

# The Text of the Apostolos in Athanasius of Alexandria

Gerald J. Donker



THE NEW TESTAMENT  
IN THE GREEK FATHERS

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The present monograph represents the latest addition to the groundbreaking *New Testament in the Greek Fathers* series of the Society of Biblical Literature. This long awaited volume, the 8<sup>th</sup> of the aforementioned series, comes out about three years after the 9<sup>th</sup> and is developed from the author's doctoral dissertation defended at Macquarie University (Sydney) in 2009.

It is important to note that an *Addenda to the Book* is freely available on the SBL website ([here](#)) and supplements the source data and output files on which Donker's analysis is based.

What Gerald Donker (as Carroll Osburn, before him) understands by the *Apostolos* is a corpus of New Testament writings that traditionally contained the Apostolic readings in the Byzantine Church (cf. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 27). Therefore, when referring to the *Apostolos*, one must include all the neo-testamental documents excluding the Four Gospels (and, sometimes, the Revelation). And since a very low number of variation units in the Book of Revelation have been found, the author chose not to include the respective data in his analysis. Thus, Donker analyses in this volume only the data from Acts, the Pauline Epistles and the Catholic Epistles, examining them separately.

It is futile to engage here in an apology of the importance of the Patristic New Testament texts. Their value for the critical New Testament Studies is now unanimously recognized, and it is through such approaches, as the one employed in this series, that a thorough study of the Church Fathers' use of the biblical texts is undertaken. And Donker's analytical study of Athanasius' *Apostolos* is a perfect example of how the New Testament text used by the Patristic authors can be relevant to the biblical textual critics. Furthermore,

his detailed study also focuses on advancing new methodological steps in analysing the texts. He proposes a further method of investigation, alongside the combination of quantitative and group profile analyses, the multivariate analysis (i.e. multidimensional scaling). It represents a revision of the methodology used by Osburn (amongst others), in his study of the Apostolos in Epiphanius of Salamis (SBLNTGF 6, 2004), which proved to be insufficient in providing accurate and precise data. In Donker's words, 'an important distinction between the previous methods and multivariate analysis is that whereas the quantitative and group profile analyses essentially utilize only one dimension of the source data (i.e. the proportional relationship between Athanasius' text and each representative witness), multivariate analysis utilizes the full dimensionality of the source data (i.e. the relationship of every witness to every other witness) to more accurately represent the location of witnesses relative to each other in a textual space.' (p. 313). Also, the multivariate analysis enables us to examine the place of a certain reading or variation within a set of witnesses without pre-defining a certain text-type to the manuscripts evaluated.

After a brief introduction (pp. 1-5), the first chapter (pp. 7-27) presents the life of Athanasius of Alexandria (295/298-373 c.e.) and his writings, with a brief section on 'The manuscript tradition of Athanasius' writings'. The second chapter (pp. 29-46) examines the so-called 'Alexandrian' text-type and aims to locate the Athanasian text within the different textual traditions. Here, Donker builds upon John J. Brogan's doctoral dissertation that examined *The Text of the Gospels in the Writings of Athanasius of Alexandria* (Duke University, 1997). Brogan delineates the Alexandrian textual tradition and, following Ehrman's subgrouping, concludes by stating that Athanasius' text is in close agreement with the Secondary Alexandrian group, rather than with the Primary. This chapter also presents the classification of Athanasius' biblical quotations and

explains the critical apparatus found in the subsequent textual analysis.

Following these two introductory chapters, the next five represent the actual analysis of the Athanasian text of the *Apostolos* that aims to both determine its place within the conventional text-types (Alexandrian, Byzantine and Western) and identify its Alexandrian features. In the third chapter (pp. 47-201), Athanasius' readings are collated with a detailed critical apparatus. The textual data is arranged into three categories (Acts, the Pauline Epistles and the Catholic Epistles), a structure that is generally followed throughout the following sections. The fourth chapter surveys the methodology of textual analysis (pp. 203-226), and separate units are dedicated to the various methods utilized in this volume. While the first two (the quantitative and the comprehensive profile analyses) are based on Brogan and Ehrman's approach and complete each other, the multivariate analysis is much more complex and can lead to visibly different results. It seems to be much more useful in comparing textual witnesses and identifying manuscript relationships by statistically calculating the critical values of dissimilarity.

Chapters 5, 6, and 7, are each devoted to a different analysis method, each examining Athanasius' text of Acts, the Pauline Epistles and the Catholic Epistles separately. The quantitative analysis employed in the fifth chapter (pp. 227-243) is based on a total of only 12 readings, and therefore it has high margins of error. However, it shows that 'Athanasius appears to have a stronger affinity with the Byzantine group than the Alexandrian in the Catholic Epistles and that this is the only place he does so in the *Apostolos*' (p. 243). These results are supplemented by the group profile analysis from chapter six (pp. 245-264). This analysis confirms that for both Acts and the Pauline Epistles Athanasius' text shows strong support for the Alexandrian (or, more specifically, the Secondary Alexandrian) group, and some support for the Byzantine group. In the case of the Catholic Epistles, the low number of readings makes it difficult to

accurately determine the relationship between the various textual data. Nevertheless, it seems to reveal stronger agreement with the Byzantine group than with the Alexandrian.

The unsatisfactory and somewhat disappointing results of the first two analyses are complemented in the seventh chapter (pp. 265-311) by a multidimensional scaling (MDS) that provides an effective and more accurate 'representation of the spatial relationship of the representative textual witnesses relative to the text of Athanasius and each other' (p. 265). This multivariate analysis is based on dissimilarity matrices, and aims to provide a clear spatial location of Athanasius' text relative to other witnesses through dendograms, 2D and 3D maps, and cluster maps. The results are therefore much more exact. Thus, for the Pauline Epistles (which contain the greatest amount of data), the Athanasian text is obviously Alexandrian, but its Alexandrian status is weak. It seems to be closer to the Alexandrian cluster in Acts, and significantly similar to 1891 in Acts 1-12. In the case of the Catholic Epistles, Athanasius' text 'has no significantly similar relationship within any witness, but is seen to be significantly dissimilar to  $\kappa$  and B' (p. 311), but still aligned with the Alexandrian group.

A comparison of the results given by the 'traditional' methods of textual analysis (quantitative and group profile), and the alternative method proposed by Donker (multivariate) is provided in the last section of this volume (pp. 313-316). He concludes by confirming that Athanasius' text of Acts is clearly Alexandrian (being located centrally in the Alexandrian cluster, according to the MDS maps), that in the Pauline Epistles the text belongs to the Secondary Alexandrian text-type (but nevertheless being a 'weak Alexandrian witness'), and that the text of the Catholic Epistles, due to the low number of variation units, seems to be more closely related to the Byzantine text. Donker's conclusions end with a brief section on 'directions for further research', in which he endorses his methodology for a more detailed and accurate data arrangement

that would produce a clear graphical output of the relationship of a certain textual witness within the greater tradition and the various text-types. Four appendices and a bibliography complete this remarkable volume.

In conclusion, we salute the pioneering work undertaken by Gerald Donker and hope that it will be as widely received as possible. However, due to the very small samples of readings that he utilizes for his analysis (at least in the case of Acts and the Catholic Epistles), a few points of concern arise from the accuracy of his results. Although the conclusion that Athanasius' text of the Apostolos generally shows affinities with the (Secondary) Alexandrian text-type, but also knowledge of Byzantine and Western readings, may not be considered a surprise, the methodology proposed by Donker is certainly to be followed by subsequent studies of Patristic biblical texts.

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