The present volume on contexts of John’s Gospel includes papers originally read at a New Testament symposium in Oberwaiz near Bayreuth, Germany, in November 2001 plus several additional contributions. The occasion for this gathering was the publication of the “Neue Wettstein,” a compendium with parallel texts to John’s Gospel from the Greco-Roman world as well as Hellenistic Jewish traditions, in an effort to combine the work on Greco-Roman backgrounds in Halle with the research on ancient Judaism in Munich. In the preface, the editors express their conviction that only an integrative approach is able to do justice to the complex tradition- and religion-historical issues raised by John’s Gospel.


Space does not permit a review of individual essays; a few summary comments must suffice. The first observation that can be made from a survey of the contents is the striking absence of contributions dealing with the so-called “Johannine community.” In light of the virtually paradigmatic status enjoyed by this hypothesis not very long ago this is a stunning omission. After Martin Hengel’s vigorous critique of this hypothesis in Die johanneische Frage (Mohr Siebeck, 1993), and the similarly strong critique in Richard Bauckham’s The Gospels for All Christians (Eerdmans, 1997), not to mention Robert Kysar’s recent denunciation of the hypothesis which he held for decades, this is yet another indication that the consensus that had
coalesced around the various permutations of the “Johannine community hypothesis” has begun to crumble.

A second, and related, observation is that the present volume, by its own admission, does not portend to present a unified picture of the setting and origins of John’s Gospel but rather offers a collection of essays on various related topics that are not always complementary and require further integration. While the editors make a case for an integrative approach in principle, they do not accomplish the actual integration that needs to be done. This means that the value of the present volume lies primarily in providing a variety of materials for such integration that still awaits future completion. It is worthy of note that a forthcoming volume in the same series will gather papers originally presented at a meeting of the Tyndale Theological Fellowship on the Gospel of John (see also my paper on the destruction of the Temple and the composition of John’s Gospel in TrinJ 26 n.s. [Fall 2005]: 205–42).

Serious students of John’s Gospel who are able to read German (all the essays are in German; doctoral students, take note!) will certainly want to digest the various contributions to this volume.

Andreas J. Köstenberger
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary
Wake Forest, NC