

Epiphanius the Monk: Life of Mary, the Theotokos, and Life and Acts of St Andrew the Apostle. Introduction, translation and commentary by MARY B. CUNNINGHAM (Translated Texts for Byzantinists 13). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2024. xi+195 pp. – ISBN 978-1-80207-853-4

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MARY CUNNINGHAM's translation of Epiphanius the Monk's *Life of Mary* and *Life and Acts of Andrew* is a significant contribution to both Byzantine studies and Christian hagiography. This dual biography, anchored in Middle Byzantine spirituality, bridges doctrinal orthodoxy with the biographies of two of Christianity's most iconic figures. The translator's comprehensive introduction, supported by a full scholarly apparatus and appendices, not only restores a neglected voice of Byzantine monasticism but also re-frames key discussions about the role of apocrypha, pilgrimage, and icon veneration in post-Iconoclasm theology.

CUNNINGHAM situates Epiphanius in the early 9th century, likely in Constantinople, where he was active as a monk, priest, and pilgrim. His awareness of iconoclastic controversies, imperial cultic spaces, and Marian piety is reflected in his literary products. The *Life of Mary* reveals a detailed Mariology, portraying her as not only the Theotokos but as an idealized nun: humble, ascetic, perpetually virginal, and the spiritual mother of all apostles. The *Life and Acts of Andrew* offer an apostolic mirror to Mary's virtues, depicting Andrew as a tireless evangelist, miracle worker, and ascetic martyr.

A key contribution of the work is Epiphanius's careful synthesis of canonical and apocryphal materials. Rather than reproducing earlier texts in full, he edits, condenses, and theologically reframes his sources – most notably the *Acts of Andrew* and *Protevangelion of James* – to suit an Orthodox, didactic purpose. In doing so, he employs a typical Middle Byzantine iconophile hagiographic strategy: the sanctification of narrative through liturgical and theological reshaping.

Both texts aim to elevate their protagonists as paradigms of holiness. In the *Life of Mary*, Epiphanius offers a detailed genealogy, physical and spiritual portrait, and liturgically resonant death scene. His theological creativity is evident in his claim that Christ appeared first to Mary after the Resurrection – a tradition more Latin than Greek, but used here to amplify her honor.

In the *Life and Acts of Andrew*, the apostle journeys through a vividly reconstructed Eastern Mediterranean, confronting pagan idols, demons, dragons, and immoral governors. His suffering and miracles, including exorcisms, resurrections, and healings, reinforce his spiritual authority. As expected in such hagiographies, Epiphanius casts Andrew as a prototype of Christ – refusing money, forgiving enemies, and ultimately martyred by crucifixion. Both texts are steeped in monastic ideals, as CUNNINGHAM duly notes. The embracing of the celibate life is emphasized not only in the cases of Mary and Andrew but also in supporting characters like Maximilla. Andrew’s dialogues often read like monastic instruction, promoting humility, prayer, and vigilance. The linking of relics, icon veneration, and pilgrimages to apostolic sites reflect the clear and intentional emphasis on material piety that characterized numerous saints’ lives written after the end of Iconoclasm.

Epiphanius also demonstrates liturgical sensitivity. His framing of Marian feasts, his reliance on patristic voices (Basil, Chrysostom, Dionysios the Areopagite), and his favorable treatment of doctrinal debates (e.g., Dormition traditions) firmly situate him within the theologically literate and pastorally minded milieu of Middle-Byzantine iconophiles.

CUNNINGHAM’s introduction spans over 70 pages, deftly combining manuscript study, doctrinal commentary, and historical geography. Her choice to translate Version B of the *Life and Acts of Andrew* reflects a critical judgment about Epiphanius’s authorial intent, while her notes and appendices provide valuable insight into, and facilitate the study of, textual variants and manuscript dissemination.

The translation is fluid, accessible, and accurate, accompanied by rich footnotes that clarify references, identify apocryphal overlaps, and explain theological implications. The inclusion of a detailed index, a subject glossary, and a bibliography enhances the volume’s utility not only for specialists in the field, but also, and critically, for advanced students and even a wider interested reading public.

Though CUNNINGHAM is careful not to go too heavy on the commentary, some areas do seem to warrant deeper exploration. First, the *Life of Mary* could be further compared with contemporaneous Dormition texts from Palestine, Egypt, and Rome to assess its uniqueness or dependency. Second, the socio-political function of Epiphanius’s iconophile stance – especially his sharp anti-iconoclast rhetoric – could be more fully explored as part of Byzantine cultural restoration after 843. Finally, the potential use

of these texts in liturgical or monastic instruction invites speculation about the possibility of a performative or catechetical role.

This volume successfully reclaims Epiphanius the Monk as an important voice in Middle Byzantine religious thought. His fusion of pilgrimage, theology, hagiography, and monastic ideology provides a fascinating window into a period of Orthodox identity reconstruction. CUNNINGHAM's edition offers scholars a dependable and engaging resource for further study of Byzantine sanctity, narrative theology, and the evolution of Christian memory.

Keywords

middle-Byzantine hagiography