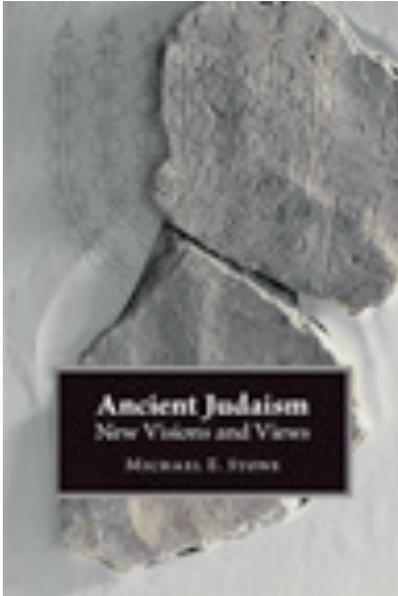


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**Stone, Michael E.**

***Ancient Judaism: New Visions and Views***

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This book is a collection of seven essays dealing with a variety of central topics in the study of Second Temple Judaism. In the preface, the author expresses his principal compositional motivation: “to engage some assumptions and axiomatic beliefs that have helped determine the directions of scholarship in the field during the last half-century.” Stone, a virtuoso who has produced significant research in the field for nearly fifty years, could not be better suited for the task. The attractive volume includes a substantial bibliography and indexes of subjects and names and ancient sources.

Chapter 1 (“Our Perception of Origins: New Perspectives on the Context of Christian Origins”) exposes one of the gravest ills plaguing the study of Second Temple Judaism. The problem arises from the fact that the written sources from this era (barring the Dead Sea Scrolls and other epigraphic evidence) have been transmitted and filtered through Jewish and Christian orthodoxies that developed only after the age in question. In general, Second Temple period traditions reinforcing these later religious configurations were retained while incompatible ones were discarded. Since modern scholars operate in a world formed by the same orthodoxies that have selected the available data, a vicious circle emerges whereby scholarship tends to perceive in the preserved material “evidence that accords with and buttresses those orthodoxies” and “to privilege the elements that are in

focus through those particular ‘spectacles,’ even if other phenomena are present in the same data.” The way out of such distortion, avers Stone, is through the integration of all the available evidence into a balanced picture fostered by scholarly introspection and avoidance of the “spectacles of orthodoxy.” One of Stone’s key contributions here is his agenda for future scholarship. He argues convincingly for the need to increase the available pool of data through the search for still-unknown sources in existing Jewish and Christian manuscript traditions and for the incorporation of evidence preserved in such “obscure” languages as Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic.

In chapter 2 (“Adam and Enoch and the State of the World”), Stone compares two significant explanations for the origins of evil bequeathed by Second Temple Judaism: the “Enoch-Noah axis,” which attributes the evils of the present world to demonic forces born out of the primordial rebellion of the watchers, and the “Adam and Eve axis,” which views the evils of the world as stemming from human disobedience. Since the library of Qumran contains almost no interest in the latter, but an intensive interest in the former (represented by numerous copies of a variety of pre-sectarian compositions), Stone justly concludes that the former worldview was favored by and fundamental to the Qumran sect. Significantly, he locates an “allied focus” in the pseudepigraphic traditions preserved at Qumran concerned with the priestly line of the patriarch Levi. These traditions unexpectedly incorporate Noah into the primordial priestly genealogy as the originator of sacrifice. This Noahic focus is linked to the Enochic axis, according to which Noah represents a sort of second Adam who nurtures postdiluvian humanity by transmitting his knowledge of sacrifice and antidemonic techniques. The author concludes that the emphasis on Noah as progenitor of priestly lore may be understood as the product of the alienation of a stream of Judaism from the Jerusalem temple in the third century B.C.E. Here Stone’s warnings from the previous chapter come back into focus. Since we have no way of determining how prevalent the ideas in these pseudepigrapha were, we cannot assess the pervasiveness of either axis in Second Temple society in general. Moreover, it should be recalled that the Adamic and Enochic axes were not the only explanations for the present world order available at Qumran. Danielic material, for instance, survives in numerous manuscripts, and it is not clear that such complexes of ideas developed in complete isolation from one another.

Chapter 3 (“Apocalyptic Historiography”) presents a nuanced discussion of the shift from prophetic to apocalyptic conceptions of history that characterized the Second Temple period. Stone charts two vital and intertwined developments: the introduction of the notion of an eschaton, which made possible the conceptualization of history as a coherent and meaningful whole, and the yearning to bridge the chasm between the Deuteronomic ideal of retribution and actual historical events, which resulted in the projection of the resolution into transcendent temporal and spatial realms. Numerous typical elements of

apocalyptic historiography, such as the schematization of all of history into grand patterns and the lack of concern with individual historical events, are to be understood as flowing from these conceptual shifts. The clarity and conciseness with which Stone sets forth these rather complex issues ensure that this chapter will remain of enduring value for students of apocalyptic historiography.

Chapter 4 (“Visions and Pseudepigraphy”) contains a plea for the integration of the understanding of religious experience as a fundamental factor behind the composition of ancient Jewish religious writings, particularly the apocalyptic pseudepigrapha. To those scholars who view these writings as fictional manifestations of a stereotypical literary convention (and thus not reflective of true experience), Stone devotes a sustained response. First (rehashing in some detail the well-known thesis from his *Hermeneia* commentary), he argues that the uniqueness of the portrayal of the experience of the visionary in 4 Ezra precludes dependence on stereotypical literary influences and most likely illustrates reliance on “direct or mediated knowledge of religious experience.” Second, the dependence on stock traditions characterizing other pseudepigrapha does not exclude the possibility of an underlying authentic religious experience, since we should expect authors to express such experiences in the traditional terms and cultural language available to them. Although he concedes that criteria to determine whether a particular author is relating personal experience or drawing on transmitted stores of knowledge do not and may never exist, Stone maintains that “religious experience always stood in the background, whether at first, second, or third remove.” A second section of the chapter explores the emergence and function of the phenomenon of pseudepigraphy, and the implications of the fact that real visionary activity is expressed in pseudepigraphic form.

In chapter 5 (“Bible and Apocrypha”) Stone weighs in on the intense discussion surrounding the formation of the canon of the Hebrew Bible. While agreeing that the terms “canon” and “Bible” are not applicable to the Second Temple period, he warns that underplaying the existence of collections of authoritative writings is equally unacceptable. The codicological data from Qumran as well as other evidence indicates the crystallization of the Pentateuch by the third century at the latest (and Stone prefers a much earlier date going back to Ezra). This detail should serve as a warning to those who would deny the special status of the Torah in relation to such rewritten biblical works as Jubilees. The Prophets collection likely included all of the books of the present corpus, but it was not fixed and probably contained a broader selection of works. The situation was fluid and complex, with different groups maintaining different views of the authoritative written tradition. Moreover, revelation was multiform in this period, and certain writings could be venerated as inspired (e.g., the pesharim) without being considered “biblical.”

Chapter 6 (“Multiform Transmission and Authorship”) treats the phenomenon of “clusters,” or groups of texts representing multiple configurations of the same apocryphal material. Specifically, Stone examines examples associated with Adam, Ezra, and Elijah. (Although this evidence stems from the first millennium C.E., he justifies the inclusion of this discussion in the book because it “affects the transmission of texts relating closely to the Second Temple period.”) Rejecting attempts to explain the variety of text forms by means of traditional stemmatic analysis, he suggests origins in oral and fluid monastic settings. By his own admission, this is far from a complete solution, but Stone succeeds in his chief goal of illuminating an important direction for future research. One can only hope that scholars will take measures to overcome the imposing language barriers impeding such important textual work.

Chapter 7 (“The Transmission of Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha”) charts the process by which the nonbiblical Jewish writings of the Second Temple period were transmitted by the oriental Christian churches and subsequently “rediscovered” by European scholars in the eighteenth century. Stone suggests that the choice of living Jewish tradition to reject these works relates to a change in the understanding of authority and a shift in literary genres (from individually authored pseudepigrapha to collections of legal and homiletical material). Fittingly, the chapter (and hence the book) concludes with two suggestions for the direction of future scholarship. First, Stone expresses pleasure with the recent shift toward broadened chronological range in pseudepigrapha studies, as it moves the field away from the dominating orthodoxy-conditioned question of what these works can teach about Christian origins. But as long as this concern continues to be valued above others, distortion remains inevitable. Second, he once again calls for the mining of known and very diverse Jewish and Christian manuscript traditions for remnants of ancient traditions that will ultimately contribute to a more complex picture of Second Temple Judaism.

In a concise presentation, this book manages to illuminate several of the fundamental issues in the study of Second Temple Judaism with a methodological distance and clarity not often encountered in the field. In an academic environment of narrow and all too often atomized specializations, Stone’s broad grasp of the contours of the preserved data (with due attention to both what is present and what is absent) as well as his ability to assess their overall significance have produced a stirring reminder of the “bigger picture” to which even the narrowest scholarly endeavors are to be related. Perhaps more importantly, his contribution has spotlighted the need to reexamine and move beyond the artificial boundaries imposed by the field that have been perpetuated, largely unconsciously, for generations. The introspective approach championed by Stone is a step forward on the path toward a more accurate and highly complex view of Second Temple

Judaism. Further progress will demand dedication to a balanced consideration of the ever-expanding corpus of data unfettered by the “baggage” of inherited orthodoxies.