

A MINI-GUIDE TO NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Until his retirement, the author taught New Testament at New College, Edinburgh. He is a former member of the UBS Europe Regional Translation Committee.

1. Why do we need Textual Criticism in studying the N.T.?

- 1.1 There are about a thousand printed editions of the Greek New Testament, both with and without a critical apparatus. These printed editions have been made from Greek Manuscripts (MSS) of which over 5,000 are known to exist.
- 1.2 The first published printed Greek NT was edited by the Dutch scholar Erasmus in 1516 along with his own Latin Translation in parallel columns. His work was done in a hurry as a publishing venture and also partly in Humanist competition with a famous Roman Catholic polyglot (multi-language version)—the Complutensian, which eventually appeared in 1521-2. Because of the haste of production Erasmus' work was executed without careful study, but it held the field and became (with some variations and revisions) the basis for the 1611 AV English Version. After 1633 it became known as 'The Received Text' (Latin—Textus Receptus) and was regularly reprinted until the middle of the nineteenth century.
- 1.3 Erasmus used a maximum of eight manuscripts, or, for some parts of the NT, only one manuscript, and all his manuscripts were later 10-12 century copies which contained for the most part the text in general use in the Greek Church. On occasion Erasmus also retranslated into Greek from the current Latin versions.
- 1.4 During the next 400+ years older manuscripts of the Greek NT (and of the OT in Greek) began to appear and these were welcomed by scholars, most of whom were classical experts and applied the same techniques to the classifying of the NT manuscripts as they did to those of classical authors. In the case of all classical authors the number of manuscripts available was very much smaller.
- 1.5 Controversies raged in the 19th century as to whether one should stick to the NT text derived from the bulk of the later (post-A.D. 1000) MSS, or concentrate on that derived from the few earlier ones of the 4th to the 6th centuries. This had been done by various editors at the beginning of that century—more notably Griesbach and Lachmann.

2. What has been learned from textual criticism in the last hundred years?

- 2.1 The controversies which are mentioned in 1.5, when taken in conjunction with the results of earlier study, led to the notion that there were four or five different groups of MSS which could be distinguished, and scholars varied in their preferences for particular groups. By the 1920s, further

discoveries had made it clear that this classification was too simple. More discoveries since then have made this clearer still.

2.2 Two other things have also become evident.

- a) Some of the readings thought to belong to groups of MSS dating say post-A.D. 400 are in fact known and found at an earlier date.
- b) Older MSS of the 4th century which were thought to be free from revision and alteration have now been shown to have undergone editing like all the others. This raises questions about the rather blind preferences some editors showed for particular MSS. Some of these preferences persist in the handbooks and writing of present-day scholars in the field.

2.3 We also now know that very few MSS can be shown to be related to one another by direct descent, and therefore construction of 'genealogical trees' in this field is misleading and unsatisfactory. It is clear that we are working in a situation where there is a great deal of common ground among all MSS, but there are also points where there tends to be a large measure of difference.

3. Why did these differences and variations arise?

3.1 If we leave out errors (with the caution that we can too readily list a reading as an error or mistake), we must look for some of the reasons for the variations. We shall find that they are the same as operate in the work of many editors and writers today. Four influences may be mentioned.

- a) The scribes were *sometimes* careless or incompetent.
- b) The scribes in writing the MSS were interested in correct grammar or clarity, and tried to improve the text with those ends in view.
- c) The scribes had preferences for particular words which they tended to introduce, or disliked others which they tended either to replace by synonyms or to leave out. This is an extension of what many scholars would find evident in the way Matthew and Luke treat Mark.
- d) The scribes had particularly theological or doctrinal interests and endeavoured to rewrite the text with these in mind. Around A.D. 200, Tertullian blames Marcion for doing this, but we are not to suppose that he was the only one.

3.2 Any attempt to suggest that the Greek NT was somehow produced once for all at the end of the first century A.D., is contrary to any serious treatment of the observed facts. The writing of the Bible and its history are a 'slice out of life' and must be examined as such, not by the application of any idealist standards which may represent what we would like the Bible to be, but which have no basis in reality.

4. The Situation Today

- 4.1 The older MSS which are now available are regarded in the main as a better base for the making of a critical text. They are not held to exclude the possibility that in some disputed passages the Received Text may be right, and, in part, they help to show why and where it may be right.
- 4.2 Many of the readings of these earlier manuscripts are reflected in the RSV and other modern translations, either in the text or in the marginal notes or footnotes. Anyone who can read Greek should not be satisfied with a Greek NT unless it has a critical apparatus. This is, in effect, a kind of shorthand to enable the variations in manuscript readings to be recorded with enough economy of space to make pocket or even larger editions manageable.
- 4.3 In the present interim state of studies, when it is obvious that the simple landmarks used by Westcott and Hort in the 1880s are no longer adequate, there are two possibilities. Either we record everything, or we make some working rules as a compromise. As there are over 5,000 copies of the NT in Greek alone, some 8,000+ of the Latin Vulgate and over 1,000 MSS of the Armenian Version, most of which are still unexamined, the first is clearly ruled out in terms of space, cost and workability; we must therefore resort to the second option.

5. How a Critical Apparatus Works

- 5.1 The basic idea of the critical apparatus to an edition of the Greek NT is to tell you that where the printed text before you has a particular reading, one of the MSS or Versions used by the edition has something else. Let us take a concrete example from Mark 7.24.
Here the RSV footnote says "Other ancient authorities omit 'and Sidon'". This means that the RSV Committee followed the MSS which have the words 'and Sidon', so they include these words in the text of their translation.
- 5.2 If we now turn to the apparatus in the Kilpatrick Greek NT we find an entry relating to this as follows (p. 125).

24 Τυρου (Tyrou—of Tyre) DW^θ 28 al it sys; Rm
add καὶ Σιδωνος (kai Sidōnos—and of Sidon)
Aleph A B f1 f13 700 pm lat co St ; Rt

(a similar but more extensive entry will be found in the UBS Greek Testament, third edition, p. 150).

This means, for example, that if I went to consult, either in the original in Cambridge University Library, or in facsimile, the MS 'D'—a fifth century Uncial MS containing the Gospels and Acts, I would find that its text was the same as the one printed by the editor, omitting the words καὶ Σιδωνος (kai Sidonos—and of Sidon).

If, on the other hand I were to examine the minuscule manuscript numbered 700 (an 11th century manuscript of the Gospels located in the British Museum) I would find a text reading *Τυρου και Σιδωνος* (Turou kai Sidonos—of Tyre and of Sidon) and so with the rest of the signs given for each variant.

5.3 This enables me to give detailed meaning to the ‘other ancient authorities’ of the RSV footnote, and also to discover that while the words ‘and Sidon’ are found in a group of older MSS generally classified as ‘Alexandrian,’ they are not found in another group classified as ‘Western’. A third group known as ‘Caesarean’ is divided between the two readings. Above all, the addition ‘and Sidon’ is also found in Mt.15.21 and has probably crept from there into the text of Mark, by harmonization. This suggests that it should not be regarded as part of the Markan text, and that is why the words are left out in the NEB translation.

5.4 Lectionaries consist, not of a full NT, but only of an orderly selection of those portions which were read in the church services. It is the belief of the present writer that those who have studied the text of the Lectionaries were correct in saying that this study should proceed on the basis of investigating individual lessons. I would contend that this argument applies even more forcibly to individual books of the Bible and that each one has its own history of transmission which must be studied separately from others. This, of course, involves more work, but it would give a truer picture in the end of the day. Much more detail about this type of study is given in the writings of Professor B. M. Metzger of Princeton and more particularly in his book entitled *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) which should be tackled by those who have managed to discover, from this brief account, what this interesting subject is all about.

6. Some Practical Working Examples

6.1 It is now time to look at some more practical examples. For this, Ephesians has been chosen as a book where the text problems are, on the whole, not too complicated. Passages have been chosen which can be followed in greater detail in Metzger’s book mentioned in para. 5.4.

6.2 The usual method of indicating variations from a printed text is to write them down as follows:

Chapter	Verse	Text	Variation (addition)	List of Witnesses
12	4	πολιν (polin—city)	praem την (tēn—the)	G 33

The verse number is given followed by the word(s) of the printed text to which the variant relates. Next a square bracket (or other symbol) is

written and this is followed by one or more alternative texts of the passage under discussion and by a list of witnesses which exhibit the reading. In some books the following abbreviations are used.

add = adds (after)
 praem = adds (before)
 om, omm = omits, omit

but it is simpler to indicate the alternative text in full and this is partly done in the notes which follow. The shorthand signs used for manuscripts, Versions and Church Fathers will be found detailed in any critical Greek New Testament. The latest and fullest list is that in the Nestle-Aland Greek NT 26th edition (Stuttgart 1979 and subsequent reprints).

6.3 Groupings of Manuscripts

Different scholars have given question-begging names to the various groups of MSS and these can be found discussed by Metzger in his *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd. edn., Oxford, 1968. Here we propose to quote only a small selection of the older MSS and to divide them into simple groups with numerals to distinguish the groups. As the first group should probably be subdivided, we have used the signs 1:1 and 1:2 to distinguish the two parts. The numerical order of the groups does not imply priority of importance.

Where an asterisk appears after the sign for a witness it means that the original hand of the MS read in this way and that it was later altered. Where the sign † appears before a witness or list of witnesses it means that they are defective at the point being considered. The sign ‘+’ appearing before a siglum means that the words referred to are added in that witness.

6.4 Selection of Manuscripts

Those MSS selected for Ephesians are as follows:

- 1:1 Papyrus 46 A.D. c.200
 Vellum MS B A.D. c.320
 Vellum MS Aleph A.D. c.350 (referred to as ‘01’)
- 1:2 Vellum MS A 5th century
 Vellum MS H 6th century
 Vellum MS I 5-6th century (in bad condition)
- 2 Vellum MS D 6th century (note this is not the same MS as the one lettered ‘D’ in the Gospels and Acts)
 The Old Latin Version—MSS back to the 5th century but representing earlier traditions.
- 3 This group has not been identified in Ephesians and no MSS will be quoted.
- 4 The Received Text which is contained in most later MSS.

- 5 The text of the Churches which had early (2nd to 5th century) translations of the Bible is shown as follows;

SY: Syriac (=Peshitta)

EG: Egyptian (=Coptic, both Bohairic and Sahidic)

LA: Latin (=Vulgate)

(In this section 'pt' means 'part of the tradition'—i.e. only some of the MSS)

- 6 Special Additional Readings

7. Four Examples (discussed more fully in Metzger's Textual Commentary)

7.1 Chapter 1, verse 1

εν Εφεσω)

1:1 om Pap.46 B* 01*

1:2 + A † H I

3 (not quoted—would in practice be left out)

4 + TR

5 + SY EG LA

Other evidence which suggests that the letter was not restricted to Ephesus would indicate that the reading of group 1:1 may well be correct and that the name of the addressees was added later.

7.2 Chapter 1 verse 15

και την αγαπην την εις παντας τους αγιους)

1:1 και την εις παντας τους αγιους Pap.46 B 01*

1:2 Text A † H I

2 Text with omission of την D*
but the corrector added the word in. Text OL

4 Text TR

5 Text SY EG^{pt} LA

6 The effect of text 1:1 can be seen in the translation of the English RV (1881) 'and which (i.e. faith—from the previous phrase) you show towards all the saints.' The omission looks however like an error caused by the presence of two identical words close together. (This is known technically as *homoio-arcton*—similarity of beginning.)

7.3 Chapter 4 verse 9

κατεβη)

1:1 Text Pap.46 01* + πρωτον B

1:2 Text A † H I

2 Text D OL^{pt} + πρωτον OL^{pt}

4 + πρωτον TR

5 Text EG^{pt} + πρωτον SY LA EG^{pt}

The addition πρωτον 'first' after κατεβη 'descended' is seen in the AV

translation, but modern translations omit the word as an explanatory addition arising from verse 10. The word should be omitted.

7.4 Chapter 5 verse 9

φωτος)

1:1 Text B 01 πνευματος Pap.46

1:2 Text A † H I

2 Text D* OL πνευματος D^{cor}.

4 πνευματος TR

5 φωτος LA EG SY

6 φωτος is also read by the 3rd century papyrus fragment Pap.49.

Here it will be noted that group 1:1 is divided, but most of the earlier support seems to be for the reading in the text. This could be a harmonization from verse 8, but it looks as if the reading πνευματος had come into the text by harmonization with Gal. 5.22. This kind of harmonization is widespread in the Gospels, but also in the Epistles, and it can be seen in operation between Ephesians and Colossians as at Eph 5.19.

7.5 Chapter 5 verse 22

γυναικες τοις ιδιοις ανδρασιν ως)

1:1 Text Pap.46 B γ.τ.ι.α υποτασσεσθωσαν 01

1:2 γ.τ.ι.α. υποτασσεσθωσαν A I † H

2 γ. υποτασσεσθε τ.ι.α.ως D OL^{P1}

4 γ.τ.ι.α. υποτασσεσθε ως TR

5 γ.τ.ι.α. υποτασσεσθε ως SY

γ.τ.ι.α. υποτασσεσθωσαν ως LA

γ.υποτασσεσθωσαν τ.ι.α. ως EG

It will be noted that no word for 'obey' appears in the text. It would seem that it is needed for the sense, however, and, if not in the text, would be carried over from the same word in the previous verse. Many of the MSS and Versions have added the word 'obey' as a commandment or in the indirect form 'let them obey'. If the two verses were separated for use in the church lectionary, the verb would be needed in verse 22 to make sense of what follows, but, so far as I can find out, this was not a starting point for the lectionary, though the verse was included on several occasions. The lack of the verb may reflect the form of some Jewish commandments and may be original. (On this see David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism*, 1956.)

8. Conclusions

I hope this small guide is enough to encourage even a few translators to venture into the unknown. It is possible to discover quite a lot about New Testament textual criticism, even, for example, from the English

text, though naturally more can be got out of examining the whole question in the original Greek. Two hours' basic study is necessary to master the Introductory pages of any critical Greek Testament and some reference back will be necessary after that, but it will be seen that the critical apparatus can give the key to many of the differences between translations in English or in other languages—some of which are quite important.

9. For Further Study

No very recent general work on Textual Criticism has appeared in English, but for a start those interested should look at J. H. Greenlee—*Introduction to NT Textual Criticism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, or (much fuller) B. M. Metzger—*The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd. edition, Oxford 1968.

PETROS VASSILIADIS

THE TRANSLATION OF *MARTYRIA IĒSOU* IN REVELATION

The author is Assistant Professor of New Testament in the University of Thessaloniki, and is one of the translators of the modern Greek common language New Testament. His article is a revision of a paper presented to the UBS Translation Workshop in May 1984.

1. *The Problem*

The Book of Revelation contains some mysterious expressions and figures, but as a whole, it is not a difficult book to translate. If the translator knows how to tackle commonplace Hebraisms, special apocalyptic expressions, and even grammatical mistakes, he will have almost no difficulty in carrying out his task. Almost, but not quite. There are a few cases where it is difficult to make up one's mind with certainty; and one such case is the phrase *martyria Iēsou* or *martyria Iēsou Christou*.

I met this problem in working as a member of the team responsible for a common language translation of the New Testament into modern Greek. I discovered that it was not at all clear whether *martyria Iēsou* is "the testimony of Jesus", or "testimony to Jesus"; in other words, whether the genitive *Iēsou* is subjective or objective.

2. *The Genitive Case in the New Testament*

In very many languages, cases are used to express what Nida has called "relations between events and the entities which participate in these events"¹. In New Testament Greek, genitives create the most difficulties. The text is so full of

¹ E. A. Nida, *Componential Analysis of Meaning*, The Hague 1975, 27; cf. J. M. Anderson, *The Grammar of Case*, Cambridge 1971; J. P. Galbert, "Modality and Case Grammar", in *Working Papers in Linguistics* 10, Ohio 1971, 85-132; C. J. Fillmore, "The Case for Case", in E. Bach and R. Harms (ed.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory*, New York 1967, 1-88; R. Jakobsen, "Beitrag zur allgemeinen Kasuslehre", in *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague* 6, 1936, 249-288.