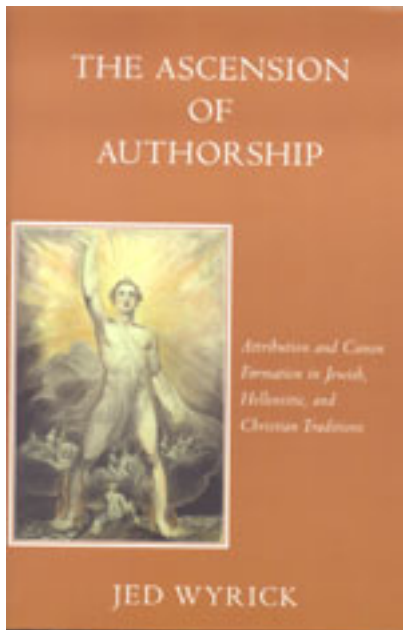


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Wyrick, Jed

The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions

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Wyrick's goal in this interesting book is to explore different conceptions of the author in late antiquity, namely, those put forward by Greek and Jewish writers, and to trace those conceptions as they develop into something resembling the modern idea of the author, through the Christian integration of its Greek and Jewish heritage, for Wyrick argues that "the Christian conceptualization of authorship was crafted from a Jewish metal, but was shaped on the anvil of Greek [thought]" (7). As he puts it, "*The Ascension of Authorship* ... investigates the ways that our present day notions of authorship 'rose up' as a transformation and synthesis of conflicting ancient views of attribution and authoritativeness" (ix). Another goal of the work is to underline the ways in which ideas of authorship interact with issues related to canonicity. Wyrick intends to trace the interactions and mutual influences of authorship, authenticity, and authority in a variety of different cultural settings.

Formally, this is an elegant, appealing work in which the author displays a playful and productive appreciation of binary structure. Wyrick is in love with duality, constantly establishing pairs and using these pairs as an organizing principle on both the macro- and

microscopic levels.¹ Most significantly, he uses the contrast between Jewish and Greek approaches to authorship as a means of establishing two poles for his work, which then winds its way back and forth between them, to end up eventually with the creation of the modern concept of authorship. For Wyrick, the Jewish pole is defined by its focus on the divine origin of its sacred texts and its consequent view of the human contribution as limited to faithful transcription (or, as in the case of Ezra, re-creation) of those texts, whereas the Greek pole is defined by its focus on individuality, individual creation, and the agonistic establishment of standards of judgment.

Wyrick's journey begins on the Jewish side with an intriguing discussion of the identification of the various scribes responsible for copying the books of the Bible, based around and inspired by the Babylonian Talmud's *Baba Batra* 14b–15a. Then, with the discussion of the attribution of the various books and the contents of these books (ch. 2: "Attaching Names to Biblical Books"), the focus shifts a bit more toward the Greek side of things, although we still remain in the Jewish camp. Nature, it has been said, abhors a vacuum, and Wyrick argues persuasively here that a similar abhorrence was the response of Second Temple Jewish thinkers when confronted with the literary vacuum of unattributed or ambiguously attributed biblical texts. Furthermore, attribution was a vital component of any discussion of authority and could either lead to a work's gain or loss of status or reflect that work's status in a "chicken or egg" type of procedure.

Following these discussions, we move away from an exclusively Jewish focus, and it is Josephus, that engaging rogue and traitor, who leads us across the great divide. His attack on Greek individualism and its concomitant agonistic desire for glory, as detailed in *Against Apion* and engagingly presented by Wyrick in chapter 3, "The Jewish Critique of Greek Letters,"² shifts the focus of the work to the Greek side of things, a shift made all the more definite by the subsequent discussion of the Homeric works and the history of their textualization in chapter 4, also drawing heavily on Josephus's *Against Apion*. In these two chapters we are looking at the Greek world through Jewish lenses—or, at any rate, Josephan lenses. These lenses are far from rose colored: indeed, what we are witness to is "Josephus' indictment of Greek historiography" (134) and his opposition to Greek creativity and individualistic values.

Remaining on the Greek side of things, in chapter 5 Wyrick leads us through a discussion of Peisistratus and Ptolemy. Wyrick establishes some interesting links between the two

1. Thus connections are set up between Homer and Moses, Josephus and Augustine, Jews and Greeks, Ezra and Aristotle, the Septuagint and the Homeric corpus, etc. In fact, virtually all of Wyrick's examples are presented in pair-form, which serves him well in making his arguments more memorable and gripping.

2. The chapter title is misleading, as the focus is overwhelmingly on Josephus.

figures: they are united at both the sacred and profane levels. On the one hand, they were associated with the textualization of, respectively, Homer and the Septuagint; on the other hand, they were also associated with the origins of the fine art of literary fraud. These rulers are examined retrospectively, largely from the point of view of the Greek grammarians of antiquity, whose job it was to define and to locate the elusive author, the source of authority, through the reconstruction of authentic texts. The author, then, emerges at least partly from literary criticism.

The Jewish side is reintroduced through the contrast between Ezra and Aristotle, as is the overriding theme of the differences between the Greek and Jewish approaches to the question of, and nature of, authorship. While Peisistratus gathered together the scattered Homeric corpus, Ezra is said (*4 Ezra* 14:18–26) to have recopied the books of the Bible after their loss during the Babylonian captivity, thanks to the inspiration of God.

This view of Ezra, never fully accepted in the rabbinic sources, combines the offices of scribe and prophet into one person. This makes a change in the Jewish side of things, as the conservative and tradition-based approach that Wyrick identifies in his discussion of Josephus and the rabbinic sources gives way to a more radical and prophetic approach represented by Ezra and his re-creation of the lost Bible, an approach that was far more amenable to Christian uses than the conservative model. In the Ezra model, the contents and trustworthiness of the Bible were upheld not through the fidelity of the long line of priests that had preserved it but rather through the direct intervention of God, in the form of the direct inspiration of one man at one given time. This new, but nonetheless Jewish, approach, with its simultaneous concern for history and its willingness to accept divine interruptions of history, thus paves the way for a Christian mediation between the Greek and Jewish poles that structure Wyrick's work.

As before, Josephus was a bridge between the Jewish and Greek poles, so here at the end of the work Augustine takes up this role. The difference between the two, however, is striking: whereas Josephus presented the Greek side of things only to reject and condemn it, Augustine, a Latin Christian, is presented as the means by which the two can be unified, as well as the means by which the modern concept of the author, which partakes of both, comes into existence.³ Intriguingly, Wyrick's discussion of this point, and particularly his citations from Augustine (*Conf.* 12; *Doctr. chr.* 3) show that one cannot discuss the author without also discussing the reader: arguments over authorial intentionality develop out of discussions of the reader's experience. The author is implicitly cast in the role of the reader, whether as the ultimate reader whose readings are

3. Although note Wyrick's nuancing of the idea of Augustine as the inventor of authorship (380).

by definition the most trustworthy or as just another reader, doing her best to make sense of the insight that God has given her.

As the reader will doubtless have noted before now, and as is regrettably so often the case, formal elegance has been attained at the cost of nuance. While the idea of separating the “Greek” and “Jewish” poles is helpful in showing contrasts and illustrating Wyrick’s points, the presentation makes the situation appear more hard and fast than it actually was. Josephus, for example, despite his vehement rejection of the “Greek” approach to things, nonetheless partakes of many of its attitudes; indeed, his rejection of Greek writers can be seen as at least partly motivated by polemical needs. By attacking the status and character of one’s opponents, one also undermines their arguments.

Furthermore, the range of Jewish approaches to literature and authorship extends beyond Josephus and the rabbis, the main focus of Wyrick’s work. Turning to a Jewish figure of the same epoch, but of greater significance even than Josephus, the brief discussions of Philo that Wyrick undertakes (esp. regarding divine inspiration [82–83]) show him to have occupied a position somewhere between these two poles, integrating aspects of both points of view into his work. Now, debate has always raged over whether Philo was a Hellenized Jew or a Jewish Hellenist, but whichever point of view one adopts, one is compelled to adopt a more nuanced understanding of what we mean by “Jewish” and “Greek” thought than Wyrick presents.

Wyrick’s book is engaging and interesting. Taken as a collection of discussions, of investigations of individual topics that are thematically related, it succeeds admirably. It does not, however, prove or systematically establish the points that Wyrick seems to wish to make about the development of the concept of the author. Too much is left out of the picture, too few writers and sources are examined: there are, in short, too many gaps between the various topics. The evidence that Wyrick does examine is treated quite satisfactorily; it is just that a full defense of Wyrick’s thesis would necessitate examining a great deal more evidence. What Wyrick ends up in the end with is a series of erudite, engaged, and engaging essays, organized around a simplified Jewish/Greek dichotomy, and while such a collection of essay is certainly no small accomplishment, neither is it a comprehensive presentation of the development of the concept of authorship in late antiquity.