

A Textual Commentary on the Greek Gospels
by
Wieland Willker

Western non-interpolations

Westcott and Hort identified 27 instances in the text of the Gospels where, contrary to normal behavior, the Western text has a shorter text which, on internal considerations, has some merit to be original. They called them "Western non-interpolations", possibly to avoid the inescapable term "Neutral interpolations". Compare WH Intro § 240-42 and 383:

"there remain, ... a few other Western readings of similar form, which we cannot doubt to be genuine in spite of the exclusively Western character of their attestation. They are all omissions, or, to speak more correctly, non-interpolations, of various length: that is to say, the original record has here, to the best of our belief, suffered interpolation in all the extant Non-Western texts."

Even though nobody uses Hort's nomenclature of a "neutral" text anymore today, it is still comparatively difficult to explain those Western non-interpolations.

These are the original 27 instances:

Mt 6:15, 6:25, 9:34, 13:33, 21:44, 23:26, 27:49

Mk 2:22, 10:2, 14:39

Luk 5:39, 10:41-42, 12:19, 12:21, 12:39, 22:19b-20, 22:62, 24:3, 24:6, 24:9, 24:12, 24:36, 24:40, 24:51, 24:52

Jo 3:31, 4:9

There are a few others, perhaps one could add: Mt 21:23, 28:7, Mk 6:50, 9:35, 14:65, Lk 8:44, Jo 12:8, 13:32, but we confine ourselves here to the ones explicitly noted by WH.

Of the above 27 cases WH noted 9 as having a strong claim for being original:

Mt 27:49, Lk 22:19b-20, 24:3, 24:6, 24:12, 24:36, 24:40, 24:51, 24:52.

WH put these words into double brackets and wrote:

"On the whole it has seemed best that nothing should at present be omitted from the text itself on Western authority exclusively."

The force of Hort's argument was so strong that for three-quarters of a century most editions and translations omitted these nine passages. Only the

advent of P75 changed the assessment. From NA²⁶ on the brackets have been removed.

The main problem is this:

Internally the readings are very difficult to evaluate. In this commentary they have almost all been rated "indecisive". Overall, purely on internal considerations, there is often a slight tendency in favor of the shorter readings. On the other hand, the shorter text is supported (for most of the readings) by D plus the Old Latin only, without any other Greek support whatsoever. This is very strange. If original, this would point to a very early change of the text. It would mean that the archetype of the Western text departed earlier than all other texts from the main root, already quite heavily edited, but containing genuine readings not preserved anywhere else. This is of course basically possible and was the opinion of Hort.

The analysis of all variants in this commentary has shown that D has more secondary readings in Luke than any other Greek codex. D has thus to be considered very unreliable in general. To accept that exactly this codex preserved more than 10 important original readings alone in Lk is therefore rather improbable from the outset. It must be admitted that from this consideration it appears more probable that the shorter readings in D have been taken over from the Latin, as it happened elsewhere in the codex. They then never existed in Greek, but only in the Latin version.

It is interesting that the Western non-interpolations appear predominantly in Luke. Why? Here we arrive at the larger problem of the two different versions/editions of Luke/Acts.

There appears to be a strange accumulation of these 'interpolations' in the last chapter of Lk. It's also curious that some of them could be interpreted as harmonizations to John:

Luke 24:12	John 20:3-6
Luke 24:36	John 20:19
Luke 24:40	John 20:20

But note to the contrary: Luke 23:38 / John 19:20, where the Western and Byzantine text harmonize to John.

It has been suggested (M. Matson, SBL 1999) that these words "were removed by copyists in the late second or early third century precisely because they are so similar to the Fourth Gospel. [...] In the late second century and early third

century there was significant opposition from within the orthodox church to the Johannine literature, especially the Fourth Gospel and the Apocalypse."

Another part of the problem is how to evaluate the Western non-interpolations? Should one analyze them all together, accepting a common origin, or should one analyze every variant on its own? Normally those accepting the shorter texts as original prefer a common origin, whereas those who accept the longer readings prefer a one by one analysis.

In my view the arguments for considering all variants together are not convincing enough. To the contrary, several quite persuasive explanations have been put forward to explain only part of the variants together.

Therefore the variants should be discussed on a one by one basis. If it subsequently turns out that they can all be explained by the same pattern, this then can be accepted, but I think it is not good to start from the *a priori* decision to consider them all together. Nevertheless the accumulation of the Western non-interpolations in the last chapter of Lk should be kept in mind. This deserves an explanation.

Rice pointed out that quite a different picture emerges, if one takes into account all variants of D in the end of Lk and not just the few Western non-interpolations. He comes to the conclusion that the alterations on the part of D "tend to explain the reasons for this unbelief [of the disciples] and, in the process, to exonerate the apostles, thus providing 'a defense of the apostolate'". Compare his article.

Conclusion:

My own conclusion is that still the evidence is not completely clear. Overall I think the arguments in favor of the priority of the Western text are not strong enough, though. To me it appears to be the most probable solution that we have here a secondary editing on the part of the Western text. It is possible that it's originally a Latin-only phenomenon. In part it has to do with adapting Luke to Acts.

Compare:

- WH Intro § 240-42 and 383
- B.M. Metzger, Discussion in his Textual Commentary
- K. Snodgras "Western non-interpolations" JBL (1972) 369-79
- G. Rice " Western non-interpolations: A defense of the apostolate", in: "Luke-Acts, New perspectives from the SBL seminar", New York, 1984, p. 1-16
- A.W. Zwiep "The text of the ascension narratives" NTS 42 (1996) 219-244
- M. W. Martin "Defending the "Western non-interpolations": The case for an anti-separationist Tendenz in the longer Alexandrian readings" JBL 124 (2005) 269-94

- Overview Lk 24:

NA²⁷ Luke 24:3 εἰσελθοῦσαι δὲ οὐχ εἶρον τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.

omit: D, it(a, b, d, e, ff², l, r¹)

τοῦ Ἰησοῦ 579, 1071, 1241, pc², Sy-S, Sy-C, Sy-P, bo^{ms}

NA²⁷ Luke 24:6 οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε, ἀλλὰ ἠγέρθη. μνήσθητε ὡς ἐλάλησεν ὑμῖν ἔτι ὧν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ

omit: D, it, arm^{mss}, geo^{II}, Bois, Weiss

ἠγέρθη ἐκ νεκρῶν c ("resurrexit a mortuis")

NA²⁷ Luke 24:12 Ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἀναστὰς ἔδραμεν ἐπὶ τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ παρακύψας βλέπει τὰ ὀθόνια μόνα, καὶ ἀπήλθεν πρὸς ἑαυτὸν θαυμάζων τὸ γεγονός.

omit verse: D, it (a, b, d, e, l, r¹), NA²⁵, Weiss

NA²⁷ Luke 24:36 Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτῶν λαλούντων αὐτὸς ἔστη ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν.

omit: D, it (a, b, e, ff², l, r¹), NA²⁵, Gre, Bois, Weiss

NA²⁷ Luke 24:40 καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τοὺς πόδας.

omit verse: D, it (a, b, d, e, ff², l, r¹), Sy-S, Sy-C, Marcion, NA²⁵, Gre, Bois, Weiss

NA²⁷ Luke 24:51 καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εὐλογεῖν αὐτὸν αὐτοὺς διέστη ἀπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἀνεφέρετο εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν. 52 Καὶ αὐτοὶ ...

omit: 01*, D, it(a, b, d, e, ff², l), geo¹, NA²⁵, Tis, Gre, Weiss

NA²⁷ Luke 24:52 Καὶ αὐτοὶ προσκυνήσαντες αὐτὸν ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ μετὰ χαρᾶς μεγάλης

omit: D, it(a, b, d, e, ff², l), Sy-S, NA²⁵, Tis, Gre, Weiss
