

Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts. *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. Pp. xvii + 202. ISBN: 978-0-8028-7224-1. Paperback, €20.00/\$22.00.

- [1] As a component volume to the Greek languages resources series (Eerdmans), Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts (henceforth P&P) have offered a fresh and unique midlevel *student's* introduction to the field of New Testament textual criticism. Even experienced scholars will be interested in the volume because its authors propose some provoking insights in the debate about variant-units, a vivid defense of an early date of the Muratorian Fragment, and a well-balanced presentation and evaluation of the text and apparatus of UBSGNT<sup>4/5</sup> and NA<sup>27/28</sup>. In the introduction, they promise to offer an introduction somewhere *in between* the concise introduction of David Alan Black (*New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide*, 1994) and the comprehensive introduction of Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman (*The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed., 2005), in which they have succeeded satisfactorily. Despite the absence of an introduction to the *Editio Critica Maior* and some regrettable mistakes that will be mentioned below, its authors have served teachers of advanced New Testament Greek with a concise but comprehensive introduction to the field of New Testament textual criticism.
- [2] Within two hundred pages, the authors introduce the reader to the whole field of textual criticism. Apart from traditional topics like writing materials and styles (ch. 3), major witnesses (ch. 4), text-types (ch. 5), the various modern text-critical methodologies (ch. 7), the principles of internal and external evidence (chs. 8–10), and a discussion of modern (critical) editions (ch. 11), the reader is offered a discussion of what textual criticism actually is (ch. 1), of the history of the New Testament canon (ch. 2), of the definition of textual variants/variant-units and its boundaries (ch. 6), of the text and apparatuses of UBSGNT<sup>4/5</sup> and NA<sup>27/28</sup> (ch. 12), and even a discussion of the various English translations and translation theory (ch. 13). The inclusion of the quite different themes of canon history and translation theories is motivated by the felt need to instruct students on these themes and because a concise introduction to these topics cannot be found among other midlevel textbooks (xiii–xiv).
- [3] The book is primarily intended for students with at least one-year experience in the Greek language, as the authors point out in the preface titled “The Reason for This Book and How to Use It: A Note to Professors and Students” (xiii–xiv).
- [4] In chapter 1, P&P discuss two approaches to textual criticism of the New Testament: (1) the traditional model (textual criticism as textual reconstruction), and (2) the sociohistorical model (textual criticism as tracking textual transmission). In their summary and evaluation (which is *de facto* a plea for the traditional model), P&P state without any hesitation that the aim of text-critical studies must remain the reconstruction of the *original* text of the New Testament. They consider the sociohistorical approach as a secondary goal because of the foundational role of a carefully reconstructed Greek text in biblical interpretation. Apparently, the authors consider a reconstruction of the original text as a prerequisite for all subsequent investigation of that text. They consider it logically prior to a sociohistorical analysis itself, because otherwise theologically and culturally driven “alterations” cannot be established. “Therefore, although variant readings may provide helpful and interesting insights into the social development of early Christianity, reconstructing the

original text must remain the principal aim of text-critical studies” (6). What P&P do not address is the important issue that it is not clear what “original text” actually means (the text of the authors, the text of an archetype because the text of the autographs cannot be recovered, the text of the first gospel or letter collection, etc.). Advocates of the traditional model should not leave this question untouched, and in my opinion it is necessary to introduce this debate to students because the most intuitive goal of textual criticism is the reconstruction of the text of the autographs, which has lots of problems. More problematic is their view of textual criticism as something that can be closed in the exegetical process after the work has been done. As I understand it, textual criticism should always continue during any interpretative work on the text, with the possibility and expectation that advancing knowledge of a certain book can have a bearing on text critical decisions. Otherwise, there would be the danger that text critical decisions predetermine the outcome of an analysis based on an incomplete evaluation of the relevant facts.

- [5] In chapter 2, P&P discuss the canon history of the New Testament. Although this subject appears to be something outside the realm of textual criticism, the authors have inserted it because of practical reasons (already mentioned) and because the canon defines the *domain* of New Testament textual criticism. “Canon” is defined as a “body of writings that came to be recognized by the early church as authoritative in matters of doctrine and liturgical practice” (9). The importance of this definition appears at the end in which P&P assert that this definition avoids the anachronistic use of “canon,” which pertains from the start to the fourth and fifth century without acknowledging the “canonical awareness,” which is already visible in the New Testament writings. As a result, they describe the process of canonization as one of *discovering* instead of *deciding*.
- [6] I wondered why they discussed the canon history without a further description of major events in the early history of the church. Three reasons could have commended such an addition: (1) the canon history would have been founded within its appropriate historical context, which remains vague; (2) as already stated by the Alands, basic knowledge of the early church history is of pivotal importance in understanding the historical context of the transmission of the New Testament; and (3) understanding the historical context of the transmission process would have provided students an understandable framework to connect their new knowledge with. Both the canon history and their further description of manuscripts and text-types now stand in a “historical vacuum.”
- [7] In chapter 3, P&P discuss the material side of textual criticism along with methods of classification. I especially appreciated their description of books and literacy in the first century (34–38), which provides a concise summary of the state of the art. This outline will be very helpful to students to get a basic knowledge of the literary culture in which the New Testament has been written and transmitted. Nevertheless, I doubt whether the cost of getting a book copied was as cheap as two to four drachmas (36), because that was almost the same price as a new unwritten roll of papyrus; unless the authors mean (outworn) secondhand books. To get a better indication: in papyrus SB 14599 (first half of the first century CE), an average of twenty-five drachma has to be paid for writing 10,000 lines (stichoi). According to T. C. Skeat, a Four-Gospel codex would have had some 8,345 lines, which means more than twenty drachma’s (without the costs of papyrus, which was almost the same price). In addition, P.

Petaus 30 (second century CE), for instance, mentions the collation of eight manuscripts of unknown length for one hundred drachmas (not to mention if they were copied). So P&P's indication of the low prices of books copied seems to be exaggerated at least for Egypt in the second and third centuries, and while Egypt was known for its extraordinary low wages, the prices in other parts of the Roman Empire would have been rather higher.

- [8] An obvious failure is their counting of manuscripts, which is according to P&P up to 7,227 (with 2,911 majuscules and only 1,807 minuscules!). While textual scholars will be very pleased with such a progress in early evidence, the numbers presented on page 50 (repeated on page 33, 80) are certainly wrong and need to be corrected by every teacher using this book.
- [9] Also their section on writing styles suffers many inconsistencies and errors (46–48). The styles borrowed from Philip Comfort and David Barrett (Common, Documentary, Reformed Documentary, and Professional) only apply to early majuscules and not to later minuscule hands (46). About majuscules, it is stated that they are usually not found after the seventh century (47), while most of the preserved majuscules date from between the eighth and tenth centuries. The truth is that a developed minuscule hand started to be used during the seventh century (as P&P state themselves), while it outreached the majuscule script in the tenth and definitely in the eleventh centuries. On the same page, P&P state that the “majority of NT manuscripts are written in what is referred to as a *biblical majuscule hand*,” which applies, of course, only to the majority of *majuscule* manuscripts. Finally, the absence of images of the various writing styles makes this section almost incomprehensible for students.
- [10] In chapter 4, P&P introduce the students to the Gregory-Aland numbering system and the various witnesses (Greek manuscripts, versions, and patristic quotations). After a short description, the most important manuscripts are presented in a table, although such important manuscripts as P<sup>45</sup>, P<sup>72</sup>, P<sup>75</sup>, Δ, Π, and 565 are not listed. Ideally such a list should contain all consistently cited witnesses in at least NA<sup>27/28</sup>, because that gives students the opportunity to have the most elementary knowledge of manuscripts they encounter in the critical apparatus. Despite this point, this chapter gives a good insight in the materials the textual critic has on his disposal.
- [11] In chapter 5, P&P discuss the various text-types as they have been distinguished by scholars. Despite the fact that some scholars consider the text-type model outdated, P&P make no efforts to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of this approach. They do not even criticize the proposed connection to distinct locations, which is certainly doubtful, especially for the “Western text.” What should have been part of this chapter is a description of the various *traits* of the distinguished text-types. Personally, I regret that the whole discussion of the Byzantine text is determined by the (theological) biases of some (77–78), leaving a *balanced* review of the Byzantine text to the reader. The appropriate place for discussing these prejudices would have been the chapter on modern text critical methodologies (ch. 7). Moreover, their one-sided and limited presentation of the arguments of Byzantine protagonists (God's preservation and numerical superiority) certainly does no justice to the more scholarly advocates of the Byzantine text-type (like Harry Sturz, Maurice Robinson, and also John William Burgon himself). Although their arguments are important and need to be answered, P&P should not have used this straw man fallacy.
- [12] In chapter 6, we enter an important issue: what is a textual variant, and what are

its definitions and boundaries? This is one of the strongest chapters of the book. Following E. C. Colwell and Ernest Tune, P&P make a distinction between “variant-units” and “readings,” so that variant-unit means the “passage or section of the Greek NT where our MSS do not agree as to what the Greek text is,” (quoted from Colwell and Tune) while “readings” are the separate constituents (variants) of the variant-unit. The importance (and here P&P are quite difficult to understand) is that the use of variant-units makes it possible to find out relationships among manuscripts on the basis of the full range of variant-units, especially where they agree. This means that manuscripts are compared with manuscripts instead of with a standard text. The next point they make (following Eldon J. Epp) is that only *significant readings* should be considered “variants,” thus excluding nonsense, dislocated, singular, and orthographic readings. Next, they address the important issue of *variant-unit segmentation*. After reproducing the approaches of Colwell and Tune, Epp, and Gordon D. Fee, P&P propose their own creative solution, which consists of “an analysis that is grounded upon the structure of the Greek language” (83–84), which means that the textual critic identifies variant-units *on the basis of* syntax or grammatical structure (morpheme, word, phrase/group, clause, and the sentence/clause complex levels). In this method, variant-units necessarily align with one of the syntactic levels of the Greek language, causing various classes of variant-units with clear boundaries. This is *de facto* a further specification of Colwell’s and Tune’s “rule,” which determines variant-units as “those elements of expression in the Greek text which regularly exist together” (83–84). In my opinion, the more manuscripts are analyzed according to this method, the bigger the variant-units will usually become, because many (minor) differences will tend to enlarge the syntactic structure involved. To deal with that problem, P&P argue for distinguishing variant-units *within* variant-units. It remains unclear to me how this method can be embedded in a critical apparatus. For students, not familiar with the materials, this chapter will be almost impossible to understand on its own.

- [13] In chapter 7, P&P discuss the various methodologies: stemmatic approach, majority text approach, various eclectic methods, and the single text method. I much regret that they did not provide a concise introduction to the basic principles of the *Coherence Based Genealogical Method* (CBGM) on which future editions of the Nestle-Aland text will be based and on which the 28<sup>th</sup> edition is already based for the Catholic Epistles. The reason is probably because P&P are quite critical towards this method. Their main points are: (1) an adequate definition of what *coherence* means is lacking; coherence becomes a mathematical calculation, rather than a literary concept; (2) the individual traits of manuscripts are overlooked; (3) there is a problem of relating the initial text to the original text (which is for P&P of high importance); and (4) there is a limited access to its technology. None of these appears to me as convincing, because the second and third argument are a general problem not necessarily confined to *CBGM*. The fourth is not true, because all local genealogical decisions (from which coherence has been calculated), together with additional tools, are freely available on the internet. The first has some validity, although we should recognize that the whole calculation is based on decisions based on the same principles (internal evidence) advocated in this book.
- [14] In their discussion of the Byzantine/Majority text approach, P&P fortunately distinguish between the Byzantine and Majority text. The first is based on a

*textual tradition*, while the other is based on *numerical calculation* (a distinction not always adequately recognized by scholars). A plain mistake is that *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* was published by Wilbur Pickering. Rather, Pickering wrote the influential book (which does not represent an “edition”) *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (1st ed., 1977; 3rd ed. 2012). The true authors of *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* are Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad (91). Further, P&P distinguish two significant schools: (1) a more eclectic approach towards the Byzantine textual tradition and (2) a school that commits rigidly to the majority reading within the Byzantine textual tradition. P&P wrongly connect William Pierpont, Robinson, and Burgon to this second school. As far as I know, the only edition that gives (almost) consistently the Majority reading is that of Hodges and Farstad. Two groups can be added: (1) those who cling wholly to the *Textus Receptus* (mostly KJV-only advocates) and (2) those who stick to one specific stream within the Byzantine textual tradition (like Pickering and his K<sup>r</sup>-family 35-text, who is therefore inadequately classified in the second school). Finally, P&P keep the mantra going that “numerical representation is the most reliable guide to the original reading,” which is actually not the view of the most serious advocates of the Byzantine text. At least for Burgon (who is always undeservedly accused of counting rather than weighing), this was not the major theoretical point.

- [15] Further, P&P discuss the various types of the eclectic method (thoroughgoing eclecticism and reasoned eclecticism) ending with the single text model. What is not noted is that the single text model is not so much a *method for reconstructing the text* (as the others are) but a *way of presenting the text in a critical edition*. I doubt whether the differences between Sinaiticus/Vaticanus and modern eclectic Greek texts is as small as P&P indicate (96), although I appreciate the idea to add a critical edition based on an existing text as is usual in Old Testament textual criticism.
- [16] In chapters 8 through 10, P&P provide a clear overview of external (ch. 8) and internal evidence (ch. 9–10). Their information is concise and clear, providing key principles for practical use in the process of weighing evidence. These chapters will be very rewarding when the principles of textual criticism need to be learned. What becomes not clear to me is how chapter 10 (on intrinsic probabilities) relates to the major rule *lectio difficilior potior* discussed in section 9.2 (116–17).
- [17] In chapters 11 and 12, P&P describe in a very concise way the development of modern critical editions, from Ximenes to NA<sup>27/28</sup> and UBSGNT<sup>4/5</sup> (ch. 11) as well as the use of both last editions. I wondered why there was no section on the *ECM*, especially because in addition to the Catholic letters there is now also a volume on parallel pericopes in the synoptic Gospels, while the volumes of Acts and John can be expected within a few years. These editions should in my opinion not be confined to specialists only. The guide to the text and apparatus of NA and UBSGNT are very helpful for students, providing useful lists with explanations of symbols and abbreviations. I liked the balanced description of the differences between these hand editions, although the proposed preference for the 27<sup>th</sup> edition of Nestle–Aland can be confusing for students, especially when we consider the fact that the 28<sup>th</sup> edition has numerous corrections and improvements in its whole apparatus (not only for the Catholic Epistles).
- [18] In chapter 13, P&P provide some information on English Bible translations and translation techniques. Although this chapter appears to me out of place, the

information provided is informative and clear. The section on the presentation of textual variation in translations (183–84) is especially important and interesting. The authors opt for excluding unoriginal texts (like the John 7:53–8:11 and Mark 16:9–20) from the running translation, with the possibility of providing a footnote on the issue, which is not common practice in most modern translations.

- [19] P&P have served the reader with several aids. Each chapter is followed by a short summary (some have the tendency to become an evaluation), a list of *key vocabulary* (the teacher needs his own creativity to make something of this aid), and a helpful select bibliography, which provides the most important recent books and articles on the subject as well as some classic works. At the end of the book, they add an appendix with tools for further text-critical study, providing information on textual commentaries, biblical commentaries that pay special attention to text critical issues, important journals and monographs series, manuscript editions and transcriptions, and finally digital and web-based tools.
- [20] I regret that the authors have not fully incorporated digital resources in their book, while (for students) the Internet becomes more and more a dominant source of information. That the *Virtual Manuscript Room* of the *Institute of New Testament Textual Research* in Münster is presented as providing “images of several manuscripts and transcriptions” (195) instead of “a huge abundance” or “potentially all” manuscripts illustrates the marginal attention for such valuable sources.
- [21] For a student’s introduction into such an imaginative field, the layout of the book definitely comes short. I would have expected rather something similar to the *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* of Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham. Even online references to images of writing materials or manuscripts like David Parker’s *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* are absent. This means that all the responsibility (apart from some low quality black-and-white images) to show the most interesting part of textual criticism (namely, the manuscripts themselves) is left to the teacher or interested reader. In my view, this was definitely the wrong choice.
- [22] To conclude, on the one hand, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* offers lots of topics relevant to a thorough introduction into textual criticism. On the other hand, its deficiencies and sometimes obvious failures make it necessary to read another introduction parallel to it. With these reservations, I recommend this book to everyone who looks for a good introduction to the field of New Testament textual criticism.

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