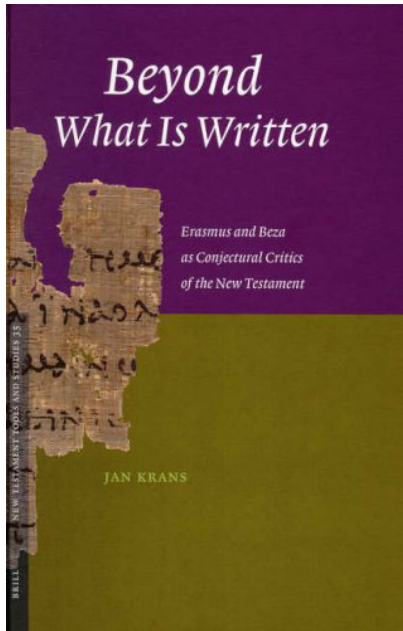


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**Krans, Jan**

***Beyond What Is Written: Erasmus and Beza as Conjectural Critics of the New Testament***

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Krans's book is based on a detailed and carefully executed piece of research at the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. In his work Krans examines the conjectural emendations proposed by Erasmus and Beza in their respective work on the Greek text of the New Testament. Conjectural readings have been introduced into the New Testament since the beginning. Most deliberate changes inserted by scribes into the manuscripts they were copying may be described as conjectural emendations of those texts. Modern scholars have also speculated about difficult readings found in the Greek New Testament, and some have proposed alternative readings that are not in the manuscripts. The United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament text followed by the Nestle edition has one such conjecture in the text printed at Acts 16:12. The *Editio Critica Maior* has recently printed a conjecture at 2 Pet 3:10. The siglum *cj* is found some 220 times in the apparatus of Nestle-Aland 25th edition, although the number of such occurrences has been pruned somewhat in the editions following (about 130 conjectures survive in the apparatus).

But under what circumstances did Erasmus and Beza make their emendations? Krans carefully traces where and how these scholars proposed changes to the Greek text. Krans emphasizes that both scholars' concerns were primarily with the *Latin Bible*, and here he

is thus following H. J. de Jonge's perceptive opinion that what it was that Erasmus was doing when he published his *Novum Instrumentum* in 1516 was the promotion of a new Latin New Testament, the readings for which were verified by an accompanying Greek text. So when Erasmus and later Beza commented on readings in the Greek, they were doing so in order to establish rather than to revise the Greek. Both had comparatively few Greek manuscripts at their disposal: Erasmus only the ten or so to hand in Basle, and Beza the sixteen found in Stephanus, supplemented by the bilinguals 05 (subsequently named Codex Bezae) and 06.

"Whereas for Erasmus, the Greek text of the New Testament is first of all a source, which he treats in essentially the same way as any other classical text, for Beza, it is first of all (holy) scripture, which has to be treated with the utmost reverence." That sentence by Krans, found toward the end of his thesis (332), could well serve as a caricature undergraduate examination question, followed by the ubiquitous "Discuss," but it demonstrates Krans's careful judgment on the two scholars under his microscope. Understanding the context of conjectures and the historical circumstances of the writers confirms Krans's guiding principle from the outset that judgment of conjectures should be preceded by knowledge of their authors (3). A bald "cj" or even a "cj Erasmus" in an apparatus is useless in itself and reinforces my oft-stated opinion that the apparatus is no place for modern deliberate conjectures. If they belong anywhere, it is in a commentary.

Krans sets the record straight regarding Erasmus, often accused of being a scholar who irresponsibly tried to rewrite the New Testament text. In practice, many of the alleged emendations were arbitrary corrections (some subsequently verified) of the few manuscripts he had at his disposal. Other "emendations" of the Greek text were actually founded on the Vulgate. And, in any case, most of the proposed emendations are found, not in the printed text, but in his copious annotations. There are very few pure conjectures (those that may be so described are given on pp. 108ff.), although in several instances Erasmus provides reasons for an emendation without actually proposing a change to his text. The conjecture "her" at Luke 2:22 made its way into the King James English version.

Erasmus's working methods are exposed, and Krans puts us in his debt by detailing the nature of his annotations. In several Erasmus is shown as a perceptive textual critic and scholar of Koine Greek grammar well ahead of his time, and as only a reluctant emendator of the biblical text. Erasmus was alert to principles such as the acceptance of a harder reading as the original, of homoioteleuton, and of itacism, topics that resurfaced in New Testament scholarship two centuries later than Erasmus after a comparative lull in such editorial activities in the eighteenth century. We are shown how Erasmus discussed cruces such as Mark 7:3; 1 Cor 1:6-7; 1 Thess 2:7; Jas 4:2 (an emendation noted in the

current Nestle edition); and 1 Pet 3:20. Krans provides us with telling examples wisely commented upon. Chapter 6 is a useful survey of how Erasmus reacted to others' conjectures (e.g., Jerome and Origen from the early Christian centuries or Valla from nearer his own day). Full and useful footnotes and cross-references to a wide range of appropriate secondary literature are provided. Krans's enviably fluent English style is to be congratulated. The only howler I spotted was a French term (*en bloque* on 196)! The welcome and ongoing series of scholarly publications of Erasmus's oeuvre (*Opera Omnia*) makes the appearance of this part of the published thesis particularly appropriate and timely.

Beza too was reluctant to make conjectural emendations. Like Erasmus, he discussed possible conjectural changes in his notes, and many of those have found their way into later discussions. There are ten emendations attributed to Beza in the Nestle-Aland 25th edition (the number is reduced in the following editions). Beza showed an interest in the readings of the manuscripts he adopted (from Stephanus) as well as betrayed a reluctance to accept many of the singular readings of Codex Bezae, which he regarded as an unreliable and maverick witness. (Beza's famous letter on this topic is translated on 229–30.)

This is a very thorough but readable thesis, displaying careful scholarship at its best: well-documented, judiciously analyzed, and logically presented and evaluated. In short, it is a richly deserved doctorate that we are now privileged to benefit from in the latest volume in this prestigious series.