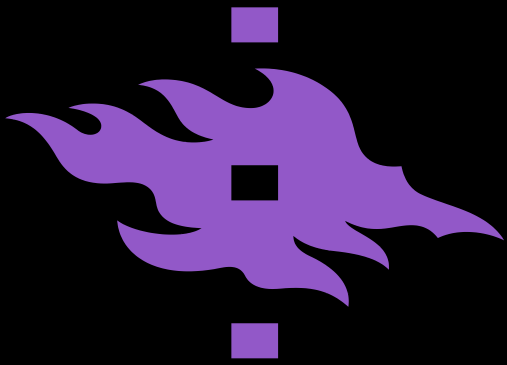


Textual Drift in the Manuscripts of the New Testament

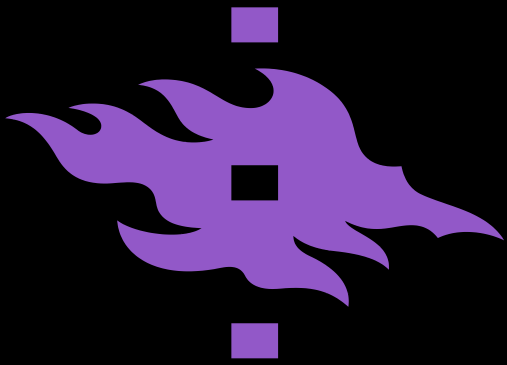
Pasi Hyytiäinen



The forces of cultural evolution

(Cavalli-Sforza & Feldman, Boyd & Richerson, and Mesoudi)

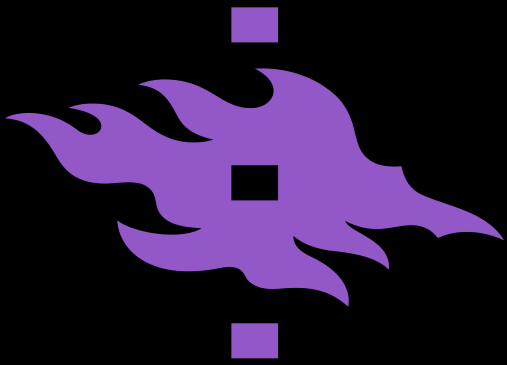
- Non-random forces:
 - Guided variation
 - Individuals intentionally modify acquired information
 - Cultural selection
 - Some traits are more likely to be adopted than others (content-, model-, and frequency based)
- Random forces:
 - Cultural mutation
 - An individual may mishear a cultural trait and accidentally modify it
 - Cultural drift
 - Random changes in cultural trait frequency
 - Some traits may become widespread or disappear entirely because some accidental events have occurred



The significance of cultural drift in small populations

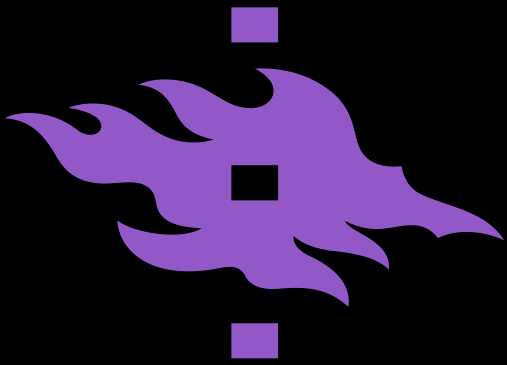
- A unique whistling language developed in a Greek island village of Antia
- Should an earthquake, for instance, wipe out the 18 people who are proficient with the language, the language would die out
- The smaller the population, the stronger the effect of cultural drift





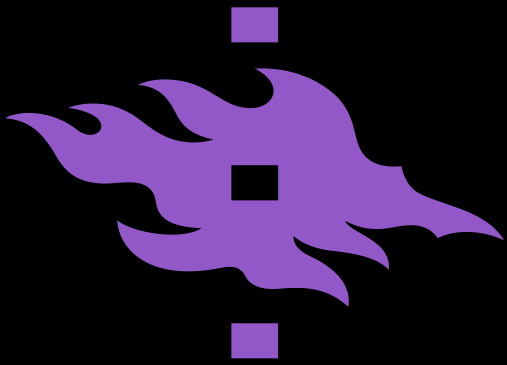
Cultural drift in New Testament manuscripts

- New Testament was transmitted for over 1400 years by the medium of manuscripts, which were produced by hand
 - Every time a new manuscript was copied, changes crept into the text
- Some textual variants may become widespread, decrease in numbers, or disappear entirely because some accidental events have occurred
- The transmission history of the New Testament is full of disturbances
 - Examples of cultural drift
- Cultural drift -> textual drift



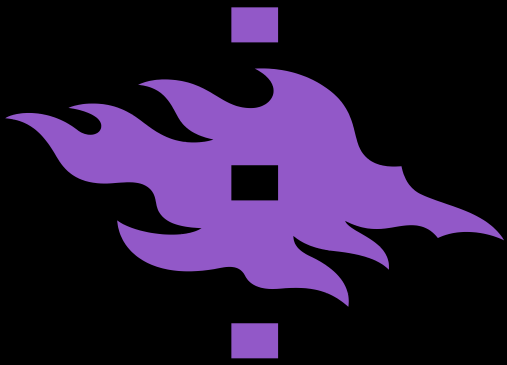
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- Over 6000 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament
- Approximately 530 manuscripts contain Acts
 - Earliest surviving manuscripts are from the 3rd century
 - P²⁹, P⁴⁵, P⁴⁸, P⁵³, P⁹¹
 - We have no manuscript evidence between the years ca. 90–250 CE
 - What happened to the text during this time?
 - 13 surviving witnesses which can be dated before the year 400 CE
 - Two complete, rest heavily fragmentary
- Why did so few manuscripts survive from the earliest Christian centuries?



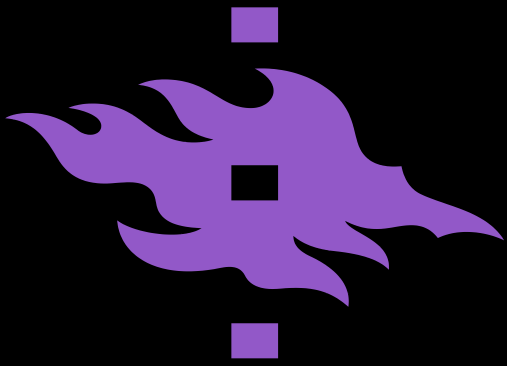
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- Several disturbances in the transmission history
- General persecutions:
 - Primarily attacking on property and senior clerics
 - Decian Persecution (250–51)
 - “Then all with one impulse rushed to the homes of the pious, and they dragged forth whomsoever anyone knew as a neighbor, and despoiled and plundered them. They took for themselves the more valuable property” (Hist. eccl. 6.41.5)
 - Valerianic Persecution (257–9)
 - “men of importance should...be deprived of their property...matrons should be deprived of their property and sent into banishment. Moreover, people of Cæsar’s household should have their property confiscated” (Cyprian, Epistle 81)



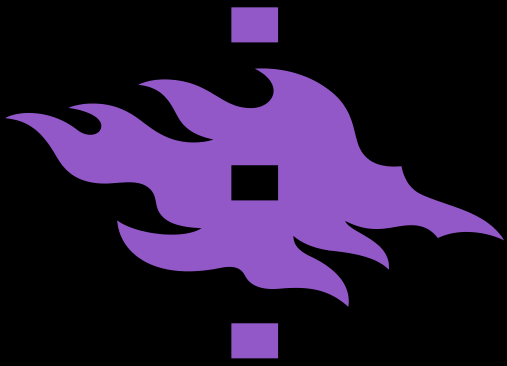
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- Diocletianic Persecution (303–313)
 - “All Christian churches were to be destroyed. All copies of the Scriptures and other liturgical books were to be surrendered and burnt, and all church plate and other such property was to be confiscated.” (The First Edict)
- It was considered a lesser evil to surrender sacred books than to give up one’s faith
 - Particularly in the eastern parts of the empire
 - Countless of manuscripts were indeed given up (*Hist. eccl.* 8.2.1, *Passion Sancti Philippi, IV, Optatus, Appendix I*)
 - In Cirta, 37 manuscripts were confiscated in one single raid (*Optatus, Appendix I*)
- Donatist schism in the west



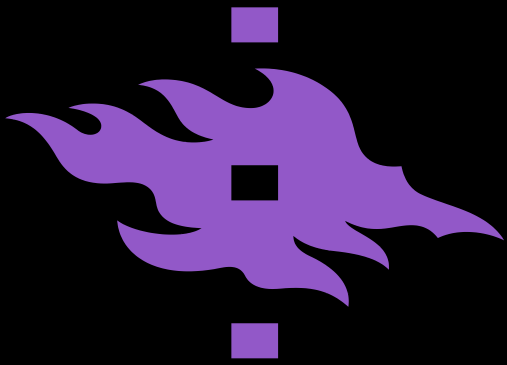
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- How low the numbers of manuscripts fell during this period?
- The population of New Testament manuscripts may have been substantial
 - Subsequent persecutions decreased the numbers of manuscripts
- How much of the earliest textual tradition Christians managed to save?
- What exemplars they used for the new copies?
 - The order of Constantine in 331 (50 copies)...?



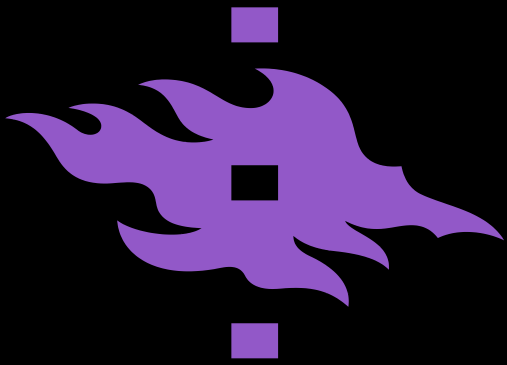
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- The overall character of the textual tradition of Acts seems to have changed during this time
- Western textual form was ones widespread across the empire
 - A free textual form
 - Irenaeus (c. 180)
 - Papyrus 45 (c. 250)
 - Half of the earliest papyrus manuscripts contains the Western text
 - Today a handful of manuscripts survives that contain this form of text



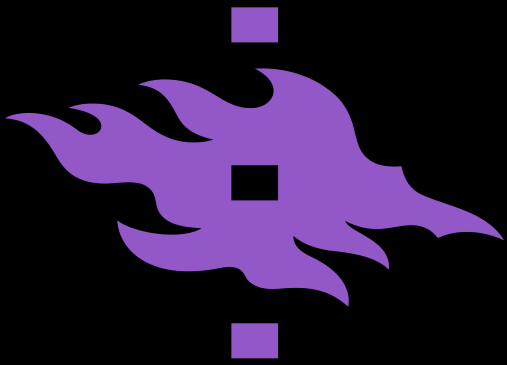
Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- Some variants were known to early church fathers only
 - Sometimes without any manuscript support
 - Acts 1:6: αποκαθιστανεις την βασιλειαν τω ισραηλ -> repraesentaberis et quando regnum Israel (Augustinus)
 - 1:8 και εν παση τη ιουδαια και σαμαρεια -> και εν τη γαλιλαια και παση χωρα της σαμαρειας (Hippolytos)
 - 2:9 ιουδαιαν -> συριαν (Eusebios) - > armeniam (Tertullian, Augustine)



Textual drift in the manuscripts of Acts

- These types of events can be described as random
 - There was no way of foreseeing which manuscripts would survive and be used as exemplars for the new copies
 - Some readings increased in numbers while others perished altogether
- Cultural drift works in this way
- Some variants survived since they were in the right hands, in the right place, at the right time



Conclusions

- We must acknowledge that also coincidence and luck play a part in the transmission history of the New Testament
- Should another types of manuscripts survive in the turmoils of the Roman empire and we could have a New Testament of different kind