

[MJTM 19 (2017–2018)]

#### BOOK REVIEW

Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder. *Textual Criticism of the Bible*. Revised ed. Lexham Methods Series. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018. xv + 236 pp. Pbk. ISBN 978-1-57799-663-7. \$29.99.

One consequence of an ever-expanding field of Biblical Studies and its many subfields is a consistent need for updated introductory books. *Textual Criticism of the Bible* is the first volume in the new Lexham Methods Series, which seeks to make particular facets of Biblical Studies more accessible to the uninitiated. In this work, the authors tackle the field of textual criticism. Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder have set a high bar for the series by providing a quality introduction to the textual criticism of both the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. The co-authors make a perfect team. Dr. Anderson is a professor of NT and has extensive experience with ancient texts and manuscripts. Dr. Widder, for her part, is a professor of Hebrew Bible with an emphasis in linguistics. Their wealth of classroom experience comes through the tone of the book.

The book reads and functions as a primer, with its target audience perhaps those in undergraduate settings and those beginning training for church service. The median price of the paperback makes it a justifiable purchase, and it can also be acquired within Lexham's partner, Logos software.

The first two sections give an overview of what textual criticism is and why it is important. Chapter 1 differentiates translation theories from the practices of textual criticism, which is a helpful place to start. The authors correct the simple—and quite common—error of blurring translation philosophies with textual criticism. Readers are provided with clear distinctions between the two.

The authors define the goal of textual criticism as the creation of the *Ausgangstext*, the now commonplace term within the field. Without overwhelming readers, the authors explain that traditionally the goal was oriented around recovering the “original” text. However, contemporary practices recognize the polyvalent nature of the term “original,” and are preferring the German term *Ausgangstext*, meaning “the ancient form of the text that is the ancestor of all extant copies” (7).

Chapter 2 provides readers with a simple overview of textual criticism, which is defined as the practice of scholars “establishing what the authors of the Bible wrote” (12). Little prior knowledge is expected from readers, as the presentation begins from the bottom up. The book explains the reason for textual criticism, the materials used by ancient writers (codex, papyrus, parchment, but ink/pen should have been included), and includes an explanation of scribal errors. All the while, key terms are in bold and later included in a glossary. To keep the presentation practical, pp. 19–40 cover the nine types of scribal changes responsible for the majority of textual variants. The exposition of definitions followed by clear examples from the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament is a real asset to the intended audience.

The presentation is robust and informed but has a different tone than most discussions of scribal behavior. As Lexham Press is a Christian publishing house that upholds the Apostles’ Creed and the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association’s Statement of Faith, the book is positive about the recoverability and reliability of the biblical text. Rather than this confessional stance being a weakness, readers will find a balanced presentation backed by footnoting of up-to-date scholarship.

The last section of Chapter 2 deals with the task of evaluating transcriptional probability. Mainly on account of brevity, the three pages devoted to this topic unintentionally downplay the complexity of the issue. While I appreciate the goal of keeping things simple, the three-step process of considering *lectio brevior*, *lectio difficilior*, and what ‘best fits the author’ needs further delineation. However, the following sections offer examples where the steps are put into practice.

The next two chapters outline the primary steps involved in

textual criticism for the Hebrew Bible and then the New Testament. The topics covered are:

- Materials used (critical editions, key manuscripts, translations)
- History: Major Names and Movements
- Methodologies are more clearly explained
  - Gather Variants
  - Analyze the Variants for Assessment
  - Draw Conclusions
  - Examples

The target readers will likely benefit most from the step-by-step case studies. The instructions focus on helping readers put the theories into practice. The authors have experience in the classroom, so they know there is no substitute for practical examples. One of their key examples is Isa 40:7–8. The authors provide the Hebrew text and compare it with the Göttingen Septuagint, while providing English translations. The authors help readers notice the differences and think through how the variant arose in history. They conclude that the LXX has a haplography error and that the MT should be accepted as original.

There is much to commend concerning the readability and helpfulness of the two chapters. However, some missing elements stood out. First, the authors never explain that they are using a rational/reasoned eclectic approach, which is a balancing of the internal and external evidence. Even the term is oddly missing. While they give four lines in the glossary defining pharyngeal, which is not a key term in most textual critic handbooks, they do not even include the eclecticism they used for the NT. Even odder, rational eclecticism is not in the index or in the section subtitled “How to Do New Testament Textual Criticism” (148–58). Only as a historical description is the “reasoned-eclectic approach” mentioned under the discussion of the Nestle-Aland edition (144).

I think this an oversight for a primer book. The book makes mention of the CBGM on multiple occasions, but does not even mention that there are multiple competing text-critical methods such as stemmatics, majority text, or varieties of eclecticism.

A second odd element concerns the imbalance of information.

This is likely a product of co-authoring, but there is more concrete information for the Hebrew Bible than for the New Testament. For instance, concerning the reliability of the textual tradition, the book cites Waltke as saying there is no significant variation in ninety percent of the Hebrew Bible. Likewise, Tov is cited as claiming that there is only a small degree of meaningful textual variation. Oddly, there is no such citation given for NT, although the data is readily available. Indeed, numerous sources claim that textual uniformity among the NT manuscripts is in the range of ninety to ninety-five percent.

The final sections include a brief reflection on TC today and a glossary of key terms. In keeping with the aims of the book, the authors express grounds for confidence in the English translations available and optimism about the recoverability of the ancient Bible.

The authors help readers appreciate the field of textual criticism while avoiding jargon, pedantic details, and obtuse difficulties within the field. The book focuses on representative methods and how they are practically implemented. While they admit it is a field for specialists, they impress on readers the value of having a rudimentary knowledge to better use the critical editions, textual commentaries, and even the footnotes in English translations. The tone makes the book accessible as a primer, and the bibliographies of resources in each section are helpful guides for further reading.

I enjoyed the book and think readers of this journal will find it helpful. It would make a nice addition to a church library for interested churchgoers. I especially think the introduction and overview sections would help many Christians and could also be used within church study groups.

Chris S. Stevens  
McMaster Divinity College  
Hamilton, ON