

## *The Text of the New Testament*

**T**HE SUBJECT OF WHICH TEXTUAL TRADITION we should follow is a vast one. However, some recent observations by specialists in the field can help guide us in the proper direction. This subject is as important as any to understand in regard to the story behind *Beyond Acts*.

First of all, we should draw our attention to the 50 Bibles that Emperor Constantine commissioned to be made. Now why is this fact significant to the subject? It is significant in that it helps us understand the true origin of the New Testament text. Eusebius stated that he sent to the Emperor the completed Bibles in “magnificent and elaborately bound volumes of a threefold and fourfold form” (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 4.36-37).

Jack Finegan comments on the expression “threefold and fourfold” (*trissa kai tetrassa*) as probably meaning “having three columns and four columns” and points out that the pages in codex Vaticanus were written respectively in three columns and four columns.<sup>519</sup>

Dr. Finegan further brings out:

Two great vellum codices of the Bible, dating probably about the middle of the fourth century A.D., are still extant, Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. ...it is interesting to find that they have three and four columns of writing per page respectively. We also learn that about the middle of the same century the famous library of Origen (d. A.D. c.254) and Pamphilus (d. A.D. 309) at Caesarea had fallen into decay and was restored by two priests, Acacius and Euzoius, who replaced what were probably damaged papyrus rolls with copies written on parchment (in membranis) and presumably in codices. From this time on, parchment or vellum remained the chief writing material until the general establishment of the use of paper in the fourteenth century; and the codex was retained permanently

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<sup>519</sup> Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 2:397-8.

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as the prevailing form of books.<sup>520</sup>

The codex Vaticanus and Sinaiticus manuscripts certainly bear witness that these great codices were the result of great projects of a significant expenditure of funds. Certainly, the Emperor Constantine would have [and could have] spared no expense in such a project. Is it conceivable that all 50 of these Bibles would have now disappeared and that none have survived?

One thing to note is that the manuscript order of codex Vaticanus follows the original manuscript order according to Westcott and Hort, and other authorities.<sup>521</sup> If the codex Vaticanus is one of Eusebius' fifty Bibles, it may well be the most accurate in terms of faithfully representing the text from the great library of Caesarea, where Eusebius worked.

Although the textual scholars Westcott and Hort placed the Vaticanus on a pedestal, later scholars have brought the prestige of this great manuscript down, claiming that it represented a recension rather than a pure line of manuscript tradition. But now, some have challenged this view due to the recently found papyrus manuscripts that have surfaced in the last century. These manuscripts show remarkable agreement to codex Vaticanus.

Philip Wesley Comfort, visiting professor of New Testament Literature and Interpretation at Wheaton College, and senior editor of the Bible Department at Tyndale, is one such scholar. He is co-translator (along with Robert K. Brown) of *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*.<sup>522</sup> His literal translation is one of my principle study guides – an excellent contribution. In his book: *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament*,<sup>523</sup> Dr. Comfort evaluates the impact of early papyrus fragments on textual studies.

One of the papyruses designated P<sup>75</sup> [Bodmer Papyrus XIV-XV] has been dated to 175 C.E. by Barbara Aland. Dr. Comfort remarks on this important papyrus:

Unquestionably, P<sup>75</sup> is the best extant copy of any substantial portion of the New Testament. ...P<sup>75</sup> is the work

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<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 398.

<sup>521</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 205-6. Unfortunately, Codex Vaticanus is missing the latter part of Hebrews, the Pastorals and Revelation. Codex Sinaiticus follows the exact same order, except for the curious fact that Acts and the Catholic Epistles follow after Philemon. It also has appended the Letter of Barnabas and the Shepherd of Hermas.

<sup>522</sup> Robert K. Brown and Philip W. Comfort, *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1990).

<sup>523</sup> Philip W. Comfort, *The Quest for the Original Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

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of a professional scribe — a scribe who very likely labored in a scriptorium in Alexandria or in another scriptorium influenced by Alexandrian scriptorial practices. **P**<sup>75</sup> displays the penmanship of a professional. ...**P**<sup>75</sup> is eminently recognized as an extremely accurate copy. ...All in all, **P**<sup>75</sup> is a thorough literary production of the highest quality. This carefully made manuscript is an excellent copy of the original text.<sup>524</sup>

So what does this have to do with codex Vaticanus? Dr. Comfort continues:

It should not surprise us that another accurate manuscript, Codex Vaticanus [B], is quite close to **P**<sup>75</sup>. ...Studies have shown a high percentage of agreement between **P**<sup>75</sup> and B. ...Seldom do we see the scribe of B adopting a variant reading from a different tradition.<sup>525</sup>

What this all means is that

prior to the discovery of **P**<sup>75</sup>, certain scholars thought Codex Vaticanus was the work of a fourth-century recension; others (chiefly Hort) thought it must trace back to a very early and accurate copy. Hort said that Codex Vaticanus preserves ‘not only a very ancient text, but a very pure line of very ancient text’ (Westcott and Hort 1882: *Introduction* pp. 250-51). **P**<sup>75</sup> appears to have shown that Hort was right. Prior to the discovery of **P**<sup>75</sup>, many textual scholars were convinced that the second- and third-century papyri displayed a text in flux.... But **P**<sup>75</sup> has proven this theory wrong. What is quite clear now is that Codex Vaticanus was simply a copy (with some modifications) of a manuscript much like **P**<sup>75</sup>, not a fourth-century recension.<sup>526</sup>

Another New Testament textual scholar, who has similarly viewed the evidence, is Gordon O. Fee, professor of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, and has served as the editor of *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. He states:

As to **P**<sup>75</sup>, it can be shown to be precisely what Hort considered B [codex Vaticanus] to be: a very pure line of very ancient text. For example, when tested along with all other witnesses in Luke 10 and 11 for variants reflecting possible harmonization to Matthew, Mark, or the LXX, **P**<sup>75</sup> and B stood alone in their “comparative purity.” Codex D,

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<sup>524</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 98.

<sup>525</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>526</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

for example, had thirty-six such harmonizing variants, the Byzantine majority had twenty-seven, while P<sup>75</sup> and B had six, and some of theirs were more likely the result of other factors than harmonization.<sup>527</sup>

Still, another prominent specialist in the field of textual criticism, Eldon Jay Epp, has also contributed to the discussion. He is the Harkness Professor of Biblical Literature at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. He states:

The place to begin a description of the “B” textual cluster is with the striking and highly significant fact that the texts of P<sup>75</sup> and Codex Vaticanus (B) are almost identical, a fact which demonstrates that there is virtually a straight line from the text of a papyrus dated around 200 to that of a major, elegant MS of 150 years later. ...the close affinity of P<sup>75</sup> and B is ...striking, for it demonstrates that an early papyrus can stand very near the beginning point of a clearly identifiable and distinctive textual group that has been preserved with a high degree of accuracy over several generations and through a period that often has been assumed to have been a chaotic and free textual environment.<sup>528</sup>

The stability of the text is due to the fact that it was not maintained in local church archives, as many have assumed. The chief guardian of the text was the archive at the Caesarean library. Once it is appreciated that this is a fact of history, then we can better understand the trustworthiness of the true Caesarean text type.

Eldon Epp has also narrowed down the textual families of the early witnesses based upon what he calls two textual streams or trajectories:

Although we are told that text-types, subsequent to the discovery of these early witnesses, should no longer be classified according to the much later codices B and D, it is true nonetheless that our extant materials and our much enhanced hindsight reveal *only two clear textual streams or trajectories* through all of our material from the first four centuries or so of textual transmission, and these two trajectories are what we have long called the Neutral (or

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<sup>527</sup> Gordon D. Fee, “Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism – Which?” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 128.

<sup>528</sup> Eldon J. Epp, “The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 289.

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Alexandrian/Egyptian) and the Western text-types. The Neutral line is the clearest, plotted first from P<sup>75</sup>, then perhaps through P<sup>23</sup>, P<sup>25</sup>, 0220, P<sup>50</sup>, etc., to Codex B and thence on through the centuries, e.g., to Codex L (eighth century), MSS 33 (ninth century), 1739 (tenth century), and 579 (thirteenth century).<sup>529</sup>

Now, we should take note of a very curious thing going on here. Where is the Caesarean text type in all of this? This is a most important question because we believe that it is the great library of Caesarea where the “elders” of the Apostle John<sup>530</sup> had ultimately delivered the completed canon of the New Testament. In other words, if we are going to seek the original text, it should ultimately draw a line back to the Caesarean Library. And if that is the case, then the true text type should be called the “Caesarean” text, the true “neutral” text type.

It is unfortunate that the so-called “Neutral Text” that Westcott and Hort identified should have been also dubbed as the “Alexandrian Text” type. Why? Because this has only given the “King James Version Only” movement<sup>531</sup> ammunition in their arsenal of trying to preserve a non-text – the so-called “Textus Receptus.” The reality is, however, that they are the ones championing a text that is the result of numerous recensions and eclectic borrowing from dubious sources.<sup>532</sup> Furthermore, because the B manuscript is also called the “Vaticanus,” anti-Catholic bias is all too ready and willing to throw suspicion on this codex as a Roman Catholic production. Obviously, clearer heads must prevail. Such prejudice has no place in any honest research.

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<sup>529</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, “The Twentieth-Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 93. Dr. Epp goes on to say: “The Western line takes us, for example, from P<sup>5</sup> and P<sup>29</sup> through P<sup>48</sup>, P<sup>38</sup>, P<sup>37</sup>, and 0171, then to codices D and D<sub>p</sub>, and thence on through the centuries to F<sub>p</sub> and G<sub>p</sub> (ninth century) and MSS 614 and 383 (thirteenth century).” Epp goes further on to describe a “midway” trajectory which ultimately formed the Byzantine line and most of the minuscules.

<sup>530</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2:22:5 [*ANF* 1:391-2], also see 5:5:1; 5:30:1; 5:33:3; and 5:36:1-2.

<sup>531</sup> Online, see: <http://www.tegart.com/brian/bible/kjvonly/>; [http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/graphic1designer/hushbeck\\_article.html](http://www.angelfire.com/hi2/graphic1designer/hushbeck_article.html); <http://hometown.aol.com/ibss2/kjv.html>;

<sup>532</sup> One only has to go online to “www.google.com” and type in “Westcott and Hort” to see evangelical idiosyncratic ideology at its very worst. The war waged is not so much against text type categories as it is a naive advocacy of theological indoctrination – one that defends a corrupt text at any cost which supports the high christological Jesus – the imagined pre-existent Divine Being of later church councilor decrees. Once it is understood that theology is the real underlying motive behind the entire tempestuous “KJV Only” movement, then one can see that it is a defecation of false rhetoric rather than an honest appraisal of the facts.

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*THE ALEXANDRIAN TEXT TYPE MYTH*

**W**E MUST NOW LAY ASIDE THE MYTH OF THE so-called Alexandrian Text Type.<sup>533</sup> It is entirely a misnomer. The Codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are not Alexandrian at all – they are Caesarean! Indeed, around the turn of the twentieth century specialists in the field of textual studies were leaning toward labeling these two great manuscripts as Caesarean.<sup>534</sup> But then it seems, scholars, for some strange reason, were compelled to label Vaticanus and Sinaiticus as Alexandrian and not Caesarean. And what was the compelling reason for this change? Hang onto your seats, the answer will floor you. In the final analysis, all the arguments boiled down to the fact that the order of the books in the codex Vaticanus is exactly the same order as that given by Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his “Festal Letter” of 367.<sup>535</sup> But has it never dawned on scholars that Athanasius was merely citing a tradition of the order of books that had come down to him from the beginning of the second century?

Is this the kind of reasoning that supports the entire Alexandrian text type? Indeed, notice how some scholars cleverly try to tip the scales in favor of an Alexandrian provenance in the face of data to the contrary:

Attempts have been made to associate the great codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus with Caesarea as their place of origin, but on rather slender data. In the first place, it would seem plausible after the paleographical work of Milne and Skeat<sup>536</sup> that the same scribe had worked upon both

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<sup>533</sup> Text types were based on what scholars believed to be recensions, i.e., a deliberate revision of the entire textual apparatus, based on a critical study of its sources. Gordon Fee has adequately demonstrated that there was not any kind of Alexandrian recension in the second, or even third century (Gordon D. Fee, “P75, P66, and Origen: The Myth of Early Textual Recension in Alexandria” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 247-273.

<sup>534</sup> The dramatic story of this change in scholarly opinion is told in the brilliant article by Theodore C. Skeat, “The Codex Sinaiticus, the Codex Vaticanus, and Constantine,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 50:2 (1999): 583-625. Anyone doing study in this area must not fail to read and understand the thrust of Skeat’s important contribution. One of the revealing points brought out in this article is that the imminent textual Harvard University scholar, Kirsopp Lake (1872-1946), originally was of the opinion that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus were of Caesarean provenance, but later changed his mind in favor of an Alexandrian one. The reasons which changed Lake’s mind on this important point seem to be a mystery rather than due to rigorous investigation. Nevertheless, scholars today seem to be in a paralysis on this point based mainly on opinions of scholars of the stature of Kirsopp Lake.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 587.

<sup>536</sup> H. J. M. Milne and T. C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus*, (London: British Museum, 1938).

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manuscripts, scribe A of the Vaticanus being probably identical with scribe D of the Sinaiticus. Hence any datum bearing upon the origin of the one may well be valid for the other. The Sinaiticus has at Matt. 13:54 for *Patrida* (homeland) the curious variant *Antipatrida* (an unknown word), which may spring from *Antipatris*, a place-name of the Caesarean region: similarly it has *Kaisareias* for *Samareias* at Acts 8:40 [sic! Acts 8:5]. ...On the other side there are two weighty points which argue for the Alexandrian origin of the Vaticanus at least (and the Sinaiticus probably comes from the same scriptorium): first, that the order of books is identical with that found in Athanasius' statements about the Canon of scripture, and secondly, that a striking variant in Heb. 1:3 is known elsewhere only in a Coptic source.<sup>537</sup>

Notice that the detailed paleographical data provided by Milne and Skeat for a Caesarean provenance is dismissed with a prejudicial slant of being "slender," but on the side of an Alexandrian provenance we have "weighty points." And what are these so-called weighty points? They are the order of Vaticanus' New Testament books as being the same as that of Athanasius and a unique reading of Hebrews 1:3 only paralleled in Coptic sources. That's basically it! In other words, in the above quote, if we were to exchange the words "slender data" with "weighty points," would our judgment on the provenance of these two manuscripts not be prejudiced in the opposite direction?<sup>538</sup>

In point of fact, the slender data is in reality that in favor of Alexandria, and the weighty points for a Caesarean provenance are those of Milne and Skeat. Indeed, Theodore Skeat has recently reiterated the following:

I think future generations may be puzzled to understand why it has taken so long for the significance of these two readings, 'Αντιπατρίδα for πατρίδα and Καισαρίας for Σαμαρίας, to be appreciated. They are in fact first-hand direct evidence of a kind rarely available. *The scribe is, in effect, himself telling us where he is writing.* Short of a colophon saying that Sinaiticus was written in Caesarea, I do not see how this could have been more clearly expressed.<sup>539</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> J. Neville Birdsall, "The New Testament Text" in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, ed., P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1:359-60.

<sup>538</sup> Indeed, how can the order of books argument for Alexandria be even considered as being "weighty" when both the codex Vaticanus and the codex Sinaiticus differ in order of the books?

<sup>539</sup> T. C. Skeat, *ibid.*, 598.

Today, scholars are still burdened with old, false stereotypes that are in fact really supported by the slenderest of data, and not the other way around as they would have you believe by prejudicial adverbs. It is time that a new generation of scholars begin a fresh study of the problem and render a decision based on the evidence and not on opinions that seek to overthrow the truth in favor of ideas that suit a post-apostolic origin of the New Testament. The true neutral text of the New Testament should be rightly called the Caesarean Text. This is because ancient Caesarea in Palestine is where the true text type originated – not Alexandria!

## *THE VANISHING CAESAREAN TEXT TYPE*

**T**HE CAESAREAN TEXT TYPE IS GRADUALLY FALLING by the wayside in scholarly discussions, which is an unfortunate direction. How do scholars categorize texts into certain groups in the first place? Eldon Jay Epp gives us some insight in this respect:

When J. A. Bengel long ago placed MSS into classes or groups, the development of text-types was under way in the textual critic's mind, reaching its classical formulation in the system of Westcott-Hort, though the more elaborate classifications of von Soden were still to come. As new MSS were analyzed, they were placed into a Westcott-Hort or a von Soden framework; this was appropriate enough if the MSS in question were generally later in time than the cornerstone MSS of each text-type. When, however, much earlier MSS – primarily papyri – began to appear (particularly those well beyond the fragmentary stage), we began to recognize the anachronism of placing these earlier MSS into groups whose nature had been determined on the basis only of the complexion of later MSS (see Birdsall 1960: 8-9, 171 Klijn 1969: 33-38, 50).<sup>540</sup>

This being said, then the resultant deduction was soon to follow:

The identification of text-types and of the MSS comprising them was a controversial matter for two centuries from Bengel to the discussion about the Caesarean text (roughly 1735-1935), but it was the analysis of papyri like P<sup>45</sup>, P<sup>46</sup>,

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<sup>540</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, "Decision Points in Past, Present, and Future New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 17.

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P<sup>66</sup>, and P<sup>75</sup> that brought a new dimension to the controversy, namely, whether the established text-type categories any longer made sense or were even useful for the earliest period, or – to push the question even further – whether there were, in fact, any identifiable text-types at all in that period.<sup>541</sup>

As early as 1945 Bruce Metzger was stating that: “It must be acknowledged that at present the Caesarean text is disintegrating.”<sup>542</sup> Why is it disintegrating? Because, the evidence of the papyri showed much overlapping, especially in what was called Alexandrian and Caesarean. Unfortunately, however, scholars maintained the term Alexandrian at the expense of the true identifier – the Caesarean text type. But notice what F. F. Bruce observed long ago:

The great centres of Christianity in the early centuries tended, in the course of copying and recopying, to have distinct types of text associated with them. Textual students have been able to distinguish among our sources of evidence for the New Testament text groups of manuscripts, versions and citations associated in particular with Alexandria, Caesarea, Antioch and the West (and the West means primarily Rome). The Alexandrian family is represented in particular by Codices  $\aleph$ , B, and C, and a few other uncials and minuscules; also by the Coptic (Bohairic) version and by Biblical citations in the Alexandrian writers, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril. The works of Origen, however, reveal the use of two types of Biblical text. When this was first pointed out (as it was in 1924 by B. H. Streeter in *The Four Gospels*), it was thought that the year 231, in which Origen left Alexandria for Caesarea, marked the time when he exchanged the use of the Alexandrian type of text for the other, which was accordingly called Caesarean. It was later pointed out, however, that Origen may have used this second type of text EVEN BEFORE HE LEFT ALEXANDRIA; and that he certainly used the Alexandrian type of text for a time after he went to Caesarea. Then, when the Chester Beatty papyri were discovered and studied, it appeared that they, too, constituted a witness for the New Testament text which Streeter had called Caesarean, so that this text was current in Egypt in the first half of the third century – that is to say, in the time of Origen. But WHEREVER IT ORIGINATED, THIS TEXT WAS CERTAINLY USED AT CAESAREA, AND RADIATED FROM THERE, AND IT MAY CONTINUE TO BE CALLED THE CAESAREAN TEXT.<sup>543</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid.

<sup>542</sup> Bruce M. Metzger, “The Caesarean Text of the Gospels,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945): 483.

This remarkable observation further confirms our thesis – that the true neutral text type should be identified as the Caesarean text group. A change in terminology is thus called for in order to correctly identify what should be regarded as the standard by which all other text groups should be judged.

A chief witness to the Caesarean text type can be found in the beautiful tenth century codex Athous Laurae 184, now known as manuscript 1739.<sup>544</sup> Also, from the above citations we can see that scholars now feel that there is a direct trajectory from P<sup>75</sup> through Vaticanus and to 1739 that shows remarkable agreement. From the critical notes in the margins that the scribe of this manuscript (who names himself as Ephraim) copied, we learn some very important facts about this manuscript:

(1) They contain no reference to any writer later than Basil of Cappadocia (A.D. 329-379).

(2) A note on James ii. 13 refers to a manuscript written by Eusebius of Caesarea “with his own hand.” This suggests the possibility that the original compilation was made in Caesarea, where, of all places, such a codex is most likely to have been preserved. It is obvious that this library would also possess copies of Origen’s commentary.

(3) A hint in the same direction may also be found in a note, unfortunately very much mutilated, on Gal. v. 15, which seems to refer to a manuscript written in prison. We are reminded of the colophon in the Codex Sinaiticus which refers to a manuscript written “in prison” by Pamphilus and preserved at Caesarea.

Thus, ...there is a possibility that Ephraim, the scribe of Codex Athous Laurae 184, in the tenth century copied a critical edition of the New Testament which had been made in Caesarea from manuscripts and patristic writings preserved in the great library of Pamphilus.

This evidence, linking up our MS. with Origen and Caesarea,

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<sup>543</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1950), 175-6. Bruce goes on to say that “Its chief representatives [the Caesarean text type], in addition to the Chester Beatty papyri and the New Testament citations in some works of Origen, are Codices W and Θ, some 20 minuscules (To wit: Codex I and allied minuscules [118, 131, 209, 1582], Codex 13 and allied minuscules (69, 124, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, 1709], and Codices 28, 565, and 700), and the Old Georgian version” (ibid.). Oddly enough, Bruce fails to mention manuscript 1739, which is a primary Caesarean witness.

<sup>544</sup> This manuscript contains the New Testament in the correct manuscript order from Acts to Philemon, with the unfortunate loss of the Gospels and the Apocalypse.

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is strikingly similar to that which has made it possible to identify the text of family  $\theta$  as the Caesarean text. With little doubt the text of Romans in Codex 1739 is that which Origen used, while the text of the other epistles is based on an ancient copy which the compiler of the archetypal text, who seems to have had an intelligent and accurate interest in textual questions, identified as agreeing with the text used by Origen in his commentaries. Thus, considering the way in which our MS. and its archetype were made, codex 1739 may well represent the Origenian-Caesarean text of the epistles more accurately than any MS. in family  $\theta$  represents the corresponding text of the gospels.<sup>545</sup>

Thus, based on this information it may be time that the so-called trajectory from P<sup>75</sup>, Vaticanus, and 1739 be identified as the true Caesarean text type. It is ultimately derived from the great library of Caesarea and not from Alexandria in Egypt, as many scholars had originally believed. Eldon Jay Epp, further notes in this regard:

As we have observed, P<sup>75</sup> had an antecedent whose existence can be established even though that MS itself is not extant, and the same kind of text appears later in Codex Vaticanus. The result is that a genuine trajectory can be drawn from a very early (though non-extant) MS to P<sup>75</sup>, and then to Codex Vaticanus, and on to later witnesses [especially 1739]. Moreover, since no canonical NT books were authored in Egypt, the texts had to travel to Egypt; hence, MSS copied anew in Egypt have trajectories reaching back to their antecedents in other parts of the very early Christian world [i.e., Caesarea].<sup>546</sup>

These other parts of the “early” Christian world, we submit, is the great library of Caesarea, where the canonical assistants, (i.e., the elders of the Apostle John) deposited the original canon for the safe keeping of the future church. It is because of the great Library of Alexandria and its professional scriptorium that scholars have surmised that many of the best manuscripts came from this area. In contrast, Caesarea has been considered virtually a hick town in comparison. But that is not the case.

The Library of Caesarea rivaled that of any great library of its day. Indeed, the noted New Testament scholar, Origen, left Alexandria to go to

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<sup>545</sup> Lake, Kirsopp, J. de Zwaan and Morton S. Enslin, “Codex 1739” in *Six Collations of New Testament Manuscripts. Vol. 17 of Harvard Theological Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932. Repr. New York: Kraus Reprint Co., 1969), 144.

<sup>546</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, “The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 296.

Caesarea to do his most scholarly work there. Why? Well, for one reason, it was in Caesarea that the best manuscripts of the New Testament resided. Also, when Eusebius made his fifty Bibles for the Emperor Constantine, he used the resources of Caesarea, not Alexandria. And the Codex Vaticanus just may be one of those great Bibles.<sup>547</sup>

## *BASE TEXT VERSUS ECLECTICISM*

**T**ODAY MANY NEW TESTAMENT TRANSLATIONS rely on a scholarly reconstruction that is called eclectic. This is a process that selects from various sources readings that one believes is the original based upon a discipline called Textual Criticism. Obviously, such a procedure produces a text that is subjective, and therefore, controversial. One good outcome of textual criticism, however, is that it identifies and classifies various manuscripts into various text-types,<sup>548</sup> such as Alexandrian, Western, Caesarean, and Byzantine or Majority Text. Since there are so many New Testament manuscripts extant, and no manuscript is free from what is called scribal error, then it is natural to try to identify these errors and eradicate them from the text. But how does one do this? Ah, therein lies the rub, for no matter what approach is taken, in the end there cannot be an eclectic text that is in itself free from the error of subjective manipulation. We note that texts, such as the Nestle-Aland text and the United Bible Society's text, continually go through revisions in a kind of evolutionary process that is becoming more estranged from the Vaticanus text cluster. P. W. Comfort remarks in this regard:

There is another disturbing element in NA26. In an effort to make NA26 different from the Westcott and Hort text, the editors rejected nearly 400 readings supported by B that were previously included in the twenty-fifth edition of the Nestle text. What is noticeable about NA26 is that the formation of this edition was more influenced by the praxis

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<sup>547</sup> Again, on this see T. C. Skeat, "The Codex Sinaiticus, The Codex Vaticanus, and Constantine." *Journal of Theological Studies* 50 (1999): 583-625. See also Günther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum*. (London: The British Academy, 1953). This important work includes a large section on manuscript 1739, its ancestry, and its relationship to P<sup>46</sup> and B, as well as observations about its relation to Origen. His conclusion was that "the archetypal *Corpus [Paulinum]* was produced about the year of A.D. 100" (279).

<sup>548</sup> Eldon Jay Epp, "Issues in New Testament Textual Criticism," in *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002), 35, prefers the term *Textual clusters*.

of eclecticism than the preference for documentation.<sup>549</sup>

The eclectic method places textual critics in an esoteric position of deciding which readings represent the original and discarding the rest. However, it is now being observed that this method is breaking down by bias on the part of textual critics rather than on purely professional criteria. Although Dr. Comfort advocates the papyrus supported readings as a means to obtaining the original text, he is fully aware that the eclectic method used by the Alands forces them to make internal judgements which “often took precedence over external evidence and there was a conscious movement away from Westcott and Hort.”<sup>550</sup>

This same criticism could be lodged against Comfort’s method as well. For instance, even if one were to attempt an unbiased eclectic approach based upon the earliest papyri, clear cut decisions are not always apparent. Here’s an example. In 1 Peter 2:21 there is a textual variation in the verse as to whether Christ “suffered” for sins or “died” for sins. The first reading is supported by P<sup>72</sup>, A, B, C, 33, 1739 and the second by P<sup>81</sup> and **Σ**. So on one side we have an early papyrus and a great Uncial in opposition to another early papyrus and a great Uncial. Astonishingly, Dr. Comfort himself notes that “this creates the situation with P<sup>72</sup> and B versus P<sup>81</sup> and **Σ** in a virtual standoff.”<sup>551</sup>

Also note that the “Majority Text” crusade is not supported in most early textual evidence and the entire movement is highly charged with more religious bias than scholarly discipline.<sup>552</sup> Indeed, the Textus Receptus<sup>553</sup> is derived from later recensions and is, from its very

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<sup>549</sup> Philip W. Comfort, *Quest*, 126.

<sup>550</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>552</sup> For a good run-down of the entire movement, one should read Gordon D. Fee’s “The Majority Text and The Original Text of the New Testament” in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 183-208. See also Maurice A. Robinson, “The Case for Byzantine Priority,” in *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*. (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2002), 125-39, and “Response,” *idem*, 141-50. Also, we should note another remark by Gordon Fee, (“The Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism” [*Studies*, *ibid.*, 12]), that seems pertinent here: “The papyri have generally confirmed [the] opinion as to the late character of the Byzantine text-type. One does find an occasional variant in the early papyri which supports the later text-type, but none of the early papyri is even remotely related to the Byzantine MSS.” Such testimony should be fully weighed in evaluating a variant reading of a Byzantine text.

<sup>553</sup> The terms “Textus Receptus” and “Majority Text” are often used interchangeably, even though the Textus Receptus is in reality a recension that was published in the work of the kinsmen Bonaventure and Abraham Elzevir, who said in their 1633 edition, “Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum” -- “So [the reader] has the text which all now receive.” See an interesting discussion of this online: <http://www.skypoint.com/~waltzmn/TR.html>.

inception, an eclectic text in its own right, since it too mixes together words and phrases from different manuscripts without any identification of its sources. One only has to read the literature that supports the TR and it is evident that the entire movement is more concerned with preserving false orthodox corruptions that support Trinitarianism, than relinquishing prejudice for the truth!

So which text should we use as a base text for translation? Based upon what we have already established the decision should be an easy one. First, codex Vaticanus from Matthew to Hebrews 9:13 (where it breaks off), then codex 1739 from Hebrews 9:14 to the end of Philemon, and finally codex Sinaiticus for the Book of Revelation. Coupled with this, all the different readings found within these three major manuscripts, along with the evidence of the papyri, especially P<sup>75</sup> for Luke and John, should be noted.<sup>554</sup>

We should finally observe that the recently published four volume set of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John entitled: *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus*,<sup>555</sup> used the codex Vaticanus as the base text, printed with all significant text variants in full, identified by their manuscript witnesses.

Thus, the precedent is already under way. The codex Vaticanus is becoming once again accepted [at least in some enlightened scholarly circles] as the purest textual transmission that exists today. This being said, a new movement should thus be championed that breaks away from the false traditions of the so-called “Textus Receptus” and the eclectic abortion of the NA27, in favor of the true neutral text type – the Caesarean Text – that we have described herein.

Once we have a New Testament that is based upon this text, and the true manuscript order, then at last we will have a Bible that is the closest as we can get to the original New Testament that was deposited in the great library of Caesarea some nineteen centuries ago. Thankfully, the seeds have been sown and efforts will soon be underway to do just that.

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<sup>554</sup> The Original Bible Project (see online: <http://www.centuryone.org/obp.html>) headed by professor James D. Tabor, had also wrestled with the question as to which base text to use in their translation. I had submitted my above proposal to them back in 1995, but Dr. Tabor decided to go with codex Sinaiticus because it represented a complete New Testament text.

<sup>555</sup> Edited by Reuben J. Swanson (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).