

IS f³⁵ ANCIENT?

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I have received feedback that goes something like this: “ok, the evidence you have presented indicates that f³⁵ is independent, but it doesn’t prove that it’s ancient” [I affirm both]. I consider that the point deserves a bit of ‘chewing’. For instance: minuscules 35, 2587 and 2723 are generally dated to the 11th century; although minuscule 1897 is generally dated to the 12th, I have collated it and must say that it looks older to me, so I claim it for the 11th as well. What about their provenance? 35 is presently in Paris, but presumably was produced somewhere in the Byzantine Empire [18, also in Paris, was done in Constantinople]; 1897 is in Jerusalem and presumably was produced there; 2587 is in Rome and may well have been produced there; 2723 is in Trikala and was doubtless produced there.

I now consider their performance in the seven General Epistles (a corpus of sufficient size and diversity to preclude reasonable challenge). As best I can tell, the exemplars of 35 and 2723 were perfect representatives of the presumed family archetype—not one variant in all seven books. The exemplar of 1897 participates in a splinter group (within the family) at three points, with no further variants. The exemplar of 2587 participates in a splinter group at six points, with no further variants. So the four monks who produced our four 11th century copies were each looking at a perfect (virtually) representative of the family’s (f³⁵) archetypal text. But how old were the exemplars?

If a MS was not in constant or regular use it would easily last for a century or more, even several. Would Greek MSS in Rome be likely to be much in use at that time? Probably not, so the exemplar of 2587 could easily have been an uncial. How about Jerusalem? The chances of greater use there were probably better than in Rome, and better yet in Constantinople (35?) and Trikala. But do we know to what extent Christians were actually reading Scripture in those years? I think we may reasonably assume that the exemplars were at least a century older than their copies. But 1897 and 2587 join splinter groups, so we are looking at some transmissional history—there must be the parent of the splinter between our exemplar and the archetype.

So, the exemplars were presumably no later than 10th century. If we allow one generation for the creation of splinters, that generation would be no later than the 9th and the archetype no later than the 8th. (I have given an absolute minimum, but obviously there could have been any number of further intervening generations, which would place the archetype much earlier.) But what are the implications of perfect representatives of a family in the tenth century in four diverse locations? How could there be **perfect** copies of *anything* in the 10th century?? That there were four perfect (virtually) representatives of the f³⁵ archetype in diverse locations in the 10th century is a fact. That they were separated from that archetype by at least one intervening generation is also a fact. So how can we explain them?

Did someone concoct the **f³⁵** archetype in the 8th century? Who? Why? And how could it spread around the Mediterranean world? There are **f³⁵** MSS all over the place—Jerusalem, Sinai, Athens, Constantinople, Trikala, Kalavryta, Ochrida, Patmos, Karditsa, Rome, Sparta, Meteora, Venedig, Lesbos, and most monasteries on Mt. Athos (that represented different ‘denominations’), etc. [If there were six monasteries on Cyprus—one Anglican, one Assembly of God, one Baptist, one Church of Christ, one Methodist and one Presbyterian—to what extent would they compare notes? Has human nature changed?] But the Byzantine bulk (**K^x**) controlled at least 60% of the transmissional stream (**f³⁵** = a. 18%); how could something concocted in the 8th century spread so far, so fast, and in such purity? How did it inspire such loyalty?

However, although **f³⁵** has been demonstrated to be independent of **K^x** (Byzantine bulk), they are really very close and must have a common source. In the General Epistles **f³⁵** does not differ from the H-F Majority Text all that much. For instance, in James **f³⁵** differs from H-F nineteen times, only two of which affect the meaning (not seriously). If **f³⁵** and **K^x** have a common source, but **f³⁵** is independent of **K^x**, then **f³⁵** must be at least as old as **K^x**—Q.E.D. [*quod erat demonstrandum*, for those who read Latin; “which was to be proved”, for the rest of us; and in yet plainer English, “the point to be proved has been proved”].

Further, if **f³⁵** is independent of all other known lines of transmission, then it must hark back to the Autographs. If it was created out of existing materials at some point down the line, then it is dependent on those materials and it should be possible to demonstrate that dependence. So far as I know, no such dependence has been demonstrated, and to the extent that I have analyzed the evidence, it cannot be demonstrated. *Selah* [Hebrew for “pause and ponder”]