

Zacchaeus and the Unripe Figs: A New Argument for the Original Language of Tatian's Diatessaron

IAN N. MILLS

Department of Religious Studies, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina 27708, USA. Email: Ian.Nelson@Duke.edu

Did Tatian write his gospel in Greek or Syriac? Treatments of this most beleaguered crux in Diatessaronic studies have largely depended on a now defunct approach to the source material. The 'New Perspective' on Tatian's Diatessaron wants for a new study of this old question. A problematic arrangement of textual data at Luke 19.4 offers unrecognised evidence that Tatian composed in Greek – namely, contradictory testimonia to the Syriac word for Zacchaeus' 'sycamore' in Tatian's gospel reflect different etymological translations of a distinctive, Greek textual variant.

Keywords: Diatessaron, Tatian, Isho'dad of Merv, Syriac, translation, apocrypha, Luke 19.4

1. Introduction

Tatian was 'the Syrian' to the Greeks and 'the Greek' to the Syrians.¹ The *Oration's* defence of barbarian wisdom and demonstration of Greek learning represent its author as an authority in both worlds. Born in Assyria, Tatian studied in Rome and then, some time after Justin's death, returned to his native country. There his gospel, the so-called Diatessaron, achieved canonical status.²

1 This observation originated as an oral remark by Tjitze Baarda. See W. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae* 25; Leiden/New York: Brill, 1994) 51 n. 54. It is apparently derived from testimonia by Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.12.81.1–3), Theodore Bar Koni (*Liber Scholiorum*, Siirt Recension 8.39) and their followers.

2 The *Doctrine of Addai* (34) identifies the Diatessaron with the New Testament. Theodoret of Cyrrhus claims to have discovered 200 copies being used liturgically in lieu of a tetraevangelion (*Haer. Fab. Comp.* 1.20). As late as the thirteenth century, 'Abd Iso' Bar Berika could credit the Diatessaron with preserving the true sequence of the life of Jesus. For Bar Berika's

We do not know where or when Tatian wrote his gospel and the question of its original language neatly divides our sub-field. To consider a few leading lights, William Petersen and Jan Joosten argue for a Syriac origin while Ulrich Schmid and Matthew Crawford maintain that Tatian composed in Greek.³ Unfortunately, much of this battle has been waged on methodologically dubious ground.

For the last century, students of Tatian's gospel have toiled under a paradigm now defunct. The hypothesis of an Old Latin Diatessaron that could furnish medieval harmonies with Tatianic readings set scholars scouring High German, Middle Dutch and other vernacular sources for parallels to early Syriac gospel readings.⁴ The arguments of Daniel Plooij and William Petersen in favour of a Syriac origin are founded on these far-flung thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sources.⁵ This inter-millennial, pan-Mediterranean parallelomania was brought to a halt by Ulrich Schmid. In a series of mutually corroborative studies, Schmid demonstrated that the vernacular harmonies are dependent for their Tatianic content on the thoroughly Vulgatised text tradition of Codex Fuldensis.⁶ The supposed Diatessaronic readings found therein were just so many apophenies.

Apart from studies dependent on such vernacular witnesses, most of the composition language debate has concerned a tiny Greek fragment found at Dura

Nomokanon, see A. Mai, *Scriptorum veterum nova collectio e Vaticanis codicibus edita*, vol. x (Rome: Typis Vaticanis, 1831) 191 (Text), 23 (Latin). On the problem of the gospel's name, see M. R. Crawford, 'Diatessaron, a Misnomer? The Evidence from Ephrem's Commentary', *Early Christianity* 4 (2013) 362–85.

3 W. L. Petersen, 'New Evidence for the Question of the Original Language of the Diatessaron', *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeven* (ed. W. Schrage and J. Verheyden; BZNTW 47; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1986) 325–43; Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 428; J. Joosten, 'Tatian's Diatessaron and the Old Testament Peshitta', *JBL* 120 (2001) 501–23, at 502; U. Schmid, 'The Diatessaron of Tatian', *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes; New Testament Tools, Studies, and Documents; Leiden: Brill, 2012²) 115–42, at 115; M. R. Crawford, 'The Diatessaron, Canonical or Non-Canonical? Rereading the Dura Fragment', *NTS* 62 (2016) 253–77, at 256 n. 9; J. Joosten, 'Le Diatessaron syriaque', *Le Nouveau Testament en Syriaque* (ed. J.-C. Haelewyck; Études Syriaques 14; Paris: Geuthner, 2017) 67–117.

4 William Petersen, this method's chief advocate, provides a comprehensive history of this paradigm in Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 84–356.

5 D. Plooij, *A Further Study of the Liège Diatessaron* (Leiden: Brill, 1925) 45–69; Petersen, 'New Evidence for the Question of the Original Language of the Diatessaron'.

6 This development is best summarised in Schmid's own introduction to the discipline: see Schmid, 'The Diatessaron of Tatian', esp. 126–33. The case is further strengthened in his most recent piece, U. Schmid, 'Before and After: Some Notes on the Pre- and Post-History of Codex Fuldensis', *The Gospel of Tatian: Exploring the Nature and Text of the Diatessaron* (ed. M. R. Crawford and N. J. Zola; The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries; London: Bloomsbury, 2019) 171–90.

Europos. Long supposed to be the only surviving piece of Tatian's Diatessaron, Dura Parchment 24 has been marshalled in support of both Greek and Syriac priority.⁷ I have argued elsewhere that the Dura fragment is not a witness to Tatian's work.⁸ In any case, the evidence furnished by these fifteen partially preserved lines has hardly generated consensus.

We must reach back to the likes of Theodor Zahn and Adolf Harnack for treatments of the issue derived only from Diatessaronic sources we still recognise as such.⁹ However, these scholars laboured before (Ps.-)Ephrem's *Commentary* – our most important source for Tatian's gospel – had been recovered in Syriac.¹⁰ New data, improved methods, and an old controversy cry out for fresh analysis.

Similarly, the relative priority of the Diatessaron and the Old Syriac gospels is a matter yet unresolved. Recent treatments of the issue argue in opposite directions.¹¹

- 7 Carl Kraeling, in the Dura fragment's *editio princeps*, and M.-J. Lagrange argue that Dura's precise agreement with Greek gospel manuscripts weigh against an intervening Syriac translation. C. H. Kraeling, *A Greek Fragment of Tatian's Diatessaron from Dura* (Studies and Documents 3; London: Christophers, 1935) 18; M.-J. Lagrange, 'Deux nouveaux textes relatifs à l'Évangile', *RB* 44 (1935) 321–43, at 324. Daniel Plooi and Anton Baumstark, on the other hand, noted that Dura's distinctive readings might be explained by grammatical ambiguities and a scribal error in Syriac. D. Plooi, 'A Fragment of Tatian's Diatessaron in Greek', *The Expository Times* 46 (1935) 471–6, at 475–6; A. Baumstark, 'Das griechische "Diatessaron"-Fragment von Dura Europos', *Oriens Christianus* 32 (1935) 244–52.
- 8 I. N. Mills, 'The Wrong Harmony: Against the Diatessaronic Character of the Dura Parchment', *The Gospel of Tatian: Exploring the Nature and Text of the Diatessaron* (ed. M. R. Crawford and N. J. Zola; The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries; London: Bloomsbury/T&T Clark, 2019) 145–70. For the debate over the fragment's Tatianic character, see D. C. Parker, D. G. K. Taylor and M. S. Goodacre, 'The Dura-Europos Gospel Harmony', *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts* (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 1999) 192–228; J. Joosten, 'The Dura Parchment and the Diatessaron', *VC* 57 (2003) 159–75.
- 9 T. Zahn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur. 1. Theil: Tatians Diatessaron* (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1881) 220–38; A. Harnack, 'Tatians Diatessaron und Marcions Commentar zum Evangelium bei Ephraem Syrus', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 4 (1881) 471–505, at 494. Schmid's argument depends on no particular Tatianic source. He contends that 'the bare mechanics of composing a gospel harmony appear to require sources and end product to be in one and the same language'. Schmid, 'The Diatessaron of Tatian', 115–16 n. 5. One recent treatment of the original language question not rooted in dubious sources is Joosten's argument from the Diatessaron's use of the Old Testament Peshitta as articulated in Joosten, 'Le Diatessaron syriaque'. Joosten's case, however, is not compelling: on the supposition of a Greek original, Vulgatisation of the Diatessaron towards the Peshitta might occur either in its translation into Syriac or in (Ps.-)Ephrem's notoriously paraphrastic discussion of the text.
- 10 The cumbersome appellation '(Ps.-)Ephrem' reflects the composite character of the commentary, as demonstrated in C. Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).
- 11 J. P. Lyon, *Syriac Gospel Translations: A Comparison of the Language and Translation Method Used in the Old Syriac, the Diatessaron, and the Peshitto* (Leuven: Peeters, 1994) 203–6. J.-C. Haelewyck, 'Les vieilles versions syriaques des Évangiles', *Le Nouveau Testament en syriaque*

These questions are interrelated and the resolution of either would provide the critic with a badly needed methodological control. In our current state, scholars should be wary of taking either position as given.

Such puzzles are not solved with a single piece. Nevertheless, a unique arrangement of the evidence at Luke 19.4 favours one solution over another.¹² The data *ad locum* are best explained by the supposition that Tatian composed his gospel in Greek and this circulated in the east before the Syriac ‘Separated Gospels’.¹³

2. Sycamore: Text and Translation

In Luke 19.4, Zacchaeus climbs up in a ‘sycamore tree’. Probably the *Ficus sycomorus* is envisioned here but, as noted below, this occasioned some confusion in antiquity. Six spellings of ‘sycamore’ are extant in Greek manuscripts at Luke 19.4. Since I am not interested in determining Luke’s initial text, these variants concern us only as two groups: the omicron-spelling and the omega-spelling. The singular readings found in Codex Alexandrinus (A) and Leicestrensis (69) are unattested in Greek literature and can be dismissed as nonsense scribal errors.

Omicron Spellings

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|---|
| (1) | συκομοραϊων | E ^C F H M R ^{vid} S V Y Γ Λ Ψ Ω |
| (2) | συκομορεων | κ B L Δ |

Omega Spellings

- | | | |
|-----|--------------|-------------------------------|
| (3) | συκομορωαϊων | W E* Y G K U Π ^{f13} |
| (4) | συκομορωεων | D Q Θ |

Singular Readings

- | | | |
|-----|-------------|----|
| (5) | συκωμοραϊων | A |
| (6) | σιμοραϊων | 69 |

(ed. J.-C. Haelewyck; Études Syriaques 14; Paris: Geuthner, 2017) 67–117. See also J. Joosten, *The Syriac Language of the Peshitta and Old Syriac Versions of Matthew: Syntactic Structure, Inner-Syriac Developments and Translation Technique* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 5–30.

12 This nexus of Tatianic witnesses was first flagged by H. F. von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt hergestellt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte*, vol. I, Part 2 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1911) 1540. It has subsequently been treated in R. J. H. Gottheil, ‘Quotations from the Diatessaron’, *JBL* 11 (1892) 68–71, at 69–70; J. R. Harris, *Fragments of the Commentary of Ephrem Syrus upon the Diatessaron* (London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1895) 19; M. D. Gibson, ed., *The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, vol. 1 (*Horae Semiticae* 5; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) xxix; T. Baarda, ‘The “Foolish” or “Deaf” Fig-Tree: Concerning Luke 19:4 in the Diatessaron’, *NT* 43 (2001) 161–77.

13 Kraeling, *A Greek Fragment of Tatian’s Diatessaron from Dura*, 17.

The Latin, Coptic and Syriac offer three different approaches to translating the term. The Old Latin, Jerome's Vulgate and the Bohairic simply transliterate the Greek, producing *arborem sycamorum* and $\sigma\upsilon\kappa\omicron\mu\omicron\rho\epsilon\alpha$ respectively.¹⁴ The Sahidic instead offers the equivalent $\text{no}\gamma\text{ze}$ or reads $\text{bo } \bar{\text{n}}\bar{\text{k}}\bar{\text{n}}\bar{\text{t}}\bar{\text{e}}$, meaning 'fig-tree' ($\sigma\upsilon\kappa\acute{\eta}$).¹⁵ The Syriac gospels adopt yet another translation technique.

3. Tasteless Fig(-Tree): The Syriac Gospel Tradition

The Syriac gospels survive in three recensions: Old Syriac, Peshitta and Harklean. Curiously, none of these opts for ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ as the Christian Palestinian Aramaic does in Luke 19.4 and the Peshitta uses for הקמה throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Isa 9.10; Amos 7.14). Rather, all three Old Syriac gospel manuscripts, the Peshitta and the Harklean together read ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ i.e. 'dull' or 'tasteless fig(-tree)'.¹⁶ The same translation is attested by Ephrem of Nisibis (*Fid.* 25.14) and Jacob of Sarug.¹⁷ Although the Greek $\sigma\upsilon\kappa\acute{\omicron}\mu(\omicron/\omega)\rho-$ (along with $\sigma\upsilon\kappa\acute{\omicron}\mu\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma$) is itself probably derived from the Semitic הקמה , the Syriac 'tasteless fig-tree' is transparently an attempt at etymology.¹⁸ The translator has identified ܫܘܟ- with ܫܘܟܗܐ = 'fig-tree' and ܡܘܪ- with ܡܘܪܘܨ = 'dull, foolish'. As Tjitze

14 There are three singular readings among the Old Latin witnesses: Vercellensis (a) reads *arborem sycamori*, the Latin column of Bezae (d) reads *morum*, and Palatinus (e) reads just *arbore*. A. Jülicher, *Itala: Das Neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung*, vol. III (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1976) 210. G. Horner, *The Coptic version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect, Otherwise Called Memphitic and Bohairic*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898) 248.

15 The Sahidic also uses $\text{no}\gamma\text{ze}$ for $\sigma\upsilon\kappa\acute{\omicron}\mu\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma$ in Luke 17.6. J. W. Wells, *Sahidic Coptic New Testament* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011) 100. Horner also lists $\text{bo } \bar{\text{n}}\bar{\text{k}}\bar{\text{n}}\bar{\text{t}}\bar{\text{e}}$ as a variant spelling. G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect Otherwise Called Sahidic and Thebaic*, vol. II (Oxford: Clarendon, 1911) 354.

16 On the third manuscript of the Old Syriac gospels, see S. Brock, 'Two Hitherto Unattested Passages of the Old Syriac Gospels in Palimpsests from St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai', *Δελτίο Βιβλικών Μελετών* 31A (2016) 7–18; Haelewyck, 'Les vieilles versions syriaques des Évangiles'. The reading is found at folio 10r in NF 39.

17 E. Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymen de Fide* (CSCO Scriptorum Syri 154/73; Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955) 87. D. Miller and M. Hansbury, *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on Zacchaeus the Tax Collector* (bilingual edition; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2010) 35. Ephrem may also have known the reading found in the Syriac Diatessaron. In his *Hymns on Nativity*, Ephrem refers to the sycamore as ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ = 'wounded fig-tree' and then contrasts its fruit not with ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ = 'flavourful/reasonable' as in *On Faith* 25.14 but with ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ = 'eloquent' (4.41–2). This is more clearly the opposite of ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ = 'deaf/mute' than ܫܘܟܡܘܪܐ = 'tasteless/foolish'. E. Beck, ed., *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymen de Nativitate (Epiphania)* (CSCO Scriptorum Syri 186/82; Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1959) 29.

18 P. Chantraine et al., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1968) 1032.

Baarda has already noted, this etymological translation requires the omega-spelling.¹⁹

Gregory of Nazianzus and Cyril of Alexandria are the only patristic commentators to attest the omega-spelling at Luke 19.4. While Gregory mentions the episode only in passing (*Or.* 39.9), Cyril offers the following interpretation:

And [Zacchaeus] was small in stature, not only bodily but also spiritually; and he was not otherwise able to see [Jesus], except being raised up from the ground. And he ascended upon the sycamore (συκομωραία) which Christ was about to pass by. The word contains a riddle. For someone is not otherwise able to see Christ and to believe in him unless he be lifted up on the sycamore (συκομωραία), making foolish (μωράνας) the parts upon the earth: fornication, immorality, and the rest. Christ, it says, was about to pass by the sycamore (συκομωραία), for travelling according to the conduct of the law – which is the fig-tree (συκῆν) – he chose the foolish things (μωρά) of the world – which is the cross and death. And all who take up his cross and follow in the conduct of Christ will be saved, accomplishing the law wisely. This person is a fig-tree (συκῆ) not producing figs (σῦκα) but foolish things (μωρά), for the secret works of the faithful ones appear as foolish things (μωρία) to the Jews ... (*Commentary on Luke* 72)²⁰

Like many patristic commentators, Cyril seems to have imagined Zacchaeus ascending a συκῆ – probably the *Ficus carica*.²¹ More interesting for our purposes, one of only two commentators to attest the omega-spelling at Luke 19.4 also saw μωρός = ‘dull, foolish’ in συκομωραία.²²

Applied to food, μωρός connotes insipidity (LSJ 1.4). In the gospels, for instance, μωραίνω applied to salt means ‘to become tasteless’ (Matt 5.13/Luke 14.34). The translator’s use of ܡܘܪܘܫ, rather than ܡܘܪܘܫܐ (cf. Peshitta Matt 7.26),

19 Baarda, ‘The “Foolish” or “Deaf” Fig-Tree’, 165.

20 PG 72.865; my translation. Interpretation 64 in Cramer’s catena collection bears an initial similarity to Cyril’s homily but lacks the relevant section. J. A. Cramer, ed., *Catena Graecorum patrum in Novum Testamentum edidit J. A. Cramer: Catena in Evangelia S. Lucae et S. Joannis ad fidem Codd. Mss.*, vol. II (Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1844) 137. Payne Smith argues that since the ‘foolish’ pun is based on a misspelling that did not exist in Cyril’s time, the homily is probably spurious. This, as my treatment of Strabo and the Syriac translators makes clear, is baseless. R. Payne Smith, *S. Cyrilli Alexandriae archiepiscopi Commentarii in Lucae Evangelium quae supersunt Syriace e manuscriptis apud Museum Britannicum* (Oxford: E Typographeo Academico, 1858) 587–8.

21 For similar interpretations, see Severian of Galba, *De caeco et Zacchaeo* in PG 59.603; (Ps.-) Chrysostom, *In Zacchaeum publicanum* 51, PG 72.865; Theodorus Prodromus, *Epigrammata in Vetus et Novum Testamentum*, PG 133.1202.

22 I know of only one potential piece of counter-evidence: in a homily attributed to John Chrysostom, the homilist evinces the omicron-spelling but, in a single sentence, puns with both μόρος and μωρός: *On the Parable of the Fig Tree* 59 (PG 61.767–8). There is no critical edition of this homily.

suggests this ‘tasteless’ interpretation of μωρός.²³ A corresponding etymological analysis of ‘sycamore’ is also attested in Greek authorities. Strabo (*Geogr.* 17.2.4) and Pedanius Dioscorides (*De materia medica* 1.127) indicate that the name referred to the fruit’s ‘dishonourable’ (ἄτιμον) or ‘unpalatable’ (ἄστομον) taste.²⁴

The critical editions of both Strabo and Dioscorides, however, print not the implied omega-spelling but the omicron. If the modern editors are correct, we should probably imagine these ancient authors reporting a popular etymology derived from a familiar word’s phonology while writing the term according to its ‘standard’ spelling.²⁵ Unlike Strabo (but like Cyril), our Syriac translators encountered an unfamiliar word in writing.²⁶ There is, however, good reason to question the editors’ preference for the omicron-spelling here.

Preliminarily, the omicron is the predominant spelling throughout Greek literature. The *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* proffers 111 results for the omicron-spelling but only six for the omega.²⁷ We should expect scribes to correct the text towards this standard spelling – as did the corrector of Codex Basilensis (E07) at Luke 19.4.²⁸

Of the four significant manuscripts extant for this portion of Strabo’s *Geographica*, only a correction in a single manuscript (Marcianus gr. xi 6) evinces συκόμορον, the omicron-spelling.²⁹ On the other hand, two manuscripts give the omega-spelling (Athous Vatop. 655; Vaticanus gr. 482).³⁰ The final

23 The verbal form of ܡܘܪܘܫܐ is used for μωραίνω at Matt 5.13/Luke 14.34 and ἄναλον γένηται at Mark 9.50.

24 S. Radt, *Strabons Geographika*, vol. iv (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) 504. M. Wellmann, *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica libri quinque*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Weidmanns, 1907) 116. Theophrastus, the father of Greek botany, never uses συκόμ(ο/ω) ρ- terminology. Rather, he refers to the *Ficus sycomorus* as ἡ Αἴγυπτία συκόμιμος or just συκόμιμος (Theophrastus, *Hist. plant.* 4.2.1–2; cf. 1.1.7, 1.14.2, 4.1.5, etc.). Athenaeus mentions the συκόμορον and ἡ Αἴγυπτία συκόμιμος in his discussion of the συκόμινον but does not comment on the etymology of the former (*Deipn.* 2.36).

25 That the omicron-spelling, not the omega, is the standard spelling is justified below.

26 Cyril’s unfamiliarity is evinced by his misidentification of the tree (with other interpreters noted above) as *Ficus carica*. Likewise, the etymological translation, rather than use of ܡܘܪܘܫܐ, suggests that the Syriac translators were unfamiliar with the Greek term. This is corroborated by Ephrem’s identification of ܡܘܪܘܫܐ ܡܘܪܘܫܐ with the fig-trees in Matt 21.18 (*Faith* 25.14) and Mark 11 (*Virginity* 35.2). By contrast, Strabo and Dioscorides describe distinctive features of the *Ficus sycomorus*.

27 *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, online at <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>, accessed 5 November 2018.

28 There are no other corrections in the majuscules or papyri but a few corrections in both directions among later minuscules. This scribal tendency is also corroborated by Strabo’s text tradition (discussed below).

29 Stefan Radt provides the most recent and comprehensive critical edition of the *Geographica*. I adopt his assessment of the text tradition as expounded in S. Radt, *Strabons Geographika*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002) vii–xvii.

30 The latter, Vaticanus gr. 482, reads συκόμορον.

manuscript (Parisinus gr. 1393) and the first hand of the corrected Marcianus gr. xi 6 read συκόμορον – probably a scribal corruption of the omega-spelling.³¹ On both internal and external grounds, the omega-spelling should be preferred for Strabo.³²

Likewise, Dioscorides' text tradition is not univocal.³³ The fourth-century Oribasius quotes Dioscorides' description of the sycamore verbatim. Instead of the omicron-spelling, however, Oribasius (without variation in his own manuscript tradition) attests the omega.³⁴ Although the divided external evidence for Dioscorides still favours the omicron-spelling, the same internal considerations adduced for Strabo favour the omega-spelling.³⁵ It is possible, therefore, that the omega-spelling and not the omicron belonged to the initial text of both authors.

Finally, ancient authorities associate the omicron-spelling with a different etymological analysis. Throughout his corpus, Galen consistently uses the omicron-spelling of sycamore.³⁶ In his *On the Properties of Food*, Galen gives the following etymology of the term:

μᾶλλον δ' ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ μόνων τε καὶ σύκων αὐτὸν εἰκότως ἂν τις θεῖη.
καὶ μοι δοκεῖ καὶ τοῦνομι' ἐντεῦθεν αὐτῷ κείσθαι.

- 31 Radt, *Strabons Geographika*, iv.504. Gustavus Kramer, in his earlier edition, also attributes the omega-spelling to Paris gr. 1394, not cited in Radt. G. Kramer, *Strabonis Geographica*, vol. iii (Berlin: Libraria Friderici Nicolai, 1852) 403.
- 32 Since Strabo glosses -μ(ο/ω)ρ- with ἄτιμον, internal considerations favour the omega-spelling. The best manuscript of the *Geographika*, Parisinus gr. 1397, is not extant at this point. However, the combined testimony of Athous Vatop. 655 and Vaticanus gr. 482, considered alongside the scribal preference for the omicron (suggested by the correction of Marcianus gr. xi 6), is to be preferred on external grounds to the correction in the Marcianus manuscript.
- 33 Dioscorides refers to the sycamore once elsewhere in the same work. At *De materia medica* 5.33 the editor prints the omicron-spelling but notes that one important manuscript, Laurent. Gr. 74, 17, gives the omega-spelling. M. Wellmann, *Pedanii Dioscuridis Anazarbei De materia medica libri quinque*, vol. iii (Berlin: Weidmann, 1914) 24.
- 34 J. Raeder, *Oribasii collectionum medicarum reliquiae*, vol. i.2, 6 (Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkart, 1964) 148.
- 35 Like Strabo, Dioscorides' gloss of -μ(ο/ω)ρ- with ἄστομον suggests the omega-spelling. In Hortian terms, both intrinsic and transcriptional probabilities favour the priority of the omega-spelling.
- 36 *Method of Medicine* 14 at Galen, *Galen: Method of Medicine*, vol. iii: *Books 10–14* (trans. I. Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011) 458; K. G. Kühn, ed., *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, vol. x (Leipzig: Officina Libraria Car. Cnoblochii, 1825) 616. *Method of Medicine to Glaucón* 2 at Galen, *Galen: On the Constitution of the Art of Medicine: The Art of Medicine. A Method of Medicine to Glaucón* (trans. I. Johnston; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016¹) 513; K. G. Kühn, ed., *Claudii Galeni opera omnia*, vol. xi (Leipzig: Officina Libraria Car. Cnoblochii, 1825) 115. Although there is some variation in Galen's text tradition, I have nowhere seen reason to overturn the judgement of the editors. Given Galen's etymology in the quoted passage, internal considerations are here reversed (in favour of the omicron-spelling).

Indeed, one might reasonably place it between berries (μόρων) and figs (σύκων). And it seems to me that this name is given to it from this.³⁷

Thus, Galen explains that the name συκόμορον (omicron-spelling) is due to the fruit's resemblance to both the συκῆ (*Ficus carica*) and μόρον. The latter term is used to describe the berry-like fruit of several different plants.³⁸ Galen himself typically uses μόρον to refer to the fruit of the συκόμινος, his name for the *Morus nigra* (*De alimentorum facultatibus libri* 2.11).³⁹

After this, Galen rejects the etymology associated with the omega-spelling:

γελοιοὶ γάρ, ὅσοι διὰ τοῦτό φασιν ὠνομάσθαι τὸν καρπὸν τοῦτον συκόμορα, διότι σύκοις ἔοικε μωροῖς.

Therefore, they are ridiculous who say that this is why this fruit was named 'sycamore', namely because it resembles tasteless/foolish (μωροῖς) fig-trees. (*De alimentorum facultatibus libri* 2.35)⁴⁰

Galen, who consistently reflects the omicron-spelling, considers absurd the etymology associated with the omega-spelling. For this Greek physician, συκόμορον apparently meant 'fig-berry' not 'fig-tasteless'.

In sum, Cyril of Alexandria's use of the omega-spelling associates it with the 'tasteless' or 'foolish' etymology while Galen's discussion of the omicron-spelling associates it with 'berries'. It follows that between the second and the seventh centuries, three Syriac translators rendered συκομορ- with ܣܝܟܘܡܘܪܐ ܣܝܟܐ = 'tasteless fig(-tree)'. The entire Syriac gospel tradition, therefore, offers a single, distinctive translation that supports the omega-spelling against the omicron.

4. Deaf Fig(-Tree): (Ps.-)Ephrem's Commentary

The gospel commentary attributed to Ephrem is the 'premier witness' to Tatian's text.⁴¹ This composite work survives in two recensions.⁴² One is attested

37 K. Koch *et al.*, eds., *De sanitate tuenda, De alimentorum facultatibus, De bonis malisque sucis, De victu attenuante, De ptisana* (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum 4.2; Berlin/Leipzig: Teubner, 1923) 302–3.

38 Most frequently, it is the fruit of the *Morus nigra*. It is also used for the fruit of the βάτος (Hippocrates, *De mulierum affectibus* 2.112; Aeschylus fr. 116) and of the συκομορέα (Ps.-Galen, *Lexicon botanicum* 390). Likewise, -μορον is appended to other plant names (e.g. κυνόμορον, αἰγόμερον, βόσμορον).

39 Koch *et al.*, *De sanitate tuenda, etc.*, 282–5.

40 Koch *et al.*, *De sanitate tuenda, etc.*, 302–3.

41 Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 116.

42 On the relationship between these recensions, see L. Leloir, 'Divergences entre l'original syriaque et la version arménienne du commentaire d'Éphrem sur Le Diatessaron', *Mélanges Eugene Tisserant* 2 (1964) 303–31; W. L. Petersen, 'Some Remarks on the Integrity of

in the aforementioned Syriac manuscript (Chester Beatty 709) and the other in two Armenian copies.⁴³ Wherever extant, both must be consulted. At Luke 19.4, this most important witness to the Syriac Diatessaron gives a different name to the publican's perch.

Although in the initial citation (Ps.-)Ephrem refers to Zacchaeus' perch only as a ܪܫܘܘܢ/ܐܩܠܢܝܗ = 'fig(-tree)', the commentator proceeds with the following interpretation:

Therefore, Zacchaeus left behind the just law. And he climbed, in a symbol, a deaf fig-tree (ܪܫܘܘܢ ܪܫܘܘܢ/ܗܝ ܫܘܠܘܢ ܐܩܠܢܝܗ) – a symbol of his blocked hearing (ܪܫܘܘܢ ܫܘܠܘܢ/ܫܘܠܘܢܝܗ ܬܘܠܘܠܝܗ ܘܚܘܪܘܢ ܘܗܘܐ). And the symbol of his salvation was signified by his ascent. He left the depth below. And he climbed into the air in the middle to examine the exalted divinity. Then our Lord quickly brought him down from the deaf fig-tree (ܪܫܘܘܢ ܪܫܘܘܢ ܘܗܘ ܫܘܠܘܢ ܐܩܠܢܝܗ), and, in the symbol, from his behaviour, so that he would not remain in deafness (ܪܫܘܘܢܘܢ/ܗܝ ܫܘܠܘܢܝܗ ܘܚܘܪܘܢ ܘܗܘܐ). (15.21)⁴⁴

The Armenian ܫܘܠܘܢ ܐܩܠܢܝܗ = 'deaf fig(-tree)' differs from the vulgate ܪܫܘܘܢ/ܐܩܠܢܝܗ in agreement with the Syriac ܪܫܘܘܢ ܪܫܘܘܢ = 'deaf fig(-tree)'.⁴⁵ In both recensions of the commentary, the distinctive term ܪܫܘܘܢ/ܫܘܠܘܢ = 'deaf' is the stimulus for a couple lines of somewhat forced exegesis. 'Forced' because, in the text cited

Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron', *Patristic and Text-Critical Studies: The Collected Essays of William L. Petersen* (New Testament Tools – Studies and Documents 40; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012) 103–9; Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron*.

43 L. Leloir, ed., *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709)* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8; Dublin: Hodges Figgis & CO LTD, 1963); L. Leloir, ed., *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709). Folios additionnels* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8; Leuven/Paris: Peeters, 1990); L. Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Version arménienne* (CSCO Scriptores Armeniaci 137/1; Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1953).

44 My translation of the Syriac from Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Texte syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709)*, 160. For another translation, see C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron: An English Translation of Chester Beatty Syriac MS 709* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 241. The Armenian cited here is MS B from Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Version arménienne*, 218. The Armenian MS A reads, և էլ նա խորյորով և ի օգնուհի անդ = 'And he ascended, with a deaf mind, in that fig-tree.' Given the agreement between the Syriac and MS B, the reading in MS A is probably secondary. On the relationship of the two MSS, see L. Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant. Version arménienne*, vi–viii.

45 The Armenian Ժանտաղօգնուհի or Ժանդաղօգնուհի reflects an etymological translation similar to the Syriac tradition. B. O. Künzle, *L'Évangile arménien ancien = Das altarmenische Evangelium*, vol. xxx (Linguistik und Indogermanistik 21; Bern: Peter Lang, 1984) 197.

but still we want for a critical edition.⁵² At Luke 19.4, the Arabic Diatessaron does not give the expected جَمِيْزَة = ‘sycamore’ or render فَحْمَة = ‘tasteless’ with a form of نَفَه as in Matt 5.13/Luke 14.34 at Arabic Diatessaron 25 or حَمَق in some of the Arabic gospels.⁵³ Rather, Marmardji’s edition prints تَيْنَة فَجَة = ‘unripe fig(-tree)’.⁵⁴

This is a sensible translation of ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ = ‘deaf fig(-tree)’ as Bar Bahlul understood the term. Alternative explanations introduce new difficulties: the Arabic’s term for ‘unripe’, which agrees with (Ps.-)Ephrem as Bar Bahlul understood ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ = ‘deaf fig(-tree)’, is not a rendering of the Peshitta’s ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ = ‘tasteless’. The Arabic تَيْنَة corresponds to (Ps.-)Ephrem’s ܐܘܪܘܟܐ but has no corresponding element in Isho‘dad’s ܐܘܪܘܟܐ (discussed below). Likewise, the Arabic is singular with (Ps.-)Ephrem rather than plural with Isho‘dad. The simplest explanation is that the Arabic Diatessaron’s تَيْنَة فَجَة = ‘unripe fig(-tree)’ is a translation of ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ = ‘deaf fig(-tree)’ as found in (Ps.-)Ephrem’s Syriac *Vorlage*.

6. Unripe Fruits: Isho‘dad, Bar Bahlul and Bar Salibi

(Ps.-)Ephrem’s *Commentary* and the Arabic Diatessaron are not our only witnesses to Tatian’s text at Luke 19.4. Three additional Syriac authors contrast Tatian’s gospel with the rest of the Syriac tradition at precisely this point of variation (Table 1).⁵⁵

These authors ascribe ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ to Tatian’s gospel at Luke 19.4. The sense of this term is not difficult to ascertain: Bar Ali and Bar Bahlul, the ninth- and tenth-century lexicographers, give similar glosses for ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ. Bar Ali reads, ‘The unripe

Joose, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Arabic Diatessaron* (Amsterdam: Centrale Huisdrukkerij VU, 1997) 345; Joosse, ‘An Introduction to the Arabic Diatessaron’, 120–1.

52 A recent catalogue of manuscripts can be found in G. Lancioni, ‘The Arabic Diatessaron Project: Digitalizing Encoding Lemmatization’, *Journal of Religion, Media and Digital Culture* 5 (2016) 205–27. For an explanation of the problems with current editions, see Joosse, ‘An Introduction to the Arabic Diatessaron’, 80–5.

53 A. S. Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tatien. Texte arabe établi, traduit en français, collationné avec les anciennes versions syriaques, suivi d’un évangélaire diatessarique syriaque* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1935) 242–4. This reading is found in Family A of the Arabic gospels. There is variation between families, but none consulted supply فَجَة. I am grateful to Robert Turnbull, Mina Monier, Josh Mugler and Fady Atef Mekhael for their help with the Arabic gospels.

54 Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tatien*, 296.

55 There is a fourth parallel to this etymology in Bar Hebraeus but it omits the Tatianic testimony. W. E. W. Carr, ed., *Bar-Hebraeus: Commentary on the Gospels from the Horreum Mysteriorum* (London: SPCK, 1925) Eng 49, Syr 60. In any case, Bar Hebraeus’ use of these earlier authors is well established. A. Sauma, ‘Bar-Hebraeus’s Use of Bar-Salibi’, *The Harp* 23 (2008) 271–9.

Table 1. Testimonia to ܦܘܢ in Tatian’s Diatessaron

Isho’dad of Merv ¹	A. H. Bar Bahlul ²	D. Bar Salibi ³
<p>And Bethphage: Some people interpret ‘meeting of the roads’. Others, ‘four-way-division of paths’. Others, ‘house of the ܦܘܢ’, that is ‘the house of the tasteless fig-trees’ (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ); and they bring testimony from the Diatessaron and from Greek copies (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ); in the story of Zacchaeus, who was small in bodily stature as well as spiritual, he climbed, it is said, ܦܘܢܐ to see Jesus, which in Syriac is ‘tasteless fig-tree’ (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ).</p>	<p>ܦܘܢܐ: ‘crossroads’, that is the meeting of the roads. Others: ܦܘܢܐ is ‘the tasteless fig-tree’ (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ) adducing that it is written in the Gospel of the Mixed in the story of Zacchaeus that ‘he climbed ܦܘܢܐ to see⁴ Jesus’, which also in Syriac is written ‘that he climbed the tasteless fig-tree’ (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ).</p>	<p>ܦܘܢܐ that is ‘crossroads’, that is the meeting of the roads. Others: that ܦܘܢܐ is the ‘four-way-division of paths’. Others: ܦܘܢܐ is the ‘tasteless fig-tree’; it is written in the Gospel of the Mixed in the story of Zacchaeus: ‘he climbed ܦܘܢܐ in order to see Jesus’, which also in Syriac is written: ‘he climbed upon the tasteless fig-tree’ (ܦܘܢܐ ܕܦܘܢܐ).</p>

¹My translation of the text from M. D. Gibson, ed., *The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, vol. II (Horae Semiticae 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) 134–5.

²Text from Hassan bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum*, vol. II (ed. R. Duval; Paris: Leroux, 1901) 1486.

³Text from A. Vaschalde, *Dionysii Bar Salibi Commentarii in Evangelia*, vol. II (CSCO 95 (Syr 47); Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1953) 2. Latin translation in A. Vaschalde, *Dionysii Bar Salibi Commentarii in Evangelia: interpretatus est*, vol. II (CSCO 98 (Syr 49); Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1953) 1.

⁴The text reads ܦܘܢܐ but I translate the emendation ܦܘܢܐ.

that has no taste, unripe, and did not mature.⁵⁶ Bar Bahlul, before giving the Syriac definitions presented above, reads, ‘The unripe that did not ripen, did not mature’ and ‘[Syriac] According to [Henanisho’] Bar Sero[shway] [Arabic] Henna Blossom.’⁵⁷ Likewise, Eliya of Nisibis defines ܦܘܢܐ as ‘unripe [fruit]’.⁵⁸ Marcus Jastrow glosses the Aramaic cognate ܦܘܢܐ as ‘hard, underdeveloped berry, fig, date’ and his examples suggest prematurity (e.g. b. Sanh. 107a).

⁵⁶ The last phrase literally means ‘did not comprehend’ but this is an idiom for immaturity. R. Gottheil, *The Syriac–Arabic Glosses Of Isho’ Bar Ali*, Part II; vol. II (Rome: Tipografia D. R. Accademia Dei Lincei, 1910) 15. Thanks to Fady Atef Mekhael for help with the Arabic.

⁵⁷ Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum*, II.1486. Thanks to Fady Atef Mekhael for help with the Arabic.

⁵⁸ P. de Lagarde, *Praetermissorum libri duo* (Göttingen: Officina academica Dieterichiana, 1879) 51. On Eliya’s lexicon, see A. McCollum, ‘Prolegomena to a New Edition of Eliya of Nisibis’s Kitāb al-turjumān fi ta’līm luḡat al-suryān’, *JSS* 58 (2013) 297–322.

Finally, the Arabic cognate عُج means unripe or immature. Although its purported occurrence in Tatian's version of Luke 19.4 suggested to these commentators that ܦܘܠܥܐ referred to Zacchaeus' sycamore, our sources for the term's conventional use indicate that it picked out premature fruit, including that of the fig-tree.

The use of the plural ܦܘܠܥܐ in Isho'dad and Bar Salibi will prove instructive. Surely they did not envision Zacchaeus ascending multiple trees. Rather, ܦܘܠܥܐ refers to the fruit itself. Tatian, according to these authors, depicted Zacchaeus climbing into the 'unripe fruits.'

These three testimonia are genetically related but the shape of their stemma is debatable. Dionysius Bar Salibi, the latest of the three, agrees with Isho'dad against Bar Bahlul on the plural of ܦܘܠܥܐ and in situating the testimony in a comment on Matt 21.1. Bar Salibi's first set of glosses, however, agree with Bar Bahlul against Isho'dad. Furthermore, Bar Salibi and Bar Bahlul both attribute the reading to the 'Mixed Gospel' rather than the Diatessaron (as in Isho'dad).⁵⁹ This pattern of alternating alignment can be explained if Bar Salibi is an independent witness to an earlier tradition or if he meticulously conflated Isho'dad and Bar Bahlul. Since it is unclear what would motivate the latter, the former seems more likely.⁶⁰ Alas, Bar Salibi provides no information not attested in an earlier author and my argument does not depend on either judgement.

Ḥasan Bar Bahlul, a tenth-century lexicographer, cites Tatian's gospel not in a comment on Matthew (as in Isho'dad and Bar Salibi) but in a lexical entry for ܦܘܠܥܐ .⁶¹ Bar Bahlul often cites his authorities by name and Isho'dad never appears among them.⁶² Rather, both authors attribute the Diatessaronic tradition to 'others.' Furthermore, Bar Bahlul elsewhere evinces independent access to traditions about Tatian's gospel.⁶³ Bar Bahlul is probably, therefore, an independent

59 Tatian's gospel is first so named in the Syriac of Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.29.6.

60 Baarda simply asserts that each is an independent witness to an earlier tradition. Baarda, 'The "Foolish" or "Deaf" Fig-Tree', 172.

61 Although both discuss the 'crossroads' definition, their vocabulary differs substantially.

62 Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum*, III.xiii-xxiv. Given the subject matter of Bar Bahlul's *Book of Signs*, it is unsurprising that Isho'dad is not cited there either. J. Habbi, 'Les Sources du Livre des signes d'al-Ḥasan Ibn Al-Bahlūl', *Actes du Deuxième Congrès International d'Études Arabes Chrétiennes* (ed. K Samir; OCA 226; Rome: Pont. Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1986) 193-203.

63 A testimony to the Diatessaron, not found in Isho'dad or any earlier source, attributes the name 'Jesus' to Barabbas at Matt 27.16 in the ܦܘܠܥܐ ܘܢܦܘܠܥܐ = 'Separated Gospels' as opposed to its omission by 'the Evangelist'. Bar Bahlul, *Lexicon Syriacum*, 1.423. I follow Burkitt's conclusion that 'separated' would only distinguish a tetraevangelion from the Diatessaron, here attributed - reminiscent of Ephrem's usage - to a singular, anonymous evangelist. F. C. Burkitt, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe: Introduction and Notes*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904) 177-9. Bar Salibi repeats this tradition. See A. Vaschalde, *Dionysii Bar Salibi Commentarii in Evangelia*, vol. II (CSCO 95 (Syr 47); Leuven: Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1953) 106.

witness to a common (lost) source for the ܦܘܩ tradition – as indeed suggested by our consideration of Bar Salibi.

Most of the differences between Isho‘dad’s testimony and Bar Bahlul’s are relatively insignificant. First, Isho‘dad gives ܦܘܩ in the plural while Bar Bahlul uses the singular. Since the singular stood atop the entry in Bar Bahlul’s lexicon and the Syriac plural is marked here only by a *syāmē*, Isho‘dad’s plural (supported by Bar Salibi) is probably the earlier form. Second, Isho‘dad refers to Tatian’s gospel according to the Greek name ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ while Bar Bahlul (supported by Bar Salibi) uses the Syriac title ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ = ‘The Mixed Gospel’. Finally, Bar Bahlul omits Isho‘dad’s claim that ‘Greek copies’ corroborate Tatian’s use of ܦܘܩ. This line is perplexing, and it is easy to imagine Bar Bahlul dropping it from his lexicon (as did Bar Salibi). We will return to consider one interpretive implication of Bar Bahlul’s probable independence from Isho‘dad, but first we must treat our oldest and most informative witness to this tradition.

Isho‘dad of Merv was a ninth-century bishop of Ḥdatta and the author of commentaries on the Old and New Testaments. He introduces Tatian’s gospel at the beginning of his commentary on Mark by rehearsing Eusebius’ account of its origin and identifying the Diatessaron as the object of Ephrem’s commentary.⁶⁴ Throughout his corpus, Isho‘dad cites the *Diatessaron* six additional times as a source for variant gospel readings.⁶⁵ Among these we discover our etymology for ‘Bethphage’ containing a testimony about Tatian’s text at Luke 19.4 (see Table 1). The following excerpt is especially relevant:

Others, ‘house of the ܦܘܩ’, that is ‘the house of the tasteless fig-trees’ (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ); and they bring testimony from the Diatessaron and from Greek copies (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ); in the story of Zacchaeus, who was small in bodily stature as well as spiritual, he climbed, it is said, ܦܘܩ to see Jesus, which in Syriac is ‘tasteless fig-tree’ (ܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ ܕܩܘܪܝܢܘܨܝܐ).⁶⁶

Thus Isho‘dad apparently contradicts (Ps.-)Ephrem on the text of the Syriac Diatessaron. Tatian’s gospel, according to Isho‘dad, read ܦܘܩ instead of

64 Gibson, *Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv*, II.204.

65 These can be found at Gibson, *Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv*, II.22–3, 39, 45 134–5, 208; M. D. Gibson, ed., *The Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv*, vol. III (Horae Semiticae 7; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) 6. Isho‘dad’s testimony concerning Matt 3.3//Mark 1.2 and Matt 3.4//Mark 1.6 can be confirmed with reference to (Ps.-)Ephrem’s *Commentary*. The testimonies concerning Matt 1.20 and the disciple lists cannot be evaluated by any diatessaronic source. Finally, Isho‘dad’s testimony concerning the diet of John the Baptist – repeated by Bar Salibi, Bar Hebraeus and Ishaq Shbadnaya – is apparently contradicted by Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 6.13.

66 My translation of the text from Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho‘dad of Merv*, II.134–5.

ܠܫܘܥܝܐ ܠܫܘܥܝܐ = ‘deaf fig(-tree)’ in the Zacchaeus pericope.⁶⁷ This is, of course, not a fatal objection to the credibility of either Tatianic witness. Rendel Harris and Tjitze Baarda acknowledge the contradiction and make conjectures concerning the evolution of Tatian’s text.⁶⁸ However, an interpretation that reconciles (Ps.-)Ephrem with Isho’dad would be heuristically preferable. I offer one below.

Curiously, Isho’dad reports that ‘others’ have cited the Diatessaron and ‘Greek copies’ (ܠܫܘܥܝܐ ܠܫܘܥܝܐ) in support of one and the same Syriac reading. Are these ‘Greek copies’ manuscripts of Tatian’s gospel or manuscripts of Luke? That Isho’dad frequently cites variant readings from the Greek text of the gospels but does not elsewhere use the language of ‘copies’ (ܠܫܘܥܝܐ) might favour the first interpretation – but we should leave this unresolved.⁶⁹ How, in either case, could any ‘Greek copies’ possibly attest the Syriac term ܠܫܘܥܝܐ?⁷⁰ Isho’dad’s testimony demands a diachronic explanation.

A simple solution to both problems is that ܠܫܘܥܝܐ reflects a Syriac commentator’s ad hoc translation of a Greek text. The term ܠܫܘܥܝܐ, *ex hypothesi*, never stood in a Syriac Diatessaron but was, rather, some earlier commentator’s gloss for a Greek noun in Tatian’s gospel and some copies (of either the Diatessaron or Luke). Therefrom Isho’dad, Bar Bahlul and Bar Salibi derived their common testimony. Indeed, (Ps.-)Ephrem’s *Commentary* provides a neat analogy. In five places, the Ephremic commentator presents a reading from ‘the Greek’ in Syriac. This also, according to Crawford, probably refers to a Greek Diatessaron.⁷¹ Such a reconstruction accounts for the attribution of a Syriac word to ‘Greek copies’. Likewise, it explains Isho’dad’s ascription of this tradition to ‘others’. Most importantly, it erases the conflict between our two witnesses to the Syriac Diatessaron.

Finally, if Isho’dad, Bar Bahlul and Bar Salibi are indeed copying independently from a common source, the shared contrast of ܠܫܘܥܝܐ/ܠܫܘܥܝܐ with ‘the Syriac’ belongs to that earlier commentator. This means that the Syriac source, working from a Greek text of Tatian, elected to use the Syriac ܠܫܘܥܝܐ and pointedly contrast this with ܠܫܘܥܝܐ ܠܫܘܥܝܐ = ‘tasteless fig-tree’, despite believing them to be

67 Isho’dad refers to Zacchaeus’ perch only as ܠܫܘܥܝܐ = ‘fig-tree’ in his comment on Luke 19. Gibson, *Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, III.73.

68 Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, I.xxix; Baarda, ‘The “Foolish” or “Deaf” Fig-Tree’, 171–2, 174.

69 See, for example, Isho’dad’s comments at Gibson, *The Commentaries of Isho’dad of Merv*, I.207, 264.

70 Baarda tentatively proposes that ܠܫܘܥܝܐ is a transliteration of φηγός = ‘oak’ but gave up on explaining this element of Isho’dad’s testimony. Baarda, ‘The “Foolish” or “Deaf” Fig-Tree’, 175. This is not supported in any Greek (or versional) witness to Luke. Additionally, it makes Isho’dad’s initial gloss ܠܫܘܥܝܐ ܠܫܘܥܝܐ = ‘tasteless fig-trees’ for ܠܫܘܥܝܐ incomprehensible.

71 As argued in M. R. Crawford, ‘The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian’, *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 18 (2015) 25–37.

synonymous. What would inspire a commentator conscious of the conventional translation (ܠܫܘܢܐ ܠܫܘܢܐ) and believing the words to be synonymous to select a different term? Since the omicron- versus omega-spelling is the only variation in the Greek tradition of Luke and ‘tasteless fig-tree’ is an etymological translation of the omega-spelling, we might infer that the omicron-spelling lay before Isho‘dad’s source. The unknown commentator, *ex hypothesi*, selected ܠܫܘܢܐ precisely to contrast the Greek’s omicron-spelling with the conventional omega-spelling. As I argue below, there are yet stronger reasons to identify ܠܫܘܢܐ (and also ܠܫܘܢܐ ܠܫܘܢܐ) with the omicron-spelling.

7. The Text of Tatian’s Gospel

(Ps.-)Ephrem’s and Isho‘dad’s ostensibly contradictory testimonia to Tatian’s gospel have an underlying unity. Both ܠܫܘܢܐ ܠܫܘܢܐ and ܠܫܘܢܐ refer to premature fruit – including that of the fig-tree. Two translators, therefore, independently opted not to use ܠܫܘܢܐ with the Old Testament Peshitta or ܠܫܘܢܐ ܠܫܘܢܐ with the Syriac gospel tradition. Rather, they selected two roughly synonymous terms to refer to Zacchaeus’ perch. How do we explain this remarkable coincidence?

First, as noted above, the omicron-reading suggested μόνον to ancient readers. That is, in συκόμωρον- readers saw ‘fig-berry’. This, I propose, accounts for the use of ܠܫܘܢܐ in the plural. Isho‘dad’s ܠܫܘܢܐ = ‘unripe fruits’ refers specifically to fruit, not a tree. The berry is, of course, fruit and, in attempting to render the omicron-spelling etymologically into Syriac, Isho‘dad’s source selected a fruit word.

What, however, of the prematurity implied by both terms? None of the etymological analyses considered above explicitly associates either spelling of ‘sycamore’ with prematurity. There is, however, evidence of such an association in antiquity. Significantly, this appears in one of only two surviving Greek texts that use μόνον to refer to the fruit of the συκομωρον- (as opposed to the συκομίνος). A botanical lexicon attributed to Galen glosses ξάνθησ σπέρμα = ‘seed of the pale [sycamore]’ as ἄωρα μόνον συκομωρονέας = ‘unripe berries of the sycamore’.⁷² There is, unfortunately, no further elaboration. Instead of modifying καρπός (cf. Luke 13.7), the lexicographer referred to the unripe (ἄωρα) fruit of the sycamore as μόνον. The association is intuitive: similar to berries, the unripe fruit of the fig and sycamore are small and round. At least for this ancient botanist, μόνον applied to συκομωρον- suggested prematurity!

Three considerations, therefore, support attributing the omicron-spelling to Tatian’s gospel. First, Isho‘dad’s source elected to use ܠܫܘܢܐ despite familiarity

72 A. Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensi*, vol. II: *Textes grecs relatifs à l’histoire des sciences* (Liège: Bibliothèque de la Faculté de philosophie et lettres de l’Université de Liège, 1939) 390. For the meaning of ξάνθη, see Delatte, *Anecdota Atheniensi*, II.316. This is the second usage of μόνον with συκομωρον-.

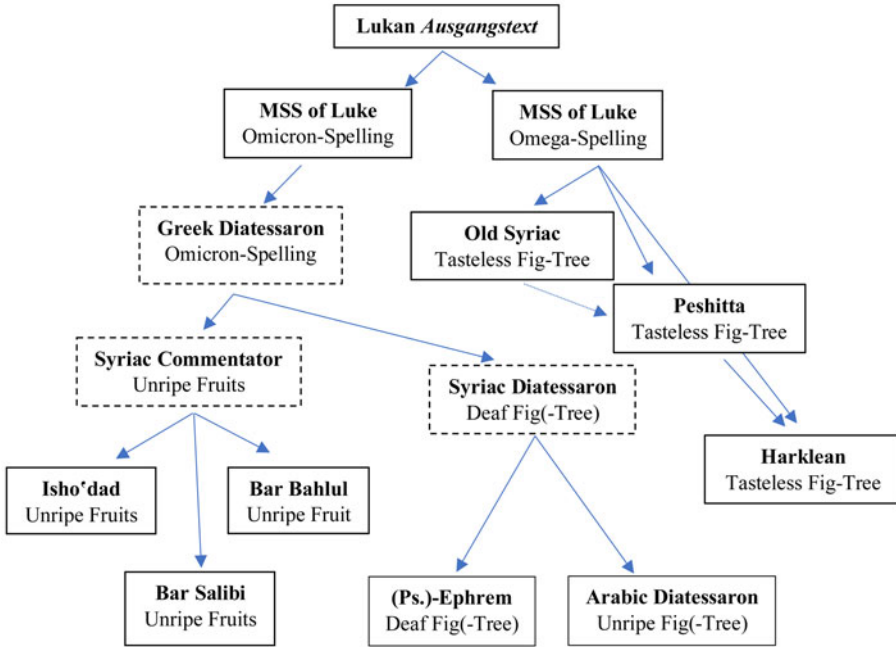


Figure 1. *Stemma for Syriac Translations of Sycamore*

with the conventional translation. Second, **ܩܘܨܐ** refers specifically to fruit as suggested by *μόρον*. Finally, both **ܩܘܨܐ ܩܘܨܐ** and **ܩܘܨܐ** signify prematurity. This too is suggested by *μόρον*. It follows that two Syriac translators worked from a Greek text of Tatian that differed from the textual base of the Syriac gospel tradition.

8. The Original Language of Tatian’s Gospel

The omicron-spelling of sycamore is probably the least interesting textual variant ever attributed to Tatian’s gospel. The unique arrangement of witnesses to this supremely unremarkable reading, however, supports one solution to the sub-discipline’s most intransigent crux. A local stemma for the Syriac of Luke 19.4 will aid in summarising the results of the preceding investigation and clarify its consequences for our understanding of Tatian’s gospel (Fig. 1).

First, if Isho’dad’s Diatessaronic testimony should be explained as an ad hoc translation, we need not attribute **ܩܘܨܐ** to the Syriac Diatessaron. These contradictory testimonia to Luke 19.4, therefore, do not suggest that the Ephremic commentator, the Arabic translator and Isho’dad each used different editions of the gospel. Rather, the Syriac Diatessaron appears to have read **ܩܘܨܐ ܩܘܨܐ** as attested by (Ps.-)Ephrem and translated *تينة فجة* in the Arabic Diatessaron.

Second, this reconstruction favours the chronological priority of Tatian's gospel to the Old Syriac gospels. If the Old Syriac furnished Tatian with the raw material for his harmony, we should expect ܠܫܘܠܥ ܠܫܘܠܥ = 'tasteless fig-tree' in Tatian's text. Since the Syriac Diatessaron reflects a Greek variant reading other than that supported by the entire Syriac gospel tradition, the Syriac Diatessaron must have had independent recourse to textual minutia in the Greek.⁷³ On the uncontroversial supposition of some literary relationship between Tatian's gospel and the Old Syriac, Luke 19.4 supports Tatianic priority. Furthermore, Greek as the language of Tatian's composition (argued below) supports the posteriority of the Old Syriac gospels.

Third, the two Syriac terms attributed to the Diatessaron reflect a single and distinctive Greek reading. This suggests that the same Greek text of Tatian's gospel circulated long enough to reach two Syriac translators independently. The enduring circulation of Tatian in Greek is itself a novel result. For instance, it lends credence to Crawford's aforementioned proposal that Ephrem's 'Greek' referred to a Greek edition of Tatian's gospel.⁷⁴ It may likewise account for Theodore Bar Koni's ascription of the Diatessaron to ܠܫܘܠܥ ܠܫܘܠܥ = 'Tatian the Greek' (*Liber scholiorum*, Siirt Recension 8.39).⁷⁵ Bar Koni is the first Syriac author to mention Tatian and, although he knows of Tatian's 'Mesopotamian' provenance (*Liber scholiorum* Memra, Siirt Recension 11.39), calls him 'the Greek'.⁷⁶ Since there is no evidence that any work of Tatian other than the Diatessaron ever circulated in the Syriac-speaking east, the enduring circulation of Tatian's gospel in the Greek language might account for this curious appellation.

Fourth, this reconstruction supports an original Greek for Tatian's Diatessaron. My stemma – assuming a Greek original – presents the most parsimonious reconstruction. Alternative genealogies introduce certain difficulties: if Tatian composed in Syriac we must suppose that a subsequent Greek translation of Tatian's Syriac recreated the omicron-spelling against the local (as evinced by the Syriac gospel tradition) omega-spelling of sycamore. Moreover, this secondary Greek translation of Tatian would then need to reach another Syriac translator who was ignorant of Tatian's original Syriac rendering.

More plausibly, Tatian composed in Greek and it was in this form that his gospel circulated widely enough to reach both Latin Fulda and Syriac Edessa. On this supposition, the Syriac need not be retro-translated into the

73 An expansive catalogue of translation and textual differences (as well as agreements) between Tatian and the Old Syriac is provided in G. A. Weir, 'Tatian's Diatessaron and the Old Syriac Gospels' (PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh, 1969).

74 Crawford, 'The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian', 25–37.

75 A. Scher, *Theodorus Bar Koni: Liber Scholiorum*, II (*Syr. II*, 66) (CSCO 69, Scriptorum Syri 26; Leuven: Peeters, 1912) 159.

76 Scher, *Theodorus Bar Koni*, 305.

omicron-spelling. Furthermore, the ignorance of our secondary Syriac translator is more easily understood if the Greek, not the Syriac, was the more prominent form of Tatian's gospel.

Reconstructing the transmission of a text so poorly preserved is discouraging work. There is much we will probably never know about Tatian's gospel. Yet minutiae so apparently insignificant as an omicron instead of an omega can offer unexpected insights. Parallel cases will be needed to bolster my arguments, but the omicron-spelling is one more piece in the Tatianic puzzle.