

Published version: Larry W. Hurtado, "P45 and the Textual History of the Gospel of Mark", in *The Earliest Gospels. The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels - The Contribution of the Chester Beatty Gospel Codex P45* (*Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series* 258), London: T&T Clark, 2004, p. 132-148.

P45 AND THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE GOSPEL OF MARK¹

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The Chester Beatty Codex of the Gospels and Acts (Chester Beatty Papyrus I, more widely known as P45) was a find of sensational importance for the textual history of the New Testament. Like a flare bursting over a night-time battlefield, it cast light upon the previously darkened pre-Constantinian centuries of the textual history of the New Testament, forcing revisions of scholarly views on several major matters. In one giant step, P45 brought scholarship on the text of the Gospels from the mid-fourth century practically to the doorstep of the second century. First made available to the scholarly world in the 1933 edition by Frederic G. Kenyon, for New Testament scholars, P45 is the jewel in the crown of the twelve Greek biblical manuscripts acquired by Chester Beatty about 1930.² My purpose here is to focus specifically on the relevance of P45 for the textual history of the Gospel of Mark. Before I take up this matter, however, some basic information to set the scene and by way of explanation of why the textual history of the Gospel of Mark should be such an important matter.

Introductory Matters

First, though some offer other views of the matter, most New Testament scholars are persuaded that the Gospel of Mark is the earliest of the four canonical gospels, and probably the earliest extant narrative book about Jesus, assigning its composition to about 70 CE. Most further agree that Mark was very quickly and widely circulated and influential, becoming the pattern and major source for the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (which are commonly thought to have been composed within a decade or two after Mark appeared). This makes the Gospel of Mark particularly

¹ Originally prepared as an invited presentation to the conference sponsored by the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin (held 1-2 December 2000) to open the exhibit, "The Word and Its Beginning: The Origin of the Fourfold Gospel" (1 December 2000 - 28 January 2001). Published version: Larry W. Hurtado, "P45 and the Textual History of the Gospel of Mark," in *The Earliest Gospels: The Origins and Transmission of the Earliest Christian Gospels--The Contribution of the Chester Beatty Gospel Codex P45*, ed. Charles Horton (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 132-48.

² Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus I: General Introduction* (London: Emery Walker Ltd, 1933); *Fasciculus II: The Gospels and Acts, Text* (London: Emery Walker, 1933); *Fasciculus II: The Gospels and Acts, Plates* (London: Emery Walker, 1934). Of course, however, others of the Chester Beatty biblical papyri had profound importance for the textual history of other portions of the biblical canon. P46 was perhaps as important for the textual history of the Pauline letters, as, e.g., reflected in the classic study of the subject by Günther Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles: A Disquisition Upon the Corpus Paulinum* (The Schweich Lectures, 1946; London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1953). The re-dating of P46 (the Pauline epistles codex) to the first century proposed by Young Kyu Kim, "Palaeographical Dating of P46 to the Later First Century", *Bib* 69(1988), 248-57, seems not to have succeeded. See now S. R. Pickering, "The Dating of the Chester Beatty-Michigan Codex of the Pauline Epistles (P46)," in *Ancient History in a Modern University, Volume 2: Early Christianity, Late Antiquity and Beyond*, eds. T. W. Hillard, et al., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 216-27.

important as a source for study of early Christianity, the history of early Christian literature, and, of course, Jesus of Nazareth.

Second, through the dedicated efforts of various scholars in the nineteenth century, the textual history of the New Testament writings became an important subject of investigation and debate. The high-water mark of the nineteenth-century work was the 1881 critical edition of the Greek New Testament by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, and the accompanying introductory volume published in 1882, which provided a still very valuable discussion of the text-critical principles by which they worked and their views on the textual history of the New Testament.³ The broad effect of their work was to consolidate the view that the New Testament writings had undergone a history of transmission characterized both by the accidental variations that happen to any text copied by many hands, and also deliberate changes arising from various concerns of those who copied these writings.

Westcott and Hort showed that the task of restoring the likely “original” text of New Testament writings involves reconstructing the history of the textual transmission of these writings. This means that it is important to study the earliest copies of such writings that we can obtain. It also means that we should inquire about the historical relationships of manuscripts to one another, and about the scribal characteristics of each manuscript before making final judgements about which are likely the original readings in the many cases where there are variants.⁴

Prior to the acquisition of P45, the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament Gospels were three codexes dated to the mid-to-late fourth or early fifth century: the famous Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century, now kept in the British Museum), Codex Vaticanus (fourth century, kept in the Vatican Library), and the subsequently-acquired Codex Washingtonianus (also known as the Freer Gospels Codex, late fourth or early fifth century, purchased by Charles Freer in 1906 and now kept in the Freer Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC). It is easy to appreciate, therefore, the excitement generated immediately when news of P45 broke upon the scholarly world in the early 1930s.

Dated sometime in third century (usually, 200-250 CE), P45 was at least one hundred years earlier than any other then previously known Greek manuscript of the Gospels.⁵ Although only a portion of the original codex survives (thirty leaves of an

³ Brooke Foss Westcott, Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge/London: Macmillan & Co., 1881); *idem*, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Introduction and Appendix* (Cambridge/London: Macmillan, 1882).

⁴ “Knowledge of documents should precede final judgement upon readings.” (*ibid.*, 31). In supporting this principle, I dissent from the approach called “thoroughgoing eclecticism”. Cf., e.g., J. K. Elliott, “Thoroughgoing Eclecticism in New Testament Textual Criticism,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, eds. Bart D. Ehrman, Michael W. Holmes (SD 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 321-35; Gordon D. Fee, “Rigorous or Reasoned Eclecticism--Which?” in Eldon J. Epp, Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (SD 45; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 124-40.

⁵ Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus II: Text*, x; Kurt Aland, *Repertorium der griechischen christlichen Papyri, Vol. I: Biblische Papyri* (Patristische Texte und Studien 18; Berlin/New

original 112), and none of the five New Testament writings in it is completely preserved, P45 provided scholars with a sufficient amount of the text of the four Gospels and Acts to make it enormously important for the textual history of these writings as well as for other matters.⁶ For example, along with evidence then emerging from the Oxyrhynchus papyri, P45 demanded radical revision of earlier views about when early Christians had adopted the codex as their preferred form of book production. It is now clear that the codex was already being programmatically used by Christians in the mid-second century (and probably much earlier).⁷

Until the identification of the small Rylands fragment of John (in 1935) and the publication of the Bodmer Gospels Papyri (P66 in 1959 and P75 in 1961), P45 was by far the earliest Greek witness to the text of the Gospels.⁸ It remains one of our most important witnesses to the text of the New Testament generally, and in at least two specific matters it still holds an unrivalled importance. First, although T. C. Skeat has recently proposed that three fragments of Matthew and Luke (P64, P67, and P4) belong to the same manuscript, which he dates to the late second century CE, and, further, that this manuscript originally contained the four canonical Gospels, P45 is still the earliest undeniable example of a four-gospel codex.⁹ Secondly, in any case, P45 remains the earliest extant witness to the text of the Gospel of Mark.¹⁰

York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 269; Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires Juifs et Chrétiens* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976), 136 (ms #371).

⁶ Shortly after the acquisition of P45 by Chester Beatty, additional fragments of the same manuscript (several fragments of Luke and one small scrap each of Mark and John) were discovered as having been acquired by the University of Michigan and were transferred to Mr. Beatty. Further portions of the same manuscript were also found in Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Pap. Vindob. Graec. 31974) by Hans Gerstinger ("Ein Fragment des Chester Beatty-Evangelienkodex in der Papyrussammlung der Nationalbibliothek in Wien," *Aegyptus* 13[1933]: 67-72).

⁷ On the Christian preference for the codex, see, e.g., C. H. Roberts, T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1987); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); L. W. Hurtado, "The Earliest Evidence of an Emerging Christian Material and Visual Culture: The Codex, the *Nomina Sacra* and the Staurogram," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, eds. Stephen G. Wilson, Michel Desjardins (ESCJ 9; Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 271-88.

⁸ P52, a fragment of one codex leaf with a few lines of the Gospel of John, is usually dated ca. 130-50 CE (C. H. Roberts, *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935]). P66, a Greek codex of John, is dated ca. 200 CE (Victor Martin, *Papyrus Bodmer II: Évangile de Jean Chap. 1-14* [Cologny-Geneve: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1956]; *idem*, *Papyrus Bodmer II, Évangile de Jean, Supplément, Chaps. 14-21* [Cologny-Geneve: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1958]; Victor Martin and J. W. B. Barns, eds., *Papyrus Bodmer II, Supplément, Nouvelle édition augmentée et corrigée* [Cologny-Geneve: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1962]). P75 (containing portions of Luke and John) is dated ca. 175-225 CE (Victor Martin and Rodolf Kasser, *Papyrus Bodmer XIV* [Cologny-Geneve: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1961]).

⁹ T. C. Skeat, "The Oldest Manuscript of the Four Gospels?" *NTS* 43 (1997): 1-34. Skeat has also suggested that P75 may have been a four-gospel codex in "The Origin of the Christian Codex" *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, no. 102 (1994): 263-68. See also Skeat, "Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon" *NovT* 34 (1992): 194-99; G. N. Stanton, "The Fourfold Gospel," *NTS* 43 (1997): 317-46.

¹⁰ Recent volumes of Oxyrhynchus papyri have reported a number of fragments from very early codex manuscripts of Matthew (P.Oxy. 4401 [P101], 4402 [P102], 4403 [P103], 4404 [P104], 4405 [a new page

It is also worthwhile to note some general features of the manuscript. I depend here almost entirely on the analysis of physical features of the codex given by Kenyon in his 1933 edition, and the more recent codicological study by T. C. Skeat.¹¹ Although the damage that the codex suffered before being acquired by Chester Beatty is extensive (as Kenyon noted, “. . . nearly every line is more or less mutilated . . .”), significant portions of all four of the Gospels and Acts survive.¹² In Skeat’s words, “When complete the codex would have formed a substantial volume, about 25 cm. [ca. 10 inches] in height and 20 cm. [ca. 8 inches] in width, and a thickness of perhaps 5-6 cm. [ca. 2-2.5 inches] apart from any binding.”¹³ P45 was composed of 56 four-page quires, each quire made up by a single sheet of papyrus folded once to make two leaves, these 56 quires sewn together to make a single codex of 112 leaves or 224 pages.¹⁴

Papyrus sheets are made up of strips of the papyrus plant, and on any sheet of the material one side has the papyrus fibres running horizontally (the *recto* side) and the other side has them running vertically (the *verso* side). In P45 the quires were arranged so that wherever one would open the codex the facing pages would match, either *recto* to *recto* or *verso* to *verso*. On each page there is a single column of writing in “a small and very clear hand” about 7.5 inches height and 6.25 inches width, estimated to have averaged 39 lines of text per page. The upper margin was at least 1.25 inches (ca. 3 cm) and the bottom margin probably as much or a bit more (the bottom of no page survives). The inner margin (between the column of text and the fold of the sheet) is about 3/4 inch (ca. 2 cm), and the outer margin was probably about an inch (ca. 2.5 cm).¹⁵

It is very interesting to note that the likely order of the four Gospels in P45 was not what became the more familiar one but rather the so-called “Western” sequence--Matthew, John, Luke, Mark--the Gospels attributed to apostles coming first (in order of decreasing length), followed by those attributed to figures connected with apostles (likewise in order of decreasing length).¹⁶ This order is also found in several manuscripts

P.Oxy. 2683; P77], 4406 [P105]; *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Volume LXIV*, ed. E. W. Handley, U. Wartenberg, R. A. Coles, *et alia* [London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1997]) and John (P. Oxy. 4445 [P106], 4446 [P107], 4447 [P108], 4448 [P109]; *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Volume LXV*, ed. M. W. Haslam, A. Jones, F. Mattomini, M. L. West, *et alia* [London; Egypt Exploration Society, 1998]).

¹¹ Kenyon, *Fasciculus II, The Gospels and Acts: Text*, esp. v-xi; T. C. Skeat, “A Codicological Analysis of the Chester Beatty Papyrus Codex of the Gospels and Acts (P45),” *Hermathena* 155(1993): 27-43.

¹² The table of contents given by Kenyon is as follows: Matthew 20:24-32; 21:13-19; 25:41--26:3, 6-10, 19-33; John 10:7-25, 31--11:10, 18-36, 43-57; Luke 6:31-41, 45--7:17; 9:26-41, 45--10:1, 6-22, 26--11:1, 6-25, 28-46, 50--12:12, 18-37, 42--13:1, 6-24, 29--14:10, 17-33; Mark 4:36-40; 5:15-26, 38--6:3, 16-25, 36-50; 7:3-15, 25--8:1, 10-26, 34--9:8, 18-31; 11:27-33; 12:1, 5-8, 13-19, 24-28; Acts 4:27-36; 5:10-20, 30-39; 6:7--7:2, 10-21, 32-41, 52--8:1, 14-25, 34--9:6, 16-27, 35--10:2, 10-23, 31-41; 11:2-14, 24--12:5, 13-22; 13:6-16, 25-36, 46--14:3, 15-23; 15:2-7, 19-26, 38--16:4, 15-21, 32-40; 17:9-17.

¹³ Skeat, “A Codicological Analysis,” 41.

¹⁴ Skeat’s calculations (“A Codicological Analysis,” 41), correcting Kenyon’s estimate of “55 sheets, forming 110 leaves or 220 pages” (*Fasciculus II*, viii). Kenyon’s reference on p. vi to “220 leaves” is an obvious error in wording.

¹⁵ Kenyon, *Fasciculus II*, vi, viii.

¹⁶ See now Skeat, “A Codicological Analysis,” 31-32, confirming Kenyon’s suggestion that the Gospels were in the “Western” order in P45 (*Fasciculus II*, viii).

of the Old Latin version, the Greek-Latin bi-lingual Codex Bezae (late fourth century CE), and the Freer Gospels codex (late fourth/early fifth century CE).¹⁷ As I shall note later in this discussion, there are further reasons for associating P45 with the Freer Gospels codex. But let us turn now to the importance of P45 for the textual history of the Gospel of Mark.

The Initial Impact

In his fascicle on “General Introduction” and also the fascicle on the text of “The Gospels and Acts”, Kenyon drew attention to the great importance of the Chester Beatty manuscripts for the textual history of the biblical writings, both Old Testament and New Testament writings.¹⁸ Collectively, the twelve Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri attested in general the text of the biblical writings as conveyed in the Greek manuscripts of the fourth century. In Kenyon’s words, “The first and most important conclusion derived from the examination of [the Chester Beatty Papyri] is the satisfactory one that they confirm the essential soundness of the existing texts”, with “no striking or fundamental variation”, and “no important omissions or additions of passages, and no variations which affect vital facts or doctrines”. The many variations in readings have to do with “minor matters, such as the order of words or the precise words used”, on which questions the Chester Beatty manuscripts give “evidence of great value to Biblical critics”. But Kenyon emphasized that the “essential importance” of the Chester Beatty Papyri was “their confirmation, by evidence of an earlier date than was hitherto available, of the integrity of our existing texts”, and he urged, “In this respect they are an acquisition of epoch-making value”.¹⁹

With specific reference to the Gospels and Acts, he judged that P45 provided evidence “of the first importance for its bearing on the early history of the text of these books”.²⁰ At the time when the Chester Beatty Papyri were published, there was a continuing difference of scholarly opinion for and against the view of Westcott and Hort that the fourth-century Codex Vaticanus and its close allies (especially Codex Sinaiticus) represented what they called a “Neutral Text” that preserved the original readings of the New Testament writings better than either the great mass of medieval-period manuscripts (the “Received Text” represented in the Authorized [King James] Version) or the other early witnesses that were thought to reflect the so-called “Western Text” (such as Codex Bezae and Old Latin manuscripts). The damage that P45 had suffered did not prevent scholars from seeking to determine what kind of text it reflected, and what it contributed to this debate.

It was certainly not an early witness to the Byzantine text, but P45 was also not “an out-and-out supporter” of either the “Neutral” or the “Western” type of text. The

¹⁷ The more familiar order (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) reflects the order of mention of the Gospels in Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.1. See the recent discussion of these matters by Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* (London: SCM, 2000), 34-47.

¹⁸ Kenyon, *Fasciculus I: General Introduction*, 14-18; *idem.*, *Fasciculus II: The Gospels and Acts, Text*, xi-xx.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

manuscript differed at numerous small points from the readings that characterize the “Neutral” text; but at the same time P45 did not have the more notable variants that distinguish the “Western” text. That is, P45 did not easily fit into either of the two early text-types identified by scholars, and was not easily enlisted to serve by either side in the scholarly disputation of the day over the priority of the “Neutral” or the “Western” text-type. Instead, in general P45 justified a re-examination of the terms of the debate, and should have provoked an inductive approach to the question of the early textual history of the Gospels.

Unfortunately, though very understandably, what soon happened instead was that P45 was enlisted in support of a fourth textual grouping that had then only recently been posited, the so-called “Caesarean” text-type. As we shall see, however, P45 was a poor conscript for that particular cause; for it actually provoked doubts about the validity of the “Caesarean” text-type as then defined.

P45 and the Caesarean Text-Type

There is not space here to give more than a brief explanation of what the “Caesarean” text-type was thought to be and how it came to be such an important category of text-critical thought in twentieth-century New Testament scholarship.²¹ Building on observations by W. H. Ferrar (published 1877) that four medieval Greek Gospel manuscripts seemed to be related textually, and on further work by several other scholars, Kirsopp Lake and close colleagues produced several important studies that added to this “Ferrar Group” a number of other manuscripts, and they initially designated this expanded collection as “Family Q”²²

It was, however, B. H. Streeter who gave the name “Caesarean” to this grouping in his widely-successful book, *The Four Gospels*, first published in 1924.²³ Agreeing with the work of Lake and Blake, his own main contributions consisted of adding several more manuscripts to the group and connecting the type of text of Mark witnessed in the putative grouping to the Gospel quotations in the writings of the important third-century figure Origen produced during his residence in Caesarea. From this last observation Streeter proposed the term “Caesarean text” for what Lake and Blake had referred to as “Family Q” and thereby the “Caesarean” group/text quickly became a well-established

²¹ For a more detailed review of scholarship, see esp. Bruce M. Metzger, “The Caesarean Text of the Gospels,” in *Chapters in the History of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 42-72; L. W. Hurtado, “Codex Washingtonianus in the Gospel of Mark: Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics,” (PhD thesis, Case Western Reserve University, 1973; Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), 13-46.

²² See esp. Kirsopp Lake and R. P. Blake, “The Text of the Gospels and the Koridethi Codex,” *HTR* 16(1923), 267-86.

²³ B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1924, reprinted 1926, 1927). In this essay I cite the second impression of 1926. See esp. 79-107.

item in text-critical discussion of the following decades.²⁴ Writing in 1933, Kenyon referred to Streeter's conclusions as a "turning point" and claimed "the assured place in textual criticism" thereafter of the Caesarean text.²⁵

We also should note that it was Streeter who in 1926 added Codex W (the Freer Gospels codex) to the growing list of putative witnesses to the "Caesarean" text in the Gospel of Mark.²⁶ As we shall see shortly, Codex W remains particularly important for characterizing properly the text of P45 in Mark, even though Streeter's view of the matter has been shown to be incorrect. Streeter claimed that in the Gospel of Mark Codex W "represents the Caesarean text in a very pure form," and that it furnished "conclusive evidence" of a 'single type of early text' behind the Caesarean grouping.²⁷ Indeed, Streeter wrote that in the Gospel of Mark Codex W "is far the oldest, and much the purest, authority for this ancient and interesting type of Eastern text . . ."²⁸

Two years after Streeter published his views, Lake, Blake, and Silva New (later Silva Lake) published an extensive study that dealt with all information on the Caesarean text-type available at that point; and they attempted a reconstruction of the supposedly archetypal text in three sample chapters of Mark.²⁹ This scholarly troika proposed still further additions to the witnesses for the Caesarean text, but also differed with Streeter on a couple of matters. For our purposes, the important disagreement was over the value of Codex W in Mark for reconstructing the Caesarean text. Lake and his colleagues concluded that in Mark 6-16 Codex W was "clearly Caesarean, though not one of the best witnesses".³⁰

The reason for all the energetic efforts of scholars in this debate was that Streeter and his followers believed that they had found in the Caesarean text-type a textual tradition at least equal in age and importance to the other two early textual groups, the "Neutral" and the "Western" texts. Lake was more hesitant about the date and origin of the Caesarean text; but the view that became dominant was that the Caesarean text was another early and very important text-type.³¹

²⁴ Streeter is most remembered in New Testament textual criticism for his theory of "local texts", each text-type associated with a major centre of Christianity in the early centuries. See *The Four Gospels*, 26-76.

²⁵ Frederic G. Kenyon, *Recent Developments in the Textual Criticism of the Greek Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 47.

²⁶ Streeter put this claim into an appendix to the second impression of *The Four Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 598-600, which I cite in this essay, and expanded his case in two articles: "The Washington MS of the Gospels," *HTR* 19(1926), 165-72, and "The Washington MS and the Caesarean Text of the Gospels," *JTS* 27(1926), 144-47.

²⁷ Streeter, "The Washington MS of the Gospels," 168-69.

²⁸ Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 599.

²⁹ Kirsopp Lake, Robert Blake, Silva New, "The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark," *HTR* 21(1928), 207-404.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 212. Lake also believed that he saw evidence that Origen had used a "Caesarean" manuscript of Mark in his Alexandrian period (*ibid.*, 263).

³¹ In the large 1928 study, Lake gave three options as to the origins of the Caesarean text, and did not see any clear basis for choosing among them ("The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark," 333). Shortly

Nevertheless, there were critics of the theory of the “Caesarean text” from the start; but we do not have the time here to rehearse the debate in any detail. It is interesting, however, that they included such giants as F. C. Burkitt, who to his death remained unconvinced that supporters of the Caesarean text had actually demonstrated an identifiable group sufficiently distinct from other “Eastern” witnesses, and M. J. Lagrange, who doubted the *close unity* of the putative Caesarean witnesses and also proposed that the *kind* of Markan text represented by the Caesarean witnesses reflected scribal efforts to meet perceived popular needs of the church for copies of the Gospels that were pleasing and inoffensive in style and contents.³²

But Streeter’s view prevailed; and Kenyon’s identification of P45 as a witness to the Caesarean text in Mark initially meant that Egypt, not Caesarea, might have been the place of origin of the “Caesarean” text, and, more importantly, that the Caesarean text was attested in the earliest extant manuscript of Mark.³³ The latter claim obviously enhanced considerably the perceived importance of the Caesarean text-type, as it had support among the oldest manuscripts of the Gospels then available (particularly Codex W and P45), and was thus a competitor in Egypt with the “Neutral/Alexandrian” text in the earliest period of extant evidence.

Kenyon also proposed that P45 had another major impact, contributing substantially towards the “disintegration of the so-called “Western” text considered as a single family”. Although P45 shared many readings with the principal witnesses of the “Western” text (e.g., Codex Bezae), it had none of their “more striking variations”. So, P45 showed that the notion of a cohesive “Western text” had to be given up, and that “throughout the second and third centuries there was in existence a considerable variety of readings which had not yet crystallized into families”, that is, the text-types identified by scholars in later witnesses.³⁴

But in light of further studies, it was not even clear that P45 really supported the Caesarean text any better than it did the Western text. A year after Kenyon’s 1933 publication of P45, P. L. Hedley showed that in the Gospel of Mark P45 was not in fact a frequent supporter of the principal Greek witness of the Caesarean text, Codex Q or of the putative “archetype” text reconstructed by Lake, Blake and New. Hedley did see a close relationship between P45 and Codex W (the Freer Gospels codex) in Mark; but he viewed the low levels of agreement of both P45 and W with Codex Q and other Caesarean witnesses as indicating that the “Caesarean text” was not really a cohesive and distinct text-type. He accused Streeter and others of lumping into their “Caesarean” text-

afterward, however, he seems to have settled for the view that the Caesarean text had resulted from the revision of a “Western” text by a “Neutral” textual standard; see Kirsopp Lake, *The Text of the New Testament* (6th ed. rev.; London, 1928; reprinted London: Rivington’s, 1959), 84.

³² F. C. Burkitt, “Review of *The Four Gospels* by B. H. Streeter,” *JTS* 26(1925), 278-94; *idem.*, “Review of “The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark” by K. Lake, R. P. Blake, S. New,” *JTS* 30(1929), 347-56; M. J. Lagrange, “Le group dit césaréen des manuscrits des Évangiles,” *RB* 38(1929), 481-512.

³³ Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus II*, 17; *idem.*, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus I*, 16.

³⁴ Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus I*, 16-17.

type a diversity of witnesses that did not easily fit into either the “Neutral” or “Western” text-types, thereby creating a text-type out of a miscellany of manuscripts.³⁵

In a 1934 article devoted to the then newly available P45, Lagrange, too, criticized the theory of a cohesive Caesarean text-type, noting that “the agreement of P [P45] with the Caesarean text is especially the agreement of P [P45] with [Codex] W”.³⁶ He suggested that P45 and Codex W might represent an early stage of a textual tradition that led to the kind of text found in the later Caesarean witnesses; but he also noted that P45 and Codex W form a distinctive group and cannot simply be called “Caesarean” in the same sense of the word as manuscripts such as Codex Q³⁷

In other studies of the period as well, P45 was recognized as a crucial witness for the early textual history of Mark. But it was clear that P45 and Codex W were placing great strains upon the credibility of the Caesarean text-type theory. The Spanish scholar Teofilio Ayuso published an extensive study in 1935 in which he proposed that P45 and Codex W were the principal members of an early sub-group of the Caesarean witnesses, and that the Egyptian provenance of these both of these manuscripts suggested Egypt as the place of origin of the Caesarean text-type. Contrary to Lagrange’s view that all the Caesarean manuscripts reflected a Markan text that was recensional in nature, Ayuso contended that this recensional quality was restricted to the later Caesarean manuscripts (e.g., Q65, 700), and he proposed that P45 and W actually represented a *primitive* kind of text of Mark. Ayuso called this the “pre-Caesarean” text (meaning the early stage of the Caesarean text), and saw it as having good claims as representing the original readings of New Testament writings.³⁸ In a later study, he argued that this “pre-Caesarean” text and the “Western” text were the only two “pre-recensional” kinds of text and, thus, were the two *most valuable* bodies of evidence for reconstructing the original text of the New Testament writings.³⁹

In 1937, Silva Lake wrote of the diversity apparent among the putative Caesarean manuscripts and mentioned two sub-groups similar to those proposed by Ayuso, with P45 and W forming the key members of the early sub-group.⁴⁰ In their 1939 tribute to Lagrange, however, Kirsopp and Silva Lake noted that the discovery of P45 and its accord with Codex W (and to a lesser extent Family 13) had tended at first to promote the identification of these two manuscripts as good Caesarean witnesses, but that later study

³⁵ P. L. Hedley, “The Egyptian Texts of the Gospels and Acts,” *CQR* 118(1934), 23-39, 188-230. See esp. 32-35.

³⁶ M. J. Lagrange, “Le papyrus Chester Beatty pour les Évangiles,” *RB* 43(1934), 5-41. I have translated a statement from p. 17.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

³⁸ Teofilio Ayuso, “?Texto cesariense o precesariense?” *Bib* 16(1935), 369-415, esp. 379-84. Cf. Lagrange, “Le papyrus Chester Beatty pour les Évangiles”.

³⁹ Teofilio Ayuso, “?Texto arrecensional, recensional o prerecensional?” *Estudios Biblicos* epoca segundo 6(1947), 35-90, esp. 79-89.

⁴⁰ Silva Lake, *Family Pi and the Codex Alexandrinus* (SD 5; London: Christophers, 1937), 4 (note 5), 62-64.

led them to view P45 and W as the two "poorest" representatives of the Caesarean text. P45 and W, they suggested, reflect the kind of text of Mark *on which* the later Caesarean text proper was established.⁴¹

For the next several decades the dominant view enshrined in handbooks on New Testament textual criticism and echoed in scholarly studies was that the P45 and W formed an early stage of the Caesarean text, and were in some way specially related to the later Caesarean witnesses such as Codex \mathcal{Q} . At the same time, there was vigorous dissent from scholars such as Hollis Huston, whose study of P45 confirmed its special relationship to Codex W, but led him to conclude that neither of these manuscripts supported the Caesarean witnesses well enough to be connected with them at all.⁴³ In several published articles on P45, C. C. Tarelli reached similar conclusions.⁴⁴ This unsettled state of opinion was to continue until the underlying problems in method were adequately addressed.

The Methodological Problem

In his 1963 analysis of research, Bruce Metzger referred to Kenyon's publication of P45 as having an effect like an acid upon the supposed unity of "the elaborately constructed Caesarean text".⁴⁵ Study of P45 exposed with particular force the specific erroneous assumptions in Streeter's theory of the "Caesarean text", and also revealed the broader problems in practically all efforts to determine textual relationships of manuscripts.

Those who accepted the claims of Streeter and Kenyon that P45, a third-century manuscript written in Egypt, agreed with the "Caesarean text" began to realize that it was scarcely correct to refer to that text as "Caesarean"; and Streeter's theory of localized texts was rather decisively shown to be wrong. On the other hand, those who denied any

special relationship of P45 with "Caesarean" manuscripts such as Codex \mathcal{Q} contended that P45 could not be invoked to provide the origins of the Caesarean text and to give it high value as a primitive textual tradition. Metzger summarized matters by saying, "it must be acknowledged that at present the Caesarean text is disintegrating".⁴⁶

⁴¹ Kirsopp and Silva Lake, "De Westcott et Hort au Père Lagrange et au-delà," *RB* 48(1939), 497-505, esp. 503. In a study released two years later, they revised their reference to P45 and W as "poor" Caesareans, preferring then to regard them simply as "early" Caesarean witnesses of a "pre-Origenian" text that was "revised into the true "Caesarean"" (*Family 13 (The Ferrar Group): The Text According to Mark with a Collation of Codex 28 of the Gospels* (SD 11; London: Christophers, 1941), 7-8.

⁴² E.g., J. Harold Greenlee, *The Gospel Text of Cyril of Jerusalem* (SD 17; Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1955), 32.

⁴³ Hollis W. Huston, "Mark 6 and 11 in P45 and in the Caesarean Text," *JBL* 74(1955), 262-71, esp. 270.

⁴⁴ See esp. C. C. Tarelli, "The Chester Beatty Papyrus and the Caesarean Text," *JTS* 40(1939), 46-55; also 'some Linguistic Aspects of the Chester Beatty Papyrus of the Gospels,' *JTS* 39(1938), 254-59; "The Chester Beatty Papyrus and the Western and Byzantine Texts," *JTS* 41(1940), 253-60; 'some Further Linguistic Aspects of the Chester Beatty Papyrus of the Gospels,' *JTS* 43(1942), 19-25.

⁴⁵ Metzger, "The Caesarean Text of the Gospels," 62.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

A large part of the reason was P45. Behind the difficulties in dealing with P45 was a larger problem. As I wrote in 1981 in a study concerned with the question of whether in fact P45 and W were really related to the later “Caesarean” manuscripts,

The major problem in the discussion of whether the Caesarean witnesses formed a sufficiently homogeneous group to be regarded as a text-type was that no one had formulated an adequate definition of a text-type relationship, nor had anyone determined an adequate method for discovering such a relationship between two or more witnesses.⁴⁷

This will perhaps seem astonishing to those not well acquainted with New Testament text-critical scholarship. Since at least the early nineteenth century scholars had been attempting to identify manuscript groups, that is, to identify manuscripts that had some sort of special textual relationship to one another, as a necessary condition for reconstructing the textual history of the New Testament. From the beginning of this effort, it mainly consisted in comparing readings of manuscripts and trying to measure the frequency of agreement in readings. However, until the last few decades of the twentieth century, this remained a highly unreliable effort. There were really two problems: one with what scholars chose to count and the other with how they counted. Once again, P45 contributed toward making these problems very apparent.

Here is the basic problem in what scholars counted. After the historic work of nineteenth-century scholars such as Westcott and Hort, most scholars were persuaded that the text-type that lay behind the “Received Text” (the text-form translated in the Authorized/King James Version), variously referred to as the “Antiochian”, “Ecclesiastical”, or “Byzantine” text-type, was a recensional text-type produced in the fifth or sixth century. The “Western” and “Neutral/Alexandrian” text-types, by contrast, were regarded as much older, both probably going back to the second century or earlier. On this basis scholars tended to assume that the readings characteristic of the Byzantine text-type were likewise all comparatively late. So, any Byzantine readings in manuscripts of the fifth century and later simply reflected the influence of the Byzantine text-type, which became the standard text-type to which readings of manuscripts were thought to have been revised. “Non-Byzantine” readings were taken as remnants of early text-types that pre-dated the rise of the Byzantine text-type. Thus, the procedure followed by scholars was usually to tabulate agreements of two manuscripts in these non-Byzantine readings (that is, in readings that differed from the *Textus Receptus*), ignoring what they regarded as Byzantine readings in manuscripts. It was believed that agreements between two manuscripts in the “non-Byzantine” readings indicated that the manuscripts were related and belonged to a common textual group.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ L. W. Hurtado, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text: Codex W in the Gospel of Mark* (SD 43; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 5. This book is a revised form of my 1973 PhD thesis (see note 21 above).

⁴⁸ Perhaps the most outspoken proponent of this method of reconstructing early texts was Streeter, *The Four Gospels*, 81-82; *idem.*, “Origen, Aleph and the Caesarean Text,” *JTS* 36(1935)178-80; “Codices 157, 1071 and the Caesarean Text,” *Quantulacumque, Studies Presented to Kirsopp Lake*, eds. R. P. Casey, S. Lake and A. K. Lake (London: Christophers, 1937), 149-50. The approach was also used, however, by Kirsopp Lake, for example, in his reconstruction of the supposed archetype of Family 1 (*Codex 1 of the*

The publication of Codex W (the Freer Gospels) in 1912 should have alerted scholars to the error, for this manuscript has numerous readings that were regarded as Byzantine. But perhaps the dating of Codex W to the late fourth or early fifth century allowed scholars to assume that these readings simply showed that the Byzantine recension was a bit earlier than they had thought. When, however, P45 appeared on the scholarly scene, to those with eyes to see it quickly became apparent that the commonly used procedure for determining manuscript relationships, counting only “non-Byzantine” readings, was based on a serious fallacy. For even this third-century manuscript had numerous readings that previously had been thought to be “Byzantine”; and it was impossible (at least for most scholars) to imagine that the supposed Byzantine recension could be dated early enough to account for them. That is, the “Byzantine” readings in P45 could not have been “revised” into the text from some manuscript of the Byzantine text-type. Clearly, restricting the counting of agreements to supposedly “non-Byzantine” readings was fallacious and totally unjustifiable.

It was partly these “Byzantine” readings in P45 that accounted for its poor agreement with the reconstructed Caesarean text of chapters of Mark published in 1928 by Lake, Blake and New. In 1939, under the impact of P45 particularly, they lamented that the principle upon which this reconstruction had been based was “clearly false”.⁴⁹

There was also a problem in the way that scholars counted agreements between manuscripts. There was no agreed standard as to what constituted *sufficient* agreement to demonstrate group relationships among manuscripts. Scholars regularly cited numbers of agreements of this or that pair of manuscripts, and this use of numbers gave a misleading air of precision to their work. But in the absence of some agreed standard of reference numbers are virtually meaningless, and in such a circumstance the use of numbers can be pseudo-scientific.⁵⁰ Furthermore, scholars usually paid little attention to the amount of *disagreement* between two manuscripts. Let us suppose, for example, that two manuscripts agree 50 times in variants from the Textus Receptus, and that one of the

Gospels and its Allies (TS 7/3; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), xxiii-iv; and by Lake and his colleagues in their putative reconstruction of the Caesarean text of selected chapter of Mark, “The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark”.

⁴⁹ K. and S. Lake, “De Westcott et Hort au Père Lagrange et au-delà,” 503. The 1928 proposed “reconstruction” of the Caesarean text of Mark 1, 6 and 11 was originally intended as a preliminary publication, with a full reconstruction of the whole of Mark to follow. As late as 1941 the Lakes still wrote of the future publication of this work, but they also referred to the need for a “complete rewriting” of it in view of newer evidence, in particular P45: K. and S. Lake, *Family 13 (The Ferrar Group)*, 8. See also S. Lake, *Family Pi and the Codex Alexandrinus*, 60 (n. 12), where she says that a full reconstruction was prepared and “will, *hoffentlich* be published in 1937.” The publication never appeared, and the likely reason is that the Lakes lost confidence that the Caesarean manuscripts constituted a real group. Note the reference to the delay by A. H. White, “The Problem of the Caesarean Text,” *Journal of the Manchester University Egypt and Oriental Society* 24(1942-45; published 1947), 39-59, esp. 41. J. Harold Greenlee mentioned a letter from Silva Lake to H. J. Cadbury dated 18 October 1946 in which she wrote that by then she thought that the two supposed Caesarean sub-groups “are so distinct that they represent two distinct textual types” (*The Gospel Text of Cyril of Jerusalem*, 13).

⁵⁰ I mean no implication of dishonesty on the part of any of the scholars mentioned. They were sincerely operating on the basis of fallacious assumptions and insufficiently thought-out procedures. But their counting of manuscript agreements was to scientific analysis of manuscript agreements comparable to what leeching was the modern medical treatment.

manuscripts has another 60 variants from the Textus Receptus not shared by the other manuscript. How significant in this case is the amount of agreement of these two manuscripts in their variations from the Textus Receptus?

Moreover, scholars rarely gave serious attention to the *nature* of the agreements of manuscripts, whether, for example, some agreements in readings might be pure coincidence or were more unusual and significant.⁵¹ Along with the need for a more objective standard and procedure for counting agreements of manuscripts, there was a need for some more systematic way of characterizing the *kind* of text represented in a manuscript.

The Methodological Breakthrough and the Results for P45

It was Ernest C. Colwell who provided the methodological breakthrough upon which virtually all subsequent study of New Testament manuscript relationships has built. Colwell was especially concerned with the need for soundly based methods in New Testament textual criticism, and in a number of essays that were then re-published as a collection in 1969 he provided the key insights that pointed the way forward.⁵² Perhaps the most influential of these essays (written in collaboration with E. W. Tune) proposed a method for establishing quantitative relationships of manuscripts that clearly sought to address the major fallacies and problems in previous scholarship.⁵³

The essential features of the method were these: (1) a broad selection of manuscripts must be used that will include representatives of all putative text-types; (2) the amount of text studied should be large enough to give several hundred places of variations in readings; (3) at any given place of variation in reading among the manuscripts, all the variant readings must be noted and the reading of each manuscript must be recorded at each place of variation; (4) the agreements of every possible pair of manuscripts of those studied must be tabulated over all places of variation, and the number of times that any manuscript agrees with any one of the others can be converted into percentages of the total number of places of variation in the portion of text studied. This all allows for a fully *comparative* picture of the levels of agreement of any manuscript with any other, which is perhaps the essential contribution that gives numbers of agreements any meaning. Finally, (5) noting that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus are commonly accepted as primary witnesses to the same type of text, Colwell proposed that

⁵¹ To his credit, Hedley drew attention to these problems in his 1934 study, "The Egyptian Texts of the Gospels and Acts," esp. 33-34.

⁵² Ernest C. Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in textual Criticism of the New Testament* (NTTS 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969). On the development of better quantitative methods of assessing manuscript relationships see also Bart D. Ehrman, "Methodological Developments in the Analysis and Classification of New Testament Documentary Evidence," *NovT* 29 (1987), 22-45; Thomas C. Geer, Jr., "Analyzing and Categorizing New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Colwell Revisited," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, eds. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes (SD 46; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 253-67.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 56-62.

their levels of agreement in such a study should be taken as a rough quantitative criterion of text-type relationship.⁵⁴

Colwell gave only a small illustration of his proposed procedure in an analysis of John 11. It was Gordon Fee who first fully applied a slightly improved form of Colwell's method in two important publications on the textual relationships of Codex Sinaiticus and P66 in the Gospel of John.⁵⁵ Encouraged by Fee's work, and appropriating his modifications of Colwell's method, in my 1973 PhD thesis I applied the basic approach in a study focused on Codex W and the "pre-Caesarean" text in Mark.⁵⁶ A revised form of this study was published in 1981, and the results appear to have been accepted in the scholarly guild.⁵⁷ These and subsequent studies by others have basically shown that Colwell's proposals were basically sound and produce reliable indications of manuscript relationships.

On the basis of my application of Colwell's method to the question of the textual relationships of P45 in the Gospel of Mark, the following results seem assured. In Mark, the closest ally to P45 is Codex W, and these two apparently Egyptian manuscripts, though separated chronologically by some two hundred years, show a level of agreement that approaches that which signifies primary witnesses of a text-type. Colwell's proposal, which has been generally validated in several studies, is this: "the quantitative definition of a text-type [relationship] is a group of manuscripts that agree more than 70 per cent of the time and is separated by a gap of about 10 per cent from its neighbors".⁵⁸

At 103 places of textual variation in Mark where P45 is extant and clearly readable, it agrees in 69% of variation-units with Codex W, and all of its quantitative relationships with the other witnesses used in the study (the 1873 Textus Receptus, Alexandrinus, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Bezae, Koridethi, and 565) range from 37% to 55%.⁵⁹ That is, the quantitative relationship of P45 and W is both strong and separated by nearly fifteen percentage points from the next closest relationship of P45, a very significant gap in terms of the Colwell quantitative method. After Codex W, the next closest relationship of P45 is with Family 13 (55%). P45's relationships with the putative Caesarean witnesses used in my study are completely unremarkable: P45-~~Q~~ 37%; P45-565 = 44%. There is no way that P45 can be regarded as having any special connection with the "Caesarean" text of Mark.

⁵⁴ I have summarized and attempted to express more simply in my own words the itemized procedures and principles listed by Colwell, *Studies in Methodology*, 57-59.

⁵⁵ Gordon D. Fee, "Codex Sinaiticus in the Gospel of John: A Contribution to Methodology in Establishing Textual Relationships," *NTS* 15 (1969): 23-44, reprinted in Epp, Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 221-44. See also *idem*, *Papyrus Bodmer II (P66): Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics* (SD 34; Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1968).

⁵⁶ Hurtado, "Codex Washingtonianus in the Gospel of Mark".

⁵⁷ L. W. Hurtado, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text*.

⁵⁸ Colwell, *Studies in Methodology*, 59.

⁵⁹ I cite percentages of agreement from my published study, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text*, 94. I have rounded off the percentage figures given there to the nearest full percent.

But there are two interesting things about the textual relationships of P45 in Mark: (1) It is clearly related to Codex W, and (2) it is not particularly related to any of the other witnesses of any known text-type. It appears that P45 and Codex W form a small group of their own and attest a particular kind of text of Mark that circulated in Egypt (and perhaps elsewhere). This suggestion is confirmed by a look at the textual relationships of Codex W. Like P45, its next closest relationship is with Family 13 (59%), which is still ten percentage points less than the W-P45 agreement. W's other relationships range from 34% (Sinaiticus) through 40% agreement with the Textus Receptus and Bezae, to 42% agreement with the Caesarean witness, manuscript 565. None of these levels of agreement signifies any special relationship with Codex W. For Codex W, as for P45, each is the other's closest ally by far.

In another valuable essay, Colwell also proposed that it was also important to characterize the scribal habits and preferences evidenced in key manuscripts; and he demonstrated the value of this data in a path-finding study of P45, P66, and P75.⁶⁰ In an insufficiently noted ThD thesis that was directly inspired by Colwell's essay, James Royse conducted a more thorough study of the scribal habits of the six earliest extensively-preserved New Testament papyri (P45, P46, P47, P66, P72, and P75).⁶¹ Regarding P45, Royse essentially confirmed and elaborated Colwell's judgements. I cite from Royse's summary: (1) "The scribe is concerned to produce a readable text and is successful", with few nonsense readings or other errors and few corrections; (2) there is "a marked tendency to omit portions of the text, often (as it seems) accidentally but perhaps also by deliberate pruning"; (3) there is frequent harmonization, particularly harmonization of readings to the immediate context, but also cases where readings in Mark are harmonized to the readings of other canonical gospels, especially Matthew; (4) stylistic and grammatical improvements are often attempted, with some of them perhaps showing Attic or Classical Greek standards; (5) the scribe of P45 is "rather rarely" subject to accidental copying errors of sight, and seems on the whole to have been a careful and rather competent worker, who copied by sense units and not (as in the case of some scribes) mechanically letter by letter or word by word.⁶²

In my 1981 book, I offered a somewhat similar characterization of the scribe of Codex W, particularly with reference to the scribal preference for a clear, readable and

⁶⁰ Colwell, "Method in Evaluating Scribal Habits: A Study of P45, P66, P75," *Studies in Methodology*, 106-24.

⁶¹ James R. Royse, 'scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri,' (ThD thesis, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 1981). [Since publication of this essay, Royse has now published an expanded version of his work: *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri*, NTTTS, no. 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), which is now an essential volume in study of NT papyri.] See also *idem*, 'scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament,' in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, eds. Ehrman and Holmes, 239-52; and Peter M. Head, "Observations on Early Papyri of the Synoptic Gospels, Especially on the 'scribal Habits'," *Bib* 71(1990), 240-47. Skeat, "A Codicological Analysis," 42 (n. 1), referred to Günter Zuntz, "Reconstruction of one leaf of the Chester Beatty Papyrus of the Gospels and Acts (P45)," *Chronique d'Egypte* 26(1951), 191-211, as "containing the only detailed description of the script and the scribal habits of the writer" [of P45]. He appears not to have known of Royse's thesis.

⁶² Royse, 'scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri,' 156-57.

inoffensive text of Mark.⁶³ That is, P45 and Codex W reflect a kind of Markan text that was likely intended for edification of an ecclesiastical readership. These manuscripts show the efforts of scribes whose high regard for the biblical text was thoroughly compatible with a freedom to amend it in the interests of readability and religious edification. In this, they reflect scribal concerns different from those that appear to have been more characteristic in those manuscripts that are usually referred to as witnesses of the “Neutral”, or today more commonly the “Alexandrian” text-type. The Neutral/Alexandrian manuscripts seem to represent a scribal practice that results in comparatively fewer deliberate changes and (probably) more faithful copying of the exemplar. P75, for example, the earliest primary witness to the Alexandrian/Neutral text and likely a few decades earlier than P45, shows a scribe who was often less careful than the scribe of P45, that is, more given to accidental changes, but also far less given to intentional changes.⁶⁴ When studied alongside the other very early extant papyri of the New Testament writings, P45 demonstrates that in the very first centuries of textual transmission we have to reckon with varying scribal tendencies and approaches, some concerned with simple copying and others ready to exercise some freedom to amend in the interests of the text serving perceived religious needs.

Conclusion

The Chester Beatty Gospels codex certainly remains one of the most important witnesses to the history of the Gospels and Acts, and is particularly important for the textual history of the Gospel of Mark. P45 has also had profound effects upon scholarly opinion. Initially greeted as support for the theory of an early “Caesarean text”, P45 ultimately helped to bring about the demise of the theory. Together with the Freer Gospels codex (Codex W), its closest known ally, P45 forms an apparently distinct group that, though small in number, is an important witness to the variety of scribal purposes and historical forces that affected the transmission of the Gospels in the earliest centuries.

Its many lacunae are frustrating for some matters. For example, we cannot be sure what the ending of Mark was in P45 (and, as is well known, there were several Markan endings from which scribes could choose!).⁶⁵ But in spite of its fragmentary condition, P45 is a priceless piece of evidence of the state of the text of the Gospels and Acts in the early third century.

⁶³ Hurtado, *Text-Critical Methodology and the Pre-Caesarean Text*, 67-84.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 538; Colwell, “Method in Evaluating Scribal Habits,” 121: “In P75 the scribe’s impulse to improve style is for the most part defeated by the obligation to make an exact copy.” On P75, see also Gordon D. Fee, “P75, P66, and Origen: The Myth of Early Textual Recension in Alexandria,” in Epp, Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, 247-73.

⁶⁵ Skeat concluded that “the codex cannot . . . be claimed to support either the inclusion or the exclusion of the controversial verses,” Mark 16:9-20, the so-called “long ending” of Mark (“A Codicological Analysis,” 39). On the long ending of Mark, see now James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: The Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (WUNT 2/112; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

Though P45 received considerable scholarly attention in the first few decades after it was made available, with many other important New Testament manuscripts it has largely lain fallow in more recent years. Unfortunately, because of changing fashions in New Testament scholarship, for several decades now young scholars have not been encouraged to work closely with biblical manuscripts. So, we likely have not yet received the full benefits that P45 can provide toward a fuller understanding of the textual history of the Gospels and Acts. I hope, however, that future scholars will not neglect this and other important manuscripts, our earliest Christian artifacts, and that P45 will be able to provide its full measure of testimony about how Christians in the second and third centuries regarded, read, copied, and circulated the New Testament.