

Book Review: I. A. Moir and J. K. Elliott. *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament: An Introduction for English Readers*

Darin M. Wood, Ph.D.

All information, unless otherwise notated, is © to Darin M. Wood, Ph.D., 2006

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Moir, I. A. and J. K. Elliott. *Manuscripts and the Text of the New Testament: An Introduction for English Readers*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.

Biographical Information

Dr. J. Keith Elliott is Senior Lecturer in New Testament Textual Criticism in the Department of Theology at the University of Leeds. He is assistant secretary of *Studiorium Novi Testamenti Societas* and founding member of the Editorial Board of international journal *Filologia Neotestamentaria*. His writings include *A Bibliography of Greek New Testament Manuscripts* (2000), *The Apocryphal Jesus: Legends of the Early Church* (1996), *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (1993), *A Survey of Manuscripts used in Editions of the Greek New Testament* (1987), *Questioning Christian Origins* (1982), and *The Greek Text of the Epistles of Timothy and Titus* (1968).¹

Dr. Ian A. Moir was lecturer in New Testament at the University of Edinburgh until his death in 1993.²

Manuscripts

This collaborative work was begun by Dr. Moir as an elementary introduction into textual criticism for those with little or no knowledge of Greek. Thus, Moir's purpose in writing was to enlighten readers as to the meaning of the curious remark "The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not contain..." Unfortunately, Moir did not live to see his work completed. Upon his passing in 1993, Dr. Elliott took up the draft and completed it, attempting to maintain the integrity of Moir's purpose. It is unfortunate, however, that because of the seamless collaboration, there is no way to discern (except in rare instances where Elliott announces such, cf. p. 70) where the two authors differ or

¹ Elliott's work also include *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark: An Edition of C.H. Turner's "Notes on Marcan Usage" together with other Comparable Studies* (1993), *The Principles and Practice of New Testament textual criticism: Collected Essays of G.D. Kilpatrick* (1990), and *Studies in New Testament Language and Text: Essays in honour of George D. Kilpatrick on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday* (1976).

² I. A. Moir, "Two Septuagint Palimpsest Fragments," *Journal of Theological Studies* 8 (Apr 1957), I. A. Moir, "Codex Climace Rescriptus Graecus: A Study of Portions of the Greek New Testament Comprising the Underwriting of a Part of a Palimpsest," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 29 (July 1958), I. A. Moir, "Tischendorf and the Codex Siniaticus," *New Testament Studies* 23 (Oct 1976).

who is responsible for which thoughts. Such delineation surely would have been insightful.

At times, works purported to be introductory in nature are not. They presuppose a sum of knowledge that the novice may or may not have. This work, however, is no such volume. In the body of this work, the authors define New Testament Textual Criticism as well as why one should care about it. They seek to define terms and their usage. They seek to address the editing of the New Testament text, and seek to do all of this without presupposing a reader's knowledge of Greek.³ The heart of the book is chapter four where the authors seek to demonstrate the veracity of their plan that they have constructed in the first three chapters. The fifth chapter offers a historical account of the rise of textual criticism as a field of study that gave way to the present discipline. The conclusion of chapter five details present textual critical concerns and projects, such as the *International Greek New Testament Project*, and offers prognostication about the future of textual criticism. A postscript, apparently written sometime later, deals with the use of computers in collating and manuscript evaluation. An enormous asset of this work is the appendix appearing at the conclusion of the volume containing a glossary of textual critical technical terms used throughout the book.

Chapter one, entitled "The Art of Textual Criticism", examines the purpose of the discipline and its artistic nature. The authors define the field of textual criticism as "the study of any written work, the original of which no longer survives, with the purpose of recovering that original text from those copies which have chanced to survive"(1). While they defer to definite controls and limits, they confess that it is an art form of vast proportions. What sets this art form apart is the medium: the word of God.

Chapter two discusses the New Testament in Greek in introductory fashion. In this chapter, the authors examine the documents which comprise the New Testament. They examine papyri, uncials, minuscules, methods of collation, versions and church fathers, and close with suggestions regarding how these documents are to be used in the construction of the New Testament (22ff.).

Chapter three examines the editing process of the New Testament text. With over 5,000 distinctive manuscripts, variations are to be expected (27). Numerous examples of editorial decisions are listed by the authors. An extended list of variant readings and their classification is listed: longer / shorter textual readings, substitution of one word for another, changes involving personal names, changes for the sake of harmonization, changes concerning the Greek spelling, word order, punctuation and some that require "specialist attention". It is in this final section where Elliott introduces the term "intrinsic possibility"(32). While a fair and equitable definition is offered, a bias is detected as he offers that the shorter reading principle is not necessarily reliable (33).

Chapter four is the heart of *Manuscript*, attempting to illustrate clearly the principles discussed in the previous chapter. No less than 200 texts are offered up for discussion in this 40-page chapter. By use of this expansive chapter, they seek to allow the reader to

³ The only Greek in this work is found in the plates at the center of the book. These plates consist of UBS⁴, NA²⁷, Tischendorf, Siniaticus and P13. The two rare exceptions where a Greek letter is found to demonstrate a point. All Koine is transliterated into English or not used at all.

discern for himself the most reliable course without the intrusion of a well-meaning editor who has included the phrase “Some ancient witness do not include . . .” However, in their effort to provide students with a wide view, it seems that the authors may have lost sight of their goal. Thus, a more complete examination of fewer texts would have been more helpful.

Chapter five provides closing thoughts on the field of textual criticism. In cursory fashion, Elliot and Moir present a brief overview of the history of the field from Origen and Jerome, through Stephanus and Erasmus up to the Metzger and Epp era. While the history is (intentionally) rudimentary, its inclusion provides an historical framework for the student to gain perspective on this field. The present age of Textual Criticism is led by the UBS/NA and Münster Institute as well as those scholars working toward collating the remaining documents and continuing projects such as the *International Greek New Testament Project*. The future is somewhat less certain, but authors appear hopeful for the use of technology within the field.

Critical Evaluation of *Manuscripts*

Manuscripts opens by announcing this work as an attempt to be a “bias-free” interpretation of the field of New Testament Textual Criticism (7, 35). However, several times Elliott’s bias showed itself (23, 33, 35, 38, 87). For instance, he refers to four manuscripts which have had “undue weight” (15, 23) placed upon them by 19th and 20th century scholars. This should not be so, Elliott suggests, thus demonstrating the first hint of his own bias. Thus, it would be interesting to consider how this work might have been different had Moir lived to see it complete.

In its effort to be “user-friendly”, this work occasionally suffers from its own desire to seek the lowest common denominator and thus may prove frustrating for some who are ready for more weighty matters. It does, however, provide a ground-level entrance for any student into this dizzying field. The heart of a teacher is seen in the writing, but the heart of pastor is seen in the purpose of strengthening one’s faith in the word of God.

In conclusion, this work is a fast and friendly read. It is well written and tightly constructed and useful for those other than “English-only” readers. If Aland is high school and Greenlee’s is junior high, then *Manuscripts* is elementary school, the ground floor into this expansive field.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Elliott, J. K. *Essays and Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism*. Filologia Neotestamentaria 3, ed. Juan Mateos. Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 1995.

Essays and Studies

In *Essays and Studies*, the foundation laid in the previous manuscript comes to full life. By compiling several of his essays from various academic journals, Elliott provides a full gourmet meal of thoroughgoing eclecticism in concise and clear form. By bringing together these thirteen essays, Elliott’s position can be seen in a full form.

Chapters one and two are the best features of this collection. Chapter one is the only essay written specifically for this volume. In its title, “Can we recover the Original Text of the New Testament? An Examination of the Role of the Thoroughgoing Eclecticist”, Elliott asks the fundamental question. With a thundering “Yes!”, Elliott announces that the original New Testament text can be found. However, he laments, not by using the “cult of the best manuscripts”(35). It is his contention that the best and most reliable path to the original version is through internal analysis, disregarding the “weight” of manuscripts. Elliott contends strongly that serious doctrinal issues are at stake in the textual critical field, despite the objections of some, such as Vaganay⁴ and Metzger.⁵

Elliott traces a short history of the critical New Testament. Following a brief history of the Tischendorf, NA and BFBS, he criticizes the UBS text for its failure to be as “eclectic” as possible, but quickly moves to define that in an eclectic fashion. He pronounces the charges which have been leveled against his view of thoroughgoing eclecticism and how each of those arguments are fallacious.

The second chapter, “The Purpose and Construction of a Critical Apparatus to a Greek New Testament”⁶, demonstrates the essential nature of critical apparatus in ascertaining the original reading of the text. It is necessary to give scholars the ability to ascertain the validity of a given variant. Otherwise, as Elliott points out, scholars are left at the mercy of editors (46). Thus, works such as Tischendorf’s or the *International Greek New Testament Project* are essential and must be continued. While this remark could be seen in keeping with reasoned eclecticism, Elliott’s purpose is much different. In the construction of this apparatus, Elliott anticipates readings which are either “attic” (which are surely wrong) and “uncharacteristic vocabulary”. Thereby, while variant readings found in the critical apparatus are crucial, it is the readings themselves, not the manuscript in which they are found that is the determinant factor. Thus, Elliott seeks to ascertain the original reading, regardless of manuscript support.

In chapter three, “The Atticist Grammarians”,⁷ Elliott lays out the first plank of thoroughgoing eclecticism. He examines two primary sources for his contention for “Atticism” in the New Testament, Phrynichus and Moeris. In essence, he argues that

⁴ Leon Vaganay and Christian-Bernard Amphoux, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Vaganay claims that of the 150,000-250,000 variants in the New Testament, no aspect of Christian dogma is affected.

⁵ B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd edition. Oxford: University Press, 1968.

⁶ Originally published in W. Schrage (ed), *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments* (Festschrift H. Greeven), Berlin: de Gruyter, 125-143

⁷ Adapted from “Phrynichus’ Influence on the Textual Tradition of the New Testament” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 63 (1972), 133-138 and from “Moeris and the Textual Tradition of the New Testament” in J. K. Elliott (ed) *Studies in the New Testament Text and Language* (Festschrift G. D. Kilpatrick), Leiden: Brill, 1976.

those who wrote the GNT made stylistic changes to the Koine text of the New Testament in order to make it conform to the older, “Attic” standards (65). In Elliott’s opinion, scribes were more likely to change from Koine to Attic Greek than the reverse (65). By doing so, one may estimate an earlier date than the text actually deserves. Thus, when faced with an Attic and a non-Attic reading, Elliott will accept the latter, other things being equal. Two grammarians, Phrynichus and Moeris, evoke this view and thus are presented as the primal cause behind this view.

In his *Ecloga*, Phrynichus states that un-Attic words and expressions should be avoided (66). As examples of this tendency, Elliott suggests that in Mark 10:25, the classical word βελόνη is to be preferred over the textual reading ῥαφίς despite the fact that only *f*¹³ stands as textual support.⁸

While such a transition is possible, there is little, if any, evidence that these grammarians had any influence on the writers of the New Testament. Nevertheless, Elliott contends, Atticisms exist in the New Testament and must be evicted. In conclusion, Elliott suggests that three elements of Atticism are of interest to the New Testament textual critic: (a) Atticism was a powerful force producing changes in the text (b) changes occurred spasmodically throughout the New Testament and (c) Atticizing readings can be found in all strata of manuscripts thus eliminating editorial bias toward one manuscript over another (71).

In the fourth chapter, “Nouns with Diminutive Endings in the New Testament”,⁹ Elliott continues his emphasis on stylistic changes brought about through the influence of grammarians. Elliott contends that through the influence of Phrynichus and Moeris diminutive endings were eliminated by scribes just as Koine phrases were changed (80).

In the fifth chapter, “Textual Variation involving the augment in the Greek New Testament”,¹⁰ Elliott pronounces “a valuable rule of thumb. . . is that a variant which is in accord with the author’s style or usage is likely to be original”(87). After challenging G. D. Fee at this point (88), Elliott announces that his method must be tested in practice, not only theory. Thus, he attempts to examine the augmented forms of δυνάμει and μέλλω. Elliott advances Moeris as one who encouraged writers to augment them with η- suffix. By use of a long list demonstrating his point, he attempts to reinforce his view. However, even if Moeris did encourage writers to augment, is that in itself evidence that such an influence is present in the New Testament?

In the sixth chapter, “Temporal Augment in Verbs with Initial Diphthong in the Greek New Testament”,¹¹ Elliott reinforces the concept of the integral nature of orthography in textual criticism. In keeping with the previous two chapters, Elliott advances specific

⁸ 66, 67. There is a parallel reading in Luke 18:25 and is supported by \aleph , B, D, L, *f*¹, *f*¹³, 579, and 1241.

⁹ Taken from: *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970), 391-398.

¹⁰ Taken from: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1978), 247-252.

¹¹ Taken from: *Novum Testamentum* 22 (1980), 1-11.

verb augments as evidence for earlier readings (95-105). However, it is as a “clanging gong”, protesting loudly when such a protest is not essential.

In the brief seventh chapter, “The Two Forms of the Third Declension Comparative Adjectives in the New Testament”,¹² Elliott argues for an Attic version of third declension nouns in the New Testament (107).

In the eighth chapter, Elliott introduces a discussion regarding the differences in the spelling of the title of the city Jerusalem. In “Jerusalem in Acts and the Gospels”,¹³ While such a distinction may seem slight, the orthological differences can give a clue as to the author (or copyist) and his heritage. For example, the Hebrew spelling ^עΙερουσαλημ may indicate a Jewish heritage of authorship (e.g. Lk 6:17). Likewise, the Greek name ^εΙερουσαλυμα may indicate a Hellenistic author (or copyist) and thereby a later rendering (Mt 23:37).

The ninth chapter, “The Use of ἕτερος in the New Testament”,¹⁴ is another plank to demonstrate the shift from Atticisms. This time, however, while the orthological changes are absent, a shift in meanings has occurred. Elliott contends in classical Greek ἕτερος is used of division into two parts (p. 121). But in the New Testament, it consistently is used synonymously with ἄλλος (e.g., Mt. 6:24; Lk 8:6; John 19:37). This, however, seems to demand that language remain static, not dynamic. Such is a crucial flaw in thoroughgoing eclecticism.

In the tenth chapter “Κυφῶς· Σίμων Πέτρος; ὁ Πέτρος : An Examination of the New Testament Usage”,¹⁵ Elliott seeks to demonstrate the New Testament occurrences of the name change and why this usage varies in different parts of the New Testament. Again, he emphasizes one as Attic and the other as Koine (125).

In chapter eleven “Μαθητής with a Possessive in the New Testament”,¹⁶ Elliott is heavily reliant on the work of C. H. Turner and his work *Notes on Markan Usage*. Throughout this chapter, Elliott is critical of UBS³ and NA²⁶ as overly reliant upon the “chief” manuscripts (140).

In chapter twelve, “The Relevance of Textual Criticism to the Synoptic Problem”,¹⁷ Elliott addresses the issue as it concerns Synoptic Studies, specifically scholarly works such as Aland’s *Synopsis* and Greeven’s revision of Huck’s *Synopsis*. Although he gives no indication as to his personal view, he invokes the Markan priority as an important

¹² Taken from: *Novum Testamentum* 19 (1977), 234-239.

¹³ Taken from: *New Testament Studies* 23 (1977), 462-469.

¹⁴ Taken from: *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1969), 140-141.

¹⁵ Taken from: *Novum Testamentum* 14 (1972), 241-256.

¹⁶ Taken from: *Theologishce Zeitschrift* 35 (1979), 300-304.

¹⁷ Taken from: David L. Dungan (eds), *The Interrelations of the Gospels* (Leuven University Press, 1990), 348-359.

section of this discussion. Elliott suggests that whatever decision one makes regarding the earliest gospel must be based on internal evidence and not manuscript age (154).

The final chapter, “An Eclectic Textual Commentary on the Greek Text of Mark’s Gospel”,¹⁸ presents the principles of Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in practice. Demonstrating a possible over-reliance on G. D. Kilpatrick, Elliott reminds readers that the UBS³ and NA²⁶ texts should not be regarded as *the* text. In summary fashion, Elliott remarks that all those who ascribe to his view of eclecticism have fundamental problems with the UBS texts. To demonstrate his point, Elliott marches out several of the same texts he has offered in defense of his position in other chapters (Mk 1:4, 27, 41; 5:22; 6:3, 22, 41; 9:38; 10:2; 11:24). Finally, Elliott chides the UBS editors for their failure to produce a more eclectic text (160, 169) and for their use of brackets (and reading ratings) to demonstrate their level of confidence in the readings.

Critical Evaluation of *Essays and Studies*

The most significant feature of this work is its introductory nature for novices to thoroughgoing eclecticism. Elliott’s writing style is clear, lucid, and quite readable. It assumes only a conversance with the Greek New Testament and basic textual critical skills as it begins. Its line of argument is clear and its evidences are well considered.

The method of textual criticism this work attempts to offer, however, is not without difficulty. Thoroughgoing eclecticism (or simply eclecticism per Elliott) is a foregone conclusion for and, as such the book must be understood in this way. He leaves little room for the “cult of the best manuscript” and scoffs at the notion of discerning one manuscript as more worthy of consideration (147, 152).

One of the fundamental issues of difficulty with this method is its inherent subjective nature, despite the protests of D.C. Parker.¹⁹ Textual criticism, in Elliott’s method, stands as a subjective creature, and, at times, more art than science. This method opens the way for even more subjectivism based on one’s understanding of the language and the author under consideration.

A subsequent issue in this compilation is the overlap of information between chapters. Since each paper was written to stand alone, several of them cover identical information which makes for redundancy in reading (cf. 18, 46). However, such repetition also serves as an asset since Elliott intends to thoroughly explain and defend his position.

As an orchestra needs dissonant notes to create a complete harmony, so it is that the voice of Elliott is needed. His work stands as a reminder that while textual critics are indebted to Westcott and Hort for their work in textual criticism, they are not to be regarded as final authorities, nor are A and B. Thus, while his work is decidedly slanted, it is well deserving of a thorough reading by every student of textual criticism.

¹⁸ Taken from: E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee (eds), *New Testament Textual Criticism its Significance for Exegesis*, (Festschrift B. M. Metzger), Oxford: University Press, 1981, 47-60.

¹⁹ David C. Parker, "Review of *Essays and Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism*," *Novum Testamentum* 36 (Ap 1994).