Textus Receptus

Textus Receptus (Latin: "received text") is the name subsequently given to the succession of printed Greek texts of the New Testament which constituted the translation base for the original German Luther Bible, the translation of the New Testament into English by William Tyndale, the King James Version, and most other Reformation-era New Testament translations throughout Western and Central Europe. The series originated with the first printed Greek New Testament, published in 1516—a work undertaken in Basel by the Dutch Catholic scholar and humanist Desiderius Erasmus. Detractors criticize it for being based on only some six manuscripts, containing between them not quite the whole of the New Testament. The missing text was back-translated from the Vulgate. Although based mainly on late manuscripts of the Byzantine text-type, Erasmus's edition differed markedly from the classic form of that text, and included some missing parts back translated from the Latin Vulgate.

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History of the Textus Receptus

See also: Novum Instrumentum omne and Editio Regia

The Dutch humanist Erasmus had been working for years on two projects: a collation of Greek texts and a fresh Latin New Testament. In 1512, he began his work on a fresh Latin New Testament. He collected all the Vulgate manuscripts he could find to create a critical edition. Then he polished the Latin. He declared, "It is only fair that Paul should address the Romans in somewhat better Latin." In the earlier phases of the project, he never mentioned a Greek text: "My mind is so excited at the thought of emending Jerome’s text, with notes, that I seem to myself inspired by some god. I have already almost finished emending him by collating a large number of ancient manuscripts, and this I am doing at enormous personal expense."
The last page of the Erasmian New Testament (Rev 22:8-21)

While his intentions for publishing a fresh Latin translation are clear, it is less clear why he included the Greek text. Though some speculate that he intended on producing a critical Greek text or that he wanted to beat the Complutensian Polyglot into print, there is no evidence to support this. Rather his motivation may have been simpler: he included the Greek text to prove the superiority of his Latin version. He wrote, "There remains the New Testament translated by me, with the Greek facing, and notes on it by me."[1] He further demonstrated the reason for the inclusion of the Greek text when defending his work: "But one thing the facts cry out, and it can be clear, as they say, even to a blind man, that often through the translator’s clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered; often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes, which we see happen every day, or altered by scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep."[4] Erasmus's new work was published by Froben of Basel in 1516 and thence became the first published Greek New Testament, the Novum Instrumentum omne, diligentia ab Erasmo Rot. Recognitum et Emendatum. He used manuscripts: 1, 1K, 2c, 2ap, 4ap, 7, 817.[5] The second edition used the more familiar term Testamentum instead of Instrumentum, and eventually became a major source for Luther's German translation. In second edition (1519) Erasmus used also Minuscule 3.

Typographical errors (attributed to the rush to complete the work) abounded in the published text. Erasmus also lacked a complete copy of the book of Revelation and was forced to translate the last six verses back into Greek from the Latin Vulgate in order to finish his edition. Erasmus adjusted the text in many places to correspond with readings found in the Vulgate, or as quoted in the Church Fathers; consequently, although the Textus Receptus is classified by scholars as a late Byzantine text, it differs in nearly two thousand readings from the standard form of that text-type, as represented by the "Majority Text" of Hodges and Farstad (Wallace 1989). The edition was a sell-out commercial success and was reprinted in 1519, with most—though not all—the typographical errors corrected.[6]

Erasmus had been studying Greek New Testament manuscripts for many years, in the Netherlands, France, England and Switzerland, noting their many variants, but had only six
Greek manuscripts immediately accessible to him in Basel. They all dated from the 12th Century or later, and only one came from outside the mainstream Byzantine tradition. Consequently, most modern scholars consider his text to be of dubious quality.

With the third edition of Erasmus' Greek text (1522) the Comma Johanneum was included, because "Erasmus chose to avoid any occasion for slander rather than persisting in philological accuracy", even though he remained "convinced that it did not belong to the original text of 1 John."[6] Popular demand for Greek New Testaments led to a flurry of further authorized and unauthorized editions in the early sixteenth century, almost all of which were based on Erasmus's work and incorporated his particular readings, although typically also making a number of minor changes of their own.[8]

The overwhelming success of Erasmus' Greek New Testament completely overshadowed the Latin text upon which he had focused. Many other publishers produced their own versions of the Greek New Testament over the next several centuries. Rather than doing their own critical work, most just relied on the well-known Erasmian text.

Robert Estienne, known as Stephanus (1503–1559), a printer from Paris, edited the Greek New Testament four times, in 1546, 1549, 1550 and 1551, the last in Geneva. The first two are among the neatest Greek texts known, and are called O mirificam; the third edition is a splendid masterpiece of typographical skill. It has critical apparatus in which quoted manuscripts referred to the text. Manuscripts were marked by symbols (from α to ις). He used Polyglotta Complutensis (symbolized by α) and 15 Greek manuscripts. Among these are included: Codex Bezae, Codex Regius, minuscules 4, 5, 6, 2817, 8, 9. The first step towards modern Textual Criticism was made. The third edition is known as the Editio Regia. The edition of 1551 contains the Latin translation of Erasmus and the Vulgate. It is not nearly as fine as the other three and is
exceedingly rare. It was in this edition that the division of the New Testament into verses was for the first time introduced.

The third edition of Estienne was used by Theodore Beza (1519–1605), who edited it nine times between 1565 and 1604. In the critical apparatus of the second edition he used the Codex Claromontanus and the Syriac New Testament published by Emmanuel Tremellius in 1569. Codex Bezae was twice referenced (as Codex Bezae and β' of Estienne).

The origin of the term Textus Receptus comes from the publisher's preface to the 1633 edition produced by Bonaventure and his nephew Abraham Elzevir who were partners in a printing business at Leiden. The preface reads, Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus, translated as, "so you hold the text, now received by all, in which (is) nothing corrupt." The two words textum and receptum were modified from the accusative to the nominative case to render textus receptus. Over time, this term has been retroactively applied to Erasmus' editions, as his work served as the basis of the others.¹⁰

Textual criticism and the Textus Receptus

John Mill (1645–1707), collated textual variants from 82 Greek manuscripts. In his Novum Testamentum Graecum, cum lectionibus variantibus MSS (Oxford 1707) he reprinted the unchanged text of the Editio Regia, but in the index he enumerated 30,000 textual variants.¹¹

Shortly after Mill published his edition, Daniel Whitby (1638–1725), attacked his work. He claimed that the autographs of the New Testament were identical to the Textus Receptus, and that the text had never been corrupted. He believed the text of the Holy Scripture was endangered by the 30,000 variants in Mill's edition. Whitby claimed that every part of the New Testament should be defended against these variants.¹²

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752), in 1725 edited Prodromus Novi Testamenti Graeci Rectè Cautèque Adornandi, in 1734 edited Novum Testamentum Graecum. Bengel divided manuscripts into families and subfamilies. He favoured the principle of lectio difficilior potior ("the more difficult reading is the stronger").

Johann Jakob Wettstein. His Apparatus was fuller than of any previous editor. He introduced the practice of indicating the ancient manuscripts by capital Roman letters and the later manuscripts by Arabic numerals. He published in Basel Prolegomena ad Novi Testamenti Graeci (1731).

J. J. Griesbach (1745–1812) combined the principles of Bengel and Wettstein. He enlarged the Apparatus by considering more citations from the Fathers, and various versions, such as the Gothic, the Armenian, and the Philoxenian. Griesbach distinguished a Western, an Alexandrian, and a Byzantine Recension.¹³ Christian Frederick Matthaei (1744–1811) was a Griesbach opponent.

Karl Lachmann (1793–1851), was the first who broke with the Textus Receptus. His object was to restore the text to the form in which it had been read in the ancient Church about A.D. 380. He
used the oldest known Greek and Latin manuscripts. Tischendorf's *Editio Octava Critica Maior* based on *Codex Sinaiticus*.

Westcott and Hort, published *The New Testament in the Original Greek* in 1881, in which they rejected Textus Receptus. The text is based mainly on *Codex Vaticanus* in the Gospels.[14]

**Defense of the Textus Receptus**

Frederick von Nolan, a 19th century historian and Greek and Latin scholar, spent 28 years attempting to trace the Textus Receptus to apostolic origins. He was an ardent advocate of the supremacy of the Textus Receptus over all other editions of the Greek New Testament, and argued that the first editors of the printed Greek New Testament intentionally selected the texts they did because of their superiority and disregarded other texts which represented other text-types because of their inferiority.

It is not to be conceived that the original editors of the [Greek] New Testament were wholly destitute of plan in selecting those manuscripts, out of which they were to form the text of their printed editions. In the sequel it will appear, that they were not altogether ignorant of two classes of manuscripts; one of which contains the text which we have adopted from them; and the other that text which has been adopted by M. Griesbach.[15]

Regarding Erasmus, Nolan stated:

Nor let it be conceived in disparagement of the great undertaking of Erasmus, that he was merely fortuitously right. Had he barely undertaken to perpetuate the tradition on which he received the sacred text he would have done as much as could be required of him, and more than sufficient to put to shame the puny efforts of those who have vainly labored to improve upon his design. [...] With respect to Manuscripts, it is indisputable that he was acquainted with every variety which is known to us, having distributed them into two principal classes, one of which corresponds with the Complutensian edition, the other with the Vatican manuscript. And he has specified the positive grounds on which he received the one and rejected the other.[16]

The Textus Receptus was defended by John William Burgon in *The Revision Revised* (1881), and also by Edward Miller in *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (1886). Burgon supported his arguments with the opinion that the *Codex Alexandrinus* and *Codex Ephraemi*, were older than the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*; and also that the *Peshitta* translation into Syriac (which supports the Byzantine Text), originated in the 2nd century. Miller's arguments in favour of readings in the Textus Receptus were of the same kind.[17] However, both Burgon and Miller believed that, although the Textus Receptus was to be preferred to the Alexandrian Text, nevertheless it still required to be corrected in certain readings against the manuscript tradition of the Byzantine text. In this judgement they have been criticised by Edward F. Hills. Hills argues that the principle that God provides truth through scriptural revelation, necessarily also implies that God must ensure a preserved transmission of the correct revealed text, continuing into the Reformation era of biblical translation and printing. For Hills, the task of biblical scholarship is to identify the particular line of preserved transmission through which God is acting; a line which he sees in the specific succession of manuscript copying, textual correction and printing,
which culminated in the Textus Receptus and the King James Bible. Hills argues that the principle of providentially preserved transmission guarantees that the printed Textus Receptus must be the closest text to the Greek autographs; and consequently he rejects readings in the majority Byzantine text where these are not maintained in the Textus Receptus. He goes so far as to conclude that Erasmus must have been providentially guided when he introduced Latin Vulgate readings into his Greek text; and even argues for the authenticity of the Comma Johanneum.

Hence the true text is found not only in the text of the majority of the New Testament manuscripts but more especially in the Textus Receptus and in faithful translations of the Textus Receptus, such as the King James Version. In short, the Textus Receptus represents the God-guided revision of the majority text.

Hills was the first textual critic to defend Textus Receptus. Although others have defended the TR per se, they are either not acknowledged textual critics (e.g. Theodore Letis, David Hocking) or their works are not on a scholarly level (e.g., Terence H. Brown or D. A. Waite).

### Relationship to the Byzantine text

The Textus Receptus was established on a basis of the Byzantine text-type, also called 'Majority text', and usually is identified with it by its followers. But the Textus Receptus has some additions and variants which did not exist in the Byzantine text before the 16th century. The Comma Johanneum in 1 John 5:7 is well known example, but there are also other texts like: Matt 10:8; 27:35; Luke 17:36; John 3:25; Acts 8:37; 9:5; 15:34; and some readings ("book of life" instead of "tree of life" in Revelation 22:19) which the Byzantine text did not have. In these
cases the majority of manuscripts agree with the [Alexandrian text-type] against the Textus Receptus.

F. H. A. Scrivener (1813–1891) remarked that Matt. 22:28, 23:25, 27:52, 28:3, 4, 19, 20; Mark 7:18, 19, 26, 10:1, 12:22, 15:46; Luke 1:16, 61, 2:43, 9:1, 15, 11:49; John 1:28, 10:8, 13:20 are under the influence of Minuscule 1 (Caesarean text-type).[22] Scrivener showed that some texts were incorporated from the Vulgate (for example, Acts 9:6; Rev 17:4.8). Daniel B. Wallace enumerated that in 1,838 places (1005 are translatable) Textus Receptus differs from the Byzantine text-type.[23]

Dean Burgon, one of the main supporters of the Textus Receptus, declared that the Textus Receptus needs correction.[24] He suggested 150 corrections in the Textus Receptus Gospel of Matthew alone.[25]

Matthew 10:8 it has Alexandrian reading νεκρους εγειρετε (raise the dead) omitted by the Byzantine text.[26][27]
Acts 20:28 it has Alexandrian reading του Θεου (of the God) instead of Byzantine του κυριου και του Θεου (of the Lord and God).