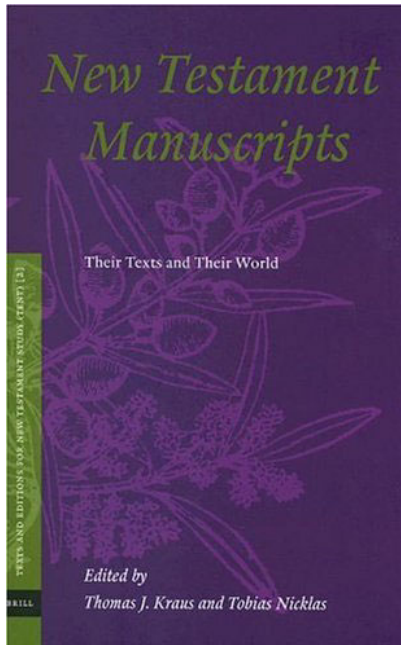


RBL 05/2007



Kraus, Thomas J., and Tobias Nicklas, eds.

New Testament Manuscripts: Their Texts and Their World

Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 2

Leiden: Brill, 2006. Pp. xii + 348. Hardcover. \$181.00.
ISBN 9004149457.

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New Testament textual criticism can, if one is not careful, operate as if textual variants and different readings in manuscripts are almost like disembodied platonic ideals floating in cyberspace. The underlying assumption of this book is that manuscripts themselves, in their concrete forms, can be just as interesting and worthy of study in their own right. Thus the essays collected here focus for the most part on concrete manuscripts and on what a consideration of these might have to tell us when we look at them more closely. In the words of the subtitle of the editors' introduction to the volume, "every manuscript tells a story," and the aim of the essays here is to seek to tell some of those stories.

Inevitably the collection is a little disparate, and some of the essays relate to the general focus only somewhat tangentially. For example, the first two essays focus more on places and/or broader geographical (and social) contexts in which Christian manuscripts were written and preserved. Eldon Epp continues his long-standing interest in the site of Oxyrhynchus, which has been famous for providing us with such a wealth of material in the form of papyri from its rubbish heaps, with his essay on "The Jews and the Jewish Community in Oxyrhynchus." He discusses the methodological problems in seeking to identify clearly Jewish personnel mentioned in the papyri (e.g., via their names) and shows

how little remains, indicating perhaps the demise of the Jewish community at Oxyrhynchus for some considerable period in the second-third centuries. Marco Frenschowski provides an analysis of the evidence concerning the famous ancient Christian library at Caesarea, especially the problems about its disappearance in the fourth-fifth centuries, arguing that it may have been more of a private collection of books that was simply dispersed gradually after the death of Eusebius.

A number of studies address problems associated with specific manuscripts. Peter Head writes about a newly discovered fragment of Luke's Gospel (with the Gregory-Aland number 0312). Probably to be dated some time in the fifth century, it has small parts extant from Luke 5 and 7. No startling new readings are contained here, but any new early manuscript is inherently interesting. Dirk Jongkind provides an in-depth study of features of Codex Sinaiticus, considering the phenomenon of the three scribes who probably worked on the manuscript and looking at some irregularities in the make-up of the quires and the changes in the scribal hands at some places. Some of the evidence may suggest that the codex was produced "at a locality where there was demand for a large Bible but where one lacked the experience to produce one" (135). Tommy Wasserman discusses the text of P78 (POxy 2684), which may have contained the text of Jude 1–13 (only) as an amulet. Wasserman seeks to provide reasons why just this particular section of text might have been thought appropriate to use for this context. Tobias Nicklas and Tommy Wasserman provide a jointly written essay looking at the problems posed by the collection in one of the codices from the Bodmer collection (here Codex Bodmer Miscellani, the codex containing the texts of 1–2 Peter and Jude generally known as P72). Rather than focusing on the biblical texts alone, they ask what might have been the rationale that led to this particular collection of (apparently somewhat miscellaneous) texts. No clear answer is given: their conclusion is that the manuscript "bleibt rätselhaft" (188), but they provide valuable insights into the various (often little discussed) texts contained in the codex. Michael Holmes contributes a very detailed study of some of the readings in P46, especially those agreeing with those that appear in D F G, and argues that some may indicate a process of "commenting" on, or clarifying, the text where it may have been felt to be slightly unclear or obscure. Thomas Kraus writes a detailed account of manuscripts that contain the Lord's Prayer in "noncontinuous" manuscripts (i.e., not containing the full text of either Matthew or Luke but simply the prayer on its own or with other excerpts).

Slightly more general considerations are provided in the essay by Larry Hurtado, who discusses the use of the staurogram (tau-rho) in early Christian manuscripts, arguing that it may be very early (it is present already in P45, P66, and P75) and may provide the earliest example of a kind of iconography, being a possible visual reference to Jesus' crucifixion. As such it would predate by some 150–200 years what had otherwise been

thought to be the earliest representations of the cross (in late fourth- or fifth-century depictions). Malcolm Choat provides a valuable survey of possible echoes and allusions to New Testament texts in documentary papyri from Egypt to the end of the fourth century. Kim Haines-Eitzen considers the phenomenon of the papyri manuscripts of some apocryphal Acts literature, noting that they are often quite high-class productions, suggesting (perhaps more controversially) that this might tell us something about the original target audience or readership of these text. Finally, Stanley Porter offers some thoughts on the whole practice of textual criticism and the construction of the critical apparatus in the light of modern theories. He suggests (not unreasonably) that perhaps distinctions should be made between “continuous” and “noncontinuous” texts and that the latter may have no more (and no less!) right to be used as evidence as, say, lectionaries; he also suggests (more controversially) that apocryphal texts should be used to provide evidence of New Testament readings (although here there are immense problems in being certain that New Testament texts are actually being “cited” and if so which ones).

This is a fascinating collection of essays showing how much light can be shed from a consideration of concrete manuscripts and taking seriously the evidence they provide for illuminating the social and religious world in which early Christians lived out their faith and produced their written texts.