Introduction

THE PURPOSE AND THE ARRANGEMENT OF THIS BOOK

By 'textual criticism' is meant any methodical and objective study which aims to retrieve the original form of a text or at least the form closest to the original. Even in a modern book there are nearly always printing errors despite careful checking by the author and proof-readers, so it is not surprising that early writings, copied as they were many times over the centuries, should have frequently undergone alteration. And indeed, from time to time in the old manuscripts of a work different forms of the text can be observed. These different forms are known as 'variants'; they may also be referred to as divergent or erroneous readings.

The goal of textual criticism as applied to the New Testament is thus a very specific one, namely to select from among the many variants transmitted by the manuscript tradition the one which most likely represents the primitive reading. It is only when the contents of the whole text have been established that the other disciplines can operate: literary criticism, to decide the origin of each book and to locate the sources used by the author; historical criticism, to assess the value of the books as historical documents; exegesis, to define the exact meaning of the text. Clearly, on many questions there is interplay between all the different aspects of biblical criticism which often have to lend each other mutual support. Nevertheless, as a general rule, the original reading must be decided upon before anything else. The task of textual criticism may not be a high-ranking one but it is a no less important one for that.

It is, furthermore, a particularly arduous task. The obstacles encountered in seeking to restore a document of any kind are familiar. There is no problem as long as the document is an autograph, however old it may be, such as a private letter written on papyrus; it is simply a matter of indicating the obvious careless slips which the author failed to notice as he was writing. The difficulties begin when the piece of writing was dictated or when there is only a copy of the original text available: account has to be taken of the scribe who may have made many mistakes, from simple slips of the pen to the most glaring faults. The job of discarding the erroneous readings becomes even less straightforward with a work which has been repeatedly copied and the extant copies of which were made a long time after the original: there is no hope of recognising all the errors which may have found their way into a text during a period for which no witnesses remain. Things are more complicated still when there are a large number of late copies with several equally plausible variants for different passages.

This is precisely the situation with New Testament textual criticism. In point of fact, the lapse of time between the original documents and the copies which have been handed down is relatively short: at worst, 250 years or so, since whole manuscripts from the fourth century have survived; and at best, no more than 100 years in the case of papyri dating from around AD 200. In this respect, no other work of early classical literature is in such a favourable position. There is a gap of over 1,000 years between the original composition and the extant manuscripts of the writings of Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Aristophanes, Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes. With the Latin authors, the picture is slightly less bleak, but still not nearly as good as the situation of the New Testament writings. The gap is well over three centuries for the writings of Virgil, which are the best preserved.

What constitutes a handicap for New Testament textual criticism are the vast number of witnesses and the enormous number of variants. There are more than 5,000 Greek manuscripts or fragments of manuscripts, counting the lectionaries. And that is nowhere near the number of manuscripts of the versions (that is, the translations into foreign languages), let alone that of the quotations in the writings of the Church Fathers (several million) which help to make up the total sum of witnesses. That being the case, it is not hard to imagine how many thousands of variants there must be. Some say 150,000, others would say nearer 250,000, but the exact number is not really important. The fact is that it would be difficult to find a sentence, even part of a sentence, for which the rendering is consistent in every single manuscript. That certainly gives plenty of food for thought!

It is sometimes said that the greater the number of variants, the greater are the chances of finding the original reading, and attention is drawn to the disadvantageous position of early classical literature for which the original text usually has to be reconstructed from only a small number of copies. In the best cases, for such authors as Euripides, Cicero or Virgil, there are only a few hundred manuscripts.

There is another side of the coin which tends to be forgotten. During the centuries prior to the date of the oldest extant manuscripts the books of the New Testament were copied much more frequently and consequently were subject to many more changes. Another negative factor is that, in the beginning at least, copying was generally carried out by amateur scribes whose skill did not match their enthusiasm. Finally, and most importantly, there are a great many places in the manuscripts of the New Testament (unlike those of more ordinary literature) where the alterations are deliberate and where it is not always easy to see what was the intention behind them. This explains something of the difficulty of New Testament textual criticism.

It would be wrong, however, to paint too black a picture. The great majority of the divergences in readings are to do with details of spelling, grammar or style and do not affect in any way the meaning of the text. True, these minor differences aside, there are a good number of variants which arouse the reader's curiosity by reason of some detail omitted or added to the text. Some are particularly interesting either because they involve a considerable portion of the text or because of their theological significance. In the latter case, though, as would be expected, the substance of Christian doctrine is never affected; rather such variants reflect the diversity of the text as it was known in the first Christian communities. The early papyri attest the overall integrity of the text. The alterations of the most daring revisers are proof of the limits they set themselves. Nevertheless, 'between this general soundness on which historical and theological deductions rely and a text which is perfectly identical to the original one, there is quite a considerable gap' (Lagrange 1929, p. clxv). The aim of textual criticism is to fill this gap.

The first job is to draw up a catalogue of the documents available. Chapter 1 provides a survey of these documents. The next step is to know how to make use of the material to hand and to establish fundamental rules which allow erroneous readings to be discarded; chapter 2 studies this question of method. Using these methodological principles, along with a thorough comparison of the variants, it is sometimes possible for the critic to come to some conclusions about the value of the various witnesses. Although this is a thorny subject, we have nevertheless presented an outline of the history of the text in chapter 3; our lack of knowledge on many of the major points in this area will be obvious but will also help to explain the reason behind changes of opinion amongst scholars. These groping explorations thus quickly lead to fresh questions: What has been done so far to restore the original text? What remains to be done? The answer is to be found in chapter 4: 'The history and the future of the printed text'.

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The sources of textual criticism

It is usual to classify the witnesses which need to be consulted in order to establish the text of the New Testament into three main types. These are the Greek manuscripts, the versions and the quotations found in early writings. A preliminary task is to examine what might be termed the identifying marks of the witnesses, that is their age and their individual characteristics. That task is the object of this chapter which, by reason of its brevity, can present little more than a dry list and a rather incomplete one at that. But it can still be useful despite these limitations. The chapter begins with some prefatory remarks concerning the manuscripts in general, a natural introduction to the study of New Testament textual criticism.

THE MANUSCRIPTS IN GENERAL

MATERIALS AND FORMS

All kinds of materials have been used for writing on: stone, metals, terracotta, waxed tablets of wood and ivory, even pottery remains ('ostraka'). But the main materials are papyrus, parchment and paper and it is for writings on these that the term 'manuscript' is reserved.

The papyrus plant (πάπυρος) is a fibrous reed which used to grow in abundance along the marshy banks of the River Nile. The Egyptians were using it for writing before 2000 BC, and it appears to have been known to the Greeks in the seventh century BC. It was not, however, until the fifth century BC that it entered into general use, first among the Greeks, and then among the Romans. In the writings of Pliny (*Naturalis historia* XIII, 21–6), there are some indications as to how papyrus was made. The inside of the reed (the pith) was cut lengthwise into thin strips which were laid across each other in two layers at right angles and then pressed together. When the fabric was dry, it was polished and then coated with wax so as to be ready for writing on (χάρτης). Papyrus remained in general use until the Arab conquest of

Egypt in the seventh century AD when its importation became practically impossible. The first discoveries of papyrus manuscripts were made in the eighteenth century, since when large numbers of these literary treasures have been found, mostly in Egypt where the dry climate favours the preservation of such fragile materials.

The age of papyrus was succeeded by the age of parchment. Hides of animals had been used for writing since very early times and, outside Egypt, were the chief writing material until papyrus became common in the fifth century BC. The oldest Greek parchment known dates from the end of the third or the beginning of the second century BC and was found at Dura-Europos in the Euphrates valley some seventy years ago. Tradition has it that when one of the Ptolemaean kings refused to send papyrus to the people of Pergamum it was they who invented a method of preparing skins that made writing on them less arduous than it had been previously. The animal skin, usually a sheep's, instead of being tanned was softened in a solution of lime and then scraped with a knife in order to take off the hairy or greasy parts, before being finally polished with a pumice stone. This is how 'parchment', or skin of Pergamum, got its name (περγαμηνή, *pergamena*; also known as μεμβράνα, *membrana*), and it was then that this new material, being strong enough to allow for mistakes to be scratched away, began to compete both with tablets and with papyrus for things like rough work, sketches and anything needing retouching. Later, as it became less expensive, parchment was preferred for literary texts, and for other important work generally. Finally, from around AD 650, when papyrus became rare, parchment predominated until the fourteenth century.

Then it was the turn of paper to take over. Its place and date of origin are somewhat uncertain; it does not seem to have been known in Syria or Egypt until after the taking of Samarkand by the Arabs in AD 707. Distinction can be made between, on the one hand, oriental paper or 'bombycine' which is of Arab invention and manufacture, and, on the other hand, paper of different sorts manufactured in the West. Of the latter, the earliest was that made in Spain from the tenth century, which resembles the paper of Arabic origin; but later types have their own characteristic format (e.g. Catalan paper, mid-twelfth century). The Italian paper (early thirteenth century) which was the first to have watermarks (1280, in Fabriano) replaced all the other Western papers from the fourteenth century. The fragile nature of paper, its high cost and its Arabic origin prevented it from being widely known for a long time. It was parchment which continued to be generally used for finer copies, particularly for the sacred books. Paper finally took over completely with the invention of printing.

As to the form of the manuscripts, they were either made as a scroll (*volumen*) or as a square book (*quadratus*), the scroll being the older of the two forms. One individual sheet of parchment or papyrus could be used only for short documents such as letters or contracts, and so, for longer texts, the sheets were joined together so as to make a scroll about ten metres in length. The much longer papyrus scrolls which have been found in tombs appear to have been made *ad hoc*. It was usual to attach a roller to the end of the scroll and sometimes even to the beginning as well, so enabling the scroll to be rolled up as the reading of it progressed.

Towards the end of the first century AD the codex entered into use. It had already been customary to fasten several waxed tablets together with one or more threads and this practice was later extended to the tying together of sheets of parchment or papyrus. These would be folded and sewn together in quires. This is the origin of the modern book. It was much easier to handle a codex than a scroll and, in addition, a codex could hold more than a scroll; yet despite these advantages it was only gradually that it replaced the scroll, such is the force of habit. It is interesting to note that the Christians were among the first to use the papyrus codex, when they came to write their sacred books. The oldest New Testament papyrus fragment, dating from the first half of the second century, comes from a codex (P^{52}). From the same period, there is a copy of Numbers and Deuteronomy which is a combination of a papyrus scroll and a parchment codex. From the fourth century onwards, the codex form became general.

WRITING

Writing instruments

For writing on waxed tablets the stylus (στῦλος) was used, a pointed stick usually made of metal and with a flattened end for making erasions. For writing on papyrus or parchment a reed cut like a quill (κάλαμος, *calamus*), was the usual instrument. Later quills were made from bird feathers, particularly goose feathers. Black ink was ordinarily used (μέλαν, *atramentum*), though red ink (*rubrica*) was also known. Writing with metal inks, that is silver or gold, on purple-dyed parchment was reserved for *de luxe* editions.

The form of the letters

This is a question of great importance from a palaeographic point of view. There are essentially three main types of writing. The capital letters are tall, regular and separated from one another as in inscriptions. The majuscule letters differ from them in that some of the letters have a more rounded shape and the writing of the majuscules was performed with greater speed; they are often referred to as uncials, a hyperbolic allusion to their size as if they were an inch high. Five main types of uncials are found in Greek New Testament manuscripts, varying according to their date: Roman (second – third century); biblical (fourth – fifth century); Coptic (sixth – seventh century); ogival (fifth century onwards); round liturgical (eighth century onwards). It is more difficult to classify the various kinds of minuscule letters, which vary greatly in shape according to the geographical origin and even the contents of the texts, and do not always correspond to an exact period. The general characteristics are that they are small and joined up; this latter feature has given rise to the designation 'cursive' (running hand), but this is not an entirely accurate label: the joining of the letters is not always a feature of the minuscules and, furthermore, it is sometimes present in the majuscules.

In writings on papyrus the minuscule was used for documents concerning daily life, whereas for literary documents the majuscule was usually – but not always – used, either detached or joined. In parchment manuscripts, scribes used only uncial letters until the ninth century; from then on they began to use minuscules and finally minuscules took over completely in the eleventh century. As for capitals, apart from some Latin manuscripts, they were hardly used at all except for the titles of books. As a final note, it may be added that a number of manuscripts display a curious mixture of uncial and minuscule letters, an indication of the transition which was taking place from capitals to a freer style of writing.

Presentation and punctuation

As a general rule, in the uncial manuscripts the words are not separated from each other but the writing is continuous (*scriptio continua*). It is not until the eleventh century, and then only in the Latin manuscripts, that there exists any kind of systematic separation of words or sections of the text. There is, however, a sign, which takes on a variety of shapes, to indicate the end of a paragraph (παράγραφος, *paragraphos*).

Punctuation and accentuation were not unknown in ancient manuscripts but were of a very elementary nature until the seventh century. In the later manuscripts, abbreviations abound. The information provided in the title (*inscriptio*) is often reproduced or added to in a final note (*subscriptio*). It sometimes happens, too, that mention is made of the number of lines (στίχος, *stichos*, a line of sixteen syllables) contained in the book, a commercial procedure known as stichometry, used as a means to calculate the payment due to the scribe.

In books that were meant to be read in public the text was sometimes divided up into sections according to sense, a procedure followed by the schools of rhetoric, whereby a new line was started after each group of words which could be spoken together. Phrases may be long (κῶλον, *colon*) or short (κόμμα, *comma*), hence Jerome's description of division *per cola et commata* (Preface to the translation of Isaiah).

Palimpsests (πάλιν, 'again'; ψάω, 'to rub')

This is the word used to describe manuscripts on parchment, very occasionally on papyrus, which have been rubbed clean of their writing in order to be written on a second, or even a third time. It was quite a common practice between the sixth and ninth centuries when papyrus and parchment were in short supply. The original text of a palimpsest is often of great value for the history of classical literature or the study of the Bible. They were initially read with the help of chemical substances such as gall-nut which used to cause serious damage to the manuscripts. These chemicals have now been replaced by ultra-violet rays.

DATE AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

A note written by the scribe at the end of a manuscript indicating its date and country of origin, known as a *colophon*, is a custom going back to very early times, but unfortunately it is only found in a few manuscripts and at certain times, such as during the Carolingian period or in the fifteenth-century Renaissance. Where any such indication is absent the date and place of origin of a manuscript are determined, with a varying degree of precision, by examining the manufacture of the book (codicology), or the details of the writing and copying (palaeography), or the characteristic aspects of the text it contains. The smallest details can be important: the material used for writing on, the type of binding and the end leaves, the stitching; the format, the arrangement of the quires, and their ruling and numbering; the page lay-out, the shape and beauty of the letters, the abbreviations; the colour and quality of the ink, the decoration of the illuminated bands, titles, initial letters, and the illustrations; any writing not in the actual text such as titles, red letters, glosses and notes in the margin, inscriptions of dedication or concerning the owner; and finally, in the text itself, the order of the contents, the divisions of the text, the variant readings, the missing words ('lacunae'), the punctuation, the accentuation, even the musical notation. None of these details is irrelevant to the philologist. For the purposes of gathering together information about as many manuscripts as possible, there are computer databases which either exist already or are in the process of being set up.

Anyone who is interested in these questions, and who is unable to gain easy access to the libraries, could consult some of the specialised works which include a great variety of samples of literary manuscripts, both secular and biblical. Particular mention may be made of the collection made by H. Follieri (1969) and also *La Paléographie grecque et byzantine* (International CNRS Colloque 559 (Oct. 1974), Paris 1977). For further works, see the bibliography in Dain 1975 and Reynolds – Wilson 1974).

THE GREEK MANUSCRIPTS

A list of the Greek manuscripts was first compiled at the beginning of the century by C. R. Gregory and later continued by E. von Dobschütz. More recently, it has been brought up to date and revised by K. Aland (1963 (V)) with additional supplements which continue to be published periodically (1969, pp. 22–37; 1972, 1974, 1977, 1982, 1985, 1988 (V)). But Aland's list is not entirely exhaustive; new manuscripts sometimes come to light in private collections, or as a result of archaeological discoveries as was the case at Mount Sinai in 1975 (see B. Aland 1985, Junack *et al.* 1989, Politis 1980; see also below p. 163). The manuscripts can be divided into four categories, of somewhat unequal importance, according to the material from which they are made, their type of script and the use for which they were intended: these are the papyri, the uncials, the minuscules and the lectionaries. These will now be discussed in order, with a paragraph at the end on ostraka and talismans.