

THE CRITICAL EDITIONS
OF THE GREEK NT AND OT
STABILITY, CHANGE, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Summary

Though their respective practitioners compare notes infrequently, the fields of NT and Septuagint textual criticism share resemblances in their overall trajectory. Namely, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critical editions have given way to decades-long international efforts to produce major critical editions that incorporate a staggeringly larger amount of manuscript data. But how much has the critical text itself changed? This article explores the magnitude of change over the past decades of work on the Greek NT and OT, offering observations about what the tremendous stability in the reconstructed text might tell us about the field(s) in general and the quality of ancient manuscripts.

1. Introduction

An excitingly different new text ... was anticipated. But it is immediately obvious that what we have in the much vaunted new text is a damp squib – merely a very modest revision of the [traditional] text! It rather looks to me as if the editors took the [traditional] text ... as their working text and only gently or reluctantly adapted it.

With these scathing words, a prominent textual critic expressed considerable letdown regarding the seemingly meagre results of decades of intense work on a recently released critical edition. Though the critic, J. K. Elliott, happens in this case to be speaking of the *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) of the Catholic Epistles of the Greek New

Testament,¹ one wonders whether a similar kind of sentiment could apply to the critical editions of the Greek Old Testament.

The recent releases of two Greek NT editions and a new Göttingen Septuagint fascicle² remind us of the long-standing efforts to produce improved critical editions of the Greek scriptures, both NT and OT. While these efforts have tended to operate almost entirely independently of each other (due to the silos in which NT and OT textual critics tend to operate), there are striking similarities on both sides of the canonical divide, particularly in terms of the resulting revisions to the critical text produced by earlier predecessors.

This article aims to explore the results of this century's worth of intense work on the Greek text of the NT and OT. In particular, we will ask the question 'How much have the Greek NT and OT texts changed as editors have gained access to mountains of new data?' We will see that on the whole the answer is 'Very little.' We will then discuss what this might tell us about the task and goals of editing the Greek Bible as well as the overall stability and reliability of the text(s) as conveyed in the ancient manuscripts.

1.1 Two Analogous Efforts

We will focus on two streams of textual work that, while not identical, are analogous in some key ways that make them instructive comparanda: (1) Westcott–Hort and Nestle–Aland/*ECM* for the Greek NT and (2) Rahlfs and Göttingen for the Greek OT.

The work of Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton Hort on the Greek NT (1881) and Alfred Rahlfs on the Greek OT (1935) serve as useful

¹ J. K. Elliott, 'Review of *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior IV Die Katholischen Briefe*, by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Gerd Mink, Klaus Wachtel', *NovT* 40/2 (1998): 195-204 (198). Though these remarks pertain to the first edition, his opinion remained largely unchanged with the second edition, denoting the final textual changes to be a 'bland result'; see 'Review of *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior IV Die Katholischen Briefe*, by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Gerd Mink, Holger Strutwolf, Klaus Wachtel', *JTS* 64/2 (2013): 636-42 (640). Somewhat surprisingly, Elliott is remarkably sanguine in his most recent review, '*Novum Testamentum Graecum. Editio Critica Maior III Die Apostelgeschichte, Part I: Text. Part 2: Begleitende Materialien. Part 3: Studien*, by Holger Strutwolf, Georg Gäbel, Annette Hüffmeier, Gerd Mink, Klaus Wachtel', *JTS* 69/1 (2018): 286-94.

² Respectively, Gerd Mink, Holger Strutwolf, and Klaus Wachtel, *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior: III Die Apostelgeschichte* (3 vols; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017); Dirk Jongkind and Peter J. Williams, *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Peter J. Gentry, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. XI.2: Ecclesiastes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018).

starting points for our analysis. Both placed a priority on the major majuscules (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus) in their critical texts. Both hand editions also served as key inputs to much larger editions that have been produced over the intervening decades: the *ECM* project led by the Institut für neutestamentliche Textforschung (INTF) in Münster and the *Septuaginta* project led by the Septuaginta-Unternehmen in Göttingen.³

Each of these larger efforts has tapped into a far larger pool of textual witnesses. *But each of them has, as it turns out, produced a revised text that is ~98.5% identical to the earlier editions*, as we will show below. What are the implications of this finding for textual criticism of the Greek NT and OT? Let us take each effort in turn and then consolidate our results. If nothing else, it is worth bringing the NT and OT sides of the field into conversation, which is so rarely done.

2. Greek NT: Westcott–Hort and Nestle–Aland/*ECM*

Among the major editions of the Greek NT produced in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – including those of Lachmann, Tischendorf, Tregelles, and Weiss – the most influential has arguably been that of Westcott and Hort (1881).⁴ Theirs rose to prominence in an era characterised by the development of the principles of eclecticism within textual criticism, the discovery of Codex Sinaiticus (among other findings), and the dislodging of the *textus receptus*. It presents a text that draws heavily, though not exclusively, on Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, with relatively limited influence from the minuscules and (sparse at the time) papyri.⁵

In due course Westcott–Hort served as one of the base texts (along with the editions of Tischendorf and, eventually, Weiss) for the work of Eberhard Nestle (1898/1901), which was carried further by Erwin

³ Also worth mentioning are the International Greek New Testament Project, which had stalled after Luke, but in recent years has been revamped to take leadership of *ECM* of John (as delegated by INTF), and the Cambridge Septuagint project (building on Swete's edition, but which was never completed).

⁴ Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (American ed.; New York: Harper, 1881) ('Westcott–Hort' hereafter).

⁵ See extensive discussion in Michael W. Holmes, 'From Nestle to the *Editio Critica Maior*: A Century's Perspective on the New Testament Minuscule Tradition', pp. 123–37 in *The Bible as Book: The Transmission of the Greek Text*, ed. Scot McKendrick and Orlaith O'Sullivan (London: The British Library, 2003).

Nestle (1927) and Kurt Aland (1952). In 1975 two parallel projects – the Nestle–Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* and the United Bible Society’s *Greek New Testament* – merged, becoming more or less the de facto text for most NT scholars.⁶ In the decades since Westcott–Hort, the various critical editions had incorporated increasing numbers of textual witnesses (especially papyri, minuscules, lectionaries, and church fathers), but remained *editiones minores*. In the 1980s, however, the INTF launched a project to produce a comprehensive *editio maior* that would tap into a vastly larger pool of data based on fresh collations of hundreds of manuscripts as well as (eventually) a revised text-critical method, the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM).⁷ The first two fascicles of this *ECM* have been released for the Catholic Epistles and Acts.⁸

The *ECM* maintains that ‘the text of the present edition has been established afresh on the basis ... of all the evidence presented’.⁹ It makes use of far more Greek witnesses (180 for the Catholic Epistles, 135 for Acts) as well as church fathers and the versions. Each page of the *ECM* features only a few lines of critically reconstructed text accompanied by an enormous apparatus of variant readings and witnesses. It is truly a marvellous achievement.

But did the inclusion of a far vaster array of witnesses, as we move from Westcott–Hort to NA/*ECM*,¹⁰ produce a large change to the critically reconstructed text itself? To this question we turn.

⁶ For an extensive summary of this historical background, see Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995): 11-35.

⁷ For an introduction to the method, see Peter Gurry and Tommy Wasserman, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method* (Resources for Biblical Study; Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017).

⁸ Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Gerd Mink, Holger Strutwolf, and Klaus Wachtel, *Novum Testamentum Graecum, Editio Critica Maior: IV.1 Die Katholischen Briefe* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013); Mink, Strutwolf, and Wachtel, *Apostelgeschichte*.

⁹ Aland et al., *Katholischen Briefe*, 21* (German: ‘Aufgrund des hier vorzulegenden Gesamtmaterials ... wird der Text der Ausgabe neu konstutiert’, 1*). Identical comments are made in the *Acts* volume.

¹⁰ This is not to imply that the line from Westcott–Hort to NA/*ECM* is a straight one. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the most logical point of comparison – especially in constructing a parallel to the Septuagint side of the equation – is Westcott–Hort. Moreover, it is the most common comparandum (even for the Alands; see below).

2.1 Method for Comparison

Our aim will be to compare the text of various critical editions with each other to examine their total agreement/disagreement. But in order to compare texts quantitatively in this way, a valid denominator is needed, otherwise ‘98.5%’ agreement does not mean anything (one asks ‘98.5% of what?’).

The vast majority of text-critical scholarship deals with units of textual *variation*, that is, segments of text where two or more witnesses *disagree*, typically called a ‘variant unit’.¹¹ This study, however, is also interested in areas where witnesses *agree*, for when disagreements *and* agreements are included when comparing two witnesses, the *entire text* is represented (not just variants). Simple word-count is not an optimal denominator, given that many variants involve more than one word. We can, however, arrive at a basis of comparison, which we will call a ‘textual unit’, as follows.¹²

The *ECM* of Acts and the Catholic Epistles identify 10,509 variant units (7,466 and 3,043, respectively) in their collations, and, importantly, these variant units comprise 22,172 total words of text.¹³ Thus, the length of each variant unit is, on average, 2.1 words, which is intuitively unsurprising given that most variations occur in sense units of text (e.g. an article and its noun). This portion constitutes 85.0% of the *total* text of Acts and Catholic Epistles (which is 26,058 total words). While the *ECM* collations have not divided the remaining *non-variant* portion of Acts and Catholics into equivalent units for comparison, it reasonable to assume that this remainder of 3,886 words could also be divided into units that are ~2.1 words on average as well. If so, the *total* ‘textual units’ would be 12,356: that is 10,509 *variant*

¹¹ Defining a ‘variant unit’ itself has been vexing; see summary in Peter J. Gurry, ‘The Number of Variants in the Greek New Testament: A Proposed Estimate’, *NTS* 62/1 (2016): 97-121.

¹² Bruce Morrill calls this a ‘comparable unit’, though he does not offer a definition. ‘A Complete Collation and Analysis of all Greek Manuscripts of John 18’ (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, 2012): 55.

¹³ The total variant units are provided in the introductions of each edition; the words represented by these units can be gathered digitally for computation using their online databases (<http://intf.uni-muenster.de/cbqm>; <http://intf.uni-muenster.de/cbqm/actsPh4>). For more on the method used here, see Gregory R. Lanier, ‘Quantifying New Testament Textual Variants: Key Witnesses in Acts and the Catholic Letters’, *NTS* 64/4 (2018): 551-72. Similar findings have been attained for a full collation of John 18, namely, 2.0 words per variant unit (395 variant units for 790 words of text; see Morrill, ‘Complete’, 65).

units and 1,847 *non-variant* units, which together cover the entire text of Acts and Catholics.¹⁴

We can illustrate using James 2:11, where seven variation units are identified in the *ECM*, while ὁ γάρ is found to be non-variant, yielding *eight* total ‘textual units’ for these eighteen words:

| | | | | | | | |
|-------|-------|---------------|-----------|----|---------|-----------|-------|
| — | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| ὁ γάρ | εἰπὼν | μὴ μοιχεύσης, | εἰ δὲ οὐ | δέ | γέγονας | παραβάτης | νόμου |
| | | εἶπεν καὶ μὴ | μοιχεύεις | | | | |
| | | φονεύσης· | φονεύεις | | | | |

This definition of ‘textual unit’ – which includes both *variant* units and *non-variant* units of text, thus representing the whole text of a witness – will be applied in the analyses that follow, thereby allowing us to compute denominators in a consistent way that can be used for statistical comparison.¹⁵ After determining the differences (in terms of variant units) between two texts via collation (e.g. *NA/ECM* vs. Westcott–Hort, or Göttingen vs. Rahlfs, below), we can use this figure, along with the estimated *total* ‘textual units’, to compute the percentage of total agreement between the two: % agreement = (estimated total textual units – differences) / (estimated total textual units).

2.2 Analysis

We can begin with data made available by other editors. According to the Alands, the 25th edition of Nestle–Aland differs from Westcott–Hort 558 times.¹⁶ Unfortunately, they give no indication of how they arrive at that number nor how to understand it relative to the whole text; the raw number itself tells us little about whether this is a large or small divergence. We can, however, tentatively approximate it by

¹⁴ Acts: 7,466 variant units + 1,181 non-variant units = 8,647 total textual units. Catholics: 3,043 variant units + 667 non-variant units = 3,710 total textual units.

¹⁵ Given that the remaining books of the Greek NT (and the Greek OT) have not been segmented into variant units in print (though the *ECM* of John is underway), we will use our metric of ~2.1 words per unit to estimate it based on word count.

¹⁶ Aland and Aland, *Text*, 26-27; they also provide the breakdown by section used in the subsequent table.

estimating how these differences compare to the *total* number of total textual units in the Greek NT, using the metrics outlined above.¹⁷

Comparison of NA-25 with Westcott–Hort

| Corpus | Estimated total textual units | Differences | % Agreement |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Gospels | 30,500 | 293 | 99.0 |
| Acts | 8,650 | 66 | 99.2 |
| Pauline Epistles | 17,900 | 111 | 99.4 |
| Catholic Epistles | 3,700 | 41 | 98.9 |
| Revelation | 4,900 | 47 | 99.0 |
| Total | 65,650 | 558 | 99.2 |

Things are harder to pin down after the 25th edition. In the introduction to the 26th edition, the editors comment that ‘more than five hundred changes have been introduced’,¹⁸ presumably relative to its predecessor, though that is not clear. Nor is it clear whether these changes are truly textual differences (or consist of punctuation, accents, etc.) and whether they are towards or away from Westcott–Hort.

No changes were made in the 27th edition, but in the 28th edition (where only the Catholic Epistles were modified as a result of the *ECM*), 33 changes were introduced (along with 43 new ‘split guiding lines’).¹⁹ Moreover, the *ECM* of Acts introduces 52 changes (and 155 split guiding lines).²⁰ Yet, again, it is difficult to contextualise these cumulative changes.

Thus, I approached the problem afresh and did my own collations of the latest critical text (NA-28, plus the changes for the *ECM* of Acts that have not made it into a NA hand edition yet) against that of Westcott–Hort. I sampled chapters essentially at random (to avoid prejudicing the selection of text) from a variety of books that cover ~5.5% of the Greek NT.²¹ In tabulating different readings between the

¹⁷ The rough analysis done here assumes that the Alands’ 558 figure used essentially the same method of defining variation units seen in *Text und Textwert*, which, in turn, fed into the *ECM* project; this is a safe assumption given that *Text und Textwert* was well underway when the Alands did their comparative analysis.

¹⁸ Kurt Aland et al., ed., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (26th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1981): 42*.

¹⁹ Aland et al., *Katholischen Briefe*, 35*-38*.

²⁰ Mink, Strutwolf, and Wachtel, *Apostelgeschichte*, 34*-37*.

²¹ Entire chapters (or large sections) were drawn from Matthew 17; Mark 9; Luke 10; John 11; Acts 7.16; Romans 7; 1 Corinthians 9; Galatians 3; Hebrews 9; James 4; 1 Peter 2; 1 John 4; Jude; Revelation 3.18. I also tabulated points in the text where NA/

two, I excluded the following from consideration: movable-v, punctuation, accents, versification, and minor orthographic differences (e.g. ει versus ι).

An illustrative example from Mark is provided below, to give the reader a sense of how the collation was produced.

Sample differences for Mark: NA-28/ECM versus Westcott–Hort

| Verses | Westcott–Hort | NA/ECM | Type of difference | # |
|--------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| 9:2 | Καὶ Ἰωάνην | καὶ τὸν Ἰωάννην | minus (τόν) | 1 |
| 9:8 | μεθ' ἑαυτῶν εἰ μὴ τὸν Ἰησοῦν μόνον | ἀλλὰ τὸν Ἰησοῦν μόνον μεθ' ἑαυτῶν | different word (ἀλλά vs. εἰ μὴ); transposition (μεθ' ἑαυτῶν) | 2 |
| 9:30 | ἐπορεύοντο | παρεπορεύοντο | different word | 1 |
| 9:43 | σκανδαλίση | σκανδαλίζη | different verb conjugation | 1 |

The summary results of this collation of NA/ECM with Westcott–Hort, applying the ‘textual unit’ metrics defined above, are as follows.

Comparison of NA-28/ECM with Westcott–Hort

| Corpus | Verses collated | Estimated total textual units | Differences | % Agreement |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gospels | 136 | 1,165 | 14 | 98.8 |
| Acts | 81 | 714 | 20 | 97.2 |
| Pauline Epistles | 92 | 734 | 6 | 99.2 |
| Catholic Epistles | 73 | 627 | 12 | 98.1 |
| Revelation | 34 | 421 | 3 | 99.3 |
| Total | 416 | 3,661 | 55 | 98.5 |

Due to the computation differences between each analysis, we cannot make a straightforward comparison of the numbers for NA-25 (total ~99.2% agreement with Westcott–Hort) with the numbers for NA-28/ECM (~98.5% agreement). But they are directionally similar.

2.3 Observations

Two questions arise that prompt further reflection.

ECM varied from Westcott–Hort in use/non-use of brackets when the text itself is the same. Including these in the numbers did not produce a discernible change in the overall percentages, so I have excluded them from the data shown.

First, is this extensive level of agreement of the twenty-first-century fully critical text (with access to substantially more information) with the nineteenth-century text surprising? Per Elliott, it most definitely is. But other scholars have made the same observation, with less acerbity. For instance, Holmes (partly quoting Epp) remarks:

And so the question has been raised: ‘If exegetes still use a text only moderately different from what they used a hundred years ago, what have our vastly increased manuscript discoveries and analysis done for us?’ The implied answer seems to be, ‘not much.’ ... Zuntz had already raised nearly the same question decades earlier ... And this is, for the most part, where New Testament textual criticism as a whole still finds itself today, a half century after Zuntz. Indeed, if anything, our current text looks more Hortian than ever.²²

This ‘Hortian’ stamp of the current critical text (~98.5–99.2% identical to Westcott–Hort) is even more striking, perhaps, due to how the various editorial teams have gone to some lengths to emphasise that their text *is not* simply Westcott–Hort all over again.²³

Several factors might contribute to this sense of letdown about the results of the past century. The publication of over one hundred NT papyri was expected to be a game-changer – and in many ways it has been – but the effect on the reconstructed text has been limited. Moreover, the aforementioned engine behind the *ECM* (namely, the CBGM) is also quite different from that used both for Westcott–Hort and the prior NA editions; in fact, some scholars have opined that old text-critical handbooks are only ‘partially useful’ nowadays.²⁴ Perhaps more than anything, the CBGM/*ECM* reflects a major reassessment of the value of the Byzantine tradition.²⁵ And doubtless the entire

²² Michael W. Holmes, ‘*The Text of the Epistles Sixty Years After: An Assessment of Günther Zuntz’s Contribution to Text-Critical Methodology and History*’, pp. 89–113 in *Transmission and Reception: New Testament Text-Critical and Exegetical Studies*, ed. J. W. Childers and David W. Parker (TS Third Series 4; Piscataway: Gorgias, 2006): 100.

²³ I.e. the introduction to the 26th Nestle–Aland edition reads ‘The results are anything but identical with those of Westcott–Hort, as the occasional ironic reference to the Standard Text as “Westcott–Hort redivivus” would have it’ (42*).

²⁴ J. K. Elliott, ‘A New Edition of Nestle–Aland, Greek New Testament’, *JTS* 64/1 (2013): 47–65 (58).

²⁵ See discussions in Klaus Wachtel, ‘On the Relationship of the “Western Text” and the Byzantine Tradition of Acts: A Plea Against the Text-Type Concept’, pp. 137–48 in *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior, III/3: Studien*, ed. Holger Strutwolf et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2017); Gregory R. Lanier, ‘Taking Inventory on the “Age of the Minuscules”’: Later Manuscripts and the Byzantine Tradition within the Field of Textual Criticism’, *CBR* 16/3 (2018): 263–308.

endeavour has made readily available a staggering amount of data that would have been unimaginable over a century ago, which will lead to further important work on piecing together in more detail the history of the Greek text. Yet at the end of the day the net change to, say, the text of Acts in the latest *ECM* (relative to NA-27) was less than 0.7%.

Second, *what might we have expected to happen with the inclusion of so much more data?* We can examine a few data points to scope out what *might* have been the anticipated result of the inclusion of more data and new methodological insights since the era of Westcott–Hort.

(a) *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (SBLGNT) serves as an interesting point of comparison.²⁶ The editor of this edition used Westcott–Hort as the textual starting point but proceeded by making text-critical judgements via comparison with other critical editions.²⁷ Even with this close relationship with Westcott–Hort, the resulting critical text differs from it 800 times.²⁸ Assuming this number is roughly analogous to that seen above for NA-25 (558 differences, discussed above), we can compute the corresponding percentage agreement of SBLGNT with Westcott–Hort to be 98.8%.

(b) Another valid comparandum is the *The Greek New Testament, Produced at Tyndale House, Cambridge* (THGNT),²⁹ which uses Tregelles as a starting point, employs a more philologically focused method, and relies almost exclusively on pre-sixth-century witnesses. It is marketed as ‘an innovative and exciting Greek New Testament text’,³⁰ though it is unclear as of yet how much the *wording* of the text differs from other editions.³¹ Thus, I collated the THGNT text against Westcott–Hort for the same sample passages as before (for NA/*ECM*).³² The results of this collation are as follows.

²⁶ Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010).

²⁷ (i) Samuel P. Tregelles, *The Greek New Testament, Edited from Ancient Authorities* (London: Bagster; Stewart, 1857–1879); (ii) a modified form of the fourth edition of the UBS *Greek New Testament*; and (iii) Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform 2005* (Southborough, MA: Chilton, 2005).

²⁸ Holmes, *SBL Edition*, xii.

²⁹ See n.2.

³⁰ <https://www.thegreeknewtestament.com> (accessed 16 October 2019).

³¹ This may be quantified in their forthcoming commentary volume.

³² The same criteria for variants were used as before. In addition, I excluded the orthographic changes that, though a key feature of THGNT, have no impact on meaning (e.g. γίγνομαι vs. γίνομαι; adscript iota; proper noun spellings; assimilated v).

Comparison of the THGNT with Westcott–Hort

| Corpus | Verses collated | Estimated total textual units | Differences | % Agreement |
|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Gospels | 136 | 1,165 | 25 | 97.9 |
| Acts | 81 | 714 | 17 | 97.6 |
| Pauline Epistles | 92 | 734 | 5 | 99.3 |
| Catholic Epistles | 73 | 627 | 9 | 98.6 |
| Revelation | 34 | 421 | 3 | 99.3 |
| Total | 416 | 3,661 | 59 | 98.4 |

We see that it profiles quite similarly to NA/ECM with respect to Westcott–Hort. Indeed, based on my collations of the THGNT edition against NA/ECM itself, the two appear to agree 98.8% overall (99.5% in the Catholics). In some cases THGNT agrees with Westcott–Hort against NA/ECM, and vice versa, thus accounting for the pattern of overall statistics.

(c) We see, then, that the reconstructed text of two competing editions stand in nearly the same quantitative agreement with Westcott–Hort as NA/ECM. From here we could, of course, cobble together a long list of suggested textual revisions posed by scholars in commentaries and the like, for, of course, individual scholars disagree with these editions regularly on specific readings. But that would be ad hoc, time-consuming, and largely unproductive. A better proxy for this exercise would be the Byzantine tradition. Byzantine proponents use a manuscript base that is substantially different from that of Westcott–Hort and NA/ECM, focusing less on early majuscules/papyri and more on minuscules and later majuscules. And their text-critical methods are markedly different as well.³³ Thus, if we want to find something quite different from Westcott–Hort but which is still seeking to reconstruct the earliest text-form, this is the premier candidate. And based on recent studies, the agreement between the Byzantine text and Westcott–Hort is in the range of ~92–93%.³⁴ While there are, no doubt, quite

³³ Details on method can be found in Maurice A. Robinson, ‘New Testament Textual Criticism: The Case for Byzantine Priority’, *TC* 6 (2001).

³⁴ See Peter Gurry, ‘The Overall Quality of Byzantine Manuscripts’, *Evangelical Textual Criticism* (blog), 20 February 2016 (<http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-overall-quality-of-byzantine.html>); Gregory R. Lanier, ‘Dating Myths: When Later Manuscripts Are Better Manuscripts’ in *Myths and Mistakes in New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. Peter J. Gurry and Elijah Hixson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019). Both analyses conclude that the Byzantine text agrees with the ECM at a rate of 93–94%; by factoring in the alignment of the

important differences at key points (ending of Mark, *pericope adulterae* in John, and so on), the alignment between the two is, on the whole, quite extensive.

Taking stock of all these computations, we find that two competing reconstructions of the Greek NT (SBLGNT and THGNT) share nearly the same level of total agreement with Westcott–Hort as NA/ECM, despite their different starting points and methods. The Byzantine text diverges more at 7–8% – which is unsurprising given its almost diametrically opposed text-critical methodology – but the degree of difference is perhaps less than commonly assumed.

We turn now to examine the similar dynamics on the Greek OT side.

3. Greek OT: Rahlfs and Göttingen

The *Septuaginta* produced by Alfred Rahlfs is, for many biblical scholars, equated with *the* Septuagint, full stop.³⁵ Rahlfs originally planned a full critical edition of the entire Greek OT and apocrypha, but quickly that task proved untenable for a single scholar. He turned instead to produce a ‘provisional critical edition’³⁶ (in contrast to the 1909–1922 diplomatic edition by H. B. Swete). This *editio critica minor* was intended to be a preliminary input (‘Vorstufe und Vorarbeit’)³⁷ for the larger Göttingen project.³⁸

This larger project has been conducted by an international group of scholars³⁹ whose goal is to produce a ‘judiciously reconstructed critical

ECM with Westcott–Hort (shown above), I have conservatively estimated the Byzantine vs. Westcott–Hort agreement shown here.

³⁵ Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta: id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1935). It was lightly revised by Robert Hanhart in 2006: Alfred Rahlfs and Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta: Editio altera* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006). Hanhart’s task was to ‘leave the text established by Alfred Rahlfs largely untouched’, focusing instead on smoothing out vocalisation/accents and improving the apparatus: Robert Hanhart, ‘Rechenschaftsbericht zur Editio altera der Handausgabe der Septuaginta von Alfred Rahlfs’, *VT* 55/4 (2005): 450–460 (460).

³⁶ Karen Jobes and Moisés Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015): 69.

³⁷ Hanhart, ‘Rechenschaftsbericht’, 451.

³⁸ To which Rahlfs himself contributed *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, vol. X: *Psalmi cum Odis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1931).

³⁹ Editors include A. Rahlfs, R. Hanhart, J. W. Wevers, J. Ziegler, W. Kappler, U. Quast, D. Fraenkel, O. Munnich, A. Aejmelaeus, F. Albrecht, J. M. Cañas Reillo,

text’;⁴⁰ that is, like the *ECM* it aims at ‘achieving the closest approximation to the original ... systematically reconstructed from the widest array of relevant textual data’.⁴¹ At present, the project is ~75% complete.⁴²

By his own admission Rahlfs’s edition relied almost entirely on the major majuscule codices (Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus).⁴³ Though at the margins he consulted other witnesses, he believed that, for all practical purposes, these three represented the oldest text-type of the Greek OT.⁴⁴

By contrast, each Göttingen fascicle taps into dozens of Greek manuscripts (majuscules, papyri, minuscules), versions, hexaplaric witnesses, and church fathers. For example, Wevers’s *Genesis* lists 132 total Greek witnesses (8 majuscules, 29 papyri, 95 minuscules) alone.⁴⁵ One is immediately struck by the difference between the lesser Rahlfs and the greater Göttingen with regards to the proportionality of text versus apparatus on the page; like the *ECM*, it is not uncommon for all but the first few lines of a page in a Göttingen edition to be dedicated to tabulations of textual variants. Each fascicle is a monument to decades of intense work collating a complicated array of textual witnesses.

But did this shift from three majuscules (Rahlfs) to hundreds of witnesses (Göttingen) produce much of a change to the critically reconstructed text itself? To this question we turn.

3.1 Analysis

As in §1.2 above, I collated a variety of sample passages from Göttingen editions against Rahlfs’s hand edition to determine the

P. J. Gentry, R. J. V. Hiebert, T. Janz, T. Kauhanen, E. Schulz-Flügel, J. Trebelle Barrera, and P. A. Torijano.

⁴⁰ Jobes and Silva, *Invitation*, 70.

⁴¹ International Organization of Septuagint and Cognate Studies, ‘Critical Editions of Septuagint/Old Greek Texts’, April 2005, <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/ioscs/editions.html> (accessed 2 August 2018).

⁴² On a word-count basis. Works in progress include Joshua, Judges, 1–4 Kingdoms, 1 Paralipomenon, Proverbs, 4 Maccabees, Song of Songs, and Psalms of Solomon.

⁴³ Rahlfs–Hanhart, *Septuaginta*, xlv.

⁴⁴ Hanhart summarises them as ‘der drei Unzialen, dort wo sie als Vertreter des ursprünglichen Textes in Anspruch genommen werden’ (‘Rechenschaftsbericht’, 453). In certain books (such as Exodus), only Vaticanus and Alexandrinus are used because Sinaiticus does not contain the text.

⁴⁵ John W. Wevers, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. I: Genesis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974): 9-29.

points in the text at which they differ from one another. Desiring to avoid certain particularly complicated sections,⁴⁶ I selected larger chapter-length sections essentially at random, covering ~5.5% of the available Göttingen text (on a word-count basis), so that an average textual profile could be ascertained.⁴⁷ I made the same exclusions as for the NT (e.g. movable-*v*, etc. – see above). An illustrative example from the collation of Hosea is provided below.⁴⁸

Sample differences for Hosea, Göttingen versus Rahlfs

| Verse | Rahlfs | Göttingen | Type of difference | # |
|-----------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| 2:1[1:10] | ἐκεῖ κληθήσονται υἱοί | κληθήσονται καὶ αὐτοὶ υἱοί | minus (ἐκεῖ); plus (καὶ αὐτοί) | 2 |
| 2:16[14] | τάζω | κατατάζω | different word | 1 |
| 2:23[21] | ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ | ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ | transposition | 1 |
| 4:18 | αὐτῶν | αὐτῆς | different noun inflection | 1 |
| 9:6 | πορεύσονται | πορεύονται | different verb conjugation | 1 |

After tabulating these differences, it was necessary to compute a common denominator for comparison, just as for the Greek NT analysis above. But unlike for the *ECM*, there has been no systematic effort to segment the Greek OT text into standardised variation units for comparison. We can, however, approximate it using the same metric for ‘textual unit’ computed above. This, of course, requires us to assume that units of variation (and non-variation) will behave in more or less the same way as what has been observed for the Greek NT and, thus, fall into ~2.1-word units on average. Based on my observations during the collation process – and considering that the linguistic milieu is fundamentally the same for both (Hellenistic Greek) – this appears to

⁴⁶ E.g. I excluded from consideration the extensive insertion of hexaplaric material in Wevers’s *Exodus* at Exod. 37:2, which he marked off from the main line of the text with a different typeface. Importantly, the remainder of Exodus 37–38 is nearly identical to Rahlfs in this section.

⁴⁷ Entire chapters (or large sections) were drawn from Genesis 1, 3, 10–11; Exodus 12; Numbers 1, 2, 24, 28; Deuteronomy 17, 20–22, 32; 2 Chronicles 9, 17, 24; Esdras (A) 4; Esdras (B) 1, 4, 9; Tobit 14; Psalms 42[41], 53[52], 143[142], 151; Job 2, 4, 28, 39; Sirach 1–2; Isaiah 2, 42, 59; Jeremiah 23, 33; Baruch 3–4; Ezekiel 20, 27, 40; Hosea 1–14; Zechariah 1, 4, 7, 13, 14; Daniel 2, 7, 12; and 1 Maccabees 2, 3, 4, 14. Note: books are listed here in the order show in the table below (grouped by editor).

⁴⁸ Joseph Ziegler, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. XIII: Duodecim Prophetiae*, 3rd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

be a safe working assumption. Moreover, given that the *same* collation approach (=numerator) and *same* method of computation of total textual units (=denominator) is being used in this analysis of the OT as for the NT (above), it is mathematically valid to compare across them.

The results of the collations and subsequent computations are as follows.

*Comparison of Göttingen editions with Rahlfs*⁴⁹

| Editor | Books sampled | Verses collated | Estimated total textual units | Differences | % Agreement |
|--------------|---|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Wevers | Gen., Exod., Num., Deut. | 256 | 4,273 | 50 | 98.8 |
| Hanhart | 2 Paralipomenon (Chronicles), Esdras A, Esdras B, Tobit (GI/GII) | 142 | 3,399 | 32 | 99.1 |
| Rahlfs | Psalms | 55 | 938 | – | 100.0 |
| Ziegler | <i>Wisdom books:</i> Job, Sirach | 107 | 1,325 | 13 | 99.0 |
| Ziegler | <i>Prophets:</i> Isa., Jer., Baruch, Ezek., Hos., Zech., Daniel (OG/Θ) ⁵⁰ | 651 | 11,902 | 228 | 98.1 |
| Kappler | 1 Maccabees | 34 | 533 | 8 | 98.5 |
| Total | | 1,245 | 22,369 | 331 | 98.5 |

The rates of agreement also vary for given editors. Wevers is 99.1% in agreement with Rahlfs for each of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers, but 98.3% for Deuteronomy (yielding the combined rate of 98.8%). For Hanhart the rate of agreement with Rahlfs for Esdras A (99.8%) is

⁴⁹ I also categorised the differences: 28.7%, different word; 28.4% minus (present in Rahlfs, absent in Göttingen); 11.8% transposition; 10.9% plus (absent in Rahlfs, present in Göttingen); 10.3% different verb conjugation; 8.5% different noun inflection; 1.5% other.

⁵⁰ For Daniel OG, Rahlfs relied on codex 88 and the Syro-hexapla, while Sinaiticus and Alexandrinus were the primary sources for Daniel Θ; they are both included (though the former is not derived from the majuscules) for completeness.

higher than that for Esdras B (97.9%), with 2 Paralipomenon (Chronicles) in the middle (99.3%). Ziegler's work on the prophets shows the most range in how it relates to the Rahlfs text,⁵¹ ranging from 99.6% agreement with Rahlfs for Isaiah to 91.8% for Daniel OG (more on this below).

3.2 Observations

We may ask the same questions as before to explore these results further.

First, *is this extensive level of agreement of the fully critical text (with access to substantially more information) with the earlier text (mostly based on three majuscles) surprising?* For Rahlfs' own Psalms edition, the agreement is understandable. Moreover, some editors, such as Hanhart, make it clear in their introductions that they start with the Rahlfs text as a base and only revise where necessary, which might explain the strong agreement.⁵² Yet Hanhart also admits (for Esdras, at least) that his main aim is to correct Rahlfs's overvaluation of Vaticanus, which may lead one to expect more thorough changes than what are observed.⁵³

Ziegler and Wevers do not make reference to whether or how they employed Rahlfs as a starting point.⁵⁴ With access to the Nahal Hever papyri (for the twelve prophets) and *P. Faoud 266* (for Deuteronomy), we might have expected higher deviation from Rahlfs in Ziegler's and Wevers's respective edition,⁵⁵ but the agreement is 98.3–98.4% for both. Wevers even comments that the earlier version of Genesis produced by Rahlfs (in 1926) is superior to the final form of the hand

⁵¹ It is for this reason that I included far more sample texts from the prophet corpus, including a full collation of Hosea.

⁵² For instance, Hanhart notes that 'Der von Rahlfs hergestellte Text bleibt die Grundlage für die vorliegende Ausgabe'; Robert Hanhart, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. VIII.1: Esdrae liber I* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974): 30. The same comment is found in his *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. VIII.2: Esdrae liber II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993): 29. However, he does not make such a comment for 2 Paralipomenon – in fact, he barely mentions Rahlfs-Hanhart at all (only in passing on p. 34) – though his text agrees with it almost entirely; *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. VII.2: Paralipomenon liber II* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

⁵³ 'In der Abgrenzung gegenüber der Textherstellung von Rahlfs geht es vor allem darum, eine Überbewertung des B-Texts zu revidieren' (*Esdrae liber I*, 31).

⁵⁴ Though the high agreement level suggests they likely did.

⁵⁵ As expressed by Hanhart, 'Rechenschaftsbericht', 460.

edition,⁵⁶ yet Wevers's fully critical Genesis that seeks to restore as closely as possible the 'original' (*ursprünglichen*)⁵⁷ Greek text agrees with the hand edition over 99%.

Second, *what might we have expected to happen with the inclusion of such additional data?* On the one hand, we should not expect a radically different text-form from the Göttingen endeavour, given that the text of the majuscules is quite good. Moreover, there have been few wholesale innovations in terms of Septuagint text-critical method that might, in a sense, shake off the legacy of Rahlfs and the majuscules. On the other hand, three points of data suggest that (transferring J. K. Elliott's sentiment into the Septuagint world) we might have at least expected there to be a *bit* more of a difference between the *editio minor* and *editio maior*.

(a) Jonathan Hong's recent study of the Greek Psalms has offered suggestions on what readings are likely earlier/better than those presented by Rahlfs.⁵⁸ Though the results of this analysis are only available for Greek Psalms 49 and 103, they are interesting: of ~650 total textual units (my estimate), Hong suggests up to ~34 modifications to Rahlfs to obtain the earlier text, which is a 5.2% difference (or a 94.8% agreement).

(b) The outlier in the analysis above (§2.1) is Daniel OG. In comparison to Rahlfs' hand edition, Munnich's revision to Ziegler's earlier Göttingen work was able to make full use of, in particular, the famous Papyrus 967.⁵⁹ This resulted in a text that is ~8.3% different from Rahlfs for ~1,000 textual units collated (or a 91.7% agreement).⁶⁰ By comparison, the agreement for Daniel Θ (for the same sections) is 97.1%, more in line with the other Göttingen volumes.

⁵⁶ Wevers, *Genesis*, 55.

⁵⁷ Wevers, *Genesis*, 63.

⁵⁸ Jonathan Hong, 'In Search of the "Old Greek" in the Septuagint Psalter: A Case Study of LXX Psalms 49 and 103', *TC* 23 (2018): 1-12. Additional data would, presumably, be included in Hong's dissertation, 'Der ursprüngliche Septuagintapsalter und seine herabraisierenden Rezensionen' (Ph.D. dissertation, Protestant University of Wuppertal/Bethel, 2017), but it is not available.

⁵⁹ Joseph Ziegler and Olivier Munnich, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. XVI.2: Susanna, Daniel, Bel et Draco*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999 [1954]).

⁶⁰ Papyrus 967 apparently had little impact on Ezekiel, where Ziegler matches Rahlfs at 99.3%.

(c) Finally, we can draw a more tentative comparison with the critical edition of the Antiochene text of Greek 1–2 Kingdoms.⁶¹ To be clear, this edition is not attempting to reconstruct the same thing that Rahlfs and Göttingen are pursuing. But it does shed light on what *might* happen with the inclusion of more data and a shift away from a Rahlfs-like paradigm. For ~400 textual units collated, the percentage agreement with Rahlfs is 83.8% (or a 16.2% difference). However, nearly half of the variants are typical Antiochene pluses; if those are excluded, the rate of agreement increases to 91.5% (quite similar to Daniel OG).

Though none of these points of comparison are ideal, together they offer a helpful perspective, whereby the rate of divergence from the Rahlfs base text ranges from ~5–8%, as compared to the ~1.5% difference seen for the bulk of the Göttingen project.

4. Concluding Observations

The fields of NT textual criticism and Septuagint textual criticism are different in many ways, but this study has shown a measure of parallelism between these two endeavours: decades of textual work involving a mountain of textual data and numerous scholars has resulted in a change of ~1.5% to the critical text established by one or two scholars working eighty or more years ago (using far fewer manuscripts). What are the implications of this finding? I will make four tentative observations.

Westcott, Hort, and Rahlfs were exceptionally good. No one really doubts this within the respective text-critical fields (apart from, perhaps, Byzantine proponents and thoroughgoing eclectics on the NT side). But this analysis shows just how well their critical text, produced long before computers, has stood the test of time.

Greek textual editors in the main streams of work are quite conservative as editors. This is unsurprising for those within the respective guilds, but it is worth emphasising. On the Göttingen Septuagint side, one might have initially expected to find larger variation, given that Rahlfs was always understood to be a provisional

⁶¹ Natalio Fernández Marcos and José Ramón Busto Saiz, *El Texto Antioqueno de la Biblia Griega I: 1–2 Samuel* (Textos y Estudios ‘Cardenal Cisneros’ de la Biblia Políglota Matritense 50; Madrid: Instituto de Filología C.S.I.C., 1989).

starting point and not the final destination. It turns out, however, that most editors so far have, intentionally or unintentionally, adhered to the guiding principle voiced by Hanhart on the anniversary of Rahlfs's edition:

The textual work of Rahlfs is, within the history of Septuagint research, a fixed datum of such significance that, even after 70 years, the prudent comparison of subsequent insights and suppositions with it, rather than self-assured corrections to it, remains the only legitimate and allowable path for Septuagint research.⁶²

The relationship of the forthcoming Göttingen volumes to Rahlfs remains to be seen; however, since these volumes cover the more complicated portions of the Greek OT, we might expect more variation from the older text.

On the NT side, it ultimately may not be all that surprising that Westcott–Hort continues to cast a long shadow. The current editors for both the *ECM* and other projects have proven themselves simultaneously innovative in terms of method but judicious in terms of textual changes,⁶³ which is a testament to their rigour but also the general inertia within the NT field.

Modern textual criticism is, in a sense, more concerned with the apparatus than the Ausgangstext. After decades of painstaking research, digitisation of manuscripts and collation data, and millions of dollars invested, the Greek NT and Septuagint text-critical fields have produced stunningly accurate and robust critical apparatuses – and texts that are largely the same as that of their predecessors. This says something about the nature of the parallel endeavours, at least indirectly. While both the Münster and Göttingen projects bill their efforts as uncovering the earliest text – and indeed, they probably have – the real upshot of their work is found not at the top of the page but at

⁶² 'Die Textdarbietung von Rahlfs ist innerhalb der Geschichte der Septuagintaforschung ein festes Datum von solcher Bedeutung, dass auch nach 70 Jahren der prüfende Vergleich seitheriger Erkenntnisse und Vermutungen mit ihr, nicht die selbstsichere Korrektur an ihr der einzig berechtigte und zulässige Weg der Septuagintaforschung bleibt' (Hanhart, 'Rechenschaftsbericht', 454).

⁶³ Some have argued that the *ECM* editors' decision to revise the text of Acts and the Catholic Epistles with three conjectural emendations (Acts 13:33; 16:2; 2 Pet. 3:10) betrays some kind of suspicious looseness with the text. However, Peter Gurry has shown that this use of conjectures is actually *more* restrained than their historical predecessors, not less ('List of Conjectures Accepted in Nestle Editions', *Evangelical Textual Criticism* [blog], 29 January 2018, <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2018/01/list-of-conjectures-accepted-in-nestle.html>).

the bottom, in the tabulation of variant readings and the witnesses to them. On the one hand, this ostensibly allows scholars to survey the data and make their own decisions about the reconstructed text; in practice, of course, most NT and OT scholars simply default to the edited text due to the complexities of each respective text-critical field. On the other hand, this repository of information has nourished two related endeavours that, arguably, dominate text criticism today far more than the actual task of reconstructing the *Ausgangstext*: piecing together the textual history itself, and analysing what textual change reveals about the reception of each corpus (and, on the Greek OT side, its parent Hebrew text).⁶⁴ These developments are in themselves very beneficial, as there is much to be learned, and crystallising more accurately the comprehensive history of the text will iteratively feed back into the editing of the text itself.

Most importantly, *our overall confidence in the transmission of the early Greek NT and OT text should be incredibly high*. At first blush, one can position the seemingly uneventful results of a century of textual work as a bad thing. In actuality, the ‘wet squib’ may well be a very good thing, as it indirectly indicates that the main line of transmission of the Greek Bible – despite to the oft-repeated claims to the contrary – was not wild and uncontrolled, but exceptionally stable.⁶⁵

Westcott–Hort and Rahlfs presented a text drawn to a large degree from the premier majuscules, and even then, the text was often, for all practical purposes, that of Vaticanus. Decades later, the same is still true. Numbers are not available on the Greek OT side, but for the NT it has been recently estimated that the NA/ECM text fully agrees with Vaticanus at a rate of 96.3% (and with at least one of the major majuscules 99.9% of the time).⁶⁶ While this may simply be another way of pointing out the latent Hortian influence on the NT editors, it is

⁶⁴ For more on the trend towards greater sensitivity towards variants (and not just the ‘original’ text) on the NT side, see Eldon Jay Epp, ‘It’s All About Variants: A Variant-Conscious Approach to New Testament Textual Criticism’, *HTR* 100/3 (2007): 275–308.

⁶⁵ Similarly, Wachtel summarises ‘[T]he high agreement rates connecting these witnesses demonstrates that a large body of text was safely transmitted from the very beginning of its transmission through the Byzantine period to today’ (‘On the Relationship’, 140).

⁶⁶ Lanier, ‘Inventory’, 279; this includes 04/C as well, but the net effect relative to Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus is negligible.

still incredibly important: decades of work, the development of a new method, and the collation of hundreds of manuscripts has determined that nearly 100% of the text considered to be best approximation of the *Ausgangstext* (for Acts/Catholics, at least) is found in the theoretical *Vorlage* of the magisterial majuscules.

Put differently, we might say that the ~98.5% agreement between the *editiones maiores* (NA/ECM and Göttingen) and earlier *editiones minores* (Westcott–Hort and Rahlf’s) suggests that the uncovering of thousands of variants in the past century has not, ultimately, changed much about our view of the earliest form of the respective Greek texts. Yes, there are a lot of variants.⁶⁷ But this compendium of data, as it increasingly becomes available in the extensive apparatuses of the critical editions, has yielded few changes to the reconstructed text itself. If you want the best single approximation of the earliest form of both the Greek NT and Greek OT, the current text-critical orthodoxy would, in essence, point you to Vaticanus. Just as it has for centuries.

In short, the ‘bland results’⁶⁸ of the past century of NT and Septuagint textual criticism signal that, amid a sea of variants now made available by the Münster and Göttingen efforts, we somewhat ironically retain *more* – not *less* – confidence in the reconstructed text than we ever have. Perhaps that is not so bland after all.

⁶⁷ Roughly 500,000 on the Greek NT side alone, per Peter J. Gurry, ‘The Number of Variants in the Greek New Testament: A Proposed Estimate’, *NTS* 62/1 (2016): 97-121.

⁶⁸ See Elliott quote in footnote 1.