Next month I will be giving a keynote address at a conference dealing with ancient pseudepigrapha at the University of Laval, in Quebec City. I have recently been discussing the topic (of ancient authors falsely claiming to be a famous person) on the blog in relation to the letter of James, and as you know, it was the subject of my monography *Forgery and Counterforgery* ten years ago, and my spin-off popular account *Forged*. I haven’t worked seriously on the problem since then.

But now, because of this upcoming lecture, I’m having to think about it long and hard again, a decade later. Lots of scholars simply don’t (or can’t?) believe that ancient people — especially Christians, but others as well — would lie about their identities. It’s not that these scholars doubt that there are lots and lots of pseudepigrapha out there, Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Christian. There are. But these scholars don’t think that the authors were doing anything duplicitous.

There are different ways scholars have made this argument, but the basic line is pretty much the same, that everyone knew that pseudepigraphy was a practice, and since they knew it was a practice, they could see through it and and either weren’t deceived or weren’t bothered if they found out they were deceived.

I continue to think this view is absolutely and precisely wrong. I will talk more about it in later posts, probably, since I’ll be reading up on what has been published over the past decade (already started: but the big reading starts today!). For now I just want to point out that as far as I know, whenever ancient readers *talk* about the phenomenon, actually saying anything about it, they condemn it. I’m not saying that the people who did it condemned it; I’ll be arguing that *they* thought that had good reasons. I’m saying it wasn’t socially respectable or accepted. It’s kind of like cheating (on an exam, on a lover, on a tax return): it’s done a lot, but when it’s talked about, it’s condemned.

To my knowledge no one in the ancient world eever approved of someone publishing a book in the name of some other famous person. It might be hard for modern scholars to believe. It may be not what we want to hear. It may not be what “makes sense” to us. But the reality is that no one approves of it. It was seeing as lying, a kind of literary deceit, not something that anyone should do.

There is one instance in antiquity where an ancient Christian author forged a writing and then was discovered. It didn’t work well for him. Here is how I talk about it in my monograph (I’ve edited it a bit to make it more accessible):

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The author was a Christian presbyter of Marseille (France) named Salvian, who around 440 CE published a book *Timotei ad Ecclesiam* (in Latin, obviously. The title means “Timothy to the Church”). The name “Timothy,” of course, had clear apostolic connections from Pauline times (as one of Paul’s traveling companions and allegedly the recipient of two of Paul’s letters; ironically Paul didn’t write either one!).

In (Salvian’s) letter to the church, “Timothy” inveighed against a community that had grown rich and soft, and advocated radical almsgiving to the church, saying rich people should give up all their property for the poor. In his concern for total commitment to the gospel and an ascetic style of life, Salvian was not far removed from the concerns of another author, from about the same time, that we know of, a pseudonymous “Titus” (the other of Paul’s Pastoral companions) who wrote a scathing attack on Christians who indulged in the joys of
the flesh, condemning anyone, married or not, who engaged in sexual activities. The author of the forged letter of Titus was never discovered. But the author of the forged letter of Timothy was, by none other than his own bishop, Salonius of Geneva.

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