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Burke and Landaus' "New Testament Apocrypha: More noncanonical Scriptures" (Book Review)

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Book Reviews



Burke, T. and Landau, B. (Eds.). (2016). *New Testament Apocrypha: More noncanonical Scriptures*. Volume 1. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 585pp. \$75.00. ISBN 9780802872890

New Testament Apocrypha, edited by Tony Burke and Brent Landau is a compilation of 30 Christian apocryphal texts dating from the second to fourteenth centuries AD. The book begins with a lengthy and helpful introduction (26 pages) covering the history of various Christian apocryphal texts and collections from ancient to modern times.

The body of the book is divided into four parts: I. Gospels and Related Traditions of New Testament Figures (17 texts), II. Apocryphal Acts and Related Traditions (7 texts), III. Epistles (2 texts) and, IV. Apocalypses (4 texts). Each of the texts in these four sections contains separate introductions covering such topics as manuscripts and versions; transmission and editions; date and provenance; literary and theological importance; content, composition; original language; history of research; later influence; prosody; and translation (Not all introductions include all of these topics).

The introduction to each of these texts also contains a short bibliography of editions and translations of the text as well as a short bibliography of secondary studies of the text. Some introductions also include a list of extant manuscripts for the text. Over 20 different authors wrote the introductions but this book only provides qualifications for the two editors.

The introduction to each text is followed by an English translation of the text (The only exception is The Revelation of the Magi which just contains a nine-page summary). Each text includes cross references in the margins to parallels in New Testament books, as well as footnotes covering such matters as textual variants, translation notes, and explanatory notes.

There were five criteria for deciding what to include in this book (pp. xxxix-xli). First, Burke and Landau include texts that were not included in J. K. Elliott's standard, *Apocryphal New Testament* (1924, 1993). The only exception to this rule is the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* which appears in both collections as well as in Wilhelm Schneemelcher's classic *New Testament Apocrypha*. Second, Burke and Landau include a much broader date-range of texts than those included by Elliott or Schneemelcher,

which only include texts written before the closing of the canon. The dates assigned to texts collected by Burke and Landau are often not much more than guesses, sometimes spanning more than a hundred years. Of the thirty total texts included, four were written possibly as early as 2nd century; four as early as 3rd century, four as early as 4th century, seven as early as 5th century, four as early as 6th century, two in the 7th century; two for 10th century, two in the 12th century, and one in the 14th century. Third, Burke and Landau contains a broader range of text genres than Elliott, including “medieval apocalypses, tales of relic invention, free-floating stories, patristic reference to apostles, recycled apocryphal acts...and Coptic pseudo-apostolic memoirs” (p. xl). Fourth, some texts in this book have been updated based on additional manuscript discoveries. Fifth, many texts are not included because they are available in other English translations, e.g. Elliott, Schneemelcher, or The Nag Hammadi Library edited by James Robinson. Most of the texts in this book “have been available to scholars for a considerable amount of time” (p. xl). One of the benefits of this book is the inclusion of texts written before the close of the canon but are not in Elliott or Schneemelcher. These include, The Legend of Aphroditianus, The Revelation of the Magi (summary only), Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 210, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 5072; Toledot Yeshu; The Discourse of the Savior and the Dance of the Savior; John and the Robber; The History of Simon Cephas, the Chief of the Apostles; the Tiburtine Sibyl and The Death of Judas according to Papias (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1 also contains The Death of Judas, but ANE only contains the short version whereas Burke and Landau contain both a short version and a long version). Texts written after the close of the canon could be helpful to church historians focusing on Medieval Christianity.

The publisher’s subtitle “More Noncanonical Scriptures” is unfortunate since there is little evidence that these writings were ever considered “Scripture” by anyone. The book contains an extensive index of modern authors and another extensive “Index of Scripture and Other Ancient Texts.” This book is recommended especially for seminary libraries or universities with graduate courses in historical theology or church history.

Reviewer

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