



Review

Reviewed Work(s): *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (SNTSMS 70) by RICHARD A. BURRIDGE

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passage is ambiguous, but he attempts to turn this ambiguity to his advantage. The very ambiguity of Prov 30:1, he surmises, enables the Evangelist to derive the SM designation from it as a suitable title for Jesus, the Son of God. B. does not ask whether this “distinctive and quite sophisticated interpretation and use of Old Testament scripture” (p. 175) is in any way characteristic of the Evangelist. Nor does he engage previous scholarship on John’s use of the OT.

Second, B. does not explain why the Evangelist needs the SM designation for Jesus if it is no more than a synonym for the Son of God title. For B., “the only difference between them is that ‘the Son of God’ expresses Jesus’ [filial] relationship to the Father clearly, while ‘the Son of the Man’ does so enigmatically.” Thus the SM designation is used “to conceal an actual reference to God” (pp. 90-91). But B. does not adduce reasons for such concealment.

Third, B. avoids discussion of the Synoptic SM sayings. But can one ignore the Synoptic evidence (even the simple fact of this evidence) while proposing that the Johannine SM designation derives not from Christian tradition but from an idiosyncratic and unparalleled reading of an obscure OT passage (p. 111)?

Fourth, B.’s proposal is predicated on eliminating any possible dependence on Dan 7:13 or on “Jewish apocalyptic.” To this end, B. gives an extended discussion of John 5:27, which contains the SM designation but, like Dan 7:13, without the definite articles found in all other Johannine instances. He argues that John 5:27 is not derived from Dan 7:13 and has nothing to do with an apocalyptic SM. The “SM” of John 5:27 is simply the Semitic idiom for human being, nothing more. From this conclusion B. then draws two others, that the articular SM designation is probably not derived from “Jewish apocalyptic” either, and that this articular designation need not reflect the Semitic idiom for human being (pp. 45-46). B. does not consider the possibility that the SM designation may well be derived from Dan 7:13 (at least in John 5:27) and yet be understood nonapocalyptically by the evangelist, or that, conversely, the Johannine term may not be derived directly from Dan 7:13 and still bear similarities to apocalyptic SM traditions concurrent with the Gospel. He also overlooks pertinent evidence in favor of dependence on Dan 7:13 in John 5:27.

Fifth, B. cripples his investigation from the start by bracketing all matters pertaining to *Sitz im Leben*, sources, traditions, and redaction. “The Gospel as it stands will be the object of investigation,” he boldly and fashionably declares (p. 14). He evidently assumes that more certainty can be obtained about the origin, meaning, and significance of the Johannine SM by ignoring the problems addressed in previous historical-critical scholarship than by critically appropriating what it has to offer. Alas, it is not so.

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RICHARD A. BURRIDGE, *What Are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (SNTSMS 70; Cambridge/New York/Port Chester: Cambridge University, 1992). Pp. xiii + 292. \$54.95.

Burridge reexamines the old question of the genre of a gospel. He situates it within the fluid genre of Graeco-Roman biography through a study exacting in terms of new methods, a wealth of data, and rigor. In the first part, B. presents the state of

the question, from early critical acceptance of the gospel as a form of biography, through rejection of this by form critics, to revival of the hypothesis by redaction critics. While applauding the renewed interest in ancient biography vis-à-vis gospel genre, B. scores contemporary studies both because of an inadequate theory of genre and an uninformed view of classical biography.

Burridge corrects the former problem by an informed and enlightened discussion of genre. Rejecting rigid notions of it, he argues that “genre is a group of literary works sharing certain ‘family resemblances’ operating at a level between Universals and actual texts and between modes and specific subgroups, and functioning as a set of expectations to guide interpretation” (p. 42). Thus, a gospel cannot be of a unique genre, for it would defy recognition; nevertheless “biography” (or *bios*) is not necessarily a rigid entity, and discussion of it must include consideration of both form and content. Indeed B. frequently asserts the genre’s “flexibility,” since not every example contains all conventional elements.

Burridge brings to his task solid knowledge of classical literature and modern criticism of it. He examines the genre of Graeco-Roman biography, noting the difference between the theory stated by ancient writers and their actual practice. Surveying the history of biography, he demonstrates that a flexible concept of the *bios* genre “nestles among neighboring genres such as historiography, rhetoric, encomium, moral philosophy, polemic and the novel” (p. 80). His survey of Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman biography is sensitive to the development of this genre, from simple encomium to propaganda for founders of philosophical schools, and thence to political propaganda for imperial figures.

Burridge presents a model of four “generic features” for examining ancient biographies: (a) opening features, such as title, prologue, preface, (b) subject, (c) external features, such as size, sequence, scale, and (d) internal features, such as setting, motifs, style, attitude, quality of characterization. In two chapters he then examines five early and five late examples of Graeco-Roman *bioi* according to this model. The ten examples are the standard parade pieces to which all scholars appeal in describing the genre. The overall result is the clear demonstration of a *bios* genre, with general family resemblances as well as diversity and flexibility. The material surveyed and discussed here should be of considerable interest in any further discussion of biography in antiquity.

Finally, B. uses his elaborate model of the *bios* genre to examine the Synoptic Gospels. In terms of external features, the narrative mode, size, chronological structure, and scale of these gospels are all in keeping with the conventions of the *bios* genre. Like examples of that genre, the gospels contain anecdotal stories, sayings, and speeches. In regard to internal features, the rhetorical topoi such as ancestry, birth, education, deeds, virtues, and death in the gospels display a range of biographical topics similar to that found in the *bioi*. Importantly, B. demonstrates that the length allotted to the gospel passion narratives is proportionately similar to the attention given to death scenes in certain *bioi*, and he correlates seven purposes put forth by gospel scholars for these works with similar authorial purposes found in the *bioi*. Thus he concludes that while the gospels may form their own subgroup, they belong within the overall genre of ancient biography.

This is an immensely learned volume; the use of its notes and bibliography will give an interested reader ready and accurate access to the best conversation on the topic. B.'s summaries of other scholars' positions are fair and trenchant. In his model for genre analysis he takes into account current discussion of literary theory and he supports it when possible by statistical analysis of key aspects of a work (such as how frequently the central figure appears as the agent; how much space is proportionately given to topics such as birth and death). This sort of analysis greatly dispels the fog of scholarly hunches and surmises. B.'s study regularly contains useful summaries; this makes it a very easy book to follow. It brings into conversation the best voices found in classical studies as well as in gospel criticism. This is a book which should have been written; it not only represents a superb survey of the topic but also breaks new ground in its nuanced reading of ancient texts and its literary model. It contains the informed, measured, and fresh insights of a mature scholar.

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JOHN A. DARR, *On Character Building: The Reader and the Rhetoric of Characterization in Luke-Acts* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992). Pp. 208. Paper \$15.95.

In chap. 1 ("Reading Readers Reading Luke-Acts: A Pragmatic Approach") and chap. 2 ("Building Lukan Characters"), Darr, assistant professor at Boston College, lays the foundations for his subsequent character studies. In order to obtain an objective criterion for reading Luke-Acts, there must be some historical controls. These controls are found in the "extratext," which "is made up of all the skills and knowledge that readers of a particular culture are expected to possess in order to read competently: (1) language, (2) social norms and cultural scripts, (3) classical or canonical literature, (4) literary conventions (e.g., genres, type scenes, standard plots, stock characters) and reading rules (e.g., how to categorize, rank, and process various kinds of textual data), and (5) commonly-known historical and geographical facts" (p. 22). And "characters are not just words (the sum of all verbs in the text, as some structuralists claim) or textual functions, but rather, affective and realistic personal images generated by the text and reader" (p. 47).

Darr correctly highlights the importance of the rhetoric of the author: "Fundamental to this study is the observation that, through a variety of rhetorical strategies, Luke-Acts maneuvers its readers into alignment with the 'witnesses' (*autoptai* or *martyres*) who constitute the insiders of the story. That is, the Lukan text is designed to persuade its readers to become believing witnesses of and to 'the things which have been fulfilled among us' (Luke 1:1). From beginning to end, the text urges one to *see*, *hear*, and *respond* to these things in an appropriate manner (i.e., in accord with the narrative's value-system)" (p. 53).

In chap. 3 ("Recapitulating John the Baptist: Holism, Rhetoric, and Characterization"), D. shows very well how the reader forms an image of the character of John the Baptist by reading sequentially through Luke-Acts: "John serves as a model of Israelite preparedness for the advent of the Lord" (p. 84).