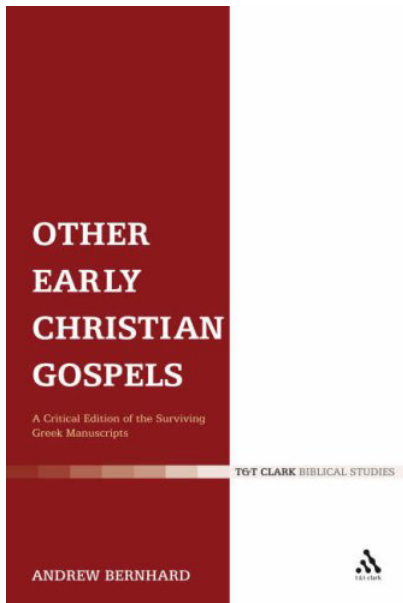


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**Bernhard, Andrew**

***Other Early Christian Gospels: A Critical Edition of the Surviving Greek Manuscripts***

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The study of noncanonical (or “apocryphal”) texts, particularly “Gospel” texts, has experienced something of a renaissance in recent scholarly work, reflecting in part the upsurge of interest in these texts amongst the wider public in recent years. Perhaps surprisingly, easy access to critical editions of some of these texts has not always been readily available. In this volume, Andrew Bernhard seeks in part to fill this lacuna, at least for an English readership (in some respects this book is not dissimilar to Dieter Lührmann’s *Fragmente Apokryph Gewordener Evangelien* [Marburg, 2000] in German). Bernhard provides what he says are “new editions” (2) of thirteen manuscripts, all in Greek, providing texts (or parts of texts) of a number of early Christian Gospel texts. Thus he treats here the three Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas (P.Oxy. 1, 654, 655), three Greek manuscripts presented here as providing parts of the text of the Gospel of Peter (P.Cair. 10759, as well as P.Oxy. 2949 and 4009), Papyrus Egerton 2, and six other fragments taken to be “otherwise unidentified gospel fragments”: P.Vindob. G 2325 (the so-called “Fayyum fragment”), P.Merton 51, P.Oxy. 210, P.Oxy. 1224, P.Oxy. 840 and P.Berol. 11710.

For each text, Bernhard provides a critical edition of the Greek (with doubtful letters, lacunae, conjectural additions, etc. indicated) and a brief critical apparatus; in addition,

on the facing page, he gives an English translation as well as what he calls a “student’s Greek text” (6), giving the Greek text in continuous form (rather than in lines) and without the extra details of editorial signs and the like. Each text is provided with a very brief introduction (though for the six “unidentified gospel fragments,” a single one-page introduction serves for all), together with a brief bibliography on each text. A general introduction sets out the rationale for the choice of texts and the principles used. There are also indices of Greek words used (divided into one index for each presumed text, rather than one for each manuscript). In addition, there are plates providing photos for most of the fragments discussed (though not for P.Vindob. G 2325 or P.Merton 51, and for P.Oxy. 840 and P.Oxy. 1224, only one side of each of the pages is reproduced here.)

The book is serviceable, and it is certainly useful to have the Greek texts readily available in a single volume. Just how “new” the editions are is not clear. At almost every point, Bernhard appears to follow relatively standard existing modern critical editions. The information given in the introductions, bibliographies, and critical apparatus is relatively small. As already noted, the six unidentified fragments only get a single (very general) page of introduction together, and none is treated separately. The introduction to the Thomas fragments mentions only briefly, and in very general terms, the full Coptic text from Nag Hammadi, but no details of any differences (e.g., in order or in the wording of individual sayings) are mentioned. The fragments attributed here to the Gospel of Peter are presented as such (following Lührmann), with not much note taken of dissenting voices (e.g., on P.Oxy. 4009, though Bernhard does not follow Lührmann in ascribing P.Vindob. 2325 to the Gospel of Peter as well). The bibliographies are generally rather brief. The critical apparatus for each text for the most part gives one the person who first proposed the reading adopted in the text here (usually to fill a lacuna); alternative suggestions are cited only rarely.

The general introduction sets out the principles and rationale for the volume, again somewhat briefly. Inevitably, any volume such as this will involve a series of decisions that are somewhat arbitrary and/or pragmatic rather than based on firm “facts” (which rarely exist!). Bernhard’s own rationale for his title, and hence for the choice of manuscripts treated, is that “Gospel” is taken as “a label for any written text that is primarily focused on recounting the teachings and/or activities of Jesus during his adult life” (2); “early” is taken as “refer[ring] to the first hundred years of the Christian movement (ca. 30–130 CE)” (ibid.). The definition of “Gospel” here excludes, for example, the Gospel of Mary and P.Oxy. 1081 (the Sophia of Jesus Christ) as resurrection traditions (though it is not so clear that, e.g., Gospel of Thomas might not be in this category as well). It also excludes infancy traditions (e.g., P.Cair. 10735). Others might also dispute the broad assertion (or assumption) that at least seven of these manuscripts preserve portions of texts “which are widely believed to have been written before 130 CE”

(2: the seven are the manuscripts of the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, and Papyrus Egerton 2). Many would be wary of ascribing such an early date to the Gospel of Thomas; the date of the Gospel of Peter is not at all certain; and no mention is made here of the now widely accepted rather later date (end of the second century beginning of the third century) for at least the manuscript of Papyrus Egerton 2 (the “original” text may of course be earlier), following the identification of P.Köln 255 as part of the same manuscript and in relation to a particular feature of the orthography there. So too the general claim that these three Gospels “seem to preserve some early traditions about Jesus in a more primitive form than Matthew, Mark, Luke or John” (3) certainly appears to beg a few questions!

However, it is probably fair to say that the main value of the book lies in the editions of the texts provided, and Bernhard generally does not seek here to enter in any detail into the further debates that these texts generate. That is, in one sense, logically secondary work based on the texts that are provided here and that provide the primary evidence for such discussions. Bernhard has provided some of that primary evidence, and for that one can only be grateful. One wonders, though, if something of an opportunity has been lost in not providing rather fuller bibliographies, more detailed introductions, and perhaps also more information about alternative suggested readings in the critical apparatus. Nevertheless, if this volume enables others to engage in a more informed way with the texts treated here, it will have performed a valuable service.