

Early Textual Variants That Downplay the Roles of Women in the Bethany Account

Richard G. Fellows, rfellows@shaw.ca

Abstract: It has been suggested that a number of textual variants in the Bethany account in John 11:1, 2, 3, 5; 12:2 suggest that Martha was not originally present but was interpolated at a later stage to minimize the importance of Mary. This article will argue that these variants are best explained not by a theory of interpolation but by a general tendency to downplay the role of women and by subsequent attempts to harmonize the text to the immediate context. In particular, we will see that an alteration to 11:1 defined Martha by her relationship to her male relative (Lazarus) rather than to her sister Mary and inadvertently created tensions with 11:2–3. This led to later adjustments that we see in the text, in particular in P66. This article makes a contribution to the subject of textual variants that suppress women, a topic that will require more research in the future.

Introduction

A recent article by Elizabeth Schrader drew my attention to many curious textual variants at John 11:1, 2, 3, 5; 12:2 in P66.¹ Schrader points out that Martha was absent from John 11:1–3 in P66 before it was corrected. After analyzing the textual data, she concludes that Martha was not originally present in the Gospel of John but interpolated into the text at a later stage in the second century to minimize the importance of Mary, whom she sees as Mary the Magdalene.

It will be shown here that these variants are best explained, not by a theory of interpolation, but by a simple sexist tendency² and subsequent attempts to harmonize the text to the immediate context. In particular, we will see that a sexist alteration to 11:1 inadvertently created tensions with 11:2–3, and this led to later adjustments that we see in the text as it was first copied by the scribe of P66 (below I will lay out my proposed sequence of events). Supporting evidence for sexism in P66*, found at 11:5 and 12:2, is also discussed. This article therefore makes a contribution to the subject of sexist variants, about which surprisingly little has been written.³

I extend thanks to the anonymous reviewers who offered constructive critique and to the editor Tommy Wasserman for all his feedback that have led to significant improvement of this article.

¹ Elizabeth Schrader, “Was Martha of Bethany Added to the Fourth Gospel in the Second Century?,” *HTR* 110 (2017): 360–92. The present article has benefited greatly from private communication with Schrader.

² By *sexist tendency*, I mean a propensity to reduce the status of women.

³ Bart D. Ehrman’s statement concerning textual variants that reflect the oppression of women continues to be true: “We are still awaiting an extensive and rigorous analysis.” See Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 290. The text of Acts in Codex Bezae has received the most attention. See Ben Witherington, “Anti-feminist Tendencies of the ‘Western’ Text in Acts,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 82–84. Michael W. Holmes suggests that many of the variants assembled by Witherington can be explained by accidents and a tendency to clarify the text. However, he cites no variants that enhanced the role of women, and Witherington’s conclusion

P66, also known as Papyrus Bodmer II, is perhaps our earliest manuscript of the Bethany account. The manuscript is dated by NA28 to circa 200 CE and by Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse to 200–250 CE, although Brent Nongbri argues that it could be from as late as the fourth century.⁴ It is widely agreed that the manuscript was initially copied from one exemplar, sometimes corrected *in scribendo*, and then corrected against another exemplar.⁵ Also, the corrector is thought to be the original scribe, at least in most cases. James R. Royse finds that there is only one place in the manuscript where a second hand is clearly at work. He writes that “the infrequency of corrections by anyone other than the scribe seems well established” and cites Victor Martin, Kurt Aland, and Gordon Fee.⁶

For this study I have consulted the manuscript evidence published in the International Greek New Testament Project’s online electronic edition, which will be included in the forthcoming *Editio Critica Maior* of John and includes those manuscripts considered important for determining the initial text.⁷ Images of all included manuscripts are available in the New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room (NT.VMR),⁸ and images specifically of P66 in this article are drawn from the Bodmer Lab website.⁹

1. John 11:1

1.1. The Textual Data

1.1.1. Greek Manuscripts

John 11:1 introduces Lazarus as a sick man from Bethany, the village “of Mary and of Martha her sister.” This wording reflects the reading [a] shown in figure 1 below, attested by 143 of the

remains statistically sound. See Michael W. Holmes, “Women and the ‘Western’ Text of Acts,” in *The Book of Acts as Church History: Apostelgeschichte als Kirchengeschichte*, ed. Tobias Nicklas and Michael Tilly (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 183–203. Examples of possible sexist variants, especially in P46, are discussed by Edgar Battad Ebojo, “Sex, Scribes, and Scriptures,” *Journal of Biblical Text Research* 36 (2015): 367–94. Prisca is discussed by Dominika A. Kurek-Chomycz, “Is There an ‘Anti-Priscan’ Tendency in the Manuscripts? Some Textual Problems with Prisca and Aquila,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 107–28; and recently by Richard G. Fellows, “Early Sexist Textual Variants, and Claims That Prisca, Junia, and Julia Were Men,” *CBQ* 84 (2022): 252–78.

⁴ Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse, “Early New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Palaeography,” *ETL* 84 (2012): 443–74, here 470; Brent Nongbri, “The Limits of Palaeographic Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations on the Date and Provenance of P. Bodmer II (P66),” *MH* 71 (2014): 1–35.

⁵ A. F. J. Klijn, “Papyrus Bodmer II (John I–XIV) and the Text of Egypt,” *NTS* 3 (1956–1957): 327–34; Howard M. Teeple and F. Allyn Walker, “Notes on the Plates in Papyrus Bodmer II,” *JBL* 78 (1959): 148–52, here 152; Gordon D. Fee, “Corrections of the Papyrus Bodmer ii and the Nestle Greek Testament,” *JBL* 84 (1965): 66–72, here 72; James R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri*, NTTSD 36 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 418.

⁶ Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 413–15; Victor Martin, ed., *Papyrus Bodmer II* (Cologne-Geneva: Bibliotheca Bodmeriana, 1958), 31; Kurt Aland, “Das Johannesevangelium auf Papyrus: Zum neu veröffentlichten Papyrus Bodmer II,” *FF* 31 (1957): 181; Fee, “Corrections of Papyrus Bodmer II,” 248.

⁷ The International Greek New Testament Project’s online electronic edition of John, <https://itsee-web.cal.bham.ac.uk/iohannes/transcriptions/index.html>.

⁸ The New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room (NT.VMR) website is maintained by the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace>.

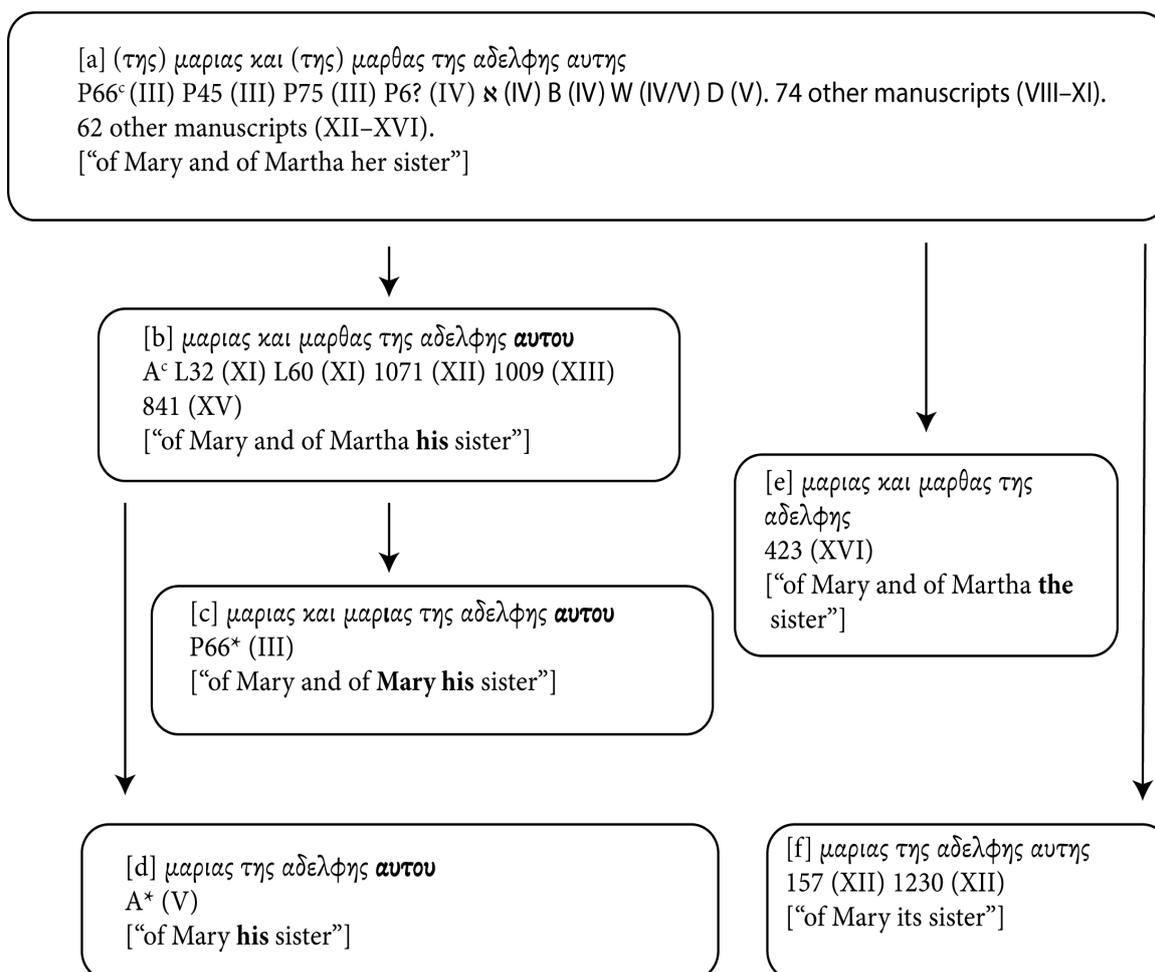
⁹ Bodmer Lab, “Papyri PB2,” <https://bodmerlab.unige.ch/fr/constellations/papyri/mirador/1072205287?page=078>. The images are published under Creative Commons CC-BY-NC, 4.0.

examined 154 Greek manuscripts included in the edition.¹⁰ The figure displays the proposed local-genealogical stemma with reading [a] as the reading that best explains how all readings in the variation-unit arose. The dating of the manuscripts is indicated in brackets.¹¹

The textual variation concerns the pronouns used to describe the relationship of the three siblings. The best-attested adjustment is the replacement of the feminine pronoun *αυτης* with the masculine *αυτου*, resulting in reading [b] “of Mary and of Martha *his* sister,” which introduces Martha as *Lazarus’s* sister. This reading, present in at least six manuscripts (P6 had either reading [a] or [b], but damage prevents a decision), is important, not only because it is well attested, but also because it can explain readings [c] and [d], as we will see.

P66* had reading [c] (“of Mary and of Mary *his* sister”) before the manuscript was corrected to reading [a] (“of Mary and of Martha *her* sister”).

Figure 1: Greek variants in John 11:1

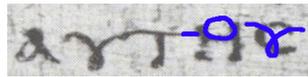


¹⁰ Reading [a] has inconsequential variations: D gives Mary and Martha the definite article, and ⲛ does so for Mary only.

¹¹ The datings are drawn from the Kurzgefasste Liste maintained by the Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung, online at <http://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/liste>.

Figure 2. *αυτου* in P66* at John 11:1

Figure 2 shows that *αυτου* has been corrected to *αυτης*, but *υ* can be seen, partly erased beneath the *ς*, as reconstructed in figure 3. When the *ου* was erased, the right of the cross bar of the *τ* was removed and was never replaced.

Figure 3. Reconstruction of *αυτου*, the original reading of P66*

As well as having the masculine pronoun, P66* has a unique variant. In place of Martha's name, it has Mary: "of Mary and of *Mary* his sister." This reading introduces two Marys, one of whom was Lazarus's sister. A corrector changed the name back to Martha by partly erasing the *ι* and inserting a supralinear *θ*, but it is clear that the scribe originally wrote *μαριας*. See figure 4.

Figure 4. *μαριας* in P66*

Royse writes, "By a backward leap (*μαριας και μαρθας*) the scribe wrote *και μαριας*, but caught the error by the end of the word since he continues with *της*."¹² However, we will see later that P66* has only one sister at 11:3, where it reads "*απεστιλεν ουν μαρ[?]α*" ("Therefore Mary sent") in place of "*απεστειλαν ουν αι αδελφαι*" ("Therefore the sisters sent"), and that it is difficult to explain how this reading arose if Martha was presented as a sister in 11:1 in all the ancestor manuscripts of P66. A better explanation is that an ancestor of P66* had reading [b] ("of Mary and of Martha his sister"). *αδελφης* here is singular, so the reader would conclude that *this* Mary was not Lazarus's sister. However, the next verse (11:2) refers to a Mary who *was* Lazarus's sister: "Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill." A reader may then have concluded that there were two Marys, only one of whom was Lazarus's sister. The reader would still need to resolve the contradiction that the sister's name in 11:1 is Martha, whereas her name in 11:2 is Mary, and one could resolve this contradiction by changing a single letter in 11:1 to convert Martha to Mary there. This gives the reading of P66*, [c], ("of Mary and of Mary his sister"). If this interpretation is correct, this manuscript is an early, indirect witness to reading [b].

The first hand of Alexandrinus, A* (reading [d], "of Mary his sister"), may have resolved the same tension by eliminating Martha (A* was later corrected by a different hand to return it to reading [b]). Alexandrinus may have had a tendency to omit female names, for it also omits Prisca (1 Cor 16:19) and Persis (Rom 16:12).¹³ The absence of the name Martha in 11:1 in P66* and A* can therefore be explained as harmonization with 11:2 following an earlier change to the gender of the pronoun.

Reading [e] ("of Mary and of Martha the sister") in minuscule 423 simply omits the pronoun.

Reading [f] (*Μαριας της αδελφης αυτης*), which is attested in two twelfth-century manuscripts, also omits Martha. Here *αυτης*, being feminine, must refer to the village, and we must take *αδελφη* to mean Christian sister, rather than biological sister (as it does at Matt 12:50;

¹² Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 430.

¹³ See discussion in Fellows, "Early Sexist Textual Variants," 270.

Mark 3:35; 10:30; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 7:15; 9:5; Phlm 1:2; Jas 2:15; 2 John 1:13). While this sentence is awkward, we could translate, “Bethany, the village of Mary, the [Christian] sister from it.” This reading retains the feminine pronoun but avoids applying it to Mary.

1.1.2. Early Versions

The Sinaitic Syriac introduces Mary and Martha by stating that Lazarus was their brother (supporting reading [g] below).¹⁴

The Latin manuscripts show a tendency similar to the Greek manuscripts. Reading [a] is supported by the vast majority of Latin manuscripts.

[a] mariae et marthae sororis eius [“of Mary and of Martha her sister”]	VL 11A* VL 15* rell.
[g] αδελφος Μαριας και Μαρθας [“the brother of Mary and Martha”]	sy ^{s.(p)}
[h] mariae et marte sorores eius	VL 2
marie et marthae sorores eius	VL 11A ^c
mariae et marthe sororibus eius	VL 48
mariae et marthae sororum eius [“of Mary and of Martha his sisters ”]	VL 11 VL 15 ^c VL 29 VL 30 VL 47
[i] mariae et sororis eius [“of Mary and her sister”]	VL 9A

1.2. Analysis

1.2.1. Sexism

Only with reading [a] (“of Mary and of Martha her sister”) is Martha introduced as Mary’s sister, rather than as Lazarus’s sister. This would have been surprising for early readers of the text, for people were usually defined by their relationship to a *male* relative. In the New Testament, we have James son of Alphaeus; James and John, sons of Zebedee; Peter, son of Jonah; Judas, son of James; Sopater of Pyrrhus; Anna, daughter of Phanuel; Mary, mother of John Mark; the mother of Rufus; and the sister of Nereus. By describing Martha as Mary’s sister, the text honors Mary, a woman, over Lazarus, a man. John Peter Lange correctly states that this text “places Mary, as the most prominent personality of the group, in the foreground.”¹⁵

My 2022 article lists the New Testament texts that give women precedence over men who are not their sons.¹⁶ In almost every case we find an early manuscript that demotes the women, often by simply reversing the order so that the males are mentioned first.¹⁷ We should therefore fully expect to find early variants that adjust 11:1 so that Mary is no longer honored over her

¹⁴ Piotr Jutkiewicz points out that, at John 11:2, the Syriac Sinaiticus emphasizes Mary’s act of washing Jesus’s feet and omits her act of anointing. He suggests that this manuscript presents Mary as a disciple. If he is right, it is perhaps a subservient form of female discipleship that is being promoted. See Piotr Jutkiewicz, “Mary as a Disciple: The Reception of the Figure of Mary of Bethany (John 11:1–46) in the Old Syriac Sinaiticus Manuscript,” *CBQ* 84 (2022): 97–108.

¹⁵ John Peter Lange, *The Gospel according to John: An Exegetical and Doctrinal Commentary*, trans. Peter Schaff (repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 339.

¹⁶ Fellows, “Early Sexist Textual Variants,” 253–60.

¹⁷ The reversals at Acts 17:12; 18:26 are also discussed by Witherington, “Anti-feminist Tendencies,” 82.

brother. Reading [b] (“of Mary and of Martha *his* sister”) is the simplest solution available to a scribe who took offense at reading [a], since it involves the changing of just two letters. While it is a small change, it cannot be explained by a slip of the pen or the eye. We have seen that reading [b], which is well attested, can explain readings [c] and [d] and that readings [e] and [f] also avoid honoring Mary over Lazarus. Sexism can therefore explain all the Greek variants, directly or indirectly.

There are six phrases in the New Testament that name a woman and define someone by their familial relationship to her. See table 1 below. In every case we find variants that seem to show a reluctance to define people by their relationship to females. Mark 6:22 is particularly interesting because the pronoun was changed in spite of the tension that was created with the rest of the narrative, where it is clear that Herodias was Herod’s wife, not his daughter. There is no reason to suppose that those making sexist adjustments to the text cared about inadvertent contradictions that their changes created.¹⁸

Table 1. Phrases defining someone by relationship to a named woman

	Likely Original	Variant	MSS Variant
John 11:1	Μαρίας και Μάρθας τῆς ἀδελφῆς αὐτῆς Mary and Martha, her sister	Μαρίας και Μάρθας τῆς ἀδελφῆς αὐτοῦ Mary and Martha, his sister	A ^c L32 L60 1071 1009 841 (P66* A*)
John 11:5	Μάρθαν και τὴν ἀδελφὴν αὐτῆς Martha and her sister	Μαρθαν και την αδελφην Martha and her sister	P66*
Matt 14:6	ἡ θυγάτηρ τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος the daughter of Herodias herself	η θυγατηρ αυτου Ηρωδιας his daughter, Herodias	D
Mark 6:22	τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος the daughter of Herodias herself	τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρωδιάδος his daughter, Herodias	⊗ B D L Δ 565
Mark 6:3	ὁ τέκτων, ὁ υἱὸς τῆς Μαρίας the carpenter, the son of Mary	ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός και τῆς Μαρίας the son of the carpenter of Mary	f ³ 33 ^{vid} 579 700 (P45 ^{vid} 565 2542) it vg ^{mss} bo ^{mss}
Matt 1:16	Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus	Joseph, to whom Mary a virgin was betrothed, was the father of Jesus	Syr ^s (emphasizes Joseph over Mary also at Matt 1:25; Luke 2:16)

The pronoun *eius*, found in Latin witnesses to reading [a], can mean “her” or “his,” but in this context it is naturally taken to refer to Mary because she is the most recently mentioned person. There is no way in Latin to make the pronoun explicitly masculine. The simplest option for a sexist corrector of reading [a] was to make the sisters plural, giving reading [h] (“of Mary and of Martha his sisters”). This change might alternatively have been motivated by a desire for clarity. Variant [i] (“of Mary and her sister”), in VL 9A, omits Martha’s name, and the same

¹⁸ NA28, however, favors τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτοῦ Ἡρωδιάδος precisely *because* it is the harder reading. The SBL and THGNT editions are surely correct to choose τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς τῆς Ἡρωδιάδος, since it is unlikely that the author of Mark’s Gospel would create such confusion. James Snapp argues persuasively for the feminine pronoun here: <https://www.thetextofthegospels.com/2018/07/mark-622-whose-daughter-danced.html>.

manuscript omits Martha at 11:24, Philip at 14:9, and Caiaphas at 18:28. All these omissions create no ambiguities or change the meanings of the texts (VL 9A at 11:5 clarifies the relationship between Martha and Mary). It should come as no surprise that the manuscript omits the female name disproportionately to male names, though this may be coincidental.¹⁹

1.2.2. Clarification

It might be suggested that reading [b] (“of Mary and of Martha his sister”) was created with no other motive than to clarify Martha’s relationship to Lazarus, which is more important than her relationship to Mary, since this passage is primarily about Lazarus. However, the passage is *not* primarily about Lazarus. Mary is the more important character, especially in this context, since she is well known to the audience for anointing Jesus (11:2). Unlike his sisters, Lazarus does not even have a speaking part in the narrative. Also, scribes wanting to add clarity would surely have made the sisters plural—“Mary and Martha, his sisters”—but no Greek manuscript has this reading. Furthermore, reading [b] creates little clarity, since it generates a tension with 11:2, as we have seen.

1.2.3. Demotion of Mary

Schrader has a very different interpretation of the same data. She sees reading [d] (μαριας της αδελφης αυτου, “of Mary his sister”) as the initial text and other readings caused by an attempt to demote Mary. I have six objections to this proposal:

1. Reading [a] is supported by the vast majority of manuscripts, including important early manuscripts such as P45, P75, \aleph , and B, but reading [d] has only one attesting witness.
2. Someone wanting to demote Mary would rather have placed Martha’s name before Mary’s.
3. While it was common for scribes to create variants that promoted men over women, the reverse was rare, so it is highly unlikely that reading [d] (“of Mary his sister”) would have given rise to reading [a] (“of Mary and of Martha her sister”).
4. Schrader would have us believe that a scribe diminished Mary at the expense of giving her role to Martha, but the New Testament textual transmission to my knowledge shows no evidence elsewhere that anyone was interested in changing the status of women relative to each other. Mary the Magdalene herself is frequently listed ahead of other women (Matt 27:56; 27:61; 28:1; Mark 15:40; 15:47; 16:1; Luke 8:2; 24:10), and, as far as I know, no scribe switched the order of the names to demote her. Indeed, Mary the Magdalene’s prominence is enhanced in several manuscripts that have the singular $\eta\upsilon$ instead of the plural $\etaσαν$ in Luke 24:10.²⁰ The only significant omission of Mary the Magdalene occurs at Matt 27:56, where Codex Sinaiticus alters the descriptions of all three women and omits Mary the Magdalene or at least omits Μαγδαληνη.

¹⁹ Schrader (“Was Martha,” 364, 382, 386) uses VL 9A to argue that Martha was absent from the original text of John 11.

²⁰ K U Π Ψ f¹ 2 69 118 are cited by Reuben Swanson, *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines against Codex Vaticanus: Luke* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995). Metzger writes that $\eta\upsilon$ “singles out Mary Magdalene for special mention.” See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 157.

5. Schrader's theory does not easily explain the text of P66* (reading [c] "of Mary and of Mary his sister"). It requires that the words *και μαριας* were added to reading [d] to get reading [c], but it does not explain how this could have happened.²¹
6. Martha is mentioned also at 11:5, 19, 20, 21, 24, 30, 39; 12:2, and the manuscript evidence for her absence there is even weaker than it is at 11:1.²²

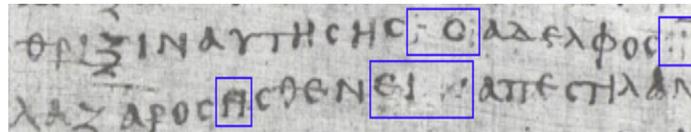
2. John 11:2

In John 11:2, we are told that Mary, who anointed Jesus, was the one whose brother Lazarus was sick, *ης ο αδελφος λαζαρος ησθενει* ("of whom the brother Lazarus was sick").

2.1. The Textual Data

As Schrader points out, P66* has a curious variant: *ης και αδελφος ην λαζαρος ασθενων* ("whose brother was also Lazarus being sick"), as seen in figure 5.

Figure 5. John 11:2 in P66



2.2. Analysis

It seems to me that this variant arose from an earlier attempt to minimize the tension between 11:2 and reading [b] of 11:1. If, as suggested above, an ancestor of P66* had "of Mary and of Martha his sister" (reading [b]) at 11:1, then a scribe may have felt the need to clarify that Mary, as well as Martha, was Lazarus's sister. This could explain the wording of P66* at 11:2, with its insertion of *και*. Thus, reading [b] of 11:1, which states that Martha was Lazarus's sister, might

²¹ She writes, "the words *της κωμης μαριας και μαριας* likely reflect some sort of scribal error, and the scribe of P66 does make occasional dittographic errors of entire words" (Schrader, "Was Martha," 362). However, this is not a dittographic error, for the word *και* is not repeated. Furthermore, while Royse gives five examples of dittographies of entire words in P66, he finds them all to be explicable by established scribal habits to which Schrader cannot appeal here (Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 441). Schrader might do better to propose reading [b] as an intermediate step between reading [d] and readings [c] and [a].

²² Schrader, "Was Martha," 382–84, points out that there are manuscripts of Tertullian, Chrysostom, and Cyril of Jerusalem that give the name Mary where we would expect to read Martha. However, we should expect to find this kind of confusion between the two names, for they differ by only one letter and are both Semitic and therefore foreign to most Greek speakers. Mary was the more famous of the sisters, and it is common for a person's words and actions to be misattributed to a more famous person. Schrader, "Was Martha," 386, further observes that Mary and Martha are never confused in the manuscripts of Luke 10:38–42, but here the narrative requires that the two women be carefully distinguished. Schrader provides arguments from outside of John 11, but it is beyond the scope of this article to address them.

have given rise to the clarification at 11:2 that Mary was *also* Lazarus's sister.²³ The manuscript was later corrected to the usual text.²⁴

3. John 11:3

3.1. The Textual Data

Figure 6 on the next page displays the stemma of attested readings in John 11:3a. Here, for simplicity, readings that differ only in word order are combined. Reading [a] best explains the rise of the other readings.

3.2. Analysis

The great majority of manuscripts report that the sisters sent a message to him (Jesus). This is reading [a] in figure 6 above (“Therefore the sisters sent to him, saying”). Here Mary and Martha are not defined by their relationship to Lazarus; they are described simply as *αι αδελφαι*/sorores, “the sisters.” As in 11:1 and 11:5, only their relationship to each other is recorded. However, I count fifty-one Greek manuscripts, and the twelve Latin manuscripts cited by Schrader, that add a personal pronoun giving more prominence to Lazarus (readings [b], [c], and [d]). In these manuscripts, Mary and Martha are now “his sisters.” While [b] added *αυτου*, [d] repurposed *αυτον* to make *αυτου* and omitted *προς*. Some manuscripts refer to Jesus by name: “Therefore his sisters sent to Jesus, saying” (reading [c]). All such manuscripts also include the masculine pronoun that refers to Lazarus. Reading [c] was therefore derived from reading [b] (“Therefore his sisters sent to him, saying”) and was likely motivated by a desire to avoid the ambiguity of having two male pronouns that refer to different people. If this scenario is correct, reading [b] must go back to the fourth century if not earlier, since reading [c] is attested in Codex Bezae (D).

The addition of the masculine pronoun to 11:3 cannot be explained by a mechanical slip. It is possible that it was inserted merely to add clarity, just as the feminine pronoun appears in many manuscripts at 11:19. However, this explanation is weakened slightly by the fact that reading [b] (“Therefore his sisters sent to him, saying”) actually created ambiguity, which some scribes felt the need to eliminate by creating reading [c] (“Therefore his sisters sent to Jesus, saying”). Another possibility is that correctors added the pronoun to define the sisters by their relationship to Lazarus rather than to each other—another more subtle example of sexism similar to that which led to the deletion of the feminine pronoun in 11:1.

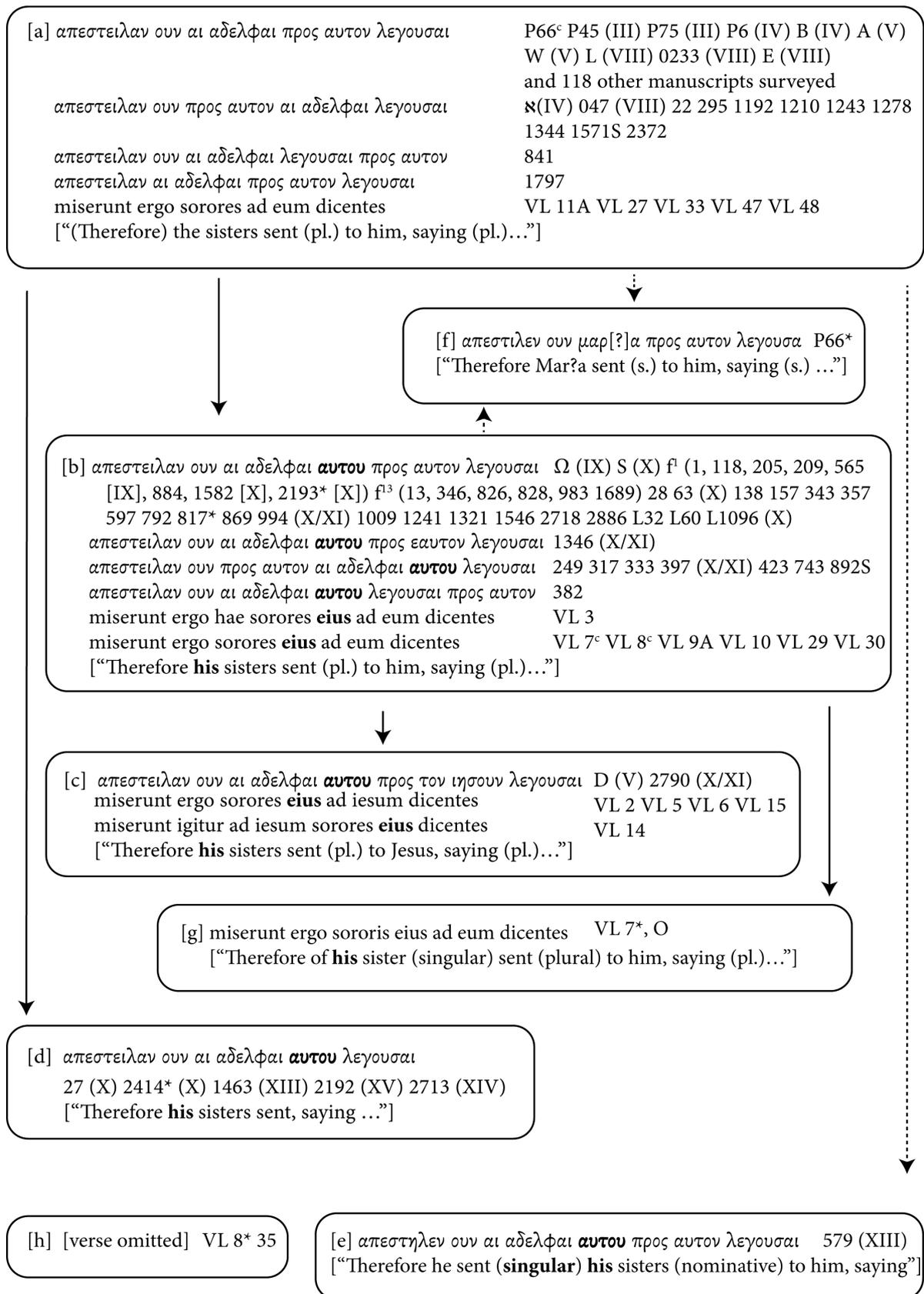
Minuscule 579 has reading [e] (“Therefore he sent [singular] his sisters [nominative] to him, saying”). It has a singular verb *απεστηλεν* with plural subject (the sisters). Schrader thinks this is an echo of an earlier text in which there was only one sister in this verse.²⁵ However, it could equally be an echo of a text in which the sisters were in the accusative case (*απεστηλεν*

²³ This also seems to be the view of Schrader, but she does not state the necessary implication that Martha stood in 11:1 when 11:2 was written in P66*.

²⁴ Fee (“Corrections of the Papyrus Bodmer ii,” 66–72, here 69) seems to have overlooked the fact that P66* has *ασθενων*, not *ησθενει*, for he suggests that “when the scribe ran into grammatical difficulties in coming to *ησθενει*, he deleted the *ην*, and perhaps at the same time changed the *και* to *ο*.” Comfort and Barrett read *ασθενει*, but figure 5 clearly shows that there has been some disruption at the end of the word. See Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Complete Text of the Earliest New Testament Manuscripts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 419.

²⁵ Schrader, “Was Martha,” 370, 384.

Figure 6: John 11:3 variants

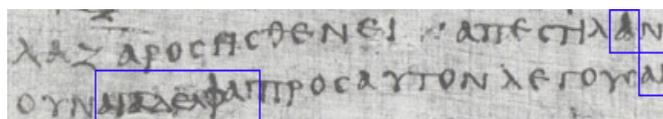


οὐν τὰς ἀδελφὰς αὐτοῦ). Such a reading would be translated “Therefore, he sent his sisters” and would give agency to Lazarus at the expense of the sisters. Either way, the reading as it stands in 579 is the result of an attempt to correct a predecessor against a more common reading such as reading [b]. The same manuscript has a similar variant at 12:2, which will be discussed later.

3.2.1. John 11:3 in P66

Again, P66* has an interesting variant [f] (“Therefore Mar?a sent to him, saying”). Here only one sister is mentioned as sending the message, and her name is given. Unfortunately, it is no longer clear whether the name was Mary or Martha, because αἱ ἀδελφαὶ has been written over the erased name (see fig. 7).

Figure 7. John 11:3 in P66



Both Schrader and I follow Fee, who suggested it was probably Mary, because that would be consistent with the text of this manuscript, in which Martha is absent in 11:1–2 (until she was added when the text was corrected).²⁶ Schrader, however, believes that P66* at 11:3 contains the initial text of the gospel, even though it is a singular reading.²⁷ In my opinion, a scribe simply harmonized 11:3 with what he read in 11:1–2. After Martha’s name was changed to Mary at 11:1 (see above) there was only one sister present. Thus, the reference to sisters (plural) in 11:3 made little sense, so someone replaced the sisters with Mary, who was the only sister introduced thus far in the manuscript. We will later summarize the sequence of changes made in the ancestor(s) of P66*.

Finally, reading [g] (“Therefore of his sister [singular] sent [plural] to him, saying”) differs from reading [b] by only one letter, since it has *sororis* in place of *sorores*. While its meaning is not clear, it assigns a bigger role to Lazarus than reading [a], reduces the sisters to one, and denies this one sister the dignity of being the subject of the verb.

²⁶ Fee, “Corrections of the Papyrus Bodmer ii,” 70. Schrader, “Was Martha,” 368.

²⁷ Schrader, “Was Martha,” 386. Schrader also sees significance in 11:4, which reads *ακουσας δε ο Ιησους ειπεν αυτη η ασθεναια...*, which is normally translated, “But when Jesus heard it, he said, ‘This illness...’” but it could also be translated, “But when Jesus heard it, he said *to her*, ‘The illness...’” The latter translation fits well when there is only one sister in 11:3. A corrector of P66 squeezed a comma between *ειπεν* (said) and *αυτη* (to her/this) at 11:4. As Schrader points out, this comma serves to clarify that the former translation is correct. The scribe of P66 had one sister in his first exemplar at 11:3 and naturally interpreted *αυτη* in 11:4 to be a reference to her. The scribe then found two sisters in 11:3 in his second exemplar and corrected 11:3 and added the comma to 11:4 to prevent his/her previous interpretation of *αυτη*. The two exemplars, with their differing number of sisters at 11:3, made the scribe realize the ambiguity of 11:4 and add the disambiguating comma. This comma tells us nothing about which meaning the author of John intended.

4. John 11:5

4.1. The Textual Data

[a] μαρθαν και την αδελφην αυτης και τον λαζαρον Martham et sororem eius et lazarum [“Martha and her sister and Lazarus”]	P66 ^c 2561 ^c Chrys ^{rell} rell. VL 5 VL 14 VL 27
[b] μαρθαν και την αδελφην και τον λαζαρον [“Martha and the sister and Lazarus”]	P66* (III) 2193 ^c
[c] martham sororem eius et mariam et lazarum [“Martha his sister and Mary and Lazarus”]	VL 48
[d] λαζαρον και τας αδελφας αυτου lazarum et sorores eius [“ Lazarus and his sisters”]	Chrys ^s VL 2 VL 3 VL 15
[e] lazarum et sororem eius [“Lazarus and his sister”]	VL 6
[f] lazarum et mariam et sororem eius [“ Lazarus and Mary and her sister”]	VL 8*
[g] lazarum et mariam et sororem eius martham [“ Lazarus and Mary and her sister Martha”]	VL8 ^c
[h] μαρθαν και την μαριαν την αδελφην αυτης και τον λαζαρον martham et mariam sororem eius et latzarum [“Martha and Mary her sister and Lazarus”]	P6 ^{vid} (IV) VL 30
[i] μαρθαν και την αδελφην αυτης μαριαν και τον λαζαρον martham et sororem eius mariam et lazarum [“Martha and her sister Mary and Lazarus”]	196 1230 2615 VL 4 VL 7 VL 9A VL 10 VL 11A VL 29 VL 33 VL 35 VL 47
[j] μαριαν και την αδελφην αυτης μαρθαν και τον λαζαρον μαριαμ και την αδελφην αυτης μαρθαν και τον λαζαρον μαριαμ και την αδελφην εαυτης μαρθαν και τον λαζαρον [“Mary and her sister Martha and Lazarus”]	f ⁱ (1 22 565 [IX] 884 1210 1582 [X]) f ¹³ (13 69 124 346 788 826 828) 138 357 543 994 1346 L253 Θ (IX) Qau 0233 (VIII)
[k] μαριαν και την αδελφην αυτης και τον λαζαρον [“Mary and her sister and Lazarus”]	597 2561* 2680

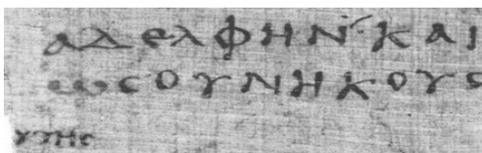
4.2. Analysis

Reading [a] in the list above, *ηγαπα δε ο ιησους την μαρθαν και την αδελφην αυτης και τον λαζαρον* (“Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus”) is certainly the initial text, for it is supported by almost all the Greek manuscripts. We will now show that this reading has three features that we may expect that scribes would correct and that it can explain the other readings.

4.2.1. Mary No Longer Defined as Martha's Sister

First, Mary is described as Martha's sister rather than as Lazarus's sister. This presents Martha, a woman, as more important than Lazarus, a man. This problem is solved in different ways by readings [b], [c], [d], and [e]. P66* and 2193^c omit the feminine pronoun, so that Mary is simply “the sister” (reading [b]). The pronoun was later added to the lower margin, as shown in figure 8, thus giving the reading [a].

Figure 8. The omission of *αυτης* in P66* in John 11:5



P66* also omits personal pronouns at 2:20; 6:60; 7:36, 37, 8:46; 9:30; 10:25, 29; 11:32; 12:16; 15:7, 16, 22, 25; 16:26; 17:11; 19; 18:2; 19:7.²⁸ In most of these cases, little or no meaning is lost. It is possible, then, that *αυτης* was omitted simply because it was considered unnecessary. While the author of the gospel emphasizes the relationship of the two women to each other, the originator of the variant in P66* was inclined to be less explicit, and this could reflect a sexist tendency.

Also, reading [c] (“Martha **his** sister and Mary and Lazarus”) changes the word order so that Martha is presented as Lazarus's sister, and Mary is no longer described as Martha's sister.

4.2.2. The Sisters No Longer Preceding Lazarus

Second, the women are mentioned before the man in this list of those whom Jesus loved. As Colleen M. Conway suggests, the sequence of names here “is more indicative of the prominence these characters will actually hold in the narrative, with the character of Martha receiving the most narrative space and Lazarus the least.”²⁹ So the order makes sense in the context, and, given the variants in word order involving names of men and women elsewhere in the New Testament, readings [d], [e], [f], and [g], which reverse the order and give Lazarus the position of honor, are only to be expected in our variation unit.

4.2.3. Harmonizing with 11:1

Third, Martha's sister is left anonymous in this verse and is mentioned after Martha. This contrasts with 11:1, where Mary is named and appears before Martha, and with 11:2, where Mary is the famous sibling. We should therefore not be surprised to find manuscripts that harmonize 11:5 with 11:1–2 by supplying Mary's name and by placing her before Martha. Thus, Mary is named in variants [c], [f], [g], [h], [i], [j], and [k]. Mary precedes her sister in readings [f], [g], [j], and [k], thus conforming the order to that in 11:1.³⁰ This harmonization has close parallels in manuscripts of Luke 8:51; 9:28; and Acts 1:13. In these verses Luke referred to John and James, in that order, but elsewhere the order is James and John.³¹ Several manuscripts

²⁸ In these texts the pronoun is in NA28.

²⁹ Colleen M. Conway, *Men and Women in the Fourth Gospel: Gender and Johannine Characterization* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 138.

³⁰ Bernard correctly observes that Θ and f³ here were “influenced by v.1.” See John Henry Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1972), 2:375 n. 1.

³¹ Matt 4:21; 10:2; 17:1; Mark 1:19, 29; 3:17; 5:37; 9:2; 10:35, 41; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 5:10; 6:14; 9:54.

promote James to his usual first position at Luke 8:51; 9:28; and Acts 1:13.³² Similarly, Andrew is listed before James and John at Matt 10:2 and Luke 6:14 but after them at Mark 3:17–18. Again, Andrew was sometimes promoted at Mark 3:17–18 and once at Acts 1:13.³³ Readings [d] and [e] avoid the problem of the inconsistent order of Mary and Martha by naming neither sister at 11:5.

4.2.4. “Lazarus and His Sister” as the Initial Text?

Schrader proposes that reading [e] (“Lazarus and his sister”), which has only one sister, was the initial text. She then suggests that reading [a] arose and was conflated with reading [e] to give rise to all the other readings. Of all the readings, reading [e] gives the least prominence to the women, since it places Lazarus first and gives only one woman and does not name her. Since scribes show a tendency to demote women relative to men, not the reverse, this reading would hardly have given rise to the other readings. Schrader’s suggestion that reading [a] was created to distract from the prominent role of Mary does not work well here. Someone who wanted to diminish Mary would have listed Lazarus ahead of her. Reading [e] exists only in a single Latin manuscript from the eleventh or twelfth century, so its manuscript support is too weak to be worthy of serious consideration.

5. John 12:2

5.1. The Textual Data

Most manuscripts have the plural verb *εποιησαν* at the beginning of John 12:2. As Schrader points out, however, P66 (III), 295 (XIII), 579 (XIII), and 841 (XV) have a singular verb. The Sinaitic Syriac, Syr^s, also has the singular verb. P66*, for example, has *εποιησεν αυτω δειπνον εκει και μαρθα διηκονει*. Schrader proposes that the initial text had the singular verb and that it is evidence that Martha was lacking in the text.

5.2. Analysis

Schrader translates P66, “there she [Mary] made a dinner for him and Martha served.”³⁴ However, the intended subject of *εποιησεν* here is more likely to be Lazarus, since he has been mentioned just seven words earlier in 12:1.³⁵ Food preparation was not the sole preserve of women in Roman Egypt (the probable provenance of P66) or elsewhere. In any case, the originator of this variant may have had in mind that Lazarus directed his household (perhaps including Martha and Mary) to prepare the meal. A close parallel is found in Mark 6:21, where Herod made a dinner and nearly the same vocabulary is used (*δειπνον εποίησεν*). The effect of the variant is to diminish the role of the sisters and increase that of Lazarus. This supports our

³² NA28 cites ⱼ A L 33. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. 2542 vg^{cl} sy^{s.c.p} sa^{ms} for Luke 8:51, P^{45.75vid} C³ D L E 33. 892. 1844* r¹ vg^{cl} sy^{s.c.p} sa^{ms} bo for Luke 9:28, and E 33. 323. 614. 1241. 1505. 1739^s M sy^h Ψ 945. 1704. 1891 for Acts 1:13.

³³ NA28 cites W b c e for Mark 3:17–18 and E for Acts 1:13.

³⁴ Schrader, “Was Martha,” 384.

³⁵ Comfort, however, believes that Martha is intended and that the scribe was influenced by Luke 10:38–42. See Philip Wesley Comfort, “The Scribe as Interpreter: A New Look at New Testament Textual Criticism according to Reader Reception Theory” (diss., University of South Africa, 1999), 195–96.

suspicions, discussed above, that predecessors of P66* (at 11:1, 5), 579 (at 11:3), and 841 (at 11:1), attempted to demote the sisters relative to their brother.

In summary, the textual variants in P66* at 11:1, 11:5, and 12:2 prove nothing individually, but they make a strong cumulative case that this manuscript has a sexist tendency in this passage.

6. Conclusions

Schrader has proposed that Martha was originally absent from the Bethany episode and that she was subsequently added to the text to diminish Mary. However, someone wanting to denigrate Mary would not have placed her before Martha at 11:1 and before Lazarus at 11:5. Also, Schrader's proposed initial text combines too many very weakly attested and unattested readings. Furthermore, she does not adequately explain the second Mary in John 11:1 in P66*.

A sexist tendency on the part of scribes has stronger explanatory value and can be applied to all variation units in the passages under consideration. We have seen that the feminine pronoun at John 11:1 is replaced by the masculine in P66, A, and other manuscripts.

In my opinion, the following steps led to P66 as we have it today in these passages:

1. John's Gospel was published (probably in the first century).
2. Someone changed *αυτης* to *αυτου* in 11:1, making Martha the sister of Lazarus:

<i>μαριας και μαρθας της αδελφης αυτης</i>	“of Mary and of Martha her sister”
<i>μαριας και μαρθας της αδελφης αυτου</i>	“of Mary and of Martha his sister”

This change demoted Mary relative to Lazarus. The changes at 11:5 and 12:2, if they were also sexist, may have been produced by the same person.

3. Someone clarified in 11:2 that Mary was *also* the sister of Lazarus:

<i>ης ο αδελφος λαζαρος ησθενει</i>	“of whom the brother Lazarus was sick”
<i>ης και αδελφος ην λαζαρος ασθενων</i>	“whose brother was also Lazarus being sick”

4. Someone changed Martha to Mary in 11:1 to more fully relieve the tension with 11:2 over who was the sister of Lazarus:

<i>μαριας και μαρθας της αδελφης αυτου</i>	“of Mary and of Martha his sister”
<i>μαριας και μαριας της αδελφης αυτου</i>	“of Mary and of Mary his sister”

5. There was now only one sister of Lazarus in 11:1–2 so someone made the necessary adjustment to 11:3:

<i>απεστειλαν ουν αι αδελφαι</i>	“Therefore the sisters sent”
<i>απεστιλεν ουν μαρια</i>	“Therefore Mary sent”

6. The scribe of P66 copied his first exemplar, giving the text of P66*. The same scribe then corrected this text against a second exemplar, which contained the initial wording.

It can be seen that the replacement of *αυτης* with *αυτου* at 11:1 triggered a series of harmonizing variants in a chain reaction. The corruption of 11:1 was the first in the chain of four sequential alterations and was therefore likely very early indeed, probably before the middle of the second century, in my judgment, regardless of the exact dating of P66. Similarly, Fellows has demonstrated that a sexist variant in P46 (which is dated to ca. 200 CE) was already

in its exemplar.³⁶ Evidence of sexist corruptions in this early period is important also because to some degree it increases the possibility that other early sexist texts, such as 1 Cor 14:34–35 and the Pastoral Epistles, are also spurious.

³⁶ Fellows, “Early Sexist Textual Variants,” 256–57.