



D. C. Parker

"An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and their Texts"

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Before I start going into the details, I would like to make two general statements:

1. This is a very good book. I recommend it to every student of the New Testament. It contains many very valuable references to manuscripts and their editions. It also points to open questions and to the limits of our knowledge.

2. A warning though, which may sound a bit surprising, this is not a book about textual criticism! It is not an introduction to textual criticism, but to NT manuscripts and their texts, exactly as the title states.

Although Parker writes (p. 2): **"This book offers an account of textual criticism today"**, it does not. The term 'textual criticism' consists of two parts; the book describes the textual side, but not the criticism.

Parker is quietly subversive with this book. Since 1997, with his "Living text", he cultivates a rather anarchistic "Anything goes" approach to the variants. Throughout the book we find this underlying aspect. Parker is not really interested in (producing) a critical text of the NT, and so teaching the "criticism" of the text is not his main concern.

In the following I will go through the chapters and note the things that attracted my attention. Perhaps this review may sound overall a bit negative, but I want to assure the reader that I agree with Parker on many things that are not noted here explicitly. Perhaps or probably I have misunderstood Parker on certain points also. Everything noted is meant to make the book better in a second edition. Quotes from the book are given in **bold italic**.

Footnotes: Parker finds footnotes *"unsatisfactory"* and therefore, he intersperses the text with them (in a smaller font) instead. This is ok, but it is not always clear to what these "footnotes" refer.

One last general point should be noted. This book does not contain any images. Instead, they are provided on a webpage. This isn't per se a bad idea. Unfortunately, the "images" are a Flash application only, and therefore you cannot download them. This is a major drawback. Flash was designed to protect web-content. On enquiry, Parker even admitted that this was intentional. He sees no reason to make the images downloadable and underlines that he has purchased the images himself. Is this protective attitude necessary?

Introduction (p. 1-10)

Parker notes the introduction of the computer and new research tools.

The first stumbling block is his definition of "variant reading": *"a variant reading should be defined as 'the entire text as it is present in a particular copy' "* (p. 4). This is absolutely true, being that it is useless in practice. Parker perhaps sees this as an original insight, but I do not think that it is useful except in an epistemological way.

On p. 6 he writes *"... 'the textual criticism of the New Testament'. There is no longer such a thing..."* He rightly differentiates the books according to their literary and historical character. However, I do not know what he means by *"no longer"* though.

p. 8: *"the Secret Gospel of Mark, which I have never believed to be genuine;"* On the previous pages Parker makes it quite clear that one has to distinguish between a document and its text, but then he makes this equivocal statement. Now what does he mean? The document found by M. Smith or the Secret Gospel? I am wondering why Parker notes this here at all. I agree that it should not be dealt with in a textual criticism introductory book, however if he mentions it, he must state clearly what he means and why. The argument "I have never believed it to be genuine" isn't one. Perhaps the paragraph should better be omitted.

Chapter 1 "The study of documents" (p. 13-87)

First Parker discusses the known questions of the transition from the roll to the codex. Unfortunately, we have no clear answers. He then describes the development of the Christian book using examples from the accompanying website. On p. 21, the reader, without looking at the website, has no way of understanding what Parker is talking about. The manuscript in question is P66, but this is not mentioned in the text! These identifications are also missing on p. 23 and 25-27.

An interesting curiosity is that the earliest Greek NT written on paper dates to the ninth century! It is 0290 (St. Catherine, Sinai).

Parker then goes on to explain what palaeography means (reading the text, dating and locating the manuscript) and notes the Gregory classification. Here there is an error on p. 38: The minuscule should be "108" without the preceding Zero.

After explaining the basic reference works, Parker writes (p. 48): *"until now it has been difficult to get images of any kind, ... this is set to change"* and he refers to digitization projects. This seems peculiar because it is Parker who refuses to make the images downloadable that accompany the book.

Parker rightly notes that the extremely valuable "Text und Textwert" series *"has been so far largely ignored"*. This statement is correct and this lack of interest in the series is difficult to understand, because it is comparatively easy to use this material e.g. for the analysis of manuscripts groupings.

p. 53: *"The oldest and most extensive and important majuscule manuscripts have been well served with facsimile editions, transcriptions, and detailed studies."* I differ with Parker's use of the word "well served". They are not. Just one example: What has been done on codex Regius, after 01 and 03 the best manuscript in the Gospels? Others that need studies: 029, 033, 037, 040, 044, 070, 33, 579, 892, 1241, 1342 ...

p. 56: It is not necessary to go through the complete 'Liste' to find commentary manuscripts. There is a conversion table at the end of the 'Liste' from von Soden to Gregory numbers.

p. 57ff.: Here are descriptions of the versional evidence. Again other aspects of this are discussed in ch. 3, and a third time in ch. 10. It would be better to consolidate these.

p. 78: an error: "Scot Mckendrick, Head of Western Manuscripts"

In discussing the manuscripts, Parker puts much stress on the question, whether a particular manuscript is a complete Bible or not. I am not sure why this is so important a question.

p. 81: *"Codex Alexandrinus is a witness to a form of the Byzantine text in some places but not all."* Perhaps this should be stated more precisely as "in the Gospels".

p 82ff.: Here Parker describes, in detail, how one can find information on a certain manuscript, in this case minuscule 724. The reference to Gregory on p. 87 could be a bit more prominent in my opinion. In Gregory you will find info on almost all minuscules (known in his day).

Chapter 2: How to describe a manuscript and make a collation (p. 88-107)

This chapter is very good and detailed. Additional comments are not necessary.

Chapter 3: Other types of witness (p. 108-130)

Patristic citations, and versions again.

p. 120: Why is Jülicher's "Itala" not noted, when on p. 135 a reference is made to it?

p. 128: The Absalom inscription: Parker notes: 01*, K, Gamma, 565, 700, 1424. It is not entirely correct that the other reading *"is found in all other witnesses"*. The support I have in the online commentary is:

01*, K, Π, Γ, 0211, 565, 700, 1071, 1424, al¹², L253, L854, Sy-H

al = 6, 229, 265, 489, 544, 713, 726, 1079, 1219, 1220, 1223, 1313

Chapter 4: Manuscripts as tradents of the text (p. 133-158)

p. 144 The information on the hands in 038 as given in Beermann/Gregory is completely wrong. Gregory actually says that the complete text was written by one scribe only. Gregory additionally identifies 6 later hands. This is clearly stated on the pages 599ff. It is certainly possible that Gregory is wrong (and this manuscript deserves a detailed study), but Parker is referring to the ed.pr. for his information.

p. 154: Here Parker makes an important observation: *"It is quite hard to believe that it [i.e. the theological examination and correction of the text] could have happened in the middle of the process of copying ... It is conceivable that it took place at a preparatory stage"*

Chapter 5: Textual Criticism (p. 159-190)

This is in my view one of the weakest chapters in the book. However, it is understandable since Parker is not interested in reconstructing a critical text.

p. 158: Parker defines textual criticism as *"the analysis of variant readings in order to determine in what sequence they arose."*

p. 160: Parker asks if the term 'textual criticism' is a useful name for the discipline? The question is what he does mean by 'discipline'. And why is he questioning the term?

p. 164: Parker rightly insists on not excluding singular readings from the analysis.

p. 170: In discussing Mink's genealogical method Parker writes *"that in a tradition with none of the three problems which have dogged traditional stemmatology, every local stemma should be identical."* Parker's meaning here is difficult to decipher. It is either wrong or stated in too short a way to make sense.

p. 170: Again he states that *"the difference between manuscripts and texts is always observed."* and once again his meaning is not clear. Could it be that things like block-mixing are taken into account?

It is typical of the book's style that the so-called Canons of Criticism are only mentioned in a smaller font 'footnote' on p. 178/9. Parker writes that they *"cannot be altogether omitted"*. In an introductory book that wants to take the topic "textual criticism" seriously these canons should be discussed in detail.

p. 179: *"Thus a major critical edition sets out the history of the text, both showing at each point of variation all the different stages through which the text evolved, and providing an overall view of the development of the text."* That would indeed be nice, unfortunately I don't know of any critical edition that achieves that.

p. 183/84: Textual criticism and exegesis:

Here again Parker's "living text" paradigm shines through. According to him we should see *"variants as early forms of commentary"* and, since we don't know the original, all variants *"contributed to the meaning of the text"*. First, most of the variants were certainly not intended as commentary (e.g. errors etc.). Second, one cannot treat all variants as of equal value. If one takes Parker seriously, one has to read all variants of a certain passage and only the sum of them

gives the full meaning of the passage. Do we then need English Bibles which print all variants? Is God's word the sum of all variants? What is done in cases where the variants are contradictory? If all variants are commentary only, one has to ask: a commentary on what? On something we don't have? The authorial text? This is not helpful. In certain cases variant readings can be helpful in understanding the text, but we shouldn't give up the concept of having reconstructed the authorial/initial text - almost. Egalitarianism isn't the solution; it is the easy way out.

p. 185-89: Textual criticism and theology:

Theological beliefs, or the lack thereof, always affect one's thinking and so have an influence on decisions in textual criticism. That the biblical text is not 100% secure is an interesting and important theological factum. In general: In a certain way textual criticism defines or refines the basis of our theological belief, the text. It is, therefore, an extremely responsible task.

p188: ***"This concept of authority is closest to that held by readers of the New Testament who are not textual scholars, who generally assume that the text in their printed edition is what Matthew, Paul and the others wrote."*** I wouldn't generalize it this way. Normally also scholars think, and this is reasonable, that what we have in our printed edition is closest to what we can recover of Matthew, Paul etc. And we have no evidence, that what comes beyond that would be significantly different. There is a lot of speculation in this area.

p. 189: Textual criticism and fundamentalism:

To assume that fundamentalism is the ***"default attitude of people who have been given no reason why they should not assume that the form they know of their sacred texts is the only one in existence"*** is at least debatable. In my view it is the default attitude of almost all Christians and I see nothing wrong with it. 99,9% of all variants are so minor that almost nobody is interested in them. To think that textual criticism has anything to teach against fundamentalism is probably asking too much.

Chapter 6: Editions (p. 191-223)

p. 191: ***"These corrections [in P66] are better described as alternatives to the first reading"***. Here it is again, Parker's subversive plurality approach.

and again on p. 201: ***"the function of the text [of the ECM] given above the apparatus is as a series of hooks from which to hang it."*** This is certainly not so for the ECM and shows the little value Parker attaches to the labor and thought that went into creating it. The creation of the critical text is the task, not the listing of variants, which is a comparatively simple job.

p. 207-9: Tischendorf's 8th: It should be noted here somewhere that Tischendorf is now available in digital form with all manuscripts' designations converted (e.g. in Bibleworks).

p. 209: Regarding the "Pe" designations Parker writes: ***"There is no place of reference that I know of to identify the Pe numbers"*** There is e.g. Sakae Kubo, "Identification of Scrivener's Collated Manuscripts," Andrews University Seminary Studies 16 (1978) 397-400.

p. 215: Here also Boismard's Synopsis should be mentioned.

One of the reasons that so many people think the NT text is fixed and completely safe is that there is currently only one up-to-date edition, the Nestle-Aland, which is used by everyone and so

has gained a monopoly position. It would probably be stimulating to have some competition here. Unfortunately, the IGNTP has never produced a critical text.

Part 3:

In this last part the NT sections and their particular problems are discussed. The versions are discussed a third time!

In this last part Parker is noting some variants (finally), but not in a systematic way as textbook cases. He is presenting (some of the) evidence and then notes some of his thoughts. This is not adequate for an introductory textbook.

Chapter 7: Revelation (p. 227-245)

no comments

Chapter 8: Paul (p. 246-282)

After a lengthy discussion of the origin of the Pauline letter collection the reader is left with no conclusion. It can be deduced though that we don't know

- if it is the starting point of the tradition
- when the corpus was formed
- by whom
- and in what order (various orders existed from early on).

Since we don't know all this, it cannot help us regarding the textual criticism of the Pauline letters. So, even though these are important questions, the evidence is too slim to get valuable help from its discussion.

p. 257: Parker mentions that P46 *"includes places where alternative readings are set side by side"*. Is this so, or is it again Parker's plurality imagination?

p. 262: *"1739 and 1908"* and *"0243 and 1739"* How is this meant? Perhaps it should be expanded a bit.

p. 267: Regarding the Alexandrian text: One should see this the other way round: Because the Coptic is closest to the Greek text form we call "Alexandrian", this textform seems to be the local text of Egypt (at least one of them).

p. 269: It might be helpful to note in which order the letters are in the Euthalian edition.

p. 274: *"P46 has no subscription"*, but it says $\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$ Εφεσιους at the beginning.

p. 274: Regarding the Endings of Romans it is written: *"The questions ... need to be considered and answered to their own satisfaction by all students of Paul"*. It appears that Parker is not really interested in deciding matters: *"I leave these questions open"*. Why?

"the questions which have been raised here are of great significance to the exegete, who has to decide" What does that mean? It seems that Parker does not think that it is also the job of the textual critic to decide and create a critical text. Is the textual critic the supplier of variants only?

p. 276: *"the internal evidence I shall leave to others."* and *"The interest of these verses text-critically lies in their study."* Perhaps for Parker. These continuous *laisse fair* comments give a quite fatal view on what textual criticism is about.

p. 279: Here we find a very bold statement: *"the weighting of good witnesses against bad is a meaningless and unthinking process."* If Parker really thinks so, he must be counted under the 'rigorous eclectics'. Then, he continues: *"That reading is original which explains all others. This simple maxim requires that at each place of decision one has to present a history of the text"*. However, Parker did not do that in the preceding paragraphs; he did not even come to a conclusion regarding the reading.

p. 279-80: Editing the Pauline letters: I do not think that the questions regarding the origin of the Pauline letter corpus affect decisions regarding the editing, because we do not know anything about it (see above).

Chapter 9: Acts and the Pauline epistles (p. 283-310)

p. 286: *"Acts is unique"*: One important aspect not mentioned in this chapter is that Acts and the Gospel of Luke are by one author and are often treated together. Here we have a case where a possible corpus may affect textcritical decisions, e.g. Western non-interpolations ...

p. 286: The text given for both Bezae and Vaticanus is not correct. The phrase τὸν θεόν ... ἀπέχεσθαι is twice in the text. Modern dittography?

p. 295-6: Important comments on the *lectio brevior potior*. These should be expanded upon and not relegated into a footnote.

p. 297: The Western text of Acts cannot be separated from the Western text in the Gospels, esp. Luke. Therefore, any explanation which is incompatible with this (like the one of Strange) cannot be right.

p. 307: *"This is a rather surprising picture, one which is irreconcilable with the traditional view of text-types."* Parker's comment here is most likely true, but it should be explained why.

p. 308-9: 2.Pe 3:10 There is now a book on the passage. Since the passage is so obscure, in my opinion the οὐχ reading should be given in the apparatus only.

Chapter 10: The Gospels (p. 311-347)

p. 311: *"Finally, it should be observed that many statements made about the New Testament text in general are really statements about the Gospels which have been extrapolated to the rest."* This is correct, but it is also the other way round. E.g. it is not correct to extrapolate Wachtel's analysis about the Byzantine text in the Catholics to the Gospels.

p. 314: Regarding the edition of Q: **"this use ... must be dismissed as illusory."** This is basically correct, but it should also be noted that there is no other way to do it, if one wants to reconstruct Q.

p. 316: Vaticanus: There are not 50 sections in John, but 80. Besides 040, these sections can also be found in 579.

What now follows are very short sections on the individual Gospels. Parker's treatment of them is not adequate, being that it is too short and incomplete and does not give even the most basic facts. He explains this on p. 311: **"I have already written an introduction to the text of the Gospels, and see no value for anyone in repeating myself."** For an introductory textbook being complete, the sections should nevertheless be expanded.

1. Mt:

Why is Parker noticing f13 in Mt (where it is very weak) and not in Mk?

It is unclear why he abruptly notices agreement with 03 of certain manuscripts. The extraordinary character of 03 in the Gospels should be discussed.

2. Mk:

There are so many important things to say about Mk, like the Caesarean text, the relationship of P45 and W. Parker only writes three sentences on Mk.

3. Lk:

There is no discussion of the special "Western" text, the Western non-interpolations ...

4. Jo:

The "Western" character of 01 in ch. 1-8 should be noted.

p. 325: On 565 as a member of f1 Parker writes: **"certainly never thought before to be a family member"**. It has, however, been observed already by Kilpatrick in 1969.

Overall the discussion of the manuscripts in the Gospels is very weak. After reading it, one does not know which are the important manuscripts and what groupings exist.

p. 335: **"The older editions ... by Legg are no longer useful"**. They are still useful, like Tischendorf, but require checking.

p. 338: **"In my opinion, too much emphasis had been placed upon the search for and emphasis upon a putative 'original text'."**

and again: **"The argument [in his Living Text] ... was a challenge to the claim that there is a single authoritative form of text"**. Both of these quotes are quite typical for Parker's views.

p. 341-2: The Endings of Mark: Again Parker notes briefly the evidence, some well-known arguments, but then refers to his Living Text.

p. 342-3: The PA: Perhaps it should be noted that the manuscript groupings in the PA are almost completely different to the normal groupings (f1 etc ...).

p. 343-5: At the end of the chapter on the Gospels comes, rather spontaneously, a short discussion of 'thoroughgoing eclecticism'. Again no conclusion or assessment of the method is given.

p. 346: His conclusion on the Gospels:

point (3): ***"The possibility that whatever the forms of text were like in the year 100, they were very different from the late second-century forms still available to us."*** There is always a possibility, but how large is it? What evidence do we have? We can always only go as far as the 'initial text', which is currently the text of the second century. Everything else is speculation.

p. 347: Regarding the text that predates the 'initial text': ***"A detailed answer to this will have to await the detailed studies which will accompany the editions of the Gospels in the Editio Critica Maior."*** It is doubtful that the ECM will help us in any significant way regarding these questions. Already Text&Textwert has shown that there are only very few new interesting manuscripts. Only new evidence from ca. 50-125 CE can help us. With the existing material it is only possible to refine groupings and stemmata. Parker also admits this then: ***"Whether the editors will find techniques and evidence for improving our picture of the second-century or even of the first-century remains to be seen."***

Overall, the book is easy to read and full of interesting thoughts and ideas. Even the professional textual critic will find something new to check out. The book, however, is not optimally structured, e.g. the information on the versions is scattered and one has to look at three (!) different places to get all the information on a specific version.

On the material part: The book is well bound; it remains flat open if you bend the binding a bit. The fonts are nice and it comes with a 4-page glossary, a 4-page manuscript-index, a 2-page Bible citations index and an 8-page general index.

Hopefully, it has become clear that Parker in this book is predominantly a "collector". A collector of variants, a collector of references and a collector of questions and of creative ideas. He isn't much interested in a critical text and in the way to get there. This is the main problem of the book for students. Parker isn't teaching the "criticism" part of textual criticism. He could, most certainly, do it quite well, but it appears that he is slowing down to promote his Living Text ideology. This ideology, which could be condensed into "Even or All the variants are inspired" is a creative idea, but also raises difficult questions: Is God working with variants? Can we pick and choose the variants we like? etc. Another effect of Parker's view is that he is not offering any judgments on the quality of texts, i.e. external evidence. We do not learn that e.g. 03 is a very good text in the Gospels or that 038 is very bad. "Knowledge of documents should precede final judgment upon variants." Parker is even citing this (p. 2).

What will this lead to in the cooperation with Münster?

Perhaps they will leave the primary line blank in the ECM of John? ☺