

**Juan Hernández, Jr. *Scribal Habits and Theological Influences in the Apocalypse: The Singular Readings of Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Ephraemi*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2nd series, vol. 218. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006. Pp. xvii + 241. ISBN: 3161491122. €54.00, \$110.00 USD, paper.**

1. In this slightly revised doctoral dissertation, which he prepared under the auspices of Carl R. Holladay at Emory University, Juan Hernández Jr. (now Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies at Bethel University) focuses on the singular readings in the text of the Apocalypse in three of the most significant codices for New Testament textual criticism. Mainly building his own work on the observations by and hypotheses of Ernest C. Colwell and James R. Royse<sup>1</sup> on singular readings, Hernández Jr. (hereafter H.) specializes on the text of Apocalypse, as it is preserved by the three major parchment codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and (the palimpsest) Ephraemi (= Codex Ephraemi Syri rescriptus). H.'s major concern is to assess the singular readings he could previously identify as such in respect of their potential theological tendencies: are there any indications that scribes deliberately harmonized passages, added or omitted words and/or phrases in order to achieve and/or highlight a special theological message? How do such tendencies then interact with the reception and transmission of the text of the Apocalypse in early Christianity? What implications does all of this have for future studies in the field of textual criticism?

2. Consequently, the book is structured according to its overall objectives as delineated above and to three main textual witnesses dealt with. H. opens with a brief general introduction under the heading "Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Text of the Apocalypse" (1-9), in which he writes about the Greek text of the Apocalypse, its 'singular readings', and the structure, plan, and thesis of his dissertation. With this at hand the readers are well prepared to plunge directly into the second chapter, the depiction of the "History of Research of the Greek Text of the Apocalypse" (10-48). It seems to be a little bit awkward that the definition of a 'singular reading', which is crucial for the assessment of certain scribal activities and the conclusions drawn from it, is placed in a footnote (7 n. 31),<sup>2</sup> whereas its discussion takes place in the next chapter. Nevertheless, H. formulates his objective in a clear and unambiguous way, so that the readers concisely get to know what he will be up to in the following chapters.

3. H.'s history of research is a well-narrated presentation of the most significant milestones on the road of investigations into the Greek text of the Apocalypse. He hits the quintessential aspects and tendencies (for example, the quest for the 'Urtext', the discussion about the name 'Apocalypse', the problem of the *textus receptus*, the reconstruction of the Greek text, and the language of the Apocalypse) and presents the theses of the most influential scholars (Erasmus, Bentley, Bengel, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Westcott and Hort, Weiss and Bousset, von Soden, Schmid). Then he interacts with more recent developments in the evaluation of scribal habits and practices, above all with Eldon Jay Epp's *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts*, Bart D. Ehrman's *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, and finally with

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<sup>1</sup> His massive Th.D. dissertation *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Graduate Theological Union; UMI 1981) is now available in an even more monumental version in the series *New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents* as volume 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> "A singular reading is a reading found only in one MS and assumed to have been introduced into the textual history by a scribe. A full discussion of how I identify and use the singular readings of the Apocalypse is found in chapter two."

the works of Ernest C. Colwell and James R. Royse; on both he builds his own ‘current project’ (46-48).<sup>3</sup>

4. It is only natural that the next three chapters are structured almost equally to each other, as they are dedicated to the three codices Sinaiticus (49-95), Alexandrinus (96-131), and Ephraemi (132-155). H. introduces the individual codex and research into it, denominates shortcomings and inconsistencies of investigations carried out so far, copes with scribes and correctors, classifies and discusses ‘insignificant singulars’ and ‘nonsense readings’, and deals with ‘significant singulars’. In principle, he categorizes his ‘singulars’ as additions, omissions, transpositions (above all, due to *homoeoteleuton* and *homoeoarchton*), harmonisations, and grammatical changes. At the end of each of these three chapters he pinpoints the crucial ‘singular readings’ that he considers as those that show a certain theological impact that is, for instance, linked with Christology (above all, for Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus). In chapter six (156-191) H. contextualizes the singular readings of each individual codex by discussing them against the background of “the record of *stated* concerns over the Apocalypse in the early church” (156). With the help of this he hopes to detect every potential relationship between what was said about the text of the Apocalypse by early Christian writers and “our scribes’ tendency to edit the text of the Apocalypse” (157).

5. In chapter seven (192-198) H. summarizes his findings and conclusions. He points out that the traditional view that the scribes “tended to add rather than omit from their texts” has been called into question and that there “is the tendency *to omit* rather than add to their texts” instead (193). According to H. this might have consequences for a more critical attitude towards the *lectio brevior potior* criterion applied in textual criticism. Although all three codices show a general tendency of harmonisation, in Ephraemi harmonisations only appear in the immediate context, while in Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus harmonisations are also applied to more remote contexts. Besides, H. identifies anti-Arian scribal tendencies in Sinaiticus; but these need further reflection and discussion in studies to come in order to guarantee that they will not be a result of (modern) interpretation, as their evaluation depends on the standpoint and interpretation of its interpreters.

6. By providing lists of the singular readings of the three codices under discussion, H. does his readers a fine service (appendices 1 to 3; 199-218). Then follow a bibliography (219-227) and indices (passages, modern authors, and subjects; 229-241). In addition the book comes with acknowledgements (vii-viii) and a short list of abbreviations (xvii).

7. In sum, H. offers an innovative and thought provoking study of the ‘singular readings’ of three of the most significant codices for the study of the New Testament and the Greek text of the Apocalypse. He does not leave any stone unturned to find answers to the questions raised at the end of the first passage of this review.<sup>4</sup> Experts in the field of New Testament textual criticism in general and scholars who specialise on the Greek text of the Apocalypse in particular will certainly challenge H.’s classification of scribal habits in regard to singular readings, i.e., whether some of the harmonisations he identifies are actually harmonisations at all or could be qualified in an alternative way here and there, or whether the singular readings really have exactly the theological concern H. wants to identify in them (see also, as delineated above, his

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<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, H. leaves no doubt that his study (48) “resembles Ehrman’s *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, although the period in question, the issues and texts we investigate, as well as the method and argument employed, differ significantly.”

<sup>4</sup> H. even integrates support of the versions for relevant singular readings in order to investigate their potential theological concerns (see 209, 215, and 218).

identification of anti-Arian tendencies in Sinaiticus). In addition, it is not evident from the study how H. fancies that the copying process of manuscripts took place and how he imagines the conditions for that process in the fourth and fifth centuries. These are two areas that may equally offer a plausible explanation of scribal errors or inconsistencies in some individual instances. Possibly, more palaeographical details could also have helped to get closer to the scribe as an individual with a certain educational and social background. This would have been only natural, because the scribes' theological ideas are addressed anyway in H.'s study. Be that as it may, the future will show what impact H.'s fresh study will eventually have on the discipline of textual criticism. But without doubt, H. has shown that traditional criteria need to be challenged continuously so that they are not taken for granted and applied automatically. He is also to be thanked for having stressed that scribes are not copying machines but human beings with certain backgrounds, ideas, beliefs, and a desire to do things right.<sup>5</sup> There is no doubt that this study supplies information with which further work on the Greek text of the Apocalypse will have to take account and that it provides essential food for thought for New Testament textual critics.

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<sup>5</sup> When scribes made alterations to their texts, they did not do so because they were wicked and wanted to corrupt the texts but because they (and/or the community they belonged to) regarded such alterations as acceptable and were convinced that they were right in what they were doing.