promised early on (p.157). Why did Leonidas only choose men with sons to remain with him? Why is ‘the First Peloponnesian War’ between the allies of Sparta and Athens, with Sparta’s own role a minor one? Why the importance of the survivors of Sphakteria? Why the appearance of Neodamodeis between 421 and 370 B.C. only? In all cases, the key is the plunge in the number of adult male citizens, halved, C. argues, between 479 and 418 B.C.

Part IV, Results and Prospects, draws the threads together against the background of Aristotle, Politics 1270A29, ('less than 1,000 hoplites') and speculates on the attitudes and values which could have contributed to this decline and fall. Five solid appendixes are added: App.5 on Artemis Orthia is particularly helpful.

C.’s analysis liberates from clichés also. This can be inconvenient. There is no handy survey of ‘The Spartan Life-style’, for example, while the Thucydidean Brasidas forfeits some charisma. Its greatest service, however, is to free us from total dependence on Athens for the connected history and development of a Greek polis, a complaint often levelled against classical historians, with some justice.

This has been an enthusiastic review. Of course no book is perfect. C.’s ‘possibilisme’ seems to fade out often in Part II; further, it is just provocative to ask one to take Renfrew without the systems theory; Eratosthenes as the Voltaire of the ancient world is not, shall we say, enlightening. But this is a book none of us practitioners of survey courses will want to be without.

K. Adshead

The Setting and Documents of Early Christianity


The two volumes by Helmut Koester represent the beginning of a new series of ‘Hermeneia: Foundations and Facets’ to stand alongside the prestigious
‘Hermeneia’ commentaries on individual books of the Bible. The series aims to deal with ‘facets’, i.e. ‘strands or trajectories of early Christian tradition’ and with ‘foundations’, in this respect offering a revised presentation (in the light of the most recent scholarship) of things foundational to the understanding of the biblical texts in their setting. Koester’s volumes deal with ‘foundations’ and, in fact, attempt to cover the ground usually covered by five or six volumes.

The first includes a ‘historical survey’ of Hellenism, a description of ‘the society and economics’, the ‘education, language and literature’ and the ‘philosophy and religion’ of the Hellenistic world, and then has sections on ‘Judaism in the Hellenistic period’ and ‘The Roman Empire as the heir of Hellenism’. Although the ground covered is considerable, the volume certainly does not simply present undocumented generalisations, but there is thoroughness and care in the presentation of each of the subjects included. Although scholars may quarrel with Koester in respect of the side on which he comes down in debatable issues, this is an admirable survey.

The second volume sets out to cover the range of the literature of early Christianity, including the 27 documents that make up the New Testament and also the ‘sixty other early Christian writings from the first 150 years of Christian history, whether or not these writings are preserved fully or only in fragments’ (p.xxi). This kind of survey has merits, enabling the reader to see the diversity within early Christianity and to identify the different currents of thought. It has the demerit of making some of the non-biblical writings appear closer to the spirit and basic content of the New Testament documents than is actually the case.

Koester follows a path which seems to this reviewer to involve an undue scepticism of the integrity and historicity of the New Testament documents themselves. Paul is the author of only seven of the thirteen letters that bear his name. In Philippians there are felt to be at least three letters (or fragments of them), in 2 Corinthians no less than five. In relation to the Acts of the Apostles classical scholars have often had a higher regard for the historical value of the book than New Testament scholars. Long ago Sir William Ramsay’s research convinced him that the writer of Acts was a careful historian, and the documentary, inscriptional and geographical evidence on which his opinion was based stands unchanged. On the basis of theological considerations many New Testament scholars have taken a different attitude. Much of Acts is seen as ‘legendary’ and the portrait of Paul regarded as greatly at variance with that which comes from his own letters. This seems unduly sceptical in the light of the way that the writer of Luke-Acts speaks of his dealing with his sources, oral and written (Luke1:1–4) and the evidence that we have for his care for detail where he can be checked with extra-biblical evidence. Koester’s view of historicity in the Gospels is
similar. Again, while diversity within the New Testament is rightly shown in Koester’s treatment, the underlying unity of witness to Jesus as Lord is not brought out clearly. Facts about the early Christian documents are presented well in Koester’s work but one misses the spirit of early Christianity and an appreciation of the immense dynamic of such documents as Romans and Galatians, 1 Peter and the Johannine writings.

These criticisms apart, Koester’s work is a mine of information and especially to be valued for the comprehensive way that it deals with the early Christian literature and especially for its treatment of some texts not often dealt with previously in such surveys.

In Koester’s first volume (pp.105-106) he speaks of the significant discoveries at the end of the 19th Century of papyri throwing light on the period of early Christianity and the ‘rich materials discovered in more recent decades’ that ‘have not yet been systematically explored . . .’. Macquarie University boasts the possession of ‘the only working collection of unpublished papyrus documents in this part of the world’ as well as having a fine collection of published editions of papyrus texts. Professor Judge speaks of these as providing ‘a stimulus for students of ancient history to seek training in the use of documentary and other sources in the original’.

‘Rank and Status in the World of the Caesars and St. Paul’ is the 1981 Broadhead Lecture in Canterbury University. In it Edwin Judge takes up 8 papyri and studies them for the light that they may throw on his subject. He admits that the information that they give does not carry us very far. There is, however, much to learn from the way that he subjects them to careful analysis. He has reason, furthermore, to say that they provide some evidence contrary to the commonly accepted view that the early Christians generally came from the lower classes. He prefers the view that ‘the social explanation of the spread of Christianity’ is to be given rather ‘by invoking’ the principle of ‘status dissonance’, that it may be ‘the discord between relatively high status in the home town and low rank in Roman eyes that explains the drive’ that enabled the early Christian Church to grow as it did.

Koester gives a valuable section of his second volume to the consideration of the text of the New Testament, pointing out that ‘classical authors are often represented by but one surviving manuscript’ (p.16) and ‘the surviving manuscripts of classical authors often come from the Middle Ages’, while ‘the manuscript tradition of the N.T. begins as early as the end of II CE’. The abundance of the material available for the textual criticism of the N.T. is immense; ‘there are nearly five thousand manuscripts of the N.T. in Greek, numerous translations that derive from an early stage of the textual development and finally, beginning in II CE, an uncounted number of
quotations in the writings of the church fathers'. The wealth of the textual material is the difficulty. Classification and division of the texts into families is imperative and the assessing of probabilities of some families being nearer to the original than others. These considerations have been the basis of the production of the N.T. Greek text by such scholars as Westcott and Hort of 19th Century and Aland and Metzger in this century. Westcott and Hort identified four main families of manuscripts giving preference for the most part to the family which they (perhaps unwisely) called the 'Neutral Text'. The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text opposes the preference that Westcott and Hort gave to the important manuscripts which for them constituted the 'Neutral Text'. That there is reason for Westcott and Hort’s judgments to be challenged is undoubtedly the case, but to lump the other families together as the 'Majority Text' would seem a worse fault. Hodges and Farstat in their introduction say 'the witnesses to the Majority Text come from all over the ancient world. Their very number suggests that they represent a long and widespread chain of manuscript tradition’ (p.ix). Such a statement is surely misleading. Even if more recent scholarship might modify Westcott and Hort’s classification of manuscripts other than the ‘Neutral Text’ into ‘Western’, ‘Alexandrian’ and ‘Syrian’, the manuscripts must be classified and each family assessed. This is the continuing task for the painstaking labours of scholars who work with what Koester speaks of as the immense abundance of the material available. There are few places in the New Testament where the original text cannot be determined with a tolerable degree of probability. What we cannot say, however, is that there is a ‘Majority Text’ that is able to be our constant guide.

Francis Foulkes