
J. Keith Elliott, Professor of New Testament Textual Criticism at the University of Leeds, is well known for the significant work he has done in the area of Textual Criticism as well as with the Apocryphal Writings of the New Testament. In 1993 he published a revision and new translation of the collection of apocryphal texts that was published by M.R. James in 1924: *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M.R. James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press). In this current publication he uses his scholarly expertise and insight to explore the Nativity and Infancy Narratives among Apocryphal Christian Literature with the intent of producing a synopsis of these narratives.

In recent decades there has been a growing interest in Apocryphal Christian Writings. Research into these texts has also proliferated. A publication of this nature is indeed most welcome as it provides a very accessible way of seeing one dimension of these Apocryphal writings, namely a focus on the Nativity and Infancy Narratives. This work began as a project initiated by the present reviewer and Dr. J.H. Petzer in South Africa, but was shelved when we left South Africa. J.K. Elliott revived this project at the request of Koninklijke Brill (p. vii).

Elliott begins his study with a brief, but very important Introduction (p. ix-xix) in which he sets out clearly how he will proceed, what texts he will use and why. He follows the “parameters set by the texts included in Geerard’s chapter ‘Apocrypha de Nativitate et de Infantia’” (p. x). (See M. Geerard, *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti* [Turnhout, 1992], 25-42.) In addition to these texts, Elliott also included one text from Papyrus Cairensis 10735 and three Irish texts that have recently been published in a critical edition (see M. McNamara et al. [eds.], *Apocrypha Hiberniae I: Evangelia Infantiæ. Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 13* [Turnhout, 2001]).

One of the main challenges facing anyone working on these Apocryphal Nativity and Infancy Narratives is the very confusing state of these ancient texts. Elliott succeeds extremely well in forging a path through the intricacies of the different texts and manuscripts that are available. In this introduction, he gives a comprehensive survey of the different texts that he has followed, examined and consulted. It is a remarkable survey of all this literature—well worth the price of this book for this overview alone.

Elliott demonstrates a good use of critical editions of the texts wherever possible. His aim in this publication is to produce an English Language Synopsis of Christian Apocrypha dealing with the Nativity Narratives and the Childhood of Jesus. He sets forth his purpose very succinctly: “The aim in giving an English language synopsis is to enable the broader differences and developments to emerge from a comparative study of the parallels” (p. xi). No doubt there are scholars on the one hand who would want an examination of all the variations within the one tradition while other scholars on the other hand would want an examination of the relationships among the different traditions themselves, as Elliott himself notes (p. xi). However, Elliott’s aim dictated where he placed his focus. As noted above, his purpose was to draw the wider picture by producing an overall presentation of the all encompassing “differences and develop-
ments” (p. xi) when all the traditions were viewed alongside each other. He would not have been able to accomplish this aim had he attempted to include in this study the detailed examination of all the minutiae required of a critical edition that examined the divergences and the dependence both within and among the different traditions. In other words, the broader picture would have been lost in the attention given to the minutiae of the critical apparatus. One would not see the forest for the trees! The choices and decisions that Elliott made in setting the parameters for his study were both necessary and consistently applied.

A word needs to be said about the use of the term *Synopsis* in this publication. Usually the term is associated with the production of a work that places similar texts beside each other in parallel columns so that similarities and differences among the various texts could be seen immediately on the one page. Elliott, however, organized this synopsis around a common topic or category where whole narrative passages from different traditions and texts follow each other sequentially. While this is perhaps not the best visual way for viewing the similarities and differences, it is practical since Elliott is operating with thirteen different texts. Such a number of texts are difficult to set in parallel columns.

The main part of this work consists in the synopsis itself (pp. 1-170). The texts on which Elliott bases his synopsis are the following: (1) the Biblical account of Matthew 1-2; (2) the Biblical account of Luke 1-2; (3) the *Protevangelium of James*; (4) the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*; (5) the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (or *Liber de ortu beatae Mariae et infantia Salvatoris*); (6) *Arundel 404* (or *Liber de infantia Salvatoris*); (7) the *Gospel of the Birth of Mary* (or the *Libellus de nativitate sanctae Mariae*); (8) the *History of Joseph the Carpenter*; (9) *Papyrus Cairensis 10735*; (10) the *Arabic Infancy Narrative*; (11) the *Irish Versified Narrative of Infancy Thomas*; (12) *Leabhar Breac*; (13) *Liber Flavus Fergusiorum*.

Elliott notes that some other texts could have been considered (p. xix) but observes that he had to be selective out of concern for the size of the publication. It is a pity, however, that he was unable to incorporate the *Armenian Infancy Gospel*. This work probably derived from a Syriac original and would have thrown more light upon traditions developing within the Syrian church and would demonstrate similarities and differences with the *Protevangelium of James* and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, two texts that had been translated into Syriac and became very popular in the Syrian Church.

Elliott divides his material into ten sections which he identifies as the main episodes in the narratives. Each of these sections is further divided into subsections that draw attention to specific elements in the narration of the episode. The ten sections that he finds as the fundamental structure of the Apocryphal Nativity and Infancy Narratives are the following: (1) Mary’s Birth and Upbringing; (2) the Annunciation; (3) Mary Visits Elizabeth; (4) Mary’s Pregnancy and its Explanation; (5) the Birth of Jesus; (6) the Adoration of Jesus after his Birth; (7) the Presentation in the Temple; (8) the Magi; (9) the Slaying of the Infants and the Flight to Egypt; (10) Jesus as a Child.

At the beginning of each section, Elliott provides a summary of the contents of the texts where he points out the elements occurring in each narrative. This is a very useful summary of the extent of the narrative appearing in each one of the texts. A helpful