

## **Sex, Scribes, and Scriptures: Engendering the Texts of the New Testament**

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### **1. Introduction**

I subscribe to the leadership role of women in advancing the Kingdom of God. This paper is not offered as a “proof” that women can lead effectively and contribute significantly to societal progress; my main interest in this article is to present the gender question from the standpoint of the transmission of the biblical texts, as enshrined in the texts of various extant manuscripts of the New Testament.

In a lecture on gender, Melba Maggay, a Filipino Christian social anthropologist, clarified that “gender has nothing to do with one’s physiological composition, but with the socio-cultural conditions that have helped develop one’s orientation; in short, gender is a ‘social construct’”.<sup>1)</sup>

Taking the same presupposition, one is disturbed by the fact that the Christian Church through the centuries has somehow contributed, consciously or unconsciously, to the somewhat unequal, if not unjust, treatment of women in the Church, especially in the area of leadership. Take, for instance, these two passages:

... women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. (1Co 14:34-35, NIV)

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1) Melba Maggay, “Gender or Sex?” (Silang, Cavite: Unpublished lecture given during the ISACC’s *Retreat on Spirituality and Culture*, 2007. 7. 31).

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing--if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1Ti 2:11-15, NIV)

Whether intended originally or not by the biblical writers, passages like these somehow served historically as impetus for the eventual development of doctrines and practices in the Church (and para-church organizations) that have placed women on a seemingly second level status in the gender hierarchy.

Can passages of this nature, however, be alternatively interpreted and understood in light of recent change of attitude toward the manuscript tradition? Is there anyway an Asian Christian can take a second look at this issue and find a more sensible reading for our context than what has been transmitted predominantly from the West?

Using text-critical lenses, this paper highlights instances in the transmission history of the New Testament texts where some textual variations may have emerged due to gender sensitivities espoused by those who copied and transmitted them. This slant benefits from recent textual scholarship demonstrating that ancient scribes can no longer be construed as passive, disinterested, detached copyists of a “sacred text”. There is now wealth of materials pointing to the scribes’ rather intentional participation in meaning (re)production of the biblical text.<sup>2)</sup>

The transmission of the New Testament was both a theological and a historical process. Those who transmitted the text of the New Testament were themselves readers embroiled in actual historical, social, cultural, and religious issues, whose socio-cultural contexts unambiguously shaped the way they perceived the text they were copying (i.e., *Vorlage*).

Deliberate scribal alterations at critical junctures, which betray scribal tendencies, mirror the way scribes reflected *their own* prevailing socio-cultural

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2) On this as a theoretical construct, see Edgar Battad Ebojo, “The Way I See It”: P<sup>46</sup> as a Paradigm for Reader-Response Criticism”, *TBT* 60:1 (2009), 22-36. See also, Bart Ehrman, “The Text of Mark in the Hands of the Orthodox”, M. Burrows and P. Rorem, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspectives* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 31.

practices that may have motivated such changes. In cases of alterations with bearing on the gender question, textual alterations were, to a greater or lesser degree, reflective of that tendency toward patriarchal predominance.<sup>3)</sup>

In the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles particular importance was accorded to women and their fundamental roles in the advance of Christianity in its early phase.<sup>4)</sup> However, not everyone in Christian antiquity was comfortable with these roles.<sup>5)</sup> Some scholars even suggested that there was an organized effort to oppress women and restrain their voices in the public circle;<sup>6)</sup> a movement perpetuated by those who believed that women should be in complete submission to men and be contented with their proverbial “Martha role”.<sup>7)</sup> This

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3) A relevant development in New Testament scholarship is the growing acknowledgment that the business of copying manuscripts, both religious and literary, was not an exclusive male domain, as previously perceived; on this, see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 42-44; *The Gendered Palimpsest. Women, Writing, and Representation in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also the indirect but related discourses offered by Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, with Evie Ahtaridis, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt, 300 BC-AD 800* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Press, 2006).

4) For instance, Richard Bauckham, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002); Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 97-351. Of particular interest is the anthology by Nicola Denzey, *The Bone Gatherer: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), tracing early Christian women (e.g., Lucina, Viatrix, Cyriaca, among others) who made a dent in the economic but more importantly in the religious life of the Imperial Rome but were never fully recognized in the annals of the Church.

5) Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985); Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*; Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of Their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1993); Antoinette Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction Through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); among others.

6) See, for instance, Bart Ehrman, “The Text as Window: New Testament Manuscripts and the Social History of Early Church”, Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes, eds., *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, SD 46 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 367-369; Ben Witherington III, “Anti-Feminist Tendencies of the ‘Western’ Text in Acts”, *JBL* 103 (1984), 82-84; among others.

7) On the Fathers and their prejudices against women see Kevin Koyle, “The Fathers on Women and Women's Ordination”, D. Scholer, ed., *Women in Early Christianity*, SEC 14 (New York: Garland, 1993), 117-167; and Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, esp. 9-50. For non-ecclesiastical (paganic?) commentaries, see Margaret MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1996), esp. 49-126.

movement and the socio-cultural tensions it entailed would not be resolved with finality in the writings of the Apostles. On the contrary, it would become even more pronounced in the ensuing centuries long after the Apostles' demise—courtesy of the scribes who transmitted the biblical texts.

## 2. (Re-)Constructing Christian Origins Through The Manuscripts

Surviving manuscripts of the New Testament are not merely repositories of variant readings from antiquity where we can reconstruct the potential “originals”. By carefully examining textual variations that make perfect sense in context,<sup>8)</sup> extant manuscripts also have the potential to become opulent resources for (re-)constructing Christian origins and thoughts, i.e., early Christians' *dogma* and *praxis*, their reaction to socio-cultural changes and the new challenges they brought, the complex rigidity of their theology and the paradox of their praxis, the seeming acceptability of multiple interpretations of similar passages, and others. In these manuscripts, New Testament scribes embedded coded messages that seem to depict their proclivities or tendencies with regard to specific issues that confronted them and the communities they represented. As such, these manuscripts were a microcosm of the early Christian movement; they provide us with the human face of Scripture transmission.

Sensible textual variations, in this regard, serve as invaluable window into the world of early New Testament scribes and how they subtly (but actively) participated in the issues of their day by enshrining, in the manuscripts they produced, their preferences in the areas of theology, culture, and their society. Because of this, the New Testament scribes can no longer be arbitrarily described as passive, disinterested, un-engaged copyists of a transmitted “sacred text” from the hands of the biblical writers.

Conversely, through these inscriptions they become responsible for “meaning

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8) In this paper, I shall call this type of textual variation as “sensible” textual variances, which falls under the rubric of “significant variation”; on the delineation of these textual categories, see Eldon Jay Epp, “Toward the Clarification of the term ‘Textual Variant’”, J. K. Elliott, ed., *Studies in New Testament Language and Text: Essays in Honour of George D. Kilpatrick on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, SNTSS 44 (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 153–173; repr. with the same title in E. J. Epp, ed., *Perspective on New Testament Textual Criticism: Collected Essays 1962-2004* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005), 101-124, esp. 116-117.

re-production,” as they deliberately altered their *Vorlagen*<sup>9)</sup> to make it effectively respond to *their own* context and conform to what they thought the Scriptures *might* have meant<sup>10)</sup> in view of their own socio-cultural milieus. In this sense, *they* kept the Scripture “relevant” to *them* and “responsive” to *their* context; the New Testament texts were not just a transmitted text from the biblical writers of the first century but sacred writings that could and should effectively address *their* present circumstance as well. It has become *their* Scripture—a “living text” that *should* resonate real living situations. As James Zetzel notes,

... critics and scribes... in antiquity were not machines, and they were not even monks or professional copyists. They were intelligent and thinking people, who read and copied books because they had interest in them, not because it was their job. And because they understood what they read and wrote, they inevitably affected the texts in accordance with their own ideas.<sup>11)</sup>

### 3. Women, Men, and Manuscripts

Surviving ancient manuscripts, therefore, provide graphic examples of textual divergences that describe rather more vividly how some scribes reacted when confronted with passages dealing with women issues and interests. Despite the fact that women were clearly affirmed in the New Testament writings as a whole, interpreters and scribes of subsequent centuries at times disagreed with the texts of their *Vorlagen*, deliberately altering them at critical junctures. Examples are now in order.

#### 3.1. “Junia”: The “Lost” Apostle?!

Romans 16:7 mentions a person identified in the manuscript tradition as **IOΥΝΙΑΝ** (“Iounian”). This is a tricky domain, for this accusative form can be

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9) This German term refers to the immediate source manuscripts that the scribes copied to produce their own manuscripts. This must not to be confused with the term “original manuscript” (or *autographs*).

10) Bart Ehrman, “*Text of Mark*”, 31.

11) James E. G. Zetzel, *Latin Textual Criticism in Antiquity* (New York: Arno Press, 1981), 254.

translated either as feminine (“Junia”)<sup>12)</sup> or masculine (“Junias”);<sup>13)</sup> and precise gender identification is to a large extent dependent on where to place the accent and what kind of accent.<sup>14)</sup> This case of “Battle of the Accents” is an interesting study since our earliest surviving manuscripts scantily employed this editorial convention.

Because of the widespread perception that **ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ** is an elite office ascribed exclusively to the “Twelve,” (**ΔΩΔΕΚΑ**) it has been thought that the term **ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΟΣ** therefore is a restricted male office.<sup>15)</sup> To caricature this, Bernadette Brooten satirically comments, “Because a woman could not have been an apostle, the woman who is here called an apostle could have not been a woman”.<sup>16)</sup>

Scholarly discussion on this issue is admittedly a topic of its own, and I can only briefly echo here what most scholars regard to be the best textual option given the scarce evidence at hand. Note further that this is especially interesting because it is the only instance in the Bible where the name **ΙΟΥΝΙΑΝ** is mentioned, i.e., a *hapax legomenon*.

There is a growing voice that the **ΙΟΥΝΙΑΝ** here is a feminine entity (most likely the wife of Andronicus) who made herself equally notable *among* the apostles. Most noteworthy is the recent decision taken by the revisors of the common text of NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup>, where they have now adopted the feminine Ἰουνίαν reading instead of the previous masculine Ἰουνιάν. This point is of fundamental importance because if a feminine reading is to be pursued (which is the position taken here) and if the subsequent clause οἵτινές εἰσιν ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις is translated as “who are prominent among the apostles”, then

12) So are GNT, NLT, NRSV, ESV, NET, etc.

13) So are RSV, NIV, GNT<sup>mg</sup>, ESV<sup>mg</sup>, NRSV<sup>mg</sup>, etc.

14) That is, the circumflex Ἰουνιάν (“*Iouniân*”) is masculine, while the acute Ἰουνίαν (“*Iounían*”) is feminine in Greek; for an extended discussion, see Eldon Jay Epp, “Text-Critical, and Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting the Junia/Junias Variation in Romans 16:7”, A. Denaux ed., *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis: Festschrift Joël Delobel* (Leuven: Leuven, 2002), 242-291; *Junia: The First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007). See also, Michael Burer and Daniel Wallace, “Was Junia really an Apostle? A Re-examination of Rom 16.7”, *NTS* 47 (2001), 76-91.

15) On how some modern translators perpetuate this idea, see the marginal note of NET Bible.

16) Bernadette Brooten, “Junia... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)”, L. Swidler and A. Swidler eds., *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (New York: Paulist, 1977), 142.

ΙΟΥΝΙΑΝ would have been the first “woman apostle” unequivocally mentioned in the New Testament. In antiquity, however, such position was deemed culturally unacceptable, scribes included, and reasons for that are obvious. In fact, a feminine identification is revolutionary in many ways, as Arichea has noted correctly,

“It is therefore very significant that Junias, even though a woman, was included among the apostles. This makes it certain that women did occupy positions of prominence in some early Christian communities, and that very early in the life of the church, a concept of ministry which included both women and men started to emerge.”<sup>17)</sup>

### 3.2. “Women of high standing”: Stealing the thunder

Ben Witherington<sup>18)</sup> suggested that the scribe(s) of codex D (Bezae) had “anti-feminist” tendencies (a somewhat anachronistic labeling, but nonetheless an important point), as it apparently downplays the significance of women in Acts 17:4 and in some other passages in the book.

Witherington noted that while the earliest reading is undoubtedly ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ ΤΕ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΩΤΩΝ (literally, “the leading women”), codex D substituted it with ΚΑΙ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΩΤΩΝ (literally, “and wives of the leading men”), effectively trivializing the high social profile of the female personalities converted to the faith through Paul’s ministry. In effect, this alteration essentially demoted these “socialite believers” as the variation now projects that their social status was simply a borrowed one, emanating from that of their husbands.

In Mark 15:41, some scribes (C Δ 579 and n) appear to have attempted also to put a distance between Jesus and his female followers,<sup>19)</sup> efficiently lessening the strategic impact of Jesus’ women disciples. For instance, some women in the Gospels have been explicitly identified because they made significant inroads into the ministry of Jesus, e.g., Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, et al (Luke 8:2-3), Mary the mother of James the young and Joseph as well as Salome

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17) Daniel Arichea, “Who was Phoebe: Translating diakonos in Romans 16:1”, *The Bible Translator* 39:4 (1988), 401-409, 402.

18) Ben Witherington III, “Anti-Feminist Tendency”, 82-84.

19) See Wayne Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Traditions: Evidence of the Influence of Apologetic Interests on the Canonical Gospels*, TCS 5 (Atlanta: SBL, 2004), 183.

(Mark 15:41), etc.

The mention of their names at significant points in the life of Jesus is indicative of their meaningful recollection in the consciousness of the early Christians—this band of remarkable women faithfully followed and supported Jesus during his lifetime. In fact, Mark 15:41 said it well by describing these women as αἱ ὅτε ἦν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ **καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ** (literally, “... when [Jesus was] in Galilee, these [women] followed him **and provided for him**”).

But this apparently did not sit well with some scribes and altered their texts by deleting the phrase καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ (literally, “and [they] provided for him”),<sup>20</sup> presumably because of its “scandalous” implication. This phrase is capable of a whole range of nuanced translations, from “and they provided for him” to “and they served table for him”. However, for creative-minded scribes with culturally pro-male leadership proclivities, it was not farfetched to misconstrue καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ to also mean “and they were ministering *with* him” – putting these women in the *same* class as that of the apostles, equally exercising all the vested powers and privileges afforded by Jesus upon his twelve male apostles. By excising the last phrase, these scribes have efficiently obviated this translational possibility by detaching these women from any attribution of a special role in the ministry of Jesus except to be portrayed as mere followers at the sidelines.

Some scribes went even further; not only did they “discredited” these women but even attempted to shift the focus from these women to their husbands. For instance, a fragmentary manuscript discovered in 1933 (Dura Parchment 24), believed to be from Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, has a reading that parallels Mark 15:40-41, Matthew 27:55-56, and Luke 23:49. In all these passages, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Younger and of Joseph, and Salome were described as γυναῖκες αἱ ἠκολούθησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ (literally, “the women who were traveling with Jesus from Galilee and were ministering with him”).

In this fragmentary manuscript, however, the reading was altered to αἱ γυναῖκες τῶν συνακολουθησάντων αὐτῷ (“the wives of the ones who were

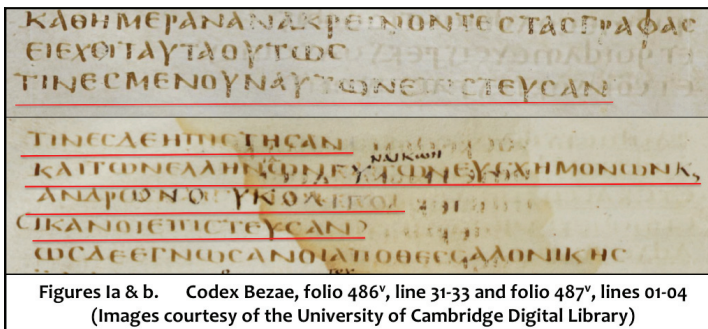
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20) Manuscripts that omitted this phrase include codex C (Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus), codex D (Bezae), codex Δ (Sangallensis), minuscule 579 and a few others.



traveling with him”). This grammatical change, however subtle, has radically denigrated the distinctive importance of these women to the ministry of Jesus; by changing the verb ending, it is no longer these women who have extensively travelled and faithfully ministered with Jesus to the end, but their husbands.

Acts 17:12 in the NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup> common text reads πολλοὶ μὲν οὖν ἐξ αὐτῶν ἐπίστευσαν καὶ τῶν Ἑλληνίδων γυναικῶν τῶν εὐσημόνων καὶ ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ὀλίγοι (literally, “Many of them therefore believed, with **not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men**”). However, it is very interesting to note the layers of scribal intervention into the text of codex D for this passage (see Figure 1a & b). The first hand copied ΤΙΝΕΣ ΜΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ ΤΙΝΕΣ ΔΕ ΗΠΙΣΤΗΣΑΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΧΗΜΟΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΙΚΑΝΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ (“Some of them, therefore, believed, but some did not believe; and some of the Greeks and of high standing, and not a few men and women believed”). However, another hand restructured the sentence to ΤΙΝΕΣ ΜΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ, ΤΙΝΕΣ ΔΕ ΗΠΙΣΤΗΣΑΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝ<sup>ΙΑ</sup>ΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΧΗΜΟΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ ΚΑΙ ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ ΙΚΑΝΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ (“Some of them, therefore, believed, but some did not believe; and some of the Greek women and of high standing, and not a few men and women believed”). But there is yet a third hand which read ΤΙΝΕΣ ΜΕΝ ΟΥΝ ΑΥΤΩΝ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ ΤΙΝΕΣ ΔΕ ΗΠΙΣΤΗΣΑΝ ΚΑΙ ΤΩΝ ΕΛΛΗΝ<sup>ΙΑ</sup>ΩΝ <sup>ΓΥΝΑΙΚΩΝ</sup> ΤΩΝ ΕΥΣΧΗΜΟΝΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΑΝΔΡΩΝ ΟΥΚ ΟΛΙΓΟΙ ΙΚΑΝΟΙ ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ (“Some of them, therefore, believed, but some did not believe; and some of the Greek women of high standing, and not a few men believed”). Clearly, both corrections essentially agree with the reading of the NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup> common text.



While the first hand's reading is admittedly grammatically smoother in Greek, the scribe of codex D has demonstrated yet again his propensity to lessen the social importance given to women and unceremoniously re-accorded such significant accolade to men, thereby stealing the thunder from these great women of the Bible. The pen has proven to be a powerful tool in reproducing a text that conforms to the wider cultural practice of the time—although it meant *recreating* the text of their *Vorlagen*.

### 3.3. Holy Secretaries?! Lost in Translation

This practice of trivializing the importance of women goes beyond the biblical writings. As this can be shown in a number of ways, I limit my example to just one: the textual domestication of women in the transmission of Christian and biblical writings by ancient Christian writers and by modern scholars.

In his rather vivid description of the academic (gender balanced) workforce behind Origen's scholarly pursuit in Alexandria, in connection with Ambrose, the early Church historian Eusebius wrote:

At that time also Origen's commentaries on the divine scriptures had their beginning, at the instigation of Ambrose, who not only plied him with innumerable verbal exhortations and encouragements, but also provided him unstintingly with what was necessary. As [Origen] dictated there were ready at hand more than seven shorthand-writers [ταχυγράφοι], who relieved each other at fixed times, and as many copyists [βιβλιογράφοι], **as well as girls trained for beautiful writing [κόραις ἐπὶ τὸ καλλιγραφεῖν ἡσκημέναις]**; for all of these Ambrose supplied without stint the necessary means. (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.23.2)

The importance of this ancient quotation is that this is the first explicit instance where the “female sex” is recognized as a member of the Christian scribal trade, at least within the circle of Origen.<sup>21)</sup> The female component is described as “girls trained for beautiful writing”—not an easy feat in antiquity—and may have been tasked by Origen for special copying assignments, including biblical manuscripts.<sup>22)</sup>

21) For a wider social context, see the list of ancient private letters and literary papyri written personally by women in Roger S. Bagnall and Raffaella Cribiore, *Women's Letters from Ancient Egypt*, 48-54.

22) On the plausibility of this suggestion, see the insightful discussion of Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 50-52; and AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the*

However, this importance easily dissipates in its transmission. For instance, when quoting the same Origen-Ambrose transaction, Jerome (*De Viris Illustribus* 61) suspiciously mentions of “seven or more short-hand writers (*notarii*) ... and an equal number of copyists (*librarii*)”. Whatever has happened to the specially trained women calligraphers?

But the textual domestication of Origen’s male-female workforce suffers also from the hands of some modern interpreters, relegating these elite women scribes to mere “stenographers”<sup>23)</sup> (an anachronistic term yet again) or “secretarial assistants” working for their male bosses.<sup>24)</sup> No wonder Haines-Eitzen’s protest is not misplaced:

Ancient and modern readers of Eusebius have not only effaced the presence of “female scribes” but also offered interpretations that once again uphold a certain “phallic-centered” orthodoxy and sensibility.<sup>25)</sup>

### 3.4. Priscilla (Prisca): Sex Change by Transcription?!

Re-ordering word sequence seems harmless at first glance. However, there are instances when word transposition becomes an obvious avenue for gender concern. For instance, in Acts 18:26, some scribes (D Ψ 1739 M and a few early versions) transposed Ἀκύλας (“Aquila”) before Πρίσκιλλα (“Priscilla”), suggesting their textual discomfort with woman’s explicit priority. Note that in all the six occurrences of Πρίσκιλλα (Act 18:2, 18, 26; Πρίσκα [“Prisca”] in Rom 16:3, 1Co 16:19, and 2Ti 4:19), it always appears in tandem with Ἀκύλας—this is an important point.

Note further that only on two occasions did Aquila’s name come first (Act 18:2; 1Co 16:19); this is expected because it was the norm of the day. But to identify the wife first was beyond the cultural convention unless the writer intends to emphasize the prominent place of the woman being referred to. The

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*Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard, 2008), 74-78, esp. 78.

23) On this interpretation, see Albert Schramm, “Zur Geschichte der Stenographie in der alten Kirche”, *Korrespondenzblatt, Amtliche Zeitschrift des königlichen stenographischen Instituts zu Dresden* 48 (1903), 62-66, esp. 66; as well as Collin Roberts, “Books in the Graeco-Roman World and in the New Testament”, P. R. Ackroyd and G. F. Evans, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1970) 30-66, esp. 65.

24) On this interpretation, see George Haven Putnam, *Books and Their Makers during the Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896), 53.

25) Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 42-43.

significance of this alteration becomes more pronounced when one looks at the context of Acts 18:26. This passage talks about Priscilla and Aquila’s “accurate teaching” (ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο) of the Way to a certain Apollos—a man of passion for the Gospel and of great knowledge about John the Baptizer but lacks exuberance for Jesus and his teachings.

Nothing could be more disturbing for a male-orientated scribe than a woman being introduced as one who accurately mentored a prominent man of wisdom as Apollos; it undisputedly ascribes honor to the mentor/s. But to blindly impute this accolade upon a woman seems to have been a big challenge, if not a scandal. Apparently, these scribes were not ready to succumb to this honorable ascription being vested upon a woman.

This scribal reservation becomes even more unmistakable when one notes that in 18:7, almost the same scribes (D\* it<sup>h</sup>) would again alter καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν (“And he left there”) to καὶ μεταβὰς (ἐκεῖθεν 614 1799 2412) ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἀκύλα (“And he left from [the house of] Aquila”). Stylistic improvement may have been a reason for this alteration. But what seems to be a scribal motive here is hinted in the fact that Priscilla and Aquila *always* appear in tandem and never independently. Given this observation, it is then not farfetched to suggest that these scribes even considered leaving Priscilla out of the picture and giving prominence solely to Aquila.

2Timothy 4:19 is another interesting case. NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup> common text reads reads Ἄσπασαι Πρίσκαν καὶ Ἀκύλαν καὶ τὸν Ὀνησιφόρου οἶκον (literally, “Greet Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus”). However, the manuscript tradition presents an interesting twist: the addition of a quite controversial index of names in connection with Ἀκύλας. After the nominal Ἀκύλαν, the cursive codices 181 (see Figure II) and 460 added Λέκτραν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ Σιμαίαν καὶ Ζηνονα τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτοῦ (“his wife Lektran and Simaian and Zenona his sons”), making Λέκτρα the wife of Ἀκύλας.

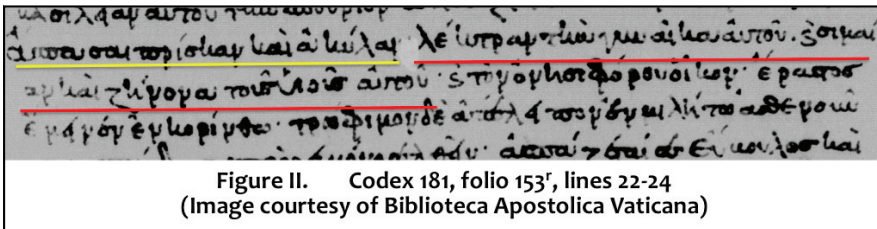


Figure II. Codex 181, folio 153<sup>r</sup>, lines 22-24  
(Image courtesy of Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)

But if Λέκτρα is the wife of Ἀκύλας, what has happened to Πρίσκα? Could it be that the scribe of codices 181 and 460 thought that Πρίσκα was a “he” and not a “she”, and therefore connected the long addition to Ἀκύλας? Are we seeing here a case of “sex change by transcription”?

That some scribes may have thought of Πρίσκα as a “male” is not without a potential example in the textual tradition. The dittography (i.e., doubling of letter/s or word/s) in 1Corinthians 16:19 seems a good case for this.<sup>26</sup> NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup> reflects the reading of the last part of the verse as ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ πολλὰ Ἀκύλας καὶ Πρίσκα σὺν τῇ κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίᾳ (literally, “Aquila and Prisca, together with the church in their house, greet you warmly in the Lord”). In the text of P<sup>46</sup> (see Figure III), however, Πρίσκα σὺν was transcribed as ΠΡΕΙΚΚΑΣ ΣΥΝ (“... Priscas, together with”). Although the doubling of the *sigma* may be explained on paleographical grounds and the intention of its scribe may not be easily ascertained,<sup>27</sup> in terms of exegetical effect, it has “miraculously” transformed Πρίσκα to a “he” because the form ΠΡΙΚΚΑΣ is masculine in Greek.

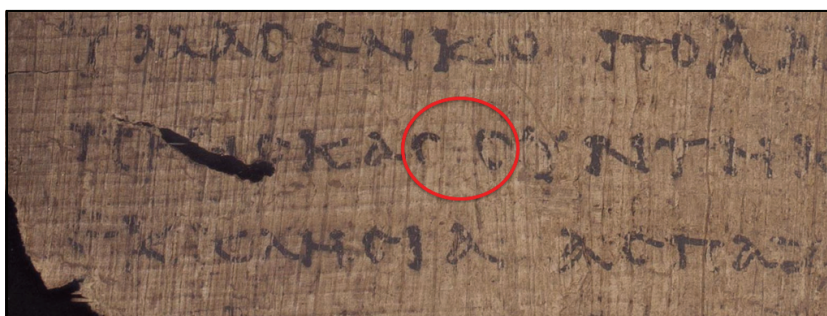


Figure III. Papyrus 46 (P<sup>46</sup>), folio 60<sup>v</sup>, lines 18–20  
(Image courtesy of The Chester Beatty Library)

### 3.5. “Sin” of commission and omission?

In the scribal tradition, one hallmark of professional scribal enterprise is a faithful representation of their *Vorlagen*. However, there are instances when

26) For some proponents, see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians*, 115-116; and Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, “Is There an ‘Anti-Priscan’ Tendency in the Manuscripts? Some Textual Problems with Prisca and Aquila”, *JBL* 125 (2006), 107-128.

27) See Edgar Battad Ebojo, “A Scribe and His Manuscript: An Investigation into the Scribal Habits of Papyrus 46 (P. Chester Beatty II-P. Michigan Inv.6238)”, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Birmingham, 2014), 276-277.

fidelity to the *Vorlage* does not always imply textual loyalty to the transmission tradition. At times it also reveals the preferences of the scribes copying the manuscript. Reflected in the manuscripts are passages that are inherently *androcentric* (at least from our modern standpoint), and the fact that no alteration was done on these passages makes one suspect that this reflects the scribe's social and theological preferences. The "scandalous" passages in Paul may well illumine this point.

### 3.5.1. The Voiceless Women of Corinth: Perpetuating a Culture of Silence

The textual problem in 1Corinthians 14:34-35, along with other similar passages, is at the center of the gender debate not only for its perceived *androcentric* tone, but also for the heightened interest given to this passage because it explicitly prohibits "γυναῖκες to speak in the churches" because it is a "shameful thing" (αἰσχρόν) to do so. This vocal prohibition has scandalized the Church through the centuries for it has been used to forbid women from taking on more active ministerial and leadership roles in many churches, particularly in the areas of preaching and teaching.

Scholarly debates have followed two basic strands: 1) its origin, i.e., whether or not Paul actually wrote this vocal prohibition, and 2) whether, assuming Paul wrote this prohibition, γυναῖκες here refers to women in general or only to the Corinthian wives in particular.<sup>28)</sup>

External evidence shows that while most manuscripts witnessing to this passage follow the traditional sequence,<sup>29)</sup> some manuscripts, however, "relocated" vv. 34-35 after v. 40,<sup>30)</sup> and a few other manuscripts inscribed this injunction in two locations (after v. 33 and after v. 40).<sup>31)</sup> It is very difficult to

28) For a review of different proposed interpretations, see Edgar Battad Ebojo, "Should Women Be Silent in the Churches? Women's Audible Voices in the Textual Variants of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35", *Trinity Theological Journal* 14 (2006), 1-33.

29) These manuscripts include one papyrus (*P*<sup>46</sup>), 8 uncial codices (⊠ A B K L ⊛ 0150 0243), 22 minuscule codices (6. 33. 81. 104. 256. 263. 365. 424. 436. 459. 1175. 1241. 1319. 1573. 1739. 1852. 1881. 1912. 1962. 2127. 2200. 2464), and a number of versional and patristic citations (it<sup>o</sup> vg syr<sup>p, h, pal</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo, fay</sup> arm eth geo slav Origen Chrysostom Theodoret; Pelagius).

30) Manuscripts with this "relocated" version include the Greek-Latin bilingual codices D/d, F/f, G/g; Old Latin codices Armachanus and Veronensis; codex Fuldensis; and two patristic commentators, Ambrosiaster and Sedulius-Scottus; see Edgar Battad Ebojo, "Should Women be Silent", 8-11.

31) For instance, codex 88.

account for these relocations as products of copying accident. On the contrary, these are reflections of a deliberate scribal effort to cushion the impact of this injunction regarding the silence of women, especially if doubts regarding its authenticity were detected very early on in the history of its transmission.<sup>32)</sup>

But it does not take long for one to realize that scribes who retained the traditional sequence (e.g., *P*<sup>46</sup>, codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and many others) of these controversial verses were, to some degree, making a statement that the cultural practice of women's subordination to men, especially in pedagogical matters, must not be disturbed in any way. Their silence seems to relay the message that intervening with this long-held social structure is to perilously commence social chaos.

What this means, admittedly, is that by not modifying anything in this passage (which these scribes would normally have done with other passages), these scribes have in effect registered their consent and agreement with what these verses explicitly express—the absolute silence of *all* women in *all* social domains (the church being a social setting as well), regardless of the strong plausibility that in context γυναῖκες refers exclusively to the Corinthian “wives” and not to “all women” in general.

Some Church Fathers, based on this disputed verses, in fact, made a whole gamut of moral prescription regarding the subordination of women. Ambrosiaster, for instance, notes:

It would be shameful if [the wives] dared to speak out in church. They are veiled precisely for this, to show their subjection: yet see how they flaunt their lack of discretion! That is a reason for their husbands to be humiliated as well; for the insolence of wives rebounds on the reputation of those to whom they are married.<sup>33)</sup>

Or take the case of Clement of Alexandria who believed that ἀνὴρ (“husband/man”) is intrinsically superior to γυναῖκή (“wife/woman”) since man had a complete human nature in himself even before Eve was created,<sup>34)</sup> and that

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32) See, for instance, Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994), 274.

33) Translation by Kevin Koyle, “The Fathers on Women and Women's Ordination”, 156.

34) Clement of Alexandria viewed the γυναῖκή as the cause of sin, *Protrepticus* 11 (*Die griechische christliche Schriftsteller*, 12, 75.25); see Kevin Koyle, “Fathers on Women and Women's Ordination”, 117-167.

woman's primary role is to receive man's semen and to assist in the house management.<sup>35)</sup>

What is clear, then, is that the injunction on woman silence does not run counter to the prevailing cultural practice at the time, both in and out of the Christian circles. In fact, this prohibition loudly echoes an earlier Greek adage. As the Greek philosopher Democritus asserts, "No woman should practice using her tongue; it just means trouble", and another Greek philosopher arrogantly asserts, "It is appropriate for a man to speak, but let a woman be content with what she hears".<sup>36)</sup>

1 Timothy 2:11-15 echoes the same assertion, and reasons out that Adam was created first, thus, it was the woman who was deceived and became a transgressor (vv. 13-14). Whether this passage was written originally by Paul or not is not my concern at the moment, but rather to show that as far as the ancient copyists were concerned, the teaching about woman's creation subsequent to the man was vitally important, so much so that going against this teaching was culturally unacceptable to their society.

Note that in these two passages, almost the same scribes did not alter anything, which is quite unusual given the very fluid character of these manuscripts on other matters. This observation is given credence when one conversely looks at passages that on the other hand clearly affirm women's worth. In these women-affirming passages, the same scribes seems to project uneasiness to the point that they made deliberate "corrections" ranging from a simple substitution of words to a total excision of a whole pericope altogether.

### 3.5.2. The Forgiven Adulteress: Excising the Grace of God

One such example is John 7:53-8:11, a passage marked in most English translations with marginal notes such as "The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11" (NRS, NIV, NLT, among others). This passage talks about the story of the forgiven

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35) For other quotations on patristic prejudices against women ordination, see Kevin Koyle, "Fathers on Women and Women's Ordination", 117-167.

36) Quotations are from Democritus, Fragment 110, γυνή ἀσκειῶ λόγον, δεινὸν γάρ, and Aelius Aristides, 45, 41D, ὁ ἀνὴρ λεγέτω, γυνή δε οἷς ἂν ἀκούσῃ χαίρετω; both quoted from Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Chicago Press, 2000), 209.



(unnamed) adulteress. In fact, it is a height of demonstration of God's love and mercy. But, however endearingly dramatic the emotive effect of this account was, it offended the cultural sensitivities of many ancient scribes<sup>37)</sup> (or perhaps their commissioning patrons).

The external evidence in favor of its non-Johannine origin is indeed impressive.<sup>38)</sup> On the other hand, the evidence can be alternatively appreciated in light of internal considerations, especially if one takes into account the moral repercussions of Jesus' compassionate treatment upon the unfaithful woman, particularly among the enemies of the Christian movement. Some scholars suggested that this account was omitted because it condones adultery; hence, its omission from the Johannine Gospel was to obviate the interpretive potential of taking this account as a passage for tolerating marital infidelity. While this proposal seems to make sense, it is difficult to sustain in view of the strong external attestations against its favor.<sup>39)</sup>

The significance of this account, however, lies not in its *written form* but in the fact that there was a widespread *oral tradition* about this forgiven adulteress that circulated at a very early stage of New Testament textual transmission, at about early 2<sup>nd</sup> century or as old as the oldest manuscript support (**P**<sup>66</sup>) for its non-inclusion. David Parker<sup>40)</sup> believes that this story, which was known to Papias (Bishop of Hierapolis), was part of the early Church's reservoir of oral traditions that have from time to time appeared tenaciously in the written tradition, albeit at different locations. The moral of the passage is starkly clear: Jesus is the man for all seasons, for all people; and this message is not incongruent with the teachings of the Gospels.

Viewing this textual phenomenon in light of the seemingly patented attempt in

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37) Many of the earlier manuscripts omitted 7:53-8:11 (e.g., **P**<sup>66</sup>, <sup>75</sup>, codices Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, Vaticanus, and others), but majority of the extant manuscripts, mostly of later dates and belonging to the Byzantine textual tradition, reflect this passage in its traditional location. On the other hand, a few manuscripts *re-located* this passage, in part or whole, either after Luk 21:38 (manuscripts in the *family*<sup>1</sup>) or Luk 24:53 (8:3-11 only, minuscule 1333); or after Joh 7:36 (minuscule 225) or after Joh 21:25 (minuscule 1). Some other manuscripts made a few more alterations.

38) See Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the UBS' Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: UBS, 1994), 187-189.

39) David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 101.

40) David Parker, *Living Text*, 99.

the Scriptures to indict women “with questionable credibility” is helpful. Could it be that this tenacious oral tradition was omitted in numerous manuscripts because its main protagonist was a woman considered by the society at large as one who deserves to die for “uncovering the nakedness of her husband”, and yet she walked away trophying the grace and forgiveness of God? The scribes’ response: excision.

### 3.6. “Flirting” with Women of Questionable Character

That Jesus directly engaged women of “suspicious” social reputation and empowered them to realize their inherent worth is clearly shown in the Gospels. But not everyone was on the same page, especially those who used different social lenses in looking at these situations. For these people, adulterers (John 8:3), prostitutes (Luke 7:37), wife of many husbands (John 4), and others were a shameful blemish to the Christian faith. Wayne Kannaday observed that Christianity during the patristic era suffered from external assaults largely because of the way the Scriptures portrayed women, i.e., the women followers of Jesus, as depicted in the Gospels, have provided enemies of Christianity with a “particularly vulnerable point of attack”.<sup>41)</sup> One of the ways in which some Christians apologetically responded was to appeal to Scripture texts that will corroborate their position—even though it meant *creating* another version of *their* Scripture.

Aside from the forgiven adulterer in John 5:3-8:11, there is another instance of Jesus’ up-close encounter with a woman of questionable reputation—the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well. In context, the exegetical importance of this morally suspect woman is explained in John 4:39 where it clearly attributes the conversion of many Samaritans διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναίκος (“because of the testimony of the woman”). But investigating further, we are told that this Samaritan woman had five husbands and was cohabitating with another who is not her husband (4:18).

It is not difficult to understand why some people would take offense at the message this account tries to convey—the conversion of the whole town was due to a polygamous woman. This was unacceptable to the prevailing social norm at the time; no wonder alterations had been done at crucial points of the discourse

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41) Wayne Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 176-177.

to address this moral concern.

In John 4:25 of UBS<sup>5</sup>-NA<sup>28</sup>, the Samaritan woman said to Jesus that **Οἶδα** ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται ὁ λεγόμενος Χριστός· ὅταν ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, ἀναγγελεῖ ἡμῖν ἅπαντα (literally, “**I know** that the Messiah is coming, the one who is called Christ; when he comes he will proclaim all things to us”). However, the first person singular **Οἶδα** (“I know”) was amended by some scribes to the plural **Οἶδαμεν** (“**We know**”),<sup>42</sup> making it appear that the coming of the Χριστός was a common knowledge, and no longer as a result of the woman’s progressive encounter with Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. By altering Οἶδα to Οἶδαμεν, these scribes have effectively averted any attempt to construe this discourse as a fitting tribute to a “morally suspect” woman, which in turn is reflective of the way “the early Church placated pagan sensitivities to the visibility and leadership status of women of nascent Christianity”.<sup>43</sup>)

### 3.7. *Magna Carta* of the New Humanity: Are you sure really?

When citing equality in the Bible, nothing is more prominent than Galatians 3:28. Egalitarian advocates unanimously appeal to it for enlightenment on the question of equity and equality. Rightly so for this passage explicitly states that in the new fellowship established by God through Christ, Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free, male and female have been brought into a relationship of oneness and solidarity such as they had not experienced previously. What is not usually told, however, is that even this so-called *Magna Carta* was not spared from the malevolent pen of some scribes.

The UBS<sup>5</sup>-NA<sup>28</sup> common text reads οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλληγν, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· **πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ** (literally, “there is not a Jew nor a Greek, there is not a slave nor free, there is not male nor female; **for you are all one in Christ Jesus**”). External attestations for this reading are compellingly impressive. However, there are variations at crucial points that subtly but substantially changed the exegetical tenor of this passage altogether.

Note that in the second clause, instead of εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ (“you [all] are

42) Aside from the respective correctors of P<sup>66</sup> and codex Sinaiticus, this reading is supported also by codices L, N, *family 13*, minuscules 33, 1241, 2 lectionaries, and early Eastern versions and a few Fathers.

43) Wayne Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse*, 187.

one in Christ”), some scribes altered the clause to ἔστε Χριστοῦ (“you [all] are of Christ/you [all] belong to Christ”, e.g., *P*<sup>46</sup>, codex Alexandrinus), or to ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ (“you [all] are in/with Christ”, e.g., the original scribe of codex Sinaiticus and a Vulgate manuscript), or simply to ἔν ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ (“you are one in/with Christ”, e.g., codices F, G, and 33). By omitting or substituting a word, the whole essence of this Christian *magna carta* has changed radically: the solidarity and equality of the created order has now been reduced simply to positional privilege, i.e., “in Christ”. With this kind of alterations the Galatians 3:28 *magna carta* is no longer a forceful assertion of solidarity and parity for everyone in the new world order Christ himself enunciated.

One cannot help but issue a suspicious look at such an egalitarian claim, especially when confronted by some manuscripts that have attempted to universalize the subordinate position of women. The scribe of *P*<sup>46</sup> is a case in point. On a number of occasions, this scribe exhibits in his text expressions about the subordinate importance of women by juxtaposing elements that have to do with women interests.

In 1Corinthians 11:9, UBS<sup>5</sup>-NA<sup>28</sup> reads καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἄνθρωπος διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα, ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἄνδρα (literally, “For [the] *husband* was created not for the *wife*, but the *wife* for the *husband*”). In *P*<sup>46</sup>, however, ἄνδρα (usually translated “*husband*”) was replaced with the more generic ἄΝΘΡΩΠΟΝ (usually translated “*man*”).<sup>44</sup> By this substitution, this scribe altered effectively the essence of the text by making it appear that the point of issue is universally valid, i.e., “man and woman”, although the passage is ambiguous, and may also be alternatively understood in light of domestic context, i.e., “wife and husband” (which I assume in this paper).

The text itself already sounds *androcentric*, and the more scholars defuse the hierarchical reading of this passage, the more pronounced it becomes.<sup>45</sup> Whether it pertains to domestic or universal relationship is a moot point, since ἄνηρ (root of ἄνδρως) is not always interchangeably used with ἄνθρωπος, and almost not without any distinction.<sup>46</sup> Not with this scribe, however. With this substitution,

44) In 1Co 11:1-16 alone, Paul used *anēr* and its derivatives 14 times. However, this is the only verse where our scribe effected this alteration.

45) Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven; London: Yale, 1995), 232.

46) The most stable criterion to judge the semantic usage of *anēr* is the context, and almost always, when it appears with *gunē*, the contrast is within the conjugal context, i.e., husband and wife.

**P**<sup>46</sup> did not only flaunt its *androcentric* (mis-)understanding of Paul’s present discourse, which in context has to do with “unveiled” women involved in prophetic utterances,<sup>47)</sup> but also its firm resolve to present an unambiguous assertion about male primacy in the gender hierarchy. For this scribe, the word-shift closed the door for any other interpretation but one: all women are, by virtue of the Genesis creation account, secondary to men. Such a message obviously thwarts any attempts to build a level playing field in the gender arena.

The same scribe made a bolder statement on women subordination in the *Haustafel* (household rules) in Ephesians 5:21-33. In v. 24 the common text of NA<sup>28</sup>-UBS<sup>5</sup> reads ἀλλὰ ὡς ἡ ἐκκλησία ὑποτάσσεται τῷ Χριστῷ, οὕτως καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἐν παντί (literally, *But just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also submit to [their] husbands in all things*), which in context has a “comparative” force. As such, Paul is here presenting an ideal model of mutual submission in view of the Christ-Church paradigm,<sup>48)</sup> and not necessarily an articulation of the *raison d’être* for the wife’s blind submission to her husband ἐν παντί (“in all things”) as such.<sup>49)</sup>

On the contrary, what the passage expects to evince from its hearers is a willful assumption of distinct roles as Christian husbands and wives just as there is a mutual (although distinct) relationship between the Church and Christ.<sup>50)</sup> However, a simple pen-stroke changed this framework altogether when **P**<sup>46</sup>’s scribe chose to reflect the causal ὍΤΙ (“because”) [see Figure IV] instead of the comparative ὩΣ (“just as”).<sup>51)</sup>

What Paul originally intended to be a straightforward point of comparison has become an occasion for yet another gender agenda, using the analogy of Christ’s

47) On the issue of unveiled women, see Bruce Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 77-96; and Antoinette Wire, *Corinthian Women Prophets*, 116-134.

48) Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, SNTSMS 59 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1988), 53.

49) Cf. Elizabeth Schussler-Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 266-270.

50) Ben Witherington III, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 58.

51) There is no immediate paleographical explanation for this substitution. Perhaps the proximity of ὍΤΙ in v. 23 influenced the scribe’s choice. But this is unsustainable in view of the fact that in this chapter where Paul used ὩΣ nine times (vv. 1, 8, 15 [2x], 22, 23, 24, 28, 33), this is the lone instance where our scribe made such a change, which turns out to be a very pivotal exegetical alteration.

headship over the Church as a pretext. From an uncomplicated analogical comparison (ὡς),<sup>52)</sup> P<sup>46</sup>'s alteration has articulated the *reason* or the *basis* for the supposed “subordination” of the “second sex”—an action that was not isolated but was dictated by the scribe’s socio-cultural context.<sup>53)</sup>

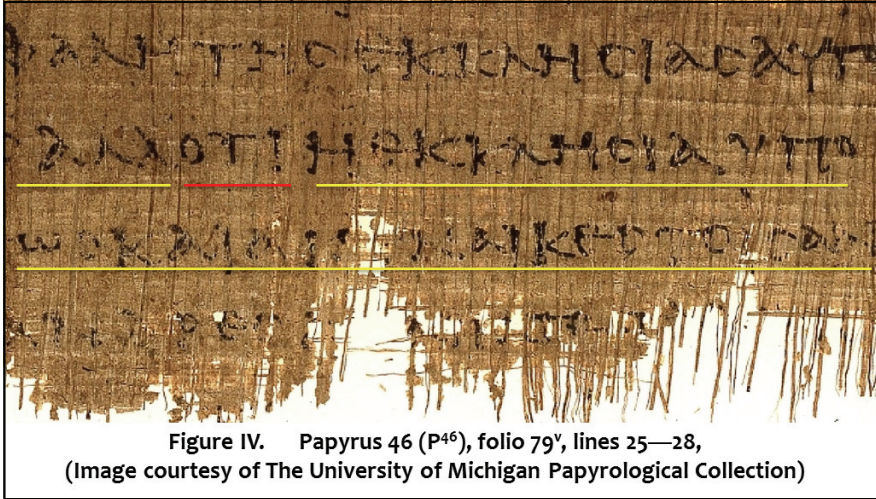


Figure IV. Papyrus 46 (P<sup>46</sup>), folio 79<sup>v</sup>, lines 25—28,  
(Image courtesy of The University of Michigan Papyrological Collection)

#### 4. Conclusion

Sensible scribal changes, with bearings on the gender question, are reflective of the socio-cultural milieu from which ancient biblical manuscripts emerged. It is no secret that the history of interpretation, particularly during the Patristic era, is openly marked with *androcentric* accent,<sup>54)</sup> and traces of this understanding are now found inscribed in the text of some New Testament manuscripts themselves.

52) The function of  $\omega\varsigma$  here is clearly comparative, which may be essentially translated as “in the same way” or “just as”; see for instance, Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: A Commentary*, Helen Heron, trans. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 246; Peter O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Leicester: Apollos Press, 1999), 416; Markus Barth, *Ephesians 4-6: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, ABC 34A (New York: Double Day, 1974), 607.

53) See Jennifer Knust, “The Politics of Virtue and Vice in the Pauline Epistles”, *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 39 (2000), 436-451.

54) For instance, see Kevin Koyle, “The Fathers on Women and Women’s Ordination”.

Alterations in the manuscripts we mentioned here are not isolated. Church history is in fact replete with many other examples recounting the seemingly programmed efforts, both from inside and outside the Church,<sup>55)</sup> to nip the bud of the growing influence of women in various fields of life, and confining them to the traditional “Martha” roles.

Women largely did not have any public voice, and when they spoke they were called shameless. Societal protocols at the time dictate that wives ought to submit to their own husbands in all respects. But being without a husband was also no exception so long as they belong to the “weaker sex”.<sup>56)</sup> The list describing the despicable plight of women during that time goes on, but the undeniable truth is that women at the time were seemingly treated as inferior breed of humanity, for one reason or another.<sup>57)</sup>

It is in our hands now, however, whether we, both as a member of our social community and of our Church, will take a long hard look at this issue and make amends as necessary or to let the *status quo* continue. Our present context must dictate what the Church in Asia can do and must do to address these issues. We have to grapple with these and not deny their existence.

The scribes we identified here also had to live with the issues of their own time. The social construct they were born in inevitably imputed on them a worldview that was primarily a patriarchal society. Without unjustifiably exonerating these scribes, for them to disavow a pre-commitment to male dominance was to go against the prevailing socio-cultural norm at the time. Through the distinctive readings they deliberately reflected in their texts, they attempted to arrest the “scandal of the hysterical woman”—a construct that

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55) See, for instance, Karen Jo Torjesen, *When Women were Priests*, 9-50; and Margaret MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion*, 49-126.

56) “‘If they have any questions to ask, they should ask their own men at home; for it is not right for a woman to speak out in an assembly’ (1Co 14:35). It seems to me that the phrase ‘their own men’ does not refer to husbands alone. If it did, virgins would either be speaking out in an assembly, or be with anyone, or with be anyone to teach them, and the same would be true of widows. Cannot ‘their own man’ also include brother, kinsman, son? In summary, a woman should acquire her information from ‘her man’, ‘man’ being understood here as a general term contrasted to ‘woman’” (Origen, *Comm. in I Epist. ad Corinthios*, 14:34-35; translation quoted from Kevin Koyle, “The Fathers on Women and Women’s Ordination”, 73).

57) On how women were treated in the Old Testament and Qumran materials, that shed light on the limits of what women can and cannot do, see Paul Heger, *Women in the Bible, Qumran, and Rabbinic Literature: Their Status and Roles*, STDJ 110 (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2014).

continues to challenge us, both men and women.

<Keywords>

*Vorlage/n*, scribal alterations, manuscript tradition, social construct, scribal habits.

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<Abstract>

**Sex, Scribes, and Scriptures:  
Engendering the Texts of the New Testament**

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Textual alterations in some of the manuscripts of the New Testament conform to the prevailing socio-cultural milieus from which these manuscripts emerged. Interestingly, a number of these alterations intimate preference for the “stronger sex”, and almost always to the detriment of the “weaker sex”. Using text-critical lenses, this article identifies some passages that may be considered as gender-related alterations in the manuscript tradition, that have preoccupied the exegetical attention of many Bible scholars and theologians for centuries. The varying interpretations that emerged out of this on-going interpretive exercise have undeniably influenced the very fabric of many Churches’ *dogma* and *praxis* with regard to the role of women in ministry and leadership. This paper will attempt to offer alternative appreciation of the evidences pertaining to these textual conundra. In offering this renewed text-critical appreciation, this paper will also appeal to the contributions of new fields of studies, particularly the field of scribal studies, in relation to the ancient socio-anthropological contexts, which might have influenced the form and content of the transmitted passages dealt with in this article. Finally, a reflection on its challenges for the contemporary Asian Church is submitted.