The Patristic Historians of Matthew's Gospel:

A Critical Analysis of the Earliest Witnesses

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By

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Abstract

The Church Fathers and early Ecclesiastical writers are unanimous in their claim that Matthew's Gospel was written first among the Four Gospels and was written in the Hebrew language. The evidence for these Patristic claims is external to the Gospel itself—relying on "traditions" purported to have been passed down from authoritative figures such as John the Evangelist and his disciples. The Patristic authors, while unanimous in their claims that Matthew wrote first and wrote in Hebrew, are generally discounted as being historically unreliable regarding the origin of Matthew's Gospel.

This thesis examines this problem by analyzing in detail the Patristic authors who, as Biblical historians, write on the authorship of Matthew's Gospel. The witnesses were examined based on the work of several contemporary scholars, and their testimonies were cross-referenced with each other and with other historical evidence in order to ascertain if the claims held up to scrutiny.

While many of the Patristic claims were indeed plausible, issues such as questionable motives on the part of some (such as Eusebius), textual errors (in Jerome's writings), linguistic unclarity (in Papias' witness), and possible chronological errors (in Irenaeus' account) make *proving* the veracity of the Patristic claims impossible. While proving the claims beyond a reasonable doubt is impossible, the research demonstrates that it is indeed *plausible* that the Patristic writers were familiar with a Hebrew proto-Gospel which later developed into a canonical Greek version—though the canonical version was likely not a direct translation from a Semitic original.

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Dedication

For St. Matthew, and for those authors who witnessed to the veracity of his holy Gospel. I pray that I have spoken well of your work. *Ora pro nobis*.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Brief History of the Problem

Much thought has been given in recent centuries as to the ordering of the four canonical Gospels in the New Testament—and, most especially, the three Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The traditional view espoused by the Patristic authors and unchallenged until recent centuries always placed Matthew as the first of the Four Gospels. Furthermore, the canonical Gospel according to Matthew was considered to be a translation or adaptation from a Hebrew original. This traditional view has fallen under suspicion since the mid-18th century, with most contemporary scholars asserting that Mark's Gospel was the first to be composed. Matthew's and Luke's Gospels seem to use a combination of Markan material and the so-called "Q source" (an Aramaic collection of sayings about Jesus). John's Gospel, in both contemporary and ancient thought, is considered to be both the last written and dependent on different sources entirely.[1] The theory of Markan priority was first proposed in the 18th century and a variety of new theories regarding the ordering of the Gospels were proposed throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the two primary camps being that of Matthean priority (a minority position) or Markan priority (the majority position).[2] Discoveries of trustworthy ancient manuscripts, examinations of linguistic and philological aspects of the texts, and various types of critical scholarship allowed for a flourishing in the technical study of Scripture—and led to the realization that the texts of the Synoptic

[1] For example, see Irenaeus' *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1.

[2] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London ; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 96.

Gospels seem to borrow substantial content from Mark's Gospel (rather than Mark borrowing from Matthew). No longer was Mark considered to be—as the Patristic witnesses and early Scripture scholars believed—an "abbreviated" Gospel, but rather as the primary literary basis of the other Synoptic Gospels.[3] B. H. Streeter sought to establish Markan priority beyond a reasonable doubt by claiming that Matthew and Luke agreed with Mark in content, wording, and order—showing that both Matthew and Luke very likely used Mark as common source material for their respective Gospels.[4]

Arguments for the priority of Mark are rooted in Streeter's observation that the Greek text of Matthew's Gospel seems to be dependent on roughly 90% of Mark's, and Luke's text is based on roughly 55% of Mark.[5] Furthermore, Mark's ordering of pericopes is generally followed by both Matthew and Luke, with the two latter never agreeing "against" Mark in their orderings. And, the Greek of Matthew's and Luke's Gospels is of a more elegant style. According to Allison and Davies, the author of Matthew's Gospel seems to have a "commanding" mastery over the Greek language—making it likely that the text was composed in Greek rather than being a translation from Hebrew as the traditional position advocates.[6] On the contrary, the Patristic authors are unanimous in their witnesses that Matthew originally composed his Gospel in the Hebrew tongue, and was the first to compose his Gospel. These witnesses all point to the reality that the early Church did not view Matthew's Gospel as a mere expansion of—or even an

[3] Ibid., 98.

[4] R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 33.

[5] B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins*, 4th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1930), 151.

[6] W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, vol. 1, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 73.

addendum to—Mark's Gospel. This presents an obvious problem to the reader given that the internal evidence seems to discount entirely the traditional view handed down by the Church Fathers.

The Traditional View

This author's purpose is to compile the positions held by the Patristic witnesses and to also demonstrate whether or not these positions hold up to contemporary academic scrutiny. If the Patristic positions are unreliable, why so? If a mistake was made in transmission of a tradition, where was the mistake made? The scholarly shift away from Matthean priority towards Markan priority shows that there was a growing distrust between the 18th and 21st centuries of the Patristic witnesses. Furthermore, there are good reasons to question some of the Patristic witnesses' claims—unanimous though they may be. These claims will be examined in subsequent chapters. Prior to the acceptance of Markan priority, it was virtually unanimously accepted that the ordering of composition of the first and last Gospels (Matthew and John) directly mirrored their canonical ordering, while there was some question as to whether Mark or Luke was the second and third Gospel, respectively.[7] Despite discrepancies in the ordering of the Gospels in some ancient codices and manuscripts, Matthew is always listed first—this is certainly the case in the oldest "complete" manuscripts such as the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* Codices.[8] The traditional ordering of the Gospels was, in the mind of the early Church, completely dependent upon the order upon which they were composed. It was seemingly

[7] John William Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 116.

[8] France, *Matthew*, 13.

unquestioned that Matthew had composed his Gospel firstly; thus, it was obviously the first of the four canonical Gospels insofar as placement is concerned—at least according to the earliest external evidence found in authors such as Papias, Irenaeus, and Origin (as will be discussed in more exhaustive detail in the second chapter).

Papias (the earliest non-Apostolic witness) claims to have received this tradition from John (likely the Apostle/Evangelist) as a companion and contemporary of Polycarp—John's disciple. Irenaeus suggests that Matthew wrote his Gospel as early as 41-44 AD prior to leaving Judaea due to the persecution by Herod Agrippa. Origen speaks of a "tradition" which he has received concerning Matthew's Hebrew authorship. Later writers such as Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine will inherit this tradition that Irenaeus, Papias, and Origen speak of, accepting it as historical. Furthermore, the earliest Patristic witnesses after the Apostles all held that Matthew had written in the "Hebrew tongue" a statement with multiple meanings ranging from the Hebrew *language* or the language used *by* the Hebrews (possibly Aramaic) or even a Hebrew *dialect*.

In addition to being considered the first Gospel, Matthew's Gospel enjoyed an explicit preeminence of teaching authority in the early Church. Specifically, Clement of Rome mentions the Sermon on the Mount (only found in Matthews's Gospel) in Chapter 13 of his *Epistle to the Corinthians*, and the *Epistle of Barnabas* quotes explicitly from Matthew 22:14 ("Many are called, but few are chosen") in Chapter 4. Ignatius of Antioch shows clear preference for Matthew's Gospel in his citations, particularly in his *Epistle to the Ephesians.*[9] Chapters 5.2, 6.1, 10.3, 11.1, 14.2, 15.1, 16.2, 17.1, and 19.1-2 of this Ignatian Epistle directly references phrases in Matthew's Gospel, showing that

[9] Ignatius of Antioch, "The Epistle to the Ephesians," ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885).

Ignatius was both *exposed* to Matthean writings by the latter 1st or early 2nd centuries AD, and that he *chose* to use them in his own writings as exemplar Gospel passages. France considers that the abundance of Matthean quotations in these early authors is enough external evidence to suggest that this Gospel held a reasonable place of preeminence among 2nd-century local Christian Churches.[10] Furthermore, Matthew's Gospel is the primary Gospel used authoritatively in the Διδαχή (Didache) in the early 2nd century AD. Matthew's Gospel is quoted in chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, and 16. The only other Gospel to be quoted is that of Luke's, which is only referred to in chapters 3 and 13.[11]

Methodology

The historical and linguistic claims of these Patristic witnesses will be examined and cross-referenced in great detail within this study so as to ascertain which details ought to be accepted with some degree of certainty, and which details are dubious at best. Drawing on both the witnesses of the early Ecclesiastical writers, as well as on a wealth of contemporary scholarship on the subject, this paper will suggest that it is plausible that the Patristic authors were indeed familiar with a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew that would evolve into—but not be *translated* into—the canonical Greek version. This author is operating on the principle that the earliest Patristic witnesses (in the first and second centuries AD) and their corroborators (in the third through the fifth centuries AD) hold a place of preeminence as historians of the Gospels' authorships. This presumption is rooted in these witnesses' proximity of location to the authorship of the Gospels, the fact that they lived mere decades apart from the Gospels' authors (in Papias' and Irenaeus'

[10] France, *Matthew*, 15.

[11] A simple textual search of the Διδαχή online can yield this conclusion.

cases), and the witnesses' shared culture and language (including linguistic nuance) with the Gospel's authors. This study deals primarily with the external evidence for Matthew's authorship of a Hebrew Gospel. Taken as a whole, this study presents itself as fairly preferential to the traditional view (the so-called "Augustinian" view) of Matthean priority. This view is accepted due to the above-stated reasoning, and due to the author's reverential view towards Matthew (as a Gospel author) and the spiritual authority of the Church Fathers within the Ecclesial body—particularly Irenaeus, Augustine, and Jerome. The author firmly rejects the notion that the Patristic witnesses—due to their lack of modern critical methodology—are of little use as historians of the Gospels. Rather, the author considers them to be authoritative for the aforementioned reasons.

Chapter 2: The Papian Tradition

Papias lived roughly between 60-130 AD, wrote during the early second century, and was the Bishop of Hierapolis in Asia Minor (modern-day southwest Turkey). He is most famous for penning the Λογίων Κυριακών Εξήγησις (usually translated as the *Exposition on the Oracles of the Lord*), a source which claimed that Matthew wrote the first Gospel, and that he wrote it in the Hebrew language.[12] According to Irenaeus, Papias was an "ancient man" (αρχαίος ανήρ) who was a hearer of "John." This "John" could have been John the Evangelist or John the Elder, both of whom Eusebius credits as being 1st-centuries teachers of Christianity.[13] Papias was most likely of a similar age to Polycarp, a disciple of John the Evangelist. Thus, while Irenaeus may have possibly been familiar with both men during his youth, he most likely wrote about them after their deaths (c. 180).[14] Papias is the first to mention the traditional view concerning Matthew's Gospel—that it was written in Hebrew and was written first. This position was embraced by later Patristic authors, most notably by Eusebius, Jerome, and Augustine. Papias' writings concerning the authorship of Matthew's Gospel were contained in a five-volume work entitled *Expositions on the Oracles of the Lord* (Λογίων Κυριακών Εξηγήσεως).

Unfortunately, Papias' five volumes are lost, though his statements concerning the Gospel's authorship are recorded in Eusebius' *Church History* (3.39.16). Quoting Papias' earlier work, Eusebius writes:

[12] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 53.

[13] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," Book III, Chapter 33, Paragraph 4.

[14] Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 453.

> περὶ δὲ τοῦ Ματθαίου ταῦτ᾽ εἴρηται: ‘Ματθαῖος μὲν οὖν Ἑβραΐδι διαλέκτῳ τὰ λόγια συνετάξατο, ἡρμήνευσεν δ᾽ αὐτὰ ὡς ἦν δυνατὸς ἕκαστος.’[15]
>
> But concerning Matthew [Papias] writes as follows: “So then Matthew wrote the oracles in the Hebrew language, and every one interpreted them as he was able.”[16]

This is the first instance in which this viewpoint is promulgated; and, this view would be embraced as *the* position regarding Matthew's Gospel throughout the Patristic era.

Dating Papias' Life and Writing

It is indeed certain that Papias is one of the earliest—if not *the* earliest—witnesses to the composition of the Gospels. The "tradition" of the four Gospels and their ordering (mentioned by Origen) currently has no feasible earlier origin as there are simply no other witnesses which mention the Gospels prior to Papias. Hall believes it to be evident that Papias was extraordinarily familiar with the earliest proto-Gospels (or writings that would become the Gospels). This is certainly evident in Papias' seeming defense of Mark's Gospel against those who would consider Mark's writings to be wrongly-ordered and fragmentary. This is an interesting position on Papias' part, given that Mark's Gospel, as is it received in the Biblical canon, is an extremely orderly (perhaps even the *most* orderly) account of Christ's life and ministry. Hall suggests that either Papias was familiar with a sort of proto-Mark that was still in development and thus a bit muddled, or that Matthew was the Gospel *par excellence* against which all other Gospels were

[15] The Greek text of Eusebius' *Church History* is taken from the Perseus Digital Library (Gregory R. Crane, ed., "Historia Ecclesiastica," Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper (accessed June 2018).

[16] All English translations of Eusebius are those of Arthur McGiffert (see bibliography).

judged.[17] Whether or not this is true is beyond the scope of this study as it deals with Mark's Gospel, not Matthew's. Papias, writing sometime in the second century AD, was familiar with some of the earliest Gospel traditions known to Christianity. This is evident most extensively in his accounts of Mark and Matthew—or at least what would become the canonical Gospel of Matthew—authoring their Gospels. Gundry proposes that recent scholarship places the authorship of Papias much earlier than was previously considered, moving the date from roughly AD 130 to as early as the first decade of the 2nd century AD. This date was achieved by triangulating dates from Eusebius' references to Papias in Book 3 of the *History of the Church*. Eusebius places Papias as a contemporary of Ignatius and Polycarp (*Church History* 3.36 and 3.39). Ignatius died in the first decade of the 2nd century, so it stands to reason that Papias (at least according to Eusebius' witness) must have lived and written around that time.[18] If Gundry's statement holds true, then Papias would have been directly privy to the accounts of the Apostles—such as John.

Gundry's argument is rooted also in the fact that the only major Patristic-era source for a later-date of Papias' witness is Philip of Side. However, this witness holds an extreme minority position among other Patristic witnesses in that he sees Papias as living later than the other witnesses attest to—the middle rather than the beginning of the second century AD. Furthermore, Philip's witness itself is dubious. His later date is unreliable due to the fact that *he* is historically unreliable, he wrote over one hundred years after Eusebius, and he seems to have equated Papias with a man named

[17] Hall, Papias and His Contemporaries: A Study of Religious Thought in the Second Century, 12.

[18] Robert H. Gundry, The Old Is Better: New Testament Essays in Support of Traditional Interpretations (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 51.

Quadratus.[19] In fact, Philip quoted Eusebius' record of Quadratus, thinking it to be a record of Papias, showing that he was not reliably familiar with Papias nor his writings, and is thus to be discarded. Eusebius speaks of Quadratus as living "during the reign of Hadrian" (117-138 AD) and as addressing an apology for the Christian religion to Emperor Hadrian (*History of the Church* 4.3.1-3). Philip of Side, on the other hand, writes that *Papias* was alive during the reign of Hadrian. In *Fragment 4.6* of Philip's *History of the Church,* he states that Papias was a witness to a group of Christians "resurrected by Christ from the dead" who "lived until Hadrian."[20] Philip is the only author to equate Papias with the reign of Hadrian, and Eusebius only ever uses Hadrian's reign to describe a certain Quadratus. Thus, Gundry's argument against a later dating of Papias seems to be consistent with the historical reality. Ultimately, the majority of the early authors seem to suggest that Papias lived from the middle of the first century to sometime during the second century as a disciple of John, and Gundry gives good evidence that his *Exposition* was written early second century (c. 110 AD).

John the Elder or John the Evangelist?

As previously mentioned, Papias claims authority from the witness of "John the Elder (Presbyter)" a title that, according to Eusebius (*History of the Church* 3.39.7), Papias uses elsewhere to designate the Apostles or "Lord's Disciples" (οι πρεβυτεροι).[21] Dating Papias' writing and determining the veracity of his account (assuming Eusebius

[19] Ibid., 52.

[20] Pearse, Roger, ed. "Philip of Side, Fragments." The Tertullian Project. 2010. Accessed May 21, 2018. http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/philip_of_side_fragments.htm#Fr.%204.1%20-%204.7.

[21] Gundry, The Old Is Better, 54.

and Irenaeus quoted Papias correctly) depend greatly on *which* "John" Papias "heard" from. If Papias indeed was taught by John the Evangelist, Papias and his account are ancient indeed, to paraphrase Irenaeus. However, despite Papias (and other early authors) often using "ο πρεσβύτερος" to refer interchangeably to an "elder" who is one of the "Apostles," a difficulty arises in that Eusebius clearly expresses that there were two distinct "Johns" who were living and writing in Asia, a clear distinction which is seen for the first time in Eusebius' writings. Eusebius distinguishes between John the Evangelist and John the Presbyter (*History of the Church* 3.39.5-7), though this distinction may be rooted more in a bias against Papias' witness rather than in an objective distinction of persons—according to Gundry. Gundry asserts that this bias is due, in large part, to Eusebius' opposition to Papias' and Irenaeus' millenarianism, which was rooted in their interpretations of the Apocalypse of John (the Book of Revelation). Thus, Eusebius may have sought to discredit the Apostolicity of the Apocalypse by ascribing a non-Apostolic author to the text—in this case, John "ο Πρεσβύτερος" rather than John the Evangelist.[22]

Gundry's hypothesis does seem to be positing a malicious motivation to Eusebius where maliciousness is not *explicitly* proven. However, there is certainly merit to the argument. In the subsequent chapter, Eusebius' *potential* conflict of interest regarding Papias will be discussed in greater depth. Several scholars will go so far as to posit that Eusebius' opinion of Papias is contradictory at best—due in large part to the two Patristic authors' opposing interpretation of the Second Coming and Final Judgement. Regardless, Eusebius' attribution of the Apocalypse to "John the Elder" (and *not* John the Evangelist) introduces a new character into the mix of Patristic authors, albeit a character whose uniqueness (as *not* being John the Evangelist) is neither affirmed by any of Eusebius'

[22] Ibid., 54.

contemporaries nor his predecessors. While Papias uses the titles of "the elder" to refer interchangeably to one of the Lord's Disciples, Eusebius does not. Thus, this debate seems to center around whether or not Eusebius knew about another John with which no one else seems to be familiar. If Eusebius' theory is wrong (as it does seem to be a bit far-fetched and perhaps even motivated by a personal agenda, as Gundry suggests), then it is entirely likely that Papias was indeed a hearer of John the Evangelist and thus a *direct* witness to the earliest traditions known to Christianity.

However, Sim disagrees with Gundry's dismissal of Eusebius' testimony, even suggesting that Papias himself claimed to hear from secondary witnesses—not from the Apostles themselves.[23] As stated, Gundry accepts Irenaeus' testimony that Papias was a hearer of John (the Evangelist), and likewise does not accept Eusebius' statement that John the Evangelist was different than John the Elder. While Gundry presented good evidence to accuse Eusebius of ulterior motives regarding Papias, Sim importantly points out that trying to embrace both Eusebius' and Irenaeus' testimony (as Gundry does, with caveats) is inherently contradictory. Either Eusebius or Irenaeus was wrong. Papias either heard from John the Evangelist or John the Elder (or even someone else); and, for Sim, Eusebius is only carrying on the tradition (from Papias) that Papias heard from John the Elder, not creating a new character in spite of Papias' witness. It is important to note that Eusebius explicitly states that Papias, in the preface to the *Exposition*, claimed that he himself was not a hearer of the Apostles proper.[24] Thus, for Sim, there is no reconciliation between the two positions to be had: Irenaeus was simply wrong and

[23] David C Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew, John the Elder and the Papias Tradition: A Response to R H Gundry," *Hervormde teologiese studies* 63, no. 1 (March 2007): 283–299, 295.

[24] Eusebius of Caesarea, "History of the Church," 3.39.2.

Eusebius—while perhaps disliking Papias—was only speaking what he had been told regarding Papias, not changing the narrative. Sim also suggests that even if Papias *was* taught by John the Evangelist, this does nothing to improve the reliability of Papias claims—a position in opposition to Gundry's, who assumes the complete veracity of Apostolic witnesses.[25] The so-called "pre-Papian" tradition that Papias documented from John is, for Sim, possibly erroneous—even if it originates from John the Evangelist. Sim makes a fair point in stating that "since John was not involved in the writing of Mark and Matthew, he too must have been informed about these matters by someone else," meaning that even the Evangelist could have received an erroneous tradition about the composition of the first two Gospels—specifically concerning Matthew writing in the Hebrew tongue.[26]

Both Gundry and Sim reconcile the Johannine dilemma by attributing errors to the witness of either Irenaeus (for Sim) or Eusebius (for Gundry). However, given the fact that Irenaeus is by far the earlier source, it would seem that he would be the more reliable witness—which, of course, is Gundry's view. And, given that there is no evidence of bias against Papias by Irenaeus, while there is somewhat conclusive evidence of bias by Eusebius, Irenaeus seems to be the more trustworthy witness. It would also seem that John—if he were indeed the Evangelist—would have been familiar enough with Matthew and Mark as *people* that he would be hard-pressed to make such a grievous error such as attributing a Hebrew Gospel to Matthew when in fact there was none. Shanks adheres to Gundry's position, as well. He points out that of all the credible witnesses that attest in some way to "John" teaching Papias (Irenaeus, Eusebius, Jerome, and Anastasius of

[25] Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew, John the Elder and the Papias Tradition," 298-299.

[26] Ibid., 298-299.

Sinai), only Eusebius makes the clear distinction between John the Evangelist and John the Elder. Shanks writes that Eusebius' attempt to partially discredit Papias' witness does more to discredit his *own* credibility given the severe lack of evidence in Eusebius' distinction between the two Johns—which Shanks refers to as "baseless conjecture."[27]

Linguistic Difficulties Regarding *τά* Λόγια (Ta Logia)

Having suggested Papias' authoritative nature as a hearer of John the Evangelist, we turn now to the content of his five-volume opus, Λόγια Κυριακά Εξήγησις. Unfortunately, this work is lost and any knowledge about its content comes from fragments and quotes from later witnesses. However, the title itself (attested to by Eusebius, among others) can help to illuminate the discussion on whether or not Matthew wrote a primordial Gospel in Hebrew (or a dialect thereof). As Papias wrote an "exposition" on the "oracles of the Lord," it is of tantamount importance to determine the nature and connotation of these words in the original Greek title—namely, "λόγια" and "εξήγησις." Given the wide variety of meanings of these two difficult-to-translate words, Papias could have written an exegesis or exposition of the Lord's words, teachings, or even the Lord's Gospel—which others "translated" or "taught" (ερμήευσεν) according to their ability. Obviously, the linguistic distinction here is critical since the reader is not entirely certain if Papias is referring to a collection of sayings, or an actual Gospel which others had to translate (into Greek, most likely). Bauckham suggests two options. The first is that Papias merely collected oral Jesus traditions (perhaps some being in Hebrew and Aramaic) into his five-volume work, making it something akin to a Gospel. The second is that Papias was eminently familiar with an orderly collection that was *already*

[27] Shanks, Papias and the New Testament, 270.

in circulation, and thus wrote a commentary on it.[28] Regardless, a study of Papias' (and Eusebius') usage of λόγια will help to illuminate the mystery surrounding this mysterious Hebrew Gospel.

Prior to its use in a particularly Christian or even Jewish context, τά λόγια would always refer to some form of an oracular divine utterance, both prophetic and exhortative.[29] This meaning would be expanded to include prophetic utterances in general and Scripture in particular. Donovan points out that, in both the Old and New Testaments, τά λόγια or τά λόγια κυρίου is used to express the "word of God" or even "God's oracular words" and "Divine revelation," frequently connoting the writings found within the Old Testament when used in this fashion in the New Testament.[30] While τά denotes a plural noun (literally, the "oracles" of God), the connotation implies a singular collection of sayings or oracles—perhaps even translated as a "collection of the words of God." It is not until Eusebius that τά θεία λόγια (the godly/divine oracles/sayings) or τά ιέρα λόγια (the divine oracles/sayings) is employed for this same meaning.[31] For Eusebius, τόν λόγιον (the singular form) could mean both prophecy and a Scriptural text, while the plural form would connote a prophetic exhortation (and be synonymous with πρόρρησις).[32] In the earlier Patristic writers, just as in the Old and New Testaments, simply using τά λόγια meant that they were referring explicitly to Scripture.

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[28] Richard Bauckham, "Did Papias Write History or Exegesis?," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 65, no. 2 (October 2014): 463–488, 464-5.

[29] J. Donovan, "Note on the Eusebian Use of 'Logia,'" *Biblica*, no. 3 (1926): 301–310, 302.

[30] Ibid., 301.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Shanks, Papias and the New Testament.

When Papias writes (as quoted in *History of the Church* 3.39.15-16) that Matthew recorded "τά λόγια" in the Hebrew tongue, we are then left with only a few possible interpretations of Papias' words. Essentially, one could extrapolate from this statement that Matthew either recorded the prophetic utterances of the Lord into a singular account (on which Papias gave his *Exposition*), or that Matthew literally recorded the *Scripture of the Lord*—in the sense of an actual Gospel. In Eusebius' previous paragraph (3.39.15), however, Papias is quoted as saying that Mark wrote down Peter's teachings of the Lord's discourses/oracles (κυριακών ποιούμενος λογίων) but did not intend to do so in an orderly fashion—only as he remembered them. Papias also discusses Mark not intending to write "an ordered collection of the oracles of the Lord" (τών κυριακών...λογίων), seemingly referring to Mark's Gospel as not necessarily being in a chronological order, but rather being a summation of the teachings Mark heard from Peter. This brief look at Papias' statement on Mark's Gospel is critical due to Papias' linguistic usage. Interestingly, Papias uses a form of the noun "λόγιον" here to refer to Mark's Gospel, suggesting that his usage of the word λόγια in regards to Matthew's text refers to a Gospel rather than a collection of sayings of discourses. However, Sim points out, Papias' language regarding Mark does not conclusively refer to Mark's *Gospel,* but perhaps to the works and teachings (oracles) of the Lord contained *within* Mark's Gospel. Furthermore, Sim adds, if Papias uniquely used τά λόγια to refer to a Gospel proper, then this would seem to contradict the very title of Papias' work, in which he uses τά λόγια to refer to a collection of writings rather than to a Gospel.[33] Of course, Sim is operating under two assumptions that are not necessarily conclusive. The first is that Matthew

[33] Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew, John the Elder and the Papias Tradition," 289.

never wrote a Gospel in the Hebrew tongue. The second is that the title of Papias' work refers to "discourses" or "oracles" rather than to a Gospel. If this were the case, then the contradiction would stand. On the other hand, if Matthew *did* write a Gospel (or at least an orderly proto-Gospel) in the Hebrew tongue, then Papias seems to be consistently using τά λόγια to refer to a Gospel proper. And, there would thus be no inherent linguistic contradiction between Papias referring to both τά λόγια of Mark and τά λόγια of Matthew (in the Hebrew tongue) since both references would connote Gospels rather than collections of sayings.

In the following paragraph, Papias uses the same language he uses for Mark's Gospel to describe these *same oracles* that Matthew wrote down in the Hebrew language (3.39.16). This adds another possibility to the connotations of λόγια in that Papias, in these paragraphs, seems to use this term to describe oral teachings *about* the Lord Jesus—the same oral teachings taught by Peter and recorded by Mark, and the same oral teachings written by Matthew in the Hebrew language. Macdonald proposes that the best interpretation of this passage is that the λόγια are "anecdotes of what Jesus said and/or did" rather than a collection of "discourses."[34] Shanks agrees with this assertion, writing that only a cursory reading Papias with no consultation of the original Greek source material (Eusebius' *History of the Church*) would yield "discourses" as any sort of suitable translation for λόγια.[35] The use of the article τά, the connotation of τά λόγια in both pagan and Judeo-Christian contexts, and the fact that Papias refers to τά λόγια multiple times as the words and deeds of the Lord necessitate that it be translated more

[34] Dennis R. MacDonald, Two Shipwrecked Gospels: The Logoi of Jesus and Papias's Exposition of Logia about the Lord (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 3.

[35] Donovan, "Note on the Eusebian Use of 'Logia,'" 310.

according to MacDonald's proposition than as the "discourses of the Lord." Of course, this does not *necessarily* mean that the "anecdotes of Jesus' words and deeds" are the same as what would come to be known as the four canonical Gospels. It only serves to highlight that Papias uses the same language to describe what both Matthew and Mark recorded regarding the words and deeds of the Lord. Papias seems to be referencing Mark's *Gospel*; thus, it would make sense that he is also referencing a Hebrew *Gospel* written by Matthew. Macdonald provides two reasons for why this is an acceptable supposition. The first is that there is no other work—as of the 2nd century AD—claiming authorship by Matthew the Apostle, nor is there any evidence or witnesses to suggest that a work containing merely the "words" or "discourses" of the Lord was in circulation. Secondly, Macdonald adds, Matthew's Gospel could have easily been entitled τά λόγια κυριακά since it does indeed contain somewhat lengthy *discourses* between Jesus and others.[36]

Ultimately, the linguistic question comes down to the use or lack of the article (τά), and whether or not there are further descriptive adjectives (ιερά, θεία, θεού, or κυρίου).[37] Compounding this linguistic difficulty is that Eusebius and Papias (either in fragments or as quoted by Eusebius) use λογία in different connotations. What seems to obviously refer to a Gospel for Papias (τά λόγια) does not necessarily do the same for Eusebius. Perhaps the change of language (the use of θεία, etc.) by the time of Eusebius was rooted in these earlier linguistic ambiguities. Seemingly, the only way to determine Papias' meaning is to look only at Papias' use of λόγια (especially τά λόγια) and try to

[36] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 61.

[37] Donovan, "Note on the Eusebian Use of 'Logia,'" 308.

extrapolate his meaning based on his consistent patterns. It seems as though Papias is specifically referring to a Gospel written by Matthew (in the "Hebrew tongue") with which, by the time of his writing, was familiar to him and his contemporaries.

Linguistic Difficulties Regarding Εβραίδι Διαλέκτω (Ebraidi Dialekto)

Another major difficulty in ascertaining the truth behind Matthew's supposed Hebrew Gospel is that of determining to what exactly Papias refers when he speaks of the "Hebrew tongue." The Greek text from Eusebius' *Church History* reads: "Ματθαίος μέν Εβραίδι διαλέκτω τά λόγια συνετάξατο, ηρμήνευσεν δ'αυτά ως ήν δυνατός έκαστος."[38] The linguistic difficulties manifest themselves immediately in the Greek text. Διάλεκτος could be translated as *language*, *speech*, *syntax*, or even *way of speaking*, meaning that Papias is not necessarily referring to a Gospel written in the Hebrew language *per se*, but in the manner of speaking used *by* the Hebrews—such as Aramaic. Furthermore, ερμηνεύω (used in its aorist, indicative, active form: ηρμήνευσεν) can mean a literal *translation* from one language to another, or even an *interpretation* or *explanation* of a given text. This proves important in that there are several radically different translations of Papias' words (quoted by Eusebius) which could all be linguistically valid. Matthew, according to Papias, could have written a Gospel[39] in the Hebrew language which others translated. He could have written a Gospel in the Hebrew manner of speaking which others translated or even interpreted. Or, Matthew could have written a Gospel in a

[38] Eusebius, *Church History*, 3.39.17.

[39] Following and accepting MacDonald's conclusions, this paper will hereafter generally translate τά λόγια as "Gospel," referring to a Matthean Gospel proper, not as "words" or "discourses" of the Lord, as some authors may.

Hebrew *syntax*, which others interpreted as they were able. Given the last option and linguistic ambiguity, it is entirely feasible that Papias is referring to the Greek canonical Gospel of Matthew, which includes some Semiticisms and a strong familiarity with Hebrew traditions and manners of speech. Such familiarity is exemplified in Jesus' genealogy (connecting him to figures of the Old Testament), the focus on the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law, references to the Temple as the "holy place" (Matt 24:15), and Jerusalem as the "holy city" (Matt 4:5). Thus, the vocabulary of the Gospel suggests that both the author and reader of Matthew's Gospel were strongly acquainted with Jewish culture and traditions—likely being Jews themselves.[40] The question remains though as to whether Papias meant that this Gospel was composed in Greek in a Hebrew style and vocabulary, or if it was literally composed in the language of the Hebrews—be that Hebrew or Aramaic. Thus, the problems posed by Papias' statement about Matthew's language of authorship are both obvious and manifold.

Hall sees in Matthew's canonical (Greek) Gospel no apparent reason to regard it as a translation from a Semitic language, nor is it a translation of mere "sayings" of the Lord. He calls Matthew's Gospel "a methodical composition, fashioned on a more artistic scheme than either Mark or Luke."[41] If the Gospel were written in Hebrew, then translational difficulties would be apparent in some form—awkward phrasing or obvious mistakes. However, there seems to be no such internal evidence present within Matthew's canonical Gospel to suggest that it is a translation. Allison and Davies conclude that the author of Matthew's Gospel wrote much that contained a "distinctly Jewish flavor" (such

[40] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 54-5.

[41] Hall, Papias and His Contemporaries: A Study of Religious Thought in the Second Century, 15.

as reference to Jerusalem as the "Holy City" and Jesus' ministry to the "lost sheep of Israel"), but that the canonical Gospel was most certainly written in Greek. They conclude that Matthew's Gospel was likely written by a Jew who made a "conscious effort at exactitude" in writing in his secondary tongue (Greek) rather than translating from an original.[42] These elements suggest that Matthew's Gospel stands on its own as a stylistically elegant Greek text rather than being a Greek translation from a Hebrew (or Aramaic) original. Unfortunately, neither Papias nor Eusebius elaborate on what exactly Papias means by referring to a Gospel in the Hebrew tongue. In fact, Papias never makes an explicit claim that he has even *seen* a copy of Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew; he only makes a claim based on a tradition with which he was familiar. Of course, given Papias' antiquity, there is no reason to fundamentally rule out that Papias was a first-hand witness of a Hebrew Matthean Gospel. He simply might not have been overly concerned with what happened to this Semitic text by the second century as he likely would have been familiar with the authoritative Greek canonical text.

Hall suggests that, at the time of Papias' writing, there may have been a multitude of translations of the Matthean text in wide circulation, a Hebrew proto-Gospel might have been absorbed into a Greek translation (thus completely losing its original Hebrew identity), or a Hebrew original existed but simply disappeared within a few centuries.[43] While these options may serve to placate Papias' legacy and witness, they still contain unresolved problems. If there were a multitude of translations of the Matthean Gospel in circulation, what happened to them? Certainly, local Ecclesiastical translations (such as

[42] Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 1:26.

[43] Ibid., 16-17.

the Latin and Syriac translations) were in circulation, but it seems somewhat suspicious that a Hebrew original would simply *disappear* without a trace. If the Hebrew text was absorbed into the canonical Greek version, it would seem that there would at least be *traces* of a Semitic original within the Greek text. But alas, there are none that are explicit. And, while Jerome mentioned a Hebrew Matthean Gospel at the library in Caesarea, it is quite possible (as will be discussed in the subsequent chapter) that this Gospel was an apocryphal text originating with the Nazoreans. Hall points out that it is difficult to believe that, had Papias mentioned any more about this Matthean text, Eusebius would simply overlook it in his historical account of Papias.[44] Of course, on the contrary, the existence of a Hebrew Matthean Gospel could have been so obvious—so taken for granted—in the second century that Papias did not see any reason to mention further details on the authorship of Matthew's Gospel. Regardless, it is difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty what exactly Papias means by Εβραίδι διαλέκτω.

Given the lack of internal evidence that the canonical Gospel of Matthew is a translation, it would seem that one is left with two obvious choices. The first choice is that the supposed Hebrew Matthean Gospel actually *was* written in a Semitic language, but that it had no linguistic bearing on the Greek text. Perhaps it was merely a primordial proto-Gospel that served as an inspiration or blueprint for a later Greek text—a proposition supported by Sim. The second choice is that Papias is not actually referring to a Gospel written in a Hebrew tongue, but to a text (perhaps even to the canonical Gospel of Matthew) that was written for a Hebrew audience and thus contained a high degree of familiarity with Hebrew tradition—a proposition supported by Gundry. The first option,

[44] Ibid., 19.

following Sim's hypothesis, suggests that Matthew gathered together an Aramaic collection of Jesus' words and deeds which would later be deemed the "Q source" by modern Biblical scholars. This source would be translated into Greek, go through multiple redactions, and eventually become the basis for the canonical Gospel of Matthew.[45] Sim admits that this theory is unprovable, but suggests that it is "at least entirely consistent with the wording of Papias' statement" as it both accepts that there was a Semitic original *and* that it needed to be translated (the lack of internal proof of translation being accounted for by multiple recensions).[46] While certainly less romantic than the notion of a "lost proto-Gospel," the second option (that Matthew used a Semitic stylization, not language) is at least consistent with many of the linguistic findings thus far. The linguistic confusion could possibly even explain the later notion by other writers that Matthew wrote in a Semitic language rather than style. Gundry argues that διαλέκτος ought not be translated literally as a Hebrew "translation/dialect" but as a Hebrew "style/syntax" which was imposed onto a Greek text[47] The difficulty with this theory, however, is that Gundry is playing guesswork with linguistic connotation. And, while his theory accounts for the lack of evidence that a Hebrew or Aramaic text ever existed, it assumes that Papias did not intend to use διαλέκτος in its most literal and widely-used meanings—a difficult argument to prove with any degree of certainty.

A final linguistic consideration on the correct translation of διαλέκτος is that of Papias' own statement (in *History of the Church* 3.39.16) that "each translated [Matthew's Gospel] as they were able" (ηρμήνευσεν δ'αυτά ως ήν δυνατός έκαστος).

[45] Sim, "The Gospel of Matthew, John the Elder and the Papias Tradition," 291.

[46] Ibid., 291.

[47] Ibid., 292.

The word ερμηνεύω, as one might expect, has multiple connotations that radically change the meaning of what Papias is trying to get across to his readers. It could imply a literal "translation" from one language to another (or to a vernacular tongue), or it could even imply an "interpretation" or "exposition" of a text for ease of reading. Obviously, the second connotation is compatible with the view that Matthew never wrote a Hebrew Gospel, but rather collected Aramaic sayings into a Q source. However, Kok suggests that ηρμήνευσεν ought to be translated as "they translated" rather than as "they interpreted." He gives five arguments backing up this translation. Firstly, he suggests that διάλεκτος has the connotation of a language rather than syntax or style since it is explicitly modified by Εβραίδι. Secondly, there are many other far-more-explicit words that Papias could have used to imply syntax or style (such as λέξις, φράσις, or απαγγελία), but Papias chooses to use διαλέκτος—the only one of these words to have linguistic connotations. Thirdly, Kok writes that other sources such as the Septuagint and Josephus use διαλέκτος coupled with Εβραίος to denote a Hebrew *language* (Hebrew or Aramaic) rather than a Hebrew style or syntax. Fourthly, ερμηνεύω is never used to imply the recording of dictation by a secondhand author—potentially eliminating the idea that Matthew had not written an actual text that needed to be translated. And, fifthly, the idea that Matthew wrote to the Hebrews in their own tongue (whether that was Hebrew or Aramaic) was virtually unanimously accepted in the Patristic tradition.[48] Thus, the most likely translation, given the arguments presented, seems to be that Matthew wrote "in the Hebrew language, and each translated it according to their ability."

[48] Kok, "Did Papias of Hieropolis Use the Gospel According to the Hebrews as a Source?," 32.

It has been mentioned several times that the "Hebrew language" could easily mean "Aramaic," since that was indeed the "language of the Hebrews." This was the common view since at least the mid-16th-century, rooted in the assumption that Hebrew had largely disappeared as a spoken language by the 1st century AD, and only existed in liturgical and perhaps *some* scholarly uses.[49] It is worth noting that the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (many of which were written in Hebrew) and other Hebrew texts throughout the Israeli desert showed that Hebrew was still used in writing in first-century Palestine.[50] While it is inconclusive whether or not (or to what degree) Hebrew was still in use as a spoken language, it is certainly conclusive that Hebrew was in written use. Therefore, given this finding of Hebrew texts near the Dead Sea, it is well within reason to accept that Matthew did indeed write his Gospel (or proto-Gospel) in the Hebrew language. Therefore, translating Papias' statements regarding Matthew's Gospel literally (that Matthew wrote "in the Hebrew language" is perfectly legitimate—though there would be few scholars who would explicitly agree with that position. Whether or not Matthew's supposed Gospel was written in Hebrew or Aramaic, it *is* certain that *someone* would have had to translate it "according to their ability" in order to make this Gospel or proto-Gospel accessible for a wider audience than that of merely the Jews and Jewish-Christian converts in Judaea.

[49] Howard, Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, 155.

[50] Ibid., 156.

Linguistic Difficulties Regarding Εξήγησις (Exēgesis)

Having discussed the linguistic difficulties surrounding Papias' topic of exposition, this chapter will conclude its study with a brief examination of the title of Papias' work. Macdonald proposes that Papias' work was not in and of itself a primary source, but that his lost five-volume *Exposition on the Oracles of the Lord* were actually a commentary on an even earlier Λόγια Κυριακά which was distinct from Papias' work of a similar name.[51] Essentially, according to Macdonald, the λόγια to which Papias refers is not actually the title of his work, but refers to an earlier work (possibly written as early as 60-70 AD) on which he writes an "exposition" around 110 AD. This matches the claim made in the previous chapter that Matthew's Gospel could well have been in circulation in the early 60's AD while both Peter and Paul were in Rome awaiting execution. In the same vein as Sim, Macdonald believes this primordial work on which Papias comments to possibly be the "Q source" that the Synoptic Gospels were heavily based upon, containing the words and teachings (λόγοι or λόγια) of Christ from direct eyewitnesses. Certainly, this view does not possess widespread support; however, the proposition does serve to provide a somewhat adequate answer to the problems inherent in accepting Papias' hypothesis about the origin of Matthew's Gospel (such as the lack of internal evidence for a Hebrew substratum).

Assuming that Papias did indeed write a commentary on an already-existent work, as MacDonald argues, it is important to understand what exactly Papias means by εξήγησις in the title of his commentary. The use of the word εξήγησις can imply either an "account" or "report" in the singular, or "interpretation" in the plural (εξήγησεις), though

[51] MacDonald, Two Shipwrecked Gospels, ix.

it is not entirely certain what connotation is implied by the title of Papias' work.[52] Thus, we are left with broadly two possibilities: firstly, that Papias wrote an "interpretation of the oracles of the Lord"; or, secondly, that Papias wrote an "account/report on the oracles of the Lord." The use of the singular εξήγησις seems to favor the latter, in MacDonald's view, though he admits that one cannot be entirely certain as to whether Papias' work was historiographical or exegetical.[53] This is an important distinction because it determines whether Papias set out to record *about* an already-published λόγια κυριακά which he perhaps inherited from John, or if he set out to record a non-published oral account of the λόγια κυριακά.

Regarding the language of Papias' title, Macdonald translates εξήγησις as "narrative" or "interpretation," and gives it the same connotation as its English cognate, *exegesis*. This implies that Papias wrote a *commentary* rather than a record.[54] If this is indeed the case, there was in fact a completed text to which Papias had access as he wrote his commentary. This lends further credence to Papias' testimony about Matthew's Hebrew Gospel since he would have had to have direct access to Matthew's text if he were setting out to write a commentary or interpretation of it. On the other hand, Bauckham disagrees with this assertion. He translates εξήγησις as "account" or "report," implying that Papias did not write a commentary on a preexistent text, but rather compiled preexisting Aramaic or Hebrew traditions regarding the "words and deeds" (literally, τά λόγια) of the Lord into a historical text somewhat reminiscent of a Gospel.[55]

[52] Bauckham, "Did Papias Write History or Exegesis?," 487.

[53] MacDonald, Two Shipwrecked Gospels.

[54] Ibid., 3.

[55] Bauckham, "Did Papias Write History or Exegesis?," 487-8.

This view is supported by the fact that the evidence as to whether Papias wrote history or exegesis is scant at best. Thus, any conclusions are rooted in the connotation of εξήγησις rather than in the internal evident within Papias work—as only fragments remain. However, given the fact that Papias himself claims that Matthew had compiled or arranged this λόγια prior to the writing of his *Exposition*, it seems likely that Papias was indeed working with a preexistent text rather than with fragments drawn from various traditions. The later witnesses of Irenaeus, Origen, and the 4th-century writers support this hypothesis as they make no reference to the theory that Papias (rather than Matthew) compiled the λόγια.

Conclusions Regarding the Papian Tradition

This chapter has presented that Papias is the earliest known witness to the Gospel "tradition" which Origen, Irenaeus, and the other early writers speak of; and, he is the primary source to later Ecclesiastical historians—most notably Eusebius. He wrote the work generally referred to as the *Exposition on the Oracles of the Lord* in the early 2nd century, possibly even as early as 110 AD. It has been presented that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that Papias heard this tradition from John the Apostle, the same John known as the "Evangelist" who purportedly authored the Gospel (and possibly the rest of the canonical corpus attributed to John). It has been argued that John the "Elder" is likely a fiction of Eusebius created to discredit the apostolicity of the *Apocalypse of John*—suggesting that Papias never heard from "John the Elder" since "John the Elder" likely never existed. Cross-examining Papias' use of τά λόγια in reference to Matthew's Gospel with his references (using the same terminology) to Mark's Gospel suggests that Papias is

indeed referring to a Gospel proper (or at least a proto-Gospel) rather than to a collection of "sayings" or "discourses" about the Lord. And, while Papias' motives for writing are unclear, it seems as though he wrote a commentary on the λόγια κυριακά purportedly written by Matthew, suggesting that the λόγια was already in circulation as a complete work, and that Papias would have been familiar enough with this text to write a five-volume commentary on it.

The linguistic difficulties present in the title of Papias' work were also presented, showing that there is some level of difficulty in determining what Papias meant in his statement that "Matthew wrote the Oracles of the Lord in the Hebrew language, which each interpreted according to their ability." Several feasible meanings were presented, such as that "Matthew wrote in a Hebrew style or syntax which needed to be exegeted," or even that "Matthew wrote in a Hebrew dialect (likely Aramaic) which needed to be translated." As presented, translating this statement as "Matthew recorded the words and deeds of the Lord in the Hebrew *language*, which each translated according to their ability" is indeed a viable translation, but is also only one of several possible translations—making determining an undisputed translation of the mere *title* of Papias' work extremely difficult, let alone the content. Kok's and MacDonald's scholarship particularly supported the traditional view that Papias wrote a commentary on an already-existent Hebrew- or Aramaic-language Gospel that other had to later translate. It is thus plausible that Papias believed that Matthew wrote his λόγια κυριακά in the Hebrew language (Aramaic, the language *of* the Hebrews, being a likely option, though the Hebrew language is by no means ruled out) given that others had to "translate" it as they were able. And, this account to which Papias refers was quite possibly used (after several

redactions) as the basis for the canonical Greek Gospel of Matthew rather than being directly translated into Greek—accounting for its eventual disappearance as it was gradually replaced by the canonical text. This study will now move to the Patristic authors writing after Papias—those who are both directly influenced by Papias, and those who seem to be utilizing their own sources and traditions.

Chapter 3: Later Patristic Witnesses to a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew

The other Patristic witnesses to the traditional view on the authorship of Matthew's Gospel are Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Jerome, Pantaenus (who is mentioned by Jerome), Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius, Augustine, and Eusebius (who quotes from Papias as his source). All of their arguments state that the original Gospel of Matthew was written in the language of the Jews: Hebrew or, perhaps more likely, Aramaic. The study of these Patristic witnesses will begin with the earliest witnesses after Papias (those writing in the second century AD who were witnesses to an oral "tradition") and will continue into an analysis of the later witnesses (those writing in the fourth and fifth centuries who sought to validate the historicity of the Hebrew Matthean Gospel in order to establish the numbering and authenticity of the four Gospels).

Irenaeus

Irenaeus wrote ca. 180 AD,[56] and he shared the view held by Papias, writing:

> ὁ μὲν δὴ Ματθαῖος ἐν τοῖς Ἑβραίοις τῇ ἰδίᾳ αὐτῶν διαλέκτῳ καὶ γραφὴν ἐξήνεγκεν εὐαγγελίου, τοῦ Πέτρου καὶ τοῦ Παύλου ἐν Ῥώμῃ εὐαγγελιζομένων καὶ θεμελιούντων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν: μετὰ δὲ τὴν τούτων ἔξοδον Μάρκος, ὁ μαθητὴς καὶ ἑρμηνευτὴς Πέτρου, καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ ὑπὸ Πέτρου κηρυσσόμενα ἐγγράφως ἡμῖν παραδέδωκεν...[57]
>
> Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and

[56] Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 1:8.

[57] From Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* (3.1.1) quoted in Eusebius' *Church History* (Perseus Digital Library).

> interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter.[58]

Irenaeus affirms Papias' witness that Matthew wrote first and in the Hebrew dialect (or "language," depending on the translation), and holds that Mark wrote second. Eusebius, dealing with the ordering and authorship of the Gospels, quotes directly from Irenaeus' account (*Church History* 5.8.2), showing that this tradition still held support from later sources.

This would place the authorship of Matthew's Gospel during the early 60s AD, as both Paul (according to the Book of Acts) and Peter (according to tradition) traveled to Rome during the reign of Nero (54-68 AD), where they were both executed (Paul being executed sometime between 64 and 68 AD).[59] Given that Irenaeus claimed that Matthew wrote while Paul was still alive, this would place the authorship of this "Hebrew-dialect Gospel" in the early 60s AD at the latest. Furthermore, Brown suggests that the internal evidence present in Matthew's Gospel (the canonical Greek version, and perhaps any earlier editions as well) suggests that Matthew's Gospel was composed prior to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus' army in 70 AD. Matthew 24 seems to juxtapose the destruction of the Temple with the Eschaton, perhaps suggesting that both *may* coincide with each other, and verse 36 explicitly states that "no one knows" the time in which this is to take place.[60] If this Gospel were composed after the destruction of the Temple, it would be rather apparent to Jesus' listeners when its destruction was to take place. This

[58] Irenaeus of Lyons, "Against Heresies," ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1885), Book III, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.

[59] Raymond E. Brown and Marion L. Soards, *Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Yale Bible reference library (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2016), 436.

[60] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 56.

further suggests that Matthew's Gospel was composed in the mid-60's AD at the latest. The spectrum of contemporary scholarship on Matthean dating is not of particular help in this circumstance given that Matthew's Gospel is dated from any time after Jesus' death to sometime around 100AD. Allison and Davies admit that the external evidence cannot prove beyond a reasonable doubt when *exactly* Matthew's Gospel was composed—only that it was likely composed between 33-100AD given Ignatius' and the *Didache's* reliance upon it.[61]

Dating Matthew's Gospel to the mid-60's is not without its own problems, however. Cross-referencing this date (assuming that Irenaeus was speaking of Peter and Paul being in Rome *during* Nero's reign) with rough estimates of the founding of the Church of Rome leads to a major discrepancy. Simon sees a major chronological error present in Irenaeus' account (which is also present to some extent in other Patristic writers such as Eusebius) in that Rome was already a "fully-functioning Christian community by the time Paul arrived (as early as 58 or 59 AD)."[62] The traditional dating of the establishment of a Christian community in Rome (possibly 42 or 43 AD by Peter, according to tradition[63]) would make Irenaeus' later date of the early 60's a chronological impossibility. Wenham appeals to the internal evidence found within the Acts of the Apostles to provide some credence to the claim that Peter was in Rome in the 40s AD. Acts 28:13-15 describes a delegation from the Roman Church (or at least Roman Christian communities) meeting him upon his arrival in Three Taverns, indicating that

[61] Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 131.

[62] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 58.

[63] For a comprehensive look at this tradition, its origin, and its supporters, see Wenham's scholarly article examining the evidence for this claim (John W. Wenham, "Did Peter Go to Rome in AD 42?," *Tyndale Bulletin* 23 (1972): 94–102).

there was already an established Church within the Roman Empire when Paul arrived sometime around the late 50s or early 60s.[64] In addition, Paul's Letter to the Romans (generally dated around 57 or 58) assumes that there is a community of Roman Christians that was already established sometime prior to his writing. Gorman suggests that a Roman community could have existed since the mid-40s either by missionary efforts or by transit between Jerusalem and Rome by Jewish converts.[65]

Logically, if Irenaeus is to be trusted, Matthew could either have written his supposed Hebrew Gospel earlier (in the early-to-mid 40s) while Peter was purported to be in Rome, or slightly later (in the early 60s) if it was written during Peter and Paul's trip to Rome to be executed. The problem in Irenaeus' testimony seems to be not so much in an erroneous dating of the Gospel, but in confusing the dates for when Peter and Paul were "preaching in Rome." They were certainly in Rome roughly around the same time in the early 60's AD, but it is difficult to prove that they were preaching and founding the Church of Rome as early as the 40's. Eusebius would later write that Matthew "left the Gospel in his mother-tongue due to lack of his personal presence" (*History of the Church* 3.24), suggesting that Matthew composed this Gospel as early as 41 or 42 AD prior to Herod Agrippa I's persecution of Judaean Christians (41-44 AD).[66] Of course, this would rule out dating the Gospel to when Peter and Paul were in Rome to be executed. Davies and Allison reject both early dates (mid-40s and early-60s) for Matthew's authorship,

[64] John W. Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 148.

[65] Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord : A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 397.

[66] Simon, *A Scripture Manual*, vol. 2, 57.

preferring instead to advocate an authorship sometime between 70 and 100 AD.[67] These commentators point to the author's soft stance towards the Gentiles (such as including Jesus' healing of the Centurion's son) and apologetic nature towards the Jews (treating Christ as the fulfillment of prophecy). They suggest that it was written after much of Paul's mission (which was still friendly towards the Jews) but before Christian-Jewish polemics arose in authors such as Ignatius of Antioch.[68] In other words, the internal evidence suggests a much later date than either the mid-40s or mid-60s—the possibilities inherent in Irenaeus' account.

One can see that it is difficult to determine the proper dating of Matthew's supposed writing since there are claims that it was written prior to Matthew leaving Jerusalem *and* that it was written while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome. Matthew either wrote in Jerusalem in the 40s while Peter may have been in Rome, in the 60s while Peter and Paul were in Rome to be executed, or even a few decades later (as Davies and Allison posit). Despite these glaring chronological problems in Irenaeus' account (and the feasible—albeit difficult to prove—ways to rectify them), his witness is still of the utmost importance in that it is one of the earliest accounts to assert that Matthew wrote his Gospel first, and in the Hebrew tongue. Irenaeus would further state that Mark and Luke wrote at an undisclosed time (possibly concurrently) after Matthew's Gospel, and that John's Gospel was written after Mark and Luke.[69] It is important to note that Irenaeus' testimony was considered historical, even to later authors. Eusebius, dealing with the

[67] Davies and Allison, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew, 1:138.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3.1.1.

ordering and authorship of the Gospels, quotes directly from Irenaeus' account (*History of the Church* 5.8.2), showing that this tradition still held support from later sources. Important to consider is that perhaps Irenaeus' account could either be the "earlier tradition" of which Origen speaks, or be one of the earliest witnesses and recorders of this tradition.

Origen

Origen, one of the earliest post-Papian witnesses wrote at the end of the 2nd century AD. He, like the other witnesses, believed that Matthew wrote first in a Hebrew tongue, and that Mark wrote his Gospel *second* while journeying with Peter (during the late-50s to mid-60s AD). Origen's witness echoes that of the other sources and is explicitly based on an earlier tradition. He wrote:

> Concerning the four Gospels which alone are uncontroverted in the Church of God under heaven, I have learned by tradition that the Gospel according to Matthew, who was at one time a publican and afterwards an Apostle of Jesus Christ, was written first; and that he composed it in the Hebrew tongue and published it for the converts from Judaism. The second written was that according to Mark, who wrote it according to the instruction of Peter, who, in his General Epistle, acknowledged him as a son…[70]

Thus, from Origen, the reader is presented with three major assertions regarding Matthew's Gospel: that its early authorship is attested in an earlier tradition, that the numbering of the Gospels was fairly well set by the end of the 2nd century (with Matthew's as the first), and that the numbering was four. This tradition is clearly echoed

[70] Origen of Alexandria, "Commentary on Matthew," ed. Allan Menzies, trans. John Patrick, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1896), Book I (fragment).

in other writers of the second and early-third centuries such as Clement of Alexandria,[71] and seems to be taken for granted by the other authors (who see no reason to defend this claim). Origen's witness, while a simple statement, is a perfect summation of the general consensus of the Patristic witnesses: Matthew wrote the Gospel attested to his name, Matthew wrote first, and Matthew wrote in Hebrew. Origen says little else about the authorship of Matthew, but he is certainly not the first Ecclesiastical writer to make such a claim—though he is among the earliest witnesses. Origen inherited this tradition from an even earlier source; however, it is unclear if Papias (writing in the early 2nd century) was Origen's source or if he inherited this tradition from someone else. Regardless, this claim regarding Matthew's Hebrew authorship is echoed by Origen's contemporary, Irenaeus.

Augustine

By the time of Augustine's writing (the mid-to-late 4th century to the early 5th century AD), the numbering and ordering of the four Gospels was already well-established and not a subject of debate. Augustine writes that the "Four Evangelists" wrote in the order of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—the traditional numbering. He goes even further to suggest that the ordering of authorship is rooted in individual "tasks"

[71] See Clement of Alexandria's *Miscellanies*, 1.21. While Clement does not deal principally with the authors of the Gospels, he *does* mention the Gospel of Matthew by name. He matter-of-factly refers to "the Gospel according to Matthew" and then quotes from Matt 1:17, specifically quoting Jesus' genealogy in Matthew's prologue. This is important in that it shows the existence (at least in some form) of a completed Gospel of Matthew that was used for catechetical and theological discourse among the Church Fathers.

given to them in regard to writing, and that their seniority as first-hand witnesses to Jesus determined the preeminence of their ordering.[72] Augustine wrote:

> Those unquestionably came first in order who were actually followers of the Lord when He was present in the flesh, and who heard Him speak and saw Him act; and [with a commission received] from His lips they were dispatched to preach the gospel.[73]

Augustine asserted that Matthew and John, as witnesses and followers of Jesus, anchored the Gospel ordering. Matthew took the first priority, and John the last, both being those "whom the Lord chose before the Passover."[74] Mark and Luke, according to Augustine's witness were "like sons who were to be embraced" and benefited from the accounts of Matthew and John in order to compose their own accounts of the deeds and teachings of Jesus. While Augustine sees Mark and Luke as no less authoritative than Matthew and John, the latter two obviously receive a sort of priority. Matthew and John were the only two Gospels purported to be written by original members of the Twelve Disciples, adding to their authoritative nature (Matthew's having pride of place).[75]

Augustine's sentiment regarding Matthew's preeminence among the Gospels is echoed by much of the early Church, and he is certainly not the first to ascribe priority to Matthew's Gospel over the other Synoptics. Augustine concludes his discussion on the authorship of the Gospels by asserting that, of the four Evangelists, only Matthew wrote in the "Hebrew language," the others choosing to write in Greek. He also asserted that each author wrote with full knowledge and exposure to the other three Evangelists,

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[72] Augustine of Hippo, "Harmony of the Gospels," ed. Philip Schaff, trans. S.D.F Salmond, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1888). Book I, c. 2.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Augustine of Hippo, "Harmony of the Gospels."

[75] Ibid.

accounting for material unique to each Evangelist since they each wanted to offer a somewhat unique perspective of the same story.[76] Of course, Augustine says nothing of how Matthew's supposed Hebrew Gospel became the canonical Greek Gospel accepted into the Church's Biblical canons. The reader is left with uncertainties as to what became of this Hebrew text, where the Greek canonical text arose from and whether or not it was a translation, who wrote the canonical version, and why the Hebrew text was considered non-canonical by the time of the earliest codices.

Eusebius

Eusebius (b. 260-265 AD, d. 339-340 AD), along with Jerome and Augustine, can be considered of the utmost importance concerning early witnesses to Matthew's Gospel.[77] He offers both his own historical research on the matter (drawing again from earlier traditions) *and* he quotes many of the other early writers regarding the Gospels' authorship. Eusebius wrote, in his estimation, on good authority that Matthew was a Hebrew who preached to the Hebrews and, prior to preaching to the Gentiles, recorded a Gospel in his "native tongue." [78] Eusebius claims Origen, Irenaeus, and Papias as his authoritative witnesses for this claim. In fact, his *History of the Church* contains the only

[76] Ibid.

[77] The Greek text of Eusebius' *History of the Church* is taken from the Perseus Digital Library (Gregory R. Crane, ed., "Historia Ecclesiastica," Perseus Digital Library, http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper, accessed June 2018).

[78] Eusebius of Caesarea, "History of the Church," ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1890), Book III, Chapter 24, Paragraphs 6-7.

existent non-fragmental writings attributed to Papias of Hierapolis.[79] Furthermore, Papias is the main source cited by Eusebius in his discussions of the authorship of the four Gospels. Eusebius documents that Papias was a "hearer of John," a "companion of Polycarp" (69-156 AD), and the author of "five books" entitled *Expositions on the Oracles of the Lord* (Λογίων Κυριακών Εξηγήσεως).[80] Eusebius, claiming to quote directly from Papias' work, wrote that Matthew wrote "the oracles of the Lord" in the "Hebrew language," which were then "interpreted" by all who heard them "as they were able" (or "according to their ability").[81] Thus, as was treated in greater detail in the previous chapter, Eusebius' use of Papias leaves some rather gaping holes to fill for the reader. What precisely is an "oracle" of the Lord? Did "interpreting" have to do with translation or exegesis by the readers? Is the "Hebrew language" the literal *Hebrew* language, or a language (such as Aramaic) *used* by the Hebrews?[82]

Eusebius attributed this knowledge of Papias and his writings to the witness of Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp. Essentially, "John" taught Polycarp and Papias, who in turn both taught Irenaeus, who handed down this tradition of the Gospels as documented in Papias' writings, which was quoted and attested to by Eusebius. Certainly, this brings up some reasonable doubts regarding the authenticity of this witness, as Papias and Eusebius are separated by several witnesses and more than a century of time. Eusebius is

[79] While various books include the writings attributed to Papias, they are mainly fragmental or reconstructed artificially from fragments.

[80] Eusebius of Caesarea, "History of the Church," Book III, Chapter 39, Paragraph 1.

[81] …περί δέ τού Ματθαίου ταύτ είρεται: Ματθαίος μέν ούν Εβραίδι διαλέκτω τά λόγια συνετάξατο, ηρμήνευσεν δ αυτά ώς ήν δυνατός έκαστος.

[82] In *History of the Church,* III, 39, 16, Eusebius does not personally refer to the "Oracles of the Lord" as did Papias, but to a "Gospel of the Hebrews" which—his language seems to assume—is a well-known text to his readers.

writing what he has heard from tradition and what has been recorded before him over the preceding century, though this in no way necessarily invalidates Eusebius' claims. The difficulty lies in the utter dearth of complete primary material from Papias himself. We are essentially forced to trust the witness of Eusebius quoting from Papias on the good authority of Irenaeus. If Eusebius' testimony is true, however, Irenaeus would have been very familiar with Papias as Papias would have been an elder disciple of John and a contemporary of Polycarp—Irenaeus' mentor. Irenaeus would then be a very trustworthy source regarding Papias, and the fact that Eusebius cites Irenaeus who cites Papias would be a moot point as the sources in questions would be reliable. If Eusebius' documentation is true, then Papias is very likely the earliest source of the "tradition" of the four Gospels and their authorship (receiving this tradition directly from firsthand or secondhand witnesses) and is perhaps even the source of the "tradition" to which Origen and others writers refer.

Eusebius does not rely on Papias exclusively for information on Matthew's authorship, though Papias seems to be the hinge of Eusebius' argument. He also quotes directly from Origen's *Commentary on Matthew*, which was previously mentioned.[83] This adds further credibility to Origen's witness as the "tradition" which Origen received was obviously well-established and reliable enough for Eusebius to quote him verbatim in the *History of the Church*. Again, the problem exists in that Eusebius is quoting Origen, who received the tradition from someone else—perhaps Papias, though this is unclear. While being several witnesses removed from a primary source does not *necessarily* forfeit credibility, it certainly makes discovering the original tradition more

[83] Eusebius of Caesarea, "History of the Church," Book VI, Chapter 35, Paragraph 4.

difficult. Manor brings attention to this "clear, though often overlooked" problem of Eusebius' source-material by restating that Eusebius is almost always paraphrasing a written account, not copying verbatim a primary source.[84] Eusebius' typical language throughout *History of the Church* makes this quite clear insofar as he uses statements such as "a record preserves" (3.24.5), "it is said" (3.24.7,11), and "the record is certainly true" (3.24.8). However, despite the strong possibility that Eusebius *does* include some actual writings of Papias and other sources in his work, Manor points out that there are two major areas which should cause the reader pause in assuming Eusebius' complete trustworthiness.

First, Eusebius frequently intersperses supposed quotes from primary sources with his own commentary, so it is highly difficult to determine what is a copy from an earlier source and what is Eusebius' own writing. Second, Eusebius' discourse on the correct ordering of the Gospels is unique to his own work and is not attributed to Papias—though it is interspersed with his supposed quotes from Papias. Thus, Eusebius is likely offering his own commentary from other sources. Manor claims that the addition of Eusebius' own commentary makes it almost impossible to determine if his mention of the Hebrew Matthew is *actually* quoted from Papias, or if it is Eusebius' own addition, as were many other portions of *History of the Church* 3.24.[85] If Eusebius does not concern himself with strict adherence to the Papian tradition when discussing the origins of the other three Gospels, why should the reader assume he would do so with the origin of Matthew's Gospel? If this is indeed the case, then the "tradition" attributed to Papias may not be as

[84] T. Scot Manor, "Papias, Origen, and Eusebius: The Criticisms and Defense of the Gospel of John," *Vigiliae Christianae* 67, no. 1 (January 2013): 1–21, 2-3.

[85] Ibid., 4.

ancient as was once thought; it may be a Eusebian addition. It is also important to consider the slightly antagonistic yet unpredictable view that Eusebius takes towards Papias in several instances. In *History of the Church* 3.36.2, Eusebius refers to Papias as "a man most learned in all matters, and well acquainted with the Scriptures." But, in 3.39.11-13, he refers to Papias as "a man of extremely small intelligence." Hall suggests that this antagonism had much to do with a major difference in hermeneutics between some of the earlier authors (such as Papias) and some of the later Patristic authors (such as Eusebius) regarding Millenarianism.[86] While an in-depth study on this theological position is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth nothing that some earlier authors such as Papias held to a literal "thousand year reign" of Christ at the Second Coming, while later Alexandrian authors such as Eusebius interpreted apocalyptic prophecy allegorically.[87] This led to no small antagonism between competing schools, and Shanks considers the antagonism to be strong enough to place an agenda (and thus to cast some level of doubt) on nearly anything Eusebius says about Papias. While the reality may not be as extreme as Shanks suggests, there are certainly questions concerning Eusebius' use of Papias. Both Manor and Shanks consider Eusebius' testimony about Papias to be questionable at best given the two Patristic authors' theological differences and the questionable historicity of Eusebius' account of Papias.

[86] Edward H. Hall, Papias and His Contemporaries: A Study of Religious Thought in the Second Century (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1899), 107.

[87] Monte Allen Shanks, *Papias and the New Testament* (Eugene, Or.: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 290-2.

Jerome

Jerome is another major witness to the existence of a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, though contemporary scholarship has identified many major yet easily-made flaws in his witness (mainly hinging upon his use of hearsay rather than eyewitness regarding the Gospel). Jerome wrote that Matthew wrote a Gospel which was published in Judaea in Hebrew in order to preach to the circumcised believers (Jewish-Christians). The Gospel itself was later translated into Greek by an unknown author and would enter wider circulation as the canonical (Greek) Gospel of Matthew.[88] This witness itself is not problematic as it echoes the views held by the aforementioned authors, though it adds to the tradition some mystery surrounding Matthew's Gospel in its standard Greek form. Jerome only attributes the Hebrew Gospel to Matthew; he considers the Greek text a translation of unknown origin. Interestingly, Jerome claimed that the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew was *still in existence* at the time of his work on the *Vulgata* and was being held in a library in Caesarea thanks to the "diligence" of Pamphilus (d. 309 AD). While Jerome did not claim to have personally seen this volume, nor was he eminently familiar with it, he claimed that it was described to him by the "Nazarenes of Beroea, a city of Syria, who use it."[89]

Kok suggests that every reference to the Hebrew Gospel made by Jerome is based on Eusebius' witness, and that Eusebius was only familiar with secondhand sources

[88] Jerome, "The Lives of Illustrious Men," ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892), Chapter 3.

[89] Ibid.

regarding this Gospel—not the actual text.[90] This makes it very difficult to determine whether or not Jerome's testimony is accurate. Kok's study explains that there *were* Hebrew "Gospels" (or Greek "Gospels" used by Jewish-Christian communities) in existence roughly around the time of Jerome's translation of the Latin Bible (392-393 AD). But, they were apocryphal texts written sometime after the canonical Gospels were composed. Jerome may have confused one of these apocryphal texts in circulation as the supposed original Gospel of Matthew. The three primary Gnostic Gospels to which Jerome may have be referring were the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (a Greek text used primarily in Alexandria), the *Gospel according to the Ebionites* (a Greek synthesis of the Synoptics, but which is only ever referred to by Epiphanius[91]), and the *Gospel according to the Nazoreans* (an Aramaic text loosely based on Matthew's Gospel). This last Gospel may very well have been the text described to Jerome by a Nazorean sect near Beroea.[92]

Furthermore, these Nazoreans *may* have provided Jerome with certain sections of their text for use in his translations. Kok suggests that certain parts of Jerome's Latin translation of the Gospel according to Matthew (the canonical Latin Vulgate version) may have taken some translations from the *Gospel according to the Nazoreans*—not verbatim, but as an extra source with which to cross-reference the Greek, Hebrew, and Old Latin texts with which Jerome was working.[93] At the very least, Jerome considered the "Gospel according to the Hebrews" to which he referred (be it apocryphal or not) as

[90] Michael J. Kok, "Did Papias of Hieropolis Use the Gospel According to the Hebrews as a Source?," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 25, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 29–53, 35.

[91] See Epiphanius' *Panarion*, 51.5.1.

[92] Kok, "Did Papias of Hieropolis Use the Gospel According to the Hebrews as a Source?," 39.

[93] Ibid., 41.

an authoritative and original text and perhaps even the "original" Gospel according to Matthew. The question remains as to how far back this confusion dates. Is the "tradition" of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew which was cited by Origen and other early writers another case of mistaken Gospel identity? On one hand, the apocryphal texts in question were written well over a century after the original Gospels and the early (Papian) commentary about them—suggesting that the earliest witnesses would likely not have been tricked by an apocryphal text. On the other hand, if even Jerome, a skilled and well-studied scholar could make such an egregious mistake, then perhaps other earlier authors could have made similar mistakes (if the post-Papian witnesses were familiar with, and tricked by, apocryphal texts). Accepting that Jerome confused two different texts would also mean that Pamphilus would have accidently brought an apocryphal Gospel to the library in Caesarea, given that Jerome was operating under the assumption that Pamphilus was the one to preserve the Hebrew Gospel. This could easily date the "mistaken" tradition to a century or more before Jerome translated the Scriptures. Perhaps Pamphilus was under the impression that he was preserving Matthew's Gospel but was actually preserving the *Gospel according to the Nazoreans* (or one of the other two apocryphal texts).

Stonehouse suggests that a similar mistake may have easily been made by Papias or his contemporaries, perhaps mistaking an Aramaic or Hebrew translation of the canonical Gospel of Matthew as the original Gospel.[94] Of course, this raises the question as to how the early writers could be so unfamiliar with the canonical Gospel of Matthew that they mistook it for a Greek translation of an Aramaic (or Hebrew) apocryphal text. It seems to be a *bit* of a stretch to assume that Papias (who was acquainted with direct

[94] Stonehouse, Origins of the Synoptic Gospels, 91-92.

successors of the Apostles: Polycarp, John the Elder, and others) or other early writers could be duped by an apocryphal text so soon after the authorship of the canonical text. The mistake on Jerome's part is far more understandable as he was centuries removed from the Apostles, he had significantly more apocryphal texts to deal with, and he inherited a tradition of authorship which may have already been flawed. If nothing else, it seems relatively evident that Jerome was operating under a different "tradition" than the one described by Origen and Irenaeus given that his sources are different. Jerome believed that the text in the Caesarean library (which he very well may have been acquainted with) was the Hebrew text mentioned by earlier authors; but, given the evidence presented, it seems as though he was mistaken. If this is true, then there was an obvious break between the tradition that Origen and Irenaeus passed on and the emergence and circulation of apocryphal "Hebrew Gospels."

Minor Witnesses

Two more witnesses worth mentioning are Pantaenus (d. 190-200) and Epiphanius (c. 315-403). Pantaenus is mentioned by Jerome as having found Christians in India who had already had the Gospel preached to them. These Christians were purported to be in possession of a Hebrew-language Gospel according to Matthew.[95] Epiphanius, similarly to Jerome, speaks of a Hebrew-language Gospel of Matthew possessed by the Ebionites and Nazoreans, which they call the "Gospel According to the Hebrews."[96] Of

[95] Jerome, "The Lives of Illustrious Men," ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2 (Buffalo, N.Y.: Christian Literature Publishing, 1892), Chapter 36.

[96] Copied from Wenham, Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem, 118.

course, the same issue inherent to Jerome's witnesses is also inherent to Epiphanius': the Hebrew "Gospels" in the possession of the Ebionites and Nazoreans were apocryphal gospels, neither of which were the canonical Gospel according to Matthew.

Conclusions and Further Questions

The earliest Patristic witnesses are clear that there was a "tradition" given to them that Matthew wrote a Gospel in the Hebrew tongue. Papias seems to be the earliest known purveyor of this theory (maybe even the earliest), and Origen and Irenaeus take up this tradition. Augustine and Eusebius quote from these earliest witnesses, and treat their testimonies as though they were obvious, that there was no need for further examination of their credibility. Jerome claims to be a direct witness to the Hebrew Matthean Gospel, and he claims that Pantaenus was as well. Similarly to Jerome, Epiphanius speaks of a Hebrew Matthean Gospel being held by the Ebionites and Nazoreans. Despite these Patristic witnesses being unanimous about a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew existing, Kok and Stonehouse have shown that there is good evidence to suggest that mistakes were made sometime between the handing on of the "tradition" and Jerome's examination of the Scriptural texts. Shanks and Hall demonstrated that a rather glaring chronological problem exists in Irenaeus' account (later embraced by Eusebius) given that Irenaeus claimed that the Gospel was written while Peter and Paul were in Rome (the mid-60's AD). Irenaeus' testimony also seems to suggest that Matthew wrote his Gospel while Peter was possibly in Rome in the mid-40's AD—a discrepancy of nearly twenty years from when Peter and Paul would *both* be in Rome (during Nero's emperorship). Allison and Davies reject both of these early dates, placing Matthew's authorship closer to the

end of the 1st century AD. Kok and Manor also show that there is a discrepancy between Eusebius' account and the reality concerning Papias and his writings. In addition, Kok suggests that it is likely that what Jerome believed to be the authentic and original Hebrew Gospel of Matthew mentioned by the earlier witnesses was, in reality, an apocryphal text of dubious authorship and content. Thus, while the Patristic witnesses are unanimous in their acceptance of a Hebrew Matthean priority, there are numerous problems in these witnesses that cast a shadow of doubt on the legitimacy of their claims.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The problem addressed in the preceding chapters is that the earliest external evidence regarding the authorship of Matthew's Gospel does not match with the internal evidence brought forward by contemporary scholars. This thesis sought to examine the veracity and plausibility of the external evidence presented by the Patristic witnesses. The unanimous Patristic position regarding the Gospel according to Matthew is that Matthew's Gospel was the first to be written, and that it was written in the Hebrew tongue. The Patristic emphasis on the preeminence of Matthew's Gospel is seen as early as the beginning of the 2nd century with the writings of Clement of Rome, Barnabus, and Ignatius of Antioch—who all show clear preference for the Gospel according to Matthew in their Epistles. In addition, Matthew's Gospel is also the primary Gospel used for teaching purposes in the Διδαχή, showing its preeminence as a catechetical text. France suggests that the frequent usage of Matthew's Gospel in these writings shows the unquestionable place of primacy that this Gospel enjoyed as early as the first decade of the 2nd century AD. This preeminence is further seen in Matthew's Gospel being placed first among the Four Gospels in all early manuscripts (particularly in the *Vaticanus* and *Sinaiticus*), showing that this Patristic tradition was codified by the 4th and 5th centuries AD. Certainly by the time of Augustine and Jerome, the Patristic tradition of Matthean priority was unquestioned in the Church. Despite this tradition of Matthew's priority among the Gospels, contemporary scholarship has veered away from the traditional view to embrace Markan priority. Streeter's work showed that the Greek of Matthew's Gospel seemed to be based on Mark's Gospel rather than on the supposed Hebrew original of which the Patristic witnesses spoke. And, Matthew's Gospel seems to be a more elegant

expansion of Markan material rather than a translation of a Semitic text. Having established generally the preeminence Matthew's Gospel enjoyed in the first centuries of the Church, each Patristic witness was then examined in detail so as to determine if and how their witnesses fall short of plausibility.

The earliest—and arguably most important—witness to this tradition of a Hebrew Matthean Gospel is Papias, the Bishop of Hieropolis, who lived sometime between 60 and 130 AD. What we know of Papias and his writings comes to us from Irenaeus, whose testimony is used later by Eusebius. Bauckham posits that Papias was likely of a similar age to Polycarp, and that both were disciples of John the Evangelist (one of the Twelve). Gundry argues that Papias likely wrote his *Exposition on the Oracles of the Lord* (Λόγια Κυριακά Εξήγησις) sometime around 110AD. Eusebius attributed to Papias the tradition that Matthew wrote "the oracles of the Lord" in the "Hebrew language," which were then "interpreted" by all who heard them "as they were able" (or "according to their ability"), which Papias learned from John. Eusebius differentiates between John the Elder and John the Evangelist (also referred to as "John the Apostle"), believing that Papias received instruction from the Elder, not the Apostle. Gundry proposes that Eusebius simply created a character (the so-called "John the Elder") in order to discredit Papias' witness due to theological differences. Sim disagrees with this attribution of malicious intent to Eusebius, arguing instead that Irenaeus was wrong about Papias' Apostolic tutelage and that Eusebius was simply recording what he had heard from his sources about Papias. Shanks argues that since Eusebius is the *only* witness to differentiate John the Elder and John the Evangelist, Eusebius' witness becomes more questionable than Papias' or anyone else's. Shanks agrees with Irenaeus, the earlier witness, that Papias—if indeed he

did hear from John—heard from John the Evangelist. While John the Elder certainly *could* have been an early and reliable source about the origins of the Gospel of Matthew, Eusebius is the only one to mention his existence. Proving that Papias had received this tradition from none other than John the Evangelist would lend even greater weight to his veracity as a witness.

Origen is the inheritor of a "tradition" that Matthew wrote the first Gospel, wrote it in the Hebrew tongue, and wrote it for Hebrew converts. He also claimed that Mark wrote second while under the tutelage of Peter. Irenaeus claimed that Matthew wrote a Gospel in the Hebrew dialect (though this word's exact connotation is unclear) while Peter and Paul were "preaching in Rome." The problem with this witness is that Peter was *possibly* in Rome as early as the 40s AD, but Peter and Paul were likely never in Rome together until the early 60s when they travelled to Rome to be executed, according to Brown. Allison and Davies admit that there is little consensus as to when exactly Matthew's Gospel was written, though they hold to a later date closer to 100. Simon adds that Rome was already a thriving Church by the time Paul arrived in the late 50s AD, a view supported by Wenham and Gorman. The confusion in regards to Irenaeus' testimony seems to stem from a misunderstanding of when Peter and Paul were in Rome. Irenaeus could only mean that Matthew wrote while Peter was preaching in Rome (possibly in the 40s), or while Peter and Paul were in Rome concurrently (during the early 60s) to be executed. Allison and Davies push Matthew's authorship closer to the end of the 1st century AD. While Irenaeus is an important witness *that* Matthew wrote first and wrote in Hebrew, his account has too many inconsistencies to be considered beyond question. Augustine, while never explicitly citing his sources, claims that

Matthew and John both received commission from the Lord to compose Gospel narratives—with Matthew completing his first. He also claims that Matthew was the only Evangelist to write in Hebrew. While Augustine's testimony echoes the other witnesses, it is unclear as to how he inherited this knowledge and from whom. Furthermore, it is unclear why Augustine would mention a Hebrew Gospel that, at the time of his writing, was no longer considered canonical (being replaced with the Greek version).

Eusebius offers historical insights as well as quotations and paraphrases from earlier sources, making him one of the most important witnesses to be drawn upon. He cites Origen, Irenaeus, and Papias as his sources for the tradition that Matthew was a Hebrew who wrote a Hebrew Gospel for the Hebrews prior to preaching to the Gentiles. This, at least, echoes Irenaeus' claim that Matthew wrote prior to leaving Jerusalem, and lends some credence to a date of authorship sometime in the 40s AD. Eusebius is also the only author to contain fragments of the writings of Papias, the earliest recorded witness to a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew and Eusebius' primary source for this tradition. Eusebius claimed that "John" taught Polycarp and Papias, who taught Irenaeus, who handed down this tradition which was eventually codified by Eusebius. Of course, Papias (early 2nd century) and Eusebius (4th century) are several generations removed, and there could certainly have been mistakes made in the transmission of this tradition. Manor distrusts Eusebius' witness on account of the fact that he paraphrases the earlier witnesses more often than he quotes them and added his own commentary to his paraphrases, making it difficult to know how much of Eusebius' writing is his own and how much is attributed. Both Hall and Shanks caution against trusting Eusebius' paraphrases of Papias given that Eusebius' uncertain opinion of Papias could have influenced his writing. In one place,

Eusebius sings the praises of Papias while, in another place, he calls him unlearned and stupid. Hall proposes that Eusebius' vehement disagreement with Papias' Millenarianism should cause the contemporary reader pause in accepting verbatim Eusebius' supposed carrying-on of the Papian tradition.

Jerome claims that Matthew wrote a Hebrew Gospel in Judaea which was later translated into Greek. He is also the only Patristic witness who explicitly claims to have seen a Hebrew Gospel of Matthew, claiming that Pamphilus had brought this Gospel to the library in Caesarea for use by the Nazoreans of Beroea (in Syria). Kok rejects this witness outright, believing that Jerome was only repeating what he had been told as a secondhand source (likely from Eusebius). Kok goes on to state that the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew with which Jerome was supposedly acquainted was in actuality one of several apocryphal gospels in circulation such as the *Gospel according to the Hebrews*, the *Gospel according to the Nazoreans*, or the *Gospel according to the Ebionites*. Given that the Nazoreans used an apocryphal gospel, it seems likely that Jerome mistook this text for the supposed Hebrew original of Matthew's Gospel. If Kok's position is correct, that would mean there is a major discrepancy between Jerome's testimony and the testimonies of the earlier sources such as Irenaeus and Origen. Jerome, thinking he had found evidence of the tradition of Matthew's Hebrew Gospel, was erroneously attributing canonicity to an apocryphal text. It is unclear how far back this confusion between the canonical Matthean Gospel and the various apocryphal gospels stretches. It is also unclear as to whether or not Pamphilus mistakenly brought an apocryphal Gospel to the library in Caesarea. Stonehouse agrees that some form of confusion between a canonical and apocryphal text may have occurred at some point, perhaps even as early as Papias.

However, it does seem somewhat questionable that the earliest Patristic writers were so unfamiliar with the Gospel according to Matthew that they confused it with a non-canonical text. Furthermore, Kok's position does not consider Jerome's familiarity with the Biblical texts as authoritative in any regard. This author finds it difficult to accept that a scholar acquainted with Latin, Greek, and Hebrew Scriptures would so easily mistake the *preeminent* Gospel of the early Church with an apocryphal text.

This author would add three thoughts to this discussion: First, why would Eusebius make the effort to (purportedly) quote Papias verbatim throughout chapter three of *History of the Church*, but paraphrase an immensely important "preface" which supposedly contained the proof that Papias learned from John the Elder? Second, given Eusebius' theological and personal bias against Papias, this author agrees with Shanks and Gundry that Eusebius' paraphrases of Papias ought to be considered the *least* reliable witness to the words attributed to Papias. Third, given the first two statements, this author finds it eminently plausible that Eusebius inserted his own biased statement into the beginning of 3.39.2—a purported Papian "preface" that only exists as a Eusebian paraphrase. This insertion would explicitly downplay the idea that Papias was taught by John the Evangelist, as Irenaeus explicitly attests to. It seems that the earlier—and arguably more reliable—witnesses affirm that Papias learned of the Hebrew Gospel of Matthew from none other than Matthew's companion and fellow Disciple, John the Evangelist.

The linguistic difficulties in Papias' account (quoted by Eusebius) were examined, showing that there is a multiplicity of feasible translations of *History of the Church* 3.39.16 that drastically change the meaning of Papias' account of the authorship

of Matthew. It is unclear whether the Λόγια Κυριακά Εξήγησις (mentioned in 3.39.1) was an exposition on a Gospel proper or an exposition of a collection of sayings. In 3.39.16, Papias used τά λόγια in order to directly reference Matthew's Gospel. Donovan states that τά λόγια [θεού] always refers (from Biblical connotation) to a Gospel proper, not a collection of sayings. Thus, he believes that Papias did indeed have access to a primordial Gospel according to Matthew, on which he wrote his Exposition. Sim takes the opposite view, believing that Papias merely collected and wrote a commentary on an assortment of sayings and deeds of the Lord—which was likely written in Hebrew or Aramaic. However, MacDonald and Shanks point out that Papias uses the same word to refer to Mark's *Gospel* (τά λόγια) as he does to refer to the supposed *Oracles/Discourses,* making it plausible that Papias is referring to a Matthean Gospel rather than simply a collection of saying or discourses. Bauchham, on the other hand, believes that Papias was merely compiling a collection of sayings, rather than writing a commentary on a Gospel, since it is difficult to determine whether Papias was writing a historical or exegetical account.

Furthermore, it is difficult to determine what Papias means by Εβραίδι διαλέκτος. Translations for this phrase could range from "Hebrew language" to "a language used by Hebrews" or even a "Hebrew style." Hall and Allison and Davies reject that the Greek Gospel of Matthew is a translation of a Hebrew original due to the elegance and artistry of the Greek employed by Matthew. However, it is possible that a "Hebrew language" Gospel of Matthew was in circulation, just as other texts such as Josephus' *Jewish War* were published in multiple languages. What Papias meant by Εβραίδι is unclear since it could imply Hebrew (the language proper) or Aramaic (the language *of* the Hebrews).

The discovery of 1st century Hebrew-language texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls proved that Hebrew was indeed still in usage as a liturgical and scholarly language, increasing the plausibility of Papias' claim. Sim believes that a Semitic original could very well have existed, but only as a proto-Gospel which would influence the authorship of the canonical Greek version, not as a Gospel which was later *translated* into Greek. Gundry takes a stronger position against translating the text as "language" proper by asserting that the term should be translated as "Hebrew style." He argues that it is apparent that the author of Matthew's Gospel was familiar with Hebrew customs, prophecy, and Scripture; and, this familiarity lends to the Gospel's "Hebrew style." According to Kok, διαλέκτος, when modified by Εβραίδι, could only mean the "Hebrew language" rather than a Hebrew style or dialect. He points to the fact that the Septuagint and Josephus only use this phrase to denote the Hebrew language proper. Furthermore, it is unclear if Papias means that each one would "translate" or "interpret" (ηρμήνευσεν) this Hebrew Gospel as they were able. Kok would translate ερμενεύω as "to translate" rather than "to interpret" due to the fact that διαλέκτος is modified by Εβραίδι, showing a clear focus on language to be translated rather than context to be interpreted. Based on Sim and Kok's research, it is feasible to say that Papias (quoted by Eusebius) wrote that Matthew authored a Gospel in the Hebrew language which each one translated as they were able. Hall, Allison, Davies, and Gundry disagree with the assertion that there was ever a Hebrew Gospel "translated" into a Greek form. Rather, they hold that it is plausible that a Semitic proto-Gospel or collection of discourses likely existed which influenced the authorship of a canonical Greek version at an undisclosed date.

Certainly, the research presented is limited in scope in that there are relatively few early witnesses concerning the authorship of Matthew's Gospel, and no eyewitnesses who wrote about the Gospel's composition. Papias and Irenaeus are the earliest, with Origen taking up the tradition he likely received from them. The later witnesses (Augustine, Jerome, and Eusebius) are commenting on a tradition which has already been well-established by the time they wrote. It is clear that Matthew held a place of priority within the early Church. Its use as a teaching resource and exemplar Gospel makes this clear, as does its listing as the first among Gospels. It is also clear that the Patristic witnesses unanimously held that Matthew wrote first and wrote in the Hebrew language. What is not clear is whether or not they believed this Hebrew Gospel was written in Hebrew or Aramaic. It is unclear if they believed that the Hebrew Gospel was translated into the Greek Gospel of Matthew, or if it was an influential proto-Gospel. It is unclear if the later witnesses confused the Hebrew Matthean Gospel with an apocryphal text. The chronological and textual discrepancies present within the witnesses makes it impossible to accept their claims verbatim. Furthermore, the question as to what happened to any supposed Hebrew Gospel is unanswered—and will likely remain that way. However, based on the research presented, it is a *plausible* assertion that there was at one point a Hebrew-language Gospel written; this Gospel was known to Papias and Irenaeus, who handed on this tradition; and, this Gospel likely influenced the canonical Gospel of Matthew, but was not translated *into* the canonical Gospel according to Matthew.

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