

REVISITING THE HISTORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT IN AFRICA

Gideon Y. Tambiyi
Department of Religion and Philosophy
University of Jos, Nigeria

Abstract

This work argues that Africans played vital roles in the reconstruction of the New Testament text, but the history of the old shrines has never been quite reconstructive, and a rereading of the African past of textual criticism will promote reliance for restoring the text of the New Testament. These arguments are born of recent research, which has shown an interest in the “original text” of the New Testament within the discipline of textual criticism. Within this, many relevant discourses have been flying in the atmosphere in search of methods of accomplishing this preconceived aim, i.e., restoring the “original text” of the New Testament. Relying on the history of the text will adequately classify the role played by Africans (Coptic Christians) and promote dependence on the substantive manuscripts that might lead us to the original text.

Keywords: Original Text, Africans, Textual Criticism, Reconstruction, and New Testament.

Introduction

For obvious reasons, text-critical scholarship has been at the forefront of trying to render solutions to the quest for the originals of the New Testament text. To extract what is scripture from what is not (under a discipline called textual criticism) has been a thing of concern since the third century AD¹ from the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century down to the twenty-first century, as many textual witnesses have been discovered. In this effort, Westcott and Hort (WH) in the 19th century attempted to draw the attention of the scholars during their time to the need for reconsidering the history of the text as a technique for returning to the originals.² Even with such effort, their attempts failed; they were unable to consider the severe implications of their quest in view of generational posterity and the lack of much evidence and witnesses, which had to be pushed to the next century.

It has been uncovered that ancient texts were preserved through hand-copying using tablets, papyrus, parchments, and paper. The Bible has undergone such “surgical” treatment through the same palaeographical means in trying to preserve its message. This preservation through copying attracted the attention of many people in the early centuries of the Church, for they were interested in having portions of the New Testament. This process is surrounded by textual corruptions and interpolations over the early centuries of the Church.

¹The third-century fathers were not the initial people to engage in the task of textual analysis. Textual criticism began with the Greeks, and it was developed in the works of Homer: the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Its wings expanded and witnessed a more intense form during the Hellenistic age in Alexandria. For adequate and substantial background information, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration* 2nd ed. (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 149-150.

²Gideon Y. Tambiyi, “The Text of the New Testament: Why the Long Silence?” *Jalingo Journal of Christian Religious Studies and Societal Research*. Vol. 3, No. 1 (2018), pp. 211-233. Also, see K. Aland, and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Trans. E. F. Rhodes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989). Philip W. Comfort, “Texts and Manuscripts of the New Testament,” *The Origin of the Bible*. Newly Updated. F. F. Bruce, J. I. Parker, P. W. Comfort, and C. F. H. Henry (Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012). Gordon D. Fee, “Textual Criticism of the New Testament,” *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1993).

History and Theory of the Text with an African Eye

As the modern quest for the “originals” prevails, scholars have attempted to consider the retrospective equivalence to involve the reconsideration of the early history of the text of the New Testament. Several aspects have been observed before achieving the aims originally coined about the discipline (restoring the originals). Scholars now discover an interest in reconstructing the “history and theory of the text” as an approach for such a task of reconstruction, dominantly in the works of Eldon Jay Epp.³ In the closing age of the 20th century, Epp has considered the rational merger of the history and practice of the text as fundamental to understanding the “original text” of the New Testament, a forge of the work of WH. He lamented that the 20th century has not been able to project its lenses beyond the past understanding (WH) rather than contributing to the locale of critical editions of the text. He stated,

After all, Westcott and Hort had written, to their satisfaction, a rather clear history of the text ... why couldn't we do much better since they had virtually no early papyri to aid them...? Should we not be able to write the very early history of our text—something that the vast majority of textual critics are convinced would improve our external arguments?⁴

What prompted Epp was the fascinating nature of the discovered documents, which are perfect witnesses to the text over the years, chiefly on the coast of Africa and Mount Sinai. But when Epp observed, “Should we not be able to write the very early history of our text...?”, what was the motive behind his usage of “very early history of the text”? Did he refer to the “very early history of the text” in absolute terms or in superficial terms? Epp lamented over the need for the 20th century to extend its lenses beyond the 19th-century textual critical studies. He writes, “...why couldn't we do much better since they had virtually no early papyri to aid them...?” Epp also believed in the reconsideration of the early Christian circulation of text around the Roman world, but he also took note of evidence from the copying and circulation of non-Christian texts as well. This results in his contention that the NT papyri from Egypt may well be sufficiently representative of the copying and circulation of text in Christian circles more widely.⁵

Similarly, it cannot be denied for majority of textual critics believe that the reconstruction of the history of the text would improve the pious knowledge of the “originals.” When Epp referred to “the vast majority of textual critics” above, one does not need special conjectural insights to clearly comprehend the usage of concepts; hence, the Africans are far below board in the understanding of the text-critical issues. Even when the phrase “history of the text” is used in many modern textual writings, a fresh look has discovered that what is called history in textual studies by virtually all the scholars is nothing but Western history rather than encompassing the proper propelled force of history; hence, the majority of them view history from the 16th century than from the early history which this work is given preference. History is depicted as having ultimate and feasible limitations in this context. It can be said that a reasonably large number of works by many Westerners have been swimming in the ocean of text-critical studies, yet the contribution or involvement of Africans and Africa, like in other disciplines,⁶ has been neglected and marginalised. The iterative past of text-critical studies has quickly been forgotten, de-Africanized, and westernized.

³Eldon J. Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays, 1962–2004* (NovTSup 116; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 656. Eldon J. Epp, “Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism: Moving from the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty-First Century,” *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*. David A. Black, ed., Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002. Larry W. Hurtado, “Going to the Biggest Picture: Eldon Epp as Textual Critic,” *Textual Criticism: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* (2010). Eldon J. Epp, “Multivalence of the Term ‘Original Text’ in New Testament Textual Criticism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999).

⁴Epp, *Perspectives*, 656.

⁵Epp, *Perspectives*, 364–5.

⁶Ali A. Mazrui writes, “Africans have often complained about how different branches of knowledge that developed in the Western world have over time attempted to scale down everything African, sometimes consciously and at other times subconsciously” *The African Condition* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1980), 5. To this, he considers the field of Biology, physical anthropology, psychology, history, and social and cultural anthropology (5–6). Similar “complaints” have been witnessed among many African theologians and scholars about the domination of Westerners in theology and biblical studies. African scholars and theologians have attempted to react and reconstruct this in the modern quest for contextualization. The same can be seen in the field of textual criticism, as this work has argued.

Those are the points that need to be given a second thought, i.e., the rapid exploration of witnesses which had been discovered in Mt. Sinai and Egypt (Africa), etc. “Very early history” in the work of Epp in unconditional terms would mean a touch on African voices in the early church centuries. Let me make it clear that Africa has been the place for the majority of papyri in the 20th century, and it has contributed to expanding the boundaries of the discipline, which the 21st century has been at the forefront in making critical judgments. Africans got involved in the transmission of the texts and making them have complexity, the total sense of reconstruction, which many of the early African church fathers started in the early centuries, as argued in this research. Such early contributions have been surveyed by Bruce M. Metzger in *The Text of the New Testament* (2nd Ed.), where he surveyed the works of Origen, Jerome, and Augustine, who started the discipline adopted from the Greek text-critical studies of the Homeric documents.⁷

It is gnomic even as a pious number of textual critics believe that a better knowledge or means of returning to the originals is to venture into the history of the text. However, Africans are left out in this quest even when they surfaced at the front covers of the discipline as ancient as the 2nd century AD. African story and presence in the text is not being told accurately, as argued evidently in the work of Aland Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Times of Jesus*, on the place of Africa in proper history, particularly about the library of Alexandria.⁸ Papyri originated on the African soil. Even some of the majority texts have African origin, as in the case of the Syriac, Byzantine, and Latin Texts, which have Alexandrian origin, and all aspects of the discipline entirely rested on Africa, yet these stories are left on the fence and are not told or reconstructed precisely.

It can be said that the result of this long study within this discipline has been witnessed in many modern critical English versions of the New Testament, which have some critical statements at the footnotes, such as “many ancient manuscripts do not have...”, “ancient manuscripts omit...”, and “some manuscripts add...” These statements have been undergoing reconstructions by many Western text-critical scholars and are quite explainable within their context, with a long silence within the African context, which had witnessed a start thousands of years ago. Many African scholars and Christians generally have been reading and paying less attention to these statements not until recent times that such statements began to make meaning to the Africans. In simply terms, these statements have undergone reconstructions by many Western text-critical scholars and are quite explainable within their context with a long silence within the African context though Africans started this textual critical process hundreds of years ago in the Early Church.⁹

Textual Reconstruction in Africa

As such, asking the question 'what else Africa?' is timeous in biblical studies in the African 21st century as far as textual controversies continue in search for the “original text” of the New Testament. This can be stated without hesitation because Africans were known to be the earliest textual critics, and Africa was the earliest home or centre of textual discussions in the early Christian era. Although a paradigm shift has been witnessed in recent years as textual documents and discussions have been invaded by Westerners and those centres have been transferred from their homes in Africa to numerous countries in the West. Most of these texts were discovered in Africa, but a survey of the list of manuscripts with “P number” and their venue in the critical texts of the New

⁷Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 149-155.

⁸Aland Millard, *Reading and Writing in the Time of Jesus* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 17.

⁹Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 149-150.

Testament (NA²⁷) would reveal that about 99% are housed in the West.¹⁰ This “Western textual criticism,” which was rooted in Africa, has challenged and has proved the authority of the scriptures in the ultimate order of high Western worldviews as conflicting with the Jewish and African worldviews, which are, in most cases, coherent and parallel. With the quest for knowledge, Western scholarship has discovered in the past century the role of archaeological findings and has helped in proving the authenticity and reliability of the biblical texts, although some are on the opposite.¹¹

It can be stated that the challenge which Western textual criticism poses to the African context cannot be overemphasized in view of Africa being the earliest centre for textual studies, as evident in the discovered documents on the continent. Materials for this area of study have been obtained in many places, dominantly by Western scholars within the coasts of Africa, which strongly proves the genuineness of Christianity on the African soil in the early centuries AD. Most of these documents have been discovered and deciphered that they are biblical related documents. They have been dated using modern dating equipment, such as the computer and Carbon-14.¹² The textual critics of the 21st century have collated the documents, and efforts have been put under what is called emendation and recession.

Despite that, the major challenge is the relevance of such textual statements for African spirituality! Many laity and African scholars do not have a proper understanding of why these statements are in the footnotes of these modern English translations, and many still don't want to know or hear about the contributions of this discipline, despite reading these modern versions of the Bible. It is always believed by many Africans that the Bible is accurate for faith, but the pains of reconstruction over the years are not highly evaluated or well thought of. One wonders what such statements mean for the African church and what relevance they have for the spiritual life of African Christians!

Africans who started the discipline (as far as evidence revealed) are left out of the discussion in the modern revisit of critical-text studies. African students and “elephants” on the continent are mostly unaware and uninvolved in this discipline, which is a basis for biblical studies, and this field of study, which every student should be cognisant of. Within this understanding, I wonder about the nature of biblical studies that have been roaming about on the African continent without a proper understanding of text-critical studies. That means high reliance and being at the mercy of Western biblical scholarship, making dichotomization a mere mirage.

¹⁰Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece 27th edition* (Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger eds. Stuttgart: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2007), 684-713. Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, “Recovering Matthean Text of the Holy Family in Africa: A Coptic and Greek Textual Analysis” (PhD Thesis at the University of Jos, 2018), 6.

¹¹There are many scholars of the Bible who, because of their nature and inquisitiveness into textual criticism, instead of defending the authenticity of the Bible, are debasing the validity of the Bible. Bart Ehrman, because of textual variations in the Gospels, ended up calling himself an agnostic. Bart Ehrman, who was educated in Wheaton and Princeton Theological Seminary, derailed as a result of textual criticism and variant readings in the Gospels, which he found to be errors in scriptures (cf. Mark 2:25:26 with 1 Sam. 21:16). Ehrman no longer views the Bible as God's word and regards himself as an agnostic. See Gideon Yohanna Tambiyi, “A Critical Appraisal of the Current State of the Historical Jesus Research with Higher Implications to African Biblical Scholarship” (MA Thesis at the University of Jos, May 2012), 160. Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospels* (Nottingham: IVP, 2007), 26.

¹²Apart from Carbon-14, 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).

Since a high level of emphasis is laid on the history of the text as a unique means for reconstructing the text of the New Testament, an inculcation of the entire framework of history needs to be considered. This means tracing from the late 1st century A.D. to the present and considering the cognitive changes (by the Africans in Alexandria, Ethiopia, Carthage [Libya]) in the text of the New Testament.¹³ There are ancient African kingdoms (Nubia, Numibia) that have disappeared in world history because of the Islamic invasion.¹⁴ Timbuktu cannot be ignored in this quest.¹⁵ This is emphasized by G. J. C. Jordaan of North-West University, South Africa, in a paper titled “New Testament Textual Criticism for Africa?” Jordaan challenged the trend of the discipline to have left the basics and engaged in the apex. He called for a visit of discourse to the early first 2 centuries as Africans got involved in text matters. He challenged that textual studies should not be for Africans and suggested a “new perspective” that scholars should not think of textual criticism for, but “textual criticism by and from Africa.”¹⁶ The need for a “different perspective” was underscored in 2007 by J. Eugene Botha of the University of South Africa in his article “New Testament Textual Criticism is Dead! Long live New Testament Textual Criticism.”¹⁷ To proffer a solution to the words of Botha and Jordaan in terms of having a different view or “textual criticism by and from Africa”, Tambiyi wrote a thesis that analysed an unidentified fourth-century Coptic bi-folio parchment of Matthew 2:11-16.¹⁸

Coptic Christians versus Christians in Africa on the New Testament Text

Recently, the wings of research in Africa have witnessed tremendous and unprecedented expansion beyond the basics to text-critical studies, which were all foreign to our frontiers since the re-proclamation of the Gospel message in the twentieth century. This has given rise to many puzzles within African biblical studies despite the effort devoted by many textual scholars in the West to reconstruct the text of the New Testament, as many witnesses are being discovered dominantly from the coast of Africa in the twenty-first century to fill those gaps in the text of the Bible.

Coptic was an ancient Egyptian language that took over the Egyptian hieroglyphics and survived into the fifteenth century.¹⁹ The Coptic copying of the text of the New Testament gave rise to various versions and copies of the Text of the New Testament in Sahidic and Fayyumic scripts. The authenticity of the text of the flight of the Holy Family to Africa, as analysed in Tambiyi's thesis, is a long-awaited tradition that has been questioned in New Testament studies.

¹³Gideon Ibn Tambiyi, “Metzger on Trial: Redefining the History of Text-Critical Studies in Africa,” *Rethinking Biblical Studies in Africa: Essays in Honour of Danny McCain* (Jos: ACTS, 2018), pp. 51-72.

¹⁴Terje Oestigaard, “Christianity and Islam as Nile Religions in Egypt: Syncretism and Continuity,” *Water, Culture and Identity: Comparing Past and Present Traditions in the Nile Basin Region*. Ed. Terje Oestigaard (Norway: University of Bergen, 2009).

¹⁵There was a high level of scholarship in Timbuktu in the fourteenth century, where people came from the Sahel region of Africa, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, to study mathematics, science, astrology, jurisprudence, Arabic, and the Koran. For more study, see Joshua Hammer, *The Bad-Ass Librarians of Timbuktu and their Race to Save the World's Most Precious Manuscripts* (New York-London-Toronto-Sydney-New Delhi: Simon & Schuster, 2016). Rick Antonson, *To Timbuktu for a Haircut: A Journey through West Africa* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2008). Aslam Farouk-Alli and Mohamed Shaid Mathee, “The Tombouctou Manuscripts Project: Social History Approaches” in Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, eds. *The Meaning of Timbuktu* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2008). Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Africa: The Hidden History,” *The New York Review of Books*. December 17, 1998. Lalou Meltzer, Lindsay Hooper, and Gerald Kinghardt, eds. *Timbuktu: Script and Scholarship* (Cape Town: Tombouctou Manuscripts Project/Iziko, 2008). Chris Gratien, “Race, Slavery and Islamic Law in the Early Modern Atlantic” *Journal of North African Studies* 18:3 (2013): 454-468.

¹⁶Robin Gallaher Branch, “New Testament Textual Criticism for Africa” <http://www.bib-arch.org/online-exclusives/stellenbosch.asp> Posted May, 2009 and Accessed 30th March, 2013.

¹⁷J. Eugene Botha, “New Testament Textual Criticism is Dead! Long live New Testament Textual Criticism.” *HTS: Theological Studies* 63:2 (2007), 561.

¹⁸Tambiyi, “Recovering Matthean Text of the Holy Family in Africa,” 1-275.

¹⁹Thomas Oden Lambdin, *Introduction to the Sahidic Coptic*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), viii-ix.

For us Africans, one of those common relative passages in the Bible that quotes the role Africans have played is the text of the Holy Family moving from the Holy Land to Egypt at the appearance and pronouncement of the Magi have been discovered to be in Coptic.²⁰ This text reveals the contribution of Africa towards the care and development of the early life of Jesus, as the movement reveals.²¹

This work deals with the brain behind this movement, particularly a touch on the Coptic text after the Greek text of this movement, as accounted by Matthew the evangelist. With the effort to reconstruct the Sahidic Coptic New Testament (*Sahidica*),²² one clear statement in the *Sahidica*, which is considered to be the new edition of the New Testament in Sahidic Coptic, reveals that the edition is “primarily meant for use by teachers and students of Sahidic Coptic, and to a lesser degree by Coptologists involved in scholarly research, textual criticism, or New Testament translation.”²³ Scholarly works in New Testament textual criticism are foundational in establishing the durable framework of this edition. The compiler has a special note which reveals the dynamic nature of the text. This dynamism draws the line and reveals the gap one finds in the scholarly discussions concerning the Coptic text of the *Sahidica*. He reveals and pleads that “this text is a work in progress.”²⁴ By using the word “progress,” he reveals that “there is an ongoing effort to standardize the spelling of words in the text.”²⁵ It is clear within this context that progress means the process of standardizing the edition through an enormous work to be embarked on by other outstanding Coptic text-critical scholars.

It is within this that this work becomes so relevant to the international academic community and to the African context, particularly. There are several documents that have been discovered and deciphered as Coptic documents in the biblical archaeological field of study and practice. These materials are geared towards the contingent evaluation revealing progressive intentions for restoring the original words first translated by the Copts from the Greek text of the New Testament, as in the words of Wells. This means that the Coptic text of Matthew, which is our main text, is so relevant not only to the *Sahidica* but also to the Greek New Testament; since the “original Sahidica,” if properly reconstructed and emendated, will be a copy of the “original” text of the New Testament.

²⁰The contributions of Africans in the Bible are clearly discussed by modern African scholars in search of blackness or Afrocentric readings in the pages of the scriptures. For a thorough discussion, see David Tuesday Adamo, “The Search for Africanness in the Bible” *African Journal of Biblical Studies* (Vol. XV, no. 2, October 2000), 20-40. See David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (Benin City: Justice Jeco Press and Publishers, 2005). See David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the New Testament* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press of America, 2006).

²¹Nabil Selim Atalla, *The Escape to Egypt according to Coptic Tradition* (Cairo: Lehnert and Landrock, 1993). Scott Th. Carroll, “Ethiopian Miracles of Mary with other Marian Texts, 18th Century,” *Passages: The Experience* (Indiana: Triangle Publishing, 2012), 122. Miles Chappell, “The ‘Assumption of the Virgin’ and ‘The Holy Family in Joseph’s Workshop’ by Sigismondo Coccapani.” *NHR*. Vol. 23, no. 4 (2004), 19-24. Vivian Ibrahim, *The Copts of Egypt: Challenges of Modernisation and Identity* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2011). William Lyster, “Coptic Egypt and the Holy Family.” *Be Thou There: The Holy Family’s Journey in Egypt*. Ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo. New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 1-29. Paul Perry, *Jesus in Egypt: Discovering the Secrets of Christ’s Childhood Years* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), 1-269.

²²Joseph Warren Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament* (2007). <http://sahidica.warpcu.com>. Accessed 15th May, 2014.

²³Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament*, 1.

²⁴Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament*, 1.

²⁵Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament*, 1.

The compiler recognizes the periodic dynamism associated with the *Sahidica* and coined that the quest has been to raise a “standardized edition of the Sahidic NT similar to standard Greek editions.”²⁶ This means a lot of textual work; emending and reconstructing the Coptic text in search for *ultimatum* to fit the Greek standard texts: Nestle-Aland (NA²⁷) and the Universal Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (UBSGNT⁴). A lot of work has been done on these texts and is still undergoing reconstruction to amend the textual pervasiveness and corruption during the preservation and transmission of the early centuries of the Church.

The copying of the text of the New Testament into Coptic took a different dimension by Scholars in Alexandria, Egypt. The copying actually made Africans to make the Coptic language and the Coptic text of the New Testament relevant to indigenous Egyptian Christians. Documents were translated into Coptic to advance the Christian faith in Egypt. This is clearly reinstated in the works of Philip Jenkins. Jenkins is Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Penn State University. In his work, Jenkins observed that the Coptic Church survived because the Copts reached the hearts of their natives from early times.²⁷ One of the Coptic achievements, according to Jenkins, is the life of Saint Anthony, who was born around AD 270 and began the Christian monasticism.²⁸ The Copts were Coptic-speaking Egyptians who were living in a small village of the Fayyum region. In this region, Christianity was a well-known religion to the community. The Church reinforced popular devotion because they were so distinct from the higher clergy.²⁹ The monks associated themselves with the people and excluded themselves from the wealth and luxury that the clergy in other regions exerted. They lived ascetic lifestyles with deep piety, with much zeal, and withstood the forces against the community.³⁰ This brought even the peasants to support the monastic movement.

By AD 300, there was a grown-up Christianity mature enough to handle challenges that were coming from other regions and from the false teachers and strange religious beliefs. Jenkins clearly puts it, “Already by 300, Christianity was firmly rooted among ordinary Egyptians, too deeply to be affected very badly by most disasters that might befall, whether by the loss of the Greek language of all the great cities, or of their elites.”³¹ The conquest and penetration by Islam were never that easy since the Coptic Church was already mature and strong to deal with external challenges. Christianity in Egypt has refused to be swept for even when Arabic took over Coptic in the nation. Jenkins puts it, “Even when Coptic itself gave way to Arabic, Christianity was too thoroughly naturalized to vanish without a lengthy struggle” (Jenkins 231).

²⁶Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament*, 1.

²⁷Phillip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 230.

²⁸Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 231. Also, see Malcolm Choat, “The Epistolary Culture of Monasticism between Literature and Papyri,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 2 (2013), 227-37. James E. Goehring, “Monastic Stories: Hagiography and History in the Panegyrics on Abraham of Farshut,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 3 (2013), 285-98. Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, “Models of Seeing and Reading Monastic Archaeology,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* Vol. 48, No. 3 (2013), 299-315. Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, “The Geography of the Monastic Cell in Early Egyptian Monastic Literature,” *Church History* Vol. 78, No. 4 (2009), 756-91.

²⁹Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 231.

³⁰Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 231.

³¹Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity*, 231.

This position by Jenkins is reinstated in the works of Lamin Sanneh (D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity and Professor of History at Yale Divinity School) when he writes,

The facts of the expansion are little in dispute: Africa, for example, in 1990, by which time the continent had come firmly under colonial rule, had 8.7million Christians, about 9 per cent of the total population of 107.86million. The majority of the Christians were Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox.³²

The consistent historical nature of the Coptic and Ethiopian faith has been like a tunnel in exerting ideological pressures upon the faith of others and revealing how diligent the Copts have been in safeguarding their faith and making it relevant to others through the availability of Coptic versions of scriptures to indigenous people through translations, as portions will tie to our text under reconstruction. The clamouring consistent situation of the Coptic Church over the Early Church centuries cannot be handed over to public jeopardization. However, in recent times, predominantly within the historical and source critical areas of biblical studies, there appears a bulk of books from both erudite and consortium of scholars that have criticized, in active and abhorring terms, the historicity and authenticity of the Matthean text of the Holy Family taking a flight from the Holy Land to Egypt. It is argued by Sceptics based on multiple attestations that if the text is authentic, why didn't the three evangelists (Mark, Luke, and John) account for such an important early history and contribution of Egypt in a detailed framework?³³ The Africans made the Coptic language relevant through the Coptic text of the New Testament, which was available in the early centuries of the Church, and such an effort cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

This work has argued and underscored the contribution of Africa and Africans in the field of textual criticism, and it is believed that a proper, painstaking approach would result in a more comprehensive and absolute history of the *old shrines* in textual criticism rather than superficial historic concepts which have been extensively dominated as “Western text-critical studies” in the name of global “textual criticism” with less concerns for the African continent, as re-evaluation of recent works revealed. Any attempt to rewrite the history of the New Testament text will prove that Africans and Africa have played significant roles in the transmission of the text of the New Testament (as witnessed in Alexandrian text-type and Coptic texts) and have dominated the scene of the early centuries of the Early Church as the Church expanded beyond the Jerusalem borders to Africa. A sincere quest for the autographs of the New Testament will have no choice but to recognise such effort by early African patriarchs.

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³²Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 14-15

³³Craig S. Keener, *Matthew* (Leicester: IVP, 1997), 68.

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