

THE *BOOK OF THE WATCHERS*
AS AN APOCALYPTIC AND APOCRYPHAL TEXT

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1. *The Book of the Watchers: New Questions*

Though employing different methods leading to different conclusions, almost all scholars, with rare and sometimes unclear exceptions,¹ agree on one point: the apocalyptic worldview or apocalypticism should be studied by starting with an analysis of the apocalyptic texts. The central question is: Which texts or which parts of a literary work can be defined as apocalyptic?

Many years ago Klaus Koch attempted to answer this question, insisting on the need to identify those ideological elements that characterize an apocalypse.² This methodology assumed that a certain literature should, in some way, be considered apocalyptic. In other words, one had to isolate a body of apocalyptic texts in order to recognize in the structure of those texts the elements that could be considered marks of apocalypticism. But on what basis should the selection of texts be made? This clearly appeared to be a vicious circle.

John Collins tried to avoid the vicious circle by claiming that “apocalypse” is first of all a literary genre. In his words, “apocalypse is a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an other-worldly 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.”³ Accordingly, “an ‘apocalypse’ is simply that

¹ P.D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975²); Idem, *Visionaries and their Apocalypses* (London: SCPK, 1983); B.Z. Wacholder, “Ezekiel and Ezekielianism as Progenitors of Essenianism,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Forty Years of Research*, ed. D. Dimant - U. Rappaport (Leiden: Brill, 1992), pp. 186-196.

² K. Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypik: eine Streitschrift über ein vernachlässigtes Gebiet der Bibelwissenschaft und die schädlichen Auswirkungen auf Theologie und Philosophie* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1970) = *Difficoltà dell'apocalittica* (Brescia: Paideia, 1977).

³ J.J. Collins, “Apocalypse: Towards the Morphology of a Genre,” *Semeia* 14 (1979), p. 9. Remarkably, Collins uses the term *apocalypse* and not *apocalyptic*. In his view, the

*Three Critical Notes on Sacchi's Reconstruction**

[1] Sacchi states that “at Qumran both the Zadokite texts and those that emerged from the same line as the *Book of the Watchers* were acknowledged as equally authoritative” (p. 23). According to Sacchi, this indicates that the label *Pseudepigrapha* was attached to certain books only after the parting of the ways between Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. There is no question that both Zadokite texts and the Enochic texts akin to the *Book of the Watchers* were present at Qumran. But one might question whether both were considered equally authoritative.

In the second book of his *Jewish War* Josephus alludes to “the books of the Essenes” as containing prophecies (§ 159), descriptions of the therapeutic qualities of stones and plants (§ 136), and names of angels (§ 142). This suggests the possibility of identifying the Essenes with the Enochic authors and their followers, as G. Boccaccini does,⁶⁷ since (1) *1 En.* 1:9 is quoted as “prophecy” in Jude 14-15, and (2) the Enochians were certainly interested in the virtues of stones and plants (*1 En.* 7:2; 8:3; 10:7; *Jub.* 10:12-13) and in angelic onomastics (*1 En.* 6:7-8; 69:1-14). But like Josephus, Enochic sources do not address such topics in detail: they merely mention them. Such sources certainly express some of the interests of the Enochians/Essenes and the “books of the Essenes,” but they cannot be straightforwardly identified with those books.

Further, the only more or less Enochic text that is explicitly quoted as authoritative in Qumranic literature is the *Book of Jubilees*. It is mentioned in CD XVI, 3-4 as “precise” (*hnh hw' mdwqdq*)⁶⁸ and in 4Q228 1 I, 9 with the introductory formula *ky kn ktwb*;⁶⁹ such indications are so clear that Martin Abegg, Peter Flint and Eugene Ulrich included the *Book of Jubilees* along with the Zadokite Pentateuch itself in their *Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*.⁷⁰ But the *Book of Jubilees* is not *in toto* an Enochic work, since it testifies to a progressive rapprochement between the Enochic and Zadokite tradition.⁷¹ In fact, we have no text from Qumran explicitly quoting the Enochic Pentateuch as revealed scripture or prophecy, as is the case in Jude 14-15. If anything, the most plausible proof that the Enochic Pentateuch was

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⁶⁷ Boccaccini, *Beyond*, pp. 166-170.

⁶⁸ B.Z. Wacholder, *The New Damascus Document: The Midrash on the Eschatological Torah of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Reconstruction, Translation and Commentary* (STDJ 56; Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 135, holds that *mdwqdq* means positively “more precise and perfect than the traditional canon.”

⁶⁹ M. Abegg Jr. – P. Flint – E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (New York: Harper, 1999), pp. 197-198; C. Hempel, “The Place of the *Book of Jubilees* at Qumran and Beyond,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Their Historical Context*, ed. T.H. Lim (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), pp. 187-196, esp. p. 193.

⁷⁰ Abegg Jr. – Flint – Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 197-198.

⁷¹ Boccaccini, *Beyond*, pp. 86-98.

already considered “canonical” at Qumran lies in the very fact that, at a given moment, five different Enochic books were juxtaposed to form a Pentateuch, then copied and transmitted together as a single corpus: no fewer than three MSS of the Aramaic *I Enoch* (4Q204, 4Q205, 4Q206) included between two and four books of this Pentateuch. Józef Milik argued that this juxtaposition took place in Qumran at about 100 BCE, possibly at the hands of a local scribe.⁷²

Is this enough evidence for us to agree with Sacchi in thinking that at Qumran the texts that “emerged from the same line as the *Book of the Watchers*” (therefore excluding the *Book of Jubilees*) were considered as authoritative or “canonical” as the Zadokite texts, and that they lost their “canonical status” only later? The presence of both Enochic and Zadokite texts in the Qumran library is still an unsolved question, as Sacchi himself admits (*ibid.*). How can we answer it unless we turn to a concept of “authority” or “canonicity” that is less circumscribed than the one to which we are accustomed, and less tightly linked to the multifarious group identities we continue to reconstruct?

[2] Sacchi asserts the by now widespread assumption that “their texts [= Qumran’s] remained unknown by the rest of the Jewish society (...). None of the texts they authored survived outside of Qumran” (p. 24). Not even Christians received them in that corpus of religious literature that they deemed to be second rate and that moderns label “the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.”⁷³

The question, though, is more complex. The case of the *Book of the Giants* with its core importance in Manichaeism is a very relevant instance of the extra-Qumranic fortune of a text that emerged “from the same line as the *Book of the Watchers*” and that, even if it did not originate within the community itself, was at least very well attested in its library. By no means less relevant, from the perspective of the history of ideas, are the survival of the Damascus Document in the Cairo Geniza and the enormous influence of Qumranic ideas on medieval Karaite thinkers and halakhists.⁷⁴ Boccaccini dismisses joint attestations of texts in Qumran, Masada, and the Geniza as “the classic exception that confirms the rule:” the Wisdom of Ben Sira could have been taken to Masada by refugees fleeing from Qumran; some scrolls could have come into Karaite hands, and from them to the Geniza, by means of a chance discovery like the one mentioned at the

⁷² J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments from Qumrân Cave 4* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1976), pp. 183-184.

⁷³ So Devorah Dimant already in 1995 (quoted in Boccaccini, *Beyond*, p. 157 n. 68).

⁷⁴ Y. Erder, “The Karaites and the Second Temple Sects,” in *Karaite Judaism: A Guide to Its History and Literary Sources*, ed. M. Polliack (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 119-143; Idem, *Avele Šiyyon ha-qara'im u-megillot Qumran: le-toldot ḥalufah le-yahadut rabbanit* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004). For a *status quaestionis* see H. Ben-Shammai, “He'arot methodology le-ḥeqer ha-yahas ben ha-Qara'im u-ven kittot yehudiyot qadumot,” in *Qaṭedra* 42 (1987), pp. 69-84.

end of the 8th century in a famous epistle by the Patriarch of Seleucia, Timothy I.⁷⁵ But Boccaccini himself admits that it is really “striking” that texts that maybe did not originate in Qumran but were present there could make their way to Masada and the Geniza *only* by means of direct contact or discovery, and not through the more normal dynamics of textual transmission.⁷⁶

Such a reconstruction, in fact, is too “striking” to be likely. Even more so if we take into account the best documented case we know, the *Wisdom of Ben Sira*. This text did not originate in Qumran, but was read and preserved there. Several copies of it were found at Masada and in the Geniza, it was accepted in the Alexandrian and Christian canons, and it is often quoted in Rabbinical literature with the formulas *še-ne’emar* or *di-khtiv* that commonly introduce quotations from authoritative Scripture.⁷⁷ Ben Sira’s path through *all* of Jewish and Christian late antiquity shows how hypothetical our distinctions and reconstructions of groups and their dynamics must remain if they start from the texts – or from the labels of ownership we ascribe to them. Also the *Wisdom Text* attested only in the Geniza was dated by one of its editors to the 1st century CE, a dating that would be compatible – if only speculatively, *e silentio* – with the possibility that the text originated in Qumran.⁷⁸ Furthermore, the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice are attested both in Qumran and Masada, and their origin in Qumran is very controversial.⁷⁹ Is it really plausible to think of Qumran after *ca.* 100 BCE as a case of intellectual isolationism that did not allow *any* form of osmosis – even if by means of disagreement? Even if we admit that *all* the texts produced within the community after 100 BCE remained unknown outside Qumran, the extra-Qumranic continuity of many texts that were read and transcribed at Qumran even in the 1st century BCE suggests that at least some texts were more socially mobile than we imagine them to be. Whether those texts moved by means of particular individuals or groups is a fruitful topic for future research.

[3] Sacchi concludes that “the apocryphal texts, starting from the most ancient ones, shed some light on that side of Judaism that had no success in history” (p. 26). He defines that side of Judaism *via negativa*: “it was surely different from the Rabbinic one,” “a vanishing variety of Judaism that we are not able to identify and describe” (*ibid.*). This *via negativa* brings us

⁷⁵ Boccaccini, *Beyond*, pp. 158-159.

⁷⁶ Boccaccini, *Beyond*, p. 158.

⁷⁷ G. Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and ‘Canonic’ Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 204-212. The “excommunication” of Ben Sira’s book in *t.Yadayim* 2:13 suggests that many rabbis must have shared the Hellenists’ point of view about the book’s authoritativeness.

⁷⁸ K. Berger, *Die Weisheitsschrift aus der Kairoer Geniza* (Tübingen: Francke, 1996).

⁷⁹ See most recently A.L.A. Hogeterp, *Paul and God’s Temple: A Historical Interpretation of Cultic Imagery in the Corinthian Correspondence* (Biblical Tools and Studies 2; Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 110, 114.

back to the same *impasse* that was experienced at the beginning of research on Jewish apocalypticism, when scholars looked for Jewish groups and movements that could enable them to stick labels on the extant texts: this one is Essenic, this one Enochic, that one must be Sadducean, and that one Rabbinic or Christian.

But intertextual references among texts even of different “families” are actually the rule, not the confirming exception. It is perhaps more interesting and fruitful to follow the history of ideas throughout texts, apart from their belonging to one or another “Jewish sect” – a method of which Sacchi himself has produced many masterful examples.⁸⁰ Texts, groups, religions and ages are the vehicles through which ideas spread, intersect, change, get superseded eventually, and dissolve. Many of the ideas that are typical of pseudepigraphical and Qumranic literature enjoyed a rich and successful path in Rabbinical literature too (e.g. the concept of *yeşer ha-ra’*, or the character of Enoch himself, if only within Rabbinic polemics against the Enochic tradition)⁸¹ or in the folkloric dimension conveyed, among other things, by a Rabbinical cornerstone such as the Bavli (e.g. the character of Satan). Sacchi is right in maintaining that distinguishing between a Judaism of the Pseudepigrapha and Rabbinic Judaism “is a negative statement that can only be used as a starting point for further research” (*ibid.*) – maybe precisely by delimitating its scope and turning our attention to the forms of osmosis, intertextuality, and continuity between the various Judaisms of late antiquity.

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*What Is an Apocalyptic Text, and How Do We Know That:
Seeking the Provenience of the Book of the Watchers*

Paolo Sacchi correctly explains a dilemma found in some scholarly publications. What is it? It is the attempt to define an apocalypse. The attempt begins with an analysis of texts. But the collected texts are chosen

⁸⁰ See in particular many of the essays of the 1980s collected in Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic* and Idem, *The History*, pp. 303-495 (Part IV, “The Themes of Middle Judaism”).

⁸¹ On the *yeşer ha-ra’* between Qumran and Rabbinical literature see J. Cook, “The Origin and Tradition of the *yeşer ha-tov* and *yeşer ha-ra’*,” *JSJ* 38 (2007), pp. 80-91; P. Capelli, “Il problema del male: risposte ebraiche dal Secondo Tempio alla Qabbalah,” *Ricerche Storico-bibliche* 19/1 (2007), pp. 135-156. On the continuity of Enochic ideas after Qumran see Boccaccini, *Beyond*, p. 190; S.F. Fraade – A. Shemesh – R.A. Clements (eds.), *Rabbinic Perspective: Rabbinic Literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. Proceedings of the Eighth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, 7-9 January, 2003* (STDJ 62; Leiden: Brill, 2006). On sources of ancient Jewish liturgy in some pseudepigrapha see already F. Perles, “Notes sur les apocryphes et les pseudépigraphes,” *REJ* 73 (1921), pp. 173-185.