

The Reading of Codex Alexandrinus in 1 Timothy 3:16

Verification of Dean Burgon's Evidence

Graham G. Thomason, 13th March 2019

Minor revisions, 17 March 2023, 19 November 2024

www.FarAboveAll.com

Introduction

Codex Alexandrinus, also known as GA 02 (i.e. in Gregory-Aland numbering), or simply Alexandrinus, or just A, is an uncial Greek manuscript, held in the British Library, containing most of the Septuagint and most of the New Testament, and it is dated as the fifth century by both [Scrivener-PI, vol.1, p.101] and [INTF-Liste], although Scrivener also allows for it to be late fourth century. Of manuscripts containing a substantial part of the New Testament, only Sinaiticus (Ⲡ, Aleph, GA 01) and Vaticanus (B, GA 03) are claimed to be older¹, and for Paul's epistles, only Ephraemi Rescriptus (GA 04) rivals its age. As such, Codex Alexandrinus is, *a priori*, an important witness to the text.

The issue, for which we will require the testimony of Alexandrinus, is the reading of 1 Timothy 3:16. The opposing readings, in manuscript uncials², are:

- The traditional reading:
Θ̄C̄ ΕΦΑΝΕΡΩΘΗ ΕΝ ΣΑΡΚΙ (where Θ̄C̄³ is the abbreviated form of ΘΕΟC, *God*)
God was manifested in the flesh
- The reading given in most modern Bibles:
ΟC ΕΦΑΝΕΡΩΘΗ ΕΝ ΣΑΡΚΙ
He who was manifested in the flesh

The differences are in the word Θ̄C̄ *God* or ΟC *He who*, where we read a theta, Θ, or an omicron, Ο. The overlining of Θ̄C̄ testifies to ΘΕΟC, but we do not date it, or press that argument, so as not to cloud the stronger argument of the historicity of the line *inside* the theta. When discussing Alexandrinus, we need the term “the old line”, for there is also a new line, and it is the existence of the old line which is at the heart of the dispute. There is considerable historical evidence to be assessed.

Some background

When the Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1881, Dean John William Burgon (1813 - 1888) reviewed it, and the new Greek text on which it was based, and saw that it was very much a deviation from the traditional text of Scripture. He provided a mass of ancient evidence supporting traditional readings – in other words in support of the Majority Text. His defence of 1 Timothy 3:16, *God was manifested in the flesh*, (where the Revisers have replaced *God* by *he*), can be found in his book *Revision Revised*, which we hereafter refer to as [Burgon-RR], pages 424-520. The present article verifies, as much as possible (and we claim considerable success), Burgon's research on Codex Alexandrinus.

¹ Sinaiticus is claimed by some, notably Dr Bill Cooper, to be an eighteenth-century production, misrepresented as ancient. See *The Forging of Codex Sinaiticus*, published by the Creation Science Movement. Valid concerns are raised.

² The modern printed Σ is C in manuscripts, and Ω is Θ. Unicode offers *lunate sigma* (U+03F9) and *Latin omega* (U+A7B6), as used here.

³ Our overlining is Unicode U+0305 *combining overline*. It does not render particularly well on our computer.

The issue in detail, as we reconstruct it

In Alexandrinus the old line in the theta (Θ) of ΘC, *God*, was the only line until someone retouched the manuscript with new bold line, which, however, did not completely obliterate the old line. We¹ propose that the retouching took place in (mid, say) 1716 when the line was becoming faint. We motivate this as follows: in 1716 it would appear that **Bentley** saw just the old line, but later that year, it is clear that **Creyk** saw a new line as well as the old. The old line stretched at least to the left hand periphery, as testified by Mill in his New Testament (ad partem sinistram ... pertingit). We summarize below our findings, based largely on examining the sources given by Dean John William Burgon, especially the dissertation by John **Berriman** (reference [Berriman]) and various editions of the Greek New Testament by collators, or editors who had been informed by collators.

We present and number the witnesses to the events described above, in the order in which Burgon discusses them, but with Burgon's seventh and eighth witnesses reversed, for chronological reasons. Our references are given after the account. The names of those who saw the old line in the manuscript are printed in bold. The names of others who communicated the reading are underlined. As mentioned above, we infer that the theta was re-touched in 1716, though **Berriman** (p.157) attributes this somewhat earlier: "most probably" to Patrick **Young**. Even if we are mistaken in assigning the date as 1716, the testimonies still stand, because the pre-1716 witnesses would surely have seen the old line as well as the new. Based on our inference, the testimonies divide into three groups.

- **Pre-mid-1716.** There was just what is *now* called "the old line", with no controversy that we are aware of about the reading – no talk of the "old line" and the "new line" – so just a line with no need to remark on it, except as time progressed to note that it was becoming faint (Mill, below). The line must have been seen by collators, otherwise there would have been a glaring issue about a variant reading. It follows that the line was seen by (1) Patrick **Young** (1584 - 1652), who communicated his collation to Archbishop James Ussher (1581 - 1656), who communicated them to Henry Hammond (1605 - 1660), who published a commentary in 1659, (2) Alexander **Huish** (1594? - 1668), who communicated his collation to Brian Walton (1600 - 1661) who published his Polyglott Bible in 1657, (3) Bishop John **Pearson** (1613 -1686), (4) Bishop John **Fell** (1625 - 1686), who published his edition of the New Testament in 1675, (5) Dr John **Mill** (1645-1707), who published an edition of the New Testament in 1707, and remarked that "the line" (not "the old line" – in his Latin: "lineolea", not "vetus lineola") was becoming faint; and (6) Richard **Bentley** (1662 – 1742) in 1716.
- **Earlier years post-mid-1716.** The place now contains the new line as well as the old, so the original line is harder to discern, both because it is becoming fainter, and because it is partly obscured by the new line, and also because of damage by repeated touching the place. The testimonies borne are now all very explicit, because the seed has been sown for dispute. The witnesses testifying to the old line are (7) John **Creyk** (1688–1747) in 1716, (8) William **Wotton** (1666 - 1727) in 1718, (9) John James **Wetstein**² (1693 - 1754), (10) John **Berriman** (1691-1768), (11) Johann Albrecht **Bengel** (1687 - 1752) and (12) Karl Gottfried **Woide** (1725 - 1790). Berriman also mentions (13) and (14) **two Gentlemen** (p.156 of his Dissertation); the marginal note of the British Library copy names four, but only Mr Hewitt and Mr Pilkington are expressly stated to have seen the old line.

¹ Burgon does not date the new line.

² Also known as Johann Jakob Wettstein [Wikipedia's preference].

- **Later years post-mid-1716.** The controversy starts, with critics basing their view as to the original reading solely on what they could themselves observe¹. We print their surnames in bold italics, distinguishing them from the witnesses to ΘC. *Wetstein* (mentioned above) and Johann Jakob *Griesbach* (1745 - 1812), originally for ΘC, changed their mind; compare the latter's 1809 and 1818 editions, the former edition being joint work with Johannes Leusden (1624 - 1699). Later famous critics militating against ΘC are Karl Konrad Friedrich Wilhelm *Lachmann* (1793 - 1851), Samuel Prideaux *Tregelles* (1813 - 1875), Lobegott Friedrich Constantin von *Tischendorf* (1815 - 1874), Brooke Foss *Westcott* (1825 - 1901), Fenton John Anthony *Hort* (1828 - 1892), Eberhard *Nestle* (1851 - 1913), Bruce Manning *Metzger* (1914–2007) and Kurt *Aland* (1915 - 1994). The chairman of the Revising Committee for the Revised Version, Bishop Charles John *Ellicott* (1819 - 1905), took the view that the historical evidence was insufficient, and he militated against ΘC in favour of OC, which is why the Revised Version reads “He who was manifested in the flesh...”

The above summary, in the first two bullet points, cites 14 witnesses to the presence of the old line in the theta, many from entirely different original sources. Can it really be claimed that this is of such slight value that it can be overruled by what is seen *now* in the manuscript? Scrivener (Plain Introduction, vol.2, p.392) states that Bishop Ellicott examined the manuscript [in about 1881], failed to see the old line, and declared that the original(!) reading was indisputably(!) OC. There is no mention of, let alone discussion about, the history of the manuscript in Metzger's *Textual Commentary On The Greek New Testament*, where we simply read A^{*vid}, i.e. *Alexandrinus by the first hand apparently*, in support of OC, denying the old line out of hand.

The references to the witnesses, and their testimonies (highlighted)

- **The Dissertation by Berriman** including the marginal remarks in the British Library copy is available at <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OJxhAAAaAAJ&pg=PA155#v=onepage&q&f=false>. This testifies to the following witnesses as we have numbered them above, presented in the order in which Berriman presents them.
 - № 5 **Mill (p.153)** – but we can also verify Mill directly; see below.
 - № 2 **Huish/Walton (pp.153-154)** – but we can also verify Walton's Polyglott directly; see below.
 - № 6 **Bentley (p.154 and margin)** – his collations include Alexandrinus [Scrivener-PI, vol.2, p.207], now at Trinity College, Cambridge, but we have not found them online. [Scrivener-PI, vol.1, p.103 margin] states that Bentley's collation is contained in Fell's Greek N.T. of 1675. Berriman reports that Bentley “declared that **it had been collated by Mr Huish with great Exactness**”.
 - № 8 **Wotton (p.154)** – He “declares it to be **past all Doubt that it ever [=always] read ΘC̄, i.e. ΘEOC in this Place**”. We take this as a verbal communication, so not traceable further.
 - № 7 **Creyk (p.154 and margin)** – apparently a verbal personal assurance given to Berriman, that “He saw the Alex[andrian] MS above five and twenty Years ago, and that **the old Line in the Letter Θ was then plainly to be seen.**”
 - № 9 **Wetstein (p.155 and margin)** – verbally communicated by Wetstein to J. Kippax, and thence in writing to Berriman that, “though the middle Stroke of the Θ has been

¹ Some, notably Wetstein [Eclectic Review, July-December 1815, p.181] and Ellicott [Burgon-RR, p.431], argue that the sagitta of the epsilon on the reverse side of the page militates against the line in the theta, but this is hardly a proof, and the positioning is such that if it were to be taken for the line in the theta, it would be abnormally positioned and would be cause for remarks, which we never encounter.

evidently retouch'd, yet the fine Stroke, which was originally in the Body of the Θ IS DISCOVERABLE AT EACH END OF THE FULLER STROKE OF THE CORRECTOR.”¹

№ 10 **Berriman himself (pp.155-156)**. He says, “though I could never perceive any Part of the old tran[s]verse Line by the naked Eye ... yet by the help of a Glass, and the advantage of the Sun shining on the Book, I could see some part of the old Line, toward the left Hand of the new Stroke, within the Circle of the Θ, and the same was seen by two Gentlemen ...”

№ 13, №14 The **two Gentlemen** (Mr Hewitt and Mr Pilkington); see № 10 above.

We regard Berriman as a very reliable witness, partly because some of his claims are verifiable, and partly because, as the title page informs us, the material was preached in lectures in St Paul's Cathedral, so it was open to much public scrutiny. His book is also valuable for its Church Father references.

- № 5 The statement by **Mill**, “*vestigia satis certa deprehendi*”, (I sufficiently certainly discerned vestiges) can be seen in the CSNTM scan of page 624 of Mill's 1707 New Testament, http://images.csntm.org/PublishedWorks/JohnMillNovumTestamentum1707/Mill_NovumTestamentum_1707_0312b.jpg linked to from this page: <http://www.csntm.org/Library/Books>.
- № 2 **Huish's** collation, which is surely reflected in Brian **Walton's** Polyglott, published in 1708, is available online. The claim that the Polyglott incorporated the various readings of Alexandrinus collated by **Huish** is attested by **Berriman**, and the Polyglott has no mention of ὄς in Alexandrinus at 1 Timothy 3:16. For the critical remarks, see https://archive.org/stream/WaltPoly1PrologVariantReadings/WaltPoly1_Prolog%26VariantReadings%29#page/n437/mode/2up For the text, where Θεός is read, see <https://archive.org/details/WaltPoly1PrologVariantReadings/page/n163>
- № 1 Although we have not been able to verify the exact line of communication of “various readings”, from Patrick **Young** to Archbishop **Ussher** to Henry **Hammond**, we can verify that **Hammond** read ΘEOC in 1659, with no objection to **God was manifested in the flesh**. <https://archive.org/details/aparaphraseanda00hammgoog/page/n314>
- № 4 We can verify that **ΘC was the reading seen** by **Fell** judging by his Edition of the N.T. published in 1675. We followed a link in [H-GNT] to Fell: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175031505954;view=1up;seq=550>
- № 11 **Bengel's** Apparatus Criticus of 1763 reads, “quanquam **lineola** qua θεός compendiose scriptum ab ὄς distinguitur, **sublesta videtur nonnullis** (although **the thin line**, by which [the word] *theos*, written in an abbreviated way, is distinguished from *hos*, **appeared faint to some**)”. <https://archive.org/details/dioalbertibengel00beng/page/400>
- № 12 We have not found **Woide's** first edition, but we have found Codex Alexandrinus, Ex Antiquissimo Codice Alexandrino, edited by B.H. Cowper, 1860 edition, which reads **θεός**, with a remark “m. recens lineam supra Θ crassavit (m. has recently thickened the line above Theos)”. If

¹ We are aware that Wetstein subsequently changed his mind [Burgon-RR, p.434], which is also clear from [Scrivener-PI, vol.2, p.392, footnote].

this is not a slip of the pen, it means that the remark on p.v (page five of the Introduction) has to be taken as referring to the line *above* the theta, not *in* it. But the choice of reading θεός in this edition could well be Cowper's, and he seems more concerned with the *present* reading than the *original* – see p.xvii.

<https://archive.org/details/CodexAlexandrinus-Cowper/page/n250>

References not found on the internet

We have not been able to find online references to the following, which therefore rest on indirect testimony.

- № 3 We cannot find the statement by Bishop **Pearson**, “**We find not ὅς in any copy**” [Burgon-RR, p.432] online. It remains unclear what claim about ὅς prompted the statement.
- № 6 We cannot find **Bentley's** collations online, nor his statement “*accuratissime ipse contuli*” (most accurately I myself collated) [Burgon-RR, p.433], but we have Berriman's testimony that Bentley declared that Huish “collated ... with great exactness”. That collation is reflected in Walton's Polyglott, for which an online reference is given above. **Bentley's** original documents are probably in Trinity College Library, Cambridge.
- № 12 We have not found the first edition of **Woide's** New Testament, nor his declaration that **so late as 1765 he had seen traces of the Θ which twenty years later (viz. in 1785) were visible to him no longer** [Burgon-RR, p.434]. But we do have the later edition mentioned above.

Conclusion

We have no reason to doubt any of the evidence adduced, since all that can be readily verified at the time of writing (March 2019) – and that is a considerable amount – has been verified. The original reading of Codex A at 1 Timothy 3:16 is determined not by what can *now* be seen, but by whether or not *all* the witnesses whom we have cited above have given false testimony. We have no reason to believe *any* have done so.

We call upon the present generation of textual critics to depart from the path entered upon by previous generations of their profession, and to place Codex Alexandrinus on the ΘC side of the controversy.

General References

- [Berriman] John Berriman, ΘΕΟΣ ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, or, A CRITICAL DISSERTATION UPON 1 TIM iii. 16, London. 1741. See especially pages 153-156.
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=OJxhAAAACAAJ&pg=PA155#v=onepage&q&f=false>
- [Burgon-RR] J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, originally published 1883.
<https://archive.org/details/revisionrevised00burggoog>

- CSNTM <http://www.csntm.org/>
- [H-GNT] Historic editions of the Greek New Testament online (links):
<https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2015/05/historic-editions-of-greek-new.html>
- [INTF-Liste] <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste>
- [Scrivener-PI] F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, (2 volumes), published 1894 by George Bell and Sons.
<https://archive.org/details/aplainintroducti00scriuoft>
<https://archive.org/details/cu31924092355118>