



Textual Criticism

What is textual criticism? It is the study on the criticism of the text. This could be divided into two classes, the science of textual criticism and the art of textual criticism. The science deals with what was used... writing material, development through history, etc. The art of textual criticism deals with the practice of determining which of the present available manuscripts is the closest to the original manuscript or is the original. Actually we have no originals today, just copies. Some things have been altered, omitted, dropped, added. There are manuscripts that take us right back to the originals, however, over 5,000 of them.

Each manuscript has to be analyzed as to principles. The scribe copying the manuscript could make errors. Therefore, we must know what type of errors the scribe would make.

Two Types of Errors: Intentional and Unintentional

Unintentional errors could be caused by the following:

The scribe had to do these four things to write a manuscript. Read a portion. Remember it. Dictate it to himself. Actually write it.

Psychological factors: Tired mind. Poor health.

Errors from faulty eye sight primarily with the Uncial text. The scribe had to deal with abbreviations. Some letters in the Uncials look nearly the same. $\alpha\mu\alpha$ - together, $\alpha\lambda\lambda\alpha$ - but. Sometimes if two lines end in the same word, the words of either may be left out. John 17:15. Sometimes things are copied twice. Acts 19:34.

Errors from faulty hearing: Rom. 5:1 is a possible example... $\epsilon\chi\omega\mu\epsilon\iota$, $\epsilon\chi\omega\mu\epsilon\iota$.

Sometimes breathing marks were left out or not heard. $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$, $\epsilon\iota\varsigma$.

Errors of the mind between the glance and the writing: Substitution of synonyms. Variations of the sequence of words. Transposition of letters in a word. Mark 14:65. Wording may be confused with parallel accounts.

Errors of judgment: Incorporating a margin comment into the text. Sometimes no judgment is used at all.

Intentional errors: Changes of spelling or grammar to conform to the normal rules of spelling or grammar. Harmonization of parallel passages. Adding or subtracting particular phrases, words, to make them make more sense. Col. 1.

Changes to clear up apparent historical or geographical problems. Conflation of readings. Incorporation of two variant reading into one new reading. Changes based on doctrinal positions, of course, slanting it to their direction. Luke 1:3 and Matt. 24:36. Expansion of titles.

Greek Manuscripts:

Four major types of manuscripts and two other sources:



Papyri: manuscripts, earliest extant manuscripts today, dated 2nd to 4th Centuries. Indicated in textual apparatus by “P” plus a number. Written in Uncials.

Uncials: written in all capital letters usually on parchment, animal skins, 4th to 10th centuries, usually more valuable than papyri. Papyri are usually more carelessly copied manuscripts. They are usually designated in two ways, sometimes three. Capital letters: A, B, C, D. Greek letters: Δ, Θ, Λ, etc. Zero plus a numeral, up through 044 and these are parallel to the above manuscripts, then at 046 they go through a long list of 250 manuscripts.

Minuscules: written in small letters with most manuscripts having a sort of cursive or connective writing. Also, they are written on parchment generally from the 8th Century onward and designated by numerals: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.

Lectionaries: There are approximately 2,000 available today, a few in Uncial, but most in Minuscule. They are labeled for each day of the week and to be used in public services. Most of the Scripture reading sections are for Saturday and Sunday use. They date from the 6th Century on.

Versions: The major contribution of the versions was to show actual verses or phrases had been in the original text.

Patristic quotations: These quote the Greek or Latin, but change the translation in their own writings. If we had no other manuscripts, we could reconstruct the entire New Testament from their quotations.

The four basic principles in analyzing internal evidence: internal evidence deals with that of the text itself, how the text and its contents support a given variant.

The shorter reading of textual variants is preferable.

The reading that is more difficult is preferable.

The reading that best describes one that another variant would arise from, is preferable.

The reading which conforms most to the author’s style is preferable.

Another factor which must always be kept in mind is that of doctrinal harmony. That which best conforms to doctrinal integrity must always be considered.

Principles and factors of external evidence: study of the text types Note: External evidence involves weighing and comparing manuscripts. Several factors are vital. These are the quality, not the age of the manuscript, the agreement of the manuscripts, and the geographical locations related to the manuscripts.

Alexandrian text type: not to be confused with the Alexandrinus codex.

Retains the rough coarse style of the true Koine Greek.

Retains the more difficult readings.

Retains the shorter readings usually.

It does not usually undergo the systematic grammatical and stylistic polishing as do the others.

Where it does wander is sometimes in technical grammar.

It is believed to be the best ancient text type and nearest the original.

The primary witnesses to this text type are the Sinaiticus X and the Vaticanus B.



When X and B occur together in the textual apparatus, this is regarded as the correct original text reading.

Western text type: D, Beza; I.T., Old Latin-Italic. This is considered to be the result of undisciplined and wild growth of manuscript tradition and translational activity. It can be traced to a very early date, some say as early as the second century. However, not all agree. It retains the longer readings. It substitutes synonyms for singular words. Usually the reading which the Western text type supports doesn't agree with internal evidence. Sometimes it will have the shorter readings.

Caesarean text type: Distinguished mainly as a mixture of A and W, Alexandrinus and Washingtonus. It usually favors the A, but will put in the longer reading of the Western. It is the least distinct and most mixed.

Byzantine text type: Generally it is inferior and not likely to be the original. It smooths out roughness by adding words. It alleviates difficulties. It makes additions to strengthen certain doctrinal tenants. The most common characteristic is the frequent harmonization of parallel passages. It is considered the weakest, least original and is usually not referred to.

Principles necessary to follow in studying variants of manuscripts:

You need to know church history and the development of certain doctrines.

One must know Greek grammar, including sounds.

Be sure you know parallel passages in the Gospels.

Each Gospel writer must be given his own individual style.

Text of the Septuagint must be considered when quotations are made. Also, the Hebrew text must be consulted.

Reading should be in harmony with the author's style.

Sometimes a variant seems to be in harmony with the author, but is opposed to external evidence. The question you must face is: does the internal evidence oppose and outweigh the external evidence?

It is better for a novice to rely on the weight of external evidence than on the author's style, because a novice can objectify on less data in that field than on interpretative factors of the author's style.

Readings supported by a combination of Alexandrinus and Western usually outweigh all other combinations. However, in Paul's Epistles, B, D, G, do not carry great weight. Bis Alexandrinus in the Gospels and Western in the Epistles, Dis Western.

The combination of W and C do not possess exceptional weight. W is the Washingtonus and C is the Codex Ephraemi, a 5th century manuscript.

True readings survive mostly alone in the Alexandrinus.

Less reliable readings with just the Western.

Even less reliable with the Caesarean.

As a rule of thumb, the beginner should follow the Alexandrian text type.