CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE TEXT OF ACTS IN THE LIGHT OF TWO STUDIES

The variants found in the Greek text of Acts that are included in this paper have been selected for three reasons: 1) They all contain readings which have the combined support of the Byzantine majority text and papyri. These have been taken from the lists to be found in Harry A. Sturz, The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism (Nashville, Camden, New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984). 2) They have a bearing on the study of Acts by M-E. Boismard and A. Lamouille, Le Texte Occidental des Actes des Apôtres: Reconstruction et Réhabilitation (Paris: 1984), to be referred to hereafter as B + L. In their work B + L print as Lucan two versions of Acts, the Alexandrian (TA) and the Western (TO). 3) They show differing types of scribal emendation.

In each variant discussed the texts printed by B + L as either TA or TO are shown. The text printed by Nestle-Aland²⁶ (N-A²⁶) is also shown below, and, when they are available, I have noted the views of the United Bible Societies’ Committee as reported by B.M. Metzger in his companion commentary on the UBS text,³ the third revised edition of which is virtually identical with that in N-A²⁶ 7th printing.

The encouragement to those of us practising radical eclecticism in relation to textual variation is clear from both Sturz’s book and from the principles applied by B + L. Neither the Western text nor the Byzantine text should be dismissed as containing by definition a suspect text. These two recent studies clearly show the antiquity of these text-types and also that their distinctive readings deserve our close consideration. That having been said, let us now pay some attention to some of these readings. The representative selection of types of variants is set out under separate headings.

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1. Hom

Some readings in our mss. are likely to have been created accidentally through scribal carelessness. Where *hom* (to use A.C. Clark’s word) can be demonstrated to have operated, a useful and basic rule of thumb is that the longer reading is likely to be original—other things being equal.

The old rule, *brevior lectio potior*, is unlikely to be as helpful to us. When assessing textual variation it is more common to find that an originally longer text was accidentally shortened than that an originally short text was deliberately expanded e.g. out of a desire to add explanatory glosses. The latter did undoubtedly occur, but when a clear palaeographical or optical reason for the former can be demonstrated this can often be a decisive argument in favour of the longer reading. As is well-known, it is within the D form of the Western text and in the Byzantine tradition that the text is, in general, the longer.

Two examples from Sturz’s lists will suffice:

a) List I p. 154:

Acts 17:13 σαλευσοντες : P45 Byz

σαλευσοντες και ταρασσοντες : P74 Ν Β Δ.

*ταρασσω* is a word used elsewhere by our author (cf. Acts 15:24; 17:8) and is likely to be original here. The Byz text happens to be the shorter at this point! The accidental shortening can be explained as due to parablepsis caused by the repeated ending *οντες*.

[N-A26 has the longer text. B + L print the longer text both for the Western Text (TO) and in their Alexandrian text column (TA).]

b) List V p. 203:

Acts 5:32  αγιον o  P45 Ν Α Byz

αγιον ov  D *

αγιον  B

[o = Westcott and Hort (= WH) text : o deleted in WH margin]

If *ον* were in the text originally *hom* would have encouraged its accidental deletion following *αγιον*. If *ον* were changed deliberately then the alteration *ο* could be explained as a grammatical ‘correction’. The reading of D * can be justified as *ad sensum* (but not a correct