

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Scripture* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_scripture-01.php

THE CONFUSION BETWEEN JOHN AND JOHN MARK IN ANTIQUITY

The suggestion previously advanced in this Quarterly¹ that a confusion between John Mark and John the son of Zebedee existed in antiquity, is considerably reinforced by an examination of some little noticed material, by taking note of one highly significant new discovery and by giving further attention to some apparently unrelated documents.

The Arabic History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria, a tenth-century compilation and translation by Severus, bishop of Al Ushmunain, of Greek and Coptic fragments which he discovered in various Egyptian monasteries,² is regarded as depending heavily upon Eusebius and certain early *Acta*,³ though one patrologist insists that 'the writer used Hegesippus and Origen'.⁴ In this work John Mark is described as the son of a certain Aristobulus (the name, as we shall see, is most important), a native of Cyrene whose brother was Barnabas and who had a cousin married to Simon Peter. The latter is said to have instructed John Mark in the Scriptures and the two became inseparable companions (as the beloved disciple and Peter appear to be in the fourth gospel, and as Peter and John the Apostle are represented to be in the Acts of the Apostles). There is nothing new in the hagiographer's depiction of John Mark's home as the scene of the events preceding and following the Saviour's Passion, but it is noteworthy that this narrative introduces John Mark into an episode recorded only in the fourth gospel: 'he (John Mark) was among the servants who poured out the water which Our Lord turned into wine, at the marriage of Cana in Galilee'.⁵ We have already seen how Alexander the Monk relates John Mark to all that occurs in the fourth gospel from chapter five onward;⁶ here we find the correlation carried back to the second chapter. The next document to which we turn our attention appears to complete the process by identifying John Mark with one of the 'two disciples' of the Baptist mentioned in Jn. 1:35.⁷ This is found in the fifth-century Egyptian 'Witness of Holy John the Precursor and

¹ 'John Mark: A Riddle within the Johannine Enigma' *Scripture* 15 (1963), 88-92.

² Principally from the monasteries of St Macarius and Nahya.

³ B. Evetts in his introduction to the text (Graffin-Nau *P.O.* 1, 103; Paris 1907).

⁴ H. J. Bardsley, *Reconstructions of Early Christian Documents* S.P.C.K. (London 1935), p. 15.

⁵ *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* Pt. 1, ch. 1 (*P.O.* 1, 135ff.). The *Synaxarium Alexandrinum* (Ed. J. Forget; *C.S.C.O.* xix, 96) also gives Aristobulus as the name of his father.

⁶ See my previous article referred to in n. 1 on p. 23.

⁷ The identification of the 'other disciple' with the Evangelist was current in Chrysostom's time as he notes in his 18th homily on the Gospel of John (*M.P.G.* 59, 117). cf. M.-E. Boismard: *Du Baptême A Cana* (Paris 1956), 71-2.

Baptist' attributed to 'John Mark his disciple'.¹ At the end of the Paris *ms* of this *Marturion* the author states: 'I have written this, brother, I, Mark, the first disciple of the holy precursor and baptist John. After having followed him and having learned from him to believe in Our Lord Jesus Christ who will deliver us from the wrath to come, I then attached myself to the holy leader of the Apostles, to Peter'.²

Over three years ago two articles appeared in the *New York Times* (30 December and 31 December, 1960) relative to a newly discovered letter of Clement of Alexandria and dealing with a hitherto unknown 'secret' gospel of Mark. Dr Morton Smith of Columbia University, who found this highly significant document at the monastery of Mar Saba near Jerusalem in 1958, has completed a study of this letter which awaits publication, and it would be presumptuous to build upon the information thus far available without his critical evaluation of it; but it does seem certain that an apparently authentic writing of Clement of Alexandria attributes to Mark, the companion of Peter, a gospel that includes material which has hitherto been classified as distinctively Johannine (such as an account of the raising of Lazarus).

There is, therefore, evidence from Constantinople (Chrysostom), Cyprus (Alexander the Monk), and most especially from Egypt (the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, the *Witness of John the Baptist* and, probably, the newly discovered letter of Clement of Alexandria) that John Mark was, if not confused with the son of Zebedee, at least assigned a role that traditionally belongs to the latter. The likelihood that this was due to a *real* confusion is reflected in the strange affirmations of three Spanish ecclesiastical writers of the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries. These are St Braulio of Saragossa, Julian Peter, Archdeacon of Toledo, and Heleca, bishop of Saragossa, all of whom identify 'Aristobulus, the brother of Barnabas' with Zebedee the father of James and John!³ This garbling of tradition can only be accounted for by the fact that John is the one name common to both strands and that John (Mark) was not distinguished from the Apostle John. The *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum*, relying on a text of Sophronius of Jerusalem (seventh century) which this author has not been able to trace⁴ makes the same identification of Aristobulus with

¹ P.O. 4, 526ff.

² *ibid.*, p. 540. This document cannot, of course, be the work of John Mark. On the possibility of the latter's having actually been a contributor to the New Testament cf. L. Dieu: 'Marc Source des Actes?' *RB* 29 (1920), pp. 555-69.

³ cf. *Acta Sanctorum Martii* (Ed. J. Bolland Paris and Rome, 1856), t. ii (xv Martii), p. 369.

⁴ *Synaxarium Constantinopolitanum* (Ed. H. Delehaye), col. 664. A. Calmet in his *Dictionarium Sacrae Scripturae*, t. I, 121 (Venice 1766) gives as reference: 'Sophron. in t. 7 Bibliot. PP.'

Zebedee and buries him beside St John the Theologian (i.e. the Evangelist), at the foot of Mt Libaton.¹

Howsoever little weight one may choose to attach to this assorted testimony, it exists and it does not support the repeated contention that tradition *clearly* and with one voice attributes the fourth gospel to the son of Zebedee.² A tradition which is confused about the identity of its subject cannot be called clear.

Several decades ago G. W. Butterworth pointed out that the active, not to say agile, John described in Clement of Alexandria's *Quis Dives Salvetur*³ could not have been the son of Zebedee. The famous episode narrated by Clement is dated to approximately A.D. 96, at which time even the youngest of the Twelve would have been at least an octogenarian. The John of Clement's tale is 'ready at a moment's notice to ride on horseback into the hills'; perhaps 'one who had, in his boyhood seen the Lord (or possibly one whose parents had told him that as a young child he had seen the Lord) might fit into the story,' but hardly a very old man—someone who had been a disciple of Jesus in the real sense.⁴ Yet the John of Clement's account is a man of wide authority and influence; not an Apostle but surely very close to being one. His situation corresponds to what we can gather about the author of 3 Jn.⁵ The 'Presbyter' of this epistle also enjoys wide authority and influence yet it is not acknowledged by all: Diotrophes will not receive him. Can we suppose that one of the twelve would have been insulted by a fellow Christian who was definitely not a heretic? Dom Chapman's interesting attempt to reconstruct the historical background of 2 and 3 Jn. is not without relevance to these considerations.⁶ He identifies the Demetrius of 3 Jn. 12 with the Demas of 2 Tim. 4:9 and sees in Diotrophes a disciple of Paul. Paul and Demas had come to a parting of ways and the Apostle of the Gentiles, with his usual candour, had not minced words in expressing his chagrin. Yet the Presbyter (years having passed since the death of

¹ cf. R. Aigrain, 'Aristobule' *DHGE* 4, col. 194. 'Libaton' does not correspond to any of the names, ancient or modern, given to the mountains or hills in the environs of Ephesus.

² e.g., *inter plurimos*, J. Vosté (*Studia Ioanea*, Ed. 2a, Rome 1930) terms the Patristic consensus 'indubius et unanims', p. 16. More recently L. Bouyer has written (*Le Quatrième Évangile*, Tournai, 1958), 'Peu de traditions antiques se présentent avec une telle continuité et une telle unanimité si loin que nous puissions remonter', p. 13.

³ *M.P.G.* 9, p. 648ff.

⁴ G. W. Butterworth, 'The Story of St. John and the Robber' *JTS* 18 (1916-17), pp. 141-6.

⁵ It is worth recalling that the *Decretum Gelasianum* (A.D. 495, though it may be a century older) distinguished between John the Presbyter, the author of 2 and 3 Jn., and the Apostle John, the author of the Gospel and First Epistle (cf. *Enchiridion Biblicum*, § 19, Rome 1927). So did St Jerome in *De Viris Illustribus* xviii (*M.P.L.* 23, 670).

⁶ J. Chapman, 'Historical Setting of II and III St John' *JTS* 5 (1904), pp. 357-68; 517-34.

BOOK REVIEWS

Paul) staunchly defends Demetrius. Diotrophes will countenance neither of them. Thus far Dom Chapman. If John Mark and the Presbyter were one and the same it would be intelligible that he should take the stand Dom Chapman attributed to him in this letter. The position of Demetrius is very similar to that experienced by John Mark many years before (cf. Acts 13:13; 15:37-9), 'a most painful and unedifying episode'.¹ Paul and John Mark were eventually reconciled but there were evidently those among the Apostle's disciples who required his insistence that they receive the younger man (cf. Col. 4:10).² In Demetrius John Mark saw himself, and in Diotrophes that same Pauline circle which balked at tolerating anyone who had ever disagreed with its hero.

This largely hypothetical reconstruction is not offered as though it were comparable in value to the evidence presented beforehand, but only because the Clementine anecdote and the Third Epistle of John also present us with a John who can easily be identified with John Mark, but scarcely at all with the son of Zebedee.

J. EDGAR BRUNS

St Michael's College
University of Toronto

BOOK REVIEWS

Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*. Translated and edited by John A. Baker. Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1964. pp. 446. 45s

This book is the first volume of an important work on the development of Christian doctrine before the Council of Nicaea. It first appeared in 1958, and now becomes available in an excellent English translation. It is necessary to point out for the benefit of those who are already using the French original that in this English edition 'the author has, in conjunction with the translator, taken the opportunity to make important alterations both in content and arrangement, with the purpose of enhancing the usefulness of the work'. It thus constitutes a second edition of a work whose aim is to draw our attention to the first period in the growth of Christian theology, dominated by Jewish theologians and still remaining within that Semitic pattern of thought

¹ cf. F. C. Grant on Acts 15, 36ff., in *Nelson's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 473 (New York 1962).

² cf. T. K. Abbot, *Ephesians and Colossians* (ICC, Edinburgh 1909), p. 300.