

D.C. Parker, *Textual Scholarship and the Making of the New Testament. The Lyell Lectures, Oxford, Trinity Term 2011*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
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- [1] This is not a conventional introduction to New Testament Textual Scholarship. In spite of the wealth of information it contains and the profound learning on which it rests, this book may justly be called a manifesto. David C. Parker proposes nothing less than a paradigm shift in the way we read the Scriptures – and every other book.
- [2] D.C. Parker FBA, FSA is Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology and Director of the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing, University of Birmingham (UK). The book under review originated as the Lyell Lectures in Bibliography¹, delivered at Oxford University in the Trinity Term of 2011. The lectures were given for an audience of specialists in the field of Bibliography, but not in the field of (Biblical) Textual Scholarship. The book consists of an introduction, five lectures, conclusions, and endnotes. There are no illustrations (except on the dust jacket).
- [3] After a short introduction (1-4), the first lecture (5-31) describes “The General Procedures.” It is an ambitious lecture both in scope and in terms of claims made, theses submitted, and concepts discussed. Parker thinks that scholars (and others) often use printed editions naïvely, believing their critical, editorial texts to be (or using them as if they were) original, authorial texts. The manuscript tradition, he argues, is not something to be studied in order to establish the text of a work, and to be left behind once we think we have the text. Failure to attend to the manuscripts, to their peculiarities, to the conditions of their production, etc., is a failure to attend to the very work we purport to be studying. “Textual scholarship defines the ways in which we understand a work [...]” (12). It follows that textual scholarship is a key factor in the ongoing process of shaping the Bible.
- [4] Apart from an uncritical use of modern reconstructions, the failure to appreciate the work of the scribes and the importance of the manuscripts also results, according to Parker, in four fundamental problems². These are (i) the danger of too easily applying to NT books a modern concept of authorship, (ii) the inappropriate separation of oral and written forms of the tradition, and neglect of their interdependence, (iii) the belief in the importance of one precise wording, or even spelling, of the text, and (iv) the anachronistic use of the concept of a (Greek) NT canon: The works making up the NT used to be copied separately or in separate collections, not in one volume, before the advent of printed books. “[...] ‘the New Testament’ is a concept made possible by editorial theory and practice and not something which self-evidently exists” (143).

¹ From <<http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/csb/lyell>>: “The Lyell readership in bibliography at Oxford University is endowed by a bequest from James Patrick Ronaldson Lyell (1871–1948), a solicitor, book collector and bibliographer. Each year since 1952, a distinguished scholar has been elected to deliver the lectures, usually six in number, on any topic of bibliography, broadly conceived.”

² In this context (18f), Parker suspects that “a growing conservatism” (18) may be observed in New Testament scholarship, which he apparently sees at work in the fact that Form Criticism has gone out of vogue, whereas more recent methods such as Redaction Criticism and Reader Response Theory, according to him, depend on the assumption of a stable text and tend to ignore text critical issues.

- [5] Parker defines three key terms: *Works* (such as one Gospel or one Letter, etc.), *Texts* (the forms of works contained in manuscripts), and *Documents* (manuscripts or other devices for storing texts³). But what exactly is a work? A work is not identical with any one document, text, or edition. The reconstructed Initial Text is not the authorial text. Parker proposes “the following dictum, That every written work is a process and not an object” (20f). The process of the manuscript tradition is the work. This would seem to imply that all text forms of a work found in the manuscript tradition are part of the work. “If early Christians were prepared to change the text in order to bring out what they believed to be its true meaning, what are we doing if we try to exchange that pluriformity for a single critical text? Should we not be embracing the multiformity of the text?” (25).
- [6] The second lecture (32-64) is devoted to the question, “What is a New Testament Manuscript?” The answer is that, in the last analysis, there is no such thing (63), and that the concept “New Testament” is unhelpful in Greek manuscript studies. Parker’s main argument is that manuscripts tend to contain material of diverse kinds. Some parts of this material began to be considered as canonical at some stage of the transmission process, whereas others did not.
- [7] This lecture is highly learned, instructive, and original, perhaps my favourite in the whole book. It will be particularly stimulating for anyone interested in the manuscript tradition as an object of study in its own right, and not as a mere repository of variants. Parker does a brilliant job of showing up the contradictions and fallacies inherent in the traditional system of manuscript classification enshrined in the Gregory/Aland-*Liste*. His brief but informative discussion of material such as amulets, ostraca, or inscriptions is very welcome and draws attention to a group of sources which are frequently neglected in textual scholarship. The tendency, found in some parts of the guild, to be excited about ‘early’ manuscripts and to ascribe particular importance to their texts is characteristically absent from Parker’s discussion. Papyri do not feature very prominently here (though Parker discusses, among others, the Bodmer miscellaneous codex, highlighting, of course, the fact that it contains a collection of rather diverse writings). Even less prominent are majuscules. Instead, one genre of minuscules - commentary manuscripts, and especially manuscripts of catenae - is given pride of place, with a discussion filling a full 12 pages. This includes a “brief” and useful “history of the commentary” (41). Many examples here and elsewhere are taken from manuscripts containing the Gospel of John. It will come as no surprise that Parker stresses the diversity of the material contained in catenae. He also discusses lectionaries and other liturgical books, and paratextual material such as the Euthalian apparatus.
- [8] At one point, Parker describes the history of biblical literature and its genres as a history of closely interwoven citations of, comments on, and expansions of earlier material: A passage from the LXX may be quoted and expounded in a NT writing, this may again be quoted and commented on in a patristic writing, and excerpts from many commentaries may be brought together in a catena, which is in turn copied many times. To which of these works does the cited text belong? Probably to all of them; but

³ In a recent conversation (Sept. 26, 2013), Parker kindly explained that he chose the term “document” so as to include printed books and computer files. Accordingly, the definition of “texts” should also be understood in this sense, i.e., forms of works found in printed books or in digital publications should be included.

at the same time, the extended process of quoting citations has given rise to a new kind of work. “[...] such repetition calls into question the uniqueness of the individual works, which may only differ in degree from the uniqueness of individual copies of a work” (63).

- [9] The third lecture, “Understanding How Manuscripts are Related” (65-100), explores ways of describing the relationships between manuscripts and of grouping them. The attribution of manuscripts to known scribes and artwork in manuscripts may be used as guides to groups of closely related manuscripts. Interesting though this may be, the results seem to be meager at present. Parker goes on to explain more conventional methods. A brief historical overview leads him from Bengel to Westcott and Hort. Parker rightly, in my view, criticizes their concept of text types, which is still influential in parts of the scholarly community. The problem with Westcott’s and Hort’s work (as well as with Lachmannian stemmatology), Parker explains, is that they could neither cope with the problem of contamination nor with the wealth of data which have to be analyzed. Passing over the Claremont Profile Method and mentioning *Text und Textwert* very briefly⁴, Parker comes, with a great leap, to the Coherence Based Genealogical Method (CBGM), which he calls “the Münster Method.” He explains how this method can be used to group manuscripts, how it calls into question the traditional concept of text types, how it helps to develop hypotheses concerning the ancestry of manuscripts, and how it can overcome the problem of contamination. Parker seems to be particularly interested in finding the position of every single manuscript in relation to its relatives and to the process of textual transmission as a whole. He thinks that “the idea of the text as an overall flow” is a metaphor for the process of textual transmission (100). Much less accentuated is the fact that (pre-) genealogical coherence is used by the CBGM as a means of forming hypotheses concerning the origin of the tradition, and of testing and refining them. According to Parker, relationships between manuscripts may be studied for diverse purposes, and the reconstruction of the earliest text forms is only one of them. It is equally possible to study the development which led to the Majority Text, or, eschewing the notions of originality and finality, to compare and describe the diverse forms which the text has had in the history of its transmission. This last option seems to be the one favoured by Parker himself (67).
- [10] The fourth lecture deals with the task of “Editing the Greek New Testament” (101-124). A critical edition should not “foster the myth of an authoritative and definitive single version of the work” (124). “It only does so for the lazy person who decides to ignore the critical apparatus” (ibid.) Rather, editions should interpret the facts and describe the history of the different text forms in which a work has existed. The major editions of the Greek New Testament, however, are all outdated. The hand editions now in use, though excellent in many ways, are not fully critical editions. The *Editio Critica Maior* of the Greek NT, currently being prepared for publication jointly by the

⁴ The index of the book claims that *Text und Textwert* is mentioned in this lecture on pp. 70-1. There is, in fact, a reference there to a “comparison of textual data in test passages in the Gospels,” but *Text und Textwert* is not mentioned explicitly. However, a bibliographical reference is found in endnote 9, found on p. 160. This does not contain any explanation or discussion of *Text und Textwert*. The description on pp. 113-4 (lecture 4) is also very brief, and the references on pp. 47-8 (lecture 2, with end notes 34 and 36) refer to *Text und Textwert*, but do not explain much.

Münster INTF and the IGNTP, is the only critical edition worthy of this name at present. Parker describes the steps made on the way to producing the *ECM*, from the list of Greek NT manuscripts and the choice of manuscripts used to the transcription and collation of manuscripts, the construction of the apparatus, and the inclusion of versional and patristic material. In addition to its publication in printed volumes, there is also a digital side to the *ECM*, so that new information can always be added. It is therefore the first edition which need never be finished.

- [11] The fifth lecture, “The New Testament of the Future” (125-142), describes Parker’s vision of a “textual Utopia” (22). Whatever the NT of the future may be like, it will, in Parker’s view, be as different from our modern printed editions as these are different from manuscripts. In fact, it will be more like manuscripts than printed books, since mass digitization will allow us to read the manuscripts themselves. Transcriptions of the manuscripts will also be available online, together with metadata such as manuscript descriptions, databases of ancient books, indices, etc. This will be further complemented by digital workspaces offering the opportunity to transcribe and collate manuscripts online. Projects such as “New Testament Transcripts”⁵, the digital edition of Codex Sinaiticus⁶, or the Birmingham and Münster Virtual Manuscript Rooms⁷ already go a long way towards putting this Utopia on the map. In the future as envisioned by Parker, we will not use manuscripts in order to make editions, but editions in order to navigate manuscripts. We will study works in their manuscript traditions. Future editions (Parker thinks) will give us the variants, but will not need to have reconstructed editorial texts.
- [12] I will mention only two of the points made in the “Conclusions” (143-147): (i) Textual scholarship increasingly uses the multiple text forms extant in manuscripts to elucidate the history of the interpretation and use of Scripture. (ii) Digital tools will enable us to create personalized texts, which raises the “interesting question”: What does this mean for “the concept of authorized versions to be read in church”? (146).
- [13] Looking back, we may succinctly describe Parker’s approach as follows: (i) The traditional distinction between ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ criticism is obsolete. (ii) Every replica may hold the potential to be regarded as a new original. (iii) The identification of the works making up the New Testament with the whole ‘wave’ which is the process of their textual transmission is tantamount to identifying Scripture and Tradition⁸. – It should be obvious that a work that has such far-ranging implications for foundational concepts such as Text, Canon, and Scripture deserves to be read and discussed beyond the narrow confines of the discipline of Textual Scholarship. For the lively debates this book will hopefully help to generate, the following questions may be of interest.
- [14] “If early Christians were prepared to change the text in order to bring out what they believed to be its true meaning [...]” (25) – who exactly was prepared to make these changes, where, when, in what kind of situation, and for what purpose? I wonder whether modern claims concerning supposed attitudes of early Christians to textual variation may in fact be based (at least in part) on our knowledge of thousands of

⁵ <http://nttranscripts.uni-muenster.de/AnaServer?NTtranscripts+0+start.anv>.

⁶ <http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/>.

⁷ <http://www.vmr.bham.ac.uk/>; <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/>.

⁸ Cf. D.C. Parker, “Scripture is Tradition,” in: id., *Manuscripts, Texts, Theology. Collected Papers 1977-2007 (ANTF 40)*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2009, 265-272.

manuscripts - a knowledge which readers in antiquity could not possibly have had – rather than on actual statements by ancient authors (and readers). We may consider, e.g., what Augustine has to say in his *De Doctrina Christiana* about the importance of textual emendation, about correctly rendering the Greek text in Latin and correcting translations, where necessary, and about comparing Latin translations with Greek manuscripts obtained from churches known to possess the required learning and to exercise the required carefulness.⁹ There seems to have been a variety of attitudes to the multiformity of the text in ancient Christianity.

[15] “Should we not be embracing the multiformity of the text?” (ibid.) Parker affirms that it is possible to reconstruct the Initial Text. But once this has been done, in which way (if any) should our engagement with “the multiformity of the text” be informed by our knowledge that most text forms can be explained, with varying degrees of certainty, as something which grew (via one or more intermediary steps) out of the earliest form attainable? What (if anything) does it mean for attempts to understand works that their reconstructed Initial Texts are demonstrably closer than other known text forms to the form the tradition had at the time of its inception?

[17] The works making up the NT can neither be identified with any one document nor with the reconstructed Initial Text of the manuscript tradition: this, I think, is the consensus of (nearly) all who are now seriously engaged in NT Textual Scholarship. What, then, are these works? We have to thank Parker both for confronting us with the question and for giving us his answer with great coherence and lucidity. Alternative answers might lay greater stress on the importance of the act of reading for the conceptualization of ‘texts’ and ‘works.’ ‘Works’ as well as ‘texts,’ I venture to suggest, are neither objects nor processes, but concepts formed in the minds of readers and applied to given objects. ‘Canon’ and ‘Scripture’ may similarly be understood as concepts emerging out of communal practices of reading communities, and applied by them to works. Hence, in Textual Scholarship, the indispensable and unending engagement with the multiformity of the text, and the equally indispensable and unending attempt to transcend it.

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⁹ Cf. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ii, xiv, 21 – ii, xv, 22; iii, i, 1. A brief passage may be cited: “Libros autem Novi Testamenti, si quid in latinis varietatibus titubat, graecis cedere oportere non dubium est, et maxime qui apud Ecclesias doctiores et diligentiores repperiuntur” (ii, xv, 22).