THE STORY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEXT

MOVERS, MATERIALS, MOTIVES, METHODS, AND MODELS

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Contents

Introduction
Getting Hooked on Textual Criticism

> I look upon the textual critic as I look upon the man who comes to clean the drains. I should not like to do it myself, but I am very glad that someone likes to do it. (R. P. C. Hanson in Birdsall 2002, 359)

I bought my first Greek New Testament in 1962, when I was a college sophomore, newly enrolled in Elementary New Testament Greek. It was the Nestle-Aland 24th edition (1960). It cost me $1.98 in the college bookstore ("No Disc[ount]," read the penciled note on the inside cover). I still have it, much battered and thumbed, alongside several other editions of the Greek New Testament. Here I was introduced to the wonders and challenges of the Greek text. But, although I completed three years of Greek grammar at Milligan College, the footnotes section on each page (the "apparatus") remained a mystery to me, unknown territory full of cryptic symbols, numbers, and letters, with snatches of Greek and Latin here and there. In my senior year I began to explore that territory just a little, in the exegesis courses of Beauford H. Bryant. When I transitioned into seminary at Emmanuel School of Religion, Dr. Bryant, who had become one of the founding faculty members of that new seminary, pulled out all the stops and offered a seminar entitled Greek Paleography and New Testament Textual Criticism. He had taken a Princeton Theological Seminary summer course of the same title under Bruce Metzger. I was hooked so strongly that I later did a PhD at Princeton Seminary, where Metzger became my mentor and *Doktorvater*.

What hooked me? Part of it was simply learning to understand the technical terms in the apparatus, to read the map of this strange new world. But more compelling was the story itself, the story of how those variants got into the text and the human-interest accounts of scholars who had searched for ancient manuscripts, recovered text that had been erased and overwritten, or risked their jobs and reputations by challenging certain readings that had become cherished residents in published texts. Fortunately, in the mid-twentieth century, scrolls, scribes, and scholars were big news on seminary campuses and even in the popular press. The discovery (in 1947), sale, and publication of the first of the Dead Sea Scrolls was a story of chance, intrigue, and promise. Here was a copy of the prophet Isaiah a thousand years older than any other manuscript of that writing. The famous Bodmer papyri P^{66} (John) and P^{75} (Luke, John) were published, respectively, in 1956 and 1961. The importance of these ancient copies was only coming to light. My fellow seminarians and I were encouraged to do as much hands-on work as we could. When we learned about Tischendorf's 1844 discovery of Codex Sinaiticus, Dr. Bryant brought to class his personal copy of the full-size facsimile of the New Testament portion (published by Oxford University Press in 1922). We tried our hand at reading fourth-century capital-letter script without word division. He acquired all back issues of the Oxyrhynchus papyri and put our library on standing order for this invaluable series.

Perhaps our budding new seminary was unusual, even for that era, but many of my colleagues educated in other schools around the same time can tell similar stories. Forty years later, the situation is much different. During a sabbatical leave several years ago, I participated in an exegetical seminar for PhD students in a divinity school attached to a major university. On the first day of class, the professor (who was nearing retirement) asked the students to discuss the nature and significance of a textual variant in the passage before us. Out of a class of eight students, seven of them New Testament majors, only one was able to interpret the apparatus.

There are many reasons for the decline of emphasis on basic textual skills in seminary education, perhaps chief among them the multiplication of courses and curricular concerns in a typical student program. The hurry to get on with theology and practical ministries may leave little room for cultivating an interest in what used to be called "lower criticism" (history, language, grammar, textual criticism). And, of course, even professional New Testament scholars cannot be expected to master all the disciplines related to New Testament studies. It is difficult enough to keep up with one's special area of expertise. Besides, the almost universal use of the United Bible Societies *Greek New Testament* (UBS^4) among students, teachers, and Bible translators easily creates the impression that the experts have "delivered the goods" and that we can simply rely on the text they have given us. Even the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.), with its more detailed apparatus, has the same text as UBS^4. For some years its major editor referred to this common text as the new "Standard Text," an expression eerily reminiscent of the old label "Textus Receptus," a publisher's blurb for the 1633 edition of the Greek New Testament (Aland and Aland 1989, 31–36, uses the term "new text" instead of the "Standard Text" of the first edition [1987, 34–35]).

But you would not be reading this introduction unless you had an interest in the text of the New Testament. This book itself is a response to a resurgence of interest in New Testament textual criticism, fueled in part by the burgeoning field of studies in the social world of early Christianity. A new generation is learning that textual variants have stories to tell about the problems the first Christians wrestled with: tensions between Jews and Gentiles; women in family life and church leadership; the divine/human nature of Jesus; the standardization of liturgical texts; social and sexual issues; and others (see ch. 8).

The fact is that textual criticism affects the life of the church at its most basic level, for its results eventually filter down to the ordinary Bible-reading public in the translations in popular use. This has sometimes produced outrage, as it did for John W. Burgon, dean of Chichester, England, when the 1881 revision of the King James Version of 1611 appeared. This Revised Version (RV) abandoned many readings familiar from the late medieval manuscripts used as the base for the KJV in favor of readings that had since come to light from earlier witnesses. Burgon insisted that these earlier manuscripts were corrupt copies exhibiting an untrustworthy text and that the KJV was more reliable (see ch. 4). The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in 1952 met with an even more incendiary reception in some circles, when readers found missing several familiar passages, including the last twelve verses of the Gospel of Mark, the story of the adulterous woman in John 7:53–8:11, and Luke 22:19b–20 (part of the Lukan account of the Last Supper).[1] A Sunday

1. The reaction was quite literally incendiary, including one preacher's public burning of a copy with a blowtorch, the ashes being then sent to Luther Weigle, chairman of the translation committee. Bruce Metzger's comment on this bizarre incident is, "though in previous centuries Bible translators were sometimes burned, today happily it is only a copy of the translation that meets such a fate" (Metzger 1997, 79).

school teacher of mine insisted that the RSV was heavily influenced by communists, which is why it was issued in a red cover. Textual criticism is not just about trivialities. It matters.

To be sure, the professional practice of textual criticism requires a formidable repertoire of skills and a fund of knowledge that relatively few persons can master. So, how can nonspecialists access such a highly specialized field of studies? This book provides one avenue of access. It is not aimed at working text critics. Indeed, it is from them that I gratefully draw so much of the book's contents. It also is not intended to be a "how-to" manual, although the careful reader will learn a great deal about how textual critics do their work. My narrative approach should not be taken to imply that others have not told the story of the New Testament text. Indeed, a recounting of the birth, growth, and fortunes of textual criticism (the "history") is a standard feature of the best manuals on the subject, but it is usually just one section or chapter among others dealing with the sources, the methods, and the practices of textual criticism. In contrast, I have integrated five major components of textual criticism in my telling of the story of the discipline. These five components are Movers, Materials, Motives, Methods, and Models. Since I have chosen these headings in part for their convenience as aids to memory, I should make it clear what I have in mind for each and what you should expect to find as you move along in the story.

Movers are the major players in the story, those who have contributed to the development of New Testament textual criticism in some important way. It would be fair to refer to most of them as textual critics, although in the earliest period the term will not fit all of them. I will give more biographical information about the pioneers (chs. 3 and 4) than about their successors, and I have had to be much more selective in later chapters, especially when referring to my contemporaries.

Under the heading *Materials*, I will highlight the collecting, collating, and evaluating of witnesses to the text: the Greek manuscripts, early versions, and the quotations of the New Testament in the church fathers. Obviously I will have to be quite selective, profiling only witnesses that have been deemed to be especially important and making summary comments about others. Readers more interested in the narrative itself might wish to read over these sections rapidly and refer back to them when particular witnesses are mentioned later in the story. In the first chapter I will also briefly describe the materials and techniques of ancient book production and show why knowledge of these things is important to textual critics.

When I discuss *Motives*, I am asking the question, What are textual critics trying to accomplish as they work with divergent forms of the text of the New Testament? The answer might seem self-evident: they are trying to get back to the original form of the text, but, as we shall see, that is only one motive of the workers in this vineyard. Indeed, some of the first persons to comment on variant readings in the text seem to have had little interest in choosing the earliest form of the text. Some scholars have been more interested in charting the differences than in getting behind them. Today the very question whether it is even useful to talk about an "original" text is debated. The motives of text-critical scholars are not self-evident and must be explored for each era.

The discussion of *Methods* traces such developments as the framing of criteria used to weigh one reading against another and various means of classifying textual witnesses sharing similar distinctive readings into groups and subgroups (chs. 3–5). We will see the difficulty and the necessity of trying to control the burgeoning mass of data by such winnowing and grouping (ch. 7 summarizes an extraordinarily complex set of developments; attempting to read it at one sitting will probably cause the eyes to glaze over). We will also come to appreciate why most working text critics today claim to follow an "eclectic" method in their decisions.

By *Models* I have in mind, in the first place, watershed publications that serve to advance the development of textual criticism. A classic example is the description of the principles Westcott and Hort used to reconstruct what they called *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (1881; ch. 4). A more recent model is Bart Ehrman's influential *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (1993), which argues that scribes frequently altered "better" (i.e., earlier) readings in order to protect and defend the church's developing theological orthodoxy (ch. 8). I also use the term *Models* to refer to examples of how scholars make decisions about specific textual variants. The vast majority of textual variants are mechanical scribal errors of the same kind we ourselves make when hand-copying material; others involve grammatical "improvements" to the text that do not change its essential meaning. But some textual variants materially alter the sense of the text, as noted in the above discussion about the RV and RSV. It is instructive to follow the shifting currents of scholarship on such variants, as they are dealt with in commentaries, articles, and published translations.

Obviously, these are five overlapping categories that cannot be neatly separated. I hope the repetition you will sometimes find between one category and another will be helpful and not tiresome. It has not been possible to organize each chapter formally around these five categories, but I have attempted to see that each gets its due in the narrative.

The past two decades have felt the blowing of new winds that are shaking the house of New Testament textual criticism. No one can predict what the discipline will look like when the dust settles, but I am glad for the energy and enthusiasm of those who will write the next chapter in this continuing story. It is my hope that some of you who read this book will be among them.

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Paul and Luke Become Published Authors

> I, Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord. (Rom 16:22)
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> Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us ... I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus. (Luke 1:1, 3)

The Prehistory of the Text: How Writings Were Produced and Published in the Roman Era

Did you ever wish you could pull back the curtain and watch Paul at work writing one of his letters to an assembly of Jesus followers? The possibility of doing this used to be largely a matter of guesswork, but more than a century of research into ancient letter writing has given us a much clearer picture. In 56 or 57 C.E., while in Corinth as a guest in the home of Gaius (Rom 16:23), Paul wrote a letter to the believers in Rome. In the sketch that follows, we will use this letter as a model to learn how Paul's writings (and perhaps other letters that ended up in the New Testament) were produced and distributed (E. Richards 1991, 2004; Gamble 1995, 1–143; Murphy-O'Connor 1995).

Paul Writes a Letter to the Romans

Our first act of historical imagination must be to think ourselves into a culture where only a small minority of the population, perhaps only about

10 percent, could read and write (W. Harris 1989, 272).[1] Even those who had these skills often dictated their work to a secretary rather than doing their own writing. After all, literacy in writing must be thought of as a continuum, ranging from name literacy (the ability to write one's name on a document), through various levels of skill in spelling and writing, to the competencies required for professional work.

In reconstructing the writing, sending, and publication of Paul's letter to the Romans, much of the process I describe is virtually certain. Other parts are not certain but highly probable, and every practice and piece of equipment is well documented from sources reasonably contemporaneous with Paul.

What eventually became the Letter to the Romans may well have begun weeks, or even months, before Paul actually "wrote" it, for he likely carried with him notebooks for jotting down ideas, useful scriptural texts, quotations, and rough drafts. Writers often used for their notes a set of waxed wooden tablets stacked and joined together with cords or thongs tied through holes at their edges. These tablets could easily be smoothed over and rewritten with the use of a stylus made of wood, metal, ivory, or bone.[2] Such tablets (*tabulae ceratae*) were in widespread use in the Roman world (E. Richards 1991, 55–57). By the time the Letter to the Romans was written, waxed tablets were being supplemented by small parchment notebooks (*membranae*), which were a Roman innovation (Roberts and Skeat 1983, 15–23). These notebooks were widely used for copying out extracts from reading, epigrams, maxims, and the like (see Cribiore 1996, pl. 385, 389, 403, for examples of wooden and parchment notebooks). The writer of 2 Tim 4:13 has Paul asking that his "books [τὰ βιβλία, *ta biblia*, probably scrolls of some of the Old Testament writings] and especially the notebooks [τὰς μεμβράνας, *tas membranas*]" be brought to him.[3] This text

1. The heavy use of literature in early Christian communities has occasioned discussion of whether there may have been a higher level of literacy among leaders of these communities than among the wider population (Gamble 1995, 3–10; Epp 1997, 15–37). Millard suggests that the strong emphasis on the importance of education of Jewish males to read the Scriptures in synagogue services likely resulted in greater literacy in Jewish society than in the Hellenistic world in general (Millard 2000, 157–58).

2. For a photograph of a wax tablet used for a school writing exercise, see E. Turner 1971, 33. For a set of five bound into a "codex," see Pestman 1990, 205–6.

3. I disagree with Gamble (1995, 64), who insists that, since *ta biblia* normally

is a valuable reference to the likely practice of Paul, even if, as many scholars hold, 2 Timothy is not written by Paul himself. For a writing as long and carefully constructed as Romans (Paul's longest letter), it is likely that a great deal of preformed material made its way out of his notebooks and into this treatise.

Paul's other writing equipment included a pen, which was simply a section of reed cut to a point (the nib) and slit to help retain ink, the ink itself (made from lampblack or soot mixed with thin gum, usually sold in a dried cake and mixed with water for use), and a sponge (to wash off writing that needed to be replaced). Two famous wall paintings from Pompeii show us what this equipment may have looked like, including the kind of containers in which bookrolls (scrolls) were carried (E. Turner 1971, 34–35). Paul would customarily have used such equipment for writing in his notebooks.

For his letters, however, Paul relied on secretaries to take down dictation. In six of his letters, Paul shows that he has used a secretary; in five of these, Paul intervenes near the end to write a greeting in his own hand (1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18; 2 Thess 3:17; Phlm 19). E. Richards (1991, 172–73) has demonstrated that, when an ancient letter writer adds a postscript in his or her own hand, that is evidence that the rest of the letter has been written by a secretary.[4] In our model letter, Romans, the secretary sends a greeting: "I, Tertius, the one writing the letter, greet you in the Lord" (Rom 16:22). From this brief subscription we know that Tertius was himself a believer, and we can infer that he was personally acquainted with some of the Roman believers (Tertius was a Latin name). We should not necessarily conclude that all of Paul's letters were dictated to fellow Christ followers. It is not likely that his circle of acquaintances would always have included a trained scribe, and we should not imagine that just any literate friend would have been capable of taking dictation, which entailed a set of skills well beyond the ability to read and write. Since Paul's letters were

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designates proper books, i.e., scrolls, the phrase "especially the parchments" must refer to what we might call published books in leaf form, not rough notebooks; Murphy-O'Connor (1995, 36–37) cites Martial's epigram entitled "Pugillares Membranei" (Fist-Sized Notebooks): "Imagine these tablets are waxen, although they are called parchment. You will rub out as often as you wish to write afresh" (*Epigrams* 14.7).

4. Even if, as many scholars hold, 2 Thessalonians and Colossians are not by Paul, there is no doubt about the other examples above. Cumulatively, there is a "favorable presumption" that Paul customarily used a secretary (Murphy-O'Connor 1995, 7).

vastly longer than the private letters that have survived from antiquity, he may well have required a secretary versed in shorthand, at least for the two longest letters, Romans and 1 Corinthians. Not every secretary will have been so skilled. E. Richards (1991, 26–43), demonstrates the use of shorthand systems in both Latin and Greek for the time of Paul, although he does not believe Paul would have had access to such highly trained scribes for all of his letters.

A plausible surmise is that Tertius was a slave of one of the few upper-class members (Gaius?) of the church in Corinth, since many of the known secretaries of Roman times were either slaves or freedmen (Haines-Eitzen 2000, 21–40, 53–64). In any case, Tertius was not hired at random from the marketplace, although Paul may on other occasions have needed to hire from the market.

For the production of the Letter to the Romans, Tertius could have done his writing almost anywhere, for he would have sat cross-legged on a small stool, or even on the ground, the skirt of his tunic stretched tightly across his knees to form a flat surface on which he laid a papyrus roll held in place by his left hand. (Surprisingly, scribes did not begin to use tables or desks for writing until the early Middle Ages [Skeat 1956, 179–208].) Laid within easy reach were the tools of his trade: a penknife, sponge, inkpot, brick of dried ink, and pumice for smoothing the writing surface. Paul could well have dictated the letter over a period of several days, working only a few hours at a time—even handing the secretary his notebooks for inserting scriptural quotations and other preformed material. Based on what we know of the average number of syllables per line generated by trained copyists and the estimated average number of lines a secretary could write per hour, Richards suggests that two to three working days would have been needed for a single draft of Romans (E. Richards 1991, 164–65). This allows about five hours of actual writing each day, with additional time needed for the preparation of the papyrus, mixing of ink, periodic sharpening of the pen nib, conferring with the author, and resting. If the rough draft was written on wax tablets, the work may have gone faster.

The expected practice would be for Paul then to go over the rough draft and enter (or dictate) revisions. A fair copy would then be made, perhaps on better-quality papyrus, to be sent out to the addressees. Finally, the secretary would make a copy in Paul's notebook for his own records. Although it is impossible to estimate the time spent in actual dictation, revising, and copying, the production of the letter to the Romans may well have occupied two weeks or more, not counting the hours Paul may have spent thinking and jotting down notes before the secretary even began to work.

The Letter to the Romans Is Sent

Writers of private correspondence had to find their own letter carriers. Paul's usual practice was to send one of his co-workers, for example, Timothy (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10), Titus (2 Cor 7:15–16), Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25–30), Tychicus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; Titus 3:12), Epaphras, and Onesimus (Col 1:7; 4:7–9) to carry his letters. The letter to the Romans was evidently entrusted to a colleague of Paul's, otherwise unknown to us, named Phoebe (Rom 16:1–2). The care with which he introduces and commends her confirms what we see from the references to Paul's other colleagues who were entrusted with his letters, namely, that letter carriers often did more than simply deliver the mail. We have abundant evidence in private letters from Egypt that other letter carriers in Hellenistic and Roman times were expected to bring personal news of the writers whose mail they carried (Epp 1991, 46–48): Timothy will "remind you of my ways in Christ" (1 Cor 4:17); "Tychicus will tell you all about my affairs. … I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are" (Col 4:7–8). It is clear from these and other references that Paul's known letter carriers communicated news of Paul's circumstances.

Paul held these letter carriers in high esteem. Timothy is his "beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Cor 4:17); the Corinthians are asked to "put him at ease among you" (1 Cor 16:10). Epaphroditus has brought to Paul financial support from the Philippians (Phil 4:14–18) and is being sent back to the Philippians as Paul's "brother and co-worker and fellow-soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need" (Phil 2:25). Phoebe is introduced as "deacon [or perhaps 'minister' (διάκονος, *diakonos*)] of the assembly that is in Cenchrea" (Rom 16:1). The Romans are asked to "assist her in whatever she may have need, because she has been a patron [προστάτις, *prostatis*] of many and of me" (v. 2). Although it is impossible to know how the congregations might be called upon to assist her, we can construct a very likely scenario of what Paul may have expected of Phoebe as his representative. Not only could she have brought more personal information about Paul, especially to those he greets by name in 16:3–15, but she may well have been asked by Paul to read the letter aloud to the several house-church groups in Rome (see Rom 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15).

Public reading of a letter required careful attention to what we now call "oral interpretation," that is, use of the voice and even gestures to convey the author's intentions clearly (E. Richards 1991, 202). It is likely that Paul would have coached Phoebe on how the letter was to be read.

The Letter to the Romans Is "Published" and Dispersed

Odd as it may seem to moderns, publication of a piece of literature in the ancient world was simply the public reading of the composition and its release in the form of a copy available to the broader community (Turner 1968, 112–13). We cannot know whether Phoebe would have carried the one letter around to each of the Roman house-churches or would have left a copy for each of these groups (Gamble 1995, 97). E. Richards (2004, 157) points out that Paul expected his original letter to the Galatians to be circulated to all of the churches in that province, because his calling attention to his large signature at the end of the letter (6:11) would have been meaningless to anyone reading a copy of the original. A single reading of one of Paul's letters would not have exhausted its usefulness to its addressees; indeed, all of these writings would have required much time for reflection and discussion within the community. Paul felt so strongly that his letters should be read before the whole congregation that he wrote to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:27), "Put yourselves under an oath to the Lord that you will read this letter to all the brothers [and sisters]." In any case, when the letter had been read aloud to its intended public and a copy had been made available for further use, the letter to the Romans had been "published."

Luke Writes a Gospel[5]

The textual mechanics of writing and publishing a Gospel would likely not have differed from those involved in the production of Paul's letters (or, indeed, of the other writings in the New Testament). Nevertheless, the process of gathering materials and fashioning them into a narrative about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was different from the process of writing a pastoral letter to a congregation. Moreover, the existence

5. I use the name Luke on the basis of tradition and without prejudice to the question of the actual author of this Gospel.

of multiple sources of traditions about Jesus and the eventual publication of multiple Gospels influenced the subsequent copying of these works in ways that set them apart from the New Testament letters.

I use Luke as the example for the production of a Gospel because, of all the Gospel writers, only he includes a preface with information about his working methods (Luke 1:1–4). Luke writes with the awareness that "many" persons had already written up their own accounts "of the events that have been fulfilled among us" (Luke 1:1). This is not the place for a discussion on the origins and interrelationships of the canonical Gospels, which any good critical introduction to the New Testament can supply. For the purposes of what follows, I accept these hypotheses: (1) that Mark was the first of the canonical Gospels to be written; (2) that the Gospel of Mark was the primary source document used by Luke; (3) that Luke's major secondary source was a collection of non-Markan traditions about Jesus (labeled Q by scholars) that was also used by Matthew; (4) and that, in addition to these sources, Luke had access to additional material, both written and oral, that contributed to his project.

The question of the nature and origin of the source material in all of the Gospels is still much debated. The earliest Christian tradition, attributed by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis (ca. 120 C.E.), to "the Elder," reports that Mark (presumably the John Mark who is associated in the Acts of the Apostles with Peter, Paul, and Barnabas) was "the interpreter (or translator) of Peter" and that he wrote down, but "not in order," what Peter recalled of the sayings or deeds of Jesus. Near the end of the second century, Clement of Alexandria (d. before 215), citing a tradition of "the elders," claims that Mark put down in writing the preaching of Peter in Rome (*Hypotyposes* 6; quoted by Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.14.5–7). The historical worth of this tradition is debated, but for our purposes the major point is that oral reminiscences or sermons about Jesus were reduced to writing and that these "notes" formed the basis for a more formal written composition that came to be called a Gospel (on the origin and significance of the term Gospel, see Hengel 2000, 34–115). We must assume that all of the Gospel writers drew from a wealth of Jesus tradition, both written and unwritten.

In comparing the work of Paul in writing his letters and Luke in writing his Gospel, it is certain that both used preformed written tradition. Paul quotes snatches of confessions of faith and hymnic material that were part of the churches' developing liturgy; he also seems to have drawn upon "virtue and vice" lists as well as other catechetical material.

Luke clearly knows other written narratives about Jesus. Both Paul and Luke may well have made use of "testimony collections" of Old Testament scriptures useful to their projects.[6] We are in the dark about how they accessed and adapted these materials or even the physical form in which these source materials were available. Testimony collections may have been available on papyrus scrolls; wax tablets and parchment notebooks were possible vehicles for source material. It is likely, but not certain, that Luke had the Gospel of Mark available in roll form, but we do not know whether he handled it physically or had assistants who read out from the text the portions Luke wished to use. That Paul customarily used secretaries is certain; that Luke did so as well is almost certain, for this was the common practice for persons writing treatises of any length. Besides, the Theophilus to whom Luke's work is dedicated (Luke 1:3) was likely a well-to-do patron who bore the expense of the project.

As for the target audiences of Paul and Luke, Paul's letters were clearly directed to particular congregations and individuals. The Gospel of Luke was directed to the instruction of Theophilus, who may well have published the letter by reading it to his circle of friends. Whether Luke's Gospel was shaped to meet the needs and interests of a wider church community in a particular geographic region is a much-debated issue.[7]

In any case, once the original work (Romans, Luke) was made available for copying, not only was it copied for use by its first recipients, but there soon developed a lively exchange of writings, the church in one city sending copies of Christian writings it possessed to the church(es) in another city. Colossians 4:16 directs its readers to make sure there is an exchange of letters between the church at Colossae and the church at Laodicea. Although Gamble believes Colossians is not an authentic letter of Paul, he rightly concludes that "the notice does show that the author either knew that letters of Paul were circulating among Pauline churches or wanted to encourage their circulation by offering a Pauline warrant" (Gamble 1995, 97). We have evidence that copies of Romans circulated without the words "in Rome" in 1:7, 15, thus allowing readers to receive

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6. A testimony collection is a list of Old Testament texts useful for supporting themes or claims relating to Christ and his ministry, death, resurrection, and redemptive work (see Rom 15:9–12).

7. The question whether each of the Gospels was written for a particular community or region or all were intended for wider use has recently been reopened (Bauckham 1998).

the letter as generally applicable to all churches. We have similar evidence for 1 Corinthians and possibly Ephesians (Gamble 1995, 97–99).

Just as the church itself was expanding rapidly during the first two centuries C.E., we are right to surmise a quite-rapid expansion in the number of copies not only of Paul's letters but of the Gospels and other early Christian literature as well. Older studies used to suppose that it would have taken a period of several years, even decades, for the dissemination of a writing from its place of origin to a distant city in the Mediterranean world, but a study of the speed with which dated private letters and documents traveled to and from distant cities has made it clear that the writings of the New Testament "could easily, in a matter of a few weeks, have moved anywhere in the Mediterranean area" (Epp 1991, 56).

But who made these copies of the originals? Did the churches have ready access to professional scribes, and could they afford their services? Probably not. The great number and variety of textual variants that are found in the earliest manuscripts of New Testament writings suggest that, from the beginning, the churches relied on the relatively few literate persons among them to make the copies they needed (Royse 2008, 28–31; Cribiore 1996, 5, 10). Although only the elite made it to the top of the educational ladder, even those on the lower rungs learned writing by means of copying: first the alphabet, then words and phrases, and, finally, longer models. We have no direct evidence of Christian copying practices from the first century, but the second-century Shepherd of Hermas depicts its author as having been given the book in a vision; he then copies the text "letter by letter" (πρὸς γράμμα, *pros gramma*), a procedure suggesting that the slave Hermas (whether a real or fictional character) was not a professional scribe (Haines-Eitzen 2000, 36). What we can demonstrate is that very few of the earliest New Testament papyri known to us (late second century) exhibit the practiced hand and careful eye of professional scribes. Furthermore, a professionally produced copy of a single Gospel, even of second-quality scribal work, might well have cost the equivalent of $1,000 today (Bagnall 2009, 50–69).

But would a person not have needed permission from the author before making a copy for private use? The answer is no. There was no concept of copyright or intellectual property in the ancient world. To be sure, there was a commercial book trade in Rome during the time of the early empire, but it was vastly different from a modern publishing enterprise. From references in Martial, Quintilian, and Pliny, Harry Gamble infers that these authors delivered copies of their new works to booksellers for a

The Writings of the New Testament Are Published

- Authors compile notes, outlines, traditions on wax tablets or parchment notebooks.
- Authors dictate their material to secretaries (scribes).
- Scribes write first drafts on wax tablets.
- Authors correct first drafts.
- Scribes write final drafts on papyrus rolls.
- Scribes make copies of final drafts for authors to archive.
- Each writing is sent to its designated audience.
- Writings are read aloud in congregational gatherings.
- Each writing is "published" when a copy is made available for others to copy.

flat fee. The dealer then paid to have multiple copies made, thus generating profits for himself (Gamble 1995, 86–87). There is no reason to believe Christian scriptures would have been available in a commercial book stall. It remains the case that any work could be copied by anyone who had access to it and was literate enough to make a copy.

The very form of book production that Christians adopted sometime in the first century may also have implications for the somewhat casual way in which early copies seem to have been made, for Christian copyists and writers moved quickly from using the roll (scroll) form of book to adopting the codex, or leaf-form book, as a proper medium for copying their religious literature (Roberts and Skeat 1983). The rationale for this move is under debate, and I will discuss it in chapter 9. Meanwhile, this much can be said: in general, the papyrus (or parchment) roll continued to be the preferred medium for copies of classical literature until the late third or early fourth centuries C.E. (the parchment or leather roll for Jewish Scriptures even longer). In addition to Christians, the early adopters of the codex seem to have been writers of professional handbooks and manuals—practical writings. As a working hypothesis, Gamble's comment is worth noting: "Christian texts came to be inscribed in codices not because they enjoyed a special status as aesthetic or cult objects, but because they were practical books for everyday use: the handbooks, as it were, of the Christian community" (Gamble 1995, 66).

Thus, both the form of the early Christian book and the rapid accumulation of copying errors and other alterations to the text indicate that the earliest copies were "working texts" for the immediate use of the individuals and communities who saw to it that copies were made. As early as the late second century, however, Christian writers (and some of their opponents) were beginning to notice and compare variant readings in the text, thus practicing a rudimentary form of textual criticism.

The Need for Textual Criticism

What exactly is textual criticism? The classical scholar A. E. Housman put it this way: "[Textual criticism] is the science of discovering error in texts and the art of removing it" (Housman 1961, 131). As we will see, removing error is not the only motivation for the critical study of texts, but variant readings in texts do invite critical attention. In his study of Origen and textual criticism, Bruce Metzger quotes Origen's famous comment about variant readings in the Gospels, part of which will be used as the caption to the next chapter: "The differences among the manuscripts have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or through the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or in the process of checking, they make additions or deletions as they please" (Metzger 1963b, 78). Origen (185–232 c.e.) was probably the greatest scholar of the pre-Nicene church and one of the first Christian intellectuals to devote attention to the transmission of the biblical text. His comment is a convenient point of departure for us to consider the causes of scribal errors and alterations in the manuscripts Origen and his near contemporaries saw and used.

Scribal Errors in the New Testament Text

Every reader of this book has committed many of the same errors as ancient scribes, just as thoughtful readers develop a certain expertise in sorting out the copying or printing errors we encounter, as David C. Parker cleverly reminds us:

> Everybody who reads the newspaper is an expert in textual criticism, in coping with those distctive errors of omssion and displaced lines, and jumbling of letrset. This sophisticated process of recognizing nonsense and picking up the sense is so natural to us the classical scholars of ancient Alexandria or the Benedictines of that we perform it without thinking, unaware of our kinship with

> St Maur. Textual criticism is not an arcane science. It belongs to all human communication. (Parker 1997, 1)

Scholars frequently distinguish between unintentional and intentional changes in the text. I prefer, with Parker, to speak of unconscious and conscious alterations (Parker 1997, 37). Even when scribes consciously altered the text they were copying, they often assumed they were *correcting* a mistake in the exemplar, thus bringing the text back to its original wording, rather than creating a new variant reading.

Unconscious alterations are those that occur during one of the four stages in the ancient copying process: reading (a line or phrase), remembering (as one's eye turns from the exemplar to the blank page), repeating (aloud, as most reading was done in antiquity), and writing the line or phrase in the new copy (so Dain 1975, 41–46). The three most common categories of unconscious alterations are scribal leaps, confusion of letters, and confusion of sounds.

Scribal leaps occur when the scribe copies a word, phrase, or line, then looks back and copies the same thing again (dittography) or looks ahead and leaves out material (haplography). For example, the scribe of our earliest manuscript of Paul's letters (known in the standard list as $P^{46)}$ has duplicated the phrase "with thanksgiving" (μετὰ ευχαριστίας, *meta eucharistias*) at Phil 4:6, producing nonsense: "with thanksgiving with thanksgiving let your requests be known." The same scribe has omitted the words "zeal, the one doing acts of mercy with" (σπουδῇ ὁ ἐλεῶν ἐν, *spoudē ho eleōn en*) at Rom 12:8 because his eye skipped from the "with" in the previous phrase ("with zeal") to the "with" in the following phrase ("with cheerfulness"). In this second example, the text still makes sense, but it is short one of the spiritual gifts of Rom 12.

Confusion of letters sometimes occurred when the exemplar (the text in front of the copyist) was poorly written or faded or the copyist did not see well. Most manuscripts prior to the ninth century were copied in capital letters, in which the Greek letters *sigma* (C), *epsilon* (Є), *theta* (Θ), and *omicron* (O) could be confused. The double *lambda*, ΛΛ, could also be read as a *mu*, M, which apparently happened at Rom 6:5, where the word ΑΛΛΑ "but" has been misread as ΑΜΑ "together" by some copyists (Metzger and Ehrman 2005, 251).

Confusion of sounds sometimes resulted in certain vowels and diphthongs being interchanged because they were pronounced alike (Caragounis 2006, 339–96, with pronunciation chart on 352). This could have occurred when the letter was first dictated (and not corrected by the author) or even when a copyist, pronouncing aloud the words before writing them, unconsciously wrote a same-sounding vowel or diphthong. Thus, the Greek vowels *iota*, *ēta*, and *upsilon* (ι, η, υ) were pronounced the same, and the diphthongs ει, οι, and υι were pronounced the same as the vowels above. The diphthong αι was sounded the same as ε. *Omicron* (ο) and *omega* (ω) were pronounced identically. Additional orthographic confusion resulted because of certain vowel/consonant combinations. The New Testament is replete with variations between the first- and second-person pronouns (ἡμεῖς, ὑμεῖς, *hēmeis, humeis*) because these sounded alike. Since both readings often make good sense, it is frequently difficult to decide between them. To be sure, Phoebe was "our" (ἡμῶν, *hēmōn*) sister from the standpoint of the Corinthian Christians, but when Paul commends her to the Roman church (Rom 16:1), is it possible he describes her as "your" (ὑμῶν, *humōn*) sister, as read by many witnesses to the text? It has been conceded that the variation between the subjunctive form ἔχωμεν, *echōmen*, and the indicative form ἔχομεν, *echomen*, at Rom 5:1 ("let us have peace with God"/"we have peace with God") may go back to the autograph (the original). Paul may have dictated one form; Tertius may have written the other; and Paul may then have let the copied form stand. In any case, the variation undoubtedly arose because of the identical pronunciation; both forms have had their champions in antiquity, as they do today.

Conscious alterations are the results of someone's attempts to improve on a text he or she judged to be faulty in some way. Metzger notes Jerome's observation that many copyists, trying to correct the errors of others, simply "expose their own" (Metzger and Ehrman 2005, 260). Although such changes are routinely said to be the fault of scribes or copyists, it is more probable, as we will see in chapter 9, that the scribe was simply copying into the text marginal or interlinear changes already suggested by a previous reader or owner of the exemplar.

Improvements to grammar, spelling, and sense intrude into the text in various ways. Common intrusions include the addition of prepositions, articles, pronouns, conjunctions, and adverbs. At 1 Cor 15:49 we find dropped into the text of P^{46} the little particle δή, *dē*, before the verb φορέσωμεν, *phoresōmen* (φορέσομεν, *phoresomen* in most witnesses), so that the text reads "just as we bore the image of the earthly, well then [δή, *dē*] let us bear the image of the heavenly," thus changing a statement ("we shall bear") into an exhortation ("let us bear").

Corrections to historical and geographical references may be a way of protecting the reader from difficulties. All three of the Synoptic Gospels have the variant readings "Gadarenes," "Gerasenes," and "Gergesenes" in their accounts of Jesus' healing of the demoniac(s) (Matt 8:28; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26), apparently because of the difficulty of settling on one location that satisfied all the conditions implied in the story (near the Sea of Galilee, with tombs and a steep bank nearby). At Mark 1:2, where there is a composite quotation (from Exodus, Malachi, and Isaiah) introduced by the words "Just as it stands written in Isaiah the prophet," the text has been corrected in several witnesses to read "just as it is written in the prophets."

Conflations occur frequently throughout the Gospels, as those who handled manuscripts found it difficult to resist the temptation to fill out a story by adding details from its parallel version(s). The piercing of Jesus' side by a spear (John 19:34) was so important in early Christian tradition that it was added to the account in Matt 27:49 in a number of manuscripts. Some editors or copyists thought that a reference to "scribes" ought always to be completed by "and Pharisees." In short, every one of the Gospels, especially the Synoptics, contains textual variants with additional material drawn from parallel accounts.

Alterations to the text to protect theological points of view eventually entered the stream of textual tradition, although we cannot know how early. During the doctrinal debates of the second and third centuries, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and others frequently accused their opponents of falsifying Scripture. In fact, it was not only the heretics who altered the text to buttress their dogmas, but also the orthodox (Ehrman 1993b). Consider an example from Mark 1:41: Was Jesus "compassionate" (σπλαγχνισθείς, *splanchnistheis*) or "angry" (ὀργισθείς, *orgistheis*) when he stretched out his hand and touched the leprous man? An early reader might well have had second thoughts about a representation of Jesus acting in anger to heal someone and thus have edited the text in the direction of a friendlier Jesus.

With the rapid expansion of the church all over the Roman world, it is certain that copies of the writings that later became the New Testament were multiplied freely for the use of local congregations. Although relatively few individuals will have been able to afford their own copies, it is clear that by the last quarter of the second century C.E. some of the church's bishops and intellectual leaders possessed, or at least had access to, multiple copies of some Christian texts. Troubled by variant readings, they began to compare these readings and comment upon them. Thus was ushered in the dawn of New Testament textual criticism.