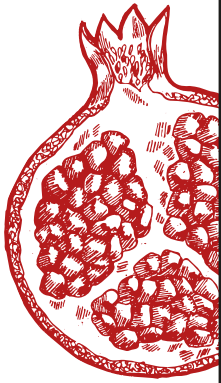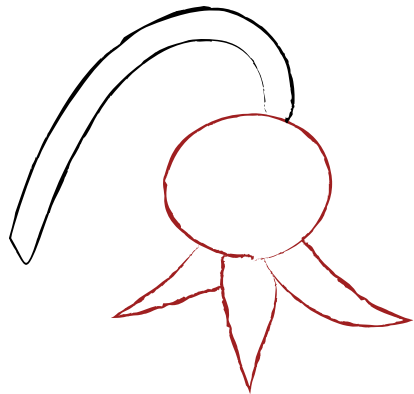# AABNER
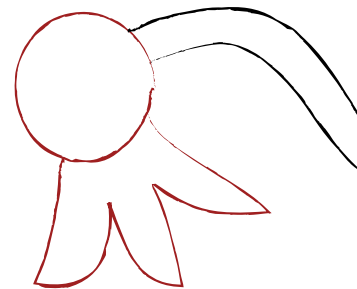
ADVANCES in ANCIENT BIBLICAL and NEAR EASTERN RESEARCH

*Categories
and Boundaries
in Second Temple
Jewish Literature*

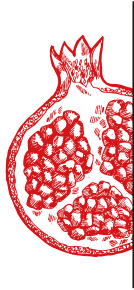# CATEGORIES AND BOUNDARIES SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

Charlie Comerford and Joseph Scales

Abstract

The articles in this special issue address questions that concern the categorization of various terms, persons, and texts that inform our understanding of ancient Judaism, with a focus on the literature of the Second Temple period.

Die Artikel in dieser Sonderausgabe befassen sich mit Fragen der Kategorisierung verschiedener Begriffe, Personen und Texte, die unser Verständnis des antiken Judentums prägen, wobei der Schwerpunkt auf der Literatur der Zeit des Zweiten Tempels liegt.

2

CATEGORIES AND BOUNDARIES SPECIAL ISSUE INTRODUCTION

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3

Introduction

This special issue grew out of a conference that was originally scheduled to take place at the University of Birmingham (UK) in June 2020. However, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was postponed and eventually held as an online-only event in March 2021. The theme for the conference, "Categories and Boundaries in Second Temple Jewish Literature," first developed out of conversations between the editors (at the time PhD colleagues). Both of us were interested in how scholarly constructions of knowledge about the literature, history, and archaeology of Second Temple Judaism were fashioned through the use of categories which have influenced the way we read and understand source texts and materials. Our attention turned towards methodological questions concerning how and why our frameworks

of knowledge arose and the ways in which these frameworks can sometimes enhance, but also restrict, our understanding of ancient Judaism. The conference heard from many presenters and respondents who often pushed at the boundaries of what we currently consider to be established ideas in studies of Second Temple Jewish literature. This special issue contains a selection of those presented papers which offer some insight into the kind of topics and discussions that took place during our conference. Some of these themes include questions around genre classification, group designations and boundaries, the presentation and construction of social roles, distinctions around human identity, and the value of interdisciplinary approaches.

Issues of genre, definition, and textual categorization are explored by Jon Darby in the context of prayer, psalmic, and liturgical Jewish literature. Darby's work sheds light on some persisting problems relating to impasses and unclarities that derive from a feature-based definition of prayer, which is often coupled with a rigid understanding of literary categories that have been largely characterized through identifying their shared formal features. For Darby, questions of definition are intertwined with questions of categorization, and so he begins with an analysis of Esther Chazon's long-standing definition of prayer as "any form of human communication directed at God." Following a discussion of the limitations of this description of prayer as a basis for categorizing texts, Darby seeks to find an alternative method derived from the field of genre studies to accommodate for the diverse set of literary characteristics found in prayer, psalms, and liturgical texts composed in the Second Temple period. In doing so, Darby calls for the field of ancient Jewish studies to move beyond feature-based descriptions of texts and to embrace more flexible models of categorization (e.g., prototype theory).

Questions about the rhetorical use of geographical terminology are raised by Hanne Kirchheiner, who provides an exegetical analysis of the terms "Israel," "Judah," and "Ephraim" as they appear in the Damascus Document. Kirchheiner demonstrates how these terms are used to refer to specific groups within the composition. Significant for Kirchheiner is the use (or absence) of qualifiers alongside these key terms. For example, "Israel" is regarded as a neutral term, consisting

of laity, with whom God's covenant is established. "All Israel," however, are those who strayed, and the "penitents/returnees of Israel" are those who repented and so are equated with the Damascus movement. Moreover, Kirchheiner proposes that while the term "Judah" on its own refers to the Damascus movement, uses of "Judah" with modifiers—such as "the land of Judah," "the princes of Judah," and "the house of Judah"—instead represent the current political leadership, who are criticized by the movement for aligning with foreign influences. Similarly, "Ephraim" is also used to refer to those same political leaders. Kirchheiner's analysis of the rhetorical use of these terms (as augmented by their qualifiers) facilitates a reading of the text that identifies those associated with the Damascus movement and their perceived opponents on its own terms.

Turning from geographical terminology to vocational terminology, David Blackwell considers how roles and figures develop over time through examining how the categories of king, prophet, and priest are blurred by the figure of David in ancient Jewish texts. Looking at the reception of David in the Hebrew Bible, Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, works of Philo and Josephus, and the New Testament, Blackwell provides a survey of the various portrayals of David, first as a king, then as a prophet, and finally as a priest. For Blackwell, it is significant that these roles are not viewed as static and that the seemingly inconsistent depictions of David do not necessarily undermine or subvert earlier presentations of the figure. Identifying prophetic or priestly qualities in the figure of David does not replace or diminish his identity as a king. Rather, Blackwell demonstrates through his survey of the literature that the offices of king, prophet, and priest are not so clearly demarcated. The available ancient Jewish sources provide a more colourful portrait of David, allowing the figure to transcend (but not abandon) his conventionally assigned vocational role of king.

Of course, this special issue is not only interested in papers that deconstruct previously relied-upon scholarly methods, categories, and frameworks. Taking a different approach, Peter J. Atkins offers a heuristic construction of a schema derived from Mesopotamian literature to illustrate distinctions between divine beings, humans,

and animals, and examines how this schema appears to emerge in the biblical book of Daniel. The article focuses on the story of Nebuchad-nezzar, an arrogant king who is humbled through being transformed into a beast and given the "mind of an animal" (Dan 4:16). This account is brought into dialogue with two Mesopotamian texts, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *Adapa and the South Wind*, in which the divine–human–animal boundaries are explained through the conceptions of immortality and wisdom. According to Atkins, divine–human–animal boundaries are predominantly defined by their relation to these two conceptions. Thus, divine beings are characterized as both wise and immortal, humans are mortal but possess wisdom, and animals possess neither wisdom nor immortality. By tracing lineages of ideas in ancient Near Eastern and biblical texts, Atkins' article lays the groundwork for future studies to examine how the Mesopotamian schema of divine–human–animal boundaries emerge in other kinds of literature and help us recognize distinctions between different states of being.

The final article in this special issue addresses the ways in which we rely on scholarly expertise, especially in areas where we may feel like our own training and/or understanding is limited. Utilizing Sam Gill's method of "storytracking," Theron Clay Mock III tells a series of stories to trace the history of engagement with a footnote (48b) in the *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* translation of 1 Enoch (eds. J. Charles-worth). Mock addresses an instance where scholars have used this single footnote as evidence that the high "divine identity Christology" in New Testament texts like Phil 2:9–11—in which Jesus' sovereignty is established by being named Lord—is claimed to be in continuity with pre-existing Jewish literature. However, Mock's close reading of the Gəʿəz language in 1 En 48:2–3 instead presents this as a case of anachronism. In fact, modern scholars have imposed ideas from the New Testament retroactively into earlier sources. Mock argues against this kind of historical theology—where Second Temple texts are deployed to support confessionalist claims—and encourages readers to be mindful of scholarly biases and practices that may impede our engagement with ancient texts.

The studies in this special issue demonstrate how our categories, schemas, and biases can become entrenched in our academic practices,

which in turn has a profound impact on the way we read and understand ancient texts. Yet even the framing of this special issue can be regarded as problematic, and so we too must be self-aware about the terms that we have used to group the discussions in this study. For instance, what do we mean by "categories," and what presuppositions do we bring to the table when we use terms like "Second Temple" and "Judaism"?

First, categories play an essential role in the cognitive process of understanding and organizing new information. At best, systems of classification help create order out of disorder, familiarize the unfamiliar, and provide a heuristic framework for thinking about complex clusters of data. Yet categories, once established, can become so relied upon that it is difficult to break free from the reins of their interpretative influence. To be sure, it is by no means a mistake to make use of well-established models of classification, providing that one is careful to recognize and work within the limitations of the category. However, issues arise when the labels we assign become so fossilized within the foundations of our interpretative structures that they are no longer regarded simply as reading alternatives, but instead operate as *rules* that govern the way we approach and understand the texts. To counterbalance the interpretative hegemony of long-standing categories, it may be beneficial to understand them not as descriptive *labels* that define or determine a particular reading of a text, but as *lenses* that we as readers apply when we want to address or focus on a specific feature of the text.

Second, the Second Temple period indicates the time during which the second Jerusalem Temple stood. Yet we may ask why this framing is significant at all. We often assume that the time the temple stood in Jerusalem was significant because the temple itself was significant. However, texts like the Elephantine papyri—which were composed in the Second Temple period—do not appear to be concerned with the Jerusalem temple, but instead refer to another Yahwist temple in Elephantine, which was evidently significant to the Jews in Elephantine. Another example is the work of Josephus, whose entire corpus was written post-temple destruction. We may ask why this time frame should be regarded as significant for grouping these texts, even as many

scholars do not adhere to this strict time frame (see, e.g., VanderKam 2001). In terming this period of Judaism "Second Temple," we both distinguish many of these texts from those which are assumed to have been written before (i.e., parts of the Hebrew Bible), and the texts and traditions of Judaism that arose after. Maintaining this time- and temple-bound distinction is useful, but can certainly be a source of further critique and study.

Third, Judaism—and particularly what defines a Jewish text as Jewish—is a tricky concept to pin down. The Dead Sea Scrolls stand as a relatively clear example of Jewish literature produced by Jewish people in a particular time frame. However, this set of texts was by and large not utilized outside of the group who are believed to have composed or collected them, and many of the texts were not carried forward into later Judaism (aside from a few, such as the Damascus Document). In another vein, the New Testament was written by Jewish authors who present an entirely different view on the constitution of Judaism, to the extent that the communities who used these texts eventually distinguished themselves from their Jewish contemporaries. Other texts labelled as Apocrypha are retained in various assortments within different Christian canons. Yet these works are excluded in Protestant Bibles in part because they lacked Hebrew originals (although the eventual discovery of Hebrew versions of Ecclesiasticus problematizes this criterion). The writings of Philo and Josephus—largely preserved in Christian manuscripts—are purportedly the collected works of a single author (free and enslaved scribal contributors notwithstanding). Finally, the Pseudepigrapha is a grouping that was created in the sixteenth century and consists of whatever other texts did not fit into the categories of canonical or Apocryphal texts, but were preserved by Christian scribes. These texts may be Jewish-authored, or perhaps in some cases the Christian authors left us little in the way to distinguish them from contemporary Jewish authors. These issues raise questions about the extent to which our conceptions of ancient Judaism are shaped by the collections themselves. Thus, we may ask ourselves, whose Judaism are we referring to when we talk about Judaism? What is (or is not) Judaism? How have we gone about reconstructing the ancient identities that emerge from the literature?

We hope that future research (including our own) will strive to be upfront about its assumptions, methods, and limitations as we continue to discuss different ways of redefining, reframing, and rethinking how we organize and present our ideas about the ancient world. For studies that address these kinds of issues in other contexts, see the works cited in the bibliography.

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