

Simon Gathercole, *The Gospel of Thomas: Introduction and Commentary*, Texts and Editions of New Testament Study 11; Leiden: Brill, 2014. Pp. xii + 723. ISBN 900-4 190412. Hardcover €193.

- [1] This impressive and comprehensive commentary of one of the most favorite texts among the noncanonical early Christian writings, the Gospel of Thomas, will certainly become *the* reference work for years to come. And it is not the first time that Simon Gathercole, University of Cambridge, deals with this apocryphal text in detail. Together with some relevant articles, his *The Composition of the Gospel of Thomas: Original Language and Influences*, SNTSMS 51 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), sets the ground for this follow up publication and, to a certain extent, facilitates his task of answering some of the obligatory introductory questions, especially those about the original language and (literary) influences, about allusions, references, and potential dependencies. Hence, by means of his monograph from 2012 and his many other specialized studies on the Gospel of Thomas, Gathercole has established himself as a distinguished expert. All that is the perfect prerequisite for writing a commentary that absorbs years of intensive personal occupation with a certain text.
- [2] The book is structured as follows: introduction (pp. 1–186), commentary (pp. 187–618), comprehensive bibliography (pp. 619–73), and a detailed *index locorum* (pp. 674–708: The Gospel of Thomas—Old Testament—New Testament—Apostolic Fathers—Patristic and Medieval Writings—Classical Authors—Judaica—Christian Apocrypha—Nag Hammadi and Related Literature—Manichaean Literature—Mandaean Literature—Samaritan Literature), a modern author index (pp. 709–18), and a subject index (pp. 719–23).
- [3] In his preface (pp. ix–xi) Gathercole explains the guiding principle of his work (ix–x): “The aim here is principally to understand the meaning of the sayings of *Thomas* in its second-century historical context. That is, it elucidates the religious outlook of *Thomas* in the setting in which it was composed.” And that is what makes the commentary unique, as its author rightfully shuns, for instance, tradition-history, long-winded discussions of references to and comparisons with passages of the Synoptics, and an assessment of the Gospel of Thomas and its worth for the quest for the historical Jesus. Gathercole regards the sayings as what they have come down to us, as a collection of sayings for a certain audience of readers (and listeners).
- [4] The handbook-like introduction covers all the salient issues and topics that are to be expected from a high quality commentary as the present one: first, Gathercole offers the most important information about the manuscripts (P.Oxy. 1.1, 4.654, 4.655, and NH II) and briefly discusses their use (3–13). Consequently, he moves on with a comparison of the Greek and Coptic texts with an overview of similarities, differences, and scribal errors to which he adds an excursus in which he critically assesses Crossan’s and DeConick’s assumptions of the Gospel of Thomas as a “rolling corpus” with parallel material of the Synoptics at its core (14–34). The next introductory chapter, at the end of which he remains doubtful about their contribution to an understanding of the text, deals comprehensively with testimonia to the Gospel of Thomas (35–61). The next chapter, “Early References to the Contents of *Thomas*,” can be taken as a supplement of its predecessor (62–90), in which he also addresses the Oxyrhynchus Shroud with “There is nothing buried which will not be raised.” If this is really a quotation from the Gos. Thom. 5 (Greek, different in the Coptic text), which has “[For there i]s nothing hidden which will not [become pl]ain, and buried which [will not be raised],” might be disputable, because the words in square parentheses are not extant in the manuscript and are reconstructed by editors. Be that as it may, Gathercole dedicates the next chapter to the significant discussion of the original language of the Gospel of Thomas (91–102), in which Gathercole—again—convincingly advocates “a Greek *Vorlage* to the Coptic version of Thomas” (102). The text’s provenance (103–11) has even been more under debate than its original language. Was it composed in Syria (Edessa, Antioch) or Egypt? According to Gathercole, this issue cannot be decided, and it not important at all. The next relevant aspects that require attention are the date of the Gospel of Thomas and its authorship (112–27): here he argues for a date between 135 and 200 CE (and provided a list of proposed dates by scholars) and leaves the matter of authorship undecided. The structure (128–36), genre (137–43), and religious outlook of the Gospel of Thomas (144–75) are the topics of the next chapters, and Gathercole also addresses the issue of gnostic influence on Thomas but concludes that it cannot be set close to any gnostic movement. And eventually, Gathercole comes to write about “*Thomas*, the New Testament and the Historical Jesus” (176–84) resulting in the conclusion that (184) “the *Gospel of Thomas* can hardly be regarded as useful for the reconstruction of a historical picture of Jesus.” Every chapter is supplemented by a very helpful bibliography in the first footnote.

- [5] The final chapter of the introduction (185–86) homogeneously represents a linking element between the introduction and the commentary, as it sets the ground for the presentation of the individual sayings to follow. Each saying is dealt with according to the same pattern: bibliography, text (Coptic and Greek where it is extant), translation, textual comment, interpretation, and notes.
- [6] Therefore, it is not surprising that the commentary section covers the core section of the book (187–618) so that every single of the 114 sayings is dealt with in detail and admirable soundly and concisely. Gathercole is cautious but not hesitating in his judgment by relying mainly on the text itself. His style is sober and—mostly—matter-of-fact. That does not mean that he is not interacting with theories and publications about the Gospel of Thomas. On the contrary, he moves into discussions with previous commentators and other scholars in order to make a decision in favor of a specific reading, interpretation, translation, and interpretation.
- [7] Logion 5 should serve as an example case to illustrate how Gathercole’s meticulous treatment of all the sayings works: first he presents the original text with diacritical signs (Leiden system, i.e., round and square parentheses, dots for doubtful letters, a stroke about letters for *nomina sacra* and so on)—Greek and English translation, then Coptic and English translation. Then in his textual comment he formulates very cautiously about the testimony of the Oxyrhynchus shroud from the fifth to sixth century, “which probably displays knowledge of *Thomas*” (221) and which made “[t]he restoration of this last clause ... more secure ...” (220). He also discusses the differences between the Greek and the Coptic, the latter without “the raising of what is buried” (220). A general interpretation of the logion (221) is followed by more particular notes with explanations of certain phrases and clauses (222).
- [8] The bibliography (619–73) is comprehensive and will serve as a reference tool, the *index locorum* is overwhelmingly rich (674–708) and is proof of the many sources Gathercole integrates into his commentary, the indices of modern authors (709–18) and subjects (719–23) complete this massive commentary.
- [9] All in all, it is not the heaviness or the many pages that turn this commentary into an impressive work of modern scholarship. Gathercole’s style, his soberness, the clear and direct interaction with earlier scholarship, his admirably confident treatment of speculations and “traditional” theories about the Gospel of Thomas, and, above all, the author’s meticulous handling of the critical Greek and Coptic texts *and* the author’s concise and sound conclusions make this book a landmark commentary on this highly controversial and fascinating piece of Christian literature. As delineated above in the first paragraph, this first-class commentary will become *the* standard work on the Gospel of Thomas to come, which Simon Gathercole is to be thanked for, its interpretations of the logia and the decisions made will serve as motivators to take this apocryphal text more serious as a manifestation of a certain form of early Christian belief.

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