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Mathētēs with a Possessive in the New Testament

This article originally formed part of a paper delivered to the Synoptic Problem seminar at the 1978 meeting of Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas chaired by Professor Bo Reicke.

C. H. Turner in his Notes on Marcan Usage stated that *hoi mathētaí* qualified by *autoû* would be the normal way of describing Jesus' disciples at a time when John, the Pharisees and others had disciples.¹ See Mark ii. 18 (3 times); John iii. 25; Luke v. 33; vii. 18, 19; Matt. ix. 14; xi. 2; xxii. 16. Only after "his disciples" most frequently came to mean Jesus' own followers could the possessive be omitted. Scribes of the New Testament consequently felt able to omit what they considered to be an otiose pronoun in such contexts and therefore tended to eliminate many such pronouns from the New Testament manuscripts they were copying. This was especially so in the case of post-positional possessives which were not considered desirable by stylistically-conscious scribes.

This two-fold motive for removing the post-positional possessive after *mathētēs* accounts for many textual variants in our New Testament manuscripts whenever the word *mathētēs* appears. It also encourages us to accept the originality of the possessive whenever it occurs as a variant. C. H. Turner's statistics on this matter need revising. He lists 32 places in Mark out of 40 where *mathētēs* is qualified by *autoû*. Of the remaining eight Turner claims that *Jesus'* disciples are obviously being referred to because of the context. Had he consulted the apparatus criticus he would in fact have discovered that seven of the eight unqualified occurrences in fact have variant readings adding *autoû* in several manuscripts. These are:

Mark

- vi. 41– P⁴⁵ ADW et al.
- viii. 1– ABW theta et al.
- ix. 14– theta, fam. 13 et al.
- x. 10– ADW gamma et al.
- x. 13– D theta 565 700 pc.
- x. 24– D delta theta 565 pc.
- xiv. 16– C ADW theta et al.

Aland's Synopsis includes these variants in the apparatus with the strange exception of the variant reading at ix. 14.² That variant is included in von Soden's and Legg's apparatuses. In all of these *autoû* should be printed as original. At vi. 41 the UBS text (3rd ed.) followed by Aland's Synopsis (9th ed.) should have the brackets removed.³ If we amend our printed texts in this way then the only place in which Mark leaves *mathētēs* unqualified by *autoû* is iv. 34, but here it is qualified by *ídios*: *autoû* is not found in any manuscript nor is it expected. Whenever variants remove the *autoû* in the 32 occurrences in our printed editions these should be considered as secondary. That it is natural for Mark to write *mathētaí autoû* may be seen in the following places where it is peculiar to this gospel: Mark iii. 7, 9; v. 31; vi. 1; vii. 2; viii. 10, 33; x. 46; xi. 14; xii. 43; xiv. 13. There are no variants here. Mark uses other possessives to describe Jesus' disciples in accordance with the needs of the context. *Sou* is found at ii. 18; vii. 5; ix. 18; *mou* at xiv. 14. All these are firm except that some manuscripts have avoided the postpositional possessive at ii. 18 by replacing it with the possessive adjective (this reading appears in the printed editions), and some manuscripts at xiv. 14 omit *mou*.

¹ C. H. Turner, Notes on Marcan Usage: Journ. Theol. St. 26 (1925), p. 235 f.

² K. Aland, Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum, 9th ed., United Bible Societies (1975).

³ This variant reading is discussed by B. M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (1971).

C. H. Turner's statements also need amending for Matthew's gospel. According to Turner, Matthew writes *hoi mathētai autoû* consistently up to xiii.10. Thereafter he says *hoi mathētai* in the nominative is often found without *autoû*. In fact had Turner looked at his apparatus here too he would have found these apparent exceptions had the variant reading adding *autoû*. Again the longer text should be accepted as original. Matthew like Mark preferred qualifying *mathētai*.⁴ The variant reading adding *autoû* is printed in the apparatus to Aland's Synopsis⁹ unless otherwise stated, and concerns the following:

Matthew

- viii. 21* – C W 0250 et al.
- xiii. 10 – C pc
- xiv. 15 – C D W et al.
- xiv. 19a – theta 047 892 fam. 13
- xiv. 22 – BEF theta pi et al.
- xiv. 26* – E (according to Legg) *kai idóntes autòn hoi mathētai autoû*
- xv. 12* – C W pl.
- xv. 33 – C D W theta pm
- xv. 36a – C W pm
- xvi. 5* – EFGH most mins.
- xvi. 20* – W theta most mins.
- xvii. 6* – 659 1402 2145 (Apparatus in von Soden)
- xvii. 10* – BCD most mins.
- xvii. 13* – 039 ff sy (s.c.) (apparatus in von Soden)
- xix. 10* – P²⁵ C D W 078 et al.
- xix. 13 – (apparatus in von Soden gives only versional evidence; Legg adds 59)
- xix. 25* – C³ W X most mins.
- xx. 17 – 13 28c 892^{mg} 1010 1216
- xxi. 1 – 245 pc (also v.l. genitive plural + *autoû* – most mins.)
- xxi. 6* – (only versional evidence according to Legg)
- xxi. 20* – 238 pc
- xxiv. 3* – C W delta 157 1241 1424 et al.
- xxvi. 8* – AW 0133 0255 most mins.
- xxvi. 19 – (apparatus in von Soden gives only versional evidence; cf. xix. 13)
- xxvi. 26* – (plerique according to von Soden; why is this absent from Syn⁹ apparatus?)
- xxvi. 36 – aleph A C D W et al.
- xxvi. 40 – D^{corr.} 047 pc
- xxvi. 45* – D W pm
- xxvi. 56* – B pc (*autoû* appears in WH^{mg})

An asterisk indicates *mathētēs* has no parallel in the Synopsis, and is therefore peculiar to Matthaean usage.

Metzger's Commentary discusses the variant readings at viii. 21; xiv. 22; xv. 36; xvi. 5; xvii. 10; xix. 25; xx. 17. At xiv. 22 and xv. 36 Metzger argues that *autoû* in Matthew has been introduced by scribes through assimilation to the Markan parallel, but this is unlikely in view of the firm and peculiar instances of *mathētai autoû* in Matthew elsewhere.

As with Mark therefore Matthew normally qualifies *mathētēs*. At viii. 21 the brackets should be removed from the text of Syn⁹ and UBS³. Although there are exceptions these are explicable. *Autoû* is absent from xiv. 19b and there is no variant reading but as *mathētai* there picks up *mathētais autoû* in 19a it is not expected. The same is true at xv. 36b which

⁴ We except from this discussion of course the non-specific references to discipleship as a concept (Matt. x. 24 f. = Luke vi. 40 and Matt. x. 42).

is unqualified but picks up the full title from the earlier occurrence in the sentence. At xvii. 19, and xxvi. 17 τὸ Ἰησοῦ follows immediately, rendering the αὐτοῦ in Mark's parallel unnecessary. At xviii. 1 τὸ Ἰησοῦ again makes αὐτοῦ unnecessary. At xxi. 1 the two disciples referred to are obviously Jesus' in the context, but some manuscripts have αὐτοῦ either after the accusative μαθητάς or genitive μαθητῶν. The latter variant is possibly original to Matthew (as in the parallels) but this is debatable. At Matthew xxvi. 35 μαθηταί has no αὐτοῦ, but as it is preceded by πάντες and the context makes it clear Jesus' disciples are meant perhaps this is not a real exception. If the versional evidence is unacceptable in the variants at xxi. 6 (two disciples only) and xxvi. 19 and these readings rejected, then again μαθηταί in the contexts can stand without qualification as being unambiguously Jesus' disciples, and as such cannot be cited as real exceptions to our general rule. At xxvi. 19 μαθηταί follows closely on μαθητῶν μου of verse 18 unlike the parallel in Mark which has another verse interpolated. Elsewhere, as in Mark, the context in Matthew sometimes demands that Jesus' disciples are qualified not by αὐτοῦ but by μου (xxvi. 18) or σου (ix. 14; xii. 2; xv. 2; xvii. 16). These are firm in the text.

When we turn to Luke's gospel the general rule can again be made to apply if we accept not just the printed text but the evidence from the apparatus. Variants adding αὐτοῦ can be found at all the following places where the printed texts usually have μαθητῆς without a possessive:

- ix. 16 – pler according to von Soden including L 33
- ix. 18 – pler according to von Soden
- ix. 54* – CADW theta most mins.
- x. 23* – U 1424 latt. according to von Soden
- xii. 22* – most mss. ex. P⁷⁵ B
- xvi. 1* – AW theta most mins.
- xvii. 22* – pler according to von Soden
- xviii. 15 – pler according to von Soden
- xix. 29 – ADW gamma delta most mins.
- (xix. 37* – theta 440 according to von Soden)
- xx. 45 – most mss. except BD pc
- xxii. 39 – gamma delta* most mins.
- xxii. 45 – fam 1 latt.

The asterisk indicates that μαθητῆς has no parallel in the Synopsis and is therefore peculiar to Lukan usage.

Again the ninth edition of Aland's Synopsis prints the variants in its apparatus with the exception of those variants found only in von Soden and so marked in the list above. If von Soden is accurate here (and this is always open to suspicion) it is regrettable that Aland's Synopsis has not seen fit to include these vital and significant variants too.

As with Matthew and Mark the above readings in Luke which include αὐτοῦ ought to be printed, with the possible exception of xix. 37 where τὸ πλῆθος precedes (cf. Matt. xxvi. 35 above), and a group larger than the twelve is probably intended. At xii. 22 and xx. 45, both of which are discussed in Metzger's Commentary, the brackets around αὐτοῦ in UBS³ and Synopsis⁹ ought to be removed. Μαθητῆς in Luke is therefore always qualified, usually by αὐτοῦ but by σου at ix. 40, xix. 39 and by μου at xiv. 26, 27, 33; xxii. 11. These are firm.

As far as the Fourth Gospel is concerned it is interesting to see that John too maintains the normal New Testament practice of qualifying μαθητῆς, although unlike the Synoptics John has a greater range of pronouns. As far as αὐτοῦ is concerned this possessive occurs about forty times as the original text in the printed editions and in most instances αὐτοῦ is undisputed in the manuscripts. In the following places our printed texts need correcting, and αὐτοῦ added from the apparatus:

John

- iv. 31 – W theta 33
- iv. 33 – 1071, 245, 1513 (in von Soden's apparatus)
- xi. 7 – AD gamma delta pm
- xi. 8 – D gamma et al.
- xi. 12 – FGLS gamma delta pm
- xi. 54 – A X theta fam. 1 fam. 13 pm
- xiii. 5 – D pc
- xiii. 22 – P⁶⁶ fam. 13 1241
- xx. 18 – D
- xx. 19 – L delta psi et al.
- xx. 20 – D pc
- xx. 30 – P⁶⁶ aleph CDLW et al.
- xxi. 1 – C³DGX psi et al.
- xxi. 4 – 69 f (in von Soden's apparatus)
- xxi. 12 – 245 (in von Soden's apparatus)
- xxi. 14 – D gamma delta most mins.

Again we should accept the longer text. Only at xx. 30 does Metzger discuss this type of variation in John. A firm decision to print the longer text should again result in the removal of the ubiquitous brackets in Syn.⁹ and UBS³.

If we accept the variants above in John which restore autoû to the text then there are no examples of unqualified mathêtaí in the Fourth Gospel except at xxi. 12 where tôn mathêtôn is itself a dependent noun and at xx. 10 where “the disciples” are Peter and the beloved disciple – again a possessive is not expected. Sometimes of course the noun is qualified by another possessive or adjective depending on the context. In the plural mathêtaí is qualified by “of this man” at xviii. 17; by pleíonas at iv. 1; by álloi at xx. 25; xxi. 8; by mou at viii. 31; by the possessive adjective emoí at xiii. 35; xv. 8; by sou at vii. 3. In the singular mathêtês is unqualified at xix. 27 (bis) but here it refers to the beloved disciple in the context. (This mathêtês is defined at xix. 26; xxi. 20 as hon ēgápa.) At xxi. 24 “the disciple” is the author. Elsewhere the singular mathêtês is qualified – by állos in xviii. 15, 16; xx. 2, 3, 4, 8; by ekeínos at ix. 28; xviii. 15; xxi. 7, 23; by “of Jesus” at xix. 38; by “of Moses” at ix. 28.

As far as the Synoptic gospels are concerned, accepting the originality of autoû throughout the gospel even when it is not textually certain means that the synopsis so printed will result in more similarities being created between the gospels than is conventionally the case. Normally one would be suspicious of such a text insofar as scribes because of their general tendency to assimilate gospel with gospel make parallel passages more similar. Thus it is normally a useful rule of thumb to propose that variants which make parallels more dissimilar are likely to be original. Here though our authors' respective usages agree in qualifying mathêtês, and as scribes would have good reason to remove the possessive from time to time that rule of thumb has here been superseded by the criterion of author's usage.

Where Matthew, Mark and Luke are in parallel mathêtaí autoû occurs in all three gospels in the following passages:

Matthew	Mark	Luke
a) xii. 1	= ii. 23	= vi. 1
b) xiv. 19	= vi. 41	= ix. 16
c) xix. 13	= x. 13	= xviii. 15
d) xxi. 1	= xi. 1	= xix. 29

For (b) Aland's Synopsis⁹ prints the shorter text in Matthew and Luke, and brackets autoû in Mark thus showing an apparent agreement of Matthew and Luke against Mark. For (c) Aland shows all three gospels agreeing in having the shorter text. In (d) Aland has only Mark with autoû.

Where two gospels only are in parallel our acceptance of *autoû* makes twelve more agreements between these gospels:

Mark viii. 27 pr = Luke ix. 18
 Matthew xiii. 10 = Luke viii. 9
 Matthew xxiii. 1 = Luke xx. 45
 Matthew xxvi. 40 = Luke xxii. 45
 Matthew xiv. 15 = Mark vi. 35
 Matthew xiv. 22 = Mark vi. 45
 Matthew xv. 12 = Mark vii. 17
 Matthew xv. 32 = Mark viii. 1
 Matthew xv. 33 = Mark viii. 4
 Matthew xv. 36 = Mark viii. 6
 Matthew xxvi. 19 = Mark xiv. 16
 Matthew xxvi. 36 = Mark xiv. 32

But lest it be thought that such a practice is alien to the habits of the original authors, it ought to be remembered that there are at least fourteen places where our printed synopses show that two gospels agree in having *mathētai autoû* in parallel. These are for the most part verses in which the possessive stands firm in the manuscript tradition:

Matthew ix. 10 = Mark ii. 15
 Matthew ix. 11 = Mark ii. 16
 Matthew xiv. 12 = Mark vi. 29
 Matthew xvi. 13 = Mark viii. 27 (sec.)
 Matthew xvi. 24 = Mark viii. 34
 Matthew xix. 23 = Mark x. 23
 Matthew xxiv. 1 = Mark xiii. 1
 Matthew xxviii. 7 = Mark xvi. 7
 Luke v. 30 = Matthew ix. 11
 Luke vi. 13 = Matthew x. 1
 Luke vi. 20 = Matthew v. 1
 Luke viii. 22 = Matthew viii. 23
 Luke ix. 43 = Mark ix. 31

Appendix

An additional instance of “his disciples” should probably be Matthew xxvi. 20. *Autoû* here is read only by 106 (according to Legg) and the old Latin (according to von Soden). *Mathētôn* is read by aleph ALW 33 and others and was included in Nestle-Aland²⁵ = Aland Synopsis⁸. The parallels here are Mark xiv. 17 *metà tôn dōdeka* and Luke xxii. 14 *kai hoi apóstoloi syn autô*. The shorter text in Matthew as it appears in Synopsis⁹ (*metà tôn dōdeka*) seems therefore to be the result of scribal assimilation to the firm text of Mark. Matthaean style demands both *mathētôn* and *autoû*. Matthew unlike Mark and Luke never writes *hoi dōdeka simpliciter*. Except at xxvi. 14; xxvi. 47 *heîs tôn dōdeka*, and *hoûtoi hoi dōdeka* at x. 5, “the twelve” is used with either *mathētai* or *apóstoloi*, see x. 1; xi. 1 where both the noun *mathētēs* and the possessive stand firm in the manuscript tradition.

A situation similar to Matthew xxvi. 20 is xx. 17 where some manuscripts remove the noun and the possessive to assimilate Matthew to Luke and Mark. Here too the longer text *mathētās autoû* should be read with 13 28c 892mg 1010 1216, the lectionaries and some versional evidence. The Aland Synopsis⁹ does not show the evidence for the adding of *autoû*.

When Matthew xxviii. 16 speaks of the “eleven disciples”, *mathētai* is not followed by a possessive in any manuscript as far as I can discover.

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