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RECLAIMING AFRICA'S LOST GLORY IN NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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ABSTRACT

This work argues that Africa was and is still the home for textual criticism and textual centres, even though the Western and European worlds happened to relocate textual materials. The need for textual criticism and textual centres in Africa is timely and thought-provoking in the minds of many Africans in view of the development of Biblical studies on African soil. While textual criticism with its various centres was known to be rooted in the African continent during the early centuries of the church, there came a shift that witnessed the relocation of these activities to the Western and European worlds. This work uses a historical-critical method to analyse the data. This work discovered that textual criticism was developed on the African continent, with many textual centres storing manuscripts in Egypt, and that Africans were the earliest textual critics, who might have created the variants in the text of the New Testament. Reclaiming such lost glory becomes a priority for the African people. This effort has been initiated by the University of Jos, Nigeria, and some parts of Kenya, where African scholars are beginning to have hands-on experience with manuscripts. With the search for the original text, the Codex Alexandrinus, with its African origin, can aid the search if the search becomes indigenous. African universities should revisit the study of textual criticism and the acquisition and storage of ancient manuscripts as a means of reclaiming the lost African glory of the early centuries of the church.

Keywords: Textual Studies, Alexandrian Text-type, Oxyrhynchus Papyri, New Testament Textual Criticism, Manuscript Transmission, African Christian Patriarchs.

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INTRODUCTION

With the growth of biblical studies in Africa, it becomes timely for us to start asking the question, "What else, Africa?" in biblical studies, a task accomplished in this work.[1] Africans have been known to have engaged at an earlier stage in the recovery of the text of the New Testament in the Catechism School of Alexandria and various scriptoriums for reproducing the text. Africans were known to be the earliest textual critics of the New Testament in the days of Origen, Tertullian, and St. Augustine of Hippo, and most of these manuscripts were stored on the African continent for many centuries.[2] Metzger states that Origen began the study of the text of the Old Testament in Hebrew and in Greek. He writes that Origen observed a variant reading in Mathew 18:1 and two readings in Hebrews 2:9, "apart from God" and "by the grace of God," though Origen found some "spiritual significance in both readings" and that Origen dismissed the reading "Jesus Barabbas" for "Barabbas" in Matthew 27:16-17 with the motive that the name Jesus cannot be associated with evil-doers.[3] Despite this, there has been much silence within the African context about issues related to textual criticism and ancient manuscripts, though Africans started this textual-critical process hundreds of years ago in the Early Church.[4] It then becomes clear that Africans are yet to seriously engage the modern revisiting of critical textual studies.[5]

In recent centuries, there have been paradigm shifts as textual documents and discussions were invaded by Westerners, which witnessed the transfer of numerous papyri and ancient documents to countries in the Western and European worlds. This 'Western textual scholarship' has discovered in past centuries the role of archaeological findings and has helped in proving the authenticity and reliability of the biblical texts, although a few scholars find it conflicting.[6]

Today, materials for this important field of study have been obtained in many places, dominantly by Western scholars along the coasts of Africa, which strongly proves the genuineness of Christianity on African soil in the early centuries AD. These manuscripts have been moved out of Africa and stored in the Western world, according to the *Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament*[27] catalogue of housing for manuscripts.[7] Most of these

[1] This research was carried out during my research fellowship sponsored by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at Goethe Universität Frankfurt, Germany. I appreciate the sponsorship opportunity by the Foundation.

[2] Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration.* Rev. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 151.

[3] Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 152.

[4] Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 149-50.

[5] Gideon Y. Tambiyi, "Recovering Matthean Text of the Holy Family in Africa: A Coptic and Greek Analysis" PhD Thesis at the University of Jos, 2018, p. 5.

[6] Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 26. Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, "A Critical Appraisal of the Current State of the Historical Jesus Research with Higher Implications to African Biblical Scholarship," A Master of Arts (M.A.) Thesis in Biblical Studies (NT) at the University of Jos, May 2012, 160.

[7] Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (NA[27]), pp. 684-713.

documents have been discovered and deciphered, so they are Bible-related documents. They have been dated using modern dating equipment, such as palaeography and Carbon-14.[8] The textual critics of the 21st century have collated the documents, and efforts have been put into what are called emendation and recension.[9]

This paper uses the historical analysis, which involves the examination, evaluation, and interpretation of systematic data about past events using evidence from primary and secondary sources to construct accurate and meaningful accounts. The Bible was used as a primary source, revealing the critical apparatus that reveals the variants created by the earliest copyists of the Bible and how Africans have attempted to fix them in the early period. Also, library books and the internet were considered as secondary sources of information. The process involved the formulation of the question, collection of the data, evaluating them within a contextual environment, and interpreting them in light of present findings.

To achieve the intention of the paper, the author has analysed the role Africa and Africans have played in ancient biblical textual criticism and portrayed its wings as a *prophet* to the African continent on the need for returning and reclaiming in textual discussions within African 21st-century biblical studies, which was started by our *ancestors* during the early Christian era. It also called for the restoration of centres on the continent, as interested Africans in ancient biblical history, particularly of the New Testament, to invest in this area to enable the availability of research materials in the field in Africa, a task the University of Jos has begun.

AFRICA: THE EARLIEST CENTRE OR HOME OF TEXTUAL DISCUSSIONS

Africans believe that a wound for one is a wound for all, so also, a praise for one is a praise for all. Within this understanding, Egypt can be addressed as Africa. Throughout the records, Egypt, a country in Africa that is known for its ancient civilisation, has played a great role in the vindication of the promised children of God. The name Egypt appears 609 times in the NIV Bible. Abraham was rescued during the famine (Gen. 12:10ff). Egyptians were known for having slaves (Gen. 37:36). They had magicians and wise men (Gen. 41:8). Egypt has helped the Israelites in the time of Joseph (Gen. 45). During the time of Moses, Egypt was a great city which the world could not do without, and it was known for special

[8] Apart from Carbon-14 and palaeography, there are other methods of dating ancient documents. These are: the historical method of dating, the meteorite method of dating, the salt method, the nitrite method, the fluorine method, the helium method, the uranium-lead method, the potassium-argon method, and the geological time scale. See Roger E. Dickson, *Biblical Research Library*, Book 26, CD. Donald E. Chittick, "Carbon-14 Dating of Fossils," *A Symposium on Creation* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany Fellowship, Inc., 1970). R. H. Brown, "Radioactivity Dating Indicates a Young Earth," *Why Not Creation?* (Walter E. Lammerts, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973).

[9]Bruce Metzger centres the whole art of textual criticism on recension, i.e., the selection of the most trustworthy evidence on which to base a text, and emendation, i.e., the elimination of errors in the best manuscripts. See Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, 2nd Ed.* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 156.

knowledge (Acts 7:22). Egypt has played a vital role in the history of the ancient world. Egypt became a refugee camp for the baby Jesus (Matt. 2:13-19).

The boundaries of textual criticism have expanded from the late 19th century to the 21st century. It got transformed and has now become a modern discipline with modern aspirations. Its modern nature came about because of the Age of Enlightenment of the 18th century, when knowledge penetrated almost every discipline. This was also evident in biblical scholarship, which experienced the emergence of biblical criticism.[10]

However, one still sees the contribution of Egypt as having been ignored by Western scholarship. Because of this study, Egypt has become the most dominant site for manuscript discoveries since the last century, although it is not clearly emphasised in European textual scholars' writings. A good number of documents were discovered and deciphered to have been of biblical and Christian origins. Even with that state of being famous in many textual writings, Egypt is not the only place where documents have been discovered (cf. the Dead Sea Scrolls).[11] Egypt also has a reputation not only in biblical history but also in the history of textual discoveries. There are quite a few eras of manuscript discovery and studies in the West since the 18th century. But with the discovery at these places, textual criticism has taken another dimension, becoming a discipline with a quest for proof and authenticity of the New Testament. These documents survived because the climate of Egypt is suitable for preserving documents compared to other countries.

Oxyrhynchus, Egypt

The trace of this discovery could reveal B. P. Greenfell and A. S. Hunt to have been the first to have excavated Oxyrhynchus in Egypt. This city is 120 miles south of Cairo. These excavators searched tombs, cemeteries, and church buildings, yet they could not find any available and interesting papyri, contrary to their former expectations. However, they decided to excavate a rubbish heap, which later yielded many papyri until 1907. The work of Greenfell and Hunt did not stop there, and later, the Italian Exploration Society worked from 1910 to 1913 and 1927 to 1934, which yielded volumes of papyrus fragments.

These documents were literature, business receipts, letters, and memos. The majority of the documents were biblical manuscripts. To Comfort and Driesbach, "Of the fifty Oxyrhynchus papyri, about half were published between 1898 and 1940. These include

[10] This is the branch of biblical studies that has been devoted to judging the Bible more scientifically. This started after the Enlightenment of the 18th century, as knowledge expanded all over Europe and its influence was felt in almost every country of the world.

[11] Eldon Jay Epp states that many manuscripts were discovered outside Egypt. These are those discovered in the Negeb, such as P^{59}, P^{60}, and P^{61} at Auja-el-Hafir an ancient Nessana in a collapsed room annexed to a small church; and P^{11}, $P^{14,}$ and P68 at Sinai, and two more at Khirbet Mird in a ruined Christian monastery on the site of the earlier fortress, Hyrcania, near the Dead Sea in Judea (P^{83}, P^{84}). Epp, "Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism: Moving from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth-First Century," *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism* (David Aland Black ed., Michigan: Baker Academie, 2002), 64.

the papyri named as follows: P^{1}, P^{5}, P^{9}, P^{10}, P^{13}, P^{15}, P^{16}, P^{17}, P^{18}, P^{20}, P^{21}, P^{22}, P^{23}, P^{24}, P^{27}, P^{28}, P^{29}, P^{30}, P^{35}, P^{36}, P^{39}, and P^{48}."[12] They state that many of the Oxyrhynchus papyri are quite early and accurate, which they state have been dated to the 2nd and 3rd centuries.[13]
Oxyrhynchus not only witnessed the discovery of the New Testament papyri alone; it also gave way to the Greek Old Testament manuscripts, which were read by the Christians, and they contain the *nomina sacra.* P. Oxyrhynchus 656 (Genesis) and P. Oxyrhynchus 1074 (Exodus), among many others. There were non-canonical books that were also discovered, such as P. Oxy. 1594 and P. Oxy. 1010. There were the *Shepherd of Hermas,* the *Didache,* the *Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Sophia,* the *Gospel of Peter,* the *Gospel of Mary,* the *Acts of Paul,* the *Acts of Peter,* and the *Acts of John.*

Aphroditopolis, Egypt

Aphroditopolis was also known for the documents that became the Chester Beatty Manuscripts. In 1931, the *London Times* reported the discovery of twelve manuscripts, which were found in a Coptic graveyard and stored in jars, comprising nearly eight complete books of the Greek Old Testament and three books of the New Testament. These were probably stored during persecution in the reign of Diocletian – P^{45} (A.D. 200), P^{46} (2nd century), and P^{47} (3rd century). These documents are in the collection of Alfred Chester Beatty and the University of Michigan.

Nag Hammadi, Egypt

Nag Hammadi or Chenoboskeia has been an important city that has yielded many manuscripts. A group of Egyptian peasant farmers dug into the grave of the ancient village and unearthed a jar with thirteen books, and nine were complete. This was the library of an ancient Gnostic sect and contained many Gnostic materials. These documents are now housed in the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Comfort and Driesbach have characterised the documents as Gnostic texts with Christian orientation, Gnostic texts with less than clear Christian orientation, non-Gnostic Christian documents, and miscellaneous documents.[14]

The Dishna, Egypt

The Dishna papers were equally known to be discovered in Jabal Abu Manna, which is located north of the Dishna plain, a small village in Egypt, north of Luxor along the Nile

[12] Philip W. Comfort and Jason Driesbach, *The Many Gospels of Jesus: Sorting Out the Story of the Life of Jesus* (Illinois: Tyndale, 2008), 49.

[13] Comfort and Driesbach, *Many Gospels,* 49.

[14] Comfort and Driesbach, *Many Gospels,* 51-2. Scholars have visited these Gnostic documents, particularly the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, the *Da Vinci Code, and the Titanic,* with an effort to reconstruct the historicity of Jesus and the authentic words he spoke during his ministry in Palestine. See Tambiyi, "Historical Jesus Research".

River, seven and a half miles east of Jabal al-Tarif. This has been the most significant discovery of a biblical document after the Dead Sea Scrolls discovery in 1947. These documents are known as the Bodmer biblical papyri and are also within the collection of Chester Beatty.

Research has shown that these manuscripts were part of the Pachomian monastery, for the basilica of Pachomian lies a few miles from Jabal Abu Manna. Pachomius is known to have brought monasticism around A.D. 320. The discovery of Coptic codices—containing some 47 writings—in the Egyptian desert (near an ancient Pachomian monastery) complicated the analysis. The codices contain a wide variety of writings, translated into Coptic from Greek, including a fragment of Plato. A real diversity of outlooks is present among the compositions so that scholars today distinguish "Valentinian" and "Sethian" strains. The first is related explicitly to Christianity; the second is not. It remains a distinct possibility that the compositions represented the recreational reading of the Pachomian monks.[15] Before Pachomia's death, there were many monks in eleven monasteries within a radius of sixty miles along the Nile River. A century later, there were thousands of monks in that area.

With these, it is right to argue that Africa, as the ancient home or centre of textual criticism, had an important role in the entire textual-critical connotations that cannot be denied by any outstanding textual critic of international repute. It is now certain that the so-called centres of textual studies today in Western and European countries are nothing but second-grade textual centres for doing adequate studies of the text of the New Testament. This is a missing emphasis in the history and theory of textual transmissions that needs to be revisited by many scholars.

AFRICANS AS THE ANCIENT TEXTUAL CRITICS

It is not a surprising thing to also say that Africans are the earliest copyists and transmitters of the New Testament, while Africa remained the earliest home or centre of textual documents and discussions. In simple terms, Africans and Africa have played a greater and earlier role in the science of textual criticism, which has been forgotten in the so-called history and theories of textual criticism. What today are called the history and theories in the field are nothing but the history and theories of Western textual criticism. It has nothing to do with the entire history of the discipline, as the omission is witnessed in the case of the African continent and its ancient contributions.

Biblical textual criticism was a discipline practised and pursued in Alexandria, Egypt. Bruce M. Metzger writes, "The critical study was pursued at the famed library in Alexandria,

[15] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Jesus and the Gospels* (Virginia: The Great Courses, 2008), 94. Marco A. Marcos, *History of the Coptic Orthodox Church* http://www.stmary-ottawa.org/publications/History_of_the_Coptic_Church.pdf Accessed 14th April, 2015.

which was reputed to have about 600,000 volumes, and for which, according to tradition, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the so-called Septuagint, was made."[16] In clearer terms, he states that,

… thus there was a fairly well-developed scholarly discipline of textual and literary criticism in antiquity, localised chiefly at Alexandria, and directed primarily toward the epic of Homer. It is common knowledge that Philo Judaeus and many church fathers, influenced by the philological scholarship current at Alexandria, utilized in their interpretation of the scriptures the methods of allegorical exegesis which had been applied to certain stories of the gods and goddesses included in the Homeric cycle.[17]

Such understanding was adopted and applied to the text of the New Testament by the early African Church fathers. A summary of patristic ideas has been discussed by Metzger, which clearly states the earlier place of textual criticism in the patristic writings. Although there are many Church Fathers who got involved in textual studies, those that relate to this paper are the African Church patriarchs, such as Origen and Augustine. Metzger writes about Origen that "Not long after the Theodotians had been excommunicated, one of the most assiduous and erudite scholars of his age, Origen of Alexandria and Caesarea, began a text-critical study of the entire Old Testament in Hebrew and in several Greek translations."[18] Whether Origen edited a critical text of the New Testament, as in the case of the Classical and German philologist of Berlin, Lachmann (1793-1851), has long been debated by many scholars of the text. To Metzger, Origen did not extend his textual efforts to preparing a formal edition of the New Testament.[19] Although one sees Origen as having been involved in "critical details in the biblical text," this became a stepping stone for the project executed by Lachmann. Origen has complained of textual transmission having been corrupted and sought information concerning the variant readings in Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, a task modern critical textual studies are embarking on. He identified the *en ekeine te hora,* which appeared as *en ekeine te hemera* in other manuscripts. Also, he identified two readings in Hebrews 2:9 'apart from God' (*chooris theou*) and 'by the grace of God' (*chariti theou*). To all these, among many others, he suggested that "perhaps all of the manuscripts existing in his day may have become corrupt,"[20] a similar task embarked upon by modern critical-textual scholars. The task of recension and emendation started long before the idea was used by Western scholars, by the African patriarch, Origen.

Another figure is St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo. Augustine was also involved in textual critical judgement when he considered that Matthew in 27:9 attributed a

[16] Metzger, 149.
[17] Metzger, 150.
[18] Metzger, 151.
[19] Metzger, 151.
[20] Metzger, 152.

quotation to Jeremiah which appears in Zechariah. He expressed his dissatisfaction with the passage because "a majority of manuscripts contain the name of Jeremiah, and those who have studied the Gospel with more than usual care in the Greek copies report that they have found it to stand so in the more ancient Greek exemplars."[21] He suggested that the "more difficult reading is to be preferred,"[22] a task which has been reiterated by WH and others.

However, these efforts, contributions, and abilities "got rotten" as Western education dominated the European world. African Christians were forgotten as Islam invaded the centres of textual studies in Egypt and Ethiopia, causing a paradigm shift, which is highly evident today in European countries. This can be stated without hesitation in view of the number of manuscripts discovered in Egypt, which proves that the Egyptian and Ethiopian Christian community was eclectic in textual copying, editing through careful studies, and circulation of texts in Christian territories in the widest sense.[23] However, recent scholarship is attempting to generalise and extend the entire circulation effort to the Mediterranean inhabitants, as in the case of Epp[24] and Hurtado.[25]

Despite that, it can be stated that no discovered manuscript can be found to be on African soil, although many, and almost all, were discovered in Africa. The West, with the advantage gained because of the late Western civilisation of the 18th century's Enlightenment, has been involved in these studies and even has many textual centres, though such centres can be known as what I termed "2nd-class centres of textual criticism." None of those can be known to be original, for all were products of "intelligible invasion."

It can also be stated without hesitation that, although those documents are being scattered across the Western world, discussions in those Western countries, such as the US, Spain, England, France, etc., have not been able to go beyond what can be known from discovered evidence to be obtainable within the ancient Christian community in Africa that existed and was invaded from North Africa. These inabilities to make progress have been lamented by one of the Western textual critics alive today, Eldon Jay Epp. Epp has made an extensive contribution to the study of the text of the New Testament.[26] Epp emphasises that the 19th-century textual scholars had tried and used their axes well on the "incredible iroko tree" through developing,

[21] Metzger, 154.
[22] Metzger, 154.
[23] Larry W. Hurtado, "Going to the Biggest Picture: Eldon Epp as Textual Critic" *Textual Criticism: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism, 2010.* The paper was originally presented on a special session of the New Testament Textual Criticism Programme Unit in honour of Prof. Epp at 80 years in the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 2010, in Atlanta.
[24] Eldon Jay Epp, "New Testament Papyrus Manuscripts and Later Carrying in Greco-Roman Times" *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honour of Helmut Koester* (B. A. Pearson ed., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 35-56.
[25] Hurtado, "Going for the Biggest Picture…," 6.
[26] For the contribution of Epp, see Hurtado, "Going for the Biggest Picture…," 1-5.

…foundational principle for using textual evidence, had dethroned the *textual receptus* (at least in scholarly opinion) and won overwhelming scholarly assent to the need for a critical approach to establishing the NT text, and (especially in the work of Westcott and Hort) had laid out a cogent and influential history and theory of NT textual transmission in the early centuries.[27]

On the other hand, to Epp, the 20th century has had a good reputation and witnessed the emergence of clear historical documents for textual criticism. He states what the 20th century has been known for:

… massive increase in manuscript evidence (including majuscules such as the Freer Gospels Codex, and also the Chester Beatty and then the Bodmer papyri), the preparation of a number of critical editions of the NT, some noteworthy developments in the analysis of the relationships of manuscripts (especially deriving from the adaptation and application Colwell's pioneering proposals), and, of course, the massive amount of activity and the projects undertaken in the Munster Institute for Text-Critical Research.[28]

We see Epp to have reacted and clearly states that scholars in textual studies have not been able to go beyond the historical/theoretical framework laid down by Westcott-Hort. Hurtado, a doctoral student of Epp, cited Epp as having stated in the Hatch Lecture that,

…every textual critic knows…that we have made little progress in textual theory since Westcott-Hort; that we simply do not know how to make a definitive determination as to what the best text is; that we do not have a clear picture of the transmission and alteration of the text in the first few centuries.[29]

The concern of the 20th-century textual critics has been to contribute their quota to what the 19th century started, yet many could be seen to be replicas and fall under the winds of the 19th-century effort, despite the massive realisation of evidence in the 20th century. This also shows that the knowledge of many textual critics is limited in some sense due to their inability to meet the initial intent of this field of study, despite the many pieces of evidence. I am of the view that if such textual evidence had been made available in the 19th century, greater efforts would have been made in view of the zeal and knowledge displayed in the 19th century.

The 21st century has been quite forcefully involved in the effort of making textual criticism interesting and fascinating through the alleged rally in the advancement of trying to reclaim the only singular thrust of biblical textual criticism, i.e., the original words of the original authors of the Bible. Cases can be mentioned, and with the influence of source

[27] Hurtado, "Going for the Biggest Picture…," 2.
[28] Hurtado, "Going for the Biggest Picture…," 2.
[29] Hurtado, "Going for the Biggest Picture…," 2.

criticism,[30] many of these are geared toward Markan priority and originality, as evident in the so-called Jesus Family Tomb, the Titanic,[31] James Ossuary, and the Tomb of Peter.

There is a most recent papyrus which has been discovered and dated by one of the Christian palaeographers as the product of the 1st century, an effort put across by the 21st-century textual critics in search of the originality of the biblical text. This has been "the first-century gospel of Mark fragment" discovered, deciphered, and dated, as argued by Daniel B. Wallace in early March 2012.[32] Because of this, the text becomes the earliest extant biblical text to be deciphered. However, a careful study would reveal that this is not the first of its kind to be so-called concluded. These acclamations have been judged and have failed in recent scholarship, for example, in the work of Acharya S.[33] and many others.

The one that can be mentioned is the Dead Sea Scroll fragment 7Q5, worked on by erudite scholars such as Josep O'Callaghan Martínez and Carsten Thiede, which has been claimed to be a fragment from the Gospel of Mark, dated to the 1st century. With this, Craig L. Blomberg writes,

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[30] Source criticism is a critical method of studying the New Testament, particularly the Gospels, which considers the literary sources that have been used by the writers of the Gospels. It has been observed that the Gospels are unanimous early Christian documents. However, scholars have associated them with the first century. The sources for the Gospels have been under serious search. Source criticism centers on determining the source that the Gospel writers used to compose their Gospels. Critical scholars believe Mark wrote first, then Matthew and Luke copied from Mark and a Q-source. There are also the four and eight sources' theories. See McCain, Danny. *Notes on New Testament Introduction Rev. Ed.* (Bukuru: Acts, 2005), 111-115. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Making of the New Testament* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1995), 51-55. Evangelically, there are basically some sources for the Gospels that we have today. These are written documents that one expects to have been under the same sources, hence they agree with the ancient and modern means of documenting. These are the eyewitnesses, oral tradition, and the apostles. For a concise study, see Tambiyi, "Historical Jesus Research," 122-5. Craig S. Keener, *The Historical Jesus of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 141, 145, 146. Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2006), 124.

[31] The most recent development of the Jesus research in this 21st century is the *Titanic,* though many scholars do not know of it. The document for *The Titanic* was said to be discovered by the Filmmaker James Cameron and colleagues, who displayed Ossuaries and they are believed to belong to Jesus of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene in a press conference in New York, February 26, 2007, in connection with a documentary which Cameron has produced. In the article *Titanic Claim: Jesus still Dead,* Tim McGirk from Jerusalem observes that James Cameron and his director, Simcha Jacobovici, make the startling claim that Jesus didn't resurrect –the cornerstone of Christian faith –and that his burial cave was discovered near Jerusalem. A similar view is held by Robert M. Price when he wrote *Jesus is Dead* (2007). There is also the claim that Jesus had a son with Mary Magdalene, not a daughter (named Sarah), as in the case of Dan Brown in *The Da Vinci Code*, [Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (London: Corgi Books, 2003)], Barbara Thierring in her *Codes,* and the movie *The Last Temptation of Jesus,* among many others. But unfortunately for Cameron, Israel's prominent archaeologist Professor Amos Kloner didn't associate the crypt with the New Testament Jesus. His father, after all, was a humble carpenter who couldn't afford a luxury crypt for his family. Well, I like to encourage Christians to follow up and never allow the topic of such nature to go like that, for the Skeptics and agnostics would always be at the forefront of the discussion of this nature. We must follow up to correct all intentional ideas within the Christian faith that are against it in any way. See Tambiyi, "Historical Jesus Research," 181. McGirk, Tim. "The Titanic Claim: Jesus Still Dead." www.time.com/time/letters/email_letters.html

[32] See www.danielbwallace.com

[33] Acharya S. has reacted to the claim of the earliest nature of the papyrus. She argued about the limitations of palaeography. At the end, she concludes that "With all these factors, I suspect the provenance of this papyrus fragment is Egypt, possibly from or near St. Catherine's Monastery. Again, I see no reason from a palaeographical analysis of this small fragment alone to push its date into the first century, especially since it certainly could be from the second, third, or later centuries and since there is no evidence that the canonical gospel of Mark as we have it existed at that time. Indeed, none of the canonical gospels clearly emerges into the historical record until the end of the second century." Acharya S. "1st century Gospel of Mark Papyrus Found,"www.freethoughtexaminer.com.

Distortions of new discoveries can also come from conservative circles. Casten Thiede, a German evangelical, has written several recent works arguing that tiny fragments of Greek manuscripts found at Qumran, containing just a few letters each, actually represent verses from the Gospel of Mark.[34]

All these have been investigated and found to be in error. There are other artefacts, such as the so-called Jesus Family Tomb, the Titanic, James Ossuary, and Tomb of Peter, among many others, which all failed the test of being original in the hands of the leading evangelical scholars.

It can be stated that, even though palaeography has been used to date these documents, the weakness of the dating is evident; hence, palaeography cannot be so precise in our time for the understanding of the 1st century. This dating, like carbon-14, has a plus and minus associated with it, which is about 25 to 50 years (or more), which could, in turn, mean that estimating such would mean putting it in the middle of the 2nd century or more.[35]

However, archaeologists can discover fragments that could belong to the 1st century. One sees God controlling history and revelation, and he decides what should be understood at what period. The extant text should prove itself to be the earliest reading when compared with the already available readings. There is a need for authentic and absolute studies of the text of the New Testament, as evidently witnessed in the effort put in by the 19th-century textual critics, who are humble but well-known in history, rather than searching for popularity in the case of 21st-century scholars.

RETURNING AND RECLAIMING: CHALLENGE FOR TEXTUAL STUDIES IN AFRICA

With the exposures and influences of the discipline, is modern African Christianity capable of handling such an area of study? Are African biblical scholars capable of competing with their Western and European counterparts in resolving and answering the questions of reclaiming textual criticism? It can be stated that with the evidence provided above on Egypt being the ancient home of textual studies and that evidence being known by the Church Fathers, such as Origen and Augustine, I can then state that the ancient African Christian community was known for the reputation of being the earliest copyists and transmitters of the text of the New Testament. To me, with the level of knowledge and exposure on the continent, which, to some extent, is competing with the Western

[34] Craig L. Blomberg, *Making Sense of the New Testament* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 18.

[35] There are many weaknesses of carbon-14 dating and other methods of dating. See Dipak Baral, Sujan Budhathoki, Ajaya Bhattarai, & Narendra Kumar Chaudhary "Revolutionizing Age Determination: Theoretical Insights into Radiocarbon (14C) Dating." *Contemporary Research: An Interdisciplinary Academic Journal,* 2024, vol. 7 (2): 77-95 77-95. https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/craiaj. Lorena Becerra-Valdivia, Rodrigo Leal-Cervantes, Rachel Wood, Thomas Higham, "Challenges in sample processing within radiocarbon dating and their impact in ^{14}C-dates-as-data studies" *Journal of Archaeological Science* Vol. 113 2020.

understanding of the Bible, the African Christian community can be able to meet the challenges involved in this area of study.[36]

Today, the level of African scholarship is particularly high in countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Zimbabwe, among many other countries.[37] This has become a concern for the Western and European worlds because theological constructions are fast developing with a passion for the betterment of the African continent. When Africans sneeze, Western and European scholars turn around to read the materials. African growth in terms of theological construction cannot be downgraded. This can also be applied in textual criticism.

In theological and biblical understanding generally, besides the works of the Fathers such as Tertullian, Origen, St. Augustine, and Clement of Alexandria, among many others, the 20th and 21st centuries have experienced and are experiencing some sense of scholarship in Africa. We now have a few capable and efficient hands that can stand and defend the continent as far as theological and biblical discussions are concerned. African scholarship has destroyed the view that theology is foreign to this continent, and this has high relevance and is a stepping-stone to 21st-century scholarship.[38] Today, there are thousands of journals and books, commentaries such as the *Africa Bible Commentary* (1st edition), and articles on theological constructions.

It can be said that in the 18th century, when serious historical study of the text expanded and became well-known, many Western scholars did not have the reputation of being capable authorities in terms of knowledge advancements. So is the state of African scholars today. Despite that, we are trying to get back and regain our ancient reputation in terms of transmission of the text, which our early church fathers started in Egypt and other African countries in the 2nd century and afterward.

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xxx Scholars such as Kato, Mbiti, and Idowu wrote to stand on the shoulders of the Western theological giants. We have notable names in Africa, including Prof. Yusufu Turaki, Prof. Danfulani Kore, Prof. Danny McCain, Prof. Zamani B. Kafang, Prof. W. O. Wotogbe-Weneka, Prof. Samuel W. Kunhiyop, Dr. Yohanna Byo, Prof. S. O. Abogunrin, Prof. Pandam Yamsat, Prof. G. O. Abe, Prof. Kwesi Dickson, Prof. Joseph Omoregbe, Prof. Dapo Asaju, Prof. Samuel Ngewa, Dr. G. O. Folarin, Prof. J. O. Akao, Prof. Chris Manus Chukwu, Prof. J. D. Gwamna, Assoc. Prof. Jotham Kangdim, and Dr. Matthew Michael, among many others. Although these scholars are scattered across other disciplines within biblical and theological studies, they can train the next generation of scholars to embark on and reconstruct this discipline by providing the necessary support from their fields of study. Hence, these fields are related to the field of textual criticism.

[37] Recently, there was the case of the *Girl Jesus* in Zimbabwe, in which a young girl claimed to be the incarnation of Jesus, having disciples and performing many miracles, which have been attracting the attention of people in the country. See Tahona Shoko, "'Third Voice of Jesus: The Rise and Fall of' Girl Jesus *Mudzimu Unoyera* Church of Guruve, Zimbabwe" *Swedish Missiological Themes,* 96, 1 (2008): 71-89.

[38] See Byang Kato, *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* (Jos: Challenge Publication, n.d.), 32-39. Kwame Bediako, "Whose Religion is Christianity? Reflections on Opportunities and Challenges in Christian Theological Scholarship –The African Dimension" *Journal of African Christian Thoughts* (Vol. 9, 2, 2006), 43-48. Musa A. B. Gaiya, *Christianity in Africa* (Jos: Ade Printing Press, 2002), 5-52. Gideon Yohanna, "A Theological Analysis of the Image of God: A Prolegomena to Anthropology" (A Theological Paper Presented to the Faculty, Staff and Students during the Senior Students' Day 2008 at ECWA Theological Seminary, Kagoro, Sept. 8, 2008).

The concern to be repeated in this article is the need for textual studies as a discipline in Africa and the reclaiming of the earliest reputation that our people had about the text of the New Testament. Why are there discoveries within the continent but without discussions? These are some of the challenges facing the African church. The church in Africa has grown to such an extent that it deserves to be given the place of this discipline. Biblical scholars are dominant in Africa, yet none of them have seen the need to take the lead to introduce such an area of study on the African soil.

We know that information should be passed at the right time when it comes to theological and biblical studies, or we end up losing those we want to help within the scholarly terrain. In the West, many scholars such as Bart Ehrman, Crossan, Borg, etc., have become higher biblical critics because of the courses and books they have read on the historical and textual discussions as disciplines. We see this as the problem facing many Africans today: critical books that have come from the West and are written from an anti-supernatural bias, a Western worldview that does not believe in the superiority of God and the occurrence of supernatural happenings in this world. To them, everything that humans cannot explain as to its cause is unintelligible and unexplainable.[39]

The African church is standard in terms of ideas and impositions, although some traces of unorthodox ideas are evident.[40] We have capable hands in the field of biblical studies, yet a branch of this study (textual criticism) has not found its place in African biblical scholarship. We cannot remember having an authority in the field of textual criticism on African soil. There is a need for gifted and eminent hands to do some projects like these in Africa. This requires finances to enable the purchase of manuscripts for studies and to return and reclaim the past reputation of Africa as the earliest centre of textual criticism. It requires high technical security to safeguard the manuscripts from the corrupt hands of some people during insecurity, which characterises the African continent.[41]

CONCLUSION

With the effort put in from the 18th century to the present in respect to reclaiming the original text of the New Testament, the 21st century should be able, in all seriousness and sincerity, to state the progress in New Testament textual scholarship in view of the effort put forth in biblical archaeological findings. Despite that effort, it is still observed that

[39] Cf. Reimarus, Strauss, and Bultmann. These are because of a distorted Western worldview, which strongly depicts an anti-supernatural bias in the scriptures.

[40] See Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, *The African Church under Fire: Problems and Prospects* (Kaduna: Tubase Print and Publications, 2014).

[41] There are many security challenges facing the Nigerian context. And these have many influences on the lives of people and their properties. In one of my papers, I have argued that rereading the healing miracles of Jesus' passages and understanding the biblical theology of eternal security will safeguard and overshadow our emotional and physical insecurities, which characterized the lives of many Nigerians. Gideon Y. Tambiyi, "The Healing Miracles of Jesus as Antidotes to Emotional and Physical Insecurity: Implications for Nigerians," www.academia.edu.

there has been a long silence in terms of the recovery of the original text. Documents need to regain their absoluteness in terms of dating and palaeographical accreditations. This can be successful as the Westerners and Europeans contextualise textual discussions and get the Africans involved.

In this thought-provoking work, I have argued that Africa was the earliest and ancient centre of textual studies, which was invaded by the West and Europe as documents were discovered and sold primitively because of poverty and the struggle to rise above socio-economic status. These contributed to the sale of the discovered documents and artefacts. Africans (Alexandrian scribes), being the earliest textual critics, made them familiar with the text of the Bible, which means that they have played a significant role in the development and emendation of the Bible. This makes Metzger correct in his assertion about the early roles that African scribes have played, and we should be looking forward to revamping such roles in the modern world in Africa. This early effort needs to be reclaimed in the 21st-century African church. Our universities in Africa and Nigeria in particular should focus on reestablishing centres and teaching textual studies in order to reclaim the lost glory.

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