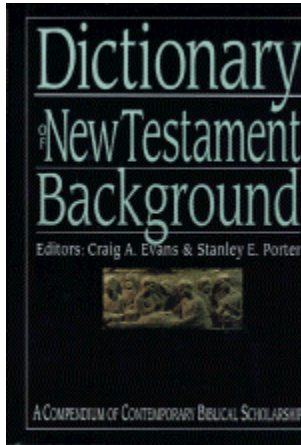


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Evans, Craig A. and Stanley E. Porter, eds.

*Dictionary of New Testament Background: A
Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*

Downers Grove, IL: The Intersociety Press, 2000. Pp.
xxxiv + 1328, Hardcover, \$49.99, ISBN 0830817808.

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This dictionary addresses those subjects that collectively make up the literary, social, and religious context of early Christianity, the study of which should inform our interpretation of the New Testament. This, the fourth in a series of reference books, is intended to complement the previous three volumes, namely, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, and *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*. Unlike the previous members of this series, this volume is not tied to specific New Testament writings but rather focuses on their broader Jewish and Greco-Roman background.

The editors, Evans and Porter, have wisely limited the number of entries to three hundred, allowing for a more thorough treatment of topics, with most entries being 1,000 to 7,500 words in length and some exceeding 10,000 words. With respect to Jewish background, the reader will find articles on Second Temple literature and later Jewish writings, including pseudepigrapha and rabbinic writings, as well as articles on various aspects of Jewish history, faith, and thought (e.g., messianism). In addition to an article on "Josephus: Interpretive Methods and Tendencies," a second article discusses "Josephus: Value for New Testament Study." One of the notable strengths of this dictionary is the numerous articles on the Dead Sea Scrolls. There are lengthy treatments of the *Damascus Document* (CD, QD), *Rule of the Community* (1QS), the *Habakkuk Commentary* (1QpHab), the *Temple Scroll* (11QTemple), and the Isaiah scrolls (1QIsaiah^{a,b}), to name a few, as well as numerous articles on lesser-known Qumran documents and an article entitled "Qumran: Place and History."

The volume also deals with a broad range of subjects pertaining to Greco-Roman culture, such as language and rhetoric, literacy and book culture, religion and cults, honor and shame, patrons and benefactors, and intellectual movements and ideas. There are also many articles dealing with archaeology, geography, numismatics, various historical figures, political institutions, historical events, peoples, cultures, and writings.

Each article is intended to bring the reader up to date on a particular subject, trace the history of scholarly discussion, and then present the latest research. As one might expect, some articles are more successful than others in this respect. Many of the articles are indeed written by experts in their respective fields, such as Stanley Porter's excellent discussion of the "Greek of the New Testament" and Paul Trebilco's "Jewish Communities in Asia Minor."

However, there is evidence elsewhere that some articles were written by persons who have more limited knowledge of the field in question. For example, in the article on the "Mysteries," in the section titled "Mysteries of Dionysus," the author seems to be unaware of the problems attendant upon using Euripides' *Bacchae* to reconstruct the Dionysiac mysteries (cf. Albert Henrichs, "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *HSCP* 82 [1978]: 121-60). The article on "Archaeology and the New Testament" fails to discuss crucial theoretical issues, such as the relationship between artifacts and the culture to which they belonged. The statement in the article on "Associations" that voluntary associations "provided a way for the disenfranchised to enfranchise themselves" (136) significantly oversimplifies the matter and is untrue of a great many associations. In the subsection of the article on "Apocalypticism," entitled "Jesus and Apocalypticism" (51-52), the writer does not discuss scholarship on this subject after G. E. Ladd, E. E. Ellis, and I. H. Marshall, nor is the relevance of the Q document mentioned.

Moreover, some of the material included in the dictionary seems to be irrelevant with respect to the espoused purpose of this work. For example, the discussion of boustrophedon inscriptions (i.e., alternating lines of text reading left to right and right to left) in the entry entitled "Inscriptions and Papyri: Greco-Roman" seems superfluous given the fact that this style of engraving passed out of usage by the fifth century BCE; a discussion of stoichedon versus proportional-spacing engraving would have been more useful. The same article also fails to mention some of the primary research tools, such as the *Packard Humanities Institute CD-ROM #7*, "Greek documentary Texts" (an extensive collection of Greek epigraphical texts), the *Guide de l'épigraphiste*, available in its second edition at the time of the printing of this dictionary (and available in 2000 in an expanded third edition), and *Epigraphic Bulletin for Greek Religion* (in *Kernos*).

This dictionary is both cross-referenced and indexed. However, this internal self-referencing apparatus should be more complete than it is. For example, in the article

entitled "Archaeology and the New Testament" under the subheading "The World of the Early Church," one unexpectedly finds an interesting study of Pauline chronology in the light of certain inscriptions (97-99). However, the reader would search the index in vain for a reference to this discussion under headings such as "Paul" or "Pauline chronology" (neither of which even appear in the index). Moreover, this discussion is not cross-referenced at the end of the article entitled "Inscriptions and Papyri: Greco-Roman." Similarly, the discussion of coins in the "Archaeology of the Land of Israel" article (109) is not cross-referenced in either of the articles on "Coinage" and is likely to be overlooked as a result. The fact that there is no article dedicated solely to "Mithraism" might lead the unwary reader to despair, since the subject is not listed in the index. However, the subject is discussed under the heading "Mysteries." Thus, there is a real danger that the reader will be prevented from using this dictionary to its full extent on account of a faulty indexing and cross-referencing.

Inevitably, some articles will fail to cite important bibliography. Regrettably, the entries entitled "Women in Greco-Roman World and Judaism" and "Benefactor" do not list the foundational work on women as officeholders in Asia Minor by Riet van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (1996), and other significant articles, such as F. Kirbihler, "Les femmes magistrats et liturges en Asie Mineure (IIe s. av. J.-C. - IIIe s. ap. J.-C.)" (*Ktema* 19 [1994]: 51-75). Similarly, one might have expected Michael Speidel's article "Legionaries from Asia Minor" (*ANRW* 7.2:730-46) to be cited in the entry on "Roman Military." Perhaps understandably, the article on "Proselytism and Godfearers" fails to mention the more recent contribution by Stephen Mitchell ("The Cult of *Theos Hypsistos* between Pagan, Jews, and Christians," in *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* [ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 81-148), but Irina Levinskaya's book, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting* (1996), the majority of which is dedicated to a discussion of proselytes and god-fearers (1-126), should have been cited. One would have hoped that one of the dictionary's discussions of manumission ("Family and Household" and "Slavery") would have cited E. L. Gibson's *The Jewish Manumission Inscriptions of the Bosphorus Kingdom* (1999).

However, deficiencies such as these should not overshadow the real contribution of this dictionary. There are many unexpected, and most interesting, articles, such as discussions of "Literacy and Book Culture," "Vice and Virtue Lists," "Pagan Sources in the New Testament," "Heavenly Ascent in Jewish and Pagan Traditions," "Economics of Palestine," "Letters, Greco-Roman," "Taxation," and "Travel and Trade." Also worthy of comment are the numerous articles on the Romans, such as "Roman Administration," "Citizenship, Roman," "Roman East," "Roman Emperors," "Roman Empire," "Roman Governors of Palestine," "Roman Law and Legal System," "Roman Military," "Roman Political System," "Roman Social Classes," "Ruler Cult," and the like. This is to illustrate the tremendous richness of this collection and its usefulness in orienting New Testament scholars to unfamiliar subjects. Thus, this dictionary represents a significant contribution

to the research tools available for scholars interested in the historical, social, literary, political, economic, and theological context of the New Testament.