

Bibliographical Comparison of Ancient Texts: Evidence for Transmission Accuracy

| Author | Work | Life of Author (Date Written) | Earliest Copy | Time Span Orig. to Copy | Number of Copies | Notes |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|------------------|--|
| Lucretius | Nature of Things | 99-55 BC | 825 AD | 880 yrs | 2 | 16 disputed papyrus fragments bearing "so few certainly identifiable letters" are claimed to date to the 1st century AD |
| Virgil | Poetry (Aeneid & Georgics) | 70-19 BC | 380 AD | 400 yrs | 9 | The earliest 7 are on parchment. All are "incomplete, damaged, or compromised in some way." Later are based on these seven. |
| Hippocrates | Medical | 460-370 BC | 590 AD | 1000 yrs | 17 | The oldest is only a partial work and is a palimpsest (over written work). Most compilations are 14th century or later |
| Thucydides | History of Peloponnesian War | 460-404 BC | 200 BC | 200 yrs | 20 | Based mostly on eight 10th century AD manuscripts, yet a few 3rd century BC papyri fragments have been found. |
| Tacitus | Annals (Roman History 14-68 AD) | 56-120 AD | 850 AD | 750 yrs | 33 | Thirty one of these are 15th century AD manuscripts based on two earlier: one 850 AD, the other 1050 AD. |
| Aristotle | Ethics, Politics, Poetics | 384-322 BC | 100 AD | 450 yrs | 51 | The oldest is a papyrus of a single work: "Constitution of the Athenians." Another, circa 850 AD: "Biological Works." Most manuscripts of others aren't until 10-14th centuries AD. |
| Livy | History of Rome | 59 BC-17 AD | 400 AD | 400 yrs | 100 | There are also 60 further known direct copies. |
| Herodotus | History | 484-425 BC | 90 AD | 550 yrs | 109 | 49 Papyrus fragments plus 60 non-papyrus manuscripts. |
| Josephus | Antiquities & Jewish War | 37-100 AD (Completed 93-94) | 490 AD | 600 years | 120 | Only 33 of these 120 Greek manuscripts are earlier than the 14th century; a further 170 Latin manuscripts exist, a few dating to the late 5th century AD. |
| Catullus | Poetry | 84-54 BC | 1375 AD | 1400 yrs | 123 | Except for 3 almost all date to the 15th century AD and are copies of those earlier three. |
| Sophocles | Tragedies | 496-406 BC | 1000 AD | 1400 yrs | 193 | There are a few insignificant small fragments thought 3rd century BC. |
| Pliny the Elder | Natural History | 23-79 AD | 490 AD | 420 yrs | 200 | Almost all are from the 14th & 15th centuries, yet one fragment is from the 5th century |
| Suetonius | Twelve Caesars | 69-123 AD (Written 121 AD) | 820 AD | 700 yrs | 200 | All manuscripts seem to have been based on a single early 9th century AD manuscript |
| Plato | Tetralogies | 427-347 BC | 895 AD | 1240 yrs | 210 | John the Calligrapher's 895 AD copy. (FYI, 2nd century BC fragment of Plato's Republic). |
| Aristophanes | Plays | 450-385 BC (Written after 427) | 590 AD | 1000 yrs | 240 | Only 2 are earlier than the 10th century AD. These earliest are fragmentary and only have part of a single work. Most are 11th century or later. |
| Julius Caesar | Gallic Wars | 100-44 BC (Written after 50) | 850 AD | 900 yrs | 251 | A majority of these manuscripts belong to the 15th century AD |
| Euripides | Plays: Incl. Medea & Hippolytus | 480-406 BC (Written 431, 428) | 400 AD | 825 yrs | 318 | The earliest vellum fragment, of Medea, is very small (seven partial lines). It's not to Medieval manuscripts we have "complete" texts. |
| Demosthenes | Speeches | 384-322 BC | 890 AD | 1210 yrs | 340 | A few "rather unhelpful" fragments date to the 1st century BC" |
| Homer | Iliad | 900-800 BC | 400 BC | 400-500 yrs | 1811 | 1,569 papyrus manuscripts plus 37 early and 188 later parchment, and 17 unclassified (privately held). Considered 95% accurate across the manuscripts. |
| Various including: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, James, Jude, Paul, Peter | New Testament | 50-100 AD | 125 AD | 30 yrs or less | 5838 | Original Greek: Roughly 2,926 Minuscules; 322 Majuscules; 128 Papyri; 2,462 Lectionaries. The earliest NT manuscript: P52. Considered 99.5% accurate across the manuscripts. |
| | Ancient NT Translations | 50-100 AD | 275 AD | 175 yrs | 18616 | Ancient translation copies in Old Latin (50), Latin Vulgate (10,000+), Coptic (980), Aramaic or Syriac (350+), Armenian (2,587), Georgian (43+), Gothic (6), Ge'ez or Ethiopian (600+), Slavic (4,000+). Many date as early as 200-300 AD. |
| | Ancient NT Citations (Early Church Father's pre 300 AD) | 50-100 AD | 96 AD | 45 yrs or less | 36289 | Estimated number of individual citations by so-called Apostolic, Greek, and Latin Fathers in the 1st to 3rd centuries AD. |

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