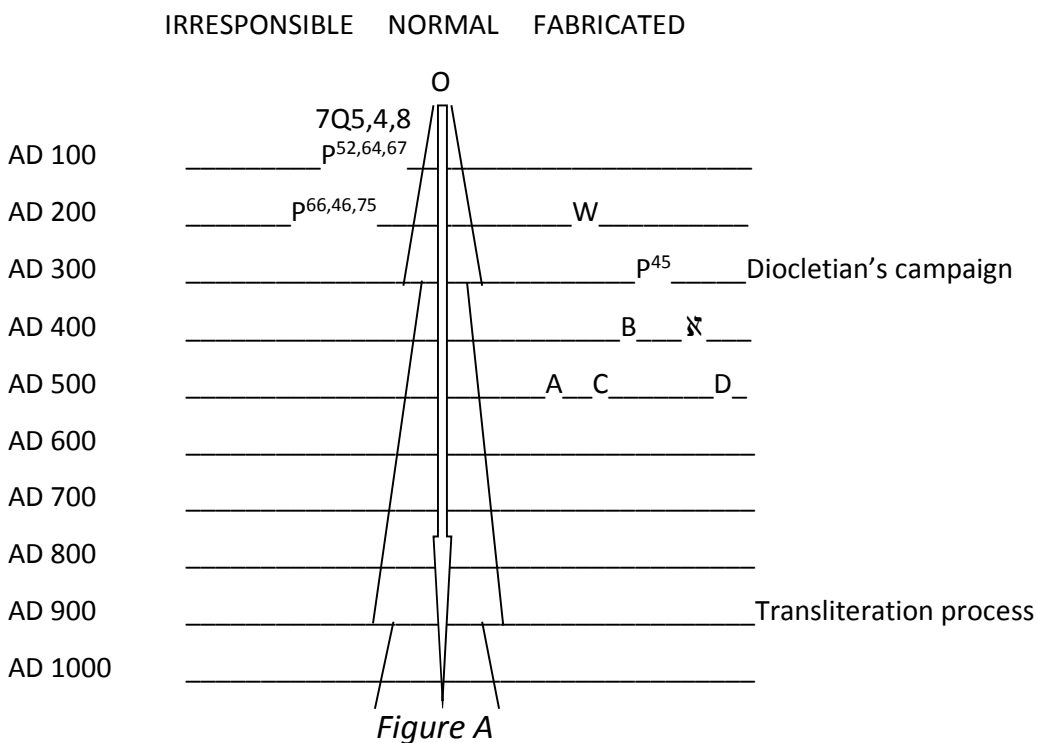


Preserved Text-v10. The Stream of Transmission

Here I am again in the name of the Sovereign Creator of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ. Continuing with the historical evidence for Preservation, I will discuss the stream of transmission.

Now then, what sort of a picture may we expect to find in the surviving witnesses on the assumption that the history of the transmission of the New Testament Text was predominantly normal? We may expect a broad spectrum of copies, showing minor differences due to copying mistakes but all reflecting one common tradition. The simultaneous existence of abnormal transmission in the earliest centuries would result in a sprinkling of copies, helter-skelter, outside of that main stream. The picture would look something like *Figure A*.



The MSS within the cones represent the "normal" transmission. To the left I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the "irresponsible" transmission of the text—the copyists produced poor copies through incompetence or carelessness but did not make deliberate changes. To the right I have plotted some possible representatives of what we might style the "fabricated" transmission of the text—the scribes made deliberate changes in the text (for whatever reasons), producing fabricated copies, not true copies. I am well aware that the MSS plotted on the figure below contain both careless and deliberate errors, in different proportions (7Q5,4,8 and p^{52,64,67} are too fragmentary to permit the classification of their errors as deliberate rather than careless), so that any classification such as I attempt

here must be relative and gives a distorted picture. Still, I venture to insist that ignorance, carelessness, officiousness and malice all left their mark upon the transmission of the New Testament text, and we must take account of them in any attempt to reconstruct the history of that transmission.

Those with some knowledge of textual criticism may wonder at my placing Codex W at 200. The history of the place where Codex W was found suggests that it must have been copied before AD 200: it was found in the ruins of a town that was abandoned in 200 AD when its water dried up. That town is in an isolated area surrounded by desert. Since W shows Byzantine influence, that text-type already existed in the second century.

As the figure suggests, I argue that Diocletian's campaign had a purifying effect upon the stream of transmission. In order to withstand torture rather than give up your MS(S), you would have to be a truly committed believer, the sort of person who would want good copies of the Scriptures. Thus it was probably the more contaminated MSS that were destroyed, in the main, leaving the purer MSS to replenish the earth.¹ The arrow within the cones represents Family 35.

Another consideration suggests itself—if, as reported, the Diocletian campaign was most fierce and effective in the Byzantine area, the numerical advantage of the 'Byzantine' text-type over the so-called 'Western' and 'Alexandrian' would have been reduced, giving the latter a chance to forge ahead. But it did not happen. The Church, in the main, refused to propagate those forms of the Greek text.

What we find upon consulting the witnesses is just such a picture. We have the Majority Text (Aland), or the Traditional Text (Burgon), dominating the stream of transmission with a few individual witnesses going their idiosyncratic ways. In Chapter 4 of my *Identity IV* I demonstrate that the notion of 'text-types' and recensions, as defined and used by Hort and his followers, is gratuitous. Epp's notion of 'streams' fares no better. There is just one stream (actually a river), with a number of small eddies along the edges.² When I say the Majority Text dominates the stream, I mean it is represented in about 95% of the MSS.

Actually, such a statement is not altogether satisfactory because it does not allow for the mixture or shifting affinities encountered within individual MSS. A better, though more cumbersome, way to describe the situation would be

¹ For a fuller discussion of this point, please see the section "Imperial repression of the N.T." in Chapter 6 of my book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV.*, available from Amazon.com as well as from my site, www.prunch.org.

² One might speak of a P⁴⁵,W eddy or a P⁷⁵,B eddy, for example.

something like this: 100% of the MSS agree as to, say, 50% of the Text; 99% agree as to another 40%; over 95% agree as to another 4%; over 90% agree as to another 2%; over 80% agree as to another 2%; only for 2% or so of the Text do less than 80% of the MSS agree, and a disproportionate number of those cases occur in Revelation.¹ [I am not prepared to defend the precise figures used, they are **guesses**, but I believe they represent a reasonable approximation to reality.] And the membership of the dissenting group varies from reading to reading (which is a significant consideration). Still, with the above reservation, one may reasonably speak of up to 95% of the extant MSS belonging to the Majority textual tradition.

I see no way of accounting for a 95% (or 90%) domination unless that text goes back to the Autographs. Hort saw the problem and invented a revision. Harry Sturz seems not to have seen the problem. He demonstrates that the "Byzantine text-type" is early and independent of the "Western" and "Alexandrian text-types", and like von Soden, wishes to treat them as three equal witnesses.² But if the three "text-types" were equal, **how** could the so-called "Byzantine" ever gain a 90-95% preponderance? [In passing, a text produced by taking two 'text-types' against one would move the UBS text about 80% of the distance toward the Majority text.]

Going on, the argument from statistical probability enters here with a vengeance. Not only do the extant MSS present us with one text form enjoying a 95% majority, but the remaining 5% do not represent a single competing text form. The minority MSS disagree as much (or more) among themselves as they do with the majority. For any two of them to agree so closely as do P⁷⁵ and B is an oddity. We are not judging, therefore, between two text forms, one representing 95% of the MSS and the other 5%. Rather, we have to judge between 95% and a fraction of 1% (comparing the Majority Text with the P⁷⁵, B text form for example). Or to take a specific case, in 1 Timothy 3:16 some 600 Greek MSS (besides the Lectionaries) read "God" while only nine read something else. Of those nine, three have private readings and six agree in reading "who".³ So we have to judge between 98.5%

¹ I heartily agree with Colwell when he insists that we must "rigorously eliminate the singular reading" ("External Evidence and New Testament Criticism", *Studies in the History of the Text of the New Testament*, ed. B.L. Daniels and M.J. Suggs [Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1967], p. 8) on the altogether reasonable assumption (it seems to me) that a solitary witness against the world cannot possibly be right.

² Sturz, *Op. Cit.*

³ The readings, with their supporting MSS, are as follows:

o – D

ω – 061

αζ Θεος – one cursive, 256 (and one Lectionary)

αζ – 33,365,442,1175,2127 (plus three Lectionaries)

Θεος – A,C^{vid},F/G^{vid},K,L,P,Ψ, some 600 cursives (besides Lectionaries) (including four cursives that read ο Θεος and one Lectionary that reads Θεου).

It will be observed that my statement differs from that of the UBS text, for example. I offer the following explanation.

Young, Huish, Pearson, Fell, and Mill in the seventeenth century, Creyk, Bentley, Wotton, Wetstein, Bengel, Berriman, and Woide in the eighteenth, and Scrivener as late as 1881 all affirmed, upon careful inspection, that Codex A reads "God". For a thorough discussion please see Burgon, who says concerning Woide, "The learned and conscientious editor of the Codex declares that so late as 1765 he had seen traces of the Θ which twenty years later (viz. in 1785) were visible to him no longer" (*The Revision Revised*, p. 434. Cf. pp. 431-36). It was only after 1765 that scholars started to question the reading of A (through fading and wear the middle line of the *theta* is no longer discernible).

H.C. Hoskier devotes Appendix J of *A Full Account and Collation of the Greek Codex Evangelium 604* (London: David Nutt, 1890) (the appendix being a reprint of part of an article that appeared in the *Clergyman's Magazine* for February 1887) to a careful discussion of the reading of Codex C. He spent three hours examining the passage in question in this MS (the MS itself) and adduces evidence that shows clearly, I believe, that the original reading of C is "God". He examined the surrounding context and observes, "The **contracting-bar** has often vanished completely (I believe, from a cursory examination, more often than not), but at other times it is plain and imposed in the same way as at 1 Timothy iii.16" (Appendix J, p. 2). See also Burgon, *Ibid.*, pp. 437-38.

Codices F/G read *OC* wherein the contracting-bar is a slanting stroke. It has been argued that the stroke represents the aspirate of *ος*, but Burgon demonstrates that the stroke in question never represents breathing but is invariably the sign of contraction and affirms that "*ος* is **nowhere** else written *OC* [with a cross-bar] in either codex" (*Ibid.*, p. 442. Cf. pp. 438-42). Presumably the cross-line in the common parent had become too faint to see. As for cursive 365, Burgon conducted an exhaustive search for it. He not only failed to find it but could find no evidence that it had ever existed (*Ibid.*, pp. 444-45) [I have recently been informed that it was later rediscovered by Gregory].

(I took up the case of 1 Timothy 3:16, in the first edition of my book, *Identity*, solely to illustrate the argument from probability, not as an example of "how to do textual criticism" [cf. Fee, "A Critique", p. 423]. Since the question has been raised, I will add a few words on that subject.)

The three significant variants involved are represented in the ancient uncial MSS as follows: *O*, *OC*, and *ΘC* (with a contracting-bar above the two letters), meaning "which", "who", and "God" respectively. In writing "God" a scribe's omitting of the two lines (through haste or momentary distraction) would result in "who". Codices A, C, F, and G have numerous instances where either the cross-line or the contracting-bar is no longer discernible (either the original line has faded to the point of being invisible or the scribe may have failed to write it in the first place). For both lines to fade away, as in Codex A here, is presumably an infrequent event. For a scribe to inadvertently omit both lines would presumably also be an infrequent event, but it must have happened at least once, probably early in the second century and in circumstances that produced a wide ranging effect.

The collocation "the mystery . . . who" is even more pathologic in Greek than it is in English. It was thus inevitable, once such a reading came into existence and became known, that remedial action would be attempted. Accordingly, the first reading above, "the mystery . . . which", is generally regarded as an attempt to make the difficult reading intelligible. But it must have been an early development, for it completely dominates the Latin tradition, both version and Fathers, as well as being the probable reading of the Syr^p and Coptic versions. It is found in only one Greek MS, Codex D, and in no Greek Father before the fifth century.

Most modern scholars regard "God" as a separate therapeutic response to the difficult reading. Although it dominates the Greek MSS (over 98 percent), it is certainly attested by only two versions, the Georgian and Slavonic (both late). But it also dominates the Greek Fathers. Around AD 100 there are possible allusions in Barnabas, "*Ἰησοῦς . . . ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ τυπῶ καὶ ἐν σαρκὶ φανερωθεῖς*" (Cap. xii), and in Ignatius, "*Θεοῦ ἀνθρώπων φερούμενου*" (*Ad Ephes.* c. 19) and "*ἐν σαρκὶ γενομένου Θεοῦ*" (*Ibid.*, c. 7). In the third century there seem to be clear references in Hippolytus, "*Θεὸς ἐν σωματι ἐφανερωθῆ*" (*Contra Haeresim Noeti*, c. xvii), Dionysius, "*Θεὸς γὰρ ἐφανερωθῆ ἐν σαρκὶ*" (*Concilia*, i. 853a) and Gregory Thaumaturgus, "*καὶ ἐστὶν Θεὸς ἀληθινὸς ὁ ἀσαρκὸς ἐν σαρκὶ φανερωθεῖς*" (quoted by Photius). In the 4th century there are clear quotes or references in Gregory of Nyssa (22 times), Gregory of Nazianzus, Didymus of Alexandria, Diodorus, the Apostolic Constitutions, and Chrysostom, followed by Cyril of Alexandria, Theodoret, and Euthalius in the fifth century, and so on (Burgon, *Ibid.*, pp. 456-76, 486-90).

and 1%, "God" versus "who". It is hard to imagine any possible set of circumstances in the transmissional history sufficient to produce the cataclysmic overthrow in statistical probability required by the claim that "who" is the original reading.

It really does seem that those scholars who reject the Majority Text are faced with a serious problem. How is it to be explained if it does not reflect the Original? Hort's notion of a Lucianic revision has been abandoned by most scholars because of the total lack of historical evidence. The eclecticists are not even trying. The "process" view has not been articulated in sufficient detail to permit refutation, but on the face of it that view is flatly contradicted by the argument from statistical probability.¹ How could any amount of 'process' bridge the gap between B or Aleph and the TR?

But there is a more basic problem with the process view. Hort saw clearly, and correctly, that the Majority Text must have a common archetype. Recall that Hort's genealogical method was based on community of **error**. On the hypothesis that the Majority Text is a late and inferior text form, the large mass of common readings which distinguish it from the so-called 'Western' or 'Alexandrian text-types' must be **errors** (which was precisely Hort's contention) and such an agreement in error would have to have a common source. The process view fails completely to account for such an agreement in error (on that hypothesis).

Hort saw the need for a common source and posited a Lucianic revision. Scholars now generally recognize that the 'Byzantine text-type' must date back at least into the second century. But what chance would the original

As for the grammatically aberrant reading, "who", aside from the MSS already cited, the earliest version that clearly supports it is the gothic (fourth century). To get a clear Greek Patristic witness to this reading pretty well requires the sequence *μυστηριον ος εφανερωθη*, since after any reference to Christ, Savior, Son of God, etc. in the prior context the use of a relative clause is predictable. Burgon affirmed that he was aware of no such testimony (and his knowledge of the subject has probably never been equaled) (*Ibid.*, p. 483).

It thus appears that the "Western" and "Byzantine" readings have earlier attestation than does the "Alexandrian". Yet if "which" was caused by "who", then the latter must be older. The reading "who" is admittedly the most difficult, so much so that to apply the "harder reading" canon in the face of an easy transcriptional explanation [the accidental omission of the two strokes of the pen] for the difficult reading seems unreasonable. As Burgon so well put it:

I trust we are at least agreed that the maxim "*proclivi lectioni praestat ardua*," does not enunciate so foolish a proposition as that in choosing between two or more conflicting readings, we are to prefer **that** one which has the feeblest external attestation,—provided it be but in itself almost unintelligible? (*Ibid.*, p. 497).

Whatever the intention of those editors who choose 'who', their text emasculates this strong statement of the deity of Jesus Christ, besides being a stupidity—what is a 'mystery' about any human male being manifested in flesh? All human beings have bodies. In the Greek Text the relative pronoun has no antecedent, so it is a grammatical 'impossibility'.

¹ For further discussion see the final pages of Appendix C in my *Identity IV*.

‘Byzantine’ document, the archetype, have of gaining currency when appeal to the Autographs was still possible (if it was a separate invention)?

Candidly, there is only one reasonable explanation for the Majority Text that has so far been advanced—it is the result of an essentially normal process of transmission and the common source for its consensus is the Autographs. Down through the centuries of copying, the original text has always been reflected with a high degree of accuracy in the manuscript tradition as a whole. The history of the text presented above not only accounts nicely for the Majority Text, it also accounts for the inconsistent minority of MSS. They are remnants of the abnormal transmission of the text, reflecting ancient aberrant forms. It is a dependence upon such aberrant forms that distinguishes contemporary critical/eclectic editions of the Greek New Testament, and the modern translations based upon them.

I wish to explain that although I have used, of necessity, the term ‘text-type’ in some of my writings, I view the Majority Text as being much broader. It is a textual tradition which might be said to include a number of related ‘text-types’, such as von Soden's K^a, Kⁱ, and K^l. I wish to emphasize again that it is only agreement in error that determines genealogical relationships. It follows that the concepts of ‘genealogy’ and ‘text-type’ are irrelevant with reference to original readings—they are only useful (when employed properly) for identifying spurious readings. Well, if there is a family that very nearly reflects the original its ‘profile’ or mosaic of readings will distinguish it from other families, but most of those readings will not be errors (the competing variants distinctive of other families **will** be errors).