

*An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts.* By D. C. Parker. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 368 pp., \$34.99 paper.

David C. Parker, the Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham and Executive Editor of the International Greek New Testament Project, offers, in this comprehensive handbook, a fascinating and often humorous look into the world of manuscript studies and textual criticism.

In Part I, Parker covers the first of these two topics. Chapter 1 gives a summary of the development of the codex and then details the methods, resources and pitfalls for studying the versions. New Testament manuscripts are introduced as well. The range of information is impressive. On the one hand, Parker teaches that ‘documents written on papyrus’ ‘are called *papyri*’ (35). On the other hand, he takes us through a sample search using the *Liste*, even noting dead ends. In this way, the text acts as a guide, walking us through the maze of resources. (The glossary at the end is invaluable, but perhaps a bit limited.)

Chapter 2 details the examination of a manuscript to make either a collation or a transcript. The author hopes that professors will be encouraged to introduce Greek students to manuscript studies (88). Again, in this chapter the level of detail is impressive; Parker even reminds transcribers to choose “a writing implement . . . strong enough to show clearly when photocopied” (96). One assumes that this suggestion comes as a result of sad experience.

Chapter 3 covers the study of patristic citations, versions, and other references and inscriptions. These may require their own critical evaluations and suffer from a lack of ancient witnesses. There is need, as well, to distinguish between “an adaptation, an allusion, or a genuine quotation” (110). On the other hand, their value rests in the possibility that a manuscript more ancient than any we now possess lies behind a quotation (109).

Part II moves from manuscripts as artifacts to the texts they contain, starting with Chapter 4 on scribal corrections. Here again, Parker’s concern for teaching is evident. He investigates the thesis that a correlation would exist between “numbers of extant copies and numbers of variant readings” (151) and finds it unsupported by the data. He also examines B. D. Ehrman’s assertion of intentionality regarding scribal corrections and concludes that the question should be stated with “a degree of agnosticism” (157).

The chapter on textual criticism (Chapter 5) offers an historical and methodological exposition, with a detailed history of the “development of the text-type concept” (172). It ends by showing the relevance of textual criticism for history, exegesis, and theology. Parker advocates, for example, commentaries which go beyond simply choosing which reading the exegete believes is best attested towards an analysis which takes the force of all variants into consideration. This chapter is slightly marred by a dismissal of fundamentalism, the Majority Text theory, bibliolatry and evangelicalism all practically on the same basis, ignoring the significant nuances between and within these positions.

Chapter 6 details various critical editions. It not only defines much of the terminology and presents the main editions in existence, both print and electronic, but it also walks the reader step

by step through the Tischendorf apparatus. In this chapter, especially, the value of the online plates is apparent. The necessity of reading near a computer is more than compensated for by the joy of being able to examine (and even zoom in on) the resources under discussion. (Many links are on the publisher's website which eliminates the usual problem of broken connections, although that continues to be an intermittent frustration with the other footnotes.) Parker's explanation in this chapter would be difficult to follow without the book in one hand and the appropriate image on the screen. With this combination of resources, however, the reader is suddenly given the key to what looked at first like secret code.

In Part III of the book, Parker goes through the history, the manuscript evidence and the specific challenges of each section of the New Testament. He begins with Revelation which has a history of research representative of "that of the whole New Testament" (227). Again, Parker introduces us to a wealth of information along with curious historical side notes. He covers the work of Erasmus, Tregelles, Hoskier (who included a variant 'communicated by a medium' 230), and Schmid. He points out the rise of copies of Revelation at the fall of the Byzantine Empire, when interest grew in this 'coded message of Christian endurance in a hostile world' (234).

In chapter 8, Parker takes us through a similar analysis of the Pauline letters. He starts (and ends) by noting that the whole enterprise here depends on assumptions about the production and collection of the letters. The variations we see could be due to differences between "copies in circulation" and Paul's "archived version" (249). In his analysis of textual variants in Romans, Ephesians, 1 Corinthians, and Hebrews, rather than proposing definitive answers, Parker teaches us to ask the right questions, and shows us some of the principles of textual criticism.

Chapter 9 addresses Acts and the Catholic epistles. In the book of Acts, Latin witnesses are often found to testify to a Greek text no longer extant. Past decisions to place all texts into either the Old Uncial or the Western family are revisited. Parker finds evidence for a more gradual development of the text. For the Catholic epistles, Westcott and Hort's view on the Byzantine text as a recension has been superseded by further studies (namely by Wachtel) pointing also towards a more gradual development.

Finally, in chapter 10 Parker tackles the textual background of the gospels. As in Acts, we have the telling of a story, and by now Parker has shown us that the content of a text has an impact on its development. In contrast to Acts, however, in the Gospels the narration is more stable than dialogue. Parker includes an explanation of internal as well as external harmonization. He then discusses a variant of Matthew 5:22 to show the weight of implications for Christian communities which textual criticism is made to bear. He prefers to emphasize the way these variations evidence the understanding of early Christian groups rather than to search for "a single authoritative form" of the text (338).

The world of manuscripts supports much of the work of theology and yet is often hidden from view. D. C. Parker's book invites us into this world and introduces us to its language, its tools, and its methodology in a systematic and comprehensive way. His love for his topic is evident. In a discussion on the benefits of natural versus artificial light, he talks about a palimpsest in St Petersburg whose ink "as the sun rose in the sky, ... slowly faded as though the writing were magic runes" (90). He tells us of Augustine of Hippo's comment that "some people removed"

the story of the woman caught in adultery “from their manuscripts in case their wives decided that it gave them *carte blanche*” (343). These comments invite us to share in the joy that he finds in his studies; his detailed instructions give us the tools, and his frequent allusions to research yet to be undertaken give us direction.

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