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Did Peter Speak Hebrew to the Servant? A Linguistic Examination of the Expression "I Do Not Know What You Are Saying" (Matt 26:70, Mark 14:68, Luke 22:60)

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In this article I examine the statement "I do not know what you are saying," uttered by Peter according to the Synoptic Gospels as a response to the accusation that he was one of Jesus's men. I examine the Hebrew parallels to this phrase in Tannaitic literature, with special attention to their wording and pragmatic function. Although Tannaitic literature postdates the New Testament, its use of this phrase may shed light on the Synoptic passage. I conclude that Peter's phrase is not likely to have been formulated originally in Greek or Aramaic; it should be understood as reflecting an idiomatic expression in Hebrew.

In recent decades and notably since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, a growing number of scholars have affirmed that, at the turn of the Christian era, a trilingual reality existed among Jews in the land of Israel.[1] Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew were all spoken at the time and in the milieu that saw the emergence of the Christian movement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that early traditions of this movement—which later found their way into the Synoptic Gospels and other New Testament writings—were formulated in all three of these languages. Yet determining the original language of a specific saying or passage incorporated into the Synoptic Gospels is notoriously difficult. The Hebrew, Aramaic, and Semitized

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[1] For a recent survey on this question, see Steven E. Fassberg, "Which Semitic Language Did Jesus and Other Contemporary Jews Speak?" *CBQ* 74 (2012): 263–80. In addition to the abundant bibliographical references provided by Fassberg, see the recent collection of essays *The Language Environment of First Century Judaea*, ed. Randall Buth and R. Steven Notley, Jerusalem Studies in the Synoptic Gospels 2, JCPS 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

Greek spoken at the time in Jewish circles often cannot be differentiated solely on the basis of the Greek text of the Gospels.[2] In order to do so, we need specific relevant insights into these languages from other ancient sources.[3] In this article, I offer one such example, in which the linguistic data at hand do enable us to determine in which language the tradition of the early Christian movement has, in all probability, remembered a certain phrase.

I. Peter's Denial

After having discreetly followed Jesus and his arresters to the house of the high priest, Peter waits outside in the courtyard during his master's trial before the Sanhedrin. While there, he is thrice accused of being one of Jesus's men and thrice he denies this firmly. According to the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, in one of the three denials, he responds sharply, "I do not know what you are saying" (οὐκ οἶδα τί λέγεις [Matt 26:70]; οὐκ οἶδα ὃ λέγεις [Luke 22:60]). In the Gospel of Mark, he replies, "I neither know nor understand what you are saying" (οὔτε οἶδα οὔτε ἐπίσταμαι σὺ τί λέγεις [Mark 14:68]).

In the context of the gospels, the pragmatic function of the phrase is clear: it is a denial. This is stated explicitly in the phrase introducing Peter's words in Matthew and Mark:[4]

> ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο ἔμπροσθεν πάντων λέγων· οὐκ οἶδα ... (Matt 26:70)
> But he denied [it] before all [of them], saying, "I do not know …" (NRSV)

> ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο λέγων οὔτε οἶδα ... (Mark 14:68)
> But he denied it, saying, "I do not know …" (NRSV)

[2] Three linguistic tests are suggested by Randall Buth in order to establish whether a text in Semitized Greek has been influenced by Hebrew or by Aramaic ("Distinguishing Hebrew from Aramaic in Semitized Greek Texts, with an Application for the Gospels and Pseudepigrapha," in Buth and Notley, *Language Environment of First Century Judaea*, 247–319). Buth states, however, that "it must be recognized and emphasized that these tests are not absolute. They must be done in conjunction with other studies" (318).

[3] See Jan Joosten, "Aramaic or Hebrew behind the Gospels?," *AnBrux* 9 (2004): 88–101, esp. 97–100.

[4] In fact, Matthew and Mark indicate explicitly that all of Peter's three responses are denials: καὶ πάλιν ἠρνήσατο μετὰ ὅρκου ὅτι (Matt 26:72); τότε ἤρξατο καταθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνύειν ὅτι (Matt 26:74); ὁ δὲ πάλιν ἠρνεῖτο (Mark 14:70); ὁ δὲ ἤρξατο ἀναθεματίζειν καὶ ὀμνύναι ὅτι (Mark 14:71). Luke says this explicitly only in Peter's first response: ὁ δὲ ἠρνήσατο λέγων (Luke 22:57). He introduces Peter's next two responses using simple verbs of speech: ὁ δὲ Πέτρος ἔφη (Luke 22:58); εἶπεν δὲ ὁ Πέτρος (22:60). It seems reasonable to assume that Luke did not reproduce the explicit expressions of denial appearing in his sources in order to avoid repetition and redundancy for a better literary quality.

Furthermore, the fact that this statement uttered by Peter constitutes a *denial* is important in the narrative of the gospels, for this is one of the three times Peter denies Jesus as the latter has foretold.[5]

The exact meaning of these words, however, is rather obscure. What exactly does Peter mean? What precisely does he not know? Does he mean to say he does not know the man of whom the servant speaks, that is, Jesus? Or is it the question itself that he for some reason does not understand? Perhaps he is implying that he does not understand any of what the servant is saying, since her or his accent is strange to his ears? Or rather, is Peter in such a state of stress and confusion that he just mumbles the first thing that comes to his mind and therefore we should not try to find logic in his words?[6] All of these interpretations have been suggested by exegetes.[7]

II. The Parallel Hebrew Expression

It is well known in New Testament scholarship that a Hebrew phrase parallel to the one attributed to Peter by the Synoptic Gospels is found in the Tannaitic literature: איני יודע מה אתה סח ("I do not know what you are saying") occurs five times in the Tannaitic corpus in two different contexts. First, in a legal passage about theft, of which there are parallel versions in the Mishnah and the Tosefta, the phrase is placed on the lips of a man accused of having stolen an ox that had been given into his charge or lent to him.[8] The owner of the animal asks him, "Where is my ox?" to which the man responds, "I do not know what you are saying," thus

[5] Matt 26:34, Mark 14:30, Luke 22:34; cf. Matt 26:75, Mark 14:72, Luke 22:61.

[6] W. J. Peter Boyd observes, "If we take the Marcan account seriously as a faithful record of how it all happened, Peter's reply to the maid's question may not seem as 'curious' as it does to the expert linguist with his critical demand for logical consistency. For in daily life people who are suddenly and unwillingly subjected to cross examination usually avoid answering directly. The more unexpected the unwelcome question, the more clumsy any attempt to hedge is likely to be. Peter must have been under considerable stress at the time. The urge to loyalty and the memory of his public avowal, 'Even if I must die, I will never deny you' (*v.* 31), was opposed by the acute awareness of personal peril, bewilderment at the catastrophe of Jesus' arrest and the apparent failure of all the glorious hopes for the kingdom of God. Such a tension would have been too harrowing to permit clear thought and logical replies" ("Peter's Denial—Mark xiv. 68, Luke xxii. 57," *ExpTim* 67 [1956]: 341).

[7] For a survey of the different interpretations, see Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 920; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), 573–74.

[8] According to m. Šebu. 8:2, the man is a שומר חנם, "an unpaid bailee" (Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* [New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1903], s.v. שׁוֹמֵר). According to m. Šebu. 8:5, he is a שואל, "a borrower." In t. B. Qam. 8:2, 3, it is said that the ox has been *entrusted* to him (שהפקדתי אצלך).

denying the implicit accusation. The sentences in which the expression appears are the following:

> m. Šebu. 8:3, 6. איכן שורי, ואמר לו איני יודע מה אתה סח.
> "Where is my ox?" And he said to him, "I do not know what you are saying."

> t. B. Qam. 8:4 היכן שור שהפקדתי אצלך ואמר לו איני יודע מה אתה סח.
> "Where is the ox that I entrusted to you?" And he said to him, "I do not know what you are saying."

> t. B. Qam. 8:7 היכן שורי שהפקדתי אצלך אמר איני יודע מה אתה סח.
> "Where is my ox that I entrusted to you?" He said, "I do not know what you are saying."

Second, the phrase is used in a midrashic interpretation of Prov 29:24: "The partner of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse, but discloses nothing" (ESV). In order to illustrate this saying, according to the Tosefta, Rabbi Simeon tells a story (*māšāl*) of a man who sees a thief leaving the house of another, carrying loot. The man asks the thief what is going on, and the thief offers him part of the take in order to persuade him to keep silent. Later, the victim of the theft asks the man to swear that he has not seen anyone leave his house with his possessions. To this, the man says, "(It is) an oath that I do not know what you are saying." The passage is quoted here in full (t. B. Qam. 7:13):

> ר' שמעון או' הרי הוא אומ' חולק עם גנב שונא נפשו וגו'. משלו משל. למה הדבר דומה? לאחד שטען כלים ויצא מבית חבירו. מצאו אחר, אמ' לו: "מה זה?" פל' אמ' לו: "ר' טול חלקך ואל תגיד." לאחר זמן מצאו בעל גניבה. א' לו: "משביע אני עליך אם לא ראית אדם שטען כלים ויצא מתוך ביתי." אמ' לו: "שבועה שאיני יודע מה אתה סח." על זה נאמ': "חולק עם גנב שונא נפשו אלה ישמע ולא יגיד."
>
> R. Simeon says, "Lo, [Scripture says], *The partner of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse but discloses nothing* (Prov. 29:24). They have made a simile: To what is the matter likened? To someone who is loaded down with utensils and leaving the house of his fellow. His friend came upon him and said to him, 'Now what's going on, Mr. So-and-so?' He replied, 'Take your share and don't squeal!' After some time the one who had been robbed found him and said to him, 'I impose an oath upon you, if you have not seen someone loaded down with utensils and leaving my house.' The other says to him, '[It is] an oath that I do not know what you are saying.' Concerning such a person, it is said, *The partner of a thief hates his own life; he hears the curse* [of an oath] *but discloses nothing*."[9]

The Hebrew phrase in question is evidently a very close parallel to Peter's Greek one. Its wording is identical to the wording of Matthew's version of the saying and very similar to that of Luke and of Mark. Furthermore, the Hebrew and Greek

[9] English translation slightly modified from *The Tosefta: Translated from the Hebrew; Fourth Division: NEZIQIN (The Order of Damages)*, trans. Jacob Neusner (New York: Ktav, 1981), 39.

phrases have the same pragmatic function: they are both used to dismiss a claim made by an interlocutor.

Nevertheless, the nature of the Hebrew phrase is much easier to determine: it is an idiomatic expression. Several factors attest to this. First, in the case of the man accused of ox theft, the narrative context does not permit a literal "first-degree" understanding of the phrase, as actually referring to "knowing" or "understanding" something. Unlike Peter, who may claim not to know who Jesus was,[10] it is not likely that the man would claim to have no acquaintance with the ox that has been entrusted to him or that he has borrowed. Similarly, whereas Peter may pretend not to understand the subject matter of the servant's affirmation, the bailee or borrower could hardly claim to be surprised at the self-evident question he is asked by the owner of the ox with whom he is in a business relationship. Finally, there is nothing indicating that the bailee or borrower came from a different region than the owner of the ox and could therefore have difficulties understanding his accent—difficulties such as Peter the Galilean might have understanding a Jerusalemite accent.[11]

Second, in the case of the midrashic interpretation of Prov 29:24, the pragmatics of the man's saying argues against a "first-degree" meaning. His use of the phrase is not a spontaneous reaction to a claim but a direct response, explicitly made under oath, to the demand: "I impose an oath upon you, if you have not seen someone loaded down with utensils and leaving my house." The phrase "(It is) an oath that I do not know what you are saying" is meant to be understood as a resolute rejection of the accusation and not as commentary on the utterance itself.

Last and most important, although the Hebrew and Greek phrases use words that have the same meaning, the Hebrew phrase is distinguished by a lexical particularity. It does not use one of the common verbs meaning "to say," such as the verb אמר or דבר (which are probably as common in Hebrew as the verb λέγω, which is used in Peter's saying in the gospels, is in Greek) but the rather rare verb סח.[12] The rare verb used in all occurrences of the Hebrew phrase is something like an emblem of idiomaticity, for in all languages rare words are often preserved in fixed idiomatic expressions even though they may hardly be used freely in other contexts.

In summary, two points may be noted. First, the simplest and most natural way to understand the phrase pronounced by Peter according to the Synoptic

[10] Peter of course does eventually make this claim (see Matt 26:72, Mark 14:71, Luke 22:57).

[11] Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary*, 888.

[12] The verb סח occurs in the Mishnah only in the quoted passages. It can also be found in the Tosefta in Yoma 2:7; Yebam. 14:9; ʿAbod. Zar. 1:14; Nid. 5:3; in Talmud Yerushalmi in Soṭah 19a; Sanh. 42b; in Talmud Babli in Ber. 18b, 51a; Šabb. 75b; ʿErub. 21b; Pesaḥ. 51a; Yoma 38a, 39b, 67a; Ḥag. 16b; Soṭah 25a; Giṭ. 57b; Sanh. 88a; Menaḥ. 36a, 39a, 109b; Bek. 10b, 38b. Spelled שׂח, the verb appears in y. Yoma 19b; y. Šeqal. 22b; b. Sukkah 28a; b. Soṭah 44b; b. Ḥul. 27a; b. Bek. 28a.

Gospels is to take it as an idiomatic expression used to vigorously dismiss a claim. This interpretation allows us to take the text at face value, and it is also the understanding adopted by most exegetes and translations.[13] Second, a similar idiomatic expression is attested in Mishnaic Hebrew. We should, of course, be careful not to be led to hasty conclusions by this similarity. Before suggesting that the Greek phrase attested in the gospels reflects a Hebrew expression, we must check two things: Could Peter's phrase actually be a Greek expression used by the authors of the gospels? Could it reflect a similar Aramaic idiom?

III. Is the Phrase a Greek Idiomatic Expression?

There is one exact parallel to Peter's phrase in Greek literature. It appears in the Testament of Joseph in a dialogue between Petephrēs (the Greek name of Potiphar) and a merchant in whose household Joseph was serving. It runs as follows:

> And Petephres … commanded the merchant to be brought, and he said to him: What is this that I hear, that you steal persons out of the land of the Hebrews, buying them to be servants? Then, the merchant fell on his face and besought him, saying: I beseech you, lord, I do not know what you say [Δέομαί σου, κύριε, οὐκ οἶδα ὃ λέγεις]. (T. Jos. 13:1–2)[14]

Here we have the same words as in Luke's version of Peter's saying, and they are used for the same rhetorical purpose, that is, to energetically dismiss a claim. The uncertain nature of the materials included in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, however, makes this parallel rather doubtful evidence for linguistic study. In fact, some of the passages in the Testaments likely depend on or have been translated from earlier texts in Hebrew or Aramaic.[15] If this is the case in the

[13] The NRSV, the NASB, and the NIV render this phrase using an equivalent idiomatic expression in English: "I do not/don't know what you are talking about!"

[14] Harm W. Hollander and Marinus de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: A Commentary*, SVTP 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 396.

[15] For a survey of the existing Aramaic and Hebrew materials that are parallel to the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, see Hollander and de Jonge, *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, 17–29. Józef Milik thinks that three very small fragments found at Qumran come from an Aramaic Testament of Joseph ("Écrits préesséniens de Qumrân: D'Hénoch à Amram," in *Qumrân: Sa piété, sa théologie et son milieu*, ed. Mathias Delcor, BETL 46 [Paris: Duculot, 1978], 101–2). For the hypothesis that the Greek text of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs is a translation from a Hebrew or an Aramaic source, see Robert Henry Charles, *The Greek Versions of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Edited from Nine MSS together with the Variants of the Armenian and Slavonic Versions and Some Hebrew Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1908), xxiii–xxxix; Marc Philonenko, *Les interpolations chrétiennes des Testaments des Douze Patriarches et les manuscrits de Qoumrân* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960); R. A. Martin, "Syntactical

passage under discussion here, then the quoted phrase actually attests to a Hebrew or an Aramaic expression parallel to the one pronounced by Peter. Furthermore, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs contain many passages that can be ascribed to a Christian author or redactor.[16] If this is the case in the present passage in the Testament of Joseph, then the phrase we have here may have been influenced by Peter's saying in the gospels and may therefore not constitute an independent occurrence of the expression. In view of these uncertainties, we must disregard the occurrence of the phrase in the Testament of Joseph as evidence for its use as an idiomatic expression in Greek.

Apart from the Testament of Joseph, three occurrences of phrases similar to Peter's saying can be found in Greek literature: two in Plato's dialogues and one in Lucian's *Solecist*. When they are read in context, however, it is apparent that their pragmatic use is very different from the phrase attested in the gospels. In Plato and Lucian, these phrases are to be understood literally. They do not constitute idiomatic expressions used to dismiss claims but are simple statements denoting one's incapacity to understand something that has been said.[17] An examination of the relevant passages will show this.

> Socrates. Then what can this thing be, which bears the name of figure [τὸ σχῆμα]? Try and tell me. Suppose that, on being asked this question by someone, either about figure or about colour, you had replied: Why, I don't so much as understand what you want, sir, or even know what you are saying [ἀλλ' οὐδὲ μανθάνω ἔγωγε ὅ τι βούλει, ὦ ἄνθρωπε, οὐδὲ οἶδα ὅ τι λέγεις]. He might well have shown surprise, and said: Do you not understand that I am looking for that which is the same common element in all these things? (Plato, *Meno* 74e–75a [Lamb, LCL])

In the imaginary dialogue that Socrates is describing here, Meno uses the phrase that is of interest to us in order to say that he does not understand his interlocutor's abstract question. He does not wish to dismiss it or to express disagreement; he simply does not understand what his interlocutor wants [ὅ τι βούλει] to say.

Evidence of a Semitic *Vorlage* of the Testament of Joseph," in *Studies on the Testament of Joseph*, ed. George W. E. Nickelsburg Jr., SCS 5 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 105–14; and Anders Hultgård, *L'eschatologie des Testaments des Douze Patriarches*, 2 vols., AUU, Historia religionum 6–7 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1981), 2:74–79.

[16] This has been emphasized by, among others, Marinus de Jonge in much of his work on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, e.g., "Christian Influence in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *Studies on the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Text and Interpretation*, ed. Marinus de Jonge, SVTP 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 193–246, repr. from *NovT* 4 (1960): 182–235; de Jonge, "The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Christian and Jewish; A Hundred Years after Friedrich Schnapp," in *Jewish Eschatology, Early Christian Christology, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs: Collected Essays*, NovTSup 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 233–43, repr. from *NTT* 39 (1985): 265–75.

[17] *Pace* Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 731–32.

> Callicles. I cannot follow these subtleties of yours, Socrates [Οὐκ οἶδ' ἅττα σοφίζῃ, ὦ Σώκρατες].
> Socrates. You can, but you play the innocent, Callicles. Just go on a little further, that you may realize how subtle is your way of reproving me. Does not each of us cease at the same moment from thirst and from the pleasure he gets by drinking?
> Callicles. I cannot tell what you mean [Οὐκ οἶδα ὅ τι λέγεις].
> Gorgias. No, no, Callicles, you must answer him, for our sakes also, that the arguments may be brought to a conclusion. (Plato, *Gorg.* 497a–b [Lamb, LCL])

This passage hardly requires any commentary. The poor Callicles has no objection; he simply does not understand what the two philosophers want. Or in any case, this is what he claims.

> Sophist. I'm surprised to hear you say I won't be able to recognise a howler [σολοικισμόν].
> Lucian. How could you recognise one when in your ignorance you've missed three?
> Sophist. What three?
> Lucian. Three whole bearded monsters I've just perjured up.[18]
> Sophist. I think you're joking.
> Lucian. And I that you don't know when a man makes howlers in his talk.
> Sophist. How can anyone know when nothing has been said?
> Lucian. Things have been said and four howlers made, so that you would have achieved a great succession if you had recognised them.[19]
> Sophist. Not a great one but the minimum requirement now that I've let myself in for this.
> Lucian. But even now you didn't notice.
> Sophist. When just now?
> Lucian. When I talked of your achieving succession.
> Sophist. I don't know what you mean [Οὐκ οἶδα ὅ τι λέγεις].
> Lucian. You're right there; you don't [Ὀρθῶς ἔφης· οὐ γὰρ οἶσθα]. Advance forward into the lead then, as you don't want to follow, though you shall be able to understand [συνήσων] if you should wish. (Lucian, *Soleocista* 2 [Macleod, LCL])

Here, too, the phrase is used by the Sophist in order to say that he does not understand what Lucian is aiming at, not that he disagrees with his claim. In addition, Lucian's answer indicates that he takes the phrase as expressing lack of understanding and not disagreement. After affirming that the Sophist does not *know* (οἶδα), he claims that he could have *understood* (συνίημι) if he had wished. "Not knowing

[18] The howler here is the faulty use of the adjective ἀρτιγενείους ("new-bearded") instead of ἀρτιγενεῖς ("newborn"); *Lucian*, vol. 8, trans. Matthew D. Macleod, LCL (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 9.

[19] In this English translation, the howler is the use of the word *succession* instead of *success.* The Greek text has ἆθλον ("prize") instead of ἆθλος ("task"); *Lucian,* trans. Macleod, 8:11 n. 1.

what has been said" is equivalent, for the character Lucian, to "not understanding something."

Thus, Greek literature supplies us negative evidence for the existence of an idiomatic expression similar to the one used by Peter according to the gospels. Such an expression is not attested in the Greek corpus, but this does not mean that it did not exist in spoken language. There is one piece of positive evidence, however, in the Synoptic Gospels themselves. As we have seen, Peter's saying has been preserved in two different forms: a long one and a short one. The long form is attested in the Gospel of Mark, and the short one is found in both Matthew and Luke:[20]

οὔτε οἶδα οὔτε ἐπίσταμαι σὺ τί λέγεις (Mark 14:68)
οὐκ οἶδα τί λέγεις (Matt 26:70)
οὐκ οἶδα ὃ λέγεις (Luke 22:60)

Matthew's and Luke's versions of the sayings are almost identical, and the minor difference between them—Luke's use of the relative pronoun ὅ where Mark and Matthew have τί—can easily be explained as Luke's attempt to use "better" Greek. Yet several substantial differences exist between this short form of the saying and the long one we find in Mark. Three such differences should be noted: (1) instead of just one verb of cognition (οἶδα), as in Matthew and Luke, Mark has two (οἶδα, ἐπίσταμαι); (2) instead of a simple negation (οὐκ), Mark has two composite ones (οὔτε ... οὔτε);[21] and (3) in Mark we find the personal pronoun σύ, which is absent from Matthew's and Luke's formulations and which is emphasized by its unusual place in the phrase.

The most striking difference between the long and short form of the saying is Mark's use of two synonymous verbs of cognition where Matthew and Luke have only one. This is far from an isolated case, however. In many places where Mark has duplicate pleonastic expressions, Matthew and Luke retain only one of the two elements, and often it is the same element.[22] There are two ways to explain this phenomenon. First, when using the Markan material, the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke omitted an element they thought to be redundant. Second, the authors of Matthew and Luke had before them a version of the Gospel of Mark

[20] Unsurprisingly, these three formulations have exercised influence on one another in the manuscript tradition. Hence, Mark's wording has influenced codices D and Δ of the Gospel of Matthew, where we find ουδε/ουτε επισταμαι added at the end of the phrase. And both Mark's and Matthew's use of τί as a relative pronoun appear also in Luke in codices ℵ and D. For additional information, see NA.

[21] According to BDF §445(2), this use of οὔτε ... οὔτε ... is "inadmissible" and the reading οὐκ ... οὐδέ ... found in some manuscripts is correct. R. T. France seems to disagree with this categorical statement, which disregards most of the manuscript evidence (*The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 620 n. 68).

[22] See Frans Neirynck, "Duplicate Expressions and the Original Text of the Gospel," in *Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of the Markan Redaction*, rev. ed., BETL 31 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1988), 37–44.

that had not the redundant expression but a simple one, which they copied faithfully. In this case, we should assume that a very early redactor of the Gospel of Mark added the duplicate expression after the composition of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but long before the first textual witnesses we have of this Gospel.

For this argument's sake, it does not matter which of the two hypotheses is closer to the historical reality. What matters is only that a Greek-speaking writer active at the time and in the milieu in which the Synoptic Gospels were composed—either the authors of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke or an early redactor of the Gospel of Mark—radically altered the wording of the phrase put into the mouth of Peter, either by substantially shortening it or adding to it. Considering the fixed nature of idiomatic expressions, this would be an unlikely thing to do, had this writer felt the phrase to be such an expression.[23]

IV. Does the Phrase Reflect an Aramaic Idiom?

To my knowledge, no Aramaic parallel to Peter's phrase is noted in the vast scholarly literature on the Synoptic Gospels. In fact, scholars who thought that this phrase reflects an Aramaic substratum supposed that Peter's original saying was mistranslated from Aramaic to Greek. In the 1930s Charles Cutler Torrey claimed that Peter had said in Aramaic, "I am neither a companion of (יָדַע), nor do I know at all (חָכַם) him of whom you speak (די אמר אנת).[24] According to Torrey, the mistranslation occurred since the Greek translators mistook the meaning of the Aramaic particle *dī*, which did not mean here "that which," as it most often does, but "he who." Hence, instead of using a masculine relative pronoun in Greek (τίνα/ὅν[25]), they used a neuter form (τί/ὅ). This hypothesis was later adopted, with minor

[23] I am aware that this argument is stronger if the supposed idiomatic expression corresponded to the short form of the saying. It seems to me that doubling the verb of an idiomatic expression would most often destroy its idiomaticity. For example, it is hard to imagine an English-speaking writer transforming the idiomatic expression "What are you **talking** about?!," which has a similar pragmatic function to that of the Greek expression we are studying, into "What are you **talking and speaking** about?" If the supposed expression corresponded to the long pleonastic form, however, a writer might shorten it. For instance, when rewriting the sentence "After all that has happened, we got home **safe and sound**," one might feel that the shorter form is more elegant while conveying the same meaning: "After all that has happened, we got home **safe**." Similar considerations could make one transform the sentence "All she wanted was some **peace and quiet**" into "All she wanted was some **peace**."

[24] This is a summary of Torrey's argument in his *Our Translated Gospels: Some of the Evidence* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 16–18, here 16. See also Torrey, *The Four Gospels: A New Translation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1933), 296, 303, 314.

[25] Cf. Mark 14:71: οὐκ οἶδα τὸν ἄνθρωπον τοῦτον ὃν λέγετε.

changes, by Matthew Black.[26] Although this explanation is possible, it is unduly complicated, since it requires changing the Greek text even though it can make sense.[27]

An idiomatic expression similar to Peter's phrase is unattested, then, as far as we know, in the written sources we have in Aramaic. Again, however, this cannot prove that such an expression did not exist in the language. This we simply cannot know. Nevertheless, there is one thing that we can have a little more certainty about: the Hebrew idiomatic expression attested in the Tannaitic corpus does not seem to be a calque on an Aramaic expression because of the use of the verb סח in all occurrences of the Hebrew expression. Although this verb was not the most common verb denoting acts of speech in Hebrew, it is well attested in both biblical and postbiblical Hebrew.[28] In Jewish Aramaic, on the other hand, this verb is extremely scarce and is attested only a handful of times, mostly in late sources.[29] Especially revealing is the fact that in the Targums, with the exception of the late Targum of Job, the Hebrew verb שׂוח is never rendered using an Aramaic cognate.[30] This verb seems, then, not to be "at home" in the Palestinian Aramaic of the first centuries. If an idiomatic expression similar to Peter's phrase had existed in this dialect of Aramaic, it would probably not make use of the verb סח. It would therefore be surprising for its loan-translation into Hebrew to introduce a rather rare verb not extant in the original form of the expression.

[26] According to Matthew Black, "A more exact equivalent of the Greek would be *man ʾamar ʾa(n)t*" (*An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Clarendon, 1967], 79–80).

[27] Torrey writes, "The reading of the Grk. is pure nonsense.… This is a sentence that no author could write" (*Our Translated Gospels*, 16–17).

[28] In the Hebrew Bible, the verb is always written with a שׂ. In the rabbinic sources, we find it spelled both with a שׂ and with a ס; see n. 12 above.

[29] The following occurrences are noted by Jastrow: b. Ḥag. 5b; Lev. Rab. 26; Tg. Job 7:11 (see below); Tg. Yer. I Num 21:27, 28 (Tg. Prov 8:15 is considered doubtful by Jastrow). To this list should be added the occurrence in b. Ber. 62a, which is parallel to the previous occurrence in the Babylonian Talmud. The verb is probably also used in the Aramaic translation of Job 36:33 in the so-called Targum of Job from Qumran Cave 11 for rendering the Hebrew verb יגיד; 11Q10 XXIX, 10. I thank Hector Patmore for drawing my attention to this occurrence. The verb is not attested in any other dialect of Aramaic. It is possible, however, that it is etymologically related to the root *śyḥ*, which is attested in several Semitic languages (see Hans-Peter Müller, "Die hebräische Wurzel שׂוח," *VT* 19 [1969]: 370–71; J. Hausmann, "שׂיח *śyḥ*; שִׂיחָה *śîḥâ*," *TDOT* 14:85).

[30] In the Targum of Job, the words אשיחה במר נפשי ("I shall speak in the bitterness of my soul"; Job 7:11) are rendered אשיח במריר נפשי, which has the same meaning. This Targum is dated to the fifth century CE (see Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Some Observations on the Targum of Job from Qumran Cave 11," *CBQ* 36 [1974]: 503–24, here 516, and references given there). For a recent discussion on the dating of the Targums of the Pentateuch, see Daniel A. Machiela, "Hebrew, Aramaic, and the Differing Phenomena of Targum and Translation in the Second Temple Period and Post-Second Temple Period," in Buth and Notley, *Language Environment of First Century Judaea*, 209–46.

V. Conclusion

The easiest way to interpret Peter's response to the servant's accusation that he is one of Jesus's men—"I do not know what you are saying"—is to consider it to be an idiomatic expression used to vigorously dismiss a claim, much like the English expression "What are you talking about?!" Such an idiomatic expression, however, is attested nowhere else in the corpus of Greek literature. Furthermore, the variation on the form of Peter's phrase in the Synoptic Gospels indicates that at least one of the writers who worked on the texts did not consider it to be an idiomatic expression. In addition, such an idiomatic expression did indeed exist in Mishnaic Hebrew, but nothing of the sort is attested in Aramaic.

From these data, two conclusions follow. First, the oral tradition of the primitive Christian church remembered Peter speaking to servants of the high priest in Hebrew. This would attest both that, according to this tradition, these Jerusalemite servants most commonly spoke Hebrew and that Peter was capable of speaking this language when needed. Second, in the process of the composition of the gospels, the original Hebrew expression attributed to Peter was translated literally into Greek, in a form similar to that in the Gospel of Matthew, possibly with the personal pronoun σύ, as is attested in Mark's version. Subsequently, the author of the Gospel of Luke slightly "polished" the Greek of the expression, whereas the author or, more likely, an early redactor of the Gospel of Mark reworked it more thoroughly.