages its audience that it is in their power to follow the Law and that it is crucial that they do so in order to assure their eternal fate. It emphasizes the individual's ability to choose much more than *4 Ezra,* and focuses more on consequences for the individual at the final judgment than what will befall the nations and more specifically, the Romans. While *4 Ezra* lambasts the Romans for their wickedness and enjoys the prospect of their judgment, *2 Baruch* urges its audience not to focus on them: yes, Rome will be punished, but for the Jews to focus on this as opposed to their own individual preparations for the afterlife would be a tragic mistake. Yes, the Temple is gone, but the Romans were simply instruments of God for his punishment, which was deserved. What is done is done and it is now imperative that the Jews focus all their

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[78] Ibid., 172.

[79] Ibid., 173.

energies on following the Torah, which will always be with them and is their main source of salvation.

This suggests that *2 Baruch* was crafted in order to encourage the Jewish community at large, as opposed to catering to the needs of leaders, as seems to be the case with *4 Ezra*. Despite the fact that both texts discuss eschatology at length, in *2 Baruch,* there is no talk of secret knowledge that is kept from the people. While eschatological secrets are revealed only to Ezra so that he can be the leader his people need him to be, in *2 Baruch* they are open to all in order to help the people realize where their priorities should lie: making sure their own lives are in line with what the Torah requires. If this analysis is correct, this helps explain why both theological angst and anger towards the Romans are downplayed in *2 Baruch.* Encouraging such things amongst the people would only stir up trouble and distract them from the constructive effort of reorganizing the community around the Torah-centered life. This would also explain the focus on individual reward and punishment as opposed to *4 Ezra,* which includes the nations more in its discussion of the final judgment. Both texts seem to be equally pragmatic, but with different audiences in mind: *4 Ezra* to leaders, and *2 Baruch* to the general public. This analysis supports Henze's contention that *2 Baruch* is not an inferior imitation of *4 Ezra*;[80] rather, they reflect the shaping of similar materials for different purposes. While *4 Ezra* strikes modern intellectuals as more probing and honest, neither text was composed as a purely intellectual exercise and that is not the standard against which they should be measured. Both contain a message for a specific audience that was felt to be urgently needed by the authors.

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[80] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 8-9.

The Apocalypse of Abraham

Structure

Let us now turn to the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* Building on the analysis in our last chapter, we may begin by discussing its structure without repeating the same material regarding date, provenance, original language, etc. We have already discussed the connections between the first eight chapters, which tell the story of Abraham and Terah, and the rest of the work. Although the first section contains traditional material, in its form in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* it is told in such a way as to serve the purposes of the text as a whole. Aside from narrative, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* contains dialogues (sometimes between Abraham and God, sometimes between Abraham and the angel Yahoel), a throne-room vision, other heavenly visions, and a song. Unlike *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* it does not contain prayers, speeches, or epistles.

The structure of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is quite easy to follow, since the various episodes are clearly demarcated. After Abraham is saved from the fire that burns his father's house, God commands him to prepare himself to sacrifice and promises to show him "the ages" and "what will come to pass in them" (ch. 9). The angel Yahoel then appears to him, introduces himself (ch. 10), and journeys with Abraham to the place of sacrifice, which is Horeb (chs. 11-12). Once there, Azazel comes and tries to dissuade him from sacrificing and ascending to heaven (ch. 13), but Yahoel instructs Abraham how to withstand him (ch. 14). The sacrifice takes place and Abraham and Yahoel ascend to heaven, where they encounter a strange heavenly scene (chs. 15-16). Abraham then recites the song that Yahoel taught him (ch. 17), after which he has a throne-room vision similar to that in Ezekiel 1 (ch. 18). Abraham is then shown the various levels of heaven (ch. 19), after which God and Abraham begin to dialogue (ch. 20). In answer to Abraham's questions in ch. 20, chs. 21-29 contain a series of revelations interspersed with

166

dialogue between God and Abraham. The visions all come from the same picture that Abraham

sees. Each vision is preceded by the command "Look now" or "Look again," followed by "And I

looked" or "And I saw." Although it is the same picture that Abraham is looking at, each time he

is commanded to look, he sees something new. What he sees in the picture are events from the

beginning of time until the last days. At this point, Abraham finds himself back on earth, but

without having learned all that he wished to know. His dialogue with God continues, despite the

change in location, and God reveals more information about the end, the coming of the Messiah,

and the punishment of the wicked, which is where the text ends (chs. 30-31). From this

summary, one can see that the actual revelations Abraham receives only constitute the last third

of the book. He must pass through many stages and tests, some of which require angelic tutelage.

This probably reflects the mystical orientation of the author.[81]

   Gen 15 also plays an important structural role in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* As previously

mentioned, everything that happens to Abraham is set within the narrative framework of Gen 15,

albeit out of order when compared to the biblical text.[82] The story of Abraham being saved from

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[81] For more on the elements of Jewish mysticism in the *Apocalypse of the Abraham,* see G.H. Box and J. I. Landsman, *The Apocalypse of Abraham* (London: SPCK, 1918), xxix-xxx; Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys: A Study of the Motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1984), 251-53; Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 55-56; David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988), 103-13; Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 83-88; Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2005); Belkis Philonenko-Sayar and Marc Philonenko, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham: Introduction, texte slave, traduction et notes* (Semitica 31; Paris: Adrien Maisonneuve, 1981), 28-33; Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 86-87; Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, *L'Apocalypse d'Abraham en vieux slave: Édition critique du texte, introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Towarzystwo Naukowe Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego; Lublin: Société des letters et des sciences de l'Université catholique de Lublin, 1987), 76-83; Michael E. Stone "Apocalyptic Literature," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. Michael E. Stone; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 383-442; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New: Schocken Books, 1961), 52, 57-61, 72; idem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1965), 23-24; idem, *Kabbalah* (Library of Jewish Knowledge; New York: Quadrangle, 1974), 18.

[82] James H. Charlesworth defines "framework" as a "type of exegesis in which the Tanach provides the setting for a work that has a different purpose. A story in the Tanach provides the basis, or framework, for a

the fire that burned Terah and his idols is a common midrashic trope on the biblical statement that God called Abraham out of "Ur (fire) of the Chaldees" (Gen 15:7); and Abraham's sacrifice, his encounter with Azazel, his ascension to heaven, and the revelations he receives about the future are all grounded in the biblical text, which is paraphrased at key points throughout the work.

<div align="center">*Theodicy*</div>

As in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, although the answer to why the Temple was destroyed is readily given, broader questions of theodicy are raised that do not receive such straightforward answers. According to the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the Temple was destroyed because the Jews angered God with their idolatry and because of murders associated with the Temple: When Abraham sees the burning of the Temple and the captivity of the people, he cries out "Eternal One! If this is so, why have you afflicted my heart and why will it be so?" (27:6). To this, God replies,

> Listen, Abraham, all that you have seen will happen because of your seed who will provoke me, because of the idol and the murder which you saw in the picture in the temple of jealousy. (27:7)

This idol, also called the "idol of jealousy" in ch. 25, reflects the language of Ezek 8 and is interpreted by God in 25:5: "And the statue you saw is my anger, because the people who will come to me out of you will make me angry." Thus, according to the text, the idol is a metaphor for the idolatry of the people; it is unclear if the author meant to refer to specific historical events that took place in the Temple during Roman rule as well. Ch. 25 also discusses the murders in the Temple in more detail, and we will address what this might be referencing when we look more closely at the social setting for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in the next chapter.

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considerably different narrative." He names *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* as examples of this type, and I would include the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as well ("In the Crucible," 31).

The primary sin responsible for the events of 70 CE in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is idolatry, which is the overarching theme of the entire work. Thus, the text is not seeking the answer to the question of why the Temple was destroyed; rather, it asks questions that presuppose that the destruction was a deserved punishment for sin. The first of these has to do with Azazel. After God shows Abraham the picture of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden being fed grapes by the twelve-winged serpent (ch. 23), he provides an interpretation:

> This is the reason of men, this is Adam, and this is their desire on earth, this is Eve. And he who is between them is the Impiety of their pursuits for destruction, Azazel himself. (23:10-11)

While the figures of Adam and Eve are metaphorical, standing for human reason and desire, the serpent stands for a real figure, Azazel. Upon learning this, Abraham asks, "Eternal Mighty One! Why then did you adjudge to this one such power to destroy humankind by his works on earth?" (23:12). His question assumes that Azazel, the master seducer, is responsible for man's sin. God's answer makes it clear that this is not so:

> Hear, Abraham! Those who desire evil and whom I have hated as they are doing these [works], over them I gave him power, and [he is] to be loved by them. (23:13)

With this, God clarifies that Azazel is given power only over those who desire evil and act on that desire of their own volition.

Since the figure of Azazel is quite prominent in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* we will briefly describe what the text says about him. The author appears to rely heavily on the description of Azazel in *1 Enoch,* which states that he made a pact with other angels to take human wives and participated in revealing heavenly knowledge to men (*1 Enoch* 6:1-5; 9:6). Reflecting this, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* says that he "scattered about the earth the secrets of heaven" and "conspired against the Mighty One" (14:4). As a result of his choice (13:8), he was made to dwell on earth, which is now his portion (13:7-8; cf. *1 Enoch* 10:4-6). When this happened, he lost his incorruptibility and his heavenly garment, both of which were set aside for Abraham

(13:14). God has set clear limits on his activity; although he is the source of "wrath and trials on the generations of impious men," he is not permitted to tempt the righteous, for God has not given them into his hands (13:10-11). All of this is consistent with what the text says elsewhere regarding the free will of the individual. Azazel has power only over those who have already chosen evil. As for his nature, he is called "impure" (13:3), "iniquity" (13:6), and "impiety" (23:10); he is the enemy of justice (14:7), and he is the source of the "wholly-evil spirit of the lie" (13:9).

Since Azazel is not to blame for man's sin, Abraham's next question implies that it must be God who is to blame:

> Eternal Mighty One! Why did you will to do so that evil is desired in the heart of man? Since you are angry at what was willed by you, who does a bad thing according to your design. (23:14)

Here, Abraham essentially asks, "How can you be angry at man for being evil if you're the one who made him that way?" This question relates to the first tableau that he saw in the picture in ch. 21, immediately before the picture of Adam and Eve. In it, he views all of creation, including earthly flora and fauna as well as all of mankind. When Abraham asks, "What is this picture of creation?" God replies,

> This is my will for existence in design, and it was pleasing to me. And then, afterward, I gave them a command by my word and they came into being. And whatever I had determined to be had already been previously depicted and stood before me in this, as you have seen, before they were created. (22:1-2)

Thus, when Abraham refers to God's design in 23:14, he bases this on what he has just seen, that there is nothing on earth that was not already part of God's predetermined plan. If this is so, it is only logical to attribute man's sinful inclination to God.

Answers

Abraham's question "Why did you will to do so that evil is desired in the heart of man?" is the most pointed question relating to theodicy in the entire work and is reminiscent of *4 Ezra,*

170

which hints at this idea, but does not ask the question quite so directly. Whereas Abraham's question regarding the involvement of Azazel in man's sin is quickly answered, this question is not addressed at all. The answer Abraham receives is:

> Such is the near future of the nations of peoples which are set apart for you after you from your progeny, as you will see in the picture, what is destined to be with them. And I shall tell you what and how it will be in the last days." (24:1-2)

One might wonder whether perhaps some material is missing between chs. 23 and 24, since the answer appears to be a *non sequitur*. But there is no textual evidence of a lacuna; after Abraham's question, the next words are "And he said to me," followed by the quote above (24:1-2). The question and answer format thus continues unbroken between the two chapters. Furthermore, we see the same thing in *4 Ezra*. Ezra's pointed questions relating to theodicy are not directly answered. Instead, the angel redirects his focus away from unanswerable questions and gives him revelations about the end times. We see this same kind of redirection in the beginning of ch. 24. Instead of addressing the question of his responsibility for man's proclivity to evil, God's answer involves the revelation of eschatological secrets.

Free Will

Although the question of God's responsibility is never answered, the responsibility of man for his own actions is repeatedly stated, as discussed in the previous chapter. After Abraham sees the future sins being committed by his descendants in the Temple, he cries, "Eternal, Mighty One! Why did you ordain it to be so?" (26:1). Again, this implies that God bears some responsibility for these evil actions. But God's reply resists this implication:

> 'Hear, Abraham, and understand what I tell you, and answer whatever I ask you. Why did your father Terah not listen to your voice and abandon the demonic idolatry until he perished, and all his house with him?' And I said, 'Eternal Mighty One! Evidently because he did not will to listen to me, nor did I follow his deeds.' And he said to me, 'Hear, Abraham! As the will of your father is in him, as your will is in you, so also the will desired by me is inevitable in coming days...' (26:2-5).

171

Again, the answer is not straightforward, but this represents more of an answer than Abraham's previous question about God's responsibility. God responds by saying that each person is responsible for their own choices; we each have our own will within us. Although God does not address his own role regarding the existence of sin, he points Abraham's attention to what he has planned for the future. As in *2 Baruch,* God's control over the march of history is firm, but this apparently does not invalidate the free will of the individual. Free will is further referenced in ch. 31, which describes the destruction of the apostate Jews. God states that only "Those who do justice, who have chosen my will and clearly kept my commandments," will see the destruction of the wicked (31:4). And of "those who followed after the idols and after their murders," God says, "I waited until they came to me, and they did not want it" (31:6).

Idolatry

As discussed in the previous chapter, idolatry is one of the themes that unites the two sections of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* The contrast between the monotheistic Abraham and his idol-worshiping father in the first eight chapters sets up the contrast between faithful and apostate Jews that is made later in the text. This contrast is also crucial to the discussion of theodicy throughout the rest of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* since God uses it to underscore the free will that each individual has to embrace or reject idolatry. These connections show that the author intentionally uses this traditional material about Abraham as an integral part of the work.

It is worth noting that although the author could have briefly summarized the story of Abraham and his father's idols, he chooses to dwell on it at length. The first eight chapters[83] contain numerous references to Abraham pondering the folly of worshiping idols, as well as several sustained reflections on the topic (1:4; 2:7; 3:1-8; 4:3-5; 6:1-19). This is in addition to the

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[83] Ch. 7 is not included in this analysis, since it is a later interpolation.

172

stories that drive home this same point: the tale of Mar-Umath, whose head falls off and must be replaced by Terah (1:3-9); the tale of the idols smashed by the frightened donkey (2:1-9); and the tale of Bar-Eshath, the fire god who is burned by fire (5:1-17). The interweaving of these stories that mock idolatry for its irrationality with the conclusions that Abraham draws from them constitutes an intentionally crafted presentation of the folly of idolatry. The amount of material devoted to this purpose shows how important it was to the author, which is borne out throughout the rest of the text.

For the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* idolatry is the reason that the Temple was destroyed; in the picture that Abraham is shown, he sees in the Temple

the likeness of the idol of jealousy, as a likeness of a craftsman's [work] such as my father made, and its statue was of shining copper, and a man before it, and he was worshiping it. (25:1-2)

> And God himself clarifies that this is why the Temple will be destroyed:
> All that you have seen will happen because of your seed who will provoke me, because of the idol and the murder which you saw in the picture in the temple of jealousy. (27:7)

Idolatry is not only the source of the devastation that has already occurred in the author's lifetime, but it is also a future threat to the integrity of the community. In ch. 29, Abraham sees some of those on the right side worship the false Messiah:

> And those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him, and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account, And he will tempt those of your seed who have worshiped him. (29:12-13)

These apostates are mentioned again in ch. 31, which discusses their eternal fate:

> I waited until they came to me, and they did not want it. And they glorified an alien. And they joined one to whom they had not been allotted, and they abandoned the prevailing Lord. (31:5-8)

The punishment for the apostates is severe: they will "rot in the womb of the Evil One – the belly of Azazel, and they will be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue" (31:5). For this author, then, idolatry is the most grievous and dangerous sin of both the past and the future.

The flip side of this focus on idolatry is the text's focus on monotheism. After Abraham's reflections on the ludicrousness of idolatry, when God first reveals himself, it is as the only God:

> The voice of the Mighty One came down from heaven in a stream of fire, saying and calling, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And I said, 'Here am I!' And he said, 'In the wisdom of your heart you are searching for the God of gods and the Creator. I am he!'(8:1-3)

And when God speaks to Abraham the second time, he again identifies himself as the one, mighty, Creator God: "Behold, it is I! Fear not, for I am the primordial and mighty God, who initially created the two luminaries of the world. I protect you and I am your helper" (9:3-4). Henceforth throughout the text, God is consistently called "Eternal One" and "Mighty One," which underscore this point, as does the song that Abraham sings in ch. 17, which emphasizes God's uniqueness and power. And when Abraham ascends to heaven, more space and emphasis than are strictly necessary are devoted to making it clear that there is no other god there:

> And a voice came to me out of the midst of the fire, saying, 'Abraham, Abraham!'
> And I said, 'Here am I!'
> And he said, 'Look at the levels which are under the expanse on which you are brought and see that *on no single level is there any other but the one whom you have searched for* or who has loved you.'
> And while he was still speaking, and behold, the levels opened, and there are the heavens under me. And I saw on the seventh firmament upon which I stood a fire spread out and light, and dew, and a multitude of angels, and a power of the invisible glory from the Living Creatures which I had seen above. *But I saw no one else there.*
> And I looked from the altitude of my standing to the sixth expanse.
> And I saw there a multitude of incorporeal spiritual angels, carrying out the orders of the fiery angels who were on the eighth firmament, as I was standing on its suspensions.
> And behold, *neither on this expanse was there any other power of other form*, but only the spiritual angels, and they are the power which I had seen on the seventh firmament. (emphasis mine; *Apoc. Ab.* 19:1-7)

The author pointedly stresses that there is no other god in heaven, which supports the idea that one of his main concerns is to underscore the truth of monotheism and denigrate idolatry.

The Law

The word "commandments" appears twice in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The first instance occurs directly after Abraham is shown the future destruction of the Temple, at which he cries, "Eternal Mighty One! Let the evil works of impiety now pass by, but make commandments in them! (27:9). It is possible that Abraham is asking God to give the Law in order to combat the

174

sin in his descendants, but this is not clear. In the second instance, it is "those who do justice, who have chosen my will and clearly kept my commandments" who will "rejoice with joy" when "those who mocked them ruling over them in this age" are destroyed in the fire of hell (31:2-4). What these commandments are is never specified; it is simply assumed that the righteous are those who keep God's commandments and that they will fare well as a result.

The words "Law," "Torah," and "covenant" are never mentioned in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* but they form an integral part of its background. First of all, although the location of Abraham's encounter with God is never specified in Gen 15, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham is commanded to sacrifice at Horeb, that is, Mt. Sinai. When he first receives the command, he is told to sacrifice "in the place which I shall show you on a high mountain" (9:8), and in ch. 12, Yahoel leads Abraham to "the glorious [of] God's mountains – Horeb" (12:2).[84] Placing Abraham's sacrifice on Mt. Sinai creates a parallel between God's revelation to Moses and God's revelation to Abraham in Gen 15. This is echoed in a few minor parallels as well. For example, both Moses and Abraham fast from bread and water for forty days, Moses while he is on the mountain, and Abraham on his way to the mountain (Exod 34:28; *Apoc. Ab.* 12:2). And the involvement of angels in Abraham's sacrifice and ascension parallels ancient Jewish traditions that God revealed the Law to Moses with the aid of angels (12:9, 13:1; 15:1).[85] Moses and Abraham also both make a sacrifice at Mt. Sinai (Exod 24:4-6). This may not be an intentional parallel, but the fact that God first speaks to Abraham "in a stream of fire" from

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[84] This is reminiscent of Gen 22, in which Abraham is commanded to sacrifice his son Isaac "on one of the mountains that I shall show you" (Gen 22:2). The Aqedah is also called to mind when the specified animals for the sacrifice are provided for Abraham on the mountain (*Apoc. Ab.* 12:4-6).

[85] Louis Ginzberg, Henrietta Szold, and Paul Radin, *Legends of the Jews Volume 1* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 598, 600-01, 603, 605.

heaven may echo God's communication with Moses through the fire in the burning bush (*Apoc. Ab.* 8:1; Exod 3:2-4).

The fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* adds the element of Mt. Sinai to Gen 15 is significant, since it implies a sense of continuity between God's covenant with Abraham and the Mosaic covenant. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham is held up before the readers as the model they should emulate: he is a strict monotheist who eschews any form of idolatry. The addition of a reference to the Law, even a subtle one, indicates that one cannot emulate Abraham outside of the context of God's covenant with Israel and the Law. Abraham was a forerunner of Moses, receiving revelation at Mt. Sinai; the implication is that if one wishes to follow in his footsteps, it will be within the context of Torah observance.

The choice of the name Horeb instead Sinai reflects the author's utilization of Deuteronomistic traditions. This is borne out throughout the rest of the text, which contains the incorporation of Deuteronomistic language and motifs, most notably regarding the absence of anthropomorphism and its substitution with God's Name, a rational approach to cult and ritual, and its rhetoric concerning idolatry. This reflected in the fact that idolatry provokes God's anger (Deut 7:4; 32:16, 21), the identification of idolatry as the cause of punishment and exile (Deut 8:19; 28:36, 64), the seductive nature of idolatry (Deut 7:16, 25; 11:16; 12:30; 13:6, 13; 30:17), the detestable and corrupting nature of idolatry (Deut 4:16, 25; 12:31; 20:18; 29:17), and the repeated warnings to be on guard against falling into idolatry (Deut 4:23; 11:16; 12:30).[86]

Another subtle way that covenant is alluded to in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is in God's agency in revealing himself to Abraham and choosing him. Abraham's piety is, of course, an important element in the story, but it is God who initiates the original revelation in ch. 8. As

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[86] Note particularly the striking verbal parallels between Deut 29:26 and *Apoc. Ab.* 31:8. Andrei Orlov has written about the use of Deuteronomic phraseology and theology in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*; see idem, "Praxis of the Voice: The Divine Name Traditions in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,*" *JBL* 127/1 (2008): 53-70.

Abraham's story is told in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the author emphasizes repeatedly that God loved him and chose him. Thus, this focus on Abraham as God's beloved provides a frame of divine favor around God's revelation to him. The Temple may have been destroyed because of sin, but the story began with and will also end with God's favor. Thus, God's choice to make a covenant with Abraham foreshadows his later choice to make a covenant with Israel. Although this connection is not made explicitly, God's agency in revealing himself to Abraham is a subtle (and comforting) reminder of God's love and favor toward Israel.

In sum, although covenant is not the main focus, it does play a supporting role in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. The best evidence that the author is a Torah-affirming Jew is his addition of Mt. Sinai to the story of Gen 15 and the mention of commandments. Although the urgent need to preach Torah observance is not a concern that drives this author as it does the authors of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* he seems to assume that this is a given for faithful Jews. The Deuteronomistic orientation of the author provides a context for this combination of warning against idolatry and obedience to the Law, since these two themes are closely connected in the book of Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic history.

Purity and Ritual

The text also reflects the presupposition that purity and proper ritual are important. Although this is not a major focus of the author, it does appear in the background of the text; its importance seems to be a given. The first reference to purity is in ch. 6 when Abraham is pondering the rationality of monotheism:

> And I said, 'How can a statue made by my father [ever] be his helper? Or would he have subordinated his body to his soul, his soul to his spirit, then his spirit – to folly and ignorance?' And I said, 'Must one put up with evil? Let me risk my life *for purity* and I shall put forth my own clear thinking before him!' (emphasis mine; 6:2-4)

177

Up to this point, the story characterizes monotheism as rational, in contrast to the irrationality of idolatry. Suddenly to equate monotheism with purity is a bit of a *non sequitur*, which "marks" it as significant. It is not developed further and only appears in Abraham's own musings to himself; thus, it seems to be a bit of a throwaway comment that reflects the presupposition of the author: monotheism is pure, while idolatry is impure. And the comment "Must one put up with evil?" implies that idolatry is both impure *and* evil. This is borne out in the rest of the text. For example, Azazel is described as impure (or dwelling in impurity) three times in ch. 13 (vv. 3, 4, and 8), and elsewhere is described as the personification of iniquity and impiety. And throughout the text there is a clear division between the righteous and the wicked, and the monotheists and the idolaters. The implication is that idolaters are both wicked and impure. We see from this that the concept of purity for this author is rather abstract, as opposed to being grounded in concrete states of purity or impurity. To characterize idolatry as both impure and evil implies that he thinks of impurity in mainly a moral sense. It is probably to be read in a similar way as Deut 4:15-16, which portrays idolatry as bringing corruption:

> You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, *so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol*, an image of any shape…(emphasis mine)

In addition, in his description of Abraham's sacrifice, the author mentions purity, an element that is not present in Gen 15. In the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* God specifically commands Abraham to offer a "pure sacrifice" (9:5). The only hint in the following verses as to what constitutes a pure sacrifice is God's command in 9:7 for Abraham to fast from cooked food and wine for forty days, which implies that the goal of the fasting is to purify oneself. Also, while Gen 15 describes "birds of prey" attempting to feed off the carcasses of the divided animals, Azazel, who takes the place of these birds in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* is twice described as

178

an "impure bird" (13:3-4); thus, "birds of prey" in Gen 15 become the "impure bird" Azazel. All these references to purity thus stand out as "pluses" when compared to the biblical account.

Although Gen 15 says nothing about where Abraham lays the cut animal pieces, the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is careful to note its location – at Horeb. What we see in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a correction on this point according to Deuteronomistic sensibilities: first, Abraham is commanded to sacrifice in the place where God will show him, which is reminiscent of the oft-repeated phrase in Deuteronomy that the Israelites should sacrifice in "the place that God shall choose" (e.g., Deut 12:14). And when the location is specified, it is at Horeb, the name for Mt. Sinai in Deuteronomy. Thus, for this author, a "pure sacrifice" also seems to mean "a sacrifice offered at the place prescribed by God" in line with the message of Deuteronomy.

The author addresses the rather ad hoc manner of Abraham's sacrifice in Gen 15 in another respect. It should first be noted that Gen 15 never mentions the word sacrifice. God commands Abraham, "*Bring me* a heifer three years old" etc. (Gen 15:9), and the text continues, "He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other" (15:10). Although this seems to be some sort of sacrifice, the word is not used, nor is any altar mentioned. In contrast, the word "sacrifice" is used in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*'s account of the story nine times, and Abraham assumes that he needs an altar to sacrifice: "…nor do I know a place for an altar on the mountain, so how shall I make the sacrifice?" (12:4). The author of *Jubilees* also corrects this omission, and his version of the Gen 15 story reads, "And he built an altar there. And he slaughtered all of these, and he poured out their blood upon the altar. And he divided them in the middle" (*Jub.* 14:11). In the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the altar is comprised of two angels:

> And give them [the animal halves] to the two men whom I shall show you standing beside you, since *they are the altar* on the mountain, to offer sacrifice to the Eternal One…And I gave to the angels who had come to us the divided parts of the animals. (emphasis mine; 12:9; 13:1)

This rather mystical portrayal of the altar again implies that this author's conception of purity and proper ritual is not strictly focused on detailed regulations, but also the broader concepts in play. The author is trying to bring the sacrifice in Gen 15 into line with Deuteronomistic sensibilities: it takes place in the place God chooses, it is offered to the one and only true God, and it is offered on some sort of altar.

The importance of the sacrifice is also underscored by the fact that Azazel tries to dissuade Abraham from making it, warning him that he will either be consumed by its fire or that if he ascends to heaven he will be destroyed there:

> And the impure bird spoke to me and said, 'What are you doing, Abraham, on the holy heights, where no one eats or drinks, nor is there upon them food of men. But these [the animal pieces] will all be consumed by fire and they will burn you up. Leave the man who is with you and flee! Since if you ascend to the height, they will destroy you.' (13:4-5)

In Gen 15, it seems quite natural that birds of prey would be attracted to animal carcasses lying on the ground, but here, they are transformed into a spiritual test that Abraham must pass. Azazel's words imply that the sacrifice is a key element in Abraham's ascension to heaven. This is borne out by the fact that Yahoel and Abraham ascend to heaven on the wings of the pigeon and turtledove, which are part of the sacrifice.

Also, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham waits until the time of the "evening offering" for his sacrifice, while Gen 15 states, "As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram" (15:12). Thus, the author has Abraham adhere to an element of temple sacrifice long before there is a temple. This is reminiscent of *2 Baruch* 57:1-2, which states the patriarchs followed the Law, even though it was still unwritten. Lastly, in ch. 29, the text states that the righteous will live, "being sustained by the sacrifices and offerings of justice and truth in the age of justice" (29:18). It is quite possible that this reference to sacrifices and offerings is

180

metaphorical, implying that actual sacrifices of animals will be replaced by ubiquitious "justice and truth." The point remains, however, that sacrifices will be present in the idealized future, whether they are concrete or metaphorical.

We see from these examples that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* believes that purity and proper ritual are important; for him, purity is to be equated with monotheistic worship of the one true God, and his concerns about proper sacrifice are shaped by Deuteronomistic sensibilities. While these are not the focus of the text, they do help us understand the theological framework within which the author is working.

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Grief

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In the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* Abraham shows grief and distress when he sees what will befall his people and their Temple in the future:

> And they burned the temple with fire, and the carried away the holy things that were in it. And I said, 'Eternal One! The people you have received from me are brought away by the multitudes of peoples. And some they are killing and others they are holding as sojourners. And they burned the temple with fire, and they are capturing and destroying the beautiful things which are in it. Eternal One! If this is so, why have you afflicted my heart and why will it be so?' (27:3-6)

Although Abraham's distress at seeing this scene is real, it is not something that he himself lives through and there are no long laments or descriptions of the horrors of the war as we see in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch.* In his treatment of the destruction, the author focuses more on its causes (the idolatry and murder that took place in the Temple) and the judgment that the Romans will receive for their wickedness. Grief is present, but it is not given much space in the text, nor does expressing it seem to be one of the main goals of the author.

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Eschatology

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The first eschatological reference is in 22:4, in which God mentions the judgment that will come at the "end of the age"; this is echoed by a reference to the "close of the judgment in the end of the creation" in 25:6. Leading up to the revelation of eschatological knowledge, Abraham

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181

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is promised that he will be shown "how it will be" in the "last days" (24:2) and especially what will happen to his "seed" at this time (23:2; 26:6). This reflects a specific concern with how the Jews in particular will fare in the end times. Similar to Daniel, *4 Ezra,* and *2 Baruch,* the *Apocalypse of Abraham* mentions "four hosts" that God brings against Israel as a punishment for sin (27:3; 28:4). The fourth host is presumably Rome. Although in ch. 27, it sounds as though all four hosts are responsible for destroying the Temple, 28:5 discusses the fourth host alone in chronological terms:

> And in the fourth host there are one hundred years and also one hour of the age. And for one hundred years it will be in evil [circumstances] among the heathen and an hour in their mercy and agreement as among the heathen.

Abraham responds by asking, "How long a time is an hour of the age?" (29:1). God replies, but does not answer his question: "I set twelve periods for this impious age to rule over the heathens and over your seed, and what you have seen will be until the end of time" (29:2). From this verse we learn that the age in which the author sees himself as living is divided into twelve periods, although it is not clear in which of these twelve periods the one hundred years and one hour of the Roman Empire are located. It is difficult to know what the author is referencing by this one hour, in which the Jews will experience "mercy and agreement." Since Abraham asks about its length, it is possible that this is where the author places himself, in a time of relative peace after the war of 66-70 CE. It is also worth noting that the author of *4 Ezra* uses a division of twelve in his periodization of history as well (14:11-12), although he is more specific about where he sees himself within that schema.

In ch. 29, there is a vision of a false Messiah contrasted with the true Messiah, that is, according to my reading outlined in ch. 2. In 29:9, we learn that God will "set up the man from your [Abraham's] seed" in the twelfth period of the close of the age." According to my analysis,

this verse refers to the true Messiah. Although the Messiah will come in the twelfth period, it seems that before he comes, God will bring a time of plague and judgment on the nations:

> In the close of the twelfth hour, in the ceasing of the age of impiety, before the age of justice will start to grow, my judgment will come upon the heathen who have acted wickedly through the people of your seed who have been set apart for me. (29:14)

It appears that the righteous will also live through this time of plague, being "kept" by God, after which they will take part in the judgment against their destroyers, presumably the Romans:

> And then from your seed will the righteous men be left, kept by me by number, hastening in the glory of my name to the place prepared beforehand for them…And they will live, being sustained by the sacrifices and the offerings of justice and truth in the age of justice. And they will rejoice over me forever, and they will destroy those who have destroyed them, and they will rebuke those who have rebuked them by mockery, and those who spit in their faces will be rebuked by me, when they will see me joyfully rejoicing with my people and receiving those who return to me in repentance. (29:17-20)

Although it is not clear how the Messiah fits into this description, chs. 30-31 retell this same sequence of events, but with additional information regarding the plagues, the Messiah, and the punishment of the Romans and Jewish apostates. First of all, the ten plagues are named: "distress from much violence," "the fiery burning of cities," "destruction of the cattle by pestilence," "famine in their native land," "destruction in their domains through the ravage of earthquake and sword," "hail and increase of snow," "wild beasts will be their grave," alternating "famine and pestilence," and "thunder and voices, and ravaging earthquakes" (30:4-8).

In ch. 29, the plagues are immediately followed by the "age of justice." In chs. 30-31, the plagues are immediately followed by the coming of the "chosen one," who will gather God's people and bring judgment on "those who mocked them ruling over them in this age," which could only refer to the Romans:

> Then I shall sound the trumpet from the sky, and I shall send my chosen one, having in him one measure of all my power, and he will summon my people blamed among the heathen. And I shall burn with fire those who mocked them ruling over them in this age and I shall commit those who have covered me with mockery to the reproach of the coming age. Since I have destined them to be food for the fire of hell, and ceaseless soaring in the air of the underground depths, the contents of a worm's belly." (31:2-3)

Since ch. 29 and chs. 30-31 both describe the same sequence of events, when you put the two together, you get the following chronology: plagues, coming of the Messiah, gathering of the righteous, punishment of the Romans. It is reasonable to assume, then, that for the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the age of justice will be inaugurated when the Messiah comes and the Romans are judged. Although the text does not say that the Messiah will assist in the punishment of the Romans, it is also reasonable to assume that since he is the one responsible for gathering the righteous immediately prior to the judgment, he would take part as well.

God also contrasts the reward of righteous Jews with the punishment of apostate Jews:

> For those who do justice, who have chosen my will and clearly kept my commandments, will see them [the Romans in hell]. And they will rejoice with joy at the destruction of the abandoned. And those who followed after the idols and after their murders will rot in the womb of the Evil One – the belly of Azazel, and they will be burned by the fire of Azazel's tongue. (31:4-5)

This describes the joy of the righteous at witnessing the punishment of the Romans, but the only description of the reward of the righteous is in 29:18-19, which says they will rejoice over God forever and will "live, being sustained by the sacrifices and offerings of justice and truth in the age of justice." There is no distinction made in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* between the age presided over by the Messiah and the afterlife as in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*; so it is difficult to know if this description applies to a time under the Messiah's rule, or the eternity that follows the final judgment. It is possible that ch. 31 does not describe the final judgment at all, but only the judgment that will come upon the Romans and apostates when the Messiah comes. In support of this reading is the fact that the resurrection is never mentioned. Based on the many other parallels between the eschatology of the three texts under discussion*,* assuming that their authors share the same general understanding of the end times, including the resurrection, the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* only describes the end up to the age presided over by the Messiah. According to this reading, what is not discussed is the end of the "age of justice," presumably

accompanied by the death of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the afterlife. If this is the case, this author's interest in eschatology is mainly as it relates to the punishment of the Romans and apostate Jews. This would be in stark contrast with *2 Baruch,* which repeatedly mentions the rewards that followers of the Torah will reap in the afterlife after the final judgment. This would reflect an emphasis on assuring readers that the Romans will pay for their wickedness on the part of the author, which is consistent with the ending words of the book: "And of the people whom they will serve – I am the judge."

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Knowledge

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In the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* God tells Abraham, "And in this sacrifice I shall set before you the ages and make you know secrets, and you will see great things which you have not seen…" (9:5-6). These "great things" include "what will come to pass in them [the ages] on those who have done evil and [those who have done] just things among the race of men" (9:9-10). Later, God characterizes these things as "the things kept in my heart." Although God is revealing "private" knowledge to Abraham, the text says nothing about his needing to keep it secret from anyone else, nor is any distinction made between what the leadership are privy to versus the rest of the people, as in *4 Ezra.* This is consistent with the book's goal of warning its readers against the dangers of idolatry, which seems appropriate to a broader audience.

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Creation

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In conjunction with its focus on God as the all-powerful, *only* God, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* employs the theme of God as Creator, which contrasts strongly with the idols, whose "power is in vain" (4:3). When God first addresses Abraham, he introduces himself as the Creator: "In the wisdom of your heart you are searching for the God of gods and the Creator. I am he!" (8:3). And in God's second address, he uses the theme again: "Fear not, for I am the

primordial and mighty God, who initially created the two luminaries of the world" (9:3). As in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* as the Creator, God is in firm control of history from beginning to end and has a predetermined plan that he will see through until the final judgment. In chs. 21 and 22, Abraham is shown a picture of all creation and learns that God had a design for all of it before any of it was created:

> This is my will for existence in design, and it was pleasing to me. And then, afterward, I gave them a command by my word and they came into being. And whatever I had determined to be had already been previously depicted and stood before me in this, as you have seen, before they were created. (22:2)

While the other texts draw a parallel between the beginning and end in terms of God's control over both, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* draws a parallel between the wickedness of man at the beginning of history and during the author's own time. In ch. 24, Abraham looks at the picture and sees "what had been in the world before" (24:4). He sees Adam and Eve,

> the Evil Adversary and Cain, who acted lawlessly because of the Adversary, and the murdered Abel, the perdition brought and given to him through the Lawless One. (24:5)

The next four verses describe the wickedness and lawlessness of the people, although it is unclear whether this describes the time of Cain and Abel or whether it belongs to the verses immediately following, which describe the idolatry in the Temple. What Abraham sees in ch. 24 (the primeval history) and in ch. 25 (the idolatry in the Temple) are presented in conjunction; there is no textual clue that a massive jump in time has been made. When Abraham is told to look in the picture in ch. 24, he says, "I looked and *saw there* what had been in the world before" (emphasis mine; 24:4). The last four verses of ch. 24 all begin with the words "(And) I saw there": "And *I saw there* fornication…" (24:6); "And *I saw there* theft…" (24:7); "*I saw there* bare-headed men…" (24:8); "*I saw there* desire…" (24:9). 25:1 is in direct continuity with this: "*I saw there* the likeness of the idol of jealousy…" This seamless description of the primeval history and the Second Temple Period implies two things: 1. That the behavior of people in both

times is similar, and 2. That the author believes he is in the last days. The juxtaposition of Cain's

murder of Abel against the murder that takes place in the Temple creates a strong parallel

between the two times; the end is like the beginning.[87]

Asceticism

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* the element of asceticism plays a minor, yet important role in

Abraham's preparations leading up to his ascension. Of the two references in the text, the first

comes when God commands Abraham to make a sacrifice, as mentioned above. After listing the

proper animals (from Gen 15), God continues,

> And in this sacrifice I shall set before you the ages and make you know secrets, and you will see great things which you have not seen, since you loved to search for me, and I called you 'my friend.' *But for forty days abstain from every food which issues from fire, and from the drinking of wine, and from anointing [yourself] with oil.* And then you shall set out for me the sacrifice which I have commanded you, in the place which I shall show you on a high mountain. (emphasis mine; 9:6-8)

This is similar to the command that Ezra receives in *4 Ezra* 9:23-24:

> But if you will let seven days more pass – do not fast during them, however; but go into a field of flowers where no house has been built, and *eat only of the flowers of the field, and taste no meat and drink no wine, but eat only flowers*, and pray to the Most High continually – then I will come and talk with you. (emphasis mine)

Both protagonists are told to restrict their diets, whether that be omitting cooked food or meat,

and to abstain from wine. And in both passages, they are told that after they follow the

instructions for the specified amount of time, "then" they will receive revelation. There are

differences in setting and detail, but both are told to prepare themselves physically before a

supernatural encounter.

After Abraham receives this command, he meets Yahoel, who journeys with him to the place

of the sacrifice:

> And we went, the two of us alone together, forty days and nights. And I ate no bread and drank no water, because [my] food was to see the angel who was with me, and his speech with me was my drink (12:1-2).

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[87] This is similar to Matthew 23:35, which reads, "And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar" (NRSV; see also Luke 11:49-51).

The text does not clarify whether these forty days replace the forty-day restricted diet of ch. 9 or whether they are consecutive. Whether it is an eighty-day fast or a forty-day fast is not important, however; by the time he is ready to make the sacrifice, he has gone through some form of physical purification through fasting. In *2 Baruch,* Baruch fasts for several seven-day periods, once without food or water, as we see in *Apoc. Ab.* 12.

There are both similarities and dissimilarities between Abraham's fasting in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and that of Ezra and Baruch. On the one hand, they all fast in one way or another as a way of preparing themselves to receive revelation. On the other hand, while Ezra and Baruch fast *before* they are visited by an angel, Abraham fasts after hearing directly from God and while in the presence of Yahoel. In *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* the protagonists fast for seven-day periods that are interspersed between angelic visitations, while Abraham fasts once for forty (or eighty) days before visiting heaven himself. Lastly, as noted above, the text indicates that the purpose of the fasting in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is so that Abraham may offer a pure sacrifice, which is an element not present in the other texts.

There are a couple of observations that can be made about these differences. First of all, the asceticism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is part of a several-stage experience that parallels later Jewish mystical accounts of heavenly ascents. Although the heroes in all three texts fast, only Abraham does so as one stage of a longer process, which includes a sacrifice. Secondly, the fasting of Ezra and Baruch is mostly formulaic and the seven-day fasting periods help function as markers between different dialogues and visions. The forty-day fast of Abraham, on the other hand, functions to parallel the fast of Moses on Mt. Sinai. While Moses was supernaturally sustained while on the mountain, Abraham is supernaturally sustained on his way to the mountain: "And I ate no bread and drank no water, because [my] food was to see the angel who

was with me, and his speech with me was my drink" (12:2). Lastly, the asceticism in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* both mirrors contemporaneous writings, which incorporate fasting in preparation for heavenly revelation, and anticipates the later developments of Jewish mysticism by placing fasting as part of a sequence leading up to an ascent to heaven.

The Romans

Given the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is written after the Roman destruction of the Temple, it can be reasonably assumed that the destroyers of the Temple are to be identified primarily with the Romans. Reading the *Apocalypse of Abraham* along with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* only solidifies that identification, since all three seem to be responding to recent events, reflecting grief and anger to varying degrees. In addition, all three address the wickedness of the destroyers of the Temple and their eventual punishment by God, although with different emphases. While the choice of Ezra and Baruch as protagonists places the second destruction in parallel with the first, creating a tacit correspondence between the Babylonians and the Romans, the choice of Abraham, and specifically Gen 15, creates a correspondence between the Romans the Egyptians who enslaved the Israelites after Joseph.

This is grounded in the account of Abraham's trance in Gen 15:

> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him. Then the Lord said to Abram, 'Know this for certain, that your offspring shall be aliens in a land that is not theirs, and shall be slaves there, and they shall be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. (Gen 15:12-14)

In the *Apocalypse of Abraham* it is this section of Gen 15 that most directly parallels Abraham's experiences. Abraham's deep sleep amidst a "terrifying darkness" in Gen 15 parallels Abraham's ascension to heaven and the strange visions he sees there. And while in Gen 15, God reveals to Abraham the Israelites' future enslavement in Egypt, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* he reveals to him the destruction of the Temple and the murder and captivity of his descendents. Although

189

the first destruction is probably included in this, implicating the Babylonians, since the

Apocalypse of Abraham was written soon after 70 CE, it is the Romans who are primarily

indicated.

There are three elements of the revelation in Gen 15:12-14 that apply to the situation after 70

CE: 1. The oppression of Abraham's descendents, 2. God's judgment upon their oppressors, and

3. The subsequent blessing of his descendents ("afterward they shall come out with great

possessions"). We see all three reflected in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* especially in its final

chapter, which ends with a paraphrase of Gen 15:12-14. First of all, ch. 29 describes the

blessings the righteous will receive in the "age of justice": "And they will live, being sustained

by the sacrifices and the offerings of justice and truth in the age of justice. And they will rejoice

over me forever" (29:18-19). This is accompanied by the judgment of the Romans: "And those

who spit in their faces will be rebuked by me" (29:20). This is echoed again in 31:2: "And I shall

burn with fire those who mocked them *ruling over them* in this age and I shall commit those who

have covered me with mockery to the reproach of the coming age" (emphasis mine). The final

words of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are:

> Therefore, hear, Abraham, and see! Behold, your seventh generation will go with you. And they will go out
> into an alien land. And they will be enslaved and distressed for about one hour of the impious age. And of
> the people whom they will serve – I am the judge. (31:9-12)

This placement of material from Gen 15:12-14 immediately after the description of the

punishment of the Romans creates a parallel between current Roman rule and the past oppression

by the Egyptians. It also implies that in the same way that God punished the Egyptians in the

Exodus story, God will punish the Romans.

This parallel emphasizes the element of judgment on both the Egyptians and the Romans.

First of all, this is accomplished by the fact that "And of the people whom they will serve – I am

the judge" are the last words of the book. Ending the work this way highlights God's future

judgment of the Romans, since the parallel between them and the Egyptians has already been established. Secondly, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* there are ten plagues that are unleashed upon "the heathen" at the end of the "twelve hours on earth" (30:2), which recall the plagues sent upon the Egyptians. There are two plagues that overlap with the list in Exodus: "destruction of the cattle by pestilence" and hail (30:5-7). It is possible to see a connection between the plagues of water turned to blood and the death of the first born in Exodus and the four plagues in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that have to do with violence: "distress from much violence," "the fiery burning of cities," "destruction in their domains through the ravage of earthquake and sword," and "punishment by the sword and flight in distress" (30:4-8). The remaining plagues in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* have to do with famine, pestilence, more earthquakes, and thunder. From this comparison we can see that the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* emphasizes violent retribution, whether it is through war or natural phenomena. The plagues that are ignored from the Exodus story are those involving small animals and the plague of darkness. Apparently, as annoying and devastating as frogs, flies, lice, locusts, and pitch darkness can be, they are not the plagues this author envisions when he thinks of the appropriate end-time punishment for the Romans.

Of all the elements of the Exodus story that this author had to choose from, including God's power against the gods of Egypt and the protection of the Israelites, he chose to emphasize the element of judgment. This is reflected by the fact that he does not shy away from the involvement of the righteous in enacting judgment against the Romans:

> And they will rejoice over me forever, and they will destroy those who have destroyed them, and they rebuke those who have rebuked them by mockery, and those who spit in their faces will be rebuked by me… (29:19)

191

This is in contrast to what we saw in *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* where only the Messiah and God are involved in the punishment of the Romans. And in *2 Baruch,* the readers are strongly encouraged to focus not on vengeance, but on their own fate in the afterlife and Torah observance. Here, not only do the Jews assist God in his judgment against the Romans, but both they and God are full of joy in the midst of it. We see above that 29:19 begins with the righteous rejoicing over God and flows right into the enactment of judgment: "And they will rejoice over me forever, and they will destroy those who have destroyed them." As verse 19 moves into verse 20, the text also flows smoothly from God's destruction of the Romans to his own joy: "…and those who spit in their faces will be rebuked by me, when they will see me joyfully rejoicing with my people." While the righteous rejoice over God in verse 19, in verse 20 God rejoices with his people *as* he punishes the Romans. Although the judgment of the Romans is not the only thing that is being celebrated, it is still a major component, as it is sandwiched directly between the descriptions of the people's joy and God's joy. And it is not difficult to hear a note of glee in the phrase "those who spit in their faces will be rebuked by me" (29:19).

What can we conclude from the fact that the author of *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not shy away from the participation of the righteous in the destruction of the Romans? First of all, we can infer that he does not feel that anger against the Romans detracts from what he wishes his audience to do, which is to reject idolatry. For him, they must be complementary, or at least not diametrically opposed. It is worth pointing out here that the author does not promote any sort of revolt or war against the Romans to punish them. The punishment only comes at the very end of time, is initiated by the coming of the Messiah, and is enacted by God himself. The fact that the author feels comfortable including the righteous in the punishment means that he does not feel the need carefully to avoid their inclusion in its enactment. We do not see the kind of caution that

192

is in *2 Baruch*, which reflects a pacifist message. It is difficult to say exactly how this reflects the

situation of the authors; it could possibly reflect an earlier date for the *Apocalypse of Abraham,*

with a later date for *2 Baruch,* one that is closer to the eruption of the Bar Kokhba revolt. Or, it

could reflect a different geographical location within the land of Israel, with *2 Baruch* in closer

proximity to militaristic circles and thus more anxious to counter such sentiments than the

Apocalypse of Abraham. Either way, this focus on vengeance and justice for the Romans reflects

a deep sense of anger and outrage.

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Function

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First and foremost, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* functions as a sustained, multi-directional

attack on idolatry. The first eight chapters portray idolatry as both irrational and ridiculous, while

the rest of the text highlights its seriousness as a sin and the great danger it poses. Although the

text does not employ any direct exhortations, the reader cannot help absorbing its message that

idolatry is both stupid and spiritually dangerous. While the theme of idolatry is firmly in the

foreground, God's covenant with Abraham and the Mosaic covenant are present in the

background, as is a concern for purity of worship. The author seems to take it for granted that if

one has not become an apostate, then one is living within a Torah-observant context. The work

also functions to validate the reader's anger against the Romans and to assure them that they will

be punished and that the righteous will participate in that punishment – but only at the very end

of history.

On another level, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* functions to provide the reader with a vicarious

mystical experience. To get to the part of the book that contains "divine secrets," one must first

pass through various levels of narrative. The reader journeys with the seer, from his path to

monotheism, to God's initial revelation, the visitation of Yahoel, his journey to Horeb, his

encounter with Azazel, his sacrifice, his ascension, his song, his throne room vision, and his

survey of the levels of heaven. Only after all of these stages is Abraham shown what will befall

his descendents in the future. The author could have set all of Abraham's dialogue with God and

visions on earth, as in Gen 15, but he chose to have him ascend to heaven. At the same time,

although the mystical elements are present, they are not given extra emphasis; they simply serve

as a vehicle for the transmission of God's secrets to Abraham. Abraham makes the proper

preparations, he is aided by angels, he passes the test presented by Azazel, he sacrifices

correctly, and he sings the song taught him by Yahoel before his throne room vision. But once he

arrives in heaven, the focus is on what God is showing him, not the mystical trappings of his

ascent. Beyond reflecting the mystical orientation of the author, this could also function to

highlight the "specialness" of the revelations that Abraham receives. One does not simply gain

access to the "secrets" regarding the future without proper preparation, purification, and testing.

The interweaving of these many stages on Abraham's journey to heaven with the overall

narrative framework of Gen 15 is both skillfully done and quite effective. Neither element

overpowers the other. And although the author has an interest in mysticism, he does not neglect

the Law or God's covenant with Israel. Although the references to the latter are subtle, they

would not have been lost on a Jewish audience.[88] As mentioned above, there is no indication that

the text was intended for an elite few; its message of warning against idolatry is one that

indicates a wider audience than just leaders or scribes. In addition, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*

addresses certain exegetical questions that arise from Gen 15, such as why the birds were not cut

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[88] "Jews were generally well educated in the Bible, and this is attributable to the practice of attending the synagogue, where the scripture was read and expounded." E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE-63 CE* (London: SCM; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 197.

in two, how Abraham got the animals, and where the sacrifice took place.[89] This indicates that

the author has an exegetical sensibility and expects his readers to have the same. Lastly, the

narrative sections of the work are well-told and engaging. The stories about Terah's idols have a

humorous quality, and Abraham's confrontation with Azazel is quite dramatic, as are the scenes

he views when he first arrives in heaven. All of these elements suggest that the author intended

his work to appeal to a broader Jewish audience.

In support of this conclusion is the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* also functions as a

warning. The author believes that a crucial test of faith will be presented to all Jews when the

false Messiah comes, so it only makes sense that he would want his message to reach as many

people as possible. He will "tempt" and "mislead" some of the faithful into worshiping him and

they will become apostates. He feels so strongly about the imminence of this test that he has

crafted the entire work to prepare them for it. Seen from this perspective, Abraham serves as the

model the reader should emulate; not only did he come to monotheistic belief from his own

observations, but he followed instructions and was able to pass the test presented by Azazel. In

contrast, the Jews responsible for the idolatry in the Temple failed their test, which resulted in

catastrophic consequences for the whole nation. There are thus three tests that are in parallel

throughout the work: Abraham's test(s), which he passed, the test that the idolatrous Jews failed,

and the test still to come in the future when the false Messiah comes to power. Although there

are many other themes and points made along the way, this thread runs throughout the work.

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[89] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* is a good example of the fact that not all ancient Jewish exegesis was always in the form of explicitly quoted verses and their explication. As Charlesworth points out, "The reviews of history in many of the apocalypses in the Pseudepigrapha are exegetical reflections on the histories in the Tanach. To retell the drama of salvation from protological time to the eschatological age is to interpret the Tanach. This exegetical component of the apocalypses has not been perceived in the examination of the reviews of history" ("In the Crucible," 42).

Comparative Conclusions

To begin with, all three texts confirm Klawans's assertion that the extant literature from the time after the destruction reflects a consensus that the reason for the second destruction was the same as that for the first. As distressing as it was, the catastrophe had happened before in Jewish history and these authors do not question why God allowed the Temple to be destroyed; rather, they explore questions that are based on the presupposition that it was a punishment for sin. Since all three either affirm or reflect the traditional view of Law and covenant, I agree with Klawans that the events of 70 CE did not create a theological crisis that shattered the pre-existing framework of Jewish faith, at least not for these authors. But although they remained within that general framework, they were still troubled by the implications of a second destruction caused by sin.

The author of *4 Ezra* writes with great sadness and despair about the overwhelming power of sin at work in the world. As perfect as it is, the Law was unable to overcome the evil in man's heart, and the vast majority of humanity will die in sin and suffer the consequences. The solution presented is to resign oneself to this fact and labor on in the effort to be righteous and to help the few who are also on the righteous path. The fact that *4 Ezra* was written at all shows that this was a common enough reaction among certain circles for it to be addressed. For many, the grief they felt over what the Jews suffered in the war was compounded by an overwhelming sadness at how difficult it is for anyone to be righteous and please God. Even Israel, God's chosen people and the recipient of the Law, could not escape two crushing military defeats that included the destruction of the temple. How does one overcome the depression and despair this engenders, especially if one is a leader of the people? *4 Ezra* provides an answer.

The fact that *2 Baruch* strikes such a different tone with such similar material shows that not all in these circles were quite so enervated by the situation. One can imagine the author of *2 Baruch* saying to the author of *4 Ezra,* "It's not so dire as all that! As long as we have the Law, righteousness is within our grasp. And God will make everything right in the end. Let's focus on the blessings to come in the future and not the curses our people have experienced in the past." Whereas, down the street, the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is earnestly saying to his friends, "It all comes down to idolatry! Idolatry is what caused this to happen to us, which is why we must be on guard against it. Soon the false Messiah will arise and we will be tested. We must be ready to resist idolatry so that we can pass the test when it comes!"

It is striking that despite the differences between these texts in content and emphasis, the similarities are extensive. We expect *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* to be quite similar because of their shared history of development, but the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is different in many respects: its hero of choice is a patriarch, not a scribe from the time of the destruction of the First Temple; it is a retelling of a biblical story, not a new story built around a biblical figure; it has a prominent Satan figure; its main theme is idolatry; and it includes elements of mysticism. Yet all three texts agree that the destruction was a punishment for sin; they all explore the broader question of theodicy (and include Adam in their discussion); they all affirm the continued validity and relevance of the Law and God's covenant with Israel; they all focus on eschatology; they all employ the theme of creation; and they all assure their readers that the Romans will be punished for what they did to the Jews, but make it clear that this will only come at the end of history and will be initiated by God. They also contain a strict periodization of history, presuppose the importance of fasting before encountering the supernatural, and display a similar blend of collective determinism (divine election) and individual free will (Klawans's "Partial

Determinism"). This leads us to agree with Stone, who writes regarding *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* that "those who composed them were socially coherent enough to cultivate a common tradition and one that was clearly at home in the Judaism of the period following the destruction."[90] And I would extend this statement to include the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as well. Although these three documents do not reflect the views of all Jews at this time, the strong similarities amongst the differences do give us a clue as to some theological elements that Jews from different circles had in common.

What, then, can we learn about post-70 Judaism from reading these three texts as representatives of a "common tradition" during this time? To begin with, they testify to the continued relevance of Deuteronomistic theology, since they all understand the destruction within that framework. And they see the way forward for the Jewish community within this framework as well; obedience to the Law and a rejection of idolatry are both key themes in Deuteronomy. Although they have different emphases, these authors see these tenets as crucial for remaining within the covenant and preparing themselves for the world to come.

The fact that all three texts contain sustained reflection on theodicy shows that contemplation of this topic was shared by enough people for it to have a prominent place in the literature of the time. Any Jew who affirmed God's sovereignty and goodness would have struggled with the implications of the destruction of the Second Temple. The belief that a good, just God created and is in control of history was called into question by the pernicious presence of sin that led to two catastrophic destructions. This pattern of failure highlighted the pervasiveness and power of sin in the world, which brought the justice of the entire system into question: If God is the one who created man, how is he not somehow responsible for man's failure to meet his

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[90] Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 42.

requirements? Yet if God is responsible, then he is the source of sin and evil, a conclusion which all three texts reject; they all affirm that individuals are responsible for their own sin. But this is only so because God made it this way, which implies that he is still ultimately responsible, which starts the cycle of questions over again. We see here the inherent tension between a belief in God's sovereignty and the responsibility of man for his own actions. It is the affirmation of free will that removes blame from God for man's sin; however, within this system, it is God who gave man free will in the first place, which includes the possibility of choosing good or evil. The tension is thus built into the system.

In this regard, we see an acceptance by the authors of these texts that they are raising unanswerable questions. And they all agree that they would rather leave some questions unanswered than abandon the Deuteronomic framework, which testifies to its key place in the Judaism of the Second Temple period and beyond. This also reflects their pragmatic approach; they knew that if they persisted on dwelling on unanswerable questions, they would reach an impasse. This pragmatic attitude most likely played a key role in preserving the importance of the Torah in post-70 Judaism, which eventually coalesced around the Torah-centered rabbinic movement.

The blend of Torah observance and apocalyptic beliefs we observe in all three texts also played a role in maintaining the importance of Torah during this interim period. Since apocalyptic belief was so strong in the Second Temple period, the continued acceptance of its compatibility with the Law of Moses is an important stage in the eventual ascendancy of a Torah-centered Judaism apart from apocalypticism. The failed Bar Kokhba revolt most likely

had much to do with dealing a death blow to the latter.[91] But until then, this symbiosis of Law and apocalypticism helped uphold the continuing significance of the Law.

One of the main reasons that the Bar Kokhba revolt was more devastating to Jewish apocalypticism than the war of 66-70 CE is that the Roman response to the revolt was much more extreme: Jerusalem was made into a pagan city and Jews were banned both from entering it and the surrounding district except for one a day year, the 9th of Ab.[92] Jewish sources report that after the revolt started, Rabbi Gamaliel II, the Nasi, was condemned to death, and that Hadrian issued decrees forbidding circumcision, Sabbath-observance, the ordination of rabbis, and the study of the Law; Rabbi Akiba was arrested for studying the Law and was subsequently tortured to death.[93] E. Mary Smallwood recommends caution regarding the historicity of all these prohibitions and argues that they could all stem from what does appear to be a pre-war prohibition of circumcision.[94] But, she writes,

> Even when allowance is made for substantial exaggeration and distortion, a substratum of truth must underlie the tradition. The bitter and lasting hatred felt by the Jews for Hadrian personally, more virulent than their hatred for Titus, testifies to at least some degree of oppression after the revolt in the form of a change from the customary Roman policy of the protection of Judaism.[95]

The severity of the Roman response to the Bar Kokhba revolt helps to explain why apocalyptic literature was discouraged from that point on: the Jews could not afford any more Roman reprisals, and it was not in the interests of the survival of the community to encourage any sort of speculation about the imminent end of the world and divine judgment against the Romans. The

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[91] Esler, "Social Function," 115; Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 281.

[92] E. Mary Smallwood, *The Jews Under Roman Rule: From Pompey to Diocletian: a Study in Political Relations* (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 459-60.

[93] Ibid., 464-6.

[94] Ibid., 465.

[95] Ibid., 466.

disillusionment that was felt after the revolt is reflected in the new name the rabbis gave Bar Kokhba: Bar Koziba, "the son of lies." The "son of the star" was not the Messiah after all, as he claimed and the cost of following him had been heavy.[96]

That these three texts are representatives of this interim period is supported by the range of expression they display in their anger towards the Romans. These authors do not seem to have supported armed revolt, since each makes it clear that it is God who will punish the Romans at the time of his choosing. But if they were writing *after* the disastrous Bar Kokhba revolt, one would expect them to be more uniformly careful about avoiding traces of inflammatory language directed at the Romans, which we observe in *2 Baruch*, but not in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* or *4 Ezra*. The fact that we observe a range in the way that anger against the Romans is articulated in these texts implies that their authors felt the freedom to choose their level of expression, which makes the most sense in the context of the time leading up to the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132-135 CE and not after it. It should be noted that even if the authors of these works did not intend to encourage rebellion, this does not mean that they were not used for this purpose all the same; if people thought that Bar Kokhba *was* the Messiah, then by joining him they thought they *were* participating in the divinely sanctioned punishment of the Romans.[97] After Bar Kokhba, authors could not afford for their works to be misinterpreted in such a way.

In addition, all three texts show a high level of engagement with the biblical text, addressing their concerns in terms of its theology, themes, stories, and figures. This implies no weakening in the pre-70 culture of Torah study and scribalism (especially in the case of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*). We also see continuity with the Second Temple period in terms of belief in the activity of angels

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[96] Ibid., 440.

[97] Lester L. Grabbe, "4 Ezra and 2 Baruch in Social and Historical Perspective," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall* (ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 232-4.

and a Satan figure, as well as extended eschatological speculation. All three authors believed they were living near the end of history and the similarity between their understandings of eschatological chronology is quite striking: each posits a time of tribulation or plagues upon the nations, followed by the advent of a human Messiah, the judgment of the Romans, and the meting out of reward and punishment for the righteous and the wicked. This implies a general consensus during this period regarding future eschatological events, at least among certain circles.

Building on Collins' point mentioned above that *2 Baruch* is not a polemical document, when we look at the other two texts, we see that this applies to them as well; all three are overwhelmingly hortatory. In this respect, they largely reflect pastoral interests, urging a focus on Torah observance and the rejection of idolatry. As will be discussed further in the next chapter, we do not see fine distinctions being made between the authors and other Jewish groups. The righteous are spoken of in general terms, as are apostates, the Torah and idolatry. Speculating about this lack of polemics in these documents, this leads one to wonder whether the post-70 period was largely characterized by a laying aside of internecine politics and theological pettiness. Surely, many must have felt that to continue to quibble over the finer points of Torah observance had to take a back seat to encouraging and guiding the people through such a distressing time. It was a luxury they could not afford if they wanted to bring the people together without the centralizing presence of the Temple. If this is correct, it might perhaps be misguided to assume that these documents contain subtle polemical jibes against other Jewish groups, such as anti-Christian polemic in *Apoc. Ab.* 29, as has been proposed. The evidence of these three texts indicates that they were attempting to speak to a wide audience of Jews, as opposed to confirming the rightness of one sect over against other groups. The takeaway from this is that if

we are dealing with a text between the revolts, we should be careful not to read polemics into it that are not directly indicated by the text. It is at least worthwhile to stop and ask ourselves if we are bringing any prior assumptions about the polemical nature of Jewish texts, especially when studying those from the post-70 era.

And what insight can we gain about the *Apocalypse of Abraham* from the scholarly work already done on *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*? First of all, the conclusions that scholars have made regarding the single authorship of these latter two texts is instructive. Although earlier scholars postulated a variety of sources for both texts, a consensus has been reached that they were written by single authors who incorporated a variety of materials for their own purposes. This fits the evidence of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* well, since we see that preexisting material in chs. 1-8 is closely connected to the rest of the text. This speaks against the idea that chs. 1-8 were authored separately and were tacked onto chs. 9-31. In this case, the scholarly work done on *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* provides a context for understanding the same phenomenon that we see in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

Similarly, Henze's articulation of the blend of collective determinism and individual free will in *2 Baruch* (and the same could be said of *4 Ezra*) is quite helpful in describing what we see in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Whereas some scholars have tended to give more credence to its deterministic statements, especially those who have posited an Essene provenance for the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* seeing how the two coexist with little to no tension in other texts helps us to understand how they function in our text. The same applies to the blend of Torah observance and apocalypticism described by Henze and Collins; whereas some might say our analysis of the role of Torah and covenant in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is incompatible with its

apocalypticism, again, the context of the other two texts helps to ground and confirm our observations based on the text itself.

We also see that the content of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* can provide context for aspects of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that strike the modern reader as odd or dissonant. For example, after Abraham's most pointed question regarding theodicy in ch. 14, the answer he receives has nothing to do with his question. This could raise suspicions regarding textual tampering or excised material, but the fact that we see the same phenomenon in *4 Ezra* provides a context for this kind of dialogue, especially since the text of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not reflect any evidence of editing between the question and the answer. Seeing such similarities between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the other two texts allows us to be less skeptical of the text as we have it; at least, it should caution us not to jump too quickly to conclude that the text is fragmented or heavily edited.

In the past two chapters, I argued that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is an ancient Jewish Palestinian text based on internal and external evidence. I can now argue this same conclusion based on comparative evidence. The similarities between these three documents testify to the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is at home in the intellectual and theological atmosphere of post-70 ancient Judaism. All three authors were wrestling with the same questions within the same theological framework, although they each addressed them differently. But most importantly, they shared a common goal – to help guide the Jewish population forward with a focus on faithfulness to the Torah and their covenant with the God of Israel.

Chapter 4

The Social Setting of 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, and the Apocalypse of Abraham

Methodological Considerations

Investigating the possible social settings and historical events behind apocalyptic documents

is a fraught enterprise, not least because of their pseudonymous authorship and preference for

symbolic language.[1] As George W. E. Nickelsburg eloquently says, "We employ the text as a

window into the author's *world*; and, as we see through a glass darkly, we attempt to correlate

the textual material with a mass – or a minuscule – of extrinsic evidence" (author's emphasis).[2]

Historically, the focus of scholarship on apocalypticism has been on genre, form, and theology;

only recently have more scholars begun to speculate regarding the social and cultural factors that

lie behind apocalyptic literature in a methodologically self-conscious way.[3] One important

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[1] J. Edward Wright, "The Social Setting of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," *JSP* 16 (1997): 81; George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypticism," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12-17, 1979* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 641.

[2] Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 641.

[3] Ibid. For example, John. J. Collins, in his discussion of the definition of the apocalyptic genre writes, "While a complete study of a genre must consider function and social setting, neither of these factors can determine the definition. At least in the case of ancient literature our knowledge of function and setting is often extremely hypothetical and cannot provide a firm basis for generic classification" ["Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-2]. Some of the discussions regarding form have touched on the issue of *Sitz im Leben* and its application (or lack thereof) to apocalyptic texts, which have informed the more recent treatments of this topic, but discussions of function have been carefully framed in terms of *literary,* not *social* function. For an introduction to the debate about the apocalyptic genre, see: Adela Yarbro Collins, "Introduction: Early Christian Apocalypticism, Genre and Setting," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 1-11; John J. Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre: Introduction," *Semeia* 14 (1979): 1-20; Paul Hanson, *Old Testament Apocalyptic* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987); idem, "Prolegomena to the Study of Jewish Apocalyptic," in *Magnalia Dei: the Mighty Acts of God: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Memory of G. Ernest Wright* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 389-413; Lars Hartman, "Survey of the Problem of Apocalyptic Genre," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 329-43; David Hellholm, "The Problem of Apocalyptic Genre and the Apocalypse of John," *Semeia* 36 (1986): 13-64; E. P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish

consideration that has been raised is that the traditional form-critical understanding of the

relationship between form, function, and *Sitz im Leben* is not necessarily applicable to

apocalyptic texts. There are a variety of settings within which apocalyptic texts are at home.

Their inherently polyvalent nature, which is due to the difficulty in drawing clear connections

between symbolic language and social reality, enables them to be applied by different groups in

varying historical situations.[4]

    For these reasons, John J. Collins suggests that it is better to think about the social setting of

apocalyptic literature in terms of methods used in the text for particular functions. This involves

a severing of function from a specific *Sitz im Leben* and tying it instead to what Lars Hartman

and David Hellholm call the "illocution" of a text, that is, what it does "*in* saying what it does"

(authors' emphasis).[5] By this they mean that by studying the signals within the text itself, one

can identify its function(s), such as consolation or exhortation.[6] For examples of method within

apocalypses, these scholars point to the use of pseudonymity, ascension to heaven, or

eschatological revelation, all of which function to convey certain messages to the reader; for

example, in the case of eschatological revelation, it functions to provide perspective, which helps

readers view their current circumstances in a new light.[7] Applying this terminology to my

previous analysis of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* more specific examples of method from that

text would be: mockery of Terah's idols, which functions to show the stupidity of idolatry, the

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Apocalypses," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (ed. David Hellholm; Tübingen: Mohr, 1983), 447-59.

    [4] John J. Collins, "The Apocalyptic Technique: Setting and Function in the Book of Watchers," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 92, 98.

    [5] Ibid., 110.

    [6] Ibid. For a detailed analysis of additional literary functions of apocalyptic texts, see: Thomas J. Sappington, "The Factor of Function in Defining Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *JSP* 12 (1994): 83-123.

    [7] Collins, "Apocalyptic Technique," 111.

multi-directional attack on idolatry throughout the work that functions as a warning against its dangers, and the use of the figure of Abraham as an exemplar of one who is able to pass the tests of faith he encounters. Tying function to the "illocution" of the text as opposed to a concrete *Sitz im Leben* allows us to learn more about the author and his audience on a broader level, while side-stepping the near-impossible task of connecting apocalypses to specific groups or institutions. Thus, when approaching apocalyptic texts in this manner one can speak of social setting in a broad sense, such as the "mood of the age" or issues relevant at the time, but to look for further specificity, especially when none is provided, is most likely to ask the wrong question of the text.[8]

Another factor to consider is that apocalypses are not necessarily produced by apocalyptic communities, nor do apocalyptic communities necessarily produce apocalypses. As P. R. Davies writes,

> In the case of apocalyptic writings, the dominance of traditional literary-historical methods, allied to the equally traditional theological-dogmatic approach, has led to the construction of a social entity called the 'apocalyptic community.' Certainly, apocalypses have social contexts, but the existence of a literary genre does not imply a correspondingly discrete social 'genre.'[9]

In support of this point, he notes that "apocalypses themselves are no proof that such communities ever existed, any more than 'prophetic communities' or 'myth communities' or 'court-tale communities' are inferred by the respective genres."[10] For example, the Qumran and early Christian communities are often called "apocalyptic," but they did not produce many apocalyptic documents.[11] This dearth of apocalyptic production does not reflect the importance

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[8] Ibid., 94, 99.

[9] P. R. Davies, "The Social World of Apocalyptic Writings," in *The World of Ancient Israel* (ed. R. E. Clements; Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 252.

[10] Ibid., 253.

[11] John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 140-1, 206.

of apocalyptic ideas within the group, however; take, for example, the elements of apocalypticism in the Gospel of Matthew and some New Testament epistles, which are considered important enough to be included, but do not determine the tone or genre of the rest of the document.[12] Thus, the social scope of apocalypticism during this time was not limited to particular "apocalyptic communities" and not all who had an apocalyptic worldview expressed this through the writing of apocalypses; this means that those who are interested in understanding apocalypticism in the Second Temple period must look at texts from a variety of genres.[13]

A direct implication of this redefinition of the function of apocalyptic texts is that inductive analysis is the most important way to collect more data. Although several scholars have brought the insight of current sociological scholarship to bear on ancient apocalyptic documents, Nickelsburg cautions that

> primary attention must be given to the documents themselves and to their peculiar contours. The model must not become a die that shapes the ancient materials or a filter that highlights or obliterates textual data in a predetermined way…With the exception of the Scrolls, there has been very little detailed analysis of the social aspects of specific Jewish apocalyptic writings. It is with the individual writings, however, that the task must begin.[14]

Collins agrees that the work that must now be done is individual textual analysis:

> Community of ideas and spirit do not necessarily require a common *Sitz im Leben.* Rather than assuming that there is a common setting and function, and then projecting the better known examples such as Daniel and Revelation onto the genre as a whole, we need to examine the individual texts…"[15]

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[12] David C. Sim, "The Social Setting of Ancient Apocalypticism: A Question of Method," *JSP* 13 (1995): 10. On Paul, see J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1989), 135-81. For Matthew, see L. Sabourin, "Apocalyptic Traits in the Gospel of Matthew," *RSB* 3 (1983): 19-36; D. A. Hagner, "Apocalyptic Motifs in the Gospel of Matthew: Continuity and Discontinuity," *HBT* 7 (1985): 53-82; and O. L. Cope, "'To the Close of the Age': The Role of Apocalyptic Thought in the Gospel of Matthew," in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in Honour of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. J. Marcus and M. L. Soards; Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1989), 113-24.

[13] Ibid., 16.

[14] Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 648-9.

[15] Collins, "Apocalyptic Technique," 94.

It is based on such considerations that I offer my own analysis of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, not only because it deserves additional study for its own sake, but with the secondary goal of providing additional data for further discussions of the apocalyptic genre.

Apocalyptic Literature and Sectarianism

There has been the assumption in much of past scholarship that apocalyptic literature was written by groups outside of the mainstream of "normative Judaism" who felt disenfranchised, oppressed, or alienated.[16] As James H. Charlesworth notes, "Usually this understanding is evident as presupposition, never exposed and examined, that miscasts the Pseudepigrapha."[17] Matthias Henze describes it as follows: "One group is subversive, esoteric, antiestablishment, and deeply skeptical of the status quo, while the other is constructive, exoteric, and concerned with establishing and maintaining permanent structures of institutionalized religion."[18] Such a dichotomy not only implies that there is such a thing as "normative Judaism" in the Second Temple period, but that the sect, which exists on the fringes of society, projects its discontent onto those it views as the "establishment."[19]

The sectarian approach to apocalyptic literature also assumes that apocalyptic *ideas* are incompatible with mainstream or establishment groups. This dichotomy, however, has increasingly come to be viewed as suspect. As Charlesworth writes, "The Pseudepigrapha were

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[16] Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 643-645. Paul D. Hanson is a strong proponent of this view [*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975)], as are E. P. Sanders and James D. G. Dunn [Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (London: SCM, 1977), 422; Dunn, *The Partings of the Ways: Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1991), 18-36. Brooks Schramm argues strongly against Hanson's conclusions in *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

[17] James H. Charlesworth, "In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Interpretation," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 23.

[18] Matthias Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century Israel: Reading Second Baruch in Context* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2011), 5, 231.

[19] Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 643-4.

not important only in some groups, but were significant in many groups, and are essential sources for any attempt to portray early Jewish life and theology." Similarly, Lester L. Grabbe points out that "Apocalypticism does not necessarily arise in times of crisis nor is it always a product of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the powerless."[20] As an example of this, he points to modern evangelical Christians, many of whom are either middle- or upper-class and simultaneously hold a strong apocalyptic worldview.[21] Although this example does not prove the incorrectness of the correlation between disenfranchisement and apocalypticism, it does show that they do not necessarily always go hand in hand.

The assumption has also been made that apocalyptic literature is a product of particular historical crises.[22] This can indeed be true, as is the case with the book of Daniel, which was written as a response to the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, but it is not necessarily so. As Collins writes,

> It [the crisis] may be no more specific than the general inequity of society and no more extraordinary than the inevitability of death (as is the case in the *Testament of Abraham*). In fact, some of the best known and clearly dated apocalypses, such as *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* were not written in the heat of persecution but in the general depression which persisted for a quarter of a century after the fall of Jerusalem.[23]

Even if the author does feel he is responding to a distinct crisis, we must not forget the inherently subjective nature of such an opinion; it is always possible that it is more of a *perceived* crisis than a concrete threat.[24]

Another problematic aspect of the sectarian hypothesis is that it does not fit the evidence of all the texts that various scholars argue should be called apocalyptic.[25] Regarding *4 Ezra,* Bruce

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[20] Lester L. Grabbe, "The Social Setting of Early Jewish Apocalypticism," *JSP* 4 (1989): 30.

[21] Ibid., 31.

[22] Nickelsburg, "Social Aspects," 643.

[23] Collins, "Apocalyptic Techniques," 110.

[24] Ibid., 98.

Longenecker writes that it is "not at all evident" from the text itself that it is concerned to bolster the claims of a sect over against the mainstream and that to assume so is "unjustified."[26] Speaking of Ezra's dialogues with Uriel, he states that they "are animated primarily by concerns of theodicy ('Is God in control?') rather than precise social definition ('What makes "us" different from "them"?')."[27] Philip Esler similarly argues that the message of *4 Ezra* regarding the Law is not directed "to individuals, nor to a group within Israel (sectarian or otherwise) but to Israel as a whole."[28] Collins agrees, writing, "There is no reason to regard *4 Ezra* as sectarian in any sense."[29]

Scholars have reached the same conclusion about *2 Baruch,* which is not surprising given its close relationship to *4 Ezra.*[30] In his comparison between 4QMMT and *2 Baruch*, Henze shows how the latter contains no sectarian or polemical rhetoric that would indicate such a sociological reality.[31] The author of *2 Baruch* does not identify any particular authority, office, or name in this regard, such as one would expect if the work were politically motivated or sectarian.[32] *2*

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[25] The definition that was agreed upon by the Apocalypse Group of the Society of Biblical Literature's Genres Project, which published its collective work in volume 14 of *Semeia* (1979) reads as follows: "'Apocalypse' is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world" (Collins, "Towards the Morphology of a Genre," 9). This definition is not universally agreed upon, but it has provided an excellent starting point for subsequent discussions.

[26] Bruce W. Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra: A Consideration of Its Social Setting and Functions," *JSJ* 28 no. 3 (1997): 274, 282. He is joined in this opinion by Nickelsburg and Christopher Rowland (Ibid., 275-6, note 17).

[27] Ibid., 274.

[28] Philip F. Esler, "The Social Function of *4 Ezra*," *JSNT* 53 (1994): 119.

[29] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 169.

[30] Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 276.

[31] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 227, 232.

[32] Ibid., 212.

Baruch's use of the term "Israel" is equally broad, which encompasses both proselytes and Diaspora communities, as opposed to designating a small select group.[33] Furthermore, *2 Baruch* does not claim to have a monopoly on correct Torah interpretation; rather, it affirms the importance of Torah in general terms. Thus, according to Henze, it is

> plausible to assume that the absence of any polarizing language and legal positions reflects a deliberate attempt on the part of the author to produce a document that was nonpartisan, a program for post-70 Judaism that was inclusive rather than exclusive, and which he hoped would become normative for the whole Jewish community.[34]

Collins is of the same opinion, writing that the main purpose of *2 Baruch* "is not to engage in polemics but to lay a sure foundation for trust in God and obedience to the law."[35]

As mentioned in the last chapter, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does not seem to reflect a sectarian or "fringe" perspective either. The righteous are consistently portrayed as one group that is contrasted with the Gentile nations associated with Azazel. For example, in ch. 22, Abraham sees all of humanity divided into two camps, one on the right and one on the left. Those on the right are defined as "The ones I have destined to be born of you and to be called my people" (22:5) in contradistinction to those on the left, who are referred to as "heathen" (e.g., 27:1). The distinction being made here is between God's covenant people, Israel, and the rest of the nations. The first time we see a division amongst "those on the right" is in ch. 29, in which Abraham sees some of those on the right side worship the false Messiah:

> And those of your seed you saw on the right side, some shaming and striking him, and some worshiping him, many of them will be misled on his account, And he will tempt those of your seed who have worshiped him (29:12-13).

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[33] Ibid., 233.

[34] Ibid., 238.

[35] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 180.

The only thing we are told about these apostates is that they commit idolatry by worshiping the false Messiah, and the author never provides a definition of idolatry other than the traditional verbage of worshiping idols (or a man) instead of God. Thus, apostasy and idolatry are only spoken of in general terms. Furthermore, the message of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to be aimed at the general Jewish population, urging them to be on guard against temptations to idolatry from *outside* of the community, not from within. Davila states that, based on his criteria for identifying a Pseudepigraphon as Jewish, the texts usually identified as such are strongly polemical, which means it is these "that make the main contribution towards reconstructing ancient Judaism," something he views as "unfortunate."[36] Thus, *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are valuable pieces of evidence for non-polemical Jewish thought in the post-70 period.

Possible Social Settings for 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch

I stated above that asking an apocalyptic text to reveal its *Sitz im Leben* is probably the wrong type of question to ask of it and argued that the most fruitful avenue of analysis is to investigate the methods of these texts as it relates to their illocutionary function. The secondary literature on *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* contains examples of this kind of analysis, as well as some tentative identifications regarding a more specific social setting, which I include as a matter of interest, although they can only be speculative at best.

J. Edward Wright takes his cues from the text in his analysis of *2 Baruch,* writing that it is "an apocalypse shaped around a group dynamic that is evident in the text itself."[37] The group dynamic that he observes has to do with the relationship between Baruch, the scribe and leader,

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[36] James R. Davila, *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha: Jewish, Christian, or Other?* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 70.

[37] Wright, "Social Setting," 86.

and the people who look to him for teaching and guidance. For example, in the scene in which Baruch's followers plead with him not to leave them, the language they use is indeed indicative of both a strong attachment and dependence on Baruch:

> Where are you going from us, Baruch, and do you leave us as a father who leaves his children as orphans and goes away from them? …And now, if you abandon us too, it would have been better for all of us that we shall die first, and that then you should abandon us (32:8-9?).

Wright believes that this reflects how the author views himself: as a "divinely-inspired interpreter of Scripture whose teachings are the source of eternal life and that the author's followers accepted this and viewed him as their direct link to God."[38] This is reflected in 46:2-3 as well: "And shall we truly be in darkness, and will there be no light anymore for that people who are left? For where shall we again investigate the Law, or who will distinguish between death and life for us?" He also writes a "letter of doctrine" to the Jews in the Diaspora; in this role as teacher he is called a "shepherd of Israel," a "lamp," and a "fountain" (77:11-16).[39]

In 44:1-3, Baruch arranges that his teachings will be passed on to those who come after him and exhorts the other leaders of the people to teach them the Law diligently. Wright surmises that the author saw himself as "one of these successors authorized to speak in the name of Baruch."[40] In the character of Baruch, Wright sees reflected the larger phenomenon of the "emergence of the role of the inspired interpreter" as the religious culture transitioned from one based on oral tradition to written scripture.[41]

In the previous chapter, we surmised that *2 Baruch* was written for a general audience in contrast to *4 Ezra,* which seemed to be directed more at the leaders of the people. Combining our

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[38] Ibid., 82.

[39] Ibid., 90-91.

[40] Ibid., 89.

[41] Ibid., 92.

analysis with Wright's, we see that while *2 Baruch* is directed at a general readership, it contains a message *about leadership* that the author wishes to communicate: God has appointed leaders who are authorized to teach the Torah, and the people should recognize their importance and follow them. Thus, both *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* are concerned with leaders and leadership, although with different audiences in mind. This fits what we know of the post-70 period quite well; with the Temple gone, there was a need for a restructuring of religious authority and the topic of leadership would have been considered highly relevant, especially for those wishing to emerge as the leaders of the people. As Henze writes regarding the speeches of Baruch,

The issues he [the author] has Baruch address publicly – most prominently the lessons learned from the recent devastation, questions regarding the continuity of the religious leadership, the selection of new community leaders, and the central role of the Torah in the lives of the Jews – are all questions that would have been immediately relevant for the post-70 community.[42]

In A. F. J. Klijn's study of the text of *2 Baruch,* he focuses on the aspects of the text that reflect a concern for the Diaspora community from the perspective of Jews in Palestine and possibly Jerusalem in particular.[43] He notes that "When the author speaks about the consequences of the fall of Jerusalem he does not mention the Temple. In this connection he always refers to the captivity of the people."[44] It is the city that "will be delivered up" (4:1; 21:21) and the people who are carried away into captivity (5:1; 6:2; 8:4-5; 10:16; 80:4; 85:3). After noting that the letter Baruch writes to the people in Babylon shows a "remarkable lack of interest in the Temple," Klijn concludes, "It appears that the destruction and depopulation of

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[42] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 207.

[43] A. F. J. Klijn, "Recent Developments in the Study of the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch," *JSP* 4 (1989): 9-10.

[44] Ibid., 9.

Zion, especially for the people in exile, is the main cause of concern."[45] According to his final

analysis,

> The situation seems to be clear. A small group of Jews, still living in Jerusalem which is devastated and obviously mainly depopulated, feels itself responsible for the other Jews in exile…The fall of Jerusalem and the devastation of the Temple is not the ultimate problem for our author. These crises created a situation in which Jews in exile lost their religious center. The danger exists that they will be absorbed by the gentiles. Living according to the Law and apocalyptic expectations may help to overcome this situation.[46]

Combining Klijn's analysis with Wright's, we get a picture of an author who understands that the

challenges facing the Palestinian Jewish community are not that different from the challenges of

the Diaspora community. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Diaspora support of the Temple were no

longer possible. Although Jewish life in the Diaspora was not as disrupted as in Palestine, the

loss of Jerusalem as its practical center still required a substantial reorientation. With that tie cut,

what would be the glue that held the worldwide Jewish community together? *2 Baruch* urges

them to focus on Torah under the aegis of their teachers. This is consonant with the author's

deemphasis of the Temple throughout the work; for him, with the Temple gone, the focus must

be the people. Although *2 Baruch* did not experience wide circulation after its composition,

Klijn's analysis helps us to realize that its author most likely wrote it with that purpose in mind.

In the case of *4 Ezra,* Longenecker focuses on the element of scribalism in the text. He takes

his lead from Grabbe and Davies, who argue that apocalyptic writing was most likely done by

"the scribes of the people – the intellectual and religious elite."[47] According to this view, "the

apocalyptic enterprise may have been a kind of 'inner-scribal game' which, in interpreting the

signs of the times, became an important pedagogical tool in the instruction of the people."[48] This

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[45] Ibid, 10.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Davies, "Social World," 265.

[48] Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 275.

view is congruent with what we have seen with the three texts under discussion, which is that they all reflect pragmatic, pastoral concerns.[49] Longenecker suggests that if we place *4 Ezra*, as Rowland says, "not far removed from the group which gained hegemony in Judaism after the fall of the second temple,"[50] it is possible that it was written by sages associated with the post-70 C.E. collection of Jewish leaders at Yavneh, which most likely included many scribes.[51] More specifically, based on the distinction between esoteric-exoteric and private-public in the work, he posits that its most likely audience is a "restricted group…That restricted audience would presumably consist of members of the Yavnean leadership, specifically and exclusively."[52] As further evidence of the likelihood of this scenario, he cites the various parallels between *4 Ezra* and rabbinic materials, which we will address below.[53]

Although I agree with Longenecker that the prominence of scribal figures and activities in *4 Ezra* (and *2 Baruch*) does suggest a provenance amongst scribal circles, there is no way of knowing how many such circles existed throughout Palestine apart from those at Yavneh, which makes his conclusion speculative at best. In line with the methodological considerations discussed above, however, when we pull back the level of specificity, we are able to reach conclusions that are less speculative and more instructive about post-70 Palestine in general. For example, from the strong scribal features present in the text we conclude that the author of *4 Ezra* highly values the role of scribes and sees them as potential leaders that can play a key role

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[49] George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah: A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 287.

[50] Christopher Rowland, "Apocalyptic Literature," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 176.

[51] Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 277, 279-80.

[52] Ibid., 284.

[53] Ibid., 278.

in Jewish life in the absence of the Temple. This speaks to the destabilization of existing power

structures within Judaism after the destruction of the Temple and to the perceived need by some

scribes not only to make their case to fellow Jews, but to help fellow scribes in this quest for

leadership as well. Although we do not know how much scribes were looked up to as leaders at

this time, especially vis-à-vis former priests, *4 Ezra* does tell us that some scribes felt that the

case for scribes as leaders and teachers of the people needed to be promoted and strengthened.

This kind of analysis thus looks at the method of the text (the use of a scribe as protagonist) in

conjunction with its function (to promote the status of scribes as legitimate leaders of the

people). This in turn tells us about the larger social conversation going on at the time about

religious authority and speaks to the power vacuum that existed while Judaism was restructuring

itself after the destruction of the Temple.

These are thus the kinds of conclusions one can reasonably draw from an apocalyptic text

written during a time about which we know little. Since it is difficult to identify any specific *Sitz*

im Leben for these documents, examining their illocutionary functions is a productive way of

learning something about the individual authors who wrote each text and how they wished to

contribute to the restructuring of Jewish life post-70 CE.

Compatibility between the proto-rabbinic movement and apocalypticism between 70 and 135 CE

4 Ezra and *2 Baruch* (and, as we will see, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*) contain both

apocalyptic material and material that is similar to later rabbinic literature, which implies that

apocalypticism and the early rabbinic movement may not have been as polarized as some have

previously thought, at least between 70 and 135 CE.[54] It should be noted here that the use of

rabbinic texts as sources for traditions dating back to the Second Temple Period is inherently

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[54] Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 281-3; Esler, "Social Function," 115.

speculative. This in turn means that any connections I draw between rabbinic traditions and these much earlier Jewish texts are equally speculative. Given the sources available to us, we can speak only of possibilities. Thus, I am not claiming that medieval texts provide direct information for Second Temple Judaism; rather, given that many of them contain traditions that are much older, I can only raise the possibility that such ideas had their genesis in the Second Temple period.

Although some scholars, including Louis Ginzberg and Jacob Neusner, maintain that apocalyptic and rabbinic interests were utterly incompatible,[55] Longenecker argues that such a polarization is based on the "unjustified assumption that a literary text or corpus presupposes a distinct community, school or movement, so that rabbinic literature is thought to emerge from a different social matrix than apocalyptic literature."[56] Against this assumption of mutual exclusivity, Rowland points to traces of apocalypticism within early rabbinic traditions. For example, there is the Shemoneh Esreh, a liturgical piece that is attributed in the Talmud to "Rabban Gamaliel in Yavneh" and includes the wish to see the temple and the Davidic kingship restored, along with other "items of political sensitivity," such as the advent of a redeemer, liberation, and the destruction of Israel's enemies.[57] In the Babylonian Talmud (b. Berakoth 28b), Yoḥanan ben Zakkai is said to expect the Messiah to appear; similarly, in the Jerusalem Talmud (j. Taʿanith 68d) R. Akiba is said to have supported Bar Kokhba, calling him the "king-

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[55] Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 280-1.

[56] Ibid., 282.

[57] Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 32, 36.

messiah."[58] Thus, Rowland concludes, "Not only did the rabbis hold fast to the eschatological beliefs of Judaism, but in most respects it would appear that the character of those beliefs differed little from those of the apocalypticists."[59]

Steven Fraade has also commented on elements of apocalypticism in rabbinic literature, discussing how Gen 25:26 receives an eschatological interpretation in both *4 Ezra* and Sifre Deuteronomy: the verse, which describes how Jacob was born holding onto Esau's heel, is interpreted in both texts as referring to the punishment of Rome (Esau), which will be followed by the redemption of Israel (Jacob).[60] Fraade writes, "We find in these two passages an identical understanding of Gen 25:26, *alluded* to in the apocalypse and *explicitly cited…*in the midrash, but very differently framed" (author's emphasis).[61] Regarding the presence of such elements in rabbinic literature, he writes, "While early rabbinic literature does not exhibit the same immediacy of eschatological expectations as do *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* it would be a mistake to deny the importance [of] such expectations, even if deferred."[62] These are just a few examples, but they testify to the fact that despite the suppression of apocalyptic speculation in the rabbinic tradition, traces do remain that point to an earlier time in the history of the rabbis when this was not necessarily the case.

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[58] Ibid. Keep in mind, however, the caution regarding Akiba's involvement with Bar Kokhba in the article by G. S. Aleksandrov, "The Role of 'Aqiba in the Bar Kokhba Rebellion" in *Eliezer ben Hyrcanus* (ed. Jacob Neusner; Leiden: Brill, 1973), 2.422-36.

[59] Rowland, *Open Heaven,* 36.

[60] Steven Fraade, "*4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* with the (Dis-) Advantage of Rabbinic Hindsight," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall* (ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 376-377.

[61] Ibid., 377.

[62] Ibid., 376.

Regarding rabbinic content in apocalypses, we see similarities between later rabbinic teaching and *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* the most striking of which are the great importance placed on the Law and the prominence of scribes as leaders and teachers of the people. Furthermore, *4 Ezra* contains extended discussion of the "evil inclination," which is reminiscent of the rabbinic *yetzer ha-ra'* (*4 Ezra* 3:20-27; 4:26-32; 7:45-48, 116-120). In Collins' analysis, although this parallel is not exact (e.g. *4 Ezra*'s deep pessimism regarding the ability of man to be righteous contrasts with more optimistic rabbinic views), he concludes, "This is not to deny that 4 Ezra falls within the spectrum of Jewish opinion at the end of the first century C.E. Parallels can be found for such pessimism, and the Judaism of Yavneh was remarkably tolerant of diversity."[63]

There are most likely additional parallels between rabbinic traditions and *4 Ezra,* but since my main focus is the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* I have limited my inductive analysis to the latter. I will mention one additional parallel, however: the motif of the sage needing supernatural assistance to remember the Torah. In *4 Ezra,* an angel gives Ezra a cup to drink, which enables him to dictate the twenty-four books of the Torah in order to preserve them (14:40). We see other variations on this theme in rabbinic materials regarding Moses. *Midrash Shemot Rabba* contains the following tradition:

> Although Moses now devoted both night and day to the study of the Torah, he still learned nothing, for hardly had he learned something from God when he forgot it again. Moses thereupon said to God: 'O Lord of the world! Forty days have I devoted to studying the Torah, without having profited anything by it.' God therefore bestowed the Torah upon Moses, and now he could descend to Israel, for now he remembered all that he had learned. (ShR 41.6)[64]

Similarly, *Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati* and Ma'ayan ha-Hokmah contain the following tradition:

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[63] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 169.

[64] Louis Ginzberg and Henrietta Szold, *The Legends of the Jews 1* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publ. Soc. of America, 1968), 617; *Jubilees* contains a much earlier variant on this theme. In *Jub.* 32:25, Jacob has trouble remembering what an angel communicates to him from the heavenly tablets.

Moses now stayed forty days in heaven to learn the Torah from God. But when he started to descend and beheld the hosts of the angels of terror, angels of trembling, angels of quaking, and angels of horror, then through his fear he forgot all he had learned. For this reason God called the angel Yefefiyah, the prince of the Torah, who handed over to Moses the Torah, 'ordered in all things and sure.'[65]

Fraade also discusses this theme in rabbinic literature as it directly relates to the figure of Ezra, writing that

In early rabbinic texts, the idea of the Torah becoming unavailable is expressed less in terms of its physical damage or removal, than in terms of a fear of its being forgotten, perhaps being reflective of a more general anxiety about memorization and forgetfulness in a predominantly oral system of reception, storage, and transmission.[66]

The traditions in question that mention Ezra in connection with this motif read,

Were it not for those who arose and established the Torah, would it not have been forgotten from among Israel? Had not Shaphan in his time, Ezra in his time, and R. Akiba in his time stood up, would it not have been forgotten?

For in ancient times when the Torah was forgotten from Israel, Ezra came up from Babylon and established it. When it was again forgotten, Hillel the Babylonian came up and established it. When it was again forgotten, R. Ḥiyya and his sons came up and established it.[67]

Aside from the common motif of anxiety about forgetting the Torah, we see here how Ezra plays a role in its transmission in both *4 Ezra* and rabbinic texts. There is no way to know exactly how this motif traveled through various circles in antiquity, but its presence, along with an emphasis on the importance of the Law in *4 Ezra*, suggests a certain proximity between apocalyptic and proto-rabbinic ideas during this time that was later lost.

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[65] *Ma'ayan Hokmah* 60-61 and *Pesiq Rab.* 20, 98a, 25, 128a, in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 615. *Ma'ayan Hokmah* is a Jewish mystical text that was first printed in 1601 in Venice [Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 27. *Pesiqta Rabbati* is a composite text with a lengthy process of development; Some traditions may date back to the third or fourth century, but redaction continued to the sixth or seventh centuries, if not later (Strack and Stemberger, 299-302). It should be noted that Ginzberg brings together many different texts and traditions from varying locales and time periods. Although his synthesis of related traditions is useful, I acknowledge that it obscures the complicated textual histories of the sources he uses.

[66] Fraade, "Rabbinic Hindsight," 368.

[67] *B. Sukkah* 20a, in Fraade, "Rabbinic Hindsight," 368. For additional texts on this theme of something being forgotten and restored, see: *b. Shabb.* 104a; *b. Yoma* 80a; *b. Sukkah* 44a; *b. Meg.* 3a, 18a.

Regarding *2 Baruch*, Collins writes, "Even more obviously than *4 Ezra*, *2 Baruch* is related to the rabbinic Judaism of the day."[68] He bases this statement on a few factors beyond the prominence of the Law and the importance of scribes: first of all, he sees a clear analogy between Baruch and Jeremiah leaving Jerusalem before it fell (*2 Bar* 6:1; 8:3-4; 9:1-2) and Yoḥanan ben Zakkai's escape during the Roman siege.[69] Secondly, its ideas are similar to the traditions attributed to Joshua ben Ḥananiah and Akiba, especially regarding its positive stance toward converts. Lastly, the way that messianic expectation is expressed is similar: although it exists, speculation is not encouraged.[70] Overall, although we cannot posit a concrete connection between the early rabbis at Yavneh and these apocalypses based on these parallels, as with the parallels in *4 Ezra,* they do show that their respective ideas were not necessarily mutually exclusive at the time.

On a broader level, apocalyptic and rabbinic texts overlap in that they both engage directly with Scripture. With this in mind, it seems artificial to posit a clear line of demarcation between the two, as if they could not be engaged in by the same person. As E. P. Sanders points out, apocalypticists did not necessarily spend all of their time "contemplating heavenly secrets," just as proto-rabbinic hermeneutic activity did include certain elements of apocalypticism and eschatology, as we saw above.[71] And as Charlesworth notes, "the tendency of the authors of the Pseudepigrapha was not to replace but to heighten Torah."[72]

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[68] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination,* 178.

[69] Because of this parallel, some have suggested that Yoḥanan ben Zakkai was the author of *2 Baruch* [A. B. Kolenkow, "The Structure and Meaning of Second Baruch," *JSJ* 18, no. 1 (1987): 93].

[70] Collins, *Apocalyptic Imagination*, 178.

[71] E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 B.C.E. – 66 C.E.* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 8; Longenecker, "Locating 4 Ezra," 283.

[72] Charlesworth, "In the Crucible," 40.

That these ideas freely interacted between 70 and 135 CE makes sense given the transitional nature of this time period; it lay at the close of the 400-year period in which Palestinian Jews wrote apocalypses and at the beginning of the development of what would become rabbinic Judaism. On the one hand, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* reflect direct continuity with previous literature, both the Hebrew Bible and that of the Second Temple period.[73] As Henze writes, "In the intellectual and literary history of early Judaism, then, the year 70 CE may well mark the beginning of the end of an era in the production of early Jewish writings – but not yet the end itself."[74] On the other hand, however, they also reflect how the loss of the Temple required substantial reorientation and adjustment. This time between 70 CE and the consolidation of the rabbinic movement in later centuries was a time of fluidity and tension, with much potential for creativity.[75] It is only natural that as the Jews of Palestine struggled to get their theological bearings in the face of so much disaster and upheaval that they would adapt the intellectual tools available to them as they responded to new circumstances. And that is what we see with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*: they both reflect elements of continuity and discontinuity with pre-70 Judaism and thus give us a glimpse inside the process of how Jewish leaders and intellectuals responded to the loss of the Temple.

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[73] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 13. For more detailed discussions of this continuity, see: Devorah Dimant, "*4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* in Light of Qumran Literature," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall* (ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 31-62; Gabriele Boccaccini, "The Evilness of Human Nature in *1 Enoch, Jubilees,* Paul, and *4 Ezra,*" in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction after the Fall* (ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 63-82.

[74] Henze, *Jewish Apocalypticism,* 373.

[75] Ibid., 11.

Let us now turn to the parallels between rabbinic material and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which are quite striking. We will briefly survey some of them here in order to provide further evidence that proto-rabbinic traditions were not considered incompatible with apocalypticism between the revolts, at least for the author in question. Because the first eight chapters of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* have already been discussed, we will only state here that these traditions about Abraham and his father the idol maker are the most obvious parallels with rabbinic material.

Given the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* places Abraham's sacrifice from Gen 15 at Horeb, it is not surprising that there are various parallels between its version of Abraham at Mt. Sinai and rabbinic traditions about Moses at Mt. Sinai.[76] To begin with, we find traditions that Moses ascended to heaven in order to receive the Torah instead of staying on the mountain, as the biblical text states. There are a number of parallels between this ascension of Moses and the ascension of Abraham, starting with the tradition that Moses purified himself before ascending to heaven: "Moses ascended the holy mountain, where he spent a week to rid himself of all mortal impurity, so that he might betake himself to God into heaven."[77] This is similar to Abraham's being told to fast so that he is prepared to make a "pure sacrifice," after which he will ascend to heaven (*Apoc. Ab.* 9:6-8). Before Moses ascends to heaven, he must get past antagonistic angels, such as Kemuel the porter, who speaks "harshly" to Moses and does not want to let him pass; to do so, Moses "struck him and destroyed him out of the world, whereupon he went on his

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[76] Some of these parallels have also been noted by David J. Halperin in his discussion of the connections between the heavenly ascent of biblical heroes and the fall of Lucifer in post-biblical literature ["Ascension or Invasion: Implications of the Heavenly Journey in Ancient Judaism," *Religion* 18 (1988): 46-67].

[77] ʾ*Abot R. Nat.*, both versions at the beginning; *Seder ʿOlam* 6; *b. Yoma* 4b; *y. Taʿan.* 4, 68b; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 613.

way…"[78] This is similar to the role of Azazel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* in that he tries to deter Abraham from ascending to heaven (ch. 13); although Azazel is a fallen angel, he still plays the same role as Kemuel does in the rabbinic tradition.

D. J. Halperin connects the antagonism of Azazel in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with the fact that Abraham's ascension "is a tangible representation of his exaltation, which will happen at the expense of an angelic being. That is why Abraham must make his ascent, and why Azazel wants to stop him."[79] In *Apoc. Ab.* 13:14 Yahoel tells Azazel, "The garment which in heaven was formerly yours has been set aside for him [Abraham], and the corruption which was on him has gone over to you," which supports Halperin's reading that Azazel is motivated by jealousy.[80] In this connection, Halperin also notes the rabbinic motif of angelic resistance to the secrets of heaven (including the Torah) being revealed to mankind. For example, in *Deuteronomy Rabba*, Moses boasts, "I took part in the war of the angels and received a fiery Torah…I vanquished the celestial retinue and revealed their secrets to humankind."[81]

Rabbinic sources also relate that when the angel Hadarniel tries to block Moses' way, God rebukes him, saying "You angels have been quarrelsome since the day I created you…"[82] This tradition about quarrelsome angels is reminiscent of *Apoc. Ab.* 10, where Yahoel describes one of his duties as "to reconcile the rivalries of the Living Creatures of the Cherubim against one another" (10:9). After Moses' Throne Room vision, which is quite similar to Abraham's,

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[78] *Ma'ayan Hokmah,* 58-60; *Pesiq. Rab.* 20, 96a-98a; *Yalkut Mishpatim* (end); in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 613.

[79] Halperin, "Heavenly Journey," 53.

[80] Halperin sees a similar pattern in the Book of Watchers (*1 Enoch* 12-16), in which "Enoch's act of ascending is parallel and opposite to the descent of the angels" ("Heavenly Journey," 54).

[81] *Deut. Rab.* 11:10, in Halperin, "Heavenly Journey," 50.

[82] *Ma'ayan Hokmah,* 58-60; *Pesiq. Rab.* 20, 96a-98a; *Yalkut Mishpatim* (end); in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 613.

especially in respect to the prominence of fire, God shows him "all the seven heavens."[83] The *Apocalypse of Abraham* contains an expanded version of this tradition, in which Abraham stands on the eighth heaven and surveys the contents of the seventh, sixth, and fifth heavens (*Apoc. Ab.* 19).

The figure of Satan also appears in rabbinic traditions regarding the revelation of the Torah at Mt. Sinai; his function there is slightly different from in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* but it is his presence that constitutes the parallel. Whereas in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* Azazel tries to frighten Abraham out of ascending to heaven, in rabbinic sources Satan tries to get the Torah from Moses after he receives it, which connects with the traditions regarding angelic resistance to the revelation of heavenly secrets discussed above.[84] He also plays a role in leading Israel into idolatry: Satan "with a wizard's trick conjured up for the people a vision of Moses lying stretched out dead"; directly after this, the tradition relates that Jannes and Jambres headed up the people's request to Aaron to make the Golden Calf, since the vision showed Moses to be dead.[85] This connection between Satan and idolatry directly parallels that between Azazel and idolatry in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, especially regarding his close association with the false Messiah who will lead Jews into apostasy in ch. 29.

Rabbinic sources also contain traditions that God revealed more to Abraham in Gen 15 than just the Israelites' future sojourn in Egypt and his judgment of the Egyptians. Speaking of the revelation Abraham received when God appeared to him in Gen 15, *Midrash ha-Gadol Sefer ha-Bereshit* relates, "And God continued and revealed to Abraham *the course of Israel's history and*

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[83] *Pesiq. Rab.* 20, 98b; *Pesiq. Rab Kah.* 1, 4b; *Num. Rab.* 12.8; *Song Rab.* 3.11; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 617.

[84] *B. Shab.* 89a; b. *Sanh.* 26b; *Kallah* 8, 15a; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 618.

[85] *B. Shab.* 89a; *Midr. Tanḥ. HaKadom vehaYashan* B. II, 112-113; *Tanḥ. Ki-Tissa* 19 and *Behaʻaloteka* 14; *Exod Rab.* 41.7; *Tg. Yer. Exod.* 32.1; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 620.

the history of the whole world" (emphasis mine).[86] Also striking is the fact that rabbinic sources

interpret the animals that Abraham cuts in two in terms of the four kingdoms seen in Daniel. The

identity of the four kingdoms is different from what is in Daniel, *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the

Apocalypse of Abraham: whereas the fourth kingdom in Daniel is Greece, and it is Rome in the

latter three, some rabbinic sources update the last kingdom to the Islamic empire:

> The heifer of three years indicates the dominion of Babylon, the she-goat of three years stands for the
> empire of the Greeks, the ram of three years for the Medo-Persian power, the rule of Ishmael is represented
> by the ram, and Israel is the innocent dove.[87]

Details aside, the main point here is that we have rabbinic parallels for God's revealing all of

history to Abraham as part of the sequence of events in Gen 15, along with a four-kingdom

historical schema, which is normally associated with apocalyptic periodization of history.

Expansions of Abraham's vision while in a "deep sleep" in Gen 15 also exist that include

elements often associated with apocalypticism:

> While he was preparing these sacrifices, a vision of great import was granted to Abraham. The sun sank,
> and a deep sleep fell upon him, and he beheld a smoking furnace, *Gehenna, the furnace that God prepares
> for the sinner*; and he beheld a flaming torch, *the revelation on Sinai* where all the people saw flaming
> torches; and he beheld the sacrifices to be brought by Israel; and an horror of great darkness fell upon him,
> *the dominion of the four kingdoms*. And God spake to him: 'Abraham, as long as thy children fulfil the two
> duties of studying the *Torah* and performing the service in the *Temple*, the two visitations, Gehenna and
> *alien rule*, will be spared them. But if they neglect the two duties, they will have to suffer the two
> chastisements' (emphasis mine).[88]

Abraham is then given a choice, whether his descendents will suffer the dominion of the stranger

or Gehenna and he chooses the former at God's urging. After this exchange,

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[86] *Midr. haGadol Sefer Bereshit* I, 240, very likely from a version of *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* different from
ours; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 198. *Midrash haGadol* is a collection of midrashim on the Pentateuch that
dates to the fourteenth century (Strack and Stemberger, 354).

[87] *Gen. Rab.* 44. 14-22; *Pirqe R. El.* 28; *Tg. Yer.* Gen 15.6; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 198.

[88] *Gen. Rab.* 44.21, 49.2; *Mekilta ba-Hodesh* 9, 71b; *Exod. Rab.* 51.7; *Tanḥ.* B. II, 130; *Tanḥ. Pekude* 5, 8;
Pesiq. Rab Kah. 5, 42b; *Pesiq. Rab.* 15, 67a; *Tehillim* 38, 254, and 52, 286; *Targumim Yerushalmi* Gen. 15.17;
Midr. Tannaim 84; *Zohar* III, 299; *Hadar,* 6b; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 198-9.

God made known to him the four hundred years' bondage of Israel in Egypt…And as he received the promise of their deliverance together with the announcement of the slavery of his seed, in a land not theirs, so it was made known to him that *God would judge the four kingdoms and destroy them* (emphasis mine).[89]

There are several things worth noting from this passage. First of all, it connects the vision of Gen 15 with the revelation at Mt. Sinai, just as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does. Although no explicit reason is given in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* for this connection, here we are told that it is because there are flaming torches in both stories (the Hebrew word *lappid* appears in both Gen 15:17 and Exod 20:18). This provides an explicit exegetical reason for a connection that is tacit in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Secondly, the four kingdoms are mentioned again, along with the detail that God will judge and destroy them; this extension of the judgment of the Egyptians to include other foreign powers is similar to the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which applies this judgment to the Romans.

Thirdly, the Temple is mentioned in relation to the future of Abraham's descendants, with the punishment of "alien rule" foretold if they neglect to "perform its service"; this explicit mention of the Temple in connection with Gen 15 constitutes a strong, perhaps unique parallel with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which places Abraham's vision of the future destruction of the Temple within the vision of Gen 15. Fourthly, the "smoking furnace" of Gen 15 is interpreted as Gehenna; the punishment of the wicked in the fires of hell is a topic more common to apocalyptic than rabbinic literature and parallels the descriptions of "the fire of Azazel's tongue" in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (31:5). And lastly, all of this is placed before a paraphrase of Gen 15:13-14 (the Israelites' future suffering in Egypt and God's punishment of the Egyptians), just as in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which ends the book with a paraphrase of the same verses.

This passage is thus significant in that it combines several key elements from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*: the connection between Abraham's theophany and that of Moses at Sinai, an

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[89] Ibid.

apocalyptic rubric for understanding history, the tradition that God spoke to Abraham about the Temple, and traditions about God's eventual judgment of Israel's oppressors. This rabbinic passage not only combines these elements, but it places them all within Abraham's vision from Gen 15, which makes the parallels with the *Apocalypse of Abraham* even stronger.

There are also additional rabbinic eschatological traditions regarding the Messiah and the resurrection of the dead in connection with Gen 15, more specifically, regarding the division of the pieces:

> Abraham took him these animals and divided them in the midst. Had he not done so, Israel would not have been able to resist the power of the four kingdoms. But the birds he divided not, to indicate that Israel will remain whole. And the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abraham drove them away. Thus was announced the advent of the Messiah, who will cut the heathen in pieces, but Abraham bade Messiah wait until the time appointed unto him. And as the Messianic time was made known unto Abraham, so also the time of the resurrection of the dead.[90]

Again, we see the four kingdoms mentioned in relation to Gen 15, but what is remarkable about this tradition is that the elements of the Messiah, his destruction of the Gentile nations, eschatological timing, and the resurrection of the dead are mentioned, all of which are key elements of apocalypticism in the Second Temple period. It is also worth noting that this source addresses the exegetical question of why Abraham does not cut the birds in half, just as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* does, albeit with a different explanation. This shows a common exegetical sensibility regarding what needs to be explained in the biblical text.

As mentioned in a previous chapter, *Genesis Rabba* contains a tradition that when Abraham looks at the stars in Gen 15:5, it is from above, not below. *Gen. Rab.* 44:12 reads, "R. Judah b. R. Simon in the name of R. Yoḥanan: 'He brought him above the vault of heaven. That is in line with the statement, "Look toward heaven and number the stars," and the meaning of the word

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[90] *Gen. Rab.* 44.14-22; *Pirqe R. El.* 28; *Tg. Yer.* Gen 15.6; *Midr. haGadol Sefer Bereshit* I, 240; in Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews,* 198.

'look' is only 'from above to below' (אין הבטה אלא מלמעלה למטה).[91] This same passage contains

another parallel with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, but based on a different part of Gen 15:5:

And he brought him outside [and said, 'Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able

to number them'] (Gen. 15:5):

> R. Joshua in the name of R. Levi, "Now did he bring him outside of the world, that the text should say,
> 'And he brought him outside"? But the sense is that he showed him the open spaces of heaven, in line with
> this verse: 'While as yet he had not made the earth nor the open spaces' (Prov. 8:26)."[92]

This midrash is based on the presence of the word *ḥuẓ* in both Gen 15:5 and Prov 8:26. *Ḥuẓ*

means outside, although it can also mean "field," "street," or "open space." In Gen 15:5 in

context it means "outside"; presumably Abraham leaves his tent to go outside and look up at the

stars at God's request. In Prov 8:26 it could mean "fields," if it is in synonymous parallelism

with "the earth," although it could be in contrast to the earth, that is, "the heavens," which is

clearly how R. Levi reads it. Taking this reading of *ḥuẓot* from Prov 8:26 and importing it into

Gen 15:5 results in the statement that God took Abraham up into the heavens in order to show

him the stars. This tradition provides yet another exegetical pathway to the idea that Abraham

was taken out of this world during his encounter with God in Gen 15. This speaks to a body of

exegetical traditions regarding Abraham's ascent to heaven that forms the basis for such works

as the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* which takes it for granted that such an ascent is implied by the

text.

Lastly, there is a midrash on Gen 15 elsewhere in *Genesis Rabba* that discusses whether God

showed Abraham things pertaining to this world or to the world-to-come:

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[91] *Gen. Rab.* 44.12, in Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis: a New American Translation* (Atlanta, Ga: Scholars Press, 1985), 2:133.

[92] Ibid.

> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, [saying, 'To your descendants I give this land'] (Gen. 15:18):
> R. Yudan: Rabban Yoḥanan ben Zakkai and R. Aqiba:
> One of them said, 'This world he revealed to him, the world to come he did not reveal to him.'
> The other said, 'This world and the world to come he revealed to him.'[93]

The significance of this quote is that both traditions assume the fact that God showed Abraham more than just the Israelites' time of slavery in Egypt; the dispute is over the exact scope of what Abraham saw. It is also noteworthy that the two sages in question lived in the first century CE, showing that this tradition was considered to be quite early.

This is not an exhaustive list of the parallels between the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and rabbinic traditions, but it is enough to show there is a certain amount of overlap between the two. These examples show that apocalyptic and exegetical traditions were not in fact always mutually exclusive. We see the motif of the four kingdoms from Daniel, the motif of Abraham ascending to heaven, and the motif that God showed him much more about the future than just the Israelites' four hundred years in Egypt, all connected with Gen 15 in rabbinic sources. Furthermore, we see such staples of Jewish apocalypticism as the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and Gehenna also connected with Gen 15 in rabbinic texts. Lastly, additions to the biblical narrative in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* are given explicit exegetical explanations in the rabbinic material. Thus, it seems quite likely that the author knew of these traditions, but that providing the exegetical connections for them did not serve his purposes in writing his apocalypse. Although this does not allow us to say with any certainty that the author himself was a part of the proto-rabbinic community, it does provide a fascinating glimpse into a time when both early rabbinic traditions and apocalyptic speculation were parts of a larger body of shared exegetical traditions.

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[93] *Gen. Rab.* 44.22, in Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah,* 143.

The Apocalypse of Abraham and Social Setting

The purpose of this section is not to provide a comprehensive inductive analysis of the social

setting of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* but to lay some methodological groundwork and discuss a

few relevant examples. To begin with, in light of the above discussion on apocalyptic literature

and sectarianism, it seems rather misguided to study the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with the goal of

connecting it with any particular sect from the Second Temple period. Rather, it seems more

fruitful to focus on its illocutionary methods to learn more about the author, his audience, and the

concerns of both, such as we did in our preliminary analysis of the function of the *Apocalypse of*

Abraham in the last chapter.

First, we wish to introduce certain concepts and terminology current in midrash studies that

we feel are relevant to this discussion. We begin by acknowledging that there are clear

differences between midrashic and apocalyptic texts: to name the most obvious, they are

different in presentation, in content, and were written down centuries apart and in different

circumstances. More specifically, apocalypses are mainly concerned with the interpretation of

visions, not biblical verses, and contain a sense of imminent eschatological expectation as

opposed to the "perpetual present" of rabbinic texts.[94] I feel, however, that the relevance of

midrash scholarship to the investigation of the social setting of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (and

possibly other apocalypses) justifies its application, which I hope will become clear.

Midrashic and apocalyptic texts have two areas of general similarity that ground the following

discussion. The first is that both contain exegesis, despite differences in presentation: while

midrash is explicitly concerned with the exegesis of biblical verses, apocalyptic exegesis has a

more subtle presence. We have seen this with the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for example, in the

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[94] Fraade, "Rabbinic Hindsight," 364-5.

way that answers to exegetical questions that arise from a close reading of Gen 15 are woven throughout the text. Charlesworth provides another, more general example of apocalyptic exegesis, writing that "The reviews of history in many of the apocalypses in the Pseudepigrapha are exegetical reflections on the histories in the Tanach. To retell the drama of salvation from protological time to the eschatological age is to interpret the Tanach."[95] The analysis of exegetical elements in apocalyptic texts is an area ripe for additional study, and based on what we have seen with our analysis of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* I agree with Charlesworth that the "exegetical dimensions" in the Pseudepigrapha deserve more attention.[96] As he concludes, "Suffice it only to state that the Pseudepigrapha are not to be branded and discarded as visionary works; as we shall see, they are part of the rich exegetical tradition of Early Judaism."[97]

The second commonality between midrashic and apocalyptic texts is their opacity regarding historical context, although the reason for this is different in each case. In midrash, the text is explicitly focused on the explication of biblical material and any contemporary concerns of the rabbis are veiled if they are present at all. In apocalyptic texts, on the other hand, the language is often so symbolic and generic that it is equally difficult to identify the historical situation of the author in any detail. Because of this opacity, scholars who are interested in the social setting of midrashic texts must probe extremely carefully behind explicit exegesis to see if they can recover any information about the sages themselves. I feel this is quite similar to the task facing scholars of apocalyptic texts, which is why what midrash scholars are currently doing can be instructive.

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[95] Charlesworth, "In the Crucible," 42.

[96] Ibid., 41.

[97] Ibid., 26.

These scholars take their cue from literary methods of reading texts and engage with discussions taking place in the field of literary criticism. The "Historical Turn" has brought to literary studies, and thus a subset of midrash studies, a renewed interest in the "socio-cultural and historical situatedness" of texts.[98] This approach acknowledges that explicitly presented historical information in midrashic texts is mostly unreliable in the sense of historical accuracy. Instead, it looks for the text to reveal a different kind of information: the contemporary concerns of the sages and/or their redactors; this, taken in conjunction with verifiable information on the relevant historical context, can lead to a richer understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics at work.

It should be noted that it has been much debated whether midrash is by nature a hermeneutical or a homiletical enterprise, that is, is it mainly addressing perceived difficulties in the biblical text, or is it using the text as an opportunity to address the religious needs of the people at the time?[99] It is most likely that these are two sides of the same coin, as Fraade argues, but this is a separate debate that need not trouble us here; we feel that this approach holds potential for apocalyptic texts regardless of one's position on the nature of midrash.

To give a concrete example, in her study of the amoraic midrashic collection *Pesikta deRav Kahana*, Rachel Anisfeld focuses on its portrayal of God as gentle and personal and his relationship with Israel as emotional and intimate, which is not paralleled in earlier tannaitic midrashim.[100] Grounded in the work of historians who point to the third through the fifth

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[98] Carol Bakhos, "Method(ological) Matters in the Study of Midrash," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (ed. Carol Bakhos; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 167.

[99] Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 3-5; Rachel A. Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes: Pesikta DeRav Kahana and the Popularization of Rabbinic Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 7.

[100] Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes,* 3.

centuries as a time when rabbis showed more interest in the sizable non-rabbinic Jewish population, she proposes that *Pesikta deRav Kahana* and its elements of "emotional persuasion" represent the "rabbinic wooing" of non-rabbinic Jews.[101] The rabbinic opinions of this time also become more lenient, which fits well with this desire to make rabbinic Judaism more attractive.[102] Anisfeld connects this shift to a larger social change taking place in the Roman empire of late antiquity: Christian institutions were replacing old pagan ones, large numbers of pagans were becoming Christians, and "persuasion and conversion were in the air, as was the feeling of competition."[103] Class structure was becoming more fluid in the Roman Empire, and the openness of the rabbis to the poorer, non-elite and non-rabbinic Jews makes sense within this context.[104] In addition, anti-Jewish sentiment was on the rise as Christianity grew, and Anisfeld views Pesikta deRav Kahana's "rhetoric of indulgence" as "a lone voice of comfort in a world of increasing hostility."[105]

This example shows how productive an analysis that correlates known historical information with the rhetorical characteristics of a text can be. It helps us to understand more fully how the text fits within its historical context and sheds light on how it was meant to function at the time. Scholars such as Anisfeld thus believe that exegesis is able to serve "larger ideological purposes' and that one can look to exegetical texts to "disclose the political, economic, and social pressures

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[101] Ibid., 4-5.

[102] Ibid., 159.

[103] Ibid., 153.

[104] Ibid., 154-5.

[105] Ibid., 160.

that condition a culture's discourse at any given moment."[106] We can see that this kind of

analysis is quite similar to the proposal discussed above that apocalyptic texts be studied for their

"illocutionary logic"; the idea that we can learn more about the socio-cultural functions of a text

by studying its rhetoric is common to both approaches.

In his discussion of the social function of midrash aggadah, Joshua Levinson asserts that since

"texts mobilize fantasies without legislating action, they provide the site at which shared

anxieties and tensions can surface as well as be symbolically addressed" and that they provide a

way for a culture that feels threatened to assert control over the perceived threat.[107] In such a

way, a text can perform "cultural work."[108] This applies quite well to how *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and

the *Apocalypse of Abraham* function, especially in the way that they provide vicarious judgment

of the Romans. Although their readers might feel powerless in the face of the mighty Roman

empire, the texts create an imagined world in which God judges the Romans for their wickedness

and vindicates the Jews. Levinson's phrase "without legislating action" raises the question of

whether the *Apocalypse of Abraham* was meant to encourage further revolt or to avoid it. It

would seem that the latter was intended, since the catharsis provided by the text regarding the

punishment of the Romans is not based on an event that happens within the normal course of

history; it is projected until after the Messiah comes and most importantly, it is initiated by God.

Levinson's description, then, seems to fit the function of the *Apocalypse of Abraham'*s treatment

of the Romans well: it provides a safe space for anger to be expressed and resolution vicariously

experienced without directly calling for any change in the present political status quo.

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[106] Gabrielle Spiegel, *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 27.

[107] Joshua Levinson, "Literary Approaches to Midrash," in *Current Trends in the Study of Midrash* (ed. Carol Bakhos; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 207-8, 219; Anisfeld, *Sustain Me with Raisin-Cakes,* 20-21.

[108] Levinson, "Literary Approaches," 190.

Levinson also discusses how exegetical narratives provide the opportunity for saying something new in the midst of telling something old, which I feel is applicable to the *Apocalypse of Abraham*:

> As a hermeneutical reading of the biblical story presented in narrative form, its defining characteristic lies precisely in this synergy of narrative and exegesis. As exegesis, it creates new meanings from the biblical verses, and as narrative it represents those meanings by means of the biblical world. As exegesis, it is subservient to the biblical narrative, but as a story in its own right it creates a narrated world which is different from its biblical shadow. It is obvious that the combination of these two elements creates a certain dissonance. Narrative and exegesis are two very different methods of persuasion, based upon divergent, if not opposing, presuppositions of 'author-ity.' It is specifically this tension between sameness and difference, subservience and creativity, that establishes the genre's identity. Nothing is more characteristic of midrash in general, and this genre in particular, than the quotation of what has already been said in order to express something new.[109]

Although narrative and exegesis are intertwined in a different way in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* than in midrash aggadah, Levinson's analysis is applicable, since we still see narrative and exegesis working together to create a cohesive message. On the one hand, a newly created narrative is subservient to the author's message, but on the other hand, the author's narrative is subservient to the Bible, which provides its framework:[110] in addressing contemporary problems, the author is constrained within the conceptual world and language of the Bible. And by addressing exegetical questions that arise from a close reading of the biblical text, he affirms that such questions are worth answering. In this scenario, the Bible is the ultimate authority for both the author and his audience; by using the *langue* provided to him by the Bible, he affirms that the answers they seek lie within it.

To give an example from the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* the text answers the exegetical question regarding why God commanded Abraham not to cut the birds in half in Gen 15:10 by

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[109] Ibid., 207-208.

[110] Charlesworth discusses this as a category of biblical exegesis that he calls "framework," which he defines as follows: "The Old Testament provides the framework for the author's own work. The original setting of the Old Testament work is employed for appreciably other purposes" ("In the Crucible," 29). In this category he places *4 Ezra, 2 Baruch,* and the various pseudepigraphal *Testaments* (Ibid., 31-2). To this I would add the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

having the birds serve as a way for him and Yahoel to ascend to heaven. Aside from providing an answer to a question generated by what is not explicitly addressed in the text, it also serves to convey a concern of the author, which is to underscore God's provision. Not only does God make sure in advance that Abraham will have a way to ascend to heaven, but the author inserts the detail that God provides *all* the animals for the sacrifice:

> And I said to the angel, 'Singer of the Eternal One, behold, I have no sacrifice with me, nor do I know a place for an altar on the mountain, so how shall I make the sacrifice?' And he said, 'Look behind you.' And I looked behind me. And behold, all the prescribed sacrifices were following us: the calf, the she-goat, the ram, the turtledove, and the pigeon. (*Apoc. Ab.* 12:4-6)

The motif of God providing the animal(s) for a sacrifice comes from the Akedah, after Abraham is told he does not need to sacrifice his son Isaac after all; the fact that the author inserts it here shows that he wishes to highlight God's role as provider. But the role of God as provider has a different function in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* from the one it has in Gen 22. We see in *Apoc. Ab.* 9 that God gives Abraham two commands: one is to offer a sacrifice and the other is to fast. In both, Abraham is commanded to *act*: "Go, *take* for me a heifer…" (9:5; emphasis mine); "For forty days *abstain*…" (9:7; emphasis mine). Yet Abraham ends up fulfilling these commands without any effort on his part: "And I ate no bread and drank no water, because [my] food was to see the angel who was with me, and his speech with me was my drink" (12:2); "And behold, all the prescribed sacrifices were following us…" (12:6).

One cannot speak of authorial intent with any certainty of course, but the presence of the motif of God as provider here does convey the message that God helps the righteous to obey his commands. In a text that warns its readers against idolatry and explicitly says that the righteous are those who keep God's commands (31:4), this motif underscores the *accessibility* of following God's decrees. This reflects the famous message of Deut 30:11-18:

> Surely, *this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you*, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?" No, *the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe*. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But *if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them*, I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. (emphasis mine; NRSV)

Given the analysis in the previous chapter of Deuteronomic language in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* it is not surprising that we encounter it again here. It is worth emphasizing, however, that while the motif of God as provider is a biblical one, it is used here in a new way: it serves the overall message of the author for his readers to avoid idolatry by encouraging them that God's assistance will be with them if they choose to obey his commands.

Returning to Levinson's point above regarding the synergy of narrative and exegesis, we see this at work in this example from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which is using elements of biblical narrative and exegesis to say something that is both unique and applicable to his audience. In Levinson's terminology, this combination of narrative and exegesis is doing "cultural work" by helping to convey the message of the author: If you choose to obey God's commands, he will provide for you by helping you carry out that obedience. We see here how the author uses an exegetical question ("Why weren't the birds cut in half?") as an opportunity to introduce the motif of God as provider. But he takes this a step further by interpreting God's role as provider in a way not seen in the Bible (i.e., God provides by helping the righteous to obey him). Thus, biblical exegesis and narrative based on the framework of a biblical story are used by this author in a new way to convey a relevant message to his audience.

Christine Hayes introduces another helpful point by proposing that we look for divergence from "expected norms" as sites where the concerns of the author might be surfacing:

> The amoraim had a more-or-less closed and distinct corpus of Oral Torah – the Mishnah; their statements are concerned primarily with explicating, delimiting, debating, and exposing the complex of meanings in mishnaic and other tannaitic traditions. Thus, amoraic statements that *do* introduce new issues or opinions (often the case in the later amoraic layers) or that violate the rabbis' own canons of interpretation are remarkable for their divergence from expected norms and invite cultural-historical analysis.[111]

There are differences of course between what the expected norms are when studying midrash, on the one hand, and apocalyptic texts on the other. But this insight can still be applied if there is a particular pattern or tradition that is being reused in the text; one can still compare the original pattern with its use in the new text to determine if there are any additions or "divergence" from the traditional model that might provide clues to the concerns of the author.

One example of this in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is the author's portrayal of the sins that caused the destruction of the Temple in *Apoc. Ab.* 25 and 27, where he relies heavily on material from Ezekiel and the Deuteronomic History. By comparing the biblical material with *Apoc. Ab.* 25 and 27, we can see how the author used, shaped, and added to the traditional material regarding the destruction of the First Temple in order to portray his own view of the destruction of the Second Temple. The following discussion shows how the approach proposed by Hayes of looking for divergence from expected patterns as a window into contemporary concerns can be helpful when studying apocalyptic texts as well as midrash.

Let us first discuss the biblical pattern that seems to be the basis for the description of the idolatry in the temple in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* For the Deuteronomist, the sins of Manasseh, King of Judah, represent the height of sin and apostasy, which led to the eventual loss of political autonomy and the destruction of the Temple. The key elements of King Manasseh's sin are described in 2 Kgs 21, according to which, he: 1. Rebuilt the high places, 2. Erected altars for Baal, 3. Made a sacred pole, 4. Worshiped "all the host of heaven," 5. Built altars in the

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[111] Christine Hayes, *Between the Babylonian and Palestinian Talmuds: Accounting for Halakhic Difference in Selected Sugyot from Tractate Avodah Zarah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 19.

Temple for the host of heaven, 6. Made his son "pass through fire," ostensibly as a sacrifice to Molech, 7. Practiced divination and dealt with mediums and wizards, 8. Had a carved image of Asherah made and placed in the Temple and 9. "Shed very much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another" (21:16). Two chapters later, when Josiah is reversing what Manasseh put in place, it mentions two additional elements of Manasseh's sin: he, 1. Instituted houses of male temple prostitutes (2 Kgs 23:7), and 2. Appointed idolatrous priests (23:5). In 2 Kgs 21, the sins are attributed to Manasseh alone; he is the one responsible for initiating all these wicked acts.

The vision Ezekiel receives of the Temple in Ezek 8 provides another perspective on the sins that led to its destruction. Idolatry is the main focus of the chapter and it is described over and over as an "abomination" (*to'evah*), which is language associated with idolatry throughout the book of Deuteronomy.[112] The key elements of this vision are: 1. The "image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy," 2. Idols associated with "creeping things" and "loathsome animals,"[113] 3. Idols spoken of in the plural ("all the idols of the house of Israel"), 4. Women weeping for Tammuz, 5. Worship of the sun, and 6. Violence: "Must they fill the land with violence, and provoke my anger still further?" (v. 17). Comparing the lists from these two chapters, we see that the main overlap between 2 Kgs 21 and Ezek 8 has to do with idolatry and violence, with a focus on idolatry within the Temple; the author of Ezekiel does not mention shrines or altars erected elsewhere, nor does he mention sorcery or divination. In contrast to 2 Kings, which highlights the agency of King Manasseh, Ezek 8 mentions two groups of people and one individual: seventy elders of Israel offering incense to idols led by Jaazaniah son of Shaphan (v. 11) and

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[112] E.g., Deut 7:25-6; 20:18; 27:15; 32:16.

[113] The Hebrew words used here (רמשׂ, *remes*; שׁקץ, *sheqetz*) echo the language of Lev 11, which discusses cultically unclean animals.

twenty-five men prostrating themselves to the sun (v. 16). It is unclear why the author of Ezekiel

goes out of his way to name Jaazaniah, so we can only speculate as to why his participation

merits being singled out; perhaps the author sees his role in leading others to idolatry as parallel

to that of King Manasseh.[114]

Like Ezek 8, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* focuses mainly on idolatry within the Temple and

the element of violence. The elements of idolatry that are mentioned are: 1. A shining copper

"idol of jealousy" set up in the Temple (25:1; note the use of terminology from Ezek 8), and 2.

Youths slaughtered on an altar before the idol of jealousy (25:2; here we see a combination of

the sacrificing of children to Molech from 2 Kgs 21 and the idol of jealousy from Ezek 8). When

God recaps what has caused the destruction of the Temple, he succinctly says that it is "because

of the idol and the murder" (27:7). As opposed to the groups of people portrayed as worshiping

idols in the Temple in Ezek 8, *Apoc. Ab.* 25 repeatedly mentions an unnamed individual: "I saw

there the likeness of the idol of jealousy…and *a man* before it, and he was worshiping it" (25:1;

emphasis mine). In v. 1, the passive is used ("youths were slaughtered"), but v. 3 makes the man

the agent ("What is this idol, and what is the altar, and who are those being sacrificed, and who is

the sacrificer…?"; emphasis mine). The man is referenced one more time in v. 6: "And *the man

you saw slaughtering* is he who angers me" (emphasis mine). Whereas Ezek 8 portrays groups of

leaders committing idolatry together, the *Apocalypse of Abraham* focuses on the agency of one

individual, as does 2 Kgs 21. Although *Apoc. Ab.* 25 is too vague to allow any identification with

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[114] The name is mentioned in 2 Kgs 25:23, but as Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite. Shaphan, the secretary of King Josiah, is mentioned several times in 2 Kings, but never as a Maacathite, so it is not clear if this Jaazaniah is the same person. Various sons and grandsons of Shaphan are mentioned by name in Jeremiah (Jer 26:24; 29:3; 36:10-14; 39:14; 40:5, 9, 11; 41:2; 43:6.), including his grandson Gedaliah, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor after defeating Judah, and the family seems to have been quite prominent. All of the descendents of Shaphan mentioned in Jeremiah are portrayed as on his side, so if the same Shaphan is meant in Ezekiel, then perhaps the point is that this member of the family stood out for his alliance with idolatry.

a particular figure in late antiquity, according to my reading of the text, the author seems to be directly comparing whomever the referent might be to King Manasseh.

Each element of Abraham's vision of the Temple is given an interpretation by the author; most of them refer to real places or people, although one seems to be metaphorical. Of the Temple, God says,

> This temple and altar and the beautiful things which you have seen are my image of the sanctification of the name of my glory, where every prayer of men will dwell, and the gathering of kings and prophets, and the sacrifice which I shall establish to be made for me among my people coming from your progeny (25:4).

Although the Temple in the vision still represents the actual Temple on earth, its significance is explained in this interpretation: it is the place where God's glorious name is sanctified and where prayers and sacrifices are offered. I would call this "semi-metaphorical" because although the language of metaphor is used ("This temple and the altar…are…"), the actual Temple is still the referent. In the interpretation to the vision, the statue is explained as representing God's anger: "And the statue you saw is my anger, because the people who will come to me out of you will make me angry" (25:5). Here, the statue does not represent an actual physical idol, but the idolatry of the people that provokes God to anger.

The man who slaughters the youths is interpreted as "he who angers me" referring to the unnamed individual whom the author singles out, which again, seems to have a real-world referent. And the slaughtered youths are interpreted as follows: "And the sacrifice is *the murder of those who are for me a testimony* of the close of the judgment in the end of the creation" (25:6; emphasis mine). Here, the youths in the vision, who echo the children sacrificed to Molech by King Manasseh, are interpreted as murdered individuals who gave testimony for God. Although the author focuses mainly on the wickedness of the murderer, the description of the murder of particular individuals is still quite significant, since it is the only addition to the biblical pattern established by 2 Kgs 21 and Ezek 8. Although the author could have spoken in

general terms about violence (as in 2 Kgs 21:16, which describes Jerusalem as being filled with blood), the youths slaughtered in the Temple are a striking detail as is their interpretation as "those who are for me a testimony of the close of the judgment."

The main element in this interpretation that stands out from the biblical pattern discussed above is the fact that the author tells us something about the victims. Whereas in 2 Kgs 21 and Ezek 8, the violence cited spoke only to the wickedness of the king or Judah's leaders, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* it speaks to the character of both the murderer *and* the victims. Whereas the victims in 2 Kings and Ezekiel are unknown innocents, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* they are righteous individuals who bravely testified for God and died as a result. Let us focus more closely, then, on this aspect of *Apoc. Ab.* 25 that stands out from the biblical pattern that it echoes. Who are these individuals who are a "testimony" for God and what makes them so important for the author? Although the word "testimony" calls to mind the concept of martyrdom, since the meaning of the Greek word *martys* is "one who testifies," it would be anachronistic to call these individuals "martyrs" or assume that the author is referring to the general concept of martyrdom, or voluntary death.[115] The general definition of voluntary death derived from Second Temple Jewish accounts paints a different picture from what we see in *Apoc. Ab.* 25: whereas the term denotes an individual's "intentional decision to die" in order to avoid transgressing the proper worship of the God of Israel and the proper practice of Judaism, in the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* we are not told anything about the choices presented to the murdered individuals.[116] Although they were a testimony for God, we do not know whether or

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[115] The first time we see the word martyr used as a technical term is in the second century in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp,* ca. 160 CE; *Qiddush ha-Shem* is the term used in rabbinic literature [Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 4].

[116] Ibid.

not they willingly chose to continue testifying, knowing full-well that it would result in their death.

For this same reason, I feel it is misguided to try to read the Roman idea of "the noble death"[117] into the *Apocalypse of Abraham* insofar as it refers to voluntary death. Whereas accounts of "the noble death" in roughly contemporaneous sources such as Philo and Josephus function to show gentile readers how this Roman ideal is exemplified by Jews and to serve as examples of piety for Jewish readers,[118] in *Apoc. Ab.* 25, the murder of these righteous individuals functions to highlight the wickedness of the man who murdered them, which was so egregious that it is one of the main reasons for the destruction of the Temple.

The word "murder" is key to this discussion, since this is what is presented in *Apoc. Ab.* 25, not voluntary death. Jonathan Klawans discusses religiously motivated murders (called "Murders in the Sanctuary") such as we see in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and differentiates them from voluntary deaths as follows:

> Martyrdoms are quasi-sacrifical deaths, after which the innocence and purity of the victim sways God's mercy. These deaths [murders in the sanctuary] are sacrilegious killings, after which the guilt of the murderers kindles God's wrath…The pattern looks something like this: the heroes in question (1) make a decision to risk or accept premature violent death at the hands of fellow Jews (2) in order to publicly condemn wickedness among the Jewish people, (3) but then suffer sacrilegious deaths at the hands of the wicked Jews, (4) with the result that God's anger is inflamed and the Jewish people suffer national catastrophe.[119]

Klawans notes that this pattern is established in the biblical story of the prophet Zechariah, son of the priest Jehoiada, who confronts the people for their acceptance of idolatry under the leadership of King Joash (2 Chron 24:17-24). As a result, the people stone Zechariah to death

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[117] Shmuel Shepkaru, *Jewish Martyrs in the Pagan and Christian Worlds* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 35.

[118] Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death,* 89, 96-97.

[119] Jonathan Klawans, *Josephus and the Theologies of Ancient Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 126.

(with the king's blessing) right in the court of the temple (24:21); as he is dying, he calls for revenge, which God brings in the form of an Aramean army, which defeats Judah (24:23-24). After the battle, some of the king's servants kill him as retribution for the murder of Zechariah (24:25), thus answering the latter's call for revenge.[120]

   The pattern of the death of Zechariah fits what we see in *Apoc. Ab.* 25 remarkably well: we have a Jewish leader associated with idolatry in the temple who slaughters individuals who bravely spoke out against him; and this slaughter takes place *in* the temple. This in turn brings God's wrath on the nation as a whole, which results in the destruction of the temple. This deviation from the pattern established in 2 Kings and Ezekiel thus echoes a different biblical trope: that of the murder of the prophets.[121] Aside from the story about Zechariah in 2 Chron 24, Neh 9 takes this theme and links it to God's punishment of the people and their exile from the land (see also Ezra 9:10-11):[122]

> Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their backs and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies…Many years you were patient with them, and warned them by your spirit through your prophets; yet they would not listen. Therefore you handed them over to the peoples of the lands. (Neh 9:26, 30)

This biblical idea that the exile (and by implication, the destruction of the First Temple) was a punishment for how the people of Israel treated the prophets seems to be reflected in *Apoc. Ab.* 25:6. Although the word "prophet" is never used, the description of the murdered individuals as

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[120] Klawans notes that this story seems to have had a "profound effect" on Josephus, who applies it to a variety of situations in the Second Temple Period (Ibid., 127-28).

[121] I am indebted to Professor Andrew Teeter for bringing this to my attention.

[122] See Matt 23:29-36, which explicitly links the murder of the prophets with the death of Zechariah and states that the current generation will be held responsible for "all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (see also Luke 11:49-51 and 13:34). God's anger at Israel for the murder of the prophets is also referenced in several other ancient Jewish writings. For a discussion of this theme throughout ancient Jewish literature, see Odil Hannes Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten. Untersuchungen zur Überlieferung des deuteronomistischen Geschichtsbildes im Alten Testament, Spätjudentum und Urchristentum* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), 146-183.

"those who are for me a testimony of the close of the judgment" is consonant with the role of the

biblical prophets as those who warn the people against sin and serve as harbingers of woe.[123]

Thus, the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* with its mentioned of murdered "witnesses" in the Temple,

seems to blend this biblical trope of the murder of the prophets with that of idolatry in the

temple. These two tropes are thematically linked in that they both provide explanations for God's

wrath against the nation. Joined together, they reinforce the power of Deuteronomistic theology

to explain the destruction of the Second Temple.[124]

　　To return to Hayes's point that deviation from expected patterns can identify a concern of the

author, what do we learn about the author from his portrayal of idolatry in the Temple and the

murder of those who are a "testimony" for God? As noted above, the language of the *Apocalypse*

of Abraham points to a singular Jewish leader the author has in mind; the mention of the

murdered individuals could simply be a reflection of the biblical tradition regarding murders in

the sanctuary, but it is equally possible that the author means to reference particular, more

contemporaneous, sacrilegious killings. This would be consonant with the *modus operandi* of the

rest of the document, which is to address current concerns through the lens of biblical traditions.

This speaks to the author's strong loyalty to the explanatory power of the Deuteronomistic

tradition and his belief that the events he has in mind directly caused the destruction of the

Temple.

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[123] Another clue that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is referencing this theme is the mention of Abel just a few verses prior to the description of the murdered individuals (*Apoc. Ab.* 24:5). Abel is mentioned in connection with the murder of the prophets in Matt 23:35 and Luke 11:51 as well, which suggests that these elements were both part of a Jewish tradition, likely oral, that circulated in antiquity. For a discussion of the links between the biblical tradition regarding the murder of the prophets and the verses in Matthew and Luke, see Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten,* 20-59.

[124] For a treatment of the development of the idea of the murder of the prophets in the Deuteronomistic tradition, see Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten,* 60-80.

Klawans lists several post-biblical examples of "Murders in the Sanctuary" in the writings of

Josephus that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* may be referencing.[125] The first is a priestly fratricide

that takes place in the sanctuary, which angers God and leads to defeat and defilement of the

temple at the hand of the Persian king Artaxerxes II (*Antiquities* 11.297-301). A similar pattern is

seen in Josephus' accounts of the murder of Onias the rainmaker (*Antiquities* 14.22-28) and John

the Baptist (*Antiquities* 18.116-19), as well as the murder of the priest Jonathan by the Sicarii,

which is arranged by Felix (*Antiquities* 20.160-66). After describing other murders carried out by

the Sicarii, Josephus attributes the destruction of the temple to these acts in a way that parallels

the message of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*:

> This is the reason why, in my opinion, even God himself, for loathing of their impiety, turned away from our city and, because he deemed the temple to be no longer a clean dwelling place for him, brought the Romans upon us and purification by fire upon the city, while he inflicted slavery upon us together with our wives and children; for he wished to chasten us by these calamities. (*Antiquities* 20.166)[126]

Josephus references this pattern in *Jewish War* as well, most notably in the case of the former

high priests Ananus and Jesus, who

> are depicted as bravely delivering speeches encouraging the people to turn against the Zealots and abandon their rebellion. Condemning the people for their internecine strife and for committing bloodshed in the temple (4. 162-92, 238-69), both of these figures are in turn, killed along with their followers; the temple is left defiled by blood, and the priests' corpses are left unburied, to be devoured by beasts (4.312-16, 324). As Josephus's encomium on their deaths makes clear, these figures were heroes whose sacrilegious murders swayed God to abandon the Jews and deliver the temple to the Romans (318-25). Yet the sinful bloodbath continues, with the Zealots next turning on the virtuous (and wealthy) Zechariah, son of Baris: he, too, is killed in the temple, after attesting to his innocence (334-44).[127]

Klawans notes that this pattern is also seen in the stoning of Stephen in the Book of Acts (6:8-

7:60). It is impossible to know whether the *Apocalypse of Abraham* is referring to any of these

situations described by Josephus, but they do show that the author of the *Apocalypse* was not the

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[125] Klawans, *Ancient Judaism,* 126.

[126] Ibid., 127.

[127] Ibid., 128.

only Jew in the post-70 era to view the violence perpetrated on Jews by other Jews (especially

leaders) through the lens of biblical precedent and as the reason for the destruction of the temple.

Idolatry

One last element of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that invites speculation regarding its socio-

cultural background is idolatry. It is noteworthy that, given the centrality of this topic throughout

the work, the author speaks of it only in general terms. Beyond defining it as the worship of

something or someone other than God, he does not discuss what behaviors or actions other than

actual prostration are implied by the term. This is not because there was universal agreement

amongst Jews as to what constituted idolatry. As Mark Bonnington writes,

> The social embodiment of anti-idolatry is relatively complex – the forms of behavior which manifested
> anti-idolatry in the Graeco-Roman world were many and varied. They included questions of what to do
> with some Gentile coins, whether to go to the baths, games and other activities, what food to buy, who you
> can eat with, how and where, who you can marry, amongst many other things. These were the multifarious
> but everyday questions which Jews faced in the Gentile diaspora and only to a lesser *degree* (for the issues
> were not different in kind) in Palestine itself (author's emphasis).[128]

Because of the complexity of the issue, there were bound to be disagreements regarding where

the line between faithfulness and apostasy lay. John M. G. Barclay underscores the importance

of perspective when it comes to defining apostasy and he is worth quoting at length:

> Yet 'apostasy,' like other deviant labels, is essentially a matter of perspective. One may list activities in
> which Jews were socially assimilated to their gentile environment and thereby abandoned some aspects of
> their national traditions, but where such assimilation was regarded as 'apostasy' was a matter which
> different Jews in different locations and times could define in very different ways…It is odd how scholars
> continue to regard the perspective of the Maccabean literature (for instance) as definitive for Judaism as a
> whole, as if all Jews contrasted 'Judaism' and 'Hellenism' along the lines of 1 and 2 Maccabees, or all
> regarded the acquisition of Greek citizenship as tantamount to apostasy (as does 3 Maccabees). Where the
> author of *The Letter of Aristeas* celebrates the social integration of Hellenized Jews in the Ptolemaic court,
> 3 Maccabees sees only compromise, inevitably entailing idolatry…when we find a Jew labeled an
> 'apostate,' it is always worth enquiring who is doing the defining and whose interests are involved in this
> definition.[129]

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[128] Mark Bonnington, "Fleeing Idolatry: Social Embodiment of Anti-Idolatry in the First Century," in
Idolatry: False Worship in the Bible, Early Judaism and Christianity (ed. Stephen C. Barton; London; New York: T
& T Clark, 2007), 107.

[129] John M. G. Barclay, "Deviance and Apostasy: Some Applications of Deviance Theory to First-century
Judaism and Christianity," in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament in its
Context* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), 118-9.

With many competing definitions of idolatry, and thus, apostasy, available, why does the author of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* fail to mention any details? Is it because he is writing for a group of people who already have an agreed-upon understanding of idolatry? In the last chapter, I concluded that the lack of specificity throughout the text implies a broader audience and that the author is not concerned with fine distinctions between groups. Yet we must entertain the possibility that the exact opposite is true: that the author is only writing for "insiders" and that his goal is not to encourage their identity as distinct from other groups in terms of belief or practice, but to prepare them for future threats from the gentile world, which he can do without reiterating the boundary markers between them and other Jewish groups. It is thus unclear whether the author speaks of idolatry in general terms because he wants to appeal to a broad audience or because he is writing for a small audience, which already shares a common understanding of the term.

It is of course possible that neither of these scenarios is correct and that the author did not clarify what he meant by "idolatry" because he did not feel it necessary for whatever reason. We certainly do not see such definitions provided by the contemporaneous literature we have, so it is perhaps misguided to read too much into this particular area of opacity in the text. As James R. Davila notes, although we know enough to know there was a continuum of Jewish attitudes towards gentiles and gentile religion, we do not know where to place the majority of Jews in antiquity: "We simply do not know where the average Jew in Palestine or in the Diaspora stood on such matters or whether Jews in the middling or the less observant sectors of the continuum were common or uncommon."[130]

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[130] Davila, *Provenance,* 36.

Even in *Apoc. Ab.* ch. 29, which mentions the false Messiah leading Jews astray, no specifics are given regarding how this will happen or any explicit instructions regarding how the readers should prepare themselves to withstand it. A course of action is *implied*, however, and can be deduced by an attentive reader (or listener): since the text communicates that Azazel can only tempt those who have already decided to "pursue impiety," the implication is that the individual Jew must protect himself from future temptation by doing what the righteous are described as doing in 31:2: doing justice, choosing God's will, and keeping his commandments. So, although the possibility of being misled into idolatry and apostasy is the author's main concern, the text still implies that what the reader should be doing in the present is following the Law. Not only this, but following the Law will create protection around the individual, shielding him from the disastrous effects of Azazel's seduction and temptation. Abraham is able to ward off the temptations of Azazel, and the readers should do the same. Since one opens oneself up to being tempted by Azazel by choosing "impiety," one should pursue piety and keep the commandments. But given the sense of urgency and the clarity behind the author's negative message about the dangers of idolatry, one does wonder why the positive side of his message is so subtle.

A possible answer to this question is that the author's main focus is to prepare the people for future apostasy as opposed to warning them against current threats. We see in the text itself a concern that Jews will be misled by the false Messiah yet to come; perhaps he cannot be specific because he is describing a future threat, not a current one. Perhaps the vagueness of his message is by necessity; he feels strongly that a test of faith is coming, but he is not sure exactly what it will look like. All he knows is that idolatry is what caused two past destructions of the Temple and it is what will cause apostasy during the time of the false Messiah.

But if idolatry is what caused the destruction of the temple, why does he not go into more detail on that topic? Since it is in the past, he should be able to describe it. Perhaps he feels there is no need to describe it because he assumes his readers already have opinions on that point, which goes back to our point above regarding the size of his audience: does he avoid specifics because he wants to appeal to a broader audience or does he do so because his audience is small and already shares his own opinion? Clearly, we have no answers here, only questions. But it is worth pointing out the lack of specifics because there are other texts from the Second Temple period that do provide some information regarding what constitutes idolatry; compare, for example, the narratives in *Joseph and Asenath, Judith,* and Esther (LXX)*,* which all portray protagonists who must navigate the complexities of eating with gentiles, eating gentile food, and/or marriage to a gentile.[131] We see no such practical issues addressed in the *Apocalypse of Abraham.*

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Conclusions

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In this and the previous chapter we have seen the usefulness of an approach to apocalyptic texts that seeks to uncover more about their authors and audience by analyzing their function through their "illocutionary methods." I have also argued that the current scholarship seeking to understand the socio-cultural "situatedness" of midrashic texts by correlating study of its rhetoric with known historical information is both complementary and applicable to this approach. The opacity of these texts regarding their specific *Sitz im Leben* does not mean that they are unable to speak to us about their general historical, social, and cultural contexts. By approaching them as representing one voice that is participating in a larger conversation, we can learn more about the author, his interlocutors, and the broader societal forces that shape the conversation. This

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[131] See Bonnington's discussion of these texts ("Fleeing Idolatry," 112-8).

enriches our general understanding of the time period, which in the case of post-70 Palestine is highly valuable, since we have so little extant data at our disposal. I thus agree with scholars such as Nickelsburg and Collins who have called for additional inductive study of individual documents. A specific text can only yield this kind of socio-cultural information when one is immersed in its rhetorical world.

In my analysis of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* aided by the work of other scholars who have studied *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* I have argued for the compatibility of apocalyptic and proto-rabbinic ideas, which goes against previous scholarship that posited a sharp dichotomy between the two. Such a dichotomy simply does not fit the evidence of the texts themselves. This challenges the long-held assumption that apocalyptic texts derive from distinct apocalyptic communities that are necessarily anti-establishment and isolated from the religious mainstream. The three texts I have surveyed do not reflect any clear sectarian leanings, leading me to conclude that approaching an apocalyptic text with the assumption that it is sectarian is unwarranted. If the evidence of the text itself indicates a sectarian provenance, then it is valid to reach such a conclusion, but it should not be an a priori assumption that is brought to apocalyptic texts.

Lastly, I have explored the idea that apocalyptic texts may contain elements of exegesis, along with visionary or mystical materials, as is the case with the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* I agree with Charlesworth that the exegetical component of apocalyptic works from the Second Temple period has been understudied, and I hope that the analysis presented here will encourage others to do the same. That such a study of the blend of apocalypticism and exegesis is warranted is supported by the overlap we have seen between apocalyptic and proto-rabbinic materials. Although apocalypticism waned in popularity after the failed Bar Kokhba revolt, the evidence of

254

the texts we have reviewed testifies that this was a new development in response to changing political circumstances. By studying apocalyptic texts that were written before 132-135 CE, we can learn more about the theological and exegetical freedom experienced by Jewish students of Scripture in the Second Temple period.

Conclusions

Over the course of this dissertation, I have examined the case for the antiquity for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* from several different angles: 1. The probability that ancient Jewish material could have survived the process of transmission from post-70 Palestine to Slavic lands in the Middle Ages, 2. The internal evidence, to which I applied the criteria of James R. Davila regarding positive markers of Jewish origin, and 3. Comparative evidence based on Jewish documents that have already been established as being written in Palestine between 70 and 132 CE, namely, *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*.

Regarding the first point, I argued in Chapter 1 that the available evidence regarding the transmission history of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha supports the general probability of ancient Jewish material surviving intact. This probability having been established, we then have a green light to examine individual documents more closely. To the best of my knowledge, Chapter 1 represents the most thorough presentation to date of information regarding the transmission of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha that is relevant to the concerns and interests of Biblical and Jewish Studies scholars. Bringing this scattered information together in one place allows scholars to weigh the available information for themselves, which can then inform their treatment of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha. Although I have argued that this information supports the high probability of the preservation of ancient Jewish material, laying out all the evidence allows others to come to different conclusions based on their own judgment. Thus far, conclusions have been offered in such a way that requires readers to trust the judgment of the authors. This is not to impugn previous authors; rather, the venues or formats in question (e.g. surveys, introductions,

etc.) have generally not allowed for such detailed treatment. Thus, it is with the goal of meeting this need that I have gone into such detail in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2, which deals with foundational matters, such as original language, date, provenance, textual unity, etc., is not the first treatment of such questions. In 1919, G. H. Box discussed these issues, followed by many others, such as Bonwetsch, Philonenko, Turdeanu, Rubinkiewicz, and Kulik, to name the most significant. Although I necessarily cover some ground that has already been traversed, my contribution lies in providing a needed synthesis of what has been published thus far. Aside from the general introductions that have been produced, many articles have been published that deal only with particular parts of the text, and to date, these have not been considered all at once. This applies especially to the original language of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and the confusing passage regarding some sort of messianic figure in *Apoc. Ab.* 29. Various theories and points have been posited by a variety of scholars, but they have not all been considered together until now.

I also believe it has been especially helpful to examine all the possible Christian interpolations in the text in a systematic way. This allows us to draw conclusions not only regarding specific passages, but regarding the text as a whole and its relative reliability as a source for Ancient Judaism. Another contribution of Chapter 2 is its integration of methodological considerations, which have been lacking in prior treatments of the antiquity of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* Distinguishing early Christian from Jewish works is a tricky enterprise, and I have relied on the cautious methodology provided by Davila. Applying his criteria for identifying ancient Jewish works provides a helpful lens through which to examine the internal evidence in the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, which puts the available evidence in sharper focus and allows us to see the strength of the case for the Jewishness of the text in a new way.

The idea of a possible Essene or Qumranic provenance for the *Apocalypse of Abraham* has previously been presented without much evidence or discussion and I wanted to take this idea seriously and see if it could withstand further scrutiny. Although I concluded that the arguments presented thus far are cursory, outdated, and do not take into account the complicated Essene/Qumran issue, the recent discussions about determinism, free will, and compatibilism, and the textual evidence from the document as a whole, this examination helped to clarify some of the characteristics of the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* such as its mixture of determinism on the macro level and free will on the micro level, which is similar to other contemporaneous documents and falls under Jonathan Klawans's category of Partial Determinism, which he derives from Josephus.

Chapter 2 also includes inductive analysis regarding the relationship between the "midrashic" and "apocalyptic" sections of the *Apocalypse of Abraham.* There I argue for its textual unity based on the thematic consistency seen throughout the work, as well as the cohesion provided by the overarching narrative structure of Gen 15, which encompasses the entire text. Again, although these points have been discussed in past scholarship, I see my contribution as picking up where others have left off and providing a more thorough examination than previously available, including a more detailed level of textual analysis and engagement.

Similarly, while others have discussed the fact that the *Apocalypse of Abraham* seems to fit well with the zeitgeist of the post-70 Palestinian Jewish community (as established by *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*, among others), I wanted to see if this observation could be borne out through a much more in-depth analysis of these texts. While my examination in Chapter 3 does strengthen the case for the antiquity of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* and provides more concrete support for previous assertions regarding the connections between it, *4 Ezra,* and *2 Baruch,* it simultaneously

furthers the study of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* for its own sake. In the course of this comparison, we learn more about the text's treatment of theodicy, determinism, and free will, its attitude towards Torah observance, its exegetical orientation, its connections with Deuteronomy, its eschatology, and its view of the Romans. Furthermore, we learn more about the function of the text; while it clearly serves as a sustained attack on idolatry, it also functions to warn its readers regarding future tests of faith, to encourage them to follow God's commandments, to validate anger against the Romans, and to provide a vicarious mystical experience.

By comparing the *Apocalypse of Abraham* closely with *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* we can also draw some general conclusions about the time between the revolts, which enriches the understanding we already have of this crucial, yet little documented time in Jewish history. First of all, the evidence of all three texts testifies to the continued relevance of Deuteronomic theology, since they unanimously interpret the destruction of the Second Temple according to its framework of reward and punishment. They also all struggle with the implications for one's understanding of God, man, and sin that arise from the pattern established by two destroyed temples, which points to a common theological sensibility, even amongst different groups. These texts also take a pragmatic approach that acknowledges that some questions cannot be answered and must be laid aside in order for the people to move forward; this reflects a conscious awareness of the fragility of the Jewish community after 70 CE and a focus on ensuring the survival of the Jewish faith. All three texts also reflect a blend of Torah observance and apocalypticism, which testifies to the compatibility of these ideas during the time between the revolts, at least for these authors; this provides a fascinating glimpse into the transitional nature of this time period. We also see close engagement with biblical texts and traditions, testifying to the continued strength of the pre-70 culture of Torah study and scriptural interpretation in the

Second Temple period. Lastly, the comparison reveals a range of attitudes and rhetoric regarding the Romans, which reflects the real struggle to figure out how best to deal with anger felt by the Jewish community in the aftermath of the devastating events of 66-70 CE. Although these themes have already been discussed in studies of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* because these two documents have such a closely intertwined history of development and most likely come from the same circles, it is difficult to draw any general conclusions from them regarding post-70 Palestine. Adding the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to the reconstruction of this time period does not necessarily provide any comprehensive results, but it does provide additional evidence that can be used in this speculative enterprise.

Chapter 4 ventures into somewhat more speculative territory with the possible social settings of the *Apocalypse of Abraham, 4 Ezra,* and *2 Baruch*. Because this topic is more speculative, it is especially important to be methodologically self-aware and extremely cautious. For this reason, I conclude that there is simply not enough information in these texts to pinpoint any specific *Sitz im Leben.* Rather, taking my cue from scholars such as John J. Collins, David Hellholm, and Lars Hartman, I argue that it is more productive to study the function and illocution of apocalyptic texts in order to draw *general* conclusions regarding the socio-cultural background of a text as opposed to specifying a particular group or setting. As important as identifying a *Sitz im Leben* has been in biblical scholarship, it is not the only kind of social information that can be gleaned from a text.

Such a redirection of analysis is still fraught with difficulty in that it involves trying to learn about the social background of a type of text that is characterized by its use of symbolism and lack of concrete references to contemporaneous events or people. I suggest that it can be instructive to learn from midrash scholars who are also trying to learn about the social

background of texts that rarely provide this type of information explicitly. Although apocalyptic

and midrashic texts have many differences, they are quite similar in their historical opacity, as

well as in their engagement with Scripture. I argue that these similarities are enough to warrant

the application of some of the methodologies of these midrash scholars to apocalyptic documents

and I use the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a test case.

I therefore examined how the *Apocalypse of Abraham* uses biblical themes and stories to

communicate a new theological message based on Joshua Levinson's discussion of how midrash

often uses biblical language to construct new ideas. And Christine Hayes's point about looking

for divergence from previously established patterns was useful in identifying how the

Apocalypse of Abraham both utilizes and diverges from biblical patterns regarding sin and

idolatry in the temple. More specifically, we saw how the author merges two patterns together,

the first being taken from King Manasseh's introduction of idolatry into the temple (2 Kgs 21)

and Ezekiel's description of the same (Ezek 8), while the second is taken from the murder of

Zechariah in the temple (2 Chron 24:17-24) and the statement in Neh 9:26-31, which establish

that God's anger is mobilized against Israel by its murder of the prophets he sends.

Any discussion of the social background of apocalyptic texts must take into account the long-

held belief in modern scholarship that apocalyptic texts represent the views of marginalized

"fringe" groups, which feel alienated from the mainstream of Second Temple Judaism. While

this view and its assumption that any such thing as "normative" Judaism existed during this time

has been increasingly questioned and shown to be untenable, this idea still persists to a certain

extent. The cumulative evidence of the *Apocalypse of Abraham, 4 Ezra,* and *2 Baruch* shows the

inadequacy of this dichotomy between dominant (non-apocalyptic) and liminal (apocalyptic)

groups in the Second Temple period and the period directly following; none of these apocalypses

reflects polemics against other Jewish groups, nor displays any sense of marginalization. Rather, the textual evidence shows that their authors are writing to Jews in general and are not attempting to reinforce their identity over against other Jewish groups. This goes hand in hand with the recent scholarly discussions regarding the fact that apocalyptic texts are not necessarily the products of distinct groups or sects. Apocalyptic ideas were widespread during this time period and it is misguided to seek to identify each text with a specific group.

The evidence of these texts also supports the argument against those who posit a sharp line of demarcation of apocalyptic and proto-rabbinic ideas and traditions before the revolt of Bar Kokhba in 132-135 CE. In all three, we see a seamless blend of these traditions. Although this has already been argued for *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch,* we can now add the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to this discussion, which bolsters the case against the idea that these different types of scriptural exegesis were mutually exclusive at this time. Whatever dichotomy evolved later on does not seem to apply to the immediate post-70 period.

Given that apocalyptic and proto-rabbinic traditions are both based in Scripture, the exegetical element of apocalyptic texts is an area that needs further study and analysis, as Charlesworth has noted.[1] What we saw of the exegetical sensibilities and the (often implicit) exegesis woven throughout the *Apocalypse of Abraham* supports the validity of this line of inquiry, which will enrich our understanding of the depth of engagement with Scripture during this time period.

I also believe there is much more that can be done regarding the broader social setting behind apocalyptic works in dialogue with what is being done with midrashic texts along these same lines; these scholars have already done much to lay a careful methodological foundation when it

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[1] James H. Charlesworth, "In the Crucible: The Pseudepigrapha as Biblical Interpretation," in *The Pseudepigrapha and Early Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 42.

comes to probing texts that are explicitly about one thing (in this case exegesis of biblical material) for the socio-cultural work they might be simultaneously doing as well.

One aspect of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* that this dissertation has largely ignored, but is still ripe for further study, is mysticism. The *Apocalypse of Abraham* appears to be one of the earliest examples we have of Jewish mysticism and there is still much work that can be done comparing it to other early Jewish mystical texts from the Second Temple Period as well as to later texts. It would also be interesting for someone with a knowledge of ancient Gnosticism to study the *Apocalypse of Abraham* with the aim of assessing its origins. This would be a useful test for my theory that the document is an early Jewish work, and I acknowledge that the results might require a rethinking of my conclusions.[2]

Furthermore, in order to provide scholars who have no knowledge of Old Church Slavonic with information that can help them navigate through the text of the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, a thorough examination should be made of every possible textual corruption or point of confusion, along with solutions that have been suggested by scholars. This will allow all students of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* to identify which verses have an unclear meaning; this can then combined with the list of all possible Christian interpolations so that scholars can be aware of questionable points in the text and apply appropriate caution.

In the realm of the Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, additional studies of Slavonic texts (of all kinds) compared with their Greek *Vorlagen* still need to be done, which will give us even more information about the translation practices of the Slavic scribes; this is invaluable information that is relevant for Slavonic texts for which we have no Greek *Vorlage,* such as the *Apocalypse*

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[2] I acknowledge that I am not an expert in ancient Gnosticism and that I may have missed certain characteristics of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* as a result.

of Abraham. There are also other Slavonic Pseudepigrapha that are understudied, such as the *Ladder of Jacob* and the *Word About Abraham and Sarah.*

The Slavonic Pseudepigrapha, including the *Apocalypse of Abraham,* have received only a modest amount of scholarly attention, but my hope is that this dissertation will encourage further study of these important and fascinating works. Knowing that there is a good probability that they have preserved ancient Jewish material establishes a firmer foundation than heretofore existed for including them in studies of Ancient Judaism. The results of my analysis of the *Apocalypse of Abraham* support this general probability by laying out various kinds of evidence for its ancient Palestinian provenance, by demonstrating the small amount of possible Christian interpolations in the text, and by showing that its contents reflect the same Jewish-oriented concerns and modes of exegesis as other texts from post-70 Judea.

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279

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