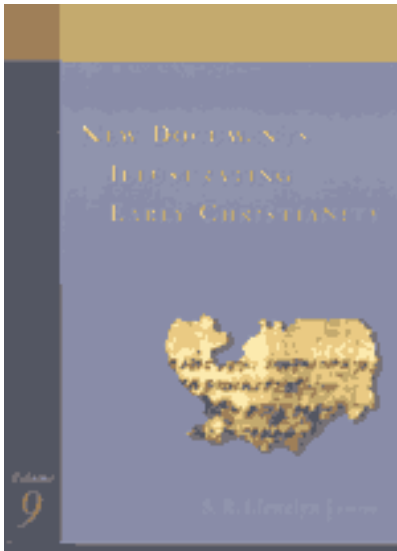


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Llewelyn, S. R., ed.

New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscriptions and Papyri Published 1986-87

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The ninth collaboration in this series of New Testament background resources is dedicated to Dr. Paul Barnett, a historian/theologian in the Reformed tradition. Dr. Barnett shepherded the *New Docs* project from its inception in 1980. In the preface to *New Docs 9* (vii), A. M. Nobbs reflects that Dr. Barnett is truly representative of the interests of those served by *New Docs*, namely, all those involved in study of and research on the New Testament documents themselves. E. A. Judge's tribute to the honoree, "Paul Barnett and New Testament History" (ix–xii), draws the distinction between investigating the phenomena of the New Testament itself (à la G. R. Elton and C. F. D. Moule) and the study of the sociocultural consequences of those phenomena in later times. Dr. Barnett's approach to the New Testament as a phenomenon of history helped to ensure that "[t]he writings of the NT are manifestly conceived and shaped under the impulse of the message they convey. Yet they are built up not out of mythological thinking but from the narrative of remembered experience" (xii). Complementing this interesting sketch is a bibliography of the honoree's publications compiled by C. B. Forbes.

Editor Llewelyn is joined in the analysis and commentary (fourteen contributions) by M. Harding, J. R. Harrison, T. W. Hillard, E. A. Judge, R. A. Kearsley, J. M. Lieu, A. M. Nobbs, and J. W. Pryor. *New Docs 9* reviews selected inscriptions and papyri published or significantly reedited in 1986–87 that appear relevant as philological and conceptual

background to the New Testament. Four categories are treated that serve to illuminate the historical setting and the distinctive extant communication of early Christianity in the Greco-Roman world: Inscriptions (twelve entries), Papyri (eleven entries), Judaica (four entries), and Ecclesiastica (four entries).

On the inscriptional side, attention may be given to the concept of beneficence (εὐεργέτης) as applied to the earthly Jesus (Acts 10:38) and to secular rulers (Luke 22:25). A virtuous man (ἄνδρα ἀγαθός) is honored as a benefactor of the people (εὐεργέτην ὄντα τῶν δήμου [6]), a Roman governor is both a benefactor of Greeks and a patron (εὐεργέτην ὄντα τῶν Ἑλλήνων καὶ πάτρωνα τοῦ δήμου [15]), and a temple warden of the imperial cult in Sardis is designated σωτήρα καὶ εὐεργέτην (p. 30). The personal patronage of individual Romans was widely understood. *Euergetes* and *patron* were conceptually connected, requiring a relational commitment by the Roman aristocrat. Perhaps Paul's reference to deaconess Phoebe as προστάτις (patroness, protectress [Rom 16:2]) should be understood in this light, cf. "Sophia, the second Phoebe" (*New Docs 4*, 239–44).

Tiberius Caesar Augustus (καίσαρα θεόν) is revered as εὐεργέτην τοῦ κόσμου (22). In this example from the base of a statue (41–54 C.E.), we may be reminded of how the orator Tertullus flattered Felix's administrative deeds as being everywhere welcomed with all thankfulness (εὐχαριστίας [Acts 24:3]). Tiberius's benefaction toward the world merits the piety and thanksgiving of his provincial subjects (εὐσεβείας καὶ εὐχαριστίας). Another εὐεργέτης is remembered for commitment to his community in times of crisis (ἐν καιροῖς ἀναγκαίοις [7]), similar to Paul's ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος (1 Cor 7:29).

Another virtuous man (ἄνδρα ἀγαθός [20]) excels all ancestral honor (πᾶσαν φιλοτιμίαν προγονικὴν ὑπερβάλλων). Here we may note the contrast (*synkrisis*) between the secular and somewhat self-serving language of excess (ὑπερβάλλειν) and distinctive Christian language stemming from experience in the Spirit. Descriptions of benefactors who excelled in a spectrum of virtues on honorific inscriptions (goodwill [εὐνοία], benevolence [φιλανθρωπία], courage [ἀνδρεία], love of glory [φιλοδοξία] and honor [φιλοτιμία], greatness of mind [μεγαλοφροσύνη], and moderation [σωφροσύνη]) may be compared (20–21) with Paul's language of excess (ὑπερβάλλειν, ὑπερβολή) for the overflow or surpassing of grace (2 Cor 9:14; Eph 2:7), glory (2 Cor 3:10, 17), power (2 Cor 4:7; Eph 1:19), revelation (2 Cor 12:7), and love (1 Cor 12:31).

Oracles in the Greco-Roman world were often memorialized by statues erected to commemorate and name persons who gave appreciated prophecies. A first-century C.E. example of this practice records such a prophecy in detail and then describes it as being πιστοὶ λόγοι (9). Llewelyn suggests that the use of "faithful words" to describe an oracle

from the gods is unusual, ἱεροὶ λόγοι or θεῖοι λόγοι being expected instead in his view. But Philo's θεῖοι λόγοι (*De Somn.* 1.148.9; 1.147.7) are rationalistic speculation about how “divine words” supposedly function toward the soul, not a description or an evaluation of prophetic speech. Seeking to illuminate the purpose of πιστοὶ λόγοι from political, scientific, religious, and legal contexts, Llewelyn finds that the phrase does not, in these instances, refer to actual words of a deity (13) but rather to trustworthy explanations, words, or reports. My response to this is that different contexts motivate different descriptions, an oracular context of ostensibly nonrational prophetic-type phenomena being different from these other contexts. For example, Hannibal's speech contains τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις ... πιστοῖς (Polybius, *Hist.* 15.7.2.1), trustworthy words deemed reliable and credible, similar in intent to those πιστοῦ λόγου and πιστὸς ὁ λόγος (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:18; Titus 1:9; 3:8), words and statements that are probably also *not* references to inspired prophetic speech or revelatory information received in a dream or vision, as are οἱ λόγοι πιστοὶ καὶ ἀληθινοὶ εἰσιν (Rev 21:5; 22:6). The latter phrase as a description of prophetic-type phenomena is the closest parallel recorded in New Testament manuscripts to the inscription's πιστοὶ λόγοι (with Llewelyn, 14).

Therefore, πιστοὶ λόγοι may not be as unusual or unexpected as Llewelyn thinks as a phrase quite reasonably describing prophetic speech that is judged, discerned, and appreciated. In the Christian context, inspired prophetic speech in the Jerusalem/Petrine tradition given by a prophet (Acts 15:32) or a prophetess (Acts 21:9) must have been appreciated to contain faithful words, or else these individuals would not have been so designated. Indeed, the narrative inclusion of material related to prophetic-type phenomena (Acts 20:23; 15:28–29) and to prophetic speech (Acts 18:9–10; 21:11b) suggests that an intrinsic conceptual discernment criterion applied to such material from a historical perspective was that it constituted πιστοὶ λόγοι. An interior function of the Spirit like the Johannine *chrisma* (1 John 2:20, 27) would not have been perceived as teaching the truth of all things had it not produced at least a component of faithful words. Paul's exhortation to pray for the interpersonal gift of prophecy (1 Cor 12:31a; 14:1, 39a) would have carried no weight if the result could not be appraised as containing faithful words. Could prophetic λόγοι ἄπιστοι serve to edify, comfort, instruct, or guide? Also, in the overall cultural and literary background, another factor conducive to an educated citizen readily using πιστοὶ λόγοι to describe the contents of an appreciated prophecy could be the easily detectable fulfillment of prophecy theme found in well-known and studied texts, which suggests the efficacy and potential importance of prophetic speech in human affairs. See G. E. Duckworth, *Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Epics of Homer, Apollonius, and Vergil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1933); E. Henry, *The Vigour of Prophecy: A Study of Virgil's Aeneid* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989); A. J. Haft, “τὰ δὴ νῦν πάντα τελεῖται: Prophecy and

Recollection in the Assemblies of *Iliad* 2 and *Odyssey* 2,” *Arethusa* 25 (1992): 223–40; A. D. Botha, “Aspects of Prophecy in Virgil’s *Aeneid*,” *Akroterion* 37 (1992): 6–14.

The ascent of a soul at death is poetically expressed, “But Italy kept my body, and my soul went up on high (ψυχὴ δ’ αἰθέρα εἰσανέβη)” (19). As is normative for *New Docs*, we are offered current bibliographical overviews of the subjects at hand. Helpful in this regard is bibliography on the soul (19), on patronage (16, 18), on benefaction (5, 6), on administration (68), on God-fearers (80), on Jewish marriage (85, 98), on the Unknown Gospel (101), and on Christian epitaphs (105).

A 1.5-meter column between Smyrna and Ephesus, announcing that it was Caesar, father of his country who made the roads, illustrates the potentially bilingual nature of citizenry under Roman governance (23). This announcement, a text first in Latin and then repeated in Greek, a format common on milestones, official inscriptions, and stones set up privately by both Greeks and Romans, again demonstrates the need to communicate in the two “official” languages. This common background is developed by R. A. Kearsley, *Greeks and Romans in Imperial Asia: Mixed Language Inscriptions and Linguistic Evidence for Cultural Interaction until the end of AD III* (Bonn: Habelt, 2001), and, on the literary side, by M. Palmer Bonz, *The Past as Legacy: Luke-Acts and Ancient Epic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

In the Papyri category, those culled for their potential illustration of New Testament backdrop turn up a third-century C.E. letter of personal petition concerning legal rights that bears on understanding the actions of women in the parable of the reluctant judge (Luke 18:1–8) and to Felix’s tardiness in hearing Paul’s case (Acts 24:26). This letter bears the common feature of ending with “farewell” (ἔρρωσο [here 34]; ἔρρωσθαι [67]; ἔρρωσθε [Acts 15:29]); cf. “The Sending of a Private Letter,” *New Docs* 7, 26–47.

A third-century papyrus (221–205 B.C.E.) unsurprisingly flatters Ptolemy Philopator with praise associated with Egyptian divinities. Of interest is the phrase “living image (εἰκὼν ζωσᾶ) of Zeus, son of the Sun, Ptolemaeus, living eternally (αἰωνόβιος), loved by Isis” (37). Llewelyn rightly notes how the metaphor employs the likeness of a statute or the stamped resemblance on a coin, the participle (ζωσᾶ) applying the life of the deity to the ruler. Perhaps flattery touting Philopator as the living image of Zeus might imply his worthiness to be gazed upon, keeping in mind that Epictetus (1.6.24) criticized his students who thought they needed to go to Olympia to see Zeus in the form of a statue. Also, given the established intercultural figurative language of “living” as a metaphor—here one recalls the well-known example in the petition of a devotee of the ancient Near Eastern scribal god Nabu, who dispenses living water and living bread in response to prayer for the afterlife—it would be just a minor self-serving detour to describe a mortal

as the living image of the ranking member of the Egyptian pantheon. Llewelyn notes the *synkrisis* (38) with New Testament usage, where it is not the image that is living, but God himself (Matt 26:63; Acts 14:15; 1 Thess 1:9), and where Christ, not men of temporal importance, is εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου (Col 1:15).

A highlight of *New Docs 9* is Llewelyn's revealing study of wedding invitations. He tabulates the fourteen extant invitations to a wedding (62–66), showing the following common format: invitation by host, occasion plus relationship of person marrying, where, and when. Identical to the Lukan parable about a dinner (Luke 14:16–24), they all are best understood as presuming a previous knowledge of the event. L. Mitteis and U. Wilcken suggest that these invitations were produced in bulk and delivered in person by a messenger with a list of guests (*Grundzüge und Chrestomathie der Papyrskunde* [Leipzig: Teubner, 1912], 419). Given that most invitations name the time as tomorrow or today or from a certain hour, Llewelyn also concludes (65) that the guests had already been informed (inferred by I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* [Exeter: Paternoster, 1978], 587–88) and that the invitations themselves were designed to serve as reminders. In Luke 14:16–24, the host (ἄνθρωπός τις) sends a slave to call previously invited guests (τοῖς κεκλημένοις) to the meal at the appointed time (τῇ ὥρᾳ τοῦ δείπνου). A custom of short notice invitations functioning as reminders does appear to be quite harmonious with three invitees in this parable begging off due to their own concerns. Such a known pattern of invitee behavior would strengthen the point of the parable that conformity to this self-serving and impolite deportment is taken very seriously by God, who will in turn reject invitees focused on worldly concerns in favor of extending an eternal welcome to those who will appreciate and respond to an invitation from the ultimate inviter.

In the Judaica category, we are treated to “Jews, Proselytes and God-fearers Club Together” (73–80) based on the text of the Aphrodisias inscription (ca. 300 C.E.). Here God-fearers (θεοσεβεῖς), three proselytes with biblical names, and diverse Jews by birth join an association whose members are “lovers of learning” (τῶν φιλομαθῶν), befitting students of the Torah. Sympathetic Gentiles, rather than Jews of distinctive piety, seem to best fit these God-fearers.

As to Ecclesiastica, *New Docs 9* offers constructive comment on “The Earliest Dated Reference to Sunday in the Papyri,” (106–18). *P. Oxy.* 3759 dates itself at 2 October 325, Constantine issuing his edict to rest on the *venerabili die solis* four years earlier in 321 C.E. In this papyrus a judge (108) refers not to *dies solis* or its Greek equivalent (ἡλίου ἡμέρα), but to “of the coming sacred Lord's day” (τῆς ἐριούσης κυριακῆς ἱερᾶς) and to “after the Lord's day” (μετὰ τὴν κυριακὴν). Constantine's decree suspended commerce and administration but allowed seasonal agricultural work, the latter industry attested by *P. Oxy.* 3407, which cites an apparently established ἡ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα to refer to Sunday.

Of particular interest here is Llewelyn's "The Use of Sunday for Meetings of Believers in the New Testament," *NovT* 43 (2001): 205–33.

Also in *Ecclesiastica*, a small fragment (*P. Köln* 255, here 99) fits the text of the larger fragments of the Unknown Gospel (*P. Egerton* 2) published by H. I. Bell and T. C. Skeat, *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel and other early Christian Papyri* (London: British Museum, 1935). *P. Köln* 255 allows a slight emendation to the textual reconstruction of Bell and Skeat. It contains the *nomina sacrum* IH, a suspended abbreviation for Ἰησοῦς, found too in the larger fragments that contain other examples (on the significance and purpose of these, see L. W. Hurtado, "The Origin of the Nomina Sacra," *JBL* 117 [1998]: 655–73). *Nomina sacra* found in other biblical fragments discovered since 1935, together with *P. Köln* 255, may now suggest that the Unknown Gospel should be dated ca. 200 C.E. See L. W. Hurtado, "P 52 (P. Rylands Gk. 457) and the Nomina Sacra: Method and Probability," *TynB* 54 (2003): 1–14, here 7 n. 20. In any case, the text of the Unknown Gospel continues to imply that the writer knew Jesus material that also found its way into the Fourth Gospel at a time when oral memory of Jesus tradition complemented and functioned alongside the circulation of manuscripts by New Testament writers.

Lastly, mention may be made of a late-second-century inscription from Bithynia (pp. 102–5), which appears to attest to a constellation of early Christian ideas: "Neither gold nor silver but bones lie here awaiting the trumpet call (περιμένοντα φωνήν σάλπιγγος). Do not disturb the work of God (μὴ λύσις ἔρον θεοῦ) the begetter (γενητήρος)." Φωνήν σάλπιγγος echoes 1 Thess 4:16; μὴ λύσις ἔρον θεοῦ could echo μὴ . . . κατάλυε τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ (Rom 14:20), or it may follow from ideas conveyed in the widespread preaching about Jesus and the resurrection, which were probably not too dissimilar from what we can deduce from Paul on that subject. Cf. G. Delling, "Der Tod Jesus in der Verkündigung des Paulus," in *Apophoreta: Festschrift Ernst Haenchen* (ed. W. Eltester and F. H. Kettler; BZNW 30; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964), 85–96. Γενετήρ applied to God is likely Christian speculation about the afterlife, consistent with the expected physical reconstruction from mortality to future glory which familiarity with Jesus tradition would encourage.

In light of recent advances, I can only repeat the sentiment expressed in my review of volume 1 of this effort, namely, that investigations of early Christianity and of New Testament texts would be enhanced by having the entire *New Docs* series at hand in order to appropriately appraise the empirical background connections to be found therein. One might call attention as well to the many concise compendia of information that are nestled throughout the series, like the role of women of means in early house-churches (50). With *New Docs* 5 providing cumulative indices to previous volumes, *New Docs* 9

continues the individual pattern with a complete set of indices to subjects, writers, texts, and prominent words.