

## An Extremely Brief Introduction to Some Basic Issues in NT Textual Criticism

Rodney J. Decker, Th.D.

Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA

### ***Value of manuscripts***

Note Greenlee's presupposition, p.13 (which is shared by most textual critics today):

If copying a document by hand leads to *variants* (variations and errors in the text), then each further copy will contain most of the variants of its "parent" copy plus some additional variants of its own. This means that a manuscript which is many copies removed from the original will normally contain more errors than one which is an immediate copy of the original or only a few copies removed. The difficulty is to know how many copies lie between a manuscript at hand and the original. For this reason, it is assumed that, in general, a later manuscript ... is probably separated from the original by more intervening copies than is an older manuscript.... Since it is generally impossible to tell how many copies lie between a given manuscript and its original, the age of a manuscript must be taken to give some indication of the number of copies which separate it from the original. This tentative judgment must then be weighed against other evidence derived from an examination of the text of the manuscript to reach a final decision concerning the accuracy of the text of the manuscript.

The probability that the original text of a document has been preserved is in part dependent upon two factors concerning the manuscripts. In the first place, the shorter the interval of time between the original document and the date when the earliest available manuscript (or manuscripts) was written, the more likely it is that only a few copies intervene between this manuscript and the original and therefore the greater the probability that the text of this manuscript accurately reflects the text of the original. In the second place, the greater the number of available manuscripts, the greater is the probability that all of the original text has been preserved accurately among them.<sup>1</sup>

Ctr. the majority text presuppositions of Hodges Farstad, p. xi–xiii:

The premises which underlie the present edition and determine its methodology are two....

(1) Any reading overwhelmingly attested by the manuscript tradition is more likely to be original than its rival(s). This observation arises from the very nature of manuscript transmission. In any tradition where there are not major disruptions in the transmissional history, the individual reading which has the earliest beginning is the one most likely to survive in a majority of documents.... The later a reading originates, the less likely it is to be widely copied.

... A reading attested by such a witness [i.e., the papyri], and found in only a small number of other manuscripts, is not at all likely to be a survival from the autograph. On the contrary, it is probably only an idiosyncrasy of a narrow strand of the tradition....

(2) Final decisions about readings ought to be made on the basis of a reconstruction of their history in the manuscript tradition....

---

<sup>1</sup>H. Greenlee, *Intro to NT Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 12–13.

... Any text-form with exceedingly large numbers of extant representatives is very likely to be the result of a long transmissional chain.... The present edition is in no way fettered by a predilection for a small handful of manuscripts, whether very ancient or somewhat later. It seeks to track the original text in the vast body of surviving documents.<sup>2</sup>

And ctr. another form of the majority text position by Robinson and Pierpont:

Although the present text parallels that of Hodges-Farstad, there are significant differences in the text since they were constructed on the basis of different principles....

... The present edition does not utilize stemmatics anywhere in regard to the sacred text. Instead, the editors have followed the critical canons of John W. Burgon throughout the entire Greek New Testament.<sup>4</sup>

... Stemmatic data for the *Pericope Adultera* was converted into numerical equivalents (percentages)....

[Regarding the text of Revelation:] Where the “A $\nu$ ” and “Q” groups agree, a true “Byzantine/Majority” consensus text exists. Where they disagree, however, a working text has been reconstructed on the basis of acceptable external and internal standards of New Testament textual criticism, following the basic criteria of John W. Burgeon and Ernest C. Colwell rather than the stemmatic approach of Hodges-Farstad. (Colwell suggested a 70% agreement as sufficient to establish a texttype relationship; the present text places all readings with 70%+ support as clearly “Byzantine” in the Revelation, whereas the Hodges-Farstad approach favors some stemmatically-determined readings which possess only 20–30% support).

<sup>4</sup>...Burgon’s canons are summarized under seven heads: Antiquity, Number, Variety, Continuity, Respectability of Witnesses, Context, and Internal Reasonableness....<sup>3</sup>

### **History of the text**

(For more detail, see the discussion in Aland, *The Text of the NT*, 50–69.)

#### 1. 2d–3d C.

- Independent copying of diverse nature (era of the papyri)
- Greek ceases as a spoken language in the West about 180 (still used in eastern church which was the intellectual and theological center of the church)
- Catechetical School at Alexandria founded (1st “Christian Univ.”; scriptorium)

---

<sup>2</sup>Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Nelson, 1982), xi–xiii.

<sup>3</sup>Maurice Robinson and William Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Roswell, GA: The Original Word, 1991), xiv–xvi. The basic method and presuppositions of this text are not set out as clearly as those of Hodges and Farstad, but they are agreed against Greenlee and the majority of modern textual critics that the oldest MSS cannot be the guide to determining the original text.

2. Late 3d–early 4th C. (prob. btwn. 260–303), <sup>4</sup> major revisions of Greek MSS
- Antioch: Koine text, *revised* for ecclesiastical and theological purposes (“polished stylistically, edited ecclesiastically, and expanded devotionally”)
  - Alexandria: Alexandrian text, edited and corrected (not *revised*) for philological purposes
3. 303–13 (ca. 10 yrs. in west; longer in east)
- Diocletian persecutions: systematic destruction of church buildings and public burning of “holy books” resulted in widespread scarcity of copies of the NT, esp. in the expansion of the church under Constantine that followed.
  - Need met largely by work of scriptoria at Antioch (where Koine text had originated; became Byzantine text) and Alexandria (where A. text originated); distribution facilitated by the training of pastors at these schools; the influence of Antioch was the most widespread (run by students of Origen and Arians at this time; Alexandria under the control of Athanasius)
  - Survival of these two text types from the 4th C. is thus due largely to historical factors: each represented the text in common use at the respective scriptoria.

Many of the MSS of the early centuries (first 3 and prob. many of the 4th) were fairly small and, in comparison with the larger, ornate vellum MSS of later times, the early papyri appeared to be quite coarse and of poor quality. These were “likely enough to be despised in comparison [with the stately tomes of the early Christian empire] in an age which exulted in outward signs of the new order of things.” The change from the earlier form of writing to the common conventions of the later centuries would also have led to lack of use of these older MSS. “When once the separation of words had become habitual, the old continuous mode of writing would be found troublesome to the eye, and even the old ‘uncial’ or rounded capital letters would at length prove an obstacle to use.”

“It must also be remembered that in the ordinary course of things the most recent manuscripts would at all times be the most numerous, and therefore the most generally accessible. Even if multiplication of transcripts were not always advancing, there would be a slow but continual substitution of new copies for old, partly to fill up gaps made by waste and casualties, partly by a natural impulse which could be reversed only by veneration or an archaic taste or a critical purpose. It is therefore no wonder that only a small fraction of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament preserved to modern times were written in the uncial period, and but few of this number belong to the first five or six centuries, none // being earlier than the age of Constantine” (W-H, 10–11)

Also note Metzger’s observation regarding the much greater quantity of minuscule MSS that were ever produced in comparison with the older uncials.

---

<sup>4</sup>303 marked the beginnings of the Diocletian persecutions. There was a lengthy period of peace for the church from 260–303, which suggests the possibility that this was a period during which the scholarly work necessary for the origins of an edited text type could have been accomplished.

The advantages of using minuscule script are obvious. Minuscule letters ... are smaller than uncials, and thus their writing is more compact ... less parchment was required and therefore the book was more economical.... less bulky and therefore easier to handle ... it was possible to write minuscule letters more rapidly than uncials, and consequently books could be produced more quickly and more cheaply.... Now the possession of copies of the Scriptures (and other literary works) was placed within reach of persons of limited means.... Thus the minuscule hand was an important factor in the dissemination of culture in general and of the Scriptures in particular. The minuscule manuscripts of the New Testament outnumber the uncial manuscripts by more than ten to one ... very much of the disparity in the number of the survivors must be due to the increased ease with which the minuscule copies could be produced. (*Text of the NT*, 10–12, et passim.)

This goes a long way towards explaining why we have such an uneven distribution of the old uncials and the more recent minuscules—it simply reflects, in part, the historical fact that far more of the latter were produced in the first place!

### **Categories of MSS**

The most recent work, stemming from the Institute for NT Textual Research in Münster, Westphalia, Germany, under the direction of Kurt and Barbara Aland, has made a much more precise classification system possible than has been used previously. This has been based on systematic test collations of far more MSS than have been previously studied or classified in any systematic, scientific way. This is the fruit of many years work by a large team of scholars. Although you will not see these categories referred to in many published sources yet (they were published in English only in 1987; German in 1981), I think that they may prove to be a significant advance in the practice of textual criticism.

*Category I:* Manuscripts of a very special<sup>5</sup> quality which should always be considered in establishing the original text (e.g., the Alexandrian text belongs here).

*Category II:* Manuscripts of a special quality, but distinguished from manuscripts of category I by the presence of alien influences (particularly of the Byzantine text), and yet of importance for establishing the original text (e.g., the Egyptian text belongs here).

*Category III:* Manuscripts of a distinctive character with an independent text, usually important for establishing the original text, but particularly important for the history of the text (e.g., *f*<sup>1</sup>, *f*<sup>13</sup>).

*Category IV:* Manuscripts of the D text. [traditionally = Western text type]

*Category V:* Manuscripts with a purely or predominantly Byzantine text, or with a text too brief or colorless to be of any real importance for establishing the original text.

---

<sup>5</sup>See the discussion on pages 105–06, 128, 155–59. A convenient summary of the available evidence is given on p. 156–59.

These categories do not invalidate references to the traditional text types (Alexandrian, Byzantine, Caesarean, Western), but suggest rather that the text types take us back only to the 4th century (perhaps late 3d century). The goal of textual criticism is not to establish the text of the 4th century, but the original text. The closest we can get to this with present knowledge is the “early text” stage of the 2d and 3d centuries. The Westcott-Hort text and the early editions of the Nestle text are perhaps the best representatives of the 4th century text, but the most recent editions—UBS<sup>3,4</sup> and NA<sup>26, 27</sup>—reflect our best understanding of the early text of the 2d-3d centuries.<sup>6</sup>

The members of Aland’s category I (the most important witnesses of the NT text) are as follows, listed in numerical order (see Aland, 156–59 for a table giving a complete classification by century and category):

Papyri: Ⓟ<sup>1</sup>, 4, 5, 9?, 10, 12?, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39, 40, 45, 46, 49, 52, 53, 64/67, 65, 69?, 70, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80?, 87

Uncials: Ⓐ, A<sup>e</sup>, B, 057, 098, 0118, 0162, 0189, 0220, 0254

Minuscules: 33, 1243<sup>Cath</sup>, 1241<sup>Cath</sup>, 1739, 2053, 2062, 2344<sup>Rev</sup>, 2427

**The “early text” of the papyri** may be divided as follows.<sup>7</sup> The further down the following classes one moves, the more carefully transcribed the MSS are.

*Affinities to D text:* transitional forms, precursors to the D [western] text. (Ⓟ<sup>29, 38, 48</sup>)

} “Between D and free,” (Ⓟ<sup>69</sup>, 0171)

*Free text:* characterized by a greater degree of variation than the “normal” text.

(Ⓟ<sup>9?, 13?, 37, 40, 45, 46, 66, 78</sup>)

*Normal text:* transmitted the original text of the NT with the limited amount of variation characteristic of the NT textual tradition. (Ⓟ<sup>4, 5, 12?, 16, 18, 20, 28, 47, 52, 87</sup>)

} “At least normal,” tendency toward the strict text: Ⓟ<sup>15, 22, 30, 32, 49, 53, 72, 77, 0162, 0189</sup>)

*Strict text:* reproduced the text of its exemplar with greater fidelity, exhibiting far less variation than the “normal” text. (Ⓟ<sup>1, 23, 27, 35, 39, 64/67, 65?, 70, 75, 0220</sup>)

---

<sup>6</sup>Probably all the UBS editions could be listed here since the differences between them are not great. The lengthy history of the Nestle text illustrates the gradual shift from the 4th century, Alexandrian text type, to the current early text focus. The account of these editions by Aland does suggest, however, that the UBS<sup>3</sup>/NA<sup>26</sup> marked a deliberate change (31–33).

<sup>7</sup>Aland, 93–94; the categories have been rearranged from Aland’s list, though the contents of each is original.

### ***Philosophies of Textual Criticism***

<b>Internal Evidence Emphasized</b>	<b>Mediating Positions</b>	<b>External Evidence Emphasized</b>
<p><b>Pure Eclecticism</b> Uses only internal evidence (Readings may come from any t.t. or any MS.) Equal weight to all MSS. External evidence only provides a pool of evidence from which to draw. Heavy emphasis on stylistics. (Kilpatrick, <i>Greek-English Diglot for the Use of Translators</i>; J. K. Elliott)</p>	<p><b>Reasoned Eclecticism</b> Internal and external evidence are used. Generally prefers Alexandrian t.t., but gives internal evidence greater weight than an Alex.-only position. Internal evidence may over-ride external evidence. (“No MS is as old as common sense”— R. Bentley) B. Metzger, <i>The Text of the NT</i></p> <p><b>Equal Weight to All T.T.s</b> Any 3 of the 4 major t.t.s are definitive. Harry Sturtz, <i>The Byzantine Text-Type and NT Textual Criticism</i>.</p>	<p><b>Alexandrian T.T. Only</b> External evidence from Alex. t.t. is definitive. Internal evidence is used within the t.t. (Westcott&amp;Hort: ⑆ B)</p> <p><b>Early Text Only</b> 2d &amp; 3d C. papyri &amp; early uncials (esp. ⑆ and B) are the most valuable. Internal evidence is used within the t.t. (Aland, <i>The Text of the NT</i>)</p> <p><b>Majority Text Only</b> The numerical majority of all MSS are definitive.  Hodges &amp; Farstad, <i>The Greek NT Accord. to the Majority Text</i> (internal evidence is used within the t.t.*); Pickering, <i>The Identity of the NT Text</i>  <b>or:</b> Robinson &amp; Pierpont, <i>The NT ... Accord. to the Byzantine/ Majority Textform</i> (a strict numerical majority system)</p>

**\*Note:** According to Mike Stallard, Zane Hodges essentially follows the text critical canons of Westcott and Hort, changing only one key item: instead of preferring the older MSS, Hodges prefers the more numerous. In essence, then, Hodges’ position is that by applying Westcott and Hort’s method to the majority text, one can determine the original text!

### ***Major Differences Between UBS/ NA and the “TR”/Majority Text (℞)***

#### **1. Significant, multi-verse additions**

The following three passages have been added to the text by the TR (℞ *differs* from the TR in *not adding* 1 John 5:7–8; ℞ *does add* the other two texts):

Mark 16:9ff; John 7:53–8:11; 1 John 5:7–8

#### **2. Verse additions <sup>8</sup>**

In twelve passages ℞ and the TR add entire verses to the text:

Matt. 17:21; 18:11; 23:14; Mark 7:16; 9:44, 46; 11:26; 15:28; Luke 23:17; John 5:3b–4; Acts 28:29; Rom. 16:24.

<sup>8</sup>Each of the 16 passages noted above are discussed in considerable detail by Aland, *Text of the NT*, 296–306. Complete MS data is also given for the same passages on pp. 293–95.

In four passages the TR adds entire verses to the text (but ℞ does not):  
 Luke 17:36; Acts 8:37; 15:34; 24:6b–8a

### Mark 10:40 • Simple example to illustrate how to read the apparatus

#### UBS<sup>4</sup>

τὸ δὲ καθίσει ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἢ ἐξ ἐωνύμων οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι, ἀλλ' οἷς<sup>14</sup>  
 ἠτοίμασται. (But to sit on my right or on *my* left, this is not mine to give; but *it is for those* for  
 whom it has been prepared. [slightly modified NASB])

<sup>14</sup>40 {A} ἀλλ' οἷς (see Mt 20.23) A B<sup>2</sup> C<sup>2</sup> (C\* αλλοι) Θ Ψ f<sup>1</sup> f<sup>13</sup> 28 157 180 205 565 579 597  
 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1424 1505 2427 Byz [E F G H] Lect it<sup>aur, c, f, i, l, q, r<sup>lvid</sup></sup> vg  
 syr<sup>p, h, pal</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> arm geo slav // ἄλλοις 225 1858 1859 1866 11074 it<sup>a, b, d, ff<sup>2</sup>, k</sup> (syr<sup>s</sup> ἄλλοις δέ)  
 cop<sup>sa<sup>mss</sup></sup> eth // αλλοις (without accents or space in between) ℞ B\* D L N W Δ Σ 0146 0233

<sup>14</sup> 40 {A}	syr <sup>p, h, pal</sup>
ἀλλ' οἷς (see Mt 20.23)	cop <sup>bo</sup> arm geo slav
A B <sup>2</sup> C <sup>2</sup>	// ἄλλοις
(C* αλλοι) Θ Ψ	225
f <sup>1</sup> f <sup>13</sup>	1858 1859 1866 11074
28 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006	it <sup>a, b, d, ff<sup>2</sup>, k</sup>
1010 1071 1241 1243 1424 1505 2427	(syr <sup>s</sup> ἄλλοις δέ)
Byz [E F G H]	cop <sup>sa<sup>mss</sup></sup> eth
Lect	// αλλοις (without accents or space in
it <sup>aur, c, f, i, l, q, r<sup>lvid</sup></sup>	between)
vg	℞ B* D L N W Δ Σ 0146 0233

#### NA<sup>27</sup>

τὸ δὲ καθίσει ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἢ ἐξ ἐωνύμων οὐκ ἔστιν ἐμὸν δοῦναι', ἀλλ' οἷς'  
 ἠτοίμασται<sup>†</sup>.

40 '· ἄλλοις 225 it sa<sup>ms</sup> |· ἄλλοις δε sy<sup>s</sup> | txt B<sup>2</sup> Θ Ψ f<sup>1.13</sup> 2427 ℞ lat syr<sup>p, h</sup> bo (cet. incert.)

40 '· ἄλλοις	2427
225	℞
it sa <sup>ms</sup>	lat
· ἄλλοις δε sy <sup>s</sup>	syr <sup>p, h</sup> bo
txt B <sup>2</sup> Θ Ψ	(cet. incert.)
f <sup>1.13</sup>	

See the following documents for supplemental illustrations and data: in the following directory:

<http://faculty.bbc.edu/rdecker/documents/> add the f. files names:

[natur\\_ms.pdf](#) [nمبر\\_mss.pdf](#) [nb\\_ty\\_ms.pdf](#) [na27symb.pdf](#) [mk1na27.pdf](#)