

Andrew E. Bernhard. *Other Early Christian Gospels: A Critical Edition of the Surviving Greek Manuscripts*. Library of New Testament Studies, no. 315. London-New York: T & T Clark, 2006. Pp. xiv + 191. ISBN: 0567042049. \$110.00 USD, cloth.

1. With this small but helpful volume Andrew E. Bernhard (B.) aims at satisfying the long-lasting demand in the English speaking world of a comprehensive edition of manuscript fragments of identified and unidentified gospels in their original languages that did not make it into the canon of the New Testament. Although there are some translations of such fragments in English that might even be considered classic,¹ there is still a need for such a critical edition that might be similar to those by Giuseppe Bonaccorsi, Aurelio de Santos Otero, or Dieter Lührmann for the Italian, Spanish, and German book markets.²

2. B.'s book comprises original language editions facing their English translations, brief introductions, and the most significant information about the manuscripts and their texts. In principle, B. addresses students and non-specialist scholars who are interested in texts indispensable for the discussion of early Christianity. The readership does not get Greek manuscripts with the conventional critical signs and sigla or with the various kinds of apparatus usually found in critical editions of that kind.

3. All in all the volume consists of four main chapters that are preceded by a general introduction (1-7), a full-scale explanation of the editorial method employed (8-14), an overview of the editorial signs applied to the Greek texts (15), and, it also contains a list of plates (viii-ix), acknowledgements (x-xi), and a key to the abbreviations a reader will come across in the book (xii-xiii). In addition there are a cumulative bibliography (128-33), indexes of Greek words, (137-54), references (155), and modern authors (156-7), and thirty-one black and white plates of most of the texts dealt with in the book (161-91).

4. Although I did not know in those days that there was a book coming up and prior to its publication, B. and I had some discussion about this and that fragment, especially about some physical features and technical questions. Thus, I really feel pleased and honoured to be listed among the people B. thanks for their support and cooperation, above all because B. seems to have appreciated our communication (as I did) and to have found some details helpful.

5. In his general introduction B. pleads for the absolute necessity of such a critical edition he has recently accomplished; and he is right doing so: with the exception of Jack Finegan's outdated volume³ there is still no comprehensive book with the fragments of potentially apocryphal gospels in the English-speaking world that includes the Greek texts, English translations, and

¹ Cf., for instance, J. K. Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993; paperback ed., 2005); R. J. Miller, *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

² See G. Bonaccorsi, *Vangeli Apocriphi* (Florence: Libreria editrice fiorentina, 1948); A. de Santos Otero, *Los Evangelios Apócrifos*, 13th ed., BAC, no. 148 (Madrid 2006); D. Lührmann, *Fragmente apokryph gewordener Evangelien in griechischer und lateinischer Sprache*, MThSt, no. 59 (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 2000).

³ B. correctly refers to this title (2 n. 5: J. Finegan, *Hidden Records of the Life of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Pilgrim, 1969]).

comments. However, his definition of the term ‘gospel’ is problematic (2): “For convenience the term ‘gospel’ is used as a label for any written text that is primarily focused on recounting the teachings and/or activities of Jesus during his adult life.” This description results in the exclusion of *P.Cair.* 10735, *P.Oxy.* L 3525 and *P.Ryl.* III 463 (*Gospel of Mary*) and *P.Oxy.* VIII 1081 (*Sophia of Jesus Christ*), as they do not preserve texts “primarily about the *adult life* of Jesus” (2 n. 6). Nonetheless, *P.Cair.* 10735, for instance, consists of only a few lines, so that we do not know whether there was originally more, and if so then possibly about Jesus’ ‘adult life,’ in the text copied there. In addition, if we think of a fragment of Luke or Matthew that just reports about Jesus’ infancy, would we turn it off then? In respect of the *Gospel of Thomas*, don’t we have just sayings of Jesus and no actual narrative storytelling? At least it can be associated with Jesus’ teaching, though it has the specific character of a collection of mostly single sayings. Moreover, this touches the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Jesus of (Christian) proclamation or preaching. Be that as it may, B. offers very interesting manuscripts, which he groups as follows: *Gospel of Thomas* (*P.Oxy.* IV 654; I 1; IV 655), *Gospel of Peter* (*P.Oxy.* LX 4009; *P.Cair.* 10759; *P.Oxy.* XLI 2949), *Unknown Gospel* (*P.Egerton* 2 + *P.Köln* VI 255), and six other manuscripts that he calls (4) “small fragments of various unidentified gospels” (*P.Mert.* II 51; *P.Oxy.* II 210; X 1224; *P.Oxy.* V 840; *P.Berol.* 11710). B.’s arguments that “the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Peter* and *Unknown Gospel* have obvious parallels with the New Testament gospels, but they do not exhibit the kind of pattern of extensive verbal correspondence with any of the New Testament texts that would be necessary to establish direct literary dependence” (3 n. 8) and that they “seem to preserve some early traditions about Jesus in a more primitive form than Matthew, Mark, Luke or John” (3) need further reflection, as these are two diversely evaluated and controversial issues.

6. Then B. explains his editorial method in detail (8-14). He collated the original or a quality photograph of each manuscript with the transcriptions of earlier editions. In cases of doubt he relied on the readings of the first editors. B. has viewed eight of the manuscripts in their original libraries or collections, basically those kept in Oxford and London. In principle, most of the somewhat overdone explanatory sections are totally superfluous for those who regularly work with manuscripts. But at the same time they are very suitable for the audience addressed and even obligatory to enable these readers to understand the transcriptions properly. So the reader learns about the four different levels applied to make up the apparatus (attribution of restoration to authors, alternative readings or restorations and their authors, unemended readings, and palaeographic notes) but also that “editorial signs and punctuation have been omitted from the apparatus” (14). Herewith B. seeks to make reading the texts and working with his edition easier.

7. The four chapters are structured to a fixed pattern: introduction (general information, research history, and problems), basic keynotes about the manuscript, transcription of the Greek text, Greek text arranged in modern form (lines filled), and English translation. The notes about the manuscript mostly and mainly comprise contents, date, a basic description, *nomina sacra*, other notable features, current housing location, museum ID, first published edition, and official publication. It may be a matter of discussion whether the repetition of the Greek text of the transcription in the form of a running text is really necessary for students who know at least some Greek (which they should in order to follow the transcriptions anyway). Additionally, the introductions to the individual chapters offer the fundamental literature about the manuscripts dealt with in their footnotes. Transcriptions and reconstructions (and apparatus) are given on the left pages facing the running Greek text (which is missing for *P.Oxy.* V 840) and the English

translation on the right. This publishing policy ends up with pages that are occasionally half empty (or even more than that).

8. Although the apparatus is restricted to only some significant details, the readers get reliable transcriptions and fluent English translations supplemented by basic general information on each individual manuscript. However, here and there some shortcomings could have been avoided, as can be demonstrated by a few random examples. (i) The literature used and referred to is not always up-to-date. For *P.Oxy. V 840*, for instance, B. should have pointed at Michael J. Kruger's monograph.⁴ (ii) For the *Gospel of Peter* B. lists the recent critical edition (which Tobias Nicklas and I accomplished) but does not use its information precisely enough. The 'traditional' notion that the Akhmîm-Codex (*P.Cair. 10759*) was found in the tomb of a monk, repeated by B. (49), originally depends on the pure speculation of its first editor, U. Bouriant, but has no archaeological backing.⁵ Further, he remains silent about the problematic verso of *P.Oxy. LX 4009* (50-1, 54-5). (iii) The reconstructions and their arrangement on the pages (indented lines) have to be rechecked with the help of the photographs in the back of the book (if available). Thus, the seventh line of *P.Vindob.G 2325* (104) starts off with five letters in parentheses (reconstruction; the other lines with six to ten letters), while the remaining four letter traces are actually on a small slip of papyrus that is in the horizontal middle of the last line. So, this reconstruction is at least problematic if not erratic.

9. Leaving these points of criticism aside, all in all this work is very much appreciated and may be a role model on the basis of which a more comprehensible edition with the conventional papyrological apparatus, the usual palaeographic descriptions, and an in-depth commentary on the texts preserved should be accomplished. B. certainly succeeds in accomplishing an interesting and useful database for students and non-specialists in the field. B. calls the texts "other early Christian gospels" in order to avoid the term "apocryphal," which shows that he has a considerable appreciation of the problem involved in the discussion of such texts and fragments. Besides, B. has done scholars a good service by supplying photographs of most of the fragments he works on (with the exception of *P.Vindob.G 2325*, *P.Mert. II 51*, parts of *P.Oxy. X 1224*, and the front page of *P.Oxy. V 840* [now available in Kruger's monograph]).

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⁴ M.J. Kruger, *The Gospel of the Savior: An Analysis of P.Oxy. 840 and its Place in the Gospel Traditions of Early Christianity*, Texts and Editions for New Testament Study, no. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). Possibly the publication of this book came too late to be integrated into B.'s work.

⁵ See T.J. Kraus and T. Nicklas, *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung*, GCS NF 11 and Neutestamentliche Apokryphen 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), following P. van Minnen, "The Greek *Apocalypse of Peter*," in *The Apocalypse of Peter*, ed. J.N. Bremmer and I. Czachesz, 17-44, *Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha*, no. 7 (Leuven: Peeters, 2003).