

The Majority text of the Greek New Testament

**By
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**Introduction by
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by Wilbur N. Pickering.

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Abbreviations

MS	manuscript
MSS	manuscripts
NT	New Testament
TR	Textus Receptus
M	Majority Text
A	Alexandrian Text
W	Western Text
W-H	Westcott and Hort and their text
TT	Traditional Text

INTRODUCTION

By Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD

It is refreshing to read a defense of the Majority Text of the Greek New Testament written by an Italian living in Italy. The author gives a good introduction to the subject of New Testament textual criticism for the lay person, including a brief review of the facts of history that make the practice of textual criticism necessary. However, since this is an introduction, anyone who wishes to pursue the matter should consult the works of Burgon, Scrivener or Miller—in our day those of Maurice Robinson or myself.

The author wrote the article directly in English; it is well done, but there are little things that show that he is not a native speaker.

Giuseppe Guarino is to be commended for a job well done; I recommend this article to the interested lay person.

Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD

PREFACE

By the author

The goal of this writing is not controversy. What led me to write about textual criticism of the New Testament and consequently about my preference for the Majority text, is my excitement for the wonderful way God preserved His Word through a journey lasted now about two thousand years – I speak of the New Testament only.

I hope the reader, whatever his opinions about this subject may be, will understand my work as an effort in the direction of communicating confidence in the supernatural way God gave His Word to the man of the XXI century.

The goal is always: “That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.” 2 Timothy 3:17.

CHAPTER ONE

Textual Criticism and the Greek New Testament

The Bible is a collection of books. Some of them date as early as the fifteenth century BC. The latest written, very probably the Gospel of John and the book of Revelation, ~~both dating around the end of first century AD.~~ Too far from the invention of print to have taken advantage of it. The first book printed from movable types was a Bible in the middle of the fifteenth century. Along with other old books before that epoch making event, the preservation and diffusion of the Bible was exclusively connected to the hand copying process.

Hand copying, though a very developed art even in old times, was subject to let mistakes enter the text. This applies to all kinds of books and being the Bible also a book, it applies, to a certain extent, to the Bible too.

Textual Criticism is the study of the available, surviving manuscript evidence in order to recover either: 1.the original text of a book or 2.the best retraceable text. A lot easier said than done.

As far as textual criticism of extra biblical books is concerned, critics face two main problems: the late date of manuscripts available and the scarcity of them.

Bruce M. Metzger gives some interesting numbers. Homer's Iliad survives in less than 600 manuscripts. Euripides works are preserved in less than 400 manuscripts. The complete Annals of Tacitus in one manuscript only dating from the ninth century. Biblical textual criticism on the contrary, deals with too large an amount of manuscripts the date of some being relatively close to the originals. In this article I will take into closer consideration the New Testament only, taken for granted that the so called Masoretic

Text is still the best text available of the Old Testament, very well attested and confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Among them the so called Great Isaiah Scroll, dated 100 BC. When compared to the Masoretic text, it showed that: “Despite of the fact that the Isaiah scroll was about a thousand years older than the Masoretic version of Isaiah, the two were nearly identical...” The results obtained from comparative studies of this kind have been repeated for many other scriptural books represented at Qumran. The large majority of the new scrolls do belong to the same textual tradition as the Masoretic text. They are, however, centuries older and thus demonstrate in a forceful way how carefully Jewish scribes transmitted that text across the years.” James C. Vanderkam, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Today*, page 126.

Just to give an idea, in round numbers, this is the situation of the New Testament surviving manuscripts:

- More than 5000 manuscripts survive, which contain all or part of the Greek New Testament. One need only consider that “The Book of Revelation is the least well-attested part of the New Testament, being preserved in about 300 Greek manuscripts”. Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1968, Oxford University Press, page 34.

- 8000 mss witness to the Latin Vulgate, the famous translation by Jerome. Also many other mss contain other versions of the Bible.

- More than 2000 lectionaries.

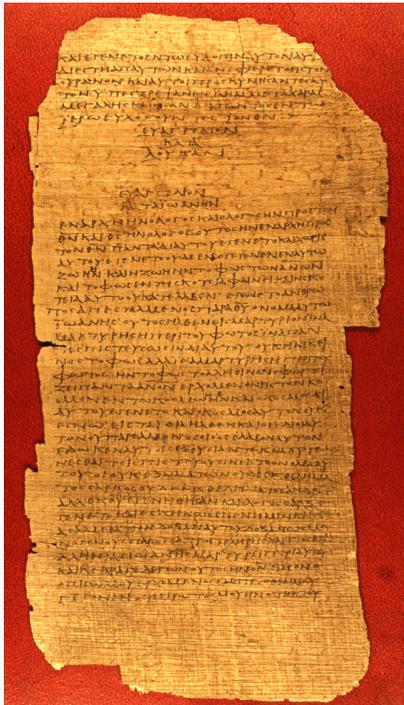
- Bible quotations in early Christian writers - the so called Church Fathers - are also very important. They witness both to readings of the text and the use and existence of New Testament books.

I think what said will suffice to show the incredible amount of evidence surviving of the New Testament. What about the age of such evidence?

P52 - picture here on the right - is a papyri fragment of the gospel of John. It has been dated around 125 BC or even earlier! One need but quickly consider what an incredible witness this is and realize the priceless source of information such a small document may be. It gives evidence of the existence of John's Gospel at such an early period, giving a definite confirmation of the traditional dating of this gospel.



Recently a growing number of scholars has been supporting the theory that sees a fragment of the Gospel of Mark in the manuscript fragment 7Q5. It was found at Qumran and since this community disappeared in 70 BC, this ms may be evidence of the gospel of



Mark already having been written before that time. Also, if such identification is correct, 7Q5 is the first Christian scroll manuscript ever found. So far, only codex manuscripts were available. I discuss the matter concerning 7Q5 at length in another article.

The picture on the left reproduces the papyri P75. It belongs to the Bodmer Papyri collection. It has been dated 175-225 AD. It is very important for the portions of the gospel of John and his evident relation to the Vaticanus codex.

For a readable picture of this papyri check the Google or Yahoo images and search for P75. It is quite an experience – it was for me – to be able to read the beginning of John's Gospel straight from a 1800 year-old manuscript.

P66 - picture on the right - is another very old papyri ms. It is as old as the second



Century It has arrived at us in a very good state. It is part of the Bodmer Papyri collection.

More other papyri evidence has recently been collected and, apart from any textual value attached to them, they witness the existence and spread of the gospels as we know them as early as the traditional view has always believed.

B and א (read Aleph) are still the two oldest and most complete manuscripts, both containing almost the whole Bible and dating as early as the middle of the fourth century. Alef or codex Sinaiticus, was found on Mt. Sinai by Constantin Von Tischendorf, the famous textual critic. To honor its antiquity and importance it was named after the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet: א, Aleph. It originally contained all the Bible but it has not survived in its integrity though all the New Testament is still intact.

B or codex Vaticanus is part of the Vatican library. Though it dates early in the IV century, it was not available to critics until the second half of the nineteenth century.

The two last mentioned mss generally enjoy the most credit among scholars and are responsible for the editions of the New Testament from 1881 until today.

Another category of mss is the minuscule.

Up to the ninth century, New Testament Greek manuscripts were written in capital letters. That is why they are also called Uncials. But, from this time on, the text was transmitted in minuscule handwriting. Minuscule manuscripts were produced from the period down to the invention of print.

MS61 is a minuscule dated fifteenth-sixteenth century. It is at Trinity College at Dublin. It is very famous because it has the Johannine Comma, I John 5:7-8. Erasmus used this manuscript to motivate the inclusion of the Comma into the third edition of his Greek text, latter to be called Textus Receptus.

Category	Name	Century	Contents
PAPYRI	P45	III	Portions of Gospels and Acts
	P46	II-III	Portions of Paul's epistles
	P47	III	Epistles of Paul and Revelation
	P52	II	John 18:31-33, 37-38.
	P66	II-III	Portions of John
	P75	III	Portions of Luke and John
	CODEX	A	V
Alef		IV	The whole Bible
B		IV	The whole Bible
C		V	The whole Bible
D		V	New Testament in Latin and Greek
W		V	
MINUSCLES	33	IX	
	61	XIII	

CHAPTER TWO

Variant Readings and Text types

We said the copying process inevitably let mistakes creep into the text. To see how easy this is, do a very simple experiment: copy a long text. Then copy from the copy. Again produce another copy from the copy. The more copies of copies you produce, the more mistakes you will inevitably collect. Imagine this process delayed in hundreds of years.

Of course Bible manuscripts were cherished as they were God's Word, the reader would argue. This was the case for Jewish scribes, who were diligent in this task beyond imagination. They destroyed the manuscripts they were copying from, not to leave a mutilated copy of Scripture. They also reviewed their work and if more than a certain number of mistakes were found, they would destroy the copy produced as unfaithful to the original.

The same care, along with a specific skill, was developed in the monasteries devoted to the copying of books in the Middle Ages. But when the Gospel began to be spread among the Gentiles, it had to confront itself with a totally different frame of mind than the Hebrew's. What was most sacred to the Jew, could be subject to investigation by the Greek mind of the Gentile believers. This is why, besides unintentional mistakes, a number of variant readings found in manuscripts can be retraced down to the self overestimation of some early scribes.

In "The Identity of the New Testament Text", Wilbur Pickering writes: "the MSS contain several hundred thousand variant readings. The vast majority of these are misspellings or other obvious errors due to carelessness or ignorance on the part of the

copyists. As a sheer guess I would say there are between ten thousand and fifteen thousand that cannot be so easily dismissed- i.e., a maximum of five percent of the variants are "significant." Scholars Westcott and Hort argued something similar when they wrote: "...the amount of what can in any sense be called substantial variation is but a small fraction of the whole residuary variation, and can hardly form more than a thousandth part of the entire text." Westcott and Hort, "The New Testament in the Original Greek", p. 2.

We'll have to keep this in mind throughout our study. We are not looking for the text of the New Testament, but for the best text of the New Testament among the critical editions available today.

Identifying the peculiarities of ancient manuscripts, their variant readings, scholars have identified three main types of text. They are: the Western, the Alexandrian (or Egyptian) and the Majority (Syrian, Byzantine, Traditional) text.

Let me dismiss the term Byzantine text at once. It renders no justice to this type of text and implies a late deliberate production of it. This latter assumption is false, destitute of any historical support, the result of mere supposition. At the same time, calling it the Traditional text would go too far in the opposite direction. On the contrary, calling it the Majority text expresses a doubtless fact, i.e. it is the text found in the majority of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament.

The Western is a "longer" type of text, characterized by interpolations. It is found in the Uncial D and in manuscripts of the Old Latin Version. It also is a witness to some peculiar omissions in the Gospel of Luke. Some of them became famous thanks to Westcott and Hort, who isolated and adopted some of these omissions, calling them the *Western Non-Interpolations*.

The term Western is conventional, since it is very probable that this text originated in the East.

The Alexandrian is a "shorter" version of the Greek New Testament text.

The Majority stands between the two and it is rightly and simply called so because it is found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

Since the work of the scholars Westcott and Hort, the Alexandrian shorter text has been favoured by critics. The simple assumption is that the Western text has been clearly tempered with interpolations and that the Majority text has been produced *conflating* - we'll see later what is intended by this technical term - the Western and the Alexandrian text to produce a smooth readable text.

Some other scholars (a minority, to be honest) believe the Majority to be the closest to the original and the Egyptian to be a shorter version of it and the Western a longer one. I believe this latter case to be true and still to this day the Majority text is, in my opinion, to be preferred to the others.

Later in this article I will try to explain why.

History of the editions of the New Testament appeared on the scene since the invention of print, has seen various seasons of fortunes for the Alexandrian and the Majority text. Let us briefly consider the critical editions appeared since the invention of print.

CHAPTER THREE

Critical Editions of the Greek New Testament

The Textus Receptus

The first phase of the history of the printed editions of the Greek New Testament saw the rise of the so called Received Text, the Textus Receptus. It was the first published, by Desiderius Erasmus in 1516. Stephanus' fourth edition of 1551 was the first to contain our modern verse division.

In the Preface to the 1633 edition of the Elzevir brothers, it was written: “**textum** ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus **receptum**, in quo nihil immulatum aut corruptum damus”

From this, the name Textus Receptus, translated Received Text.

It was used by the translators of the King James Version of the Bible completed in 1611. It was translated by Diodati in Italian and French, by Luther in German.

The text of the TR is mainly the text of the majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts, though some readings are peculiar to the few manuscripts used to edit it. Acts 8.37, is an example: it is found in the TR but not in the Majority text. Another famous reading peculiar to the TR is I John 5:7. It was first introduced in a later edition (Erasmus' third edition of 1522) and ever since printed with it.

The critical value of the Textus Receptus can be judged from various points of view.

The usual objection is that only a few and late manuscripts were used when editing it. This is true. But it would be a false

representation if we do not add that, by incident or by the grace of God, the few manuscripts consulted contained the Majority Text. Personally - if this may be of any interest to the reader - I read and study on the KJV. If I read the Bible in Italian I still consider the Diodati Bible my favourite translation. But, since I have learned Greek, I have not read translations much. Of course I prefer the original. I consider the TR a good text since it includes the Majority text.

We can conclude that the value of the Textus Receptus, though, beyond any possible doubt, revision of it was necessary to improve its critical value, rests on the importance given to the Majority New Testament text.

The Westcott and Hort critical text

In 1881 two English scholars, Brooke Foss Westcott (1825-1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828-1829), published their edition of the New Testament, along with their theories in support of it. They claimed to have retraced and presented to the public what they called the Neutral Text, the closest text to the original possible. Their Greek Text is mainly based on the Vatican (B) and Sinaitic (Ⲛ) manuscripts, which had become available at their time. Bruce M. Metzger quotes them saying: "it is our belief that the readings of Ⲛ B should be accepted as the true readings until strong internal evidence is found to the contrary", Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of The New Testament*, second edition, 1968, Oxford University Press, page 133.

The reason for the success of their theory was due to a simple concept, very captivating to the mind of both the average Bible reader and the student: "the oldest, the best." An idea that any sufficiently honest scholar of textual criticism can disprove. But that can easily win the public's confidence on the reliability of their

work. Alexander Souter writes: “A manuscript’s importance does not of course depend solely on its age. An old manuscript is likely to be a more faithful representative of its ultimate original only because in its case there has been less time for corruption to accumulate...But a late manuscript may be the last of a series of faithful copies, and may thus preserve a better tradition than another manuscript actually much earlier in date of it.” – The Text and Canon of the New Testament, page 18.

The Neutral Text that W-H thought to have retraced simply never existed. Kurt and Barbara Aland clearly agreed on the fact that there is no Neutral Text. The backbones of their theory were mere suppositions. Their *conflation* and Byzantine Text official *recension* theories were not supported by historical evidence.

I must confess that I consider their fame unmerited, since little or nothing remains of the validity of the reasons that led them to support the text they edited. Even their disrespectful attitude toward what they called the Byzantine text must be abandoned and today it is with right called the Majority text in the best editions of the Greek New Testament.

Another peculiarity of their theory were the so called Western Non-Interpolations. W-H collected nine Bible passages that were in all or in part omitted by the Western text representative Uncial Manuscript D, preferring this isolated witness against the rest of the New Testament evidence. They are Mt 27.49, Lk 22.19b-20, 24.3, 6, 12, 36, 40, 51 and 52. The discovery of Papyri unknown during the days when they developed their theory, if necessary, proved how unmotivated were such considerations on a part of the New Testament text so well supported by external evidence, and how personal judgement guided their ideas more than evidence.

Their absolute preference for shorter readings led them to support a text that contradicted even their favourite manuscripts, B and **8**, as well as the rest of the available evidence. Bruce Metzger says:

"...scholars have been critical of the apparently arbitrary way in which Westcott and Hort isolated nine passages for special treatment (enclosing them within double square brackets), whereas they did not give similar treatment to other readings that are also absent from the Western witnesses", A textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, Second Edition, United Bible Societies, p. 165.

We must agree with those who supposed that the only true success of these two scholars was to bring back to life a text – that found in the so called Alexandrian – Egyptian manuscripts - that the church had gotten rid of almost two thousand years earlier. This conviction stood at the base of the work of their opponents.

Burgon - Miller - Scrivener

John W. Burgon (1813-1888) another English scholar, raised his voice against the Westcott and Hort theory.

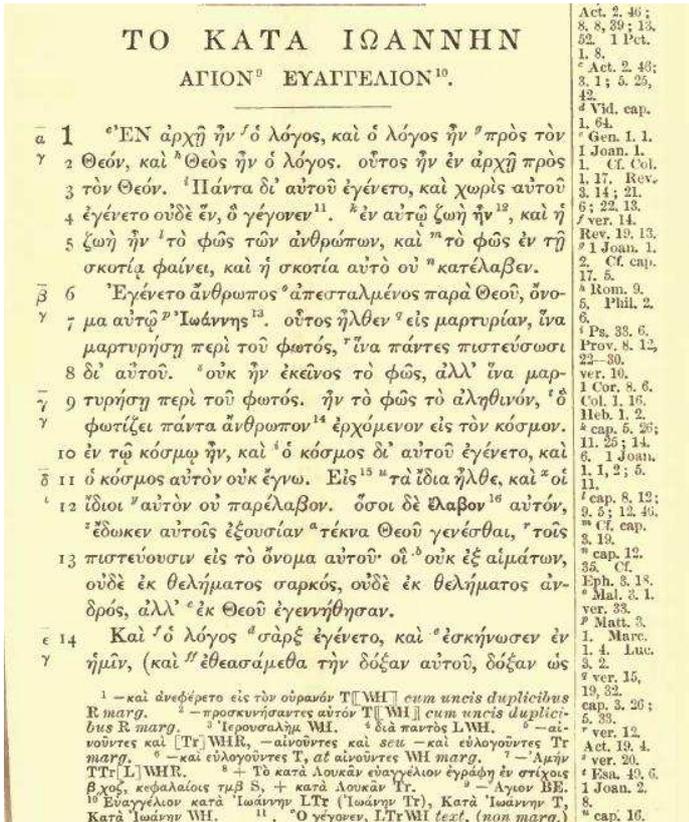
Among his books, he wrote: *The Last Twelve Verses of the Gospel According to S. Mark*, 1871. *Revision Revised*, 1883. *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, 1896. *The causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels*, 1896.

The latter two books were edited by Edward Miller.

Burgon supported the Majority text. He called it the Traditional Text, giving to it the dignity of the text which best represented the originals, being faithfully handed down, copied and spread by the church.

The sad thing is that it was very difficult to recover those seduced by the so captivating “the oldest, the best” slogan.

Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener (1813-1891) believed also in the superiority of the Majority text. I am a fan of his work and text. This great scholar was, in my opinion, very reliable and moderate,



sound in his research principles. His critical edition of the Greek New Testament is here reproduced in the picture. It is the beginning of the Gospel of John in the edition of 1887. It can be downloaded at www.archive.com. The text is that of Stephanus published in 1550 and translated in the King James Version, along with the changes made in the Revised Version of 1881. The apparatus showing the

readings of other critical editions, including Westcott and Hort, makes it very valuable. The facts that he was so moderate a supporter of the Traditional Text and that he served only the cause of a better knowledge of the text of the New Testament, mixed with his unforgivable fault not to have produced any sensational theory, I believe are the reasons why he is unknown to the public. True and honest servants of truth rarely produce sensational theories and their precious work is done in silent and very rarely will bring fame and fortune. I must add that his great contribution to textual criticism included the editing of Codex Bezae, the collation of Codex Sinaiticus, Alef, with the TR. He also wrote "A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament" 1861.

The Nestle-Aland text edited by Barbara and Kurt Aland, Karavidopoulos, Martini and Metzger

The most credited critical editions today are the Nestle-Aland and the UBS (United Bible Societies), which are virtually identical. I personally use very frequently the 27th edition of the N-A text. It is a very important reference work because of the critical apparatuses which offers a list of the variants of the manuscripts. Though I do not agree with some conclusions, the evidence is listed and this makes it most useful.

The text preferred is still mainly that of Westcott and Hort since most credibility is still given to the Alexandrian witnesses, B and \aleph . The more recent discovery of the papyri has somehow strengthened the witness to the Alexandrian-Egyptian manuscripts. Though, as I already said, Hort's basic principles have been reviewed. Kurt and Barbara Aland with confidence call their text the "Standard Text". They believe it represents the closest to the original ever presented to the public.

Pickering – Hodges and Farstad – Robinson and Pierpont

Recently a growing number of scholars have advocated the value of the Majority Text. This position stands in the Anglo-Saxon world, right between the two extremes of the KJV-TR only supporters and those who totally dismiss the Byzantine/Traditional/Majority text as of little or no critical value.

This school can be retraced in the positions of scholars already mentioned, like Burgon or Miller.

Wilbur N. Pickering has made a Majority Text available. It is found on line at www.walkinhiscommandments.com It is difficult not to recognize the value of this scholar's work as he argues for both the Majority text and the reliability of the New Testament.

The Majority text edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad has been published by Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville. This editor also made available a new translation of the TR, the New King James Version.

Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont edited another edition of the Majority Text, published by Chilton Book Publishing. It is available online at <http://koti.24.fi/jusalak/GreekNT/RP2005.htm>

Personally, I translated the book of Colossians into Italian from the critical text edited by Pickering and I made it available in my websites, www.ebiblicalstudies.com and www.studibiblici.eu.

The Majority text clearly emendates the TR of its mistakes and restores to its rightful place a very important witness to the Greek New Testament. I believe it is the closes text to the original, its archetype being, in my opinion, the originals themselves.

The King James Version – TR only position.

For the sake of information, it must be listed also a certain school of thought that boldly defends the TR and its most famous English translation, the King James Version. It is mainly a phenomenon of the English-speaking Christianity. It is also to be explained as a reaction to the bewildering confusion raised by so many new English translations being published.

Edward F. Hills in his studies defended and recalled the work of Dean Burgon, only to take it further and support the peculiar readings of the Textus Receptus. I personally don't feel like condemning Hills' work, since I see the honest efforts of a Bible-believing Christian defending the Authorized Version. Of course, I

cannot share his positions, but his book “the King James Defended¹” contains a lot of good information. Though the value of the Textus Receptus cannot be denied, since it is a good representative of the Majority text, some of its readings need be corrected. We cannot blame critics who support readings found in only one or two manuscripts and believe the TR to be a new autograph only because it is “the received text” even when it shows peculiar readings that have no possible textual value. Of course the revision of the nineteenth century - if it was really meant to improve the Textus Receptus - failed miserably.

Some organizations, like the Bible for Today in America or the Trinitarian Bible Society, defend the TR-KJV only position.

¹ I noticed it is available on line, in various websites.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Neologian Text and some of the basic principles behind it

The main stream of today's textual critics are still supporting the witness of B, Alef and the mss that associate with them. Their preference is clearly for the Alexandrian-Egyptian text. The road trodden today is still that inaugurated by Westcott and Hort, though the means used to travel in it are quite different.

The first and most significant practice behind the Neologian text is Eclecticism. Using this method, the critic chooses among the available variant readings, according to Intrinsic Probability and Transcriptional Probability. In lay terms, the personal judgment of the editor will lead him to choose among the available readings found in the extant manuscripts, according to what he believes the author of the inspired book might have written and how the scribes might have handled the text, the mistakes they might have done or their intentional changes introduced in it.

Colwell clearly pointed out that using such a method, manuscripts become only suppliers of readings. And the text of the critical editions based on this principle, though it may seem an incredible paradox, "taken as a whole, is not one found in any extant manuscript... **Modern eclectics have created an artificial entity with no ancestral lineage from any single historical MS or group of MSS**". We are speaking literally of critical texts that produce "a sequence of favored readings that at times – ever over short segments of text – has no demonstrated existence in any known manuscript, version or father." Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in The Original Greek, Byzantine Textform*, 2005.

In other words, Eclecticism in the hands of textual critics produces a text that has no archetype. It does not reflect the witness of any manuscript too, not even of the Alexandrian Type. It differs from Alef. It is different than B. It's not the text of P66. Nor that of P75. It is simply a further editing of the Alexandrian text, following, very probably, the principles of the scribes behind this text. The result, like the previous, is only a new isolated witness.

In my opinion, the weak link in today's textual criticism is that critics still follow the text of Westcott and Hort. Most of the pillars of the theory of those two scholars have been completely demolished, but incredibly the building is still up, the preference is still for the Alexandrian witnesses. Something is going wrong with this approach to the text of the New Testament. Hort had created a Neutral Text. But now it is abundantly clear that, if there ever was an archetype of the Alexandrian text, it is impossible to try to find it in the contradicting surviving manuscripts that are thought to derive from it. The only option left is internal evidence and personal judgment of the editors.

Official textual criticism has become an art. But it was meant to be a science. It has become the art of supplying first the translators and then the Bible readers with the available readings to choose from. Some principles of this *art* will be further discussed.

A very controversial rule, so famous with modern critics, is that "a shorter reading is more likely to be right than a longer." – Alexander Souter, *The Text and Canon of the New Testament*, page 110.

“As an editor the scribe of P45 wielded a sharp axe. The most striking aspect of this style is conciseness. The dispensable word is dispensed with. He omits adverbs, adjectives, nouns, participles, verbs, personal pronouns - without any compensating habit of

addition.”, E. C. Colwell, “Scribal habits in Early Papyri: A study in the corruption of the Text”, p. 383, quoted by Wilbur Norman Pickering and published in “True or False”, edited by David Otis Fuller, p. 250. According to the same authority the omission practice is peculiar of the scribe of P66. One need but compare the Alexandrian witnesses to understand how unsafe such confidence in the short readings can be, especially considering the fact that their omissions are peculiar to some of them and not to all. Their disagreement is often evidence of the liberties taken by the scribes behind this type of text and the tendency is clearly for omissions. Origen was a representative of the Christian school at Alexandria, in Egypt. Just to give an idea of the critical spirit at work in this branch of the church, I will quote a passage of his commentary on the Gospel according to Matthew: "But you will compare together His saying to Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan", with that said to the devil (who said to Him, "All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me"), "get thee hence", without the addition, "behind Me;" for to be behind Jesus is a good thing", The Ante-Nicene fathers, edited by A. Allan Menzies, fourth edition, Hendrickson Publishers, volume 9, p. 462.

Origen gives us here an example of what is technically called conjectural emendation, which is the most dangerous practice of textual criticism: the critic emendates the text not because of any external evidence but because of personal considerations. Since Origen thought it was impossible that Jesus had actually said to the devil: "get thee behind me, Satan", he supposed that "behind me" was not part of the original. Is it a wonder that the mss coming from the Alexandrian-Egyptian tradition support a shorter text? **This assumption - the short is the best - is false**. The shorter reading has no more right to be considered the closest to the original *a priori* than the longer. Such presumption must be abandoned. Or better, it proves that the preference given to a certain type of text is very

probably due to the fact that the scribes that produced that mutilated text and modern critics share a very similar frame of mind.

Westcott and Hort were deeply convinced that the Majority text was deliberately created in Antioch and that it was imposed on the church. This Byzantine **Recension** of the text would be visible in the examples of the so called *conflate readings* they propose to the reader. This was a backbone of their theory but it has not shaken the securities of the supporters of their text the simple fact that no trace in history remains of such an event. A theory based on assumptions based on silence or considerations on the state of the available text is at least weak and closer to speculation than to facts. The death blow to this Recension theory is that the Majority text is quoted by church fathers and some traces are found also in newly discovered papyri, taking its existence long before it is supposed to have appeared on the scene. P66 is said to agree in the first eight chapters of John more with the M readings (50.9%) than those of a (43.7%), *Studies in the Text and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, by Epp and Fee, pp.228, 233.

Bruce M. Metzger writes about Colossians 1:12: "The reading of B is an early conflation of both variants" the Majority and the Western.

How can an earlier text be influenced by a later fabricated text?

It is very instructive to consult Miller's work in this field. By a careful study he was able to retrace what Hort called Syrian or Byzantine readings in the writings of Christian writers in a time (before the IV century) where Hort believed they could not exist. In this same direction the results of Pickering's studies are very interesting. Today the birth of the Majority text has been taken back significantly. But not back enough in time, as I will state later. The Alands are convinced that official recensions occurred also in other branches of the Church. They think, anyway, that some old

mss preserve a text antedating those recensions. They boldly state that their so called *Standard Text* brings back to light a text that antedates such recensions. I believe that no historical evidence survives of such recensions and that it is more than doubtful that churches wanted or were able to impose a uniform text of the New Testament. I think I can say that the Standard Text is the best text that can be obtained today if the presumptions of textual critics are considered true. It is slightly different.

On top of any other rule and, being so simple and apparently obvious, is the first confident statement made by every supporter of the Standard Text: ***the oldest the best.***

If this is the case, the oldest papiry must be the recipient of the all the New Testament textual pureness.

Upon inspection, our expectations may very quickly turn into disappointment.

P45, P66 and P75 do not have in common antiquity only.

P66 is perhaps the oldest manuscript of the New Testament. It contains most of John. It is said that it is the earliest witness to omit the so called *Pericope de Adultera*, which is John 7:53 – 8:11. But to understand how reliable this manuscript is and the significance of the readings it supports, other facts must be weighed. Pickering records that it shows an average of two mistakes per verse. He argues that the scribe who copied this manuscript did not even know Greek, since the kind of mistakes he made clearly show that he copied the text syllable by syllable. This would have not been the case had he known the language. It has 482 singular readings. But if the oldest witness is the best, why can't we rely on this manuscript and review our text according to it? Because, notwithstanding its age, it is a bad copy, worth something just

because it survived to our days to witness the incompetent work of a scribe. A reason why it got to us maybe the fact that, because of the poor text, it must have been put aside and not even read.

P75 is another very old papyri manuscript. It is only a little less older than P66 but its text is of no better quality. It shows 257 singular readings, 25 percent of which are nonsensical. Pickering believes that this scribe also must not have known Greek, since, by the kind of mistakes he made it seems that he copied letter by letter.

“In general, P75 copies letters one by one; P66 copies syllables, usually two letters in length. P45 copies phrases and clauses. The accuracy of these assertions can be demonstrated. That P75 copied letters one by one is shown in the pattern of the errors. He has more than sixty readings that involve a single letter, and not more than ten careless readings that involve a syllable. But P66 drops sixty-one syllables (twenty-three of them in “leaps”) and omits as well as a dozen articles and thirty short words. In P45 there is not one omission of a syllable in a “leap” nor is there any list of “careless” omissions of syllables. P45 omits words and phrases...He shortens the text in at least fifty places in singular readings alone. But he does not drop syllables or letters. His shortened text is readable.” Colwell, *Scribal Habits* p. 380, 383.

Manuscripts produced even one thousand years later than the above are very easily more reliable and accurate than them. Age in itself does not mean much. A manuscript that has been copied without due care, though it may be closer to the original timewise, cannot be valued more than a later manuscript, come down through a number of faithful and accurate, honestly produced copies.

Yes, honestly. Because another reason for variant readings, besides mistakes due to the quality of the work of the scribe, are deliberate changes. The scribe of P45 literally created² a text of its own.

Westcott and Hort thought "the oldest was the best" also because they supposed that no deliberate changes were made to the text of the New Testament. All who believe that, must also be convinced with those two scholars that the extant manuscript show no trace of deliberate falsification of the text. Evidence prove the opposite to be true. Both as far as history and manuscript evidence are concerned. With this (false) presumption Hort believed that through what is called a *genealogical* method, knowing the practice of scribal work and retracing the accidental mistakes it introduces in the text, it would be possible to emend those mistakes and restore the original text.

We read of how some scribes handed the manuscripts with freedom. It deserves notice that such mss belonged to the Egyptian/Alexandrian tradition! We read of Origen, belonging to this school. It must be added that many heretic views came from this area of Christianity. Even the Christian school there was considered Gnostic Christian.

It is a known fact that heretics of the first centuries adulterated the text of manuscripts creating new copies that would fit to their ideas. The heretic Marcion mutilated his copies of Scripture in order to justify his heretical views. I think some of the omissions found in the mss tradition of Luke can be retraced to this heretic man. The Western Non-Interpolations supported by WH and found in the Uncial ms D may be a trace of such deliberate tempering of the text. Here is a direct witness to the deliberate adulterations of the New Testament. Caius (180-217 AD) was a Christian who wrote of the

² "Edited" is the technical term.

heretics: “...they have boldly laid their hands upon the divine Scriptures, alleging that they have corrected them...if any one should choose to collect and compare all their copies together, he would find many discrepancies among them.” – The Ante-Nicene fathers, edited by A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, volume 5, p. 602. To see the extent of how much some wanted credit for their heretic views one must only consider the many apocryphal gospels and other writings circulating in the first centuries of our era. The recent discovery of the gospel of Judah has only added one to the number of them we already know. The historical and religious value of those writings is well known to the informed and the antiquity of such forgeries will impress only the unaware of the multitude of heretical movements that rose in the first century of Christianity. Going back to our subject. W-H presumption of no deliberate changes affecting the transmission of the NT text, was wrong and their method and work were affected by that as well as other wrong assumptions. If not so, they would have not failed to see how suspicious it is that the witnesses of the Alexandrian text, to which the more recently papyri must be added, contradict one other all the time.

If a complete copy of Marcion mutilated text of the Bible was found today, would it be considered reliable and trustworthy only because of its age?

The problem Westcott and Hort had to solve before going on with their theories and produce their text was the Majority Traditional Text. Before being able to discard it, he had to find an explanation for something that has no other explanation than the supernatural work of God through the Church in preserving the New Testament.

So many independent witnesses, agreeing with one another, supporting the same text of the New Testament – too good to be true³.

In order to discard it altogether a satisfactory, rational explanation for its existence had to be found.

If I may add their attitude seems to me so close those of unbelievers when they are confronted with the most precious truths of the Christian faith, the virgin birth, the resurrection, etc. An explanation is desperately sought everywhere to avoid the simple witness of the apostles.

Westcott and Hort spoke of Byzantine or Syrian text, explaining its existence with a deliberate ecclesiastic recension that took place on the IV century. The church then went on to impose the edited text. Conflate readings would prove such event. This would explain the existence of the Majority text.

All works perfectly, doesn't it? Except for the fact that such an event never took place, since no trace in history is left, and no branch of the church was ever really able to impose (not in the IV century for sure) its text to the whole Christian world.

The so called Lucian Recension Theory now faded out of the scene and in the apparatus of critical editions (N-A 27th edition) you will read of M as an abbreviation for the Majority text.

But we must explain what that capital M stands for. Since, visibly, it gives the idea as of one isolated witness, we need to remark the weight of evidence that is included in that abbreviation indicating the Majority text.

Pickering writes: "Not only do the extant MSS present us with one text form enjoying a 95 percent majority, but the remaining 5 percent do not represent a single competing text form." He adds:

“The chief Alexandrian witnesses, B, A... & are in constant and significant disagreement among themselves, so much that there is no objective way of reconstructing an archetype. 150 years earlier the picture is the same; P45, P66 and P75 are quite dissimilar and do not reflect a single tradition.”

When I spoke of text types, I did for the sake of simplicity, following what is the reference of textual criticism’s manuals. I do not believe there are text types besides the Majority text. The above statements prove it abundantly. In fact, instead of looking for Hort’s neutral text, resting on their personal judgment and internal considerations, today’s textual critics evaluate each controversial reading adopting from time to time that supported by this or that manuscript. But please notice that behind that M supporting this or that reading against B or P75, there is a 95 percent consent of manuscript evidence.

Pickering makes it very clear and simple, the Majority text is “the result of an essentially normal process of transmission.”

The apostolic writings were faithfully copied from the first century on till the invention of print. Those few disagreeing witnesses are only deviations from this pure stream of manuscripts. Their disagreement among themselves proves it.

To recover the original text of the New Testament all that today’s scholars should really do is find the archetype of the Majority text. Praise God for those scholars who are working in this direction.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Majority Text

Most of what I know about the Majority Text I owe to John William Burgon. So I think it is more appropriate to present his authoritative voice instead of mine. He called the Majority Text the Traditional Text.

He writes: "their witness (Alexandrian MSS) does not agree together. The Traditional Text, on the contrary, is unmistakably one." – The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established by John William Burgon, p. 34.

It is a simple and undeniable truth that witnesses that contradict one another, are not reliable. On the contrary, agreeing witnesses, if no connection or conspiracy can be proved, must be supposed to be reliable and honestly representing the truth.

About M Burgon adds: "Those many MSS were executed demonstrably at different times in different countries", p.46.

Independent agreeing witnesses are very reliable. These are the kind of witnesses which support the Majority Text.

On the contrary, concerning the Alexandrian text not only we cannot say that its representatives agree with one another, but we can't also call them independent witnesses, since they mostly derive from the same location.

"The consentient testimony of two, four, six, or more witnesses, coming to us from widely sundered regions is weightier by far than the same number of witnesses proceeding from one and the same locality, between whom there probably exists some sort of sympathy, and possibly one degree of collusion", p. 52.

For example, the witness by the Alexandrian text against John 5:4 as it is found in the M text, is considered final by modern critics. But it should be said of those witnesses against the authenticity of the traditional reading that they “are unable to agree among themselves whether there was a Jerusalem a sheep-pool (⌘) or ‘a pool at the sheep-gate’: whether it was surnamed (BC), or named (D), or neither (⌘): - which appellation, out of thirty which have been proposed for this pool, they will adopt, - seeing that C is for ‘Bethesda’; B for ‘Bethsaida’; ⌘ for ‘Bethzatha’; D for ‘Belzetha’...in respect of the thirty-two contested words...only three of them omit all the words in question...D retains the first five, and surrenders the last twenty-seven.”, p. 82-83.

Adding the information provided by the newly discovered papyri, this is the witness of the mss against the traditional reading:

- Bethsaida – P75, B, T,W
- Bedsaida – P66
- Bethzatha – Alef and 33.

The choice among those, when discarding the Majority text, can be only based upon the editors personal judgment or preference.

External evidence is for the traditional reading.

Burgon gives even more details about the contradictions of the Alexandrian text witnesses. “The five Old Uncials (⌘ A B C D) falsify the Lord’s Prayer as given by St. Luke in no less than forty-five words. But so little do they agree among themselves, that they throw themselves into six different combinations in their departures from the Traditional Text; and yet they are never able to agree among themselves as to one single various reading.”, p.84.

The weakness of the M text is the relatively late age of its representatives. Again we say that age alone cannot determine whether a ms is reliable or not. A sixth century ms that is the last in a chain of faithfully copied mss is more reliable than a single ms produced in the second century by a scribe so convinced of his

doctrinal positions to change the text of a ms accordingly. We read about church official revisions and the ecclesiastical authority imposing those revisions, the Byzantine, the Alexandrian. But those are simply theories. The habit of some to change the NT text for doctrinal purposes is a documented fact. We quoted Caius and Origen. It will be useful to relate about an instance of this kind found in P66. It stands alone in adding an article before the word "prophet" in John 7:52. The scribe did not hesitate to solve an evident difficulty of the text by changing it as he pleased. If the mss of the M text are late, it means only that its ancestors have not survived to our days. In my library, the best preserved text is the New World Translation, the Jehovah's Witnesses Bible. I simply do not read it. On the contrary, the books which I most value are those in the worst conditions. Is it not possible that the ancestors of M were in use in the church and are no more in existence because they were torn apart by the use in the church, whose only care was to produce new faithful copies of the original? Codex Sinaiticus was literally rescued from fire by Tischendorf. The Vaticanus ms was undisturbed in the Vatican library for centuries. Another reason why we have so many old mss of the Alexandrian-Egyptian tradition is because of the dry and hot climate of those areas. Number is no more relevant in itself than age. In general, number would be less important than the age. But because of what we noticed, this may not be applicable to the mss of the NT. Some facts must be taken into consideration along with the age of the Alexandrian witnesses. The value they can boast because of their antiquity is weakened by: 1. The contradictions of his representatives. 2. The fact that these mss come from one specific area and consequently from one textual school and tradition. 3. The area from which they come is where heresies were rampant, so much that it even influenced the orthodox.

Though number in itself would not mean much, the other facts in favor of the reliability of the M text are: - 1. That its representatives mss come from different areas of Christendom, - 2. They all agree in one text, but they show some peculiarities that are evidence of their value as independent witnesses⁴. - 3. This type of text is well supported by the quotations of the fathers of the church, which take its existence back in time, before the supposed Recension, which was said to have given birth to it.

The truth is that the Recension theory was conceived to give a rational explanation to the existence of the M text which is in it self a quite peculiar phenomenon. In fact, without believing that the Traditional text is the product of an authoritative Recension, how can we explain its existence?

The Western text has Majority Text readings. The Alexandrian Text – we saw in the papyri – has them too. The Western and the Alexandrian differ from one another. The late date assigned to the Byzantine text is but a myth, so no other reason can be found to deny its antiquity. Is it then so strange, is it not the natural consequence to believe that the Traditional/Byzantine/Majority text simply represented the “normal” faithful process of copying of the New Testament writings and those isolated, contradicting witnesses, only corruptions of it.

Now it is time to ask: What would you expect from the faithful copying of the books of the NT, down from the time of the apostles to the age of print, if not a text like the Majority text? Moreover:

⁴ “Robinson has collated the Pericope Adulterae (John 7:53-8:11) in all available Greek manuscripts and lectionaries that include the narrative of this incident...The Pericope Adulterae data suggests an increased presumption of relative independence within the various lines of Byzantine manuscript descent.” Robinson and Pierpont, Preface to their Greek Text, p.ii.

what would you expect of mss departing from this faithful transmission of the text, if not a small number of unreliable witnesses, contradicting each other, soon to be doomed to oblivion along with the hands and minds that produced them?

Robinson and Pierpont, say it more technically in their Preface to their Greek Text: "This "normal" state of transmission presumes that the aggregate consentient testimony of the extant manuscript base is more likely to reflect its archetypal source (in this case the canonical autographs) than any single manuscript, small group of manuscripts, or isolated versional or partristic readings that failed to achieve widespread diversity or transmissional continuity." "The Byzantine-priority hypothesis thus appears to offer the most plausible scenario for canonical autograph transmission." p. 5.

I close this section by reproducing a question posed by Burgon, which resembles mine above. "Does the truth of the Text of Scripture dwell with the vast multitude of copies, uncial and cursive, concerning which nothing is more remarkable than the marvelous agreement which subsists between them? Or is it rather to be supposed that the truth abides exclusively with a very handful of manuscripts, which at once differ from the great bulk of the witnesses, and - strange to say - also amongst themselves?", The Traditional Text, p. 16-17.

CHAPTER SIX

Examples of Variant Readings

I think the time has come to discuss some of the most famous variant readings detectable in Bible translations, leaving the theoretical speculations for the most important consideration of the practical implications.

I will compare the King James Version as a representative of the TR and still the most popular Majority Text translation available, to the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament, eighth edition, 1994 and its companion textual commentary by Bruce M. Metzger. I will shortly consider some controversial Bible passages.

Matthew 1.25

KJV: "And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS."

The NA text, following B and Alef, omits the word "her firstborn". The Majority text, as well as other manuscripts, retain it and so does the Textus Receptus.

Matthew 6:13b

"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen."

These words are omitted by Alef, B and D. But they are in the Majority text and in other manuscripts that usually side with the Alexandrian witnesses like L, W, 33.

Do we need more overwhelming evidence to consider authentic a portion of Scripture?

Mark 1.1

KJV: "The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." The words "Son of God" are sometimes omitted, sometimes enclosed in brackets. I like the way Metzger justifies this decision, I like the way he explains it in a moderate and scientific way. But external evidence in support of the long reading is overwhelming. The short reading is only supported by suppositions and a few manuscripts, belonging to the Alexandrian text. My opinion is that this is one of the many instances that shows the attitude of some scribes to shorten the text, like we see it in the mss so much valued by some critics.

Mark 16.9-20

The so called "long ending", the traditional ending of the gospel of Mark, with which most are familiar, is supported by the Majority text. Its omission is based both on the external support of the Alexandrian witnesses and on internal considerations concerning the text: most scholars agree about the fact that the author of this ending of the gospel was not the author of the rest of Mark.

John W. Burgon wrote a book on this subject.

I ask myself a simple question: Why is it that the long ending is still retained in the Bibles which translate the modern text? Why don't they simply end the gospel at v.8?

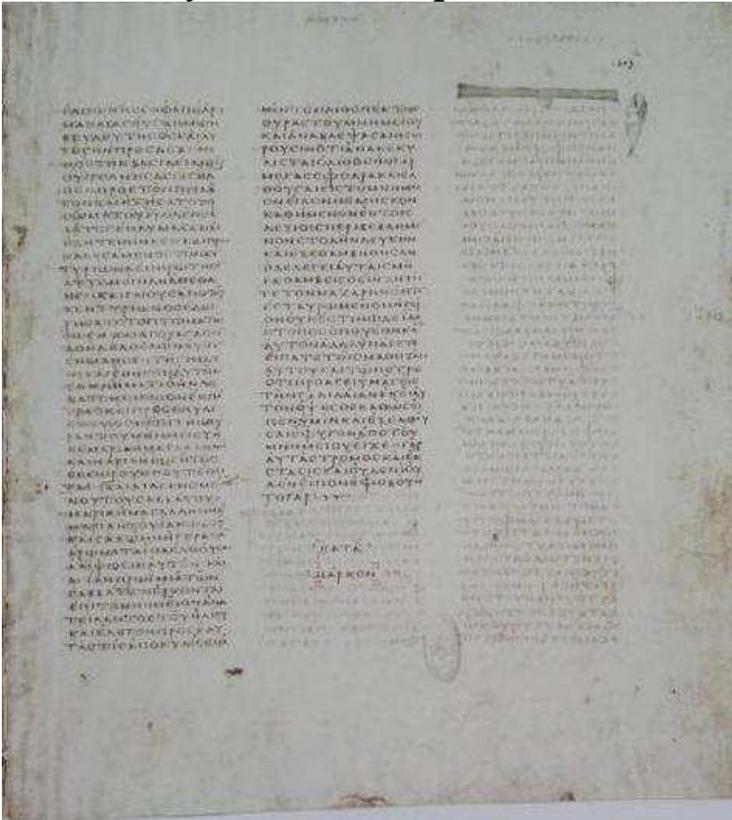
If critics, and the mss supporting the omission of this portion of Scripture, are right: 1. Are we to believe that Mark ended his gospel at v.8, quoting: "And they went out quickly, and fled from the sepulcher; for they trembled and were amazed: neither said they any thing to any man; for they were afraid." 2. Or, even worse, are we to believe that the original ending of this gospel is lost?

Besides the overwhelming support of mss to this passage, it was quoted by old Christians like Papias, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Diatessaron of Tatian, Tertullian, Hippolytus, Epiphanius, taking the existence of the M text back to the first steps of Christianity.

Concerning the testimony in favor of the omission, there are some facts which must be taken into very serious consideration concerning B and **ℵ**.

Codex Vaticanus B, in the place where these verses should have been has a "blank space, amply sufficient to contain the verses, the column in question being the only vacant one in the whole manuscript.", Dean Burgon, *The Traditional Text*, p. 298.

It is clearly seen in the picture below of this portion of the codex.



To be added to this strange case, is the fact that the very same scribe who is author of B "appears to have cancelled the sheet originally written by the scribe of **ℵ**, and to have substituted for it the sheet as we now have it, written by himself... Thus we are led not only to infer that the testimony of **ℵ** is here not independent of that of B, but to suspect that this sheet may have been thus cancelled and rewritten in

order to conform its contents to those of the corresponding part of B." *The Traditional Text*, p. 299.

The blank space in B is due to the fact that the ending we know was found in the manuscript it was copied from? What other explanation can there be?

At the same time, if the scribe of B had to fix the testimony of **ℵ** in order to agree with his omission, are we not entitled to understand that the ending of the gospel as we know it was known to him and that he, willingly, for some reasons, though found in the copies he had before him, decided to omit this portion of Scripture? Is this evidence against the traditional ending of Mark's gospel, or rather against the reliability and even honesty of the work of the scribe behind **ℵ** and B?

Bruce Metzger writes: "the longer ending, though current in a variety of witnesses, some of them ancient, must also be judged by internal evidence to be secondary." A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, p.104.

On the ground of the same considerations - so called: internal evidence! - the authenticity of John 21, of some epistles of Paul, of II Peter, is questioned. Is it safe to rely on the personal judgment of critics?

Resting on objective external evidence alone, as it is safe to do, there is no reason for the omission of this portion of Scripture.

Luke 10:41-42

KJV: "And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But **one thing is needful**: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The reading of the KJV-TR is the Majority text reading. P45 and P75 agree with it. They leave B, **ℵ**, L and 33, who support the reading: "Few things are needful, or one."

The M text is the original. There can't be any doubt, not if we rely on textual evidence instead of suppositions and/or personal

judgment. Where is the theory of a late, fabricated text here? The M text has the earliest witnesses on its side.

Please, notice the Gnostic taste of the text of B and Alef! Are we to believe that that deviation from the text might have occurred by mistake?

Of course the spurious reading is rejected by newer critical editions but it was adopted by the Westcott and Hort text.

Luke 12:31

KJV: "But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Seek ye the kingdom of God is supported by M and P45. Also by A, W, 33 and other witnesses.

Seek ye the kingdom is found in P75.

Seek ye His kingdom is the reading of B and Aleph

It is quite peculiar that P45 reads like the Majority text. The other manuscript where the Alexandrian text should have found support is P75. But it finds none but the death blow.

Considering the preceding passage observed, Luke 10:41-42, it is very probably to believe that the scribe of P75 changed from a M reading using his sharp axe.

The fact still remains, the traditional reading is supported by an ancient manuscript. Again, we must ask where is the theory of a late, fabricated text here? Again the Majority reading is found in the oldest authorities! Again we notice the confusion and contradiction among the Alexandrian witnesses themselves. In the best case, at least two of them are lying!

External evidence is overwhelming in favor of the TR-Majority Text reading. The only reason why the reading of the B and Alef (against older Alexandrian witnesses) can be preferred is mere internal

considerations, not objective evidence. From the omission of “of God” (P75) to the addition of “His” (B and Alef) we see how the original text was corrupted into the reading still supported by Aland’s text.

In a very similar instance, Matthew 6:33, B and Alef, show a corrupt text, though Westcott and Hort blindly adopted it. Today even the N-A must retain the traditional reading in the text, though “of God” is between square brackets.

The Majority reading is by far the best attested reading.

Incredible as it may seem, the three old Papyri, P45, P66 and P75 show a number of M readings that is too relevant. It is something unexpected from mss that have been usually assimilated to the Alexandrian text. Such a thing was impossible if Hort’s theories were true.

On the contrary, such an event perfectly fits the idea that the Majority text is simply the result of a normal and faithful work of copying the originals down to the invention of print and that the so called Alexandrian witnesses, B and Alef, are old deviations from the pure and honest stream of manuscripts. P45, 66 and 75, being older show a larger number of traditional readings.

I checked my N-A apparatus in Johh.

In John 5:17, “Jesus” is omitted by P75, B, Alef and of course Westcott and Hort text. But it is found in P66!

In John 5:19 the original Greek word $\alpha\nu$ is the reading of Alef and B, adopted by W-H. But the Majority reading $\epsilon\alpha\nu$, among other witnesses, is found in P66, P75!

In John 5:29 the choice is between:

- $\omicron\iota$ - P66c, B. It is in W-H.

- οἱ δὲ - P75, Alef. Like in the preceding readings, in light of the new evidence, the traditional-Majority reading has become the N-A also.
- καὶ οἱ - P66, W.

Pickering writes: “I have used Klijn’s study with reference to the existence of texttypes, but his material also furnishes evidence for the antiquity of the “Byzantine” text. Summing up the evidence for the 51 cases Klijn discusses,

P45 agrees with Alef 21 times, with B 25 times, with TR 33 times

P66 agrees with Alef 16 times, with B 32 times, with TR 38 times

P75 agrees with Alef 11 times, with B 36 times, with TR 33 times

or to put it another way,

all three papyri agree with Alef 4 times, with B 18 times, with TR 20 times,

any two of them agree with Alef 8 times, with B 13 times, with TR 15 times,

just one of them agrees with Alef 36 times, with B 62 times, with TR 69 times,

for a total of 48 times, 93 times, 104 times.

In other words, in the area covered by Klijn’s study the TR has more early attestation than B and twice as much as Alef – evidently the TR reflects an earlier text than either B or Alef.” Wilbur

Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text*.

The instances of agreement of the above mentioned papyri with Alef and B is not a surprise, since they are even said to belong to the same type of text, they all are Alexandrian-Egyptian manuscripts. But it is quite a surprise that they have so many Traditional-Majority readings. The latter cannot be called Byzantine text anymore, since its existence before the Byzantine period is now a fact – existence definitely proved by a rival type of text witnesses!

The truth is that, if P45, 66 and 75 had been available then, there would have never been Westcott and Hort speculations about a Byzantine text, a Lucian Recension, a Neutral Text. The only result of their work and theories was to create the strongest prejudice against the Traditional Text of the New Testament.

Luke 22:43-44

KJV: "And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground"

One can just wonder how can the witness for the omission of this passage mean anything when it represents the voice of the champions of deliberate omissions: P75, **Σ**, B, Marcion, Origen.

Some early Christian sects (among them that of Marcion) denied the reality of the incarnation of Jesus, not believing he was a true man! With some other (confused) exceptions, the rest of the New Testament mss support the authenticity of this passage along with quotations from the writings of early orthodox Christian writers like Justin, Hippolytus, Irenaeus, Eusebius.

Luke 23:34

KJV: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

This portion of Scripture is omitted by P75, B, D and some few more mss. P75 and B are so close to each other that they could be with right considered just one witness. D, besides the famous Western Non-Interpolations, omits other passages considered unanimously original, Mt. 9.34, Mk 2.22, 10.2, 14.39, Lk 5.39, 10:41-42, 12.21, 22.62, 24.9. What is the weight of the testimony of

such an unreliable witness, which shows a text that has been so clearly willingly mutilated?

External evidence cannot motivate the denial of the authenticity of the words of Jesus. Metzger motivates the doubts cast on this passage by the fact that no reason could explain its deliberate omission. But I would rather say that: no reason that we know of, could explain the omission! How incredible were the suppositions of Origen to lead him to dismiss the word "behind me" as spurious. The fact is that we do not know why some might have removed this portion of Scripture from their copies, and since such scarce evidence is in favor of the omission and the rest for its presence, if we want to abide in the realm of objective evidence and not speculations, we must admit there are no true or sufficient reasons to cast any doubt on the authenticity of this passage.

John 1.18

KJV: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."

I have discussed of this passage in my Italian book on the Trinity. The Alexandrian text reads "God" instead of "Son". The change is very simple in the original Greek: it takes a single consonant change, since Son was among the so called *Nomina Sacra* and abbreviated YS (υς) and ThS (θς). It is only another corruption of the Alexandrian tradition and maybe clear evidence of Gnostic infiltration in the Egyptian text of this gospel.

Some modern translators understand the total absence of meaning of the expression "the only begotten God" and retain the Majority text.

Also in this case, the witnesses against the Majority text are not in agreement with each other.

- 1. ὁ μονογενῆς υἱὸς – "the only begotten Son" - is the Majority - TR reading.

- 2. ὁ μονογενῆς θεὸς – “the only begotten God” - is supported by P75, 33 and a corrector of **Ⲙ**.

- 3. μονογενῆς θεὸς – “only begotten God” - is supported by P66, **Ⲙ**, B, C, L.

The latter reading enjoys the consent of modern critics. But the contradiction in which the supporters of the reading “Only Begotten God” fall, invalidates the value of their witness. The article could only have been dropped intentionally. Omission is a characteristic of the Alexandrian text scribes. The freedom with which the text was handed, let the change to God enter the text. The imprint of Gnostic influence is clearly seen in the Alexandrian reading: “the only begotten God” simply means nothing. Read some of the surviving Gnostic Gospels and you will agree.

John 3:13

καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀναβέβηκεν εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν	No one has ascended to heaven
Εἰ μὴ ὁ ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καταβάς,	but He who came down from heaven,
ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ.	that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.

The representatives of the Alexandrian text omit: “who is in heaven”. They are P66, P75, Alef, B and 33.

Honestly it is a lot more explainable the omission of this gloss than the insertion of it. If we consider also that the longer reading is attested by manuscripts of different traditions against the Egyptian tradition only, it remains little or no room for doubt that the longer reading is the original. The reasons for its omission are explained by Bruce M. Metzger: “the quality of the external attestation supporting the shorter reading, regarded the words ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (who is in Heaven) as an interpretative gloss, reflecting later Christological development”. A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament, United Bible Societies, second edition, page 175

The quality of a text limited to use in a single region is obviously poor. The “Christological development” explanation is even a weaker point, since this reading clearly creates a difficulty even to it. Such difficulty was the reason for its omission. It is both clear and simple. It is also evident a loss in the rhythm of the wording if the last sentence is missing.

John 6.69

KJV: “And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Instead of “the son on the living God”, the modern text has “the Holy One of God”. I do not see the need to discuss the importance of choosing one text instead of another. One may not fail to see how unimportant such a slight change in a 2000 years old text is. I urge the reader to keep this fact in mind, since it will be duly considered when I will draw my conclusions on this subject.

John 7:53-8:11

This portion of Scripture, the so called *Pericope of the Adulteress* is one of the most famous portions of the Bible. It is supported by the Majority text.

Just like in the case of Mark 16.9-20, I ask the reader: why is it retained in the text of most Bibles? If thought not to be part of the original gospel of John, why is it not completely deleted and what critics are sure is the original text restored? If it is considered original, how can we reject such an important witness of the Alexandrian text and then adopt the other variant readings from them?

Most Bible readers don't know that John 21 is also thought not to have belonged to the original gospel. This is usually supposed because of internal considerations on the text. But since (so far) not one ms supports its omission, no textual critic can successfully

remove it from the received text. All it would take is even one single manuscript!

I personally advocate the inclusion of the *Pericope* right where it is. The manuscripts that have it in other places of the New Testament are unreliable witnesses.

It is supported by the Majority text and few other passages of Scripture have enjoyed so much sanction from the body of Christ. It is also found in D. It is in the Old Latin manuscripts *b* and *e*. Jerome included it in his fourth century translation, the Latin Vulgate.

Augustine of Hippo, who lived between 354 and 430 AD, wrote concerning this passage of Scripture: "Certain persons of little faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given impunity in sinning, removed from their manuscripts, the Lord's act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if he who had said "sin no more" had granted permission to sin." Quoted by Hills in the *King James Version Defended*.

John 8:39

"They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye **were** Abraham's children, ye **would do** the works of Abraham."

The confusion among the witnesses against the Majority reading has not stopped critics from choosing *eclectically* from the Alexandrian supporters.

- If you **are** Abraham's children, **do** the works of Abraham" – is found in P66 and B. It was the text of Westcott and Hort.

- If you **are** Abraham's children, you **would do** the works of Abraham." – is found in P75 and Alef.

The latter is the reading adopted in the Nestle-Aland text.

It is so evident that the Alexandrian text must have fallen victim of the attempts of scribes to correct and early copying mistakes. The Majority text has the strongest external support and is still to be preferred.

John 10:29

KJV: "My Father, which (or who) gave *them* (to) me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand."

The *New World Translation* of the Jehovah's Witnesses adopts the Greek text of Westcott and Hort. "*The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Greek Scriptures*" translates:

"What my Father has given me is something greater than all other things, and no one can snatch them out of the hand of the Father"

Again the simplicity of the truth of Scripture is turned into philosophy. The confusion of the mss against the traditional reading makes them support no definite reading. The traditional reading is found also in P66. This is another instance where the Majority text is supported by the earliest authority.

Ephesians 1.1

KJV: "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

The words "at Ephesus" are omitted by some witnesses. The evidence for its presence in the text are too strong to give any credit to a few witnesses who have fallen victim of scribes seduced by the speculations of some early heretics and Christian commentators on the real addressee of this epistle.

I Timothy 3.16

KJV: "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The reading "God was manifest" is the Majority text reading.

The change again, just like in John 1:18, was possible by changing one single consonant in the *Nomina Sacra*. Θεός (*Theos*) was abbreviated Θς (*Ths*).

The modern text (Revised Standard Version) has "He was manifested in the flesh". But this is not the translation of the Greek text they support. In fact the RSV adds in a note: "Greek Who." If the Greek text says "who" why don't they translate it "who"? Because in every language a sentence needs a subject and this is missing in the Neologian text!

No less without meaning the reading of D and the Latin Versions that read: "which was manifest in the flesh."

Though a misleading note in the same RSV says: "other ancient authorities read God", evidence is abundantly in favour of the Majority text. Pickering maintains that the manuscript evidence is the following: 300 Greek manuscripts read "God" and 7 have other readings.

Peculiar readings of the Textus Receptus

It was very sad to read in a book on the epistles of Paul published by a famous Italian publisher of "John W. Burgton" supporting the Textus Receptus which, says the author, he believed was uncontaminated.

Such a gratuitous wrong statement comes from a man unable even to spell Burgon's name correctly!

Serious scholars like Burgon, Scrivener, Miller then, Pickering, Robinson, Pierpont today, defend the critical value of the

Traditional/Majority text. Burgon was convinced that revision of the TR was necessary. He only argued that the revision made during his days in light of the Alexandrian witnesses did not improve the text but only made it worse. The ideas of Burgon stood the test of time. They are as good today or even stronger than they were in the nineteenth century. All he maintained against Westcott and Hort theory, time proved to be correct!

Though the Textus Receptus is a good representative of the Majority text, its peculiarities cannot be supported. Here are some examples:

Acts 8.37

KJV: “And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

The case is against the authenticity of this passage. It is an insertion – though it appears to be an early one. It is not found in the Majority text, in P45, P74, Alef, A, B, C, 33.

It was not even in the manuscripts used by Erasmus. He introduced it into the text because he found it in the margin of one manuscript.

I John 5.7-8

KJV “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.”

The underlined words are not found in all the Greek mss. They were included in the TR by Erasmus because he found them in the controversial ms 61.

The long reading is not the original one, this is beyond question.

I know that many Christians consider this passage a strong affirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity. But it was not written by John. I believe in the Trinity too and I wrote a book on the subject, but it is not in this passage that we find this truth but in almost every page of the New Testament!

Revelation 17:8

KJV : " when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

The correct reading is: "and is to come." The TR reading is due to a mere printing mistake.

CONCLUSION

The time has come to end our discussion and explain the peculiarities of New Testament Greek Textual Criticism and its impact on the Bible reader.

When I consider the various texts available today, I marvel at the great work of God, how he preserved his Word in such a miraculous way. My first Bible was a TR Italian translation, the Diodati. Then I started using the Riveduta Luzzi Bible, which is sort of an Italian Revised Version. Right now I read the New Testament in Greek - praise be to God for that, it's not my merit but His grace. I learned Greek on the TR. Later, when I was able to get one, I started using the Majority text, in an interlinear Greek-English edition. I recently got a Nestle-Aland text which I consider very important for study purposes. The percentage of differences from different editions is so small and the quality of those changes affect so little the meaning of the sentences and passages and even less the doctrine and teaching of the church that I can boldly say that the preservation of the New Testament is a fact. No other book can boast such a wonderful reliable text after a 2000 years journey! I believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible. I am convinced that God inspired the very words of Scripture. This is the divine aspect of the Bible, its supernatural quality.

Jesus was God made man. He was God but was also a man. A special man but human in the full sense of the term. He could walk, eat, speak. He had to walk from one place to another, though he was God and as such, time and space had no power over him. The Bible is God's Word. But it is also a book. As a book it was subject to all the quality and limitations of a book. Today the Bible

is being translated in many languages and published almost everywhere in the world. It is also available on audio and video. It is available on the internet. As a book it is enjoying all the potentials offered by the technology of our time. Everyone has a Bible in their home. I have dozens, both printed and electronic editions. Why do we accept all the privileges down from the time of the invention of print to today, but neglect to consider the limitations that were common to all the books before the invention of print?

Why do we want to judge with our experience facts we cannot correctly interpret from today's perspective? What was given to other generations has not been given to ours. And, at the same time, what has been given to our generation has not been given to other past generations. We need to live our time. We must not judge the past from our perspective, but trust God's mighty work.

Why do some want a uniform text of the Bible, a printed perfect edition of the Scripture to satisfy their need for certainties? It is the same frustrating search for doctrinal perfection in different denominations, when it is quite evident that no church is perfect on earth.

If we do simply look at the facts and consider them for what they are, we can but marvel at the greatness of God's perfect plan to save man. How God created the ground for the birth of Jesus, so perfectly prophesied of in the Old Testament. How God arranged the times and the conditions so that the Gospel might easily be preached to all the nations, when the Roman Empire virtually united politically all the then known world and the Greek culture and language was familiar to people everywhere, like English is today.

As there are some areas of Christianity and churches that go astray and far from the truth, so far as that their faithfulness to the Gospel may be easily questioned - Jehovah's witnesses, Latter Day Saints or

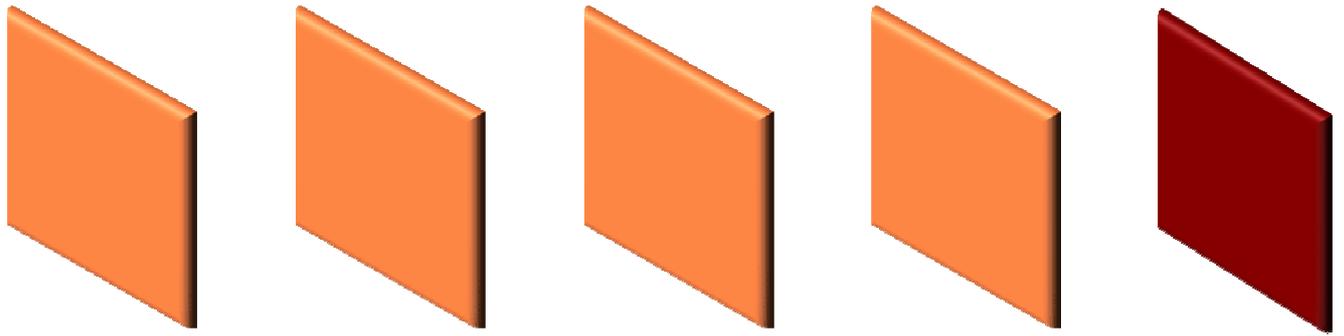
some liberal Protestant churches - at the same time, there are some Bible texts who can be considered inferior to others.

Critics today definitely prefer the Alexandrian, shorter, text. The rest follows as a consequence. It was the same text that circulated in an area where thinkers like Origen and Gnostics dominated the scene. This means one thing: the frame of mind of critics of today is simply more fitting to the frame of mind of those who lived in that environment and created the deviations of the text survived in the Alexandrian witnesses. The same applies to Christianity today. Today's moderate, compromising, educated but not convinced Christianity, animated more by ecumenical desires than by the will to spread the Truth of the Gospel, finds itself at ease with this type of text, produced by likeminded people.

The modern text has not improved the TR text, the Majority text in use in the church, it has simply revived a text that the church had long since gotten rid of. The Holy Spirit did not let some portions of Scripture to be taken away. I can't find any other reason why Mark's traditional ending or the *Pericope de Adultera*, though openly considered spurious by eminent critics, are still there, available to the Bible reader in all its editions. Most of the omissions considered to restore the original text are not entirely followed and the text is still there: enclosed in double square brackets, included in the text with a note casting doubt on its authenticity, some omissions followed, some not... If the critics are so sure of these omissions and their text, why don't they just edit a text, their text, getting rid of the supposed spurious additions? Is it because the body of Christ won't accept such a text? Is it because the Spirit of God has already sanctioned some of the omissions of the modern text into the hearts of believers?

For the reasons that I have given so far, there is no reason to think that critics from Westcott and Hort till today have improved the text of the Textus Receptus. The modern text is fluctuating,

changing according to the personal judgment of editors and their choices among the contradicting evidence of mss departing from the Majority text. Westcott and Hort's Neutral Text proved to be a fable. The same will happen in time to the Standard Text of today. My suggestion is that we follow the path of the early church and confine again to oblivion the Alexandrian text and the confused isolated witnesses departing from the Traditional-Majority text of the New Testament.



The Majority text of the New Testament has been underestimated for too many years by textual critics from the days of Westcott and Hort on.

This article will provide enough evidence to let the reader reconsider the simple concept of “the oldest the best” in light of the reliability of the readings supported by the majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

