

An Assessment of the Authenticity of John 9:38-39a

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Abstract: *The dilemma of establishing the earliest form of the New Testament text is evident in the, now well-known dictum, that no two ancient manuscripts of the New Testament are absolutely identical. One crux in the history of New Testament textual criticism has been the variation unit in John 9:38-39a, that is, its omission or inclusion in the larger pericope of the 'Blind Man' in John 9. This paper will engage with both the methodological and textual issues in this debate and tentatively suggest a solution to the variation unit under discussion in light of both internal and external probabilities.*

Key Words: Textual Criticism; Papyri; Biblical manuscripts; Manuscript classifications; Gospel of John; Healing.

INTRODUCTION

Within the centuries and millennia preceding the invention of Johannes Gutenberg's printing press in c.1450 AD, multiple copies of a document were all made by hand. The necessity of New Testament textual criticism stems from the simple phenomenon that none of the ancient New Testament manuscripts are exactly alike. It is somewhat ironic that the very means of the text's preservation (i.e. being hand copied) is also the source of its corruption.

This paper will investigate the variation unit found in the Gospel of John at 9:38-39a. After briefly discussing some methodological principles, external and internal evidence will be scrutinized in order to make a textual decision. In the concluding comments an appropriate designation of A, B, C or D will be attributed to the certainty of our findings, similar to the United Bible Society's fourfold categorisation of confidence; 'A' indicating that the textual decision is certain; 'B' indicating that the textual decision is almost certain; 'C' indicating the variation unit has even handed supporting evidence; and 'D' indicating significant doubt as to the textual probability of originality.

CONTEXTUAL JOHANNINE ISSUES

Jn 9:38-39a falls within the larger pericope of vv. 35-41, which is itself part of the larger narrative of controversy between Jesus and certain members of the Pharisaic party over the Sabbath healing of the man born blind (Jn 9:1-41). Jn 9:1 does not indicate a chronological connection between chapters eight and nine, rather it provides a concrete example and exposition of Jn 8:12, in that Jesus is portrayed as the light of the world who reveals God (through healing) and exposes people who reject his revelation (certain Jewish authorities). For our purposes it is important to note that chapter 9 is composed of a short introductory pericope (vv. 1-7) which records the mighty deed Jesus performed,

and a comparatively longer section (vv. 8-41) which elaborates on the consequences of this event. As R. Bultmann has argued, it is most plausible to see 9:39-41 as operating as an introductory discourse on that which follows.¹ That other early readers surmised a similar division is evidenced by the lectionaries which divide the narrative into 9:1-38 and 9:39-10:9.²

At this point we turn to the text under discussion. After the Pharisees' investigation of the healing of the blind man, they cast (ἐξέβαλον) [*exebalon*] him out of their hearing (9:34). The relevant textual decision pertains to the inclusion or exclusion of the phrase "Then the man said, 'Lord, I believe' and he worshiped him. And Jesus said" (vv. 38-39a), after Jesus reveals his identity as the Son of Man (9:36-37).

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

External evidence consists of the actual manuscript data. In assessing the authenticity of a manuscript variant, considerations of external evidence include the age, quality, and geographic distribution of the extant manuscript tradition. Although external data is often considered to be the more 'objective' evidence (as opposed to internal criteria), it is historically demonstrable that spurious presuppositions can unhelpfully influence a textual decision. One need not look further than Pickering or Hodge's adamant conviction that numerical attestation is the primary category of support.³ Cautioning against this kind of reasoning, K. Aland and B. Aland have argued that "manuscripts are to be weighed rather than counted."⁴ This is not to say that numerical support is negligible, but rather the process of evaluating external support is a combination of factors which includes numerical support amid quality, date, and geographical distribution. In order to provide the most accurate assessment of the external evidence, tables 1 and 2 have been compiled for comparison. Due to the large number of later witnesses which include the variation unit, only the more significant manuscripts have been included in table 2.⁵

Table 1. Manuscripts which exclude vv38-39a.

Manuscript	Century	Provenance	Character
P ⁷⁵ (Papyrus Bodmer)	III	Egypt	Strict text, Category I
ℵ* (01, Codex Sinaiticus) Non-corrected reading.	early IV	Not known. Discovered at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mt. Sinai	Varied text, but primarily Alexandrian text, Category I.
W (032, Codex Freerianus)	V	Not known	Category III. Independent of known text type.
it ^b , Codex Veronensis	V	Not known	Purple / gold manuscript.
Copt ^{sa ms}	IV/V	Possibly Alexandria.	Sahidic or Akhmimic dialect.
Copt ^{Ach2}	IV	Possibly Egypt. ⁶	Sub-Akhmimic
Copt ^{mf}	IV/V	Egypt ⁷	Middle Egyptian Fayyumic

¹ R. Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 329.

² G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John*. 2nd edn. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 148.

³ W. N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997); Z. C. Hodges, "The Greek Text of the King James Version" *BSac* 125 (1968): 334-45.

⁴ K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 280.

⁵ For a helpful glossary and explanation of basic text critical nomenclature and sigla, see E. Nestle and K. Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* 27th edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), 44-89. 648-771.

⁶ Akhmimic was spoken in Panopolis.

Table 2. Manuscripts which include vv38-39a.⁸

Manuscript	Century	Provenance	Character
P ⁶⁶ (Papyrus Bodmer II)	III	Not known	Free text, Category I
ℵ ^c (01, Codex Sinaiticus). Corrected reading.	c. VII	Not known	Unclassified corrector characteristics.
A (02 Codex Alexandrinus)	V	Alexandria	Gospels: Category III,
B (03, Codex Vaticanus)	IV	Not known	Category I
D (05 Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis)	V	North African or Egyptian	Category IV
<i>f</i> ¹ , Family 1, The Lake Group [mss 1, 118, 131, 209, 1582 et al]	X-XIV	<i>Not known</i>	Gospels: Category III
<i>f</i> ¹³ , Family 13, The Ferrar Group [mss 13, 69, 124, 174, 230, 346, 543, 788, 826, 828, 983, 1689, and 1709]	XI-XV	Not known	Category III
33	IX	Not known	Gospels: Category II.

As is evident from even a cursory glance at the above summary of the manuscript data the numerical count vastly favours the inclusion of vv. 38-39a. Thirty-two of the thirty-four uncials which attest Jn 9 include the reading.⁹ Furthermore, there is no known miniscule of the current 2,812 documented which omits the text. However one needs to be cautioned by Aland's 'weighing and not counting,' so as not to rush too hastily to a conclusion.

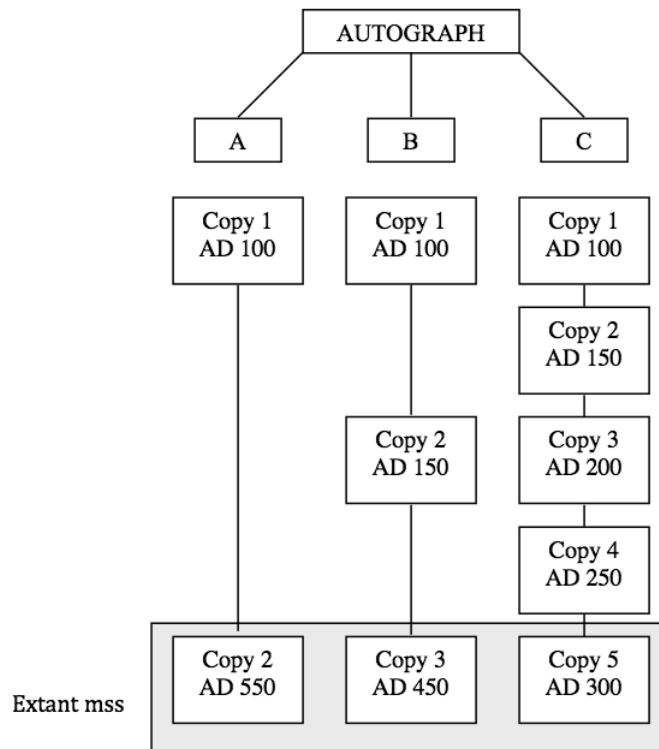
In general, the earlier a manuscript is dated the greater probability there is that it has retained the original reading. However a problem arises here in the phenomenon of later manuscripts being copies of earlier manuscripts – relatively speaking. In a hypothetical scenario (see figure 1), an autograph may have been copied in three distinct textual streams (for the sake of argument A, B and C), wherein there was a variegated frequency of copying and thus increased potential for corruption (cf. column C of figure 1). The problem lies in the fact that there is no way of knowing how many times a manuscript has been copied throughout the history of its transmission.¹⁰ This should urge caution in arguments of this kind.

⁷ Fayyamic was spoken in Lake Moeris area. A. Vööbus, *Early Versions of the New Testament: Manuscript Studies*. Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile 6 (Stockholm: ETSE), 1954.

⁸ Also see P⁶⁶ ℵ^c A B D L Q Y 070 0141 0250 *f*¹ *f*¹³ 28 33 157 180 205 565 579 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505 *Byz* [E F G] *Lect* it^a, aur, c, d, f, ff2, q, r1 vg TR syr^s p, h, pal cop^{sa} mss, pbo, bo arm eth geo slav Didymus.

⁹ This count does not include the corrector to Sinaiticus.

¹⁰ This is, where a given manuscript stands with regard to what has preceded it.



The earliest attested manuscript including the variation unit under discussion is P⁶⁶. This papyrus has been dated to approximately 200 AD.¹¹ The earliest attested manuscript which does not include the variation unit is P⁷⁵, which is considered to be roughly in the same period (c. 225 AD). Given the difficulty for paleographers to more precisely date a manuscript, a difference of twenty-five years is negligible, and in this sense one can hardly talk of a difference at all in terms of dating. Both readings were known in the earliest period of our extant manuscript tradition and both are from the same general geographical location.

What remains, then, in regard to external evidence, is to ascertain the ‘quality’ of these various textual traditions. Manuscripts of the New Testament have characteristically been divided into various ‘text-types.’ Although there is significant debate surrounding the validity of these divisions, text critics have postulated that the main text-types include the Alexandrian, Western and Byzantine texts.¹² Although several manuscripts do not fit into these categories (hence the creation of other categories such as Caesarean), the majority are related in a significant manner, as these groups have been established on the basis of similar characteristics and patterns in copying. Manuscripts classified into one of

¹¹ K. Aland and B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 100; V. Martin, and J. W. B. Barnes, *Papyrus Bodmer II: Supplément, Evangélie de Jean, 14-21*. Geneva (1962); K. Aland, “Neue neutestamentliche Papyri III” *NTS* 20 (1974): 357-381; B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edn. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 216. Noteworthy is H. Hunger, “Zur Datierung des Papyrus Bodmer II (P66)” *Anzeiger der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 4 (1960): 12-33, who dates P66 in the first half of the second century.

¹² B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 3rd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 215ff. G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles, A Disquisition upon the Corpus Paulinum* (London, 1953), 272-76. However it should be noted that there is a distinct shift away from the division of the text into strict text-types in emerging text critical discussions.

these three broad categories (Alexandrian, Western and Byzantine) have often been considered to display a discernable descending level of quality.

The Alexandrian text is considered to be superior due to its inclusion of readings which are terse or rough.¹³ This manuscript tradition also displays impressive resilience against harmonising to an author's individual idiosyncrasies. In assessing the external evidence, the problem arises when the two principal witnesses of the Alexandrian text (P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵) are split at Jn 9:38-39a, as are two other important Alexandrian witnesses, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus (the former of these supporting the inclusion of the variation unit).¹⁴ Although it has been shown that Sinaiticus has distinctive Western readings in John 1-8, \aleph (Codex Sinaiticus) is Alexandrian in chapters 9 and following.¹⁵ It is also important to note that a corrector of \aleph has made a seventh century inclusion of the variation unit in the margin, which testifies to the fact that the reading was not an immediate correction to the exemplar. In addition to several interpolations, the Western text displays significant harmonistic tendencies and substitutions.¹⁶ The principal Western manuscript Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (which is conventionally given the symbol D) includes the reading. Although one must be careful not to immediately dismiss a Western reading for the above stated deficiencies, it is important to note the 'freedom' D displays in transmitting the tradition.¹⁷ The exclusion of the variation unit is attested in the Old Latin Codex Veronensis.

Since the publication of J. J. Griesbach's major work in the later part of the eighteenth century,¹⁸ the Byzantine text has been commonly considered to be the most recent textual development and hence least valuable for establishing the original text.¹⁹ Therefore, the additional attestation of the variation unit's inclusion in the Lake and Ferrar families, as well as the attestation of miniscule witnesses are to be weighed lightly. Even though, as stated above, the gross numerical count of manuscripts attests to the inclusion of the variation unit under discussion, the quality of the few manuscripts which do support the exclusion is very high. P⁷⁵ and \aleph are two of the strongest witnesses of the New Testament, and for this reason the exclusion should be carefully considered.

In regard to geographic distribution, generally speaking, the wider the attestation in the manuscript tradition, the more likely that the attested reading is original. The

¹³ G. D. Fee, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament" in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, Vol. 45, Studies and Documents Series. Ed. E. J. Epp, and G. D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 7 (3-16).

¹⁴ It is interesting to note Cowell's comments on P⁷⁵ at this point, "P⁷⁵ ... [represents] the disciplined scribe who writes with the intention of being careful and accurate. ... the scribe's impulse to improve style is for the most part defeated by the obligation to make an exact copy." E. C. Colwell, "Method in Evaluating Scribal Habits: A Study of P⁴⁵, P⁶⁶, P⁷⁵", in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, Vol. 45, Studies and Documents Series. Ed. E. J. Epp, and G. D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 117, 121 (106-24).

¹⁵ G. D. Fee, "Codex Sinaiticus in the Gospel of John" In *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, Vol. 45, Studies and Documents Series. Ed. E. J. Epp, and G. D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 221-244.

¹⁶ G. D. Fee, "Textual Criticism of the New Testament", 7.

¹⁷ Although Codex Freerianus (W) displays Western characteristics in Mk 1:1-5:30, within the Gospel of John it has been identified as Alexandrian.

¹⁸ J. J. Greisbach, *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 2 Vols. (London: Elmsly, 1796).

¹⁹ Aland and Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 18.

manuscripts which exclude the variation unit in Jn 9:38-39 have substantial geographic distribution including Latin translations in Europe, three Coptic translations in Egypt and two major uncials. The inclusion, however is also supported strongly with diverse geographical distribution including translations in Armenian, Ethiopian, Georgian, Slavonic, Latin, Syriac and Coptic versions, with their respective places of origin. Clearly both readings have widespread geographical distribution. It is therefore somewhat surprising, in light of this even handed external textual attestation (date, quality and geographic distribution) that Metzger would conclude that the inclusion of vv. 38-39a has an “overwhelming preponderance of external attestation”²⁰ when compared with the variation unit’s exclusion. At the conclusion of this paper we will return to assess the validity of the United Bible Society’s decision to include the variant in the fourth edition of their Greek New Testament.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE

Internal evidence (often referred to as ‘transcriptional probability’) consists of constructing the most plausible hypothesis which accounts for the proposed original text, as well as the rise of the other divergent readings. At this juncture, the textual critic is called to enter the world of scribal habits, idiosyncrasies and possible causes of error. It is important to note that scribes did not necessarily treat the New Testament text as an authority which should not, under any circumstances, be ‘enhanced’ by their own scribal activity. Scribes often took the liberty to offer explanatory remarks or include/omit portions of text, including, but not limited to, changes related to spelling, grammar, resolving theological difficulties, harmonisation, introducing euphemistic elements and marginal glosses of various kinds. This potential for the corruption of the manuscript tradition does not include the long list of possible unintentional errors such as haplography (omission due to similar word in immediate context), dittography (a word or letter that has been written twice), metathesis (a reversal in order of two letters or words), fusion (incorrect word division, two words into one), fission incorrect word division, one word into two), homoioteleuton (omission cause by confusing similar endings), and homioarchton (omission cause by confusion of similar word beginnings).²¹ In light of this complex textual situation, questions pertaining to the assessment of internal evidence include the following: 1) What are the possible mistakes which could produce the divergent manuscript traditions? 2) How did the other reading come about if it is not the original? And 3) What would have caused the other readings to have been formed or omitted? These questions will be addressed below.

In order to assess the possibility of theological motivation for inclusion or omission in the original text, it is necessary to investigate how the variation unit fits within the immediate context, chapter and entire work. It is evident that the inclusion or the exclusion of vv. 38-39a in the immediate context is equally appropriate, and thus neither can be dismissed on that basis. The exclusion simply has the uninterrupted words of Jesus, without the interlude of dialogue between the blind man who has been healed and Jesus. At this level of transcriptional probability there is equal weighting.

²⁰ B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), 195.

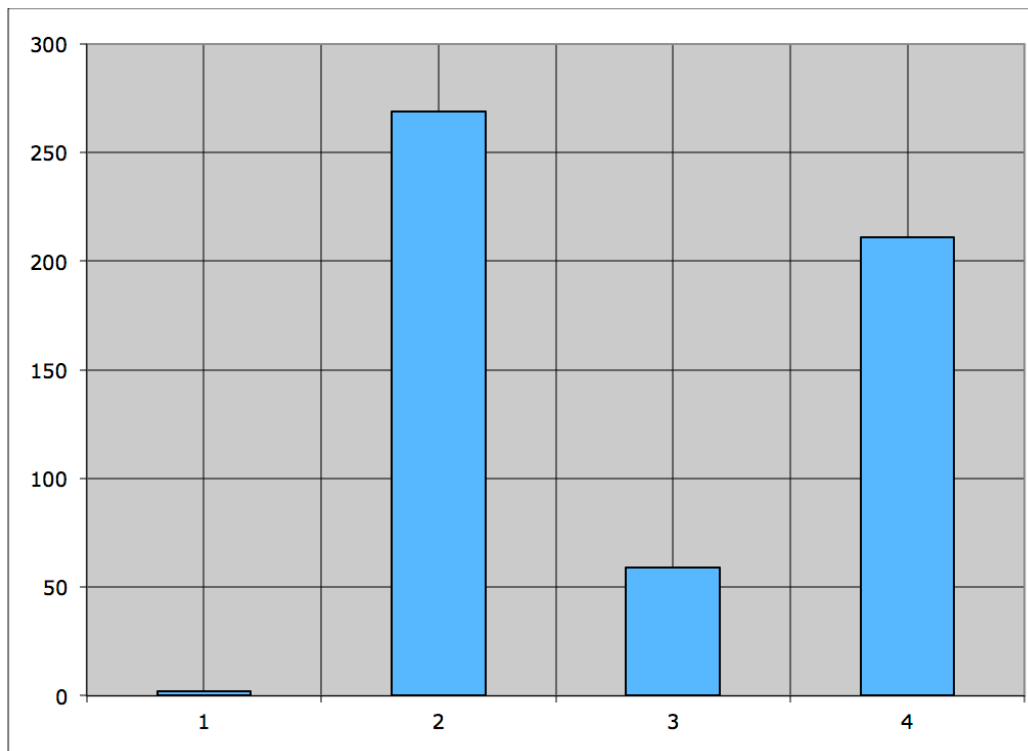
²¹ For further discussion see P. D. Wegner, *A Student’s Guide to Textual Criticism: Its History, Methods and Results* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 44-57.

In regard to the wider context of the chapter, if the original text did include vv. 38-39a then this would be a climactic expression of faith which recalls 9:3 “he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” If the reading is excluded then the focus is on Jesus’ controversy with the Pharisees. This latter emphasis seems more plausible given the content of chapter 8, which also envisages Jesus’ controversy with his opponents culminating in intense disputation. Chapter 9 is followed by the ‘Good Shepherd’ discourse, which contrasts Jesus with the ‘bad shepherds’ of 10:12. This element of bitter disputation is heightened by the omission of the variation unit. The exclusion of the reading is also preferred in the vision of the entire gospel which seems to be driving towards Thomas’ confession of faith in chapter 20:28 “Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God.’” The inclusion of the act of worship in 9:38-39a seems to intrude too early into John’s longer trajectory of Thomas’ climactic confession, and hence disrupts the overall development of the theme within the narrative.²²

Stylistic features of this variation unit (vv.38-39a “ὁ δὲ ἔφη· πιστεύω, κύριε· καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ. Καὶ εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς” [*ho de ephē; pisteuō, kyrie, kai prosekynēsen autō. Kai eipen ho Iēsous*], And he said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshipped him. And Jesus said), also weigh in favour of its omission rather than inclusion. Firstly, ἔφη [ephē], the Greek term translated as ‘he said,’ occurs in only one other location in John’s Gospel (1:23). This, of course, is not definitive evidence that the term here is foreign, as several commentators have noted, the numerous Johannine expressions used to denote speaking, saying, talking or telling. This freedom to use various Greek terms interchangeably is evident in 1:38 “When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said (εἶπαν) [*eipān*] to them, “What are you looking for?” They said (λέγεται) [*legetai*] to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” Nonetheless, based on a statistical analysis of John’s use of terms in reference to speaking, one would be hard pressed to argue that the word used in the disputed passage (vv. 38-39a) is common. See the figure 2 below for a summary of the distribution of the relevant terminology in John’s Gospel. A note of caution is in order. One should not over emphasise these findings as definitive, as perhaps Brown did in his assessment.²³ However this analysis does indicate the possibility of the variation unit having its origin outside the original text.

²² Even though chapters 4, 6 and 11 do have their climactic points (4:29 ‘Messiah’; 6:14 ‘prophet’; 11:45 ‘believed in him’) none describe Jesus as receiving worship.

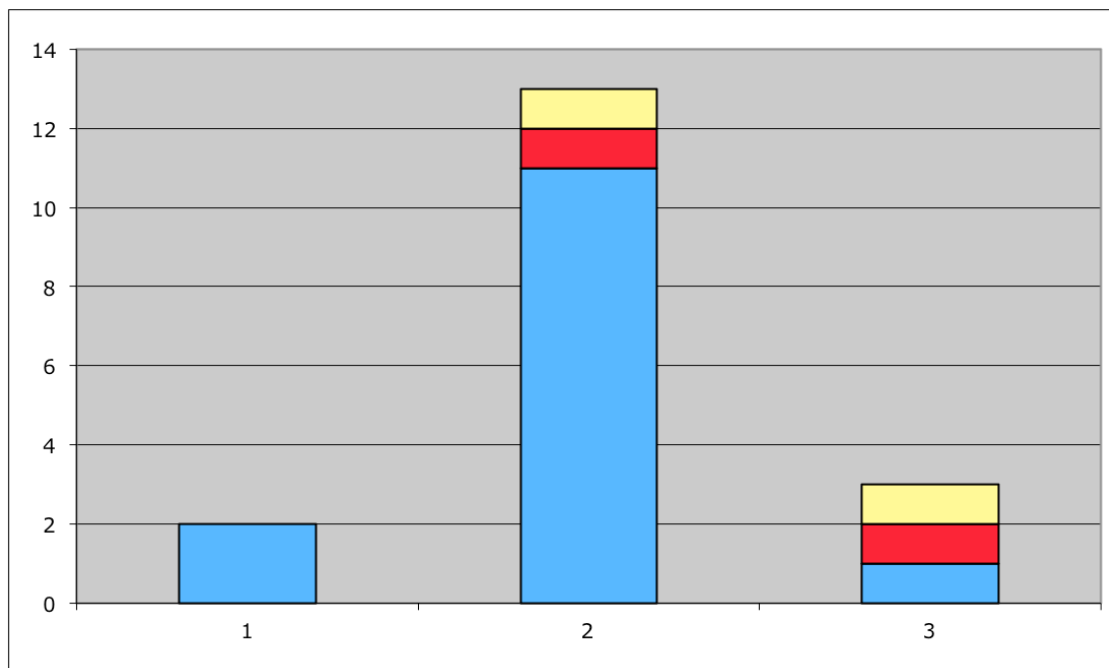
²³ Brown, 1966, 375.



Column	Word	Frequency	References
1	φημί [phēmi]	2	Jn 1:23, [possibly 9:38]
2	λέγω [legō]	269	Jn 1:15, 21, 26, 29, 32, 36, 38, 41, 43, 45, 51; 2:3, 7, 10, 21; 3:3, 11; 4:5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 25, 28, 31, 33, 34, 35, 42, 49; 5:6, 8, 10, 18, 24, 25, 34; 6:5, 8, 12, 14, 20, 26, 32, 42, 47, 52, 65, 71; 7:6, 11, 12, 15, 25, 26, 28, 31, 37, 40, 41, 50; 8:4, 5, 6, 12, 19, 22, 25, 27, 31, 33, 34, 39, 45, 46, 48, 51, 52, 54, 58; 9:2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19, 41; 10:1, 7, 20, 24, 36, 41; 11:3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 16, 23, 24, 27, 32, 34, 36, 39, 40, 44, 47, 54, 56; 12:4, 21, 22, 23, 24, 29, 33, 34; 13:6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 33, 36, 37, 38; 14:5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 22; 15:15; 16:7, 12, 17, 18, 20, 23, 26, 29, 18:4, 5, 17, 26, 34, 37, 38, 40; 19:3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 21, 24, 26, 35, 37; 20:2, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29; 21:2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22.
3	λαλέω [laleō]	59	Jn 1:37; 3:11,31,34; 4:26-27; 6:63; 7:13,17-18,26,46; 8:12,20,25-26,28,30,38,40,44; 9:21,29,37; 10:6; 12:29,36,41,48-50; 14:10,25,30; 15:3,11,22; 16:1,4,6,13,18,25,29,33-17:1; 17:13; 18:20-21,23; 19:10.
4	εἶπον [eipon]	211	Jn 1:15, 22-23, 25, 30, 33, 38, 42,46, 48, 50; 2:16, 18-20, 22; 3:2-3, 7, 9-10, 12,26-28; 4:10, 13, 17, 18, 27, 29, 32, 39, 48, 50, 52-53; 5:11-12, 14; 6:10, 25-26, 28-30, 32, 34-36, 41, 43, 53, 59-61, 65, 67; 7:3, 9, 16, 21, 33, 35-36, 38-39, 42, 45, 52; 8:7, 10-11, 13-14, 21, 24-25, 28, 39, 41-42,48, 52, 55, 57-58; 9:6-7, 11-12, 15, 17, 20, 22-24,

			26-28, 30, 34-37, 39-41; 10:6-7, 24-25, 34-36, 41; 11:4, 11-14, 16, 21, 25, 28, 34, 37, 40-43, 46, 49, 51; 12:6-7, 19, 27, 30, 35, 38-39, 41, 44, 49-50; 13:7, 11-12, 21, 28, 33; 14:2, 23, 26, 28-29; 15:15, 20; 16:4, 15, 17, 19; 17:1; 18:1, 6-9, 11, 16, 21-22, 25, 30-34, 37-38; 19:21, 24, 30; 20:14-15, 17-18, 20-22, 25-26, 28; 21:6, 17, 19-20, 23.
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The second stylistic feature which would support the omission of the variation unit is the use of προσκυνέω [prosekynēō]. Although John employs this term at several points throughout his gospel,²⁴ it always refers to the worship of the Father. What then accounts for an alternative reference in Jn 9? It seems evident on the basis of patristic citations and lectionary readings, that within the early church the Gospel which enjoyed most circulation and usage was by far the Gospel of Matthew.²⁵ It has commonly been noted in synoptic studies that a scribe would often assimilate or harmonize a Markan or Lukan text to its Matthean counterpart. In regard to the variation unit under discussion, it is entirely plausible given the use of προσκυνέω [prosekynēō] in the synoptic tradition, that a scribe has assimilated the concept of a person offering worship to Jesus into the Johannine record. This possibility can be adequately displayed in a simple graphical analysis which demonstrates the frequency and distribution of προσκυνέω [prosekynēō] in the synoptic record.



²⁴ Jn 4:20-24; 12:20.

²⁵ The Gospel of Matthew occupies the first place in all the earliest lists of the gospels (e.g. Muratorian Canon). See further R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 13-24; R. H. Mounce, *Matthew* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 1. In the West the two apostolic gospels were put first (Matthew then John). For the widespread influence of Matthew's gospel see E. Mausaux, *Influence de l'Évangile de saint Matthieu sur la littérature chrétienne avant saint Irénée* (Louvain: Publications Univeritaires de Louvain, 1985). For the importation of non Matthean variation units into other texts see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 129-132.

	Mark	Matthew	Luke
Occurrences	2	13	3
Object of verb and references	2 x Jesus (Mk. 5:6; 15:19)	11 x Jesus (Mt. 2:2,8,11; 4:9-10; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20; 28:9,17;) 1 x God (4:10) 1 x Satan (Mt. 4:9)	1 x Jesus (Lk. 24:52) 1 x God (Lk. 4:8) 1 x Satan (Lk 4:7)
% with Jesus as subject	100 %	84.6%	33.3%

CAUSES OF VARIATION

One of the important and indeed necessary steps in textual criticism is attempting to account for the non-original readings. How did the change occur? Was it accidental or intentional? Which hypothesis accounts most fully for the manuscript tradition? We will first consider the question of deliberate or accidental change. There is typically a catalogue of accidental changes which have been noted by textual critics.²⁶ Some have attempted to attribute the omission in Jn 9 to haplography because verses 37 and 39 begin in a similar fashion (v. 37 εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς [*eipen autō ho Iēsous*], cf. v. 39 εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς [*eipen ho Iēsous*]). However if this was the scenario the latter part of v. 37 (καὶ ὁ λαλῶν μετὰ σοῦ ἐκεῖνός ἐστιν) [*kai ho lalōn meta sou ekeinos estin*] would also have been omitted, and the beginning of v. 39 would be attested in the manuscript tradition which have omitted the variation unit. However, what one finds in the manuscripts is a complete v. 37 and divided support for v. 38-39a.²⁷ Second, it is often claimed that a shorter reading is to be preferred to a longer or more complex variation unit due to the scribal tendency to embellish or add rather than omit textual data. Although not the strongest criterion, the exclusion of the text is obviously shorter and thus is marginally favored within this category.

It is interesting to note that within one of the lectionaries, there is a singular reading which, although not listed in any modern apparatus (due to the fact that singular readings are considered highly unlikely to be original), it does provide insight into scribal willingness to expand the texts that were being copied. The lectionary reading of Jn 9:38 reads as follows: Καὶ εἶπεν, Ναὶ κύριε· πεπίστευκα ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος [*Kai eipen, nai kyrie, pepisteuka hoti sy ei ho christos ho huios tou theou ho eis ton kosmon erchomenos.*] (And he said, “Yes Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”). This has been noted as an obvious harmonisation to Jn 11:27, λέγει αὐτῷ· ναὶ κύριε, ἐγὼ πεπίστευκα ὅτι σὺ εἶ ὁ

²⁶ Some of the most common include faulty word divisions (1 Tim 3:16), homoeoteleuton (1 Jn 2:23), haplography (1 Thes 2:7), dittography (Mk 12:27), metathesis (Mk 14:65) and itacism (Rom 5:1).

²⁷ Often the more difficult reading is preferred due to the scribal tendency to polish or make clear rather than obscure a text. Both readings make sense and should not be dismissed on these grounds. Neither reading presents itself as grammatically or syntactically more problematic than the other.

χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἐρχόμενος [*legei autō, nai kyrie, egō pepisteuka hoti sy ei ho christos ho huios tou theou ho eis ton kosmon erchomenos*] (She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”). In this way, the lectionary reading in John 9, in addition to affirming Jesus’ messianic status, affirms his divine sonship.²⁸

The question that remains, however, is how one accounts for the variation unit’s exclusion if it was original? It is possible that an ‘Arian’ type of theological position found the phrase in vv. 38-39a unpalatable and thus omitted the entire reference to the blind man’s response. However, the early date of P⁷⁵ mitigates against this hypothesis. Even if there were several proto-Arian precursors circulating before that time, the one hundred year chasm suggests that this reconstruction of theological motivation is tenuous and somewhat implausible. Furthermore, when one investigates how the same apparently ‘proto-Arian’ scribes treated other passages of high Christology (Jn 1:1-18; 20:28), there is no evidence of similar tendencies. This purely hypothetical scenario has nothing other than its claim to support it. In fact the opposite has been noted in the wider manuscript tradition, that scribes have a tendency to change a lower Christology to a higher Christology. B. Ehrman has argued at length that scribal activity included the possibility of anti-adoptionistic interpolations.²⁹

The above noted scribal willingness to expand texts (Jn 9:38 in light of Jn 11:27) presents itself as the most plausible scenario for the text’s corruption. Perhaps it seemed odd to a scribe that the blind man did not respond to Jesus and thus saw it appropriate to add a small section. Brown suggests that the longer reading is motivated by liturgical concerns.³⁰ C. L. Porter, in similar vein to Brown, argues that the omitted passage is perhaps an expansion stemming from the use of John 9 in the baptismal liturgy.³¹

Leaving aside the rather complex debate of sacramentalism in the Johannine corpus, there is substantial evidence that the early church did find a source of sacramental teaching in Jn 9. In addition to the catacomb art in which the story of the blind man appears several times as an illustration of Christian baptism (second to third century AD),³² Irenaeus,³³ Ambrose,³⁴ and Augustine³⁵ all refer to Jn 9 in a sacramental fashion. The text of Jn 9 was significant for baptismal rites due to the importance of discerning the suitability of a person’s candidature for baptism, in which the one being baptised would respond appropriately to a biblical story.³⁶ Braun suggests this may have occurred as early as the third century.³⁷ The practice of baptism as reflected in *The Apostolic Tradition* (c. 217) of Hippolytus adequately provides the historical circumstances for an addition to a biblical story.

²⁸ See G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 148.

²⁹ B. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 47-118.

³⁰ R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City: DoubleDay, 1996), 375.

³¹ C. L. Porter, “John IX. 38, 39a: A Liturgical Addition to the Text” *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966): 387-394.

³² F.M. Braun cited in Porter “John IX. 38, 39a”, 391.

³³ *Adv. Haer.* V.15, 3

³⁴ *De Sacramentis* III. 2,8-15

³⁵ *Tract. John* 44:1-2

³⁶ Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 380.

³⁷ Cited in Porter “John IX. 38, 39a”, 392.

Then, after these things, let him give over to the presbyter who baptizes, and let the candidates stand in the water, naked, a deacon going with them likewise. And when he who is being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him, shall say thus: Dost thou believe in God, the Father Almighty?' And he who is being baptized shall say: I believe. Then holding his hand placed on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he should say: Dost thou believe in Christ Jesus...And when he says: I believe, he is baptized again. And again he should say: Dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost and the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh? He who is being baptized should say accordingly: I believe, and so he is baptized a third time.³⁸

Porter suggests that it is highly probable that a similar confession was made in response to the story of the man born blind, which, although originally contained no confession or response to Jesus' statement in 9:37, was an early addition which provided an appropriate baptismal response.³⁹

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSION

In light of our above discussion there seems adequate cause to disagree with Metzger and the United Bible Society committee who allocated the inclusion of the variation unit at B level confidence. Metzger comments

Apart from the question whether...liturgical influence would have been likely as early as P⁷⁵, in view of the overwhelming preponderance of external attestation in favor of the longer text it appears that the omission, if not accidental, is to be regarded as editorial, made in interest of unifying Jesus' teaching in verses 37 and 39.⁴⁰

As noted above, although it is evident that there are numerically more manuscripts which include the reading, Metzger seems somewhat optimistic in concluding that the longer reading enjoys "overwhelming preponderance of external attestation." Any reading which finds disagreement with P⁷⁵, \aleph , W and several of the earliest Old Latin and Coptic manuscripts at an early date and geographically diverse manuscript tradition could hardly be considered an 'overwhelming preponderance.' It is also surprising that Metzger would suggest that the omission could be accidental given there is no way to plausibly account for it in any known accidental textual omissions.⁴¹

³⁸ *The Apostolic Tradition* II 21:11-18. Translation by B.S. Easton *The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1934), 46-47.

³⁹ A further consideration for the variation unit under discussion is its use in the liturgical setting. Although initially, manuscripts were marked or tagged in the margin to indicate the designated ecclesial readings, as their number and complexity grew it was necessary to provide a separate and distinct collection of readings in what is known as a lectionary manuscript (Porter "John IX. 38, 39a", 393.). In the lectionary text of Jn 9 it was divided at the exact place of the variation unit's discrepancy. H.C.Hoskier states that lesson 36 includes Jn 9:1-38 and lesson 33 runs from Jn 9:39-10:9. This division is also found in the Synaxarion of the Greek lectionary (cited in in Porter "John IX. 38, 39a", 390). This scenario provides the liturgical motivation and context for the text's susceptibility to add words for the sake of clarity.

⁴⁰ B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 195.

⁴¹ Although it may be argued that accidents can happen in any way, it seems hardly likely that there might not be some discernable trace of reason for the change, even if it fell under one of the more general categories of fatigue or re-inking the scribe's pen. See P. Head and M. Warren, 'Re-inking the Pen: Evidence from P. Oxy. 657 (P13) concerning unintentional scribal errors' *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997), 466-473.

In light of the theological and exegetical evaluations of the readings, it is evident that neither is heterodox,⁴² however the omission of vv. 38-39a does cohere with the broader trajectory of John's Gospel. Additionally, literary style, and in particular, key terminology favours the omission of the variation unit. When these issues in theology and style are coupled with the overall question of how one might account for the non-original reading, no plausible scenario has been proposed by advocates for the text's inclusion which credibly provides a rationale for the scribal exclusion of the variation unit (either accidental or intentional) in the manuscript record. It is far more probable that a scribe, before 200 AD, added vv. 38-39a as a contemporary confession of faith that was deemed appropriate, given the ecclesiastical context in which the Johannine Gospel was used and read. In this light, the 'B' level rating attributed to the *inclusion* of 9:38-39a, by the United Bible Society, as "almost certain," should be reversed to indicate a 'B' level rating for its *exclusion*. That is, our evaluation of the textual evidence would indicate that 9:38-39a was almost certainly *not* part of the original text of John's Gospel.

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⁴² Even if these words are not authentic, such an omission would nevertheless hardly diminish John's high Christology (cf. 1:1; 5:18-23; 14:6-10; 20:28), nor detract from the climactic implicit worship of him by Thomas.