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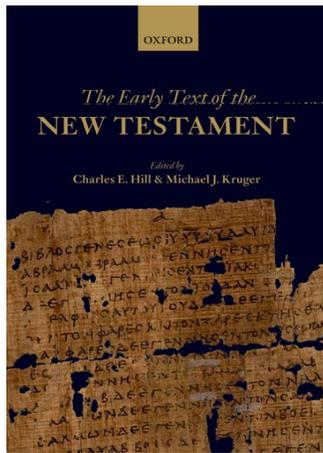
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Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger, eds.
The Early Text of the New Testament.

Oxford University Press, 2014

Pp. xiv + 483. ISBN: 978-0-19-870969-5. \$50.00
[Paperback]. [Purchase](#)

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Charles Hill (Ph.D., Cambridge) and Michael Kruger (Ph.D., Edinburgh) serve as Professors of New Testament for Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando and Charlotte, respectively. Their research and publications are held in high regard in the interrelated fields of manuscripts, canon, and early Christian writings. In *The Early Text of the NT*, Hill and Kruger have brought together nearly two-dozen of the current, leading voices in textual criticism to analyze the available evidence from the earliest period for the transmission of the NT text. The evidence is delimited to pre-fourth century, but most of the patristic evidence is second century while much of the manuscript evidence is third. Evidence from this period has always been crucial to the field, but even more so in recent years as Hill and Kruger explain in the introduction. In the last two decades, NT textual criticism has seen a resurgence in research and the emergence of new debates on subjects such as the concept of an original text, the role of the papyri, the types

of text, scribal habits, the quality of transmission, as well as other related issues. Much of the reason this earliest period has been scrutinized is because the precise nature of the copy process in that time period has yet to be clarified, and opposing claims of reliability and unreliability have been made based on the same elusive data.

Twenty-one essays comprise the book and are arranged in three large sections—four, nine, and seven essays divided respectively. In the first section regarding scribal copying, Harry Gamble describes the book trade of antiquity and its implications towards early Christian texts. Scott Charlesworth next examines the significance of *nomina sacra* and codices as evidence towards the collaboration of early Christian scribes over and against their non-“orthodox” counterparts. Larry Hurtado surveys the evidence for early Christian reading culture and its implications towards how texts were understood. Kruger then concludes the section with an important essay on how texts, which are now in the NT, were considered scripture from the earliest time periods and how this scriptural status precluded overt attempts to alter texts as indicated in a variety of early Christian statements.

All but one of the essays in the second section make a detailed inventory of the extant, early evidence for the various parts of the NT: Matthew (Tommy Wassermann), Mark (Peter Head), Luke (Juan Hernández), John (Juan Chapa), Acts (Christopher Tuckett), Paul (James Royse), Catholic Epistles (Keith Elliott), and Revelation (Tobias Nicklas). For some of these texts, the pre-fourth-century evidence is rather slim—especially Mark, Catholic Epistles, and Revelation. When ample evidence is found, more interpretation of the data is possible. Wassermann, for example, examines fourteen early specimens of Matthew to determine if their textual character was free, normal, or strict. This middle section of the book concludes with an essay by Peter

Williams on the use of versional evidence, and specifically the intriguing agreements between the Syriac and Old Latin.

Seven essays in this final section of the book examine specific second-century sources for the NT text: Apostolic Fathers (Paul Foster), Marcion (Dieter Roth), Justin (Joseph Verheyden), Tatian (Tjitze Baarda), non-canonical gospels (Stanley Porter), Irenaeus (Jeffrey Bingham and Billy Todd), and Clement of Alexandria (Carl Cosaert). While all the essays in this third section are important, Hill's opening essay in this section is must reading for anyone working with patristic citations. Hill carefully documents how citations were handled outside of Christian circles, whether of Greek classics (Homer, Herodotus, Plato) or by Jewish writers (Philo, Josephus, *Jubilees*, Pseudo-Philo). Hill is responding to claims by Helmut Koester and William Peterson that the NT text prior to 180 CE was "very unstable" and "textual chaos" based on the looseness of NT citations in patristic sources prior to Irenaeus. Hill agrees with Peterson that Irenaeus represents a watershed moment for the citation of NT text, but "the question is not, 'why do early authors [prior to Irenaeus] cite the NT writings so loosely' but 'why does Irenaeus cite more accurately?'" (p. 278). For this, Hill offers three suggestions: (1) prior to Irenaeus, early Christian writings weren't as exegetical; (2) by Irenaeus' time, Christians scriptures were more widely known and available; and (3) about this same time, the codex overtook the roll which would have facilitated the use of a written text and not merely one's memory for the wording of a citation.

The Early Text of the New Testament is an important and unique contribution to these current debates. The individual NT books are examined separately to prevent homogenizing and blurring textual issues in unfortunate and misleading kinds of ways. The second-

century sources are also examined individually to see the evidence they are able to present collectively. While some of the material in the essays has been discussed elsewhere by these and other scholars, still much of the analysis has been approached in a new and fresh manner. Crucial data regarding textual reliability in the second century is especially to be noted in both essays by the two editors (Hill and Kruger). The twenty-one essays in *The Early Text* are not the final word about the NT text in the first three centuries, but nonetheless it is an important word that must be considered. Those wishing to engage in this debate must examine closely the detailed data provided in this volume.

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