

Definitions

A vast amount of Jewish literature written in the intertestamental period (mainly 2nd and 1st centuries bce) and from the 1st and 2nd centuries ce was preserved, for the most part, through various Christian churches. A part of this literature is today commonly called the [Apocrypha](#) (Hidden; hence, secret books; singular apocryphon). At one time in the early church this was one of the terms for books not regarded by the church as canonical (scripturally acceptable), but in modern usage the Apocrypha is the term for those Jewish books that are called in the Roman Catholic Church deuterocanonical works—*i.e.*, those that are canonical for Catholics but are not a part of the Jewish Bible. (These works are also regarded as canonical in the Eastern Orthodox churches.) When the Protestant churches returned to the Jewish canon (Hebrew Old Testament) during the Reformation period (16th century), the Catholic deuterocanonical works became for the Protestants “apocryphal”—*i.e.*, non-canonical.

In 19th-century biblical scholarship a new term was coined for those ancient Jewish works that were not accepted as canonical by either the Catholic or Protestant churches; such books are now commonly called [Pseudepigrapha](#) (Falsely Inscribed; singular pseudepigraphon), *i.e.*, books wrongly ascribed to a biblical author. The term Pseudepigrapha, however, is not an especially well suited one, not only because the pseudepigraphic character is not restricted to the Pseudepigrapha alone—and, indeed, not even all Pseudepigrapha are ascribed to any author, since there are among them anonymous treatises—but also because the group of writings so designated by this name necessarily varies in the different modern collections. Theoretically, the name Pseudepigrapha can designate all ancient Jewish writings that are not canonical in the Catholic Church. The writings of the philosopher Philo of Alexandria (1st century bce–1st century ce) and the historian Josephus (1st century ce) and fragments of other postbiblical Hellenistic Jewish historians and poets, however, usually are excluded. Rabbinic literature (2nd century bce–2nd century ce) also is generally excluded; such literature existed for centuries only in oral form. The edition of the Pseudepigrapha edited by the British biblical scholar R.H. Charles in 1913, however, contains a translation of *Pirke Avot* (“Sayings of the Fathers”), an ethical tractate from the Mishna (a collection of oral laws), and even the non-Jewish *Story of Ahikar* (a folklore hero), though other genuine Jewish writings from antiquity are omitted. Some of the Jewish Pseudepigrapha were discovered only in the last two centuries, and the Dead Sea Scrolls (the first of them discovered in the 1940s), most of which belong to this category, are not yet all published. Thus, in the broader meaning of the terms, the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha are a bloc of Jewish literature written in antiquity from the later Persian period (*c.* 4th century bce) and not canonized by the Jews.

Texts and versions

A small portion of this literature is preserved in the original languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Most of the Hebrew or Aramaic works, however, exist today only in various translations: Greek, Latin, Syriac, Ethiopian, Coptic, Old Slavonic, Armenian, and Romanian. All the works of the Apocrypha are preserved in Greek, because they have for the Greek Church a canonical value. Those books not considered canonical by the early church have often fallen into oblivion, and their Greek text was often lost; many of the ancient Jewish Pseudepigrapha are today

preserved only in fragments or quotations in various languages, and sometimes only their titles are known from old lists of books that were rejected by the church.

Of this literature only the Apocrypha (contained in Latin and Greek Bibles) were read in the liturgical services of the church. The Pseudepigrapha, in their various versions, were in most cases nearly forgotten; and manuscripts of most of them were rediscovered only in modern times, a process that continues. The discovery of the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) at Qumrān in the Judaeen desert not only furnished new texts and fragments of unknown and already known Pseudepigrapha but also contributed solutions to problems concerning the origin of other Jewish religious writings (including some Old Testament books), the connection between them, and even their composition and redaction from older sources. The new original texts also strengthened interest in the Jewish literature of the intertestamental period because of its importance for the study of both ancient Judaism and early Christianity. As a result of such discoveries, better critical editions of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha, as well as new studies of their content, have been published.

The Shrine of the Book, which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls, at the Israel Museum in west Jerusalem.

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The Apocrypha, whose texts originated mostly before the rise of Christianity, were regarded as canonical in the early church but contain no Christian interpolations. Many of the Pseudepigrapha, however, were interpolated by Christian writers. The nature and the extent of these Christian interpolations are often difficult to define since a Christian interpolator not only changes the text according to Christian views or introduces specific Christian terminology but also may introduce in a Jewish text ideas, motifs, or terminology that are common to both Judaism and Christianity. For these reasons it is sometimes difficult to decide if a passage in a pseudepigraphon, or even sometimes the whole work, is Jewish or Christian.

Persian and Hellenistic influences

Some of the Apocrypha (*e.g.*, Judith, Tobit) may have been written already in the Persian period (6th–4th century bce), but, with these possible exceptions, all the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha were written in the Hellenistic period (*c.* 300 bc–*c.* ad 300). Yet the influence of [Persian](#) culture and religion sometimes can be detected even in comparatively late Jewish works, especially in Jewish apocalyptic literature (see below *Apocalypticism*). The Persian influence was [facilitated](#) by the fact that both the Jewish and Persian religions are iconoclastic (against the veneration or worship of images) and opposed to paganism and display an interest in [eschatology](#) (doctrines of last times).

Although such an affinity did not exist between Judaism and Hellenistic culture, literary activity among Hellenistic Jews was generally Greek in character: the Greek-writing Jewish authors thought mainly in Greek concepts, used genuine Greek terminology, and wrote many of their works in Greek literary forms.

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Though [Hellenistic](#) Jewish authors sometimes imitated biblical forms, they learned such forms from their Greek Bible (the Septuagint). Many Greek products written by Jews served as religious [propaganda](#) and probably influenced many pagans to become proselytes, or at least to abandon their heathen faith and become “God-fearing.” Thus, the Jewish literature written in Greek could be used by Christianity for similar purposes later.

Greek influence on Jewish writings written in Hebrew or Aramaic in Palestine in the intertestamental period was by no means as significant as upon Jewish works written in Greek among the Hellenistic [Diaspora](#) (Jews living outside Palestine). In Palestine, religion and culture formed a unity, and the Hellenization of the upper classes in Jerusalem before the Maccabean wars (167–142 bce) was restricted to some families who had accepted Greek civilization for practical purposes. Jews in Palestine developed a flourishing autonomous culture based upon religious ideals. Living without interruption in their powerful religious tradition and with their own non-Greek education, the Palestinian Jews were able to produce literary works without significant evidences of Greek influence. The language of this literature was both [Aramaic](#) and Hebrew. Under the national revival in the Maccabean period, Hebrew became prevalent as the language of Jewish literature in Palestine; but since Aramaic was a spoken language in Palestine during the whole period, some of the extant literary works of Palestinian Jews in the Maccabean and Roman period probably were originally written also in Aramaic.

Apocalypticism

In intertestamental Jewish literature a special trend developed: namely, apocalypticism. *Apokalypsis* is a Greek term meaning “revelation of divine mysteries,” both about the nature of God and about the last days (eschatology). Apocalyptic writings were composed in both Judaism and Christianity; one of them (the Book of Daniel) was accepted in the Jewish canon and another (the book of Revelation) in the New Testament. Other [apocalypses](#) form a part of the Pseudepigrapha, and influences of apocalypticism or similar approaches are found in some of the Apocrypha. The sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls are the works of an apocalyptic movement, though not all are written in the style of apocalypses. *The Sibylline Oracles* are, in their Jewish passages, a part of Jewish Hellenistic literature; inasmuch as they contain eschatological prophecies of future doom and salvation, they are apocalyptic, but in their polemics against idolatry and their apology for Jewish faith, they are a product of Jewish Hellenistic propagandistic literature. Because one of the central themes of apocalypticism is that of future salvation, messianic hopes involving the advent of a deliverer are usually the object of intertestamental Jewish apocalypticism.

Apocryphal works indicating Persian influence

Esdras

The “Greek Ezra,” sometimes named I (or II or III) [Esdras](#), enjoyed considerable popularity in the early church but lost its prestige in the Middle Ages in the Latin Church. At the reforming Council of Trent (1545–63), the Roman Catholic Church no longer recognized it as canonical and [relegated](#) it in the Latin Bible to the end, as an appendix to the New Testament. One of the reasons for its non-canoncity in the West is that the “Greek Ezra” contains material parallel to the biblical books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah but differs in textual recension (points of critical revision) and occasionally in the order of the stories. The content of the book is a history of the Jews from the celebration of the Passover in the time of King Josiah (7th century bce) to the reading of the Law in the time of Ezra (5th century bce). Though written in an idiomatic Greek, “Greek Ezra” is probably a Greek translation from an unknown Hebrew and Aramaic redaction of the materials contained in the biblical books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah. An important part of this book (3:1–5:6), the story of the three youths at the court of [Darius](#), has no parallel in the canonical books. This story concerns a debate between three guardsmen before Darius, king of Persia, about the question of what they consider to be the strongest of all things; the first youth asserts that it is wine, the second says that it is the king, and the third, who is identified with the biblical [Zerubbabel](#) (a prince of Davidic lineage who became governor of Judah under Darius), expresses his opinion that “women are strongest, but truth is victor over all things.” He is acclaimed as the victor, and, as a reward, he requests that Darius rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. The story evidently was written in two stages: originally, the competition was about wine, the king, and women, but later, [truth](#) was added. Truth is one of the central concepts of Persian religion and the competition itself is before a Persian king; thus it seems likely that the story is Persian in origin and that it became Jewish by the identification of the third youth with Zerubbabel.

Judith

The [book of Judith](#) is similar to the biblical Book of Esther in that it also describes how a woman saved her people from impending massacre by her cunning and daring. The name of the heroine occurs already in Gen. 26:34 as a Gentile wife of Esau, but in the book of [Judith](#) it evidently has symbolic value. Judith is an [exemplary](#) Jewish woman. Her deed is probably invented under the influence of the account of the 12th-century-bce Kenite woman Jael (Judg. 5:24–27), who killed the Canaanite general Sisera by driving a tent peg through his head.

The story is clearly fiction, and the [anachronisms](#) in it are intentional: they show that the story itself is a mere fiction. The book speaks about the victory of [Nebuchadnezzar](#), “who reigned over the Assyrians at Nineveh” (the name is of the 7th–6th-century-bce king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar) in the time of an unknown Arphaxad, king of the Medes. Since the western nations of Nebuchadnezzar’s empire had refused to come to his aid, the King ordered his commander in chief, [Holofernes](#) (a Persian name), to force submission upon the rebellious nations. In subduing these nations Holofernes destroyed their sanctuaries and proclaimed that Nebuchadnezzar alone should henceforth be worshipped as a god. Thus, the Jews, who had

recently returned from the Babylonian Captivity (6th century bce) and rebuilt the Temple, were compelled to prepare for war. Holofernes laid siege to Bethulia (otherwise unknown), described as an important strategic point on the way to Jerusalem. Because of a long siege, the inhabitants wanted to surrender their city, but Judith persuaded the people to delay the surrender for five days. Judith was a virtuous, pious, and beautiful widow. She removed her mourning garments, left the city, entered Holofernes' camp, and was brought before him. On the fourth day, Holofernes decided to seduce Judith and invited her to come into his tent; he then drank more wine than ever before. After he fell into a drunken stupor, Judith cut off his head with his sword and returned with the head to Bethulia. The Jews put Holofernes' head outside the city wall, and the following morning, upon learning of the death of their commander in chief, the Assyrian soldiers dispersed and were pursued by the Jews of Bethulia, who took abundant spoil. The Jews were not threatened again during Judith's lifetime—she lived to be 105—or for long thereafter.

Many suggestions have been made about the book of Judith's date of composition. Though current scholarly opinion is that the book was written in the warlike patriotic atmosphere of the early Maccabean period (c. 150 bce) by a Palestinian Jew, there are no Maccabean elements in the book. It shows no direct or indirect Greek influences, the deification of kings existed already in the ancient Near East, and the political situation described in the book has nothing in common with the Maccabean period. All the apparently intentional historical mistakes, however, can be understood if it is suggested that the book of Judith was written under Persian rule. Holofernes is, as noted above, a typical Persian name; and the whole political and social situation described in the book fits the Persian world, as do the Jewish life and institutions reflected in the book. Thus, there are no serious indications that the book of Judith is a Maccabean product, and there are many [allusions](#) to the time of the Persian rule over Palestine. Only a Greek translation of the book is extant, but, from its style, it is clear that the book was originally written in Hebrew. In his preface to the book of Judith, the Latin biblical scholar [Jerome](#) (c. 347–419/420 ce) states that he used for his translation a "Chaldaean" (*i.e.*, Aramaic) text and that he also used an older Latin translation from Greek. His translation differs in many points from the original text.

Tobit

The other Jewish short story possibly dating from Persian times is the book of [Tobit](#), named after the father of its hero. From the fragments of the book discovered at Qumrān, scholars now know that the original form of the name was Tobi. Tobit was from the Hebrew tribe of Naphtali and lived as an exile in Nineveh; his son was Tobias. Obeying the tenets of Jewish piety, Tobit buried the corpses of his fellow Israelites who had been executed. One day, when he buried a dead man, the warm dung of sparrows fell in his eyes and blinded him. His family subsequently suffered from poverty, but then Tobit remembered that he had once left a deposit of silver at Rages (today Teheran) in Media. He sent his son Tobias along with a companion, who was in reality the angel [Raphael](#) under the guise of an Israelite, to retrieve the deposit. During the journey, while Tobias was washing in the Tigris, a fish threatened to devour his foot. Upon instructions from Raphael, Tobias caught the fish and removed its gall, heart, and liver, since it was believed that the smoke from the heart and liver had the power to exorcise demons and that ointment made from the gall would cure blindness. On the way he stopped at Ecbatana (in Persia), where Raguel, a member of Tobias' family, lived. His daughter Sarah had been married seven times, but the men had been slain by the demon [Asmodeus](#) on the wedding night, before

they had lain with her. On the counsel of Raphael, Tobias asked to marry Raguel's daughter, and on the wedding night Tobias put Asmodeus to flight through the stench of the burning liver and heart of the fish. Raphael went to Rages and returned with the deposit. When he returned with his young wife and Raphael to Nineveh, Tobias restored his father's sight by applying the gall of the fish to his eyes. Raphael then disclosed that he was one of God's seven angels and ascended into heaven.

The story of the book of Tobit is a historicized and Judaized version of the well-known folktale of "The [Grateful Dead](#)" (or "The Grateful Ghost"), in which a young man buries the corpse of a stranger despite injunctions against such an act; later the youth wins a bride through the intercession of the dead man's spirit. Asmodeus (in Persian, Aeshma Daeva, the demon of wrath) occurs as a powerful demon in rabbinic literature as well as in folktales. In the Jewish form of the story, "The Grateful Dead" is replaced by the angel Raphael. According to the *Ethiopic Enoch* (20:3; 22:3), Raphael is appointed over the spirits of the souls of the dead (for *Enoch*, see below). Because the cause of this situation is not mentioned in the book of Tobit, the story itself in its Jewish form probably existed before it became the subject of the book of Tobit. The present work is a literary product; the interesting plot gave to the author many occasions to insert religious and moral teachings in the manner of wisdom literature, which is concerned with practical, everyday issues. The book contains prayers, psalms, and aphorisms, most of them put in the mouth of Tobit. It is the oldest Jewish witness of the [golden rule](#) (4:15): "And what you hate, do not do to anyone." Eschatological hopes are also described: at the end of time, all Jewish exiles will return, Jerusalem will be rebuilt of [precious](#) stones and gold, and all nations will worship the true God. In these eschatological images, however, the figure of the Messiah does not occur.

The religious, social, and literary atmosphere of the book does not contain elements from the Greek period. Thus, the book probably was written already in the Persian period or in the early days of Greek rule (3rd century bce). The book exists today in three principal recensions, and it is often difficult to determine, in a particular passage, what was the original text. The book was written in Hebrew or Aramaic; the Greek recensions differ, perhaps because they are based on different Semitic versions. These questions may be answered when the Hebrew and Aramaic fragments of the book, which were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, are published.

The Story of Ahikar

According to the book of Tobit, Ahikar, the cupbearer of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, was Tobit's nephew; he is a secondary personage in the plot, and his own story is mentioned. Ahikar is the hero of a Near Eastern non-Jewish work, *The Story of Ahikar*. The book exists in medieval translations, the best of them in Syriac. The story was known in the Persian period in the Jewish military colony in Elephantine Island in Egypt, a fact demonstrated by the discovery of fragmentary Aramaic papyri of the work dating from 450–410 bce. Thus, the author of the book of Tobit probably knew *The Story of Ahikar*, in which, as in the book of Tobit, the plot is a pretext for the introduction of speeches and wise sayings. Some of Tobit's sayings have close parallels in the words of the wise Ahikar.

Baruch

The apocryphon of Baruch, which is extant in Greek and was included in the Septuagint, is attributed to [Baruch](#), secretary to the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah (7th–6th century bce). It was Baruch who read Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in Babylon. After hearing his words, the Jews repented and confessed their sins. The first part of the book of Baruch (1:1–3, 8), containing a confession of sins by the Jews following the destruction of Jerusalem and the exiles’ prayer for forgiveness and salvation, may date from the Persian or at least from the pre-Maccabean period. This early section was originally written in Hebrew and seems to be very ancient. The other two parts (3:9–4:4 and 4:5–5:9) were written in Greek or freely translated from Hebrew or Aramaic. The first is a praise of wisdom: only Israel received wisdom from God, which is the Law of Moses. The last part of the book of Baruch contains Jerusalem’s lament over her desolation and her consolation.

Apocryphal works lacking strong indications of influence

The Letter of Jeremiah

The Letter of Jeremiah, like the book of Baruch, was conserved—together with the Greek translation of the Book of Jeremiah—in the Septuagint. The oldest witness of the letter is a fragment of a Greek papyrus, written about 160 bce and found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumrān. Whether the letter was originally written in Greek or is a translation from Hebrew or Aramaic is difficult to decide. The letter attacks the folly of idolatry as did Jeremiah’s letter “to those who were to be taken to Babylon as captives.” Though, according to some experts, the idolatry described in the book fits Babylonian cults, the only clear indication of its date is that of the Qumrān fragment.

Prayer of Manasseh

In some manuscripts of the Septuagint and in two later Christian writings, a pseudepigraphic Prayer of Manasseh is contained. This prayer was composed with reference to II Chron. 33:11–18, according to which the wicked Judaeen king Manasseh repented and prayed. In the present form the prayer is Greek in origin, but it may have existed in a Hebrew version, of which the Greek is a free adaptation. The prayer was probably composed (or translated) in the 1st century bce.

Additions to Daniel and Esther

Two of the Old Testament Hagiographa (Ketuvim; *see above* [The Hebrew canon](#))—Daniel and Esther—contain, in their Greek translations, numerous additions.

The Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men

The first addition to Daniel (in Greek and Latin translations Dan. 3:24–68) contains the Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men. These are the prayers of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the three young men who praised God after they had been placed in the midst of the fiery furnace during a persecution of Jews in Babylon, as told in the Book of Daniel. The first prayer is said by Azariah alone; the second, a thanksgiving prayer, is said by all three after having been saved by God. The two poems are not found in the original Daniel and were never a part of it. They were translated from Hebrew originals or adapted from them. A passage from the second, a liturgical hymn of praise, is a poetic expansion of the doxology that was sung in the Temple when the holy name of God was pronounced. Like the other additions to Daniel, the two prayers were probably composed before 100 bce.

Susanna

The second addition to Daniel, the story of Susanna, and the third one, Bel and the Dragon, are preserved in two Greek versions. In both stories the hero is the wise Daniel. Susanna was the pious and beautiful wife of Joakim, a wealthy Jew in Babylon. Two aged judges became inflamed with love for her. They tried to force her to yield to their lust, and, when she refused, they accused her of committing adultery with a young man, who escaped. She was condemned to death, but when Daniel cross-examined the two elders separately, the first stated that Susanna had been surprised under a mastic tree, the other under a holm tree. Susanna was thus saved and the two false witnesses executed.

The short story, perhaps invented even before the extant Book of Daniel was composed, could very well be added to Daniel (whose name means God is my Judge). The story was written in its present form in Greek, since it contains two Greek puns, but a written Semitic prototype may have existed.

Bel and the Dragon

The third Greek addition to the Book of Daniel is the story of Bel and the Dragon. The Babylonians worshipped the idol of the god Bel and daily provided him with much food, but Daniel proved to the King that the food was in reality eaten by the priests. The priests were punished by death and Bel's temple destroyed. The Babylonians also worshipped a dragon, but Daniel declined to worship him. To destroy the beast, Daniel boiled pitch, fat, and hair together: the dragon ate it and burst asunder. After Daniel's sacrilege of slaying the dragon, the King was forced to cast Daniel into the lions' den, but nothing happened to him. Indeed, he was given a dinner by the prophet Habakkuk, who was brought there by the hair of his head by an angel. On the seventh day the King found Daniel sitting in the den; so he led Daniel out and cast his enemies into the den, where they were devoured.

The two stories are an attack against idolatry. As the addition ends with the story about Daniel in the lions' den, which is also narrated in the canonical Book of Daniel with another motivation, it is probable that this short [treatise](#) originated in a tradition that was parallel to the canonical Book of Daniel and that the two stories were translated from a Hebrew or Aramaic original.

Greek additions to Esther

The Hebrew [Book of Esther](#) had a religious and social value to the Jews during the time of Greek and Roman anti-Semitism, though the Hebrew short story did not directly mention God's intervention in history—and even God himself is not named. To bring the canonical book up-to-date in connection with contemporary anti-Semitism and to stress the religious meaning of the story, additions were made in its Greek translation. These Greek additions are (1) the dream of Mordecai (Esther's uncle), a symbolic vision written in the spirit of apocalyptic literature; (2) the edict of King Artaxerxes (considered by some to be [Artaxerxes II](#), but more probably Xerxes) against the Jews, containing arguments taken from classical anti-Semitism; (3) the prayers of Mordecai and of Esther, containing apologies for what is said in the Book of Esther—Mordecai saying that he refused to bow before Haman (the grand vizier) because he is flesh and blood and Esther saying that she strongly detests her forced marriage with the heathen king; (4) a description of Esther's audience with the King, during which the King's mood was favourably changed when he saw that Esther had fallen down in a faint; (5) the decree of Artaxerxes on behalf of the Jews, in which Haman is called a Macedonian who plotted against the King to transfer the kingdom of Persia to the Macedonians; and (6) the interpretation of Mordecai's dream and a colophon (inscription at the end of a manuscript with publication facts), where the date, namely, "the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra" (*i.e.*, 114 bce), is given. This indicates that the additions in the Greek Esther were written in Egypt under the rule of the Ptolemies.

I and II Maccabees

I Maccabees

The first two of the four books of Maccabees are deuterocanonical (accepted by the Roman Catholic Church). The [First Book of the Maccabees](#) is preserved in the Greek translation from the Hebrew original, the original Hebrew name of it having been known to the Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria. At the beginning, the author of the book mentions Alexander the Great, then moves on to the Seleucid king of Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes (died 164/163 bce), and his persecution of the Jews in Palestine, the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple, and the Maccabean revolt. After the death of the priest Mattathias, who had refused to obey Antiochus, his son [Judas Maccabeus](#) succeeded him and led victorious wars against the Syrian Greeks. Exactly three years after its profanation by Antiochus, Judas captured the Temple, cleansed and rededicated it, and in honour of the rededication initiated an annual festival (Hanukka) lasting eight days. After Judas later fell in battle against the Syrian Greeks, his brother Jonathan succeeded him and continued the struggle. Only in the time of Simon, Jonathan's brother and successor, did the Maccabean state become independent. A short mention of the rule of Simon's son [John Hyrcanus I](#) (135/134–104 bce) closes the book. The author, a pious and nationalistic Jew and an [ardent](#) adherent of the family of Maccabees, evidently lived in the time of John Hyrcanus. The book imitates the biblical style of the historical books of the Old Testament and contains diplomatic and other important—though not necessarily authentic—official documents.

II Maccabees

The Second Book of the Maccabees, or its source, was probably written in the same period as I Maccabees. The book is preceded by two letters to the Jews of Egypt: the first from the year 124 bce and the second one written earlier (164 bce) commemorating the rededication of the Temple. In the preface of the book, the author indicates that he has condensed into one book the lost five-volume history compiled by Jason of Cyrene. II Maccabees describes the persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean wars until the victory of Judas Maccabeus over Nicanor, the commander of the Syrian elephant corps, in 161 bce. The book, written in Greek, is an important document of Hellenistic historiography. Descriptions of the martyrdom of the priest Eleazar and of the seven brothers under Antiochus, in which Greek dramatic style is linked with Jewish religious spirit, became important for Christian martyrology. The book also furnished proof texts for various Jewish and subsequently Christian doctrines (*e.g.*, doctrines of angels and the resurrection of the flesh).