

Elijah Hixson, *Scribal Habits in Sixth-Century Greek Purple Codices*, New Testament Tools Studies and Documents 61, Leiden: Brill, 2019. Pp. xvi + 578, figures, tables, and three color plates. ISBN 978-90-04-399990-7. Hardcover, €159.00/\$192.00.

[1] Although the sixth century might be not a period of time that stirs a sensation among textual critics, Elijah Hixson will certainly succeed in attracting the attention of scholars and interested readers to the three Greek purple codices he focuses on in his revised PhD thesis, which was completed at the University of Edinburgh under the auspices of his *Doktorvater* Paul Foster and the late Larry W. Hurtado, his second supervisor. Codex Purpureus Petropolitanus (N 022), Codex Sinopensis (O 023), and Codex Rossanensis (Σ 042) are luxury manuscripts from the sixth century, and, though they are of different extant, they all have the Gospel of Matthew, and this is the feature Hixson makes use of for his investigation into these codices and the parent exemplar they stem from. All in all, Hixson utilizes his own *singular reading method* to assess the changes each scribe might have made, and he offers a tentative reconstruction of the lost *Vorlage*. One of the outcomes of his analyses is “that the *singular reading method* does not accurately reveal the habits of these three scribes,” as the text on the back cover tells.

[2] The volume includes a considerable number of figures and, above all, tables (xi–xiv), and it opens with three color plates, one of each of the codices dealt with (see plates 1–3). Unfortunately, the plates do not contain any measures, that is, a ruler or tapeline, next to it, because images can be betraying in respect to the actual size such codices have. Therefore, the codices here appear as if they are of similar size, though their page dimensions differ from each other in reality (see the description of the codices, 6–7, 14, and 18). Be that as it may, it is very convenient that Hixson offers at least some visual representation of the fine luxury outcomes of the book production in the sixth century so that readers are given the chance of perceiving and imagining the overwhelming impression such purple codices might have had on their beholders. Moreover, for those interested in more details and images of the manuscripts, there are quite a number of additional sources available on the Internet:

- Codex Purpureus Petropolitanus (N 022) is housed in Moscow (138 folios), while there are folios on Patmos (33), in the Vatican Library in Rome (6), in the British Library in London (4), and in Vienna (2), and single folios are in Athens, Thessaloniki, Lerma, and New York. Images of several of its folios are scattered throughout the Internet, for example, on the pages of the Vatican Library (https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.gr.2305).
- Codex Sinopensis (O 023; *BnF Supplément grec* 1286) is described in detail and presented with images to click through and to be enlarged on the website of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (<https://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc24356w>).
- Codex Rossanensis (Σ 042) is kept in the Diocesan Museum of Rossano whose website offers quality images (<http://www.calabria.org.uk/calabria/arte-cultura/Codex-PurpureusRossanensis/codex2.htm>).

A list of abbreviations (xv–xvi) and indices of modern authors, subjects, and scripture (564–78) help readers to navigate through the massive book.

[3] The book comes with a bibliography that is far from being comprehensive, a circumstance, however, that can partly be attributed to the focus of the study and the accompanying neglect (1) of including the illustrations (O 023) and the miniatures (Σ 042) the codices offer and, thus, (2) of investigating the manuscripts as whole entities so that the

pictorial elements would also have been taken into account for a more adequate perception of writing, reading, and book production in the sixth century. Especially for Sinopensis (O 023) readers with special interests in features additional to textual ones are advised to have a closer look at the website of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (see above) and those who want to get to know more about the famous and unique miniatures of the “Life of Christ” cycle of Rossanensis (Σ 042) will find further information and literature in Petra Sevrugian, *Der Rossano-Codex und die Sinope-Fragmente: Miniaturen und Theologie* (Worms, 1990). What strikes the reader is that, even if the focus of the study is on *the text* (and here Matthew only) preserved by the three parchment codices and this may justify taking illustrations and/or miniatures as an aside or negligible phenomenon left to be investigated into by specialists, no mention is nonetheless made of Kurt Weitzmann, an experienced and distinguished expert in the field of codicology and book illumination. In his *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), nos. 442–444, Weitzmann writes on all three codices, and in his *Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination* (New York: George Braziller, 1977), plates 29–33, he specializes on the so-called Rossano Gospels. Furthermore, for those readers interested in books as invaluable complex entities, Christopher de Hamel’s fascinating and brilliantly written *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts* (London: Allen Lane, 2016; London: Penguin; Random House, 2018 [paperback]) might be now a reference and a good read in order to attain a better understanding of the world of manuscripts. There Sinopensis and Rossanensis are intertwined with the complex and fascinating world of other contemporary sixth century codices (above all 44–45, 567, and 575–76).

[4] In Hixson’s first main chapter (1–48)—it might have been interesting to embed the quote by Jerome (*Prologue to Job*) on the first page (1) into a brief discussion of his own life and his attitudes towards asceticism and women in order to understand more closely what he tries to express with that but the citation remains without further interpretation—Hixson starts off with a short narrative on Codex Beratinus 1 (Φ 043) and 2 (1143), which is reminiscent of Didier Lafleur’s fine and detailed introduction to his (and Luc Brogly’s) *Greek New Testament Manuscripts from Albania* (Leiden: Brill, 2018; Hixson refers to them on 85 n. 195 and 9–10 n. 30), to link the color purple, its significance and implications, with the “022-023-042 family,” as he calls it, that is, the three purple parchment codices he concentrates on. Then follows a concise description of the individual codices and their histories (6–23) and a splendid analysis of ink and dyes, two technical palaeographical features, in which Hixson compares Rossanensis with the famous Vienna Genesis (23–29), and a report on the discussion of date and provenance of the purple parchment codices resulting in their production (36) “in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian I (527–565) as gifts to churches he built, or possibly shortly thereafter.” After a brief history of research on the three purple parchment codices as belonging to the same family (36–48, especially 47 for his stemma), Hixson’s own way of using what is there in the manuscripts to reconstruct the original-but-lost *Vorlage* becomes visible: on the basis of speculative arguments from plausibility, he concludes on a certain text in the parent codex (47–48), a sound line of argument that has been used elsewhere, for example, for establishing the form of text Q might have had.

[5] Hixson presents his own approach in chapter 2 (49–85) as a condensed and modified substratum from other methodical treatments of the so-called *singular readings* (e.g., among others, Hort, Colwell, and Royse) so that he differentiates between the corrected and uncorrected text, looks at instances where all three codices agree, tries to establish a

profile for each of the manuscripts on its own, wants to ignore ϵ/ι and α/ϵ interchanges for *singular readings* while he includes o/v (because they are infrequent), and intends to discuss the ignored interchanges in chapter 3 thereafter (see table 4, 97). Consequently, the same verse might be referenced more than once, because it may count as a singular *and* a family reading (85).

[6] Chapter 3 (86–150) is a comparison of the scribes and their treatment of textual and paratextual features in instances where the three codices are extant. Hixson deals with orthography, “Kephalaia *and* Titloi” (91), the Eusebian apparatus, and “Deviations from the Exemplar” (93). Tables 2–34 offer rich details and salient pieces of information for which Hixson has to be trusted and, according to the meticulous depiction and treatment of textual features so far, deserves to be trusted. Consequently, he concludes that the scribe of N 022 tried to be as close as possible to his master copy, though there are quite many orthographic changes visible in the manuscript. The scribe of O 23 tried “to produce an aesthetically pleasing manuscript” so that he might be “the ideal scribe” for the text-critical goal to be achieved in the present study (148), while that of Σ 042 “was an editor” who wanted to harmonize and substitute texts (148).

[7] Chapters 4 to 6 are individually dedicated to the three purple parchments in order to test the *singular readings method* Hixson defined earlier. So, he distinguishes between significant (additions, omissions, substitutions, transpositions, harmonizations, and editorial readings) and insignificant (nonsense, orthographic) singular and family readings in detail (151–85, 186–205, and 206–249), before he draws reasonable, cautious, and valuable conclusions from the aforesaid and his analyses (250–69). A synopsis of the different readings in the three codices facilitates the task for the reader to follow Hixson’s fine deductions that are similar to his earlier qualifications of the scribes of the manuscripts. Personally, I find most interesting Hixson’s critical approach to the *singular readings method* when it comes to evaluate strengths and weaknesses; for example, the method does not help to identify editorial changes, and scholars must be careful with calling certain readings “scribal creations,” because, as it was the case here, “fifty-five readings were not created by the scribe but were inherited from the exemplar” (257). Hixson suggests that scholars should be hesitant to identify scribes as editors, unless they have defined an editor’s job exactly previously. It might be problematic to mix the two terms that are definitely two different occupations with different tasks to be fulfilled (“creating a new work,” “revising an existing work substantially,” “making theologically-motivated alterations,” and/or “proofreading”), though there *might* be some overlap. Hixson’s plea against the Aland’s biased “dismissal of the usefulness of the purple codices” (268–69) is very much appreciated, because that way manuscripts are taken more seriously as evidence and sources (rather than only regarding them as carrier of texts), and it is Hixson himself who proves convincingly that the three codices do have a say when it comes to identifying a stemma, retelling a story they have to offer, and refining methodological approaches to singular readings in the New Testament.

[8] The seven appendices to follow are not only fine treats for everybody interested in the reconstructed shape of the *Vorlage*, the original and lost parent manuscript of the three purple parchments, but they are also proofs of an ideal-typical academic study that deserves to be received with open arms among textual critics. Hixson reconstructs the *Vorlage* (271–307; also see the transcriptions the Gospel of Matthew in the three codices, 308–58, 359–83, and 384–514; further see the *kephalaia* and *titloi* in all three codices, 531–45) and presents a transcription with a three-fold apparatus (textual matters, i.e., differences among manuscripts; orthographic variants; delimitation and the Eusebian

apparatus), with parentheses and question marks to indicate uncertainties and speculations. For Rossanensis he also provides (1) data on singular readings where only this codex is extant (513–25) and (2) an overview of the position of the miniatures on the folios and the text on the same page (386–401) so that further research might take these pieces of information as a starting point for reflections on the interaction and mutual influence between text and miniatures, which might be seen as an expression of reception and interpretation on their own.

- [9] Although the reviewer would have appreciated a discussion of all the palaeographical data available and all the illustrations/miniatures together with the texts, he might have held at least two volumes in his hands. Furthermore, that would be beyond the limits of what usually is expected from textual critics and lies beyond the tasks they fulfil. Congratulations to Hixson for this fine piece of scholarship or, to be more precise, to these “fine pieces,” because the author presents more than *just* a demonstration of critical and consequent methodology with sound evidence, plausible reasoning, and transcriptions as supplements. This monograph might serve as a role model for similar projects on other purple parchment codices that belong together and (so far) neglected textual witnesses.

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