Rediscovering the Apocryphal Continent: New Perspectives on Early Christian and Late Antique Apocryphal Texts and Traditions

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Entering the Mainstream:  
Twenty-five Years of Research on the Christian Apocrypha*

Tony Burke

In 1988 James H. Charlesworth published his article “Research on the New Testament Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha.”¹ The article features a comprehensive bibliography on the Christian Apocrypha (CA) – condensed from his 1987 volume for the American Theological Library Association² – and a discussion of pressing issues in the study of the literature. In a brief overview of previous research, Charlesworth divides scholarship on the CA into four phases. The last of these phases began in 1965 and is marked by a tendency to evaluate the texts critically as evidence (alongside the canonical gospels) for early forms of Christianity. Twenty-five years have elapsed since Charlesworth’s work, and there have been great developments in the study of the CA in this period. The time is right, then, to look back at the past two-and-a-half decades of scholarship in the field, to celebrate its achievements, reflect on its setbacks, and consider what directions it might take in the years to come.

Among the significant developments of recent years are to be counted the broadening of criteria for the selection of texts in CA collections, the publication of new manuscripts of both known and newly-discovered works, the increased interest in the CA among the wider public, and the preliminary efforts at using the Internet to make the texts and new scholarship on the texts available to the wider public. Noncanonical Christian texts have never been so popular, but popularity is no barometer for quality of work. Among the challenges facing the study of the CA today is the gulf that exists between the truly excellent work of specialists on the CA and the discussions of the literature found in works by non-specialists, both scholarly and non-scholarly. Narrowing that gulf will lead

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* This essay was prepared for the Ottawa Apocrypha Workshop in 2006. It appears here in revised form to reflect developments in the field over the intervening years.


to a greater understanding of the CA for all those who are intrigued by these fascinating texts.

1. Defining “Christian Apocrypha”

Charleworth’s identification of the fourth, and arguably still ongoing, phase of CA research is indisputably generalized – not all scholars view the CA as valuable texts for the study of early Christianity. The past several years in particular have seen a backlash from conservative scholars over the efficacy of using these texts to reconstruct early Christian history, particularly for recovering the life and teachings of Jesus. Also in contention is the traditional term “New Testament Apocrypha” and its utility for describing and delineating noncanonical Christian literature.

The origin of the term “New Testament Apocrypha” as a corpus of literature defined in relation to the canon has been credited to Johann Albert Fabricius and his seminal anthology, *Codex Apocryphus Novi Testamenti* (1703; 17192). This definition endured into the twentieth century, influencing the contents of CA collections, including Edgar Hennecke and Wilhelm Schneemelcher’s influential 1959–1964 third edition of the *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*. But in 1971, when a group of Swiss and French scholars met to discuss the possibility of a new French translation of CA, it became apparent that the traditional definition of “New Testament Apocrypha” would be an obstacle in promoting thoughtful study of the literature.4 Ten years later this group of scholars formed the Association pour l’étude de la littérature apocryphe chrétienne (AELAC) and began the work of the group with a critique on the limitations placed on Christian apocryphal literature by the term “New Testament Apocrypha.” The principal voices in the discussion were Éric Junod and Jean-Claude Picard who called for an expansion of the CA corpus to include: 1) texts composed after the fourth century and, 2) texts written by Christians but focused on Old Testament figures and events.5 In response to Junod’s concerns, Schneemelcher revised his definition

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for the fifth edition of the *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen* in 1987–1989, but not to the AELAC’s satisfaction – the edition still neglects later texts and Old Testament Pseudepigrapha written by Christians. Willy Rordorf, in support of Junod and Picard, has suggested completely abandoning the term “New Testament Apocrypha” and replacing it with “anonymous or pseudepigraphical, extra-biblical Christian literature.” Junod, however, has resigned himself to keeping the adjective “apocryphal” but eliminating “New Testament” to form the new term “Écrits apocryphes chrétiens” (Christian Apocryphal Writings).

Participants in the AELAC have taken seriously this redefining of the CA corpus. Scholarship published under the aegis of the group, including the journal *Apocrypha* and the *Écrits apocryphes chrétiens* volumes published in the Pléiade series, has brought needed attention to later Christian texts (e.g., the *Dormition/Transitus of Mary*) and opened up questions about the supposed Jewish origins of several Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (e.g., *Lives of the Prophets*). In addition, severing the literature from the New Testament – in content, genre, and time period – has encouraged the examination of noncanonical texts for their own sake as valid and fascinating expressions of early Christian belief and not merely as texts that aid in understanding the origins of the New Testament.

Jean-Daniel Dubois, in his 2001 overview of the history of the AELAC, states that the debate on defining the CA appears now to have lost its urgency, but popular editions and studies of the CA continue to use the canon to establish the parameters of their work. And, continuing the discussion, one AELAC-affiliated scholar, Pierluigi Piovanelli, advocates widening the scope of the field even further to embrace all Christian Apocrypha, including examples as recent as Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of the Christ* and L. H. Dowling’s *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ*. Charlesworth, for his part, took great pains to separate “authentic

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7 Rordorf, “Terra Incognita,” 146.


apocrypha” from “forgeries” such as the Letter of Lentulus (and even the Secret Gospel of Mark); yet, as Piovanelli argues, the only distinction between these two groups of texts is temporal and is based, again, on using the New Testament to define the corpus. The debate over the limits of the CA may have lost its urgency but, for some, the debate is far from settled.

Attitudes toward the CA differ in the United States, where the majority of scholarly and non-scholarly attention is lavished upon those apocryphal texts believed to be important for recovering the life and teachings of Jesus. Helmut Koester, James Robinson, John Dominic Crossan, Elaine Pagels, and Bart Ehrman are leading representatives of such an approach. Critic Darrell L. Bock has dubbed these scholars the “new school” (because they present a “new vision” of Christian origins based on “new texts”) and characterizes their work as seeking to prove there were “competing and alternative Christianities with no real orthodoxy present in [the] early period.”11 Though the scholars Bock names hardly agree on the usefulness of the earliest CA texts (for example, Ehrman and Crossan are diametrically opposed on the value of the Gospel of Peter), they are in agreement that certain non-canonical texts are equally as likely as canonical texts to preserve early traditions about Jesus. The most well-known example of such an approach is Crossan’s The Historical Jesus.12 Here, Crossan includes an assortment of non-canonical texts in his list of independent sources for Jesus traditions; the more often a tradition is found in independent sources, Crossan claims, the more likely it is to be authentic. Alas, Crossan is selective about which texts he includes in his study – i.e., he focuses on sayings, thereby neglecting narratives; therefore, sayings gospels, such as the Gospel of Thomas or the Dialogue of the Savior, receive much attention, but story-cycles, such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, are ignored.

gines,” les méthodes du doute, et la conversation contemporaine entre disciplines (ed. S. C. Mi-


11 D. L. Bock, The Missing Gospels: Unearthing the Truth Behind Alternative Christianities (Nashville, Tenn. 2006), xxv. Bock’s book, while useful for understanding objections to the scholarship of the “new school,” is rather uncritical in its use of the primary sources (for one, the “missing gospels” he disparages include the Letter to Rheginos and the Valentinian Exposition, which, while useful for understanding gnostic thought, are not CA texts); also, it is inadequate in its use of secondary sources (he draws heavily on general introductions to the CA rather than on the broad range of scholarship that they try, but often fail, to condense), and so polemical that he characterizes the New Testament authors unjustifiably as theologicially consistent with each other and CA authors as merely “people associating themselves with Christianity” (8, emphasis mine). For other criticisms of this “new school,” see M. J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., Jesus Under Fire (Grand Rapids, Mich. 1995); P. Jenkins, The Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way (Oxford 2001); B. Witherington III, The Gospel Code: Novel Claims About Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Da Vinci (Downers Grove, Ill. 2004); idem, What Have They Done with Jesus? Beyond Strange Theories and Bad History – Why We Can Trust the Bible (San Francisco 2006); J. P. Burgess, “Going Creedless: Alternative Christianities,” ChrCent 121 (2004): 24–28.

The spirit of the “new school” also infuses the work of Robert Funk’s Jesus Seminar. Two of the Seminar’s publications particularly promote the view that certain CA texts are of equal value to the canonical gospels for recovering Jesus traditions: the *Five Gospels*, which features the *Gospel of Thomas* alongside the canonical gospels for determining the authenticity of sayings of Jesus, and *The Complete Gospels*, which again places noncanonical texts alongside canonical texts and even boasts that it includes “everything you need to empower your own search for the historical Jesus.”

The work of both the “new school” and its critics is transparently polemical. The “new school” scholars read twenty-first century liberal values (egalitarianism, relativism) into first-century Christianity, while their critics fight the public’s attraction to the “new school’s” views by rehashing the arguments of the heresiologists to reestablish the view of an early, consistent orthodoxy. In the “new school’s” defense, Bock and his ilk tend to misrepresent and exaggerate their opponents’ claims; indeed, Witherington goes so far as to demonize his adversaries in stating, “these scholars, though bright and sincere, are not merely wrong; they are misled. They are oblivious to the fact that they are being led down this path by the powers of darkness.” But the “new school” scholars do tend to reach hasty conclusions from the evidence and advance (perhaps intentionally) provocative claims. A reasonable middle ground between the two extremes can be achieved and likely the majority of New Testament scholars would place themselves within it.

Nevertheless, the interests of the “new school” have been and continue to be influential in North America. Bart Ehrman’s best-selling New Testament text-

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16 These words, attributed to John Dominic Crossan, are emblazoned upon the book’s front cover.


book and companion reader feature the early CA prominently,19 bringing these
texts to the attention of thousands of college and university students every school
year. Ehrman’s other CA-related books20 add to the promotion of the literature.
And other U.S. scholars, such as Nicola Denzey Lewis and Crossan, are regularly
called upon by the media when the CA come to the public’s attention. While all
of this interest is welcome and beneficial to the field, it narrows the perception
of why these texts are important, making them useful merely as sources for re-
constructing the teachings of Jesus. Once mined for golden nuggets of perceived
early Jesus traditions, the texts are routinely discarded. And once a scholar per-
suasively refutes claims for the texts’ independence from the canonical gospels,
the texts return to being considered heretical nonsense.21 In U.S. scholarship
there is little effort to understand and appreciate the texts in their entirety as
legitimate products of Christian imagination, as the AELAC advocates. Little
wonder, then, that the editions and commentaries by the AELAC members rarely
cover the same texts as those of their North American counterparts. Unfortu-
nately, this limits the opportunity for fruitful exchange of information and col-
laboration between the two groups of scholars. But they are not isolated entirely;
some North American scholars (such as Pierluigi Piovanelli, F. Stanley Jones, and
others) participate in the AELAC projects – indeed, Harvard’s professor François
Bovon was a founding member of the group and contributed to both American
and European research and guided new CA scholars through graduate school.

As for defining the CA, certainly some precision is necessary in determining
which texts belong to the category. Texts noncanonical or even heretical are
not necessarily apocryphal, though in some collections and commentaries the
distinction is blurred.22 Ehrman’s poorly-named Lost Scriptures, for example,
includes several texts commonly considered among the Apostolic Fathers as well
as a few Valentinian tractates (the Letter to Rheginos and Ptolemy’s Letter to Flo-
ra); none of these texts fit anyone’s definition of “apocryphal,” nor were they ever

Reader (New York 1998; 2nd ed., 2004); idem, A Brief Introduction to the New Testament (New

20 Including B. D. Ehrman, Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus in History
and Legend (New York 2006); idem, The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer
and Betrayed (New York 2006); idem, “Christianity Turned on Its Head: The Alternative Vision
ed., 2008), 77–120 (79–102 and 181–82 of the 2nd ed.); and additional works discussed below.

21 Bock’s attack on the “new school,” for example, argues against claims that texts like the
Gospel of Thomas feature a more human Jesus by emphasizing their gnostic affinities, thereby
doubtlessly leading his readers to think all noncanonical texts are gnostic and CA scholarship
on the whole as “seriously flawed when it comes to describing early Christianity” (The Missing
Gospels, 212).

22 See the discussion on ancient assessments of select texts from the Apostolic Fathers in
Charlesworth, “Research,” 3926, n. 6. For another modern edition that combines the two groups,
considered sacred. Perhaps the solution lies in redrawing the lines that divide the traditional CA from the Apostolic Fathers and the Nag Hammadi texts (the pseudonymity of the Epistle of Barnabas makes the text a good candidate for the CA, and any Nag Hammadi texts attributed to apostles and/or documenting the teachings or activities of New Testament figures likewise deserve inclusion).\(^\text{23}\) And although the term “New Testament Apocrypha” is objectionable on many levels, it remains effective as a brand; as J. Keith Elliott notes in the introduction to his own collection, “most readers turning to a book with this title are usually aware of the sort of literature they expect to find within its covers.”\(^\text{24}\) “Christian Apocryphal Literature” or “anonymous or pseudepigraphical, extra-biblical Christian literature” may be more accurate terms, but they are less likely to draw as many readers or tweak the interests of college and university students shopping for titillating electives.

2. Major studies on Christian apocryphal texts

Some particular CA texts have received a great deal of attention in the years since Charleworth’s article. Thanks to diligent investigative work in libraries and some shady negotiations with antiquities dealers, several new manuscripts have been brought to light either presenting us with entirely new texts or helping us to better establish texts already known. In addition, scholars have given the CA significant exposure in some key works aimed at reconstructing important aspects of early Christian history.

The apocryphal acts have benefited greatly from recent manuscript discoveries. These texts present challenges to scholars because most witnesses are heavily edited by an orthodox Christianity interested more in the apostles’ martyrdoms and travels than their esoteric speeches and astonishing miracles. The recovery of the Acts of Philip, for one, has been aided by François Bovon’s discovery of a new manuscript containing chapters 11–15, a good third of the work.\(^\text{25}\) Bovon

\(^{23}\) Charlesworth adheres more to the traditional definition of the CA (“Research,” 3924) and lists as exclusions the Apostolic Fathers, the Nag Hammadi Library (because these texts are gnostic), and the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Bock draws a distinction between the orthodox Epistle to Barnabas, which is “not tied to the Barnabas of the New Testament” (The Missing Gospels, 124), and the heretical CA. CA collections tend to include few Nag Hammadi texts chiefly because they can be found so readily in James Robinson’s well-established volume, The Nag Hammadi Library in English (4th ed.; Leiden 1996) or its recent update: M. Meyer et al., eds., The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The International Edition (New York 2007).


documents the discovery and editing of the manuscript in “Editing the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” an invaluable essay for CA scholars wishing to pursue textual criticism. The essay opens a volume on the apocryphal acts edited by and with contributions from participants in Bovon's Harvard Divinity School seminars.26 The book does much to advance scholarship on these texts and even includes editions of two new texts: the Martyrdom of the Holy Apostle Ananias and the Memorial of Saint John the Theologian.27 In recent years, Bovon turned his attention to texts related to Stephen, the first martyr.28

The five “great” apocryphal acts also have been examined in recent scholarship. Dennis R. MacDonald, known for his interest in illustrating Homeric intertextuality in early Christian literature, applied his approach to the problem of determining the original extent of the Acts of Andrew.29 Work on the Acts of Paul has advanced thanks to three new discoveries: a Greek manuscript from St. Catheriné’s Monastery, additional pages from a previously-published Greek papyrus, and a Coptic fragment containing the beginning of the text.30 Also noteworthy are the conference paper collections and dissertations in the series Studies on Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles (now Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha) edited by Jan N. Brenner,31 and an issue of Semeia dedicated to “The


Several texts well-known for their complicated transmission histories have received much-needed and long-deserved attention from textual critics. The first of these, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, suffered from neglect for decades after scholars determined that it was not the “Gospel of Thomas” often mentioned in antiquity. No-one seemed ready, willing, or able to arrange the numerous sources for the text – in Greek, Syriac, Latin, Slavonic, Ethiopian, and Georgian – into a comprehensive critical edition. But such an edition is nearer in sight thanks to Thomas Rosén’s edition of the Slavonic manuscripts, my own edition of the published and unpublished Greek witnesses, updated work on the Syriac tradition, and several important contributions by Sever Voicu, including a critical synopsis of the sources for the gospel, a landmark discussion of its original form, and, most recently, an overview of the important early Latin branch of the manuscript tradition. Mention should be made also of the work on *Infancy Thomas* by Reidar Aasgaard. His 2009 monograph on the text, *The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, features detailed examina-


37 R. Aasgaard, The Childhood of Jesus: Decoding the Apocryphal Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Eugene, Or. 2009). Also adding her voice to the study of the gospel is U. U. Kaiser, who contributed the entry on the text to the Markschies and Schröter collection (*Antike christliche Apokryphen in deutscher Übersetzung* [see below, n. 76], 2:930–59) and has written also “Jesus als e-offprint for the author with publisher’s permission
tions of the text’s putative origins, narrative and literary features, and theological propensities. But most interesting is Aasgaard’s argument that the gospel should be understood as “Christianity’s first children’s story” – a text written specifically for the education and entertainment of children.

Another text with a rich and complex manuscript base is the Dormition of Mary; at last count it is extant in 62 versions, in eight different languages. The Dormition traditions, though certainly popular throughout Christian history, are less well-known to Christians today. This neglect is due in part to the late date of origin for the text – the earliest Dormition text, the Ethiopic Liber Requiei, likely was composed in the fifth century, outside the time period of the formation of the New Testament, and therefore outside the purview of most CA collections. But that has not prevented Simon Mimouni, Michel van Esbroeck, and Stephen Shoemaker from contributing significant studies of the text.\(^{38}\) Shoemaker’s monograph in particular does much to determine the relationships between the versions of the Dormition while also challenging the assumptions lying behind previous research on the text. In addition, it offers valuable English translations of some of the less accessible witnesses: Ethiopic, Coptic, Armenian, and Georgian. Finally, much attention has been paid in recent years to the Pseudo-Clementine Romance. F. Stanley Jones, in particular, has contributed much to its study, including work on isolating Jewish-Christian sources from the extant materials and efforts to bring awareness to the very early Syriac fragments (one is dated to 411 C.E.) of the Recognitions.\(^{39}\) Bringing attention to the Pseudo-Clementines would be aided by featuring the text more prominently in CA collections; the

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\(^{38}\) S. C. Mimouni has published numerous works on the text, the most comprehensive being *Dormition et Assomption de Marie. Histoire des traditions anciennes* (ThH 98; Paris 1995), and “Histoire de la recherche relative aux traditions littéraires et topologiques sur le sort final de Marie,” *Marianum* 58 (1996): 111–82 (repr. in idem, *Les traditions anciennes sur la Dormition et l’Assomption de Marie. Études littéraires, historiques et doctrinales* [VCSup 104; Leiden 2011], 1–73). For van Esbroeck’s contributions, see his collected articles in *Aux origines de la Dormition de la Vierge. Études historiques sur les traditions orientales* (Variorum Collected Studies Series 472; Aldershot 1995). Shoemaker’s major work is *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (OECS; Oxford 2002); see further his contribution in this volume.

new French translations of the *Homilies* and *Recognitions* included in the Pléiade volumes is a welcome change, but an up-to-date English translation is long overdue.

As significant as these developments are for CA scholarship, the bulk of attention outside the field has been drawn to two newly-published texts: the *Gospel of the Savior* and the *Gospel of Judas*. The *Gospel of the Savior* was published in 1999 by Charles Hedrick and Paul Mirecki from a sixth-century Coptic manuscript (P. Berolinensis 22220). The text is extremely damaged and no title survives; the editors called it *Gospel of the Savior* simply because of its prevalent use of the Christological title “Savior,” which, though rare in the New Testament, is prominent also in the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Dialogue of the Savior*. Subsequent work on the text by Stephen Emmel has led to a re-ordering of the pages and has established a possible connection with the unknown gospel of the so-called Strasburg Coptic Papyrus. More recently Emmel posited a relationship between the gospel and the Coptic version of the Old Nubian “Stauros-Text” which came...

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to light in 1965\textsuperscript{42} and was published recently by Peter Hubai.\textsuperscript{43} Hedrick and Mirecki’s initial work on the *Gospel of the Savior* began in 1991; when the news of it emerged in 1996, newspapers spoke of an unknown gospel that would shed a completely new light on the origins of Christianity. But, when finally published, the text attracted virtually no attention in the media – likely its esoteric contents were considered unpalatable to an audience hoping for sensational new insights about the historical Jesus.

A similar reaction heralded news of the publication of the long-lost *Gospel of Judas*. The text became known to select members of the scholarly community as early as 1983 but was not made available for study until 2004 when the manuscript’s owners allowed Rodolphe Kasser to prepare a critical edition. An arrangement was made with the National Geographic Society to publish the text; the NGS planned a television special, a feature magazine article, and two books for simultaneous release at Easter 2006.\textsuperscript{44} Not everyone was happy with the monopoly that Kasser and the Society had on the text. James Robinson, famed for his efforts to make the Nag Hammadi library accessible, publicly called the secrecy surrounding the document “skullduggery”\textsuperscript{45} and published his own book on the text detailing his efforts to acquire the codex in the eighties.\textsuperscript{46} In another development, Charles Hedrick circulated photographs, a transcription, and a translation of several pages from the text to colleagues and these were leaked, apparently without Hedrick’s permission, to the Internet in early 2006. All of this intrigue only helped to stimulate interest in the text and Judas was certainly on everyone’s minds that Easter. Unfortunately, the media focused only on the text’s apparent elevation of the infamous apostle and attempted to maneuver scholars into declaring that the historical Judas was a hero, not a villain.\textsuperscript{47} The gospel’s


\textsuperscript{43} P. Hubai, *Koptische Apokryphen aus Nubien. Der Kasr el-Wizz Kodex* (trans. A. Balog; TU 163; Berlin 2009 [original Hungarian ed., Budapest 2006]).


\textsuperscript{45} J. M. Robinson, “From the Nag Hammadi Codices to *The Gospel of Mary* and *The Gospel of Judas*,” lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, held in Philadelphia, Pa., 20 November 2005.


\textsuperscript{47} The first generation of publications on the *Gospel of Judas* include Ehrman, *The Lost Gospel* e-offprint for the author with publisher’s permission
main contents – gnostic cosmogogical speculation in dialogue form – were ignored. Work on the Gospel of Judas has continued in subsequent years, though without the media interest that greeted its release. New interpretations of Judas’ role in the text – he may be more villain than hero after all – likely will not reach many of those attracted by the sensationalism of the early reports.48

An additional new text that also prominently features Judas deserves mention: the Book of the Rooster (also referred to as the Book of the Cock). Excerpts from this fifth-century passion narrative circulated in the West as early as the seventeenth century, but the entire text was not published (in a French translation from Ethiopic) until 2005.49 As Pierluigi Piovanelli reports, the text holds a privileged place in the liturgy of the Ethiopian church and is extant, in whole or in part, in at least thirty manuscripts. The Book of the Rooster contains some controversial additions to the story of Jesus’ final days, including assigning a key role to Paul in Jesus’ arrest and scourging.50 Yet, because the text is a relatively late apocryphon, its publication did not produce a media spectacle nor stir much interest among New Testament scholars.

The media did take some interest, however, in the Revelation of the Magi, a relatively unknown infancy gospel translated into English in 2010 by Brent Landau.51 The text, found within an eighth-century Syriac manuscript of the


51 B. Landau, Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men’s Journey to Bethlehem (San Francisco 2010). It is one of two projects deriving from Landau’s doctoral dissertation, “The Sages and the Star-Child: An Introduction to the Revelation of the Magi, An Ancient Christian Apocryphon” (Ph.D. diss.; Harvard University, 2008); the second is a complete critical edition, to be published in the CCSA.

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Chronicle of Zuqnin, was published previously in Latin and French translations. Landau’s English translation, however, was aimed at a popular market and appeared before Christmas in 2010, just the right time of year to attract attention. According to the tale, a group of twelve (not three) Magi journey from the mythical land of Shir to see Jesus; their path is directed by Christ, who takes the form of a star. The Magi knew to follow the star because they are descendants of Seth, the third child of Adam and Eve; Seth passed on to them a prophecy revealed to him by his dying father. The Revelation of the Magi is of interest also because it features parallels with other Syriac literature, specifically the Book of the Bee and the Cave of Treasures, and with another infancy gospel usually referred to as the J Compilation, which has been re-examined in recent years.\(^{52}\)

Another text enjoying renewed interest of late is the Secret Gospel of Mark. For decades scholars have kept this text at a distance, fearing it will one day be proven a forgery.\(^{53}\) But a few scholars, including Helmut Koester,\(^{54}\) Marvin Meyer,\(^{55}\) and Scott Brown,\(^{56}\) have defended the gospel's authenticity and have integrated it into discussions of the transmission history of Mark and of solutions to the Synoptic Problem. The debate over Secret Mark’s authenticity was reignited in 2005 with the publication of Stephen Carlson’s The Gospel Hoax, which makes new arguments for the gospel as the creation of Morton Smith, the man who discovered the text.\(^{57}\) Carlson, who began his professional career as a lawyer but now holds a Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Duke University, departed from standard approaches to the text by employing modern handwriting analysis and other techniques to prove his argument that the text is a hoax. However, not everyone has been convinced by his evidence, including Brown and Allan Pantuck, who have become Carlson’s most vocal critics.\(^{58}\) But whether

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\(^{54}\) Most prominently in H. Koester, Ancient Christian Gospels (Philadelphia 1990), 293–303.


\(^{56}\) S. G. Brown, Mark’s Other Gospel: Rethinking Morton Smith’s Controversial Discovery (ESCJ 15; Waterloo, On. 2005).


one stands with Carlson or Brown and Pantuck, all of these writers should be praised for stimulating discussion on a text which, in Charles Hedrick’s words, had reached “a stalemate in the academy.”\(^{59}\) Carlson’s dissenting voice has been joined by that of Peter Jeffery, a musicologist and specialist of the history of Christian liturgy, who formulated other objections to the authenticity of Morton Smith’s discovery.\(^{60}\) Meanwhile, in an attempt to vindicate Smith’s honor, Guy Stroumsa published the correspondence exchanged by Smith and his mentor and friend Gershom Scholem; the correspondence details the efforts Smith made to understand the text in the years subsequent to its discovery.\(^{61}\) And, hoping to authenticate the text once-and-for-all, the magazine *Biblical Archeology Review* enlisted the efforts of a Greek handwriting analyst and a paleographer; in short, the experts concluded that the manuscript was created by a native Greek writer in a difficult-to-duplicate eighteenth-century hand, which, some would argue, was beyond Smith’s capabilities to manufacture.\(^{62}\) In response to this flurry of interest in the gospel, and in an effort to seek consensus between the prominent voices in the debate over *Secret Mark*’s authenticity, a symposium dedicated to the text was organized at York University in 2011.\(^{63}\) Though full consensus was not reached, scholars attending the symposium did agree that some of the weaker arguments for forgery advanced by Carlson and others can no longer be sustained.

Several other developments in the current phase of CA scholarship must be acknowledged. The field has benefited recently from studies of apocryphal texts...
and traditions extant in Irish, Anglo-Saxon, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Armenian. Greek, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac sources have long dominated scholars’ interests, but the lesser-known languages are becoming increasingly important for recovering the texts. It remains to be seen, however, if other scholars – particularly those who produce survey articles, monographs, or collections of primary texts – will integrate effectively the results of these studies into their work. However, research on the CA is not limited to texts; art and iconography have long been noted as repositories of apocryphal traditions. David Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliott have catalogued 2000 examples of paintings, mosaics, and sculptures displaying scenes or characters from the CA in Art and the Christian Apocrypha and its companion web site.

64 See Apocrypha Hiberniae. Part 1, and M. McNamara, “Jesus in (Early) Irish Apocryphal Gospel Traditions,” in Jesus in apokryphen evangelienüberlieferungen, 685–739.
69 D. R. Cartlidge and J. K. Elliott, Art and the Christian Apocrypha (London 2001). Cartlidge first discussed the project in "An Electronic Database of Pictorial Images Parallel in
Of all the characters who feature prominently in the CA the one that has most captured recent scholarly and non-scholarly attention is Mary Magdalene. Along with several popular translations of the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary Magdalene has been the focus of several major studies, including *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* edited by F. Stanley Jones (with contributions from Karen L. King, Antti Marjanen, and Stephen J. Shoemaker), and Ann Graham Brock’s published dissertation *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*. Brock’s work in particular illustrates the North American propensity to use both canonical and noncanonical texts to reconstruct early Christian history. Given such interest in Mary Magdalene’s place in the life of Jesus, it is surprising that this “first apostle” is scarcely mentioned in Amy-Jill Levine’s *A Feminist Companion to the New Testament Apocrypha*. Levine’s volume instead follows the earlier work by Stevan Davies and Virginia Burrus in focusing primarily on the roles afforded ascetic women in the apocryphal acts of the apostles. All of this discussion of women in the CA, whether in gospels or acts, appeals to a growing need to envision early Christianity as a sort of proto-feminist utopia eventually suppressed by patriarchal orthodoxy. It is encouraging to see the CA play such a large role in the discussion.

Unfortunately, the ghettoization of the CA is by no means a phenomenon of the past. Despite efforts to include apocryphal texts in a rechristened “Early Christian Studies” or field of “Christian Origins,” the CA remain outside the interest of most New Testament scholars. The sensationalism that surrounds such texts as the *Gospel of Judas* or *Secret Mark*, while helpful for bringing attention to the material, tends ultimately to alienate New Testament scholars from these texts, as they react with understandable cynicism to the exaggerated claims that regularly attend news of their discovery. Nevertheless, those working within the


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CA field continue to benefit from the work of their peers, enjoying increasingly better critical editions, a deepening knowledge of the forms of Christianity reflected in the literature, and a growing appreciation for later, neglected texts.

3. Collections of Christian apocryphal texts and related series

The CA collection is the point of entry for non-specialists looking for a quick, yet thorough treatment of an apocryphal text. It is the public face of the field and, ideally, should represent the best scholarship on each of the individual texts. Unfortunately, the quality of these collections often does not meet expectations. As a result, non-specialists come away from reading them with insufficient or erroneous information. This is particularly the case for scholarship in English, which has yet to see a truly comprehensive CA collection. Other languages fare much better. Earlier collections in Spanish and Italian, considered pioneering because of the breadth of texts included in their pages, are joined now by similarly wide-ranging collections in French and German.

In 1988 Charlesworth had available to him the latest CA collections by Italian scholars Mario Erbetta and Luigi Moraldi. 74 He praised the two for including documents many scholars had not previously seen. But aside from a second edition of Moraldi in 1994, scholarship in Italian has been relatively scarce in recent years. 75 As for German scholarship, the fifth edition of the CA collection by Wilhelm Schneemelcher appeared in 1987–89, shortly after Charleworth composed his article. As noted above, Schneemelcher has been criticized for ignoring Old Testament-related Christian texts and late antique apocrypha, but his collection still is praiseworthy for its utilization of contemporary scholarship and thereby has rightfully achieved a prominent place in the field. A new edition under the editorial guidance of Christoph Markschies and Jens Schröter promises to include new and formerly unpublished texts stretching into the eighth century. The first volume of this new collection appeared in 2012 under the title Antike christliche Apokryphen, 76 indicating that Junod’s arguments against Schneemelcher’s

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75 Notable exceptions include A. Lenzuni’s collection of essays from a lecture series held in Florence in 2000–2001, *Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento* (Letture patristiche 10; Bologna 2004), M. Pesce’s impressive anthology, *Le parole dimenticate di Gesù* (Scrittori greci e latini; Milan 2004), and the “critical synopsis” of the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* by Voicu mentioned above. Not to be overlooked, also, are those works written in French and English by Bausi and the Italian contributors to the Pléiade volumes.

definition have carried the day.\textsuperscript{77} Though the Markschies and Schröter volumes certainly are important, German scholars were not idle while they waited for them to materialize. In 1995, Gerhard Schneider produced \textit{Apokryphe Kindheitsevangelien}, which presents the various infancy gospels in their original languages; regrettably, however, it utilizes manuscript evidence from much-outdated critical editions.\textsuperscript{78} More serviceable is Dieter Lührmann’s \textit{Fragmente apokryph gewordener Evangelien in griechischer und lateinischer Sprache} from 2000; this collection features critical editions and German translations of such fragmentary works as the \textit{Gospel of Peter}, the Jewish Christian gospels, and the Greek manuscripts of the \textit{Gospel of Thomas}.\textsuperscript{79} In the popular market, Alfred Pfabigan, Walter Rebell, and Uwe-Karsten Plisch have provided brief introductions and German translations to a select number of texts, though relying again on older studies.\textsuperscript{80} For new and significant work on the CA, German readers must turn to Hans-Jo-osef Klauck’s introductions to the apocryphal gospels and acts.\textsuperscript{81} Klauck’s works are studies of the most well-known apocryphal writings, not collections of texts, but aside from a few infelicities and omissions, they draw upon a wide range of international scholarship to present the most current knowledge on the texts. He even breaks tradition by presenting chapters on such rarely examined “gospels” as the \textit{Dormition of Mary} and the \textit{Toledot Yeshu}.\textsuperscript{82} German scholars have also contributed to two new CA series: the aforementioned Studies on Early Christian Apocrypha edited by Bremmer and the Neutestamentliche Apokryphen, a new subseries of the prestigious Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte, from de Gruyter, which has so far yielded two volumes: Thomas

\textsuperscript{77} Markschies states as much in his study, “‘Neutestamentliche Apokryphen’: Bemerkungen zu Geschichte und Zukunft einer von Edgar Hennecke im Jahr 1904 begründeten Quellen­sammlung,” \textit{Apocrypha} 9 (1998): 97–132.

\textsuperscript{78} G. Schneider, \textit{Evangelia infantiae apocrypha = Apokryphe Kindheitsevangelien} (Fontes Christiani 18; Freiburg im Breisgau 1995).

\textsuperscript{79} D. Lührmann with E. Schlarb, \textit{Fragmente apokryph gewordener Evangelien in griechischer und lateinischer Sprache} (Marburger theologische Studien 59; Marburg 2000). Also significant is Lührmann’s collection of previously published work, \textit{Die apokryph gewordenen Evangelien. Studien zu neuen Texten und zu neuen Fragen} (NovTSup 112; Leiden 2004).


\textsuperscript{82} On which see now the proceedings published by P. Schäfer et al., eds., \textit{Toledot Yeshu} (see above, n. 50).
J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas’s edition of the *Gospel of Peter* and the *Apocalypse of Peter* and Hans Förster’s study of the Coptic tradition of the *Transitus Mariae*.\textsuperscript{83}

In the English-speaking world, the most comprehensive CA collection released to date is J. Keith Elliott’s updated version of Montague Rhodes James’s *The Apocryphal New Testament*.\textsuperscript{84} While Elliott’s collection features excellent introductions and bibliographies, it appeals too readily to the same critical editions (Tischendorf and Lipsius-Bonnet) used seventy years earlier by James. Up-to-date introductions certainly are welcome, but up-to-date texts are required also. Furthermore, despite Elliott’s assertions to the contrary,\textsuperscript{85} there are few texts in the volume that fall outside the typical time limit of the fourth century. Elliott’s publisher, Oxford University Press, has since released a number of other CA-related studies. The first of these is the Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts series headed by Christopher Tuckett and Andrew Gregory. The series was launched in 2007 with an edition of the *Gospel of Mary*; the Greek fragments of apocryphal gospels followed in 2008,\textsuperscript{86} and volumes are planned on the Jewish Christian gospels, the *Gospel of Judas*, and the *Epistula Apostolorum*. Each volume features a comprehensive introduction, the extant text(s), English translation(s), and, where possible, manuscript photographs. Tuckett and Gregory are also compiling the *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha* to be published in 2015. Oxford also recently released Bart D. Ehrman and Zlatko Pleše’s *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*.\textsuperscript{87} Though the aims of this new collection are modest – with a focus only on early Christian gospels and featuring translations of previously published (and somewhat outdated) editions – the editors must be credited for bringing together the material in one useful volume and for including some texts absent from Elliott’s collection (in particular, a number of texts from the *Acts of Pilate* cycle). A somewhat wider scope is applied in Ehrman’s other compilation for Oxford, *Lost Scriptures*, which features translations of a range of gospels, acts, letters, and apocalypses; but, intended as an accessible an-


thology of primary texts to be read alongside his Lost Christianities monograph, the collection merely translates old editions.88

A few other endeavours in English scholarship focus more narrowly on individual CA texts or a select groups of texts. Andrew Bernhard published a Greek and English collection of the Greek fragments similar to Lührmann’s FrAGMENTE apokryph; Thomas A. Wayment presented new editions and photographs of CA extant on papyrus and parchment from the first five centuries,89 Michael J. Kruger prepared his own edition and commentary of one of these manuscripts, P. Oxy. 840;90 Paul Foster contributed a new edition of the Gospel of Peter91 and edited The Non-Canonical Gospels, a multi-author volume of introductions to some of the more widely-known texts, such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Judas, and the Gospel of Mary;92 and, as mentioned earlier, Polebridge Press has published five volumes of translations in their Early Christian Apocrypha series: the Acts of Thomas, the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of Peter, the Epistle of the Apostles, and the Didache.93 In progress also is a multi-volume collection of little-known and newly-published texts in translation entitled New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures which I am editing with Brent Landau.94 The collection is inspired by a related project for Old Testament Pseudepigrapha led by Jim Davila.95 While all of these initiatives provide CA scholars with an impressive set of tools and resources, they do not match the boldness and accessibility of the French and German apocrypha collections, nor even the earlier Italian volumes. English CA scholarship is not short of talent but it does lack a unifying direction.

The much-needed interplay between groundbreaking essays, up-to-date critical editions, and comprehensive CA collections has been achieved only by the French and Swiss scholars who form the AELAC. The group began publishing critical editions and concordances in their Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum in 1983. The journal Apocrypha followed in 1990, followed by the association’s Bulletin in 1991, the invaluable bibliographical work Clavis apocryphorum Novi Testamenti in 1992,96 and a series of pocketbook editions of individual

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93 See above, n. 13.
96 M. Geerard, Clavis apocryphorum Novi Testamenti (CCSA; Turnhout 1992).
texts (La collection de poche Apocryphes) in 1993. The AELAC grew out of a need for a new CA collection in French. That goal was realized when the group put their collective energies into the two-volume Écrits apocryphes chrétiens published in 1997 and 2005. The AELAC is a lesson in synergy, with its members simultaneously producing high-quality and well-regarded critical editions, articles, popular-market introductions, and contributions to the CA collection. Nevertheless, the group has its shortcomings, as even some of the AELAC’s own members have pointed out. First, the production of critical editions has been rather sporadic, with only seventeen volumes of the major series, together with one concordance and two editions of some auxiliary texts in the Instrumenta subseries,97 now in print. The choice of which text(s) to edit and the edition’s speed of completion depends entirely upon the interests and availability of the individual members; as a result, some planned projects have been abandoned or delayed because of either disagreements among scholars, increasing awareness of the complexity of the manuscript evidence, or the premature deaths of contributors.98 The paperback series also has had mixed success, with some recognizable texts selling well (e.g., the Gospel of Nicodemus) but lesser-known texts languishing (e.g., the Acts of Mar Mari). As for the Pléiade volumes, contributor Pierluigi Piovanelli has praised the editions for including some late antique texts and Christian-authored Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, but criticized them for inexplicably neglecting others. He also questioned the wisdom of leaving out the vast majority of gnostic texts (except for the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Mary) in anticipation of a separate Pléiade edition of the Nag Hammadi library.99

As the “public face” of CA scholarship, the apocrypha collections ideally present the best work on the individual texts by scholars writing in a particular language. This regional division must not obscure the fact that the AELAC, for its part, is no longer an exclusively French association – it has become an international organization, with members from such countries as Canada, Georgia, Germany, and the U.S. contributing not only in French, but also in English, Italian, and German. French CA scholars, therefore, are not any more or less capable than their English, German, or Italian colleagues. Nevertheless, readers of English are in dire need of a CA collection that effectively keeps non-specialists informed about developments in the field and provides translations of the texts based on current text-critical work.

97 F. Amsler, Concordantia Actorum Philippi (CCSA, Instrumenta 1; Turnhout 2002); Z. Izydorczyk and W. Wydra, Evangelium Nicodemi in Polonia asservatum – A Gospel of Nicodemus Preserved in Poland (CCSA, Instrumenta 2; Turnhout 2007); R. Gounelle, Evangelium Nicodemi Byzantinum – Les recensions byzantines de l’Évangile de Nicodème (CCSA, Instrumenta 3; Turnhout 2008).
99 Piovanelli, “Qu’est-ce qu’un ‘écrit apocryphe chrétien,’” 176.
4. Christian Apocrypha on the Internet and in other media

The Internet is the most significant scholarly tool to appear in the past twenty-five years.\(^{100}\) Yet few CA scholars have embraced the Internet as a means of promoting and advancing work on the CA. The majority of the web sites dedicated to the literature do little more than present electronic versions of outdated, public domain editions of the main texts.\(^{101}\) Of course, many of the administrators of these sites are not scholars but hobbyists using their programming knowledge to share their interest with other novices.\(^{102}\) A few sites, however, have contributed to the study of the CA, primarily by drawing on the Internet’s capabilities for rapid and broad communication.

Perhaps the most well-known hobbyist site is Peter Kirby’s “Early Christian Writings.” As the name suggests, the site is more than a selection of CA texts – it covers also canonical and patristic literature. At last count, the site featured 226 entries, arranged in chronological order from the hypothetical Passion Narrative in 30–60 to the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* in 320–380. For each text, Kirby presents at least one public-domain English translation, a brief introduction, links, and a select bibliography. Wieland Willker’s “Neutestamentliche Apokryphen” site is similar.\(^{103}\) Andrew Bernhard, administrator of “gospels.net” (formerly “Jesus of Nazareth in Early Christian Gospels”), has more scholarly credentials than Willker and Kirby – along with a degree in molecular biology, Bernhard has a Master’s Degree in Greek and Roman history from Oxford University and assembled the edition of the apocryphal gospel fragments mentioned earlier. His academic expertise in the CA and proficiency in Greek contribute to a site that is much more useful to scholars: it includes Greek editions of the texts, English translations (sometimes his own), and images of important manuscripts. In 2006, the year of the Ottawa Apocrypha Workshop, the scarcity of CA-related information on the Internet compelled me to create several pages on my own web site dedicated to CA texts,\(^{104}\) including a page on the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, some bibliographical resources, and a companion page to the *More Noncanonical*...

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\(^{100}\) In most cases, the URLs for the Internet resources discussed here are not provided as sites often change location. To find the resource, simply enter both the name of the site and its administrator (if provided) into a search engine.

\(^{101}\) Most often, the texts are taken over from *ANF* 8, presented in full at, among other sites, Christian Classics Ethereal Library (http://www.ccel.org/cCEL/schaff/anf08.toc.html).

\(^{102}\) For example, computer network administrator G. Trowbridge’s “The Whole Bible: Analysis of the Canonical and Apocryphal New Testament Scriptures” (http://www.maplenet.net/~trowbridge/contents.htm), and G. Davis’s “The Development of the Canon of the New Testament” (http://www.ntcanon.org). Educational institutions fare little better: the site of the Wesley Center for Applied Theology (http://wesley.nnu.edu/sermons-essays-books/noncanonical-literature) features either public domain e-texts or links to sites which host public domain e-texts.

\(^{103}\) See the section on “NT Apocrypha” on the page http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/bibel.html#apo.

\(^{104}\) http://www.tonyburke.ca.
Scriptures project. I also began the first CA blog, “Apocryphicity,” which has since been joined in cyberspace by April DeConick’s “The Forbidden Gospels” (now accessible at DeConick’s eponymous web site), Julio Cesar Chaves’s “Apocrypha gnostica,” Timo Panaanen’s “Salainen evankelista,” and self-titled blogs by Alin Suciu and Brice C. Jones. CA-related posts also appear regularly on Jim Davila’s “PaleoJudaica” and Mark Goodacre’s “NT Blog.”

The CA text that receives the most attention on the Internet is the Gospel of Thomas. Computer programmer Michael Grondin’s “Gospel of Thomas Resource Center” features an interlinear translation of the Coptic text with a concordance and notes. It also conveniently links to several other sites, including Sytze van der Laan’s “Gospel of Thomas” page with bibliography, texts, and translations, and Peter Kirby’s “Gospel of Thomas Commentary” which includes quotations from scholars, Kirby’s own notes, and comments from readers. All three sites are laudable for truly utilizing the capabilities of the Internet, rather than merely making outdated editions widely available. The Gospel of Thomas is not the only CA text with an online presence. István Czachesz has a site dedicated to the apocryphal acts of the apostles. Unfortunately, the content is rather bare – it includes primarily bibliographies and links to sites (such as Kirby’s and the Wesley Center’s) with outdated translations. The situation is much the same for the Dormition of Mary texts featured on Stephen Shoemaker’s site. My own web site fares a little better, with several otherwise unavailable translations of versions of the Infancy Gospel of Thomas (Ethiopic, Slavonic, Arabic, and new translations of Latin and Syriac texts). The shortage of new and dynamic work available on CA-related Internet sites is unfortunate, but it should be noted that scholars’ reluctance to do so is due, at least in part, to proprietary rights of print-publishers. Scholars under contract with publishers or wishing to publish new work in scholarly journals rarely are able to post the same work, or a significant portion of that work, online, at least not without special permission. This restricts CA scholars’ abilities to widely disseminate advances in the field to scholarly and non-scholarly audiences and results in a failure to take advantage of the dynamic nature of the Internet.

That said, two texts in particular have benefited greatly from the rapid and broad dissemination of information afforded by the Internet: the Gospel of Judas and Secret Mark. The existence of the Gospel of Judas manuscript was revealed to the world in 2001 on the web site of Dutch art-dealer and Scotland Yard informer Michel van Rijn. The site also leaked photographs, a transcription, and an Eng-
lish translation of the text before its official publication, and followed the story of the recovery of additional missing pages from the manuscript.¹¹¹ The various developments in the purchase and publication of the gospel were followed thoroughly also by Roger Pearse, a software consultant from Suffolk with an interest in Tertullian.¹¹² The desire to disseminate up-to-the-minute information on controversial texts has led also to heavy online exposure for Secret Mark. Pearse, Willker, and Kirby each devote considerable space to the on-going debate about the text’s authenticity, and Stephen Carlson, author of The Gospel Hoax continued the debate for a short time on his “Hypotyposeis” blog, before turning his attention to other interests. More significant, however, is Timo Panaanen’s “Salainen evankelista” blog, which grew out of Panaanen’s Master’s thesis, “A Conspiracy of the Secret Evangelist: Recent Debate Concerning Clement of Alexandria’s Letter to Theodore” (University of Helsinki, 2009), but became also a venue for several scholars to present new arguments in the debate on Secret Mark,¹¹³ and revealed a number of interesting facts about the status of the manuscript.¹¹⁴ Biblical Archaeology Review took full advantage of the Internet’s immediacy by posting to their Scholars Study page the full texts of the reports by the experts commissioned to examine Secret Mark. The page also features several follow-up articles by scholars Brown, Jeffery, and Pantuck.¹¹⁵

The Internet is being used also by academic societies for the dissemination of news on conferences and publications. The AELAC site includes announcements of the group’s various meetings, details the group’s publishing projects, and makes available bibliographies and its member contact list from their annual Bulletin.¹¹⁶ The Westar Institute, home to the Jesus Seminar, provides information on

¹¹¹ The material was available originally at http://www.michelvanrijn.nl/artnews/judastotal.htm but van Rijn’s presence largely has been absent from the Internet since 2006.
¹¹⁵ http://www.bib-arch.org/scholars-study/secret-mark.asp.
¹¹⁶ http://www2.unil.ch/aelac/.
their publishing efforts (including CA-related works) and access to select articles from their journal *The Fourth R*.117 Something similar would be welcome for the Christian Apocrypha Section of the Society of Biblical Literature, which once had a rudimentary web page, but the site has been unavailable for several years.

Clearly, the CA needs to have a greater, and more sophisticated, presence on the Internet. While scholars and publishers are understandably leery about losing revenue and diluting the quality of the work (if published/posted without refereeing) by making scholarship available online, it is possible to strike a balance between traditional print publishing and the creation of tools that take advantage of the Internet’s strengths (particularly hypertext capabilities). Until that balance is found, Internet users will continue to read and use inadequate texts and, for the most part, dated scholarship. The field can also learn from the stories of *Secret Mark* and the *Gospel of Judas* to use the Internet for the rapid dissemination of information, particularly information that is otherwise restricted to a small group of scholars. Work on individual texts in the CA could be improved if knowledge of new manuscripts is circulated widely and quickly. One of the persistent problems in the study of the CA is that non-specialists tend to lag far behind scholars in the field. Nowhere is this delay more apparent than on the Internet.

Growing interest in the CA has led also to an increased presence of the texts in popular fiction, television, and films. This increased presence is both helpful and harmful to the study of the texts. For example, many viewers of the film *Stigmata* (1999; dir. R. Wainwright) learned for the first time of the *Gospel of Thomas*, but they were made to believe the text is actively suppressed by the Catholic Church in a scheme to deny believers individual paths to salvation. A satirical episode of the once-popular science-fiction drama *X-files* (“Hollywood A.D.,” 2000) mentions the *Gospel of Mary*, which according to Agent Scully is a text “long rumoured to be in existence;” however, the text has been available to scholars since 1955.118 Apocryphal traditions appear in Mel Gibson’s controversial film *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), Abel Ferrara’s *Mary* (2005), Roger Young’s *Jesus: The Greatest Story of All Time* (1999), and provide details on the family of Jesus in Catherine Hardwicke’s *The Nativity Story* (2006). Stories of Jesus’ childhood are used also by Anne Rice in *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005), her first novel in a series on the life of Christ.119 The book grew out of Rice’s reconnection with Catholicism, but doubtless many Catholics would not appreciate her use of apocryphal gospels to fill in the early years of Jesus, nor would many of the

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117 http://www.westarinststitute.org/.
118 A transcript of the episode can be found at http://www.insidethex.co.uk/transcrp/scrp718.htm.
conservative New Testament scholars (including N. T. Wright, Martin Hengel, and Larry Hurtado) she praises in her concluding “Author’s Note.” But the most well-known use of the CA in fiction is Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). Its claims about the relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, established in part from the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Gospel of Philip*, have spawned a cottage industry of books by the likes of Bart Ehrman, Darrell Bock, and Ben Witherington seeking to correct Brown’s historical infelicities and a rash of television documentaries acquainting viewers with the “secret lives” of Jesus. Brown is not the first novelist to use the impact of revelations from lost apocryphal gospels as a theme; Robert M. Price reviews and analyses over forty such novels in *Secret Scrolls: Revelations from the Lost Gospel Novels*, though in the majority of these tales the “lost gospel” is not a true CA text from antiquity but is wholly the invention of the writer. For all the problems attending these uses of CA in popular culture, they nevertheless contribute to the study of the texts in several notable ways: they stimulate outsiders’ interest in the texts, they have the potential to draw CA scholars into the public eye to comment on the material for the media (thereby showing the world that the texts are the focus of serious study), and they illustrate the ongoing urge to expand and reinterpret the story of Jesus.

Scholars frustrated with the misuse of the CA in non-print media may find *Banned from the Bible* (2003 and 2007), a two-part documentary produced by the History Channel in the U.S., more satisfying. The documentary features discussions of several Old Testament Pseudepigrapha along with the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, the *Protoevangelium of James*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, and the *Apocalypse of Peter* (in part one), and the *Acts of Peter*, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, *Secret Mark*, and the *Gospel of Judas* (in part two). The commentary – by Marvin Meyer, John Dominic Crossan, Bart Ehrman, Kirsti Copeland, and others – is scholarly, but could have benefited from appearances by specialists in the featured texts. A number of other documentaries have appeared since – including *Secret Lives of the Apostles* (National Geographic, 2012), an episode of the six-part series *Bible Secrets Revealed* (The History Channel, 2013), and an episode of BBC2’s two-part series *The Bible Hunters* (2014) – each

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122 December 2006 saw the airing of the National Geographic Channel’s “The Secret Lives of Jesus,” Fox’s “The Birth of Jesus” (which includes a discussion of apocryphal traditions), and both “The Secret Family of Jesus” and “The Lost Gospels” on BBC4 in the U.K.
124 Ehrman was involved in the publication of the *Gospel of Judas*, but he is not a Coptologist. Meyer is qualified to discuss the *Gospel of Mary*, but he did not appear in the segment on *Judas*.
of which presents information and scholarship on a selection of apocryphal texts with varying levels of sensationalist hyperbole and historical accuracy.

5. Assessment

Undeniably, the past twenty-five years of CA scholarship have been fruitful. Scholars have entered into much-needed discussions over defining the parameters of the field and shedding restrictive and pejorative terminology; the trend of examining both canonical and noncanonical texts as equally-valid expressions of early Christianity has continued; new discoveries have aided in establishing better critical editions and recovering previously-lost texts; and the incorporation of apocryphal traditions into popular culture has helped stimulate interest in the literature. CA scholars have begun also to examine their own history of interpretation – a sure sign of a healthy discipline. 125 Unfortunately, scholars outside of the field are not as appreciative of these developments. Some are hostile to claims that certain CA are early and independent of the canonical gospels; some resist the notion that the CA provide evidence for variety in Christianity from its very beginning; and others continue to disparage the CA as heretical nonsense. Even the most liberal of New Testament scholars tend to interact with apocryphal texts only when they aid in understanding the canonical texts. Later apocrypha, therefore, remain largely ignored outside the field despite efforts to broaden standard CA collections to include such material.

Though the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* has helped bring CA scholarship out of the shadows, there is still much that could be done to improve the reception of work in the field. For one, CA collections, the primary source for information by non-specialists, need to follow the model used in continental European scholarship, with a broad range of texts based on up-to-date critical editions and studies. This model is particularly needed in English scholarship where the state of the collections has precipitated reliance on outdated editions of the texts and has led to a lack of knowledge of later works important in the history of Christian thought. The gulf between the work of specialists and non-specialists requires drastic narrowing so that scholars can communicate meaningfully about the texts. And critical editions, which contribute significantly to the utility of CA collections, need to appear with more regularity. The AELAC editions, for

example, are valuable resources, but they are published sporadically and, to date, have focused on texts with limited audiences. The series seems to lack direction, even though the association has no shortage of scholars willing to work on the material. Perhaps the rigor that is a hallmark of the series has proven to be more a hindrance than a help to the dissemination of the texts – an edition with minor flaws or omissions is better than no edition at all and at least puts the texts more rapidly into the hands of interested scholars. The aim of a critical edition should not be to place a cap on text-critical work, but to stimulate further work; indeed, new manuscript discoveries appear too often to expect a critical edition to be complete enough to stand in perpetuity. De Gruyter’s Neutestamentliche Apokryphen series or the Oxford Early Christian Gospel Texts series may become competition for the AELAC if they manage to achieve an effective balance of quality and accessibility that satisfies better the needs of scholars.

CA scholarship could be aided also by better communication between scholars. While conferences are helpful for bringing scholars together, the examples of the Gospel of Judas and Secret Mark have shown that the Internet, particularly blogs, is an effective, yet dramatically underutilized resource for disseminating information. Research on the CA cannot develop if scholars and publishers zealously restrict access to texts or selfishly guard knowledge of important manuscripts. CA scholars need also to be more visible if they hope to have the results of specialized work on the texts reach public consciousness, because the media cannot tell the difference between a New Testament scholar, with casual knowledge of the apocrypha, and a CA scholar, with an awareness of the complexities of the literature. The CA need more public intellectuals willing to share their work with the world. Otherwise the field will remain a marginalized service industry for New Testament scholars and a curiosity to the public, both of whom hunger for sensational new discoveries that could impact our understanding of first-century Christianity, but have little interest in the phenomenon of apocryphy in all its breadth and depth.