THE SOURCE OF CATENA COMMENTS ON JOHN 21:25

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My attention was drawn to this topic by a footnote to chapter 4 of Martin Hengel’s study of ‘‘The Johannine Question.’’ Seeking an explanation of the plural ὁμασμόν of verse 24 and the singular ὁμας of verse 25, he refers, on stylistic grounds, to the possibility of an addition to the original gospel.

His footnote introduces two data from manuscripts as a contribution to the discussion. Firstly, the omission of verse 25 by the scribe of the famous Codex Sinaiticus and its subsequent addition is adduced. Tischendorf drew attention to this feature when first he brought the manuscript to light: the observation, and Tischendorf’s further assertion that the addition of the verse was the work of a later scribe led to a rather vituperative controversy. After the codex came to the British Museum in 1933, the study of it by Bell and Skeat, published in 1938, resolved the problem. Tischendorf was right that the text of John in the codex finished originally at the end of verse 24. He was incorrect in his assertion that it was a later scribe who added verse 25. Ultra-violet photography and the palaeographical expertise of these scholars showed that it was the scribe who first wrote a copy in which the verse was absent, who later washed out the coronis and subscriptio which followed verse 24, and added verse 25 and the coronis and subscriptio now visible. Whether this means that his exemplar for the text as at first copied

3 H.J.M. Milne and T.C. Skeat, Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus (London 1938) pp. 12f. and Figure 3. “Verse 25 was undoubtedly penned by the same scribe as the rest of the page, that is by scribe A.”
differed from that used by him as standard for the diorthosis or whether he had made a simple mistake, we have no means of knowing. That two minuscules, quite unconnected with the Sinaiticus, give verse 25 on a separate folium from the earlier verses, contributes nothing to the resolution of the question. No Biblical manuscript apart from the Sinaiticus omits the words which form verse 25, so far as our knowledge goes.

Hengel's second point, for which he adduces Dom John Chapman and Hermann von Soden, is that "catenae contained the observation that the verse was omitted by 'others'." This he interprets to mean that "copyists" found "the ironic and hyperbolic conclusion offensive." The remarks of Chapman and his references to von Soden have become rather garbled in this report. Chapman wrote, "in the commonest Greek commentary ... there is a remark on this verse that 'another (or others) says, it is an addition'." It is from this comment that we should in fact start. Von Soden did indeed list catena manuscripts, which is all that Chapman said, but does not appear to deal with the omission of verse 25 in any part of his discussion, whether of the catenae or of the Sinaiticus.

The introduction of a reference to a catena comment goes back to Wetstein. He repeated the information of Mill that a Dublin manuscript (Dublin, Trinity College, A.1.8: Gregory-Aland 63) omitted the verse. This was in fact an error; a leaf containing the verse and any subscription in the manuscript had been lost by accident, a mishap which occurred perhaps even before it came into Ussher's possession. To this information, Wetstein added that a scholion is found in ms.36 (i.e. Coislin Gr.20), which he then quotes in full. Its gist is that "another" says that verse 25 was originally an addition outside the text, which made the point that Our Lord's miracles were more than those written in the gospel. Carelessness led to its being taken into the text, whence custom and the passage of time established its treatment as part of the inspired words of the evangelist. So it came about that it was not removed from its accidental place.

4 John Chapman, "We know that his testimony is true," JThS 31 (1930) pp. 379-387, Section IV (p. 386).