

RBL 04/2008



**Epp, Eldon Jay**

***Junia: The First Woman Apostle***

Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005. Pp. xvii + 138. Paper.  
\$16.00. ISBN 0800637712.

Nancy Calvert-Koyszis  
McMaster University  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

Epp's book, in substance, is based on an earlier article entitled, "Text-Critical, Exegetical, and Socio-cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variation in Romans 16,7," in a Festschrift for Professor Joël Delobel (in *New Testament Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift J. Delobel* [ed. A. Denaux; BETL 161; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002], 227–91). In the foreword to *Junia: The First Woman Apostle*, Beverly Roberts Gaventa summarizes the two major issues that run through Epp's book: "the name Junia and its presence during the two millennia since Phoebe first delivered the letter to Rome" (x); and how a male name replaced Junia's given the fact that the case for a female name is so strong (xi).

The book is divided into two major parts. The first part addresses contemporary textual criticism. In the first chapter, Epp argues for the "loss of innocence" of textual criticism insofar as the establishment of the "original" text is concerned. Working with well-known examples of text-critical difficulties (Mark 1:1; Rom 1:7; Mark 10:2–12 and parallels), Epp shows how the customary internal and external criteria for establishing the text are often fraught with difficulties. Yet this erosion of confidence also has a bright side, since textual variants can tell us stories about the ideological tendencies or bias that shaped them (4). For Epp, "*the greater the ambiguity in the variant readings of a given variation unit, the more clearly we are able to grasp the concerns of the early church*" (12, emphasis original).

In his second chapter Epp discusses the silencing of women pericope (1 Cor 14:33b–36) and contemporary arguments over its status as an interpolation (he thinks it is) as evidence for the significance of text criticism for exegesis and vice versa.

In the second (and most lengthy) part of the book Epp addresses more facets of the Junia problem than any previous publications (Gaventa, x). Epp begins by showing why the discussion of Ἰουνίαν (Junian, here unaccented; in the accusative in Rom 16:7) is significant, since it can be understood as either male or female depending to a large degree on the way it is accented. Since the passage calls this person an “apostle,” if this is a woman, she “is presented here as the first and only woman to be called ‘apostle’ in the canonical writings of the New Testament” (22). In his third chapter Epp shows that the way Ἰουνίαν has been accented in Rom 16:7 has played a role historically in whether scholars believe the lexical form is Ἰουνία (feminine) or Ἰουνιά (masculine; in some cases Ἰουνία) and how the belief that the name was masculine was not based on actual evidence but on scholarly conjectures. As a result, Epp prefers the feminine (Ἰουνία) option.

In chapter 4 Epp reviews the Christian interpreters of Rom 16:7 until late antiquity, concluding that “to date a *bona fide* instance of Junias, whether in Greek or Latin, has not been found” (35). When he moves to the late Middle Ages he shows that Aegidius of Rome is “commonly credited as the first to identify Junia as male when he referred to the pair greeted in Rom 16:7 as ‘those honorable men [*viri*]’”(35). Later interpreters, particularly Martin Luther, interpreted Junia as male with the result that the reading “Junias” occurred (39). Of course, it was the “contracted name theory,” in which “Junias” was thought to be the Greek shortened from of the Latin “Junianus,” that the masculine interpretation of Junia really took hold, and this is the subject of chapter 5. According to Epp, the theory was widespread until the 1990s, when scholars mounted convincing technical arguments against it. Epp believes that neither Ἰουνιά nor Ἰουνία should be placed in any New Testament critical editions unless they are marked as conjectures (44).

In chapters 6–10, Epp considers Junia in present and past critical editions of Greek New Testaments, reference works, and English translations. In chapter 6 he shows the progression particularly from the UBS 1993 edition, where Ἰουνιά is listed as the preferred reading, based upon majuscule manuscripts that contain no accents whereby one could ascertain the gender of the word to the UBS 1998 (also the “Jubilee Edition” of Nestle Aland), where the unaccented majuscules are used to support Ἰουνίαν and the masculine form disappears from the scene. Clearly Epp is not happy with the use of unaccented majuscules to support either option, but he is perplexed by the earlier attribution of a male name where no support existed. Epp shows in chapter 7 how critical editions of the Ἰουνίαν (Rom 16:7) reading of the Greek New Testament offered Ἰουνιά

as the undisputed text for over seventy-five years (52). He is remarkably restrained in his eighth chapter as he shows how modern reference works to the New Testament have “contributed to (or impeded!) the exegetical tradition of Junia/Junias by supporting the view, with a high degree of consistency, that the name in Rom 16:7 was masculine, while, at the same time, discouraging the notion that it was feminine” based primarily on cultural bias (54). In chapter 9 he considers the critical editions of the Greek New Testament and provides two tables that show how, between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries, all but one used Ἰουνίαν, while between 1927 and 1998 all but one used Ἰουνῖαν. All of this has greatly influenced exegesis. Epp considers English translations of the New Testament in much the same way in chapter 10. Here he shows in another table that English versions move from a generally “consistently feminine understanding of ‘Junia’ for the first three centuries (1526 to 1833)” (65) until the 1870s, when “Junias” was used until the 1960s, followed by decades of alternation between feminine and masculine, “with an increasing trend of returning to the feminine” (65). In chapter 11 he shows that “ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖ ἀποστόλοι ” means that both Andronicus and Junia were “outstanding apostles,” not merely “well known to the apostles,” as some have argued. Finally, he concludes that Junia really was a prominent apostle, contrary to the “manipulations and machinations of countless male scholars ... over the past two centuries” (80), and that text criticism and exegesis do affect one another, although the perspective that scholars bring to each discipline greatly influence the results.

This is a fine, erudite study, full of technical detail that is very readable, and the most complete discussion of debates about Junia (except perhaps for Epp’s earlier article) that I am aware of. However, I was left wondering just who it was that alleges “that Junias [masculine] was mentioned by Origen according to Rufinus’s Latin translation” (33) or what significance Junia’s social status may have had in the early church in Rome and whether this was related to her apostolic status (23). I also wondered if Junia really was the “first” woman apostle, as the title of the book suggests, in view of Ann Graham Brock’s *Mary Magdalene: The First Apostle* (HTS 51; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). In her book Brock suggests that Mary Magdalene is depicted as having the necessary characteristics of an apostle. I assume it depends upon whether one believes that Mary Magdalene was a historical figure and that the accounts of Jesus’ postresurrection appearance to her are authentic. I have to admit that I enjoyed reading Epp’s book very much, in part because he shows so often what I have suspected for so long, that cultural bias about whether a woman could be an apostle, let alone a prominent apostle, kept scholars from revealing Junia for the significant figure that she really was. For this, and for his careful research and discussion throughout the book, I am grateful.