

New Jerusalem

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New Jerusalem (hereafter NJ) is the title given to a work preserved in seven fragmentary Aramaic manuscripts (1Q32, 2Q24, 4Q554–554a–555, 5Q15, and 11Q18) which describe a city and its temple as they are shown to the narrator.

Genre

NJ is an apocalypse or ‘revelation’ of special knowledge otherwise inaccessible to human beings [→66 Revelation]. The present revelation is not merely auricular, but ocular or visionary, as the narrator gives an account of what he ‘saw’ or ‘was shown’ (using the verb *hzy* ‘to see’). Apocalypses often focus on past and future events, or spiritual realms; the city described here is not an actual, contemporary one, but an ideal, perhaps – but not necessarily – future, city. Similar apocalyptic visions and descriptions of an ideal city were known in ancient Jewish literature prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, notably in the Book of Ezekiel (Ezek. 40–48) and the Revelation of John (Rev. 21–22). The city *par excellence* is of course Jerusalem, or the ‘New Jerusalem’ as reflected in the title given to this work, although the city described here is not explicitly identified. This anonymity may be due to the fragmentary state of the manuscripts (the beginning of the text, for instance, is lost), but it is not uncommon that apocalypses omit such details (cf. Ezek. 40.1). Several fragments of NJ seem to describe – or rather prescribe – priestly duties in the temple also dealt within halakhic and liturgical texts from Qumran [→69 Jerusalem and the Temple; 58 Halakhah; 61 Liturgical Texts]. This shows that, as is often the case, NJ is not limited to a single literary genre.

Narrator

As is the case with the city, the names of the narrator and his guide are not attested in the extant fragments. Given the numerous affinities between NJ and Ezek. 40–48 the prophet Ezekiel is a strong candidate. His guide there – and perhaps also here – is an unnamed man of special appearance (Ezek. 40.3), most likely a divine being or angel [→67 God(s), Angels and Demons].

However, other candidates may be suggested. Daniel, for instance, is known for his interactions with divine beings (Dan. 8–10), and a number of Dead Sea Scrolls may be linked to Danielic traditions (see, e.g. 4Q242, 4Q243–245, 4Q246, 4Q552–553a) [→27 Authoritative Scriptures: Writings and Related; 26 Authoritative Scriptures: Prophets and Related). Enoch is another serious candidate: not only are Enochic traditions well attested at Qumran [→28 Authoritative Scriptures: Other], but the books of Enoch feature a first-person account of visionary journeys (1 En. 17–36) led by angels, e.g. Uriel (1 En. 19.1), Raphael (1 En. 22.3,6), Raguel (1 En. 23.4) or Michael (1 En. 24.6). These journeys include a description of the divine mountain, the tree of life and the topography of Jerusalem (1 En. 24–26). Moreover, their language is Aramaic, as in NJ, and not Hebrew, as in Ezek. 40–48 or Dan. 8–10. For these reasons, Enoch seems to be the likeliest candidate as NJ narrator; his guide, then, may be one of the angels mentioned above or appearing elsewhere in the books of Enoch (e.g. Gabriel or Sariel). He may also be anonymous, as in the Book of Ezekiel.

Language and Manuscript Evidence

Seven manuscripts from five Qumran caves have been identified as copies of NJ. On the basis of paleographical analysis and textual overlap, one of the fragments of 4Q554 was re-labelled 4Q554a (Puech, 2009, pp. 91, 139ff.); on the other hand, the identification of a possible NJ Hebrew fragment referred to by Milik (1976, p. 59) – the editor of 1Q32 and 5Q15 – was not subsequently upheld (it may have been a fragment of the Temple Scroll, Reworked Pentateuch [→51 Temple Scroll; 56 Parabiblical Texts/Rewritten Scripture] or related manuscripts – if not lost). To our present knowledge, therefore, NJ is attested by seven manuscripts, all of them in Aramaic. The language itself is a Western dialect exhibiting orthographic features slightly posterior to the Aramaic sections of the Book of Daniel [→17 Languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek]; the dates of the copies range from the first half of the first century BCE (4Q554a) to the first half of the first century CE (2Q24).

Significance

Notwithstanding its language, the Aramaic NJ differs in several aspects from the Book of Ezekiel, the Temple Scroll or Revelation. Unlike John's New Jerusalem, the city does not have a temple which is described in great detail. Whereas Ezekiel's visit begins with the temple, the direction of NJ's description seems to start from the outside walls into the city with its streets and, finally, the temple (e.g. DiTommaso, 2005, pp. 96ff.). The city gates are, as elsewhere, named after the twelve tribes of Israel, but appear in a unique order (Puech, 2009, p. 93). Unlike the square basis of Ezekiel's and John's cities (4,500 cubits and 12,000 stadia respectively), the city plan of NJ is rectangular (100 × 140 stadia). Moreover, its streets follow an orthogonal pattern similar to the well-known Hippodamian plan. This and other architectural features suggest a composition in the Hellenistic period.

Finally, the presence of a fragment mentioning foreign kingdoms such as Babylon, the Kittim, Edom, Moab and the sons of Ammon (4Q554 13), is reminiscent of the four kingdoms at Qumran (4Q552–553a) and the Book of Daniel (Dan. 7). Such texts allude to the political crisis in Judea during the first half of the second century BCE, which may also underlie the redaction of NJ.

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