

EARLY APOCRYPHAL NON-GOSPEL LITERATURE
AND THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

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Introduction

A range of apocryphal literature is potentially informative regarding the text of the Greek New Testament. The latest major edition of these apocryphal documents in English translation organizes this diffuse body of literature by genre. These include: apocryphal Gospels, apocryphal Acts, apocryphal Epistles, and apocryphal Apocalypses.¹ However, a closer examination of this literature makes clear that only a limited number of texts is relevant for a study of the Greek text of the New Testament, especially if one is examining the Greek text as it developed in the second and third centuries as this paper is. This paper began as a study of all of the apocryphal literature written during the second and third centuries, including apocryphal Gospels, as well as apocryphal Acts, Epistles and Apocalypses.² However, the material as a whole proved too long for that project, and so the material on the Gospels is being published separately. This paper examines the non-Gospel apocryphal documents of that period before the rise of the major codexes in the fourth century. Much of the literature falls outside these temporal parameters, some of it being written quite late. Other apocryphal texts thought to be early are only known indirectly through reference or quotation by other, later

1. J.K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), whose information is drawn upon, especially for dates, general background and bibliography. See also Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens* (Université de Paris IV Paris-Sorbonne Série 'Papyrologie', 1; Paris: La Sorbonne, 1976).

2. See Stanley E. Porter, 'Early Apocryphal Gospels and the New Testament Text', in Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger (eds.), *The Early Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 350-69. I acknowledge quoting some of the material in this paper, especially in the introduction and conclusion, from that other paper.

authors. Still others of these texts are not in Greek, but in a variety of other languages, the most frequent being Latin, Coptic or Syriac, thus compromising their use in analysis of the Greek text. Others of these apocryphal texts do not significantly reflect any New Testament book, and so provide at best only incidental reference to the Greek New Testament. Finally, there are texts that meet all of the requisite criteria that I have noted above regarding date and Greek language, but simply do not quote the Greek New Testament. By far the majority of apocryphal literature is simply not germane to this particular exercise of textual exploration, and does not provide much promise of apocryphal literature informing our knowledge of the text of the Greek New Testament. However, there is still some apocryphal literature—even if the quantity is much smaller than one might desire—that can be drawn upon to inform our understanding.

*The Greek New Testament in the
Early Apocryphal Non-Gospel Literature*

In this section, I present those apocryphal non-Gospel documents dated to the second to the third centuries that offer citational evidence of the Greek New Testament. This material falls into two categories—apocryphal Acts and apocryphal Apocalypses. There is no apocryphal Epistle that is either early enough or in Greek that is to be considered in the discussion.

Before I undertake this close examination, a word needs to be said about the texts and how they are presented. The quality of the texts involved varies considerably, depending upon the number of manuscripts available, their date and condition and the extent of text readable (comments on the individual manuscript traditions are made below). The major task of this exercise is to provide evidence of the state of the Greek text of the New Testament in these apocryphal documents, and so the minimal unit of examination is usually groups of words, not single words, and certainly not individual letters.³

Apocryphal Acts

There are three apocryphal Acts that cite the Greek New Testament. Despite the length of these apocryphal documents and their clear attempts

3. I have explored these issues earlier in Stanley E. Porter, 'The Greek Apocryphal Gospels Papyri: The Need for a Critical Edition', in Bärbel Kramer *et al.* (eds.), *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Berlin, 13.-19.8.1995* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997), pp. 795-803.

to reflect biblical people and events, the actual citations of the Greek New Testament are few.

Acts of John.⁴ The *Acts of John*, a fictional account of John's travels in Asia Minor without any clear dependence upon the canonical Acts of the Apostles, is generally considered to date from the second century (a portion with biblical citations exists only in Latin). The Greek text, however, is found in manuscripts from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries, except for some possible earlier evidence in other writers or documents, such as one papyrus from the fourth century (P.Oxy. VI 850).

There is one passage, *Acts of John* 22, where Mt. 7.7//Lk. 11.9 is cited:

αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν.

The context is where John, in Ephesus, prays to Christ and cites these words. The wording may be formulaic or traditional.

Acts of Paul.⁵ The *Acts of Paul* has a complex textual history. Its earliest attestation is in a number of Church Fathers, although the three works that make up what is now called the *Acts of Paul* were originally seen to be separate works: *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the *Martyrdom of Paul*, and *3 Corinthians* (the Coptic P.Heidelberg manuscript has portions of all three, and so points to their unity). The *Acts of Paul* is thought to be a second- or third-century text, based upon the discovery of the P.Hamburg 1 manuscript, which dates to the third or fourth century, and several other papyrus fragments that date to the third to fifth centuries.⁶ In 1959, the

4. I use the text in Richard Adelbert Lipsius and Maximilian Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Hermann Mendelssohn, 1891–1903), II.1, pp. 151–216. Information on the *Acts of John* is from Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 303–307; Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of John* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995).

5. I use the texts in Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, I, pp. 235–72 (*Acts of Paul and Thecla*); C. Schmidt and W. Schubart, Πράξεις Παύλου: *Acta Pauli nach dem Papyrus der Hamburger Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1936), pp. 22–72 (online) (P.Hamburg 1); and M. Testuz, *Papyrus Bodmer X–XII* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1959) (online) (*3 Corinthians*). For information on the *Acts of Paul*, see Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 350–60 and various essays in Jan N. Bremmer (ed.), *The Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1996), esp. Pál Herczeg, 'New Testament Parallels to the *Acta Pauli* Documents', pp. 142–49, who provides examples considered below (pp. 144–45).

6. P.Mich. 3788 (third or fourth century); P.Mich. 1317, P.Berol. 13893, P.Ant.

only Greek manuscript of *3 Corinthians* was published (P.Bodmer X), dated to the third century. Before discovery of these papyri, the editions relied upon manuscripts dated to the tenth century or later.

There are a number of identified parallels between the *Acts of Paul* and the text of the Greek New Testament. The number of direct quotations, however, is significantly less. I divide them here into three groups, those in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, in P.Hamburg 1 (*Acts of Paul in Ephesus*) and in *3 Corinthians*.

There are two places where the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* cites the New Testament. There are now numerous (over 40) manuscripts of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*. There are also a number of allusions,⁷ much suggestive language⁸ and instances where apparently common phrases are cited.⁹

5 and GNT: μακάριοι οἱ καθαροὶ τῆ καρδίᾳ, ὅτι αὐτοὶ τὸν θεὸν ὄψονται (Mt. 5.8)

6 and GNT: μακάριοι οἱ ἐλεήμονες, ὅτι αὐτοὶ ἐλεηθήσονται (Mt. 5.7)

There are two possible citations of the text of the Greek New Testament in the *Acts of Paul in Ephesus* (P.Hamburg 1), although neither is a certain instance. There are also a number of instances of use of New Testament words.

P.Ham. 1.1: [κατα]καύσι ὑμᾶς πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ; GNT: κατακαύσι πυρὶ ἀσβέστῳ (Matt. 3.12)

P.Ham. 1.2: ἐν ᾧ [δε]ῖ σωθῆναι; GNT: ἐν ᾧ δεῖ σωθῆναι ἡμᾶς (Acts 4.12)

Third Corinthians has a number of suggestive instances of especially

1.13 (all fourth century); P.Oxy. XIII 1602 (fourth or fifth century); P.Oxy. I 6 (fifth century).

7. For example, *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 5 and 1 Cor. 7.29 concerning wives.

8. For example, *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 37 (ἡ δὲ αἰτία τῆς ἐπιγραφῆς) and Mk 15.26 (ἡ ἐπιγραφή τῆς αἰτίας); *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 37 and 2 Thess. 1.7 with θλιβομένοις ἄνεσις/ν.

9. For example, *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 24 reads: ὁ ποιήσας τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, as does Acts 4.24. This phrase is also found in 2 Kgs 19.15, so it is difficult to show that this is a citation of the New Testament. *Martyrdom of Paul* 7 ends with: ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. ἀμήν, but is found in the middle of 1 Tim. 1.7. A similar doxology ends *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 45 and *Acts of Paul and Thecla* manuscript G, indicating a doxological form, rather than a citation, even if the author knew the canonical writings.

Pauline language,¹⁰ as might be expected, but very few direct quotations of the Greek text. The one possible (though questionable) example is in 1:

ὁ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ; GNT: Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] (Eph. 3.1; cf. Phlm. 1)

However, this quotation is used in a different place in the structure of the letter.

The *Acts of Paul* shows little dependence upon the text of the Greek New Testament, although at those places where it does cite the text it does so fairly faithfully.

*Acts of Peter.*¹¹ The *Acts of Peter* dates from the late second century but its two major (partial—they contain only the martyrdom of Peter) Greek manuscripts were written from the ninth and tenth to eleventh centuries (there is a papyrus fragment from the fourth century, P.Oxy. VI 849, and a Latin manuscript from the sixth to seventh century, probably translation of an earlier Greek version).

There are three possible passages that cite the Greek New Testament.

37(8): ἀποδιδόντα ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὰς πράξεις αὐτοῦ; GNT: ἀποδώσει ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τὴν πράξιν αὐτοῦ (Mt. 16.27)

39(10): ἃ οὔτε ὀφθαλμὸς εἶδεν, οὔτε οὖς ἤκουσεν, οὔτε ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη; GNT: ἃ ὀφθαλμὸς οὐκ εἶδεν καὶ οὖς οὐκ ἤκουσεν καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίαν ἀνθρώπου οὐκ ἀνέβη (1 Cor. 2.9, partially quoting Isa. 64.4)

40(11): ἄφετε τοὺς νεκροὺς θάπτεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἰδίων νεκρῶν; GNT: ἄφες τοὺς νεκροὺς θάψαι τοὺς ἑαυτῶν νεκρούς (Mt. 8.22; cf. Lk. 9.59), in which the *Acts of Peter* has a loosely similar passive voice version of Mt. 8.22 and Lk. 9.59.

The *Acts of Peter* has relatively few quotations of the Greek New Testament, and they appear to be dependent upon it, with only minor variations for contextual reasons.

10. For example, 3 *Corinthians* 35: τὰ στίγματα ἐν τῷ σώματί μου, and Gal. 6.17: τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου. This may be a quotation.

11. I use the text in Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, I, pp. 78-103. For information on the *Acts of Peter*, see Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 390-92.

Apocryphal Apocalypses

There is one possible apocryphal Apocalypse early enough to provide information regarding the text of the Greek New Testament.

Apocalypse of Peter.¹² The *Apocalypse of Peter* was well known in the early church and cited by some of the Church Fathers. It is dated to around 100 to 150 CE. Although the complete text is only found in Ethiopic, there are a number of Greek fragments, one of which was found along with the *Gospel of Peter* at Akhmim (P.Cair. 10759). The *Apocalypse of Peter* is full of allusions to the New Testament, and sometimes uses wording similar to the Greek New Testament.¹³ However, the Greek New Testament itself is only cited once in the *Apocalypse of Peter*.

25: ὁ θεός, δικαία σου ἡ κρίσις; GNT: δικαία αἱ κρίσεις σου (Rev. 16.7; cf. Rev. 19.2 with 'his' rather than 'your')

Conclusion

There are several observations to make regarding the text of the Greek New Testament in the apocryphal non-Gospel literature. (1) The evidence for the Greek New Testament in the apocryphal non-Gospel literature is not as great as one might expect, and this includes the apocryphal Acts, Epistles (for which there is no text early enough or in Greek for consideration) and Apocalypses. There are numerous works that cite the text of the New Testament very little, with some not quoting it at all.

(2) The Acts and apocalyptic apocryphal literature is relatively sparse in its use of the Greek New Testament, and is virtually nothing compared to

12. I use the text of the *Apocalypse of Peter* in Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas (eds.), *Das Petrus-evangelium und die Petrusapokalypse: Die griechischen Fragmente mit deutscher und englischer Übersetzung* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), pp. 104-17. The *editio princeps* is M.U. Bouriant, 'Fragments du texte grec du livre d'Énoch et de quelques écrits attribués à Saint Pierre', in Edouard Naville *et al.* (eds.), *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire* 9.1 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1892), pp. 137-42, 142-47 (142-47); cf. A. Lods, 'L'Évangile et l'Apocalypse de Pierre: Le texte grec du livre d'Énoch', in *Mémoires publiés par les membres de la Mission Archéologique Française au Caire* 9.3 (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1893), pp. 216-24, 224-28 (224-28). I use the information on the *Apocalypse of Peter* in Elliott, *Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 593-95.

13. See J. Armitage Robinson and Montague Rhodes James, *The Gospel according to Peter, and the Revelation of Peter* (London: Clay & Sons, 1892), pp. 89-93.

that of the apocryphal Gospels.¹⁴ In the several instances where there is enough evidence, this points toward the apocryphal Acts and Apocalypse directly using the text of the Greek New Testament, often quoting it virtually word for word, and simply making contextual adaptations. (3) The evidence from the apocryphal non-Gospel literature is the same as that for the apocryphal Gospels—in other words, that the text of the Greek New Testament was relatively well established and fixed by the time of the second and third centuries. In those places where there are indications of transmissional changes, the vast majority of these changes indicate that the apocryphal literature has drawn upon the canonical texts (even in the apocryphal Gospels).

14. See Porter, 'Early Apocryphal Gospels'.