

RBL 06/2004



**Llewelyn, S. R., ed.**

***New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity.  
Vol. 9: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and  
Papyri Published 1986–87***

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Pp. xvi + 136. Paper.  
\$35.00. ISBN 0802845193.

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The series *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity*, produced by the Ancient History Documentary Research Centre at Macquarie University, N.S.W, Australia, is already well known and appreciated for its contribution to broaden the context of biblical studies as well as to keep scholars in this field informed about recently published Greek transcriptions and papyri that might throw light on the context of the early church and its documents. It is a laborious task that requires systematic and disciplined work, and the commitment as well as the level of excellence shown thus far should be commended. The contribution of the research center is making a definite impact on scholarly work. This is also true of volume 9 in this series.

Volume 9 is produced in honor of Paul Barnett. At the beginning of this volume one finds an essay by E. A. Judge entitled “Paul Barnett and New Testament History,” in which he gives a brief description of the fruitful and productive career of Paul Barnett. The volume also includes a bibliography of Barnett compiled by C. B. Forbes. Paul Barnett played an invaluable role in this project, and his publications, in which he wrestles with some key theological issues, have also made a significant impact.

The format and purpose of this series is by this time well known. Volume 9 differs somewhat from the preceding volumes in format. In the preceding volumes the documentary evidence was grouped under subject headings. In this volume only two

subject headings are retained, namely, “Judaica” and “Ecclesiastica.” The rest of the documents are grouped according to their type: inscriptions and papyri. Within each group the documents are arranged chronologically.

For readers who are not familiar with the series, a brief description of the way in which the material is presented is in order. Following a brief heading, important information about that particular text follows. In the case of inscriptions, the location where the inscription was found, the form of the inscription (rectangular stone, statue base, etc.) and the date is normally provided. In the case of the papyri, the size of the papyrus is also given. This is followed by bibliographical information about the text itself, which is in some cases followed by additional information about that particular document that might be of interest. This information is really useful and important—the more the better.

The presentation of the ancient texts themselves is also helpful. The original text is printed parallel to an English translation. The translation follows the original text literally (word for word) so that relevant words in the original text can be identified by looking at the parallel English text. Following these two parallel texts is a discussion in the form of an essay. Although the length, quality, and style of these essays vary, they usually start with a discussion on that particular text, pointing out interesting features. The relevance for New Testament studies of that particular text and often the theme addressed in that particular text also receive attention, sometimes in detail. Respective articles are written by different members of the team at the research center, which might also explain the differences one observes. At the end a bibliography is added for further reading.

Volume 9 contains twelve inscriptions, eleven papyri, four contributions on Judaica, and four on Ecclesiastica. These documents are published together because they were first published or reissued in 1986–87. Obviously there is no unifying theme with such a wide variety of material on different topics. The presentation of material in a series of this kind is indeed important. Scholars are not necessarily going to read a book of this nature as a whole, especially because it consists of short essays on a variety of unrelated topics. (However, I must admit that simply reading these different texts and reviews consecutively was interesting and full of surprises, mainly because of the wealth of information offered in the different reviews. Although the nature and presentation of the articles differ, mainly because of the difference in authors, I did not find one review disappointing.) Easy and reader-friendly access to the material is crucial. My impression is that the way the material is presented meets these requirements. There are good indexes—based on subjects, words, ancient writers, inscriptions, papyri, biblical texts, apocrypha, and rabbinical literature—that help to “open up” the material.

The back cover mentions that these volumes aim at broadening the context of biblical studies. The specialist material provided in the reviews of the articles proved to be invaluable inter alia in making the material functional for biblical studies. It sensitizes the reader to the sociocultural dynamics of the ancient world that New Testament scholars are studying. Obviously people differ in what they find interesting and what not, but I can barely imagine that anyone could be disappointed. There is a wide variety of articles, but the articles on Roman roads, the king as “living image” of Zeus, changing the legal jurisdiction, the lost sheep, invitation to a wedding, a Jewish deed of marriage, and the earliest dated reference to Sunday in the papyri deserve special mention.

Remarks on page 55 on theft and fraud will definitely broaden the context of, for instance, John 10. Not much attention is given to the dynamics of theft and fraud in material dealing with John 10, not even in some of the best commentaries. The information presented here will stimulate people who seek to analyze and understand John 10 to focus more thoroughly on the issue of theft as a social phenomenon and to make that fruitful for John 10. The same can be said about the credit note on page 59. Colossians 2:14 presents the reader with a powerful image; with the additional information on credit notes provided in this volume, the intention of this image in Colossians becomes even clearer. And so we can carry on. The material on the king as image of Zeus has obvious christological links, and the material on the Sabbath has relevance for patristics. These materials will undoubtedly be referred to in forthcoming generations of commentaries and articles.

What is exciting, of course, is that new material is indeed some of the life blood of New Testament research. New Testament scholarship has investigated and reinvestigated and again reinvestigated the text of the New Testament. Can anything more be said about these texts? Well, finding new methods of analysis or gaining access to new material that broadens our scope on the New Testament texts is indeed like manna to run for before someone else picks it up. New and additional material helps to keep the “machine of New Testament scholarship” going. Volumes such as the one reviewed here supply valuable fuel for this machine.

The research center at Macquarie University undoubtedly renders an important service to the community of biblical scholars. Thank you, and please carry on.