

# A Study of the Word *αυθεντεω*

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1 Timothy 2:12 is a key passage in the debate on man-woman relationships, and the verb *αυθεντειν* critical to the understanding of the passage. It might be argued that *αυθεντειν* is the single most important word in the debate. Until recent times there was little question on the meaning of the word. Bible versions, Eastern and Western, followed the line of interpretation represented in the Old Latin and Vulgate *dominari* (not to be construed as “dominate” or “domineer,” but “have dominion over” and the Syriac Peshitta *rê’shîth* (“have primacy, authority, power”). Erasmus and Beza in their revisions of the Vulgate translated *auctoritatem usurpare*, reproduced in English by the Authorized Version and others as “usurp authority.” The Old Gothic translation, which was based on the Greek and thus may claim some measure of independence from the Vulgate, has *frauþinon*, commonly used elsewhere to render *κυριευειν*. So apart from the nuance of meaning between neutral “exercise” of authority and negative “usurping” or “misuse” of authority, there was little variation in how the church translated what Paul meant when he said that a woman should not *αυθεντειν* a man. It had to do with authority in the relationship, and denied to woman the right to usurp or exercise such. But now such disparate meanings for the verb have been advanced as “dictate,” “domineer,” “instigate violence,” “murder,” “assert sexual dominance,” “engage in fertility practices,” and “represent oneself as originator of.” Is there evidence to support these new and widely divergent interpretations? Is the traditional interpretation of *αυθεντειν* in 1 Timothy 2:12 as “exercise authority” still legitimately maintained?

This paper will examine linguistic and contextual and, to a lesser degree, “culture-theme” evidence that bears on the meaning of *αυθεντειν*. We will also look in passing at the modern debate (post-1980) on the word as it is currently waging in the “evangelical” wing of the church. In fact, it is singularly an evangelical debate in our times, engaging as protagonists Biblical scholars who almost uniformly would identify themselves as “evangelical” and affirm a high opinion of the holy scriptures. Three studies in particular merit attention. George W. Knight III published a study of *αυθεντειν* in *New Testament Studies* in 1984, concluding that “the overall evaluation of all the documents surveyed places the meaning of the word *αυθεντεω* in the area of authority and places it there as a quite neutral concept, without any necessary negative connotation.”<sup>1</sup> Leland Edward Wilshire followed with studies of *αυθεντειν* in 1988 (*New Testament Studies*) and 1993 (*Evangelical Quarterly*), coming to the opposite conclusion that “it was a problem not of authority but of violent self-assertion in a rhetorically defined form of instruction.”<sup>2</sup> Wilshire also has produced an unpublished article on the Latin West with a detailed analysis of the use of the Vulgate reading of 1 Timothy 2:12 (*neque dominare in virum*). The third study is in the form of a book, *I Suffer Not a Woman, Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in*

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<sup>1</sup> Knight, p.154

<sup>2</sup> Wilshire, *EQ*, p.52

*Light of Ancient Evidence*, by Richard Clark and Catherine Clark Kroeger, published in 1992. These three studies would appear to be representative, with some variations, of what is being said today about the interpretation of *αυθεντειν* in 1 Timothy 2:12. Knight argues for the traditional interpretation that a woman is not to “exercise authority” over a man. Wilshire says that Paul is actually addressing a “more limited contextual situation” in Ephesus where he is forbidding a woman to get embroiled in the heated teaching controversies of the day and “violently self-assert herself” (*αυθεντειν*) against a man. The Kroegers have somewhat distanced themselves from their earlier opinion that Paul was saying a woman should not “engage in fertility practices with” or “sexually dominate” (*αυθεντειν* in both cases) a man.<sup>3</sup> Now they would argue for the translation of 1 Timothy 2:12a as: “I do not permit a woman to teach nor to represent herself as originator (*αυθεντειν*) of man.”<sup>4</sup> Whence these conflicting interpretations?

### The Linguistic Problem

*αυθεντειν* presents a number of problems to the Biblical interpreter. First, it is a New Testament *hapax legomenon*, occurring only in 1 Timothy 2:12. Thus we are forced to look to literature outside of the Scriptures to find its meaning. When we examine the extra-Biblical literature, we find at least two distinct, seemingly unrelated meanings, *to murder* and *to exercise authority*. The etymology of the word is not at all certain. Phrynichus, a second century grammarian, saw the word as a compound formed from *αυτος* + *εντος* (from *ιημι*, to thrust self forward).<sup>5</sup> Other old commentators find an etymology in *αυτος* + *φω* or *φονευω* (“to murder, kill”), formed through an unlikely dropping of the “φ.”<sup>6</sup> Paul Kretschmer at the turn of the century suggested that possibly two separate roots are involved, *αυτος* + *εντης* and *αυτος* + *θεινω* (to strike), the latter becoming *αυθεντης* by *haplology*, i.e., “the contraction of a word by the omission of one or more syllables in pronunciation,” from an original *αυτοθεντης*. Thus through the blending of two unrelated words into one through a similarity of sound, *αυθεντης* came to carry its double meaning, that of “authority” from *αυτο-εντης* and “murderer/murder/suicide” from *αυτο-θεινης*.<sup>7</sup> The French scholar Pierre Chantraine in his *Dictionnaire Etymologique*, while allowing the possibility of Kretschmer’s suggestion, prefers a single basic meaning (for the noun *αυθεντης*) of *auteur responsable*, “responsible agent,” “notably one responsible for murder.” As a put-together word in Greek *αυθεντειν* has no direct equivalents in the Indo-European family of languages, leaving no avenue of etymological research open in that direction.

<sup>3</sup> see Panning, Armin, *ΑΥΘΕΝΤΕΙΝ — A Word Study*, for an adequate answer to the Kroegers’ suggestion that *αυθεντειν* conveys sexual overtones.

<sup>4</sup> Kroeger, R.C. & C.C., *I Suffer Not a Woman*, p.103

<sup>5</sup> Panning, p.186

<sup>6</sup> *Suda*, A.4426; Eustathius, II.2.26.18, 3.322.12

<sup>7</sup> Knight, p.154

A further area of difficulty relates to the fact that the verb form of the *αθεντ-* root is of infrequent use and the researcher is forced to rely heavily on occurrences of the cognate noun *αθεντης*, which may or may not perfectly correspond in meaning to the verb. The classical writers of Greek antiquity almost exclusively used *αθεντης* in the sense of “murderer” and “suicide.” By the time of the patristic writers of the fourth century AD, the meaning had become almost as exclusively “one who exercises authority.” The adjective and adverb from the same root, *αθεντικος* and *αθεντικως*, follow a path of sense development of their own, approaching the English cognate *authentic*, and shed little light on the meaning of *αθεντειν*.

Adding to the difficulty of interpretation is the fact that *αθεντειν* in the sense of “exercise authority” was viewed as *κοινη διαλεκτος* by Atticist purists of the first century AD and thereafter who had as their object to cleanse the language of the “corrupting” elements of the larger Hellenistic world culture. That *αθεντειν* was seen as a Hellenistic (koine) word led, in the critical centuries immediate to our inquiry, to two significant outcomes that have a bearing on our study: 1) the use of *αθεντειν* in the written literature of the first three centuries of the Christian era is somewhat restricted since it was frowned on as vulgar by Atticists, a word belonging to the common people, and 2) what we do have in the extant literature, under influence of the Atticist movement, cannot be fully trusted to accurately convey the meaning of St. Paul’s Greek which was koine. Paul would have used *αθεντειν* in its koine sense since the New Testament, as demonstrated by Adolf Deissmann a century ago, was written to a greater or lesser degree in the language of the people. Writers of an Atticist bent, on the other hand, used *αθεντειν* in what they saw as its “proper” Attic, albeit archaic, meaning. Second century AD Atticist lexicographers and grammarians argued that the noun *αθεντης* should not be used for *despot*, one in authority, because it is a Hellenistic word, but for *one who acts by his own hand* (*αυτοχειρ*), particularly *murderer*, which they saw as the true Attic sense. This argument was repeated almost verbatim by Atticists for over ten centuries. The objection to the use of *αθεντης* as “despot” or “ruler” would imply that the common people were in fact using *αθεντης* precisely in that “*authority-related*” sense the Atticists felt it necessary to oppose.

At some point near to the writing of the New Testament, a shift in the dominant meaning of the word group *αθεντ-* took place from the *murder/violence* sense of the earliest Greek literature to the *authority-related meanings* that are almost exclusive in the patristic writings of AD IV on, although both meanings are found throughout the literature, early and late. Where that shift is located in the history of the use of the word will have an important bearing on the interpretation of *αθεντειν* in Paul’s use in 1 Timothy.

### **The Thesaurus Linguae Graecae**

Monumental to Greek philology has been the development of the computer-based *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, a data bank housed at the University of California, Irvine, under the direction of Theodore Brunner, which now contains about 70 million words of Greek text spanning 1200 years of usage from Homer through the patristic era of the New Testament to

about 600 AD, or the beginning of the Byzantine era. A parallel project at Duke University is gathering materials and organizing a data bank of the five million or so extant non-literary papyrus citations. The TLG data bank then includes the known literary use of *αυθεντειν* from the time of the writing of the New Testament as well as from the immediately preceding and subsequent centuries. About 57 million words in the data bank are verified; the remainder await verification. Searches of both the verified and unverified texts for *αυθεντ-* and *ηυθεντ-* were made for the sake of this study. Prefixed forms of the root, such as there may be, could not be obtained through the search.

The text search yielded a total of 1,779 verified and an additional 36 unverified citations of our root for a total count of 1,815. An interesting footnote to this study is the fact that J.H. Thayer, whose Grimm-Thayer NT Greek Lexicon (1901) was still in use in this writer's school days, just in process of being replaced as the standard by Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, could write at the turn of the century that *αυθεντειν* was "a bibl. and eccl. word," meaning the word was not known from secular sources. George W. Knight III, mentioned above, as late as 1984 wrote a major study of *αυθεντειν* without reference to the materials in the TLG data base. Knight reached his conclusions on the basis of citations in Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker (BAGD), with two additional citations from Preisigke's *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyruskunden*. Leland Edward Wilshire, also mentioned above, in his 1988 study, was the first, as far as this writer knows, to make extensive use of the 329 incidences of the *αυθεντ-* root then available in the TLG. Wilshire disputed Knight's findings, in part, on the grounds of Knight's limited resources. We will assess at a later point whether the newly available materials in the TLG force, as Wilshire suggests, a rethinking of "to have authority over" as the recognized meaning of *αυθεντειν* in the disputed passage in Paul.

### ***Αυθεντειν* in the Classical Age of Greek Literature**

When the wave of Indo-European migration reached Greece and the isles at the end of the third millennium BC, the immigrants settled initially in small groups and lived for a long enough time in isolation from each other to develop a number of distinct dialects, the most significant of which, from a literary standpoint, were the Doric, Aeolic, Ionic and Attic. The odes of Pindar are in Doric, the fragments of Sappho's poetry in Aeolic. Homer wrote in old Ionic or Epic. Herodotus, the "father of history," wrote in Ionic proper. Attic was a refinement of the Ionic, and because it was the language of Athens, the cultural center of Greece, became the most important of all Greek dialects. The tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, the comedies of Aristophanes, the histories of Thucydides and Xenophon, the orations of Demosthenes, and the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle were all written in the Attic dialect.

The sense in the which the *αυθεντ-* group is used in the classical age of Greek literature, from Homer to 323 BC, is almost uniformly "to kill by one's own hand/murder/suicide." There are 21 occurrences of *αυθεντ-* from the classical age found in the TLG.

The TLG cites no instances from the classical age of the literary use of *αυθεντειν* in the dialects outside of Ionic/Attic, nor have any citations been found in Homer, Aristophanes, Xenophon, Demosthenes, or Plato and Aristotle. Further, the citations we have from the classical age are exclusively of the noun form *αυθεντης* (or its earlier form *αυτοεντης*). The verb and other

noun forms, such as *αυθεντια*, and the adjectival or adverbial forms, *αυθεντος*, *αυθεντικος*, *αυθεντικως*, do not appear until later in the literature so far researched. It must be kept in mind, then, that in the citations from the classical age, we are not looking directly at *αυθεντειν*, the verb that appears in 1 Timothy 2:12, but at its related noun, *αυθεντης*.

The tragedian Aeschylus (VI-V BC) has the two oldest citations to be found in the TLG. In *Agamemnon* (1573) and *Eumenides* (212) he uses the word in the sense of “murder of kin.” There are six occurrences in Antiphon (V BC), one of the earliest Greek professional speech writers. He uses it for “murderer” in *The Murder of Herodes* (11.6). In his *Tetralogies*, three hypothetical cases of homicide which appear to be designed for classroom teaching of how real cases should be handled, the word appears five times for “self-inflicted death” or “taking of one’s own life” (2 *Tetr.* 3.4.6, 3.11.4, 4.4.3, 4.9.7, 4.10.1). Sophocles (V BC), the second of the great threesome of Greek tragedy, uses the older variant form *αυτοεντης* once in *Oedipus Rex* for “murderers.” Herodotus (V BC), the only representative in our search of the Ionic proper, uses *αυθεντης* once in his history of the Persian Wars in reference to the murder of a child (*Hist.* 1.117.12). Euripides (V BC) has nine citations. Seven times it is translated “murderer” or “slayer” (*Andromache* 172, 614; *Heracles* 839, 1539; *Iphigeneia in Aulis* 1190; *Troades* 660; and *Rhesus* 873). One citation from Euripides I did not track is 020.645.4. The ninth reference in Euripides is intriguing. It is found in *Supplices* 442, and in the received text is translated as “the people, the *master* of the land.” A variant reading, *εϋθυντης* (“the people, the *correctors* of the land”), has been suggested. But if *αυθεντης* is the correct reading here, it is the oldest occurrence of the word in the sense of the traditional translation of 1 Timothy 2:12, “have authority over” and the only such occurrence from the classical age. An unverified reference in the TLG comes from Thucydides (V BC), the greatest of the Greek historians, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (3.58.5.4). Here again the word means “slayers.” One citation from the classical period remains, which actually is from the pen of the I-II AD lexicographer Harpocration who quotes the V-IV BC orator Lysias in support of his definition of *αυθεντης* as “one who murders through the use of others” (*Lex.* 66.7). Harpocration is arguing that *αυθεντης* has to do as much with the one who is ultimately responsible for the dark deed as with the one who actually puts his hand to it.

Based on the small sampling of available evidence the common meaning of the *αυθεντ*-group in the classical age is “murder” or “suicide.” Bear in mind this reflects Ionic/Attic usage only, not Doric or Aeolic or other dialect. Further, it reflects *literary* usage only, and does not necessarily tell us how the word was used in common speech through the classical period. The sampling reflects also exclusively *noun* usage, not the verb form used by St. Paul in 1 Timothy 2:12. (The two marginal notes in Aeschylus with the participial forms probably come from much later than Aeschylus’ time.) The only exception to the usage of *αυθεντης* as “murder/murderer/suicide” is in Euripides *Supp.* 442 where the meaning of “master” is found. The perceptive comment of W. Gunion Rutherford over a century ago on this passage is worth repeating: “There are two ways of accounting for the only exception to this rule (*Suppl.* 442)—Either *αυθεντης* is, as Markland conjectured, an error of the copyists for *εϋθυντης*, or Tragedy has here, as often, preserved an old meaning. The late signification of *master* must have had some

origin, and it is more natural to regard it as entering the Common dialect from some of the older ones than as being a perversion of the meaning ... frequent in early Attic.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Αυθεντεῖν in the Age of Koine**

More pertinent to our study is the use of *αυθεντεῖν* in koine Greek, the language of the people that St. Paul himself both spoke and wrote.

The classical age of Greek literature came to an end with the death of Aristotle in 322 BC and the campaigns of Alexander that led to a new Greek world order. The processes that gave birth to the koine speech are not dissimilar to the processes that are shaping world English today. The speech of the people prevailed. It was not Attic or Ionic, but *Greek*, that conquered the world. Already as early as the fifth century BC certain elements of the koine began to appear. With the rise of the first Athenian maritime empire at that time, it became necessary to have a common Greek language for the sake of communication. The displacement of the old dialects by a common speech gathered force when Alexander created an army of men from all parts of the land who could barely understand each other’s dialect. As might be expected in this process, the Attic element was dominant. As recruits from backwards areas of Doric and Aeolic speech were confronted with the refined elegance of Attic, they would try to imitate Attic speech to avoid being ridiculed. In the amalgamation of dialects that ensued those features of speech that were peculiar to a single dialect had the lowest probability of survival. In these ways the babel of tongues gradually gave way to the new common speech. By the end of the fourth century before Christ a world Greek was in place. When the Romans conquered the Mediterranean world, they in turn were mastered by the koine speech, and koine Greek became the language of the Roman Empire. Even to Christians living in Rome in the first century AD St. Paul wrote in Greek, not Latin.

The Hellenistic era, during which the koine reigned as the common language of the Mediterranean world, generally is viewed as covering the period from 322 BC to 600 AD and the beginning of the Byzantine era. For our purposes we will deal with the first two-thirds of this period, breaking off our study of *αυθεντεῖν* at the end of the third century AD. By that time the *authority-related* sense of *αυθεντεῖν* was firmly established with the exception of a handful of antiquarian Atticists who tried to stem the tide of language flow. Of the Greek patristic writers only Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215) used the word to mean “murder/suicide,” while elsewhere using it also for “authority.” Clement is unique in that he was trained classically and subsequently converted to Christianity. Thus he would have had something of an Atticist element in him from his classical education. In 27 usages in Eusebius (AD III-IV) and 166 in Chrysostom (AD IV) the *αυθεντ-* group consistently refer to “authority.” This is the case also with the patristic writers (followed by number of citations in the TLG): Amphilochus (AD IV), 7 cit.; Apostolic Constitutions (AD IV), 3 cit.; Asterius (AD IV-V), 7 cit.; Athanasius (AD IV), 14 cit.; Basil (AD IV), 19 cit.; Cyril of Alexandria (AD IV-V), 5 cit.; Didymus the Blind (AD IV), 30 cit.; Epiphanius (AD IV), 17 cit.; Evagrius Scholasticus (AD VI), 8 cit.; Gregory Nazianzus (AD IV), 2 cit.; Gregory of Nyssa (AD IV), 13 cit.; Palladius (AD IV-V), 3 cit.; Sozomen (AD IV-V),

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<sup>8</sup> Rutherford, W. Gunion, *The New Phrynichus*, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, Hildesheim, 1968 (reprint of original publication of 1881).

2 cit.; Severianus (AD IV), 17 cit.; and Theodoret (AD IV-V), 12 cit. The meaning here is consistently *authority-related*.

Other writings of later origin, some with frequent usages of the *αυθεντ-* group, such as the AD VII-VIII historian of the Syriac church, George Sphrantzes (140 citations), and the pseudonymous author who published a history under Sphrantzes' name (212 citations), as also the uncertain dated Greek version of the History of Alexander the Great (447 citations), are omitted from this study as being too far removed from the Apostolic age to shed light on the meaning of a word in St. Paul.

During the Hellenistic age the koine, the common language of the people, made inroads into every area of Greek speech, in its structure, syntax, style, as well as in the vocabulary. New forms of the *αυθεντ-* root begin to make their appearance, *αυθεντιζω, αυθεντευω, αυθεντια, αυθεντεια, αυθεντας –ταδης, αυθεντος -ου*. The adjective and adverb *αυθεντικος* and *αυθεντικως* begin to take on a new prominence. The sense of “have power,” “be in authority” increasingly is the meaning attached to *αυθεντειν*, and “despot” or “ruler” to *αυθεντης*. Whether this is the meaning of one of the ancient Greek dialects finally coming into its own, or whether this is truly a new meaning developed in the koine, cannot be said with certainty.

The sense of the *αυθεντ-* group did not settle quickly and uniformly into a single meaning with the advent of the koine speech. The old meaning of “murder/suicide” still lingers, in some writers as an expression of their natural background and vocabulary, in others more as an affecting a dying and deemed superior classical style. Apollonius of Rhodes (BC III) uses *αυθεντης* twice in his epic poem *The Argonautica* in the sense of “murderer” (*Arg.* 2.754, 4.479). Atticist grammarians and lexicographers pressed for a return to the old Attic vocabulary and speech. Apollodorus (BC II), a grammarian, writes that *αυθεντης* and its earlier form *αυτοεντης* mean “self-killer” (*αυτοεντης και αυθεντης ο αυτοφοντης*) (002.2b.244.F.124.6). The AD II grammarian Harpocration, mentioned above, writes in his “Lexicon of the Ten Orators” that *αυθεντης* has always meant “one who kills by his own hand” (*ο γαρ αυθεντης αιει τον αυτοχειρα δηλοι*) (*Lex.* 66.7). But, as stated above, Harpocration tried to show that *αυθεντης* could also describe the person ultimately responsible for the crime, and not just the actual perpetrator. Later in the second century AD the Atticist grammarian and rhetorician Phrynichus argued that *αυθεντης* should never be used for despot, but for one who kills by his own hand (*Αυθεντης μηδεποτε χρηση επι του δεσποτου, ως οι περι τα δικαστηρια ρητορες, αλλ’ επι του αυτοχειρος φονεως*) (003.89.1). Still in the second century AD, in what had come to be an impassioned battle over the encroachments of the common crowd on the pure Attic speech, Aelius Dionysius gave as his definition of *αυθεντης*: *ουχ ο δεσποτης, αλλ’ ο αυτοχειρα φονευς, λεγεται δε ο αυτος εντελεστερον και αυτοεντης* (001.alpha.194.1). So we can see that the lines were being clearly drawn between the way the people were commonly using the *αυθεντ-* group (“be in authority/exercise authority”), and the “pure” Attic sense of lexicographers and grammarians of “kill by one’s own hand/murder/suicide.”

The philological struggle over *αυθεντειν* went on for centuries. Moeris, another AD II grammarian identified as an “Atticist,” wrote in his lexicon *αυτοδικην Αττικοι, αυθεντην Ελληνες*

(001.190.25). This tells us two important things: 1) that *αυθεντην* was recognized as a Hellenic word, and 2) that what *αυθεντην* was to koine speech, *αυτοδικην* was to the Attic. *Αυτοδικην* may be translated “self-judged.” But it may also be translated “having one’s own jurisdiction,” “independent,” “self-governing.” Thus Moeris acknowledges that the common usage of *αυθεντης* in the second century AD was “authority-related.” The *Lexica Segueriana*, the dating of which I could not determine, gives a proper Attic double definition: *αυθεντης: ουχ ο δεσποτης, αλλ’ ο αυτοχειρια φονευς* (005.alpha.163.18); and *αυθεντης: ο εαυτον αναιρων* (006.35a.11). Hesychius of Alexandria, an AD V scholar about whose life nothing is known, wrote a lexicon which says several things about our word. First of all, he gives a rare definition of the verb form, *αυθεντειν*, saying that it means *εξουσιαζειν*, “to exercise authority over,” listing 1 Timothy 2:12 as his reference. For *αυθεντης* he gives a three-fold definition in three words, *εξουσιαστης, αυτοχειρ, φονευς* (“one who exercises authority,” “one who kills by his own hand,” and “murderer”). Under his definition of *αυταντας* Hesychius offers *ο προεστως τινος πραγματος, και αυθεντων* (pres. part. *αυθεντεω*). Under his definition of *αυτοδικει* (“to exist under independent jurisdiction”) Hesychius lists *αυθεντει*, another appearance of the verb form (002.alpha.8260.1; *Sap.* 12.6; 002.alpha.8367.1; 002.alpha.8409.1). The AD X Byzantine lexicon, the *Suda*, repeats the centuries old definition that *ο γαρ αυθεντης αι το αυτοχειρ* (“one who acts by his own hand”). But in defining the participle *αυθεντησαντα* the *Suda* gives the example of Mithridates who in 88 BC gave an order for the slaughter of every Roman living in the Province of Asia. The word, therefore, in the *Suda* includes the actual perpetrator of the deed and the one who orders it done (001.alpha.4426). As late as XII AD, Eustathius, Metropolitan of Thessalonica, who was also a classicist in his own right who wrote a highly regarded commentary on the Homeric poems, could write that *αυθεντια* does not denote a wholly despotic authority (11.1.17.19), and elsewhere says it means the same as *αυτοφοντης*, “the murderer himself or a murderer of himself” (II.2.26.18, 3.322.12).

Not everyone wrote as an Atticist. There were writers and writings in our period which, in the words of Bauer, “were more or less able to avoid the spell of antiquarianism which we know as ‘Atticism.’”<sup>9</sup>

The historian Polybius (BC III-II) uses the noun *αυθεντης* in the sense of “author” or “responsible party,” which falls into the *authority-related* sense (*Hist.* 22.14.2.3). The LXX, though clearly koine in language, has one reference to “parents who kill” (*Wis.* 12.6.1), and one *authority-related* reference to “restrictions” or “rights” (*3 Macc.* 2.29.3). The BC I historian Diodorus Siculus has three citations, all *authority-related*, to “responsible parties” (*Hist.* 16.61.1.3), “author” (*Hist.* 17.5.4.6), and “perpetrators” or “promoters” (*Pho. frag.* 35.25.1). Philodemus in his BC I *Rhetorica* has “those in authority” as a significant usage of the verb form *αυθεντουςιν*. (Each verb usage is significant since only 10 of the 165 usages of *αυθεντ-* from BC VI through AD III is, as was St. Paul’s usage in 1 Timothy 2:12, of the verb or participial form.) Again, significantly, the participial form *αυθεντηκοτος* in the BC I *Papyrus #1208* is translated

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<sup>9</sup> Bauer, in *BAGD*, x

“exercise authority over,” exactly as in the traditional translation of 1 Timothy 2:12. Philo, though writing in the κοινή διαλεκτός, is an exception to koine usage in his single reference to “murderer of self” (σεαυτου αυθεντην) (*Det.* 78.7). An undated papyrus (*P.Leid.W<sup>vi</sup>46*) addresses an archangel with the vocative αυθεντα ηλιε, “O ruling sun.”

The Apostolic Father, Clement of Rome, writing very close to the time of the Apostles, uses αυθεντης in a dispute between Peter and Simon Magus for “sole power” (006.18.12.1.4). His other citation is for αυθεντικον, the adjectival form. Flavius Josephus, a direct contemporary of the Apostle Paul, used αυθεντης twice in his *Jewish Wars* for “the perpetrator of a crime” and “perpetrators of a slaughter” both *authority-related* in the sense of “responsible party(ies)” (B.J. 1.582.1; B.J. 2.240.5). Appian, an AD I-II historian widely regarded as untouched by Atticism, uses the noun αυθεντης five times, nonetheless meaning by it three times “murderer,” once “suicide,” and once “perpetrator” or “responsible party.” Ptolemy (AD II) has a significant verb usage among his six citations (the other five are adjectival). It refers to the birth of a child under a certain sign of the heavens “[that signifies that the newborn will be] the one who exercises authority (αυθεντουντα) over all” (*Tetr.* III.13.38). The Apostolic Father, Shepherd of Hermas, in his *Similitudes* has one noun use (αυθεντης) that Wilshire says must be translated “owner” or “builder” of the house, but the phrase lends itself just as readily to “*master* of the house,” which in fact is the authority-related expression Hermas uses just a few lines below our citation” (*Herm. Sim.* 9.5.6). Irenaeus (AD II) uses the noun αυθεντια three times in the sense of “authority” (*Adv. Haer.* 1.18.1.4, 1.21.1.10, 1.28.9.2).

Clement of Alexandria (AD II-III) has nine citations, and is unique, as mentioned above, because he was classically trained and converted to Christianity. This perhaps accounts for his being the only Greek patristic writer to use our word in the sense of “murder/murderer/suicide.” He uses αυθεντης three times for “murderer/self-murderer” (*Strom.* 2.8.38.3.5, 3.18.106.2.3, 4.4.16.3.4).” In two other places in Clement the word (αυθεντια) refers to “the *authority* of the Lord” or “*full authority*,” as defined by “omnipotent” (παντοκρατορικης) (*Paed.* 2.3.36.1.4, *Strom.* 4.1.2.2.4). Four other uses are adjectival. Origen (AD II-III) in his commentary on 1 Corinthians quotes Paul’s usage in 1 Tim. 2:12, and in his fragment on the Psalms uses αυθεντια with the meaning “authority” or “command.” With Hippolytus, pupil of Irenaeus and bishop of Rome, moving into the third century, all six citations are *authority-related*, including one verb usage. Also the *Corpus Hermeticum* (AD II-IV), a pagan work exalting knowledge, uses αυθεντια three times for “word of *power*” or “mind of *power*.” In the *Sibylline Oracles* twice Jesus is referred to as “truth” or “power” (αυθεντης). Pseudo-Justin Martyr (AD III-V) has eleven citations, nine of αυθεντια, all of which are *authority-related*, and with Pseudo-Justin Martyr we move out of our range of study.

The scholia (“scholarly notes,” “marginal glosses”) on the classicists, 39 in number, fit here but will not be treated in this paper. Likewise the *Magic papyri*, 11 in number, will not be treated.

### The Ancient Versions

There were three lines of translation from the Greek New Testament that were made at a very early date, the Old Latin, the Old Syriac and the Egyptian or Coptic. Other versions derive from one of these versions, as the Arabic from the Syriac, or else are too remote from the Greek original by time or place to be of value in ascertaining the meaning of the original.

The early Christians who translated the Old Latin, Syriac and Coptic versions understood from living experience, with clarity denied to us today, both the Greek as the lingua franca of their world and their own mother tongue. The early dates of these versions, the African Old Latin (ca. 150) and European Old Latin (late II AD), the Sinaitic (ca. 170) and Curetonian Syriac (ca. 200), and the Sahidic (ca. 200) and Bohairic (early III AD?) among the Coptic versions, make them particularly valuable to our understanding of the Greek text. Those who translated the African Old Latin could have been born as early as 90-100 AD, and could have communicated directly with members still living who had been served by Timothy at Ephesus, and conceivably even with Timothy himself who was a young man in 63-65 when he received this letter. Timothy might well have lived to 110 and beyond.

The Vulgate's *dominari in virum* is also the standard form of the Old Latin text. Variants in the Old Latin read *dominari supra virum*, *dominari super virum suum*, *dominari viro*, *dominari invicem*, and two text types of Old Latin that use different words to express similar meaning, *praepositam esse viro*, and *principari in viro*. *Dominari* does not mean here to "dominate" or "domineer" which in English carry with them negative connotations, but simply to "rule," to "have dominion over" in a positive or neutral sense.

Dr. Jaral Fossum of the Near Eastern Studies Department of the University of Michigan helped me track down both the Old Syriac and Coptic versions. Unfortunately, the Coptic versions, both the Sahidic and Bohairic, simply took the Greek word *αυθεντειν* directly into their texts without translating. This may mean that they did not know how to translate it, or it may mean the word was well enough understood and used by the people that it could be left untranslated. But either way it is of no use to our study.

Dr. Fossum had immediate access only to the Peshitta (ca. 425 AD) and not to the earlier Syriac versions, but the lack of any variant readings in his critical apparatus gave him a "high certainty" that the Peshitta reading for *αυθεντειν*, *rê'shîth*, is the same in the Old Syriac Sinaitic and Curetonian texts. He translated *rê'shîth* as "to have primacy, authority, power." It is the same word, he said, that appears in the first verse of the Hebrew Bible, *b<sup>e</sup>rê'shîth*, meaning that it would convey some of the connotations of *αυθεντειν* also in the sense of "author," "origin," "beginning."

### **The Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12**

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to *αυθεντειν* a man." In the light of what we have seen of the use of the word in extra-Biblical literature and in the early versions of the Bible, how are we to understand him?

*Αυθεντειν* as "Murder" or "Suicide"

There is no question *αυθεντειν* does mean this in the period under study. Dozens of citations in the times close to the writing of the New Testament, also in writers of *κοινη*, would

support the translation “I do not permit a woman to teach or to murder a man.” St. Paul himself would not have argued with the concept, but the context cries out for answer to the question, “Why the prohibition against murdering a *man*?” Why not a *woman*, or a *child*, for that matter? Richard and Catherine Kroegers’ “culture-current” interpretations<sup>10</sup> that suggest the possibility of ritual castration in the Artemis worship of Ephesus (the sacrifice of manhood; the killing of the man), sex role reversals (making a woman out of a man), references to Greek belief that sex sometimes brought death to men and to Christian belief that a loose woman can bring spiritual death to a man through sexual sin, display the range of the Kroegers’ classical learning and are useful as background information to the student of the New Testament, but make for a poor and inexact exegesis when we read into the text circumstantial elements that may have surrounded the text or beliefs that may have circulated at the time of the writing. The text simply does not say what the Kroegers allow for it here to say.

The meaning of “suicide” for *αυθεντειν* in this text is inadmissible since the structure of the sentence does not permit it. The verb “commit suicide” does not allow a direct object. A woman can commit suicide but cannot “suicide” a man.

#### *Αυθεντειν* as “Violent Self-Assertion”

This is the conclusion of Leland Wilshire, referred to above, who writes: “The issue may be (compressing a complex meaning into two words) ‘instigating violence.’ ” Paul “expressed his desire that ‘men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or quarreling’ (2:8). The words ‘anger’ (*οργης*) and ‘quarreling’ (*διαλογισμων*) are terms with strong violent connotations ... It could be that the concern over the possible anger or quarreling of men in 2:8 found its parallel in the use of the word *αυθεντειν* in 2:12 relating to the possibility of ‘violent intent’ being done by women in the Ephesian fellowship.” “It was a problem not of authority but of violent self-assertion in a rhetorically defined form of instruction.”<sup>11</sup> Wilshire would translate, “I do not permit a woman to teach (in a volatile setting) or to instigate violence against a man.”

Wilshire is an excellent language scholar and is to be commended for the fine work he has done researching the TLG citations of *αυθεντειν*. But he has not demonstrated that the “instigation of violence” is a legitimate rendering of the *αυθεντ-* group. He points to a number of passages where *αυθεντειν* in its koine, *authority-related* sense is associated with a violent or criminal activity, as “*perpetrators* of a crime” or “*perpetrators* of a slaughter.” But the word itself simply means “responsible party” or “authoritative source” and the criminal or violent action must be attached to it by association with another word. *Αυθεντεῖν* as “authority” or “responsible party” in the koine no more must mean “author of violence” than “author of good” or “author of a morally neutral action.”

Wilshire’s contextual argument that Paul has addressed earlier in the chapter the issue of anger or quarreling in the men’s prayers, does not mean that there must, or even is likely to, appear a parallel warning to the women. One might equally argue that the mention of kings and mediators and heralds and apostles earlier in the chapter would warrant reading elements of royalty or mediation or messenger-work into *αυθεντειν*.

<sup>10</sup> Kroegers, *I Suffer Not a Woman*, pp.93-98

<sup>11</sup> Wilshire, *EQ*, pp.50-52

None of the early versions or early commentaries on 1 Timothy 2:12, those who dealt with the text close to the time of the original writing, would support the translation “*instigate violence against.*”

Again we must ask: Why, with no further word of explanation or introduction, would Paul abruptly warn the women of Ephesus against instigating violence against a *man*? Would it be permissible against a *woman* or a *child*?

### *Αυθεντειν as “Representing Oneself as Originator of”*

This comes also from the “culture-centered” studies of the Kroegers, Richard and Catherine. Indeed it is their main thesis, and has been at least since their published views of the mid-80s. *Αυθεντειν*, as may be shown, does have in it the sense of “authorship, origination.” This comes through also in the Peshitta translation *rê’shîth*. Drawing on nascent Gnostic theories that represent Eve as originating and being the spiritual mentor of Adam, the Kroegers surmise that Paul with this verse is warning women against engaging in (false) teaching and representing woman as the originator of man. Once again the Kroegers display their wide learning in the classics and provide us with much useful information about the religious environment of Ephesus and the worship of the goddess Artemis.

A tendency to draw into the text things that are incidental or circumstantial to the text and make the words say things that are not in the words themselves, however, seriously flaws their exegesis. One looks in vain to the linguistic evidence or to the early versions of the Scriptures or to any of the early Biblical commentators for any support for their unusual views. Either one must say that no one understood what Paul was saying at the very time when he wrote *αυθεντειν* in 1 Timothy 2:12, or the Kroegers’ are guilty of putting into Paul’s mind thoughts that are very alien to what anyone could ever have imagined he meant.

### *Αυθεντειν as “Exercise Authority Over”*

A study of the use of *αυθεντειν* in the available Greek literature leads to the conclusion that there is no compelling reason to abandon the traditional interpretation of “exercise authority” in 1 Timothy 2:12 as the correct understanding of Paul.

1) The dominant meaning of *αυθεντειν* in the Ionic/Attic of the classical age of Greek literature (Homer to 322 BC) was indeed “murder/murderer/suicide,” with one notable exception in Euripides where the word would appear to have its koine sense of “master, power, authority.”

2) The dominant meaning began to shift with the advent of the koine, the common Greek that spread through the Mediterranean world with the conquests of Alexander the Great.

3) Paul wrote in the koine Greek, the common language of the people, who understood and used the word in an *authority-related* sense.

4) The centuries immediately preceding and following the Apostolic Age, are filled with witnesses to the koine use of the *αυθεντ-* root with the *authority-related* sense in which it was used by Paul.

5) Particularly in the handful of uses of the verb form *αυθεντεω*, we find exclusive use of the *authority-related* meaning, with the exception of two participial usages in the scholia of Aeschylus.

6) Atticists from the first century onward opposed the use of *αυθεντης* in the sense of “despot” or “ruler” on the grounds that it was vulgar usage, underscoring the truth that this was how the common people were speaking and understood the term at that time.

7) No interpreter of 1 Timothy 2:12 from the most ancient times ever understood *αυθεντειν* in any other than the sense that has been handed down to us of the exercise of authority.

8) The ancient versions of the Bible uniformly render *αυθεντειν* in its koine, *authority-related* sense. These were translated very close to the time of the writing of the original Greek text, and thus carry a considerable weight.

9) Since the number of verb citations of the *αυθεντ-* group are still very limited, and we are forced to rely for linguistic evidence on references to the cognate noun *αυθεντης*, the interpreter is still heavily dependent on Scriptural context for the correct understanding of the text of 1 Timothy 2:12.

Citations from Homer through 3rd Century AD on				Αυθεντ—				
Date	Author	Work	cit.	τεω	της	τια	τικός/κως	other
BC VI-V	Aesychlus	Tragedian	2		2			
BC V	Antiphon	Orator	6		6			
BC V	Sophocles	Tragedian	1		1			αυτοεντης
BC V	Euripides	Tragedian	9		9			
BC V	Herodotus	Historian	1		1			
BC V	Thucydides	Historian	1		1			
BC V-IV	Lysias	Orator	1		1			
BC III	Apollonius of Rhodes		2		2			
BC III-II	Polybius	Historian	1		1			
BC III-II	Septuagint		2		1	1		
BC II	Apollodorus	Grammarians	1		1			
BC II-I	Posidonius	Philosopher	2		2			
BC I	Diodorus Siculus		3		3			
BC I	Philodemus	Rhetorica	1	1				
BC I	Papyrus #1208		1	1				
BC I-AD I	Aristonicus	Grammarians	1	1				
BC I-AD I	Dorotheus	Astrologer	1		1			
BC I-AD I	Philo Judaeus		1		1			
varia	Scholia	Homer (BC VIII)	5	1	4			
varia	Scholia	Aeschylus (BC VI-V)	14	2	12			
varia	Scholia	Euripides (BC V)	6		4		2	
varia	Scholia	Thucydides (BC V)	6		5		1	
varia	Scholia	Aristophanes (BC V-IV)	4		4			
varia	Scholia	Apollonius (BC III)	3		3			
BC III	Scholia	Lycophron	1				1	
varia	Magic papyri		11				10	αυθεντα
AD I	Clemens Romanus	Scr. Eccl.	1		1		1	
AD I	Flavius Josephus	Historian	2		2			
AD I	NT-1 Timothy		1	1				
AD I-II	Appianus	Historian	5		5			
AD I-II	Harpocration	quotes Lysias: BC V-IV	2		2			
AD II	Alexander	Rhetorician	2		2			
AD II	Claudius Ptolemy	Mathematician	6	1			5	
AD II	Hermas	Scr. Eccl.	1		1			
AD II	Herodianus	Grammarians	2		2			
AD II	Irenaeus	Scr. Eccl.	3			3		
AD II	Phrynichus	Atticist	4		4			
AD II	Aelius Dionysius	Attic.	2		1			αυτοεντης
AD II	Moeris	Attic.	1		1			
AD II-III	Clemens Alex.	Scr. Eccl.	9		3		4	αυθεντεια (2)
AD II-III	Dio Cassius	Historian	3		2	1		
AD II-III	Flavius Philostratus		1		1			
AD II-III	Origenes	Theologian	4	1		1	2	
AD II/IV	Corpus Hermeticum		3			3		
AD III	Hippolytus	Scr. Eccl.	6	1	1	4		
AD III	Oracula Sibyllina		2		2			
AD III/V	Pseudo-Justin Martyr		11			9	2	
AD III?	Testamentum Salomonis		3			3		
varia	Scholia	Aelius Aristides (AD II)	1					αυθεντοπωλους

?	Adespota	Papyrus	1		1			
?	Lexica Segueriana		2		2			
		<b>Total entries</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>6</b>

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