Bart D. Ehrman
Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics
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Ehrman's book consists of two parts. In part I he deals on nearly 150 pages with the phenomenon of forgery in Greco-Roman antiquity (11-145). In the much longer second part he identifies and analyses early Christian forgeries and counterforgeries from the first four centuries (149-548).

Since "the majority of our early Christian forgeries do in fact appear to have been generated out of a polemical context" (531), most early Christian pseudepigrapha are covered in part II, some of them at several places, among them the New Testament pseudepigrapha. One of the main impressions Ehrman's arrangement of the source material makes is that in terms of their deceptive intention and strategies the New Testament pseudepigrapha were not fundamentally different from the extra-canonical pseudepigrapha of the same period.

As someone who has himself written on the same subject, I am particularly interested in what Ehrman has to say (mainly in part II) about the complex and debated literary phenomenon of early Christian pseudepigraphy. In Ehrman's treatment of this topic, at least three central questions can be distinguished.

First, were pseudepigraphical texts written to deceive and regarded as deceptive by their readers? Ehrman gives a positive answer. One of his main theses is that "forgery was widely considered a form of literary deceit" (529). To my ears, admittedly the ears of a second language reader, this statement sounds somewhat tautological since forgery is per definition the act of producing something for a deceitful or fraudulent purpose. Therefore, I would prefer to say that, as a rule, ancient *pseudepigraphy* was considered a form of literary deceit. But apart from this terminological caveat, I agree with the conclusions Ehrman has drawn from the available source texts.

Ehrman's second question is: "Did forgers think that lying is something not only right, but divinely sanctioned?" (548). Ehrman's answer is again positive, and there can be little doubt, I believe, that this is exactly what some of the ancient sources indicate.

Thirdly, Ehrman asks, what kinds of texts were regarded as pseudepigraphical? His answer to this third question is problematic. Whereas both of us have covered pretty much the same ground and so far have come to very similar conclusions, Ehrman explicitly explains to his readers where our books differ. Apart from Ehrman's leading interest in forgery and counterforgery and my overarching focus on forgery and canonicity he disagrees with my thesis that "a book that was not authored by the person named is not a forgery if its

contents can be traced back directly to that person" (31 n. 6). Ehrman does not concur with my observation that the ancients distinguished between the wording and the contents of a text and formed their opinion about its authenticity or inauthenticity on the basis of the origin of its contents (87-88, 90, 110, 116 *etc.*; cf. my *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung* [Tübingen 2001] 195). Ehrman's counter thesis is that the decision about a book's authenticity "was not based purely on the question of the contents of a work" (88); "it was not simply the contents of a work that mattered" (90); "the contents of a work mattered insofar as they were genuinely penned by an authoritative figure" (92). A book was only regarded as authentic if it contained the alleged author's "own words" (111).

One of Ehrman's main targets is my interpretation of ancient school pseudepigraphy. In 2001 I had disputed the prevalent thesis that in ancient philosophical and medical (and Christian) schools it was acceptable for pupils to publish their own ideas under the names of their famous teachers, for instance Pythagoras or Hippocrates. After having reviewed the relevant source texts I concluded that the understanding of authorship in Greco-Roman schools was compatible with the notion of authenticity in the rest of ancient literature: Pupils were allowed to publish their teachers' words and thoughts under the names of their teachers, but they had to publish their own philosophical, medical, or theological ideas under their own names. Otherwise they were regarded as literary forgers.

One of the alleged proof texts for non-deceptive pseudepigraphy in ancient schools I had to deal with came from Porphyry. According to B. L. van der Waerden, in a fragment that has only been preserved in an Arabic translation, Porphyry distinguished 280 authentic books of Pythagoras from other books which had been forged under his name; while Pythagoras himself published 80 authentic books, the inheritors of his knowledge published 200 authentic books—apparently under the philosopher's name (Pauly-Wissowa Suppl. 10 [1965] 862-864). I suggested that Porphyry distinguished the 200 books from the literary forgeries because he regarded them as adequate documentations of Pythagoras' teaching and therefore as non-deceptive.

In his book, Ehrman quotes a new translation of the Arabic fragment in which Porphyry does not say or imply that the 200 books were published under Pythagoras' name (109-110). But the translation of Porphyry's remarks which Ehrman offers is not complete; it omits its final and most decisive section in which Porphyry accepted 280 books of the sage as authentic.

If Ehrman's interpretation of Porphyry's explanation was correct (which I doubt, because it rests on an incomplete textual basis), he had at least demonstrated that one of the central proof texts for non-deceptive school

pseudepigraphy does not at all speak about innocent pseudepigraphy. Yet, Ehrman is not content merely to further the case against acceptable school pseudepigraphy; instead he moves on to a considerably stricter interpretation of the ancient concept of authorship than I had suggested: It was only acceptable for a student to publish his teacher's lectures under his teacher's name if he reproduced the exact wording. "If the words did not go back to the teacher himself, this would be forgery" (115). According to Ehrman, a text could be regarded as authentic only if both content and wording came from the author to whom the text was ascribed.

This short review does not leave enough room for a full discussion of this interpretation of the ancient evidence, but a few observations might be in order. The basic principle that lay behind the great majority of ancient statements on literary authenticity and pseudepigraphy was stated clearly by, among others, Philo of Alexandria. In his work on Moses, Philo wrote: "Who does not know that every language, and Greek especially, abounds in terms, and that the same thought can be put in many shapes by paraphrasing more or less freely and suiting the expression to the occasion?" (*Mos*. 2.38 [Colson, LCL]).

This fundamental insight was applied by various ancient authors to all sorts of texts, first of all those that were produced under their authors' control. Some ancient correspondents employed secretaries who composed their letters and did so in their own style (Philostratus of Lemnos, *De Epistulis etc*.). Some ancient historians authorized language assistants to improve the Greek style of their books (Jos., *Ap*. 1.50). In classical Greece, litigants who had to appear in court allowed professional logographers, on the basis of prior consultation, to compose their defense speeches which they then learned by heart and recited on trial as their own (cf. Plut., *Garr*. 5 = *Mor*. 504c *etc*.); in Rome, political leaders employed ghost writers for their letters, their speeches, and their proclamations (Suet., *Dom*. 20 *etc*.). I am not aware of any ancient complaints that this practice was deceptive.

The principle that the authenticity of a text depended on its contents and not on its wording was also applied to independent texts that were produced without authorial control. Ancient translators like Cicero felt free to practice a *sensu de sensu* type of translation (*Opt. gen*. 5.14 *etc*.); likewise Jerome justified his decision against a word for word translation with the observation that even the apostles, when they translated the Old Testament, reproduced not its words but simply its meaning (*Ep*. 57.9 *etc*.). In a similar way, the Gospels could be ascribed both to their assumed editors, who were responsible for their published form, and to those who were regarded as the intellectual authors of their contents (Tert., *Marc*. 4.5.3-4 *etc*.).

Finally, the distinction between content and form was also applied to embedded texts that were produced without authorial control. According to Polybius, historians were not expected to render the wording of historical speeches but were obliged to reproduce the sense of what had been said (12.25a.5 *etc.*). The church fathers made this same differentiation when they explained the differences in wording between the differing reproductions of the words and speeches of Jesus in the synoptic Gospels (Aug., *Cons.* 2.12.29 *etc.*). Pompeius Trogus was the only ancient historian I know who criticized historians for rendering the content of historical speeches in *oratio recta*; he claimed that for historians who merely reproduced the content but not the actual words of a speaker *oratio obliqua* was the only acceptable medium (Justin, *Epit. Hist. Phil.* 38.3.10-11).

With an eye to these and many similar ancient statements, I cannot agree with the most innovative contribution of Ehrman's otherwise very useful book. Ehrman has rightly joined the growing number of scholars who have raised substantial doubts regarding the (once) popular thesis of innocent ancient pseudepigraphy. At the same time, his assertion that in antiquity a text's authenticity was assessed not on the basis of its content but always on the basis of its wording goes one step beyond what the numerous relevant sources reveal.

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