

Larry W. Hurtado, *Texts and Artefacts: Selected Essays on Textual Criticism and Early Christian Manuscripts*, Library of New Testament Studies 584, London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018. ISBN 978-0-5676-7771-6. Pp. xx + 231. \$85.00/€105.25.

- [1] The collection of essays under review is an exceptional one in several respects: not only does it offer some state of the art articles by a distinguished and leading scholar in the field of textual criticism and (the material culture of) early Christianity, Larry W. Hurtado; it also contains valuable updated bibliographical references, brief discussions, and conclusions in the footnotes of most of the contributions. Moreover, Hurtado dedicates the volume to another distinguished and leading scholar in the relevant academic fields, his mentor and friend Eldon J. Epp, in whose succession he sees himself. And, last but not least, many of the essays may be taken as initial sparks for the development and progress that textual criticism has made over the years and for the shift of the discipline from focusing mainly on readings and variants, that is, on the text a manuscript preserves, to the perception, awareness, and appreciation of manuscripts as archaeological objects (for Hurtado's role in this, see, for instance, T. J. Kraus, "From 'Text-Critical Methodology' to 'Manuscripts as Artefacts': A Tribute to Larry W. Hurtado," in *Mark, Manuscripts, and Monotheism: Essays in Honor of Larry W. Hurtado*, ed. C. Keith and D. T. Roth, Library of New Testament Studies 528 [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 79–98). Epp and Hurtado value manuscripts as parts of a *material culture* and as physical objects that offer quite some more salient and crucial information than mere letters, words, and phrases.
- [2] The book comprises twelve chapters, that is, articles, distributed unequally among its two major parts or sections: part 1 is captioned as "Text-Critical and Text-Historical Studies" and consists of four chapters; part 2 is labelled "Manuscripts as Artefacts" and has eight essays. The contributions to this volume have all been previously published with the exception of the fresh chapter 3, "New Testament Scholarship and the Dating of New Testament Papyri" (48–63). They do not dramatically differ in length (between fifteen and twenty-five pages). All the essays appeared between 2006 and 2016 as parts of other collections of books, with the exception of the classical "The Origin of the *Nomina Sacra*: A Proposal," *JBL* 117 (1998): 655–73 (pages 115–35 in the present book) and a rather recent study about P⁴⁵, "P45 as Early Christian Artefact: What It Reflects about Early Christianity," *Teologisk Tidsskrift* 4 (2016): 291–307 (pages 200–219 in the present book). Consequently, it is very convenient to have these twelve scatteredly published and not always easy to reach essays, which are thematically closely related to each other, all together in one volume.
- [3] In his one-page preface (ix), Hurtado writes sensitively about his bonds with his "highly esteemed teacher, PhD supervisor ..., and valued colleague and friend, Eldon Jay Epp" to whom the book is dedicated. He points out that "it was from him that I learned the practice of New Testament textual criticism, a discipline

which also contributed greatly to my larger practice of historical inquiry into the origins of Christianity... He taught me to see textual variants, not as textual ‘corruptions’, but as evidence of how the New Testament writings were read and transmitted.” He continues “I first learned of the *nomina sacra* from his pointing to the phenomenon as indicative of a scribal practice across the otherwise varied attention to the early New Testament papyri, and his own studies of these items were part of what inspired me to give them close attention.” And this is basically the foundation from which Hurtado himself started and developed his theses.

- [4] In his introduction (xv–xx), Hurtado underlines that “the relevance of early Christian manuscripts extends well beyond the familiar tasks of textual criticism, for these manuscripts are not only copies of texts. Their physical and visual properties are also important data, and the Christian manuscripts of the second and third centuries are among the earliest (and, unfortunately, often overlooked) Christian artefacts.” With this he sets the stage for the (slight) distinction between “Text-Critical and Text-Historical Studies” (part 1 of the book) and “Manuscripts as Artefacts” (part 2), which he defines briefly by providing very short surveys of the twelve essays.
- [5] There is no comprehensive bibliography, but each individual essay has rich bibliographical data in the footnotes so that there is not anything missing. The two indices—references (e.g., scriptural, Dead Sea Scrolls, Philo, Josephus, apocryphal, Pseudepigrapha, patristic, and papyri) and authors (220–31)—are welcome aids for the readers to find what they are especially interested in.
- [6] Most of the essays in *Texts and Artefacts* are very well known and have been reviewed, utilized, and discussed many times before so that there might be no need to deal here in detail with the individual chapters again, with the exception of the unpublished essay (chapter 3). In addition, here and there the attentive reader finds updates in the footnotes, in which Hurtado not only offers significant bibliographic references not available to him when he wrote the essay, but he also interacts with these references and very clearly evaluates them. Due to the nature and topics of the essays, there are several thematic overlaps between the individual chapters, of which quite a few repeat Hurtado’s views on the particularly Christian use of the codex (and not the roll), the *staurogram*, the *nomina sacra*, and special scribal features. This might be annoying to those who wish to read or even to peruse the book as a whole, in other words to experience Hurtado’s studies as a single continuous text. Readers with such an expectation should go to Hurtado’s *The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). Yet, if the reader remembers that each chapter is an independent research article, to be read as a distinct unit, the repetition makes sense.
- [7] As mentioned above, the only previously unpublished essay in this collection is chapter 3, “New Testament Scholarship and the Dating of New Testament Papyri” (48–63). In this chapter, Hurtado first frankly admits that he does not dare to date manuscripts on palaeographical and papyrological data on his own (48). He then points out “how NT scholars have been involved in assigning and

communicating dates of NT papyri.” Here Hurtado can refer to a rich array of standard publications in the field. Then he interacts with Roger Bagnall’s *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) and his claims that, in Hurtado’s words, “the number of Christian papyri assigned to the second century is too great, and that nearly all should probably be assigned dates no earlier than the third century,” and further that “the number of Christian papyri should be ‘proportionate to the Christians’ share of the population at a given moment” (57). In his view Bagnall does not give full attention to the fact that “Christians inherited ‘a writing-centered culture’” and “therefore have had greater reasons than the general population for making copies of their writings” (57–58). For a fuller discussion of Bagnall’s book, see Hurtado’s engaged and critical five-page review in *RBL* (2010; <https://tinyurl.com/y7rdpluw>). Next is Hurtado’s discussion of Brent Nongbri and his “critique of early dates assigned to the famous Rylands fragment of the Gospel of John” (59). According to Hurtado, Nongbri rightly criticizes a tendency of hasty and incautious early dates given for P⁵² (“The Use and Abuse of P52: Papyrological Pitfalls in the Dating of the Fourth Gospel,” *HTR* 98 [2005]: 23–48). Hurtado also discusses Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse (“Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Palaeography,” *ETL* 88 [2012]: 443–73), a must have article for everybody seriously interested in dating New Testament manuscripts and the rectification of early dates too easily given to New Testament manuscripts by New Testament scholars (60–61). Hurtado slightly rectifies some parts of Orsini and Clarysse’s harsh criticism of “theological papyrology” (i.e., their criticism of theologians to suggest dates for papyri on theological assumptions) as often too early dates were proposed by theologians and not by papyrologists (62). However, Hurtado acknowledges that “in the overwhelming number of cases (by my count, 73 of the 91 manuscripts listed) Orsini and Clarysse agree” with “the dates in the Nestle-Aland column.” In addition, they provide “somewhat later dates for 13 ..., but also, notably, somewhat earlier dates than in Nestle-Aland for another five.” Even more significant is that “(contra Bagnall’s proposal) they date seven NT manuscripts to sometime in the second century (or late second early third century)” (62–63). In his very welcome conclusions Hurtado advises his readers and New Testament scholars to rely on the dates given in Nestle-Aland and approved by Orsini and Clarysse and recommends that they should be on guard whenever someone “attempts to push for earlier dates of NT papyri that do not enjoy the support of papyrologists and palaeographers.”

- [8] The realm of topics and texts dealt with is wide and proof enough of the fundamental significance of the essays collected in the present volume. The editor of LNTS, Chris Keith, and Bloomsbury T&T Clark have to be thanked for republishing these eminently relevant and pivotal studies; but credit for the outstanding quality of these exemplary pieces of research that emphasize the physical features of manuscripts and demand the realization of what manuscripts actually are, that is, archaeological objects, is due to Larry Hurtado alone.

[9] Table of Contents:

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