

Who Is "Full of Grace and Truth" in the W^s Text of John 1:14?

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Authorities disagree in their readings of "full" in the Codex Washingtonianus text of John 1:14. The Alands, Swanson, and I opt for πληρη, whereas Sanders and Goodspeed read πληρις. If the former reading is correct, then the referent for the accusative masculine-singular adjective πληρη is still the Word, or Jesus Christ. If πληρις is the correct reading, however, then the crucial question is whether πληρις is merely an itacism for πλήρης- or whether it is the same word as the plural adjective πλήρεις. If πληρις is plural, then the substitute scribe of W^s as well as the scribe of Codex Seidelianus and others understood that it is we rather than the Word who are "full of grace and truth."

Key Words: Freer Gospels, Codex Washingtonianus, supplemental quire, John 1:14, full of grace and truth, itacisms of πλήρης and πλήρεις

THE FREER GOSPELS

The manuscript of the Freer Gospels (Codex Washingtonianus or W or 032) includes the four canonical Gospels in the order Matthew, John, Luke, Mark. The first quire of the Gospel of John was apparently lost in antiquity and was replaced by a later quire, which dates perhaps to the seventh or eighth century. This substitute quire is variously designated W^s, W^{sup}, or W^{supp} in the literature, and its eight leaves or sixteen pages cover from John 1:1 to John 5:11a.

The ink on the first and last pages of the first quire of the Gospel of John is considerably lighter than on the inside pages. These outer pages of the quire appear to have been exposed to some bleaching environment such as direct sunlight before they were bound with the remainder of the Freer Gospels manuscript. These two pages are

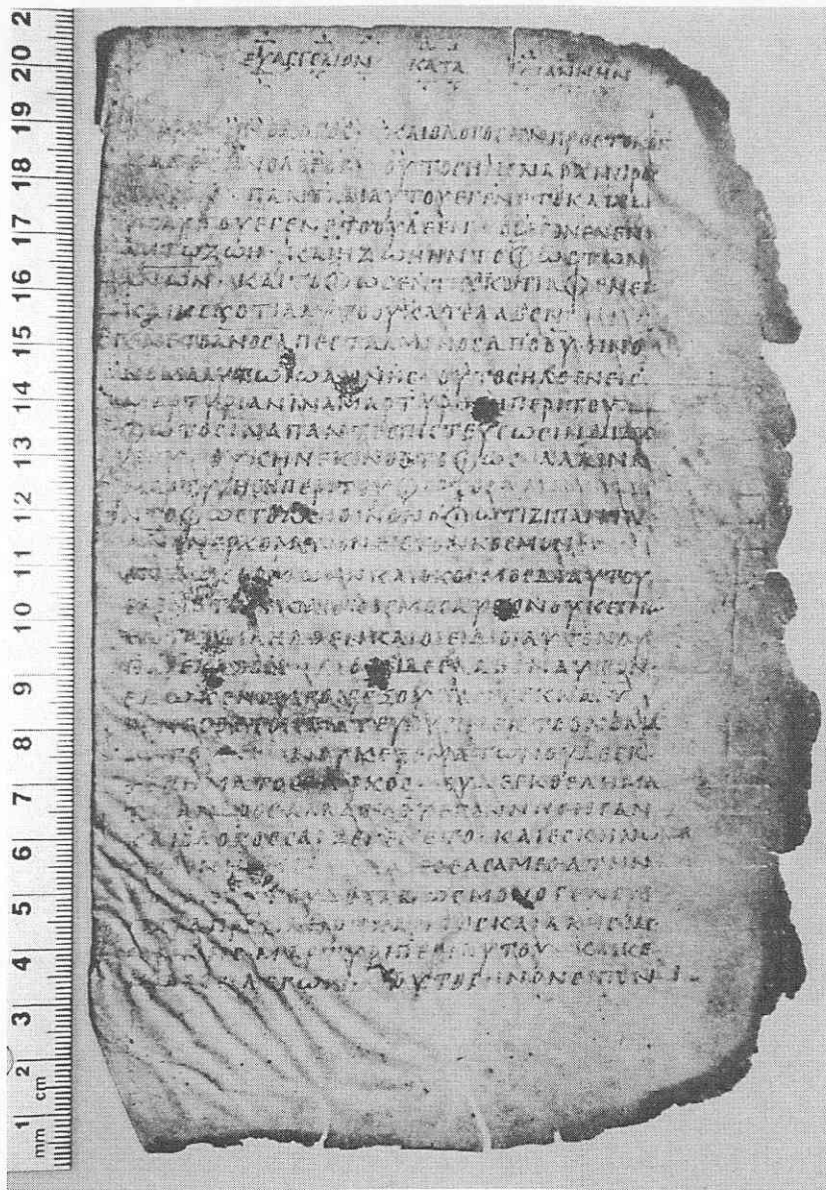


FIG. 1. W^s p. 113, John 1:1–15a. Photo courtesy of J. Bruce Prior.

therefore especially difficult to read. Fig. 1, reproduced from the 1912 Sanders facsimile,¹ shows the first page of the Gospel of John, which is p. 113 in the manuscript.

1. Henry A. Sanders (ed.), *Facsimile of the Washington Manuscript of the Four Gospels in the Freer Collection* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1912) 113.

THE STANDARD TEXT OF JOHN 1:14

The standard text of the "full of grace and truth" passage in John 1:14, agreed on by the Textus Receptus, Tischendorf, Merk, the Greek New Testament, Nestle-Aland, and the Byzantine-Majority School,² is:

ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας

The πλήρης reading is so incontrovertible to Scrivener's edition of the Textus Receptus and to the editors of the *Greek New Testament* and Nestle-Aland that they mention no variants in their apparati. *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*³ mentions a πληρη variant for D and W^s. Merk notes the presence of πληρη in both D and 1321. Tischendorf cites a πληρη variant in the eleventh-century father Theophylactus of Constantinople.⁴

TWO READINGS OF THE FREER GOSPELS TEXT OF JOHN 1:14

There are two possible readings of "full" in the Freer Gospels text of John 1:14. The author⁵ and *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*⁶ read line 28 of p. 113, the third line up from the bottom of the page, as follows:

παρὰ πρὸς πληρη χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας

Reuben J. Swanson⁷ does not mention W for any variant in this case, but Dr. Swanson has recently reexamined a microfilm of *Codex Washingtonianus*, and he now opts for a πλήρη reading for W as well as D.

2. F. H. A. Scrivener, *Ἡ ΚΑΙΝῆ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ: Novum Testamentum* (4th ed.; London: Bell, 1906) 217-18; Constantinus Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (8th ed.; Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869) 1. 744; Augustinus Merk and Joseph O'Callaghan, *Novum Testamentum Graece et Latine: Apparatu Critico Instruct Edidit* (11th ed.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1992) 307; Barbara Aland et al., *The Greek New Testament* (4th rev. ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft and United Bible Societies, 1993) 313-14; Barbara Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993) 247. This work is commonly designated "Nestle-Aland 27th edition"; Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The New Testament in the Original Greek according to the Byzantine/Majority Textform* (Atlanta: The Original Word, 1991) 171; and Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (2d ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 290.

3. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997) 2.

4. Constantinus Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 3.1227.

5. J. Bruce Prior, *The Freer Gospels: Codex Washingtonianus Facsimile and Transcription* (forthcoming) 226.

6. Aland and Aland, *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 2.

7. Reuben J. Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines against Codex Vaticanus—John* (Pasadena: William Carey International University Press, 1995) 7.

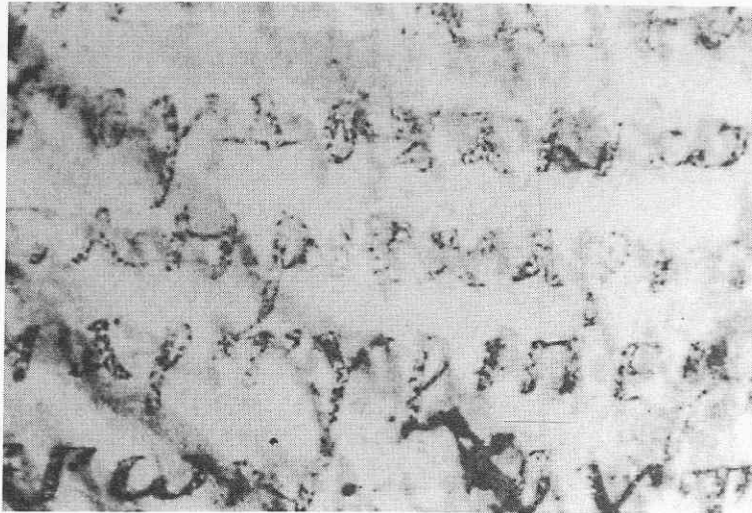


FIG. 2. W^s p. 113, Magnified Detail. Photo courtesy of Darcy Kehler.

On the other hand, the early collators of the Freer Gospels, Henry A. Sanders⁸ and Edgar J. Goodspeed,⁹ both decided that the line should read:

παρα πρς πληρις χαριτος και αληθιας

The left vertical stroke could be either ι or the left leg of Η. The right vertical stroke could be part of a C, which the W^s scribe normally wrote quite narrow, or it could be the right leg of Η. This right vertical stroke is malformed, perhaps including a remnant of the right chevron of a K, which the W^s scribe corrected. The deciding factor is whether a horizontal midstroke for Η is present. I see an extremely faint horizontal stroke under extra light and magnification in the 1912 facsimile¹⁰ (see Fig. 2). This is a very close call, however. Sanders, who had access to the original manuscript, and Goodspeed, who may or may not have had similar access, may well be correct with their πληρις reading.

Guided by *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, Tischendorf, Merk, and Swanson, I list the readings of various manuscripts as follows:

8. Henry A. Sanders, *The New Testament Manuscripts in the Freer Collection* (2d ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1918) 166.

9. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The Freer Gospels* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914) 21.

10. Sanders (ed.), *Facsimile of the Washington Manuscript*, 113.

πληρης P⁷⁵ B* BC K et al.

πληρη D (perhaps Ws, if *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* and I are correct) 1321

πληρις H 2* 579 1071 (perhaps W^s, if Sanders and Goodspeed are correct)

Note that there are apparently no manuscripts that read πλήρεις.

THE INTERPRETATION QUANDARY

If the reading of *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* and my reading are accurate, and the text reads πληρη, then the change is only from nominative to accusative. Both forms are still masculine singular, and the referent is still the Word, or Jesus Christ. In this case there is no dilemma for interpreters.

If Sanders and Goodspeed are correct, and the text reads πληρις, then interpreters have a problem. Is πληρη an itacism for πλήρης or for πλήρεις? If it is the same word as πλήρης, then it is the Word or Jesus Christ who is "full of grace and truth." If, however, πληρις is another spelling of πλήρεις, then the scribes of manuscripts W^s, H^c (013), 2*, 579, and 1071 must have understood that we are the ones who are "full of grace and truth." In order to reach a conclusion, we must examine the NT text tradition beyond John 1:14. According to Schmoller and Köster¹¹, the plural adjective πλήρεις appears in Matt 14:20; 15:37; Mark 8:19; Acts 6:3; 19:28. In Acts 19:28 πλήρεις is nominative masculine. In Matt 14:20; Mark 8:19; and Acts 6:3, πλήρεις is accusative masculine. In Matt 15:37 πλήρεις is accusative feminine.

In order to study the itacisms of πληρις for πλήρεις, we can consult Swanson.¹² Manuscripts, including W, that read πληρις are not listed here. Here are the data for other variants:

πληρις *as nominative masculine plural*:

Acts 19:28 **Σ** 1837

[variant πληρης A E L 049 056 33 618 1243 1245 2344]

πληρις; *as accusative feminine plural*:

Matt 15:37 **Σ** E^c F H 579

[variant πληρης E* G P 2* 1424]

πληρις *as accusative masculine plural*:

Matt 14:20 F L 21

[variant πληρης E G M 2 28 157 1424]

11. Alfred Schmoller and Beate Köster, *Handkonkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament* (8th ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990) 414.

12. Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Acts* (1998) 90, 342; idem, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Matthew* (1995) 249, 271; Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Mark* (1995) 125.

Mark 8:19 **Σ** E H Δ 1071

[variant πληρης A F M]

Acts 6:3 049

[variant πληρης P⁷⁴ A E H P 056 927 1243 1505 1646]

[variant ῥηρης 33]

In each case there are, indeed, manuscripts that read πληρις, but the nominative masculine-singular adjective πληρης also appears in a collection of manuscripts for each of these verses, so we cannot be certain whether πληρις is singular, coinciding with πλήρης in the NT textual tradition, or plural, coinciding with πλήρεις.

INTERPRETATION UNCERTAIN

On the basis of the evidence available so far, therefore, we cannot tell for certain whether the scribe of Codex Seidelianus and others (as well as the one who wrote W^s, if Sanders and Goodspeed are correct) understood that we, rather than the Word or Jesus Christ, are "full of grace and truth."