

Overcoming Hellenophilia: Thoroughgoing Eclecticism and the Curetonian Syriac Manuscript

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Popular methods of New Testament textual criticism, and the scholars behind their use, have traditionally favored Greek texts over their Near Eastern counterparts. This paper utilizes the text critical method of thoroughgoing eclecticism in a textual and philological examination of the Curetonian Syriac manuscript in order to bring balance to this discipline strongly influenced by Hellenophilia. Three variant readings found in this study will ultimately illustrate the usefulness of thoroughgoing eclecticism for Syriac studies, allowing lesser-known manuscripts to be read authoritatively on their own merit.

Documentary methods of textual criticism, which prioritize a certain family of manuscripts or favor the variant that appears most frequently in popular manuscripts, pay little attention to variants found only in one or a few manuscripts. Through documentary approaches in textual criticism, these variants would be discarded due to the lack of supporting external witnesses. It is when the method of thoroughgoing eclecticism is used that these variants can gain authority. Thoroughgoing eclecticism, defined by Elliott (1968), is a method of textual criticism that pays attention to the author's style and usage, the effect of Atticism and other contextual factors on scribes, possible deliberate alterations to the text, and accidental errors in the text. Most importantly, the abundance of external witnesses does not sway the eclectic method toward a particular variant.

A document that is often neglected in popular text critical study is the Curetonian Syriac manuscript. Only when this manuscript is in agreement with a popular manuscript is it given any authority in text critical apparatuses. When applying thoroughgoing eclecticism to a reading of this manuscript, however, new possibilities in the text's interpretation arise.

Hellenophilia, as illustrated here by popular methods of textual criticism, is also evident when comparing the early version work of Bruce Metzger (1977) to that of Arthur Vööbus (1954), as one will find several places where Metzger prefers a Greek reading to Vööbus' non-Greek reading. There are many other reasons for this Hellenophilia, including: the relatively large number of Greek witnesses that have survived and are available today for study, the history and development of modern textual criticism, and western scholarship's traditionally classical education. Taking these issues into account along with reading the text through a thoroughgoing eclectic lens, our manuscript can be given the authority that was once reserved for only popular and, typically, Greek manuscripts.