Look to the East: New and Forgotten Sources of 4 Ezra

Liv Ingeborg Lied and Matthew P. Monger

In this essay we will trace some new and some almost forgotten lines of the history of transmission and use of 4 Ezra in the Christian East. We are pleased to dedicate this essay to Michael E. Stone and his monumental contribution to scholarship, both on 4 Ezra and on Armenian text and manuscript traditions.1

In recent years, some important manuscripts have come to light—some fragmented and some complete—that give us a better picture of the transmission and reception of 4 Ezra. In the current essay we want to address some of these manuscripts and fragments, as well as the implications they have for the study of 4 Ezra. We will begin by exploring two surviving fragments which, despite having been known to the scholarly community for some time, have not been actively engaged by scholars. We will discuss the way in which these fragments and the manuscripts they were once part of have been used, both historically and in the scholarly discussion of 4 Ezra, how they can be approached in scholarship, and how our approaches affect perceptions of both the surviving manuscript materials and of 4 Ezra as a book.2 We will also present a lectionary manuscript that was not known to the scholarly world until 2014 and that can be seen as a “new” manuscript containing passages excerpted from 4 Ezra, or alternatively as a new source for the history of transmission of 4 Ezra. Finally, we will develop some of the implications of these specific manuscripts and fragments for the understanding of the conception and circulation of 4 Ezra, with a particular focus on the transmission and use in the Syriac tradition. It has long been known that 4 Ezra survives in a complete copy in the oldest extant Syriac Old Testament pandect (full-bible codex), the so-called Codex Ambrosianus: Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 21 Inf. and B 21


2 In this essay, we use the term “book” to refer to a discrete unit of text, a composition identified by a specific title, i.e., in the way the term is typically used about biblical books.
However, excerpts from and fragments of *4 Ezra* survive in other manuscripts as well, but these manuscripts have not received the attention they deserve. The present essay is a first and preliminary attempt to rectify this.

The theoretical point of departure of the current essay is so-called New Philology. This theoretical perspective argues for the importance of studying manuscripts as material artifacts and not only as textual witnesses. Such a perspective opens different avenues of inquiry and helps to contextualize the discussion of individual manuscripts in the cultural traditions that produced and engaged with them, as well as the relationship between them. When *4 Ezra* appears in liturgical manuscripts, for instance, this frame of reference is especially helpful, as the few extant manuscripts may be fragmentary in the textual sense but are still full of information about the context and process of transmission. As a result of our theoretical orientation, we talk of manuscripts as bearers of text in different ways than traditional philologists. In our usage, the text is the words found on the page(s) of a manuscript. The manuscript, then, is the physical artifact which bears the text, and which is a product of a specific historical context. Thus, in the following we will be discussing manuscripts and fragments of manuscripts that contain text identifiable to us as passages from *4 Ezra*, but the manuscripts themselves did not necessarily contain copies of the complete book of *4 Ezra* and should not be conceptualized as “copies of *4 Ezra*” unless there are reasons to believe that this was in fact the purpose of the manuscript in question.

---

3 Identified as “7a1” in the *List of Old Testament Peshitta Manuscripts (Preliminary Issue)* (Peshitta Institute Leiden University; Leiden: Brill, 1961).