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Apokalypse Now: The Ethiopic Version of Revelation Fifty Years after Hofmann

CURT NICCUM

In 1967 Josef Hofmann published the first installment of his study on the Ge'ez text of Revelation.¹ The volume marked a watershed moment in the history of New Testament textual criticism. First, his work was trailblazing. Although some critical editions of books in the Ethiopic Old Testament had begun to appear, the importance of the Ge'ez text for the history of the LXX was by then well recognized. Hofmann's predecessors in New Testament studies, on the other hand, had offered only confusing and contradictory assessments of the version's origin and value for textual criticism.² He was the first to demonstrate irrefutably that the Ethiopic version was just as important a witness to the Greek text of the New Testament as to the Old. Second, his three volumes were exemplary, his erudition and caution setting a standard for future investigations. Five decades later, his text, observations, and conclusions remain valuable and, for the most part, definitive, yet, as Martin Heide has noted, there are reasons for updating his work. Specifically Heide pointed to the need for verifying Hofmann's edition based on those early manuscripts unavailable or unknown to him.³ This chapter summarizes the results of preliminary steps taken in this direction.

1 J. Hofmann, *Die äthiopische Übersetzung der Johannes-Apokalypse* – *Textus* (CSCO 281; *Scriptores Aethiopicus* 55), Leuven 1967.

2 See, for example, L. Hackspill, *Die äthiopischen Evangelienübersetzung* (Math. I–X), ZA 11 (1896), 117–196, 367–388; J. Montgomery, *The Ethiopic Text of Acts of the Apostles*, HTR 27 (1934), 169–205; A. Vööbus, *The Early Versions of the New Testament*, (PETSE 6), Stockholm 1954, 249–265; and M.-É. Boismard, *Review: The Early Versions of the New Testament* by A. Vööbus, RB 63 (1956), 455.

3 "Deshwegen muss eine Auswertung seiner Edition für die neutestamentliche Textforschung mit der nötigen Umsicht geschähen und ggf. unter Zuhilfenahme weiteren Handschriftenmaterials, das Hofmann entweder nicht benutzt hatte oder das noch nicht bekannt war, verifiziert werden," M. Heide, *Zur Vorlage und Bedeutung der äthiopischen Bibelübersetzung*, in: M. Sigmund/M. Karrer/U. Schmid (edd.), *Studien zum Text der Apokalypse* (ANTF 47), Berlin 2015, 289–313, here 308.

