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Greek Manuscript Leaves, New Testament Lectionary

On the Style and Substance in Fragments of a Greek Manuscript¹

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Manuscripts are a crossroad in research because they are at the same time both an artifact of material culture and a piece of literature. Although not on display, the Dunham Bible Museum possess many manuscripts within their archives, one of which, cataloged as 2011.63a-d, is a four page collection of Greek New Testament writings. Through an examination of both the material substance and by indexing the numerous stylistic ligatures throughout the document, it can be demonstrated that the Greek Manuscript Leaves was written on Italian paper from the first half of the 1500's.

Prior to going into the details of its style, the material substance of the manuscript ought to be described. The museum holds four pages from the entire original lectionary codex which have writing on both front and back. For ease of reference, Page A (f) will indicate the front of Page A, while Page A (b) will indicate the back. The codex was written on a distinctive brown paper in a folio size with a relatively soft texture. On Pages A and C, the paper itself is watermarked with both a primary and a secondary countermark. The primary mark, lying in the center of the page, represents a flat-bottomed balance enclosed by a circle which is then surmounted by smaller duplicated circles and a six point star. Two individual letters compose the countermark and they are placed in the lower left hand corners of the pages which include the primary mark. When observing the watermarks under the necessary light, six chain lines also become visible. A chain line is what remains on the paper from the vertical wires which helped hold the paper in place during production.² Looking at the actual writing, the script appears to be

² Dard Hunter. *Papermaking, The History and Technique of an Ancient Craft* (New York: Dover Publications, 1943), 264.

a late Byzantine hand divided into two columns on each side with twenty-three lines of text in each column.

When attempting to place and date a manuscript written on paper, the first order is to match the watermark with any that have been previously archived. If such a thing can be done, and the particular paper mill is identified, then one not only gleans a date but also a location. In this case, the largest and most encyclopedic compendium of watermarks, Briquet's *Les Filigranes: Dictionnaire Historique des Marques du Papier Dès Leur Apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600*, failed to produce a mark which met the requirements of both the primary and the countermark. That said, a number of balances resemble the primary mark on 2011.63 which allows for a general location and date to be postulated. Looking specifically at *Les Filigranes 02601* and those related to it, an Italian origin from around 1500 presents itself. Briquet also provides a narrower location for the balances, explaining that, “Il est devenu banal dans les Etats de Venise et le papier à cette marque (revêtant des formes variées et accompagnée de nombreuses contremarques) est très abondant.”³ Continuing this thought, a plausible terminus ante quem arises when he remarks, “Toutefois, la balance a été abandonnée très subitement comme filigr.; on ne la trouve plus, après 1555, qu’exceptionnellement dans deux ou trois documents.”⁵ The peculiar history of Greek manuscripts written on paper after the invention of the printing press confirms the date and location. Greek manuscripts were primarily written on Italian papers after 1200, and countermarks did not begin to appear en masse until the start of the 16th century.⁶ From a substantival examination of the material facts an Italian origin and a range of dates from 1500-1555 seems most likely.

³ Charles Moïse Briquet. *Les Filigranes: Dictionnaire Historique des Marques du Papier Dès Leur Apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600* (Paris: A. Picard & fils, 1907), 178. Trans.

Shifting attention to the actual style and content of the text brings the historical context of the artifact into clearer focus. The pages are fragments of a Gospel Lectionary, specifically from the Vesper readings on Holy Thursday and the Matins of Holy Friday. In order to more clearly explain the relation of the passages to each other and the liturgy here is a chart detailing the extant passages and the corresponding reading: “It [the balance] had become common in the State of Venice, and the paper with this mark (coming back in various forms and accompanied by a number of countermarks) is very abundant.”⁴ “However, the balance was abandoned quite suddenly as a watermark; it is no longer found, after 1555, except in two or three documents.”⁵

Page	Selection	Lectionary
Page A (f)	Matthew 26:52-60	Holy Thursday, Vespers
Page A (b)	Matthew 26:60-69	Holy Thursday, Vespers
Page B (f)	Matthew 26:69-27:2	Holy Thursday, Vespers
Page B (b)	John 13:31-38	Holy Friday, Matins, a7
Page C (f)	John 14:20-28	Holy Friday, Matins, a
Page C (b)	John 14:28-15:5	Holy Friday, Matins, a
Page D (f)	John 18:23-28 / Matt.	Holy Friday, Matins, β/.
Page D (b)	26:57-59	Holy Friday, Matins, . ⁶
	Matthew 26:59-67	

⁴ Briquet, *Les Filigranes*, 178. Trans.

⁵ Robert W. Allison. *Archive of Watermarks and Papers in Greek Manuscripts* (2001).

⁶ Note that the Matins for Holy Friday are conducted on the evening of Holy Thursday.

Pages A-B (f) are the conclusion of the Vespers which then leads directly into the first of the Twelve Gospel readings of the Passion. Thus the heading on Page B (b) reads, “e.a..e..a d.de.a t.. 'a.....st.. pa...,” albeit in an extremely abbreviated style.⁷ The following line starts with an a indicating that it is the first reading which finds its parallel on Page D (f) when, next to the start of the reading from Matthew, a . signifies that it is the beginning of the third reading. Returning to Page B (b), the actual text is preceded by an abbreviated, “e. t.. [e.a..e....] .ata ..a....,”⁸ which is again mirrored on Page D (f). The body of the text itself is highly abbreviated and various ligatures cover the all of the pages.⁹ The rushed and imprecise nature of the script is further attested to by the larger letters and the wide bulbous strokes. Additionally, a second scribe takes over for the column on the right of Page B (f). This second writer's style falls short of the primary scribe as the graphemes are even larger, more erratic with the stroke patterns, and there are several conspicuous errors. However, by the first column on Page B (b) the original scribe resumed his station and finished the rest of the manuscript.

The foremost conclusion derived from the observations is that the abbreviated construction of the minuscule text indicates a later date. When discussing Greek minuscule texts, they are divided into four categories based on age beginning with the *codices vetustissimi* (9th - 10th),

⁷ Cf. Note I on the Abbreviations and Ligatures from Manuscript below. Translation of the phrase: “The twelve gospels of the holy suffering of Christ.”

⁸ Cf. Note II on the Abbreviations and Ligatures from Manuscript below. Trans. “from the gospel according to John.”

⁹ Cf. The index of Nomina Sacra and Ligatures below for the great variety of forms found throughout the document.

then the *codices vetusti* (10th – mid 13th), *codices recentiores* (mid 13th – mid 15th), and lastly the *codices novelli* (everything post the mid 15th).¹⁰ Based on the previous conclusions concerning the date of 2011.63 it should be classified as a *codices novelli* which then allows for the dating to be reassured by the paleographical style. When comparing the style of this manuscript to manuscripts of the preceding period the progression from the less abbreviated neater style of the *codices recentiores* to the sloppier abbreviated method employed in the *novelli*.¹¹ Thus the paleographical approach gives further credence to dating 2011.63 from the first half of the 1500's.

The most striking aspect of this document is that it provides a synthesis of Greece, Italy, and Jerusalem in the context of world which had just seen the fall of Constantinople and the blossoming of the printing press. In such a setting at the beginning of the 16th century two scribes composed this humble manuscript. Many speculations could be drawn about the writers and the purpose of the manuscript from the evidence which, while interesting, would take too long. Suffice it to say, these Greek Manuscript Leaves are marvelous footnotes from a time in which the church and the world transitioned into the first stages of modernity.

¹⁰ Edward M. Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 220.

¹¹ Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography*, 265-268.

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