

Some Notable Readings of Papyrus Bodmer II

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Until recently, the papyri have yielded little that is of interest to translators of the Fourth Gospel. The most spectacular find has been the John Rylands fragment which dates from the first half of the second century, and hence furnishes strong evidence for the traditional date of the gospel, against the more extreme critics. But its content is confined to only five verses of the eighteenth chapter, so that it offers no appreciable contribution to textual criticism, exegesis or translation. The Chester Beatty papyrus of John is somewhat longer, extending from 10:7 to 11:57, but also a century later. It contains a few interesting readings such as the omission of the phrase "and the life" in 11:25, but its chief value is to the student of textual history, not the exegete or translator.

Against this background we can see the importance of a new papyrus, recently published by Victor Martin of the University of Geneva, and known as Papyrus Bodmer II or, in textual apparatus, as P66.¹ It includes two-thirds of the chapters and three-fourths of the total verses of the Gospel of John, from 1:1 to 14:26. Only two leaves, containing 6:11-35, are lacking. Although the details of its discovery are not yet known, Professor Martin has recently made the manuscript available in attractive printed form, with a description of its binding, the quality of the papyrus, the script, the subdivisions of the text, the title, abbreviations, and corrections. On the basis of such considerations, he cautiously dates the manuscript around 200 A.D. or very early in the third century. Its extent combined with such an early date give this papyrus great significance.

It is too early to determine the implications of this find for textual criticism, but even a preliminary collation uncovers a number of readings which are of interest to the exegete and the translator. These naturally fall into several classes. Some of them confirm the tradition; others have been hitherto rejected on the basis of the manuscript evidence; still others are peculiar to P66 and open up problems and possibilities which did not exist before.

With regard to many of the classic textual questions of John's gospel, we find that P66 strengthens the well-established conclusion of textual criticism. For example, it omits the pericope of the woman taken in adultery in 7:53-8:11 with no break in the manuscript between 7:52 and 8:12; it omits also the reference to the angel troubling the water in 5:3b-4, as well as the explanatory glosses in 2:3 and 6:56, and the difficult phrase "which is in heaven" in 3:13. In 1:18 the papyrus has "God only-begotten," with \aleph and B, a reading more difficult and certainly better-attested than "the only-begotten Son," which has been so widely adopted in modern versions. Such examples could be multi-

¹ *Papyrus Bodmer II, Evangile de Jean, ch. 1-14*. Ed. by Victor Martin. Cologny-Genève, 1956, p. 152. (Bibliotheca Bodmeriana V.).

plied. More interesting for exegesis are the unique readings, and others long hidden away in the recesses of critical apparatus.

In a few cases, peculiar readings which promise much at first glance fail to lead to any definite conclusions. In 4:36, the papyrus omits the article before the second *θερίζων* 'harvesting', allowing for the possibility that the sower and the harvester are the same. But the whole point of the passage and the statement of verse 37 expressly forbids this supposition. In 12:3, the singular, "he made," instead of the plural, "they made," leaves room, grammatically, for the conjecture that it was Lazarus who made a supper for Jesus, or even that Jesus made a supper for Lazarus. But the statement that Lazarus was "one of those who reclined with him" seems to argue, although not conclusively, against both of these possibilities. The singular may be intended impersonally, or it may be a copyist's error. In 12:47 we have the omission of the negative *μὴ* before *φυλάξῃ* 'to keep', with D and some of the old Latin witnesses, changing the verse so as to read, "And if anyone hear my words and keep them, I do not judge him." This is intentional, but almost certainly not the true reading. It is a natural change in the light of the immediate context, but in view of the total context, especially the emphatic "I" (*ἐγὼ*) and the statement of verse 48 that the judgment of the disobedient is reserved for the last day, the *μὴ* is virtually required. We must here follow the traditional text and regard the omission in the Bodmer Papyrus as an early corruption. The fact that it has been written in P66 and then obliterated may even indicate that there we have the origin of this variant.

By way of contrast, we have another omission of a negative in 9:27, this time supported by the internal evidence. The context is the argument between the Jews and the man whom Jesus has just cured of blindness. According to most manuscripts, the man is saying, "I told you already and you did not hear." The Bodmer Papyrus, with minuscule 22 and a few of the old Latin versions, omits the *οὐκ* 'not' before *ἤκούσατε* 'you heard': "I told you already and you heard." This has a truer ring than the usual reading, which sounds more like the words of Jesus himself, as John records them (cf. 5:37, 8:43, 8:47, etc.). The reading of some manuscripts of family 13, *οὐκ ἐπιστεύσατε* 'you did not believe', sounds even more suspiciously like Jesus speaking, and may reflect an extension of the same tendency (cf. 4:48, 5:38, 10:25, 26, etc.).² The next phrase, "Why do you want to hear it again?" lends further credibility to the variant in P66. The Jews had already heard the testimony once; why should they wish to hear the same thing again? There is not the strong spiritual implication there would be if Jesus were the speaker. The ironic jest of verse 28 ("do you want to become his disciples?") is a more natural conclusion to the man's argument when seen in this light. In all probability, P66 gives us the correct reading.

There are a number of instances where the papyrus supports variants which are much in dispute, either on external grounds or because they seem to represent elaborating or harmonizing tendencies. In 7:8 we find

² Or it may correspond to the *οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν* 'they did not believe' of verse 18.

οὐπω 'not yet' rather than οὐκ 'not',³ so as to read, "I go not yet up to this feast." The natural tendency is to regard this as a harmonization, since Jesus does go up to the feast in verse 10. But in view of the antiquity of P66, this cannot be regarded as a closed question. It is not certain that the οὐπω is meant to be a harmonization at all, or that it looks forward to verse 10. The καιρός, or appointed time, in verses 5 and 8 must mean the time of Jesus' manifestation, because it is mentioned in answer to his brothers' demand that he manifest himself (φανέρωσον σεαυτὸν) to the world. Yet when Jesus goes to the feast in verse 10, it is "not openly (οὐ φανερώς) but in secret." Hence the "time" is not the providential time for the visit to Jerusalem in chapter seven, but rather the appointed season for Jesus' final and open manifestation to the world. This may be connected with the triumphal entry (12:12-15) and the subsequent events leading up to the Passion (cf. 12:23, 27-28, 13:1, etc.). This does not solve the textual problem. The οὐπω could still point forward to verse 10, especially since Jesus is speaking of "this feast." He would then merely be refusing to travel with his brothers, because this would involve making himself known before the time; therefore he goes secretly and alone in verse 10. Or, the idea might be, "I do not yet go up—that is, unto *this* feast." Neither reading is actually more difficult than the other. The οὐπω could be a harmonization, but on the other hand, the οὐκ could have been introduced because of the fact that the "time" really proved to be the Passover (11:55, 12:1, 13:1) and not the Feast of Tabernacles, spoken of in chapter seven. There is little chance that the οὐπω can be an assimilation to the same word in the last clause of verse 8, because there P66 varies from all the tradition in reading οὐδέπω, synonymous in meaning but slightly different in form. In P66 we have either the true reading or else an example of a very early and deliberate alteration in the text.

Similar alternatives present themselves elsewhere. In 4:9, the papyrus agrees with B in retaining the explanatory clause "For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans." In Peter's confession in 6:69, it has "the Christ, the Holy One of God," with the Coptic versions. In 13:10 it not only retains the phrase "except the feet," with B against κ, but adds a strengthening word μόνον 'alone' with minuscule 235 and one old Syriac witness. Although criticism is apt to find a tendency toward elaboration in such cases, the testimony of P66 suggests that more elaborate and defined readings cannot necessarily be considered late.

With regard to some variants that have been rejected on external grounds, the support of P66 may be sufficient to swing the weight of evidence in their favor. For example, the papyrus agrees with D, E*, L, etc., in reading οὐ 'that' instead of ὅτε 'when' in 12:17, thus giving the content rather than the time of the multitude's witness to Christ and relating the witness directly to the raising of Lazarus. Bultmann holds that this would confuse the two distinct multitudes which he finds in this passage.⁴ It is hard to see why this is necessarily so.

³ With B and some Byzantine texts against κ, D, and most of the old Latin and Syriac.

⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 1941. p. 320.

The variant merely suggests that the multitude in verse 17 does not necessarily consist of those who actually witnessed the raising of Lazarus in chapter eleven, but might be identified with those who saw the risen Lazarus in 12:9. It may still conceivably be distinguished from the multitudes mentioned in verses 12 and 18. In 12:32, the papyrus has πάντα with \aleph^* , D, and the Latin tradition. This gives the verse a more cosmic aspect: "I will draw all things unto myself," instead of "all men." In 13:2, the aorist participle *γενομένου* allows for the translation "supper being ended," thus placing the feetwashing after the meal, although both the aorist and the more strongly supported present form may have a more general sense, "at supper."⁵ Other variants of P66 which have support in the tradition, but which differ from the strongest witnesses, include the nominative *μείζων* in 5:36 ("I, a greater than John, have the witness"), the masculine forms *ὄς . . . μείζων* in 10:29 ("My Father who gave them me is greater than all"), a structural variation in 11:33, and the addition of the clause "because they are evil" in 3:20.

Most significant of all are some of the unique readings of the Bodmer Papyrus. Theologically, the most interesting one occurs in 7:52, where P66 adds the definite article before *προφήτης*. Instead of claiming that "No prophet arises out of Galilee," the Jews are saying, "The prophet does not arise out of Galilee," thus bringing this verse in line with 7:41, "The Christ does not come out of Galilee." The belief that no prophets come from Galilee conflicts not only with the Old Testament (2 Kings 14:25, Jonah 1:1) but also with the teaching of the Rabbis,⁶ and it is hard to see why John should have attributed such surprising ignorance to these Jews. Nestle has listed "the Prophet" as a conjecture by Owen,⁷ while Bultmann mentions it as a possible interpretation of the verse,⁸ but P66 is the first textual witness to its originality.⁹ "The Prophet" is a Messianic figure in John (1:21, 25, 6:14, 7:40), to be distinguished from the term "a prophet" which is applied to Jesus in 4:19 and 9:17 by individuals who had not yet attained a mature faith. The context of 6:14, where "the Prophet" is also *ὁ ἐρχόμενος* 'the Coming One' and is connected with the attempt to make Jesus king, suggests that the Prophet and the Christ are the same, even though they are mentioned separately in 1:21ff. and in 7:40 and may have been distinct in the minds of many Jews. The reading of P66 in 7:52 strengthens the identification of the two since it applies to the Prophet the very saying which in 7:41 refers to the Christ. At every point, the reading of the Bodmer Papyrus accords with the

⁵ The Byzantine and most of the Western witnesses, as well as Θ and 33 have *γενομένου*, a form similar to that of P66, while the bulk of the tradition has the present *γινόμενου*.

⁶ R. Eliezer, about 90 A.D., said, "You have no tribe in all Israel out of which prophets have not come forth" (Sukkah 27b).

⁷ E. Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 20th ed. Stuttgart: Privileg. Württ. Bibelanstalt, 1950. p. 255.

⁸ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 236n.

⁹ Cf. Luke 7:39 where B and a few other texts similarly add the article before *προφήτης*. "The Prophet" probably refers to the prophet like unto Moses in Deut. 18:15ff.

internal evidence. It is almost certainly the correct text, or at the very least a true interpretation of what John really meant.¹⁰

In 8:25 we have an obscure reply of Jesus to the Jews who ask who he is. Discussion has centered around the words *τὴν ἀρχὴν*, which literally mean 'the beginning'. They have generally been taken adverbially, either as a statement ("In general that which I tell you") or as a question ("Why do I even speak to you at all?"). Before the *τὴν ἀρχὴν*, P66 inserts in the margin another unique reading, *εἰπον ὑμῖν* 'I told you'. If accepted, this would at least rule out the interrogative sense and require some such translation as, "I told you in the beginning what I tell you now" or, "I told you the sum of what I tell you now," or, "I told you the sum of the matter; I am that which I speak to you." One might argue that a scribe has added the words to explain a difficult verse, but the sentence is far from crystal clear even with the addition; certainly something seems to be missing from the verse as it stands in all the rest of the manuscripts. It may be that here also P66 has recovered for us the original text. At any rate, the interpreter should not ignore its witness.

Two more of the peculiar variants deserve mention. In 10:16, the papyrus varies from all the tradition in reading *συναγαγεῖν* 'to gather', instead of *ἀγαγεῖν* 'to bring'. This is the first of the references to the calling of the Gentiles, and the use of *συνάγω* accords with 11:52, where it is used to refer to the "children of God who are scattered abroad." The same verb appears in a different context, but with a similar reference to the Gentiles as sheep in Matt. 25:32. In John 11:20, P66 inserts *ἐαυτῆς* 'of herself' thus adding the detail that it was in her own house that Mary remained. Probably no certain conclusions can be drawn from this as to whether or not Mary and Martha lived together, but it is interesting that one late Byzantine witness inserts the less emphatic *αὐτῆς*,¹¹ while D, Θ, and the Byzantine tradition add *αὐτῆς* in Luke 10:38, where it is Martha's house that is in question. Matters of detail such as this should perhaps wait until more evidence is forthcoming. The examples we have given are far from exhaustive. There are enough, however, to show that the text of P66, while not to be accepted uncritically, has much to contribute to exegesis and translation as well as to textual criticism. The translator should use judgment and restraint in adopting its readings against the overwhelming witness of our other manuscripts, but in at least three instances, 7:52, 8:25 and 9:27, Papyrus Bodmer II offers him a clearer, more logical text, and quite possibly the original one.

¹⁰ The fact that the present *ἐγείρεται* 'arises', rather than the perfect *ἐγήγεγραι* 'has arisen', is found in the best manuscripts, including P66, also accords with this reading. The verb *ἐγείρω* is usual in describing the advent of a prophet (cf. Lk. 7:16, Mt. 11:11), thus showing that "the Prophet" in becoming a Messianic title has not lost its normal connotation.

¹¹ H. F. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1913. II, p. 445.