

7Q5

by

Dr. Wilbur N. Pickering

The identification of papyrus fragment 5 from Qumran cave 7 with Mark 6:52-53 by Jesuit scholar Jose O'Callaghan in early 1972 produced a flurry of reaction.^{iv} The implications of such an identification are such that I suppose it was inevitable that much of the reaction should be partisan. But the lack of objectivity and restraint on the part of some scholars can only be construed as bad manners, at best.

O'Callaghan is an experienced papyrologist, a careful scholar, and is entitled to a respectful hearing.

To my mind, the lack of restraint and objectivity in M. Baillet's response borders on the reprehensible.^v Unfortunately Baillet's article has

been widely quoted and seems to have influenced many people, including K. Aland.^{vi} Having myself done a little work with papyri from the Ptolemaic period (third century B.C.) I should like to comment upon Baillet's response to O'Callaghan's transcription of 7Q5. The fragment contains *five* lines of text and I will discuss them in order.

Line 1: All that remains is a vestige of the bottom of one letter—that it is the bottom can be seen by measuring the average distance between the other lines. O'Callaghan reconstructs an *epsilon* and puts a dot under it to show that what is left of the ink itself is not sufficient to allow a certain identification of the letter. This is in strict accord with the norm universally followed by papyrologists. Baillet calls it a "gratuitous hypothesis" even though he himself gave *epsilon* as one of four possibilities in the *editio princeps*. In fact, the vestige looks precisely like the bottom extremity of either an *epsilon* or a *sigma*. It is important to note that the identification of the fragment is not based on this letter at all; it does not play a positive role. It could play a negative role if the vestige did not seem to fit the letter required by the reconstruction. But far from being an embarrassment to O'Callaghan's reconstruction, the vestige of ink agrees very

nicely with it. Baillet's criticism is entirely unwarranted.

Line 2: Since there is some ink left on the papyrus, O'Callaghan is at perfect liberty to reconstruct an *epsilon* provided he puts a dot under it, as he has. Baillet grants that it is possible. Again, the identification of the fragment is not based on this letter; it is only necessary that the ink traces not be against the identification.

Everybody agrees that the *tau* and *omega* are certain. Following the *omega* O'Callaghan reconstructs a *nu*, which initiative Baillet dignifies with the epithets "absurd" and "impossible" while opining that an *iota* "appears certain." Baillet's rhetoric is disappointing and I begin to doubt his competence as a papyrologist. The most sharply preserved letter on the whole fragment is the *iota* in line 3, and the vertical stroke immediately following the *omega* in line 2 differs substantially from it. What it more nearly resembles is the left-hand vertical stroke of the *nu* or the *eta* in line 4. The horizontal extremity of the following vestige could easily be the bottom extremity of the diagonal stroke of a *nu* (but not the horizontal stroke of an *eta*). In short, O'Callaghan's reconstruction of a *nu* here, with a dot under it of course, is perfectly reasonable.

As for the *eta* that completes line 2 in O'Callaghan's reconstruction, although Baillet

prefers an *alpha* he concedes that *eta* is possible, and the *editio princeps* (of which Baillet was co-editor) suggested *eta* as a possibility. O'Callaghan remarks that for him this is the most difficult piece in the puzzle--his response to Baillet's discussion of line 2 is a model of restraint and competence.^{vii}

A further consideration must be kept in mind. It is a rule of thumb among papyrologists that any proposed reconstruction of a text be accompanied by a translation (or an identification with a known piece of literature)—in other words, it must make sense. Frequently there are so many individual points that are uncertain, taken alone, that there is little point in offering a reconstruction unless a reasonable translation or identification can also be offered — it is the total picture that carries force. O'Callaghan has produced an identification, but Billet has not. Until he does, his criticisms of O'Callaghan do not deserve to be taken seriously.

Line 3: It is generally agreed the line begins with an *eta* (with a dot under it) followed by a notable space, then the letters KAIT which are quite clear. After the *tau* O'Callaghan reconstructs an *iota*, which Baillet declares to be "impossible." I fail to see how any careful scholar could use the term "impossible" so freely. The letter in question

is a close replica of the indubitable *iota* two spaces to the left, so much so that it could reasonably be written without a dot under it. But O'Callaghan does put a dot under it and is therefore above reproach.

Line 4: There is general agreement about this line. It begins with half a letter which is almost certainly a *nu*, followed by a clear *nu* and *eta*, followed by a dubious *sigma*. This is a very important line because of the unusual sequence of letters.

Line 5: There is general agreement that the first letter is a dubious *theta* and the second an indubitable *eta*. O'Callaghan calls the third letter a clear *sigma* while Baillet prefers to call it an *epsilon*. Just with the naked eye I would call it an obvious *sigma*, but O'Callaghan affirms that seen with a scope what appears to be a short crossbar is in reality two dots; how they got there or what they may signify is not known, but they evidently should not be used to interpret the letter as an *epsilon*.^{viii} The last letter is given by O'Callaghan as a possible *alpha*; Baillet rises to new heights, "Mais jamais de la vie un *alpha*, . ."ix The papyrus is too lacerated at this point to tell much from a photograph, but after studying the original with a strong lens O'Callaghan affirms that the left half of an *alpha* is clearly visible, and he invites Baillet to go see for himself.^x

In sum, I see no reason to take Baillet's criticisms seriously—on the contrary, wherever he says "impossible" we should understand "most likely." It seems to me that O'Callaghan's reconstruction is eminently reasonable, but there are several problems connected with identifying the fragment with Mark 6:52-53.

The fragment presents us with two variations from the wording found in all our printed texts. In line 3 the fragment has an indubitable *tau* where the text has a *delta*. More serious, the identification involves the omission of the words ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν between lines 3 and 4. Can anything be said in relief of these problems? Yes. Apparently the difference between a voiced and a voiceless alveolar stop (*delta* and *tau*) was not obvious to some users of Greek. At any rate, the substitution of one for the other is not infrequent in ancient Greek literature. O'Callaghan offers twenty examples from four biblical papyri of the very change in question.^{xi} What we have in 7Q5 could easily be just one more instance. The omission of three words seems more awkward, until it is remembered that it is a characteristic of the earliest N.T. MSS that they are full of eccentricities. I have already discussed this at some length above. I will cite two specific examples.

P⁶⁶ is so full of errors that I suspect it would be nearly impossible to find any five consecutive lines such that if superimposed on a fragment the size of 7Q5 the reconstruction would not present us with singular variants. P⁹ is similar to 7Q5 in that it also consists of only five lines, albeit with over three times as many letters. It has been identified with 1 John 4:11-12 by everyone. But it badly garbles a word in the first line, misspells a word in the second, omits a word and misspells another in the third and adds a nonsense word in the fourth (line 5 is all right). If only the first four or five letters of each line were preserved (instead of twelve or thirteen) I doubt that it would have been identified, or the suggestion of 1 John 4:11-12 accepted.^{xii}

The point is, our whole experience with early papyri should lead us to expect unique variants in any new one that is discovered—it would be far more surprising to discover one that had no variants. The identification of 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53 should not be rejected on such grounds.

In spite of the problems, there is evidence in favor of the identification. In the first place, the total effect of the reconstruction is impressive—to match fifteen clear or reasonably clear letters spread over four lines with a stichometry of 23, 20, 21, 21 for the respective lines is all but conclusive. The felicitous way in which the

unusual letter sequence NNHC fits into the reconstruction is a favorable argument. The sequence would presumably indicate a form related to the Greek word "generation" or a proper name like "Gennesaret."

Even more striking is the obvious space (two letters' worth—recall that words are run together in early MSS so there are usually no spaces) which occurs precisely at the boundary between verses 52 and 53. Since verse 53 begins a new paragraph the space is appropriate, so much so that to ascribe the occurrence of the space to mere chance seems scarcely credible. The combination of the space at a paragraph break and a felicitous match for NNHC I believe to be compelling. I see no reasonable way to reject O'Callaghan's identification. For further considerations and a discussion of some implications see the series of articles in the June, 1972 issue of *Eternity*.

Once 7Q5 is firmly identified with Mark 6:52-53 then the probability that 7Q4 is to be identified with 1 Tim. 3:16, 4:1,3 and 7Q8 with James 1:23-24 becomes very strong. The remaining fragments are so small that dogmatism is untenable—O'Callaghan's identifications are possible, but cannot be insisted upon. It seems to me that 7Q5, 4 and 8 tend to confirm the history of the text presented in this volume.^{xiii} That someone should have such a collection of New