

Thomas J. Kraus & Tobias Nicklas (eds), *Early Christian Manuscripts. Examples of Applied Method and Approach* (Texts and Editions for New Testament Study 5; Leiden: Brill, 2010). Pp. 243. ISBN 978 90 04 18265 3. Hardback €99/\$141

- [1] The impressive new TENTS series continues here with a further volume of essays edited by Thomas Kraus and Tobias Nicklas. The emphasis in the volume as a whole is on individual manuscripts, with many of the essays devoted to particular manuscripts; others deal with broader methodological issues and/or groups of manuscripts.
- [2] An initial general essay by Thomas Kraus, 'Reconstructing Fragmentary Manuscripts – Chances and Limitations,' highlights some important general issues for the unwary (or the hasty!) in relation to many manuscripts that have been, at least in part, reconstructed by their initial editors. The points made are in one way obvious, but sometimes necessary to articulate. Reconstructions of texts are often necessary if we are to try to make sense of what survives in a manuscript; but one must not forget that reconstructions, and suggestions about filling lacunae, can only be scholarly guesses: 'scholarly' in the sense of being as well-informed as possible, but at the end of the day only conjectures. Further, it makes a considerable difference whether one is trying to fill in the gaps of a text one knows from elsewhere (e.g. the NT) or whether the text is otherwise unknown. Kraus illustrates his points by reference to a number of famous papyri, including *P.Ryl.* III 457 (P⁵², the famous fragment of John 18), *P.Rain. Cent.* 24, *P.Mert.* II 51, *P.Vindob. G* 2325 (the 'Fayyum fragment'), and *P.Oxy.* IV 654 (Gospel of Thomas). Thus, for example, the unwary should not forget that any reference to 'Pharisees' in *P.Mert.* II 51 only comes in the reconstructed part of the text; and hence any appeal to the text for evidence about possible anti-Pharisaic tendencies can only be made with considerable caution. At the very least, the dots and brackets in a modern critical edition are often as important as the letters of the text!
- [3] Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, 'Hunting for Origen in Unidentified Papyri: The Case of *P.Egerton* 2 (= Inv. 3)' considers in detail the text of what she calls '*P.Egerton* 2' (though it is sometimes called '*P.Egerton* 3'). This is a small scrap (in the same collection as the more famous 'gospel'-type fragment *P.Egerton* 2), which has defied certain identification but has often been attributed to Origen. Much attention here has been focused on the citations, or allusions, to biblical texts which seem to be present here in the text (insofar as we can be certain about what might have been present in the text originally: the extant text is extremely fragmentary). Yuen-Collingridge debates in detail with others in the past who have written on this text, showing in particular how attributing the text to Origen has led to suggestions about how to fill in some of the (many!) lacunae in the text and perhaps has foreclosed other possibilities too quickly. Her essay illustrates well (though in slightly tortuous English at times!) the inevitably circular arguments involved in identifying and editing a text, especially one which is apparently the only surviving copy of the text in question.
- [4] Paul Foster, 'Papyrus Oxyrhynchus X 1224,' provides a very full analysis of *P.Oxy.* 1224. He describes fully the codicological and palaeographical features of the papyrus manuscript (though his criteria for deducing e.g. the date of the MS from this data are not quite clear). A detailed discussion of the reconstruction of the text engages with previous studies, though does not suggest anything very new in substance. For the social setting of the text (inevitably a difficult undertaking given the very fragmentary extent of the surviving text), Foster suggests an origin *not* among 'Jewish Christianity', primarily because of apparent use of Luke's

gospel (though other 'Jewish Christian' texts probably used Luke), with perhaps some attractiveness for 'Gnostic' groups. The essay will be an important resource for future study of this text (though one might have valued a discussion of the possible significance of the two column format, a topic noted by Yuen-Collingridge in the previous essay).

- [5] Lincoln Blumell, 'Is *P.Oxy.* XLII 3057 the Earliest Christian Letter?', provides a critical analysis of some recent works which have sought to strengthen the suggestion (made by Peter Parsons, the original editor) that *P.Oxy.* XLII 3507 might be the earliest Christian letter we possess. There is no direct proof of the theory, and Blumell shows well that some of the features to which others have pointed as evidence of a Christian origin (e.g. the 'crossed letter' referred to here, appeals for 'concord' and 'mutual affection', the address of the recipient as both 'master' and 'brother') are by no means confined to Christian literature: rather, they are relatively widespread in contemporary literature, so that the theory of a Christian origin is at least questionable. The essay does not attempt to 'prove' that the letter was *not* a Christian text (it rightly recognises that this would not be possible); but it does show clearly that past claims for the importance of the text in relation to early Christianity may be exaggerated.
- [6] John Granger Cook, 'Ψ⁵⁰ (*P Yale I 3*) and the Question of its Function', examines this unusual papyrus text containing the text of Acts 8:26-32 + 10:26-31 alone, with no break between the two sections of Acts, and the text clearly ending where it does (with a large blank space in the rest of the final column). It has been suggested that the text was written as an amulet (partly on the basis of some fold marks visible), but the texts contained make this not easy to envisage. Instead, Cook shows how the two stories contained here (the Ethiopian eunuch and Cornelius) were used by patristic authors in homilies about conversion, evangelism, baptism etc. Thus the papyrus may have been written as part of a preacher's or teacher's notes, and there is no need to classify the papyrus as an amulet.
- [7] Don Barker, 'The Reuse of Christian Texts: *P.Macquarie Inv.* 360 + *P.Mil.Vogl.Inv.* (Ψ⁹¹) and *P.Oxy.* X 1229 (Ψ²³)', discusses features from these two papyri, and also the prayer text found in *P.Oxy.* III 407. Ψ⁹¹ shows clear signs of foldmarks, suggesting that the fragment was used as an amulet. (Sadly, the essays of the volume do not interact with each other: it would be interesting to see how Barker would react to Cook [cf. too De Bruyn's essay which follows] on the significance of fold marks!) Hence this page of the papyrus might have been used as an amulet for healing purposes (the text contained is that of the healing story in Acts 3). Fold marks in Ψ²³, containing part of the text of James, may also show that this text was used in a similar way (perhaps to provide comfort in times of difficulty). So too the fold marks in *P.Oxy.* III 407, may show that the prayer there 'was held to have amuletic powers' (p. 139). Barker realises the difficulty of using the term 'amulet' in this context, and suggests perhaps 'Lieblingstexte' ('favourite texts') for this possible phenomenon of Christians carrying around (parts of) texts on their person to provide help and/or encouragement.
- [8] Theodore de Bruyn writes on 'Papyri, Parchments, Ostraca, and Tables written with Biblical Texts in Greek and used as Amulets: A Preliminary List'. He discusses the methodological problems involved in seeking to identify texts as 'amulets' and suggests some criteria for describing individual papyri which contain a biblical text in this way: for example, to qualify for this description, such a text should include characteristics that rule out its having been written as part of a literary work, and it should include evidence of having been worn or affixed. Other characteristic features of amulets would include scribal hands (generally fairly coarse) and irregular orthography. De Bruyn then provides a comprehensive list of texts, divided in

‘certain’ and ‘probable or possible’ amulets. The detailed information here will be an important resource for future work on the topic.

- [9] Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge discuss ‘The Egyptian Hermas: The Shepherd in Egypt before Constantine’, surveying the (many!) early Christian MSS of Hermas. They provide detailed information on individual manuscripts, and also raise the question of why this text, which was of course not included in the (later) Christian NT canon (though it is still present in Codex Sinaiticus), proved so popular among early Christians. One answer might be the ascetic nature of the text; but more likely was the fact that Hermas was very popular for catechetical purposes, especially as the text has the form of a catechetical text within a catechetical text (‘Hermas’ being taught the mysteries of the world). Again, the detailed evidence supplied here will be an important resource for future work on papyri containing the text of Hermas.
- [10] Stanley Porter writes on ‘The Babatha Archive, the Egyptian Papyri and their Implications for Study of the Greek New Testament’. He considers the Babatha archive to be from Palestine, and seeks to place it, together with other Egyptian papyri, in their historical contexts. He then compares and analyses a number of aspects of the Greek reflected in these texts and of the Greek of the New Testament texts. Despite some inevitable regional variations, there are overall some fundamental similarities between the language of the different *corpora* here, ‘apparently that of the koine Greek of the Roman period’ (p. 237).
- [11] These essays show the importance of detailed attention to individual manuscripts and what these might show, not only in relation to the individual manuscript concerned, but also in relation to broader, more general issues. Particularly interesting here are the discussions (not all necessarily agreeing with each other!) on the identification of ‘amulets’. So too the methodological issues involved in discussing individual manuscripts, seeking to fill lacunae, and postulating historical contexts in which the MSS might have originated, are well highlighted here. This is a valuable collection of essays; it contains too some important material relevant data which will serve as very useful resources for many future studies in this fascinating general area.

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