

Published in Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Synoptic Gospels* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 152-174

Author Accepted Manuscript (AAM)
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CHAPTER 9 Manuscripts: The Problem with the Synoptic Problem

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Abstract: Studies seeking to elucidate the Synoptic Problem, the issue of literary dependence among the Synoptic Gospels, often proceed by making close comparisons among the Synoptic Gospels that rely on the idea that the text of each of these Gospels is fixed. Yet, when one turns to the actual manuscripts preserving the Gospels, one finds instead fluid texts with significant variation. Textual critics of the New Testament have attempted to sort through these variations and determine the earliest recoverable text of each of the Gospels, and in doing so, they often adopt a particular approach to the Synoptic Problem. At the same time, one's approach to the Synoptic Problem is determined by the analysis of the editions established by textual critics. This chapter explores the implications of this circularity by examining a series of parallel passages in different printed synopses and in individual manuscripts.

Keywords: Manuscripts, Dependence, Synoptic Problem, Textual Criticism, Harmonization, Two-Source Hypothesis, Farrer Hypothesis

INTRODUCTION

The texts traditionally known as the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke are so similar that, if they lacked these traditional names, they would probably simply be classified as different versions of the same text—a shorter recension of the *Life of Jesus* and two longer recensions of the *Life of Jesus*. But the fact is that these texts do bear these traditional names and came to be thought of as three distinct works by at least as early as the late second century. Both ancient and modern readers have thus understandably treated them as discrete compositions that can be compared and contrasted with each other. One of the typical goals of such comparison is resolving the issue of dependence.¹ That is to say, because these texts

Thanks to Hugo Lundhaug and the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo for the invitation to present an earlier version of some of this material at the Oslo Lectures in New Testament and Early Christian Studies in April 2019. I am also grateful to AnneMarie Lujendijk and Mark Goodacre for providing very useful feedback to an earlier version of this essay and to Mary Jane Cuyler for discussion of several points.

¹ Awareness of literary relationships among the gospels goes back at least to Augustine of Hippo, who described Mark as something like an epitomizer (*breviator*) of Matthew (*Cons.* i.2.4 and i.3.6).

are so very similar, often displaying near exact verbal agreement, modern scholars regularly speak of the composers of two of these three texts “being dependent upon” or “using” one or more of the others.

The very detailed comparisons of the similarities and differences among these texts undertaken in order to determine these relationships constitute the so-called Synoptic Problem, one of the central building blocks of the study of the Gospels and the historical Jesus over the last century. Yet the kinds of comparisons that New Testament scholars carry out under the heading of the Synoptic Problem often presume that these texts (the Gospel According to Matthew, the Gospel According to Mark, and the Gospel According to Luke) each existed in a stable, finalized form, akin to what we find in modern printed editions. But, like all ancient literature, the Gospels were preserved in manuscripts, individual copies made by hand, each with unique characteristics. In the case of the Gospels, thousands of manuscripts have survived with many thousands of variations.² For the last few centuries, textual critics of the New Testament have attempted to sort through these variations and determine the earliest recoverable text of each of the Gospels, and in doing so, they often adopt a particular approach to the Synoptic Problem. At the same time, one’s approach to the Synoptic Problem is determined by the analysis of the editions established by textual critics. While most New Testament scholars would agree that we can be reasonably confident about the results of the text-critical enterprise, it is simply a fact that the ancient manuscripts of the Gospels show myriad variations. That is to say, these are *not* the kinds of stable texts necessary for detailed synoptic comparison.³ The difficulties of dealing with any single ancient text preserved in multiple different manuscripts with textual variation are increased three-fold when attempting to compare and contrast these three Gospels. This is not a reason for despair so much as a call for vigilance and an invitation to view the Synoptic Problem as an opportunity for exploring the complex transmission and transformation of Gospel texts.

My task in this essay is to provide a series of observations from a material perspective that may be of interest to those engaged in research related to the issue of “dependence” among the Synoptic Gospels. I attempt to demonstrate the ways in which textual fluidity and the practicalities of manuscript culture complicate both the search for solutions to the Synoptic Problem and the very idea of “dependence.” To more fully appreciate the ways that

² For an assessment of the levels and types of variation in New Testament manuscripts, see Holmes 2013.

³ The challenge that the multiplicity of Gospel manuscripts presents to students of the Synoptic Problem has long been known. For an excellent overview of scholarship at the turn of the twentieth century and reflections on the symbiotic relationship between textual criticism of the Gospels and the Synoptic Problem, see Head 2011. For further incisive commentary, see Parker 1997, 103-123.

manuscripts affect these discussions, however, we need to begin by having a very clear sense of what the Synoptic Problem is and how scholars have tried to “solve” the problem.⁴ The first portion of the chapter will thus be a general overview of the Synoptic Problem, and the second portion will be a more technical look at Greek manuscripts of the Synoptic Gospels and the ways editors have worked with them.

WHAT IS THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM?

It has long been recognized that the Gospels According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke have very close agreement both in content and even in the exact wording of their Greek texts. This agreement occurs both in direct quotations of characters in the Gospels and in narrative exposition, which suggests that these three Gospels have some kind of literary relationship. We can get some sense of this overlap with a rough Venn Diagram (see Figure 9.1). There are a variety of different ways one might choose to “count” agreement and overlap among the Synoptic Gospels that will differ in some degree, but this diagram, based on a rough count of the shared stories in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, provides a good general idea of overall relations.⁵

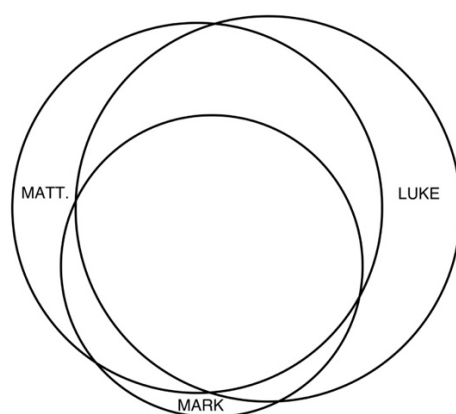


Figure 9.1: Venn Diagram Showing Shared Material in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (design by Joe Weeks)

The overlaps show the material common to the Gospels. Matthew contains a little over 90% of Mark. Luke contains just under 90% of Mark. Matthew and Luke share very roughly about

⁴ For more detailed and nuanced treatments of the Synoptic Problem, see Sanders and Davies 1989 and Goodacre 2001. For a history of the Problem, see Kloppenborg chapter 1 in this volume.

⁵ Thanks to Joe Weeks for the design of the graphic, which is based on a survey of the *Conspectus locorum parallelorum* index in Aland 1997: 567-591. Thanks also to Mark Goodacre for pointing out that this way of representing synoptic data takes no account of the order of stories in the Gospels and therefore can misrepresent the actual degree of similarity among the three.

75% of their material.⁶

How did the Gospels come to share these commonalities? The opening sentence of Luke in fact suggests a likely reason: “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account (διήγησις) of the events that have been fulfilled among us... .” That is to say, the composer of Luke knew of and very likely made use of other written accounts or narrations of the life of Jesus. The same is presumably true of the composers of Matthew and Mark. That is to say, there is a literary relationship among these Gospels. There is really no other convincing way to explain the similarities among these three texts. They are so alike, in fact, that they are often called the “Synoptic Gospels,” for they can be productively viewed synoptically, that is, side-by-side. Thus one of the great tools for studying these Gospels is a synopsis, a text that prints the Gospels side-by-side in columns in order to highlight where they align and where they are different.⁷

In fact, using a synopsis is the best way to get a sense of the degree of similarity among these Gospels. We may begin by looking at a single verse. The English translation used here is the New Revised Standard Version (Table 9.1):

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27-28
<p><u>As</u> Jesus <u>was walking along</u>, <u>he saw</u> a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.</p>	<p><u>As</u> he <u>was walking along</u>, <u>he saw</u> <i>Levi</i> son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.</p>	<p>After this he went out and saw a tax collector named <i>Levi</i> sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up, left everything, and followed him.</p>

Table 9.1: The Calling of Matthew/Levi (NRSV)

The material in bold is the same word-for-word in all three Gospels. The underlined words are common to Matthew and Mark, and the italicized words are common to Mark and Luke. It is clear that the central elements of the story and the quotation of Jesus are exactly the same, but the framing differs slightly among the three. Matthew and Mark agree in saying

⁶ Different methods of comparison (for instance, comparing words or verses rather than stories) will yield different percentages but do not radically alter the overall picture. See, for instance, Honoré 1968. B. H. Streeter’s estimate that “Luke omits more than 45%” of the subject matter of Mark results from his presumption that Luke used “a non-Markan source” for some of his “Markan” material (Streeter 1930:159-160).

⁷ Gospel synopses are plentiful. A good English edition is Throckmorton, Jr. 1992. The standard Greek texts are Aland 1997 and Huck and Greeven 1981.

Jesus was walking along, while Mark and Luke agree that the name of the man at the tax booth was Levi, while in Matthew, the man at the tax booth is called Matthew. In Luke, there is the detail that this man from the tax booth “left everything” to follow Jesus. But, overall we can see that this kind of close verbal similarity can really only be explained by a literary relationship among these three Gospels.

So, when scholars talk about the Synoptic Problem, what they mean is “*the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship*” (Goodacre 2001, 16). How we resolve this literary relationship has ramifications both for the study of the historical Jesus and for the study of the early Christians who produced and used the Gospels. So there is actually quite a lot at stake with how we think about the Synoptic Problem. When it comes to explaining this literary relationship among the Synoptic Gospels, there are some clues that help us determine at least some of the lines of influence. I noted earlier that roughly 90% of the material in Mark is contained in Matthew. That means about 10% of the material in Mark is not present in Matthew. Most of this material is also absent from Luke. Examining some of these passages provides insight into why they might be in Mark but not in Matthew or Luke. Consider a healing story unique to Mark (Mark 8:22-26; Table 9.2).

Matthew	Mark 8:22-26	Luke
	They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, “Can you see anything?” And the man looked up and said, “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Then he sent him away to his home, saying, “Do not even go into the village.”	

Table 9.2: Mark 8:22-26 (NRSV)

There are no parallels in Matthew and Luke for this story in Mark. One can imagine why. We have an account of Jesus using his own spit to perform a healing, at first unsuccessfully. Jesus gets it right on the second try but then tells the healed man not to say anything about it. It is a somewhat uncomfortable story. And it turns out that much of the material that is unique to Mark is somewhat strange. To take just one other example, consider Mark 14:48-52 (Table 9.3).

Matthew 26:55-56	Mark 14:48-52	Luke 22:52-53
<p>At that hour Jesus said to the crowds,</p> <p>“Have you come out with swords and clubs <u>to arrest me</u> as <u>though</u> I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple <u>teaching</u>, and you did not <u>arrest</u> me.</p> <p>But all this has taken place, so that <u>the scriptures</u> of the prophets may <u>be fulfilled</u>.”</p> <p>Then all the disciples <u>deserted him and fled</u>.</p>	<p>Then Jesus said to them,</p> <p>“Have you come out with swords and clubs <u>to arrest me</u> as <u>though</u> I were a bandit? Day after day I <i>was with you</i> in the temple <u>teaching</u>, and you did not <u>arrest</u> me.</p> <p><i>But</i> let <u>the scriptures</u> <u>be fulfilled</u>.”</p> <p>All of them <u>deserted him and fled</u>.</p> <p><i>A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.</i></p>	<p>Then Jesus said to the chief priests, the officers of the temple police, and the elders who had come for him,</p> <p>“Have you come out with swords and clubs as if I were a bandit? When I <i>was with you</i> day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me.</p> <p><i>But</i> this is your hour, and the power of darkness!”</p>

Table 9.3: The Young man in the Garden (NRSV)

For much of the account there is significant verbal overlap among the three, especially between Matthew and Mark, but Mark closes with the words I have marked here in bold italics, a bizarre little story of a naked man fleeing the scene. These odd features unique to Mark raise the question: Are these stories the kind of thing we imagine Mark adding to Matthew or Luke? Or are they the kind of thing we imagine Matthew and Luke deleting from Mark? Most scholars think the latter. That is to say, most scholars agree that the best way to account for these similarities and differences is to suppose that Mark seems to have served as a source for the composers of Matthew and Luke.⁸ While the majority of students of the Synoptic Problem basically agree on this point, there is significantly more disagreement when it comes to determining other synoptic relationships, specifically the material that is not

⁸ There are of course other reasons in addition to the unique contents of Mark that have led a majority of scholars to agree on Markan priority. For a clear summary of the relevant evidence, see Goodacre 2002: 19-45. A minority of scholars argue that Matthew was the oldest composition and was used by the composers of Mark and Luke. For a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of this position, see Sanders and Davies 1989: 84-92.

present in Mark.

Once one has accounted for the “triple tradition,” that is, the overlapping material present in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, one is left with a substantial amount of parallel material that is common only to Matthew and Luke. And we often find a high level of verbal agreement in these passages. Consider the preaching of John the Baptist (Table 9.4).

Matthew 3:7-10	Mark	Luke 3:7-9
<p>But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance. Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”</p>		<p>John said to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits worthy of repentance. Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”</p>

Table 9.4: The Preaching of John the Baptist (NRSV)

The narrative framing is slightly different, but the words of John the Baptist are almost identical, showing nearly perfect verbal agreement. So, we seem to be dealing with a literary relationship beyond just Mark as a common source. The evidence has led many scholars to adopt what is called the “Two Source Hypothesis” or the “Two Document Hypothesis,” which states that Matthew and Luke independently used Mark and also a second source, usually called Q (from the German word for “source,” *Quelle*), a hypothetical document that has not survived, but which is thought to have contained the material that is common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark.⁹ This proposed set of relationships is generally set out in a diagrammed fashion as shown in Figure 9.2:

⁹ John Kloppenborg defines the hypothesis as follows: “Stated succinctly, the Two Document hypothesis proposes that the Gospels of Matthew and Luke independently used Mark as a source. Since Matthew and Luke share about 235 verses that they did not get from Mark, the 2DH requires that they had independent access to a second source consisting mainly of sayings of Jesus. This, for want of a better term, is the ‘Sayings Gospel,’ or, ‘Q’” (Kloppenborg Verbin 2000: 12-13).

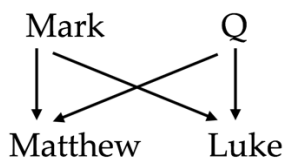


Figure 9.2: The Two Source Hypothesis

Sometimes the material that is unique to Matthew and that which is unique to Luke is also represented, designated by “M” and “L,” as shown in Figure 9.3:

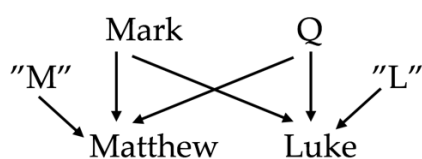


Figure 9.3: The Four Source Hypothesis

Thus Matthew and Luke are supposed to have composed their Gospels by independently using Mark and Q along with additional material available to each of them.¹⁰ This is the most widely accepted solution to the Synoptic Problem today.

But matters are not quite so neat as such graphics imply, because there are several instances when Matthew and Luke actually agree with each other against Mark.¹¹ We can see an example of this phenomenon in the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Table 9.5).

¹⁰ In more advanced studies of the Synoptic Problem, the relationships are acknowledged to be more complex. See, for example, Kloppenborg Verbin 2000: 37 and Sanders and Davies 1989: 100-109.

¹¹ In what follows, I speak of “agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark” because I regard this description as both accurate and neutral. Advocates of the Two-Source Hypothesis tend to describe this material under separate headings that derive from the Two-Source Hypothesis itself. Some of these agreements are said to be “Mark-Q overlaps” while others are “minor” agreements. The result of this way of classifying is an obfuscation of the full measure of agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark. See further Goodacre 2002, 163-165 and Goodacre 2018.

Matthew 13:31-32	Mark 4:30-32	Luke 13:18-19
<p>He put before them another parable:</p> <p>“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is <u>the smallest of all the seeds</u>, but when it has grown it is <u>the greatest of shrubs</u> and becomes <i>a tree</i>, <u>so that the birds of the air</u> come and <u>make nests in its branches.</u>”</p>	<p>He also said,</p> <p>“With what can we compare <i>the kingdom of God</i>, or what parable will we use for it? <i>It is like a mustard seed</i>, which, when sown upon the ground, <u>is the smallest of all the seeds</u> on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes <u>the greatest of all shrubs</u>, and puts forth large branches, <u>so that the birds of the air</u> can <u>make nests in its shade.</u>”</p>	<p>He said therefore,</p> <p>“What is <i>the kingdom of God</i> like? And to what should I compare it? <i>It is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his garden;</i> it grew and became <i>a tree</i>, and the birds of the air made nests in its branches.”</p>

Table 9.5: The Parable of the Mustard Seed (NRSV)

Notice the word-for-word agreements (in bold italics) between Matthew and Luke against Mark. These kinds of agreements pose a problem for scholars who hold to the Two-Source Hypothesis.¹² If Matthew and Luke both adapted this passage from copies of Mark, then it is incredible that they changed it in such similar fashions. Scholars holding to the Two-Source Hypothesis have tried to explain this phenomenon in different ways. Some propose that Matthew and Luke preserve an earlier and more primitive version of Mark’s Gospel that differs in some substantial ways from the versions of Mark that have survived in the manuscript tradition.¹³ This solution is possible, but, it forces advocates of the Two-Source Hypothesis to depend upon a second hypothetical document in addition to Q. Many more scholars have suggested that passages like this one must have been preserved both in Mark and in Q, and that Matthew and Luke have both followed the Q version rather than the version in Mark. This notion of Mark-Q overlaps is of course possible. Since Q is a hypothetical document, its contents cannot be known with certainty. But allowing for the existence of Mark-Q overlaps also creates problems for the Two-Source Hypothesis. One of

¹² I choose this example for its brevity. For a list of other examples, see Sanders, 1973.

¹³ In one sense, this observation is self-evident: It is unlikely, bordering on impossible, that the composers of Matthew and Luke “used” copies of Mark that were identical to each other, or to any surviving manuscript of Mark. That said, it is not possible to know the precise wording of any manuscripts of Mark that pre-date our earliest surviving extensive copies, which date to the fourth century.

the arguments that necessitates hypothesizing Q in the first place is the claim that neither Luke nor Matthew reproduces the other's changes to Mark (which one would expect, if either Luke used Matthew or Matthew used Luke).¹⁴ The very existence of Mark-Q overlaps refutes that claim. We can visualize this difficulty by adjusting our Venn Diagram of Synoptic relations. First, let us adapt it to the Two-Source Hypothesis by identifying the material common to Matthew and Luke but absent from Mark as Q (Figure 9.4):

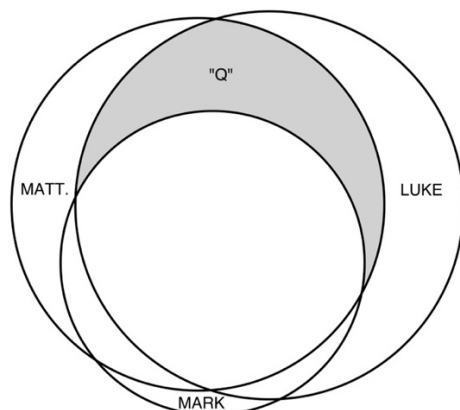


Figure 9.4: Venn Diagram Showing Shared Material in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with “Q” Material Shaded (design by Joe Weeks)

Then, notice what happens if we allow for overlaps between Mark and Q as shown in Figure 9.5:

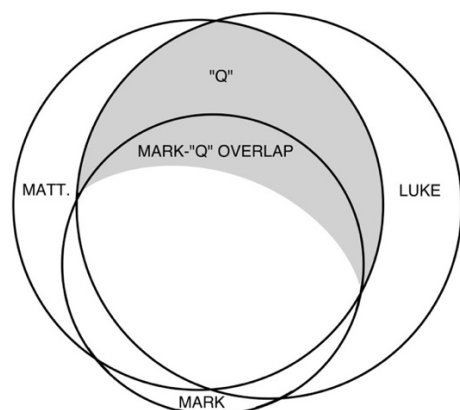


Figure 9.5: Venn Diagram Showing Shared Material in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, with “Q” and a Sample of Mark-“Q” Overlap Material Shaded (design by Joe Weeks)

We begin to have a Q that looks more and more like the Gospel According to Matthew (and, to a slightly lesser degree, Luke). And indeed, we could also shade in some of the “triple

¹⁴ See further Goodacre 2018.

tradition” space in deference to the observation of E. P. Sanders that “Those who wish to explain all or most of the agreements between Matthew and Luke against Mark by attributing them to the influence of Q are simply arguing for an Ur-Gospel which very closely resembles Matthew. *Virtually every single pericope in the triple tradition has some such agreements*” (Sanders 1973, 454, my emphasis). Problems like this have led some scholars to dispense with the hypothetical Q-source and argue instead that Luke made use of Mark and Matthew. This approach to the Synoptic Problem is most commonly known as the “Farrer Hypothesis.”¹⁵ It is usually diagrammed in a manner similar to Figure 9.6:

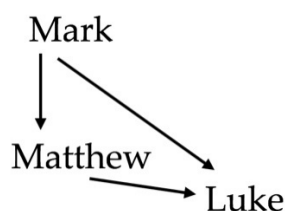


Figure 9.6: The Farrer Hypothesis

The Farrer Hypothesis remains a minority opinion in current scholarship, but my sense is that an increasing number of scholars are open to entertaining it as a viable solution to the Synoptic Problem.¹⁶

It is important to emphasize that in several of the examples we have examined, small differences of just one or two words here and there really do matter. Although they may seem insignificant when we look at them individually, cumulatively they are important factors for scholars seeking to resolve the Synoptic Problem.

THE PROBLEM: MANUSCRIPTS

As I noted at the outset, advocates of these traditional approaches to the Synoptic Problem often proceed as if there were singular, stable texts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.¹⁷ Recall Goodacre’s definition of the Synoptic Problem: “The Synoptic Problem might be

¹⁵ The clearest articulation of this viewpoint can be found in Goodacre 2002.

¹⁶ See, for instance, Watson 2013.

¹⁷ I am not the first to make this point. D. C. Parker characterizes the situation as follows: “The study of the Synoptic Problem as normally conducted includes the agreement between practitioners that the text of Nestle-Aland is, to all intents and purposes, what Matthew, Mark and Luke originally wrote” (Parker 1997: 115). Parker also helpfully observes that “solutions” to the Synoptic Problem are actually models, which by definition simplify the phenomena they describe.

defined as *the study of the similarities and differences of the Synoptic Gospels in an attempt to explain their literary relationship*” (Goodacre 2001, 16). In this formulation, the phrase “Synoptic Gospels” is really a shorthand. What are actually being compared are reconstructed Greek texts of each of the Synoptic Gospels. Let us look again at our first simple example of the call of the tax collector in Matthew 9:9, but now in an eclectic Greek text (Table 9.6):

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27-28
Καὶ παράγων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκεῖθεν ἔειπεν εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, Μαθθαῖον λεγόμενον, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἤκολούθησεν αὐτῷ.	Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν Ἰακωβὸν τὸν τοῦ Ἀλφαίου καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἤκολούθησεν αὐτῷ.	Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἐθεάσατο τελώνην ὀνόματι Λεβὶν καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ καταλιπὼν πάντα ἀναστὰς ἤκολούθει αὐτῷ.
εκειθεν ο Ιησους D N Θ f ¹³ 565; Eus ο Ιησους κ* L bo ^{ms} ο κυριος ημων Ιησους ο Χριστος l 844. l 2211 ἤκολουθει κC ^{vid} D f ¹ 892	Γ (3,18) Ιακωβον D Θ f ¹³ 565 it Λευι κ* A K Γ Δ 28. 33. 2542 pm aur q vg ^{cl} co? txt Ϝ ⁸⁸ κ ² B C L W 1. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. l 2211 pm f l vg st	ε p) και ελθων παλιν παρα την θαλασσαν τον επακολουθουντα αυτω οχλον εδιδασκεν και παραγων ειδεν Λευι τον του Αλφαιου D ἤκολουθει κ D f ¹³ ἤκολουθησεν κ A C K N Γ Δ Θ Ψ f ^{1,13} 33. 565. 579. 1241. 1424. 2542. l 844. l 2211 m txt B D L W Ξ 700. 892 a

Table 9.6: The Calling of Matthew/Levi (Nestle-Aland)

The first obvious difference is the presence of a critical apparatus showing a number of textual variants in this verse in all three Gospels. Some of the details of the apparatus will occupy us later. For now, notice the first line of the Greek text. Looking back at the English translation of this passage, we find agreement across all three Gospels with the word “saw,” but notice that this covers up a difference in the Greek of Luke. There is εἶδεν in Matthew, εἶδεν in Mark, but ἐθεάσατο in Luke. The same thing happens with the verb of “saying” further down. There is the historical present λέγει in Matthew and Mark, and the aorist εἶπεν in Luke. And the same thing happens yet again with the final verb in the passage. In the English translation, there is triple agreement with the word “followed,” but in the Greek text, we have an instance of Matthew and Mark agreeing on the aorist form ἤκολούθησεν against Luke’s imperfect ἤκολούθει. So, it is clear that in order to notice the small differences present

in the manuscripts, it is necessary to work with a Greek text.

This observation in turn raises the question: *Which* Greek text should be used? The parallels above are drawn from the 28th edition of Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, the standard eclectic Greek text in use today among scholars.¹⁸ But it is certainly not the only Greek text of the Gospels. Earlier generations of scholars also regularly consulted the *Synopsis* of Albert Huck (now the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis*).¹⁹ Here is the same passage in the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis* (Table 9.7):

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27-28
Καὶ παράγων ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐκεῖθεν εἶδεν ἄνθρωπον καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, Μαθθαῖον λεγόμενον, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ.	Καὶ παράγων εἶδεν Ἦ Λευὶν τὸν τοῦ Ἀλφαίου καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ.	Καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ἐξῆλθεν καὶ ἐθεάσατο τελώνην ὀνόματι Λευὶν ¹ καθήμενον ἐπὶ τὸ τελώνιον, καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ· ἀκολούθει μοι. καὶ καταλιπὼν πάντα ἀναστὰς ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ.
<i>omit</i> ἐκειθεν p: 8 L φ 1547 σ71-692 Lv ^g Cb ¹ λεγομ.] ονοματι Lk: S Eu L<k[e]> Ss[c]p Eu C ηκολουθησεν 42p.22Lk511Jo137 Rpl/Eu Or L Sj Eu C	παρ. + ο Ιησους Mt: 1604 φ230-346 σ27-179-267-945-1194-1223-1391-1402 F G H Γ Ω α/ + εκειθεν Mt: φ 174 1093 Geo Λ.] Ιακωβον 318: Θ-565 Φ<346-983> D Pho Le[k] abcff ² r ¹ vg ¹ Δa E ^a ηκολουθησεν 118 Mt420.22pJo137: Ϝ ⁸⁸ Rpl L S[sc]j C	και + παραγων p: φ1547 D εθ.] ειδεν p: 544 σ945-990-1223 A D Π ^c pc τελ. ον. Λ.] Λευι τον του Αλφαιου Mk: D ειπ.] λεγει Mt Mk: 8 φ<124> D pc 150 1184 11627 Arm αναστ.] και αν. p: 2145 ηκολουθησεν 511pJo137: Rpl L ¹ Ss ^v [c]phj C

Table 9.7: The Calling of Matthew/Levi (Huck-Greeven *Synopsis*)

The two printed Greek texts are very close, but notice what happens with the last verb. In the Huck-Greeven synopsis, we have triple agreement with the imperfect form ἠκολούθει. The editors have chosen to print the imperfect form in Matthew and Mark rather than the aorist

¹⁸ I have elected to generate my own synopsis from the 28th edition of Nestle-Aland in order to make use of its revised critical apparatus. The most recent printing of Aland's *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum* was made in 2001 and employs an older form of the apparatus that cites fewer witnesses.

¹⁹ Huck and Greeven 1981. Since the newest edition of this synopsis appeared in 1981, it does not reflect the most recent papyrological discoveries, but in fact these discoveries have had very little impact on the printed Greek text in modern editions. See Petersen 1994: 138: "It is simply a fact that *nowhere* in the *entire* apparatus for the Gospels in Nestle-Aland²⁷/UBS⁴ is there a single instance where a reading supported *just* by the papyri, or by *just* the papyri and Patristic evidence has been adopted as the text."

ἠκολούθησεν that the editors of Nestle-Aland preferred. This particular choice for the text of Mark 2:14 is striking because the Nestle-Aland text and apparatus give no indication of variation for this word in Mark 2:14. But as the apparatus for the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis* indicates, the imperfect form does occur in manuscripts of Mark, including one of earliest surviving Greek manuscripts of Mark, Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus. If we had read only Nestle-Aland, we would never know that in one of our most ancient manuscripts of Mark, this verse reads ἠκολούθει, and that in the judgment of at least some scholars, that reading represents the earliest recoverable text, resulting in an instance of triple agreement here.

Of course, this is a very small difference, but it is just one of many that can be found by comparing different synopses.²⁰ Consulting different synopses helps to remind us that even the Greek text itself is unstable. Over the last couple decades, scholars have come to realize that the idea of a single, stable, original text is a highly problematic notion.²¹ Ancient production and transmission of literature was a far cry from the publication of modern works mass produced by printing presses. What we might call rough drafts of pieces of literature sometimes circulated outside of authors' control. Works were revised and circulated multiple times in different forms. Using our surviving manuscripts to try to triangulate an earlier version of any single text is thus a hazardous undertaking. The difficulty is only compounded when we seek to compare three such reconstructed texts. The idea can be expressed in mathematic terms. If there is, say, 80% certainty that the eclectic text of each of the three Synoptic Gospels represents the earliest recoverable text in a basically accurate fashion, then we would be only about 50% certain that any given set of parallels in the triple tradition all represent the earliest recoverable text ($0.8 \times 0.8 \times 0.8 = 0.512$).

How might we then proceed with comparison of the Synoptic Gospels? One way is to look at the parallels one manuscript at a time. Let us turn to the parallel texts for our simple example of the call of the tax collector in Codex Sinaiticus, a manuscript generally agreed to have been produced in the fourth century.²² It is perhaps the earliest surviving version of a number of our synoptic parallels (Table 9.8).

²⁰ To judge from most studies of the Synoptic Problem, the comparison of multiple different Greek synopses does not seem to be a frequent practice. J. K. Elliott has, however, repeatedly stressed the importance of such work in a series of articles: Elliott 1980, Elliott 1986, Elliott 1992, and Elliott 1993. These essays have been reprinted in Elliott 2010: 385-467.

²¹ On these points, see the seminal works of D. C. Parker (Parker 1997), Eldon J. Epp (Epp 1999), and Matthew D. C. Larsen (Larsen 2017 and Larsen 2018).

²² The text is drawn from the transcription at codexsinaiticus.org. For a recent overview of the manuscript, see Parker 2010.

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27-28
<p>και παραγων ο ις ^{εκειθε(v)} ειδεν ανον</p> <p>καθημενον επι το τελωνιον μαθθαιον λεγομενον ^{κ(αι)} λεγει αυτω ακολουθι μοι και αναστας ηκολουθει αυτω</p>	<p>και παραγων ειδε(v) λευει τον του αλφαιου καθημενο(v) επι το τελωνιον και λεγει αυτω ακολουθι μοι και αναστας ηκολουθησεν αυτω</p>	<p>και μετα ταυτα εξηλθεν και εθεασα το τελωνην ονοματι λευειν καθημενον επι το τελωνιον και λεγει αυτω ακολουθι μοι και καταλιπων απαντας αναστας ηκολουθησεν αυτω</p>

Table 9.8: The Calling of Matthew/Levi (Codex Sinaiticus)

To begin, I want to draw attention to the correction in the first line of Matthew 9:9. Notice that in the apparatus of the Nestle-Aland text, the reading attributed to the copyist of Sinaiticus (κ*), is simply ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶδεν. The same is true of the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis*. In both synopses, then, the “original” reading of Sinaiticus is said to lack the word ἐκεῖθεν. And indeed, if we look closely at the line in question, we can see that the word does appear to be a secondary addition, as it was inserted in a smaller script above the end of a line (see the top line in Figure 9.7):

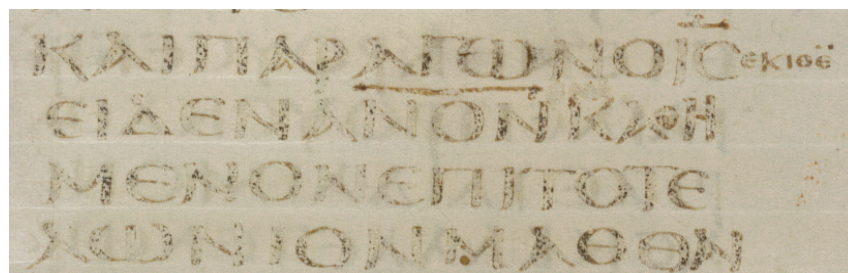


Figure 9.7: Codex Sinaiticus, Matthew 9:9; image by permission of the British Library, London, UK

But the question is: *When* was this addition inserted? In this instance, the correction is actually attributed to one of the same copyists who copied the text.²³ That is to say, the correction happened at or near the time of copying and may in fact be a *better* representation of the exemplar, the manuscript that was being copied, than the so-called “original” reading

²³ According to the website of the Codex Sinaiticus Project, a correction like this one (identified as “S1”) is “a correction made in the production process, as part of the revision of the text after it had been copied, or a correction by the scribe in the copying process. These cannot always be distinguished” (http://www.codexsinaiticus.org/en/project/transcription_detailed.aspx).

of the manuscript marked with the asterisk in the Nestle-Aland apparatus. Thus, even when one consults multiple different Greek synopses, the manuscripts themselves continue to present a more nuanced picture. One can begin to see some of the problems with the notion of what constitutes the “best” text of a passage.

To get a better sense of the levels of possible variation that we face, we can examine the same passage in another manuscript, Codex Bezae. Bezae is diglot, with facing pages having Greek and Latin texts of the Gospels and Acts. It probably dates to the fifth century.²⁴ If we look at the text of our passage in this manuscript, we find a number of differences (Table 9.9):

Matthew 9:9	Mark 2:14	Luke 5:27-28
και παραγων εκειθεν ο ιης ειδεν ανθρωπον καθημενον επι το τελωνιον Μαθθαιον λεγομενον και λεγει αυτω ακολουθει μοι και αναστας ηκολουθει αυτω	και παραγων ειδεν <i>ιακωβον τον του αλφαιου</i> καθημενον επι το τελωνιον και λεγει αυτω ακολουθει μοι και αναστας ηκολουθησεν αυτω	και παραγων ειδεν <i>λευει τον του αλφαιου</i> καθημενον επι το τελωνιον και λεγει αυτω ακολουθει μοι και καταλιπων παντα αναστας ηκολουθει αυτω

Table 9.9: The Calling of Matthew/Levi (Codex Bezae)

Perhaps the most striking characteristic is that the name of the tax collector differs across the three Gospels—Matthaios, Iakobos, and Levi. On the other hand, notice how the framing material in the Gospel of Luke more nearly matches the framing of Matthew and Mark. The synoptic relations here differ in fairly substantive ways from the relations in Codex Sinaiticus.

Examining two actual manuscripts side-by-side helps us to see that it is not the case that the variant readings in the apparatus just intrinsically belong down at the bottom of the page below the main body of our critical editions. Any one of these readings may be the earliest recoverable text. Every variant represents an editor’s decision, a choice made between multiple possible readings. And that leads to a central question: How exactly do editors choose between variants? They look at many factors. Editors have traditionally referred to the differing quality of the manuscripts in which readings appear. They consider the age of the manuscripts. They determine the degree to which a given variant matches an author’s style. But in the Synoptic Gospels, there is an added issue that is crucial for our

²⁴ For details on the manuscript, see Parker 1992.

topic, a phenomenon called synoptic harmonization. In the opinion of most textual critics of the New Testament, the copyists who produced our surviving manuscripts often eliminated small differences among the Synoptic Gospels, usually assimilating Mark to Matthew or Luke. Kurt and Barbara Aland have phrased it this way:

Particularly frequent are harmonizations between parallel texts with slight differences. In the Synoptic Gospels this could be quite unintentional. The scribe knew the text of the Gospels by heart, and when copying a pericope the details from a parallel passage would be suggested automatically. But again it could also be intentional, because it was impossible that sacred texts should not be in agreement. The text of the Gospel of Mark (which was the ‘weakest,’ i.e., used least extensively among the churches) was particularly susceptible to influence from parallel texts in the course of manuscript transmission (Aland and Aland 1995, 290).

Textual critics are in general agreement on this point, and they stress its importance as a factor in establishing the earliest recoverable Greek text. Thus, Bruce Metzger and Bart Ehrman have argued that “since scribes would frequently bring divergent passages into harmony with one another, in parallel passages (whether involving quotations from the Old Testament or different accounts of the same event or narrative) *that reading is to be preferred which stands in verbal dissidence with the other*” (Metzger and Ehrman 2005, 303, emphasis mine).²⁵

These claims are not without problems. The biggest is the assumption that we can know with certainty when any given reading actually is an instance of harmonization (rather than, say, simple coincidence). But I want to set aside such problems and examine the implications of these claims: If, as a general rule, editors of the Synoptic Gospels have opted to favor unparalleled readings as more original, then the eclectic text produced by such a process will provide a version of the Gospels with *the least possible* verbal agreement among the three Synoptic Gospels. What this means is that, even if editors do an excellent job, at least some instances of agreements among the Synoptic Gospels will probably be lost in the production of our Greek text.

It will be helpful to illustrate some of the complexity of the editorial decisions that translate manuscripts with variants into a readable critical synopsis. Take, for example, a saying of Jesus in the triple tradition, the Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath. Here is the saying as printed in the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis* (Table 9.10):

²⁵So also Elliott 1980: 231: “It is a useful and valuable rule of thumb in textual criticism to accept as the original text the variant which makes parallel passages more dissimilar, and to explain the secondary text as scribal harmonization.”

assimilating it to the parallel in Mk 2:28), than that καί should have been deleted from early representatives of several text-types. The non-Markan word order is likewise to be preferred” (Metzger 1994, 117). In this instance, the Nestle-Aland text has the virtue of lining up precisely with some of our earliest manuscripts across all three Gospels. Codex Vaticanus, for instance, a codex of the full Bible likely produced in the fourth century, supports the Nestle-Aland reading for each of the Gospels in this passage, as does Codex Sinaiticus. It is, however, surprising that the Nestle-Aland apparatus for these verses lacks any indication of variation in the manuscripts of Matthew. As we saw in the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis*, there was some interesting support in later manuscripts for an alternative reading in Matthew that matches the text of Mark. This is in addition to the fairly strong support for the Markan reading among manuscripts of Luke.²⁶ Thus, if the editors of the Nestle-Aland edition have in fact correctly identified the earliest recoverable reading for all three Gospels, then it is interesting that so many manuscripts of both Matthew and Luke have been *independently* harmonized *to the text of Mark* in this passage, especially given the Alands’ characterization of Mark as the “weakest” of the three Gospels.

For an even more striking example of the problem of assimilation and the creation of a critical text, we can look at the end of Matthew chapter 21. Here is the Nestle-Aland text for that portion of Matthew along with the parallel passages in Mark and Luke (Table 9.12):

²⁶ The apparent stability of the saying in Greek manuscripts of Mark is impressive, although it is interesting to note that in the Old Latin Codex Vercellensis the saying in Mark 2:28 is followed directly by a version of Mark 3:21 (*et cum audissent qui ab eo exierunt detinere eum dicebant enim quia extitit mente*).

Matthew 21:42-46	Mark 12:10-12	Luke 20:17-19
<p>42 οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς· λίθον δὲν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας· <u>παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν;</u></p> <p>43 διὰ τοῦτο λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἀρθήσεται ἀφ' ὑμῶν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ δοθήσεται ἔθνει ποιοῦντι τοὺς καρποὺς αὐτῆς.</p> <p>44 [□][καὶ <i>ὁ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον</i> τοῦτον <i>συνθλασθήσεται· ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ λικμήσει αὐτόν.]</i></p> <p>45 Ἐκεῖνοι οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι τὰς παραβολὰς αὐτοῦ ἔγνωσαν ὅτι περὶ αὐτῶν λέγει·</p> <p>46 καὶ ζητοῦντες <u>αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι</u></p> <p>ἐφοβήθησαν τοὺς ὄχλους, Ἐπεὶ ἦσαν εἰς προφήτην αὐτὸν εἶχον.</p>	<p>10 Οὐδὲ τὴν γραφὴν ταύτην ἀνέγνωτε· λίθον δὲν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας·</p> <p>11 <u>παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη καὶ ἔστιν θαυμαστὴ ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν;</u></p> <p>12 Καὶ ἐζήτουν αὐτὸν κρατῆσαι,</p> <p><i>καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν ὄχλον, ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν εἶπεν.</i></p> <p>[□]καὶ ἀφέντες αὐτὸν ἀπήλθον.</p>	<p>17 τί οὖν ἐστὶν τὸ γεγραμμένον τοῦτο· λίθον δὲν ἀπεδοκίμασαν οἱ οἰκοδομοῦντες, οὗτος ἐγενήθη εἰς κεφαλὴν γωνίας;</p> <p>18 πᾶς <i>ὁ πεσὼν ἐπ' ἐκεῖνον τὸν λίθον</i></p> <p><i>συνθλασθήσεται· ἐφ' ὃν δ' ἂν πέσῃ, λικμήσει αὐτόν.</i></p> <p>19 Καὶ ἐζήτησαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ ἀρχιερεῖς ἐπιβαλεῖν ἐπ' αὐτὸν τὰς χεῖρας ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ ὥρᾳ <i>καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν τὸν λαόν,</i></p> <p><i>ἔγνωσαν γὰρ ὅτι πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἶπεν τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην.</i></p>
<p>42 ^Γ υμων D* f^{1.13} 1424 sa mae</p> <p>43 ^ο κ B* Θ 565. 700. 892 txt B² C D K L W Z Δ 0102 f^{1.13} 33. 579. 1241. 1424. / 844 m; Ir^{lat}</p> <p>44 [□] D 33 it sy^s; Or Eus^{sy^r} txt κ B C K L W Z Δ (- και Θ) 0102 f^{1.13} 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. / 844 m lat sy^{c.p.h} co</p> <p>45 ^ρ ακουσαντες δε κ L Z 33. 892 aur sa bo txt B C D K W Δ Θ 0102 f^{1.13} 565. 579. 700. 1241. 1424. / 844 m lat sy^{p.h} mae</p> <p>46 ^Γ επειδη C K W Δ 0102 f¹³ 565. 579. 700. 1241. 1424. / 844 m txt κ B D L Θ f¹ 33. 892</p> <p>^ρ ως C D K W Δ 0102 f¹³ 33. 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424. / 844 m sy co txt κ B L Θ f¹</p>	<p>12 [□] W</p>	<p>19 ^ρ 4 5 3 / 2 κ D N Γ Δ Ψ 565. 579. 700. 892. 1241. 1424 m lat sy^{s.c.p} sa οι γραμματεις και οι Φαρισαιοι C txt A B K L W Θ f^{1.13} 33. 2542 e sy^h bo ^ρ 2-4 / A C K N W Γ Δ Θ Ψ f¹ 33. 565. 700. 1241. 1424 m sy^h 2 3 / 579 ειρηκεν την παραβολην αυτην D txt κ B L f¹³ 892. 2542 latt</p>

Table 9.12: The Stone that the Builders Rejected (Nestle-Aland)

In all three versions, we have a citation of Psalm 118 followed by a saying of Jesus with nearly a full sentence of material common to Matthew and Luke but absent in Mark. But note verse 44 in Matthew. It is marked with a small square, the Nestle-Aland symbol indicating omitted text. If we look down in the apparatus for verse 44, we can see that this verse is indeed lacking in a very small group of witnesses. But the editors have decided to place verse 44 in brackets, indicating that “the authenticity of the text enclosed in brackets is dubious.” In fact, the editors regarded this passage not just as dubious, but as definitely a later addition to the text of Matthew, as Metzger explained in his commentary:

Many modern scholars regard the verse as an early interpolation (from Lk 20:18) into most manuscripts of Matthew. On the other hand, however, the words are not the same, and a more appropriate place for its insertion would have been after ver. 42. Its omission can perhaps be accounted for when the eye of the copyist passed from ἀὐτῆς (ver. 43) to αὐτόν. *While considering the verse to be an accretion to the text, yet because of the antiquity of the reading and its importance in the textual tradition, the Committee decided to retain it in the text, enclosed within square brackets* (Metzger 1994, 47, my emphasis).

The editors acknowledged that the text was “an accretion,” but they opted to print it anyway (in brackets) because of its “importance in the textual tradition.” If we turn to the Huck-Greeven *Synopsis*, we find that the verse is simply missing entirely from their text. These are interesting decisions. If we look at the evidence in the Nestle-Aland apparatus, we find that the manuscripts generally regarded as the earliest and most reliable contain the verse. It is present in Codex Vaticanus, Codex Sinaiticus, and Codex Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus, not to mention the Coptic versions and what are generally regarded as the most important minuscules. On the other hand, the small group of witnesses lacking the verse includes Codex Bezae and the Old Latin.²⁷ This passage thus provides a vivid example of how editorial decisions can lead to, depending on one’s perspective, the disappearance of a fairly major agreement of Matthew and Luke against Mark that is present in many of our earliest surviving manuscripts, or the creation of such an agreement that is absent in some important witnesses.

The significance of such textual decisions divides scholars of the Synoptic Problem,

²⁷ It has been suggested that a more recently published papyrus from Oxyrhynchus, P.Oxy. 64.4404 (P104) supports the omission of verse 44. For the fullest discussion of the matter, see Lanier 2016 and the literature cited there. This papyrus is sometimes assigned to a date as early as the second century, so it is regarded by some as an especially important witness. The text of the papyrus, however, is highly uncertain and thus of limited usefulness in the present discussion. And in any event, the date of this papyrus relies solely on palaeographic evidence and is therefore subject to doubt. On the scant evidence used to establish the second century date for P.Oxy. 64.4404, see Nongbri 2018: 245.

and they generally treat such matters, if at all, as an afterthought.²⁸ Yet these kinds of editorial decisions are foundational to the whole enterprise of the Synoptic Problem. Very small differences of word choice or word order in the critical text that are sometimes ignored by exegetes take on special significance with reference to the Synoptic Problem because it is exactly questions of precise diction and word order that allow scholars to argue for or against, say, the Two-Source Hypothesis or the Farrer Hypothesis. That the creators of Matthew and Luke each relied on a manuscript (or manuscripts?) of Mark still seems like a safe conclusion. But in light of the realities of manuscript variation and transmission, deciding firmly between the Two-Source Hypothesis and the Farrer Hypothesis becomes more challenging.²⁹

CONCLUSIONS

Where, then, do these observations leave us? It is sobering to acknowledge the sheer complexity of trying to balance the textual criticism of the individual Synoptic Gospels with the determination of synoptic relationships. Without a set of stable texts to compare, how can this kind of work take place responsibly?³⁰ One thing that seems clear is that traditional printed Greek synopses, while necessary for doing work on the Synoptic Problem, are not adequate for carrying out such work seriously. New tools are needed. At minimum, a critical parallel Gospel text with fuller citation of witnesses is required. Fortunately, the producers of the *editio critica maior* have produced a prototype of this kind of complex synopsis that is highly promising.³¹ But more innovative tools will be helpful as well: The recently published synopsis of Matthew, Mark and Luke with the texts of Codex Vaticanus and Codex Bezae on facing pages offers one example of a useful set of parallels that re-centers our focus on the manuscripts.³²

Finally, a work like the Vaticanus-Bezae parallels also helpfully reminds us that the earliest surviving manuscripts of the Synoptic Gospels that preserve extensive parallel passages date to the fourth and fifth centuries, meaning that our critical synopses are based on manuscripts that are the result of at least two centuries of textual transmission and

²⁸ For contrasting views, see Kloppenborg Verbin 2000: 36 and Goodacre 2002: 162.

²⁹ It does appear that the more widely held Two-Source Hypothesis, which requires non-agreement of Matthew and Luke against Mark, may be especially liable to scrutiny in light of editors' preferences for favoring dissimilar readings in parallel passages.

³⁰ A good example of a piece of scholarship that really wrestles with the problem productively is Holmes 1990.

³¹ Strutwolf and Wachtel 2011. Sample pages are viewable online here:

<https://app.box.com/s/pncm86vx9ko34jd4hk12>

³² Read-Heimerdinger and Rius-Camps 2014. One could also imagine a parallel text in the form of Reuben Swanson's *New Testament Greek Manuscripts* series.

intermingling.³³ What we can know with confidence about the text(s) of the Gospels in the period before the fourth century is, I think, more limited than we have sometimes imagined. Conflicting trends in composition and transmission in those prior centuries pull in different directions. The creative re-writing of Mark by Matthew and Luke in the first or second century suggests a willingness to freely change, cut, and expand gospel material.³⁴ But developments in the second and third centuries, such as the emerging argument for a four-Gospel canon and the production of gospel harmonies, suggest an impulse toward harmonization in the period before our earliest surviving manuscripts.³⁵ This should probably make us humble about any and all conclusions we make about issues of “dependence” among the Synoptic Gospels.

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³³ While one fairly extensive manuscript of the synoptic Gospels is sometimes assigned to the third century (the Chester Beatty codex of the Gospels and Acts, P45), the number of parallel passages preserved is limited, and the dating of the codex to the third rather than the fourth century may be overly optimistic; see Nongbri 2018: 134-138.

³⁴ On this point, see the fascinating work of Larsen (Larsen 2018).

³⁵ See further Parker 1997: 120-121.

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