

# “Rabbouni,” which means *Lord*: Narrative Variants in John 20:16

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**Abstract:** In the received text of John 20:16, Mary Magdalene responds to Jesus with the Aramaic word רַבּוּנִי, translated into Greek as διδάσκαλε (“teacher”). However, in some early manuscripts, ραββουνι is instead or also translated as κύριε/*domine* (“Lord”). Moreover, many other witnesses include the additional phrase καὶ προσέδραμεν ἅψασθαι αὐτοῦ (“and she ran to touch him”). Where did these variants originate, and how were they interpreted in the history of the church? This study broadly surveys the philological, text-critical, exegetical, and patristic evidence, and demonstrates that a first-century Aramaic context supports the translation of ραββουνι as “Lord”; meanwhile, the variant “and she ran to touch him” may have originated in a Valentinian setting where Mary Magdalene was being connected with Achamoth/the “lower Sophia.” Deliberate editorial activity was likely at play in these various presentations of Mary Magdalene at John 20:16, since the stakes around her were particularly high in the early centuries of Christianity. Thus, Johannine exegetes should begin to look beyond our received text of John 20:16 and discover the *narrative variants* preserved in this important verse, which have enlivened its interpretation throughout the history of the church.

The encounter between Jesus and Mary Magdalene is a climactic moment in the narrative of John’s Gospel: when the risen Jesus calls Mary Magdalene by name (John 20:16) she exclaims ραββουνι, an Aramaic word which the narrator translates into Greek as διδάσκαλε, or *teacher*. Due to several implied parallelisms between Mary’s search for Jesus in John 20 and the search for the bridegroom in Song 3:1–4, there is a long interpretive tradition understanding Mary as exemplifying the bride in this heightened moment.<sup>1</sup> This scene is also thought to have a special profundity due to its parallel with the words of Jesus in the Good Shepherd discourse:<sup>2</sup> “He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” (John 10:3, 14, NRSV). Yet whether Mary Magdalene “knows” Jesus by the sound of his voice is a matter of debate. According to commentator Sandra Schneiders, in John’s Gospel,

Mary Magdalene is the first pre-Easter disciple to encounter the risen Lord. She erroneously thinks that the past dispensation has been reinstated. Things will be as they had always been. Literal misunderstanding in John’s gospel is a literary technique to describe growth in faith. Mary reaches out to touch Jesus, to relate to him as she had in the past, using a form of address suitable to that time, “Rabbouni”.... Mary must pass over from the Pre-Easter to the Easter

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Hippolytus, *In Canticum canticorum* 24–25 (further analysis below); Cyril of Alexandria, *Fragmenta in Canticum canticorum* (PG 69:1285.33–46); Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermones in Canticum canticorum* 7.8; Adele Reinhartz comments: “allusions to the Song of Songs implicitly define Mary as the one who exemplifies the intimacy and love between the believer and the risen Lord” (*Befriending the Beloved Disciple: A Jewish Reading of the Gospel of John* [New York: Continuum, 2001], 111).

<sup>2</sup> E.g., see the comment of Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, AB 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 1009–10.

dispensation. Her proclamation to the other disciples makes clear that she has indeed made that transition. She no longer speaks of “Rabbouni.” As first apostle of the Resurrection, she proclaims “I have seen the *Lord*.”<sup>3</sup>

Raymond Brown similarly comments, “One is tempted to theorize that by using this ‘old’ title [i.e. ‘teacher’] the Johannine Magdalene is showing her misunderstanding of the resurrection.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet along with the majority of commentators, Schneiders’s and Brown’s exegeses do not acknowledge significant textual variation that appears in many early extant manuscripts and patristic quotations of this verse. The word *ῥαββουνί* is not uniformly translated with the Greek term *διδάσκαλε*; in some cases *ῥαββουνί* is translated with the term *κύριε* (“Lord”). Moreover, in many manuscripts we find the additional phrase *καὶ προσέδραμεν ἅψασθαι αὐτοῦ* (“and she ran to touch him”). Since Jesus’s consequent injunction *μὴ μου ἅπτου* (“do not touch me”) occurs in the present imperative, this additional phrase strengthens the likelihood that Mary’s action is already in progress.<sup>5</sup>

These variant readings can provide the modern interpreter with a new point of entry into discourse about the Johannine narrative of Mary Magdalene: either she recognizes him only as her “teacher,” or alternatively, she immediately knows that she has encountered the risen Lord. She may or may not run to touch the risen Jesus and may or may not succeed in her attempt. This paper investigates the variant readings of John 20:16 and suggests that these variants reflect on-the-ground textual negotiations of Mary Magdalene’s presentation in the Johannine narrative at a time when her authority was being debated. We will demonstrate that the earliest textual record of this verse is divided in the manuscript tradition as well as in patristic quotations; the variants’ material impact on the transmission of John has had important consequences for the interpretation history of this well-known pericope.

## Variant Translations of the Word *ῥαββουνί* in John 20:16

The received text of John 20:16 translates *ῥαββουνί* as “teacher.” *διδάσκαλε* is the word found in the vast majority of Greek manuscripts, and *magister* is the Latin equivalent used by Jerome in his Vulgate translation. However, if we instead focus on the most ancient textual record, we discover that “teacher” is only one of several extant translation variants.

Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 208 (more commonly referred to as *℘*<sup>5</sup>), a fragmentary third- or fourth-century CE Greek codex of John’s Gospel found at Oxyrhynchus, contains a lacuna in the manuscript where this word should appear. In the *editio princeps*, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt write,

The ordinary reading *ῥαββουνί, ὃ λέγεται διδάσκαλε. λέγει αὐτῇ [ὁ] Ἰησοῦς* produces a line of at least thirty-four letters, which is obviously too long. D [Codex Bezae] has *κυριε διδασκαλε*, which looks rather like a conflation of two variants, and suggests that *κ̄ε* alone may have stood here in the papyrus.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Sandra M. Schneiders, “Touching the Risen Jesus: Mary Magdalene and Thomas the Twin in John 20,” in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, ed. Craig R. Koester and R. Bieringer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 171–72. Emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, *Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 1010.

<sup>5</sup> Brown notes that the “use of the present imperative (*mē mou aptou*), literally ‘Stop touching me,’ probably implies that she is already touching him and is to desist; however, it can mean that she is trying to touch him and he is telling her that she should not” (*Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 992).

<sup>6</sup> Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, eds., *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part II, Edited with Translations and Notes, with Eight Plates* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1899), 7.



Closeup of P. Oxy 208 (fol. 1<sup>r</sup>, col. 2, ll. 15–20)<sup>7</sup>

Below is a transcription of a portion of the column in  $\Psi^5$  to which Grenfell and Hunt refer, beginning midway through John 20:15. This transcription provides clear visual representation of their reasoning.<sup>8</sup> The papyrus’ extant letters appear outside brackets, the conjectured lacuna text is in brackets, and the uncertain portion of John 20:16 is marked with a space.

αυτω [κε̄ εῑ σῡ εβαστασας̄ αυτον̄ ειπε̄]  
 μοι π[οῡ αυτον̄ εθηκας̄ καγω̄ αυτον̄]  
 αρω [λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄ μαριᾱ στραφεῑ]  
 [σᾱ εκεινη̄ λεγεῑ αυτω̄ εβραιστῑ ραβ̄]  
 β[οῡνῑ ο̄ λεγεταῑ λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄ μη̄]  
 μ[οῡ απτοῡ.....]

If the usual text of 20:16 had been copied by  $\Psi^5$ ’s scribe here, the column would either look like this:

αυτω [κε̄ εῑ σῡ εβαστασας̄ αυτον̄ ειπε̄]  
 μοι π[οῡ αυτον̄ εθηκας̄ καγω̄ αυτον̄]  
 αρω [λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄ μαριᾱ στραφεῑ]  
 [σᾱ εκεινη̄ λεγεῑ αυτω̄ εβραιστῑ ραβ̄]  
 β[οῡνῑ ο̄ λεγεταῑ διδασκαλε̄ λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄ μη̄]  
 μ[οῡ απτοῡ.....]

or this:

αυτω [κε̄ εῑ σῡ εβαστασας̄ αυτον̄ ειπε̄]  
 μοι π[οῡ αυτον̄ εθηκας̄ καγω̄ αυτον̄]  
 αρω [λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄ μαριᾱ στραφεῑ]  
 [σᾱ εκεινη̄ λεγεῑ αυτω̄ εβραιστῑ ραβ̄]  
 β[οῡνῑ ο̄ λεγεταῑ διδασκαλε̄ λεγεῑ αυτη̄ ο̄ ιη̄ς̄]  
 μ[η̄ μοῡ απτοῡ.....]

By contrast, ο̄ λεγεταῑ κ(υρῑ)ε̄ would create the most reasonable line length, resulting in a column that would either look like this:

<sup>7</sup> © British Library Board (catalogued as P. 782, fol. 1r). Used with permission. This image available at [http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=papyrus\\_782\\_fo01r](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=papyrus_782_fo01r).

<sup>8</sup> The papyrus itself is heavily abraded in the last lines of the column, and, based on our reading of the high-resolution image, we agree with Grenfell and Hunt’s reconstruction of the μ below the β.

αυτω [κε̄ ει συ εβαστασας αυτον ειπε]  
 μοι π[ου αυτον εθηκας καγω αυτον]  
 αρω [λεγει αυτη ο ιης μαρια στραφει]  
 [σα εκεινη λεγει αυτω εβραιστι ραβ]  
 β[ουνι ο λεγεται κε̄ λεγει αυτη ο ιης μη]  
 μ[ου απτου.....]

or this:

αυτω [κε̄ ει συ εβαστασας αυτον ειπε]  
 μοι π[ου αυτον εθηκας καγω αυτον]  
 αρω [λεγει αυτη ο ιης μαρια στραφει]  
 [σα εκεινη λεγει αυτω εβραιστι ραβ]  
 β[ουνι ο λεγεται κε̄ λεγει αυτη ο ιης]  
 μ[η μου απτου.....]

The conjecture of Grenfell and Hunt has stood the test of time. Well over a hundred years later, Lincoln Blumell and Thomas Wayment write of  $\Psi^5$ , “the inclusion of *λεγεται διδασκαλε λεγει* ... would create an extraordinarily long line. *ο λεγεται κυριε* is possible but impossible to confirm.”<sup>9</sup> The suggested reading *ο λεγεται κε̄* is the Greek rendition of the Latin words *quod dicitur domine*, which is found in the fourth-century Old Latin manuscript Codex Vercellensis/VL 3 (see further discussion below).<sup>10</sup> Consequently Grenfell and Hunt, Elliott and Parker, Head, Blumell and Wayment, the International Greek New Testament Project (IGNTP), and the forthcoming *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) have all conjectured that the translation of *ραββουνι* in  $\Psi^5$  is *κε̄*.<sup>11</sup> If this majority conjecture is correct,  $\Psi^5$  would lend very early Greek manuscript support to the translation variant “Lord” for *ραββουνι*. The reading *quod dicitur domine* is also found in Codex Usserianus primus/VL 14 (copied ca. 600 CE).<sup>12</sup> Considering that several of our most ancient witnesses do indeed use the word “Lord” in John 20:16, it is surprising that prominent commentators assume that Mary misunderstands precisely because she calls Jesus “teacher.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Lincoln H. Blumell and Thomas A. Wayment, eds., *Christian Oxyrhynchus: Texts, Documents, and Sources* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 53.

<sup>10</sup> Old Latin manuscript numbers throughout this article refer to the list of Old Latin manuscripts by Roger Gryson, *Altlateinische Handschriften—Manuscrits vieux latins*, Première partie: Mss 1–275, VL 1 (Freiburg: Herder, 1999); and Roger Gryson, *Altlateinische Handschriften—Manuscrits vieux latins*, Deuxième partie: Mss 300–485, VL 2A–2B (Freiburg: Herder, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See W. J. Elliott and D. C. Parker, *The New Testament in Greek IV: The Gospel according to St. John; 1. The Papyri* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 34; Peter M. Head, “The Habits of New Testament Copyists: Singular Readings in the Early Fragmentary Papyri of John,” *Bib* 85 (2004): 399–408, at 405; “Papyrus 5,” <http://www.iohannes.com>; “J 20:16/26,” <https://ntg.uni-muenster.de/john/phi/coherence/5616>. The INTF conjectures [ραβ]β[ουνι] [ο] [λεγεται] [διδασκαλε], without any comment on the line’s length. See “New Testament Transcripts Prototype,” <http://nttranscripts.uni-muenster.de/AnaServer?NTtranscripts+o+start.anv>. Unfortunately,  $\Psi^{66}$  is mostly lacunose in this section; only the word *λεγεται* survives in John 20:16b.  $\Psi^{75}$  and  $\Psi^{45}$  are completely lacunose here. The NA<sup>28</sup> apparatus reads “κυριε D (it).”

<sup>12</sup> The UBS Editorial Committee does not address the *κύριε/domine* variants in Bruce Metzger’s classic *Textual Commentary on the New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971).

<sup>13</sup> See Schneiders’s and Brown’s comments above; see similarly Karen L. King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003), 131: “when [Mary] does recognize his voice, she addresses him as ‘Teacher’ (Rabboni), indicating a relatively low standing on the hierarchical scale of Johannine Christological titles.”

Other variant translations are also found in early manuscripts, especially in the D-Text. As noted above by Grenfell and Hunt, the scribe of Codex Bezae/05 (copying ca. 400 CE) incorporates both the words “lord” and “teacher” in the Greek transcription of John 20:16:  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omega\nu\epsilon\iota\ \omicron\ \lambda\epsilon\gamma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \kappa\bar{\epsilon}\ \delta\iota\delta\alpha\sigma\kappa\alpha\lambda\epsilon$ . Similarly, several fifth-century Old Latin manuscripts (VL 2, VL 8\*, and VL 5, the Latin side of Bezae) also incorporate both the words *domine* and *magister* in their renderings of John 20:16. As noted above, Grenfell and Hunt believed that the inclusion of both words at John 20:16 may be a conflation of two known manuscript readings. Notably,  $\Phi^5$  frequently agrees with VL 2 against NA<sup>28</sup>, which may lend additional support to the conflation hypothesis.<sup>14</sup>

A different textual representation of John 20:16 is found in the fourth-century Old Syriac Sinaitic Palimpsest: Sy<sup>s</sup> provides  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  without translation.<sup>15</sup> The absence of translation is to be expected, since the Old Syriac texts (Sy<sup>s</sup> and Sy<sup>c</sup>) consistently do not translate Aramaic terms that appear in Greek transliteration. While John 20:16 is lacunose in Sy<sup>c</sup>, other passages containing Aramaic terms are not translated across Sy<sup>s</sup> and Sy<sup>c</sup> including, for example, attestations in John 1:38, 1:41, and 4:25.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, it is most likely that early Syriac readers did not require a translation of the Aramaic word in John 20:16. However, at least two Greek commentary manuscripts show the same omission (0141 and 821). In these Greek manuscripts, the decision to omit the word’s translation could reflect scribal awareness of two different text forms and a preference to avoid choosing between them.

In sum, there were four translation variants that early copyists employed in order to convey the meaning of the term  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omega\nu\epsilon\iota$  in John 20:16: (1) “teacher,” (2) “Lord,” (3) “Lord Teacher”/“Teacher Lord,” or (4) omitting the translation entirely. These very early renderings represent multiple, divergent manuscript traditions, suggesting a variety of editorial motivations. Yet the “Lord” variants in several early and important Greek and Latin manuscripts raise a crucial question for modern exegetes: is  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omega\nu\epsilon\iota$  most accurately translated as “teacher” in John 20:16 (as it appears in our received text)? Or should it be translated as “Lord”?

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., John 1:34, 1:35, 16:18, and 16:26.

<sup>15</sup> The most recent critical edition of the Old Syriac manuscripts can be found in George A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels*, vol. 4, 2nd ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2002). For Smith Lewis’s edition, see Agnes Smith Lewis, *A Translation of the Four Gospels from the Syriac of the Sinaitic Palimpsest* (New York: Macmillan, 1894), 203. In Lewis’s later commentary on the Sinaitic Palimpsest, she states that the word  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  should be translated as “My Master.” See Agnes Smith Lewis, *Light on the Four Gospels from the Sinai Palimpsest* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), 179. While it is possible  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  might mean “summus pastorum” (as it is interpreted in one Nestorian text, Georgias Hoffman, *Opuscula Nestoriana syriace tradidit* [Kiel: G. von Maack, 1880], 114; cf. Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* [Berlin: Reuther & Reichard, 1895], 708), the term  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  is likely a corrupted spelling of  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  (cf. the discussion in “The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon,” <http://cal.huc.edu>). This corruption is preserved in both Sy<sup>s</sup> and Sy<sup>p</sup>. While translating  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  as something like “chief shepherd” might draw a comparison to the good shepherd narrative in John 10, there is no evidence of the use of  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  as “chief shepherd” during the time that the Old Syriac manuscripts were copied. Additionally, Sy<sup>s</sup> uses  $\text{ܪܥܘܝܢܝ}$  for “shepherd” in John 10:11 (where Sy<sup>c</sup> is lacunose).

<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Sy<sup>p</sup> and Sy<sup>h</sup> often mirror the Greek (either offering a redundant translation, e.g. Sy<sup>p</sup> Mark 15:34, or a transliteration, e.g. Sy<sup>h</sup> Matt 27:46). Sy<sup>p</sup>, Sy<sup>h</sup>, and Sy<sup>pal</sup> do not replicate the Old Syriac corrupted spelling  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$ , instead  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  appears. The  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  orthography appears in many later Syriac texts as well, including Jacob of Sarug’s homilies on Elisha from the early sixth century CE (Stephen A. Kaufman, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Elisha* [Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010], 245). For additional examples of the  $\text{ܐܘܨܝܘܢܝ}$  orthography, cf. those listed in R. Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879), 3788.



## Translations of the Word $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omicron\upsilon\nu\iota$ outside of the New Testament

We can look outside the context of the New Testament to help us answer this question. The manuscript tradition that translates  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omicron\upsilon\nu\iota$  as “Lord” is supported by the contemporaneous Aramaic context. It is clear that  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omicron\upsilon\nu\iota$  is a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic  $\text{רַבּוּנִי}$  (*Rabûni*) from  $\text{רַבּוֹן}$  (*rbwn*, “master, lord”). There are distinct differences between the Aramaic term  $\text{רַבִּי/רַב}$  (*rb/rby*, expressed as  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\iota$  in John 1:38, 1:49, 3:2, 3:26, 4:31, 6:25, 9:2, 11:8) “scholar, master, teacher” and  $\text{רַבּוֹן}$  (*rbwn*, expressed as  $\rho\alpha\beta\beta\omicron\upsilon\nu\iota$  in John 20:16) “master, lord,” both of which are distinct from  $\text{מַרְא/מַרִּי}$  (*mr'/mry*, equivalent to the Hebrew  $\text{בַּעַל}$  [*b'el*] and Akkadian *bel*) “master, owner.”<sup>17</sup> The semantic range of the lemma  $\text{רַבּוֹן}$  includes both “master” and “lord” and is attested in Mishnaic Hebrew and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (JPA) texts.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, the term  $\text{רַבִּי/רַב}$  (“rabbi,” consistently translated  $\text{διδάσκαλε}$  in John 1:38) has a semantic range that includes “scholar” and “master.”<sup>19</sup> A third term  $\text{רַבָּן}$  appears only once in JPA, though it is a backformation of  $\text{רַבּוּנִי}$  (“Rabbis”).<sup>20</sup> The common form of  $\text{רַבָּן}$  used in early Rabbinic Hebrew means “our master.”<sup>21</sup> Throughout the Targums, the Aramaic  $\text{רַבּוֹן}$  is used to translate  $\text{אֲדוֹן}$  (*dwn*, “master, lord,” often vocalized  $\text{אֲדוֹנִי}$  *’adonî*) from the Hebrew texts.<sup>22</sup> If

<sup>17</sup> While the term  $\text{מַרְא}$  modifies or describes divine names in Old and Imperial Aramaic texts, the title describes the function of kings, officials, or overseers and therefore applies regnal attributes to deities in these cases. At Qumran, 4Q529 frequently refers to a  $\text{רַבִּי מַרְא עֲלָמָא}$  “my lord, master of the universe” (cf. Emile Puech, *Qumran Grotte 4\* XXII: Textes Araméens, première partie, 4Q529–549*, DJD XXXI [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001], 6), as  $\text{מַרְא}$  is used to describe a leader who rules over the kingdom. As a title, the 1cs pronominal suffix follows the construct *mr*, which eventually led to the by-form spelling  $\text{מַרִּי}$ , or in Syriac  $\text{ܡܪܝ}$  “my master” or simply “master.” Cf. the entry *mry/mry’* in “The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon,” <http://cal.huc.edu>.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, 2nd ed. (Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press, 2002), 513. Sokoloff cites Mark 10:51.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. “2#  $\text{רַבִּי}$ ” in Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 513.

<sup>20</sup> Sokoloff, *Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 513 and 514. For later appearances, cf. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim*, 1444.

<sup>21</sup> Abraham Geiger, *Lehr- und Lesebuch zur Sprache der Mischna* (Breslau: J. Leuckart, 1845), 128–29. Both  $\text{רַב}$  and  $\text{רַבָּן}$  appear in the Aramaic texts from Qumran, but both terms have a limited semantic range: as a noun,  $\text{רַב}$  can mean “noble,” “ruler,” “master,” or “chief”; and  $\text{רַבָּן}$  can mean “chief” or “leader.” Edward M. Cook, *Dictionary of Qumran Aramaic* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 216–18. Though the Qumran Aramaic corpus is limited, it does not contain the use of  $\text{רַבָּן}$  in the sense of teacher.

<sup>22</sup> The earliest example, Targum Onkelos, which dates as early as the mid-second century CE, consistently translates the Hebrew  $\text{אֲדוֹנִי}$  with the Aramaic  $\text{רַבּוּנִי}$  (cf. Gen 18:12 in Targum Onkelos, and for more on the dating of this text see Paul Flesher and Bruce Chilton, *The Targums: A Critical Introduction* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011], 151–66). Though the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project cites this example under the meaning “husband” in the entry “*rbwn, rbwn*,” it is clearly an equivalent to the Hebrew  $\text{אֲדוֹן}$  (*dwn*), which describes another facet of the relationship between Sarai and Abram. “The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project,” <http://cal.huc.edu/>. While Targum Jonathan’s Hosea 2:9 appears to use  $\text{רַבּוּנִי}$  to translate the Hebrew  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי}$ , the translator of Hosea consistently avoids translating vocabulary related to the marriage metaphor in the Hebrew text. Instead of translating  $\text{אֱלֹהֵי}$ , the translator emphasizes the relationship between a woman and her god (rather than a woman and her husband) by intentionally using  $\text{רַבּוּנִי}$  as it means “lord.” “Targum Jonathan, Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project,” [http://cal.huc.edu/get\\_a\\_chapter.php?file=51015&cset=H](http://cal.huc.edu/get_a_chapter.php?file=51015&cset=H). Sarai is identified as  $\text{רַבּוּנִיתִיךְ}$  in Gen 16:9. This facet is perhaps best defined by Buxtorf’s translation “Herus.” Johannes Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum, Talmudicum, et Rabbinicum* (Basel: Ludwig König, 1640), 2178. Cf. references for the entry  $\text{רַבּוֹן}$  in

the initial production of Targum Onkelos occurred between the mid-first and the mid-second centuries CE, there is additional precedent to suggest that the Aramaic רבון was the accepted translation of the Hebrew ארני during the first two centuries of the common era.<sup>23</sup>

Our examination of the manuscript tradition can also be informed by understanding the Aramaic term in attestations in early rabbinic texts. The word רבון, and its place in rabbinic material, has long been of interest to interpreters. In the mid-twentieth century, E. Y. Kutscher refuted P. Kahle’s claims that the earliest examples of ῥαββουvi were only found in the New Testament, clearly demonstrating the early use of רבון, sans vocalization, as “lord” in early rabbinic texts.<sup>24</sup> Joining interpreters such as H. Yelon,<sup>25</sup> Kutscher later sought the origins of four different vocalizations of the term, determining that the difference in vocalization is related to regional dialect—רבוני (Rabûnî) reflected a Western vocalization, whereas רבוני (Ribônî) reflected a Babylonian vocalization.<sup>26</sup> For both Yelon and Kutscher, the presence of the Greek transliteration ῥαββουvi served as another piece of evidence that could help solve the interpretive puzzle that is the Aramaic word.

Even a number of nineteenth-century philologists believed this word should be translated not as “teacher,” but as “lord” or “master”: Kautzsch translates ῥαββουvi as “mein Herr,” Meyer renders the word “mein Gebieter,” and Delitzsch asserts “διδάσκαλε entspricht nicht unserem ‘Lehrer’ sondern ‘Meister,’ רבון ist Meister *sensu eminentissimo*.”<sup>27</sup> As early as 1640, Johannes Buxtorf translates רבוני (Ribôn) as “Dominus, Herus.”<sup>28</sup> All of these commentators argued that ῥαββουvi should be translated as “lord” or “master,” even without referencing the κύριε/*domine* variants in the Johannine manuscript tradition.

Overall, there is no substantive use of either morphemic variation רבון or רבן in the sense of “teacher” prior to or during the first century CE; meanwhile its translation in the earliest copies of John 20:16 is inconsistent. By contrast, when the term רבי (transliterated ῥαββί, “teacher”) first appears in John 1:38, its translation is quite stable in the text transmission. The Gospel of John undoubtedly contributes to our understanding of many Aramaic words in a first-century CE context, and the consistent translation of ῥαββί as διδάσκαλε in John

Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushlami and Midrashic Literature*, vol. 2 (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1903), 1440. In some places in John, the use of the phrase εγω εμι might bear a resemblance to a title such as ארני, especially in cases when the phrase does not take a predicate. In one instance, εγω εμι is used by the blind man after an encounter with Jesus, hearkening back to the phrase used so often by John’s Jesus (cf. usage of εγω εμι at John 9:9).

<sup>23</sup> “The range for the first stage of Targum Onkelos (i.e., Proto-TO) is fairly narrow, from roughly 50 to 150 CE.” Flesher and Chilton, *Targums*, 157. Further, Flesher argues that Proto-Targum Onkelos was written prior to the destruction of the first temple. Cf., Paul Flesher, “The Literary Legacy of the Priests? The Pentateuchal Targums of Israel in their Social and Linguistic Context,” in *The Ancient Synagogue from Its Origins to 200 CE*, ed. B. Olsson and M. Zetterholm (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003), 467–508.

<sup>24</sup> Eduard Y. Kutscher, “Das zur Zeit Jesu gesprochene Aramäisch,” *ZNW* 51 (1960): 52–54. A clear understanding of רבון as “mein Herr” appears on page 53.

<sup>25</sup> Hanoth Yelon, “נימוקים למשניות מנוקדות: שעה, בשעת, בשעתו,” *Lěšonénu* 24 (1959–1960): 162. Yelon also utilizes the variant Greek transliterations of רבוני in his interpretation.

<sup>26</sup> Eduard Y. Kutscher, “לשון חז”ל,” in *Hebrew and Aramaic Studies*, ed. Z. Ben-Ḥayyim, A. Dotan, and G. Sarfatti (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977), 95–98.

<sup>27</sup> Emil Kautzsch, *Grammatik des Biblisch-Aramäischen* (Leipzig: FCW Vogel, 1884), 10; Arnold Meyer, *Jesu Muttersprache: Das galiläische Aramäisch in seiner Bedeutung für die Erklärung der Reden Jesu und der Evangelien überhaupt* (Freiburg: Mohr, 1896), 50; Franz Delitzsch, “Horae Hebraicae et Talmudicae: Ergänzungen zu Lightfoot und Schöttgen: III. Lucas IV. Johannes,” *ZLThK* 37 (1876): 606.

<sup>28</sup> Buxtorf, *Lexicon Chaldaicum*, 2178.

1:38 gives no reason to doubt it. However, the very early and significant variant translations of ῥαββουῖ in John 20:16—which sometimes match the most natural translation of רבון as “lord”—do merit a deeper investigation of the διδάσκαλε translation.

## Mark 10, John 20, and Parallels

Further light can be shed on the question by examining Mark 10:51, the only other verse in the New Testament containing the word ῥαββουῖ. In this verse there is another unique Greek reading in Codex Bezae: instead of the word ῥαββουῖ, we find κ̄ε ραββει (“lord rabbi”). No other Greek manuscript contains this odd reading, although it matches the equivalent on Bezae’s Latin side, *dm̄e rabbi*. Bart Ehrman points out that there may have been an early desire to add the word κυριος or κυριε to designations of Jesus, since the Valentinians apparently refused to refer to Jesus as “Lord” (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 1.1.3).<sup>29</sup> Jenny Read-Heimerdinger similarly notes that Bezae has a stronger tendency to include references to Jesus as κύριος than does the Alexandrian text.<sup>30</sup> Yet κ̄ε ραββει is not a simple addition of κυριε to Mark 10:51; rather, it is a unique substitution for ῥαββουῖ. It is possible that this reading shows influence from John, since in Bezae John’s Gospel was copied *before* Mark’s Gospel. Thus Bezae’s copyist<sup>31</sup> was already familiar with the translation of ῥαββί as “teacher” from John 1:38, as well as the translation of ῥαββουῖ as “lord teacher” from John 20:16. The decision to replace ῥαββουῖ with “lord rabbi” was thus not an unreasonable interpretation. In fact, several other Old Latin manuscripts that copied John before Mark (VL 3, VL 4, VL 8, and VL 17) also transcribe *domine rabbi* instead of *rabboni* at Mark 10:51 (the Vulgate retains *rabboni*). Thus the D-text reading κ̄ε ραββει / *dm̄e rabbi* at Mark 10:51—found only in witnesses that copied John before Mark—could show influence from an early version of John 20:16 that had translated the word ῥαββουῖ/*rabboni* as “Lord.”<sup>32</sup> Clearly there is more than one possible explanation for variants in the D-Text at Mark 10:51 and John 20:16.<sup>33</sup>

Additional illumination results from a comparison of Mark 10:51 to its parallels in the Mat-

<sup>29</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 162. For examples of the tendency to add or omit the word “lord,” see minuscule 28 at Mark 10:47 and 10:48, VL 18 at John 11:46, and VL 7 at John 14:5.

<sup>30</sup> See Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, *The Bezan Text of Acts: A Contribution of Discourse Analysis to Textual Criticism* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 286–94, esp. at 293.

<sup>31</sup> Note the comment of David Parker: “The picture that emerges [from Codex Bezae] is of two exemplars. The first contained the Gospels, in the order Matthew, Mark, John, and Luke. It was written by two scribes: one of them copied Matthew, Mark, and the first part of John; the second wrote the rest of the codex. ... The scribe of D ... changed the order of the Gospels.” David C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 116. Since the scribe of Bezae copied John before Mark, but the exemplar did not, and since the variant is otherwise unattested in the Greek manuscript tradition, in this case it is indeed possible that the variant originates with the scribe (perhaps under the influence of the Old Latin version as demonstrated by VL 3).

<sup>32</sup> Of the abovementioned witnesses, VL 3 and VL 8 also include the word “Lord” at John 20:16 (unfortunately VL 17 is lacunose in John). “Lord rabbi” might have become a common understanding of *rabboni* in certain circles.

<sup>33</sup> Yet another possibility is that the double translation of ῥαββουῖ is simply a pleonastic choice in both verses. J. R. Harris provides a pleonastic explanation in *Codex Bezae: A Study of the So-Called Western Text of the New Testament*, TaS 2.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 257. However, Harris does not provide explanation for why VL 3 and 14 only translate *rabboni* as *domine*.



thean and Lukan narratives. Perhaps in order to make the narrative more broadly understandable, the later Synoptic authors replaced Bartimaeus’s ῥαββουνί with the anonymous blind men/man’s address to Jesus as κύριε (Matt 20:33 and Luke 18:41). This consistent translation of the Aramaic term in both Matthew and Luke suggests that the most natural first-century Greek rendering of ῥαββουνί was, in fact, κύριε.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, in Mark 10 the blind man who truly “sees” is contrasted positively against the sons of Zebedee, who a few verses earlier called Jesus διδάσκαλε when requesting to sit at his right and left hand (Mark 10:35). Since Mark has used Bartimaeus’s word ῥαββουνί in contrast to the shortsighted disciples who call Jesus διδάσκαλε, might John have intended ῥαββουνί for the same purpose?<sup>35</sup> Translating the word as διδάσκαλε in John 20:16 actually ensures that gospel readers cannot consider Mary Magdalene to be more insightful than the sons of Zebedee.

To bring the κύριε/*domine* variants in John 20:16 to their fullest consideration, we must also put the verse in its Johannine narrative context. Of course, John 20:16 is not the only verse in John 20 in which Mary Magdalene uses the word κύριε or κύριος. The use of this word is stylistically consistent for her, and thus κύριε makes better sense at 20:16 according to intrinsic probability. At John 20:2, she says “They have taken the Lord [τὸν κύριον] out of the tomb”; at John 20:13 she explains the reason for her weeping: “They have taken away my Lord [τὸν κύριον μου]”; at John 20:15 she thinks Jesus is the gardener, and she addresses him as κύριε (usually translated as “sir”); and at John 20:18 she announces, “I have seen the Lord [τὸν κύριον].” These phrases are all relatively stable in the text transmission.<sup>36</sup> But at John 20:16—the moment where Jesus calls Mary by name—the text transmission reflects significant instability.<sup>37</sup> It is possible that if a scribe or editor encountered the word διδάσκαλε as the translation of ῥαββουνί at John 20:16, there might have been a desire to harmonize the text so as to make Mary’s addresses for Jesus as κύριος consistent. Another (more remote) possibility is that some early Christian editors were familiar with Aramaic and were substituting κύριος as what they believed to be the more accurate translation of Mary’s word.

Yet perhaps the most important factor here is that this exchange between Jesus and Mary Magdalene recalls a moment at the opening of John’s Gospel, when Jesus first appears and is followed by two disciples of John the Baptist. Jesus turns (στραφεῖς) to these two disciples in John 1:38—just as Mary Magdalene will turn (στραφεῖσα) to Jesus in John 20:16. Jesus then asks these two disciples τί ζητεῖτε (“what are you seeking?”) just as he will ask Mary Magdalene τίνα ζητεῖς (“who are you seeking?”) in John 20:15. These two disciples of John the Baptist then address Jesus as ῥαββί—which the narrator of 1:38, of course, translates as διδάσκαλε (“teacher”). Since several of the same Greek cognates are used in these two scenes, another exegetical parallelism is implied between John 1 and John 20. Yet in John 1:38 the disciples address Jesus as ῥαββί,<sup>38</sup> whereas in John 20:16, Mary Magdalene addresses Jesus as ῥαββουνί. Since the Ar-

<sup>34</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by William O. Walker in “ΚΥΡΙΟΣ and ΕΠΙΣΤΑΤΗΣ as Translations of RABBI/RABBOUNI,” *Journal of Higher Criticism* 4 (1997): 56–67, at 64, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Mark’s use of διδάσκαλε in 4:38, 9:17, 9:38, 10:17, 10:20, 10:35, 12:14, 12:19, 12:32, and 13:1; cf. also John’s use of both ραββί and διδάσκαλε in 1:38 and 3:2.

<sup>36</sup> There are a few minor textual variants in these verses: at John 20:2, in a handful of majuscules Mary says “they have taken *my* Lord out of the tomb,” and in VL 4 at John 20:18 Mary says “I have seen Jesus” (instead of “I have seen the Lord”).

<sup>37</sup> See below for additional variants.

<sup>38</sup> For an interesting exegetical exploration of John’s use of ῥαββί, see Bruce Chilton, “The Gospel according to John’s Rabbi Jesus,” *BBR* 25 (2015): 39–54. Chilton suggests John deliberately employs the title ῥαββί “prior to ... assertions of Jesus’ true identity ... John intends a theology of Jesus’ pre-existence as the son of man and uses *rabbi* as an introductory counterpoint” (53–54). See also the view of Brown: “In John the frequency of the terms ‘rabbi’ and ‘teacher,’ used by the disciples

amaic words utilized in these two verses differ, it is curious that the διδάσκαλε translation does not change. Certainly the appearance of διδάσκαλε rather than κύριε in John 20:16 impacts the reader’s impression of Mary Magdalene: for commentators like Brown, “the [διδάσκαλε] parallel brings out forcefully the modesty of the title that Magdalene gives to the risen Jesus, a title that is characteristic of the *beginning* of faith rather than of its culmination.”<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the reading διδάσκαλε suggests that Mary’s insight is no more advanced than that of Andrew and the other disciple in John 1:38 or even of Nicodemus in John 3:2.

Yet as we now know, depending on the manuscript, the title that Mary Magdalene gives to the risen Jesus is not always so modest. In ancient witnesses like Codex Bezae (both Greek and Latin sides), VL 2, VL 3, VL 8, VL 14, and probably  $\Psi^5$ , the word ῥαββουνί is instead (or also) translated as “Lord.”<sup>40</sup> Readers of these manuscripts would naturally conclude that Mary’s understanding of Jesus has advanced from the simple “teacher” confession of John the Baptist’s disciples in John 1:38 and contrast it with her more sophisticated confession of Jesus as “Lord” in John 20:16. Joel Marcus notes that “Rabbouni ... may have a more exalted nuance than rabbi; in rabbinic traditions *ribbon* and related words are more often used of God than of human beings.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly E.C. Hoskyns: “In the older Jewish Literature the word *Rabboni* ... is reserved for address to God.... Mary’s use of it here is therefore probably to be understood as a declaration of faith, parallel to that of Thomas.”<sup>42</sup> Thus, the central question here is whether Mary’s utterance of ῥαββουνί indicates faith or misunderstanding.<sup>43</sup> The translation of Mary Magdalene’s reply has real consequences for readers’ perceptions of her level of insight at this important moment of the gospel.

## Another Curious Variant in John 20:16: “And She Ran to Touch Him”

The “teacher/Lord” issue is not the only striking variant found in early manuscripts of John 20:16. Several important copies actually include an additional phrase in this verse. In many manuscripts throughout the text transmission, immediately after Mary recognizes Jesus, we find the words καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ, “and she ran to touch him.”<sup>44</sup> As pointed out

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in addressing Jesus, seems to follow a deliberate plan: these terms appear almost exclusively in the Book of Signs, while in the Book of Glory the disciples address Jesus as ‘*kyrios* [lord].’ In these forms of address John may be attempting to capture the growth of understanding on the disciples’ part.” Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, AB 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 75. Brown also highlights the order of Jesus’s titles at John 13:13 (“you call me διδάσκαλος and κύριος”) as reflecting development in the disciples’ understanding. See Brown, *Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 553.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 1010. Emphasis added.

<sup>40</sup> Although  $\Psi^5$  is partially lacunose in John 1:38, the nine letters of διδάσκαλε fit easily into the conjectured text.

<sup>41</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, AB 27A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 760.

<sup>42</sup> E. C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 648. For a contrasting opinion (and a reminder of the variant’s exegetical weight) see the comment of Brown: “John translates *Rabboni* into Greek as ‘Teacher,’ the same translation given for Rabbi.... There is even less basis for supposing that the writer is deliberately using a form primarily addressed to God, so that Magdalene is making a declaration of faith” (*Gospel according to John XIII–XXI*, 992).

<sup>43</sup> The same question is necessarily raised of Bartimaeus in Mark 10.

<sup>44</sup> Although this reading has ancient attestation, no extant manuscript of John 20:16 contains both this phrase and the “Lord” variant. However, one patristic exception may be Romanus Melodus; the hymnodist seems to have had some awareness of both variants (see below).

in a careful study by Tjitze Baarda, the additional phrase is widely attested: a version of it is found in the sixth- or seventh- century correction to Codex Sinaiticus/01, Θ/038, Ψ/044, f<sup>13</sup>, several other Greek minuscules (1093, 1195\*, 1230, 2106, and 2145), several Old Latin manuscripts (VL 30, VL 35, and VL 48), three Syriac versions (Sy<sup>s</sup>, Sy<sup>h</sup>, and Sy<sup>pal</sup>), and two tenth-century Georgian manuscripts (geo<sup>a</sup> and geo<sup>b</sup>); it even found its way into the Middle Dutch and German gospel harmonies.<sup>45</sup> In the Syriac Sinaiticus, the Syriac Diatessaron, and several Latin commentaries, the phrase appears with slightly different wording than the Greek. For readers of the manuscripts that contain the additional phrase, the story in John 20:16–17 would have looked something like this:

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means teacher), *and she ran to touch him*. Jesus said to her, “Do not keep clinging to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

In his analysis of the variant, Baarda argues that “the gist of μή + imptv. present. is rather that [Mary] already touched Him”<sup>46</sup>; the additional phrase heightens the possibility that Mary Magdalene actually touched the risen Jesus.

Some commentators have argued that this phrase has its origin in Tatian’s second-century Diatessaron;<sup>47</sup> however, Baarda concludes that it was more likely introduced in Alexandria at an early stage of the text transmission, perhaps as a marginal gloss or interpolation to help explain why Jesus forbade Mary from touching him.<sup>48</sup> To explain both the additional phrase and its variants, Baarda tentatively hypothesizes:

καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ was originally inserted into Greek texts as an interpolation in the second or early third century, in Alexandria (Ammonius? Origen?)... Independently, or under the influence of this Greek text, the Syriac Diatessaron introduced another phrase, namely *and ran up and wished to seize Him*... This hypothesis explains both the spread of the interpolation *and* its different wording in western areas.<sup>49</sup>

Contrary to Baarda’s hypothesis, it is worth noting that Origen was apparently unaware of the reading. Origen’s *Commentary on John* states emphatically, “nor is that woman entrusted with the first-fruit of the touch of Christ, for he says to her, ‘Do not touch me.’ For it was Thomas who was to hear, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and bring your hand and put it into my side.’”<sup>50</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Tjitze Baarda, “Jesus and Mary (John 20 16f.) in the Second Epistle on Virginité Ascribed to Clement,” in *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeven*, ed. Wolfgang Schrage, BZNW 47 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986), 30.

<sup>46</sup> Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 26n96.

<sup>47</sup> Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 28–29. For a similar conclusion, cf. Gilles Quispel, “The Diatessaron of Romanus,” in *Gnostica, Judaica, Catholica: Collected Essays of Gilles Quispel*, ed. Johannes van Oort, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 55 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 88. Also relevant here are the Diatessaronic traditions of the early Syrian church, which included reworkings of John 20:16 where Jesus’s mother (rather than Mary Magdalene) receives the first appearance of the risen Jesus. See Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 85–86.

<sup>48</sup> Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 26.

<sup>49</sup> Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 33. Emphasis Baarda’s.

<sup>50</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Comm. Jo.* 12.180. This translation in *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John Books 13–32*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 106–7. See also *Comm. Jo.* 11.287: “But after he had destroyed his enemies through his passion, the Lord, who is mighty in battle and strong, needing the cleansing for his

Perhaps a more fruitful avenue to pursue is early patristic discussion of Valentinian belief. In *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus describes the Valentinian myth of the encounter between Christ and Achamoth (or the “lower Sophia”):

When, therefore, their Mother had endured every passion and had with difficulty raised herself up, she turned to supplicate the Light, that is, Christ, who had left her, so they say.... He was sent to her together with his coeval Angels. They relate that Wisdom [Ἀχαμώθ] when she met him, first covered herself with a veil out of reverence, but, having gazed upon his entire prolific retinue, she took courage from his appearance and *ran towards him* [προσδραμεῖν εὐτῷ]. He then formed her for the formation that is according to knowledge [γνώσιν] and healed her passions by removing them from her and not neglecting them.... They teach, too, that when Achamoth had been freed from passion and had with joy received the contemplation of the lights which were with him, that is, of the Angels that were with him, and had yearned after them, she brought forth fruits after their image, a spiritual offspring.<sup>51</sup>

Clement of Alexandria paints a similar picture of Valentinian belief in the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*:

When Wisdom [Σοφία] beheld [Jesus Christ] she recognized that he was similar to the Light who had deserted her, and she *ran to him* [προσέδραμεν] and rejoiced and *worshipped* [προσεκύνησεν] and, beholding the male angels who were sent out with him, she was abashed and put on a veil ... therefore, the Saviour bestowed on her a form that was according to knowledge [γνώσιν] and a healing of passions.<sup>52</sup>

The similarities between the Valentinian descriptions of Sophia and the longer textual variant in John 20:16 are striking: all three use a form of προσδραμεῖν when describing a female figure’s joyful response to the unexpected appearance of Christ. Irenaeus and Clement’s description of the “coeval Angels/male angels who were sent out with him” is reminiscent of the two angels who appear to Mary Magdalene in John 20:12–13, and Christ’s healing of Wisdom’s passions seems to echo Jesus’s healing of Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:2. Clement also describes Wisdom as worshipping (προσεκύνησεν) Christ, the same verb used to describe Mary Magdalene in Matt 28:9. These parallels between Valentinian belief and gospel passages about Mary Magdalene are so numerous that the variant at John 20:16 may provide us with a key Valentinian interpretation, which apparently encouraged the identification of Mary Magdalene with Achamoth/“lower Sophia.”<sup>53</sup> Since the textual parallels are not exact, the influence of oral traditions on Irenaeus and Clement seems probable.

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manly deeds which can be given to him by the Father alone, prevents Mary from touching him.” This translation in *Origen: Commentary on the Gospel according to John Books 1–10*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 246. Of course, the transmission of Origen’s works has been fraught with difficulty, and there is always the possibility of scribal substitution or interpolation of phrases.

<sup>51</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.4.5. This translation found in St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against the Heresies. Volume I: Book I*, trans. Dominic J. Unger with revisions by John J. Dillon (New York: Newman Press, 1992), 32–33. Emphasis added.

<sup>52</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 44–45. This translation in Robert Pierce Casey, ed., *The Excerpta Ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (London: Christophers, 1934), 71. Emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip* 48: “The Wisdom [Ἦσοφία] who is called barren wisdom is the mother [of the] angels. And the companion of the [...] Mary Magdalene. The [...] loved] her more often than [all] the disciples, [and he used to] kiss her on her [...] more] often than the rest of the [disciples].” This translation in Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures: A New Translation with Annotations and Introductions* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 339. See also the reference to ΜΑΡΙΣΑΜΜΗ as the “spirit of wisdom” in C. R. C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book Part II*



The reading καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ is ancient; since there is no certain Greek, Latin, or Coptic attestation of this variant before the fifth century,<sup>54</sup> Baarda’s conclusion is reasonable that the additional phrase is likely an early Alexandrian interpolation. Its wording may show influence from the Johannine verb προσέδραμεν, which has just been used to describe the Beloved Disciple who went first into the tomb (John 20:4). Valentinus did, in fact, live in Alexandria in the second century; thus his teaching provides a reasonable historical setting and motive for the addition of the phrase. An oral teaching identifying Mary Magdalene with the “lower Sophia” would explain the textual addition, the differing descriptions provided by Irenaeus and Clement, and the difference of wording in the Syriac version of the long variant. Building on Baarda’s thesis, we therefore suggest that the phrase καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ originated orally in a Valentinian setting and was likely added as a gloss into some manuscripts of John 20.

Let us now turn to the broader patristic record to see how the manuscript variants of John 20:16 were used in antiquity to interpret Mary Magdalene’s interaction with Jesus.

## Treatment of the Variants of John 20:16 in Early Patristic Commentary

Perhaps the earliest known direct quotation of John 20:16 comes from a very ancient *Commentary on the Song of Songs* attributed to Hippolytus of Rome. In the commentary, which is preserved in a tenth-century Georgian manuscript (itself translated from an Armenian version, translated from the Greek), John 20:16b is cited as ῥαββουνι, ῥομιερον γαμμοισαδραμειδανηδονις ηψαδον βηδο (“‘Rabbuni,’ which means ‘my Lord’”).<sup>55</sup> Although the manuscript is of a late date, the “Lord” reading is only attested otherwise in very early gospel manuscripts; since the Armenian and Georgian translators probably had access to copies of John with only the “teacher” reading, this variant in a commentary of Hippolytus is all the more striking. If the text was accurately rendered through its translations, Hippolytus’s early third-century Greek gospel text may have read ραββουνι ο λεγεται κυριε μου.

Meanwhile in the Latin tradition, we may see early evidence of the longer reading of John 20:16 in Tertullian’s *Against Praxeas*. Tertullian writes: “[Jesus] now could show himself as the Father to that faithful woman who attempted to touch him [*tangere eum adgressae*] as a result of

(Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1938), 192. For more on parallels seen between Mary Magdalene and the figure of Sophia, see B. Barc, “Les noms de la Triade dans L’Évangile selon Philippe,” in *Gnosticisme et Monde Hellenistique*, ed. J. Ries (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université catholique de Louvain, Institut orientaliste, 1982), 361–376, at 375; J. K. Coyle, “Mary Magdalene in Manichaeism?,” *Le Muséon* 104 (1991): 39–55; Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), 48–53; Bruce Chilton, *Mary Magdalene: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 143–146; Karen L. King, “The Place of the Gospel of Philip in the Context of Early Christian Claims about Jesus’ Marital Status,” *NTS* 59 (2013): 578–80. For a contrasting interpretation, see Silke Petersen, “Zerstört die Werke der Weiblichkeit!” *Maria Magdalena, Salome und andere Jüngerinnen Jesu in christlich-gnostischen Schriften* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 146–48, 192–93.

<sup>54</sup> Cyril of Alexandria’s fifth-century lemma is treated here as datable Greek attestation of the variant (see below). The sixth- or seventh-century correction found in Codex Sinaiticus is the earliest surviving Greek manuscript attestation.

<sup>55</sup> Yancy W. Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing: Hippolytus’ Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Context*, Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics 62 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2015), 349.

affection, and not of curiosity nor of Thomas’s unbelief.”<sup>56</sup> The Old Latin text manuscripts read *et occurrit ut tangeret eum*, which is not an identical reading. However, it is generally accepted that Tertullian made his own translations from Greek to Latin;<sup>57</sup> thus, *tangere eum adgressae* could plausibly be Tertullian’s own rendering of the Greek words προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ.

Eusebius of Caesarea, who wrote in the early fourth century, may also have had awareness of the long reading:

Then, because she was starting to approach [προσιέναι ὠρμᾶτο] him as teacher [ὡς διδασκάλῳ] still, not as God, he rejects that and tells her: “Do not touch me.” As she was still thinking in human terms, she could not touch his Godhead. It would not have been fitting for her, with lowly human thoughts of him, still in tears, and looking for him down among the tombs and graves as if he were a corpse, to share in contact with him. That is why he gave the conclusive reason, saying that he had not yet ascended to the Father as far as she was concerned, because she did not believe that had happened, but thought he was lying dead somewhere. That is why he says to her: “Being the sort of person you are, and harbouring such thoughts of me, do not touch me, because *you* have not attained faith that I am God.”<sup>58</sup>

Eusebius’s comment that Mary “started to approach” Jesus may be a paraphrase of προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ, although this is not certain. However, it is clear that Eusebius knows the διδάσκαλε reading from his Johannine text; notably, he uses the “teacher” translation to argue that Mary Magdalene has not attained adequate faith. For Eusebius, Jesus’s response to Mary in John 20:17 is a rebuke.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, when our extant manuscripts clearly demonstrate different readings of John 20:16, we find commentary on this passage from two very influential Latin church fathers, Jerome and Augustine. Both men show interest in the “teacher”/ “Lord” question in John 20:16—and both men seem to have known both readings. In Jerome’s *Epistle to Hedybia*, written in approximately 405 CE, he advocates against the “Lord” reading when describing Mary Magdalene’s confession:

It is not a confession of real faith that she calls the Savior “lord” [at John 20:15], but it is in fact humility and fear of the gardener that draws [her] compliance. And see the extent of her ignorance: she believed a gardener had completely taken [his body] away, which court soldiers were watching, and whose tomb angels were protecting; and not knowing her feminine weakness, she, alone and panic-stricken, believes herself of such strength to carry an embalmed corpse of full age, which (to say nothing of the rest) was coated with one hundred pounds of myrrh. And when Jesus—the man whose appearance she did not recognize—had addressed her, and had said, “Mary,” she discerned by his voice, [but] she persisted [in her ignorance], saying not “Lord” [*nequaquam Dominum*], but *Rabboni*, that is to say, she calls him “teacher” [*magistrum*]. And see the extent of her confusion: the one whom she reckoned a gardener, having called him “lord,” the risen Son of God, she calls “teacher”!... Therefore the faith of the apostles is greater. For without a vision from the angels, nor a vision of the savior, after his body was not to be found in the tomb, they believed he had risen from below.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Tertullian, *Prax.* 25.2. This translation in Tertullian, *Treatise against Praxeas*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1948), 169.

<sup>57</sup> See Philip Burton, “The Latin Version of the New Testament,” in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis*, ed. Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Holmes, NTTSD 42, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 178.

<sup>58</sup> Eusebius, *To Marinus* 3.2. This translation in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Gospel Problems and Solutions: Quaestiones ad Stephanum et Marinum* (CPG 3470), ed. Roger Pearse, trans. D.J.D. Miller (Ipswich, UK: Chieftain, 2010), 116–17. Emphasis Miller’s.

<sup>59</sup> Jerome, *Ep. 120 (to Hedybia)*. Our translation, from the Latin text available in J. Labourt, ed., *Saint Jérôme Lettres*, vol. 6 (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1958), 135.

In this letter, Jerome forcefully advocates for the *magister* reading at John 20:16, contrasting it to the *domine* reading at John 20:15 (usually translated “sir”), to argue that Mary Magdalene’s faith and understanding are weak compared to that of the male apostles. Jerome concludes that “the faith of the apostles seems much more lively and more vibrant” than that of Mary Magdalene in John 20; for Jerome, the *magister* translation confirms Mary’s failure to understand.<sup>60</sup> This translation is, of course, the reading found in Jerome’s Vulgate at John 20:16; considering Jerome’s insistence that Mary did not say “Lord” (*nequaquam Dominum*), and the access he had to a wide array of manuscripts, it seems likely that he was also familiar with the *domine* variant at John 20:16.

In Augustine’s Sermon 229L, written sometime after 412 CE, he directly quotes a text where “Rabbouni” is translated as “Lord”: “Mary recognized the voice, looked up at the Savior; and answered him as really now himself: *Rabbouni, which means Lord*.”<sup>61</sup> Notably, in this sermon Augustine sees no misunderstanding on Mary’s part. But a few years later, when writing one of his *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Augustine (perhaps relying on Jerome’s Vulgate translation) instead uses the “teacher” reading to suggest that Mary Magdalene’s understanding was in fact limited:

Let no one think bad of the woman because she called the gardener “sir” [*domine*] and Jesus “Master” [*magistrum*].... She called one *lord* (sir) even when she was not his servant so that through him she could come to the Lord whose [servant] she was.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus Augustine interpreted the same passage in different ways, depending on which manuscript was in front of him; like other patristic writers in antiquity, he may have had no objection to seeing both readings as legitimate.<sup>63</sup> Hugh Houghton notes, “When preaching, [Augustine] would refer during his sermon to the text which had been used for the liturgical lection, and sometimes repeat it from the same copy.”<sup>64</sup> Thus, it seems likely that when preaching Sermon 229L, Augustine relied on a local Old Latin manuscript of John to interpret this passage, but he relied on a Vulgate copy when writing his *Tractates on John*.<sup>65</sup> Yet Augustine’s divergent exegeses clearly create differing interpretations of Mary Magdalene’s level of understanding.

Cyril of Alexandria, who wrote his *Commentary on John* at the beginning of the fifth century, actually cites the additional phrase καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ in the lemma when commenting on John 20:16.<sup>66</sup> He then writes,

<sup>60</sup> This interpretation is in marked contrast to Jerome’s earlier *Ep. 127 (Ad Principiam)*, dated 397 CE: *Mariamque proprie Magdalenen, quae ob sedulitatem et ardorem fidei, turritae nomen accepit, et prima ante Apostolos, Christum videre meruit resurgentem* (“And Mary, properly ‘the Magdalene’—who, because of diligence and ardent faith, received the name ‘of the tower’—deserved to see the Risen Christ first before the apostles”). See also F. A. Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, LCL 262 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), 450–51.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Serm. 229L.1*: “*Maria agnovit vocem, respexit Salvatorem; et ipsa illi tamquam ipsi respondit: Rabbouni, quod interpretatur, Domine*.” This translation in J. E. Rotelle, ed., *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century; Sermons, III/6 (184–229Z) on the Liturgical Seasons* (New Rochelle, NY: New City, 1993), 313. Emphasis Rotelle’s.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Tract. Ev. Jo. 121.2*. This translation in J.C. Elowsky, ed., *John 11–21: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IVb* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 346. Emphasis Elowsky’s.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. see Jennifer W. Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 84–88.

<sup>64</sup> H. A. G. Houghton, *Augustine’s Text of John: Patristic Citations and Latin Gospel Manuscripts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42–43.

<sup>65</sup> Such a habit of Augustine is suggested in Houghton, *Augustine’s Text of John*, 350.

<sup>66</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Jo.*, book 12. Cited in Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 26.

Her mind is filled with the highest joy, and she eagerly runs to him to touch his holy body and gain a blessing from it... [Jesus] hinders the woman as she is running to him, and though she longs to embrace his feet, he does not allow it. He clarifies the reason for his action by saying, “I have not yet ascended to my Father.”<sup>67</sup>

Cyril’s comment that Mary “longed to embrace [Jesus’s] feet” suggests that he has conflated this longer reading of John 20:16 with Matt 28:9; Baarda has demonstrated that there was an early and widespread tendency to conflate these two verses, observed as early as Irenaeus.<sup>68</sup> This interpretation seems to have been widespread. John Chrysostom makes a similar interpretation in his *Eighty-Sixth Homily on John*, although he suggests that one only needs the usual Johannine text to make the inference: “How is it evident that she touched Him and fell at His feet?... This [interpretation] is evident from the words ‘Do not touch me.’”<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, for Cyril, who had the additional phrase, Mary Magdalene was *not* able to touch Jesus; however, for Chrysostom, who seems not to have the phrase, she *was* indeed able to touch him.

According to Leo I, who wrote in the mid-fifth century, Mary Magdalene was able to touch Jesus: “the Lord said to Mary Magdalene (who represents the church), when she hurriedly approached and touched him, ‘Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my father.’”<sup>70</sup> Severus of Antioch, writing in the early sixth century, also knew the interpretation that Mary Magdalene was able to touch Jesus: “Some indeed say that ... this woman approached him and touched him just as she had done before ... when Mary approached him with more fervent desire and to ask something concerning the divine, she did so because she wanted the reason for his resurrection revealed to her and so she returned to touch him.”<sup>71</sup> Later in this homily, Severus clearly identifies Mary Magdalene as Mary of Bethany: “[John] testifies to this desire of Mary, the sister of Martha, to know when, instead of listening to Martha’s instruction, she should remain close to Jesus.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, from this homily it appears that Severus may be familiar with either the Greek or Syriac version of the longer reading and understands Mary Magdalene to be the same woman as Mary of Bethany (who “touched him just as she had done before”—cf. John 12:3).

Both the “Lord” and “and she ran to touch him” variants seem have been present in certain manuscripts into the mid-sixth century. In Constantinople, the hymnodist Romanus Melodus composed the following:

Knowing that Mary would recognize His voice,  
Like a shepherd, [He] called His crying lamb,  
Saying, “Mary.” She at once recognized him and spoke:  
“Surely my wonderful shepherd calls me,

<sup>67</sup> This translation in Cyril of Alexandria, *Ancient Christian Texts: Commentary on John*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, trans. David R. Maxwell (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 360. Oddly, Maxwell has omitted the additional portion of the lemma in his translation of Cyril’s text.

<sup>68</sup> Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 21–27, esp. 26. Cf. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.31.1.

<sup>69</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. Jo.* 86. This translation in *St. John Chrysostom: Commentary on Saint John the Apostle and Evangelist, Homilies 48–88*, trans. Sr. T. A. Goggin (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1959), 449.

<sup>70</sup> *Dominus, cum Maria Magdalene personam Ecclesiae gerens, ad contactum ipsius properaret accedere, dicit ei: Noli me tangere, nondum enim ascendi ad Patrem meum.* Leo the Great, *Sermon* 74.4. This translation in Elowsky, *John* 11–21, 349.

<sup>71</sup> Severus of Antioch, *Cathedral Homily* 45/PO 36 (167): 118–22. This translation in Elowsky, *John* 11–21, 346–47. This is one of several early examples of writers identifying Mary of Bethany as Mary Magdalene even before Pope Gregory the Great’s *Thirty-Third Homily* of 591 CE.

<sup>72</sup> Severus of Antioch, *Cathedral Homily* 45. Translated in Elowsky, *John* 11–21, 347.



In order that henceforth He may number me among the nine and ninety lambs;  
 For I see behind Him who calls me  
 The bodies of saints, the ranks of the Just,  
 And I do not say, ‘Who art Thou who callest me?’  
 For I know clearly who He is who calls me;  
 It is *my Lord* [ὁ κύριος ὁ ἐμός],<sup>73</sup>  
 The one who offers resurrection to the fallen.”  
 Carried away by the warmth of her affection, and by her fervent love,  
 The maiden hastened *and wished to seize Him* [καὶ κρατήσαι ἡβουλήθη],  
 The One who fills all creation without being confined by boundaries;  
 But the Creator did not find fault with her eagerness;  
 He lifted her to the divine when He said,  
 “Do not touch me; or do you consider me merely human?  
 I am God, do not touch me.”<sup>74</sup>

In Romanus’s interpretation, when Jesus speaks Mary’s name, she recognizes him and “knows clearly” that he is her κύριος. Moreover, she sees “the bodies of saints” and “the ranks of the Just” behind Jesus, suggesting that she has attained very high level of insight. Here Romanus definitively presents Mary as one of Christ’s “own”; she is a crying lamb who recognizes her shepherd Jesus’s voice (cf. John 10:3, 14–16).<sup>75</sup> When she hears her name, Mary’s response is to “wish to seize him,” but Romanus finds no fault with this response. Rather, he suggests that Jesus uses her enthusiasm as a means of lifting her to the divine. Romanus composed his hymns in Greek; thus, this kontakion strongly suggests that the word κύριε was still present in some Greek copies of John 20:16 circulating as late as the sixth century.<sup>76</sup> This word seems to have had a direct impact on Romanus’s exegesis, since he presents a strikingly positive portrayal of Mary. The statement that Mary “wished to seize” Jesus also suggests that Romanus had access to a variant very close to the long reading, perhaps as rendered in the Syriac Diatessaron.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the many interesting variants surveyed above, the textual richness found in early interpretations of John 20:16 would eventually drop out of the transmission. By the end of the sixth century in Rome, Gregory the Great only shows familiarity with the “teacher” variant: in a *Gospel Homily* he writes, “because Mary was called by name, she acknowledged her creator and called him at once ‘Rabbouni,’ that is, ‘teacher.’”<sup>78</sup> By the seventh century, patristic references to the “Lord” and “and she ran to touch him” variants had died out completely. Yet for many centuries, these variations in the actual Johannine text provided commentators with what are basically *parallel versions* of John 20:16.

<sup>73</sup> Here Carpenter translates ὁ κύριος ὁ ἐμός as “my Teacher and my Lord”; she has apparently conformed her translation to the received text. She may also show influence here from section 9 of the kontakion (see footnote 76 below).

<sup>74</sup> Romanus Melodus, *Kontakion on the Resurrection* 29.10–11. This translation (other than the note above) in *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist* (vol. 2.2), trans. Marjorie Carpenter (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri, 1973), 318–19. Emphases added.

<sup>75</sup> Romanus’s use of the shepherd metaphor may harken back to the corrupted spelling ܠܘܫܝ in Sy<sup>c</sup> and Sy<sup>s</sup>.

<sup>76</sup> Notably, in section 9 Mary says ἐμός πέλει διδάσκαλος καὶ κύριος ὁ ἐμός ἐστίν (“He is my teacher and my Lord”). From this text Romanus also shows familiarity with the διδάσκαλε reading, yet he has deliberately set up the hymn so that Mary’s confessions transition from διδάσκαλος καὶ κύριος (*before* Jesus speaks her name) to κύριος alone (*after* Jesus speaks her name).

<sup>77</sup> See Baarda, “Jesus and Mary,” 32–33.

<sup>78</sup> Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 25. This translation in Elowsky, *John 11–21*, 346.

## Textual Analysis

Although both the “Lord” variant and the “and she ran to touch him” variant appear in very early manuscripts, no known manuscript contains both readings. These two distinct variation units have independent origins; interestingly, the “and she ran to touch him” variant seems to have gained momentum in the manuscript transmission at around the same time as the “Lord” variant was dying out. It is obvious that different text forms of this climactic moment in John’s Gospel circulated throughout antiquity—and that both commentators and copyists could emphasize, downplay, reinterpret, or even alter certain details of this story. Let us now collate these variants in both Greek and Latin against the text as it appears in NA<sup>28</sup> and the Vulgate, by looking at the readings of important papyri, majuscules, and minuscules.

### Greek Collation against NA<sup>28</sup>

John 20:16b) ραββουνι ο λεγεται διδασκαλε

ϣ<sup>5vid</sup>

διδασκαλε] κε

01

*txt*

01<sup>c2a</sup>: *add* και προσεδραμεν αψασθαι αυτου

01<sup>c2b</sup>: *txt*

02

λεγεται] λεγετε

03

ραββουνι] ραββουνει

05

ραββουνι] ραββωνει

διδασκαλε] κε διδασκαλε

032 *rell.*

*txt*

0141

ο λεγεται διδασκαλε] *om.*

037

λεγεται] λεγετε

038

ραββουνι] ραββωνι

λεγεται] λεγετε

*add* και προσεδραμμεν αψασθε αυτου

044  
 ραββουνι] ραβουνι  
 add και προσεδραμεν αψασθαι αυτου

*f*<sup>1</sup>  
 ραββουνι] ραβουνι 118<sup>sup</sup> 205 565 884 (*txt rell.*)

*f*<sup>13</sup>  
 ραββουνι] ραβουνι (*txt* 983 1689)  
 λεγεται] λεγετε (13)  
 add και προσεδραμεν αψασθαι αυτου (*txt* 69 124 788)

## Latin Collation against the Vulgate

John 20:16b) *rabboni quod dicitur magister*

VL 2  
*dicitur] interpretatur*  
*magister] magister et dñe*

VL 3  
*rabboni] rh[abboni]*  
*magister] domine*

VL 4  
*dicitur] interpretaetur*

VL 5  
*magister] dñe magister*

VL 6  
*rabboni] Rabboni?*  
*dicitur] interpretatur*

VL 8  
*dicitur] interpretatur*  
*magister] magister dñe (VL 8<sup>c</sup> txt)*

VL 14  
*magister] dñ[e]*

VL 30 & 35\*  
 add *et occurrit ut tangeret eum (VL 35<sup>c</sup> txt)*

VL 7, 9A, 10, 13, 15, & 35<sup>c</sup>  
*txt*

**John 20:16b (combined Greek and Latin collations)**

λεγεται] λεγετε 02 037 038 13 | *interpetratur* VL 2 VL 8 | *interpr(a)etatur* VL 4 VL 6  
 ραββουνι] ραββουνει 03 | ραββωνει 05 | ραββωνι 038 | ραββουνι 044 <sup>f<sub>1ms</sub></sup> <sup>f<sub>13mss</sub></sup> | *rh[abboni]* VL 3  
 διδασκαλε] κ̄ε <sup>ϕ<sub>5vid</sub></sup> | *d(omi)ne* VL 3 VL 14 | *magister et d̄ne* VL 2 | κ̄ε διδασκαλε 05 | *d̄me ma-*  
*gister* VL 5 | *magister d̄ne* VL 8\*  
 om. ο λεγεται διδασκαλε 0141  
 add και προσεδραμεν αφασθαι αυτου 01<sup>c2a</sup> 038 (προσεδραμμεν αφασθε) 044 <sup>f<sub>13mss</sub></sup>  
 add *et occurrit ut tangeret eum* VL 30 VL 35\*

This leaves us with seven renderings of the text found in the Greek and Old Latin:

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| [a] | ραβ(β)ουν(ε)ι ο λεγεται [/λεγετε] διδασκαλε<br><i>rabboni quod dicitur [/interpr(a)etatur] magister</i><br><i>rabboni quod interpetratur magister</i><br>("Rabbouni, which means teacher")  | 01* 02 03 032 037 <sup>f<sup>i</sup></sup> <i>rell.</i><br>VL 4 6 10 13 15 35 <sup>c</sup><br>VL 8 <sup>c</sup>              |
| [b] | ραββουνι ο λεγεται κ̄ε<br><br><i>r(h)(abboni) quod dicitur d(omi)ne</i><br>("Rabbouni, which means Lord")   | <sup>ϕ<sub>5vid</sub></sup> (Romanus?)<br>(+ μου Hippolytus?)<br>VL 3 14 Augustine   |
| [c] | ραββωνει ο λεγεται κ̄ε διδασκαλε<br><i>rabboni quod dicitur d̄mē magister</i><br>("Rabboni, which means Lord Teacher")  | 05<br>VL 5   |
| [d] | <i>rabboni quod interpetratur magister et d̄ne</i><br>("Rabboni, which means teacher and Lord")   | VL 2 (Romanus?)  |
| [e] | <i>rabboni quod interpetratur magister d̄ne</i><br>("Rabboni, which means teacher Lord")  | VL 8*  |
| [f] | ραββουνι<br>("Rabbouni")  | 0141   |
| [g] | ραββουνι ο λεγεται διδασκαλε και προσεδραμεν αφασθαι αυτου<br>ραββωνι ο λεγετε διδασκαλε και προσεδραμμεν αφασθε αυτου<br>ραββουνι ο λεγεται διδασκαλε και προσεδραμεν αφασθαι αυτου<br><i>rabboni q(uod) dicitur magister et occurrit ut tangeret eum</i><br>("Rabbouni, which means teacher. And she ran to touch him")<br><br>ⲙⲁ ⲁϣⲗⲗ ⲃⲗⲧⲱⲛⲓ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲓ ⲓⲗⲁⲃⲏⲁ ⲁⲟⲧ ⲙⲁⲃⲓ<br>("Raboni, what is called teacher. And she ran to touch him")<br><br>ⲙⲁ ⲁⲣⲓⲃⲏⲁ ⲃⲗⲧⲱⲛⲓ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲓ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲓ ⲓⲗⲁⲃⲏⲁ ⲁⲟⲧ ⲙⲁⲃⲓ<br>("Rabuni, that which he was known as teacher. And she ran to touch him") | 01 <sup>c2a</sup> Cyril<br>038<br>044 <sup>f<sub>13</sub></sup><br>VL 30 35*<br><br>Sy <sup>h</sup><br><br>Sy <sup>pal</sup> |

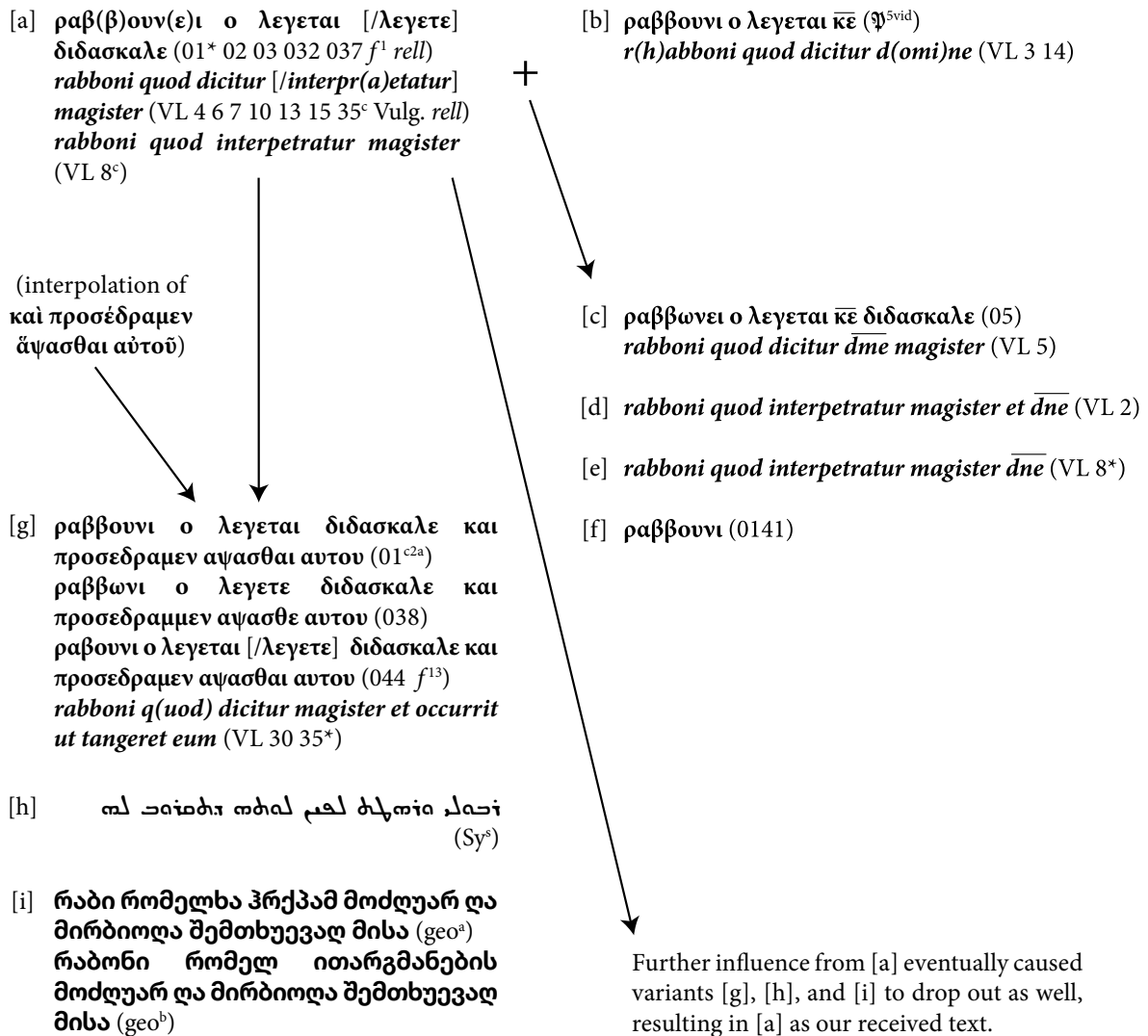
as well as two additional variants in Syriac and Georgian:

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| [h] | ⲙⲁ ⲁⲣⲓⲃⲏⲁ ⲧⲏⲃⲗ ⲙⲁⲗⲗⲓ ⲃⲗⲧⲱⲛⲓ ⲙⲁⲃⲓ<br>("Rabuli. And she ran towards him in order that she might touch him")   | Sy <sup>s</sup> (Romanus?)               |
| [i] | რადი რომეღბა ჰრქჷმამ მოძღუარ ღა მირბიოღა შემთხუევაღ<br>მისა<br>("Rabi, which is to say teacher. And she ran to meet him")<br>რადონი რომეღ ითარგმანების მოძღუარ ღა მირბიოღა<br>შემთხუევაღ მისა<br>("Raboni, which is translated teacher. And she ran to meet him") | geo <sup>a</sup><br><br>geo <sup>b</sup> |



Below we propose a diagram of a theorized “textual flow” of local stemma in John 20:16. Some conflation of the two early readings [a] and [b] resulted in readings [c] [d] [e] [f]. At some point the phrase *καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ* was interpolated, with varying translations attested in Syriac and Georgian. By the end of the sixth century the *κύριε/domine* variant had died out; this coincided with the rise in popularity of the longer reading “and she ran to touch him” (with some variation), which survived in many manuscripts, but was eventually edited out of the Byzantine text.

### Theorized Textual Flow for John 20:16



Thus, we have evidence not only of several distinct textual variants, but of what might be called *narrative variants* of John 20:16 circulating in antiquity. In some versions of the story Mary Magdalene recognizes Jesus as her *teacher*, in others she confesses him as the risen *Lord*, sometimes she confesses him as *teacher and Lord*, and sometimes she additionally *runs to touch* Jesus (which may or may not be interpreted as Mary Magdalene actually touching Jesus on Easter morning).

## Conclusion: Multiple, Divergent Manuscript Traditions Surrounding John 20:16

In conclusion, although the majority of the surviving textual evidence reflects the reading διδάσκαλε/*magister* (“teacher”) at John 20:16, many ancient manuscripts and variant patristic quotations reveal that differing translations of the word ῥαββουνί as well as an additional phrase about Mary were in fact circulating in the text for centuries. There are several possible explanations for how these variants originated. Regarding the κύριε/*domine* variant, there may have been a desire to make Mary Magdalene’s addresses to Jesus consistent in John 20 or to ensure that Jesus was always referenced as “Lord”; equally valid are the possibilities that κύριε is the correct translation of the Aramaic word or that John 20:16 was editorially harmonized to John 1:38 under the influence of Mark 10:35 and 10:51. Regarding the variant καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ, this phrase may have been added as a gloss to help explain Jesus’s injunction to Mary in John 20:17; the testimony of Irenaeus and Clement suggests it could have originated in a Valentinian setting where Mary Magdalene was being connected with Achamoth/the “lower Sophia.”

In general, variations in the text transmission are more likely to have been accidental than intentional. Yet considering the exegetical impact of these variants in John 20:16, it seems that deliberate editorial activity is at play here—especially since the stakes around Mary Magdalene were particularly high in the early centuries of Christianity. These variations in John 20:16 all originated when the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Mary*, the *Gospel of Philip*, and the *Pistis Sophia* were circulating, texts which demonstrate debates about Mary (Magdalene)’s status, worthiness, and insight *vis-à-vis* the other disciples.<sup>79</sup> The exegetical importance of how to translate ῥαββουνί in a milieu where Mary Magdalene could be seen as rivaling the male apostles would have been obvious to ancient commentators like Eusebius and Jerome and may have influenced their advocacy for the “teacher” reading. For other commentators, the phrase καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ offered rich exegetical possibilities, both orthodox and “gnostic.” These narrative variants, which all originated at a very early stage of the text transmission, have not yet been widely discussed by interpreters of the New Testament.

Although it is impossible to know for certain the origins of the κύριε/*domine* reading or the additional phrase καὶ προσέδραμεν ἄψασθαι αὐτοῦ, the fact remains that these ancient variant readings were a part of the gospel text for many ancient commentators. These variants create a direct exegetical impact on Mary’s level of understanding, and perhaps even whether she (rather than Thomas) was the first to touch the risen Jesus in John. The Greek evidence is too slim to argue forcefully for either of these readings as the initial text, although it is within the realm of possibility; philological evidence does support the κύριε reading at John 20:16, and Mary’s attempt to touch Jesus may have been present in manuscripts as far back as the second century. Thus, Johannine exegetes should begin to look beyond our received text of John 20:16 and discover the rich variations in this important verse which have enlivened its interpretation throughout the history of the church.

<sup>79</sup> See *Gospel of Thomas* 114, *Gospel of Mary* 17.10–18.15, *Gospel of Philip* 63.30–64.9, and *Pistis Sophia* 36, 72. For a contrasting opinion on whether “Mary” should always be identified as Mary Magdalene, see Shoemaker, *Mary in Early Christian Faith and Devotion*, 75–93.