

**Elliott, J.K., *New Testament Textual Criticism: The Application of Thoroughgoing Principles; Essays on Manuscripts and Textual Variation*. Novum Testamentum, Supplements 137, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2010. Pp. xvi + 661. ISBN 978-90-04-18952-2. Hardback € 184.00. US\$ 259.00.**

- [1] The volume under review is a collection of several essays by the distinguished textual critic of the New Testament, J.K. Elliott. Twelve of Elliott's essays had been previously collected in an earlier book, *Essays and Studies in New Testament Textual Criticism* (Cordova: Ediciones el Almendro, 1992). Weighing in at nearly seven hundred pages, the present volume is far more substantial, containing thirty-two chapters, several of which combine multiple separately published studies. A detailed discussion of the individual chapters is thus not practical. I offer instead a more general description of the contents and some reflections on the collection as a whole (since I was unable to find a copy of the table of contents online, I have appended a copy to the end of this review).
- [2] A brief (9-page) introduction by Elliott opens the volume. The essays, all previously published in a variety of outlets, are apportioned into four sections. Some of the chapters, though not all, have postscripts with updated bibliography. The first section, "Methodology," contains three chapters. Two of these focus on the problems and prospects of recovering the second century text of the New Testament and a third provides a clear statement of the principles of the methodology for which Elliott has become the chief spokesperson, "thoroughgoing eclecticism." The second section, "Manuscripts," contains eight chapters. Highlights include studies of the manuscript tradition of the book of Acts and the book of Revelation, Elliott's reports on recently published Oxyrhynchus papyri of New Testament texts, and his edition of a Greek-Coptic uncial fragment of Titus and Philemon (complete with nicely reproduced plates).
- [3] The third section, "Studies and Praxis," is the longest of the book with sixteen chapters and shows the thoroughgoing eclectic method in action (the influence of G.D. Kilpatrick echoes throughout the book but is especially present in this portion). Recurring themes in these essays are the importance of recognizing the phenomenon of Atticism when thinking about scribal changes to the manuscripts of New Testament texts and the need for close attention to the stylistic tendencies both of the authors who wrote early Christian texts and of the scribes who copied the individual manuscripts. For me, the most useful of these chapters are those gathered under the subheading "Text-critical issues concerning the Synoptic Problem" (385-467). In these pages, Elliott tackles a difficult (and too frequently ignored) issue, namely, the ways that proposed solutions to the synoptic problem are complicated by the phenomenon of textual variation. Solutions to the synoptic problem often presuppose stable texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as the basis for synoptic comparisons. Elliott's work in these essays helpfully points out that no such stable texts exist, and one's choice of what Greek tools to employ carries significant implications for how one approaches the synoptic problem. For this reason, Elliott's thoughtful reviews of available Greek synopses and their critical apparatuses are especially informative and deserve to be read by anyone who studies (or teaches!) the synoptic problem.
- [4] The final section of the book, "Reviews of Recent Critical Editions," draws together Elliott's evaluations of recent critical texts of part or all of the Greek New Testament. These include his assessments of the twenty-seventh edition of Nestle-Aland, the fourth edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, and the volumes of the Catholic epistles produced by the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung for the *Editio Critica Maior*.

These chapters highlight Elliott's position as an appreciative but stringent critic of the work of Kurt and Barbara Aland and the Münster Institut. In that regard, it is interesting to note that this section of the book also includes a piece recounting Elliott's frank reflections on the shortcomings of the International Greek New Testament Project's volumes on Luke's Gospel for which he served as executive editor (575-594). The juxtaposition of Elliott's critiques of the work of the Institut and Elliott's reports of the Alands' strongly critical reviews of the IGNTP serves as a reminder of the good fortune we enjoy today with the atmosphere of international cooperation that currently enlivens the field of New Testament textual criticism.

- [5] The book concludes with a final chapter as an appendix ("Manuscripts, the Codex and the Canon"), a presentation of Elliott's impressive bibliography (29 books authored or edited, 97 refereed articles, 63 contributions to edited volumes, and over 400 book reviews), and indices of modern scholars and biblical passages.
- [6] The arrangement of the volume by topic has both benefits and drawbacks. It is of course very useful to have essays on a given subject presented together. Yet, such a mode of organization can also obscure certain important developments in Elliott's thinking about several "big picture" issues. To take just one example, Elliott has changed his opinion considerably concerning the viability of the notion of "the original text" of the New Testament. In a study first published in 1980, Elliott wrote that the "main object of textual criticism is to establish as accurately as possible a text approximating to the original words of the original authors" (417). The statement is somewhat surprising since 200 pages earlier in the book (in a chapter first published in 2003), Elliott questioned the discipline's focus on "the original text" and wondered whether "it may perhaps be a better function of textual criticism if it alerts readers to the sheer variety of viable options in a text that has had a theologically rich history" (219). In a piece originally published in 2002, Elliott went so far as to question the wisdom of even producing an eclectic text at all ("...there is no need nowadays to establish a critical text, because any attempt to create such an 'original' text is an elusive and illusory task" [593]). A chronological arrangement of the essays (at least within each of the topical groupings) would have made progressions like this one easier to appreciate.
- [7] While I had consulted a number of these studies in their original publications over the years, the effect of reading all of these essays together gave me a better sense of what is gained and lost by adhering to the thoroughgoing eclectic approach to textual criticism. I find Elliott's cautions against being seduced by "the cult of the best manuscripts" to be salutary insofar as they remind us of the circularity involved in talking about "good manuscripts": "Good" manuscripts are those judged to have a high percentage of "good" readings, and it is the presence of "good" readings that in turn establishes some manuscripts as "good." Yet, I found myself querying Elliott's tendency to relativize the ages of manuscripts and to treat all manuscripts as equally valid carriers of variant readings (see, e.g., 290). Such an approach seems to depend on an assumption to which Elliott returns on multiple occasions in these essays: the declaration by Heinrich Joseph Vogels that "all the genuine (i.e. meaningful) variants in our apparatus were known from before 200 AD" (45; see also p. 36), that is *before* the period of most, if not all, of our extant manuscripts of the documents comprising the New Testament. As far as I know, neither Vogels nor Elliott ever offered any evidence to support this assertion. Furthermore, the little evidence known to me offhand rather argues against such a presupposition (for instance, the absence of Byzantine readings in the writings of Christian authors prior to John Chrysostom, a point noted by Westcott and Hort and confirmed by more recent scholarship on the text of Origen and Clement). I would be curious to see Elliott (or another intrepid soul) provide an argument to substantiate Vogels' claim.

[8] The typographical errors in the volume are numerous (which is perhaps to be expected in a volume of previously published essays that have all been reformatted), but, as far as I can tell, none are substantive, although I only spot checked a handful of the many lists and charts for accuracy. These small slips do not detract from this useful and provocative collection. A debt of gratitude is owed to Elliott (and to Brill) for having brought together these essays in a single, easily consulted volume.

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