

Multiple Copies

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When is an autograph not an autograph, or at least not a single copy? When the author himself sends out multiple copies of his work (having penned the actual original). Consider the case of Peter's first letter: it is addressed to believers in "Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (verse 1). Well now, what basis could Peter have for writing to people in those places? Probably a good number of the older leaders had been with Peter at Pentecost, and had sat under his ministry until the persecution under Saul sent them packing back home, presumably (Acts 8:4). Notice that the list of places in Acts 2:9-11 includes the following places in Asia Minor: Asia, Cappadocia, Pamphylia, Phrygia and Pontus. Three of the five are in Peter's list, and we need not assume that his list was exhaustive.

Have you ever looked at a map to see the location of Peter's five provinces? They basically represent the whole of Asia Minor (today's Turkey)! 'Asia' seems to have been used in different ways. Acts 27:2 has Asia including Cilicia and Pamphylia (verse 5). The glorified Christ put the seven churches in Asia (Revelation 1:4). In Acts 16:6 the term seems to refer to a more limited area, which, however, presumably included Ephesus, to which Paul returned later. Proconsular Asia included Mysia and Phrygia. Now how many congregations would there have been in all of Asia Minor? And how could a single copy get around to all of them? If the letter was written on papyrus (as seems likely—cheaper, more abundant) it would be falling apart by the time it got to the twentieth congregation, if not before (papyrus can't stand very much handling).

Now let's just suppose, for the sake of the argument, that Peter sent five copies of his letter, one to each province. What would the implications be for the transmission of its Text? It means that you multiply the process and progress of transmission by five! It means that you have the beginnings of a 'majority text' very early on. It means that the basic integrity of the text would be guaranteed (the more so if God was superintending the process). If Peter sent out more than five copies, so much the more. And what about James; how many copies would it take to reach "the twelve tribes that are in the dispersion" (verse 1)? (Doesn't the very term 'dispersion' suggest that they were widely scattered? And what if the 'twelve tribes' is literal?) Peter's second letter doesn't list the five provinces, but 3:1 would appear to indicate that he was targeting the same area.

To see that I didn't pull the idea of multiple copies out of thin air, let's consider 2 Peter 1:12-15. Verses 12 & 13 refer to repeated reminders while he is still in his 'tent', which would be his own ongoing activity; so why the 'moreover' in verse 15? In the NKJV verse 15 reads: "Moreover, I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease". Well, how can you 'ensure' that someone will 'always have a reminder' of something? It seems clear to me that the something has to be written down; a reminder has to be in writing, to be guaranteed. So what is Peter's intention? He specifies "a reminder of these things", so what are the 'these things'? They are evidently the things he will discuss in this letter. But he must be referring to something more than the initial draft of the letter (or the verse becomes meaningless)—hence, multiple copies.

It was Mike Loehrer, a pastor in California, www.michaelcannonloehrer.com, who called 2 Peter 1:12-15 to my attention and got me started thinking about it. With reference to verse 15 he wrote me the following: "Could choosing to use mneme with poieo in the middle voice mean to ensure a way of always being able to validate a memory? In those days most people could not afford their own copy of a writing, and the church would no doubt become the repository of an autograph anyway. The usual way of getting the Scripture back then was by committing it to memory when hearing it during the public reading. Having multiple autographs in multiple locations would definitely ensure a way of validating a memory. Even if the leaders of a church or synagogue were imprisoned and their autograph was seized or destroyed, they could rest assured that they could locate another autograph to validate their memory of the way a verse or passage was actually written."

The idea of validating a memory is as interesting as it is suggestive. Peter's use of $\mu\eta\eta\mu\eta$, basically reflexive, with $\text{ποιε}\omega$ in the middle voice, makes Mike's suggestion a reasonable one, as it seems to me. It goes along with the multiple copies. Irenaeus puzzled over verse 15 and came up with the suggestion

that Peter intended to get copies of Mark's Gospel to those regions. Evidently the idea of multiple copies was not strange to him. And how about other books? 2 Corinthians was written to "the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in all Achaia" (verse 1). How many congregations would there have been "in all Achaia"? Was Paul thinking of multiple copies? Galatians was written to "the churches of Galatia" (verse 2). Could a single copy get to all of them?

If Peter wrote his second letter under divine inspiration, then 1:15 is inspired, and in that event the idea of multiple copies came from God. It would be an efficient means of preserving the Text and guaranteeing its integrity down through the years of transmission. The churches in Asia Minor could always cross check with one another whenever a doubt arose or need required. (The idea is so good, I wouldn't be surprised if once they got it they would set about making multiple copies of other writings they considered to be inspired.) A 'majority text' would be well established throughout the area already in the first century. The 'heartland of the Church' (to use K. Aland's phrase) simply kept on using and copying that form of text—hence the mass of Byzantine MSS that have come down to us.