

John's Radical Rewriting of Luke-Acts

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When asked to present a paper for the Jesus Seminar on "Which came first, Luke or John?" I hesitated. I long had been convinced by Gilbert Van Belle, and especially Manfred Lang, that John freely redacted Luke.¹ So why are we still debating this issue? On second thought, however, it seemed that this presentation might help resolve an issue that for many scholars remains unsettled.

Rowan & Littlefield published three books relevant to this topic, each of which argues for imitations of classical Greek literature on NT narratives by applying criteria designed to identify mimesis, a methodology that has come to be called Mimesis Criticism: (1) *The Gospels and Homer: Imitations of Greek Epic in Mark and Luke-Acts*; (2) *Luke and Vergil: Imitations of Classical Greek Literature in the Aeneid and Luke-Acts*; and, (3) a less technical trade book entitled *Mythologizing Jesus: From Jewish Teacher to Epic Hero*. I also have completed another, *John and Euripides: The Dionysian Gospel*, much of which is directly related to the question, "Which came first, Luke or John?"

The *Gospels and Homer* argued that Mark and Luke created many of their narratives by imitating Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*:

The Spirit Descending like a Dove (John 1:32–34 and Mark 1:9–11 [Luke 3:22])

Athena's descent as a bird to Telemachus in *Od.* 1;

Purging the Temple of Merchants (John 2:14–17 and Mark 11:15–17)

Odysseus rids his house of suitors in *Od.* 22;

Feeding Five Thousand Men (John 6:1–13 and Mark 6:32–44)

Nestor feeds 4500 men at the shore in *Od.* 3;

Walking on Water (John 6:16–21 and Mark 6:45–51)

Hermes walks on water in *Il.* 24;

Raising the Dead (John 11:3–44 and Mark 5:21–24, 35–43)

Apollo heals Glaucus' wound in *Il.* 16;

Anointing by a Woman (John 12:1–8 and Mark 14:3–5 [Luke 7:37–38])

Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus while washing his feet in *Od.* 19;

Entering Jerusalem on a Donkey (John 12:12–15 and Mark 11:1–10)

Odysseus enters the city of the Phaeacians in *Od.* 6 and 7;

Jesus' Soul is Troubled (John 12:27 and Mark 14:33–36)

Odysseus despairs of life when he learns that he must go to Hades in *Od.* 10;

1. Lang, *Johannes und die Synoptiker*; Van Belle, "Lukan Style in the Fourth Gospel," 351–72.

- Peter and the Cock (John 13:37–38 and Mark 14:26–31)
 Eurylochus vows not to slay the cattle of Helios in *Od.* 12;
 Judas the Betrayer (John 6:70–71 and 18:3, 10 and Mark 6:16; 14:43–49)
 Melanthius, Odysseus' treacherous slave, arms Penelope's suitors in *Od.*
 17–22;
 Peter's Denial (John 18:13, 15–18, 25–27 and Mark 14:65–15:1)
 Eurylochus breaks his vow in *Od.* 12;
 Barabbas rivals Jesus (John 18:39–40; 19:2–3, 16a and Mark 15:2–20a)
 Irus the beggar rivals Odysseus in *Od.* 18;
 Joseph of Arimathea (John 19:38, 41–42 and Mark 15:42–46 [Luke 22:50–52,
 53b–54])
 Priam, Hector's father, bravely asks Achilles for the body of his son in *Il.* 24;
 The Stone at the Tomb (John 20:1; Mark 16:2–4)
 Polyphemus hefts a stone to protect the door of his cave in *Od.* 9;
 Mary Magdalene at the Tomb (John 19:25; 20:11–18 and Mark 15:40–41; 16:2–8
 [Luke 24:1–12])
 Andromache mourns Hector in *Il.* 22 and 24
 Jesus reveals his identity to two disciples (John 20:19–28; Luke 24:3–43)
 Odysseus reveals his identity to his father Laertes in *Od.* 24.

The presence of these Homeric imitations in John should leave little doubt that John knows the Synoptics, especially Mark. The study at hand investigates two examples.

The Anointing at Bethany

According to Homer, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, reassured Penelope that her husband soon would return and slay the pesky suitors. His wife was not convinced but in gratitude ordered Eurycleia, his old nurse, to wash his feet:

Vry early in the morning, bathe and anoint him.
 ...
 If one is noble and is of noble heart,
 strangers [given hospitality] carry one's fame far and wide
 to all peoples, and many speak of one's excellence.
 (19.320, 332–34)

For his part, the hero did not trust the younger women to touch him, lest they recognize him and blow his cover, but he knew that he would be safe with Eurycleia. He told Penelope:

"Washings of feet do not please my heart,
 and no woman shall touch my feet
 of those who are female slaves in your halls,
 unless there is an old woman, a good care-giver,
 who has suffered in her breast as much as I.
 I would not object to a woman like this touching my feet."
 Then wise Penelope said to him again,
 "Dear stranger, never before has a man so smart

of dear strangers from afar come here to my house,
so thoughtfully wise as you are in everything that you say.
I have an old woman with a sensible heart in her breast,
who nursed well and cherished that unlucky man;
she took him in her arms first, when his mother birthed him.
She will wash your feet, though she is frail.
Wise Eurycleia, arise now and come;
bathe this man who is the same age as your lord; Odysseus
perhaps now has similar hands and similar feet,
for quickly mortals grow old because of hardship." (19.343–60)

As the old nurse started her chore, she noticed just such resemblance:

"Many weary strangers come here,
but I say that I have never seen anyone here so similar,
for you resemble Odysseus in shape, voice, and feet."

...

And the old woman took the gleaming basin
to wash his feet, and poured into it lots of cold water,
and then drew the hot. But Odysseus
sat at the fireplace ...

...

So she approached and began to wash her lord. Immediately she recognized
the scar that a boar long ago had gouged with a white tusk.

...

The bronze basin tipped over, and the water spilled onto the ground.
Simultaneously joy and anguish overwhelmed her heart; both of her eyes
filled with tears, and her voice stuck in her throat.
After touching Odysseus' beard, she said,
"You most surely are Odysseus, dear child! I did not
recognize you before, not until I touched the whole body of my lord."
(19.379–81, 386–89, 392–93, 470–75)

The Markan Evangelist told a similar tale:

³And while he was in Bethany, at the house of Simon the leper, and as he
was reclining at dinner, a woman entered who brought an alabaster jar of
very costly ointment of pure nard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured
the ointment over his head. ⁴Some people expressed with each other their
indignation: "Why this waste of ointment? ⁵This ointment could have been
sold for more than three hundred denarii and donated it to the poor!" And
they scolded her harshly. ⁶But Jesus said, "Let her be! Why do you trouble her?
She has committed a beautiful act for me. ⁷For you always have the poor with
you, and when you wish, you can do good for them, but you do not always
have me. ⁸She offered what she had; she anticipated the anointing of my body
for burial. ⁹I tell you truly, wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout
the world, what this woman has done also will be mentioned in her memory."
(14:3–9)

This unnamed woman in Mark did not anoint Jesus' feet but poured perfume over his head, an act that Jesus interpreted as an anointing for his death. That is, she apparently recognized something about him that had escaped his disciples: the necessity of his suffering. Eurycleia, too, lamented the sufferings of her lord. Mark emphasizes the extravagance of the woman's action by having her break a stone jar to release the oil. Eurycleia dropped her brass basin and spilled the water when she recognized Odysseus.

In the epic and the Gospel a woman anoints a stranger in an act of hospitality while he sits in the home of his host. Whereas the epic contrasted Eurycleia's hospitality with the hostility of the suitors, the Gospel contrasts the hospitality of the woman at Bethany with the stingy response of the disciples, who objected to this costly show of affection. "In both myths a female follower anoints the king shortly before events reach a crisis ... In the Gospels it is not a prophet who anoints him [as one might find in the Jewish Bible] but, as with Eurykleia and Odysseus, a woman."²

Here is an overview of the parallels.

Od. 19

- Odysseus went to Penelope and sat.
- Penelope, in private, questioned her husband in disguise.
- Odysseus answered and gave her signs that he had seen her husband and that he would soon return.
- After giving his prophecies to Penelope, Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, sat by himself.
- Eurycleia came in with a bowl of water and washed his feet; later she "anointed him generously with oil."
- When she recognized her master, she dropped his leg into the brass vessel, spilling the water.
- She alone recognized her king.
- Melanthe had objected to Penelope's generosity to a poor beggar.

Mark 13:1–4, 28–37; 14:1–11

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives and sat.

Four of the disciples, in private, asked him about the destruction of the temple.

Jesus answered and gave the sign when he would return.

After giving these prophecies to four disciples, Jesus sat at table in the humble home of a leper.

A woman came in with an expensive stone jar of ointment and poured the contents on Jesus' head.

She broke the jar to release the oil.

She alone recognized that Jesus soon would die.

People at the meal objected to the woman's extravagant anointing; the ointment could have been sold and the money given to the poor.

2. Louden, *Homer's Odyssey and the Near East*, 269–70. Eurycleia's recognition and Odysseus' silencing of her also seems to have been Mark's model for Peter's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah and Jesus' insistence that the disciples tell no one.

I have delayed the most strikingly unusual similarity until now. Jesus praised the woman by saying, "Wherever the good news is proclaimed throughout the world, what this woman has done also will be mentioned in her memory" (14:9). That is, this woman will have far-flung renown; she will be *eurykleia*, "Renowned-far-and-wide." The significance of the name Eurycleia was noted by an ancient reader: "Eurycleia, she who had far-flung [εὐρύ] and great fame [κλέος]."³

The promise of eternal fame to the anointing woman in Mark is a flag to Eurycleia, and the juxtaposition of Jesus' prophecies of his return in the third person followed by a wise woman anointing him surely issues from mimesis, and Byzantine readers saw the resemblance. When the poets of the *Homeric Centos* retold the story of Jesus' anointing, they used lines from *Od.* 19 to do so, including the wordplay on the name Eurycleia: what the woman did for Jesus would earn her "far-flung fame."

Hom. Cent. 1.1321–26

(= *Od.* 19.348) "I would not object to a woman like this touching my feet.

(= *Od.* 19.107) Woman, no mortal on the boundless earth

(= *Od.* 19.108) would reprove you, for your renown [κλέος] extends to the far off [εὐρύ] sky,

(= *Od.* 19.109) like that of a faultless king, who, god-fearing,

(= *Od.* 19.110) rules over many valiant men,

(= *Od.* 19.111) maintaining justice, and the black earth brings him ..."

The Johannine Evangelist also tells this story and at first relies heavily on Mark's account. The unnamed woman now is Mary.

Mark 14:3b, 5

[A] woman entered who brought an alabaster jar of ointment of pure nard [μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτελοῦς].

...

⁵"She could have sold this ointment for more than three hundred denarii and donated it to the poor [τοῦτο τὸ μύρον προαθῆναι ἐπάνω δηναρίων τριακοσίων καὶ δοθῆναι τοῖς πτωχοῖς]!"

John 12:3, 5

Then Mary took a pound of very expensive ointment of pure nard [μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτίμου].

...

⁵"Why did she not sell this ointment for three hundred denarii and give it to the poor [τοῦτο τὸ μύρον οὐκ ἐπράθη τριακοσίων δηναρίων καὶ ἐδόθη πτωχοῖς]?"

Luke's account of Jesus' anointing is a free redaction of Mark 14:2–9 to which he added, among other things, a reference to the woman wetting his feet and drying them with her hair. A similar episode appears in John 12:1–8, but the evangelist anticipates it by explaining that Lazarus' sister Mary was the woman

3. Scholion to *Od.* 1.429.

in question. It would appear that he expected his readers already to be aware of the story, even though he had not yet told his version of it!⁴ In any case, the verbal affinities with Luke are striking.

Luke 7:37–38

And a woman, who was a sinner in the city, learned that he was reclining in the house of the Pharisee, brought an alabaster jar of ointment [μύρου],³⁸ stood behind his feet, wept, with her tears began to wet his feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet [τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς θριξίν τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ἐξέμασσαν καὶ κατεφίλει τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ], and anointed them with the ointment [μύρω].

John 11:2

And it was Mary who anointed the Lord

with ointment [μύρω]

and wiped his feet with her hair [ἐμάξασα τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς].

The verb ἐκμάσσω appears only five times in the NT: twice in Luke 7 in connection with the repenting woman; twice in John in connection with Mary (here and in the narration of the anointing per se in 12:3), and once in John's account of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples in 13:5.

When the Johannine evangelist gets around to tell his own version of the anointing, he displays indebtedness to Luke, not Mark.

- Only the accounts in Luke and John clarify that Jesus was eating with others at the time (Luke 7:36; John 12:1–2).
- According to Mark and Matthew, the woman anoints Jesus' head, but in Luke and John she anoints his feet.

Luke 7:38

[A woman] stood behind his feet, wept, with her tears began to wet his feet, wiped them with the hair of her head, kissed his feet [τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς θριξίν τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ἐξέμασσαν καὶ κατεφίλει τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ], and anointed them with the ointment [ἤλειψεν τῷ μύρω].

John 12:3

[Mary] anointed the feet of Jesus

and wiped his feet with her hair [ἤλειψεν τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἐξέμαξεν ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ]. And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment [τοῦ μύρου]

- Mark and Matthew both place the objections to her action on the lips of multiple unnamed people, but Luke and John both refer to a named

4. See Bauckham, "John for Readers of Mark," 147–71.

individual: "The Pharisee who had invited him" (Luke 7:39); "Judas Iscariot ... who was about to hand him over" (John 12:4).

- Immediately after this story in Luke the Evangelist names three women, among whom is Mary Magdalene, who "served [δμηκόνου] Jesus and the disciples (8:2–3). John gave the name Mary to the woman who anointed Jesus, while her sister Martha "served [δμηκόνει] dinner" (12:2; cf. Luke 10:39–42).

If one grants that Mark created the anointing at Bethany after Odysseus' anointing by Eurycleia, the presence of the tale in John surely requires knowledge of the Synoptics, but, as we have seen, his retelling actually has much in common with Luke's retelling of the story in 7:36–50. Those who would argue for Luke's knowledge of John would have to claim that the Lukan Evangelist knew two versions of the story (Mark's and John's), vacillated between them, and expanded his version into his tale of the sinful but contrite woman. This history of tradition, though unnecessarily complex, is not impossible, but it cannot explain the second example insofar as the parallels between Luke and John have no equivalent in Mark. Here one must decide whether Luke or John imitated another episode of the *Odyssey*.

The Recognition of Jesus by his Wounds

The Gospel of Luke tells the following tale about two disciples on their way to a village called Emmaus who failed to recognize their risen Lord.

¹⁵It so happened that while they were talking and looking for answers, Jesus himself was approaching and joined them in their journey. ¹⁶Their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷And he said to them, "What were these sayings that you were discussing with each other while you were walking?" And they stopped momentarily, full of gloom. ¹⁸And the one named Cleopas replied and said to him, "Sojourner, are you the only one in Jerusalem who does not know what has happened in the city during these days?" ¹⁹And he said to them, "What things?" They said to him, "Things that happened to Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, ²⁰and how our chief priests and rulers handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him." (24:15–20)

²⁸As they approached the village where they were headed, he pretended to be walking on beyond it. ²⁹They prevailed on him and said, "Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day already is far spent." He went in to stay with them. ³⁰While he was reclining with them he took the bread and blessed it; having broken it, he gave it to them. ³¹And their eyes were opened and they recognized him. He then vanished from them. ³²And they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking with us on the road as he opened the scriptures for us?" (24:28–32)

For this famous story Luke borrowed from the last book of the *Odyssey*. After slaying the suitors and revealing his true identity to Penelope, Homer's hero went to Laertes' farm "far from the city" and told Telemachus to go to the old man's home to prepare a meal. "I will test my father,

whether he will recognize and perceive me with his eyes
or not recognize me because I was gone for so long."

...

He found his father alone in his well-tended orchard.

...

When the much-enduring, glorious Odysseus saw him,
exhausted with age and laden with profound sorrow in his heart,
he stopped under a tall pear tree and shed a tear.

(*Od.* 24.216–18, 226, 232–34)

The hero was tempted to reveal his identity at once, but decided to proceed with his test. He went to him and said,

Old man,

...

you are not taking good care of yourself but show signs of miserable old age;
you are quite filthy and wear rags.

...

Whose slave are you? Whose orchard do you tend?

(24.244, 249–50, 257)

Similarly in Luke, Jesus does not reveal himself to his two disciples, whose "eyes were kept from recognizing him" (24:16). Compare this with Odysseus' desire to know if his father would "recognize and perceive me with his eyes / or not recognize me because I was gone for so long" (*Od.* 24.217–18).

In the epic, Odysseus went on to say that he was hoping to find the island of Ithaca and receive hospitality from an old acquaintance. "And his father responded to him, shedding tears, / 'Stranger, you have indeed arrived at the land about which you asked, / but insolent and wicked men now have it'" (*Od.* 24.280–82). In the gospel one reads, "And the one named Cleopas replied and said to him, 'Sojourner, are you the only one in Jerusalem who does not know what has happened in the city during these days? ... Our chief priests and rulers handed Jesus over to be condemned to death and crucified him'" (Luke 24:18–19).

Odysseus told yet another lie in which he claimed to have seen Laertes' son just five years earlier. At the mention of his son, the old man broke into sobs, and the hero no longer had the stomach to prolong the agony. He kissed his father and said, "Father, I here am that man whom you seek; / I have come to my homeland in the twentieth year" (*Od.* 24.321–22). Laertes had his doubts:

"If you are indeed my son Odysseus who has come home,
tell me now some recognizable sign so that I may be persuaded."

In response, crafty Odysseus told him,
 "First, consider with your eyes this scar
 that, when I went to Parnassus, a boar
 gouged with a white tusk." (24.328–33)

The hero also described in detail the planting of orchards and vineyards when he was a lad. "So he spoke, and the knees and dear heart of Laertes / melted when he recognized the sure signs that Odysseus showed him. / Then he threw both arms around his dear son" (24.345–47). The hero then made this proposal:

"Let us go to your home that sits beside the orchard.
 Earlier I sent Telemachus, the cattleman, and the swineherd there
 so that they might quickly prepare a dinner."
 So spoke the two of them and went off to the good house.
 And when they arrived at the well-situated house,
 they found Telemachus, the cattleman, and the swineherd
 carving large quantities of meat. (24.358–64)
 Then from the fields, ready for dinner, came the slaves.
 And when they saw Odysseus and recognized him in their hearts,
 they just stood there in the halls—astonished. Then Odysseus
 ordered them with gentle words:
 "Old man, sit down to dinner; and you servants, rid your minds of wonder."
 ...
 When he had so spoken, Dolius spread both hands, made straight for him,
 took Odysseus' hand, and kissed his wrist. (24.391–94, 397–98)
 By the end of the epic, Odysseus once again ruled as king of Ithaca.
 (24.483)

In both the last book of the *Odyssey* and the last chapter of Luke, recognition scenes involve meals. Odysseus invited Laertes back to his father's own home, where a feast was awaiting them (*Od.* 24.358–61). Cleopas and his companion "prevailed on Jesus and said, 'Stay with us, for it is almost evening and the day already is far spent.' He went in to stay with them" (Luke 24:29). Jesus could not play host in Luke, so the roles are reversed from the epic: the disciples, who otherwise play a role similar to that of Laertes, invite Jesus to stay with them.

The signs of Odysseus' identity were his scar and his memory of planting trees. The sign of Jesus' identity was the breaking of bread. "While he was reclining with them he took the bread and blessed it; having broken it, he gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him. He then vanished from them" (Luke 24:30–31). Laertes' heart melted when he recognized his son. So also in Luke: "The disciples said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was speaking with us on the road as he opened the scriptures for us?' They rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and they found the eleven and those with them gathered together" (24:32–33).

In the epic, father and son go off to Laertes' home, where "they found Telemachus, the cattleman, and the swineherd / carving large quantities of meat" (*Od.* 24.363–64). In Luke the two disciples "returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven" (Luke 24:33).

³⁶As they were saying these things, Jesus himself stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace to you." ³⁷They were startled and terrified—they thought they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do misgivings arise in your hearts? ³⁹See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and look: a mere spirit does not have flesh and bone as you see that I have." ⁴⁰Having said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While they were still amazed and in disbelief for joy, he said to them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴²They gave him a portion of broiled fish; ⁴³he took it and ate it before them. (24:36–43)

Jesus' wounds play the role of Odysseus' scar that enabled Laertes to recognize him. "First, consider with your eyes this scar / that, when I went to Parnassus, a boar / gouged." (*Od.* 24.331–33). Odysseus then gave Laertes a second sign in addition to his scar: knowledge of the trees they had planted long ago. Jesus, too, gave a second sign in addition to his wounds: he ate a piece of fish to prove he was no mere spirit. The recognitions of Odysseus and Jesus both produced jubilation.

Finally, Luke dropped lexical clues that point to the ending of the epic. Several villages in Palestine were named Emmaus, but no archaeological site precisely corresponds to his description of the village "sixty stadia from Jerusalem." Eumaeus, of course, is the name of Odysseus' servant who earlier had recognized him by his scar. The name Cleopas is exceedingly rare, and appears nowhere else in the NT. As we have seen, the name Eurycleia is a compound of εὐρύ, "far and wide," and κλέος, "renown." Cleopas trades on the same word for renown and means "all-fame." Surely it is no accident that "Far-flung-fame" (Eurycleia) and "All-Fame" (Cleopas) both recognized the identities of their lords.

Here is a comparison of the similarities:

***Od.* 24.216–394**

- Odysseus, thought dead, returned alive.
- Odysseus went to his father's farm, outside the city, to see if he would recognize him "with his eyes."
- Laertes was sad as he worked his garden.
- The "stranger" began asking questions.
- Laertes expressed his sadness over the death of his son and the violence

Luke 24:13–43

Jesus died but returned alive.

Jesus met the disciples on the road, outside Jerusalem, but "their eyes were kept from recognizing him."
The disciples were sad as they walked.

The "sojourner" began asking questions.

Cleopas expressed sadness over Jesus' death and the violence of the Jewish

of the suitors.

- Odysseus spoke with his father about himself in the third person, but the old man still did not recognize him.
- Odysseus revealed himself by means of his scar and knowledge of the trees, and there was a meal at another venue.
- Odysseus had told Laertes to look at the scar on his leg for proof. ["I here am that man!"]
- Those who recognized Odysseus were astonished, and he comforted them.

authorities.

Jesus spoke with his disciples about himself in the third person, but they still did not recognize him.

Jesus revealed himself by breaking and distributing bread at a meal at another venue.

Jesus told the disciples to look at the wounds on his hands and feet: "It is I myself." (cf. John 20:20a)

On recognizing Jesus, the disciples were terrified, and he comforted them. (cf. John 20:20b)

If Luke's readers picked up these clues and compared the last chapter of the gospel with the last book of the epic, they should have seen significance to the story invisible on the surface. Odysseus visited Hades without dying; Jesus died and returned from the dead. Odysseus' wound came from a hunting accident; Jesus' came from his execution. The recognition of Odysseus by Laertes demonstrated that the hero had returned home. The recognition of Jesus by the disciples demonstrated his status as the Messiah who conquered death. Here again, Luke does not merely imitate Homer, he rivals him by exalting Jesus over Odysseus.

If one attributes the disciples' recognition of Jesus by his wounds to Lukan redaction under the influence of *Od.* 24, the following parallels between Luke 24 and John 20 must be attributed to John's knowledge of Luke:

Luke 24:13, 36–41

Two of them on that day [ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ] ... ³⁶As they were saying these things,

Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them ,

"Peace to you [ἔστι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν]."

³⁷They were startled and terrified—they thought they were seeing a spirit. ³⁸And he said to them, "Why are you troubled and why do misgivings arise in your hearts? ³⁹See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and look: a mere spirit does not have flesh and bone as you see that I have."

John 20:19–23

When it was evening on that very day [τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἐκείνῃ], the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut for fear of the Jews at the place where the disciples were,

Jesus himself stood in their midst and said to them,

"Peace to you [ἔστι εἰς τὸ μέσον καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν]."

⁴⁰Having said this, he showed them his hands and his feet [καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τοὺς πόδας].

⁴¹While they were still amazed and in disbelief for joy [χαρᾶς], ...

[Jesus then says that forgiveness of sins (ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν) must “be proclaimed to all peoples” and promises to send them the Holy Spirit (24:47–48).]

²⁰Having said this, he showed them his hands and his side [καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τὴν πλευρὰν αὐτοῖς].

Then, when the disciples saw the Lord, they rejoiced [ἐχάρησαν] ...

[Jesus then breathes on them, tells them to receive the Holy Spirit, and grants them authority to forgive sins (ἄφητε τὰς ἁμαρτίας) (20:21–23).]

Conspicuously absent in the Johannine account is Jesus’ invitation that the disciples investigate his hands and touch him. The physicality of Jesus’ resurrection was hotly contested in the early church, even in the Johannine epistles.

John and Euripides will propose that Jesus’ second appearance to the disciples in John 20:24–28 was the work of the final redactor. What is most amazing about the following parallels is the emphasis on Jesus’ invitation to observe his hands, which in the earlier appearance was strategically omitted! Whereas the Johannine Evangelist refused to redact Luke 24:37–39, the final redactor made it the center of attention, and by so doing retained what made Luke’s account most like the recognition of Odysseus: the revealing of his scar.

Luke 24:13, 36–41

Two of them on that day [ἡμέρα] ...

³⁶As they were saying these things,

Jesus himself stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace to you [ἔστη ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν].”

³⁷They were startled and terrified—they thought they were seeing a spirit.

³⁸And he said to them,

“Why are you troubled and why do misgivings arise in your hearts? ³⁹See my hands and my feet [ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου], that it is I myself. Touch me and look: a mere spirit does not have flesh and bone as you see that I have.” ⁴⁰Having said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹While they were still amazed and in disbelief [ἀπιστοῦντων] for joy, ...

John 20:26–28

And after eight days [ἡμέρας], his disciples again were inside and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut,

Jesus came, stood in their midst, and said, “Peace to you [ἔστη εἰς τὸ μέσον καὶ εἶπεν· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν].”

²⁷Then he says to Thomas,

“Bring your finger here and see my hands [ἴδε τὰς χεῖράς μου], and bring your hand and push it into my side,

and do not be unbelieving [ἄπιστος] but believing [πιστός]. ²⁸Thomas responded and said, “My Lord and my God.”

These parallels provide the strongest evidence that John knew the Lukan gospel, and, for that reason, it also has become the center of the controversy (see Lang, 1999, and Van Belle, 2005). What makes my proposal definitive is Luke's mimetic indebtedness to the *Odyssey*. John even retains Homeric motifs, such as the display of tell-tale wounds.

These parallels did not escape the attention of Byzantine poets. The poet of the first recension of the *Homeric Centos* borrowed from four of Odysseus' most famous recognition scenes to narrate the episode concerning doubting Thomas, a Johannine imitation of Luke 24:36–41. The doubting apostle thus asks for a sign, borrowing a line from Laertes (1.2300).

(= *Od.* 24.329) "Show me now some sure sign so that I may be certain."

Jesus then agrees to produce a sign by borrowing lines from Odysseus to his servants and Laertes.

***Hom. Cent.* 1.2309–11, 2313, 2315–16**

(= *Od.* 21.212) "But to you two [!] I will declare the truth, what will happen:

(= *Od.* 21.217) and if you come, I will display another sure sign,

(= *Od.* 21.218) that you may recognize me well and be certain in your heart."

...

(= *Od.* 21.221) Having said this, he pulled back his rags from his large scar.

...

(= *Od.* 24.331; to Laertes) "First, consider with your eyes this scar,

(= *Od.* 22.373) that you may recognize me in your heart."

The voice of the narrator then adopts a line from Eurycleia's recognition (1.2319).

(= *Od.* 19.391) He recognized the scar, and the truth came to light.

Thomas's response is an amazing rearrangement of lines from Penelope's recognition that the beggar who had slain the suitors was indeed her husband.

***Hom. Cent.* 1.2321–22, 2324–29**

(= *Od.* 23.225) "And now, since you already have revealed sure signs,

(= *Od.* 23.230) you are convincing my heart, even though it is hardened.

...

(= *Od.* 23.175) I am not overly amazed, and I know well who you are.

(= *Od.* 23.213) So do not now be angry or indignant with me

(= *Od.* 23.214) because when I first saw you I did not obey you.

(= *Od.* 19.475; by Eurycleia) But I did not recognize you earlier, before I felt all the body of my Lord,

(= *Od.* 23.215) for the dear heart in my breast always

(= *Od.* 23.216) shuddered that some mortal would deceive me with words."

The poets responsible for the second recension of the *Centos* borrowed four lines from Odysseus' revelation to Laertes, including the reference to his scar as a token of recognition.

Hom. Cent. 2.1895, 1898–99, 1903–4

(= *Od.* 24.400) [Thomas:] “O friend, since you have returned to us who have longed for you ...”

...

(= *Od.* 24.248) But I will tell you something else, and do not hold resentment in your heart,
(= *Od.* 24.329; Laertes’ request for a sign) show me a clear sign so that I may be persuaded.”

...

(= *Od.* 11.126) [Jesus:] “I will show you a clear sign; it will not escape you;
(= *Od.* 24.331) first, consider with your eyes this scar.”

This paper has argued that John retains evidence of Mark’s Homeric imitations. This shared content thus does not witness to independent tradition but knowledge of the Synoptics. It also argued that the Fourth Gospel retains evidence of Luke’s Homeric imitations, so that parallels between Luke and John must point to John’s use of Luke.

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