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The Early Text of the New Testament

Charles E. Hill,
Michael J. Kruger



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Edited by

CHARLES E. HILL AND MICHAEL J. KRUGER

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Abbreviations

<i>Aeg</i>	<i>Aegyptus</i>
AGBL	Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel (= Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel: Aus der Geschichte der lateinischen Bibel). Freiburg: Herder, 1957–)
<i>AJP</i>	<i>American Journal of Philology</i>
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> . Edited by H. Temporini and W. Haase. Berlin, 1972–
ANTF	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
<i>Anton</i>	<i>Antonianum</i>
ANTT	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
<i>APF</i>	<i>Archiv für Papyrusforschung</i>
<i>ATR</i>	<i>Australasian Theological Review</i>
<i>Aug</i>	<i>Augustinianum</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibS(F)	Biblische Studien (Freiburg, 1895–)
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>ByzNeugr Jb</i>	<i>Byzantinisch-neugriechischer Jahrbücher</i>
CADp	Centre d'analyse et de documentation patristiques
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series latina. Turnhout, 1953–
CEBT	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CJA	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
ConBNT	Coniectanea neotestamentica or Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
CQ	<i>Church Quarterly</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium, ed. I. B. Chabot <i>et al.</i> Paris, 1903–
CW	<i>Classical World</i>
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>

<i>Exp</i>	<i>Expositor</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>FilNeo</i>	<i>Filologia Neotestamentaria</i>
<i>GTT</i>	<i>Gereformeerd Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
<i>Herm</i>	<i>Hermanthema</i>
HTB	Histoire du Texte Biblique
HTKNT	Heders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
ICC	International Critic Commentary
IGNTP	International Greek New Testament Project
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JRH</i>	<i>Journal of Religious History</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
MPIL	Monographs of the Peshitta Institute, Leiden
MthSt	Marburger theologische Studien
NA ²⁷	Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland, 27th edition
<i>NewDocs</i>	<i>New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity</i> , ed. G. H. R. Horsley and S. Llewelyn (North Ryde, NSW, 1981–)
<i>NedTT</i>	<i>Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift</i>
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus

NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OECT	Oxford Early Christian Texts
PapFlor	Papyrologica Florentina
PBA	Proceedings of the British Academy
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RAC	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> , ed. T. Kluser <i>et al.</i> (Stuttgart, 1950–)
RB	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RE	<i>Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche</i>
RevScRel	<i>Revue des Sciences Religieuses</i>
RHA	<i>Revue hittite et asianique</i>
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLNTGF	Society of Biblical Literature, The New Testament in the Greek Fathers
SC	Sources chrétiennes (Paris: Cerf, 1943–)
SD	Studies and Documents
SecCent	<i>Second Century</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SO	<i>Symbolae osloenses</i>
SPap	<i>Studia Papyrologica</i>
STAR	Studies in Theology and Religion
STP	Studi e testi di papirologia
StPatr	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
SSEJC	<i>Studies in Early Judaism and Christianity</i>
TC	<i>TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism</i>
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
TRE	<i>Theologische Realencyklopädie</i> , ed. G. Krause and G.Müller (Berlin, 1977)
TS	Texts and Studies
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
UBS ⁴	The Greek New Testament, United Bible Societies, 4th edition
VC	<i>Vigiliae christianae</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>

<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
<i>WUNT</i>	<i>Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament</i>
<i>ZAC</i>	<i>Journal of Ancient Christianity</i>
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZKG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
<i>ZKT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie</i>
<i>ZPE</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik</i>
<i>ZWT</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie</i>

Introduction

In Search of the Earliest Text of the New Testament

Charles E. Hill and Michael J. Kruger

INTRODUCTION

In 1979, after years of writing about what he called ‘The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism’, Eldon J. Epp published an even more dismal prognosis for scholars in this field in an article entitled, ‘New Testament Textual Criticism in America: Requiem for a Discipline’.¹ Despite Epp’s dire analysis, however, or perhaps partly because of it, the discipline slowly began to show signs of a turnaround. By 1999 Larry Hurtado could say that the patient ‘may be a bit healthier (particularly in the English-speaking countries) as we near the end of this century’.² Now, a decade into the twenty-first century, some might wish to grant the discipline of New Testament textual criticism a clean bill of health.

There is currently an undeniable flowering of interest in many aspects of research on the text and the manuscript tradition of the New Testament documents. One fairly dramatic sign of vitality is the phenomenal success of Bart Ehrman’s *Misquoting Jesus*,³ which introduced, somewhat controversially, the formerly moribund discipline to the popular reading public. And on the other end of the spectrum, highly technical, scholarly volumes having to do in some way with the early transmission of NT documents are swelling

¹ E. J. Epp, ‘The Twentieth Century Interlude in New Testament Textual Criticism’, *JBL* 98 (1979), 94–8.

² L. Hurtado, ‘Beyond the Interlude? Developments and Directions in New Testament Textual Criticism’, in D. G. K. Taylor, ed., *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts* (Atlanta, Ga.: SBL, 1999), 47.

³ B. D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: Harper, 2005).

the catalogues of many an academic publisher. The continuing publication of newly edited papyri from Oxyrhynchus generates more interest than ever, particularly as high-resolution photographs and other tools for study have become available to scholars through the Oxyrhynchus website. One of the most spectacular stimulants to the scholar and the general public alike is the recent publication of the entire text of the famous codex Sinaiticus, a codex which has played so large a role in the construction of modern editions of the NT, on a well endowed website.⁴

While these and other developments signify a burgeoning of interest in the history of the NT text, the greatest injection of substantial *new* materials into the textual database for the discipline, and the greatest of several impetuses for this book, has come from the steadily accumulating papyrus and early parchment finds from Egypt. There are now, as we write, 127 catalogued papyri containing some portion of the New Testament writings. These range from large codices to tiny fragments of text. The early date of many of them, before the great uncial codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus of the fourth century, elevates them to an 'automatic' importance in the minds of many textual critics. But, as we shall see below, their real significance for the discipline of NT textual criticism is currently controversial.

While data from the study of these papyri have been mounting, gains have also been made in the understanding of scribal habits and methods of book production and distribution in antiquity. Significant research by Harry Gamble,⁵ Kim Haines-Eitzen,⁶ Larry Hurtado,⁷ and James Royse,⁸ among many others, has brought new insights to the attention of scholars dealing with Christian origins.

This growth in new knowledge unavailable to previous generations of scholars has arguably reached a 'critical mass'. As far back as 1989 Kurt and Barbara Aland wrote, 'Although many details are obviously still debatable, there can be no doubt that the earlier view of the textual situation before the rise of the major text types is now due for a radical and thorough review.'⁹ With the influx of a substantial amount of new material and newer methods of research since 1989, the time seems ripe to make at least a first attempt at such a review.

The Early Text of the New Testament thus intends to provide an inventory and some analysis of the evidence available for understanding the pre-fourth-century period of the transmission of the NT materials. Any attempt to do this

⁴ <http://codexsinaiticus.org>.

⁵ H. Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

⁶ K. Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

⁷ L. W. Hurtado, *The Earliest Christian Artifacts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006). See also T. J. Kraus and T. Nicklas, eds., *New Testament Manuscripts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2006).

⁸ J. R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁹ K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 95.

at the present time, however, must recognize that the traditional conception of the task of NT textual criticism has been actively challenged in the past two decades or so, and for some remains in a state of flux.

EARLY TEXT AND 'ORIGINAL' TEXT

Looming large in discussions over the last generation is the viability and relevance of the concept of an 'original' text.¹⁰ Although the traditional treatments of textual criticism—including those of Hort,¹¹ Gregory,¹² Kenyon,¹³ Lake,¹⁴ Metzger,¹⁵ and the Alands¹⁶—have generally pursued the goal of recovering the original text, they have offered little sustained treatment about the complexities involved in defining the term. More recent writers have not only begun to raise questions about the meaning of the term, but also about whether establishing the original text should even be the goal of the discipline. Ehrman, commenting on past attempts to recover the original text, declares, 'It is by no means self-evident that this ought to be the goal of the discipline . . . there may indeed be scant reason to privilege the "original" text over forms of the text that developed subsequently'.¹⁷ Others have been keen to raise concerns about how close we can really get to the 'original' text even if we wanted to do it. Helmut Koester argues that the papyri themselves are at least a century removed from the original publication of the New Testament text and thus provide no real assurance that the earliest text looked anything like our extant papyri.¹⁸ Similar sentiments are expressed by Petersen, Parker, and Epp.¹⁹

¹⁰ The most detailed overview of the recent debate can be found in E. J. Epp, 'The Multivalence of the Term "Original Text" in New Testament Textual Criticism', *HTR* 92 (1999), 245–81.

¹¹ B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1881), 2.1.

¹² C. R. Gregory, *Canon and Text of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1907), 485.

¹³ F. G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1926), 1–2.

¹⁴ K. Lake, *The Text of the New Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1913), 1.

¹⁵ B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: OUP, 1992), 150.

¹⁶ Aland and Aland, *Text*, 291–2.

¹⁷ B. D. Ehrman, 'The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Christianity', in Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, eds., *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 361 n.1. Ehrman's position was anticipated many years earlier by D. W. Riddle, 'Textual Criticism as a Historical Discipline', *ATR* 18 (1936): 221; and M. M. Parvis, 'The Nature and Tasks of New Testament Textual Criticism: An Appraisal', *JR* 32 (1952): 172.

¹⁸ H. Koester, 'The Text of the Synoptic Gospels in the Second Century', in W. L. Petersen, ed., *Gospel Traditions in the Second Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 19–37. Differing from Koester are F. Wisse, 'The Nature and Purpose of Redactional Changes in Early Christian Texts: The Canonical Gospels', in W. L. Petersen, ed., *The Gospel Traditions of the Second Century* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 39–53; and J. Delobel, 'The Achilles' Heel of New Testament Textual Criticism', *Bijdragen, International Journal of Philosophy and Theology*, 63 (2002): 3–21.

¹⁹ W. L. Petersen, 'What Text Can New Testament Textual Criticism Ultimately Reach?', in B. Aland and J. Delobel, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church*

In a number of ways, the recent attention to the concept of the ‘original’ text is a welcome development. No doubt the term has been used far too long without appropriate nuance and qualification.²⁰ Moreover, given the complexities of the textual history of some of the New Testament writings (in particular, Acts), and the limited number of early papyri we possess, we should not be overly confident that our reconstructed critical text is equivalent to what was originally written. Such a cautionary approach has been exemplified by the Metzger-Ehrman volume which does not claim textual critics can recover the original text, *per se*, but rather the text ‘regarded as most nearly conforming to the original’.²¹ Likewise, the present volume has attempted to strike a cautionary tone in its very title, *The Early Text of the New Testament*. Our concern here is not so much a recovery of the original text, but an analysis of the ‘early’ text and its transmission.

However, while the complexities in recovering the original text need to be acknowledged, that is a separate question from whether the *concept* of an original text is incoherent and should therefore be abandoned as a goal of the discipline. Unfortunately, these two questions are often mingled together without distinction. Although recovering the original text faces substantial obstacles (and therefore the results should be qualified), there is little to suggest that it is an illegitimate enterprise. If it were illegitimate, then we would expect the same would be true for Greek and Roman literature *outside* the New Testament. Are we to think that an attempt to reconstruct the original word of Tacitus, or Plato, or Thucydides is misguided? Or that it does not matter? Those who argue that we should abandon the concept of an original text for the New Testament often give very little (if any) attention to the implications of such an approach for classical literature. Indeed, Parker gives the impression that concern for the original text is simply a *religious* phenomenon, driven by pressure from churches who desire an ‘authoritative text’.²² It is doubtful that the scholars devoting their careers to recovering the original text of classical works would agree. To them, a text does not have to be sacred for its original wording to matter.

There appears to be little reason, therefore, to relinquish the traditional goal of textual criticism (even if that goal cannot always be reached with the precision we desire). That said, retaining this goal does not preclude the existence of other valuable goals for the discipline—recovery of the original

History (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 136–52; D. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 203–13; Epp, ‘Multivalence’, 261–4.

²⁰ One thinks especially of the title of Wescott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*. However, they also qualify their goal by noting that they seek the original texts ‘so far as they can now be determined from surviving documents’ (2.1).

²¹ B. M. Metzger and B. D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. xv.

²² Parker, *The Living Text*, 209.

text need not be the *only* goal. The work of Ehrman (and others) reminds us that textual variants need not be relegated to the status of scraps on the cutting room floor, but can also function as ‘windows’ into the world of early Christianity, its social history, and the various theological challenges it faced.²³ Such discussion of theologically motivated scribal changes can be traced back to Kirsopp Lake and J. Rendel Harris, and more recently to scholars like Eldon J. Epp and his well-known book, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Cantabrigiensis in Acts*.²⁴ Recognizing the historical value of such scribal variations need not be set in opposition to the goal of recovering the original text. These two aspects of textual criticism are complementary, not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it is only when we can have some degree of assurance regarding the original text that we are even able to recognize that later scribes occasionally changed it for their own theological purposes. Without the former we would not have the latter.

THE PAPYRI AND THE EARLY TEXT

To many, the fresh discoveries of New Testament papyri, offering something both new and old, hold an inherent attraction. But despite the interest they have generated, the significance of the papyri for textual scholars is still quite debated. Over two decades ago Epp noted that the early papyri ‘contribute virtually no new substantial variants’ to the collection of variants already known from the later tradition.²⁵ Even with the discovery of many more papyri the situation has not changed.²⁶ Thus, it is not uncommon for experts to observe that, in spite of the mounting evidence from the early period, the critical editions of the NT have changed relatively little since the work of

²³ Ehrman, ‘The Text as Window’, 361–79.

²⁴ K. Lake, *The Influence of Textual Criticism on the Exegesis of the New Testament* (Oxford: Parker & Son, 1904); J. R. Harris, ‘New Points of View in Textual Criticism’, *ExpTim* 7 (1914): 316–34; E. J. Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (Cambridge: CUP, 1966).

²⁵ E. J. Epp, ‘The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission’, in W. L. Petersen, ed., *The Gospel Traditions in the Second Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 101. He continued by saying that this suggests ‘not only that virtually all of the New Testament variants are preserved somewhere in our extant manuscript tradition, but also that representatives of virtually all textual complexions have been preserved for us in the papyri’.

²⁶ Affirmed in 1994 by B. D. Ehrman, ‘The Text of the Gospels at the End of the Second Century’, in D. C. Parker and C.-B. Amphoux, eds., *Codex Bezae* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 100. Affirmed by J. K. Elliott, in full view of the papyri numbered up to \mathfrak{P}^{116} , in ‘The Nature of the Evidence Available for Reconstructing the Text of the New Testament in the Second Century’, in C.-B. Amphoux and J. K. Elliott, eds., *The New Testament Text in Early Christianity* (Lausanne: Éditions du Zèbre, 2003), 16.

Westcott and Hort.²⁷ Since ‘earlier is not necessarily better’, Keith Elliott has even criticized a tendency on the part of editors to give too much weight to the papyri in their critical editions of the NT.²⁸

Yet the non-revolutionary nature of the texts contained in the papyri recovered so far is itself worthy of comment. According to Ehrman, the papyri have had the effect ‘of showing that while aspects of our textual theories needed to be modified, the basic physiognomy of our reconstructed originals was altogether on target’.²⁹ It also means that the fourth-century ‘best texts’, the ‘Alexandrian’ codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, have roots extending throughout the entire third century and even into the second. Even so, vigorous debate continues about how to analyze and classify the readings of the papyri and about their potential to deliver an accurate picture of the development of the NT text in the early period.

Classifying Early Papyri Readings: Text Type or Type of Text?

Since the nineteenth century the textual criticism of the New Testament has rested mainly upon the great fourth- and fifth-century uncials, \aleph , A, B, C, D, and W and on the classification of the manuscripts of the textual tradition according to text types. (In the classic formulation of Colwell, a ‘text type’ could be defined as ‘a group of manuscripts that agree more than 70 per cent of the time and is separated by a gap of about 10 per cent from its neighbors’.³⁰) At the beginning of the twentieth century only nine papyri were known. Then came a number of exciting discoveries from Oxyrhynchus and the appearance of the Chester Beatty and Martin Bodmer collections. Little by little, the accumulating papyri, some of which contained substantial portions of text, allowed scholars a glimpse of the text of the New Testament writings before the time of the esteemed uncials. In 1957 Jack Suggs made an acute observation about the papyri and posed a question: ‘The papyri texts frequently give the appearance of being “mixed” texts. But how can second- and third-century texts be derived by mixture of later texts?’³¹ Clearly, they cannot. Either the ‘later texts’ are actually earlier than imagined, or the effort to classify

²⁷ B. Aland, ‘The Significance of the Chester Beatty Papyri in Early Church History’, in Charles Horton, ed., *The Earliest Gospels*⁵ (London and New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 108; B. Ehrman, ‘The Use and Significance of Patristic Evidence for NT Textual Criticism’, in Aland and Delobel, *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History*, 122 n. 15.

²⁸ Elliott, ‘The Nature of the Evidence’, 11.

²⁹ Ehrman, ‘Patristic Evidence’, 119.

³⁰ See E. C. Colwell, *Studies in the Methodology of the Text Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), 59.

³¹ M. J. Suggs, ‘The Use of Patristic Evidence in the Search for a Primitive New Testament Text’, *NTS* 4 (1957–8): 145.

the papyri according to text types which only emerged later is backwards. These two explanations have become fountainheads for two streams of analysis of the papyri which continue up to the present.

In the second edition of his book on textual criticism in 1968 Bruce Metzger included in his descriptive list of the NT papyri an assessment of the text type to which they corresponded. He did not hesitate to characterize some of the early papyri as having the sort of 'mixed' texts which Suggs had questioned. Kurt and Barbara Aland responded specifically to Metzger in their handbook on textual criticism, warning that 'Descriptions in such terms as "mixed text," "partly Alexandrian, partly Western (pre-Caesarean) text," etc., to describe manuscripts of a period when these groups had not yet developed and could hardly be "mixed" contribute nothing to clear thinking.'³² Even in the 2005 fourth edition of Metzger's *Text*, however, he and Ehrman continue to affirm the existence of two major text types, Western and Alexandrian, in the second century.³³ They continue to speak of \mathfrak{A}^{45} as 'intermediate between the Alexandrian and the Western'³⁴ and of \mathfrak{A}^{66} as 'mixed, with elements that are typically Alexandrian and Western'.³⁵

Based on Metzger's evaluations, Eldon Epp in 1989 argued that the textual characters of the papyri placed most of them into four constellations which corresponded to the major text types.³⁶ Well aware that there were those who 'eschew the identification of text-types in the early period', Epp still maintained that three of these types were in existence by around 200 CE or shortly thereafter, and that the \mathfrak{A}^{75} -B text clearly existed in the second century. He described an 'A' Group, texts which foreshadow and approximate the Byzantine type and connect to Alexandrinus (A) (in the Gospels); a 'B' Group, texts which foreshadow and approximate the Alexandrian type and connect to Sinaiticus (a) and Vaticanus (B); a 'C' Group, texts which show a mixed type, between the B and D groups, and connect to Washingtoniensis (W); and a 'D' Group, texts which foreshadow and approximate the Western type and connect to Bezae (D). Epp reaffirmed the groupings in 1995³⁷ and defended them as 'constellations' in a Society of Biblical Literature paper in 2008. We may chart his constellations as in Table I.1.

³² K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd edn., tr. E. F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, 1989; 1981 German original), 59.

³³ Metzger and Ehrman, *Text*, 278.

³⁴ Ibid. 54.

³⁵ Ibid. 67.

³⁶ Epp, 'The Significance of the Papyri'.

³⁷ E. J. Epp, 'The Papyrus Manuscripts of the New Testament', in B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes, *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 17–18, repeated in 2004, with the statement that they were 'highly provisional', in Eldon Jay Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), ch. 13, esp. 380–1.

Table I.1. Epp's Classification of the Papyri in 1989

Century	'A' Group	'B' Group ^a	'C' Group ^b	'D' Group ^c
2nd		ⲓ ⁵²		
2nd/3rd		ⲓ ⁴⁶ , ⲓ ⁶⁴⁺⁶⁷ , ⲓ ⁶⁶		
3rd		ⲓ ¹ , ⲓ ⁴ , ⲓ ¹⁵ , ⲓ ²⁰ , ⲓ ²³ , ⲓ ²⁸ , ⲓ ³⁹ , ⲓ ⁴⁰ , ⲓ ⁴⁷ , ⲓ ⁴⁹ , ⲓ ⁵³ , ⲓ ⁶⁵ , ⲓ ⁷⁵ , ⲓ ⁹¹	ⲓ ⁴⁵ (most of Mark), ⲓ ²⁷	ⲓ ⁵ , ⲓ ²⁹ , ⲓ ⁴⁸ , ⲓ ^{69?}
3rd/4th		ⲓ ¹³ , ⲓ ¹⁶ , ⲓ ⁷² [in Peter], ⲓ ⁹²	ⲓ ^{37?}	ⲓ ^{37?} , ⲓ ³⁸ , ⲓ ⁷² [Jude], 0171
4th		ⲓ ¹⁰ , ⲓ ⁶² , ⲓ ⁷¹ , ⲓ ⁸⁶ ⲓ ⁸ , ⲓ ³⁵	ⲓ ^{25?}	
4th/5th		ⲓ ⁵⁰ , ⲓ ⁵⁷		ⲓ ^{19?} , ⲓ ^{21?}
5th		ⲓ ¹⁴		
4th/6th		ⲓ ⁵⁶		
6th	ⲓ ⁸⁴	ⲓ ³³⁺⁵⁸	ⲓ ³⁶	
6th/7th		ⲓ ³ , ⲓ ⁴³ , ⲓ ⁴⁴ , ⲓ ⁵⁵		
7th	ⲓ ⁶⁸ , ⲓ ^{74?}	ⲓ ¹¹ , ⲓ ³¹ , ⲓ ³⁴		
7th/8th	ⲓ ⁴²	ⲓ ⁶⁰ , ⲓ ^{61?}		ⲓ ⁴¹

^a In 'Papyrus Manuscripts', 17, he added L and 33 and pointed to a connection between P46 and 1739 for Paul.

^b Ibid. he mentions also f¹³.

^c Ibid. he mentions only ⲓ⁴⁸, ⲓ³⁸, ⲓ⁶⁹, 0171, and perhaps ⲓ²⁹, and connects them to D and to 1739 in Acts, 614, and 383.

But while some text critics were comparing manuscripts with each other to find similarities and groups, the Alands at the Münster Institut were comparing manuscripts with their presumed archetypes, and with the 'original' or *Ausgangstext*, the text which first circulated. The Alands have maintained unwaveringly that text types as such did not exist in the second century.³⁸ What the complexities of the earlier papyri showed instead was the freedom of the text in that period. Even the very close correspondence between ⲓ⁷⁵ (Luke and John) from around 200 and the Gospel text of Vaticanus from the mid-fourth century does not signify a text type, resulting from a deliberate

³⁸ Aland and Aland, *Text*, 64 (among many other places). It is notable that the Coherence Based Genealogical Method developed by Gerd Mink—which allows scholars to develop genealogical trees of MSS—is not built on the traditional text-type model and is now being used to reconstruct textual flow by the editors of the *Editio critica maior* (G. Mink, 'Ein umfassende Genealogie der neutestamentlichen Überlieferung', *NTS* 39 (1993): 481–99; see discussion in Parker, *New Testament Manuscripts and their Texts*, 169–71, and note the series *Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1987–). As a result, some scholars, like Holger Strutwolf, have begun to suggest that the traditional text-types should be abandoned entirely (Strutwolf's comments were made in a paper delivered at the Nov. 2006 SBL annual meeting in Washington, DC).

recension, but only a line of strictly copied texts executed with great care.³⁹ Manuscripts which did not conform to this careful or strict line of copying were simply the result of scribal ‘freedom’. Thus, what may look like early forms of the ‘Western’ text anticipating codex D are not the products of a recension but of a certain negligence in copying.⁴⁰

The Münster approach then is to attempt to classify early manuscripts in three major groups ‘strict text’, ‘normal text’, and ‘free text’ (sometimes with further modifications: ‘at least normal’, ‘like D’), according to how closely they mirrored the original or *Ausgangstext*—assumed for practical purposes to be the text now established by over a century of text critical work, the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graeca* (now the 27th edn.).⁴¹ Critics are correct to point to the circularity of this approach.⁴² Yet, because the vast majority of textual critics⁴³ seem to agree that the current editions (NA²⁷ and UBS⁴) reproduce a text which must be close to the original or *Ausgangstext*, using the method as a working hypothesis⁴⁴ seems unobjectionable to many, at least as a point of departure.

Text Quality: The Early Text as ‘Free Text’?

Throughout much of the twentieth century it appeared that the text of the early period exhibited a much greater ‘freedom’ than in the later period, when

³⁹ See also G. Fee, ‘The Myth of Early Textual Recension in Alexandria’, in E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 272; originally publ. in R. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney, *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974). Echoing Hort’s judgments of a century earlier, Fee claimed that A^75 and B ‘seem to represent a “relatively pure” form of preservation of a “relatively pure” line of descent from the original text’ (272).

⁴⁰ Cf. B. Aland, ‘Der textkritische und textgeschichtliche Nutzen früherer Papyri, demonstriert am Johannesevangelium’, in W. Weren and D.-A. Koch, eds., *Recent Developments in Textual Criticism* (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2003), 37.

⁴¹ Aland and Aland, *Text*, 93–5; cf. K. Aland, ‘Der neue “Standard-Text” in seinem Verhältnis zu den frühen Papyri und Majuskeln’, in E. J. Epp and G. D. Fee, eds., *New Testament Textual Criticism* (Oxford: OUP, 1981), 257–75; J. H. Petzer, ‘The History of the New Testament Text: Its Reconstruction, Significance and Use in New Testament Textual Criticism’, in Aland and Delobel, *New Testament Textual Criticism, Exegesis, and Early Church History*, 32; B. Aland, ‘Kriterien zur Beurteilung kleinerer Papyrusfragmente des Neuen Testaments’, in A. Denaux, ed., *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 1–13.

⁴² B. D. Ehrman, ‘A Problem of Circularity: The Alands on the Classification of New Testament Manuscripts’, *Biblica*, 70 (1989): 381; Epp, ‘Papyrus’, 15; B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd edn. (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 290 n.1. The evaluation of William L. Petersen is less charitable: ‘A more unscientific, hubris-filled, and self-serving approach to scholarship is hard to imagine’ (W. L. Petersen, ‘The Genesis of the Gospels’, in A. Denaux, ed., *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 60 n. 89).

⁴³ Notwithstanding what he would later say in *Misquoting Jesus*, 58, Ehrman wrote already in 1994, ‘Our surviving evidence can take us back . . . to the point of being reasonably certain that we have before us a close approximation of the original text’ (‘Patristic Evidence’, 122 n. 15).

⁴⁴ This is what Barbara Aland has maintained that it is (e.g. B. Aland, ‘Die Rezeption des neutestamentlichen Textes in den ersten Jahrhunderten’, in J.-M. Sevrin, ed., *The New Testament in Early Christianity* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1989), 26–7 and elsewhere).

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