

Jesus in History, Legend, Scripture, and Tradition: A World Encyclopedia

Leslie Houlden and Antone Minard, eds. *Jesus in History, Legend, Scripture, and Tradition: A World Encyclopedia*. Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2015. 2 vols: 695 pp. \$189.00. Hardcover. ISBN: 9781610698030 (set).

This two-volume encyclopedia holds great company in the world of reference works seeking to simplify the vast amount of information available to scholars and students of the history of Jesus and the reception of that history. This is the second edition of the encyclopedia, originally published in 2003 with the title *Jesus in History, Thought, and Culture: An Encyclopedia*. This set is relatively short for a work of its kind, only two volumes and 602 pages of encyclopedia entries, but added value comes in the comments of the introduction and in appended material such as a glossary and a collection of primary source documents.

The introductory material of the encyclopedia states that “entries fall into three broad areas of history, thought, and culture” (xxi), which leads immediately to the question of whether the title of the 2003 edition might well have been retained. The title change is not discussed in the introduction to the present edition, but there is discussion of the changes to the contents. The introduction to the 2015 edition briefly addresses these changes as a “shift in focus” from a British to an American context and audience, with the addition of entries on areas of study “crucial to the anthropological study of Christianity as religion, such as Material Culture, Religion in Television, and the Satanic Panic,” and important American religious events and phenomena, like witch trials and Deism (xxxvi). In a quick comparison of the two editions, indeed, entries like “Religious Education in British Schools” and entries on Scottish and Irish Christianity do not appear in the present edition, and entries like “Megachurches,” “Material Culture,” and “New Religious Movements” have been added. On the whole, the differences are enough that the title change is justified, and retention of the older edition is recommended with acquisition of the 2015 edition.

Both volumes of the present edition begin with a “How to use this book” essay, greatly expanded from the one that appears in the 2003 edition, which may prove quite useful to novices to the subject, and which specifies that the encyclopedia is primarily about Jesus (i.e., not about Christianity, theology, God, etc.). The 2015 edition includes a new introduction as well as the introduction to the 2003 edition. The older introduction includes a very brief overview of the history of Christianity (the introduction as a whole is nine pages long), with references to articles in the encyclopedia. A quick tour of the life of Jesus includes brief descriptions of documentary evidence in Paul’s letters and the gospels, along with an instructional statement about using documentary evidence: “it is necessary always to recognize its character if we are to understand it and profit from it appropriately, using it for what it can do and not for what it cannot” (xxvii). This will come as a welcome comment for librarians and teachers who have been faced with students set on giving some documents priority over others in their research.

What follows is a very brief tour of early to late antique Christianity, the beginnings of monasticism, the Middle Ages and the split between East and West, and the rise of the papacy, through the Enlightenment and into modern times. The introduction ends with a poem, “Travellers,” by R.S. Thomas.

The 170 entries of this encyclopedia are well executed: concise syntheses of information written by experts with sufficient notes for further reading. A random sampling of entries reveals that longer entries are conveniently broken up with subheadings, and the larger subjects within the study of Christianity are addressed specifically as they relate to the figure of Jesus. For instance, the entry on Orthodox Tradition, after an introduction describing the tradition and its history, focuses on the figure of Jesus as center of faith, as God, as man, as sacrament, and as related to the Holy Spirit. Similarly, the entry on Paul, after an introduction to the man and his story, centers on the way Christ figures in Paul’s letters.

This reviewer was delighted to see references within the encyclopedia's entries to other entries in addition to the "See also" referrals at the end of each entry and the bibliographies for further reading. This style of intra-encyclopedia cross-referencing subconsciously delivers a message to readers about the importance of proper attribution. The prevalence of bibliographic entries following each encyclopedia entry is also extremely satisfying for the librarian or teacher who hopes that students will use a reference work as a starting point, rather than as a single source for information. The number of entries in each of these supplemental bibliographies averages around six and includes a mix of primary and secondary sources. The only issue this reviewer encountered was the inconsistent labeling of bibliography entries as primary and secondary, which may be a result of the styles of the contributors or inconsistent editing of the bibliographies.

Structurally, the encyclopedia is well laid out. The table of contents and lists of entries, both alphabetical and topical, appear in both volumes, a seemingly minor feature that will be welcome to readers who are using the set for extensive introductory research. A glossary, list of contributors, subject index, and general bibliography of print sources appear in the second volume. The glossary is a nice accompaniment, with entries cross-referenced to entries in the encyclopedia.

The second volume also includes a collection consisting of selections from eighteen primary source documents that correspond to and are referenced in specific entries. Each document has its own brief introductory material. The materials included in this section are excerpts from many of the primary documents scholars of Jesus and early Christianity would expect (e.g., selections from the *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, the *Didache*, *Acts of Thomas*, *Pistis Sophia*). All of these primary source document selections are taken from very old translations and editions, seemingly from works in the public domain. While this is certainly not a fault, this reader in particular would appreciate acknowledgment that the materials appear also in more recent translations and editions, especially in a work that succeeds in providing a great model for crediting source material. This might have been easily accomplished with the addition of a supplemental bibliography of more recently published editions of these primary texts, and perhaps also of recent works of criticism and interpretation. That said, the inclusion of primary source documents at all ought to be considered a bonus in any encyclopedia reporting historical people and events, and what appears here is a great introductory collection for learners new to using documentary evidence.

The introduction to the present edition remarks, "the audience for an encyclopedia on Jesus is changing" from people interested in faith to those interested in science, other religions, anthropology, comparative religion, folklore, history, literature, and the social sciences (xxxv). This reviewer would rather insist that scientists, scholars of other religions, anthropologists, folklorists, historians, social scientists, and scholars of literature have always held membership in the possible audience for an encyclopedia on Jesus, especially one as easily accessible by non-experts as this one. This is certainly not new to the years intervening between the two editions of this set. The statement that "[o]ur fascination with this man [Jesus] at the heart of western civilization continues to keep him relevant" (xxxvi) may be more palatable, but alongside the previous statement, it feels apologetic. The editors need not justify the relevance of the publication of a work like this, as it holds its own in the myriad encyclopedias in circulation.

The information in this set is ideal for learners new to the subject of the history (and legend, scripture, and tradition) of Jesus, whether they are scholars new to the discipline, scholars in peripheral disciplines, or enthusiasts of another origin. In particular, this encyclopedia would be a great addition to an academic library serving an undergraduate population engaged in theological or history of religions coursework. As someone who helps scores of undergraduate students each semester with beginner-level research on Jesus and Christianity, this reviewer heartily recommends this encyclopedia as a resource to assist this population of learners. It is this type of approachable and easily navigable reference source that allows students new to theological and historical research to become immersed in a subject without feeling immediately overwhelmed. The two volumes, which may seem at first glance limiting to those of us who recognize how much must be squeezed into such a contracted format, are manageable in size and scope to learners who may find a source like the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* dizzying. The subject coverage, while focused on Jesus, remains more general than the contents of works like the *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* and requires less prior knowledge.

In summary, *Jesus in History, Legend, Scripture, and Tradition: A World Encyclopedia* is a highly recommended addition to academic libraries. It is ideal for learners at the undergraduate level or those new to the study of Jesus.

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