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INSTITUTO DE CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS — IH

DEPARTAMENTO DE HISTÓRIA — HIS

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Mark's Longer Ending and the Fourfold Gospel

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Ele não queria compor outro Quixote — o que seria fácil — mas o Quixote.
— Jorge Luis Borges

Abstract

The testimony of Greek manuscripts related to the end of Mark's Gospel presents a puzzle to contemporary Western readers. The several alternative endings across the manuscript tradition allow us to know only until which point the text is authentic, leaving room for further inquiry about what are the reasons for omission, or material addition in texts later deemed canonical. However, textual variation is not about only the content of Mark's Gospel, but it also sheds light over the New Testament process of canonical formation, especially over the grouping of the subcollection consisting of the four Gospels. Thus, we'll evaluate the textual variation of this New Testament pericope based on the findings of modern textual criticism and the harmonizing tendencies concomitant with the fourfold Gospel in second century CE Christianity, especially as seen in Tatian's *Diatessaron*.

Key-words: Mark's Gospel; Canon; Diatessaron; New Testament; Early Christianity.

Resumo

O testemunho dos manuscritos gregos do final do Evangelho de Marcos apresenta um enigma para leitores do Ocidente contemporâneo. Os diversos finais alternativos presentes na tradição manuscrita nos permitem saber apenas até que ponto o texto é autêntico, deixando ainda espaço para inquirição acerca de quais as razões da omissão ou acréscimo de material em textos posteriormente considerados canônicos. Todavia, a variação textual diz respeito não apenas ao conteúdo do Evangelho de Marcos, mas incide luz sobre o processo de formação canônica do Novo Testamento, em especial o agrupamento da subcoleção que compreende os quatro evangelhos. Assim, iremos avaliar a variação textual dessa perícopes do Novo Testamento com base nos achados da crítica textual contemporânea e com base nas tendências de harmonização concomitantes com o evangelho quadrúplíce durante o segundo século EC, em especial no *Diatessaron* de Taciano.

Palavras-chave: Evangelho de Marcos; Cânon; Diatessaron; Novo Testamento; Cristianismo Primitivo.

List of Abbreviations

<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	Irenaeus. <i>Adversus Haereses.</i>
<i>I Apol.</i>	Justin Martyr. <i>I Apology.</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Epistle of Barnabas.</i>
<i>1 Clem.</i>	<i>1 Clement.</i>
<i>2 Clem.</i>	<i>2 Clement.</i>
<i>Dial.</i>	Justin Martyr. <i>Dialogue with Trypho.</i>
<i>Did.</i>	<i>Didache.</i>
<i>Diog.</i>	<i>Epistle to Diognetus.</i>
<i>Ephr. Comm. Diat.</i>	Ephrem. <i>Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron.</i>
<i>Ep. Phil.</i>	Polycarp. <i>Letter to the Philippians.</i>
<i>Ep. Philad.</i>	Ignatius of Antioch. <i>Letter to the Philadelphians.</i>
<i>Ep. Smyrn.</i>	Ignatius of Antioch. <i>Letter to the Smyrneans.</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius. <i>Ecclesiastical History.</i>
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint.

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Introduction

For many readers of the Gospels in the West, it has been a tacit assumption that the texts at hand have always had a fixed form, without variation except for the rhythm and vocabulary of different translations. Yet, this has not been the case for much of the history of the text, either as a separate entity or as a collection used for liturgical, social, political or intellectual interests. One of the greatest, and most known, examples of such a textual fluidity is the end of Mark's Gospel.¹ Even though some translations may not make very clear that it presents a textual problem with a long history, and attested very early in church history (Jerome and Eusebius already mention it in textual notes), we could speak of at least five main variant readings.²

Yet, since this variation is a topic already extensively, and more aptly, covered by others, that which is of most interest isn't the alternative endings of the Gospel of Mark, but it's meaning and significance for canonical history, or the history of what later would be the New Testament canon. However, for the sake of clarity, it's necessary, at the outset, to define what we mean by canon and distinguish between the two main issues that will be dealt (Mark's longer ending³ and its bearing on the

¹ All quotations of the Bible in English, unless otherwise noticed, will be from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

² For a clearer presentation of those endings, cf. chapter 3, p. 36-37.

³ Mark's longer ending (Mark 16.9-20) as normally printed in modern Bibles: "Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them. Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table; and he upbraided them for their lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen. And he said to them, 'Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved; but the one who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes in their hands, and if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.' So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it." The Greek text (without noting variants) as printed in NA28 [cf. p. 11 below]: "Ἀναστὰς δὲ πρῶτῃ πρώτῃ σαββάτου ἐφάνη πρῶτον Μαρία τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ, παρ' ἧς ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια. ἐκείνη πορευθεῖσα ἀπήγγειλεν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ γενομένοις πενθοῦσιν καὶ κλαίουσιν· κάκεινοι ἀκούσαντες ὅτι ζῆ καὶ ἐθεάθη ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἠπίστησαν. Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα δυσὶν ἐξ αὐτῶν περιπατοῦσιν ἐφανερῶθη ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ πορευομένοις εἰς ἀγρόν· κάκεινοι ἀπελθόντες ἀπήγγειλαν τοῖς λοιποῖς· οὐδὲ ἐκείνοις ἐπίστευσαν. Ὑστερον [δὲ] ἀνακειμένοις αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἑνδεκά ἐφανερῶθη καὶ ὠνείδισεν τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν καὶ σκληροκαρδίαν ὅτι τοῖς θεασαμένοις αὐτὸν ἐγγερμένον οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν κόσμον ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει. ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ βαπτισθεὶς σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται. σημεῖα δὲ τοῖς πιστεύσασιν ταῦτα παρακολουθήσει· ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου δαιμόνια ἐκβαλοῦσιν, γλώσσαις λαλήσουσιν καιναῖς, [καὶ ἐν ταῖς χερσὶν] ὄφεις ἀροῦσιν κἄν θανάσιμόν τι πῖωσιν οὐ μὴ αὐτοὺς βλάψῃ, ἐπὶ ἀρρώστους χεῖρας ἐπιθήσουσιν καὶ καλῶς ἔξουσιν. Ὁ μὲν οὖν κύριος Ἰησοῦς μετὰ τὸ λαλήσαι αὐτοῖς ἀνελήμφθη εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ. ἐκείνοι δὲ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν πανταχοῦ, τοῦ κυρίου συνεργοῦντος καὶ τὸν λόγον βεβαιοῦντος διὰ τῶν ἐπακολουθούτων σημείων."

development of the New Testament canon) in order to advance the argument presented here.

As Gamble puts it “the canon is in the main a collection of collections, indeed of rather disparate collections that arose at different times and places under the force of different motives and agents.”⁴ Considering that definition, still somewhat loose, here we start to hint at a specific aspect of canon: that it is the final product of a process, and as such can never be called open, or is subject to notions such as that of an “open canon”, a conception that would render talk of canonicity useless.⁵ When defining canon, it is necessary to stress its finality if the purpose is to serve any use with analytic precision. Thus, taking our cue from James Barr, we may say that “A canon, in the sense of the canon of scripture, is: 1. a body of texts; 2. something public, declared authoritative for the whole community; 3. something understood to be permanent and not intended for revision.”⁶ Such a thing, then, must be translatable in the form of a list. We can say, then, that a canon is a list with those characteristics enumerated by professor Barr. It’s in this sense that we’ll be speaking of canon. This means that a distinction between the function of a writing as authoritative in a given community and its canonical status is operating when we speak of scripture and canon. A text may be scriptural because it is authoritative for a given community in a given time and location, but seen from the later perspective it can’t be called canonical because it didn’t make into the canon thus defined. Or, to put it more bluntly, every canonical writing is scriptural because it has religious authority, but not every text that once has functionally worked as scriptural is necessarily canonical. There may be a considerable overlap between both groups, but they are not identical, even though related.⁷

However, the finality involved in canon talk doesn’t mean that there weren’t any processes behind the collection and recognition of scriptural texts as part of a canonical list. Much the contrary, many, if not most, of the books that made their way into the New Testament canon already functioned as scripture for their original communities and for the christian church at large long before official canon lists started to be drawn by the fourth century. And with the distinction between scripture and canon made clear, we can consistently speak of a canonical process, or a process of canon formation that goes back a few centuries before the completion of the canon. Not an “open canon” of any

⁴ GAMBLE, Harry Y. “The New Testament Canon: Recent Research and the *Status Quaestionis*” In: MCDONALD, Lee Martin; SANDERS, James A. (Ed.). *The Canon Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, p. 275.

⁵ “If the canon is by definition a closed list of books that have been considered, debated, sifted, and accepted, then talk of an open canon is confusing and counterproductive; it seems more appropriate to speak of a growing collection of books considered as sacred scripture.” ULRICH, Eugene. “The Notion and Definition of Canon” In: MCDONALD, Lee Martin; SANDERS, James A. (Ed.) *The Canon Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, p. 34.

⁶ BARR, James. “The concept of canon and its modern adventures” In: *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 71.

⁷ MCDONALD, Lee Martin; SANDERS, James A. “Introduction” In: MCDONALD, Lee Martin; SANDERS, James A. (Ed.) *The Canon Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, p. 11.

sort, but the process by which books and texts started to be recognized as scripture and established themselves in the christian communities as part of an authoritative tradition.

It is to this process as related to the four gospels that we'll dedicate the next pages, cross-fertilizing the history of the New Testament canon with the consolidated results of textual criticism in Mark's Gospel. For the history of the text is crucial for the history of the canon, and thus we may follow the insight of Kurt Aland in a reverse direction.⁸

The weighty evidence against the authenticity of the other endings of Mark, as shall be seen in due course, is itself evidence of other concomitant processes beyond the mere transmission of the text at hand. The main assertion then is that the early appearance of alternative endings that also found early acceptance in the transmission history of Mark's Gospel, just as the material content of those endings, is evidence of an earlier circulation of a collection containing what later would be known as the four canonical gospels — earlier in relation to what is generally supposed to be the first indisputable attestation of it *as a fourfold collection* in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 180 AD).⁹

Many accounts of the formation of the Christian canon, and specially of the New Testament canon, frequently assert that it has been formed, or had a closure (whatever that means), only during the fourth and fifth centuries CE.¹⁰ While that may be true at a

⁸ “These insights gained from the history of the canon are fundamental and of vital significance for the history of the text — New Testament textual criticism has traditionally neglected the findings of early Church history, but only to its own injury, because the transmission of the New Testament text is certainly an integral part of that history.” ALAND, Kurt; ALAND, Barbara. “The Transmission of the Greek New Testament” In: *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*. 2. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, p. 49. This imply integrating social history and textual history, something recently done by Bart Ehrman, for example, in his book *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. In his case, he deals with the ways that christological divergence informed textual transmission. Here, we'll show how the notion of the fourfold gospel, or something very akin to that, informed the early transmission of Mark's Gospel.

⁹ *Adv. Haer.* 3.11.8. In chapter 11 of Book III, Irenaeus discusses the openings of each Gospel, and in the famous section 8 he speaks of the spiritual significance of the number four as related to the gospel. cf. “The fourfold Gospel” in: STANTON, Graham. *Jesus and Gospel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 75. See also SKEAT, T. C. Irenaeus and the Four-Gospel Canon. *Novum Testamentum*, v. 34, n. 2, 194-199, 1992, where T. C. Skeat speculates about a possible earlier source on which Irenaeus draws for his remarks over the significance of the number four.

¹⁰ John Barton speaks of this tendency to place the status of the New Testament as Scripture only in the late 4th century. However, we must concur with his remarks in the sequence: “[...] eventually what we call the New Testament books did become Scripture in much the same sense as the Old Testament: that is, after all, how most Christians see them today. When did this change occur? There is a widespread belief that it did not happen until the fourth century, which is the period from which we have the first official lists of New Testament books. [...] though indeed listing of that kind is a later development, it was in the second century that the New Testament books began to be seen not as informal documents but as scriptural texts.” BARTON, John. “Christians and Their Books” In: *A History of the Bible: The Book & Its Faiths*. New York: Penguin, 2020, p. 240. However, there's one possible candidate for a canon list that could come from the second century: the *Canon Muratori*. Nonetheless, its precise dating is not certain, and more recently there's been a tendency to ascribing it to the fourth century also. For the issues

definitional level, if we consider canon as a closed list of authoritative books, and for that matter an authoritative list itself, it's possible that a false impression may be garnered from the standard accounts: that those lists were the result of arbitrarily selected books from an infinitude of other possible combinations. However, that's not quite the picture we get from the production, consumption and circulation of early christian books from the early second century onwards. Surely, it's impossible to already speak of a New Testament canon here, yet we already see some well demarcated contours of what would later be called the New Testament canon through the use of specific books considered scriptural, or at least authoritative for the lives and identities of christian communities from an earlier date than usually conceded.

Proceeding, then, from the evidence against the authenticity of the alternative endings of Mark's Gospel,¹¹ it will be contended that they are evidence of a gathering that happened very early in the history of the four gospels as a subcollection within the New Testament canon. As it will be argued, framing the textual problem in those terms yields a good explanation for the phenomenon of textual addition itself and for the variation between different text strands concerned with the closure of Mark. Furthermore, the early tendency of harmonizing alternative readings of the same history, as seen in Tatian's *Diatessaron* for example, plus the discomfort left by the abrupt ending, which furnishes no resurrection account, serve as additional confirmation for the hypothesis here presented. Beside, further confirmation in this direction is seen in elements at the longer ending that indicate with considerable plausibility the presence of elements of the resurrection accounts of Matthew, Luke, and even John, thus placing that piece of textual evidence as a possible amalgamation between the other two synoptic gospels and John, all of which were, arguably, written after Mark. Even if the priority of Mark is not granted,¹² the presence of johannine elements in the text, as shall

regarding its dating, cf. HAHNEMAN, Geoffrey Mark. "The Muratorian Fragment and the Origins of the New Testament Canon" In: MCDONALD, Lee Martin; SANDERS, James A. (Ed.) *The Canon Debate*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, p. 405-415.

¹¹ Cf. chapter 3, p. 36-37. The most promising ending for analysis, for our purposes here, is the one called longer, and we'll focus particularly on it.

¹² Today most vigorously defended by FARMER, William. *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*. London: Cambridge University, 1974., considered a proponent of a neo-Griesbachian hypothesis, postulating Matthean priority as a solution to the synoptic problem, that is, to the literary relationship between the synoptics. The connection between the neo-Griesbachianism of Farmer and adherence to Mark's longer ending is succinctly elucidated by David Parker: "There is another area of Gospel study in which the ending of Mark has become a centre of attention. The Griesbach solution to the Synoptic Problem, which argues that Matthew was written first and Mark last, has some difficulty with the idea that Mark should have ended at 16.8. For it requires him to have rejected all the material contained in Matthew 28 and Luke 24, and to have decided to go against the tradition of recording resurrection appearances. It is thus no surprise to find W. R. Farmer, a leading contemporary 'neo-Griesbachian', claiming that we should consider the question 'still open', and in favour of the verses being 'redactional use of older material by the evangelist.'" PARKER, David. C. "The endings of Mark's Gospel" In: *The Living Text of the Gospel*. Nova York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 131-132. For a critical assessment of Farmer's proposal cf. FARMER, William. *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*. London: Cambridge University, 1974. Review: FEE, Gordon D. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, v. 94, n. 3, p. 461-464, 1975.

be argued, leaves open the door for the same line of inquiry and preserves the coherence of the argument here advanced.

The argument shall be divided in three main parts, dealing with the most relevant questions posed at such a proposal. First, we'll delve into the issue of Gospel collections, with questions regarding the material culture of early christianity as related to its literary practices and establishing the necessary starting point in terms of the more general transmission history of the New Testament. Secondly, Tatian's *Diatessaron* will be dealt as supplementary evidence of harmonizing tendencies between the Gospels, a tendency that may speak as indicative of early circulation of them as collection and a tentative approach to solve the multiple accounts of Jesus' life already receiving some sort of authoritative use in the ongoing Jesus' movement. Thirdly, the evidence of the different endings of Mark's Gospel will be dealt with, and the authenticity of the shorter version available asserted with an eye to some of the ensuing issues that may arise from that reconnaissance, such as if it is the intended original ending, the socio-rhetorical implications of it, and some elements of the textual history and transmission of that gospel. That evidence will be read in light of the question of a τετραεὐαγγέλιον (*tetraevangelium*), that is, of a fourfold gospel, which will prove itself as extremely relevant.

Critical editions

Nowadays, the main critical edition used for New Testament studies is the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (which enjoins nearly universal use), published by the *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* and known as Nestle-Aland, presently at its 28th edition (NA28).¹³ Due to its critical apparatus, that indicates the main units of textual variation within the textual tradition of the different books that compose the New Testament, and also to its attestation of the main testimonies from patristic era authors which may bear on the textual reconstruction, it has a very well suited critical apparatus for our present purposes. Thus, any references to the greek New Testament, unless otherwise noted, will be derived from the NA28 edition.

Unlike the greek New Testament, research related to post-apostolic and patristic fields does not have a critical edition that functions as a nearly universal reference work. Maybe the closest to this is to be found in the work produced by the *Ed. du Cerf*, with the *Sources chrétiennes* series, here employed for the references to Irenaeus of Lyon and arranged by Adelin Rousseau and Louis Doutreleau.¹⁴ For works coming from Antiquity in general, the material edited by the *Loeb Classical Library* is commonly used as a reference. Thus the new edition of the *Apostolic Fathers* that Bart Ehrman made to replace the revered edition prepared by Kirsopp Lake for the *Loeb* collection, will here

¹³ ALAND, Kurt; ALAND, Barbara; KARAVIDOPOULOS, Johannes; MARTINI, Carlo M; METZGER, Bruce M. (Ed.). *Novum Testamentum Graece*. 28. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012.

¹⁴ ROUSSEAU, Adelin; DOUTRELEAU, Louis. (Ed.). *Irénée de Lyon: Contre les Hérésies. Livre 3. Texte et traduction*. Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1974 (*Sources chrétiennes*, 210-211).

be taken as the working reference.¹⁵ For the greek fragments coming from Papias of Hierapolis preserved in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, we will also follow the *Loeb* edition, using the greek text prepared by Eduard Schwartz and accompanied by the translation of the late Kirsopp Lake.¹⁶ For the references to Justin Martyr two different critical editions have been employed: to his *Dialogue with Trypho* the work of Philippe Bobichon will be our company,¹⁷ and to both of his *Apologies* the references will be to the work of Dennis Minn and Paul Parvis.¹⁸

For Tatian's Diatessaron, however, we are faced with a peculiarity. It's very hard to determine with precision which readings are authentically diatessaronic, and the manuscript tradition is preserved in a multitude of different languages and in a plethora of texts ranging from late antiquity to early modernity. Therefore, we'll follow only generally what was supposed to be the Diatessaron through Ephrem's commentary on it. Our edition will be a translation prepared by Louis Leloir from the armenian and the syriac text of Ephrem's commentary published by *Ed. du Cerf* in the *Sources chrétiennes* series.¹⁹ Also, for this reason, it wouldn't be secure to establish any important premise in the foregoing argumentation based on any exact reconstruction of diatessaronic readings, and so our study of it will be out of necessity limited in scope.

¹⁵ EHRMAN, Bart D. (Ed.). *The Apostolic Fathers: volume I*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003 (Loeb Classical Library, 24); EHRMAN, Bart D. (Ed.). *The Apostolic Fathers: volume II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003 (Loeb Classical Library, 25).

¹⁶ CAPPS, E; PAGE, T. E.; ROUSE, W. H. D. (Ed.). *Eusebius: the Ecclesiastical History: volume I* (Books I-V). Transl. by Kirsopp Lake. Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1926 (Loeb Classical Library, 153).

¹⁷ BOBICHON, Philippe. (Ed.). *Justin Martyr, Dialogue avec Tryphon: édition critique, traduction, commentaire*. Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2003 (Paradosis, 47). 2 v.

¹⁸ MINN, Denis; PARVIS, Paul. (Ed.). *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹⁹ LELOIR, Louis. (Ed.). *Éphrem de Nisibe: Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant ou Diatessaron*. Traduit du syriaque et de l'arménien. Paris: Ed. du Cerf, 1966 (Sources chrétiennes, 121).

1. Gospel Collections

1.1. What is a gospel?

The word gospel simply means “good news”, coming from the greek noun “τὸ εὐαγγέλιον.” In our current usage, it usually designates a written record that tells about the life and deeds of Jesus Christ, that is, the good news of Jesus of Nazareth. In this sense, it generally means those gospels that appear in the New Testament of printed christian Bibles. But is the notion of a written gospel present since the beginning of christianity (or at least in the message of Jesus), or is it possible to detect alteration and mutation in the process of its comprehension? After being written down, how did the gospels circulate, what are their most reliable textual witnesses and how can we reconstruct their earlier texts? It is essential to think through those questions if we really want to understand how textual variation can shed light on the canonical history of the New Testament. Therefore, before delving more deeply on the issue of Mark’s different endings, or in the harmonizing tendencies of the first half of the second century, we’ll explore the earlier notions of gospel and the transmissional history of the gospels.

We could say that the written gospels are both unique and part of their cultural *milieu* (jewish and hellenistic), showing many continuities and discontinuities with literary genres that came before or were contemporaneous to them. As Loveday Alexander puts it,

Many of the motifs that appear in the gospels can be paralleled in contemporary texts, especially in the anecdotal material which acted as a prime carrier of school traditions both in the rabbinic academies and in the Greek philosophical schools. The way the tradition works is certainly not unique: folklore studies suggest a number of fruitful analogies. But what may be unique is the particular form this tradition takes when it is written down, a form whose external shape is strongly reminiscent of the Greek *bios* but whose narrative mode and theological framework (connectives, narrative structure, use of direct speech, intertextuality) owe much more to the [Hebrew] Bible.²⁰

That element of oral transmission, as taken in analogy to folktales, has something to say, because before there was a written gospel (at least resembling the familiar canonical form we are used to), when Mark was put down on papyrus or any

²⁰ ALEXANDER, Loveday. “What is a gospel?” In: BARTON, Stephen C. *The Cambridge Companion to the Gospels*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 29.

other type of written media, the noun τὸ εὐαγγέλιον was already known and widely used in first century christianity. Pauline christianity was very familiar with the expression, so much that in many undisputed letters Paul doesn't even bother to define the gospel, it's meaning is simply assumed. It

[...] is used sixty times in the Pauline letters, forty-eight times in the undisputed letters. In just over half of those passages, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is used absolutely, i. e. without any additional explanatory phrase such as 'of God' or 'of Christ.' [...] The prominence of the noun in early christian writings is astonishing, especially given the fact that the noun is used only once in the LXX at II Sam. 4.10 [...] ²¹

Here we have a hint that in the Pauline corpus gospel didn't designate a written work. Despite the cultural, political, or theological frame of reference that was possibly attached to the word, it wasn't being used as a name for a specific literary work or genre. Gospel was synonymous with Paul's preaching and with the *kerygma* of the dawning christian movement.

Whatever the instance one may take regarding the nature and genre of the canonical gospels, it's important to bear in mind that as a manifold testimony to the life of Jesus they look considerably different from the current approaches and attempts to formulate a coherent picture of Jesus of Nazareth (so-called historical Jesus scholarship). Their main goal isn't to instruct about the very mundane issues of Jesus' life, but rather to present him as the one who fulfilled the messianic expectations of the jewish people interpreted according to the Hebrew Bible; one who came with an apocalyptic message about the kingdom of God.²²

1.2. Orality and literary culture

²¹ STANTON, Graham N. "Jesus and Gospel" In: *Jesus and Gospel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 20.

²² For an informed assessment on the contours and main themes of the probable (eschatological) message of Jesus himself and its subsequent testimony in the synoptic tradition, cf. ALLISON, Dale C., Jr. "The Eschatology of Jesus" In: COLLINS, John J. (Ed.). *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism: The Origins of Apocalypticism in Judaism and Early Christianity*. New York: Continuum, 1998. Besides, it's necessary to be cautious not to confuse 'apocalypse' with 'apocalyptic'. Although two related concepts, they are nonetheless distinct. For what we mean when we talk about them, cf. COLLINS, John J. "The Apocalyptic Genre" and "Apocalypticism in Early Christianity" In: *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*. 3 ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016, p. 1-52 and p. 321-351.

What then of the transition from mostly oral proclamation to written narrative? It's important to bear in mind that despite the specific process that elapsed for the semantic overlapping between oral and written accounts of Jesus' life, we can't posit orality and literacy as competitive modes of traditioning in early christianity. It should be noted that the pauline corpus, which treats gospel roughly as the same as the message about Jesus, is itself written (to say the obvious). That triviality, at least, should make us pause before assigning two completely opposite modes of transmitting traditions about Jesus in early christianity.²³

Even if we took the problem a further remove from the issue at our hands and thought in terms of the relationship between the later canonical gospels and the historical Jesus, nevertheless we wouldn't have any reason to think that the nature of Jesus ministry, or of his immediate followers, privileged in absolute terms anyone of the poles. Even if we take one of the most popular scholarly reconstructions of Jesus as apocalyptic prophet by heart,²⁴ something that could make many people think that the eschatological urgency and immediacy in Jesus' preaching, and also in Paul's, would hinder the production of written records, that's not sufficient reason for thinking so. As Harry Gamble summarizes,

The discovery at Qumran brought to light a Jewish sectarian community contemporary with Christian origins that held eschatological expectations no less fervent than those of the early church yet invested heavily in the production and use of literature. Thus the claim of form critics like Dibelius that apocalyptic eschatology and literary activity are fundamentally incompatible was finally rendered untenable, for in Judaism the two were hand in glove, and imminent eschatology could not itself have inhibited literary activity in early christianity.²⁵

²³ We'll deal with the relevant testimony from Papias in chapter 3, p. 45-47.

²⁴ For a history of the scholarship behind the recovery of the "apocalyptic Jesus", cf. FREDRIKSEN, Paula. "*Al Tirah* ('Fear Not!'): Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology, from Schweitzer to Allison, and After" In: FERDA, Tucker S; FRAYER-GRIGGS, Daniel; JOHNSON, Nathan C. (Ed.). "*To Recover What Has Been Lost*": Essays on Eschatology, Intertextuality, and Reception History in Honor of Dale C. Allison Jr. Leiden: Brill, 2020, p. 15-38.

²⁵ GAMBLE, Harry Y. "Literacy and literary culture in early Christianity" In: *Books and Readers in the Early Church*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 20.

That's not to say that there weren't any differences between orality and literacy. Rather, it simply suggests that thinking in terms of opposition between the two modes isn't necessary, and in some cases is really misplaced.

1.3. Documentary evidence

Dealing with the transmissional history of the gospels requires from us, at least, a picture of what ancient texts we have at our disposal and how they came to us. However, we are faced with an issue that is not often mentioned: we have thousands of greek manuscripts for the later New Testament. Those manuscripts are normally classified as thus:

- (1) Documents written on papyrus. These are called papyri.
- (2) Documents written in majuscule script. All but two of such documents are written on parchment [...]. These are called majuscules.
- (3) Documents written on parchment and/or paper in minuscule script. These are called minuscules.
- (4) Documents in which the text is found in the sequence of the readings of the Church's year. These are called lectionaries. Most of the documents in the other three categories are called, in contrast, continuous-text manuscripts.²⁶

Definitely, that's not a coherent classification system. We have manuscripts classified by material support, type of script and text format (continuous or non-continuous text). Many of those categories may overlap, so using them as a classificatory tool can yield a lot of confusion. Nonetheless, this is the most effective classification system achieved for the collection of about 5,700 manuscripts.²⁷

²⁶ PARKER, David C. "The study of the manuscripts" In: *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 35.

²⁷ This system was elaborated by Caspar René Gregory during the beginning of the 20th century. Even though not a consistent one, it works with much more ease than its predecessors. For a brief history of the different classification systems of New Testament manuscripts, cf. ALAND, Kurt; ALAND, Barbara. "The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament" In: *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*. 2. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, p. 72-75. For a more thoroughgoing classification, cf. ALAND; ALAND, "The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament." Cf. also the website hosted by the *Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung* (Münster University), where is possible to access in digital form information for most of the New Testament manuscripts: <[New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room - INTF \(uni-muenster.de\)](http://www.uni-muenster.de/New_Testament_Virtual_Manuscript_Room_INTF)>. Access: 24 mar. 2021. For digitized manuscripts, cf. the page hosted by *The Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts*: <[Manuscripts - CSNTM](http://www.csntm.org/Manuscripts-CSNTM)>. Access: 1 apr. 2021.

Among those four kinds of documents classified, the papyri generally are the oldest extant forms of the text. Many of them came to us only in fragmentary form, but in some cases it is possible to have some idea of their content. A few of the most important for the study of the gospels are:²⁸

- **p⁴, p⁶⁴ and p⁶⁷** — originally thought as fragmentary, are now regarded as parts of the same manuscript (a single-quire codex with the four gospels). Dated to the end of the second century.
- **p⁴⁵** — it is one of the Chester Beatty papyri, and it contained the four gospels plus Acts. It's generally dated to the beginning of the third century.
- **p⁵²** — contains only a few verses of John's Gospel. It's generally dated to the beginning of the second century. Despite having a contested dating, many paleographers agree with its assignment. The fact that it is the oldest fragment of any portion of the New Testament, and that contains verses from John's Gospel found in Egypt is one piece of evidence that in the beginning of the second century all four gospels were already circulating (even though not necessarily together).²⁹
- **p⁶⁶** — contains a considerable portion of John's Gospel. Generally dated to the end of the second century or beginning of the third. However, some attempts have been made in ascribing it to the beginning of the second century or at least to the first half.

²⁸ This section [p. 17-20] is based on the information and analysis in METZGER, Bruce M; EHRMAN, Bart. "Important Witnesses to the Text of the New Testament" In: *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 4. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 52-86. For a more comprehensive list and categorization of manuscripts of the New Testament, cf. ALAND; ALAND, "The Manuscripts of the Greek New Testament", p. 159-163.

²⁹ "Although the extent of the verses preserved is so slight, in one respect this tiny scrap of papyrus possesses quite as much evidential value as would the complete codex. Just as Robinson Crusoe, seeing but a single footprint in the sand, concluded that another human being, with two feet, was present on the island with him, so **p⁵²** proves the existence and use of the fourth Gospel during the first half of the second century in a provincial town along the Nile, far removed from its traditional place of composition (Ephesus in Asia Minor)." METZGER; EHRMAN, "Important Witnesses to the Text of the New Testament", p. 56.

- **p⁷⁵** — a single-quire codex containing Luke and John. Dated to the end of the second century or beginning of the third. It attests to a form of the text similar to the main uncials used in reconstructing the text.³⁰

There are many other important papyri, but we won't deal with their content or description here because they don't have much to bear on the subsequent analysis. However, in the reconstruction of the text of the New Testament, we generally rely on some of the majuscules (also called uncials) assigned from the fourth to the fifth century. While the papyri are generally fragmentary, the uncials present on the whole a more continuous text. Let's take a look, then, at some of the most important majuscules:

- **Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲙ)** — once a complete Greek Bible, including apocrypha, this fourth century codex came to us with missing parts of the Old Testament, but is the only uncial with the complete Greek New Testament. This codex, discovered

³⁰ We must be cautious when speaking of reconstructing a text, be it an ancient text like the Septuagint and the New Testament, or an early modern like Shakespearean plays. All those texts have more than a single version, for the New Testament the situation is even more felt since in most cases we only have access to early third century or late second century texts. However, from most of our sources we can perceive great textual fluidity after the first stages of composition, so we can't assume that the text in a critical edition like the NA28 reflects what the purported original read like. That a third century papyrus conforms to fourth and fifth century uncials containing most of the New Testament only means that the *Vorlage* [i.e. exemplar text] of those uncials is reflected in the third century, not that it was anything like an autograph. For this reason, when we speak of "authentic", either about the text or about markan elements, this applies only to the possible text recoverable from these witnesses, that can go back only to the second half of the second century at some points and, in general, to the third century. Thus, when we speak of "authentic", we are making informed guesses as to how the text may have conformed to its actual format in a way that can account for variant units *in relation to* this reconstructed text. This, however, can't stop us from saying how the text *was not* based on internal criteria and external controlling factors adduced as evidence, and this is as relevant as saying how it was. The example of Shakespeare's plays come from PARKER, David C. "The Theory" In: *The Living Text of the Gospels*. Nova York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 4-7. As Eldon Epp puts it, "The issue of 'original text' is, for example, more complex than the issue of canon, because the former includes questions of both canon and authority. It is more complex than possessing Greek gospels when Jesus spoke primarily Aramaic, because the transmission of traditions in different languages and their translation from one to another are relevant factors in what is 'original.' It is more complex than matters of oral tradition and form criticism, because 'original text' encompasses aspects of the formation and transmission of pre-literary New Testament tradition. It is more complex than the Synoptic problem and other questions of compositional stages within and behind the New Testament, because such matters affect definitions of authorship, and of the origin and unity of writings. More directly, it is more complex than making a textual decision in a variation unit containing multiple readings when no 'original' is readily discernible, because the issue is broader and richer than merely choosing a single 'original' and even allows making no choice at all." EPP, Eldon J. The Multivalence of the Term "Original Text" in New Testament Textual Criticism. *Harvard Theological Review*, v. 92, n. 3, 1999, p. 246. In a certain sense, we need to presuppose some access to the original text, even though in limited form. The only caveat is that this access is not transparent and it assumes already a textual history before reconstructing the text. External evidence, then, works as the controlling factor, serving to stop us short from thoroughgoing skepticism and at the same time from naïve optimism in textual reconstruction.

in the Monastery of St. Catherine on Mount Sinai (Egypt), represents a kind of text generally called Alexandrian.

- Codex Alexandrinus (**A**) — a complete Greek Bible, with the whole Old Testament, and almost the whole New Testament, with the exception of most of the Gospel of Matthew and parts of John’s Gospel and 2 Corinthians. The text of this fifth century codex varies for different parts of the New Testament; in the Gospels it’s one of the oldest exemplars of what we call a Byzantine text-type (also called *koine*, or imperial), generally considered a latecomer textual form.
- Codex Vaticanus (**B**) — a complete Greek Bible, including apocrypha (except for the books of the Maccabees), this fourth century codex came to us with a few missing parts of the Old Testament (many chapters in Genesis and many Psalms are missing). Its New Testament is almost complete, but the final pages are missing (which includes the end of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Pastorals, Philemon and the Revelation of John). The text of **B** has great resemblance to **p**⁷⁵, and it is one of the clues for the continuity between the text-forms of the second and third centuries to the uncials of the fourth and fifth centuries. It represents a kind of text generally called Alexandrian.
- Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (**C**) — a fifth century codex of the Greek Bible erased in the 12th century (thus the designation *Rescriptus*) to give place to a series of sermons of St. Ephrem, the Syrian.³¹ Few of the Old Testament was left, and portions of most of the New were kept, with the exception of 2 Thessalonians and 2 John. It has a mixed text-type (compared to other codices and with the papyri).
- Codex Bezae-Cantabrigiensis (**D**) — a Greek-Latin codex from the fifth century with most of the four Gospels and Acts, and parts of 3 John. It’s the manuscript with most peculiar variants, being characterized by free additions and expansions to the text (especially in Luke).
- Codex Washingtonianus (**W**) — from the end of the fourth century, or beginning of the fifth, this codex with the four Gospels has a mixed text, with continuing

³¹ A fourth century church father, the same that wrote the commentary on the *Diatessaron* that we’ll use as a basis for our next chapter.

portions varying in agreement to one or other of the major identified text-types. It was included here for its markan text, that represents two combined text-types, with the first five chapters resembling the Old Latin, and the rest going up to Mark's longer ending and a few extra words at verse 14. Its text resembles **p**⁴⁵ in Mark.

In order to rely on the majuscules for the reconstruction of the text, considering the distance of two to three centuries between them and the texts they purportedly represent, we need some extra confirmation that they reliably represent text-forms³² that circulated during the second or third centuries. We can see that this is the case³³ by considering a few things. Even though most of the papyri found so far were discovered in Egypt, it's very unlikely that their texts were created there, since no New Testament book that was later deemed canonical has egyptian origins. Besides, we should consider the wide circulation of documents between egyptian cities (e.g. between Oxyrrhincus and Alexandria, where a great deal of New Testament, and other kinds of, papyri have been found) and between egyptian cities and provinces with the rest of the mediterranean world. This wide net of documents that accommodated egyptian and other mediterranean cities make it more likely to think that the textual fragments and remains of the New Testament found there provide a reliable picture of a few of the main texts in circulation back then. Add to this the resemblance between the text of the earliest papyri with later uncials, representing the three main text-types that became established in the fourth and fifth centuries, and we have evidence for contending that the text of the second century is well represented in the later uncials. That's not to say they are exactly the same, for the manuscript transmission process, by its very nature, precludes complete identity and assumes scribal errors and variation.

³² Although text-forms is a somewhat imprecise term, it is usual in the field. When speaking of text-forms we are referring to texts that show a resemblance of about 70% of textual agreement and a difference of *circa* 10% to texts of others so-called text-forms. Those numbers are taken from Eldon Epp (who prefers to speak of "textual clusters", bringing the analogy of a galactic cluster to represent the affinities between different manuscripts with similar texts), pointing to an already familiar precedence to keeping them this way. Cf. EPP, Eldon Jay. "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century: A Dynamic View of Textual Transmission" In: EPP, Eldon Jay; FEE, Gordon D. *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, p. 291-292.

³³ The argument that follows is derived, in condensed form, from EPP, "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century."

Then, some of the reasons to suppose that we have access to the main variant readings from the second century are, as Eldon Epp summarizes,

- (1) The dynamism of the early Christian environment in the first three centuries stimulated the movement of Christian writings (whether later to become "canonical" or "noncanonical") over wide areas of the Greco-Roman world and encouraged their use in various aspects of the liturgical and theological/intellectual life of the church.
- (2) The dynamism of life in the Greco-Roman world — even in the outlying areas of Egypt (where most of the NT papyri were discovered) — permitted relatively easy travel and rather free transmission of letters and documents, so that the earliest NT papyri — though they have survived accidentally and randomly — are generally representative of the earliest NT texts used by the Christianity of the time in all parts of the Greco-Roman world. Incidentally, it is of more than passing interest that the NT papyri contribute virtually no new substantial variants, suggesting not only that virtually all of the NT variants are preserved somewhere in our extant manuscript tradition, but also that representatives of virtually all textual complexions have been preserved for us in the papyri.³⁴

This brings us to the point of recognizing a pattern in christian literature from the early century, especially New Testament texts: they were generally written in papyrus and there appears to be a preference to the codex format.

Rolls, or scrolls, generally made of papyrus were the most common form of book circulation during greco-roman antiquity.³⁵ Similarly, rolls were the most used format for books in jewish settings also, but with a very accentuated preference for writing on animal skins (parchment). It's difficult to tell which kind of material was generally used by jews in pre-exilic times, but by the time the christian movement rose and the New Testament books started to be written, parchment was definitely the norm, especially for the *Torah*.³⁶

However, for some uncertain reason, the codex (a predecessor of modern books) seems to be the preferred format for books in early christianity since the beginning. It's hard to tell why that change happened, and so we must be cautious proposing wholesome theories. Yet, considering that the codex format was more akin to notebooks

³⁴ EPP, "The Significance of the Papyri for Determining the Nature of the New Testament Text in the Second Century", p. 295.

³⁵ GAMBLE, Harry Y. "The Early Christian Book" In: *Books and Readers in the Early Church*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

or utilitarian books, something must have prompted this transition with enough impetus to carry through the subsequent literary norms and traditions in christian book production.³⁷ Our *realia* suggests to us that the codex, able to contain more than one gospel, is the technology that enabled the gospel harmonies we'll study now. For even though possible to think of their authors/editors using many rolls to write their harmonies, the circulation of the gospels together assumed more space than rolls generally could afford.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49-66. Gamble argues that this transition was prompted by an early collection of the pauline letters. While that's not possible to prove, it seems a very good explanation as to why the transition may have happened in a world mostly dominated by the roll, and why it took traction in most christian circles. As to the use of a codex for recording a literary text, we have a reference to a very limited use in Martial's *Epigrams*. However, this reference only indicates that a literary use of the codex, instead of a purely utilitarian one, was thought as possible by Romans, not that it was widespread. The christian preference for the codex, then, was unexpected both in terms of its jewish and greco-roman inheritance.

2. Gospel harmonizations and Tatian's *Diatessaron*

In our way thinking through the issue of harmonizations, either between pericopes or whole books of the New Testament, it's almost inevitable to stop by and take a longer look at Tatian's *Diatessaron*. Tatian was Justin Martyr's disciple in Rome (until 165 CE), and undertook the task of writing a harmony of the four Gospels, thence the name *Diatessaron*, meaning "according to the four." We could postulate more sources for Tatian's *Diatessaron*, or discuss an alternative naming of it based on ancient musical theory, calling it instead *Dia + pente* (5) or *pollon* (many), but for the sake of clarity and for our present purposes, it's sufficient to keep the traditional name.³⁸

Our analysis of gospels harmonizations as related to Tatian's *Diatessaron* will be very limited. It is of somewhat importance to the issue at hand, but it also faces considerable difficulties. Diatessaronic studies are a very vast field, and command of both the literature and its primary sources is a remarkable achievement of erudition and patience, as put by William Petersen,

There are, however, significant obstacles to using the *Diatessaron*. The first is the wide range from Parthian to Middle English, from Syriac to Old Saxon. Secondary literature ranges just about as widely — both by language and by discipline: from Italian to Armenian, and from Germanic studies to Oriental studies [...]

It is simply a fact: the breadth of languages and disciplines relevant to Diatessaronic studies exceeds the grasp of any individual.³⁹

Thus, we'll concentrate on it as a relevant testimony to the main issue at our hands. That is, what can we say about it in terms of the scope and authority of the

³⁸ "The term diatessaron [...], borrowed from musical terminology and designating a series of four harmonic tones, is altogether appropriate as the descriptive title of a work that smoothly harmonizes the four accounts." METZGER, Bruce. "Development of the Canon in the East" In: *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, p. 114. Cf. also PETERSEN, William L. "Tatian" In: *Tatian's Diatessaron: It's Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*. Brill: Leiden, 1994, p. 49-51, where William Petersen elaborates a little bit the musical explanation for the variation between the designation *diatessaron* and *diapente*, both terms coming from ancient musical theory. There are good reasons, however, not to invest too much in explaining the name *Diatessaron* through exclusive reference to the Gospels, or even primarily. Among them, we should note that the possibility of other sources being employed and that it was probably written in syriac and very likely only later to be called by a greek name indicating its composite nature, seems to invite us to caution. For other possible sources employed by Tatian, cf. CHARLESWORTH, James H. *Tatian's Dependence Upon Apocryphal Traditions*. *The Heythrop Journal*, v. 15, n. 1, p. 5-17, 1974.

³⁹ PETERSEN, William L. "Introduction" In: *Tatian's Diatessaron: It's Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*. Brill: Leiden, 1994, p. 4-5.

gospels? How can we describe the fluidity of Gospel texts and their authority in second century early christianity?

2.1. The issue of a fourfold gospel

Up until the time Tatian wrote his harmony and Irenaeus referenced the fourfold gospel, we have a few instances of references to the gospel, or to the gospels, although most of them appear in the singular, and it's not clear if all of them refer to a written form.

From the Apostolic Fathers, we have *1 Clement* (c. 94-96 CE)⁴⁰ using the famous formula "it is written", following the quotation structure of the Epistle to the Hebrews chapter 1, but only applying it to the Psalms, even though the structure of quotation is taken from Hebrews. This is not directly related to the issue of the fourfold gospel, but shows that appreciation of books as scriptural and close association between these books (in this case the Psalms) with what later would be New Testament books was already taking shape. Of course, it would be misleading to say based on this excerpt that he took the Epistle to the Hebrews as scripture, but we do see an epistle shaping the way he thought about Old Testament scriptures.

However, this notion of paring and yet not directly equating the gospel and the scriptures of old becomes more accentuated at two later instances in *1 Clement*. At 42.3 it is said that the apostles preached the good news (εὐαγγελιζόμενοι), and they instituted bishops/overseers and deacons as a result of their preaching.⁴¹ At 42.5 he says that the appointment of bishops/overseers and deacons, according to the preaching of the gospel, is not an innovation, but happens according to the scriptures, and then quotes Isaiah 60.17 (LXX). It's quite interesting that he perceives the need to justify the results of gospel preaching with a scriptural quotation. The gospel (singular) is not yet regarded as scripture, but it needs to be enacted according to the available scriptures.

At 47.2 he speaks of a letter of Paul (referencing 1 Corinthians) written in the beginning of his proclamation of the gospel (τί πρῶτον ὑμῖν ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

⁴⁰ *1 Clem.* 36.3-5.

⁴¹ *1 Clem.* 42.4.

ἔγραψεν). To be sure, gospel is not treated as a written document, but its proclamation can be tied to a written form just as in the beginning of Paul's preaching.

At the *Didache* (c.100 CE), a very early catechetical work, we find that all instances of the word “gospel” are on the singular. The first of those instances⁴² occurs in a context related to prayer, and speaks of what the Lord commanded in his gospel (ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκέλευσεν ὁ κύριος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ αὐτοῦ). What's interesting is that it follows with a form of the dominical prayer with a wording almost identical to that found in Matthew's Gospel (Matthew 6.9-13), so when it introduces a quotation of what is said in the gospel, the didachist⁴³ is referring to a written source, most likely the Gospel of Matthew.

Later, it once again speaks of acting according to the gospel, that is, “as the gospel decrees” (κατὰ τὸ δόγμα τοῦ εὐαγγελίου οὕτω ποιήσατε).⁴⁴ This could be a reference to the gospel as orally proclaimed, but in the same section another reference is made to a saying in Matthew's Gospel.⁴⁵ The other occasion that reference is made to the gospel, or the “gospel of our Lord”, is not clear that it refers to a book.⁴⁶ We can see that in the *Didache* gospel already refers to a written source, even though it can't be demonstrated that this happens exclusively, and it appears that only Matthew's Gospel is envisioned.

From Ignatius of Antioch (writing c. 110 CE, on the way to his martyrdom) it doesn't seem that gospel has such a bookish connotation, although it's very likely that he was acquainted with one or more of the later canonical gospel. In his *Letter to the Philadelphians*, he says that the proclamation of the prophets anticipated the gospel.⁴⁷ The reference is to the prophets of the Old Testament, but we get a clue that he's not equating the gospel with a written form, because he says that the prophets hoped in ‘him’ and awaited ‘him’, not ‘it’ (διὰ τὸ καὶ αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον κατηγγελκέναι καὶ

⁴² *Did.* 8.2.

⁴³ The compositional history of the *Didache* is somewhat complex. It looks like a composite work, whether this was done by the same person, joining many sources in a single work, or if it was done during a longer time is not so relevant for our purposes. What is clear is that Matthew's Gospel exerted a considerable influence over its redaction.

⁴⁴ *Did.* 11.3.

⁴⁵ *Did.* 11.7. The reference is to Matthew 12.31 and the sin against the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁶ *Did.* 15.3-4.

⁴⁷ *Ep. Philad.* 5.2.

εις αὐτὸν ἐλπίζειν καὶ αὐτὸν ἀναμένειν). For Ignatius, the gospel is the equivalent to the life and person of Jesus Christ, as he explicitly says:

ἔμοι δὲ ἀρχεῖα ἐστὶν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, τὰ ἄθικτα ἀρχεῖα, ὁ σταυρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ἡ ἀνάστασις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ πίστις ἢ δι' αὐτοῦ, ἐν οἷς θέλω ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ ὑμῶν δικαιωθῆναι.⁴⁸

ἔξαιρετον δέ τι ἔχει τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ σωτῆρος, κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, τὸ πάθος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀνάστασιν.⁴⁹

In his *Letter to the Smyrneans* the contours of what gospel means are essentially the same. At 5.1 he speaks of those who haven't been convinced by the Law of Moses, by the words of the prophets, by the gospel or by the suffering they are experiencing. It's noteworthy that the Law of Moses and the prophets refers to written things, while the gospel, even though in the same sequentiation, come at the end side by side with their sufferings. They are related types of testimony, but of different kinds. The gospel, in the singular, certainly has narrative content for Ignatius, but it can't be said that it is conceived in bookish terms. In the same *Letter to the Smyrneans* we have another reference⁵⁰ of the gospel side by side with a reference to the prophets, but the meaning of the gospel is always in narrative terms (e.g. the passion and the resurrection).

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, seems to have thought about the meaning of gospel in a way very reminiscent of Ignatius of Antioch. In Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians* (c. 130 CE), the gospel is portrayed in the singular also and, like Ignatius, its content is equivalent to the coming of the Lord, which the prophets proclaimed in advance.⁵¹ A little bit later, in the same letter, Polycarp seems to call a Pauline (or deutero-pauline) epistle scripture.⁵² The quotation brought by Polycarp could also be from Psalm 4.5, but

⁴⁸ *Ep. Philad.* 8.2. "But for me, Jesus Christ is the ancient records; the sacred ancient records are his cross and death, and his resurrection, and the faith that comes through him—by which things I long to be made righteous by your prayer."

⁴⁹ *Ep. Philad.* 9.2. "But there is something distinct about the gospel—that is, the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ, his suffering, and resurrection."

⁵⁰ *Ep. Smyrn.* 7.2.

⁵¹ *Ep. Phil.* 6.3.

⁵² *Ep. Phil.* 12.1: "Confido enim vos bene exercitatos esse in sacris literis, et nihil vos latet; mihi autem non est concessum. modo, ut his scripturis dictum est, irascimini et nolite peccare, et sol non occidat super iracundiam vestram."

in the same section he brings an injunction reminiscent of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.⁵³

The *Epistle of Barnabas* (c.100-130 CE) has one saying of Jesus that possibly comes from Matthew introduced by the scriptural formula "it is written" (ὡς γέγραπται).⁵⁴ Whether the saying really comes from Matthew, or from another place, its contents are identified as scripture.

The picture in *2 Clement* (c. 140 CE)⁵⁵ points to a more textual comprehension of the christian faith.⁵⁶ We do have unequivocal attestation for the words of Jesus being called scripture, and the quotation is very close to its synoptic formulation, especially the markan form of the saying.⁵⁷ Later he speaks of what the Lord says in the gospel, and then his quotation has equivalence in Luke's Gospel, even though only for the second half.⁵⁸ At 14.2 he puts side by side what the books (τὰ βιβλία) say, making reference to the Old Testament scriptures he had just quoted, and what the apostles say concerning the church. That, however, can't be extrapolated for a very defined *corpus* in use by the author of *2 Clement*, for just a few lines later he quotes Jesus from an unknown source.⁵⁹

In the *Epistle to Diognetus* (written after 150 CE) we do have a reference to the gospels (plural).⁶⁰ Even though *en passant*, section 11 of the epistle seems to ecoate at least themes from John's Gospel and also from Matthew's.⁶¹

Up to the middle of the second century, then, we perceive that the boundaries between oral and written gospel are not so clear. But in some of the authors, there seems to be a pattern of thinking the gospel in the singular and attaching a narrative structure to it. Another interesting feature is that in many of those instances the gospel is placed

⁵³ *Ep. Phil.* 12.3.

⁵⁴ *Barn.* 4.14.

⁵⁵ The majority of scholars judge that this epistle was not written by the same author of *1 Clement*.

⁵⁶ "There is a clear movement toward the establishment of a set of Christian textual authorities here, for example, but no indication of a recognized canon. EHRMAN, Bart. "Introduction to the Second Letter of Clement to the Corinthians" In: *The Apostolic Fathers: volume I*, p. 159.

⁵⁷ *2 Clem.* 2.4: "καὶ ἑτέρα δὲ γραφὴ λέγει, ὅτι [...]" and then proceeds with a quotation that found an equivalent form in Matthew 9.13, Mark 2.17, Luke 5.32.

⁵⁸ *2 Clem.* 8.5. The quotation resonates with Luke 16.10.

⁵⁹ *2 Clem.* 14.3.

⁶⁰ *Diog.* 11.6.

⁶¹ The first chapter and the last, respectively. The thematic resemblance may be too thin, but is plausible.

side by side with the Old Testament scriptures. In most of the cases they are not equalled, but are nonetheless seen as interrelated. If we can't speak of a fourfold gospel within these authors, we can still perceive a movement to a more textual faith taking shape from the 140's on.

If we are correct in thinking that the textual criticism of the New Testament allows us to speak of the fourfold gospel circulating together at an earlier date than most commonly thought, it seems that the best place to locate this achievement would be in churches with correspondences with the roman church. The more consolidated textuality in *2 Clement* may point to this direction. There's no certainty about the provenance of *2 Clement*, but since it was thought that it came from the same pen as *1 Clement*, it would make sense to think of Rome, Corinth (the destiny of *1 Clement*), or even some egyptian churches that kept in touch with the roman church.⁶²

If that is the case, Justin Martyr, who lived in Rome, would lend more credibility to the assertion that the fourfold gospel started to take its more consolidated form within the roman church. It's generally accepted that Justin knew at least the synoptics, but his knowledge of John is disputed. However, following Graham Stanton, it seems very reasonable to suppose that he also knew John's Gospel.⁶³ At his *I Apology*,⁶⁴ there's an instance where he seems to be quoting from John 3. Many scholars raise doubt over it, because at the second half of the quotation he adds the expression 'kingdom of heaven' (τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν), typically matthean. However, in the following sentence, he brings the same doubts that Nicodemus raises when speaking of being born from the high (and Justin has born from the water) — the impossibility of reentering his mother's womb. This seems peculiarly specific to be coincidental. The matthean element in this instance would suggest very strongly that Justin himself already had a harmony of the gospel, before his disciple Tatian made his own.⁶⁵

⁶² EHRMAN, Bart. "Introduction to the Second Letter of Clement to the Corinthians" In: *The Apostolic Fathers*: volume I, p. 156.

⁶³ STANTON, "The fourfold Gospel", p. 76.

⁶⁴ *I Apol.* 61.4-5: "καὶ γὰρ ὁ χριστὸς εἶπεν, Ἄν μὴ ἀναγεννηθῆτε, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν, ὅτι δὲ καὶ ἀδύνατον εἰς τὰς μήτρας τῶν τεκουσῶν τοὺς ἅπαξ γενομένους ἐμβῆναι φανερόν πᾶσιν ἐστὶ."

⁶⁵ Cf. PETERSEN, William. Textual Evidence of Tatian's Dependence upon Justin's ΑΠΟΜΝΗΜΟΝΕΥΜΑΤΑ. *New Testament Studies*, v. 36, n. 4, p. 512-534, 1990.

That he knew the gospels, we can confirm this only a few lines later in his *I Apology*.⁶⁶ He calls them the memories (ἀπομνημονεύμασιν) of the apostles called gospels (ἃ καλεῖται εὐαγγέλια). Of course, this could just refer to oral memories of the apostles, but at *Dialogue with Trypho*,⁶⁷ the Jewish man says he has read Jesus' commandments in the Gospel.

We have, then, in the Roman church during the middle of the second century CE enough evidence that the four gospel was known and used in various forms. It's interesting that even though Justin prefers to call the gospels as the 'memories of the apostles', he nonetheless suggests that they were known as gospels, in plural form. He still calls it the gospel, in the singular, a few times, but the use of the plural when there's a solid precedent to generally favour the singular in reference to them suggests a blur between the media and the content. This also suggests something more relevant for the history of the fourfold gospel — at this moment, the content of the gospel (before thought in more narrativized form and more or less equivalent to Jesus' life) is now being confused with the format of the gospel. It's in this scenario that we find out the first harmonies being made (Justin's and Tatian's), for if the content can't be distinguished from the books anymore, it's necessary to have a unified account of Jesus' life, for there are not many Jesus but one.

2.2. Gospel harmonizations as an ambiguous trend

That this problem started to be felt in the middle of the second century and prompted many responses in different forms until the time of Irenaeus is a reason to make us pause before proposing a canon with a fourfold gospel ahead of its time. But make us ponder and think that it was a problem felt before, even though with a smaller intensity. For Justin and Tatian to make their harmonies, they already needed to have access to the fourfold gospel.

There's a sense in which it's possible to say that the Diatessaron is the stick of sobriety and modesty in the main argument here advanced. Even if, as argued here, we

⁶⁶ *I Apol.* 66.3.

⁶⁷ *Dial.* 10.2: “Υμῶν δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐν τῷ λεγομένῳ Εὐαγγελίῳ παραγγέλματα θαυμαστὰ οὕτως καὶ μεγάλα ἐπίσταμαι εἶναι, ὡς ὑπολαμβάνειν μηδένα δύνασθαι φυλάξαι αὐτά.”

can with some measure of confidence suppose that the four now canonical gospels circulated together at least from the time of Papias' on,⁶⁸ we would still need to be cautious before proceeding with unbridled confidence on this thesis. Even the later canonical gospels themselves are harmonizations of earlier sources in a very real way, as William Peterson says,

While normally thought of as such, all of the canonical gospels “harmonize” earlier materials. While it is true that the Diatessaron appears to have been a very subtle, word-by-word harmonization, and the canonical gospels seem to use their sources *en bloc*, the genre of both is, ultimately, the same.⁶⁹

Regardless of positions about the so called “Synoptic problem”, or the degree of familiarity the author (or authoral community) of John had of the synoptics, or the other way around, in all of them we find a very marked superposition of sources and traces of editorial work. Luke's prologue is, in that sense, paradigmatic, stating that

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus [...]⁷⁰

Though only a small sample, it explicitly asserts that in its own time many people had already tried to “set down an orderly account of the events” related to Jesus' life. However, considering the literary affinities shared by all four later canonical evangelists, we are in a good position stating that all of them were harmonizers.

That's enough to caution us in postulating too many continuities between early and later christianity as to how both tended to look at the writings at their disposal. And even if we keep the distinction between canonical and scriptural as laid out in the introduction, the relationship between the synoptics, John, and other Jesus traditions

⁶⁸ See chapter 3, p. 45-47.

⁶⁹ PETERSEN, William L. “The second-century background” In: *Tatian's Diatessaron: It's Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship*. Brill: Leiden, 1994, p. 26-27.

⁷⁰ Luke 1.1-3: “Επειδήπερ πολλοὶ ἐπεχείρησαν ἀνατάξασθαι διήγησιν περὶ τῶν πεπληροφορημένων ἐν ἡμῖν πραγμάτων, καθὼς παρέδοσαν ἡμῖν οἱ ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς αὐτόπται καὶ ὑπηρεταὶ γενόμενοι τοῦ λόγου, ἔδοξεν ἡμῶν παρῆκοι καὶ ἀκριβῶς καθεξῆς σοὶ γράψαι, κράτιστε Θεόφιλε [...]

that were contemporary, must have been a little more complicated to situate within these two categories. If we accept the most common two source theory with marcan priority in the case of the synoptics, it's very difficult fleeing the conclusion that whatever all the priorities of Matthew were, at least some of them had to do with replacing Mark as the landmark work in transmitting Jesus' life. Were it not the case, it would seem pointless to enlarge the narrative portions of it, keeping much of the language, and yet inserting a bunch of alterations that smoothed out hard sayings to a later audience.⁷¹ Even if the four started to circulate together at a very early date, as we propose based on Mark's longer ending, it's scriptural status is not sufficiently secured as being of equal footing between them — the freedom Matthew took to extensively rework Mark for its purposes and the free pattern of quotations of Jesus traditions in the second century, even by ardent defenders of the sacredness of the fourfold gospel like Irenaeus, points in this direction.⁷²

⁷¹ For example, the divorce sayings (Matthew 19.3-9; Mark 10.1-12; Luke 16.18), where there's considerable variation in meaning because of the presence or absence of a clause. The marcan and the lukan Jesus both bring forth a condemnation of divorce without any qualification, whereas the matthean Jesus inserts the clause "except for *πορνεία*." Even assuming Mark as the oldest of the three, it's possible to suppose a certain distance between this saying and the probable original saying of Jesus, since Mark envisages the possibility of women seeking divorce, something very unlikely in the predominantly Jewish milieu where Jesus supposedly said this. Thus, we would see the 'matthean clause' as a reworking of the saying in order to make it fit for a new audience. Even Mark does this, for a larger measure, when he adapts the saying for an audience more familiar with Roman marriage practices. Many scholars, based on the marcan redaction, take this as evidence that Mark was probably written in Rome. However, as Zeichmann argues on other grounds (the taxation episode in 12.13-17), many of those more typical Roman perspectives present in Mark could just as well, or even better, be explained in Palestine after the destruction of Jerusalem's Temple, situating Mark's Gospel c. 71 CE in a Syrian context. cf. ZEICHMANN, Christopher B. The Date of Mark's Gospel Apart from the Temple and Rumors of War: The Taxation Episode (12:13–17) as Evidence. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, v. 79, n. 3, p. 422-437, 2017. Kloppenborg proposes that the Roman practice of *evocatio deorum* is echoed in the beginning of the eschatological discourse in Mark 13.1-2, and is thus relevant for dating Mark's Gospel, arriving at a date a little bit before or a little bit later than 70 CE, cf. KLOPPENBORG, John S. *Evocatio Deorum* and the Date of Mark. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, v. 124, n. 3, p. 419-450, 2005. Zeichmann's proposal has the advantage of making sense in different reconstructions and not depending upon a very disputed analysis of the eschatological discourse and the origin of those sayings. For a more detailed analysis of the divorce sayings, examining not only variation between the synoptics, but also textual variation in the transmission history of the gospels themselves, cf. PARKER, David C. "The sayings on marriage and divorce" In: *The Living Text of the Gospel*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 75-94.

⁷² As Graham Stanton remembers us: "[...] it is important to recall that there are no explicit comments on the fourfold Gospel before Irenaeus, and to note that knowledge and use of a plurality of gospels is not necessarily to be equated with acceptance of the fourfold Gospel." STANTON, "The fourfold Gospel", p. 74. And, "for Justin, we could say that his quotations very probably come from an already harmonized version he had that in many respects was distinct from the four later canonical gospels and had a considerable overlap with the later work of his student Tatian." So much that "The most recent study of the matter, which compared Justin's gospel citations with their parallel passages in the Diatessaron, found

There were also other harmonies, in the strict sense of the word, and gospels circulating back then that had some kind of affinity with the *Diatessaron*. William Petersen mentions at least two harmonies (from Theophilus of Antioch and from Ammonius of Alexandria⁷³) and a judaic-christian gospel: the “Hebrew Gospel” or “Gospel according to the Ebionites.”⁷⁴

But the harmonizing path, with whole books composed of many Jesus’ traditions arranged to compose a single coherent narrative, wasn’t the only one taken. And even though Tatian’s *Diatessaron* or Justin’s harmonies may be duly seen as representatives of a period, at least in the west, it remains that they weren’t the only plausible ways of solving the impasse between having a single Jesus and many narratives about him. The fact, then, that we have an harmonization inserted at the end of an individual gospel, as we shall see now, is an indicative that at least some people in the early second century church before Irenaeus thought possible to live with a fourfold gospel. The fourfold gospel emerged from previous roots, of course, but he also had to assert itself in front of the other paths that were once seen as plausible as the fourfold gospel became later.⁷⁵

textual agreements both in the sequence of harmonization and in variant readings, some of which are unique. These agreements admit only two explanations: either Tatian knew and used Justin's harmony, or both relied on the same pre-existing harmonized source.” PETERSEN, “The second-century background”, p. 29.

⁷³ Not to be confused with Ammonius Saccas and other Ammonius of Alexandria, a monk who lived during the fifth or sixth century. PETERSEN, “The second-century background”, p. 32, n. 82.

⁷⁴ The precise identification of this Gospel is difficult, and precise identification of other judaic-christian Gospels is also difficult. We could just as well be speaking of the same work under a different designation, or speaking of different works under an umbrella-term. However, despite the precise identification of the “Hebrew Gospel” it’s attested as some form of harmonization, even though church fathers like Epiphanius and Jerome deemed corrupt or tampered. “The fact that fragments from two Judaic-Christian gospels find frequent parallels in Diatessaronic witnesses raises the question whether the fragments have been assigned correctly: since both sets of fragments contain parallels with the Diatessaron, might they come from one (not two) Judaic-Christian gospel, one which was also known to Tatian? These formal and textual similarities are not the only link between the Diatessaron and the Judaic-Christian gospels, for Epiphanius states that a gospel used by the Nazoraeans, which he calls [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον] κατὰ Ἑβραίων (“[the gospel] according to the Hebrews”) is also known as Tatian's Diatessaron.

Whatever the precise number and names of the Judaic-Christian gospels, it is clear that at least one of them, quoted extensively by Epiphanius and designated by modern scholars as the Gospel according to the Ebionites, was a harmony of the synoptic gospels. It also incorporated extra-canonical traditions. Fragments from it and from another Judaic-Christian gospel, designated by modern scholars as the Gospel according to the Nazoraeans, have textual parallels with Diatessaronic witnesses.” PETERSEN, “The second-century background”, p. 31.

⁷⁵ For the plurality of early christianity and its reflexes upon the textual transmission of the New Testament, cf. EHRMAN, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*. The *realia* of Ehrman’s work is a great summary of the availability of other paths for the future open for the early church. Maybe one of the

problems with his work is only that it assumes that all those paths were of equal footing among them, that is, that they were on the same level of exegetically defensibility if we consider the writings that came to be regarded as the New Testament. Even if the accuracy of those writings is open to discussion, nonetheless they gather the most ancient record we have for early christianity.

3. The last verses of Mark and the fourfold Gospel

3.1. Missing end or intentionally ended at v. 8?

Anthony Grafton tells the story of Paul Coleman-Norton, who in 1950 published a supposed greek fragment of Matthew 24, in which

The text continues the passage in Matthew 24 where Jesus tells his disciples that those who are assigned the portion of the hypocrites will be condemned to ‘weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ In the new section a disciple raises an objection: what, he asks, will happen to the toothless? ‘O ye of little faith,’ Jesus replies, ‘teeth will be provided.’⁷⁶

Professor Grafton quickly notes that the supposed fragment wasn’t discovered, but created by Coleman-Norton. Despite the longer ending of Mark not being so funny (except if the reader enjoys playing with snakes), it was created as an answer for a perceived necessity, namely, to supplement the story told until verse 8. Obviously, not a comic necessity as that related to the oral health of those gnashers, yet a very poignantly felt need, since at least five different endings appeared in the transmission history of this pericope. We can certainly suppose that part of the discomfort has to do with the text ending with women fleeing in fear and no appearance of the resurrected Jesus.⁷⁷

In a study exploring cognitive genre theory and audience expectation, Elizabeth Shively suggests that Mark might have plausibly ended at verse 8.⁷⁸ She notes that some

⁷⁶ GRAFTON, Anthony. “Introduction” In: *Forgers and Critics: Creativity and Duplicity in Western Scholarship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990, p. 4.

⁷⁷ It’s must be noted that the proclamation of Jesus’ resurrection was already somewhat consolidated in the proclamation of the early Jesus movement, orally and even in textual form, as 1 Corinthians 15.3-8 make clear: “παρέδωκα γὰρ ὑμῖν ἐν πρώτοις, ὃ καὶ παρέλαβον, ὅτι Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς καὶ ὅτι ἐτάφη καὶ ὅτι ἐγήγερται τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς καὶ ὅτι ὤφθη Κηφᾶ εἶτα τοῖς δώδεκα· ἔπειτα ὤφθη ἐπάνω πεντακοσίοις ἀδελφοῖς ἐφάπαξ, ἐξ ὧν οἱ πλείονες μένουσιν ἕως ἄρτι, τινὲς δὲ ἐκοιμήθησαν· ἔπειτα ὤφθη Ἰακώβῳ εἶτα τοῖς ἀποστόλοις πᾶσιν· ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων ὡσπερὶ τῷ ἐκτρώματι ὤφθη κάμοι.” There may be other good reasons for adherence to this particular tradition, as David Parker says: “The contents of Mark 16.9-20 provide another, theological, reason for the intensity of debate. We have in these verses a command to preach the gospel throughout the world; emphasis on the necessity of baptism for salvation; a list of signs that accompany belief — exorcisms, glossolalia, immunity to venom and poison, healing of the sick; the ascension and session of Jesus, and successful activity by the apostles. Most of these are found elsewhere. But the safe handling of venomous snakes (a popular subject for television programmes in search of the lurid) is not.” PARKER, “The endings of Mark’s Gospel”, p. 130.

⁷⁸ Cf. SHIVELY, Elizabeth E. Recognizing Penguins: *Audience Expectation, Cognitive Genre Theory, and the End of Mark’s Gospel*. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, v. 80, n.2, p. 273-292, 2018.

biblical works do in fact have open endings,⁷⁹ inviting the audience to imagine the rest of the story or to imitate the model presented. Whether she is correct or not,⁸⁰ her study eliminates the *a priori* supposition that every ancient work, specially those with biographical overtones, necessarily had to give an explicit closure. While this is a welcome suggestion, if the ending at Mark 16.8 was the original one intended by the evangelist, it seems that he was roundly misunderstood very early thereafter. As we'll show, very soon the text was interpolated and included a resurrection narrative (something that, *contra* Shively, appears to be implied by Mark 14.28 and 16.7).⁸¹ Our argument wouldn't be affected if the abrupt ending was intended for rhetorical purposes, for, after all, misunderstanding can occur as soon as any text is read.

3.2. External evidence

With regard to the external attestation of Mark's longer ending, it should be noted that the overwhelming majority of later manuscripts show it in one form or another. However, that's not in itself evidence for its authenticity. This is so because with respect to variant readings in the textual history of the New Testament, as Kurt and Barbara Aland notes,

[...] an indomitable stubbornness is one of the basic characteristics of New Testament textual history: once a variant or a new reading enters the tradition it refuses to disappear, persisting (if only in a few manuscripts) and perpetuating itself through the centuries. One of the most striking traits of the New Testament textual tradition is its tenacity.⁸²

Despite the tenacity of variant readings, it's already almost certain that the earliest authentic recoverable ending (considering the publication of the book as the

⁷⁹ SHIVELY, *Recognizing Penguins*, p. 285. The examples she gave were the prophet Jonah and Acts, although Acts is much more closer to Mark than Jonah.

⁸⁰ For the suggestion that Mark's ending is irretrievably lost, cf. STEIN, Robert H. *The Ending of Mark. Bulletin for Biblical Research*, Princeton, v. 18, n. 1, p. 79-98, 2008.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² ALAND; ALAND, "The Transmission of the Greek New Testament", p. 56.

reference for authenticity)⁸³ is the one called shorter, that which ends at verse 8 of chapter 16 in modern versions.⁸⁴

It is very likely that those readers acquainted with Mark's Gospel know what became called the longer ending. This variant reading won its place in modern Bibles translated from the New Testament critical edition produced by Erasmus of Rotterdam and from subsequent editions that followed up until the mid nineteenth century. This family of print editions of the Greek New Testament, that became known as *Textus Receptus*, or received text, from the Elzevir brother's edition of 1633, Leiden, secured the place of the longer ending that Erasmus inserted in his own text based on the manuscripts that he disposed.⁸⁵ However, there's more to textual variation at Mark's ending than just two variant readings. It is possible to group the alternative endings presently at our disposal into five main endings:⁸⁶ 1) The short and abrupt one, that goes up until verse 8, and closes saying “καὶ ἐξεληθοῦσαι ἔφυγον ἀπὸ τοῦ μνημείου, εἶχεν γὰρ αὐτὰς τρόμος καὶ ἔκστασις· καὶ οὐδενὶ οὐδὲν εἶπαν· ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ”⁸⁷ 2) The intermediate ending,⁸⁸ that adds after verse 8: “Πάντα δὲ τὰ παρηγγελμένα τοῖς περὶ τὸν Πέτρον συντόμως ἐξήγγειλαν. Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπὸ ἀνατολῆς καὶ ἄχρι δύσεως ἐξαπέστειλεν δι' αὐτῶν τὸ ἱερὸν καὶ ἄφθαρτον κήρυγμα τῆς αἰωνίου σωτηρίας. ἀμήν.”, and only in *Codex Bobiensis* (a latin codex from the end of the IV, or

⁸³ For the concept of publication in Antiquity, and particularly in Christian circles cf. GAMBLE, Harry Y. “The Publication and Circulation of Early Christian Literature” In: *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995, p. 82-143.

⁸⁴ The various different readings here presented have elsewhere been named differently by other authors.

⁸⁵ For a history of the critical printed editions of the New Testament cf. “The Editions of the New Testament” In: ALAND, Kurt; ALAND, Barbara. *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*. 2. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989, p. 3-47.

⁸⁶ STEIN, The Ending of Mark, p. 80-85.

⁸⁷ This end is attested in manuscripts **ⲛ B 304 sa^{ma} arm^{ms}**. Usually, the combined testimony of Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus is a strong indicator regarding the authenticity of a passage or a variant. Taking heed of the careful articulation between the evaluation of patristic evidence, and exegetical practices of antiquity proposed by professor Farmer (FARMER, William. *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark*. London: Cambridge University, 1974, p. 3-30), we should be careful in our evaluation of Jerome's and Eusebius' testimony relevant to the ending of Mark's Gospel, cf. KELHOFFER, James A. The Witness of Eusebius' *ad Marinum* and Other Christian Writings to Text-Critical Debates concerning the Original Conclusion to Mark's Gospel. *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, v. 92, n. 1-2, p. 78-112, 2001. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translates it as follows: “So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.”

⁸⁸ We owe both the designation “short” and “intermediate” to PARKER, “The endings of Mark's Gospel”, p. 124-125.

beginning of the V, century) it appears without being followed by the longer ending. 3) The already mentioned longer ending, that despite good attestation in some of the most ancient manuscripts, according to the testimony of Eusebius and Jerome doesn't appear in a great number of the most reliable ones. In some of the manuscripts where it shows up it appears at the margins, or with graphic markers, or with some critical comments. 4) The brief ending followed by the longer one, appears in some manuscripts of the VII, VIII, and IX centuries, besides some Syriac, Sahidic, Bohairic and Ethiopian manuscripts, which clearly show cases of later interpolation. 5) And the *Freer Logion*,⁸⁹ which is a version of the longer ending plus an interpolation at verse 14 before giving continuity to the text.

3.3. Internal evidence

Weighing internal evidence for the longer ending, we can note many linguistic oddities. Those linguistic idiosyncrasies at the longer ending make very unlikely that the parallels between this section and the resurrection appearances on the other synoptics and John could be explained as derivatives of it and not the other way around (that the extended ending was composed drawing from them). For one thing, were the resurrection appearances of Matthew, Luke and John based on Mark 16. 9-20, we would expect consistency in the rendition of some linguistic features being common between all of them. Yet the use of many words nowhere else found throughout the rest of the New Testament, or even in the rest of Mark's Gospel itself, is a strong indicative of its secondary nature compared to the rest of the markan corpus.⁹⁰ Even some words that

⁸⁹ Attested in **W**, and in some manuscripts available to St. Jerome, which unfortunately we don't have access anymore. As to its authenticity, James Elliott put it bluntly: "The so-called Freer logion found after 14 in the Greek uncial W and part of which is found in Greek MSS. known to Jerome has no claim to being original either to Mark's Gospel or to the longer ending. The vocabulary differs sharply from both: ὄρος and πρόσλεγω are hapaxes [i. e. hapax legomenon, a word or expression that has only one occurrence on a given *corpus*] in the Greek New Testament; ἄφθαρτος, δεῖνα, ὑποστρέφω, ἁμαρτάνω ἀποκαλύπτω and ἀπολογέομαι do not occur in Mark 1, 1-16, 8 or in 16, 9-20; ὁ Χριστός is not the designation of Jesus by the author of the longer ending." ELLIOTT, James K. The Text and the Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel. *Theologische Zeitschrift*, v. 27, n. 4, 1971, π. 260.

⁹⁰ ELLIOTT, The Text and the Language of the Endings to Mark's Gospel., p. 255-262.

also appear elsewhere in Mark are used in an unusual way, that is, are employed with a different connotation or with another referent from that of the authentic markan text.⁹¹

However, not only its linguistic peculiarities, but also flat contradictions between the short and the longer endings points us to the inauthenticity of the latter. A glaring example is a doublet in the introduction of Mary Magdalene. At 15.40, during the crucifixion scene, and at 16.1, accompanied by Mary (the mother of James) and Salome, she was already introduced. Nonetheless, at 16.9 she is reintroduced with an explanatory note telling us that “Mary Magdalene, from whom he [Jesus] had cast out seven demons”, and contrary to 16.1-4, where she witnesses the empty tomb accompanied, at 16.9 she is pictured as being alone. If that wasn’t enough, the element of fear from verse 8 is completely lost if we take verse 9 at face value. At the former, Mary Magdalene and her companions left the empty tomb afraid because they didn’t find Jesus’ body. However, here she assumes the role of comforter of those who are mourning and weeping Jesus’ death. A stark contrast, indeed. After all, did she witness an empty tomb, or the risen Jesus? Was she alone or accompanied? She reacted in fear or as comforter for those who mourned?

3.4. The synoptic problem

Yet, there’s another kind of internal evidence in Mark 16.9-20 that seems crucial to substantiate the claim that the four gospels started to circulate together (at least in some places) from an early date, indeed. The very possible parallels and textual agreements between the longer ending and the other synoptics along with johannine material potentially found there.

This claim would be non-material to the case at hand if it could be definitely demonstrated that all other textual agreements between the synoptics, for example, were dependent on oral material rather than the use of distinct and specific textual sources in the redaction of each of the gospels. That is, before evaluating how the use of matthean,

⁹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 258-262, where he shows that every single verse has varying kinds of linguistic oddities. If only one or two of them were found throughout the section, maybe we would be able to recover the legitimacy of this section. However, the cumulative case of so many weird renderings alone, without further evidence, should make us suspicious of it. The external evidence and the literary incoherences move us from suspicion to a very firm ground in rejecting it.

or lukan, traditions in the longer ending of Mark could be canvassed as evidence for what we are here proposing, we can't avoid dealing with the question of the relatedness and the interdependence (or not) between them. We are dealing here with the famous 'synoptic problem,' which in the past two centuries has afforded many different theories purporting to solve it.⁹²

Summing up very briefly what the synoptic problem is, we could say that it's the apparent textual interrelatedness between Matthew, Mark and Luke (usually called 'the triple tradition') and how to understand it. This engenders many models elaborated to deal with the literary similarities and differences between them, thus the name synoptic. John is left out because the outlook of his narrative is very different from the synoptics, all of them sharing more or less the same narrative flow, with a more closer chronology and many shared traditions.

In recent synoptic scholarship it has been a general assumption that Mark was the first written gospel, and that both Matthew and Luke used it as their source. This is what we call 'markan priority', a widely held position regardless of whether Matthew and Luke used also one another as sources in writing their own gospels respectively. The great amount of verbatim agreement in the triple tradition, and the same general sequence of events in markan fashion in both Matthew and Luke, point to some level of textual dependency among the synoptics, and not only use of the same pool of oral tradition. We could, then, call Mark 'medial' to Matthew and Luke, that is, his text is either the source for them, or involves a great amount of conflation from theirs.⁹³

Nonetheless, that's not the whole story. We also have good reasons to postulate Mark as one of the sources for Matthew and Luke, and not the other way around. A very interesting phenomenon emerges when we compare material from the triple tradition: Matthew and Luke in the beginning of similar narratives tend to correct or adjust the wording of Mark in some measure, but near the end relapses to the use of the same

⁹² For a summary of the contemporary research related to the synoptic problem, cf. TUCKETT, Christopher M. "The Current State of the Synoptic Problem" and HEAD, Peter M. "Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem" In: FOSTER, P. et al. (Ed.). *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*. Leuven: Peeters, 2011. (BETL, 239), p. 9-50, 115-156.

⁹³ KLOPPENBORG, John S. "What is Q?" In: *Q, the Earliest Gospel: An Introduction to the Original Stories and Sayings of Jesus*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008, p. 5-9, called Mark 'medial' for describing the same phenomena.

markan words. We can locate a certain consistent use of markan words and expressions, but the same doesn't occur in Matthew and Luke. This is what we call editorial fatigue.

⁹⁴ There's some discussion if editorial fatigue in connection with markan priority in the synoptics dispenses with the necessity of postulating a hypothetical lost document

⁹⁴ "Editorial fatigue is a phenomenon that will inevitably occur when a writer is heavily dependent on another's work. In telling the same story as his predecessor, a writer makes changes in the early stages which he is unable to sustain throughout. Like continuity errors in film and television, examples of fatigue will be unconscious mistakes, small errors of detail which naturally arise in the course of constructing a narrative. They are interesting because they can betray an author's hand, most particularly in revealing to us the identity of his sources." GOODACRE, Mark. *Fatigue in the Synoptics*. *New Testament Studies*, v. 44, n. 1, 1998, p. 46. Goodacre provides a few examples of editorial fatigue in the synoptics. It's not possible to provide all of them here, so one drawn from Matthew and another from Luke will suffice for our present purposes. For more information on the phenomenon, Goodacre's article is a great presentation of the case. Editorial fatigue in Matthew: "The clearest way to explain the phenomenon is to illustrate it. Though he did not use the term 'fatigue', G. M. Styler, in his famous article on Marcan priority, draws attention to a strong example, the Death of John the Baptist (Mark 6.14-29 // Matt 14.1-12). For Mark, Herod is always 'king', four times in the passage (vv. 22, 25, 26 and 27). Matthew apparently corrects this to 'tetrarch'. This is a good move: Herod Antipas was not a king but a petty dependent prince and he is called 'tetrarch' by Josephus (*Ant.* 17. 188; 18. 102, 109, 122). More is the shame, then, that Matthew lapses into calling Herod 'the king' halfway through the story (Matt 14.9), in agreement with Mark (6.26). Styler points further to a more serious inconsistency in the same verse. The story in Mark is that Herodias wanted to kill John because she had a grudge against him, 'But she could not because Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him.' (Mark 6.19f). In Matthew's version of the story, this element has dropped out: now it is Herod and not Herodias who wants him killed (Matt 14.5). When Mark, then, speaks of Herod's 'grief' [...] at the request for John's head, it is coherent and understandable: Herodias demanded something that Herod did not want. But when Matthew in parallel speaks of the king's grief ([...], Matt 14.9), it makes no sense at all. Matthew had told us, after all, that 'Herod wanted to put him to death' (14.5). The obvious explanation for the inconsistencies of Matthew's account is that he is working from a source. He has made changes in the early stages which he fails to sustain throughout, thus betraying his knowledge of Mark. This is particularly plausible when one notes that Matthew's account is considerably shorter than Mark's: Matthew has overlooked important details in the act of abbreviating. It would be difficult, one would imagine, to forge a convincing argument against this from the perspective of Matthean priority."

Editorial fatigue in Luke: "[...] it will be instructive to look at the Healing of the Paralytic (Matt 9.1-8 // Mark 2.1-12 // Luke 5.17-26), to which Michael Goulder has drawn attention. Here Luke omits to mention entry into a house, unlike Mark in 2.1 which has the subsequent comment that 'Many were gathered together, so that there was no longer room for them, not even about the door' (Mark 2.2). In agreement with Mark, however, Luke has plot developments that require Jesus to be in a crowded house of exactly the kind Mark mentions: Mark 2.4: 'And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and when they had made an opening, they let down the pallet on which the paralytic lay.' Luke 5.19: 'Finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.' There are obvious difficulties here similar to those that Matthew has with Jesus' Mother and Brothers (above): continuity errors like this are natural when a writer is dependent on the work of another. Luke omits to mention Mark's house and his inadvertence results in men ascending the roof of a house that Jesus has not entered. It might be added, as further evidence from the same pericope, that Luke has the scribes and the Pharisees debating not, as in Mark, 'in their hearts' ([...], Mark 2.6) but, apparently, aloud ([...], Luke 5.21). This is in spite of the fact that Jesus goes on to question them, in both Luke and Mark, why they have been debating 'in' their 'hearts' ([...], Mark 2.8 // Luke 5.22). The latter phrase has simply come in, by fatigue, from Mark." GOODACRE, *Fatigue in the Synoptics*, p. 46-47 and p. 49-50, respectively.

containing sayings (*logia*) of Jesus for explaining the agreements between Matthew and Luke (also called ‘double tradition’). This hypothetical source is commonly called ‘Q’, in reference to the German word for source (*Quelle*).⁹⁵

The existence of ‘Q’ is not important for our present purposes, however. Assuming, then, markan priority with a fair amount of evidence, we can evaluate how relevant the textual parallels between Mark’s longer ending and the other two synoptics and John shed further light on the issue of the early circulation of the fourfold gospel. We’ll turn our attention to them now.

3.5. Parallels between Mark’s longer ending and the other gospels

Mark 16.12 has strong resonance with Luke 24.13-35, which records the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Some of the linguistic similarities and semantic dependence (both underlined)⁹⁶ between Mark 16.12 and Luke 24,⁹⁷

<p>Μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα <u>δυσὶν ἐξ αὐτῶν</u> <u>περιπατοῦσιν ἐφανερώθη ἐν ἑτέρᾳ μορφῇ</u> <u>πορευομένοις εἰς ἀγρόν·</u> (Mark 16.12)</p>	<p>Καὶ ἰδοὺ <u>δύο ἐξ αὐτῶν</u> ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ἦσαν πορευόμενοι εἰς κώμην ἀπέχουσαν σταδίους ἐξήκοντα ἀπὸ Ἱερουσαλήμ, ἧ ὄνομα Ἐμμαοῦς [...] (Luke 24.13)</p> <p><u>οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ</u> <u>ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν.</u> (Luke 24.16)</p>
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The commonalities highlighted show some of the linguistic affinities between the two accounts. However, note that the underlined section in Mark 16.12 presuppose the semantic content of Luke 24.16, in a certain sense explicates it: the disciples in Luke 24 don’t recognize Jesus, and Mark 16.12, being directly or indirectly dependent on this tradition hint that Jesus showed up in another form. Thus, in both scenarios we have two

⁹⁵ Cf. HÄGERLAND, Tobias. Editorial Fatigue and the Existence of Q. *New Testament Studies*, v. 65, n. 2, p. p. 190-206, 2019.

⁹⁶ The same pattern of highlighting (underlining) linguistic and semantic affinities will be kept for the next comparative sections.

⁹⁷ Other possible lukan features are discussed below.

travelling disciples that don't recognize the resurrected Jesus, and Mark's longer ending explains the reason in a condensed form. Further evidence may be seen right after this, for Mark 16.13-14 parallels in condensed form the lukan sequence,

<p>κάκεινοι ἀπελθόντες ἀπήγγειλαν τοῖς λοιποῖς· οὐδὲ ἐκείνοις ἐπίστευσαν.</p> <p>Ἔστερον [δὲ] ἀνακειμένοις αὐτοῖς τοῖς <u>ἕνδεκα ἐφανερώθη καὶ ὠνείδισεν τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν καὶ σκληροκαρδίαν ὅτι τοῖς θεασαμένοις αὐτὸν ἐγηγερμένον οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν.</u></p>	<p>Καὶ ἀναστάντες αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ ὑπέστρεψαν εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ καὶ εὗρον ἠθροισμένους τοὺς <u>ἕνδεκα</u> καὶ τοὺς σὺν αὐτοῖς, λέγοντας ὅτι ὄντως ἠγέρθη ὁ κύριος καὶ ὤφθη Σίμωνι. καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐξηγοῦντο τὰ ἐν τῇ ὁδοῦ καὶ ὡς ἐγνώσθη αὐτοῖς ἐν τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου.</p> <p>Ταῦτα δὲ αὐτῶν λαλούντων αὐτὸς ἔστι ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῶν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γενόμενοι ἐδόκουν πνεῦμα θεωρεῖν. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· <u>τί τεταραγμένοι ἐστέ καὶ διὰ τί διαλογισμοὶ ἀναβαίνουσιν ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν;</u> ἴδετε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ τοὺς πόδας μου ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι αὐτός· ψηλαφήσατέ με καὶ ἴδετε, ὅτι πνεῦμα σάρκα καὶ ὀστέα οὐκ ἔχει καθὼς ἐμὲ <u>θεωρεῖτε</u> ἔχοντα. καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἔδειξεν αὐτοῖς τὰς χεῖρας καὶ τοὺς πόδας. (Luke 24.33-40)</p>
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Again, we can note that the markan version condenses the lukan material, stating it with a single sentence, yet very reminiscent of the original lukan story.⁹⁸

The same thing is seen in comparison with John:

⁹⁸ Specially because Mark very rarely uses the expression “the Eleven” to designate the disciples.

Ἀναστὰς δὲ πρῶτὴ πρώτη σαββάτου ἐφάνη
πρῶτον Μαρία τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ, παρ' ἧς
 ἐκβεβλήκει ἑπτὰ δαιμόνια. ἐκείνη
πορευθεῖσα ἀπήγγειλεν τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ
γενομένοις πενθοῦσιν καὶ κλαίουσιν
 κάκεινοι ἀκούσαντες ὅτι ζῆ καὶ ἐθεάθη
 ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἠπίστησαν. (Mark 16.9-11)

Μαρία δὲ εἰστήκει πρὸς τῷ μνημείῳ ἔξω
 κλαίουσα. ὡς οὖν ἔκλαιεν, παρέκυψεν εἰς
 τὸ μνημεῖον καὶ θεωρεῖ δύο ἀγγέλους ἐν
 λευκοῖς καθεζομένους, ἓνα πρὸς τῇ
 κεφαλῇ καὶ ἓνα πρὸς τοῖς ποσίν, ὅπου
 ἔκειτο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. καὶ λέγουσιν
 αὐτῇ ἐκεῖνοι· γύναι, τί κλαίεις; λέγει
 αὐτοῖς ὅτι ἦραν τὸν κύριόν μου, καὶ οὐκ
 οἶδα ποῦ ἔθηκαν αὐτόν. Ταῦτα εἰποῦσα
 ἐστράφη εἰς τὰ ὀπίσω καὶ θεωρεῖ τὸν
Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα καὶ οὐκ ᾔδει ὅτι Ἰησοῦς
 ἐστίν. λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· γύναι, τί
 κλαίεις; τίνα ζητεῖς; ἐκείνη δοκοῦσα ὅτι ὁ
 κηπουρός ἐστίν λέγει αὐτῷ· κύριε, εἰ σὺ
 ἐβάστασας αὐτόν, εἰπέ μοι ποῦ ἔθηκας
 αὐτόν, καὶ γὰρ αὐτόν ἀρῶ. λέγει αὐτῇ
 Ἰησοῦς· Μαριάμ. στραφεῖσα ἐκείνη λέγει
 αὐτῷ Ἑβραϊστί· ραββουνι, ὃ λέγεται
 διδάσκαλε λέγει αὐτῇ Ἰησοῦς· μή μου
 ἅπτου, οὐπω γὰρ ἀναβέβηκα πρὸς τὸν
 πατέρα· πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς
 μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν
 πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν
 μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν. Ἔρχεται Μαριάμ ἢ
Μαγδαληνῇ ἀγγέλλουσα τοῖς μαθηταῖς
ὅτι ἐώρακα τὸν κύριον, καὶ ταῦτα εἶπεν
 αὐτῇ.

It's noteworthy that only Mary Magdalene is mentioned as a messenger to the disciples in John, and in Mark 16.9 she is singled as the first person to witness the risen

Jesus. It would be very difficult to single her out as the first witness if we follow Mark 16.1-8. The only other Gospel that mentions only her telling the news to the disciples is John. The author/editor (or authors/editors) of Mark's longer ending may very well be betraying their Johannine influence stating that Mary of Magdala was the first witness to Jesus' resurrection. As we noted before, Mark 16.1-2 states that she had the company of other women, so the emphasis on her as the single witness to the disciples is quite suggestive. The matthean and the lukan version both preserve the authentic markan reference to the women (Matthew 28.9-10; Luke 24.9-11).

It's interesting that among the matthean elements that found their way to Mark's longer ending we don't have the reference to the meeting in Galilee. Mark's Gospel had already mentioned two times that after the resurrection Jesus would meet the disciples in Galilee (Mark 14.28 and 16.7). This is missed in the longer ending, but it's not in Matthew, which holds fast to the galilean meeting. What is kept is the missionary commission of the disciples and an emphasis on baptism:

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς: <u>πορευθέντες εἰς τὸν</u> <u>κόσμον</u> ἅπαντα κηρύξατε τὸ εὐαγγέλιον πάση τῇ κτίσει. ὁ πιστεύσας καὶ <u>βαπτισθεὶς</u> σωθήσεται, ὁ δὲ ἀπιστήσας κατακριθήσεται. (Mark 16.15-16)	<u>πορευθέντες</u> οὖν μαθητεύσατε <u>πάντα τὰ</u> <u>ἔθνη</u> , <u>βαπτίζοντες</u> αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος (Matthew 28.19)
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But, after all, it could be objected that all those parallels are dependent on common oral tradition and that it would be unlikely that they were all redactionally intertwined this way, that is, with examples of micro-conflation. This objection would take hold if we assumed that ancient authors (or scribes) didn't use more than one source at time, but that's not quite the picture we get either from greco-roman authors or from the jewish sources contemporary with the writing of the gospels.⁹⁹ However, we

⁹⁹ BARKER, James W. Ancient Compositional Practices and the Gospels: *A Reassessment*. *Journal of Biblical Literature*, v. 135, n. 1, p. 109-121, 2016. For sources that predate the Gospels, Barker mentions the "pre-Samaritan 4QDeutn (4Q41)" which "conflates the Priestly and Deuteronomic explanations of the Sabbath" (p. 112-113).

have a very close example already mentioned: Tatian's *Diatessaron*. According to James Barker,

In the vast majority of cases, Tatian actually works phrase by phrase from one Gospel to another—oftentimes tacking back and forth, even among three or four Gospels. In other words, ‘more detailed conflational passages’ in the *Diatessaron* are the norm rather than the exception. For example, Tatian calls the blind man at Jericho (§53) by the name Bartimaeus (בַּרְתִּמָּאֵי), which appears in Mark 10:46b and is a *hapax legomenon* in the NT. Yet in the *Diatessaron* Jesus commands the blind man to “see” (ראה), which corresponds more closely to “look up” (ἀνάβλεψον) in Luke 18:42b than to “go” (ὑπάγε) in Mark 10:52b.³⁸ So there Tatian harmonizes Mark and Luke. Another example of Tatian's micro-conflation occurs at the crucifixion (§73), where Jesus is given wine mixed with gall (Matt 27:34) and he says not only “Father forgive them” (Luke 23:34) but also “Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26). The *Diatessaron* is replete with such micro-conflations of two or more Gospels within a single pericope.¹⁰⁰

3.6. Mark 16.9-20 as early interpolation

Among the fragments of Papias (who probably wrote around 100-110 CE) found in Eusebius, there is a reference to a certain Justus Barsabas, who drank poison and yet suffered no harm.¹⁰¹ Considering the striking resonance that such a story has with Mark 16.18, for example mentioning drinking deadly poisons and suffering no harm as a sign of those who believe, we may have further evidence that Mark's longer ending was already known at the beginning of the 2nd century. It may certainly be the case that the story reported by Papias didn't come from the accretions to Mark, yet it is a feature so specific in both cases as to render the probability of separate development somewhat unlikely. So, supposing that Eusebius correctly gave us this fragment, we could both speak of Papias taking the main feature of the story from Mark's longer ending, or we could speak of both deriving from the same stream of tradition. In both scenarios the tradition behind it would necessarily be old enough for Papias to be accustomed to it. However, considering that he explicitly knew Mark's Gospel, as well Matthew's, and that the references to Justus Barsabas and his discussion about the ‘living voice’¹⁰² and

¹⁰⁰ BARKER, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Gospels*, p. 117. Barker is dealing with the problem that micro-conflations pose to the synoptic problem. However, the evidence he adduces also dispels objections that would be unlikely for the later editors/redactors of Mark to micro-conflate using the other synoptics and John (and maybe Acts).

¹⁰¹ *Hist. eccl.* III. xxxix. 9.

¹⁰² *Hist. eccl.* III. xxxix. 3-4. The famous statement about the ‘ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης [living and abiding voice]’, in context, reads as follows: “αὐτός γε μὴν ὁ Παπίας κατὰ τὸ προοίμιον τῶν αὐτοῦ λόγων

the Gospels are both recorded in the same place by Eusebius, and are related to the relationship between oral and written sources, it remains very plausible to suggest that Papias already knew Mark's longer ending.¹⁰³

However, someone could posit that recurrence to Papias' remarks about the 'living voice' cuts the grain of the argument since it would imply that he preferred oral tradition over written sources. In that way, they would lend little force to the contention that the longer ending of Mark implies that the four-gospel collection started to function as Scripture somewhat earlier than generally conceded, since the parallels between the story of Justus Barsabas and Mark 16.18, despite being there, are both regarded as important based on oral tradition. Yet, based on Papias' remarks, no such radical opposition between orality and textuality needs to be posed for early christianity. As Harry Gamble puts it,

[...] its not oral tradition as such that Papias esteemed, but first-hand information. To the extent that he was able to get information directly, he did so and preferred to do so. This does not mean, however, that he thought he could not get it elsewhere too — from texts in particular. [...]

The sentiment Papias expressed in the concluding part of his statement [...] is not peculiar to him but frequently appears in ancient literature and indeed constitutes a topos in certain contexts. A similar statement is made by the learned physician Galen, a near contemporary of Papias, in *De compositione medicamentorum*.¹⁰⁴

ἀκροατὴν μὲν καὶ αὐτόπτην οὐδαμῶς ἑαυτὸν γενέσθαι τῶν ἱερῶν ἀποστόλων ἐμφαίνει, παρειληφέναι δὲ τὰ τῆς πίστεως παρὰ τῶν ἐκείνοις γνωρίμων διδάσκει δι' ὧν φησιν λέξεων· “οὐκ ὀκνήσω δέ σοι καὶ ὅσα ποτὲ παρὰ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καλῶς ἔμαθον καὶ καλῶς ἐμνημόνευσα, συγκατατάξαι ταῖς ἐρμηνείαις, διαβεβαιούμενος ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν. οὐ γὰρ τοῖς τὰ πολλὰ λέγουσιν ἔχαιρον ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοί, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ἀληθῆ διδάσκουσιν, οὐδὲ τοῖς τὰς ἀλλοτρίας ἐντολάς μνημονεύουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς τὰς παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου τῆ πίστει δεδομένας καὶ ἀπ' αὐτῆς παραγινομένας τῆς ἀληθείας· εἰ δέ που καὶ παρηκολουθηκώς τις τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις ἔλθοι, τοὺς τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἀνέκρινον λόγους, τί Ἀνδρέας ἢ τί Πέτρος εἶπεν ἢ τί Φίλιππος ἢ τί Θωμᾶς ἢ Ἰάκωβος ἢ τί Ἰωάννης ἢ Ματθαῖος ἢ τις ἕτερος τῶν τοῦ κυρίου μαθητῶν ἅ τε Ἀριστίων καὶ ὁ πρεσβύτερος Ἰωάννης, τοῦ κυρίου μαθηταί, λέγουσιν. οὐ γὰρ τὰ ἐκ τῶν βιβλίων τοσοῦτόν με ὠφελεῖν ὑπελάμβανον ὅσον τὰ παρὰ ζώσης φωνῆς καὶ μενούσης.”

¹⁰³ METZGER, Bruce. “Period of preparation: The Apostolic Fathers” In: *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. p. 39-73, discusses the most relevant witnesses from the 2nd century as they bear upon the issue of the formation of the New Testament canon. At p. 53-54, Metzger, just as Eusebius before him, briefly brings the incident with Barsabbas recorded by Papias and then proceeds to evaluate the possible New Testament books that Papias knew.

¹⁰⁴ GAMBLE, “Literacy and literary culture in early Christianity”, p. 30-31.

The same stream of tradition, or a very similar indeed, also appears in Luke 10.19 and in Acts 28.3-6.¹⁰⁵ In both passages reference is made to dangerous snakes not endangering missionary activity, or the missionary *personae* involved. We are not certain that Papias knew Luke's Gospel, and it's possible that the main feature of the story regarding Justus Barsabbas may have already arrived at him just as it is recorded in Eusebius.¹⁰⁶ The ultimate origin of that story is not of the utmost importance, but that it's literary structure is shared both by the marcan accretions and lukan material, and that it was widespread enough in order to leave us guessing from where Papias took that tradition. This is already significant to locate the accretion to Mark, or the tradition already closely associated with the gospels, at the beginning of the second century, taking Papias as a very early testimony to it.

Late in the second century, Mark's longer ending was certainly known, since it is attested in Irenaeus (c. 180).¹⁰⁷ However, for it to be known it needed already to be circulating for a little while. Thus, combining the testimony of Papias and Irenaeus,¹⁰⁸ we have a somewhat firm ground to claim an early date for it.

¹⁰⁵ Luke 10.19: “ἰδοὺ δέδωκα ὑμῖν τὴν ἐξουσίαν τοῦ πατεῖν ἐπάνω ὄφεων καὶ σκορπίων, καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶσαν τὴν δύναμιν τοῦ ἐχθροῦ, καὶ οὐδὲν ὑμᾶς οὐ μὴ ἀδικήσῃ.” and Acts 28.3-6: “Συστρέψαντος δὲ τοῦ Παύλου φρυγάνων τι πλῆθος καὶ ἐπιθέντος ἐπὶ τὴν πυράν, ἔχιδνα ἀπὸ τῆς θέρμης ἐξελθοῦσα καθήψεν τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ. ὡς δὲ εἶδον οἱ βάρβαροι κρεμάμενον τὸ θηρίον ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ, πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἔλεγον· πάντως φονεὺς ἐστὶν ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος ὃν διασωθέντα ἐκ τῆς θαλάσσης ἡ δίκη ζῆν οὐκ εἶασεν. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀποτινάξας τὸ θηρίον εἰς τὸ πῦρ ἔπαθεν οὐδὲν κακόν, οἱ δὲ προσεδόκων αὐτὸν μέλλειν πίμπρασθαι ἢ καταπίπτειν ἄφνω νεκρόν. ἐπὶ πολὺ δὲ αὐτῶν προσδοκῶντων καὶ θεωρούντων μηδὲν ἄτοπον εἰς αὐτὸν γινόμενον μεταβαλόμενοι ἔλεγον αὐτὸν εἶναι θεόν.”

¹⁰⁶ See, however, HILL, Charles E. What Papias said about John (and Luke): *A 'new' papian fragment. The Journal of Theological Studies*, v. 49, n. 2, p. 582-629, 1998, especially p. 625-629 for Luke, where Charles Hill argues that Papias knew both Luke and John based on Eusebius' (*Hist. eccl.* III. xxxix.) section devoted to Papias.

¹⁰⁷ *Adv. Haer.* 3. 10, 6: “*In fine autem Euangelii ait Marcus: Et quidem Dominus Iesus, posteaquam locutus est eis, receptus in caelos et sedit ad dexteram Dei, confirmans quod a prophetam dictum est: Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis, quoadusque ponam inimicos tuos suppedaneum pedum tuorum. Sic unus et idem Deus et Pater est, qui a prophetis quidem adnuntiatus, ab Euangelio uero traditus, quem christiani colimus et diligimus ex toto corde, Factorem caeli et terrae et omnium quae in eis sunt.*”

¹⁰⁸ Some people would say that the longer ending is indirectly attested in Justin Martyr's First Apology (45.1-6), with its references to the assumption of Christ, and allusions to Psalm 110 in the same context, similar to those in the quotation of Irenaeus, where the ending of Mark is referenced with a supplement from Psalm 110. That could very possibly be the case, but is very indirect to give us firm ground to posit as earlier reference. However, considering that Tatian possibly used a gospel harmony that comes from Justin, at *Ephr. Comm. Diat.* 21.26 we may have a glimpse that Justin knew, after all, Mark's longer ending. There are clear echoes of Psalm 110 there at the description of the resurrection, and in many places there's literary associations between Mark's longer ending and Psalm 110, as in *Adv. Haer.* 3. 10, 6.

Conclusion

While discussing Irenaeus famous passage in defense of the number four as related to the Gospel (*tetraevangelium*),¹⁰⁹ Annette Yoshiko Reed says that “Without the corroborating evidence of the [Muratorian] Fragment, however, it becomes problematic to assume that Irenaeus simply presupposes an established ‘Canon of the Four Gospels’— rather than attempting to defend the authority of these texts.”¹¹⁰ With regard to the meaning of canon, of course Irenaeus doesn’t mean it, but it doesn’t seem to follow that without the Muratorian Fragment we can’t speak of an already established use of only four gospels, or one gospel in fourfold form, as scriptural in the proto-orthodox church, or at least in the most prominent theologians of the day.

The early circulation of the four gospels together, as our discussion of the longer ending of Mark has shown, does indeed suggest that by the time of Irenaeus this was already a tradition somewhat consolidated. This is more so considering that the main parallels that appear in the extended ending, even though being an interpolation, seem to be restricted to elements also present in the rest of the synoptic tradition but also in the johannine tradition. The early date of the interpolation, probably known by Papias, and the fact that it arose in an environment where other Jesus traditions, whether oral or written, were still regarded as of high status, points to an even more interesting aspect of that interpolation: the extra material that was sought for filling the lacunae left by Mark 16.8 was taken not from many floating Jesus traditions, but specifically from the other three gospels that later would be regarded as canonical.

Of course, we can’t speak of a fourfold gospel canon ahead of its time. There were many more competing traditions, and the proto-orthodox could still have been pushed to the margins of Christianity. Taking seriously the imaginative exercise proposed by James Barr,

Suppose, for instance, that the protests against the Johannine literature had been successful, and John had not continued in the New Testament canon: we would have had by now nearly seventeen hundred years of Christian faith with the Synoptic Gospels but without John; and, trained in this long tradition, we would have found John

¹⁰⁹ *Adversus Haereses* III.11.8.

¹¹⁰ REED, Annette Yoshiko. EΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΟΝ: Orality, Textuality, and the Christian Truth in Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. *Vigiliae Christianae*. v. 56, n. 1, 2002, p. 12, n.1.

exceedingly strange, rather heretical in tendency, something like some of the apocryphal gospels are to some of us. Supposing that the Diatessaron had won the day and superseded the separate gospels: we would have had one single and combined gospel, and no doubt many would consider it an absurd speculation that scholars would claim to find within this one gospel a 'Matthew source' and a 'John source', when everyone knew that the gospel was only one single book. The fourfold separate gospels, as we now have them, would have seemed a strange and rather improper version.¹¹¹

Maybe we could still fancy a little bit more and imagine a later theologian explaining, like Irenaeus did with the fourfold gospel, why the church has a threefold, or a single, gospel. But, even being able to step out a little bit of what really happened, Mark's longer ending remains a constant reminder that the odds of that being so weren't equal, for much longer before we could still speak of a fourfold gospel canon, this kind of sticky interpolation was being forged with primary reference, and why not preference, to the rest of the synoptic tradition and John. Even if Tatian's *Diatessaron* had won the day and got the position of the gospel in the then mainstream christianity, it would still ironically bear the marks of the fourfold tradition, since it also uses Mark's longer ending.

Thus, a much probed early interpolation is even today able to point us the way in a very complex history as that of the New Testament canon. Because of it, we can with a good dose of confidence speak of a fourfold gospel even before Irenaeus' famous defense.

¹¹¹ BARR, James. "Biblical authority and biblical criticism in the conflict of church traditions" In: *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 45.

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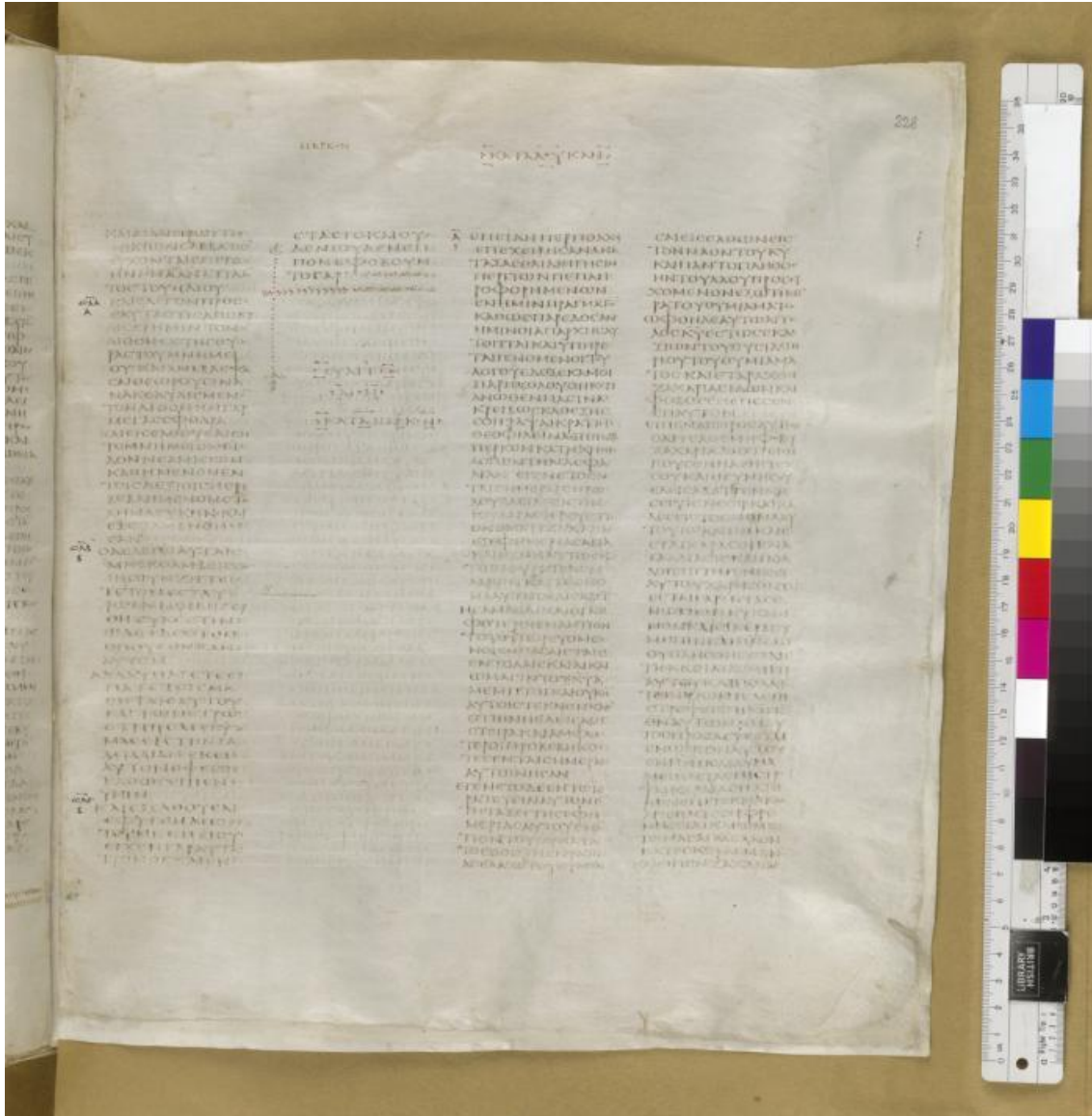
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Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1:



Codex Sinaiticus (Mark 16.1-8 / Luke 1.1-18). 4th century. Location: London, British Library (Add. 43725); folio: 228. End of Mark's Gospel, without the longer ending. Available in: [<Codex Sinaiticus - See The Manuscript | Mark |>](#) Access: 31 mar. 2021.

Figure 2:



Codex Washingtonianus. H x W: 21.3 x 14.3 cm. St. Mark and St. Luke. 7th century. Location: Washington, D.C., Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Museum (F1906.298). Icon of St. Mark and St.

Luke added to the 4th century *Codex Washingtonianus*. Available in: <[St. Mark and St. Luke: Right cover of The Washington Manuscript of the Gospels | Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery \(si.edu\)](#)>. Access: 31 mar. 2021.