

Did Jews Rinse their Hands ‘with a Fist’ (Mark 7.3)?

DELBERT BURKETT

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA. Email: dburket@lsu.edu

According to UBS⁵ and NA²⁸, Mark 7.3 says that Pharisees and other Jews do not eat unless they rinse their hands ‘with a fist’ (πυγμῆ). This notorious *crux interpretum* has resisted all efforts to give it a plausible meaning. The present article reviews these efforts and suggests that it is time to abandon this reading in favour of the variant reading πικνύ in the sense ‘repeatedly’. This translation best fits the practice described in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature, in which devout Jews rinsed their hands twice before the meal, twice after, and often twice or more during.

Keywords: Mark 7.3, with a fist, rinsing hands, washing hands, handwashing

According to UBS⁵ and NA²⁸, Mark 7.3 says that Pharisees and other Jews do not eat unless they rinse their hands πυγμῆ (‘with a fist’). This notorious *crux interpretum* has the widest attestation in the manuscripts.¹ However, it has resisted all efforts to give it a plausible meaning. In the present article, I review these efforts and suggest that it is time to abandon this reading in favour of the variant reading πικνύ in the sense ‘repeatedly’.

1. Interpretations of πυγμῆ

Critics have proposed numerous interpretations of πυγμῆ. First, it might mean to put the clenched fist of one hand into the hollow of the other and rub.² Martin Hengel found this interpretation already in the works of Beza, Scaliger,

1 πυγμη A B G L N Θ Σ Φ 0131 0274 0292 ^{f¹³} 33 565 700 892 1071 1241 1243 1342 1424 1506 2542 Byz Lect (*pugillo* it^c ^{ff² i q r¹}) syr^{hmg} arm geo slav Origen Epiphanius // πυγμην 59 179 273 544 792 1555 l387 l773 // πικμη D // πικνα & W (*subinde* it^b) (*crebro* it^f ^{g² l r²} vg) (= ‘many times, repeatedly’ bo) // *crebro pugillo* it^{aur} // *momento* it^a // *primo* it^d // = ‘carefully’ syr^p h eth // omit Δ 427 732 2106 syr^s sa.

2 H. B. Swete, *The Gospel according to St Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (London: Macmillan, 1908²) 144; V. Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes* (London: Macmillan, 1966²) 335.

Grotius and Calov, as well as in numerous nineteenth-century commentaries.³ This interpretation accords with the case of the word, which is best understood as an instrumental dative.⁴ However, it does not accord with the Jewish ritual, which was not a washing or scrubbing, but simply a rinsing, in which water was poured over the hands from a vessel.⁵ The rabbinic regulations concerning rinsing the hands say nothing about rubbing the palm of one hand with the fist of the other.⁶ The one reference to rubbing one hand on the other refers not to washing but to drying. If a person poured water over only one hand and then rubbed it on the other to dry it, the rinsed hand became unclean. However, if he rubbed it on his head or the wall, it did not become unclean.⁷

In a second type of interpretation, *πυγμῆ* referred to the shape in which one held the hands. According to some critics, the term meant to clench the fist while an attendant poured water over it.⁸ However, a clenched fist would prevent the water from reaching every part of the palm.

In a variation of this view, Stephen Reynolds thought that Mark referred to ‘cupped’ hands:

... the hands were held with fingers flexed or cupped, so that they were neither tightly clenched fists nor open or spread wide. The purpose of not clenching the fist is to allow the water to pass between the fingers so as to touch all parts of the hand. The reason for cupping the hands is to provide for the washing of the whole hand with as small a quantity of poured water as possible.⁹

The New Living Translation (2005) followed Reynolds’s suggestion: ‘until they have poured water over their cupped hands’.

Reynolds gave two different translations of *πυγμῆ*. Within the text of his article, he translated it as a participial phrase: ‘cupping the hand’. However, *πυγμῆ* could not have this meaning because it is not a participle, but a noun in the dative case. Reynolds took this as a dative of respect, but this would mean ‘with respect to a fist’, not ‘cupping the hand’.¹⁰ In the title of his article, Reynolds translated

3 M. Hengel, ‘Mc 7₃ *πυγμῆ*: Die Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie und der Versuch ihrer Lösung’, *ZNW* 60 (1969) 182–98, at 188.

4 The term *πυγμῆ* occurs twice in the LXX (Exod 21.18; Isa 58.4), both times in the instrumental dative (‘with a fist’ or ‘with fists’).

5 *m. Yad.* 1.1–2; Str-B, 1.695, 698–700.

6 Str-B, II.13–14.

7 *m. Yad.* 2.3.

8 Swete, *Gospel according to St Mark*, 143–4; Taylor, *Gospel according to St. Mark*, 335.

9 S. M. Reynolds, ‘ΠΥΓΜΗ (Mark 7 3) as “Cupped Hand”’, *JBL* 85 (1966) 87–8, at 88; cited with approval by J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 441; D. Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012) 116–17, 181–2 n. 12.

10 On the dative of respect, see, for example, BDF 105–6 §197; D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 144–6.

πυγμῆ as 'cupped hand'. However, πυγμῆ does not have this meaning either. It refers to a clenched fist, and from this primary meaning came the derived meaning of 'boxing' or 'fisticuffs'.¹¹ The related term πύκτης means 'boxer' or 'pugilist'. Pugilists, then as now, fought with fists, not cupped hands. If Mark had wanted to refer to a 'cupped' hand, he would have used the adjective κοίλος, literally meaning 'hollow'. The phrase 'with a cupped hand' would be expressed as χειρὶ κοίλῃ (lit. 'with a hollow hand'). For example, Lucian used a similar phrase in one of his dialogues: ἄρυσάμενος κοίλῃ τῆ χειρὶ, meaning 'drawing (water) for yourself with the hand cupped'.¹² Strato provided another example: τὴν χεῖρα μοι κοίλῃν προσενήνοχας (addressed to a beggar), meaning 'You have held out your hand to me cupped.'¹³

James G. Crossley gave essentially the same explanation as Reynolds, proposing that Jews who rinsed their hands held them 'in the shape (or form) of a fist' in order to cover the hands fully with the least amount of water. He supposed that the fists were sufficiently relaxed that water would seep through the fingers to cover enough of the hand for purification.¹⁴ Like Reynolds, Crossley derived this meaning from πυγμῆ by interpreting it as a dative of respect. Once again, however, if πυγμῆ were a dative of respect, it would mean 'with respect to a fist'. It would not mean 'in the shape of a fist', which would be expressed by ἐν σχήματι πυγμῆς. For example, Nicolas Cabasilas used ἐν σχήματι in this way when he referred to the tongues of fire in Acts 2.3 as fire ἐν σχήματι γλώσσης, 'in the shape of a tongue'.¹⁵

In a third interpretation, some critics take πυγμῆ to mean 'with a handful (of water)'.¹⁶ Hengel traced this explanation back to Wettstein, who supposed that 'a handful' corresponded approximately to 1/4 log, which was the least amount of water permissible for the rite of rinsing the hands.¹⁷ This explanation faces the objection that πυγμή means 'fist', not 'fistful'. Hengel circumvented this objection by supposing that πυγμή in Mark's usage was a Latinism. In Latin the word corresponding to πυγμή (*pugnus*) can mean either 'fist' or 'handful'.¹⁸

11 LSJ s.v. πυγμή 1.2.

12 Lucian, *Dialogi mortuorum* 7.1.

13 H. Beckby, ed., *Anthologia Graeca*, vol. IV (Munich: Heimeran, 1968²) 12.212.

14 J. G. Crossley, 'Halakah and Mark 7:3: "with the hand in the shape of a fist"', *NTS* 58 (2012) 57–68, at 58; cf. R. H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on his Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 360.

15 M.-H. Congourdeau, ed., *Nicolas Cabasilas: La vie en Christ* (2 vols.; SC 355, 361; Paris: Cerf, 1989–90) II.98, line 11.

16 F. Schulthess, 'Zur Sprache der Evangelien', *ZNW* 21 (1922) 232–3; W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THKNT II; Berlin: Evangelische Verlaganstalt, 1962²) 148–9.

17 Hengel, 'Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie', 190.

18 *Ibid.*, 193–5.

This explanation still faces several objections. First, Mark had no need for a Latinism since he could have used the term δρόξ, the normal Greek word for 'handful'.¹⁹ Second, even if πυγμή meant 'handful', it does not mean 'handful of water'. Hengel had to suppose both a Latinism not otherwise attested and an ellipsis in the same expression. Third, even if 'a handful' corresponded to the 1/4 log mentioned in rabbinic literature, the handwashing ritual was not limited to 1/4 log. This was simply the minimum amount of water that could be used.²⁰ If Mark's expression meant 'with a handful of water', it would imply that the practitioners always used this amount of water, when presumably they often used more.²¹ To accurately describe the ritual, Mark would have had to say 'with at least a handful of water'. This, however, is not expressed by πυγμή.

A fourth interpretation is based on the fact that the noun πυγμή can mean not only 'fist', but also a measurement of length, specifically the length of a forearm, from the knuckles to the elbow.²² In this sense, it corresponds to the 'short cubit'.²³ This meaning forms the basis for the paraphrase 'up to the elbow'.²⁴ The Jerusalem Bible (1966) adopted this translation ('as far as the elbow'). The same interpretation appears in the Revised Patriarchal Greek Orthodox New Testament (1904): 'unless they wash their hands and forearms'. However, the dative case of πυγμῇ would be an awkward way to express this idea ('they rinse the hands with respect to a cubit').²⁵ The meaning 'up to the elbow' would be expressed not by πυγμῇ, but by μέχρι τοῦ ἄγκωνος. For example, Hippocrates referred to a man who had his hand festering 'up to the elbow' (μέχρι τοῦ ἄγκωνος).²⁶ Even if πυγμῇ could mean 'up to the elbow', it would not apply to the Jewish ritual. While rinsing to the elbow fits the Islamic practice of ritual washing before prayer (Quran 5.6), it does not agree with Jewish

19 S. M. Reynolds, 'A Note on Dr. Hengel's Interpretation of πυγμῇ in Mark 7₃', *ZNW* 62 (1971) 295-6, at 295.

20 *m. Yad.* 1.1; 2.1. 'A quarter-log is equal in bulk to an egg and a half' (H. Danby, *The Mishnah: Translated from the Hebrew with Introduction and Brief Explanatory Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) 778 n. 9).

21 R. P. Booth, *Contrasts: Gospel Evidence and Christian Beliefs* (Aldwick, Bognor Regis: Paget, 1990) 201-6, at 204.

22 LSJ s.v. πυγμή II.

23 C. C. Torrey, 'Studies in the Aramaic of the First Century AD', *ZAW* 65 (1953) 228-47, at 233-4.

24 Theophylact and Euthymius Zigabenus, cited by Swete, *Gospel according to St Mark*, 143; C. H. Turner, 'Marcan Usage: Notes, Critical and Exegetical, on the Second Gospel', *JTS* 29 (1928) 275-89, at 278-9; reprinted in J. K. Elliott, *The Language and Style of the Gospel of Mark* (NovTSup 71; Leiden: Brill, 1993) 107; A. Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 339, 347.

25 Hengel pointed to the accusative πυγμήν in minuscule 59 as an effort to correct this problem ('Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie', 185).

26 Hippocrates, *De morbis popularibus* 5.1.36, line 2.

practice at a meal, in which the hands were considered clean or unclean only to the wrist.²⁷

This fact leads to a fifth suggestion: that *πυγμῆ* means 'up to the wrist'.²⁸ Hengel traced this explanation to John Lightfoot.²⁹ It was adopted in Young's Literal Translation (1862): 'if they do not wash the hands to the wrist'. Linguistically, however, it is difficult to derive this meaning from *πυγμῆ*.³⁰ The term for 'wrist' in Greek was *καρπός*, or more fully *καρπὸς τῆς χειρός*.³¹ The phrase 'up to the wrist' would be expressed as *μέχρι τοῦ καρποῦ*. For example, Sozomen refers to an angel whose hand was seen only 'up to the wrist' (*μέχρι τοῦ καρποῦ*).³²

Because no one has ever plausibly explained the meaning of 'with a fist', a number of critics have regarded this term as the result of an error. A few have explained it as a mistranslation of an Aramaic word. According to C. C. Torrey, the original Aramaic meant 'not at all', construed with the following verb: 'they eat not at all'.³³ According to P. R. Weis, the original Aramaic meant 'with the (special) pitcher', construed with the preceding clause: 'unless they rinse their hands with the (special) pitcher'.³⁴ Neither suggestion, however, has gained any degree of assent.³⁵ These suggestions assume that an Aramaic source stood behind the current Greek text. However, the context in which *πυγμῆ* occurs (Mark 7.3–4) was apparently added by Mark to a pre-existing story in order to explain Jewish customs to his primarily Gentile audience. Mark inserted these verses into the middle of a sentence, breaking the original connection between 7.2 and 7.5. As Markan redaction, these verses probably originated in Greek and never existed in Aramaic.

T. C. Skeat attributed the term to a mistake in the autograph. Immediately before this term, Mark mistakenly wrote *ἐὰν μὴ* ('unless') twice and crossed out one instance of this phrase. However, the scribe to whom he gave the manuscript to copy mistakenly restored the crossed-out expression as *πυγμῆ*.³⁶ This suggestion, unfortunately, has nothing to support it except speculation.

27 *m. Yad.* 2.3; Str-B, 1.699, 701–2.

28 A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (2 vols.; New York: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1896⁸) II.11; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963²) 233; M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967³) 9.

29 Hengel, 'Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie', 189.

30 Swete, *Gospel according to St Mark*, 143; Hengel, 'Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie', 189.

31 LSJ s.v. *καρπός* B.

32 J. Bidez and G. C. Hansen, eds., *Sozomenus: Kirchengeschichte* (Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller 50; Berlin: Akademie, 1960) 6.29.11, line 8.

33 Torrey, 'Studies in the Aramaic', 233–4.

34 P. R. Weis, 'A Note on ΠΥΓΜΗ', *NTS* 3 (1956/7) 233–6; followed by K. L. Schmidt, 'πυγμῆ, πυκτεῦω', *TDNT* VI.915–17, at 916.

35 For critiques, see Black, *Aramaic Approach*, 8–9; Reynolds, 'Cupped Hand', 87.

36 T. C. Skeat, 'A Note on *πυγμῆ* in Mark 7:3', *JTS* 41 (1990) 525–7.

W. D. McHardy proposed that the term originated as a marginal gloss. A scribe took the term from Exod 21.18 and placed it in the margin at Mark 7.10, which cites Exod 21.17. A copyist then moved it from the margin into Mark 7.3.³⁷ J. M. Ross subsequently gave four good reasons to reject this explanation.³⁸

Numerous critics have concluded that the term $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta\eta$ is incomprehensible. Julius Wellhausen remarked that no one knows what it means.³⁹ Likewise M. Eugene Boring concluded, 'The precise meaning ... is not known'.⁴⁰ Critics have often reaffirmed Henry Barclay Swete's judgement, that 'no explanation hitherto offered is wholly satisfactory'.⁴¹ Because of the uncertain meaning of this word, it was left untranslated in several Bible translations, including the Revised Standard Version (1952), the New English Bible (1970) and the Revised English Bible (1989). Others have translated it with a vague generality: 'unless they wash their hands in a particular way' (An American Translation, 1923) or 'in a special way' (New King James Version, 1982); 'unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing' (New International Version, 1978); or 'unless they wash their hands properly' (English Standard Version, 2001).

2. Interpretations of $\pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}$

Efforts to find a satisfactory meaning for $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta\eta$ have probably come to a dead end. Further efforts are unlikely to produce results that are any more satisfactory than those obtained thus far. Yet surprisingly few critics have sought an alternative explanation in textual criticism. The editors of UBS⁵ adopted the reading $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta\eta$ with an 'A' level of certainty because it is the more difficult reading. They assumed that its difficulty prompted some copyists to omit it and others to replace it with a word that gives a better sense.⁴² Westcott and Hort previously made the same assumption.⁴³ K. L. Schmidt expressed the same view.⁴⁴

It is true that the more difficult reading is to be preferred when a scribe made an intentional change. A scribe would be more likely to revise away difficult wording intentionally than to create it intentionally. Textual critics sometimes

37 W. D. McHardy, 'Mark 7³: A Reference to the Old Testament?', *ExpT* 87.4 (1976) 119.

38 J. M. Ross, 'With the Fist', *ExpT* 87.12 (1976) 374-5.

39 J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci: Übersetzt und erklärt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1909²) 54.

40 M. E. Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 199.

41 Swete, *Gospel according to St Mark*, 114; Taylor, *Gospel according to St. Mark*, 335; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 441.

42 B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994²) 80.

43 B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek: With Notes on Selected Readings* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1882; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988) Appendix (numbered separately) 25.

44 'But the $\nu\lambda$, which means "frequently", ... is obviously an easier reading and thus no help' (Schmidt, *TDNT* vi.916 n. 5).

state this principle without qualification as *lectio difficilior potior* ('the more difficult reading is preferable'), as if it were always true. In fact, however, this criterion applies only to intentional changes. It does not apply when the text has been corrupted unintentionally by an error. As Hyeon Woo Shin observed, 'The criterion preferring the more difficult reading appears to contradict the criterion rejecting scribal mistakes, for readings caused by scribal mistake could appear to be more difficult.'⁴⁵ A scribal mistake often introduced into the wording some difficulty or confusion that was not there before. In such cases, when the text has undergone corruption, the less difficult wording is generally more primitive.

In the case of $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta$, 'it seems likely that the text is corrupt', because no one has ever found a plausible meaning for it.⁴⁶ This fact justifies taking a closer look at the variant reading $\pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}$. Constantinus Tischendorf adopted this reading in his final critical edition of the Greek text.⁴⁷ From the perspective of Jewish practice, Strack and Billerbeck also supported it.⁴⁸ Adolf Schlatter considered it a possibility.⁴⁹

This reading appears in the Greek majuscules \aleph and \mathcal{W} . Apparently several Latin witnesses also read $\pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}$, giving its normal meaning of 'repeatedly, frequently, or often'. The Old Latin it^b rendered it as *subinde* ('repeatedly'), while it^f and the Vulgate translated it as *crebro* ('repeatedly, frequently, often').⁵⁰ Likewise, the Coptic Bohairic translated it as *ḡoumēš ḡsop*, meaning 'many times, repeatedly'.⁵¹ Following the Vulgate, all the early English translations through the King James Version (1611) gave the translation 'oft' or 'oft tymes'.⁵² The Douay-Rheims American Edition (1899) has 'often'.

The Syriac Peshitta and the Syriac Harklensis (both *bṯila'it*), the Ethiopic version (*bahəqqu*) and the Arabic Diatessaron (*ḡaslan*) give translations that mean 'diligently' or 'carefully'.⁵³ Some critics have thought that these versions

45 H. W. Shin, *Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem in Historical Jesus Research: The Search for Valid Criteria* (CBET 36; Leuven: Peeters, 2004) 46.

46 A. E. J. Rawlinson, *St Mark: With Introduction, Commentary and Additional Notes* (WC; London: Methuen, 1925) 94.

47 C. Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869⁸).

48 Str-B, II.13–14.

49 A. Schlatter, *Die Evangelien nach Markus und Lukas* (Schlatters Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament 2; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1947) 69 n.

50 A. Jülicher, *Itala: Das Neue Testament in altlateinischer Überlieferung*, vol. II: *Marcus-Evangelium* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1940).

51 G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect Otherwise Called Memphitic and Bohairic* (4 vols.; Oxford, 1898–1905).

52 E. J. Goodspeed, *Problems of New Testament Translation* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1945) 59–60, at 59.

53 G. H. Gwilliam, J. Pinkerton and R. Kilgour, *The New Testament in Syriac* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1920); J. White, *Sacrorum Evangeliorum versio Syriaca Philoxeniana* (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1778); R. Zuurmond, *Novum Testamentum Aethiopicum: The Synoptic*

were translating πυγμαῖ, taking ‘with a fist’ to mean ‘vigorously’, or ‘with care’.⁵⁴ J. M. Ross, for example, suggested that ‘to clean with the fist’ was a common way to denote any thorough cleansing.⁵⁵ However, this conjecture lacks any substantiation. It is more likely that the ancient versions that gave this translation based it on the variant reading πυκνά (‘repeatedly’), paraphrasing this as ‘diligently’. Both UBS⁵ and NA²⁸ cite these versions as witnesses for the reading πυκνά. Numerous English translations since the King James have given a similar translation.⁵⁶ This interpretation explains the translations ‘diligently’ in the American Standard Version (1901), ‘scrupulously’ in the New American Bible (1970), ‘carefully’ in the New American Standard Bible (1971) and the Common English Bible (2011), and ‘thoroughly’ in the New Revised Standard Version (1989). However, the rabbinic sources do not describe a thorough cleansing but simply a rinsing, and neither πυγμαῖ nor πυκνά actually has these meanings.

3. πυκνά as ‘Repeatedly’

The Greek lexica give the meaning of πυκνά as ‘often’ or ‘frequently’.⁵⁷ In reality, this word conveys a wider range of nuances, including ‘repeatedly’. For example, in the *Argonautica*, when Medea, at home at night, impatiently waited for dawn, πυκνά δ’ ἀνὰ κληῖδας ἔων λύεσκε θυράων, αἴγλην σκεπτομένη (‘repeatedly, then, she loosened the bolts of her doors, watching for daylight’).⁵⁸ Likewise in *Joseph and Asenath*, when Asenath was in distress, ἐπάτασσε τῆ χειρὶ τὸ στῆθος αὐτῆς πυκνά (‘she beat her breast with her hand repeatedly’).⁵⁹ For the Latin translations *subinde* (it^b) and *crebro* (it^f 1 vg), the Latin lexica do give the meaning ‘repeatedly’ as an option.⁶⁰

The translation ‘repeatedly’ best fits the practice described in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature. When devout Jews ate, they rinsed their hands before the

Gospels. General Introduction. The Gospel of Mark (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1989); A.-S. Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tâtien* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1935); cf. Hengel, ‘Geschichte einer exegetischen Aporie’, 184–5. My thanks go to Francis Watson for providing these transliterations.

54 LSJ s.v. πυγμαῖ 1.3; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Marc* (Paris: Gabalda, 1929⁴; repr. 1966) 181.

55 Ross, ‘With the Fist’.

56 Goodspeed, *Problems of New Testament Translation*, 60.

57 LSJ s.v. πυκνός B.11; BAGD s.v. πυκνός.

58 Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 3.822.

59 *Joseph and Asenath* 10.1. Greek text from U. B. Fink, *Joseph und Asenath: Revision des griechischen Textes und Edition der zweiten lateinischen Übersetzung* (Fontes et Subsidia ad Bibliam Pertinentes 5; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

60 E.g. C. T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1879; repr. 1980) s.v. *subinde* 11; s.v. *creber* 11.1 *crebro*.

meal, after the meal, and sometimes during the meal if it consisted of more than one course.⁶¹ Furthermore, each rinsing involved pouring water on the hands twice. The 'first water' purified the hands but thereby became unclean itself. The 'second water' therefore purified the first water that remained on the hands.⁶² Thus Jews who practised this rite rinsed their hands repeatedly during the course of a single meal: twice before the meal, twice after, and often twice or more during. Against this background for Mark 7.3, the reading $\pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}$ in the sense 'repeatedly' gives excellent sense: 'unless they rinse their hands repeatedly, they do not eat'.⁶³

Since the Mishnah was compiled more than a century after Mark wrote his gospel, it is necessary to consider whether the Jewish practices described there correspond to those current in Mark's day. In the present case, there is little reason for concern about this issue. In Mark 7.3-4, Mark mentions a number of Jewish practices relating to immersion. These correspond quite well to the practices described in the Mishnah and other rabbinic literature.⁶⁴ These rabbinic sources, therefore, probably provide relevant background for the practice of rinsing hands, just as they do for the other practices that Mark mentioned in the same context.

It appears likely, then, that Mark originally wrote $\pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\acute{\alpha}$ in the sense 'repeatedly'. This word became corrupted to $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta$ through a scribal error. While we cannot know for certain how this error arose, the manuscript tradition suggests one possibility. The immediate context of this word originally read $\mu\eta \pi\upsilon\kappa\nu\alpha$. Apparently a copyist started to write this, but through a mental error duplicated the $\mu\eta$ and wrote instead $\mu\eta \pi\upsilon\kappa\mu\eta$.⁶⁵ This variant has been preserved in Codex Bezae (D). After the first copyist made this initial mistake, a subsequent scribe, finding the unknown word $\pi\upsilon\kappa\mu\eta$, may have regarded it as a misspelling of $\pi\upsilon\gamma\mu\eta$ and changed it accordingly. In this way, perhaps, rinsing 'repeatedly' became rinsing 'with a fist'.

61 Str-B, 1.695-6, 697.

62 *m. Yad.* 1.1; 2.2, 3; Str-B, 1.698-9; Danby, *Mishnah*, 778 n. 10.

63 So Schlatter, *Evangelien nach Markus und Lukas*, 69 n. ('wiederholt').

64 Crossley, 'Halakah and Mark 7.3', 64, 65-6.

65 On errors of the mind among copyists, see B. M. Metzger and B. D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005⁴) 257-8.