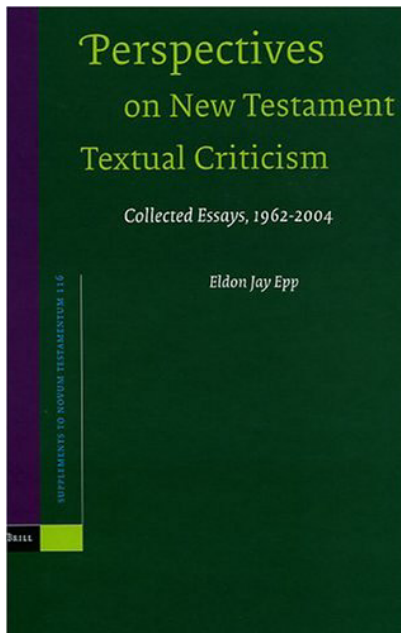


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**Epp, Eldon Jay**

***Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism:  
Collected Essays, 1962–2004***

Supplements to Novum Testamentum 116

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When the Society of Biblical Literature launched its The Bible and Its Modern Interpreters series, it was not surprising that Eldon Jay Epp was chosen to be one of the two editors of the third title in the series, *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (1989), for he was known to be a shrewd and meticulous commentator on the broad area of study and, more particularly, his own specialization in textual criticism. He contributed the chapter on this branch of New Testament scholarship for that volume. Even those whose area of academic interest is not textual criticism know of and frequently cite his *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis*, based on his doctoral thesis and published in the SNTS Monograph Series in 1966. Equally well cited outside the normal circles is his essay “The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism” of 1974, which served as a wake-up call to the discipline—and one that has worked: the subject is far more buoyant now than it was when Epp wrote that gloomy but painfully accurate diagnosis of the discipline. In the past decade or so his interest has turned to the impact of the New Testament papyrus texts, and he has written perceptively on the significance of the papyri and the historical context of the early transmitting of texts. In these and in many other ways Epp has been a wise and familiar figure, especially in North American biblical scholarship.

Now Epp has gathered together twenty-three of his own articles for republication here. These start from 1962 and culminate, appropriately, in the reproduction of his presidential address to the Society of Biblical Literature in 2003 and originally published in the following year. (Some articles in this selection had already been republished in Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans] in 1993.) A short introductory essay plots his developing interest in textual criticism since his student days. A full bibliography of Epp's writings comes near the end of the volume, and there is a black and white photograph of Epp as a frontispiece. As we would expect from Epp, he has furnished the book with full and carefully controlled indexes.

Among the treasures reproduced here, the following are especially significant for having stood the test of time: chapter 6, "The Eclectic Method of Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?"; chapter 13, "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Criticism"; and chapter 21, "Issues in the Interrelation of New Testament Textual Criticism and Canon." These and other articles in this collection are packed with verifiable fact, wise interpretation, and full footnotes; they merit our constant consultation.

As indicated above, "Twentieth Century Interlude" was a call to arms. Epp's own "Added Notes," following that essay here, readily acknowledge that the original is now somewhat dated; he has also added to its bibliography. But it is important to have this historic and landmark essay if only to indicate how the subject has grown over the past thirty years. His "New Testament Textual Criticism in America: Requiem for a Discipline," originally published in *HTR* in 1979 and now reprinted as chapter 7, has also merited extended additional notes, in which Epp now classes the article "a rather strange publication." That short piece has, however, like "Twentieth Century Interlude" also proved to be a regularly cited piece and, when written, was to the shame of textual criticism more widely applicable than the title would suggest. Note also Epp's further second thoughts in 1980 in another article on the same theme but now with an indefinite article and a question mark: "A Continuing Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism?" now here as chapter 8.

Epp's historical surveys and judgments such as "Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism: Moving from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First century" (ch. 22 from 2002), the essay on the Claremont Profile Method (ch. 3 from 1967), and his story of the International Greek New Testament Project (ch. 16 from 1997) are important. It is also good to have to hand essays that lie hidden in the *Festschriften* to Metzger (1981),

Fitzmyer (1959), Koester (1991), and Baarda (1997); these have not been reprinted elsewhere.

Not for Epp the typical teasing out of a nest of text-critical variation units, although he has addressed such cruces in his day—and one of his most recent pieces (for the Delobel Festschrift) examines in a meticulous way, so characteristic of his scholarly writing, the variant Junia/Junias at Rom 16:7. That piece, in many ways not typical of Epp’s work, is not included in the present collection, but it has been published as a small monograph (*Junia: The First Woman Apostle* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005]). Rather, in many of his writings Epp has tended to go for the loftier view, tracing trends in the ongoing discipline of textual criticism and trying to establish principles, definitions, and methodologies.

He has the happy knack of asking the right questions of the discipline. One recent example is his thorough examination of the well-used phrase “original text.” What does *original* mean? The question is tackled head on in the essay reproduced here as chapter 5: “The Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in New Testament Textual Criticism” (cf. his earlier article “Towards the Clarification of the Term ‘Textual Variant’ ” from the Kilpatrick Festschrift of 1976 and now here as ch. 5).

Epp’s editorial skills are in evidence in his reworking his own essays for this publication. He has updated and added material. Helpfully, the original pagination of the original publication is given in the outer margins. Cross-references to other articles in this collection are given in footnotes. This large volume (2½ inches thick) is to be highly commended. For the present reviewer at least my pile of offprints in the “Epp” file will no longer be consulted so frequently—this one large book has replaced most of those offprints, and it can now sit neatly by my desk.