

Evidence for Interpolation in Paul

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EDITORS' NOTE: Pages 15-90 of **Interpolations in the Pauline Letters** are here greatly condensed and slightly revised, with the permission of the author, to make them more directly available to our readers.

Definition. A *gloss* is an explanatory note or comment, generally written in the margin or between the lines of a manuscript by a reader, scribe, or the author of the document. A later scribe might copy a gloss into the document, assuming that it was meant to be part of it. Unlike a gloss, an *interpolation* is foreign material inserted deliberately and directly into the text.

A Priori Probability of Interpolations. That interpolations were introduced into many Classical writings cannot be questioned. Ancient critics believed that Homer had suffered interpolation, and that it was possible for critics to recover something like the original text.¹ Zenodotus, the first head of the library in Alexandria (03c), relied on four principles of criticism: Interpolations could be detected (1) if they broke the continuity of the poem, (2) if they lacked poetic art or were unsuitable to the characters of gods and men, (3) if they contained errors about ancient events, (4) if they differed from the usual style of the poet.² Maurer has asserted that 'the fact [of interpolations in Homer] is notorious,'³ and Bolling has identified numerous interpolations in the texts of the Iliad and the Odyssey.⁴ Interpolations have also been detected in the works of Hippocrates, Aristophanes, Euripides, and Thucydides.⁵ Of direct relevance to the question of interpolations in the Pauline letters is the almost certain presence of interpolations in precisely the genre of ancient literature most closely akin to those letters: the letters of philosophers (eg Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Seneca), and particularly those 'letters of exhortation in which teachers seek to guide and mold the character of disciples.'⁶ The Epicurean correspondence, for example, 'has been heavily edited by Epicurus' followers who amplified the master's teachings and adapted them to later situations.'⁷ This provides a close parallel to the letters of Paul, which can also be seen as 'letters of exhortation in which [a teacher] seek[s] to guide and mold the character of disciples.'

¹Grant **Letter** 17.

²Grant **Marcion** 211; cf Pfeiffer **History** 108-113.

³Maurer **Interpolation** 181.

⁴Bolling **External**.

⁵Grant **Heresy** 21-22 and 61-66; Maurer **Thucydides** 181.

⁶Stowers **Greek** 292.

⁷Stowers **Greek** 292.

Beyond this, there is evidence that early Christians introduced interpolations into Jewish writings. It is widely agreed, for example, that material was added to the Greek text of Josephus to create non-Christian testimony to the messiahship and resurrection of Jesus.⁸ Similarly, Celsus charged that Christians had added interpolations to the Sibylline Oracles to provide pagan support for the truth of the Christian religion.⁹ Other Jewish texts in which Christian interpolations have been identified are the Hellenistic Synagogal Prayers, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, the Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah, and 4 Ezra.¹⁰

The presence of interpolations in other ancient literature would lead us to expect, on a priori grounds, that the Pauline letters may contain non-Pauline interpolations.

The Lack of Manuscript Evidence. Apart from two passages,¹¹ every proposed interpolation in the Pauline letters appears in all extant manuscripts of the letters. This raises the crucial question: Might a passage appear in all surviving manuscripts and yet be a non-Pauline interpolation? I suggest that the absence of direct manuscript evidence for interpolation should be seen precisely as the *absence* of evidence. Barrett reminds us that ‘the evidence of the [extant manuscripts] can tell us nothing about the state of the Pauline . . . literature before its publication (presumably late in the 1st century).’¹² Further, the evidence of the manuscripts provides no clear information regarding the state of the Pauline literature prior to the date of the oldest surviving manuscript of the letters – that is, near the end of the 2nd century. Koester notes that ‘critics of classical texts know that the first century of their transmission is the period in which the most serious corruptions occur,’ and that ‘the Gospels [and the same could be said of the Pauline letters], from the very beginning, were not archival materials but used texts.’ This ‘is the worst thing that could happen to any textual tradition,’ because ‘a text not protected by canonical status, but used in liturgy, apologetics, homiletics, and instruction of catechumens is most likely to be copied frequently and is thus subject to frequent modifications and alterations.’¹³

It would thus appear that the period between the composition of Paul’s letters (mid 1st century) and the date of the earliest extant manuscript (late 2nd century at best) was precisely the time when the letters would have been most susceptible to alteration, including interpolation.¹⁴ In short, the circumstances provided ample motivation and opportunity for the introduction of interpolations. All of this, in my judgement, makes it reasonable to assume that interpolations are likely to have been introduced into the Pauline letters prior to the date of the earliest surviving manuscripts.

It remains to ask: Precisely how shall such interpolations be recognized?

⁸Josephus Antiquities 18/3:3; see Feldman **Josephus** 990f, Sanford **Propaganda** 127-145.

⁹Grant **Heresy** 24; see also Collins **Sibylline** 2-6.

¹⁰Charlesworth **Christian** 28.

¹¹Rom 16:25-27 and 1 Cor 14:34-35 occur at different places in different manuscripts.

¹²Barrett **First** 14.

¹³Koester **Text** 19f.

¹⁴See further Walker **Unexamined**.

External Evidence for Interpolation

1. Absence from Witnesses. The most obvious type of evidence for interpolation would be the absence of a passage from ancient manuscripts, versions, or lectionaries. Such evidence exists for one Pauline passage. The doxology of Rom 16:25-27 appears in all the “best” manuscripts, but there is evidence for an early version of Romans without it. It was apparently not in the texts used by Marcion (2c), Priscillian (4c), or Jerome 4/5c); Gamble has argued that ‘this patristic testimony is buttressed by . . . the complete omission of the doxology’ in the original Old Latin.¹⁵

2. Presence in Different Locations. Besides being absent from some witnesses, Rom 16:25-27 is located: (a) after Rom 15 in the oldest extant manuscript (P46, late 2c or early 3c); (b) after Rom 16 in most of the “best” witnesses, including Sinaiticus (4c), Vaticanus (4c), Ephraemi Rescriptus (5c), and Bezae (6c); (c) after Rom 14 in several witnesses; (d) after both Rom 14 and 16 in a few (including Alexandrinus, 5c); and (e) after both Rom 14 and 15 in one 14c manuscript. Such uncertainty about the appropriate location of the passage suggests that it may be a later addition.¹⁶

3. Lack of Citation in an Early Writer who might reasonably be expected to have mentioned it. 1 Cor 14:34-35 is cited by no Apostolic Father, and indeed by no early ecclesiastical writer prior to Tertullian (160-240).¹⁷

Internal Evidence for Interpolation

4. Interruption. A passage which seems to interrupt its context, so that the context becomes continuous when the passage is removed, is likely to be an interpolation. Of 1 Cor 14:34-35, Fee observes that ‘one can make much better sense of the structure of Paul’s argument without these intruding sentences,’ which have little, if anything, to do with the subject matter of the surrounding material. In short, 1 Cor 14:34-35 is a self-contained unit that interrupts the context in which it appears, and its removal leaves a complete and coherent discussion of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12 and 14.¹⁸

5. Repetition From Context. Another phenomenon suggesting that a seemingly interruptive passage may be an interpolation is the repetition – near the end of that passage or in the verse directly following – of a significant word or phrase from the verse preceding. This might represent an attempt to improve the transition between the passage and its context. In 1 Cor 12:31a, for example, Paul encourages his readers to be ‘zealous for the greater gifts.’ This is repeated in 14:1b-c with the substitution of ‘the spiritual gifts’ for ‘the greater gifts’ and the addition of ‘that you may prophesy.’

¹⁵Gamble **Textual** 25-26; see the entire discussion on p24-29.

¹⁶The most extreme example of presence in different locations is the story of the Woman Taken in Adultery, which is absent from the best texts of John, but occurs in 12th century and later manuscripts after John 7:52, or John 7:36, or John 4:44, or even Luke 21:38.

¹⁷Payne **Fuldensis** 247-248.

¹⁸Fee **First** 701f. [For the interpolated nature of 1 Cor 13, see Walker **Interpolations** 147f. Further examples of obvious interruption are Mark 14:28 and Mark 16:7, the second of which refers back to the first. Both feature a remark which is ignored by the persons in the following passage, who instead respond to a remark made in the *preceding* passage – Editors].

With the elimination of 12:31b-14:1a as a non-Pauline interpolation, it would become necessary to remove either 12:31a or (more likely) 14:1b, which may have been added to provide a smoother transition between 12:31b-14:1a and its context.

6. Linguistic Evidence. With due allowance for the effect of subject matter on vocabulary, unusual vocabulary or grammatical forms in a passage may suggest that it is an interpolation. At several points, the vocabulary of 1 Cor 14:34-35 appears not to be characteristically Pauline.¹⁹ (1) The verb ὑποτάσσω ‘be subject’ appears often in the authentic Pauline letters, but in all except three cases it refers to submission either to God, Christ, God’s law, God’s righteousness, or to ‘futility’ (Rom 8:20). Apart from 1 Cor 14:34, it refers to submission to humans at only three places, one of which (Rom 13:1, 5; governing authorities) is regarded by some as a non-Pauline interpolation. The others are 1 Cor 14:32 (prophets) and 1 Cor 16:16 (Christian leaders). In the pseudo-Pauline Colossians, Ephesians, and Titus, however, it almost *always* has in mind submission to other human beings.²⁰ (2) The verb ἐπερωτάω ‘to ask’ appears elsewhere in the disputed letters only at Rom 10:20, in a quotation from Isaiah; otherwise it is found in the New Testament only in the Gospels. (3) The adjective αἰσχρός ‘shameful’ is found in the undisputed letters only at 1 Cor 11:16, which is part of another suspected non-Pauline interpolation; otherwise, it is found in the New Testament only in the pseudo-Pauline Eph 5:12 and Tit 1:11.

7. Content Evidence for the distinctiveness of a passage is the counterpart of linguistic evidence. The content of 1 Cor 14:34-35 contradicts its immediate context in 1 Cor 14, where women are among those who speak in church (note the ‘all’ in verses 5, 18, 23, 24, 31 and ‘each’ in v 26), and its wider context in 11:3-16, where it is assumed without reproof that women pray and prophesy in the assembly.²¹ 1 Cor 14:34-35 also contradicts the egalitarianism of Gal 3:27-28 (in Christ ‘there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus’). Also, the phrase “just as the law says” in 1 Cor 14:34 appears not to be characteristically Pauline. As Collins notes, ‘Paul generally expresses a somewhat negative view of the law’ (cf 1 Cor 15:56).²²

8. Situational Evidence. The case for distinctiveness is stronger when the language or content of a passage is not merely different from its context, but can be related to specific outside material, or to a later situation. Thus, 1 Cor 14:34-35 resembles the pseudo-Pauline 1 Tim 2:11-12. Both use the verb ἐπιτρέπειν to enjoin silence on the part of women; both require that women be ‘submissive’ (using the same root, ὑποτάσσειν in 1 Cor 14:34-35 and ὑποταγή in 1 Tim 2:11), presumably to men, an idea that also occurs elsewhere in the pseudo-Pauline writings.²³

¹⁹There is a danger of circularity, in that the definition of “Pauline” is tentative until all interpolations have been identified. It is also to be expected that interpolators in Paul, as in any other text, may attempt with more or less success to imitate the style and content of that text.

²⁰To other Christians, women to men, slaves to masters, and subjects to rulers. The only exception is Eph 5:24, which speaks of the church being in submission to Christ.

²¹Fee **First** 702.

²²Collins **First** 515.

²³Col 3:18, Eph 5:24, Tit 2:5; cf 1 Pet 3:1, 5 (all using the verb ποτάσσειν).

Apart from 1 Cor 14:34-35 (and perhaps 1 Cor 11:3-16, which is also regarded by some as an interpolation), there is nothing in the undisputed letters to suggest that the activity of women in the church was a problem for Paul. Clearly, however, such activity *was* later seen as problematic. This makes 1 Cor 14:34-35 anachronistic, and suggests that it was not composed until after the time of Paul.

9. Motivational Evidence for 1 Cor 14:34-35 is closely related to the situational evidence. After the time of Paul, when the status and role of women in the Church apparently came to be regarded as problematic, it may have appeared desirable to have the Apostle say something to address the problem. Hence the addition of a passage such as 1 Cor 14:34-35 to an authentic letter.

10. Location. Why was an interpolated passage inserted precisely where it is? The position of 1 Cor 14:34-35 is appropriate in several ways. (1) 1 Cor 14 as a whole deals with ‘speaking’ in church, which is also the theme of 14:34-35. (2) v 28 speaks of ‘keeping silent’ in church, a notion picked up in v34. (3) v 32 speaks of ‘being subject,’ an idea that reappears at v 34 (using the same verb, ὑποτάσσεσθαι). (4) v 33 includes the phrase ‘in all of the churches,’ and this reappears almost verbatim in v 34 (‘in the churches’). In short, it may simply have been the common themes of speech, silence, and submission, together with the setting of public worship in the churches, that led to the insertion of 14:34-35 at its present location in 1 Corinthians.

Comment

The Editors (2012)

The present paper is an example of criticism of a text from internal evidence: signs *in the text itself* that something has been inserted, at an early date, into the original.

Time was when textual criticism was recognized as having two components: (1) the lower, in which scribal corruptions were removed by comparison of manuscript variants, and (2) the higher, in which the formation process of the purified text was detected by evidence internal to the text. The term “higher criticism” has been rarely used in recent times, and it is now common to hear, of those practicing the higher criticism, “You have no evidence,” or to encounter the notion that, when scribal errors are eliminated, what remains is “the author’s holograph.” What manuscript criticism actually reaches is the archetype **A**, the version(s) from which the rest are descended. But this archetype may be centuries later than the author.²⁴ Given a first beginning **F**, much corruption may thus lie between the point when a text is given out to be copied for a wider public (**P**), and the date of the oldest reconstructible archetype (**A**):

F . . Author(s) or Proprietor(s) . . **P**Scribe(s). . . **A**
 ⇔ Formation Process ⇒ || ⇔ Corruption Process ⇒

If scribal changes between **P** and **A** are to be detected, it must be by the methods of the higher criticism. This is even more obviously so with authorial changes during the formation process, between **F** and **P**, which *by definition* elude manuscript criticism.

²⁴West **Textual** 9, “Most classical authors come to us in parchment or paper manuscripts which are seldom earlier than the ninth century, and often as late as the sixteenth.”

Authority Texts, by their nature, are especially liable to be adjusted or extended so as to remain relevant to changing conditions. Culturally central texts like the Iliad tend to evolve to suit that culture's changing idea of itself.²⁵ Advocacy texts like the Confucian Analects or the Gwändž statecraft tracts steadily grow by adding new tracts, including commentaries on the older tracts, over the course of centuries. Religious texts are especially liable to such change, and the four Gospels show it in progress.²⁶ The Pauline texts, which constitute a doctrinal foundation for much later Christianity, are for that reason, not merely because they are exhortational in an Epicurean sense, intrinsically likely to have undergone later improvements and adjustments.

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²⁵[See Brooks **Reader** 64-65 – Editors]

²⁶[See Brooks **Trajectories** – Editors].