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C. E. B. Cranfield

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## INTRODUCTION

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## I. AUTHORSHIP, DATE AND PLACE OF WRITING

### I. EARLY TRADITION

The earliest extant statement about the Gospel according to St Mark is a quotation in Eusebius (*H.E.* III. 39) from a lost exposition of the Lord's sayings written by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, about A.D. 140. It may be translated as follows:

This also the Elder said: Mark, who became Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately, though not in order, all that he remembered of the things said or done by the Lord. For he had neither heard the Lord nor been one of His followers, but afterwards, as I said, he had followed Peter, who used to compose his discourses with a view to the needs [of his hearers], but not as if he were composing a systematic account of the Lord's sayings. So Mark did nothing blameworthy in thus writing some things just as he remembered them; for he was careful of this one thing, to omit none of the things he had heard and to make no untrue statement therein.<sup>1</sup>

The first sentence at any rate—and this is the vital one—is a quotation within a quotation and gives us the testimony of an older contemporary of Papias who is probably to be identified with the Elder John mentioned by him in another passage which Eusebius has just quoted. It is thus evidence of what was believed in the province of Asia at the beginning of the second century. It represents Mark as closely associated with Peter and testifies to his accuracy, while at the same time drawing attention to a certain lack of order in his gospel (whether the reference is to chronological order or to systematic arrangement and comprehensiveness is not clear). The exact meaning of *ἐρμηνευτῆς Πέτρον γενόμενος* is problematical—perhaps that Mark acted as interpreter when

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Peter was teaching, translating his Aramaic into Greek, or perhaps that by writing down Peter's reminiscences he made them available to more people. The second and third sentences are probably not part of the quotation, but they probably gloss it correctly. They explain the lack of order as due to Mark's not having been himself a first-hand witness but having derived his information from Peter's discourses, and underline the Elder's testimony to Mark's accuracy.

Justin Martyr's reference to Peter's<sup>1</sup> 'memoirs' (*Dial.* 106) is probably a reference to Mark; for the words he quotes occur only in Mark. If so, it is another testimony (before 161) to the close connection between this gospel and Peter.

The 'Anti-Marcionite Prologue' to Mark is perhaps to be dated as early as 160–80 (though some would date it much \*later). The beginning is lost. What remains may be translated as follows:

... Mark declared, who is called 'Stump-fingered' because he had short fingers in comparison with the size of the rest of his body. He was Peter's interpreter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy.<sup>2</sup>

This contains two significant details not given by Papias: that the gospel was written after Peter's death and that it was written in Italy.

Irenaeus (about 180) agrees with the 'Anti-Marcionite Prologue' in dating Mark after Peter's death: 'And after their [i.e. Peter's and Paul's] deaths Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, himself also handed down to us in writing the things preached by Peter' (*adv. Haer.* iii. i. 1).<sup>3</sup>

The first line of what has been preserved of the Muratorian Canon (about A.D. 200) reads: '... at which he was present, and so wrote them down'.<sup>4</sup> From what follows it is

<sup>1</sup> *αὐτοῦ* is ambiguous, but more probably refers to Peter than to Christ.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin is given in Huck, p. viii.

<sup>3</sup> The Greek is given in Huck, p. viii.

<sup>4</sup> The Latin is given in Huck, p. ix.

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clear that the subject of the verbs must be Mark. It is highly probable that the relative refers to Peter's discourses.

The tradition of the gospel's connection with Peter is repeated by later writers, the tendency being to heighten it—Clement of Alexandria, for example, represents the gospel as having been written during Peter's lifetime and, while in one place he says that Peter 'neither actively hindered nor encouraged the undertaking' (Eusebius, *H.E.* vi. 14),<sup>1</sup> in another place he actually asserts that the apostle 'ratified the writing for reading in the churches' (*ibid.* ii. 15).

The testimony of early tradition to Mark's authorship and to the gospel's connection with Peter is thus clear and constant from the beginning of the second century onwards. The support for dating the composition of the gospel after Peter's death is early and reliable. That the place of writing was Rome is probably implied.

## 2. AUTHORSHIP

The unanimous tradition of the early Church that the author of the gospel was Mark, the associate of Peter, is not open to serious doubt. While the gospel provides no direct internal evidence in support of the tradition, it contains nothing which is incompatible with it and a good deal that points to a connection with Peter.

But is this Mark, who is presumably also the person referred to in I Pet. v. 13, further to be identified with the Mark of Acts xii. 12, 25, (xiii. 13), xv. 37-9, Col. iv. 10, II Tim. iv. 11 and Philem. 24? Objections have been raised to this identification, but they are unconvincing. The objection that the gospel contains blunders concerning Palestinian conditions which would hardly have been made by someone who had grown up in Jerusalem loses its impressiveness when it is realized that the most significant of

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these alleged blunders, the Markan dating of the Passion in relation to the Passover, is probably not a blunder at all (see the notes on xiv. 12). The explanation of the failure of writers earlier than Jerome to make this identification explicitly is probably that they took it for granted and assumed that their readers would do so too. As to the indirect form of Jerome's statement in his commentary on Philemon with reference to the Mark of Philem. 24 (*Marcum . . . quem puto evangelii conditorem*), it is perhaps due to the fact that he had not found the identification explicitly made by earlier writers: it can hardly be pressed as a reason for doubting the truth of the identification. We may take it as virtually certain that the Mark who is the associate of Peter and the author of the gospel and the Mark of Acts and the Pauline epistles are one and the same person.

## 3. THE PRIORITY OF MARK

It is now very widely agreed that Mark was the first gospel to be written. The arguments for the priority of Mark may be stated briefly as follows:

(i) The substance of over 90 per cent of Mark's verses is contained in Matthew, of over 50 per cent in Luke.

(ii) Where the same matter is found in all three Synoptic gospels, usually more than 50 per cent of Mark's actual words will be found either in both Matthew and Luke or in one of them; and, while there is often agreement in sentence structure and collocation of words between both Matthew and Luke and Mark or between one of them and Mark, it hardly ever happens that Matthew and Luke agree together against Mark, except in some instances covered by (iv) below.

(iii) Usually all three Synoptists agree as to the order in which they arrange their common material: where either Matthew or Luke differs from Mark, the other usually agrees with him.

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(iv) Often, where the language of Matthew and/or Luke differs from that of Mark, it will be seen that it represents a grammatical or stylistic improvement.

(v) Things in Mark which could offend or perplex are sometimes either omitted or presented in a less provocative form in Matthew and/or Luke (e.g. xv. 34, omitted by Luke; iv. 38b, contrast Matt. viii. 25, Luke viii. 24; x. 17f., contrast Matt. xix. 16f.).

(vi) The disciples' pre-Resurrection way of addressing Jesus as Rabbi or Teacher is faithfully reflected in Mark, whereas Matthew and Luke represent Jesus as being addressed by the title 'Lord', thus reflecting the usage of the post-Resurrection Church.

Against the hypothesis that Matthew was written first and used by Mark, which has recently been stoutly championed by Abbot Butler, two further points must be mentioned:

(vii) That Matthew, whose style is much more succinct than Mark's, should have omitted superfluous words and phrases which he found in Mark in order to make room for additional matter is understandable: the opposite process of omitting valuable material in order to make room for diffuseness, which the theory of Matthaean priority presupposes, is incomprehensible.

(viii) On a number of occasions when Matthew's order differs from Mark's, it appears to be secondary (see, for example, the Matthew parallels to Mark ii. 1-iii. 6 and vi. 6b-33).

On the subject of this section see further: Streeter, *Four Gospels*, pp. 157-69; B. C. Butler, *The Originality of St Matthew* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 62-171; H. G. Wood, 'The Priority of Mark', in *E.T.* LXV (1953-4), pp. 17-19. The discussion has been reopened by W. R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem* (New York, 1964; also London).

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## 4. DATE

That Mark wrote his gospel after Peter's death is actually stated in the 'Anti-Marcionite Prologue' and by Irenaeus, and is probably implied by Papias (note the two references to remembering). It is confirmed by the internal evidence of the gospel, the relentlessness with which the apostle's failures are recorded being most easily understandable on the assumption that he had already died a martyr's death by the time Mark was writing: Mark's frankness, which earlier would have seemed malicious, would after Peter's martyrdom be welcomed as underlining the encouragement it afforded to weak disciples. This gives us A.D. 65 as our *terminus a quo*, for it is fairly certain that Peter died in the Neronian persecution of 64-5. The use of Mark by the later Synoptists makes a date later than A.D. 70 unlikely. We may date the gospel between 65 and 70, and probably, since chapter xiii is not coloured by any awareness of the actual events of the Jewish War of 66-70 (contrast Lk. xxi. 20-4), we should date it before the later stages of the war—so within the

\* narrower period 65-7.

## 5. PLACE OF WRITING

The fact that Mark supplies translations of Aramaic expressions (iii. 17, v. 41, vii. 11, 34, xv. 22) and explanations of Jewish customs (vii. 3f., xv. 42) suggests that he wrote for Gentiles. The 'Anti-Marcionite Prologue' states that he wrote the gospel in Italy. Clement of Alexandria implies that he wrote it in Rome.

Some support for Rome is afforded by I Pet. v. 13; for, if the epistle is Petrine, the verse is direct evidence that Mark was in Rome ('Babylon' clearly stands for Rome) shortly before Peter's martyrdom, and, even if the epistle is pseudonymous and to be dated as late as 112, it is evidence

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of the existence of a tradition to that effect at the beginning of the second century. It is possible that Mk xv. 21 also points to Rome; for the fact that Simon's sons are mentioned by name suggests that they were known to the church for which Mark was writing, and it is reasonably likely that Simon's son Rufus is to be identified with the Rufus named by Paul (Rom. xvi. 13) in a series of greetings which were probably (in spite of the doubts of some scholars) addressed to the church in Rome. The rapid and wide dissemination of the gospel, of which the use made of it by the later Synoptists and probably also the Fourth Evangelist is evidence, suggests that it had behind it the authority of an important church: such a church the one in Rome certainly was—though of course there were others. The prominence given by Mark to sayings about persecution and martyrdom (e.g. viii. 34–8, xiii. 9–13) might perhaps be regarded as a pointer to Rome: at least it would be very understandable, if the gospel was written there soon after the Neronian persecution.

The arguments in favour of Rome are not conclusive, but they are much stronger than those put forward in support of any other place. Antioch, which has been preferred by a few modern scholars, has perhaps the next best claim; but the explanation of the two mites as equivalent to a *quadrans*, a coin that was not in circulation in the east,<sup>1</sup> in xii. 42 and the presence of a considerable number of other Latin loan-words and of some possible Latinisms of idiom tell in favour of a western rather than an eastern origin.

The statement of Chrysostom that Mark wrote the gospel in Egypt is doubtless a mistake: it probably rests on a misunderstanding of a statement in Eusebius' *History* (ii. 16).

<sup>1</sup> See W. M. Ramsay in *E.T.* x (1898–9), pp. 232, 336.

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## II. THE CHARACTER OF THE GOSPEL

### I. ITS IMPORTANCE

After exercising an extensive influence for a time, during which it was used by the writers of the First and Third Gospels, and probably also the Fourth, St Mark's Gospel suffered relative neglect for centuries. That this was so is hardly surprising; for, when compared with the other gospels, Mark was clearly at a disadvantage. It contained very little that was not also to be found in Matthew, while Matthew contained much additional matter of great value. Its roughness of style made it less suitable than the other gospels for liturgical use; and both for liturgical and for catechetical purposes its arrangement was less satisfactory than that of Matthew and Luke. It was not the work of an apostle, as Matthew and John were both thought to be. The fact that it was the first gospel to be written was soon forgotten. Irenaeus dates its composition after that of Matthew (*adv. Haer.* iii. i. 1), while Augustine actually speaks of Mark having followed Matthew *tamquam pedisequus et breviator eius* (*de Cons. Evang.* i. ii. 4); and until the nineteenth century, during the course of which the hypothesis of the priority of Mark established itself, this view prevailed unchallenged. Not unnaturally Mark was the least read and least commented on of all the gospels.

But the discovery of Mark's priority transformed the situation. Since the end of last century its importance as the earliest gospel and the primary source of information about the ministry of Jesus, the study of which is fundamental to the study of the other gospels, has been widely acknowledged. The vast amount of work done during the last sixty or seventy years on St Mark's Gospel has gone a consider-

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able way to compensate for the neglect of centuries. As a result of it the importance of St Mark's witness to Christ has become more and more apparent.

## 2. CONTENTS AND SOURCES

It is possible to distinguish four different kinds of narrative material in the gospel:

(i) Narratives the wealth of detail and vividness of which suggest direct derivation from the reminiscence of an eye-witness. Many of these record incidents in which Peter played a prominent part, or which must have had a special interest for him, or which only a few people (including Peter) witnessed: e.g. i. 16-20, i. 29-31, i. 35-8, v. 21-4, 35-43 (see *vv.* 37 and 40), ix. 2-8, xiv. 27-31, 54, 66-72, xiv. 32-42, while in ix. 14-27 the story is told from the point of view of those who returned with Jesus, of whom Peter was one. With regard to most narratives of this sort we may with considerable confidence accept the tradition of Mark's dependence on the reminiscences of Peter.

(ii) Narratives which by their rounded form and lack of vivid details give the impression of being units of oral tradition which have been worn smooth by frequent repetition. Many of these narratives are pronouncement-stories (e.g. ii. 18-20, ii. 23-6, iii. 31-5)—to use a convenient technical term for a narrative which has for its climax and *raison d'être* a saying of Jesus.

(iii) Narratives which, though based on tradition, do not seem to be actual units of oral tradition, but rather to have been constructed by Mark himself: e.g. iii. 13-19, vi. 6b-13, vi. 30-3, vi. 53-6. Dr Taylor calls them 'Markan constructions'. They lack vivid details and are rather vague.

(iv) Brief summary statements indicating in general terms what was happening during a certain period: e.g. i. 14f.,