

REVIEW ARTICLE

*The Text of the New Testament*¹

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The Text of the New Testament, by Kurt and Barbara Aland. Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987. Pp. xviii + 338. \$29.95. Cloth.

With the long-awaited translation of *Der Text des Neuen Testaments* (1982), English-speaking students may now share in the debt of gratitude owed to the well-known German scholars, Kurt and Barbara Aland. The five-year delay, due to a number of complications, has resulted in more than a translation; the English edition "represents a revision of the original German edition of 1982" (translator's preface, viii).

Though modeled after Würthwein's *Der Text des Alten Testaments* (ET: *The Text of the Old Testament* [1979]), the NT counterpart tends to be more practical since a follow-up volume by Kurt Aland for advanced students is in the present time (*Überlieferung und Text des Neuen Testaments: Handbuch der modernen Textkritik*). Nevertheless, the advanced student and scholar alike can profit from this volume: the computer-generated/assisted tables, charts, and collations are, by themselves, worth the price of the book, representing the equivalent of countless thousands of man-hours. This could only have been produced at the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Munster.

Besides sixty-five plates (all but three of various NT manuscripts), eight tables and six charts (including one two-sided detached fold-out), the Alands have provided the essentials for a thorough introduction to textual criticism: an overview of the history of the printed NT text—from Erasmus to Nestle-Aland²⁶ (=UBSGNT³); a discussion of the interrelation of early church history and NT textual criticism (our appetites are barely whet, however, in the twenty-four pages on this topic); a description of the extant Greek manuscripts, as well as Greek patristic evidence (it should be noted here that readers of Metzger's *Text of the New Testament*² will find this chapter to be

¹I wish to thank Dr. J. K. Elliott, of the University of Leeds (Great Britain), for examining the first draft of this review and for making several corrections.

²B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 2d ed (Oxford: Oxford University, 1968).

quite complementary: whereas Metzger describes in greater detail a few of the more important MSS, the Alands treat us to a *seemingly* exhaustive list of MSS—though giving only the cold, hard facts in each case); a brief presentation of the versional evidence (and non-Greek patristic evidence); expansions and clarifications of the introductions in UBSGNT³, Kurt Aland's two synopses,³ and especially NA²⁶; resources (perhaps too brief) for NT textual criticism; and finally, principles and praxis of textual criticism, orienting almost all of the discussion around real examples.

Positive Observations

The Alands' work includes an extremely helpful and detailed collection of data—almost all of which is found in chapter 3 (“The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament” [72-180]). For example, tables 7 and 8 show that the Byzantine text did not *become* the majority text until the ninth century (as far as extant witnesses reveal). The many plates interspersed throughout this chapter give almost a ‘hands-on’ feel for textual criticism. But most significantly, in the descriptive list of MSS, *each* MS is listed by textual affinity (though the groupings are far from the traditional text-types). Further, the Alands *demonstrate* their assessment by comparing test-passage readings in the MSS against the Byzantine reading and against the reading of NA²⁶ (which they gratuitously call “the original text”). For example, Vaticanus shares only nine non-original readings with the Byzantine text-type in the gospels, but has 196 non-Byzantine ‘original’ readings (note that these numbers relate only to the *test* passages, not to the entire gospel text of B.) In Paul and the Catholic epistles, B has a slightly lower percentage of non-Byzantine ‘original’ readings and a slightly higher percentage of Byzantine ‘non-original’ readings. This kind of information (based on computer-assisted collations) is invaluable in helping the student to see textual consanguinity in a moment’s notice. This is especially the case among the minuscules where the Alands list over 150, the vast majority of which would *not* fit into the mainstream of the Byzantine text-type (“those with a developed Byzantine text have been omitted . . .” [135]).

Second, chapter 2 (“The Transmission of the Greek New Testament” [48-71]) *begins* to fill a much needed void in text-critical studies (though the treatment here is hardly more than an outline). As the Alands state, “New Testament textual criticism has traditionally neglected the findings of early Church history, but only to its own injury, because the transmission of the New Testament text is certainly an integral part of that history” (49). In particular, the relation of the canon to textual criticism and the continued paring down of centers for Greek MS production⁴ are important considerations for the textual critic.

³*Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 12th ed (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1982) and *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*, 7th ed (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1984).

⁴That is to say, as time went on, the production of Greek MSS of the NT became more centralized (and more uniform); the many small local scriptoria gave way to the few larger ones.

Third, students of the Greek NT will especially appreciate chapter 5 ("Introduction to the Use of Modern Editions" [218-62]), for the Alands go to great lengths to clarify what is in the standard 'pocket' edition of the NT, Nestle-Aland²⁶. A profound appreciation for German concision is gained from this chapter: the symbols and abbreviations found in the apparatus as well as the inner and outer margins of NA²⁶, if spelled out, could well fill ten volumes! Much of the material in this chapter does not properly belong to a work on textual criticism, but it is nevertheless a great help to the student who, having read the Introduction in NA²⁶ (39*-78*), still needs assistance in using this Greek NT to its maximum potential.

Fourth, it is refreshing to see two respected *German* NT scholars adamantly reject appeals to conjectural emendation, textual rearrangement, or excision ("the way in which chapter 21 has been attached to the gospel of John argues against any such complex theories as Rudolf Bultmann's, for example" [292]).⁵

Finally, the twelve principles of textual criticism and the very concrete examples of these principles in operation in chapter 7 give the work a very pragmatic thrust and help in illustrating the principles by which Kurt Aland has come to his text-critical decisions as reflected in (his contribution to) the text of NA²⁶-UBSGNT³.⁶

Negative Observations

For those who have been introduced to NT textual criticism by reading Metzger's *Text of the New Testament*, with its copious and careful documentation, the Alands' text will appear to be taking a step backwards. There is no bibliography and the footnoting is at best substandard. A veritable avalanche of text-critical dissertations, articles, books and *Festschriften* have been produced since Metzger's second edition went to press. Perhaps Kurt Aland's forthcoming *Überlieferung und Text* will update the bibliography, but it is difficult to hold back some sense of disappointment in the present volume on this score.

Second, the lack of documentation of this work seems to be matched only by its lack of irenic spirit. As significant as the Institute for New Testament Textual Research is for the discipline—E. J. Epp once lamented the probability that there are more bona fide textual critics at the Institute than in all of North America!⁷—one gets the impression that *almost* no one outside the Institute has contributed much of worth to textual criticism in the last two decades. Gordon Fee and Eldon Epp are cited only incidentally in

⁵See other comments on the Pauline corpus on 291-92.

⁶Especially to be noted is the emphasis in these principles on external evidence as normally taking precedence over internal criteria and that "A constantly maintained familiarity with New Testament manuscripts themselves is the best training for textual criticism" (276).

⁷"The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism," *JBL* 93 (1974) 414. See also his follow-up essay which elaborates on this point, "New Testament Textual Criticism in America: Requiem for a Discipline," *JBL* 98 (1979) 94-98.

one footnote (95); J. K. Elliott and J. N. Birdsall are ignored; G. D. Kilpatrick is cited but twice. Conversely, Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, editors of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, are mentioned four times—all pejoratively. Obviously a scholarly work needs to critique other views. The tenor in which the critique is done, however, coupled with the overly dogmatic stance, will not be of great benefit to the undiscerning student. On the one hand, some may reject the Alands' viewpoints because of their attitude. This would be a tragedy, for Kurt and Barbara Aland are scholars whose opinions deserve the weightiest consideration. On the other hand, some students may buy both the arguments and the attitude, thinking that nothing else needs to be said about the subject.⁸

Third, much of the Alands' viewpoint is open to criticism in six major areas: (1) Their dismissal of the validity and early date of the 'western' text, for example (cf. 54-55, 181ff.), is based on the premises that (a) since it does not clearly show up in the early papyri (though P²⁹, P³⁸, and P⁶⁸ seem to contradict this), it is not early, and (b) the Itala, since they are not in Greek, do not constitute primary witnesses to any text-type.⁹ As much good as the Alands have done in stressing the tremendous importance of the early papyri, perhaps their assessment of these exclusively Egyptian MSS as giving an accurate picture of the overall transmission of the text in the first three centuries is overly generous. The versional and especially patristic evidence through the third century coupled with relatively sparse and certainly provincial Greek MS evidence for the same period (less than fifty MSS, the vast majority of which are mere fragments) ought to caution against funneling *everything* through the sands of Egypt. (This, of course, is not to say that the *Byzantine* text-type is early for theories must be based on evidence, not arguments from silence.)

(2) The test-passage method for determining textual consanguinity is an imperfect and, at times misleading, method.¹⁰ For example, the Alands found only one place (among their test passages) in Luke where P⁷⁵ had a non-original (i.e., a reading not found in the text of NA²⁶) Byzantine reading (95),

⁸To some degree, this volume tends to be, rather than a handbook on textual criticism, a vindication of NA²⁶ (not UBSGNT³, in spite of their claim of objectivity about the two texts [219]) in terms of its text, apparatus, and general layout. This is clearly seen in the final chapter: in virtually all of the examples of scribal corruption given, the Alands speak dogmatically about what the original read. They give little incentive here for *others* to do textual criticism; in fact, one gets the distinct impression that NT textual criticism is soon to become obsolete since it has almost attained a state of perfection.

⁹Part of the reason that the 'western' text is viewed this way by the Alands is their regard for the versional (and, to some degree, patristic) evidence as merely of supplementary help in informing text-critical decisions.

¹⁰Cf. F. Wisse, *The Profile Method for Classifying and Evaluating Manuscript Evidence*, vol 44 of *Studies and Documents*, ed I. A. Sparks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 21-22 for a specific critique; and B. D. Ehrman, "Methodological Developments in the Analysis and Classification of New Testament Documentary Evidence," *NovT* 29 (1987) 22-45 for a more general discussion. Ehrman's article not only shows the inadequacies of several methods used to determine textual affinities, but gives a positive approach to the whole program which he calls "The Complete Profile Method."

yet in H. A. Sturz's more exhaustive research into the early papyri-Byzantine alignments, ten such places were noted.¹¹ No one would, of course, call P⁷⁵ a Byzantine MS, but even this venerated MS has some allies beyond those the test-passage method would suggest. The drawbacks of this method limit the usefulness of the descriptive lists of Greek MSS in chapter 3.

(3) The Alands have misrepresented the view held by Hodges and Farstad (editors of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*).¹² They call it a "return to the Textus Receptus of Erasmus . . ." (vii), though in reality there are almost 2000 differences between the Majority Text and the TR. The Alands' misunderstanding of the Hodges-Farstad text is evident in their discussion of "Verses Omitted in the 'Standard Text'" (292-300) where they specifically intend to interact with the Majority Text, for of the fifteen passages they discuss, four are also missing in the Majority Text though found in the TR!

(4) As helpful as their "Twelve Basic Rules for Textual Criticism" (275-77) are, not only are some debatable (e.g., their fifth principle is that "the versions and Fathers [serve] no more than a supplementary and corroborative function" [275]; their eleventh rule ['lectio brevior'] they are cautious not to apply mechanically, but they nowhere mention that for *unintentional* errors the longer reading is often to be preferred), but one of the rules is not even followed entirely by Kurt Aland himself. The seventh principle ("that the original reading may be found in any single manuscript or version when it stands alone or nearly alone is only a theoretical possibility" [276]) is overturned in several places in NA²⁶. For example, in Matt 8:18 NA²⁶ has $\alpha\chi\lambda\omicron\nu$ which is supported only by B sa^{mss}; in Luke 17:23 the reading $\epsilon\kappa\epsilon\iota \omega \iota\delta\omicron\nu \omega\delta\epsilon$ is found only in P⁷⁵ B; in John 5:2 NA²⁶ reads $\beta\eta\theta\zeta\alpha\theta\alpha$, though it is supported only by κ 33 (it¹) Eusebius (Cyril) (thus, only two Greek MSS with additional 'corroborative' support); $\alpha\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma\omicron \tau\eta\varsigma\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$ in Acts 17:3 is found only in B and, perhaps, sa^{mss} (though the latter are not mentioned in NA²⁶); Rev 18:3 reads $\pi\epsilon\pi\omega\kappa\alpha\nu$ which has only two minuscules as its total support (1006^c 2329) according to NA²⁶ (though UBSGNT³ adds 1828; Hoskier lists 1828 and 2321;¹³ and, most surprisingly, in Rev 21:17 NA²⁶ reads $\epsilon\kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\nu \tau\epsilon\sigma\sigma\epsilon\rho\alpha\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\alpha \tau\epsilon\sigma\sigma\alpha\rho\omega\nu$, duplicating a *conjecture* found in Westcott-Hort which has, according to Hoskier, *no MS support* (that there is a textual problem here is not mentioned either in the NA²⁶ apparatus, nor the UBSGNT³ apparatus, nor in Metzger's *Textual Commentary*). Apparently, theoretical possibility has become a reality in a few (albeit *very few*) places in NA²⁶.

(5) Overlapping with the criticism above is the much higher emphasis on external evidence than on internal criteria.¹⁴ (This can be seen clearly by the

¹¹*The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984) 147-49.

¹²2d edition (Thomas Nelson, 1985).

¹³J. K. Elliott has informed me that here Hoskier is in error—i.e., for 2321 [=200 in Hoskier's system] in Hoskier we should understand 2329 (cf. Elliott's forthcoming conversion table in *JTS*).

¹⁴Although their emphasis on external evidence has already been mentioned as a positive point, it is the overemphasis coupled with the negligible treatment of internal evidence to which I am objecting here.

lay-out of the book: internal considerations are discussed only in chapter seven and there only under praxis—no theory is developed for doing internal criticism.)

(6) There are a small number of *fairly* significant misleading statements as well as overstatements: (a) the first two tables (29–30) show the agreements among seven major editions of the NT in the last 100+ years (table 1) and the disagreements between NA²⁵ and these other six (table 2). The amount of variant-free verses (between 45 and 81% for every book in the NT) seems incredibly high, but the Alands qualify it by not counting orthographical variants or verses “*in which any one of the seven editions differs by a single word . . .*” (29, italics added). Many of these verses are not variant-free, therefore, even though they are called such.

(b) The Alands surprisingly claim that “a comparison of the critical apparatuses of Tischendorf and Nestle-Aland²⁶ shows that the latter offers *all the variants cited in Tischendorf (and even more)* . . .” (37, italics added). It is true that the MS discoveries since 1869 have produced more variants, many of which have been incorporated into the apparatus of NA²⁶. But a quick check on a few passages reveals that this claim is an overstatement much, if not most, of the time: in Eph 6:17, NA²⁶ records only the omission to the reading δεξασθε, while Tischendorf also reveals the significant variant δεξασθαι (whether one adopts the imperative or infinitive in this text *can* effect the structure of the whole pericope); in Gal 3:20, NA²⁶ lists no variants while Tischendorf records ογαρ as a variant for οδε. A random check of Tischendorf produced an example on p. 437 (vol. 2) regarding Rom 14:1–4a: in addition to the variants listed in NA²⁶, Tischendorf mentioned three other variant-units: ο δε / ος δε (ν 2), εξουθνειτο/-νειτω/κρινετω and ο θεος υαρ / ουαρ θεος (ν 3). Obviously, not all of these variants are merely orthographical in nature. Tischendorf is still necessary for a *list* of variants (besides, of course, for the evidence supporting them). On the other hand, Tischendorf will not always be more exhaustive than NA²⁶ in the number of variants recorded. In 3 John, for example, NA²⁶ had about a dozen *more* variants than Tischendorf (and, incidentally, about three times as many as NA²⁵).

(c) The definition of category III describing textual affinities (106) seems a bit of an overstatement: “Manuscripts of a distinctive character with an independent text . . .,” for most of the MSS which the Alands place here have a predominantly Byzantine flavor (though not nearly as uniform as the MSS which they classify as having “a purely or predominantly Byzantine text”). Category III, therefore, tends to give an artificial impression of more MSS having an independent text than is really the case. It might be better to define this category as “manuscripts which have not been *wholly* tampered with by the Byzantine standard.”

(d) On p. 58 it is claimed that “If a fragment preserves a passage where there is any variation in the tradition, it is quite sufficient to signal the textual character of the whole manuscript. There is no need to consume a whole jar of jelly to identify the quality of its contents—a spoonful or two is quite enough!” Perhaps this kind of reasoning is what stands behind the Alands’ test-passage method, and moves the authors to classify codex Alexandrinus as ‘independ-

dent' rather than Byzantine in the gospels (107, but see 50!). Further, it is demonstrably untrue: if only a leaf or two of P⁴⁵ had been discovered—say, of Mark 7:30–36 (where it shares seven readings with the Byzantine text *against* the Alexandrian and *none* with the Alexandrian against the Byzantine¹⁵—the Alands might be forced to conclude that such a fragment was an early third century Byzantine MS!¹⁶ Textual consanguinity can not always therefore be determined by simply sampling a 'spoonful or two' of a MS's contents.¹⁷

(e) Finally, in attempted to show NA²⁶'s superiority over other texts (UBSGNT³ excepted)—in part by default—the Alands mention that "the circulation of editions formerly in competition with Nestle seems to have subsided" (218. Then they state that the last edition of Merk's *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine* was in 1964. This statement was true in 1982, when the German edition of the Alands' text was published; but it was not true in 1987 (nor in May 1985, when Kurt Aland made his final corrections/revisions of the English edition), for Merk's 10th edition in 1984.

Finally, some minor errata in the work need to be mentioned: the caption for the plate on p. 80 reads "Codex Guelferbytanus (A^c. . .)", but it should read "Codex Guelferbytanus A (P^c. . .)"; "text passages" (95) should read "test passages"; "104^s (107, third line from bottom) should read "104²", the cross reference for 0189 (122) should be to p. 103 rather than to p. 105; "plate 4" (first line, 128) should be "plate 40"; MS 1067 should be labeled Category V in Paul, III elsewhere (132); "Bonafactius Fischer" (170) should be "Bonifatius Fischer"; plate 23 (p. 90) P⁴⁷ should be dated *third* century, not second, and P⁷⁵ (plate 24, p. 91) should be dated "early *third*" rather than "early second." All in all, with the great mass of details covered in this volume, that there are so few errata is commendable to authors and publishers alike.

Conclusion

The Alands' *Text of the New Testament* should serve the academic and ecclesiastical communities well for years to come. Unfortunately, though one could justifiably have expected it to supplant Metzger's handbook (since so much has happened in the nineteen year gap between the two), because of its lack of documentation coupled with its tone, the two should be used together. A second edition, with some work, could correct these deficiencies and render for itself an unqualified commendation.

¹⁵Cf. also Luke 12:21–13:2; John 9:16–35; 10:19–38; 11:19–12:9; Rev 9:20–12:13 for similar 'strings' of Byzantine-papyrus alignments (as well as the list supplied in Sturz, 145–59).

¹⁶Cf. also G. D. Fee's article in *NTS* 15 (1968) 23–44 in which he demonstrates that \aleph has a D-text for John 1:1–8:38

¹⁷One could note further the 'patchwork' text of codex W (which has dramatic shifts in its textual affinities: In Matthew and Luke 8–24 the text is Byzantine; in Mark 1–5 it is 'western'; in Mark 6–11 it is Caesarean; and in Luke 1–7 and John 5:21 it is Alexandrian.