

CHAPTER FIVE

COMBINED REVIEW¹

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Volume 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments; Volume 2: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works. Edited by James H. Charlesworth. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983 and 1985.

The Apocryphal Old Testament, Edited by H.F.D. Sparks. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.

These volumes (*OTP* 1–2, *AOT*) have been reviewed, individually or in combinations, in part or in whole, in various publications by various scholars with various insights, commendations and complaints.² There is general consensus that the diverse reading publics, whether specialists or generalists or somewhere in between, have profited from the appearance of these works, whatever the shortcomings. Since the following review often will be bluntly critical in its evaluations, let me emphasize at the outset that I can and do appreciate the enormous amount of useful effort, especially on the part of the respective editors, that has gone into producing these anthologies, and I readily admit that we are better off with them than we would be without them. Serious students and scholars who deal with early forms of "Judaism" and the heritages they left will need to consult these volumes regularly, especially the set edited by Charlesworth. I would purchase these books, at least

¹ This combined review appeared originally in *Religious Studies Review* 14.2 (April 1988) 113–17; some additional material, including some from my separate review of Charlesworth in *JBL* 106 (1987) 736–39, has also been incorporated here. Since my comments are largely methodological in nature, it seemed appropriate to include this revised version of the review at this point.

² See e.g., Richard Bauckham "The Apocalypses in the New Pseudepigrapha," *JSNT* 26 (1986) 97–117; Sebastian P. Brock, Review of Charlesworth, vol. 1 in *JJS* 35 (1984) 200–9 and of vol. 2 in *JJS* 38 (1987) 108–14; David Hay, *Studia Philonica Annual* 1 (1989) 127–28; George W.E. Nickelsburg, *CBQ* 50 (1988) 288–91; see esp. Michael E. Stone's companion review to this one, *RSR* 14 (1988) 111–13.

at the original prices in 1983–1985.³ This is a strong, if not unqualified, recommendation!

Nevertheless, these works have serious shortcomings to which users should be alerted. Since ultimately the editors, Charlesworth and Sparks, rightly or wrongly bear the responsibility for such failings as well as receive the praise for the successes, this review will concentrate on the overtly “editorial contributions” in the respective materials. Much could and should also be said about the individual contributions (see, e.g., Brock’s review), but that will not be the focus here. Serving as general editor to such corpora can be a frustrating, time consuming, and largely thankless task. One is not well advised to jump into it lightly. It requires a great deal of time and effort, depends on the work of others with whom the editor may not completely agree and leaves the editor open to various sorts of criticism both of the whole and of its parts. It requires a special combination of personal and professional traits and talents to do it successfully. The larger the number of contributors, the more potential for problems. The wider the range of coverage, the more difficult the organizational task. And so forth. If an editor is fortunate and/or very talented, the work can all be made to fit together with relative “homogeneity” of some sort, and the plusses will outweigh the minuses. Frequently things do not work out so neatly. Few people would have accepted the assignment faced by Charlesworth or by Sparks, and doubtless each person confronted with such a task would have done things slightly differently.

From the outset, there are obvious significant differences between Charlesworth and Sparks as editors as well as between the circumstances that gave birth to the respective editions, and these differences color the final products. When Charlesworth was offered this assignment by the publisher in 1972, he was an energetic junior faculty member (PhD 1967) who was actively pursuing dissertation related research on the *Odes of Solomon* and related topics and was serving as secretary to the steering committee of the recently founded (1969) SBL Pseudepigrapha Group. He had already published a couple of articles, and his new edition of the Syriac *Odes* (1973) was about to go to press.⁴ He

³ The prices have, of course, skyrocketed in the meantime; these volumes are still available in 2008 (Sparks appeared in paperback in 1985; Yale University Press reissued Charlesworth in 2007).

⁴ *The Odes of Solomon: the Syriac Texts* (Oxford, 1973; reprinted, with minor corrections, by Scholars Press, 1977).