Chris S. Stevens, *History of the Pauline Corpus in Texts, Transmissions and Trajectories: A Textual Analysis of Manuscripts from the Second to the Fifth Century*, Texts and Additions for New Testament Study 14, Leiden: Brill, 2020. ISBN 978-90-04-42822-5. €127.00/$153.00

[1]   Chris S. Stevens has provided a great study on the history of the Pauline corpus by way of comparative analysis. The present book is the published version of his dissertation that was supervised by Stanley E. Porter. The comparative analysis makes use of a new methodology developed by Stevens and is focused on manuscripts from the second to fifth century CE to determine transmissions and trajectories.

[2]   Stevens begins the book in chapter 1 with a brief overview of the history of textual criticism. At first glance, it seems odd that he would begin this extensive study with an elementary history of textual criticism, but Stevens provides his rationale for doing so. A brief sketch of the history of the discipline helps to frame this study in light of the textual research to date, as well provides a basis on which Stevens will evaluate contemporary methodologies (3). This brief section highlights the important figures and developments of textual criticism beginning with Irenaeus and ending with the critical printed editions of today. A key takeaway from this sketch shows that at the outset of this discipline, and throughout most of its history, the goal has been to establish the original text of the Greek New Testament. Second, it emphasizes the current rejection of any idea of an original text and the shift of the goal of textual criticism to establishing the *Ausgangstext*. Stevens ends the chapter acknowledging that while the debates around these two developments are important, the current work will not attempt to settle them. Instead, Stevens hopes to engage in textual criticism afresh with a synchronic study of Pauline literature "without the restrains or concerns of originality" (26).

[3]   In chapter 2, Stevens continues his overview of the field by summarizing the predominate methods used presently in textual criticism. He covers majority text, single text theory, byzantine text form, eclecticism, stemmatics, and the coherence-based genealogical method. Within these summaries, Stevens highlights the main practices of each methodology, as well as some of the major weakness inherent in each one. Stevens also points out that, while each of these methodologies are different, they all possess the same historical goal of trying to determine/reconstruct the original text or the earliest attainable form of the text. He closes this chapter emphasizing that while this goal is important, it is not the goal the present work will strive toward. Therefore, all the methods mentioned in this chapter are inadequate for the research that Stevens will undertake.

[4]   After demonstrating that previous methods for doing textual criticism will not suffice for this project, Stevens points out that a comparative method seems to be most suited. At the beginning of chapter 3, he surveys present comparative methods, as well as highlights some of their weaknesses. The two biggest weaknesses of these methods are the inadequacy of a "base text" (48) and a lack in precise definition for "variant" (53). Because of these weaknesses, Stevens proposes his own method of comparative analysis. First, Stevens follows in the steps of Stan Porter and Andrew Pitts by adopting systemic functional linguistics (SFL) to determine textual boundaries. More specifically, Stevens utilizes rank scale to determine these boundaries "based on Greek-language structure" (55). He then explains how rank scale works with several examples. Then, instead of looking for variants, Stevens looks for "textual differences" among manuscripts. By changing the terminology, any assertion of an original reading is abandoned. This change better serves the purpose of Stevens's research. Second, rather than make

his comparisons against a base text, Stevens proposes to examine readings in every manuscript with the simple numerical majority acting as the basis of comparison (63). The significance of this method "does not give privilege to any manuscripts or reading" and allows for calculating the degree of deviation of a manuscript to the majority as well as individual manuscripts (64). Stevens closes the chapter by indicating that this method will be applied to the Pauline corpus from the second to fifth century, and statistical data will be collected from these comparisons.

[5]   Stevens's comparative analysis yields interesting results. The summaries of the comparative analysis for the Pauline corpus are recorded in chapter 4. For each book of the Pauline corpus, the manuscript being used, as well as a few other manuscripts, is compared against the majority readings. The summary indicates overwhelmingly that there is a high textual stability within the Pauline corpus in the second to fifth century manuscripts. This fact is indicated by the total weighted average of agreement between the manuscripts and the majority reading: 96.6 percent (100). Stevens reminds readers at the close of the chapter that this comparison has never been done before and will yield interesting insights. One such insight in chapter 5 is that, while this comparison does confirm that scribes are inconsistent in every category of textual differences, scribes "tend to vary more on low rank linguistic elements versus high rank elements" (128).

[6]   After explaining the results of his analysis, Stevens compares his research with current text-critical research in chapter 6. First, he compares the results of his study with Kurt and Barbara Aland's classification of text types and ultimately sides with other modern methods calling into question the use of text types (136). Second, Stevens compares his results with studies of textual transmission in other ancient texts as well as the New Testament. The results seem to indicate the Pauline corpus from the second to fifth century contain greater uniformity than the Aland's assertions and are more stable than other ancient literature (156). In chapter 7, Stevens compares his results with narrative textual critics and concludes that there does not seem to be a scribal development towards a higher Christology (184).

[7]   Finally, in chapter 8, Stevens uses the results of his analysis to interact with discussions relating to the source and history of the Pauline corpus. Stevens engages in what Eldon Jay Epp has called "historical-critical imagination" (197) to postulate a hypothetical trajectory of the Pauline corpus to manuscript α. Stevens also argues that the degree of textual uniformity and stable transmission seems to support the hypothesis that the Pauline corpus possess a single point of early origination.

[8]   A major strength of Steven's research is his utilization of SFL to determine textual boundaries. This method is a fresh approach to textual criticism and provides a way to make "the counting and weighing of textual differences more quantifiable, consistent, and ranked according to content and semantic weight" (212). Stevens is able to effectively rule out textual differences of low-semantic weight based on an unbiased categorization that is inherent to the Greek language itself. A second strength of this book is the model it can serve for further research in textual criticism. By abandoning the traditional goals of textual criticism, Stevens provides a fresh methodology for examining a corpus in a specific time frame. This methodology yields interesting results by asking new questions of the text, as well as provides potential answers to old questions.

[9]   A third strength of this book is the two large appendices at the end of the book. These two appendices make up a little more than half of the total page count. While Stevens summarizes the results of his comparative analysis effectively in chapter 4, the full data set along with commentary is accessible to readers. The data is a treasure trove of information for

those who wish to do a deep dive into the results of Stevens's analysis. The second appendix is even more focused; it presents the data summarized in chapter 7 concerning textual differences for christological tendencies. Stevens's arguments can be examined in detail with all his data on full display.

[10] A weakness of Steven's book is his dating of two manuscripts, which narrows the period of investigation. While Stevens mentions that he is not arguing for a specific date, he does give dates for both P46 and D as second and fifth centuries, respectively. Indeed, these dates are reflected in the title of the book. Elijah Hixson has recently argued for the adoption of a broader range of manuscript dates between the NA²⁸ and the *Liste*.¹ In this case, more appropriates dates for these manuscripts would be the third and sixth centuries. Despite this weakness, the analysis provided by Stevens stands on its own and is still a great contribution to textual criticism.

[11] Overall, Stevens provides a fresh approach and methodology to textual criticism that is both interesting and yields important results. I highly recommend this book to students of textual criticism looking for examples of how to broaden their research interests in the field. I would also recommend this book to those interested in the transmission history and stability of the Pauline corpus in the Greek manuscripts.

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¹ Elijah Hixson, "Dating Myths, Part One: How We Determine the Ages of Manuscripts," in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Elijah Hixson and Peter Gurry (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 90–109, here 108.