

Armenian, Early Jewish Literature preserved in:

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Background

The Armenian literary tradition commenced in the fifth century CE with the invention of the alphabet by St. Mesrop Maštoc', traditionally dated to 404. The first work translated into Armenian was the Bible and the fifth century CE, particularly its first part, is reckoned to be the Golden Age of Armenian literature. By the end of that century, the Armenians had not only created a very substantial literary corpus in the Armenian language, but had also translated a large number of Greek and Syriac religious works. In the late fifth century and for some time thereafter, in addition to translations into "ordinary" Ancient Armenian, a Hellenizing style of translation from Greek developed, which strove to stay very close to Greek linguistic usage. It even calqued Greek word formations and syntactic constructions. A number of very significant Greek works, mainly of philosophical theology and the like, were translated into Hellenizing Armenian.

With the possible exception of a single Talmudic passage (see below), no Jewish works seem to have been translated directly into Armenian from Hebrew or Aramaic. The works we shall enumerate in the following paragraphs were all translated from Greek or, in rarer instances, from Syriac. Moreover, Armenian translations of Jewish works were most probably made from Christian Greek copies and not Jewish Greek ones.

Of course, the Old Testament was the first Jewish work translated into Armenian. The exact extent of the ancient Armenian Old Testament canon is unknown but it surely incorporated books such as Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, Baruch, Judith and Tobit, at least two Books of Maccabees, and other "apocrypha"

that were not included in the Hebrew canon. For the purposes of the following discussion, we shall regard the Old Testament in Armenian as containing those works usually found in Greek and Latin Bibles, for the scholarly problems of such "additional" works resemble those of the canonical books. The other ancient Jewish compositions translated into Armenian may be divided into the following chief categories: (a) writings of Philo of Alexandria and some other Jewish Hellenistic works that came to be associated with the Armenian Philonic corpus; (b) works belonging to the category of the Pseudepigrapha, which are closely associated with the Armenian Old Testament and which occur exclusively or predominantly in Armenian Old Testament manuscripts; (c) other Pseudepigrapha that are not usually found in Armenian Old Testament manuscripts; (d) fragments of works that are attributed to "the Jewish Books" or "the Jewish writings", including the above-mentioned Talmudic fragment; and (e) a few other varied writings. Our discussion will encompass such works as were most likely translated into Armenian down to the end of the fifteenth century.

Philo: Quite a lot of Philo's treatises were translated from Greek into Hellenizing Armenian. Of particular interest are those works that survived only in Armenian and whose Greek text is lost. These are the following: (1) *Quaestiones in Genesin*; (2) *Quaestiones in Exodum*; (3) *De providentia I and II*; and (4) *De animalibus*. The *Quaestiones* and *De animalibus* have been translated into English (the *De providentia* is forthcoming).

De Jona

This is a Jewish Hellenistic treatise, homiletic in character, about the prophet Jonah. A good edition has been published, and an unpublished English translation and introduction written by the late Hans Lewy exist in the archives of the Israel Academy

of Sciences and Humanities. Lewy characterises the work as a Jewish Hellenistic sermon, perhaps of the second century, and as such it is potentially extremely important.

De Sampsonē

This work has not appeared in a critical edition but may be found in Aucher's edition of 1826. A German translation by Folker Siegert exists.

Known Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.

All the writings included in the Apocrypha exist in Armenian as part of the biblical corpus of the Old Testament. They have been published in various editions, and are printed in Armenian Bibles, except for those issued by Protestant organizations. In the still standard printing of the Armenian Bible (based on the Latin Canon), ed. J.

Zohrabean, 1805, the following works are included: 1 Esdras, Judith, Tobit, 1-3 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon and Baruch. In an Appendix are to be found: Sirach (two versions: two more exist as well), *4 Ezra* (3 Ezra in Armenian) and Prayer of Manasseh. In the extensive Canon List of Mxit'ar of Ayrivank' (14th century), some additional works occur in the Old Testament. Intriguingly, not all of these occur in full in the Bible manuscript copied by him: *3 Paralipomena* (in his Bible, a short text), *4 Maccabees*, *Josephus who is Caiphas the High Priest* (perhaps Josephus Flavius, but no Armenian of Josephus is known), *The Vision of Enoch* (an Armenian apocryphon), *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, *Joseph and Asenath*, *Deaths (i.e., Lives) of the Prophets*. In addition to all the above, Armenian liturgical Psalters contain the Canticles.

The textual worth of known works seems to be substantial, not differing in many cases from that of the Armenian witness to the Greek Old Testament. A critical edition of *4 Ezra* exists and it was translated into Armenian together with the biblical

corpus, and witnesses to a reworked Greek text. The Testaments of Levi and Joseph have been issued in critical editions and a full edition of *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* is underway; *Joseph and Asenath* has been intensively studied by Ch. Burchard (Heidelberg) who is currently preparing a critical edition. An edition of *Maccabees* exists and additions of some of the *Vitae Prophetarum* have been published. Clearly further study of these significant Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical works will contribute to their textual basis in Greek. For example, the Armenian ninth-century *Epitome of Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, reflecting a developed text, is witness to a textual stage prior to the extant Greek manuscripts.

In the major collection of extra-biblical Armenian apocrypha (Yovsēp'ianc' 1896), we note the following Jewish writings in addition to those mentioned above: *Apocalypse of Moses* (Greek Life of Adam and Eve), *Questions of Ezra*, *Paralipomena Ieremiou* (in three recensions). There also exists another, independent form of the Adam Book, the *Penitence of Adam*, which has been published separately. Three versions of parts of the *Testament of Adam* also occur in Armenian.

Unknown Works

Lipscomb published a list of names of the wives of the patriarchs, which originates in *Jubilees*. As in many Christian traditions, the story of the translation of the Septuagint had considerable circulation, ultimately deriving from *Aristeas*, but immediately from Epiphanius' *De mensuris et ponderibus*. In addition, in Armenian extensive texts are preserved of the *Onomastica Sacra*, which ultimately go back to Jewish sources.

Lexicological texts relating to the Bible and Philo were assembled. *The Signs of the Judgement* also known as *15 Signs before Doomsday* exists in Armenian, Latin and a medieval Hebrew made from the Latin. The Armenian version attributes it to "Books

of the Jews" while in Latin it is usually attributed to Jerome, famed for his knowledge of Hebrew. The body of the text has nothing notably Christian in it. There also exists a corpus of Armenian scholia on Philo and various texts associated with Sirach.

The story of Aḥikar is first witnessed in a fifth century BCE Aramaic papyrus from Oxyrhincus. Aḥikar plays a role in the Book of Tobit, and his story is widespread in a number of Oriental Christian languages, including Armenian. The Armenian text has been critically edited. An unpublished text in Matenadaran ms no. M5148 (1617-8) is entitled, "A Jewish Tradition concerning Mercy," and compare M0783. A canon list giving Hebrew names of the biblical books has been published.

Baraitha

A Baraitha from the Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Bathra 14b-15a* occurs in Armenian and it has been proposed that this was the result of oral transmission between Jews and Armenians. In the *Catalogue of Manuscripts* of the Matenadaran, ms no. 3144 is entitled "Talmud", but is in fact a collection of Jewish legal material translated into Armenian.

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