

Let “Us” In: Reconsidering the Weakest Links in the Textual Base of Revelation

The textual base for the Apocalypse of John is the thinnest for any New Testament book. Barely 300 Greek manuscripts are available for consideration and few from the first eight centuries. At four points, the textual evidence of early and significant manuscripts is so thin that the critical text (NA28/UBS5) is based on the reading of a single Greek manuscript. In all four cases, Codex Alexandrinus (A/02) is that witness. Normally in textual criticism, singular readings are not given much weight since they are generally considered to be divergent and independent peculiarities, not the last surviving remnant of the initial text. This paper re-examines the textual evidence for these four singular readings from Alexandrinus to see if alternate readings should be preferred. In one prominent situation (5:9), Alexandrinus omits the pronoun ΗΜΑC in a location in the majuscule easily exposed to transcriptional error. In another situation (12:10), Alexandrinus exhibits a spelling variation unattested in all of Greek literature. Another case (13:10) is a complex and confusing variation unit involving multiple phrases and at least eight different possible readings. Finally, the concluding words of the Apocalypse (22:21) are found in their briefest form in Alexandrinus. Beyond the specifics of these examples, the question must also be considered if too much weight has been placed on this single, fifth-century majuscule since all four of these singular readings in the critical text originate from it alone. Without surveying all the singular readings known in early manuscripts, one example of a singular reading from P47 (16:18) will be reconsidered as the best possible explanation for the origin of the known readings in that variation unit. If established, P47 could join Alexandrinus as the sole remaining witness in at least one point for the Ausgangstext of the Apocalypse