

## 'The Assumption of Moses.'<sup>1</sup>

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ONE of the least known of the apocryphal Old Testament books is the 'Assumption of Moses,' which was written in Hebrew shortly after the beginning of the Christian era, and designed to be a protest by its author, a Pharisaic Quietest, against the Zelotic materialism of the age, and the secularization of the Pharisaic party through political influences. The author harks back to the early ideals and aspirations of the Early Pharisaic party, and strives to stir up the Jews generally to 'ask for the old paths.' Possibly it was written during Christ's lifetime, and, at all events, it was known to the writers of Jude v.<sup>9, 16, 18</sup>, Ac 7, and also probably to the writers of 2 P 2<sup>10, 11</sup>, and Mt 24<sup>29</sup> (Lk 21<sup>25-26</sup>). Probably the 'Assumption of Moses' was originally a composite work, made up of two separate booklets, viz. the 'Testament of Moses' and the 'Assumption of Moses.' The 'Testament' seems to have been written between the years 7 and 29 A.D., and the 'Assumption' about the same time. During the first century a Greek version of the united work appeared, and of this a few phrases and sentences are preserved in the New Testament, in the passages just quoted, also in the Apocalypse of Baruch, in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other Greeks. During the fifth century the Greek version was translated into Latin—a translation which was unknown to the modern world till forty years ago, when Ceriani discovered, in the Ambrosian Library of Milan, a considerable fragment of it.

The 'books of Moses,' or rather the books attributed to him, are far from being few. In Hebrew literature: the *Midrash Tanchuma Debarim*, the *Vita Mosis* (Philo), the *Exodus of Moses* (in Slavonic); in Christian literature: the *Apocalypse Mosis* (Tischendorf, also an Armenian version of the Mechitarists at Venice), the *Apocryphum Mosis* (from which it is said St. Paul

<sup>1</sup> *The Assumption of Moses: translated from the Latin sixth century MS., the unemended text of which is published herewith, together with the text in its restored and critically emended form.* Edited, with introduction, notes, and indices, by R. H. Charles, M.A., Trinity College, Dublin, and Exeter College, Oxford. London: A. & C. Black, 1897.

derived Gal 6<sup>16</sup>,—'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, but a new creature,'—though in all probability the writer of this apocryph really derived the sentence from St. Paul), the *Story of Moses*, found in Armenian. In Gnostic literature, it is said that the Sethites used certain books of Moses in addition to others attributed to Abraham and other Old Testament saints. The Latin text of the 'Assumption of Moses,' discovered and identified by Ceriani, has been reproduced by Hilgenfeld, who also retranslated the Latin into Greek; by Volkmar, Schmidt and Merx, Fritzsche, and others. Critical inquiries on the subject have been entered into by Ewald, who holds it was the work of a Zealot a few years after the death of Herod the Great, and subsequent to the rising of Judas the Gaulonite, the 'slaves, sons of slaves,' being, in his view, the Maccabean high priests; by Langen, who holds it was written in Hebrew shortly after the destruction of the Holy City in 70 A.D.; by Hilgenfeld, whose belief is that a Roman Jew wrote it about 44 A.D.; by Haupt, Rönsch, Philippi, Colani, Geiger, Wieseler, Hausrath, Reuss, Dillmann, and many others; but the almost unanimous opinion of them all is that the author was a learned Jew, thoroughly at home in the Scriptures and with Jewish history,—full of patriotism, and looking for the establishment of the theocratic kingdom and the final triumph of Israel over its foes,—not a Zealot, but a patriot of the older type, believing that the true Israelites should not resort to arms, but keep the law and prepare, through repentance, for the personal intervention of Jehovah on their behalf. The Latin version would appear to be a direct translation from the Greek—Greek words being transliterated, Greek forms and idioms surviving in the Latin, and generally a Greek tone pervading the whole book linguistically. The Greek, on the other hand, seems to be a direct translation from a Semitic original, but it is doubtful whether the evidence warrants an Aramaic or a Hebrew source. The grounds for a Hebrew original are briefly stated: (1) that Hebrew idiomatic phrases abound in the text; (2) that syntactical idioms probably survive; (3) that in some cases we must translate

not the Latin text, but the Hebrew presupposed by it; (4) that very often it is only through retranslation that we can understand the source of corruptions in the text and remove them; and (5) that a play upon words discovers itself on retranslation into Hebrew in 'Assumption' vii. 3. There seems little doubt of the Semitic origin of the book, and probably its Hebrew origin as well.

What are known as the 'Assumption' and 'Testament' of Moses are really united into one 'Testament,'—the original 'Assumption' being preserved in only a few quotations. The book is described as the 'Assumption of Moses' in the Acts of the Nicene Council, in the Stichometry of Nicephorus, the Synopsis of Athanasius, the *Adscensio Mosis* of Origen, the *Assumptio Mosis* of Didymus of Alexandria, and the *Secreta Mosis* of Evodius. In Early Christian ages the book seems to have been called sometimes the 'Assumption' and sometimes the 'Testament' of Moses, the reason being that two earlier apocryphal works bearing these names were united in one under a general title. In early lists both are referred to, and in the Stichometry of Nicephorus the respective stichoi given to each are 1100 and 1400. The present book is really the 'Testament,' with a few quotations from the earlier 'Assumption,' in fact, a coalition book of Moses, which was probably done in the first century, for St. Jude in his Epistle draws upon both.

The date of this united volume is probably anterior to 70 A.D., because (1) the temple is to stand till the establishment of the theocratic kingdom; (2) the temple was plainly standing when the book was written. 70 A.D. is the latest possible date of this book, but how much earlier is a matter of dispute. It could not have been earlier than 3 B.C., for Herod is already dead, and the war of Varus is past, after which war, the writer says, 'the times will be ended, and the four hours will come.'

The conclusion to which one is led by a close survey of historical reference is, that its date is anywhere between 7 and 30 A.D. The views of the writer as to Moses ('prepared from the foundation of the world to be mediator of God's covenant with His people'), Israel, the theocratic

kingdom, and good deeds prove it to be the work of a Pharisaic Quietest of the first quarter of the first century of this Christian era.

That New Testament and later writers were thoroughly acquainted with the work known as the 'Assumption' is plain: Jude v.<sup>9</sup> is directly derived from it; Jude v.<sup>16</sup> is composed of several clauses taken from it; in Jude v.<sup>18</sup> the 'mockers' are identical with the *ἐμπαῖκται* of the writer; the 'ungodly men' of Jude v.<sup>4</sup> are twice referred to in the 'Assumption,' while both accounts are distinctly prophetic.

The author of 2 Peter used the 'Assumption' likewise. 2 P 2<sup>10, 11</sup>, as Jude v.<sup>9</sup>, are derived from the 'Assumption,' while 2 P 2<sup>3</sup> bears a strong resemblance to another passage in the work. In Stephen's speech (Ac 7) there are references to the 'Assumption of Moses,' Ac 7<sup>36</sup> being an almost verbal rendering of the Jewish version: 'who suffered many things in Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness during forty years.' In Ac 7<sup>38, 39</sup> there is a reference to the passage in the 'Assumption' (iii. 2): 'That we should not transgress God's commandments, in the which He was a Mediator to us.' The prediction of the Captivity and the citation of the prophecy of Amos, both in the 'Assumption,' are likewise found in Stephen's speech.

In Mt 24<sup>29</sup> (cf. Mk 13<sup>24, 25</sup>, Lk 21<sup>25, 26</sup>) there is a direct quotation from the 'Assumption' (x. 5): 'The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon shall not give its light,' etc. In the parallel passage (Lk 21<sup>25</sup>) there is also a reference to the sea, as there is in the 'Assumption' (x. 6).

Another parallel exists in Mt 24<sup>21</sup> and 'Assumption' viii. 1.

Besides being undoubtedly known to the writers of Ac 7, 2 P, Mt 24<sup>29</sup> (Mk 22<sup>24, 25</sup>, Lk 21<sup>25, 26</sup>), and the writer of the Epistle of Jude, the 'Assumption of Moses' was familiar to the writer of the Apocalypse of Baruch (see 84<sup>2-5</sup>) and to other apocryphal writers in the first century.

The 'Assumption' is, in fact, an account of Moses' last days and closing advice to Israel, and Mr. Charles has done an excellent critical work in giving to the world the Latin version from the sixth century MS., with critical emendations and English translation.