

Preserved Text-v11. What Is the Actual Evidence?

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 actual evidence.

What is the actual evidence that needs to be evaluated? The continuous text MSS are the primary witnesses. The Lectionaries are secondary witnesses. The ancient Versions and patristic citations are tertiary witnesses. Any historical evidence, to the extent that it can be verified, is ancillary. **Attention please:** the relevance of the secondary and tertiary types of evidence depends upon the presuppositions that the original wording was lost, and that the transmission of the text was not normal. Since both those presuppositions are false, I will confine my attention to the primary witnesses, the more so since there are so many of them.

The primary witnesses are customarily treated as being of three types: the papyri, the uncials and the cursives. The papyri and the uncials are both written with upper case letters (often without spacing between words), the difference being in the material used, papyrus or parchment (leather). The cursives are written with lower case letters, often run together, and usually with spacing between words; the material used was parchment or paper. The uncial script was exclusively used until the ninth century, when the first cursive MSS appear. By the eleventh century the cursive script had taken over.

The international list of extant (known) NT MSS is maintained by the Institute for New Testament Textual Research (INTF) in Münster, Germany. It is called the *Kurzgefasste Liste*.¹ As of February, 2018, that list contained 133 papyri, 282 uncials (majuscules) and about 2,850 numbered cursives (minuscules).

The dating of MSS is a slippery business, vulnerable to presupposition, bias and 'party line'. The reader should understand that the dates that have been assigned to the individual MSS may be little more than rough guesses; so much so that they are usually given as a century. When a MS has a specific date, the copyist wrote the date when he finished.

I made a rough tabulation of the papyri by century (taking the later date when there was an option); [This paragraph, and the next, are simply based on the *Liste* (whether I agree, or not).]; going on, they range from the II to the VIII: II—4, III—49, IV—31, V—14, VI—16, VII—16, VIII—3. Of those 133 papyri, 35 have less than five verses (they are mere fragments); [In passing, in my opinion, the only contribution of a fragment is to establish that any variant it

¹ Kurt Aland, ed., *Kurzgefasste Liste der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

contains existed when it was written, if it was not created by the copyist. A fragment earlier than AD 100 establishes that the book existed at that time.] Going on, 76 papyri have between six and twenty verses (still fragments); 13 more have less than two chapters; only 9 of them are of significant size. For some 40 chapters throughout the NT there is no papyrus witness. Only Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, 1 & 2 Peter and Jude have a papyrus witness for one full chapter. Only one papyrus has a complete book: P⁷² contains 1 & 2 Peter and Jude. The importance attached to the papyri will depend on one's presuppositions.

I made a rough tabulation of the uncials by century (taking the later date when there was an option); they range from the III to the XI: III—2, IV—18, V—50, VI—65, VII—36, VIII—27, IX—62, X—20, XI—2. Of these 282 uncials, 182 have less than one chapter (most of them have only a few verses; some even less); another 37 have less than a whole book; only 63 have a complete book or more. The importance attached to the uncials will depend on one's presuppositions.

The cursives range in date from the IX to the XVII centuries. The heavy majority of them, some 2,130, are bunched in four centuries: XI – XIV. Around 90 of them are rather fragmentary, and many more are not complete. Around 25 of them have a number, but so little is known about them that they evidently are not available; and as many more have disappeared from sight. Even so, there are enough left to keep us busy for a long, long time.

Until the invention of paper, the materials used for making copies were papyrus and parchment (leather), both of which are thicker than paper. A complete NT bound in one volume would be rather bulky, and quite expensive. So early on the books started to be bound in smaller groups: the four Gospels, the letters of Paul (including Hebrews), Acts and the General Epistles, with Revelation added on here and there. The Gospels were by far the most popular, followed by Paul's letters. At this writing, we know of around 2,350 MSS (including fragments) that contain some part of the Gospels, around 800 that contain some part of Paul's letters, over 650 that contain some part of Acts, over 600 that contain some part of the Generals, and about 300 that contain some part of Revelation. We know of around 60 complete New Testaments, another 150 that contain all but Revelation, and around 270 that contain Acts through Jude.

Not all of the above will be available for an interested person to work with. Consider the Gospels: of the 2,350 MSS mentioned above, for any single Gospel (like John) the number will be around 2,000. But because of fragments, damage and lacunae, for any given verse the number will be around 1,700.

The INTF in Münster, Germany, holds microfilms of almost all of them. **However**, such an interested person needs to understand that he is not dealing with 1,700 independent witnesses—those MSS represent a variety of lines of transmission, or ‘families’; such families would be the witnesses. For example, Frederik Wisse collated and compared 1,386 MSS in Luke 1, 10 and 20 (three complete chapters); he reduced those MSS to 37 groups (families) (plus 89 “mavericks”)¹. It happens that 36 of the 37 fall within the broad Byzantine river of transmission. He found 70 subgroups within the 36, so he felt able to define those relationships, based on the profiles.

But there will be inter-relationship between families, and to be sure about such relationships we need a scientifically elaborated reconstruction of the history of the transmission of the NT Text. Lamentably, no such reconstruction exists. Worse, due to the soporific effect of the Hortian theory, the families have yet to be defined. I have scientifically defined Family 35 for the whole NT, but so far as I know, no other family has been similarly defined. It may be that no other family exists throughout the entire NT, but that has yet to be determined.

Those who catalog NT MSS inform us that the 12th and 13th centuries lead the pack, in terms of extant MSS, followed by the 14th, 11th, 15th, 16th and 10th, in that order. There are over four times as many MSS from the 13th as from the 10th, but obviously Koiné Greek would have been more of a living language in the 10th than the 13th, and so there would have been more demand and therefore more supply. In other words, many hundreds of really pure MSS from the 10th perished. A higher percentage of the really good MSS produced in the 14th century survived than those produced in the 11th; and so on. That is why there is a progressive level of agreement among the Byzantine MSS, there being a higher percentage of agreement in the 14th than in the 10th. But had we lived in the 10th, and done a wide survey of the MSS, we would have found very nearly the same level of agreement (perhaps 98%). The same obtains if we had lived in the 8th, 6th, 4th or 2nd century. In other words, THE SURVIVING MSS FROM THE FIRST TEN CENTURIES ARE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE TRUE STATE OF AFFAIRS AT THE TIME.²

¹ *The Profile Method for the Classification and Evaluation of Manuscript Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

² Consider what Maurice Robinson concluded as a result of doing a complete collation of 1,389 MSS that contain the Pericope, John 7:53 – 8:11:

However, contrary to this writer’s earlier speculations, the extensive collation of the PA MSS has conclusively demonstrated that cross-comparison and correction of MSS occurred only *rarely* and *sporadically*, with little or no perpetuation of the corrective changes across the diversity of types represented [italics his, also below].

Kurt Aland seems to grant that down through the centuries of church history the Byzantine text was regarded as "the text of the church", and he traces the beginning of this state of affairs to Lucian.¹ He makes repeated mention of a "school of/at Antioch" and of Asia Minor. All of this is very interesting, because in his book he agrees with Adolf Harnack that "about 180 the greatest concentration of churches was in Asia Minor and along the Aegean coast of Greece".² This is the area where Greek was the mother tongue and where Greek continued to be used. It is also the area that started out with most of the Autographs. But Aland continues: "Even around A.D. 325 the scene was still largely unchanged. Asia Minor continued to be the heartland of the Church". "The heartland of the Church"—so who else would be in a better position to identify the correct text of the New Testament? Who could 'sell' a fabricated text in Asia Minor in the early fourth century? I submit that the Byzantine text dominated the transmissional history because the churches in Asia Minor vouched for it. And they did so, from the very beginning, because they knew it was the true text, having received it from the Apostles. The

If cross-correction did not occur frequently or extensively in that portion of text which has more variation than any other location in the NT, and if such corrections as were made did not tend to perpetuate, it is not likely that such a process occurred in those portions of the NT which had less textual variety. . . . the lack of systematic and thorough correction within the PA as well as the lack of perpetuation of correction patterns appears to demonstrate this clearly. Cross-comparison and correction *should* have been rampant and extensive with this portion of text due to the wide variety of textual patterns and readings existing therein; instead, correction occurred sporadically, and rarely in a thoroughgoing manner.

Since this is the case, the phenomenon of the relatively unified Byzantine Textform *cannot* be explained by a "process" methodology, whether "modified" or not. . . .

Based upon the collated data, the present writer is forced to reverse his previous assumptions regarding the development and restoration/preservation of the Byzantine Textform in this sense: although textual transmission itself is a process, it appears that, for the most part, the lines of transmission remained separate, with relatively little mixture occurring or becoming perpetuated. . . .

Certainly, all the types of PA text are distinct, and reflect a long line of transmission and preservation in their separate integrities. . . .

It thus appears that the Byzantine minuscule MSS preserve lines of transmission which are not only independent but which of necessity had their origin at a time well before the 9th century. The extant uncial MSS do not and cannot account for the diversity and stability of PA textual forms found among even the earliest minuscules of the 9th century, let alone the diversity and stability of forms which appear throughout all centuries of the minuscule-era. The lack of extensive cross-comparison and correction demonstrated in the extant MSS containing the PA precludes the easy development of any existing form of the PA text from any other form of the PA text during at least the vellum era. The early uncials which contain the PA demonstrate widely-differing lines of transmission, but not all of the known lines. Nor do the uncials or minuscules show any indication of any known line deriving from a parallel known line. The 10 or so "texttype" lines of transmission remain independent and must necessarily extend back to a point long before their separate stabilizations occurred—a point which seems buried (as Colwell and Scrivener suggested) deep within the second century. ("Preliminary Observations regarding the *Pericope Adulterae* based upon Fresh Collations of nearly all Continuous-Text Manuscripts and over One Hundred Lectionaries", presented to the Evangelical Theological Society, Nov. 1998, pp. 11-13.)

¹ K. Aland, "The Text of the Church?", *Trinity Journal*, 1987, 8NS:131-144 [actually published in 1989], pp. 142-43.

² *The Text of the New Testament*, p. 53.

Majority Text is what it is just because it has always been **the Text of the Church**.

Concluding Remarks

Up to this point I have dealt with the broad river of the normal transmission of the NT Text. This broad river is commonly referred to as the 'Byzantine' text or text-type. But this broad river is made up of many distinct lines of transmission within it—recall that F. Wisse posited 36 such lines, based on his study of Luke, chapters 1, 10 and 20. Among those 36 lines, one is by far the largest, in terms of the number of representative MSS, and I will argue that it is also clearly the best. I call that line of transmission 'Family 35', and my discussion of that 'family' occupies Part II of my book, *God Has Preserved His Text!*¹ There I will argue that Family 35 constitutes the ultimate proof that God has preserved the NT Text.

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*. The book may be ordered from Amazon.com, and it may be downloaded from my site, www.prunch.org, or from www.walkinhiscommandments.com. I here list my conclusions, promising the reader that I will then give the evidence that leads to those conclusions (besides that already given above).

On the basis of the evidence so far available I affirm the following:

- 1) The original wording was never 'lost', and its transmission down through the years was basically normal, being recognized as inspired material from the beginning.
- 2) That normal process resulted in lines of transmission.
- 3) To delineate such lines, MSS must be grouped empirically on the basis of a shared mosaic of readings.
- 4) Such groups or families must be evaluated for independence and credibility.
- 5) The largest clearly defined group is Family 35.

¹ This Part I is basically a reproduction (with a few embellishments) of Chapter 5 in my book, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV*, available from Amazon.com, as well as from my site, www.prunch.org. My refutation of eclecticism, whether 'reasoned' or 'rigorous', occupies Chapter 2 of that book. My refutation of the Westcott-Hort critical theory occupies Chapters 3 & 4. Chapter 6 takes up four "possible objections": 1) Are not the oldest MSS the best?; 2) Why are there no early "Byzantine" MSS?; 3) "But there is no evidence of the Byzantine Text in the early centuries"; 4) Should not witnesses be weighed rather than counted? I direct the interested reader to those discussions.

- 6) Family 35 is demonstrably independent of all other lines of transmission throughout the NT.
- 7) Family 35 is demonstrably ancient, dating to the 3rd century, at least.
- 8) Family 35 representatives come from all over the Mediterranean area; the geographical distribution is all but total.
- 9) Family 35 is not a recension, was not created at some point subsequent to the Autographs.
- 10) Family 35 is an objectively/empirically defined entity throughout the NT; it has a demonstrable, diagnostic profile from Matthew 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. (That profile is given in Part II.)
- 11) The archetypal form of Family 35 is demonstrable—it has been demonstrated.
- 12) The Original Text is the ultimate archetype; any candidate must also be an archetype—a real, honest to goodness, objectively verifiable archetype; there is only one that has been identified so far—Family 35.
- 13) God’s concern for the preservation of the Biblical Text is evident: I take it that passages such as 1 Chronicles 16:15, Psalm 119:89, Isaiah 40:8, Matthew 5:18, Luke 16:17 and 21:33, John 10:35 and 16:12-13, 1 Peter 1:23-25 and Luke 4:4 may reasonably be taken to imply a promise that the Scriptures (to the tittle) will be preserved for man's use (we are to live "by every word of God"), and to the end of the world ("for a thousand generations"), but no intimation is given as to just how God proposed to do it. We must deduce the answer from what He has indeed done—we discover that He **did!**
- 14) This concern is reflected in Family 35; it is characterized by incredibly careful transmission (in contrast to other lines). [I have a perfect copy of the Family 35 archetypal text for most NT books (22); I have copies made from a perfect exemplar (presumed) for another four (4); as I continue to collate MSS I hope to add the last one (Acts), but even for it the archetypal form is demonstrable.]
- 15) If God was preserving the original wording in some line of transmission other than Family 35, would that line be any less careful? 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.
- 16) I affirm that God used Family 35 to preserve the precise original wording of the New Testament Text; it is reproduced in my edition of the Greek

Text. (And God used mainly the Eastern Orthodox Churches to preserve the NT Text down through the centuries—they have always used a Text that was an adequate representation of the Original, for all practical purposes.)

I claim to have demonstrated the superiority of Family 35 based on size (number of representatives), independence (it is demonstrably independent of all other lines of transmission), age (it dates to the 3rd century, at least), geographical distribution (all over the Mediterranean area), profile (empirically determined), care (by the copyists) and range (all 27 books). I challenge any and all to do the same for any other line of transmission!

The Original Text is the ultimate archetype; any candidate must also be an archetype—a real, honest to goodness, objectively verifiable archetype; there is only one that has been identified so far—Family 35.