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A Second Glance at Matthew 27.24*

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In the climactic trial scene of Matthew's Gospel, Pontius Pilate stands over Jesus and, having washed his hands, declares himself innocent of 'this man's blood'. This shorter reading is found in most modern translations and critical editions and is supported by many of the best manuscripts. It has been the preferred reading ever since Wescott and Hort. Prior to then, however, a longer reading was preferred by the majority of scholars. It reads 'I am innocent of the blood of this *righteous* man'. It too is found in many of the best manuscripts, but for the last century has been all but ignored by scholarship. This internal investigation will show why it is finally time to give the longer reading a second glance.

At first glance the textual variant in Matt 27.24 does not appear to deserve further scrutiny. The shorter reading is ἀθῷός εἰμι ἀπὸ τοῦ αἵματος τούτου, while the longer reading contains τοῦ δικαίου in the penultimate position.[1] Although neglected by most modern readers, this longer reading has a respectable history. One of the earliest editors to support it was Jerome, whose Vulgate reads *innocens ego sum a sanguine iusti huius*. When Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros completed the NT volume of his polyglot in 1514, he too supported the longer reading, but more important would be its selection by Erasmus for his 1516 edition. On that basis Stephanus printed the longer reading in his editions, and from there it was chosen for the Textus Receptus. From this textual tradition both Luther's and the King James versions drew the longer reading, thereby assuring it a period of dominance in the majority of the European church. Objections, however, would not be long in coming.

At least as early as his eighth edition in 1869, Tischendorf relegated the longer reading to the apparatus. The tide would truly turn in 1881, however, when Westcott and Hort published their edition that decisively chose the shorter read-

* Gratitude is due J. S. Kloppenborg, W. Olmstead and B. Seale for their assistance with this article.

1 The longer text could function grammatically as a neuter adjective agreeing with 'blood' or a masculine dependent genitive. Ultimately the debate is probably moot, since one likely would not speak of righteous blood outside of a righteous person. Note, for example, Deut 21.8–9.

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ing. Since they did not publish their notes for this text, the extent of their deliberations can only be a matter of conjecture, but their preference for readings supported by Codex Vaticanus is well known.[2] Since Westcott and Hort, the supremacy of the shorter reading has been almost absolute. While the UBS4 is cautious enough to classify it as a 'B' rated text, both it and the NA27 text print the shorter reading. It is found in most modern translations, with only the nrsv including the longer reading in the marginalia. Contemporary commentaries reflect this as well; of major modern works, only Gundry[3] and Davies and Allison[4] support the longer reading.[5] In his influential *Textual Commentary*, Bruce Metzger described the longer reading as 'an accretion intended to accentuate Pilate's protestation of Jesus' innocence' that should be dismissed because it is not found 'in the best representatives of the Alexandrian, Western, and Caesarean texts'.[6] It seems then that the matter is all but settled, and the consensus of the academy is that the shorter reading is the new best choice. In this internal investigation, however, it will be seen that there is good reason to question that status quo.

The Evidence

The external support for both readings is impressive. The shorter reading is found principally in the uncials B, D, and Θ, but also in ancient versions such as the Old Latin manuscripts $it^{a, b, d, ff2, r1}$, the Syriac, a corrector's hand of the Georgian, and some manuscripts of the Sahidic Coptic. It is also found in some patristics, such as Chrysostom or the Latin text of Origen. There are currently no extant papyri for this portion of Matthew, which means the earliest Greek witness

2 Hort wrote 'Accordingly . . . the readings of ℵB combined may safely be accepted as genuine in the absence of specially strong internal evidence to the contrary, and can never safely be rejected altogether. [In] the numerous variations in which ℵ and B stand on different sides . . . . Every such binary combination containing B . . . is found to have a large proportion of readings which on the closest scrutiny have the ring of genuineness, and hardly any that look suspicious after full consideration: in fact, the character of such groups is scarcely to be distinguished from that of ℵB. On the other hand every combination of ℵ with another primary MS presents for the most part readings which cannot be finally approved . . . All other MSS stand the trial with even less success than ℵ' (B. F. Wescott and F. J. A Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* [New York: American Book Company, 1881] 557).

3 Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

4 W. D. Davies and D. C. Alison, *Matthew* (ICC; New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004).

5 Note also the support of W. G. Olmstead, *Matthew's Trilogy of Parables* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) 196.

6 Bruce Metzger, *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1st ed. 1971) 68.

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is the fourth century Vaticanus. However, given the broad distribution of the reading, it is a safe supposition that it had a lively circulation prior to the fourth century among the papyri that are no longer extant. The longer reading has uncial support in ℵ, L, W, the Byzantine subset of E, F, G, H, and Σ, the Alexandrian cursive 33 and a host of other late minuscules, such as $f^{1, 13}$, 157, 180, 205, 565, 579, 597, 700, 892, 1006, 1071, 1241, 1243, 1292, 1342, 1424 and 1505. The reading is again distributed broadly among the versions, including the Old Latin $it^{c, ffi, g1, l, q, Θ}$, the Vulgate, other manuscripts of the Sahidic Coptic as well as the Boharic and Middle Egyptian Coptic traditions, the Armenian, the Ethiopic, another correction of the Georgian and the Old Church Slavonic. Likewise, it was also known by several different patristic writers, such as Augustine, Ambrose and Jerome. Thus, while it is again clear that the reading existed in the early papyri, the earliest direct evidence is the fourth century codex Sinaiticus. In other words, the Matt 27.24 variant is essentially a conflict between the two great Alexandrian uncials ℵ and B. How, then, has the shorter reading gained such popularity? Perhaps this is just another occurrence of the well-documented tendency of the academy to favour Vaticanus.[7] Or perhaps this is part of the new trend to root out orthodox corruption by favouring the less pious reading.[8] In either case, when the external evidence is so evenly allotted, the text should be determined by a careful analysis of the internal evidence.

An initial study of internal concerns is only slightly more decisive. Intrinsically, the longer reading could be described as characteristically Matthean. The word δίκαιος is a favourite of his; at 19 occurrences, he uses it more than the other three Gospels combined.[9] Thematically, the concept of *righteous blood* can be traced through many Matthean texts. In 23.35 Matthew alone has Jesus chastise the Pharisees for shedding αἷμα δίκαιον. Likewise, in 27.4, only Matthew has Judas bemoan his betrayal of αἷμα ἀθῷον. Matthew also refers to the *righteous man*.[10] In 10.41 Jesus characterizes himself as δίκαιος, while in 27.19 Pilate's wife warns him to have nothing to do with τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ. Gundry further notes that the syntactical order of the longer reading corresponds well with 27.19.[11] What is most significant about the δίκαιος theme is that it constitutes a uniquely Matthean contribution to all of these texts. It is also worth noting that the actions described

7 Even the Alands, for example, characterize B as 'by far the most significant of the uncials' (Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 109). This type of partiality stems from Wescott and Hort themselves (see n. 2).

8 This trend is, of course, not entirely recent. As early as 1751–52 Johann Jakob Wettstein argued that the 'more orthodox reading' was not necessarily preferable.

9 Mark: 2×; Luke: 11×; John: 3×.

10 The overlap of these two themes should likely be understood metonymically, and is further indication that the grammatical debate (cf. n. 1 above) is probably irrelevant.

11 Gundry, *Matthew*, 565.

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in 27.24 would be exceedingly hospitable to the longer reading. As most commentators have noted, Matthew depicts Pilate as washing his hands in order to reflect a common Jewish purity ritual.[12] Harrington points out, however, that the ritual was not concerned with general purity, but was understood specifically as a 'protestation of innocence' of shed blood.[13] Hence it would be only too appropriate for Pilate to declare Jesus δίκαιος explicitly as his actions had already done so implicitly.[14] Finally, so common was the righteous man motif that it can be found in the other Gospels, such as Luke 23.4, 14, 22 and John 19.4, 6[15] and is reflected in extra-biblical material as well, such as *1 En* 47.1–4[16] and especially *Gos Nic* 4.1, which reflects perfectly the longer reading. The clear testimony of the intrinsic evidence is that the longer reading well accords with Matthew's theological and literary character.

However, almost every point presented in favour of the longer reading could be re-construed to support the shorter reading. Transcriptionally, the ubiquity of the righteous man motif – both in Matthew's frequent use of δίκαιος and the general theme in the Gospels and later literature – could arguably explain why a scribe inserted it here: they thought they saw what they were used to seeing.[17] More importantly, on intrinsic grounds the theme's strong Matthean precedent could be taken as evidence of precisely why Matthew did not write it in 27.24: it would have been redundant. While it could be argued that the burden of proof would lie on the shorter reading to demonstrate why Matthew would diverge from his usual character, even that would leave the longer reading as only slightly more likely. In the end it must be conceded that on internal grounds both readings are equally possible.

A Transcriptional Investigation

Since initial reviews of external and intrinsic evidence leave two equally possible readings, the quest for the Matthean text[18] must therefore be pursued by

12 The historical probability of Pilate engaging in a Jewish ritual is secondary to Matthew's clear intention to portray him doing so. See Deut 21.6–9, as well as Ps 26.6–10; Isa 1.15–16.

13 Daniel Harrington, *Matthew* (SP 1; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1991) 389.

14 See also H. Benedict Green, *Matthew* (London: Oxford University, 1975) 221.

15 These Gospel accounts, strictly speaking, affirm only Jesus' *innocence*, not *righteousness*, but, notwithstanding the historical oddity of a Roman governor delivering a moral judgement, within the Gospels the conceptual parallel is surely suggested by the context.

16 Note Marc Philonenko, 'Le Sang du Juste', *Revue D'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 73 (1993–94) 395–9.

17 This is the basic error that lies behind almost all scribal acts of harmonistic parallelism; cf. Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 4th ed. 2005) 257.

18 Traditionally textual criticism sought 'the original text'. Lately that phrase has become the centre of debate (cf. Eldon Jay Epp, 'The Multivalence of the Term "Original Text" in New

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determining which of the two readings can be explained most easily by scribal tendencies. According to the logic of text criticism, there are four possible scribal explanations for the corruption in 27.24: deliberate omission, deliberate addition, accidental addition or accidental omission. This article will examine each of these in turn, and upon finding the most feasible, will draw the corresponding conclusion for the Matthean text.

The first two can be dealt with together, since they both propose an intentional scribal act. An intentional scribal act, however, must be considered in light of known scribal intentions. A typical introductory textbook classifies intentional corruption into grammatical changes, liturgical changes, elimination of discrepancies, attempted manuscript correction and dogmatic changes.[19] The first of these may be dismissed, since neither the shorter nor the longer reading contain any grammatical obstacles. The second can be dealt with similarly, since there is no known liturgy that incorporates the text of Matt 27.24.[20] As demonstrated, neither reading contradicts Matthew's characteristic style, so there are no apparent discrepancies that could occur with either that would provoke the scribe. Though some manuscripts have been corrected to support one reading or the other, scribal correction can not explain the bulk of manuscripts, nor the origin of the corruption itself. This leaves dogmatic changes. While there is no major Christian doctrine that hangs directly on this text, Bart Ehrman has recently refined the understanding of dogmatic corruption to include more minor polemical changes. He writes, 'scribes occasionally altered the words of their sacred texts to make them more patently orthodox and to prevent their misuse by Christians who espoused aberrant claims'.[21] Unfortunately, Ehrman only explores his thesis in regard to Christological controversies, none of which could be brought to bear on Matt 27.24. Even if the application of his thesis is broadened, it is difficult to imagine any polemical context where the heart of the dispute would be whether Christ was *righteous*, especially since the theme is already so well established in the Gospels.

A new perspective, however, is offered by one of Ehrman's students, Wayne Kannaday, who broadens the focus from Christological *polemics* to Christian *apologetics* in general. His thesis is that 'scribes engaged in the work of transmitting the canonical Gospels did indeed, in some cases, modify their exemplars under the influence of apologetic interests'.[22] Kannaday divides his study into four

Testament Textual Criticism', *HTR* 92 [1999] 245–81). This article will speak of 'the Matthean text', which refers to the text composed by the author known as 'Matthew'.

19 Cf. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 66–8.

20 Though it should be noted that the Coptic church did later confer sainthood on Pilate, a trend that also echoed in some medieval Catholic liturgies.

21 Bart Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University, 1993) xi.

22 Wayne Kannaday, *Apologetic Discourse and the Scribal Tradition* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004) 57.

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main apologetic fronts, including 'When Quire Meets Empire',[23] which explores the apologetic impulse to improve the church's standing in Roman eyes. Perhaps following the lead of Metzger's textual commentary, it is here that Kannaday places the longer reading of Matt 27.24. In fact, Kannaday sees in this verse two distinct scribal changes, which form a variation unit deliberately designed to ameliorate the guilt of Pilate in the crucifixion of Jesus. First he notes that codex Koridethi (Θ) changes the word for the crowd before which Pilate washed his hands from ὄχλου to λαοῦ. This was apparently done because λαός served later Christian writers as a technical term for 'the Jews' and as such the change would serve to further distance the innocent Pilate from those who demanded the crucifixion.[24] Second, Kannaday sees the longer reading as an 'embellish[ment]' intended to place 'on the lips of the Matthean Pilate an unambiguous pronouncement of the uprightness of Jesus'.[25] That the entire variation unit was an intentional scribal corruption for apologetic purposes is, using Kannaday's term, 'undeniable'.

Kannaday has perhaps overstated his case. Before the first claim, the substitution of λαάς, could be considered undeniable, he would have to prove at least four formidable premises. First, that the change was not the result of a simple synonymous substitution. Λαός and ὄχλος share significant semantic overlap. Both are used significantly by Matthew.[26] If the Koridethi scribe was, for example, in the habit of reading a line of his exemplar into his short-term memory and then quickly trying to rewrite that line onto his own copy,[27] it is more than feasible that in the jumble of his mind λαός could have been substituted for ὄχλος for no other reason than that the two were so similar.[28] To this end, it is notable that of the 50 occurrences of ὄχλος in Matthew, only 8 are the subject of any textual variation in extant manuscripts. Of those 8 variants, a mere 2 are found in Koridethi,[29] and of those 2, only 1 involves the substitution of λαός, and that is here in 27.24. Similarly, both of the other synoptic passion accounts make use of ὄχλος without any such variation by Koridethi. In other words, if the substitution of λαός is, as Kannaday argues, indicative of an apologetic tendency, it is a rather acute tendency indeed. Second, while it is true that some Christian writers used λαός in an anti-Semitic manner,[30] that the Koridethi scribe himself had such a usage in mind when he

23 Kannaday, *Discourse*, 199–235.

24 Kannaday, *Discourse*, 225.

25 Kannaday, *Discourse*, 224.

26 14 and 50 times respectively.

27 Cf. Bruce Metzger *The Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University, 1992) 16.

28 Such an unprofessional slip-up could be expected from a scribe who Metzger (*Text*, 58) describes as 'a rough, inelegant hand . . . clearly not familiar with Greek'.

29 Matt 8.18 and 27.24.

30 Kannaday cites Eldon Epp's *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis in Acts* (London: Cambridge University, 1966) 76–9.

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copied the verse would be exceedingly difficult to prove. Third, Kannaday would have to demonstrate the improbable premise that a ninth-century scribe was still concerned with ingratiating the faith to a long-defunct Roman Empire. Fourth, Kannaday would have to explain why the change could not be explained more easily by a different trend in the medieval church: simple anti-Semitism. Given the cumulative insurmountability of these obstacles, it seems safe to dismiss Kannaday's first claim.[31]

This leaves the second claim, that the longer reading in Matt 27.24 was a pious embellishment intended to appease the Romans by placing Pilate in a better light. It should be conceded that this proposal is more plausible than the first. Metzger, as noted, described the reading in a similar fashion and under his influence that assessment has quickly become the status quo.[32] However, the question still remains whether the option is plausible enough to be considered the most likely option. In fact, there are several reasons to question its probability. Matthew's authorial intentions must be weighed differently from scribal motivations. The righteousness of Christ is already a well-established Matthean theme. He places it on the lips of Pilate's wife just five verses previously, and in v. 24 the idea is implicit in the action of Pilate's hand washing. Yet another explicit declaration of Christ's righteousness in the longer reading of v. 24 would simply be characteristic for Matthew, but it would be an unnecessary redundancy for a scribe.

Further, it is worth asking how well the longer reading would actually accomplish the task for which Kannaday claims it was intended. That is, how much rehabilitation would Pilate actually receive from the longer reading? The positive depiction of Pilate occurs at the beginning of v. 24 where he is declared 'innocent'. There is no extant variation on that part of the text. Strictly speaking, the variant in question does not concern Pilate at all, but addresses the righteousness of Christ. It is a curious apologetic strategy that would attempt to elevate Pilate's image by increasing Christ's righteousness. That the scribe nevertheless had this in mind is certainly possible, but not very likely, given that the resultant text would not address any apologetic concerns it did not address already. Accordingly, even Kannaday concedes that as an insertion the longer reading *could* have resulted from simple synoptic harmonisation.[33] This may be the case, but that would no longer be a deliberate addition, but would fall into the realm of accidental insertions. Thus, it can be concluded that neither deliberate addition nor deliberate omission is the most likely explanation for the corruption of 27.24.

31 It is also worth noting that, in any case, Koridethi contains the shorter reading of 27.24, and thus even if Kannaday's first claim was correct, it would hardly be supportive of his second claim about the longer reading.

32 For example, Donald Hagner (*Matthew* [WBC; Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1995] 826) does little more than quote Metzger to justify his decision on the variant.

33 Kannaday, *Discourse*, 225.

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Accidental addition is the next possible scribal explanation. This is an attractive option because it accords with the text critical canon of *lectio brevior potior*: the shorter reading is preferable.[34] In this case, as Kannaday has pointed out, accidental addition would take the form of harmonisation. The scribe could have, for example, confused Matthew's Pilate with Luke's, who gives a three-fold declaration of Jesus' righteousness. Alternatively, harmonisation could stem from the Matthean context, with the scribe accidentally assimilating Pilate's speech to that of his wife five verses prior. Thus, accidental addition is possible, but before it can be declared the most likely option, it needs to be demonstrated whether or not such scribal behaviour could be responsibly attributed to the supporting manuscripts of Matt 27.24. In other words, while the proposal is plausible *generally*, it needs to be seen if it accords with the characteristics of these scribes *specifically*. Scribal characteristics are usually discerned by studying the singular readings of a manuscript individually,[35] but such a study is not possible in this case. As discussed, the corruption of this text, whether shorter or longer, occurred on a singular level in one of the early papyri. By the time of the best extant evidence, ℵ and B, the corruption had already permeated the manuscript tradition, and soon after would spread throughout the patristic writers and versions.[36]

It seems, then, that the earliest picture the evidence is able to paint is of a corruption being corporately perpetrated; a group of manuscripts preserving the act of a common ancestor. Since it is a group that preserves the change, however, it is only reasonable to investigate what types of changes are characteristic of that group as a whole. In this way the *variant context* of the corruption is established, and from that can be determined whether accidental addition by harmonisation is in fact a likely explanation of Matt 27.24.

Accordingly, what follows is a comprehensive study of the manuscripts that support Matt 27.24. The natural beginning and ending of the passion account function as the boundaries of this variant context. Within the 141 verses of these two chapters the Nestle–Aland 27 includes 183 variants of all kinds. Before presenting the analysis of these variants, however, it is perhaps prudent to clarify the exact type of corruption that occurred in 27.24, against which they were compared.

Simply put, if the change was an accidental addition, it was the addition of a visually unrelated noun that significantly affected the sense of the sentence. First, the inserted noun was *visually unrelated*. There was nothing in the immediate

34 Greenlee (*Introduction*, 114) again serves as a good example: 'The shorter reading is often preferable. If a scribe makes an intentional change in the N.T. text he is more likely to add than to omit. He may add . . . a phrase from a parallel account (harmonization)'.

35 See, for example, the seminal work of Epp, *The Theological Tendency of Codex Bezae*.

36 That some of the patristic evidence, e.g. Origin, actually precedes the uncials only buttresses the claim that the corruption occurred early in the manuscript tradition.

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context to suggest it. There were no letters or syllables that were similar to it. There was nothing that could have facilitated dittography or any other type of insertion. One possibility could be 27.19, where Pilate's wife refers to Jesus as τῷ δικαίῳ ἐκείνῳ. However, as a standard text reconstruction of 30–33 characters per line shows, there would be approximately 15 lines between the two texts in an early manuscript. Surely this is too far to inspire a visual error.[37] Thus, the noun was simply unrelated. Second, the addition *affected* the sense of the sentence. A truly accidental slip of the pen would have likely resulted in nothing but gibberish; an ancient typo. In this change, however, the scribe inserted a suitable word that was able to affect the sense of the sentence while allowing it to stay sensible overall. On some level, then, the scribe must have known what he was doing, and therefore can be said to have done it deliberately. This deliberate decision, however, was accidentally incorrect. The scribe was accidentally misled by the voices of the other Gospels that echoed in his head. This is why it is termed an 'accidental addition by harmonisation'. Finally, the change not only affected the sense of the sentence, but did so *significantly*. There are many similar additions that are quite accidental but remain insignificant. In Matt 26.8 the manuscripts A W *f*1 and the majority of the Byzantine minuscules contain just such a variant. To the phrase οἱ μαθηταί they add the possessive pronoun αὐτοῦ. While the addition does slightly refine the phrase, it does not significantly alter the sense. The only group of disciples in the story belonged to Jesus; if the αὐτοῦ was not already in the text, it would have been assumed in the interpretation. The same cannot be said of Matt 27.24. Having Pilate refer to τοῦ δικαιοῦ instead of the more general τούτου is significantly different. As has been seen, the interpretation of the text as a whole remains unchanged, but the sense of v. 24 shifts significantly. This is important since, while conjectural, it seems reasonable that it would be harder for a scribe to commit a significant accidental addition. Though it stems from an accident of the scribe's subconscious, it would be harder for a significant change to escape detection by his conscious mind. Thus, the essential elements of an accidental addition in Matt 27.24 are the insertion of an unrelated noun that significantly affects the sense of the sentence.

Turning then to the statistical analysis of the variant context, of the 183 variants in the Matthean passion pericope, correlated against the critical text of the NA27/UBS4, there are only 51 additions. Of these, only 5–7, or around 10%, are found in ℵ.[38] The important question, however, is how many of those 51 additions are comparable to the possible addition in 27.24, and the answer to that is 3. In just 3 texts is there an addition of an unrelated word that significantly affects the sense

37 My thanks to J. S. Kloppenborg for directing me to consider this.

38 The difference depends on how the text of ℵ is defined. There are 5 definite occurrences of addition in ℵ. In one further text, an addition was made but then removed by a corrector. In yet another text no addition was made originally, but was inserted by a later corrector.

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of the verse. First, in 26.28 the uncials A C D W and $f^{1, 13}$ along with the Byzantine minuscules insert καινή into the penultimate position of the phrase τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμα μου τῆς διαθήκης. It is notable that the addition is likely the result of harmonisation to Luke 22.20. Second, in an otherwise uncertain text of 26.60, almost the same group of manuscripts, if the minuscule 33 is substituted for W, add ψευδόμαρτυρες to the end of ὕστερον δὲ προσελθόντες δύο. The harmonisation, however, is possibly to the beginning of the same verse. Finally, in 26.63, again harmonising to the beginning of the verse,[39] the manuscripts C* N W Δ 1241 and 1424 add τοῦ ζῶντος to the end of ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. Thus, of 51 additions, only 3, or 6%, could possibly provide any precedent of character for an accidental addition by harmonisation in 27.24.[40] It is further worth noting that none of these comparable variants occurs in codex Sinaiticus, the chief evidence for the longer reading. By way of comparison, there are 36 omissions in the passion pericope, of which 7, or a notable 19.4%, are found in B, the chief evidence for the shorter reading. Of the 36 only 4, or 11%, would be comparable to the shorter reading, but 3 of those 4 are found in B. In 26.3 B omits τοῦ λαοῦ, while in 26.4 B alone omits the verb ἀποκτείνωσιν, and in 27.16 B, along with most other major uncials, omits Ἰησοῦν from before Βαραββᾶν.

The conclusions that can be drawn from these statistics are as follows. Within the variant context of 27.24, it is slightly more likely that there will be an addition than an omission. However, if there is an addition it is unlikely that it will be comparable to 27.24, and in the off chance that it is, it will almost certainly not be found in ℵ. If there is an omission, however, it is almost twice as likely that it will be comparable to 27.24, and then it is relatively certain that it will be found (or not found as the case may be) in codex Vaticanus. In other words, the variant context suggests that an accidental omission would be more likely in 27.24 than an accidental addition by harmonisation. As much as such an insertion may be generally possible, the manuscripts supporting this specific text simply do not behave in that manner.

Unfortunately, since the corruption originally occurred not in ℵ or B but in a non-extant papyrus that pre-existed them, these statistical conclusions must be considered tentative. However, it is worth noting that these findings correspond well with what is known of other extant early papyri. James Royse,[41] in a study further confirmed by Peter Head,[42] has shown that among the papyri it is actually

39 But note also Matt 16.16.

40 See Appendix A for a full listing of the statistical analysis.

41 James Royse, 'Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament', *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research* (ed. Bart Ehrman and Michael Holmes; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 239–52.

42 Peter Head, 'Observations on Early Papyri of the Synoptic Gospels, especially on the "Scribal Habits"', *Biblica* 71.2 (1990) 240–7.

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more common to omit than to add. Accordingly he has advocated modifying the canons of textual criticism so that, at least in regard to readings that stem from papyri, the shorter reading is in fact *not* preferred. Indeed, it has perhaps been forgotten that when Griesbach famously proposed the rule, he conceded a number of conditions under which it would not be true, including 'if the occasion of the omission can be attributed to homoeoteleuton',[43] which, as will soon be seen, may well be the case. Thus, while the evidence is not strong enough to allow total rejection of the option, it must be concluded that it is not very likely that accidental addition is the best explanation for 27.24.

Whenever there is a textual omission with similar sets of letters at each end of the absence, haplography should be one of the first suspects. Such has never been more warranted than in Matt 27.24. The phrase itself should have straightway made scholars suspicious: τοῦ δικαίου τούτου has 16 letters, of which 50% belong to ου diphthongs. With 4 ου endings – 3 prefixed with a τ – in the space of just 3 words, the phrase would be most hospitable to haplography. The extraordinary thing would not be that some early scribe skipped over part of the verse; the extraordinary thing is that more of them did not. What is surprising, however, is that despite this it appears that only one major commentary has noted the possibility of haplography. Davies and Allison write that 'omission by scribal leap is likely'.[44] Just how likely it is can easily be demonstrated by looking at the earliest manuscripts themselves. Codex Sinaiticus, written in full *scriptio continua* uncials, looks like this:

ⲁⲑⲱⲟⲥⲉⲓⲫⲓⲁⲡⲟⲧⲟⲩⲁⲓⲫⲁⲧⲟⲥⲧⲟⲩⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩⲩⲫⲉⲓⲥⲟϯⲉⲥⲑⲉ

In comparison, codex Vaticanus, written in the same style, reads as follows:

ⲁⲑⲱⲟⲥⲉⲓⲫⲓⲁⲡⲟⲧⲟⲩⲁⲓⲫⲁⲧⲟⲥⲧⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩⲩⲫⲉⲓⲥⲟϯⲉⲥⲑⲉ

The scribe would only have to move mistakenly from the first ⲧⲟⲩ to the third,

ⲁⲑⲱⲟⲥⲉⲓⲫⲓⲁⲡⲟⲧⲟⲩⲁⲓⲫⲁⲧⲟⲥⲧⲟⲩ **ⲇⲓⲕⲁⲓⲟⲩⲧⲟⲩ** ⲧⲟⲩⲩⲫⲉⲓⲥⲟϯⲉⲥⲑⲉ

in order for haplography to occur and the reading of Vaticanus to enter the manuscript tradition. This is certainly no unreasonable proposal, since several similar examples of haplography already occur in the Matthean passion pericope. In 26.4 the NA27 text reads ἵνα τὸν Ἰησοῦν δόλῳ κρατήσωσιν καὶ ἀποκτείνωσιν, and yet it is notable that Vaticanus alone seems to have skipped from one ωσιν ending to the other, thereby omitting the final conjunctive clause. In 26.29 a number of scribes again appear to have been confused by a profusion of ου diphthongs: while the text reads ἐκ τούτου τοῦ γενήματο, 𝔓37 ℵ* C and L preserve only τούτου, while Δ 892 and 1424 leave just the τοῦ. Haplography might be the expla-

43 *Apud* Metzger, *Text*, 120.
44 Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 590.

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nation for the omission in 27.3 as well: while the critical text, supported by ℵ A C W Θ $f^{1, 13}$ and the Byzantine minuscules, reads ὁ παραδιδοὺς, the double δ could have caused parablepsis, resulting in the reading ὁ παραδοὺς that is preserved in B L 0281 and 33. Finally, a classic case of haplography is afforded by 27.60, where the reading preserved in ℵ L Θ f^{13} 33 892 reveals a scribe who was befuddled by the abundance of εν endings in the phrase καὶ ἔθηκεν αὐτὸ ἐν τῷ κσινῷ, and thereby managed to omit the αὐτό. In short, not only are there many cases of haplography in the passion account, but many of those cases were preserved by Vaticanus. This, combined with 27.24's demonstrated susceptibility to haplography by parablepsis, makes it very likely that accidental omission is the best explanation for the scribal corruption of Matt 27.24.

Assessing the Evidence

Since both the external and intrinsic evidence for this variant were evenly divided, this study set out on an investigation of transcriptional probability that examined each of the four main scribal options. Both deliberate addition and deliberate omission were found to be unlikely explanations of the variant. Accidental addition was found to be more likely *in general*, but had to be dismissed for this variant *in specific* because such behaviour would be atypical of the variant context – the transcriptional character of the supporting mss. The final option, accidental omission, was found to be very likely due to haplography by parablepsis. Therefore, the most reasonable explanation of the current evidence is that the longer reading best represents the Matthean text.

In light of this conclusion, two remaining pieces of evidence can finally be discussed that otherwise would have been of undetermined value. First, besides the longer and shorter readings discussed so far, there is also a third reading that exists in the manuscript tradition. The uncials A and Δ along with several manuscripts of the old Latin, namely $it^{aur, f, h}$, a copy of the vulgate and the patristic Petilianus all preserve a text that reads τούτου τοῦ δικαίου. This third reading contains the same terms as the longer reading but in a different order. The earliest primary Greek evidence is codex Alexandrinus. It dates from the fifth century but, like the other two readings, given the contemporary distribution it is likely that its exemplar was some earlier, non-extant papyrus. How can this reading be explained? Assuming this paper's conclusion that the longer reading best represents the Matthean text, this reading can easily be seen as a simple transposition of terms. This should not be surprising, since Royse's study of early papyri revealed that, after omission, one of the most frequent errors was transposition.[45] Thus, this reading reveals something of the history of the text, showing a longer

45 *Apud* Head, 'Observations', 246.

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Matthean text that subsequently suffered two parallel but accidental corruptions: haplography and transposition.

The second piece of evidence draws on Matthew's language. It was noted above that in 27.4 Matthew adds an account of Judas bemoaning his betrayal of αἷμα ἀθῷον. What has not yet been discussed here, however, is the startling substitution made by the first corrector of Vaticanus, along with the uncials L and Δ, a host of old Latin, a variety of versions and a number of patristics: instead of ἀθῷον, they read δίκαιον.[46] How can this be explained? Some might argue that this supports the shorter reading, since it shows evidence of a scribal trend to insert δίκαιος where it does not belong.[47] The conclusion of this article, however, should suggest a different import. First, note the character of the mss involved. As Gundry points out, most of the manuscripts that insert δίκαιον in 27.4 are not the same ones that read it in 27.24.[48] The greater importance, however, is in the character of Matthew's literary style, specifically his use of αἷμα. Besides 27.4, he uses it again in 23.35 when Jesus chastises the Pharisees for shedding αἷμα δίκαιον. Taken as a whole, this pair of texts – and any corruption therein – perhaps suggests two authorial characteristics: first, that Matthew prefers to link αἷμα with an adjective;[49] second, that δίκαιος and ἀθῷος were roughly synonymous for the task.[50] If this perspective is brought back to 27.24, a two-fold observation can be made: that Pilate had already used ἀθῷος in reference to himself, and thus if Matthew wanted an adjective for αἷμα, his only choice would have been δίκαιος. What this perhaps reveals is something of the compositional history of the text: why Matthew wrote what he wrote.

The balance of evidence allows the declaration that, contrary to popular consensus, the most likely Matthean text was the longer reading: ἀθῷός εἰμι ἀπὸ του αἵματος τοῦ δικαίου τούτου. It was Westcott and Hort who swayed the academy to the shorter reading, possibly for no greater reason than their preference for Vaticanus. A second glance, however, reveals that it is now time for that to change. The most probable interpretation of the best extant evidence is that in Matt 27.24 the longer reading should be preferred.

46 The NA27 lists: B[1] L Θ latt sy[s] sa[mss] mae bo Cyp.

47 Cf. R. T. France, *Matthew* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1985) 392.

48 Gundry, *Matthew*, 565.

49 Matthew uses αἷμα 12 times in 7 texts: in 23.30–35 there are 4 occurrences governed by the adjective δίκαιος; in 27.4–8 there are 3 occurrences governed by ἀθῷος; 16.17, 26.28, 27.25 and 27.49 all contain one occurrence, each of which is arguably not applicable since context would disallow any adjective; finally 27.24 arguably contains the adjective δίκαιος. Thus, of 7 texts, 4 are not applicable, and 3 demonstrate Matthew's preference to link αἷμα with an adjective when he can.

50 Matthew is the only NT author to use ἀθῷος, both times in situations where the closest related synoptic text uses the more popular δίκαιος.

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Appendix A

The following table presents a summary of statistics relevant to the discussion at hand from the study of variants in the Matthean passion pericope.

Insertions	**#**	**%**
Total	51	
Total in ℵ	7 (5)	14/10%
Total Comparable	3	6%
Total Comparable in ℵ	0	0%
Omissions		
Total	36	
Total in B	7	19%
Total with Haplography	3	8%
Total Comparable	4	11%
Total Comparable with Haplography	3	8%
Total Comparable in B and with Haplography	1	3%

The following chart gives a complete descriptive listing of all the insertions and omissions that are summarised in the above table. The headings, all of which are marked by a 'Y' or 'N' (for 'yes' or 'no'), are as follows: ℵ indicates whether the corruption is found in Sinaiticus. The C indicates whether the corruption is comparable to Matt 27.24. The B indicates whether the corruption is found in Vaticanus, while the 'H' suggests whether the corruption might be a case of haplography. A complete descriptive listing of all the variants of all kinds in the Matthean passion pericope is available upon request.

V.	Insertion	ℵ	C
3	Leaders	N	N
9	Noun	N	N
9	Article	N	N
16	Pronoun	N	N
20	Disciples	Y	N
25	Divine Name	Y	N
26	Article	N	N
27	Article	N	N
28	Article	N	N
28	*New* Covenant	N	Y
29	Particle	N	N
34	Conjunction	N	N

V.	Omission	B	H	C
1	Pronoun	N	N	N
3	*The People*	Y	N	Y
4	Verb	Y	Y	Y
18	Noun	N	N	N
21	Particle	N	N	N
22	Pronoun	N	N	N
26	Participle	N	N	N
27	Conjunction	N	N	N
33	Pronoun	N	N	N
29	Article / Pronoun	N	Y	Y
36	Pronoun	N	N	N
36	Particle	N	N	N

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38	Conjunction	N	N
39	Verse	N	N
42	Prep. Phrase	N	N
45	Disciples	N	N
49	Pronoun	N	N
53	Particle	Y*	N
53	Article	N	N
55	Prep. Phrase	N	N
56	Disciples	N	N
59	Leaders	N	N
60	Conj. & Verb	N	N
60	*False Witnesses*	N	Y
63	Verb	N	N
63	*The Living* God	N	Y
65	Particle	N	N
65	Pronoun	N	N
67	Pronoun	N	N
70	Verb	N	N
71	Noun	N	N
71	Pronoun	N	N
73	Noun	N	N
75	Pronoun	N	N
2	Pronoun	N	N
2	Name	N	N
3	Article	N	N
5	Number	Y	N
11	Pronoun	N	N
16	Verse	N	N
22	Pronoun	N	N
26	Pronoun	Y[1]	N
28	Noun	N	N
32	Noun	N	N
33	Article	N	N
35	Verse	N	N
42	Verb	N	N
43	Verb	N	N
49	Verse	Y	N
58	Noun	N	N
65	Conjunction	Y	N

39	Pronoun	N	N	N
42	Participle	Y	N	N
42	Pronoun	N	N	N
44	Number	N	N	N
44	Adjective	N	N	N
45	Noun	Y	N	N
58	Preposition	N	N	N
71	Article	N	N	N
72	Particle	N	N	N
73	Pronoun	N	N	N
9	Name	N	N	N
11	Noun	N	N	N
16	Name	Y	N	Y
21	Name	N	N	N
40	Conjunction	Y	N	N
41	Conjunction	N	N	N
41	Leaders	N	N	N
45	Prep. Phrase	N	N	N
47	Particle	N	N	N
48	Prep. Phrase	N	N	N
59	Prep. Phrase	N	N	N
60	Pronoun	N	Y	N
64	Pronoun	Y	N	N

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