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## Book Review: The Early Text of the New Testament

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sion introducing the reader to the study of semantic fields. The value is that this work is a great help for linguistic analysis and Bible translation of the Old Testament. Koller introduces the reader to the contextual world of language noting that words do not have a solely functional meaning.

The monograph freely uses original language (e.g. Hebrew, Greek, Arabic) limiting its audience to the scholar and student who can use the original biblical texts. Nevertheless, the author does use transliterations and translations that the reader can easily follow the argumentation. He provides a bibliography (that includes articles in modern Hebrew) as well as indices for texts (biblical, Mishnah, DSS), words discussed, modern authors, as well as subjects.

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***The Early Text of the New Testament.* Edited by Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 483 pages. Hardcover, \$175.00.**

This volume represents some of the most recent scholarship on some of the oldest New Testament texts. Professors at Reformed Theological Seminary, Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger seek to gather high-quality reflections and detailed investigations of the early textual transmission of the New Testament writings. An intentional emphasis of the volume is on both the scribal context and early textual history of the New Testament writings. Their overall goal is “to provide an inventory and some analysis of the evidence available for understanding the pre-fourth-century period of the transmission of the NT materials” (2). The structure of the volume reflects these primary concerns. Part one provides a series of essays on the textual and scribal culture of Early Christianity (chaps 1-4), part two devotes a chapter to the early text of each major section of the New Testament (chaps 5-13), and part three examines the early citation of the New Testament writings in the patristic period (chaps 14-21).

One distinctive feature of this volume is its careful attention to questions of method and recent debates within the discipline of textual criticism. The contributors are seeking to describe the shockwaves produced by the papyri manuscript discoveries of the last century. Though Hill and Kruger acknowledge that these manuscripts have an “automatic importance,” they also note that “their real significance for the discipline of NT textual criticism is currently controversial” (2). In addition to containing sacred text, the manuscripts also have a story to tell about their own checkered history and about those who produced and passed them along. This type of analysis involves “the study of the papyri as physical specimens, as scribal artifacts” (15).

Accordingly, the essays of part one seek to adumbrate the ways a keen attention to paratextual elements (those surrounding the actual text) can shed light on early scribal cultural, the actual textual transmission of the New Testament documents, and the study of Christian origins. Harry Gamble outlines the nature of the “book trade” in the Roman Empire at large and also the “early and lively private traffic in texts within and between far-flung Christian communities” (36). Moving to the manuscripts themselves, Scot Charlesworth highlights the consistent codex size and use of *nomina sacra* (an early and intentional abbreviation system) among early New Testament manuscripts. These are likely indications of “catholicity” and show signs of coordinated (yet still informal) consensus among the early churches.

Similarly, Larry Hurtado argues that there is “a distinguishable Christian reading-culture” among the early churches and that “early Christian manuscripts are direct artifacts of it” (49). After analyzing a variety of visual/artifactual features, Hurtado concludes that the manuscripts reflect a Christian “reading-culture” that involved “the enfranchising and affirmation of a diversity of social strata in the public reading and discussion of literary texts” (62). Kruger ends this section with a brief survey of early Christian attitudes toward the reproduction of the texts they held to be Scripture. In order to account fully for the complexity of the historical data, Kruger contends that the historian must allow the explicit testimony of early church leaders to inform the reconstruction of their actual practice in handling those texts.

In their editorial role, Hill and Kruger not only seek to account for fresh evidence but also recent developments in research and methodological approaches. For Hill and Kruger, the time is ripe for “at least a first attempt” to assess this new data and these new developments. In the process, they discuss and take positions on important text-critical areas. For example, they note the discussion regarding the difference between the “early text” and the “original text” (3-5). Acknowledging the “complexities involved in defining” the “original text” and taking into account recent arguments against the term, Hill and Kruger opt to define the goal of textual criticism as the pursuit of the “earliest text” and its transmission (e.g., 4). However, they do argue that “the concept of an original text” is not altogether incoherent and illegitimate (4). For them, there is no need “to relinquish the traditional goal of textual criticism (even if that goal cannot always be reached with the precision we desire)” (4).

Hill and Kruger also ask whether the most helpful text-critical category for new readings is “text type” or “type of text” (6-9). These two explanations of variants “have become fountainheads for two streams of analysis of the papyri which continue up to the present” (7). The traditional approach classifies patterns of readings into broad text types (Western, Alexandrian, etc) based on characteristic features of the texts found in the major fourth century manuscripts. The early papyri evidence from the second and third centuries is then classified according to these broadly developed text types. An alternative approach (the “Münster approach”) classifies early manuscripts in three main groups (strict, normal, and free text) “according to how closely they mirrored the original or *Ausgangstext*—assumed for practical purposes to be the text now established by over a century of text critical work, the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graeca*” (9). Noting that this approach has received legitimate criticism (e.g., of “circularity”), they also recognize it as a valuable “working hypothesis” that is unobjectionable “at least as a point of departure” (9).

For Hill and Kruger, adopting this kind of starting point also helps respond to the assumption that the pre-fourth century was populated by wildly incompetent scribes roaming an uncontrolled textual wilderness. They observe that (according to the standard clarifications), “just under 73 percent of the earliest NT manuscripts” are classified as “normal to strict” texts, and conversely “just over 27 percent” are labeled as “free” (10-11). Accordingly, “what was previously, even by the Alands, dubbed the ‘living text’ of the early period now seems to have been ‘dead’ for nearly three-quarters of the scribes who copied it” (11).

Although the editors do not impose a particular methodology on the scholars presenting the chapters in the text-criticism section of part two, they do ask them to note the transmission quality of the texts in question in their analysis (using the classification system of the Münster approach). For Hill and Kruger, the inclusion of

this technical element is crucial because “these judgments constitute one significant datum which many researchers use in formulating judgments about the transmission of the NT text in the early period” (18). Part two provides text-critical analysis of the early texts of each of the New Testament books or groupings: Matthew (Tommy Wasserman), Mark (Peter Head), Luke (Juan Hernández), John (Juan Chapa), Acts (Christopher Tuckett), Paul/Hebrews (James Royse), the general epistles (J. K. Elliott), and Revelation (Tobias Nicklas). Peter Williams rounds out this section by surveying the translational technique of some of the early versions of the New Testament (e.g., Syriac versions) and the difficult task of discerning a translation’s *Vorlage* (underlying text).

After the historical and text-critical analysis of parts one and two, the volume ends with a series of literary studies on the early citation of the New Testament writings in the apostolic and patristic period. Hill provides a methodological discussion of the “methods and standards of literary borrowing” in this period (261-81). Patristic citations often receive prominence in the establishment of a “clear picture of an erratic NT text” (262). Because there are numerous loose quotations in the patristic literature, it is assumed, there must not have been a stable textual tradition. Hill points out that there is a difference between an author’s “manner of citation” and “the text behind the citations” (263). He also seeks to take “the literary environment in which Christian authors operated” as a starting point rather than modern standards of quotation (265ff).

After surveying citation examples from the wider literary culture, Hill argues that Christians did not represent a “special case” but they too cited even scriptural texts with a variety of methods (e.g., “loose” or adaptive citation). While taking account of the vagaries of the historical data, Hill posits that “the reading of an author’s NT exemplar from his citation always remains, in some authors more so than in others, and therefore the task must be pursued” (281). Accordingly, the essays that follow examine the citation and possible underlying text cited in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (Paul Foster), Marcion (Dieter Roth), Justin Martyr (Joseph Verheyden), Tatian and his Diatessaron (Tjitze Baarda), the apocryphal Gospels (Stanley Porter), Irenaeus (D. Jeffrey Bingham and Billy Todd), and Clement of Alexandria (Carl Cosaert). These discussions of external evidence plow through most of the textual ground that traditional canon studies seek to harvest.

Hill and Kruger observe in their introduction that “there is currently an undeniable flowering of interest in many aspects of research on the text and the manuscript tradition of the New Testament documents” (1). On both a popular and a scholarly level, the discovery and reconstruction of the earliest manuscripts of the New Testament continues to garner wide interest. In light of this scenario, the editors establish a clear need for the type of analysis afforded in this volume. As they note, though the importance of the (apx.) 127 papyrus manuscript fragments is universally acknowledged, “their real significance for the discipline of NT textual criticism is currently controversial” (2).

One of the most valuable aspects of this volume is that it presents a bevy of technical data alongside of a general orientation to the issues that impinge upon the study of textual transmission (e.g., scribal culture and book production). Through the introduction, the first major section, and the methodological reflections in parts two and three, this volume provides the student of the New Testament text with a goldmine of information and also the tools to excavate that payload.

For instance, Tuckett provides a series of methodological cautions for those

piecing together a manuscript's checkered textual landscape (157-60), and Williams discusses at length the critical importance of translational technique when reconstructing a translation's underlying text (239-45). This type of preliminary exploration is common throughout the volume. The interpretation of fragmentary data is always informed by the given interpreter's various methodological presuppositions, so these elements are welcome features of this collection.

Though the editors set parameters for the textual analysis, a clear diversity surfaces in the text-critical studies of part two. There are considerable differences in style, method, and analysis in each contributor's contribution. For example, in his study of Matthew's text, Wasserman adopts and interacts with the Münster approach at length. Other contributors, though, prefer to continue speaking of the various textual traditions as "text-types" (e.g., 115, 118, 128-30). Hernandez, for instance, includes the Alands' category of "textual quality," but he does so only "for the sake of convention" (139, cf. 157n3).

In terms of the presentation in part two, it would help if the headings and progression of the chapters were uniform. The "reading aids" for each entry are different. Royle uses Roman numerals in his chapter on Paul's letters, and Wasserman uses the papyrus number + other classifications. Nicklas' chapter on Revelation does not include a table, and Elliot's table on the Catholic Epistles does not include the Alands' "textual quality" category. Standardizing the shorthand used by various authors to indicate scribal activity (e.g. for additions or omissions) would also increase the cohesion of the text-critical studies.

Despite this diversity, each of the chapters has a table of text-critical results that includes the same elements (including an assessment of a given witness' "textual quality"). Thus, this section serves as a rich resource for specialists and non-specialists (who will not detect/care about the subtle methodological differences). Further, even if the approaches were perfectly uniform, the chapters would still probably feel uneven because of the unevenness of the manuscript evidence being analyzed. For example, in Head's chapter on Mark, P<sup>45</sup> is the only significant witness but is relatively insignificant for textual reconstruction. On the other hand, in his chapter on Luke, Hernandez shows how P<sup>45</sup> is a very significant witness for current scholarly editions of the third Gospel.

These features make this volume a timely contribution to the study of the earliest texts of the New Testament. As a novice of New Testament textual criticism, I found these chapters to be consistently engaging, always informative, and sometimes even exciting (if that is possible in a volume brimming with technical minutiae!). The story that the New Testament manuscripts tell is one that continues to unfold and take shape. These discussions are part of that documentary drama. Indeed, though certain elements will surely be dated quickly (e.g., new papyrus fragments are still being "uncovered"), the value of this volume will also surely endure for the foreseeable future. Because of its focus and methodological savvy, I think it would prove an excellent supplementary volume (or main textbook) in a course on contemporary textual criticism of the New Testament.

If you are a scholar sifting through these fragments or a student seeking an introduction to this area of the field, this volume is the "type of text" that you will want to keep within reach.

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