

THE BOOK OF THEKLA

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The Book of Thekla by Edgar J. Goodspeed

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EDGAR J. GOODSPEED

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OF THEKLA**



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THE BOOK OF THEKLA

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THE BOOK OF THEKLA.

The peculiar interest attaching to the history of the text of the Acts of Thekla in its various forms, Greek,¹ Latin,² Syriac,³ Armenian,⁴ and Coptic,⁵ together with the problems, not yet fully solved, which that history raises, justifies the publication of another and quite unusual form of this early Christian romance. The Ethiopic "Book of Thekla" is preserved in two British Museum codices, dating respectively from the fifteenth ("A") and from the eighteenth ("B") centuries.

Brit. Mus. Orient. 689 is a ponderous fifteenth-century synaxarium of 237 heavy parchment leaves. It is well written in double columns, with forty-five to forty-seven lines to a column. The leaves measure *cm.* 31.9 by 46.2. They are carefully lined on the flesh side, and are set with flesh sides facing flesh sides. The outer and lower margins are wide. There are numerous erasures and some other corrections. The ornaments are few and generally simple, and there are no pictures. The quires are not at all uniform, but in most cases consist of the usual four double leaves, or their equivalent. The Book of Thekla stands fifth among the volume's sermons and martyrdoms, and occupies *fol.* 31*a* to 34*a*.

Brit. Mus. Orient. 687-688 is an eighteenth-century folio of 233 parchment leaves. The leaves, which measure *cm.* 31 by 35.3, are gathered in quires of four—rarely of three—with flesh

¹ Lipsius, *Acta Apostolorum Apocrypha*, I, 236-72.

² There are two Latin translations—one published in *Bibliotheca Cassinensis, III Florilegium*, 271 *sqq.*; the other in Mombricitus, *Sanctuarium II*, 303 *sqq.*

³ The Syriac, considered most important of the versions, at least until the Coptic, has been published by W. Wright, *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (1871), I, pp. 116 *sqq.*; II, pp. 116 *sqq.*, on the basis of four British Museum manuscripts.

⁴ Translated by F. C. Conybeare, *The Apology and Acts of Apollonius and Other Monuments of Early Christianity* (1894), pp. 48-88, from select Armenian martyrdoms, published by the Mochitarists of San Lazzaro, 1874.

⁵ Parts of the Coptic version of the Acts of Paul, including the Acts of Thekla, are soon to be published, from a Heidelberg papyrus, by Dr. Karl Schmidt, of Berlin. Arabic (*Assemani, Bibliotheca Orientalis*, III, I, 286—Harnack's reference to 288 is an error) and Slavonic versions also are known to exist, the latter in several codices; cf. Bouwetsch, in Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*, I, pp. 304-5.

sides facing flesh sides. They are carefully lined on the flesh side. The writing is fine and regular, and is arranged in three columns, of from thirty-one to thirty-three lines. There are more than fifty pictures, great and small, representing the martyrdoms described, for the volume is a synaxarium of lives of saints. The names Jesus, Christ, Paul, Thekla, and Walda Gtyörgis, who seems to have been the owner of the book, are usually in red. The Book of Thekla occupies *fol.* 49a to 51b. Both manuscripts were presented to the British Museum in August, 1868, by the Secretary of State for India.

The question of the relationship of the two manuscripts at once suggests itself, but their connection does not seem to be very close. A certain amount of modification from the archaism of a fifteenth-century exemplar is indeed to be expected in an eighteenth-century copy, and it is not surprising that B's readings are very often improvements upon A's. But the divergences of B are by no means all improvements or modernizations. Once at least B unwittingly allows us a glimpse of precisely what the parent manuscript read, and that manuscript was evidently not A. In the account of Thekla's second attempted martyrdom the immediate ancestor of B seems to have had a different order of words from that of A. After the words "lions and bears" (AB), the sentence "and they seized her and cast her into the den of bears and lions" (A) has fallen out of the text, doubtless by an error of the eye, *homoioleuton*, and must thus have ended with the same word as the preceding sentence, *i. e.*, with the order "lions and bears." The parent manuscript thus cannot have been A, which has the order "bears and lions." The alternative explanation that one or two complete lines of A were simply skipped is inadmissible, as the sentence in A begins and ends in the middle of the line. A few lines farther down the first hand of B has been guilty of a similar error, but this time of repetition. There, however, the corrector has set him right. But the distinguishing of A from the parent of B rests on broader grounds than this isolated, though instructive, instance. How frequently the two manuscripts differ a glance at the lower margins of the following pages will show.

In a comparison of A and B the statistics of preferred readings rather favor the younger manuscript. Its text commends itself in over 25 per cent. more cases than does that of A. In

the matter of fulness, on the other hand, the older manuscript excels in over 60 per cent. more readings than B, but B's omissions are often in the interests of clearness, if not absolutely required by the sense. In a large number of cases neither manuscript can be given the preference, both being right or both equally wrong. B has the smoother, easier text. A is occasionally found using a nominative for an accusative, or a singular pronoun for a plural, while B is in general better in the matter of forms. As to roots, A rarely has a different root from B for the same meaning, but in general differences in roots are confined to the common confusions Ω with Ψ , Υ with Δ , Θ with Σ , Φ with η , Λ with Θ , etc., A usually preserving the better reading. B shows a decided preference for *a*-long instead of short, especially in the case of Σ , for which guttural it evinces considerable fondness.

The evidence supplied by a comparison of the tables of contents is not in itself decisive. To the thirty-five titles of the older manuscript the younger adds eleven. Five of these—Nos. 3, 16, 31, 35, 36—are scattered through the manuscript. The remaining six appear at the end. The place of each seems to have been determined by the ecclesiastical calendar, in accordance with which the contents of both manuscripts are arranged. But numbers 25-28 of A, in which the calendar order is not observed, are correctly rearranged in B.

It seems reasonable to conclude that, while B is a corrected and amplified manuscript of the synaxarium, it is not the immediate descendant of A, and probably not a direct descendant of A at all, but comes through a collateral line from some ancestor of A.

The numerous modifications that the monument has undergone in passing into the Ethiopic form suggest the propriety of prefacing the text with an epitome.

Paul comes to Macedonia, and, taking up his abode with Tāmerēnōs, preaches the new righteousness and the doctrine of virginity. Thekla, the betrothed of Tāmerēnōs, from her window hears his discourse and believes. The importunities of Tāmerēnōs and her mother only strengthen her new convictions. She escapes by night to the house of Paul and sits at his feet. For a week these visits continue. At the end of this time her mother discovers her and tells Thekla's lover, Tāmerēnōs, who must thus