

A Case for the Assimilation of Matthew 21:44 to the Lukan “Crushing Stone” (20:18), with Special Reference to \mathfrak{P}^{104} *

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Abstract: Modern critical editions enclose Matt 21:44 in brackets due to lingering questions about whether the major witnesses have preserved an early scribal assimilation to Luke 20:18, as it is not present in many Western witnesses. Due to the challenge posed by papyrus discoveries to such “Western noninterpolations” in recent decades, many scholars now tend to favor the authenticity of this verse in Matthew and reject the assimilation hypothesis along with most other shorter Western readings. This particular text, however, has rarely been studied thoroughly, and recent treatments have not fully dealt with the implications of the second-century fragment \mathfrak{P}^{104} (P.Oxy. XLIV 4404), which appears to lack the verse. This article presents a comprehensive study of the text’s external and internal evidence and argues that it is best explained as an early scribal assimilation by (1) providing a detailed transcription of the papyrus that corrects errors in prior versions, (2) presenting new quantitative data on assimilation tendencies among major witnesses, and (3) responding to the internal arguments for the longer reading.

Keywords: Assimilation, Interpolation, Matthew, Luke, Papyri, Western Non-Interpolation, Parable of the Wicked Tenants

The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.
(Matt 21:44 NRSV)

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.
(Luke 20:18 NRSV)

The conclusion of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Matt 21:33–45; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 20:9–19; Gos. Thom. 65–66; hereafter, PWT), with its citation of the “stone” text of Ps 118[117]:22, has long been a point of significant debate. Further complicating the discussion is the second “crushing stone” text. While the text is secure in Luke 20:18 with no major variants, NA28 and UBS5 enclose the Matthean version in single brackets, reflecting a long-standing hypothesis that the text was interpolated by scribes into Matthew’s account in order to assimilate it to Luke.¹ English translations handle this bracketing in various ways: some exclude the verse altogether or relegate it to a footnote (NEB, RSV, NJB); some include it in the text but insert a foot-

* Many thanks to Klyne Snodgrass for his constructive interaction with an early draft of this essay, which is dedicated to him in honor of his recent retirement and years of diligent scholarship. Thanks also to Peter Head for feedback on my work on \mathfrak{P}^{104} , Simon Gathercole for general comments, and James Brusuelas of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri Collection for assistance in viewing the manuscript. Photos courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society and the Imaging Papyri Project, Oxford.

¹ To clarify, in NA/UBS single brackets denote variants that may be regarded as part of the text but without complete certainty. Throughout the term “assimilate/assimilation” will be defined as any scribal modification intended to mitigate differences between synoptic versions of parallel texts.

note mentioning how some manuscripts lack the verse (NRSV, ESV, NIV); and some include it in the text with no comment about variants at all (ASV, CEB, NASB, NKJV). This variation among major translations reflects a similar variation among scholars and commentators—for all are relying on critical Greek editions and textual resources (such as Metzger’s *Textual Commentary*) that do not currently incorporate recent papyrological data for this verse.

Surprisingly, however, there have been few detailed studies of the assimilation hypothesis for this verse. The primary exception remains Snodgrass’s argument against it.² His oft-cited case, however, does not deal substantially with \mathfrak{P}^{104} or with work done on the patterns of assimilation in the synoptic manuscripts, and few \mathfrak{P}^{104} discussions have engaged meaningfully with the internal evidence. It is my aim, therefore, to revisit the question and integrate both the external evidence—including fresh looks at \mathfrak{P}^{104} (based on personal inspection of the fragment under magnification) and assimilation patterns in the Synoptics—and internal evidence to build a case that Matt 21:44 is an early scribal interpolation that assimilated Matthew’s text to Luke’s.

1. State of the Question

Let us begin by surveying the manuscript witnesses, treatment in major editions, and the spectrum of opinions on the assimilation hypothesis. I will conclude this section by outlining the rationale for revisiting the data in a comprehensive way.

1.1 Manuscript Evidence and Treatment in Major Editions

NA28 and UBS5 list the following witnesses that do not read Matt 21:44: D 33 it (including b,d,e,ff1,ff2,r1) sy^s Origen Eusebius (Syriac translation) Iren^{lat}. By contrast the following witnesses include the verse: uncials representing various text-types (\aleph B C K L W Z Δ Θ 0102 0233); minuscules ^f1,13 28 157 180 205 565 579 597 700 892 1006 1010 1071 1241 1243 1292 1342 1424 1505; the Byzantine witnesses; several lectionaries; several versions (Vulgate, Syriac c,p,h, Coptic sa,meg,bo, Armenian, Ethiopic, Gothic, Slavonic); and multiple church fathers (Chrysostom, Cyril, Jerome, Augustine).

The breadth of witnesses is overwhelmingly in favor of the originality of Matt 21:44. However, the agreement of D it syr on a shorter reading has, since the time of Westcott and Hort, typically been considered stronger than agreement among the major uncials and other witnesses on the longer reading.³ Such variants have been labeled “Western noninterpolations” (hereafter WNI). The WNI hypothesis maintains that the reading shared in D it syr derives from the second century and, thus, precedes the key uncials that are otherwise favored.⁴

² The key points are found in his *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 286; the fuller argument is found in his *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants: An Inquiry into Parable Interpretation*, WUNT 27 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 66–71. The only other detailed treatment of the verse that includes both internal and external evidence is found in John Kloppenborg’s *Tenants in the Vineyard: Ideology, Economics, and Agrarian Conflict in Jewish Palestine*, WUNT 195 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 194–96; he primarily responds to Snodgrass’s arguments. This article will further develop some of Kloppenborg’s points.

³ Westcott-Hort’s original argument is found in *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (London: MacMillan, 1890), §240–242. See summary of the history of the debate in Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. E.F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987 [1982]), 232.

⁴ Westcott-Hort identified nine “certain” WNIs (mostly in Luke) and eighteen “suspected” WNIs, including Matt 21:44.

Various editors’ treatments of Matt 21:44 reflect in part the difference of opinions regarding the WNI hypothesis:⁵

– Omit/relegate to the apparatus: Tischendorf (1869); de Solages *Synopsis* (1959); Huck-Lietzmann *Synopsis* (1963); Boismard-Lamouille *Synopsis* (1986).

– Single brackets, with a note on variants: Westcott-Hort (1890); von Soden (1913); La-Grange *Synopsis* (1926); Vogels (1949); NA25–28; UBS3–5;⁶ Aland *Synopsis* (1996).

– No brackets, but note on variants: Legg (1950); Bover (1953); Merk (1957).

In short, the critical editions leave things inconclusive regarding whether Matt 21:44 should be considered an assimilation or fully embraced as authentic.

1.2 Recent Scholarly Debate

Unsurprisingly, there is tremendous diversity among Matthew commentators regarding how to treat the verse:⁷

Omit	Bracket	Include
Nolland (2005)	Hagner (WBC, 1995)	Evans (2012)
Mello (1999)	Bonnard (1992)	Chamblin (2010)
Davies/Allison (ICC, 1997)	Albright/Mann (AB, 1971)	France (NICNT, 2007)
Harrington (SP, 1991)		Witherington III (2006)
Zahn (KNT, 1903)		Luz (Hermeneia, 2005)
		Keener (1999)
		Senior (ANTC, 1998)
		Gnilka (1992)
		Maier (BK, 1980)
		Gaechter (1962)
		Schlatter (1959)

This distribution of opinions indicates a shift in recent years in the direction of favoring the text’s authenticity.

One reason behind this development has been the strong critique leveled against the WNI hypothesis. The publication of numerous NT papyri has demonstrated that in nearly all cases for which we have evidence, the papyri do not agree with these shorter WNI readings but, rather, agree with the longer “Alexandrian” readings.⁸ Consequently, the following analogy is proposed: if among most WNI readings, an earlier witness such as \mathfrak{P}^{75} agrees not with the “Western” readings but with the “Alexandrian,” we can extrapolate to conclude the same holds

⁵ Unfortunately this pericope is not included among the *Teststellen* studied in Kurt Aland et. al., *Text und Textwert der griechischen Handschriften des Neuen Testaments 4.2. Das Matthäusevangelium 2.1,2.2* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1999), nor in the ECM study of Holger Strutwolf and Klaus Wachtel, *Parallelperikopen: Sonderband zu den Synoptischen Evangelien* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2011).

⁶ UBS1–2 used double brackets.

⁷ The commentators included here have specific discussions about the verse (and do not merely follow NA).

⁸ See Kurt Aland’s discussion of such findings, particularly related to \mathfrak{P}^{75} , in “Neue neutestamentliche Papyri II,” *NTS* 12 (1966): 193–210. Note that I am enclosing the traditional text-type labels in quotations to reflect the work on the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method (the method underlying the *Editio Critica Maior*), which has called into question the validity of these century-old labels.

true for other WNI readings—even those for which we lack papyri.⁹ Indeed, in their discussion of Matt 21:44 itself, the Alands conclude that the WNI hypothesis “can only be regarded today as a relic of the past.”¹⁰ Observe, however, the quite different explanations offered by two members of the UBS committee for their decision to retain Matt 21:44 in brackets:

Metzger:

While considering the verse to be an accretion to the text, yet because of the antiquity of the reading and its importance in the textual tradition, the Committee decided to retain it in the text, enclosed within square brackets.¹¹

Aland:

The external evidence [for authenticity] is particularly strong, and it would be conclusive if it were supported by one of the great early papyri, *but unfortunately none has been preserved for this passage*.... And yet there remains a slight doubt [against authenticity], sufficient to justify single brackets but inadequate to warrant the use of double brackets to indicate certainty that the sentence was not a part of the original text.¹²

This perhaps explains their decision to assign it a C rating.

While there has been a small resurgence of defenders of the WNI hypothesis based on perceived theological tendencies in some papyri¹³—leading to longer readings rather than shorter readings—most scholars now accept the longer readings in the “Alexandrian” witnesses and, thus, treat the shorter readings as true omissions. In this vein Snodgrass concludes:

The case against the non-interpolations appears to be decisive. Matthew 21,44 is an exact parallel except that no papyri are extant which cover this section of Mt. That the Western non-interpolations have no claim to originality in Lk. and Jn. does not prove that the omission of Mt. 21:44 has no such claim, but it certainly prejudices the case against it. On external grounds there appears to be little doubt that v. 44 was part of the original text.¹⁴

The problem, however, is that a papyrus (\mathfrak{P}^{104}) *has* been published after Snodgrass and Aland penned their original cases that covers precisely this passage in Matthew and, thus, should be given more weight in the conversation. Snodgrass’s and B. Aland’s more recent works offer limited engagement with \mathfrak{P}^{104} ;¹⁵ nearly all recent commentaries do not mention it; and UBS5/

⁹ Snodgrass presents a version of this case in “Western Non-Interpolations,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 369–79.

¹⁰ *Text*, 232.

¹¹ Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006), 47. This is unchanged from the 1971 edition.

¹² Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 232–233 (emphasis added). This echoes Aland’s previous statement elsewhere that “‘Western non-interpolations’ have been, so to speak, stripped of their original nimbus and that, although interesting, they are no longer regarded, or should no longer be regarded, as authoritative” (“The Significance of the Papyri for Progress in New Testament Research,” in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. P. Hyatt [Nashville: Abingdon, 1965], 325–46 [334]).

¹³ E.g., Mikeal Parsons, “A Christological Tendency in \mathfrak{P}^{75} ,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 463–79; Michael W. Martin, “Defending the ‘Western Non-Interpolations’: The Case for an Anti-Separationist *Tendenz* in the Longer Alexandrian Readings,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 269–94.

¹⁴ Snodgrass, *Parable*, 67.

¹⁵ In *Stories* Snodgrass briefly mentions \mathfrak{P}^{104} but does not think it is a “trump card” to his broader argument, because it is “so fragmentary that its reading is uncertain” (286). Similarly, B. Aland more recently discusses \mathfrak{P}^{104} and its significant implications for the Western tradition—but she takes it no further (“Kriterien zur Beurteilung Kleinerer Papyrusfragmente des neuen Testaments,” in *New Testament Textual Criticism and Exegesis*, ed. A. Denaux, BETL 161 [Leuven: Peeters, 2002], 1–14 [8]).

NA28 do not yet include it in the apparatus. Thus, a comprehensive reassessment is long overdue. I will argue that this *external* evidence—which does not, in fact, support the longer reading—suggests that we should reconsider throwing out all the shorter “Western” babies (like Matt 21:44) with the WNI bath water. From there I will turn to the *internal* evidence to see whether it supports the longer or shorter reading.

2. External Evidence: \mathfrak{P}^{104} and Assimilation Among Major Witnesses

In this section I will pursue two related lines of inquiry regarding external evidence that I believe shifts the balance back in favor of Matthean assimilation. The first is a renewed look at \mathfrak{P}^{104} , a second-century fragmentary papyrus published in 1997 which, on my examination and that of others, lacks Matt 21:44. The second presents data regarding an often unaddressed question: in light of this peculiar mix of agreeing witnesses (a very early papyrus *and* D 33 *it sy^s* etc.), how should we evaluate a claim of assimilation among the much more illustrious group of witnesses? Can we quantify in some way the likelihood that key uncials (esp. \mathfrak{B}) and minuscules (from \mathfrak{f}^{13} to \mathfrak{M}) might agree on an assimilated reading?

2.1 Examination of \mathfrak{P}^{104}

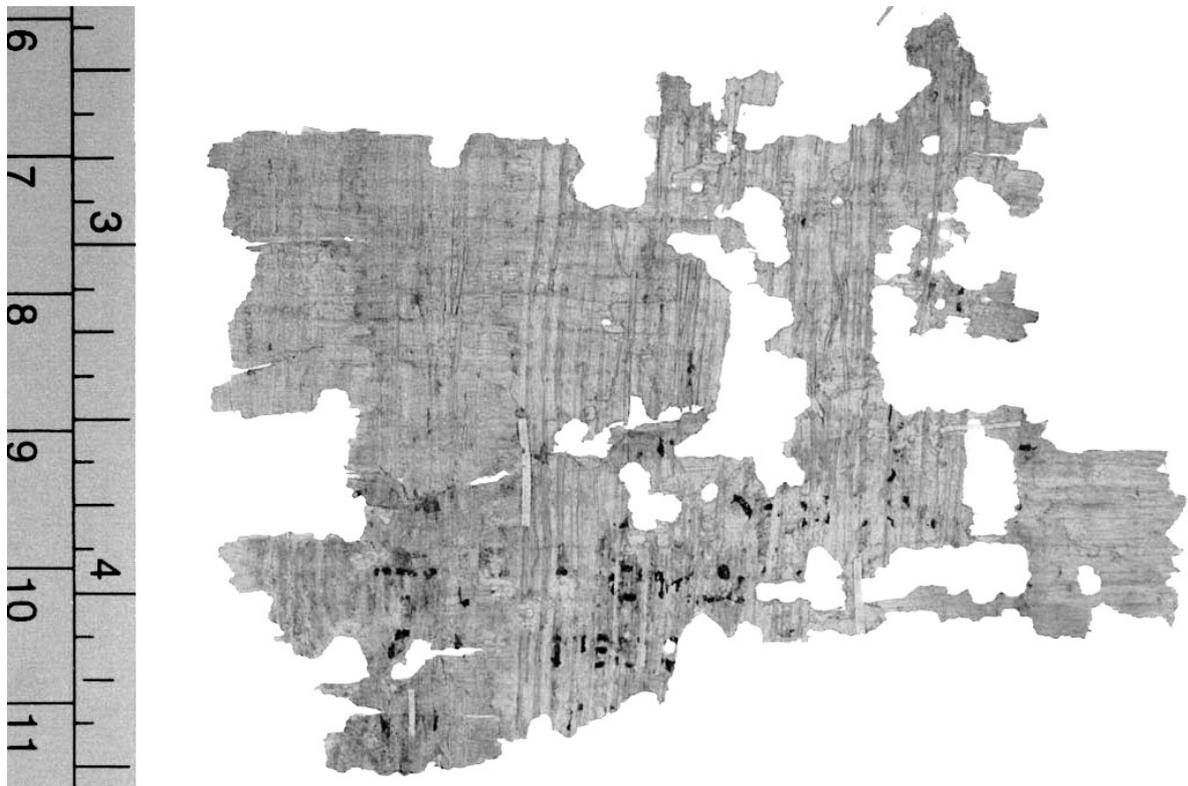
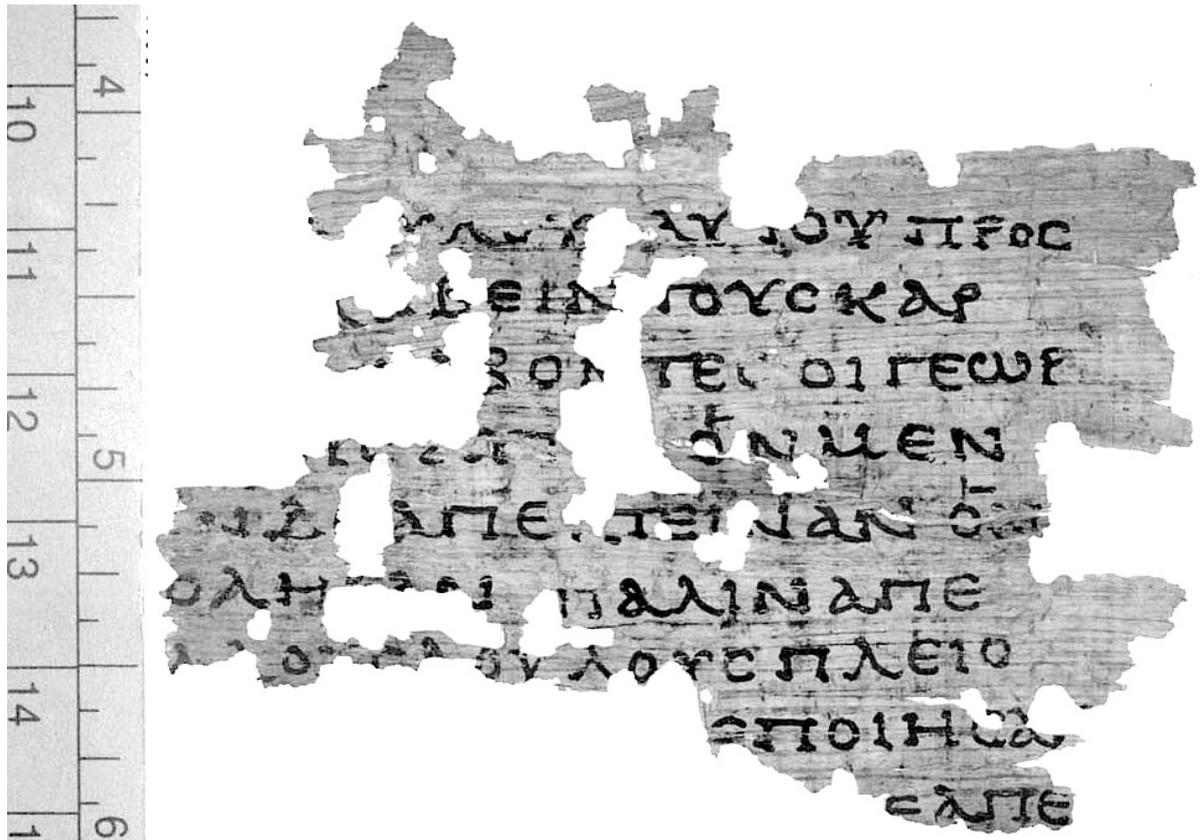
P.Oxy. XLIV 4404 (\mathfrak{P}^{104}) is a fragmentary papyrus housed at the Sackler Library (Oxford University).¹⁶ It is one of only a few NT manuscripts dated paleographically to the second century,¹⁷ and it is the only one discovered thus far that contains these verses in Matthew. Published images of the fragment (both online and in print) are low resolution and, while sufficient for the better-preserved (\rightarrow) side, are rather inadequate for (\downarrow).¹⁸ Hence, the following discussion follows from my examination of the fragment under magnification at Sackler. For reference, images of the (\rightarrow) and (\downarrow) of the manuscript are as follows:

One of B. Aland’s doctoral students cites an additional publication (“Textkritische und exegetische Beobachtungen zu den neu gefundenen Papyri $\mathfrak{P}^{100-116}$ ”) in which Aland apparently reverses her prior position (in *Text*) and suggests that she now believes Matt 21:44 is an interpolation (Kyung S. Min, *Die früheste Überlieferung des Matthäusevangeliums: Edition und Untersuchung*, ANTF 34 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2005], 237 n 10), but it does not appear Aland’s article was ever published.

¹⁶ J. David Thomas, “P. Oxy. 4404,” in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Vol. LXIV*, ed. E.W. Handley (London: British Academy for the Egypt Exploration Society, 1997), 7–9.

¹⁷ Thomas dated the papyrus to ca. 175–200. Comfort-Barrett, on the other hand, proposed ca. 100–125/150 (Philip Comfort and D. P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts: A Corrected, Enlarged Edition of the Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 643–44. Jaroš-Hintermaier push the date even further back to the turn of the century (Karl Jaroš and J. Hintermaier, eds., *Das Neue Testament nach den ältesten griechischen Handschriften* [CD-ROM] [Mainz: Rutzen, 2006], 224). Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse critique what they see as apologetically-driven early dating among Comfort-Barrett and Jaroš-Hintermaier, but they maintain a second-century date for \mathfrak{P}^{104} (“Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Paleography,” *ETL* 88 [2012]: 433–74), as does NA28.

¹⁸ Official images can be found online at http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/papyri/the_papyri.html and http://www.csntm.org/Manuscript/View/GA_P104. Unfortunately, I was not granted permission to take new, higher quality photographs.



The surviving text on the (→) side has been transcribed without difficulty, and the visible text agrees with NA28 for Matt 21:34b–37a. The opposite side of the papyrus (↓) is more damaged and has generated debate regarding its reconstruction. The four main published transcriptions read as follows (converted to capitals):

Thomas (1997, <i>editio princeps</i>) ¹⁹	Jaroš-Hintermaier (2006) ²⁰
	[line 1]
	[line 2]
[line 1]	[line 3]
[line 2]	[line 4]
[line 3]	[line 5]
[line 4]	[line 6]
] ΔΟΘΗÇĒΤ[A]Ι] δοθησετ[α]ι
[ΕΘΝΕΙ ΠΟΙΟΥΝ]ΤΙ Τ[Ο]ΥÇ ΚΑΡ[ΠΟΥ]Ç	εθνει ποιουν]ΤΙ τ[ο]υC ΚΑΡ[που]ç
[ΑΥΤΗC ΚΑΙ ΑΚΟΥ]ÇΑ[Ν]ΤΕÇ Ο[Ι]	αυτης και ακου]Çα[ν]ΤΕÇ Ο[ι]
[traces of line 8]	
Comfort-Barrett (2001) ²¹	INTF VMR ²²
[ΒΑCΙΑΕΙΑ ΤΟΥ ΘΥ ΚΑΙ] ΔΟΘΗÇĒΤ[A]Ι	[ΘΕΟΥ ΚΑΙ] ΔΟΘΗÇĒ[ΤΑΙ ΕΘΝΕΙ ΠΟΙΟΥΝ]
[ΕΘΝΕΙ ΠΟΙΟΥΝ]ΤΙ Τ[Ο]ΥÇ ΚΑΡ[ΠΟΥ]Ç	ΤΙ Τ[Ο]ΥÇ ΚΑΡ[ΠΟΥC ΑΥΤΗC ΚΑΙ ΑΚΟΥ]
[ΑΥΤΗC ΚΑΙ ΑΚΟΥ]ÇΑ[Ν]ΤΕÇ Ο[Ι]	ÇΑ[Ν]ΤΕÇ Ο[Ι ΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΙC ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΦΑ]
	[ΡΙCΑΙΟΙ]

The four versions evince a handful of disagreements. With respect to *certainty about letters*, Thomas and Comfort-Barrett suggest that only K and E (second and third lines of the transcription itself) are certain. Jaroš-Hintermaier suggest that C (second line of transcription) is “clearly visible,” while nine other letters—including the aforementioned K and E—are not clearly identifiable but are still somewhat recognizable.²³ The VMR transcription suggests that only C, K, and E are certain. With respect to *vertical position on the page*, Thomas begins his transcription on line five, while Jaroš-Hintermaier begin on line seven. The VMR transcription is silent on the number of preceding lines, and Comfort-Barrett imply that at most two lines precede their reconstruction.²⁴ Finally with respect to *horizontal position on the page*, Thomas, Comfort-Barrett, and Jaroš-Hintermaier agree that the reconstructed text falls slightly right-of-center of the textual column: they have eleven letters to the left of TI and twelve to the left of CA. By contrast, the VMR transcription places TI and CA flush with the left margin.

¹⁹ Thomas, “P. Oxy. 4404,” 8. The transcriptions of Wieland Willker (“Mt. 21:44: Does P104 [POxy 4404] omit this verse?” <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/TCG/prob/Mt-21-44-P104.pdf>, accessed 19 Jan 2015) and Min (*Die früheste Überlieferung*, 234) agree with Thomas except on the letters considered certain. Both are, thus, excluded.

²⁰ Jaroš-Hintermaier, *Neue Testament*, 228. They use their own colored notation to reflect transcription confidence (p. 17), which I have adjusted here for print: (1) lower-case letters reflect those which they consider unrecognizable (“nicht mehr mit freiem Auge erkennbar sind”); (2) capitals with subscript dots reflect those which are not clearly identifiable but still recognizable to some degree (grey font color in Jaroš-Hintermaier; “nicht mehr eindeutig erkannt werden können”); and (3) unmarked capitals are those which are clearly identifiable (red font color in Jaroš-Hintermaier; “klar lesbar erkannt werden”).

²¹ Comfort and Barrett, *Text*, 644.

²² Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace/?docID=10104>, accessed 5 December 2014.

²³ Note that it is not straightforward to correlate the more common transcription categories (certain vs. uncertain) with Jaroš-Hintermaier’s three categories.

²⁴ In their transcription of the (→) side, they note that “21:37–12:42 [*sic*; 21:42] missing,” and they begin their transcription of the (↓) side by explicitly starting at “21:43.” The thirty-five letters of 21:43 that precede βασιλεία at the start of their first transcribed line would constitute ca. 1.5 lines of missing text.

Despite these differences, it is notable that all four agree exactly on the transcription. They are in alignment that (↓) contains Matt 21:43 (which ends with τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς) and 21:45 (which begins with καὶ ἀκούσαντες οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς)—both of which, significantly, have letters which fall into at least one editor’s “certain” category. The implication is that, if these transcriptions are correct, P¹⁰⁴ omits Matt 21:44, whose sixty-three letters (~2.6 lines)²⁵ could not fit in the space between the K (of καρποὺς) and E (of ἀκούσαντες). To this end, Jaroš-Hintermaier state in multiple footnotes, “Matth 21,44 ist in dieser Handschrift nicht enthalten”;²⁶ similarly, Comfort-Barrett state, “it does not include Matt. 21:44, thus making it the earliest witness to its exclusion.”²⁷ However, Thomas exercises more caution, noting, “The reading throughout, however, is very tentative indeed, thus making it hazardous to use this papyrus as evidence in support of the omission of the verse.”²⁸ For this reason, P¹⁰⁴ is usually listed as “Matthew 21.34–37; 43 and 45 (?)” or P¹⁰⁴ with *vid.*

In light of the discrepancies among these four transcriptions, a fresh look at the papyrus may help determine whether Thomas’s tentative conclusions might be strengthened. I will proceed in five steps: (1) vertical position on the page; (2) horizontal position on the page; (3) high-certainty letters; (4) elimination of possible matches; (5) completion of the transcription.

(1) *Vertical position.* Close inspection confirms that the visible text on the (→) side falls at the top of the column, as there is no evidence for any additional ink above what is clearly visible. The distance from the top of the first legible line of (↓) to the same edge is 1.33 inches. The same point on the (→) falls exactly at the top stroke of the Π of ἀπέκτειναν, that is, line 5. Thus, assuming the (↓) side was prepared with generally the same top margins and line spacing,²⁹ I conclude with Thomas (*pace* Comfort-Barrett and Jaroš-Hintermaier) that there are four lines of missing text.³⁰ Hereafter, I will denote the visible lines 5–7.

(2) *Horizontal position.* The (→) side indicates that the column of text ends with the visible letters—that is, there are no traces of writing beyond the rightmost side of the preserved text. It is, of course, possible that the papyrus is broken off and that another column is missing to the right, but this would be rare for papyri of the period,³¹ and Thomas rightly concludes it contains a single column of text. We would expect that the left and right column margins would be roughly the same on both sides. Taking the two extremes of what is visible on (→), the average distance to the right edge of the papyrus is 0.46 inches. When we turn to (↓), we note that all three visible letters on the left measure ~0.48 inches from the left edge of the papyrus. Moreover, all three are basically flush with each other, and there are no indications of missing letters to the left. Thus, those initial letters belong at the start of each line, *pace* Thomas, Jaroš-Hintermaier, and Comfort-Barrett.

(3) *Analysis of high-certainty letters.* I propose that three contiguous letters on line 6 and one letter on line 7 are identifiable beyond reasonable doubt:

²⁵ Based on Thomas’s average of twenty-four letters per line on the (→) side (“P. Oxy. 4404,” 8).

²⁶ Jaroš-Hintermaier, *Neue Testament*, 228–31 nn 5–7.

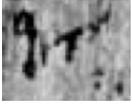
²⁷ Comfort and Barrett, *Text*, 643.

²⁸ Thomas, “P. Oxy. 4404,” 9. The editor of the text in the INTF VMR likewise notes, “Die Zuordnung der Edition 21,43.45 is sehr gewagt.”

²⁹ The average line spacing on (→) is 0.19 inches and is quite uniform; likewise, the average height of the lines (using top-to-top and bottom-to-bottom measurements) on the (↓) side is 0.19.

³⁰ The locations of the very slight traces of ink in the space above line 5 confirm this.

³¹ According to the database hosted by the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (<http://csntm.org/manuscript>; accessed 5 December 2014), all second-century NT papyri are single column. Among the third-century NT papyri (non-roll), forty-seven are single column and four are two-column.

(↓)	Comparanda from (→)	Discussion
		The other possibilities for this letter are O and E. However, the absence of E's middle stroke or O's closure on the right indicate this is a lunate sigma. ³²
		The left stroke and upwards crossing stroke match K from (→). No other option is conceivable.
	 	There are two possibilities: A or Δ. The shape of the bottom of the letter fits better with the two-stroke nature of the A rather than the flat stroke of the Δ. Under magnification, there is a discernible gap at the top of the letter that would fit with the loop in the first A comparandum. Moreover, under magnification the ink to the right of the letter appears to be a smudge similar to the numerous examples found on (→), not a stroke. The absence of any example of CKΔ elsewhere in Matt 21–22 confirms this. ³³
		The prominent middle stroke indicates this is an E.

Thus, the high-certainty letter combination is CKA on line 6, followed by slightly less than a full line of text (~22–27 letters, the min/max line length from [→]), followed by E on line 7. To restrain the target area, we can assume that, using a generous range of twenty-five to forty lines per side,³⁴ the text on (↓) falls either in Matt 21:26–30 if *before* the known text on (→) or in Matt 21:42b–22:1 if it is *after* the known text.³⁵

(4) *Elimination of possible matches.* Within these two ranges of text, there are three instances of CKA followed by E at some point:³⁶

Before (→) text

Matt 21:27b

...ΟΥΚ ΟΙΔΑΜΕΝ ΕΦΗ
ΑΥΤΟΙΣ ΚΑΙ ΑΥΤΟΣ ΟΥΔΕ ΕΓΩ ΛΕΓ
Ω ΥΜΙΝ ΕΝ ΠΟΙΑ ΕΞΟΥΣΙΑ ΤΑΥΤΑ

³² Moreover, within the relevant range of text: (1) OK (assuming K is the second letter) appears only with P or E, neither of which fit the third letter; and (2) EKD and EKA each appear once, but the surrounding letters do not fit lines 5 and 7.

³³ Within these two chapters, CK only appears with E Λ Ο Υ Ρ, but none of these would fit the third letter.

³⁴ Thomas estimates thirty-one lines (but in part this is derived from his transcription, though he verifies the resulting total size of the papyrus against similar forms of the period); Jaroš-Hintermaier estimate twenty-nine (thus explaining their two-line difference in preceding lines on the [↓] side).

³⁵ That is to say, the text in question is ca. six hundred–nine hundred letters (twenty-five to forty lines/leaf * ca. twenty-four letters/line) either before or after Matt 21:35a (line 5 of →). Note that Willker offers up 21:23 and 21:24 as possible matches for CKA followed by E, but concludes (as I have) they are “too far removed to fit on the same page.”

³⁶ Texts shown are from the NA28, converted to capitals at twenty-three to twenty-four letters per line (excl. spaces).

After (→) text

Matt 21:43b–44a

... ΔΟΘΗCΕΤΑΙ ΕΘΝΕΙ ΠΟΙΟΥΝ
ΤΙ ΤΟΥC ΚΑΡΠΟΥC ΑΥΤΗC / ΚΑΙ Ο
ΠΕCΩΝ ΕΠΙ ΤΟΝ ΛΙΘΟΝ ΤΟΥΤΟΝ

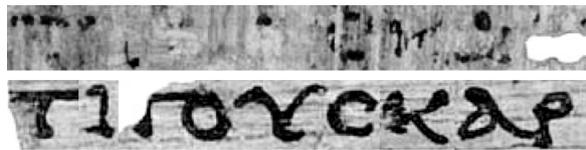
Matt 21:45

... ΚΑΙ ΑΚΟΥCΑΝΤΕC ΟΙ ΑΡΧΙ
ΕΡΕΙC ΚΑΙ ΟΙ ΦΑΡΙCΑΙΟΙ ΤΑC ΠΑ
ΡΑΒΟΛΑC ΑΥΤΟΥ ΕΓΝΩCΑΝ ΟΤΙ

Upon examination each proves an unlikely fit to the remaining letters of the papyrus. (1) *Matt 21:27b*: The second E (ἐξουσίᾳ) for *Matt 21:27b* is twenty-nine letters away from CKA, likely too far, and the subsequent letter Ξ does not fit what follows the E in Ψ¹⁰⁴. The first E (ἐν ποίᾳ) works better from a space perspective, but the subsequent ΝΠ does not fit with the rounded strokes of what follows. (2) *Matt 21:43b–44a*: The first E (πεσῶν) is likely too close to the CKA to work.³⁷ The second E (ἐπι) works spatially, but ΠΙ does not fit the subsequent rounded letters. (3) *Matt 21:45*: Here the E (ἔγνωσαν) is thirty-one letters from CKA, which probably rules it out. Moreover, it is difficult to see how any of the letters preceding CKA (e.g., ΑΡΧΙΕΡΕΙ) could fit with the flat top stroke at the beginning of the line;³⁸ how Υ (from αὐτοῦ) could fit with the prominent vertical line to the left of E that extends the full height of the line; or how ΓΝ could fit the rounded letters after E. In short, all three possible matches should be ruled out.

(5) *Completion of the transcription*. By contrast a fourth option, namely, *Matt 21:43b* and *21:45a* (omitting 21:44)—wherein the E of ἀκούσαντες falls twenty-three letters from CKA—fits well with the extant data. Using handwriting samples from (→), I visually reconstruct lines 6 and 7 as follows:

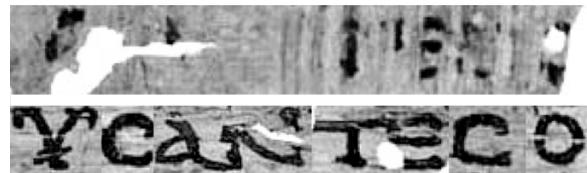
Line 6: (↓) / (→ comparison)



ΤΙ ΤΟΥC ΚΑΡ

Conveniently, (→) provides ΤΟΥCΚΑΡ, thus providing a direct comparison. The TI fits quite well with the prominent top stroke at the beginning of the line. The trace downstroke in the third letter position also fits with the second T. Under magnification there is a clear remnant of a stroke to the left of the top of the visible C (not visible in the images), which fits the top-right of the Y.

Line 7: (↓) / (→ comparison)



ΥCΑΝΤΕC Ο

The VMR transcription proposes C as the first letter of the line. It is hard to conceive how AN could fill the resulting gap between C and T. Moreover, the left edge of the visible stroke is indented relative to lines 6 and 8, and the top stroke appears to stop about halfway, unlike C. Hence, a better fit is Y, in which the upward stroke on the left side has been effaced. This makes for a more reasonable fit of CAN in the gap. Such a reconstruction, however, requires the assumption that the diphthong OY has been split, which is admittedly unusual (but by no means impossible); the other considerations would, on the balance, seem to outweigh it.³⁹ Under magnification the second visible stroke (above

³⁷ This would require line 6 to be seventeen letters—so that the C of αὐτῆς could start line 7, as it is the only logical candidate—but this is six letters (26 percent) shorter than the *shortest* line on (→).

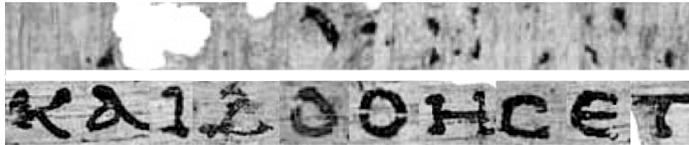
³⁸ Possibly E, but the scribe's E is normally curved at the top.

³⁹ One plausible alternative is to propose that the O was originally to the left of where I place Y on line 7, and, thus, the N (now effaced) would be to the left of T at the start of line 6. This would preserve the diphthong while allowing for the better fit of CAN proposed for line 7.

the hole) is diagonal, not vertical as the images suggest. This would fit the hand’s A. The proposed T is confirmed by the ink of the endpoint of a horizontal top stroke that is visible under magnification to the left of the E. Moreover, under magnification the C and O to the right of the E are much clearer than in the images.⁴⁰

While it is technically unnecessary to reconstruct line 5, given that all other options have been ruled out and the findings for lines 6–7 are sufficient to draw a conclusion about 21:44,⁴¹ I would suggest the following:

Line 5: (↓) / (→ comparison)



KAI ΔΟΘΗCET

The four transcriptions tentatively fit ΔΟΘΗCET by taking the prominent diagonal stroke as the right side of Δ. This may work but presents problems with fitting ΟΘ before what appears to be the squarish letter (=H) shortly thereafter. Under magnification that diagonal stroke is actually curved and has visible counterclockwise turn at its peak, so it easily fits O, given the similar example from (→). Also, under magnification there is a trace of a stroke just above the visible line to the left of the hole (a strip of papyrus has pulled away) which would suggest the loop of the A.

Note: There is no extant Θ from (→), so O serves as proxy.

In short, I propose the following transcription, which attempts to correct deficiencies in prior proposals:

[traces of lines 1–4]
 5 ... K]A[I Δ]OΘH̄CET̄[AI EΘNEI ΠOIOYN]
 6 T̄I T̄[O]ȲC KAP[ΠOYC AYTHC KAI AKO]
 7 Ȳ[CAN]T̄EÇ Ō[I APXIEPEIC ...]
 [possible traces of line 8]

By eliminating other options and providing more detail than has been shown before, this analysis strengthens the hypothesis that \mathfrak{P}^{104} omits Matt 21:44, thus mitigating to some extent the “(?)”/vid regarding the contents of (↓) as well as Thomas’s warning against using this fragment for text-critical decisions.⁴²

⁴⁰ Δ would not fit, so this manuscript does not support the variant ἀκούσαντες δὲ οἱ (⌘ L Z 33. 892 etc.).

⁴¹ Peter Head likewise concludes, “My own investigation of the manuscript, including several attempts to find alternative identifications of the verses, supports Thomas’s reconstruction as the best possible fit” (“Some Recently Published NT Papyri from Oxyrhynchus: An Overview and Preliminary Assessment,” *TynBul* 51 [2000]: 1–16 [10 n. 18]).

⁴² If so, double brackets would be the appropriate treatment in the critical editions.

In other words, the earliest witness for this passage agrees with D 33 *it sy*^s against the major uncials, minuscules, and Byzantine texts. This sharply contrasts with the broader papyrus findings where the lines of agreement run the opposite direction. This raises an important question: how should we evaluate this peculiar combination of witnesses for an assimilated reading?

2.2 Assimilation among Major Witnesses

All textual critics admit that scribes often assimilated readings among Synoptic Gospels and that Bezae is one of the main offenders. Yet one has to ask whether the typical appeal to the number and quality of witnesses in defense of the originality of Matt 21:44 rests on an implicit belief that it is simply out of the question that the entrenched “Alexandrian” witnesses would agree on such an assimilation. But is this a correct assumption? Put differently, to what degree should we expect generally superior witnesses to possess assimilated readings and even agree on them against supposedly lesser witnesses, as in this case? Can this be quantified in some way?

Though oft-cited as a source of variants, assimilation among gospel manuscripts has rarely been systematically studied. One of the only substantial works has been that of Willem Wisselink (1989).⁴³ Wisselink confines his analysis to five *Teststellen* of the triple tradition, none of which our text: Matt 4:1–5:16//; 7:1–12:45//; 19:16–22//; 21:1–27//; and 27:57–28:8//. In analyzing a wide variety of witnesses for ~1,490 variants about which prior editors have postulated a possible assimilation, he asks three questions: Which manuscripts have the highest tendency towards assimilation? In which gospels do most assimilations occur? In what direction have most assimilations occurred?⁴⁴ I highlight the following findings:

- “Assimilations occur in all manuscripts.”⁴⁵ This is obvious, but Wisselink’s data provides quantitative support.
 - Based on his data set, the key MSS can be put in the following order based on frequency of assimilation (from highest to lowest): D 33 Θ M P⁷⁵ A W X P⁴⁵ B.⁴⁶
 - Even B, which is far purer than others in the data set, has a possible assimilated reading in 31 percent of the variants investigated, compared with 39 percent in P⁷⁵.⁴⁷
- “The greatest number of assimilations occurs in Matthew” and the fewest in Mark.⁴⁸
- “The number of assimilations to Matthew is proportionally smaller than the number of assimilations to Luke and to Mark.”⁴⁹

Though limited in scope, Wisselink’s findings help provide some quantitative grounding for the question of assimilation.

We can take his analysis a step further towards quantifying *agreements in assimilation* among witnesses, particularly focusing on manuscripts relevant for Matt 21:44. Given that a full anal-

⁴³ Willem Wisselink, *Assimilation as a Criterion for the Establishment of the Text: A Comparative Study on the Basis of Passages from Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (D.Th. Dissertation, Theologische Universiteit te Kampen; Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴⁶ He notes that for the papyri the study presents challenges due to fragmentary evidence in some cases, so he urges caution here (*ibid.*, 75).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 79–80.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

ysis of all possible assimilations among all manuscripts would require a dissertation-length study, I will limit the data set to those major variants about which the UBS editorial committee suspected possible “assimilation,” “interpolation,” “harmonization,” or “conformity” to another gospel (documented in Metzger’s *Textual Commentary*). This data set—about eighty total variants in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—improves upon Wisselink’s data by covering the entirety of the Synoptics, but it is by definition limited to those deemed significant by the committee. This data set leaves out the thousands of other possible variants at the microscopic word level, but the upshot is that they includes only significant variants that might be valid comparanda for Matt 21:44. For each variant identified by Metzger as a suspected assimilation, I tabulated which manuscripts contain what the editors hold to be the nonassimilated reading and which contain the assimilation.⁵⁰ I further classified these assimilations as insertions, omissions, or modifications. Select results from this analysis are tabulated below. Note that the subtotals rarely equal each other due to the fact that the apparatus rarely lists *every* manuscript for a given reading. For our purposes, the witnesses highlighted below are primarily those listed in NA28 for the Matt 21:44 reading.⁵¹

Chart 1: Assimilations by Witness, by Gospel; Sorted by Total Assimilated Readings

Key: Y = “Contains suspected assimilation”; N = “Does not contain assimilated reading”

	Matthew			Mark			Luke			Total		
	Y	N	Total	Y	N	Total	Y	N	Total	Y↓	N	Total
D	14	9	23	11	14	25	21	5	26	46	28	74
Θ	11	12	23	13	11	24	22	4	26	46	27	73
<i>f</i> ³	12	11	23	13	13	26	21	4	25	46	28	74
1424	15	8	23	10	16	26	19	4	23	44	28	72
565	15	8	23	12	12	24	16	8	24	43	28	71
700	13	9	22	12	13	25	18	8	26	43	30	73
K	15	8	23	7	18	25	18	5	23	40	31	71
W	12	12	24	15	12	27	13	12	25	40	36	76
Δ	13	11	24	7	19	26	19	5	24	39	35	74
℞	14	9	23	7	19	26	18	4	22	39	32	71
579	14	8	22	11	15	26	13	11	24	38	34	72
<i>f</i> ¹	13	11	24	10	16	26	12	10	22	35	37	72
33	9	14	23	8	14	22	17	7	24	34	35	69
892	9	14	23	8	19	27	17	7	24	34	40	74
L	13	11	24	6	20	26	11	14	25	30	45	75
1241	11	8	19	8	19	27	11	13	24	30	40	70
⊗	10	14	24	11	16	27	7	19	26	28	49	77
A	1	1	2	8	18	26	18	6	24	27	25	52
C	8	8	16	10	16	26	9	5	14	27	29	56
B	6	18	24	6	21	27	2	24	26	14	63	77
$\mathfrak{P}^{(var)}$	–	1	1	3	–	3	1	15	16	4	16	20
it	2	5	7	3	3	6	4	2	6	9	10	19

⁵⁰ In some cases, the editors opt for the *suspected* assimilated reading because they rule out assimilation on other external/internal grounds (as with Matt 21:44, in fact).

⁵¹ Unfortunately, sy^s and 0102 are not listed frequently to be included in this analysis. Note that Alexandrinus is missing Matt 1:1–25:6, impacting the numbers.

Chart 2: Assimilations by Witness, by Type of Assimilation; Sorted by Total Assimilated Readings
 Key: Y = “Contains suspected assimilation”; N = “Does not contain assimilated reading”

	Omission			Insertion			Modification			Total		
	Y	N	Total	Y	N	Total	Y	N	Total	Y↓	N	Total
D	10	3	13	21	12	33	15	13	28	46	28	74
Θ	4	5	9	24	9	33	18	13	31	46	27	73
f ¹³	2	9	11	28	4	32	16	15	31	46	28	74
1424	1	8	9	23	9	32	20	11	31	44	28	72
565	2	7	9	21	11	32	20	10	30	43	28	71
700	3	7	10	22	11	33	18	12	30	43	30	73
K	-	8	8	21	11	32	19	12	31	40	31	71
W	7	6	13	17	16	33	16	14	30	40	36	76
Δ	2	9	11	23	10	33	14	16	30	39	35	74
℞	-	9	9	20	11	31	19	12	31	39	32	71
579	5	6	11	20	13	33	13	15	28	38	34	72
f ¹	5	8	13	12	17	29	18	12	30	35	37	72
33	1	8	9	18	14	32	15	13	28	34	35	69
892	3	8	11	19	13	32	12	19	31	34	40	74
L	5	6	11	13	20	33	12	19	31	30	45	75
1241	2	9	11	16	16	32	12	15	27	30	40	70
Ⲁ	8	5	13	9	24	33	11	20	31	28	49	77
A	-	9	9	14	8	22	13	8	21	27	25	52
C	4	7	11	12	6	18	11	16	27	27	29	56
B	2	11	13	8	25	33	4	27	31	14	63	77
ϣ ^(var)	1	-	1	-	10	10	3	6	9	4	16	20
it	2	-	2	4	6	10	3	4	7	9	10	19

We may summarize some key findings of this initial set of data as follows. (1) While it is clear that D is one of the most assimilated witnesses, a diverse mix of other uncials and minuscules rank with it. While in about two-thirds of the cases such witnesses possess the possible assimilated reading, in one-third of those cases they *do not* whereas others do. (2) The flagship uncials ⲀABC, as expected, possess the fewest assimilations. However, this does not mean they have *no* assimilations. In fact, ⲀAC rank just behind lesser minuscules, and particularly in Matthew, the spread is not large (e.g., fourteen in D vs. ten in Ⲁ). In fact, in our data set, B has the assimilated reading in 18 percent of cases.⁵² (3) The data make clear that assimilations are about three times as likely to result from insertion than omission. The major uncials are not free from the influences of assimilation-driven insertions (24–27 percent in ⲀB; higher in AC).

A final question to be answered from the data relates to agreements and disagreements with respect to readings. Provided below is a snapshot of a handful of important pairs of witnesses analyzed together to determine when they agree or disagree on a possible assimilation.

Chart 3: Agreements/Disagreements Among Major Witnesses

Key: Y = “Contains suspected assimilation”; N = “Does not contain assimilated reading”

	Agree		Disagree		Total
	Y-Y	N-N	N-Y	Y-N	
Ⲁ - B	9	44	5	19	77
Ⲁ - D	11	15	34	13	73

⁵² The difference relative to Wisselink’s 31 percent for B would presumably be due to differences in methodology and data set.

$\aleph - 33$	13	25	21	10	69
$\aleph - \mathfrak{M}$	14	20	25	12	71
B - D	4	18	41	10	73
B - 33	8	29	26	6	69
B - \mathfrak{M}	5	23	34	9	71
D - \mathfrak{M}	23	14	14	16	67
D - 33	21	14	11	20	66

We might also summarize the patterns of agreement among the lesser witnesses included in this set, namely, K L W Δ Θ $f^{\text{f}3}$ 33. 0102 565 579 700 892 1241 1424 \mathfrak{M} . The frequency distribution of how many MSS from this group *agree* on a given assimilation is as follows:

0 MSS agreeing	8 percent of total assimilations
1–5 MSS agreeing	31 percent
6–10 MSS agreeing	22 percent
11–16 MSS agreeing	39 percent

Select results of these additional data may be summarized. (4) \aleph and B agree on an assimilated reading in 12 percent of cases, and they disagree (e.g., one has it, the other does not) in 31 percent. Moreover, the number of cases in which D or 33 *do not* have an assimilated reading but \aleph or B do is non-negligible (~15 percent of cases on average). (5) Furthermore, it is not at all uncommon for large numbers of diverse witnesses to agree on an assimilated reading (e.g., over half are shared among six or more such MSS).

A few implications relevant to Matt 21:44 may be stated. First, the witnesses which most text critics prioritize are nevertheless contaminated with assimilations. B is the least impacted, but even it has almost one out of five assimilations deemed important enough by the UBS committee to highlight. Second, the lesser witnesses show diverse patterns of agreement and disagreement on assimilations, both among themselves and alongside the superior witnesses. In short, then, we can approach an answer posed at the outset of this section. There would seem to be no *a priori* reason to suspect that a group of witnesses from a variety of types, including the key “Alexandrian” witnesses, would *not* agree on an assimilated reading. While Matt 21:44 may be the only variant in which *all* these witnesses agree against \mathfrak{P}^{104} D 33 et cetera, it is by no means statistically out of the question that such a phenomenon is possible. Connecting to Wisselink’s data, this is a particularly valid possibility in the case of an *insertion*, in *Matthew*, to conform it to *Luke*—all of which are the most common patterns.

2.3 Summary

As outlined above, the WNI hypothesis has, on the whole, been thoroughly challenged, and it can no longer be used *by itself* as a defense of assimilation in Matt 21:44. However, the preceding two-pronged analysis of the external evidence demonstrates that not all suspected WNIs are created equal.⁵³ The analysis of \mathfrak{P}^{104} shows with high confidence that the earliest witness to Matt 21:43–45 omits the verse.⁵⁴ This alone shows that the analogy drawn between this variant and other now-rejected WNIs is invalid. The second stage of the analysis confirms, moreover, that

⁵³ Metzger mentions such a perspective in *Textual Commentary*, 165.

⁵⁴ B. Aland suggests that the reading must be earlier than the papyrus itself (e.g., in its exemplar), for the variant in \mathfrak{P}^{104} was unlikely to have been generated by the scribe given the overall integrity of transmission on (\rightarrow) (“Kriterien,” 8).

the manuscripts generally favored by textual critics often possess assimilated readings (particularly insertions, and particularly in Matthew), and at a nonnegligible frequency agree with each other (or disagree with D and 33, among others) on a reading deemed an assimilation.

At a minimum the external evidence suggests that the agreement of a large number of witnesses on an assimilation of Matt 21:44 to Luke 20:18 is possible, perhaps even probable. We turn now to the internal evidence.

3. Internal Evidence: Addressing the Arguments in Favor of Originality

In the final stage of the discussion, I will respond to the five main “defeaters” that have been put forth (in their most robust form by Snodgrass) against the assimilation hypothesis, followed by summarizing the internal case for it.

3.1 Illogical Sequence: Why Would a Scribe Add It Here?

Most proponents of the authenticity of Matt 21:44 argue that “it seems out of place in its present context,”⁵⁵ thus prompting the question as to why scribes would interpolate the verse at such an illogical position. On one level this argument is irrelevant, since one could simply reverse it and blame Matthew for failing to place the verse in its apparently more “logical” position to begin with.⁵⁶ More importantly, the argument relies on subjective assessments on what constitutes a more “logical” position. Two other locations are offered: (1) after the Ps 118[117]:22 quotation, to match Luke 20:18 or (2) after Ps 118[117]:23 and before Matt 21:43. The former is problematic, as it would require the scribe knowingly to break up the two cola of the important Hallel citation, which are sequential in Mark 12:10–11.⁵⁷ The latter proposal, which implicitly concedes that Ps 118[117]:23 has already disrupted the “logical” connection between the stone texts, is also suspect, for it minimizes the important function 21:43 plays as Matthean *Sondergut*. Not only does this verse give Jesus’s *own* definitive sentence of judgment—whereas Matthew has the *audience* rendering a self-judgment in 21:41 that Mark and Luke ascribe to Jesus (12:9 and 20:16, respectively)—but it completes the textual play on “fruit” (ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς in 21:43, connecting to ἀποδώσουσιν αὐτῷ τοὺς καρποὺς in 21:41). In other words, 21:43 rounds out Matthew’s parable in a distinct way and brings coherence to the inner structure Matthew’s conclusion—a coherence which perhaps would have given a scribe reason to reconsider disrupting it via inserting a verse from Luke before 21:43. And if the position of the plus is so obviously illogical, why did no other scribes in the textual tradition attempt to move it to (1) or (2)? At a minimum we should be compelled to assign equal odds to each possible insertion point, thus taking the “illogical” sequence argument off the table.

3.2 Textual Disagreements: Why Does It Differ from Luke 20:18?

A second “defeater” focuses on the textual differences between the two accounts:

⁵⁵ Snodgrass, *Parable*, 66; see also Daniel Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, SP 1 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 303; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 807 n. 3; numerous others.

⁵⁶ Kloppenborg argues similarly (*Tenants*, 195).

⁵⁷ Min argues similarly (*Die früheste Überlieferung*, 238 n. 11).

- Matt 21:44 Καί ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται·
ἐφ’ ὃν δ’ ἂν πέση λικμήσει αὐτόν.
- Luke 20:18 πᾶς ὁ πεσὼν ἐπ’ ἐκεῖνον τὸν λίθον συνθλασθήσεται·
ἐφ’ ὃν δ’ ἂν πέση, λικμήσει αὐτόν.

Snodgrass argues, “If Matthew 21,44 were an interpolation, surely the scribe would have followed the wording of Luke more closely.”⁵⁸ Two replies may be offered. (1) The key elements of the text, including all the verbs and nouns, are preserved identically and in the same order,⁵⁹ so we should avoid overplaying the differences. If scribal harmonizations are likely driven more by memory and less by direct textual copying (as most text critics surmise), such variances are not surprising. (2) Moreover, none of the variances are outside the bounds of normal scribal phenomena. Observe the textual diversity already present in the manuscripts of Matt 21:44 and Luke 20:18 that NA28 oversimplifies. For Matt 21:44, Θ Π 124 omit the καί; 124 788 1346 omit δέ before ἂν πέση; and 1346 switches ἂν πέση to ὃν πέση.⁶⁰ For Luke 20:18, Λ switches ἐπ’ to εἰς; 157 inserts οὖν after πᾶς; Δ drops the final δ’; W 69 change the tense of πέση; and 124 reads ἐκεῖνον rather than τοῦτον.⁶¹ In sum, the minor variations in Matt 21:44 are weak arguments against its assimilation to Luke.⁶²

3.3 Homoioteleuton: Did the Scribes of D 33 et. al. Simply Skip the Verse?

Some scholars draw upon this important text critical rule, often a port of first call in textual omissions, to attempt to argue that the “Western” scribes dropped the verse by skipping from the αὐτῆς at the end of 21:43 to the αὐτόν at the end of 21:44.⁶³ Aland rightly comments that, while this is always possible, it is weakened by the fact that the two words have dissimilar endings (-HC vs. -ON).⁶⁴ In other words, it simply is not *homoioteleuton*. Furthermore, the third person pronoun appears twenty-four times in Matt 21:33–46 (incl. 21:44), but there are no other extant omissions in the pericope driven by *homoioteleuton*.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Snodgrass, *Parable*, 68; also Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 47.

⁵⁹ Compare this to the substantial differences between the two renditions of the Ps 117:22 in Luke 20:17 and Acts 4:11 (which reads: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ λίθος, ὁ ἐξουθενηθεὶς ὑφ’ ὑμῶν τῶν οἰκοδόμων, ὁ γενόμενος εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας; underlined portions differ from Luke 20:17).

⁶⁰ Reuben Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, vol. 1: *Matthew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 211.

⁶¹ Reuben Swanson, ed., *New Testament Greek Manuscripts*, vol. 3: *Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 340.

⁶² We could nevertheless venture tentative explanations. The καί is unproblematic, as it functions paratactically with καί in 21:43 and is not part of the stone text proper. The πᾶς fits naturally as a gloss on a proverb-like saying (the difference between “the one who” and “everyone who” is slight). The variation of τοῦτον versus ἐκεῖνον may derive from the modified clause ordering.

⁶³ Snodgrass, *Stories*, 286; also Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 47.

⁶⁴ Aland, *Text*, 233.

⁶⁵ Swanson, *Matthew*, 209–12.

3.4 Coherence in Matthew: Does 21:44 Fit with 21:43 via an Allusion to Daniel 2?

Snodgrass, though noting the illogical sequence of 21:44, goes on to argue for its authenticity based on a composite allusion it shares with 21:43 to Dan 2:44–45, which “would explain the sequence.”⁶⁶ The relevant texts read as follows, with possible allusions underlined:⁶⁷

Matt 21:43–44	Dan 2:44–45a Old Greek	Dan 2:44–45a Theodotion
43 διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι <u>ἀρθήσεται</u> ἀφ’ ὑμῶν	44 καὶ ἐν τοῖς χρόνοις τῶν βασιλέων τούτων στήσει ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν ἄλλην, ἣτις ἔσται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας καὶ οὐ φθαρήσεται,	44 καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῶν βασιλέων ἐκείνων ἀναστήσει ὁ θεὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ βασιλείαν, ἣτις εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας οὐ διαφθαρήσεται,
<u>ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ</u> <u>καὶ δοθήσεται</u> ἔθνει ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς.	καὶ αὕτη ἡ βασιλεία <u>ἄλλο ἔθνος οὐ μὴ ἐάσῃ</u> ,	καὶ ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ <u>λαῶ ἑτέρῳ οὐχ ὑπολειφθήσεται</u> .
44 καὶ ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν <u>λίθον</u> τοῦτον συνθλασθήσεται· ἐφ’ ὃν δ’ ἂν πέσῃ <u>λικμήσει</u> αὐτόν.	πατάξει δὲ καὶ <u>ἀφανίσει</u> τὰς βασιλείας ταύτας, καὶ αὐτὴ στήσεται εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα,	λεπτυνεῖ καὶ <u>λικμήσει</u> πάσας τὰς βασιλείας, καὶ αὐτὴ ἀναστήσεται εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας,
	45 καθάπερ ἐώρακας ἐξ ὄρους τμηθῆναι <u>λίθον</u> ἄνευ χειρῶν, καὶ συνηλόησε τὸ ὄστρακον, τὸν σίδηρον καὶ τὸν χαλκὸν καὶ τὸν ἄργυρον καὶ τὸν χρυσόν.	45 ὃν τρόπον εἶδες ὅτι ἀπὸ ὄρους ἐτμήθη <u>λίθος</u> ἄνευ χειρῶν καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν τὸ ὄστρακον, τὸν σίδηρον, τὸν χαλκόν, τὸν ἄργυρον, τὸν χρυσόν.

The argument assumes that the (Ur-)Theodotion reading, which alone shares Matt 21:44’s use of λικμάω, is behind Matthew’s text (vs. ἀφανίζω in OG). Based on the parallelism between ἀρθήσεται–βασιλεία–ἔθνει ... λίθον–λικμήσει in Matt 21:43–44 and βασιλεία–λαῶ–ὑπολειφθήσεται ... λικμήσει–λίθος in Dan 2:44–45 (θ’), it is then argued that Matthew’s notion of the giving of the kingdom to other people (δοθήσεται ἔθνει) is a conceptual allusion to Daniel’s notion that the fifth kingdom will *not* be given to another people (λαῶ ἑτέρῳ οὐχ ὑπολειφθήσεται).⁶⁸ This suggestion, if correct, “removes all doubt that verse 44 belongs in the text.”⁶⁹

While there is a certain *prima facie* appeal to the argument, three problems undermine it. (1) It is by no means certain that Matt 21:44/Luke 20:18 are, in fact, alluding primarily (or at all) to Dan 2:44 to begin with. The verb λικμάω is not such an unusual word that the audience would automatically have jumped to (Ur-)Theodotion Daniel as the allusion.⁷⁰ The only other verbal parallel is λίθος, but there are numerous other stone texts throughout the OT that form

⁶⁶ Snodgrass, *Parable*, 70. He draws on R. Swaeles, “L’arrière-fond scripturaire de Matt. XXI.43 et son lien avec Matt. XXI.44,” *NTS* 6 (1960): 310–13.

⁶⁷ Daniel 2 from Joseph Ziegler and Olivier Munnich, eds, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum*, vol. 16.2: *Susanna, Daniel, Bel et Draco*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1999).

⁶⁸ On the difference between Matthew’s ἔθνος (shared with OG) and Theodotion’s λαός, Swaeles suggests, “Dans ce cas, Matthieu n’aurait-il pas choisi ‘ἔθνος’ dans un sens d’opposition?” (“L’arrière-fond,” 312); Snodgrass finds this unconvincing, but he concludes the difference “does not detract from the allusion to Daniel 2,44–45” (*Parable*, 69).

⁶⁹ Snodgrass, *Parable*, 68.

⁷⁰ E.g., TLG lists dozens of uses; sixteen times in LXX.

the source domain of the metaphor (Isa 8:14; 28:16; Ps 118:22; Zech 3:8–9; 4:7–8; among others).⁷¹ While smashing/crushing perhaps brings Daniel’s stone conceptually towards to Matt 21:44, the important wordplay on “falling” which is in *both* 21:44a and 44b (πεσών→πέση) has no parallel in Daniel.⁷² (2) Daniel clearly has in view a succession of four political kingdoms followed by a fifth that will destroy the others. It is this kingdom *itself* that is the stone. While it is possible that, as Snodgrass argues, Matthew is polemically combining the Dan 2:44–45 stone with another Jewish stone saying to indict Jesus’s audience,⁷³ it is difficult to account for the fact that the Danielic stone is a political kingdom crushing other political kingdoms, while in the parable the stone is Jesus and those being crushed are specifically the temple authorities. (3) The distinctive emphasis in Matthew’s account is the giving away of the kingdom specifically to a people who will produce fruits (21:41 and 43). Apart from the problem that Daniel’s vision refers specifically to a kingdom that *will not be given away*, it is hard to understand how the καρπός emphasis squares with Dan 2:44–45.⁷⁴

In sum, the cumulative effect of these differences between Matthew’s parable and Dan 2:44–45 (OG or θ^1)— $\xi\theta\nu\omicron\varsigma$ vs. λαός, limited verbal parallels to the Daniel stone, different referent for the stone, political connotations in Daniel, καρπός—make it difficult to sustain the alleged allusions put forth in defense of the coherence of 21:44 with its antecedent.

3.5 Double Tradition: Are Matthew and Luke Redacting a “Q”-Like/Non-Markan Parable?

Finally, Snodgrass argues against assimilation by positing that Matthew and Luke derive the saying from a shared, non-Markan source, thus providing an organic reason for its inclusion in Matthew and obviating the assimilation hypothesis. He maintains that Matthew best preserves the original form of the parable at least up through 21:42.⁷⁵ After discussing stylistic reasons why 21:43–44 appear non-Matthean, he concludes:

Verses 43–44 are probably a double tradition (‘Q’) saying which ... were either always connected to the parable or were taken over and added in the tradition used by Matthew as a fitting inter-

⁷¹ See extensive discussion in Klyne Snodgrass, “The Christological Stone Testimonia of the New Testament” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 1973), 19–49.

⁷² Note the differences: Matt 21:44 πίπτω/συνθλάω/πίπτω/λικμάω vs. OG πατάσσω/ἀφανίζω/συναλοάω vs. Theodotion λεπτύνω/λικμάω/λεπτύνω. Scholars have longed noted the difficulty in paralleling the stumbling stone in Matt 21:42, which in v. 44 causes people to fall before in turn falling on them to crush them, with the stone carved out of a mountain that strikes the *feet* of the statue in Dan 1:34 (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, trans. J.E. Crouch, Hermeneia [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005], 43).

⁷³ Esth. Rabb. 7.10 reads, “If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot! If a pot falls on a stone, woe to the pot! In either case, woe to the pot!” (Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Esther* [London: Socino, 1961], 85); Snodgrass, *Parable*, 77.

⁷⁴ It is more likely that Matt 21:43 alludes instead to Dan 7:27, which, though lacking the “fruit” emphasis, is a better fit since the kingdom *is* given (same verb as in Matthew) to “the people of the saints of the Most High” (ἔδωκε λαῶ ἀγιῶ ὑψίστου, OG). See Michel Hubaut, *La parabole des vigneronniers homicides*, CahRB 16 (Paris: Gabalda, 1976), 83–86.

⁷⁵ *Parable*, 70 (but he withholds judgment on Matthean priority as a whole). The PWT is quite complex from the perspective of the Synoptic Problem; some argue for Markan primitivity, some for Lukan, and some for Thomasine (or something approximating it), with lines of influence running in all sorts of directions.

pretation. If Mark knew of this saying, he omitted it completely. ... Luke apparently knew of the final saying in Matthew 21:43–44 and omitted the first half as superfluous.⁷⁶

Both halves of the “either/or” are problematic. On the one hand, if 21:43–44 was “always connected” to a single original parable tradition, we must not only explain why Mark omitted them, but we would seem forced to conclude that the omission of Matt 21:44 in the Western witnesses and \mathfrak{P}^{104} arose from an assimilation to Mark.⁷⁷ But if so, why would these same scribes retain 21:43, which is also absent in Mark (and Luke)?

If, on the other hand, 21:43–44 was “taken over and added” from a preexisting tradition—whether we call it “Q” is immaterial—we encounter further problems. It is not so simple as assigning one part of the Matthean parable (21:33–42) to the original/primitive tradition and the remainder (21:43–44) to this “Q”-like tradition. The latter would necessarily need to contain some other substantial portion of the parable, because the two verses would not be intelligible as standalone sayings.⁷⁸ This implied “Q” version of the parable would, thus, stand alongside whatever original version is in some sense shared by all three Synoptists (and Gospel of Thomas)⁷⁹ and to which, as Snodgrass argues, canonical Matthew “added” 21:43–44. But introducing such a “Q”-like tradition into the mix raises questions. First, from which tradition would Luke be deriving his judgment sequence (*Jesus’s question*→*Jesus’s answer*→*Audience’s shock* in 20:15b–16a): the original behind Matthew (*Jesus’s question*→*Audience’s answer* in 21:40–41a), Mark (*Jesus’s question*→*Jesus’s answer* [no Audience reply] in 12:9), or this “Q” tradition? And if from this “Q” tradition shared with Matthew, where did Matthew derive his *different* version? Second, how would we explain the very clear parallelism between καρπός in Matt 21:41 and καρπός in 21:43 if the latter derives from the “Q”-like tradition, especially given that *neither* instances are in Luke (or Mark or *Thomas*)? Is it merely coincidental?

It is extremely difficult to postulate a feasible scenario if Matt 21:43–44 is assigned to a separate “Q”/non-Markan tradition—apart from the fact that it has never been considered part of “Q” by Q scholars⁸⁰—so this helps very little in establishing the authenticity of 21:44.

⁷⁶ *Parable*, 71. While Snodgrass does not necessarily endorse Q as a document, his main point is that Matthew and Luke agree here against Mark; in *Stories*, he refers to this source simply as a “non-Markan tradition” (286).

⁷⁷ Illogical sequencing and *homoioleuton* are the only other real options on the table, but we have dealt with them above. One could possibly argue (as Snodgrass suggested in personal correspondence) that the fact that some lectionaries omit Matt 21:44 *and* 21:43 while others omit just 21:44 may indicate that an oral retelling of the parable could reasonably cut off at either place, thus generating a possible reason for the omission of v. 44 in some manuscripts. However, the fact that there is no non-lectionary evidence for an omission of v. 43 (see Swanson, *Matthew*, 211) weakens this hypothesis, as well as the late date of the lectionaries.

⁷⁸ Grammatically διὰ τοῦτο in 21:43 and τοῦτον in 21:44 at a minimum would require this. From a content perspective, 21:43 would be inscrutable without the broader vineyard context that gives meaning to “you,” other “people,” and “fruits.” Likewise, since 21:44 is not an obvious OT quotation, it makes little sense without some other context to identify the referent of the stone, the people falling, and the people being crushed.

⁷⁹ See Snodgrass’s argument regarding the Gospel of Thomas’s dependence on the Synoptics in “The Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen: Is the Gospel of Thomas Version the Original?” *NTS* 21.2 (1974), 142–44.

⁸⁰ J. M. Robinson, Paul Hoffman, and John S. Kloppenborg, eds., *The Critical Edition of Q*, *Herme-neia* (Leuven: Augsburg Fortress, 2000). Ben Witherington is one of the few that assigns 21:44 explicitly to Q (*Matthew* [Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006], 405).

3.6 Summary

The five “defeaters” of the assimilation hypothesis outlined above prove to be quite weak. To summarize, let me recast the analysis in terms of the foundational text critical principle of preferring the reading that best explains the others.

(1) *Is there a convincing reason why a scribe would have dropped Matt 21:44 if it were originally in the gospel?*⁸¹ As shown above, the three leading candidates—illogical sequence, *homoioteleuton*, and assimilation-to-Mark—are problematic. Few other reasons, and none with sufficient explanatory power, have been offered to explain why scribes from text traditions known for *adding* rather than *omitting* would omit such a verse if it were authentic. In short, the longer reading cannot explain the shorter reading.

(2) *Is there a convincing reason why a scribe would have interpolated Luke 20:18 into Matthew?* The short answer here is affirmative. The verse is well established in Luke, and it is plausible that a scribe introduced the text (with slight adaptations) at the logical end of Matthew’s version to bring it closer in line with Luke. The rationale could have been to shore up the stone emphasis that is otherwise interrupted by Matt 21:42b–43, while simultaneously reinforcing the judgment motif.⁸² Whatever the case, we know empirically that there was a greater tendency among scribes to assimilate via insertion (versus omission) and that Matthew received the most scribal assimilations. In sum, the cumulative weight of evidence suggests that the shorter reading best explains the longer.

4. Conclusions

Taking stock of the entire external and internal case, I have demonstrated the following. First, the apparent omission of Matt 21:44 in the earliest witness changes the equation of the textual witnesses greatly. No longer should any lingering adherence to the WNI hypothesis be used to defend assimilation, nor the defeat of WNI in other cases be applied bluntly here to defend authenticity. Rather, the text must be evaluated on its own merits. Second, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that the numerous and diverse group of witnesses that retain the verse could not agree on such an assimilation. Scribal assimilation via insertion was a widespread phenomenon, particularly in Matthew, and even the revered uncials were far from untouched. Finally, we have seen along internal lines (via counterargument against proposed “defeaters” of the assimilation hypothesis) that there is very weak support for the originality of the text in Matthew. I conclude, thereby, that the insertion of the verse arose early in the tradition (given it is not in the exemplar of \mathfrak{P}^{104} , in the ancestor of D, or the old Latin and Syriac), apparently by an ancestor of the key Alexandrian witnesses, thus accounting for the wide diffusion of the reading.

In such situations where we are weighing and balancing incomplete evidence, the case is never indisputable. However, we can all agree that this analysis does indisputably point to the necessity of incorporating papyri evidence more thoroughly in future rounds of editorial work on the gospel texts—which the ECM will presumably accomplish—as well as the need for further rigorous study of assimilation patterns.

⁸¹ W. D. Davies and Dale Allison summarize succinctly, “If v. 44 was original, why was it omitted?” (*Matthew: Volume III, XIX–XXVIII*, ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997], 186 n. 65).

⁸² Suggested by Nolland, *Matthew*, 879; Martin Rese, *Alttestamentliche Motive in der Christologie des Lukas*, SNT 1 (Gütersloh: G. Mohn, 1969), 171–72.