

The Resurrection and the Ending of the Gospel of Mark

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Part I

What constitutes the ending of the Second Gospel has long been a matter of dispute. Indeed, it is one of the salient examples of a critical problem in textual criticism, both because there is quite a bit at stake—i.e., the story comes to a conclusion in radically different ways, depending upon one's choice, and because the actual manuscript evidence is rather extensive on several sides. There is, of course, a shorter ending, found in several manuscripts and appended after 16:8, which must be considered in any basic treatment of this question—it reads:

And they announced briefly all the things which were commanded, to those surrounding Peter. And after these things, also Jesus himself sent out through them from East unto West the sacred and imperishable κήρυγμα of (the) eternal salvation, Amen.

But we will not deal with it in this essay, if only because, with a single exception¹ any ms. which adds this short ending also appends the longer ending after it. But aside from this possibility, the choices presenting themselves are, as is well known, to end the book at 16:8, to declare that Mark did not end at verse 8 but to aver that the actual ending has been lost, or to add 12 verses after verse 8, appending what are known as verses 9-20. The second and third arguments are akin, for they declare, to put it simply, that there really must be more. And the arguments for them are not weak. Clayton Croy, in a thorough and wide-ranging work entitled *The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel*, lays the negative arguments out forcefully, the first being linguistic, and the rest literary in nature:

1. Mark 16:8, ending as it does with the conjunction γάρ, is unlikely to be the final verse, because this conjunction is unlikely to be the final word of a sentence, of a paragraph, and, especially, of a book (47-60).

2. If Mark ends at 16:8, it would be a wholesale departure from Christian tradition, which strongly emphasizes the resurrected Jesus' appearing to his disciples (54-55).

3. The story could not end with the women silent and afraid, for then Mark could not have known the story of the empty tomb, which he clearly does (55-57).

¹OL ms. k, Bobiensis, is the only source to end Mark with the short ending after verse 8 and nothing further.

4. Mark has prepared his reader for a different ending, because (quoting Robert Gundry) "Mark has repeatedly and in detail narrated the fulfillment of Jesus' other predictions so far as those fulfillments occurred during Jesus' time on earth" (57-60)

5. "If Mark ends his gospel at 16:8, he defies the general expectations of ancient storytelling" (60-63).

6. Finally, the presence of alternative endings shows that the ancients were dissatisfied with an ending at 16:8 (63-64).²

Positively, those supporting the inclusion of vv. 9-20 point to the considerable weight of ms. evidence that suggests inclusion of these words—not only do the vast majority of the mss. include them, but taking traditional analysis, mss. of every text type (Alexandrian, Caesarean, Western, Byzantine) and of wide geographical distribution support their inclusion, as well. More important, and also "positively," as it were, those who suggest that the original ending of the gospel has been lost point to the damage often occurring at the end of scrolls, which make such loss if not probable then extremely feasible (France: 673, note 15), though a more sophisticated version of this explanation has been articulated and popularized by J. Keith Elliott (1991, 2000), who holds that both the beginning and the end of the gospel have been lost—assuming a traditional Christian codex format—as suggested, not only by the abrupt ending, but also, by the abrupt beginning, both literarily (Jesus bursts on the scene with no birth or pre-existence narration) and linguistically (*καθώς* at the beginning of v. 2 is normally retrospective [as elsewhere in Mark], but here seems to be prospective to v.4 and thus inappropriate).³ As noted above, these are not weak arguments at all.

But the arguments for ending the Second Gospel at 16:8 are also strong.

1. Text-critically, as is well known, major manuscripts normally deemed quite reliable, \aleph and B, omit any further wording at this point.⁴ What is not generally so well known, however, is that some manuscripts actually discuss the matter in their texts. The manuscripts of family 1, e.g., say:

²Croy also adduces two other reasons, viz., that *fobevomai* would normally be followed by an indication of a direct object when in the imperfect passive (50-51), and that an ending at 16:8 would make Mark an anachronistic "Gospel Noir" (51-54). Neither of these two points is particularly persuasive, however. See Ken Olson, "The Un-narrated Resurrection as the Climx of Mark: A Response to Clayton Croy", paper delivered to the Mark Group at the 2006 meeting of the SBL, Washington, D.C., for a succinct summary of Croy's argumentation.

³See also a fully detailed articulation of both positions in Croy: 113-163.

⁴But it is important to note the extra blank column in ms. Vaticanus at end of the Gospel of Mark, *Bibliotheca Sacrorum Graecorum Codex Vaticanus B*, in loc.

In some of the copies the evangelist fills things to the full (πληροῦται) up to this point, up to where also Eusebius, the follower of Pamphilos, drew the line (ἐκανόνισεν). But in many also these things are presented [= vv.9-20].

Perhaps more important, mss. L and Ψ, two important witnesses in Mark (Voelz, 2005: 227, 245), plus some others, include this comment:

Also these things [= vv. 9-20] are (regularly) presented after (the words) ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ.

Furthermore, there is interesting patristic evidence on this point. Eusebius of Caesarea discusses the ending of Mark specifically in a letter to one Marinus (Kelhoffer), in which he says (as he argues about supposed discrepancies in the resurrection accounts of Matthew and Mark [84-5]):

At any rate, the accurate ones (ἀκριβῆ) of the copies define the end of the history according to Mark with the words of the young man who appeared to the women and said to them, "Stop being afraid...!...and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid (ἐφοβοῦντο γάρ)." For in this way just about (σχεδόν) in all the copies of the Gospel according to Mark the end is defined (περιγράφεται).⁵

2. Linguistically, it is not impossible to end a sentence with γάρ; indeed, it is not impossible to end a paragraph or a book with this conjunction, as even Croy himself admits.⁶ Furthermore, if one adds vv. 9-20, the Greek of these verses does not ring true. On the one hand, the transition between verses 8 and 9 is very awkward; no subject is expressed for the verb in 9, though the subject has been switched from verse 8 immediately before. On the other hand, and more critically, the Greek of vv. 14, 19, and 20, especially, is quite complex by Marcan standards, making the inclusion of these verses very unlikely as they stand.

3. Finally, literarily, it is simply not true that the ending of the Second Gospel at 16:8 is atypical of the literature of its time. The touchstone work here is that of J. L. Magness, *Sense and Absence: Structure and Suspension in the Ending of Mark's Gospel*, which describes numerous works with suspended endings. The example most parallel to Mark is Euripides' *Medea*, in which the death of Medea and Jason's children is reported, not portrayed (lines 1306-09, 1370, 1410-11), and their bodies are only spoken of and not

⁵Kelhoffer notes that similar observations are made by Jerome (99-101), Hesychius of Jerusalem (101-3), and Severus of Antioch (103-4), though evidence in the other direction also occurs (104-9).

⁶Croy notes that most sentences ending thus are found in oral-styled works (48), while most books ending thus are philosophical works not narratives (48-9), but this distinction seems too much like special pleading.

seen (lines 1313-16a, 1377, 1390, 1402-04, 1411-12).⁷ Also instructive, however, are Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The former has an ending even more suspended than Mark's—Iphigenia, Agamemnon's daughter, who must be sacrificed by her father to obtain fair winds for sailing to Troy, declares herself ready to die for the Greek cause (lines 1368-1401, 1416-20, 1466-73, 1502-03, 1505-09) and exits the stage, to the praise of the chorus (1510-31), with neither description nor report of her death occurring as the denouement⁸—and like Mark, this ending also occasioned conclusions that seem to be of a later date.⁹ The latter, the *Aeneid*, has a suspended ending which, like Mark's, is "inappropriately" dark. The denouement of this monumental tale of Rome's great heritage (Book XII, lines 919-52)) depicts Aeneas brutally murdering Turnus, though the latter pleads for mercy, leaving unnarrated the hero's final defeat of the Rutulians, his marriage to Lavinia, the founding of Lavinium, and his ascension into heaven (deeds known from the prior well-known myth and from foreshadowings within the tale itself), and presenting the reader with a "negative, rough edge" picture of the heretofore disciplined, virtuous, and long-suffering hero (Lewis: 34).¹⁰ Biblical examples of suspended endings may also be adduced.¹¹

These arguments, in my view, tip the scale decisively in the direction of the end of the Gospel of Mark being at 16:8.¹²

⁷Magness calls this a "second level suspension" (39), *viz.*, one in which a report of events occurs. Mark's ending is such a second level suspension, given the report of the young man (16:6-7). (A first level suspension [37] involves a prophecy of the fate of major characters.)

⁸Magness calls this a "third level suspension" (39), "the total omission of the narration of the climactic event at the very end of a play."

⁹There is dispute whether Euripides intended *Iphigeneia at Aulis* to end at line 1531, including the suggestion that he did but that the ending has been lost (337, note 28). The editor of the edition consulted, David Kovacs, says (333, note 26): "Here [at line 1531], in all probability, is the end of the play as it was presented at its first performance. The rest is probably a later addition meant to bring the play into mythical agreement with *Iphigeneia among the Taurians*." In this latter work, Iphigeneia recounts how Artemis took her from the sacrificial pyre, replacing her with a hind, and took her to the land of the Taurians to serve her (Euripides, 1929: lines 1-41). Lines 1532-1629 of *Iphigeneia at Aulis* describe these developments, with, it can be noted, problems of internal consistency, language, and meter, which reveal it to be from a later time (Euripides, 2002: 159-61, 337, note 28). (There is also another, shorter ending [161, 342-3]!) The parallels to Mark 16:9-20 are apparent.

¹⁰David Lewis discusses this example in great detail (31-43) and notes (33, note 73) that in the article on the Aeneid in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the plot summary includes Aeneas' marriage to Lavinia and the founding of Lavinium, though these events are not related at the conclusion of the story.

¹¹Lewis also discusses NT examples in detail, especially Matthew (10-21) and Acts (21-25). We may also note from the OT especially the book of Jonah, which ends in an open-ended way with these words (4:11): "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, as also much cattle?" See also Magness (65-85) for further examples on both larger and smaller scales.

¹²Perhaps most critical is the question of whether, in fact, a modern/postmodern reading strategy comes to be imposed upon the Second Gospel, if the story is seen as purposely ended by the author at 16:8 and is

Part II

But it is the express purpose of this paper to ask the further question, Is there literary evidence within the text of the Second Gospel that would suggest that Mark's story ends at 16:8, without a resurrection or appearance of the risen Christ? I want to argue strongly that there is. But in order for my argument to be at all persuasive, I need to make a large detour/introduction, which I now commence.

A.

When one speaks of literary evidence within the Second Gospel, one stands, indeed, builds, upon numerous often unspoken assumptions. Allow me to try to enumerate the most important of these, because they are so crucial for my view.

1. First, is Mark essentially a literary production at all? In the modernist consideration of the gospel, the answer would be, No. It must be seen, essentially, as an assemblage of independently circulating pieces of oral tradition (*Formgeschichte*) that then are placed, somewhat awkwardly at times, within an editorial framework (*Redaktionsgeschichte*) (see, e.g., Bultmann: 350, Meagher). Such an understanding sees the gospel essentially as source, not literature, i.e., source for the reconstruction of both an oral tradition standing behind it, and the activities/events standing behind the oral tradition. Put in other terms, this understanding sees the text as a window through which to look through to something else. But evidence suggests strongly that Mark is much more literary than one might think. The view of Mark and its Greek as simple and unliterary is due largely to analyses of the 19th century, which began to see Mark as the first and most primitive of the gospels (often because of its "lower" view of Christ). This analysis was heavily indebted to rising Romanticism and to its valuing of the natural and the unstudied, as well as to the formation of the new German universities in the early 19th century, and to dissertation requirements concerning new faculty at that time (Reicke). But close reading of Mark suggests quite the opposite, in fact. An analysis of the Phaedo of Plato, especially the death scene of Socrates at the end (115-118), reveals numerous parallels between the Greek of its text and the Greek of Mark. The following are especially worthy of note: O-V word order, strings of nominative participles in predicate position, nominative participles in predicate position placed after finite verbs, repeated use of *καί* as the basic copulative, extensive use of imperfect tense forms for basic narration, asyndeton (especially in discourse), *αὐτός* in the nominative as a personal pronoun, and the use of *γάρ* to introduce asides (Voelz, 2003: 17-19).¹³

deemed to make powerful, if not profound, literary sense. See the strong argument asserting such an (improper) imposition in France (673, including note 14).

¹³See Addendum for more complete presentation of the evidence.

Furthermore, careful analysis also reveals that Mark's style changes subtly but materially between the first and second halves of the Second Gospel. The first half, set in Galilee and the north, is characterized by V-S word order, use of the adjective εὐθύς as an adverb, and predominance of καί as the main conjunction—largely Semitic features. The second half, set largely on the road to and within the environs of Jerusalem, is more distinctively Hellenistic and is characterized by S-V word order, declining use of εὐθύς as an adverb, increase in the occurrence of δέ, split syntax (i.e., splitting nouns from modifying adjectives or pronouns), participle strings, ἐάν as an alternative to ἄν in dependent clauses, and the use of the classical form ἔφη to convey a formal statement (Voelz, 2005: 239-42, 246-48). Is that essentially a non-literary move, perhaps even by some chance? I would say it is unlikely so to be.

One may also note in this regard the persuasive argumentation of reader-response critics such as Robert Fowler, who focus upon the pragmatics (not the semantics) of the text, its impact upon those who read or hear.¹⁴ They have demonstrated convincingly, in my opinion, that Mark's text manipulates its readers, as it were, forcing them to feel chagrin (chapter 4, "Who is this....?"), alienation (chapter 8), positive expectation (chapter 8), etc. These are characteristics of an overtly literary work.

2.¹⁵ But if it is a literary work, does the reader/hearer do a "virgin" reading or a "veteran" reading of the text? It is quite common in reader-oriented circles to seek a virgin reading of a given work and especially of this Gospel text. Robert Tannehill, can be typical in this respect. He has said (390-391) concerning the reader of Mark's Gospel:

A story may arouse expectations of an event and then report the realization or non-realization of our expectations. This not only emphasizes through repetition...but also involves the reader through his interest in the outcome of events. The reader may be involved in several different ways. There may be elements of the narrative which are puzzling, causing the reader to look forward to further enlightenment. The reason for Jesus' commands to silence may constitute such a puzzle in the first half of Mark. Or the reader may anticipate several clear but mutually exclusive outcomes. Or the reader may be fairly certain as to how the story will turn out but still be emotionally involved through fear or hope as he anticipates the outcome for important persons in the narrative.

I would suggest that we listen to other voices which argue for a "veteran" reading of this kind of book. What I mean by a veteran reading is not a "visual-literate"

¹⁴Discussions of illocutionary and perlocutionary forces are common in such analysis.

¹⁵Sections 2 and 3 which follow are heavily dependent upon Voelz, 2006:47-52.

interpretation characteristic of a modern critic (to use the phrase of Robert Fowler in his masterful *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* [152])—a non-temporal consideration of the static "architecture" of a work. Rather, I mean a repeated reading, a repeated temporal experience, and thus one which is informed by a prior experience of reading the entire work. Ehud ben Zvi, in his commentary on Obadiah, calls this type of reading a re-reading of a work and the readers "(re)readers" (4)¹⁶

Are there indications of such a reading process, i.e., that a veteran, re-reading process is anticipated for this book? An important piece of evidence from the introduction may be adduced. First is the jolting μετὰ δὲ¹⁷ τὸ παραδοθῆναι τὸν Ἰωάννην.... of Mark 1:14. How would a virgin reader understand this verse? Is this simply a seed which is planted, to flower later on in chapter 6? Or does Mark expect a veteran reader, one who knows his story, one who has already read, to read this verse and understand? R. T. France feels this problem, as he says in his commentary (90):

The use of παραδοθῆναι without qualification to describe the arrest and imprisonment of John is surprising in view of the lack of any background at this point in Mark's story to enable the reader to understand it....For now the reader is expected to know it already or must simply take it on trust.

Second is the ὁδόν of 1:2,3. Boring (66) argues, correctly, I believe:

ἽΟδός appears sixteen times in Mark...In fourteen of the sixteen instances, the term is used in a theologically significant manner...That Jesus has a "way" is the first thing we learn about him (1:2) Jesus' way ultimately leads to the cross—each of the passion predictions takes place ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, "on the way"...¹⁸

When the way of Jesus is announced in the introduction, it is a way that includes the path of discipleship. And yet the meaning is not disclosed until later.

Disciples do not learn what discipleship means in advance, but only along the way.

Would virgin readers ever get this point, even "along the way"? Even with "retrospection," a procedure they will surely use? I think not—I did not make the

¹⁶Ben Zvi follows Bruce Malina and others on the matter of text processing and notes that readers construct a mental representation of the "fictive world" as they read and that this representation is constructed on the basis of the text together with the reader's world knowledge (4). This is another way of addressing the question of the implied reader. What "world knowledge" does the writer assume? We are contending here that it includes the later content of the book.

¹⁷Mss. B and D have καὶ μετὰ....

¹⁸See also the treatment of this point by Joel Marcus: 29-47.

connection, I must say (even reading in the Greek!)—and anyone who has made this connection has been, I would wager, a very veteran reader of the text.¹⁹

3. But if the work is a literary piece and if its reading is to be a veteran one, should the reading of Mark be an isolated reading or an intertextual reading? It is common to do an isolated reading of St. Mark—especially if one sees it as an early, even primitive production. It is also common in reader-oriented circles to seek an isolated reading of a given work. Fowler is insistent on this point (see especially his chapter 9). Indeed, a, if not the, major accent of his book is that Mark should be read on its own, that it has been subjected to "strong reading" by Matthew (especially) and by Luke; indeed, that Matthew has proved to be a "reading grid" (237), a veritable "misreading" (237) of Mark.

I would suggest that we listen to other voices which argue for an intertextual reading of Mark's book. On the one hand, an intertextual reading is one which recognizes that the phenomenon of intertextuality is present with every text; to quote Fowler himself (233), that a "text always implicates other texts within itself."²⁰ Furthermore, quoting Jonathan Culler and building upon the previous point, Fowler informs us (233):

...a work can only be read in connection with or against other texts, which provide a grid through which it is read and structured by establishing expectations which enable one to pick out salient features and give them a structure.

To apply this insight to the Gospel, he contends (233): "...we encounter a relationship among them in reading them; they are tangled texts, implicated deeply within each other." And with this I agree. But he himself turns his face 180° degrees away from this insight—toward an isolated reading—of these texts by saying (233):

We should exercise some critical suspicion here...for we are likely to be dealing with one or more texts that were intentionally produced to function as a reading grid, with the primary goal of changing our perception of another text.

Consequently, when we read one Gospel, we should be on the lookout for ways in which our knowledge of another Gospel exercises its influence.

But this is unnecessarily suspicious, it seems to me. Not only do we have no concrete, explicit, evidence that "we are likely to be dealing with one or more texts that were

¹⁹I would be shocked if a "virgin" reader, after only one reading, could come to Boring's conclusion, even upon reflection. Indeed, it is tempting to deconstruct Boring's reading and to conclude that a non-reader-oriented, spatial, static analysis is driving his interpretation. (I would be surprised if I were to learn that he did not use a concordance, for example!)

²⁰Quoting Julia Kristeva, he says (233): "...every text takes shape as a mosaic of citations, every text is a transformation of other texts.

intentionally produced to function as a reading grid...."²¹ But it is also and especially unclear which text is providing a grid for which! (Note that this is not to argue for the Griesbach hypothesis of Gospel interdependence.) Furthermore, there is positive evidence from the early church that an intertextual understanding is quite legitimate for the book. The early church father Papias informs us (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical Histories* III 15):

Mark, having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately, but not in order, the things either said or done by the Lord, as many as he remembered. For he neither heard the Lord nor followed him, but later, as I said, Peter, who used to compose his teachings with reference to (the) needs....²²

This assumes an oral "text," a kind of non-literary "content" text, known by others, as matrix for Mark's book.

Are there Marcan indications that an intertextual, rather than isolated, reading is requested by this book? Once again, consider Mark 1:14a (concerning John being "handed over"). Is only an isolated (even if veteran) reading expected for this verse? Is not an oral text or a content text also required for these words? Should not the readers know, if not from Matthew or Luke, then from the kerygma preached to them by the apostles and evangelists, the story behind the "handing over" of this verse? Or consider Mark 1:13: καὶ ἦν μετὰ τῶν θηρίων. Should not Ezekiel 34:25,28, which speaks of the people of God dwelling unharmed with wild beasts, come to mind, perhaps also Ps. 91:11-13 ("You shall tread upon the lion and the adder...") and/or Job 5:22b-23 ("...neither shall you be afraid of the beasts of the earth")? Or the quotations in 1:2-3, should not Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1, which speak of God sending τὸν ἄγγελόν μου...πρὸ προσώπου, come to mind? Is not a canonical matrix, a canonical intertextuality, absolutely demanded for this text (see France's fine literary study [63-4])—indeed, both a kerygmatic and canonical matrix²³—which renders an isolated reading, a reading detached from the Gospel and the Hebrew Bible texts, an unrealistic reading, in the end.

4. Finally, if the work is a literary piece and if its reading is to be veteran (= repeated) and intertextual (with even a book such as Jonah), is it not possible, indeed, is it not more than possible, that Mark's gospel is more than standard, that he could form his

²¹ Here, standard isagogical analysis seems to be driving to allegedly reader-oriented reading experience!

²² Μάρκος μὲν ἐρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου γενόμενος ὅσα ἐμνημόνευσεν ἀκριβῶς ἔγραψεν οὐ μέντοι τάξει τὰ ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου ἢ λεχθέντα ἢ πραχθέντα. οὔτε γὰρ ἤκουσεν τοῦ κυρίου οὔτε παρηκολούθησεν αὐτῷ, ὕστερον δὲ ὡς ἔφην Πέτρῳ, ὡς πρὸς τὰς χρείας ἐποιεῖτο τὰς διδασκαλίας....

²³ Again it must be said that one need not assume written partners in the matrix. A standard kerygma would certainly be adequate for an intertextual reading partner.

story creatively, that he could dramatize the characteristics of the actions of the tale, and, e.g., that he could manipulate the ending of that tale? This cannot be answered directly from the text, for it is an extra-textual supposition, but it is at least plausible that the answer to be given is really, Yes. Indeed, it is my view that, given that St. Mark's gospel is a literary work, and given that it assumes that one reads it and reads it once again, and given that it assumes that one knows the total story with its larger details and larger features—it is my view that the Gospel is not a standard treatment of the tale, that it is not a standard telling of the Gospel story. Rather, that it is a drama on the tale, a twisting of the story. It is a first century *Jesus Christ, Superstar*, as it were—a telling which assumes a knowledge of the basic tale—it is to Matthew and Luke what *Wicked* is to *The Wizard of Oz*, viz., a retelling of the tale with a literary and rhetorical goal in mind.²⁴

Now, if this analysis is correct, then we need to read/to hear—and to re-read/to re-hear—the gospel's text in bold relief. That is to say, we must do, not a "strong" reading, as Fowler styles the reading of Matthew *vis à vis* the text of Mark—coercing the text of Mark—but, rather, a "foil" reading, using the Gospel message and the gospels (especially Matthew and Luke) as foils against which to interpret the message of St. Mark.²⁵

B.

If we do as I suggest, what is it that we see? Yes, as many have come to understand, we do see Jesus as the one who walks upon and leads his disciples ἐν τῷ ὀδῷ τοῦ σταυροῦ (see, e.g., Gundry, Moloney). We see Jesus triumphing in and through suffering and the cross—saving his life by losing it—and calling his followers to do the same (chapter 8). But that, I would submit, is the penultimate message, the penultimate concern of the Gospel of St. Mark. Rather, when one reads/hears this gospel against what else we know, when we read this gospel against the foil of depictions from elsewhere, then we see a different, a stranger, and a more fascinating picture—a different, strange, and fascinating tale and protagonist, indeed. Read literarily, in a veteran way, and intertextually—and, by one prepared to be challenged as one reads or hears—the story of the Second Gospel is the story of ambiguity throughout:²⁶

²⁴Francis Moloney has very recently put it this way (7): "Whatever the first readers knew of the life story of Jesus of Nazareth was subverted by the Markan story" (emphasis original). While I agree that Mark's telling was unfamiliar to his readers/hearers, as will be argued below, it was not designed to subvert understanding but to expand it.

²⁵Note again the interesting parallel to *Iphigeneia at Aulis* (see note 9, above). *Iphigeneia at Aulis* was written after the composition of *Iphigeneia among the Taurians* (Euripides 1929, xi-xii) and would thus have been read/heard/seen against the background of the prior play.

²⁶I say "ambiguity" in somewhat clear distinction to "paradox," which is often asserted to be a characteristic of Mark's portrayal (see, e.g., France: 670-73).

- The protagonist is divine: he casts out demons, who name him Son of God (chapter 1); he raises the dead (ch. 5), as Yahweh says that he will do (Is. 26:19), and he walks on water (ch. 6), as Yahweh is described in the Psalms (Ps. 77:14) and Job (9:8).

- But he is also a frail human being, who gets angry when his opponents resist his work (ch. 3), who is ignorant when his garments are being touched (ch. 5), who cannot do miracles, when the people do not believe (ch. 6).

- Moreover, he is a strange and scary human being, for he hides from the crowds, though he has come to preach the Word to them (ch. 1), he dresses down a man whom he has healed, after he has had mercy on his plight (ch. 1), and he curses a fig tree, though it was not the season then for the figs (ch. 11).

And the plot is janus-faced as well.

- The voice declares from heaven, "You are my beloved Son" (ch. 1); he does miracles and reveals the mystery of God's kingdom to those who follow him (ch. 4); the crowd is dumbstruck at his deeds, declaring that he has done all things very well (ch. 7).

- Yet his family thinks that he is crazy, as they attempt to seize him and remove him to their home (ch. 3); the disciples wonder to themselves, "Who is this, that both the wind and the seas obey him?" (4), and he cries out in desolation on the cross, though he truly is the Son of God (ch. 15).

Simply and succinctly put, here in the Second Gospel we see a story hard to follow, and a hero difficult to understand. Therefore, we cannot see clearly and believe (cf. ch. 8:22-26). Or, as summarized by the Jewish leaders at the cross (15:32): "The Christ, the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, in order that we may see and believe (ἵνα ἴδωμεν καὶ πιστεύσωμεν)!" — which is exactly what this gospel will not give—that is, seeing to believe/clear sight to understand/ unambiguous evidence to be very sure. In this gospel, you must believe even though you do not see, not the other way around.

And this itself should prepare us not to be surprised if we do not see a resurrected Christ. This itself should prepare us not to be surprised, if there is ambiguity in the end. This is truly in-text evidence that we should not be surprised at an ending of the gospel at a verse which gives an ambiguous, no-clear-sight ending, which is congruent with the story line. Or, put more strongly, it is in-text evidence for an ending of the Second Gospel at chapter 16 verse 8.

But it is not the in-text evidence for an ending at 16:8! That occurs in chapter 8. You know the story. It is a *tete à tete* between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning a sign from heaven (8:11-13). Have you listened to the story—and have you listened to it against the foil of St. Matthew and St. Luke? In Matthew, Jesus gives reply: "A wicked

and adulterous generation seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah" (16:4²⁷). In Luke (in a different context), he clearly says: "This is a wicked generation. It seeks a sign, and a sign will not be given to it, except the sign of Jonah" (11:29).²⁸ But in Mark, this is the text: "Why does this generation seek a sign? If a sign will be given to this generation, I'll be damned!" (τί ἡ γενεὰ αὕτη ζητεῖ σημεῖον; εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον).²⁹ There will not be a sign.³⁰

And Jesus Christ is "right," if we may put it in this way. In this Marcan tale, no sign will be given. There will be no concrete sign. All there is, is a report—the report of the young man encountered at the tomb, who says (16:6-7):

Stop being frightened! You seek Jesus, the Nazarene, the crucified one. He has arisen, he is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you into Galilee, there you will see him, just as he told you.

And this maintains the ambiguity of the story line. There is no sight. Evidential surety does not exist. But there is a word. A true word, Mark would tell us—a word of which we can be sure—because it is founded upon the word of him whose promises in this story are true and ever sure. (This promise answers to Jesus' prediction in 14:28 ["But after I arise, I will go before you into Galilee"], and builds upon many other promises, most notably the passion predictions of 8:31, 9:31, and 10:32-3, [but also other predictions such as the assertions of what the disciples would encounter as they prepared for his entry into Jerusalem [11:2,6], and as they prepared to eat the Passover [14:13,16], all of which come true.) Nothing could be more perfect for the purposes of Mark.

C.

What then is the message of this book? In my view it is this: In this age, the reign and rule of God in Jesus Christ has come in power, but hiddenly, as it were, in humility and lowliness. The goal of the ministry of Jesus was to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many. Therefore, the true revelation of the Son of God was

²⁷Matthew records the Sadducees as also being present. See also Matt. 12:39, where an almost identical saying is made before some of the scribes and Pharisees.

²⁸In Luke's context Jesus speaks only to the gathering crowds. Considering also the note before, it is the presence of several versions of the saying in different contexts that has perhaps shifted the focus of scholars (e.g., Mann: 330-1) away from the meaning and function of the saying within the narrative of Mark to a consideration of its original form, original setting, etc.

²⁹This primary semitism reflects Hebrew idiom with ׀ (see, e.g., 1 Sam. 14:45) and represents the suppression of an apodosis of a conditional sentence (aposiopesis).

³⁰I owe this insight to a suggestion by John David Duke, who broached the idea in a graduate seminar at Concordia Seminary, MO, in 2001. It is an idea mentioned only rarely in the history of scholarship. For exceptions, see Snoy and Swetnam.

at the cross, as he gave his life as that ransom. Jesus promised a revelation of his triumphant self after the cross (14:28), when the disciples would see him (and all things?) clearly. Just as they did not see him clearly immediately, however, and only had his promise and the word of the young man, just so we do not see him and the kingdom of God fully implemented and manifested now. We do not first see and then believe (cf. 15:32); we have only his promise in the/his word. It is difficult to be faithful on the basis of the word alone—the disciples are testimony to that fact! Yet, that promise is always sure. There will be a full revelation of the glorious, risen Christ, but for now we can only believe the witness of the word.

This is appropriate for the recipients of the book, as I would see them, within their specific time and place: Irenaeus (ca. 180) says: "After the departure (ἔξοδος) of these men [Peter and Paul, who were founding the church in Rome], Mark the disciple and interpreter (ἑρμηνευτής) of Peter, also himself has handed over (παραδέδωκεν) to us in a written form the things that were habitually proclaimed by Peter."³¹ If this is so, then the early Christians in Rome³² may have been thinking in this way:

In this time of persecution, we want to be confessors of the Faith. We are not ashamed of the gospel message of the Christ (cf. Mark 8:35-38). But it would be so much easier to endure, if we could see some proof or sign. If only we had been there when Jesus walked the earth. If only we had been there on that Easter morn.

But the answer of the Second Gospel is: "It was ever thus. If you had been there, your Lord would have seemed quite different and not obviously 'divine.' Furthermore, you have what the women and the disciples had on Easter morning. You have the promise of his word. And that word is ever sure."

³¹Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* V 8 3, cited in Aland, 549.

³²Two minor pieces of evidence may confirm Rome as the provenance of the book: "legion" is the name of the Gadarene unclean spirit in 5:9, and Alexander and Rufus are mentioned as figures known to the hearers/readers in 15:21 (cf. Romans 16:13).

Addendum

Mark's Greek and Literary Greek

A number of Mark's stylistic features are congruent with those of standard literary Greek authors. While the topic must be explored in much greater detail, the following characteristics of Mark's Greek may be noted in the Greek of Plato's *Phaedo*. The *Phaedo* is of no small interest because of the general parallel of subject matter (death of a group leader with concomitant misunderstanding by his followers). We will consider four sections from the final scene of the death of Socrates, indicating parallels to Mark's Greek style.

A. Scene One: Conversation about Final Plans (115 C,D)

1 Ταῦτα μὲν τοίνυν προθυμηθησόμεθα, ἔφη, οὕτω ποιεῖν· θάπτωμεν δέ σε τίνα τρόπον;
2 Ὅπως ἄν, ἔφη, βούλησθε, ἔάνπερ γε λάβητέ με καὶ μὴ ἐκφύγω ὑμᾶς. Γελάσας δὲ ἅμα
3 ἡσυχῇ καὶ πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀποβλέψας εἶπεν Οὐ πείθω, ὦ ἄνδρες, Κρίτωννα, ὡς ἐγὼ εἶμι οὗτος
4 Σωκράτης, ὁ νυνὶ διαλεγόμενος καὶ διατάττων ἕκαστον τῶν λεγομένων, ἀλλ' οἶεταί με
5 ἐκεῖνον εἶναι, ὃν ὄψεται ὀλίγον ὕστερον νεκρὸν, καὶ ἐρωτᾷ δὴ πῶς με θάπτῃ. ὅτι δὲ
6 ἐγὼ πάλαι πολὺν λόγον πεποίημαι, ὡς, ἐπειδὴν πίω τὸ φάρμακον, οὐκέτι ὑμῖν
7 παραμενῶ, ἀλλ' οἰχίσομαι ἀπιὼν εἰς μακάρων δὴ τινὰς εὐδαιμονίας, ταῦτά μοι δοκῶ
8 αὐτῷ ἄλλως λέγειν, παραμυθούμενος ἅμα μὲν ὑμᾶς, ἅμα δ' ἐμαντόν.

The Greek of this scene evidences the following features, which are also characteristic of the Greek of the Gospel of Mark:

1. O–V word order (lines 1, 5, 6): cf. Mark 3:27b: ...ἐὰν μὴ πρῶτον τὸν ἰσχυρὸν δῆσῃ καὶ τότε τὴν οἰκίαν αὐτοῦ διαρπάσει / διαρπάσῃ (see also 5:3, 6:8, 7:26, 8:19, 12:13, 12:44 [subordinate clauses], and 11:3, 13:6, 14:65 [main clauses]).³³

2. Asyndeton in discourse (line 3): cf. Mark 14:8: ὁ ἔσχεν ἑαυτῇ ἐποίησεν. προέλαβεν μυρίσαι τὸ σῶμά μου εἰς τὸν ἐνταφισμόν (see also 1:24, 2:8b-9, 8:1, 8:17-18, 9:43b, 9:45b, 9:47b, 10:28, 12:14b, 12:15b, 12:16b, 12:17b).

3. Nominative predicate position participles following a main verb (lines 7,8): cf. Mark 7:12: οὐκέτι ἀφίετε αὐτὸν οὐδὲν ποιῆσαι τῷ πατρὶ (αὐτοῦ) ἢ τῇ μητρὶ (αὐτοῦ) ἀκυροῦντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ.... (see also 1:5, 6:6, 7:3, 9:22, 10:2, 12:24, 13:11, 14:39, 15:24).

³³Note also that in each case in this scene, the verb terminates the clause, which is often the case in Mark.

4. Predicate position participles in string (lines 2-3): cf. Mark 5:33: ἡ δὲ γυνὴ φοβηθεῖσα καὶ τρέμουσα εἰδυῖα ὃ γέγονεν (ἐπ') αὐτῇ ἦλθεν... (see also 5:25-27 [seven participles!], 6:22, 10:50, 12:28, 14:3, 14:67, 15:36).³⁴

B. Scene Two: Preparation for the End (116 A,B)

1 Ταῦτ' εἰπὼν ἐκεῖνος μὲν ἀνίστατο εἰς οἴκημά τι ὡς λουσόμενος, καὶ ὁ Κρίτων εἶπετο
 2 αὐτῷ, ἡμᾶς δ' ἐκέλευε περιμένειν. περιεμένομεν οὖν πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς διαλεγόμενοι
 3 περὶ τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ ἀνασκοποῦντες... ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐλούσατο καὶ ἠνέχθη παρ' αὐτὸν τὰ
 4 παιδιᾶδύο γάρ αὐτῷ υἱεῖς μικροὶ ἦσαν, εἰς δὲ μέγαζκαὶ αἱ οἰκεῖαι γυναῖκες
 5 ἀφίκοντο, ἐκείναις ἐναντίον τοῦ Κρίτωνος διαλεχθεῖς τε καὶ ἐπιστείλας ἅττα
 6 ἐβούλετο, τὰς μὲν γυναῖκας καὶ τὰ παιδιά ἀπιέναι ἐκέλευσεν, αὐτὸς δὲ ἦκε παρ' ἡμᾶς.

The Greek of this scene evidences the following features, which are also characteristic of the Greek of the Gospel of Mark:

1. Imperfect indicative forms for basic narrative³⁵ (lines 1-2); see Mark 14:31: ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ πάντες ἔλεγον (also 1:45b, 4:33-34, 9:30-32, 10:16, 10:46-48, 10:52, 15:29-32).
2. O–V word order (line 6): see A 1, above.
3. Nominative predicate position participles following a main verb (lines 2-3); see A 3, above.
4. γάρ to introduce an aside (line 4);³⁶ see Mark 5:42: καὶ εὐθὺς εὐθέως ἀνέστη τὸ κοράσιον καὶ περιεπάτει, ἦν γὰρ (ὡς) ἔτων δώδεκα (see also 1:16, 2:15, 7:3, 9:6a, 11:18a, 15:10, 16:4)
5. αὐτός in the nominative case as a personal pronoun (line 6); see Mark 14:15: καὶ αὐτὸς ὑμῖν δεῖξει ἀνάγκαιον μέγα ἐστρωμμενον (see also 1:8, 4:38, 6:47, 8:29).

C. Scene Three: Socrates Prepares to Take the Poison (117B)

1 Καὶ ἅμα ὄρεξε τὴν κύλικα τῷ Σωκράτει: Καὶ ὃς λαβὼν καὶ μάλα ἴλεως, ὃ Ἐχέκρατες,
 2 οὐδὲν τρέσας οὐδὲ διαφθείρας οὔτε τοῦ χρώματος οὔτε τοῦ προσώπου, ἀλλ' ὡσπερ

³⁴It is also noteworthy that Plato employs ἔφη for more formal statements (a common reading of ms. B and its allies from chapter 9 of Mark onward), and that line 4 contains a construction comprising a nominative article and two dependent participles in apposition to a name (cf. the problem of the text in Mark 1:4). Note also the non-avoidance of hiatus with δὲ in lines 2 and 5 (common in Mark and the gospels). Note also the lack of express subjects in discourse in lines 1,2 (characteristic of ms. B's readings, especially early in the gospel).

³⁵Literarily, the usage in this context foregrounds the action.

³⁶See also Phaedo 60A: εἰσελθόντες οὖν κατελαμβάνομεν τὸν μὲν Σωκράτη ἄρτι λελυμένον, τὴν δὲ Ξανθίππην - γινώσκεις γάρ - ἔχουσαν τε τὸ παιδίον αὐτοῦ καὶ παρακαθημένην.

3 εἰώθει ταυρηδὸν ὑποβλέψας πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, Τί λέγεις, ἔφη, περὶ τοῦδε τοῦ πάματος
4 πρὸς τὸ ἀποσπεῖσαί τι; ἔξεστιν ἢ οὐ; Τοσοῦτον, ἔφη, ὦ Σώκρατες, τρίβομεν, ὅσον
5 οἴομεθα μέτριον εἶναι πιεῖν.

The Greek of this scene evidences the following features, which are also characteristic of the Greek of the Gospel of Mark:

1. O–V word order (lines 4-5); see A 1, above.³⁷
2. Asyndeton in discourse (lines 3,4): see A 2, above.
3. Predicate position participles in string (lines 1-3); see A 4, above.

D. Scene Four: Reaction to the Poison (117E-118)

1 καὶ ἅμα ἐφαπτόμενος αὐτοῦ οὗτος ὁ δοῦς τὸ φάρμακον, διαλιπὼν χρόνον ἐπεσκόπει τοὺς
2 πόδας καὶ τὰ σκέλη, κᾶπειτα σφόδρα πῖσας αὐτοῦ τὸν πόδα ἤρετο, εἰ αἰσθάνοιτο· ὁ δ'
3 οὐκ ἔφη. καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ἀῦθις τὰς κνήμας: καὶ ἐπανιών οὕτως ἡμῖν ἐπεδείκνυτο, ὅτι
4 ψύχοιτό τε καὶ πήγνυτο. καὶ ἀῦθις ἤπτετο καὶ εἶπεν ὅτι ἐπειδὴν τῇ καρδίᾳ γένηται
5 αὐτῷ, τότε οἰγήσεται.

The Greek of this scene evidences the following features, which are also characteristic of the Greek of the Gospel of Mark:

1. και; as the basic conjunction (lines 1-4); see Mark 3:1-27 (see also 1:16-20, 5:35-41, 8:1-13, 12:1-5, 14:53-72, 16:1-8).
2. imperfect indicative forms for basic narrative (lines 1, 3-4); see B 1, above.
3. δέ to introduce the immediate reaction of a character to a plot development (line 2); see Mark 14:52: ὁ δὲ καταλιπὼν τὴν σίνδονα γυμνὸς ἔφυγεν / ἔφυγεν γυμνός (see also 14:11, 14:46-47, 14:64, 15:36, 15:44).
4. predicate position participles in string (line 1); see A 4, above.

It may also be noted that the description of the actual death of Socrates (118) uses verbs in the aorist tense only, even as does Mark to describe the death of Jesus (15:33-34, 37).

³⁷Note also that in each case in this scene, the verb terminates the clause.

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