

Fall Meeting 2007

Report on the Acts Seminar

Dennis E. Smith

At this meeting, the papers not only addressed specific texts but also provoked further discussion about the developing working hypotheses of the Acts Seminar.

In our Friday session, we examined details of the Stephen story in Acts 6–7 that had not yet been fully discussed at previous meetings. Perry Kea’s paper, “The Hellenists and the Hebrews,” argued for the basic histo-

ricity of two Christian groups, the “Hellenists” in Acts 6:1 and the “seven” in Acts 6:5. The arguments in the paper represented a longstanding consensus in scholarship. Many of the Fellows, however, felt that Kea’s arguments were tied too closely to theories about the reliability of Acts based on the traditional scholarly view that Acts was written around 80 CE. In contrast, since more and more of the Fellows are now convinced that Acts was written in the early second century to respond to issues in its own day, a majority concluded that both “Hellenists” and “the seven” are more likely to be narrative devices rather than historical references and voted black or gray on all of Kea’s proposals. The Associates were less skeptical, giving the proposals a few pink votes. The discussion of this paper was of significant benefit to the seminar because it provided an occasion to grapple with the implications of dating for the interpretation of Acts.

Ballot Three • Acts Seminar The Hellenists and the Hebrews Perry V. Kea

Q1	The Hellenists of Acts 6:1 were Gentiles.					
Fellows	0.09 Black	0.00 R	0.00 P	0.26 G	0.74 B	
Associates	0.07 Black	0.03 R	0.02 P	0.08 G	0.88 B	
Q2	The Hellenists of Acts 6:1 were Greek-speaking Jews.					
Fellows	0.49 Gray	0.13 R	0.42 P	0.25 G	0.21 B	
Associates	0.65 Pink	0.09 R	0.80 P	0.06 G	0.05 B	
Q3	The Hellenists of Acts 6:1 were Diaspora Jews.					
Fellows	0.47 Gray	0.04 R	0.54 P	0.21 G	0.21 B	
Associates	0.55 Pink	0.00 R	0.72 P	0.20 G	0.08 B	
Q4	The list of the Seven in Acts 6:5 is a pre-Lukan tradition.					
Fellows	0.47 Gray	0.17 R	0.29 P	0.33 G	0.21 B	
Associates	0.48 Gray	0.06 R	0.49 P	0.27 G	0.17 B	
Q5	The Seven belonged to the Hellenists of Acts 6:1.					
Fellows	0.29 Gray	0.04 R	0.17 P	0.42 G	0.38 B	
Associates	0.43 Gray	0.03 R	0.48 P	0.24 G	0.25 B	
Q6	The Seven were selected by the Twelve.					
Fellows	0.04 Black	0.00 R	0.00 P	0.13 G	0.87 B	
Associates	0.15 Black	0.03 R	0.06 P	0.23 G	0.67 B	
Q7	The Seven served as overseers/administrators for the Hellenist community in Jerusalem.					
Fellows	0.19 Black	0.00 R	0.13 P	0.33 G	0.54 B	
Associates	0.31 Gray	0.00 R	0.19 P	0.53 G	0.27 B	
Q8	At least two of the Seven, Stephen and Philip, were evangelists.					
Fellows	0.22 Black	0.00 R	0.17 P	0.33 G	0.50 B	
Associates	0.37 Gray	0.03 R	0.33 P	0.34 G	0.30 B	
Q9	The Hellenist community of Jesus’ followers in Jerusalem was persecuted.					
Fellows	0.24 Black	0.00 R	0.25 P	0.21 G	0.54 B	
Associates	0.40 Gray	0.02 R	0.41 P	0.32 G	0.25 B	

Ballot Four • Acts Seminar Stephen and the Ethics of Historiography Shelly Matthews

Q1	There is no necessary and singular relationship between the events of history and the language used to translate those events into historical narrative.					
Fellows	0.90 Red	0.83 R	0.04 P	0.13 G	0.00 B	
Associates	0.95 Red	0.91 R	0.05 P	0.01 G	0.03 B	
Q2	Decisions about how to translate the ‘raw events’ of history into the language of a historical narrative have ethical consequences.					
Fellows	0.93 Red	0.83 R	0.13 P	0.04 G	0.00 B	
Associates	0.98 Red	0.94 R	0.06 P	0.00 G	0.00 B	
Q3	The story of the Stoning of Stephen fails both the criteria of multiple attestation and dissimilarity.					
Fellows	0.89 Red	0.79 R	0.13 P	0.04 G	0.04 B	
Associates	0.91 Red	0.77 R	0.22 P	0.00 G	0.01 B	
Q4	It is anachronistic to speak of “Jews” killing “Christians” in the first century of the common era.					
Fellows	0.91 Red	0.80 R	0.16 P	0.00 G	0.04 B	
Associates	0.92 Red	0.79 R	0.17 P	0.04 G	0.00 B	
Q5	There is no ethical good to come from speaking of Jews killing Christians in the first century of the common era.					
Fellows	0.80 Red	0.64 R	0.23 P	0.05 G	0.09 B	
Associates	0.93 Red	0.85 R	0.10 P	0.04 G	0.01 B	
Q6	The story of the Stoning of Stephen in Acts constricts “the Jews” as a negative category.					
Fellows	0.93 Red	0.84 R	0.12 P	0.04 G	0.00 B	
Associates	0.91 Red	0.80 R	0.15 P	0.03 G	0.03 B	

Ballot Ten • Acts Seminar
Luke's Portrayal of Aquila and Priscilla
William O. Walker, Jr.

Q1 Aquila and Priscilla were actual historical characters.

Fellows 0.95 Red 0.85 R 0.15 P 0.00 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.94 Red 0.86 R 0.13 P 0.00 G 0.02 B

Q2 Aquila and Priscilla were a married couple.

Fellows 0.94 Red 0.81 R 0.19 P 0.00 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.95 Red 0.88 R 0.11 P 0.00 G 0.02 B

Q3 Aquila and Priscilla were "tentmakers" by trade.

Fellows 0.37 Gray 0.04 R 0.12 P 0.77 G 0.08 B
Associates 0.36 Gray 0.00 R 0.11 P 0.87 G 0.02 B

Q4 Aquila and Priscilla lived at one time in Rome but left because of Claudius' edict banishing all Jews from Rome.

Fellows 0.37 Gray 0.04 R 0.08 P 0.85 G 0.04 B
Associates 0.35 Gray 0.00 R 0.09 P 0.87 G 0.04 B

Q5 Aquila, at least, was Jewish.

Fellows 0.40 Gray 0.00 R 0.19 P 0.81 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.41 Gray 0.00 R 0.26 P 0.70 G 0.04 B

Q6 Aquila, at least, was originally from Pontus in Asia Minor.

Fellows 0.35 Gray 0.04 R 0.04 P 0.85 G 0.08 B
Associates 0.37 Gray 0.00 R 0.13 P 0.85 G 0.02 B

Q7 Aquila and Priscilla at one time lived in Corinth.

Fellows 0.67 Pink 0.12 R 0.77 P 0.12 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.65 Pink 0.02 R 0.95 P 0.02 G 0.02 B

Q8 Aquila and Priscilla were associated with Paul in Corinth.

Fellows 0.60 Pink 0.15 R 0.50 P 0.35 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.58 Pink 0.04 R 0.70 P 0.25 G 0.02 B

Q9 Aquila and Priscilla at one time lived in Ephesus.

Fellows 0.88 Red 0.69 R 0.27 P 0.04 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.93 Red 0.84 R 0.14 P 0.00 G 0.02 B

Q10 Aquila and Priscilla were, at one time, associated with Paul in Ephesus.

Fellows 0.88 Red 0.73 R 0.19 P 0.08 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.93 Red 0.84 R 0.14 P 0.00 G 0.02 B

Q11 Aquila and Priscilla corrected Apollos' defective version of the gospel.

Fellows 0.22 Black 0.04 R 0.04 P 0.46 G 0.46 B
Associates 0.25 Black 0.00 R 0.10 P 0.56 G 0.35 B

Q12 Priscilla was regarded as, in some sense, the more important of the two.

Fellows 0.72 Pink 0.19 R 0.77 P 0.04 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.70 Pink 0.15 R 0.81 P 0.02 G 0.02 B

Q13 Priscilla's actual name was Prisca, but the author of Acts, for whatever reason, changed this to the diminutive form.

Fellows 0.65 Pink 0.15 R 0.69 P 0.12 G 0.04 B
Associates 0.72 Pink 0.19 R 0.80 P 0.00 G 0.02 B

Q14 The author of Acts knew a collection of Pauline letters.

Fellows 0.87 Red 0.70 R 0.22 P 0.09 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.91 Red 0.78 R 0.18 P 0.04 G 0.00 B

The paper by Shelly Matthews, "The Stoning of Stephen and the Ethics of Historiography," placed the discussion of the Stephen text in the larger context of historical method. Matthews proposed that the story of Stephen's martyrdom fails on several criteria to qualify as historical. In addition, she gave special attention to the themes of the story in which Jews as a group are stereotyped as killers of Christians. Her paper thus argued not only that the story is not historical but also that the traditional reading of it as historical has been closely associated with an anti-Judaism agenda in the writing of Christian history. Both the Fellows and the Associates affirmed her arguments with strong votes in favor.

In our Saturday session, we looked at issues of characters and characterizations in Acts. The paper by William O. Walker, Jr., "Luke's Portrayal of Aquila and Priscilla and the Letters of the Pauline Corpus," presented a set of finely reasoned arguments that Luke's stories about this couple developed out of a creative use of data from Paul's letters and contained no independent historical information. In concurrence with Walker's arguments, the

Fellows voted for the historical reliability of data derived from Paul, namely that a couple whom Paul called Prisca and Aquila were historical figures associated with Paul's mission in both Corinth and Ephesus and that Prisca, mentioned first by Paul, was the more prominent of the two. The Fellows rejected the data derived only from Acts, namely that the two were "tentmakers" by trade, had been banished from Rome, and had once corrected the faulty teachings of Apollos, a Christian missionary mentioned by both Acts and Paul. This paper was especially important in providing a detailed case for the use of a collection of Paul's letters by the author of Acts.

The paper by Chris Shea, "What Isn't in a Name? Naming and the Mission of Acts," addressed the tendency in Acts research to assume that proper names tend always to refer to historical figures. Shea utilized examples from Greek and Roman literature to illustrate a common occurrence in narrative texts in which an author provides a name for a character whose symbolic meaning fits the story within which the character is placed. She argued likewise for Acts, that "names of characters found only in Acts

Ballot Eleven • Acts Seminar
What Isn't in a Name?
Chris Shea

Q1 Names of characters found only in Acts are often assigned for theological or symbolic reasons rather than being based on historical fact.

Fellows 0.85 Red 0.58 R 0.38 P 0.04 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.93 Red 0.80 R 0.20 P 0.00 G 0.00 B

Q2 Theophilus (“God-lover”), to whom both Luke and Acts are dedicated, was a real person.

Fellows 0.32 Gray 0.00 R 0.17 P 0.63 G 0.21 B
Associates 0.23 Black 0.02 R 0.07 P 0.48 G 0.43 B

Q3 Felix (“Happy”) and Portius Festus (“Porky”) were the names of the actual Roman governors at the trials of Paul in Acts 23:24–26:32.

Fellows 0.35 Gray 0.00 R 0.13 P 0.78 G 0.09 B
Associates 0.37 Gray 0.00 R 0.21 P 0.70 G 0.09 B

Q4 Names for divine figures in Acts are often anachronistic for the historical period of the Acts story.

Fellows 0.71 Pink 0.38 R 0.38 P 0.24 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.91 Red 0.75 R 0.24 P 0.02 G 0.00 B

Q5 The name Tabitha, or Dorcas (“gazelle”), in Acts 9:36 occurs because of its symbolic value rather than because it was historically factual.

Fellows 0.80 Red 0.52 R 0.35 P 0.13 G 0.00 B
Associates 0.87 Red 0.67 R 0.27 P 0.04 G 0.02 B

Q6 The name Aeneas occurs in Acts 9:33 because of its symbolic value rather than because it was historically factual.

Fellows 0.76 Red 0.46 R 0.42 P 0.08 G 0.04 B
Associates 0.90 Red 0.72 R 0.26 P 0.02 G 0.00 B

are often assigned from theological or symbolic reasons rather than being based on historical fact.” This proposal was strongly affirmed by both Fellows and Associates. Also affirmed were Shea’s recommendations that the following names should be read as symbolic rather than histori-

cal: Theophilus (“God lover”; Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1), Felix (“Happy”) and Portius Festus (“Porky”; Acts 3:24–26:32), Tabitha or Dorcas (“Gazelle”; Acts 9:36), and Aeneas (based on a character in Vergil’s *Aeneid*; Acts 9:33–34).