

Defining ‘preservation’

Wilbur N. Pickering, ThM PhD

We understand that the human authors of Scripture wrote under inspiration, by which we mean that the Holy Spirit superintended the process with the result that they wrote just what He wanted them to write (respecting the norms that rule the use of language). The authors were inspired, protected from error, but not the copyists down through the years. There is nothing like actually collating a number of MSS to give one an appreciation for the divine preservation of the Text, a process more complicated than inspiration. (Satan was not allowed to interfere in the inspiring, but was in the preserving.)

The purpose of this note is to ‘chew’ a bit on the question of just how to evaluate a copy’s representation of its archetypal form, and hence its preservation thereof. I consider that the following should not be regarded as ‘variants’, or deviations from the archetype:

- 1) Whether a number is written out or given with the letters;
- 2) Whether a letter (*alpha*) is written out or given with the letter;
- 3) Abbreviations or ‘shorthand’ forms (these are especially frequent at the end of a line), where the identity of the word and its meaning are not touched; the so-called ‘nomina sacra’ are probably the best known examples.

Both parchment and ink were prepared by hand, and were hard to come by, so any legitimate means of economizing those materials would be viewed as entirely appropriate. This attitude is reflected in the first three items.

- 4) Copyists would often give expression to an artistic bent with the top line of a page and the end of lines, using flourishes, curlicues, exaggerated forms, lines running off the page, and such—these should be ignored.
- 5) Alternate spellings of the same word, where the identity of the word and its meaning are not touched. This one is a bit more bothersome than the others, but I think it should be included in the list. However, such differences can be useful in identifying sub-groups.

Of course, when printing a text a choice must be made between competing forms [I am prepared to defend mine in every case], but since the meaning is not touched, such choices will mainly be of concern to someone wishing to apply a numeric code to the text. The sort of changes listed above may not legitimately be used to argue against the doctrine of inerrancy.

Back in June, 2008, I spent three weeks in Münster, working with the *Institut’s* microfilms. I checked 40 of the 44 MSS I have so far identified as belonging to Family 35 in the Apocalypse. When I returned home I prepared and posted “^f splits in Revelation”. I will illustrate my proposal with the Apocalypse, using that ‘paper’.

In that paper I had already eliminated class 1), the numbers; these may be found in 4:4, 4:10, 7:4, 7:11, 11:2, 11:16, 12:1, 14:1, 14:3, 19:4, 21:16 and 21:17, where at least three MSS share a variant. I had also eliminated class 2), a letter; 1:8 and 22:13. All printed texts ignore class 3), as well as class 4); which brings us to class 5). Of the total of 54 splits presented, class 5) removes 16, almost one third of them, but I will limit this discussion to the twelve splits that involve over a third of the MSS, plus two that fall just below it. Class 5) removes eight of the fourteen: $\kappa\rho\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\lambda\omega$ || $\kappa\rho\upsilon\sigma\tau\alpha\lambda\lambda\omega$ in 4:6; $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\delta\omicron\omega\nu$ || $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha\delta\omega\nu$

in 9:11; ἐπεσον || ἐπεσαν in 16:19 and 17:10; ἡρημωμένην || ἐρημωμένην in 17:16; ἐπεσον || ἐπεσα in 19:10; σαρδωνυξ || σαρδονυξ in 21:20; κρυσταλον || κρυσταλλον in 22:1. The proper name and nouns need not detain us, but the verbal forms deserve comment. The verb πιπτω is generally considered to have a 2nd aorist form, not a 1st; the difficulty comes from the *sigma*—it is usually associated with the 1st aorist, not the 2nd, so it was predictable that the 2nd aorist ἐπεσον would be changed to ἐπεσαν. So we have alternate spellings of the same word. The perfect passive participle of ἐρημω is ἡρημωμένην (acc.sg.f.); the loss of the augment merely gives an alternate spelling to the same word.

When I wrote that paper, I ranked the family representatives depending on Hoskier, since I had only collated MS 2723 myself. I have since collated MSS 757, 824, 1072, 1503, 1864, 1865 and 2334 (for 2334 I used a facsimile prepared by Marcus Lembke—thank you, Marcus). These eight MSS all fall in the top tier, in terms of quality, as representatives of their archetype; especially their presumed exemplars. (Half of them are from Mt. Athos, but from three different monasteries.) I will now present the performance of these eight MSS with reference to the six remaining splits (of the 14).

3:9 ἡξουσιν—757,824,1072,1503,1864,2434,2723
 ἡξωσιν—1865

One's first impression is that the three verbs controlled by *ινα* are parallel and should be in the same mode, namely subjunctive—γινωσιν is home free, προσκυνησωσιν has a heavy majority (including **f**³⁵) but with some dissent; with ἡξωσιν the dissent becomes stronger, including 2/3 of Family 35 (a preponderance of the better representatives read the indicative). The generalized splitting in the families suggests that the 'norm' of subjunctive with *ινα* was at work in the minds of the copyists, the more so since the other two verbs are in that mode; but the indicative isn't all that infrequent, and in this case presumably emphasizes certainty—they **will** come. If the original were subjunctive, who would have changed it to indicative?

4:8 λεγοντα—757,824,1503,1864,1865,2434,2723
 λεγοντες—757^c,1072

The subject of the participle is τα ζωα, neuter, so the neuter form is correct, in spite of the slim attestation. It seems clear from verse 9 that it is only the four living beings who are repeating 'holy', but if copyists thought the elders were in chorus with the living beings, they would naturally change the gender to masculine. In spite of the split in **f**³⁵, most of the better representatives of the family attest the first variant.

7:17^a ποιμανει—757^{alt},824^{alt},1072,1503^{alt},1864^{alt},1865,2434,2723
 ποιμανει—757,824,1503,1864

7:17^b οδηγει—757^c,824^{alt},1072,1503^{alt},1864^{alt},1865,2434,2723
 οδηγησει—757^{*2},824,1503,1864

These two verbs in 7:17 go together; is their tense present or future? In the context, the first two verbs in verse 15 are present; the last one and those in verse 16 are future. The benefits described are because the Lamb 'shepherds' and 'leads'. The last verb in verse 17, like the last in verse 15, being what God will do, are in the future. If the verbs 'shepherd' and 'lead' had started out as future, who would have changed them to present?—the pressure is in the other direction. The difference in meaning is slight, in any case.

9:5 πληξῆ—757^{alt}, 824^{alt}, 1072, 1503^{alt}, 1864^{alt}, 1865, 2434, 2723
παλση—757, 824, 1503, 1864

It is difficult to imagine medieval monks changing παλση to πληξῆ; on what basis would they do so? On the other hand, the unfamiliar πληξῆ could be changed to παλση, and even πεση, early on (πλησσω having been used with the 2nd aorist in 8:12 above, the 1st aorist would be unexpected). πλησσω is used for sudden, violent strikes, like from lightning or God's wrath; it is used expressly of a scorpion's sting in the 1st century AD [Sammelb. 1267.6]. In this context πληξῆ is precisely appropriate, although the difference in meaning is slight.

14:14 καθημενος ομοιος—757^{alt}, 824^{alt}, 1072, 1503^{alt}, 1864^{alt}, 1865, 2434, 2723
καθημενον ομοιον—757, 824, 1503, 1864

Whenever the phrase καὶ εἶδον καὶ ἰδοὺ occurs (6:2, 5, 8; 7:9; 14:1, 14), the noun that follows is nominative, not accusative—here in 14:14 νεφέλη is nominative. So 'someone like a son of man' must also be nominative. I find it difficult to understand what gave rise to the accusative, but that doesn't make it right. The resultant meaning is the same.

In terms of the presumed exemplars, I would say that the vote is 7:1 for the first two (the second could be interpreted as 6:2), and 8:0 for the last four—there is no reasonable question as to the archetypal forms. Yet the exemplars were distinct, except for possibly those of 757 and 1864, in that both were probably perfect (this includes all splits and variants). However, as they stand, 757, 824, 1503 and 1864 evidently form part of a subgroup, which presumably had its beginning many generations earlier.

To go back to the opening question, how have these eight MSS preserved the archetypal form of their family? They each did a good job, their exemplars doing an even better one—taken together they did a perfect job. God has preserved His Text.