

BOOK REVIEW

Craig A. Evans (ed.), *The World of Jesus and the Early Church: Identity and Interpretation in Early Communities of Faith* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2011). xvi + 257 pp. Pbk. US\$29.95.

This edited volume is the product of a series of scholarly conferences and symposia held at Acadia Divinity College and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Craig A. Evans, Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College and a prolific author, introduces this volume with the claim that it is through an ‘interpretive reciprocity—the archaeological discovery clarifying the text and the text clarifying the archaeological discovery—that we are able to make significant progress in understanding what went before us and why we are what we are today’ (p. 1). This volume contains various interesting and up-to-date chapters aimed at addressing the world of Jesus and the early church. While it is necessary to evaluate each essay on its own terms, their wide-ranging topics make it difficult to do so. Thus, I offer some general comments on the volume as a whole regarding what could have made the book more helpful to readers. Before doing so, I provide a summative overview of the chapters of this book.

This volume is proportionately divided into two parts. The seven essays in Part 1 address the issue of community identity in early Jewish and Christian communities. This is followed by six essays in Part 2 that focus on ‘how authoritative Scripture was interpreted in diverse community settings’ (p. 4). These two major sections are prefaced with an introduction and concluded with a comprehensive bibliography and modern authors and ancient sources indices.

Part 1 begins with John Collins’s essay on the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) and the site and community of Qumran. Collins says that the two comparable ‘rule books’ discovered in Qumran (1QS) and in the Cairo Geniza (CD) point to the fact that this so-called ‘Qumran community’ did not live in a single ‘Qumran settlement’ but in multiple settlements. Collins suggests that Qumran was not even the headquarters of the sect. He recommends scholars not to

associate the Essenes exclusively with Qumran, since the sect 'was part of a religious association spread widely throughout the land' (p. 22).

Torleif Elgvin compares the concepts of the heavenly temple and the Jerusalem temple. In chronological fashion, he traces the priestly tradition through the Old Testament, intertestamental and New Testament literature, Hebrews and then to Revelation. Arguing that the authors of Hebrews and Revelation were priests or Levites and Jewish Christians, he concludes that 'Hebrews and Revelation may derive from priestly milieus that were able to produce both theological treatises and apocalyptic visions' (p. 36), since both employ the heavenly temple as a 'model' for the earthly temple.

Dorothy Peters argues that 'authoritative scripture', rather than 'Bible' or 'canon', is a more appropriate term to use with reference to the first-century context. She points out that such categories as biblical, non-biblical and marginal books would not have been familiar to ancient scribes in the Qumran library. She presents some of the strategies scribe-interpreters used for acknowledging and claiming authority for their own writings, and she surveys selected scriptures from the apocrypha, the Aramaic reworkings of Genesis and the Hebrew reworkings of Moses and Torah. Peters concludes that these marginal books may have been highly authoritative books at that time.

Mark Chancey deals with the disputed issues about the economic and urban-rural situations of Galilee. He points out that, whereas some scholars think that 'most rural Galileans suffered economic turmoil under Antipas' (p. 53) and other scholars suggest 'the reign of Antipas and his city-building activities had positive effects on the region as a whole' (p. 54), the lack of archaeological evidence and literary sources should make both camps circumspect in their arguments. Nevertheless, he concludes that a rigorous comparison of the various economic models may be the best thing scholars can offer at this point, since 'a universalizing model is problematic' (p. 67), and it is still uncertain whether one can replace the traditional opinion that Galilee was a parasitic geographical region.

Margaret MacDonald tackles the issue of the role of children in ancient house churches. She says that archaeological evidence for house churches in the period after the first century points to female leadership and patronage, but at the same time, it also shows the existence of separate rooms for men and women during worship. She further says that modern concepts of private and public domestic space cannot be ap-

plied to this ancient context. Thus, the ‘household codes need to be envisioned within the context of urban neighborhoods and domestic spaces where free and slave children played together’ (p. 84).

Craig Evans’s essay attests to the importance of family burial in ancient times as evidenced by the Jewish practice of *ossilegium* (reburial of the bones of the deceased) found in ossuaries. After briefly discussing the procedures, beliefs and necessity of burial in Jewish customs, Evans presents archaeological evidence of Jewish burials in the Roman era. He argues against J.D. Crossan’s suggestion—which is based upon the inference that normal Roman practice does not permit burial of executed persons—that Jesus was not buried, and subsequently gives four objections to this suggestion. Evans concludes that Jesus was buried, since ‘the strong social and family ties of the Jewish people of late antiquity expected it’ (p. 96).

Shimon Gibson points out that, while there is unanimous agreement among New Testament scholars that Jesus was tried before Pilate, there is not much agreement with respect to the historical reliability of the details surrounding the trial’s proceedings. Arguing against such negative notions of the trial’s historical reliability, Gibson provides readers with historical, topographical and archaeological evidence as to the overall layout of Herod’s palace (the Roman praetorium) in order to show that it was in the western gateway, probably the Gate of the Essenes, where Jesus was brought to trial. Thus, Gibson’s essay provides further evidence for the historical credibility of the Trial Narratives in the Gospels.

Part 2 begins with George Brooke’s essay on scriptural interpretation and the DSS. Contrary to Peters, Brooke contends that the distinction between such categories as biblical and non-biblical ‘is strongly suggested by the overall contents of the library’ (p. 123). The evidence seen from non-biblical compositions indicates that they showed signs of contingency on earlier scriptural authoritative antecedents. From here Brooke presents the foundations (e.g. scriptural pluralism, interpretation within Scripture, scriptural preferences) and the different types of interpretation (e.g. halakhah and haggadah, pure and applied exegesis, implicit and explicit interpretation) employed by Jewish and Christian communities. He also identifies five types of interpretation by content and method—legal, narrative, hymnic and poetic, exhortatory and prophetic interpretations—as his own interpretive preference.

In his essay, Keith Bodner studies the three Qumran scrolls of Samuel (4QSam<sup>a-c</sup>), making three kinds of comment: ‘First, I am keen to affirm that the Qumran material makes a quantifiable literary contribution for biblical exegetes in [narrative criticism]. Second, I would assert that the Qumran texts of Samuel provide us an idea of the reception history of these compelling narratives... Third, I would like to argue that the 4QSam material provides insight as far as the history of interpretation is concerned’ (pp. 144-45). Bodner’s comments suggest that the Qumran scrolls alert readers to the fact that early scribes were already practicing the kinds of hermeneutical and literary analyses used today.

Stephen Andrews discusses the surrounding controversies that have transpired since the discovery of the Khirbet Qeiyafa inscription, a rare ostrakon discovered in ‘Iron IIA and dated to the early tenth century BCE’ (p. 153). Andrews points out that, unlike the Nash Papyrus—the oldest biblical Hebrew text discovered before the DSS—and the Ketef Hinnom amulets—dated to the end of the seventh century—the five lines of text in the Qeiyafa inscription do not show any citation of the biblical text. Nevertheless, the inscription proves its worth in enlightening our understanding of language and literacy in the early Iron Age, which, in turn, may shed some light on the issue about the historicity of David’s kingdom.

James Sanders reviews the progress of *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) in the light of the contribution made by the DSS. According to Sanders, the Scrolls so far have shed much light on the understanding of the history of transmission of the Hebrew text. To date, five fascicles of the BHQ—intended to be a single-volume standard *Handausgabe* of the Hebrew Bible—have already appeared. Sanders concludes that ‘the field of textual criticism of the HB is in the process of being redeemed, rectified and made fully available’ (p. 178).

Larry Hurtado examines the issue of the physical and visual features of the earliest Christian manuscripts in order to demonstrate that the earliest Christians had already developed a distinct corporate identity as evidenced in these Christian manuscripts. He first explains how to recognize an early Christian manuscript, providing three types of indicators: the content of a manuscript, the predominant use of the codex as the preferred book form (to the roll or scroll) by Christians and the scribal usage of *nomina sacra*. He then deals with questions about ‘why Christians preferred the codex and deployed the *nomina sacra*, and what these features represent in historical perspective’ (p. 186).

Finally, Paul Foster discusses opinions concerning the date of P.Egerton 2 in conjunction with other early manuscripts (e.g. P46, P52, P90), and brings the book to a close with the injunction: ‘The lack of granularity in paleographical dating should be frankly acknowledged, and extreme caution should be exercised in assigning early dates to highly fragmentary scraps of papyrus. Instead, NT scholars should be happy to celebrate the diversity of third-century...manuscript witnesses to the text that is the center of their scholarly attention’ (p. 211).

I now give my comments on the volume. First, the diverse topics in this volume, which are supposed to provide insight into the ‘identity and interpretation in early communities of faith’, lack a coherent focus. That is, I think that some essays more appropriately belong to the disciplines of textual criticism and papyrology. Given the goal of the volume, readers would expect topics that are more related to the other essays in the volume that address the socio-cultural and religious context of this ancient world. In other words, the title of the book may confuse readers as to whether the book aims to discuss archaeology and the DSS or the world of Jesus and the early church.

Secondly, because many of the essays deal with issues of manuscript dating and archaeological evidence, it is important, I think, that paleographic and other such methods of dating be included in the introductory discussions. Readers will want to be informed of the means and accuracy of claims made by different authors regarding manuscript dating and archaeological evidence. Even though Paul Foster addresses this issue in his essay, it does not follow that the other authors are in agreement. A clear example is the ‘script on the [Nash] papyrus [which] was originally dated to the second century CE, but later, with the discovery of the DSS and the advancement of Hebrew paleography, the text was redated to between 250 BCE to 150 CE’ (p. 159).

Thirdly, and lastly, it is not altogether clear whether all of the essays actually address how people lived in antiquity or address matters concerning identity and interpretation in the early faith communities. James Sanders’s essay on the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, among others, might prove this point, since the discussion concerns how the discovery of the DSS illuminates the history of transmission of the Hebrew text. All in all, however, biblical scholars who wish to gain new insights and familiarity with the New Testament world will find this volume helpful.

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