

PSEUDEPIGRAPHY / (LITERARY) FORGERY

Thirteen of the 27 New Testament books were published under the name of Paul. How many of them are pseudepigraphical is controversial. While some church fathers also regarded the Letter to the Hebrews as Pauline, because of its anonymity the problem of pseudepigraphy does not apply.

In addition, about one third of the speech material in the Book of Acts is attributed to Paul. The extent to which these speeches are pseudonymous is also the subject of much debate.

Other ancient texts composed under the name of Paul were not accepted into the New Testament canon, among them the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, the *Epistle to the Alexandrians*, the *Epistles of Paul to Seneca* and the *Apocalypse of Paul*. It is generally agreed that all of them are pseudepigraphical.

The apocryphal *Acts of Paul* contains a narrative about Paul's ministry but the book may have been distributed anonymously. However, Paul's *Third Epistle to the Corinthians* and the Pauline speeches, which it contains, are also generally regarded as pseudonymous.

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1. Anonymity, Orthonymity, Pseudonymity and Allonymity

In discussions of ancient texts with false authorial attributions, four technical terms are relevant.

A text without an authorial attribution is called "anonymous" (from ἀνώνυμος = "without name" [LSJ s.v.]). A text with a correct attribution is called "orthonymous" (from ὀρθώνυμος = "rightly named" [LSJ s.v.]).

In contrast, a falsely attributed text is called "pseudonymous" (from ψευδώνυμος = „under a false name“ [LSJ s.v.]). An alternative designation for a pseudonymous text is "pseudepigraphos" (from ψευδεπίγραφος = "with false superscription or title" [LSJ s.v.]). A "pseudepigraphon" is an ancient text that was not written by the author to whom it is attributed in its title. An alternative designation is "literary forgery". The terms "pseudepigraphy", "pseudonymity", and "literary forgery" designate the use of a false authorial attribution or the state of a text that carries a false authorial attribution.

Since "pseudepigraphy" is, as a rule, used for a false attribution with deceptive

intent, the modern term “allonymity” has been coined to designate a false attribution irrespective of its deceptive or non-deceptive intent.

The word pseudepigraphon must not be confused with apocryphon. An “apocryphon” is a writing for which canonical status was claimed but which was not received into the biblical canon. Apocrypha could be anonymous (like perhaps the *Acts of Paul*) or pseudepigraphical (like the *Apocalypse of Paul*). Pseudepigrapha (like the *Epistle to the Alexandrians*) could in principle be regarded as apocryphal or as canonical.

2. Different Kinds of False Attribution

Three kinds of false attribution are closely related but must be carefully distinguished: primary false attribution, secondary false attribution and literary borrowing.

First, an author could publish his own complete text under someone else’s name. This is primary complete false attribution (as in the *Apocalypse of Paul*). Secondly, an author could publish someone else’s complete text under another name (as happened with medical texts which were falsely ascribed to Hippokrates). This is secondary complete false attribution. Third, an author could publish someone else’s complete text under his own name (as happened to some of Galen’s texts). This is complete literary borrowing.

Each kind of false attribution can be applied not only to complete but also to embedded texts. First, an author could compose a falsely attributed speech or letter and embed it into his narrative (as the author of the *Acts of Paul* did with *3 Corinthians*). This is primary embedded false attribution. Second, an author could interpolate a passage from one author into the text of another author (as, according to some, a reader of 1 Corinthians did in 1 Cor 14:33b-35). This is secondary embedded false attribution. Third, an author could insert passages from someone else’s work into his own text (as, according to some, the author of Ephesians did with passages from Colossians). This is partial literary borrowing.

	False attribution		
	by publishing one’s own text under someone else’s name	by publishing someone else’s text under another name	by publishing someone else’s text under one’s own name
as independent text	Primary complete false attribution (<i>Apoc. Paul</i>)	Secondary complete false attribution (some Ps-Hippocratica)	Complete literary borrowing (some of Galen’s texts)
as embedded text	Primary embedded false attribution (<i>3 Cor.</i>)	Secondary embedded false attribution (1 Cor 14:33b-35)	Partial literary borrowing (Eph/Col)

3. False Attribution with Deceptive Intent

For the ancient texts which were ascribed to Paul it is not only controversial how many of them are falsely ascribed but also if the false attributions were deceptive or not. Regarding this second question, the ancient evidence is quite clear that the concept of intellectual and literary property was already known in antiquity (Blum, Schickert, Mülke).

According to the ancient sources (cf. the collection in Baum, "Authorship and Pseudepigraphy"), primary complete false attribution was usually not practiced as transparent literary fiction (without deceptive intent) but as literary forgery (with the intention to deceive). Motives for the writing of pseudepigraphic texts varied; the sources mention profit seeking, the intention to discredit opponents, and the concern to increase the effectiveness of a text. Such motives presuppose a deceptive intent (Baum).

Literary analogies point in the same direction: That some ancient historians (like Duris of Samos) put unhistorical speeches into the mouths of their protagonists was considered inadmissible (as primary embedded pseudepigraphy) by Polybius and many others (Baum). Interpolators (like Onomakritos) were regarded as forgers, against whose manipulations authors sought to protect their works (Mülke). Galen denounced readers who distributed his texts under their names. Pliny and Vitruvius considered partial borrowing from technical treatises theft (*κλοπή* or *furtum*) of intellectual property, i.e. plagiarism (Stemplinger, Janßen, "Plagiat"). These analogies confirm the conclusion that the composition of pseudepigraphic writings was generally regarded as literary forgery.

	Deceptive false attribution (forgery)		
	by publishing one's own text under someone else's name	by publishing someone else's text under another name	by publishing someone else's text under one's own name
as independent text	Primary complete pseudepigraphy		Complete plagiarism
as embedded text	Primary embedded Pseudepigraphy	(Secondary) Interpolation	Partial plagiarism

Ancient authenticity criticism identified pseudepigrapha (as well as invented historical speeches, interpolations and plagiarism) based on internal and external criteria. Critics evaluated external historical testimonies about the origin of a given text and compared its style and content with the genuine writings of the alleged author (Speyer, Blum).

In ancient authenticity criticism, a text's authenticity was not assessed based on its wording (thus Ehrman). Rather, its authorial attribution was regarded as correct and non-deceptive if its content (and not necessarily its wording) could be traced back to the author whose name it carried (Baum, "Content and Form").

		Style	
		from the author	from someone else
Content	from the author	authentic	authentic
	from someone else	forged	forged

4. False Attribution without Deceptive Intent

Secondary false attribution of independent medical and philosophical texts usually happened by mistake. Secondary false attribution of embedded texts (interpolation) could also occur erroneously.

While most ancient texts that were falsely ascribed by their authors were literary forgeries, this is not true for all categories of false authorial attributions.

(1) A clear exception were falsely ascribed texts, which were written as rhetorical exercises (Sint, Brox). An important piece of evidence is a text by a certain Mithridates in which he told his readers that he had composed historically plausible letters under different names. This is a case not of (deceptive) primary complete pseudepigraphy but of (transparent) primary complete allonymity.

(2) A second exception are ancient epics and novels in which authors like Homer or Apuleius put freely invented speeches into the mouths of their characters without deceptive intent. These false attributions were not primary embedded pseudepigraphy but primary embedded allonymity.

(3) A third exception is literary borrowing in poetry that could be regarded as transparent artistic imitation of great models, both in independent and embedded texts (Janßen, "Plagiat").

	Transparent false attribution	
	by publishing one's own text under someone else's name	by publishing someone else's text under one's own name
as independent text	Primary complete allonymity (in stylistic exercises)	Transparent full borrowing (in poetic imitation)
as embedded text	Primary embedded allonymity (in novels)	Transparent partial borrowing (in poetic imitation)

Some scholars have identified other areas of ancient literature in which non-deceptive false attribution was acceptable, but these are controversial. Among them are the following:

(4) Some scholars believe that false attribution in medical and philosophical schools, where pupils composed their own texts under the names of their famous teachers, was transparent (Speyer, Brox, Wilder), while others regard it as deceptive (Donelson, Baum, Ehrman).

(5) Some scholars believe that false attributions in letters and letter collections, which were attributed to famous persons of the past, were

transparent (Schmidt, Wilder), while others regard them as deceptive (Sint, Donelson).

(6) Some scholars believe that in early Jewish apocalypses and related texts the attributions to famous men of the biblical past were transparent (Sint, Speyer, Brox, Meade, Naiman, Dobroruka), while others regard them as deceptive (Donelson, Baum, Van der Toorn).

5. The Deceptive Intent of False Attribution in Early Christianity

Apocryphal texts, which were composed under the name of Paul (the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, the *Epistle to the Alexandrians*, the *Epistles of Paul to Seneca* and the *Apocalypse of Paul*), are generally regarded as pseudepigrapha or literary forgeries. The same holds true for the Pauline speeches and Paul's *Third Epistle to the Corinthians*, which are contained in the apocryphal *Acts of Paul*.

The question whether and to what extent New Testament or early Christian pseudepigrapha were meant to deceive their readers is answered differently. In textbooks, non-deceptive New Testament pseudepigraphy is assumed more often than in research monographs on the subject (Janßen).

(1) Some researchers believe that all New Testament pseudepigrapha were transparent fictions (Kiley, Meade, possibly Riedl).

(2) Others believe that some New Testament pseudepigrapha were transparent fictions (Brox, Frey/Herzer, Schmidt as a possibility).

(3) A third group believes that no New Testament pseudepigraphon was a transparent fiction (Speyer, Donelson, Duff, Baum, Frenschkowski, Wilder, Ehrman, Lüdemann).

6. The Moral Evaluation of Literary Forgery by its Authors

Ancient forgers rarely attempt to justify their activities or explicitly state whether they acted with a clear conscience.

Indirect insights into the self-justification of ancient forgers are provided by literary forgeries (as the *Apostolic Constitutions*), which warned against literary forgeries. Their ethical stance is clear: They considered forgeries in favor of their own theological convictions to be legitimate and only forgeries in favor of opposing positions to be reprehensible. Early Christian forgers considered themselves justified in writing under the names of recognized authors of the past if it served the cause of what they considered to be the truth.

This self-justification must be viewed in the context of numerous statements from pre-Christian and Christian antiquity, which declared a useful, salutary or pious lie to be legitimate. The authors of literary forgeries applied this general justification of deception to the production of their texts (Speyer, Brox, Donelson, Baum, Lüdemann).

7. Roman-Catholic Coping Strategies for Canonical Pseudepigraphy

The Christian churches agree that the biblical canon is the normative basis of Christian faith and practice. In academic theology, different strategies are pursued to cope with canonical pseudepigraphy. Some authors combine several arguments. Overall, Protestant theologians have more options at their disposal than Roman Catholic theologians.

Roman Catholic (and some Protestant) exegetes presume that the Church has made a definitive dogmatic delimitation of the biblical canon of scripture (Schelkle), and interpret canonical pseudepigraphy on this basis:

(1) False author attributions were not intended to deceive and therefore do not represent a moral problem (Kiley, Meade, possibly Riedl). – This argumentation can hardly be reconciled with the historical evidence in the ancient source texts (see sections 3-5 above).

(2) In the process of canon formation, literary authenticity was not a necessary criterion; therefore, it may not be used as such today (Ohlig, Brox). For the contemporary church, the historical origin of a biblical pseudepigraphon is of secondary importance in comparison to its canonization by the early church and to its ecclesiastical influence (Childs). – The historical argument on which this approach is based cannot be substantiated from the sources. In the early church, literary authenticity was not regarded as a sufficient, but as a necessary canon criterion (Baum).

(3) New Testament pseudepigrapha are literary forgeries, which God accepted in his mercy, just as he accepted the deceiver Jacob after he had obtained the rights of the firstborn by deception. Therefore, pseudepigraphy should only be rejected outside the canon (Pokorný). – This distinction between a canonical and an extra-canonical morality is not convincing. Moreover, a valid analogy can only be drawn between the cheater Jakob and the forger of a pseudepigraphic text. Just as Jacob (although he had promoted himself as a Pseudo-Esau and had to go into exile for this) did not forfeit the grace of God, God's grace also remains valid for a Christian forger (who published a text under Paul's name and had therefore been deprived of his office). There is, however, no analogy in the story of Jacob to the question of canonical forgeries (Baum, Lüdemann).

8. Protestant Coping Strategies for Canonical Pseudepigraphy

For (most) Protestants the assumption of an infallible canon decision of the church is not acceptable. Therefore, they can (in accord with Luther's freedom regarding the canon) change the boundaries of the canon of scripture or (going beyond Luther) partially or completely abandon the concept of a binding canon of scriptures in favor of a "canon in the canon". This leads to further options:

(4) Early Christian pseudepigrapha are literary forgeries and cannot have a full canonical but at most a deuterocanonical or apocryphal status. Because of the

pious lie (and the associated historical and content-related problems), pseudepigraphic texts cannot serve as theological yardsticks in the same way as orthonymous biblical texts (Baum, Wilder). – One objection to this position is that it leads to a reduced canon of scriptures (Janßen, Riedl).

(5) Literary forgeries can remain in the canon, because it is not the canon of scripture as a whole that serves as the yardstick for Christian faith and practice, but rather a "canon within the canon" (Käsemann). Therefore, a distinction has to be made between normative and non-normative elements within the canon. Thus, it is possible to detach the valuable ethical and theological contents of a biblical book from its deceptive statements (Lindeman). – This position abandons the theological concept that determined the creation of the biblical canon as a collection of normative scriptures.

Most unproblematic are canonical forgeries for researchers who deny any normativity of the canon:

(6) The biblical canon has no normative significance whatsoever since its texts were purely human contributions to the theological and ethical discussions of early Christianity. The deceptive intention of the New Testament pseudepigrapha corresponds to the fact that all human theology is deficient (Donelson; cf. Ehrman, Lüdemann). – This position is incompatible with any normative use of the biblical scriptures.

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