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The Greek Texts of Eli Smith and Cornelius Van Dyck

Joshua Yoder (joshua@etsc.org)
Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo

Eli Smith, the progenitor of what would eventually become known as the Van Dyck translation, began the task of translating the Bible into Arabic in 1848. By the time of his death in 1857 he had completed his translation of the New Testament and overseen the printing of the first sixteen chapters of the Gospel of Matthew.[1] The subsequent fate of Smith's translation is recorded by Henry Jessup:

> At the next annual meeting of the mission after Dr. Smith's death (April 3, 1857), a committee was appointed to examine and report on the state of the translation of the Scriptures as left by Dr. Smith. […] It was found that in the translation of the New Testament, the Greek text followed had been that of [Augustus] Hahn, but in the first thirteen chapters of Matthew, there are some variations from that text according to the text of [Samuel Prideaux] Tregelles and others. . . .
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> The mission then appointed Dr. [Cornelius] Van Dyck to the work. . . . As the American Bible Society required a strict adherence to the Textus Receptus of Hahn's Greek Testament, Dr. Van Dyck revised every verse in the New Testament, taking up the work as if new. The basis left by Dr. Smith was found invaluable, and but for it the work would have been protracted very much beyond what it really was.[2]

[1] In his last progress report, from April 1, 1856, Smith reported the printing of the first part of Matthew. Translation of the whole New Testament had been completed by the time of Smith's report of April 3, 1855. See Henry Jessup, *Fifty-three Years in Syria* (New York: Revell, 1910), 1:66–76.

[2] Jessup's source is a report on the history of the translation that Van Dyck wrote in 1885 at the request of Rev. James S. Dennis, a member and librarian of the Syria Mission in Beirut. In the report, Van Dyck cites and comments on

The purpose of this short essay is to review the work of Smith and Van Dyck in terms of the progress of New Testament textual criticism during the nineteenth century. By placing the decision to insist on fidelity to the Textus Receptus in its historical context, I hope to show that the Smith-Van Dyck translation was conceived and brought to fruition in a time when textual criticism, though not new, was still developing and had not yet won widespread acceptance. Advances since the mid-nineteenth century in the availability of ancient manuscripts, the techniques of textual criticism, and the quality of the critical texts available have brought with them greater acceptance of the use of textual criticism and the departure from the Textus Receptus or majority text.

The Textus Receptus

The term Textus Receptus originates from a "small and convenient" edition of the Greek New Testament first published at Leiden in 1624 by the Elzevir brothers, Bonaventure and Abraham. In the second edition of this text, published in 1633, the Elzevir brothers asserted: *textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus* ("[the reader] has the text which is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or corrupted").[3] As a result of this bit of publicity, the term Textus Receptus ("received text") came into popular use as a term for the type of Greek New Testament text that was most widely disseminated at that time.

Although the Elzevirs derived their text for the most part from an edition published by Theodore Beza in 1565, this text can ultimately be traced back to the work of Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch humanist who famously debated Martin Luther over the question of free will. Although Beza had access to the ancient

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minutes from the general meetings of the Syria Mission. Jessup quotes the report at length, but in summary form rather than verbatim (*Fifty-three Years in Syria*, 1:66–76).

[3] Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 105–6.

texts found in Codex Bezae and Codex Claromontanus, he did not make much use of them because of the extent to which they diverged from the generally accepted text of his time.[4] Instead, Beza's text largely resembled the fourth edition (1551) of the text published by the Parisian printer and publisher Robert Estienne, also known as Stephanus. Stephanus, starting with his third edition, had begun to favor the text produced by Erasmus for the publisher Johann Froben, first published in 1516. This near exclusive fidelity to Erasmus' text (as found in its fourth and fifth editions) required almost three hundred changes in the editions Stephanus had published in 1546 and 1549.[5]

Erasmus prepared his text on the basis of incomplete and inferior manuscripts. The extent of variation among New Testament manuscripts was not fully appreciated in the early sixteenth century, and Erasmus imagined he could find manuscripts at Basle to send directly to the printer as copy for typesetting. Instead, he found manuscripts riddled with errors that required correction.[6] Erasmus could not find a manuscript with the entire New Testament. He used one for the gospels and another for the Acts and Epistles. Both manuscripts date from no earlier than the twelfth century.[7] These he compared with several other manuscripts in order to spot errors. Erasmus translated the Latin Vulgate into Greek to help him with these difficulties, and thus, as Bruce Metzger puts it, "here and there in Erasmus' self-

[4] Metzger, *Text*, 105.

[5] Marvin R. Vincent, *A History of the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1903), 57.

[6] Metzger, *Text*, 98–99. A photo of a page of one of the manuscripts used by Erasmus (MS. 2), with Erasmus' clarifications and corrections for the printer written on it, can be seen in plate XV. See also C. C. Tarelli, "Erasmus' Manuscripts of the Gospels," *Journal of Theological Studies* 44 (1943): 155–62.

[7] The Gospels manuscript may date from as late as the fifteenth century, a mere century before Erasmus' own time. See Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 52. For Revelation, Erasmus had only one manuscript (also twelfth century), which lacked the final leaf containing the last six verses and had commentary in Greek that was "so mixed up [with the text] as to be almost indistinguishable" (Metzger, *Text*, 99).

made Greek text are readings which have never been found in any known Greek manuscript—but which are still perpetuated today in printings of the so-called Textus Receptus of the Greek New Testament."[8] Erasmus' level of confidence in his own text can be appraised from the fact that for his fourth edition (1527) he made corrections based on the Greek text printed in the Complutensian Polyglot, which had been published in 1522 soon after Erasmus' third edition left the press.[9]

Although the Elzevirs claimed to give "nothing changed or corrupted," they did not simply reprint any of Erasmus' (or Stephanus') editions but used Beza's, with influence from Erasmus, the Complutensian Polyglot, and even the Vulgate. As a result, their text contained nearly three hundred differences from Stephanus' third (1550) edition, considered the standard for the Textus Receptus in England.[10]

Such figures, however, do not tell the whole story. The chief problem with the Textus Receptus was not that it claimed an immaculate status for a text that in fact was in some degree arbitrary. The chief problem was that it reflected a type of text, sometimes called the "majority text," that many scholars today consider to reflect later developments in the transmission of the New Testament text rather than the original readings of the New Testament books.[11] Although most extant New Testament manuscripts carry this type of text (thus the term "majority text"), this is because most of the New Testament manuscripts that have

[8] Metzger, *Text*, 99–100. A famous case of such interpolation is the so-called *Comma Johanneum* in 1 John 5:7–8 (marked with italics): "For there are three that bear record in heaven, *the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth*, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one" (KJV). Erasmus did not include it in his first edition because he could find it in none of the Greek manuscripts he consulted. However, he was obliged to include the words in his third edition after a manuscript containing the words was produced, though he suspected that the manuscript had been manufactured for the purpose.

[9] Metzger, *Text*, 102.

[10] Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 60–61.

[11] Kurt Aland, "The Text of the Church?" *Trinity Journal* 8 (1987): 131.

survived into the modern era were copied during the Byzantine period and later, when this particular text had become the standard. The earliest surviving manuscripts, however, do not bear witness to this type of text.[12] Just as the nineteenth century saw the flourishing of New Testament textual criticism, it also saw the growth of the available early manuscript evidence. The more this sort of early manuscript evidence was uncovered without a trace of the majority text type, the less likely it began to seem that this text really represented the original readings of the books.

Eli Smith's Text

What Greek text or texts did Smith use as a basis of translation? In 1854 Smith detailed the state of his library in a report to the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. The report, however, is focused on the resources used in translating the Old Testament. It does not provide much information on the resources Smith had at his disposal for the New Testament work, textual or otherwise. Thus we turn to a report made by Van Dyck in 1883, related by Isaac H. Hall:

> Dr. Smith adopted no known text of the Greek, but selected from [Constantin von] Tischendorf, [Karl] Lachmann, [Samuel Prideaux] Tregelles, and [Henry] Alford, as he thought fit. He had gone on far with the New Testament when Alford was published; and he stopped until he could go back and compare what he had done with Alford.[13]

This report is problematic, as it seems to represent historical hindsight rather than the texts Smith might actually have had at

[12] See Aland, "Text," 139-143, and Daniel B. Wallace, "The Majority Text Theory: History, Methods, and Critique," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the* Status Quaestionis, ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 297–320.

[13] Isaac H. Hall, "The Arabic Bible of Drs. Eli Smith and Cornelius V. A. Van Dyck," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 11 (1885): 279 (originally presented to the Society Oct. 25, 1883), quoting "an account written by Dr. Van Dyck himself and kindly transmitted to me in May, 1883" (276).

his disposal. In particular, although Tregelles published *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* in 1854, the year of Smith's report to the board quoted above, this was merely a survey of previously printed editions of the New Testament and an explanation of his own critical principles. Tregelles did not begin to publish his own text until 1857, the year of Smith's death (he released the text in six parts between 1857 and 1872). Indeed, according to Margaret Leavy, Smith left Beirut in the winter of 1855–56 and was never able to resume his work after that.[14] Smith could not have used Tregelles in his work.

The work of Karl Lachmann, on the other hand, would have been available. Lachmann's first edition was published in 1831 and marked the first time in the modern era that a text had been published based solely on the ancient manuscript evidence, without reference to previously printed editions. Thus the Textus Receptus was completely ignored, to the extent that Lachmann did not even indicate where and how his text diverged from it, though he supplied variant readings from other sources in the margin.[15] Lachmann's stated purpose was to reconstruct the form of the text widely used in the fourth century—he was less sanguine about the possibility of going beyond that. Thus he gave priority to the readings found in the most ancient manuscripts (the uncials) rather than to the readings found in the majority of manuscripts.[16]

It is intriguing to consider that Smith may have used Lachmann's first edition rather than the second, larger edition that began to appear in 1842 (its second volume was not

[14] Margaret Leavy, *Eli Smith and the Arabic Bible*, Yale Divinity School Library Occasional Publication 4 (New Haven, CT: Yale Divinity School Library, 1993), 19, http://web.library.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/OccPub4.pdf.

[15] Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 110–11. The first (1831) edition did print Lachmann's departures from the 1624 Elzevir edition in the back—see A. T. Robertson, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1925), 30.

[16] F. G. Kenyon, *The Text of the Greek Bible*, 3rd ed. rev. and aug. by A. W. Adams (London: Duckworth, 1975), 178.

published until 1950). In the earlier edition Lachmann gave preference to what he called "Oriental" sources such as Codex Alexandrinus and Codex Vaticanus—the type of text used by the Alexandrian theologian and exegete Origen—as opposed to those he called "Occidental," representing the type of text used in the West from Irenaeus onward. In Lachmann's larger second edition he gave the Western authorities more weight, though the resulting text did not differ greatly from the earlier edition.[17]

As for Constantin von Tischendorf, the famous discoverer of Codex Sinaiticus published eight editions of the Greek New Testament between 1841 and 1872. Smith could feasibly have used one of the early editions. However, only the later editions reflected the evidence of Sinaiticus, which Tischendorf did not discover until 1844 (he only became aware of the existence of the New Testament section of it in 1859). In 1867 Tischendorf became the first to publish the text of Codex Vaticanus.[18] The great age of these two manuscripts, which date from the fourth century AD, and their tendency to agree with each other against the majority text, provided a major impetus for the rejection of the Textus Receptus as representative of a later text type, leading to the publication of a revision of the English Authorized Version and a new Greek text by Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, both in 1881 (the former is not based directly on the latter, but reflects it to a great extent).

It is not unrealistic to think that Smith acquired and used the texts published by Lachmann and Tischendorf. Hall writes of Smith's penchant for scholarship:

> But for the collecting of such books as were necessary in order even moderately to furnish the Bible translator, it is the universal testimony that the work was planned and executed by

[17] Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 110–11.

[18] Though it had arrived in the Vatican library by 1481 at the latest, for centuries scholars were granted only limited access to it. Collations were made in 1669, 1720, and 1780, and Tischendorf himself was able to make his own collation in 1866, on the basis of which he published his edition in 1867. It was then formally published in 1868 (though only the New Testament section; the Old Testament did not appear until 1881).

> Dr. Smith—except so far as continued after his death. I do not refer to the Arabic books, for in that respect Dr. Van Dyck's gatherings were much superior; but to the critical and linguistic apparatus, such as are needed and appreciated in the better libraries of Europe and America, but are scarcely valued, or even understood, by the average missionary or clergyman at home. Such a collection, and yet quite moderate in extent, was brought together chiefly by the influence and efforts of Dr. Smith; though how he justified it as a necessity to those who could not see the use of such costly tools of trade, is one of the questions which had better remain unasked.[19]

Smith's interest in acquiring and employing the edition of Henry Alford as soon as it was published reinforces this impression of his habits.

Van Dyck lays great emphasis in his report on Smith's use of the work of Alford, who was Dean of Canterbury and the author of an influential commentary on the New Testament.[20] The time of publication of Alford's Greek testament fits Van Dyck's recollection: the first volume was published in 1849, so Smith would have had ample time to acquire and make use of at least part of Alford's work (the fourth volume was not published until 1861). However, it was not until the fifth edition that Alford rewrote the text and list of variant readings in response to the work of Tischendorf and Tregelles.[21] In the earlier editions, on the other hand, he was influenced to a greater degree by the Textus Receptus.[22] Thus, had Smith indeed been using the texts of Lachmann and Tischendorf, any revision of earlier work that Smith would have done on the basis of Alford would likely have led him back in the direction of the Textus Receptus. It may be that one should understand Van Dyck's phrase "compar[ing] what he had done with Alford" to mean that Smith checked to see

[19] Hall, "Arabic Bible," 284.

[20] Metzger, *Text*, 128.

[21] Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 138. According to Robertson it was the 6th edition (*Introduction*, 35).

[22] Robertson, *Introduction*, 35.

if Alford had dared to make the same departures from the Textus Receptus that he had.

Van Dyck's Text

Curiously, Van Dyck's report of 1885 claims that the committee tasked with reporting on the state of the translation project following Smith's death found that except for the first thirteen chapters of Matthew, where "there are some variations from that text according to the text of Tregelles and others," Smith had followed the Greek text that Van Dyck reported to be the standard for the American Bible Society, that of Augustus Hahn.[23] First published in 1840, Hahn's text reproduced the Textus Receptus, though it did provide alternate readings from scholars such as Johann Griesbach and Karl Lachmann.[24] Despite this, Van Dyck (as summarized by Jessup) reported that he had to revise "every verse in the New Testament, taking up the work as if new," though using Smith's earlier translation as a basis accelerated the work considerably.

However, according to Isaac Hall, Van Dyck did not use Hahn's text for this task, but a reprint of a much older work:

> Here I may say that Dr. Van Dyck informed me orally that the particular variety of the Textus Receptus which he used, by direction, was that of [John] Mill: I think, in some of its English reprints. (Of course the professed reprints vary very much. The Oxford edition of 1836, with its repetitions, is almost the only one that is accurate—correcting Mill's misprints.)[25]

[23] Jessup, *Fifty-three Years in Syria*: "The American Bible Society required a strict adherence to the Textus Receptus of Hahn's Greek Testament" (see the quotation at the beginning of this article). "The first thirteen chapters of Matthew" coincides to a significant extent with the portion of Matthew (sixteen chapters) that had already been printed by the time of Smith's last progress report of 1856.

[24] Vincent, *Textual Criticism*, 115. Vincent also mentions Tischendorf in this connection, but his first text was not published until 1841, too late for Hahn's first edition. A second edition of Hahn was published in 1861.

[25] Hall, "Arabic Bible," 282–83.

A fellow of Queen's College, Oxford, John Mill's "epoch-making" edition of the Greek New Testament was published in the year of his death, 1707.[26] Mill did not deviate from the standard text (as found in Stephanus' 1550 edition) but did include a thorough (for the time) digest of variant readings that he had collected over a period of thirty years from manuscripts, early versions and patristic sources.[27] Thus Mill was likely a source for at least some, and possibly many or all, of the variant readings that Van Dyck eventually was permitted to publish along with his translation.

If it is true that Van Dyck used Mill's edition "by direction" (presumably by direction from the American Bible Society, the organization that had insisted on fidelity to the Textus Receptus), then there is some irony here. Despite his loyalty to the Textus Receptus in his printed text, in his own day Mill had been the subject of criticism from those concerned with the integrity of the New Testament text. His willingness to print approximately thirty thousand variant readings alongside the main text was seen as undermining confidence in the standard text.[28] For the more evidence of alternative readings came to light, the more tempting it became for scholars to think of revising Erasmus' text in light of them.

Conclusion

The preceding account should make clear two things. First, Eli Smith began his translation at a time when pioneering work in New Testament textual criticism was being done. Even the earliest works of text criticism that Smith is alleged to have used

[26] The assessment belongs to Metzger (*Text*, 107). Similarly, Kenyon writes that Mill's edition "remained for a long time the foundation of all subsequent textual study" (*Text*, 175), and Vincent judges that Mill's edition "marks the foundation of textual criticism" (*Textual Criticism*, 67).

[27] Metzger, *Text*, 107–8. Though Metzger states that Mill reproduced Stephanus' text "without intentional variation" (108), Vincent notes that his text did in fact stray from its exemplar in a few places (68).

[28] Metzger, *Text*, 108, citing by way of example Daniel Whitby, *Examen variantium lectionum J. Millii* (London, 1706).

did not start to appear until the 1830s, less than twenty years before Smith began his assignment. The majority would have been only recently published, or in the process of coming out, at the time Smith was working in the 1850s. Second, the latter half of the nineteenth century, which saw the publication of the codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, was a significant period for New Testament textual criticism and the production of a more accurate Greek text of the New Testament. Wider knowledge of these two codices, with their numerous readings in agreement against the Textus Receptus, did much to undermine its primacy.

In 1886, about the time Van Dyck was recalling Smith's work, Benjamin Warfield wrote the following assessment of the progress of textual criticism up to his time:

> Already in Mill's day (1707) as many as 30,000 various readings had been collected; and from [Richard] Bentley and [John Jakob] Wetstein to Tischendorf, Tregelles, and [Frederick Henry Ambrose] Scrivener, the work has been prosecuted without intermission, until it has now reached relative completeness, and the time is ripe for the extimation [sic] of the great mass of evidence that has been gathered…. The scholar of to-day, while beckoned on by the example of the great collators of the past to continue the work of gathering material as strength and opportunity may allow, yet enters into a great inheritance of work already done, and is able to undertake the work of textual criticism itself as distinguished from the collecting of material for that work.[29]

From Warfield's vantage point in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, a great deal of the task of collecting variants had already been done, but the task of adequately assessing their import for the New Testament text had only just begun. The publication of Westcott and Hort's Greek text in 1881—and a

[29] Benjamin Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1886), 21–22; I consulted the 7th edition (1907). Warfield mentions Tregelles and Tischendorf as the two editions to choose between, perhaps giving some indication of why Van Dyck mentioned them alongside Lachmann and Alford as sources of Smith's variant readings.

revised version of the King James Bible largely based on it—represented a large step in this direction in the English-speaking world.[30]

The translation and publication of the Van Dyck Bible occurred at a point when modern textual criticism was still taking shape, when important evidence for the ancient form of the text was still coming to light, and when editions of the Greek text that were wholly independent of the Textus Receptus were just beginning to be printed. In attempting to make use of some of this textual evidence in his Arabic translation, Eli Smith was indeed ahead of his time. In rejecting any departure from the traditional text, the Van Dyck translation that finally emerged was a product of its time.

Postscript

As for the fate of Smith's work, Hall writes:

> From various sources I have learned that the New Testament translation of Dr. Eli Smith was actually not used by Dr. Van Dyck: principally, I understand, because its following an eclectic text would make it at least a little confusing to one who was under orders to follow the Greek Textus Receptus. But I also heard, and am inclined to believe, that the manuscript was burned (I never could learn by whom), and that the few printed sheets or proofs were destroyed. At all events, Dr. Smith's translation of the New Testament was not adopted (or, we may say, it was rejected) by the Bible Society, on account of its underlying text; and I could find no trace of the manuscript copy in Beirut. Nothing would be more natural, in view of the ideas that then prevailed respecting the New Testament text, than for some one to destroy it in holy horror, or as a well-intended but misguided work; for Dr. Smith was much ahead of his times, though apparently not a New Testament critic. I am inclined to think, on the whole, that it was destroyed as if

[30] For an assessment of the importance of Westcott and Hort, see Frank Pack, "One Hundred Years Since Westcott and Hort: 1881–1981," *Restoration Quarterly* 26 (1983), 65–79.

> useless, with tacit acquiescence of all concerned, as one would destroy a first draught after a fair copy was produced.[31]

But in its republication in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* the following tantalizing subscript is attached to Hall's report:

> Since the above article was printed, a note has been received from the author, as follows:
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> The report that the manuscript translation of Dr. Smith was destroyed, and not used by Dr. Van Dyck, is now contradicted, and seems likely to be proved untrue; and an early opportunity will be taken to publish the matter correctly, as soon as a complete statement on that point arrives from Dr. Van Dyck. It is the belief of those in charge of the mission archives that all Dr. Smith's manuscripts, of all the work he did, are preserved in tin boxes in the library of the mission. The present aspect of the matter is that the story of the destruction of his manuscript translation of the New Testament rests upon the fact that all that was printed of the New Testament under his direction, viz. Mathew i. to end of xvi., was destroyed, for the reason that it did not follow the Textus Receptus. It may be added that some valuable additional reports on the subject of the Arabic Bible by Dr. Smith have recently come to my knowledge, which throw light on the subject, and deserve to be printed in full.[32]

This writer is not aware of any subsequent publication of additional details.

Joshua Yoder teaches New Testament at ETSC under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. He received a PhD in 2012 from the University of Notre Dame for a dissertation entitled "Representatives of Roman Rule: Roman Governors in Luke-Acts." He served as a pastor of a Mennonite church in Indiana for five years prior to entering graduate school.

[31] Hall, "Arabic Bible," 282.
[32] Hall, "Arabic Bible," 286.