

The Liturgical system

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So far as I know, Hermann von Soden was the first person to publish an identification and description of the line of transmission, or family of MSS, that I call Family 35, but that he called **K^r** (he used Koine to represent the Byzantine bulk, and 'r' stands for a revision of that bulk).¹

Von Soden repeatedly mentioned the well-known fact that the **K^r** MSS are characterized by an elaborate liturgical apparatus in the margins, including 'begin' and 'end' written within the Text itself, but in ink of a different color, usually red, so the reader would know precisely where to start and stop. Although some non-**K^r** MSS have some indication of lections in their margins, none are so elaborate as **K^r**, with the exception of what Frederik Wisse² called Cluster 17 in Luke, composed of fewer than ten MSS (**K^r** has over 250 in the Gospels). So far as I know, they are the only two groups that have the elaborate liturgical apparatus, so the presence of that apparatus is virtually diagnostic of his **K^r** (my Family 35, **f³⁵**). That much is fact, but what does it mean?

Von Soden gave it as his opinion that the circumstance indicated that his **K^r** was a liturgical revision produced in Constantinople in the XII century, but did not offer so much as a shred of evidence in support of his opinion. (He did try to defend the XII century by re-dating the three **K^r** MSS that he knew of from the XI.) (I hold copies of at least ten such MSS, and there are others, but I will argue that the point is irrelevant.) Now then, it should be obvious to everyone that preparing a copy in two colors with an elaborate apparatus will take more time and effort than a copy in one color without that apparatus. It will also be more expensive to produce. So why would people do it? There had to be a demand for such copies. But what factor, or factors, could drive such a demand?

A MS with a liturgical apparatus was obviously prepared to be used for public reading, to be read aloud to an audience. For private reading and study one wants a text without interruptions. Von Soden actually noted that the individual letters in his **K^r** MSS tended to be somewhat larger than in non-**K^r** MSS. So why would that be? Presumably to facilitate the public reading. So why is **K^r/f³⁵** **by far** the largest family within the broad Byzantine tradition? And why are its representatives scattered all around the Mediterranean world? And how many people could read Koine Greek, and of them, how many could afford a private copy of the NT? After all, 'supply and demand' operates within the Church as well as in the commercial

¹ Soden, Hermann F. von. *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*. 2 vols. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1911, pages 757-765. (His German is difficult to read.)

² *The Profile Method for the Classification and Evaluation of Manuscript Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

world. At first it was the local congregations that required copies, to be joined by the monastic communities, later on.

In 2014 I spent nine nights on the Mt. Athos peninsula, with its twenty independent monasteries. I visited five of them (including the top four in the hierarchy: Megistis Lavras, Vatopediu, Iviron and Dionysiu), slept in three of them and ate meals in two of them. To this day, the monks and visitors eat in silence, while one monk reads Scripture aloud. The monasteries pride themselves on being ruled by tradition, which they affirm goes back to the earliest centuries. Is it not reasonable to conclude that that tradition includes the reading of Scripture during meals? Would they not use MSS that were precisely prepared for public reading? And to what text-type do those MSS belong? And why did they use that text-type? Those MSS belong to Family 35, and they used that family because that was the tradition that they received, a tradition that was passed on down through the centuries.

Quite apart from the Talmud, we know from the NT that it was the custom in the Jewish synagogues to read from the OT writings in their Sabbath meetings. The Lord Jesus Himself did this, as recorded in Luke 4:16-19. At the 'Jerusalem Council' James concluded his decision with: "For from ancient generations Moses has in every city those who preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21). The apostle Paul always began his ministry in a new city with the Jewish synagogue, when there was one. Notice what Acts 13:15 says: "After the reading of the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue leaders sent to them . . ." In a synagogue Paul usually began his speech with: "Men of Israel and you who fear God", the 'you who fear God' referring to Gentiles who were present.

Now in the very beginning the Christian community was mainly made up of Jews and such Gentiles, and they would naturally continue the practice of reading Scripture in their weekly meetings. Recall what gave rise to the office of deacon in Acts 6. "It is not advantageous that we should forsake the Word of God to serve at tables" (verse 2). "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the Word" (verse 4). Of course, at that time their Bible was the OT; the first Gospel, Matthew, not being 'published' until 38/39. However, since the NT writings were recognized as Scripture from the very first, it was natural that they would be added to the OT, and in time probably took the lead. Notice what Justin Martyr wrote in his First Apology (around 150 AD):

On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has

ceased, the president [presiding minister] verbally instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.³

The “memoirs of the Apostles” were the Gospels as we know them (First Apology 66). If one considers Justin’s use of the phrase “memoirs of the Apostles” in all of his writings, one may safely conclude that he accurately refers to two apostles (Matthew and John) and two followers of the apostles (Mark and Luke), which he delineated. Justin used the phrase “memoirs of the Apostles” to reference the four Gospels, but he never used this phrase to reference gnostic or apocryphal gospels.⁴

Notice that the Gospels are mentioned first, before the ‘writings of the prophets’, that would refer to the OT. Justin makes clear that the practice of reading Scripture in the weekly meetings was continued by the Christians, and, as was to be expected, the NT writings came to be preferred. We have no evidence that the practice of reading Scripture in public meetings was ever dropped, at least in the East. Indeed, the very existence of Lectionary manuscripts would be evidence that the practice continued. If the ‘Eusebian Canons’ were actually produced by Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), we have evidence from the early fourth century, and he certainly was merely standardizing what was already being practiced in the churches. So then, when the Mt. Athos monks claim that their practice goes back to the earliest times, they are correct.

Please notice that the lectionary evidence flatly contradicts von Soden’s claim that the lectionary system was created in Constantinople in the 12th century. According to the *Kurzgefasste Liste*⁵ (Feb., 2018), we have one extant lectionary from the IV century, two from the V, two from the VI, two from the VII, fifteen from the VIII, 113 from the IX, 162 from the X and 303 from the XI. Even if we reduce all those numbers by half (to preclude quibble), they demonstrate that von Soden was completely mistaken. It happens that among the extant Lectionaries, the second largest family contains the **K^r/f³⁵** text, but it is small, compared to the dominant family; but please note: the difference is in the wording, not the selection of lections. Von Soden also claimed that the **K^r/f³⁵** text was imposed by ecclesiastical authority. In that event, **how is it that the vast majority of Lectionaries have a different text?** And how could something created in the 12th century supplant an ancient practice? Again, von Soden was completely mistaken.

It should be obvious to everyone that books that are used wear out; the more they are used, the faster they wear. The earliest manuscripts survived because no one wanted to use such poor copies; nor were they copied (why waste good

³ Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James, eds. *The Ante-Nicean Fathers*. American Edition. New York: Christian Literature Co., 1906. I. p. 186.

⁴ Personal communication from Dr. Michael C. Loehrer.

⁵ Kurt Aland, ed., *Kurzgefasste Liste der Griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

parchment?). If the communities used K^r/f^{35} for public reading, those copies would be worn out and could not survive physically. So the lack of early K^r/f^{35} MSS is not necessarily an argument against the text-type.

I will now return to the fact of the liturgical apparatus characteristic of f^{35}/K^r . A lectionary copy would be far easier and faster to produce than a full continuous text copy, quite apart from an apparatus in a different color. Since we have extant lectionaries from the IV and all subsequent centuries, why would anyone go to the extra work of adding a liturgical apparatus to a continuous text copy? And why was that apparatus added to only one text-type?

But first, why were lectionaries prepared, instead of continuous text MSS? As the practice of reading and expounding established passages on specific Sundays became generalized, having to use a full text MS became cumbersome; why not prepare MSS containing only the established lections? Recall that most people could not read and were limited to hearing Scripture during the weekly meetings. Very few people were able to read and study the Scriptures at home. Fewer still would be in a position to make written copies of anything. Scribe was a profession. However, I submit for the consideration of the reader that the very mentality that would consider a lectionary to be a good thing, in itself represented a relaxing of a devout commitment to the precise form of the Sacred Text.

From the fourth century on, if not before, the Roman Church used Latin, not Greek. So who preserved the Greek NT during the middle ages? Increasingly it would have been the Greek speaking monastic communities. By definition a monastery is a religious community; its daily life and very existence derives from and depends upon its religion. For Christian communities, the NT writings would be central to their faith. However, as time went on, tradition took over, and there would be a relaxing of a devout commitment to the precise form of the Sacred Text. This would be reflected in the level of quality control that prevailed in each monastery with reference to the copying of NT MSS. It would also be reflected by the increased production of lectionaries in the monasteries.

The relaxing of quality control in the copying of NT MSS is reflected in the variety of readings to be found among the MSS that make up the broad Byzantine tradition. For three chapters of Luke, F. Wisse identified 36 lines of transmission within that tradition. An average Byzantine MS will have 3 to 5 variants per page of a printed Greek Text (as compared to 15 to 20 for an

Alexandrian MS). The monk was performing a religious duty, but without a personal commitment to the Text. A merely 'ho-hum' f^{35}/K^r MS will have one variant per two pages of a printed Greek Text, while the better ones will only have one variant per four or more pages of a printed Greek Text (the really good ones will be perfect for the shorter books). I have collated a MS with just one variant for the 21 chapters of John; the same MS (GA 586) has just one variant for the 16 chapters of Mark. What does that picture tell us about the mentality of the copyists? How can we account for the extreme care demonstrated by the f^{35}/K^r copyists?

The extant f^{35}/K^r MSS come from isolated monasteries around the Mediterranean world and were produced during five centuries (XI-XV). (I ignore, for the moment, the generations of exemplars that they represent.) There simply was no human agency that could exercise such control. Evidently some monasteries would be more conservative in doctrine and attitude than others, and within a conservative monastery an individual copyist could be committed to the divine authority of the exemplar he was copying. Apart from supernatural participation in the process, the prevailing attitude in certain monasteries plus the personal conviction of individual copyists is the only explanation that I can see for the incredible internal consistency that the f^{35}/K^r MSS demonstrate.

But why would anyone go to the extra work of adding a liturgical apparatus to a continuous text copy, since lectionaries were in plentiful supply? And why was that apparatus added to only one text-type, precisely the one with the greatest internal consistency? Well, what would a conservative monastery do if it wanted to use the established lections for the reading aloud at the community meals, but doing so with a continuous text MS (because of respect for the Text)? The beginning and the ending of the lections would have to be marked somehow. But respect for the Text dictates that such lection markers must not be confused with the Text itself—therefore ink of a different color (which would also help the reader to start and stop at the correct spots).

Well and good, but why choose f^{35}/K^r ? Well, if it is respect for the Text that motivates you to use continuous text MSS, rather than lectionaries, what kind of text are you going to use? If you are aware that the different MSS offer some differences in wording, how will you choose? That very awareness will derive from a conviction within the monastery as to which line of transmission within the MSS has the best pedigree, and it will be that line that deserves your greatest respect. So that is the type of text that you will use. But how is it that isolated monasteries made the same choice? Von Soden opined that a central authority ordered a

revision and imposed it on the monasteries. Since it is demonstrable that f^{35}/K^r is not a revision, on what basis would that imaginary authority make a choice of what text to impose? If that authority was a sincere Christian, would he not choose what he considered to be the best text? Since there was no such authority, we are still left with the question: how is it that isolated monasteries made the same choice? They probably did not make such a choice; they simply continued the tradition that they had received from prior generations.

And they all received the same tradition because there was a generalized conviction throughout the global Christian community as to the identity of the line of transmission with the best pedigree. Since the transmission of the NT Text down through the centuries was essentially normal, from the very start, the conviction about pedigree would be based upon historical evidence. When the Autographs were penned, there were no NT lections. The idea of adding lection markers had to come later; just how much later we have no way of knowing. Somewhere along the line, the first such MS was produced. Was the idea so brilliant that it spread like wild fire? Or did the idea spread slowly? We have no way of knowing. However, whenever it was, those markers were added to the text-type that was being used in the public meetings.

It should be obvious to everyone that preparing a copy in two colors with an elaborate apparatus will take more time, effort and money than a copy in one color without that apparatus. So why would people do it? There had to be a demand for such copies. A MS with a liturgical apparatus was obviously prepared to be used for public reading, to be read aloud to an audience. For private reading and study one wants a text without interruptions. In any case, books that are used wear out. So much so, that monasteries that used a specific text-type for their public reading would be sure to make and keep a number of back-up copies on hand. There would not be the same motivation for text-types that were not used. That may be why f^{35}/K^r is **by far** the largest family within the broad Byzantine tradition, and is the only family that has so far been demonstrated to exist in all 27 books.⁶ (Back-up copies that were never used would have a good chance of surviving.)

⁶ Just by the way, it is common knowledge that the Lectionaries contain no lections from the Apocalypse. What few people know is that some f^{35} MSS do contain a liturgical apparatus in the Apocalypse. Might this be something that deserves further study?