

Incredibly Careful Transmission

This section focuses on the Thessalonian epistles, generally thought to have been the first of the apostle Paul's canonical writings (at least in conservative circles). If so, his prestige and authority as an apostle would not yet have reached its full stature, and in consequence such early writings might not have been accorded as much respect as later ones. As I continue collating more and more f³⁵ MSS I have been surprised by a different picture. I have collated the following thirty-four representatives of the family and invite attention to the results.

Performance of f³⁵ MSS in the Thessalonian Epistles

MS	1 Thess.	2 Thess.	Location	Date ¹	Exemplar
18	---	---	Constantinople ²	1364	---
35	2c	---	Aegean ³	XI	---
201	2y,2/	2x	London	1357	2x,2y,2/
204	1/	---	Bologna	XIII	1/
328	1/,1s	2s	Leiden	XIII	1/
386	1y,1/,1s	1s	Vatican	XIV	1y,1/
394	1s	---	Rome	1330	---
444	1s	2s	London	XV	---
604	1x,1y	1s	Paris	XIV	1x,1y
757	1s	1y,1c	Athens	XIII	1y
824	---	1i	Grottaferrata	XIV	---
928	---	---	Dionysiu (Athos)	1304	---
986	1s	1s	Esphigmenu (Athos)	XIV	---
1072	1i	---	M. Lavras (Athos)	XIII	---

¹ I give the location and date as in the *Kurzgefasste Liste* (1994), although I must admit to an occasional doubt as to the accuracy of the dating.

² Although presently in Paris, 18 was produced in Constantinople.

³ Although presently in Paris, 35 was acquired in the Aegean area.

MS	1 Thess.	2 Thess.	Location	Date ⁴	Exemplar
1075	1x,1/	---	M. Lavras	XIV	1x,1/
1100	1y,1s	1y	Dionysiu	1376	2y
1248	3x,1/,4s	2s,2i	Sinai	XIV	3x,1/
1249	1y	---	Sinai	1324	1y
1503	2s	---	M. Lavras	1317	---
1548	2x,1s	1s	Vatopediu (Athos)	1359	2x
1637	1/	---	M. Lavras	1328	1/
1725	2/	1/	Vatopediu	1367	3/
1732	1y,2s	1/	M. Lavras	1384	1y,1/
1761	2x,2y,1s	1s,1i	Athens	XIV	2x,2y
1855	---	1s	Iviron (Athos)	XIII	---
1864	---	---	Stavronikita (Athos)	XIII	---
1865	1c	---	Philotheu (Athos)	XIII	---
1876	4y,1/	1y,1/	Sinai	XV	5y,2/
1892	10s	3s	Jerusalem	XIV	---
1897	1/,1c	3s,1h	Jerusalem	XII	1/
2466	1x,2y,1s	1s	Patmos	1329	1x,2y
2554	1c	---	Bucharest	1434	---
2587	1s	1s	Vatican	XI	---
2723	---	---	Trikala	XI	---

Key:

x = an uncorrected variant that it is attested by MSS outside the family;

y = a split that is not limited to the family;

⁴ I give the location and date as in the *Kurzgefasste Liste* (1994), although I must admit to an occasional doubt as to the accuracy of the dating.

/ = a split within the family (no outside attestation);
c = a variant of any kind that has been corrected to the presumed archetype;
s = singular reading / private variant (until all MSS have been collated, this is just an assumption);
h = an obvious case of homoioteleuton (or –arcton), often involving a line or more, but can be just three or four words;
i = sheer inattention;
--- = no departures from the presumed profile.

Implications

I begin with the last column in the chart, ‘Exemplar’. Except for 18, 928, 1864 and 2723 that are themselves perfect, most of the others have a different rating. All singular readings should be discounted (including homoioteleuton and inattention); if not introduced by the copyist it was done by the ‘father’ or ‘grandfather’—an ancestor was free of all ‘singulars’, so they contribute nothing to the history of the transmission, are not relevant to the tracing of that transmission. All variants that were corrected to the presumed family profile should also be discounted—whoever did the correcting, it was done on the basis of a correct exemplar (correct at that point). So I only attribute ‘x’, ‘y’ and ‘/’ to the exemplar—of course some of these could be the work of the copyist as well, which would make the exemplar even better, but I have no way of knowing when that occurred.

Notice that of thirty-four MSS, sixteen of their exemplars (almost half) were ‘perfect’, and another six were off by only one variant (the worst was only off by seven, for two books). If there were no splinters, we could be looking at thirty-four independent lines of transmission, within the family, which to me is simply fantastic.⁵ But what about the splinters? There are a few very minor ones in 1 Thessalonians, and only a few pairs in 2 Thessalonians.

I conclude that all thirty-four MSS were independent in their generation, and I see no evidence to indicate a different conclusion for their exemplars. Please note that I am not claiming that all thirty-four lines remain distinct all the way back to the archetype. I cheerfully grant that there would be a number of convergences before getting back to the source. However all that may be, we are looking at very careful transmission.

I now invite attention to location. The MSS come from all over the Mediterranean world. The thirteen Mt. Athos MSS were certainly produced in their respective monasteries (seven). Ecclesiastical politics tending to be what it tends to be, there is little likelihood that there would be collusion between the monasteries on the transmission of the NT writings—I regard the thirteen as representing as many exemplars. MSS from Trikala, Patmos, Jerusalem and Sinai were presumably produced there; cursive 18 was certainly produced in Constantinople; cursive 35 was acquired in the Aegean area. The MSS at the Vatican and Grottaferrata may very well have been produced there.

I now invite special attention to minuscule 18, produced in Constantinople in **1364!** As it stands it is a perfect representative of the presumed family profile for the Thessalonian epistles (I say ‘presumed’ only out of deference to all the family representatives that I haven’t collated yet, but given the geographical distribution of the thirty-four above, I have no doubt

⁵ 18, 928, 1864 and 2723 were produced in Constantinople, Dionysiu, Stavronikita and Trikala, respectively—I consider it to be virtually impossible that they should have a common exemplar (of course they could join somewhere back down the line).

that the profile as given in my Text is correct).⁶ How many generations of copies would there have been between MS 18 and the family archetype? Might there have been fifteen, or more? I would imagine that there were at least ten. However many there actually were, please note that every last one of them was perfect! *The implications of finding a perfect representative of any archetypal text are rather powerful. All the ‘canons’ of textual criticism become irrelevant to any point subsequent to the creation of that text* (they could still come into play when studying the creation of the text, in the event). For MS 18 to be perfect, all the generations in between had to be perfect as well. Now I call this **incredibly careful transmission**. Nothing that I was taught in Seminary about New Testament textual criticism prepared me for this discovery! Nor anything that I had read, for that matter. But MS 18 is not an isolated case; all the thirty-four MSS in the chart above reflect an **incredibly careful transmission**—even the worst of the lot, minuscules 1761 and 1874, with their seven variants [the ‘singulars’ in 1893 and 1248 are careless mistakes {unhappy monks}], are really quite good, considering all the intervening generations.

This point deserves some elaboration. A typical ‘Alexandrian’ MS will have over a dozen variants per page of printed Greek text. A typical ‘Byzantine’ MS will have 3-5 variants per page. MSS 1761 and 1876 have about one per page, and one of the better **f³⁵** MSS will go for pages without a variant. There is an obvious difference in the mentality that the monks brought to their task. A monk copying an ‘Alexandrian’ MS evidently did not consider that he was handling Scripture, in stark contrast to one copying an **f³⁵** MS. For those who do not exclude the supernatural from their model, I submit that the information above is highly significant: obviously God was not protecting any ‘Alexandrian’ type of MS, probably because it contained ‘tares’ (Matthew 13:28). A monk copying a ‘Byzantine’ bulk type MS did far better work than the Alexandrian, but still was not being sufficiently careful—he was probably just doing a religious duty, but without personal commitment to the Text. Since God respects our choices (John 4:23-24), the result was a typical ‘Byzantine’ MS. It is also true that not all **f³⁵** MSS were carefully done, but I conclude that the core representatives were done by copyists who believed they were handling God’s Word and wanted their work to be pleasing to Him⁷—just the kind that the Holy Spirit would delight to aid and protect.

Performance of **f³⁵** MSS in 2 & 3 John and Jude

This section focuses on 2 & 3 John and Jude. I have collated forty-six representatives of Family 35, so far (for these three books), and invite attention to the results. I have so far identified 84 MSS as belonging to **f³⁵** in the General Epistles (plus another 10 or 12 on the fringes), so this sample is certainly representative, considering also the geographic distribution.

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Location	Date	Exemplar
18	---	1s	---	Constantinople	1364	---
35	---	---	2c	Aegean	XI	---
141	---	---	---	Vatican	XIII	---

⁶ Actually I have now collated 39 family representatives for 1 Thessalonians and 38 for 2 Thessalonians. They probably represent at least 40% of the total extant membership, so there can really be no doubt that they correctly represent the family archetype.

⁷ It is not at all uncommon to find a colophon at the end of a MS where the copyist calls on God for His mercy, and even for His recognition and blessing.

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Location	Date	Exemplar
149	---	1/	1/,1c	Vatican	XV	2/
201	---	1/	1/	London	1357	2/
204	---	---	---	Bologna	XIII	---
328	---	---	1x,1s	Leiden	XIII	1x
386	---	---	---	Vatican	XIV	---
394	---	1i	---	Rome	1330	---
432	2s	1/	3s	Vatican	XV	1/
444 ⁸	---	---	1s	London	XV	---
604	1x	1/	---	Paris	XIV	1x,1/
664	1x,1s	3s	3s	Zittau	XV	1x
757	2s	---	---	Athens	XIII	---
824	---	---	---	Grottaferrata	XIV	---
928	---	---	---	Dionysiu (Athos)	1304	---
986	1s	---	1s,1i	Esphigmenu (Athos)	XIV	---
1072	---	---	---	M Lavras (Athos)	XIII	---
1075	---	---	---	M Lavras	XIV	---
1100	---	---	---	Dionysiu	1376	---
1247	1x,1/,1s	1/,1s	1x,1/,6s	Sinai	XV	2x,3/
1248	2/	1/,3s	4s	Sinai	XIV	3/
1249	1/,1c	---	1/	Sinai	1324	2/
1503	1s	---	---	M. Lavras	1317	---
1548	---	---	1s	Vatopediu (Athos)	1359	---
1628	---	---	1s	M. Lavras	1400	---
1637	---	---	---	M. Lavras	1328	---
1725	---	---	1s	Vatopediu	1367	---
1732	1/	---	1x,1s	M. Lavras	1384	1x,1/
1754	1s	1/,1s	2s	Panteleimonos (Athos)	XII	1/
1761	1s	2s	---	Athens	XIV	---
1768	---	1y	1s	Iviron (Athos)	1516	1y
1855	---	---	---	Iviron	XIII	---
1864	---	---	---	Stavronikita (Athos)	XIII	---

⁸ 444 is a mixed MS. In James, 1&2 Peter it is not at all f³⁵, while in 1 John it is a very marginal member of the family.

MS	2 John	3 John	Jude	Location	Date	Exemplar
1865	---	1/	---	Philotheu (Athos)	XIII	1/
1876	2/,1s	1/	1/,2s	Sinai	XV	4/
1892	1x	---	---	Jerusalem	XIV	1x
1897	---	---	1s	Jerusalem	XII	---
2221	---	---	---	Sparta	1432	---
2352	1c,1i	---	---	Meteora	XIV	---
2431	---	---	1i	Kavsokalyvia (Athos)	1332	---
2466	---	1/	2s	Patmos	1329	1/
2554	---	---	---	Bucharest	1434	---
2587	---	---	1c	Vatican	XI	---
2626	1/	1/,1s	2/	Ochrida	XIV	4/
2723	---	---	---	Trikala	XI	---

Implications

In 2 John, 2/3 (thirty) of the MSS are perfect representatives of the family as they stand; in 3 John the percentage is also 2/3 (thirty, but a different selection); in Jude just under ½ (twenty-two); and for all three under 1/3 (fourteen). Over half (twenty-nine) of the exemplars were presumably perfect. Since I have the figures for all seven books of the General Epistles, I can assure the reader that all forty-six MSS are independent in their generation, as were their exemplars. Cursives 149 and 201 are clearly related, as are 432 and 604, and all four probably come from a common source short of the archetype. I see no evidence of collusion, of ‘stuffing the ballot box’—there was no organized effort to standardize the Text. We are looking at a normal transmission, except that it was **incredibly careful**. The fourteen MSS that are perfect in all three books had perfect ancestors all the way back to the archetype, and so for the twenty-nine perfect exemplars. I refer the reader to the prior section for the explanation of how I arrive at the classification of the exemplars.

As I keep on collating MSS I have observed a predictable pattern. For the first 2 or 3, even 4, pages the MSS tend to have few mistakes, or none. If the scribe is going to make mistakes, it tends to be after he has been at it long enough to start getting tired, or bored. Quite often most of the mistakes are on a single page, or in a single chapter; then the scribe took a break (I suppose) and returning to his task refreshed did better work. I would say that the high percentage of ‘perfect’ copies is largely due to the small size of our three books—the copyists didn’t have a chance to get tired. For all that, this observation does not change the fact that there was **incredibly careful transmission** down through the centuries.⁹ Considering the size of my sample and the geographic distribution of the MSS, I am cheerfully certain that we have the precise original wording, to the letter, of the f^{35} archetype for 2 and 3 John and Jude. It is reproduced in my Greek Text.

⁹ I have already demonstrated this for the Thessalonian epistles, above, and am in a position to do the same for all the books of the NT. Of course, the longer the book the greater the likelihood that a copyist would make an inadvertent mistake or two. Even so, I have a perfect copy of Romans (fair size and complexity) and one of Matthew (a Gospel, no less!).

Given my presuppositions, I consider that I have good reason for declaring the divine preservation of the precise original wording of the complete New Testament Text, to this day. That wording is reproduced in my edition of the Greek NT, *The Greek New Testament According to Family 35*, available from Amazon.com, as well as from my site, www.prunch.org. BUT PLEASE NOTE: whether or not the archetype of f^{35} is the Autograph (as I claim), the fact remains that the MSS collated for this study reflect an incredibly careful transmission of their source, and this throughout the middle ages. My presuppositions include: God exists; He inspired the Biblical Text; He promised to preserve it for a thousand generations (1 Chronicles 16:15); so He must have an active, ongoing interest in that preservation [there have been fewer than 300 generations since Adam, so He has a ways to go!]. **If He was preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than f^{35} , would that transmission be any less careful than what I have demonstrated for f^{35} ?** I think not. So any line of transmission characterized by internal confusion is disqualified—this includes all the other lines of transmission that I have seen so far!¹⁰

¹⁰ Things like M^6 and M^5 in John 7:53-8:11 come to mind.