SOME RECENT BOOKS


‘New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity’ by G. H. R. Horsley, published by the Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, is described as a review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri published in 1976. The collection includes those which are considered to be most significant in illustrating aspects of early Christianity, or illuminating obscure New Testament passages. The work of selection, translation and comment has been done principally by G. H. R. Horsley, with some help from E. A. Judge and others. This is intended as the first in a series of such reviews.

The preface states that the collection is a contribution to the illumination of the background of the New Testament in the Hellenistic World, and that the texts chosen set Christianity in its wider context. The need for a revision of Moulton and Milligan’s ‘Vocabulary of the Greek Testament’ has provided some of the motivation, and much of the comment will be found to modify and support the entries in Moulton and Milligan. A note at the beginning reveals that the research and production of the volume has been funded by a fruitful co-operation between Macquarie University and the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. The author has in mind the needs of the New Testament researcher, teacher and student; to this end he has tried to make available material from a wide variety of sources in a convenient and readable format.

Section A deals with texts which set the New Testament in its wider secular context. Thirty two examples of varying length and provenance are quoted; each is translated and accompanied by a note setting it in its historical, social and political context as appropriate, and suggesting how it impinges on the New Testament. This latter aspect is usually tangential rather than direct, and useful because it illuminates the way in which New Testament usage assumes the milieu of the Hellenistic World. It would be impossible to illustrate this in detail, but the sort of approach taken can be usefully shown from a few examples.

Text 1 contains three invitations to the Klinê of Sarapis; these lead to comment on the nature of invitations, the belief in the presence of the god at the Klinê, and the reclining position of the participants, all of which impinge on eucharistic beliefs and practices. Text 2 is an Aretalogy of Isis which demonstrates interesting parallels with the ‘I am’ sayings in St John’s Gospel. Text 9 is a Regional Kanon for Requisitioned Transport, and in this case we are given full historical notes and treatment of the legal ques-
tions involved. The text gives valuable background for understanding the value of transport such as Paul and other early Christian missionaries would have had to use in their journeys; it is suggested that Jesus’ requisitioning of the donkey prior to His entry into Jerusalem is to be understood against this background also. Most illuminating is the discussion on the meaning of the Greek noun, κανών, as it is used by Paul at 2 Corinthians 10.13-16; the edict suggests that the passage refers to ‘respective territorial commitments’ of Paul and other apostles as against those scholars who deny such a sense to the word κανών.

Section B contains minor Philological Notes on words with New Testament connections. Each note demonstrates the secular associations of the word in some regard, and helps the reader to appreciate the connections the words may have had in the mind of early Christian writers. These notes can often be read as additional to the entry in Moulton and Milligan. There is a long note of considerable interest on names, and especially the use of double names. Reference is made to New Testament names, and there are notes on such difficulties as the translation offered at Acts 4.36 of the name Barnabas.

Section C deals with biblical and related citations, and notes especially the interesting combination of texts which were popular. The citations are from a wide variety of articles — vases, epitaphs, a cross, an oil lamp, a mosaic, an amulet — as well as from papyrus fragments.

Section D is entitled Judaica, and includes early inscriptions from Christian tombs in Jerusalem as well as Jewish epitaphs.

Section E contains texts of great interest for the study of the life and values of the early Church. Text 79 gives examples from various sources illustrating women office-holders in the Church. Text 85 is a letter from a Christian to his friend in which he complainsthat he was assaulted by the latter’s camel-driver. It is salutary to notice the way in which the preservation of friendship takes precedence over insistence on rights. The note also contains helpful information about words which indicate the comparative status of those between whom the friendship exists.

It is hoped that these examples will encourage those with interest in the New Testament and early Christianity to study this collection in detail. There is great interest to be found in the texts and the comments; copious referencing will help those who wish to delve more deeply. The philological comment is of great importance for the understanding of the language of early Christianity. The volume is well indexed — Biblical passages; Greek words; Subjects; Patristic and Jewish writers; Published Texts Discussed. This is a very good first volume, and many of us will look forward to further volumes in the planned series.

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