

## RECENSION OF THE SBL GREEK NEW TESTAMENT

A NEW hand edition of the Greek New Testament is welcome. The text of the Nestle and United Bible Society editions has been a cause for disquiet in several quarters for many years. The USA-based Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) decided that a freely available online version of a new critical edition of the Greek New Testament was a desideratum and in keeping with its ›mission‹ to promote biblical scholarship. Michael W. Holmes was appointed its editor and he has beavered away apparently clandestinely to produce this edition, which was launched during the annual meeting of SBL in November 2010. It is accessed on <<http://sblgnt.com>>. A printed version has been produced.

Holmes, for pragmatic reasons, worked with existing critical texts that are already accessible online and chose four that were not subject to copyright constraints. He started out with the classic Westcott and Hort edition from 1881 (hereafter WH); then he added Tregelles's often overlooked edition from 1857-79, the Greek text underlying the evangelical New International Version (the first, not second, edition, of 2003, as edited by Goodrich and Lukaszewski), and Robinson and Pierpont's *The New Testament in the Original Greek Byzantine Textform* (RP). Holmes doubt-

less found it easier to compare and collate these four because all are available electronically. He then analysed this amalgam especially in all the places where these editions disagree with each other and he then printed as this SBL Greek New Testament (SBLGNT) the text he preferred, having studied the manuscript attestations for all the readings. His apparatus gives us the support for that reading, with alternative readings among the base texts. (His method is not mechanical, as was the case with the early Nestle editions, where a majority reading from the editions of WH, Tischendorf, and Weymouth [later, B. Weiß] was printed.)

The surprising choice of RP rather than the more scholarly edition of the majority text by Hodges and Farstad or even the Byzantine text-type in Antoniades's (*Orthodoxy's*) *Greek New Testament* seems to have been determined on pragmatic grounds: RP is online. RP has a bizarre preface replete with dubious and touching pieties asserting what God has or has not decreed, with bold statements that brook no contradiction about what God's people must do, about the integrity of the ›inspired‹, ›sacred‹ originals and divine preservation of his pure revelation! By comparison with this, scholarly editions

are obviously at a gross disadvantage, not being privy to these divine intentions. (No wonder RP makes a claim to print the New Testament in the *Original* Greek, matching WH's over-confident title.)

Holmes claims to have read through the whole of the New Testament text looking at places where his four base texts agreed but where variation exists in the manuscripts, Like his namesake Sherlock, he has been assiduous in his investigations. In some 56 places he decided to go against all four of his base texts and here he presents a different text (labelled 'Holmes' in his apparatus). Not all are readings read by Holmes alone: 26 (six in Hebrews) have the support of WH's margin. (Not surprisingly, many of WH's marginal readings are where their favourite manuscripts, a and B, divide: six in SBLGNT follow a reading in a, eleven follow a reading of B; in Revelation three follow a reading by A. Most offer a shorter text than the alternative reading[s] now consigned to the apparatus in SBLGNT.) To clarify and unravel the figures given by Holmes on p. xi, note 9 we find that three of his 56 are where 'Holmes' has support from WH<sup>marg</sup> plus NA. Of those *one* is a short reading at Matt. 6:15 with a D; another, usually deemed to be the source of the alternative readings, is at 2 Thess. 3:6 with a\*A; the third is at 2 Thess. 2:13, where the chosen reading by B F G agrees with Pauline usage. (WH<sup>marg</sup> is usually found only where Holmes accepts its text against his four base texts. However WH<sup>marg</sup> appears also at Matt. 21:44; 22:32; 23:26 [with NA]; Mark 7:9 [with NA]. Not all marginal references in WH are included, e.g. τοῦδαίων at John 3:25 is not here.)

Another combination is where Holmes sides with Treg<sup>marg</sup> at 1 Cor. 9:7 with B C<sup>2</sup> D F G. Yet another combination is where Holmes sides with WH<sup>marg</sup> and also with Treg<sup>marg</sup>; this is at Eph. 6:16 with p<sup>46</sup> B D\* F G.

More interesting are the seven places where Holmes is against his four base texts but where his text agrees with NA. These are Matt. 27:16, 17, a wise decision adding ἠσοῦν (τον) with fam<sup>1</sup> before βαραββαν; Mark 7:28, the shorter reading with P<sup>45</sup> W θ; Luke 3:33, where NA/UBS print what the UBS *Commentary* calls the 'least unsatisfactory reading'!; John 4:1, ἠσοῦς with P<sup>46</sup> a Θ D, which strikes me as the wrong choice - the ambiguous κυριος is the reading more likely to have been altered; at Rev. 18:2 and Rev. 22:12 - both with complex variants - Holmes seems to have been influenced by the reading of A. As an eclectic critic and a member of the Metzger *Schule*, Holmes makes choices that respect the manuscript transmission and he recognizes the role of intrinsic probability when assessing variation.

Even more significant is where SBLGNT prints a reading championed by Holmes alone without the support of another printed edition. There are 18 in total (once again six in Hebrews alone). It is significant that Holmes accepts a reading from the 'Western' text-type at Rom. 11:25; 13:12; 1 Cor. 12:9, 10bis; 14:37. I was pleased to see χωρις printed as the text at Heb. 2:9 with 0243. 1739\*. Other independent readings are at Heb. 3:6; 11:39; 13:21, where in each case the support of P<sup>46</sup> may have swayed his decision, although Zuntz's opinion that early Alexandrian plus Western readings

may be early and original could well have influenced Holmes over 3:6; 13:21; other idiosyncratic readings are to be found at Matt. 15:30; 22:30; Mark 11:31; Col. 1:22. Remarkably, no such readings occur in Acts. I think Holmes is probably right to put a rough breathing at Mark 9:16 αὐτους; Heb. 1:3; 5:3 αὐτου (and cf. also 1 John 5:10 αὐτω with WH). Many manuscripts, of course, are non-committal in such matters and therefore ambiguous but the ›abbreviated reflexive‹ is more likely to be a reading subsequently altered to a ›proper‹ reflexive or to a pronoun with a smooth breathing. (Another place where Holmes prints a quasi-independent reading, with WH<sup>marg</sup>, is αὐτη Σαππα at Heb. 11:11, with smooth breathing and iota subscripts - once again, most manuscripts are not decisive.)

At 1 Cor. 2:4 Holmes's choice of πειθοι σοφιας is a reading described as *sine test.* by the NA apparatus although this verdict is queried. It seems to be a conjecture although the Latin tradition may offer some support and a few Greek manuscripts seem to support πειθοι. (At 1 Cor. 6:5 Holmes prints a conjecture but not as his lead text; it appears in the apparatus as Holmes *em* = emendation.)

The reasons why Holmes opted for these readings and indeed throughout why he favoured one reading from his base texts against alternatives must remain speculative until such time as he may be persuaded to furnish us with a textual commentary that explains the motives behind each choice. Such a *vade mecum* would make SBLGNT even more useful. We can merely identify places where elucidation is required, such as Μαριαμ at Rom. 16:6

with RP but not at Matt. 1:20 (*v.l.*) or Luke 2:19 (*v.l.*). Likewise, it is fascinating to speculate why Holmes supports the word order in Tregelles, NIV, RP in Matt. 14:28a and that of WH, Tregelles, NIV in 28b. Or why he chose *om. ev* at 1 Cor. 12:26 with WH, Tregelles, or *om. και* at 1 John 3:19 or *om. οτι* at Jude 18; or why he opted for *om. υιου θεου* at Mark 1:1 with WH; or *καυθησωμαι* with NIV against NA and his other base texts at 1 Cor. 13:3, etc., etc.

But a total of 18 truly independent readings by the editor is not a great number from the whole of the New Testament. One may have hoped that there were other places where the four base texts agree or even where the base texts disagree and where Holmes wished to print a different reading that, say, conformed to the author's style, or to Hellenistic Greek usage, or seemed on other grounds to be the *Ausgangstext*. We rue that lost opportunity to create a truly revolutionary, radically eclectic text. And this is especially true in Acts, where many distinctively 'Western' readings are overlooked, which may be deemed 'original'.

In all there are 6,928 variation units in the apparatus, all clearly set out - a worthwhile cull. No manuscripts are given here, only the printed editions used as base texts plus a few other editions consulted and occasionally cited (according to p. xv this means the marginal readings in WH and Tregelles supporting a reading adopted by the editor, but, tantalizingly, 'in other circumstances as well'). Obviously, readers must seek the witnesses supporting each reading elsewhere. It will be of interest to check if particular manuscripts have influenced Holmes's choices.

In addition to his four base texts we have one reference to Greeven's *Synopse* (at Mark 9:38); the *Textus Receptus*, taken from Scrivener<sup>4</sup> (1906), is shown alone in places where an extra following verse was once accepted as original: Matt. 23:13 (where RP has the text of v. 14 following v. 12); Luke 17:35; Acts 8:36; 15:33; 24:6.

The distinctive readings of NA are given in the apparatus only where these differ from NIV, thus one may infer the readings of NA throughout the New Testament. NA may be regarded in effect as a fifth witness in the apparatus, as intimated on p. xv. NA appears in the apparatus 234 times, i.e. where this text is not the same as that in NIV. (Holmes has communicated elsewhere that SBLGNT differs from NA overall some 542 times.)

The latest edition of the Catholic Epistles is that found in the recent fascicles of the *Editio Critica Maior* (=ECM). Its distinctive reading at 2 Peter 3:10 is included in the SBLGNT apparatus, the only place where this edition is reported. Otherwise we learn about its text only in the Appendix (pp. 515-16), where differences between ECM and SBLGNT are listed. There we see that, despite ECM having been constructed on the premisses of the scientifically controlled 'Coherence-based Genealogical Method' (CBGM), devised by the Münster Institut, which is now being adopted for the IGNTP/ECM text of John and for other forthcoming books in that collaborative project, Holmes's text *disagrees* with ECM 39 times in the Catholic Letters, 12 of these in 1 Peter alone (although *ἄλλα* read by B alone at 1 Peter 2:25, as a variant concerning *crasis*,

is not recorded in the SBLGNT apparatus [see p. xv]; cf. also 1 John 2:16). Twenty of the 39 instances involve a dotted, that is an uncertain, reading in ECM.

Despite reservations about the choice of RP as a base text, I note that Holmes's text disagrees with RP 5,959 times, 4,876 of these where SBLGNT is with WH, Tregelles, and NIV. (SBLGNT goes with RP alone only 66 times out of the 6,928 variation units, and where Holmes deems that the Byzantine text alone has preserved the 'original' text.) We may calculate that SBLGNT differs from WH some 879 times. Such statistics are helpfully given in the introduction, p. xii, but, whereas we have figures of agreements and disagreements between SBLGNT and respectively WH, Tregelles, NIV, and RP, and also where SBLGNT is with one of these four editions and against the other three and vice versa with three against one of the base texts, there are, regrettably, no statistics giving us the figures where SBLGNT sides with two only of the base texts to complete the tables.

Orthography follows BDAG. I was pleased to read *Ἐμμωρ* at Acts 7:16. Punctuation generally agrees with WH. (Punctuation is shown in the apparatus for the *v.l.* at Matt. 11:9 but not at Mark 1:27 where a changed punctuation, printing a question mark before *οτι*, could preserve Mark's penchant for double questions.) Paragraphing follows an *English* edition (NRSV) except at Phil. 1:18 and in other places where the adoption of WH's punctuation affects the paragraphing. Versification follows NA except at Acts 19:40 (-41).

It is praiseworthy to have an edition of the Greek New Testament not overburdened with bracketed words, as is the case with UBS/NA. SBLGNT has only six places where single brackets are found: Luke 22:19b-20; 24:40, 51, 52; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:20. Luke 22:43-4 appears within the text; the Pericope Adulterae is in the apparatus. However, the longer ending to Mark (Mark 16:9-20) and the intermediate ending to Mark are printed in the text but within double square brackets; the significance of these is not explained in the introductory list of symbols found in the text (only the double brackets found around WH in the apparatus are explained in footnote 19 and on p. xvi). For the purpose of constructing his text and the designing of the apparatus Holmes has accepted that all words single bracketed in the text of his base editions *include* the words bracketed, as explained with reference to the apparatus on p. xvi. (Doubtful cases of *omission*, signalled, say, by the rating letters C and D in the UBS text, may give us an indication of the UBS = NA editors' decisions, but these account for very few instances.) So, obviously, a *v.l.* such as +/- μου at Mark 1:7 does not appear in the apparatus; RP and WH differ here, insofar as WH brackets the pronoun in its text. Holmes reads + μου<sup>2</sup>.

Holmes's tactful and very concise preface covers most of the issues needed to understand and use the edition. Perhaps we could quibble about note 10 on p. xii, where what is obviously meant is that the *oblique* cases of αὐτοῦ may carry a rough breathing to indicate a reflexive. Also, we note that he refers on p. xvii to the 'Elziver [*sic*] brothers [*sic*]'. Apart from the idiosyncratic spelling of the publisher's family name,

Holmes perpetuates a common error: the second edition of this family text in 1633 and the one in which the words *Textus Receptus* first appear is edited by Abraham and his uncle Bonaventure.

The apparatus draws attention to many important places of variation that have divided the editors of four printed editions. Such information can be supplemented with the valuable Appendix III to the NA edition ('Editionum Differentiae') which details comparisons with Tischendorf<sup>8</sup>, WH including its margin, von Soden, Vogels, Merk, Bover, and NA<sup>25</sup>. Also, to supplement Holmes's apparatus, we may make cross-references to Hendrickson's 2007 reprinting of WH which includes in its footnotes the readings of RP and NA.