

The Harklean Syriac of 1 Timothy 3:16

Covering Verses Translating *Εὐσέβεια*

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Introduction

This article forms part of a study of the reading of 1 Timothy 3:16. We wish to establish whether the reading is *God was manifested in the flesh* (the traditional reading) or *He was manifested in the flesh*, as given in most modern Bibles. Elsewhere we have investigated the Bible manuscript evidence the lectionary evidence and the Church Father evidence¹. The present study is concerned with the Harklean (also spelled Harkleian²) Syriac version, dated AD 616.

The issue simplified, in English only

There is a Greek word meaning *godliness* or *piety* which occurs 15 times in the New Testament. In the Harklean Syriac it has the literal translation *beauty-of-fear* 14 times, and just *fear* once. One of the 14 cases is 1 Timothy 3:16, where the word *piety* / *beauty-of-fear* is followed by *God* in Greek, and by *God* in the Harkleian Syriac. Yet there are critics who claim that the word *God* is to be disallowed in translating the Harklean in 1 Timothy 3:16, because of an apparent rule that if the verse is 1 Tim 3:16 – and this verse only – then the Syriac for *piety* changes from *beauty-of-fear* to *beauty-of-fear-of-God*, with the result that *God* is eliminated in the English of the Harklean – swallowed up in the word *piety*. Readers must assess the fairness of this for themselves. We simply present the issue in a factual way, by presenting the Greek and Syriac of the relevant verses.

The issue as expressed by Burgon

This study is a verification of an observation made by Dean John William Burgon, in *The Revision Revised* on page 489, quoting in the following summary the editor of the Version, the Rev. Henry Deane, of S. John's College, Oxford:

To the VIIth century [A.D. 616] belongs the HARKLEIAN (or PHILIOXENIAN) Version; concerning which see above, page 450. “That Θεός was the reading of the manuscripts from which this version was made, is put beyond reach of doubt by the fact that in twelve* of the other places where εὐσέβεια occurs, the words ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܘܫܘܒܐ (‘beauty-of-fear’) are found *without* the addition of ܐܘܪܘܟܐ (‘GOD’). It is noteworthy, that on the thirteenth occasion (1 Tim. ii. 2), where the Peschito reads ‘fear of GOD’, the Harkleian reads ‘fear’ only.** On the other hand, the Harkleian margin of Acts iii. 12 expressly states that εὐσέβεια is the Greek equivalent of ܐܘܪܘܟܐ ܕܘܫܘܒܐ (‘beauty-of-fear’). This effectually establishes the fact that the author of the Harkleian recension found Θεός in his Greek manuscript of 1 Tim. iii. 16”

* Burgon, or rather Rev. Henry Deane, omits 1 Timothy 6:11, but we include it, so covering all occurrences of εὐσέβεια.

** It is the Harkleian that corresponds to the Greek (which does not contain the word for ‘God’ in 1 Tim. ii. 2). The Peschito adds the word for ‘God’. But we are not particularly concerned with the Peschito here.

¹ For the Bible and lectionary manuscripts, see www.faraboveall.com/015_Textual/01_Textual.html; Church Father investigations are in progress at the time of writing, but see www.berenddeboer.net/article/1_timothy_3_16.html

² Burgon spells it *Harkleian*, and we retain that spelling quoting him and in our remarks following. Elsewhere, we use the more usual spelling *Harklean*. The translator is spelled *Thomas of Harqel* in Wikipedia. We also retain Burgon's spelling *Peschito* (another Syriac translation) when quoting him, but the more common *Peshitta* elsewhere.

Typographic note.

The Syriac *alef* is rendered in a standard font, which is an Estrangela font, by Ⲁ in this document, but in the scans we reproduce, it is in a Serta font. For readers not familiar with Syriac, but attempting to at least match Syriac words in our description with those in the Harklean publication, the table below shows equivalent words.

	Our font (Estrangela)	Harklean book printed font (Serta)	Transcription
Beauty of	ⲁⲟⲓⲁⲉ	ⲁⲟⲓⲁⲉ	shafirut
Fear [of] } piety	(Ⲁ)ⲁⲟⲓⲁⲉ	(Ⲁ)ⲁⲟⲓⲁⲉ	dechilat(a)
God	ⲀⲙⲀ	ⲀⲙⲀ	Aloha

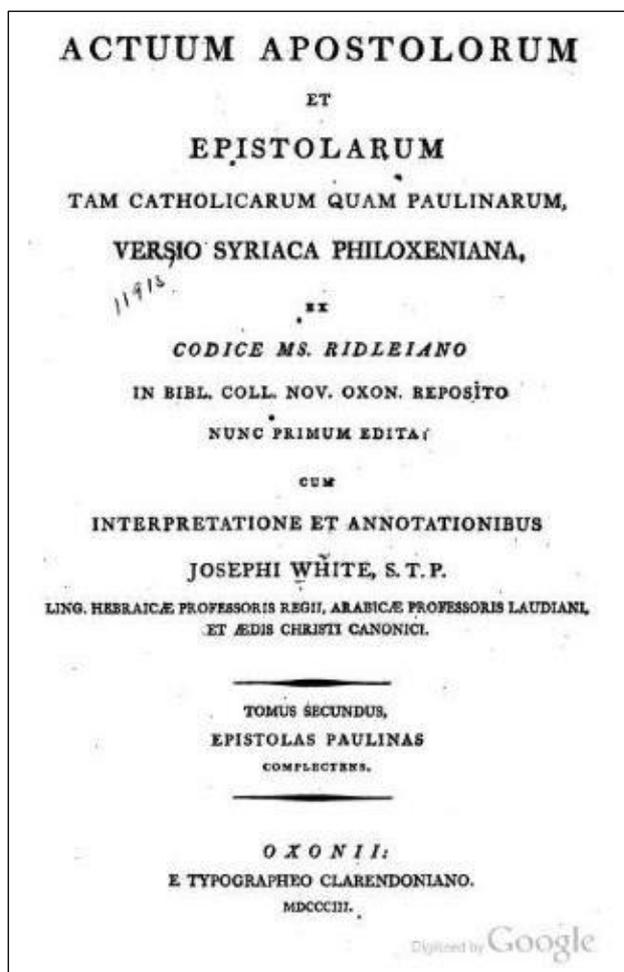
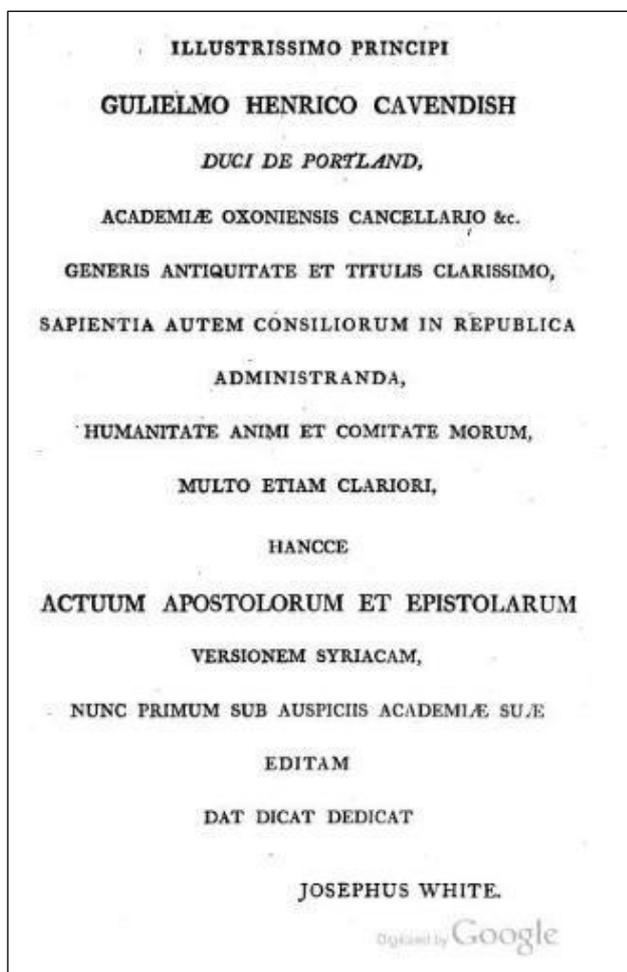
The letter in the round brackets in the Syriac makes the word determinate (the fear / fear), otherwise it is in a construct form (fear-of). So the *inclusion* word in square brackets in the English corresponds to the *absence* of the bracketed letter in the Syriac.

Translation note

Readers should note that the English word “godliness” (used in the AV and FarAboveAll translations) is not a translation of a word, or phrase, containing the word “God” in Greek or Syriac. To avoid confusion, we translate the Greek and Syriac equivalents by “piety” in this study. Similarly, we replace “godly” by “pious”.

The Harklean Syriac Text

A scan of a printed edition of the Harklean Syriac is available online (see our References). The two volumes were digitized by Google, and are for personal, non-profit use, so we request that Google's Usage Guidelines are respected. The title pages shown below.



The Verse-by-Verse Study of the Translations of *ἑὸςέβεια* in the Harklean Syriac

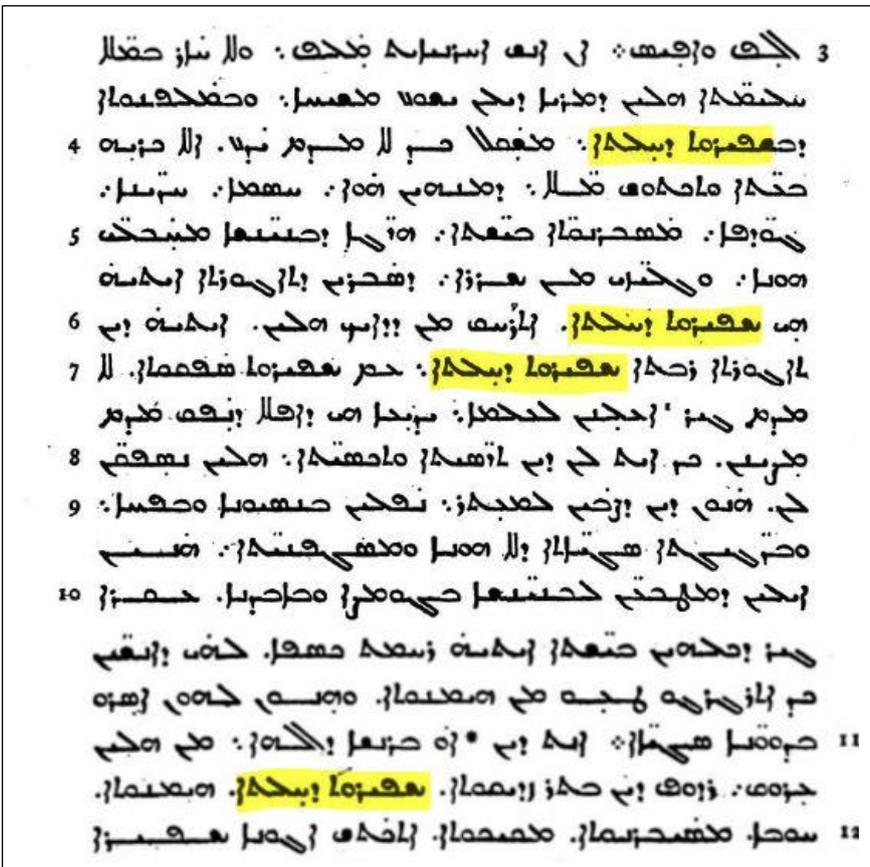
We consider all verses where the Greek contains the word *ἑὸςέβεια*. We will consider 1 Tim 3:16 last. In each case, we first give the Greek from the Majority Text (Robinson-Pierpont Byzantine Textform 2005) and an English translation of the Greek, from the *FarAboveAll* translation (but using the word “piety” rather than “godliness”, and “pious” rather than “godly” as explained above).

1 Timothy 6:3, 6:5, 6:6, 6:11

³Εἴ τις ἑτεροδιδασκαλεῖ, καὶ μὴ προσέρχεται ὑγιαίνουσιν λόγοις, τοῖς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ, καὶ τῇ κατ' εὐσεβείαν διδασκαλίᾳ, ⁴... ⁵διαπαραιτῆται διεφθαρμένων ἀνθρώπων τὸν νοῦν, καὶ ἀπεστερημένων τῆς ἀληθείας, νομιζόντων πορισμὸν εἶναι τὴν εὐσεβείαν. Ἀφίστασο ἀπὸ τῶν τοιούτων. ⁶Ἔστιν δὲ πορισμὸς μέγας ἡ εὐσεβεία μετὰ αὐταρκειᾶς· ⁷... ⁸... ⁹... ¹⁰... ¹¹Σὺ δέ, ὦ ἄνθρωπε τοῦ θεοῦ, ταῦτα φεῦγε· δίωκε δὲ δικαιοσύνην, εὐσεβείαν, πίστιν, ἀγάπην, ὑπομονήν, πραότητα.

³If anyone teaches another doctrine and does not adhere to sound words – those of our Lord Jesus Christ and to the **pious** doctrine – ⁴... ⁵vain arguments of men corrupt in mind and devoid of the truth, who reckon **piety** to be a means of gain. Do not associate with such. ⁶But **piety** with independence is an important means of gain. ⁷... ⁸... ⁹... ¹⁰... ¹¹But you, O man of God, flee from these *things*, and pursue righteousness, **piety**, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Harklean Syriac (archive.org Vol II, electronic pages n293-295, printed page numbers 284-286)

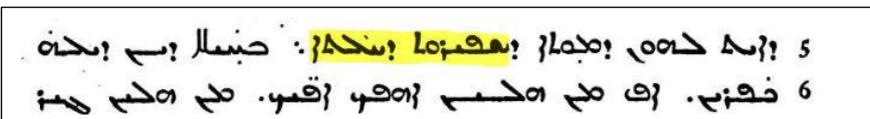


In all these cases, the translation of εὐσεβεία is ܘܥܘܒܝܬܐ.

2 Timothy 3:5

ἔχοντες μὴ μορφῶσιν εὐσεβείας, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν αὐτῆς ἠρνημένοι· καὶ τούτους ἀποτρέπου.
having a form of **piety**, but having denied the power of it. From these also turn away.

Harklean Syriac (archive.org Vol II, electronic page n305, printed page number 296)



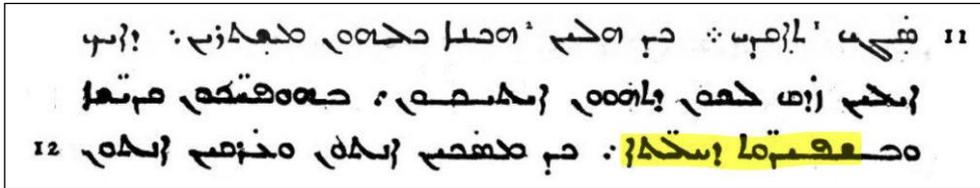
The translation of εὐσεβεία is ܘܥܘܒܝܬܐ.

2 Peter 3:11

Τούτων οὖν πάντων λυομένων, ποταποὺς δεῖ ὑπάρχειν ὑμᾶς ἐν ἀγίαις ἀναστροφαῖς καὶ εὐσεβείαις,

Seeing that all these *things are to be* dissolved, then, what kind of *people* should you be in holy conduct and *piety*,

Harklean Syriac (archive.org Vol I, electronic page 269, printed page numbers 240-241)



The translation of εὐσεβεία is ܐܘܨܥܝܘܬܐ.

**** We now come to the crux of the matter. Does 1 Timothy 3:16 read *God* or not? ****

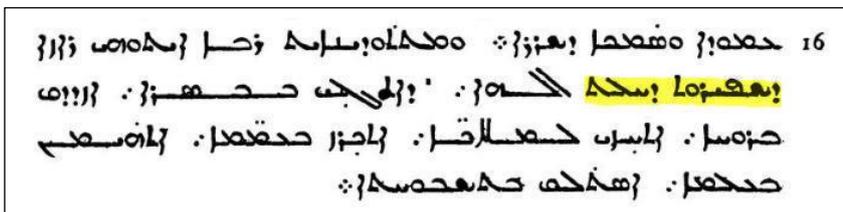
1 Timothy 3:16

Majority Text (Robinson-Pierpont Byzantine Textform 2005, FarAboveAll English)

Καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶν τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

[A pillar and base of the truth,] and confessedly great, is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, believed on in the world and taken up in glory.

Harklean Syriac (archive.org Vol. II, electronic page n287, printed page number 278):



We have shown that in all other verses the translation of εὐσεβεία is ܐܘܨܥܝܘܬܐ. And so is it here. The word following ܐܘܨܥܝܘܬܐ, namely ܐܘܘܬܐ, is never used anywhere else to part-translate εὐσεβεία, which means that neither is it here. The word ܐܘܘܬܐ is a stand-alone word, *God*, in 1 Tim 3:16. There is no justification for swallowing it up in the translation of εὐσεβεία.

The Harklean version therefore reads

the mystery of godliness towards **God**, who was manifested in the flesh

which must have come from a Greek reading of

τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί

or perhaps (though no Greek manuscript³ contains it)

τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· θεὸς ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί

and certainly not

τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί

³ I.e. not one out of 584 we have examined, these being almost all known, and all that are available in online scans. See our summary on www.faraboveall.com/015_Textual/01_Textual.html.

We have shown that Burgon's astute observation is correct, and that Bishop Ellicott (the chairman of the Revising Committee) has put the Harklean version on the wrong side of the dispute⁴.

The Revising Committee for the Revised Version adopted the **ὁς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί** (he was manifested in the flesh) reading partly through Ellicott's– or rather his informants' – misinformation. The error has persisted to modern times. The *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 1971 edition, by Bruce Metzger, which attempts to justify the Nestle-Aland / United Bible Societies reading **ὁς**, and which will have been consulted by many a translator, states that “all ancient versions presuppose **ὁς** or **ὁ**”. The Harklean is one example showing the falsity of the statement; for the other ancient versions supporting **θεός** (Georgian and Slavonic), see Burgon's *The Revision Revised*. Burgon shows that the bulk of the other ancient versions (Latin, Peshitta, Coptic, Ethiopic and Armenian) support **ὁ** not **ὁς**, and so do not support the Nestle-Aland / United Bible Societies reading. Only the Gothic supports **ὁς**.

References

The Harklean Syriac is available online. We found a link on this page
<http://syri.ac/bibliography/379437680>

which links to this volume for Paul's epistles:

<https://archive.org/details/ActuumApostolorumEtEpistolarumTamCa2/page/n287>

For Acts and the Catholic Epistles, the link is:

<https://archive.org/details/ActuumApostolorumEtEpistolarumTamCa/page/n31>

The Revision Revised J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, originally published 1883.
<https://archive.org/details/revisionrevised00burggoog>

[UBS-Commentary] Bruce Metzger, in cooperation with The United Bible Societies,
A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament
published by and obtainable from
Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, P.O. Box 810340, 7000 Stuttgart 80, Germany.
ISBN 3 438 06010 8.

⁴ For Bishop Ellicott's position, see *The Revision Revised*, p. 429 (where the Harklean is called the Philoxenian).