

critiques the manner in which Papyrus Egerton 2, containing Gospel fragments, was originally assigned a date of origin before the mid-second century CE, far too early, as subsequent analysis has revealed.

In sum, these essays provide valuable and accessible discussions of how our understanding of the nature and identity of the Christ-movement in the first century CE and its ancient Israelite context is being enriched by archaeological and epigraphic research.

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PHILIP F. ESLER
pesler@glos.ac.uk

A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative. By CORNELIS BENNEMA. Pp. xviii + 216. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014. ISBN 978 1 4514 7221 9 and 8430 4. Paper £25.99; e-book n.p.

OVER the last three decades, narrative and literary approaches to New Testament interpretation have become standard in the field. Yet in that time, the study of a literary character—a featured element of a story—has often been neglected and currently no consensus exists for an adequate framework that does not reduce characters to overly simplistic categories such as ‘flat’ and ‘types’. In *A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative*, Cornelius Bennema follows up his 2009 monograph *Encountering Jesus: Character Studies in the Gospel of John* on character reconstruction by continuing to refine a non-reductive theoretical model for studying characters in New Testament narratives.

In chapter 1, Bennema reviews studies of character from the Gospels of Mark and John and the book of Acts that consciously work within a particular theoretical framework. Though there is no consensus on how to analyse a character, Bennema argues that a majority pattern still emerges: (1) New Testament interpreters distinguish between ancient Hebraic and Hellenistic characterization (pp. 24–5). Ancient Hebrew characters can be complex and evolve whereas, it is argued, Greco-Roman characters are static and are subordinated to plot. (2) A majority maintains that there is a distinction between ancient and modern characters (p. 25). Modern characters are often psychologized and develop over the course of a narrative, whereas this type of

characterization is not a feature of ancient narratives. (3) Though many maintain that there is a distinction between modern and ancient characters, the majority of scholars still use modern literary methods to study New Testament narratives (p. 25). In chapter 2, Bennema sets out to deconstruct this inconsistent paradigm, which he identifies as the majority pattern. His critical argument is that the difference between characters in the Hebrew Bible, Greek literature, and modern narratives is a difference of emphasis rather than kind (p. 52). Subsequently, if characters can be complex, dynamic, and evolve in ancient narratives, then the differences between ancient narratives and modern are also ones of emphasis. It is, therefore, necessary to classify characters along a continuum rather than by hard categories.

The central argument of Bennema's book is found in chapter 3, where he outlines a non-reductive framework to study characters. His first step is to study a character in text and context from the biblical text and from available non-biblical sources. Next he uses Yosef Ewen's classification model to classify the character along three dimensions: complexity, development, and inner life. Lastly, he evaluates the character in relation to the narrative's ideological point of view, the function the character plays in the plot of the narrative, and the value the character has for today's reader. In chapter 4 Bennema applies his non-reductionistic theory to a number of characters from the Gospels of Mark and John and the book of Acts. Chapter 5 is a conclusion to the study. Bennema summarizes the main arguments and offers suggestions for further research.

A Theory of Character in New Testament Narrative is a well-written and well-researched book on character that flows logically from one chapter to the next. Bennema helpfully orients the reader to the major challenges when it comes to studying New Testament characters and demonstrates the need for a sophisticated theoretical approach. This study challenges commonly held ideas about Greco-Roman characterization and provides a more satisfactory understanding of ancient Hebraic and Greco-Roman characters. It also rightly argues that ancient and modern narratives have different emphases rather than simply different categories. While this book is primarily aimed at addressing methodological issues, it is also balanced nicely with a chapter devoted to the application of the theory. Some, however, will still question the constructed framework. But, as Bennema himself notes, the study of character in New Testament interpretation is still in its infancy (p. 3). Most readers will agree with Bennema about the need to study a character in text and context, but his

choice to use Yosef Ewan's classifications will be challenged in some quarters. Why should a reader only plot a character along a continuum of complexity, development, and inner life? Why not other categories? The strongest element of Bennema's theory, however, is its flexibility. Through refinement, interpreters may find the need to adjust the given classifications or to exchange those offered altogether. Regardless, Bennema has erected the scaffolding and this book will inform future discussions.

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LUCAS GLEN WISLEY
Hughes Hall, Cambridge
 Lgw25@cam.ac.uk

The Content and Setting of the Gospel Tradition. Edited by MARK HARDING and ALANNA NOBBS. Pp. xix + 460. Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN 978 0 8028 3318 1. Paper £35.99/\$55.

THIS all-Australian production is an impressive monument to the standard of learning, especially classical learning, at Macquarie University and the other universities at which the authors teach. As in all collections of essays, the contributions are uneven, especially the early, more general chapters, which are hard-hitting, deeply learned, and enlightening. Later chapters on details of the gospels (Parables, Miracles, Passion Narratives) are often no more than useful summaries of widely held positions. More rigorous editing might profitably have cut out considerable overlap between the chapters.

The stated target of the essays is undergraduates in theology or history, and a good example of the standard set is given by the helpful first chapter on the archaeology of Palestine around the time of Jesus, giving both plenty of detail and summaries of possible deductions. It is slightly disappointing that there is only one short section on the textual discoveries in the Judean desert. By contrast, the second chapter on the Gospel Manuscript seems to me too sophisticated and advanced for undergraduates; more helpful would have been discussion of particular examples. The chapter on the Language of the Gospels is an excellent example of detailed but intelligible investigation, focused on the question how the linguistic usage of the gospels fits into the contemporary use of language. From the sample studied it appears that the *koine* Greek was not so