

The uncials are so called from the fact that they are written altogether in capitals, while the cursives derive their name from the fact of their being written in a running hand like modern writing.

The uncials, which do not number more than about 127, were written prior to the 10th century, while almost all the cursives date subsequently to that period, and are so numerous as to reach 1456.

The names of the persons who transcribed the various MSS. have not with certainty come down to us; but many of the later copies especially were made in the monasteries of the Roman Catholic Church, where she had not as yet so far departed from the truth as to cause her to fear the testimony God's Word bears against her.

These two great classes of MSS. are separated into several different groups, named from the localities whence they seem to have emanated, as the Alexandrian, Latin, African and Constantinople group. Each member of a group has the same general peculiarities as all the other members in the idiom of the text and the various readings it contains; indeed, knowing the doctrinal disputes that prevailed in the countries whence a group proceeds, one can form a tolerably correct idea of the peculiar reading of certain texts. For instance, knowing the prevalence of Arianism before the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), and indeed for some time after in Alexandria and in Constantinople, we shall be prepared for certain variations in the groups emanating from those places in texts that would seem to countenance that error, not because such readings were contained in the original, but because they gradually crept into the text, or were boldly inserted by a copyist who desired to take from it any force it might appear to have in favour of Arianism; e.g. Luke xxii. 43 is omitted by "Codex Alexandrinus" and "Codex Vaticanus" because it was supposed to favour the error of Arius.

The principal uncial MSS. are the "Codex Alexandrinus," "Codex Vaticanus," "Ephraem," "Beza," "Regius," and "Sinaiticus," designated by the letters A, B, C, D, L, and the Hebrew letter Aleph respectively. Of one or two of these principal MSS. a brief account will not be out of place.