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**THE NEW TESTAMENT  
IN THE  
ORIGINAL GREEK  
ACCORDING TO THE  
BYZANTINE / MAJORITY  
TEXTFORM**

**THE TEXT REVISED BY  
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**INTRODUCTION AND APPENDIX BY THE  
EDITORS**

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR  
WILLIAM DAVID MCBRAYER**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is an awesome task to attempt to present the Greek New Testament in its greatest possible integrity. Faithful scribes through the centuries have labored to preserve and transmit the written Word as originally given by inspiration of God. Building upon this tradition, the textual critic seeks not to produce a merely "good" text, nor even an "adequate" text, but instead to establish as nearly as possible the precise form of the written Word as originally revealed.

The discussion which follows provides evidence to support the hypothesis that the Byzantine Textform more closely represents the original autographs than any other texttype. It is the opinion of the present editors that this text, as currently printed, reflects the closest approximation yet produced to a true Byzantine-Text edition of the Greek New Testament.

The present Byzantine/Majority Text was jointly edited and refined by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont during the period 1976-1991. The primary textual apparatuses utilized in the preparation of this edition were those of Hermann Freiherr von Soden and Herman C. Hoskier.[1] These same apparatuses were utilized by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad in their "Majority Text" edition of the Greek New Testament.[2]

Although the present text parallels that of Hodges-Farstad, there are significant differences in the texts since they were constructed on the basis of different principles. Textual distinctions from Hodges-Farstad are due either to their particular interpretation of identical data, their use or rejection of additional data, or because some items in the difficult-to-read Von Soden apparatus were neglected or misinterpreted by them. Minor differences are most noticeable where closely-divided Byzantine readings appear sporadically from Matthew through Jude (marked "M<sup>pt</sup>" in the Hodges-Farstad apparatus). Many of these divided readings appear in brackets [ ] in this edition when simple omission or inclusion is indicated (see further on this matter, pp. [xlx-l]).

Major differences from the text of Hodges-Farstad appear in John 7:53-8:11 (the "Pericope Adultera"), as well as in the entire book of the Revelation. These significant variations derive from the Hodges-Farstad stemmatic approach<sup>[3]</sup> in those two portions of Scripture, which closely followed the stemmatic approaches of Von Soden and Herman C. Hoskier. The present edition does not utilize stemmatics anywhere in regard to the sacred text. Instead, the editors have followed the critical canons of John W. Burgon throughout the entire Greek New Testament.<sup>[4]</sup>

The present edition attempts to recreate an acceptable and exclusively Byzantine text for the Pericope Adultera, as evidenced among the typical Byzantine manuscripts, most of which contain that passage without question. To accomplish this task, Von Soden's stemmatic data for the Pericope Adultera was converted into numerical equivalents (percentages). Von Soden in that portion of the text provided only basic stemmatic evidence rather than his normal K-group data (K = κοινή = Byzantine Textform). To edit this passage, the evidence of the Von Soden apparatus and introduction has been carefully compared with that of other critical editions, including the current and generally accurate Nestle-Aland 26th edition. The Appendix to this volume presents the various forms of the Pericope Adultera, both as they appear in manuscript groupings as well as in various editions of the Greek New Testament.

For the book of the Revelation, the present editors have constructed a working "Byzantine Text" from the full collation data of Herman C. Hoskier. In the Revelation there is no single representative "Byzantine/Majority Textform" such as exists in the rest of the New Testament; rather, two major and complementary textual traditions exist, each supported by an approximately equal number of manuscripts. One tradition is termed the "An" text (named for the church father Andreas, whose commentary accompanies most manuscripts of this type); the other tradition (the remaining large group of manuscripts) is called the "Q" text.

Where the "An" and "Q" groups agree, a true "Byzantine/Majority" consensus text exists. Where they disagree, however, a working text has been reconstructed on the basis of acceptable external and internal standards of New Testament textual criticism, following the basic criteria of John W. Burgon and Ernest C. Colwell rather than the stemmatic approach of Hodges-Farstad. (Colwell suggested a 70% agreement as sufficient to establish a texttype relationship; the present text places all readings with 70%+ support as clearly "Byzantine" in the Revelation, whereas the Hodges-Farstad approach favors some stemmatically-determined readings which possess only 20-30% support).<sup>[5]</sup> Although Robinson in 1977 developed a strictly numerical "majority-consensus" text of Revelation for dissertation research purposes, the text since that time has been carefully and extensively revised by the present editors on more thoroughly Burgonian principles. The present edition reflects the latest and most complete revision of that text.

# The Approximation of the Byzantine/Majority Textform

For over four-fifths of the New Testament, the Greek text is considered 100% certain, regardless of which texttype might be favored by any critic.<sup>[6]</sup> This undisputed bulk of the text reflects a common pre-existing archetype (the autograph), which has universal critical acceptance. In the remaining one-fifth of the Greek New Testament, the Byzantine/Majority Textform represents the pattern of readings found in the Greek manuscripts predominating during the 1000-year Byzantine era. Early printed editions of the Greek New Testament reflect a general agreement with the Byzantine-era manuscripts upon which they were based. Such manuscripts and early printed editions are commonly termed "Textus Receptus" or "Received Text" documents, based upon the term applied to the Elzevir 1624 printed Greek edition. Other editions commonly termed "Textus Receptus" include the editions of Erasmus 1516, Stephens 1550, and Beza 1598. George Ricker Berry has correctly noted that "in the main they are one and the same; and [any] of them may be referred to as the Textus Receptus."<sup>[7]</sup>

All these early printed Greek New Testaments closely paralleled (but were not identical with) the text which underlies the English-language King James or Authorized Version of 1611. That version was based closely upon the Greek text of Beza 1598, which differed but little from its Textus Receptus predecessors or from the derived text of the few Byzantine manuscripts upon which those editions were based. Nevertheless, neither the early English translations nor the early printed Greek New Testaments reflected a perfect agreement with the predominant Byzantine/Majority Textform, since no single manuscript or small group of manuscripts is 100% identical with the aggregate form of that text.

Most of the significant translatable differences between the early Textus Receptus editions and the Byzantine/Majority Textform are clearly presented in the English-language "M-text" footnotes appended to most editions of the New King James Version, published by Thomas Nelson Co. Those M-notes, however, are tied to the Hodges-Farstad Majority Text and do not always coincide with the present Byzantine/Majority Textform edition.<sup>[8]</sup>

There are approximately 1500 differences between any Receptus edition and either the present text or that of Hodges-Farstad. Nevertheless, all printed Receptus texts do approximate the Byzantine Textform closely enough (around 98% agreement) to allow a near-identity of reading between any Receptus edition and the majority of all manuscripts. Due to the greater quantity of manuscript evidence presently available, however, no one today should choose to remain bound to any early printed Greek text based upon a relative handful of manuscripts. The bibliographical resources listed at the end of this edition provide additional information regarding these and other matters of text-critical history.

## A Case for Byzantine Priority

The "Byzantine" Textform (otherwise called the "Majority" or "Traditional Text") predominated throughout the greatest period of manual copying of Greek New Testament manuscripts -- a span of over 1000 years (ca. AD 350 to AD 1516). It was without question the dominant text used both liturgically and popularly by the Greek-speaking Christian community. Most Greek manuscripts in existence today reflect this Byzantine Textform, whether appearing in normal continuous-text style<sup>[9]</sup> or specially arranged in lectionary format for liturgical use. Of over 5000 total continuous-text and lectionary manuscripts, 90% or more contain a basically Byzantine Textform.<sup>[10]</sup>

This statistical fact has led some simply to refer to this Textform as the "Majority Text." This misnomer, however, gives a false impression regarding the amount of agreement to be found among Byzantine manuscripts where places of variation occur. No two Byzantine-era manuscripts are exactly alike, and there are a good number of places where the testimony of the Byzantine-era manuscripts is substantially divided. In such places, the archetypical "Byzantine Textform" must be established from principles other than that of "number" alone.

An important consideration is that, except for a few small "family" relationships which have been established, the bulk of the Byzantine-era documents are not closely-related in any genealogical sense.<sup>[11]</sup> A presumption, therefore, is toward their relative independence from each other rather than their dependence upon one another. This makes the Byzantine majority of manuscripts highly individualistic witnesses which cannot be summarily lumped together as one "mere" texttype, to be played off against other competing texttypes. This relative autonomy has great significance, as will be explained.

The Byzantine/Majority Textform is not the text found in most modern critical editions, such as those published by the United Bible Societies or the various Nestle editions.<sup>[12]</sup> Byzantine readings, however, are often cited in the apparatus notes to those editions. The critical Greek editions favor a predominantly "Alexandrian" text, deriving primarily from early vellum and papyrus documents having an Egyptian origin -- a clear minority of manuscripts in any case. It should be remembered that most of the variant readings pertaining to one or another texttype are trivial or non-translatable, and are not readily apparent in English translation (significant translatable differences are discussed [above](#)).

Not all early manuscripts, however, favor the Alexandrian text, and few are purely Alexandrian in character. Many early papyri reflect mixture with a more "Western" type of text; but few (if any) scholars today favor the "Western" readings found in such manuscripts. Such rejection, although well-founded, is basically subjective. On a similar basis, the early date and certain "preferred" readings currently cause the minority Alexandrian manuscripts to be favored by critics over against those comprising the Byzantine/Majority Textform.

Many scholars, particularly those from within the "Evangelical" camp, have begun to re-evaluate and give credence to the authenticity-claims for the Byzantine Textform, as opposed to the textual preferences of the past century and a half. The Alexandrian-based critical texts reflect the diverse textual theories held by various critics: a preference for early witnesses (as espoused by Lachmann, Tregelles or Aland); a partiality for a favorite document (as demonstrated by Tischendorf or Westcott and Hort); a "reasoned" eclectic approach (as advocated by Metzger and Fee); and a "rigorous" eclectic approach (as argued for by Kilpatrick and Elliott). The weakness of each of these positions is the subjective preference for either a specific manuscript and its textual allies, for a small group of early manuscripts, and/or for certain types of "internal evidence" regarding a reading's length, difficulty, style, or contextual considerations.

## Hort's Basic Contentions

In contrast, the "Byzantine-priority" position simply urges, as a primary consideration, a return to external evidence following the sound principles of John W. Burgon and in agreement with an initial objective principle of F. J. A. Hort. Hort wrote in his "Introduction" volume that

A theoretical presumption indeed remains that a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents at each stage of transmission than vice versa.[\[13\]](#)

Yet Hort immediately proclaimed that this objective principle (which would favor "Byzantine/Majority-priority") was too weak in itself to stand "against the smallest tangible evidence of other kinds." Hort's supporting evidence in favor of an Alexandrian priority, however, was deficient, and many of those who today favor an Alexandrian-based text have rejected certain of Hort's main principles. Hort, however, made it clear that, were his foundation-pillars to be overthrown, his theory would crumble. In such a case, a return to his initial "theoretical presumption" would appear to become the only logical position for textual scholars to hold, namely, that "a majority of extant documents is more likely to represent a majority of ancestral documents." The Byzantine Textform, therefore, would hold a strong claim toward autograph authenticity.

The main pillars of Hort's theory are presented here in their most logical sequence:

- The argument from genealogy. This hypothesis claims that all manuscripts of a texttype -- no matter how numerous -- have descended from a single archetype (parental ancestor) of that texttype. One therefore need consider only the archetype form, which becomes but a single witness in competition with the remaining archetypical "single-witnesses" of other texttypes. This argument -- established from a hypothetical stemmatic diagram -- effectively eliminated, in Hort's view, the "problem" of the Byzantine Textform's overwhelming numerical superiority.
- Widespread conflation (the combining of readings from two or more source documents) was claimed to have prevailed among Byzantine-era manuscripts, but was claimed not to occur in early Alexandrian or Western documents. This argument supposedly showed the Byzantine Textform to be "late," having been created by combining readings of the "early" Western and Alexandrian texttypes. Hort provided a mere eight examples to "demonstrate" this point, and then proclaimed this state of affairs "never" to be reversed.
- Hort claimed a total absence of "distinctively Byzantine" readings from manuscripts, versions, and Church Fathers before the mid-fourth century AD. Hort considered this argument to "prove" that readings found exclusively in later Byzantine manuscripts had no known early support and therefore absolutely could not have existed prior to AD 350. Hort was extremely adamant on this point.

- The origin of the Byzantine Textform was alleged to be the result of an authorized revision in the fourth century. Hort used this argument to demonstrate how the Byzantine Textform could have been a "later" development, yet suddenly overwhelm the entire Greek-speaking church from AD 350 onward.
- The assumed internal "inferiority" of Byzantine readings as opposed to the "better" readings found in the early manuscripts was strongly pressed by Hort. This argument, though obviously subjective, nevertheless further reduced whatever value remained of the Byzantine Textform in the eyes of many critics.
- While the final item is subjective and basically prejudicial, the other arguments at least appear to present a convincing aura of objectivity. Had [???] case not seemed so solidly secured, his text might have been more seriously scrutinized and questioned. Yet, in truth, all of Hort's main points were subjectively-based and were deliberately contrived to overthrow the Byzantine-priority hypothesis.[\[14\]](#)

Nevertheless, most modern scholars, while rejecting Hort's main principles, continue to favor his conclusions regarding the "original" Alexandrian-based text and the supposed inferiority of the "later" Byzantine/Majority Textform. This academic anomaly derives from holding a conclusion based upon no solid theory of textual transmission-history.

# A Rebuttal of Hortian Logic

In response to Hort's five "pillars," modern scholarship can declare the following counter-arguments:

1. The genealogical argument was never actually applied to the New Testament text by Hort, and in fact has never been so applied by anyone. As Colwell noted, Hort utilized this principle solely to "depose the Textus Receptus," and not to establish a line of descent. His "stematic diagram" was itself a pure fabrication.[\[15\]](#)
2. Even though a hypothetical stemma might "demonstrate" that "a majority of extant documents" may only have descended from the text of a single archetype (one branch on the genealogical "tree"), Hort was not able to establish that the Byzantine majority of manuscripts were genealogically dependent (and therefore belonged to a single branch of the stemma). Nor could he disallow that the essential archetype of the Byzantine Textform might not in fact be the autograph text itself rather than a later branch of the stemma. The virtual independence of the Byzantine-era manuscripts (as mentioned earlier) alone suffices to refute Hort's genealogical claim regarding the entire Byzantine/Majority Textform. Further discussion of this point will follow.
3. Conflation is not exclusive to the Byzantine-era manuscripts; the scribes of Alexandrian and Western manuscripts conflate as much or more than what has been imputed to Byzantine-era scribal habits.[\[16\]](#) (Hort argued that only the Byzantine manuscripts practiced conflation, and that manuscripts of supposedly "earlier" texttypes never followed this practice).
4. Over 150 "distinctively Byzantine" readings have been found in papyrus manuscripts predating AD 350, even though totally unattested by versions and Fathers.[\[17\]](#) (Hort emphatically maintained that, were this principle overthrown, his entire hypothesis would have been demolished).
5. There never has been a shred of evidence that an "authorized revision" of the Greek New Testament text ever occurred, and the Greek church itself has never claimed such. (Hort maintained that, apart from such formally-authorized revision, there would be no way possible to explain the rise and dominance of the Byzantine Textform).[\[18\]](#)

Many Byzantine readings have been strongly defended by non-partisans on internal grounds; in fact, all Greek New Testament editions since Westcott-Hort have increasingly adopted Byzantine readings to replace those advocated by Westcott and Hort.

Despite the inherent subjectivity of this approach, Byzantine-priority advocates maintain that a successful internal-evidence case can be made for nearly every Byzantine reading over against the Western, Caesarean, and Alexandrian readings.[\[19\]](#) (Hort claimed that every purely Byzantine reading was "inferior" on all sound principles of internal evidence).

Hort adamantly maintained that the concurrence of all five points was essential to the establishment of an Alexandrian-preference theory. His modern successors have retreated from all these points into a position which in essence favors only the external age of documents, their particular texttype, and/or the internal quality of the readings they contain. Unlike Hort, however, the modern critics fail to offer a systematic history of textual transmission which satisfactorily explains the phenomenon of the Byzantine Textform. Hort at least postulated a deliberate authorized revision as a possible explanation for the later Byzantine predominance. Yet today, the supposed rise and overwhelming dominance of the Byzantine Textform out of the presumed primordial Western and Alexandrian texttypes is accounted for merely as the result of a lengthy, vague "process." But, as Hodges has cogently pointed out,

No one has yet explained how a long, slow process spread out over many centuries as well as over a wide geographical area, and involving a multitude of copyists, who often knew nothing of the state of the text outside of their own monasteries or scriptoria, could achieve this widespread uniformity out of the diversity presented by the earlier [Western and Alexandrian] forms of text.... An unguided process achieving relative stability and uniformity in the diversified textual, historical, and cultural circumstances in which the New Testament was copied, imposes impossible strains on our imagination.[20]

This consideration should again force the scholars who forsake Hort to do as Colwell suggested; namely, to come up with a better reconstruction of the history of the transmission of the New Testament text which offers a credible explanation for the utter dominance of the Byzantine/Majority Textform.[21] A "process" view is not necessarily wrong[22] -- only the insistence that the process begin with the Alexandrian and Western texttypes rather than the Byzantine Textform. In light of the preceding discussion, it would appear that "process" advocates are forced to return to Hort's initial presumption regarding "a majority of extant documents," and acknowledge that the Byzantine/Majority Textform indeed has a strong (if not the best) claim to reflect the original text.

# Addressing Current Objections to Byzantine Priority

No one should deny that a case for the Byzantine Textform can be strongly advocated. Nevertheless, certain objections are presented by those who oppose this Textform, and some of these need to be briefly addressed.

## The Allegation of No Early Byzantine Manuscripts

The most common criticism concerns the fact that there are in existence no manuscripts of the Byzantine Textform earlier than AD 400. At first glance, this appears to be a formidable objection, and indeed unanswerable in view of the absence of the hard data required for refutation. A defense which provides sound reasons for this situation, however, can be effectively made.

First of all, the extant early manuscript evidence we possess all apparently stems from the Egyptian region, and reflects the mixed types of text prevalent in that area during the second century. Indeed, had it not been for the fortuitous discovery of P75 (ca. AD 175) in 1955, we today would have no certain evidence that manuscripts which were predominantly Alexandrian in character predated the great uncial codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (ca. AD 350) -- only a hypothesis. That hypothesis would be called into serious question by the remaining papyri, each of which possesses a good degree of "mixture" between Alexandrian and Western readings (with some "distinctively Byzantine" readings thrown in for good measure). Any bold assertion that the point is settled, since no predominantly Byzantine manuscripts of the second century have yet been recovered, certainly seems to beg the question from an argument based on silence.

Secondly, the overall presence of Western + Alexandrian "mixture" in the known papyri from Egypt indicates a far more complex textual situation in that region than might have been imagined for the Greek-speaking Eastern portion of the Empire. The local situation of Egypt would thus not be the most appropriate for preserving a more "general" text -- a text which had its origin and its essence above and beyond any purely "local" or regional texts.<sup>[23]</sup> The complexity of the text in the Egyptian papyri is strongly paralleled among the Old Latin manuscripts which predominated in the Western portion of the Empire -- thoroughly "mixed" manuscripts possessing "African" and "European" readings which reflected no common archetype in their "uncontrolled" state.

Thirdly, in postulating a reconstruction of the history of textual transmission which favors the Byzantine-priority hypothesis, it is not at all necessary that a Byzantine manuscript be expected or produced from these earliest centuries. In fact, a "pure" Byzantine text may have almost vanished in certain locales shortly after the completion of the autograph form of the canonical books, especially among non-church manuscripts in areas relatively distant from their original source.<sup>[24]</sup> Such a puzzling and paradoxical notion stems from the knowledge of the uncontrolled "popular" nature of some localized textual transmission (evidenced by many surviving papyri) as practiced during the first

few centuries and the status of the church at that time as a persecuted entity. It appears that when the early copies of the autographs arrived in regions distant from their sources there must have been less constraint against altering their wording in such locales.[25] "Popular" alterations and regional "corrections" would combine in a continual process of scribal corruption and resultant mixture of texts. This process would occur as scribally-altered manuscripts were later cross-corrected from other "popular" manuscripts possessing differing readings -- whether intentionally (with good motives) by the orthodox, or accidentally.[26]

Thus, in some localities during this early period, there arose "uncontrolled" and "popular" types of copies, which were apparently widely distributed in those areas. Pious attempts to "correct" some of the aberrations intensified the problem as time went on. This situation was further complicated by the increasing persecution against the church, which effectively cut off certain controlling and correcting factors. This reconstruction of the history of textual transmission seems to be demanded in view of the confusion evidenced by the early surviving Greek papyrus and uncial manuscripts, both in their originally-copied text and in the various attempts to re-edit and "correct" them into a more satisfactory product.

Although oral recollection and liturgical repetition of biblical texts could serve as a stabilizing factor for the Greek New Testament text, neither of these "unwritten standards" would be foolproof. Only a well-preserved written standard could serve to secure and safeguard a correct and reliable "original text."

Had there been no original "common archetype" (the autographs), this uncontrolled process would have produced much the same result among the Greek manuscripts as found among the Old Latin -- a veritable hodgepodge of readings created by individualist scribes ("translators" as regards the Old Latin), with no characteristically-prevailing "majority" text, whether Byzantine or any other.[27] Such indeed was the situation when Jerome was commissioned to make sense out of the Old Latin in order to create a "standard text" for the Latin-speaking Church.

Jerome's revision was absolutely necessary to unify the Latin tradition. Apart from a similar "Byzantine revision" (of which there is no historical evidence), the Byzantine Textform dominance cannot be satisfactorily explained by those who reject its possible "autograph archetype" status. Nor can appeal to a simplistic "process" hypothesis solve the problem.

An unrestricted "process" would lead only to greater mixture and less and less unity of text, such as had occurred with the Old Latin manuscripts. Only a common pre-existing archetype will permit order ever to come out of chaos. Even that possibility depends upon both the process of time and sufficient scribal concern for the text being copied so that other manuscripts beyond the current exemplar (master copy) would be regularly consulted for corrective purposes.

The original Byzantine Textform must have rapidly degenerated into the various uncontrolled popular texts which prevailed in certain times and localities, due to the

events and circumstances which surrounded manuscript copying during the first three centuries. These "popular" texts, in the normal process of copying and re-copying (with scribal "improvements" and blunders coupled with cross-correction changes from other exemplars), eventually would have developed into the distinctive "local text" forms which centered around various metropolitan regions. These in effect became the birthplaces of various "texttypes" -- some now probably lost to history, since they prevailed in regions where the climate was too damp to allow a preservation of such manuscripts. Of those locally-preserved texttypes, we find in manuscripts of the present day those minority groups which we term the Western, Alexandrian, and Caesarean (the Byzantine Textform is specifically excluded from the enumeration of local texts under the present hypothesis since it represents the original Textform from which all the others derived).

All this occurred during the period of greatest persecution for the early church. It is understandable, given these circumstances, that the preservation of the precise "autograph form" of the text by common scribes did not always have the highest priority. The rise of local text forms was the best possible result that could have been expected in some locales. Local text forms would arise only as a side effect of the deposition of certain "popular" texts in a given locality, regardless of their genealogical derivation.

Once the status of the churches had become sanctioned under Constantine, however, the predominantly "local" nature of the church was permanently altered. Official sanction engendered wider communication between the churches, including regional and Empire-wide councils. Greater communication meant wider travel and exchange of manuscripts among both the churches and individual Christians. It was only natural that cross-comparison and correction of one manuscript by another should then proceed on a numerical and geographical scale far greater than ever before.

The result of this spontaneous "improvement" of manuscripts through cross-correction would not manifest itself immediately. Over the process of time, however, all manuscripts would slowly but inexorably tend toward a common and universally-shared text -- a text with its own subgroups and minor differences among the manuscripts, but a text which was basically unitary in form and content, though not itself an ingrown "local text" nor identical with any single local text.<sup>[28]</sup> This "universal text" could only be one which would approach the common archetype which lay behind all the local text forms. For the Greek manuscripts, that archetype could only be the autograph form itself.

Scribal "creativity" formed no part of this "autograph restoration" process; readings created by individual scribes would be effectively weeded out during the next copying generation or soon thereafter by cross-correction. The vast amount of "singular readings" obviously created by scribes, as seen in our existing manuscripts, amply illustrates the fact of the relative nonproliferation of unique scribal alterations.

The result inevitably arrived at would be a continually-improving, self-consistent Textform, refined and restored, preserved (as would be expected) in an increasing number of manuscripts which slowly would overcome the influence of "local texts" and

finally become the dominant text of the Greek-speaking world. This explains both the origin and dominance of the Byzantine/Majority Textform.

This reconstruction adequately explains why no early Byzantine manuscripts appear among our existing documents, as well as the phenomenon of the Byzantine Textform. It has offered a plausible reconstruction which requires no extreme theological "leaps of faith," nor a general assignment of blame to "heretics" for non-Byzantine texttypes or readings. Nor are any "wild" speculations presented which strain the sensibilities of the inquirer. A sound, rational approach which accounts for all the phenomena and offers a reconstruction of the history of textual transmission is all that is demanded for any text-critical hypothesis. It is the opinion of the editors that these criteria have begun to be fulfilled in the presentation and advocacy of the present Textform so as to overcome a predominant objection that has been urged against a Byzantine-priority hypothesis.[\[29\]](#)

## **No "Distinctively-Byzantine" Text in Early Fathers**

The first orthodox Father who consistently cites a Byzantine type of text is John Chrysostom (d.407). The earliest Church Father who is acknowledged to have used a Byzantine type of text is Asterius, a heretic who died in AD 341. Early Fathers quoted a "mixed bag" of Alexandrian, Western, and commonly shared readings with the Byzantine text. Hort claimed that "distinctively Byzantine" readings were not found in the early Fathers; hence, such readings did not exist.

However, the presence of "distinctively Byzantine" readings in the early papyri amply demonstrates that the component elements of the Byzantine Textform may well have been known to these early Fathers. Of course, had they utilized such readings they would no longer be "distinctively Byzantine" according to Hort's definition (i.e., possessing no support in the Fathers or versions before AD 350); thus the "circle of Byzantine exclusion" would have been pushed back further. Point three below looks toward another possible explanation of these phenomena.

It may be readily affirmed that the same phenomena which resulted in the absence of early Byzantine manuscripts would also affect the texts available to the Church Fathers in their various locales. It becomes no surprise to find the "popular" or local readings predominating among the early Fathers. This explains only a portion of the problem, however.

First, the supposed "text of a Father" is based upon a gratuitous assumption: namely, that a Father in any single locale or at any particular time used one and only one manuscript. In fact, a Father may have switched manuscripts daily in some cases. This possibility alone precludes any suggestion that "the" text used by a Father can indeed be reconstructed with confidence. Certainly, while a Father was in a single location, most manuscripts available to him in that region would reflect the local text of the area; but what if now and then another manuscript from a different region came his way? It becomes no surprise to find that some Fathers possess a text that is "mixed" in a significant degree. The fact is, we can only determine which readings a Father may

have quoted at certain times in his works; the actual text of the manuscript(s) he may have used remains an open question.

Secondly, Fathers often paraphrase, quote faultily from memory, or deliberately alter a quotation to make a point. Unless a Father states unambiguously that he is actually quoting a manuscript (which cases are in the minority), one cannot be certain that the Father was reproducing a text that lay before him. The goal of the Fathers was theological rather than primarily text-critical, and they often altered readings which did not fit their dogmatic purposes (e.g., John 1:13).

Thirdly -- and most importantly -- the common practice among patristic scholars is to dismiss distinctively Byzantine readings found in the writings of the Fathers unless the Father expressly comments on the significance of the Byzantine reading. This is due to their hypothesis that the scribes (who also copied the works of the Fathers as well as the New Testament manuscripts) would habitually and deliberately tend to alter the scriptural quotations of the Fathers into those with which they were familiar, namely, the Byzantine readings. This argument is similar to that made against the Byzantine manuscripts in regard to scribal "harmonization." Scribes are assumed to have a "tendency" to alter the text of a manuscript they are copying into that with which they are more familiar, whether from personal memorization, liturgical usage, "easier" synonyms, or the like. However, this "harmonizing" or "easier/more familiar" principle was not a major factor among Byzantine-era scribes as seen reflected in scribal habits among the New Testament documents themselves; nor is it likely that any different copying policy was applied with regard to the text of the Fathers. The simplest refutation of such a supposition is that, were widespread Byzantine alteration a fact, it becomes incredible that the scribes would have left so many obvious and sensitive places utterly untouched.

Byzantine-era scribes as a whole were less inclined to gratuitously alter the text before them than simply to perform their given duty. It was the earlier scribes in some locales who, during the uncontrolled "popular" era of persecution and the initial years of Imperial "freedom," felt more at liberty to deal with the text as they saw fit.[\[30\]](#)

This suggests the contrary hypothesis: namely, that patristic readings which are non-Byzantine and not expressly commented on by the early Fathers might be questioned. But this perspective need not be pressed. If the Byzantine readings now summarily dismissed in the early Fathers were legitimately included, the Fathers' overall text would be seen as more "Byzantine" than current scholarly opinion claims. This was Burgon's original contention, which was dismissed out of hand, due to his use of "uncritical" editions of the Fathers. Current "critical" editions of the Fathers, however, follow the above-mentioned practice of eliminating distinctive Byzantine readings where unconfirmed by direct comment. Were this not so, the text of the Fathers would be recognized as far more Byzantine than current opinion allows.

## The Circumstance of Dually-Aligned Readings

Another problem which arises when dealing with the text of the Fathers as well as with Alexandrian and Western manuscripts in general is that of the "Hortian blinders" which have been so skillfully applied to the eyes of modern critics.<sup>[31]</sup>

The textual blind spot occurs in regard to certain dually-aligned readings (i.e., readings supported by both Alexandrian and Byzantine manuscripts or by both Western and Byzantine manuscripts). Those readings which are supported by a Byzantine-Alexandrian combination are termed "Alexandrian," and are considered to have been "later" incorporated into the emerging Byzantine text. Likewise, readings supported by a Byzantine-Western combination are considered solely "Western," later adopted by the Byzantine-era scribes. The unprejudiced mind can readily see how seriously this approach begs the entire question. From the present perspective, the Byzantine-Alexandrian and Byzantine-Western alignments are merely those autograph readings of the Byzantine Textform from which the Alexandrian or Western manuscripts did not deviate -- a very different picture.

Thus, the Alexandrian manuscripts are themselves far more "Byzantine" than they have been given credit for, if only their readings are first considered from a Byzantine-priority perspective. Likewise, the Western manuscripts also are far more "Byzantine" than has been claimed, if viewed from the Byzantine-priority standpoint. Researchers simply must not beg the question by assuming the point to be proven, but must fairly place themselves in the midst of opposing hypotheses in order to gain a proper perspective of each view.

When this principle is applied to the readings found in the Fathers, the result will appear striking. Many dually-aligned Alexandrian or Western readings which "typify" and categorize the text of various Fathers will suddenly be seen to have been Byzantine all along -- reclassified only because the Byzantine alignment with such readings was ignored, in accordance with a theory requiring the removal of anything "Byzantine" which happened to concur with other "earlier" texttypes. By default, the only remaining "Byzantine" readings in the early Fathers are those classified as "distinctive" by Hort, and many of these are summarily dismissed as scribal accommodation to the later dominant text if no express comment is made regarding them. It is thus no wonder that the prevailing opinion concerning the text of the Fathers clashes so severely with Burgon's claims that a far greater number of Patristic readings were essentially Byzantine.

The Patristic evidence, therefore, requires a full and complete reinvestigation from within the Byzantine-priority perspective to see whether any statistical change might occur. It is also important to note that the "writing theologian" Fathers of the fifth century from the Eastern (Greek-speaking) portion of the Empire already had in hand what appears to be a basically Byzantine text. One is hard pressed to explain where this text came from so quickly if no Byzantine revision occurred. The present reconstruction of the history of transmission would satisfactorily account for the presence of a thoroughly Byzantine Textform in the fifth-century Fathers. It would also explain the lack of a clearly

Byzantine text in any Father during the period when many popular, uncontrolled manuscripts circulated in the midst of persecution, and for a while thereafter.

## **The Issue of Older Manuscripts**

In view of the transmissional history suggested, the fallacy of the "older is necessarily better" argument should already have been made clear. Going beyond the contents of the earliest manuscripts, however, the editors would stress (following Burgon and many other critics) that it is not the age of the manuscript itself, but the quality and antiquity of the text it contains which is the real item of value.

Most early manuscripts in existence today have been affected by the uncontrolled nature of textual transmission which prevailed in their local areas, as well as by the persecutions which came continually against the church. The whole matter of early copying practices is hypothetical, regardless of which textual theory one prefers. We know nothing beyond what can be deduced from what survives. In the early papyri, we may have only personal copies, and not those which were generally used by the churches themselves. Also, the papyri all come from a single geographic area, and reflect a good deal of corruption, both accidental and deliberate. One should not summarily question the integrity of all early manuscripts because of the character of this limited sample from Egypt.

There is good reason to presume that most early copies -- many made directly from the autographs themselves -- would have been as accurate as ordinary care would humanly permit, especially for Holy Writ. Church sources in particular would not knowingly send forth what they would have considered "defective" copies. At least the first and second copying generations should have been generally secure. Responsible scribes would presumably take general care with their sacred deposits.

Although a healthy respect for the sacred text generally prevailed, keeping corruption to a minimum, even the orthodox sometimes took the opportunity to alter the text, under the supposition that they were "improving" or "restoring" the text with their corrections. Heretical tampering did occur, as witnessed by the work of Tatian and Marcion, but the church as a whole, and especially its leaders and theologians, were keen watchdogs against such deliberately-perversed manuscripts. It is not without significance that today we know of Marcion's heretical text only from citations in the Church Fathers, and the heretic Tatian's Diatessaron is seen in but one Greek manuscript fragment, despite its early widespread popularity even among the orthodox.

Yet, even though heretical alterations were not tolerated, nowhere in the early Fathers do we find any indication that in those early centuries a uniformity of text was a concern or demand. Had common scribal alteration been a concern, the Fathers would have spoken out as strongly as they did against the theology and text of the heretics. The evidence of the existing early manuscripts as well as the Patristic quotations of Scripture is plain in this regard. The manuscript text in the earliest centuries had been corrupted to a degree, chiefly through the agency of common orthodox Christians. The Fathers, like all other Christians, had to make do with the manuscripts currently

available. They did not actively seek to "restore" the autograph form of that text; such was not their purpose.

The text found in the manuscripts of the second and third centuries, therefore, is in many cases corrupt, and to that extent somewhat removed from the autograph text. Not all manuscripts showed the same degree of corruption, however, as even the early papyri demonstrate.<sup>[32]</sup> Only the continual process of manuscript comparison and cross-correction as practiced throughout the centuries would succeed in weeding out early scribal corruption and conflicting variant readings. The same process would later keep the vagaries of individual Byzantine-era scribes in check.

With the increased cross-cultural communication which followed the legitimization of Christianity, such a practice would slowly but naturally purge manuscripts from both the conspicuous and even the less-obvious corruptions to which they earlier had been subjected, and a truly "older" and purer text would result. This "process" could not be successful were the basic text of all Greek manuscripts not in large measure "secure." A mish-mash of conflicting readings, such as prevailed in the Old Latin tradition, would never allow for the restoration of an older or purer Textform by a natural "process."

In light of the general uniformity of the Greek text as found in the later Byzantine-era manuscripts, it therefore appears more rather than less likely that these later manuscripts would preserve a form of text closely approximating the autograph. Certainly this would be far more likely than the chances for the autograph readings to survive only in a conflicting handful of second- and third-century manuscripts which were copied under less-than-favorable uncontrolled conditions.

Even more to the point, later manuscripts may often preserve an "early" text. This was one of the main considerations of Hort's genealogical hypothesis. A manuscript of the twelfth century may have been copied directly from a manuscript of the third century. There is no way of knowing this directly, except where a scribe makes mention of such a fact in a colophon (closing written comment).<sup>[33]</sup> Most colophons, however, do not address the issue of the type of manuscript (papyrus, uncial, or minuscule) from which they were copied, but only those items of pressing concern to the scribe, many of which are insignificant to us, being devotional in nature (we should dearly love to have even the date when each manuscript was copied, but most scribes did not consider that to be of major importance).

We do know that, after the 9th century, almost all manuscripts ceased to be copied in the uncial style (capital-letters), and were systematically replaced by the "modern" minuscule style (cursive-letters) which then predominated until the invention of printing. This "copying revolution" resulted in the destruction of hundreds of previously-existing uncial manuscripts once their faithful counterpart had been produced in minuscule script. Many truly ancient uncials may have vanished within a century due to this change in the handwriting style. Those palimpsest<sup>[34]</sup> manuscripts which survive provide mute testimony to the fate of many of those ancient uncials, the remnants of which, having been erased and re-used to copy sermons or liturgical texts, might simply have perished or been discarded once those texts were no longer considered valuable.

Since Kirsopp Lake found only genealogically-unrelated manuscripts at Sinai, Patmos, and Jerusalem, he concluded that it was "hard to resist the conclusion that the scribes usually destroyed their exemplars."[\[35\]](#) If strictly applied to all copying generations, this view would lead to a number of logical fallacies. Some of these have been discussed by Donald A. Carson and Wilbur Pickering.[\[36\]](#)

However, the real explanation of Lake's comment revolves around the "copying revolution": scribes apparently destroyed uncial exemplars as they converted the Greek text into the then-standard minuscule format. Thus, the apparently unrelated mass of later minuscules may in fact stem from long-lost uncial sources far older than the date of the minuscules containing them. This in itself adds a significant weight to the testimony of the minuscule mass, especially those copied in the ninth and tenth centuries, at the height of the copying revolution.

For modern researchers summarily to neglect the text of the minuscules because they mostly reflect a Byzantine type of text is to suggest that their text is all one and all late, in accord with Hort's thesis concerning the ultimate origin of the Byzantine Textform. Yet Von Soden and subsequent researchers have clearly shown the internal diversity found among the manuscripts of the Byzantine Textform -- a diversity which cannot be accounted for genealogically. An unprejudiced consideration of the present hypothesis will impart a value to (at least) the earlier minuscule testimony which ranges far beyond that allowed by modern critics. This factor now makes the complete collation of all known minuscule manuscripts an important task which should be completed as rapidly as possible.[\[37\]](#)

## **Fallacies of Some Claimants of the "Majority Text" Position**

The present editors allow that criticisms leveled against some advocates of the "Majority Text" theory have a certain validity. These include objections to a primarily quantitative approach (using "Number" as the main criterion); the use of stemmatics (which illegitimately overturns "Number," "Variety," and "Continuity" in many places); a transmission-history which permits but a single "orthodox" line of transmission, with all other lines being viewed as "unorthodox" or "heretical"; and the departure from the text-critical "mainstream" in the complete rejection of the value of most ancient manuscripts, the elimination of texttype relationships and their significance, and the suggestion that internal principles of textual criticism are useless for establishing the text.

The present editors have attempted to avoid such pitfalls by working from a carefully-constructed theory of textual transmission, remaining within normal text-critical practice and principles. They advocate a "Byzantine-priority" rather than a solely "Majority Text" hypothesis. As has been explained, no stemmatic approach is utilized in this edition, nor is "Number" a sole or necessarily a primary criterion. The present edition does not deliberately mingle the Byzantine, Western, or Caesarean witnesses -- i.e., does not combine the testimony of Von Soden's K and I groups -- to produce the preferred text. The suggested reconstruction of the history of transmission requires no single "orthodox" line of descent in opposition to a multitude of "heretical" lines; nor are standard text-critical concepts summarily rejected. The testimony of the most ancient manuscripts, texttype interrelationships, and principles of sound internal evidence were regularly considered to assist in determining the original form of the text in places where Byzantine-era manuscripts were divided.

### **The Presumed "Hidden Agenda"**

Certain partisans claiming to affirm a "Majority Text" position have abused that term to promote a sole objective of defending the Textus Receptus and ultimately the exclusive advocacy of the King James Version. To achieve such an end, however, all recognizable principles of textual criticism must be discarded by them; their ultimate struggle becomes purely theological, and that in the extreme. God and the TR/KJV are pitted against Satan and the Alexandrian Text. The Alexandrian manuscripts are thoroughly deprecated. In their eyes Westcott and Hort become "closet Jesuits," bent on destroying the "orthodox Bible" by substituting the readings of "heretical" manuscripts. Those who accept any texts besides the TR and KJV are "liberal," "heretical," and/or dupes of a "Catholic conspiracy." Some authentic "Majority Text" advocates have been unfairly lumped with this extreme position, even though these individuals have made it plain that they are not in sympathy with such an absurd agenda.

The present editors desire to make it absolutely clear that they are not tied to such an agenda in any way. Neither the Textus Receptus nor any English translation is in view under the Byzantine-priority theory -- only the restoration of readings considered most closely to reflect the original form of the Byzantine text, and ultimately the autograph.

The Byzantine Textform does not concur with any Receptus edition, and clearly not with any English version presently available, including the KJV or NKJV. The present editors would welcome heartily a good modern translation based upon the Byzantine Textform (a project which will come in its own due time).

For advocates of the TR/KJV position, the "theological argument" regarding the conflict between God and Satan is primary, centering upon the "providential preservation" of a specific and unique text, unlike that found in any single manuscript or texttype, including the Byzantine Textform. For advocates of the Byzantine-priority hypothesis, the underlying theological factors take a secondary role in the realm of textual criticism. Nor can we summarily dismiss the manuscripts of competing texttypes as "useless" or "heretical." Neither the Alexandrian nor the Western manuscripts in themselves present a deliberately "evil" text -- only a text which (under the present hypothesis) has suffered from scribal corruption and/or "creativity" to an adverse degree -- a situation which has lessened their overall value and authority.

Christians who use a translation based upon the Alexandrian (or even the Western) texttype are only somewhat disadvantaged from a Byzantine-priority perspective, specifically in the study of details. The best-selling NIV, the NASV, and most other modern translations are themselves based upon a generally-Alexandrian text, and Christians seem to suffer no devastating effects from their use (one must remember that, regardless of texttype, over 85% of the text found in all manuscripts is identical).

There are certain exegetical and theological problems found within the manuscripts of the Alexandrian and Western texttypes. Many readings are plainly erroneous or contradict other passages of Scripture. However, the primary doctrinal emphases of Scripture remain sufficient and clear throughout even the worst of these manuscripts. Their many textual errors are in no way endorsed by the present editors, however, even though some of these erroneous readings appear in various modern English translations and critical Greek editions.

The Byzantine-priority hypothesis is advocated, not because it is the only "pure" and therefore "good" form of the text, but because it appears to possess a greater claim toward "autograph originality" than other proposed hypotheses. The goal of textual criticism is not to produce a merely "good" text, nor even an "adequate" text, but instead to establish as nearly as possible the precise form of the original text. That alone has been the goal of the present editors.

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## Footnotes

1 Hermann Freiherr Von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt*, 2 vols. in 4 parts (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1911); Herman C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1929). [\(back\)](#)

2 Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, eds., *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985 [1st ed. 1982]). [\(back\)](#)

3 "Stemmatics" or a "stemmatic approach" is simply the attempt to construct a "family tree" of descent for manuscripts which appear to be closely related through the sharing of certain readings where places of textual variation occur. Normally, a genealogical stemma ("branch" = "family tree") would be constructed solely on the basis of shared errors among closely-related "family" groups of manuscripts. Some modern critics, however, have applied the genealogical principle to any shared readings among manuscripts in order to determine texttype interrelationships. They have thus reconstructed family trees for texttypes and have attempted to reconstruct hypothetical intermediate "lost ancestor" manuscripts to fill in the gaps where necessary. The present editors consider that approach to be invalid and inapplicable to the New Testament manuscripts en masse. [\(back\)](#)

4 See John W. Burgon, *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established*, arranged, completed, and edited by Edward Miller (London: George Bell and Sons, 1896), pp. 40-67. Burgon's canons are summarized under seven heads: Antiquity, Number, Variety, Continuity, Respectability of Witnesses, Context, and Internal Reasonableness. Burgon's full discussion of each of these points should be read carefully by all textual students. This will prevent any false claim that Burgon merely elaborated "Number" into seven similar statements. [\(back\)](#)

5 Ernest C. Colwell, "Method in Establishing Quantitative Relationships between Text-Types of New Testament Manuscripts," in his *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, *New Testament Tools and Studies*, IX, edited by Bruce M. Metzger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p.59; idem, "Hort Redivivus: A Plea and a Program," *Studies*, p.163. Cases where the Hodges-Farstad text clearly has less than 30% support can be found in Rev. 3:2; 11:15, 17:3, 18; 18:3, 6, 23; 19:9, 17; 21:10. A much larger number of cases exist where the Hodges-Farstad text has only between 30-40% support over against the clear majority readings of the manuscripts. [\(back\)](#)

6 A texttype is a specific pattern of variant readings shared among a fairly distinct group of manuscripts. The manuscripts which "belong" to a certain texttype are not themselves equal to that generalized text, since each manuscript has its own peculiar readings, as well as some mixture from readings of other texttypes. The texttype exists apart from and beyond the manuscripts which comprise it. [\(back\)](#)

7 George Ricker Berry, ed., *The Interlinear Literal Translation of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Hinds & Noble, 1897), ii. Note from Berry's apparatus that most of the variant readings found in manuscripts of other texttypes are trivial or untranslatable. Only about 400-600 variant readings seriously affect the translational sense of any passage in the entire New Testament. [\(back\)](#)

8 The "NU-text" (Nestle-United Bible Societies' Greek text) notes in the NKJV reflect significant translatable differences between the Textus Receptus editions and the Nestle/UBS Alexandrian-based critical texts. The NU notes do not apply to the present discussion, but reflect a wider textual difference than that found among the manuscripts of the Byzantine Textform. Note that the two apparatuses of the Hodges-Farstad edition show almost all the Greek language differences between the Alexandrian texttype and the Textus Receptus or Byzantine/Majority Textform. [\(back\)](#)

9 "Continuous-text" manuscripts are those which present the full text of a New Testament book or books in consecutive order, as in our English Bibles. Certain manuscripts designed for liturgical use (lectionaries) present the biblical text arranged in the order in which portions are read in the liturgical service week by week or even day by day. [\(back\)](#)

10 For the Gospels about 2000 continuous-text and 2000 lectionary manuscripts exist today; this number lessens considerably for the other books of the New Testament, with only about one-third of this total being present for the Acts, Pauline and General Epistles, and less than 300 manuscripts (and no lectionaries) existing for the text of the Revelation. All Byzantine-era manuscripts can be subdivided into smaller, loosely-connected subgroups which possess minor differences, one from another. [\(back\)](#)

11 This was the conclusion of Lake, Blake, and New after examining the manuscripts in monasteries at Mt. Sinai, Patmos, and Jerusalem. (Kirsopp Lake, R. P. Blake, and Silva New, "The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark," *Harvard Theological Review* 21 [1928] 349). [\(back\)](#)

12 Aland, Kurt, et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1975); idem, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979). [\(back\)](#)

13 Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1881), 2:45. [\(back\)](#)

14 Colwell was bold enough to admit this fact in his "Hort Redivivus," *Studies*, pp. 158-159. [\(back\)](#)

15 Colwell, "Hort Redivivus," *Studies*, p.158. Colwell stated in 1947 that "genealogical method as defined by Westcott and Hort was not applied by them or by any of their followers to the manuscripts of the New Testament. Moreover, sixty years of study since Westcott and Hort indicate that it is doubtful if it can be applied to New Testament manuscripts in such a way as to advance our knowledge of the original text of the New

Testament." ("Genealogical Method: Its Achievements and Limitations," *Studies*, p. 63). Yet at the time of Colwell's statement, the stemmatic approaches of Hoskier (to the Apocalypse) and of Von Soden (to Jn. 7:53-8:11) had been in print for about 20 and 45 years respectively. Colwell doubtless would have declared the same today regarding the approach of Hodges-Farstad to the same portions of Scripture. The principle remains: genealogical stemmatics have not been applied successfully to the New Testament Greek documents because such cannot be applied to a textually "mixed" body of manuscripts. Kinship in such a case is remote in the extreme, and the mixture within the manuscripts varies not only from book to book but even within chapters of the same book (See Thomas C. Geer, Jr., "The Two Faces of Codex 33 in Acts," *Novum Testamentum*, 31 [1989] 39-47, for a demonstration of this point). [\(back\)](#)

16 See Wilbur N. Pickering, "Conflation or Confusion," Appendix D in his *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), pp. 171-200. Contributors to that Appendix included William G. Pierpont, Maurice A. Robinson, Harry A Sturz, and Peter Johnston. [\(back\)](#)

17 See Harry A. Sturz, *The Byzantine Text-Type and New Testament Textual Criticism* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 137-230. [\(back\)](#)

18 See John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (Paradise, PA: Conservative Classics rep. ea., n. d. [1883]), pp. 276-294; Colwell, "Hort Redivivus," *Studies*, pp. 157-159, 164-169. [\(back\)](#)

19 See for example, George Dunbar Kilpatrick, "The Greek New Testament Text of Today and the Textus Receptus," in *The New Testament in Historical and Contemporary Perspective: Essays in Memory of G. H. C MacGregor*, ed. H. Anderson and W. Barclay (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), pp. 189-208; J. Keith Elliott, "Rational Criticism and the Text of the New Testament," *Theology* 75 (1972) 338-343; also any other articles by Kilpatrick or Elliott which favor the "rigorously eclectic" methodology, and as a result defend on internal principles the authenticity of many "distinctively Byzantine" readings. [\(back\)](#)

20 Zane C. Hodges, "The Implications of Statistical Probability for the History of the Text," Appendix C in Pickering, *Identity*, p. 168. [\(back\)](#)

21 Colwell, "Hort Redivivus," *Studies*, pp. 149-150, 155-157, 164-169. [\(back\)](#)

22 Colwell, "Method in Establishing the Nature of Texttypes," *Studies*, pp. 53-55. [\(back\)](#)

23 See Burnett Hillman Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study in Origins*, 4th impression revised (London: Macmillan, 1930), pp. 26-76, for a discussion of "Local Text" theory and its implications for textual criticism. The "Western" texttype is the local text typical of the Latin-speaking portions of the Roman Empire. It is subdivided into "European" and "North African" subtypes. The "Alexandrian" texttype is the local text of the Egyptian region, heavily influenced by the Coptic language. The "Caesarean" texttype predominated in Palestine, and reflects a local mixture of Alexandrian and Byzantine

readings, stemming from that region's respective southern and northern geographical textual "neighbors." [\(back\)](#)

24 "Church manuscripts" would have been those designed for regular use in public worship as well as those formally prepared and distributed from local churches to individual Christians. Manuscripts used in the churches were originally in continuous-text form; in later centuries the text of Church manuscripts was rearranged in the order of the readings (lections) for the liturgical year (hence, "Lectionaries"). "Non-church manuscripts" would indicate those documents prepared by individuals for personal use outside the church context proper. [\(back\)](#)

25 We speak here primarily of Egypt and the Western Roman Empire regions where Coptic and Latin were the primary languages, in contrast to the native Greek-speaking portions of the Mediterranean world. Many factors related to the native language differences as well as to a strong oral proclamation of the Gospel message would have contributed to the situation as we find it in the early manuscripts, Versions, and Fathers of the regions. [\(back\)](#)

26 Scribal error and cross-correction from another exemplar is clearly exemplified by the scribe of P66. See Gordon D. Fee, Papyrus Bodmer n (P66): Its Textual Relationships and Scribal Characteristics, *Studies and Documents* 34 ed. Jacob Geerlings (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1968). Heretical corruption of texts is not here in view; indeed, the existing New Testament manuscripts show no consistent marks of such alteration as is reported in the early Fathers concerning manuscripts produced by the heretics Marcion or Tatian. [\(back\)](#)

27 Note that the "human factor" affecting translation into another language naturally plays a larger role than mere scribal copying within a single language group. Nevertheless, the uncontrolled "popular" form of the Greek text, with its sometimes freewheeling deliberate and accidental scribal alterations plus cross-correction from other exemplars, provides a close parallel to the situation which so adversely affected the transmission of the Old Latin manuscripts. [\(back\)](#)

28 This consideration alone rules out any notion that the Byzantine Textform was merely the "local text" of Constantinople, which somehow could mysteriously overwhelm all other local texttypes. Neither the Arab conquest of Alexandria nor the degeneration of Western Christianity could have allowed such a development as a natural process. Even Kurt Aland had to posit an "officially-imposed" authoritative decision in order for his so-called "Byzantine Imperial Text" to spread rapidly and dominate Eastern Christianity in such a short time. Such an imposition of ecclesiastical authority, however, once more falls under the same condemnation that seriously weakened Hort's "revision" hypothesis: there simply is no historical data to support such a contention. [\(back\)](#)

29 Our view summarized from available evidence is this: the earliest surviving copies show a very wide range of difference among themselves, yet with a "backbone" of general consistency running quite strongly all along, in spite of their plain blunders and/or deliberate alterations. The pre-existing "backbone" thus served as some sort of

standard which provided that relative consistency in the midst of some rather wild local deviation. Yet almost suddenly, from the late fourth century onward, a quite solid and consistent Textform is seen in almost all quarters. This near-universality can be explained only because the Textform already had been present all along, or a "legislated" and forced imposition of a revised text was almost simultaneously adopted in nearly all quarters without complaint. Since there is no hard evidence for the latter option, the former necessarily commends itself as the best way in which to account for the data we now possess. This is a strong argument, based upon evidence that, even in the "wild" early manuscripts, this great "universal" type of text was already in existence. This evidence appears in the commonly-shared text of each of those early papyri.

[\(back\)](#)

30 See Maurice A. Robinson, "Scribal Habits among Manuscripts of the Apocalypse," Ph.D. dissertation, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, TX, 1982, for evidence regarding these points. [\(back\)](#)

31 Colwell, "Method in Evaluating Scribal Habits," *Studies*, p 106 [\(back\)](#)

32 See Colwell, "Scribal Habits," where he compares the relative accuracy of the scribes of P45, P66, and P75. [\(back\)](#)

33 The post-Apostolic document, *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*, has a colophon which states it was first copied by Gaius from the writings of Irenaeus. It was then copied in Corinth by one Socrates, and later by one Pionius, who had diligently sought out this document and "gathered it together when it was almost worn out by age" (*Martyrdom* 22.2). This is a clear case of a "new" copy reflecting a text which was already quite old.

[\(back\)](#)

34 From the Greek, "to rub again." The term denotes a manuscript from which the original text was erased and a second, differing text placed on top of the original writing. Through the use of various methods (e.g., ultraviolet light), the original text can often be recovered with extreme accuracy. [\(back\)](#)

35 Lake, Blake, and New, "Caesarean Text of Mark," p.349. [\(back\)](#)

36 Donald A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), pp. 47-48, note 5. Pickering offered a clarification and rebuttal of Carson's critique which differs at points from the present hypothesis; see Pickering, *Identity*, pp. 230-231, note 30 [\(back\)](#)

37 See further W. J. Elliott, "The Need for an Accurate and Complete Collation of all known Greek NT Manuscripts with their Individual Variants noted in pleno," in J. K. Elliott, ed., *Studies in New Testament Language and Text* [G. D. Kilpatrick Festschrift] (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), pp. 137-143. [\(back\)](#)

As with the CT, there are two different published editions of the MT: The New Testament in the Original Greek According to the Byzantine/ Majority Textform edited by Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont and The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad. "The Providential Preservation of the Greek Text of the New Testament" is the title of a booklet written by Rev. W. MacLean. This title sums up the first argument for the MT. Textual criticism of the New Testament is the analysis of the manuscripts of the New Testament, whose goals include identification of transcription errors, analysis of versions, and attempts to reconstruct the original. 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