

Book Review

Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, compilers. *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Byzantine Textform 2005* (Southborough, Mass.: Chilton, 2005): 587 pp.

This attractively printed and sturdy book presents the text of the Greek New Testament in the Byzantine manuscript tradition. Thus, it offers an alternative to current eclectic, modern Greek texts. Robinson is Senior Professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Pierpont a layman who died in 2003. The title of the book “deliberately parallels that of Wescott and Hort (*The New Testament in the Original Greek*)” (p. xvi).

The book’s attractive physical form and layout is impressive. The font of the Greek text is large and easy to read. Marginal notes provide significant variations in the Byzantine manuscripts. A lower apparatus identifies variations in the Byzantine text from the standard modern Greek texts (Nestle-Aland 27th edition and United Bible Society 4th edition). One drawback to these notes, however, is the fact that the manuscripts from which the cited variations are drawn are not specifically identified. This book improves, however, on an earlier edition of the Byzantine text from Robinson and Pierpont in that it includes accents, breathings, capitalization, and punctuation. Also of practical help is an attached ribbon to mark one’s place in the book.

The compilers have also retained distinctive elements in the Greek “canonical order.” The order of the books is grouped as follows: Gospels, Acts, the General Epistles, the Pauline epistles, and Revelation. Hebrews is also included among the Pauline epistles, placed between Second Thessalonians and First Timothy. The doxology usually found at Romans 16:25-27 is, instead, placed following Romans 14:23 (numbered as vv. 24-26), with Romans concluding at 16:24. The controversial *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53-8:11) is printed with two alternative texts (see p. 213). Versification also varies from the *Textus Receptus* in the omission of four verses not found in the Byzantine tradition (Luke 17:36; Acts 8:37; Acts 15:34; and Acts 24:7).

The rationale for this book is presented in the preface (pp. i-xxiv). Here the compilers announce their support of “a theory favoring the priority and canonical autograph authenticity of the Byzantine Textform” (p. vii). This theory “presents as canonical the Greek New Testament text as it has been attested, preserved, and maintained by scribes throughout the centuries” (p. vii). The editors hold to a conservative view of Scripture, noting that the content of Scripture “is truth without any mixture of error” (p. xxi). They also note their corollary belief that “this revelation has been kept pure in all ages by the singular care and providence of God” (p. xxi). They hold that the Byzantine Textform is “the strongest representative of the canonical autographs of the Greek New Testament text” (p. xxiii).

As an Appendix, the book ends with a previously published, technical article by Robinson, “A Case for Byzantine Priority” (pp. 533-86). In this article he distinguishes

the Byzantine text from the *Textus Receptus* which he claims demonstrates “failure to reflect the Byzantine Textform in an accurate manner” (p. 533). He is even more critical of the approach of modern eclecticism and its effort to find the “original text” of Scripture. Robinson is relentless in stressing that the modern eclectic text give us a text which over long portions of Scripture offers “no support” with any actually existing “manuscript, versional, or patristic witnesses” (p. 537). Robinson presents eight principles of internal evidence (see pp. 545-54). Among these is principle eight, “*Neither the shorter nor longer reading is to be preferred*” (p. 552). He rejects here the standard text critical principle of *lectio brevior potior* (the preference for the shorter reading) as being based on the faulty premise “that scribes have a constant tendency to expand the text.... Yet scribal habits as exemplified in the extant data simply do not support such a hypothesis” (p. 553). He proceeds to offer nine principles of external evidence (see pp. 554-66). Noteworthy here, among other things, is his contention that “it is methodological error to assume ‘oldest is best’” when it comes to evaluating texts (p. 564). Robinson also anticipates several objections that might be raised against the Byzantine-Priority hypothesis (see pp. 567-80). One would hope that proponents of the modern critical text would read and respond to Robinson’s arguments.

The compilers note that this edition of the Byzantine text is “the culmination of twenty-seven years of intense collaboration (1976-2003)” (p. xxiii). They are to be thanked for their life’s labor. In addition to texts like Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad’s *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) or the *Textus Receptus* (as published by the Trinitarian Bible Society), this book will be a valuable help to any who desire to read and study an alternative, ecclesiastical Greek text to the current modern editions based on the eclectic views of Westcott and Hort.

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