

Special Feature: Decentralizing the Biblical Text in Greek New Testament Manuscripts

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Abstract: The editors introduce the five articles in the special section of the current volume. These papers were first presented at a workshop at the University of Birmingham.

The occasion for the articles published in this special section of *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* was a workshop on the theme “The Decentralizing of the Biblical Text in Manuscript Formation” convened by Andrew J. Patton and Clark R. Bates in conjunction with the CATENA project.¹ The workshop was held on 14 March 2022 in hybrid format from the University of Birmingham, with one paper delivered online and participants joining from various countries throughout Europe and from North America. New Testament Textual Criticism has been invigorated in recent decades by studies of New Testament manuscripts and textual variants that pursue questions about the documents themselves rather than the form their texts adopt. The studies have especially focused on paratextual features of the manuscripts, the lives of the men and women who produced or read them, and theological or sociological issues reflected in the texts and material artifacts.

Commentaries and catenae remain an understudied aspect of many Greek New Testament manuscripts. It is worth observing that commentaries and catenae are not the same. *Commentary* is a multivalent term, which may refer to a genre of exegetical writing or to a specific kind of text written by a single identifiable author. *Catenae* are a form of commentary that interpret the biblical text through a series of extracts from multiple early Christian writers. Catenae differ from the so-called single-author commentaries in that they are a form of compilation literature and generally do not include the words of the compiler; most have been transmitted anonymously.² The *Kurzgefasste Liste* has treated catena and commentary manuscripts inconsistently, omitting some codices that have a complete biblical text because it is found within a commentary, but accepting the majority of catena manuscripts and even inadvertently assigning Gregory-Aland numbers to such witnesses without a complete biblical text.³ Text-critical studies have continued to use commentary manuscripts as witnesses to the text of the New

¹ The CATENA project was funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program (grant agreement no. 770816). For further information, see <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/itsee/projects/catena>.

² For general introductions to catenae which elaborate on these classifications, see Carmelo Curti and Maria Antonietta Barbàra, “Greek Exegetical Catenae,” in *Patrology: The Eastern Fathers, 451–750*, ed. Angelo di Berardino, trans. Adrian Walford (repr., Cambridge: James Clarke, 2008), 605–54; Gilles Dorival, *The Septuagint from Alexandria to Constantinople: Canon, New Testament, Church Fathers, Catenae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 135–54.

³ See the discussion in H. A. G. Houghton, “Catena Manuscripts in the *Editio Critica Maior* of the Greek New Testament,” in *Pen, Print, and Pixels: Advances in Textual Criticism in the Digital Era*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace, David Flood, Elijah Hixson, and Denis Salgado (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2023).

Testament without addressing the nature of these texts and the implications of their presence alongside the scriptures in manuscripts.

Greek New Testament commentaries and catenae have not only taken a back seat to the biblical text in scholarly inquiry, but research on them has also advanced at a much slower pace than similar research on Old Testament catenae. John Anthony Cramer's multi-volume set of editions of catenae on the New Testament, *Catena Graecorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, remains the standard edition for the text of most catenae.⁴ The pioneering work of German scholars such as Joseph Sickenberger, Joseph Reuss, Max Rauer, and Karl Staab in the twentieth century advanced the discussion related to the documents and texts of the catenae by investigating the nature of individual traditions and producing editions of scholia from authors found in select New Testament books.⁵ Systematic research on New Testament catenae largely stalled from the middle of the twentieth century until the renewal of interest over the last decade.⁶

The production of commentary and catena manuscripts from late antiquity through the Byzantine era involved reshaping the format and use of these documents. During this period, a decentralizing of the biblical text began to occur. In some cases, this impulse manifested itself materially with the biblical text being dwarfed by the commentary or segmented into sections of varying length. In these formats, the hierarchy between text and paratext changes. Commentaries, catenae, and other paratextual furniture—to use Saskia Dirkse's term—show that not every Greek New Testament manuscript with a complete biblical text elevates the text over the commentary.⁷ Such shifts in prominence, position, and organization of the texts on the page were driven by the purpose of these manuscripts and ultimately affected the ways in which the scriptures were read.

A tendency to decentralize the biblical text also appears within commentaries and catenae. The act of producing interpretive works led to innovative ways of reading the New Testament and the canonization of tradition. The fourfold gospel and the plentiful connections between the epistles held together in one canon, if not frequently in a single document, meant that none

⁴ J. A. Cramer, *Catena Graecorum Patrum in Novum Testamentum*, 8 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1837–1844).

⁵ A representative work for each author is cited here, for others see the references within the following articles and the bibliographies in *Clavis Clavium* database: <https://clavis.brepols.net/clacla/>. Joseph Sickenberger, *Titus von Bostra: Studien zu dessen Lukashomilien*, TU 6.1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1901); Joseph Reuss, *Matthäus-, Markus- und Johannes-Katenen nach den handschriftlichen Quellen untersucht*, NTAbh 18.4–5 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1941); Max Rauer, *Der dem Petrus von Laodicea zugeschriebene Lukaskommentar*, NTAbh 8 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1920); Karl Staab, *Die Pauluskatenen nach den handschriftlichen Quellen untersucht* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1926).

⁶ Recent work includes William R. S. Lamb, *The Catena in Marcum: A Byzantine Anthology of Early Commentary on Mark*, TENTS 6 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); H. A. G. Houghton, ed., *Commentaries, Catenae, and Biblical Tradition: Papers from the Ninth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament in Conjunction with the COMPAUL Project*, TS 3.13 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2016); H. A. G. Houghton and D. C. Parker, eds., *Codex Zacynthius: Catena, Palimpsest, Lectionary*, TS 3/21 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2020), as well as several doctoral theses: Michael A. Clark, “The Catena of Nicetas of Heraclea and Its Johannine Text” (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2016); Theodora Panella, “The Pseudo-Oecumenian Catena on Galatians” (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2017); Jacopo Marcon, “The Pseudo-Oecumenian Catena on Romans” (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2022).

⁷ Saskia Dirkse, “New Treasure as Well as Old: The Use and Reuse of the Gospel Kephalaia in Commentary Manuscripts,” in this volume.

could be read independently. The intertextual reading of the New Testament within exegetical works pushed to the margins some of the distinctive characteristics of one biblical book in favor of another. Catenae curate a selection of interpretations which are placed adjacent to the scriptures. Hindy Najman aptly wrote, “Authoritative interpretations are not exactly scriptural. Yet they participate, to some degree, in scriptural authority and exist, as we might say, in the margins of scriptural texts.”⁸ The curated collection of scholia placed alongside the scriptures is imbued with authority as mediators of knowledge between readers and the sacred text.

The present collection of papers brings together current research on commentary material in gospel manuscripts, the difficulty of classifying and describing manuscripts with catenae, and the historical and ecclesial climate within which catenae were produced. Andrew J. Patton’s essay, “Unchaining the Scriptures,” takes up the question of whether the biblical text itself can ever become a paratext. The standard understanding of paratextuality in Greek New Testament manuscripts treats the biblical text as the main text, especially because of the ways it has been formatted in the pages of codices. He presents examples of gospel catena manuscripts that reverse the usual text-paratext relationship and offers a profile of features in the text and arrangement of gospel books with catenae which might clarify what is the main text. Page layout alone does not suffice to determine the paratextual relationships in commentary manuscripts.

Continuing the focus on manuscripts of the gospels, the contribution from Jeremiah Coogan, titled “Doubled Recycling: The Gospel according to Mark in Late Ancient Catena Commentary,” investigates the use of “double-recycling” in Markan catenae through which catenae on Mark were produced from extracts found in the catenae of Matthew, Luke, and John. This practice of refashioning and renewing earlier material imbues the catena in Mark with the authority of the past traditions and places the biblical text of the gospel under the control of these traditions. Additionally, the previously unexplored scholia composed by the catenist where Mark lacked parallel material in the other gospels are interrogated, particularly as they relate to the authority transferred to this material as it joins that of the previous gospel extracts.

Saskia Dirkse, in “New Treasure as Well as Old: The Use and Reuse of the Gospel *Kephalaia* in Commentary Manuscripts,” presents an analysis of an expanded version of the Greek chapter lists found in three commentary manuscripts, which adds references to material within the commentary. She also explores the reuse of this chapter list outside the commentary format and the gaps it creates in those instances, as well as another expanded chapter list found in a separate commentary tradition. This work considers the impact such paratextual material may have had on the way in which the biblical text was read and understood and how this might affect contemporary readings of the same material.

Addressing the need for a more consistent practice in cataloguing catena manuscripts in the *Kurzgefasste Liste* is Tommy Wasserman’s article, titled “Marginalized Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament in Vienna.” Following a visit to the National Library of Austria, Wasserman identifies four additional manuscripts for inclusion in the *Liste*. In addition to these, he proposes that fifty-five folios of Matthew with a catena in a miscellaneous codex ought to be included in the *Liste* with another part of it already registered as GA 2988. That these five manuscripts were omitted from the official register of Greek New Testament manuscripts despite the excellent catalogs of the codices in the Austrian National Library can be attributed to the various ways the text of the gospels has been marginalized within them.

The final article in this collection is “Materializing Unity: Catena Manuscripts as Vessels for Imperial and Ecclesial Reform” by Clark R. Bates. He describes the ecclesiastical and imperial

⁸ Hindy Najman, “The Vitality of Scripture within and beyond the ‘Canon,’” *JSJ* 43 (2012): 515.

climate of Byzantium between the sixth and tenth centuries, during which the catenae were composed and became a dominant form of exegetical literature. Using the Pseudo-Oecumenian catenae in the Pauline epistles, this article situates the exegetical and homiletical content of the catenae within the social debates of the time, addressing both the inclusion of heterodox voices within the scholia and proposing an ecclesial role that catenae may have played after the seventh century. This contribution differs from other efforts either to rationalize the inclusion of heterodox voices in the catenae or to explain them simply as biblical counterparts to commentaries on classical texts or florilegia by promoting interdisciplinary research between manuscript and historical studies.

The editors of this edition would like to extend their gratitude to the presenters and all those who attended for a series of stimulating papers and discussion. Our thanks are also due both to Hugh Houghton for being receptive to the idea of organizing a second workshop under the auspices of the CATENA project, opening the event, and assisting with the selection and preparation of these papers and to Tommy Wasserman and the other editors of *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* for accepting and publishing this special feature.