

Jan Krans. *Beyond What is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament*. New Testament Tools and Studies 35. Leiden: Brill, 2006. Pp. x + 384. ISBN: 90-04-15286-5. €133.00; \$173.00 USD, cloth.

1. This volume represents a slightly revised version of a Ph.D. thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, with the research conducted under the supervision of Prof. Martin de Boer. Primarily the book is interested in the study of textual conjectures. These are defined as ‘readings not attested in the manuscript transmission, which are proposed and argued for by a critic with the intention of restoring a lost text’ (p. 1). For reasons of size the study is delimited to studying the conjectures proposed by two of the earliest text critics of the NT in the modern era, Desiderius Erasmus and Theodorus Beza.

2. After the General Introduction, the book divides into two parts. The first investigates the textual work of Erasmus and comprises seven chapters; the second part looks at Beza and occupies five chapters. The initial chapter sets the groundwork for discussing the method Erasmus adopted in his approach to conjectural emendations. Of particular help is his explanation of the manner in which his 1516 edition of the Greek NT, with its controversial Latin translation of this base text, occasioned such strident and polemical reaction. This resulted in Erasmus being forced to discuss many of his textual decisions, and these are often found in his accompanying *Annotationes*. Krans argues that Erasmus was in many ways a conservative respecter of the manuscript tradition, with an unwillingness to adopt readings not found in the manuscript tradition. While Erasmus discusses many possible conjectures, he rarely adopts these into the actual printed text of the Greek NT. The endeavour undertaken by Erasmus is in many ways an enterprise that ‘is centred around the correction or “emendation” of the Vulgate’ (p. 13). Thus the annotations he provides discuss the choices of Latin translations of the Greek text and the possible Greek terms that may stand behind the Latin. Hence Krans observes that the collation of the textual data does ‘not necessarily imply the vindication of the Greek text over the Latin, for all cases are special’ (p. 24). The ‘decision chart’ (p. 25) depicting the process by which Erasmus came to decide on a particular reading is particularly helpful.

3. After this scene-setting chapter, Krans investigates the general text-critical method and approach adopted by Erasmus. It is noted that explicit principles of textual criticism were not drawn up until the eighteenth century, so it is necessary to deduce such principles from the actual textual decisions made by Erasmus. Some of the ‘unwritten’ rules that can be derived are due to unintentional changes. In fact Krans cites Erasmus’ own comment from the preface of the *Annotationes*, ‘... if I found something damaged by carelessness or ignorance of scribes or by the injuries of time, I restored the true reading, not haphazardly but after pursuing every available scent’ (p. 31). Although not labelled using modern terminology Erasmus discusses cases due to itacism, confusion of similar letters, homoioteleuton, abbreviations such as *nomina sacra*, transpositions in lists, and even scribal blunders. In addition, intentional scribal changes are also noted by Erasmus, including the understanding of ‘orthodox corruptions’ made for dogmatic purposes (pp. 31-39). Krans describes the method as ‘common sense’ but unpacks this further. He states, ‘He [Erasmus] seems to have had an inkling of the local-genealogical principle in textual criticism, according to which the critic has to “choose the reading which best explains the origin of the others”’ (pp. 51-52).

4. Chapter three discusses a well-known phenomenon in the Erasmian text, that of ‘re-translation’ or ‘backwards-translation’ into Greek. Two longer instances of this are considered: Rev 22:16-21 and Acts 9:5. The first instance is where Erasmus did not possess an extant Greek text of this passage; in the second the Vulgate preserved a longer reading. Here Erasmus

introduced Greek words which it appears he ‘felt were missing through scribal oversight’ (p. 58). Krans prefers not to describe such reconstruction based upon the Vulgate as ‘conjectural emendation’ since it is not the act of proposing a reading based on no textual evidence, but it arises from the lack of available Greek manuscripts and consequentially bases the reading on the witness of versional texts. Related to this issue, in chapter four Krans looks at the wider importance of the Vulgate for producing retroverted readings. The dependence upon versional manuscripts problematizes the whole notion of ‘conjectural emendation’. Thus Krans concludes, ‘a sliding scale of “conjecturality” can be suggested, in which a reading’s “conjecturality” is defined as inversely proportional to the “weight” of its attestation’ (p. 90). Chapter five provides much of the solid evidence on which Krans’ thesis is built. It is here that numerous conjectures proposed by Erasmus are discussed in detail. Again it is necessary to differentiate between different classes of conjecture. In the concluding chapter dealing with Erasmus, Krans notes that a number of later text-critical principles can be found in embryonic and often unarticulated form in the work of Erasmus. Moreover, specifically in relation to conjectural emendation it is argued that ‘Erasmus showed great skill both in transcriptional and intrinsic reasoning, though the conjectures were ingeniously and sometimes too ingeniously sought within the range of transcriptionally imaginable scribal change’ (pp. 190-191).

5. The next section is based on an analysis of Beza’s five major editions of the NT as a means of assessing his approach to conjectural emendation. It is noted that most of Beza’s suggested conjectural emendations have fallen beside the wayside, with extremely few preserved in the apparatus of Nestle editions of the NT. In chapter nine, Krans looks at the use of Greek manuscripts by Beza in his editions of the NT. Particularly interesting is the discussion of the (in)famous eponymous Codex Bezae. It is noted that Stephanus mentioned the manuscript under the siglum β´ and that Beza used the collations of Stephanus. Thus ‘[t]his means by a quirk of history, Beza knew numerous readings of D (05) before actually acquiring the manuscript’ (p. 227). However, Krans notes that despite the manuscript being named after Beza, he made relatively little use of its highly divergent text. He states, ‘The Greek text actually changed little, while the most notable role of Cantabrigiensis was to provide Beza with additional readings to draw upon for his annotations, especially as an additional means to explain the origin of numerous Vulgate readings’ (p. 236). While Krans notes the poor quality of Beza’s textual criticism in the use of sources, he also observes that this did not preclude him from making conjectural emendations. The final two chapters of the volume are devoted to this topic. It is noted that Beza repeatedly stated his reluctance against making conjectures. This is a marked difference to the approach of Erasmus. Thus Krans describes the variance in method in the following terms: ‘Whereas for Erasmus, the Greek text of the New Testament is first of all a source, which he treats in essentially the same way as any other classical text, for Beza, it is first of all (holy) Scripture, which has to be treated with utmost reverence’ (p. 332).

6. This study by Krans is first and foremost an historical investigation of the work of two early modern editors of the NT text and their competing understandings of the role of conjectural emendation. Krans convincingly argues that the difference in approach stems from the different underlying significance that Erasmus and Beza attach to the text with which they are working. This study, however, is not an arcane piece of historical research. It has ongoing implications for the way in which conjectural emendations should be understood. Perhaps the most important contribution made by Krans is to problematise the definition of ‘conjectural emendation’ by illustrating the ‘sliding-scale’ of ‘conjecturality’. Despite the oft repeated maxim that the original text of the NT is preserved somewhere in the extant manuscripts, this is more an aspiration than a certainty. Because of this textual critics need to more fully consider the role and methodology of proposing conjectural emendations. This study will ensure that such endeavours can be

considered with the benefit of a rich history of practice exemplified in the works of Erasmus and Beza. This fine study has much to commend it and is required reading for all advanced students and scholars of textual criticism.

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