

Foreword¹

— Christoph Markschies —

THOSE OF US IN Europe who work with Christian apocrypha will appreciate this opportunity to reach for a volume documenting the current state of the question in the United States and Canada. In Europe, research on the apocrypha has been closely tied to the annual meetings of the *Association pour l'étude de la littérature apocryphe chrétienne* (AELAC), which until 2013 took place in Dole (Burgundy). Only few European scholars regularly travel to the great annual meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature in the United States or—as the unforgettable and as-kind-as-he-was-wise François Bovon (1938–2013) did—actually move to North America to teach and conduct research there. The lower intensity of transatlantic scholarly co-operation—at least in comparison to that of European countries—can be explained not only by the significant geographical distance, but also by the fact that European research on apocrypha is often published in French, a language which is not widely studied at a sufficient level everywhere (including, admittedly, Europe). Barely one tenth of the members of AELAC live and work in the U.S. and Canada; consequently, the contents of a volume such as the present one put together by Tony Burke should not only attract the interest of North American scholars, but also provide their counterparts in Europe with an excellent overview of the current research on apocrypha taking place in the United States and Canada.

Papers included in this volume can be roughly divided into four groups: first, there are a number of attempts to describe the characteristics and the history of American research on apocrypha; second, some representative examples of American research are provided, along with; third, American perspectives on European (and German) research on apocrypha; and fourth, papers which—as is to be expected with a subject as complex as

1. I would like to thank Slavomír Čéplö for translating this Foreword into English.

this one—grapple with the term “apocrypha” and its definition. Based on this division of the contents of this volume, I will now proceed with a few remarks on the individual papers.

First, the papers that aim to track the history of Christian apocrypha research in the United States and Canada. Some time ago, Elizabeth A. Clark demonstrated how European and especially German scholars and research paradigms helped promote the concept of Early Church History in nineteenth-century America.² One could continue her narrative of history well into the twentieth century, and I will only need to mention Edgar J. Goodspeed in Chicago who studied with Aldof Harnack in 1898 in Berlin, and later met Theodor Nöldecke in Tübingen.³ It is hardly surprising, therefore, that it was not just the Harvard School that was influenced by German scholars or scholars who spent their formative years in Germany (as Brent Landau shows); the same and yet a fundamentally different story could be written for the Divinity School in Chicago, and several other institutions. However, it must be made clear that the German and Swiss scholars Helmut Koester and François Bovon repeatedly pointed out to what extent their move to America changed the fundamental paradigms of their research (and the same is, incidentally, true of Hans Dieter Betz in Chicago). One must also not underestimate the “strong local influences” of the department tradition in Harvard that Landau describes. This is made clear by, say, a comparison between scholars influenced by Bultmann from both sides of the Atlantic. Koester, as well as his Bonn colleague Wilhelm Schneemelcher,⁴ were influenced by Rudolf Bultmann’s form criticism—Koester obtained his doctorate in Marburg, the last place where Bultmann was academically active,⁵ Schneemelcher was exposed to Bultmann’s most significant works during his studies in 1920s Berlin.⁶ But while Schneemelcher—who was active in the German Protestant Church (for example in its ecumenical dialogue with the Greek Orthodox Church)⁷ all of his life—was influenced by Karl Barth’s idea of church theology and therefore considered apocrypha to be relevant only for the history of Christian piety, but not for the history of Christian theology, Koester (together with James Robinson who

2. Clark, *Founding the Fathers*.

3. Cobb and Jennings, *Biography*, 1–2.

4. For more on Schneemelcher, see below, p. xv.

5. Koester, *Synoptische Überlieferung*.

6. Bultmann, *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition*.

7. See the Foreword by the Patriarch of Constantinople Demetrios I (1972–1991), in Damaskinos Papandreou et al., eds., *Oecumenica et Patristica*, 7–9.

was also originally influenced by Karl Barth)⁸ placed emphasis elsewhere. In other words, Koester drifted much further away from the paradigms of his German studies than Schneemelcher ever could. Maybe we could even speak anachronistically of a more conservative and a more radical reception of Rudolf Bultmann's theological as well as historical concerns. It is, after all, well-known that Bultmann himself did not do any work on Christian apocrypha, not even in his book reviews.⁹ Consequently, his students and others he influenced could not follow in his footsteps—for example, when it comes to the question of the so-called historical Jesus. Additionally, as Stephen J. Patterson makes clear in his contribution, certain viewpoints held by classical German scholarly figures could have survived even without direct contact and tight routes of transmission—so, in some parts of the American search for the “historical Jesus,” the idea of a “plain Jesus” was given precedence over any considerations of the age of tradition, which also assumes the central position in the message of the New Testament in Harnack's lectures on “The Essence of Christianity.”¹⁰ Patterson, and F. Stanley Jones with him, shows the effect this has on the reconstruction of the first decades of Christianity when such approaches shaped by the New Testament (or rather by a certain view of Jesus, whether derived from the *Gospel of Thomas* or the Synoptics) are abandoned and all texts are considered worthy and equal. The paper by Pierluigi Piovanelli makes it abundantly clear that for some time now (and perhaps increasingly so), scholars from other European countries than Germany have exercised influence over the debate in the United States and Canada, and the same can be said about the situation in Germany: the influence of research from the United States and Canada is increasing constantly. His enthusiastic defense of *longue durée* and objections to limiting Christian apocrypha research to texts from antiquity show how far has the discussion drifted from its original connection to the study of the New Testament: all versions of apocryphal texts, even the medieval ones, are of interest. Later editors are to be taken seriously and should never be considered mere reworkers of an original text sanctified by virtue of its age. Piovanelli also makes another excellent point by drawing attention to scholars with double qualifications, such as Bovon, who studied both ancient Christianity of the early imperial era as well as Byzantine Christianity and was thus able—just to give one example—to study the growth of the Stephen tradition.¹¹ Without such double qualifications,

8. Robinson, “Theological Autobiography.”

9. Bultmann, *Theologie als Kritik*.

10. Osthövener, “Adolf von Harnack als Systematiker”; Osthövener, “Nachwort.”

11. Bovon, “Dossier on Stephen”; Bovon and Bouvier, “La translation des reliques.”

the study of the complex history of versions of many Christian apocrypha could only have been possible in teams. To the fields listed by Piovaneli, we must, naturally, add the knowledge of the languages of the Christian Orient which are indispensable to those who wish to study the material in its full scope or, alternatively, invoke wider cooperation such as that practiced by the AELAC through the many volumes of the series *Corpus Christianorum*.

A number of papers address the notoriously complicated issue of defining what “apocrypha” are and how to tell them apart from hagiographic or the so-called gnostic writings. Even a cursory look at the history of such attempts reveals¹² that there is no logically precise delineation of this material written down somewhere in the Platonic realm of ideas that waits to be correctly read. Any and all attempts at definition are based on conventions and pragmatic compromises and therefore must be tested in scholarly practice. The debate of the recent decades has only succeeded in showing that some of these attempts lead nowhere, as is the case with, say, those older definitions which presuppose such an early existence of a Christian biblical canon and that the term “apocrypha” is merely a label for those noncanonical writings that aspired to become a part of the canon, but were not accepted as such by the majority (or “orthodox”) church. This definition of “apocrypha” which seeks to establish a dialectical relationship of such writings to the biblical canon (and which has become quite commonplace) is especially useless when extending the definition of the term to writings beyond antiquity and recognizing that many relevant textual traditions are only extant in medieval recensions (as Pierluigi Piovaneli rightly points out). But even the classic sociological delineation of apocrypha as mere witnesses to “popular piety” employed as a matter of course by Schneemelcher (who, in turn, follows Lietzmann)¹³ can only be applied to a fraction of the material. Nicola Denzey Lewis is right to point to the oft-cited origin of the so-called apocryphal or gnostic literature in an anti-intellectual (or at least only partially educated) milieu or even as a part of folk religion, where in fact such an assessment is more likely to be a later legacy of a heresiologically-determined prejudice against both textual contexts. In fact, the vast majority of the so-called Christian gnostic texts (including, but not limited to, those found in Nag Hammadi) belong *per definitionem* to collections of Christian apocrypha. Often there are only pragmatic reasons—of ostensibly economic nature—that motivate publishers and booksellers to exclude Nag Hammadi texts from editions of Christian apocrypha. Additionally, Denzey Lewis has shown elsewhere that the unity of the Nag Hammadi texts, appar-

12. Markschiefs, “Haupteinleitung,” 104–14.

13. *Ibid.*, 75–80.

ently constructed on the basis of their relationship as a single archeological artifact, is not as solid as it would seem upon first glance.¹⁴ And with that, any reason to treat and edit this corpus separately disappears.

For a European scholar working with Christian apocrypha, seeing European research traditions through the (critical) eye of an American-based colleague is naturally particularly interesting and the paper by Jean-Michel Roessli offers a number of fascinating insights. Roessli wonders why the field is so strongly focused on the two thick volumes assembled by a Hamburg secondary school teacher¹⁵ named Johann Albert Fabricius. The reason for that is most likely the wide dissemination of these volumes which can be easily found in used books stores even today.¹⁶ Roessli cites this focus on a baroque anthology as a mere example of how heavily the conflicts of the past three centuries weigh on European research. And so he also wonders why, when compiling collections of translations of early Christian apocrypha, Wilhelm Schneemelcher followed Edgar Hennecke and Christoph Marschies followed Wilhelm Schneemelcher. The truth in these cases, however, is slightly more complicated: one might say that the editors felt bound to follow in the tradition of their predecessors and did so also because their predecessors left them the *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* (first published in 1904¹⁷) as a sort of inheritance. Inheritance binds. However, it does not bind the inheritors to slavishly continue the work of their predecessors. Consider the latest edition which came out in 2012 where the break with tradition is more than obvious: the title of the collection is *Antike christliche Apokryphen* (“Ancient Christian Apocrypha”) because a large number of texts emerged at a time when there did not exist (at least in some areas under the influence of the “orthodox” church) any generally-recognized New Testament canon and so calling such writings “New Testament Apocrypha” would be absurd. The new title also serves to indicate agreement with certain common basic principles of the AELAC, which were expressed also in the critical review of one of Schneemelcher’s editions by Éric Junod.¹⁸ To put it bluntly: the new title of the new Schneemelcher edition recognizes that Junod is right and Schneemelcher wrong. The only, but seemingly decisive, point where Marschies maintained the classic architec-

14. Denzey Lewis and Blount, “Rethinking the Origins.”

15. Though, in fact, the “secondary school” was something between a secondary school of our times and a university: a *Gymnasium illustre*.

16. Marschies, “Haupteinleitung,” 11.

17. Hennecke, *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*.

18. Junod, “Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament: Une appellation erronée et une collection artificielle”; see also “Apocryphes du Nouveau Testament ou apocryphes chrétiens anciens?”

ture of Hennecke's and Schneemelcher's work is the form-critical structure based on the canonical New Testament writings: gospels, acts, epistles, and apocalypses. This is, incidentally, also the structure employed by Fabricius, who, however, organized his volume on Old Testament Pseudepigrapha strictly alphabetically by biblical figures. The approach adopted by Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter in *Antike christliche Apokryphen* where apocryphal writings are ordered by form or genre should be understood in the same pragmatic terms. While Wilhelm Schneemelcher defended this arrangement of texts with a statement of research principles arguing that this form-critical structure is the crucial insight of German New Testament scholarship in the twentieth century,¹⁹ the motivation for holding on to this arrangement until today is now purely pragmatic: a chronological arrangement of the texts would be extremely speculative since their dating is either controversial or it is, considering the fluidity of the repeatedly reworked material, outright impossible. The alternative, an alphabetical arrangement, would mix modern literary titles, manuscript abbreviations, and other titles often haphazardly selected from a host of titles extant in manuscript witnesses in a motley ensemble which would perhaps be appropriate for a loose series titled "Some More Apocrypha," but certainly does not seem fitting for a selection of the most important ancient and late antique texts comprising several thousand pages. The same applies here: there is nothing hiding behind the arrangement (any more) except for practical considerations which are in any case set aside in the planned subsequent volumes on biographical tradition and also in other places. After all, unlike "New Testament Apocrypha," the label "Ancient Christian Apocrypha" includes not only the apocryphal acts, but also various other forms of biographical tradition, such as *vitae* or testaments. Jean-Michel Roessli is naturally perfectly right when he says that the history of research on Christian apocrypha before Fabricius has been examined only cursorily²⁰ and that European scholarship [is] burdened by the past, at least in the sense that what is perceived as revolutionary in recent scholarship still runs within established tracks that are connected to certain normative traditions. Interestingly, when one looks at the work of American or Canadian scholars, it is obvious that research on Christian apocrypha is still too tied to the canonical writings, as clearly seen in the paper by Stephen J. Patterson. Even if it is true that for at least some apocryphal writings the relationship to the canonical writings or figures or

19. As said in a conversation on the occasion of the transfer of publishing responsibilities to Markschies, summer 1994 in Bad Honnef near Bonn.

20. So for example Markschies, "Hauptleitungung," 91–95, including more detailed comments on Michael Neander.

genres is their primary *raison d'être*, apocryphal writings as such must be treated and studied separately from canonical writings.

And finally, a number of papers in this volume focus on individual apocryphal writings and by doing so demonstrate the vigor of American and Canadian research. It is somewhat surprising, however, that most of these studies chose to employ a comparatively classic approach to the material. More often than not, new research paradigms can barely be seen on the horizon rather than applied to apocryphal texts. Lee Martin McDonald goes beyond summarizing his work on the formation of the biblical canon by extending it to the study of the material aspect of modes of transmission. As such, exploration of the material culture of the antique world and its relationship to the history of the formation of its scripture canon is a fascinating and promising avenue of research²¹ that I would like to see discussed in much more detail in the future. Surprisingly, there is only one paper (by Kristian S. Heal) on the subject of Digital Humanities, which can be found at the end of the volume and focuses on a single (but admittedly characteristic) example. It is, after all, immediately obvious that this is an area where much needs to be done for the so-called apocryphal literature: the existing corpora, such as the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, contain texts drawn from the now-obsolete nineteenth-century compilations edited by Tischendorf, Lipsius/Bonnet and others. Heal's paper describes an edition of the *Syriac History of Joseph* prepared for the Oxford-BYU Syriac Digital Corpus using the Classical Text Editor developed by the Wiener Akademie der Wissenschaften. But it is perhaps a common task of American and European apocrypha research (and not just a challenge related to certain specific texts) to shift their focus away from books to the digital presentation of the fruits of their work. This applies especially to critical editions, since newly-discovered manuscripts can be easily converted to a digital edition and digitalized photographs of the manuscript can be linked with the edition or transliteration. Hardcopy publications can even be linked to digital editions, as is the case with Peter Schäfer's latest edition of the *Toledot Yeshu*.²² It is desirable to engage with leading experts in the field of Digital Humanities in a discussion about whether a digital corpus of apocryphal literature (with appropriate links to other corpora) could and should be built. This fluid literature, which mostly exists in various translations and editions and thus constitutes a perfect example of "living literature,"²³ is especially

21. I myself have attempted to draw conclusions about the *Sitz im Leben* of the so-called apocryphal gospels from their material aspect, in Markschies, "Was wissen wir über den *Sitz im Leben*?"

22. Meerson and Schäfer, eds., *Toledot Yeshu*.

23. Markschies, "Haupteinleitung," 9–10.

amenable to digital presentation: with a push of a button, one can focus on a single version in a synoptic presentation, but one can also step back and see the text in the multitude of its recensions and editions. The digital medium helps to avoid especially the type of pseudocanonization typical of the nineteenth-century editions, which artificially filtered out certain texts from a rich and varied current of transmission. They thus created compiled texts, texts which had never been attested, texts that are the product of the philological fantasy of a modern editor or rather their desperate attempt to control a nearly unmanageable abundance of witnesses and versions—a problem that modern technology may be better equipped to handle.²⁴

But this introduction should certainly not end with a note of this excellent volume's shortcomings, even if those shortcomings are in fact a roadmap to a mighty task. I hope that these lines are but an opening salvo of a renewed and close transatlantic cooperation in the field of Christian apocrypha research which seeks to build on the work begun in the twentieth-century by European scholars such as Helmut Koester and François Bovon, as well as Bultmann's student James M. Robinson, but also to critically evaluate and transform it for the needs of a changed research landscape. The papers in this volume which critically reflect upon American research are—or at least will be, once European scholars undergo such self-reflection—an excellent point from which to start anew and work together. In that sense, Tony Burke and Brent Landau should be congratulated and thanked for their efforts to organize the York Christian Apocrypha Symposium and publish the expanded proceedings in this volume.

24. Some fundamental observations can be found as early as Ritter, *Stemmatierungsversuche zum Corpus Dionysiacum Areopagiticum*.