

**A Brief Survey of**  
**Textual Criticism**  
**Second Edition**

**M. David Johnson**

## **A Brief Survey of Textual Criticism Second Edition**

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*“Textual Criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.” (Greenlee, p. 1).*

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### **Doctrinal Position**

I hold to traditional Reformed Theology as often expressed by the acronym TULIP:

**T = Total Depravity**  
**U = Unconditional Election**  
**L = Limited Atonement**  
**I = Irresistible Grace**  
**P = Perseverance of the Saints**

I also hold to the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, and affirm its authority, sufficiency, and inerrancy in the original autographs.

Sola Scriptura – Sola Fide – Sola Gratia – Solus Christus – Soli Deo Gloria

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Published by BDS Software, P.O. Box 485, Glenview, IL 60025-0485, USA at:

[www.TheologyFromBelow.org](http://www.TheologyFromBelow.org)

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## Introduction

Consider this scenario.

Last week, you bought a new paperback mystery at the drugstore. The cover promised great suspense.

The first line on the first page read, “Andrew crouched behind the desk, checking the silenced 9mm while waiting for the girl with the AK-47 to come out of the dark office.”

Now, today, you’re halfway through the book, and it’s so captivating that you decide to buy another copy as a gift for a friend.

But, you want it to be a *nice* gift, so you decide to buy the hardcover instead of the paperback.

You open it to the first page and check the first line.

It reads, “Andrea crouched behind the desk, checking the silenced 9mm while waiting for the guy with the AK-47 to come out of the dark office.”

Someone has made a mistake!

Perhaps it was the typesetter who worked on the paperback. Or maybe it was the typesetter who worked on the hardcover. Or maybe it was one of the editors.

In any case, the two copies of the mystery don’t agree. And you want to know what the author of the mystery originally wrote.

If you had the author’s original manuscript, you could check it and you’d have your answer. But, you don’t have that manuscript, so you’ll have to try a different way to discover the truth.

*“Textual Criticism is the study of copies of any written work of which the autograph (the original) is unknown, with the purpose of ascertaining the original text.”* (Greenlee, p. 1).

## External Evidence

The first things you try are methods textual critics call checking external evidence.

First, you go to the library and look at some other copies of the book. But, all the paperbacks read “Andrew” and “girl”, and all the hardcovers read “Andrea” and “guy”. So you check several other libraries and several bookstores, but the results are all the same.

So, next, you try to contact the publishers. You figure they'll have copies of the original manuscript and those copies will tell you the author's original intent. Unfortunately, the publishers have gone out of business and their copies have long since been discarded.

So, you try to contact the author directly. But it turns out the author has died in a house fire which also destroyed the original manuscript.

“External evidence deals with the MSS [manuscripts] and other witnesses to the text in order to decide which reading has the best support by these witnesses.” (Greenlee, p. 111).

### **Internal Evidence**

So, you go back to the library and read every other book or story the author ever wrote.

You discover that, in every case, the author used a male protagonist (main character) and a female antagonist (the main character's primary enemy).

So, you conclude it is *most likely* the author originally wrote “Andrew crouched behind the desk, checking the silenced 9mm while waiting for the girl with the AK-47 to come out of the dark office.”

You can't be *certain* because you don't have the original manuscript. But, you feel you've gotten as close to the truth as you possibly can.

“Internal evidence deals with the probabilities of what a scribe [writer, copyist] might have done, intentionally or unintentionally, that would have produced a different reading.” (Greenlee, p. 111).

### **Ancient Documents**

Textual Criticism becomes more complex when applied to books and documents from thousands of years ago.

In our scenario above, there were only two variants: the paperback variant and the hardcover variant. All paperback copies read the same as every other paperback copy because they were all printed from the same printing plate.

The same held true for all hardcover copies.

But the printing press wasn't invented until after 1400 A.D. Before that time, all copies of a document had to be made by hand. Every copy could introduce new variants, so you could have hundreds of copies with no two exactly alike.

In some ways, this makes the art and science of Textual Criticism more difficult. But, in other ways, it makes the task easier.

If you have a hundred copies and they're all different, you have to wade through all hundred copies, assessing all those differences, and that can be quite time consuming and exhausting.

But, on the other hand, if 98 of the copies read "Andrew" at one location, and only two read "Andrea", you can make a strong case for "Andrew" being the original reading, on the basis of external evidence alone.

Of course, there are additional difficulties to face with ancient documents. One major difficulty is the changes which have occurred in languages over time.

Many people today prefer the NIV or NASB or another modern version of the Bible to the old KJV. This is because they're easier to understand. The KJV was first published in 1611, four centuries ago.

For example, the KJV of I Thessalonians 4:15 reads, "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not **PREVENT** them which are asleep."

But, the NIV reads, "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not **PRECEDE** those who have fallen asleep."

Now, there's no error here. In 1611, the word "prevent" carried the same meaning in this context which "precede" does in today's usage. But most people don't know that.

But now, consider these lines from *The Deth of Blaunche*, written by Geoffrey Chaucer in the 1300's, seven centuries ago:

Thoghte I, "Thys ys so queynt a sweven  
That I wol, be processe of tyme,  
Fonde to put this sweven in ryme  
As I kan best, and that anoon."  
This was my sweven; now hit ys doon.

The English is almost totally incomprehensible to the casual modern reader.

The Greek in which the New Testament was written nineteen centuries ago is so different from the Greek spoken today, that it is effectively a completely different language. And the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament are even older than that.

Even more different is the manuscript style. The early manuscripts were written completely in capital letters and without any punctuation or space between words, sort of like:

THISISANEXAMPLEOFWHATIAMTALKINGABOUTINTHISSECTION.

This is especially problematic when more than one set of words can be found in a given line. For example, does the line:

COMETOVERSECONDONE

mean:

Comet over second one?

Or, does it mean:

Come to verse condone?

For an actual example from the Bible, Codex Sinaiticus, also identified as  $\aleph$  by textual critics, was discovered by Constantin von Tischendorf at St. Catherine's Monastery near the foot of Mount Sinai in 1859. It currently resides in the British Museum in London. It is a copy of the entire Bible, made around 350 – 375 A.D. (Comfort, 2005, pp. 77-78, cf. Greenlee, pp. 28-30). Within the limits imposed by the Times New Roman font, John 1:1 appears in Codex Sinaiticus as:

**ΕΝΑΡΧΗΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ**

(In the beginning was the Word,

**ΚΑΙΟΛΟΓΟΣΗΝ**

and the Word was

**ΠΡΟΣΤΟΝΘΝΚΑΙ**

with God, and

**ΘΣΗΝΟΛΟΓΟΣ**

the Word was God. – KJV).

I found the actual digitized facsimile of this passage in Codex Sinaiticus at:

<http://alpha.reltech.org/cgi-bin/Ebind2html/BibleMSS/TischendorfSinv4?seq=99>

(accessed 2008/12/29).

## Chapter 1: Paleography

Paleography is the study of ancient writing.

### Writing Materials

Throughout history, writing has been done on many different kinds of materials, from tree bark to stone walls, from broken pieces of pottery to metal placards, from the palm of one's hand to wax tablets, and on just about everything in between.

God wrote the Ten Words (commonly known as the Ten Commandments) on two tables of stone. (cf. Exodus 31:18).

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, wrote "His name is John" on what could very well have been a wax tablet (Luke 1:63).

But the most common materials were paper and paper-like products.

The word paper, in fact, is derived from the Greek **πάπυρος** papyrus, which was the most common writing material from about 2000 B.C. up until about the fifth century A.D. After that, until about the fourteenth century A.D., parchment (also called vellum) was the most common material. After that, it was paper. (cf. Harrison, Waltke, Guthrie, and Fee, pp. 130-131).

In the Textual Criticism of the Bible, we will be primarily interested in papyrus and parchment, because those are the two materials on which handwritten manuscripts of the Bible are found.

"The papyrus plant is a reed which grew in swampy areas in the delta of the Nile River and in a very few other places in the Mediterranean world." (Greenlee, p.9).

The process of making the paper-like papyrus sheet from the papyrus plant was to split the reed with a needle into very thin strips. These strips were then laid on a board, with one layer running top-to-bottom on top of a second layer running left-to-right, using muddy Nile water to "glue" the strips together. The layers were then pressed together and allowed to dry in the sun. The resulting paper-like material was then cut into twelve- to eighteen-inch wide sheets. For scrolls, up to twenty sheets were pasted together to make a roll. (Finegan, p.21).

As might be expected, if you oriented the sheets so the strips ran horizontally on the front side of the sheet, it was much easier to write along that continuous smooth surface. This was then called the *recto* side of the sheet. In scrolls, this was also the inside of the roll. Naturally, then, the strips ran vertically on the back side of the sheet, also called the *verso* side.

While papyrus sheets were made from a plant, parchment was made from animal skins, usually calfskin or rams' skin.

“In general, the making of parchment involves some such steps as soaking the skin in limewater, scraping off the hair on the one side and the flesh on the other, stretching and drying the skin in a frame, smoothing it with pumice, and dressing it with chalk.” (Finegan, p.25).

### **Writing Implements**

The implement for writing on papyrus was the reed pen, i.e. it was made from a reed. Early reed pens had their ends frayed like a brush. Later reed pens were sharpened to a point at one end and then slit about a half an inch like a fountain pen from the 1950’s. The slit picked-up and held ink by capillary action when the pen tip was dipped into a reservoir of ink.

The implement for writing on parchment (and later paper) was the quill pen, i.e. it was made from the quill (the hard, hollow, reed-like part) of a large bird feather. It, too, was split like a fountain pen from the 1950’s. Quill pens were not used on papyrus because they were too hard and would be likely to tear the papyrus.

“Ink used in ancient MSS was most commonly one of two kinds: ink made of lamp-black and gum dissolved in water, which produced very black writing; and ink made from nutgalls, which produced a fine rusty-brown color”. (Greenlee, p. 13).

### **Document Forms**

Except for very short documents which could be written on a single sheet, documents were produced in either scroll (roll) form or codex (modern book) form. Scrolls were almost always made of papyrus, but codices could be of either papyrus or parchment.

On scrolls, the writing was done in columns which were each two to three inches wide. With such narrow columns, the scroll didn’t have to be opened very far to allow reading, and the scroll was thus easier to handle. The writing was oriented so it could be read horizontally.

The codex form is familiar to anyone who has ever read a book. The codex consists of a number of folded sheets, bound together on top of each other, so the reader can leaf through them one after another.

Most commonly, the sheets were folded together in quires of four sheets per quire, and then the quires were bound together into a complete book. For papyrus, the sheets were assembled and folded in the quire so that recto side faced recto side and verso side faced verso side. For parchment, they were arranged so hair side faced hair side and flesh side faced flesh side.

In the codex form, parchment had an advantage over papyrus in that, on papyrus, the scribe would be able to write with the grain on one side of each sheet, but would have to write against the grain on the other side. (On scrolls, the scribe only wrote on the verso side, the side inside the roll.)

But the codex form had an overwhelming advantage over the scroll form in that, with numbered pages in the codex form, it was much easier and faster to locate a specific passage within the document.

Over the years, a particular document might become no longer wanted. Then, the writing might be scraped off and a new document written over the old. Such a document is called a *palimpsest*. Quite often, the originally writing was not completely obliterated and can be recovered by modern methods. Such has been the case with more than fifty tenth-century and earlier palimpsest manuscripts where texts of the Greek New Testament underlay later writing.

## Handwriting Styles

The two handwriting styles are *Uncial* and *Miniscule*.

Uncial MSS were written with all capital letters and without punctuation or space between words; as shown near the end of the Introduction on page 7 above. The Uncial MSS of the New Testament which we have discovered so far, go all the way back to about 125 A.D. (Papyrus Rylands Greek 457, p<sup>52</sup>). The Uncial MSS mostly date from the tenth century A.D. and earlier, and constitute roughly 500 separate MSS.

Miniscule MSS were written in lower case, but still without punctuation or space between words. The earliest available Miniscule MSS go back to about 800 A.D. The Miniscule MSS mostly date from the ninth century A.D. and later, and constitute roughly 4,500 separate MSS.

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations are fairly common in modern writing. They're often used because they save space. The abbreviations used are often either commonly understood, or they're defined the first time they appear in the document, or they're defined in a glossary. For example, there are several abbreviations defined in the Glossary at the end of this book.

In the Bible, we don't generally find abbreviations in our English or other language translations. Even if we open our NA27 Greek New Testament, we don't find abbreviations. But some abbreviations do appear in the original language manuscripts.

The reason for such abbreviations was different than the reasons for modern abbreviations, however.

In Hebrew, the divine name of God is יהוה Yahweh. (Remember: Hebrew reads from right to left, instead of from left to right like English).

But, the divine name was considered to be so sacred, that it was never to be pronounced. So it was handled as a special case, a *nomen sacrum* (Latin = sacred name).

So, the word  $\text{אֲדֹנָי}$  Adonay = Lord was written in the margin, and this was pronounced instead of Yahweh.

Meanwhile, the vowel pointings of Adonay were added to the Consonants of Yahweh in the text itself.

This produced the impossible (in Hebrew) form  $\text{יְהוָה}$  Y<sup>e</sup>howa, (Weingreen, p.23).

This impossible form is sometimes expressed in English as Jehovah.

Even in the Greek LXX version, when Jewish scribes came to Yahweh, they would write  $\text{יהוה}$  in Hebrew characters, and then continue in Greek.

But, when Christians made copies of the LXX, they used the Greek word **κύριος** Kurios = Lord instead, and abbreviated it in Greek nomen sacrum form as noted below.

This is a clear way to tell the difference between Jewish and Christian copies of the LXX.

In the Greek New Testament, the Christian scribes utilized four nomina sacra (sacred names) for the names and titles of God. They formed these nomina sacra by (in most cases) writing just the first and last letters of the name or title, and then drawing a bar above the abbreviation, as shown below.

Sometimes the abbreviated form would vary slightly, and some scribes occasionally abbreviated other words in a similar fashion, but these four names and titles were the most common and universal. (Comfort, 2005, pp. 199-202).

$\overline{\Theta\Sigma}$  =  $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}s$  = theos = God

$\overline{\text{ΙΣ}}$  =  $\text{ἰησοῦς}$  = iesous = Jesus

$\overline{\text{ΚΣ}}$  =  $\text{κύριος}$  = kurios (or kyrios) = Lord

$\overline{\text{ΧΣ}}$  =  $\text{χριστός}$  = christos = Christ

## Chapter 2: Sources

The Sources for Textual Criticism include all the manuscript copies and other witnesses and evidences which we have available, and which we will compare, analyze, and synthesize into the closest possible match for the original autograph of the document we are studying.

### Old Testament Sources – The Masoretic Text (MT)

“[The Old Testament] survives in an unusually complex form. Copies have been transmitted by rabbinic tradition in an unbroken sequence over the millennia. Other copies – or partial copies – have been discovered at Qumran and other archeological sites. The Hebrew of the Bible has been translated into numerous other languages, and copies of the translations have been preserved. Each of these copies, whether of the text itself or of a translation of the text, is called a witness, inasmuch as it provides testimony to the original form of the text. The biblical textual critic assembles these witnesses and compares them in an attempt to explain their divergences. The goal is the determination of a primitive text to which the various surviving copies bear witness.” (McCarter, p.12).

Unless you’re a practicing Old Testament textual critic, or other eminently qualified Old Testament scholar, when you open your copy of the Hebrew Old Testament, you’re most likely looking at a copy of the Masoretic Text (MT).

The MT was assembled, edited, and distributed by the Masoretes over a 300 year period beginning in the seventh century A.D. The Masoretes were groups of Jewish scribes located in Jerusalem, Tiberias, and Babylon.

Originally, the Hebrew Scriptures were written all in consonants with only the letters waw װ and yod ם sometimes acting as vowels. Pronunciation when reading Hebrew thus required considerable memory and skill on the part of the reader.

As an English example, suppose you saw this line of consonants in a document:

TH CS F TH FR WS BT GN.

Without good recall, and without experience with the context, how could you tell whether the line means:

THE CASE OF THE FOUR WAS ABOUT A GUN,

or:

THE CAUSE OF THE FIRE WAS BAT GUANO,

or perhaps even something else?

The Masoretes defined the system of diacritic vowel points (the small marks above and below the consonants) that specify the correct word and its pronunciation in the MT.

In the divine name of God יהוה יהוה, the four consonants are יהוה and the וּוּוּ are the vowel points.

Today, the definitive critical edition of the MT is the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), published by Deutsche Bibelstiftung, in Stuttgart, Germany, 1977.

A “critical edition” is one which includes an apparatus of notes indicating variants from the base text of a document and the source(s) in which those variants are found. The base text for BHS is the Codex Leningradensis, the oldest (1008 A.D.) complete Hebrew Old Testament produced according to the Tiberian mesorah.

Except in certain very specialized research, the textual critic works with critical editions wherever possible, rather than trying to collate all the extant manuscripts individually. This is because examining every manuscript individually would be very time consuming. It would also be a duplication of effort and a waste of time, because the authors and editors of the critical editions have already performed all this work.

Also, in many cases, certain manuscripts may simply be inaccessible for various reasons. If you’re working in San Francisco, for example, traveling to Chicago, Philadelphia, New York, London, Rome, Moscow, and several other locations where manuscripts are archived, may simply not be practical.

“[I]n reference to the masoretic text the word *mesorah* has a very specific meaning: the diacritic markings of the text of the Hebrew Bible and concise marginal notes in manuscripts (and later printings) of the Hebrew Bible which note textual details, usually about the precise spelling of words.” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoretic\\_text](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masoretic_text) - accessed 2008/12/31).

### **Old Testament Sources – The Septuagint (LXX)**

The Septuagint is the Greek version of the Old Testament, translated from the Hebrew over a 200 year period starting in the third century B.C. Being a translation, it doesn’t carry the same inherent authority as the Hebrew original. But, its great value lies in the fact that it is about 1000 years closer to the original autographs than is the MT.

The LXX includes some books which aren’t included in the MT, and in a not insignificant number of passages, the wording of the LXX differs from that of the MT.

“Of significance for all Christians and for Bible scholars, the LXX is quoted by the Christian New Testament and by the Apostolic Fathers. While Jews have not used the LXX in worship or religious study since the second century AD, recent scholarship has brought renewed interest in it in Judaic Studies. Some of the Dead Sea scrolls attest to Hebrew texts other than those on

which the Masoretic Text was based; in many cases, these newly found texts accord with the LXX version. The oldest surviving codices of LXX (Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus) date to the fourth century AD.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Septuagint> - accessed 2008/12/31).

Critical editions of the Septuagint are generally either only partial or are out of date. The two most prominent critical editions are Brooke and Thackeray, and Ziegler. (McCarter, pp. 80-81):

Brooke and Thackeray’s *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Text of the Codex Vaticanus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906-) covers Genesis through Tobit in LXX order.

Ziegler’s *Septuaginta: Veius Testamentum Graecum auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931-) covers Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Esther, Job, the Twelve Minor Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, and some of the apocryphal books.

Rahlfs’ covers the entire LXX but the critical apparatus is quite sparse:

*Septuaginta, id est Veius Testamentum Graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Privileg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1935).

Holmes and Parsons, and Swete both cover the entire LXX, but are significantly out of date:

Holmes and Parsons’ *Veius Testamentum Graecum variis lectionibus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798-1827).

Swete’s *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1887-1894).

Brenton’s *The Septuagint Version: Greek and English* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) or (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986) is easier to find than any of the above critical editions. It’s useful for quick reference, and is based on Vaticanus with some reference to Alexandrinus, but it does not include any critical apparatus.

### **Other Old Testament Sources**

In addition to the MT and the LXX, the serious student who wants to pursue Old Testament Textual Criticism, should expect to also consult the various versions in other languages (the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Aramaic Targums, the Old Latin, and the Vulgate), as well as the manuscripts from the Judean Desert (Qumran, Masada, Wadi Murabba’at, and Wadi Habra).

For an excellent bibliography of all these sources, see McCarter, pp. 80-86.

I also found useful Old Testament Manuscript Bibliographies online at:

<http://www.bible-researcher.com/ot-bibliography.html> - accessed 2009/01/01,

<http://www.library.yale.edu/div/ottools.htm> - accessed 2009/01/01,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead\\_Sea Scrolls](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dead_Sea Scrolls) - accessed 2009/01/01,

and <http://www.bibletexts.com/bibliogr/02bib-hg.htm> - accessed 2009/01/01.

The interested student should be able to discover even more by googling Old Testament manuscripts bibliography.

### **New Testament Sources**

Today, the generally accepted definitive critical edition of the Greek New Testament is the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27<sup>th</sup> Edition; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006 (NA27).

The base text for NA27 is a weighted composite of the extant manuscripts and other witnesses, with higher weights generally assigned to the older manuscript copies, on the basis of the belief that the older manuscripts are inherently closer to the original autographs. However, this statement is really just an incomplete picture of the complex process of decisions which will be discussed in greater detail in following chapters.

An identical text, but with a different critical apparatus, is provided by the United Bible Societies' *The Greek New Testament*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007 (UBS4).

An alternate text and critical apparatus, developed on the basis of a different and competing theory of how textual variants should be weighed, is provided by Hodges and Farstad's *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Second Edition; Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985.

The base text for Hodges and Farstad is also a weighted composite of the extant manuscripts and other witnesses, but with higher weights generally assigned to variants which have the support of the most manuscript copies, on the basis of the alternate belief that the original autographs are more closely matched by such a majority. Once again, however, this statement is really just an incomplete picture of the complex process of decisions which will be discussed in greater detail in following chapters.

The critical apparatus in each of these three critical editions covers the variants found in the uncials, minuscules, papyri, other language versions, and the Church Fathers (patristic quotations) in sufficient detail for all but the most esoteric projects in textual criticism and research.

For those who want to explore some of the original manuscripts themselves, Comfort (1990), Comfort (1992), Comfort (2005), and Finegan provide extensive bibliographies, descriptions, and manuscript photographs.

A somewhat dated, but nonetheless useful, bibliography of New Testament Textual Criticism is found in Greenlee, pp.149-153.

A more extensive and modern bibliography is found in Comfort, 2005, pp.395-405.

The bibliography in Souter, pp. 238-248, however, is too far out of date to be useful, except perhaps for historical interest.

I also found useful New Testament Manuscript Bibliographies, descriptions, photographs, and digital facsimiles online at:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_New\\_Testament\\_uncials](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_Testament_uncials) - accessed 2009/01/01,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_New\\_Testament\\_minuscules](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_Testament_minuscules) - accessed 2009/01/01.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_New\\_Testament\\_papyri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_New_Testament_papyri) - accessed 2009/01/01,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chester\\_Beatty\\_Papyri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chester_Beatty_Papyri) - accessed 2009/01/01,

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxyrynthus\\_manuscripts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxyrynthus_manuscripts) - accessed 2009/01/01,

[http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/bibliographies/new\\_testament.pdf](http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/bibliographies/new_testament.pdf) - accessed 2009/01/01,

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/manuscripts.html> - accessed 2009/01/01,

and <http://www.bibletexts.com/bibliogr/02bib-hg.htm> - accessed 2009/01/01.

The interested student should be able to discover even more by googling New Testament manuscripts bibliography.

I also found an Amazon catalog page for Elliot, J.K.; *A Bibliography of Greek New Testament Manuscripts*; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000 at:

<http://www.amazon.com/Bibliography-Testament-Manuscripts-Society-Monograph/dp/0521770122> - accessed 2009/01/01.

### Chapter 3: Transmission

At the beginning of Chapter 2 above, we saw that the Sources for Textual Criticism include all the manuscript copies and other witnesses and evidences which we have available, and which we will compare, analyze, and synthesize into the closest possible match for the original autograph of the document we are studying.

In order to perform proper analyses, it's helpful to understand how the sources came to have the wordings that they do, and to understand how the variants between the sources came to be.

In the Introduction above, we examined a paperback copy of a book which began with "Andrew crouched behind the desk, checking the silenced 9mm while waiting for the girl with the AK-47 to come out of the dark office", and we compared it with a hardcover copy of the book which began with "Andrea crouched behind the desk, checking the silenced 9mm while waiting for the guy with the AK-47 to come out of the dark office."

We immediately concluded that someone had made a mistake, and that perhaps it was the typesetter who worked on the paperback, or the typesetter who worked on the hardcover, or maybe it was one of the editors.

Eventually, after further research, we concluded that "Andrew" and "girl" were the correct readings, instead of "Andrea" and "guy".

But this leaves the question, "How did the errors occur?"

Perhaps the typesetter accidentally hit "a" instead of "w" on the linotype keyboard, producing "Andrea" instead of "Andrew". (The "a" is not quite as close to the "w" on a linotype keyboard as it is on a computer keyboard, but it's still close).

Or, perhaps the typesetter's glasses were dirty, or his eyes were weak, and he simply misread the word in the manuscript.

Or, maybe it was the editor who misread the word.

The point of all this is that, in Textual Criticism, if you understand how errors occur, you have a better chance of assessing which variant readings are more likely to have been the result of a scribal error than other variant readings. Thus, you will also have a better chance of determining the correct reading.

For example, it's easy to see how you might accidentally strike an "a" instead of a "w" on a computer keyboard. But accidentally striking a "p" instead of a "w" is much more unlikely. So, if you see an "a" where you expect a "w", you might conclude a mistake had been made. But, if you see a "p" where you expect a "w", you might instead conclude the writer intended the "p" to be there, even though it may not look right to you.

At this point, it's **VERY IMPORTANT** to note that the necessity for Textual Criticism does **NOT** mean our Bibles are full of errors.

In fact, it's quite the opposite. The ability of Textual Criticism to ferret-out scribal variants means the text of our Bibles is very close indeed to that of the original autographs. And, none of the scribal variants impact any of the major doctrines of the Bible.

“You may hear someone speaking of the thousands of variants in the manuscripts of the Bible, and in one sense, they are speaking the truth, as there are thousands of variants. One number that appears often in this context is 200,000 variants in the New Testament alone! But just as it is wise to listen closely to what a politician is saying, it is wise to look closely at this claim as well. If you put ten people in a room and asked them all to copy the first five chapters of the Gospel of John, you would end up with ten ‘different’ copies of John. In other words, no two handwritten copies would be *absolutely identical* to each other. Someone would skip a word that everyone else has. One person would misspell that *one* word that they can *never* get right. Someone would probably skip a line, or even a verse, especially if there were similar words at the beginning or end of the verse before and the verse after. So you would end up with a lot of *variants*. But would you not have ten copies of the same book? Yes, you would, and by comparing all ten copies you could rather easily reproduce the text of the original, because when one person makes a mistake, the other nine are not likely to do so at the very same spot.” (White, pp. 38-39).

Today, we have well over 5,000 handwritten manuscripts of all or a portion of the New Testament still available for our inspection and comparison. No other ancient book or document has anywhere near that number of manuscripts available. Most have less than 100 copies still extant. We can get far closer to the original autographs of the Bible than we can to any other ancient book or document in existence.

Why did God allow *any* corruption of His word at all? Is he not omnipotent? Could He not have miraculously preserved it, absolutely perfect in *all* its copies?

Of course He could have. So why didn't He?

I don't know. Nobody can fully know the mind of God.

Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (KJV).

We *can* know the things God has revealed to us in the Bible, but God has *not* told us everything *He* knows.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (KJV).

Perhaps God allowed scribal variations to occur in order to keep us from Bibliolatry: the worship of the book instead of God. The Bible's job is to tell us *about* God, **NOT** to be an idol in place of God.

Consider, for example, the "King James Only" movement.

'The King James-only position is often associated with the name of Peter S. Ruckman of Pensacola, FL. He is, without question, the most extreme example of the King James-only position. For instance, Ruckman holds that the KJV is superior to the Greek text from which it is translated and even superior to the originals themselves. Ruckman also denies that the original manuscripts were verbally inspired. He believes that the KJV corrects errors in the Greek text and that mistakes in the KJV are advanced revelation.' (Combs, pp. 254-255).

Now, I myself hold the King James Version in very high regard. In fact, on many assembled grounds, I personally believe the KJV is, in many ways, closer to the original autographs than are many of our more "modern" translations. For example, with Hodges and Farstad, Sturz, and others, I believe there are many valid reasons for considering the majority text to be, in many variants, closer to the original autographs than is NA27.

But, Dr. Ruckman and his followers seem to have carried their preference for the KJV almost to the point where they're worshipping the KJV instead of God. *Anything* which claims your ultimate allegiance, other than God Himself, is an idol. And, God **HATES** idolatry!

So... To get back to our primary question in this Chapter on Transmission, ...

How did all these variants in all these manuscripts come to be?

In the first couple of centuries after Christ, the copies of the New Testament documents were most probably made by private individuals for private use. Many of them may have been copied by people with little literary training, rather than by professional scribes.

And the underlying message of the documents may have been considered far more important than word order and other details. It is clear that some copyists even made intentional changes, based perhaps on a parallel account in another book of the Bible, or for other reasons that seemed equally valid to them at the time.

And the variants were cumulative in many cases. "A" makes a copy for his friend "B" and accidentally skips a word. There is now one variant in B's copy. Later, "B" makes a copy for his friend "C" and misspells a different word. There are now two variants in C's copy. Later than that, "A" makes another copy for his friend "D", and doesn't skip the word he skipped in B's copy. But he does accidentally skip a different word, and he also accidentally copies one word twice in a row. There are now two variants in D's copy, but they're not the same as the two variants in C's copy. And, so on.

Eventually this leads to various local families of copies. "C" moves 500 miles east, and makes copies for new friends. All those copies have the two variants which were in C's copy, (probably

with additional variants of their own). They all, together, form a “family” of copies, characterized by the two “C” variants. Meanwhile, “D” moves 500 miles west, and makes copies for new friends. All those copies have the two variants which were in D’s copy. They all, together, form a “family” of copies, characterized by the two “D” variants.

Eventually, when Christianity became an “official” religion under the Roman Emperor Constantine’s Edict of Milan in 313 A.D., the various local texts began to give way to a dominant standard text. That text eventually became the “Byzantine” text, which was the basis for the “Textus Receptus” (TR), the Greek text from which the English King James Version was translated in 1611 A.D.

Roughly 95% of the MSS currently extant date from the eighth century A.D., and very few of these vary appreciably from the Byzantine text. (Greenlee, p. 54).

What different types of variants might occur? The following list is summarized from Greenlee, pp. 55-61:

- I. Unintentional Changes
  - A. Do it
  - B. Errors of Sight
    1. Wrong division into words. With no space between words, errors in picking the division points were possible.
    2. Confusion between letters. It was easy to confuse **μ** with **ω**, for example.
    3. *Homoioteleuton*, i.e. skipping from one group of letters to a similar group of letters further down the page. A special case is *haplography*, i.e. writing a word once when it should be written twice. The opposite is *dittography*, i.e. writing a word twice when it should be written once.
    4. *Metathesis*, i.e. changing the order of letters or words, e.g. writing **ἐλαβον** instead of **ἐβαλον** in Mark 14:65.
    5. Other errors of sight.
  - C. Errors of Writing. Similar to the Errors of Sight, but made while writing, rather than while reading.
  - D. Errors of Hearing. Scriptoriums were places where one reader would read a document out loud, and several copyists would write down what he read. Variants could arise because vowels and diphthongs (two different vowels, one right after the other) were pronounced alike. For example, **ι**, **υ**, **η**, **ει**, **οι**, and **υι** all came to be pronounced like the English “ee” in feet.
  - E. Errors of Memory. The copyist might forget a word while copying and substitute a synonym instead.
  - F. Errors of Judgment. For example, a copyist might mistake a comment in the margin of his exemplar (the document he was copying from) for a correction which should be in the text itself, or vice versa.
- II. Intentional Changes
  - A. Grammatical and Linguistic Changes. The copyist might “correct” words and passages he considered to be poor grammar.

- B. Liturgical Changes. If a New Testament passage, in slightly different form, was regularly used in the liturgy of the local church, the copyist might include the familiar form instead of what was actually in his exemplar.
- C. Elimination of Apparent Discrepancies. For example, some MSS make the Prodigal Son complete the speech he was contemplating in Luke 15:19.
- D. Harmonization. This is most common in MSS of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) where attempts were sometimes made to make various parallel passages read the same across different gospels.
- E. Conflation. This is the combining of two or more existing variants into one composite reading.
- F. Attempts to Correct a Manuscript Error. A copyist might “correct” something which he thought was an erroneous reading in his exemplar.
- G. Doctrinal Changes. This is altering the text to conform more closely to what the copyist might perceive as doctrinal “truth”.

## Chapter 4: Principles and Practice

“The method of textual criticism which has been generally practiced by editors of classical Greek and Latin texts involves two main processes, recension and emendation. Recension is the selection, after examination of all available material, of the most trustworthy evidence on which to base a text. Emendation is the attempt to eliminate the errors which are found even in the best manuscripts.” (Metzger, 1992, p. 156).

### Two Basic Criteria

There are two basic criteria for the practice of New Testament Textual Criticism:

1. Among a group of variant readings for a given part of a passage, select the variant which best explains how the other variants came to be.
2. Reconstruct the history of a variant reading before forming a judgment about it.

### Metzger’s Rules

The following rules and considerations for evaluating variant readings are summarized from Metzger, 1992, pp. 209-210 (Within this outline, I use “better” to mean “more likely to be closer to the original autographs”):

- I. External Evidence
  - A. The date of the witness – Metzger holds that, generally, older is better; more so the age of the text type than the age of the document itself.
  - B. The independent geographical distribution of the witnesses which agree with the variant.
  - C. The weighted genealogical relationships among the witnesses.
- II. Internal Evidence
  - A. Transcriptional Probabilities, depending upon paleographical details and scribal habits.
    1. In general the more difficult reading (for the copyist) is better, but this criterion can be overdone.
    2. In general, the shorter reading is better, except where:
      - a. Homoioteleuton may be involved.
      - b. The copyist may have omitted material he deemed:
        - (i) Superfluous
        - (ii) Harsh
        - (iii) Doctrinally unsound.
    3. Verbal dissidence (rather than harmonization) between passages is better.
    4. To make the text smoother, copyists would sometimes:
      - a. Replace an unfamiliar word with a synonym

- b. Atticize a passage (alter a less refined grammatical form to be more elegant – Attic Greek was the Greek of literature, i.e. more formal than the common, everyday Koine Greek).
  - c. Add pronouns, conjunctions, or expletives.
- B. Intrinsic Probabilities, i.e. what the author was more likely to have written, considering:
  - 1. The author's style and vocabulary throughout the book.
  - 2. The immediate context.
  - 3. Harmony with what the author says elsewhere, and with the Gospels' message.
  - 4. The Aramaic background of Jesus' teaching.
  - 5. The priority (according to Metzger) of the Gospel of Mark.
  - 6. The influence of the Christian community upon the formulation and transmission of the passage being examined.

### **The Process**

Given these criteria and rules, the process of Textual Criticism involves five steps (cf. Colwell, p. 160-171):

1. Start with the individual manuscript readings.
2. Describe the characteristics of the individual copyists and manuscripts.
3. Collect the manuscripts into groups.
4. Construct a historical framework.
5. Make a final judgment of the preferred reading.

1. Start with the individual manuscript readings: It's really not sufficient to just concentrate on the variant readings of the passage in question. In order to be able to adequately make a final judgment, one needs to be familiar with the style of the original author, and with the styles of the copyists being compared.

Textual critics need to read both intensively and extensively in the documents. To be familiar with Paul's style, for example, requires reading the entire Pauline corpus in the original Greek, as well as in a wide selection of different versions. The goal is to be able to look at any given passage in any Pauline manuscript, and be immediately able to judge whether or not Paul would have been likely to word the passage in just that way.

While it's not likely for the critic to be able to definitively identify one particular individual copyist over a range of different manuscripts, it is possible to categorize copyists as, for example, unlearned private copyists, students-in-training, professional scribes, etc. based on the overall general quality of the given manuscript. Then, with practice, the textual critic should become adept at determining how a given variant was most likely to have occurred, based on the category of copyist involved.

2. Describe the characteristics of the individual copyists and manuscripts: What kinds of errors is this particular copyist prone to make? How does he copy the text? (letter-by-letter, syllable-by-

syllable, word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase, etc.). Is he careful or careless? Did he tend to edit the work as well as copy it?

Is this particular manuscript an uncial or a miniscule? Is it on papyrus or upon parchment? Of what date or period is it? Where was it discovered? Where is it assumed to have been prepared? Was it produced for private use or as a literary document?

3. Collect the manuscripts into groups: If two manuscripts are highly alike, it may be reasonable to think they have a common ancestor, i.e. they may both have been copied from the same exemplar, or may have each descended from copies which were copied from the same exemplar.

Colwell argues there are three levels of groupings. *Families* are groups of manuscripts which are so close together that it's often possible to construct a stemma (a tree) showing the relationships between the individual manuscripts, and reconstructing their archetype. *Tribes* are groups of families, larger and less closely related than families, and smaller and more closely related than text-types. *Text-types* are the largest identifiable groupings of manuscripts.

In many cases, the textual critic will be more concerned with placing manuscripts in groups which have already been defined by the Textual Criticism community, rather than with establishing new groupings. For example, Family I, Family II, and Family 13 are already defined groups within the collection of New Testament MSS.

The New Testament MSS have been generally categorized into four major text-types: the Alexandrian, the Caesarean, the Western, and the Byzantine. However, these category titles are more just convenient names than geographical descriptors. Some "Caesarean" MSS, for example, were never anywhere near Caesarea. And, some "Western" MSS were found further east than most others.

4. Construct a historical framework: This historical framework describes, verbally and/or graphically, the interrelationships among the MSS the critic is studying, and specifying where and how a given manuscript derives from another, and also where and how it contributes to another.

For example, manuscripts "B" and "C" may derive from "A", "D" and "E" may derive from "B", manuscripts "C" and "E" may contribute to "F", "B", "D", and "F" may contribute to "G", etc. Such mixing and mixtures are not at all uncommon in the descent of MSS.

5. Make a final judgment of the preferred reading: Eventually, you have to make a decision. You have to apply all these analyses, along with a judicious consideration of the internal evidence, and conclude, "This is the reading which I believe most closely corresponds to the text of the original autograph".

### **Example**

As an example of this process, let's look at Luke 15:21. This verse is part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (cf. Greenlee, pp. 127-129).

In verses 18-19, the son, having wasted all his money and fallen to caring for pigs (a detestable job for a Jew) thinks to himself:

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” (KJV).

But, in verses 21-22, according to the KJV, the NIV, the NASB, and most other translations, he doesn't actually complete this statement when he arrives home. He breaks off after “no more worthy to be called thy son”. He doesn't say “make me as one of thy hired servants”.

Many have conjectured that this is because his father was so overjoyed to see his son, that he interrupted him before he could complete the statement. Verses 21-22 read:

“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet”. (KJV).

However, a significant number of the extant MSS do, in fact, show the Prodigal Son actually completing the statement.

1. The external evidence is mixed. Within the Alexandrian Text-type, the inclusion of the final phrase is supported by the two major witnesses often associated with the modern translations: Sinaiticus (**Ⲛ**) and Vaticanus (**B**). According to these witnesses, verses 21-22 should read:

“And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet”. (KJV).

Within the Alexandrian Text-type, the inclusion of the phrase is also supported by MSS (**X**), 33, 1241; while its omission is supported by **p**<sup>75</sup>, **L**, **Q**, **Δ**, **Ψ**, 892, sa, bo.

Within the Byzantine Text-type, the inclusion of the phrase is supported by manuscript **U**; while its omission is supported by **A**, **K**, **P**, **Γ**, **Δ**, **Λ**, **Π**, **Ω**, goth, Byz.

Within the Caesarean Text-type, the inclusion of the phrase is supported by MSS 700, 1071; while its omission is supported by **N**, **Θ**, **f**<sup>1</sup>, **f**<sup>13</sup>, 28, 157, 565, 1071, **sy**<sup>pal</sup>, geo, arm.

Within the Western Text-type, the inclusion of the phrase is supported by manuscript **D**; while its omission is supported by it, **sy**<sup>c.s</sup>, (Aug).

On the modern, text critical, weighted basis, the external evidence seems about equally divided.

2. In analyzing the internal evidence concerning this state of affairs, most textual critics would see the shorter version as being the most likely to give rise to the longer version, rather than vice versa. This would be because, faced with an exemplar with the longer reading, there would be no reason for the copyist to drop the phrase while copying verse 21.

On the other hand, if working from an exemplar with the shorter reading, the copyist could very well reason that the boy planned in verse 19 to say the final phrase, and thus it must have been accidentally left out of verse 21. The copyist would thus “correct” that error and add the phrase “back in” to verse 21.

3. Neither reading seems to be particularly “difficult”, so Metzger’s Rule II-A-1 wouldn’t apply here.

4. The Greek word order here is different from what is normal in English. Thus, the phrase “no more worthy to be called thy son” in the Greek (within the limits of the Times New Roman font – the font doesn’t have the rough breathing mark) is:

**οὐκέτι εἰμί ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου**

while the phrase “make me as one of thy hired servants” is”

**ποιήσόν με ὡς ἓνα τῶν μισθίων σου**

Since both of these phrases end in **σου**, the copyist might have accidentally skipped from the first **σου** to the second, thus missing the entire second phrase. Thus, if the change was unintentional, the longer reading would be preferred.

Of course, if the change was intentional, then the shorter reading would be preferred, by Metzger’s Rule II-A-2.

5. Which reading would be more characteristic of Luke’s style? The evidence is not clear either way.

After considering and weighing all these different evidences, essentially all textual critics, including Hodges and Farstad on majority reading grounds, and also including myself, have concluded that the reading closest to the original autograph would omit the final phrase. Thus, Luke 15:21 would end with **οὐκέτι εἰμί ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου**.

## Chapter 5: Controversies

The largest and main controversy of New Testament Textual Criticism, today, can be summed-up by comparing this statement of Metzger with Hodges and Farstad. Metzger says:

“Readings which are early and are supported by witnesses from a wide geographical area have a certain initial presumption in their favour. On the other hand, readings which are supported by only Koine or Byzantine witnesses (Hort’s Syrian group) may be set aside as almost certainly secondary. The reason that justifies one in discarding the Koine type of text is that it is based on the recension prepared near the close of the third century by Lucian of Antioch, or some of his associates, who deliberately combined elements from earlier types of text. Despite the fact that it appears in a large majority of Greek manuscripts (for it was adopted, with subsequent modifications, as the received text of the Greek Orthodox Church), the abundance of witnesses numerically counts for nothing in view of the secondary origin of the text-type as a whole. (Metzger, 1992, p. 212).

But, Hodges and Farstad say:

“The Majority Text is a text that employs the available evidence of the whole range of surviving manuscripts rather than relying chiefly on the evidence of a few. To us it is unscientific to practically ignore eighty to ninety percent of the evidence in any discipline.

“For all intents and purposes since Westcott and Hort’s time, the readings of the majority of manuscripts have been rejected as ‘late and secondary’. Much of the support for this approach has been the theory that there was an official ecclesiastical recension thrust upon the church in the fourth century, thus explaining the preponderance of so-called Byzantine manuscripts thereafter. Another support was that no manuscript evidence before the fourth century apparently supported Byzantine readings. Further, a handful of alleged conflations was used to suggest that the traditional text was full of them. (Actually, all manuscripts have some.) History has not yielded any evidence of such a recension, and this aspect of the theory is now largely abandoned. Second- and third-century papyri now support many readings that were once dismissed as ‘late.’ Furthermore, many of the ‘conflations’ can be just the opposite: a fuller text from which part has dropped out by such things as Homoioteleuton, stylistic or theological considerations, or sheer carelessness.” (Hodges and Farstad, pp. v-vi).

Those who would fall into Metzger’s camp are further divided into those who practice what is called Reasoned Eclecticism, and those who practice Thoroughgoing (or Rigorous) Eclecticism. Reasoned Eclecticism gives balanced consideration to both External and Internal Evidences. Thoroughgoing Eclecticism, on the other hand, relies primarily, or almost exclusively, upon Internal Evidences.

Conversely, relying primarily upon *External* Evidences generally leads to the Majority Text position, or something similar.

Metzger's Rule I-A holds that, generally, older is better. Hodges and Farstad maintain that "majority rules" is a better philosophy. How do we decide? Americans, and citizens of other democratic countries, are preconditioned to favor majority rule. But an introduction to the Telephone Game usually changes their mind.

In the Telephone Game, everybody sits in a big circle and someone pulls a very short story (usually only two or three sentences long) out of a hat. That person whispers the story in the ear of their neighbor on their right. The neighbor then whispers the story to the neighbor on *their* right, and so on, until the story comes back to the one who originally pulled it from the hat. The amount of distortion and error the story has picked up during its trip around the circle is usually hilarious.

Anyone who plays this game quickly sees the merit of Metzger's viewpoint: the further a copy gets from its original source, the more distorted it becomes. This becomes even more obvious when some of the people in the circle aren't as concerned as others about transmitting the story accurately.

Kurt and Barbara Aland have suggested four degrees of transmission mechanisms for MSS produced prior to 300 A.D.: 1) MSS copied with strict, meticulous care from their exemplars, 2) MSS copied with normal care, 3) MSS copied in a rather free manner, and 4) MSS copied periphrastically. (Black, pp. 39-40).

Once someone reaches agreement with Metzger's position, it's often difficult to pry them loose from it. But, there *are* some arguments which tend back towards the Majority Text view. Among the more persuasive are those which still maintain the concept of "older is better", while challenging the oldest known manuscripts' claims to priority.

Shortly after Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort of Cambridge University published the first modern critical edition, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, in 1881, John William Burgon, Dean of Chichester Cathedral published *The Revision Revised* in 1883.

Westcott & Hort's edition embodied what I have here called Metzger's Rules, and Burgon's book provided three primary arguments against it:

1. The Church's acceptance of the traditional Textus Receptus for over 1500 years was proof of its integrity.
2. It was incredible that the testimony of hundreds of later witnesses should be ignored in favor of a few supposedly early ones.
3. The traditional Textus Receptus was actually older and intrinsically superior.

The third argument faces what adherents of Metzger's Rules would consider to be an insurmountable obstacle, i.e. that the Textus Receptus didn't exist until after Lucian of Antioch developed it as a composite in the third century A.D.

But those favoring the Majority Text have disputed this claim. Some have suggested that the oldest MSS we have are only the oldest because they were set aside as incorrect copies. Thus,

they sat on the shelf while more correct copies didn't survive, because they were worn out through continued use.

But that proposed explanation seems somewhat contrived. Therefore, I'd like to offer an alternate scenario:

The manuscript Westcott and Hort considered most important was Sinaiticus (Ⲛ). Sinaiticus is a late fourth century manuscript which was discovered by Dr. Constantin von Tischendorf at the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai in 1844. Mt. Sinai is in the desert of Judea.

Except for Codex Vaticanus (B), almost every one of the MSS older than Sinaiticus were papyri, either found in the Egyptian desert (roughly 80%), or the place they were discovered is unknown. Of those whose discovery location is known, over 60% were all found in the ancient rubbish dump in the desert outside of Oxyrhynchus, Egypt. (Comfort, 1990, pp.32-73).

Vaticanus is a mid-fourth century manuscript which has been housed in the Vatican Library in Rome since it appeared in that Library's first catalog in 1475 A.D. Its location prior to that is unknown.

Conversely, the Majority Text manuscripts come primarily from the Byzantine (also known as Syrian) Text-type. The Byzantine Empire was the eastern remnant of the Roman Empire; the remnant which remained after the Fall of Rome in the fifth century A.D. It survived until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The capital city was Constantinople, which is now Istanbul, Turkey. Antioch of Syria was also in the Byzantine Empire.

Much of the Byzantine Empire bordered on the Mediterranean or the Black Sea, and was a much more temperate and humid region than the deserts of Egypt and Judea. Papyrus does not survive as well or as long in a humid climate, as it does in a dry desert climate.

Thus, my alternate suggestion is that the oldest MSS we have are only the oldest because they were stored in the desert instead of the more humid regions where the Byzantine Text-type was common.

And, note again from above; Hodges and Farstad report "Second- and third-century papyri now support many readings that were once dismissed as 'late.'"

Sturz says "Although the reasoning of [Westcott & Hort] seemed sound at the time they wrote, discoveries since then have undermined the confident appraisal that characteristically Syrian readings are necessarily late." (Sturz, p. 55).

And also, "Numerous distinctively Byzantine readings now proved early would seem to reverse the burden of proof. Instead of assuming that characteristically Byzantine readings are late, it may be more logical and more in accord with the facts to assume that they are early." (Sturz, p. 65).

During the first and second centuries A.D., there was also a growing movement to “improve” writings in Koine Greek (in general, not just in Bible MSS), by substituting more formal Attic phraseology.

Kilpatrick writes, “Westcott and Hort may have owed some of their partiality for **NB** to the fact that these manuscripts often display a brevity and an idiom which is akin to the classical Greek on which they were brought up. In particular, this led to a serious underestimate of A and the Syrian text as they called it. We have however noticed several places where A or the Byzantine manuscripts preserve a feature of the *Koine* where **NB** give us the Attic equivalent.” (Kilpatrick, p.31).

As a result of this main controversy, several subsidiary controversies have arisen.

Should the entire Story of the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11) be deleted from the Bible, or should it remain? No English version of the Bible has actually been bold enough to exclude it, but the “modern” versions deprecate it. For example, the NASB adds the footnote, “John 7:53-8:11 is not found in most of the old mss.” And, the NIV sets it off between two dividing lines, headed by the statement, “The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11.”

Should the last half of the last chapter of Mark be deleted? The NIV says, “The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.”

Should all sixteen chapters of Romans be included in the Book of Romans, or should the last chapter, or the last two chapters, be excluded, or perhaps included in the Bible, but at another place? “It has been a strong and growing conviction among many critics that the transmitted texts of at least some of the letters of Paul do not correspond in form to the letters actually written by Paul, but are to be regarded as ‘editorial products’ in which originally independent pieces of Paul’s correspondence are conflated.” (Gamble, p. 11).

Are the “King James Only” advocates right when they accuse the modern translations of denying the role of the Holy Spirit in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and other such mutilations of Scripture? Or are their arguments invalid.

And a plethora of smaller, but still fascinating, controversies await the textual critic’s attention, almost at every turn of the page.

This, then, is Textual Criticism.

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For students who would like to continue, and to explore Textual Criticism in more depth, I highly recommend you begin with Greenlee. It’s a 160-page softcover, and the first sentence in its Preface says, “This book is a primer.” Indeed, it is; but a primer which covers the material exceptionally well, and in clear and easy-to-follow language.

The book should be readily available in most Theological and Divinity School libraries, often in multiple copies; your local public library should be able to obtain it for you by interlibrary loan. Alternatively, I found it available from Amazon for \$11.53 at:

[http://www.amazon.com/Introduction-New-Testament-Textual-Criticism/dp/1565630378/ref=sr\\_1\\_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1230916434&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Introduction-New-Testament-Textual-Criticism/dp/1565630378/ref=sr_1_3?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1230916434&sr=1-3)

(accessed 2009/12/02).

## Glossary and Bibliography

### Glossary

BHS = *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*

KJV = King James Version.

LXX = The Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament.

MSS = Manuscripts.

MT = Masoretic Text.

NA27 = Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> Edition (of the Greek New Testament).

NASB = New American Standard Bible.

NIV = New International Version.

UBS4 = United Bible Societies' 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (of the Greek New Testament).

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