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Houghton, H.A.G.

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'Flattening' in Latin Biblical Citations

Hugh A.G. HOUGHTON, Birmingham*

One of the problems with using patristic citations for biblical textual criticism is the difficulty of determining the accuracy with which a Father cites Scripture. For 'primary' citations, use of a biblical codex is explicit or probable. Other 'secondary' citations, however, have no such indication: some may have been drawn from a manuscript, but the majority are likely to have been made from memory in keeping with ancient practice. This is not to say that they are without value for the text of Scripture, but they require careful analysis before they can be used in this way.

Certain alterations are characteristic of citations made from memory. This process, which may be described as 'flattening', does not simply consist of removing references to the original context but may also involve a more active reshaping of the biblical text employing rhetorical techniques. Most of these variations were probably not introduced deliberately: a flattened form is shorter, easier to memorise and concentrates on a single aspect of the biblical text, the more clearly to illustrate an argument. The nature of this practice means that the same types of variation will be found independently in different authors and across different languages. The occurrence of an identical text in two or more Fathers is not necessarily an indication of mutual dependence or shared reliance on a third source, although this will be true in certain cases.

It is possible to identify instances of flattening by comparing the patristic citation with the text transmitted in biblical exemplars. In the case of the early Latin Fathers, these are the handful of surviving Old Latin versions as well as the witnesses to the later Vulgate tradition. As gospel manuscripts contain a continuous text they are unlikely to have been influenced by flattening, although they may be subject to other types of alteration during the copying process. Given the scarcity of Old Latin witnesses, however, patristic citations may include readings which were present in a version which is no longer extant. The seven examples which follow from the *Gospel according to John* will illustrate how biblical references in the Church Fathers may be analysed with particular reference to the concept of flattening. They come from a variety of authors and works, in order to show the prevalence of this phenomenon throughout the tradition.¹

* The author is a Research Fellow on the *Vetus Latina Iohannes* project funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

¹ Patristic citations have been taken from the *Vetus Latina Database*, a card index available for consultation at the Vetus Latina-Institut in Beuron and online at <http://www.brepolis.net/vld>. An updated version of this database is planned as part of the new edition of the *Vetus Latina*.

1) *John* 10:18; Ambrose, *De fide* 2.25 (CV 78, 65):

potestatem habeo ponendi animam meam et potestatem habeo sumendi eam. nullus eam tollit a me, sed ego a memetipso pono eam.

Stuttgart Vulgate:

nemo tollit eam a me, sed ego pono eam a meipso. potestatem habeo ponendi eam, et potestatem habeo iterum sumendi eam. hoc mandatum accepi a patre meo.

Ambrose has reversed the order of the two phrases he cites and replaced the first pronoun with the object, *animam meam*, from the previous verse. Both alterations enable the verse to be quoted out of context, with the key sentence fronted for emphasis. There is no example of this re-ordering of the verse in biblical manuscripts; the one instance of *animam meam* after *ponendi*, in the Old Latin Codex Aureus, was later corrected. By contrast, both Ambrose's other citations of *John* 10:17-8 in this work (*De fide* 4.120 and 5.131) have the regular pronouns and word-order. It is possible that the other variants *nullus* and *memetipso* represent traces of an Old Latin text (*memetipso* occurs here in Codex Vercellensis), although they do not appear in the two later references. Several other Fathers cite similar forms of this verse to Ambrose, including Augustine (*Sermo* 52.13, 299A.10; *Tractatus* 8.10.12, 11.2.31, 37.9.28 etc.), Cerealis (*Disputatio* 6), Petrus Chrysologus (*Sermo* 37.3, 40.3 etc.) and the *Contra Varimadum* of Ps.-Vigilius.

2) *John* 8:24b; Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium* 38.7-8 (CChr.SL 36, 341-2).

The process of flattening can often be traced in Augustine's sermons, recorded verbatim by stenographers. When delivering his commentary on John to the congregation at Hippo, he would read the initial citation from his codex (an early copy of the Vulgate) but rely on memory as he developed his exposition.² The first occurrence of *John* 8:24b appears as:

si enim non credideritis quia ego sum, moriemini in peccatis uestris.

Three sentences later, he gives the whole line again, but without *enim*. The omission of the connective is typical of flattening, since the text is now being

Iohannes currently in preparation at the University of Birmingham, to be hosted on the website <http://www.iohannes.com>. In this paper, Old Latin manuscripts are cited from Adolf Jülicher, with Walter Matzkow and Kurt Aland (eds.), *Itala. IV. Iohannes-Euangelium* (Berlin, 1963). The editorial text of the Stuttgart Vulgate (Robert Weber, Roger Gryson, et al. [eds.], *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem [editio quartam emendatam]* [Stuttgart, 1994]) has been taken as representative of the Vulgate, with punctuation added.

² For more on Augustine's citation technique in this work and other writings, see Hugh A.G. Houghton, *Augustine's Text of John: Patristic Citations and Latin Gospel Manuscripts* (Oxford, 2008).

taken in isolation rather than as an explanation of the previous sentence. *Enim* is also absent from the next two citations. When Augustine comes to discuss the absolute use of *ego sum*, however, the five possible complements he suggests all begin *nisi credideritis quia ego sum*. This is the only form in which this verse appears from now on, with ten citations in this sermon followed by two in *Tractatus* 39. Despite the frequency of this text, all surviving gospel manuscripts read *si enim non*: the progression visible here towards a flattened form indicates that citations with *nisi* should be attributed to Augustine's reliance on memory.³

3) *John* 6:44a; Cassiodorus, *Expositio Psalmorum* 44.15 (CChr.SL 97, 413.424):
nemo uenit ad me nisi pater attraxerit eum.

Stuttgart Vulgate:

nemo potest uenire ad me nisi pater qui misit me traxerit eum.

There are two instances of flattening in Cassiodorus' version of *John* 6:44a, which are paralleled in several other Latin Fathers.⁴ The contraction of *potest uenire* to *uenit*, and the removal of auxiliary verbs in general, is widespread in forms from memory: not only is it shorter, but it also focusses attention on the complement. This could be described as the omission of the element of potentiality, although this text may have been influenced by other examples of *nemo uenit* such as *John* 14:6. The omission of the subordinate clause, *qui misit me*, which is incidental to the thrust of the saying, is another alteration typical of flattening. Neither finds any support in biblical manuscripts, but the compound verb *attraxerit* is attested in six Old Latin witnesses, which suggests that it may have been known to Cassiodorus (or his source).

4) *John* 6:38; Hilary of Poitiers, *De trinitate* 3.9 (CChr.SL 62, 80.5):
non ueni uoluntatem meam facere, sed uoluntatem eius qui me misit.

Stuttgart Vulgate:

quia descendi de caelo non ut faciam uoluntatem meam, sed uoluntatem eius qui misit me.

³ Augustine's treatment of *John* 5:22 in *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium* 21.12ff. offers an almost identical example: the initial citation of *neque enim pater iudicat quemquam* then becomes *non enim pater iudicat quemquam* a few lines later, before reaching his preferred form *pater non iudicat quemquam* which appears in all subsequent citations.

⁴ See, amongst others, Ambrose, *De fide* 5.149 and *In Lucam* 8.9; Augustine, *De diuersis quaestionibus* 38.8; *id.*, *Sermo* 112A.11 *etc.*; Jerome, *Commentariolus in Psalmos* 15; Maxentius, *Aduersus Hormisdam* 40; Sedulius Scottus, *In Matthaum* 1.1.

This version of *John* 6:38 is introduced as a verbatim citation, and Hilary's reading *non ueni...facere* is corroborated by other identical citations (*Tractatus super Psalmos* 91.6 and 139.12; *De trinitate* 9.74 and 11.30). Nonetheless, he has the Vulgate form at *De trinitate* 9.49, and there is nothing in surviving gospel manuscripts which supports his paraphrase. Several features can be interpreted as flattening: the fronting of the emphatic *non*, the replacement of *descendi de caelo* by a more general *ueni*, and the simplification of *ut faciam* to *facere*. The rhetorical balance of the resultant form is noteworthy, with two contrasting phrases of comparable length centred in an almost chiasmic structure around *facere*. Such a form of text is easily committed to memory. It is hardly surprising that a similar version is found in numerous other Latin authors, including Augustine, Gregory the Great, Sedulius Scottus, Venantius Fortunatus and Vigilius of Thapsus. The same type of variation is also found in citations of *John* 3:17 which read *non uenit filius hominis* rather than *non enim misit deus filium suum in mundum* (e.g. Augustine, *Contra partem Donati* 8.11; *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium* 87.2.12 and 95.4.13). The expression *filius hominis* here betrays harmonisation with the Synoptic Gospels (e.g. *Matthew* 18:11 *etc.*), another characteristic of citations made from memory.

5) *John* 3:5b; Tertullian, *De baptismo* 13.3 (CChr.SL 1, 283.14):

nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu sancto, non intrabit in regnum caelorum.

Stuttgart Vulgate:

nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua et spiritu non potest introire in regnum dei.

Around thirty examples of *John* 3:5 in the *Vetus Latina Database* have the Matthaean *regnum caelorum* rather than the Johannine *regnum dei*. Such a harmonisation is not restricted to Church Fathers: it also appears in the Old Latin Codex Palatinus as well as several Greek witnesses. Of course, this does not imply that all these citations were taken from biblical manuscripts, but it is possible that this reading was in a version known to Tertullian, particularly as Codex Palatinus is sometimes classified as an African text.⁵ The addition of *sancto* is also found in the Latin gospel tradition. The only variant which presents conclusive evidence of flattening is the replacement of *potest introire* by *intrabit* (see *John* 6:44 above), again paralleled by a number of other Fathers, including Augustine, Chromatius of Aquileia, Caesarius of Arles, Filastrius of Brescia and Gregory the Great.

6) *John* 14:2a; Augustine, *De natura et origine animae* 3.11.15 (CV 60, 371.28).

In this passage, Augustine criticises the citation of *John* 14:2 offered by his opponent Vincentius Victor, *multae mansiones sunt apud patrem meum*, and

⁵ See Philip H. Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels* (Oxford, 2000), 17f.

states that the correct version reads *in domo patris mei mansiones multae sunt*. This is corroborated by the Vulgate and every surviving Old Latin witness, which all agree on *in domo patris mei*. However, Vincentius' text is not without precedent: among the Fathers who read *apud patrem meum* are Ambrose, Cyprian, Filastrius of Brescia, Gregory of Elvira, Jerome (on eighteen occasions), Hilary of Poitiers and Tertullian. In fact, it even appears in three of Augustine's own citations (*Enarratio in Psalmum* 60.6.10, *Sermo* 239.2.2 and *De uirginitate* 26.26)! These may have been influenced by the phrase *apud patrem* elsewhere in the Gospels (e.g. *Matthew* 6:1). That said, there is a similar situation in the Greek tradition: although biblical manuscripts appear to be invariant, with ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου, a large number of Greek Fathers cite this verse with παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ, the equivalent of *apud patrem*, including all nineteen citations in Eusebius of Caesarea.⁶ Although some of the examples in Latin Fathers may derive from Greek writings, this is a good illustration of how the same processes of flattening can be applied independently in different languages. Nonetheless, in the absence of any attestation in a gospel codex, the grounds for claiming that this variant featured in a biblical manuscript are slim.

7) *John* 14:30b.

Ambrose, *De fuga saeculi* 23 (CV 32/2, 183.1) and elsewhere:
uenit enim huius mundi princeps et in me inuenit nihil.

Augustine, *De trinitate* 13.14.13 (CChr.SL 50, 406.13) and elsewhere:
ecce uenit princeps huius mundi et in me nihil inuenit.

Stuttgart Vulgate:

uenit enim princeps mundi huius et in me non habet quicquam.

The agreement between Augustine and Ambrose in reading *inuenit nihil* is striking. Although *nihil* might be a flattened form of *non... quicquam*, the use of the more specific verb *inuenit* rather than *habet* goes against the characteristic direction of flattening towards a semantically less detailed verb. This, along with the preservation of *enim* in Ambrose's citation, suggests that *inuenit nihil* may not be an example of flattening, but a genuine alternative reading. Investigation of the manuscripts bears this out: the Old Latin Codex Brixianus reads *non inueniet quicquam*, which in turn corresponds to a Greek variant,

⁶ The only exception among Greek manuscripts noted in Tischendorf is Γ (036), which omits μου. Greek patristic evidence has been taken from the database in preparation for the International Greek New Testament Project *Editio Critica Maior* of John. I am very grateful to Dr Roderic L. Mullen for access to this information: I would also like to thank Professor David C. Parker for comments on this paper.

οὐκ εὐρήσει οὐδέν. Other citations in Augustine and Ambrose have a future tense, *nihil inueniet*, which also translates this Greek text. On the other hand, the wide attestation of the present tense *nihil inuenit* in the Fathers combined with the present tense of other codices in this verse leads Caragliano to suggest that both forms derive from manuscripts which are no longer preserved.⁷ Given that the variations in word order are also paralleled in surviving Old Latin witnesses, the only instance of flattening seems to be the treatment of the opening words in Augustine, who adds *ecce* on other occasions.⁸

Conclusion

The process of flattening comprises a set of alterations characteristic of citations made from memory, when a biblical verse is presented out of its original context and attention is focussed on a particular aspect or theme. Several of these have been illustrated in the examples above, including:

- a) Deletion of connectives
- b) Replacement of pronouns
- c) Re-ordering of phrases
- d) Omission of less important or incidental material, such as relative clauses
- e) Changes in word order, especially fronting of important words
- f) Combination or separation of words (e.g. *nisi* for *si non*)
- g) Variation in verb form (e.g. *intrahit* for *potest introire*, or *facere* for *ut faciam*)
- h) Harmonisation with other accounts

The result is often a memorable, rhetorically-balanced form, which is not unique to an individual Father but shared across a broad range of texts and even between languages. Some of these variants, however, including harmonisations and omissions, may be shared by surviving biblical manuscripts. Comparison with continuous-text witnesses, including those in the original language when dealing with a translated tradition, is necessary in order to determine the extent to which each citation may represent the reading of a codex. In practice, this prevents the reconstruction based on patristic evidence of a multitude of forms of text which may never have existed. Only after we have accounted for elements attributable to flattening can we use these citations as evidence for the text of the Gospel.

⁷ Tindaro Caragliano, *Restitutio critica textus latini evangelii secundum Iohannem ex scriptis S. Ambrosii: Biblica* 27 (1946) 30-64 & 210-40, 219.

⁸ See the commentary on *John* 4:46, 6:67, 7:25 and 20:27 in H.A.G. Houghton, *Augustine's Text of John* (2008).