

**J. K. Elliott. *A Synopsis of the Apocryphal Nativity and Infancy Narratives*. NTTS 34. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006. Pp. xxviii + 170. ISBN: 90-04-15067-6. \$167.00, cloth.**

1. Much of popular piety and tradition surrounding the “Christmas story” and the infant Jesus derives not from the two canonical accounts (Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2) but from what are traditionally termed “apocryphal” accounts. Though some of these accounts are relatively easy to obtain, others can be difficult to locate or acquire. Thus J. K. Elliott has performed a useful service by collecting in a convenient form all the major sources that narrate some part of the story of the nativity, infancy, and childhood of Jesus.

2. In view of his excellent revision and updating of M. R. James’ venerable edition of the “Apocryphal New Testament” (J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993]) and his continuing involvement with projects focusing on that body of literature, Elliott is extraordinarily well qualified to create the present synopsis. Indeed, no small part of it will seem familiar to users of his earlier volume, since the translations of about one third of the documents are taken from that volume.

3. What to include (and not to include) is a critical matter for a volume such as this. Elliott tells us what he includes (and excludes) but does not indicate the grounds for those decisions. In general, he (a) limits the collection to narrative items (thus setting aside patristic sources) and (b) for the narrative items, follows the parameters established by the chapter on “Apocrypha de Nativitate et de Infantia” in Geerard’s *Clavis Apocryphorum Novi Testamenti*—except that in detail he doesn’t, as he both excludes some material Geerard includes and adds other material. Pragmatically there is little to argue with regarding his selections, but nonetheless it is a pity that he didn’t say a bit more about his rationale. For the sources included, a brief bibliography lists the key editions of the text of each, and in some instances some general works as well. The bibliographies are sufficient for the purpose, but nonetheless have a bit of a sparse feel to them.

4. Typically a “synopsis” brings to mind a volume whose contents are arranged in parallel columns (or, in the case of Swanson’s work, parallel lines). Elliott rightly discerned that such an arrangement is unworkable for this collection, for reasons both typographical and material. Instead here the parallel sections from the various sources are set out sequentially under a common heading, so that, for example, all the accounts of “Anna’s Laments” or “Mary’s birth” are conveniently grouped together. This is a pragmatic resolution of a difficult issue that is both efficient and effective for this particular collection of materials.

5. There are a few slight difficulties to note. First, the volume is slightly mistitled, in that it does include the canonical accounts alongside the apocryphal ones. Second, it may be suggested that on pp. 2, 28, 36, 41, 55-56, 85, 90, 96, 106, 132—where for each chapter a list summarizing the contents of each individual witness is given—a visual presentation (e.g., in chart form) rather than lists would have given the information a bit more impact and significantly facilitated ease of comparison of the contents of the witnesses. Finally, on p. xxvi it appears that (a) the heading “*Papyrus Cairensis 10735*” is missing above the second instance of “EDITIONS,” and (b) the second instance of “GENERAL” (under “*The Arabic Infancy Gospel*”) apparently should read instead “EDITIONS”.

6. Overall this is a fine *instrumentum studiorum* that will be used with appreciation and profit by anyone investigating the topics it covers. It is a pity that the volume’s price will seriously restrict its availability.

Michael W. Holmes  
Bethel University

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