APOCALYPTIC VISION AND PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL MEMORY

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The subject to be discussed in this paper is related to apocalyptic, yet apocalyptic literature as such will not be dealt with in it. We will investigate various apocalyptic texts, mainly historical apocalypses (see below) and especially chapter 11 in the book of Daniel, and their role in the formation of the historical memory of the Jewish people.

Historical memory is an important subject in historical research both as influential component in various cultural, social and ethnical processes and as a major factor in the evaluation of historical sources (Quellenforschung).

But we should begin with what is meant, here at least, by apocalyptic. The term apocalyptic carries with it various connotations and a wide range of meanings\(^1\). Yet both as literary genre and as a way of historical expression apocalyptic literature is a very distinct phenomenon. It is related to Eschatology and Messianism since in the apocalyptic writings the Eschaton is the major theme. Nevertheless, not every eschatological work is apocalyptic in the strict sense of this term.

There are various messianic prophecies and eschatological works, which are not apocalypses. Anyhow, here we will limit our discussion only to historical apocalypses. The trait which is typical

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\(^1\) K. KOCH, Rediscovery of Apocalyptic (London, 1972), p. 18; also M. SMITH, 'On the History of Apocalyptic and Apocalypsis, in: Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East, ed. D. HELLOHOLM (Tübingen, 1983), pp. 9-20. This last mentioned volume (abbreviated as Apocalypticism in the MW and NE) is a mine of information on the various sources and apocalyptic literature as well as of relevant bibliography. Also may be added: L'Apocalyptique, eds. M. PHILONENKO and M. SIMON (Paris, 1977); Apokalyptik, eds. K. KOCH & J.M. SCHMIDT (Darmstadt, 1982); and Apocalypses et théologie de l’espérance [Lectio Divina No. 95] (Paris, 1977). This is of course but a fraction of the immense literature on this subject; see also the following note.
and necessary for an eschatological work to be an historical apocalypse\(^2\) is a historical consciousness and specific literary framework. By historical consciousness we mean not only an awareness to history coming to its end (which is common to everything eschatological) but also understanding the Eschaton as part of a historical continuum and stressing this continuity, and giving due attention to historical past as a meaningful part leading to the expected Eschaton.

This conceptual attitude towards history, when framed within the fixed literary form, makes up the historical apocalypse. This is fully evident in some writings and only partially or dimly in some others. The model of apocalyptic literature is, as well known and agreed upon, the Book of Daniel, especially chapters 10-12, 7 and 8. But various other works may be added, as e.g. the Vision of the Animals in the book of Henoch (Chs. 85-90)\(^3\), and the later Assumptio Mosis, 4 Ezra and the Book of Revelation in the NT (Apocalypse of John). The problem of the origins of apocalypticism will not be discussed here. It was dealt with by various scholars, some of whom pointed to writings of Akkadian, Egyptian or Iranian origin, which may have served as forerunners of the late biblical and post-biblical apocalyptic books and were to a certain measure their prototypes\(^4\).

But let us now turn to the main theme of this paper: How does this kind of literature function as a tool in the preservation of historical memory? Or in other words: How does apocalyptic literature treat past events and in what form are they contained,

\(^2\) To avoid semantic discussion it is admitted here that our treatment covers only historical apocalypses, J.J. Collins assigned for them the No. Ia in his typology (Iia, b, c, are for outworldly journeys). See his "The Jewish Apocalypses," Semeia 14 (1979), esp. 22-23. See also E.P. Sanders, "The Genre of Palestinian Jewish Apocalypses", in Apocalypticism in the MW and NE, pp. 447-459, for a comprehensive review of the definition of Apocalyptic.


\(^4\) W. Lambert, The Background of Jewish Apocalyptic (London, 1978); but see the more cautious conclusion of H. Ringgren, "Akkadian Apocalypses", in: Apocalypticism in the MW and NE, pp. 379-386. Egyptian parallels are more distant, though similarities can be shown. Especially interesting is the status of the Egyptians under the Ptolemies in comparison to Judea in the Hellenistic period. See J. Gwyn Griffiths, "Apocalyptic in the Hellenistic era," ibid., pp. 273-293, and J. Bergman, "Introductory Remarks on Apocalypticism in Egypt," ibid., pp. 51-60.