

BOOK REVIEW

Carlson, Stephen C. *The Text of Galatians and its History* (WUNT II, 385; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015). xiv + 308 pp. Pbk €89.00.

The published dissertation of Stephen Carlson demonstrates that interest in New Testament textual criticism is alive and developing. Studying at Duke University under Mark Goodacre and Bart Ehrman, Carlson explores newer tools to address newer questions. No longer satisfied with only pursuing an original text, Carlson maps the history of the text of Galatians. Specifically, he wants to recreate the history of the ‘patterns of readings, not disembodied variants’ (p. 7). While much textual analysis looks at variants in isolation only as a means to seek after the original or authorial text, Carlson is attempting something far more robust. He defines and defends the thesis that a ‘stemmatic history of the text...can be used to refine these findings further by investigating whether there is a pattern to this textual variant generally and to these theological effects in particular’ (p. 180). The distinctive feature of the book is that the history and patterns of textual changes over the centuries is the primary goal, and only then can an authorial text be created.

There are six major sections to the book. In the first, Carlson offers a succinct introduction to the most popular methods used for text-critical research. The methods covered are Copy-Text, Majority-Text, Stem-matics, Eclectic and Coherence-Based Genealogies (CBGM). Each one is well defined and evaluated for inherent strengths and weaknesses. This section serves as a good introduction for students. Carlson displays a thorough knowledge of the past and current trends, presenting them in a fair manner. He concludes that a hybrid approach is required to create both a reconstruction of textual-history and a serviceable authorial text. Carlson believes that a hybrid stemmatic-eclectic methodology will best serve this end.

The second section will be the most unfamiliar material to text-critics. Here Carlson presents innovative, new methods for determining

the history behind the biblical text. He begins by presenting the theory and methods of a computer program he developed to create a textual stemma. The computer models were initially developed for use in the field of genetics for cladistics mapping. Cladistics works to map biological history and development by showing the relationship among biological organisms that have shared traits. Geneticists have used the principle of parsimony as a guide to creating historical maps for the relationships among species over time.

Cladistics was first applied to manuscript history in 1987, though not in biblical studies (p. 60). The computer program constructs a visual map of the relationships between manuscripts selected for consideration. In the case of Galatians, Carlson entered 94 witnesses (see p. 80). The stemma produced shows the primary relationships among the manuscripts and indicates the possibilities of secondary or contamination influences. The program examines the textual history solely upon external evidence.

It is fascinating to see the methodological considerations Carlson must implement for the computer software to produce the textual history (pp. 61-74). He reports on having written over 6500 lines of code to run the program, but Carlson is forthright about the limitations. Most importantly, the software does not display the definitive historical stemma; rather, it produces a 'best-found stemma' (p. 74). After attempts at verification, the stemma found is supported by 70 per cent, which is apparently conventional in cladistics (p. 82). Furthermore, the stemma found is un-oriented, meaning it lacks a clear starting point or a base, and so the rest of the book works to orient the stemma, examine the base text and then further analyze the variant history.

Quite interestingly, the stemma that a complicated computer program created largely confirms the theories of Westcott and Hort from a century ago. Not only is this a great confirmation that current studies are founded upon proven theories, but it is also a validation of their past work. They created their theories even before the discovery of P⁴⁶.

Section three serves to orient the stemma and the relationships among the manuscripts. Carlson focuses on particular points in the stemma diagram (p. 88; after confirmation, these points are where P⁴⁶ meets the Western branch, and the Eastern branch meets Sinaiticus). To establish the direction of influence at these points, Carlson explains that in many locations the 'internal evidence must be determinative because the external evidence is split' (p. 102). He looks at 36 variants in four

sets to orient the stemma. He engages even minute features such as word-order inversion of ἔτη τρία in Gal. 1.18 (pp. 95-96). He concludes there were two divisions in the history of the text. On the one side is the Western branch, containing the notable texts of P⁴⁶ and Vaticanus (B), while the Eastern branch has Sinaiticus (Ⲡ) and text 33, known as the Queen of the Cursives.

While the implementation of cladistics is promising, what is truly determinative for Carlson's goal is still the internal evaluation of variants. Unfortunately, this is the weakest point of the entire book. Carlson does not define any formal criteria or methodology for evaluating the internal features. I often struggled to follow his argumentation from one variant to the next. Unlike the very thorough and clear sections describing the computer programming, his description for assessing internal evidence receives a single paragraph (pp. 89-90).

For each variant, Carlson first looks at the external evidence again, and then does what he calls 'exegesis of each variant' (p. 89). While his exegesis considers the 'traditional semantic and syntactic meaning', he also looks at pragmatic considerations, which he claims is a 'new contribution to the field of NT textual criticism' (p. 89). After his so-called 'exegesis', he then applies reasoned eclecticism, but when the situation calls for it, the CBGM is also utilized. The result is a haphazard analysis.

In a dissertation where more than half the work is focused on the internal evidence of hundreds of variants, it would seem advantageous to have established a more formal methodology. Furthermore, there is a lot of linguistic works on pragmatics that deserved far more attention than the single citation of Stephen Levinsohn's introductory course book (see p. 89). Levinsohn is fine for what it is, but Carlson's methods would have greatly benefited from better linguistic research.

Without a formally laid out methodology for examining and assessing the internal evidence, there are times when the argumentation is not systematic or precise. For instance, concerning Gal. 5.14, Carlson prefers the perfect tense verb reading, and though I agree, I am confused by the explanation. He comments that the perfect *πεπλήρωται* is 'usually taken to be gnomic', but it 'should be construed Christologically' (p. 202). He goes on to say that some scribes changed the perfect tense-form because they understood it as gnomic and thus switched it 'to the more appropriate present tense' (p. 225). He is creating false categories for the scribes to choose from. While gnomic

is a common pragmatic category concerning the *Aktionsart* of the perfect tense-form, there is no such christological grammatical category. Carlson has confused grammar with theological interpretation. At points of internal evaluation, it is hard to distinguish his theological reasoning from legitimate grammatical evidence. Moreover, even when he does focus on grammar his argument is often left unsupported, or he uses theological works for citations. If grammar is going to be the basis for his argument concerning a particular reading, then it needs to be thoroughly grammatical and not mingled with theology. Despite these inconsistencies, I agree with many of his conclusions. But his work would have been significantly strengthened if a definite and consistent methodology had been applied.

The fourth section investigates variants where the external manuscript history is more difficult to process. Thirteen locations are examined in greater detail in an attempt to decide the authorial text based on internal factors. The section concludes by offering a final critical text of Galatians.

The last section before summary conclusions is an analysis of the history of the textual variation. Having worked through the stemmatic history and discussed the likely relationships between ancient texts, Carlson turns to investigate any patterns that emerged. He scrutinizes the evidence for any theological motivation that could underline the variants. The result is a few interesting conclusions concerning the 120 textual changes found.

A few noticeable patterns are noteworthy. In the Western branch of texts, there is a marked tendency toward variations that result in an anti-Judaic effect, especially against the Torah (p. 208). Additionally, he notes there is a tendency to 'strengthen the portrayal of Paul' in the West (p. 209). On the other side of the history, the Eastern branch displays a small pattern of scribes adjusting the text towards harmonization and attempts 'to clarify the text and reduce its ambiguity' (p. 239). These types of patterns are beneficial finds. The data Carlson obtains could be further explored for issues of early Christianity.

Many readers will find Carlson's work a profitable read. Besides numerous intelligent points throughout the work, I think there are at least four enduring benefits to the work. First, for the field of textual criticism in general, he has offered the first computer-based stemma on such a complete scale. He is entirely correct in concluding that he has shown 'promising value of computer-based stemma construction' (p.

252). It will be interesting to see what further research will be conducted using computer software to create stemma history.

A second benefit is demonstrating how computers can process a lot more texts at once than an entire team of papyrologists could. This could be a means for reevaluating many facets of text-type theory. While some have been calling for a move away from family labels, Carlson goes further by arguing there is no Alexandrian text-type at all (p. 243).

Third, those studying Galatians are given a rich resource. The critical edition might not be a perfect authorial text, but the final product is rigorously produced. In fact, it should be put together with other popular New Testament texts such as the NA²⁸, von Soden and Westcott-Hort. It has twelve differences with the Nestle-Aland text, and should be appreciated for its own merits (see p. 250). A final feature I found very fascinating is the computer model's ability to calculate formally the level of influence of one text onto another (pp. 80-82). Such data would be very helpful in examining all sorts of relationship types and likely assist in the dating of manuscripts.

Overall, I think Carlson makes a strong contribution to the continued research in textual history. Many of his claims will undoubtedly be explored further. Many of his findings will be utilized for further research. And the book will prove useful for the study of textual criticism of Galatians and the New Testament in general.

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