

BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTES

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***Archaeology and the Letters of Paul.* By Laura Salah Nasrallah.**

New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. xviii + 310 pp. \$99 cloth.

New Testament archaeology has focused primarily on the world of Jesus, so it is refreshing to have a study dealing with the Pauline corpus. Lacking an ability to answer most New Testament critical questions (for example, questions of source criticism or authorship), New Testament archaeology historically became geared to locating sites mentioned in the text. Over time, material evidence related to the New Testament accumulated, primarily consisting of relevant inscriptions and what could be labeled as narrative backdrops of physical space. Contemporary New Testament archaeology has expanded far beyond these boundaries and draws on current archaeological theory and the geometrically expanding data on the first century world.

Laura Nasrallah begins *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* with a strong introductory chapter that firmly argues for the importance of current archaeological data for biblical scholarship: “Those interested in the historical context for the production and first reception of biblical text *must* [LSN] use archaeology” (14). Nasrallah confines her discussion to the recipient cities of letters included in the higher critical “canon” of Pauline writings (1 Thessalonians, Galatians, the Corinthian correspondence, Philippians, and Romans; she also includes Philemon, which some critical scholars do not). She then provides a chapter based on each of her accepted letters. By including Philemon, she is able to engage with Ephesus as her starting point from which she focuses on slavery: “being bought with a price” is her theme here. In chapter 3 she uses Galatians to discuss travel and hospitality, in particular the effect on the hosting community of various travelers. Philippi becomes the context for a discussion on poverty and abundance. This chapter is her first real engagement with archaeological data beyond inscriptions. Chapter 5 focuses on death and grief against a Corinthian background. In Chapter 6 she uses the Augustan mausoleum in Rome as the launching pad for a discussion of time, race, and obelisks and their influence in the letter to the Romans. Chapter 7 discourses on what Nasrallah calls “the afterlife of the Apostle Paul” (224), using Thessalonike as a backdrop. Her concluding chapter again argues for the use of archaeology in New Testament study, a weakness that she correctly identifies in much contemporary New Testament scholarship.

However, this book, despite its title, is neither a comprehensive survey of the archaeology of the world of Paul nor a true archaeological study on the letters of Paul as she calls for in her discussion of method (34). As her title indicates, she does not discuss Acts or use its data in her presentations. She baldly states that “Acts is a later text . . . it is not an objective history against which to plot the life of Paul” (14). Instead, Nasrallah uses archaeological data from the various cities linked to the letters to lay a foundation for a discussion of nontraditional perspectives on various interpretive issues in the letters. She correctly points out that we should think of the letters attributed to Paul as products of collaboration, which Paul himself clearly states. However, if the letters are seen as collaborative, then some of the justification for eliminating certain epistles of the Pauline New Testament canon is undercut, but this issue is not raised as she simply accepts the limitations of the higher critical canon. Nasrallah writes as a biblical scholar, writing for biblical students and scholars, freely admitting in both the introduction and the conclusion that she is not an archaeologist. For the most part, her archaeological data is inscriptional material and the physical topography of the cities she engages with. This is a classic “biblical backgrounds” approach, of some value, but it is not archaeology. Her strongest chapter is probably the one on Philippi because she understands the site very well.

This study can be frustrating to use. For example, Nasrallah’s failure to accept Ephesians and the Timothy correspondence as Pauline severely limits her interaction with the archaeology of Ephesus. This site has been intensively excavated for nearly a century and provides a wealth of contextual data on first century life in the first generations after Roman conquest. She does not engage at all with the fluidity of identity in Ephesus or with the overpowering presence of Artemis in the lives of the populace, a major issue in the New Testament writings. Philemon mentions a house church, but she does not use the results from the extensive domestic excavation which has occurred in Ephesus to comment on this phenomenon. Even on this issue, she could have used the physical layout of the houses to discuss domestic slavery, and the newly excavated gladiator cemetery could have nuanced the discussion as well. In chapter 3, she has a good discussion of travelers, but does not emphasize that ideas spread through trade networks. She could have engaged the wealth of new data on Roman trade networks in Anatolia, primarily derived from ceramic studies and used it as a framework to discuss Paul’s travels. The chapter on Rome is, frankly, bizarre with a five-page section devoted to a discussion of Mussolini’s “archaeology.” She defends this choice, saying “embedding the letter to the Romans within the ancient roman landscape of Augustus’ mausoleum complex, even while our awareness hovers over the fact that this complex is an ‘authentic ruin’ produced by fascist ‘archaeology’ allows us to hear more

clearly the language of time and cosmos in the letter to the Romans” (222). Maybe it does for her but not for me.

Overall, Nasrallah raises good questions that are rarely asked in the way she does, but when she answers them, she actually employs only a small amount of the archaeological data that could be brought to bear on these issues. If this book encourages students and scholars of New Testament and early Christianity to dip into the burgeoning archaeological literature bearing on the Mediterranean world of Paul, than it will have achieved a positive purpose.

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A Women’s History of the Christian Church: Two Thousand Years of Female Leadership. By **Elizabeth Gillan Muir**. Toronto:

University of Toronto Press, 2019. xiii + 415. CAD \$63.75 cloth;

CAD \$34.95 paper; ebook available.

The subtitle of Elizabeth Gillan Muir’s comprehensive study of women in Christianity summarizes the focus of the book—namely, female leadership of the church from its beginnings. The book covers an extensive, even staggering, number of women who clearly were church leaders in every sense of the word. This exhaustiveness is both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, we learn about a range of figures throughout Christian history, both the little-known and the overdetermined. On the other hand, so many women are presented that it is difficult at times to know who, or what, is worth remembering.

Several elements stand out in this notable book: the inclusion of Canada and Canadian women as objects of study; the coverage of non-mainstream branches of Christianity, such as Christian Science, Spiritualism, and folk religions that incorporate Christian theology; and discussions of Methodism and women’s ordination, which both get their own chapters.

Clearly designed as a textbook—with pedagogical apparatuses, such as a timeline, a glossary, illustrations, and suggested readings—the volume also presupposes an academic knowledge of Christianity. For this reason, it would probably work best in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses, where students have a strong foundation in the basics of Christian history.

The author acknowledges in the preface some of the limitations of the work. A few of my quibbles would be: is that all there is on women leaders in

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