

New College MS 333: An Extraordinary Witness to the Harklean Syriac New Testament¹

New College MS 333, a manuscript held in New College Library, Oxford, is an extraordinary masterpiece of medieval Syriac writing. The manuscript is a remarkable witness to the Harklean translation of the New Testament. Originally, it probably contained the entire New Testament, but today it breaks off, due to damage, at Hebr 11:27 (f. 272v). Unfortunately, nothing is known about the provenance of this manuscript. Although it is relatively late (undated, probably thirteenth or fourteenth century), New College MS 333 marks an important milestone in the development of the Harklean translation and helps identify its various stages.

‘Harklean’ comes from the name Thomas of Ḥarkel, a seventh-century Syriac bishop of Mabbug (Hierapolis, northeast of Aleppo), who was born at Ḥarkel (northwest of Mabbug).² He was a very prominent figure in the Miaphysite Syriac church at the beginning of the seventh century. Thomas received his education at Qenneshre, a bilingual monastery and a famous place for Greek language studies.³ During the persecution by the Chalcedonians, Thomas was expelled from his see and fled to Enaton, near Alexandria in Egypt. In 615/6, he completed there his edition of the New Testament in Syriac. The ‘Harklean’ marks a new step in the long and prominent history of the Syriac translations of the New Testament. The Diatessaron (second century) and the Old Syriac (perhaps third century) were both written in idiomatic Syriac and in a rather free translation style,⁴ while the Peshitta (early fifth century) in language and style was already moving closer to the Greek original. The Harklean, however, which was based on the so-called ‘Philoxenian’ translation from a century earlier (now lost), is so close to the Greek that it may be called a mirror translation.⁵ Furthermore, it is very probable that the Harklean version originated amidst the efforts to reunite the Syriac and the Egyptian (Coptic) Miaphysite Christians after a few decades of schism.⁶

A short description of New College MS 333 is preserved in Coxe’s catalogue under CCCXXXIII.⁷ While we await the new catalogue currently in progress at New College Library, the most complete description of this manuscript may be found in Aland and Juckel’s edition of the Catholic Letters in Syriac.⁸ The present paper offers an update to that information, focusing on MS 333’s particular paratextual features. I hope that in this way, a non-specialist reader will also have an opportunity to become acquainted with the richness of paratextual features in the Syriac Harklean manuscripts.

¹ I am grateful to Dr Christopher Skelton-Foord, the Librarian, and all the staff of New College Library, Oxford for the kindness and hospitality I experienced during my visit in January 2022. I extend my thanks to Professor Lucas Van Rompay for his insightful comments on the first draft of this paper and to Fr. Paul Bechter (Dallas, Texas) who kindly proofread it.

² Andreas Juckel, ‘Tumo of Ḥarqel’ (2011), *GEDSH: Electronic Edition*: <<https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Tumo-of-Harqel>> (Accessed: online edition 2018).

³ See Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 169–73.

⁴ This is called a ‘reader-oriented’ translation as opposed to a ‘source-oriented’ one (like the Harklean Syriac). See below.

⁵ See S. P. Brock, ‘The Resolution of the Philoxenian/Harklean Problem’, in *New Testament Criticism: Its Significance for Exegesis: Essays in Honour of Bruce M. Metzger*, ed. Eldon Jay Epp and Gordon D. Fee (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), pp. 325–43. This transition from the ‘reader-oriented’ type to the ‘source-oriented’ type is characteristic of the Syriac translations (not only of the Bible) in that period, see S. P. Brock, ‘Towards a History of Syriac Translation Technique’, in *III^e Symposium Syriacum 1980: Les contacts du monde syriac avec les autres cultures: Goslar 7–11 Septembre 1980*, ed. René Lavenant (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1983), pp. 1–14; Sebastian Brock, ‘Charting the Hellenization of a Literary Culture: The Case of Syriac’, *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 3 (2015), 98–124.

⁶ Andreas Juckel ‘Ḥarqlean Version’ (2018), *GEDSH: Electronic Edition*: <<https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Harqlean-Version>> (Accessed: 1 August 2020).

⁷ Henry O. Coxe, *Catalogus codicum MSS. qui in collegiis aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adservantur* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1852), p. 119.

⁸ Barbara Aland, A. Juckel (eds.), *Das Neue Testament in syrischer Überlieferung: I. Die grossen Katholischen Briefe* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1986), pp. 32–5.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NEW COLLEGE MS 333 FOR THE TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF
THE NEW TESTAMENT AND FOR THE TEXTUAL HISTORY OF THE HARKLEAN VERSION

The goal of textual criticism of the New Testament is to establish, on the basis of all the available manuscripts, the best possible text. While the discipline focuses mainly on Greek manuscripts, it also makes use of ancient translations in other languages. These translations, called ‘versions’, allow us a glance at the state of the Greek text at the moment these versions were made and, in this way, they bear witness to the history of the Greek text and can provide significant insights. The Harklean version is exceptional in this sense. Being a ‘mirror translation’, it gives the reader quasi-certainty about the Greek original behind it at the beginning of the seventh century. Furthermore, over the centuries, the Harklean itself also underwent a series of transformations and revisions. A careful examination of these stages allows scholars to understand better the history of the Greek text of the New Testament.

Despite its relatively late age, New College MS 333 proves to be very important for understanding the development of the Harklean tradition, as it stands at the crossroads of various currents of this tradition. First, its text bears signs of the later revision of the Harklean, the so-called ‘Dionysios-stage’.⁹ Second, it transmits many ancient readings, found mainly in the oldest manuscripts and in those most untouched by the later revisions.¹⁰ Third, MS 333 presents features that situate it close to the ‘Syriac Masora’, a current of Syriac tradition focused on the standardization of orthography and pronunciation, developed by Syriac grammarians probably around the tenth century.¹¹

There is one more reason that New College MS 333 is uniquely important for the scholarship of the Harklean version and the textual criticism of the New Testament. Joseph White employed it at the end of the seventeenth century in Oxford to create the first edition of the Harklean text.¹² This edition remained the only point of reference to the Harklean text of the New Testament for scholars for over two centuries. While this choice brought world-class fame to MS 333, we can also acknowledge it as a rather unfortunate result because of the idiosyncratic textual character of MS 333.

⁹ A. Juckel, ‘Introduction to the Harklean Text’, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels: Aligning the Sinaiticus, Curetonianus, Peshîṭtâ and Harklean Versions*, ed. George A. Kiraz (Leiden: Brill, 1996), I, xxxvii–xxxix.

¹⁰ The oldest Harklean manuscripts are Florence, *Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana*, Plut. 1.40 (757 CE); Vatican City, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vat. Syr. 267 (eighth/ninth century); and Vatican City, *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*, Vat. Syr. 268 (858/9 CE or earlier). In this sense, New College MS 333 seems to be the result of a ‘correction’ of the ‘Dionysios-stage’ revision back in the direction of Vat. Syr. 268 (probably closest to the original Harklean). See Piotr Jutkiewicz, ‘Stages of the Harklean Tradition and the Process of Its “Byzantinization” in the Example of the Gospel of Luke in the MS Chaldean 25 of Alqosh’, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 25 (1) (2022), 43–84, at p. 80.

¹¹ A. Juckel, ‘Zur Revisionsgeschichte der Harklensis’, *Bericht der Hermann Kunst-Stiftung zur Förderung der Neutestamentlichen Textforschung für die Jahre 1992 bis 1994* (Münster: Hermann Kunst-Stiftung, 1995), pp. 64–67. ‘Syriac Masora’ is a traditional, modern name (deriving from similar compilations in Hebrew) given to the materials called in Syriac ܠܗܝܬܐ ܕܡܫܘܪܐ ‘words and readings’. See Jonathan Loopstra, *The Patristic “Masora”: A Study of Patristic Collections in Syriac Handbooks from the Near East* (Louvain: In aedibus Peeters, 2020), pp. 1–5. The evident connection between MS 333 and the ‘Masora’ manuscripts is seen in several particular orthographic choices in the spelling of the proper names and a high number of Greek source-word notes and short explanatory notes (see below), typical auxiliary features of the ‘Syriac Masora’ manuscripts.

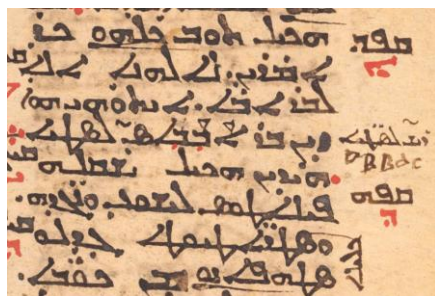
¹² White believed that the Harklean was not actually a separate version but only a revision of the ‘Philoxenian’ version, one century older translation. For this reason he called his edition ‘Versio Syriaca Philoxeniana’. The four gospels appeared in two volumes: Joseph White, *Sacrorum Evangeliorum Versio Syriaca Philoxeniana ex Codd. Mss. Riddleianis in Bibl. Coll. Nov. Oxon. repositis*. Tomus Primus (Oxford, 1778) and Joseph White, *Sacrorum Evangeliorum Versio Syriaca Philoxeniana ex Codd. Mss. Riddleianis in Bibl. Coll. Nov. Oxon. repositis*. Tomus Secundus (Oxford, 1778).

PARTICULAR PARATEXTUAL FEATURES OF NEW COLLEGE MS 333

Recent scholarship has started to appreciate how the study of the paratextual features of manuscripts not only helps to understand the text but also constitutes a fertile scientific discipline in itself.¹³ A paratext demonstrates how a particular text was received, read, and transmitted through the centuries. Paratextual features surrounding the Syriac Harklean translation of the New Testament are notably diverse and abundant: marginal variant notes, Greek source-word notes, explanatory notes, liturgical notes, Eusebian apparatus (plus its tabular mini-concordance in the lower margin of the folios), *kephalaia* and *titloi* (divisions in chapters of the biblical text with titles accompanying them, employed earlier in Greek manuscripts of the NT). In addition to these, the gospels are often preceded by a list of the *kephalaia* and *titloi*, tables with the Eusebian canons, the 'Letter to Carpianus' (an introduction to the Eusebian apparatus), and sometimes other notes. MS 333 is particularly rich in this regard. It lacks the liturgical notes, but all other features are very abundant.

Greek Source-Word Marginal Notes

Greek words often appear in the Harklean margin. They were employed to present to the reader the evidence of the Greek original behind the Syriac text. In MS 333, they are even more numerous than in other Harklean manuscripts. We find a compelling example of a Greek marginal note in John 18:40. The Greek text mentions the name of Barabbas, a bandit released by Pontius Pilate. His name is spelled Βαραββας (Barabbas) in Greek but normally ܒܪܐܒܒܐ (Bar-abba) in Syriac. Since this name is genuinely Aramaic, it was spelled in the same way in the standard Syriac translation (Peshitta) and in the original Harklean. But the later Harklean tradition, transmitted in MS 333, preferred to mirror the Greek name more precisely by adding the final 'S' and writing explicitly the double 'B': ܒܪܐܒܒܐܝܝܬ (Bar-abbas).¹⁴ The note in the margin confirms this choice with a quotation of Greek: ΑΒΒΑΣ.¹⁵ However, it is noteworthy that the copyist corrected only the second appearance of the name 'Barabbas' in this verse. The first one was left intact.



New College Library, Oxford, MS 333, f. 132r

The name 'Bar-abbas' appears in the centre of the fourth line from the top, and the Greek note is next to the same line in the right margin.¹⁶

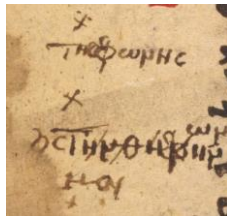
¹³ See in general: Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, tr. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); and in particular an example of a recent project: Darius Müller and Peter Malik, 'Rediscovering Paratexts in the Manuscripts of Revelation', *Early Christianity* 11 (2020), 247–64.

¹⁴ The double 'B' was 'hidden' in the earlier form ܒܪܐܒܒܐ in the *qushshoyo* dot over the letter ܒ.

¹⁵ Σ as often in the late antiquity and middle ages appears as C (the so-called 'lunate sigma,' see Edward Maunde Thompson, *An Introduction to Greek and Latin Palaeography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), pp. 144–7.

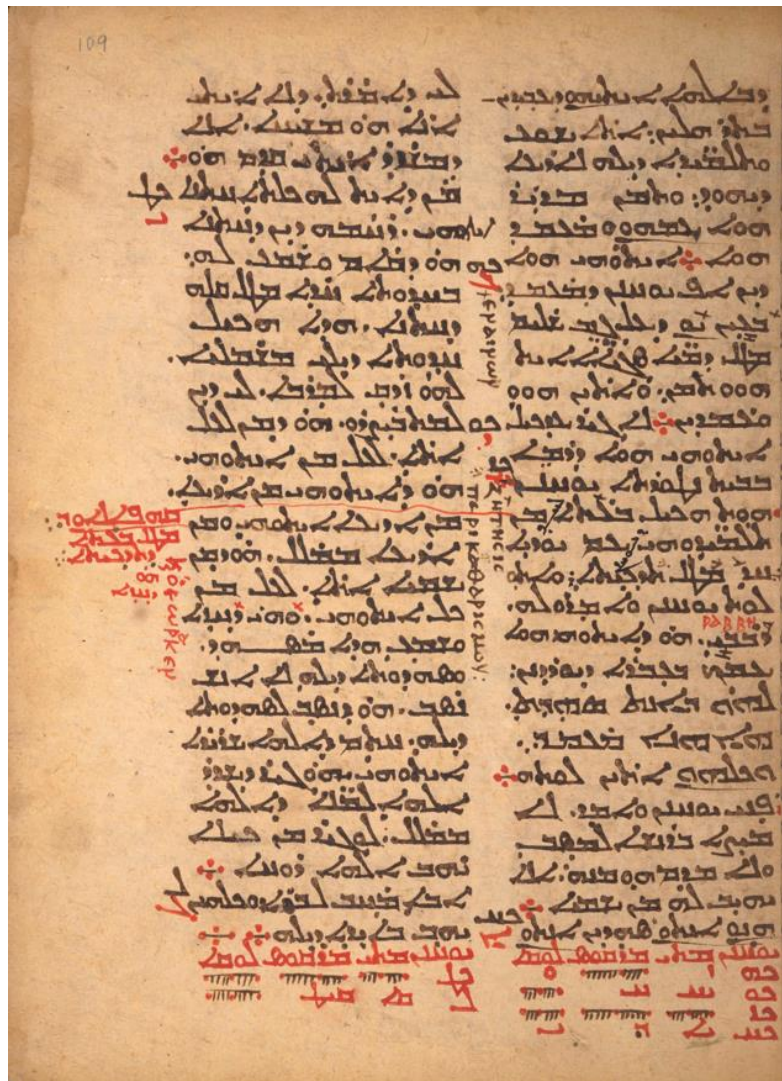
¹⁶ The last line in the same image presents another interesting reading in connection with the Greek original text of the Gospel. Only MS 333 switches here from the standard Syriac word for 'crown' (ܬܠܬܐ) to the Greek word στεφανος, written with Syriac letters (ܪܫܐܝܬܐ) and imitating the Greek accusative with the final 'N'.

Another interesting example of a Greek note appears on f. 131r. The note cites in Greek the words of Jesus in John 18:37: μου της φωνης ‘my voice.’ The Greek letters here underwent a series of corrections, and ultimately THC ΦΩΝΗC was written once more, slightly above.



f. 131r

MS 333 adds to the Harklean margin many new notes in Greek. For example, in the Gospel of John, there are fourteen additional Greek notes and some appear in clusters (John 3; 18; and 19). For example, in John 3:23–32, there are five notes that do not appear in any other Harklean manuscript: εν Αιων, ζητησις, περι καθαρισμου, ραββι, και ο εωρακεν. All of them appear on one folio.



f. 109r

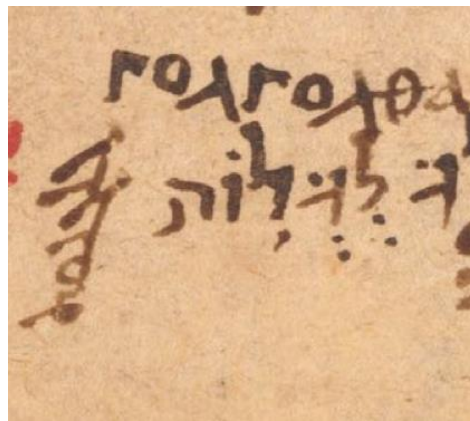
For the Greek notes, see the space in the middle of the folio, between the columns.

Hebrew Marginal Notes

These notes are unique to MS 333. Aland and Juckel mentioned the existence of marginal notes in Hebrew in an awkward script.¹⁷ Indeed, the orthography in these notes sometimes must be qualified as nonstandard. Also, the vocalization presents some signs that are both unexpected in placement and shape for the standard Tiberian system (see the images below).

Hebrew Source-Word Notes

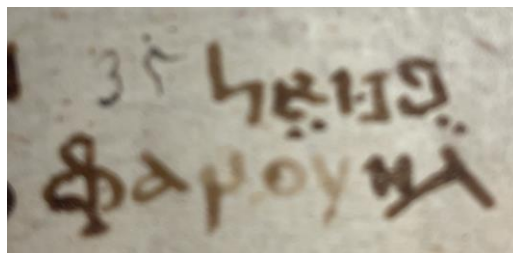
Like the Greek notes, the Hebrew notes try to provide the (supposed) Hebrew origin of the words. See, for example, the Greek word near John 19:17 (NRSV: ‘And carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha’).



f. 132r (the image was rotated)

ΓΟΛΓΟΘΑ might seem like a typo to the reader who knows the Greek text (the second ‘Α’ is redundant). But the copyist provided here in the margin not only the Greek source word (typical in the Harklean for proper names and names of places) but also the (supposed) Hebrew source (תל לזלזל).¹⁸ Hebrew word תל לזלזל means ‘skull’ and is traditionally associated with the name of the place of the crucifixion.¹⁹

Another example with both Greek and Hebrew appears for the name ‘Phanuel’ in Luke 2:36.



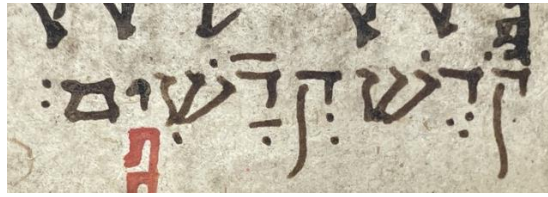
f. 68v

Curiously, the copyist decided to furnish also the name of the place of ‘Holy of Holies’ in Hebr 9:3 with a note in Hebrew.

¹⁷ Aland, Juckel, *Die grossen Katholischen Briefe*, p. 34.

¹⁸ It seems that the *hireq* vowel under the second ל was cancelled.

¹⁹ See for example: *The Gospel according to John (XIII–XXI)*, introduction, translation, and notes by Raymond E. Brown (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 899–900.

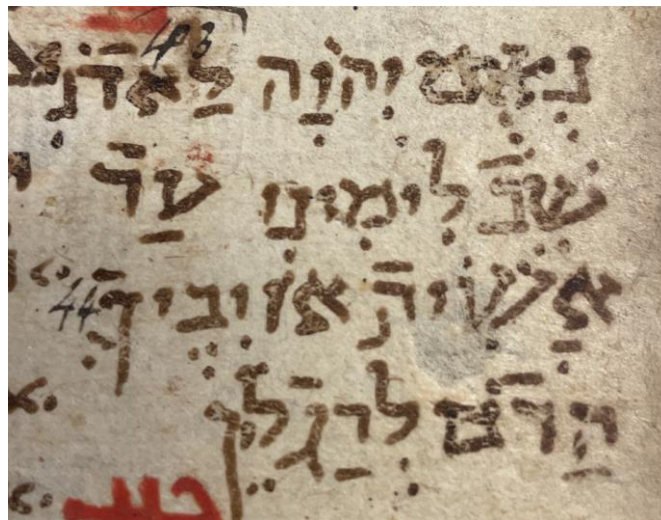


f. 210r

Other notes of this type appear for ‘Hosanna!’ (הושיענו) in Matt 21:9 (f. 29v), ‘Rabbi’ (רבני) in Matt 23:7 (f. 31v), ‘Melchizedek’ (מלכיצדק) in Hebr 7:17 (f. 269v).

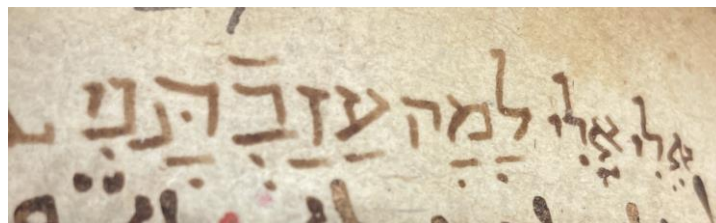
Old Testament Quotations

There are other cases when a note in Hebrew provides the Old Testament quotation that appears in the New Testament text. Words from Ps 110:1 (NRSV: ‘the Lord says to my lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool’’) are quoted in Matt 22:44. They appear in Hebrew in the margin of MS 333.²⁰



f. 31v

One more case of this type is in Matt 27:46 when the dying Jesus quotes Ps 22:1 from the cross (NRSV: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’). The words in the margin of MS 333 appear in Hebrew (and not in Aramaic, as in the words of Jesus).



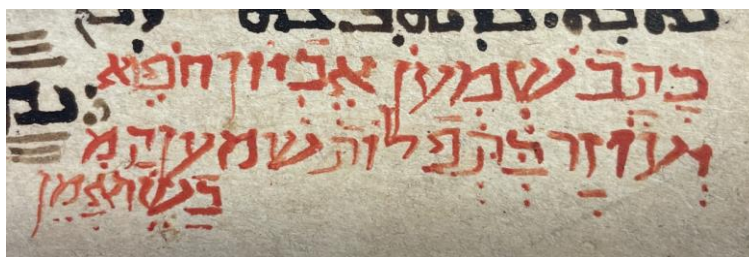
f. 39r

²⁰ The Hebrew text of Ps. 110:1 has a longer history in Syriac. It appears in three languages (Syriac, Hebrew, and Greek) in Jacob of Edessa’s *Scholion on the honorable and secret name of the Lord*: see Maurice Brière (ed.), *Les Homiliae cathedrales de Sévère d’Antioche: Traduction syriaque de Jacques d’Édesse*. Introduction générale a toutes les homélies. Homélies CXX a CXXV, *Patrologia Orientalis* 29 (1) (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1960), pp. 206–7.

Copyist's Expressions

The third type of the notes in Hebrew in New College MS 333 is unique. Three notes do not refer to the content of the lemma they appear close to. The first note presented below reads like a colophon, but it was placed in an unexpected place in the middle of the book (and the language of the note is also unexpected). In two other notes, the copyist used some known biblical phrases and words in Hebrew to construct a sort of invocation. One wonders whether the writer of these notes tried in this way to practice the Hebrew calligraphy or was at least fascinated by Hebrew as the original language of the Bible. Given the (sometimes) unexpected vocalization of these notes, they are transcribed below in the consonantal form only. An attempt at translation is also proposed.²¹

1. This note appears in the proximity of Acts 9:40.

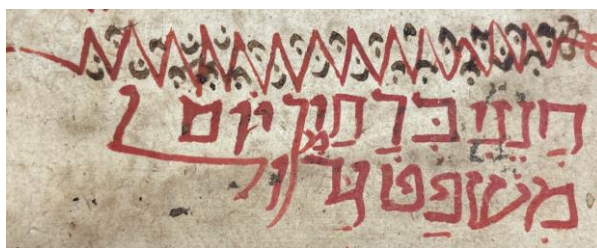


f. 152v

כתב שמעון אביון חפוא
ועוזר בתפלות שמעון המ-
בשר אמן

Wrote Simon the poor, secretly. And [was] helped by the prayers of Simon, the announcer. Amen.

2. This note appears after the list of the *kephalaia* of the Letter to Colossians.



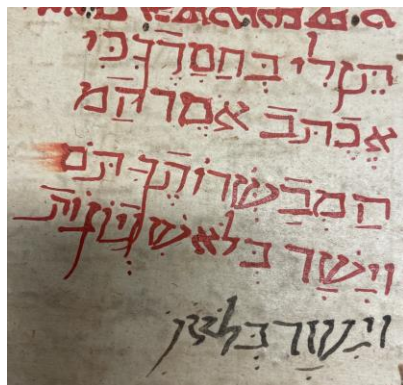
f. 250r

חנני ברחמיך יום
משפט גדול

Have pity on me in your mercy [in] the day of [the] great judgment.

3. The note that appears at the end of the Gospel of Mark is more difficult to understand than the others since the Hebrew seems particularly problematic.

²¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Paola Mollo and Craig E. Morrison (both Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome), and Jakub Bluj OP (École biblique et archéologique française de Jérusalem and Université de Lorraine) for their helpful comments on my reading of these notes.



f. 64r

תן לי בחסדך כי
אכתב אמר המ
המבשרותך תם
וישר בלאשיונות
וישר בלי'ן

Allow me in your kindness to write saying

(the last two letters in the second line anticipate the first word of the third line)
your good tidings are perfect and just in the languages

(the last line seems to be a repetition of the previous one with an abbreviation in the second word)

Explanatory Marginal Notes

Explanatory notes are typical for the Harklean version, though they do not appear in every manuscript. Gwynn commented on them over a century ago, but they have never been thoroughly studied.²² Only a few types of these comments received some scholarly attention, namely comments on the origin of the OT quotations²³ and notes on attestation (or lack of thereof) of given variants among Greek and Syriac manuscripts.²⁴ But there are many other marginal notes in the Harklean manuscripts that present additional information: grammatical comments, Old Testament references, particular word usages, and other comments. Several Harklean manuscripts include also longer exegetical and theological remarks in the margin whose sources can be identified in the early Church writers. It seems that this tendency to include these notes was connected to the 'Syriac Masora' tradition and grew over time.²⁵ MS 333 is special in this regard since it transmits some earlier notes and adds new notes to the Harklean margin. Some of these notes are very short, others longer. Several were mentioned in the notes to White's edition. I will present four examples of different types so that the reader may acquire a broader picture.

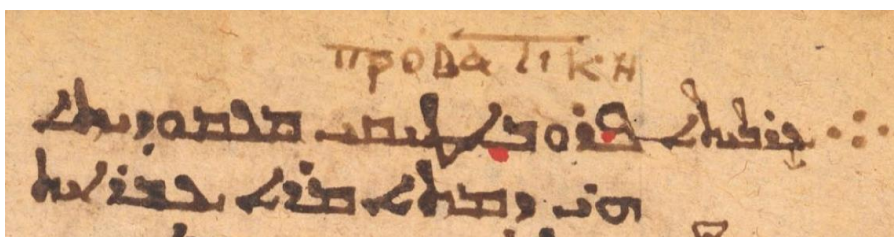
²² J. Gwynn, 'Thomas Harklensis', in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines; during the First Eight Centuries*, ed. William Smith and Henry Wace (London: John Murray, 1887), IV, 1014–1021, at p. 1017: 'The marginal notes, likewise, though sometimes trifling or even absurd, usually throw some light on the text of the MSS, used by Thomas, or the text which underlay the original Philoxenian version. Some uncertainty, however, attaches to them, inasmuch as a few of them appear to bear marks of a later hand'.

²³ Aland, Juckel, *Die grossen Katholischen Briefe*, p. 111 (note 2).

²⁴ Peter A. L. Hill, 'The Harklean "Currency Annotations"', *The Journal of Eastern Christian Studies* 56 (1–4) (2004), 105–127.

²⁵ Most of these notes are very similar to the types of the notes one finds in many of the 'masoretic' manuscripts. The authors are also those typical for the 'masoretic' manuscripts: Ps.-Dionysius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Severus of Antioch, and John Chrysostom. See Loopstra, *Patristic "Masora"*, pp. 9 and 17.

John 5:2

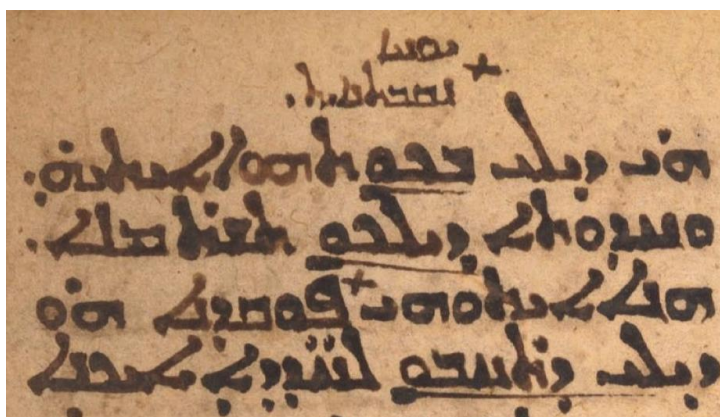


f. 111v

The commented word (ܦܪܒܐܬܝܟܐ) is located in the centre of this image, at the beginning of a new line. The note in Greek stands above it, and the note in Syriac on the right (this is the right margin of the folio) is connected to the commented word by a stroke of the pen.

John 5:2 reads (NRSV): ‘Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes’. To describe the place where the action takes place, the Greek gospel employs a substantivized adjective *προβατικη* ‘pertaining to sheep’, which derives from *προβατον* ‘sheep’ and stands for *πυλη προβατικη* (the Sheep Gate). In the Harklean version, renowned for its fidelity to the Greek original, the word is cited in a transliterated form, as if it were a proper name (ܦܪܒܐܬܝܟܐ). In numerous Harklean manuscripts in the margin, a note in Greek was added that quotes the original, providing a helpful explanation for the source of this newly invented Syriac word. But in MS 333 yet another note was added in the margin, this time in Syriac. It reads ܦܪܒܐܬܝܟܐ. This adjective in Syriac, deriving from ‘sheep’ (ܦܪܒܐ), is mimicking the Greek also in its morphological form (feminine). This note is of a lexicographic type. As a result, the reader of MS 333 will realize that *προβατικη* means “of the sheep”.

John 15:12

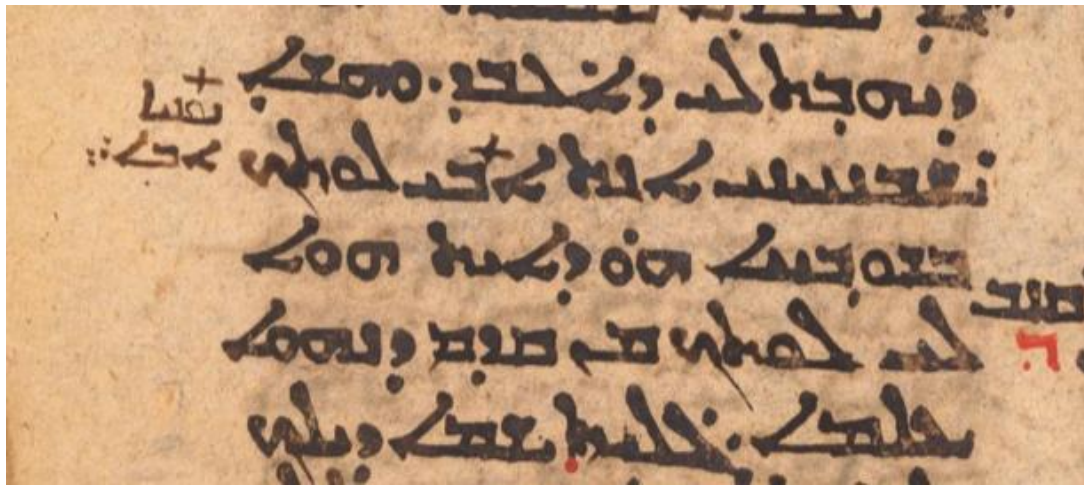


f. 127v

The commented word (ܦܪܒܐܬܝܟܐ) is located in the second line from the bottom and has a cross above it. The marginal note is written above the column, in the upper margin of the folio, with a cross that marks the connection.

John 15:12 reads (NRSV): ‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you’. The Greek word for ‘commandment’ is *η εντολη*, and it is feminine. The Syriac word is ܦܪܒܐܬܝܟܐ, and it is masculine. The note in the margin, which was added in MS 333, comments on this situation. It reads ܕܡܚܕܐ ܕܡܚܕܐ, which means: ‘Greek: feminine’. This note is of a grammatical type. As a result, the reader of MS 333 may be aware of this morphological detail of the Greek source text.

John 17:5

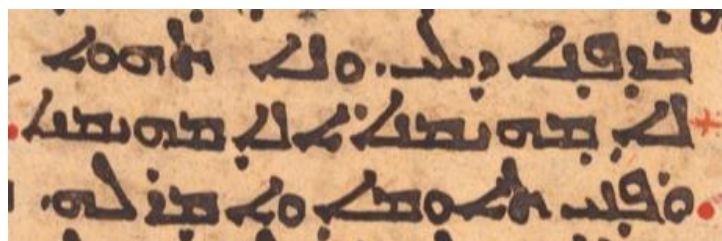


f. 129r

The commented word (ܐܬܝܬܝ) appears as the second from the left in the second line from the top.
The sign over it is a simple cross and the note in the left margin has the same sign over it.

John 17:5 reads (NRSV): ‘So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed’. The Greek employs here the standard vocative *πατερ*. In Syriac, however, this word was usually translated with the possessive suffix ܐܬܝܬܝ ‘my father’. This rendering was typical of the most ancient Old Syriac translation (perhaps third century) and often appeared in the standard Syriac translation, the Peshitta (early fifth century).²⁶ This particular Syriac rendering appears even in the Harklean version, known to be in every sense extremely literal. For this reason, the later copyist of MS 333 considered it helpful to make a comment on this situation, writing: ܐܬܝܬܝ ܐܬܝܬܝ, which means: ‘Greek: Father’, as if to say ‘and not “my Father”’. The same note appears twice on the same folio (the first appearance is in 17:1), always in the same context. The type of this note may be labelled as Greek source-text commentary.²⁷

John 20:27



f. 34r

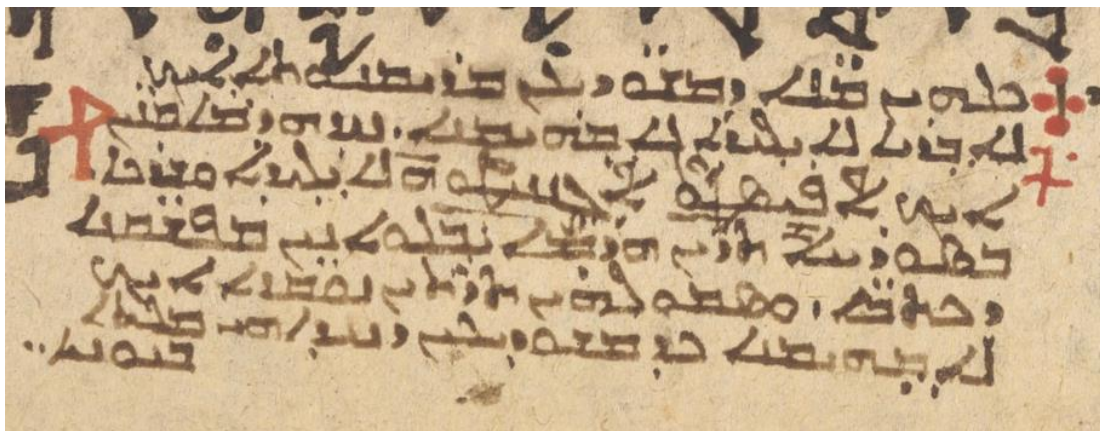
The commented words (ܐܬܝܬܝ ܐܬܝܬܝ) appear in the central line, first from the right.
The sign (a cross with diamonds) is attached to it.

²⁶ See *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe: The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels, with the Readings of the Sinai Palimpsest and the Early Syriac Patristic Evidence*, ed. F. Crawford Burkitt: Volume II: Introduction and Notes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904), p. 47, and P. J. Williams, *Early Syriac Translation Technique and the Textual Criticism of the Greek Gospels* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2004), pp. 89–95.

²⁷ These short notes are typical for the so-called ‘Masora’ tradition. Of course, the labels used here to describe these notes may seem artificial. Actually, all these notes have in common the desire to comment on the original Greek text of the gospel, thus offering more details to the reader. Only the type of these details differs.

A distinctive note appears in connection to the words of resurrected Jesus directed to Thomas: 'Do not be unbelieving but believing' (John 20:27).²⁸ The Greek word for 'believing' is πιστος, while its negation is obtained by a prefixed letter α (the so-called *α-privative*): απιστος. In Syriac, a simple negation must be expressed by the particle ܐܠܐ 'not' preceding but not connecting to the word. Once more, the copyist of MS 333 preferred to make the readers aware of the difference between Greek and Syriac.

Two commented words, apart from the cross with diamonds that sends the reader to the note in the margin, received two dots, below the line, under the last letter of the first word, and under the first letter of the second word, so that the dots appear close to each other (ܐܠܐ ܡܢ ܐܝܬܐ). These dots describe the connection between these two words. In fact, ancient Syriac scribes, among different uses for the diacritical dots, also invented this way to show that the original word is one and not two.²⁹ Another explanatory note in the margin comments precisely on this practice of putting two dots that signify the connection between two words.



f. 134r

The note stands in a vertical position in the left margin of the folio.

The note reads:

All these words that signify the negation, as 'not-created', 'not-begotten', 'not-believing' obtain one term, as 'אπισθουν', [so] 'αγεννηθον', namely 'not-begotten', and so on. In Syriac, the translators of the Scriptures transmitted them with two words, and they put on them two dots as in 'not-believing' as to inform that this is one word in Greek.

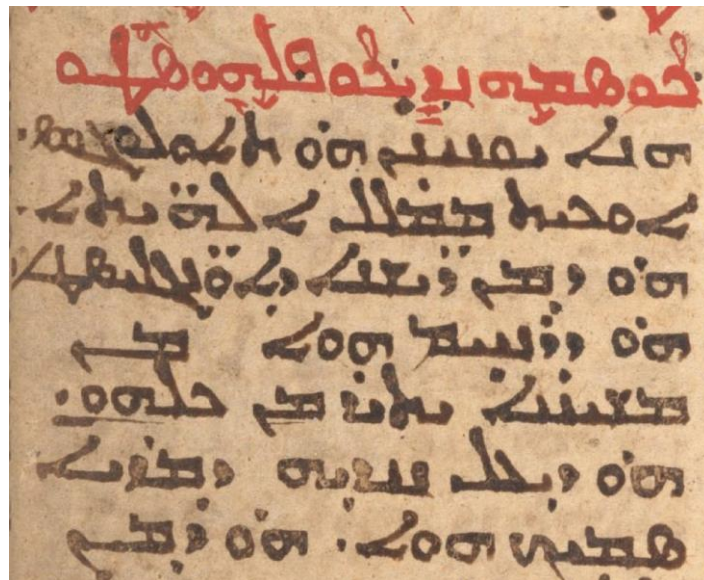
The comment is clear to the readers. They are informed about the purpose of these particular dots and the important difference between Greek and Syriac languages. This note probably comes from the writings of one of the Syriac grammarians, but so far it has not been identified. The complete text and translation of all these new notes in New College MS 333 in the Gospel of John will appear in its forthcoming edition.

²⁸ This translation comes from the *New American Standard Bible* (1995) which is helpful in this context, because it employs the same adjective with the negation, thus mirroring closely the Greek original.

²⁹ George Anton Kiraz, *Tūrāṣ Mamlā: A Grammar of the Syriac Language* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), Volume 1: Orthography, pp. 142–3. For a fascinating historical survey on the gradual employment of the system of diacritical points in the Syriac writing see George Anton Kiraz, *The Syriac Dot: A Short History* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015).

A Special Introductory Note to the Gospel of John

After the list of the *kephalaia* and *titloi* (ancient chapters and titles) of the Gospel of John (ff. 104v–105r) appears another particular note. It comes from the writings of Cosmas Indicopleustes, a sixth-century Greek writer.³⁰ The note describes the evangelist and his material, developing on the content of the *titloi*. Indeed, this content was the connection that made the copyist include this fragment precisely in this place (namely, just after the list of the *titloi* in John).³¹ The Syriac translation is sometimes far from the Greek original.³² The note was never mentioned nor published. Furthermore, it seems that this is the first excerpt from Cosmas ever found in Syriac. The existence of Syriac translations should not seem unexpected, given his connections with the Syriac tradition. Nevertheless, it is compelling that while the (East-)Syriac Christianity is well reflected in Cosmas's work, this note is a unique echo of his composition in a (West-)Syriac manuscript. The picture below presents the beginning of the note. In the first line appears the name of Cosmas Indicopleustes. Text, translation, and some first comments on this long note will appear in the forthcoming edition of the Gospel of John in the Harklean version.



f. 105r

OTHER SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NEW COLLEGE MS 333

Paratextual features may grow with time as a manuscript journeys among different persons and communities who sometimes feel the need to make corrections or new comments. New College MS 333 is also abundant in this regard. This abundance, though of secondary importance, will be briefly described here.

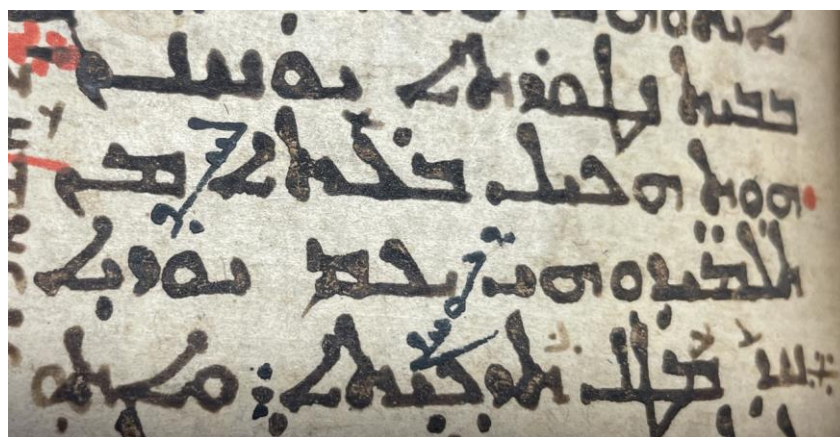
³⁰ Cosmas, before becoming a monk, travelled a lot as a merchant, reaching even India. He is the first to account for the presence of Syriac Christians there. His contacts with the Syriac church started with his becoming a disciple of the future East Syriac patriarch Mar Aba I. Cosmas wrote the 'Christian Topography' to describe the world and defend traditional Christian views about its shape. For more about Cosmas see the Introduction to Wanda Wolska-Conus (ed.), *Cosmas Indicopleustes Topographie chrétienne: Topographie chrétienne, tome I (Livres I–IV)* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1968), pp. 15–19; see also Joel Walker, 'From Nisibis to Xi'an: The Church of the East in Late Antique Eurasia', in *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, ed. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 994–1052, at p. 1019; Lucas Van Rompay, 'Pawlos of Tella' (2011), *GEDSH: Electronic Edition*: <<https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Pawlos-of-Tella>> (Accessed: online edition 2018).

³¹ However, there are no such notes in the introductions to the other three gospels.

³² See the Greek text and its French translation in: Wanda Wolska-Conus (ed.), *Cosmas Indicopleustes Topographie chrétienne: Topographie chrétienne, tome II (Livre V)* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1970), pp. 302–305.

Corrections

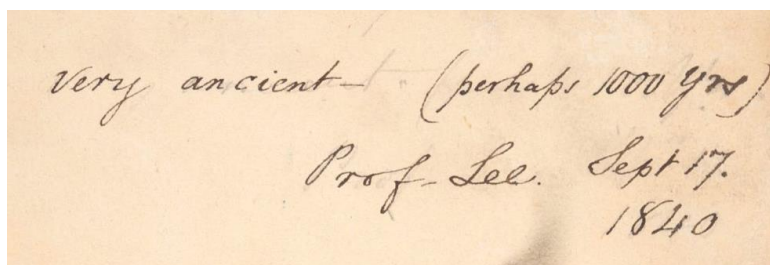
New College MS 333 contains numerous corrections. Some words are added, and others are crossed out. There are also many words added but then cancelled. Although the stages of these corrections are often difficult to discern, one distinguishable stage is that of the corrections added between the lines or words by another hand in the Serto script.³³ For example, on f. 109r, some missing words were later inserted by a different hand twice: in the second and in the third line from above. Both added words are written in an oblique position to fit the narrow space between the words. These additions are clearly by another hand with different ink.



f. 109r

Comments in Latin and English

There are also in New College MS 333 several more recent comments in Latin and English. They explain the lack of the so-called *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11, missing from the most ancient copies of the gospels),³⁴ a subscript at the end of the four gospels, and other minor comments, often about variant readings and omissions in the twin Harklean manuscript New College MS 334. These modern notes are more numerous in the Gospel of Matthew than in the rest. The same hand marked the names of the books of the NT and modern chapter-divisions numbers with Arabic numbers (in Matthew, Mark and Luke sometimes even the verse numbers; some of these seem to have been added even later with a pencil). One might think that these comments come from White, who compared the two manuscripts for his edition (published 1778–1803). Actually, it seems that they are a little bit more recent. The last folio before the back cover explains who marked the manuscript with the English script.



f. [277]r

³³ A later Syriac script that developed from the eighth century onwards, but in its developed form only from the twelfth century.

³⁴ For a detailed study of the fascinating history of this Gospel passage see Jennifer Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

The signed person must have been Samuel Lee (1783–1852), a famous English orientalist who, in 1823, published the Peshitta.³⁵ He was a professor at Cambridge and was very interested in any available Syriac sources. In that period, it was not unusual for a renowned scholar to make such notes on the manuscript itself, a practice that seems impossible to think of today.

CONCLUSION

Every written source carries a hidden story. Real individuals created it with care, and real communities received its message and were formed by it. Sometimes the story behind a manuscript is harder to see, and sometimes it is more evident. While earlier scholarship focused on finding a consensus among differences in manuscripts, modern studies encourage giving more space and importance to individual witnesses, with all their particularities. New College MS 333, with all kinds of notes and paratextual features, is extraordinary in this regard since it allows its reader to witness so much of how the Syriac Harklean text of the New Testament was transmitted. Each comment and every note reveals the endeavour to give the reader a more complete picture of the biblical text and, thus, to understand it better. May these past endeavours inspire our modern zeal to understand better the story hidden in every individual manuscript and, in this way, appreciate even more of the richness of the transmitted text.

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³⁵ See Anna Mary Lee, *A Scholar of a Past Generation: A Brief Memoir of Samuel Lee* (London: Seeley, 1896)—available via <www.tertullian.org/fathers/lee_scholar/lee_scholar.htm> (Accessed: 28 July 2022)—for more information about him and a sample of his hand-writing.