

ONYEKACHI UGWU

The Woman  
Caught in Adultery  
and the Gospel of John

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen  
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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**Mohr Siebeck**

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Onyekachi Ugwu

# The Woman Caught in Adultery and the Gospel of John

Mohr Siebeck

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*In grateful and loving memory of my father (Matthew Ugwu) and siblings (Scholastica, Onyinye and Onwuteaka).*



## Preface

This book is an updated version of my doctoral thesis publicly defended on January 26, 2024, at the Catholic University of Paris / Institut Catholique de Paris under the title: *John 7:53–8:11 in the Gospel of John: Assessing the Locust Standi of a “Proscribed” Narrative*. As the title of the thesis suggests, this book deals with one of the most controversial texts of the New Testament. The curiosity to know the content of Jesus’s writing on the ground became the origin of my journey with the pericope. It was, however, disappointing that the more I sought to know the content, the more enigmatic it became. There are so many assumptions<sup>1</sup> on the content of the writing. While it was disappointing, the investigation, nonetheless, led me to discover that the pericope is beclouded with controversy, especially with its presence in the Gospel of John.

A look at the history of the text reveals that the pericope (traditionally called *pericope adulterae*, *pericope de adultera*, or the pericope of the woman caught in adultery) has a controversial history that worked against its reception over the centuries. Rejected outrightly by some authors as inauthentic and tagged as doubtful and problematic by others, the status of the pericope of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11) in the Gospel of John provokes debate. Unfortunately, the richness of the narrative is beclouded in such debates concerning its chaotic textual history. Often, participants in such debates are influenced by certain stereotypes and prejudices. This book invites the reader to question such preconceived ideas. It affirms that the narrative was orally transmitted before it was adapted and adopted by the scribes of the Johannine circle consistent with their message and theology. It is, therefore, within that context in the Gospel of John that the narrative is to be read. In the picture painted by the narrator, Jesus is on trial in the pericope of the woman accused of adultery. And with the failure of that mock trial, Jesus’s adversaries prepare a rock-solid ploy for his ultimate trial. Ironically, what his adversaries understand as their own victory is in fact Jesus’s victory – the victory of light over darkness.

Research on this book and its publication would not have been possible without the help of my doctoral thesis supervisor, Prof. Dr. Régis Burnet (Institut Catholique de Paris, France and Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium). He was exceptional in the manner in which he supervised my research. My special thanks to other members of the jury for my thesis defence – Rev.

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<sup>1</sup> For some of the assumptions, see page 195 of this book.

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## Abbreviations

//	parallel to
§	section
AB	Anchor Bible
ABAJ	<i>American Bar Association Journal</i>
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AnGr	Analecta Gregoriana
ANTF	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
<i>Apocrypha</i>	<i>Apocrypha. Revue internationale des littératures apocryphes</i>
ASEs	<i>Annali di storia dell'esegesi</i>
AThR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
AUSS	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
AUU	Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis
BA	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAR	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BETS	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BGBE	Beiträge zur Geschichte der biblischen Exegese
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
BibAC	Bible in Ancient Christianity
<i>BibAn</i>	<i>The Biblical Annals</i>
<i>BiBh</i>	<i>Bible Bhashyam</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibSem	Biblical Seminar
BiInS	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJ	Bible de Jérusalem
<i>BT</i>	<i>Black Theology</i>
<i>BN</i>	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture</i>
<i>BW</i>	<i>Biblical World</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>

<i>CBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CCEL	Christian Classics Ethereal Library
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
<i>ChrLit</i>	<i>Christianity and Literature</i>
<i>CJ</i>	<i>Classical Journal</i>
ConBNT	Coniectanea Biblica: New Testament Series
<i>Conspectus</i>	<i>Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
<i>CTQ</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
CUFr	Collection des Universités de France
<i>CurTM</i>	<i>Currents in Theology and Mission</i>
<i>DePLR</i>	<i>DePaul Law Review</i>
<i>Did</i>	<i>Didaskalia</i>
DMOA	Documenta et monumenta orientis antiqui
ECIL	Early Christianity and Its Literature
EHPHR	Études d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses
EQE	Explication suivie des quatre Évangiles
EssBib	Essais bibliques
<i>EstBib</i>	<i>Estudios Bíblicos</i>
ESV	English Standard Version
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FC	Fathers of the Church
<i>FNT</i>	<i>Filologia Neotestamentaria</i>
<i>GMLRev</i>	<i>George Mason Law Review</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HTKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HTS Teol</i>	<i>HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies</i>
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde Teologiese Studies</i>
<i>IEJ</i>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
IETH	Institut d'études théologiques
<i>IJPR</i>	<i>International Journal for Philosophy of Religion</i>
Int	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching & Preaching
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBQ</i>	<i>Jewish Bible Quarterly</i>
<i>JBTh</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Theology</i>
<i>Jdm</i>	<i>Judaism. A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought</i>
<i>JECH</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian History</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JEP</i>	<i>Journal of Education and Practice</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JITC</i>	<i>Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center</i>
JJC	Jésus et Jésus-Christ

<i>JJS</i>	<i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JPrag</i>	<i>Journal of Pragmatics</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JRSSup</i>	<i>Journal of Religion &amp; Society: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSHJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSNTSup</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament: Supplement Series</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JTAK</i>	<i>Journal of Theta Alpha Kappa</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KBANT</i>	Kommentare und Beiträge zum Alten und Neuen Testament
<i>KEK</i>	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
<i>Landas</i>	<i>Landas: Journal of Loyola School of Theology</i>
<i>LCA</i>	Langues et cultures anciennes
<i>LCL</i>	Loeb Classical Library
<i>LeDiv</i>	Lectio Divina
<i>LNM</i>	Les livres du nouveau monde
<i>LNTS</i>	Library of New Testament Studies
<i>LS</i>	<i>Louvain Studies</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>MLRev</i>	<i>Marquette Law Review</i>
<i>MoTh</i>	<i>Modern Theology</i>
<i>MSS</i>	manuscripts
<i>MT</i>	Masoretic Text
<i>NAB</i>	New American Bible
<i>NCB</i>	New Century Bible
<i>NEA</i>	<i>Near Eastern Archaeology</i>
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
<i>NIBCNT</i>	New International Biblical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NICNT</i>	New International Commentary on the New Testament
<i>NIGTC</i>	New International Greek Testament Commentary
<i>NIV</i>	New International Version
<i>NJB</i>	New Jerusalem Bible
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
<i>NovTSup</i>	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>NTTS</i>	New Testament Tools and Studies
<i>NTTSD</i>	New Testament Tools, Studies and Documents
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>PAAJR</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research</i>
<i>Pacifica</i>	<i>Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies</i>
<i>PBM</i>	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
<i>PEQ</i>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<i>PEW</i>	<i>Philosophy East and West</i>
<i>PG</i>	Patrologia Graec
<i>PIBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association</i>

PIRSB	Publications de l'Institut Romand des Sciences Bibliques
PL	Patrologia Latina
<i>Profession</i>	<i>Profession. Modern Language Association</i>
PTA	Papyrologische Texte und Abhandlungen
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue biblique</i>
RBS <sub>t</sub>	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>ResQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament
<i>RRJ</i>	<i>The Review of Rabbinic Judaism</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SBLAB	Society of Biblical Literature Academia Biblica
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
<i>Scr</i>	<i>Scriptura</i>
ScriHier	Scripta Hierosolymitana
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
<i>Semeia</i>	<i>Semeia</i>
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SMRev</i>	<i>St Mark's Review</i>
<i>StAnt</i>	<i>Studia Antiqua</i>
StPatr	Studia Patristica
SubHag	Subsidia Hagiographica
<i>Théophilyon</i>	<i>Théophilyon</i>
ThKNT	Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
TOB	Traduction œcuménique de la Bible
<i>Trad</i>	<i>Tradition</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>TULQ</i>	<i>Temple Law Quarterly</i>
TW	Theologie und Wirklichkeit
v(v).	verse(s)
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VCSup	Vigiliae Christianae Supplements
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum Supplements
VVi	<i>Verbum Vitae</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>



## General Introduction

Among the passages in the canon of the New Testament whose authenticity is debated, we find the *pericope adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11), the account on the stirring of the water at the pool by an angel (John 5:4), the second conclusion to the Gospel of John (ch. 21), the account of the consolation of Jesus by an angel and the drops of blood in the form of sweat while Jesus was in agony in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43–44), a saying of Jesus on the observance of the Sabbath that is added in Luke 6:4 in *Codex Bezae*, the words of Jesus interceding for his disciples as he hangs on the cross (Luke 23:34), and the account of the post-paschal apparition of Jesus (the longer conclusion of the Gospel of Mark) found in Mark 16:9–20.

As for our pericope, one easily notices that there is a problem as soon as one begins to consult academic works on John 7 and 8. After assessing the works on these two chapters, it becomes obvious that some authors skip the pericope without comment.<sup>1</sup> A certain incoherence is found in the approach of Rudolf Bultmann. He refuses to discuss the pericope but notes it does not belong to the Gospel of John in its original form. Yet, he comments on John 21 just after affirming that its language, style, sentence connections, and vocabulary are not Johannine.<sup>2</sup> Some authors give a very brief commentary on our pericope only in the appendix of their work on the Fourth Gospel.<sup>3</sup> There are also those who comment briefly on it in the Gospel of Luke as they inform the reader that the

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray, ed. Rupert W. N. Hoare and John K. Riches (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 312; Henri van den Bussche, *Jean* (Bruges: Desclée de Brouwer, 1967), 301; Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 289–443; see also Dodd's narrative-discourse structure of the Gospel of John in George Mlakuzhyil, ed., *The Christocentric Literary Structure of the Fourth Gospel*, AnBib 117 (Roma: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1987), 53–54.

<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, *Gospel of John*, 312, 700–718.

<sup>3</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 589–92; Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (London: James Clarke, 1957); Edwyn Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel*, ed. Francis Noel Davey (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 563–72.

pericope is of a Lukan origin.<sup>4</sup> Yet, there are still those who think that it may be Johannine.<sup>5</sup> Some argue that although the pericope is located in the Gospel of John, it really originated from early Christian writings.<sup>6</sup> Due to its controversial textual history, the pericope has been given different nicknames: “nomadic bold pericope,”<sup>7</sup> “text without a home,”<sup>8</sup> “so-called pericope de *adultera*,”<sup>9</sup> “crossroads-text,”<sup>10</sup> “most perplexing passage,”<sup>11</sup> or “itinerant pericope.”<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that the pericope is traditionally called “*pericope adulterae*” or “*pericope de adultera*.”

Apparently, the choice of including or suppressing the pericope by authors could be because of some interest or influence. Here, we reiterate Leticia Guardiola-Sáenz’s observation about the pericope: “Explicitly or implicitly, our rejection or acceptance of the text shows the imprint of our cultural values, political agendas, and in sum, maps the borders of our subjectivities in the content of our cultural conditions of consumption (readership).”<sup>13</sup> Her observation echoes Augustine’s comment that some leaders of Christian communities in his

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<sup>4</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Das Johannesevangelium*, HTKNT 4/2 (Freiburg: Herder, 1971); Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John*, vol. 2, trans. Cecily Hastings, Francis McDonagh, and David Smith (New York: Crossroad, 1980), 167; Marie-Émile Boismard, *Comment Luc a remanié l'évangile de Jean* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 2001); Kyle R. Hughes, “The Lukan Special Material and the Tradition History of the Pericope Adulterae,” *NovT* 55/3 (2013): 232–51; Michel Gourgues, *Luc, de l'exégèse à la prédication* (Paris: Cerf, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> John Paul Heil, “The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7:53–8:11) Reconsidered,” *Bib* 72/2 (1991): 182–91; Alan F. Johnson, “A Stylistic Trait of the Fourth Gospel in the Pericope Adulterae?” *BETS* 9/2 (1966): 95.

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich Becker, *Jesus und die Ehebrecherin. Untersuchungen zur Text- und Überlieferungsgeschichte von Joh. 7:53–8:11*, BZNW 28 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1963); William Lawrence Petersen, “ΟΥΔΕ ΕΓΩ ΣΕ [KATA]KPINΩ John 8:11. The Protevangelium Iacobi and the History of the Pericope Adulterae,” in *Patristic and Text-Critical Studies: The Collected Essays of William L. Petersen*, ed. Jan Krans and Joseph Verheyden, NTTSD 40 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 302–8. Such apocryphal texts that are supposed to have influenced the pericope include the Gospel according to the Hebrews, Protoevangelium of James, and the apocryphal story of Susanna.

<sup>7</sup> Josep Rius-Camps, “The Pericope of the Adulteress Reconsidered: The Nomadic Misfortunes of a Bold Pericope,” *NTS* 53/3 (2007): 379–405.

<sup>8</sup> Ben Witherington III, “A Text Without a Home,” *BAR* 34/4 (2008): 28.

<sup>9</sup> James Ian H. McDonald, “The So-Called Pericope de Adultera,” *NTS* 41/3 (1995): 415–27. The expression, “so-called,” is often used in a derogatory sense.

<sup>10</sup> Leticia A. Guardiola-Sáenz, “Border-Crossing and its Redemptive Power in John 7:53–8:11: A Cultural Reading of Jesus and the Accused,” in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-Viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 267–91.

<sup>11</sup> Steven Grabiner, “Pericope Adulterae: A Most Perplexing Passage,” *AUSS* 56/1 (2018): 91–114.

<sup>12</sup> Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien-Überlieferung*, WUNT 2/7 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1981; repr., 1988), 231.

<sup>13</sup> Guardiola-Sáenz, “Border-Crossing,” 278.

time were suppressing the pericope from their manuscripts because of the fear that it could lead their wives to sexual infidelity. Indeed, Augustine's observation underscores the attitude of those who may have been influenced by the controversial textual history of the pericope – its presence or absence in many manuscripts, especially the earliest ones. A special interest is drawn to the pericope as soon as one looks at the two important critical editions of the Greek New Testament<sup>14</sup> that enclose the pericope with double-square brackets and are graded "A" in their *apparatus criticus*. Bruce Metzger explains such a grading: "Inasmuch as the passage is absent from the earlier and better manuscripts that normally serve to identify types of text, it is not always easy to make a decision among alternative readings. In any case it will be understood that the level of certainty (A) is within the framework of the initial decision relating to the passage as a whole."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, Metzger is saying that although the Johannine origin of the pericope is in doubt, its status as an inspired text is not in question. Therefore, the pericope is to be handled like every other inspired text of the sacred Scripture, however controversial it may be. Despite the above observation, the status of the pericope as an inspired text is not supported unanimously, as we will see later in our treatment of the state of investigation.

Rudolf Schnackenburg captures the controversial situation of the pericope as each author is left to decide on how to deal with it. Thus, he remarks: "A commentator ... has to decide whether he will ignore the pericope entirely (as do e.g., Bultmann and Strathmann), deal with it in an appendix (like the English scholars Westcott, Bernard, Hoskyns-Davey, Barrett and Lightfoot) or comment on it here [John 7:53–8:11], where it appears in most MSS (as do Catholic commentators and some others)."<sup>16</sup> In all, the status of the pericope in the Gospel of John continues to pose problems to editors and commentators. Its worthiness of being added or not in the Gospel of John by editors and its worthiness of being commented on or not make the pericope somewhat like the woman accused of adultery, who in the narrative is denied a voice by her accusers.<sup>17</sup>

Analogically, the pericope is treated like the woman in the narrative – separated from community as she is placed in the middle of the crowd and is on the verge of being stoned to death. The narrator informs the reader that the

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<sup>14</sup> Eberhard Nestle and Erwin Nestle, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th ed., ed. Kurt Aland et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012); Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 189.

<sup>16</sup> Schnackenburg, *Gospel According to St John*, 162.

<sup>17</sup> See Peter Phillips, "The Adulterous Woman: Nameless, Partnerless, Defenseless," in *Character Studies in the Fourth Gospel: Narrative Approaches to Seventy Figures in John*, ed. Steven A. Hunt, Francois D. Tolmie, and Ruben Zimmermann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 409–10.

woman is made to stand in the middle (John 8:3) – she is like an inanimate object, incapable of movement or speech. She is not allowed to defend herself even though her survival is at risk. Like the woman, our pericope is implicitly considered as “adulterous” as it faces the accusation of being involved in an illegitimate relationship with the Gospel of John. Its survival is at stake, if we consider the manner in which it was treated through the centuries. In most cases it was rendered voiceless. I believe that it should be given a voice to speak for itself as it is on trial. And if it is to be given a voice, it must be for it to speak first for itself within the context in which it is found. In other words, what is the place of the narrative within the context of the Gospel of John, considering the controversy surrounding its presence in that Gospel?

For the narrative to speak for itself, narrative analysis will be the essential methodology adopted in the course of this work. The methodology will be helped by other forms of synchronic analysis. Comparative criticism will be necessary in distinguishing Johannine texts from others. Socio-historical criticism (diachronic analysis) will also be employed, because realities discussed in a narrative are often situated within a historical context. In addition, there will be arguments presented for and against different positions of authors.

This work is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 will focus on the state of research. It will expose previous studies concerning the pericope/narrative and build on the limitations of those studies. Chapter 2 will focus on the setting of the narrative, whereas chapter 3 will concentrate on the characters. An analysis of the plot will be the scope of chapter 4. Chapter 5 will deal with the content and context analysis of the pericope with regard to the Gospel of John. And chapter 6 will address the theology and interpretation of the narrative within the context of Johannine theology of light and high Christology. The conclusion will reiterate some findings, draw necessary conclusions, and propose areas for future research.

## Chapter 1

# State of Research

This chapter examines the questions raised over the centuries in relation to the pericope; it questions and evaluates the conclusions made by previous researchers. The chapter deals with the translation of the text and the problems of manuscript, source, authorship, literary style, inspiration, and canonicity. As a conclusion in this chapter, I postulate that the narrative was orally transmitted before it was adapted and adopted by Johannine scribes in harmony with their theology and message. Therefore, it is within that context that the narrative is to be read in the Gospel of John. My effort in the chapters that follow will be to investigate the validity of my assertion.

### 1.1. The Text

*Table 1: The Greek Text and the Author's English Translation*

<i>Greek Text</i>	<i>Author's English Translation</i>
7 <sup>53</sup> Καὶ ἐπορεύθησαν ἕκαστος εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ. 8 <sup>1</sup> Ἰησοῦς δὲ ἐπορεύθη εἰς τὸ ὄρος τῶν ἔλαιων.	7 <sup>53</sup> And each of them went to his dwelling place. 8 <sup>1</sup> Jesus, on the other hand, went to the Mount of Olives.
<sup>2</sup> Ὁρθρου δὲ πάλιν παρεγένετο εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, καὶ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἤρχετο πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ καθίσας ἐδίδασκεν αὐτούς.	<sup>2</sup> Early in the morning, he came again to the Temple, and all the people were coming to him. Having sat down, he began to teach them.
<sup>3</sup> ἄγουσιν δὲ οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι γυναῖκα ἐπὶ μοιχείᾳ κατελημμένην, καὶ στήσαντες αὐτὴν ἐν μέσῳ,	<sup>3</sup> But the scribes and the Pharisees bring a woman who has been caught in adultery; and having made her stand in the middle,
<sup>4</sup> λέγουσιν αὐτῷ, Διδάσκαλε, αὕτη ἡ γυνὴ κατελήπται ἐπ' αυτοφώρῳ μοιχευομένη.	<sup>4</sup> they said to him: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.
<sup>5</sup> ἐν δὲ τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσῆς ἡμῖν ἐνετείλατο τὰς τοιαύτας λιθάζειν. σὺ οὖν τί λέγεις;	<sup>5</sup> However, in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such as this. You, therefore, what do you say?"
<sup>6</sup> τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον πειράζοντες αὐτόν, ἵνα ἔχωσιν κατηγορεῖν αὐτοῦ. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κάτω κύψας, τῷ δακτύλῳ κατέγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.	<sup>6</sup> But they were saying this to test him so that they might have [something] to accuse him. Having stooped

<p><sup>7</sup> ὡς δὲ ἐπέμενον ἐρωτῶντες αὐτόν, ἀνέκυψεν καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Ὁ ἀναμάρτητος ὑμῶν πρῶτος ἐπ’ αὐτῇ βαλέτω λίθον.</p> <p><sup>8</sup> καὶ πάλιν κατακύψας ἔγραφεν εἰς τὴν γῆν.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> οἱ δὲ, ἀκούσαντες καὶ ὑπὸ τῆς συνειδήσεως ἐλεγχόμενοι ἐξήρχοντο εἰς καθ’ εἷς ἀρξάμενοι ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ κατελείφθη μόνος καὶ ἡ γυνὴ ἐν μέσῳ οὕσα.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> ἀνακύψας δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, εἶπεν αὐτῇ, γύναι, ποῦ εἰσιν οὐδεῖς σε κατέκρινεν;</p> <p><sup>11</sup> ἡ δὲ εἶπεν, οὐδεῖς, κύριε. εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, οὐδὲ ἐγὼ σε κατακρίνω. πορεύου [καὶ] ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν μηκέτι ἀμάρτανε.</p>	<p>down, Jesus began to write with his finger on the ground.</p> <p><sup>7</sup> As they continued questioning him, he straightened up and said to them: “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to cast a stone at her.”</p> <p><sup>8</sup> And having stooped down again, he continued to write on the ground.</p> <p><sup>9</sup> Having heard it and being convicted by their conscience, they began to go away one by one beginning from the elders; and he was left alone with the woman being in the middle.</p> <p><sup>10</sup> Having straightened up, Jesus said to her: “woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”</p> <p><sup>11</sup> She said: “No one, Lord.” Then Jesus said: “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now, sin no more.”</p>
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## 1.2. Justification of the Author’s Translation

I took the context of the narrative into account in my translation as some of the Greek terms in the text have more than one equivalent meaning in English; therefore, my translation respects the context of the narrative as such polysemic words are considered. For example, the choice of “dwelling place” as the translation of οἶκος (7:53) instead of “house” is explained in my treatment of the (topographical) setting of the narrative.

Similarly, while ὄρθρος (v. 2) could be translated as “dawn,” “daybreak,” or “early in the morning,” I chose “early in the morning” because it adequately captures the idea of time within the context of the narrative. It shows that the scribes and the Pharisees deprive themselves of sleep during the night as they plot for the entrapment of Jesus, and thus, they come out very early in the morning to actualize their plan. It also reveals that it is too early for them to entrap Jesus compared to the late hour of his arrest and condemnation in John 18:3. Jesus is also presented as waking up early in the morning to begin his activities (cf. Mark 1:35), for he is always working (cf. John 5:17). It also reflects the visit at a very early hour to the tomb in Luke 24:1, bearing in mind that the women went there when it was still dark out of fear of being seen. “Dawn” or “daybreak” do not adequately capture the very early hours for they also connote sunrise, i.e., the moment when the sun dispels the darkness of the early part of the morning. On the other hand, “early in the morning” could mean

anytime from midnight to the moment before sunrise. It captures how the night was used in preparation for what happens in those early hours at the Temple.

While ἐν μέσῳ (John 8:3, 9) could be translated as “in the midst” (ESV) or “in the middle” (NAB, NJB), I prefer to translate it as “in the middle.” It is helpful to note that the Vulgate translates it as “*in medio*” (in the middle). Although TOB and BJ translate ἐν μέσῳ as “*au milieu*,” which could mean “in the midst” or “in the middle,” preference should be given to “in the middle” as compelled by the context. “In the middle” brings out the subtlety of the context of judgment and the place of the accused woman, which is “in the middle” – at the centre where everyone could focus attention on her. It portrays the accused as being somehow imprisoned within the circle formed by imposing accusers and witnesses. Moreover, the accused is in the middle between the judge and her accusers. Employing “in the midst” does not bring out that aspect of judgment.

While ἀναμάρτητος (v. 7) could be translated as “sinless” or “without sin,” I choose “without sin.” Sinless can imply a state of never having sinned since birth, thus connoting a sinless nature. On the other hand, being “without sin” takes account of the vulnerability or sinful nature of man to which the scribes and the Pharisees belong. It portrays a possible sin in the past but underscores a state of being without fault at the time of the episode. The reader can refer to chapter 5 of this work for more on ἀναμάρτητος.

The term πρεσβύτερος (v. 9) is to be understood in terms of age. It is used in this text in the context of age rather than an office. Thus, its use as a comparative adjective (πρεσβυτέρον, elders in the sense of the older ones), rather than in the nominative form where a group that occupies a religious office could be implied, confirms this position. Within the narrative, the term captures the sequence in which the departure of the scribes and the Pharisees from the scene of the episode occurs.

While κατακόπτω (vv. 6, 8) could be translated as “to bend” or “to stoop down,” I prefer to use “to stoop down.” Modern Bible versions like ESV, NAB, and NJB translate “bent down” in the two verses, whereas NIV translates “bent down” in v. 6 and “stooped down” in v. 8. My preference for “to stoop down” is informed by the fact that “stooping” suggests a sense of self-emptying or humbling (cf. Phil 2:7–8, Jesus emptying himself or stooping low to take the form of a slave in the likeness of man). In the context of the narrative, therefore, Jesus stoops down to the level of the woman whose life is in the balance and empathises with her situation. He stoops down to her condition in order to raise her up. It is also a humiliating moment for the scribes and the Pharisees as stooping down/low suggests humiliation. Nonetheless, much as it is a humiliating moment for the scribes and the Pharisees, it is also a call to humility for them. They are to humble themselves to recognize their limitations with regard to sin. From that angle, it is a gesture that will, by implication, be verbalized in Jesus's statement in John 8:7 (“Let the one among you who is without sin

be the first to cast a stone at her”). Such subtleties are not adequately conveyed by the verb “to bend.”

While ἀνακύπτω (vv. 7, 10) could be translated as “to raise the head,” “to stand up,” or “to straighten up,” I prefer to use “to straighten up.” NAB, NJB, and NIV translate “straightened up” where ESV translates “stood up.” “Straightening up” does imply the movement of a part of the body (the upper part beginning from the abdomen) to an upright position while the remaining part remains in its former position. In the context of the narrative, the fact that Jesus sits down to teach as the case of adultery is brought before him (vv. 2–3) and supposedly still sitting throughout the episode disqualifies “to stand up” as the appropriate translation. So, Jesus could straighten up while still sitting. Furthermore, as “straightening up” suggests the act of putting something in order or in an upright position, we assume that ἀνακύψας of v. 7 refers to the scribes and the Pharisees, and that of v. 10 refers to the woman. The scribes and the Pharisees are being challenged to be upright in their demand and amend their ways, and Jesus demands that the woman amend her ways in order to be upright (cf. v. 11 – “and from now, sin no more”).

### 1.3. Manuscript Problem

This part shows how the manuscript evidence, especially the absence of the pericope in very early manuscripts and the silence of many Greek Fathers, has brought about controversy on the status of the pericope in the Gospel of John and in the New Testament in general. The different locations of the pericope in different manuscripts and the extensive number of variant readings unite to compound the controversy. Such difficulties can easily make researchers treat the pericope from a biased position. It is an attitude that was evident in my discussions with some scholars during the outset of this research. Although data from manuscripts can, at face value, make a researcher doubt the authenticity of the pericope and its status in the Gospel of John, it is nonetheless important that the pericope be approached with an open mind, because there are two sides of the same coin. In the lines that follow, I shall raise some of the concerns and evaluate them with some opposing arguments.

#### 1.3.1. Remarkable Absence in Manuscripts

Without mincing words, Metzger holds that the evidence against the Johannine origin of the pericope is overwhelming.<sup>1</sup> He makes a long list of the earliest manuscripts on the Gospel of John, which do not have the pericope; and he argues the hypothesis that the pericope, which may have been attested in *Co-*

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<sup>1</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187.

*dices Alexandrinus* (A02, fifth century) and *Ephraemi Rescriptus* (C04, fifth century), is not strong because those two *codices* are defective in the part of the Gospel of John where the pericope is presumed to have been located before its suppression.<sup>2</sup> He affirms, therefore, the supposition that the pericope may have been located in the blank spaces in those two *codices* is highly improbable. He maintains that “it is highly probable that neither [A02, C04] contained the pericope, for careful measurement discloses that there would not have been space enough on the missing leaves to include the section along with the rest of the text.”<sup>3</sup>

Worth mentioning is the fact that there was a practice of leaving blank spaces by copyists who were aware that a certain text existed but did not have such a text in their possession. Such a practice is evident in *Codex Vaticanus* where the copyist left a large blank column after Mark 16:8. It shows that the copyist was aware of the existence of one of the long endings of Mark, even if he did not find it in the text he was copying from.<sup>4</sup> The copyist then left a space for the missing Mark 16:9–20 and began copying the Gospel of Luke.

Metzger’s argument that the spaces in the blank parts of *Codices* A and C are not long enough to contain the number of words in our pericope and his subsequent dismissal of an earlier location before a probable suppression have some loopholes. Metzger does not take note of the idiosyncrasies of different copyists in relation to the reality of copying from manuscripts that had spaces in which lengthy parts of their contents were erased or lost. The scribe’s attitude was simply to give some space to indicate to his reader that there was something lacking that he was unsuccessful in finding. Leaving a space, no matter how small it may be, was geared towards showing the reader there was a problem in that part of the manuscript. So, the copyist was not obliged to count the number of lines that could be contained in the empty space of the manuscript that he was copying and then measure the lines in his own manuscript so that the size of the space that he left in his manuscript became directly proportional to that which was left in the manuscript he was copying. The scribe who copied from another manuscript was not obliged to reproduce the same size of blank spaces found in the manuscript from which he copied. As a matter of fact, it should not be expected that the exact same length of blank space within a continuous text must be reproduced by different copyists in different manuscripts over a long period of time in the recopying process.

Besides, the scribes who copied from manuscripts have other pragmatic considerations. Menahem Haran, in his criticism of the hypothesis that the Septuagint text of Ps 151 is a combination of two works (Ps 151 A and Ps 151 B)

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<sup>2</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187.

<sup>3</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 187.

<sup>4</sup> See also Eldon Jay Epp, *Perspectives on New Testament Textual Criticism*, NovTSup 116 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 630.

because of the empty space/gap in the manuscript after the twelfth line, argues that the space may not necessarily be evidence of a new unit but may stem from pragmatic considerations or other reasons.<sup>5</sup> In fact, copyists, for whatever reason, separated texts. If the copyists could space texts for whatever consideration, then they could also shorten empty spaces for whatever reason.

In sum, the empty spaces left in some manuscripts like *Codex Alexandrinus* and *Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus*, where the pericope is thought to have been located, are probably due to the handiwork of those scribes who, although having the pericope from the manuscripts that they were copying, were in doubt of the authenticity or felt that the narrative was offensive to the sensibility of their community as Augustine<sup>6</sup> suggests. Thus, they suppressed it from their manuscripts. It is also important to note that the original texts/manuscripts of the New Testament were all lost and that we have only copies from the earliest surviving copied manuscripts. Consequently, one must be prudent and suppose that the argument against the authenticity of the pericope on the grounds of an early absence has some limitations.

### 1.3.2. Absence of the Witness of Greek Fathers

While placing doubt on the place of the pericope in the Gospel of John, Metzger asserts that it is very significant “that no Greek Church Father for a thousand years after Christ refers to the pericope, including even those who, like Origen, Chrysostom, and Nonnus (in his metrical paraphrase) dealt with the entire Gospel [of John] verse by verse.”<sup>7</sup> It is, however, important to note that silence is not equivalent to a lack of knowledge. Therefore, in contrast to Metzger’s assertion, we believe that the silence of the earliest Greek Fathers does not necessarily imply that they did not know about the pericope. We assume that they could have been influenced against commenting on it as a result of the moral prejudice associated with the pericope and by the fact that some manuscripts known to them omitted it. The moral prejudice associated with Jesus’s act of forgiving the adulteress “must be thought to have led to more and more hesitation in quoting and using our pericope, which resulted in its slipping out of the mainstream of the tradition.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Menahem Haran, “The Two Text-Forms of Psalm 151,” *JJS* 39 (1983): 179.

<sup>6</sup> See Augustine, *De conjugii adulterinis* 2.7.6 (PL 40/6:474). We will treat Augustine’s observation under the section “Inspiration and Canonicity.”

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 223; see also Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l’évangile selon Jean*, vol. 2 (Paris: Seuil, 1990), 312. Léon-Dufour adds Heracleon and Irenaeus to the list.

<sup>8</sup> Harald Riesenfeld, “The Pericope de Adultera in the Early Christian Tradition,” in *The Gospel Tradition: Essays by Harald Riesenfeld*, trans. Margaret E. Rowley and Robert A. Kraft (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), 99.

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