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BOOK REVIEWS

Bengt Alexanderson, *Problems in the New Testament: Old Manuscripts and Papyri, the New Genealogical Method (CBGM) and the Editio Critica Maior (ECM)*, Acta regiae societatis scientiarum et litterarum Gothoburgensis. Humaniora 48 (Göteborg, 2014), 146 pp., ISBN 978-91-980420-5-4.

Alexanderson's book is not an easy read. It is addressed to the experienced editor of New Testament texts and takes for granted a great deal of knowledge in this field. It consists of four chapters, partly deriving from previously published material (see p. 62 n. 96), which, though closely related and even overlapping in content, still read as separate pieces. The lack of a clear progression to the argument is among the difficulties any reader is likely to experience; this, and a good deal of repetition, could have been improved by more radical copy-editing. Moreover, perusing lists of variants in abstraction from the textual context is indeed challenging, so that one needs to work at understanding each passage by having an edition of the Greek New Testament ready at hand.

With these provisos, one may nonetheless sympathize at the general frustration that brought the author to vent his concerns about the new "scientific" methods of editing the text of the New Testament from all the extant witnesses, namely by applying the "Coherence-Based Genealogical Method" as outlined by Gerd Mink and applied by Barbara Aland (among others) in the ongoing "Editio Critica Maior", which has so far published a new text of the Catholic Epistles (2013). Some of these problems appear to be the crux of most critical editing: what is one to make of the many apparently insignificant variants that plague the manuscript transmission and crowd bottom-page apparatuses? Can any variant, considered statistically, have equal value to another? More importantly, how does one reckon the number of variants in any one passage? Alexanderson convincingly shows that even simple reckoning depends on subjective criteria and can be done in several equally justifiable ways (see pp. 64-66). Alexanderson also objects to the theory of "textual flow" for which a manuscript can have both "prior" and "poste-

rior” readings –i.e. be a carrier of a more ancient and original, as well as of later and more corrupt readings. In simple terms, the evaluation of the place of any readings in a varied and indeed highly contaminated tradition is extremely difficult; and as often the particular consideration for a reading comes down to the editor’s judgement, not least because the process of derivation of readings can be described in a number of equally acceptable ways, so that the certainty required for scientific claims is always jeopardized by further observation and by different evaluative criteria.

Alexanderson describes himself as an “old-fashioned textual critic” (p. 100), perhaps because his attention is focused strictly on the evaluation of meanings rather than on the contextual evaluation of readings and their carriers (his paleographical or codicological notions appear quite basic). Nevertheless, his pointing out that significant problems do remain in evaluating a complex textual tradition do not seem entirely misplaced. Moreover, his observation that “our knowledge of the Greek language is unsatisfactory” (p. 9) calls for some degree of honesty. Ultimately, his plea is that there should be nothing triumphalistic about “major” editions, howevermuch they are buttressed by highly respectable academic institutions, but rather the awareness of a painstakingly long and uncertain process in trying to retrieve a reliable text.

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