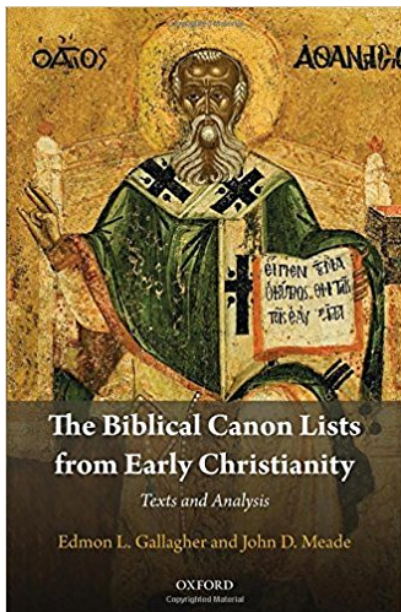


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**Edmon L. Gallagher and John D. Meade**

***The Biblical Canon Lists from Early Christianity:  
Texts and Analysis***

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxii + 337.  
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Lee Martin McDonald

Acadia Divinity College, Acadia University

Gallagher and Meade have produced a remarkably useful volume that is indispensable for any investigation of the complex history of the biblical canon. They focus mostly, though not completely, on the earliest surviving canonical lists from the end of the first century CE to roughly the fifth century as well as on the earliest and most complete biblical manuscripts that reflect notions of the scope of the Christian Scriptures. They also add excellent citations of the major players among the early church fathers and also a large collection of supportive footnotes that add clarity for the translations of the ancient texts they cite and explain some of the more obscure and difficult aspects in those translations. They have produced a careful listing and analysis of the earliest known ancient canon catalogues that reflect the complex history of the formation of the Bible in its formative stages.

The authors include a large collection of early lists or catalogues of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures from the end of the first century CE to roughly the early part of the fifth century CE but with some observations dating after that. They focus mostly on the formative period of canon formation and offer numerous helpful citations of the church fathers that clarify the context and interpretation of the canon lists they investigate. The scope and clarity of their examination of these important canon lists, citations, and manuscripts in the formative time of the church's biblical canon is broad, unusual, and

most helpful. The ancient catalogues or lists are presented in their original Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and Syriac languages along with careful English translations and a wealth of helpful footnotes that enable students and scholars to see why they translated the texts the way they did and to clarify some obscure texts with multiple scholarly interpretations. The footnotes also reflect the considerable awareness of the authors of the vast majority of the current critical literature analyzing these ancient texts.

Gallagher and Meade begin their work with a summarizing chapter of their conclusions based on the results of their research of the primary ancient sources that they present in the rest of the volume (1–56). After this opening chapter, they start their lists with Jewish canons at the end of the first century CE, namely, Josephus's list (*C. Ap.* 1.37–43) along with four attempts of scholars to identify the specific books in it. They also include an investigation of the mid- to late second century CE Babylonian Talmud *barita* (b. B. Bat. 14b) (57–69). The next chapter lists and examines the Greek scriptural catalogues (70–173), followed by the next chapter on the Latin lists (174–235); finally, chapter 5 examines some of the Syriac lists (236–43). The authors conclude with an important listing of the books in several pivotal Greek, Syriac, Latin, and Hebrew manuscripts (244–60). These manuscripts reveal the operative Scriptures of the communities that possessed them and are highly significant in discerning the history of the formation of the Bibles in specific congregations in Judaism and emerging Christianity. While most canon scholars, including this one, list some of the complete Bible manuscripts from the fourth and fifth centuries (Codices Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus), Gallagher and Meade also include several others (especially Codex Venetus, Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, Minuscule 1424, Codex Ambrosianus [7al], Codex Amiatinus, and Codex Leningrad) that include both Old and New Testaments or just the Tanak or New Testament. These manuscripts are critically important for all canon research.

The appendix (261–84) includes a collection of introductory or summary comments about several Jewish and Christian sacred texts that were marginalized by some but later welcomed as scripture (e.g., Esther, Ezekiel, Song of Songs, Judith, Hebrews, James, Revelation) or not finally accepted by some (e.g., 1 Enoch, Sirach, Wisdom, 1–2 Clement, Epistle of Barnabas, Shepherd of Hermas, Diatessaron). Their up-to-date bibliography (285–316) is extensive and reflects their well-informed and careful attention to the details in their research. It includes major scholarly sources, including those with which they disagree. The authors are well aware of the variety of positions on the formation of the biblical canon and present the ancient evidence on the subject as well as anyone else to the present.

Although I disagree with some of their conclusions, the authors nonetheless present their evidence well and regularly interact with contemporary critical canon scholarship with

which they agree and disagree. No one can fault their informed scholarly assessments even if there is some disagreement over their conclusions. They present the most important primary sources of most of the early stages of the formation of the Bible and offer many well-informed footnotes on each of these sources with up-to-date and pivotal secondary sources. They are well aware of the limits of what can be known today because of the frequent gaps in the available ancient resources. They provide a wealth of information that was not available in earlier canon research, including my own. I know both of these scholars and was privileged to have access to some of their research as I was finishing my own recent volumes on canon formation. I am grateful for their help in correcting some of the canon lists in my own work.

These authors are also fully aware that their volume is not complete and that there is much more to learn from the medieval and pre-Reformation eras. They have indicated the possibility of a subsequent volume that will deal in more canon lists from the first millennium (e.g., Cassiodorus, Isidore, Nicephorus, Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila) and Latin, Greek, and Syriac scriptural manuscripts well into the fifteenth century (pre-Reformation). This could also include the content and influence of pandect Bibles, especially the influence of the western Paris Bibles on the *books and text* of subsequent Bible production. This should also focus more on the complex history of the reception of the deuterocanonical or apocryphal writings and the presence of some Christian apocryphal texts, such as 3 Corinthians, in Armenian Bibles well into the nineteenth century.

Some important areas that do not receive adequate attention in this volume include the surviving lectionary evidence that reflects the operative canon consciousness of local churches, as well as the *texts* of the books included in the biblical canon. The authors are rightly aware that the primary focus of biblical canon formation is on books and not texts, but still the text of those books is critically important for churches and synagogues. They have shown considerable awareness of the variations of the books on the “fringe” of the biblical canon in its early stages, such as we see in their awareness of texts of Jeremiah in the LXX with the inclusion or exclusion of Baruch or the Epistle of Jeremiah to Jeremiah or the additions to the books of Esther and Daniel, but this can be extended to the texts of other books as well, including the Christian Scriptures as in the cases of the longer or shorter form of the Lord’s Prayer or the ending of the Gospel of Mark or John 7:53–8:11, and others. Which text of the church’s Scriptures is canon for the church? While it is appropriate to focus on the books that made the various canon collections, I hope the authors include these matters in a subsequent volume. Canon inquiry cannot in the end ignore the text of the church’s scriptural canon. I would also suggest investigating the Hellenistic influence on the list of twenty-two or twenty-four books in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament canon.

While the authors and I have some differences in our analysis of some of the primary related texts, such as Melito's reference to Wisdom, the date and influence of the Muratorian Fragment, and elsewhere, this cannot diminish the value of this remarkable resource that will doubtless become the standard starting resource for all subsequent canon list research.

Gallagher and Meade are also to be commended for their frequent use of the words "possibly" and "may be" when the evidence in their sources is not as clear as they would hope. I also want to commend them for their irenic position toward all those with whom they disagree without demeaning either the scholars or their positions. They have produced a superb volume with a wealth of information about canon formation that cannot be ignored in all future investigations of this topic. They have produced what I think may well remain the standard volume on canon lists that scholars and students alike will appreciate for years to come. I heartily recommend this impressive volume.