

A tale of two MSS

If you are a ‘senior citizen’, and if your mother tongue is English, you have presumably heard of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens, and may even have read it. Well, let me tell you a tale of two manuscripts.

In John, GA 586 and GA 2382 share a single variant that keeps each, as it stands, from being a perfect representative of Family 35 for that Gospel. The variant is found in John 12:6.

The **f³⁵** representatives are seriously split between $\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu$ and $\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\nu$. Here is the evidence for the 57 family representatives that I have collated so far:

$\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu$	18,141,201,204,363 ^c ,402,479,480,553 ^c ,685 ^c ,789 ^c ,928,1072 ^c ,1075,1111 ^c ,1334,1339,1384,1461,1496, 1503,1572, 1667,2253,2322,2382 ^c ,2503,2554 (2122 is missing)
$\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\nu$	35,83,128,363,510,547,553,586,685,696,757,789,824,867,897,1072,1111,1117,1145,1147,1435, 1559, 1560,1617,1637,1652,1686,1694,1700,1713,2352,2382,2466,2765,l.2110

It can be seen that all the corrections go in a single direction. If we follow the corrections, we get a tie. Is the verb $\mu\epsilon\lambda\omega$ or $\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omega$? $\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota$ as an impersonal form is most common; however, the verb is also used in a personal/active sense. $\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omega$ (‘to be about to’) does not make sense here, so what gave rise to this spelling? $\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omega$ is about ten times as frequent in the NT and some copyists may have put the more customary spelling without thinking. They had just written $\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\omega\nu$ two lines above and some may have repeated the form by attraction. However, since both forms have the same pronunciation, someone hearing the Text read aloud would understand it correctly, being guided by the context. This could also happen to someone reading it by himself. Precisely for this reason, it may be that the semantic area of the longer form came to be regarded as including that of the shorter form; in which case we would have alternate spellings of the same verb. It is not my custom to appeal to the early uncials, but all of them have the shorter form here, which would go along with my hypothesis above. Here is the evidence from my Greek Text:

$\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\nu$ **f³⁵** P^{66,75} \aleph A,B,D,Q,W [40%] HF,RP,OC,TR,NU || $\epsilon\mu\epsilon\lambda\lambda\epsilon\nu$ **f^{35pt}** [60%] CP || one other variant

As best I can tell, the earliest uncials with the longer form date to the IX century. Returning to the two manuscripts, GA 2382, as corrected, is perfect. GA 586 was not corrected. However, if my hypothesis is correct, then both of them may be considered to be perfect representatives of **f³⁵** for John’s Gospel. This means that all their ancestors, the exemplars of all intervening generations based on the family archetype, were also perfect. Now I call that incredibly careful transmission!