Juan Hernández Jr.
Bethel University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Introduction

By any measure, the imaginative task of reconstructing the past through an interrogation of its artifacts remains a daunting one, often complicated by the neglect of primary sources. Such appeared to be the fate of the Freer Codices, long overshadowed by the twentieth-century discoveries of the Egyptian papyri and the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, the publication of *The Freer Biblical Manuscripts: Fresh Studies of an American Treasure Trove*, edited by Larry W. Hurtado, fills a long-standing lacuna in the study of these codices and lays the groundwork for further historical inquiry. This volume covers three of the six available manuscripts in the Freer Collection: a papyrus codex of the Minor Prophets and two parchment codices—W (containing the four Gospels) and I (containing the Pauline Epistles). With the exception of the initial (“Paleography and Philanthropy: Charles Lang Freer and His Acquisition of the ‘Freer Biblical Manuscripts,’” by Kent D. Clarke) and final (“Manuscript Markup,” by Timothy J. Finney) contributions, each article explores unresolved yet relevant text-critical issues. Codex W garners the lion’s share of the attention, with six articles devoted to the study of its Gospels, five of which focus on Matthew either entirely or in part. General areas covered in this anthology...
include textual consanguinity (Racine), scribal activity (De Troyer, Prior, Haugh, Wayment, Royse), and paleography and codicology (Choat, Schmid).

The Freer Minor Prophets

The first set of text-critical essays targets the Freer Minor Prophets Codex. De Troyer examines the revisions of the FMP’s Greek text of Jonah in order to determine whether it exhibits the influence of pre-Hexaplaric translations of the Hebrew Bible or the Hebraizing versions. Her comparisons against the Nahal Hever Minor Prophets Scroll, the Old Greek, and the Masoretic Text reveal that the first and second hands of Jonah stand in the OG tradition. The text of the first hand also appears to lack any influence of the so-called *kaige* text. De Troyer’s exclusion of the third hand from consideration, however, is perplexing, especially since she introduces it in her *Forschungsberichte*. De Troyer also misses an important opportunity to facilitate peer review of her judgments by not providing a full collation of Jonah’s corrections. Nevertheless, the study is a critical first step in appraising FMP’s revisions.

Despite the title (“The Unidentified Text in the Freer Minor Prophets Codex”), Choat’s contribution offers codicological observations of the Freer Minor Prophets Codex as a whole (e.g., its acquisition, provenance, physical description, hand, date, marginalia, glosses, and ancient acquisition history), as well as of the so-called “Unidentified Text” (consisting of fragments found with the FMP on similar papyrus). Choat’s discussion of the “Unidentified Text” provides readers a full transcription of the recto/verso sides of the manuscript, as well as copious notes on the text in a commentary. Largely a quotation of the LXX of Isa 54:12–15 (with themes and vocabulary drawn from the Apocalypse), the “Unidentified Text” sheds additional light on the intertextual appropriation of the book of Revelation in the fourth (?) century and invites further study against the larger sociohistorical background of that period.

The Gospels (Codex W), Pauline Epistles (Codex I)

Textual Consanguinity

In the only contribution dealing almost exclusively with textual consanguinity, Racine offers quantitative and qualitative appraisals of the Greek text of Matthew in Codex W. Drawing on his previous research on the text of Matthew in Basil of Caesarea, Racine conducts statistical analyses of Matthew’s text in W against twenty other manuscripts and finds that Matthew’s rate of agreement in W (with other manuscripts) places it within the Byzantine textual group. Racine’s qualitative analysis is more restricted, focusing on a comparison between Matthew’s text in the codices W and B. Using applied linguistics,
Racine finds that the text of Matthew in W gives a general impression of greater cohesion than B due to its more frequent use of reference, conjunctions, and lexical cohesion—a product, he surmises, of sporadic modifications rather than any editorial strategy.

Scribal Activity

The *nomina sacra*, singular readings, and scribal corrections are the focus of four separate studies of scribal activity. Building on Hurtado’s well-known classification of *nomina sacra* into three groups, Prior investigates their appearance in the text of Matthew in Codex W. Prior’s study largely supports Hurtado’s classifications, especially regarding the members of the primary group (e.g., Ἰησοῦς, Χριστός, κύριος, and θεός). Codex W does, however, exhibit some interesting variations. For example, some members of Hurtado’s secondary and tertiary groups (e.g., οὐρανός, σταυρός, Ἱερουσαλήμ, and νιός) do not appear as *nomina sacra* in Matthew. Prior also calls for further study of the rarely used (and often neglected), *nomen sacrum* for the vocative θεέ. Although he does not address the disputed theological significance of the various *nomina sacra*, Prior has certainly laid an important empirical foundation for future study of their sacral and nonsacral uses in W.

The studies of Haugh and Wayment explore the singular readings in the codices W and I. By examining the “intentional” singular readings in Matthew, Mark, and John, Haugh seeks to learn whether the scribe of W was faithful to a number of exemplars or whether he acted as a redactor across the Gospels. Observing a lack of homogeneity in the degree and kinds of redaction exhibited by these readings, Haugh concludes that the scribe did not act as a redactor. Rather, the variation indicates that changes were made to the manuscript prior to the scribe of W. The conclusions of this study, however, are preliminary. Haugh passes over Luke’s Gospel and offers no collation of all the available singulars in Codex W. Haugh also overlooks how scribal corrections in Codex W might enable textual critics to gauge the probability that some subsingular readings were also created and therefore valuable for assessing scribal habits in this manuscript.

In a similar vein, Wayment reviews Codex I’s singular readings in order to identify their potential sources: lector, scribe, and exemplar. Wayment’s working assumption is that the text was dictated and that its scribal peculiarities are best explained in that light. Wayment further assumes that a competent scribe who was capable of harmonizing or quoting scripture would have been unlike to confuse visually dissimilar homophones, such as χ for κ, ξ for ζ, and ξ for ζ, if he were in fact copying from an exemplar. Such confusions, rather, were prompted by the lector’s pronunciation, which resulted in scribal misspellings but produced words that are quite intelligible when read aloud. Wayment
assigns most of the remaining sensible singular readings, such as rearranged word order and case changes, to the scribe. Five singulars were possibly in the scribe’s exemplar.

Although Wayment’s study is intriguing, several questions remain. Does the scribe appear to compress or expand the letters of his manuscript, perhaps as he approaches the end of his folio? If so, this raises questions about a putative dictation theory. Are there erasures or rewritings that require explanation? A study of the manuscript’s corrections could help determine what types of errors were being made and how they relate to its singular readings for a fuller portrait of scribal habits. As with Haugh, a complete collation of all the manuscript’s singulars would have facilitated peer review of Wayment’s judgments.

In sharp contrast, Royse offers what is without a doubt the most comprehensive and detailed treatment of scribal corrections in the Freer Gospels Codex since the century-old studies of Sanders and Goodspeed. Availing himself of the new color images of the Freer biblical manuscripts, Royse not only sheds light on the early textual practices of W’s identifiable correctors, but he also revisits and corrects the assessment of scholars who have studied the codex in the interim. Royse discovers no consistent attempt to shift W from one textual tradition to another. Neither does he detect a concerted effort to redact the text for doctrinal reasons. Rather, the corrections of Codex W simply reflect a concern to copy the text of the Gospels with reasonable care. Royse’s meticulous documenting of every textual decision inspires confidence in his conclusions and sets a standard for studies of scribal habits.

Codicology and Paleography

Finally, in an incisively argued piece, Schmid reappraises the arguments for a fourth-century dating of Codex W, suggesting that current paleographical and codicological data are consistent with a sixth-century date. Taking note of the logical and chronological difficulties of Sanders’s original theory of the codex’s composition history, Schmid demonstrates how three of the analogues used for locating the first quire of John in the fourth century are no longer relevant. As for the codex’s main hand, Schmid cites telling differences between the epigraphy of W and those of fourth-century manuscripts. Moreover, Schmid considers Lameere’s description of mid-sixth-century sloping hand to be consistent with that of W. The capstone to Schmid’s case is the recently revised dating for the Mani Codex, whose hand is widely recognized to be similar to that of W. Well aware of the limitations and possibilities of his study, Schmid calls for multispectral photos, a new codicological analysis, a fresh comprehensive paleographical study, and state of the art radio carbon dating of W to lay the issue to rest.
Conclusion

This is the most significant collection of essays to appear on the codices since their acquisition nearly a century ago. The contributors to this anthology have done more than raise important historical questions; they have provided a model for future collaborative studies of the Freer Collection. A precedent has been set, and the resolution of several desiderata remains, not least of which is the application of such erudition to the remaining codices in the Freer collection.