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Why in *Luke 23:33* did Tyndale use *Calvary* rather than *Golgotha*?

Although the original Hebrew and Aramaic term was recorded as *Golgotha* [Anglican translation – see *golgoleth* below], borrowing from the Latin Tyndale translated the term meaning ‘head/skull’ as *Calvary*. After Tyndale’s martyrdom at the stake, others continued translating using the term *Calvary* in his *New Testament*.

*And when they were come to the place which is called **Calvary** there they crucified him and the evyll doers one on ryght honde and the other on the lefte. (Luke 23:33, Tyndale)*

*And wha they came to ye place, which is called **Caluery**, they crucified him euen there, and the two myssdoers with him, the one on the righte hande, the other on ye left. (Luke 23:33, Coverdale)*

... from which both the Geneva and KJV bibles used.

*And when they were come to the place, which is called **Calvary**, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. (Luke 23:33, AV)*



Figure 1: *Novum Instrumentum omne* was the first published New Testament in Greek (1516). It was prepared by Desiderius Erasmus (1466–1536) and printed by Johann Froben (1460–1527) of Basel. Although the first printed Greek New Testament was the Complutensian Polyglot (1514), it was the second to be published (1516). Five editions of *Novum Instrumentum omne* were published, although its title was changed to *Novum Testamentum*, the third edition (1522) was used by William Tyndale for the first English New Testament (1526) and later by translators of the Geneva Bible and the King James Version.

William Tyndale



Born	c. 1494 Kingdom of England
Died	6 October 1536 (aged 42) near Vilvoorde, Duchy of Brabant, Habsburg Netherlands in the Holy Roman Empire
Alma mater	Magdalen Hall, Oxford University of Cambridge
Known for	Tyndale Bible

Calvary. The canonical Gospels use the Koine term *Kraníon* (Κρανίον) when testifying to the place outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. *Kraníon* is often translated as "Skull" in English, but more accurately means **Cranium**, the part of the skull enclosing the brain. In Latin it is rendered **Calvariae Locus**, from which the English term *Calvary* was derived. (Wiki:Calvary, 2020).

Note that in all other gospel writings the authors used the Hebrew term **Golgotha** [גִּלְגֹּתָא *gulgoleth*].

Matt 27:33 *And when they were come unto a place called **Golgotha**, that is to say, a place of a skull,*

Mark 15:22 *And they bring him unto the place **Golgotha**, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull.*

Antioch was a hub of ecclesiastical activity. There, the Apostles and general assemblies could hear an oratory of the latest epistles and meet others in passing.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and ANTIOCH, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. (Acts 11:19). Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

This city very quickly became a centre for the early New Testament Church. (Nelte, 1995).

It was from there that Sha'ul [Paul] began three of his journeys.

Origin of the Greek Manuscripts

All the Greek MSS in existence today come from two areas in the Middle East ... 1) Antioch, Pisidia [Majority Text], and 2) Alexandria in Egypt [Septuagint, also called LXX]. [It was the Textus Receptus, also called Majority Texts, that came from Antioch.

Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and ANTIOCH, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.
(Acts 11:19)

The Church there grew quickly ...

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to ANTIOCH, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as ANTIOCH. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. **(Acts 11:20-23)**

Barnabas then brought Paul to Antioch ...

Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: And when he had found him, he brought him unto ANTIOCH. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in ANTIOCH. **(Acts 11:25-26)**

It was in Antioch that members were first called "Christians". Antioch also had direct links to the Church in Jerusalem ...

And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. **(Acts 11:27)**

It was at Antioch that Paul and Barnabas were raised in rank to "Apostles" ...

Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid [their] hands on them, they sent [them] away. **(Acts 13:1-3)**

Antioch became Paul's home-base. It was from there that Paul started all three of his journeys. The end of his first journey is recorded in **Acts 14:26** ...

And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. **(Acts 14:26)**

To summarize: It is very easy to see from the New Testament that Antioch was a leading centre for the early Church. The majority of Greek MSS in existence come from the Antioch text-base. This represents about 95% of all Greek MSS. These MSS are known by the following names:

- ANTIOCHIAN TEXT,
- BYZANTINE TEXT,
- SYRIAN TEXT,
- MAJORITY TEXT,
- UNIVERSAL TEXT,
- REFORMATION TEXT,
- IMPERIAL TEXT,
- TRADITIONAL TEXT,

- TEXTUS RECEPTUS (i.e. RECEIVED TEXT).

... (Nelte, 1995).

The Textus Receptus Today

The current count of fragments, copies, and all other forms remains well above 5000. Here are the definitions of these items.

Manuscripts

A '**manuscript**' is a **hand-written document, not one that is typed or printed**. The word '**manuscript**' is often abbreviated as MS or ms (singular) and MSS or mss (plural). Currently there are between **5250** and **5309** extant (existing) manuscripts of the Scriptures or parts of it. Manuscripts fall into two categories:

- **Masters:** These were the original autographs. *There are currently no original autographs or masters in existence.* They have all long since been replaced by copies.
- **Copies:** These are hand-written copies of the masters or hand-written copies of earlier copies. Some 5000+ hand-written copies of the whole or parts of Scripture are still in existence.

Manuscripts produced by the early Christians fall into three categories:

1. **Copies** of masters or copies of earlier copies.
2. **Versions:** These are translations of Scripture made directly from the original languages. For example from Hebrew or Greek into Syriac, Latin, German, English or French. A translation from Latin into English, or from English into Chinese, cannot strictly be called a 'version.' It is simply a translation of a translation: whereas a 'version' must be a translation from the original. Bear this important fact in mind.
3. **Church Fathers:** *"Our third group is the early church fathers. These are the men who led the Christians in the first few centuries after the New Testament was completed. We have record of their early sermons, books and commentaries. They will be able to provide us with much information on disputed passages. Many may have seen the original autographs."* Ref: B1)

As regards the **format** of ancient manuscripts, they are often described as:

- **Uncial** or **Majuscules:** written in capital letters with no spaces: e.g. NOMANHATHSEENGD.
- **Cursives** or **Miniscules:** written in small letters and later with spaces: e.g. No-man-hath-seen-gd.

... (Loughran, 1999).

So how do these writings apply to our bibles today, and why the variance of **Calvary** vs. **Golgotha**?

About Greek and Latin

Koine Greek, was also known as an Alexandrian dialect, common Attic, Hellenistic or Biblical Greek, and was the common form of Greek spoken and written during the Hellenistic period, the Roman Empire, and the early Byzantine Empire in rural areas of the Mediterranean region. It evolved from the spread of Greek following the conquests of Alexander the Great in 325 BC, and served as the lingua franca in much of the and the Middle East during the following centuries.

The Macedonian Wars (214–148 BC) were won by Rome over the Greek Empire. Latin was the common language of Rome and became the preferred language wherever they expanded their borders. The Jews of Alexander had been speaking the Greek language for centuries and continued speaking it, It was then known as the Hellenistic Greek. Koine Greek remained the common language in rural Palestine until Latin was introduced but was spoken more widely only in metropolitan cities and towns.

Native Hebrews in the land of Israel and Judah spoke the Aramaic and Hebrew languages in their synagogues, educational centers, and nearby communities to Jerusalem. The Galilean dialect confirms this in Yeshua's use of Aramaic as found in the scriptures.

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius of Antioch (/ɪɡˈneɪʃəs/; Greek: Ἰγνάτιος Ἀντιοχείας, *Ignátios Antiokheías*; died c. 108/140 AD), also known as **Ignatius Theophorus** (Ἰγνάτιος ὁ Θεοφόρος, *Ignátios ho Theophóros*, lit. "the God-bearing") or

Ignatius Nurono (lit. "The fire-bearer"), was an early Christian writer and bishop of Antioch (Wiki: Ignatius, 2020).

The patriarch Ignatius¹, collected His and other epistles and writings here at Antioch. Second and third generation followers of the faith helped in this matter such as Barnabas having retrieved Sha'ul and introduced him to the assembly (**Acts Ch. 13**). There, the first semblance of a 'New Testament' was collected. It was from these, and some other writings gathered that were translated for us today. We call them the Textus Receptus/Majority Texts. It is in these fragments that we read the original writings in the koine Greek and gives a clue why Tyndale wrote **Calvary** instead of **Golgotha** in **Luke 23:33**.

Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus

Erasmus had been working for years on two projects: a collation of Greek texts and a fresh Latin New Testament. In 1512, he began his work on this Latin New Testament. He collected all the Vulgate manuscripts he could find to create a critical edition. Then he polished the language. He declared, "It is only fair that Paul should address the Romans in somewhat better Latin."

Declaring, "... the translator's clumsiness or inattention the Greek has been wrongly rendered" Erasmus soon turned his attention to producing a Greek text to also permit qualified readers to verify the quality of his Latin version titled *Novum Testamentum omne* ("All of the New Testament"). During his Greek translation, and as mentioned above regarding Paul's address to the Romans, it becomes clear of his favor toward the Latin.

However, both Erasmus and Tyndale's commitment to staying true to the koine copies suggests another reason for the use of **Calvariae** rather than scholarly ego, or sentiment.. It is more plausible that the Greek copies of the book of Luke 23:33 was incomplete, therefor making it necessary to default to another early translation.

Calvary, or **Golgotha** (Koinē Greek: **Γολγοθᾶ[s]** *Golgothâ[s]*, traditionally interpreted as reflecting Syriac: **ܩܘܠܓܘܬܐ** *golgoṯā*^{2 3}, as it were Hebrew *gulgōleṯ* "skull" (**גּוֹלְגוֹתַת**)^{4 5}, Arabic: **جَلجثة**), was, according to the canonical Gospels, a site immediately outside Jerusalem's walls where Jesus was crucified.

The canonical Gospels use the Koine term *Kraníon* (Κρανίον)⁶ when testifying to the place outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified. *Kraníon* is often translated as "Skull" in English, but more accurately means **Cranium**, the part of the skull enclosing the brain. In Latin it is rendered **Calvariae Locus**, from which the English term *Calvary* derives. (Wikipedia: Tyndale's, 2020)

William Tyndale

Erasmus had just completed his Latin translation, his favored language of translation. Upon personal request of Pope Leo X, to whom he would dedicate his work, and Emperor Maximilian I, he was granted four years to also complete a Greek translation. It was first published in 1516.

Tyndale and Erasmus met at Oxford where Tyndale approached Erasmus to commission a copy of his Greek New testament. Tyndale utilized several resources for interpretation into English including Erasmus's Greek Testament of 1519 and 1522 (Daniell, 1989, p. xvii). It was soon afterward that Tyndale began his own Greek translation.

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- 1 **Ignatius of Antioch** (*/ɪɡˈneɪʃəs/*; Greek: Ἰγνάτιος Ἀντιοχείας, *Ignátios Antiokheías*; died c. 108/140 AD), also known as **Ignatius Theophorus** (Ἰγνάτιος ὁ Θεοφόρος, *Ignátios ho Theophóros*, lit. "the God-bearing") or **Ignatius Nurono** (lit. "The fire-bearer"), was an early Christian writer and bishop of Antioch. (Wiki: Ignatius, 2020)
 - 2 Schultens, Albert (1737). *Institutiones ad fundamenta linguæ Hebrææ: quibus via panditur ad ejusdem analogiam restituendam, et vindicandam : in usum collegii domestici*. Johannes Luzac. p. 334.
 - 3 Thrupp, Joseph Francis (1855). *Antient Jerusalem: A New Investigation Into the History, Topography and Plan of the City, Environs, and Temple, Designed Principally to Illustrate the Records and Prophecies of Scripture*. Macmillan & Company. p. 272.
 - 4 Lande, George M. (2001) [1961]. *Building Your Biblical Hebrew Vocabulary Learning Words by Frequency and Cognate*. Resources for Biblical Study 41. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature. p. 115. ISBN 1-58983-003-2.
 - 5 **H1538** - gulgoleth - Strong's Hebrew Lexicon (KJV)". *Blue Letter Bible*.
 - 6 Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22 Luke 23:33 John 19:17

Erasmus had inserted the term *Calvary* into the texts of [Luke 23:33](#) in favor of the Latin. It was from Erasmus's translation that Tyndale relied upon as his Greek reference text, among others, albeit seemingly slanted by Erasmus in this verse.

Erasmus "synchronized" or "unified" the Greek and the Latin traditions of the New Testament by producing an updated translation of both simultaneously. Both being part of canonical tradition, he clearly found it necessary to ensure that both were actually present in the same content. In modern terminology, he made the two traditions "compatible". This is clearly evidenced by the fact that his Greek text is not just the basis for his Latin translation, but also the other way round: there are numerous instances where he edits the Greek text to reflect his Latin version. For instance, since the last six verses of *Revelation* were missing from his Greek manuscript, Erasmus translated the Vulgate's text back into Greek. Erasmus also translated the Latin text into Greek wherever he found that the Greek text and the accompanying commentaries were mixed up, or where he simply preferred the Vulgate's reading to the Greek text ⁷ (Wikipedia: Erasmus, 2020).

Lucanus / Luke

Born **at Antioch in Syria**, Luke [Lucanus], it remains is undecided by some whether he was was a Jew. Scholars have written that Luke was both a Gentile and Hellenist Jew. Luke was not listed among the original disciples, however, he was the author of both a gospel bearing his name and the book of Acts. An educated man, a doctor, Luke was also an occasional companion to the apostle Paul.

Contracted from *Lucanus*, as Silas is contracted from *Silvanus*. He was of Gentile parentage before he became a *Christian*; as appears from [Col 4:11,14](#): "Luke the beloved physician" (*one of "my fellow workers unto the kingdom of God which have been a comfort unto me"*) is distinguished from those "of the circumcision."

That he was not of "the seventy" disciples, as Epiphanius (Haer. i. 12) reports, is clear from his preface in which he implies he was not an "eye witness"; the tradition arose perhaps from his Gospel alone recording the mission of the seventy. His history in Acts is first joined with that of Paul at Troas ([Act 16:10](#)), where the "we" implies that the writer was then Paul's companion. He accompanied the apostle in his journey to Jerusalem and Rome, at Paul's first Roman imprisonment "Luke my fellow labourer," Philemon ([Phm 1:24](#)) written from Rome, as also Colossians ([Col 4:14](#)); also in Paul's last imprisonment there, when others forsook him Luke remained faithful ([2Ti 1:15](#); [2Ti 4:11](#) "only Luke is with me".) His death by martyrdom between A.D. 75 and 100 is generally reported. (Jamieson, Faussett, & Brown, 1961)

Discussion

Ignatius's role at Antioch helped to produce the Greek texts used in today's English translations. During and after Antioch's position as the New covenant ecclesia 'headquarters' the koine Greek texts were translated into many other languages. A short list included:

- The Peshitta Bible ~150 CE
- The Old Latin Version ~157 CE
- Coptic Version 3rd Century
- Armenian Version 4th Century
- Gothic Version 4th Century
- Ethiopian Version 7th Century
- Slovic Version... and others ... (Gipp, 2004).

Through the dark ages and following centuries the manuscripts were preserved through copies onto Vellum and papyrus. Naturally, wear and tear required copying the copies over time. Of the original manuscripts, over 5000 remain to this day. However, for the early translators not all may have existed.

Fast forwarding to the 15th century, we read of **Erasmus**. He was considered the greatest scholar of that era. Erasmus dedicated his latter life collecting and collating Greek and Latin copies, and writing scriptures. While initially writing his Latin version, it became apparent that he would also need to write a Greek New Testament as well. **Tyndale**, Erasmus's Junior by ~30 years, met him while studying at Cambridge. He was impressed with

⁷ E.g. at Acts 9:6. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 99–100; Kurt Aland – Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament. An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, Translated by Erroll F. Rhodes. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. Second edition, revised and enlarged, 1989, p. 4

Erasmus's Greek writing and commissioned a copy for his own reference. This is where we find the Greek word *calvariae* [κρανίον] meaning 'skull'. As defined above, it is a Latin term.

Yes, both Erasmus and Tyndale used the MSS and Latin copies among their resources for translation. Their selection of materials was carefully vetted and made certain of their authenticity. It becomes highly probable that the use of the term *calvariae* was not by accident and/or preferential selection. But what were the alternatives? In Syriac the term was *Karkaphtha*, meaning 'skull', in Latin the term was *calvariae Locus* [*Calvary*], meaning 'cranium', In Hebrew it was *gulgolet* [*Golgotha*], meaning 'head, and skull'.

It is plausible that Luke Himself, an educated man and a doctor, would have used a more accurate Latin medical term in this verse; thus, differing from the other gospels Aramaic-Hebrew term, *Golgotha*. It is also interesting to note that John used both terms in his account of this event in *John 19:17*.

αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς ἵνα σταυρωθῆ. Παρέλαβον ἐξ ἑ τὸν Ἰη-
 him to them that he might be crucified. "They "took "and Je-
 σοῦν ἑκαὶ ἀπήγαγον·" 17 καὶ βαστάζων ἐτὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ"
 sus " and led [him] away. And bearing his cross
 ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὸν λεγόμενον κρανίου τοπον, ὃς λέγεται
 he went out to the "called "of "a "skull "place, which "is called
 Ἑβραϊστὶ Γολγοθᾶ. 18 ὅπου αὐτὸν ἐσταύρωσαν, καὶ μετ'
 in Hebrew Golgotha: where him they crucified, and with

Both Erasmus and Tyndale stand as the founders of today's English translations and of the King James Bible, from which most all others have modeled their various translations from; ergo, given the title, Authorized Version [AV].

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