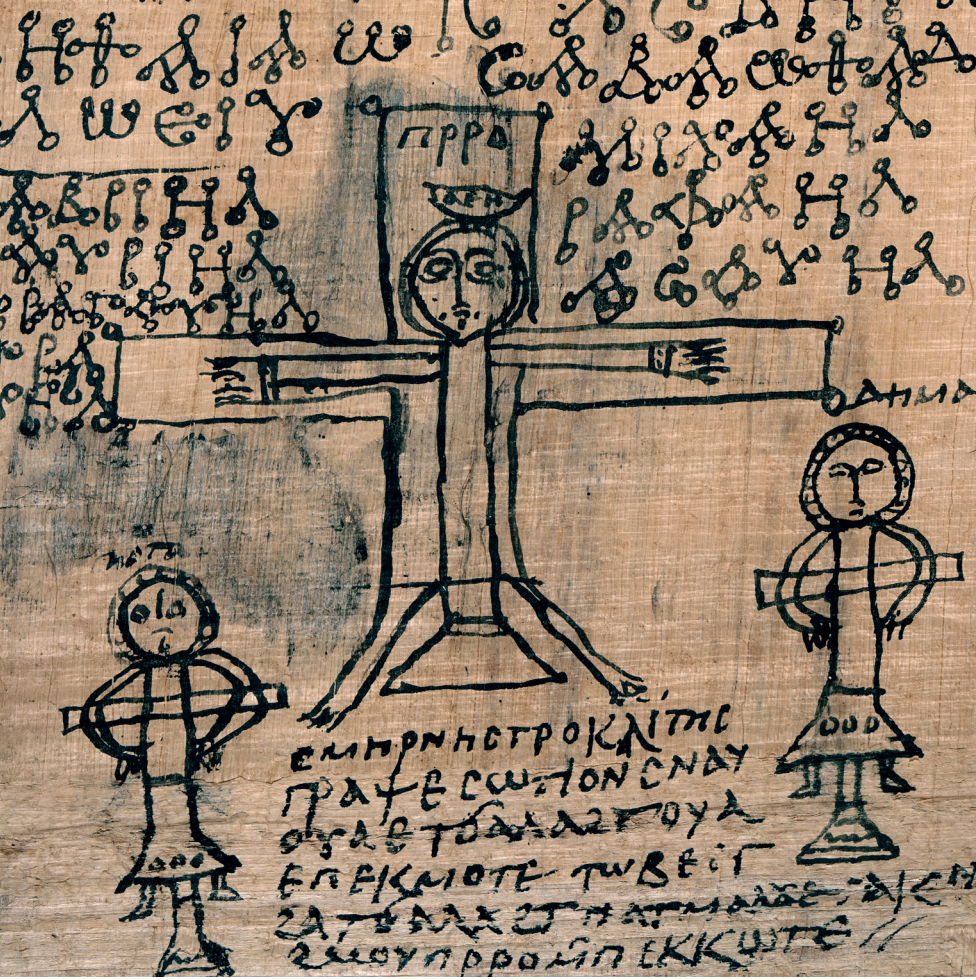


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THE APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS

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The Apocryphal Gospels

Translated with an Introduction by
SIMON GATHERCOLE

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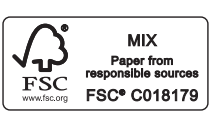
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Introduction

'The Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are.' So wrote St Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, around 180 CE. This statement is no mere platitude, but a sharply combative insistence that the four 'canonical' Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were the only path to the truth. In Irenaeus' line of fire were some rival groups who used fewer than four Gospels – only a mutilated version of Luke, for example, or an amalgam of the four Gospels rolled into one. At the same time, he was targeting 'heretics' who had minted additional Gospels such as the *Gospel of Truth* or the *Gospel of Judas*. In Irenaeus' view, to deviate in either direction from the fourfold nature of the Gospel was to invite the curse spelled out in the closing words of the Book of Revelation: 'If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City.'

For Irenaeus and others like him, the books in the fourfold Gospel collection went hand in hand with the way many in the early church understood the message of the 'good news' which they preached. These Gospels now in our New Testament were the four accounts understood to encapsulate the truth of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These four had been handed down from the time of Jesus' apostles, in contrast to recent arrivals produced by unorthodox sects. Perhaps above all, since Irenaeus was writing in the midst of vicious Roman persecution, the canonical Gospels provided not just group solidarity but the message of eternal life with

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God. Many agreed with the Bishop of Lyons: the canonical Gospels were generally the most widely copied and quoted, and in Irenaeus' time many across the breadth of the Roman Empire had adopted the same fourfold Gospel.[1]

Popular though the four Gospel collection may have been, however, Irenaeus and the other church leaders of his day could not enforce it. In the first three centuries CE, Christians had no legal mandate or military muscle enabling the church to insist on four, and only four, Gospels. Even under Constantine (emperor 306–337 CE), orthodox Christianity was not the official religion of the Roman Empire as is sometimes thought. The so-called Edict of Milan in 313 merely granted Christianity tolerated legal status. It was not until the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 that the three co-emperors of the time decreed: 'It is our will that all peoples, over whom the measure of our mercy reigns, abide in the religion which the divine apostle Peter passed down to the Romans.' Before this time, there were no enforceable punishments that could be meted out to dissident religious groups.

Despite Irenaeus' solemn declaration, then, various groups in early Christian times produced 'apocrypha'. This term, from the Greek *apokruphos*, meaning 'hidden' or 'secret', came to refer to any books which exercised undue allure or which trespassed on the contents of the Bible by supplementing or replacing the ground it covered. These apocrypha came in various forms. There were apocryphal epistles attributed to disciples of Jesus, and other apocalypses besides the Revelation of St John in the New Testament. The label 'Gospel' was especially potent, however, since it laid claim to the 'good news', the literal meaning of the Greek word for Gospel, *euangelion*.[2] Calling a book a Gospel was a claim to have the truth about Jesus and the message of new life.

Having this label did not necessarily mean that a Gospel author would rewrite the historical story of Jesus in Galilee and Judaea *c.* 30 CE, however. 'Gospel' on its own is not a literary genre, but a title referring to the good news of salvation by Jesus. The form that the text took depended on what kind of salvation the author considered Jesus to have brought. Some apocryphal Gospels do imitate the canonical Gospels

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of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Marcion's Gospel, the *Gospel of Peter* and Tatian's *Diatessaron* all adopt the established biographical, narrative form and so see the good news as rooted in Jesus' activity in history. Other works strike out in different directions, consisting of dialogues between the risen Jesus and certain disciples, or setting out the divine plan of salvation in pithy oracles. In a Gospel which is a catalogue of sayings, like the *Gospel of Thomas*, the medium is the message: interpreting Jesus' enigmatic utterances is what brings salvation. Still other Gospels resemble myths about the genesis of the Greek pantheon, with Jesus revealing the redemptive knowledge of how the different parts of the divine realm came into being.

Alongside the texts called 'Gospels' in their manuscripts or by other writers, there is also a large body of other Gospel material. Some works are not designed to contain the message of salvation as such, but speculate on additional details of the life of Jesus not included in the New Testament Gospels. 'Infancy Gospels' imagine what Jesus got up to as a child, for example. 'Passion' texts, centred on the trial and death of Jesus, offer conjectures on the legal wranglings behind the decision to sentence Jesus to death, or supply further dialogue between Jesus and the criminals crucified with him. Like the theologians of the early church, modern scholars classify these texts as 'apocryphal Gospels' as well. A particular problem arises with very small manuscript fragments referring to Jesus and his disciples. These tend to be labelled immediately as Gospels, but they could equally be fragments of sermons or commentaries or some other genre. The translations in this edition encompass all these kinds of apocryphal Gospel texts, which cover a very diverse array of material by many different authors. The literature included here is not intended to present 'the other Jesus', as if the apocryphal Gospels all joined forces to recount an alternative life of Christ. Rather, the aim of this volume is to present the earliest apocryphal Gospel literature (mostly from before 300 CE) in all its different styles, theologies and perspectives heavenly or earthly.

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PURPOSE

A good deal of the apocryphal literature has no particularly subversive purpose. It is pious legendary material supplying *complementary* narratives to the existing canonical Gospels. The Gospel material in this category does not in any sense seek to challenge the conventional picture of Jesus, and indeed in some respects it emphasizes or exaggerates the orthodox view. This is the case for the two most important infancy Gospels, the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. The *Protevangelium* stresses the incarnation as the coming of a Christ who is both fully human and fully divine. It also develops the portrayal of Mary, whose own birth and early life is described, with an emphasis on her virginity both before and after the birth of Jesus. Additional dialogue between the angel Gabriel and Mary makes it clear that Mary does not conceive in the normal manner, and she is told by the angel, 'You will conceive by his Word' (*Prot.* 11). In addition, there is a rather lurid scene in which Salome, a sceptical friend of Mary's midwife, insists on examining Mary to check she is still a *virgo intacta* after Jesus' birth: 'As surely as the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and examine her hymen, I will not believe that the virgin has given birth' (*Prot.* 19). When she does so, her hand gets burned off, but God shows mercy and miraculously heals her. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* contains similar legendary material to that in the *Protevangelium*, but has more of a single focus on the young Jesus who even before the start of his public ministry possessed miraculous powers which confounded the religious authorities.

At the other end of Jesus' biography, there is an abundance of literature which focuses on the mechanics of Jesus' trial: in the *Gospel of Nicodemus* and the *Narrative of Joseph of Arimathaea*, for example, there is an unsavoury emphasis on the guilt of the Jews involved in the process. The *Gospel of Peter* reports that Jesus redeemed the Old Testament saints from hell on Holy Saturday by going down to rescue them, and the *Questions of Bartholomew* describes the event in detail. After

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Easter, the *Epistle of the Apostles* offers a post-resurrection dialogue with Jesus which stresses his fleshly corporeality, countering an unorthodox tendency to question Jesus' bodily humanity. Both these infancy Gospels and the 'Easter' works, then, seek not so much to challenge the established portrait of Jesus, as to bolster it by emphasizing and developing existing features, and providing new ways of shoring up the doctrines of the incarnation, cross and resurrection.

Much more defiant, on the other hand, is a work like the Coptic *Gospel of the Egyptians*. Its form is that of a heavenly mythological narrative which is influenced partly by Greek philosophy, and partly by Egyptian myth. Instead of Galilee and Judaea, the setting is the heavenly realm. Gone are Mary, Joseph and the disciples; instead the cast of characters includes figures with names such as Domedon Doxomedon and Telmael Telmachael Eli Eli Machar Machar Seth. It scarcely seems to touch down on planet earth until the very end, where there is an account of the mysterious baptismal ritual of the 'Gnostics', along with a polemical statement that any other purported accounts of the truth by Old Testament prophets or Christian apostles are simply spurious. It is clearly intended to undercut a conventional understanding of Jesus – and indeed any understanding of Jesus which appealed to his disciples, the apostles.

The Gospels of Judas and Thomas are no less subversive, but – unlike the *Gospel of the Egyptians* – they do seek to undercut the New Testament Gospels on their own terms, that is, by presenting accounts which resemble the canonical four to some degree. The *Gospel of Judas* uses a mythological style similar to that of the Coptic *Gospel of the Egyptians*, but here the episodes in the myth are recounted by Jesus in speeches delivered in the days leading up to Easter. *Thomas* sets out a series of sayings of Jesus, many of which are identical to, or resemble, those in the canonical Gospels. Interspersed among familiar material like the parable of the sower and the saying about the blind leading the blind, however, are more esoteric utterances which reflect the distinctive interests of the author: parables about a woman who loses a jar of meal, and of an assassin (*Gos. Thom.* 97–98), and sayings about the world

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being a corpse and the person who consumes the lion being blessed (*Gos. Thom.* 7, 56). Even though a good deal of the Jesus tradition in the *Gospel of Thomas* is known in other Gospels, *Thomas* is highly critical of the most influential Gospel name in the second century, Matthew (*Gos. Thom.* 13).

Similarly, *Marcion's Gospel* is also subversive, while imitating even more exactly the canonical Gospel format. While its wording is almost all derived from Luke's Gospel, Marcion's version is highly selective, portraying a kind of 'liberal' Jesus, extracted from his Jewish roots, and relieved of the task of judging the world. Marcion describes Jesus in terms of 'the Good' as defined in a Greek (especially Platonic) philosophical context. He removes from the Gospel any sense that Israel's scripture foresaw or foreshadowed the work of Jesus; indeed, the Old Testament god and the God of Jesus were according to Marcion two entirely separate and unrelated deities. Here, then, we are a considerable distance away from the canonical Gospels, and yet Marcion sets out this radical theological vision through the quite conventional means of narrating Jesus' ministry, death and resurrection, just as Matthew, Mark, Luke and John do.

Between the near-opposites of the conventional Gospels at one end and the confrontational and subversive ones at the other, there is other Gospel literature across the spectrum. Some of this literature appears to provide advanced theological teaching complementary to the canonical Gospels. The *Gospel of Truth* and the *Gospel of Philip*, for example, appear to have this intention. It seems very likely that they belong to the Valentinian school. (See discussion of 'Theology' below.) This movement used the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but seems also to have employed the other two Gospels (*Truth*, and *Philip*) alongside them. The *Gospel of Truth* supplements the canonical Gospels by providing an elaborate cosmological backdrop, and applying its metaphysics to the work of Jesus. There is no trace of any polemic in the *Gospel of Truth*, and the work is peppered with faint allusions to the New Testament, though without quoting it or acknowledging its sources. The *Gospel of Philip* is also aware of the canonical Gospels, and

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explicitly and approvingly quotes from them. *Philip* writes, for example: 'For this reason the Word says, "Already the axe is laid at the root of the trees" ' (Mt. 3:10; Lk. 3:9), and, 'That is why he said, "Whoever does not eat my flesh and drink my blood has no life in him." ' (Jn 6:53). On the other hand, *Philip* takes up a negative stance against some of the standard tenets of those same canonical Gospels. There is criticism of Matthew and Luke in *Philip*'s particular view of Jesus' birth: 'Some say that Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit. They are deceived!' This Valentinian Gospel's unconventional approach to Jesus' death leads to a paradoxical criticism of the standard narrative: 'Those who say that the Lord first died and then rose are wrong. For he first rose and then died.' The *Gospel of Philip*'s attitude to the canonical Gospels therefore is neither wholehearted acceptance nor rejection, but correction. Some of the post-resurrection dialogues, whether more 'orthodox' works like the *Questions of Bartholomew* or more sectarian works like the *Gospel of Mary*, presuppose knowledge of the canonical Gospels while building further theological edifices upon them. The *Gospel of Mary* is also an interesting case of a work which provides a Jesus who is both reassuringly familiar at points, but innovative in other ways.

Finally, off the spectrum altogether is a work like the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. This horoscope-like text announces itself at the beginning as a Gospel, seemingly using the term 'Gospel' merely in an attempt to acquire authority. In this respect, however, it is only an extreme case of what has been happening all along in much of this literature. It illustrates how compelling the label 'Gospel' is, and how contested the subject matter of Jesus and his significance.

MANUSCRIPTS

When we come to consider the earliest period of the apocryphal Gospels, the problem which immediately faces us is the small number of manuscripts which survive. This is sometimes explained as the consequence of the orthodox suppressing or

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burning the texts of the heretics, but the scarcity of copies is not the result of any kind of systematic destruction. The main reference to the ecclesiastical hierarchy collecting up copies of an apocryphal Gospel comes in the fifth century. While Theodoret was bishop of Cyr (423–457 CE), he found over two hundred copies of the *Diatessaron*, a conflation of all four canonical Gospels; these volumes he 'collected and put away, and introduced instead of them the Gospels of the four evangelists'. But such references are few and far between.

There are other explanations for the limited numbers of apocryphal Gospel manuscripts which we possess. In the first place, it is unlikely that large numbers of the manuscripts were produced, given the cost of both the materials (papyrus being expensive) and labour (involving copying every text by hand). Many of the apocryphal Gospels which reveal a particular sectarian outlook no doubt hailed from small groups. The *Gospel of Thomas* at one point records Jesus as saying: 'I will choose you, one out of a thousand, two out of ten thousand', evoking to some degree the sense of the movement as a small, embattled group (*Gos. Thom.* 23). Some of the more elaborate works probably circulated only in elite intellectual circles. No doubt some apocryphal works have left no trace at all, while others are known to us as mere names. Most of the ancient apocryphal texts which have survived come down to us in fragments and/or in translation, as is the case with the *Gospel of Thomas*.

The paucity of copies, then, is probably primarily a result of not many having been made. There was such a disproportionate amount of copying of canonical biblical books that even orthodox non-canonical books are relatively poorly attested. We can take as an example the corpus which has the modern name of 'The Apostolic Fathers'. These are some of the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament and were in general regarded in the early church as having sound theological credentials. One part of this corpus, the *Didache* or *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is an early document of church order from the beginning or middle of the second century that survives in just one complete Greek manuscript from 1056 CE and two small fragments of medieval translations. The *Epistle to Diognetus*, a

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letter from a Christian to a pagan interested in knowing about Christianity, was preserved in one thirteenth- or fourteenth-century manuscript, but even this has been lost – in a fire from shelling during the Franco-Prussian war. It was first noticed in Constantinople in 1436 by one Thomas d'Arezzo, who rescued it from a pile of papers to be used for packaging in a fish-shop, so its survival was a result of pure happenstance. Among the earliest 'Apologies', pleas written to the emperor on behalf of Christianity, those of Quadratus of Athens and Melito of Sardis survive in only a few quotations. Justin Martyr's great *Apology* survives complete in three medieval manuscripts, but since one of these is the source of the other two, this means that there is only one independent manuscript. As the German scholar of the early church Christoph Markschies has calculated, of the second-century Christian works whose titles are known to us, only about 15 per cent have survived – and that does not, of course, include the works whose names are lost.[3] For an ancient work, whatever its theological orientation, being copied repeatedly was the only survival strategy.

As a result, the only manuscripts which survive in high quantities are those of 'canonical' books. Here, canonical is used in a broad sense, to refer to any works which were ascribed status by substantial numbers of people. Much as Harold Bloom did in *The Western Canon*, ancient scholars compiled 'canons' of model Greek speakers and writers. There were lists, for example, of the nine great lyrical poets, and of the ten great Attic orators. These canonical authors tend to be those authors who are best preserved. Outside of the Bible, the ancient works extant in the most copies from the ancient world are Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (the former more than the latter). Hundreds of manuscripts of Homer survive, because the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were taught in schools and regarded as essential reading for any educated person. We still have plays of the three great authors of classical Greek tragedy, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, although nothing like their entire bodies of work.

Against this background, we can better understand the attestation of books like the *Gospel of Thomas* (three Greek fragments; one complete Coptic translation), the *Gospel of*

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Judas (one Coptic manuscript) and the *Gospel of Mary* (one fragmentary Coptic manuscript, and two small Greek fragments). The most popular apocryphal Gospels were probably the infancy texts, which were often reworked and incorporated into larger blocks of material: the *Protevangelium* and *Infancy Thomas* were edited and combined to form a *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (probably in the seventh century), which in turn was reworked into other infancy texts. The *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* themselves survive in many manuscripts, and both were translated into Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic and Slavonic. They left footprints in other ways as well. The *Protevangelium*'s depiction of Mary spinning purple and scarlet thread for the veil of the temple (*Prot.* 10) is picked up in a number of late-antique and medieval images of the Annunciation.[4] The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*'s account of Jesus moulding clay birds and enlivening them (*IGT* 2) is referred to in the Qur'an, according to which Jesus said: 'I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: I will make the shape of a bird for you out of clay, then breathe into it and, with God's permission, it will become a real bird' (*Qur'an* 3:49; cf. 5:110). An image of this scene can be found on the medieval ceiling (*c.* 1100) of the church of St Martin in Zillis in Switzerland.

RECEPTION IN THE CHURCH

During to the relative lack of manuscript evidence, most of what we know about the fate of apocryphal Gospels in the early period comes from the church fathers. While some of these theologians had an entirely negative attitude to such 'heretical' works, others saw them as curates' eggs. Bishop Serapion, patriarch of Antioch at the end of the second century, is highly critical of the *Gospel of Peter*, but this is because it is a mixed bag, rather than wholly awful. In his treatise written in response to it, he remarks: 'I have been able . . . to go through it and discover a majority of the right teaching about the Saviour, but also what was inserted.'[5] Jerome, the

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translator of the standard Latin version of the Bible, could also concede in 403 CE that in some apocryphal Gospels one might find *aurum in luto*, 'gold in amongst the muck'.[6]

The gold did not stop these texts from being prohibited, however. The fourth-century Alexandrian theologian Didymus the Blind cites an early authority: 'One ancient bishop of the church has put it well: "We prevent the study of the apocrypha," he says, "because of those who are not able to distinguish what has been combined in them by heretics." '[7] Some orthodox theologians studied them on the grounds of wanting to know what tunes the devil was playing. Around the same time as Didymus was writing, St Augustine's teacher Bishop Ambrose of Milan wrote:

> There is another Gospel in circulation, which the Twelve are said to have written. Basilides has also ventured to write a Gospel, which is called 'According to Basilides'. There is also in circulation another Gospel, which is entitled 'According to Thomas'. I know of another entitled 'According to Matthias'. We have read some of them [i.e. privately] not so that they may be read [i.e. publicly, in church]; we have read them so that we may not be ignorant of them; we have read them not in order to hold to them, but to reject them and to know the nature of these books in which those prideful men have elevated their hearts.[8]

Increasingly, the fathers and church documents take this line and prohibit the reading of apocryphal Gospels – at least publicly in church. In fact, we only hear one account of a non-canonical Gospel being read publicly. As noted above, Serapion of Antioch came to a very negative conclusion about the *Gospel of Peter*; initially, however, he had allowed a church to read it in worship before realizing his mistake. Eusebius takes an uncompromising position: some apocryphal writings have not been handed down in the orthodox succession and so are 'to be rejected'. This is not because they contain both good and bad which the unlearned might not be able to distinguish, but on the grounds that such works are, as he puts it, 'completely wicked and impious'.[9]

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One official church document, the so-called Gelasian Decree from around the seventh century, catalogues the acknowledged biblical books, and then proceeds with a long list of other Gospels or Gospel-like books – attaching to each of them the Latin word *apocryphum*. Notably here, even the relatively innocuous infancy Gospels appear on the index of prohibited books, the last two titles referring to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and the *Protevangelium of James* respectively:

> Gospel in the name of Matthias: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of Barnabas: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of James the younger: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of the apostle Peter: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of Thomas, which the Manichees use: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of Bartholomew: apocryphal
> Gospel in the name of Andrew: apocryphal
> Gospel which Lucian forged: apocryphal
> Gospel which Hesychius forged: apocryphal
> Book about the childhood of the redeemer: apocryphal
> Book about the birth of the redeemer, about Mary or the midwife: apocryphal
> . . . and what has been taught or written by all the disciples of heresy and of heretics or schismatics whose names we have hardly liked to preserve, we acknowledge is not merely to be rejected but is to be excluded from the whole Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, and damned along with its authors in the inextricable shackles of anathema for ever.[10]

In late antiquity from about 400 CE, and into the medieval period, the main survival of apocryphal works was in lists such as this. There are a few exceptions. Some texts continued to be copied; the surviving manuscript of the *Gospel of Peter*, for example, may have been copied as late as the ninth century. There are also some paths off the beaten track where faint footprints of apocryphal Gospels can be detected. One such place is the literature of the Manichees, a sect which began in the third century CE under the leadership of the Persian prophet Mani,

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and survived long into the Middle Ages. Some of its writings have quotations from or allusions to apocryphal Gospels: the *Kephalaia of the Teacher*, a third-century Manichaean text, quotes from the *Gospel of Thomas*, as does a late-first-millennium copy of a work written in the central Asian language of Sogdian. A similar Gnostic group known as the Mandaeans alludes to some of the same sayings as do the Manichees: they both refer to *Thomas*'s saying about Jesus choosing 'one out of a thousand, two out of ten thousand', resonating with the sense of being part of an elite few (*Gos. Thom.* 23). Similar esoteric material emerges from the medieval inquisitions of heretics in south-western France, the subject of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's acclaimed historical monograph *Montaillou*.[11] According to some of the mass of detailed inquisition records which survive, certain heretics confessed that women were unable to enter Paradise, and so had to be made male in order to be saved. This corresponds precisely with what Jesus says according to the climax of the *Gospel of Thomas*: 'Behold, I will draw her [i.e. Mary Magdalene] in order to make her male, so that she also might be a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who makes herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven' (*Gos. Thom.* 114). The *Thomas* saying in turn goes back to an ancient conception of gender, according to which the female spiritual nature is defective (see also the Greek *Gospel of the Egyptians*).[12]

As in late antiquity, however, for most authors in the middle ages and the Reformation era the apocryphal Gospels are no longer known except as mere names. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas made a catalogue of extra-canonical Gospels, but it is entirely derived from St Jerome's work of nearly a millennium earlier.[13] Canon lists of biblical books often continued to append inventories of forbidden books, but there was rarely any danger of readers using such long-lost heretical texts. Many were itemized purely out of antiquarian interest.

In the early modern period, with the advent of printing, knowledge of the Christian apocrypha became more widespread. Oddly enough, the first issue of a collection of Christian apocrypha is appended to a posthumous edition, published by Michael

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Neander in 1567, of Martin Luther's *Small Catechism*.[14] This contains the *Protevangelium of James* and the apocryphal correspondence (from the middle ages) of Pontius Pilate with Tiberius, as well as various extracts from Jewish authors and from church fathers about Jesus. Where there is text of a Greek original, this appears on the left-hand page, with a Latin translation on the right. The editor's introductory letter gives a long list of apocryphal Gospels, almost all of which were lost to him. An exception is the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, to which he appends the words *quod adhuc* – 'which still survives'. Other collections followed, mostly following Neander's very closely, and which by today's standards would probably be judged as plagiarized.

The first volume to resemble a modern collection of Christian apocrypha was published in 1703 by the German scholar Johann Albert Fabricius (1668–1736) – with a subtitle describing the apocryphal literature as 'collected and castigated' in his book.[15] Alongside the original Greek texts and Latin translations of the *Protevangelium of James* and the other works already published by Neander, Fabricius included the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, as well as apocryphal epistles such as the purported correspondence between St Paul (*c.* 5–64 CE) and his contemporary the Roman philosopher Seneca (*c.* 4 BCE–65 CE) which dates from the fourth century. Fabricius' collection was also the first modern scholarly work to assemble lists of non-canonical sayings of Jesus found quoted in the church fathers, and his catalogue of apocryphal Gospels therefore contains collections of the material belonging to the Greek *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the *Gospel of the Ebionites* and the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*.

In the absence of new discoveries, the apocryphal publishing industry stagnated for the next couple of hundred years. This all changed at the end of the nineteenth century, when excavations in Egypt transformed our understanding of early Christian literature.

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NEW DISCOVERIES

The damp climate of Europe means that very few documents survive from Greece and Italy, the places we most readily associate with ancient classical literature. Public inscriptions on stone abound, as do curses and spells which were often inscribed on strips of metal. The same cannot be said for literary texts written on papyrus. A rare exception is a collection of papyri that are preserved from Herculaneum, which survived because they were baked and turned into almost pure carbon by the nearby eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 CE. We do, however, have an enormous quantity of both literary and administrative papyri from Egypt, where the climate is more conducive to their survival. Apocryphal Gospel material, like ancient tax documents and the earliest manuscript fragments of classical literature, is known primarily from there.

One of the first excavations of a new Gospel text was the unearthing of the *Gospel of Peter*, in a dig by the French Archaeological Mission in Cairo during the winter of 1886–7. One Cambridge scholar recorded his amazement at the event: 'We may expect anything, in the world of Christian letters, after such an astonishing discovery; if we do not realise our expectations, it will certainly be because, either at home or abroad, in labours philological or archaeological, we are wicked and slothful servants.'[16]

Neither diggers nor scholars were wicked or slothful, because the following decade witnessed the discovery of the most impressive collection of classical and Christian fragments ever found. This is the hoard of texts from a rubbish dump in the ancient Egyptian town of Oxyrhynchus, modern El-Behnesa. At the time of writing, eighty-four volumes containing nearly 5,000 manuscript fragments from Oxyrhynchus have been published, and this only scratches the surface of the surviving papyri, some scholars estimating that only about 1 per cent of the texts has yet been published. The scholars initially involved in sorting and editing the papyri could not believe their luck, with the very first season of excavation turning up treasures

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from the classical Greek poetess Sappho as well as apocryphal sayings of Jesus.

Grenfell and Hunt, the Oxford scholars publishing the finds, were so bowled over by the discovery of these sayings of Jesus that they commented, in Volume 1 of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri publication series: 'It is not very likely that we shall find another poem of Sappho, still less that we shall come across another page of the "Logia".'[17] Hence their remark several years later in 1904: 'By a curious stroke of good fortune our second excavations at Oxyrhynchus were, like the first, signalized by the discovery of a fragment of a collection of Sayings of Jesus.'[18] These particular logia, or sayings of Jesus, turned out to be from the *Gospel of Thomas*, and many other logia (as well as manuscripts of Sappho's poetry) have subsequently been discovered as well. In addition to these, dozens of manuscripts of the New Testament, and of the Greek Old Testament, have surfaced there. The Oxyrhynchus harvest of apocryphal Gospels (all in Greek) also includes a manuscript of the *Gospel of Mary*, a short fragment of the *Gospel of Peter* and various otherwise unknown Gospels translated in this volume with such unsensational titles as 'Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1224' or 'Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 4009'.

The three different fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* found at Oxyrhynchus were not clearly identified as parts of *Thomas*, or even as parts of the same work, until a complete manuscript of the text appeared. This came as part of another very important discovery of a cache of manuscripts in 1945–6, near the town of Nag Hammadi, approximately halfway between Cairo in the north and Lake Nasser in the south, in the eastern-central part of Egypt. Like the first Greek Oxyrhynchus fragment of *Thomas*, the manuscripts were in the form of codices, or bound books, rather than scrolls. Unlike the Oxyrhynchus texts mentioned, these Nag Hammadi books were written in Coptic, the hieroglyphic language of ancient Egypt transliterated using the Greek alphabet.

It is an ingrained part of the mythology of scholarship on the Nag Hammadi codices that an Egyptian peasant named Muhammad Ali discovered the codices in a jar while digging

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for *sabakh*, a kind of fertilizer, shortly after the end of the Second World War. Ali allegedly remembers the date with some accuracy because the find coincided with a momentous family event. Ali's father had worked as a night-watchman, and one night had killed an intruder. In revenge, Ali's father was shot dead the next day by a member of the intruder's family. In counter-reprisal, Ali and his brothers planned to murder their father's killer. Eventually, around the time of Coptic Christmas (7 January), Muhammad Ali and his brothers were told of the location of their target, killed him, cut out his heart and each ate a share. Ali's account is that the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices took place shortly before this blood feud. At least some of this story is questionable. Different tellings of the story have yielded different results. One scholar has noted that the height of the jar containing the manuscripts can range from 2 feet to 6 feet. Others have commented that finding the jar when digging in an area containing fertilizer is hard to imagine, given that papyrus would be unlikely to survive centuries of inundations of the Nile there. Whatever the truth about the discovery, however, there has never been any doubt about the genuine antiquity of the Nag Hammadi codices. Wherever they may have been found, dated letters reused in the binding of the manuscripts indicate that the codices go back to the fourth or fifth century CE.

Among the works preserved from Nag Hammadi are a number which have not captured the public imagination, perhaps because of their uninspiring or unintelligible names – such as the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, or the *Trimorphic Protennoia*. Others are very widely known. Undoubtedly the most famous is the *Gospel of Philip*, some of whose contents were mediated to a wide audience, in admittedly garbled form, through Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*. The *Gospel of Thomas* similarly has been important, especially to scholars who have tried – albeit unsuccessfully – to argue that it may preserve some of the sayings of Jesus in a more pristine form than do the canonical Gospels, or that it may contain some previously unknown sayings that go back to Jesus.

Probably found in a location near Nag Hammadi was the

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Gospel of Judas, although its precise find-spot is now unknown. What is known is a good deal of its recent history, and how before its publication in 2006 it passed through the hands of various dealers, some of whom broke it up into pieces to maximize profit from it. The manuscript spent some years in a bank vault in a town rejoicing in the name of Hicksville, on Long Island in New York State. One dealer even stored it for a time in a freezer, which did not have a salubrious effect on the papyrus. Because the text makes Judas a central character in the Gospel narrative and a confidant of Jesus, its publication caused a sensation in the press. The British *Mail on Sunday*, not without some overstatement, hailed it as the 'greatest archaeological discovery of all time', and a 'threat to 2,000 years of Christian teaching'.

Even since 2006 there have been more discoveries, including the identification by AnneMarie Luijendijk of the *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, a manuscript found in the Sackler Museum at Harvard University. A further Gospel or Gospel-like text from Oxyrhynchus has been published (Papyrus 5072). Perhaps the best known, which also hit the headlines of national newspapers, is a pseudo-discovery – that of the 'Gospel of Jesus' Wife'. A carefully contrived press release and a lengthy journal article in the *Harvard Theological Review* announced this as a genuine ancient Gospel. Shortly afterwards, however, a combination of technical scholarly analysis and brilliant investigative journalism showed that the text was a forgery: around the year 2010, a confidence trickster wrote on a piece of genuinely ancient papyrus some lines of Coptic which were largely based on a copy of the *Gospel of Thomas* on the internet. Unfortunately, the webpage happened to have a copying mistake in its transcription of *Thomas* – a mistake which the hapless author of the *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* reproduced.[19]

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THEOLOGY IN THE APOCRYPHAL GOSPELS

The *Gospel of Judas* and three of the Nag Hammadi Gospels are significant because they reflect two different, 'heretical' systems of thought. Both these theological worldviews were hotly discussed by Christian scholars in antiquity, and they still elicit interest from scholars today.

Sometimes apocryphal Gospels are generally labelled as 'Gnostic', which is in fact a narrower, more technical term applying to a particular school of thought sometimes called the 'classical Gnostic' or 'Sethian Gnostic' movement. Among the Gospels in this anthology, the *Gospel of Judas* and the *Gospel of the Egyptians* are relatively complete examples, and the Greek *Gospel of Philip* and that of *Eve* are fragmentary survivals of Gnostic Gospels. The Gnostics have always been known to us not just from the church fathers but also from the circle of Neo-Platonist philosophers around Plotinus in Rome in the third century CE. These philosophers, like the church fathers, embarked on an extensive anti-Gnostic project. One particularly zealous disciple of Plotinus, Amelius Gentilianus, composed a treatise against a single Gnostic work (*Zostrianus*), his refutation running to forty books or scrolls in length. Another disciple of this school, Porphyry of Tyre, summarized Gnostic teaching under the two headings: 'the creator of the world is evil' and 'the world is evil' – doctrines which were just as abhorrent to these Neo-Platonists as they were to Christians. Porphyry's two-part summary is naturally an abbreviation or simplification, but is useful nonetheless, and matches what we know from elsewhere. The *Gospel of Judas*, identified as a Gnostic Gospel by Irenaeus in the second century CE, depicts the creators and overlords of this world as demonic in the text that survives. In the other complete Gnostic Gospel translated in this volume, the Coptic *Gospel of the Egyptians*, the world is described as 'the image of night', and has a similar cast of demonic characters presiding over it. The

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lists of these sentinels of Chaos coincide across the various Gnostic works: 'Harmathoth, Galila, Iobel and Adonaios' (in the *Gospel of Judas*), 'Athoth, Harmas, Iobel and Adonaios' (in the Coptic *Gospel of the Egyptians*) and 'Athoth, Harmas, Galila, Iobel and Adonaios' (in the *Apocryphon of John*).

Long lists of higher heavenly beings are also a feature of the distinctive style of Gnostic theologizing. One of the alternative titles of the Coptic *Gospel of the Egyptians* is *The Holy Book of the 'Great Invisible Spirit'*, and this designation of the supreme divine figure as the Great Invisible Spirit is found frequently in other works with a similar theological outlook, such as *Zostrianus*, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and, again, the *Gospel of Judas*. The character 'Barbelo' also appears frequently as a kind of heavenly female consort for the Invisible Spirit.

These figures – divine and demonic alike – all constitute part of the Gnostic 'myth'. This myth typically begins with a principal, transcendent figure who generates or emanates additional deities, who in turn generate further heavenly figures. At some point in the sequence, there is a lapse in the process which means that evil creeps in. Sometimes a female deity, Sophia ('Wisdom'), decides to create on her own without male assistance. Sometimes it is just that, after a long sequence of emanations, the derivative divinities are so far removed from their ultimate source that malevolent deities spring up and, seeking to make an imitation of the higher heavenly echelons above, create their own inferior, evil world. This lower world is the world we currently inhabit. At this point, however, a higher deity sows spirit into this lower world, and this spiritual matter resides in the true Gnostic disciples. The process of history consists in the regathering of the spiritual matter back into the divine realm.

A similar, though slightly less stark myth is shared by another important group in early Christianity, the school of Valentinus, one of the most notorious heretics of the second century CE. The Valentinians were probably a kind of reform movement, seeking to reconcile parts of the Gnostic philosophy with a more Christian theological framework. They used the four canonical Gospels, but also – as noted above – produced two

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Gospels of their own which reflect their distinctive theological emphases.

The first of these texts, the *Gospel of Truth*, comes in Nag Hammadi Codex I, a volume which at one time was in the possession of the famed psychoanalyst Carl Jung. The *Gospel of Truth* was written around 150 CE, and – as already noted – has a close relationship to the *Gospel of Philip*. In the Valentinian theological systems of these two Gospels, creation of the material world was not part of the plan of the supreme divine Father: 'The world came into being by a mistake. For its creator wanted to make it imperishable and immortal, but failed, and did not manage what he had hoped' (*Gos. Phil.* 99). Because this was a presumptuous creation with no endorsement from the top, it was a cosmos mired in deficiency and ignorance. (In this the Valentinians differed both from more mainstream Christian views and also from the Gnostics who held an even more negative view of creator and creation.) As in more conventional forms of Christianity, Jesus, the Son of the divine Father, is the saviour figure, although in the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Truth* the salvation consists in the provision of plenitude or fulness (the solution to deficiency) and of knowledge or revelation (the solution to ignorance).

A further feature of the Valentinian school is a certain theological style, rooted especially in linguistic scholarship. For the *Gospel of Philip*, the word 'messiah' has a double meaning. The conventional sense is 'anointed', but there is also the less common, alternative meaning of 'measure' or 'measured', which would perhaps identify Jesus as the visible, comprehensible, 'measurable' revelation of the invisible, ineffable and immeasurable Father (logion 47). There is word-play in the naming of positive and negative wisdom, personified in the figure Sophia (Greek for wisdom). 'Echamoth' is Sophia, but 'Echmoth' is the negative, deadly Sophia (logion 39): Echamoth sounds like the Aramaic word for 'wisdom' (*hokmatha*), while Echmoth can be heard as the Aramaic for 'like death' (*eyk moth*). In the *Gospel of Truth*, the etymologizing is less playful: 'gospel' means 'the revelation of hope', because of the two components of the Greek-Coptic word *eu-angelion* – 'good' and 'announcement'

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(*Gos. Tr.* introduction). The explanation that the 'ointment' is 'the Father's mercy' (*Gos. Tr.* 28) may go back to a Greek pun on *elaion* ('oil', 'ointment') and *eleos* ('mercy').

A very common feature in apocryphal literature, especially of a Gnostic or Valentinian orientation, is the explanation of how to navigate one's way through demonic interrogation as one ascends to the higher spiritual realms after death (and perhaps in mystical experiences during the present life as well). Just as some Greeks thought it necessary to pay the ferryman Charon to take the dead across the rivers Styx and Acheron to Hades, similarly in Egypt it was thought that the 'Books of the Dead' would equip the dead person with the necessary spells to pass the respective doorkeepers to the afterlife. Apocryphal texts appear to be influenced in particular by Egyptian afterlife themes. Hence, the *Gospel of Thomas* (in logion 50) instructs the reader in how to answer questions about the disciple's true identity and place of origin, and much of the *Gospel of Mary* contains Jesus' explanation to Mary Magdalene of how her soul can overcome successive demonic obstacles. Egyptian myth is also influential in some texts' constructions of the heavenly world, as in the case of the 'Octads' or 'Ogdoads' in the Coptic *Gospel of Egyptians* (discussed further in the introduction to that text).

Not all apocryphal Gospels can be neatly sorted under a particular theological label. The *Gospel of Thomas* is, as far as we can tell, *sui generis*. Some have classified the *Gospel of Peter* as a 'Jewish-Christian' Gospel, but this is a problematic term, and the work is at the same time also highly *anti*-Jewish. The same Jewish-Christian label has also been applied to the *Gospel of the Hebrews* and the *Gospel of the Ebionites*, but they are both too fragmentary for us to be able to identify their theological profiles. (Some scholars also suppose the existence of a *Gospel of the Nazoreans* in addition to these two; others, whom I follow here, assume only two such 'Jewish Christian' Gospels.) Although we can come to some conclusions in assigning the apocryphal Gospels to different schools, there are, as always in ancient history, a number of loose ends.

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CURRENT STUDY

In addition to theological analysis, a great deal of scholarly work on apocryphal writings is taken up with basic questions of when and where they were written, questions often very difficult to answer precisely. Many ancient books (like, for example, the canonical Gospels) refer to historical events and place-names, and these allusions can be helpful in determining the origins of a work. A good deal of the most significant apocrypha, however, contain precious little. The *Gospel of Thomas* probably refers to the finality of the destruction of the Jerusalem temple which some relate to the aftermath of the failed Jewish revolt by Simon bar Kokhba against the Romans of 132–135 CE, but in the case of the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Gospel of Judas* there are really no references to external events except those of the life of Jesus. The only place names employed in the Gospels of *Judas* and *Thomas*, for example, are 'Judaea' and 'the world'. The authors are almost all unknown. Only Marcion and Tatian can be identified clearly as authors of substantial apocryphal Gospels, and no scholar imagines that any of the apocryphal Gospels are really written by Thomas, Judas, Peter or Mary.

Many of these texts therefore can only be dated by a combination of factors. First, there is carbon dating, which can calculate the age of the papyrus on which the text is written. While a papyrus plant is alive, the proportion of carbon-14 to carbon-12 in it – as in all living things – is constant, but when it dies, the unstable carbon-14 decays. When a piece of a papyrus manuscript is tested, scientific analysis measures how much of the carbon-14 has decayed: because the rate of decay is known, the time elapsed since the papyrus' harvesting can be calculated. There are nevertheless a number of disadvantages to carbon dating. It destroys some of the papyrus. It is also very expensive, and therefore only a very small number of ancient manuscripts have been dated this way. Of the apocryphal Gospels, only the *Gospel of Judas* and the so-called *Gospel of Jesus' Wife* have been carbon dated. *Judas* was dated to

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280 CE ± 60 years, and the *Jesus' Wife* papyrus was first dated, impossibly, to sometime between 404 BCE and 209 BCE because the sample was contaminated. (A subsequent carbon analysis was useful in establishing the date of the papyrus in the seventh or eighth centuries CE, but the dialect of Coptic in which the text was written was no longer in use by that time.) And, of course, carbon dating provides a time-frame only for the papyrus, not for the original composition.

The most effective way of dating a papyrus copy is by analysis of its handwriting. This has an important role, but is still fraught with difficulty. Coptic handwriting is difficult to date, as some copying styles can remain very constant over centuries. It is easier to establish the time-frame of Greek handwriting, but this cannot be fixed more securely than within a margin of about a century. Although the discipline is currently being set on a surer footing, scholars previously have come to wildly different conclusions about such matters. While one scholar dated the Oxyrhynchus fragments of the *Gospel of Thomas* to 100–150 CE, another considered 250–300 CE to be the best estimate.

Also very useful for dating an original composition are the literary relations between the text and other roughly contemporaneous writings. In the case of the *Gospel of Judas*, for example, were it not for Irenaeus' reference to it, we would only have the carbon dating to provide the latest possible date (i.e. *c.* 340 CE). Since Irenaeus refers to it in about 180 CE, we know that that is the upper limit before which it must have been written (the so-called *terminus ante quem*). We also know that the *Gospel of Judas* is familiar with the Gospel of Matthew, and probably also the book of Acts, which probably pushes the date of *Judas* out of the first century and into the second. This is confirmed by the presence of second-century Gnostic ideas like 'the aeon of Barbelo' and 'the Great Invisible Spirit'.

Debate continues, however, especially in the case of the *Gospel of Thomas*, which has received the most attention of all the apocrypha. Some have argued that *Thomas* is very early, perhaps even from roughly the same time as the canonical Gospels, and so might provide authentic new sayings of Jesus, or more original versions of sayings of Jesus known

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already from the canonical Gospels. This optimism has recently declined, as scholars have demonstrated now fairly conclusively that *Thomas* is a product of the second century and is already influenced by Matthew and Luke to a considerable degree.

Although scholars have been very sceptical of taking apocryphal Gospels as historical evidence for Jesus, there has been considerable interest in how such literature opens a window onto the times in the second and third centuries when much of it was composed. To take one example, we have always known that there was controversy in early Christianity about whether Jesus can really be classed as a human being. Statements as early as the New Testament Epistles of John (*c.* 80 CE) and the letters of Ignatius (*c.* 110 CE) strongly warn against those who take the view that Jesus did not really come in the flesh but – as Ignatius puts it – only appeared to do so. This side of the conversation is attested widely in the literature of the church fathers (and in the *Epistle of the Apostles* translated in this edition). With the discoveries of the late nineteenth century onwards, we now have the other side: texts like the *Gospel of Judas*, where Jesus refers to 'the man who carries him about', give voice to that other side. In other similar cases, we can identify clearly the differences between the two opposing viewpoints, or when one side has perhaps caricatured the other.

Scholars have also recently become more interested in what one author has labelled 'the second church', that is, Christianity in its popular forms, rather than as it is manifested in the literature of elite, educated theologians.[20] Some apocryphal Gospels probably reflect views or versions of Gospel stories assumed by ordinary Christians in antiquity even if such accounts were not approved of by church authorities. The doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity is reflected in the widely popular *Protevangelium of James*, written in the late second century, but only became official Catholic dogma at the Synod of Milan in 390 CE. Similarly, the apocrypha contain a number of the legends especially surrounding Jesus' birth, early life, trial and the 'harrowing of hell' – the idea that Jesus at or after his crucifixion went down to the underworld to redeem

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those who had believed in him before his coming to earth. These legends appear particularly in works which were very widely distributed – this is true of both the infancy Gospels and the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, which was very influential in medieval Europe, being translated into various vernacular languages including Old English. This popular legendary material consists largely of orthodox material designed to supplement the contents of the canonical Gospels.

The significance of the more esoteric Gospels, by contrast, lies in the evidence it provides for the diversity of early Christianity. Marcionites, Valentinians and Gnostics are all represented by Gospels in the collection here, as is the movement whose lodestar was the *Gospel of Thomas*. The apocryphal Gospels are important evidence for the views of these fringe movements. In addition to the distinctive teachings which they set out, they also respond to orthodox positions, and thereby reciprocate the criticism they had received from church fathers like Irenaeus.

PRESENTATION OF THE TRANSLATIONS

It may be helpful for the reader to understand some of the choices that have been made in the process of translating the works included in this volume. There is no attempt here at a standardized form for the different works. Indeed, the opposite is the case. Unlike in previous translations of the apocryphal Gospels, the aim here has rather been to give a sense of the literary register of the original. Hence the Greek of the *Protevangelium of James* is 'Bible-ese', so I have sought to render it in an English which has the same biblical resonances. By contrast, the *Gospel of Truth* is a highly sophisticated work which is written in the form of a philosophical treatise, and so demands a different style of translation.

One particular difficulty in the translation of Coptic is that the antecedents or referents of pronouns like 'he'/'she' and 'him'/'her' are often rather underdetermined. This can lead to some confusion, especially in complex texts like the *Gospel of Truth*. Where I think it is clear what the pronoun refers to, I

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have tried to express this in the translation. Often, however, there is considerable ambiguity and so I have attempted to retain this ambiguity in the translation.

It will also be apparent that in some of the translations the text is interrupted with ellipses [. . .]. This indicates that the manuscript is fragmentary and has broken off at this point. The reader should therefore beware of logically linking material that is separated by a [. . .], because some of the intervals are short and some are rather long. Sometimes, as in the case of the rather fragmentary *Gospel of Philip*, the reader will encounter a string of lacunae, where all that can be divined in the text is some kind of continuity of theme. In other places, however, the hole in the papyrus is brief, and there is little doubt about how to fill the gap.

Finally, especially in the dialogue, the translation in particular departs from a 'literal' approach. Ancient works often present dialogue mechanically in a 'X said . . . Y said . . . X said . . . Y said . . .' structure. This is partly because ancient manuscripts generally had no punctuation or spaces between words, so there is no other way to indicate speech or a change of speaker. Modern English literature, of course, has quotation marks and line-breaks at its disposal, and the translation here makes use of these rather than reproducing woodenly the word 'said'. All centred headings, and chapter, verse and logion numbers are modern additions not parts of the ancient texts.

NOTES

1. At the end of the second century, in addition to Irenaeus himself in Gaul in the west, the four-Gospel collection is taken for granted by Tertullian in modern Tunisia, Clement of Alexandria in Egypt and in a list of New Testament books from Rome.
2. This Greek term was so iconic that it was also borrowed by Latin, Syriac and Coptic.
3. Christoph Markschies, *Christian Theology and Its Institutions in the Early Roman Empire*, translated by Wayne Coppins (BMSEC, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), 21.
4. See some examples listed in D. R. Cartlidge and J. K. Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (London: Routledge, 2001), 79–80.

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5. Serapion of Antioch, quoted in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.12.6.
6. Jerome, *Letter to Laeta* 12.
7. Didymus, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 8.3–7.
8. Ambrose, *Exposition of the Gospel according to Luke*, 1.2 (*c.* 389 CE).
9. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25.6–7.
10. *Gelasian Decree* 5.3.
11. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: The Promised Land of Error*, translated by Barbara Bray (New York: Vintage Books, 1978).
12. See further the introduction to the translation of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*.
13. Thomas Aquinas, *Catena aurea on Matthew*, Preface.
14. Michael Neander, *Catechesis Martini Lutheri parua* . . . (Basileae: Per Ioannem Oporinum, 1567).
15. Johann Albert Fabricius, *Codex apocryphus Novi Testamenti, collectus, castigatus* (Hamburg: Benjamin Schiller, 1703).
16. J. Rendel Harris, *A Popular Account of the Newly-recovered Gospel of St. Peter* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), vi.
17. B. P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part I* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1898), vi.
18. B. P. Grenfell and A.S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri: Part I V* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1904), 1.
19. For the scholarly analysis, see *New Testament Studies* issue 61.3 (July 2015): https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/new-testament-studies; for the exposé of the forger, see Ariel Sabar, *Veritas: A Harvard Professor, A Con Man, and the Gospel of Jesus's Wife* (New York: Doubleday, 2020).
20. Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009).

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Further Reading

On the Manuscript Discoveries

Marvin Meyer, *The Gnostic Discoveries* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).
An account of the Nag Hammadi manuscript finds.

Peter Parsons, *The City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007).
A highly informative and brilliantly written account of the Oxyrhynchus discoveries.

Scholarly Introductions

Markus Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/ John Knox, 2017).

Hans-Joachim Klauck, *The Apocryphal Gospels: An Introduction* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003).
Both very helpful handbooks to non-canonical Gospel literature. Bockmuehl's is slightly clearer and more up to date, with lengthy discussion and very helpful bibliography for each individual work.

Translations of Other Apocryphal Literature

J. Keith Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
Covers a wide range of apocryphal material, including

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non-canonical epistles and apocalypses as well as a selection of Gospels.

J. Keith Elliott, *Synopsis of the Apocryphal Nativity and Infancy Narratives. Second Edition, Revised and Expanded* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).
A particularly helpful English translation of all the infancy material.

Marvin Meyer, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2007).
The most useful translation of the Nag Hammadi material, containing very helpful introductions, as well as including the Gospel of Judas and the Gospel of Mary.

Original-Language Texts

Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
Especially useful for its inclusion of the original language with facing translations, although it has a preference for narrative and sayings material similar in form to the canonical Jesus tradition, excluding works such as the Gospel of Truth.

Lance Jenott, ed., *The Gospel of Judas: Coptic Text, Translation, and Historical Interpretation of 'the Betrayer's Gospel'* (STAC 64; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).
The Coptic text of the Gospel of Judas, critically edited, with notes.

James M. Robinson, ed., *The Coptic Gnostic Library* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
Contains the apocryphal literature from Nag Hammadi (as well as the Gospel of Mary) in both Coptic and English.

Constantin von Tischendorf, ed., *Evangelia Apocrypha* (Leipzig: Mendelssohn,[2] 1876).
Editions of many of the legendary texts, freely available at www.archive.org

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Symbols

[. . .]	Indicates a lacuna in the manuscript
[Jesus]	Indicates the probable lost text of a lacuna
[p. 1]	Original manuscript page number
*	Indicates an accompanying comment in 'Notes'
†	Indicates a term explained in 'Times, Measurements and Currencies' (pp. 419–420)

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INFANCY GOSPELS



Jesus enlivens clay birds
St Martin's, Zillis, c. 1120

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1 The Protevangelium of James

(late second century CE)

INTRODUCTION

The Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome contains an image of Mary receiving the announcement of Jesus' coming while she is spinning scarlet thread for the veil of the temple. This motif, not a feature of the canonical Gospels, comes from the *Protevangelium of James'* depiction of Mary (*Prot.* 10). The *Protevangelium* was an immensely popular work in early and medieval Christianity. It survives in a great number of manuscripts and was translated into Latin, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, Slavonic and Arabic. The *Protevangelium*'s contents were also incorporated into other infancy legends, which indirectly extended its influence further.

The modern title 'Protevangelium', or 'first Gospel', alludes to the fact that this book's dramatic setting is earlier than any of the events in the four canonical Gospels. This work goes all the way back to before Mary's own birth, and so the births of Jesus and John the Baptist are the climax, rather than the beginning, of the story. The 'of James' in the title is derived from the end of the text, where there is a note on the circumstances in which James is purported to have composed the book: James, as the brother of Jesus, could be imagined to know the family history.

The *Protevangelium* is a work of some literary and theological sophistication, and its main doctrinal interest lies in Mary's *post partum* virginity. James and the other brothers and sisters of Jesus must therefore be his older step-siblings, children from Joseph's previous marriage. The reference to Joseph's son pulling

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along the pregnant Mary's donkey (*Prot.* 17) is probably a reference to James. Its literary points of interest include a vivid narrative, with variation of form: besides the narration there are extended poetic sections (e.g. chs. 3, 6) and Joseph's peculiar vision (ch. 18). The *Protevangelium*'s account of Jesus' birth runs counter to our traditional ideas of Jesus' birth in a stable. Here in the *Protevangelium* Mary gives birth to Jesus in a cave (ch. 19), and places him in a manger there. Jesus was quite commonly believed in the early church to have been born in a cave: Justin Martyr, for example, in the middle of the second century also recounts a similar story. Nor does this picture contradict the New Testament, which mentions the manger but not a stable.

The *Protevangelium of James* can be divided roughly into four parts: (i) the birth and childhood of Mary (chs. 1–10); (ii) Mary's pregnancy and Joseph's crisis (chs. 11–16); (iii) the journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus (chs. 17–21); and (iv) the concealment of John the Baptist and the murder of Zechariah (chs. 22–24). As noted, there is a coda at the end describing James' writing of the book (ch. 25). The *Protevangelium* probably dates to the latter part of the second century.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MARY *The mother of Jesus*
JOACHIM *Mary's father*
ANNA *Mary's mother*
JUTHINE *Anna's maidservant*
JAMES *Joseph's son, Mary's stepson*
JESUS
TWO MIDWIVES
SALOME *An acquaintance of the midwife*
ZECHARIAH *A priest*
ELIZABETH *Zechariah's wife, and a relative of Mary*
JOHN *John the Baptist, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth*
SAMUEL (I) *A priest*
HEROD *Herod the Great, King of the Jews*
SAMUEL (II) *Joseph's servant*

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ANNAS *A scribe, a Jewish official*
MAGI *Astrologers from the east who come to see Jesus*
SCRIBES *Authoritative experts in Jewish Law*
ELDERS *The Sanhedrin, or Jewish ruling council*

TRANSLATION

The Birth of Mary. The Revelation of James.

1. Joachim's distress

In the *History of the Twelve Tribes*, there is mention of a very rich man named Joachim. He would offer his gifts twice over to the Lord, thinking, 'The gift of my surplus can go to all the people, and the forgiveness offering will go to the Lord to atone for my sins.'

The great day of the Lord's festival came, and the sons of Israel were offering their gifts. A man from the tribe of Reuben stood in front of Joachim. 'It is not lawful for you to be first to offer your gifts,' the man said, 'because you have not raised up any offspring in Israel.'

Joachim was deeply distressed, and consulted the accounts of the twelve tribes of the people, thinking, 'I will check the twelve tribes of Israel to see if I am the only one not to have raised up offspring in Israel.' So he searched, and he found that all the righteous had raised up offspring in Israel. (He also remembered that the Lord God gave the patriarch Abraham a son, Isaac, at the very end of his life.) Joachim was sorely grieved, and did not return to his wife. Instead, he took himself off into the wilderness, pitched his tent there and fasted for forty days and forty nights, thinking, 'I will not go back either for food or drink until the Lord my God visits me. Prayer will be my food and drink.'

2. Anna's grief

His wife Anna had been wailing twice over and lamenting twice over, thinking, 'One lamentation for my widowhood, and one lamentation for my childlessness.'

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When the great day of the Lord's festival came, Juthine her maidservant spoke to her.

'How long must you demean yourself? The great day of the Lord has come, so you mustn't lament. Take this headband, which my mistress of work gave me. I cannot wear it, because I am your maidservant and it bears the royal seal.'

'Get away from me!' Anna said. 'I have not brought this on myself! It is the Lord God who has humbled me so deeply. Perhaps some shady character has given you this, and you have come to embroil me in your sin.'

'Why should I pray for you,' Juthine the maidservant said, 'since you haven't listened to what I've said? The Lord God has closed up your womb, so you cannot produce any fruit in Israel.'

Anna was sorely grieved. She took off her mourning clothes, washed her face and put on her bridal garments. And around the ninth hour,† she went down to her garden for a walk. Seeing a laurel-tree, she sat down under it, and after she had rested, she entreated the Lord.

'O God of my fathers, bless me and hear my prayer, just as you blessed Sarah's womb and gave her a son, Isaac.'

3. Anna's lamentation

Then Anna looked up to the sky and saw a sparrow's nest in the laurel-tree.

'Woe is me!' she thought to herself, lamenting within. 'Who gave birth to me? What kind of womb produced me? I was born to be a curse in the eyes of everyone and in the eyes of the sons of Israel! I have been insulted! I have been mocked! I have been excluded from the temple of the Lord my God!

'Woe is me! What do I resemble? Not the birds of heaven, because even the birds of heaven are fruitful in your sight, O Lord.

'Woe is me! What do I resemble? Not the brute beasts, because even the brute beasts are fruitful in your sight, O Lord.

'Woe is me! What do I resemble? Not the livestock of the soil, because even the livestock of the soil are fruitful in your sight, O Lord.

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'Woe is me! What do I resemble? Not these waters, because even these placid waters ripple, and their fish bless you, O Lord.

'Woe is me! What do I resemble? Not this soil, because even this soil produces its fruit in season and blesses you, O Lord.'

4. The angels' promise to Anna and Joachim

Then an angel of the Lord came and stood next to her.

'Anna, Anna,' he said, 'the Lord God has listened to your prayer. You will be with child and will give birth, and your child will be spoken of the whole world over.'

'As surely as the Lord God lives,' Anna said, 'if I do indeed give birth to a boy or girl, I will offer the babe as a gift to the Lord my God, to be a servant to him all the days of the child's life.'

Just then, two angels came. 'Behold, Joachim your husband is coming with his flocks,' they said. For an angel of the Lord had come down to Joachim, saying, 'Joachim, Joachim, the Lord God has listened to your prayer. Come down from there. Behold, your wife Anna has conceived!'

Immediately Joachim went down and called his shepherds.

'Bring me ten ewes, spotless and without blemish. Those ten ewes will be for the Lord. And bring me twelve tender calves. Those twelve calves will be for the priests and the council of elders. And bring a hundred goats, and those one hundred goats will be for the whole people.'

When Joachim arrived with his flocks, Anna was standing by the gate. When she saw Joachim coming with his flocks, she immediately ran to him and threw her arms around him.

'Now I know that the Lord God has blessed me greatly!' she said, 'For the widow is no more a widow, the barren has conceived!' On that first day, Joachim refreshed himself at his house.

5. The birth of Mary

On the following day Joachim brought his gifts, thinking, 'If the Lord God forgives me, may the high priest's crown* make it known to me.'

As Joachim was offering his gifts, he gazed upon the high

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