



*Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2015.10.12*

**Vicente Dobroruka, *Second Temple Pseudepigraphy. A Cross-cultural Comparison of Apocalyptic Texts and Related Jewish Literature*. Ekstasis: Religious Experience from Antiquity to the Middle Ages 4. Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013. Pp. xviii + 193. ISBN: 978-3-11-033354-1. Hardcover. 89, 95 € / \$126.00.**

**James R. Davila  
University of St Andrews**

In this volume Dobroruka provides us with a thoughtful cross-cultural comparison between ancient quasi-biblical pseudepigraphic literature and a modern mediumistic movement in Brazil in order to explore the usefulness of the automatic writing tradition in the latter as a parallel to the pseudepigraphic authorial attributions in the former.

In the Introduction he lays out a comparative table of the obvious similarities and differences between the two literary corpora and concludes that they are such that a full-scale comparison is worthwhile. In Chapter 1, “Why a cross-cultural approach is needed in order to try a different understanding of Second Temple pseudepigraphy,” Dobroruka sets out the hypothesis he is testing: “that pseudepigraphy *may* have been understood and lived as a sort of possessional phenomenon in which the actual writer ... would have imagined himself as being the very person in whose name he is writing” (p. 5). He then defines terms (altered states of consciousness, ecstasy, possession, automatism, hypnosis) and reviews the scholarship on late Second Temple Jewish pseudepigraphy. Chapter 2, “How much is automatic writing useful as a hermeneutic tool?” explores the subject of “automatic writing,” with special attention to the experiences of the Kardecist medium Chico Xavier and his spirit guide Emmanuel, but with attention also to the somewhat complicated relationship of the experiences to possession trance, as well as to related phenomena (e.g., multiple personalities, past-lives therapies) found in clinical contexts. Chapter 3, “Automatic writing in modern-day Kardecism,” introduces the Brazilian Kardecist Spiritism movement, which is the basis for comparison with Second Temple Jewish pseudepigraphy. Kardecism developed in the nineteenth century in Europe and underwent a revival in Brazil late in that century, becoming an established religious movement involving formal training. The mediums engage in automatic writing (and other types of intermediation not relevant to this book) without the use of ascetic rituals or psychotropic drugs and are expected to live disciplined, quiet lives. Chico Xavier’s career as a medium spanned much of the twentieth century, during which he produced a vast corpus of texts in the names of deceased authors, including a number of works that can reasonably be considered “apocalypses.”

Chapter 4, “Automatic writing in Antiquity regarding religious texts,” surveys passages with indications of the narrator’s identity in ancient literature not limited to Second Temple-era Jewish texts. The principles for the selection of texts and passages is not obvious and is not explained clearly. Three cases of possible automatic writing are noted: a dubious one in 1 Chronicles 21 which conceivably could refer to a post-mortem (or post-translation) letter delivered from the prophet Elijah; the Book of Elchasai, which was received from an angel; and an account by Lucian of Samosata of a successfully fraudulent medium named Alexander. Chapter 5: “Philo, Josephus and 4Ezra: the main testimonies for inspired writing during the Second Temple period,” determines that Philo refers to dreams, fantasies, and signs, but tends to use such terms interchangeably, which obscures any distinctions intended in his usage. He also describes mystical experience as drunkenness. Josephus associates visions with the study of scripture in two passages. The presentation of inspired writing in *4 Ezra* is characterized as less sophisticated and simpler than that of Philo or Josephus, but it is not very clear what this means. In general, this chapter contains many undigested quotations from the primary works which would have benefitted from more commentary. Chapter 6: “Considerations on religious pseudepigraphy,” observes that ancient Jewish apocalyptic pseudepigraphy drew on a limited number of names of biblical characters, mostly prophets, for its authorship attributions. It also recounts the two cases in which biblical (New Testament) pseudepigraphy was detected and the authors exposed: that of the unnamed author of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* and Salvian of Marseille’s letter ascribed to Timothy. In the end it fails to find evidence for a link between ancient biblical pseudepigraphy and any hypothetical mystical experience.

In the Conclusion, Dobroruka allows that, like Kardecism, ancient apocalyptic pseudepigrapha describe appropriate emotional and physical effects of the experiences on the authors, display fantastic imagery, and attribute appropriate characters as authors of the pseudepigraphic works, but he correctly decides that these similarities are too general to constitute significant cross-cultural parallels. He finds no evidence that the ancient Jewish apocalyptic writers entered trance states in which they identified themselves with an ancient author as the author of their work. Dobroruka indeed raises a number of objections to this hypothesis, the one raised at the beginning of the book. The manipulation of deceased spirits and a belief in reincarnation were at best marginal to Second Temple Jewish thought. The stereotypical descriptions of ritual practices associated with ASCs in the ancient pseudepigrapha have no parallels in Xavier’s work. And the identity of the medium is always a matter of public knowledge in Kardecism, whereas in the ancient pseudepigrapha the identity of the actual author is always hidden behind that of the pseudepigraphic author. In the end the comparative model explored in the book provides no convincing evidence that the authors of ancient biblical pseudepigrapha wrote their works in possession trance states in which they identified with the named authors of their works.

One point of criticism must be made before we turn to substantive matters. The English of this book is poor and it has been edited poorly. There are numerous grammatical errors, typographical errors, spelling errors, and malapropisms, and it shows little evidence of having been proofread or even put through a spell-checker. It is almost always possible to work out what the author was trying to say, but he frequently does not quite say it, and deciphering his intent sometimes takes some effort. I hope that De Gruyter and the otherwise promising Ekstasis series will take better care in the future of their authors who are not native speakers of English.

With that aside, this volume is a stimulating work with much to commend it. The review of Kardecism is itself a significant contribution to the study of altered states of consciousness and will be of interest to many types of specialists working on ASCs in various cultural traditions. More importantly for our purposes, the book establishes that there is no direct evidence that the writers of ancient pseudepigraphic apocalypses considered themselves possessed by the spirits of the deceased attributed authors and they show substantial differences from the Kardecist model, which is a well-documented movement that employs exactly this sort of possession-authorship. This issues an important challenge to the idea that some form of “channeling” was involved in writing these apocalypses.

Whether this is a fatal challenge remains to be seen. It is true that nothing is indicated of the actual authors of the ancient pseudepigraphic Jewish apocalypses, but then again we know virtually nothing about the social context of their composition, and the picture might be different if we did. And various forms of spirit possession are certainly known in the biblical tradition, although the exact nature and extent of these is far from clear. In the Hebrew Bible the spirit of God sometimes came upon prophets (e.g., 1 Sam 10:10; Isa 61:1; Joel 3:1; 2 Chr 15:1) and even entered the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 2:2) and “was clothed with” the priest Zechariah son of Iddo when he prophesied to the people (2 Chr 24:19-20). An evil spirit “terrorized” and “came upon” Saul (1 Sam 16:14, 16, 23). In the New Testament, unclean spirits routinely possessed human victims, while the spirit (of God) rested upon Jesus at his baptism and drove him into the wilderness (Mark 1:10-12). Possession of human beings by deceased spirits is much less clearly attested, but the medium of Endor raised up the departed spirit of Samuel, who presumably spoke through her (1 Sam 28:8-19); Elijah’s spirit rested upon Elisha after the translation of the former (2 Kgs 2:9, 15); and it may be hinted that earlier prophets and the executed John the Baptist could have been regarded as possessing Jesus (Mk 6:14-16; 8:27-28). The Kardecist model is not a good fit for what we know or may infer about spirit possession in the Second Temple period, but a wider exploration of “channeling” traditions may provide better parallels in support of the possibility that trance possession by the spirits of deceased authors was a factor in the composition of some ancient Jewish works.

Moreover, other models of spirit-influenced ancient authorship more consonant with the biblical and related evidence remain to be explored. The restoration of the ninety-four books of scripture in *4 Ezra* 14 was rightly given relatively little attention by Dobroruka, because it has few parallels to Kardecism. But in itself it is quite important, because it describes a process of automatic dictation in which God’s holy spirit entered the medium (14:22) so that he dictated lost scriptures with no diminution of his own sense of identity and no identification with the deceased authors of those scriptures. This model is actually attested (albeit fictionally) in an ancient Jewish apocalypse and it may have a wider application in explaining the composition of similar works.

But these are just a few ideas in response to this rich book. In sum, Dobroruka’s work provides us with a cross-cultural comparison of ancient pseudepigraphic biblical literature with a modern and far better documented spiritual movement that also produced literature written in the names of deceased authors and did so through trance possession by the spirits of those authors. This comparison fails to find convincing parallels that would encourage us to read the ancient pseudepigraphic literature as originating under similar conditions of possession trance. This is

an important contribution to the debate over the origin of these works and it is bound to stimulate further research.