Let me state at the beginning that this book brought me very great satisfaction. This volume presents a series of eleven essays from the famous Yale scholar Wayne Meeks. These essays were formerly published from 1972 to 2002. The two editors, A. R. Hilton and H. G Snyder, wisely decided not to classify Meeks’s texts in the chronological order in which they were published but in a systematic order that reflects the evolution of his thought. This makes it possible for us to follow in a better way the evolution in the thinking of this important scholar.

Moreover, the essays are reproduced, at the request of Meeks himself, without any modification, improvement, or updating other than the way in which the foreign characters (Coptic, Greek, and Hebrew) are quoted. In this way this volume is much more than an extremely useful collection of essays from a major scholar arranged in a portable format but is also probably destined to become a document in itself. Since Meeks is definitely a significant player not just in the field of New Testament studies but also in the history of contemporary North American erudition, this opportunity to count on the essays in their entirety will be useful to scholars and students.
As Meeks explains in the introduction, entitled “Reflections on an Era,” this collection of essays represents “three decades of trying to understand the New Testament—and the people who wrote and first listened to and used the writings out of which the New Testament came into being” (xi). In this introduction Meeks exposes his academic course and specifies the intentions that he had and continues to have during the length of his career. He talks with great openness about the masters who influenced him at his entry into the field of New Testament Studies (P. Schubert, N. A. Dahls) and about the methods that he used at these times (i.e., Formgeschichte and Traditionsge schichte). One thing is now sure: with this introduction we now have in our hands some new evidence to discuss Meeks’s works. He then speaks openly about his concerns, about his discussions with his colleagues in Yale, about the evolution of his thinking, and about how he was able to develop his ideas piece by piece. As an example, we may now have a better understanding of how the identification of a specific “form” (i.e., “a pattern of language shaped in repetitive use by a group of people in a certain context of their life together” [xiv]) in the Epistle to the Galatians was at the base of his first works, which were the object of the first essay published in this volume: “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity.” If I may express my view, I definitely think that the publication of this essay was an important moment in the history of New Testament research in the last half of the twentieth century. This introduction is a real gift, a blessing we might say, that Meeks is offering to the new generation of scholars in order to show how stimulating the life of a committed scholar can be.

Since this book contains much material that is already published and largely discussed in the academic field during the last three decades, it is not in my intention to criticize here in any way the values of the conclusions of Professor Meeks but rather simply to give a word about the general idea discussed in each essay. In addition to the introduction and the afterword (which I will shortly discuss at the end), the book is divided into two sections.

The first part is named “Reading and Writing the Past” and contains the following essays. The first one is, as already mentioned, “The Image of the Androgyne: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity.” In this essay first published in 1974, Meeks seeks to defend the idea that in Gal 3:28, Paul uses a preexistent baptismal liturgy formula rather than rhetorically expressing a personal social view on the reunification and the equality of men and women. By doing this, he shows the importance of the feminine role in the leadership of the first Christian communities.

The following article is “The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” which was published in 1972. In this study Meeks wants to understand the function of the motif of
Christ’s ascent and descent in the literary structure of the Fourth Gospel as an indication of the structure of the Johannine community and in its relation to its environment.

The third article was first published in 1990 and carries the title of “Equal to God.” Meeks questions the historicity of what is said in John 5:18, that the causes of the plot to kill Jesus were that he “was making himself equal to God.” He tries to understand the signification that such an expression could have had in the Johannine community.

The next essay is “The Man from Heaven in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians.” It is a short study that first appeared in 1991 on the christological hymn in Phil 2:6–11. Meeks studies its rhetorical function, we might say, in the construction of Paul’s moral advice.

In the next essay, entitled “Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity’s Separation from the Jewish Communities,” Meeks examines the evidence contained in the Gospel of Matthew, the Pauline letters, as well as the Gospel of John that show that Christianity was a Jewish sect. His object is to isolate the internal indices showing that there was a rupture between the two groups. This essay was published in 1985.

In the following essay, entitled “‘And Rose Up to Play’: Midrash and Paraenesis in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22,” Meeks discusses the rhetorical construction as well as the sources of inspiration of Paul concerning the question of the attitude to adopt concerning the consumption of the meats sacrificed to the idols. It was formerly published in 1982.

In the next essay, entitled “Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1–15:13,” Meeks starts by noting that the study of the final chapters of the Epistle to the Romans has been neglected. His objective is to study the elements of Paul’s rhetoric in these chapters. Meeks concludes that Paul deliberately chooses the topics of his final development in a way to show that the Christian standards about the conduct among the members of the community is to be found in the impartial righteousness of God. It was formerly published in 1987.

Finally, the last article of this section dates from 1990 and is entitled “The Circle of Reference in Pauline Morality.” The starting point of this study is in reference to the work of A. J. Malherbe on the moral environment of Paul and Pauline communities. Meeks begins by introducing the concept of “Reference Group,” which was coined in 1942 by Herbert H. Hyman. He then discuss the question of the Reference Individuals, the Movement as Reference Group, and the Outsiders as Reference Group in the Pauline letters.
The second part of the volume is entitled “Responding and Revisioning.” It consists of essays written in reaction to particular theses of other scholars and includes the following. “A Hermeneutics of Social Embodiment” is an essay that was formerly published in 1986 and proposes to examine the ideas of George Lindbeck and his book *The Nature of Doctrine* concerning the dialogue between the historical approaches and the literary approaches to New Testament study in a possible dialogue between church members, historians, and theologians.

In the next essay, entitled “The Polyphonic Ethics of the Apostle Paul,” Meeks examines the question that Bernard Williams proposes in his book *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Meeks formulates this question as follows: “What is the social process by which a religious movement like that of the early Christians undertakes to instill moral confidence in its members?” (196). The importance of the material in Rom 14:1–15:13 and of the proposition of Christ as model to be imitated are crucial in this discussion. This subject had already been covered at length in a preceding article in this volume (“Judgment and the Brother”). These two might be read together. It dates from 1988.

“On Trusting an Unpredictable God: A Hermeneutical Meditation on Romans 9–11” is an article published in honor of Paul Myers. It is an examination of Rom 9–11 in order to specify its object and to show its coherence and unity within the framework of the entire epistle. It was formerly published in 1991.

The last essay is a very recent one (published in 2002) and is entitled “Vision of God and Scripture Interpretation in a Fifth-Century Mosaic.” It relates to a mosaic of the fifth century from the Church of Hosios David (Latomou) in Thessaloniki. Meeks questions the possible relation of this mosaic to the account of the vision of God of Senouphios entitled *Miracle of the Latomou*. This account is largely inspired by the Scriptures, in particular by the visions of Moses and of Ezekiel.

In the afterword section Meeks raises the question that was omnipresent among his students during all those teaching years in Yale: What about faith? He emphasizes that in the theological tradition of the Christian churches faith is a gift, not an achievement.” This observation, coming from a scholar such as Wayne Meeks, does not leave us without reflection.

At the end of this valuable volume we find a bibliography of the works quoted in the essays. Following this we have three reference indexes: the first contains the biblical references, the second is an index of the subjects, and the third is an index of the modern authors. The list of the articles with their year and place of original publication is given on pages 285 and 286. I wondered, however, whether it might have been more useful if
the editors had reproduced (in the margins?) the original pagination, as it is more and more common to have in this kind of publication. But to tell the truth, it is the only shortcoming that I have found in this wonderful book, and it is small in comparison with the major contribution that it contains. Theologians as well as historians and students of Christian origins will surely receive great benefits from this collection.