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From Priest to Patriarch
Genealogical speculations around Levi

Summary

Levi, the son of Jacob, about whom the Bible tells almost nothing except for Gen 34 becomes one of the most prominent figures in Second Temple Literature. While in the case of Enoch or Baruch the scribe it is obvious, why they are attractive for pseudepigraphic literature, in the case of Levi it is not.

This paper tries to partially answer that question: Levi is the pivotal, genealogical link between the Genesis and the Exodus narratives and therefore the guarantor for the reliable transmission of priestly and/or halakhic knowledge. Levi grows into this function as a result of ongoing interpretation of the scriptures. Starting point is a re-reading of Ex 2:1 and a re-interpretation of the Hebrew word לוי/Levite as a personal name. Since this re-reading creates new problems of coherence, new "exegetical solutions" are necessary and provided by "Fortschreibungen". This process of ancient exegesis can be shown by means of "higher criticism" in the Hebrew biblical texts as well by means of "lower criticism" in the Greek and Latin versions, but also in other Second Temple Literature.

The end of this chain is twofold: Levites as second class priesthood and Levi as ancestor of all priests and patriarchal main character.