

Diachrony in New Testament Exegesis

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1. The Diachronic (or Holistic) Approach

With the discovery of the Egyptian papyri from the second part of the XIXth century onward, and in particular with Adolph Deissmann's work, great emphasis was placed both on the value of the vernacular form of the Hellenic language and, especially, on the investigation of materials contemporary with the New Testament. Such emphases, which came to dominate the study of the New Testament during the XXth century, received their classic expressions in Deissmann's own works, *Bibelstudien*, *Neue Bibelstudien*¹ and *Licht von Osten*², as well as—in the English speaking world—in James Hope Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek: Prolegomena*³ and Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*⁴. Henceforth, not only NT Grammarians, but also, and especially, commentators and interpreters of the NT adopted the papyrologists' position both with regard to where to look for illustrations of the meaning of NT words as well as the stance that the NT should be interpreted by means of contemporary texts. This came to be called the *Synchronic Approach*⁵.

¹ The *Bibelstudien* was published in 1895. The *Neue Bibelstudien* was published in 1897. The Eng. edition, containing both works, was published in 1901 by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh under the title *Bible Studies*. This was reprinted in 1979 by Alpha Publications, Winona Lake, IND., USA.

² Published in 1908. 4th Eng. ed. 1923, rp. Baker Book House 1965.

³ Published in 1908 by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh.

⁴ Published as one volume in 1930, rp. 1972 by Hodder and Stoughton.

⁵ See esp. the notable Australian attempt to create a “new Moulton-Milligan” by their great admirer, GREG HORSLEY (and others), entitled *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity* (published under the auspices of The Ancient History Documentary Research Centre Macquarie University, 1981-), and in particular Volume 5 (*Linguistic Essays*, 1989), containing several important essays by Horsley.

Deissmann was, of course, not the first scholar to discover the relevance of the papyri for the interpretation of the NT. In this he had been preceded by the linguist George Hatzidakis⁶. But while Hatzidakis recognized the importance of the new discoveries, his linguistic competence in the entire history of the Hellenic language from Homeros to Neohellenic (the Mycenaean Linear B tablets had not been deciphered yet), prevented him from giving unqualified precedence to the papyri. He rightly saw that the papyri projected a form of Hellenic that differed considerably from the ordinary language, and that the linguistic expression of the Hellenes was different from the uncouth expression of the Egyptians and the Nubians. Hatzidakis was interested in the historical development of the language and its state at different points of time. A similar perspective characterizes A. Jannaris' *Historical Greek Grammar*.⁷

Indeed, while the light that the Egyptian papyri throw on the vocabulary and even on the syntax of the NT is to be welcomed, and the knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic is a necessary presupposition for many passages, a proper grasp of the development of the Hellenic language is a *sine qua non* for a more correct interpretation of the NT. After all, the NT *is* written in the Hellenic language, and its literary level far surpasses that of the barbarous documents of Egypt and Nubia.⁸

The approach that is advocated here is the *Diachronic* or *Holistic Approach* to the Hellenic language in the interpretation of the NT. This approach considers the language as a whole and seeks to place NT vocabulary and syntax within the proper historical parameters in the development of

⁶ See DEISSMANN, *Light from the Ancient East*, 22 and CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen 2004, rp. Baker Academic 2007, 124.

⁷ A. N. JANNARIS, *An Historical Greek Grammar Chiefly of the Attic Dialect*, etc. London 1897.

⁸ I have discussed the character of the Hellenic of the NT in my *The Development of Greek, passim*. See e.g. 120-40.

the language. This approach has not been utilized during the past five hundred years on account of two historical circumstances. The first was the Fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 to the Turks. The Hellenic scholars who fled with their libraries to the West, chiefly Italy, together with their Italian pupils initiated the movement of the Renaissance. However, their own country, for self-evident reasons, never participated in the momentous events that changed the course of European history. The decisions taken with regard to the Hellenic language and its literature were taken in the total absence of the people they concerned. The second event was the error of Erasmus, who in 1528, falling a victim to a farce played by the Swiss monk-scholar, Henricus Glareanus, wrote his famed *Dialogus*⁹ on the pronunciation of the Hellenic and Latin languages. At that time all Europeans, including Erasmus himself, pronounced the Hellenic language in the manner of the Hellenes¹⁰. Now, a novel, Latinized pronunciation was promulgated, which after a centuries-long struggle with the traditional Historical Hellenic Pronunciation, established itself in Europe and America.

The main effect of the error of Erasmus, was that, in addition to introducing a pronunciation that was unnatural and foreign to the genius of the Hellenic language, it also divided it into two: ancient and modern. European (and later American) classical scholarship concentrated on the ancient period, and all touch was lost with the subsequent history of the language. The NT was left to the theologians¹¹, who, if they ever went beyond the elements of the NT, it was to pay occasional visits to the earlier period, while during the past hundred years or so, their interest turned to the papyri. (Parenthetically, it ought to be clarified that this disinterest in the lat-

⁹ ERASMUS, *De recta Latini Graecique sermonis pronuntiatione dialogus*, Basiliae: Frobenius 1528.

¹⁰ For the story and its dire effects, see C. C. CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 339-96.

¹¹ R. BROWNING, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, Cambridge: CUP, 3rd ed. 1983, Preface vii.

ter history of the Hellenic language was to some extent corrected by the work of Karl Krumbacher, who established Byzantine studies as a serious discipline. Today even Neohellenic is taught in a few European Universities¹²).

The above state of affairs produced the exigencies for the *Synchronic Approach*. The NT scholar usually contented himself with the linguistic evidence of one or two centuries before and one or two centuries after the time of the NT. Thus, the unity of the language was lost. This lack of orientation in the study of NT Hellenic has produced NT scholars, who are acquainted neither with earlier nor with later Hellenic. To paraphrase John 3:8, such scholars hear the wind blow, but do not know wherefrom it comes or whither it goes! On the negative side, this has meant that the pronunciation applied has obscured many facts and hindered us from interesting insights into the NT text, its wordplays, and its text-critical problems, and, more significantly, it has deprived us from important light that is shed on the morphology and especially the syntax of the NT by later literature¹³; and finally, by depriving scholarship of the proper parameters for its linguistic research.

The unity of the Hellenic language and its Historical Pronunciation as well as the innumerable insights that these give into the text of the NT—as J.Keith Elliott pointed out in his review¹⁴—have been discussed in detail and with evidence drawn from each one of the twenty-eight centuries of Hellenic literature from Homeros to the present day in my book, *The De-*

¹² Cf. CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek*, 95-6 and BROWNING, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, 346.

¹³ With regards to the Greek pronunciation in ancient times and Erasmus's error and its consequences, see C.C. CARAGOUNIS, "The Error of Erasmus", *Filologia Neotestamentaria*, no. 16, Vol. VIII, (1995), 151-85, and the more detailed discussion in CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission*, pp. 339-96.

¹⁴ J.K. ELLIOTT, "Review of C.C. CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*", in *Novum Testamentum* 47,4 (2005), 394-96.

velopment of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission, (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 167), Tübingen: Siebeck-Mohr 2004. There, the interested reader will find massive evidence for the above statement, which will dispell any suspicions of anachronism with regard to the *Diachronic Approach*.

Briefly, the *Diachronic* or *Holistic Approach* to the Hellenic language is based on the following facts:

(1) in spite of inevitable changes, the Hellenic language is one from the second millennium B.C. till today.

(2) The nine-hundred-year period from Alexander to Justinian (335 B.C. – A.D. 565) constitutes the transition period from ancient Hellenic to Neohellenic.

(3) The NT appears in the middle of this transitional period and contains partly elements that were at home in the pre-NT period and partly elements that are characteristic of the post-NT period. For example, the NT contains neologisms, i.e. terms and structures that appear for the first time in the NT, and therefore, cannot be properly explained by reference to classical literature. Only later literature, sometimes up to Neohellenic, can explain them.

(4) And finally, among other factors, the NT exerted an arresting influence on the development of the Hellenic language as a whole. Thus, it may be confidently asserted that during half the length of the period since the New Testament was written, English and German, for example, have changed much more than Hellenic.

It may be helpful at this juncture to cite the words of two linguists, one German and one English. In his *Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft bei den Griechen und Römern*, 1st ed. Berlin, 1863, 411, Heinrich STEINTHAL writes:

“Die neugriechische Sprache ist eine der verwundersamsten Erscheinungen in der Geschichte der Sprachen. Man darf sie nicht bloss nicht neben die romanischen Töchter Sprachen stellen; sondern ihr Verhältniss zum Alt-

Griechisch ist auch noch ein anderes als das des Neu-Deutschen zum Alt-Deutschen. ... so kann doch die neuere Sprachforschung nicht umhin, in der Sprache der heutigen Griechen eine Gestaltung anzuerkennen, die sich ... enger an die alte Sprache anschliesst, als das heutige Deutsch an das Karls des Grossen..."

and R. BROWNING, *Medieval and Modern Greek*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, Preface vii, 2-3, 13 says:

"Since then [the time of Homeros] Greek has enjoyed a continuous tradition down to the present day. Change there has certainly been. But there has been no break like that between Latin and the Romance languages. Ancient Greek is not a foreign language to the Greek of today as Anglo-Saxon is to the modern Englishman (vii). Perhaps connected with this continuous identity over some three and a half millenia is the slowness of change in Greek. It is still recognizably the same language today as it was when the Homeric poems were written down... The continuity in lexical stock is striking (2)... Earlier stages of the language are thus accessible to speakers of later stages, in a way that Anglo-Saxon or even Middle English is not accessible to speakers of modern English (3) ...a brief survey of the vocabulary...will throw further light on...the peculiar situation created by a long and continuous literary tradition which makes all elements of Greek from antiquity to the present day in a sense accessible and 'present' to any literate Greek (13).

In the light of these facts, the *Diachronic Approach* commends itself as the only appropriate approach to the investigation of the NT. We must treat the language in its entirety and take account of all the evidence, not selected areas or periods of it.

In this lecture I intend to illustrate with one example how the application of the *Diachronic Approach* to Hellenic can lead to important insights into and a more correct understanding of the text of the NT, that is, it can lead to an interpretation that is more natural and truer to the spirit of the NT text. The text that I shall consider is John 15:1-6, which is introduced by the words usually translated as "I am the true Vine". This text constitutes the last of the seven "I am"-sayings of Jesus with a predicate in the Gospel of John, which not only is one of the most beloved words of Jesus, but also by virtue of its position in this Gospel, plays a crucial role in its arrange-

ment and message, delineating the kind of relationship that is to obtain between Jesus and his disciples after his departure.

2. Linguistic Considerations on the Terms Used

Before I proceed with the metaphor or parable of John 15, it is necessary to clarify, by means of two tables, the important Hellenic and Hebrew words around which my discussion will revolve:

<i>Hebrew Bible</i>	<i>LXX</i>
גֶּפֶן (<i>gefen</i>) = vine (Jer 2; Ps 80)	ἄμπελος (<i>ámbelos</i>) = vine
כֶּרֶם (<i>kerem</i>) = vineyard (Isa 5)	ἄμπελών (<i>ámbelón</i>) = vineyard

John 15

ἄμπελος (*ámbelos*) (conventionally) = vine
κλήματα (*klêmata*) (conventionally) = branches

For the time being, I am using the expressions “conventionally” as well as “ἄμπελος (*ámbelos*” and κλήματα (*klêmata*”, purposely, to avoid translating them. Their true meaning will emerge at the end of my discussion.

The way in which Jesus formulates his saying “I am the *true* ἄμπελος”, suggests that he does it intentionally, to draw a contrast between himself and another ἄμπελος, that was not the true ἄμπελος. That ἄμπελος was Israel. For example, Jer 2:21 portrays Israel as God’s choice vine that later turned to “a corrupt, wild vine” and Ps 80 describes Israel as a vine brought out of Egypt, planted with great care, but then abandoned by God, because of its unfaithfulness¹⁵. In both texts the Hebrew Bible uses the word גֶּפֶן¹⁶, which in the LXX is rendered by ἄμπελος (‘vine’).

¹⁵ See my comments on these texts in C. C. CARAGOUNIS, “Vine, Vineyard, Israele, and Jesus”, *SEÁ* 65 (2000), 201-14.

However, the OT portrays Israel not only as a ‘vine’ but also as a ‘vineyard’. In a passage of great poetical beauty, Isaiah (5:1-7) relates in detail how Yahweh planted a vineyard (made up of choice vines) and cared for it, building a watchtower with walls and hedges around it in order to protect it. He also built a winepress. Then, it tells of the bad crop that it yielded, and God’s judgment on it. Here the Hebrew Bible uses the word קִרְפֹּס , which the LXX renders with $\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\epsilon\lambda\acute{\omega}\nu$ (vineyard)¹⁷.

Thus, in the OT Israel is portrayed both as a ‘Vine’ and as a ‘Vineyard’. In view of this fact, the question that arises for us is, which of these backgrounds is in the mind of Jesus, when he claims to be the *true* $\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$? Is he thinking of Israel as a vine or as a vineyard?

It might be reasoned that since Jesus, according to John, uses $\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, which in Jer 2 and Ps 80, translated the Heb word for ‘vine’, and not $\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\epsilon\lambda\acute{\omega}\nu$, which in Isa 5 translated the Heb for ‘vineyard’, it must be obvious that that he meant ‘vine’. This sounds reasonable. However, as we shall see, the matter is not so simple. For one, although Ps 80 begins by describing Israel as a vine, it then goes on to attribute to it walls, which are a characteristic of vineyards, not of vines. These walls are broken down with the result that both strangers and beasts of the field ravage it. In other words, although Ps 80 uses only the word קִרְפֹּס , as the story unfolds, there occurs a conceptual transition from the idea of קִרְפֹּס to that of קִרְפֹּס ¹⁸.

Again, it may be thought that, since Jesus uses the word $\acute{\alpha}\mu\pi\epsilon\lambda\omicron\varsigma$, which from Homeros down to the Attic or classical period had the sense of

¹⁶ Of its cognate languages, Ugaritic *gpn*, *gupana* = ‘vineyard’; Akkadian *gapnu* and Assyrian *gupnu* = ‘tree’; Arabic *jafn*, Old South Arabic *gpnt* and Syriac *gufna* = ‘vine’.

¹⁷ This has cognate parallels in Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Syriac. Similarly, Arabic *karm* means ‘grape’, ‘vine’ and Ethiopic *kerm* means ‘vine’. Akkadian *karmu* denotes ‘dry’ or ‘barren land’ (perhaps because vineyards were planted in dry areas, thus, possibly ‘vineyard-land’), but in Ugaritic Akkadian *karanu* means ‘vineyard’. The same is the case with Egyptian *k’mw*. On this and the above note, see C.C. CARAGOUNIS, “Vine, Vineyard, Israele, and Jesus”, *SEÅ* 65 (2000), 201-14.

¹⁸ See C.C. CARAGOUNIS, “Vine, Vineyard, Israele, and Jesus”, *SEÅ* 65 (2000), 201-14.

‘vine’¹⁹, should it not be clear that he presents himself as a ‘vine’, and therefore, refers to those OT texts that present Israel as a ‘vine’ rather than a ‘vineyard’? Unfortunately, the matter is more complex than that. The terms ἄμπελος and κλήματα, underwent a change of meaning, since classical times. In consequence of this, in Neohellenic ἄμπελος, which via its diminutive ἀμπέλιον, first gave the Byzantine form ἀμπέλιον, and then the Neohellenic Demotic form ἀμπέλι, no longer means ‘vine’ but ‘vineyard’. In the same way, κλήματα in Neohellenic means no more ‘branches’ but ‘vines’, i.e. the plant itself. Thus, what in classical times was ‘vine’ became ‘vineyard’ and what in classical times was ‘branch’ became the ‘vine’ itself.

Now, it may be objected, “These facts may be interesting, but can the Neohellenic evidence have any bearing on the meaning of ἄμπελος and κλήματα in John 15?” The answer to this objection depends on the date when ἄμπελος and κλήματα received their new meanings. If these meanings are a purely Neohellenic phenomenon, then they are of no consequence for what Jesus is saying in John 15. But if the changes pre-date John, then they may be applicable. It is thus obvious, that a *diachronic* investigation of the terms ἄμπελος and κλήματα is of critical importance for the interpretation of John 15:1-6.

a. The Meaning Shift in ἄμπελος

Throughout classical times and in later texts of literary prestige, that is, classicistic or Atticistic writings, down to the Patristic period, ἄμπελος is used mainly in its classical sense of ‘vine’. However, already in classical times a new development begins to show its head: there are a few texts, in which this word is used with a new meaning. If we could be certain of its date, the 42nd fable of Aisopos (VI B.C.) would be the first instance in

¹⁹ Homeros, *Odyseia*, IX 110: ἀλλὰ ... τὰ πάντα φύονται, πυροὶ καὶ κριθαὶ ἡδ’ ἄμπελοι (“but ... all spring up of themselves wheat and barley and vines”)

which ἄμπελος was used in the sense of ‘vineyard’. The fable relates that a dying father told his sons that all his possessions were hidden in his ἄμπελος: «‘My children, I am about to die. However, you are going to find whatever I possess in the ἄμπελος’. They, supposing that he had hidden some treasure there, when their father died, took two-pronged forks, hoes, and scythes and dug up the whole plot in their desire to find the treasure»²⁰. The fact that the sons began to dig the plot of land where the ἄμπελος was, proves conclusively that they understood ἄμπελος as ‘vineyard’, not as ‘vine’! Another example, this time of certain date, is Thoukydides (V B.C.), IV. 90. While fortifying Delion, the Athenian general Hippokrates, had to «cut down the ἄμπελος that surrounded the sanctuary»²¹. There can be no doubt here that the ἄμπελος that surrounded the precinct of the sanctuary was a vineyard, not a single vine plant²².

The next literary text in point of date is Aelianus (A.D. 165-230): «a farmer was digging a trench in an ἄμπελος in order to plant a fine, choice κλῆμα»²³. It is obvious that a trench could only be dug in a vineyard, not in a vine, wherefor ἄμπελος here can only have the sense of “vineyard”.

The lack of more evidence in properly speaking literary works is to be explained by the fact that this was the time of Atticism. As is well known, the Atticists and the Atticizing authors, disregarded the idiom of their own

²⁰ Aisopos, Fable 42: «‘τεκνία, ἐγὼ τοῦ βίου ὑπεξέρχομαι· πλὴν ἅπερ ὑπάρχει μοι, ἐν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ εὐρήσετε πάντα’. οἱ δὲ νομίσαντες θησαυρόν τινα ἐνταῦθα ἔχειν μετὰ τὴν ἀποβίωσιν τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτῶν λαβόντες δικέλλας, καὶ ἀξίνας καὶ δρέπανα κατέσκαψαν πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐκ πόθου».

²¹ Thoukydides IV. 90: τάφρον μὲν κύκλῳ περὶ τὸ ἱερόν καὶ τὸν νεῶν ἔσκαπτον, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ ὀρύγματος ἀνέβαλλον ἀντὶ τείχους τὸν χοῦν, καὶ σταυροὺς παρακαταπηγνύντες, ἄμπελον κόπτοντες τὴν περὶ τὸ ἱερόν ἐσέβαλλον καὶ λίθους καὶ πλίνθον ἐκ τῶν οἰκοπέδων τῶν ἐγγύς

²² Even though in ancient times, just as in modern times, a vine might grow so large as to cover the walls of a building, see e.g. Pliny, *Natural History*, XIV.1.9–III. 10-11.

²³ Aelianus, *On the Characteristics of Animals* XI.32: ἐν ἀμπέλῳ δὲ γεωργὸς εἰργάζετο τάφρον, ἵνα ἐμφυτεύσῃ κλῆμα καλὸν τε καὶ εὐγενές. The *v.l.* ἀμπελών, instead of ἄμπελος, in view of κλῆμα, should be regarded as improbable.

day, following Attic usage. They, thus, used ἄμπελος in its traditional sense of “vine”.

However, the gap between Thoukydides and Aelianus is bridged by the evidence of the inscriptions and the papyri. In these documents, ἄμπελος is used times without number from early III B.C. on in the sense of ‘vineyard’. As I have already presented the epigraphic and papyrial evidence in previous studies²⁴, I shall exemplify the new meaning with only one or two texts. *BGU XIV*, 2380, 5 (from 265 B.C.) speaks of tax paid for an ἄμπελος²⁵. The meaning must be ‘vineyard’, since no authorities were ever likely to demand tax for a single vine plant. In another document, *PHibeh* (260-250 B.C.), the owners of another ἄμπελος complained that they had to pay too high a tax for their ἄμπελος²⁶. Again, it is obvious that they would not be paying tax for a single vine plant but for a whole vineyard, which implies that ἄμπελος here is used in the sense of “vineyard”. Finally, the Zenon correspondence (III B.C.) contains many instances of ἄμπελος meaning ‘vineyard’. I mention just one example from 244 B.C., in which mention is made of watchmen for a ‘vineyard’²⁷.

These few examples are part of an immense documentary evidence that by the middle of the III B.C. ἄμπελος was widely used in the sense of ‘vineyard’.

b. The Meaning Shift in κλήμα (pl. κλήματα)

Κλήμα was originally a vine twig or a vine branch. As such, it could be a branch that bore fruit or a superfluous branch that was cut off and thrown

²⁴ C.C. CARAGOUNIS, “Vine, Vineyard, Israele, and Jesus”, *SEÁ* 65 (2000), 201-14; “Is Jesus the Vine or the Vineyard? in ”*The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, pp. 247-61, and «‘Abide in me’. The New Mode of Relationship Between Jesus and His Followers as a Basis for Christian Ethics (John 15)» in J.v.d. WATT – R. ZIMMERMANN,

²⁵ *BGU XIV*, 2380, 5: ἐ]ξ ἀμπέ[λ]ου τῆς π[]...αι []ρτου[]ν κεχωρισμένον] ἐκφόριον [τοῦ μηνός].

²⁶ *PHibeh* II, 205, 13 f.: [μη]θενός πράσσειν [[τὸν φόρον τῆς [ἀ]μπ[έ]λου]]]

²⁷ *PCair Zen* III, 59350, v, 11: φυλά[κων ...] τῆς ἀμ[πέ]λου ...

away. But, since the propagation of vines was by vine twigs—as is the case with many other plants—it could also be a vine twig intended for planting in order to propagate another vine. It must be obvious here that κλῆμα covers two ideas: the idea of a branch, whether good or bad, and the idea of a plant. In its latter capacity, κλῆμα was to all intents and purposes the vine. Thus, the meaning of κλῆμα fluctuated between a vine branch (for example, a superfluous branch) and a vine plant, depending on whether the κλῆμα was to be discarded or was to be planted as a new vine. It is thus easy to perceive how natural the transition was from the meaning of vine-branch to the meaning of vine-plant. In this way, κλῆμα came to represent the whole plant, the vine itself.

The word κλῆμα began to be used in the sense of ‘vine’ at about the same time as the word ἄμπελος began to take on the meaning of ‘vineyard’. The two words must have developed their new meanings concurrently: the ἄμπελος was upgraded to ‘vineyard’ and the κλῆμα was upgraded to ‘vine’.

One of the earlier examples here is Xenophon (430-355 B.C.), *Oikonomikos* XIX. 9. 2: Here, Ischomachos asks Sokrates: «What do you think, will the vine or vine twig (κλῆμα) take better root if you place the whole of it upright looking, as it were, toward the sky, or if you put it somewhat slanting?»²⁸. Here κλῆμα is used of the vine plant that is planed in order to produce a new vine tree. A somewhat later example is Theophrastos (372-288 B.C.), *History of Plants* II. 6. 12: «With regard to the cultivation of other plants, the layers are to be laid in the opposite way, like those of the

²⁸ Xenophon, *Oikonomikos*, XIX. 9.2: πότερα ὄλον τὸ κλῆμα ὀρθὸν τιθεὶς πρὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν βλέπων ἢ γῆ μᾶλλον ῥιζοῦσθαι αὐτὸ ἢ καὶ πλάγιόν τι ... Similar is Xenophon, *Oikonomikos*, XIX. 8. 3, where Ischomachos asks Sokrates «whether a vine-cutting is likely to shoot forth sooner if planted in soft and well-worked soil than in hard and undug soil» πότερον ὑποβαλὼν ἂν τῆς γῆς τῆς εἰργασμένης οἶει τὸν βλαστὸν τοῦ κλήματος θᾶττον χωρεῖν διὰ τῆς μαλακῆς γῆς ἢ διὰ τῆς ἀργοῦ εἰς σκληρόν;

vines or vine-twigs (κλήματα)»²⁹. Again, here κλήματα are the vine twigs or vine plants that are planted in order to produce new vine trees. Another case is an epigram from the time of emperor Nero. It speaks of the root of a κληῖμα, which, obviously, cannot be anything other than a ‘vine’ plant. A third document, *Anthologia Graeca* XVI, 255, mentions a sign that warns the passers by not to creep toward the κλήματα. The meaning of κλήματα here can hardly be other than ‘vines’. Obviously the man who put up the sign was warning presumptive thieves from entering the vineyard stealthily and approaching the vines (κλήματα) in order to steal their grapes!³⁰ It is crystal clear here that κλήματα is used in the sense of fruitbearing vines. The passage of Aelianus, which evidences the new meaning for both ἄμπελος and κλήματα, has been discussed above. Finally, the inscriptions and the papyri contain many examples in which κληῖμα is used in the sense of ‘vine’. Copious evidence is presented in my earlier studies.

There is, thus, no doubt whatsoever, that ἄμπελος and κλήματα had assumed their new meanings already some three to four centuries before the Gospel of John. The question now is whether John uses these words in their old or in their new meanings. This can be determined only by a detailed exegesis of John’s passage.

3. The Exegesis of John 15:1-6

Before proceeding to John 15, I wish to draw your attention to Rev 14:18-19. According to this text, an angel with a sickle in his hand, is urged to gather the grapes from the ἄμπελος of the earth (τρύγησον τοὺς βότρυας τῆς ἀμπέλου τῆς γῆς). This text has normally been mistranslated in our Bibles, though some commentators have guessed its correct

²⁹ Theophrastos, *History of Plants* II. 6. 12: ἐν δὲ ταῖς τῶν ἄλλων φυτεῖαις ἀνάπαλιν τίθενται τὰ φυτευτήρια, καθάπερ τῶν κλημάτων

³⁰ *Anthologia Graeca* XVI, 255: Ὀδῖτα, μὴ πρόσερπε πρὸς τὰ κλήματα.

meaning³¹. The expression used here, ἡ ἀμπελος τῆς γῆς, means “the vineyard of the earth”—not “the vine of the earth”. The genitive construction—ἀμπελος τῆς γῆς—is appositive/explanative, meaning “the vineyard which is the earth itself”. This is confirmed also by the mention of a ‘winepress’, which as in all other texts, was a feature of ‘vineyards’, not of single ‘vines’. We now turn to John 15:1-6.

1. The saying in vs. 1, “I am the true ἀμπελος”, makes good sense whether ἀμπελος is a “vine” or a “vineyard”. However, vs. 2 makes sense only if ἀμπελος is a vine. In this saying we have a wordplay in the original which is lost in translation. John uses two verbs (αἶρει “he takes away” and καθαίρει “he cleanses”). This is very interesting for the following reasons:

a. the verb αἶρει “takes away” is not the most natural verb to express the cutting off of a branch. A proper verb here would have been τέμνει or κόπτει or one of their compounds ἀποτέμνει, ἐκκόπτει, or ἀποκόπτει. The reason for using αἶρει seems to be that this verb fits better the idea of uprooting a vine from a vineyard. This consideration lends its support to the view that by κλήμα Jesus intends a ‘vine’, not a ‘branch’.

b. There is no doubt that by the verb καθαίρει “he cleanses”, he intends the activity of pruning. Also Theophrastos uses this verb in a similar context³². The κλήματα are a *Bild* of the disciples. In as much as this is a metaphor or a parable, it is important that we be aware of the two parts constituting a parable: the *Bild*-part, the actual picture or illustration and the *Sach*-part, i.e. the entity illustrated or symbolized by the *Bild*-part. Here, the ‘κλήματα’ is the *Bild*-part, while the entity symbolized by the vine, i.e. the *Sach*-part, are the disciples. Now, on the level of the *Bild*-part we wo-

³¹ AGOURIDIS, S., *Ἡ Ἀποκάλυψη τοῦ Ἰωάννη*, Θεσσαλονίκη: Ἐκδ. Πουρνάρα, 1994, 351; AUNE, D. E., *Revelation 3 Vols.*, (WBC), Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1997-98; Vol II: 6-16, 790.

³² Theophrastos, *History of Plants*, II.7.4: ἔτι δὲ ἡ διακάθαρσις καὶ ἀφαίρεσις τῶν αὔων. (“moreover, also the cleansing and removal of the dry [branches]”).

uld have expected a more proper word for ‘pruning’, like Attic κλᾶν or Hellenistic κλαδέειν. But instead, Jesus anticipates the *Sach*-part in the *Bild*-part and so uses a verb that strictly belongs to the *Sach*-part: “he cleanses”. This happens also in the synoptic parables, as, for example, when Mt 7:17f. (by anticipation) uses the words “good” or “bad” improperly of trees, which properly apply to the good and bad people, symbolized by those trees.

c. It should be born in mind, that, as in the case of other trees, pruning is not applied to the branches of a vine but to the vine itself. Pruning a vine means cutting off weak, sickly, superfluous, or unpromising branches.³³ If, however, the vine-plant stood for Jesus, then the pruning would be done to him—which is an absurd idea. Moreover, if κλήματα referred to the disciples as branches, then pruning would imply the cutting away and removal of certain disciples! But if these disciples were pruned away, how would they then bear fruit? Here we see how hopeless the traditional interpretation is! However, if κλήμα referred to a disciple as the whole *vine plant* within a vineyard, then, the pruning would entail the removal of bad, negative habits or vices, in the life of that disciple, which hindered him from bringing forth good fruit. This interpretation is free from all problems.

2. Vs. 4 exhorts the disciples to abide in him: “as the κλήμα cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the ἀμπέλω, so, neither can you, unless you abide in me”. This exhortation would be unnatural and pointless if it were directed to a branch, in as much as the branch is an inseparable part of the vine. But it would be quite natural if directed to a vine, which is not a natural or integral part of the soil (of the vineyard) in which it is planted. A vine whose roots do not remain in the soil (of the vineyard) cannot bear fruit. This detail, too, supports the new meaning of these words.

3. Vs. 6 is most decisive for the new meanings of ἀμπελος and κλήμα: “if anyone does not abide in me, he is cast out as a κλήμα and is withered

³³ For the various terms used, see C.C. CARAGOUNIS, *The Development of Greek*, 257 f.

and men collect them and throw them into the fire and they are burned up”. The verb ἐβλήθη ἔξω³⁴, “cast out”, cannot reasonably be used of the cutting off of a branch. But it can be used fittingly of a vine plant, that is pulled up by the roots and thrown out of the vineyard! This recalls to mind not only Mt 15:13 “every plant that my Heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted”, but also the judgement on Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), who far from bringing forth good fruit, they introduced deceit and corruption into the early Church, and had to be removed from the Church. Nor should we forget here that what bears fruit is the entire tree, not merely its branches. Thus, if Jesus were the Vine and the disciples the branches, then the fruit would be born by him. In this case the exhortation “abide in Me, for without me you can do nothing” would be pointless. However, if the disciples are the whole tree, i.e. the vine and the branches together, then we understand the exhortation: the vines (i.e. the disciples) must abide in the soil of the vineyard (i.e. Jesus), in order to bring forth fruit.

4. Finally, there is here also the idea of protection, which is entirely missing in the traditional interpretation. The OT texts—in line with the practise in all antiquity—emphasize the need to protect the vine plants! This is the reason why vineyards had wall or hedges: to keep out intruders as well as wild animals. For a single vine they would never build walls and hedges. In the same way, Jesus as the Vineyard provides his disciples not only with the spiritual nourishment but also with protection. He is a wall of fire round about them. It is for this protection that he prays in John 17:9-15: “Holy Father ... keep them in Thy name”, he says. This reminds us of Ps 80, which though it began by speaking of a 𐤂𐤃𐤁 “vine”, it went on to speak of the breaking down of its hedges and as a consequence of this, of the for-

³⁴ BARRETT’s discussion (*John*, 474 f.) on these verbs being timeless aorists—obvious but irrelevant for the meaning of the verb—has missed the whole point of the significance and use of the verb ἐξεβλήθη.

aging of boars and other wild animals (vv. 12-13), that is, it speaks of conditions that are appropriate to a כַּרְפָּס, a “vineyard” (vv. 12-13), not a נֶזֶן a “vine”.

From the above considerations, we must conclude that what Jesus said, was not “I am the Vine, you are the branches” but “I am the Vineyard, you are the vines”.

4. The New Mode of Relationship Between Jesus and His Disciples

In another lecture, given at a conference in Holland, the volume of which is to appear next month, I have discussed at some length the place of the parable of the Vineyard and the Vines within the context of Jesus’ Last Discourse and his prayer in John 17. The present time limits do not allow more than a few indications on the role that this parable plays in the context of John’s Gospel.

John 13:1-16:33 constitute the Last Discourse of Jesus, with which the Last Supper is interwoven. The Last Discourse comprises 1.848 words of Jesus. The parable of the Vineyard and the Vines occupies 138 words. Now what is astonishing here is that John has placed the Parable of the Vineyard and the Vines exactly in the middle of the Last Discourse. Jesus utters 857 words before the parable of the Vineyard and 853 after the parable. 857 before and 853 after! It is difficult to imagine a more perfect balance between the two parts of a Discourse of such great length. This literary arrangement seems to confirm the hunch that the parable of the Vineyard and the Vines intentionally occupies the *Mittelpunkt*, the heart, of the Last Discourse.

Now the burden of the Last Discourse is, as his prayer shows, Jesus’ concern for his disciples: “When I was with them, I kept them in Thy name” (17:12). Now, that he is about to leave them, he wishes them to know that they will not be left alone. He prays the Father for them: “Holy Father ... keep them in Thy name” (17:11). I would like to suggest that it is

noteworthy that in the tense atmosphere of the Last Supper, with Judas going away to betray him and with the dark premonitions of the disciples, who are dismayed at the prospect of Jesus' imminent departure, Jesus utters the significant words: "I am the Vineyard; you are the vines". I will continue to give you protection; you will be safe in me. And so he lays out for them the prospect of a new relationship with himself. Until now, they had enjoyed his physical presence: his care and his protection; from now on the relationship would be raised to another level through the mediation of the *Parakletos*, the Holy Spirit.

I should like to conclude with a long quote from a previous study of mine³⁵:

As was intimated above, in interpreting this text, the Church Fathers and other early Christian authors observed the old Attic distinctions between ἄμπελος and κλήματα as vine and branches.³⁶ The reason was that the Fathers had usually acquired a classical education—not infrequently rhetorical—often in the schools of Athens.³⁷ But in the case of some of them, there was probably a theological reason as well. The author who seems to have set the tone for this was Athanasios. As an unflinching defender of the reality of the incarnation, he sought corroboration for his doctrine of the *homoousion* of the human nature which Christ took through his incarnation from the sameness of nature between the vine (= Christ) and the branches (= the Christians). He argued that just as the vine and the branches share in their nature (something that is not true of the vine and the vinedresser), so too, Christ in his incarnation came to share our nature.³⁸ This

³⁵ C.C. CARAGOUNIS, «'Abide in me'» in J. v.d. Watt – R. Zimmermann (eds.),

³⁶ Of early Christian Authors who adhere to the old distinction, mention may be made of Klemes of Rome, Ignatios, Didache, Justinos Martys, Klemes Alexandreus, Irenaios, Hippolytos, Origenis, Eusebios, Epiphanius, Gregorios Nazianzenos, Gregorios Nysseus, Amphilochios, Chrysostomos, Palladios and Johannes of Damaskos. These authors have an aggregate of some 560 occurrences of ἄμπελος, all of which have been examined.

³⁷ See C.C. CARAGOUNIS, "Atticism. Agenda and Achievement", in C.C. CARAGOUNIS (ed.), *Greek. A Language in Evolution. Essays in Honour of Antonios N. Jannaris*, Hildesheim: Olms 2010, pp. 153-176.

³⁸ See e.g. Athanasios, *De sententia Dionysii*, 10, 3: ὅτι δὲ ἀνθρωπίνως εἴρηται ταῦτα περὶ τοῦ σωτῆρος, σκοπεῖν ἐντεῦθεν προσήκει· ὁ μὲν γεωργὸς ξένος ἐστὶ κατ'

idea found favor with some of the later Fathers. For instance, Basilios of Caesarea repeats Athanasios' argument in his book *Against Eunomios*,³⁹ while Theodoretos of Kyrhos in his *Eranistes* refers explicitly to Athanasios' interpretation.⁴⁰

In spite of the venerable origins of this theological interpretation it must be rejected on exegetical grounds. The new relationship of the disciples to Christ (to obtain after he "has gone away") illustrated by the imagery of the ἄμπελος and the κλήματα is not based on the relation that once existed between the disciples and the incarnated Jesus, but is thought of as a future relationship to obtain between the disciples and the pneumatic Christ. The whole question of "abiding in Christ" sets the relationship between the believer and Christ on a transcendental, almost mystical plane, which has nothing to do with the incarnated state of the Logos, even though it was precisely the incarnation of the Logos that made this pneumatic relationship possible. For this reason it is not possible to argue that this parable illustrates the sameness of nature which the be-

ούσίαν τῆς ἀμπέλου, τὰ δὲ κλήματα ὁμοούσια καὶ συγγενῆ καὶ ἀδιαίρετα τῆς ἀμπέλου τυγχάνει ὄντα καὶ μίαν ἔχει καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν γένεσιν ταῦτα τε καὶ ἡ ἄμπελος. ἔστι δέ, ὡς εἶπεν ὁ κύριος, "αὐτὸς ἡ ἄμπελος, ἡμεῖς τὰ κλήματα". εἰ μὲν οὖν ὁμοούσιος ἐστὶν ἡμῖν ὁ υἱὸς καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἡμῖν ἔχει γένεσιν, ἔστω κατὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ υἱὸς ἀλλότριος κατ' οὐσίαν τοῦ πατρὸς, ὡσπερ καὶ ἡ ἄμπελος τοῦ γεωργοῦ, εἰ δὲ ἄλλος ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς παρ' ὃ ἐσμέν ἡμεῖς, κάκεῖνος μὲν λόγος τοῦ πατρὸς, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἐκ γῆς γεγόναμεν καὶ τοῦ Ἀδάμ ἐσμεν ἔκγονοι, οὐκ ὀφείλει τὸ ῥητὸν εἰς τὴν θεότητα ἀναφέρεσθαι τοῦ λόγου, ἀλλὰ λοιπὸν εἰς τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην αὐτοῦ παρουσίαν.

³⁹ Basilios, *Against Eunomios*, 29, 697: Εἰ ἄμπελος, φασίν, ὁ Σωτὴρ, κλήματα δὲ ἡμεῖς, γεωργὸς δὲ ὁ Πατὴρ· τὰ δὲ κλήματα ὁμοφυῆ μὲν τῇ ἀμπέλῳ, ἡ δὲ ἄμπελος οὐχ ὁμοφυῆς τῷ γεωργῷ· ὁμοφυῆς μὲν ἡμῖν ὁ Υἱός, καὶ μέρος ἡμεῖς αὐτοῦ, οὐχ ὁμοφυῆς δὲ ὁ υἱὸς τῷ Πατρί, ἀλλὰ κατὰ πάντα ἀλλότριος. Πρὸς οὓς ἐροῦμεν οὐ τῆς θεότητος αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ τῆς σαρκὸς εἰρηκέναι ἡμᾶς κλήματα.

⁴⁰ Theodoretos, *Eranistes*, 101: Τοῦ Ἁγίου Ἀθανασίου ἐπισκόπου Ἀλεξανδρείας καὶ ὁμολογητοῦ ... "Εγὼ εἶμι ἡ ἄμπελος, ὑμεῖς τὰ κλήματα· ὁ πατὴρ μου ὁ γεωργὸς ἐστίν". Ἡμεῖς γὰρ τοῦ κυρίου κατὰ τὸ σῶμα συγγενεῖς ἐσμεν· ... Καὶ ὡσπερ εἰσὶ τὰ κλήματα ὁμοούσια τῆς ἀμπέλου, καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς, οὕτω καὶ ἡμεῖς, ὁμογενῆ σώματα ἔχοντες τῷ σώματι τοῦ κυρίου. ... Ὁ δὲ πατὴρ εἴρηται ὁ γεωργός· αὐτὸς γὰρ εἰργάσατο διὰ τοῦ λόγου τὴν ἄμπελον, ἥτις ἐστὶ τὸ κυριακὸν σῶμα. ... Ἄμπελος δὲ ἐκλήθη ὁ κύριος διὰ τὴν περὶ τὰ κλήματα, ἀπερ ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, συγγένειαν σωματικῆν.

liever shares with the Logos following his incarnation. But it is important to emphasize that this “abiding” is not a mystical union of the kind which some find in the Eucharist⁴¹ or in the sense of mere passive contemplativeness, but an active every day abiding and utter dependence on Christ that issues into fruitbearing. This emphasizes the distinctiveness rather than the sameness between Christ and the believer, between the vineyard and the vines.

Thus, the exegesis by the Fathers of ἄμπελος as ‘vine’ and κλήματα as ‘branches’ has no more to commend it than that these authors used these terms in their old, well established distinctions, and that they took no account of the semasiological shifts that had been at work for several centuries before the Fourth Gospel.

Such an abiding in Christ is not to be confused with the inceptive salvific faith in Christ, since it is not a question of becoming a Christian but of staying a Christian,⁴² *i.e.* living out the Christian life.⁴³ It is the divine pattern, obtaining in the relationship between Jesus and the Father: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” he had said in Jn 14:10. This implies an inner commitment with reciprocal obligations: the believer abides in Christ and Christ and his words abide in the believer. This definitive *modus vivendi* of the believer is made possible through the operation of *Parakletos*.

We thus see that the parable of the Vineyard and the vines is used to illustrate the relation that is to obtain between Christ and his followers following his physical departure from them. As the new arrangement for the future relation between the disciples and the departing Jesus, the injunction “abide in me” seems to form the basis of a new ethics that the post-resurrection, exalted Christ demands of his followers.

⁴¹ See e.g. R. BROWN, *John II*, 672-74 on the “Vine as a Eucharistic Symbol”, an interpretation which R. BULTMANN rightly dismisses.

⁴² Cf. G.R. BEASLEY-MURRAY, *John*, 272, “To ‘remain’ in Jesus has a deeper significance than simply to continue to believe in him”.

⁴³ Cf. C.K. BARRETT, *John*, 474, “The Christian life is unthinkable except in union with Christ. It is not however a static condition that John has in mind”.