Origen on the Assumption of Moses

Tromp, J.

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FLORENTINO GARCÍA MARTÍNEZ

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GERARD P. LUTTIKHUIZEN

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ORIGEN ON THE *ASSUMPTION OF MOSES*

JOHANNES TROMP*

At some time in the early first century C.E., in Jewish Palestine, a writing was composed in which the history of the Israelite people was related, extending from the entry into the promised land up to and including the end of time. This survey was cast in the mould of a prophecy revealed by Moses to Joshua, his successor as the leader of the people. To this prophecy the author attached a dialogue between Moses and Joshua, in which the former expressed words of reassurance to the latter, who doubted his capability of fulfilling his task of bringing the people into the land successfully. The writing was probably concluded by the story of Moses' death, and his assumption into heaven; this concluding part of the writing is lost. The writing was entitled the *Assumption of Moses* (*As. Mos.*) or, in Greek (quite possibly the language in which it was originally written): the ἀνάληψις Μωϋσέως.

There must have been some interest in this small book in the early church. It was known to several authors, including the theologian Origen (185–253/4) and the church historian Gelasius of Cyzicus († 476), who both have explicitly referred to it. The earliest reference to the *As. Mos.* is most likely that found in the Epistle of Jude (vs. 9). The *As. Mos.* was translated into Latin, and copied at least once, presumably in the sixth century C.E.

The production of this copy is the last trace of interest in the *As. Mos.* until its rediscovery in the nineteenth century. Some thousand years before that rediscovery, the text of this copy was sacrificed for the *Excerpts from Augustine* by Eugippius († after 533):[1] in a time when parchment was scarce, the pages of the codex containing the *As. Mos.* were erased and re-used for what was then considered a more useful purpose. With great difficulty, and not without damaging the material, the lower scripture could be deciphered for the edition of the text in 1861.

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* Leiden.

[1] A.-M. Ceriani, "Fragmenta Parvae Genesis et Assumptionis Mosis ex veteri versione latina," in: *id.*, *Monumenta sacra et profana* I (Milan, 1861), 11b.

In the course of time, the codex containing Eugippius' *Excerpts* disintegrated, and the pages containing the final part of the *As. Mos.* were lost. The disappearance of this final part of the *As. Mos.* is a loss both for students of early Judaism, and for students of the early church. There is reason to believe that Christians were interested in that part in particular: all extant citations but one refer to a scene in which the corpse of Moses was the object of a dispute between the archangel Michael and the devil. In fact, the part of the *As. Mos.* that has been preserved, contains little that could be useful for early Christian theologians: in that part, the downfall of Israel, but especially its eventual salvation through the establishment of God's kingdom, stands central,[2] and nothing is offered which could be interpreted in a Christian sense. One of the questions addressed in this article is why Christians were at first interested in this writing, and why they lost interest afterwards.

I have discussed the possible contents of the lost ending of the *As. Mos.* previously.[3] In the following pages, I shall discuss the matter anew, but from a different angle (that of the Christian interest in the *As. Mos.*), and in light of recently developed insights in the literary history of the *Life of Adam and Eve.*

1. Quotations of the *As. Mos.* in Early Christian Literature

In an earlier discussion of the possible quotations from the *As. Mos.* in early Christian literature, I have argued that most of the candidates assembled by A.-M. Denis,[4] are unlikely to be quotations from the *As. Mos.*, but rather speculations about the context of Jude 9, which was known to be a reference to the *As. Mos.* Four phrases that can be ascribed to the *As. Mos.* with certainty remained; three of these must stem from the lost ending. They are the following.

[2] N.J. Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis. Studien zur Rezeption massgültiger Überlieferung* (JSJSup, 67; Leiden, 2000), chapter 2.

[3] J. Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses. A Critical Edition with Commentary* (SVTP, 10; Leiden, 1993), 270–285.

[4] A.-M. Denis, *Fragmenta pseudepigraphorum quae supersunt una cum historicorum et auctorum Judaeorum hellenistarum fragmentis* (PVTG, 3; Leiden, 1970), 63–67; cf. the discussion in R. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh, 1990), 245–270.

(1) καὶ προεθεάσατό με ὁ θεὸς πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναί με τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ μεσίτην.

This is a quotation of *As. Mos.* 1:14: *itaque excogitavit et invenit me qui ab initio creaturae orbis terrarum praeparatus sum ut sim arbiter testamenti illius*,[5] found in *Ecclesiastical History* II 17:17 by Gelasius of Cyzicus.[6]

(2) ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος.

Quoted in Jude 9, these words are certain to derive from the *As. Mos.* (as opposed to Zech 3:2, where an identical phrase occurs), because of the description of the scene in which they are said to be spoken: ὁ δὲ Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος, ὅτε τῷ διαβόλῳ διακρινόμενος διελέγετο περὶ τοῦ Μωϋσέως σώματος κτλ. The same scene is depicted in the following cases, where its source is explicitly identified as the *As. Mos.*

(3) ἀπὸ γὰρ πνεύματος ἁγίου αὐτοῦ πάντες ἐκτίσθημεν.

According to Gelasius, this phrase was quoted by one of the theologians present at the Council of Nicaea. It is one of several quotations used to prove that the Holy Spirit as a "member" of the Trinity played a role in the creation of the world. From testimony (1) it appears that Gelasius knew the *As. Mos.*, and it is therefore only reasonable to accept that his assertion is correct in this instance as well. The phrase is introduced by a reference to the context from which it was taken: ἐν βίβλῳ δὲ ἀναλήψεως Μωσέως Μιχαὴλ ὁ ἀρχάγγελος διαλεγόμενος τῷ διαβόλῳ.

(4) After this quotation in Gelasius' *Ecclesiastical History*, the next one follows immediately, introduced by the formula: "And again, he says": ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθε τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὁ κόσμος ἐγένετο.

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[5] In my edition of *As. Mos.* 1:14, the word *creaturae* has fallen out (as noted by W. Horbury, review in *Vetus Testamentum* 45 [1995] 398–403, esp. p. 401).

[6] Ed. G. Loeschcke and M. Heinemann, *Gelasius. Kirchengeschichte* (GCS, 28; Berlin, 1918). It can be argued that Gelasius' introduction to this phrase, Μωσῆς προσκαλεσάμενος Ἰησοῦν υἱὸν Ναυῆ, is not part of the quotation, but Gelasius' own reference (Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis*, 95), even if these words are the almost exact equivalent of *As. Mos.* 1:6, *qui vocavit ad se Jesum filium Nave* (Tromp, *The Assumtion of Moses*, 78). To be on the safe side, I will leave out these words from the present discussion.

Apart from these four instances which can with certainty be taken to be testimonies of the *As. Mos.*, a special case was presented by a phrase found in Origen's *Principles* (written in the third decade of the third century, and preserved in Rufinus' Latin translation from the fifth century). This reference to the *Assumption* (or, in his words, *Ascension*) *of Moses* runs as follows:

> *in Ascensione Moysi, cuius libelli meminit in epistola sua apostolus Iudas, Michahel archangelus cum diabolo disputans de corpore Moysi ait a diabolo inspiratum serpentem causam extitisse praeuaricationis Adae et Euae.*[7]
>
> in the Ascension of Moses, to which booklet the apostle Jude refers in his epistle, the archangel Michael, when he is arguing with the devil about the body of Moses, says that because of the devil's inspiration, the serpent had become the cause of Adam and Eve's transgression.

The *As. Mos.* must indeed have contained a scene in which the angel and the devil disputed about the body of Moses, as can be safely concluded from the preceding instances. However, in my earlier treatment of this passage, I found reason to doubt that Michael's words as cited by Origen, "that because of the devil's inspiration, the serpent had become the cause of Adam and Eve's transgression," derived from the same writing.[8] The reasons for these doubts were the following.

(1) A reference to the original sin of Adam and Eve is surprising in a writing such as the *As. Mos.*, which does not seem to be particularly concerned with primeval history and the origin of sin.
(2) Adam, Eve and the serpent are at the centre of attention in another writing, nowadays usually designated as the *Life of Adam*

[7] *De principiis* III 2:1, ed. H. Crouzel & M. Simonetti, *Origène. Traité des Principes* III (SC, 268; Paris, 1980).

[8] D. Maggiorotti, "Testamento di Mosè (*Assumptio Mosis*)," in: P. Sacchi (ed.), *Apocrifi dell' Antico Testamento* IV (Brescia, 2000), 181–235; esp. 191, doubts whether Origen knew the *As. Mos.* at all, and has suggested that he followed the opinion of those who asserted that the apostle Jude quoted from it. Also, the traditions concerning the death of Moses may by the end of the second century have been developed to such an extent, that a kind of general mix-up of sources containing them would be conceivable—in that case, Maggiorotti concludes, the references of Gelasius (or at least nrs. [3] and [4]) may not be trustworthy, either. However, it will be argued below that Origen had good reasons for quoting the *As. Mos.*, and the suggestion that he simply guessed what was in it, without really knowing it, does not seem to be in accordance with the general nature of Origen's theological and exegetical work. Concerning Gelasius, Maggiorotti too easily brushes over the fact that he quotes *As. Mos.* 1:14 correctly, which proves that he knew the writing.

and Eve, but also known as the *Apocalypse of Moses*; a confusion of the *Assumption* and the *Apocalypse of Moses* on account of their similar titles seems well possible, the more so because the *Apocalypse of Moses*, in contrast to the *As. Mos.*, contains no revelations in the ordinary sense.

(3) A factor contributing to the emergence of such a confusion might have been that in the *Apocalypse of Moses* another dispute with the devil seems to occur, namely that of Seth with an animal (see below). In this context Seth rebukes the animal with the same words Michael used against the devil according to the *As. Mos.*: ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος, for in the Latin version of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, Seth is reported to say: *increpet te Dominus Deus*, the exact Latin translation of the Greek words.

I concluded that Origin's information concerning the contents of Michael's dispute with the devil must derive, not from the *As. Mos.*, but from the *Apocalypse of Moses*, to which I added in parenthesis: "whatever form it may have had when Origen knew it." Since then, however, much more has become known about the form which the *Life of Adam and Eve* may have had in the time of Origen, and it is now virtually certain that Origen cannot have quoted the phrase under discussion from that writing. A dispute between Seth and an animal does occur in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, but in its most primitive text-form, the animal is neither a serpent, nor the devil, and it is not accused of having caused Adam and Eve to sin.

2. The Greek and Latin Versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve* 10–12

In sections 10–12 of the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* (perhaps to be dated to the second or third century),[9] the following story is told.[10] When Adam is lying on his deathbed, his wife Eve and their son Seth travel to paradise to try to obtain a medicine against death. On their way, they come across "an animal" (θηρίον) which attacks

[9] Cf. M.E. Stone, *A History of the Literature of Adam and Eve* (SBLEJL, 3; Atlanta, 1992), 53–58.

[10] For this and the following paragraphs, see also G.A. Anderson, "The Penitence Narrative in the *Life of Adam and Eve*," *HUCA* 63 (1992) 1–38, here quoted from G.A. Anderson *et al.*, *Literature on Adam and Eve. Collected Essays* (SVTP, 15; Leiden, 2000), 3–42, esp., 33–40.

Seth (10:1). Eve reproaches the animal, asking it how it dares to attack "the image of God" to which it was subordinated (10:3). The animal answers by explaining that Eve's sin has caused a profound change in the order of creation. Later on in the story, when Eve is looking back on her and Adam's transgression in paradise, she recounts that as a result of their mistake, humankind has lost its garments of righteousness and glory (20:1–2; 21:6). Here, the animal informs her that "our (that is, the animals') nature, too, has changed" (διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμῶν αἱ φύσεις μετηλλάγησαν 11:2), and the dominion of the animals has arisen because of Eve (11:1). Thus, Eve and Seth are confronted with the enmity between humans and animals which issued from God's curse of the serpent (cf. 26:1).

The conclusion to this episode is curious. Seth tells the animal to be silent and disappear from the image of God (that is, himself), and the animal obediently departs to its lair (12:1–2). This strange turn of events may be no more than an awkward way to end the episode. After all, Eve and Seth are on their way to the gates of paradise, and the story must continue.[11] Therefore, from the narrator's point of view, the animal has to disappear from the scene.[12]

In this form of the story, the animal is nothing more than some wild animal, part of nature that had been subordinate to humanity in paradise (15:2–3), but now forms a hostile environment (cf. 26:4).[13] The animal is not identified, neither as a snake, nor as any other kind of dangerous animal.[14]

Only in a secondary form of the story, represented by the Greek manuscripts EFW (fifteenth–seventeenth centuries), a copyist has apparently taken the animal to be the devil. In these manuscripts, the relevant clause in 10:1 reads as follows:

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[11] On the use of suspense in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, see M.E. Eldridge, *Dying Adam with his Multiethnic Family. Understanding the* Greek Life of Adam and Eve (SVTP, 16; Leiden, 2001), 191–192.

[12] Three manuscripts, ATL (thirteenth–sixteenth centuries), represent a text of which the editor has attenuated the imperfection by adding that the animal had wounded Seth. This addition is preserved in the Georgian and Latin translations (see below). The texts of the manuscripts of the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* are available in a diplomatic edition, presented in parallel horizontal lines, by M. Nagel, *La vie grecque d'Adam et Ève* I–III (Lille, 1974).

[13] T. Knittel, *Das griechische 'Leben Adams und Evas'. Studien zu einer narrativen Anthropologie im frühen Judentum* (TSAJ, 88; Tübingen, 2002), 113–114.

[14] For the animosity of animals against humankind, compare Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 85–90. As particular examples of animals posing a threat, Philo mentions wolves, bears, lions, panthers, elephants, tigers, scorpions, serpents, crocodiles and hippopotamuses.

εἰσερχομένων ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ὑπήντησεν αὐτοὺς θηρίον ἀγρίωδες καὶ ἀνήμερον, ἤγουν ὁ ἀντικείμενος διάβολος, πολεμῶν μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς Σὴθ ὡς ἰδέας θηρίου.

while they were on their way, a wild and untamed animal, that is to say, the adversary, the devil, came towards them, fighting with her son Seth in the form of an animal.

Originally, the addition identifying the animal as the devil may have been just a marginal gloss (ἤγουν often occurs in glosses). In the text as it stands in these manuscripts, the point of the story is ruined, and this form of the sentence is certainly secondary. Nonetheless, it shows that a reader of the *Life of Adam and Eve* could easily misunderstand this passage in light of the common interpretation of the story of Eve's transgression as having been caused by the devil speaking through the serpent.

An identification of the animal in the *Life of Adam and Eve* 10–12 is also implied in the Latin version. In the oldest text-form of this version,[15] the story as such is left intact: the animal (*bestia*) is not yet said to be a serpent, and the point that Eve's transgression has caused the rule of the animals[16] is well made (38[11]).[17] Only in Seth's words to the animal does it appear that the author of the Latin version must have associated it with the devil—the designation "enemy of truth" is clear proof of that: *Claude os tuum et obmutesce maledicte et inimice ueritatis* (39[12]). The reference to the animal's "lair" (σκηνή in the Greek version) is left out as no longer appropriate (*statimque effugit bestia, eumque dentibus suis uulneratum dimisit* 39[12]).

In later developments of the Latin text, Seth's speech is expanded, and the animal is explicitly identified with the serpent as a representative of the devil.[18] In the version of the manuscripts from England,

[15] In this part of the text represented mainly by manuscript *Pr*, ed. J.-P. Pettorelli, "Vie latine d'Adam et d'Ève. La recension de Paris, BNF, lat. 3832," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 57 (1999) 5–52.

[16] The translator of the Latin version, however, less felicitously rendered the Greek ἡ ἀρχὴ τῶν θηρίων with *initium bestiarum*, which may have been unclear to later copyists.

[17] It is likely that the mention of Satan in the Armenian version is a separate development within that branch of the tradition. The Georgian translation, generally agreed to be closely related to the Armenian, does not mention the devil, either. Cf. Knittel, *Das griechische 'Leben Adams und Evas'*, 116–117.

[18] On the secondary character of these text-forms as compared to that of ms. *Pr*, see J. Tromp, "The Textual History of the *Life of Adam and Eve* in the Light of a Newly Discovered Latin Text-Form," *JSJ* 33 (2002) 28–41.

the animal, as soon as it is introduced, is said to be the accursed snake: *subito uenit serpens bestia impietatis* (37[10]). In Seth's reproach of the animal, its diabolical character is emphasized: *Increpet te Dominus Deus! Recede a conspectu hominum et claude os tuum et obmutesce, inimice, maledicte, confusio ueritatis.*[19] Only at this stage of the development of the Latin text, therefore, do the words *increpet te Dominus Deus* occur.[20] It is likely that the editor of this text-form was dependent on Zech. 3:2 and Jude 9.[21] It is from these passages that the editors of the late Latin recensions must have learned that these are suitable words to rebuke the devil.

It is not clear to which century the original Latin version of the *Life of Adam and Eve* should be dated, but it can be maintained with certainty that it must have existed before the tenth century.[22] However, it seems highly unlikely that the text form containing the biblical words *increpet te Dominus Deus* was already available to Origen, around 200 C.E., or even Rufinus, in the second half of the fourth century. Therefore, my earlier suggestion that Origen mistakenly ascribed to the *As. Mos.* what actually was in the *Apocalypse of Moses*, must be withdrawn. Instead, Michael's words in his altercation with the devil over Moses' body should be included in the corpus of quotations from the lost ending of the *As. Mos.*

3. The Lost Ending of the *As. Mos.*

It must now be investigated if our understanding of the lost ending of the *As. Mos.* is changed or improved by the addition of this testimony. Before that, however, some remarks about the desirability of making sense of the quotations from the lost ending are in order.

[19] Ed. J.H. Mozley, "The 'Vita Adae,'" *JTS* 30 (1929) 121–149.

[20] They are maintained in one of the latest versions of the Latin *Life of Adam and Eve*, the text-form represented by the manuscripts from southern Germany: *increpet te dominus deus! Stupe, obmutesce, claude os tuum, maledicte, inimice ueritatis, confusio perditionis* (ed. J.-P. Pettorelli, "La Vie latine d'Adam et Ève," *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 56 [1998] 5–104; spec., 18–67).

[21] In the Old Latin translations, the rendering of ἐπιτιμήσαι in Jude 9 seems to be rather consistently *imperet* or *imperat*; see W. Thiele (ed.), *Epistulae catholicae* (Vetus Latina 26; Freiburg, 1956–1969), 421–422; so also the Vulgate. The Vulgate of Zech. 3:2 reads *increpet*.

[22] J.-P. Pettorelli, "Deux témoins latins singuliers de la *Vie d'Adam et Ève*: Paris, BNF, Lat. 3832 & Milan, B. Ambrosiana, O 35 Sup.," *JSJ* 33 (2002) 1–27, esp., 26–27.

It has been suggested that no attempts at the impossible should be made, because the ensuing speculations run the risk of obscuring the meaning of the writing as a whole, burdening it with content matter which it may never have had.[23]

It is true that interpreters of the *As. Mos.* should not let themselves be disturbed by passages of the writing which are no longer there. A relatively large fragment of the work does exist, and it is possible to reach plausible interpretations of that fragment, so that a pragmatic attitude towards the fact that the document is incomplete, is to be recommended: for the purpose of understanding the *As. Mos.* insofar as it has been preserved, it is enough to assume that the writing probably ended with the end of the earthly life of Moses.[24] However, this does not relieve us from the task of trying to make sense of the few phrases preserved in the testimonies, even if that exercise is of an entirely different nature than interpreting the *As. Mos.* as it lies before us. The quotations suggest that Christian theologians were interested in this writing, but mainly in the part that is lost. This means that these quotations are the only clues to an answer to the question of why the church for a while chose to transmit this writing.

As remarked above, a reference to the original sin of Adam and Eve comes as a surprise in a writing such as the *As. Mos.*, because in the extant fragment no attention is paid to primeval history and the original sin. Naturally, this argument is worthless if it appears to be true that this reference comes from the lost ending of that writing, after all, so that we have to overcome our surprise, and imagine how it might have fitted in the context of the concluding part of the *As. Mos.*

It can be safely assumed that the main events described in the lost ending of the *As. Mos.*, included the prophet's death, his burial, and his assumption into heaven.[25] Presumably, the archangel Michael was presented as descending from heaven to bury Moses' body and take his soul with him. At some moment during this scene, the devil must have appeared and made objections of some kind to what was happening. However, it can be taken for granted that the archangel's

[23] Maggiorotti, "Testamento di Mosè," 192.
[24] Cf. Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis*, 70.
[25] Differently: Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 235–245.

words, of which a number survive in quotations, were supposed to effectively put the accuser to shame.

Speculating about the Epistle of Jude, vs. 9, exegetes from the fifth century onwards have adduced various grounds on which the devil may have protested against the ascension of Moses' soul into heaven.[26] Thus, it has been suggested that Moses' sins were an obstacle, or that the devil demanded that Moses be handed over to him as the master of matter (ὕλη).

However, it is unlikely that the author of the *As. Mos.* would have brought Moses' errors into the discussion. The stature of the prophet in the eyes of the author is so high (see especially 11:16–18),[27] that it can be ruled out that the biblical reports about Moses' sins were a point of even the slightest interest to him. Furthermore, the concept of the devil as the master of matter seems to be primarily at home in second-century anti-gnostic, Christian discussions, and may therefore be dismissed as later speculation about the scene described in Jude 9.[28]

The addition of Origen's reference to the corpus of quotations from the *As. Mos.* may be helpful in reconstructing an outline of the argument between Michael and the devil. In this reference, the archangel is pictured as recalling that it was the devil who had caused Adam and Eve to transgress. If this is supposed to be the answer to an argument of the devil's, one could guess that the devil had objected against at Moses' immortalization as such.

The devil's role as the accuser of somebody who is highly valued by God is well known from Old Testament and Jewish tradition. In the book of Job, Satan is described as making objections to God's praise of Job, because God has made it too easy for Job to be pious (Job 1:9–11). In Zech 3:1–2, Satan is envisioned as the accuser of Joshua, trying to prevent him from being consecrated as high priest. More particularly, the devil is regarded as one who is intent on people's death (e.g., *Jub* 1:20) and struggling to prevent them from reaching eternal life (1QM XIII 10–12; cf. Hebr 2:14).[29] According to *As. Mos.* 10, Israel will be exalted into heaven at the arrival of God's

[26] For this and the following paragraph, see Tromp, *The Assumption of Moses*, 275–280.

[27] Cf. Hofmann, *Die Assumptio Mosis*, 174–177, 191–193.

[28] Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 244–245.

[29] Cf. A. Piñero, "Angels and Demons in the *Life of Adam and Eve*," *JSJ* 24 (1993) 191–214; esp., 203.

kingdom (10:8–9). God's first deed on that occasion, however, is to kill the devil (10:1; cf. Rev 12:10), whose presence is apparently thought to prevent Israel's obtaining such happiness until that day (cf. *1 Enoch* 10–11).

It is conceivable that in his dispute with Michael, who had come to bring Moses to heaven, the devil insisted that he should die. In that case, he may have pointed to the fact that God had imposed death on humankind as a reaction to Adam's sin, and that there were no grounds to except Moses from this general verdict on humankind. The archangel may have retorted that God, contrary to the devil, does not wish people to die. To make this point, the author may have made use of a common ethical pattern in Jewish literature from the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E.: God has given humanity the choice between righteousness and impiety, and thereby between life and death.

Whereas it may be that death is imposed on all human bodies, the souls of the righteous will live forever (as opposed to the souls of the unrighteous, for whom no such happy fate is in store). This is one of the teachings recurring in the *Psalms of Solomon*, e.g., 3:11–12; 13:11; 14:9–10; 15:12–13. It is also a major theme in the *Fourth Book of Ezra*. In this writing, death is presented as a punishment for the evildoings of man, but eternal life is said to be in store for the righteous in the next world (e.g., 7:45–48). In answer to Ezra's complaints about the universality of sin, it is said that evil is sown into the human heart (4:30), but so is the law (9:31). It may be that there are not many who are faithful to the law, but they are precious in God's eyes (7:60) and for them the bliss of the age to come is prepared (8:51–52). In short, the possibility exists to choose against evil and for God's commandments, and therefore, the possibility to escape eternal death exists, and one is invited to choose life (7:127–129).[30]

The views on death and afterlife in *4 Ezra* are complicated by the fact that its author seems to be deliberately trying to harmonise two conflicting notions of life after death: that of a survival of the soul after death, and that of the resurrection of the dead in the last days (see especially 7:75–80).[31]

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[30] Cf. C. Münchow, *Ethik und Eschatologie. Ein Beitrag zum Verständnis der frühjüdischen Apokalyptik* (Göttingen, 1981), 89–91.

[31] Cf. M.E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra. A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Minneapolis, 1990), 65b–67a.

Closer to the subject matter of Michael's words may therefore be *Wisdom of Solomon* 2:23–3:4. In that passage it is stated that God has created (ἔκτισεν) man to be incorruptible (ἐπ' ἀφθαρσίᾳ), as an image of God's own eternity, but that death arrived in the world because of the devil's envy. The souls of the righteous ones, however, are in God's hands: to fools it may seem they have died, but they are in peace, full of hope for immortality (ἀθανασία; cf. 8:17).[32] An important role in the creation of the world and of humankind is attributed to wisdom (e.g., 7:21; 9:1–2), and wisdom is little less than God's holy spirit (7:22–8:1), descending into holy souls and making them friends of God (7:27; 9:17).[33]

In Jewish literature from the period in which the *As. Mos.* was written, there appear to be clear and consistent relationships between the concepts of righteousness and piety, wisdom and the spirit of God, and immortality. Against this background, the surviving phrases quoted in Jude, and by Origen and Gelasius are conceivable as parts of Michael's answer to the devil's objections to Moses' immortalization.

After having the devil demand that Moses should die, referring to the story of Adam's sin, the author may have described how Michael rebuked the accuser (ἐπιτιμήσαι σοι κύριος) for being the cause of death in the first place (*a diabolo inspiratum serpentem causam extitisse praevaricationis Adae et Evae*). The devil's inspiration may then have been contrasted with God's inspiration: it is possible to let oneself be inspired by God, for we are all created by his holy spirit (ἀπὸ γὰρ πνεύματος ἁγίου αὐτοῦ πάντες ἐκτίσθημεν), that same holy spirit which permeates the entire creation (ἀπὸ προσώπου τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξῆλθε τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὁ κόσμος ἐγένετο). For the author of the *As. Mos.*, the only way to cling to the Lord is through perfect obedience to his commandments (*As. Mos.* 1:10; 9:4–5; 12:10), mediated by Moses (1:14), that is, "the holy and sacred spirit" himself (11:16).[34]

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[32] Cf. K. Martin Hogan, "The Exegetical Background of the 'Ambiguity of Death' in the Wisdom of Solomon," *JSJ* 30 (1999) 1–24.

[33] Cf. Philo (admittedly using a different concept of immortality), who in *De opificio mundi* 135 comments on Gen 2:7 that God insufflated man with the divine spirit (πνεῦμα θεῖον), so that man, although mortal according to the body, might partake in immortality through his mind (θνητὸν μὲν κατὰ τὸ σῶμα, κατὰ δὲ τὴν διάνοιαν ἀθάνατον).

[34] Cf. S. Schreiber, "Hoffnung und Handlungsperspektive in der *Assumptio Mosis*," *JSJ* 32 (2001) 252–271.

Obviously, this reconstruction is speculation, but it does show, in my opinion, that the phrases under discussion are conceivable in the context of the *As. Mos.* as a first-century Jewish writing. The contents of the quotations give no cause to regard them as part of a secondary addition or revision of the writing.[35]

4. Origen's Reasons to Quote the *As. Mos.*

Finally, it should be asked why Origen chose to refer to a somewhat obscure apocryphon to make his point that the original sin was caused by the devil's inspiration. In Genesis 3, the serpent is not associated with the devil. However, the association of both was considered obvious in Origen's age and before.[36]

On many occasions, Origen's contemporary Tertullian (*ca.* 160–*ca.* 220) simply identifies the snake of Genesis 3 with the devil, e.g., in *Adversus Iudaeos* 10:10 (= *Adversus Marcionem* III 18:7); *De carne Christi* 17:5.

Justin Martyr († 165) also regards the serpent in paradise as the devil himself. In his *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 39:6,[37] Justin says that one of the reasons why the Jews refuse to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, is that they want to avoid being persecuted by the rulers, who are continually driven by that bad spirit, the serpent, to persecute the Christians (οἳ οὐ παύσονται ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ πονηροῦ καὶ πλάνου πνεύματος, τοῦ ὄφεως, ἐνεργείας θανατοῦντας καὶ διώκοντες τοὺς τὰ ὄνομα τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁμολογοῦντας; cf. 70:5; 125:4). In ch. 79, the Jew Trypho comes forward with the accusation that it is blasphemous to say that there are angels who have acted wickedly. Justin then proves that the bible itself says that this is so by pointing at several biblical passages, including Isa 30:4; Zech 3:1–2 and Gen 3:3–14: καὶ ὑπὸ Μωσέως ἐν ἀρχῇ τῆς Γενέσεως ὄφιν πλανήσαντα τὴν Εὔαν γεγραμμένον ἔχομεν καὶ κεκατηραμένον. That the serpent was none other than the devil is apparently obvious for Justin, for he does not explicitly equate the two (cf. 124:3). He does so in 103:5, where he explains

[35] Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 269.

[36] Evidence for this association in Jewish tradition is extant, but scarce; cf. Piñero, "Angels and Demons," 210.

[37] Ed. M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris dialogus cum Tryphone* (PTS, 47; Berlin/New York, 1997).

the element νᾶς in Σατανᾶς as deriving from the Hebrew for "serpent," *naḥaš*.

The assumed association of the serpent with the devil probably also underlies Rev. 12:9, where the defeat of the devil is described: καὶ ἐβλήθη ὁ δράκων ὁ μέγας, ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, ὁ καλούμενος Διάβολος καὶ ὁ Σατανᾶς.[38]

However, the distinction between the serpent and the devil was not always completely lost. Theophilus of Antioch (*fl.* 180) clearly distinguishes the devil and the serpent, when he states that the devil spoke through the serpent's mouth: ὁ κακοποιὸς δαίμων, ὁ καὶ Σατὰν καλούμενος, ὁ τότε διὰ τοῦ ὄφεως λαλήσας αὐτῇ (*Ad Autolycum* II 28:6).[39] This is also the view explicitly expressed in the Greek *Life of Adam and Eve* (16:1–4).

Both the complete identification of the serpent and the snake, and the awareness that they can be regarded as separate personalities, come together in the curious phrase of Epiphanius (*ca.* 315–403): οὐκ ἦν δε αἴτιος μόνος ὁ φαινόμενος τότε ὄφις, ἀλλὰ ὁ ἐν τῷ ὄφει ὄφις λαλήσας (*Panarion* XXXVII 1:6).[40]

Origen himself sometimes refers in a casual way to the serpent as the devil's mouthpiece, e.g., in *Homilia in Jeremiam* XX 7.[41] In other instances, however, he is well aware that the book of Genesis contains no reference to the diabolical adversary.

In *Contra Celsum* IV 36,[42] Origen reports that Celsus had ridiculed the story told by the Jews, that a serpent had opposed God's commandments and prevailed over them. Celsus regarded this old wives tale as most impious, "making God a weakling from the very beginning, unable to make even a single man, whom he had created himself, be obedient." After pointing out that Celsus should have taken the story allegorically (as the Greeks themselves do with their own preposterous stories; IV 39), Origen explains that in this story "Adam" stands for humanity in general. To say that God is presented as

[38] L.J. Lietaert Peerbolte, *The Antecedents of Antichrist. A Traditio-Historical Study of the Earliest Christian Views on Eschatological Opponents* (JSJSup, 49; Leiden, 1996), 133–135.

[39] Ed. M. Marcovich, *Theophili Antiocheni ad Autolycum* (PTS, 44; Berlin/New York, 1995).

[40] Ed. K. Holl and J. Dummer, *Epiphanius II* (Berlin, ²1980).

[41] Ed. P. Nautin, *Origenes Werke* III (GCS, *sine numero*; Berlin, ²1983).

[42] Ed. M. Marcovich, *Origenes. Contra Celsum libri VIII* (VCSup, 54; Leiden, 2001).

weak, because he could not prevent one man from sinning, is then equivalent to objecting to the idea that evil exists at all (IV 40).

In this instance, Origen makes no connection between the serpent and the devil. However, in book VI he returns to the matter, where he discusses Celsus' objections to the Christian teaching concerning the devil. In Celsus' understanding, Christianity represented the devil as one who successfully opposes God in his efforts to do something good for humankind, thus impiously representing the great God as impotent (ὁ μέγιστος θεός, βουλόμενός τι ἀνθρώπους ὠφελῆσαι, τὸν ἀντιπράσσοντα ἔχει καὶ ἀδύνατει; VI 42). To show that the doctrine of an opposing power is not a Christian invention, but a revered teaching of great antiquity, much older than the Greek authorities produced by Celsus, Origen quotes from the books of Moses. He insists that the serpent, the cause of the expulsion from paradise, cannot have been anything other than something like the devil; his other examples include the destroying angel, and the goat sent into the desert. In the book of Job, even older than the Mosaic scriptures, the devil is explicitly named and depicted (VI 43). Origen also discusses why the devil should exist: God, far from being a weakling, introduced an adversary (ἀντικείμενος) into creation, in order to put men to the test and enable them to show themselves worthy of the ascent to things divine (ἄξιοι φανέντες τῆς εἰς τὰ θεῖα ἀναβάσεως VI 44).

From this passage in book VI, it is clear why Origen had waited with his identification of the serpent with the devil in the passage in book IV: Celsus did not just object to the story of the serpent, but to the idea of the devil as God's victorious opponent. Only after Origen had defended the Christian view on "the adversary," could he point to the serpent as a reference to this evil power. To mention the devil in his discussion of the serpent in book IV would have gravely damaged his argument at that stage.

It also emerges that, although the association of the serpent and the devil was self-evident within a Christian context, someone like Origen was aware that in other contexts it had to be made plausible that the devil played a role in the story of Genesis 3. In other words, Origen knew very well that the devil is not explicitly mentioned in the biblical version, and that the assumption that the serpent was associated with him is the outcome of exegesis, and therefore at best a likelihood.

Finally, it appears that in philosophical circles, such as those of Origen and Celsus, the notion of the existence of a power opposing God was a matter of contention. Therefore, it is not surprising that in *De principiis*, in which Origen for the first time in history systematically expounded a Christian theology, he pays quite some attention to the reality of the devil, that is, the powers which try to incite us to sin from the very beginning of creation (III 2:1). It is in this connection that Origen quotes the *As. Mos.*, of which he emphatically states that it was used by the *apostle* Jude.

Origen knew of course that the *As. Mos.* had no canonical authority (cf. his remark to that effect in *Homilia in Jesu Nave* II 1),[43] but he also knew that it was quoted in the Epistle of Jude. By mentioning that fact, he could transfer some of Jude's authority to the *As. Mos.*, and thereby strengthen the important point that the devil had been active in creation from the very beginning.[44]

Conclusions

Origen's statement that in the final part of the *As. Mos.*, the archangel Michael was portrayed as reproaching the devil because he had inspired the serpent to induce Adam and Eve to sin, is probably correct. The earlier suggestion that Origen might have mixed up the *Assumption* and the *Apocalypse* of Moses must be discarded.

The inclusion of this reference to the *As. Mos.* into the corpus of quotations from the lost ending of this writing contributes to our understanding of that part as a discussion of the human fate after death. It is conceivable that the story described how the devil denied the archangel Michael's right to bring Moses to heaven and how, in response, the archangel discoursed on various sorts of inspiration, that by the devil, or that by God's holy spirit. Moses had to die according to the flesh, but he was a righteous person and the embodiment of the holy spirit, and so his soul should rightfully be immortalized.

Although the interpretation of the transgression in paradise as diabolically inspired was common in the Christian exegesis of Origen's

[43] Ed. A. Jaubert, *Origène. Homélies sur Josué* (SC, 71; Paris, 1970).

[44] Cf. E. Bammel, "Die Zitate aus den Apokryphen bei Origenes," in: R.J. Daly (ed.), *Origeniana quinta. Papers of the 5th International Origen Congress* (BETL, 105; Louvain, 1992), 131–136; esp., 134–135; repr. in *id., Judaica et Paulina. Kleine Schriften II* (WUNT, 91; Tübingen, 1997), 161–167; esp., 166–167.

time and before, Origen was aware that the association of the serpent with the devil was not explicit in Genesis 3. He regarded the usual interpretation of that story as correct, but was nonetheless happy to quote the *As. Mos.*, because in that writing the identification of the devil as the real evildoer was made explicit. As appears from Origen's discussion with the non-Christian philosopher Celsus, the concept of an evil force opposing God was not undisputed. Origen acknowledged the apocryphal character of the *As. Mos.* (for which reason he could not use the writing in his discussion with Celsus), but suggested that it still had some authority because it was used and quoted by the apostle Jude.

Finally, some remarks concerning the Christian transmission of the *As. Mos.*, as compared to that of the *Life of Adam and Eve*, may be made, in order to shed light on the phenomenon of the Old Testament pseudepigrapha as part of the Christian heritage in general.

The *As. Mos.* has travelled from Judea to Italy via Alexandria and Caesarea (where Origen worked), and Asia Minor (where the Nicene fathers quoted it). Early Christian writers found it worthwhile to quote its views on good and evil spirits. However, when it was no longer needed for that purpose (possibly because the Christian teachings on the spiritual world were no longer opposed), the writing came into disuse: insofar as the scribes of Northern Italy were concerned, the parchment on which it was written was more valuable than the text itself. Only by chance part of it survived.

The *Life of Adam and Eve*, too, travelled throughout the Roman empire and beyond. It is preserved in scores of manuscripts in many languages of Christendom. Its main usefulness seems to have been that a story about the first human beings is capable of incorporating changing and new views on the details of the human condition in general. Many readers of the story must have found it enjoyable and useful for the purpose of edification. In stark contrast to the five extant quotations from the *As. Mos.*, however, the *Life of Adam and Eve* is never quoted in theological discourses.

The question of why the Christian church adopted and transmitted the pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, will have to be answered differently in each individual case. The interest vested by the church in non-canonical writings cannot be defined in a general manner, but should be determined by reading each and every document (and, in the event, each and every recension of a document) by itself. If this is true, it once more underlines the fact that the "apocrypha

and pseudepigrapha" should not be treated as a separate corpus of texts.[45] In other words: from the perspective of its reception in the church, the *As. Mos.* has as much in common with, e.g., *1 Enoch* or the *Testament of Job*, as with the works of Flavius Josephus, Thucydides and Julius Caesar.

[45] Cf. J.-C. Picard, "L'apocryphe à l'étroit," *Apocrypha* 1 (1990) 69–117; repr. in: *id., Le continent apocryphe: Essai sur les littératures apocryphes juive et chrétienne* (Instrumenta patristica 36; Turnhout, 1999), 13–51.