AUTHORSHIP AND PSEUDEPIGRAPHY IN EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE: A TRANSLATION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT SOURCE TEXTS AND AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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The following contribution to the discussion of Paul and ancient pseudepigraphy does not consist of a defense of a particular view on pseudepigraphy and its relevance for the *Corpus Paulinum* and other ancient literature.[1] Rather, it contains a collection of the most relevant source texts pertaining to ancient and early Christian authorship and pseudepigraphy in English translation and an annotated bibliography of the most important and most recent contributions to the scholarly discussion of ancient pseudepigraphy.

Both the source texts and the secondary literature focus on a number of related questions: What is a pseudepigraphon? Was pseudepigraphy a non-deceptive literary device or literary forgery? What was the reaction of ancient readers if they found out that a certain book was a pseudepigraphon? How did ancient authors justify their use of pseudepigraphy? Were pseudepigraphical books accepted into the biblical canon or on principle rejected as uncanonical?

Select Source Texts

For the present contribution I have considerably enhanced an earlier text collection that I published in German ten years ago[2] and which left

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[1] I have offered my own interpretation of the available ancient evidence in a number of contributions: "Literarische Echtheit als Kanonkriterium in der alten Kirche," *ZNW* 88 (1997): 97–110; *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum* (WUNT 2.138; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001); "The Anonymity of the New Testament History Books: A Stylistic Device in the Context of Greco-Roman and Ancient Near Eastern Literature," *NovT* 50 (2008): 120–42; "Revelatory Experience and Pseudepigraphical Attribution in Early Jewish Apocalypses," *BBR* 21 (2011): 69–96.

[2] See my *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung*, 198–261, which includes also the Greek and Latin texts.

room for amplification.[3] Where possible, I have made use of the available English translations. In the remaining cases I have provided my own translations, except for an Arabic text which has been kindly translated by a competent colleague.[4] Beyond that, I have introduced every text with a short note that offers the most necessary information on its writer and the literary and historical context of his remarks on authorship and pseudepigraphy.

Apocalypse of Paul *1–2*

The Christian *Apocalypse of Paul* claimed to contain revelations that the apostle Paul received when, according to 2 Cor 12:2–4, he was caught up to the third heaven. In order to explain why it remained unknown before the fourth century CE, the book offered a detailed explanation of its own rediscovery in Tarsus in 388 CE. By means of this deceitful explanation the unknown author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* wanted to deflect critical questions about the authenticity of his work. The pseudepigraphical *Apocalypse of Paul* begins with the words:[5]

> The revelation of the holy apostle Paul: the things which were revealed to him when he went up even to the third heaven and was caught up into Paradise and heard unspeakable words.
> [1] In the consulate of Theodosius Augustus the Younger and of Cynegius a certain respected man was living in Tarsus in the house which had once belonged to St. Paul; an angel, appearing to him by night, gave him a revelation telling him to break up the foundations of the house and to make public what he found. But he thought this was a delusion. [2] However the angel came the third time and scourged him and compelled him to break up the foundations.
> And when he had dug he discovered a marble box which was inscribed on the sides: in it was the revelation of Saint Paul and the shoes in which he used to walk when he was teaching the word of God. But he was afraid to open the box and brought it to a judge; the judge accepted it and sent it as it was, sealed with lead, to the emperor Theodosius; for he was afraid it might be something else. And when the emperor received it he opened it and found the revelation of Saint Paul. After a copy had been made he sent the original manuscript to Jerusalem.
> And it was written in it as follows...

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[3] This has been rightly noted by M. Frenschkowski in Jorg Frey et al. (eds.), *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen* (WUNT 246; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 183.

[4] Detailed information on the origin of the English translations is offered in the footnotes.

[5] Trans. by H. Duensing and A. de Santos Otero, "Apocalypse of Paul," in R. McL. Wilson (ed.), *New Testament Apocrypha* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 2:716–17.

Apocalypse of Paul, *Syriac Addition*

In its Syriac version, the *Apocalypse of Paul* ends with a fictitious section that relates how in the first century the apostle Paul deposited his apocalypse under a wall where it was found in the fourth century. The claim that an apocalyptic text carrying the name of Paul had been rediscovered after more than three centuries demonstrates that the name "Paul" was meant as an authorial attribution. Had the author of the *Apocalypse of Paul* wanted his readers to infer that his books did not claim to have originated with the apostle Paul (but was, for instance, a mere interpretation of Pauline thoughts) he would, in all probability, have abstained from such a historical claim.[6]

> I, Paul, however, came to myself and I knew and understood what I had seen and I wrote it in a roll. And while I lived, I did not have rest to reveal this mystery, but I wrote it (down) and deposited it under the wall of a house of that believer with whom I was in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia.
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> And when I was released from this temporal life (and stood) before my Lord, he spoke thus to me: Paul, have I shown everything to you so that you should put it under the wall of a house? Rather send and reveal it for its sake so that men may read it and turn to the way of truth that they may not come into these bitter torments. And thus this revelation was discovered.

Athanasius, Epistulae festales *39.2*

In his famous 39th Easter Letter of 367 CE, Athanasius of Alexandria presupposed that ordinary church people were misled by the authorial names of pseudepigraphical apocrypha:[7]

> Since we have spoken of heretics as dead, but of ourselves as possessing the Divine Scriptures for salvation; and since I fear that, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:3), some few of the simple should be led astray from their simplicity and purity, by the subtleties of certain men, and should henceforth read other books—those called apocryphal—being deceived by the similarity of their names with the genuine books; I exhort you to bear patiently, if I also write, by way of remembrance, influenced by the need and advantage of the Church.

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[6] Trans. by Duensing and de Santos Otero, "Apocalypse of Paul," 2:743.
[7] Trans. in *NPNF*[2] 4:551.

Wilder, Terry L. *Pseudonymity, the New Testament, and Deception.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2004.

Wilder argues, against scholars like G. Bornkamm and A. T. Lincoln, that ancient and early Christian authors were aware of the concept of literary property. He adopts the thesis that ancient philosophical schools knew a form of non-deceptive pseudepigraphy (35–73). While some of the many philosophical letters claimed to have been written by the philosophers mentioned in their prescripts, other names were neither intended to be construed as authorial claims nor to deceive their readers (75–121). Early Christian authors condemned pseudepigraphy almost unanimously and disputed the canonicity of pseudepigrapha (123–63). Whoever wrote under the name of an apostle and thereby claimed his authority deceived his readers. In the first and early second century non-deceptive apostolic pseudepigraphy was impossible (165–216). The pseudepigraphical authors of 2 Thessalonians, Colossians and 2 Timothy wanted to deceive their audiences (217–43) (compare my review in *TLZ* 132 [2007]: 1208–10).

Wyrick, Jed. *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Tradition.* Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 49. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

In this dissertation in comparative literature, Wyrick traces the genesis and history of the idea of the author in ancient literature. His main conclusion is that Jews, Greeks, and Christians judged the authenticity of a book by evaluating the status of its scribe and his place in the prophetic succession (Jews and Christians) or the likelihood that it was actually written down by the person whose name it bore (Greeks and Christians). *M. Baba Bathra* 14b–15a and comparable rabbinic texts do not talk about human authorship in terms of a Greek understanding but emphasize the divine origin of the Bible (21–79). In early and rabbinic Judaism the anonymity of texts was eliminated by means of attributions which served to determine the authority of those texts (801–10). Josephus summed up the differences between the individualistic aims of the Greek approach to composition and the Jewish concept of a succession of prophets who guaranteed the truthfulness of the written tradition (111–202). A parallel to the Jewish-Christian legend on the origin of the Septuagint existed in certain Greek scholia to Dionysius Thrax which reported a re-textualization of Homer during the sixth century BCE. In this context the adding and identification of secondary lines as well as literary forgery and attribution criticism played a major role (203–80). The approach of Christians to their literature was influence by both the scholarly approach of Aristotelian and Alexandrian attribution analysis and the Ezra legend of the re-textualization of the Hebrew Bible (281–343). Augustine combined the Greek concept of the role of intentional individuals in literary composition and the Jewish concept of the authorship of God and the prophetic scribes who recorded divine truth (344–81).

Zimmermann, Ruben. "Lügen für die Wahrheit? Das Phänomen urchristlicher Pseudepigrafie am Beispiel des Kolosserbriefs." Pages 257–72 in *Lügen und Betrügen: Das Falsche in der Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Moderne.* Edited by O. Hochadel and U. Kocher. Cologne: Böhlau, 2000.

The unknown authors of the unauthentic Paulines lied about their identity for the sake of orthodoxy. Jewish and Christian writers did not consider this to be in conflict with the Old Testament prohibition of lying.

———. "Unecht—und doch wahr? Pseudepigraphie im Neuen Testament als theologisches Problem." *ZNT* 12 (2003): 27–38.

Only rarely did pseudepigrapha intend to deceive their readers about their authors' identity. Like the majority of the ancient pseudepigraphers, the unknown authors of the New Testament pseudepigrapha did not intend to mislead the recipients.

Paul and Pseudepigraphy

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