



THE HISTORY OF RESEARCH

The apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* presents a fascinating story: a description of the childhood of Jesus. The gospel, which covers about six to seven book pages, consists of a number of miracle accounts and some discourses: it begins with the five-year-old Jesus playing by a brook and ends with the well-known episode from the Gospel of Luke about Jesus at twelve discussing Scripture with the learned men in the temple. From these early years, we hear of Jesus' play with other children. He is said to perform nature wonders by making clay sparrows come alive and by carrying water in a cloak. We are told that he heals a young man after a deadly axe cut and his brother James from a poisonous snakebite. We hear of his father Joseph taking the boy to school three times and of conflicts with teachers as he outshines them all in knowledge. Indeed, Jesus' wisdom is so great that it must come from God himself.

But we also come to know of stranger features. When Jesus is instructed in the art of reading, he not only knows the alphabet, but also the hidden meaning of each letter—he interprets the A in inscrutable ways. When he is criticized, he becomes infuriated. On occasion, he ridicules others. And still more shocking: when a child destroys the pools Jesus has made and when another bumps into him, Jesus' curse causes both to die. An imprudent teacher meets the same fate when attempting to correct his precocious student.

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (IGT) is also special in that it is the only account of Jesus' childhood to have come down from early Christianity. To be sure, the gospels of Matthew and Luke, the apocryphal *Infancy Gospel of James* (*Protevangelium of James* [*Prot. Jas.*]), and a few ancient gospel fragments also have something to say about his early life.¹ But they almost exclusively focus on his birth and the events taking place immediately after. Thus, IGT is the only writing to tell about Jesus'

1. See appendix 7.

childhood, a period of his life for which we have elsewhere no reliable historical data. Regrettably, IGT too has no such data to offer us—its value is of another kind.

The tradition history and reception history of the gospel are as fascinating as troublesome to follow. IGT can, at least in core, be traced back to the middle of the second century CE within a Greek-speaking context.² It proved popular and was early translated into other languages, first into Latin and Syriac, and a little later into Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Irish, and Slavonic. It occurs in varying forms—in Greek there are at least four different variants: Ga, Gb, Gd, and Gs.³ The gospel is also found in combination with other legendary material, such as *Prot. Jas.* Judging from the geographical spread and the age of its preserved manuscripts (fifth–sixteenth centuries), IGT appears to have been in frequent use way up in the medieval period, when it was made an integral part of other gospels, such as the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew (Ps.-Mt.)*. Only around the time of the Reformation it seems gradually to have fallen into disuse.

It is no wonder that this infancy gospel has attracted interest, but also caused bewilderment and even disgust among present day readers. With its mixture of ingratiating and unsavory elements, particularly in its depiction of Jesus, with its frequent attribution to heretical groups, and with its unruly transmission process, IGT has become an object that scholarship has had great problems addressing. Often, it has been placed at some margin in early Christianity. Sometimes its Jesus has been accounted for by appealing to similar material in other religions. Frequently, the gospel has been viewed as banal and theologically uninteresting. For brief periods, it has been eagerly studied, but then fallen into near oblivion. And whereas much work has been done during the last decades to situate other apocryphal material within the framework of nascent Christianity, this has not been true of IGT. In modern analyses of the early Christians and their communities, history, faith, and theology, the gospel plays virtually no role.⁴ Seldom has it been

2. See Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 247–54, 265–69 for discussions about the language and time of composition. I agree with his conclusions (which concur with many other scholars).

3. See *ibid.*, 100.

4. IGT is either not mentioned or only very briefly commented on, see Hurtado, *Lord Jesus*, 449–51; Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 203–5; Young, *Cambridge History*,

taken into the family and to heart; instead, it has become a neglected outsider—an exposed orphan within the study of early Christianity.

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* does not deserve such a fate. The aim of this book is to contribute to a renewal of the debate on this gospel. I shall do so by analyses of its material, by offering interpretations on central issues, and eventually by presenting a fresh understanding of the story as a whole. Hopefully, this can advance the interest in IGT in general, but also create a deeper appreciation of the story itself and of its place in early Christianity.

Research Prior to 1950

A brief survey of IGT's research history is necessary so as to give a picture of current main issues and views and to prepare the ground for the analyses to follow.⁵ Modern research on IGT commenced in the late seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, with scholars devoted to the search for ancient manuscripts containing apocryphal gospel materials, and among them IGT. The gospel was edited by J. Fabricius as early as 1703, but the first ripe fruit of this quest was Johann C. Thilo's text-critical work *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* (1832), which became the basis for several translations into modern languages. His edition, however, was surpassed by Constantin von Tischendorf's *De evangeliorum apocryphorum origine et usu* (1851). It presented the text in four variants—the so-called Greek A and Greek B, and two Latin versions (Lv and Lt, see pp. 181–82). This work has in its second edition (1876) remained the standard text-critical edition so far.

Following Thilo's edition some discussion of IGT's origin arose. Usually, IGT was thought to be the *Gospel of Thomas* (*Gos. Thom.*) mentioned by early patristic sources (see p. 174, n. 30), and both in them and in modern times often considered to be of gnostic origin. Some scholars also argued for docetic or Manichean origins.⁶ It was generally held that IGT was originally much longer than what was extant, and that it had been cleaned of its heretical contents by orthodox

29–30; Burrus, *Ancient Christianity* (IGT scarcely mentioned); Moreschini and Norelli, *Greek and Latin Literature*, 151–52.

5. The research history in Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," 19–99, has been of great value here.

6. For a presentation and more references, see *ibid.*, 22–30.

redactors, a so-called “expurgation theory.” Progress in research was small, however, and during the fifty years after Tischendorf’s edition little significant work took place. Very often, IGT was denigrated as being banal and offensive in contents.⁷ At the beginning of the twentieth century, scholars influenced by the history-of-religion school pointed to Indian and Egyptian parallels.⁸ Similar views have been repeated and developed until recently.⁹

Some discussion also took place about the social setting of IGT. Michel Nicolas (1866) suggested that IGT was to be situated among common people.¹⁰ This was followed by Jean Variot (1878), who noted similarities between IGT and miracle accounts in hagiographical literature.¹¹ Such an origin among commoners was later supported by Arnold Meyer (1904), who saw in IGT a collection of folktales, and also credited it for its realistic and agreeable portrayal of everyday life.¹² Their insights, however, were by and large neglected until taken up again in recent years.¹³

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, research profited from discoveries of several new manuscripts, especially versions in Syriac, Georgian, Slavonic, and Ethiopic. Much energy was put into studying the complex relationships among the growing number of witnesses.¹⁴ Edgar Hennecke’s edition of NT apocrypha in German (1904) created new interest in the material.¹⁵ Here, Arnold Meyer questioned the expurgation theory, and held that IGT was originally a brief collection of folktales similar to Indian childhood stories about Buddha and Krishna, but that it was adopted by Gnostics and expanded with

7. See for example Cowper, *Apocryphal Gospels*, x–xi.

8. For example Resch, *Aussercanonische Paralleltexte*; Conrady, *Quelle der kanonischen Kindheitsgeschichte*.

9. Particularly by Thundy, *Buddha and Christ*.

10. Nicolas, *Études*, 295–99.

11. Variot, *Les Évangiles Apocryphes*, 214–15, 232–34.

12. Meyer, “Erzählung Des Thomas,” 65–66; Stählin, *Altchristliche Griechische Literatur*, 1196; also Enslin, “Along Highways and Byways,” 92.

13. By Chartrand-Burke in particular (see p. 10). But such ideas are also hinted at by Gero, “Infancy Gospel,” 47, 77; Elliott, *The Apocryphal Jesus*, 1–3.

14. For a presentation, see Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 41–43, 47–56. Cf. also the discussion in Peeters, “Introduction,” i–lix.

15. Hennecke, *Handbuch*; Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*.

speculative material, which later was excluded through orthodox revision.¹⁶ His views were supported by Walter Bauer (1909), Felix Haase (1913), and James Moffatt (1915–1918).¹⁷ Moffatt held that there was little in IGT to support docetic or gnostic origin.¹⁸ Against the common view that IGT was composed in Greek, Paul Peeters (1914) argued that it originated in a Syriac speaking setting.¹⁹

New manuscript findings from the 1920s on enabled further progress in the study of forms and variants of IGT.²⁰ Important was Armand Delatte's publication (1927) of a manuscript, A, which later became a main witness to variant Gd.²¹ The translation of the Georgian version (1956) and the publication of the Irish version (1958; 1964) were also of great benefit.²² Views of IGT as inferior and of gnostic origin, however, continued to dominate. Occasionally, the idea of Jewish-Christian origins was launched, but with little acclaim.²³

Research from the 1950 to 1990

An important turn in IGT research took place in 1956 with the publication of the *Gospel of Thomas*.²⁴ From this it became clear that IGT had often within modern scholarship been confused with this sayings gospel. A positive effect of this was that scholars began to question the expurgation theory and the idea of gnostic origin, and instead to search

16. Meyer, "Erzählung Des Thomas," 63–66.

17. Bauer, *Leben Jesu*, 87–100; Haase, *Literarkritische Untersuchungen*, 38–48; Moffatt, "Gospels," 485–88.

18. Moffatt, "Gospels."

19. Peeters, "Introduction."

20. Especially as concerns variant Gd, see Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," 58–60.

21. Delatte, "Évangile De L'enfance." Delatte used the term Greek C, but Voicu, "Verso," 26 and others have established Gd as its scholarly designation.

22. Garitte, "Fragment Géorgien," 511–20; Carney, "Two Old Irish Poems," 1–43; Carney, *Poems of Blathmac*. See also Herren and Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity*, 162–65.

23. Such views were advanced by Wilde and Schonfield, see Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," 61–62.

24. It first became accessible to scholars with the publication of Labib, *Coptic Gnostic Papyri*. For a brief survey of its finding and publication, see Robinson, "Nag Hammadi."

for other settings for the gospel. More negatively, interest in IGT waned as focus turned toward the newly discovered *Gos. Thom.* Consequently, research stagnated, with scholars often repeating old views about IGT, particularly as to its banal character and its heretical leanings. In various ways, the gnostic hypothesis has been repeated, sometimes uncritically, by scholars such as Philipp Vielhauer (1975), Alfred Schindler (1988), Walter Rebell (1992), Gerhard Schneider (1995), and—in greatest detail—by W. Baars and J. Helderma (1993; 1994).²⁵

Some progress in research was made in more limited areas. Aurelio de Santos Otero (1967) did significant work on IGT's Slavonic version (tenth century).²⁶ He produced a (much criticized) retro-version into Greek, claiming that this hypothetical Vorlage reflected more superior evidence to the original IGT than did the oldest Greek manuscripts. He also held that this Vorlage had more gnostic features than other variants of IGT. His arguments have been decisively refuted, though. In spite of its shortcomings, Santos Otero's work served to weaken the confidence in the Greek manuscripts as main evidence to the earliest text of IGT.²⁷ Thomas Rosén (1997) has continued the work on the Slavonic versions, as editor of a very important critical edition of this branch of the IGT tradition.²⁸

Valuable work was done on IGT's Latin (fifth century) and Ethiopic (no later than the seventh century) versions, showing that they were rooted in old Greek Vorlagen.²⁹ New findings of Greek manuscripts were also made, among them the sole witness to variant Gs, the Codex Sabaiticus 259 (H),³⁰ and also of an Arabic version.³¹ Some scholars also

25. Vielhauer, *Geschichte*, 676–77; Schindler, *Apokryphen*, 439; Rebell, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 134–35; Schneider, *Evangelia Infantiae*, 37–38; Baars and Helderma, “Neue Materialien (I),” 203–4; *ibid.*, “Neue Materialien (Fortsetz.),” 30–31.

26. Santos Otero, *Das kirchenslavische Evangelium*.

27. For a critique of Santos Otero, see Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 70–73; Esbroeck, “Review,” 261–63.

28. Rosén, *Slavonic Translation*.

29. Particularly by Arras and Rompay, “Manuscrits Éthiopiens,” 133–46; Philippart, “Fragments Palimpsestes,” 391–411; Rompay, “Ethiopische Versie,” 119–32.

30. Probably first in Esbroeck, “Review,” 262.

31. Cf. Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 88–89.

attempted to argue for the primacy of origin of the Greek variant Gb, but unconvincingly.³²

Whereas scholarship during this period emphasized transmission history and textual criticism, some scholars also discussed issues of form and content. Johannes B. Bauer (1964) suggested that the story originated from the need of non-intellectual early Christians to account for the “hidden years” of Jesus.³³ This was supported by Oscar Cullmann in his influential introduction to IGT in Wilhelm Schneemelcher’s *New Testament Apocrypha* (1991); here, Cullmann also concedes that IGT has some qualities of good storytelling.³⁴ Scholars such as Craig A. Evans (1992) renewed the search for Jewish parallels to IGT and pointed to similarities with accounts about famous rabbis.³⁵ And Albert Fuchs and Franz Weissengruber (1978) published a concordance of the variants Ga and Gb, crediting their authors with talents for storytelling.³⁶

The most important contribution in this period, however, was that by Stephen Gero (1971), who made a thorough form-critical analysis of IGT’s individual episodes. Gero rejected gnostic origin and favored Greek, not Syriac, as IGT’s original language. Importantly, he also argued in favor of an oral setting for the material and suggested that some of the episodes in IGT may once have been independent units.³⁷

Discussion of IGT’s provenance within this period usually favored Syrian and Palestinian, occasionally Asia Minor, origin.³⁸ A few scholars also argued that IGT incorporated traces of Christian or Jewish-Christian tensions with a Jewish milieu. For example, Stephen Wilson (1995) has held that the Jewish spectators’ concession in IGT of Jesus’ divinity reflects ongoing Jewish-Christian disputes.³⁹

32. Cf. Lowe, “*Ioudaioi*,” 76–78; Mirecki, “Infancy Gospel,” 191–201. Cf. also the detailed discussion in Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 78–80.

33. Bauer, “Entstehung Apokrypher Evangelien,” 269–70.

34. Cullmann, “Infancy Gospels,” 416–17, 442.

35. Evans, *Noncanonical Writings*, 234–36; also McNeil, “Jesus and the Alphabet,” 126–28.

36. Fuchs and Weissengruber, *Konkordanz*, 226, 247.

37. Gero, “Infancy Gospel,” 56–64. I return to his contributions on pp. 29, 38, and 39. I agree with Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 73 in that Gero (56 n. 1) is far too cautious in dating the writing down of IGT as late as the fifth century.

38. See the discussions in *ibid.*, 81–84, 269–76.

39. Wilson, *Related Strangers*, 84–85.

Central Contributions Since 1990

Especially significant contributions since 1990 have been made by Sever J. Voicu, Ronald F. Hock, Tony Chartrand-Burke, and—to an extent—Andries G. van Aarde.⁴⁰

Voicu (1991; 1997; 1998) has greatly improved on earlier work on IGT's transmission.⁴¹ He pointed out the primacy of IGT's shorter variant(s), which he sees reflected in the early versions (particularly the Ethiopic and the Syriac), thus further undermining the expurgation theory.⁴² By means of a careful synoptic comparison he has also shown that Codex Sabaiticus 259 (H) forms a distinctive variant, Gs, which represents an early stage in the Greek transmission, closer to the early versions than other Greek witnesses. He has, however, not fully integrated the Gs material in his synopsis and probably also overestimated the value of the Ethiopic version as witness to IGT's earliest text.⁴³

Hock (1995) has contributed to IGT research through an accessible text edition, giving a parallel Greek-English presentation of the material. The hybrid character of his main text—a combination of Tischendorf A and B, and Gd and others—is problematic, however.⁴⁴ More important than the text itself is Hock's introduction and commentaries, which in spite of their brevity represent considerable advances in the understanding of IGT's setting and contents. Hock develops the form-critical analysis of Gero, thus supporting the idea of IGT's narrative sophistication.⁴⁵ He also points out similarities in genre and content between IGT and other ancient literature, for example the Alexander Romance and emperor biographies, in which descriptions of the childhood of their heroes aim at foreshadowing their future greatness as adults. Thus, IGT reflects common patterns within ancient biography, also seen in other early Christian literature including the gospels of Matthew and Luke.⁴⁶

40. Elliott, *Synopsis* is also of some value as a tool for comparing variants, although it very much relies on the text edition of Tischendorf.

41. Voicu, "Histoire," 191–204; *ibid.*, "Notes," 119–32; *ibid.*, "Verso."

42. *Ibid.*, "Notes," 130–32.

43. Cf. the criticism in Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," 92–93. Some of Voicu's views are followed up by Schneider in his Greek-German edition of the infancy gospels, see Schneider, *Evangelia Infantiae*, 41–47.

44. Hock, *Infancy Gospels*.

45. *Ibid.*, 92–95.

46. *Ibid.*, 96–97.

According to Hock, features that had been thought to represent heretical leanings in IGT should instead be seen as mirroring general cultural conventions in late antiquity and early Christianity.⁴⁷

In his thesis “The Infancy Gospel of Thomas: The Text, its Origins, and its Transmission” (2001), Chartrand-Burke has developed the views of Voicu and Hock, but also made other important contributions to the study of IGT.⁴⁸ In his work, Chartrand-Burke presents an extensive chronological history of research.⁴⁹ He describes the Greek manuscripts and the versions, presents the Greek variants (Gs, Ga, Gb, Gd) in a synopsis with a detailed apparatus, gives an English translation of Gs with notes rendering translations of differing texts, and discusses in detail IGT’s development, variants, origins, transmission, and stemma. This makes his work the most complete presentation of IGT’s text and transmission.⁵⁰ In Chartrand-Burke’s opinion, Gs (H) is—together with the earliest versions (the Syriac and Latin)—the closest witness to the original text of IGT.⁵¹

Chartrand-Burke focuses in particular on IGT’s Christology and its depiction of Jesus as a child. He dismisses the idea of Jesus as a gnostic saviour figure and with it also the expurgation theory. Instead, he finds some resemblance to IGT’s Jesus in stories of ancient heroes and miracle workers; the closest parallels, however, are with ancient Israelite holy men such as the prophets Elijah and Elisha.⁵² In his view, the problematic features such as Jesus’ cursing can be explained on this basis, since such activity is also attributed to them.⁵³

Chartrand-Burke considers the life of children in antiquity and early Christianity as a background for IGT’s depiction of Jesus. In his

47. *Ibid.*, 98–99.

48. The thesis, which is of great value for further IGT research, is under revision and to be published; it is accessible online: <http://www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk3/ftp05/NQ63782.pdf>.

49. Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 10–99. The only other research history of any length is Gero, “Apocryphal Gospels,” 3969–96, esp. 3981–84. On the church Slavonic, see Rosén, *Slavonic Translation*, 17–38.

50. It will make Tischendorf’s edition finally obsolete and should be the requisite starting point for future study.

51. Chartrand-Burke, “Infancy Gospel,” 259–62; also *ibid.*, “Greek Manuscript Tradition,” 150–51.

52. *Ibid.*, “Infancy Gospel,” 305–11.

53. *Ibid.*, 309–10.

view, children's living conditions were very demanding, with little or no understanding of the special character of childhood. Children were valued for what they were to become: they were unfinished adults.⁵⁴ Accordingly, IGT's Jesus is an adult in disguise, and the gospel aims at showing, "following convention, that Jesus' character, and with it his abilities, was already apparent at birth."⁵⁵ IGT does not present Jesus as a real child in any way, but as an idealized child, as adults saw children.⁵⁶

Occasionally, Chartrand-Burke also touches on IGT's social setting, taking up again the ideas of Nicholas, Variot, and Meyer (p. 4). He places IGT within an early Christian "middle class" stratum, a mixed and broad group above the level of slaves, but below the very few belonging to the social elite.⁵⁷

Finally, van Aarde has launched an alternative to the idea of gnostic origin in his thesis "Die Kindheidsewangelie van Tomas as 'n heroïese mite van die God-kind Jesus in die konteks van die Ebionitiese vroeë Christendom" (2005).⁵⁸ In his opinion, IGT reflects, or is at least influenced by, Ebionite Christianity.⁵⁹ He also sees in IGT a presentation of Jesus in the form of a god-child myth.⁶⁰ In his view of Jesus as an adult

54. *Ibid.*, 321–61.

55. *Ibid.*, 316.

56. *Ibid.*, 366–403.

57. *Ibid.*, 363–64.

58. Van Aarde, "Kindheidsewangelie" (in Afrikaans). He has also presented his view in some articles, see Van Aarde, "Infancy Gospel"; "Griekse Manuskrip"; "Kindheidsewangelie van Tomas"; "Ebionite Tendencies."

59. Van Aarde builds his analysis on the manuscript S (Codex Sinaiticus Gr. 453), which belongs to variant Gb, see below (p. 16). He concedes that other manuscripts can be colored by gnostic thinking, but holds that this is not the case with Gr. 453, see *ibid.*, "Infancy Gospel," 832–35. He bases his view very much on IGT's prolog and argues that it should be read as if Thomas is writing to his "brothers" (i.e. Jewish Christians) in the diaspora, not to Christians among the Gentiles. Van Aarde's emphasis on the prolog and his reading of it is puzzling and little convincing (see "Kindheidsewangelie," 68–74, also 93–115). In my opinion, he has exaggerated the Jewish coloring of IGT; on this, see my chapter 8.

60. Van Aarde, "Infancy Gospel," 838–42; and "Kindheidsewangelie van Tomas," 477–84. His interpretation, in which he holds that IGT should be read as a myth, in a "tautegorical" and not allegorical, symbolic, or metaphorical way, is not convincing (Van Aarde, "Kindheidsewangelie van Tomas," esp. chaps. 5–6.) and very similar to earlier (allegorical) attempts at reading theological or ecclesial conflicts out of IGT's story; on this, see chap. 10 below.

in disguise, van Aarde is—despite some nuances—in agreement with Hock and Chartrand-Burke.⁶¹

Main Challenges for IGT Research

Much IGT research has until recently been seriously misguided, primarily due to its association with Gnosticism. In addition, scholarship has been long preoccupied with, and hampered by, problems related to IGT's transmission. As a consequence, study of its actual contents has been nearly neglected. In fact, research on IGT must in several respects start anew.⁶² With the recent works of Voicu, Hock, and Chartrand-Burke, however, important advances have been made both as concerns IGT's transmission and socio-cultural and theological setting, which will facilitate future study of IGT.

In this book I address a variety of issues regarding IGT. Some have already been discussed within research, whereas others are in need of being raised. On some points my views concur with earlier insights, particularly those of Hock and Chartrand-Burke. On others I bring in radically new perspectives, and also present ideas which should evoke controversy.

It is also my contention that some of the issues that have been seen as obstacles to the study of IGT, can in fact help deepen our understanding of it. Instead of causing scholarly bewilderment and even despair, they can be turned to advantage: by taking fresh points of departure as concerns perspectives and methods new avenues to the story and setting of IGT can be opened up.

The main challenges in IGT research can be related to four areas in particular. The four—which are closely interconnected—are:

1. *Transmission history.* Although the understanding of the relations among the different manuscripts, variants, and versions of IGT has improved, especially with the contributions of Voicu and Chartrand-Burke, the great variation among them has not been sufficiently accounted for. Why the great differences in form, style, and even contents of the texts? And why is it so difficult to produce a clear stemma for the preserved manuscripts?

61. Van Aarde, "Infancy Gospel," 843–46.

62. I here agree with the verdict of Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," 100.

2. *Story*. Due to IGT's complex transmission history and the charges of heresy and lack of narrative sophistication, limited energy has been spent on the story itself. How is the story constructed? What is it about? Except for the form-critical analyses of Gero and Hock, and a brief narrative analysis by Chartrand-Burke, IGT has in fact not been made subject to thorough analysis, neither as concerns structure nor individual elements.⁶³ The need for such an undertaking is overripe.
3. *Theological and ideological profile*. Except for Chartrand-Burke's and van Aarde's discussions of IGT's Christology, neither the various aspects of IGT's theology nor its theology as a whole have been systematically treated. Most such analyses have been fragmentary, often merely indicating possible gnostic or history-of-religion parallels to expressions and concepts in the story. Also, very little has been done to advance our understanding of IGT's broader ideological horizon, such as the social and cultural values reflected or its perceptions of childhood and of gender.⁶⁴
4. *Social setting and audience*. Except for those who have considered IGT heretical, very few scholars have addressed and discussed its social setting and audience. Some have loosely assumed the addressees to have been common people. Far more needs to be said about issues such as these, however. Can such scrutiny for example tell us something new about IGT's place within early Christianity? And can it also be that a new appreciation of IGT may somehow enrich our understanding of early Christianity itself?

Approaches in This Book

These are the basic questions addressed in the chapters below. The procedure will be as follows: first, the transmission of IGT will be treated as a starting point for the study of the material (chap. 2). An analysis of its story follows (chap. 3). Third, IGT's narrative world will be presented, with a view to social and cultural aspects (chaps. 4–5). Then I shall dis-

63. For this seminal narrative analysis, see *ibid.*, 262–64. There are also many valuable observations in the notes in Hock, *Infancy Gospels*.

64. With the exception of the discussion of ideas about children and childhood in Chartrand-Burke, "Infancy Gospel," chaps. 6–8.

cuss issues related to IGT's Jesus, viz., the depiction of him as a child and a boy, highlighting questions about childhood and gender (chaps. 6–7). The subsequent chapters analyze IGT's theology, based on exegetical readings of the story, so as to draw up its theological and ideological profile (chaps. 8–10). Then the issue of audience is addressed, with the aim of investigating the social and cultural context within which IGT can have belonged (chaps. 11–12). Finally, I reflect on some implications following from my study and its findings (chap. 13). Since many of the passages in IGT will be dealt with from different perspectives, some repetition and overlap will occur throughout the chapters.

The appendixes provide material in support of reading and for further study. The text and translation of IGT in appendixes 1 and 2 can be used for reference as one works through each chapter. Appendix 3 lists titles and short titles of individual episodes; these will be employed throughout the book. Verse numbering follows Chartrand-Burke's text of IGT.

One caveat is needed from the outset: since IGT is so difficult to situate in time and place, we will have to relate to its ideological, cultural, and social context in rather general terms. Thus, I shall sometimes be sweeping in my descriptions of ancient perceptions on gender, childhood, values, and the like. My use of the designation "late antiquity" will also be fairly open: unless otherwise stated, it will cover the period from IGT's time of origin, mid-second century CE and up to the fifth–sixth centuries.