

The importance of objective evidence

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Even when MSS are collated by persons with a negative bias (bias against the MSS), if they will record the collation accurately, the result is valuable. The continuous text MSS are the primary witnesses to the NT Text. To be able to trace the transmissional history of individual readings, we need complete collations of a large number of extant MSS, the more the better. I wish to illustrate what I have affirmed with the *Editio Critica Maior (ECM)* collations for James and 1 John. They were done while Kurt Aland was still directing the Institute for New Testament Textual Research in Münster (*INTF*), and the work reflects his bias against the Byzantine MSS. (By the time the *ECM* for the General Epistles was published, 1997, Kurt had died, but since his wife, Barbara, succeeded him as director of the Institute, *INTF*, there would be no change in the theoretical orientation.)¹

As of May, 1988, Kurt and Barbara Aland had excluded “more than 1,175 minuscules” (p. 138) as exhibiting “a purely or predominately Byzantine text”. They go on to say, “they are all irrelevant for textual criticism, at least for establishing the original form of the text and its development in the early centuries” (p. 142). (*The Text of the New Testament*, Eerdmans, 1989.) That this bias prevailed in the *Editio Critica Maior* for James is quite clear. Without apology the editors excluded some 340 of the 522 MSS they evaluated because they “attest the Majority text in at least 90% of the test passages” (p. 12). The “test passages” refers to the 98 variant sets taken from the seven General Epistles presented in *Text und Textwert*. However, they did include GA 18 and 35 to represent Soden’s **K** (my Family 35), and GA 1, 424, 607, 617 and 2423 to represent the core Byzantine MSS that were excluded. Apart from those seven, they class another 70 (of the included MSS) as being Byzantine, albeit falling below the 90% threshold.

So why do I say that their work is valuable, in spite of their bias? I hasten to explain. In the critical apparatus of my *The Greek New Testament According to Family 35*, I list eight **f**³⁵ readings (for James) as having 30% overall attestation, or less, which would make them more or less diagnostic **f**³⁵ readings. Family 35 represents about 16% of the total of extant MSS, but it is almost never entirely alone. However, as illustrated below, the sprinkling of other MSS is almost never the same. So I ask: **How is that diverse sprinkling to be explained?** In the chart below, the eight readings form the first line, and below each reading I list the MSS that *ECM* gives as supporting each one. Since GA 18 and 35 have them all, of course, they are not listed. I will discuss the implications below, but first, the evidence (numbers with an asterisk are classed as Byzantine):

3:4	1:23	4:14	4:14	3:2	2:3	4:11	2:4
ιθυνοντος	νομου	ημων	επειτα	δυναμενος	λαμπ. εσθ.	γαρ	ου
---	---	---	---	*	---	---	*
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	A
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	C
---	---	33	---	---	---	---	33
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	81

¹ Indeed, for James the editors included 70 MSS that they classed as Byzantine; but for 1 Peter they reduced the number to 51, and for 2 Peter to 44. For 1 John it was reduced to 41—one might conclude that Barbara was even more radical than Kurt in her disdain for the Byzantine MSS.

3:4 ιθυνοιτος	1:23 νομου	4:14 ημων	4:14 επειτα	3:2 δυναμενος	2:3 λαμπ. εσθ.	4:11 γαρ	2:4 ου
---	88	88	---	---	---	---	---
---	104*	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	206	206	206	206	206	206
---	---	254*	---	254	---	254	254
---	---	321*	321	---	---	---	---
---	378*	---	---	---	---	378	---
400	---	---	---	---	400	---	---
---	---	429	429	429	429	429	429
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	436
442*	---	---	---	---	---	---	442
---	459*	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	467*	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	522	522	522	522	522
---	<u>607</u>	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	614	614	614	614	614
---	---	---	---	621	---	621	621
---	---	630	630	630	630	630	630
---	---	---	---	---	720*	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	876*	---	---
---	915	915	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	945
---	---	999*	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1067
---	1127	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1175
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1241
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1243
1270	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	1292	---	1292	1292	1292
1297	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	1367*	1367	---
---	---	---	---	1448	1448	1448	1448
---	---	1490	---	1490	1490	1490	1490
---	1501*	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	1505	1505	1505	1505	1505
---	---	1524	---	1524	---	1524	1524
1595*	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
1598	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	1611	---	1611	1611	1611
---	---	1678	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	1729*	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1735
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1739
---	---	---	---	---	---	1751	---
---	---	---	---	---	1765*	---	---
---	---	---	1799	---	1799	1799	1799
---	---	---	---	1827*	---	---	---
---	---	1831	1831	1831	1831	1831	1831

3:4	1:23	4:14	4:14	3:2	2:3	4:11	2:4
ιθυνοιτος	νομου	ημων	επειτα	δυναμενος	λαμπ. εσθ.	γαρ	ου
---	---	---	---	---	1832*	---	---
---	1838*	1838	---	---	---	---	---
---	1842	---	---	1842	---	---	---
---	1848*	---	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	1852	---	1852	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	1874*
---	1890	---	1890	1890	1890	1890	1890
1893*	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
2080*	2080	---	2080	---	2080	2080	2080
---	---	---	2138	2138	2138	2138	2138
---	2147	---	2147	---	2147	2147	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2180*
---	---	2200	2200	2200	2200	2200	2200
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2298
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2344
---	---	---	---	2374	---	2374	2374
---	---	---	2412	2412	2412	2412	2412
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2492
---	---	---	---	---	2494*	---	---
---	---	---	2495	2495	2495	2495	2495
---	---	---	---	---	2523	---	---
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2541
---	---	---	2652	---	2652	2652	---
---	---	2674*	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	2774*	---	---	---	---	---
---	---	---	---	2805	---	2805	2805
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	2818*
8	16	18	19	23	28	29	44

So what can we learn from this evidence? To begin, the sole underlined MS that appears in the chart, 607, is the only one of the five core representatives to appear, and it does so only once. This shows clearly that **f³⁵** is distinct from the Byzantine bulk, or Soden's **K^x**. Further, there are 43 MSS that are alone in attesting a **f³⁵** reading: A,C,81,104*,436,459*,467*,607,720*,876*,945, 999*,1067,1127,1175,1241,1243,1270,1297,1501*,1595*,1598,1678,1729*,1735,1739,1751, 1765*,1827*,1832*,1848*,1874*,1893*,2180*,2298,2344,2492,2494*,2523,2541,2674*,2774*, 2818*. Twenty-one of them, or virtually half, are classed as Byzantine, but since they only appear once, they are evidently independent of the Byzantine bulk. (Actually, all of the MSS that appear here are independent of the Byzantine bulk, except 607.) So we have 43 independent witnesses to **f³⁵** readings that **are certainly not part of that family**.

Twelve MSS appear only twice, but there is no pattern, no overlap, except for three with the same distribution; so we have ten more independent witnesses. Those that appear more than twice generally reflect some dependency, but even so, they add another ten independent witnesses. When I say 'independent', I mean in their generation. There will presumably be grouping as we move back through the centuries. Still, would the 63 independent witnesses in their generation reduce by more than half by the time we got back to the fifth century? I very

much doubt it; I would expect at least 30 lines² still in the fifth century. Would they reduce by more than half in two centuries? If not, we would still have 15 lines in the third century; which would mean that **f**³⁵ is very early.

Going back to the chart, I note that ιθυνοντος and νομου share only one MS out of 23; but ιθυνοντος and ημων share none at all out of 26! ιθυνοντος and επειτα share only one out of 26; ιθυνοντος and δυναμενος share none at all out of 31! νομου and ημων share three out of 31; νομου and επειτα share two out of 35; νομου and δυναμενος share only two out of 37. ου is the champion, having 18 MSS by itself. So what does this evidence tell us? Does it not indicate that **f**³⁵ is the core from which a great many tangents departed? There is very little pattern, which indicates that **f**³⁵ must be both ancient and independent. The MSS that agree with **f**³⁵ six times out of the eight may prove to be on the fringe of the family; those that agree five times would be farther away, and so on.

Now let us look at 1 John. Whereas in James they included 77 Byzantine MSS (including **f**³⁵), for 1 John they included only 48, so the bias is stronger. Again they included seven to represent the excluded MSS, GA 18 and 35 to represent Soden's **K**^r, and GA 319, 424, 468, 617 and 2423 to represent the core Byzantine MSS that were excluded.

I list four **f**³⁵ readings (for 1 John) as having 30% overall attestation, or less, which would make them more or less diagnostic **f**³⁵ readings. In the chart below, those readings form the first line, and below each reading I list the MSS that *ECM* gives as supporting each one. Since GA 18 and 35 have them all, of course, they are not listed. I will discuss the implications below, but first, the evidence (numbers with an asterisk are classed as Byzantine):

3:6	5:11	1:6	3:24
και	ο θεος ημων	περιπατουμεν	--- εν
---	---	---	κ
---	B	---	---
---	---	0142*	---
---	0296	---	---
---	---	33	---
---	---	61	---
---	69*	---	---
---	---	---	94
---	---	180*	180
254	---	---	---
---	323	---	---
---	---	378	---
---	---	607*	607
---	614	---	614
---	630	---	---

² I understand that someone may well say: "Wait just a minute; on what basis do you say that all those independent MSS represent lines of transmission?" Well, the readings that they attest are not the sort that a copyist would invent on his own initiative. If the copyist did not invent it, then the reading was in his exemplar. If the reading was in his exemplar, then you have a line of transmission. To attempt to gage the length of the 'lines', and any relationship between lines, we need complete collations of a great many more MSS.

3:6	5:11	1:6	3:24
και	ο θεος ημων	περιπατουμεν	--- εν
915	---	---	---
---	1292	---	---
---	---	1501*	---
---	1505	1505	---
1523	---	---	---
1524	---	---	---
---	1611	---	---
---	1739	---	---
1827*	---	---	---
---	---	---	1836
---	---	1842*	---
1844	---	---	---
1852	---	---	---
---	1881	---	---
---	---	1890*	1890
---	2138	---	---
---	---	2147	---
---	2200	---	---
---	2298	---	---
2374	---	---	---
---	2412	---	2412
---	---	---	<u>2423</u>
---	2492	---	---
---	---	2544	---
---	---	2652	---
---	---	---	2805

8	16	13	10

As with James, there is no overlap between the first two columns (in James the 1st column does share one MS with the 2nd, but none with the 3rd and 5th), and only one MS in common between the 2nd and 3rd! It follows that **f³⁵** is independent of all the lines of transmission represented by the MSS in those columns. There are no Byzantine MSS in the 1st column and only one (not very strong—69) in the 2nd. In contrast, the 3rd column has one very strong Byzantine MS (607), one strong one (180), two fair ones (0142, 1890), and two weak ones (1501, 1842); for all that, they obviously do not represent the bulk of the Byzantine tradition. As in James, **f³⁵** is clearly early and independent of **K^x**. If it is independent of all other lines of transmission as well, as I believe I can demonstrate, then it harks back to the Original—what other reasonable explanation is there?

Family 35 represents about 16% of the total of extant MSS, but it is almost never entirely alone. However, as illustrated above, the sprinkling of other MSS is almost never the same. So again I ask: How is that diverse sprinkling to be explained? Does it not indicate that **f³⁵** is the core from which a great many tangents departed? What other reasonable explanation is there? If it is the core, then it represents the Original. (I am assuming a reasonably normal transmission, which I have defended elsewhere.)

I invite the reader to pause and really think about the implications of the evidence presented above (trying to set aside preconceived ideas). It has been standard procedure for partisans of a certain theoretical orientation to insist upon the difference between individual readings and a text-type. I agree that these must be distinguished. However, it is the mosaic, or profile, or selection of individual readings that define a text-type, or family, or line of transmission. **If all the individual readings that define a family are demonstrably ancient, then perforce the family itself is ancient!**

I suppose it could be theoretically possible for someone in the eighth century to concoct a new archetype, using only early readings; but what possible reason could anyone have for doing so? And how could such a concocted text spread throughout the Mediterranean world? And how could it achieve a level of loyalty far exceeding that in any other line of transmission, including far older ones? How could an archetype concocted in the eighth century supplant all of the older archetypes? I refer to fidelity of transmission. (In our day a concocted text, based on early MSS, has taken over the academic world, but there is no analogy—we know who did it, when, how and why. I have written a page or two on that subject elsewhere.)

Anyone who wishes to advance a theory that Family 35 was concocted by someone in the twelfth century, or the eighth, or the fourth, and do so responsibly, must produce the evidence that gives rise to the theory. He must show who did it, when and where. There are many hundreds of extant copies of NT writings. If all those MSS do not furnish the requisite evidence, then the theory is patently false. To advance a theory that is patently false is to be perverse.