ENOCHE, ARAMAIC LEVI
AND SECTARIAN ORIGINS*)

BY

MICHAEL E. STONE

Jerusalem

Important aspect of Qumran origins can, and perhaps should be
understood in light of the situation of Judaism in the third century
B.C.E., well before the Qumran sect actually appeared. While
some aspects of the peculiar views of the Qumran sect are best to
be perceived as idiosyncratic developments, other dimensions of
what at first seem to be particular views of the Essenes of the
Judean desert were in fact of broader diffusion and more antique
origin. Consonant with this situation, there exist writings in the
Qumran library that antedate the foundation of the sect yet seem
allied to the Essene works in some, but not all, of their ideas and
terminology).

Indeed, one fortunate result of the publication of some of the
manuscripts from Cave 4 at Qumran is that we are able to demon-
strate the antiquity of certain such "Qumran-like" documents on
newly available literary or palaeographic grounds. Two such works
are The Book of Enoch (1 Enoch) and The Aramaic Levi Document2).

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November 1986.

1) Examples of writings probably in this early date, in addition to those to be
dealt with here, are certain of the Apocryphal Psalms, The Book of Jubilees, and
there are yet more.

2) We stressed the antiquity of the Book of Enoch and its significance a decade
ago: M. E. STONE, "The Book of Enoch and Judaism in the Third Century
Levi Document is not as well known. It is based on a number of considerations:

a. It seems likely that it is a source for The Book of Jubilees which is to be dated
in the first part of the second century B.C.E. according to recent authorities.
Nickelsburg would give it a slightly earlier date than Vanderkam, but both agree
that it must be older than the settlement at Qumran: see G. W. E. Nickelsburg,
"The Bible Rewritten and Expanded," in M. E. Stone (ed.), Jewish Writings of
the Second Temple Period (Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum,
2.2; Assen & Philadelphia: van Gorcum & Fortress Press, 1984), 102-103; further
It is superfluous to rehearse the structure of 1 Enoch. In its full form, existing only in Ethiopic, it is made up of five different works, Aramaic manuscripts of a number of which were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The implications of dates gained by the study of the paleography of these manuscripts force us to set the composition of The Book of the Luminaries (1 Enoch 72-82) well back into the third century B.C.E. at the latest, while the same criteria would place The Book of the Watchers (1 Enoch 1-36) in the same period, or very slightly later. These parts of 1 Enoch are, consequently, the oldest extra-biblical Jewish writings known.


b. There are some palaeographic indications. Most of the Qumran manuscripts of The Aramaic Levi Document remain unpublished, and while the fragments from 1Q (1Q21) were reckoned too small to date palaeographically by the editor, in 1956 he dated the fragment of 4QLev to the end of the second or beginning of the first century B.C.E. (J. T. Milik, RB 62 (1955), 399) and twenty years later in The Books of Enoch (Oxford: 1976), 23, he unambiguously set it in the second century. The dates, the contents, and indeed the exact number of other Qumran manuscripts remain for the future to uncover. Whatever palaeographic dating is known sets this work into the context of other second century manuscripts of Aramaic writings, like those of The Book of Enoch.

c. The so-called ‘sectarian’ calendar has been proven to stand at the base of its datings. See J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone, “Some Remarks on the Aramaic Testament of Levi from the Geniza,” RB 86 (1979), 224-225. Since the work seems to antedate The Book of Jubilees the calendar is important indicative evidence for its general affinities.

J. T. Milik claimed the The Aramaic Levi Document is of exceptional antiquity, being as old as the fourth century B.C.E.: see The Books of Enoch, 24. He also claims that it is Samaritan in origin, but his arguments have not been published and his views have not found broad support.

We prefer to call this work The Aramaic Levi Document since it bears no indications which mark it as a testament; see the comments of H. W. Hollander and M. de Jonge, The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (SVTP 8; Leiden: Brill, 1985), 21.

The most recent translation of The Aramaic Levi Document is by J. C. Greenfield and M. E. Stone in Appendix III of Hollander and de Jonge, Testaments.

* In The Books of Enoch Milik dates the MSS as follows (ranged by date): late third/early second century B.C.E. 4QEnastr
first half of second century B.C.E. 4QEn
middle of second century B.C.E. 4QEn
150-125 B.C.E. 4QEn
first half of first century B.C.E. 4QEn
middle first century B.C.E. 4QEn
middle first century B.C.E. 4QEnastr
second half first century B.C.E. 4QEnastr
last third first century B.C.E. 4QEn
slightly later than 4QEn 4QEn
first century C.E. 4QEnastr.