

CHAPTER 10

NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM

[This is a very brief summary. More detailed discussion takes place in the course Intermediate Greek.]

The Conventions of Textual Criticism (*Sigla, apparatus*)

Several systems of manuscript designation became obsolete by the sheer volume of witnesses.

The major Uncials (major early NT MSS written with capital letters) add a further complication by retaining Latinized titles which reflect either:

- Their original discoverer, benefactor, or present owner (e.g. D/Bezae),
- Their ancient or present residence (e.g. B/Vaticanus), or
- Some descriptive adjective (e.g. C/Ephraemi Rescriptus).

Here is how NT MSS are designated:

- Papyri: capital or gothic P and a superscript number; e.g., P⁵²
- Uncials: capital letters, then Greek capitals; thence numerals prefixed by 0; and in one instance, a Hebrew letter (Ⲁ, Aleph [=01]); e.g., A (=02), B (=03), W (=032), 0216
- Minuscules: numerals not beginning with a 0; e.g., 33, 1241
- Lectionaries: numerals with an italicized *l* prefixed; e.g., *l*156
- Versions: the name of the version, e.g. Latin, Syriac, Coptic
- Church Fathers: the name of the father associated with the reading

Additional Symbols:

*	Original hand
c	Corrector
2,3,4	Successive correctors (a,b,c successive correctors of a D D ^p)
pt	<i>partime</i> i.e. divided evidence
Byz	Majority of Byzantine mss
mg	Marginal reading
ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
sic	Abnormality reproduced
supp	reading supplied by later hand
vid	Apparent reading
()	i.e. a ms. Supports the reading in question, but with minor variation (s)

The Practice of Textual Criticism

Consider external evidence (MSS evidence)

Date

All things being equal, the earliest manuscripts may be considered relatively more proximate to the original in term of number of copies intervening.

“Witnesses that excel in antiquity prevail in authority.” (Tischendorf)

Moreover, age is among the least subjective elements in manuscript evaluation.

Note. It is not always the date of an individual MS which is most significant. The date of the text-type is of more weight than the date of the MS (i.e., a later MS may have a near original as its exemplar); e.g., the 10th century minuscule 1739 preserves a text which is closely related to P⁴⁶.

Place of origin (geographical distribution)

Primary areas are designated *Alexandrian*, *Western*, *Byzantine*, and *Caesarean*. Generally, a reading supported by dispersed witnesses is stronger than a provincial one.

Textual affinity (genealogical distribution)

“Variants must never be treated in isolation, but always considered in the context of the tradition. Otherwise there is too great a danger of reconstructing a ‘test tube text’ which never existed at any time or place.” (Aland)

Harmonizing agents/ attempts to sterilize/standardize

E.g., Tatian's *Diatesseron* (170); Origen's Caesarean text (254); Lucian's 'standard' Byz recension (312); Constantine's/Eusebius' 50 copies (331); Jerome's Vulgate (382); the Peshitta, the revised version of Syria (early 5th century)

Consider internal evidence (what it seems the author would have said or how a copyist might have made an error)

Intrinsic probability

How probable is it that a certain author would use such word or expression? This can be determined somewhat by consulting his writing elsewhere in the book and in any other of his books in the NT.

Note. "Conjectural emendation" can be a refuge for sloth or cowardice; we must not have the audacity to correct the original author.

"Such attempts amount to capitulation before the difficulties and are themselves violations of the text." (Aland)

"The fault most often committed in the use of conjectural emendation has been to use it prematurely." (Metzger)

Transcriptional probability

How likely is it that this is an error originated by a scribe (Hort's description: "observed proclivities of average copyists.")

(1) Unintentional errors

- Illiteracy (incompetence)
- Fatigue (inattention)
- Haste
- Faulty seeing
 - Rough surface of papyri
 - Orthographic
 - Ligatures

- Nomina sacra
- Easily confused uncials
- Scriptio continua
- Faulty attention
- Faulty hearing – the scriptorium
- Faulty judgment – unconscious assimilation to parallels; incorporation of marginal glosses.

(2) Intentional “improvements”

- Fixing of perceived factual blunders (historical, theological, or grammatical)
 - “The characteristic of most scribal emendations is their superficiality, often combining ‘the appearance of improvements with the absence of its reality’ (W&H).” Metzger
- Smoothing orthography, grammar, style
- Harmonizing with known parallels (harmonistic corruption)
- Synthesizing readings – conflation for fear of losing any inspired reading (also called conflate readings)
- Sterilizing readings thought to be vulgar or vague
- Editorializing

“Internal criteria can never be the sole basis for a critical decision, especially when they stand in opposition to the external evidence.” (Aland)

The canons of textual criticism

- The reading is to be chosen which best explains the origin of the others.
- Witnesses are to be weighed rather than counted.
- Other things being equal, the shorter reading is to be preferred.

- As long as it makes sense, the more difficult reading usually is to be preferred.
- Generally:
 - Alexandrian readings are to be preferred.
 - The combination of Alexandrian and Western is to be regarded as strong.
 - Western witnesses alone are suspect.
 - All of the pre-Byzantine forms of text deserve a hearing.
 - Readings which are supported by only Byzantine witnesses are almost certainly secondary (however, the Byzantine text does have some early readings not recorded in one or another of the earlier families).