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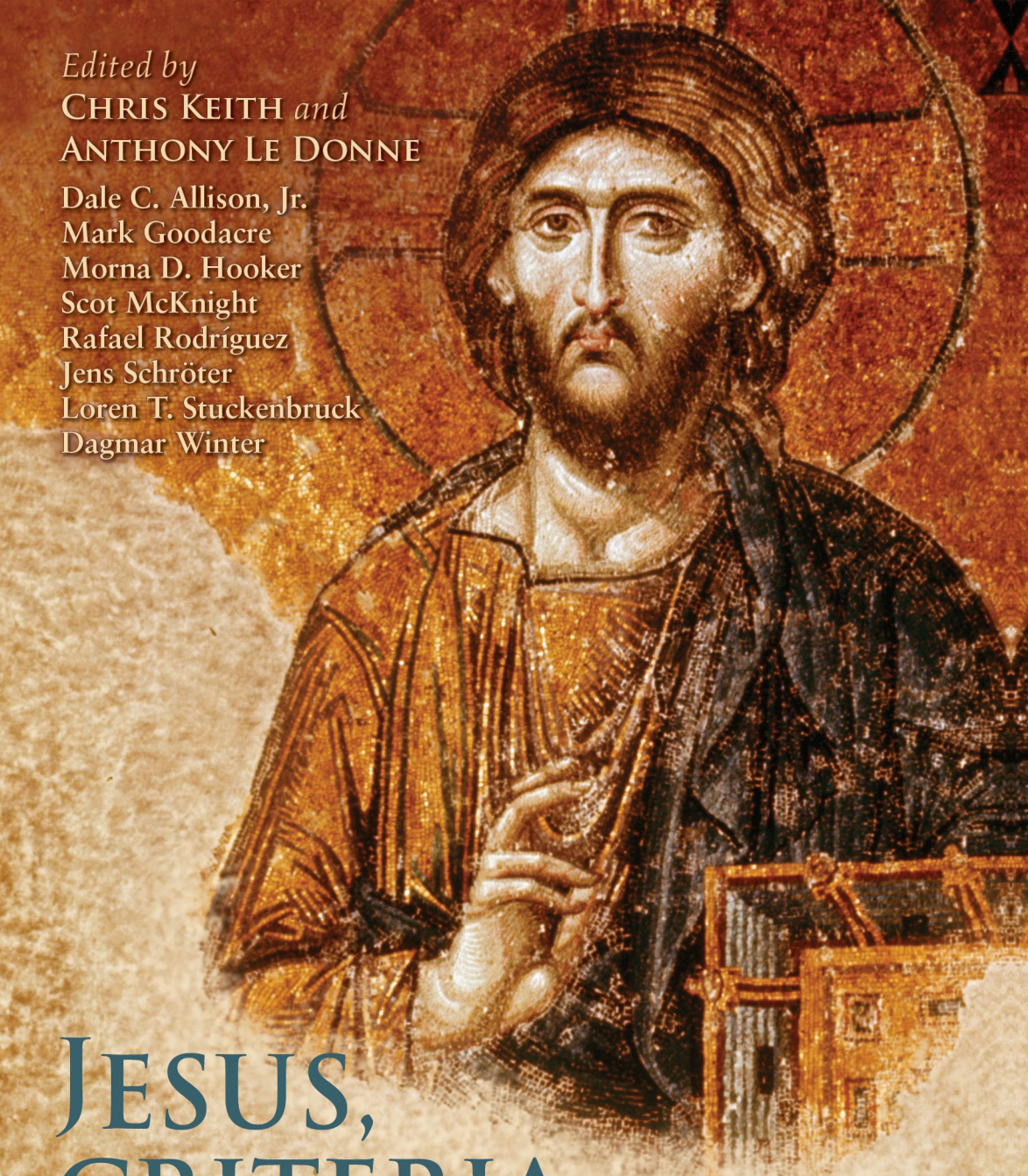

JESUS, CRITERIA, *and the* DEMISE *of* AUTHENTICITY

The 2012 Lincoln Christian University Conference

Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity

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dedicated to
John Castelein and Tom Thatcher
models of authentic mentorship and collegiality

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Foreword: Forty Years On

Morna D. Hooker

It is always satisfying to say "I told you so," even if *what* I told you seems so obvious as hardly needing to be said! At the time, however, it was not so. My original article on authenticity criteria[1] began life as a response to what appeared to me to be the naïve assumptions being made in a Seminar led by Norman Perrin at a meeting of SNTS, and my criticisms were dismissed or ignored by scholars who were wedded to the use of such criteria. It soon became clear, however, that others were feeling equally uneasy about the methods being used. My own protest coincided, for example, with very similar criticisms from Robin Barbour.[2]

It is not difficult to understand why our pleas fell on deaf ears. To many, they appeared unduly pessimistic, since the various criteria seemed to offer a way forward in a field where progress had previously proved impossible. Searching for the "real historical Jesus" in the 1960s and 1970s appeared as hazardous as trying to make one's way across a bog, jumping from one tuft of grass to another, while in constant danger of sinking. Käsemann's famous suggestion that we might be able to find "more or less safe ground under our feet"[3] was enormously attractive, since the appeal to a system of "criteria" seemed to present scholars with a scientific method—a way of establishing "assured results," and so of building a causeway across the bog to one's goal. The ruthless exclusion of everything that might be "inauthentic," and the cautious construction of a new picture of Jesus based on adding that which "cohered" with the "genuine" fragments must surely, it was argued, produce a scientific result. For many, the pursuit of this goal was fuelled not only by the

1. Morna D. Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," *NTS* 17 (1970): 480–87.

2. Robin S. Barbour, *Traditio-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (Studies in Creative Criticism 4; London: SPCK, 1972).

3. Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 41; London: SCM, 1964), 15–47, at 37. First published in *ZTK* 51 (1954): 125–53.

desire to discover the truth about Jesus, but by the determination to prove that those engaged in it were not influenced in their decisions by religious belief, but were motivated by the same scholarly impartiality shown by those working in other disciplines.

Now the analogy with science may not be entirely misplaced, since science proceeds on the basis that one forms an hypothesis and then tests it. But whereas in the scientific world it is normally possible to continue testing an hypothesis *ad infinitum*—so producing what appear to be "facts"—the material in the Gospels is limited. The result was that hypotheses were assumed to be correct, and formed the basis for yet more hypotheses. Even in science, however, it is always dangerous to conclude that an hypothesis has been proved. I remember being taught at school that, according to the atomic theory, an atom was "the smallest indivisible particle of matter." Whether it was my own fault or that of my science teacher I am not sure, but for a long time I somehow remained blissfully unaware of the many discoveries that had been made in the previous 50 years or so, and failed to realize that atomic bombs were conclusive proof that the atom was not, after all, indivisible! Scientists and Gospel critics alike must recognize that they work with hypotheses that may prove inadequate or even wrong.

Another reason why scholars have continued to appeal to the criteria is that it has been difficult to think of other ways forward. Searching for a "tool"—to repeat my original analogy—nothing else suitable came to hand. I myself concluded that scholars who were searching for the "authentic" material must continue to use them—though with great caution![4] In practice, I preferred not to make the attempt. Contributors to this volume are divided between those who think that these "tools" still have a modest role, and those who are determined that they must be put aside altogether. Perhaps, however, the time has come to abandon the whole enterprise of trying to discover the "real historical Jesus."

The great temptation is to analyse the material in detail—a temptation that is encouraged by the need to find suitable topics for Ph.D. dissertations! To make a contribution to scholarship, it seems, one has to subject a particular pericope or pericopes to close analysis. The more we do this, however, the more distorted the resulting picture will be. Imagine an old fresco where the restorers have managed to pick out some of the original features and to highlight them, leaving the rest of the picture in limbo. The result is far from satisfactory: the few clear details merely make the remaining blank spaces more puzzling. That is the kind of result to

4. Morna D. Hooker, "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81, at 580–81.

which the discredited criteria of "double dissimilarity" and "coherence" logically lead. But what we have in the case of Jesus is in fact a much fuller picture—indeed, several versions of that picture—though with many details confused or contradictory. As with an expressionist painting, what we need to do is to stand back from it, rather than poring over details, for the closer we get, the less we see of the whole.

If we concentrate on the whole rather than the details, however, we shall find that we know quite a lot about Jesus, even though we may not be able to reconstruct with certainty any of his sayings or actions. It is clear, for example, that he spoke with impressive authority, even though there is considerable doubt about the exact form of all the stories demonstrating that fact. It is beyond question, also, that he taught in parables, however difficult it may be to reconstruct them, or to be certain about their original meaning. Few scholars, if any, have doubted that the centre of his teaching was the Kingdom of God—though what he might have meant by that phrase is again a matter of dispute. He also performed various miracles, even though we may disagree about precisely what happened or how. Again, while various stories and sayings may or may not be "accurate," it is clear that he befriended those on the outskirts of society and that he offended the religious and political leaders. It seems clear, too, that he called men to be his disciples—though whether or not there were twelve in the inner circle is not so certain—and that he demanded—and inspired—remarkable devotion on their part. It is indisputable that he was put to death by the Roman authorities—though to what extent the Jewish authorities were involved is far from clear—and that his followers came to believe that he had been raised from the dead, though how and where they came to that conviction it is now impossible to say.

This conviction about the resurrection may perhaps provide a good model for the way in which we should proceed. The details of the resurrection story differ from one account to another, and the more we ask "What exactly happened?" the more perplexed we shall be. But that the disciples came to believe that Jesus had been raised from the dead is indisputable. Perhaps, then, we shall find the "real" Jesus, not by seeking for the "historical," but—as some are now arguing—in looking at the "memory" that he left.

The search for the "authentic" is in fact a strange conceit. For what makes a saying or a story "authentic"? Since Jesus spoke in Aramaic, and the Gospels are written in Greek, the record of them inevitably takes us at least one remove from the original, for all translation involves interpretation. We have to reckon, too, with the interpretation given to the saying or the story by the early Christian community, which handed the tradition on, as well as with that given to it by the evangelist. And what

makes a tradition "inauthentic"? In teaching undergraduates, I have sometimes told them the story of the Principal of a theological college whose students decided, many years ago, that they would like to hold a dance at the end of the academic year. This story goes back, you must understand, to the days when theological colleges were strictly male institutions. The Principal duly gave permission for the dance, and on the appointed night he himself arrived, to make sure that all was going well. He was discovered, white and shaking, at the door, and when he was asked what ailed him, replied "But Gentlemen, you did not tell me that there would be *ladies* present!" Now the story is clearly apocryphal—even he could not have behaved *so* absurdly. But the point lies in that "even he," for those who knew him recognized that the story was an accurate representation of his character and attitudes. So do we call this story "authentic" or "inauthentic"? Historically, it may be a complete invention, while nevertheless conveying the truth. It has been said of Winston Churchill that half the things attributed to him are untrue—but are nevertheless true! On the same principle, should we not abandon altogether the attempt to shuffle the Gospel sayings and pericopes into two piles, labelled "authentic" and "inauthentic"? Does not any attempt to do so inevitably distort the truth? It would seem that those who have pursued the *ipsissimi verba Jesu* in the belief that this would take them to the historical Jesus have in fact succeeded only in shunting themselves into a siding.

Advances in scholarship often take the form of a spiral, rather than a straight line. I was introduced to the study of the New Testament in the 1950s, and much of the literature I was expected to read had been written by the great non-conformist trio, namely, C. H. Dodd, T. W. Manson, and Vincent Taylor. Of these, the scholar who was in many ways most original (and most ignored) was T. W. Manson.[5] Yet I find that many scholars who are seeking today to write about Jesus frequently echo, probably unconsciously, what Manson wrote, not forty but *eighty* years ago. Back in 1942, he wrote:

> The characteristic features of the teaching of Jesus can be linked up with the Old Testament on one side and with the Church on the other… [I]n order to see the full bearing of the fragments of evidence about the ministry, we must learn to see them in their Jewish and Christian context.[6]

5. For an assessment of his work, see Morna D. Hooker, "T. W. Manson and the Twentieth-century Search for Jesus", *BJRL* 86, no. 3 (2004): 77–98.

6. T. W. Manson, "Is It Possible to Write a Life of Christ?," *Expository Times* 53 (1942): 248–51, at 250b.

This appeared to me when I first read it, and appears to me still, to be plain common sense! If we want to understand Jesus, we must see him in his own context—very largely a Jewish one—and examine the impact that he made on those who followed him. If Jesus' sayings echo teaching found in Judaism, that should tell us something about him. If his followers "invented" sayings and attributed them to Jesus, the important question to ask is why they did so.

Most scholars would agree with this approach. Yet the so-called criterion of double dissimilarity, which scholars have been trying to apply for the last 100 years or so (for it goes back beyond Käsemann to Bultmann himself[7]) works in precisely the opposite direction! I suggest that it is time to throw away the tools altogether, and to opt for plain common sense.

7. Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963), 205.

My chief plea…is for less dogmatism in our conclusions, and the recognition that all our results are only tentative. We know too little to be dogmatic, and it is probable that any rigid division of material into "authentic" and "non-authentic" distorts the picture. All the material comes to us at the hands of the believing community, and probably it all bears its mark to a lesser or greater extent; to confine our picture of Jesus to material which passes all our tests for genuineness is too restricting.

—Morna D. Hooker

The Rise of the Quest for an Authentic Jesus: An Introduction to the Crumbling Foundations of Jesus Research

Anthony Le Donne

> Material regarded as wholly "unauthentic" in terms of positivistic historiography may not seem nearly as "unauthentic" in terms of modern historiography. For a saying which Jesus never spoke may well reflect accurately his historical significance, and in this sense be more "historical" than many irrelevant things Jesus actually said.[1]

The authors of this book call for an end of the traditional methods employed by Jesus historians. Our aim is to clear the ground of several crumbling foundations to provide space for the more sophisticated discussions of historiography already underway within Jesus studies. Indeed, the table of contents of this book well represents the voices that must be heard if and when historians move beyond the "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus. To this end, this book is a polyvalent attack on the conventional use of the traditional "authenticity criteria" in Jesus studies.

The idea of "authenticity" and the development of particular criteria by which it can be excavated emerged from the presuppositions of historical positivism. In recent research, almost all Jesus historians mention the impossibility of absolute objectivity or of the nonexistence of "bare facts" devoid of interpretation. These are the right things to say to distance oneself from the caricature of Leopold von Ranke put forth by contemporary historiographers. And yet, while it has become commonplace to react against this Rankean foil, the assumptions of historical positivism remain ubiquitous in Jesus studies. In the same vein, almost all contemporary Jesus historians who employ the traditional authenticity criteria do so with repeated reservations and qualifications. One can hardly blame historians for establishing rules for the road or aiming

1. James M. Robinson, *A New Quest of the Historical Jesus* (SBT 25; London: SCM, 1959), 99 n. 3.

toward historiographical rigor. But as the reservations about these traditional criteria become greater and as the qualifications offered by their adherents become more pronounced,[2] it must be asked whether these traditional methods are poorly founded[3] or perhaps should be abandoned altogether.[4] In this way, the authors of this book think it is time to rethink the traditional quest for authenticity from the ground up.

Some of us think that the notion of an "authentic" dominical tradition creates false dichotomy between memory and interpretation. As such, it is the *conventional use* of the criteria that must be replaced by a more

2. For example, the reservations and qualifications of James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (Christianity in the Making 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 92–97, 191–92; Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Dissimilarity from Second Temple Judaism and the Early Church," in *Memories of Jesus: A Critical Appraisal of James D. G. Dunn's* Jesus Remembered (ed. Robert B. Stewart and Gary R. Habermas; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 145–58, esp. 145–46; Tom Holmén, "Authenticity Criteria," in *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (ed. Craig A. Evans; New York, Routledge, 2010), 43–54, esp. 46, 53–54; Craig Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 155; Anthony Le Donne, *The Historiographical Jesus: Memory, Typology, and the Son of David* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009), 87–91; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. Vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 171–76; Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979), 86; Stanley E. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussion and New Proposals* (JSNTSup 191; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 70–89, 126. Porter, among the more prominent names associated with the criteria, suggests that his aim is to nuance the discussion until "the enterprise is finally abandoned" (126).

3. Cf. Robin S. Barbour, *Traditio-Historical Criticism of the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1972); Ferdinand Hahn, "Methodological Reflections on the Historical Investigation of Jesus," in *Historical Investigation and New Testament Faith: Two Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 36–50; Tom Holmén, "Doubts About Double Dissimilarity," in *Authenticating the Words of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 47–79; Morna D. Hooker, "Christology and Methodology," *NTS* 17 (1970–71): 480–87, and "On Using the Wrong Tool," *Theology* 75 (1972): 570–81; Chris Keith, *Jesus' Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee* (LHJS 8/LNTS 413; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 169 n. 16; Jack T. Sanders, "The Criterion of Coherence and the Randomness of Charisma: Poring Through Some Aporias in the Jesus Tradition," *NTS* (1998): 1–25; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "An Approach to the New Testament through Aramaic Sources: The Recent Methodological Debate," *JSP* 8 (1991): 3–29; Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, *Jesus and the Historians* (WUNT 269; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 161–82.

4. Cf. Dale C. Allison Jr., "How to Marginalize the Traditional Criteria of Authenticity," in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 3–30; Rafael Rodríguez, "Authenticating Criteria: The Use and Misuse of a Critical Method," *JSHJ* 7 (2009): 152–67.

sophisticated historiography. Others of us think that the entire "criteria approach" is bankrupt. The reader will find that the authors herein hold different views on the nuances of the problem and the best way to a solution, but all acknowledge the problem at hand. Moreover, all of us argue that one or more of the traditional authenticity criteria are beyond repair and thus one or more should be abandoned. In short, we collectively argue that the crumbling foundations of historical Jesus research must be exposed and that this exposure should lead to a programmatic shift in our historiographical methods.

The above quotation by James Robinson, who was instrumental in the introduction of form-critical Jesus studies to the English-speaking world, seemingly recognized the impending demise of historical positivism. Indeed, Robinson follows these words by acknowledging the "hopeless ambiguity of the old term 'unauthentic.'"[5] But to assess his critique of "positivistic historiography" justly, it must be said that his thoughts on the inefficiency of the hard delineation of authentic vs. unauthentic were mentioned in a passing footnote. Robinson's acknowledgment was in no way programmatic for form criticism or the decades of Jesus research that followed. However, importantly, this quotation exposes the cracks in the foundations of historical positivism at a defining stage in the entrenchment of the authenticity criteria.

My observation builds from the recent essay by Chris Keith, which exposes the extent of form-critical indebtedness of what he deems the "criteria approach."[6] It is Keith's thesis that serves as the basis for this project.[7] Our hope is that this book, the first full-length treatment of its kind, will expose the crumbling foundations of Jesus studies and help to level several longstanding remnants of historical positivism.

The remainder of this introduction will expose (1) two competing notions of authenticity from which conflicts in modern Jesus studies emerged and (2) the emergence and reception of the traditional criteria for authenticity. Finally, (3) I will then provide a chapter by chapter overview of this project.

5. Robinson, *Quest*, 99 n. 3.

6. Chris Keith, "Memory and Authenticity: Jesus Tradition and What Really Happened," *ZNW* 102 (2011): 155–77.

7. Keith argues that the "criteria approach" stands in antithesis to the "memory approach." This said, not every chapter in this book advocates a "memory approach." While many chapters herein are conversant with recent advances in social memory theory, this is not primarily a book about social memory.

The Two Authenticities[8]

The story of the traditional authenticity criteria begins in Europe and then takes on new life in America. The following two sections will sketch the history of ideas behind their formation and reception. I will have an eye to the larger scope of their development, but I will specifically focus on their reception in America.

In the late nineteenth century, proponents of (neo-)Romanticism were keenly interested in "originality." To be an originator bespoke genius and heroism. Building from eighteenth-century philosophers in Germany,[9] Scottish author Thomas Carlyle measured the major movements of history by the (types of) heroes who moved history forward.[10] Dagmar Winter points out the parallels in German Jesus research:

> As [Keim, Baumgarten, Bousset, Wellhausen, Wrede, Holtzmann] began to examine the historical figure of Jesus, both concepts of genius[11] and hero were easily applied to him. And both the concept of hero and genius bear not only a special relation to the divine, they also indicate a fundamental difference to the milieu whence their protagonist emerges. What had hitherto been a doctrinal appreciation of the uniqueness of Jesus was replaced with Jesus as the unique hero and genius… Jesus can be seen to pick up the threads again and be an even greater hero and genius by founding universal Christianity.[12]

8. My thanks to Christopher Ben Simpson and John Castelein for our conversations about this section.

9. For example, J. G. Herder, J. P. F. Richter, W. von Humboldt. See Albert Reble, *Geschichte der Pädagogik* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989), 190–94; Theissen and Winter, *Plausible*, 44–63. Although, this idea of the "hero" in history is at least as old as Giambattista Vico (1668–1744). See especially *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (trans. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1968), 331. Vico, however, associated the "heroic" with a particular stage in (pre)history while Carlyle located particular heroes that began successive stages of history.

10. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (vol. 5 of *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*; ed. H. D. Traill; 30 vols.; London: Chapman & Hall, 1896–1901). See D. Winter's chapter in the present book for more on this topic.

11. Theissen and Winter point out that "genius [Genie]" often carried the connotative value of "creative genius" rather than pure intelligence leading to and through this period—although the latter definition was well within the semantic range also (*Plausible*, 46–47).

12. Dagmar Winter, "The Dissimilar Jesus: Anti-Semitism, Protestantism, Hero-Worship and Dialectical Theology," in *Soundings in the Religion of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton, Anthony Le Donne, and Jacob Neusner; Philadelphia: Fortress, forthcoming).