ERASMUS AND THE *COMMA JOHANNEUM*

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Extrait des *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*,
1980, t. 56, fasc. 4, pp. 381-389

ERASMUS AND THE COMMA JOHANNEUM

The history of the study of the New Testament is far from being a subject of wide popular interest, even among New Testament scholars themselves[1] Yet there is one episode in this history which is surprisingly well known among both theologians and non-theologians I refer to the history of the *Comma Johanneum* (1 John 5, 7b-8a) in the editions of the New Testament edited by Erasmus It is generally known that Erasmus omitted this passage from his first edition of 1516 and his second of 1519, and only restored it in his third edition of 1522 The current version of the story is as follows Erasmus is supposed to have replied to the criticism which was directed against him because of his omission, by proposing to include it if a single Greek manuscript could be brought forward as evidence When such a manuscript was produced, he is said to have kept his word, even though from the outset he was suspicious that the manuscript had been written in order to oblige him to include the *Comma Johanneum* We cite the version of the story given by Bruce M Metzger, since his work, thanks to its obvious qualities, has become an influential handbook and is in many respects representative of the knowledge of New Testament textual history among theologians "In an unguarded moment Erasmus promised that he would insert the *Comma Johanneum*, as it is called, in future editions if a single Greek manuscript could be found that contained the passage At length such a copy was found — or was made to order! As it now appears, the Greek manuscript had probably been written in Oxford about 1520 by a Franciscan friar named Froy (or Roy), who took the disputed words from the Latin Vulgate Erasmus stood by his promise and inserted the passage in his third edition (1522), but he indicates in a lengthy footnote his suspicions that the manuscript had been prepared expressly in order to confute him"[2]

This version of events has been handed down and disseminated for more than a century and a half by the most eminent critics and students of the text of the New Testament, for example S P Tregelles (1854)[3], F J A Hort (1881)[4], F H A Scrivener (1883)[5], B F Westcott (1892)[6], A Bludau (1903)[7],

1 Revised version of a short paper given before the Dutch Studiosorum Novi Testamenti Coventus, on 19 May 1980, at Zeist (Netherlands)

2 B M METZGER, *The Text of the New Testament*, Oxford, 1968², p 101

3 S P TREGELLES, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament*, London, 1854 pp 22 and 27

4 F J A HORT, *Notes on Select Readings* in B F WESTCOTT and F J A HORT, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, Cambridge and London 1881 Appendix to vol II, p 104

5 F H A SCRIVENER, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, Cambridge, 1883³ p 187

6 B F WESTCOTT, *The Epistles of St John*, third edition 1892, reprinted with a new introduction by F F Bruce, Abingdon, Berkshire, 1966, p 207

7 A BLUDAU, *Das Comma Ioanneum (1 Io 5,7) im 16 Jahrhundert*, in *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1 (1903), pp 280-302 and 378-407, see p 280

Eb Nestle (1903)[8], C H Turner (1924)[9] and F G Kenyon (1901, 1912/1926)[10] The same tradition has also been disseminated in a number of works intended for a wider public interested in the textual transmission of the Bible or other ancient literature, for example in the works of W A Copinger (1897)[11], T H Darlow and H F Moule (1903)[12], L D Reynolds and N G Wilson (1974)[13] and J Finegan (1974/5)[14] The story of the way Erasmus is said to have honoured his promise is also handed down in the literature which refers specifically to the humanist himself, for example by P S Allen (1910)[15] and by the authors of such excellent biographies as those by Preserved Smith (1923)[16] and R H Bainton (1969)[17] How often must those who lecture in the New Testament or textual criticism at universities the world over have passed on the story of the good faith with which a deceived Erasmus kept his word, to the students in their lecture halls! The writer of these lines cannot plead innocence in this respect

Yet there are a number of difficulties in the story of Erasmus' promise and its consequences, which arouse a certain suspicion of its truthfulness

In the first place it is remarkable that there is no trace of this tradition in the works of the great experts in the history of the text of the New Testament in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries We find not a word of it in Richard Simon's *Histoire critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (1689) even though a special chapter of this work (ch xviii) is devoted to the *Comma Johanneum* John Mills too is completely silent about Erasmus' promise, although in paragraph 1138 of the Prolegomena to his *Novum Testamentum Graecum* he refers specifically to the inclusion of the *Comma Johanneum* in the third edition of Erasmus' New Testament He even adds the interesting detail that Erasmus included the *Comma Johanneum* as early as June 1521, in a separate edition of his Latin translation published by Froben at Basle This detail is important because it helps to determine the period of time within which Erasmus must have become aware of the *Comma Johanneum* in Greek He was

8 Eb NESTLE, *Vom Textus Receptus des Griechischen Neuen Testaments* (Salz und Licht 8), Barmen, 1903, p 15

9 C H TURNER, *The Early Printed Editions of the Greek Testament*, Oxford, 1924 p 23

10 F G KENYON, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* London 1901, p 229, 1912[2] (reprinted 1926), p 270

11 W A COPINGER, *The Bible and its Transmission*, London 1897 p 140

12 T H DARLOW and H F MOULE, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of Holy Scripture*, vol II *Polyglots and Languages other than English*, London, 1903 reprinted New York, 1963, p 579

13 L D REYNOLDS and N G WILSON, *Scribes and Scholars*, Oxford, 1974[2] p 144

14 J FINEGAN, *Encountering New Testament Manuscripts*, Grand Rapids, 1974, London, 1975, p 57

15 P S ALLEN (ed), *Opus Epistolarum Des Erasmi Roterodami*, II Oxford 1910, p 165 The story is also told by J -Cl MARGOLIN, *Laski, lecteur et annotateur du 'Nouveau Testament d'Érasme*, in J COPPENS (ed), *Scrinium Erasmianum* 2 vols, Leiden, 1969, I, pp 93-128, see p 104, n 46

16 Preserved SMITH, *Erasmus, A Study of his Life, Ideals, and Place in History*, New York 1923, pp 165-166

17 R H BAINTON, *Erasmus of Christendom*, New York, 1969, pp 169-170, the same author, *The Bible in the Reformation*, in S L GREENSLADE (ed), *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, III, Cambridge, 1963, pp 1-37, see p 10

still unaware of it in May 1520 when he wrote his apologia *Liber tertius* against Edward Lee Thus, he must have received evidence of the passage between May 1520 and June 1521 It is not known who brought it to his attention

Not only do Simon and Mills make no reference to Erasmus' promise, J Clericus does not mention it, either in his *Ars Critica* (1696, often reprinted) or his commentary on 1 John 5,7 (1714[2]) Nor do we find it in J J Wettstein (1751/2)[18], J le Long - C F Boerner — A G Masch (1788/90)[19], J D Michaelis (1788)[20], G W Meyer (1802/9)[21], J Townley (the author of *Biblical Anecdotes*, 1821)[22] or in T F Dibdin (1827)[23] The earliest reference to Erasmus' promise of which I am aware is that of T H Horne in 1818[24] It remains unclear from which source Horne derived his information He was too scrupulous a critic to raise any suspicion that he was the inventor of the whole story Moreover, Horne himself published a list of more than fifty volumes, pamphlets or critical notices on the *Comma Johanneum* which had appeared up to his time[25] He may thus very well have derived the details from a predecessor but it is scarcely feasible to go through all his material again

A second difficulty is that in the retelling of the story of Erasmus' supposed promise, there are striking variations Some authors, such as Horne, Darlow and Moule, Kenyon and Turner, relate that Erasmus made this promise in the controversy with his Spanish opponent Jacobus Lopis Stunica Others, among them Bludau and Bainton, say that the promise was given to his English assailant Edward Lee Yet others write, without making a clear distinction, that Erasmus gave his promise in reaction to the criticisms of both Lee and Stunica, while others again leave it indeterminate, to whom the promise was directed

Now it is completely impossible that Erasmus could have given his pledge to Stunica, for he did not address himself to the Spaniard until his *Apologia respondens ad ea quae in Nouo Testamento taxauerat Iacobus Lopis Stunica*, of September 1521[26] In this apologia he explains, in dealing with 1 John 5, that he had received a transcript of the *Comma Johanneum*, from a Codex Britannicus, and had inserted it into the text of 1 John, which was shortly to

18 J J WETSTENIUS, *Novum Testamentum Graecum*, 2 vols, Amsterdam 1751/2

19 Jac LE LONG, C F BOERNER, A G MASCH, *Bibliotheca Sacra* Halle, 1778/90

20 Johann David MICHALLIS, *Einleitung in die gottlichen Schriften des Neuen Bundes*, Gottingen, 1788[4]

21 G W MEYER, *Geschichte der Schrifterklarung*, Gottingen, 1802/9

22 James TOWNLEY, *Illustrations of Biblical Literature*, exhibiting the History and Fate of the Sacred Writings from the Earliest Period to the Present Century , London, vol I-II, 1821

23 T F DIBDIN *An Introduction to the Knowledge of Rare and Valuable Editions* London, vol I, 1827

24 T H HORNE, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scripture*, vol II, Part II Appendix, London, 1818, p 133

25 S P TREGELLES, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, = Vol IV of T H HORNE, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures*, London, 1856[10], pp 384 388

26 Des ERASMUS, *Opera Omnia* (ed J CLERICUS, tom IX), Leiden, 1706, col 283-356 This apology figures also among the 'tractatus" included in the final volumes of the *Critici Sacri* (ed J PEARSON et al), London, 1660 Frankfurt, 1695, Amsterdam, 1698

appear in a new impression of his *Novum Testamentum* (1522[3]) Therefore, Erasmus can hardly have given Stunica any promise containing the condition 'if a single Greek manuscript with the *Comma Johanneum* is found"

Nor did Erasmus give such a promise to Lee at least not in any of the surviving correspondence[27] or apologias[28] in which the Rotterdammer addressed Lee

A third problem is that the famous promise of Erasmus is not to be found anywhere else in his oeuvre It is thus not surprising that, with one exception, none of the authors known to me who relate the story, refer to a specific passage in Erasmus or in other sixteenth-century literature, where such a pledge is to be found The only exception is Bainton, who himself seems to have become suspicious and eventually includes a reference to a passage which is by no means a promise, as will be clear from what follows[29]

It is naturally exceptionally difficult, if not impossible in principle to furnish conclusive proof that someone did *not* say something Yet in my opinion there is sufficient reason to assume that Erasmus, when he chose to insert the *Comma Johanneum*, did not feel himself constrained by any promise He explained on several occasions what had led him to include this passage in his third edition He did so 'so that no one would have occasion to criticise me out of malice", *ne cui sit causa calumniandi*[30] or as he expressed it in his *Annotationes* on 1 John 5,7 *ne cui sit ansa calumniandi*[31] It should be borne in mind that Lee had written that the omission of the *Comma Johanneum* brought with it the danger of a new revival of Arianism This was of course a very serious insinuation Erasmus had reason to fear that if he were suspected of heretical sympathies, his *Novum Testamentum* would miss its exalted goal This *Novum Testamentum* was not in the first place intended as an edition of the Greek New Testament, as is incorrectly assumed It was, in Erasmus' intention, in the first place a new, modern and readable translation of the New Testament into Latin The function of the Greek text was secondary it was to show that Erasmus' new version rested on a firm foundation and that it was not just a reckless search for novelty By his new translation Erasmus hoped to make the words of Christ and the apostles accessible to a wide circle in clear and easily understood prose He wished to fill the world with the *philosophia Christi*, the simple pious, and practical Christianity which would best serve the world To achieve this, as many people as possible had to read the New Testament But not the Vulgate which was full of all sorts of obscurities A new, more readable and clearer translation was necessary, and that was Erasmus' *Novum*

27 ALLEN *Opus Epistolarum* nos 765 and 998

28 *Apologia nihil habens nasi quae respondet duabus mucciuis Eduardi Lei* Antwerp 1520 not included in any edition of Erasmus collected works but re edited in W K FERGUSON (ed) *Erasmi Opuscula* The Hague 1933 *Responsio ad Annotationes Ed Lei* I Antwerp April 1520 (in Clericus edition tom IX col 123-200) II Antwerp May 1520 (Clericus *ibid* 199 284)

29 Bainton s reference is to the *Responsio ad Annotationes Eduardi Lei in Erasmum nouas* in Erasmus *Liber Tertius E R quo respondet reliquis annotationibus Ed Lei* Antwerp May 1520 in Clericus edition this *Liber Tertius* occurs as *Liber alter quo respondet Lei* tom IX col 199 284, see col 275 B C Cf n 33 below

30 Erasmus first apology against Stunica ed Clericus tom IX col 353 E

31 *Annotationes in N T* ed Clericus tom VI col 1080 D

Instrumentum from 1519 entitled *Novum Testamentum* The goal of Erasmus undertaking to imbue all Europe with a clear and simple gospel threatened to fail if Erasmus himself were tinged with any suspicion of unorthodoxy For the sake of his ideal Erasmus chose to avoid any occasion for slander rather than persisting in philological accuracy and thus condemning himself to impotence That was the reason why Erasmus included the *Comma Johanneum* even though he remained convinced that it did not belong to the original text of 1 John [32]

The real reason which induced Erasmus to include the *Comma Johanneum* was thus clearly his care for his good name and for the success of his *Novum Testamentum* How then did the famous story arise of his promise and the way in which he honoured it? It is likely that it grew out of a misinterpretation of a passage in his *Responsio ad Annotationes Eduardi Lei* of May 1520 [33] Lee was a truly quarrelsome individual a myopically conservative theologian later archbishop of York who troubled and pestered Erasmus for several years with his criticisms which were unusually mediocre of the *Novum Instrumentum* [34] Lee was one of several critics who had remarked on the absence of the *Comma Johanneum* in the first two editions In 1520 Erasmus felt himself obliged to make a detailed reply to Lee In his lengthy discussion of 1 John 5 7 Erasmus wrote as follows Si mihi contigisset unum exemplar in quo fuisset quod nos legimus nimirum illinc adiecissem quod in caeteris aberat Id quia non contigit quod solum licuit feci indicaui quid in Graecis codicibus minus esset If a single manuscript had come into my hands in which stood what we read (sc in the Latin Vulgate) then I would certainly have used it to fill in what was missing in the other manuscripts I had Because that did not happen I have taken the only course which was permissible that is I have indicated (sc in the *Annotationes*) what was missing from the Greek manuscripts

This is the passage which Bainton regarded as containing the promise which Erasmus is supposed to have redeemed later It is to Bainton's credit that he at least tried to find the promise somewhere in Erasmus works no other author so far as I am aware took this trouble Still no such promise can be read into the passage cited It is a retrospective report of what Erasmus had done in 1516 and 1519 If he had had a Greek manuscript with the *Comma Johanneum* then he would have included the *Comma* But he had not found a single such manuscript and consequently he omitted the *Comma Johanneum* This is not a promise but a justification after the event of what had happened cast in the unfulfilled conditional

It is not impossible that another passage in Erasmus apologia against Lee played a part and gave reason for a misunderstanding It was with particular reference to Erasmus omission of the *Comma Johanneum* that Lee had charged

32 For a correct assessment of Erasmus insertion of the *Comma Johanneum* in the third edition of his *Novum Testamentum* see e g Bo REICKE *Erasmus und die neutestamentliche Textgeschichte* in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 22 (1966) 254 265 (p 265 In der 3 Auflage 1522 wurde das Komma Johanneum aus taktischen Grunden wieder eingefugt) and Ed RIGGENBACH *Das Comma Johanneum* (Beitrage zur Forderung christlicher Theologie 31 4) Gutersloh 1928 p 6 (Die Streitigkeiten veranlassten indes den *um seinen Ruf besorgten* Humanisten in der dritten Ausgabe von 1522 das C J aufzunehmen)

33 Ed Clericus tom IX col 275 B C the passage referred to by R H BAINTON *Erasmus of Christendom* pp 169 170 and 354 note 21 Cf n 29 above

him with indolence ("supinitas") According to Lee, Erasmus might very well have had, by some chance, a manuscript which gave an abbreviated text of 1 John 5,7-8, but he ought not to have published, on two occasions, the mutilated text of this manuscript, without consulting other manuscripts Lee here suggests that Erasmus, if he had looked at other codices, would certainly have found a copy which contained the *Comma Johanneum*, but that he had been remiss in not doing so In his answer to this charge Erasmus explains that he consulted not just one but many manuscripts in England, Brabant and Basle, none of which contained the *Comma Johanneum* He continues "Quae est ista tanta supinitas (.) si non consului codices quorum mihi non potuit esse copia? Certe quot potui congessi Proferat Leus codicem Graecum, qui scriptum habeat, quod editio mea non habet, et doceat eius codicis mihi fuisse copiam, ac postea supinitatem mihi impingat " (Clericus, IX, 277A-B) "What sort of indolence is that, if I did not consult the manuscripts which I could not manage to have? At least, I collected as many as I could Let Lee produce a Greek manuscript in which is written the words lacking in my edition, and let him prove that I had access to this manuscript, and then let him accuse me of indolence"

Nor can this passage be interpreted as a promise by Erasmus to include the *Comma Johanneum* if it is shown to him in a single Greek manuscript Erasmus is here defending himself against the accusation of having deliberately neglected to search for Greek manuscripts in which the *Comma Johanneum* occurs The accusation of *supinitas* was thus, according to Erasmus, premature Let Lee first prove that Erasmus neglected a manuscript containing the *Comma Johanneum* If Lee can prove this negligence, with the evidence, then and only then will Erasmus accept Lee's accusation of *supinitas* Erasmus does not say that if Lee can prove this negligence, he will include the *Comma Johanneum* but only that in such a case, Lee may accuse him of *supinitas* Erasmus is not thinking of the possibility that he would have to insert the *Comma Johanneum*, for he regarded it as completely out of the question that the *Comma* should turn up in any Greek manuscript The only point he is making is let Lee first prove my *supinitas*, and then he can accuse me of it The passage therefore does not contain any promise, but an exhortation to prove the truth of an accusation before making it

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Another misunderstanding deserves to be corrected As we showed above, Erasmus received a Greek text of the *Comma Johanneum* at some time between May 1520 and June 1521 This text had been copied from a Codex Britannicus also named, after a later owner, Codex Montfortianus, and now at Trinity College, Dublin (A 4 21), and designated as minuscule Gregory 61 It is as good as certain, as J R Harris demonstrated, that this manuscript was produced to order[34] Many writers on this subject, for example Tregelles, Kenyon and Metzger, assert that Erasmus himself suspected at the time that the Codex Britannicus had been produced to oblige him to include the *Comma Johanneum*

34 J Rendel HARRIS, *The Origin of the Leicester Codex of the New Testament*, London, 1887, pp 46-53

This is again a version of events which does not seem to be based on any passage in Erasmus' printed works or letters

It is true that Erasmus assumed that the Codex Britannicus was "recens"[35] But so far as I am aware, his writings do not contain any expression from which it would appear that he suspected that the Codex Britannicus had been written especially to induce him to include the *Comma Johanneum*

The confusion presumably arose from a misunderstanding of a remark which Erasmus made in his first apologia against Stunica, and repeated in his *Annotationes* on 1 John 5 After declaring that now that the *Comma Johanneum* had been brought to his attention, in Greek, in a Codex Britannicus, he would include it on the basis of that manuscript, he wrote "Quamquam et hunc (sc codicem) suspicor ad Latinorum codices fuisse castigatum"[36] "Although I suspect this manuscript, too, to have been revised after the manuscripts of the Latin world"

Erasmus does not mean by this that the Codex Britannicus was interpolated to invalidate his own reading He means that the Codex, like many other manuscripts, contained a text which had been revised after, and adapted to, the Vulgate This was one of Erasmus' stock theories, to which he repeatedly referred in evaluating Greek manuscripts of the New Testament He regarded manuscripts which deviated from the Byzantine text known to him, and showed parallels with the Vulgate, as having been influenced by the Vulgate[37] Erasmus believed that the Ecumenical Council of Ferrara and Florence (1438-45), whose chief object had been the reunion of the Latin and Greek churches, had decided in favour of adapting the Greek manuscripts to the Vulgate In 1527 he commented on the adaptation of Greek manuscripts to the Latin as follows "Hic obiter illud incidit admonendum, esse Graecorum quosdam Noui Testamenti codices ad Latinorum exemplaria emendatos Id factum est, in foedere Graecorum cum Romana Ecclesia quod foedus testatur Bulla quae dicitur *aurea* Visum est enim et hoc ad firmandam concordiam pertinere Et nos olim in huiusmodi codicem incidimus et talis adhuc dicitur adservari in Bibliotheca Pontificia ( ) mainsculis descriptus literis"[38] "It should be pointed out here in passing, that certain Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been corrected in agreement with those of the Latin Christians This was done at the time of the reunion of the Greeks and the Roman church This union was confirmed in writing in the so-called Golden Bull It was thought that this (sc the adaptation of the Greek biblical manuscripts to the Latin) would contribute to the strengthening of unity We too once came across a manuscript of this

35 Ep 1877, ALLEN, *Opus Epistolarum*, VII, p 177, l 294, and *Aduersos monachos quosdam Hispanos*, ed Clericus, tom IX, col 1031 F

36 Ed Clericus, tom IX, col 353 E Cf *Annotationes in N T*, ed Clericus, tom VI, col 1080 D "Tametsi suspicor codicem illum ad nostros esse correctum"

37 Ep 1877, Allen, VII, p 177, ll 296-298, and often in the apologies, see Clericus' edition, tom IX, col 333 B, 349 F, 351 C, 353 E, 1031 F - 1032 A See also Epp 2905 and 2938, Allen, X, pp 355/6 and 395 On the whole matter A BLUDAU, *Der Beginn der Controverse uber die Aechtheit des* Comma Johanneum *(1 Joh* 5,7-8) im 16 Jhdt, in *Der Katholik*, 3rd series, 26 (1902), pp 25-51 and 151-175, and Fr DELITZSCH, *Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Polyglottenbibel des Cardinals Ximenes*, Leipzig, 1871, pp 12-14

38 *Contra morosos quosdam ac indoctos*, in ed Clericus, tom VI, fol ***1r

nature[39], and it is said that such a manuscript is still preserved in the papal library ( ) written in majuscule characters"

The manuscript to which Erasmus refers at the end of this passage is the Codex Vaticanus *par excellence*, now Gr 1209, designated as B[40] Erasmus regarded the text of this codex as influenced by the Vulgate and therefore inferior For the same reasons he had earlier, in 1515/6, also excluded Gregory I as an inferior manuscript, from the constitution of the Greek text of his own *Novum Instrumentum*[41] although this manuscript is now generally regarded as more reliable than the codices which Erasmus preferred and made use of Erasmus passed the same verdict on the Codex Rhodiensis (minuscule Wettstein Paul 50 = Apostolos 52) from which Stunica cited readings in his polemic against Erasmus[42]

Erasmus' view, according to which Greek manuscripts had been adapted to Latin, was indeed applicable to the Codex Britannicus the *Comma Johanneum* was no more than a retroversion of the Vulgate But for most other manuscripts, it was no more than an *idee fixe* The Bulla aurea of the Council of Ferrara and Florence says nothing at all of any decision to revise Greek biblical manuscripts in accordance with the Vulgate[43] In 1534 Erasmus admitted that he had not read the bull himself, but only knew its content from hearsay[44] He maintained, however, that even if the bull did not say anything about the intended latinisation of Greek manuscripts, this latinisation had in fact been carried out in some cases[45]

However erroneous Erasmus' theory of the latinisation of Greek manuscripts may be in general, from an historical viewpoint it has played an important role When J J Wettstein was working on his great edition of the New Testament which eventually appeared in 1751/2 he became increasingly convinced that the text of most of the old Greek codices was influenced by the old Latin translation He subscribed to Erasmus' evaluation of codex B and minuscule 1, but he also extended the theory to the majority of the old codices, among others, A, B, C, D^e, D^p, F^p, K^e, L^e, min 1, 3 etc He regarded all these manuscripts as unusable for the constitution of the text of the New Testament Wettstein's title to fame was formed by his excellent presentation of the copious text-critical material which he had collected, as well as by his commentary, but not by his insight into the history of the text

39 Minuscule Gregory 1 on which see below

40 See Allen, X, p 355, ll 37 ss

41 For Erasmus own account of how he dealt with min 1 see Clericus, tom IX, col 1049 D Joannes Reuchlinus suppeditarat Codicem Noui Testamenti, bellum verius quam emendatum ( ) iussi ne quid ad illum corrigerent qui videretur ad vulgatam Latinorum ac recentem lectionem emendatus Cf Ep 2951 Allen, XI, p 14 ll 55 57 Vidi et ipse codicem euangeliorum ex bibliotheca Capnionis qui per omnia consentiebat nostrae editioni Latinae"

42 See on this codex, which seems to be lost, TREGELLES, *An Account*, pp 5 6, 11-18, DELITZSCH, *Entstehungsgeschichte*, pp 30 32 39-41, J H BENTLEY *New Light on the Editing of the Complutensian New Testament* in *Bibliotheque d humanisme et Renaissance* 42 (1980), pp 145 156, esp 146

43 Allen, X, p 355, ll 40/1 note

44 Allen, XI, p 14, ll 52/5

45 *Ibid*, ll 55/7 For the history of the theory according to which Greek manuscripts of the New Testament have been altered from the Latin, see S P Tregelles in volume IV of T H HORNE, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* tenth edition London, 1856, pp 107-116

It is true that Erasmus repeatedly disqualified the Codex Vaticanus as a latinising textual witness[46] Yet it should be pointed out nonetheless, that Erasmus was also the first scholar who appealed to the Codex Vaticanus for critical purposes On 18 June 1521 Paul Bombasius, the secretary of the influential cardinal Lorenzo Pucci at Rome, sent a letter to Erasmus containing a copy of 1 John 4,1-3 and 5,7-11 from the Codex Vaticanus[47] In his *Annotationes* on 1 John 5,7 Erasmus later stated that the *Comma Johanneum* was missing from the Codex Vaticanus, according to a transcript which Bombasius had made at his, Erasmus', request (*meo rogatu*)[48] It appears from this that Erasmus himself had asked Bombasius to verify the passage in question in the Codex Vaticanus It is with Erasmus that the Codex Vaticanus began to play a role in the textual criticism of the New Testament[49]. Again, Erasmus also suspected the Codex Britannicus of having undergone the influence of the Vulgate It cannot, however, be shown from Erasmus' writings, that he ever considered the Codex Britannicus as a product specially prepared to induce him to include the *Comma Johanneum*

Conclusions

(1) The current view that Erasmus promised to insert the *Comma Johanneum* if it could be shown to him in a single Greek manuscript, has no foundation in Erasmus' works Consequently it is highly improbable that he included the disputed passage because he considered himself bound by any such promise

(2) It cannot be shown from Erasmus' works that he suspected the Codex Britannicus (min 61) of being written with a view to force him to include the *Comma Johanneum*

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46 See the passage referred to in footnote 38 above, and Allen, X, p 355, ll 37-46

47 Allen, IV, p 530.

48 Ed Clericus, tom VI, col 1080 E

49 Carlo M MARTINI, *Il problema della recensionalità del codice B* (Analecta Biblica 26), Roma 1966, pp 8-9, where Erasmus' role in the history of the Codex Vaticanus is slightly underestimated