



Analysis of the SBL GNT in the Gospels

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It is good to see this new critical text by Mike Holmes. There are too few today. My opinion is that creating a critical text is the crowning achievement of a textual critic's career. Textual critics should produce more texts. One is learning a lot by doing so and the quality of one's work will improve.

I am basing my analysis on the Unicode text published online at:

<http://www.sblgnt.com/download/>

First, what one immediately recognizes is the almost complete lack of single brackets. In the Gospels there are only four, all in Luke and all Western non-interpolations: Lk 22:19-20, 24:40, 24:51 and 24:52. Outside of the Gospels single brackets occur only at Eph 1:1 [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] and Col 1:20 [δι' αὐτοῦ]. I like that. Courage to come to a decision! Double brackets are used only for the long ending of Mark.

Holmes writes:

Brackets have been employed in this edition very sparingly—not, one hopes, due to a lack of what Parker nicely terms “wise reticence” in the face of difficult choices (Parker, “Development,” 325), but for positive reasons. These include a widely shared sense that brackets have been somewhat overused in some recent editions (sometimes as what could be perceived as a means of avoiding difficult choices); an opinion that one of an editor's duties is to make choices, particularly in the “hard cases,” so as to offer some degree of guidance to those making use of the resulting text; and a corresponding concern that the availability of brackets biases the decision-making process toward inclusion (one can bracket an included word about which one has some degree of doubt regarding the decision to include it, but one cannot bracket the omission of a word about which one has an equal degree of doubt regarding the decision to exclude it).

The second thing that one is recognizing immediately is that the apparatus gives the evidence of printed editions only. Holmes accurately notes the readings of his four base texts (Tregelles, Westcott-Hort, Robinson-Piermont, NIV), plus that of Nestle-Aland and occasionally some others (e.g. the ECM).

If one is creating a new text from four base texts one probably has to produce such an apparatus. The question is if such an apparatus is useful. I am not sure. Today you are comparing texts on the computer screen at a glance, which is

easier than to deduce readings from a printed apparatus. Ok, it is better than nothing when you are reading your Bible in bed in the evening or on the bus. But what does it help to know that Tregelles supports a reading? Would he today? We know that Tregelles had only limited access to certain witnesses (like B).

In my view this apparatus is a stopgap, to produce something better than nothing. It is noting many minutiae, but is omitting many important variants. So the student is not informed on all important textual variants, but only on those that are covered by the base texts.

A lot could be said about the selection of base texts. Tregelles was the base text of WH, so these are sometimes quite close. NIV is not really a critical text, but a "reverse-engineered" text established from the English translation. For some reason NA is not included. NA is only listed in the apparatus. Other critical texts that come to mind and could have been used are Weiß, Tischendorf, Vogels or Baljon, and for the Gospels additionally Greeven and Boismard. Greeven is mentioned once in the apparatus (Mk 9:38). But using these texts instead wouldn't have changed much, I presume.

It seems that Holmes chose his texts pragmatically, because they were the ones readily available in digital form. This is of course the easy way, not starting from scratch, but starting from a consensus text and then only applying some changes that one finds necessary.

It may be that one of the main reasons to produce this text was the very restrictive copyright policy of the German Bible Society, which does not allow using the NA freely. Perhaps the SBL needed a free Greek text for some publications?

Below is my analysis of the text of the Gospels.

Some of the more important readings are:

- Mt 16:2-3 judging the weather: not in brackets
- Mt 19:9 divorce: the longer, majority reading
- Mt 27:16 Jesus Barabbas
- Mk 1:41 "with anger"
- Mk 3:14 apostles: short text, 3:16 long text not in brackets
- Mk 14:70 "and thy speech is alike"
- Lk 8:43 the physicians: not in brackets
- Lk 10:42 ὀλίγων δέ ἐστιν χρεία ἢ ἐνός·
- Lk 18:24 "become very sorrowful" omitted
- Lk 22:43-44 the angel: not in brackets
- Lk 23:34 Father forgive them: not in brackets
- Jo 1:34 "the chosen one"
- PA not in the text, only in the apparatus

As one can see from Mk 1:41 and Jo 1:34, Holmes seems to have some fondness for the Western text. Besides these he is accepting six (of the 27) Western non-interpolations and omits the text:

- Mt 6:15 τὰ παραπτώματα αὐτῶν
- Mt 6:25 ἢ τί πίτηε
- Mk 10:2 προσελθόντες Φαρισαῖοι
- Lk 12:39 ἐγρηγόρησεν ἄν καὶ
- Lk 23:3 τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.
- Lk 24:36 καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν.

Additionally Holmes puts four Western non-interpolations in single brackets (= doubtful):

- Lk 22:19-20 τὸ ποτήριον
- Lk 24:40 ἔδειξεν χεῖρας καὶ πόδας
- 24:51 καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν
- 24:52 προσκυνήσαντες αὐτὸν

Another Western reading is found at Mk 11:31: Τί εἴπωμεν;

But that's about it. All the other Western readings are not accepted by Holmes. A somewhat curious, selective selection. Why exactly these and not others?

I think what most people are interested in are the differences between SBL and NA. I checked these in the Gospels. I did not count bracketed text in NA that is without brackets in SBL and purely orthographical things, like μεθ' for μετα, αλλ' for αλλα, παρ' for παρα, εμε for με, μαριαμ for μαρια or μη γε for μηγε. After some consideration I also excluded the ειπε/ειπον variation for the imperative and the υιος/υιε for the vocative.

Within this frame there are 232 differences between SBL and NA in the Gospels. Of these, SBL follows WH about 48% of the time and the Byzantine text about 44%.

Part 1: The special cases:

In only 19 cases (7%) Holmes is neither following WH nor the Byzantine text. Of these, 4 are Western non-interpolations (Mt 6:25, Mk 10:2, Lk 24:3, 24:36).

Here's the evidence:

Mt 6:25 omit ἢ τί πίητε: 01, f1, 22*, 372, 892, Lat(a, b, ff¹, k, l, vg), Sy-C

Mt 13:28 οἱ δὲ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ λέγουσιν read by C, 0281

Mt 15:30 κωφούς, τυφλούς, χωλούς, κυλλούς read by 33, 892, 1241

Mt 22:30 ὡς ἄγγελοι θεοῦ read by 01, L, f13, 33, 892, 1241, 1424, al

Mk 1:21 ἐδίδασκεν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν read by 01, L, f13^{pt}, 28, 565

Mk 1:41 ὀργισθεῖς read by D, 1358, a, d, ff², r^{1*}, Ephrem

Mk 2:10 ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἀφιέναι ἁμαρτίας read by 01, C, D, L, Δ, 33, 579, al

Mk 3:27 ἀλλ' οὐδεὶς δύναται read by L, f1, f13, 28, 33, 579, 700, 1071

Mk 10:2 omit Φαρισαῖοι ἐπηρώτησαν: D, 1661, 2615^c, it(a, b, d, k, r¹), Sy-S

Mk 11:31 Τί εἴπωμεν; read by D, Θ, f13, 28, 565, 700, it(a, b, c, d, ff², i, r¹)

Mk 13:27 omit αὐτοῦ: D, L, W, Ψ, f1, 28, 565

Lk 17:23 Ἴδου ἐκεῖ· Ἴδου ὧδε· read by D, W, 28, 33

Lk 18:22 ἐν οὐρανοῖς read by 01, A, L, 892

Lk 24:3 omit τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ: D, it(a, b, d, e, ff², l, r¹)

Lk 24:36 omit καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν: D, it(a, b, e, ff², l, r¹),

Lk 24:48 ὑμεῖς ἐστε: 01, L, 157

Jo 1:27 οὐδ' εἰμὶ ἄξιος read by P66*, P75, P120, 01, C, L, al

Jo 1:34 ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ: read by P106^{vid}, 01*, 187, 218, 228, 1784,

b*, e, 11A, ff^{2*}, Sy-S, Sy-C

Jo 10:29 πάντων μεῖζων read by 01, (D), L, W, Ψ

Of the above, the following readings are found in Tregelles:
Mt 13:28, 22:30, Mk 2:10, 3:27, 13:27, Lk 17:23, 24:48

It is clear that the Western non-interpolations and the other Western readings (Mk 1:41, 11:31, Jo 1:34) have been chosen carefully by Holmes.

We are left with 3 readings that are not Western, not from WH, not from Byz and not from Tregelles:

Mt 15:30 κωφούς, τυφλούς, χωλούς, κυλλούς read by f1, 33, 892, 1241, Or

Mk 1:21 ἐδίδασκεν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν read by 01, L, f13^{pt}, 28, 565, WH^{mg}

Lk 18:22 ἐν οὐρανοῖς read by 01, A, L, 892, [WH: τοῖς in brackets]

Probably Holmes chose the last two from WH. But what about Mt 15:30? In a [post to the textualcriticism list](#) he explains his reasons for choosing this reading.

Thus, Holmes deviated from his four base texts in only about 8 cases in the Gospels (7 Western readings and Mt 15:30).

Part 2: The WH and Byz cases

What one immediately recognizes is that Holmes is a lectio brevior man. In about 80% of the cases where there is a shorter and a longer reading, he prefers the shorter. This results in a very short text.

The SBL Gospels are 88 words shorter than the WH text! The complete SBL NT is 126 words shorter than WH. This is remarkable! The SBL NT is 465 words shorter than NA. This is the shortest GNT ever!

Besides shorter/longer variants (61%), Holmes is changing the word order in 12%, and he is choosing a different word in 27% of all cases.

Part 3: Comparison with the TCG commentary

Of course I was interested to see, how Holmes' text compares with my [suggestions given in the TCG commentary](#). 165 of the 232 deviations from NA are covered in the commentary. Of these, I disagree with Holmes in 33 cases (20%). I agree with him in 61 cases (37%). In 71 cases (43%) I am indifferent, i.e. I give an "indecisive" rating.

So, overall there is more agreement than disagreement. I give below in an appendix the cases where we agree against NA.

67 cases (29% of all deviations) are not covered in the commentary, but this is all very minor stuff, like omission/addition of an article, personal pronouns, word-order variants etc.

Conclusion:

This GNT is interesting. I wasn't prepared to find so short a text. Since Holmes follows about half of the time WH and half of the time the Byzantine text (when he deviates from NA) I thought that this would roughly equal longer and shorter readings out. But this is not the case. Often not only WH, but also the Majority text is shorter than NA at those positions where Holmes chose a different reading. This really is a lectio brevior text!

Overall I agree more often than not with Holmes' textual choices. I also like his decision to get rid of the single brackets, at least for the minor stuff.

I wouldn't have printed the Western readings though. My gut feeling is that "with anger" in Mk 1:41 is wrong. Besides these Western things all my other disagreements with Holmes are really minor stuff and certainly debatable.

For the future I hope for another version to come out with a "real" apparatus, showing the manuscripts. Perhaps this could be done in collaboration with Bill Warren, who is working on an apparatus? I also hope that Mike Holmes is writing a commentary on his text.

Below is the list of deviations from NA on which we agree, or, where I see at least a possibility that NA is wrong here. All these should be reconsidered carefully.

PS: The Bibleworks file of this GNT, produced by Michael Hanel, can be downloaded [here](#). The apparatus is also available as [CHM module](#).

Appendix

Agreements between Holmes and Willker against NA:

Mt:

- (1) 5:11 ψευδόμενοι: remove brackets
- (2) 8:13 omit αὐτοῦ
- (3) 8:21 μαθητῶν [αὐτοῦ]: omit αὐτοῦ
- (4) 8:23 εἰς τὸ πλοῖον: omit τὸ, see also 14:22
- (5) 9:14 πολλά: omit brackets
- (6) 11:9 ἰδεῖν; προφήτην;: change to προφήτην ἰδεῖν;
the B reading is problematic
- (7) 12:10 θεραπεῦσαι: change to θεραπεύειν
- (8) 12:47 verse, omit brackets, h.t.
- (9) 14:22 εἰς τὸ πλοῖον: omit τὸ
- (10) 19:9 μοιχᾶται h.t., change to Byz
- (11) 19:10 μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ: omit αὐτοῦ
- (12) 19:29a add ἡ γυναικᾶ
- (13) 20:17 + 26:20 δώδεκα [μαθητᾶς]:
either both times μαθητᾶς in brackets in text or both times in apparatus
- (14) 20:23b reconsider, possibly omit τοῦτο
- (15) 20:31 retain NA²⁵ 3-1-2 reading
- (16) 22:32 [ὁ] θεός: remove brackets
- (17) 26:20 δώδεκα μαθητῶν
- (18) 27:40 omit καὶ

Mk:

- 1) 1:21 ἐδίδασκεν εἰς τὴν συναγωγὴν
- 2) 3:11 λέγοντες: λέγοντα
- 3) 3:32 [καὶ αἱ ἀδελφαί σου] reconsider
- 4) 4:16 add ὁμοίως
- 5) 5:6 αὐτῷ: change to αὐτόν
- 6) 6:2 πολλοὶ: add οἱ in brackets
- 7) 6:23 αὐτῇ [πολλά]: reconsider
- 8) 6:38 ἄρτους ἔχετε: reverse
- 9) 7:9 στήσητε: change to τηρήσητε
- 10) 7:35 better omit εὐθέως
- 11) 7:37 τοὺς ἀλάλους: omit τοὺς, reconsider
- 12) 8:34 ἀκολουθεῖν / ἐλθεῖν: reconsider
- 13) 9:2 τὸν Ἰωάννην: omit τὸν
- 14) 13:15 ἄραί τι: reverse

Lk:

- (1) 2:52 [έν τῇ] σοφία: omission right
- (2) 9:2 [τοὺς ἀσθενεῖς], remove brackets
- (3) 9:18 λέγουσιν οἱ ὄχλοι: change to οἱ ὄχλοι λέγουσιν
- (4) 9:59 [κύριε,] omit brackets
- (5) 10:32 γενόμενος: reconsider
- (6) 10:42 ὀλίγων δέ ἐστιν χρεία ἢ ἐνός: the long reading is right
- (7) 11:33 τὸ φέγγος is right
- (8) 13:27 omit ὑμᾶς
- (9) 15:16 γεμίσαι τὴν κοιλίαν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ is correct
- (10) 17:12 omit αὐτῷ
- (11) 18:4 δὲ ταῦτα: reverse
- (12) 18:24 περίλυπον γενόμενον: reconsider
- (13) 20:9 ἄνθρωπός [τις]: omit τις
- (14) 20:26 αὐτοῦ change to τοῦ
- (15) 22:43-44 put words in SINGLE brackets
- (16) 23:34 put words in SINGLE brackets
- (17) 24:47 change εἰς to καὶ
- (18) 24:49 change to ἐξαποστέλλω
- (19) 24:50 ἕξω: reconsider

Jo:

- (1) 1:19 omit πρὸς αὐτὸν: reconsider
- (2) 3:28 omit ὅτι
- (3) 4:53 [έν] ἐκείνη: omit έν
- (4) 5:2 Βηθεσδα? reconsider
- (5) 5:17 Ὁ δὲ [Ἰησοῦς]: omit Ἰησοῦς
- (6) 6:7 omit article before Φίλιππος
- (7) 8:28 [αὐτοῖς] ὁ Ἰησοῦς: omit αὐτοῖς
- (8) 8:41 omit οὖν
- (9) 8:52 omit οὖν
- (10) 16:28 change παρὰ to ἐκ