

STUDIES IN P.BEATTY III (P47) THE CODEX, ITS SCRIBE, AND ITS TEXT¹

Peter Malik
(petros.malik@gmail.com)

The importance of papyri in NT textual criticism, if properly understood, is difficult to overestimate. Despite their state of preservation, they allowed the critics to move beyond the fourth-century ‘barrier’ of the Constantinian period, in which the earliest ‘Great majuscules’ were produced. The early papyri thus provided a venue for revisiting previous theories concerning transmission history and even some of the ‘canons’ of textual criticism. And perhaps of equal significance is the fact that the early papyri have provided the historians with valuable evidence of early Christian material culture and worship. Although to varying degrees this applies to all the papyri from the pre-Constantinian time, it is particularly true of those from Chester Beatty (P⁴⁵⁻⁴⁷) and Bodmer (P^{66, 72, 75}) collections.

Of the six aforementioned papyri, the one that has received the least attention is P.Beatty III (P⁴⁷; LDAB 2778), the manuscript of Revelation. Even though the scope, content, and state of preservation of this manuscript are nowhere near manuscripts such as P⁶⁶, it seems hard to believe that such an extensive witness to one of the most sparsely-attested NT books would have nothing further to offer on closer scrutiny. Surprised by this void in our knowledge, I decided to subject P⁴⁷ to extensive analysis, which then served as the basis for my doctoral thesis.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of monographs on NT manuscripts, partly due to the growing interest in early Christian material culture. Such extensive studies are a suitable venue for what may be called ‘integrative’ analysis, an approach that takes into account the manuscript’s physical, textual, as well as scribal aspects, so

¹ Peter Malik, ‘Studies in P.Beatty III (P⁴⁷): The Codex, Its Scribe, and Its Text’ (PhD diss., University of Cambridge, 2016). Supervisor: Dr Peter M. Head. The publication of the thesis is forthcoming (NTTSD 52: Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017).

that different pieces of evidence inform one another in the process. This methodological approach is based on the recognition that manuscripts are not only uninvolved tradents of textual material but complex amalgamations of physicality (manuscript), human involvement (scribal behaviour), and transmitted content (text). My dissertation fits squarely with this trend, but with one notable difference: whereas the previous studies dealt with much more substantial codices and so had to be based on samples of data, the more limited extent of P⁴⁷ facilitates a more exhaustive manner of analysis as well as a wider selection of aspects to be considered alongside each other.

Given the approach outlined above, I decided to focus on those aspects of P⁴⁷ which seemed most conducive to the integrative nature of my inquiry. The basic questions that the thesis seeks to answer pertain to the nature of P⁴⁷ as an early Christian manuscript, its production setting and quality, the main features of its writing and scribal practice, the accuracy of transmission of its exemplar, and unexplored features of its text. Since the thesis was manuscript-driven, this analysis was inevitably of an inductive kind, as reflected in the structure of its contents. Thus, the analytical chapters (2–6) focus broadly on the three focal points of my investigation: the manuscript, its scribe, and its text.

Chapter 2 focuses on the constitutive material elements of the manuscript and explores issues such as original content and composition of the codex, layout of the text, basic scribal practices, as the manuscript's script and date. My analysis concluded that P⁴⁷ was probably produced in an informal, but not necessarily non-ecclesial, setting. Its abundance of numerical abbreviations is more likely to be reflective of the general *paradosis* leading to the manuscript rather than its scribe's proclivities; the same holds true for a number of ει-spellings. I date the hand, which is rough in character and sloppy in execution, to 250–325 AD—thus extending the previous suggested date-range to the fourth century. If P⁴⁷ was indeed produced later on in this spectrum, then it only briefly predates Codex Sinaiticus, its closest textual ally, and is roughly contemporary with or briefly postdates the Sahidic version. Although this finding has potential text-historical implications, it must be kept in mind that palaeographical dating does not allow for precise results and the date of the manuscript and that of its text need not be identical.

Chapters 3–5 take the discussions of palaeography and physical features one step further so as to address various aspects of scribal behaviour. The first of these studies concerns scribal corrections. Because I based my analysis on personal inspections and high-resolution images (including microscopic and ultraviolet photographs), I was able to identify a number of new corrections, resulting in a 50% increase compared to the previous studies and editions. Just as importantly, however, my analysis clarified the nature of these corrections. For instance, I argue that all the corrections were produced by the original scribe during the transcription process, so that the papyrus is likely never to have been subjected to further review after that. This finding has obvious consequences for our understanding of those few corrections where both the initial reading and correction are well supported: rather than being derived from another exemplar, they in all likelihood simply restore the reading of the original exemplar.

After corrections, I revisit the manuscript's singular readings — an aspect of P⁴⁷ which has received the most recent (as well as most thorough) treatment. Singulars are typically defined as readings without external support in Greek continuous-text witnesses. For the purposes of studying scribal habits, they are assumed to have been created by the scribe who penned the given manuscript. My analysis departs from the previous study of P⁴⁷ — and indeed from all such studies on other manuscripts — in several important respects. Firstly, I take into account versional evidence, as there is *prima facie* no reason why versional support could not furnish genetic support and thereby problematise the seeming 'objectivity' of this method. The close examination of cited versional agreements in previous studies, collations and editions led me to discard most of them, but in several cases the support of the Sahidic version seemed significant. This, in turn, led to further research into this version's textual affinities, which formed the basis for Chapter 6. Secondly, my analysis goes beyond surface-level formal categories of scribal alterations (addition, omission, substitution, etc.) and attempts, where possible, to ascertain the origin of scribal errors and utilise their evidence to identify the main distinctive features of the scribe's copying behaviour. In doing so, I consider material features of the manuscript, the mechanics of the copying process, as well as psycholinguistic factors involved. My investigation thus demonstrates that the scribe of P⁴⁷ seems to have copied the exemplar in short, meaningful text-units with little

awareness of the larger preceding context. Many of his errors may be explained by visual confusion (especially abbreviations and similar-looking letters), influence of the ensuing context, and distraction at line breaks. In a similar vein, Chapter 5 focuses on the intersection of singular readings as well as corrections with one of the most basic aspects of copying, viz. the scribe's periodic re-inking of the pen. Therein, I argue that scribe-generated variation often correlates with re-inking — mostly due to the concomitant distraction but in a few cases due to the pause thus occasioned.

And finally, chapter 6 is, *stricto sensu*, the only text-analytical chapter of my thesis. Since the textual affinities of P⁴⁷ have been studied before and will undoubtedly be reinvestigated in preparation of the *Editio Critica Maior*, I chose not to concentrate on the textual profile of our manuscript. As noted above, however, the genetic agreements with the Sahidic version discovered in the course of investigation into scribal habits necessitated further scrutiny of this version's relationship with our papyrus. (Ironically, one of the few aspects of the Apocalypse's textual history which received comparatively very little attention is the versional evidence.) This full-fledged analysis of the version's textual affinities confirmed my initial suspicions: where P⁴⁷ is extant, it is the version's closest ally from amongst the 'consistently cited witnesses' cited in NA²⁸.