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Book of Enoch
In Ethiopian (Ge'ez), decorated manuscript on parchment
[Ethiopia, c. 1450-1500]

<i>126 ff., complete (missing a small portion of parchment with text in the bottom of right hand corner of fol. 2), mostly in gatherings of 8 (i-xv⁸, xvi⁶), written in 2 columns of 20 lines, in black with the usual rubrics (alternate opening lines at the beginning of the text, titles of major subsections [6 in number], in a generally well-formed hand (4-5 mm in height), one colored bead ornament or haräg (f. 2) at the beginning of the text bridging both columns. Bound between contemporary plain wooden boards, quires stitched with rope, no leather covering spine or boards (Small amount of staining or rubbing to a small number of leaves, the last 13 leaves at the back of the manuscript show some rodent or other damage, else in good condition). Dimensions 210 x 160 mm. </i>

This newly discovered copy of the apocalyptic and pseudepigraphic biblical book of the lost prophet Enoch, the great-grandfather of Noah, is arguably the “most important Jewish writing that has survived from the Greco-Roman period.” Although Aramaic fragments were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a Greek version existed in the Early Christian era, it was only in Ethiopia that the Book of Enoch enjoyed a rich textual tradition. Discovered there in the eighteenth century and today known in 80 manuscripts, the Book of Enoch has captured the attention of biblical scholars for the last two centuries. Scholars now believe that the earliest Ethiopic versions (of which the present manuscript is one of just two extant) preserve the closest record of the Aramaic (and possibly Semitic) versions written in the time of the Old Testament.

PROVENANCE

1. As is usual, there is no colophon giving details of original ownership, date or provenance. However, the hand and the style of the haräg on f. 2 suggest a possible date of the second half of the 15th century [Uhlig's Period III]. Notable about the hand are the consistently joined loops and generally upward tilt of all orders of the letter L; the seventh order K both with and without a connecting stroke, though predominantly the latter.
2. A much later addition (f. 2) contains the date Tahsas 15th 1924EC (25th December 1931).
3. Private Collection, USA (unpublished and evidently unrecorded).

TEXT

f. 1, Part leaf with stitching, blank except recto with English cataloguing notes in pencil; and verso with a small pen trial in the form of a latticework design;

ff. 2-27, The Book of Enoch, Part 1, The Book of the Watchers, beginning: "The words of the blessing of Enoch, how he blessed the chosen and the righteous who shall be present on the day of affliction for all the ungodly."

The text opens with a colored haräg bridging both columns, beneath which is simply written "Book of Enoch." There is no further preamble or introductory invocation or formula.

ff. 27-62v, The Book of Enoch, Part 2, The Book of Parables, beginning: "The vision which he saw, the second vision of wisdom which Enoch saw ...";

ff. 63-81v, The Book of Enoch, Part 3, The Book of the Luminaries, beginning: "The Book of the revolution of the lights of heaven...";

ff. 82-103v, The Book of Enoch, Part 4, The Book of the Dream Visions, beginning: "And now, come, I will show you, my son Methuselah...";

ff. 103v-120, The Book of Enoch, Part 5, The Book of the Epistle, beginning: "That which is written by Enoch the scribe of all...";

ff. 120-122, Appendix, Narrative on the Birth of Noah;

ff. 122-124, Appendix, the Second Book of Enoch, beginning: "The second book which Enoch wrote for his son Methuselah and for those who would come after him ...";

ff. 124v-125, Acrostic poem for each letter of the Ethiopic syllabary;

ff. 125v-126v, blank except for a rough pen trial.

The Book of Enoch (properly 1 Enoch to distinguish it from two other texts attributed to the Old Testament that figure Enoch) is a Jewish apocryphal, pseudepigraphical ("writing under a false name," that is, attributed to Enoch but not by him) writing, probably dating originally at least to the third century B.C.E. and perhaps earlier. The Epistle of Jude mentions Enoch the prophet (Jude 14-15), and he is known from Genesis (5: 18-24) as the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah and as a man who "walked with God." Early Jewish tradition considered him messianic, like Elijah, and when he became popular among emerging Christians, Jewish writers condemned him. Most of what is known about him comes, in fact, from Early Christian writers. The Epistle of Barnabas quotes twice from Enoch. Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, both writing in Greek, knew of the Book of Enoch. Tertullian, writing in Latin in the early third century C.E., considered the Book of Enoch to be canonical scripture. But, by the late fourth or early fifth century, Enoch was condemned. Saint Augustine in the *City of God* dismissed the Book of Enoch as "falsehood," though he admitted that it must have been inspired because Jude thought so. It is last cited by the

Greek chroniclers Syncellus in the ninth century and Cedrenus. Nevertheless, Enoch occasionally appears in Christian art, in a twelfth-century Byzantine manuscript and in a stained glass at Canterbury Cathedral. (for the above, see Barker, pp. 5-9). Except for these visual records, Enoch was lost to the West.

Evidently, just about at the time that the West condemned the Book of Enoch, a version found its way to Ethiopia, which was converted to Christianity in the fourth and fifth centuries. The isolation of Ethiopia, sealed off from the West for nearly a millennia, led to the preservation of an intact textual tradition of the Book of Enoch that has been closely studied. The full text now only survives in the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) translation. Originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic (the Dead Sea scrolls now prove that a full Aramaic version existed), and then translated into Greek, the Book of Enoch appears to have reached Ethiopia in a Greek translation, although Ethiopic translators likely had access also to the Aramaic. A third of the text exists in Greek, discovered at Akhmim in Egypt in 1886/7 (ch. 1-32), along with the seven Aramaic fragments discovered at Qumran amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1952, which constitute less than 5% of the Ethiopic version. The Ethiopic Book of Enoch was first brought to Europe by the traveler James Bruce in 1773, and to date around 35 or so manuscripts are known to exist in Europe, along with many more that have been catalogued in Ethiopia itself, making a total of around 80 manuscripts. Other than the present manuscript and a copy in Ethiopia in Lake Tana (MS 9), no manuscripts were copied earlier than the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most date from the eighteenth century and a few in the nineteenth.

The oldest Ethiopic manuscript known of the Book of Enoch was copied in the first half of the fifteenth century: MS Lake Tana, no. 9 (see E. Hammerschmidt, 1973, MS. no. 9). The transcription of the Lake Tana manuscript was shortly followed by the present manuscript, copied in the second half of the fifteenth century.

There have been many editions and a number of different translations of the Book of Enoch into English. The "editio princeps" of Laurence in 1838 was based on the manuscripts Bruce brought back from Europe. Subsequent critical editions, using an ever increasing number of manuscripts as more were discovered, were issued by Dillerman (1851, 1853, the latter a translation into German), Flemming (1902), and Charles (1893, 1906). Fleming and Charles made use respectively of fourteen and twenty-six Ethiopic manuscripts. The critical edition by Charles and his subsequent translation was supported by the Greek version discovered a few years earlier. Flemming and Charles were responsible for the identification of separate recensions, Groups I and II, on which all subsequent scholarship relies. Charles's assessment of the two recensions favored Group II over the smaller Group I. For Charles, Group II represented a revised "accurate" version of the text, which constituted a sort of Vulgate that was finally fixed in the eighteenth century. He saw Group I, on the other hand, as containing many inaccuracies.

Writing in 1978 and taking into account the evidence of the Qumran fragments, Knibb pointed out that Group II presented many inaccuracies with the Aramaic versions. Nevertheless, he still chose an eighteenth-century "Vulgate" (Manchester, John Rylands Library MS 23) as the most accurate, and his edition represents a transcription of this copy. Knibb knew of, but had not yet

systematically studied, a newly emerged manuscript, the oldest Ethiopic copy yet discovered, Lake Tana MS 9 from Group I.

Two recent studies review the evidence of the combined textual sources, focusing on the early manuscripts. Black published a translation in 1985, reviewing the extant manuscript evidence, and in 2004 by Nickelsburg and VanderKam offered "a fresh translation based on a critical reading of all the ancient textual sources." Black admits that a reading of Lake Tana MS 9 overturns earlier assessments of the accuracy of Group II in favor of Group I, because of its concordance with the Aramaic and Greek fragments. A facsimile and translation is still in preparation of the oldest of the manuscripts, Lake Tana MS 9. The welcome discovery of the second earliest copy, and the only other extant fifteenth-century version, will thus likely shed important light on the textual tradition and help confirm or reject the newly claimed primacy of Group I manuscripts.

The Ethiopic Book of Enoch is divided into five sections, which together with the two appendices are the parts of the present manuscript distinguished by the rubricated headings. These are: The Book of the Watchers [chs. 1-36]; The Book of Parables [chs. 37-71]; The Book of the Luminaries [chs. 72-82]; The Book of the Dream Visions [chs. 83-91]; The Book of the Epistle [chs. 92-105]. In the present manuscript, these are followed by two sections, a narrative on the birth of Noah [chs. 106-7] and the Second Book of Enoch [ch. 108].

Described in Genesis as the great-grandfather of Noah, the antediluvian patriarch Enoch was reported to have lived 365 years before being taken by God after his walk to God. The Book of Enoch is the account of what happened on his walk with God (in Genesis 5, 24, "Enoch walked with God" and "God took him"). In its visionary and prophetic nature, it presents an Enoch who is comparable to Elijah. As an apocalyptic narrative, it focuses on Last Judgment and bears similarities with Revelations. Enoch's messianic, chosen character likens him to Jesus Christ in the New Testament. It survives as well as one of the earliest and richest examples of "mission" or "travel" literature. The Book begins with God selecting Enoch to convey to a group of fallen angels (*nephilim* or "Watchers") the full details of the torments that await them. In order to do so he has to travel to the furthest extremes of the earth. He goes to the far north, the far west, far east and far south. He goes to regions where no living things exist and nothing is completed. At last he reaches the ends of the earth, where the heavens stretch high above it. He has reached the region where the fallen angels are condemned.

The Book of Enoch remains as one of the most important apocalyptic books of the Bible, and it has been called "great literature," a work that describes how "societies rub up against each other and as individual persons try to get along, and make sense of their lives" (Thomas Moore, review of Nickelsburg and VanderKamp) and as the "most important and ancient of the Jewish apocalypse" (Michael Stone, author of the *Fourth Ezra*). In the most recent publication Nickelsburg and VanderKamp state: "The size of the collection, the diversity of its contents, and its many implications for the study of ancient Judaism and Christian origins make it arguably the most important Jewish writing that has survived from the Greco-Roman period" (p. vii).

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Book of Enoch (Jewish Encyclopedia)

<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=384&letter=E>