

Christopher de Hamel, *Meetings with Remarkable Manuscripts*, London: Allen Lane, 2016. ISBN 978-0-241-00304-6. Pp. v + 632. £30,00/\$45,00. Also available in paperback: London: Penguin/Random House, 2018. ISBN 978-0-141-97749-2. Pp. v + 630. £12,99/\$25,00.

- [1] Why reviewing such a book for the readers of *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism*? At first glance, its title and contents do not have anything to do with recent trends of textual criticism, especially when it comes to talk about the New Testament, that is, the production of a critical and usable edition, on the one hand, and current lines of methodology, above all, the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM) and its outcomes, on the other. Every approach to readings, variants, and textual units and every attempt of producing and reconstructing a responsible and sound text form, however, has to deal with the carriers of texts, at least implicitly, with manuscripts. In order to understand more about the production, purpose, use, handling, and transmission of these manuscripts, scholars working in textual criticism should and must know something about manuscripts that definitely are more than pure carriers of texts, as they are archaeological objects, artefacts that point to the people behind them. Only then will decisions in favor of or against certain variants and readings be backed up by palaeographical and papyrological matters of fact.
- [2] But for all that there is another reason to read Christopher de Hamel's book which conveys both his fascination with and his love for manuscripts expressed in a style that is easy and fluent, attractive and enchanting, and absolutely absorbing to the reader. The author's expertise—"a long career at Sotheby's, Christopher de Hamel has probably handled and catalogued more illuminated manuscripts and over a wider range than any person alive" (i)—ubiquitously shines through on every single page of this thrilling book.
- [3] All in all, de Hamel meets twelve medieval manuscripts stemming from the sixth to the sixteenth century that are very different from each other. For him the (illuminated) manuscripts he selected do not represent plain example cases for a certain period of time and its unique features, but they help him to map his trip through the centuries on which he illustrates specific differences *and* similarities in book production and handling. Although, this might appear as if to define de Hamel's intention as a chronologically uninterrupted presentation of the history of the book and the Bible (see his *The Book: A History of the Bible*, London: Phaidon, 2001), the author succeeds in dealing with every single manuscript as a unique and individual entity with its own significance.
- [4] The book opens up with a short introduction (1–9), in which the author points out his aims and the purpose of his project (1): "This is a book about visiting important medieval manuscripts and what they tell us and why they matter." He underlines the importance of experiencing encounters with manuscripts in their original places and not only relying on facsimiles and digitized images (2), that he has seen all the items himself (4) and a handwritten manuscript "was written over time" (7), just to mention a few of the (auto)biographical aspects the author offers to his readers. Then, twelve main chapters dedicated to a single manuscript follow (10–563) together with many illustrations—mostly black-and-white, but see the sixteen beautiful color plates between pages 312 and 313—in order to make visible what the author writes about. Illustrations are mainly reproductions of manuscripts, their folios or details from them, but there are also photographs of places in order to situate the codices some more. An epilogue

(564–70) sums up the idea behind the book, bibliographical data and additional notes on the chapters guide the interested reader to further readings and studies (571–608, text in a rather tiny script). A list of illustrations (609–15) and two indices (of manuscripts and of people; 616–30) help readers to navigate more easily through the book.

- [5] The twelve manuscripts covered are: (1) the Gospels of Saint Augustine (late sixth century; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 286), (2) Codex Amiatinus (c. 700; Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. Amiat. 1), (3) the Book of Kells (late eighth century; Dublin, Trinity College, MS 58), (4) the *Aratea* (early ninth century; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Cod. Voss. Lat. Q 79), (5) the Morgan Beatus (mid-tenth century; New York: Morgan Library and Museum, M 644), (6) Hugo Pictor [a commentary in Latin on the Old Testament book of Isaiah by Jerome] (late eleventh century; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 717), (7) the Copenhagen Psalter (third quarter of the twelfth century; Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, MS Thott 143 2^o), (8) the *Carmina Burana* (first half of the thirteenth century; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 4660), (9) the Hours of Jeanne de Navarre (second quarter of the fourteenth century; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS n.a. lat. 3145), (10) the Hengwrt Chaucer (c. 1400; Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth MS 392 D), (11) the Visconti *Semideus* (c. 1438; Saint Petersburg, National Library, Cod. Lat.v.XVII.2), and (12) the Spinola Hours (c. 1515–1520; Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, MS Ludwig IX.18). This is proof enough that most of the chapters revolve around Biblical manuscripts and texts, but there are also other codices that are determined by devotion.
- [6] De Hamel provides clear and concise information on every single manuscript (cover/binding, dimensions, script, texts copied, and illustrations). His style can best be described by giving an example, here the introductory sentences to his first chapter on the Gospels of Saint Augustine (10): “At the end of this chapter I will recount how Pope Benedict XVI and the Archbishop of Canterbury both bowed down before me, on live television, in front of the high altar of Westminster Abbey. Before reaching that unlikely moment, however, we must follow the footsteps of a manuscript as it weaves through a millennium and a half of English history, encountering several popes and other archbishops of Canterbury on its journey.” And then the story of this codex begins with Archbishop “Matthew Parker (1504–75), who owned the book itself.” The author devotes quite some passages to the fine illustrations of the manuscript and compares them to those of other codices. He finds out that the format of the illustrations reminds of Ethiopian religious paintings (41) so that there might be a common tradition behind both of them; and he talks about the texts the codex preserves, above all its beginning in the middle of the *capitula* preceding the Gospel of Matthew (19). Finally, de Hamel keeps his promise: a photograph depicts Pope Benedict XVI venerating the codex in the hands of de Hamel with Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, standing next to them and watching in June 2010 (50–53). That shows how de Hamel skillfully interrelates stunning stories with technical, academic, and learned facts.
- [7] The book is a brilliant example of how to fire people with enthusiasm about something far off and rather dry: the study of manuscripts. The author is capable of taking his readers by their hands in order to lead them through the rooms, along the aisles and close to the actual manuscripts, and to provide a very special and sensitive experience. This is a book warmly recommended for everybody

interested in manuscripts, both nonexperts and academics working in the field—
and that should include textual critics alike.

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