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Was Jesus Crucified?

Gunnar Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity. An Inquiry into the Background of the New Testament Terminology of Crucifixion*, University of Göteborg, 2010, 413 pp.

Following Abbreviations of various works cited and a Preface, the book contains seven chapters: 1. "Introduction" (pp. 25-63), in which the author introduces the problem, the definition, the methodology to be followed and the purpose of the investigation; 2. "Greek literature" (pp. 65-204), by far the longest and most weighty chapter, in which he takes up a sufficiently broad and representative number of texts from Homeros down to the time of the New Testament, using the main words relevant to the problem, i.e. σταυρός, σταυρῶ, ἀνασκολοπίζω, etc.; 3. "Latin literature" (pp. 205-267), treating such words as *crux*, *patibulum*, *affigere* from Julius Caesar to Tacitus, 4. "The Old Testament and Related Literature" (pp. 269-299), taking up such terms as תַּלַּת, קָע as well as the Greek terms used in the LXX, chiefly κρεμάννυμι ((ἀνα)σταυρῶ and ἀνασκολοπίζω do not occur in the LXX); 5. "The Execution of Jesus" (pp. 301-330), in which the various events in the crucifixion of Jesus are discussed; 6. "Discussion with Reference to Literature and Scholars" (pp. 331-378), discussing the interpretations of scholars such as H-W. Kuhn, M. Hengel and J. Blinzler as well as dictionaries such as LSJ and BDAG (lexicographical work by Greek scholars is ignored!); and 7. "Answers to Basic Questions of the Investigation" (pp. 379-382), which is essentially a summary of what the author has argued for before.

In this book Samuelsson aspires to study in detail and depth the evidence from mainly Greek but also Latin, and some Hebrew-Aramaic literature in order to decide whether Jesus was crucified in the sense in which the word has been traditionally understood or died in some other way.

Samuelsson rejects all the previous attempts to elucidate crucifixion in the ancient world (e.g. by noted researchers such as M. Hengel and H-W.Kuhn), including all dictionaries and encyclopaedias, not only in Sweden but everywhere in the wide world. Everything that has been written on crucifixion during the past 2000 years is wrong, according to Samuelsson. This must include also the Greeks, who though using the

relevant words continuously from ancient times till today, do not know what is meant by them.

Such an astonishing claim makes it incumbent on me, who have spend my whole life investigating texts from the entire history of the Greek language, i.e. from Mycenaean times (c. 1500 B.C.) till today (Neohellenic), to look critically into the kind of evidence that has led the author to such an extraordinary conclusion, namely, that Jesus most probably was not crucified, but died in some other way. e.g. through some kind of “suspension” (e.g. p. 372).

The relevant words for such a study in Greek literature are mainly: σταυρός, (ἀνα)σταυρῶ, σκόλοψ, ἀνασκολοπίζω, κρεμάννυμι, κρεμῶ, κρεμαννύω, ἀγχόνη, ἀπαγχονίζω, ἦλος, προσηλῶ, πάσσαλος (Attic: πάτταλ.), πασσαλεύω, προσπασσαλεύω, and ἐμπήγνυμι [e.g. ἦλον]. They occur down to the XVIth century A.D. many thousand times. They continue to occur till today.

Samuelsson treats a smaller number of occurrences, but even these should have been sufficient to clarify the meaning of crucifixion. Samuelsson writes in a clear, easy to read manner, sets out the evidence beautifully and it is certainly a good thing to have (some of) the evidence about crucifixion presented in this orderly manner. For this positive feature of his work, he is to be congratulated. The Reviewer wishes that he could be equally commending for the author’s interpretation of the evidence. But, alas, this is impossible.

It is a fact that words such as σταυρός (ἀνα)σταυρῶ, σκόλοψ, and ἀνασκολοπίζω in Greek literature have a wide spectrum of meaning, depending on the context. Of the many thousands of occurrences I present here a few examples. Σταυρός may be a pointed pole, often fixed in the ground, forming a fence or (Homeros, *Odysseia*, XIV.11 σταυρούς δ’ ἐκτὸς ἔλασσε διαμπερὲς ἔνθα καὶ ἔνθα, πυκνοὺς καὶ θαμέας “**Outside he had driven stakes all the way in its length and width, tight and closely-set**”), or a palisade (Thoukydides IV. 90. 2: καὶ σταυροὺς παρακαταπηγνύντες “**having driven alongside a palisade**”) as well as long pointed poles sunk into the sea as protection against enemy boats (Thoukydides VII. 25.5 f: ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν σταυρῶν ... οὓς οἱ Συρακόσιοι ... κατέπηξαν ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ “**And it happened also with regard to the stakes /poles ... that the Syrakusians ... had driven into the sea**”); see also VII. 25.7, etc. In line with this, the verb ἀνασταυρῶ bears a number of times the sense of “fortify”: Thoukydides VI. 97. 2: διασταυρωσάμενος τὸν ἰσθμὸν, “**having fortified the Isthmus**”; Xenophon, *Hellenica*, VII. 4. 21: περιεσταύρωσαν τὸν Κρῶμον διπλῶ σταυρώματι “**they fortified [by**

driving stakes] Kromnos with a double palisade”, while ἀποσταυρῶ means to “defortify” (e.g. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, VI. 5. 1: καὶ ἀπεσταύρωσαν ἅπαν “and they broke down all the fortifications”). In agreement with the above, σταύρωμα means “fortification” (Thoukydides VI. 100. 1: καὶ προσβάλλοντες οἱ τριακόσιοι αἰροῦσι τὸ σταύρωμα “and the three hundred attacked and captured the fortification”).

Analogically, σκόλοψ may be a pointed piece of wood, a “pale” or “stake” (Homer, *Ilias* XVIII. 177: πηξαι ἀνὰ σκολόπεσι “and fix it on the stakes”); a “palisade” (Homer, *Odysseia*, VII. 45: καὶ τεῖχει μακρὰ ὑψηλά, σκολόπεσιν ἀρηρότα “and long and high walls fitted closely with stakes/palisades”); a very small “thorn” (LXX Num 33:55: σκόλοπες ἐν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ὑμῶν “‘thorns’ in your eyes”, 2 Cor 12:7: ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί), etc. The verb ἀνασκολοπίζω bears the cognate meaning of σκόλοψ, i.e. “to pierce”, “to ‘pale’”, that is, “to impale” someone. This could take different forms, which explains that this verb came to coincide with (ἀνα)σταυρῶ (Loukianos, *The Consonants at Law* 12. 8: ξύλα τεκτήναντες ἀνθρώπους ἀνασκολοπίζειν “they fashioned timber in order to crucify people”, Porphyrios, *Contra Christianos*, 36. 6: Καὶ Πέτρος ... σταυρῶ προσηλωθεὶς ἀνασκολοπίζεται “Peter, too, ... is crucified by being nailed to a cross”), cf. also Origenis, *Contra Celsum*, 2. 36 and 3. 32, who uses ἀνασκολοπίζω interchangeably with (ἀνα)σταυρῶ.

The multivalence of such words as the above—indeed, of almost all Greek words—has been well known all along, so that Samuelsson γλαῦκ’ Ἀθήναζε “is carrying owls to Athens”, when he implies that he is the first one to notice this polyvalence, which makes it impossible for him to ascribe the meaning of “crucify” to (ἀνα)σταυρῶ, etc. As a matter of fact, Samuelsson says nothing new here.

The basic problem with Samuelsson’s dissertation is his strange methodology. He makes his point of departure modern definitions of crucifixion (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Webster’s Third International Dictionary*, etc. pp. 53-55), and then examines each one of his texts to see whether the Greek texts contain every item found in the definition and explanation of crucifixion in modern works. A crucifixion is supposed to include the following elements: 1. the vertical pole was already fixed on the ground; 2. the condemned person was scourged; 3. he then bore the horizontal part of the cross (the *patibulum*) to the place of execution; 4. he was undressed and scourged (if he had not been scourged before); 5. he was nailed to the horizontal piece of wood (the *patibulum*) with arms outstretched; 6. the *patibulum* with the

nailed person was then lifted up and nailed on the vertical pole somewhat higher than the ground; 7. there was a kind of seat or a projection half way up for the support of the body, so the strain on the wrists was somewhat alleviated; 8. the possibility that there was sometimes a support for the feet; 9. the death of the crucified one was witnessed as a result of the loss of blood or of exhaustion (usually after one or more days). Since Greek authors content themselves with merely stating the fact that some one or a number of persons were “crucified” without mentioning all these details, Samuelsson jumps to the conclusion that the text in question is not describing crucifixion, but some other kind of suspension, that Samuelsson has no idea what it is.

This simplistic way of interpreting ancient texts, which no philologist worth his salt would ever dream of applying, inevitably and predictably leads Samuelsson to reject everyone of the Greek texts that he takes up, apart from plausibly but not certainly 3 examples (Chariton, *Chaereas and Kallirhoe*, III. 4.18; VIII. 7.8; IV. 3.3-10), because they appear to contain a detail or two more (p. 194).

This arbitrary way of evaluating ancient evidence can be better understood if I use a modern analogy. Suppose that a Stockholm morning paper reports that the previous night some one was “shot dead”. Samuelsson would not accept that the person in question was killed as a result of being shot, unless the newspaper described in detail 1. that the perpetrator approached the victim, say, 2-3 meters, 2. what kind of gun he held in his hand, 3. what kind of bullets were in the gun, 4. that the gunman actually pulled the trigger, 5. that a sound was heard and smoke came out of the gun, 6. that the bullet struck the victim in the head or the heart, 7. and that the victim fell to the ground bleeding and dead. Only then, according to Samuelsson, would the newspaper be describing a murder by a gun shot. Because Greek authors did not have in mind Samuelsson’s expectations when relating a crucifixion, writing as they were for people who were acquainted with what a crucifixion was, Samuelsson arbitrarily draws the conclusion that they do not describe crucifixions!

It should be understood that any details that we have about the various elements that belonged to the crucifixion process were given quite incidentally by various ancient authors, and it becomes quite apparent that it was not their intention to describe for modern readers how exactly crucifixion went. Its procedure was well-known. It would, therefore, be the height of folly on our part, if we make the mention of all these details each time the verb “crucify” occurs the condition that “crucify” actually means

crucify! Moreover, the use of various expressions is wholly in line with Greek linguistic standards, which recommend variation in expression. This is rather in considerable contrast to the Swedish language, which tends to use the same expression. At this point Samuelsson errs, who thinks that variation proves that the texts do not speak of crucifixion. No one who has a feeling (i.e. Sprachgefühl) for Greek would question this.

Already at the beginning of his presentation of the Greek evidence (p. 73) Samuelsson prejudices his work by a false syllogism, which sets the tone for the rest of his investigation. For example, he quotes Herodotos (V cent. B.C.) VII. 194.1-3, according to which the Persian king Darios crucified Sandokes. A little later Darios changed his mind and released him. Samuelsson syllogizes that since Sandokes did not die, this is not a crucifixion but a “temporary suspension” (p. 90). The absurdity of this claim can be seen from the fact that the Jewish historian, Josephos, too, (*Vita* 420) intervened with Titus, who had crucified among hundreds of persons also three of his own friends and was able to save one of them by taking him down from the cross and attending to his wounds. This happened again in Chariton’s case. But more importantly, Darios (as also Titus) had crucified Sandokes in order to have him killed. If now Darios later changed his mind and released Sandokes, this can under no circumstances be taken as proof, as Samuelsson thinks, that the Greek verb for “crucify” does not mean “to crucify”.

The false course that Samuelsson has set for himself leads him quite predictably to translate every instance of “crucify” with “to suspend”! This has also a psychological effect: by continually reading of “suspension” in stead of “crucifixion”, in the reader’s mind the picture of a “hanging” is elicited, and one is deluded into thinking that the texts actually speak of a “hanging” — or “suspension”, as Samuelsson prefers to call it. This unnatural translation for the words used in Greek authors has been taken out of thin air, since neither (ἀνα)σταυρῶ nor ἀνασκολοπίζω in the Greek language mean “to suspend”. There are other verbs with this meaning.

The evidence for crucifixion is altogether too overwhelming to cite here. The examples are innumerable. I shall here content myself with presenting just a few brief texts.

Ktesias (V-IV B.C.), *Fragments* 3c, 688 F, 1b 500 speaks of the Indian king Staurobates, who abused and threatened the invading Assyrian queen Semiramis with “nailing her on a cross”, when she fell into his hands: πολλὰ δὲ καὶ ἄρρητα κατ’ αὐτῆς ὡς ἐταίρας βλασφημήσας διὰ τῶν γραμμάτων καὶ θεοῦς ἐπιμαρτυράμενος, ἠπείλει καταπολεμήσας αὐτὴν

σταυρῶι προσηλώσειν “Having insulted her through his letters with many and unutterable words as being a whore, and having called the gods to witness, he threatened to nail her to a cross, when he had defeated her”. The story is cited by Diodoros Sikeliotes (I B.C.) 2:18.

Diodoros Sikeliotes *Historike Bibliotheke*, XX. 54. 7 speaks of Agathokles’ archers nailing with their arrows on a siege machine enemies on whatever part of the body they happened to hit, so that the punishment was similar to being “nailed on a cross”: τινὰς δὲ τοῖς ὀξυβελέσι πρὸς τῆ μηχανῆ προσκαθήλωσαν καθ’ οὓς ποτε τύχοι τοῦ σώματος τόπους, ὥστε σταυρῶ παραπλησίαν εἶναι τὴν ὕβριν ἅμα καὶ τὴν τιμωρίαν “And some of them they were able to nail on the siege engine with their sharp missiles on whatever parts of the body they happened to hit them, so that the maltreatment and the punishment was very similar to being nailed to a cross”.

Strabon (I B.C. – A.D. I), *Geographika*, III. 4. 18 speaks of the action of the Kantabrians as ἀναπεπηγότες [τινας] ἐπὶ τῶν σταυρῶν ἐπαιάνιζον “having impaled/crucified some on the stakes, they sounded the paean”, i.e. crucifixion is expressed here with different wording.

Josephos (A.D. I), *Antiquitates Judaicae*, XIX. 95, by means of a tragic play witnesses to the fact that crucifixion entailed the shedding of blood, something that would not be the case with “suspensions”. This shows that σταυρῶ does not mean “suspend”: ὁ τε ὀρχηστῆς δρᾶμα εἰσάγει Κινύραν, ἐν ᾧ αὐτός τε ἐκτείνεται καὶ ἡ θυγάτηρ Μύρρα, αἱμά τε ἦν τεχνητὸν πολὺ καὶ περὶ τὸν σταυρωθέντα ἐκκεχυμένον “the dancer (i.e. the actor) introduced a play, namely, Kinyras, in which both he himself and his daughter, Myrrha, were being killed, and there was a lot of artificial blood poured out around the crucified one”.

In his *Vita*, 420 (see above), Josephos relates how he saw many captives crucified by Titus, among whom he saw three of his friends. Interceding with Titus, he got the latter’s permission to take them down from the cross and attend to them. In this way he was able to save one of them. This shows that if a crucified person was taken down in time, he could be saved: εἶδον πολλοὺς αἰχμαλώτους ἀνεσταυρωμένους καὶ τρεῖς ἐγνώρισα συνήθεις μοι γενομένους, ἥλγησά τε τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ μετὰ δακρύων προσελθὼν Τίτῳ εἶπον. ὁ δ’ εὐθὺς ἐκέλευσεν καθαιρεθέντας αὐτοὺς θεραπείας ἐπιμελεστάτης τυχεῖν. καὶ οἱ μὲν δύο τελευτῶσιν θεραπευόμενοι, ὁ δὲ τρίτος ἔζησεν “I saw many captives having been crucified and [among them] I recognized three who were my friends. My heart was sorely pained and in tears I came to Titus and told him. And he immediately commanded that they be taken down and given the best of

medical care. And two of them died while being treated, but the third one survived”.

Josephos, *Bello Judaico*, II. 308: ὁ γὰρ μηδεὶς πρότερον τότε Φλωρος ἐτόλμησεν, ἄνδρας ἵππικοῦ τάγματος μαστιγῶσαι τε πρὸ τοῦ βήματος καὶ σταυρῶ προσηλῶσαι, ὧν εἰ καὶ τὸ γένος Ἰουδαίων ἀλλὰ γοῦν τὸ ἀξίωμα Ῥωμαϊκὸν ἦν “For Floros that day dared to do what nobody had done before, namely to scourge before the tribune and nail on crosses some of the horse squadron, who although they were Jews, nevertheless were Roman citizens”, another instance of crucifixion, preceded by scourging.

Josephos, *Bello Judaico*, II. 306-8, testifies to the scourging of the those condemned to the cross: οὓς μάλιστα προαικισάμενος ἀνεσταύρωσεν ... καὶ σταυρῶ προσηλῶσαι “whom he maltreated beforehand by scourging and crucified ... and nailed them on a cross”. The same point is made in *Antiquitates Judaicae*, XII, 256. 4. That ἀνεσταύρωσεν means “crucify” and not to “suspend” is proved by the appositional expression σταυρῶ προσηλῶσαι, “nail on a cross”!

Ploutarchos (A.D. I), *Divine Vengeance*, 554, witnesses to the bearing of the cross by the condemned man: καὶ τῷ μὲν σώματι τῶν κολαζομένων ἕκαστος κακούργων ἐκφέρει τὸν αὐτοῦ σταυρόν “and each of the condemned criminals bears his own cross with his own body [i.e. himself]”.

The concern shown in the Gospels to have the body of Jesus as well as of those crucified with him taken down from the cross before sunset, is confirmed by Josephos, *Against Apion*, IV. 317-8: ὥστε καὶ τοὺς ἐκ καταδίκης ἀνεσταυρωμένους πρὸ δύντος ἡλίου καθελεῖν τε καὶ θάπτειν “so that even those who have been crucified after being condemned [to such a death] must be taken down and be buried before sunset”.

Artemidoros (A.D. II), *Oneirokritikon*, I. 76. 35 witnesses to the use of the verb σταυρῶ = “crucify”, and mentions the detail that this takes place with the arms outstretched: κακούργος δὲ ὢν σταυρωθήσεται διὰ τὸ ὕψος καὶ τὴν τῶν χειρῶν ἕκτασιν “being a criminal he shall be crucified raised high [sc. above the ground] and with outstretched arms”.

Artemidoros, *Oneirokritikon*, II. 53. 3 says explicitly that the cross for crucifying consists of wood and nails, and is like the mast of a ship (i.e. on which a horizontal beam is fastened): καὶ γὰρ ἐκ ξύλων καὶ ἥλων γέγονεν ὁ σταυρὸς ὡς καὶ τὸ πλοῖον, καὶ ἡ κατάρτιος αὐτοῦ ὁμοία ἐστὶ σταυρῶ “for the cross is made of pieces of wood and nails like a boat, whose mast is similar to a cross”.

Artemidoros, *Oneirokritikon*, II. 53.7 also witnesses to the practice of crucifying people naked: γυμνοὶ γὰρ σταυροῦνται καὶ τὰς σάρκας ἀπολλύουσιν οἱ σταυρωθέντες “for those crucified are crucified naked and lose their flesh [i.e. to the flesh-eating birds]”.

Loukianos (A.D. II), *Consonants at Law*, 12, playfully says about the letter “T”, that many curse Kadmos, who is supposed to have introduced the alphabet and hence the shape of “T”, because the tyrants imitating this figure, fashioned pieces of timber so as to look like a “T”, on which they crucify their opponents: τὸ Ταῦ ... τῷ γὰρ τούτου σώματί φασι τοὺς τυράννους ἀκολουθήσαντας ... ξύλα τεκτῆναντες ἀνθρώπους ἀνασκολοπίζειν ἐπ’ αὐτά “It is said that the tyrants imitating the shape of ‘T’ ... fashioned pieces of timber in order to crucify men on them”. It is also obvious here that ἀνασκολοπίζειν and (ἀνα)σταυροῦν (cf. the shape of “T”, which in Greek was understood to be that of the cross!) are interchangeable. This is also supported by Philon, *On Dreams*, 213 (687): προσηλωμένος ὡσπερ οἱ ἀνασκολοπισθέντες τῷ ξύλῳ “nailed like those crucified on wood/timber/tree”.

Seneca, *Epistle 101*, mentions drugs received by the condemned as well as the torment experienced as the condemned one hanged on the horizontal bar, the *patibulum*: “Is it worth while to weigh down on one’s own sore, and hang outstretched from a *patibulum*? ... Is there anyone, who having been fastened to that cursed piece of wood, already worn-out, distorted, swelling with bad wounds on shoulders and chest, and having many reasons for dying even before ascending on the cross, would prefer to prolong his breath that is about to experience so many torments?”

Finally, V. Tzaferis’ study of the archeological find in 1968, published in *Israel Exploration Journal* 20:31, 1971, is referred to in Joe Zias’ internet article “Crucifixion in Antiquity” (via Google). The article contains also pictures, showing a nail of 11,5 cm piercing the wrist of the condemned. The find shows also nails have been used for fastening the feet. See also J. Zias and E Sekeles, “The Crucified Man from *Gi’at ha-Mivtar*: A Reappraisal”, *Israel Exploration Journal* 35: (1985), 22-27.

According to Alexander Medicus (A.D. VI) Asklepiades the Pharmakologist (A.D. I) recommended that a nail that had been used in crucifixion should be hanged around the arm to protect against epilepsy: ὡς Ἀσκληπιάδης ὁ φαρμακευτής. ἦλον ἐσταυρωμένον τῷ βραχίονι τοῦ πάσχοντος περιάπτε καὶ ἀπαλλάξεις “Just like Asklepiades the pharmacologist ordains, fasten a nail from a crucifixion on the arm of the sick person and you will deliver him [of his ailment]”. In a similar way, Jewish writings evidence that the use of nails from crucifixions were valued as amulets (*Mishnah, Sabbath* VI.10). ובמקום מן הצלב משום רפואה.

“and with a nail from a stake by way of healing” (The editor, Ph. Blackman, comments on ‘nails’ “... It was also suspended from the neck of a patient to cause the swelling to go down”).

The above evidence, cited briefly, is more than sufficient to prove that the Greek verbs σταυρῶ, ἀνασταυρῶ, ἀνασκολοπίζω, προσηλῶ, as well as the noun σταυρός constructed appropriately, are all used of crucifying. The Greeks, too, have always been well aware of the meaning of these terms in their various contextual uses, making use of them appropriately throughout the history of the Greek language.

The above examples also illustrate various details that are mentioned in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus in the New Testament, such as the removing of his clothes, scourging him before the crucifixion, bearing his own cross to the place of execution, giving him a drug, which he refused, the fact that nails had been driven through his hands/wrists (the Greek word for ‘hand’ could extent even to the elbow) as well as the marks that the nails had left on them (see John 20:20-27; cf. also Luke 24:39-40).

It were to be wished that many other ancient events were as well documented as the crucifixion of Jesus. No one who is a competent scholar of Greek and who is fair-minded toward the immense evidence in the sources could ever entertain the least doubt that Jesus was crucified and that crucifixion was a well established form of execution in the ancient world, at this time especially among the Romans. That the cross of Jesus did not look like the modern decoration symbol is another matter altogether.

The main theses of those who have investigated the crucifixion of Jesus, such as Joseph Blinzler, H.-W. Kuhn, and Martin Hengel have not been overturned by this investigation; they continue to stand strong in their main thrust.

Now to return to the dissertation under consideration, it must be pointed out that it has many other problems, including inconsistencies. Thus on p. 98, for example, he claims that “the verb *anaskolopizein* disappears after Herodotos”. This is not true. The verb occurs in many authors down to Jesus’ time and by the XVIth cent., there are some 300 texts (Samuelsson himself quotes a few of these examples later!). There is a lot of repetition, particularly in general and detailed summaries as well as conclusions of material that has been discussed in the detailed treatment of the texts, which could have been avoided.

With such mistaken methodology in interpreting Greek texts, it is no wonder that on p. 330 he arrives at a hair-raising conclusion: “If a suggestion of the holistic view of the terminology is heeded, that there was no distinct punishment of ‘crucifixion’ before the death of Jesus, it is

plausible to say that the punishment of crucifixion, so to speak, came into being on Calvary — *or rather in the later Christian interpretation of the texts depicting the events on Calvary*” (my emphasis). In other words, it was the Christian Church that created the concept of crucifixion by interpreting Jesus’ death (sc. “suspension”) as crucifixion!

Sadly, it is the view of the present Reviewer that Samuelsson’s book does not meet the standards of stringent scientific inquiry into Greek linguistic problems. Through the use of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, he may have amassed a long list of texts, which at first sight may look impressive to the uninitiated, but a specialist in Greek linguistics and philology is not fooled by this caricature presentation of the Greek evidence on the question of ancient crucifixion in general and of Jesus’ crucifixion in particular. The evidence stands clear and cannot be falsified by such dilettantish investigations.

This book is not as important as it may seem at first sight. Those of us who have spent our lives at the University, know what terrible pressure there is on doctoral candidates to produce something new and impressive in order to earn their doctorate. The pressure is such that they sometimes are tempted to pay the high price of sacrificing integrity and taking the risk involved in pressing the evidence in order to make it say what they want it to say, and thus achieve their purpose! This dissertation has interest primarily for the mass media, which are hungry for the scandalous, the populist and whatever lacks seriousness. Sober and knowledgeable New Testament scholarship will see through its threadbare character and set it aside as another attempt to create impressions. I feel sorry for Gunnar that he has expended so much toil for a result that cannot stand closer critical scrutiny. The book will need to be radically reworked in order to arrive at an interpretation that is consonant with the linguistic evidence on crucifixion. But then, such a result may not be as glamorous as it is now nor what was contemplated at the outset. However, to publish such a book with its present thesis, I am afraid, will only lead to bitter regrets.

I deeply regret that I could not be more positive about this book.