The idea is to publish a whole series of these readers on various topics. This volume contains seven articles on the Gospel of John: B Lindars: _Discourse and Tradition: The use of the sayings of Jesus in the discourses in the Fourth Gospel_; B Byrne: _The Faith of the beloved disciple and the community in John 20_; R Bauckham: _The beloved disciple as ideal author_; B H Grigsby: _The cross as expiatory sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel_; M C de Boer: _Narrative criticism, historical criticism and the Gospel of John_; A H B Logan: _John and the Gnostics_; W E Sproston: _Witnesses to what was 'ἐκ' ἀρχῆς: 1 John's contribution to our knowledge of the tradition in the Fourth Gospel_.

In addition to these articles there are 6 articles on the revelation of John: J J Gunther: _The Elder John, author of Revelation_; D E Aune: _The prophetic circle of John of Patmos and the exegesis of Revelation 22:16_; L W Hurtado: _Revelation 4-5 in the light of Jewish apocalyptic analogies_; M G Reddish: _Martyr Christology in the Apocalypse_; P Barnett: _Polemical parallelism: Some further reflections on the apocalypse_; F Downing: _Pliny's prosecutions of Christians: Revelation and 1 Peter_. This volume also has a list of abbreviations, as well as an index of authors and a Scripture index.

It is certainly not the place to review the various articles chosen here, but perhaps a few words about the idea and approach are necessary. The editors mention in the preface that they have chosen the articles on the following grounds: 'Some articles are truly ground breaking, pushing their respective enquiry into new paths and introducing new critical questions into the debate. Others are assessments of the critical terrain of a particular topic, providing useful and insightful analyses that others can and have built upon. Other are included because they are major contributions to an on-going discussion' (7). If one takes this into consideration, then the editors have certainly chosen the articles in the volume well. There is indeed a wide variety and each article can introduce readers to some discussion or debate in the literature. It is also useful in the sense that one can obtain some kind of picture of the basic issues and trends in research over the past two decades. As such this kind of approach would be useful for scholars and students alike, since it would provide an easy and useful exposure to critical debate. This volume is called _The Johannine Writings_, rather misleading title since it deals basically with the Gospel of John and Revelation, and very indirectly with the letters. Nowhere is it explained why articles on the Johannine letters are not also included here. Nevertheless, this series is a welcome addition to the excellent publishing programme at Sheffield Academic Press and this volume is highly recommended to both scholars and students of the Johannine writings, and even those whose field of expertise lies outside the Johannine corpus will be able to use this volume to gain an overview of the research in this area.

Smith, Morton — Studies in the Cult of Yahweh, Vol 2


Reviewer: Prof S J van Tilborg, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

It is never easy to review a series of articles. Usually they cover such a variety of subjects that one cannot do much more than give an overview of the titles. That would not be very meaningful in this case because this is a collection of some 40 articles. But because they are reprints of articles by one author,
Morton Smith himself, there is more unity in this collection. In this second part, his articles about the New Testament, it is more like a spin-off from some well known book publications, especially his studies (1) Heroes and Gods: Spiritual Biographies in Antiquity (together with M Hadas, publ in 1965) and (2) Jesus the Magician (from 1978).

It is obvious that he defends the same positions: that is: (1) there is a genre which one can call aretology in which the words and deeds of a divine man are described. The Gospels are influenced by this genre and are more in line with it than any other non-Christian writing we know of. And (2) a further reflection on the Christology of Jesus. Jesus is not only a divine man, he is on the basis of his own self-awareness and seen from the option of his contemporaries a magician: someone who knows magic, who uses that knowledge for the benefit of people who ask for his help, and who, therefore, gets involved in discussions and controversy with the religious authorities.

In this series of articles the positions are partially repeated (in the studies on the divine man, on the ascent to the heavens and on the transfiguration story); but there are in part also additional specialised studies of detail. Fairly new is the attention for Paul. In several articles the author tries to show that Paul too belongs in the area of magic: in his self-awareness (possessed by the demon Jesus), in his way of acting (curses, leadership of the Christian community; speaking in tongues) and in the resistance which he evokes. Compared to the books the studies on magic writing are new. They form a step towards their Formgeschichte; a description of the (limited) influence of Jewish thought; aspects of the history of magic in antiquity. More on the side of this mainstream are the studies about the (pseudo-) Plutarch treatise, De Superstitione; about the history of the concept ‘gnostikos’ and of the terms ‘apokalyptō’ and ‘apokalypsis’.

Morton Smith wanted to be an adherent of the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule from the beginning of this century (with people like Reitzenstein, Norden, Bousset e a). He brought this stream in exegesis for a good part to new life. His first class knowledge of the classical (Greek, Hellenistic, Jewish, Roman) antiquity, specialised on the religious aspect made this possible. Like Eric Robertson Dodds he was fascinated by the irrational in this culture; for Morton Smith that was the magic, the strange, the extravagant. And he never tired to make this clear ‘opportune importune’. He manages to convey that fascination and that makes reading this book exciting notwithstanding the repetitions which one finds also. In this study we are (again) confronted with a completely different world. In this way he re-enforces the awareness that the New Testament can be understood from within only for a small part.

It is clear that he evoked a good deal of resistance. To quote just one of his exclamations: ‘To describe the religion of Paul is, in Shakespearean terms, to take up arms against a sea of quibbles and expose oneself, on every side, to the slings and arrows of outrageous exegetes’ (p 133). The resistance among the exegetes was not always or in all aspects right but that does not mean that there are not serious problems from a historical point of view. Even leaving apart whether the expression ‘the divine man’ as indication of a certain type of person and, parallel to this the genre ‘aretology’, can be used historically as M Smith thought — it seems to me that this discussion is settled against him — one can also ask questions about ‘the magical’ in classical culture. If one pays careful attention — M Smith obviously does not emphasize this all that much — it appears that the magical texts which are relevant for comparison with texts from the New Testament and which can more or less be dated are all later than the first century. I think that what happened with ‘gnosticism’ also happened with magic. While it may be said that the beginnings of it are to be dated in the first century, the real explosion of texts comes in the middle of the second century. What that means for the evaluation of the use of these texts to explain texts from the New Testament and thus for the scientific scaling of this part of Morton Smith’s research project is not difficult to guess.