

REVIEW

Parker, D. C. *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xxx + 368 pages. ISBN: 978-0-521-89553-8.

David C. Parker is a NT textual critic who comes with indisputable credentials tucked in his belt. He is the Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology and a Director of the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing (ITSEE) at the University of Birmingham, U.K. He is perhaps one of the most engaged practitioners in the field, serving on various projects, including the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNTP), the online edition of the Codex Sinaiticus, and the Oxyrhynchus papyri project.

In 1992 Cambridge University Press published Parker's treatise on Codex Bezae, based on his doctoral dissertation at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, where he in essence advocated that a NT manuscript is best appreciated when both its physical *and* textual features are studied integrally. In many respects, he put forward palaeography and codicology as inseparable disciplines alongside textual criticism—a methodological perspective that is carried on in this book under review.

Parker's latest book continues and enriches the honourable tradition of providing the world of NT studies with scholarly introductory material to the study of the manuscripts of the New Testament and the texts they reflect, and their attendant issues. However, the way he continues the legacy is in a league of its own, departing in many respects from the conventional historical treatment of the subject. While the book's title is modestly called an "Introduction," it is no exaggeration to say that it is, in fact, a compendium on *how* textual criticism is applied *today*, across geographical channels (Continental Europe, North America, etc.), in multifaceted media (print, electronic, internet), and by various schools of thought.

This 398-page introduction comes with an appended Glossary, which is undeniably a helpful device to better appreciate text-critical terminologies oftentimes known only to the experts in the field but otherwise clanging cymbals to many, if not most, students of the Bible. Indices of manuscripts cited and names and topics are also appended, for ease of reference. Note, however, that if one is used to reading literature utilising the convention of endnotes or footnotes, this book might be confusing at first glance, since it does not follow such a convention. Instead, Parker decided, giving his justification on p. 10, to follow the structure he used in his monograph on Codex Bezae, wherein bibliographical and subsidiary information are set in a smaller font size. But by the time the reader gets to chapter two, having gone through sixty-six such notes (although the second paragraph on p. 34 and the second paragraph on p. 91 should have also been set in the smaller size), such a layout becomes easy on the eyes.

On p. xi, Parker cites economic reasons for not including any manuscript plates in the book. But it will become evident that the actual rationale for this must

have been his desire to prove his point to the readers that the value of manuscripts resides not only in the texts that they carry, but also in the very physical materials that contain the texts. Certainly, a higher level of appreciation of the “physicality” of manuscripts results from viewing three-dimensional images of these subjects. Hence, fifty-one high-quality coloured digital images of select manuscripts and other materials are posted at <http://www.cambridge.org/9780521719896> (the actual site is <http://itsee.bham.ac.uk/parker/introduction/>), with accompanying explanation for every image in focus. Perhaps the only drawback of this schema is that in some parts of the world, internet connections are a perennial problem where the benefit of broadband is yet to be fully realized.

The book has three major parts, involving ten chapters, each chapter dealing with a particular important topic, oftentimes accompanied with provocative comments or queries by the author. One immediate instance is his definition of a “variant reading” as “the entire text as it is present in a particular copy” (5), a definition that veers away from the traditional definition of the term. But again this definition is to be understood in the context of Parker’s emphasis on the physical *and* textual features of NT manuscripts. Or take, for instance, his view on the failure of the quantitative analysis as a method of establishing manuscript relationships, particularly the Claremont Profile Method (163-65), and his preference for the Münster-initiated Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (169-71). Or perhaps for those taught to discuss textual variants in view of the Alexandrian, Western, Byzantine, and Caesarean *text-types*, Parker’s statement on p. 174 might come as a big surprise: “If one considers the frequency with which writers on many of the newly found papyri, from P⁴⁵ onwards, confessed to the uselessness of the traditional terminology in describing these older witnesses, one wonders why it has taken so long to face the problem. . . . But the time has come to take a long and hard look at the question. . . . It is now possible to move on, abandoning the concept of the text-type and, with the new tools and methods now available, retelling the history of the text.”

The book’s title best explains the whole argument and rationale of the book—it is about NT manuscripts *and* their texts. Note that Parker puts “manuscripts” first before the words “their texts,” for this is what he aims to drive at, especially in a field still dominated by opinions and ideas about the *text* of a particular manuscript (with an end-goal of reconstructing the “original reading” where variations exist), and sparsely about their *physical* features as ancient documents. This book has superbly brought to the fore the need to look at manuscripts as “manuscripts,” that is, they are also “ancient documents” with all their physical and paratextual characteristics. Along this line, he raises the issue of the need to wed textual criticism with palaeography (and codicology for that matter), arguing that “to the palaeographer every manuscript has its attractions. The textual scholar should feel the same” (3). Parker is also quick to point out the Hortian dictum (set in capital letters) that influenced the writing of the book (2, 349): KNOWLEDGE OF DOCUMENTS SHOULD PRECEDE FINAL JUDGEMENT UPON READINGS.

Because of its different perspective, this book in a number of ways departs from previous introductory monographs on textual criticism, without denigrating the information that literature provided. Inevitably, this book contains original materials aimed at corroborating the thesis of the book. For instance, even though Parker's formal discussion on palaeography is only five pages long (30-34), its assumption nevertheless is evident throughout the book. Accordingly, chapter two deals with "Practical skills in the study of manuscripts," which provides pragmatic guidance on how to appreciate a particular manuscript, ranging from a visit to the library where a manuscript is housed, to describing the manuscript, to making a transcription and collation, among others. And even if one cannot actually visit and personally examine manuscripts, this practical guidance can still be enjoyed in many other respects.

There is also a good deal of discussion on how to use Greek text editions, both the printed editions and electronic software that are now available in the market. The summary of electronic-based Greek text software is also very impressive, for the obvious reason that studying ancient manuscripts can now hardly be divorced from electronic-driven platforms. But along this line, Parker's view with regard to the proliferation of electronic software is very instructive, if not poetic, and is worth quoting:

There is a risk in a pioneering period such as today's, namely that time and resources are wasted by small groups of scholars or individuals "reinventing the wheel." . . . There is a better alternative to this approach. It is to join in with projects which are already under way and achieving results. If everyone interested in making editions were to throw in their lot . . . , we would have within our grasp the possibility of making available machine-readable fully searchable transcriptions of at least the more significant documents of all periods of the manuscript transmission. (223)

While the focus of the book is on the Greek-ness of the NT text, Parker also devotes significant discussion to the other languages, particularly Latin, Syriac, and Coptic (57-70), in which the New Testament was also transmitted. The bibliographical information he provides for each of these languages no doubt testifies to Parker's well-roundedness in dealing with a complex issue such as this. Furthermore, Parker is also able to reiterate here the call, along with other textual critics, for the need to look seriously at other types of witnesses in assessing textual variations, particularly patristic citations and the versions, which are (ab)normally set aside or relegated to a lesser status when a NT manuscript is extant.

In his discussion of "Manuscripts as tradents of the text" (133-58), Parker boldly addresses the surging popularity of a school of thought that looks at sensible textual variations as products of *intentional* scribal activity. Contrary to this viewpoint, Parker prefers to explain the situation from a more restrained position, and sounds the warning that "if we were to agree that these intentional changes were the work of the scribes, we would have to abandon the assumption that the text we find in a manuscript is intended by its scribe to be a faithful reproduction of the exemplar" (153). It is admittedly a fair warning; but at the same time we

must also be reminded to be more circumspect in the way we “reconstruct” ancient scribes, for even though they were duty-bound to mechanically reproduce a copy faithful to their exemplars, they were still persons in specific socio-historical contexts, and therefore, with specific socio-historical needs. While there is a methodological question as to how some textual variants are selectively used to prove intentional changes, we should not altogether abandon the need to explain these textual phenomena in light of the socio-historical context of the scribes; there must be other ways to explain these changes.

Parker’s discussion in chapter five, which he curiously entitles “Textual criticism,” is no less controversial. For one, he calls for the abandonment of establishing textual relationship based on quantitative analysis. Using the analogy and language of evolutionary biology, especially the theory of *phylogenetics*, Parker identifies inherent problems that keep any form of Lachmannian stemmatics from achieving its goal of establishing textual relationships among witnesses (161-68). For Parker the partial and incomplete data provided by quantitative analysis just won’t work. This led him to offer the theory now known as the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method, used and developed by the Münster Institute for New Testament Textual Research and applied by the editors of the *Editio critica maior*, as the most workable alternative to establishing relationships.

Perhaps Part Three, entitled “The Sections of the New Testament,” is the most innovative component of this book, considering the history of introductory literature on textual criticism. This part consists of four chapters devoted to studying *separately* the textual history of each section of the New Testament, jumping off with Revelation, which to date has the least manuscript evidence for its text. Then he moves on to the more complicated textual stories of the Pauline Epistles, Acts and the Catholic Epistles, and finally the Gospels. The rewards of this part reside in a fact which Parker has so brilliantly articulated, i.e., one textual theory cannot be applied across the board since each literary section (or genre) has its own textual idiosyncrasies, and the story of the manuscript evidence for each varies enormously.

There are few mistakes of an editorial nature. On p. 38, “0108” should have been “108,” to indicate its minuscule form; a “dittography” of the conjunction “and” on p. 88; the bibliographical information at the bottom of p. 134 (involving Zuntz’s article) accidentally runs to the next line; the total of columns 3 and 4 under the 037 entry in Table 4.1 (143) comes only to 81 and not 82 as indicated in column 2; on the same page, the grand total states 1,939 but adding columns 3 and 4 sums up only to 1,859; the use of “repr.” vis-à-vis “reprinted,” and commas after publication dates or page numbers in the bibliographical information need to be rechecked for consistency (e.g., instead of a comma, a full stop [.] was used after the title of a book on p. 168); the bibliographical information on p. 234 should have been placed on the previous page, as the actual table being referred to is on that page; the citation of Gamble’s *Books and Readers* is cited differently on pp. 250-51 although it’s on the same spread; there are also two different citation formats for *Festschriften*, one citing the subject-recipient and the other citing the editor/s

(e.g., *Baarda Festschrift*, *Festschrift Delobel* as opposed to Epp and Fee, *Metzger Festschrift*); and a few others. These are negligible errors that can be arrested in the next print-run; they hardly affect the message the book aims to convey.

Parker is certainly to be congratulated for this innovative and timely contribution to NT textual criticism. His depth of knowledge of the field is admirably brilliant, and yet he does not covet a monopoly of answers to the questions he raises in this book. One is even more impressed when Parker, having come to the conclusion of his book, confesses, “Writing this has therefore been an exercise in humility” (348). Such a spirit and the thought-provoking issues raised in the book will certainly be beneficial both for neophytes and experts in the field, and will come as a big encouragement for Bible translators who are continuing the history of the transmission of the New Testament text and producing the *new* manuscripts for future generations’ consumption.

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Bible versions referenced in this issue (unless otherwise identified in individual articles)

ASV	American Standard Version	NASB	New American Standard Bible
CEV	Contemporary English Version	NEB	New English Bible
DHH	Dios Habla Hoy	NIV	New International Version
ESV	English Standard Version	NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
GNB	Good News Bible/Translation	NJPS	Tanakh (Jewish Publication Society)
JB	Jerusalem Bible	NKJV	New King James Version
KJV	King James Version	NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Lu1984	Luther Bibel (1984 ed.)	NVI99	Nueva Versión Internacional
LXX	Septuagint	REB	Revised English Bible
MT	Masoretic Text	RSV	Revised Standard Version
NA ²⁷	Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 27th ed.	Sem	Bible du Semeur
NAB	New American Bible	TNIV	Today’s New International Version
		UBS ⁴	UBS Greek New Testament, 4th ed.