

Billington, Mark and Peter Streitenberger, eds., *Digging for the Truth: Collected Essays Regarding the Byzantine Text of the Greek New Testament – A Festschrift in Honor of Maurice A. Robinson*, Norden: Focus Your Mission, 2014. ISBN 978-3-942729-81-9. Pp. 203. Hardback, €19.

- [1] Maurice Robinson is a familiar name for those engaged in New Testament Textual Criticism. His publications have spanned over three decades. His positive contribution in academics makes him a worthy candidate for this Festschrift from his colleagues and former students. As the title of the book suggests, the twelve articles are centered around the position Robinson has become most famous, Byzantine text form priority.
- [2] Each article explores a different topic, but all conclude to varying degrees that the Byzantine text form should be treated as a reliable witness to the biblical autographs. In fact, the majority of authors hold to the position that the Byzantine is “identical to—or at least very close to—the original text” (p. 2). Many modern text critics will have problems with this thesis. For many, even speaking of establishing the original text as the goal of textual criticism is largely abandoned. The pursuit now is typically for the earliest recoverable text. Nonetheless, the book is a worthy read. The essays can be summarized as follows.
- [3] Chapter 1: (A Modest Explanation for the Layman of Ideas Related to Determining the Text of the Greek New Testament. pp. 2–20) Timothy Friberg offers readers a very helpful introduction to textual criticism as it relates to the premises of Byzantine priority. It faithfully summarizes the position of Byzantine theorists with Friberg acknowledging he received input from thirty scholars holding the position (p. 17). His focus is to explain how Byzantine theorists evaluate internal evidence. Their method of internal evaluation is important to defend since most criticism of the Byzantine position is against the seemingly sole emphasis on external criteria. He also addresses four commonly held objections to the position. The article is so well executed and informative, it would work very well as a standalone introduction for students. It even includes a glossary.
- [4] Chapter 2: (Scribal Habits and the New Testament Text. pp. 21–39) Andrew Wilson writes one of the best articles in the collection. He delivers a scathing critique against the majority of the field of textual criticism for a commitment to transcriptional canons that he contends are decisively proven wrong. Building on Maurice Robinson’s Ph.D. thesis from 1982, Wilson attacks the traditional canon of *lectio brevior*, the preference for the shorter reading. He gathers textual data from Robinson, James Royse, Peter Head, and even his personal study of singular readings, to establish that early scribes more frequently omitted than added to the text. Hence, the longer reading is more likely closer to the original. The article is aggressive. He charges scholars are committed to the traditional canons because of their ill-placed preference to the Alexandrian text-type rather than a commitment to the evidence. It is an article that should be engaged further.
- [5] Chapter 3: (A Translator Takes a Linguistic Look at Mark’s Gospel. pp. 40–48) John R. Himes offers a very short piece. He purports to use Discourse Analysis as a means to defending the long ending of Mark. But the fact that he claims to be doing “DA of the εὐθὺς” word shows this reviewer Himes does not know what full Discourse Analysis is (p. 42). Though he claims to present a Linguistic

approach, his bibliography only has three distinct linguistic publications. All of which are two or three decades old. Notably, he does not even reference the monographs of Reed or Callow but only their articles. Furthermore, he merely quotes definitions from those works rather than substantively implementing their methods. The approach he is hinting at is not DA. At best it is intermediate grammar and nothing more. This article does not positively contribute to Robinson's Festschrift.

- [6] Chapter 4: (Early Textual Recension in Alexandria. pp. 49–53) T. David Anderson also adds a very short piece. It is, in fact, only four pages including footnotes. And most of the first three pages are block quotes. His only point is to challenge Gordon Fee's contention that P75 and B are not descendants of a recensional manuscript. With such a short article, it is hard for readers to be convinced of his critique of Fee.
- [7] Chapter 5: (The Relationship of the Vaticanus Umlauts to Family 1. pp. 54–72) Edward D. Gravely builds on his dissertation completed under Robinson. He found that the 900 umlauts in the margins of Vaticanus correspond with textual variation between Vaticanus and its vorlage(s). In this paper, he focuses on what the umlauts can teach about Family 1 text-type. It is an interesting article with plenty of well-documented research. Gravely concludes that the umlauts prove two things. First, in the manuscript before the scribe(s) of Vaticanus, the *Pericope de Adultera* was located at the end of John and not at 7:52. Second, based on statistics this vorlage is likely an ancestor of Family 1. Thus, Gravely is attempting to address one of the main arguments against Byzantine priority. If the manuscript used by Vaticanus is an ancestor of the Byzantine form, then the critique of Byzantine form being a late development is refuted. The article is a thought-provoking exploration of manuscript form and textual criticism.
- [8] Chapter 6: (Varieties of New Testament Text. pp. 73–91) Timothy J. Finney writes an intricate article on how to compare ancient texts to one another. The premise is that all textual data is simply data. It is how it is mapped which influences conclusions. Thus, Finney looks at data for the Gospel of Mark through four modes: 1) ordering (p. 77) 2) multidimensional scaling (MDS) (p. 77–78), 3) divisive clustering (DC) (p. 78), 4) partitioning (p. 78). These four modes of analysis reveal distinct information when mapped in different ways revealing relationships among, and distances between, textual families. Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae (it-k) is an example of why more than one mode of analysis is needed (p. 87). In conclusion, Finney submits that if the 'it-d' textual variety is associated with Rome and the Latin-speaking part of the Empire, the 'L/892' variety with Alexandria and Egypt, and the '565' variety with Syria and Palestine, this leaves but one cluster and early Christian population center to connect, namely the 'Byz' variety and Asia Minor. Furthermore, the three-dimensional MDS analysis result implies that Jerome used the 'Byz' variety when revising the Old Latin to produce the Vulgate text of Mark. Jerome's statement that he used old Greek copies when revising the Latin then suggests that the Byzantine text has a *terminus ante quem* somewhere in the third century (p. 89). Finney concludes that on account of the evidence, each family should be "given due weight" in establishing the "initial text" (p. 90).
- [9] Chapter 7: (The Alexandrian Presumption of Authenticity Regarding the Matthew 27:49 Addition. pp. 92–99) Abidan Paul Shah contributes a brief study challenging the inconsistency of the eclectic approach in the case of Matt 27:49. It is a rhetorically charged article asserting that the Alexandrian priority position,

which he says is held by most eclectic critics, should read the variant addition to this verse. However, the NA28 does not include the addition that both Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus contain. The NA28 text is treated as proof that eclectic critics inconsistently hold Alexandrian favoritism and thus should be abandoned. Unfortunately, the article strongly feels like it is missing a page. It ends abruptly on page 99 without a final conclusion. Nonetheless, this is an article worth considering further.

- [10] Chapter 8: (Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: A New Concept? pp. 100–115) Thomas R. Edgar writes a very familiar argument against the methods of Bart Ehrman. He tries to demonstrate that Ehrman’s motives are heavily influenced by an ‘anti’ orthodox approach. Ultimately Edgar concludes Ehrman is not bringing any new challenges that have not already been sufficiently addressed.
- [11] Chapter 9: (The Textual Criticism of Luke 24:53 and its Implications. pp. 116–123) James A. Borland explores the variant reading in Luke 24:53. His aim is to show how defaulting to Sinaiticus has resulted in treating the Byzantine text as irrelevant. Borland believes the original reading is ‘blessing and praising’ God instead of the text in Sinaiticus of only ‘praising.’ While this reviewer was not convinced, it is worth reading how Byzantine theorists process internal and external evidence.
- [12] Chapter 10: (The Adulteress and Her Accusers: An Examination of the Internal Arguments Relating to the *Pericope Adulterae*. pp. 124–143) Andrew Wilson writes on a pericope that Maurice Robinson has devoted a great deal of attention, the *Pericope Adulterae*. Wilson contends the (in)famous passage is original. He addresses common charges against its authenticity such as style and vocabulary, thematic issues, and topical continuity of John 7–10. He does not, however, address the massive external textual challenges against the pericope. Furthermore, he concludes with an incorrect argument. He believes that holding to Byzantine priority is similar to Hebrew Bible text critics holding to the Masoretic Text. But this is not entirely accurate. The Masoretic text is primarily based on a single documentary manuscript, the Leningrad Codex. Based on Wilson’s argument, Westcott and Hort would be correct to treat the documentary text of Codex Sinaiticus as the base for the NT. Of course, such a conclusion would argue against the position of the whole book.
- [13] Chapter 11: (‘Burned Up’ Or ‘Discovered’? pp. 144–153) Paul A. Himes approaches the notoriously difficult variant readings in 2 Peter 3:10d. He works through some of the theological ramifications, lexical factors, and historical backgrounds. Faithful to the overall book, he concludes that the Byzantine reading is correct. He believes that only this reading makes sense, which he glosses as, ‘and the works in it will be burned up,’ (p. 144). Indeed, the reading makes sense, but a much longer article is necessary to prove his underlining premise. Himes believes the reason the Byzantine text has been ignored is because of the scholarly biases towards the Alexandrian text and the traditional canon of *lectio difficilior*. But calling those two positions illegitimate biases, is not proof that “the considerably easier Byzantine reading” should, therefore, be preferred (p. 144). That is the same biased logic in a different direction.
- [14] Chapter 12: (Arguments for and Against The Byzantine and Alexandrian Text Types. pp. 154–188). T. David Anderson offers a fitting article to end the book. The article does not attempt to present new material; rather he posits arguments for the Byzantine text and addresses counterarguments. Anderson then offers his hypothesis of textual transmission history. It is interesting that the book ends

with an article mildly critiquing the Byzantine position. Anderson calls for a “theoretically valid middle position” (p. 186). The reason a middle position is needed, is that Anderson finds it a “disturbing” position to content the original reading will always be found among the Byzantine manuscripts (p. 185). But he likewise concludes the eclectic approach seems “dubious” on theoretical grounds (p. 186). I believe Anderson should be studied further at this point. Overall, if a student needed to become well acquainted with the Byzantine position, the first article by Friberg together with this one would do a fine job.

- [15] The book is a fitting compliment to Maurice Robinson and his work. But there are a few things that could have improved the gift to him. First, the book is quite large with very narrow margins. Making it not comfortable to read. There are some typos, inconsistency with typesetting, and varying formatting. I actually spoke with one of the authors involved in the project and was saddened to hear there was a problem during the editorial process between editors and publisher. But such mistakes do not distract much from the articles. There is, however, one unstated feature that readers might perceive. While the articles are academic in tone, there is a sense the authors are defending a providential preservation of the Byzantine text form. For instance, Friberg allows Westcott and Hort to summarize the Byzantine position: “a theoretical presumption indeed remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents at each stage of transmission” (Westcott and Hort, p. 45, cited by Friberg p. 8). This is an unproven assumption, and likely unprovable. But the motivation for such a position is not purely academic. Timothy Finney reveals the motivation, “Does this mean that the New Testament is unreliable? God Forbid!” (p. 75). The authors of this book believe in the divine preservation of the biblical documents, which is an acceptable evangelical position, and they are arguing that the preservation took place through the Byzantine text form. At points, this conclusion drives the argument and rhetoric. If readers know this underlining assumption, then they can better appreciate where the authors are coming from. Readers who agree, disagree, or are new to the topics altogether, will find the book a rewarding introduction to a breadth of subjects and debates.

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