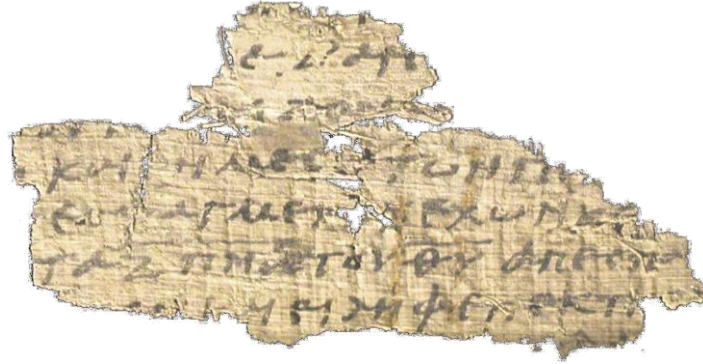


OVERVIEW OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Powellhurst Men's Bible Study
Applied to the Book of Revelation
May 13, 2023



Fragment from Greek Papyrus $\mathfrak{P}24$, Rev. 5:5-8; 6:5-8, 19x28 cm, 4th century CE, Andover MA

Learning objectives

- Define 'NT textual criticism'.
- Identify a few early NT Greek manuscripts.
- Dismiss some mistaken ideas.
- Review 12 rules for doing NT textual criticism.
- Apply to several verses from the Book of Revelation.



Leaf from Greek Papyrus $\mathfrak{P}47$, Rev. 9:10-17:2, early 3rd century CE

Episode 3, Revelation 11:19—15:4

New Testament Textual Criticism

“Textual criticism of the New Testament is the identification of textual variants, or different versions of the New Testament, whose goals include identification of transcription errors, analysis of versions, and attempts to reconstruct the original text. Its main focus is studying the textual variants in the New Testament.” —Wikipedia

New Testament Manuscripts

“The New Testament has been preserved in more than 5,800 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages including Syriac, Slavic, Ethiopic and Armenian. There are approximately 300,000 textual variants among the manuscripts, most of them being ... changes of word order and other comparative trivialities.” —Wikipedia



Latin Codex Claromontanus, 4th or 5th century CE. Vatican Library (Lat. 7223).

Early New Testament manuscripts

1. The (original) autographs were copied repeatedly and have been lost.
2. Manuscript copies circulated separately, until churches began binding them into books.
3. Churches translated manuscripts into their own languages (Versions: Latin, Egyptian, Aramaic, Syriac, Slavic, Ethiopic, Armenian et cetera).
4. Ancient writers and lectionaries quoted from Greek manuscripts and from versions.
5. Copyists sometimes tried to correct mistakes or to make phrases clearer, but never tried to alter early Christian doctrines.
6. Through the centuries, writing materials (papyrus, parchment, vellum) and styles (uncial, personal, miniscule) changed.
7. Manuscripts can be classed into ‘families’ according to geography and century in which they were copied.

Mistaken notions about NT manuscripts

1. The text of the original 'autographs' has been preserved in the 16th or 17th century Textus Receptus editions of the Greek New Testament (GNT).
2. No variant reading changes the meaning of a verse.
3. The 4th or 5th century Majority, Byzantine or Imperial text of the NT is nearest to the original.
4. The oldest manuscripts remain the most accurate ones.
5. Liberal scholars alter the Bible, denying the deity of Christ, his sacrificial death, or his resurrection.
6. Textual variants are so many and so different, that it is not possible to know for certain what Jesus said or did, if he ever lived.
7. Scribes tried to hide original mistakes and contradictions by altering their copies.
8. God inspired the Authorized (King James) English version, from which translations should be made into other languages.

Rules for doing textual criticism

Adapted from Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1983.

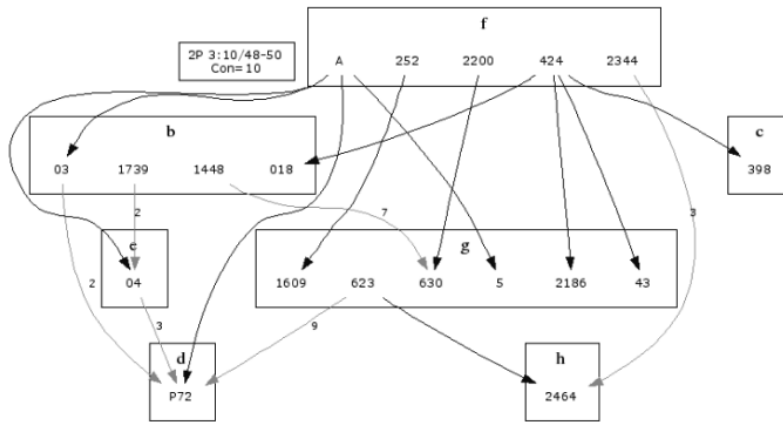
1. Only one reading can be original, however many variant readings there may be.
2. Only the reading which best satisfies the requirements of both external [manuscript] and internal [text] criteria can be original.
3. Criticism of the text must always begin from the evidence of the manuscript tradition [extant text, age, quality, language, family, text type].
4. Internal criteria [context, style, vocabulary, theology] must never be the sole basis for a critical decision.
5. The primary authority for a critical textual decision lies with the Greek manuscript tradition [rather than with versions, church Fathers' quotations, or scholarly conjectures].
6. Manuscripts should be weighed [quality], not counted [majority], and the peculiar traits of each manuscript should be duly considered.
7. Decisions in textual criticism must be worked out afresh, passage by passage.
8. That the original reading may be found in any single manuscript or version, when it stands alone, is only a theoretical possibility.
9. The reading which can most easily explain the derivation of the other forms is itself most likely the original.
10. Variants must always be considered in the context of the [textual] tradition. Otherwise, there is too great a danger of reconstructing a text which never existed at any time or place.
11. The more difficult reading is the more probable reading. [Scribes might choose an easier or clearer word or phrase.]
12. The shorter reading is the more probable reading. [Scribes might expand a text but never removed text.]

Episode 3, Revelation 11:19—15:4

13. A constantly-maintained familiarity with New Testament manuscripts themselves is the best training for textual criticism.

New! Coherence-based genealogical method

Computers help to find the 'initial' ms of a variant, along with 'textual flow' across mss, after humans evaluate each ms' date, text type and provenance.



Examples from the Book of Revelation

[From Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the GNT* (1994)]

Revelation 1:5

“To him who loves us and freed [~washed] us from our sins by his blood.”

Washed: *louō apo*. From 6th century and later manuscripts, KJV.

Loosed: *luō ek*.

- From 3rd, 4th, 5th centuries and later manuscripts.
- Consistent with ‘made us kings’ (1:6a).
- Consistent with Isaiah 40:2 in LXX Greek and Hebrew: ‘her penalty is paid (*luō*)’.
- *apo* (from) and *ek* (out of) translate as the same in the versions.

Revelation 1:8

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, [~(the) beginning and (the) ending],” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

Short form: Most manuscripts and versions.

Long form:

- One 4th cent Gk ms and others after the 10th century CE.
- Latin vulgate manuscripts
- Were it original, then there would have been no reason to remove it.
- Scribes likely recalled it from Rev. 21:6.

Revelation 1:15

“His [flaming] feet were like [burnished] bronze, refined as in a [burning] furnace.”

Episode 3, Revelation 11:19—15:4

- Burn: *puroō*. Three variants: (a) a feminine form modifying bronze (5th cent), (b) a masculine form (6th cent) modifying feet, and (c) a neuter form (4th cent) modifying furnace.
- All three forms have good manuscript support.
- Because “burnished’s” feminine genitive form has poor grammatical agreement with “bronze’s” accusative feminine form, it best explains the rise of the other forms.

Revelation 2:22

“Those who commit adultery with her I am throwing into great distress, unless they repent of her [~their] doings.”

- Both readings have Greek and versional support.
- Her: *autés* (fem. sing.) could have been taken from its occurrences in 21b and 22a.
- Their: *autōn* (masc. pl.) could have been mistaken from the same word ending (-ōn) in ‘doings’.
- *autés* better explains a change to *autōn* as scribes preferred that folk repent of ‘their (own) deeds.’

Revelation 5:9

“For you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God ^{omit}[saints] [~us] from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

- ‘Saints’: Inferred verse 5:8 and from ‘them’ in 5:10.
- ‘Us’: 4th and 6th centuries and later, KJV.
- No explicit object of the verb ‘ransom’: 5th cent.
- Scribes supplied a direct object, inserting ‘us’ before, after or instead of ‘for God’.
- Theologically, the Lamb did not redeem the four creatures or the 24 elders who are divine beings.

Revelation 9:21

“They did not repent of their murders or their sorceries [~drugs] or their prostitution or their thefts.”

- Drugs: *pharmakon*, occurs only here in the NT.
- Sorceries: *pharmakeia*, 4th and 6th centuries and later manuscripts, KJV. It also appears in Rev 18:21 and in Gal. 5:20.
- Copyists were more likely to alter *pharmakon* to *pharmakeia* than the inverse.

Revelation 11:2

“Do not measure the court outside [~inside] the temple; leave that out, for it is given over to the nations.”

‘Outside’: *eksōthen*, as in ‘outer court’.

- 3rd century and many later manuscripts and versions.

‘Inside’: *esothen*, as in ‘inner court’.

- 4th century and a few manuscripts and versions.
- Copyists were puzzled by the reference to a (non-existent) outer court, so changed it to inner court.