

## Preaching Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England

By Brandon W. Hawk. Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, 30. Pp. xvii + 271. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1487503055.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Preaching Apocrypha in Anglo-Saxon England.** By Brandon W. Hawk. Toronto Anglo-Saxon Series, 30. Pp. xvii + 271. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. ISBN 978-1487503055.

The present volume, a revision of Hawk's 2014 doctoral dissertation at the University of Connecticut, examines the use and reuse of Christian apocrypha in Old English sermons and represents a most welcome contribution to the fields of Old English apocrypha and homiletics. Hawk surveys Old English sermons as media containers for apocryphal content and, contrary to outdated and somehow unfounded misconceptions, he provides tangible evidence of the centrality of non-canonical writings in the heart of mainstream Anglo-Saxon Christianity and, more broadly, in Anglo-Saxon culture.

In the Introduction — entitled 'Seeking Out Gold in the Mud' after a poignant quotation in which Jerome recommends that his friend Laeta instruct her daughter in the Scriptures and advises her to make vigilant use of non-canonical writings — Hawk reviews previous research on apocrypha and pseudoepigrapha and provides a clarification of two concepts. While previous scholars have too often appraised apocryphal writings as either 'heterodox' or 'heretical', Hawk suggests that the Anglo-Saxons turned to non-canonical writings for preaching 'to seek out gold in the mud'. He subsequently stresses the importance of a survey of sermons as a type of medieval mass media, which can reveal much about mainstream Christianity since sermons were aimed at the most diverse audiences and contexts.

Chapter 1, 'Homiliaries, Apocrypha, and Preaching Networks', examines Continental and Insular collections of sermons and homilies, both in Latin and Old English, and traces among them a network of apocryphal material that is firmly embedded and associated with numerous Scriptural texts and patristic sources. In the second section of the chapter, recent concepts of media theory and methods of network analysis (borrowed from the digital humanities) allow Hawk to draw complex associations between texts in Latin and Old English composed between the tenth and the twelfth century.

Chapter 2, 'Apostles, Trinity, and Reform in Blickling 15', provides a survey of the anonymous Old English homily, Blickling 15, which has up to the present been considered a close rendering of the *Passio sanctorum apostolorum Petri et Pauli* (BHL 6657). Yet, Hawk notes important editorial excisions from the narratives and a consistent retainment of the speeches of the two apostles. Accordingly, he advances the possibility that, as a result of tenth-century and eleventh-century reforms that most commonly affected vernacular preaching, the original Latin *passio* was deliberately molded in order to provide a more orthodox form of the Trinitarian doctrine.

The same revisional approach has been detected in Chapter 3, 'Ælfric and Correct Doctrine', where a small network of interrelated apostolic apocrypha in Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* is discussed. Hawk warns the readers of the misleading over-emphasis on Ælfric's well-known quotation, 'mycel gedwyld on manegum engliscum bocum' ['much error in many English books'], a condemnation that appears only sporadically in his prose. While Ælfric avoided numerous apocryphal sources, Hawk notes the acceptance and use of the apocryphal Apostolic Acts in his preaching. The Apocryphal accounts of the apostles' missionary activities appear to function as prototypes of hagiography and were possibly preferred since they substantiate the narrative of Christian history without attempting to alter or embellish the biblical Canon.

Chapter 4, 'Translating Jesus in Text and Image', discusses apocryphal narratives related to the life of Christ transmitted both as texts and as visual representations on parchment. The survey turns


to Vercelli 6 and Blickling 7, two texts notably adapted respectively from the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* and from a complex matrix of sources surrounding the Harrowing of Hell. Hawk then offers a reading of the illustrations of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, most importantly those extant in the *Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ll. 1. 10) and in the so-called *Sacramentary of Robert of Jumièges* (Rouen, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 0274 [Y. 006]), produced respectively in the ninth century and eleventh century, where they serve as ‘intermedial translations’ of apocrypha.

Lastly, Chapter 5, ‘A Network Microcosm in Bodley 343’, examines Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 343, a thirteenth-century homiliary containing both Latin and Old English sermons—that represents a small-scale example of preaching traditions accumulated from the tenth through the twelfth centuries and the sophisticated media network of apocrypha for preaching traditions in Anglo-Saxon England.

In his Conclusion, ‘Mediating Tradition’, Hawk challenges modern scholarship in considering apocrypha as marginal works to the Christian society and shows how Old English sermons in fact disrupt binary notions of canonicity/apocryphicity or orthodoxy/heterodoxy. He considers Old English preaching texts as ‘hybridized media’ and sketches their process of ‘mediation’ and ‘remediation’ of Christian lore that is progressively molded to conform to new, local ideologies. Through the first process of ‘mediation’, the original antecedents of Old English sermons (the Latin sermons) are reshaped through new means of communication (Old English) for new audiences (a wider medieval public), under new circumstances (ecclesiastical concerns about the Trinitarian doctrine, the rise of the Marian cult, and so on). Through the second process of ‘remediation’, subsequent Anglo-Saxon authors, such as Ælfric and Wulfstan, reused Old English sermons in new composite forms or relocated them in new collections, according to their own ecclesiastical agenda and composition needs.

The chapters and the conclusion are followed by an ‘Excursus on Terminology’, in which Hawk reviews fluid, and often misleading, categories and concepts central to his discussion — such as ‘apocrypha’ and ‘sermon’ — and by three appendices: ‘The Pseudo-Marcellus *Martyrdom of Peter and Paul* in the Earliest Manuscripts of the *Virtutes apostolorum*’; ‘Apostolic Apocrypha in Ælfric’s Corpus’; ‘Translation of the *Book of Cerne Harrowing of Hell*’, published for the first time in this volume; and ‘Common Pericopes in the Homiliary of Angers and Ælfric’s *Catholic Homilies*’.

My only minor reservation is that little background is provided for the numerous apocrypha discussed — except for the *passiones* of Bartholomew (*BHL* 1002) and Matthew (*BHL* 5690) in Chapter 3 — while students and novices of Old English who are not necessarily well-read in apocryphal literature might have benefitted from the presentation of clear synopses of the texts discussed. However, this is only a minor point that does not undermine the high scholarly value of the volume, which is overall well written, carefully argued, and elegantly edited. Hawk has produced a laudable work that will stimulate ongoing and future scholarly discussions most notably in demonstrating how Old English preaching texts draw from non-canonical material as freely as they draw from the Canon. The readers will pleasantly learn that sharp boundaries between the canonical and apocryphal realms — a misleading and somehow compartmentalized mindset that is too often recalled in modern studies — appear to be largely absent in early medieval England.

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