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Tommy Wasserman and Crucifixion

My attention was drawn to the *Evangelical Textual Criticism* blog, which made mention of my review of Gunnar Samuelsson's dissertation *Crucifixion in Antiquity*.

What struck me, however, was Tommy Wasserman's remarks about my review. Wasserman, who has assumed the role of Samuelsson's advocate, writes:

The thing is that almost all those texts that Caragounis cites are included in Samuelsson's treatment, which implies that Caragounis has not read Samuelsson's interpretation of those texts. It seems Caragounis has browsed the work, made his own searches and then responded.

Nevertheless, the critique is serious and many points are probably relevant, but I'd like to hear Samuelsson's response

There are several things that cause surprise here:

1. With what right does Wasserman assume that "Caragounis has not read Samuelsson's interpretation of those texts"? How does he know that? Any fair reader can see that my review does not betray ignorance of Samuelsson's interpretation, but, on the contrary, it points out that Samuelsson's interpretation of the Greek texts is unacceptable. This implies that I have actually read Samuelsson's book. Or does Wasserman think that when he does not like a review against a friend of his, he can brush it aside by simply telling his reader that the reviewer has not read the book? Such irresponsible conduct is hardly the mark of serious scholarship?

2. Is Wasserman's conclusion that "Caragounis has not read Samuelsson's interpretation of those texts" a logical conclusion from his premise that "Almost all those texts that Caragounis cites are included in Samuelsson's treatment"? In which way does my citation of a number of texts that Samuelsson treats prove that I have not read what he wrote? Is it not rather the case that here we have the exact opposite situation, namely, that *precisely because Caragounis has read Samuelsson's interpretation of those texts and found it wanting*, that those are the best texts to cite to show that Samuelsson's interpretation is wrong? Here it is not a case that we need more texts about crucifixion (there are about

10.000 texts till the XVIth century and many more till the present day!), but that we need *to understand* what the texts are saying.

3. But suppose for a moment that I did what Wasserman assumes that I have done. He claims that “**Caragounis has browsed the work, made his own searches and then responded**”. In which way would such a procedure invalidate what I have to say about this dissertation? If I have done my own search and found that a proper study of the texts lead to another conclusion than Samuelsson arrived at, how can my evaluation of Samuelsson’s book be brushed aside with the above insensitive remark? Where is the logic in this reasoning?

4. Any serious and competent reader of my review would have seen that this is a well-weighed review, which gets at the very heart of what is wrong with this dissertation. This implies a thorough acquaintance with its contents. I did not have to discuss every single text in my review—no review ever does that—in order to show that the author of this dissertation has failed to interpret the evidence correctly.

5. Moreover, Wasserman does not seem to appreciate that I write both as a scholar of Greek and as a Greek *user* of Greek. I have mentioned, for example, that the words in question have been used in the Greek language continuously till the present day. If some non-Greek students of Greek are uncertain about what Greek words mean, *we, at least, who have Greek as our mother tongue, consider that we do know what we mean with the words of our language!*

6. When in the second paragraph Wasserman says that Caragounis’ “**critique is serious and many points are probably relevant**” it is obvious that behind this “probably” hides his uncertainty. A competent scholar of the Greek language ought to know whether my linguistic objections are correct or not and not hide behind “probablies” and “maybies”. But perhaps old Riesenfeld was not so wrong after all, when he deplored that with the developments taking place in his time, the day would soon come in Sweden when it would be difficult to find a competent scholar of Greek within the field of the NT.