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THE TEXT OF THE REVELATION OF SAINT JOHN:

A Review of its Materials and Problems With Especial Reference to the Work of Josef Schmid

by J. NEVILLE BIRDSALL

AMONG the handful of British scholars who are devoting themselves to the study of New Testament textual criticism, Dr. Birdsall, Lecturer in Theology in the University of Birmingham, is rapidly winning for himself a front-rank position. Textual criticism is not the most popular of disciplines: for one thing, it is too exacting! Yet it is of high importance that all who are interested in Biblical study should acquaint themselves with the present position in textual criticism, and Dr. Birdsall is never reluctant to instruct us. The following paper was read to a New Testament study group convened by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research.

THE book of the Revelation is of great interest to many in the evangelical tradition. Whatever the particular interpretation of its details which we consider to be correct, we should all be in agreement that this book is of the greatest importance to all believers since, being the one fully prophetic work in the New Testament Canon, it draws together and interprets the prophecies of the rest of Scripture. It is always of especial importance to study Scripture in its original tongues and this is particularly true of a book whose closest details may demand the most careful scrutiny. It is therefore a matter of especial joy that this book has attracted in recent years the labours of a number of scholars who have given attention to its textual criticism. As we shall see in the course of this review, work still remains to be done; but much has now been accomplished for the establishment of the Greek text of this book.

The two scholars whose commentaries still dominate critical study of the book, Wilhelm Bousset and R. H. Charles, both gave their attention to the text as well as to many other aspects which aid our understanding and interpretation. But pride of place belongs to two more recent students who have devoted themselves solely to the problems of text. First to be named is Herman C.

Hoskier, who made many valuable contributions to the textual criticism of the New Testament as a whole and in regard to the Revelation gave thirty years to the task of collating all the available manuscripts of the book. The result of this task are to be found in the two massive volumes of his *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*.¹ Hoskier as a theoretician of textual criticism was exceedingly eccentric nor was he gifted with a very felicitous style of English; but as a collator he was, as Kirsopp Lake testified,² preternaturally accurate, so that all his works are valuable as repositories of raw material, however they may vary in other respects. This is particularly true of this work, where the data are given in a systematic arrangement. It would be incredible, of course, if there were no slips at all in a work of this size and kind, and here and there correction is required. There is also material come to light since the publication of Hoskier's work which supplements his discoveries. But for the Greek text of the Apocalypse his work stands as a *ktema eis aei*. In regard to the versions he relied largely on translation and gives all his data in English or Latin: and this may well prove to need some revision, for instance in the case of the Ethiopic, which is reported from Walton's *Polyglot*, where the Latin translation given is not accurate in all details. With these reservations then, we may say that the textual data for the Revelation are to be found accurately gathered together in the work of Hoskier.

We have mentioned the deficiencies of Hoskier's presentation of the versions. It may be well at this point then to give some account of scholarly work on this material by which we may make good these faults. The Latin sources have been definitely studied by the veteran German textual critic H. J. Vogels in his *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der lateinischen Apokalypse-übersetzung*.³ This painstaking investigation involves much deduction from the numerous Latin commentaries upon the Revelation, since we have only *Codex Gigas*⁴ amongst actual MSS. to represent pre-Vulgate translations. The earliest commentary is by Victorinus of Pettau which has been well edited both in its original form and

¹ London, 1929.

² *The Text of the New Testament* (6th edition, 11th impression, 1949), p. 76.

³ Düsseldorf, 1920.

⁴ *Codex Bibliorum Gigas Holmiensis*, a thirteenth-century MS. in the Royal Library at Stockholm. Edited by J. Belsheim, Christiania, 1879; recollated by H. Karlson for Wordsworth and White's edition of the Vulgate.

in Jerome's adaptation.⁵ The work of the Donatist Tyconius exists in fragmentary manuscript form only⁶: but it was widely influential and lies behind the commentaries of Apringius,⁷ Caesarius of Arles⁸ (transmitted under the name of Augustine), and Beatus.⁹ We possess up-to-date editions of these works. Other works not directly dependent on Tyconius are those of Primasius,¹⁰ Bede,¹¹ and Ambrosius Autpertus,¹² which all await a modern editor. The Vulgate of Jerome is to be found in the final fascicule¹³ of the edition of Wordsworth and White, which is also the most convenient locus for the study of the older Latin data of Gigas and the commentaries. This whole field, together with all the citations in Latin, is covered by Vogels, who finds that the Revelation was translated into Latin at least three times directly from the Greek. Two Syriac translations are known. One is known in a single manuscript only, the property of the Earl of Crawford, edited by the Irish scholar John Gwynn¹⁴: it is evidently the earlier of the two and is ascribed by its editor to the so-called Philoxenian version; whether this is correct is difficult to decide since the question does not stand by itself but is entangled in the inextricable arguments, still unresolved, about the nature of this version and its relationship to the Harklean version. The other was known earlier and is extant in five manuscripts: it was first edited in 1627¹⁵ and later from another MS. in the Paris Polyglot. In its slavishly literal style it is akin to the Harklean version: some have doubted however that it truly belongs to the work of Thomas, although

⁵ *CSEL*, vol. 49. Vienna, 1916 (J. Haussleiter). [Cf. F. F. Bruce, "The Earliest Latin Commentary on the Apocalypse," *THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY*, x (1938), pp. 352 ff.]

⁶ Primarily in a fragment at Turin: edited by A. Amelli (*Spicilegium Casinense*, iii. 1, pp. 261-331), 1897. For its influence see Vogels, *op. cit.*, or Wordsworth and White, *Novum Test. Latine* III, p. 420. Francesco lo Bue gives corrections of a number of readings in the two latter in *Vigiliae Christianae* IX, pp. 20-24.

⁷ Ed. M. Ferotin, Paris, 1900.

⁸ Ed. G. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii Opera Omnia*, Vol. II, pp. 210-277. Maredsous, 1942.

⁹ Ed. H. A. Sanders, Rome, 1930.

¹⁰ J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, lxxviii, 793-936. ¹¹ *Id.*, xciii, 129-206.

¹² Ed. Eucharius Cervicornus (Hirschorn), Cologne, 1536. Reprints in 1618 and 1677 (see Migne, lxxxix, 1265).

¹³ *Novum Testamentum D.N.I.C. Latine*. Pars Tertia, Fasciculus Tertius. *Apocalypsis*. Recensuit H. F. D. Sparks.

¹⁴ *The Apocalypse of Saint John in a Syriac version hitherto unknown*. Dublin, 1897.

¹⁵ *Apocalypsis Sancti Johannis ex manuscripto exemplari . . . opera et studio L. de Dieu*. Lugduni Batavorum, 1627.

one of its manuscripts contains a colophon which asserts this. The textual affinities of these versions have not been recently studied. The field of the Armenian versions has been exhaustively covered by F. C. Conybeare¹⁶ who discerned five revisions of an original translation made in the fourth or fifth century. The original stratum bears a very close affinity to the Latin version known to Ticonius and Primasius with whom it shares a considerable number of readings. The Coptic evidence is to be found in the editions of the Sahidic and the Bohairic made by G. Horner¹⁷: their affinities were outlined by R. H. Charles in his commentary on the Revelation. The Georgian version does not appear to have been studied in its most ancient form;¹⁸ and that which has been printed was probably translated from Russian.¹⁹ A number of Arabic versions exist, some translated from the Greek, some from the various Coptic dialects: an account of them has been given by the historian of Christian Arabic literature, G. Graf.²⁰ The much neglected Ethiopic, though twice printed, has not been critically established or studied.

The Greek material collected by Hoskier has now been studied by Professor Josef Schmid of Munich, who has devoted many years to the analysis of the manuscript families and the allegiance of the Fathers, while in his latest work he has definitively assessed the worth of the different families and has discussed with acumen the many cruces of the text of the book. His earlier work²¹ was concerned with families attesting a later text: in his *Studies in the History of the Greek Text of the Apocalypse*²² he deals also with the older streams of tradition found in the oldest

¹⁶ *The Armenian Text of the Book of Revelation*. London, 1907.

¹⁷ *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect*, Oxford, 1911-24; and *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect*, Oxford, 1898-1905.

¹⁸ Preserved in a Tiflis manuscript written in A.D. 978, cited by M. Tarchnisvili, *Geschichte der kirchlichen georgischen Literatur*, Vatican City, 1955, p. 131, footnote 3.

¹⁹ See B. M. Metzger, "The Evidence of the Versions for the Text of the New Testament," in *New Testament Manuscript Studies*, edited by M. M. Parvis and A. P. Wikgren, Chicago, 1950, p. 44 and p. 191, note 176.

²⁰ "Arabische Übersetzungen der Apokalypse," *Biblica* x (1929), pp. 170-194.

²¹ (a) *Der Apokalypsetext des Arethas von Kaisareia u. einiger anderer jüngerer Gruppen*, Athens, 1936. (b) "Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypsetext: Der K-Text," *Biblica*, xvii, 1936.

²² *Studien zur Geschichte der griechischen Apokalypsetextes*, Munich, 1955.

uncials and papyri. The first volume of the work, however, is concerned with the establishment of a critical text of an ancient Greek commentary, that of Andreas of Cappadocian Caesarea, composed in the late sixth or early seventh century. The only earlier extant commentary is that of Oecumenius, which was edited by Hoskier.²³ A commentary reputedly written by Hippolytus has not survived;²⁴ the commentary of Arethas, based on that of Andreas, has not been critically edited.²⁵

The second volume contains the textual discussion with which we are here chiefly concerned. He outlines six major tasks with which he is concerned, viz. (i) The accurate definition of the two texts termed by him (A_v (i.e., the text used for the commentary of Andreas) and K (i.e., the common or κοινή text), which are the two dominant medieval forms. Other scholars had taken uncials P and Q, respectively as representative of these texts but the researches of Schmid and the availability of other material had shown this assumption to be quite incorrect. In fact, it is a number of minuscules which demand attention here. (ii) The definition of the relationship of the K text to the A_v text. (iii) The demonstration of the twofold nature of the earlier tradition which has been made possible by the discovery of the Chester Beatty papyrus of Revelation, known in the apparatus of the Greek New Testament as p47. This has made a closer analysis of the text of the codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus and Ephraimi Rescriptus which have hitherto been treated as a single indivisible group. (iv) An investigation of places where the group AC Oik (i.e., the codices Alexandrinus and Ephraimi, and the text used for the commentary of Oecumenius) stand alone against the rest of the tradition and of the possibility of considering their text to be a truly "neutral" text. (v) The relation of the A_v and K texts to this earlier tradition. (vi) The testing of the manuscript tradition by the criteria of the language and usage of the Revelation. He then proceeds to a review of the extant material: four papyri are now known and ten uncials, a number of them, however, fragmentary. For the minuscules he notes that Hoskier's collations have superseded all previous.

Tasks i and ii occupy forty pages. Schmid tells us that most minuscules either belong to these two textual forms or are the

²³ *The complete commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Ann Arbor, 1928.

²⁴ On this see H. Achelis, *Hippolytstudien* (TU. NF. Band 1), Leipzig, 1897.

²⁵ J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, cvi, 487-786.

result of mixture of them. When the latter are relegated we find the whole Greek tradition to be divided into four ancient text-types. Of these the *Av* and the *K* texts are recensions, the distinctive readings of which are mainly corrections of more primitive readings. The *Av* text is clearly the work of one man although the principles on which he was working are not very clear. The *K* text derives a number of its corrections from the influence of parallel passages. It is clear that neither is a recension of the other yet they share seventy-two readings, many of them erroneous corrections but eight survivals of the original text preserved in these two medieval text-types only. Although these are in the main readings which concern linguistic usage, this in no way detracts from the significance of the fact, and it might be said that because of the absence of any opportunity of bias on the part of any student of the question, the presence of such readings is of particularly high importance. Their presence indicates, as Schmid concludes, that these two texts are related, not in their present form, i.e., not because they have influenced one another since the time of their recension, but as being recensions of ancient texts of equal antiquity to those preserved in *C* p47, etc.: so that, although in their present form the *Av* and *K* texts are the result of recensional activity, they contain at their base material which takes us back as far as these other "purer" streams do. These two medieval texts then reveal to the scholar two more ancient sources of knowledge of the text of the Revelation.

The *AC* text is next examined and it is shown that most of its sixty-nine singular readings in fact preserve the original text. It should not be thought, however, that all the singular readings of these witnesses are original: there are in fact eleven cases where it is clear that their readings are errors. Yet, even so, only one of these is the result of deliberate correction; the rest are scribal error, so that the taint of recensional activity is absent from the text of these witnesses and their repute may still stand high.²⁶

²⁶ Amongst the errors of *AC*. Oik, Schmid lists 15: 6 λιθον *l.* λινον (clothed in pure clear stone), thus supporting the opinion of Bousset and others that this must be an old scribal error since it cannot be correct. The arguments of Westcott and Hort, Charles and Lagrange still carry weight in my view, however, that this more difficult reading should be accepted as original. Nor can I see the force of the arguments which urge that Ezek. 28: 13 is of no significance here. At least that passage shows that to be clothed (in whatever sense) with stone is a concept by no means strange to a mind steeped in the Scriptures. This inclines me to find here some hidden sense such as Lagrange favours rather than the ingenious mistranslation suggested by Charles.

Schmid goes so far as to say that this text-type deserves the epithet of "Neutral." The disagreement of A and C in a number of places reveals that C is the more carefully written of the two but that A preserves the higher number of original readings,²⁷ and is in no instance contaminated by other texts, whereas C sometimes is.

The other ancient text which is preserved in a pure form is that of p47. This has been isolated as distinct from that of AC Oik only since the discovery of p47: it attests a number of original readings in places where these have been lost by AC Oik and also, in the area extant in the papyrus, shows thirty-six singular readings, most of which are corrections of the language although they do not show any signs of a systematic attempt to revise the Greek of the book. Some minuscules (f1066, 2344, f1678, 1611, 1854) and the Coptic versions are probably witnesses to this text: but this is difficult to establish since the extant text of p47 shows that both it and Aleph have each a proportion of singular readings, so that in the area where p47 is not extant we have no clear criterion whereby to judge whether a reading of Aleph is the reading of this text-type or an idiosyncrasy of that manuscript.²⁸

The distinction between the AC Oik text and the p47 Aleph text is further seen in that they agree with the K and Av texts in different groups of readings. Aleph shares forty-three readings with the K text, eleven of which are clearly original, while there is

²⁷ A reading of A not accepted by Schmid, in spite of this high appraisal of its worth, is 2: 20 add. σου post γυναικα (i.e., 'thy wife' or 'thy woman Jezebel') c. Q 69 61 1006 1841 2040 94 2065 2023 al. permult (i.e., the K text) arm syr Cypr Prim. He describes this as "a quite patently false correction." In this opinion he has the support of Bousset and Charles, but parts company with Zahn and Johannes Weiss. On many grounds, however, it may be argued that this reading is original. Take first its attestation: A is acclaimed by Schmid himself, and this will be a place where the K text goes back to its ancient basic text. The triple or quadruple versional support is also of great significance, and no doubt Schmid's neglect of the versions is in evidence here. Next, we should observe that the omission of this pronoun is amply explicable by the difficulties of interpretation to which it leads, i.e., not so much that it obliges us to take 'angel' as the equivalent of 'bishop' but that the 'bishop' is here still most literally 'husband of one wife'! This surely outweighs any suggestion that the understanding of 'angel' as meaning 'bishop' gave rise to the addition: who can think of such an addition being made in the third century? As *lectio difficilior* yet with such attestation it demands more sympathetic treatment here. Perhaps its acceptance is—for reasons quite other than those of *Textkritik*—easier for a Baptist than for a Roman Catholic.

²⁸ P47 contains only Rev. 9: 12-17: 2.

a close affinity between A and Av shown mainly by their community of error or correction. It is thus evident that no one manuscript or text contains the original wording preserved in all purity; in varying degrees all contribute to our knowledge of it. In the concluding paragraphs of this section of the book Schmid demonstrated this by a consideration of three passages of particular difficulty where both the superiority of A and the contribution of the other strains towards the establishment of the text is to be seen. These are (a) 13: 10 where the text of 2344 vg. (3 mss.) with doubled εἰς ἀχμαλωσίαν in the earlier part of the verse is evidently correct; but in the latter part the un-Greek text of A in which δεῖ is absent may represent a corruption of the original: Charles suggested that the text as it stands was in fact a literal transference into Greek of a Hebrew idiom, but Schmid is not convinced by this. (b) At 18: 3 the reading πέπτωκεν which is commonly accepted into the text is in fact very weakly attested. The choice lies between πέπτωκεν and πεπότικεν. By examination of the analogous variation in Rev. 14: 8, where πέπτωκεν (Aleph^a p47, 1854) is an error arising from the citation of Jer. 51: 7, 8, and πέπτωκεν occurs only in the Latin tradition, it is clear that the author is accustomed to use πεπότικεν and this must be the original text here. But this reading is found only in f2014, 2026-2057, 2065-2432 94 syr 1: this seems to Schmid to be only a conjecture and not a case of preservation of the original text.²⁹ (c) At 18: 2, the parallel of Isaiah 13: 21 and 34: 11, 14 (which are echoed, not quoted, thus eliminating the possibility of assimilation) shows that a triple phraseology with πνεύματος, ὀρνέου, θηρίου is original: but such a text is to be found only in the text of Oecumenius' commentary, although Richard Bentley in the eighteenth century had already observed that this must be the original text.³⁰ The examination of these passages makes it clear that the manuscript tradition leaves a number of places where we are obliged to resort to reasoned conjecture for the final stages of our establishment of the text. One guide in this process is our knowledge of the peculiar and distinct linguistic usage of the Revelation: in his third section Schmid discusses the text from this point of view. Before he turns to this, he gives a brief examination of the relation of certain fathers and the fragmentary uncials and papyri to the main lines of tradition

²⁹ G. D. Kilpatrick challenges this conclusion in his important review article in *Vigiliae Christianae*, xiii, 1-13, esp. pp. 9, 10.

³⁰ Bentleii *Critica Sacra*, ed. A. A. Ellis (Cambridge, 1862), p. 91.

which he has just traced. Amongst the latter, p18, p24, p43 and 0163 are allied to A; 0207 shares some readings with A and others with K Av; 0169 is closely allied to Aleph p47 Origen. Of the fathers, Origen's text is precisely the p47 Aleph text: Hippolytus attests an ancient text having a number of close agreements with p47 Aleph but also a certain affinity with C: Irenaeus presents us with a text fairly closely akin to A.

Schmid's review of the relevance of the linguistic usage of the Revelation to the problems of its textual criticism is divided into eleven sections. These are entitled respectively Morphology (i.e., declension, word-formation and the like), Use of the article, Use of the cases, Pronouns, the Verb, Prepositions, Conjunctions and Particles, Stereotyped turns of phrase, Use of Singular and Plural (including *constructio ad sensum*), Hebraisms, and finally some other irregularities of the book's style. These discussions, valuable as they are, evidently do not lend themselves to a summary account such as this present. Schmid draws two conclusions from this part of his study. Firstly, that although the style of the Apocalyptist is so individual and so stereotyped within its own peculiarities we must not interpret the textual data on which the stylistic data bear in any rigid fashion, but rather we are impelled by the textual data to admit that the author was not at the mercy of his own style but that he indulged at a number of points in exceptions to his own "rules." Secondly, the study of the language emphasizes the overwhelming worth of the AC Oik text, although not every reading of that text meets with a critical approval.

To two further matters, as he intimates in an early footnote, Schmid does not give attention here. One of these is the question whether a "Western" text is to be found in the Revelation as elsewhere in the New Testament. As he himself suggests, it is unlikely that there is, since such witnesses as Hippolytus and Irenaeus, who provide much evidence of the so-called Western text elsewhere, here attest texts not far from the p47 text and the AC Oik text respectively. This is an indication of the fact that the fortune of the Revelation in the canonical estimation of the Church has been far different from that of other parts of the Scriptures. Schmid himself gives a list of cases where the Revelation is found preserved in non-biblical MSS. accompanied by all variety of non-biblical material. The second matter here neglected (of set intent) is the relation of the versions to the Greek tradition: as G. D. Kilpatrick has indicated in his valuable critical estimation of Schmid's work,³¹ this restriction of Schmid's attention to the Greek occasionally weakens his hand. But, as Kilpatrick further sug-

gests, although we may occasionally disagree with Schmid on this or that matter, his work leaves little indeed to be done in respect of the basic text of the Revelation. Scholarship may now devote its attention to the question of the versions and their place in the overall tradition. Hermann von Soden was of the opinion that the versions present us with a pre-recensional text.⁸¹ This judgment demands further examination. As we have indicated, the materials for some part at least of this investigation are already amassed in critical form. It is to be hoped that the future will produce scholars who will be able to give their time to the examination of the questions which the versions of the Revelation raise in the field of text. To their work, this study by Schmid will be fundamental. We offer him both praise and thanks for this epoch-making investigation.

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⁸¹ *Loc. cit.* in note 29 above. See p. 8, final paragraph; p. 9, final paragraph; p. 12, paragraph 3.

⁸² *Die Schriften des N. Testaments usw.*, 1911-13. Teil I, Abteilung III, para. 548, p. 2094. The statement applies to the Latin and Syriac only, while the Harklean and the Armenian are dismissed as worthless. The facts adduced by Kilpatrick on p. 8 of his article make this treatment of the Armenian at least a little more than suspect.