



a new approach to textual criticism considering the weight of evidence for various readings. Their text, called “The Majority Text” is often abbreviated MT. In 2005 Maurice Robinson and William Pierpont published *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*. Their approach focuses on the Byzantine text-type.

Standard Version. Only the New King James Version (and a few other updates of the KJV) continue to use the TR as their textual basis.

While the theory was quickly accepted that the Byzantine text-type was a corrupted text, some scholars continue to question its assumptions. Does the age of a manuscript guarantee its accuracy? Does a well-preserved manuscript guarantee it is accurate, or does it show it fell into disuse? There were times when major collections of NT manuscripts were destroyed. Did these contain manuscripts as old as these majuscules that read as the Byzantine text does? Should accepted readings be rejected based on the witness of only a few manuscripts?

In 1982 Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad introduced

Since Westcott and Hort, while no complete NT manuscripts have been found many fragmentary papyri have been discovered that predate Sinaiticus. These have been published in *The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1999). Some include . . .

The Rylands Papyrus (P⁵²), a fragment acquired by B.P. Grenfell in Egypt in 1920 and published in 1934. It is in the Rylands Library and was copied around AD 150. It is the oldest undisputed fragment of a NT book with a portion of John 18:31-33.

The Chester Beatty Papyri (P⁴⁶), discovered in Egypt and sold to Chester Beatty and the University of Michigan in the 1930s. This manuscript has almost all of Paul’s epistles. When first found it was dated to AD 200, but some modern scholars place it into the first century based upon paleography.

For several years Daniel B. Wallace has been announcing the upcoming publication of a manuscript of Mark he believes should be dated into the first century. He posts listings of new discoveries at *The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts*: www.csntm.org. In some cases readings found in papyri discoveries support readings found in the Byzantine text. NU has occasionally restored readings they once rejected. What will new discoveries reveal?



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Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM
10:00 AM
11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Arend Gressley
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Brady McAlister
Walker McAnear
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Rusty Scott
Justin Smiley
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament How the Bible Came to Us (12)

By Kyle Pope

In our last study we learned about the *Textus Receptus* (TR) edition of the Greek NT. Produced by Erasmus (1516), then refined in later editions by Estienne (1550), Elziver (1624), and Scrivener (1894), the TR served as the textual basis for English translations such as the King James Version (KJV) for over 400 years. In the nineteenth century a discovery would dramatically change this.

When Erasmus made his first edition he viewed only a few relatively young manuscripts, but the text he produced reflected what is known as the *Byzantine* text-type (named for Byzantium, the former capital of the Eastern empire). This text-type is found in most of the 5800 surviving manuscripts and was accepted throughout the Greek-speaking world for centuries. Erasmus’ work motivated a rise in the study of ancient manuscripts to determine the original text. This field of study, known as *Textual Criticism*, is used in the study of all types of historical literature. Its name doesn’t mean one is *criticizing* a text. It is the use of *critical* examination of manuscript evidence to determine the most likely form of the original text.

Greek, like all languages changed over time. One of the most important ways it changed was how it was written. Think of it this way, if you looked at a note written by a person when he was four, forty, and ninety-four, the way he wrote at each age shows which notes were

older or younger. The study of changes in writing is called *paleography*. In its earliest forms Greek used block letters that were all capital letters (known as *majuscules* or *uncials*). There were no spaces between letters and no accent or breathing marks. This continued through about AD 900, but around AD 800 Greek began to use mostly lower case letters (known as *minuscules*). It was a more cursive style with space between letters along with accent and breathing marks. None of this changed the meaning, but it allows scholars to determine a manuscript's age based on how it was written. Generally majuscule manuscripts are the oldest, minuscule are younger. After Erasmus sever-

al majuscule manuscripts came to light that became important to the study of the Greek NT. Here are some of the most important along with the symbol used to identify them in footnotes in Greek Bibles:

Codex Alexandrinus (A). Sixteen years after the KJV Cyril Lucar, Patriarch of Constantinople gave Charles I a near complete manuscript of the Greek Bible copied in Alexandria around AD 400. It is in the British Museum.

Codex Vaticanus (B). Since at least 1475 the earliest catalog of the Vatican library records a near complete manuscript of the Greek Bible believed to date to about AD 300.

Codex Bezae (D). Theodore Beza was a friend John Calvin. In 1581 Beza gave Cambridge Library a manuscript of the Gospels and Acts he got from a monastery in Lyons made in the fifth or sixth century.

The story of one of the most significant discoveries revolves around the life of a man named Constantin von Tischendorf (1815-1874). Daniel B. Wallace believes the fictional character Indiana Jones was based in part on Tischendorf's life. At nineteen he was already skilled in Greek and Latin. At twenty-five, he taught at a university. At twenty-six, he deciphered the *palimpsest* (a manuscript "scraped twice" with one text written over another) known as **Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C)** which turned out to be a near complete manuscript of the NT from around AD 400.

At twenty-seven Tischendorf published his first edition of the Greek NT. Two years later, in 1844 at the age of twenty-nine, he discovered the oldest complete NT manuscript ever found. At St. Catherine's monastery in the Sinai he rescued this ancient manuscript from a pile of parchments about to be burned for firewood. It is known as . . .

Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ). Dated to around AD 300, it is a parchment elegantly written in four columns. It contains all of the NT and much of the Greek OT. It is in the British Museum and can be digitally viewed at: www.codexsinaiticus.org.



So how did these discoveries compare to the TR? For the most part there was agreement, affirming the Lord's promise, **"Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away"** (Matt. 24:35). But there were some differences. Sinaiticus differs from the TR in 12,000 instances. The most of these are minor spelling differences, but in other cases, the differences are more significant. For example, in Romans 8:1, mentioned in our last study, most manuscripts have the longer reading ending with the words, **"who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit"** (NKJV). Sinaiticus ends the verse with the words, **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Does that mean the original text had the shorter reading, or was Sinaiticus miscopied in this instance? Throughout Sinaiticus there are notes where scribes (at some point) added corrections that match the Byzantine text. In Romans 8:1 there is a break in the line after the words **"Christ Jesus"** with an arrow pointing back to these words. At the top of the page there is another arrow with the words of the longer reading supplied (possibly) by a later editor. Which reading should be accepted? How scholars answer this affects decisions made in Bible translation for the next centuries.

Sinaiticus became the basis for Tischendorf's future editions of the Greek New Testament. He published eight from 1841-1869, but included notes that identified variants in other manuscripts. In the years that followed a theory developed that the Byzantine text had been changed over time to include *conflated readings* (i.e. readings bringing together different variants into one reading). In 1881 B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, proponents of this theory, published a text of the Greek NT advocating the view that older manuscripts are the only trustworthy witnesses to the text. Using the majuscule manuscripts as their primary source, their edition omitted words or phrases that had long been in the TR. These were listed in the back as "rejected readings." It had no footnotes showing evidence for variant readings.

Shortly after this a revision of the KJV was made relying on this approach. In England it was called the Revised Version, but in 1901 an American version of it was published called the American Standard Version. Although it did not omit all readings Westcott and Hort rejected, for the first time a textual basis other than the TR was used.

Since Westcott and Hort the view that the Byzantine text-type is a secondary text has become the accepted view among most scholars. Critical (or Eclectic) texts based on readings scholars pieced together from their best judgment of the original reading are produced leaning primarily on the age of a manuscript as a basis for its authority. The two most popular editions are the Nestle-Aland and the United Bible Society Greek texts (abbreviated NU). Unlike Westcott and Hort, both include footnotes allowing readers to evaluate manuscript evidence. Updated editions try to include the most recent manuscript discoveries. NU has been used as the textual basis for almost all English translations since the American