Ambrosiaster’s Three Criteria of the True Text and a Possible Fourth-Century Background for Codex Bezae’s Bilingual Tradition

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Codex Bezae’s distinctive text form has typically been viewed against the backdrop of the second century, with little attention given to its place in the late fourth-century context that gave rise to the manuscript’s production (circa 400). But given the remarkably close corroboration of at least three well-known Bezan characteristics with late fourth-century sources, this article suggests that period sources cannot be overlooked in reconstructions of Bezae’s context. As a case study, I examine Ambrosiaster’s remarks on the Old Latin version in his Commentary on Romans (5:14), noting how Ambrosiaster’s three “criteria” of the true text — reason, history, and authority — anticipate specific features of Bezae’s bilingual tradition. Since Ambrosiaster’s remarks in various ways prefigure Bezae’s own apparent outlook towards the Old Latin version, it is suggested that Bezae like Ambrosiaster might be viewed in a context that accords at least equal authority to the Old Latin version as to the Greek tradition.

Since the nineteenth century, research on Codex Bezae has generally viewed its distinctive bilingual Greek and Latin text of the gospels and Acts primarily as a product of the second century, whether on the basis of the free character of its text or certain parallels with second-century writers. In his notes on J. D. Michaelis’ Introduction to the New Testament, H. Marsh argues that
Bezae “has a very ancient text,” much older than the manuscript itself.¹ Others, such as Friedrich Blass and A. C. Clark, have argued that Bezae attests the earliest text form of the gospels and Acts.² As Clark writes, “we are brought back to an archetype of the four Gospels in book-form, which cannot be later than the middle of the second century.”³ Even F. J. A. Hort described Bezae’s text as “substantially a Western text of Cent. II.”⁴

It is understandable then that researchers have first turned to the second century in attempts to illuminate Bezae’s tendentious readings. Thus, B. D. Ehrman looks to Tatian’s Diatessaron to explain “anti-Judaic tendencies” in Bezae’s text.⁵ J. Crehan similarly writes of Bezae’s enhancement of Peter that “[o]ne must look to a time between the compiling of the original version of Acts and the middle of the second century. There was … at that time someone … intent on making the position of Peter much more striking than the existing record made it.”⁶ Crehan assumes that “[t]he Western text [of Bezae] was in existence long before the time

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³ Clark, *Primitive Text*, vi.
of Irenaeus (who made use of it).”  

7. B. Witherington likewise looks to the second century to contextualize Bezae’s so-called “anti-feminist” readings, proposing the rise of “a concerted effort by some part of the Church, perhaps as early as the late first century or beginning of the second, to tone down texts in Luke’s second volume that indicated that women played an important and prominent part in the early days of the Christian community.”  

8. In fact, Bezae attests a number of documented tendencies, from favorable portrayal of Roman soldiers and officials to negative portrayal of Judaism to expanded references to Peter and the Holy Spirit to limitations imposed on the ministry of Paul.  

9. Such a variety of proposed tendencies, unheard of in any other manuscript tradition, should offer sufficient clues to lead us to a plausible historical context. Yet we struggle to find any such context in the second century.

**THE LATE FOURTH CENTURY AS A SETTING FOR BEZAE’S DISTINCTIVE TEXT**

Meanwhile, it has scarcely been noticed that Bezae’s tendencies have compelling explanations in the two decades immediately preceding Bezae’s paleographically-assigned date *circa* 400. Concerning Bezae’s anti-Judaic tendency, we know that the legal status of the Jews was deteriorating throughout the fourth

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century under the influence of Christian polemicists and Christian emperors. Opposition to what was called “Judaizing” — namely, any Christian observance of Jewish practices, such as Sabbath observance — is palpable in the works of fourth-century Christian polemicists such as Ephrem, Chrysostom, Ambrose, and the anonymous redactor of the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch. The Council of Laodicea (ca 363) singles out Christians who prioritize Sabbath observance over observance of the Lord’s day, condemning Christians who rest on the Sabbath as “Judaizers … accursed from Christ.” Hostility towards the Jews is palpable in Ambrose’s successful petition to the emperor Theodosius to exonerate Christians accused of burning down a synagogue, under the pretext that “[after all] a synagogue has been burned, an abode of unbelief, a house of impiety, a shelter of madness under the damnation of God Himself.”

Concerning Bezae’s expansion of Peter’s role, we can point to Damasus’s efforts to promote the cult of Peter, documented in his epigrams: “Not by human power or art, … but with the help of Peter, pre-eminent, to whom was handed over the very door of heaven, I, Damasus, Bishop of Christ, built this. There is one chair of Peter and one true baptism that no chain can bind.” This interest in Peter is


13 “Non haec humanis opibus, non arte magistra … sed praestante Petro,
consistent with Rome’s growing assertiveness for a place of primacy among the ancient sees, especially in its rivalry with the new see of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{14} But when we consider that Peter’s enhancement in Acts also comes at the expense of Paul, we find that the aggrandizement of Peter over Paul is perhaps better explained in light of the late fourth-century anti-ascetic movement.\textsuperscript{15} Meanwhile, those who objected to privileging virginity over marriage naturally looked to Peter’s precedent as married apostle.\textsuperscript{16}

Concerning Bezae’s so-called “anti-feminist” readings, we can draw parallels to critics of radical asceticism in the Latin West in the final decades of the fourth century, such as Helvidius, Jovinian, and Ambrosiaster.\textsuperscript{17} By placing women \textit{and children} in the upper room with the apostles (Acts 1:14), Bezae’s text can be seen as an appeal to the apostolic precedent of marriage and procreation, contending with radical ascetics who promoted virginity as a more meritorious way of life.\textsuperscript{18} Meanwhile, Bezae’s


\textsuperscript{15} On Bezae’s diminution of Paul, see Brock, “Appeasement” at 219–220.


\textsuperscript{18} D. G. Hunter, “On the Sin of Adam and Eve: A Little-known Defense
discomfort with women in autonomous or prominent roles, such as religious conversion, in the case of Damaris, whose name is dropped from the list of Paul’s Athenian converts (Acts 17:34), or positions of social prominence, in the case of the women of Berea, whom Bezae obscures behind prominent husbands (Acts 17:12), is consistent with Ambrosiaster’s striking contention that women lacked the *imago Dei* except through a male head.19

On the basis of Bezae’s tendentious readings, then, it is possible to construct a realistic setting for its text at the end of the fourth century. Moreover, if we consider the three “anti-feminist” readings cited above (Acts 1:41; 17:12, 34), it is striking that all three are attested only by Bezae, suggesting that they more likely reflect the context of Bezae’s producers than echoes of second-century traditions.20 As M. W. Holmes observes, “most of the singular Bezan readings will likely derive from the scribe of the manuscript itself.”21 In fact, the emendations proposed by Bezae’s “Corrector G,” who was contemporaneous with the scribe, confirm that active development of the tradition was still taking place at the time of Bezae’s transcription.22 But if Bezae’s “anti-feminist”

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readings were introduced by its producers, looking for connections in the second century is clearly a fruitless undertaking.

**AMBROSIASTER’S THREE “CRITERIA” OF THE TRUE TEXT**

But turning to the context of Bezae’s production, we find writers, such as Ambrosiaster, whose positions are largely presupposed by Bezae’s tendentious text forms. Of particular interest are Ambrosiaster’s views on the text, articulated in his *Commentary on Romans* (5:14), which offers a contemporary perspective on the Greek and Old Latin traditions that seems to anticipate the perspective implied by the Greek and Latin columns of Codex Bezae. Ambrosiaster’s remarks are usually understood as objecting to Jerome’s Vulgate revision of the Old Latin gospels.²³ If this is so, we may reasonably date them to the mid-380’s, within two decades of Bezae’s paleographically-assigned production in c. 400.²⁴ Ambrosiaster objects in particular to Jerome’s use of the Greek manuscripts currently in circulation, which he considers corrupt, against the Old Latin version, which he sees as comparatively more pure.²⁵ After attributing corruption in the recent

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Greek tradition to “a spirit of controversy,” Ambrosiaster turns to defending the priority of the Old Latin version based on its conformity with “reason,” its antiquity, and its citation by ancient authorities, as he observes, “I consider this to be the true text, when reason, history, and authority are all preserved.” Ambrosiaster argues that these qualities or “criteria” of the true text are more characteristic of the Old Latin version, supporting his point with the claim that “the text retained today in the Latin codices is found similarly in the ancients, Tertullian, Victorinus and Cyprian.” Ambrosiaster appeals to these criteria essentially as “proofs” that the Old Latin version of his day preserved a more ancient tradition than recent Greek manuscripts.

While we might think of Ambrosiaster’s qualities of the true text in a general sense as “criteria,” this term should not be taken in a strict methodological sense as offering a set of critical principles for assessing readings. Ambrosiaster’s ultimate object here is polemical, namely, to defend the Old Latin version as an authority on equal footing with the Greek text. Viewed in this light, the “criteria” serve an apologetic purpose. While not functioning as critical canons, Ambrosiaster’s criteria nevertheless reveal much of value regarding his assumptions as to the character and relationship of the Greek and Latin traditions. In this article, I suggest that similar assumptions are implied by the relation of the Greek and Latin columns of Codex Bezae, arguing that Ambrosiaster held a view

26 “Hoc autem verum arbitror, quando et ratio et historia et auctoritas conservatur.” Ambrosiaster Commentary on Romans 5:14.5a, ed. H. J. Vogels (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 177).

27 “Nam hodie quae in Latinis reprehenduntur codicibus, sic inveniuntur a veteribus posita, Tertulliano et Victorino et Cypriano.” Ambrosiaster Commentary on Romans 5:14.5a (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 177).

28 Donaldson, “Explicit References,” 137.
similar to that of the producers of Bezae with regard to the relationship of the Greek and Latin traditions.

**Criterion 1: Reason**

Ambrosiaster’s remarks on the Greek and Old Latin traditions occur in the context of an objection to the mainstream Greek text of Romans 5:14, which affirms that death reigned over *all* before Moses, whether or not they sinned in the same way as Adam.²⁹ Ambrosiaster objects specifically to the suggestion that Abraham and the other Old Testament saints before Moses had sinned precisely in the same way as Adam, that is, “in contempt of God,” and thus were now in Hades under the reign of death.³⁰ In support of his objection, he cites the Old Latin copies that lack the negative particle, thereby limiting the reign of death strictly to those who had sinned in the same way as Adam, that is, through apostasy or idolatry.³¹ Attempting to show that these pre-Mosaic saints were not subject to the reign of death, Ambrosiaster argues for a prior law, turning to the concept of natural law — taken over from Roman juridical theory and ultimately from Stoic ideas of natural reason — as an innate manifestation of the Mosaic Law.³² Earlier in his

²⁹ Ἐβασίλευσεν ὁ θάνατος ἀπὸ Ἀδὰμ μέχρι Μωϋσέως καὶ ἐπὶ τοὺς μὴ ἀμαρτήσαντας ἐπὶ τῶ ὁμοιώματι τῆς παραβάσεως Ἀδὰμ (Rom 5:14). According to NA²⁸, the witnesses that lack μὴ or its equivalent are 614, 1739*, 2495*, d*, m, Origen (some manuscripts), and Ambrosiaster.


³¹ The Latin column of Codex Claromontanus (cited by NA²⁸ as d*) reads, “regnavit mors … in eos qui peccaverunt in similitudine praevaricationis adae.”

³² This background is consistent with the suggestion that Ambrosiaster may have practiced law before (presumably) joining the clergy. On Ambrosiaster’s interest in natural law, see S. Lunn-Rockliffe, *Ambrosiaster’s Political Theology*, Oxford Early Christian Studies, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 50–52; Robert Warrand Carlyle and Alexander James
commentary, Ambrosiaster had commented on Paul’s own allusion to natural law in Romans 2:14, suggesting that natural reason anticipated the Mosaic law in revealing knowledge of the Creator and arguing that “nature itself recognizes its Creator through its own capacity for discernment, not through the [Mosaic] law but rather through natural reason (per rationem naturae).” According to Ambrosiaster, natural law was “implanted [by God] in nature itself,” allowing those between Adam’s fall and the Mosaic law to worship the Creator before the written law. So arguing from natural reason, Ambrosiaster concludes that death certainly did not reign over those who followed the natural law (in huiusmodi mors non regnavit). Therefore, in Ambrosiaster’s view, the mainstream reading could not be correct, so he rejects it in favor of the Latin.

Ambrosiaster is not willing then to accept the Greek text on its own terms. Rather, he wants the text to conform to natural reason as a more foundational rule. Ambrosiaster’s belief in the

33 “Ipsa ergo natura proprio iudicio creatorem suum agnoscit, non per legem, sed per rationem naturae; opus enim opificem cernit in sese.” Ambrosiaster Commentary on Romans 2:14 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 75), translation mine. Ambrosiaster identifies natural law with natural reason in the first edition (α) of his Commentary on Romans (10:8), where he refers to “the natural law, called reason” (lege naturae loquendi ratione) (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 347).

34 In natura ipsa inserta quodam modo est. Quest. 4.1, ed. A. Souter (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 50, 24).

35 Ambrosiaster Commentary on Romans 5:14.3 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 173).


37 Cf. Donaldson’s understanding Ambrosiaster’s criterion of reason as a principle of logic. See Donaldson, “Explicit References,” 210, 212.
correspondence of pre-Mosaic natural law and its incarnation in the text of the Mosaic law allows him to insist that any true scriptural text must also conform to natural reason.\textsuperscript{38} As he remarks in \textit{Question} 26, “[t]he Scripture wants … many things to be implied, so that the sense gathered from the words should never be contrary to the reason of religion.”\textsuperscript{39} So Ambrosiaster makes natural reason the final arbiter of texts.

We are not surprised then that, before offering his three criteria of the true text, Ambrosiaster accuses controversialists of changing the text because their arguments cannot stand up to reason. Unable to appeal to reason, they try to bypass reason by appealing directly to the authority (\textit{auctoritas}) of a written text (\textit{verba legis}, literally, “the words of the law”), even if that text is corrupt: “those who are unable to prevail on their own authority change the words of the law, so to speak, to claim their own meaning seemingly by the word of the law, so that, not reason, but the authority of the text would seem to prescribe what they want.”\textsuperscript{40}

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\textsuperscript{40} quis auctoritate uti non potest ad victoriam, verba legis adulterat, ut sensum suum quasi verbis legis adserat, ut non ratio, sed auctoritas praescribere videatur. Ambrosiaster \textit{Comm. Rom} 5:14.4e (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1, 177), translation my own, following Bray, who has “not rational argument, but the authority of the text,” discerning the appeal to an external authority. Bray, \textit{Commentaries}, 43. On the other hand,
We should point out though, that in his appeal to reason in Romans 5:14, Ambrosiaster ends up deciding *against* what is on text-critical grounds almost certainly the correct reading, leaving us to wonder how much his “criterion” is simply a pretext to favor the Old Latin version.

*Reason and Codex Bezae*

In light of Ambrosiaster’s appeal to reason, we can point to a similar prioritization of “reason” over the written letter of the text in Bezae’s tradition. Bezae’s numerous incremental improvements that have little if any support in the tradition but an evident rationale in the context offer a case in point. In his study on Bezae’s text of Matthew, M. W. Holmes identifies several categories of such improvements, including adjustments to style, word order, vocabulary, and emphasis, tendentious changes, explanatory glosses, and harmonizations among others, suggesting that the architects of this text applied a principle that in many ways superseded the literal text.\(^1\) In a similar way, G. Zuntz notes the use of “paradigmatical expansions,” made without reference to any preexisting text form, but solely to promote the authority of the apostles, that is, ”to present the Apostles and their manner of acting and speaking as guiding examples of Christian life.”\(^2\) In their appeal to considerations beyond the text, Bezae’s many improvements imply a principle, such as natural reason, operating behind the text that supercedes existing written text forms.


Criterion 2: History

Ambrosiaster’s preference for the Old Latin version is discernible in his consistent citation and defense of Old Latin readings against the Greek tradition that he believes to be corrupt. Yet in objecting to the Vulgate and its basis on this Greek tradition, Ambrosiaster must offer an account as to how the Old Latin version could be closer to the ancient text, given its own internal discrepancies and its divergence from extant Greek manuscripts. With his second criterion of history (historia) Ambrosiaster appeals to the greater antiquity of the Old Latin version on the basis of the original Greek manuscripts from which it was translated, which he insists were more accurate than those extant in contemporary times. As Ambrosiaster explains, “it is well-known that very long ago native Latin speakers translated the text we now have from ancient Greek codices.”

In his appeal to the antiquity of the Old Latin version, Ambrosiaster does not question the authority of the ancient Greek text itself, but rather Jerome’s access to this ancient text given the discrepancies in the available copies. While Jerome claimed to revise the Latin version to “its source” (de fonte) “in the Greek original” (ad graecam originem), Ambrosiaster suggests that the Greek Vorlage of the Old Latin version — older than any Greek text in his day — is closer to the true original, not only in its antiquity, but in bypassing the corruption introduced by schismatics and heretics into recent Greek manuscripts. Ambrosiaster explains:

46 Praef. ev., ed. R. Weber and R. Gryson, 5h ed. (1515.23,14); Ambrosiaster, Comm. Rom 5:14.4e (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum
“But after disputes were raised by troublesome schismatics and heretics to turn us away from unity, many passages were altered to a human sense so that what seemed good to people would be preserved in the letter of the text, with the result that even the Greeks themselves have divergent codices.”

Ambrosiaster singles out discrepancies introduced, not only by heretics, but by “a spirit of controversy” presumably within the orthodox church, noting that “the Greek codices … have discrepancies among themselves, which provoke a spirit of controversy … [such that] those who are unable to prevail on their own authority change the letter of the law [i.e., the text].”

Now Jerome was well aware of recent controversies and the charge of corruption. To avoid this charge, he promises to use only the ancient Greek manuscripts (codicum graecorum emendata conlatione sed veterum). At the same time, Ambrosiaster is able to point to the “ancient Greek codices” (veteribus Graecis ... codicibus) from which the original Latin version was translated “very long ago” (porro olim de veteribus Graecis translatos codicibus), implying that what was ancient to these ancient translators is even more ancient than the manuscripts presently available to Jerome. Of course, Jerome can reply that the Old Latin is a mere translation of a source originally Greek. He reminds his

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48 de Graecis codicibus, quasi non ipsi ab invicem discrepent, quod facit studium contentionis, quia enim propria quis auctoritate uti non potest ad victoriam, verba legis adulterat. Ambrosiaster Comm. Rom 5:14.4e (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1:177).


readers that “there can be no doubt it [i.e. the source] was Greek” and, moreover, that the full meaning of the original is obscured in the Latin.\footnote{graecum esse non dubium est. Praef. ev. (1515.20), translation mine.} Ambrosiaster replies by assuring his readers of the skill of the translators as native Latin speakers (Latinos).\footnote{Ambrosiaster Comm. Rom 5:14.4e (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1:177).} Surely, translators of such competence were able to produce a translation that reflected the quality, clarity, and authority of an original.

Yet for his argument to succeed Ambrosiaster must somehow show that the Old Latin version has been transmitted faithfully in the same period in which the Greek tradition has suffered corruption. Ambrosiaster claims that “the innocence of former times has safeguarded [the original Latin version] and now certifies [it] to us without corruption.”\footnote{Latinos porro olim de veteribus Graecis translatos codicibus. Ambrosiaster, Comm. Rom 5:14.4e (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 81.1:177).} But what is this almost naive innocence to which Ambrosiaster alludes? One clue lies in his earlier allusion to a “spirit of controversy” and its corrupting effect on the Greek text, suggesting that this “innocence” refers to freedom from schism, heresy, and controversy. But how is it possible that, after the same period of copying, the Old Latin version would have suffered any less corruption?

In fact, the relative “innocence” of the Latin West in comparison with the Greek East was taken for granted by contemporary observers in both East and West, as seen in Sozomen’s account of the post-Nicene period from the early fifth century:

The Church throughout the whole of the West in its entirety regulated itself by the doctrines of the Fathers, and kept aloof from all contentions and hair-splitting about dogma. As to
the Eastern Church, … [t]here were some … who were fond of wrangling and battled against the term “consubstantial.””

The “innocence” of the West is still captured in the decades following Ambrosiaster’s dispute with Jerome in a letter from Pope Anastasius to John of Jerusalem (401), in which the former can credibly profess ignorance, not only of Origen’s writings or their contents, but even of Origen himself: “As for Origen, whose writings he [Rufinus] has translated into our language, I have neither formerly known, nor do I now seek to know either who he was or what expression he may have given to his thought.”

While Anastasius’s exaggerated plea of ignorance is no doubt a matter of self-preservation in a climate of suspicion, it only works because of the reputation on which it depends, namely, that of the relative innocence of the West as a source of potentially heretical speculation. Such innocence is implied also in Basil of Caesarea’s repeated requests to the bishops of Italy and Gaul for assistance in mediating the Antiochian schism between rival Nicene factions in the 370’s. As Basil writes:

It is not only one Church which is in peril, nor yet two or three which have fallen … The mischief of this heresy spreads almost from the borders of Illyricum to the Thebaid. Its bad seeds were first sown by the infamous Arius … souls are drenched in ignorance, because adulterators of the word imitate the truth. … [Yet] in addition to the open attack of the heretics, the Churches are reduced to utter helplessness

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by the war raging among those who are supposed to be orthodox.\textsuperscript{57}

Of course, Basil’s appeal to Western bishops, rather than bishops in his own Eastern parts, implies a certain confidence in the greater orthodoxy of the church in the Western half of the empire.

So, this contrast between East and West in their relative exposure to heresy offers a promising account of the kind of innocence Ambrosiaster claims for the Old Latin version in escaping the corrupting influence of theological controversy. Due to its transmission in the theological backwater of the pre-fourth-century Latin West — at the same time the “heretic” Origen was active in the East — the Latin version was safeguarded from corruption simply because it was remote from the centers of heresy and, moreover, presented a less appealing target to heretics who naturally preferred to corrupt the original language. So Ambrosiaster’s view of the reliability of the Old Latin version in his day rests fundamentally on its supposed reproduction of ancient Greek texts, accurately translated and relatively insulated from the corrupting influence of the controversies to which the recent Greek tradition had in his view become susceptible. In this way, he can argue that the Old Latin version supplies more direct access to the ancient Greek tradition.

\textit{History and Codex Bezae}

While we cannot accept Ambrosiaster’s fanciful conception of the Latin version as a purer tradition, his opinion that the Old Latin version still preserved the ancient Greek text of its translators is instructive for the potential light it sheds on the implied relationship between Bezae’s Latin and Greek columns. On the one hand, Bezae’s Latin column reveals a contemporary northern-Italian Old

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Epist.} 92.1–2 (Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers\textsuperscript{2} 8:178; Patrologia Graeca 32:477–80).
Latin text dating to the years 350–380. On the other, judging from its archaic *nomina sacra*, Bezae’s Greek column presents an apparently archaic Greek text, as D. C. Parker observes, “[while] in the Greek column, the scribe of D is imitating practices totally archaic for the year 400 … [t]he Latin text, by contrast, presents the contemporary situation.” Parker concludes: “Particularly significant for our study is the discovery that the *nomina sacra* are at different stages in the two columns: the Latin traditions are changing and developing, whilst those in the Greek remain static and archaic.” So Bezae apparently tries to show that the Old Latin version can stand side-by-side with archaic Greek traditions.

Indeed, Bezae’s bilingual format creates the impression that the Greek and Latin texts are highly complementary. Certainly, the layout of the columns in discrete sense units encourages comparison between the traditions. In addition, there has been an impressive attempt by Bezae’s early correctors to bring the Greek and Latin columns into even closer agreement. Parker observes of Bezae’s earliest corrector (G) that “[o]ne of the purposes of his activities in Acts is to remove discrepancies between the columns.” This creates a strong impression that the two sides are intended to support each other and that in some sense Bezae’s archaic Greek text was


59 Parker, *Bezae*, 104.

60 Parker, *Bezae*, 106.

61 See Parker, *Bezae*, 247–249. The degree of correspondence between the columns varies from book to book with greater similarity in Matthew and John, but less in Mark and Acts.

62 See Parker, *Bezae*, 73

63 Parker, *Bezae*, 128.
intended to validate the Old Latin with a putative Greek *Vorlage*, much as the Vulgate claimed to rest on a Greek model. But if this is so, it implies that Bezae was produced with the interests of the Latin tradition in view, to demonstrate the historical continuity of an Old Latin text with the Greek tradition.

**Criterion 3: Authority**

Ambrosiaster’s objection to the Greek manuscript tradition on the basis of its inner discrepancies seems incompatible with his preference for the Old Latin version, known equally for its discrepancies, leading Jerome to challenge proponents of the Old Latin version, “if they want us to trust the Latin copies, let them tell us which ones, for there are nearly as many varieties as manuscripts.” 64 Ambrosiaster’s third criterion of “authority” (*auctoritas*) answers Jerome’s challenge, singling out manuscripts that agree with ancient writers as worthy of trust, arguing, “today you will find that the same text that is closely preserved by the Latin codices is cited precisely by the ancients, Tertullian, Victorinus and Cyprian.” 65 So Ambrosiaster believes that the true text lies somewhere in the Old Latin version, identifiable through its agreement with the ancient authorities.66

**Authority in Codex Bezae**

Ambrosiaster’s criterion of authority may clarify Bezae’s parallels with the citations of second-century Christian writers, such as Irenaeus, that have led too quickly to Bezae’s own assignment to the second century. While Bezae’s more diffuse second-century

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64 *Praef. in ev*, translation mine.


parallels seem to have come through the Old Latin version —
judging from their agreement with various witnesses of this tradition
— other more striking parallels that occur apparently only in Bezae
may have entered its text directly. Ambrosiaster’s criterion provides
a context in which a fourth-century text might appropriate the
citation of a second-century writer to correct or legitimate this text
on the basis of the authority of that ancient writer. If so, Bezae
would in fact represent a fourth-century text that cites second-century
writers, rather than, as is typically assumed, the late copy of an
ancient text form cited by second-century writers.

DID AMBROSIASTER KNOW
BEZAÉ’S PRODUCERS?

The prevailing view of Bezae’s tradition is that its Greek
column has a close genealogical relationship to the Vorlage of its
Latin column.\(^67\) So given Ambrosiaster’s express interest in the
Vorlage of the Old Latin version, it is tempting to consider whether
Ambrosiaster knew Bezae’s producers. While Ambrosiaster’s
pseudonymity presents an obvious difficulty, we can connect him to
Bezae’s larger context by at least three inferences:

1. He was a presbyter at Rome.\(^68\)
2. He had legal training and possibly a background in law.\(^69\)
3. He had a negative opinion of the Vulgate, regarding it as
   based on corrupt Greek manuscripts.

But we can make parallel inferences about Bezae’s context:

\(^{67}\) Parker, *Bezae*, 248.

\(^{68}\) Lunn-Rockliffe, *Political Theology*, 83–84, from the view expressed
   of presbyters in his writings.

\(^{69}\) Lunn-Rockliffe, *Political Theology*, 57, from a special interest in the
   law and legal proceedings.
1. Bezae’s initial corrector, “Corrector G,” seems to have been an individual with some authority in the church, perhaps a bishop or presbyter.\(^70\)

2. Bezae’s distinctive “b-d” uncial script, known almost exclusively from legal documents, suggests that it was transcribed by an individual with a background in law.\(^71\) This legal connection leads Parker to ascribe the manuscript to the Roman law school in Berytus.\(^72\)

3. Bezae’s bilingual format and choice of texts stands in clear disjunction to Jerome’s efforts to bring the Old Latin version into conformity with the Greek tradition, by accomplishing nearly the opposite, namely, presenting a Greek text with a “slavish” Old Latin representation.\(^73\)

Considering the effort and expense of producing a codex such as Bezae, we are immediately impressed by its use of an Old Latin text that had only recently been marked for obsolescence. While we hesitate to draw a direct connection, what we can gather about Bezae’s context is remarkably consistent with what we know also about Ambrosiaster.

**CONCLUSION**

In this article, I have examined Ambrosiaster’s three criteria of the true text as a background for illuminating Bezae’s bilingual tradition. Ambrosiaster’s defense of the Old Latin version reveals a


\(^{71}\) On “b-d” uncial, see B. Bischoff, *Latin palaeography: antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 74, who notes “the very considerable component of legal texts transmitted in this kind of writing.” On Ambrosiaster's interest in law, see Lunn-Rockliffe, *Political Theology*, 50–57.

\(^{72}\) Parker, *Bezae*, 281.

\(^{73}\) Fischer, “Lateinischer Sprache,” 42.
strong motive to legitimate the Old Latin version in relation to the Greek text, a motive that seems to lie behind Bezae’s presentation of Greek and Latin columns. I pointed to three distinctive characteristics of Bezae’s bilingual tradition that correspond to qualities Ambrosiaster attributes to the true text—reason, history, and authority—namely, its incremental conjectural improvements, its pairing of an archaic (or archaizing) Greek text with a contemporary Old Latin text, and its parallels with the scriptural citations of ancient writers, such as Irenaeus. In fact, just as Ambrosiaster’s remarks represent a critique of the Vulgate, so too might we regard Bezae’s presentation of mutually corroborating Greek and Latin columns, as in some sense a critique of the Vulgate, specifically, of the Vulgate’s claim of greater fidelity to the Greek text. Ambrosiaster’s potential relevance to the situation that motivated Bezae’s own producers suggests that we cannot overlook the fourth century in considering Bezae’s context and history.

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