Authorial Fictions and Attributions in the Ancient Mediterranean

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CHANCE E. BONAR and
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Introduction to Authorial Fictions and Attributions in the Ancient Mediterranean

Julia D. Lindenlaub and Chance E. Bonar

This edited volume began as a conversation over Twitter between ourselves and Eva Mroczek, attesting to the ability of social media – when in the right hands – to connect academics over long distances and be used effectively to collaborate on shared topics of interest. That Twitter conversation became a series of four colloquia between September and December of 2021, hosted by the Bible and Religions of the Ancient Near East Collective (BRANE) and taking place over Zoom. The colloquia, also entitled "Authorial Fictions and Attributions in the Ancient Mediterranean," were an opportunity both to highlight the important contributions on attribution between our distinct academic silos and to provide a platform for new scholarship in early Judaism, early Christianity, classics, and Near Eastern studies on authorship and attribution. Some of those presentations have made their way in revised form into this collection, while others were solicited from audience members of the colloquia.

In gathering these contributions, we have made a point to prioritize the work of early career researchers across a variety of fields that study the ancient world. This was done, in large part, to give a voice to the next generation of scholars who will be teaching and producing scholarship in a landscape different than their 20th-century-trained predecessors: a landscape with shrinking and disappearing departments, fewer permanent or stable academic jobs, and further contingency whether or not one is on the tenure track. As early career researchers continue to pursue scholarship and employment in, parallel to, or outside of the professoriate, we hope that this volume can represent the type of interdisciplinary collaboration that will help us sustain each other's subdisciplines in the twenty-first century.

This volume emerged with the support of multiple scholars who helped shape the colloquia upon which it is partially based. We are particularly grateful to Karen King, Hindy Najman, Irene Peirano Garrison, Tom Geue, Eva Mroczek, and Benjamin Wright for allowing us to center much of our theoretical discussion of authorship, author-function, and attribution around their work. Additionally, we are grateful to the many scholars who responded to the colloquia's reading list and those who offered new research in ancient Mediterranean authorship: Joseph Howley, Liv Ingeborg Lied, Roberta Mazza, Hugo Méndez, Patricia Rosenmeyer, Alin Suciu, Olivia Stewart Lester, Natalie Dohrmann, James

Walters, Tim Whitmarsh, Candida Moss, Sarah Rollens, Annette Yoshiko Reed, Chance McMahon, Marieke Dohnt, and David Brakke. Tobias Nicklas and Janet Spittler have been central in shepherding this project through to publication with Mohr Siebeck.

Particularly in the fields of classics and biblical studies, there is a long history of the study of authorship and attribution that focused on determining and confirming the "real" or "historical" author. This is especially true for the concern of Christian biblical scholars and theologians over the authorship of New Testament literature, whose value to contemporary Christians partially depended on the ability to confirm that the apostles themselves (or, at least, the apostles' colleagues or successors) produced the texts and approved of their contents. For example, Samuel Tregelles's 1881 *The Historic Evidence of the Authorship and Transmission of the Books of the New Testament* was dedicated to just such a goal, arguing that he could demonstrate apostolic authorship and thus eliminate concern that anonymous texts (e. g., the gospels) or potentially pseudonymous texts (e. g., 2 Peter) were a threat to one's faith.[1] Likewise, determining the "real author" via philological and historical analysis has been important for determining whether an ancient text attributed to Vergil or Ovid, for example, should be considered part of the classical canon.[2] Such authorial attributions and our modern evaluations of them determine in what settings, how often, and in what ways ancient Mediterranean texts are read, studied, or used to inform people's lives. Such work has historically focused on delimiting a particular list of acceptable authors and texts worth reading in both biblical studies and classics. As historian of late antiquity Ellen Muehlberger put it in her examination of authorship and the "church fathers," fields like classics and early Christian studies have historically been organized around and bound by the concept of authorship and particular sets of authorial figures. Consequently, the types of knowledge we seek (and produce) are tied to authors, and "texts without a secure association to a known author stay dropped at the end of the hallway, unused."[3] Even those texts that have a secure association to a known author may be attached to the *wrong* author according to some scholars, thus making them less valuable in the eyes of some for being utilized for particular types of historical, literary, and religious work.

[1] Samuel Prideaeux Tregelles, *The Historic Evidence of the Authorship and Transmission of the Books of the New Testament: A Lecture*, 2nd ed. (London: Samuel Bagster, 1881); cf. Joseph Agar Beet, *The New Testament: Its Authorship, Date and Worth* (London: Robert Culley, 1908).

[2] For a fuller examination, see Markus Stachon, *Tractavi monumentum aere perennius: Untersuchungen zu vergilischen und ovidischen Pseudepigraphen*, Bochumer altertumswissenschaftliches Colloquium 97 (Trier: WVT, 2014).

[3] Ellen Muehlberger, "On Authors, Fathers, and Holy Men," *Marginalia*, 20 Sept 2015, https://themarginaliareview.com/on-authors-fathers-and-holy-men-by-ellen-muehlberger/.

Nevertheless, humanistic disciplines have shifted in recent decades in order to reexamine texts left on the outskirts (or that remain in the center of our canons) and have asked what work authorship might do beyond merely assigning otherwise-wandering texts to their "correct" authors and producing clean, orthonymous canons. As scholars have begun to read more broadly across ancient Mediterranean literature and between texts traditionally siloed into distinct academic disciplines, topics like the function of anonymity and pseudonymity have made their way to the forefront of discussions of ancient authorship.[4] In particular, the work of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault in the 1960s and 1970s set the stage for new investigations into ancient authorship. Barthes's famous essay "The Death of the Author" questioned the centrality of the figure of the author to the meaning of a text, arguing that literary scholarship was often "tyrannically centered" on the author and their biography, often to the point of overlooking how the reader is involved where a text's meaning is created.[5] While not erasing the author altogether but rather centering them as a character worthy of analysis, Foucault's "What is an Author?" urged scholars to question the purpose that an author plays within a text: Why does it matter who the author is, and what role(s) do they play? Foucault suggests that "the author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture" – it marks off the edges of a text, exists in relation to the text, and helps contextualize a text within a broader literary world.[6] Such an analysis of "author-function" allowed for new interpretative possibilities, moving scholarly examination away from trying to uncover the "real" author of a text and toward asking how an authorial figure does particular types of identifiable work for a text, its audience, and its writers.

Since then, much scholarship on authorship in the ancient Mediterranean has focused more on authorship as a *concept* or a *function* that has a history of its own

[4] Kurt Aland, "The Problem of Anonymity and Pseudonymity in Christian Literature of the First Two Centuries," in *The Authorship and Integrity of the New Testament: Some Recent Studies*, ed. Kurt Aland (London: SPCK, 1965), 1–13. Aland especially critiques New Testament scholarship of the mid-twentieth century for treating the New Testament as a distinct and separate corpus from other Mediterranean literature of the first and second centuries and calls for greater comparison across classical and near eastern corpora.

[5] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Book History Reader*, ed. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2006), 277–80; cf. idem, "Theory of the Text," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge, 1981), 31–47. This is developed further by Stanley Fish (*Is There a Text in This Class: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980]) through the concept of "interpretive communities" that shape and guide a reader's interpretative approach and the horizon of interpretative possibilities.

[6] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 107.

and flexibility in how it is deployed.[7] The relationship between authorship and a text's authority has been one traditional avenue of research, since authorial attribution has been treated as a manner by which a writer can authorize or make valuable their text within a specific community.[8] The study of pseudepigraphy and forgeries especially has taken off in recent decades, with emphases both on the detection of forged literary artifacts and on reformulating traditional associations between pseudepigraphy, deceit, and creative reworking of earlier literary worlds or characters.[9] Scholars have turned their attention heavily to how attribution allows a text to be slotted into a distinct storyworld or literary tradition, often attaching a text to other texts associated with authorial names like Moses, Solomon, or John.[10] Additionally, scholarship on how theories of author-

[7] This overview is not meant to overlook the important work still happening across these fields that are interested in uncovering the "real author" behind a text. For example, see: Charles E. Hill, *From the Lost Teaching of Polycarp: Identifying Irenaeus's Apostolic Presbyter and the Author of* Ad Diognetum, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 186 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

[8] Egbert J. Bakker, ed., *Authorship and Greek Song: Authority, Authenticity, and Performance* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Roberta Berardi et al., eds., *Defining Authorship, Debating Authority: Problems of Authority from Classical Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020). As a challenge to the relationship between authorial authenticity and authority, see Mark Letteney, "Authenticity and Authority: The Case for Dismantling a Dubious Correlation," in *Rethinking 'Authority' in Late Antiquity: Authorship, Law, and Transmission in Jewish and Christian Tradition*, ed. A. J. Berkovitz and Mark Letteney (London: Routledge, 2018), 33–56.

[9] For an example of recent detection of modern forgeries, see Kipp Davis et al., "Nine Dubious 'Dead Sea Scrolls' Fragments from the Twenty-First Century," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 24 (2017): 189–228. On rethinking pseudepigraphy, see Irene Peirano Garrison, *The Rhetoric of the Roman Fake: Latin Pseudepigrapha in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Tony Burke, ed., *Fakes, Forgeries, and Fictions: Writing Ancient and Modern Christian Apocrypha: Proceedings from the 2015 York Christian Apocrypha Symposium* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017); Edmund P. Cueva and Javier Martínez, eds., *Splendide Mendax: Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2016); Hindy Najman and Irene Peirano Garrison, "Pseudepigraphy as an Interpretive Construct," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphy: Fifty Years of the Pseudepigrapha Section at the SBL*, Early Judaism and its Literature 50 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 331–55; John North Hopkins and Scott McGill, eds., *Forgery Beyond Deceit: Fabrication, Value, and the Desire for Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023); Jörg Frey et al., eds., *Pseudepigraphie und Verfasserfiktion in frühchristlichen Briefen*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 246 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009). On pseudepigraphy and deceit, see Bart D. Ehrman, *Forgery and Counterforgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); cf. David Brakke, "Early Christian Lies and the Lying Liars Who Wrote Them: Bart Ehrman's *Forgery and Counterforgery*," *Journal of Religion* 96 (2016): 378–90.

[10] Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Jed Wyrick, *The Ascension of Authorship: Attribution and Canon Formation in Jewish, Hellenistic, and Christian Traditions*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature 49 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Anna Marmodoro and Jonathan Hill, eds., *The Author's Voice in Classical and Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Karen L. King, "'What is an Author?' Ancient Author-Function in the *Apocryphon of John* and the Apocalypse of John," in *Scribal*

ship impact the ways in which biblical scholars discuss the author's "intention" have been explored in recent years.[11] Along with pseudepigraphy, research on anonymity has grown as scholars explore anonymous and untitled literature not as a deficit, but as a creative literary decision.[12] The contributions that we have gathered here intend to build upon such scholarship and continue to explore how authorial attribution functions in antiquity and modernity to contextualize texts within literary corpora, produce boundaries of acceptable knowledge, bolster key figures within a religious movement, or preserve or obscure a text's origins and potential uses.

The contributions collected in this volume are written by a variety of scholars who work on different aspects of the ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds: the Hebrew Bible, rabbinics, the New Testament, early Christianity, classics, Manichaean studies, and Near Eastern and Mesopotamian studies. In doing so, it is our hope that scholars of the ancient world will continue to collaborate in edited and co-authored volumes, journal issues, conferences, symposia, workshops, and other gatherings in order to share our resources and knowledge across traditional institutional and disciplinary boundaries.

Robyn Faith Walsh's contribution on the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, originating in the sixth century CE, explores the pseudo-Pauline letter's complex history of interpretation and scholarly treatment: What should we make of the fact that *Laodiceans* is not written by Paul and yet its contents are cobbled together out of "authentic" Pauline letters like *Philippians*? Is this letter simultaneously Paul and not-Paul? Placing *Laodiceans* in conversation with contemporary scholarship on authorship, François Bovon's published and unpublished scholarship on *Laodiceans* and "useful books," and Andy Warhol's *S & H Green Stamps* – a piece of artwork only deemed "authentic" when *not* signed by Warhol himself – Walsh suggests that scholars turn their attention to the epistle's sixth-century

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Practices and Social Structures Among Jesus Adherents: Essays in Honour of John S. Kloppenborg, ed. William E. Arnal et al., Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 285 (Leuven: Peeters, 2016), 15–42; Jacqueline Vayntrub, "Before Authorship: Solomon and Prov 1:1," *Biblical Interpretation* 26 (2018): 182–206; Clarissa Breu, *Autorschaft in der Johannesoffenbarung: Eine postmoderne Lektüre*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 541 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

[11] Clarissa Breu, ed., *Biblical Exegesis Without Authorial Intention? Interdisciplinary Approaches to Authorship and Meaning*, Biblical Interpretation Series 172 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

[12] Tom Geue, *Juvenal and the Politics of Anonymity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); idem, *Author Unknown: The Power of Anonymity in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Robyn Faith Walsh, *The Origins of Early Christian Literature: Contextualizing the New Testament within Greco-Roman Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), esp. 134–69; Benjamin G. Wright and Eva Mroczek, "Ben Sira's Pseudo-Pseudepigraphy: Idealizations from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages," in *Sirach and Its Contexts: The Pursuit of Wisdom and Human Flourishing*, ed. Samuel Adams, Greg Schmidt Goering, and Matthew J. Goff, Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplements 196 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 213–39.

Latin context rather than attempt to reconstruct a hypothetical second-century Greek original. When we move away from an obsession with the "original text" and Christian origins, Walsh argues that we can better understand *Laodiceans* in light of Latin literary *imitatio* and late ancient *cento* production, in which writers patched together material from authoritative sources in order to produce a textual entity that was simultaneously new and old, Paul's and not-Paul's.

Claire Rachel Jackson's examination of the second-century Greek novel *Leucippe and Clitophon* explores the seeming absence of Achilles Tatius, its purported author, from the text as well as the novel's Byzantine reception. In the first half, Jackson explores how the paratactic opening of *Leucippe and Clitophon* places the text not in the hands of an Alexandrian convert (as the *Suda* later claimed) but rather in a Phoenician context. She posits that Cadmus haunts the novel, filling the authorial void and offering a Phoenician foundation upon which the narrative emerges. In the second half, she turns to the Byzantine *Lives of Saint Galaction and Episteme* to consider Galaction's parents: Clitophon and Gleucippe. Between the two recensions of the *Lives*, Jackson finds some authorial and thematic similarities to *Leucippe and Clitophon*, examines how Byzantine bibliographers chose to attribute hagiographical narration, and raises questions about Leucippe's narratival voice.

In her exploration of the early rabbinic tradition, Rebecca Scharbach Wollenberg offers an explanation for the construction of figures she calls "alien Bible readers" – non-Jewish characters in rabbinic literature that read biblical literature. Instead of reading alien Bible readers as Christians, as some scholarship has attempted to do in order to reconstruct the Jewish side of early Jewish-Christian relations, Wollenberg suggests that such readers are literary constructions that allow the rabbis to express dangerous, subversive, or challenging interpretations of biblical literature. Comparable to pseudepigraphic biblical characters (e.g., Moses, Enoch) becoming nodes for particular genres of Jewish literature or thought, she argues that the rabbinic character of the "alien Bible reader" gave rabbinic literature an otherized mouthpiece through which to explore non-normative hermeneutical approaches.

In her contribution on the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2), Julia Lindenlaub explores how authorial fiction can be used to elevate the intellectual status of an early Christian reading community. To this end, she compares the text's epistolary framing device with a letter from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy. 2192, as both illustrate the textual practices of a learned reading community in the Roman Mediterranean. Positioning Christians as relevant participants in the agonistic struggles over literary expertise in this milieu, Lindenlaub reveals how the fictive letter writer, James, invokes recognizable social strategies for cultivating a reading community around shared values and practices. Turning to the manuscript context for the *Apocryphon of James*'s reception in Nag Hammadi Codex I, she shows how the vision for an intellectual community that is shaped by the text's

authorial construct is also capitalized on in reception by the text's placement in the codex. The fictive author in the *Apocryphon of James* narratively represents a past literary circle of disciple authors, directly addresses a circle of like-minded contemporary recipients, and ultimately invites later reception among a new circle of readers.

Nicholas Baker-Brian's contribution turns to the role of apocalyptic traditions in the formation of Mani's authorial persona. After demonstrating the importance of apocalyptic literature and thought in the third-century Sasanian court and in Mani's own *Shābuhragān* (a treatise dedicated to Shapur I), he turns to a range of Manichaean literature to show how Mani's role as author of texts is shaped by his revelations and access to secret knowledge. While, as Baker-Brian demonstrates, not all were convinced by the revelatory authority on which Mani spoke and wrote, his disciples argued that Mani's apocalyptically infused authorial persona was part of a longer apostolic authorial history: Mani is an apostle of God and author much like Paul. Baker-Brian concludes by comparing Mani's approach to authorship and apocalyptic to that of Bardaisan, who rejects an apocalyptic basis for his theology and cosmology.

In his contribution on the often-overlooked *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4), Chance Bonar explores the rationale behind attaching the name of one of Paul's associates to a text built upon Jewish wisdom and Alexandrian philosophical literary traditions. Against the arguments that attribution to Silvanus either points to an unknown third-century figure named Silvanus or is a randomly chosen name from the apostolic age, Bonar suggests that Silvanus's role as a Pauline coauthor for 1–2 Thessalonians and messenger for 1 Peter may have contributed to the authorial attribution of *Silvanus*. By comparing sections of *Silvanus* to passages from these Silvanean epistles, he argues that the writer of *Silvanus* wrote the text with Silvanus's coauthorial status in mind. Bonar's contribution makes two points: (1) that *Silvanus* may be participating in and pulling from earlier Silvanean literature more than previously thought, and (2) that ancient coauthorship and its potential reception by later writers who construct narratives around coauthorial figures should not be overlooked.

In her examination of the Chester Beatty-Michigan Codex, Elena Dugan demonstrates that authorship has material, paratextual, and codicological effects on the way that early Christians arranged literature within the format provided by the codex. Dugan shows how this codex – containing the *Epistle of Enoch* alongside Melito's *On the Passover* (*Peri Pascha*) and the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel* – is a fruitful example of how the authorial figure of Enoch and his association with the antediluvian history of Israel was put to use by Christian scribes to frame an anti-Jewish literary agenda. Through a close examination of the *Epistle of Enoch*'s titular and paratextual features, as well as how its contents complement and differ from *On the Passover* and the *Apocryphon of Ezekiel*, she argues that Enoch's texts and authorial attribution are generative for early Christian manuscript

culture. Building upon the growing scholarship on Jewish pseudepigrapha that wrestles with how to account for its preservation and transmission at Christian hands, Dugan offers a new avenue to explore how authorial figures associated with Israel's past and the texts attached to those figures could be (re)framed through their material inclusion in Christian codices – and how the Jewishness of such authorial figures can be used for anti-Jewish ends.

In her exploration of Latin verse epitaphs, Emily Mitchell considers the difficulty of pinning down a singular figure that might be called the "author" between the commissioner, inscriber, financier, and individuals named or purportedly speaking on the epitaph itself. This difficulty is compounded in the case of epitaphs of enslaved and freedpeople in the Roman Mediterranean. Mitchell argues that the phenomenon of "ventriloquism" takes place on the epitaphs of the enslaved, through which their enslavers make the dead speak in ways that make their still-living enslavers appear benevolent. Conversely, many epitaphs of the emancipated that ventriloquize through husbands or other familial figures minimize their former enslaver's prominence or benevolence, crafting different social and kinship ties through the inscription. Mitchell especially builds upon Orlando Patterson's famous definition of slavery as "social death" to inform her approach to ventriloquized authorial voices and the construction of enslaved and freed kinship at the moment of death.

Jeremiah Coogan's analysis of gospel authorship turns us away from traditional questions about the (in)authenticity of attributions to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Instead, Coogan's contribution encourages further exploration of how early Christian writers themselves balanced their narratives of apostolic collaboration in the writing of gospel texts with their understanding of the gospel texts themselves as having a singular "monographic" agency. Through an analysis of the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2), Origen of Alexandria's *Homilies on Luke*, and Epiphanius of Salamis's *Panarion*, he demonstrates that early Christian writers could distinguish collective gospel literature from personal revelation, as well as that early Christians debated how much agency individual gospel writers could have over the composition of their inspired text.

Finally, Sophus Helle rounds out the volume with a reflective afterword. He notes how the study of authorship in literary history can refer to the production of a text or the presentation of how an author figure becomes attached to a text. Through a discussion of his own research, particularly on the Babylonian epic *Gilgamesh* and Sumerian *Exaltation of Inana*, Helle argues that our fragmentary data about much of the ancient world sets certain methodological limits for our research that ought to encourage analysis of authorship-as-presentation rather than authorship-as-production. What we know best (and what is often the more interesting literary and historical information) is how later writers made sense of a text's authorial attribution. Helle points to three features of the contributions to this volume to highlight how further research on authorship-as-presentation can

be done: (1) collaborative authorship and its disruption of traditional individualist authorial paradigms; (2) how ancient and modern aesthetic and historical value judgments influence authorial attribution; and (3) how attribution works to assign a text to a particular literary and historical context.

As this volume's editors, we hope that its readers will not only be interested in the historical, literary, and methodological insights of our contributors, but will also be inspired to continue interrogating *how* and *why* particular figures have their names attached to texts. For whom does authorial attribution matter, and what do ancient and modern writers, readers, and hearers gain from the way storyworlds are produced and circulated?

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