

## Introduction to the Greek Lectionary

It has long been inquired if there is a definite identifiable textual grouping within the great number of Greek manuscripts that make up the lectionary tradition. There have been various studies done beginning with the Colwell articles in the 30's and most recently by Christopher Jordan in his recent 2009 doctoral dissertation available for study at CSPMT with his study of the lectionary tradition in John.

Ernest Colwell was the first to bring out the fact that to understand lectionary manuscript tradition one must collate the manuscripts lection by lection rather than just incipits, columns, decorations and so forth. Colwell saw value in these types of studies regarding the lectionary manuscripts, but to arrive at the text exemplar one needed to collate the lectionaries lection by lection. The issue becomes if one did do the lection by lection collation, would there be understanding of the collations and text variants at the end of the study? Probably not. Most textual scholars simply have not taken the time or interest to value the study of the textual profile patterns within majority text continuous manuscripts which leads even to greater difficulties in lectionary text studies when attempting to understand them more fully.

First of all, a basic understanding of the lectionary system is necessary before internal lection by lection collation is possible. The following description is brief but will provide possibly some keys to understand the lectionary system for further collation and textual studies.

The great lectionary of the Greek Orthodox Church was a development over time. Yet, the question remains how early and in what time frame during the manuscript tradition of the Greek lectionary text develop. It was at least in development by the 300's to the best estimate based upon the early Church Fathers and extant the manuscripts. The "lections" or gospel readings first developed with the synaxarion then later with the menologion being added. There are also incipits and explicits or opening and closing formulae for the lectionaries such as for the incipits, "*On a certain occasion*" or, "*The Lord said to his disciples*" or finally, "*the Lord said to the Jews who had come to Him*". There are variations in the later menologion sections but generally one finds this type of incipit introducing the gospel reading. The lections range usually from two or three verses to as much as three to four chapters. Usually about ten verses on average. Sometimes being mixed verse readings skipping one to another then others are straight forward reading blocks.

Much more could be said on the finer details of the lectionary system but it basically comes down to understanding the *synaxarion* and *menologion* sections and their seasons. The synaxrion consists for lections for the *ecclesiastical* (movable year) running from Pascha (Easter) to Pascha and the menologian *calendar* (fixed year) from September 1<sup>st</sup> through August and dedicated to the Saints and their specific feast days. The synaxrion lection readings begin with

John having lections for Saturday, Sunday and week-days. The manuscripts are divided into those including only week-day readings, some with weekday plus weekend i.e. Saturday-Sunday readings and still others with Saturday-Sunday lections only. Again, the Gospel of John again begins the synaxarion lections for the synaxarion including lections for the entire week from Easter to Pentecost. The margins often contain give the day of the week or above the opening given lections.

Matthew in the synaxarion gives the lections from Pentecost to approx. the 1<sup>st</sup> of September. Most of Matthean lections are Saturday-Sunday lections only. That is why the Johannine section beginning the synaxarion is crucial in text type study and identification i.e. more variant sets in which to collate and more internal text type identifiable gospel lections available. In the Matthean section about the first half of week day lessons are from Matthew but the second half roughly being from the Gospel of Mark.

The Gospel of Luke gives lections from the Sunday following September 14 to the beginning of Lent. Again like Matthew three-fifths from Luke for Saturday-Sunday lections only and the rest for week-day lections only. The end of the Lukan section contains readings from chapters eight on from the Gospel of Mark.

The next section of the synaxarion is the Markan section lections for Saturdays and Lenten Sundays along with a couple lections also from John leading up until Holy week with gospel lections varying from manuscript to manuscript and from all four gospels. This ends the synaxarion cycle.

After Holy Week in the lectionary begins the menologion section which dates later in composition in the manuscript tradition of the Greek lectionary. It is composed of lections again (gospel readings) for various saints' days and festivals some varying from church to church therefore at times varying in the lection read as well. This is where the more difficulty arrives in deciphering the text type. Due to later introduction into the Greek lectionary, the menologion of the first manuscripts including the menologion the lection text type changes from synaxarion to menologion as does the overall textual profile. Less so the case in the later grouping of manuscripts as Antoniades observed.

In the next sequel to our review of Greek lectionaries some terms used in lectionaries will be defined. We will then give a summary to the history of study into the lectionaries and then finally a general summary on this large Greek manuscript tradition.

Blessings

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