

Kyoung Shik Min, *Die früheste Überlieferung des Matthäusevangeliums (bis zum 3./4. Jh.). Edition und Untersuchung, ANTF 34, Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 2005. x + 357 pp.*

- [1] The book under review is a slightly revised version of the author's doctoral thesis prepared under Barbara Aland in Münster. Min aims to study the earliest manuscript evidence for the Gospel according to Matthew in order to empirically evaluate the character of that tradition with regard to scribal habits and textual affiliation.
- [2] The book is subdivided into three main sections. The first roughly 50 pages are devoted to discussing history of research and methodological issues. Transcriptions, visual reconstructions and discussions of fourteen manuscripts (\mathfrak{P}^1 , \mathfrak{P}^{35} , \mathfrak{P}^{37} , \mathfrak{P}^{45} , \mathfrak{P}^{53} , $\mathfrak{P}^{64/67}$, \mathfrak{P}^{70} , \mathfrak{P}^{77} , \mathfrak{P}^{101} , \mathfrak{P}^{102} , \mathfrak{P}^{103} , \mathfrak{P}^{104} , \mathfrak{P}^{110} , 0171) form the main part of the work (more than 200 pages). Finally, on some 55 pages the author presents his conclusions with respect to text-critical observations in general and on Matthew more specifically. In addition, the author discusses his results in relation to early patristic data, and raises two very interesting questions: (a) What about theologically (dogmatically) motivated variants? (b) What about the "Western" text as texttype? Fourteen pages of indices conclude the volume.
- [3] In the opening section Min presents two key issues that inform scholarly perceptions of the earliest phases of NT textual transmission, i.e. the definition and application of the text-type model and the evaluation of scribal habits by various means.
- [3.1] Regarding the former Min employs the formal distinction between "Redaktion" (a systematic reworking of the text through the hands of conscious redactors) and "Rezeption" (no systematic tendency detectable, instead occasional improvements at individual places). He contends that neither the "Western" nor the Alexandrian text exhibit anything like a "Redaktion"—citing with approval Colwell on the "Western" text and Fee on the Alexandrian. Even the Byzantine text is far from being the product of systematic and conscious reworking (cf. Wachtel). In concluding this discussion Min dismisses the concept of text types as inappropriate for evaluating the earliest manuscript evidence (siding with K. and B. Aland, K.W. Clark, J.N. Birdsall).
- [3.2] Regarding scribal habits Min builds on the work of Colwell and Royse trying to overcome their restrictive focus on singular readings for determining scribal habits by referring to B. Aland's recent publication "Kriterien zur Beurteilung kleinerer Papyrusfragmente des Neuen Testaments" (*New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel*, BEThL 161, ed. A. Denaux, Leuven 2002, 1-13). He then develops a method that he finds especially suitable for assessing fragmentary manuscripts. The main points of the method are:
- (a) all of the variants need to be taken into account, not just singular readings; (b) collation base is the NA²⁷/GNT⁴ text as the closest approximation to the hypothetical "Ausgangstext"; (c) the readings of a specific fragmentary manuscript have to be mapped comprehensively against all the available evidence for each witness available for the passage covered by the fragmentary witness; (d) a careful weighing of the evidence should result in reasonably informed guesses about the relative carefulness of an individual copyist in transmitting his

or her Vorlage either strictly (“fest”), normally (“normal”) or freely (“frei”); (e) after assessing the faithfulness of the copyist one may then proceed to assess the tradition to which his or her Vorlage belonged; the quality of the tradition is, again, labelled either “fest”, “normal” or “frei” dependent on its relative closeness to the hypothetical “Ausgangstext”.

- [4] This method is applied to all of the 14 early manuscript witnesses to Matthew in a rather standardised way: diplomatic transcriptions with apparatus focussing on deviations from the NA²⁷/GNT⁴ text are followed by basic palaeographical information and the relevant literature pertinent to the individual item. Rough statistics on the number of deviations from the NA²⁷/GNT⁴ text are given with subsequent discussions of those deviations classified as additions, omissions, transpositions, substitutions, corrections, orthography, “nonsense readings”, singular readings, and harmonizations (where applicable, of course). These assessments are crucial in reaching an informed judgment about the faithfulness of the respective copyist, whereas the mapping of non-singular readings against other textual witnesses is meant to detect the textual character of the respective Vorlage. An itemized summary (“Fazit”) terminates every manuscript analysis, giving specific conclusions and a graphic reproduction of the manuscript which even emulates its hand where it is physically not available.
- [5] In the final part of his study Min summarises his research under five headings. His conclusions yield a number of important points for further consideration.
- [5.1] “Textkritischer Ertrag im Allgemeinen”: Here Min emphasizes both the relative plurality of individual scribal performances on one hand and a tendency towards a bad result on the other: seven (out of the 14) copyists transmitted their Vorlage freely (“frei”) and, in the case of P¹¹⁰, even “sehr frei”. Yet, at the same time the textual character of their respective Vorlagen is considered to have been of a strict type in 11 out of 14 cases, i.e. closer to the NA²⁷/GNT⁴ text as the hypothetically reconstructed “Ausgangstext” than to anything else. As the main reason for such a seemingly paradoxical result Min supposes the availability of and striving for good Vorlagen from the earliest period that were then considered authoritative.
- [5.2] Especially interesting is Min’s analysis of the distribution of scribal changes that occurred in the manuscripts under review and enquiry as to what might have motivated them. Substitutions form the largest group of variants in the body of witnesses under scrutiny (57 substitutions, 42 omissions, 18 additions and 13 transpositions). Among them, Min contends, are no theologically relevant substitutions. Most of them involve changes in word forms (verbal forms, case and number changes or orthographicals) and are thus judged to be caused by scribal sloppiness rather than intentional activity. [NB: the same reason seems to be operative with Min’s own calculations that count a total of 128 rather than the correct 130 readings.] This concurs with the data from the 42 omissions, which are said to include mostly small words that hardly affect the narrative content. Hence scribal sloppiness on a semi-conscious level is invoked as the most likely explanation of the vast majority of scribal changes. The potential influence of harmonization is detected in 39 out of 130 variant readings, while the number of harmonizations to a synoptic parallel (20) slightly outweighs the number of harmonizations to the immediate context (17). Min concludes from these data that the earliest copyists of Matthew were Christians who also knew the other synoptic Gospels.

- [5.3] Under the heading “Textkritischer Ertrag für das MtEv” Min proposes three changes to the printed text of NA²⁷: Matthew 20:30-31; 21:44; 25:22, all of which involve passages in square brackets. In his discussion of these three cases Min carefully evaluates the testimony of the papyrus witnesses (P⁴⁵ at 20:30-31, P¹⁰⁴ at 21:44, and P⁵⁵ at 25:22) in line with their overall scribal tendencies and the quality of their respective Vorlagen.
- [5.4] Under the heading “Exegetischer Ertrag” Min discusses four passages that either could include changes due to dogmatic reasoning (3:11: omission of *οπισω μου*) or have been pronounced to be so motivated by B. Ehrman (20:30: addition of *κυριε*; 26:39: addition of *μου*; 1:16: readings attested by Θ, *f*³ and *sy*^s). Although his discussion of 26:39 is very effective, it is a pity that Min misrepresents Ehrman’s use of 20:30, for Ehrman does not discuss the addition of *κυριε*, but of *Ιησου* (cf. *Orthodox Corruption*, p. 162 and p. 180 n. 197).
- [5.5] By way of summarizing the individual discussions on P¹⁰⁴ and 0171 Min treats the question whether the “Western” text is a texttype. Here, he vigorously argues against the early existence of a “Western” texttype. However, the way Min sets up his case begs many questions. This is especially true of his treatment of 0171. The biggest problem I see is Min’s constant neglect of the Old Latin as part of the complex that is traditionally viewed and discussed in conjunction with the “Western” text. Instead he reduces the question of 0171’s affinity to something “Western” to a comparison with 05, arguing that there is no direct relationship between the two manuscripts (269: “Wir dürfen also schließen, dass D [05] und 1071 genealogisch keine direkte Beziehung hatten.”). In such a procrustean bed the idiosyncrasies of 0171 and especially of 05 count too heavily. For example, two “Singularlesarten” (singular readings) of 0171 that Min (269) brings forth against mutual genealogical relationship are attested in the Old Latin tradition (10:19 omission of *πωσ η* also among others in Old Latin *k*; 10:28 *αποκτεινει* instead of *απολεσαι* see Old Latin *k* *occidere*). Similarly, Min (269) counts the omission of *και βασιλεων* in 05 against 0171 in 10:18 without recognizing their remarkable consensus in using *σταθησεσθε* rather than the usual *αχθησεσθε*; again, 0171 is here in complete agreement with a variety of Old Latin manuscripts: *et apud (ante) reges et praesides (magistratus) stabitis*. In short: Min offers here an inadequate treatment of the issues involved.
- [5.6] Finally, Min selects four Matthean passages (20:28; 21:44; 3:11; 26:29) which he compares with the testimonies of early Church Fathers. He claims that this would enable him to detect which text or textform they have been using (311). Unfortunately, the first two examples involve additions (omissions). Hence, comparisons with the Church Fathers boil down to *argumenta e silentio*. With the remaining two examples Min can hardly expect to accomplish what he promised. And indeed, despite their assertive presentation, his conclusions display a lack of documentation, clarity and logical coherency. To back up my charges, I refer to passages from page 320:

[1] Here Min observes that one and the same biblical passage could have been cited with different wording by one and the same Church Father. This, he contends, points decisively to the Church Fathers’ lack of interest to engage in redactional activity on the NT text. The logic here is seriously flawed, it seems. Why should inconsistency when citing scripture negatively correlate to individuals’ intentions regarding redactional activity of the same scriptures? What has the one activity (citing) to do with the other (redacting)?

[2] In support of this contention, Min refers to the lack of early textforms that display systematic redactional activity. This, however, begs the question because an open search for potential “parallels” with larger parts of the tradition than those represented in the NA²⁷ apparatus has not been attempted. E.g., the Old Latin tradition is, again, completely ignored when assessing the variation displayed by the Latin citations from Irenaeus, Cyprian and Origen.

[3] Most of the inconsistent citations found in Church Father texts are said to come through interferences with the synoptic parallels. At the same time, however, this manner of citation should indicate that the Church Fathers still mean (“meinen”) the text of the individual Gospels. But why, then, do they produce conflated citations?

- [6] Undoubtedly, some of the problems with Min’s way of putting things are due to insufficient editing of the final product. His tone is at times very assertive. A surprisingly large number of unclear logical connections, redundancy as well as shortcuts, and stereotypical remarks have survived. To be sure, it is a huge endeavour to write a book in a foreign language. The “flow”, the nuances and subtleties of the mother tongue are hardly within reach. But that is where the indispensable support of native speakers comes into play in order to spell out what is intended and leave aside distracting remarks. With the book under review it is more than once left with the reader to finish that job. This is a pity, because Min’s work merited better editing to fully support its strengths.
- [7] Concluding remarks: The book under review is important for interpreting the surviving early texts of one NT book within a purely historical perspective. Starting from a putative archetype the individual items are classed according to scribal performances and quality of Vorlage in a methodologically controlled environment. The challenge is set up for those who view the earliest period of NT textual transmission as a time of major textual change. Min’s conspectus of the earliest Greek witnesses that survive from Matthew’s Gospel is certainly not in favour of such a position. At the same time it needs to be emphasized that Min tells only part of the story. E.g., his neglect of the Old Latin excludes crucial data which ought to be included not only when dealing with the “Western” text but especially when dealing with a comprehensive picture of the early period of NT textual transmission. Despite this criticism Min’s book is a step beyond the study of mere scribal habits and thus merits the attention of every student of early manuscripts of the NT.

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