The AGNT Project Report—Q4 2010

As a licensee or friend of AGNT or ANLEX, we would like to update you once a quarter about our continuing work to enhance and perfect these databases and about our plans for the future.

The Project. *The AGNT Project Report—Q3 2008* introduced the team, outlined ongoing tasks, and discussed potential tasks.

Announcement. The AGNT project is happy and proud to announce the release of BYZAGNT—the AGNT analysis based on the Byzantine Textform. The database has just been provided to BibleWorks as a beta version for testing and implementing in their Bible software. We will continue to proofread (once again!) our contribution of the morpho-grammatical tagging (parsings) and lemma assignments (fully compatible with our ANLEX). If all goes as expected, we hope to make the package available to all our Bible software vendors this spring.

The BYZAGNT itself is the product of intense effort over the last five years. We are grateful to those who have contributed to its birth and also to our ongoing efforts to revise both AGNT and ANLEX. As also in development for AGNT, we expect that the BYZAGNT will be, in the not-too-distant future, fully supplied with our English Reference Glosses (ERGs), as the basis of a new type of interlinear New Testament.

But why the Byzantine Textform? For an answer to that we commend to you the following article by scholar Maurice Robinson. Happy reading and Happy New Year.

Timothy Friberg

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The Byzantine Textform in Relation to the History of the New Testament Text

Maurice A. Robinson, PhD

Without question, the most dominant Greek text of the New Testament over the centuries has been the Byzantine Textform. As Westcott and Hort correctly noted 130 years ago, this form of the Greek text prevailed among the manuscripts and the greater bulk of the lectionaries from at least the fourth century AD until the invention of printing, and has equally been dominant among Greek patristic writers during the same period. Whether this particular text might more precisely reflect the autograph originals of each New Testament book is a matter of ongoing healthy debate; however, its significance within the life of the Eastern Greek-speaking church cannot be minimized. Even among the early printed Greek testaments commonly termed "received text" or "Textus Receptus" editions, the Byzantine Textform maintains a consistency with the bulk of those texts, exceptions arising from either a few weakly supported Greek minority readings or intrusions stemming from back-translated Latin Vulgate readings.

On the other hand, the Byzantine Textform differs more significantly from the current "critical text" editions, whether those of early text-critical pioneers such as Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, Westcott and Hort, or those reflected in modern critical editions such as the current Nestle/UBS or the newly published Holmes/SBL versions. The difference between the critical editions and the Byzantine Textform should be kept in perspective, however: for approximately 94% of the entire Greek New Testament both the Byzantine Textform and the critical editions are in precise agreement; only in the remaining 6% of the text do differences occur, and most of these are minor, involving primarily matters of orthography or word order, or essentially equivalent synonym substitutions. Yet the more substantial differences that remain (affecting perhaps some 3% of the New Testament text) indeed are translatable, and often affect basic meaning, translation, and exegetical interpretation; these include cases of words, phrases, or passages that are either included or excluded among the various textual traditions, as well as word or phrase substitutions that otherwise impact the translation, exegesis, or interpretation of the text.

In general, the primary difference between the Byzantine Textform and the various critical editions is texttype based: while the Byzantine exists as a texttype in its own right, the critical editions are almost exclusively based primarily on an Alexandrian type of textbase, usually with sporadic deviations that involve readings of differing texttypes (including the Western, Caesarean, and even Byzantine) or at times of particular manuscripts. Both the favoring of a predominantly Alexandrian type of text and non-Alexandrian deviations tend to derive from the combined subjective analysis of internal criteria coupled with a preference for a particular type of external evidence; those who favor the Byzantine Textform, on the other hand, are essentially founded upon unquestioned external evidence, with internal considerations coming into play only when the external data is itself seriously divided. Both the critical text and the Byzantine Textform therefore have grounds upon which to stand according to their own principles; which form of the text should be considered preferable of course remains a matter of debate.

Although scholarly readers of the Greek New Testament for the past 175 years have gravitated to the various Alexandrian-based critical editions, this in part was a matter of default, since the only prior alternative was the various early printed Textus Receptus editions, each with its own questionable minority and various back-translated Vulgate readings that were not an accurate reflection of the more dominant Byzantine Textform found among the Greek New Testament manuscript base. In fact, until the last quarter of the 20th century there did not exist in print a thoroughly Byzantine edition of the Greek New Testament, despite calls for such decades earlier from textual critics who themselves did not even favor the Byzantine Textform as opposed to the critical text editions. Even today, the only editions that reflect the Byzantine Textform are those of Zane Hodges- Arthur Farstad (HF) and Maurice Robinson-William Pierpont (RP) — similar texts with quite different histories and methodologies.

The HF methodology was primarily numerically based, counting not merely Byzantine manuscripts, but also manuscripts reflecting the Western and Caesarean texttypes. In the Revelation and the woman taken in adultery narrative, the H-F text also attempted to apply a stemmatic approach toward establishing the text. In contrast, the RP text was established strictly from manuscripts that represented the Byzantine Textform, whether in part or as a whole. The two editions result in a similar but not identical text, primarily due to the fact that a numerical majority (as appealed to by H-F) will almost always reflect the Byzantine Textform; however, there are clear and distinct differences between these two editions throughout the New Testament, most particularly in the Revelation and adulteress narratives. The more amazing result is the near-total identity of the respective texts given the diverse methodologies and theories applied.

Robinson and Pierpont began to work jointly on the Byzantine Textform some 35 years ago (1976), carrying on their research by postal correspondence in the days before computers and e-mail. Their work continued until Pierpont's death in 2003, shortly after he had given his final approval to the proofs of what would become the RP 2005 edition. Overall, Pierpont already had developed most of the underlying theory and methodology in the period 1965-1975, before his association with Robinson began; the bulk of the work that followed their association involved a more precise fine-tuning and honing of the underlying transmissionally based theory, and a careful re-examination and re-evaluation of all Byzantine readings throughout the NT. Interestingly, Robinson had independently (1976-77) established a strictly numerically based text of Revelation as a foundation for his dissertation research involving scribal habits within that book; that preliminary text was later extensively revised in conjunction with an overall Byzantine-priority theory once his collaboration with Pierpont had begun.

The first published approximation to the Byzantine Textform were the textual notes of RP, included in 1979 as an appendix to the New Testament volume of *The Interlinear Bible* (4 vols., Lafayette, IN: A. P. & A., 1976-1979). This was followed in 1981 and 1985 by the first and second editions of HF (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), and by the electronic edition of RP in 1987 in the Online Bible software product (Winterbourne, Ont: Timnathserah). In 1991 the first printed edition of the RP Byzantine Textform appeared as a full running text (Atlanta: Original Word); this was followed in 2005 by a more formal edition, with footnoted variants reflecting the Nestle/UBS text (Southborough, MA: Chilton Book Publishing), and in 2010 by an extensive Reader's Edition, published by VTR (Verlag für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft) of Nürnberg, that included complete parsing data for all verb forms as well as lexical definitions and glosses for all Greek New Testament words, either on the page where a word appears (if occurring 50 times or less in the New Testament) or in an appendix (if occurring more than 50 times in the New Testament).

For various reasons, the RP Byzantine Textform edition has become an edition of choice as a standard of comparison among critical scholars and certain newly published Alexandrian-based editions of the Greek New Testament, even while such scholars do not accept that Textform as original. For example, Daniel Wallace has suggested the use of the RP edition as a collating base; Amy Anderson cites the RP continually in her published dissertation on the textual alignments of Family 1; the reprint of the Westcott-Hort text by Hendrickson publishers lists in footnotes the places where the RP text varies; so also the newly released Holmes/SBL cites (among other editions) the RP variations from his reconstructed critical edition. For this reason alone, if not for other more compelling reasons, one should become familiar with the readings found in the Byzantine Textform edition, and to this end the presentation of an edition of AGNT based on the Byzantine Textform represents a welcome accession to our store of knowledge regarding the Greek New Testament.

Although William Pierpont died in 2003, work on the RP Byzantine Textform edition has continued. John Jeffrey Dodson assisted with the definitional material and overall layout of the 2010 Reader's Edition, plus there has been great assistance in regard to verification of parsing data from Timothy Friberg, Scott Musser, and Ulrik Sandborg-Petersen. The help obtained from these sources will make future projects easier to accomplish and more accurate. Eventually there is projected for the RP Byzantine Textform an interlinear version, a textual commentary on various readings, as well as a modern English translation; these will come as time, assistance, finances, and opportunity permits. All this will help to assist teachers and translators throughout the world, many of whom have come to accept the Byzantine Textform as a superior textual base for their varied purposes, as well as others who, while maintaining a critical text approach, are beginning to recognize the value and importance of those Byzantine

readings that tended to dominate textual transmission through at least the greater part of the manuscript copying era.

The most up-to-date electronic files of the RP Byzantine Textform edition can be obtained freely at <http://koti.24.fi/jusalak/GreekNT/NTTexts.htm>. The same material is also available in varying degrees of update in various Bible software products such as the Online Bible, BibleWorks, Logos, and Olive Tree.

As always, we remain open to developing AGNT and ANLEX in ways that are most useful to the needs of students and readers of God's Word.

Thank you for your continued support of *The AGNT Project*, for faithfully marketing the AGNT and ANLEX databases, and for making these state-of-the-art tools for studying the Greek New Testament available to students, scholars, pastors, translators, and laypeople worldwide.

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