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The Text of the Gospel and Letters of John

H.A.G. Houghton

In keeping with the principle of F.J.A. Hort that ‘knowledge of documents should precede final judgement upon readings’ (Westcott & Hort 1881:31), this chapter consists of two parts. The first offers an overview of the manuscripts and other sources in which the Gospel according to John and the Johannine letters are transmitted. These provide evidence for how the text was received, copied, and used for over a millennium. It also gives details of current critical editions and developments in textual theory. The second part considers a selection of variant readings, focussing on alternative forms preserved in the textual tradition which are significant for the interpretation of these writings.

1. The Transmission of the Text

A. Direct Tradition (Greek Manuscripts)

Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament range from fragments which may have been copied in the second century to books from the sixteenth century and even later. Nothing has been preserved which has a claim to be written in the hand of the author. Instead the surviving documents represent later stages in the tradition, following the early intervention of editors. One obvious indication of this is the grouping of writings: most manuscripts consist of the four gospels, or the Pauline letters, or, with a greater degree of variety, Acts and the Catholic letters, sometimes with Revelation. Apart from four remarkable Greek bibles created around the end of the fourth century, manuscripts of the whole New Testament are relatively rare. No early manuscripts consist solely of the collection of writings ascribed to the Apostle John: instead, they are divided according to the groupings above or transmitted separately. The gospel is preserved in almost two thousand Greek manuscripts, while there are over six hundred and fifty witnesses to the Catholic letters.

Several of the oldest known Greek New Testament manuscripts feature the Gospel according to John. Originating from Egypt and written on papyrus, they were preserved by the arid climate until their excavation in the early twentieth century. The earliest is a small fragment with just thirty-two words from John 18, identified in editions of the New Testament as P52 (P.Rylands Greek 457). An almost complete text of the gospel is preserved in P66 (P.Bodmer II), while P75 (now in the Vatican) contains most of Luke and the first two-thirds of John. The fragments of P45 (P.Chester Beatty 1) preserve text from all four gospels and Acts. P22, a third-century copy of John, is unusual as a Christian manuscript because it is written as a roll rather than in book format (a codex). No fewer than twenty-six other papyri survive with portions of John in Greek, suggesting that it was the most popular New Testament writing in Egypt. In contrast, the Johannine letters are only preserved in two papyri: P9 (P.Oxy. III 402), containing fifty-six words from 1 John, and P74 (P.Bodmer XVII), a manuscript of Acts and the Catholic letters with fragments from all three Johannine letters; copied in the seventh century, the latter is one of the latest New Testament papyri. The dating of these manuscripts is based on their styles of writing. Literary texts are normally assigned to a range spanning several decades: although the year 125 has been proposed as the earliest date for the production of P52, it could have been copied at any time up to the early third century, and Nongbri cautions that

‘P52 cannot be used as evidence to silence other debates about the existence (or non-existence) of the Gospel of John in the first half of the second century’ (2005:46). What is more, the publication of other papyri since the first editions of these witnesses provides a greater amount of comparative material, which may lead to revisions of their date. For example, although P66 and P75 are traditionally dated around 200, they could be as late as the fourth century (Orsini & Clarysse 2012; Nongbri 2014, 2016).

The adoption of parchment, as well as improved techniques in binding, led to the creation of larger books which could contain the entire Greek bible in one or two volumes. As mentioned above, four manuscripts of this type survive from the fourth and fifth centuries: Codex Sinaiticus (GA 01), Codex Alexandrinus (GA 02), Codex Vaticanus (GA 03), and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (GA 04).¹ These codices, however, are exceptional: most manuscripts written in majuscule script, which was used until around the ninth century, are smaller and only contain part of the New Testament. As with the papyri, the gospel is much more common than the letters of John: it is transmitted in fifty-seven majuscule manuscripts as well as the four complete Bibles; only seven other majuscules have all seven Catholic letters, with four other Greek fragments preserving one of the Johannine letters. Codex Bezae (GA 05 or D) is a bilingual Greek-Latin manuscript copied around the year 400 which contains the four gospels in the so-called ‘Western order’, with John second; after these, sixty-four pages are lost before the final page of 3 John in Latin and the Acts of the Apostles. It has been suggested that the missing portion contained Revelation and the three Johannine letters (Parker 1992:8). If this is right, Codex Bezae could be taken as evidence for a collection of the Johannine writings, although the presence of Mark and Luke after John indicates that the corpus was not presented as a unity. The page numbers on a contemporary parchment leaf of 2 John in Greek (GA 0232) have also prompted the proposal that this, too, was preceded by the gospel and Revelation (Hill 2004:455–6). Another example of the ‘Western order’ of the gospels is GA 032, the Freer Gospels, which features a number of unusual readings.

The majority of surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts were written on parchment in minuscule script between the ninth and the sixteenth centuries. The age of a manuscript, however, does not necessarily correspond to the number of generations of intervening copies: many minuscules are important for the reconstruction of the earliest text. Of the twenty witnesses which stand closest to the initial text of the Catholic letters, twelve are minuscules (Parker 2012:87). Just under half of the two hundred and thirty-three manuscripts selected for the *Editio Critica Maior* of John are minuscules (Parker et al. in Gurtner, Hernández & Foster 2015). Several of these are scholarly productions, such as catena manuscripts which alternate between biblical text and commentary from early Christian authors. Family 1, a group of related gospel books including GA 1 and 1582, derives from an archetype in which variant readings were noted in the margin (Welsby 2013). The equivalent witness to Acts and the Letters is GA 1739, copied by the same scribe as GA 1582. Just two late Greek manuscripts contain only the writings attributed to John: GA 743, a catena manuscript copied in the fourteenth century of Revelation, the Johannine letters, and John, and the fifteenth-century GA 368 with the order John, Revelation, Johannine

¹ The Gregory-Aland (GA) register of Greek New Testament manuscripts is maintained online at <<http://ntvml.uni-muenster.de/liste>>.

letters. Both the gospel and the Johannine letters are widely attested in Greek lectionary manuscripts containing the passages read during the liturgical year. In the Byzantine system, extracts from John were read between Lent and Pentecost, as well as on certain feast days; the full text of the Johannine letters is present in certain lectionaries (Osburn in Ehrman & Holmes 2013).

B. Indirect Tradition (Translations and Quotations), Paratext, and Use

The first translations of the New Testament, into Latin, Coptic, and Syriac, were made around the end of the second century from Greek manuscripts which no longer survive. Latin texts predating the late fourth-century Vulgate form are called ‘Old Latin’ or *Vetus Latina*; the earliest Coptic version is Sahidic, closely followed by Bohairic, Lycopolitan, and Fayumic; two Old Syriac gospel books, the Curetonian and Sinaitic, came before a standard text known as the Peshitta although the earliest Syriac form of the gospels was a translation of the Diatessaron, a harmony created from all four canonical gospels by Tatian around 170. As in Greek tradition, there is no evidence among the early versions for the transmission of the Johannine writings as a unit. Although gospel books predominate, it should be noted that they vary in order: most Old Latin codices have the ‘Western order’ with John second; in the Curetonian Syriac and an early Sahidic manuscript (sa 1) it is third.² Several Coptic manuscripts appear only to have contained John, although with fragments it is impossible to be sure: these include three fourth-century papyri (two in Lycopolitan, one in Middle Egyptian) and many of the Fayumic witnesses. The only Achmimic papyrus of John (the bilingual P6) combines it with 1 Clement and James, while the earliest Bohairic papyrus (P.Bodmer III) consists of John and the first three chapters of Genesis. In Sahidic, John appears in conjunction with a variety of other biblical books, including portions of Isaiah, Psalms, 1 Corinthians, and Titus (sa 370L, fourth century), or 1 John and 2 Peter (cw 1, fifth century). As with the Greek papyri, the high proportion of surviving texts of John in Coptic shows its popularity in Egypt.

The Johannine letters are less widely attested in the early versions. The oldest witnesses are a number of fourth-century Coptic papyri of 1 John, either by itself or in combination with other New Testament writings.³ Evidence for the collection of the Catholic letters is provided by a leaf with 3 John and Jude (sa 617), and an eighth-century parchment codex of all three letters of John followed by James (sa 120; this is the standard Coptic order for the Catholic letters). In Latin, 1 John first appears in fragments from a fifth-century palimpsest of Revelation, Acts and the Catholic letters (VL 55) and seventh-century additions to an earlier manuscript of Paul (VL 64). The end of 3 John in Latin is found in Codex Bezae, as noted above. All three letters are only found together in whole Bibles: the seventh-century Léon palimpsest (VL 67), Codex Amiatinus (Vg A, completed in 716), and a ninth-century copy of a pandect assembled in Rome in the fifth century (VL 7). There is no Old Syriac evidence for the Catholic letters, and the Peshitta only contains James, 1 Peter and 1 John (identified as ‘The Letter of John’). The four other Catholic letters, including 2 and 3

² On the Latin tradition, see Houghton 2016; for Coptic, Askeland 2012; for Syriac, Williams in Ehrman & Holmes 2013. Coptic manuscript sigla are taken from the Schmitz-Mink-Richter database available at <<http://intf.uni-muenster.de/smr/>>. Full transcriptions of many versional witnesses to John are available at <<http://www.iohannes.com/XML>>.

³ e.g. sa 608 with fragments of Ephesians, 1 John, 1 Peter, and James; sa 614 (1 John only); sa 32 (Revelation, 1 John, and Philemon); also cw 1 above.

John, were probably included in the sixth-century Philoxenian version, and are also present—based on a relatively early Greek text—in the Harclean Syriac completed in 616 (Williams in Ehrman & Holmes 2013:153–4).

Versional manuscripts display paratextual features also found in Greek tradition. The earliest evidence for the division of New Testament books into numbered chapters comes from north Africa in the middle of the third century, and no fewer than fifteen series of chapter titles for John are preserved in Latin (Houghton 2011). A set of eighty divisions is attested in Codex Vaticanus, matching certain section markings in P75 (Hill in Gurtner, Hernández & Foster 2015), but most Greek manuscripts from the fifth century onwards have a single set of *kephalaia* consisting of eighteen titles (*titloi*) for John. Coptic witnesses usually divide John into forty-five sections. The Eusebian Apparatus, incorporated into Greek manuscripts from the fourth century onwards, is a system to identify material shared between the four gospels. It consists of section numbers in the margins (232 in John) and ten initial canon tables with the different permutations of agreement. Jerome states that he was responsible for introducing it into Latin tradition, where it is more widely attested than in Greek; it is also present in Coptic and Syriac. A set of divisions for Acts and all the New Testament letters, accompanied by chapter lists and other introductory material, is known as the Euthalian Apparatus: this is the most common form of division for the Johannine letters in Greek, although Codex Vaticanus once again preserves a different system. Sets of prologues and chapter titles became standard for all books in the Latin Vulgate.

One paratextual feature peculiar to John is the system of *hermeneiai* (*sortes* in Latin). These phrases written in the margins were used for divination and may be loosely connected with the gospel text. For example, alongside John 2:12, where Jesus orders the servants to fill the wine jars with water, comes the *hermeneia* ‘believe that your purpose is good’, while at John 6:70 (‘Did I not choose you, the twelve? Yet one of you is a devil’), the *hermeneia* reads ‘through everything hidden the purpose will be made clear’. The principal witnesses to this system are the Latin Codex Sangallensis (VL 7) and the Greek side of Codex Bezae.⁴ However, the indication ‘*hermeneia*’ also appears in papyrus fragments of John in Greek and Coptic, and recent studies have proposed that its function is interpretative or liturgical (Jones 2016:34–7). The deployment of manuscripts for magical purposes is attested by early Christian writers: in his *Commentary on John*, Augustine suggests that holding a copy of the gospel against the head to cure a headache is preferable to the use of an amulet, while one of John Chrysostom’s sermons on John claims that ‘the devil will not dare to approach a house in which a gospel book is present’.⁵ Texts from the gospel and letters of John in Greek or Coptic (as well as extracts from other biblical books) are also found on folded scraps of papyrus which served as amulets and pieces of pottery (ostraca) from the fourth to the seventh centuries. Miniature codices may have had a similar purpose. Several of the Coptic papyri of John or 1 John fall into this category, as do two Latin copies of the gospel: VL 33, measuring just 7 by 5½ centimetres, was produced in

⁴ Despite their relation to John, in Codex Bezae the *hermeneiai* are written in Mark (the fourth gospel in this manuscript).

⁵ Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis evangelium* 7.12; Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Iohannem* 32.3; see further Gamble 1995:238.

Italy around the year 500 and later discovered in a reliquary; the Cuthbert Gospel, made in Northumbria in the early eighth century, was enclosed in the saint's coffin.

Quotations in Christian writers also provide indirect evidence for the early text of the New Testament. These references can be assigned a date and location with much greater confidence than manuscripts, although authors may not always have quoted verbatim and their own text may have undergone alteration during its transmission. Various studies examine the text of one or more books of the New Testament in the writings of a particular author.⁶ Online databases of biblical quotations, especially *Biblicindex* (<<http://www.biblicindex.org>>) and the *Vetus Latina Database*, facilitate scholarship on the use of any verse in a particular author. Patristic evidence is also often cited in the apparatus of editions of the New Testament. Commentaries may be a source for the biblical text known to the author as well as their interpretation.⁷

C. Modern Editions and Textual Theory

Since the invention of printing, the New Testament has largely been treated as a single corpus. Discoveries of older manuscripts and developments in textual theory have enabled the reconstruction of forms of text ever closer to the origins of the tradition, although the earliest period remains the most unclear. In recent decades, progress has been made towards a new scholarly edition of the New Testament based on an analysis of all surviving manuscripts and charting the development of the Greek text during the first millennium. This is the *Novum Testamentum Graecum Editio Critica Maior* (ECM), which will also provide a revised text for the standard Nestle–Aland and United Bible Societies' hand editions. Among the electronic tools used to handle large amounts of data is the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM), an application which assists traditional philological reasoning in establishing the earliest form of text in a tradition for which the construction of a stemma is not possible (Mink in Wachtel & Holmes 2011; Parker 2012:84–100). The result of this process has been termed the 'Initial Text' (*Ausgangstext*).

The first volume of the ECM to be published was the Catholic letters: initial fascicles have now been replaced by a complete revised edition (ECM 2013). The Initial Text from this revision has been adopted in NA28 (2012) and UBS5 (2014), resulting in seven changes to the Johannine letters (affecting 1 John 1:7, 3:7, 5:10, 5:18; 2 John 5, 12; 3 John 4), and twenty-seven to the other Catholic letters. The ECM of John is currently in preparation: separate editions of the Greek papyri and majuscules and the Old Latin tradition appeared in conjunction with this, including online versions with full transcriptions.⁸ A related project produced an edition of the Greek text of John in the Byzantine tradition.⁹ Recent years have seen the publication of another hand edition, the *SBL Greek New Testament* (SBLGNT; Holmes 2011), which differs from the text of NA28/UBS5 in fifty-five places in John and thirteen places in the Johannine letters.

⁶ Greek writers are listed online at <www.igntp.org/patristic.html>; for Latin authors, see Houghton 2016:141–2.

⁷ See further the chapter on Commentaries in the present volume.

⁸ Elliott & Parker 1995; Schmid, Elliott & Parker 2008; Burton et al. 2011–; the online editions are at <www.iohannes.com>.

⁹ Mullen, Crisp & Parker 2007; a Byzantine text of the complete New Testament is offered by Robinson & Pierpont 2005.

One of the results of the fuller investigation of the manuscript tradition and analysis with the CBGM has been a move away from the terminology of geographical text-types to describe different forms of Greek text. Reliance on a subset of readings to characterize witnesses as ‘Western’, ‘Alexandrian’, or ‘Caesarean’ has become more difficult to maintain in the face of comparisons of the full text of each manuscript (Parker 2008:171–4; Elliott in Hill & Kruger 2012). Even certain readings considered typical of later, ‘Byzantine’ witnesses have been shown to be present in the earliest stratum of the text, a development welcomed by advocates of the priority of the Byzantine or Majority Text, although Wachtel’s detailed analysis of the Catholic letters (1995) has shown that the Byzantine form was the result of a lengthy process of development. The predominant methodology in New Testament textual criticism continues to be that of ‘reasoned eclecticism’, taking into account both external evidence (e.g. the age and number of manuscripts) and internal evidence (e.g. transcriptional probability and stylistic criteria): alternative approaches include ‘thoroughgoing eclecticism’, based solely on internal criteria, and those who privilege the quantitative superiority of attestations of the Majority Text.¹⁰ The attempt by Boismard and Lamouille (1993–6) to reconstruct the text of a ‘pre-Johannine’ gospel based on abbreviated quotations in a recension of Chrysostom’s *Homilies* was abandoned after five chapters.

2. Selected Passages

The textual tradition of the gospel and letters of John is relatively consistent, unlike, for example, the different recensions of the Acts of the Apostles (see Chapa and Elliott in Hill & Kruger 2012). Nevertheless, variant readings are attested in every verse and certain phrases or passages are missing from some witnesses. A selection of these is treated below, referring back to the sources described in Part One. It should be emphasized that this is only a subset comprising well-known differences and illustrations of common types of variation, with the philological reasoning which is applied to decide between them: reference should always be made to the critical apparatus of scholarly editions for a fuller picture, which may be supplemented by individual studies or a commentary such as Metzger (1994). Translations are based on the NRSV.

A. The Opening of the Gospel (John 1)

The initial verses of the gospel are some of the most stable in the whole of New Testament tradition. One aspect of the manuscript tradition which has often been overlooked, however, is the extent of the first section. Despite the layout of most modern printed texts, the first eighteen verses are rarely if ever treated as a unit in antiquity. Instead, the first five verses constitute the opening section, and there is no major break after John 1:18 (Williams 2011). Identifying this passage as the ‘Prologue’ is therefore problematic.

Punctuation and word division are relatively scarce in early manuscripts (cf. John 8:25 below); modern verse-numbering was only introduced in printed editions and does not always correspond to the earliest interpretations. Many ancient sources take

¹⁰ See further Wallace, Holmes, and Elliott in Ehrman & Holmes 2013:689–802.

the last two words of John 1:3 (ὁ γέγονεν) with the following phrase, to read ‘What was made in him was life...’. In one strand of early Latin tradition, with some Old Syriac support, John 1:13 is read as singular (‘who was born, not of blood...’): this is secondary, interpreting Christ, the implied subject of the preceding phrases, as the subject of this as well.

B. The Chosen Son or God (John 1:18, 1:34)

The following four readings in John 1:18 are all attested in early Greek tradition:

μονογενὴς θεός (‘only-begotten God’);
 ὁ μονογενὴς θεός (‘the only-begotten God’);
 ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός (‘the only-begotten Son’);
 εἰ μὴ ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός (‘except the only-begotten Son’).

The first reading, adopted as the editorial text in NA28/UBS5, is the most difficult both in terms of sense and grammar, with the implication that God could be begotten and the absence of the article. It occurs in P66 and Codices Sinaiticus, Vaticanus and Ephraemi Rescriptus. The other forms seem to be attempts to simplify this, beginning with the addition of the article ὁ in P75 and an early corrector of Codex Sinaiticus; the third reading appears in the majority of Greek manuscripts. Nevertheless, Ehrman maintains that ὁ μονογενὴς υἱός is the earliest form, based on the internal criterion of Johannine usage (2011:78–82).

Although the commonest form of John 1:34 is ‘this is the Son of God’ (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ), the first hand of Codex Sinaiticus has ‘Chosen One’ (ἐκλεκτός) in place of ‘Son’: this also seems to be the reading of P5 and P106. An early corrector of Sinaiticus added υἱός, resulting in the conflate reading ‘Chosen Son’ paralleled in some Old Latin, Sahidic and Palestinian Syriac manuscripts. Other Old Latin witnesses and both Old Syriac gospel books support ‘Chosen One’ by itself. This strikingly broad attestation and the lack of an obvious synoptic parallel make this reading worthy of attention: although Metzger (1994:172) suggests that the terminology is not Johannine, Quek (2009) argues in favour of ἐκλεκτός and it is adopted in the SBLGNT and by Ehrman (2011:69–70).

C. The Kingdom, the Spirit, and Heaven (John 3:5–13)

The similar phrases in this pericope have led to harmonizations: in John 3:5, some manuscripts read ‘see’ rather than ‘enter’, while in John 3:8 they have ‘water and the spirit’. The substitution of ‘the kingdom of the heavens’ for ‘the kingdom of God’ in 3:5, however, derives from the synoptic parallel. One Greek minuscule (GA 1344) adds ‘for God is Spirit’ at the end of John 3:6: this is more widely attested in the Latin tradition and also appears in the Curetonian Syriac. At the end of John 3:13, after ‘the Son of Man’, the majority of Greek manuscripts and representatives of all three early versions add ‘who is in heaven’ (ὁ ὢν ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ). This is a difficult—and therefore potentially original—reading because it poses a conflict with the rest of the sentence which an editor might have sought to remove. Nevertheless, the formulaic nature of the phrase and its absence from the oldest Greek manuscripts have led to its being characterized as a secondary gloss (Metzger 1994:174–5); an alternative in a few late manuscripts, ‘who is from heaven’ (ὁ ὢν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), seems to be an attempt to make the addition fit better with the context.

D. The Pool and the Angel (John 5:2–4)

There is a remarkable concentration of variants in this pericope. Greek manuscripts are divided as to whether the pool is ‘by’ (ἐπί), ‘in’ (ἐν), or identified with the Sheep Gate, which is sometimes translated in Latin as ‘the lower part’. Proper nouns are always confusing for copyists not familiar with the original language: most Greek sources read ‘Bethesda’, but P66, P75, Codex Vaticanus and other early witnesses have ‘Bethsaida’. Codex Bezae and some Old Latin gospel books have ‘Belzetha’, but modern editors accept ‘Bethzatha’, present in Codex Sinaiticus and a different early Latin tradition. A large number of witnesses include ‘great’ (πολύ) after ‘multitude’ in John 5:3, harmonizing it to synoptic parallels. The list of the sick sometimes features ‘paralytics’, a later adjustment in order to ensure the inclusion of the man healed in this passage even though this is the only time the word appears in John. Similarly, the majority of manuscripts include the information that the sick were ‘expecting the stirring of the water’ and the whole of 5:4 with the descent of the angel into the pool. Both of these represent expansions which make the rest of the passage smoother yet use non-standard vocabulary for John: their secondary character is confirmed by their absence from the papyri, three of the fourth-century bibles, and the early translations.

E. Authority, Ability, and Secrecy (John 7:1, 7:8)

Part of the Old Latin tradition and the Curetonian Syriac state in John 7:1 that Jesus ‘did not have power’ rather than ‘did not wish’ to walk in Judea. In Greek, this is found in the Freer Gospels and manuscripts of the catena by Nicetas of Heraclea: the latter is often dependent on Chrysostom, who also attests this variant. Despite its surprising sense, the phrase occurs elsewhere in the gospels and can be explained as a harmonization: external evidence favours ‘did not wish’ as original. However, John 7:8 provides an example of an adjustment of the text as early as the oldest surviving manuscripts: P66, P75 and Codex Vaticanus all have Jesus saying that he will ‘not yet go up to the festival’. This seems to be a deliberate attempt to remove the inconsistency with John 7:10, when Jesus does go up to the festival: it is more difficult to explain why ‘not yet’ (οὐπω) would be changed to ‘not’ (οὐκ) in this context. Furthermore, the presence of ὥς (‘as if in secret’) in John 7:10 has a similar attestation, and may represent a similar intervention by an early editor to reduce the contrast with the rest of the narrative.

F. The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53–8:11)

The story of the Woman Taken in Adultery (the *Pericope Adulterae*) was not part of the earliest text of John. It is missing from all Greek manuscripts prior to Codex Bezae and from the earliest Latin, Syriac and Coptic witnesses; it is rarely quoted by Greek writers; it also displays linguistic differences from the rest of the gospel (see Becker 1963). The passage is found in different positions in certain groups of Greek manuscripts: in Family 1 it occurs at the end of John; in Family 13 it appears after Luke 21:38; other manuscripts place it after John 7:36. This, as well as the textual variation within the passage, is typical of a floating piece of tradition which was only incorporated at a relatively late stage. Nevertheless, among the abundant recent literature on this passage (e.g. Black & Cerone 2016) are renewed claims that it was originally part of John or one of the other canonical gospels, and even that copyists

sometimes left marks to indicate that it was deliberately omitted: this is not customary in ancient copying practice.

G. Jesus the Beginning? (John 8:25); An Acclamation of Faith (John 9:38–39)

The absence of word division and punctuation in the earliest Greek manuscripts means that John 8:25, translated as ‘Why do I speak to you at all?’ (with ὅτι) could also be read as ‘What I have told you from the beginning’ (ὅτι): the latter is adopted in NA28 and the SBLGNT. Metzger (1994:191) notes that it may even be interpreted as an exclamation. Uncertainty about this phrase may underlie an early correction in P66, prefacing it with εἶπον ὑμῖν: ‘I said to you at the beginning that which I am also telling you’. The first hand of Codex Sinaiticus includes ἐν (‘I tell you one thing’, or possibly an erroneous ἐν, ‘in’). The ambivalent case of the Latin word for beginning adds to the confusion: in most Latin versions, Jesus claims that he is ‘the beginning who speaks to you’.

All of John 9:38 and part of 9:39 are absent from a variety of early witnesses, including P75, the first hand of Codex Sinaiticus, the Freer Gospels, and Latin and Coptic manuscripts. This has led to the suggestion that the acclamation of faith and act of worship by the man born blind are a later addition (Brown 1966:375). An accidental omission early in the tradition or an editorial intervention to remove the interruption from Jesus’ discourse could also explain the pattern of preservation. Ἐφῶ is very rare in John and it is intriguing that P75 and the Freer Gospels are two of the four manuscripts which feature it in a truncated introduction to the same man’s question at 9:36: this abbreviation might be connected with the omission of his next intervention, and the fuller form at both places is retained in all modern editions.

H. Martha and Mary (John 11)

Schrader (2016) suggests that confusion between Mary and Martha and fluctuations in the number of sisters in the manuscript tradition (e.g. the absence of Martha from Codex Alexandrinus in 11:1 and from P66 in 11:3) might derive from an early form of text from which Martha was absent. The similarity in the names Μαρία and Μάρθα is likely to have led to copying errors, but a significant minority of Greek manuscripts read Μαρτίμ, ‘Mariam’ instead of ‘Mary’, which is more distinctive: this form is adopted throughout John 11 in NA28/UBS5, although less unanimity is displayed in John 19–20. The presence of Martha at some point in every witness indicates that any such reworking precedes the earliest consistent text which can be reconstructed. Still, it remains possible that early redactional activity could leave traces of this sort.

I. Repetitions (John 13:32, 14:14)

The first clause of John 13:32, ‘if God has been glorified in him’, is missing from a wide range of early witnesses, including P66, three of the four early Greek Bibles and the Latin, Syriac and part of the Coptic tradition. It is unclear whether this is an omission resulting from skipping between identical words (an error known as ‘eyeskip’ or ‘homoeoteleuton’), the excision of repetitive material by an early editor, or the oldest form of text. As similar duplications are found later in this discourse (e.g. 13:34, 14:2–3, 14:10–11) the phrase may be original. A comparable example involves John 14:14, which reproduces much of the previous verse and is missing

from some Greek, Latin, and Syriac witnesses. Even the earliest surviving manuscripts of John 14:14, P66 and P75, appear to be subject to influence from John 14:13 with the addition of τοῦτο ('this'); most others omit με, 'me', for the same reason.

J. The Trial and Crucifixion (John 18–19)

There is evidence in a few Greek minuscules of an attempt to rearrange John 18:13–27 in order to make sense of references to the high priest preceding Jesus' appearance before Caiaphas and bring the account into line with the synoptic gospels. The Sinaitic Syriac also has a variation in this sequence, which may reflect the Diatessaron, while some Latin manuscripts read 'to Caiaphas' rather than 'from Caiaphas' in 18:28, and others substitute Pilate for Caiaphas. While all of this is secondary, it demonstrates concern for the narrative sense and the extent of rearrangement which some editors were prepared to implement. Synoptic harmonization is also the best explanation for the variant reading at John 19:14 where, despite overwhelming evidence in support of 'the sixth hour', some majuscules and lectionaries read 'the third hour' as at Mark 15:25.

Variants are attested for several of the key words in John 19:28. The Greek tradition is split between Jesus 'seeing' (ἰδὼν) rather than 'knowing' (εἰδώς) that everything was fulfilled, while the word 'now' is absent from the Freer Gospels, Family 1 and representatives of the three early versions. Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Bezae and Family 1 and 13 offer a different word for 'fulfilled', πληρωθῇ instead of τελειωθῇ: both occur elsewhere in John but the former is the preferred term in the Synoptics, which may have led to the substitution here. P66 and some early Coptic manuscripts lack the phrase 'in order to fulfil the scripture', which may be a deliberate omission (Ehrman 2011:194). In the next verse, the interpretative difficulties of the reference to hyssop seem to have led to variations. At least two late Greek manuscripts read ὑσσῶν ('on a javelin', GA 476 and L32): this may simply be the accidental omission of two letters from ὑσσώπῳ ('on hyssop'), although *perticae* ('on a pole') in a group of Old Latin manuscripts suggests that the reading may have been current earlier (see also Parker 1997:176–7). A few Greek witnesses add καλάμῳ ('on a reed') to this phrase, probably reflecting the account in the Synoptics (Matt. 27:48, Mark 15:36). An ancient alternative for μίγμα ('mixture') in John 19:39 is ἔλιγμα ('wrapping'): its attestation is restricted to Codices Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, the Freer Gospels, and possibly one Old Latin manuscript; although this technical medical term is the more difficult reading, adopted by Westcott and Hort, other editions have preferred the prevalent form.

K. The Final Chapter of the Gospel (John 21)

There is no secure evidence in the textual tradition for copies of the gospel which omit the final chapter, despite the apparent conclusion at John 20:31. The outer pages of manuscripts are most vulnerable to loss, so a blank space or a colophon would need to be present to indicate the end of the book. The one Coptic manuscript which has a gap following John 20:31, the fourth-century sa 66, appears to be an amulet which only contained this passage rather than an otherwise complete text of the gospel.

An insertion from Luke 5:5, another episode with a miraculous catch of fish, is found following Jesus' words in John 21:6. This entered the tradition at a very early date, as it is already found in P66 as well as a correction to Codex Sinaiticus.¹¹ Another harmonization appears in John 21:13, where Codex Bezae, some Latin manuscripts and the Sinaitic Syriac include the detail that Jesus 'gave thanks' before he distributed the bread (cf. John 6:11). The variations in John 21:15–17 also cause confusion for copyists, and were only occasionally observed in early versions (Royse in Gurtner, Hernández & Foster 2015; Houghton 2014). Although the majority of manuscripts read 'Simon, son of Jonah' in these verses and John 1:42, this is generally thought to be a harmonization to Matthew 16:17. The oldest witnesses to each of the four verses agree on 'Simon, son of John', although the variation 'son of Joanna' is also found on every occasion.

L. Our Joy or Yours? (1 John 1:4)

The sound change known as itacism meant that the vowels η, υ, and οι came to be pronounced identically. One of the most commonly affected pairs of words is the plural pronouns 'we' and 'you', ἡμεῖς and ὑμεῖς. Other grammatical information, such as the person of the verb, often indicates the correct form. Yet there are also occasions, as in 1 John 1:4, where either form could stand. In this case, the external evidence is divided: both forms are attested in early manuscripts, and the alteration could easily have been made independently on different occasions. The editors of the ECM believe that either form could be original, and place both in 'a split primary line' (ECM 2013:34*): this is indicated by the diamond symbol in the text of NA28 and UBS5. In such cases, a decision must be made on the basis of style and sense: it is interesting to note that the editors of UBS4 were confident of the first-person plural in this verse (Metzger 1994:639). Another sound change led to the convergence of ο and ω, which particularly affects subjunctives: 'let us write' is also found alongside 'we write' in this verse (γράφωμεν for γράφομεν), although the context and its restriction to late minuscule manuscripts indicates that this is secondary.

M. Additions and Omissions (1 John 2:17, 2:23, 3:1)

The early versions of the Catholic letters are marked by a number of expansions. One example of this is the addition of 'just as God remains for ever' at the end of 1 John 2:17 in Latin and Sahidic witnesses. Although these are interesting for the reception of the letter, their lack of Greek attestation means that they have little claim to constitute the earliest text. Conversely, the initial five words and the latter part of 1 John 2:23 are absent from later Greek tradition. Their widespread attestation in earlier manuscripts and biblical translations indicate that this is a later omission because of homoeoteleuton (see John 13:32 above) rather than a gloss. The words 'and that is what we are' (καὶ ἐσμέν) in 1 John 3:1 are also missing from the majority of Greek manuscripts and some versions: although this could be interpreted as a gloss, the presence of the text in all majuscules once again supports its authenticity.

¹¹ For a comparable example of a parallel verse introduced into P75 by an early reader, see Schmid 2008:16–23.

N. Acknowledging or Dissolving Jesus (1 John 4:3)

One of the most interesting variants in the Johannine letters is λύει (‘dissolves’) rather than μὴ ὁμολογεῖ (‘does not confess’) in 1 John 4:3. Its only appearance in a Greek manuscript is as an alternative noted in the margin of GA 1739, but it is also found in quotations of this verse by Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and other early Greek writers, and Latin tradition including the Vulgate. The universal attestation of μὴ ὁμολογεῖ in Greek manuscripts and its parallelism with the previous verse suggest that it is original, although the majority of manuscripts (including Codex Sinaiticus) take the parallelism yet further by repeating ‘has come in the flesh’ (ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα) from 4:2. Metzger suggests that the substitution with λύει was doctrinally motivated, in order to counter Gnosticism in the second century (1994:645; see also Ehrman 2011:125–35).

O. The Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8)

The expansion of these verses to specify three witnesses in heaven, ‘the Father, the Word, and Holy Spirit’, while identifying spirit, water and blood as the witnesses ‘on earth’ is best explained as one of the many versional glosses in the Catholic letters (compare 1 John 2:17 above, or 5:20). It is first attested in Latin tradition in the fourth century, but does not appear in Greek until the sixteenth century: one of the minuscule manuscripts in which it is found, GA 61, is likely to have been created in response to Erasmus’ omission of these words from his edition, although there is no evidence that he suspected this nor that he had promised to include the text if a Greek witness could be found (de Jonge 1980). The dependence of GA 61 on a Latin source is shown in 1 John 5:6, where it reads ‘Christ’ rather than ‘Spirit’ because of a similarity peculiar to the Latin *nomina sacra* abbreviations (XPS and SPS). Nevertheless, Erasmus’ subsequent adoption of these words led to their inclusion in the printed edition of the Greek New Testament known as the *Textus Receptus*; they are rejected by modern editors.

P. Christ or the Believer? (1 John 5:18)

In 1 John 5:18, a variation is found between the reflexive ἐαυτόν, ‘guards himself’, which interprets the believer as ‘the one born from God’ (ὁ γεννηθεὶς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ), and αὐτόν, ‘guards him’, which implies Christ as the subject. On internal grounds, the latter is more probable: appearing in Codex Alexandrinus, Codex Vaticanus and the Latin translations, αὐτόν is adopted in the SBLGNT as well as NA27/UBS4. Ehrman believes that ἐαυτόν was a deliberate change in order to prevent an adoptionistic reading of Christ as ‘born from God’ (2011:70–1). However, following the application of the CBGM, the ECM, followed by NA28 and UBS5, accepts ἐαυτόν, found in Codex Sinaiticus, as the Initial Text.

Q. What was written? (3 John 9)

The oldest attested reading of 3 John 9 is ἔγραψά τι, ‘I have written something’. In the majority of Greek minuscules and the Latin Vulgate, however, τι is replaced by ἄν, ‘I would have written’. Other witnesses have both τι and ἄν, and others neither. The underlying reason for the variations appears to have been a concern to avoid implying that another letter of John had been lost, or that John, despite his eminence, was

prevented from writing by Diotrephes. The earliest reading is therefore also the most compelling on internal grounds.

3. Conclusion

Apart from the earliest witnesses, especially Coptic papyri from the fourth century, the Gospel and letters of John seem to have circulated separately or in collections of the four gospels or Catholic letters rather than as a group of writings by the same author. The manuscript tradition is extensive, particularly in Greek; the three earliest translations, Latin, Coptic, and Syriac, also offer important evidence for the history of the text. Variant readings are attested in every verse: some of these represent copying errors; others may be the work of editors smoothing or harmonizing the text, diffused through numerous subsequent manuscripts; others are more difficult to explain and must be resolved by balancing external and internal evidence. Early translations of the Catholic letters incorporate a number of secondary glosses in the text, including the Johannine Comma; passages such as the Angel at the Well and the Woman Taken in Adultery are not part of the original text of the gospel. Scholars investigating these writings can now benefit from the comprehensive ECM of the Catholic letters and work towards the edition of John in this series, as well as a growing number of online resources for the textual tradition of the New Testament.

Suggested Reading

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