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HEBREW-LANGUAGE APPROACHES TO THE GOSPELS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO SYNOPTIC STUDIES

Hebrew-language origins of the synoptic gospel tradition have been discussed by church fathers and scholars from the second century onwards well into modern times. However, with the rise of critical scholarship in the 18th and 19th century, the traditional assumption of a pre-canonical Hebrew gospel tradition has been dismissed gradually from the discourse about gospel origins and the synoptic question. The reasons for this dismissal can briefly be summed up as follows:

1. The rise of the Two-Source-Hypothesis as the most commonly accepted solution to the synoptic problem led to a shift of focus from a possible *Hebrew* Matthew to the *Greek* Mark as the oldest written document of the synoptic gospel tradition.

2. The discovery of a growing number of papyri and Greek inscriptions from the New Testament era furthered the understanding of *koine Greek* and disproved the traditional assumption that the linguistic characteristics of New Testament Greek were owed to translation from Semitic sources.

3. Travels by the Austrian catholic and humanist scholar Johann Widmannstadt to the Christian churches of Syria and the subsequent publication of the Syriac New Testament (*peshitta*) in 1555 led to a widespread conviction among early bible scholars that Aramaic, not Hebrew, was the *lingua vernacula* of Jesus.

4. This assumption was strengthened even more by the thesis, put forward by German Jewish Scholar Abraham Geiger in 1845, that Mishnaic Hebrew was an artificial language created by the early rabbis, after Hebrew had been a dead language for centuries.

5. A growing atmosphere of antisemitism and hostility towards Hebrew literature and Jewish culture within German scholarship also led

to a decline of interest in Hebrew and/or Jewish origins of the New Testament literature, while the focus or the early religio-historical school shifted towards the greco-roman culture and language as a milieu of origin for the gospels.

As a result of these, and other, factors, there has been a widespread consensus well into the second half of the past century that the long-held tradition of a pre-canonical Hebrew gospel tradition was a mere myth created by misinformed church fathers and should be abandoned completely. Ongoing attempts to find at least some traits of truth in this tradition have been met by the scholarly community with either ridicule or emphatic rejection.

However, over the past decades, some of the basic convictions that once led to the dismissal of the traditional "Hebrew Gospel" hypothesis have been called into question by new archeological discoveries, changed paradigms in linguistic studies and alternative approaches to the synoptic problem. It therefore seems appropriate today to take a new look at some of the old problems and open up again some of the files that have been closed in order to re-evaluate the evidence. Without doubt, such re-evaluation should not simply be a revival of hypotheses of the past and a repetition of mistakes that have already been dismissed for good reasons. However, it could lead to new, refined and more cautious approaches by avoiding some of the mistakes of the past while at the same time embracing their valuable contributions that might have been laid to rest too early by past generations of scholars.[1]

In this paper, I will first try to show why I believe, together with others, that there is sufficient reason to re-evaluate the evidence anew in view of recent trends and paradigm shifts in biblical, linguistic and archeological scholarship. Second, I will sum up recent discussions and evidence concerning the use of Hebrew as a spoken and literary language at the time of Jesus. Third, I will suggest that the quest for possible Hebrew origins of the synoptic tradition can serve as a helpful methodological tool for the study of synoptic relationships.

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[1] This article is an English summary of the main results of my German book *Hebräisches Evangelium und Synoptische Überlieferung: Untersuchungen zum hebräischen Hintergrund der Evangelien* (WUNT II/312), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011. I am grateful for Prof. Kaperas invitation to present this summary here. For reasons of space, I have limited footnotes and bibliographical references throughout the article. For interaction with primary sources and secondary literature readers may refer to the German original. However, some more recent literature has been added.

I. Changed parameters and new evidence

1. A new openness of the synoptic question

The synoptic question is more open today than it was fifty years ago. The traditional acceptance of the "Two source hypothesis", or its extended version in the form of Streeters "Four document hypothesis" as the only viable answer to the synoptic problem has for long given way to a much broader spectrum of variations and outright alternatives: As a matter of fact, the hypothesis had never existed in a unified and unanimously accepted form from its beginnings: Some assumed a Hebrew or Aramaic "Q", some did not. Some assumed an "Ur-Markus", others not. Some proposed a "Proto-Lk", others not. Already in 1918, an analysis of 17 different reconstructions of "Q" came to the conclusion that no single verse of the Gospel of Matthew was included in all 17 of them.[2] The raw, non-narrative and (by definition) non-markan sayings collection "Λ" in Holtzmanns original hypothesis has next to no resemblance to the "Sayings-Gospel" of the International Q Project which contains not only a continuous narrative running from the Baptist through the Passion tradition, but also overlaps with Mark to a large amount.[3] Both, in turn, differ considerably from Matthew Caseys concept of Q as a "convenient label" for all sorts of independent sources that were available to the evangelists partly in Aramaic, partly in Greek.[4]

Alongside these differing variations and modifications of the traditional Two-Source hypothesis, some of the main alternative approaches have been worked out more thoroughly over the past decades and therefore gained new momentum in the debate: William Farmers theory of Matthean priority, often dubbed as the "Neo-Griesbach" hypothesis, and also proposed earlier by Basil Butler and Pierson Parker, has been laid out in detail by his followers.[5] Austin Farrer's proposal to "dispense

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[2] Moffatt, J.: *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament* Edinburgh: T&T Clark (3. Edition) 1918, 197-202.

[3] Kloppenborg Verbin, J. S.: *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2000; similar Hultgren, S.: *Narrative Elements in the Double Tradition* (BZNW 113), Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter 2002.

[4] Casey, M.: *An Aramaic approach to Q* (SNTS.MS 122), Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2002, 2.

[5] Farmer, W.R.: "The Present State of the Synoptic Problem", in: *Literary Studies in Luke-Acts: Essays in Honor of Joseph B. Tyson*, ed. R.P. Thompson et al. Macon: Mercer University Press 1998, 11-36. McNicol, A. J. et al, *Beyond the Q Impasse: Luke's*

with Q" has been taken up and further developed by Michael Goulder and Mark Goodacre.[6] In German scholarship, Albert Fuchs's proposal of a Deutero-Mark has found considerable support, albeit not in its intended form as an alternative, but rather as a helpful addition to "Q".[7]

More complex theories of "multiple layers" and "multiple sources", as developed by scholars like Pierre-Emile Boismard and Jean Carmignac, and, in different variations, more recently by Philippe Rolland and Delbert Burkett, have been commented as being historically plausible in a general sense, however at the same time too complex for practical work on synoptic texts.[8] Considerations of the extent and impact of oral tradition on the several stages of literary development add to the complexity of the issue and have led to even more complex reconstructions of the early gospel tradition.[9]

The ever growing diversity of approaches and hypotheses leaves no doubt that the synoptic question is far from settled. It therefore seems justified to continue efforts to find new approaches and tools that could bring to light new aspects of the problem and thereby enrich the discussion of the synoptic problem.

2. A changed perspective on the Jewish setting of the Gospels

Another major shift of paradigms that affects the discussion of synoptic research has taken place in the field of "historical Jesus" studies:

Use of Matthew, Valley Forge: Trinity Press International 1996. Peabody, D. B. et al, *One Gospel from Two: Mark's Use of Matthew and Luke*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International 2002. Parker, Pierson: "A Second Look at the Gospel before Mark", *JBL 100* (1981) 389-413. Butler, B. C., *The Originality of St. Matthew*, Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 1951.

[6] Farrer, A. M.: "On Dispensing with Q", in: *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot*, ed. Nineham, D.E., Oxford: Blackwell 1955, 55-88; Goulder, M. D.: *Luke: A New Paradigm.* (JSNT.S 20), Sheffield: JSOT Press 1989; Goodacre, M.: *The Synoptic Problem: A Way through the Maze*, London: Sheffield Acad. Press 2001.

[7] Fuchs, A.: *Spuren von Deuteromarkus 1-5* (SNTU.NF 1-5), Münster: LIT 2004-2007 (cf. esp. Vol. 1 p. 20). Schnelle, U.: *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (4. Edition) 2002, 195

[8] Boismard, M.: "The Two-Source Theory at an Impasse", *NTS 26* (1980) 1-17; Carmignac, J.: *Recherches sur le 'Notre Père'*, Paris: Éditions Letouzey & Ané 1969; Rolland, P.:"A New Look at the Synoptic Question", *EJT 8* (1999) 133-144; Burkett, D.: *Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark*, New York: T&T Clark 2004.

[9] Riesner, R.: "From the Messianic Teacher to the Gospels of Jesus Christ", in: *Handbook of the Historical Jesus I*, Leiden: Brill 2011, 405-446.

While the general tendency of 18th and 19th century scholarship was to separate Jesus and the Gospels from contemporary Jewish literature and culture, this tendency has been reversed in the second half of the 20th century: A majority of scholars are now convinced that any serious study of the historical Jesus must place him firmly in the setting of Second Temple Palestinian Judaism, and only then ask for differences and discontinuities. The "criterion of difference", which tried to find the most authentic straits of the Gospel tradition in places where the conflict with Judaism was most obvious,[10] has been replaced today by the "criterion of historical context plausibility", which assumes high authenticity especially for those passages that fit into the cultural, religious and linguistic context of Second Temple Judaism.[11] Obviously, both approaches have an element of truth and should be applied with mutual reference.

However, for the synoptic question, this important shift of perspectives bears significant consequences: For many of the fathers of synoptic research, the "jewishness" or "non-jewishness" of synoptic material was an important heuristic factor for the discernment of literary dependencies:[12] Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, as an example, described the process of Gospel tradition as follows:

> "The original simplicity of the Christian teachers, which had limited itself to the essential parts on the life of Jesus and his religious teachings, was lost soon after, and people began to follow the spirit of the Jewish obsession with details, which the Jews did not abandon even after they became Christians, and they esteemed minor matters as important, even as foundational for Christianity"[13]

Based on this assumption, it was clear for Eichhorn that Mark, as the shortest and simplest Gospel, must have been closest to the *Urevangelium* that stood at the beginning of the Gospel tradition. Many details and traditions now found in Mt and Lk, however, could be characterized as later additions "because the Jewish Christians needed them".[14] Christian Hermann Weiße, the earliest proponent of the Two-Source

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[10] Käsemann, E.:"Das Problem des historischen Jesus", *ZThK 51* (1954) 125-153:144.

[11] Theissen, G. / Merz, A.: *Der historische Jesus: ein Lehrbuch*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (3.) 2001, 117.

[12] For an overview, cf. Baltes, *op.cit.* (n. 1), 151-155 and 176-194.

[13] Eichhorn, J. G.: *Über die drei ersten Evangelien.* Leipzig: Weidmannische Buchhandlung 1794, 973 (translation mine).

[14] ibid., 787.

hypothesis, employed the criterion of difference even more radically: For him, the priority of Mark was demonstrated quite clearly by the fact that he "creates the most vivid picture of the enmity between Jesus and ths scribes and pharisees," while the other Synoptics "copy mechanically" and therefore often weaken this picture.[15] For example, while Jesus sovereignly declares himself Lord over the Sabbath in Mk 2:23-28, the Matthean parallel presents him as "accomodating" to Jewish law and custom, which "deliberately presses him below the greatness of spirit which we find in the historical records".[16] While Mk 9:11-13, according to Weiße, shows Jesus in clear opposition to the "Jewish messianic saga", the Matthean parallel suggests that Jesus "was pedantic enough, like the scribes of old and modern times, to adhere to the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament in an outward and literal way".[17] Both instances, for Weiße, testify to the priority of Mk over Mt.

Bruno Bauer, who popularized the Two-Source hypothesis shortly after, argues in a very similar vein:

> "Once it becomes clear that only in Mark's Gospel [...] the collision between the new freedom and the old statutes is steadily progressing and the superiority of this new power is culminating in a final triumph through ever new revelations, and once it is clear that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew show only a dim reflection of this harmony, [...] than it should be obvious that the narrative of Luke and Matthew is based on [...] the canonical Mark."[18]

For Bauer, only the Gospel of Mark clearly speaks the "death sentence on the Jewish people", only here we find the "enmity of the privileged classes" and the "final separation from Judaism" fully worked out.[19] This contrast is regularly "weakened" and "flattened" by the other two Synoptics.[20] The non-jewish character of Mark therefore clearly serves as a criterion of authenticity for Bauer.

Few scholars today would follow, or even are aware of, this line of thought that permeates the works of early synoptic research. Arguments from the "jewish" or "non-jewish" character of synoptic traditions have

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[15] Weiße, C. H.: *Die evangelische Geschichte, kritisch und philosophisch bearbeitet.* Erster Band, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel 1838, 70.

[16] ibid., 484-485 (translation mine).

[17] ibid., 546 (translation mine).

[18] Bauer, B.: *Kritik der Evangelien und Geschichte ihres Ursprungs*, Berlin: Hempel 1851 (Reprint Aalen: Scientia 1983), Vol. II:59.

[19] ibid., 68.73-74.

[20] ibid., Vol. I:261; Vol. II:8,115,121.

disappeared from the discussion, and other textual, linguistic and theo-
logical features have moved into the focus today. However, the ques-
tion may be asked why the results and hypotheses of these early synop-
tic researches are still accepted unquestionably today, when it is clear
that some of the main arguments and assumptions they were based on
are dubious, at best, from today's perspective. As a matter of fact, the
weight of evidence has turned around in view of the paradigm shifts
within historical Jesus studies described above: If proximity to, or dis-
tance from Jewish thought, culture, religion or literature can throw any
light on the question of literary dependencies, than the "criterion of his-
torical context plausibility" should be applied as a heuristic criterion: In
any given comparison of differing synoptic variants, the line of assumed
dependencies should run from the "most Jewish" to the "least Jewish"
variant.[21]

Within the scholarly debate on the synoptic question, arguments of
this kind have disappeared more or less from the discussion since the
beginnings of the 20th century. This development was probably a re-
sult of an ongoing compartmentalization of New Testament scholarship,
where the "literary-historical" school has focused on linguistic analysis
of the canonical Gospels and therefore largely ignored Jewish literature
and thought, while the "religio-historical" school has focused on the re-
lations between early Jewish and early Christian literature without ask-
ing questions about synoptic relationships. The major scholarly works
on the synoptic problem do not engage in depth with the field of Jewish
studies or with Jewish literature of the Second Temple period. On the
other hand, the major studies on the historical Jesus, whether within the
"Jewish reclamation of Jesus" or the so-called "Third Quest", engage
thoroughly with the world and literature of early Judaism, but in most
cases pragmatically accept the traditional Two-Source hypothesis as a
working model without ever engaging with it any further.

Two notable exceptions to this rule should be mentioned here:[22] One
is to be found in the work of the "Jerusalem School of Synoptic Re-
search", initiated by David Flusser and Robert Lindsey, and inspiring

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[21] This does not exclude the possibility that traditions can be "re-judaized" in a later
stage of literary development, e.g. in view of a more Jewish audience or as an "ac-
comodation" to surrounding Jewish culture. However, this should not be the standard
assumption as it has been in earlier research.

[22] A more detailed assessment of different approaches to the synoptic question and
their interaction with the Jewish historical setting of the Gospel tradition can be found
in Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.1), p. 197-220.

the work of other Jewish and Christian scholars in Jerusalem and beyond. Here, the study of the synoptic problem is closely intertwined not only with linguistic study of Hebrew and Aramaic literature, but also with historical study of the wider Jewish context, especially with the world of proto-rabbinic Judaism.[23] Though the views of scholars within the school vary in respect to the synoptic hypotheses preferred, Flusser and Lindsey agreed with the observations of earlier synoptic researchers that the Gospels of Luke and Matthew are very often closer connected to Jewish culture and thought, while Mark shows less familiarity. They also observed that, in terms of language, Mark's Greek style betrays less influence from Hebrew interference than that of Matthew and Luke. Therefore, they reversed the conclusions of the early researchers and suggested a model of synoptic relations in which Luke is the oldest of the canonical gospels and was used by Mark, who in turn was used by Matthew, while all three are also dependent on an earlier narrative source, probably written in the Hebrew language.

In a similar vein, Jean Carmignac suggested an approach to the synoptic question through the lens of Jewish literature, however with a stronger focus on the literature from Qumran, his field of expertise. Unfortunately, his plans to write a "commentary on the New Testament from the texts of Qumran" as well as a major work on his synoptic theory,[24] never materialized due to his untimely death in 1986. However, in 1984 he presented a temporary working hypothesis, in which, quite similar to Lindsey's hypothesis, the Gospel of Luke features as the earliest of the three canonical Gospels and served as a source for the other two, while all three depended on earlier Hebrew documents of proto-markan, deutero-markan and proto-matthean shape.[25] His theories on synoptic relationships, as well as his research on the Hebrew background of the New Testament, is based on the work of earlier French collegues, most notably Marie-Joseph Lagrange, Léon Vaganay and Marie-Emile Boismard. However, Carmignac went beyond their scope of work in

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[23] Cf. the two more recent works of the "Jerusalem School": Notley, R. S. / Turnage, M. / Becker, B. 2006: *Jesus' Last Week* (JCP 11), Leiden: Brill 2006; Buth, R. / Notley, S.: *The language environment of First century Judaea* (JCP 26), Leiden: Brill 2014.

[24] Carmignac, J.: *La Naissance des Évangiles Synoptiques*, Paris: Guibert (3. Edition) 1984 (Reprint 1995), 6 and 50; cf. also Kapera, Z. J.: "The Life and Work of the Reverend Jean Carmignac (1914-1986)", in: *Mogilany 1989: Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls Offered in Memory of Jean Carmignac. Part I* (Qumranica Mogilanensia 2), ed. idem. Krakow: Enigma Press 1993.

[25] Carmignac, *op. cit.*, 54-56 and 71-73.

integrating not only linguistic study on the texts themselves, but also a broader view on the historical Jewish context of the New Testament, including concepts of thought, culture and realia, in the attempt to re-construct the development of the synoptic tradition.[26]

The synoptic theories of Flusser, Lindsey and Carmignac have not found much support within the scholarly community. However, even if one does not agree with their specific *results*: their *approach* can defi-nitely serve as a model for synoptic research in the future, especially in the light of the shift of perspectives described at the beginning of this section. The criterion of "historical (Jewish) context plausibilty", as suggested by Theissen for the field of historical Jesus studies, has be-come indispensable for that field. However, it still remains strangely ab-sent from the field of synoptic studies until today. Most contributions to the discussion focus instead on arguments from word frequency, word order, arrangement of material, narrative structures, redactio-historical considerations and linguistic features. While all these methods doubt-less have their value, many of them are highly susceptible to circular reasoning, a critique that has been voiced repeatedly from all sides of the discussion by proponents of all synoptic models alike.

The approaches to the synoptic question from interaction with He-brew literature and the Jewish historical context, however, add evidence from outside to the discussion and therefore can help as a helpful cor-rective and addendum to the other tools. If researchers on the synoptic questions could agree that, generally speaking, synoptic variants that fit in well with the context of first-century Palestinian Judaism have a higher probability of going back to pre-canonical tradition than those that do not, then an additional heuristic tool would be available to enrich the discussion. Scholars applying this tool might even come to quite different conclusions than Flusser, Lindsey, Carmignac or others. How-ever, what concerns us here is not the results and conclusions, but the methodology.

3. A new openness of the linguistic question

If the Jewish setting of the early synoptic tradition is to be incor-porated into the methodology of synoptic research, then the question of

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[26] An early insight into his working method can be found in his study of the Lord's prayer: Carmignac, *op. cit.* (n.8). However, in this study Carmignac deliberately leaves aside synoptic considerations due to the paucity of material (cf. p. 361).

language comes into play: Although we have a good number of Greek Jewish literature from the New Testament era at hand, the closest and most relevant parallels are to be found in the rabbinic literature and the Dead Sea scrolls. Synoptic studies that seek interaction with these cor- pora of literature therefore will necessarily be cross-lingual: The Greek texts of the Gospel tradition have to be compared with the Hebrew and Aramaic Texts from Rabbinic and Qumran literature. Researchers of the past have therefore frequently employed approaches that use *retrover- sion* of Greek texts into Aramaic or Hebrew as a tool for study. The term *retroversion* is purposefully chosen in more recent study over against the older term *reconstruction*, because the primary aim is not, as it had been in older studies, to reconstruct a historical "original source" or even the "ipsissima vox" of the historical Jesus: The aim is rather to find a plausible Semitic equivalent for the present Greek text, solely for the purpose of interaction with other Semitic texts of the era.

However, there is a point of disagreement on the question which Se- mitic language should be chosen for this type of approach: Should it be the spoken vernacular of Jesus and his Jewish contemporaries, be- cause this is where the oral Gospel tradition originated in the first place? Should it rather be the literary language of Jewish texts of the period, because this would be the language that would have been chosen for early written Semitic sources, if they ever existed? Or should it rather be the respective language type of the literature aimed at for compar- ison (e.g. Palestinian or Babylonian Aramaic for comparison with the respective Targums, Postbiblical Hebrew for comparison with the Dead Sea Scrolls, Mishnaic Hebrew for interaction with Rabbinic literature)?

In either of the two first options, the question of language choice is heavily debated: What exactly was the Jewish vernacular in the land of Israel during the Second Temple period, if there was any unified one? And which language would an early (Jewish-)Christian writer choose if he wanted to put Jesus tradition a written form?

The early fathers of synoptic research, from Lessing (1776) to Holtz- mann (1863), did not study the matter intensely, but worked instead with the traditional assumption that the "syro-aramaic" language, known from the Peshitta, was the mother tongue of Jesus and therefore the most probable language for any assumed Semitic sources like the "Hebrew Matthew", the "logia source" or "Ur-Mark". The most extensive study of the question, available to them at that time, had been presented by

Heinrich Friedrich Pfannkuche in 1798.[27] However, Pfannkuches main purpose was to prove that a *Semitic* language, as opposed to *Greek*, was the "Jewish national language" at the time of Jesus. He therefore did not engage very thoroughly with linguistic differences between Hebrew and Aramaic, and even less with the question of their respective dialects. Since he worked with the *a priori* assumption that Hebrew had been a dead language since the time of the Babylonian exile, all evidence for *Semitic* language use in later times was counted by him as evidence for *Aramaic* language use: Accordingly, he presented Hebrew coins from the Jewish revolt (which he dated into the Maccabean era) as an example for Aramaic language use. Josephus' remark (*Ant*, 20.264) that wise men of his time were able to interpret (ἑρμηνεῦσαι) the Holy scriptures was for him a proof for the existence of written Targum. Place names with "Beth, Caphar und En (עין)" are interpreted indiscriminately as evidence for Aramaic language use.[28] This monolingual approach, typical for the era of early critical biblical scholarship, was further supported half a century later by Abraham Geiger's thesis that Mishnaic Hebrew was an artificial language created by the Rabbis of the tannaitic era and therefore Hebrew could not have been a spoken language during the Second Temple period.[29] German scholars readily accepted this approach because the idea of a "dead Hebrew language" fitted well with the idea of a dead, or at least dying, Judaism or "late Judaism", the term coined by Wellhausen around the end of this era.

Serious critical scholarship on the Aramaic language began with the works of Gustav Dalman.[30] Unlike his predecessors, Dalman did not focus on the Christian Syriac language but rather on Jewish Palestinian Aramaic as found in the Targums. On the opening pages of his "Words of Jesus", Dalman summed up the evidence that led him to the conclusion that Aramaic, and Aramaic only, was the Jewish vernacular at the time of Jesus:[31]

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[27] Pfannkuche, H. F.: „Über die palästinische Landessprache in dem Zeitalter Christi und der Apostel.", in: *Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Literatur. Achter Band, Drittes Stück*, ed. J. G. Eichhorn. Leipzig: Weidmannische Buchhandlung 1798, 365-480.

[28] ibid., 408-409; 420; 441.

[29] Geiger, A.: *Lehr- und Lesebuch zur Sprache der Mischnah*. Breslau: Leuckart 1845.

[30] For reasons of space, full bibliographic information on his well-known *Grammar* (1894), *Textbook* (1896) and *Lexicon* (1897) will not be given here.

[31] Dalman, G., *The words of Jesus*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1902.

1. The "high antiquity" of the targum custom.[32]
2. The lexical Aramaisms in Josephus and the New Testament
3. The use of Aramaic in the temple, according to later sources[33]
4. The use of Aramaic in older strata of rabbinical literature[34]
5. The use of Aramaic in legal documents (e.g. Ketubot)
6. The change of script
7. The artificial character of Mishnaic Hebrew
8. The use of εβραις for Aramaic in Josephus and the NT

As will be seen, many of these assumptions are outdated from today's perspective. This fact is largely due to the discovery of new text corpora and ongoing progress in linguistic research. However, with the data and texts available at Dalman's time, the conclusion seemed inevitable that only Aramaic could be assumed as a spoken language at the time of Jesus and as a written language for early Semitic Gospel sources. This conclusion was widely received by New Testament scholars, both those that were interested in the "ipsissima vox" of the historical Jesus as well as those who were interested in pre-canonical Gospel sources.[35]

However, a good number of scholars have continued to work with the assumption of Hebrew language as a possible linguistic background of the Gospel tradition. Already in the 19th century, Alfred Resch had put together a meticulous study of canonical and extracanonical Gospel tradition, agrapha and textual variants in order to reconstruct precanonical Hebrew Gospel sources.[36] The assumption of Hebrew sources remained prominent in German and French Catholic scholarship,[37] but also in Scandinavia[38] as well as among the newly emerging Judaic scholarship and Jewish-Christian dialogue in the Land of Israel.[39] Others have as-

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[32] "...represented already in the second century after Christ as very ancient".

[33] e.g. mSheq 5:3 and 6:5, ySot 24b.

34 e.g. Megillat Ta'anit.

[35] For an overview of the work of Meyer, Zahn, Wellhausen, Torrey, Burney, Black, Jeremias, Beyer, Fitzmyer, Zimmermann, Schwarz and Casey, cf. Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.1), 15-44 and other bibliographical summaries cited there.

[36] Resch, A.: *Aussercanonische Paralleltexte zu den Evangelien* (TU 10, 1-5). Leipzig: Hinrichs 1893-1897.

[37] For an overview of the works of German Catholic biblical scholars Hermann-Joseph Cladder and Georg Aicher, German Orientalist Hubert Grimme, as well as French Catholic scholars Boismard, Carmignac, Rolland, Van Cangh and Toumpsin, cf. Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.1), 50-67.

[38] Notably Harald Sahlin and Harris Birkeland, cf. *ibid*, 53-59.

[39] Notably Jehoshua M. Grintz, David Flusser, Samuel Safrai, Malcolm Lowe, Rob-

sumed hebraizing sources at least for parts of the Lucan special tradition.[40]

While part of the early Catholic preference for Hebrew language was owed to other factors,[41] the main reason for a renewed interest in possible *Hebrew* (as against *Aramaic*) origins of the Gospel tradition was the emergence of new evidence and changed parameters in the course of the 20th century. Many of the assumptions of Dalman and other early scholars of Aramaic were called into question by ongoing research and new discoveries, so that today the question of language use at the time of Jesus is far more open to discussion than it was a hundred years ago.[42] Some of the factors that have changed the debate will be mentioned here:

a) New textual evidence

At the time of Dalman, little textual evidence for the use of either Aramaic or Hebrew during the Second Temple era was available. As two prominent Aramaic scholars of our time have put it:

"The position of Aramaic in our period was long a somewhat ironic one. The central importance of the language was universally recognized, and many scholars [...] supposed it to be the Semitic vernacular of Palestine to the virtual exclusion of Hebrew; yet actual texts in Aramaic from our period have until recently been very scanty."[43]

"Between the final redaction of Daniel (ca. 165 B.C.), in which roughly six chapters are written in Aramaic, and the first rabbinical writings, *Mĕgillat Taʿanit*, dating from the end of the first Christian century, there had never been much evidence of the use of Aramaic

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ert Lindsey, Brad Young, Randall Buth. Cf. *ibid.*, 56-67.

[40] Harald Sahlin, Adolf Schlatter, Eduard Schweizer, Raymond Martin, Stephen Farris, Rainer Riesner and James R. Edwards. Cf. *ibid.* 64-68.

[41] Some of there include: a) a stronger emphasis on traditio-historical interaction with Old Testament texts rather than contemporary Jewish literature; b) a more confident reception of the patristic traditions about a "Hebrew Gospel"; c) the "anti-modernist" course of the papal see which prevented Catholic scholars from fully embracing the conclusions of (mainly) protestant critical scholarship of the time, including hypotheses of Aramaic sources that had been prevalent in early synoptic research.

[42] For a recent in-depth study of many of the issues discussed here, cf. Buth/Notley (n.23).

[43] Barr, J.: "Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek in the Hellenistic Age." in: *The Cambridge History of Judaism* (ed. W.D. Davies and L. Finkelstein; Cambridge: Universiy Press 1989), 79-114: 91.

in Palestine prior to the discovery of the Qumran scrolls and frag-
ments."[44]

This situation changed dramatically in the course of the 20th century:
Ancient copies of *Ben Sira* and the *Damascus Document*, though dating
to later centuries, were the first tangible evidence of Semitic literature
from the post-biblical era. However, both were composed in Hebrew,
not Aramaic. The finds from Qumran, and later from other locations in
the Judean Desert, then fully revolutionized our picture of Jewish liter-
ature and culture of the Second Temple era. In terms of language use,
these finds enhanced our understanding of the development of Hebrew
as well as Aramaic. They also bridged the gap that existed between late
biblical Hebrew/Aramaic and early Rabbinic Hebrew/Aramaic litera-
ture, although they also make it clear that no simple line of linear devel-
opment can be drawn.

However, in summary, it can be said with confidence that at the turn
of the 21st century it is no longer a matter of debate that Hebrew and Ar-
amaic both were used as a language of religious literature well into the
end of the Second Temple era. As a matter of fact, the vast majority of
extant literature from that era, according to one recent estimate around
80 Percent,[45] was written in Hebrew, not in Aramaic. Any hypothesis of
pre-canonical Gospel sources therefore should include considerations
about a possible Hebrew language form of these sources.

In addition to the new literary finds, also the amount of epigraphical
and other non-literary material has multiplied in the course of the past
century: While the "Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum" (CIJ), published
1952, listed a total of 533 Jewish Inscriptions from the area of Palestine,
its successor, the "Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae et Palaestinae" (CIIP)
projects a total of 10.000 inscriptions.[46] Unfortunately, the CIIP still

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[44] Fitzmyer, J.A.: "The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A.D." (1970). in:
idem, *A Wandering Aramaean: Collected Aramaic Essays* (Missoula: Scholars Press,
1979), 29-56:39.

[45] Poirier, J. C.: "The Linguistic Situation in Jewish Palestine in Late Antiquity",
Journal of Graeco-Roman Christianity and Judaism 4 (2007) 55-134:69. The figure,
according to Poirier, is based on an estimate that excludes the biblical texts.

[46] Hannah M. Cotton, Leah Di Segni, Werner Eck et al., *Corpus Inscriptionum Iu-
daeae/Palestinae*. (Berlin/New York, de Gruyter, 2010-2014). Volumes 1-3 have been
published to date. The introduction to Volume 1.1 (p. v-xii) gives an updated overview
of the layout and scope of the whole project. Even if it is taken into account that the CIIP
includes Jewish as well as Non-Jewish inscriptions, as well as a wider geographical area
(including the Arab peninsula), the difference in numbers shows the enormous progress
in epigraphical research over the past decades.

remains unfinished, so currently there is no comprehensive catalogue of epigraphical finds from the land of Israel. However, data can be collected from a number of separate publications, catalogues, excavation reports, textbooks and dictionaries to form a reasonably comprehensive picture of language use in non-literary texts: An examination of about 2300 extant inscriptions and documents, dating from around 100 B.C.E to 135 C.E., has brought the following results:[47]

Around 1400 (60%) of these texts were written in Jewish script (i.e. either Hebrew or Aramaic), while 680 (30%) were written in Greek. Of the 1400 Semitic samples, the majority (870) were too short to be identified as Hebrew or Aramaic, many of them bearing only a name or indiscernable letter combinations. Of the remaining 530, another 179 have no identifiable Hebrew or Aramaic features apart from the use of ברה/בת/בר/בן, בר or אתת/אשת in the patronym.[48] This feature, however is not very reliable for identification of language use: The use of בר in names had become so conventional that it frequently appears in Hebrew literary and non-literary contexts. It therefore does not reveal reliable information about the language of the inscription, its maker or the person carrying the name. Only 323 of the 2300 inscriptions and non-literary documents in "Jewish script" therefore have reasonable clear grammatical or lexical features to identify them as Hebrew or Aramaic: 176 of these are written in Aramaic, 147 in Hebrew.[49]

One last piece of textual evidence is the Jewish coinage during the Second Temple period. Here, the weight of evidence is quite clearly on the Hebrew side: All Jewish coins of this period were inscribed in Hebrew and written in Paleo-Hebrew script, except for one series minted by Alexander Jannai in 78 B.C.E., which bore an Aramaic inscription in square script.[50]

In sum, the textual basis for the debate on language use in Jewish Palestine has broadened considerably over the past century. Many assumptions of early scholarship concerning the exclusive use of Aramaic

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[47] Cf. Baltes, G.: „The Use of Hebrew and Aramaic in Epigraphic Sources of the New Testament Era", in: *The language environment of First century Judaea* (JCP 26), ed. Buth, R. / Notley, S. A., Leiden: Brill 2014, 35-65.

[48] 123 of these used an "Aramaic", 56 a "Hebrew" patronym.

[49] 21 are probably bilingual, containing Hebrew as well as Aramaic parts. Of the 69 bilingual Greek-Semitic texts, 16 are Greek-Aramaic and 14 Greek-Hebrew.

[50] Naveh, J.: *On Sherd and Papyrus*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1992, p. 23, assumes that Alexander Jannai had political reasons to deviate from the convention for this one series of coins.

have been challenged by the new material. On the other hand, the classification of Hebrew as a "dead language" can no longer be upheld against the evidence from literary, epigraphical and documentary sources:

Literary texts:	20 % Aramaic, 80% Hebrew
Ossuary inscriptions:	25 Aramaic, 16 Hebrew
Inscribed ostraca:	19 Aramaic, 7 Hebrew
Other inscriptions:	25 Aramaic, 17 Hebrew
Letters:	14 Aramaic, 22 Hebrew
Documentary texts:	85 Aramaic, 33 Hebrew
Other non-literary texts:	8 Aramaic, 52 Hebrew
Coins:	All but one series in Hebrew

Although statistics can never reflect the complexity of historical realities, they still can help develop a more balanced view of the language situation. While Hebrew seems to have been the dominant language for religious literature and matters of national identity (coins, military letters), Aramaic seems to have been more prevalent in administrative, financial and judicial contexts (supply lists, legal documents, bills, deeds etc.), however none to the exclusion of the other. Traditional assumptions about geographical[51] or social distribution[52] of languages are not reflected in the epigraphical data.

b) The date and function of the targumic custom

In his 1898 summary, Dalman listed the "ancient custom" of *targum*

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[51] The often assumed preference for Aramaic in Galilee or for Hebrew in Judea cannot be based on the archeological evidence, since 322 out of 323 relevant samples (i.e. those that can be classified as being Hebrew or Aramaic on grammatical or lexical grounds) were found in Judea. The only exception is an Aramaic Jar inscription from Jeleme. All other Aramaic (and Hebrew) inscriptions from Galilee date to a period after 135 C.E. If place names within inscriptions are taken into consideration, the picture becomes even more complex. Those that mention place names from the north of the country are written in Hebrew without exception: Four mention "Galileans", three "Bet-Sheanites" and one possibly a "Gadarene". On the other hand, the only southern place name ("Bet Alon") appears in an Aramaic inscription. Therefore, the place names in fact contradict the traditional assumption. For details cf. Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.47), 63.

[52] The popular assumption that Hebrew was the language of the "learned", while Aramaic was the language of the "masses" cannot be verified from the epigraphic data, since we do not know enough about the social reality of those who stand behind the inscriptions and documents. However, since most of the epigraphic material comes from upper social strata, we can conclude that both languages were used here.

as prime evidence for his assumption that Aramaic had replaced Hebrew as the Jewish vernacular. Pfannkuche, in his earlier study, had dated the written Targums as early as the time of Philo.[53] Dalman was more cautious with regard to written Targums, however he assumed that oral targum was already a regular part of synagogal life at the time of Jesus, "because visitors of the synagogue would not have understood the Hebrew text".[54] He nevertheless used the language of Targum Onkelos as a model for the spoken language at the time of Jesus.

Ongoing targumic and Aramaic studies of the 20th century, however, have shed a different light on all of these assumptions:[55] The *written* Targumim today are dated to the third century or later. The origins of *oral* targum are still being debated, however it is generally assumed that the custom originated after the end of the Bar Ḳochba revolt. In addition, the *function* of targum is being viewed differently today: While early researchers assumed that the main purpose of targum was translation, today the function of exegetical expansion is seen as the main focus of the custom. Therefore, the custom of targum, if it existed already in the New Testament era, can no longer serve as an indicator of Hebrew language competence in the Second Temple period.

c) Lexical Semitisms in the New Testament

"Lexical Aramaisms" are listed by Dalman as evidence for the exclusive use of Aramaic as Jewish vernacular at the time of Jesus, and his assessment was repeated by many scholars afterwards. However, many of the various lists of lexical Semitisms suffered from a one-sided analysis of the material: many of them listed any *Semitism* as an *Aramaism*, sim-

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[53] Pfannkuche, *op. cit.*, 424, based on a remark in VitMos 2,26.

[54] Dalman, *op. cit.* (n.31), 1-2.

[55] Kaufman, S. A.: "Dating the Language of the Palestinian Targums and their Use in the Study of First Century CE Texts", in: *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in their Historical Context* (JSOT.S 166), ed. Beattie, D.R.G. / McNamara, M.J., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1994, 118-141:122; Safrai, Z.: "The Origins of Reading the Aramaic Targum in Synagogue", in: *The New Testament and Christian-Jewish Dialogue. Studies in Honor of David Flusser* (Immanuel 24/25), ed. Lowe, M., Jerusalem: ETRFI 1990, 187-193: 189 and idem: "The Targums as Part of Rabbinic Literature", in: *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part: Midrash and Targum, Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism, Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (CRINT 2.3b), ed. Safrai, S. et al. Assen: Van Gorcum 2006, 243-278; Machiela, D. A.: "Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Differing Phenomena of Targum and Translation in the Second Temple Period and Post-Second Temple Period", in: *The language environment of first century Judaea* (JCP 26), ed. Buth, R. / Notley, Steven A. Leiden: Brill 2014, 209-246.

ply based on the assessment of Hebrew as a dead language.[56] No serious effort was made to ask whether a specific lexical Semitism could *also* be derived from the Hebrew language, or if such a derivation could even be more probable. Today, with much better and more specific lexica available for either of the two languages, this task needs to be re-adressed:

> „...the way in which claims are sometimes made for the Aramaic substratum of the sayings of Jesus, when the evidence is merely ‚Semitic' in general, or worse, still, derived from some other Semitic language, e.g. Hebrew, should no longer be countenanced."[57]

> „...many Semitisms can be classified as Aramaisms, only if Aramaic is the basic, if not the sole, Semitic influence upon a given writer or speaker. But this is precisely what can no longer be assumed."[58]

My own preliminary re-evaluation of the lexical Semitisms contained in the Gospel tradition, based on an even comparison with the most recent lexica of both Hebrew and Aramaic, yields the following results:[59] The only lexical Semitism that can *only* be Aramaic is the word ταλιθα in the phrase ταλιθα κουμ, which renders the whole phrase as Aramaic. For the exclamation εφφαθα, a derivation from Hebrew is more plausible than one from Aramaic. For the quote from Psalm 22 on the cross, the case is complicated, because the phrase is rendered differently in different synoptic and textual variants, some of which relate to Aramaic and some to Hebrew.[60] Semitic equivalents for the words ἀμὴν, ὡσαννά, ἀλληλουϊά, βεελζεβοὺλ, μάννα, σάκκος, and βάτος can be found in biblical Hebrew, but not in Judean Aramaic. Some appear in later Aramaic literature, but there they apparently still function as Hebrew loanwords.

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[56] Cf. Schwarz, G.: ‚*Und Jesus sprach'. Untersuchungen zur aramäischen Urgestalt der Worte Jesu* (BWANT 118), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1985. Schwarz lists 30 lexical Aramaisms and 2 lexical Hebraisms, however he includes words like בני in his list of Aramaic-only words.

[57] Fitzmyer, J. A.: "The Study of the Aramaic Background of the New Testament", reprinted in: idem, *A Wandering Aramaean*, Missoula: Scholars Press 1979, 1-27:5.

[58] Voelz, J. W.: „The Language of the New Testament", in: *ANRW. II:25.2*, ed. Haase, W. / Temporini, H.. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1984, 893-977:923.

[59] Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.1), 110-121. For a similar catalogue, cf. Tilton, J. N. and Bivin, D.N.: "Greek Transliterations of Hebrew, Aramaic and Hebrew/Aramaic Words in the Synoptic Gospels", *Jerusalem Perspective Online Magazine* (http://www.jerusalemperspective.com/12404/), published May 28, 2014 (last retrieved 30/11/2014).

[60] Cf. Buth, R.: "The Riddle of Jesus' Cry from the Cross: The Meaning of ηλι ηλι λαμα σαβαχθανι (Matthew 27:46) and the Literary Function of ελωι ελωι λειμα σαβαχθανι (Mark 15:34)", in: Buth/Notley, *op. cit.* (n.23), 355-422.

κόρος and γέεννα can be derived from both languages, but their equivalents are much more common in Hebrew than in Aramaic. σάββατα is a special case: It has equivalents in Hebrew as well as in Aramaic, however even in Aramaic contexts, the term remains a Hebrew loanword, since the root remains Hebrew שבת, while the Aramaic verb for "rest" is נח.[61] For the words ῥαββί, ῥαββουνί, μεσσίας, αββα, μαμωνᾶ, πάσχα, σατανᾶς, κορβᾶν, βύσσος, μνᾶ, σάτον, equivalents can be found in Hebrew as well as Aramaic language. For the word ῥακά, an equivalent can be found in biblical Hebrew, however it is not yet used in a derogatory sense as in Mt 5:22. The derogatory use can however be found in later Aramaic and Hebrew literature.

Arguments for the Aramaic or Hebrew character of the words in question are often made from morphological rather than lexical observations: Thus, the word ending -α is frequently interpreted as an Aramaic *status emphaticus*. However, the transliterations of the LXX show that the final -α was frequently used in transliterations of Hebrew terms, even where it has no equivalent in the Hebrew morphology. It is therefore no conclusive evidence for either Aramaic or Hebrew language. In sum, the lexical Semitisms of the New Testament do not support the claim that Aramaic was more common than Hebrew as a spoken or written language at the time of Jesus. To the contrary, they more frequently have their origin in the Hebrew than in the Aramaic language.

d) Evidence of language use from rabbinical literature

Items 3-5 in Dalman's list all refer to the use of Aramaic in rabbinic liturgy: Aramaic language is used in historical references to temple literature, in early strata of rabbinical literature (e.g. *Megillat Ta⸂anit*) and in legal documents (e.g. *ketubot*). This, in itself, is evidence for the use of Aramaic in New Testament times. However, it does not exclude the use of Hebrew in other spheres of life. Obviously, other early strata of rabbinic literature have been transmitted in Hebrew.[62] In fact, the Aramaic parts within the early strata of rabbinic literature are the exception to the rule. And, what is more, they do not represent the kind of genres that are relevant for the gospel tradition. When we turn instead to the genres

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[61] Cf. Buth, R. / Pierce, C.: "Hebraisti in Ancient Texts: Does Ἑβραϊστί Ever Mean 'Aramaic'?", in: *The language environment of First century Judaea* (JCP 26), ed. Buth, Randall / Notley, Steven A. Leiden: Brill 2014, 66-109:81-82 and 85-87.

[62] *ketubot* seem to have been issued in both languages, depending on local custom in different geographical traditions (mKet 4,12).

of rabbinic parables and halakhic discussion, which feature much more prominently in the gospel tradition, both are transmitted in Hebrew language, even within Aramaic literary contexts, in the case of parables this even exclusively so.[63] As was already seen from the epigraphic evidence, language use seems to have been a matter of situative choice rather than mere capability: Aramaic seems to have been more appropriate in some contexts and for some genres, while Hebrew was for others.

We even find, in rabbinic literature, examples of deliberate code-switching between the two languages: Thus, the sage Shimon ben Shetah is depicted as switching from Aramaic to Hebrew in the middle of conversations (bBer 19a and 48a), in both cases at a point when the topic changed towards halakhic issues. Other examples of code-switching involve situations where Sages switch to Hebrew because they adress a different person in the midst of conversation: In all cases, these persons are local and less educated people (bNed 66b, bMeg 18b and bRHSh 26b). Even if these traditions do not necessarily reflect historical events, they still are evidence for a familiarity with phenomena of deliberate code-switching between Aramaic and Hebrew. A later dictum of Joseph of Beth Guvrin (3rd c. C.E.) reflects a language diversity in the land of Israel that is defined by function and genre rather than geographical preference or educational status.[64] And the fierce opposition in a saying ascribed to Juda Ha-Nasi against the use of Aramaic in the Land of Israel (bSot 49b und bBQ 82b–83a) might well reflect a situation at the end of the 2nd century C.E., in which Hebrew was still in use as a living language among the sages, while Aramaic had become more and more predominant. In sum, the early strata of rabbinic literature do not reflect a monolingual Aramaic environment for the late Second Temple period in Israel.

e) The artificial character of Mishnaic Hebrew

Item no. 6 in Dalman's list, the claim of an artificial character of Mishnaic Hebrew, was based on an earlier thesis of Abraham Geiger (1845) who stood at the forefront of the German Jewish Reform movement. Geiger attempted to prove that Hebrew was never used as a liturgical language in early Judaism and therefore should also not be used in

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[63] E.g. the Hebrew parables employed in the midst of an Aramaic discussion in bTa'an 5b; bBQ 60b.

[64] ySot 7,2/3 (21c), ed. Schäfer/Becker III:120

modern Judaism. The presumed use of an Aramaic "vernacular" in the synagogues of the Second Temple period for him was a useful analogy for his campaign to introduce the German vernacular into the synagogues of his own time. However, his hypothesis has not stood the test of time. As early as 1908, and then later in his Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew (1927), Moshe Segal concluded from some of the distinctive features of Mishnaic Hebrew that a spoken dialect must have been the basis of the formation of this specific form of literary Hebrew.[65] The later discoveries of the Bar Kochba letters, the Copper Scroll (3Q15) and the Halakhic letter 4QMMT have verified his hypothesis. Today, it can safely be said that the existence of a spoken, proto-mishnaic dialect of Hebrew, commonly called "Middle Hebrew", is a *communis opinio* in the world of Hebrew linguistic scholarship.[66]

f) Terms for "Hebrew" and "Aramaic" in Greek Jewish Literature

Item no. 7 in Dalman's list is the assumption still widely held in scholarship today that ancient Greek authors, including the New Testament writers, did not distinguish between Aramaic and Hebrew when they used the terms Ἑβραΐς, Ἑβραϊστί, or Ἑβραϊκή. This assumption has become so common that it found its way into the standard definition of the term ἑβραΐς in the BDAG lexicon, and even some modern bible translations translate the term with "Aramaic" in places like Acts 21:40; 26:14 or Joh 19:17. However, these claims have mostly been based on the *a priori* assumption that Hebrew was not in use at this time and therefore the term ἑβραΐς *must* mean Aramaic in these contexts as well as in Philo and Josephus. A close examination of all relevant Greek literature of the period shows that the term Ἑβραΐς, Ἑβραϊστί and Ἑβραϊκή are never used anywhere to denote Aramaic language,[67] and that other

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[65] Segal, M. H.: "Mishnaic Hebrew and its Relation to Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic", *JQR 20* (1908-09) 647-737; Segal, M. H.: *A Grammar of Mishnaic Hebrew*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1927.

[66] Nebe, W.: "Neologismen im rabbinischen Hebräisch am Beispiel der Bildung des Infinitivus constructus qal der Verben I א,ג,נ,ה,ל", in: *Vom Nil an die Saale. FS Arafat Mustafa* (Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft 42/2006), ed. Drost-Abgarjan, A. et al. Halle: Orientalisches Institut der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg 2008, 243-300:245-246. Cf. Bar-Asher, M.: "Mishnaic Hebrew: An Introductory Survey", in: Safrai et al, *op. cit.* (n.55), 567-596; Fassberg, S. E.: „Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?", *CBQ 74* (2012) 263-280.

[67] Two passages are often being quoted here (Ant 1:33 and 3:252). However, in both cases the transcriptions in question are not unambiguously Aramaic, cf. Buth/Pierce, *op.*

terms like Συριστί, Συριακή or Χαλδαϊστί were used consistently by ancient authors to distinguish Hebrew from Aramaic language.[68] The same can be shown for the terminology of the early church fathers, especially the much-debated quote of Bishop Papias.[69]

g) *Non-lexical Hebraisms and Aramaisms*

In addition to the lexical Semitisms listed above, also non-lexical Semitisms need to be taken in consideration when evaluating the Semitic language background of ancient Greek texts. Already Dalman, in his study of the words of Jesus, had compiled a list of 15 typical Semitic idioms found in the Gospel tradition. Two of these he described as exclusively Aramaic, while six were identified as exclusively Hebrew. However, Dalman concluded that only the two Aramaic idioms were "true Semitisms", while the Hebrew idioms should be regarded as "artificial" Hebraisms introduced by the Greek authors as a stylistic echo of biblical texts.[70] Klaus Beyer, in his extensive study of the Semitic syntax of the New Testament, has more carefully separated syntactical Aramaisms from Hebraisms.[71] Other authors, like Raymond Martin and more recently Randall Buth, have suggested methodologies to discern Aramaic from Hebrew in Semitized Greek sources.[72] It can be shown that distinguishable linguistic features point to the fact that some extant works of ancient Greek literature more probably go back to Aramaic sources or traditions, while others more probably are based on translations from Hebrew. Based on these criteria, a Hebrew language background is more probable for the Gospels than an Aramaic one.

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cit. (n.61), 74-82. But even if Aramaic word were in view, Josephus speaks here, unlike in other passages, not about "Hebrew language", but about a language of the "Hebrew people", which obviously can denote Aramaic as well as Hebrew language.

[68] Buth/Pierce, *op. cit.* (n. 61), 66-109.

[69] cf. Nagel, P.: „Hebräisch oder aramäisch? Zur Sprache des judenchristlichen Nazaräerevangeliums", in: Drost-Abgarjan, *op. cit.* (n. 66), 217-242.

[70] Dalman, *op. cit.* (n.31), 36-38.

[71] Beyer, K.: *Semitische Syntax im Neuen Testament. Band I: Satzlehre Teil 1* (StUNT 1), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1962; and, more recently, Beyer, K.: „Woran erkennt man, dass ein griechischer Text aus dem Hebräischen oder Aramäischen übersetzt ist?", in: *Studia Semitica necnon Iranica*, ed. Macuch, M. et al., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1989, 21-31.

[72] Buth, R.: "Distinguishing Hebrew from Aramaic in Semitized Greek Texts, with an Application for the Gospels and Pseudepigrapha", in: Buth/ Notley, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 247-319.

   This observation is to be supplemented by the fact that for some spe-
cific idioms and wordplays in the Gospel tradition a Hebrew language
background is much more plausible than an Aramaic one: The phrases
βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν and σὰρξ καὶ αἷμα are not attested in Aramaic lit-
erature, but common in Hebrew. To be more specific, they only became
common in Post-Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew. The same is true for the
periphrastic construction, which is rare in Biblical Hebrew, Classical
Greek and Jewish Palestinian Aramaic, but very frequent in Mishnaic
Hebrew. The specific semantic nuances of the terms παραβολή (hebr.
משל) as "story parable" and δικαιοσύνη (hebr. צדקה) as "almsgiving",
both found in the Gospels, are attested neither in Biblical Hebrew nor in
Aramaic, but again are frequent in Rabbinic Hebrew. Wordplays based
on the names of Ἰησοῦς (Mt 1,21) and Πέτρος (Mt 16:18) only work
in Hebrew,[73] as well as a possible wordplay on the terms "sons" and
"stones" behind Mt 3:9/Lk 3:8 and Mt 21:38.43.[74] Grintz,[75] Edwards[76]
and Notley[77] have compiled more extended lists of similar idiomatic
Hebraisms.

   In conclusion, it can be said that the evidence adduced at the begin-
ning of the 20th century to support a monolingual, Aramaic-only model
of sociolinguistic realities in the Land of Israel at the time of Jesus has
been reversed by more recent scholarship in the fields of archeological,
historical, philological and linguistic study. There can be no doubt today
that the Hebrew language was used as a spoken and literary language
alongside Aramaic and Greek. In fact, much of the evidence discussed
here makes a Hebrew language background for the Gospel tradition
more probable than an Aramaic one, taking into consideration the spe-
cial genre of the gospels, their content, their linguistic style as well as

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   [73] Bivin, D.: „Jesus' Petros-petra Wordplay (Matthew 16:18): Is It Greek, Aramaic,
or Hebrew?", in: Buth / Notley, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 375-394.
   [74] This can only be a tentative assumption and should be handled with caution. How-
ever, a comparable wordplay, only possible in Hebrew, is attested in Jos. Bell. 5,269–
272. Cf. Buth/Pierce, *op. cit.*, (n.61), 88-89.
   [75] Grintz, J.: "Hebrew as the Spoken and Written Language in the Last Days of the
Second Temple", *JBL 79* (1960) 32-47:33-42.
   [76] Edwards, J. R.: *The Hebrew Gospel and the Development of the Synoptic Tradi-
tion*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009, 131-141; 164-165; 185.
   [77] Notley, S. R.: Between the Chairs: New Testament Evidence for the Hebrew Jesus
Spoke. Lecture given on October 25, 2014 at The Lanier Theological Library Chapel in
Houston, Texas. http://youtu.be/cuPDW_3RtJQ (retrieved 31/12/2014). Cf. also *idem*:
„Non-Septugintal Hebraisms in the Third Gospel: An Inconvenient Truth", in: Buth /
Notley, *op. cit.* (n. 23), 320-346.

idiomatic evidence. However, this assumption would have to be tested on the basis of a thorough analysis of the synoptic texts themselves.

II. A proposed methodology for synoptic comparison

Based on linguistic observations, but also on the patristic tradition of an early pre-canonical "Hebrew Gospel", several scholars have in the past applied *retroversion* into Hebrew or Aramaic as a tool for synoptic studies. Resch, Sahlin and Carmignac have envisaged such retroversions for the entire Gospel tradition, however their work remained fragmentary.[78] Flusser, Lowe and Casey have instead concentrated on in-depth-studies for selected pericopes to demonstrate the heuristic value of retroversion for synoptic studies.[79] Casey has suggested a "standard procedure for reconstruction of Aramaic sources from the witness of our Greek Gospels",[80] which in its essentials can also be applied to the work with Hebrew language and literature.[81]

However, in contrast to the work of Casey and much of the older studies on the Semitic background of the Gospels, the focus of my own approach would not be on the attempt to *reconstruct* older sources that lie behind our canonical Gospels, or even to find the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus at the core of synoptic sayings. The history of scholarship in this field has shown that this attempt is loaded with dangers and pitfalls, and much of it has to be based on conjectures and emendations of the text: Scholars of the past have often focused too much on supposed reading or writing errors, abnormalities, mistranslations, translational variants or reconstructed poetic forms for single words or phrases within the gospel tradition. They have also often focused on lexical and syntactical Semitisms, because their aim very often was to provide conclusive evidence or proof for the existence of Semitic sources. This, however,

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[78] Resch, *op. cit.* (n. 36). Sahlin, H.: *Der Messias und das Gottesvolk* (ASNU 12), Uppsala: SNU 1945, p. I. For Carmignac, cf. above n. 8 and 24.

[79] Lowe, M. / Flusser, D.: "Evidence Corroborating a Modified Proto-Matthean Synoptic Theory", *NTS 29* (1983) 25-47; Casey, M.: *An Aramaic approach to Q: Sources for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke* (SNTS.M 122), Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press 2002. Casey, as well as Lindsey and Van Cangh/Toumpsin, have also worked on retroversions for the gospel of Mark, however without employing synoptic comparison.

[80] Casey, M.: *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTS.M 102), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998, 107; extended and revised in Casey, Aramaic Approach, 2002, 60-63.

[81] Cf. Baltes, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 220-235.

is not the aim of the approach suggested here. Verbatim reconstructions of presumed Semitic sources can never be more than mere conjecture.[82] And they can never prove the historical existence of such sources either.

The approach suggested here, therefore, takes a different road: The focus of interest is not on the wording of a supposed Semitic source, but on *synoptic comparison* of canonical Greek texts. Retroversion into Hebrew serves only as a linguistic tool to facilitate interaction with Hebrew literature and sources from the same period. Based on the assumption that most of the synoptic material originated in a Semitic language context, such an interaction seems plausible even if written Semitic sources never existed. Synoptic research has always been confronted with questions of "who came first?" and "who is dependent on whom?". If it can be demonstrated that one synoptic variant is more closely related to idiomatic expressions, patterns of thought or wording found in Hebrew literature than the other, this observation might serve as a helpful additional evidence to answer these kind of questions.

Obviously, it is also possible that a phrase or expression becomes "more Hebraic" or more "Jewish" also in later stages of literary development. However, in most cases the line of development would be from a "more Hebraic" to a "less Hebraic" style.

Historical Jesus research has for a long time adopted the "criterion of historical plausibility (in a Jewish context)" as a tool to evaluate the historical credibility of a given tradition. In a similar vein, comparison with Hebrew literature could facilitate a "criterion of linguistic plausibility (in a Hebrew language context)" and a "criterion of literary plausibility (in the context of Jewish literature)". Both criteria could then help to make judgements about the originality of specific synoptic variants and about possible lines of literary or oral dependency between these variants.

Retroversion into Hebrew, therefore, does not serve to reconstruct the original wording of a Semitic source. Rather, it serves as a heuristic tool to evaluate Greek texts, to distinguish between traditional and redactional elements within a given canonical text and to reconstruct Greek sources or 'Vorlagen' that might lie behind our canonical texts. Proximity to Hebrew language and Jewish patterns of thought serves as a criterion for authenticity and originality of a given Greek text or variant, when compared to others.

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[82] However, as such, they may still be helpful for further study, e.g. comparison with Hebrew literature or study of idioms and realia.

III. Examples

In the main part of my study, I have attempted to apply this approach to four different synoptic texts. I have chosen my examples from different strata of synoptic material: Two texts from the "triple tradition" that are traditionally ascribed to a "Mark-Q overlap", one from Matthaean "Sondergut" and one from the Passion narrative. The limits of space do not allow a full presentation of the results here, or even a thorough interaction with the primary texts. What is more, one of the main features of the approach suggested here is that it always attempts a full line-by-line retroversion of coherent synoptic pericopes, in order to avoid the concentration on linguistic particularities or oddities that has been so prevalent in older research. Only a full reconstruction of supposed pre-canonical Sources, alongside a full retroversion of these sources into a historically plausible Hebrew equivalent, avoids the danger of jumping to premature conclusions based on isolated phenomena. However, in this summary it will not be possible to adhere to this principle for obvious reasons. I can only point to a few, isolated observations and results of my studies here. However. it is important to keep in mind that exactly this is a danger that needs to be adressed and avoided in any serious involvement with the approach suggested here.

1. The ministry of John the Baptist (Mt 3,1-6 parr)

Traditionally, this pericope has been explained as a "Mark/Q overlap" in the commentaries. However, on a closer look, this explanation does not work and a more complex explanation is needed.

a) The main crux is the very unusual translation of the Hebrew phrase וּפִנָּה־דָרֶךְ (Mal 3:1) with ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου in Mk 1:2 as well as in the synoptic parallels in Mt 11:10 and Lk 7:27, a classic "Q" passage. A close examination of the two passages reveals that Mk 1,2parr is a very complex intertextual composition that weaves together several biblical verses (Mal 3:1, Ex 23:20) and motives (first exodus and new exodus, first creation and new creation, the angel of JHWH and JHWH himself). Especially the unusual Greek verb κατασκευάσει, which has no basis either in the Masoretic text or in the different LXX renditions, purposefully binds together passages of Dt-Isaiah (Isa 40:19.28;43:7;-45:7-9) and the creation narrative (Gen 1:2) with the quotes from Maleachi and Exodus. This construction only works on a Greek language

level and cannot be explained as an independent redactional feature in Mark and Q. It can also not be explained as the work of a Deutero-markan redactor.[83] Therefore, either Mark knew the Q passage, or vice versa, or both passages were based on a common, pre-synoptic Greek source.

b) Additional minor and major agreements between Mt and Lk, in wording and in content, support this conclusion. These do not only include verbal agreements within the "triple tradition" passage (e.g. πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου Mt 3:5 cf. Lk 3:3), but also verbal agreements within the "double tradition" passage (e.g. ἔμπροσθέν σου, Lk 7:27par.), and finally also overlaps in content (an allusion to the baptist's clothing in Lk 7:25par, to his role as a "prophet" in the same verse and to his diet in Lk 7:33par. All three motives are also present in Mk 1:6). It seems, therefore, that Mk knew a tradition that contained not only the citation from Mal 3:1/Ex23:20, but the whole "Q" passage behind Mt 11:2–21/Lk 7:24–35; 16:16.

c) The assumption of a common pre-synoptic source is also supported by the fact that parallels to this narrative exist not only in the Gospel of John (1:6.28; 3:22-26), but also in the apocryphal Gospel of the "Ebionites" (Ebion 1,2 and 4), which was explicitly called the "Hebrew Gospel" by Epiphanius.

d) The narrative core, common to the synoptic and non-synoptic parallels, is found in Mk 1:4-5. A retroversion of the different variants into possible Hebrew equivalents shows that the Markan Version (ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων...) is probably the one that is closest to common forms of Hebrew narrative introductions, using the "periphrastic construction" (היה + name + participle), while Mt has a more complex verbal construction (παραγίνεται) and a titular ὁ βαπτιστὴς instead of the simple participle βαπτίζων. Lk, in turn, seems to be a creative reworking of the narrative in reflection of biblical stories of prophetic vocation.

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[83] Fuchs, A.: „Die Überschneidungen von Mk und ‚Q' nach B.H.Streeter und E.P.Sanders und ihre wahre Bedeutung (Mk 1,1-8 par.)", in: *Wort in der Zeit: Neutestamentliche Studien. Festgabe für Karl Heinrich Rengstorf zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Haubeck, W. / Bachmann, M., Leiden: Brill 1980, 28-81:61. However, Fuchs leaves unmentioned the fact that the citation is not simply omitted by Mt and Lk, but appears in both gospels in a later, however identical context, presumably a „Q" passage. A deuteromarkan explanation therefore must assume that the whole „Q" passage in Mt 11/Lk 7 was also part of the Deuteromarkan Gospel. However, if this line is followed, the shape of Deuteromark would in the end include all Markan and all Q material. It would then no longer be a „Deutero-Mk", but rather a traditional „Proto-Mt".

e) Two other elements that seem to have been part of the common pre-synoptic narrative are some kind of temporal clause in the introduction ("in those days", "in the days of...") and the quote from Isa 40.

f) The citation formulae used by Mt 3:3 (οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ῥηθεὶς διὰ Ἠσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου) and Lk 3:4 (ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἠσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου) both reflect Hebrew citation formulae. Luke's formula renders כאשר כתוב, frequent in the Dead Sea Scrolls and often used in the New Testament. Matthews formula stands closer to the Rabbinic formula שנאמר, however similar forms are also attested in Qumran. Marks version (καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἠσαΐᾳ τῷ προφήτῃ), which uses the name of a prophet as a synonym for a book, has no analogy in Hebrew literature.

g) As to the description of the Baptists ministry, some of the parallels have a typical Hebraic "figura ethymologica" (βαπτίζων βάπτισμα, Act 19:4; Ebion 1), which is still visible, however augmented in some Markan manuscripts (βαπτίζων ... καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα), while other manuscripts have dissolved the figure grammatically (ὁ βαπτίζων ... κηρύσσων βάπτισμα). Mt and Lk both have a different formula. If it can be assumed that the Hebraic "figura ethymologica" is more orginal, then Mk has kept the most original version here.

h) The formula βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, shared by Mk and Lk, is difficult to retrovert into Hebrew, since a construction with טבילה in a construct state with a noun following always denotes the person or thing that is immersed, but never the purpose or effect of the immersion.[84] The purpose of an immersion, or the action that the immersion prepares for, is not denoted by a construct noun, but by the preposition ל. Therefore, Matthew's formula βαπτίζω ἐν ὕδατι εἰς μετάνοιαν (cf. Mt 3:11), using instrumental ἐν and final εἰς, is much closer to Hebrew idiom than the formula used by Mk and Lk.

i) The linguistic style of Mark changes in Mk 1:6. Part of this verse is a verbatim citation from II Kg 1:8 (LXX). The other parts are *ad hoc* descriptions of the clothing and diet of John without significant parallels in biblical texts or other Jewish literature. The syntax of this second part is strikingly non-Semitic, compared to the rest of the passage. Also

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[84] Samples from biblical literature include Gen 37:31; Ex 12:22; Lev 4:6.17;9:9; 14:6.16.51; Num 19:18; Dtn 33:24; Ruth 2:14. In Qumran only Q274 (=4QTohorotA) 2 i:4–6. In rabbinical literature, טבילת אצבע (the dipping of the finger) bZev 13b; טבילת טמא מת (the ablution of a person with corpse impurity), bHag 22b; טבילה של ריבה (the ablution of a young woman) ARN A 8,24 (Becker 104).

Matthew has a non-Semitic word order and syntax here. Apart from Mt 3:4, parallels to this passage are absent from the other versions of the Baptist narrative.[85] Cumulatively, this points to the conclusion that Mk 1:6 was not part of the original narrative.

j) If, however, the initial observation that Mk knew the "Q" material in Mt 11:2-21par remains valid, then Mk 1:6 could be understood as a Markan summary of the material he omitted (clothing and diet of the Baptist, his role as a prophet like Elijah). Apparently, he followed the same procedure with his inclusion of Mt 11:10 par as introduction to his narrative in Mk 1:2. Robert Lindsey coined the term "Markan Pick-Up" for this phenomenon, which can be observed frequently in Mk.[86] A similar "Pick-Up" might be identified in the minor agreement πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου (Mt 3:5 par Lk 3:3), which might be echoed in Mark's χώρα (Mk 1:5).

k) Mt shows several instances of duplicity: He mentions the Jordan twice (Mt 3:5 and 3:6), he has two references to the clothing of the Baptist (Mt 3:4 and 11:8), as well as two references to his diet (Mt 3:4 and 11:18). All three instances in Mt 3:4-6 are close Mt-Mk parallels without a parallel in Lk. Also, in Mt 3:4 he has a non-Semitic style that resists retroversion into Hebrew more than in the rest of the passage. The transition with narrative τότε (Mt 3:5) is a typically Matthean redactional feature, stemming from Aramaic language interference on the side of the redactor, however evidently not from Aramaic sources.[87] Cumulatively, these observations point to the conclusion that Mk 1:6 is a Markan addition to the original pre-synoptic narrative that was in turn copied by the final redactor of Mt, thereby producing doublets between the original "Q" material and the additional "Mk" material.

In conclusion, a reconstructed pre-synoptic source could have had the following shape:

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[85] Ebion 2, which differs in style from the (more Semitic and more independent) traditions in Ebion 1 and 4, is apparently directly dependent on Mt 3:6 here, which becomes obvious from a wordplay (ἐγκρίς/ἀκρὶς) which only works on a Greek language level.

[86] The phenomenon refers to minor agreements "in addition", shared by Mt and Lk but missing in Mk, corresponding to minor agreements "in omission" with a similar content in a different place. Lindsey, working from a hypothesis of Lucan priority, explains this as a redactorial style of Mk, who frequently omits material from his sources in one place, only to re-employ it in another place.

[87] Buth, *op. cit.* (n.72), 253-263 and 296-304.

Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις   בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
or: [Ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἡρῴδου etc.]   [בִּימֵי הוֹרְדוֹס הַמֶּלֶךְ וג"]
ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης   הָיָה יוֹחָנָן
βαπτίζων βάπτισμα εἰς μετάνοιαν   מַטְבִּיל טְבִילָה לִתְשׁוּבָה
[ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ] [τῆς Ἰουδαίας]   [בַּמִּדְבָּר] [יְהוּדָה]
καθὼς γέγραπται   כַּאֲשֶׁר כָּתוּב
ἐν βίβλῳ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου   בְּסֵפֶר יְשַׁעְיָהוּ הַנָּבִיא
φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ·   קוֹל קוֹרֵא
ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου,   בַּמִּדְבָּר פַּנּוּ דֶּרֶךְ יְהֹוָה
εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ   יַשְּׁרוּ [בָּעֲרָבָה] מְסִלָּה לֵאלֹהֵינוּ:
καὶ ἐξεπορεύετο πρὸς αὐτὸν   תֵּצֵא אֵלָיו
Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ πᾶσα ἡ Ἰουδαία   יְרוּשָׁלַיִם וְכָל־יְהוּדָה
καὶ πᾶσα ἡ περίχωρος τοῦ Ἰορδάνου   וְכָל־כִּכַּר הַיַּרְדֵּן
καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο   וַיִּטָּבְלוּ
or: [καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ]   [וַיִּטָּבְלוּ עַל־יָדוֹ]

The important part of the reconstruction here is the left column. However, the retroversion in the right column serves as a "plausibility check" to demonstrate that the pre-synoptic Greek source is linguistically well grounded in the context of Hebrew literature and might (!) also go back to a Hebrew source, as claimed in this case by Epiphanius.

This presumed pre-synoptic source of the Baptist narrative has, at a later stage, been connected with other Baptist material now ascribed to "Q" (Mt 11:2-19 par, Mt 3:7-12 par), which then, in turn, was used by Mt, Mk and Lk. Mk omitted much of the material, however he included the quotation from Mal 3:1/Ex 23:20 in Mk 1:1-2 and the motif of the Baptists clothing and diet as well as the Elijah-motif in Mk 1:6. On the last redactional stage, the final redactor of Mt included the Markan additions into Mt, thereby creating several doublets. In their canonical shape, Mk has preserved the original wording of the source more closely than the other two in some places. However, Matthew displays the original structure of the narrative more faithfully, once the Markan additions are removed. Lk, together with Mt, has kept much of the original material and some of the original wording, however he has reworked it more thoroughly, added the synchronism in Lk 3:1-2a, extended the citation in Lk 3:5-6 and reused the material from Mt 3:5-6 in several redactional clauses throughout his Gospel (Lk 3:5;3:21;7:17; 7,29-30).

2. The Beelzebul controversy (Mt 12,22–32 parr.)

This pericope, too, has traditionally been explained as a "Mk/Q overlap". However, the similarities in structure and wording are so close that also here, as in the Baptist narrative, an additional direct dependence between Mk and Q or a common source for both, often described as "ancient" or "Aramaic", has also been frequently assumed by commentators. Not all the details of the discussion can be repeated here, however some observations will be noted:

a) The original narrative setting of the controversy seems to be reflected best in the Lucan version (Lk 11:14-15a) which contains features typical for Hebrew narrative: A periphrastic construction and an ἐγένετο clause.[88]

b) Within the accusation itself, the double negation in Mt 12:24 reflects Semitic style better than the parallels in Mk and Lk. The instrumental use of ἐν in ἐν τῷ Βεελζεβοὺλ also reflects Hebrew style.

c) The whole argument in this controversy is based on the motif of demonic hierarchies prevalent in Jewish demonology, as testified in Enochic literature as well as in the Dead Sea Scrolls and rabbinic literature. However, the phrase ἄρχων τῶν δαιμονίων more specifically points to the rabbinic tradition of שרים, denoting "ruling angels" of nations, individuals or demonic hierarchies. The closest parallels to the phrase are found in later rabbinic sources,[89] however the appearance of the phrase in the Gospels shows that it must be a tradition going back to the Second Temple period. In Jewish literature, the idea of שרים, ruling over nations and territories, is frequently connected with the motif of the "fall of rulers" and the "binding of the strong"[90], especially in mid-

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[88] The narrative introduction with καὶ ἐγένετο (ἐγένετο δέ) has frequently been termed as an "artificial Septuagintism" created by Luke as a redactorial feature. However, a close look at all instances of the formula shows that there are three different variants of this clause. One of these, using the infinitive after καὶ ἐγένετο, appears in the second part of Acts in places where Lk does not depend on sources. The other two, using finite verbs after καὶ ἐγένετο and closer to Septuagintal style, are employed by Luke in places where he is apparently dependent on sources. They might therefore reflect a Hebraic style of Luke's sources rather than his own redactorial preferences. Cf. Buth, R., *op. cit.* (n. 72), 263-277 and 296-319.

[89] Aramaic שרהון דרוחתא, "ruler of the spirits", WaR 5:1 on Lev 4:3 (Mirkin 8:52); רבהון דרוחיא, "Lord of the spirits", yPea 8:9/7 (21b) par ySheq 5:6/4 (49a) ed. Schäfer/ Becker I.1–2:396 and II.5–12:102; מלכא דשידי, „king of demons", bPes 110a, bGit 68a.

[90] Jub 10:1-7 narrates a story of "binding of demons" which also involves Mastema, the "ruler of the spirits". TLev 18:12 mentions the binding of Beliar. Similar motifs appear in Jub 48:15-18 and äthHen 10:12.

rashim about the Exodus tradition:

The Holy One will not cause a nation to fall   אין הקדש ברוך הוא מפיל אמה
unless he has first caused their ruler to fall[91]   עד שהוא מפיל שרן תחלה

The idea behind these midrashim is that, at the Red Sea, the Egyptian army was protected by the "guardian angel" (שר) of Egypt, and only after the שר had been bound or caused to fall, could the Egyptian army be conquered and the kingdom of God (Ex 15:18) be revealed. The same motif is applied to Nebukaddnezar (based on Dan 4:28). The motif is sometimes connected with the formula that the kingdom of the שר "can not stand" or "will fall" when God intervenes on behalf of his people.[92] In other places, it is connected with the motif of the prior "binding" of the ruler.[93] In one late midrash, the binding of Satan and his שרים is caused by the appearance of the Messiah.[94] One passage in a midrash on Num 34:2 asks the question "How can the land 'fall' before we enter it?". The answer weaves together several motifs that we also find in the Beelzebul pericope: The "Lord of the house", the plundering of the spoil, the binding of the שר and his subsequent fall, as well as the division of his kingdom:

Should it be that the Lord of the House	כביכול אין בעל הבית
could not take his belongings from there?	יכול להוציא כליו משם
What did the Holy One do?	מה עשה הקדוש ברוך הוא
He lifted up the ruler of the land,	נטל שר הארץ
and he bound him and threw him down	וכפתו והפילו לפניהם
before them (...).	(...)
Thus, the land was divided	לפי שנחלקה הארץ
between the twelve tribes.	לשנים עשר שבטים

We have here a cluster of motifs that is repeated in different forms and shapes throughout Jewish literature, and the different elements are closely intertwined. The Beelzebul controversy employs several of these motifs and weaves them together into a consistent picture.

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[91] ShemR 21:5 on Ex 14:15 (Mirkin 5:249), par. DevR 1:22 on Dtn 2:31 (Mirkin 11:24, Liebermann 29); similarly MekhY שירתא on Ex 15:1 (Horovitz/Rabin 124–125).

[92] In addition to the texts mentioned above, cf. 4Q386 (=4QpsEzek[b]) ii 3–4 (Parry 3:350); BerR 77:3 on Gen 32:26 (Theodor/Albeck 2:914).

[93] DevR 1:22 and 1:23 on Dtn 2:31 (Mirkin 11:24, Liebermann 29); ShirR 8:19 on Cant 8,14 (ed. Wilna 42a); BerR 56:5 on Gen 22:9 (Theodor/Albeck 2:600).

[94] PesR 36:1 §2 (Ulmer 2:830)

e) In Lk 11:19 par we find another allusion to the Exodus story that fits in neatly with this cluster of motifs, although it is mostly assumed to come from a different source ("Q"): The "finger of God" (Ex 8:15) is a demonstration of God's victory over the rulers and therefore a sign of his kingdom (Ex 15:18). Again, this motif of the "finger of God" is frequently picked up in rabbinic literature.[95] It is an interesting detail that Luke's translation of the Hebrew phrase בְּאֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים stays closer to the Hebrew original than the two translations offered in the LXX (Ex 31:18; Dtn 9:10) which he obviously does not build upon.

f) The motif of conflicting kingdoms is applied to the sphere of conflicting schools of teachers in the "Q" tradition behind Mt 12:27 par Lk 11:19. That same connection is made in a rabbinic dictum that is close in wording and content. The collection itself is late, however most commentators assume that the material goes back to early traditions:

A city that is divided	עיר שיש בה מחלוקת
will end in devastation.	סופה ליחרב
(...)	(...)
A house that is divided	בית שיש בו מחלוקת
Will end in devastation.	סופו ליחרב
Two disciples of sages	שני תלמידי חכמים
who quarrel in one town,	הדרים בעיר אחת
and also two judges and their sons,	וכן שני בתי דינים
when they are divided	ובניהם מחלוקת
their end will lead to death.[96]	סופון למות

Commentators have suspected the term πόλις in the Matthean version to be a "hellenistic" addition. However, in view of this rabbinic dictum it is not impossible that it was part of the original saying.

g) The remark about "knowing their thoughts" in Mt 12:25a par is reflecting Hebrew phrases of the Old Testament (notably Job 21:27 and Ps 94:11), however it does not show direct dependence on the LXX translation of these passages. The phrase appears, in different forms, frequently in Mt and Lk, and regularly both agree against Mk in these places, who mostly has a more complex and less Hebraic version of the phrase, or, as in the present text, omits it completely. It has therefore

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[95] ShemR 10:7 on Ex 8:12 (Shinan 234; Mirkin 5:136); Migr 85; ShemR 5:14 on Ex 5:1 (Shinan 171; Mirkin 5:98); ShemR 23:9 zu Ex 15:1 (Mirkin 5:265); bSan 67b; bSan 95b; cf. also Philo VitMos 1:113.

[96] Derekh Eretz Zutta 9:24 (ed. Sperber 54).

been suggested that the phrase goes back to hebraizing Proto-Matthean and Proto-Lucan sources that were used in turn by Mk.[97]

h) The final saying of the pericope, Mt 12:31-32 parr, has been in the focus of Semitic Gospel studies since the beginning, especially in view of the differing synoptic renditions of a presumed Semitic "Son of Man" phrase at the core of the saying.

Limits of space do not allow a deeper interaction with the passage here. However, due to the traditional focus on Aramaic language, few commentators have noticed the multiple intertextual connections of this passage with Hebrew literature, beginning, again, with the Exodus narrative, continuing into the Psalms and Prophets, and into later rabbinic traditions about blasphemy and unforgiveable sins. At the core of this intertextual complex lies the Hebrew phrase דבר ב, used in Ex 12,1.8 for Aaron und Miriam, "speaking against" Moses as the representative of God. In Num 21:5.7 the same phrase is used for the people of Israel, speaking against Moses, and thereby, against God himself. These passages have later become the *typos* for Jewish teaching about blasphemy and unforgiveable sins, in different Hebrew and Greek terminology.[98] Rabbinic midrash reflects on the parallelism that Num 21 draws between Moses and God himself.[99] The only two biblical passages that remotely echo an idea of "blasphemy against the Spirit", virtually absent in other Jewish sources,[100] allude to this Exodus tradition (Isa 63:10; Ps 106:32-33). The ambiguity between the human and the divine, already present in Num 21, also appears in Ps 106:33, since the phrase הִמְרוּ אֶת־רוּחוֹ could refer to the spirit of Moses or to the Spirit of God. [101]

This ambiguous relation between "speaking against a human figure" and "speaking against God" also lies at the core of Jesus' controversy in the Beelzebul pericope. And it presents the basis for Jesus' final say-

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[97] Rolland, P.: "Jésus connaisait leurs pensées", *ETL 62* (1986) 118-121.

[98] mSan 10:3 (Krauß 277) par. tSan 13:10 (Zuckermandel 435). cf. also eth. Hen 20:6 and 27:1–2 (ed. Uhlig 552 and 563).

[99] MekhY ויהי 7 on Ex 14:31 (Horovitz/Rabin 114); in a list of ten cardinal sins in WaR 17:3 on Lev 14:34 (Margulies 2:394.397), the "speaking against Moses" is used as an illustration for the sin of לשון רע. The motif also appears in SifBam §103 on Num 12:8 (Horovitz 102); bSan 110a; BamR 19:21 on Num 21:4; BamR 20:23 on Num 25:1 (Mirkin 10:236 and 271); QohR 5:3 on Qoh 5:5 (Wilna 14b). Most of these are midrashim on Num 21.

[100] Exceptions are eth. Hen 20:6 (see above) and the Targum on Ps 106:33 (see following note).

101 The Targum on Ps 106:33, however, explicitly explains the phrase as referring to the Spirit of God.

ing, adressing this same ambiguity between "speaking against (a) man" and "speaking against the (Holy) Spirit" in respect to Jesus. There is no room here to discuss the "Son of Man" debate in depth. However, the ambiguity of this phrase, ranging from the simple generic meaning "(a) man" to the apocalyptic "Son of Man" figure, might exactly be what was intended in this context. And it might have led to the diversity of synoptic renditions that remains much more ambiguous here than in other places of the synoptic tradition.[102]

Commentators agree that Mark might have preserved a more original form of the saying here, focusing on the generic sense of a Semitic "son of man" phrase. Luke has preserved a version that understood the saying in light of the apocalyptic "Son of Man" tradition.[103] Matthew seems to have conflated both versions.

i) Finally, the distinction between sins against (a) man, which might be forgiven, and sins against God, which can only be removed by divine atonement, is a common distinction in Jewish tradition, preserved in a frequently quoted Hebrew dictum:

Transgressions between Men and God	עבירות שבין אדם למקום
will be atoned for on the Day of atonement	יום הכפורים מכפר
But those between a man and his neighbour	ושבינו לבין חברו
will not be atoned for on the day of atonement	אין יום הכפורים מכפר
until he first has appeased his neighbour.[104]	עד שירצה את חברו

In conclusion, the whole "Beelzebul" pericope is a literary unit that is deeply rooted in biblical texts, Jewish exegetical traditions and Hebrew terminology. In addition, many of the different motifs employed share an intertextual connectedness with the Exodus tradition. The motif of conflicting kingdoms and the emerging kingdom of God, the motif of the "finger of God", the motif of the שר of the enemy kingdom who needs to be bound and will fall before his kingdom can be taken. And

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[102] One reason for the complexity of the "Son of man" debate might lie in the fact that within a Hebrew discourse, the Aramaic phrase בר אנש would have been more easily discernable as a title or intertextual allusion, a discernment that would have been lost when both were translated into Greek. Cf. Buth, R.: "A More Complete Semitic Background for בר אנש, 'Son of Man'", in: *The Function of Scripture in Early Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSNT.S 154), ed. Evans, C. A. / Sanders, J. A., Sheffield: JSOT Press 1998, 176-189.

[103] However, he alone has kept a very literal rendition of the phrase דבר ב (ἐρεῖ λόγον εἰς).

[104] mYom 8:9 (Meinhold 72) parr Sifra אחרי מות Pereq 8 (§186) on Lev 16:3 (Weiss 63a); yYom 8:8–10 (44c), ed. Schäfer/Becker II,1–4:213.

the motif of "speaking against" God and his representative. All these motifs are closely connected in Jewish literature, and therefore form a cluster that cannot easily be taken apart without losing its meaning. This points strongly to the conclusion that the passage, as it now stands in Mt and Lk, is an original literary unit that should not be separated into Markan and "Q" elements.

A closer look at the linguistic features of this pericope, and a tentative retroversion into Hebrew, shows that Mt has probably retained a more original (and often, more Semitic) wording or syntax in Mt 11:24b-25.27.29, while Lk seems to be more original in Lk 11:17-18a.23, whereas Mk repeatedly appears to be less Semitic and secondary in all of these places. Only in Mk 3:28, Mk seems to have preserved a more original wording. Apparently, at this place only, the final redaction of Matthew seems to have been influenced by this Markan version as well as by another version preserved in Luke, thereby creating a doublet of the saying in Mt 12,32 and 33.

Again, a common, pre-synoptic source seems to lie at the roots of this pericope. Again, this source seems to have included "Markan" as well as "Q" material. It therefore had a "Proto-Matthean" rather than "Proto-Marcan" structure. Again, this source seems to have been used by all three evangelists, and again, Matthew seems to have been influenced slightly by Mark on a final redactional stage.

3. The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Mt 18,21–35)

This parable has traditionally been identified as "Matthean Sondergut". Without doubt, the main core of the parable is unique to Matthew. However, on a closer look, the narrative frame narrative has a parallel in Lk 17:1-4, and the motif of "two debtors" also appears in a Lukan parable (Lk 7:41-42). Also, in Lk 6:34-35, Lk has two noticeable additions to his Matthean parallel, which resemble the terminology of Mt 18:21-35. It might be asked, therefore, if the parable and its frame were possibly part of a source common to Mt and Lk. Lk would then have known the material, however chosen to rephrase and rearrange it for use in three different new contexts. Two additional observations could support this conclusion: First, Lk 17:1-4 betrays knowledge of several other elements of the Matthean "community discourse" (Lk 17:1 par Mt 18:7; Lk 17:2 parr Mt 18:6 and Mk 9:42; Lk 17:3 par Mt 18:15). The assumption that both Lk and Mt arranged "Q" and "Markan" material in the same order is less probable than the assumption that Mt reflects an

original discourse, partly used also by Lk and Mk. Second, the "repentance clause" in 4b, missing in the Matthean parallel, could be a very concise, but appropriate summary of the parable told by Matthew.

The parable itself has a striking resemblance, in content and wording, with a number of rabbinic parables about kings and their debtors.[105] Limits of space do not allow an in-depth presentation of the similarities. However, a close linguistic analysis, and comparison with rabbinic parables, shows that the Matthean parable, though commonly described as "Matthean Sondergut" or even Matthean redactional creation, is firmly rooted in Hebrew language and highly dependent on a tradition of teaching that we also find in the later rabbinic literature. If we do not want to assume a direct line of dependence, the only explanation is that Matthew and the later rabbinic parables both are rooted in a shared, proto-rabbinic tradition of parabolic teaching on debt and forgiveness. From the many examples, two will be selected here to show the kind of parallels that exist in wording and content:

Mt 18:23-35	SifDev §26 on Dtn 3:23
ὠμοιώθη	משל
εἷς ὀφειλέτης	לאחד שלוה
ἀνθρώπῳ βασιλεῖ	המלך
μυρίων ταλάντων	אלף כורים
ἰδόντες οὖν οἱ σύνδουλοι ... διεσάφησαν	היו הכל אומרים ... ידעו הכל
τὸ δάνειον ἀφῆκεν αὐτῷ	כתב לו אפוכי
μὴ ἔχοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀποδοῦναι	לא שקל לו כלום
αὐτὸν ... πραθῆναι	והעמידם על אבן המכר
καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ τὰ τέκνα	בניו ובנותיו

Mt 18:23-35	MTeh 79,3 (180a)
ἀνθρώπῳ	בשר ודם

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[105] mAv 3,16 (Marti/Beer 82–85); SifDev §26 on Dtn 3:23 (Finkelstein 38); MTeh 79:3 (180b–181a), ed. Buber 360–361; PesK 27:7 (Mandelbaum 412); WaR 30:7 on Lev 23:40 (Margulies 4:704–705); TanB אמור 30 on Lev 23:40 (Buber 2:101–102); PesR 51:8 §27–30 (Ulmer II:1088–1089); WaR 11:7 on Lev 9:1 (Margulies 1:233–234); BerR 49:8 on Gen 18:23 (Theodor/Albeck 2:506); PesK 24:11 (Mandelbaum 363); PesK App. 7:2 (Mandelbaum 472); ShirZ 1:15 (Buber 19); bRHSh 17b; ShemR 31:1 on Ex 22:24 (Mirkin 6:60); DevR 5:3 on Dtn 16:18 (Mirkin 11:87 missing in Liebermann); Yalq כי תשא §398 on Ex 34:3.

εἷς ὀφειλέτης μυρίων ταλάντων	חייב מאה מנה
τῷ ἀδελφῷ αὐτοῦ (Mt 18,35)	לחבירו
ἀπόδος εἰ τι ὀφείλεις	תן לי מעותי
μὴ ἔχοντος δὲ αὐτοῦ	אין לי
οὕτως καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ὁ οὐράνιος	אבל הקב״ה אינו כן
ποιήσει ὑμῖν	מה יש לעשות

Most of the rabbinic parables apply the debtor/king imagery to the Jewish festivals of Rosh Ha-Shana and Yom Ha-Kippurim: Both festivals are compared with the arrival of a human king (מלך בשר ודם, ἄνθρωπος βασιλεύς, Mt 18:23) who wants to settle accounts (לעשות חשבון, συνᾶραι λόγον, Mt 18:23) with a city or with his servants. The two different dates, then, allow for a period of "patience" (אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם, μακροθυμία, Mt 11:26), in which the servants can turn the verdict of the king by their appropriate behaviour (prayer, fasting and repentance). The earnestness of repentance, in this context, can be displayed by showing deeds of loving kindness towards others.

Closely connected with this is the rabbinic concept of the two opposing "character traits" of God, the "measure of mercy" (מדת הרחמים) and the "measure of justice" (מדת הדין). In the course of the two festivals, the "measure of mercy" is connected with the first date, while the "measure of justice" is ascribed to the second date. Therefore, the ten days in between the two festivals, are seen as the last chance for repentance, while God is still "merciful".

In Matthew's parable, all these motifs are perfectly visible: The king who comes to settle accounts, the two separate appointments with a period in between that gives the servant time to show "deeds of loving kindness", and eventually leads to the final verdict. A king who shows "unjust" mercy at the first appointment and "merciless" justice at the second appointment. And finally, the idea of reciprocity of human forgiveness and divine forgiveness that we have already found in the rabbinic dictum cited above (p. 45).

In conclusion, the parable could be a perfect example of Jewish teaching about the obligation to forgive in the context of the yearly autumn festivals.[106] What commentators have missed, though, is any specific

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[106] Though we have only little evidence for the existence of a "Rosh Ha-Shana" festival, with all the later motifs and traditions attached to it, in the time of the Second Temple, some early sources (Jub 12:16-18; 4Q508; LAB 13:6; Philo SpecLeg 2:188–192) reflect the origins of these later traditions. The Matthean parable might be another

"Christian" aspect in the parable: In fact, the story runs contrary to the message of unlimited grace, and the image of the divine king remains ambiguous. Commentators have therefore questioned the authenticity of the parable and ascribed it to a later, Judaeo-Christian redactor. However, according to Theissens "criterion of historical plausibility" (in a Jewish context) and the "criterion of embarassment" (in a later Christian context), the parable has a high probability of authenticity. The close linguistic ties with Hebrew parables of the same genre add further to that probability.

We therefore have here, in the middle of presumed Matthean "Sondergut", a passage that is characterized by a highly Hebraic style, proto-rabbinic imagery and terminology, thoroughly Jewish theology, a probable "Sitz im Leben" in a Jewish festival and a high claim to historical authenticity. We also have evidence that the material was known to the author of Lk.

The common assumption that this passage was added by a late redactor of the Gospel of Matthew should therefore be reconsidered. A more probable assumption would be that the parable, maybe even the whole "community discourse" in Mt 18, was part of an original, hebraizing pre-canonical source used by Mt and Lk alike: While Matthew retained the parable in full, Luke kept only the frame (Lk 17:1-4), echoed the message of the parable in a short additional "repentance clause" (Lk 17:4b), created a new "parable of two debtors" in a new context (Lk 7:41-42)[107] and reworked some of the "forgiveness/debt" material from the parable into a new, parenetic context (Lk 6:34-35). Mk, if he knew the same source, dropped the whole passage. In a non-Jewish context, the whole idea behind the parable would not have been understood by the readers of either Luke or Mark.

In view of these observations, it would be helpful to examine other Matthean "Sondergut" with respect to its linguistic and historical "context plausibility". It might be that some of the material that has been assigned to a Matthean redactor so far, is indeed older material that was also known to Luke and/or Mark, but was omitted by them for whatever reasons possible.

First-century piece of evidence.

[107] The idea that the amount of forgiveness correlates to the amount of love for the king is alien to the rabbinic parable traditions and does not appear in any of the parables as a *nimshal* (application).

4. Preparations for the Passover Meal (Mt 26,17–20 parr.)

The passion narrative is a special field of research for synoptic studies: Many of the traditional working hypotheses have to be abandoned or augmented here to explain the specific characteristics of synoptic relationships in this part of the Gospel tradition. Many suggest some kind of common, pre-synoptic tradition shared by the Synoptics and John. Some suggest an additional, pre-Lukan source. Debates are still on about the question whether Q extends into the Passion narrative. The example that I have chosen as a fourth test case is one of the rather neglected passages. However, some observations invite a closer look:

a) Matthew's introductory phrase τῇ δὲ πρώτῃ τῶν ἀζύμων (Mt 26:17) has been the object of intense linguistic and historical study. The chronology of the Passion is a matter of fierce debate, as is the question whether the last meal of Jesus was a passover meal or not. Not all aspects of the question can be adressed here. However, one observation from Hebrew language and literature could help to solve some of the issues in question:

The main crux of the discussion is the fact that "the first day" of the Passover always designates the 15th of Nisan, obviously not the day in view by Matthew. The Mishna has several designations for this day, they all use either יום טוב הראשון (17x) or יום טוב ראשון (3x). The biblical text prescribes the removal of leaven on this "first day" of the feast (Ex 12:15-16). However, Jewish practice had moved the removal of leaven to the 14th on Nisan, the day "before" passover. Some targumic translations reflect this by giving ambiguous translations such as ביומא קדמאה, which might be translated as "the first day" or "the day before". Some commentators have suspected a similar formula behind Mk 14:12, and a subsequent mistranslation or misreading on behalf of Mark. However, these explanations suffer from the fact that they have to assume mistranslations, misreadings or emendations. Also, the proposed formulae never appear in Jewish literature as designations for the first day of Passover. Another explanation, based on Hebrew language and rabbinic literature, might therefore be more probable:

Matthew's strange formula might reflect a rabbinic discussion as to the question, which day was designated by the biblical term בְּרִאשֹׁן in Ex 14:18. Without doubt, Ex 14:15 and 14:16 designate the "first day of the feast", i.e. the 15th of Nisan, as the correct day for the removal of leaven. However, Ex 14:18 leaves room for a different reading:

On the First,	בָּרִאשֹׁן
on the 14th day of the month	בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר יוֹם לַחֹדֶשׁ
on the evening, you will eat unleavened bread	בָּעֶרֶב תֹּאכְלוּ מַצֹּת

Obviously, the term בָּרִאשֹׁן here designates the first month of the year. However, rabbinic discussion later took the opportunity to extract a different meaning from the text and thereby find a scriptural basis for the removal of leaven already on the 14th:

(R. Ishmael b. Elisha says:)	
We find (in scripture),	מצינו
that the 14. of Nisan is called „the First"	ארבעה עשר שנקרא ראשון
For it is said (in Ex 12:18):	שנאמר
On the first, on the 14th of the month...	בראשן בארבעה עשר יום לחדש

(R. Nahman b. Isaak says:)	
„The First" - this means „before"	ראשון – דמעיקרא משמע
For it is said (in Job 15:7):	דאמר קרא
„Were you born before Adam?"	הראשון אדם תולד

In this discussion, recorded in bPes 5a, the two rabbis debate whether the term בָּרִאשֹׁן designates the 14th or the 15th of Nisan. If it denotes the 14th, then the removal of leaven on the 14th would be allowed. Similar discussions about the exact meaning of ראשון can be found in other places.[108] It seems from these discussions, that some teachers made a clear distinction between the absolute use of הראשון (Ex 12:15) or בראשון (Ex 12:18), denoting the 14th of Nisan according to this tradition, and the fuller formula יום טוב הראשון or יום טוב ראשון, always designating the 15th of Nisan. The original biblical term יום הראשון (Ex 12:15-16), is never used in rabbinic literature, probably because of its ambiguity and the differences in interpretation.

If we compare the three synoptic variants in Mt 26:17a parr, only Matthew and Luke have a formula that correctly describes the morning of the 14th on Nisan: Matthew uses exact "rabbinic" terminology (corresponding to בראשון, while avoiding the more ambiguous יום הרא־שון), which seems to have been already common in his time. Luke uses a more general formula which rightly describes the day on which the

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[108] yPes 1,1/1 (27a), ed. Schäfer/Becker II,1–4:122; yPes 1,4/2 (27c), Schäfer/Bekker II,1–4:126.

lambs were slaughtered. Only Mark has a formula that is imprecise in halakhic terms and might betray a lack of knowledge of the halakhic discussions behind the term. Mark seems to have conflated the two different formulas of Mt and Lk into one double formula.

b) This phenomenon of "Markan conflation" can be observed throughout the pericope, as well as throughout the Gospel of Mark: Mark seems to stand between Mt and Lk, drawing from both sides in turn. This points to the conclusion that, in these places, Mt and Lk reflect two different versions of the same text, while both of these versions were known to Mark. The phenomenon has been described frequently by commentators and has led to the identification of two distinct proto-Markan sources, one closer to Lk and one closer to Mt.[109]

c) In Mt 26:17b, Mt and Lk share the verb προσῆλθον/ἦλθεν as a minor agreement,[110] and Mt closes with a typical Hebrew formula of speech (λέγοντες). In the following verse, the language of Mt and Lk is more Hebraic than that of Mk, however both differ from each other. Again, it seems that Mark conflated both versions. Mt and Lk seem to have preserved an earlier version, however in two different forms.

d) The narrative about the sending of the two disciples and the man with the water pitcher (Mk 14,13b–14a.15 par) differs from the rest of the passage in several respects: It is missing completely in Mt. It is characterized by a high frequency of *hapax legomena* and non-semitic word order. It has, especially in the Markan version, close similarities to the pericope of the entrance to Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-7). These observations, together with general assumptions about Lukan special tradition that can not be unfolded here, lead to the conclusion that this material was inserted by the proto-Lukan author from a special tradition and then taken over by Mark,[111] again by way of conflation.

e) The following verses (Mt 26:18b) again have a more Hebraic character: A messenger formula (ὁ διδάσκαλος λέγει) in Mt; the term οἰκοδεσπότης, not unknown in Greek literature, however much more

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[109] The phenomenon of Markan conflation can not be discussed here, but see my detailed analysis and references to further literature in Baltes, *op. cit.* (n.1), 522-524; also Longstaff, T. R. W.: *Evidence of Conflation in Mark? A Study in the Synoptic Problem* (SBL Dissertation Series 28), Missoula: Scholars Press/ SBL 1977; Burkett, D.: *Rethinking the Gospel Sources: From Proto-Mark to Mark*, New York: T&T Clark 2004, 124-126.

[110] However, the common verb carries a different function in both contexts.

[111] Mark then might have structured and worded the whole passage in close parallel with the earlier passage Mk 11:1-8.

common in Hebrew (בעל הבית) in Lk; the Hebrew terminology ποιέω ὁ πάσχα in Mt. In Lk and Mk, the syntax is rather non-Semitic. Therefore, the Matthean version seems to have retained the most original version here.

f) The details in this passage fit very well with the socio-cultural context of Jewish Passover traditions: This includes the necessity of renting a room within the city, the cushions that allow eating in a reclined position, the size of the group as well as the use of an "upper room" for religious purposes. These details lend historical authenticity to the narrative.

g) The formula ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης is unknown in classical Greek literature, however it appears frequently in Mt (7x) and Mk (6x). Other similar formulae appear in other Jewish writings of the era (John, Josephus, Judith, Philo and Nikolaus of Damascus). It therefore seems to be a specific Jewish terminology. However, the expression has no direct equivalent in Hebrew. In biblical Hebrew, even terms for "late" or "early" are lacking, and the beginning of the night needs to be circumscribed with terms like ἑσπέρα, ἡμέρα, νύξ, σκότος or ἥλιος. However, in rabbinic halakhic discussions, especially in respect to the exact beginnings of holidays, these terms lacked the necessary precision. In Mishnaic Hebrew, therefore, the terms עם חשכה ("before sundown") and משחשיכה ("after sundown"), and other similar terms were introduced to describe the halakhically relevant moments. Even a new verb להחשיך was coined to describe actions that took place at the time of sundown.

It is therefore probable that the phrase ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης, appearing only in Jewish literature, reflects this new, more precise, Jewish terminology. In the present text, Matthew's description is more precise, since the "coming" of Jesus and his disciples (Mk) would have taken place "before sundown", while the "lying down" at the table (Mt) would have taken place "after sundown" (ὀψίας δὲ γενομένης).

In conclusion, the pericope reflects a good knowledge of Jewish Passover customs and traditions. Especially Matthew uses terminology that seems to be aware of precise halakhic distinctions. Generally speaking, Matthew's and Luke's version are closer to Hebraic style than Mark. Mark consistently follows a pattern of "conflation" throughout the pericope. The passage about the man with the water pitcher seems to be a secondary addition to the narrative, introduced by (Proto-) Luke and taken over by Mark. Taken together, these observations support the conclusion, drawn already by several earlier commentators, that a common presynoptic source lies at the root of this passage. This source has prob-

ably been transmitted in two distinct versions, a Proto-Matthean and a Proto-Lukan version. Both have been used and conflated by Mark, while Mt and Lk seem to have used only one of these. On a final level, Mt and Lk might have been influenced by Mk in turn, but there is no compelling evidence for that in this pericope.

IV. Conclusions

Hebrew language and literature can - and should - be employed as a linguistic tool by New Testament scholars in their study of the synoptic problem. Linguistic, philological, archeological and historical studies over the past century have made it sufficiently clear that Hebrew was a living, spoken language in the Land of Israel at the time of Jesus alongside Aramaic and Greek.[112] Hebrew, as well as Aramaic, would have been employed naturally by Jesus in his teachings, in discourses, parables and other sayings. For some genres, like parables and halakhic discourse, Hebrew would even be more probable than Aramaic. Words of Jesus have probably been transmitted in Hebrew language in the early phase of oral transmission. It is possible, however not verifiable, that early written sources existed in Hebrew and/or Aramaic, however the linguistic evidence points more strongly to the former. Early church fathers attest to the existence of such sources and call them "Hebrew", however none have survived to our knowledge.

While the question of written sources might be left open,[113] the use of Hebrew retroversion for synoptic studies does not depend on the actual existence of such sources. Earlier approaches to the Semitic background of the New Testament have focused on the reconstruction of

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[112] Folker Siegert, in his review of my work (*ThRv 108*/2012, 381-382) dismisses this fact by simply recurring to the earlier works of Dalman and the non-negotiable results of earlier Synoptic scholarship. However, this in itself can not be a sufficient argument in view of more than hundred years of progress in archeological and linguistic research and the overwhelming number of new literary and epigraphical evidence discovered since the time of Dalman.

[113] Jacob Thiessen, while generally agreeing with my citique of traditional synoptic hypotheses in his review (*JETh 26*/2012, 261-263), has rightly commented that synoptic studies should not focus exclusively on processes of „literary dependency", but also take in account more complex processes of oral tradition and autopsy. Other reviewers have criticized my work because retroversion can never proof the existence of written Semitic sources. Cf. Zwiep, A. (*Soteria 29*/2012, 89-90), Foster, P. (ExpT 123/2012, 507). However, I totally agree with this assessment and have repeatedly stated that in my work.

these sources or even the words of Jesus himself, however all results remained speculation at best. Other approaches have focused on the irrefutable proof of the existence of such sources, however to no avail.

The approach suggested here, and by several other scholars before, focuses therefore on the synoptic comparison of extant Greek sources. It uses, however, retroversion into Hebrew[114] as a tool to test the historical and linguistic plausibility of assumptions about originality and dependencies between synoptic Gospels. The general assumption behind this approach is that a more Hebraic language style and a more Jewish terminology points to the more original synoptic variant.[115] Comparison with Hebrew literature and retroversion into a plausible Hebrew equivalent helps to discern these factors.

In the four examples chosen here, the Gospel of Matthew repeatedly featured as the version that retained a more original version of the text, both in language and in structure. Sometimes, the version of Luke retained more original wording, however a less original structure. The version of Mark frequently appeared to be less original and at times dependent on the versions of Mt and Lk. These observations match with conclusions made by other scholars that have taken a similar approach, based on Semitic languages. While four samples are not enough material to make any reliable conclusions, the results of this study seem to call into question traditional models of Markan priority and invite to further investigate the option of a Proto-Matthean shape of the pre-canonical Gospel tradition.

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[114] Jan Joosten (*RHPhR 92*/2012, 523-524), while generally agreeing that this approach might bear fruit for future synoptic research, and also agreeing that Hebrew, not only Aramaic language should be considered as a background for Gospel Studies, has dismissed my Hebrew retroversions as linguistically inadequate. This is a weakness I readily admit. New Testament Scholars who follow the approach suggested here will necessarily need a close collaboration with well-versed Semitists, as well as the help of Judaic scholars for a task that they alone can never sufficiently accomplish. Exactly this is the kind of collaboration I am suggesting here. Joosten also criticizes the „unfortunate mixture of Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew" in the retroversions. However, this mixture has been a deliberate choice, even if the realization might be defective: Linguistic features of the Greek texts point to the conclusion that, if Semitic sources were indeed used, they were characterized by a more Biblical Hebrew style in the narrative parts, while using proto-Mishnaic Hebrew in discourses, parables and direct speech. Cf. already Lowe, M. / Flusser, D., *op. cit.* (n. 79), 42.

[115] Obviously, the opposite is possible as well. Cf the reviews of Thiessen, J. (*JETh 26*/2012, 261-263) and Ochs, C. (ThLZ 138/2013, 565-568). However, it should not be the primary assumption in Synoptic studies.

However, such conclusions about models of synoptic dependencies are not the main focus of this study. The focus is on the approach as such. And even if other scholars, following this approach, will arrive at different conclusions in respect to models of synoptic dependencies, the approach itself will still remain valid. And it hopefully will help to deepen our insights into the synoptic question, broaden our discussion and widen our understanding for the Jewish context of the Gospel tradition.

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PODEJŚCIA HEBRAJSKOJĘZYCZNE DO EWANGELII I ICH WKŁAD DO STUDIÓW SYNOPTYCZNYCH

Język i literatura hebrajska mogą i powinny być używane przez badaczy Nowego Testamentu jako narzędzie językoznawcze w studiach nad problemem synoptycznym. Badania językoznawcze, filologiczne, archeologiczne i historyczne w ostatnim stuleciu przekonująco ukazały, że w czasach Jezusa hebrajski był żywym, mówionym językiem kraju Izraela równolegle z aramejskim i greką. Hebrajski, podobnie jak aramejski, był przez Jezusa używany naturalnie w jego nauczaniu, przemowach, przypowieściach i innych wypowiedziach. W pewnych gatunkach literackich, takich jak przypowieści i wypowiedzi halachiczne, hebrajski był nawet bardziej prawdopodobny niż aramejski. Można przyjąć, że słowa Jezusa były przekazywane po hebrajsku we wczesnej fazie słownego przekazu. Jest możliwe, choć to nie do sprawdzenia, że wczesne źródła pisane istniały w hebrajskim i/lub aramejskim, jednakże dowody językowe mocniej wskazują na hebrajski. Wcześni Ojcowie Kościoła poświadczają istnienie takich źródeł i zwą je „hebrajskimi", jednak, o ile wiadomo, żadne z nich nie zachowało się.

Podczas gdy kwestia źródeł pisanych mogłaby pozostawać otwartą, użycie hebrajskich retrowersji dla studiów synoptycznych nie jest uzależnione od faktycznego istnienia takich źródeł. Wcześniejsze podejścia do semickiego tła Nowego Testamentu koncentrowały się na rekonstrukcji tych źródeł lub nawet słów samego Jezusa, jednakże wszelkie ich wyniki pozostawały w najlepszym razie spekulacją. Inne badania ogniskowały się na nieodpartych dowodach istnienia takich źródeł, jednakże bez powodzenia.

Toteż podejście proponowane tutaj, a także uprzednio przez innych uczonych, koncentruje się na synoptycznym porównaniu zachowanych źródeł w języku greckim. Jednakże używa ono retrowersji na hebrajski jako narzędzia

weryfikacji historycznego i lingwistycznego prawdopodobieństwa założeń do-
tyczących oryginalności Ewangelii synoptycznych i zależności między nimi.
U źródeł takiego ujmowania leży generalne założenie, że bardziej hebrajski
styl i bardziej żydowska terminologia wskazują na bardziej oryginalny wariant
synoptyczny. Porównanie z literaturą hebrajską i retrowersja na wiarygodny
hebrajski ekwiwalent pomaga wyróżnić te elementy.

W zbadanych w artykule czterech fragmentach ewangelii, to Ewangelia św.
Mateusza zachowała bliższą oryginału wersję tekstu, zarówno pod względem
języka, jak i struktury. Oczywiście cztery przykłady, tj. Mt 3,16 ; 12, 22-32 ;
18, 21-35 i 26,17-20, nie stanowią wystarczającego materiału dla uzyskania
niezawodnych konkluzji, jednakże zdają się one kwestionować tradycyjny mo-
del priorytetu Ewangelii św. Marka i zachęcają do dalszych badań nad moż-
liwością odtworzenia proto-Mateuszowego kształtu pre-kanonicznej tradycji
Ewangelii.

Jednak to nie modele synoptycznych zależności są sednem tych rozważań.
Jest nim zaproponowane podejście jako takie. Być może inni uczeni dojdą do
odmiennych wniosków w kwestii modeli zależności synoptycznych. Niemniej,
niniejsze podejście pozostanie w mocy.

[Wg konkluzji autora streścił Z.J.K.]