

Aramaic Levi Document and Greek Testament of Levi

Michael E. Stone

The question of the relationship between the *Aramaic Levi Document* (*ALD*) known chiefly from the Cairo Geniza, the Greek Athos fragments and seven fragmentary Qumran manuscripts on the one hand, and the Greek *Testament of Levi* (*TPL*) from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* on the other, is complex and much debated. The question has been particularly important for two reasons: the antiquity of *ALD* and the disputed nature of *TPL*.¹ It is our view that *ALD* is of the third century BCE and, in any case, one of the oldest of the extra-biblical pseudepigrapha from Qumran or elsewhere.² None would deny that it is one of the sources used by the author / redactor of *TPL* (and, by the way, of *Jubilees*, *pace* Kugel),³ and presumably, therefore, of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. What is debated, is whether *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is a Christian document using Jewish sources or a Jewish document with Christian interpolations. The present writer finds himself, basically, on Marinus de Jonge's side of that discussion, i.e., that the present form of the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, including the *TPL*, is the work of a Christian

¹ A bibliography of older editions and translations of *ALD* is to be found in J.C. Greenfield and M.E. Stone, "Remarks on the Aramaic Testament of Levi," *RB* 86 (1979) 214-230, especially 214-215. See also J.C. Greenfield and M.E. Stone, "The Aramaic Levi Document," *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary*, eds. H.W. Hollander and M. de Jonge (*Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*, 8; Leiden: Brill, 1985) 457-469, especially p. 457. The Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts are edited by J.T. Milik in *DJD* 1, 87-91 and by Greenfield and Stone in *DJD* 22.17,1-82.

² M.E. Stone, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Pseudepigrapha," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 3 (1996) 279 and M.E. Stone, *Studies in the Pseudepigrapha, with Special Reference to the Armenian* (*Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigrapha*; Leiden: Brill, 1991) 247-48 where arguments for this dating are set forth.

³ J. Kugel, "Levi's Elevation to the Priesthood in Second Temple Writings," *HTR* 86 (1993) 1-64; on pp. 52-58 he argues for *Jubilees* precedence to *Aramaic Levi Document*.

author / redactor. This means that a complete Jewish *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* never existed, or at least cannot be argued to have existed from the existing document called *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*. The Christian author / redactor of that work used varied Jewish sources in Semitic languages or Greek.

Through a careful, synoptic study of *ALD* and *TPL* it is possible to show how the author (I shall use this term for convenience's sake) of *TPL* adapted and used *ALD*. This is worth understanding for the following reasons. It is common for students of ancient Jewish literature to say that one or another work used pre-existent sources. Indeed, this is an essential factor in many analyses of works in the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature and, of course, in biblical studies. An example of a source and its use in the Hebrew Bible is Kings and Chronicles. Like Kings and Chronicles, in the case of *ALD* and *TPL*, both the source and the document using it survive. Surely understanding that process from an extant instance might show how a similar process might have happened in other works. More specifically, whether *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is a Jewish document with Christian interpolations, or a Christian document using Jewish sources, it is indubitably using sources, and not only *ALD*. Moreover, studying the one testament of which we do actually have the source may cast light onto authorial procedure adopted by the author of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* throughout.

The research presented here is part of a project originally undertaken by the writer with the late Jonas C. Greenfield and now being continued with the collaboration of Esther Eshel. The aspect of the research presented here, however, is the writer's. The project itself is complex but, nonetheless, some advances can be made from the study of one example. So, we have chosen to

examine the sequence of events surrounding the prayer of Levi in *ALD* and how these events were reworked in *TPL*. The texts discussed are to be found in the Geniza fragments (Cambridge and Oxford), in Qumran manuscripts, and in Greek. We use de Jonge's edition of the Athos fragment and of *TPL*, and our own edition of the Aramaic text. The main points of the argument are the following:

1. The surviving fragments of *ALD* open with the story of Shechem. A codicological analysis of the Geniza manuscript shows that a substantial amount of text must have preceded the extant fragment. A section of a conversation between the sons of Jacob and the Shechemites survives and we may infer that the complete narrative of the event must have been considerably longer originally, because the surviving fragment of the conversation is very detailed. In contrast, *TPL* opens with the usual testamentary scene; it then gives brief biographic details of Levi and recounts the Shechem story in a summary fashion. (Even its longer recapitulation of the Shechem incident in chapter 6 is far less detailed than *ALD*'s text.)
2. In *ALD* a substantial lacuna, two columns and 14 lines to be exact, ensues and then a fragment of text (designated Cambridge col. b) that refers to an unknown incident. Nothing corresponds to it in *TPL*. In our view, the fragment of 4QLevi^a arm known as the "Prayer of Levi" and one or two further small Qumran fragments followed this unknown incident and preceded the surviving first column of the Bodleian leaves (Bodleian col. a).⁴
3. In the prayer in *ALD* Levi launders his garments and washes his body, a

⁴ See J.C. Greenfield and M.E. Stone, "The Prayer of Levi," *JBL* 112 (1993) 247-266.

purification ritual such as commonly follows a ritual act or corpse uncleanness. As Greenfield and I wrote some years ago: "[T]he laundering of garments and washing of the body, actions [that] are typical of Levitical purity (see Num 8:21), do not occur anywhere else preceding a prayer or an apocalyptic vision experience, but instead usually follow a cultic, priestly act" or, I may add, on uncleanness, such as corpse uncleanness.⁵ E. Eshel and I propose that the purification is consequent on the Shechem incident, though that is quite a long way before it in the text. Alternatively, it follows on some other event, such as the wars of the sons of Jacob referred to in *Jubilees*, *Testament of Judah* 3-7 and in *Midrash Wayyisa 'u*, which might have been the context of the Cambridge, col. b fragment.⁶ These lines (§§*1-*2), then, are not the opening of the prayer but the conclusion of another, prior incident.⁷

4. According to *ALD* *3ff., after the above purification, Levi assumes the spiritual and bodily stance of a person praying and he commences the prayer. Functionally parallel but differing, in *TPL* 2:3-4 Levi describes an incident of inspiration, grief and consequent prayer. The geographical setting is given there, Abel Meholah which is near Shechem (see *TPL* 2:1). *ALD* does not identify the site. The actual text of the prayer is omitted by *TPL* but occurs in *ALD* both in Aramaic and in Greek.

5. In *ALD* three fragmentary lines follow the prayer. They read "Then I continued on[" (l. 11); "to my father Jacob" (l. 12); and "from Abel Mayin"

⁵ J.C. Greenfield and M.E. Stone, "Two Notes on the Aramaic Levi Document," *Of Scribes and Scrolls: Studies on the Hebrew Bible, Intertestamental Judaism and Christian Origins*, eds. H.W. Attridge, J.J. Collins, and T.H. Tobin. (College Theology Society Resources in Religion, 5; (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990) 153-162: see p. 156.

⁶ *Jubilees* 34:1-9, cf. *Testament of Judah* 3-7 and *Midrash wayyisa 'u* (A. Jellinek, *Bet Ha-Midrash* [repr. Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1938] 3:1-5).

⁷ See Greenfield and Stone, "Two Notes," 156.

(l. 13). Levi apparently went to Jacob (ll. 11-12) though we do not know to what end. L. 13 relates that Levi was in Abel Mayin and traveled from there to somewhere else. Great edifices have been constructed on "Abel Mayin",⁸ but it is not clear whether Abel Mayin was the site of the prayer, or the place where Levi found Jacob, or some third location. If Levi pronounced the prayer there, it corresponds functionally to Abel Meholah in *TPL* 2:1. He almost certainly departs from there ("from Abel Mayin. Then" [l. 13]) before receiving the vision which is related in lines 14-18. The word "Then" in l. 13 commences the narration of the events leading up to the vision, that does not take place at Abel Mayin.

6. In both texts Levi, probably prone according to *ALD* and explicitly asleep in *TPL*, receives the vision. In the vision in *ALD*, Levi sees something (lost in a lacuna) below him, high until it reached to the heavens. If what was below him was the mountain, which is likely if we compare the text with *TPL* 3:5, he is above it and situated before the gates of heaven. In *Apocalypse of Abraham* the seer describes an experience of rapture. Before seeing the Deity, he says "I desired to fall down upon the earth, and the high place, on which we stood [at one moment rose upright,] but at another rolled downwards" (*Apocalypse of Abraham* 17).⁹ In his vision, from this position, Levi sees the gates of heavens (*ALD* 4QLevi^a aram 2: 16-18) "and an angel ..." (here the manuscript breaks off).

7. In *TPL* 2:5-6, but not in *ALD*, the mountain is given the name "Aspis in Abel-Meholah." In our view, the introduction of the mountain's name by *TPL* is secondary. In the original text, the mountain was part of the vision.

⁸ See J.T. Milik, "Le Testament de Lévi en araméen," *RB* 62 (1955) 403-405. This will be discussed in detail in Greenfield, Stone and Eshel (forthcoming).

⁹ This mystical state of standing on high and having bottomless space below is discussed by G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1941) 52 and footnote 43.

Here, though in the context of the vision, the mountain is identified as "Mount Aspis which is in Abelmaoul" (*TPL* 2:5), a specific mountain drawn from real geography. This is secondary, whether the vision took place at Abel Mayin or not. In *TPL* the mountain has been moved from the vision into geographic reality.

8. The identification of Abel Mayin (*ALD*) with Abel-Meholah (*TPL*) also creates a considerable problem. The facts are the following. First, the name Abel-Meholah occurs nowhere at all in *ALD* while it is found in the biographical preliminary to the vision in *TPL* 2:3 and 2:5.¹⁰ Second, the known site Abel-Meholah is nowhere near a high mountain; it is in the center of the country. Third, the name Abel-Mayin found in *ALD* is otherwise known only (in a Hebrew form) as a hapaxlegomenon in 2 Chron. 16:4 where it corresponds to Abel-Beth-Maacah of 1 Kings 15:20. This identification would indeed put Abel Mayin in the North of the country and, doubtless, for this reason the secondary identification of the high mountain as Aspis is made in *TPL* 2:5. This happens for the following reason: the name Aspis results from a name midrash on the mountain name Sirion (also known as Si'on) read as Shirion "armor," and, in turn, Sirion / Si'on was identified with Mt. Hermon. Thus we have the following development:
Aspis < Shirion < Sirion < Hermon.

9. The text of *TPL* may, then, have arisen as follows.

- ∞ First, in *ALD*, since the events discussed are in the environs of Shechem, Bethel and, apparently, Hebron, we would expect that Abel-Mayin should also be in the center of the country.
- ∞ Second, Abel-Meholah as the place of the prayer in *TPL* 2:5 corresponds

¹⁰ In this and the following geographical remarks, we follow in a several respects proposals of E. Eshel, to whom we are much indebted.

to Abel-Mayin which is somehow related to the prayer in *ALD* (4QLevi^a aram 2:13). The location of mount Aspis in Abel Meholah (*TPL* 2:5) implies that *TPL*'s author / redactor has taken two sequential steps. The first was to apply Chronicles' identification of Abel Mayim with the northern site Abel-Beth Maacah to the place name Abel Mayin in his source. Thus, since he thought that Abel Mayin was in the north, he identified the mountain, which he said was nearby, as the Hermon / Sirion / Aspis.¹¹ Second, perhaps as a result of the geographical inconsistency thus created, northern Abel-Mayim, a rare name, was identified as Abel Meholah a good distance to the south. This produced the anomalous geography we have in *TPL* 2:5. The Shechem story was introduced into the text of *TPL* a second time (chaps. 6-7) and there the mountain tradition was introduced again, adding in *TPL* 6:1, Abila's connection with Gebal and Mount Aspis.

∞ Esther Eshel will address the issue of the location of Abel Mayin separately. Here I will just say that the geographical problem only arises if Chronicles' isolated and unparalleled identification of Abel-Beth-Maacah of Kings as Abel Mayim is accepted, for that puts Abel Mayin in the north. There are good reasons, however, to doubt that *ALD* accepted this identification and to seek *ALD*'s Abel Mayin much further south.

10. Observe that in *TPL* the vision in chapter three, though complicated, seems to be composed of a beginning, a visionary section, and a concluding prophecy.¹² Levi is led from one heaven to another until he reaches the

¹¹ Note the "high mountain" in Mark 9:2 which many scholars today identify as Mt. Hermon.

¹² The structural anomaly, the doubling of the heavenly ascent within chapter 2, is a separate issue, and will not be analyzed here. The full series of heavens occurs in 3:1-8; a preliminary and somewhat different treatment of the seven heavens occurs in 2:7-9. The structure of the two descriptions is quite similar:

highest heaven of all, where he sees the "Great Glory" (3:4). The heavenly vision experience is followed by an eschatological prophecy, and by a blessing at the end of chapter 4. Then, in chapter 5:1 we read what sounds like the beginning of another vision experience, "And then the angel opened to me the gates of heaven, and I saw the holy temple, and the Most High sitting on a throne of Glory."¹³ This follows very strangely on chapters 2:5-4:6, for at the start of the vision in 2:6 the heavens had already been opened to Levi and he was invited in by an angel. Moreover, no descent, awakening or vision conclusion is to be found at the end of chapter 4, and he is not said to leave the heavens. So 5:1, which says the heavens were opened and Levi saw the Most High seated on the Throne of Glory, is odd. That is compounded by the fact that there is no further vision of the heavens following *TPL* 5:1, but instead Levi receives a blessing of priesthood and a promise of the incarnation of Christ.

11. Then, in 5:3 the vision concludes. Levi is brought to earth, the angel gives him a shield and sword and commissions him to destroy Shechem. In response to Levi's request for his name (5:5) the angel only says that he is protector of Israel. The word used for shield in this passage is not $\epsilon\text{sp}\alpha\text{w}$ but $\tilde{\text{p}}\text{lon}$. In the narrative of chapter 6, Levi finds the shield (there called

2:7-9 three + four heavens	3:1-8 three + four heavens; God is in the seventh.
2:10, 12 prophecy to Levi	3:9 God's awesome presence; 3:10 hidden from sinful men.
2:9 prophecy to Levi and Judah about Christ's appearance and salvation, cf. 4:3-4.	4:1 Prophecy of judgement.
	4:2 God has answered your prayer;
	4:3-4a Prophecy to Levi.
	4:4b Sons of Levi will lay hands upon Christ.
	4:5-6 Levi's teaching function is so he can instruct his sons about Christ. Conclusion.

Clearly there is a sort of doublet here, with chapter 4 repeating more expansively the vision of chapter 3.

¹³ This brief vision description, of course, recalls Isaiah chapter 6.

ésp᳚w), which is said to be the reason for the name of the mountain, and in the rest of chapter 6 and 7 the Shechem incident is described.¹⁴

Clearly the same hand that introduced the name midrash in *TPL* chapter 2 and moved the mountain from the visionary to earthly geography, was responsible at least for the second half of the vision (chap. 5) and for the detailed Shechem narrative in chapters 6 and 7. What we cannot know is how much of this repetitive narrative was drawn from the missing parts of *ALD* preceding 4QLevi^a aram. Possibly quite a lot of it, for we saw that that part of *ALD* was rather detailed. We do know that the phrase, "to me the gates of heaven", which occurs at the beginning of the vision in *ALD*, has been used to open the second part of the vision in *TPL* 5:1. Yet the content of the angelic command to take vengeance that follows this in *TPL* certainly did not come in this position in *ALD* in which the Shechem incident had preceded the prayer.

M. de Jonge makes a number of observations about the relationship of the two writings, which have contributed substantially to our developed view set forth above.¹⁵

a. The narrative in 4QLevi^a aram differs from the order of events in *TPL* which also omits most of the text of the prayer. All it preserves is hÈjãmhn Kur᳚f ~pvw svy« "I was praying to the Lord that I might be saved" (2:4) which at most is a passing allusion to the extensive prayer found in *ALD*.¹⁶ To this observation, we may add that the angelic words in 4:2 also refer to

¹⁴ Is it possible that this is an indication of a further complexity in the composition of this section?

¹⁵ M. de Jonge, "Notes on Testament of Levi II-VII," *Travels in the World of the Old Testament*, eds. M.S.H.G. Heerma van Voss, Ph.H.J. Houwink ten Cate, and N.A. van Uchelen (Assen: 1974) 132-145, especially 138.

¹⁶ Greenfield and Stone, "Two Notes," 155. It was this phrase, of course, that provided the occasion for the scribe to introduce the prayer into the Koutoumlous manuscript (manuscript *e*) of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*.

view of our research, we are inclined to support this assertion, but more because of our analysis of *ALD* than because of where a medieval scribe may have decided to interpolate a fragment of the Greek translation of *ALD*.

The editorial process, which introduced redundancy, confusion, and geographic duplication into the story line of *ALD* is, therefore, quite evident. It involves re-arrangement, omission, and the introduction of learned glosses at least. Indeed, very much of the language and phraseology of *ALD* has been incorporated into *TPL*, perhaps more than was previously hypothesized. The reason for the re-arrangement of the material by the author / redactor of *TPL* remains unclear. That is a question of very considerable interest, to which the answer must still be sought. That it was purposeful and designed to achieve a goal or goals cannot be doubted.