

Ancient and Rare Readings in the Syriac Harklean Version of the Gospel of John and their Significance for its Interpretation: A Contribution to the Narrative Textual Criticism of the Fourth Gospel

Piotr Jutkiewicz

The Catholic Academy in Warsaw

pjutkiewicz@akademiatolicka.pl

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4112-7705>

ABSTRACT: This paper analyses four intriguing variant readings that are ancient, rare, and unexpectedly transmitted by a relatively late translation of the NT, the Syriac Harklean version. Although the existence of these readings is not a recent discovery, the broader picture emerging from their joint presentation is hoped to encourage a new, less biased perspective from which to approach the Harklean text of the gospels and an enhanced understanding of how the Gospel of John was read and interpreted by its early audiences. This different approach to textual criticism than the traditional quest for one ‘original’ text appreciates even secondary readings exploring their place within larger patterns and is called ‘narrative textual criticism’.

KEYWORDS: textual criticism, Gospel of John, Syriac, Harklean version, reception history, Vetus Latina, Greek MS x

Historically, the majority of scholars underestimated the value of the Syriac Harklean version of the NT to New Testament textual studies. This position was based on the common assumption that the Harklean text represents the Byzantine text and is, therefore, not a witness of primary importance. New editions of the Harklean version, which demonstrate the complexity of its textual character, mean that this bias can now be corrected. In fact, the Harklean version of the gospels, despite being close to what has long been called the Byzantine text-type, preserves several rare and ancient readings. Although the importance of these readings and their consequent inclusion in modern studies will not affect critical editions of the NT, an awareness of their existence may provide new insights into the reception history of the related sections and enrich understanding of these. This ‘narrative textual criticism’ approach, which appreciates even secondary readings and explores their place within larger patterns, has recently gained more recognition.

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1. The Harklean Version: A Witness to the Byzantine Text?

The question of the textual character of the Harklean version eludes simple answers. As often, the picture is more complex than widespread and broad generalisations suggest. Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Hort, authors of the seminal 1882 edition of the NT, argued: ‘Taken altogether, this [the Harklean Syriac] is one of the most confused texts preserved: but it may be rendered more intelligible by fresh collations and better editing.’¹ Almost 150 years later, this rendering is yet to be fully accomplished. The first necessary step of critical research into the textual character of the Harklean version of the NT is to acknowledge the confusion mentioned above, and the second is to prepare accurate editions. A critical edition of the Gospel of Mark, prepared by Samer S. Yohanna, appeared in 2015²; my edition of the Gospel of John should soon be available in the Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium series (Peeters Publishers).³

In this context, it is crucial to avoid superficial stereotypes, some of which are very common. First, the ‘Byzantine’ label usually given to the Harklean NT is not sufficiently precise. While the general textual character of the Harklean version is close to the Byzantine text-type, numerous readings transmitted by the Harklean version are not. Second and more generally, textual critics have tended to almost automatically reject all Byzantine readings as secondary. However, recent discoveries show that numerous readings considered Byzantine may be ancient. This throws new light on the evaluation of the Byzantine text-type and its value for New Testament textual criticism.⁴ For this reason, the Editio Critica Maior ‘grants the Byzantine tradition a full hearing, featuring many Byzantine readings that have never appeared before in an apparatus.’⁵

1 B.F. Westcott – F.J.A. Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek. Introduction and Appendix* (New York: Harper 1882) 156. See also J.D. Thomas, *The Harklean Margin. A Study of the Asterisks, Obeli, and Marginalia of the Harklean Syriac Version with Special Reference to the Gospel of Luke* (Ph.D. Diss. University of St. Andrews; St. Andrews 1973) 34: ‘We need most of all a thorough, systematic collation of each and every manuscript which will yield to us the full limit of their contents. Someone will someday have to do for these manuscripts what Pusey and Gwilliam did for the Peshitta ones. Until this happens, we cannot come to grips with this version. Nor can we wrestle with its problems on a sure footing.’

2 S.S. Yohanna, *The Gospel of Mark in the Syriac Harklean Version. An Edition Based upon the Earliest Witnesses*, (BibOr 52; Rome: Gregorian & Biblical Press 2015).

3 P. Jutkiewicz, *The Gospel of John According to the Syriac Harklean Version* (CSCO 709 – Scr. Syr. 273; Louvain: Peeters 2025) (forthcoming).

4 K. Wachtel, ‘Early Variants in the Byzantine Text of the Gospels,’ *Transmission and Reception. New Testament Text-Critical and Exegetical Studies* (ed. J.W. Childers – D.C. Parker) (Texts and Studies, Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature 3.4; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2006) 28–47; P.J. Gurry, ‘The Harklean Syriac and the Development of the Byzantine Text. A Historical Test for the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (CBGM),’ *NovT* 60 (2018) 189: ‘Where the Byzantine text is rejected as later and derivative, its unique readings are likewise rejected; where this same text is viewed as an accumulative development with early roots, its unique readings may be accepted as original particularly when the internal evidence warrants.’

5 J. Hernández Jr., ‘Modern Critical Editions and Apparatuses of the Greek New Testament,’ *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research. Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (eds. B.D. Ehrman – M.W. Holmes) (NTTSD 42; Leiden – Boston, MA: Brill 2013) 706. See also: K. Wachtel, ‘Notes on the Text of the Acts of

This updated approach should also be applied to the Harklean version, and its unique and rare readings should be studied in greater depth. First, perhaps more can be done to determine the Greek Vorlage available to Thomas of Harkel. Recent research on the Harklean text of the Catholic and Pauline epistles has yielded promising results.⁶ The family of Greek minuscules known as Family 2138 (MSS 1611, 1505, 2138, and 2495) reveals a textual form close to the Harklean version.⁷ There are, however, questions remaining. The relationship cannot be direct: Since the four manuscripts of Family 2138 are relatively late (tenth to fifteenth centuries), any connection to the Harklean version (created at the beginning of the seventh century) presumes the existence of earlier common ancestors. Also, no source has been identified for the marginal variant notes. Finally, for the gospels, only two of the Family 2138 manuscripts contain them, and no relationship has been found between these texts and the Harklean text of the Gospel of John.⁸ In this context, it is hoped that new studies based on digital analysis and comparison of texts will yield better results.

Second, since the precise method applied by Thomas of Harkel in preparing his edition, described in the colophon,⁹ is not totally clear; his precise Greek sources are perhaps unreachable; and the meaning of the Harklean signs still remains under discussion,¹⁰ it may be best for now to study individual cases of textual variations one by one.¹¹

2. Narrative Textual Criticism

It is beneficial to consider this topic from yet another perspective. Textual criticism in the twenty-first century is turning from the quest to identify a single original text to an acknowledgement and appreciation of textual diversity.¹² Textual variation is no longer

the Apostles," *Novum Testamentum Graecum. Editio Critica Maior*. III. *Acts of the Apostles* (eds. H. Strutwolf et al.) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2017) [part 1.1] 30*–31*.

- 6 A. Juckel, "Introduction to the Harklean Text," *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels. Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshittā and Harklean Versions* (ed. G.A. Kiraz) (NTTSD 21; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2004) I, xxxiv.
- 7 A. Juckel, "Die Bedeutung des Ms. Vat. Syr. 268 für die Evangelien-Überlieferung der Harklensis," *OrChr* 83 (1999) 45; A. Juckel, "La version harqléenne du Nouveau Testament: forme, intention, tradition," *Le Nouveau Testament en syriaque* (ed. J.-C. Haelewyck) (Études syriaques 14; Paris: Geuthner 2017) 165. See also C.-B. Amphoux, "La parenté textuelle du sy^h et du groupe 2138 dans l'épître de Jacques," *Bib* 62/2 (1981) 259–271.
- 8 MS 1505 (Mt. Athos, Lavra B' 26, twelfth century) and MS 2495 (Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Gr. 1992, fourteenth/fifteenth century) contain the gospels, but a survey of the unique and rare readings of the Harklean text of the Gospel of John has not revealed any relationship.
- 9 Jutkiewicz, *The Gospel of John*, 167–172 (forthcoming).
- 10 Jutkiewicz, *The Gospel of John*, 139–147 (forthcoming).
- 11 As proposed by Juckel in "La version harqléenne," 154–155, where he studied the usage of the Harklean critical signs and marginal notes in a few particular cases (John 4:52; 7:20; and 9:28).
- 12 See the breakthrough article in this regard: E.J. Epp, "The Multivalence of the Term 'Original Text' in New Testament Textual Criticism," *HTR* 92 (1999) 245–281.

‘a dross’ to be discarded once ‘pure gold’ has been extracted;¹³ it is a field worth studying on its own. David C. Parker expresses this accurately:

So the textual variation remains significant for two reasons: first, because it provides important primary material in the study of early Christianity; secondly because the quest not only for the original text of the Gospels but also for the *ipsissima vox Iesu* cannot be made on the basis of a modern eclectic text such as the Nestle-Aland, but must continue to engage with the real multiplicity of forms in which the tradition survives.¹⁴

This new approach to the textual criticism of the NT has developed in recent decades in the broader context of the New Philology movement and reception history studies. It is sometimes called ‘narrative textual criticism’, indicating an attempt to place variant readings within a larger ‘narrative’ context. Once more, in Parker’s words, it ‘represents a move away from the traditional atomizing of texts into variant readings, towards a reconstitution of the fragments into an intelligible whole.’¹⁵ Such an approach encourages careful analysis of what, from the traditional perspective, would be called secondary variant readings, treating them as a window into a better understanding of how the early audiences of Christians grasped their foundational texts.¹⁶ Perhaps the two approaches (traditional and narrative) should be regarded not as opposed and irreconcilable extremes but as separate, equally legitimate goals of textual criticism that remain in dialogue. Holmes argues for

a fuller understanding of the goal of New Testament textual criticism: both identifying the earliest text and also studying all the variant readings for the light they shed on how particular individuals and faith communities adopted, used, and sometimes altered the texts that they read, studied, and transmitted.¹⁷

13 See F.H.A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 4 ed. (London: Bell & Sons 1894) I, 5.

14 D.C. Parker, “The Future of the Critical Edition,” *The Future of New Testament Textual Scholarship. From H.C. Hoskier to the “Editio Critica Maior” and Beyond* (ed. G.V. Allen) (WUNT 417; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2019) 400.

15 D.C. Parker, “The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament,” *JTS* 45 (1994) 704. Parker describes two forms of this method. The first, represented by E.J. Epp, studies a particular manuscript from an exegetical or theological perspective. The second, developed by Bart D. Ehrman, takes a broader view of theological tendencies as motives for creative corrections of the Scripture within a particular period of time.

16 For an example of this approach for particular Coptic readings in the Gospel of John, see H. Förster, “Textual Criticism and the Interpretation of Texts: The Example of the Gospel of John,” *Early Readers, Scholars and Editors of the New Testament: Papers from the Eighth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (ed. H.A.G. Houghton) (TS 11; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press 2014) 163–187.

17 M.W. Holmes (ed.), *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Atlanta, GA – Bellingham, WA: Society of Biblical Literature 2010) viii. The various approaches may be described along a continuum rather than as a binary choice; see M.C. Parsons – G.M. Barnhill, “Textual Criticism and Lukan Studies: The (Dis)Connection between the Two,” *TC: A Journal of Biblical Textual Criticism* 24 (2019) 1–2, with note 4.

The following examples represent a handful of intriguing variant readings that are ancient, rare, and unexpectedly transmitted by a relatively late translation of the NT, the Syriac Harklean version.¹⁸ The existence of these readings is not a recent discovery. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the broader picture emerging from their joint presentation will encourage:

- 1) a new, less biased perspective from which to approach the Harklean text; and
- 2) an enhanced understanding of how the Gospel of John was read and interpreted by its early audiences.

In this sense, it is hoped that this contribution to narrative textual criticism will bridge what has sometimes been considered a wide gap between textual critics and exegetes.¹⁹

3. Examples

The Greek text of the Gospel of John is quoted according to the Nestle–Aland 28th edition.²⁰ The Vetus Latina manuscripts are quoted according to Jülicher’s edition, and the most up-to-date online edition.²¹ The Harklean version is quoted according to my forthcoming edition of the Gospel of John. The sigla of the Harklean manuscripts are also given according to my edition, based on 22 manuscripts.²²

	<i>Shelfmark</i>	<i>Date</i>
A	Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, Or. 74	eleventh/twelfth century
B	Beirut, American University of Beirut, 220.43/B58s/c.1	twelfth century
C	Ankawa, Chaldean Antonian Order of St. Hormizd, Chaldean 25	eleventh/twelfth century
D	Dublin, Chester Beatty Library, Syc 703	1177 CE
F	Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 1.40	757 CE
H ³	Cambridge (MA), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Syr. 176	probably 991/2 CE
L ¹	London, British Library, Add. 7163	ninth/tenth century
L ²	London, British Library, Add. 14469	936 CE
L ³	London, British Library, Add. 17124	1233/4 CE
O ¹	Oxford, New College Library, MS 333	thirteenth/fourteenth century

18 There is no specific rationale for selecting these readings other than that all of them are ancient, rare, and significant for interpretation.

19 See Parsons – Barnhill, “Textual Criticism and Lukan Studies: The (Dis)Connection between the Two,” 1–16.

20 E.E. Nestle – B.K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28 ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2012).

21 A. Jülicher, *Itala. Das Neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung. IV. Johannes-Evangelium* (Berlin: De Gruyter 1963) and P.H. Burton et al. (eds.), *Vetus Latina Iohannes. The Verbum Project. The Old Latin Manuscripts of John’s Gospel* (2007), <https://itseeweb.cal.bham.ac.uk/iohannes/vetuslatina/index.html> [access: 1.07.2024].

22 For the full description of the manuscripts, see Jutkiewicz, *The Gospel of John, XXXI–LXX* (forthcoming).

	<i>Shelfmark</i>	<i>Date</i>
O ²	Oxford, New College Library, MS 334	twelfth/thirteenth century
P ¹	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syriaque 52	1164/5 CE
P ²	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syriaque 54	1192 CE
P ³	Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Syriaque 362	twelfth/thirteenth century
R ¹	Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Or. 227	1011 or 1061 CE
R ²	Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Add. 1700	1169/70 CE
S ¹	Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Syr. 124	ninth/tenth century
S ²	Birmingham, Cadbury Research Library, Mingana Syr. 42	twelfth century
V ¹	Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. sir. 267	eighth century
V ²	Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. sir. 268	858/9 CE or earlier
Z ¹	Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, Dam 12–9	994 CE
Z ²	Damascus, Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate, Dam 12–8	1055 CE

3.1. John 2:1 (2:3)

NA28:

2:1: Καὶ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ γάμος ἐγένετο ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἦν ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐκεῖ.
On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2:3: καὶ ὅσπερ ἔσχεν οἶνον λέγει ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸς αὐτόν· οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν.
When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus says to him, ‘They have no wine.’

Harklean version:

ⲛⲥⲟⲁⲃⲱⲥⲁⲓ ⲛⲓⲛⲁ ⲙⲓ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲣⲁⲓ ⲙⲓ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ

And they had no wine because the wedding’s wine was consumed.

The variant reading in some Harklean manuscripts appears in the lemma (MSS V², Z¹, Z², L², and P²) or in the margin (MSS V¹, C, S¹, D, P³, and O¹). Only in MS V¹ does the sign in the lemma place the addition at the beginning of John 2:3, as in the Greek witnesses. In other Harklean manuscripts, the addition is placed in the middle of John 2:1, just before ‘and the mother of Jesus was there.’ In some Harklean manuscripts, various signs or notes mark the reading as unexpected.²³

23 In MS L², the reading is circled; in MSS Z² and O¹, there are notes by later hands to explain that this phrase is an addition. The note in MS O¹ (f. 107r) reads: ⲛⲓⲛⲁ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲛⲁⲣⲁⲓ ⲙⲓ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲁⲙⲟⲥ ⲟⲩⲛ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ (This couplet is not extant in any of our Harklean manuscripts. However, it is found in a few Greek codices). The note in MS Z¹ (f. 259v) reads: ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ ⲛⲓⲛⲁⲟⲥ (This couplet of words, which is between the crosses [which are as this sign +], is an addition). The sign in the manuscript that is mentioned in this note is challenging to represent. It is substituted here by an *asteriskos*.

The Harklean reading in John 2:1 (2:3) reflects a reading that appears in one Greek manuscript and several Vetus Latina manuscripts. This reading also appears in Ethiopic (families of manuscripts Ab, Cabc, and 12').²⁴

Greek MS \aleph^*

οινον ουκ ειχον οτι συνετελεσθη ο οινος του γαμου· ειτα

They had no wine because the wedding's wine was consumed. Then...

VL MSS 3 (fragmentary), 4, 8, 14, 22, 47 (with some minor variants):

et vinum non habebant, quoniam finitum est vinum nuptiarum

And they had no wine because the wedding's wine was consumed.

Two Vetus Latina manuscripts have a similar yet different reading.

VL MSS 2 and 11:

et factum est per multam turbam vocitorum vinum consummari

It happened that, because of the great crowd of those who had been invited, the wine was finished.

Of the variant readings studied in this paper, the reading in John 2:1 (2:3) is the best known. Metzger calls this addition a 'paraphrase'.²⁵ Other scholars have seen this variant as the possible original; if that is the case, what is usually chosen as the standard text would be an attempt to smooth the clumsy original.²⁶ Still other commentators have treated the variant as a gloss, arguing that the addition contains no new information.²⁷ However, the apparent redundancy serves to focus attention on a crucial element in the narrative: the wine. One of the most essential components of the feast, and a symbol of joy, the wine had unexpectedly run out at the wedding.²⁸ The standard text of the gospel refers to the absence of wine almost casually, as though it were a regular occurrence at a wedding. In contrast, the variant reading highlights this tragic moment, thereby enhancing the miraculous act performed by Jesus and making it seem even more remarkable.

The transposition of this addition from John 2:3 to 2:1 in most of the Harklean manuscripts must have happened either by mistake or in an attempt to save the standard wording of John 2:3. The addition certainly makes less sense in John 2:1, the introduction to the story, where it anticipates the story's crucial moment. Yet it must have appeared to the

²⁴ M.G. Wechsler, *Evangelium Johannis Aethiopicum* (CSCO 617 – Scriptorum Aethiopicum 109; Louvain: 2005) 9.

²⁵ B.M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament. A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 2 ed. (London: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft – United Bible Society 1994) 201.

²⁶ R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, 21 ed. (KEK 2; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1986) 80, note 6; T. Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark 1909) III, 345.

²⁷ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John. An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2 ed. (London: Westminster John Knox 1978) 190.

²⁸ The alternative Vetus Latina (MSS 2 and 11) reading further explains the problematic situation, giving a reason for it: It happened because of the great crowd present at the wedding.

the most important person at the table is unaware of what happened, the servants know exactly how the miracle occurred. Thus, the lowest-ranking individuals are portrayed as the more knowledgeable.³⁰ The variant reading, by enhancing their active role in the miracle, makes this irony even more pronounced.

From a narrative flow perspective, the comment about the servants in the standard text functions as an interjection (in some translations, the comment is placed in brackets). The servants' 'amazement' is not mentioned at the moment of the miracle (2:7–8), but is highlighted only later. The variant reading extends this interjection, making it appear even more unnatural in this place.

3.3. John 3:36

This reading is an addition that appears after the standard text of John 3:36.

NA28:

ὁ πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον· ὁ δὲ ἀπειθῶν τῷ υἱῷ οὐκ ὄψεται ζωὴν, ἀλλ' ἡ ὀργὴ τοῦ θεοῦ μένει ἐπ' αὐτόν.

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but God's wrath rests upon him.

Harklean version:

ܘܥܬܪ ܘܥܬܪ ܘܥܬܪ ܘܥܬܪ ܘܥܬܪ

And after these [things], John was handed over.

In most of the Harklean manuscripts (V¹, V², S¹, Z¹, Z², S², D, and O¹), the addition appears in the margin; however, at a later stage of the transmission of the Harklean version, it was inserted at the end of the verse (MSS C, P³, and L³).

This reading appears only in two other manuscripts, one Latin and one Greek.

VL 2 (fifth century, Trento National Museum):

et post haec traditus est Iohannis

Greek minuscule 1195 (eleventh century, Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Gr. 158)³¹:

και μετα ταυτα παρεδοθη ο ιωαννης

³⁰ The theme of the world's ignorance appeared earlier in the prologue (1:10). See C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Hendrickson 2003) I, 514–515.

³¹ Greek MS 1195 agrees more often than other manuscripts with unique Harklean readings. These instances are not highly numerous, yet are worth notice. See Jutkiewicz, *The Gospel of John*, 188–189 and the following section.

Although commentators are not usually interested in this addition to the standard text, it is significant, and the reason for its appearance is understandable. The Gospel of John has a gap concerning John the Baptist's end. Details about his imprisonment and death are provided only by the Synoptics. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist appears for the last time in 3:23–30; after this, he is only mentioned (in 4:1; 5:33; 10:40–41). In 3:24, there is a narrator's comment on the chronology of the events involving John: 'he had not been yet thrown (βεβλημένος) into prison.' This addition in 3:36, just after the last appearance of John (and the ambiguous section 3:31–36 where it is uncertain who is speaking) and the climax of the chapter in 3:35–36,³² has two effects. First, it refers back to the comment in 3:24 ('he had not been yet thrown into prison'), now providing firm information about John's disappearance. Second, the term used (παρεδόθη in Greek) is significant. In the Gospel of John, the verb παραδίδωμι is almost a technical one: it describes the mystery of evil at work against Jesus and becomes practically a nickname for Judas, the traitor. In this sense, the addition in 3:36 somehow marks John's resemblance to Jesus in a way that goes beyond the original picture of the Gospel of John, in which John the Baptist's inferiority and his merely intermediary role are highlighted (see John 1:8–9; 1:20; 1:30; 3:28–30; 10:41).³³ It is unclear whether a scribe (and others who transmitted this reading) intended this effect or if it happened by coincidence. The addition after John 3:36 must be directly influenced by Matt 4:12: 'Now when Jesus heard that John had been handed over (παρεδόθη), he withdrew to Galilee.' The movement of Jesus to Galilee is mentioned in John 4:3. Also Dionysius bar Salibi, a famous Syriac commentator from the twelfth century, commented on the meaning of this addition in the Harklean version, which is absent in the standard Peshitta translation.³⁴

3.4. John 4:24

NA28:

πνεῦμα ὁ θεός, καὶ τοὺς προσκυνοῦντας αὐτὸν ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ δεῖ προσκυνεῖν.

God is spirit, and those who worship him should worship in spirit and truth.

Harklean version:

ܩܘܕܝܫܐ ܘܢܫܐ ܕܘܨܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܨܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܨܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܨܝܠܝܢܐ ܕܘܨܝܠܝܢܐ

God is spirit, and those who worship him should worship in the spirit of the truth.

³² Barrett, *John*, 227.

³³ See also R.E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (I–XIII). Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1966) lxvii–lxx.

³⁴ N. Akçay, *The Commentary on the Gospels by Dionysius Jacob Bar Salibi Metropolitan of Amid (†1171)* (Istanbul: Department of Syriac Studies – Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate 2019) 870 (author's translation): 'This phrase is absent in the Peshitta gospel. From the beginning of the gospel up to here, John [the Evangelist] wrote before John [the Baptist] fell into prison. Nevertheless, his companions [the evangelists] did not write about these [things]. However, from here and beyond, John wrote about these [things] that his companions [the evangelists] left out and about these [things] that happened after the slaughter of the Baptist.'

This reading appeared first in the margin (MS V¹ is among the oldest Harklean manuscripts); later it remained in the margin in some manuscripts (Z¹ and O¹) and in the others (C, B, P³, and L³) was inserted into the lemma. Apart from the Harklean version, this reading is unique to the Greek Sinaiticus.

Greek MS \aleph :

ἐν πνεύματι ἀληθείας

The Greek reading most probably was created from a harmonisation with πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας that appears three times in the Fourth Gospel (14:17; 15:26; 16:13) and once in 1 John 4:6. At first sight, the reading is compelling, but it is essential to evaluate the significance of the difference in meaning between ἐν πνεύματι ἀληθείας and ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ. In this section, Jesus describes the manner of worship for ‘true worshippers’ (4:23). The use of the genitive in this construction in the Harklean version makes a single expression out of two. However, in no Harklean manuscript (as in the Greek MS Sinaiticus) is there a variant for the same expression (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) in the preceding verse, 4:23. This means that for the copyist who created this reading (and those who transmitted it), the expression with the genitive (ἐν πνεύματι ἀληθείας) was intended as a synonym for the double reference (ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) rather than a construction with a new meaning.³⁵ This passage might result from a simple error or a scribe’s attempt to vary the style slightly.

The text-critical treatment of this reading deserves further comment. In ‘The Initial Collation for the *Editio Critica Maior* of John,’³⁶ the Greek Sinaiticus reading has been divided into two: the omission of καὶ and the variant ἀληθείας. The latter has been marked for regularisation (that is treated as an error).³⁷ However, it is worth noticing that this procedure is a significant interpretative intervention of the editors. The result is not helpful for two reasons. First, two obviously connected elements are more difficult for the reader of the apparatus to notice. Second, the Greek Sinaiticus reading appears as disconnected from the Syriac witnesses for this reading. The existence of this reading in the later tradition, represented by the Syriac Harklean version, confirms that it is a real variant and not a reading that should be regularised and, thus, eliminated from the apparatuses.

³⁵ However, when the phrase ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ is treated as a hendiadys (that is, a figure of speech used for emphasis), one could argue that the more original and plain sense is transmitted in ἐν πνεύματι ἀληθείας. This point of view could have influenced (even unconsciously) the change introduced by some scribes.

³⁶ Edited for “The International Greek New Testament Project” by D.C. Parker with M.B. Morrill and U.B. Schmid (Version 1.0: August 2016). See John 4:24 in the positive apparatus <https://itseeweb.cal.bham.ac.uk/iohannes/ECMGreek/positive/index.html> and in the negative apparatus <https://itseeweb.cal.bham.ac.uk/iohannes/ECMGreek/negative/index.html>.

³⁷ In the ECM edition of Mark the regularisation is described: ‘Die Handschrift bezeugt zwar eindeutig die Lesart, bei der sie steht, gibt sie aber fehlerhaft wieder’ (H. Strutwolf *et al.* [eds.], *Novum Testamentum Graecum. Editio Critica Maior. I/2.2. Markusevangelium. Begleitende Materialien* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft 2021] 1.)

4. Conclusion

The four readings in the Gospel of John according to the Harklean version that have been analysed above appear in the following Greek and Latin manuscripts as detailed in the table below. Their existence in these manuscripts does not seem connected in any way. Several Harklean manuscripts and three *Vetus Latina* manuscripts (3, 4, and 14) contain the additions in 2:1 (2:3) and 2:9, but there is no apparent connection between the two.

John	Greek MS n	VL 2	VL 3	VL 4	VL 14	VL 8, 14, 22, 47	Greek MS 1195
2:1 (2:3)	yes		yes	yes	yes	yes	
2:9			yes	yes	yes		
3:36		yes					yes
4:24	yes						

Of course, tracing any direct dependence between these texts and the Harklean version is impossible. The readings must have existed earlier in other Greek manuscripts, given that they gained sufficient authority to be transmitted in many manuscripts throughout the Harklean tradition. For the Harklean version, known for its extreme fidelity to transmit readings otherwise unknown in the Syriac tradition, these rare readings must have been known from other sources and sufficiently widely attested. Still, these other sources probably represent very limited streams of the tradition since no Greek witness from the period between the most ancient witnesses for these readings and the creation of the Harklean version has been preserved (the reading in 3:36 is an exception in this regard). This situation poses an intriguing question about how much has been lost within the transmission process of these texts and again teaches humility in approaching the text-critical study of the NT. It is always necessary (though difficult) to assume that we know less than we would like to, and we must acknowledge that other readings preserved in late witnesses may also have ancient origins.

Furthermore, the Harklean version of the NT functioned for generations of Syriac Christians as the 'Greek' text, sometimes different from the standard Peshitta translation. Various commentators (for example, Dionysius bar Salibi and Barhebraeus) have commented on these differences treating textual plurality as an abundance worth appreciation. Although the readings presented in this paper are not sufficiently spectacular to entirely change our understanding of the gospels, it is fascinating to wonder how much (even minor) impact they, and other similar readings, have had on exegesis, theology, and human beliefs. This is a place where textual criticism interacts with ordinary life.

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