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TEARING DOWN WALLS OF SEPARATION

*The major obstacle to the study of Judaism and Christianity from Second Temple to Late Antiquity is ironically not the lack of documentation but the way in which sources have come down to us, grouped into denominationally determined corpora, or canons (Hebrew Bible or Old Testament, New Testament, OT and NT Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Apostolic Fathers, Church Fathers, Rabbinic literature, etc.). Such denominational division has given birth to a denominationally divided scholarship with clear boundaries between Christian and Judaic studies, and a very confusing fragmentation of canonical and non-canonical corpora. To a large extent, each corpus still lives its own separate, self-sufficient existence, with its own specialists, journals, bibliographies, and audience. The canonical status of a document, more than any intrinsic historical value, is still the best warranty of success: it secures a high frequency of editions and commentaries, the presence in the programs of universities and seminaries, and a predictable and consolidated degree of popularity among readers.*

*Ever since Paul Eber in 1548 and then Humprey Prideaux in 1716 published the first introductions to Second Temple Judaism, the field was defined by what was left aside (and not included) in Biblical Studies. It became the “intertestamental” period, between the Old and the New Testaments, or between the Bible and the Mishnah. As for the fields of early Church History and Rabbinic Judaism, they developed one apart from the other, along rigidly separated linguistic and confessional lines.*

*We are now well aware that there never was an “intertestamental” period as many (perhaps most) texts in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible were written after the Babylonian exile and many Second Temple Jewish texts are contemporaneous to, or even later than, some New Testament texts. Besides, we now agree that New Testament texts belong to Second Temple Judaism and cannot be artificially separated from their Jewish context, and that the border lines between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity were much more permeable and ill-defined than our religious and scholarly traditions would imply.*

*It is true that contemporary critical scholarship is no longer bound by canonical or denominational division. In the last century, we have seen a proliferation of studies specifically devoted to non-canonical documents, which have contrasted the overpowering presence of the canonical*

*collections. The most successful story is that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which in the aftermath of one of the most exciting archaeological discoveries of modern times have succeeded to become an autonomous field of their own, with international specialists (such as Hanan Eshel, Florentino García Martínez, Lawrence Schiffman, James VanderKam and others), two outstanding international journals (Revue de Qumran, Dead Sea Discoveries), the Orion Center website, and plenty of introductions, commentaries, conferences, international projects, etc.*

*The Pseudepigrapha also have known a period of renaissance thanks in particular to the efforts of scholars such James Charlesworth, John Collins, Robert Kraft, and George Nickelsburg, in the United States; Michael Knibb, Klaus Koch, Helge Kvanvig, Paolo Sacchi, and the late Albert-Marie Denis in Europe; and Michael Stone, in Israel. The field can now count on a specialized journal (Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha), and on regular sessions at all major conferences in Biblical Studies (notably at the SBL, and SNTS). The success of the Enoch Seminars, launched in 2001 by the University of Michigan, has certainly greatly contributed to a growing interest in the field.*

*Lately, the Apocrypha also have attracted some fresh attention. On one hand, the OT Apocrypha have seen the publication of some new introductions as well as the launching in 2004 of a series of conferences and seminars by the Shime'on Center under the leadership of Géza Xeravits. On the other hand, the success of the fictional Da Vinci Code and the publication of the authentic Gospel of Judah have given some momentum to the NT Apocrypha and to the efforts of Pierluigi Piovanelli and other colleagues to bring this material into our mainstream scholarly discourse.*

*David Runia and Gregory Sterling with the journal Studia Philonica Annual, Steve Mason with his Internet-based Project on Ancient Cultural Engagement (PACE), and Tessa Rajak with the AHRB Greek Bible Project are keeping up the good fight to promote studies in Hellenistic Judaism.*

*Any attempt to revive interest in these neglected, non-canonical bodies of literature is an important and much welcome contribution to our comprehension of the field. Yet, so serious a problem as the existence of canons cannot be solved by simply balancing the specific weight of each corpus and giving an introduction, distinct research tools (journals, conferences, publications, etc.) and even the dignity of a theology to each and every collection. The risk is ironically to “freeze” even further the literature of the period into separate fields just by strengthening the importance and autonomy of each canon, while the problem is the existence of canons.*

*Canons and corpora only make sense in relation to the epoch and ideology in which they were born, and tell us the fascinating history of how ancient texts were collected, selected and handed down to us, and how religious groups found identity and legitimacy in the process. Canons and corpora, however, are misleading in their interposition between the sources*

(their author, their age, their worldview) and modern interpreters. What is the point of studying and teaching sources within an anachronistic framework that gives a false illusion of unity and homogeneity while only creating artificial, a posteriori affinities and separating originally related texts? A denominational criterion for collecting sources is not a criterion for understanding their original content.

Freeing ancient Jewish and Christian texts from the cages of their anachronistic corpora and canons is the first, necessary and fascinating step. A chronological outlook immediately gives us a much better understanding of the literary and historical context in which the documents were composed. The interpreter recovers forgotten connections and unexpected distances, new hierarchies or unsettling marginalities, supporting roles elevated to protagonists and protagonists reduced to supporting roles. Since 1970 the pioneering work of the *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period*, directed by Florentino García Martínez and Eibert Tigchelaar, has been a continuous source of inspiration for all of us engaged in the study of the period from a purely historical perspective.

Yet shifting the focus of attention from the traditional corpora to the time of composition of the documents themselves is not enough. A purely chronological approach, like the one even advocated by George Nickelsburg already in 1981 and recently re-proposed in the 2005 revised edition of his *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, brilliantly shows the potential of a trans-canonical approach. It successfully breaks down the distinction between OT Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo and Josephus, by simply rearranging the literary works according to their chronological order of composition. The volume however still suffers by the omission of “canonical” texts (with the only noticeable exception of the book of Daniel). The methodological soundness and consistency of the work only makes even more conspicuous the absence of texts such as *Qohelet* or *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, or the letters of Paul, the Gospels and the Book of Revelation.

The chronological approach has great advantages compared to the “canonical” approach and yet does not entirely solve the problem of the ideological identification of documents. If Judaism and Christianity are not the monolith suggested by the canons, they also have never been a single incremental tradition, but always a set of contemporarily diverse and sometimes competing forms of religion. Documents written in the same period are expressions of different intellectual movements and were authored by different social groups.

*Enoch* has revealed himself a key element in tearing down the walls of separation within our field. *Enoch* is an important character in both ancient Judaism and Christianity and in each and every corpus and at the same time he cannot be understood without studying comprehensively all of them. Whereas the traditional corpora give us only a partial look at the diversity

*of Second Temple Judaism, Enoch has forced us to look globally. The “new” journal Henoch was born with the goal to contribute aggressively to tear down anachronistic and artificial boundaries, and create a common ground in which specialists in different documents and corpora may share their research and explore the connections of texts outside any canonical limitation. Not a journal of “Enochic Studies” to add yet another corpus to an already fragmented field and divide further an already fragmented field, but a research tool to look globally at the period and at the interactions among its many diverse components. Not a close group to fulfill its own competing and parochial strategy, but an open house where scholars from different countries and different methodological approaches are all welcome and appreciated, brought together and united. Let then the trumpets loudly sound until the walls of Jericho would fall.*