

Review of Günther Zuntz's "The Text of the Epistles"

This past week, I gave a presentation in my Textual Criticism class on Günther Zuntz's important work, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum*. What follows is the summary and review of the book that was the basis for my presentation. -Charles (CJ) Schmidt

Günther Zuntz. *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum*. London: Oxford University Press, 1953. xi, 295 pp

Zuntz thinks the majority of textual critics are plagued by excessive skepticism when it comes the ability to recover the original readings of the NT. He believes it is possible to determine genuine readings more often than is generally assumed. In order to demonstrate this point, Zuntz selects the *Corpus Paulinum* and begins with the oldest extant MS, the Chester Beatty papyrus (P⁴⁶), of which he focuses primarily upon the texts of 1 Corinthians and Hebrews.

After demonstrating the high quality of P⁴⁶, Zuntz compares the papyrus to B, D, the Byzantine text, and other late MSS, all whilst making text critical judgments regarding the authenticity of readings in order to establish textual relationships. He concludes that there is a close relationship between B and P⁴⁶ due to their shared singular erroneous readings. None of the unique readings of D find support in P⁴⁶, thereby suggesting that no special connection exists between the two MSS. The Byzantine text, however, has many readings supported by P⁴⁶ against all other Greek MSS. Zuntz considers many of these to be genuine. Building on this observation, Zuntz argues that the editorial method of the Byzantine scribes was one of selection of readings from amongst textual witnesses rather than making conjectures. After further comparison between P⁴⁶, the Byzantine, and other 'Western' and 'Alexandrian' texts, Zuntz concludes that the combination of P⁴⁶ B 1739 sah boh Clem Orig all comprise what he calls the 'proto Alexandrian' group, for these MSS appear to preserve the most original collection of readings based upon the analysis of 1 Corinthians and Hebrews.

The "outstanding feature" of this group (highlighted by P⁴⁶) is the presence of what are typically referred to as 'Western' readings (156). These so-called 'Western' readings are present in the 'proto-Alexandrians' but have "disappeared from the later 'Alexandrian manuscripts (and often also from other Eastern witnesses)" but recur in some Western MSS as well as select Byzantine texts (156-57). This comparison, according to Zuntz, leads to the conclusion that all three of the textual traditions are like "streams," each running out of a common second century "reservoir" of variant readings—there is in fact no 'Neutral' text (265). In light of this conclusion, and the demonstrable fact that 'the text' of the second century contained a sea of variant readings, Zuntz suspects that these 'pure' readings found in the 'proto-Alexandrians' were purposefully preserved and defended against competing corruptions.

Zuntz believes, after examining the scribe and correctors of P⁴⁶, that one can detect the effects of an early and conscious effort at keeping the text free from corruption. He considers this deliberate attempt to eliminate second century corruptions as evidence of "the existence and the effects of a Christian critical philology as early as c. A.D. 200" (262). This, according to Zuntz, is an effect of a Greek appreciation for the original wording of the text that must have spurred the preservation of pure readings. For Zuntz, the term 'Alexandrian text' suggests an answer for the location of such efforts. P⁴⁶Clement, Origen, and the Coptic versions strongly favor Alexandria as the likeliest location for a late second century Christian philological tradition.

While Zuntz is to be praised for his carefully crafted argument, his book is not without its faults. Zuntz often appears too confident in his conclusions regarding the authenticity of variant readings. Sometimes he provides thorough arguments in favor of a particular reading and against a competing variant; other times he provides only one-sided arguments or very little explanation for his choice at all. One gets the occasional suspicion that the solutions are not as simple as Zuntz suggests. (There are numerous instances where Zuntz and the text of NA²⁷ depart from one another.) Moreover, it remains unclear as to why Zuntz specifically chose these two epistles from P⁴⁶, especially Hebrews, for his study. While he is most certainly correct that any effort to broaden the scope of the study to include the remaining texts preserved in P⁴⁶ would become unruly, the possibility remains that one of the other epistles could have become incorporated at a later time or from a less 'pure' textual tradition, thus tarnishing the exceptional quality of P⁴⁶. Perhaps more work has been done on the remaining epistles to confirm Zuntz's conclusions. And finally, Zuntz claims P⁴⁶ supports the majority of 'Alexandrian' witnesses for a variant reading in 1 Cor 6.10 (ou), when in fact the papyrus reads "ουδε" (65; cf. NA²⁷, 741).

Nevertheless, Zuntz's book is an exceptional contribution to textual criticism and the study of the *Corpus Paulinum*. He forcefully demonstrates the quality of many of the readings found in P⁴⁶ and B along with the existence of a proto-Alexandrian group. While some may differ with Zuntz on judgments regarding select variant readings, the strength of Zuntz's study is in its detailed and close reading of the textual evidence and subsequent testing of MSS. Although this book is indeed, as Zuntz himself describes it, a "hard cake to digest," his thorough methodology and insight into the earliest attainable text of the Pauline corpus is a recipe that students and scholars alike will do well to follow.