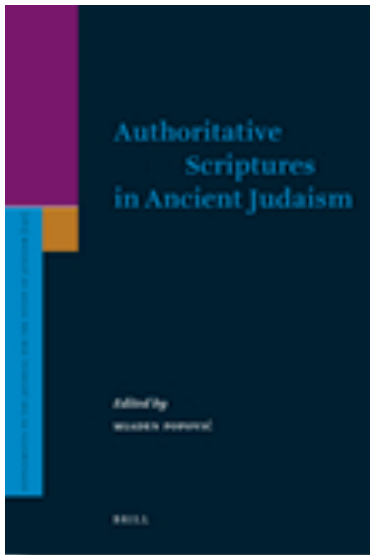


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Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism

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A conference held at the Qumran Institute, in the University of Groningen, in April 2008 marked the retirement of Florentino García Martínez. Participants in this study of the religious ideology of the Second Temple period considered, among other topics, the definition of the term “authoritative,” the canonical process, the status of Scripture, and how it related to postscriptural traditions. Sociological, cultural, and literary/linguistic aspects were covered, and the current volume contains fourteen of the fifteen papers delivered, plus two others, by scholars from Europe, North America, and Israel. The editor, who is Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Early Judaism and Director of the Qumran Institute, has provided a clear and helpful introduction, followed by fairly detailed summaries of the papers.

The honorand opens the discussion with the view that “‘The Bible’ is a complete anachronism during the Second Temple period” (20). Texts were variously regarded as authoritative, but there were many books and forms and no closed, canonical list. Whatever the Jewish situation elsewhere, textual plurality was the norm at Qumran. He identifies two forms of authoritative interpretation: one a continuous revelatory exegesis for prophetic texts, the other a novel exegesis that emanated from the Teacher of Righteousness, acting as a prophet.

According to George Brooke, Qumran was open to the influence of apocalyptic and broader wisdom traditions, while the practice of rewriting Scripture created texts that both received and conveyed authority. The Teacher is priest, heir to Moses, scribe, and mantic diviner, altogether “a notable multi-tasker” (46) who contributes to the creation of a fresh religious identity for the nascent movement.

The authority of books and their ancient status, their study, and their temple link occupy Arie van der Kooij. He describes the role of the scribes (“the intellectual elite,” 64) in the activities of transmission and reinterpretation and notes the place of the high priest atop the hierarchy, all as exemplified in Ben Sirā. The new literature is rooted in ancient teachings but also emerges out of the process of reinterpretation.

The question raised by Emanuel Tov is whether 4QRP, in its five manuscripts, represents a reworked or paraphrased text of the Pentateuch, as earlier thought, or an alternative textual version. He opts, on the basis of close analysis of LXX versions of 1 Kings, Esther, and Daniel, for the latter view and regards the version as of equal authority with, say, that of the proto-Masoretic version in priestly circles. Tov’s default assumption is that “all scripture texts must have been equally authoritative in the Qumran compound” (87).

Julio Trebolle describes how scribal schools in the ancient East redacted and transmitted sacred and secular texts that ultimately became the “education canon” (95) and explains the ancient character of Israel’s sacred texts. Canonical literature derives its authority from priesthood, royalty, and scribal/prophetic schools, but there are various views about the Jewish and Christian canonical process. The literary play-out and chronological order of the biblical books do not always correspond, as in 1 Kings 3–10, and the conflict “may determine the formation of different editions or textual forms” (116).

In his French essay, Émile Puech closely analyzes the phrase “the book of Moses, the books of the prophets and David”) in 4QMMT C 10–11. He deals with the matter of what was included in the Prophets and the Writings at Qumran and also touches on some deutero-canonical writings. He concludes that prerabbinic Jews and the earliest Christians had no strict biblical canon but “avaient reçu de la tradition des collections de livres composant la Loi, les Prophètes et d’autres Écrits religieux, dont les Psaumes, au groupement non défini, mais dont la lecture était bénéfique pour la vie juive” (141).

For Michael Knibb, the relatively large number of manuscripts and the important influence on other works of early Enochic writings and their translation into Greek indicate an authoritative status, not only at Qumran. Such literature, with its specially revealed knowledge of astronomy, cosmology, and calendar, seems less interested in law

than other works, but there is “no reason to think that the author of the *Apocalypse* [of *Weeks*] would not also have been concerned about the observance of the Law” (154).

Having summarized the manuscripts, the content, and recent scholarship on the authoritativeness of Scripture in the Second Temple period, Eibert Tigchelaar points out that the Aramaic texts have quotations, allusions, interpretations, and reworkings of scriptural texts and often demonstrate a subjective and selective approach to Hebrew Scriptures. The degree of authoritativeness may not always have been the same over time (“different strategies of authorizing additional elements,” 171), and there is a recognition, especially regarding “Danielic” material, that authority does not lie exclusively in biblical texts.

Again on Aramaic and “Danielic” traditions, Albert Hogeterp offers a close, literary, linguistic, and theological analysis of 4QFour Kingdoms and argues that “it stands apart from sectarian Qumran literature” (175). Although not at one with later conceptions of the Danielic material, that composition regarded Danielic literature (then still characterized by relative textual variety) as prophetic and therefore offered an interpretative elaboration on the religious thought expressed there.

Charlotte Hempel carefully explains the variation between 1QS and 4QS (Serekh or Rule), tracing complex literary developments and fluid traditions. Textual and literary inconsistency and variation did not trouble Qumran people for nonbiblical any more than for biblical texts. Given that texts were regarded as dynamic and evolving, not final and authoritative, she prefers to “refrain from insisting on establishing the final, authoritative *Endtext* of the *Rule*” (208).

Historical allusions (which are neither narratives nor objective) in the pesher texts are examined by John Collins, with the focus on the special challenges of Pesher Nahum and Pesher Habakkuk. History was the fulfillment of prophecy so that the allusions represent the writers’ internal understanding of recent developments in their society and demonstrate how the system of pesher worked and was applied. Although only the “original readers knew enough of the history to catch the allusions” (p. 216), the exegesis provided support for their way of life and religious identity.

With Ezekiel and Pseudo-Ezekiel constituting the case study, Mladen Popović tackles the relationship between the biblical and the parabiblical, paying special attention to the Qumran and Masada manuscripts and the Hebrew *Vorlage* of the pre-Hexaplaric Papyrus 967. He suggests that the relationship was reciprocal, “one occasioning the creation of the other” (228), each with its own form of authoritativeness and its influence on the other, with no fixed texts in either case.

Hindy Najman explores “figures, Scriptures and *paideia* in Philo’s Jewish Greek project” (253) and the scheme to “inscribe the Jewish tradition of Moses and Mosaic law into the school of Plato” (255). Abraham, Isaac, and Moses are exemplary figures, and Mosaic traditions are to be read in the light of *paideia*. The ideal is a life lived according to Scripture that is the embodiment of the law of nature. This process not only hellenizes Judaism but also judaizes Hellenism (265).

For George van Kooten, Paul’s view of authoritative Jewish writings was “rather nuanced and subtle” (267). Scripture was authoritative as the ancestral writings of the Jews, not necessarily all divinely revealed. “Jewish writings did contain divine oracles but he attributed the authorship of the Law to human authors” (276). Paul differentiates between ancestral, oracular, and prophetic authority, and 2 Tim 3:16 (“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching”) is explained as a polemic against gnostic rejection of authoritative writings and categorical criticism of Old Testament writings as false or corrupt.

Using the *Textsicherungsformel* of Rev 22:18–19 as his starting point, Tobias Nicklas explains how the book of Revelation (Apocalypse of John) claims for itself authoritativeness through Torah, prophets, and the word of God or Christ’s revelation. At the same time, Christ “himself plays the role of the great authority” (325), past, present and future and therefore needs no support from other sources.

Jan Bremmer argues that the notion of “holy books” was borrowed by the Jews, and inherited by the Christians and Muslims, from the Egyptians, whose “temple scribes” not only composed and copied “holy books” but, when the texts deteriorated, “perhaps even preserved [them] in special rooms as a kind of genizah” (334). Between the second and fourth centuries Christians referred to *hagia graphe* (holy scripture) and *theia graphe* (divine Scripture), the later medieval *sacra scriptura*. Early Christians used the codex for their religious writings (like Roman legal documents), and that distinguished them from Jewish usage and gave them greater authority.

This is a book of detailed and often complex scholarship, replete with careful and wide-ranging analysis and technical competence, well-planned and thoughtfully constructed, and very much aimed at the specialist reader. The contributors’ views generally correspond, and a consensus is thereby achieved. It undoubtedly takes the subject forward in a sound and admirable fashion, but one wonders if somewhere in the vastness of scholarship there are no views that presuppose a different overall reading of the same evidence and that might have received attention. Perhaps that needs to be the subject of a different volume. There are detailed indexes of ancient sources and modern authors but no bibliography or subject index.