

BOOK REVIEW

Albert Wifstrand, *Epochs and Styles: Selected Writings on the New Testament, Greek Language and Greek Culture in the Post-Classical Era* (ed. Lars Rydbeck and Stanley E. Porter; trans. Denis Searby; WUNT, 179; Tübingen: Mohr–Siebeck, 2005). viii + 240 pp. Hdbk. €74.00.

This volume is a translated collection of Albert Wifstrand's papers to honour his contribution to the study of the New Testament and its relationship to and placement within the post-classical milieu. This tribute begins with a brief outline of the book's contents and a copy of the eulogy given by Jonas Palm in June 1964. The motivation behind this book is to allow English scholars access to Wifstrand's work and ideas, which were primarily written in Swedish.

The book itself is divided into three sections: New Testament, Greek language, and Greek culture in the post-classical era. Chapter 1 focuses on Luke's relationship to Greek classicism. Wifstrand looks to defend Luke from the Attic label by comparing Luke to the literary works that were written in his day. Luke is considered to have the highest Greek of the Gospels, but falls short of many Attic literary characteristics. Wifstrand gives a good overview of this time period and does a fine job of distinguishing Luke's writing style in his use of diminutives and his imitation of the LXX.

Chapter 2 is related to Chapter 1 and seeks to determine the relationship between Luke's Gospel and the LXX. The theory that Luke's Septuagint flavor is a result of an 'L' source is refuted by Wifstrand, who proposes that Luke was deliberately attempting to associate his Gospel with the sacred language style of the LXX in order to give his narrative a more elevated style.

In the third chapter, Wifstrand evaluates the Epistles of James and Peter and compares their literary styles to Greek diatribe. Wifstrand

disagrees that the major influence on these authors is Greek philosophical diatribe, but suggests that the real foundation is Hebraic and Aramaic modes of thought as can be seen through a variety of examples.

Chapter 4 discusses the different placements of enclitic pronouns in the New Testament and classical Greek. Originally, this difference was thought to reflect LXX influence; however, a closer look at vulgar language and different papyri shows that post position was dominant and that there was not free word order. In addition to this, Wifstrand evaluates the percentages within the different books of the New Testament and appraises their relationship to koine Greek.

Section One closes with a brief essay discussing the development of the negative perception of the Gospels and New Testament literary style and how it is misrepresented as vulgar because of Julian the Apostate and the classical movement.

The Greek language section begins with an article tracing the development of Greek prose writing from Attic times to late antiquity. This chapter discusses the major schools of thought and the contributions to Greek literary style. Among other movements, Wifstrand evaluates classicism, its mild beginning and radical second-century developments.

In Chapter 7, Wifstrand makes an interesting comparison between ancient Greek and modern prose style. He brings to light some basic but vital characteristics of Greek prose, namely that it was linked to an oral culture and that euphony was a key feature of style. Wifstrand contrasts this and other aspects of Greek prose with our modern, visually-oriented literature. He links these ideas to the abundance of imagery in our literature compared to that of antiquity.

An evaluation of the Homily of Melito on the Passion concludes Section Two. Wifstrand expresses the opinion that, although there are some Semitic aspects of style, the homily is more akin to Greek literature. He substantiates this point by comparing the homily to a large variety of Greek writers, including: Maximus, Dio Chrysostom, Lucian and Euripides. One negative aspect of this article for those who do not read Greek fluently is that the majority of the text is untranslated Greek prose.

Section Three, Greek culture in the post-classical era, begins with an article outlining the development of the terms 'classical' and 'post-classical'. In this essay, Wifstrand looks to understand the motivation for the disproportion of attention paid to classical Greek and how it was

considered to be the highpoint of Greek literature. Wifstrand traces this belief back and finds that it was seeded in Greek times. He concludes that the classicism movement, as a nationalistic reaction to Roman dominance, created this opinion.

Similar to Chapter 9, Chapter 10 discusses the Greek perspective of the Roman Empire. Wifstrand outlines how the Greeks originally disliked the Romans because of the elevated view that they had of themselves. Therefore, they preferred to view their captors as Hellenistic monarchs and, in doing so, promote traditional Greek values and thus provide a form of resistance. This view gradually changed because of the adoption of Greek culture by the Romans and in the fourth century by the Greek Christian writers.

Chapter 11 is an essay evaluating the role of the child within the ancient world. Traditionally, the child was not valued because it was not developed and had little intellect. The child did, however, have aesthetic value and was a theme in art and poetry conveying innocence and life before corruption. There was a shift in this perspective when it came to Jesus, whose comments regarding children and the practice of adoring the Christ child elevated the position of children in Greek, primarily Christian, thought.

The brief article in Chapter 12 looks to find a Greek or Latin influence for the 'son of...' construction. In his search, Wifstrand finds very few cases, but believes that it can be traced back to the LXX.

Chapter 13 is another brief chapter that looks at the development of the term 'centre' within our language. Wifstrand believes that this imagery originated only after Copernicus discovered that the earth travels around the sun. Although this has little to do with Greek literature, Wifstrand makes it an important object lesson regarding our own preconceptions and how the common imagery of our age has risks when we superimpose it on ancient cultures.

The final chapter of the book is a detailed look at Galen and his works. Wifstrand notes that there are some important side comments found in Galen's work that provide insight into Roman life. These side comments are difficult to locate and are usually buried in a mass of medical information, but the careful reader will find that there are interesting tidbits of information to be gleaned, specifically in the areas of the relationship between religion and medicine, the certification of other 'doctors', and methods of publication.

There is a good flow and organization to this compilation of articles. Wifstrand does an admirable job of situating the New Testament within its first-century context and indicating how this affects the Bible as literature. In addition to this, Wifstrand excellently expounds the literature and culture of this time period and how it has interacted with the different New Testament works. Overall, *Epochs and Style* has a number of valuable insights into Greek literature and culture and the Bible and, as a compendium, does justice as a tribute to a great scholar.

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