

Is contamination really a disease?

The "contamination" of manuscripts traditions seems to be one of the most terrible plagues philologists have to face ; as P. Maas put it, "against contamination is there no remedy".

Several problems occur when one tries to go beyond this irrational fear, and first of all, a problem of terminology. Under the biological metaphor, alluding to disease and pollution, several very different phenomenon's lie hidden: (accidental) shift of exemplar, several copies made at the same time on few dismantled exemplars, corrections and scholarly interventions, influence of a text which the copyist might know by heart... The causes of what we call "contamination" are diverse, as well as their results - obviously we should differentiate the way we are dealing with those diverse phenomenon's and, perhaps the names we are giving to them. Second problem : how can we detect with certainty a "contamination"? And finally what should we do with "contaminated" witnesses?