

A BRIEF SURVEY OF ANCIENT JEWISH LITERATURE

Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, and Other Jewish and Rabbinic Texts

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APOCRYPHA

The collection of books which were rejected from the Jewish canon of Scripture, but were included in the Greek (one exception is 2 Esdras which is not found in the Septuagint) and Old Latin versions. Apocrypha is the Greek word meaning “hidden” and is a title which may be regarded either positively as books containing hidden, esoteric knowledge or negatively as heretical, ‘ought to be hidden from the faithful’ books. In the Roman Catholic, Greek and Russian Orthodox traditions, this collection of works is known as the Deuterocanonical Books. It includes the following books:

- 1 Esdras - Ca. 150 BCE, original probably in Hebrew or Aramaic
- 2 Esdras (*or* 4 Ezra) - A composite work; chs. 3-14 by a Jewish author near close of 1st century CE though with traditional material back to 1st and perhaps even 2nd centuries BCE. Christian interpolations in 2nd and 3rd centuries CE
- Tobit - Written ca. 190 - 170 BCE
- Judith - Written about the middle of the 2nd century BCE following the Maccabean revolt
- Additions to the Book of Esther - Interpolations to Esther made probably 114-110 BCE which were removed and placed at the end of Esther by Jerome in the 4th century CE
- Wisdom of Solomon - Written probably 100 - 50 BCE and reflects Alexandrian Judaism
- Sirach (*or* Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach *or* Ben Sira) - Originally in Hebrew ca. 180-175 BCE and translated into Greek by author’s grandson who also added a prologue ca. 132 - 116 BCE
- Baruch (= 1 Baruch) - Written 150-60 BCE (though perhaps as late as 79 CE)
- Epistle of Jeremiah - Written 300-100 BCE (usually included with Baruch)
- The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men - Written 2nd or 1st century BCE
- Susanna - Written (2nd or) 1st century BCE
- Bel and the Dragon - Written ca. 100 BCE
- The Prayer of Manassah - Written 1st century BCE or CE but perhaps as late as beginning of 3rd century CE
- 1 Maccabees - Written ca. 100 BCE though perhaps with later additions
- 2 Maccabees - A summary of a work by a Hellenistic Jew, Jason of Cyrene: Jason wrote early 2nd century BCE and the summary was made in 1st century BCE

PSEUDEPIGRAPHA

A collection of Jewish writings written between 200 BCE and 200 CE (or later) which do not appear in either the Jewish canon or the Apocrypha. The Greek word ‘pseudepigrapha’ refers to works written under an assumed name. Many of the works evidence Christian influence. There is no defined limit to this collection, but among the important works are:

Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs	Psalms of Solomon
Testament of Job	Jubilees
Martyrdom of Isaiah	Enoch (or 1 Enoch)
3 and 4 Maccabees	Slavonic Enoch = 2 Enoch
Paralipomena of Jeremiah	Assumption of Moses
Life of Adam and Eve	Letter of Aristeas
2 Baruch = Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch	Sibylline Oracles
3 Baruch = Greek Apocalypse of Baruch	Qumran writings

OTHER JEWISH and RABBINIC TEXTS

- Targum (pl. Targumim) - This is a Hebrew word meaning “translation.” When used in a technical sense, the term designates one of several Aramaic paraphrases of Hebrew Scripture. These translations were unofficially begun in the first centuries BCE, but their final editions were not made till the (first or) second and third centuries CE and later in Palestine and Babylonia.
- Mishnah - The word mishnah comes from the Hebrew verb *shanah*, which, in post-biblical times, meant “teach” or “study.” Thus *mishnah* is what is taught or studied. Used as a title, Mishnah designates a collection of oral tradition (from between 2nd century BCE and 2nd century CE) taught and studied, in particular that which became the official Rabbinic compilation of this tradition. The compilation was the work of Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi who died in 219/220 CE. The Mishnah is divided into six main orders (*sedarim*), each of which is subdivided into several tractates (*masekhtot*). The Tosefta and the two Talmudim are arranged according to the orders and tractates of the Mishnah.
- Tosefta - The word is an Aramaic title usually defined as meaning “supplement” and designates a compilation closely resembling the Mishnah in form which supplements the Mishnaic material. Its origin is hard to determine, however, because it not only supplements the Mishnah but also records traditions opposed to those in the Mishnah, material which corresponds to a greater or lesser degree, and totally ignores some entire tractates of the Mishnah. The Tosefta was compiled in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE, but it records some traditions that are much older.
- Talmud - Talmud, from the Hebrew word for “study,” is the comprehensive designation for the Mishna and the discussions (in Aramaic) which are joined to it. These discussions of the Mishna are called Gemara. There are two Talmudim written by rabbis known collectively as Amoraim (3rd to 6th centuries CE).
- Gemara - From the Aramaic verb meaning “complete,” this term is used technically to refer to those amplifications of the Mishna recorded in the Talmudim. It recalls traditions back to the 2nd century BCE, but the final compilation was not made until the 5th century CE and later. The Gemara consists of both Halakah and Haggadah.
- Halakah - From the Hebrew verb meaning “go, walk, follow,” halakah refers to teaching about the torah, that is, the explication of the religious laws which one is to follow and by which one is guided.
- Haggadah - This refers to all scriptural interpretation which is non-halakic in character. Thus it includes interpretations of Scripture that can be practical, homiletical, or expository.
- Talmud Yerushalmi (= Jerusalem or Palestinian Talmud) - This talmud records the Gemara of the rabbis in Palestine. It ceased developing about 425 CE.
- Talmud Bavli (= Babylonian Talmud) - This talmud records the Gemara of the rabbis in Babylonia. It was essentially complete by the end of the 5th century CE but continued to be supplemented until as late as the 9th century CE.
- Midrash - The verb *darash* means, in post-biblical Hebrew, “to search out a scriptural passage, expound it,” then also “to find something by exposition.” Concretely, midrash (pl. midrashim) is the term for those literary works, some of them quite ancient, which contain scriptural interpretation of the haggadic, more rarely of the halakic, character. Often then Midrash is outright the title by which such a literary work is known—e.g., Midrash Rabbah—though there are numerous other midrashim with such titles as Mekhilta, Siphre, Siphra, Pesikta, Pirke.....

For Further Study:

- For further reference on the Apocrypha, see the article in the *IDB* and also the introduction to the collection as well as to each book in the *Oxford Annotated Bible With Apocrypha* or the *Harper Collins Study Bible (NRSV)*. Online: http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/apocrypha.htm
- On Pseudepigrapha, see the article in *IDB* and also the *Pseudepigrapha* by Charlesworth. Online: http://wesley.nnu.edu/biblical_studies/noncanon/pseudepigrapha.htm
- On rabbinic sources, see the article of that name by J.T. Townsend in *The Study of Judaism. Bibliographical Essays*, H.L. Strack's *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, and any number of books or articles by Jacob Neusner. Online: <http://www.earlyjewishwritings.com/talmud.html> For the targumim, cf.: <http://www.gettysburgsem.org/mhoffman/other/TargumInfo.pdf>