

The Value Of "Floating Words"ⁱ In The Fourth Gospel

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INTRODUCTION

One serious issue that rocks the heart of New Testament Studies is floating words.ⁱⁱ Most scholars have labored from the age of the church Fathers even to our present day, to give explanation, justification, or find solution and rationale behind such words, sentences or pericope.ⁱⁱⁱ It is believed, more often than none, that when a word or phrase or perhaps a sentence is not found in all the manuscripts, but rather appears in other manuscripts, it is a mark to note that such was not in the original text, but rather a later addition or an interpolation. However, this point as it stands is subject to debate, yet no debate about the reliability of the Gospel message has been able to water down the power of the Gospel of God in Christ Jesus.^{iv}

Of course the above consideration should be considered valid in the case of a single word, or thereabout. For example in Matt. 16:13, the reading of B shows some early versions with little changes in a is Ti,na le,gousin oi` a;nqrwpoi ei=nai to.n ui`o.n tou/ yavnqrw,pouÈ while C W syc arm include me after le,gousin D K L X, several minuscules and quotations from the Fathers insert me after Ti,na and the parallel passage in Mark 8:27 has Ti,na me le,gousin oi` a;nqrwpoi ei=naiÈ . Luke 9:18 has Ti,na me le,gousin oi` o;cloi pei=naiÈ . A clear indices is that the copyist of Matthean account inserted since he cannot appreciate the Son of Man to mean "I" hence he inserted it to fill the supposed gap.

Similar issues of a single word or phrases, which are probably not original but are inserted by copyist are many across the New Testament. Further examples are in Matt. 18:7; 26:61; Lk 10:21; Actss 19:43; Rom 1:29; I Thess. 4:12 and Heb 12:18 etc. The deal becomes serious when the floating words consist of a whole sentence or more! Assuming, it is easy for different copyists to have some independence to add a word which they thought are needed to complete a sense or thought, it is questionable if a whole sentence or more is added to the text. This would suggest a degree of uncertainty, and may not be a case of in-authenticity.^v

If we register or label floating words or sentence(s) as uncertain, what then shall we say about longer passages or a whole pericope which appears as an additions to the text in different places, and different manuscripts? There are six longer passages like this in the New Testament which are listed bellow: Matt. 23:14, Lk 22:43-44; 23:17; John 7:53-8:11; Rom 16:25-27 and 1 Cor 14:34-35. The most notorious case of insertion among the above mentioned passages is John 7:53-8:11, and that shall be the pre-occupation of this paper. We start with the authenticity of the text.

AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXT

The genuineness of the pericope under review has attracted controversies from the time of the church Fathers even today! The subject is still on the table for scrutiny. To start with, the committee inserted the text inside a double bracket, which indicate that, the passage though, rather extensive, is not known to be a part of the original text, but an addition at a very early stage of the tradition. According to Metzger textual commentary, the evidence for the un-

Johannine origin of the text is awesome, because earliest manuscript omitted it, apart from earmarks historical authenticity; notwithstanding, the degree of certainty about the text is highly rated.^{vi} The passage is now included with the text because of its antiquity nature and the position they have traditionally enjoyed in the Church.^{vii} Moreover, the variant reading number 11 in verse 53 of chapter 7, though, grouped with chapter 8, yet it is clear that it is essentially treated as part of chapter 7. Most ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts omitted this passage altogether. Many church Fathers rejected it and did not make reverence to it in their writings. That will reveal that the text must have passed through storms.^{viii}

Earliest manuscripts like P^{66,75} & A^{avid} B C^{vid} L N T W 0141 33 157 565 1241 1333* 1424* Lect it^{a,f}, 1, q syr c.s.p.h (but added in some late mss. of Syr^{p,h}) cop^{sa}. pbo. bopt. ach² arm^{mss} geo slav Diatessaron Origen Chrysostom Cyril; Tertullian Cyprian mss acc. to Augustine omitted this passage altogether, and according the UBS committee, this is considered certain because these witnesses range from the 2nd to the early 4th century. However, certain other manuscripts ranging between 5th century and Augustine included the passage namely: D 28 180 205 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1243 1292 1342 (1424^{mg}) 1505 Byz (F gap 7.28-8.10) GHM) it^{aur}, c.d.e. ff² j.r 1 vg syr^{pal} cop^{bopt} slav^{mssmg} Apostolic Constituions^{vid} mss^{acc.to} Didymus; Ambrosiaster Ambrose Pacian Rufinus Greek and Latin mss^{acc. to} jerome Jerome Faustus-Milevis Augustine. The third reading include with asterisks or obeli (E include only 8.2-11) S 1424^{mg}. The asterick or obeli implies "the reading of the original hand of a manuscript." The forth reading include only 8.3-11(A with asterisks) 184 / 211/ 387 / 514 / 751 / 773 / 1890 / 1780 (these lectionaries are in footnotes 1-7 of chapter 8 = Lect^{pt}). The belong to the 12th and 13th centuries. The fifth reading include 7.53-8.11 after Lk. 21.38f¹³, after Jn 7.36225 after jn 21.25 (with critical note) 1; include 8.3-11 after Lk. 24.53 1333^C is said to have been included after Luke 21:38.

Furthermore, there are two variant readings in verse six. The first reading were attested by E G H S A f¹ f¹³ 28 180 205 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1243 1292 1342 1424^{mg} 1505 Lect ^{pt} it^{aur}, c.e. ff².j.r1 vg syr^{pal} cop^{bopt} eth slav^{mssmg} Augustine with minor variants of some few manuscripts omitting tou/to de. e;legon peira,zontej auvto,n(i[na e;cwsin kathgorei/n auvtou/ the initial nine words of the verse, but rather prefer to introduce the phrase after verse 4 or in some after verse 11. The second reading, D M 1071 it^d (but D 1071 it^d add this sentence after 8.4 M after 8.11 is not without minor differences within the witnesses, yet there is a high degree of certainty by the committee.^{ix}

Again, verse 7 has two footnotes each of them has two readings and three readings respectively. The first footnote reading E G H M S A f¹ f¹³ 28 180 205 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1243 1292 1342 1424^{mg} 1505 Lect^{pt} it^{aur}, c,e,ff²,j,r1 vg syr^{pal} eth slav^{mssmg} is supported with minor variants on auvto,n(avne,kuyen kai. ei=pen auvtou/j While the second reading D 107 it^d

Omit it altogether. The second footnote of three readings has its first reading supported by DSA f¹f¹³ 28 205 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1243 1292 1342 1424^{mg} Lect^{pt} itaur, c, ff² j,r1 vg eth slav^{mssmg} The second reading E G H 180 579 1505 / 184 also has the support with minor variant on auvtou/j The third reading M Omit it altogether. Some witnesses omit auvto,n while others replace them with auvtou/j introducing prepositional phrase pros autous Each of these reading are not appealing to the 4th edition of the UBS.^x

Moreover, verse 9 contains five readings. The first reading 28 597 700 are supported by oī evxh,rconto ei-j kaqV ei-j (892 avkou,santej de.) 1006 1010 1243 1342 Lect^{pt} (it^{aur} c,e,ff2 r¹vid vg) eth slav^{mssmg} (Ambrose) (Augustine) (Quodvult-deus) while the second reading include oī de. avkou,santej kai.upo suneidhsews elegxomenoi exhrxonto eis katelei,fqh mo,noj kai. h` gunh. evn me,sw| ou=sa in E G H 180 205 579 1292 1505 / 184 / AD (cop bopt) The third reading also has little variants supported by D 1071 itd , while the last reading also entails some variants readings (*f*¹³)1424mg syrpal The basic of the text continue to be enlarged by addition of descriptive glosses. The Textus Receptus adds the statement that the woman's accusers were themselves condemned by their own conscience.^{xi} The next reading has to do with presbute,rwn which was enhanced by adding a clause in one form or another. It is a clear indication that all of the woman's accusers went away.^{xii} The reading E G H M 1 579 892 1505 Lect^{pt} it^{aur}, e,r¹vid vg slav^{ms mg} Ambrose from supported the degree of certainty presbute,rwn The second reading has some emendations on the mss S A f13 28 180 205 597 700 1006 1010 1243 1292 1342 1424mg / 184 / AD syrpal¹ slav^{mesg} Augustine The third reading even introduces more variants on the mss D 1071 it^d // and lastly presbute,rwn pantes anexwrhsan is further introduced by this 10th century and above mss it^c ff2 cop^{boms}(bopt)

A clause has been referring to Jesus has been added to elaborate the text in in a way hence ei=pen de. o` Vlhou/j has been supported by D M S 1 28 892 1010 1071 Lect^{pt} it^{aur} c,d,e,ff2 r¹ vg (syrpal) cop^{boms}(bopt) slav^{mssmg} Ambrose (Augstine added kuri,os(The second reading E F^{Vid} G H 579 1243 1505 / 184 / AD a seven letter words as variants while the third reading added a four letter word variants in *f*¹³ 180 205 597 700 1006 1292 1342mg eth The last reading of greater degree of certainty decided on pou/ eivsinÈ and it has the manuscript support of D M A 1 180 982 1010 1071 1342 1424mg Lect^{pt} it^{c,d,e}, vg^{ww}, st syrpal cop^{boms} The second reading also include a five letter word variant in the mss H S f13 28 597 700 1006 1243 1292 184 / 387 / 890 itaur(ff2) r¹ vg^{cl} cop^{bopt} eth slav^{mssmg} Ambrose Jerome The third reading introduces a six letter word variant in E F G 579 1505 /AS while the reading 205 and Augustine belonging to 14th and 5th centuries respectively omit this additions.

Even then, the story is not free from literary and historical in-congruency. Some critical scholars have concluded that the story is anti-Johannine and has some synoptic coloration, especially the Gospel of Luke. This conclusion is rated on the basis that the passage is omitted from P^{66,75} Aleph A B C and other versions and manuscripts.^{xiii} It is generally accepted to be an interpolation in the context of 7:52 and 8:12 which would have read fluently without this interruption.^{xiv} The style, vocabulary and expressions in the story are not characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. Again the early references to this passage even in the apostolic constitutions show that it was regarded as part of the gospel record as early as the second century, and the passage is found in several places and manuscripts. Fam 1 inserts it after John 21:25, Fam 13 puts it after Luk 21:38; 1333 inserts after Lk 24:53; 225 after John 7:36.^{xv}

The above analysis would reveal that the story is part and parcel of the original Gospel tradition, and one of the Gospels must have initially recorded it, but perhaps it was excised on the thought that it might indulge church indiscipline. Yet, it was preserved and perhaps the reason why most early manuscripts of the Greek New Testament omitted it. Later a copyist who appreciated the genuinity of the passage inserted it but perhaps did not know the proper placement of the document.^{xvi}

HISTORY AND PROBLEM OF THE TEXT

The story of the adulterous woman in John is one of the most intriguing pericope in the whole of the New Testament, yet it is not a story without problems of reliability. Most scholars have raised serious questions and doubt on its evidences: both internally and externally. Oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are accorded greater value, reliability and authenticity. In the case of the story before us, evidences against the reliability of the passage are obvious that they cannot be put aside.^{xvii} Best-known Greek manuscripts omitted the story, even in many early church writings! Even then, scholarly consensus stands on the fact that the passage is foreign to the Fourth Evangelist and that it bears a close resemblance the synoptic, probably, Lukan tradition.^{xviii}

The main problem of the text is that it is very weak in external substantiation. The major Greek manuscript attesting to the story is Codex Bezae D antedating the eighth century and providing us with the story in its traditional location, a manuscript, notorious for its interpolations and omissions. In addition, various... join Bezae in this, which, would suggests that the story must have been known in the western Church. Of-course, many nineteenth century Byzantine manuscripts include the text, yet, a good number of scribes expressed reservations about the writing, and hence it was written in an obelus or with an asterisk, while some like E M L write in the margin. MSS L and Delta do not give the text but rather leave a space after 7:52, to indicate that the scribe is aware of the story. This is common to Westcott and Hort.^{xix}

Considerably, in most of the main Greek mss, the story conspicuously absent from P66, 75, Aleph, B, L, N, T, W, X, D Theta Omega, apart from several minuscules. Codices A and C are missing this section in John. Early eastern mss like Syriac, Coptic, and the Coptic dialects Sahidic and Bohairic are equally silent on this issue, including some of the OL text ita. It is clear therefore from the foregoing that the story was of a very late and for the most part, it is known only in the west. Most substantial Greek mss from the East gives support to the reading.^{xx}

The patristic evidence has nothing new to offer on the issue.^{xxi} For one thousand years, there was no Greek father that mentioned the passage in the East, except Euthymius Zigabenus in the 12th century, but then he sees it as an assertion. According to Westcott and Hort, early lectionary readings omit the story. The Constantinopolitan Lection even lists John 7:37-52 for Pentecost and moves on straight to 8:12. Origen in his commentary also skips the story. Cosmas of Jerusalem in listing Johannine narrative peculiarities omits the story totally. Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage in making judicial directions on cases of adultery make no reference to Jesus or the adulterous woman.^{xxii}

However, in the later west, the text was known to Ambrose, (d. 397) Pacian of Barcelona (c.350), Ambrosiaster (d. c. 350) and Augustine (d.430), Jerome (d. 419) makes an interesting remark that he found the story in the gospel of John in many Greek and Latin codices. So, when Jerome started his work on the Vulgate, in the later part of the 4th century, the section was included into the mainstream of the Latin text tradition and the western church tenet.

Further discovery by the famous exegete and educator of the 4th century Alexandria, Didymus, would relax our muscle on a considerable light shed on the textual history and literary difficulty in the pericope of the adulterous woman in our story. His 8th century discovery would give us an earliest Greek Patristic witness to our story, contrary to the general opinion that there was no patristic witness before 12th century. While he was interpreting Eccl 7:21-22a, (And do not give your heart to all words which they speak, lest you hear your slave cursing you), Didymus encourages that slave owners should not be discourage by slaves who do their work reluctantly and who pest their masters for their heavy burdens. This is to

juxtapose Paul's teaching in Col 4:1, then he illustrates his views by making reference to the story of Jesus and the adulteress woman in John 7:53-8:11 saying:

"we find, therefore, in certain gospels (the following story). A woman, it says, was condemned by the Jews for a sin and was being sent to be stoned in the place where that was customary to happen. The saviour, it says, when he saw her and observed that they were ready to stone her, said to those who were about to cast stones, He who has not sinned, let him take a stone and cast it. If anyone is conscious in himself not to have sinned, let him take up a stone and smite her. And no one dared. Since they knew in themselves and perceived that they themselves were guilty in some things, they did not dare to strike her."^{xxiii}

Diddymus' "in certain gospels" should be connotative here. Perhaps he is referring to the fact that this story is already familiar with people in certain manuscripts of both Luke and John, or rather that the same passage can be found in some books which contain the gospels. There can be no doubt that some 4th century manuscripts of Alexandria contained the passage, but Didymus would not bother himself citing the exact book because, his work was mainly on the Old Testament. The earlier omission in most reliable manuscript must have been for certain domestic moral issue which the church must combat, there and then, later a copyist re-insert it for the paramount position it occupies in New Testament Theology.^{xxiv}

On linguistic ground, the authenticity of the passage is also questioned. Many scholars believe that the passage has a lot in common with the Synoptic Gospels rather than with the Fourth Evangelist. Johannine transition device, therefore, is totally absent in the passage, and it has been substituted with but these eleven times. Other expression like: *pa/j o` lao.j h;rceto pro.j auvto,n(kai. kaqi,saj evdi,dasken auvtou,j* and others are rather without similarity in John except just a re-echo. Against the background, some commentators have remarked that our story is a complete interpolation.^{xxv} For every practical purposes, considering language, vocabulary, or sequence, and style, it has been considered perhaps, historical, but not Johannine.

Internal evidences, on the other hand, have not even remove our problem with the pericope before us. Several factors give ample proof that the section is foreign to the fourth Evangelist. This is evident in mss that locate the passage in various places like John 7:36 (ms225), 7:44 in some Georgian mss, or at the end of the gospel in fam. 1, 1, 118, 131, 209 etc. Some other mss like the Group of Farrer in fam 13, 13, 69, 124, 230etc^{xxvi}

Jesus was at the end of John 7 is at the Feast of Tabernacles, but chapter 8 begins in a note that Jesus was approaching his final Passover when he retires to the Mount of Olives as his daily customs (Mk 11:11, 19; 13:3). Verse 9 leaves Jesus to himself while 12-13 presumes a crowd again (7:40). It follows that the passage will smooth if the passage is left out altogether. That explains the massive number of textual variants in these twelve verses almost line by line, as a textually notorious passage of the New Testament. It may have suffered many changes having been floating, unattached to a canonical authority for centuries. Notwithstanding, it landed in its traditional place. In 8:14 Johannine turns on judgment but Jesus judges no man 8:15. The adulteress woman's judges have gone unannounced and Jesus does not judge her either (8:11). From the foregoing, the items of internal concerns above lay credence to the fact that our story is unlike the 4th Evangelist.^{xxvii}

THE TEXT

Furthermore, the passage before us is reminiscent of the synoptic problem of paying tribute to Caesar in Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26. The target of the Scribes and the

Pharisees appear not to be the adulterous woman, but rather, probably seeking a legitimate occasion to humiliate, trap, and to stop Jesus from his ministry, because, they feel he is becoming too popular, and they are losing adherents. Jesus' was to be challenged beyond proportion over his Messianic claim. The case is like: proof yourself if indeed you are the Messiah. This approach reveals the tradition that when there is a difficult question to answer, a rabbi is approached to solve the problem, and since Jesus is considered a committed rabbi, they approach him. However, the issue of immorality had been degenerated to the effect that the Law of Moses had fallen out of effective use that it had become difficult to sanction decadence in progress of community opinion.^{xxviii}

Monogamy was a prevailing marital tradition among the Jews, while an intercourse between married and unmarried was adultery, but in theory a man may go ahead to marry an unmarried girl with whom he may have had intercourse. However, keeping concubine was totally condemned, hence rabbinic law gave room for such illicit sex to turn a legal marriage, and death penalty became outlaw around 30 AD. It follows therefore, that the woman in our story could not have been legally stoned. Only the Sanhedrin or perhaps the Roman government can issue death penalty. There is no record of trial for the woman, let alone her condemnation. The court that has the jurisdiction to try her case, by Jewish law was closed down not a long time before the issue at stake.^{xxix} It is not impossible therefore that the case here may be a mob action like it happened to Stephen in Acts chapter 7.

Could Jesus give them a yes answer, he would have probably usurp the authority of the Sanhedrin and the Roman Government, and that would have lured him into political quagmire. If He says no, he would as well been found indulging adultery or encouraging people to break the Law of Moses. However, Jesus' answer thwarted their plan against themselves. Then, Jesus bowed down to write on the ground. According to Keener, commentators have suggested several answers to the issue of what Jesus could be writing on the sand. Some proposed that Jesus' action reveals that he is out-of-mind or distraught. Others are making allusion to Jer. 17:13 "those who forsake the fountain of living water will be written on the earth," or could he be writing on the ground, making reference to the Decalogue about the commandment against coveting one's neighbor's wife, or quoted Matt. 5:28? Keener's submission puts this matter to a rest by the submission that "Jesus indicts the accusers and reversing the charges against them". This "was a standard rhetorical practice,"^{xxx} and if one accused could show that his accusers shared responsibility in a matter that turned out badly, he could often force the withdrawal of their criticism.

Brown retorted the verb meaning to write, or to register, raising the question: "what did Jesus draw on the ground with his finger."^{xxxi} His submission ranges from a tradition which goes back to Jerome and that has found its way into a 10th century Armenian gospel manuscript, wherein the sins of the accusers are written. This would probably explain what Jesus was writing on the ground in the story before us, especially in verse eight, except we want to advocate that he writes on both occasions of verses six and eight.

In his own submission, Derrett says divided the discussion into three namely: the first writing, the oral reply and the second writing. The first writing is said to be that a tradition had it that Jesus was writing the sins of his questioners, or perhaps he was quoting from Psalm 1:1-2; Eccles, 11:9; 13:1. The oral reply insists on the innocence and therefore the capability of whoever stands against her as complainant and eyewitness. "Let him among you who is without sin cast first upon her a stone" (John 8:7). He does not deny that she may be stoned, but perhaps insisting on the principal meaning of Exodus 23:1b "...You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness." He had to establish the competency of the witnesses, since their attitude seems to betray them.^{xxxii} The second writing is accounted for on

the basis that if the choice of Exodus 23:1b is correct, then the stage is automatically revealed to a Scribe that what Jesus was writing on the ground needs no further investigation. He wrote to round-off his opinion: 'from a false matter keep far....' God is the source of vengeance, and so human impartiality need not strain his laws to grant penalties in a tough case.^{xxxiii}

Quoting Manson, the legal practice in the Roman Empire required that the judge would write the sentence first before reading it aloud. Hence, it is submitted that Jesus was probably writing the judgment he would later deliver in verse seven, and in verse eight, he was writing what he would deliver in verse eleven.^{xxxiv}

Macgregor claims there is no reason to ask what Jesus wrote on the ground, because the significance of it lay not in what is written but in the very gesture of the writing itself. Hence, the action is not such that require an answer, but a hint that an answer is redundant in this context. The action is that of a man, preoccupied by anger at "the shame of the deed itself and the braze hardness of the prosecutors"^{xxxv} to the effect that he is holding his approach under severe control. He bends down to write again as if to say the chapter of the discussion is closed. Hence, they left one after the other, having been convicted in their own heart, that they are equally guilty.^{xxxvi}

SOLUTION TO THE TEXT

Literally, the text before us has been overwhelmingly agreed to be an interpolation in its positioning in the gospel, therefore it is unlike John, and perhaps historical.^{xxxvii} If we consider it to be historical, why has it not been part of the earliest manuscripts? To this question, scholars have supplied eight rationales. The passage is unhistorical and the creation of it in one geographical area was to solve some theological problems and to enforce church discipline. The absence of it in most early manuscripts makes it unhistorical. Its absence in earlier Greek extant manuscript makes it unhistorical. It has also been part of the un-canonized gospel hence it is unhistorical. It is historical having been circulating as an independent document, because the scribes or copyist find it difficult to relate to the story of Jesus. It is probably part of the gospel of Mark or Luke. It was originally part of the canonical gospel before it was suppressed, and latter it was restored. It has ever been part of the gospel of John, and has ever maintained the same present placement.^{xxxviii}

While the above submissions have weight as it is, it has to be realized that the Evangelists were not chronologically minded in the presentation of the gospel write-up; hence this passage is somewhat like the end of Mark. Another explanation is that, Robert Kysar has regarded the gospel of John as a maverick gospel in his book: *The Maverick Gospel*.^{xxxix} That is to say that the nature of the Fourth Evangelist as an unconformity, self branded, may explain the supposed arbitrary placement of the story where it is found. Hence, the story may not, unnecessarily, be branded anti-Johannine.

Moreover, it is customary for Johannine Evangelist to relate a story in such manner that one would imagine it shares some similarity with the Synoptics. Such stories include the healing of the official's son, the feeding of the multitude, the walking on the sea, the anointing at Bethany and sections of the passion narratives in 4:46-54; 6:1-21; 12:1-8; 18; and 19, and it is probable that both Luke and John included the story in their original gospels before they were suppressed in the early centuries, but a well known tradition connects the story with John otherwise, it would not be so. Therefore, placing the story before us in any other place in the Gospels may lead to more problem, hence it may be save to allow the passage to remain where ancient manuscripts have placed it even when they are of a later date.^{xxxx}

Again, it is noteworthy that the opening statements of the narrative from its background and setting, seems to fit smoothly into the Johannine context in the material, which comes before the pericope. The incidents are clearly set at the Jewish feast of Tabernacles and in fact on the last great day of that feast in John 7:2, 37. This last great day is referred to in Lev. 23:39, showing that there is a unique appropriateness to the mention of each person going to his house, since the last seven days would have traditionally been spent in the booths, but now the feast was over, hence it could have been a genuine point to tie the story skillfully to the norm of the feast, stretches gullibility to an intolerable level.^{xxxxi}

CONCLUSION

In this paper, it has been stated that a serious issue that rocks the heart of New Testament Studies is floating words. It ranges from a word, a phrase, sentence or even a whole pericope, like the story of the adulterous woman in John's Gospel. The most ancient Greek New Testament manuscripts omitted this passage altogether. Even then, the story is not free from literary and historical in-congruency. Some critical scholars have concluded that the story is anti-Johannine and that it has some synoptic coloration, especially the Gospel of Luke. This conclusion is rated on the basis that the passage is omitted from P⁶⁶,⁷⁵ Aleph A B C and other versions and manuscripts.^{xxxxii} The above analysis would reveal that the story is part and parcel of the original Gospel tradition, and one of the Gospels must have initially recorded it, but perhaps it was excised on the thought that it might indulge church indiscipline.

The story of the adulteress woman in John is one of the most intriguing pericope in the whole of the New Testament, yet it is not a story without problems of reliability. Oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament are accorded greater value, reliability and authenticity. In the case of the story before us, evidences against the reliability of the passage are obvious that they cannot be put aside. Best-known Greek manuscripts omitted the story, even in many early church writings! The major Greek manuscript attesting to the story is Codex Bezae D antedating the eighth century and providing us with the story in its traditional location, a manuscript, notorious for its interpolations and omissions. MSS L and Delta do not give the text but rather leave a space after 7:52, to indicate that the scribe is aware of the story. Codices A and C are missing this section in John. Most substantial Greek mss from the East gives support to the reading.^{xxxxiii}

According to Westcott and Hort, early lectionary readings omit the story. Origen in his commentary also skips the story. Cosmas of Jerusalem in listing Johannine narrative peculiarities omits the story totally. Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage in making judicial directions on cases of adultery make no reference to Jesus or the adulterous woman.^{xxxxiv}

Furthermore, the passage before us is reminiscent of the synoptic problem of paying tribute to Caesar in Matt 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26. The case is like: proof yourself if indeed you are the Messiah. It follows therefore, that the woman in our story could not have been legally stoned. Only the Sanhedrin or perhaps the Roman government can issue death penalty. Then, Jesus bowed down to write on the ground to indicate that Jesus himself cannot condemn the adulterer since there was no witness to that effect.

The text before us has been overwhelmingly agreed to be an interpolation in its positioning in the gospel, but it should be noted that the interpolator must have been brilliant enough to stand in the position of the author, elucidating the message of forgiveness.^{xxxxv} Therefore it is most probable that the value of the story and its placement show partly, the peculiar nature of the Fourth Gospel, which throws illumination to Biblical scholarship, especially, the understanding of Johannine literature as a maverick Gospel, just to buttress the word of Robert Kysar. Moreover, New Testament scholarship is reminded that the wisdom of the author (Holy

Spirit) of our text to include what, should be trusted inspite of human elements in the composition.

ENDNOTE

- i "Floating words" is a word, a phrase, a sentence, or a periscope found in manuscripts of the Gospels. Such words or phrase are considered floating because it is a mark to note that such was not in the original text, but rather a later addition.
- ii J.M. Ross, "Floating Words: their significance for Textual Criticism," *New Testament Studies*, 38,1, 1992, 153. A word(s) is regarded as floating words when it is not found in all the manuscripts, but rather occupies different places in other manuscripts.
- iii S.O. Abogunrin, "Revisiting the Story of Jesus and the Adulteress in the Context of the Church's Life in Africa," *African Journal of Biblical Studies*, XV, 1, 2000, 1. Barbara and Kurt Aland, *Nestle-Aland Greek English New Testament* (Edmonds, W.A: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), 273), 273.
- iv Ross, 153.
- v Ibid.
- vi Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.3rd ed (Germany: United Bible Societies, 1971), 219-222.
- vii Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bbuce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, *The Greek New Testament 4th Edition* (Germany: Biblia-Druck, D-Stuttgart, 1998), 2.
- viii Abogunrin,1-2.
- ix Metzger, 189-190.
- x Ibid.
- xi Ibid.
- xii Ibid.
- xiii Ibid.
- xiv G.H.C. Macgregor, *The Gospel of John*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1959), 210. This section is literally an interruption of the flow of the passage in John's narrative and thought, yet there is no valid justification to doubt, here, like in other passages we have an authentic piece of evangelical document.
- xv Ross, 155. George R. Beasley-Murray, *Word Biblical Commentary on John* ed D.A Hubbard and others (Waco, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 145.
- xvi Ross.
- xvii Abogunrin.
- xviii Bart D. Ehrman, "Jesus and the Adulteress," *New Testament Studies*. 34, 1, 1998, 24.
- xix Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed. (Germany:UBS, 1998), 187-189.
- xx Gary M. Burge, "A Specific Problem in the New Testament Text and Canon: the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 27, 2, March 1984, 142.
- xxi Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 341.
- xxii Ibid.
- xxiii Bart D. Ehrman, "Jesus and the Adulteress," *New Testament Studies*. 34, 1, 1988, 25.
- xxiv Abogunrin, 4-5.
- xxv Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, v. 1, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers,2003), 735-736. Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible : The Gospel According to John (I-xii)* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 332-333.
- xxvi Burge,143.
- xxvii Ibid.

xxviii Abogunrin, 12-13.

xxix J.D. Derrett, "Law in the New Testament: The Story of the Woman Taken in Adultery," *New Testament Studies*, 10, 1, October 1963, 9.

xxx Keener, 737-738. See also Macgregor, 213. The accusers are condemned by their own conscience. The departed one after the other, beginning with the eldest, in order of precedence.

xxxi Raymond E. Brown, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to John*. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966), 333-334.

xxxii Derrett, 22.

xxxiii Ibid, 23.

xxxiv Brown, 334.

xxxv Macgregor, 212-213.

xxxvi Ibid.

xxxvii Brown, 332.

xxxviii Abogunrin, 7-8.

xxxix Robert Kysar, *The Maverick Gospel*. (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1963), 1.

xxxx Abogunrin, 11-12.

xxxxi Zane C. Hodges, "The Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11): Exposition," *Bibliotheca Sacra*. V. 137, no. 545, January-March 1980, 42.

xxxxii Ibid.

xxxxiii Gary M. Burge, "A Specific Problem in the New Testament Text and Canon: the Woman Caught in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 27, 2, March 1984, 142.

xxxxiv Ibid.

xxxxv Hodges, 50.