

Introduction: Loose Texts, Loose Women

Some 1,700 years ago, the anonymous author of the third-century church order the *Didascalia apostolorum* reminded his audience of an episode involving Jesus and a woman accused of adultery. In this story, as now known from the Gospel of John, scribes and Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery before Jesus, asking him to make a decision about her and the law; should she be stoned as the law commands? Instead of offering an immediate reply, Jesus stoops and writes on the ground. Finally, he answers, “Let the one without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” They then go away, leaving Jesus alone with the woman. Jesus asks her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replies, “No one, Lord,” to which he responds, “Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more” (John 7:53–8:11, NRSV).

First written in Greek but preserved in Syriac and Latin, the *Didascalia's* discussion of this story offers the earliest explicit reference in the Christian tradition to an episode involving Jesus and a woman caught in adultery, now known to scholars as the *pericope adulterae*. Citing a version somewhat different from what is printed in the Gospel of John as it appears in modern editions of the New Testament (the writer speaks of “elders” rather than “scribes and Pharisees,” for example), the *Didascalia* exhorts local Syrian bishops to forgive repentant sinners and welcome them back into the church. If Christ did not condemn the sinful woman but sent her on her way, the writer argues, then bishops should also be willing to reconcile former sinners to the faith in imitation of their Savior (*Did. apost. 7*).¹

1. *Did. apost. 7*. Critical ed. of the Syriac with English trans., Arthur Vööbus, *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac I–II*, CSCO 401–2, 407–8, *Scriptores Syri 175–76, 179–80* (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1979), 175:92–93; 176:89. Greek and Latin fragments, *Didascalia Apos-*

In 1975, the Nobel Prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney presented a very different interpretation of this same story in “Punishment,” one of his “bog poems.”² Inspired by the discovery of a set of two-thousand-year-old mummified bodies, murdered and left to rot in a Danish bog, Heaney offered a series of reflections on archaeology, history, and place that linked these Iron Age murders to the “Troubles” in Northern Ireland.³ “Punishment,” addressed to the body of an adolescent girl (age fourteen?), associates the Gospel’s adulteress with a victimized Viking girl and a group of Irish women tarred for fraternizing with British soldiers. Silent witnesses who observe but do not prevent these punishing acts, Heaney implies, are full participants in the perpetuation of violence and abuse they later decry. The allusion to the pericope in this poem is indirect and yet unambiguous: Heaney names the drowned girl “little adulteress” (her specific crime is not actually known) and laments that he, the poet, would have thrown “the stones of silence” as an “artful voyeur.” Blaming mute spectators for complicity and hypocrisy, the poem therefore indicts those who observe acts of “tribal revenge” and yet speak with “civilized outrage” after the fact.⁴

By the time Heaney composed “Punishment,” it was possible to call the pericope adulterae to mind merely by mentioning an adulteress and stones, but this was not always so. From the first reference to the story in the *Didascalia apostolorum* until today, the pericope adulterae boasts a long, complex history of reception and transmission, which, at least early on, placed it on the margins of Christian interpretation. Absent from early copies of the Gospels and rarely cited, it finally emerged as a popular tale only in the fourth century, and then largely among Latin-speaking authors. Writers like Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315–67/8), Pacian of Barcelona (ca. 310–91), Ambrose of Milan (ca. 339–

tolorum, Canonum ecclesiasticorum, Traditionis apostolicae versiones latinae, ed. Erik Tidner, TUGAL 75 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1963).

2. Seamus Heaney, “Punishment,” in *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 30–31. We would like to thank Professor Heaney for confirming to us in a personal communication that he did intend to cite the pericope adulterae here. We mourn his passing soon after our conversation.

3. For discussion, see Helen Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 48–50.

4. As Helen Vendler has explained, the poem provides an inventory of three “criminal acts”: silence in the face of violence, hypocritical condemnation of the injustice once the act is carried out, and the tribal vengeance of the punishment itself (*Seamus Heaney*, 50). By equating the adulteress, the woman of the bog, and the “betraying sisters” of Ireland, Heaney might be accused of imparting a “decorative tinge” to violence while also implying that this violence is natural and inevitable. See Edna Longley, “North: ‘Inner Emigré’ or ‘Artful Voyeur?’,” in *The Art of Seamus Heaney*, ed. Tony Curtis, 3rd ed. (Chester Springs, PA: Dufour Editions, 1994), 63–94.

97), Gelasius (d. 395), Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345–411), Jerome (ca. 345–420), Augustine of Hippo (345–430), Peter Chrysologus (ca. 400–450), Leo the Great (d. 461), Sedulius (active ca. 450), and Cassiodorus (ca. 485–580) referred to it, often in great detail, and in versions similar to what is printed in modern editions of the Gospel of John. The Greek writer Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–98), a fourth-century theologian and teacher living in Alexandria, also knew this story but in a slightly different version and probably not from John.⁵ Codex Bezae (D/d 05, ca. 400), a bilingual Greek and Latin copy of the Gospels, Acts, and Catholic Epistles, provides the earliest manuscript witness to the presence of the story in a canonical Christian Gospel.⁶ Many but not all early Latin manuscripts of John preserve the story; the vast majority of Byzantine Greek manuscripts include it, though in several slightly different versions.⁷ Other Greek manuscripts omit the story, however, most significantly those identified with the “Alexandrian text,” a type of text thought to be most faithful to the initial text of the Gospel.⁸ In *Against the Pelagians* Jerome acknowledges that the passage is found “in many of both the Greek as well as

5. He cited it at length in the context of his *Commentarii in Ecclesiasten* 223.6b–13a. Greek text with German trans., *Didymos der Blinde Kommentar zum Ecclesiastes (Tura-Papyrus)*, part 4, *Kommentar zu Eccl. Kap. 7–8,8 in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Ägyptischen Museum zu Kairo*, ed. and trans. Johannes Kramer and Bärbel Krebber, *Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen* 16 (Bonn: Rudolf Habelt Verlag, 1972). For further discussion of Didymus’s text, see chapter 5.

6. On the date of Codex Bezae (D/d 05), see D. C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 281. There has been a debate regarding the possibility that the original scribe of John in Codex Vaticanus (B 03) knew the story and intentionally excluded it. At some point, a scribe may have indicated that one or more of his exemplars contained the pericope by placing a double-dot (distigmē) at John 7:52. Philip Payne and Paul Canart, “The Originality of Text-Critical Symbols in Codex Vaticanus,” *NovT* 42, no. 2 (2000): 105–13. A number of scholars have expressed their doubts about this proposal, however, including Peter Head in “The Marginalia of Codex Vaticanus: Putting the Distigmai in Their Place” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, New Orleans, November 21–24, 2009). See further discussion in chapter 3, “Correction (διορθωσις), the Corrector (διορθωτής), and the Scholarly Edition (ἐκδόσις).”

7. Representative examples include Codex Basiliensis (E 07, 8th cent.), Codex Campianus (M 021, 8th or 9th cent.), and Codex Nanius (U 030), a ninth- or tenth-century Byzantine Gospel book copied in Constantinople but now held in Venice. Also see Jennifer Knust and Tommy Wasserman, “Earth Accuses Earth: Tracing What Jesus Wrote on the Ground,” *HTR* 103, no. 4 (2010): 407–45.

8. Codex Sinaiticus (Σ 01, 4th cent.), Codex Vaticanus (B 03, 4th cent.), and Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C 04, 5th cent.) omit the passage. No extant papyrus copy of the Gospels includes the story. For further discussion of the “initial text,” as opposed to the “original text” or “authorial text,” see Michael W. Holmes, “From ‘Original Text’ to ‘Initial Text’: The Traditional Goal of New Testament Textual Criticism in Contemporary Discussion,” in *The Text of*

the Latin copies” of the Gospel of John (in multis et Graecis et Latinis codicibus; *Pelag.* 2.17);⁹ in other words, he knew it could not be found in every copy.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he included the pericope when composing his own Latin translation, a translation that was ultimately preserved in the Latin Vulgate.¹¹

Although not everyone knew the story, those who did took pains to ensure its survival. For example, an eighth- or ninth-century corrector of an Old Latin Gospel book, noticing that the story was missing from the seventh- or eighth-century Codex Rehdigeranus (11, l), copied Jerome’s translation in the margin. At a later stage, the pages were trimmed, but this part of the margin was retained and folded.¹² A few scribes, unsure about how they ought to handle differences between their exemplars, appended the tale of the adulteress to the end of the Gospel.¹³ In one family of manuscripts, the pericope was incorpo-

the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Questionis, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael W. Holmes, 2nd rev. ed., NITS 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 637–88.

9. CCSL 80:75–78; English trans., J. N. Nritzu, *Jerome: Dogmatic and Polemical Works*, FC 53 (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 1965), 321–22.

10. Ulrich Becker suggests that Jerome is employing a figure of speech to convey a sense of certainty about the passage (92). Jerome also discusses the Greek and Latin evidence of Luke 22:43–44 and, in this instance, refers only to “some copies” (in quibusdam exemplaribus) in order to justify his use of the passage (*Pelag.* 2.16). Ulrich Becker, *Jesus und die Ehebrecherin: Untersuchungen zur Text- und Überlieferungsgeschichte von Joh. 7,53–8,11*, BZ 28 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1963), 23. For further discussion of Jerome’s discussion of variants, see Bruce M. Metzger, “St. Jerome’s Explicit References to Variant Readings in Manuscripts of the New Testament,” in *Text and Interpretation: Studies in the New Testament Presented to Matthew Black*, ed. Ernst Best and R. McL. Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 179–90.

11. Every known copy of the Vulgate contains the pericope, including Codex Fuldensis, a Gospel harmony with the Vulgate text copied between 541 and 546; critical edition, Ernst Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis: Novum Testamentum Latine Interprete Hieronymo ex manuscripto Victoris Capuani* (Marburg: Sumtibus N. G. Elwertii Bibliopolae Academicis, 1868). For a full overview of the evidence, see Bonifatius Fischer, *Die lateinischen Evangelien bis zum 10. Jahrhundert*, vol. 4, *Varianten zu Johannes*, AGLB 18 (Freiburg: Herder, 1991), 242–78.

12. Codex Rehdigeranus (VL 11, l) of the Gospels (Stadtbibliothek Breslau, R. 169); editio princeps, Heinrich Joseph Vogels, *Codex Rehdigeranus*, *Collectanea Biblica Latina* 2 (Rome: Pustet, 1913). Vogels includes a plate of the relevant folio.

13. For example, see the scribe of Codex 1 (12th cent., Basel, Universitätsbibliothek AN IV 2). The pericope was likely placed at the end of the exemplars from which the Christian Palestinian Aramaic (formerly labeled “Palestinian Syriac”) lectionaries were copied, for all three extant manuscripts, one of which preserves the pericope adulterae, include a colophon after John 8:2. In the Greek, retranslated from the Syriac by Agnes Smith Lewis and Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *The Palestinian Syriac Lectionary of the Gospels, Re-Edited from Two Sinai MSS. and from P. de la Garde’s Edition of the “Evangeliarium Hierosolymitanum”* (London: K. Paul,

rated into the Gospel of Luke;¹⁴ other locations were also possible, including after John 7:36, 7:44, 8:12, or between Luke and John.¹⁵ A sixth-century Syriac compilation by a monk in Amida suggests that the story was found within John in a tetraevangelion once owned by Mara, an anti-Chalcedonian bishop exiled for eight years in Alexandria.¹⁶ The memory of the story's

Trench, Trübner, 1899; repr., Jerusalem: Raritas, 1971), lv; manuscripts A (1030 CE) and B (1104 CE) read ἐτελιώθη τὸ εὐαγγέλιον Ἰωάννου ἑλληνιστὶ ἐν Ἐφέσῳ; manuscript C (1118 CE) reads ἐτελιώθη τὸ εὐαγγέλιον Ἰωάννου βοηθείᾳ τοῦ χριστοῦ. In her introduction, Lewis refers to Rendel Harris, who had suggested to her that the pericope adulterae “was at one time appended to St. John’s Gospel after the final colophon,” and “in the Greek or Syriac MS from which the lessons of the Palestinian Lectionary were taken, the section was removed to the place (between chapter vii and viii) which it now usually occupies.” These scribes, however, “not highly endowed with intelligence,” transported the colophon with the story (*ibid.*, xv). The production of this lectionary likely represents the late period in the development of this version (from the end of the 10th cent. to the early 13th cent.). See Matthew Morgenstern, “Christian Palestinian Aramaic,” in *The Semitic Languages: An International Handbook*, ed. Stefan Weninger et al., *Handbooks of Linguistics and Communication Science* 36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 628–37 (esp. 631); Lucas Van Rompay, “Christian Writings in Christian Palestinian Aramaic,” in *Encyclopedia of Religious and Philosophical Writings in Late Antiquity: Pagan, Judaic, Christian*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 64–65.

14. Family 13/The Ferrar Group, a set of Greek Gospel manuscripts, probably copied in Southern Italy from an eighth-century exemplar. See Jacob Geerlings, *Family 13 (The Ferrar Group): The Text according to Luke*, SD 20 (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1961). The pericope adulterae was inserted after Luke 21:38. On the Italian origin of these manuscripts, see Bernard Botte, “Ferrar (groupe de manuscrits),” in *Supplément au dictionnaire de la Bible*, ed. Louis Pirot (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1938), 3:272–74. For recent surveys, see Didier Lafleur, *La Famille 13 dans l’évangile de Marc*, NTSD 41 (Leiden: Brill, 2012); and Jac Dean Perrin Jr., “Family 13 in St. John’s Gospel” (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2012).

15. Chris Keith has offered a helpful overview of the many locations in which this story can be found: *The Pericope Adulterae, the Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus*, NTSD 38 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 120–21. The evidence for Keith’s summary is drawn from Kurt Aland, Barbara Aland, and Klaus Wachtel, eds., *Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments*, part 5, *Das Johannesevangelium*, vol. 1, *Teststellenkollation der Kapitel 1–10*, ANTF 35–36 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), 2.211–15. For further discussion, see Maurice A. Robinson, “Preliminary Observations regarding the *Pericope Adulterae* Based upon Fresh Collations of Nearly All Continuous-Text Manuscripts and All Lectionary Manuscripts Containing the Passage,” *Filología Neotestamentaria* 13 (2000): 35–59.

16. On Bishop Mara, see Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *Chronicle*, 8.5; John of Ephesus, *Lives of Thomas and Stephen* 14 (ed. and trans. E. W. Brooks, “John of Ephesus, Lives of the Eastern Saints, 1,” *PO* 17.1 [Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1923]: 187–95); Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre, *Chronicle* 3 (trans. with intro. and notes, Witold Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre: Chronicle, Part III*, Translated Texts for Historians 22 [Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996], 30–32); Introduction to the *Chronicle* in Geoffrey Greatrex, Robert Phenix, and Cornelia Horn, *The*

uncertain place in the Gospel was retained. Byzantine scribes often placed a series of asterisks next to the text, either to indicate that it should be skipped by the reader (the passage was omitted from the Pentecost liturgy, which jumped to John 8:12) or to show that it was spurious.¹⁷ A few scribes left a blank space where it could be copied, but omitted it just the same.¹⁸ Augustine, aware of the problem with the passage, proposed an unlikely explanation for the story's occasional omission from the Gospels: it is not found in every copy of John, he argued, because "men of slight faith," afraid that their wives might commit adultery after hearing about the woman, deleted it (*Adulterous Marriages* 2.7.6).¹⁹

The irregular transmission of the story within the Gospel books, however, did not prevent it from securing a home in Christian worship and art. By the sixth century the Johannine version of the passage had been incorporated in the Roman stationary liturgy, read at the titular church of the Gai (later Santa Susanna) on the third Saturday of Lent.²⁰ In the Byzantine church, the peri-

Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity, Translated Texts for Historians 55 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 32–34, 37, 50. The author notes that "the holy bishop Mara" possesses a copy of John with a story involving an adulterous woman, though this is the only manuscript he knows of with the story. Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *Chronicle*, 8.7 (Greatrex, Phenix, and Horn, *Chronicle*, 311–12).

17. For example, the scribe of Codex Basiliensis (E 07) marked the beginning and end of the pericope with an *obelos* (a horizontal stroke) and then each line with an *asteriskos* (crossed lines in the shape of an X with dots in each space (Basel, Universitätsbibliothek AN III 12, fol. 276). Other examples include Codex Petropolitanus (Π 041, Saint Petersburg, Russian National Library, Gr. 34), Codex Tischendorfianus III (Λ 039, Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Auct. T. Infra I.1 [Misc. 310]), and Codex Athos Dionysiou (Ω 045, Mount Athos, Convent of Saint Dionysius Cod. 10). For further discussion, see chapter 7.

18. For example, see Codex Sangallensis (Δ 037), which contains the canonical Gospels in Greek with Latin translation.

19. *De adulterinis coniugiis*, CSEL 41:345–410. For further discussion see H.A.G. Houghton, *Augustine's Text of John: Patristic Citations and Latin Gospel Manuscripts*, OECS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 258–59, 346–47. We would like to offer our sincerest thanks to Hugh Houghton of the Institute for Textual Scholarship and Electronic Editing (Birmingham) for his valuable assistance with Augustine's citations of the passage and also with the Old Latin versions of John.

20. W. H. Frere, *Studies in Early Roman Liturgy*, vol. 2, *The Roman Lectionary*, Alcuin Club Collections 30 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), iii–iv, 8, 81; Theodor Klauser, *Das römische Capitulare Evangeliorum: Texte und Untersuchungen zu seiner Ältesten Geschichte*, vol. 1, *Typen*, Liturgiewissenschaftliche Quellen und Forschungen 28 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1972), xi–xxviii. On the problem of dating, see John F. Baldovin, SJ, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of Stationary Liturgy*, OrChrAn 228 (Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1987), 143–53; and Jacob Latham, "The Ritual Con-

cope was often read during the feast days of various female “sinner saints,” though the date of its inclusion in various *menologia* (a calendar of saints’ days and the readings to accompany them) remains unclear.²¹ It was also occasionally featured in decorative art; for example, it is depicted on two sixth-century Egyptian ivory pyxides,²² on the golden cover of the Codex Aureus of Saint Emmeram, a ninth-century copy of the Vulgate,²³ and in ivory scenes of the life of Jesus carved in Magdeburg in the tenth century.²⁴ In some later

struction of Rome: Processions, Subjectivities, and the City from the Late Republic to Late Antiquity” (PhD diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 2007), 388–453.

21. Surviving medieval *menologia* most often associate the story with Saint Pelagia. Since the *Vita S. Pelagiae, Meretricis* was not composed until the fifth century, the story cannot have been added to her feast day before then. On the date of Pelagia’s “life” in Greek, see Bernard Flusin, “Les textes grecs,” in *Pélagie la Pénitente: Métamorphoses d’une légende*, ed. Pierre Petitmengin (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1981), 1:39–76. Allen Paul Wikgren compared thirty-seven lectionary manuscripts and found that most associated the story with Pelagia, but others with Theodora, Euphemia, and Mary of Egypt. See his essay, “The Lectionary Text of the Pericope Adulterae, John 8:1–11,” *JBL* 53, no. 2 (1934): 188–98. Also see Harald Riesenfeld, “The *Pericope de adultera* in the Early Christian Tradition,” in *The Gospel Tradition: Essays by Harald Riesenfeld*, trans. E. Margaret Rowley and Robert A. Kraft (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), 109.

22. We have reviewed the artistic evidence at greater length in our essay “Earth Accuses Earth” (407–46). Also see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Siligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971–72), 1:160–61; Paul Bloch, “Ehebrecherin,” in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie*, vol. 1, *Allgemeine Ikonographie A-Ezechiel mit 295 Abbildungen*, ed. Günter Bandmann et al. (Rome: Herder, 1968), 581–84; Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters*, 3rd ed. (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1976), 112, plates 179 and 180; and A. Darcel and A. Basilewsky, *Collection Basilewsky: Catalogue raisonné précédé d’un essai sur les arts industriels du Ier au XVIIe siècle* (Paris: Vve A. Morel et Cie, 1874), 1:6; 2, plate 27. Schiller and Volbach identify the carving of a woman and Jesus as the pericope adulterae, Darcel and Basilewsky as the woman with a hemorrhage. The presence of the pillars of the Temple on either side of Jesus suggest the first interpretation, the placement of the woman’s right hand—she is touching Jesus’s cloak—suggests the latter. We would like to thank Harald Buchinger for calling Bloch’s discussion to our attention.

23. Schiller, *Iconography*, 160; Jesus is depicted as leaning over and writing “si quis sine peccato” (if anyone is without sin). See O. K. Werckmeister, *Der Deckel des Codex Aureus von St. Emmeram: Ein Goldschmiedewerk des 9. Jahrhunderts* (Baden-Baden: Verlag Heitz GMBH, 1963), plate 2a, discussion 31–32.

24. Schiller, *Iconography*, 160; Adolph Goldschmidt, *Die Elfenbeinskulpturen aus der Zeit der karolingischen und sächsischen Kaiser, VIII–XI. Jahrhundert*, *Die Denkmäler der deutschen Kunst* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1914–18), 2:19, plate 5; J. O. Westwood, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Fictile Ivories in the South Kensington Museum with an Account of the Continental Collections of Classical and Mediaeval Ivories* (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1876), 142; and Margaret Gibson, *The Liverpool Ivories: Late Antique and Medieval Ivory and Bone Carving in the Liverpool Museum and the Walker Art Gallery* (London: HMSO, 1994), 32–37, plate 13.

Byzantine manuscripts, an extra chapter was added to the kephalaia of John, identifying the passage explicitly.²⁵ Eventually, the woman taken in adultery emerged as one of the favorite subjects of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European painters.²⁶

Today the story is so widely known, so widely quoted, and so often alluded to in art, literature, film, and public discourse of all sorts that “throwing stones” serves as a cliché. Even so, the textual instability of the episode has not been forgotten, especially by biblical scholars, who continue to debate the implications of its unusual past. By now, most scholars have concluded that the pericope was not original to the Gospel; rather, it was added by a well-meaning interpolator at some later date, after the Gospel of John was already circulating. This conclusion, however, raises other questions: If the story was not included in the original or most primitive versions of the Gospel of John, should it be printed within the Gospel? In what sense can such a free-floating tradition be considered canonical? Is it authentically “Johannine” or something else? These concerns are further complicated by the popularity of the story among Christians today. The pericope adulterae is simply too well known and too beloved to be easily ignored, let alone expunged from the Gospel. The fame of the passage has guaranteed that it will continue to be mined for information about who Jesus was, how early Christian traditions were transmitted, and what this story might mean for Christians today. If anything, the unusual history of this story has enhanced rather than detracted from its already significant appeal.

Though the pericope adulterae remains the main focus of this study, tracing the threads of its journey across nearly seven centuries of Christian storytelling, art, liturgy, and Gospel book transmission has much larger implications for the study of ancient Christian books and traditions. The modern preoccupation with the question of the story’s textual standing has sometimes prevented readers from noticing that “the gospel” has rarely been limited to what can be found in texts. What is represented in art, employed in liturgy, or cited in the context of a polemical argument can extend well beyond traditions now

25. Among the majuscule manuscripts, this extra chapter can be found in G 011, H 013, K 017, and M 021. The running title for the chapter (περι της μοιχαλιδος) is also found in 045 Ω and 028 S. For further discussion, see Hermann Freiherr von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911–13), 1:403–12.

26. See, for example, the paintings of the scene by Tintoretto (1546–48), Pieter Brueghel the Elder (1565), Rembrandt (1644), and Pietro della Vecchio (ca. 1620–25). Cf. Sabine Engel, *Das Lieblingsbild der Venezianer: “Christus und die Ehebrecherin” in Kirche, Kunst und Staat des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Schriftenreihe des Deutschen Studienzentrums in Venedig 6 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 2012).

associated with “the canonical Gospels.” Moreover, the practical use of texts has a tremendous impact on how these texts circulate, endure, or fall away. Thus, as we will argue, differences between Latin and Greek receptions of this passage had more to do with the early development of the liturgy than with any clear-cut ecclesial decision either to include or exclude it. Such a decision simply cannot be detected. And current efforts to exclude the story from the Gospel of John on the basis of its textual instability have failed: preachers continue to preach it, students still seek to unlock its hidden meanings, and most Christians remain blissfully unaware of the current scholarly consensus. As the history of the pericope adulterae shows, the gospel will not be limited either to canonical pronouncements or to scholarly interventions. Some culture of book production and storytelling has permitted the pericope adulterae to survive. Some culture of book production and storytelling keeps the story alive even now. Dismissing the passage as extraneous to the Gospel fails to explain how the passage entered the tradition at all, and embracing the story without question masks the situated and local character of both Gospel books and Christian practice. To tell the history of the pericope adulterae is to tell the history of the Gospels, and vice versa.

Plan of the Work

Our discussion begins in part 1, “A Case of Textual Corruption?,” with an evaluation in chapter 1 of modern scholarship on this passage. Debates about the pericope adulterae have been central to the development of both modern textual criticism and historical-critical approaches to the Gospels, as these disciplines emerged in the nineteenth century. When nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars advocated for the necessity of correcting ancient scribal error, they did so in part on the basis of this pericope, which was relegated to brackets or margins and thereby effectively removed from the canonical Gospel of John. The displacement of this story, as well as a few other passages, was inextricably linked to a new scientific approach to textual editing that finally overturned the *Textus Receptus*, the Greek text that had been employed in Europe since the Renaissance. This new approach also impacted the modern reception of the so-called Longer Ending of Mark (Mark 16:9–20), an equally unstable and “late” passage, but with a significant difference: Whereas most scholars came to regard the Longer Ending of Mark as a compilation of church traditions, appended for the sake of smoothing out the ending of the Gospel and harmonizing it with other accounts, the historical if not canonical authenticity of the pericope adulterae continued to be defended. Invested with contemporary meanings in a way that the Longer Ending of Mark has not been, the story of the woman taken in adultery is more often

consulted by scholars, theologians, and lay Christians for important information about Jesus and the movement he founded. Historical-critical studies of the passage therefore continue apace, whether or not the pericope is regarded as Johannine.

Part 2, “The Present and Absent Pericope Adulterae,” intervenes in previous scholarship on the passage by challenging the firm link between “Gospel” and “Gospel book” implied by textual and historical-critical studies to date. Rather than attempting to solve the relationship between the pericope adulterae and an initial text of John, chapter 2 seeks to describe and understand a climate of Gospel production and interpretation that could lead to the story’s incorporation within an already published Gospel of John. As this chapter shows, while it is true that the pericope was not likely to have been materially present in the earliest copies of John, its absence from the fourfold Gospels would not have prevented interpreters from highly regarding the story. Moreover, with books produced by hand and distributed within circles of affinity groups (churches, schools, and among friends), it would have been difficult for even the staunchest editor to prevent an interpolator from going about his or her work. Once placed within some copies of John, few (if any) would dare to remove it, a point examined more carefully in chapter 3.

Chapter 4 revisits the possibility that the story was deleted rather than interpolated. Contemporary scholars have often suggested that the unusual history of the pericope adulterae can best be explained by its seemingly radical content. In a world where adultery on the part of women was heavily censured, it is argued, this story may have pushed the limits of Christian mercy too far, especially since the earliest Christians were often accused of sexual misconduct. In addition, the woman showed no apparent signs of repentance. Yet, we argue, outright deletion or intentional suppression are both highly improbable: scribes and scholars were trained never to delete, even when they doubted the authenticity of a given passage, and the widespread affection for stories about adulterous women across the ancient world belies the thesis that this story was censored.²⁷ Always “gospel” to some Christians somewhere, the pericope adulterae may not originally have been Johannine, but it had no less claim to importance than any other well-known and highly regarded story about Jesus.

Part 3, “A Divided Tradition?,” addresses the presentation and preservation of the pericope in late antique and early medieval manuscripts, exegesis, and art, dispelling the notion that the story was in fact marginal to Christian

27. This does not exclude the fact that individual scribes obviously made omissions by mistake, for example, skipped over a word or a line, and some, especially in the early era, apparently deleted small words that they regarded as superfluous.

thought and practice. By the mid-fourth century, educated Christians had begun to register discrepancies among their copies of John, acknowledging that the pericope adulterae could be found only “in certain Gospels,” “in many copies in both Greek and Latin,” or “in most copies” but not all, statements that are confirmed by surviving manuscripts. Chapter 5 illuminates this evidence by considering editorial work, Gospel translation, traditions of reception, and attitudes toward the fourfold Gospels among late ancient scribes and scholars. The great Greek pandect Bibles of the fourth and fifth centuries omitted the passage, as did Eusebius when he developed his canon tables (a paratextual instrument that enabled easy comparison of the Gospels, thereby demonstrating their overall harmony). Yet, as chapter 6 shows, the Latin-Greek diglot Codex Bezae (D/d 05) included it, and Latin writers like Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine understood it to be fully Johannine. This inconsistency points back to rival local texts, some of which incorporated the passage when others did not, and reflects the continuing fluidity of Gospel texts and traditions even after the advent of imperial patronage. As in the earlier period, however, those who knew the pericope held it in high regard, whether or not they found it in John. It was more widely known in Latin-dominant contexts, but it was neither ignored nor overlooked in Greek.

Part 4, “Liturgical and Scholarly Afterlives of the Pericope Adulterae,” considers the afterlives of the story in the text, paratext, liturgy, and art. Chapter 7 examines the importance of the Johannine passage in Old Latin and Byzantine texts, with particular attention to paratextual notes, chapter headings, and annotations. A few have claimed that the story was rarely cited in the Latin West, but our research overturns this misconception. Some Old Latin Gospels retain traces of the pericope’s earlier absence, but most include it, highlighting it in capitula, the chapter summaries and lists that also accompanied Vulgate Gospels, often preserving Old Latin forms. By contrast, the story remained comparably marginal in Greek contexts, as scholars have frequently noted. Even so, the story was popular enough to provoke an exceptional event: at some point in late antiquity, the passage was interpolated in some manuscripts into the kephalaia, a set of chapter headings with titles that prefaced most Byzantine copies of the Gospels. This manuscript evidence challenges the impression that the story was marginal, even in Greek. While it is true that no Christian bishop, priest, or monk working in a Greek-dominant context cited the passage in the centuries between the unique citation of a (non-Johannine?) version by Didymus the Blind (ca. 313–98) and the twelfth-century exegetical and scholarly works of Euthymios Zigabenos and Eustathios of Thessaloniki (nearly eight hundred years), this does not mean that the story was either unknown or unloved.

Chapter 8 addresses the divergent liturgical history of the passage. Assigned to the third Saturday of Lent in Rome, the story gained even greater prominence in Latin contexts, particularly during the Carolingian and Ottonian periods. Carolingian biblical reform preserved and promulgated the Roman stational liturgy, Jerome's Vulgate, and also the pericope adulterae, which was featured in an imperial-sponsored homiliary and depicted in luxurious copies of the Gospels. The story was comparatively peripheral in Byzantine contexts, yet it was incorporated in this context as well. Featured as a lection on the feast days of female sinner saints and read in penitential contexts, the story was readily accepted within earlier traditions about repentant prostitutes and the mercy Christ extends. Liturgical reading guaranteed that the pericope would be remembered in both contexts, albeit differently.

As our study shows, editions of the New Testament are representations in script or print of systems of valuation that seek to institute some current understanding of "the best text." Other systems of valuation are also possible, however, as ancient manuscripts and any number of other Gospel editions—ancient, medieval, or modern—can demonstrate. Yet an honest reckoning of the contingency of both interpretation and textual transmission should not imply that texts cannot be interpreted. To the contrary: it is possible to acknowledge the intricacies of New Testament textual transmission while still attempting to describe this transmission accurately, to accept the contingency of meaning making while making meaning claims anyway, and to regard material Bibles not as problems waiting to be solved but as witnesses to the kaleidoscopic and ever-changing character of human communities and the stories they tell. Rather than troubling the importance of "initial" texts and meaning making, the remarkable history of the pericope adulterae illustrates the irregular, temporal sedimentations through which gospel, story, and text survive, not in neat, linear sequences of progress and decline but through fits and starts, accidents and chance.