WHY EZRA AND NOT ENOCH?
REWRITING THE SCRIPT OF THE FIRST EXILE WITH THE HOPE FOR A PROMPT RESTORATION OF ZION’S FORTUNES

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1. Pseudepigraphy at Stake

In his contribution to the present volume, John Collins raises three important and closely related questions concerning 1) the pseudepigraphic choice by the author of 4 Ezra, 2) the identity of its narrator, and 3) its Enochic proclivities. On the one side, it is true that, among the great number of literary reactions to the First Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, neither biblical pseudepigraphy nor pseudonymity were the only available options: Josephus, who viewed himself as a second Jeremiah, did not engage in the composition of new apocryphal texts, instead writing a multivolume series of historiographical and apologetic works in the most beautiful (pseudo-)Thucydidean style, while John of Patmos did not hesitate in proclaiming his own authorship at the beginning of his Revelation (Rev 1:1–2, 4, 9). On the other side, a significant number of Jewish (and Christian) writings which circulated between 70 and 132 CE (4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, 3 Baruch, the Coptic Jeremiah Apocryphon, the Apocalypse of Abraham, Books IV and V of the Sibylline Oracles, the Ascension of Isaiah, and perhaps the Christian edition of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs) belong definitively to the category of biblical and related literature. As specialists of biblical

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1 John J. Collins, “Enoch and Ezra,” in this volume.
and pseudepigraphic rewritings, we along with Collins need to consider seriously the delicate problem of pseudonymity, particularly because it is precisely on this point that “pseudorthodox” scholars (as Morton Smith used to call them) continue to denounce the deceitful intentions of our apocalyptic authors. But why Ezra and not Enoch—not to mention Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, or even Job? This is the question.

In order to explore certain aspects of this intriguing issue I will repeatedly make reference to the works of the late Jean-Claude Picard (1943–1996), a French specialist of early Jewish and Christian literature who was a pioneer in the application of structural analyses and anthropological models to our old texts. Picard was the first to suggest the “curative function” of many apocalyptic writings, as well as uncovering—independently from Michael Knibb!—the existence of a pessimistic current of thought according to which the Babylonian exile had never ended. These and many other sensitive and stimulating suggestions were made prior to his untimely disappearance from the scholarly community. Moreover, I will also make use of two seminal studies by Philip Esler that, perhaps, have not received all of the attention that they deserve.


