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ARTICLE

THE EARLY ANCESTRY OF THE TEXTUS
RECEPTUS OF THE GOSPELS

WHAT is the earliest 'state' that we can recover of that text of the Gospels which became dominant in the Byzantine period, and which in a deteriorated form became the basis of the printed Textus Receptus? A definite forward step towards the solution of this problem is made in the monograph *Family II and the Codex Alexandrinus* by Silva Lake (Christophers, 1936). This exhaustive study of certain important MSS is a model of how such an investigation should be conducted. All the facts are assembled, cross-collations are given to illustrate the relation between the different families and groups of MSS concerned, and a continuous text is printed of Family II as reconstructed by the editor. To understand the exact angle from which the problem is here attacked, we may glance briefly at the work of previous investigators.

As long ago as 1894 W. Bousset, in his *Textkritische Studien zum Neuen Testament*, endeavoured to isolate what he called *Die KII(M)Gruppe* of Gospel MSS. Later on von Soden added a number of minuscule supporters to KII, but assigned the uncial M to a different family. Besides doing this he gave the group a new importance by including in it the Codex Alexandrinus A; and, presumably in order to emphasize the inclusion of this famous MS, he designated the whole group by the symbol K^a . In his Introduction von Soden classes this K^a text with his K^1 and K^i as one of the three oldest subdivisions of the Byzantine text (which he names the *Kovή*, hence the symbol *K*), to which Hort gave the name 'Syrian', and which Lake calls 'the ecclesiastical'. Following Hort's tentative

suggestion von Soden (rightly, I think) believed this text to be based on a recension by Lucian of Antioch, *c.* A.D. 300. In his *Apparatus Criticus*, however, von Soden treats the *K*^a text as a 'weak' form of what he calls the *I* text (i.e. as a descendant of an *I* MS, the great majority of whose readings have been conformed to the *K* text), and he cites it as *I*^{ka}.

It is at this point that Mrs Lake's investigation begins. The most important and the most certain of the conclusions reached is summed up in the fact that she is enabled to give to this group of MSS the name of 'Family *II*'.

First, she herself, Professor Lake, and Dr Norman Huffman have each collated or identified several MSS not included in von Soden's list, bringing the number examined in this monograph up to twenty-one. Then, on the basis of these collations, a table is submitted in which is given the percentage of readings characteristic of the family contained in each of these twenty-one MSS. The result is summarized as follows:—

'With five manuscripts attesting more than ninety-five per cent. of the readings and eleven more than ninety per cent., it is obvious that this is a family of MSS, rather than a loosely related group, and that a practically perfect Family text can be reconstructed from the evidence of the three best witnesses. If all those just mentioned are included, the theoretical margin of error in the reconstructed text is reduced almost to the vanishing point.'

But one of these MSS, the uncial *II*, contains 98.96 per cent. of the family readings. In fact, only in twelve readings in the Gospel of Mark—the only gospel treated in the monograph—does *II* differ from a theoretical archetype of the whole family, and five of these are corrected in a hand hardly, if at all, later than that of the original scribe. It seems, then, more probable that *II* is itself the archetype of the whole family than that we must postulate a lost MS whose text differed from that of *II* in only seven variants, all of them unimportant.

It appears, then, that this group of twenty-one MSS is comparable to the Ferrar group, all of which are beyond doubt descended from a single uncial MS (probably sixth-century)—only in the present case the archetype itself survives in the ninth-century MS *II*. Incidentally, it is shewn that the uncial *K* is a representative of the family (it has 88.60 per cent. of the family

readings) with a text decidedly inferior to that of many of the minuscules. This is a salutary warning against the idea—still subconsciously influential in the minds of scholars—that uncial evidence is *as such* superior to minuscule.

We come now to the second main conclusion of Mrs Lake's investigations: the Codex Alexandrinus is definitely *not* a member of this family. In fact, in including A in the same group as **II** and its relatives, von Soden makes the same kind of mistake as he did when he included the Codex Bezae in the same group as **Θ** and its allies.

But although A is not a member of Family **II**, it shares a number of readings with the family. Since, then, A is a MS of the fifth century, while **II** is assigned to the ninth, the question must be asked, Is it possible to explain the points of contact on the hypothesis that **II** is a direct descendant of A? This question Mrs Lake answers in the negative, and produces conclusive reasons for so doing.

What, then, is the relation of A to **II**? Mrs Lake argues that they both descend from a common ancestor, which could hardly be later than the fourth century. She then proceeds to argue that this fourth-century archetype is much more accurately reproduced in **II** than in A, and throws out, in a footnote, the interesting suggestion that **II** may represent the recension of Lucian of Antioch in something very near its original form. At this point her arguments just fail to carry conviction to my mind. She may be right, but the considerations adduced seem hardly sufficient to prove it.

Some years ago, in an Appendix to my book *The Four Gospels* (p. 579), I very tentatively threw out the suggestion that Lucian's recension may be best preserved in A. But that suggestion was made on the provisional hypothesis that I could accept two contentions of von Soden:

(1) that his *K^a* text is a real entity—in which A, as well as **KII** and its supporters, can be included;

(2) that this *K^a* text was used by Chrysostom in his Homilies on John, in the commentary on Luke by Titus of Bostra, *c.* 370, and by the author of the 'Antiochene Commentary' (? 420).

Mrs Lake, however, has now disproved the existence of the *K^a* text. It is therefore no longer possible to draw any inference

from the patristic evidence alleged by von Soden until it is thoroughly re-examined.

I would, therefore, put forward the suggestion that there is an alternative method of exploring the question, What is the earliest form of the 'Lucianic' or Ecclesiastical text?—a method which (to the best of my belief) has not been essayed by any student of the subject.

We possess three very ancient MS authorities, apparently completely independent, each of which, while giving a text which is dominantly 'Lucianic', has a relatively small proportion of readings which occur in the other types of text.

(a) The earliest of these is the remarkable MS W (late fourth or early fifth century), which in Matthew, and in Luke viii 13 to the end, has a mainly 'Lucianic' type of text.

(b) Next comes the Codex Alexandrinus (fifth century) which has lost the early part of Matthew (up to xxv 6), but has a predominantly 'Lucianic' text for the rest of the Gospels.

(c) There are the sister Purple MSS N and Σ , which have been shewn to be copies of the same immediate ancestor. This ancestor must at the latest be dated near the beginning of the sixth century and may well have been earlier. In N and Σ between them the whole of Matthew and Mark, and about half of Luke and John, are preserved.

Now the non-Lucianic elements in these three authorities are very diverse from one another; hence the common ancestor from which derives their dominant text must be dated well back in the fourth century. If, then, those portions of Matthew and Luke which survive in all three were carefully compared, and a text formed on the basis of the agreement of any two against the third, we should have *approximately* a fourth-century text of this recension for a part of Matthew and Luke substantial enough to enable us to estimate its character. I say 'approximately' for, when a text is preserved in three MSS, it is always probable that a few readings of the original are preserved in only one of the three. This reconstructed text could then be compared with von Soden's K^1 text (i.e. S, V, Ω), his K^i text (E, F, G, H), and with the text of the Π family. It would then appear which view is right—that of Mrs Lake who supposes that Lucian's recension is best preserved in Family Π , or that of von Soden who finds it in SV Ω .

H. A. Sanders, in his volume on W (The Macmillan Co. of New York, 1912), p. 96 (compare also p. 48), says of the 'Antiochian' (i.e. of the Byzantine) element in W: 'While W differs often from the derived forms of the Antioch recension (noted by von Soden as K^a , K^i , &c.), it does not agree with these against the original type of the recension, as shewn in the MSS S, V, Ω , &c. (K^1 of von Soden).' If (as I think would prove to be the case) the text of N and Σ could be explained as a K^1 text with a few Caesarean readings, the text of Π could be explained as a K^1 text crossed with a *different* set of Caesarean readings. In that case it would be shewn that von Soden, on this particular point, is in the right. But even so, it would (for reasons too complicated to state here) actually strengthen Mrs Lake's arguments for the hypothesis that Π descends from a fourth-century MS which is also an ancestor of A.

It may at first sight seem surprising that, alike on von Soden's and on Mrs Lake's view, the purest form of the text of Lucian's recension should be preserved in MSS not earlier than the ninth century (von Soden assigns Ω to the eighth century, but Dr R. P. Blake is convinced it is late ninth or tenth). The fact, however, becomes easily explicable when we remember that in the ninth century there was a notable revival of learning in the Byzantine Empire. A natural result of this would be to cause Christian scholars to seek a better text of the Gospels by going back from current texts to more ancient MSS. The Menologies say that Lucian bequeathed to his pupils copies of the LXX and the New Testament written in his own hand. When Antioch was submerged in the Mahommedan invasions, a number of Christian refugees would certainly have fled to Constantinople, bringing with them their most valued portable possessions. Lucian's autograph or an early copy of it might well have reached Constantinople in this way. An analogy may be found in the effect of the revival of learning under Charlemagne on the text of the Latin classics. MSS of the seventh and eighth centuries—I derived the information from the late Prof. A. C. Clark—are full of corruptions which do not occur in MSS of the subsequent period.

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