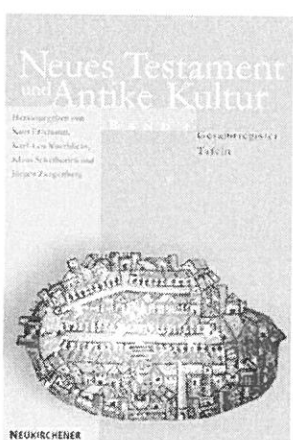
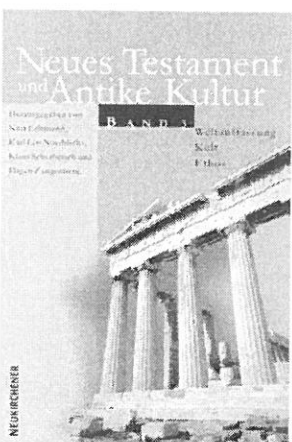


Erlemann, Kurt, Karl Leo Noethlichs, Klaus Scherberich, and Jürgen Zangenberg, eds.

Neues Testament und Antike Kultur

Volume 1: Prolegomena; Quellen; Geschichte

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Volume 2: Familie; Gesellschaft; Wirtschaft

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Volume 3: Weltauffassung; Kult; Ethos

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Volume 4: Karten, Abbildungen, Register

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Neues Testament und Antike Kultur is the overall title of an ambitious project and of the four volumes that have resulted from it thus far. The project is directed by a quartet that at the time it was initiated had its home at the University of Wuppertal (K. Erlemann and

J. Zangenberg; the latter now in Leiden) and at the Technische Hochschule of Aachen (K. L. Noetlichs and K. Scherberich). The former two are well-known New Testament scholars; the Aachen pair are ancient historians. This obvious choice for this kind of joint venture is also reflected in the list of contributors, which counts no less than eighty-seven names, in addition to the editors. With a few exceptions (e.g., J. Barclay, M. Miglietta, or A. C. Mitchell), all of these are scholars from Germany or Austria. Not surprisingly, the majority are biblical scholars, but the list also contains specialists of ancient history, classical philology, Greco-Roman archaeology, Roman law, and even ancient musicology. The group offers a good mix of scholars from various generations and various exegetical and academic traditions and can rightly be called "eine vielfältige 'Wissensquelle'" (4:1: "a multifold source of knowledge").

In three years the team has been able to produce four volumes averaging 250 pages each. A supplementary fifth volume has been announced that will offer a large selection from primary literature in German translation. The editors have opted for a thematic arrangement instead of a purely alphabetical listing of items and lemmata. The choice has obvious advantages in avoiding fragmentation, but there is also a certain danger of overlapping, though the editors have made great efforts to avoid the latter by ample cross-referencing. By way of example, Dura Europos is mentioned, almost in passing, in the section on the Diaspora (1:206), but the reader is also referred to the somewhat longer paragraph in the section on synagogues (3: 207).

Volume 1 ("Prolegomena; Sources; History") contains four chapters. The first one is called "Aspects of Ancient Culture" (1:6–59; the "Prolegomena" of the title?) and offers some introductory reflections on such topics as the distinction between the concepts of culture and of religion in antiquity and (post-)modernity, the relation between religion and philosophy and religion and politics, the complex interplay of family, individual, and society, and cult and society. Even in these more general sections the presentation is guided more or less by the same principle that is followed through all the volumes of concentrating as much as possible on what is immediately relevant for studying particular New Testament passages, even though the selection that has been made of the latter is not always self-evident. In the section on "Cult and Society" (1:48–59), W. C. Schneider deals, quite appropriately, with initiation rituals in Rome (citing Luke 2:21–40, which is lacking from the list of New Testament texts at the beginning), but he concentrates above all on the long-standing tradition in Greek culture of criticizing ritual practices, a tradition that is documented since Xenophanes in the sixth century B.C.E. and that survived all through to Porphyrius, and the echoes of it in Jesus' polemics with the religious authorities on purity or Sabbath rules, in the accusation that is brought against him in Matt 26:61, and in the concerns of the Jerusalem community to establish a *modus vivendi* about keeping the commandments of Torah that is acceptable to all. This is no doubt an important issue

in the Gospels, as elsewhere in the New Testament, but one could have added still other aspects related to this topic that, if maybe less controversial, certainly had an equally strong impact on the individual and on society as a whole, such as burial and commemoration rituals (see Luke 7:11–17 or the burial of Jesus; but see also in 3:122–28) or the questions of idolatry or of “conversion” (see Nock’s famous essay). On the other hand, one could question the way some other New Testament passages are mentioned. Luke 3:1–10 (par. Matt) indeed emphasizes the ethical dimension that should accompany and give content to any ritual praxis, but is the act of being baptized not also a ritual of purification and/or initiation?

Chapter 2 of volume 1, “The Sources and Their Influence on the New Testament” (1:60–142), introduces the reader to some of the major literary (Hellenistic-)Jewish sources that help to illustrate or situate, or maybe even have influenced in some way, certain passages in the New Testament and to the most important literary genres that are represented in ancient literature, from *epos* to epistolography. Some of the latter are dealt with quite succinctly. One can understand that *epos* is perhaps not the most relevant category for studying the New Testament (no passages are mentioned). The author of this section (A. Breitenbach) is not convinced by recent attempts to compare the Gospel of Mark with Homer, and he is also critical about discovering at least some “epic” elements in Luke-Acts, although I do not see how the fact that such material that is found does not stem from Luke would argue against the (modest) conclusion that Luke’s work occasionally shows some features from epic tradition. One is rather more astonished, however, to see that the section on historiography is even shorter (108–10) than the one on epic, given the immensely rich scholarly literature that has been produced on this topic and the sympathy the authors of this section (Scherberich and A. von Dobbeler) show for the historiographical dimension in Luke’s work. That the Gospel and Acts cannot solely be explained through the influence of ancient historiography is of course true, but the issue is in any case not to be decided on the basis of what we might be able to know about Luke’s training as “a physician, annex historiographer,” as the comments on 109 seem to imply. Biography receives a rather longer and far more (again: too?) positive treatment focusing on Mark, although its author (D. Frickenschmidt) concentrates on the genre as a whole (“die Gesamtform”) and tends to neglect somewhat the variety and flexibility that characterizes a good part of ancient biography. Finally, it is a good thing that some attention at least is given to the nonliterary sources, which are still all too often dismissed as if of only secondary importance and to many a student and scholar remain the great unknown. J. Hengstl shows how information from the papyri can help one to understand the measures taken by the steward in Luke 16:1–8 or the concern of the centurion for his sick servant in Luke 7:1–10. These few examples are obviously but a most selective choice from a much richer field. The edict of Claudius (Acts 18:12–17) is the best known of three

epigraphical texts that are cited by T. Carsten. R. Ziegler, on the other hand, offers an ample list of New Testament passages dealing with or referring to money to illustrate the fairly long and well-documented section on numismatics, one more discipline for which most biblical scholars have to rely on the assistance of professionals.

The chapter on “Historical Contexts” (2:143–220) contains sections on the structure of the Roman Empire as a global power and its significance in modeling the worldview of the ancients, on the history and cultural and religious life of its most important regions in the eastern Mediterranean (foremost Asia Minor and Palestine; with three remarkably short sections on the wars with Rome and its consequences, its history up to Bar Kokhba, and the transformation toward rabbinic Judaism), on the Jewish Diaspora (by J. Barclay, except for the one on Egypt: G. Schimanowski), and on the problems in establishing a chronology of the ministry of Jesus and of the first decades of Christianity (R. Riesner).

The volume concludes with a chapter on “Ancient Law and Jurisprudence” (1:221–68) discussing the principles of Roman, Greek, and Jewish Law. The first and last of these deal at length with matters related to the trials of Jesus and of Paul; the latter is of some importance also for matters of private law (divorce).

Volume 2 (“Family; Society; Economical and Cultural Activities”) opens with a short general introduction on the interaction between religious-cultic praxis and daily life (2:1–8) and contains five chapters. The core chapter, “Man as a Social Being” (2:9–177), is further divided into seven sections that deal with practical aspects of daily life, the cycle of life as seen in antiquity, threats and dangers (physical and psychological), the organization of the social life of the individual (voluntary associations) and of society at large (social classes and the tensions between them), and life in the villages of Syro-Palestine and Asia Minor and in the provincial and capital cities in the eastern part of the empire. Special mention should be made of the two short subsections on the use the New Testament makes of imagery from family and public life (2:48–52, 123–26). Also worth consulting is the subsection on associations. M. Oehler shows that this phenomenon is not only of interest for studying the structure of the Pauline communities but can also throw light on the procedures of regulating tensions among group members as narrated in Matt 18:15–21. Many of these subsections show that daily life in antiquity was quite different from what we experience in contemporary (First World) societies. Life expectation was such that few could say that they were raised in a “complete” family. Perhaps most alienating is what the New Testament and other ancient sources tell us about disease and illness as the results of the wrath of God/the gods. Yet even in such issues there is often also an element of recognition, as was amply demonstrated by the whole wave of social-scientific studies of the past decades. Coping with disease is a

struggle of all times, and forms of ostracism or marginalization have evidently not disappeared altogether.

The chapter closes with sections on life in the countryside and in the city. As for the former, our knowledge often remains rather poor indeed, but one wonders why the evidence from our best source (Egypt) is hardly mentioned. Moreover, not all of the instances in the list of New Testament passages, which is cited twice (104, 112), are immediately relevant. The various subsections on cities as a rule offer some notes on their history, the most important public buildings (esp. for Rome and Jerusalem), and the New Testament passages in which they are mentioned. A most prominent place is given to Alexandria, even though it appears to have been quite insignificant a city for earliest Christianity. Other cities that probably did not really have flourishing Christian communities are nevertheless mentioned because they had the good luck of having been chosen as the stage for an important episode in New Testament writings (Athens in Acts 17). The Decapolis is dealt with as one entity, but Damascus, one of the ten, according to Pliny, and not a particularly important Christian center, is also mentioned separately. The list of New Testament passages exceptionally also mentions a postbiblical source (Eusebius of Caesarea on Pella).

The chapters on "Business and Finance" (2:178–98) and on "Science and Technology" (2:199–222) include information on the Roman tax system (with brief discussions of the "tax pericopes" in Matt 17:24–27 and 22:15–22, but only a passing reference to the question of the *fiscus iudaicus*), the principles and basic structures of economic life in the eastern Mediterranean, work ethos, and the organization, maintenance, and reliability of international trade and supply lines in an after all still rather primitive economy that was based for the greater part on agriculture. The information the New Testament provides on these and similar topics (water supply, etc.) is very selective indeed and often of a metaphorical character only (using imagery from architecture or from the military). In part this can be explained because it was not the interest of the authors. But maybe one should also bear in mind that they may not have wished to bury their readers with information that at that time must have been regarded as common knowledge, but as a result has left us clueless about the details of Paul's journey in the hinterland of Asia Minor, or maybe also their silence merely reflects something of how little people knew about or had access to sources on things that largely remained out of their horizon. The chapter on technology concludes with an essay on medicine in the ancient world. A place of honor is naturally given to Asclepius and his successful career, who, even though he is not mentioned by name in the New Testament, later on famously became the major challenger of Christ himself, at least in the eyes of Christian authors, in promising healing and promoting a message of salvation. This later development is in a sense somewhat surprising because in the New Testament Jesus is never positively compared to or

addressed as a medical doctor (see Luke 4:23), and the latter, as a matter of fact, are qualified quite negatively, or at least labeled as helpless by Mark (5:26), a view Luke is often said to have weakened out of self-respect for his profession (8:43).

The chapter on "Education" (2:223–48) informs about ways of communicating, book production and storing, the school system and the curriculum, the special place reserved all through antiquity to the study of rhetoric and philosophy, and the specific type of religious education that characterized Jewish society. The New Testament often pictures Jesus or his disciples as "instructing" their audiences. Being taught *viva vox* was a reputed way of getting trained, in certain disciplines at least, but if not accompanied by any form of written production, such a training could easily be dismissed as marginal or "illiterate." P. Müller draws attention to New Testament passages that present characters in the act of reading (Jesus in Luke 4:16–30, the eunuch in Acts 8:26–40). Paul's apologetically inspired contrast between what he regards to be good Christian praxis and the vanity of those aspiring at living the life of the Greek philosopher is mentioned in the section on rhetorics; the artificially created tension is indeed in part itself a topos of ancient rhetoric (2:243).

Other expressions of "higher culture" (although this did certainly not apply to all forms of music) are dealt with in the closing chapter on "The Arts" (2:249–63). Here again the New Testament offers a good deal of information that can helpfully further be illustrated from nonbiblical sources.

Volume 3 ("Worldviews; Cult; Ethos") deals with philosophy and religion in the broadest sense. It is divided into three chapters. The first one, "Schools and Groups" (3:1–78), contains sections on Hellenistic-Roman philosophy, the mystery cults, religious diversity in first-century Palestine and in Asia Minor, and gnosis. Of course, all of these should figure in this kind of work, but the first two are quite short. All the important philosophical schools and traditions, old and new, are there, but it is a pity that the issue of "Jesus and the Cynics," a hotly debated question only a few years ago, at least in the Anglo-Saxon world, is reduced to one bibliographical note (3:5). The mystery cults are treated in a mere five pages, although it should be noted that its author (H. Kloft) does not limit himself to a presentation of the sources and a mere repetition of the well-known facts but also proves to be quite skeptical of D. Zeller's thesis that there are no traces in the New Testament of direct borrowing from or even dependence upon these cults (3:25). The variety in Palestine is well-documented, although the combination of Pharisees, Zealots, and *sicarii* into one subsection constitutes quite a triad. Asia Minor is home to Cybele and to a number of lesser known deities who rapidly spread through the empire, but nothing is said about the survival, in some respects even the revival, of the ancient Greco-Roman cults (Artemis was alive and well in Ephesus, as Paul experienced). Also lacking is a

reference to the (relative) success of some other deities that are maybe not to be reckoned among the mystery cults. The cult of Serapis played a prominent role in the religious life of Thessalonica (see 2:171). The section on gnosis, which is not limited to the sole question of whether there ever was such a thing as a "pre-Christian" gnosis that might have influenced, negatively or positively, the earliest Christian writings, leads us well into the second century, but of course some of the evidence that is cited and dealt with in the field of philosophy and the mystery cults also brings us way beyond the New Testament era.

The second chapter, "Topics" (3:79–150), includes sections on the perception of reality and the worldview of the ancients, the concept of (a) god and of man, death and the belief in the afterlife, miracle working and magic, prophecy and oracles, and political theories. The section on afterlife (U. Volp) contains a good general survey on the origins and transformation of the concepts and views of resurrection and of the immortality of the soul in Jewish and Greek tradition, as well as a paragraph on their reception in later Christian tradition, but it does not mention at all the empty tomb/resurrection stories in the Gospels. The one on prophets/prophecy and oracles (V. Rosenberger) refers to a number of New Testament passages that warn against pseudoprophets or depict the Baptist or Jesus as prophets, but it would seem that for the latter the more important source of inspiration is the biblical tradition (John and Jesus as Elijah *redivivus*). In the final section, on the notion of "state/nation," M. Klinghardt briefly analyzes the concept of *ekklesia* and the metaphor of the body that both were commonly used in this respect in classical tradition and were received in Christian tradition as well.

The third chapter, "Cult and Ethics" (3:151–253), has nine sections. It opens with a very long one—the longest in the whole set (3:151–80)—by H. Löhr on the principles and aims of teaching and living the ethically good life according to Hellenistic philosophical and to Christian tradition (Paul in particular). Among many interesting observations and comments, I note the one on reciprocity, a notion that is prominent in Paul's instruction but seems to be overshadowed (though not really substituted) in the Pastorals by a more diversified view that rather focuses on status and role play within an organization (159). There follows a double section on temple and temple cult in the ancient world and in Jewish tradition, then shorter sections on the synagogue, the emperor cult, prayer, private worship and piety, visionary and other forms of mystical experience, esoteric traditions (e.g., gematria), and mission and apologetics. In the section on the emperor cult one misses a reference to the book of Revelation in the list of New Testament passages. The one on the Jerusalem temple contains a very detailed description of its architecture and ends with a paragraph on the relation between temple and synagogue that introduces the next section, which pays due attention to the discussions on the (lack of) archaeological evidence for the existence and functioning of the synagogue in the first century. The

section on *religio domestica* evidently has a direct bearing on the origins and organization of the Christian cult and liturgy in and through the so-called house churches, but the phenomenon is also linked to and partially explained in terms of popular piety ("Volksfrömmigkeit"), although the two of course do not necessarily overlap completely. In the closing section, Christian missionary activity is mentioned side by side with Jewish and "pagan" mission, but what is said about the latter does not go beyond a brief survey of New Testament passages that mention the existence of cults of foreign gods in Acts. The issues of proselytism and of the "Godfearers" had been treated in the first chapter, in the section on religious diversity in Palestine (3:50–52), although some of the more important evidence comes, of course, from elsewhere (the Aphrodisias inscription) and Acts speaks of Godfearers in areas outside of Palestine.

Volume 4, published last year, offers detailed lists of indexes that are an indispensable complement to a work that is arranged along thematic lines and often covers rather large areas, but it also contains a selection of one-hundred photos (none color), plans, maps, and drawings that are all cross-referenced to a particular section in one of the three volumes. There are maps of the Roman Empire (unfortunately quite small and difficult to read), of Palestine, and of several of the cities that were presented in volume 2. Some of the photos are well-known already (aerial views of Qumran and Masada). Perhaps most interesting is the selection of photos of daily life scenes, including a most vivid and amusing fresco from Pompeii of a farewell scene at a drinking party in which one of the guests (a lady) clearly needs some support to get up from the couch and is greeted by a merry company (no. 25). Sarcophagi and reliefs on tombstones are a rich source of information both on the tragedies of life (no. 42, the tomb of a once victorious gladiator who is depicted at the moment he is slaying his victim—or is it the other way around?—but whose inscription tells the reader that he spared the other's life only to be killed later by this same person) and the aspirations of the deceased (no. 72, a brother and sister posing as *literati*). Among the photos related to volume 3, one should compare the two depicting Cybele and her career from a local Phrygian deity (no. 55, Bogazköy) to a Roman matrona (no. 79, Pompeii). Also interesting are the drawings of the plans and structures of several synagogues (nos. 91–94), which give a clear idea of the differences in extent and impact of Jewish communities in various cities of the empire (compare the size of the "grand synagogue" of Sardes to that of the one in Stobi). Among the (rather too few) photos of inscriptions I mention the warning to Gentiles on the Jerusalem temple precincts (no. 90).

To conclude, it is not an easy task to try and define the term "culture," and as a matter of fact no formal definition is given. One could call it a prudent move, or an unfortunate one. However, it is clear from the contents of the various surveys that for the *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur* team "culture" is not just "high culture" and not only about

“high society” and high-brow literary and other artistic activities, but also quite appropriately includes material, some might say almost mundane, aspects. Studying and understanding Christianity is not just a matter of theology or philosophy. It is further to be noticed that the qualification “ancient” in the title of the work primarily refers, again quite appropriately, to Greco-Roman/pagan-Hellenistic culture and sources but also includes (Hellenistic-)Jewish culture and sources of the turn of the era. Some might feel that the indigenous aspects of one or another cult are perhaps slightly neglected (in as far as they can be documented, which is not always easy), but it may also just reflect the way these cults were known to the wider community. The priests and promoters of the cult of Isis and company may have continued to cherish their Egyptian or Oriental roots, but their success within larger circles also depended, in part at least, on their flexibility and willingness to adapt to Greco-Roman schemes and frameworks, and it was probably in such forms that these cults were best known to Christians in the cities of the East or in Rome. Finally, the decision to start in a sense from the relevant New Testament passages and to integrate them, as much as possible, in the presentation of a theme obviously has guided and influenced the selection of the material that is discussed or cited. But this approach has the advantage that one keeps focused on the New Testament writings. It also often shows that nascent Christianity was itself part and parcel of that ancient world, even if the message it proclaimed was “not of this world,” and that the documents it produced are themselves a most valuable source of information about that world in which Christianity took shape.

Obviously not everything in these three volumes may look equally relevant or important to every reader, and it is rather easy to cite one or another item that could have been shortened or developed in more detail. But the overall impression is most positive. As a study book *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur* will certainly offer good services to students and scholars alike and well deserves its place among other such projects of documenting the *Umwelt* of the New Testament, not in the least also because of the useful bibliographies at the end of each section.