

## *Preface*

*Alpha* provides a home and venue for studies of text growth and interaction in the early Christian writings, with attention also to contemporary religious developments, and to Homer and the Hebrew Scriptures as parallel cases of text formation over time. With our sister journal *Warring States Papers*, which is responsible for classical China (and which exchanges articles of mutual interest with *Alpha*), we seek to demonstrate the applicability of standard philological methods to all fields of humanistic inquiry. What are those methods?

As William L Holladay said in his 1986 Jeremiah commentary, “The first question . . . is the integrity of the passage: is it one unit or more?” We recognize strata, interpolations, and any other signs of text growth that internal evidence may suggest. We remember (with Tischendorf) that, of related passages, the one which is more readily seen as giving rise to the other is likely to be the earlier, and (with Ranke) we prefer the earlier evidence, while being aware that all texts have their own agendas. We apply the test of coherence to individual results, and that of historical plausibility to the gradually emerging large picture.

Proceeding thus has led us to regard several Gospels (not only John) as stratified, and to view the genuine Pauline Epistles as having been improved by Paul’s editors. So clarified, the texts attest a humanly intelligible Paul, free of the additions by which he was made less divisive for a future Christian readership, and reveal in the Gospel record a pre-Pauline Christianity which we call Alpha: a Christianity based not on the Resurrection or any other theory of Jesus’ death, but on his teachings during his life. This early Christianity, at first little more than a Messianic Jewish sect, continued alongside the later Pauline or Beta Christianity down to the time of Pliny and beyond. Though it has long been institutionally extinct, it still survives in a sort of tacit form, in the practical day-to-day living of many Christians.

Each *Alpha* volume begins with articles of general and methodological interest, and then runs chronologically: early witnesses, the immediate post-Apostolic generation, and later developments including Gnostic tendencies and post-Temple Judaism.

At present, there can be said to be an “Alpha Christianity” community, and papers in this first volume are mostly the work of the founding figures. It is not required that *Alpha* authors agree among themselves, but the editors select what seem to them the best current solutions, and combine them in a Working Chronology at the end of the volume. It will be updated annually. Dates of articles are those of original presentation; most papers have been revised by their authors for their appearance here.

**This Volume** focuses on what we find to be the key pre-Pauline texts: the earliest layer of Mark, the Epistle of Jacob, and the core of the Didache. The non-Markan material in Matthew and Luke receives special attention; we see no need to conjecture an outside source for it, and find instead a two-way relation between the two Gospels. We also discover a division within Acts, and an unsuspected second Sermon in Luke. We compare Mandaean and Gospel tradition echoes of the John the Baptist movement and begin a consideration of the non-Synoptic portions of the Gospel of Thomas.

Conventions for *Alpha* include the following:

**Dates.** As a convention which works well in languages other than English, we use a leading zero in place of BC(E). 65 BC becomes 065, while AD 14 is simply 14. The “03rd century” (which can be abbreviated as 03c) is the 3rd BC; “3rd” is the 3rd AD. The advantages of this leading zero over a minus sign are that it allows unambiguous hyphenation of dates which cross the century line (Horace, 065-08; Augustus, 063-14). It also avoids a conflict with astronomers, whose “-65” is *not* the “-65” of historians.

**Abbreviations** for books of the Bible are mostly standard, though we distinguish Phm (Philemon) and Php (Philippians). For the Epistle of James, we use Ja, which suggests the correct Jacob (as in the OT) and the Anglicized James (in English Bibles in the NT). Jesus, it is now known, was a Jew, and so, presumably, were his brothers (and, as we suspect in connection with that Epistle, the brother of Levi of Alphaeus).

**Greek Text.** For the NT, we follow the latest edition of the United Bible Societies (UBS) text and the corresponding Nestle-Aland (NA) edition, but are inclined to accept the minority opinion of Bruce Metzger on several points. There has been a drift away from the decisions of Westcott and Hort (1881), including the recent readmission to the text of such stories as “The Woman Taken in Adultery,” a tendency from which we prefer to hold ourselves apart. In citing manuscripts, we resist the temptation to abbreviate Vaticanus as V, but use S for Sinaiticus. Papyri are cited with a capital P. Among translations, we suggest the ASV, which preserves Mark’s historical presents, but no one version is required of our contributors.

**References.** Short citations (in the form Surname **Keyword**) are expanded in the Works Cited list at the end of each article. To save space, often cited standard works are not normally included in those lists. For them, and for journals cited by acronym, see the reference lists at the end of the volume. Also at the end of the volume are indexes to subjects and to passages discussed, along with the above-mentioned Working Chronology of texts and events.

**Original Venues** of these articles include meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature, the Project’s own conferences, and several E-lists. Some articles are repeated here from Warring States Papers; they are indicated by a formula such as

*Alpha v1 (2017) < Warring States Papers v1 (2010)*

at the bottom of the first page.

**Contributions** from interested scholars are welcome. Our formal Call for Papers will be found at <http://www.umass.edu/wsp/publications/alpha/call.html>. Except for first serial and database rights, our contributors retain full ownership of their material, and do not require our permission for its further use in any form.

We conclude with the hope that publication of these studies will bring them more effectively to the attention of potentially interested readers, both in the NT field proper and in the wider historical community. We hope they may also serve to suggest that, whether at the level of general methodology or at the more specific substantive level, humanity, and the study of humanity, are ultimately one.

The Editors