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*Mark and his Gentile Audience: A Traditio-Historical  
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its Interface with Gentile Polytheism in the Roman  
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JENNIFER WILKINSON

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**Mark and his Gentile Audience:  
A Traditio-Historical and Socio-Cultural Investigation of  
Mk 4.35-9.29 and its Interface with Gentile Polytheism in the  
Roman Near East**

By

JENNIFER WILKINSON

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF  
PHILOSOPHY

AT

DURHAM UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGION

2012

## ABSTRACT

This thesis takes a novel, inter-disciplinary approach to an examination of the Markan evangelist's portrayal of Jesus' interface with Gentiles in a central section of his Gospel (Mk 4.35-9.29). As a framework to this section, Mark created a connected account of Jesus' itinerary that included trips to perform miracles in the Gentile territories of Gerasa, Tyre, Bethsaida, the wider Decapolis and Caesarea Philippi. This thesis examines the role of these pericopae in the narrative as a whole and challenges the view that Mark's geographical references were largely symbolic, rural and for the most part aimed at Jewish followers. The study scrutinizes Mark's choice of geographical locations, systematically examines recent research on the religious milieu in these specific locations and brings this research into connection with the Gentile mission portrayed by Mark. The polytheistic and social environment in which Mark's first century audience functioned has received little attention in recent scholarship and represents a lacuna in New Testament historical-critical research which this study addresses. A detailed exegesis of this section of the narrative concludes that Mark (a) deliberately redacts his text to place miracles in geographical regions where Gentiles predominate; (b) emphasizes obduracy and faithlessness on the part of Jewish officialdom and the Jewish disciples, in contrast to an implied understanding on the part of the Gentiles; (c) orchestrates a prolonged and sustained Jesus mission to the Gentiles as a precursor to his own community's mission, to respond to their need for support and reassurance and (d) formulates his narrative to engage with his intended first century audience's Graeco-Roman religious and social worldview, inviting them to make comparison between the activities of Jesus and other contemporary miracle-performing men and polytheistic gods.

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## **DECLARATION**

This work has been submitted to Durham University in accordance with the regulations for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and none of it has been previously submitted to Durham University or to any other university for a degree.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

The scriptural quotations contained in this thesis are from the New Revised Standard Version, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the churches of Christ in the United States of America. Abbreviations of biblical chapter and verse and other ancient sources follow the Sheffield Academic Press style (D. J. A. Clines, *The Sheffield Manual for Authors and Editors in Biblical Studies* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1977], sections 17 and 24).

1QM	<i>War Scroll</i> , DSS
1QSa	Appendix A ( <i>Rule of the Congregation</i> ) to 1QS, DSS
<i>Aen.</i>	<i>Aeneid</i> , Virgil
<i>Abod. Zar.</i>	<i>Abodah Zarah</i> , Palestinian Talmud
<i>Adv. Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i> , Irenaeus
<i>Alex.</i>	<i>Alexander the Great</i> , Quintus Curtius Rufus
<i>Annals</i>	<i>Annals</i> , Tacitus
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	<i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> , Josephus
<i>Apion</i>	<i>Contra Apionem</i> , Josephus
<i>Aug.</i>	<i>Augustus</i> , Suetonius
<i>Bab.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
<i>B. San.</i>	<i>Babylonian Talmud: Sanhedrin</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
<i>Cal.</i>	<i>Caligula</i> , Suetonius
<i>Catiline</i>	<i>Conspiracy of Catiline</i> , Gaius Sallustius Crispus
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CD	<i>Damascus Document</i> , DSS
<i>Cic.</i>	<i>Cicero</i> , Plutarch
<i>Com. Jn.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i> , Origen
<i>Con. Flacc.</i>	<i>Contra Flaccum</i> , Philo
CUP	Cambridge University Press
DDS	<i>On the Syrian Goddess</i> , Lucian
<i>Dig.</i>	<i>Digest of Justinian</i> , Ulpian
<i>D. L.</i>	Diogenes Laertius
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls

<i>Eccl. Hist.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i> , Eusebius
<i>Epist.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i> , Pliny the Younger
<i>FRLANT</i>	<i>Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments</i>
<i>Geogr.</i>	<i>Geography</i> , Ptolemy
<i>Geogr.</i>	<i>Geography</i> , Strabo
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	Gospel of Thomas
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories</i> , Herodotus
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories</i> , Polybius
<i>Hist.</i>	<i>Histories</i> , Tacitus
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>HUR</i>	Harvard University Press
<i>IB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Bible</i>
<i>Iliad</i>	<i>Iliad</i> , Homer
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JRA</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legatio ad Gaium</i> , Philo
<i>L. Sac.</i>	<i>Lex Sacra</i> , Selinous
<i>Life</i>	<i>Vita Josephi</i> , Josephus
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> , H. G. Liddell et al
<i>LXX</i>	Septuagint
<i>m. Bek</i>	<i>Mishnah Bekorot</i>
<i>m. B. Qam.</i>	<i>Mishnah, Bava Qamma</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> , Apuleius
<i>m. Zavim</i>	<i>Mishnah Zevahim</i>
<i>Nat. Hist.</i>	<i>Natural History</i> , Pliny the Elder
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>OUP</i>	Oxford University Press
<i>Peregr.</i>	<i>Passing of Peregrinus</i> , Lucian
<i>PDM</i>	<i>Papyrus Demotic Magical</i>

<i>PGM</i>	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>PGM IV</i>	<i>Great Paris Papyri Graecae Magicae</i>
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>Papyri Oxyrhynchus</i>
<i>Prof. Rel</i>	<i>De Errore Profanarum Religionum</i> , Fermicus Maternus
<i>QpHAB</i>	<i>Habakkuk Pesher</i> , DSS
<i>Refut.</i>	<i>Refutation of all Heresies</i> , Hippolytus
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>Epistle to the Romans</i> , Ignatius
<i>Rom. Hist.</i>	<i>Roman History</i> , Dio Cassius
<i>R. Rus.</i>	<i>Res Rusticae</i> , Varro
<i>Sat.</i>	<i>Saturneila</i> , Petronius
<i>Str.–B.</i>	<i>Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch</i> , Strack and Billerbeck
<i>SNTS MS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>Targ. Ket.</i>	<i>Targum of Writings</i> , Rabbinic
<i>Tib.</i>	<i>Life of Tiberius</i> , Suetonius
<i>T. Sol.</i>	<i>Testament of Solomon</i>
<i>Vesp.</i>	<i>Vespasian: The Twelve Caesars</i> , Suetonius
<i>Vita Apoll.</i>	<i>Vita Apollonii</i> , Philostratus
<i>War</i>	<i>De Bellum Judaicum</i> , Josephus
<i>YUP</i>	Yale University Press
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### ***Introduction***

#### **1.1 Background, Aims, Objectives and Scope**

This thesis takes an inter-disciplinary approach to an investigation of the Markan evangelist's portrayal of Jesus' interface with Gentiles in a central section of his Gospel (Mk 4.35-9.29). As a framework to this section Mark created a connected account of Jesus' itinerary that included trips to perform miracles in the Gentile territories of Gerasa, Tyre, Bethsaida, the wider Decapolis and Caesarea Philippi. An examination is made of the role of these pericopae in the narrative as a whole and corrects the view that Mark's geographical references were largely symbolic, rural and for the most part aimed at Jewish followers.

The study systematically scrutinizes Mark's choice of geographical locations, investigates recent research on the religious milieu in these specific locations and brings this research into connection with the Gentile mission portrayed by Mark. The polytheistic environment or cultural 'web of significance' in which Mark's first century audience functioned has received little attention in recent scholarship and represents a lacuna in New Testament historical-critical research.<sup>1</sup> An exegetical survey is made of the particular Gentile orientated passages contained in this central section of Mark's Gospel (5.1-20; 6.45-53; 7.24-30; 7.31-37; 8.1-10; 8.22-30; 9.14-29) to determine how, in the course of transmission, the story of Jesus' confrontation with the polytheistic world was shaped by the

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<sup>1</sup> C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 5.

evangelist to accommodate the 'doctrinal, apologetic, pastoral and liturgical needs of the early church'.<sup>2</sup>

The objectives of the dissertation are: (Chapter One) to give a brief history of scholarship in relation to the Markan Gentile mission and first century polytheism in the Roman Near East, discuss the methodological approaches applied in this thesis and define the scope of the investigation; (Chapter Two) to argue that the internal and external evidence relating to authorship, date, provenance and audience of the Gospel, suggests composition in southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee, at the time of the Romano-Jewish War (66–73 CE); (Chapter Three) to explore the social, political and religious first century environment in the Gentile regions where Mark locates specific miracles and (Chapters Four to Seven) to conduct an exegetical survey of the miracles recorded in Mk 5.1-9.29 to determine which parts of the written material have been redacted by the evangelist or preserved in a form similar to that used in the original tradition.

Chapter Eight determines whether Mark (a) deliberately redacted his text to place miracles in geographical regions where Gentiles predominated; (b) emphasized obduracy and faithlessness on the part of the Jewish disciples in contrast to an implied understanding and faithfulness on the part of the Gentiles; (c) orchestrated a prolonged and sustained Jesus mission to the Gentiles as a precursor to his own community's mission, as a didactic response to the community's need for support and reassurance at that time and (d) formulated his narrative to engage with his intended first century audience's Graeco-Roman religious and social worldview, inviting them to make comparison between the activities of Jesus and other contemporary miracle-performing men and polytheistic gods.

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<sup>2</sup> W. R. Telford, 'Mark' in J. Riches, W. R. Telford and C. M. Tuckett (eds), *The Synoptic Gospels* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 155.

Without prejudice to the identity of the authors and following convention, I will refer to the Synoptic Gospels simply as Matthew, Mark and Luke. I intend to examine only the passages and geographical locations in this section of the Markan Gospel where the author's intention is to present Jesus as interacting with Gentiles. I have made no attempt to be completely exhaustive in citing secondary literature, either supportive or otherwise. The citations I have given are meant, unless otherwise noted, to be representative. Whilst there were many reports of miracles and miracle-working rabbis in the Jewish literature of this period, the formal characteristics of those stories are in many respects different from those of the non-Jewish Graeco-Roman world and for that reason, and the issue of space, they have not generally been taken into account in this thesis. It is also not within the scope of this thesis to try to address the problematic issue of this quasi-biographical Gospel's genre. This is a highly disputed subject and the debate is ongoing as to whether the Gospel of Mark is a literary *novum*, aretalogy, tragedy, Graeco-Roman biography, *midrash*, apocalyptic text or some other literary type.<sup>3</sup> However, I will attempt to situate the text in the history of ancient literature of the period.

## **1.2 History of Scholarship: Gospel of Mark**

Interest in the social milieu in which the early church conducted its mission received some early focus, lapsed into irrelevance and has not been substantially revived in recent New Testament study. In the seventies Theissen conducted an influential social-historical study which encompassed the whole of the New Testament and, more recently, Meeks has focused on the political and social

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<sup>3</sup> For recent scholarship on genre, see W. R. Telford, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark* (Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2009), 9.

background of the Jesus movement, primarily as it relates to Pauline Christianity.<sup>4</sup> In relation to the Gospel of Mark and its cultural environment, unresolved issues still surround authorship, date, audience, provenance, the complexities of Markan geography and the Gentile mission.<sup>5</sup> Recent scholarship has had a shift in perspective from source-,<sup>6</sup> form-,<sup>7</sup> and redaction-critical<sup>8</sup> approaches and eclipsed these paradigms with holistic techniques which view the Gospel as a piece of literature and as an integrated, literary whole.<sup>9</sup> An exhaustive discussion on these issues is not possible within the limits of the present work. However, the opinions of key contributors to the debates (published in books, theses and significant journals), their methodological approaches, the strengths and weakness of their variant views and their contribution to the understanding of the problems will be discussed within the parameters outlined above.

Scholarship is almost unanimously agreed that the Markan Gospel is perhaps closest to the historical Jesus tradition.<sup>10</sup> This thesis accepts the 'Two-

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<sup>4</sup> G. Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus. A Sociological Analysis of the Earliest Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1978); W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven & London: YUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2003). See also the sociological approach of S. C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (SNTS MS, 80: Cambridge UK & New York: CUP, 1994), 82-86.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of recent Markan scholarship on these issues, see Telford's *Writing on the Gospel of Mark, passim*.

<sup>6</sup> This is the attempt to identify and isolate the disparate written or oral elements or sources, from which the author or redactor constructed his final text.

<sup>7</sup> Form criticism demonstrates that the Gospel consisted of a series of separate units linked artificially into an overall framework. This methodology was developed during the inter-war period and is primarily associated with the names of M. Dibelius (1883-1947) and R. Bultmann (1884-1976).

<sup>8</sup> After the Second World War, redaction criticism emerged (*Redaktionsgeschichte*). On the Gospel of Mark this was pioneered by the German scholar, W. Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. J. Boyce, et al (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969). On the Gospel of Matthew; G. Bornkamm, G. Barth and H. W. Held, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (London: SCM Press, 1963) and in connection with Luke; H. Conzelmann, *Theology of St. Luke* (London: Faber, 1960).

<sup>9</sup> W. H. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979); B. M. F. van Iersel, *Reading Mark*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989); J. Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> The so-called 'Griesbach hypothesis' proposed by G. J. Griesbach in 1789, posits Mark as a secondary conflation of Matthew and Luke. This idea was taken up by W. R. Farmer, *Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Macmillan, 1964) and still has proponents

Source' theory, that Matthew and Luke are dependent upon Mark and that the non-Markan parallels between Matthew and Luke are the result of the evangelists' use of a written or oral text consisting largely of 'sayings' of Jesus, often referred to as 'Q'. In each of the Gospels, the evangelists have reinterpreted the life of Jesus for the purpose of teaching their own communities, in their contemporary setting. The guiding concept of this thesis is the view that Mark's Gospel was written by a Palestinian, addressed to his own community, at a time of crisis and heightened apocalyptic expectation, in close proximity to the events of the Romano-Jewish War (66-73 CE). At this time the Gentile-orientated Pauline sect, possibly not directly connected with the historical Jesus, was successful in its pursuit of converts. Whilst they did produce didactic material for their movement, there is no evidence to suggest they created a narrative account of Jesus' life and ministry. The early Jewish-orientated Jerusalem sect (comprising of some of Jesus' own close followers) appears to have essentially been eclipsed by the Gentile church, possibly through the impact of the Romano-Jewish War. This group had still maintained a close association with the cause of Jewish nationalism and the issue of extending the mission to the Gentiles was not yet resolved.<sup>11</sup> Mark's great accomplishment was to write a Gospel that told the story of Jesus and his disciples at the time of these developments from the perspective of the successful Gentile-orientated Pauline sect but also for the benefit of the beleaguered remnants of the Jerusalem movement.

It is a difficult task to analyse any work of ancient literature in order to determine the author and this is complicated in the case of the Markan Gospel by

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today: D. L. Dungan, 'The Purpose and Provenance of the Gospel of Mark According to the "Two Gospel" (Owen-Griesbach) Hypothesis' in W. R. Farmer (ed.), *New Synoptic Studies: The Cambridge Gospel Conference and Beyond* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 411-440.

<sup>11</sup> See S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1951).

the fact that there is no internal evidence to suggest the name of its creator. Many scholars have discounted enquiry into authorship as futile, including Grant who asserted in an early study that the Gospel was 'a book based on a common tradition, not a product of personal literary authorship'.<sup>12</sup> The late and inconsistent patristic evidence on authorship has been examined by many scholars including Black, Schildgen and more recently Blackwell. They consider any association with the disciple named Mark, mentioned throughout the New Testament, to be dubious.<sup>13</sup> In this thesis I will review the evidence relating to authorship in order to establish provenance but will dispense with historical inquiry into the figure of Mark as a personality, focussing instead on the text attributed to him.

There are many scholars who feel that it is also impossible to be specific regarding the Gospel's provenance.<sup>14</sup> However, the difficulties of this enterprise have not been a deterrent and the enduring question of Markan provenance and its resolution has resulted in a variety of locations which include Graeco-Roman cities as far apart as Rome (based mostly on patristic evidence),<sup>15</sup> Antioch<sup>16</sup> and

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<sup>12</sup> F. C. Grant, 'Gospel According to St. Mark', *IB*, 7 (1951), 632. See also, D. E. Nineham, *Gospel of Saint Mark* (London: A. & C. Black, 1968), 39; P. J. Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark with Complete Text from the Jerusalem Bible* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1986), 128; R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35.

<sup>13</sup> C. C. Black, *Mark: Images of an Apostolic Interpreter* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2001); B. D. Schildgen, *Power and Prejudice. The Reception of the Gospel of Mark* (Detroit MI: Wayne State University Press, 1999); B. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria* (PhD. thesis, Durham, 2010).

<sup>14</sup> J. R. Donahue, 'The Quest for the Community of Mark's Gospel', in F. Van Segbroeck, et al (eds), *Four Gospels 1992*, vol. II (Leuven: Leuven University Press/Peeters, 1992), 817-838. A similar view is also undertaken by P. J. J. Botha, 'The Historical Setting of Mark's Gospel: Problems and Possibilities', *JSNT*, 51 (1993), 27-55 and M. D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A. & C. Black, 1991), 8.

<sup>15</sup> S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 221-282; B. H. Standaert, *L'Évangile selon Marc: Composition et Genre Littéraire* (Nijmegen: Stichting Studentenpers, 1978); B. M. F. van Iersel, 'The Gospel According to St. Mark – Written for a Persecuted Community?', *Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift*, 34 (1980), 15-36; J. R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 5; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 35-41.

<sup>16</sup> K. Kertelge, 'The Epiphany of Jesus in the Gospel (Mark)', in W. R. Telford (ed.), *Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1995), 106.

Alexandria.<sup>17</sup> This thesis and more recent scholarship contend that the Gospel was written in northern Galilee,<sup>18</sup> or southern Syria.<sup>19</sup> (See Appendix 1 - Map: Southern Levant in the Roman Period.)

In relation to constructing the audience or community addressed by Mark, again some scholars consider this to be an impossible task.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, many methodological approaches have been taken to determine the character of the Markan audience including a multi-disciplinary approach (social anthropology, historical reconstruction, narrative analysis and deconstruction)<sup>21</sup> and critical examination from a sociological perspective.<sup>22</sup> I will argue that Mark's audience was a group located in southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee, where persecution, or the threat of it, was a reality. Mark's Jesus teaches the spiritual 'kingdom of God' (1.15; 4.11, 26, 30; 9.1, 47; 10.14-15, 23-25; 12.34; 14.25; 15.43) but it seems likely that his community knew about kingdom and empire only under

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<sup>17</sup> L. W. Barnard, 'St. Mark and Alexandria', *HTR*, 57.2 (1964), 145-150. External evidence is based on the late fourth century claim of Archbishop John Chrysostom of Constantinople (*Homily Matthew* 1). This assertion is generally regarded as the result of his misreading Eusebius' statement that Mark was sent to Alexandria to preach: τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ δὴ καὶ συνεγράψατο (*Eccl. Hist.* II.xvi.1-2).

<sup>18</sup> H. N. Roskam, *The Purpose of the Gospel of Mark in its Historical and Social Context* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2004), 103.

<sup>19</sup> J. Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 25-37; G. Theissen, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. L. Maloney (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 245-249; R. L. Rohrbaugh, 'The Social Location of the Marcan Audience', *BTB*, 23 (1993), 114-127; J. Schröter, 'The Gospel of Mark', in D. Aune (ed.), *Blackwell Companion to the New Testament* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 279. E. E. Ellis, 'The Date and Provenance of Mark's Gospel' in F. Van Segbroeck, *et al* (eds), *Four Gospels*, 814, specifically designates Caesarea Philippi as the Gospel's provenance.

<sup>20</sup> E. Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, trans. D. H. Madvig (London: SPCK, 1971), 25; R. E. Brown, *Churches the Apostles Left Behind* (New York: Paulinist Press, 1984), 28; Donahue, 'The Quest for the Community', 817-838; W. R. Telford, *Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 151; D. N. Peterson, *The Origins of Mark. The Markan Community in Current Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 5.

<sup>21</sup> R. J. McFarlane, *Mark's People: The Anatomy of a Community and its Narrative* (PhD. thesis, University of Sydney, Australia, 1995); S. H. Smith, *Structure, Redaction and Community in the Markan Controversy-Conflict Stories* (PhD. thesis, University of Sheffield, 1986).

<sup>22</sup> J. A. Wilde, *Social Description of the Community Reflected in the Gospel of Mark* (PhD. thesis, Drew University, 1974); J. S. Suh, *Discipleship and Community: Mark's Gospel in Sociological Perspective* (Claremont CA; Center for Asian-American Ministries, 1991).

the terms of the Roman exploitative system of tax and debt, malnutrition and sickness, agrarian oppression and demonic possession. Several methodological approaches have led to a variety of suggestions as to the Gospel's *Sitze im Leben* or function/setting in the life in its community.<sup>23</sup> A real possibility for the Gospel's function is as a didactic instrument addressed to Mark's community, suffering as a result of Roman occupation and the Romano-Jewish War and in need of comfort, encouragement and support in their mission of evangelisation of the Gentiles.

There is evidence that the early Jesus movement, attached to the Palestinian-Jewish community (which probably included most of the original Jewish disciples) took the form of a mildly modified Judaism.<sup>24</sup> The evangelist suggests that his own community were distinctive in many respects from this Jerusalem group whose leaders required circumcision of converts, obedience to the kosher food laws (Gal. 1-2; Acts 15.1) and harboured reluctance towards the admission of Gentiles. Sections of the Gospel examined in this thesis, include a major (Mk 7.1-23), as well as a minor controversy pericope (8.11-13) in which Mark portrays negativity towards and disassociation from Jesus' native Jewish milieu. It cannot be denied that the evangelist is very hard on the disciples who have hardened hearts (Mk 6.52) and persistently and ever increasingly misunderstand Jesus' mission and the true nature of discipleship (7.18; 8.15, 21; 8.32-33; 9.32; 10.35-37). I shall argue that Mark portrays the Jewish disciples

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<sup>23</sup> See Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*, who understood Mark as a directive to the Jerusalem Church advising them at the start of the Jewish War to cross the Jordan and relocate to Pella. Conversely, Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealot*, considered the Gospel was directed to pagans with a pro-Roman apologetic nuance. T. J. Weeden, *Mark – Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971) saw the Gospel as an attack on those who were falsely spreading miraculous tales and E. Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), understood Mark as a call to a community to maintain faith whilst suffering Roman persecution.

<sup>24</sup> Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus*, 111-119; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 321-327; 335-340.

closest to Jesus as obtuse, faithless and also grudging in their acceptance of Gentiles into the community.

Markan geography, and in particular the excursions into Gentile territory, has been criticized as inaccurate by many scholars who conclude that the evangelist was unfamiliar with the territories he describes. These inaccuracies form a central pillar in the arguments against Mark having been written within an eastern location.<sup>25</sup> Scholars have approached the anomalies in Markan geography from many different perspectives including a narrative approach,<sup>26</sup> spatial aspect,<sup>27</sup> or from a structuralist perspective.<sup>28</sup> The result has been that some scholars see Mark's geography as a random application of obscure references, which were inserted for literary and theological purposes,<sup>29</sup> whilst others see it as a redactional construct through which the evangelist (using the traditional material available to him) plots the Gentile mission.<sup>30</sup> Achtemeier, in his influential study on the pre-Markan miracle catenae, indicates that Mark is willing to tolerate geographical difficulties in order to link independent stories in his Gospel.<sup>31</sup> I have adopted the view that Mark's theological intentions govern his references to geographical

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<sup>25</sup> Nineham, *Gospel of Saint Mark*, 40 and Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 237.

<sup>26</sup> D. Rhoads and D. Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 63-72.

<sup>27</sup> D. W. Chapman, 'Locating the Gospel of Mark: A Model of Agrarian Biography', *BTB*, 25 (1995), 24.

<sup>28</sup> E. S. Malbon, 'Galilee and Jerusalem: History and Literature in Markan Interpretation', in W. R. Telford (ed.), *Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1995), 253-268 and 'Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee', *JBL*, 103 (1984), 363-377; K. W. Larsen, 'The Structure of Mark's Gospel: Current Proposals', *Currents in Biblical Research*, 3 (2004), 140-160.

<sup>29</sup> K. L. Schmidt, *Der Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu, Literarkritische Untersuchungen zur ältesten Jesusüberlieferung* (Berlin: Trowitzsch and Sohn, 1919), who argues that Mark did not have access to, or at least did not employ, any geographical or chronological framework for the career of Jesus.

<sup>30</sup> H. K. Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 7 and H. R. Preuss, *Galiläa im Markus-Evangelium* (PhD. thesis, Göttingen, 1966), who argues that 'most of Mark's geographical detail belongs to the tradition and that confusion or lack of geographical knowledge is expressed in the redaction' (cited in M. E. Boring, *Mark A Commentary* [Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox, 2006], 216, n.175).

<sup>31</sup> P. J. Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation of pre-Markan Miracle Catenae', *JBL*, 89 (1970), 283.

locations and that he simplifies these references to Jesus' actual historical movements in order to ease the understanding of his audience.<sup>32</sup>

Many scholars agree that there is a strong thematic representation of the Gentile mission in Mark.<sup>33</sup> Focus has been directed to individual Markan passages deemed to have a Gentile 'tendency' with some taking the redaction-,<sup>34</sup> narrative-,<sup>35</sup> or rhetorical-<sup>36</sup> critical approach, whilst others have sought elucidation through Synoptic comparison.<sup>37</sup> Iverson has recently made a study of individual Gentile characters portrayed in Mark's Gospel, examining them from a literary and theological viewpoint, and arguing that Mark's sequential Gentile episodes are progressively arranged to reinforce the universal message of the Gospel.<sup>38</sup>

Any scholarly attempt to examine individual pericopae (by any of the above methods) is most valuable. Boobyer was one of the earliest scholars to see the Gentile significance of the feeding stories (Mk. 6.30-44; 8.1-10),<sup>39</sup> and since that time several scholars have made detailed studies of their implications for the

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<sup>32</sup> R. M. Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes: The Function of the Feeding Stories in the Gospel of Mark* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), 66; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 33.

<sup>33</sup> R. P. Martin, *Mark – Evangelist and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1979), 214-225; D. Senior, 'The Struggle to be Universal: Mission as Vantage Point for New Testament Investigation', *CBQ*, 46 (1984), 63-81; R. Feneberg, *Der Jude Jesus und die Heiden. Biographie und Theologie Jesu im Markusevangelium* (Frieburg: Herder, 2000); Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 18.

<sup>34</sup> J. Anthonysamy, 'The Gospel of Mark and the Universal Mission', *Bible Bhashyman*, 6 (1980), 81-96; Z. Kato, *Die Völkermission im Markusevangelium. Eine redaktionsegeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Frankfurt & New York: Lang, 1986); F. C. Senn, 'Mark 7-13', *Pro Ecclesia*, 6.3 (1997), 351-358.

<sup>35</sup> E. K. Wefald, 'The Separate Gentile Mission in Mark: A Narrative Explanation of Markan Geography, the Two Feeding Accounts and Exorcisms', *JSNT*, 60 (1995), 3-26.

<sup>36</sup> D. M. Young, *Whoever has ears to hear: The discourses of Jesus in Mark as Primary Rhetoric of the Greco-Roman Period* (PhD. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1994).

<sup>37</sup> F. Wilk, *Jesus und die Völker in der Sicht der Synoptiker* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche, 109; Berlin & New York: de Gruyter, 2002).

<sup>38</sup> K. R. Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark: Even the Dogs Under the Table Eat the Children's Crumbs* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2007).

<sup>39</sup> G. H. Boobyer, 'The Eucharistic Interpretation of the Miracles of the Loaves in St. Mark's Gospel', *JTS*, 3.2 (1952), 161-171; 'The Miracles of the Loaves and the Gentiles in St. Mark's Gospel', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 6 (1953), 77-87; 'Galilee and Galileans in St. Mark's Gospel', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35 (1952-53), 334-348.

Gentile mission.<sup>40</sup> The story of the Gerasene Demoniac (Mk 5.1-20), positioned geographically within Gentile territory, has been examined extensively using a wide range of methodologies, including liberation theology,<sup>41</sup> theological anthropology,<sup>42</sup> sociological study,<sup>43</sup> and narrative-critical methods.<sup>44</sup> The story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7.24-31) with its Gentile connotations has also been examined at length and in most cases determined to be a pivotal point in the Gospel in relation to inclusion of the Gentiles.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.3 Methodological Approach: Gospel of Mark

As it is almost twenty centuries since Mark recounted the miracle stories which I examine in this thesis, and as we can only reasonably ascertain what was intrinsically likely or unlikely about these events, it is necessary to proceed contextually with an approach that examines the evangelist as a figure in his own time, a figure in history. Additionally, there are many tensions in the Gospel itself between the purpose of the evangelist, the needs of his community and the literary

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<sup>40</sup> J. D. M. Derrett, 'Crumbs in Mark', *Downside Review*, 102 (1984), 12-21; E. A. LaVerdiere, 'Jesus Among the Gentiles', *Emmanuel*, 96 (1990), 338-345; 'Do You Still Not Understand?' *Emmanuel*, 96 (1990), 382-389 and F. J. Moloney, 'Reading Eucharistic Texts in Mark', *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association*, 14 (1991), 7-24.

<sup>41</sup> A. Gabriel, 'The Gerasene Demoniac (Mk 5:1-20): A Socio-Political Reading', *Bible Bhashyam*, 22.4 (1996), 167-174.

<sup>42</sup> S. T. Rochester, *Good News at Gerasa. Transformative Discourse and Theological Anthropology in Mark's Gospel* (Oxford: Lang, 2011) highlights the transformative potential of the Gospel, demonstrating the rhetorical means by which Mark promotes the transformation of his audience and showing how this rhetoric is linked to a dynamic eschatological anthropology.

<sup>43</sup> G. Theissen, *The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition*, trans. F. McDonough (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 255.

<sup>44</sup> C. M. Williams, *The Gerasene Demoniac of Mark 5:1-20: A Study of the Dynamic Interaction of Cultural and Narrative Contexts* (PhD. thesis, Emory University, 2003).

<sup>45</sup> T. A. Burkill, 'The Syrophenician Woman: The Congruence of Mark 7.24-31', *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, LVII (1966), 23-37; 'The Historical Development of the Story of the Syrophenician Woman (Mark vii: 24-31)', *Novum Testamentum*, 9 (1967), 161-177 and P. Pokorny, 'From a Puppy to the Child: Some Problems of Contemporary Biblical Exegesis Demonstrated from Mark 7.24-30/Matt. 15.21-8', *NTS*, 41 (1995), 321-337.

form he chose to express that purpose.<sup>46</sup> As there is no methodology which is a universal key to the interpretation of biblical texts, a layered, integrated approach will be taken to these complex passages by the use of a variety of parallel and complementary historical-critical approaches to locate the Gospel in its geographical, historical and religious context. The text itself will be interrogated using the robust and appropriate tools of source-, form- and redaction-criticism and a social-critical approach will determine the cultural and historical context of the story where tensions existed between Gentiles and Jews, town and country, rich and poor.<sup>47</sup> I will apply reader-response criticism to the pericopae under review, in order to determine what Mark's first century audience subjectively perceived as the meaning encapsulated in this Gentile-orientated section of his Gospel.<sup>48</sup>

It is my intention to evaluate the Gospel on the basis of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors. In relation to internal analysis, an assumption is made that three levels can be distinguished with regard to the material contained within the text. The first level is that of the finished Gospel (the redactional level) which reflects the theological interests that motivated the evangelist to construct the narrative as he did, to make it useful to his early community and address the difficulties they were facing at the time. The second level is the early oral and written traditions used by the evangelist in the composition of his Gospel, which need to be isolated and separated from the interpretative elements he has imposed on it through his redactional activity. The third level would be to distinguish whether or not any historical event gave rise to the traditions. However, because of the nature of the material, the distortions, and the propensity of the early church to read its own

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<sup>46</sup> D. C. Duling and N. Perrin, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1994), 323.

<sup>47</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 65.

<sup>48</sup> R. M. Fowler, 'Reader-Response Criticism: Figuring Mark's Readers', in J. C. Anderson and S. D. Moore (eds), *Mark & Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2008), 59-94. For recent scholarship on the application of reader-response criticism in Mark, see Telford, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark*, 297-301.

ideology back into Jesus' career, the historicity of the accounts under scrutiny will not be addressed. There is no doubt these accounts were accepted as reality by the evangelist's first century audience, along with the miracles recounted as performed by other miracle-working men.<sup>49</sup>

If Markan priority is assumed (which it is here) we do not have an extant pre-Markan tradition, only the ability to reconstruct this tradition. Therefore, Mark's source material can only be inferred indirectly and arguments from tradition can only be speculative as it is less easy to show the redactional work of Mark than his successors. Many source theories have been proposed, some directed towards an earlier written version of the Gospel,<sup>50</sup> or abridgement of another Gospel.<sup>51</sup> Mark represents the first stage of the Gospel tradition and presents a text suited to the needs and expectations of his audience. Later Gospels adopt the next stage of correction, qualification and polemic against what they may consider to be distortion. Telford (in commenting on the proto-Mark or *Ur-Markus* theory), along with most other scholars, convincingly argues that the diversity of the Gospel's contents indicates that it is 'the compilation of a multiplicity of sources rather than an edited version of a single source'.<sup>52</sup>

In this thesis I will attempt to reconstruct the earliest possible form of the stories under review, to establish any previously existing traditions that the evangelist may quote, or allude to, and discuss the way in which he redacts these traditions in his narrative. With regard to Q as a source, my assumption is that Mark probably did not know it as a literary document but may have shared in a common sphere of tradition and thus may have known some of the sayings in

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<sup>49</sup> There is evidence that the primitive church was aware that others besides Jesus performed these kinds of deeds (Mk 9.38-39; Mt 12.27; Lk 9.49-50; 11.19).

<sup>50</sup> For an account of these, see V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1977), 67-77.

<sup>51</sup> D. L. Dungan, 'Mark – the Abridgement of Matthew and Luke', in G. D. Buttrick, *et al* (eds), *Jesus and Man's Hope* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 1970), 51-97.

<sup>52</sup> W. R. Telford, *The Theology of the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), 19.

different forms to those in Matthew and Luke. The collection of aphorisms which purport to be sayings delivered by the risen Jesus to Thomas and the other disciples, point towards the Gospel of Thomas' dependence on the Synoptics and thus I am discounting Thomas as a source for the Markan Gospel.<sup>53</sup>

It is my perception that the focus of a major part of the Gospel is upon mission. In this thesis Mark's portrayal of Jesus' contact with Gentiles will be examined using the tools of modern diachronic, traditio-historical criticism, to determine his interpretation of the Jesus movement's putative contact with Gentiles and his intention to shape the beliefs and attitudes of his audience. This approach will dissect developmental strands and also elucidate the evangelist's motives for inclusion of the Gentiles in Jesus' mission.

A study of the order of events as they appear in the Gospel clearly show that the evangelist was not concerned with accuracy in the presentation of Jesus' itinerary, nor the chronology of his movements and that the author created his narrative with a concern to solve theological rather than historical problems. This has resulted in the narrative colliding with modern conceptions of historical accuracy. However, the structure and arrangement of Mark's material is an important clue to the evangelist's purpose.<sup>54</sup> He imposes upon his simple storyline diverse, separate, possibly independently circulating oral traditions such as miracles, conflict dialogues, sayings and parables. He does not reproduce his sources mechanically but meshes together these collections into a coherent presentation by adding summary passages (using numerous literary devices

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<sup>53</sup> The Gospel of Thomas has many Gnostic features, which date it to the second century CE. However, the date of the document is not necessarily identical with the date of the traditions it transmits as half of the sayings are found in the Synoptics but the Thomas form is usually shorter.

<sup>54</sup> For a summary of scholarly opinion on the structure of Mark's Gospel see Larsen, 'Structure of Mark's Gospel', 140-160 and also Telford, *Writing on the Gospel of Mark*, 385-387.

including chiasms or concentric schemas, rhetoric and intercalation),<sup>55</sup> and by supplying them with a ‘chronological, topographical or geographical setting’.<sup>56</sup> Dewey describes an ‘observable surface organization of material’ and ‘an interwoven tapestry or fugue made up of multiple overlapping structures’.<sup>57</sup> These are written in the style of the spoken word and were perhaps performed in what would be popular oral contexts of the time.<sup>58</sup>

#### **1.4 First Century Polytheism in the Roman Near East**

In pursuit of the original social and religious context of the Markan author and his audience, I intend to examine evidence of polytheism in the geographical areas described in a central section of the Gospel (Mk 5.1-9.29) where I will argue the Markan community were located. These areas are contained within the scholarly-defined region of the ‘Roman Near East’ which in the first century CE was generally regarded as bounded by the Mediterranean on the west, the Taurus mountains to the north, the desert of the Arabian peninsula to the south and to the east extended as far as Roman administration prevailed. ‘Polytheistic’ is the term I have chosen to describe the religions of this region in the first century CE, excluding Judaism and Christianity.

Investigation of the Gospels on the basis of external events in the Graeco-Roman world and its interface with the early Jesus movement was first conducted by the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (Gunkel, Bousset, Weiss, Wrede; later

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<sup>55</sup> For a classic example of intercalation, see the cursing of the fig tree (Mk 11.12-14, 22-25) and Jesus’ action in the Temple (Mk 11.15-19) and compare W. R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark’s Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

<sup>56</sup> Telford, *Theology of the Gospel of Mark*, 22.

<sup>57</sup> J. Dewey, ‘Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience’, *CBQ*, 53 (1991), 223-224.

<sup>58</sup> On the orality of the Gospel see W. H. Kelber, *The Oral and Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul and Q* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, [1983], 1997).

Bultmann and Eissfeldt) who examined the historical, cultural and religious circumstances of Christianity's early environment, with the shared conviction that the New Testament must be interpreted with a much stronger emphasis on its Graeco-Roman polytheistic pre-suppositions.

The history of scholarship into polytheistic religious life in the Roman Near East traditionally had its roots in archaeological exploration.<sup>59</sup> At the beginning of the twentieth century exploratory expeditions were conducted by Howard Crosby Butler (1872-1922),<sup>60</sup> the German archaeologist, Walter Andrae (1875-1956),<sup>61</sup> along with exploratory travels made by Gertrude Bell (1868-1926).<sup>62</sup> The Belgian scholar Franz Cumont (1868-1947) was particularly interested in the philological, archaeological and epigraphical perspectives of ancient eastern religion in the Roman Empire as a whole and 'set the academic agenda for the following generation'.<sup>63</sup> His great contribution to this subject was *Les Religions orientales dans le paganisme romain* (1906). Ramsay MacMullen in his *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981) took issue with many of Cumont's 'oversimplifications' and successfully argued that 'the traditional gods did not dissolve into one syncretistic, monotheistic unity'.<sup>64</sup> Cumont had coined the reductive and problematic phrase 'Oriental cults', which more recent scholarship also considers 'conflates matters

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<sup>59</sup> For a full discussion on early exploration of the Near East, see T. Kaizer (ed.), 'Introduction' in *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), 11-16.

<sup>60</sup> H. C. Butler, *Publications of an American Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1899-1900, I-IV*, (New York, 1903-1914) and *Syria: Publications of the Princeton University Archaeological Expedition to Syria in 1904-1905, I-IV* (Leiden, 1914-1949).

<sup>61</sup> W. Andrae, *Hatra: General Description of the Ruins; Individual Description of the Ruins*, vols. I & II (Leipzig; German Orientgesellschaft, 9 & 21, 1908/1912) and *Anu Adad Temple in Assur* (Leipzig: German Orientgesellschaft, 10, 1909).

<sup>62</sup> G. L. Bell, *Desert and the Sown* (London: Virago, [1908], rev. ed. 1985).

<sup>63</sup> T. Kaizer, 'In Search of Oriental Cults. Methodological Problems Concerning "the particular" and "the general" in Near Eastern Religion in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods', *Historia*, 55 (2006), 28.

<sup>64</sup> S. R. F. Price, Review of R. MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (New Haven & London: YUP, 1981) in *JRS*, 72 (1982), 194-196.

which ought to be kept separate' and 'does not do justice to the diversity of the forms under which religious experiences could be expressed in various places'.<sup>65</sup>

The French historian, Javier Teixidor specifically addressed inscriptional evidence of pagan gods in the Roman Near East, which included Phoenician and Syrian deities.<sup>66</sup> Later Fergus Millar's historical research and subsequent influential book on the Near East in the Roman period led him to describe the region itself as a 'world of villages and small towns'.<sup>67</sup> Millar's work resulted in a further resurgence of interest in the area and subject that includes recent works by Warwick Ball, Maurice Sartre, Kevin Butcher and Ted Kaizer.<sup>68</sup> There are also prominent standard works on religious life in the Graeco-Roman cities specifically mentioned in Mark's narrative, such as Gerasa,<sup>69</sup> and the Decapolis in general.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, new data are continually emerging through explorations of individual cities in the Roman Near East and the endeavours of archaeological and historical scholarship.

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<sup>65</sup> Kaizer, 'In Search of Oriental Cults', 26, 28.

<sup>66</sup> J. Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977). Teixidor comments that the inscriptions do not relate any 'theological dogma' or 'reconstruct the myths' but only act as 'bare acts of faith in the divine providence', p.143. On inscriptions see also F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC - AD 337* (Cambridge MA: HUP, 1993), *passim* and the third volume of Millar's collected essays; *The Greek World, the Jews & the East*, Rome: The Greek World, the Jews and the East, vol. III (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>67</sup> F. Millar, *RNE*, 390. For discussion on settlements in the Decapolis region, see also S. Moors, 'The Decapolis City Territories, Villages and *Bouleutai*', in W. Jongman and M. Kleijwegt (eds), *After the Past, Essays in Ancient History in Honour of H. W. Pleket* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 157-207, who also concludes 'the cities appear to have been more or less submerged beneath a multitude of villages', p.191.

<sup>68</sup> W. Ball, *Rome in the East. The Transformation of an Empire* (London: Routledge, 2000); K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East* (London: British Museum Press, 2003); M. Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome*, trans. C. Porter and E. Rawlings (Cambridge: HUP, 2005); T. Kaizer (ed.), *The Variety of Local Religious Life in the Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008).

<sup>69</sup> C. H. Kraeling, *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938).

<sup>70</sup> A. Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur der Dekapolis. Untersuchungen zu numismatischen, archäologischen und epigraphischen Zeugnissen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003). See, also T. Kaizer, 'Some Remarks About Religious Life in the Decapolis', *Hallesche Beiträge zur Orientwissenschaft*, 38 (2004), 173-185.

In the late first century, at the time the Gospel of Mark was written, the eastern Mediterranean world was a milieu undergoing change and growth and at almost every level of society individuals were reacting or accommodating to the challenges of the ongoing impact of Romanisation. An array of social, economic, judicial, political, and religious factors were interrelated with the literature, philosophy, ideas and practices of the diverse cultures of their Near Eastern neighbours. The region could not be described as a cultural unity but displayed a mingling variety of cultural and religious traditions. Tolerance of a large number of religious forms of worship during the imperial age, in the general locale of the Gospel's provenance, has been demonstrated by Kaizer in his case study on patterns of worship at Dura-Europos, located much further to the east, on the Euphrates. He describes the town as 'our best test case for all aspects of the culture of a relatively minor locality, a small-town, in the Levant'.<sup>71</sup> Dura typically maintained 'temples inhabited by various gods, while simultaneously these same gods were worshipped in more than one sanctuary', and would 'not necessarily have been in conflict with each other'.<sup>72</sup>

In addition to evidence of these gods, the imperial cult has been described in the region as, 'active in local communities and in the associations formed of these communities'.<sup>73</sup> The primary function of this cult was the welfare of the state, support of the established order and organisation of the social network of urban and rural society. In this context, the large Roman military machine was

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<sup>71</sup> T. Kaizer, 'Patterns of worship in Dura-Europos. A case study of religious life in the Classical Levant outside the main cult centres', in C. Bonnet, *et al* (eds), *Les Religions Orientales Dans Le Monde Grec et Romain: Cent ans Après Cumont (1906-2006): Bilan Historique et Historiographique Colloque de Rome, 16-18 Novembre, 2006* (Brussels & Rome: Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, 2009), 158.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, 159, 171, 172.

<sup>73</sup> S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: CUP, 1984), 2.

'influential' in policing both the cult and anniversaries of the state.<sup>74</sup> In a society where religion and politics were so closely related these public celebrations, performed for the emperor in his absence, played a pivotal role in manipulation of the masses.

I will take an interdisciplinary approach to examine the principal primary first century CE source materials of archaeological remains, inscriptions, coins and allusions in ancient literary works and will also discuss and evaluate the conclusions made by scholars in secondary sources. The fragmentary character of the sources requires that I proceed with caution and avoid drawing heterogeneous elements into an amalgamation of a regional 'universal' religion, which Metzger describes as making parallels 'plausible by selective description'.<sup>75</sup> There is also limited evidence in relation to what those practising polytheism actually believed in terms of the nature of their gods. Millar, therefore, advises to proceed with caution and avoid reflexivity as, 'religious affiliations, mythical origins and ethnic identities are human constructs, and we simply falsify history by fathering on peoples in the past identities which they did not construct, or had not yet constructed, for themselves'.<sup>76</sup>

Millar describes the source material as 'scattered, inadequate and often difficult to relate to any intelligible context',<sup>77</sup> making research into this period and area problematic. However, whilst Millar is correct in indicating that it may not be possible to be comprehensive, Kaizer comments that a research approach 'which limits itself to the exploration of local or regional literary, numismatic, epigraphic and archaeological sources, or "the particular" as opposed to "generalizations"',

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<sup>74</sup> D. Kennedy, 'Greek, Roman and native cultures in the Roman Near East', *JRA*, 31 (1999), 90.

<sup>75</sup> B. M. Metzger, 'Methodology in the Study of the Mystery Religions and Early Christianity', in *Historical and Literary Studies: Pagan, Jewish and Christian* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 9.

<sup>76</sup> Millar, *RNE*, xix.

<sup>77</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 1.

can be a relevant starting point.<sup>78</sup> This research, therefore, uses a variety of methodologies but limits its scope to the regions of the Phoenician hinterlands, Galilee, Transjordan, the Decapolis and Southern Syria (which Mark records as having been part of Jesus' itinerary), taking into consideration the diversity in the separate 'pockets' of culture and language in these various cities and towns.<sup>79</sup>

We have been and remain heavily dependent on the literary sources in our attempts to reconstruct first-century polytheistic religious life. These limited sources tend to be influenced by the ancient social elite whose interests are reflected in the literature. The Synoptic Gospels are, in fact, unusual in that they reflect the circumstances and interests of ordinary people. The surviving literary texts which provide allusions to polytheism in the Roman Near East include works by Ptolemy, Strabo, Pliny the Elder, Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Plutarch, Philostratus, Cassius Dio and Philo of Byblos.<sup>80</sup> In all these texts material on religious life holds only a minor place.<sup>81</sup> The Oration of Melito the Philosopher, an early second century Syriac text does, however, contain a passage which records which deities were worshipped in specific areas, including Syria.<sup>82</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>78</sup> Kaizer, 'In Search of Oriental Cults', 26 and see also his 'The Near East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods Between Local, Regional and Supra-Regional Approaches', *Scripta Classica Israelica*, vol. XXII (2003), 283-295.

<sup>79</sup> Kaizer, 'Near East', 295.

<sup>80</sup> For Philo's *Phoenician History*, see A. I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1981) and H. W. Attridge and R. A. Oden, *Philo of Byblos, The Phoenician History. Introduction, Critical Text, Translation, Notes* (Washington DC: CBQ, 1981). See also translation at 'Philo of Byblos', Brill's New Jacoby online: [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=1522/search\\_results?search\\_text=Phoenician+History&refine\\_editions=bnj\\_bnj](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=1522/search_results?search_text=Phoenician+History&refine_editions=bnj_bnj) (February, 2012).

<sup>81</sup> M. Sartre, 'Les Sources' in D'Alexandre à Zénobie. Histoire du Levant antique, IV<sup>e</sup> siècle avant J.-C., – III<sup>e</sup> IV<sup>e</sup> siècle après J.-C., (Paris: Fayard, 2001), 17-24.

<sup>82</sup> For discussion on the text's context and its comments on polytheistic religions in the Roman Near East, see J. Lightfoot, 'Pseudo-Meliton and the cults of the Roman Near East', in C. Bonnet, *et al* (eds), *Les Religions Orientales Dans Le Monde Grec et Romain: Cent ans Après Cumont (1906-2006): Bilan Historique et Historiographique Colloque de Rome, 16-18 Novembre, 2006* (Brussels & Rome: Belgisch Historisch Instituut te Rome, 2009), 387-399. For translation on the euhemeristic section only, with brief discussion, see Kaizer, 'In Search of Oriental Cults', 32-35, n.36.

Also translation online at: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/melito.htm>, 'An Oration of Meliton the Philosopher' (February, 2012).

second century satirist Lucian of Samosata wrote a ‘tongue in cheek’ detailed, contemporary account of ancient goddess-worship at Hierapolis in northern Syria, entitled *On the Syrian Goddess*, which is useful and has been described as ‘emblematic’ of religious life in the region in general.<sup>83</sup>

Stories relating to the miraculous had become a common theme throughout the Graeco-Roman world. There is evidence of familiarity with the imagery of the miracle worker and magician, who would perform astonishing acts in order to legitimize their ideas and ‘the accounts of those deeds themselves became useful in such missionary competition’.<sup>84</sup> The high water mark of magic in the Roman Near East was the third and fourth centuries CE but from before the first century CE there was a growth of interest in the miraculous where boundaries between religion and magic are not sharply marked.<sup>85</sup> The main source of knowledge of magical practices is contained in a number of surviving magical papyri dating from the second to the fourth centuries CE.<sup>86</sup> Whilst Mark does not present Jesus as carrying out magical rituals as directly described in the magical papyri, I shall argue that there are aspects of his presentation of these miracles that would resonate with the magical worldview of the first century and popular Graeco-Roman imagery.

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<sup>83</sup> Kaizer, ‘Introduction’, 29. See major commentary by J. Lightfoot, *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess* (Oxford: OUP, 2003).

<sup>84</sup> P. J. Achtemeier, ‘Gospel Miracle Tradition and the Divine Man’, *Interpretation*, 26 (1972), 195.

<sup>85</sup> For full discussion see the three key works on magic in the Graeco-Roman world: M. W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001); N. Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World: Pagans, Jews and Christians* (London: Routledge, 2001) and F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. F. Philip (Cambridge MA: HUP, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> These include the Egyptian Magical Papyri and the Great Paris Magical Papyrus (*PGM IV*). See A. D. Nock, ‘Greek Magical Papyri’, *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, 15 (1929), 219 and H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992).

Evidence of polytheism can also be elucidated from a systematic examination of remaining coinage in the geographical areas described by Mark.<sup>87</sup> Many cities in the Roman Near East were given the right by the ruling emperor to mint coins, a practice that lasted until approximately the middle of the third century.<sup>88</sup> The bronze civic coinage lent an opportunity for a display of loyalty to the empire and provided an official image of the ideological and sometimes religious tone of the city. In order to reach a better understanding of local religious traditions, it is necessary to take into account this local civic coinage with the caveat that any cultic evidence depicted on a city's coinage 'does not provide us with a complete and impartial view of the various aspects of worship in that city but presents a mere civic façade of religious life'.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore, this numismatic, inscriptional, literary and archaeological evidence, from each of the Gentile geographical areas described in the Gospel, will be examined as a representation of the polytheistic environment in which Mark's community operated. This evidence of polytheism will form the background to the premise that the author was writing with the purpose of attracting an audience outside the confines of Jewish followers. I will argue that Mark constructs his Gospel with the supposition that his audience will recognise these specific locales as areas where polytheism prevailed and relate these geographical

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<sup>87</sup> Kaizer, 'Introduction', 25.

<sup>88</sup> For an influential study of coins of the Decapolis see, A. Spijkerman, *The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia*, (ed.), M. Piccirillo (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1978).

<sup>89</sup> T. Kaizer, Review of A. Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur der Dekapolis. Untersuchungen zu numismatischen, archäologischen und epigraphischen Zeugnissen* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003) in *Plekos*, 6 (2004), 56. Contra N. Belayche, *Judaea-Palaestina: The Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)*, (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2001), 8, who indicates that the excavations undertaken on Palestinian sites have proven that the civic coins did not circulate outside the immediate cities and thus when gods and goddesses such as Zeus, Tyche and Artemis are portrayed, 'coinage in this capacity' is an excellent representation of local religious life.

sign-posts to the evangelist's internal indicators in the text itself which describe a purposeful mission to embrace and attract Gentiles.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### ***Gospel of Mark – Author, Setting and Mission***

#### **2.1 Introduction**

Scholarship in the seventies revealed evidence which demonstrated that the early Jesus movement was a complex phenomenon, with differing characteristics, dependent upon the geographical, economic, political, social and cultural locations in which it was found.<sup>90</sup> Contributions and perspectives on the understanding of these issues have been controversial and variable, resulting in fundamental shifts occurring in the way Mark's Gospel has been interpreted. Consequently, there are still unresolved issues in relation to its authorship, date, provenance, audience and inferred Gentile mission. All of these concepts of context are critical in the process of establishing the extent of the Markan community's interface with Gentile polytheism.

The objective of this chapter is to present evidence that the Gospel has characteristics that suggest it was written by a Palestinian at the time of, and in close proximity to, the Romano-Jewish War and that the evangelist presents an instructive Gospel addressed to his own persecuted, southern Syrian, Transjordan or northern Galilean, ethnically-mixed community (μιγάδες). This community may have re-located north from Jerusalem or southern Galilee as a consequence of the War (Mk 13.14), and was forced to face the problem of widening the fledgling religion to include a Law-free mission to the Gentiles (7.14-23). Some of these Gentiles may have been inclined positively towards the movement, whilst others

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<sup>90</sup> J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1971); J. D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 114-157.

may have been hostile, seeing it as a provocation to insurgence against the Roman overlords or a threat to Graeco-Roman social, political and family values.

## 2.2 Authorship

I support the argument that the Gospel, in its initial form, was the work of an individual, rather than a collectively authored work, and any evidence that may shed light on the author's background is extremely valuable to this investigation. There are, of course, no explicit statements within the text about its composition in terms of authorship and as late as the fourth century some copies were being circulated anonymously.<sup>91</sup> The superscriptions KATA MAPKON or EYANΓEΛΛION KATA MAPKON, variously placed at the beginning, middle or end of the manuscript, were probably not added until the second century, when it was necessary to distinguish between a growing collection of Gospels.<sup>92</sup> The Anti-Marcionite Prologue has been cited as evidence of the author having a close association with Peter and thus Rome.<sup>93</sup> However, this evidence is late as the Prologue was not incorporated into the Gospel until the last third of the second century, or even later.<sup>94</sup>

Perspectives on the perceived identity of the Markan evangelist and the origins of the text have diminished the credibility of the traditional patristic explanation, which suggested that the Gospel was practically a verbatim transcript

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<sup>91</sup> Black, *Mark: Images*, 4.

<sup>92</sup> B. Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 65-66.

<sup>93</sup> "Mark declared, who is called 'stump-fingered,' because he had rather small fingers in comparison with the stature of the rest of his body. He was the interpreter of Peter. After the death of Peter himself he wrote down this same gospel in the regions of Italy". Translation from M. Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, trans. J. Bowden (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 3. The tradition may also be known to Hippolytus, who designates Mark as κολοβοδάκτυλος *Refut.* VII.30.)

<sup>94</sup> See J. L. North, 'ΜΑΡΚΟΣ Ο ΚΟΛΟΒΟΔΑΚΤΥΛΟΣ: Hippolytus, Elenchus, VII.30', *JTS*, 28 (1977), 498-507, who suggests an even later date of the third century.

of Peter's eye-witness testimony of Jesus by the 'Mark' of tradition.<sup>95</sup> These accounts are divergent and inconsistent, emerging as a result of critical challenges to the canon c.150-250 CE.<sup>96</sup> Eusebius ascribes the Gospel to an individual named 'Mark', Peter's interpreter ( ἑρμηνευτής).<sup>97</sup> In support of this, there are several references in the New Testament to a person named 'Mark' or 'John Mark',<sup>98</sup> but most associate this character with the apostle Paul (except the pseudonymous 1 Peter 5.13, written in the first century).<sup>99</sup> Eusebius' account is third-hand, in that he quotes Papias, who in turn was quoting someone he, Papias, identified as 'the elder'. The validity of Eusebius' informant, Papias, is somewhat negated by the fact that Eusebius himself dismisses him as 'a man of very little intelligence, as is clear from his books' (*Eccl. Hist.* III.xxxix.13).<sup>100</sup> A further reason for not taking Papias' account at face value is his inaccuracy about the Gospel of Mathew, namely that 'Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language and each interpreted them as best he could' (*Eccl. Hist.* III.xxxix.16). The problem here is that there is no evidence that the extant Gospel of Matthew was composed in any language but its present Greek.<sup>101</sup> Additionally, modern Markan scholars have

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<sup>95</sup> Christian tradition located the provenance and date of the Gospel with the martyrdom of Peter and Paul at the period of the Neronian persecutions in Rome (c. 64-67): *I Clement* 5.4-7; 6.1; Ignatius, *Rom.* 4.2-3; Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.3.2; Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* II.xvi.1-2.

<sup>96</sup> Justin, Irenaeus, Clement and Origen's hypotheses were preserved and systemized in the fourth century by Eusebius who cites a lost work of Bishop Papias of Hierapolis in Asia Minor. This Papias, he claims, wrote a five volume work, *Interpretation of the Oracles of the Lord*, c. 120 CE, ascribing the Gospel to Mark, a follower of Peter.

<sup>97</sup> Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.*, Books I-V, Loeb Classical Library, trans. K. Lake (Cambridge MA & London: HUP, 2001), II.xvi.1-2; III.xxxix, 14-16; VI.xiv.5-7.

<sup>98</sup> Acts 12.12, 25; 13.5, 13; 15.37-40; Phil. 24; Col. 4.10; 2 Tim. 4.11.

<sup>99</sup> Eusebius considers this to be a genuine writing from the Apostle Peter (*Eccl. Hist.* III.iii.1).

<sup>100</sup> Loeb Classical translation, 291-298.

<sup>101</sup> B. D. Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 43.

pointed out that the perspective from which the evangelist operates is considerably more Pauline than Petrine.<sup>102</sup>

There is much skepticism about the early church tradition of a close association between Mark and Peter. However, this association has been vigorously defended by Hengel, who interestingly does not advocate a break with Palestinian tradition and still strongly argues for authorship by a Jewish Graeco-Palestinian. He defends this assumption by referring to the countless features of Palestinian Judaism within the Gospel, including the unusual number of Semitic (Hebrew or Aramaic) language terms (Mk 5.41; 7.34; 14.36; 15.34), as well as biblical quotations and phrases.<sup>103</sup> In support of this hypothesis, we find the evangelist using the unsophisticated, lively Greek of the *vox populi* which is frequently awkward, requiring correction by his later adaptors. In addition, Semitic syntactical features influence the form of the Greek in that verbs are frequently found at the beginning of a sentence and there is an abundance of asyndeta.<sup>104</sup> This is further evidence that the mother tongue of the author was probably Aramaic and consistent with his being a Palestinian Jew.<sup>105</sup>

Some scholars object to the hypothesis of Palestinian authorship on the grounds that there are too many inaccuracies relating to Jewish laws and customs. The following have been cited as inaccurate, but they can be explained and do not necessarily demand that the author of the Gospel was from outside the area of

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<sup>102</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 442; Telford, *Mark*, 15-20 and *Theology*, 164-169; J. Painter, *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), 213.

<sup>103</sup> Hengel, *Studies*, 45-53. See also L. W. Hurtado, 'The Gospel of Mark: Evolutionary or Revolutionary Document', *JSNT*, 40 (1990), 15-32; Chapman, 'Locating the Gospel of Mark', 24-36.

<sup>104</sup> E. C. Maloney, *Semitic Interference in Marcan Syntax* (Chico CA: Scholars Press, 1981).

<sup>105</sup> However, it should be noted that M. Reiser, *Syntax und Stil des Markusevangeliums im Licht der hellenistischen Volksliteratur* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2.11; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1984), came to a different conclusion following research comparing Mark with Graeco-Roman folk literature. Reiser concluded that in syntax and style Mark was largely free of Semitisms.

Jesus' ministry. (1) The evangelist's reference to the hand-washing ritual of the Pharisees and 'all the Jews' (Mk 7.3) is deemed as inaccurate by some scholars, who suggest Jewish hand-washing rituals were limited to the Pharisees.<sup>106</sup> However, recent evidence suggests that hand-washing may have been widespread in first century Palestinian Judaism.<sup>107</sup> (2) Mark deviates from the Jewish method of calculation of days from sunset-to-sunset and substitutes the Graeco-Roman calculation of sunrise-to-sunrise (Mk 14.12). In this instance, the evangelist could have been generalising or adapting the Jewish time schedule for his Gentile audience. He is certainly familiar with the Jewish method of calculation, as he uses this system at other points in the Gospel (cf. Mk 1.32; 4.27; 15.42). (3) Some scholars find it incongruous that Mark should describe Joseph of Arimathea approaching Pontius Pilate to request the body of Jesus between late afternoon and darkness on the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Mk 15.42: παρασκευή, a *hapax legomenon*). This may not infer a lack of knowledge of Jewish burial customs on the part of the evangelist but simply a means of directing the narrative focus, to bring it into line with the evangelist's own chronology.<sup>108</sup> (4) The scriptural inaccuracies at Mk 1.2 (not in fact from Isaiah alone, but a combination of Isa. 40.3, Exod. 23.20 and Mal. 3.1) and Mk 2.26 (the Old Testament passage alluded to [1 Sam. 21.1-6] cites Ahimelech, Abiathar's son [2 Sam. 8.17], rather than Abiathar) have also been used as evidence to support the view of an author unfamiliar with the Hebrew scriptures and thus located outside of Palestine. However, inaccurate references to Jewish scripture can be found

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<sup>106</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 117, n. 33.

<sup>107</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Westminster: John Knox, 1990), 48; R. Deines, *Jüdisches Steingefässe und pharisäische Frömmigkeit* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 2.52; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1993); cited in Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 20.

<sup>108</sup> J. Marcus, *Mark 8-16, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven & London: YUP, 2009), 1070 and B. D. Schildgen, *Crisis and Continuity: Time in the Gospel of Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 29.

throughout the whole of the Gospels (Mt. 1.22-23 cf. Isa. 7.14; Lk 2.23 cf. Ex. 13.2, 12; Jn 12.40 cf. Isa. 6.10).

Additionally, and most prolifically, scholars have cited errors relating to Palestinian geography as evidence of an author unfamiliar with the territories he describes and thus not Palestinian. ‘Inaccuracies’ have been cited in: Mark’s placement of Gerasa on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Mk 5.1); Jesus’ implausibly convoluted itinerary from Tyre, through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee (7.31); Mark’s location of the Sea of Galilee (7.31: ἀνα μέσον τῶν ὀρίων Δεκαπόλεως: in the middle of the region of the Decapolis); the apparent error of extending the territory of Judaea beyond the Jordan (10.1: εἰς τὰ ὅρια τῆς Ἰουδαίας [καὶ] πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου: into the region of Judaea [but] beyond the Jordan)<sup>109</sup> and the sequence of Bethphage and Bethany on the approach to Jerusalem (11.1) where Mark’s terminology incorrectly locates the two villages in reverse order, thereby indicating that travellers from the east came to Bethpage before reaching Bethany.<sup>110</sup> Among Markan scholars these ‘errors’ form a central pillar in the arguments against Mark having been written by someone familiar with the area.<sup>111</sup>

Conversely, scholarship has taken the logical view that the evangelist’s theological intentions governed his geographical locations;<sup>112</sup> that the geography is

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<sup>109</sup> Marcus points out that the evangelist correctly distinguishes between Judaea and Transjordan in Mk 3.7-8 and argues this verse is a ‘grammatical amelioration’ (*Mark 8-16*, 700).

<sup>110</sup> There is some discrepancy with regard to the actual location of Bethphage and the route which may have been taken in the first century (Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 334; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 771; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 306.) It has been suggested that Bethphage (Mk 11.1: bêt paggē: Aramaic = house of unripe figs) may have been placed intentionally before Bethany at the beginning of this section of narrative to correlate with Mk 11.12-14, where Jesus curses a fig tree (Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 771). See also Telford, *Barren Temple*, esp. 11 and n. 75, 177-178).

<sup>111</sup> Nineham, *Gospel of St. Mark*, 40 and Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 237.

<sup>112</sup> W. Marxsen, ‘Study Two: The Geographical Framework’, in *Mark the Evangelist*, trans. J. Boyce, D. Juel, et al (London: Abingdon Press, 1969), 54-116; F. G. Lang, “Über Sidon

a drastic simplification of Jesus' actual historical movements;<sup>113</sup> his first-century concept of geography was culturally different to twentieth century western culture;<sup>114</sup> the geography is constructed to suggest Jesus is embarking on a Gentile mission;<sup>115</sup> and that the evangelist was 'trying to fit localized pre-Markan traditions into his own geographical framework'.<sup>116</sup> Positive consideration should also be given to the sheer number of specific place names included in the Gospel, such as Bethany, Bethphage, Bethsaida, Caesarea Philippi, Capernaum, Dalmanutha, Gennesaret and Gerasa, which were not available to the author from the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Septuagint or the foremost geographic writer of his time, Strabo, the author of the *Geographica*.<sup>117</sup> On a further positive note, the evangelist does correctly assign several areas of Palestinian geography: Nazareth in Galilee (Mk 1.9); Gerasa in the Decapolis (5.1); Capernaum (1.21), Gennesaret (6.53) and Bethsaida (6.45), all on the Sea of Galilee, and Bethany on the Mount of Olives (11.1). Additionally, Jesus is correctly described as travelling from Jericho (Mk 10.46) to Bethany (11.1) and thence to Jerusalem (11.11). Therefore, it seems evident that these cities and towns were contextually and geographically familiar to the Markan author.

In summary, the evangelist, a non-geographical specialist, writing in antiquity, has correctly positioned the majority of the place names in his Gospel, with some minor errors. Thus, the geographical argument that the author of the Gospel could not be writing in the east, because of internal discrepancies, cannot

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mitten ins Gebiet der Dekapolis": Geographie und Theologie in Markus 7.31', in *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 94 (1978), 145-160.

<sup>113</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Chapman, 'Locating the Gospel of Mark', 24-25; 28-36.

<sup>115</sup> G. Vermes, 'Jesus and Galilee' in *Jesus the Jew. A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 42-57.

<sup>116</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 21. Pryke's redactional examination of Mk 7.31 comes to the same conclusion: E. J. Pryke, *Redactional Style in the Markan Gospel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978), 16.

<sup>117</sup> Chapman, 'Locating', 24.

be wholly sustained. The Gospel, with its internal Palestinian Jewish Jesus traditions and Gentile missionary outlook, contains many characteristics from which one can infer that the author had a strong connection with the area of Jesus' ministry. The evangelist probably lived in the region, or at the very least, was in close touch with Palestinian tradition.

### 2.3 Date of the Gospel

A brief résumé of the current consensus in relation to the date of the Gospel will be helpful at this point, in order to situate it in its period of first transmission. In an early study, Robinson suggested the period of composition as between 45–60 CE.<sup>118</sup> This hypothesis has recently been revived by Crossley, who dates the Gospel in the forties, prior to the rapid expansion of the Gentile mission. He asserts that, as the biblical *Torah* is not challenged in the Gospel, it must have been written before the controversies over the ritual Law developed in early Christianity.<sup>119</sup> However, an early date does not fit the form-critical view that the other Gospel authors modified anonymous oral and written traditions (with a considerable pre-history) to create their own individual accounts.<sup>120</sup>

It is my view, and that of many modern scholars, that the Gospel should be dated to the period of panic and urgency which surrounded the Romano-Jewish War.<sup>121</sup> This hypothesis is based on the internal evidence of Jesus' apocalyptic

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<sup>118</sup> J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 95.

<sup>119</sup> J. G. Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel: Insight from the Law in Earliest Christianity* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 43.

<sup>120</sup> Telford indicates that the 'forms' in Mark 'all point to the fact that the Gospel is a product of a long process of "community tradition" and not of direct eye-witness testimony' ('Mark', 135). For a critical review of Crossley, see W. R. Telford, *Biblica*, 88 (2007), 131-135. P. M. Casey, *The Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospel* (SNTS, 102; Cambridge, 1998) also supports an early date based on the evangelist's alleged use of Aramaic sources.

<sup>121</sup> Telford, 'Mark', 139 and Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 37. B. Incigneri, *The Gospel to the Romans. The Setting and Rhetoric of Mark's Gospel* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), dates the Gospel to late 71 CE but posits a Roman provenance. Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 91, argues for a date post 70 CE, following the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple.

prophecy of the destruction of the Temple (Mk 13.1-2); the series of earthquakes in 60 and 63 CE (Mk 13.8; Tacitus, *Annals* 14.27); the 'desolating sacrilege' which may have symbolised the occupation of the Temple by the Zealots (Mk 13.14; *War* IX.151-57) or the polluting presence of Titus' troops sacrificing to their standard in the Temple (the masculine 'he' is present in Mark's Greek) and the flight to the Graeco-Roman city of Pella in Transjordan, 60 miles north-east of Jerusalem, prior to the eventual destruction of the city (Mk 13.14; cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* III.v.2-3; Epiphanius, *Panarion* XIX.7.7-8 and *Adv. Haer.* XXIX.7).<sup>122</sup> The Gospel also appears to address a community which is involved in an actual situation (Mk 10.30:  $\nu\upsilon\nu \epsilon\nu \tau\hat{\omega} \kappa\alpha\iota\rho\hat{\omega}$ ) and that situation is most likely to be turmoil surrounding the War.

Thus a *terminus a quo* of sometime in the mid-60s and *terminus ad quem* of 75 CE is probable, corresponds with the internal evidence of the Gospel and is in accordance with the incorporation of Mark, by Matthew and Luke, into their own narratives in the eighties and nineties.<sup>123</sup> This would allow Mark to be copied and distributed and then gain acceptance in two distinct Christian communities. Therefore, it can be argued that Mark represents the Jesus tradition during the rapid expansion of the Gentile mission in ancient Palestine (defined as the area west and immediately east of the Jordan, and its territories, as well as Lebanon and southern Syria) in the sixties and seventies, at a time of conflict and crisis, which the community may have assigned to eschatological tribulation (Mk 13.5-37).

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<sup>122</sup> The historicity of the flight to Pella has been disputed by J. Verheyden, 'Flight of the Christians to Pella', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 66 (1990), 368-384. Also, Brandon, *Fall of Jerusalem*, 167-173 and *Jesus and the Zealots*, 208-216.

<sup>123</sup> Telford, 'Mark', 139 and Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 37.

## 2.4 Provenance

Establishing provenance is also critical in determining the sphere of influence of the evangelist and his community's proximity to centres of traditional polytheism. Some scholars contend that there is no 'method agreed upon for describing the social make-up of a particular community on the basis of a text',<sup>124</sup> whereas others consider criteria can be systematically applied to texts to determine their association with a particular place or region. Moreland has suggested that these criteria are chronology, language, demographics, known presence of a Jesus group, socio-economic and political factors, independent literary sources, references to sites, personal names, regional events, geographical details and theological affinities.<sup>125</sup> The leading contenders for provenance are Rome and southern Syria, Transjordan, or northern Galilee. I shall address these locations in turn and where appropriate, apply the above criteria. I shall also focus on the relevance and indications of the prophecies in Mark 13 as a lens through which to view the life of the community, a key to the setting of the Gospel and a reflection of a period of persecution and betrayal by loved ones and family (Mk 13.9-13), as well as a period of war and conflict.

### 2.4.1 Rome

In terms of chronology and the issue of persecution, many scholars still hold with the patristic tradition of Roman provenance, placing the Gospel's composition during the Neronian persecution c. 64 CE (Tacitus, *Annals*. XV.44: *Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat*: Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a

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<sup>124</sup> Donahue, 'Quest for the Community', 817-838. A similar view is also undertaken by Botha 'Historical Setting of Mark's Gospel', 27-55.

<sup>125</sup> 'Report of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins (Spring Meeting 2008)', <http://www.westarinstitute.org/assets/pdfs/S08JSXnO.pdf> (February, 2012).

class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace).<sup>126</sup> The case of the proponents for a Roman provenance rests mainly on the testimony of Papias (*Eccl. Hist.* II.xvi.1-2) and the reference linking Mark with Peter but he does not, in fact, give any definitive indication of when or where the Gospel was written. The date of Papias' own work is somewhat uncertain but most scholars suggest the early part of the second century.<sup>127</sup> Papias' apologetic testimony may have been motivated by a necessity to make the connection between Mark and Peter (a first-hand disciple of Jesus) to guarantee the authority of the Gospel and defend it against detractors and the Gnostics.<sup>128</sup> Additionally, the later literary references which take up this idea of a connection between the evangelist and Peter (Irenaeus [c. 140-200 CE]; Clement of Alexandria [c. 150-215 CE] and the Anti-Marcionite Prologue [c. 175 CE]) are contradictory, of questionable historical value and cannot be used with any confidence to position the Gospel.<sup>129</sup> Irenaeus speaks only of the *transmission* of Mark's Gospel after Peter and Paul departed Rome, with no information on date or provenance; Clement is the only one to speak of the *writing* of the Gospel at Rome and as previously discussed, the evidence of the Anti-Marcionite Prologue is very late.<sup>130</sup> Additionally, there is no corroborative evidence of other Christian documents (cf. 1 Peter, 1 Clement and the Shepherd of Hermas) issuing from Rome in the late first or early second

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<sup>126</sup> Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots*, 221-282; Dungan, 'Purpose and Provenance', 411-440; Hengel, *Studies*, 1-30; 117-138; R. A. Guelich, *Mark 1 – 8.26* (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), xxix-xxxii; C. A. Bryan, *Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in Its Literary and Cultural Setting* (Oxford: OUP, 1993), 155.

<sup>127</sup> c.101-108 CE (R. H. Gundry, *Mark. A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 1027-1029); c. 110 CE (U. H. J. Körtner, *Papias von Hierapolis. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des frühen Christentums* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983], 225-226). See also Roskam, *Purpose*, 77.

<sup>128</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 81.

<sup>129</sup> See also K. Niederwimmer, 'Johannes Markus und die Frage nach dem Verfasser des zweiten Evangeliums', *ZNW*, 58 (1967), 172-188; Gundry, *Mark: Commentary*, 1026-1041; Crossley, *Date of Mark's Gospel*, 18; Roskam, *Purpose*, 77.

<sup>130</sup> North, 'ΜΑΡΚΟΣ Ο ΚΟΛΟΒΟΔΑΚΤΥΛΟΣ', 498-507; A. von Harnack, 'Die ältesten Evangelien-Prologe und die Bildung des Neuen Testaments', in *Opuscula*, vol. II (Leipzig: Teubner, 1980), 804.

century, which would demonstrate the use of, or familiarity with, Mark's Gospel.<sup>131</sup> It is also possible that the pseudonymous 1 Peter 5.13, and its allusion to some kind of relationship between Mark and Peter (ἀπάξεται ὑμᾶς ἢ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι συνεκλεκτῇ καὶ Μάρκος ὁ υἱός μου: She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son, Mark), if written early in the second century, is the source of the original information used by Papias.<sup>132</sup> He may have placed an allegorical interpretation on the words ἐν Βαβυλῶνι,<sup>133</sup> to determine that the epistle was written in Rome.<sup>134</sup>

Linguistic arguments have been used to support Roman provenance with the suggestion that the designation in Mk 7.26, Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα was essential to a Roman audience, to make a distinction between the Carthaginians and the Phoenicians.<sup>135</sup> However, this can be challenged as the designation 'Syro-Phoenician' could just as easily be directed to a Syrian audience to specify that she is a particular kind of Syrian.<sup>136</sup> The use of Latin loan words in two other passages in particular, where Mark wishes to clarify the Greek terms for a coin, λεπτὰ δύο, ὃ ἔστιν κοδράντης (Mk 12.42) and ὃ ἔστιν πραιτώριον (15.16) are also used to support the argument for Roman provenance. However, the use of the Latin *quadrans* does not necessarily indicate Roman origin, since the Roman designation for coins in first century Palestine was more common than the Greek

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<sup>131</sup> Black, *Mark: Images*, 236-237.

<sup>132</sup> Dungan, 'Purpose and Provenance', 411-440, argues that both the Gospel of Mark and 1 Peter originated in Rome at the same time.

<sup>133</sup> Babylon was a Jewish typological identification for Rome, at least from the first century BCE. See Ellis, 'Date and Provenance', 808.

<sup>134</sup> 'In Christian apocalyptic literature, beginning in the late first century, "Babylon" is symbolic for *Rome* since both are remembered for destroying Jerusalem (587 BCE [Babylon]; 70 CE [Rome])' in Duling and Perrin, *New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis*, 297.

<sup>135</sup> Hengel, *Studies*, 29.

<sup>136</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 32.

and Hebrew designations.<sup>137</sup> Additionally, Mark's comment Οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἀπήγαγον αὐτὸν ἔσω τῆς αὐλῆς, ὃ ἔστιν πραιτώριον (Mk 15.16: And the soldiers led him away inside the palace, that is, the *praetorium*) could easily be seen as a specification or clarification rather than a definition. This would be necessary for an audience in Syria-Palestine, since inhabitants would be aware that there were several palaces in Jerusalem.<sup>138</sup> When considering the complex use of Latin in the region, Millar reminds us that Jn. 19.19-20 indicates that the inscription on the cross of Jesus was written in Aramaic, Latin and Greek and the evangelist describes it as a τίτλος, or *titulus* in the sense of a multi-lingual notice for public display.<sup>139</sup>

Latinisms were, in fact, widely distributed in the first-century Greek and Semitic world, and do not necessarily localise Mark to Italy. There was a prevalence of such 'loan words' wherever Roman imperial power made itself felt. Mark's Latinisms are mostly of a military, legal or commercial nature and could occur anywhere in the empire where a garrison was stationed. From the time of Pompey's arrival in 63 BCE, and certainly at the time of the Romano-Jewish War, there were Roman garrisons, legionaries and auxiliaries present in the Palestinian region who were responsible for Romanization in several ways, including the introduction of Latin into civic areas of the language which would have undoubtedly filtered into the vernacular.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> E. Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, rev. and ed. by G. Vermes, F. Millar, M. Goodman and M. Black, vol. II (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973, 1979, 1986/1987), 64. On the use of *quadrans* found in Hebrew literature, see M. A. Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica, 1886-1903, rev. ed. 1982), 1324.

<sup>138</sup> The Antonia Fortress, Herod's Palace and the citadel or Hasmonean palace. See J. Marcus, 'The Jewish War and the *Sitz im Leben* of Mark', *JBL*, III.3 (1992), 441-462.

<sup>139</sup> F. Millar, 'Latin in the Epigraphy of the Near East', in *Rome, the Greek World and the East*, 223-224.

<sup>140</sup> M. A. Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus* (SSNT MS, 134; Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 48. For full discussion see, W. Eck, 'The presence, role and significance of Latin in the epigraphy and culture of the Roman Near East', 15-42 and B.

Mark 1.1 and 15.39 have also been cited in linguistic arguments as pointing to a Roman provenance. They are designated as important framing devices whereby Mark presents Jesus at the beginning and near the end of his Gospel as the antitype or alternative to Caesar, thus appealing to potential Gentile converts in Rome.<sup>141</sup> A number of scholars have also pointed out the high levels of similarity, including exact word usage, between the Gospel's opening phrase, 'Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ θεοῦ (Mk 1.1: The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God) and what is known as the Priene inscription.<sup>142</sup> This Roman Imperial inscription from Asia Minor (9 BCE) lauds the birth of the emperor and god Augustus, for the 'good news' (εὐαγγελίων) and peace he has brought to the world.<sup>143</sup> Whilst there is no doubt that Mark has made use of the terminology of his day, and may have echoed words which were an important element of the imperial cult, I consider these associations to be tangential and unconvincing as evidence of a Roman provenance. However, they would most certainly resonate with a Gentile audience, located anywhere in the empire.

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Isaac, 'Latin in the Cities of the Roman Near East', 43-72 in H. M. Cotton, *et al* (eds), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguist Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge & New York: CUP, 2009).

<sup>141</sup> I. F. Head, 'Mark as a Roman Document from the Year 69: Testing Martin Hengel's Thesis', *Journal of Religious History*, 28 (2004), 240-259.

<sup>142</sup> 'It seems good to the Greeks of Asia, in the opinion of the high priest Apollonius of Menophilus Azanitus: "Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a saviour (σωτήρ), both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance (ἐπιφανεῖν) (excelled even our anticipations), surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good tidings for the world that came by reason of him (ἤρξεν δὲ τῷ κόσμῳ τῶν δι' αὐτὸν εὐαγγελίων ἢ γενέθλιος τοῦ θεοῦ)", which Asia resolved in Smyrna". Translation: C. A. Evans, 'Mark's Incipit and the Priene Calendar Inscription: From Jewish Gospel to Greco-Roman Gospel', *Journal of Greco-Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 1 (2000), 67-81, esp. 69-70.

<sup>143</sup> F. C. Grant, *Ancient Roman Religion* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957), 173; Evans, 'Mark's Incipit', 67-81; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 146.

In order to validate Roman provenance, it is necessary to find evidence of a persecuted, nascent Jesus movement in Rome. Brandon compiled one of the earliest and most influential arguments for the Gospel's Roman origin, concluding that in the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem, the 71 CE triumph arranged in Rome by Vespasian and Titus, had an immense negative impact on the nascent, Roman Christian community (*War* VII.132-162).<sup>144</sup> Hengel's influential view (and Streeter before him) that Mark's Gospel was written at a time of social-political repression and severe Christian affliction in Rome in the year 69 CE, is also representative of many who posit a Roman provenance.<sup>145</sup> However, the internal evidence of community persecution in the Gospel does not support a connection with a Roman triumph. Josephus describes this event in 71 CE in detail, but does not connect it negatively with the Romano-Jewish population (*War* VII.123-158).

It is difficult to approach persecution of early Christians in Rome without assessing the evidence of persecution towards Judaism itself in the city, as the movement was still both ethnically, culturally and perhaps even intrinsically linked to its Jewish roots. Many thousands of Jews had been taken to Rome as slaves under Pompey (Philo, *Leg.* 568),<sup>146</sup> and although records differ on exact timelines, there is clear evidence that Judaism had an established presence in the city of Rome in the early first century.<sup>147</sup> The subsequent favourable socio-political policies of Augustus resulted in their freedom, eventual Roman citizenship and

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<sup>144</sup> Brandon, 'Date of the Markan Gospel', 126-141; see also Incigneri, *Gospel to the Romans*, 163; M. A. Logsdon, *Suffering and Abandonment in the Gospel of Mark: Socio-Textual Clues Pointing Towards a Shared Roman Community* (PhD. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003).

<sup>145</sup> Hengel, *Studies*, 30.

<sup>146</sup> For discussion see G. La Piana, 'Foreign Groups in Rome during the First Centuries of the Empire', *HTR*, 20 (1927), 183-403 and in particular, 'Jews in Rome; Jewish Districts; Synagogues and Cemeteries', 341-371.

<sup>147</sup> P. Richardson, 'Augustan-Era Synagogues in Rome', in K. P. Donfried and P. Richardson (eds), *Judaism and Christianity in First-Century Rome* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19-29. Richardson concludes that inscriptions in the Roman catacombs attest to at least five synagogues in Rome in the early first century.

tolerance to conduct their religion as *religio licita* in the city (Philo, *Leg.* 155). Both Tacitus and Josephus report that conditions deteriorated under Tiberius, who in 19 CE shipped many Jews to Sardinia (*Annals* II.58; *Ant.* XVIII.83-84). Claudius, on his accession (41-54 CE) had taken steps to ameliorate the fanatical antagonism towards the Jews (*Ant.* XIX. 288-290) which had been upheld by his predecessor Caligula (37-41 CE). However, Cassius Dio (LX.6.6-7) reports that early in Claudius' reign, whilst permitting Jews their traditional mode of life, for a period he did prohibit them from convening assemblies. From this time forward the Jews (and presumably the early Christians) were tolerated, at least in a political sense and were never compelled to take part in Caesar worship (Tacitus, *Hist.* V.5: *non regibus haec adulatio, non Caesaribus honor*: This is a compliment which they do not pay to their kings).

Claudius' expulsion of the Jews from Rome, as reported by Suetonius (*Vita Claudius* V.25.4: *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantes Roma expulit*: Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city) is difficult to date. Suetonius' record of Claudius' life is not given in a chronological sequence and this short statement appears in a summary passage on Claudius' treatment of the Roman population in general. There has also been some scholarly doubt expressed as to whether *Chresto* definitively takes this expulsion from its Jewish context into the realm of early Christianity. If this event is to be linked with Cassius Dio's report of Claudius' treatment of the Jews (LX.6.6-7), then it is contradictory as Cassius specifically states that the Jews were not expelled from Rome and there is no existing record of this in any of Josephus' extant works.<sup>148</sup> Additionally, Luke's statement,

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<sup>148</sup> H. D. Slingerland, 'Suetonius *Claudius* 25.4 and the Account of Cassius Dio', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, LXXIX, 4 (1989), 305-322 and *Claudian Policymaking and the Early Imperial Repression of Judaism at Rome* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), 152-168.

Κλαύδιον χωρίζεσθαι πάντος τοῦς' Ιουδαίους ἀπὸ τῆς' Ρώμης (Acts 18.2: Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome) does not indicate that Aquila and Priscilla, who joined Paul in Corinth, were Christians before they left Rome or that Luke's *all* is absolute.<sup>149</sup> Thus, there is no definite evidence of systematic repression or enduring hostility of the Jewish community in Rome during this period and it would appear that Roman policy was generally tolerant and broad-minded, even actively supportive of Jewish privileges and prerogatives.<sup>150</sup>

A clear distinction between Christians and Jews in the Roman capital emerges at the time of Nero's reign (54-68 CE) when we have seen that there is a record of Christian persecutions (*Annals* XV.44). This group has been described as of relatively mixed socio-economic status, centered on two swampy, urban districts, 'west of the Tiber at Trastevere; beyond the Porta Capena near the Appian Way'.<sup>151</sup> Paul's Epistle to the ethnically mixed Jewish (Rom 2.1-3.20) and Gentile (Rom 11.13) Roman church (written in the mid to late 50s CE),<sup>152</sup> however, makes no suggestion that the early Jesus movement is being persecuted at this time.<sup>153</sup> Additionally, the 'persecutions' in Mark 13, where followers will be delivered up to councils, beaten in synagogues and stand before governors and kings, do not fit well with Tacitus' account of the Roman persecutions. As Marcus points out, 'the wickedness of a Nero-like pagan king' is absent from Mark's

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<sup>149</sup> S. Cappelletti, *The Jewish Community of Rome: from the Second Century BC to the Third Century CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 70, 74.

<sup>150</sup> B. E. Holdsworth, *Reading Romans in Rome: A Reception of Romans in the Roman Context of Ethnicity and Faith* (PhD. thesis, Durham University, 2010), 146.

<sup>151</sup> P. Lampe, *De stadromischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten: Untersuchungen zur Sozial-geschichte: Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, 18 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 52.

<sup>152</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 12; J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), xiii.

<sup>153</sup> Holdsworth, *Reading Romans in Rome*, 164.

Gospel and 'Nero is an unlikely candidate for the "abomination of desolation"', as he never visited Palestine.<sup>154</sup>

In summary, modern scholars who place the writing of Mark in Rome, do so on the basis of (1) the patristic testimony; (2) the Gospel's Latinisms; (3) its Gentile perspective and (4) its proximity to persecutions. We have seen that the patristic testimony is largely based on Papias' account which does not specifically indicate a Roman provenance; the Latinisms would be at home in many locations, including Palestine itself and the Gentile perspective could be applied to anywhere in the Roman empire. Additionally, the evidence of any actual Christian persecutions in Rome, in the second half of the first century, is centred on Tacitus' uncorroborated account of the Neronian persecution. Internally, the Gospel has no direct geographical reference to Rome, nor any direct link concerning personal names or regional events. Thus, a Roman provenance, whilst still a remote possibility, no longer seems probable.

#### **2.4.2 Southern Syria, Transjordan and Northern Galilee**

There are plausible, alternative locations to Rome and, in fact, clear patterns of resonance between the social, political and economic dimensions of ancient Palestine and the events which Mark described in his Gospel. Modern social and cultural-historical methods of interpretation applied to the whole of Mark's text have led to the supposition that the community was located in a rural setting 'from which the events of the Jewish War could be closely observed, yet without immediate involvement'.<sup>155</sup> It is not inconceivable that the Gospel originates from southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee. As there were no clear geographical

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<sup>154</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 33.

<sup>155</sup> B. L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 15.

boundaries in the Roman Near East in the first century (either eastwards towards the Decapolis, westwards towards Tyre and Sidon, southward towards Samaria, nor northward between Galilee and Syria), it is impossible to be precise in terms of exact location.

The world of the self-governing Jewish community in Jerusalem, which had been first starved and then slaughtered, had disappeared. The primitive Jesus movement was itself fractured and far from approaching a unified entity.<sup>156</sup> In this situation of danger, which was both intense and lengthy, the movement and possibly the Markan community itself may have spread north out of the Jerusalem/southern Galilee area, into the villages of southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee and eventually to the cities of Damascus, Antioch, Tyre and Sidon. This migration north could be paralleled with the flight of James' followers across the Jordan from Jerusalem (at the time of the Romano-Jewish War) to Pella in Perea, as reported by Eusebius (*Eccl. Hist.* III.v.2-3) and suggested in the Gospels (Mk 13.14; Mt. 24.16; Lk 21.21).<sup>157</sup>

There are two events which are important to this exodus, the first occurring at the outset of the War in 66/67 CE when Cestius Gallus, having occupied the northern suburb with the *XII Fulminata* legion, withdrew and was ambushed, suffering heavy losses (*War* II.513-555). Secondly, in the late spring of 68/69 CE, the Roman general Vespasian had to halt military operations temporarily in Judaea to await the outcome of developments in Rome (*War* IV.630-657). It is probable that the early Jesus movement, with its emphasis on peace, would wish to escape the conflict, persecutions and violence which were centralised in the locale of Jerusalem. These two periods provided the Jewish community in Jerusalem with

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<sup>156</sup> E. E. Ellis, "'Those of the Circumcision' and the Early Christian Mission', *Studia Evangelica* IV (1968), 390-399; R. Pesch, 'Were there Parties in the NT Church?' *Concilium*, 8 (1973), 26-36.

<sup>157</sup> This tradition has been questioned (see, p. 32, n. 122).

an unexpected respite and the early Jesus movement with the freedom to leave the city and the surrounding regions and head north.

The importance of Galilee itself in relation to the provenance of the Gospel has been emphasized in recent scholarship.<sup>158</sup> The evangelist places importance on the region (naming Galilee a dozen times) and his text has a distinctive rural focus (Mk 1.4, 12, 16, 35; 2.13, 22; 3.7, 13; 4.1-20, 26-29, 30-32, 35; 5.1-19, 21; 6.32-44, 47; 8.1-13, 23; 9.2; 12.1-11). Thus, it is very difficult to imagine that the Gospel emerged from a large urban setting such as Rome or that it would find consonance with a community living in crowded city conditions on the banks of the Tiber. Mark describes Jesus as coming from Galilee (Mk 1.9), beginning his preaching there (1.14, 39), recruiting his first disciples there (1.16) and Galilee is also the point of departure for the Gentile mission (7.24).<sup>159</sup> Mark suggests that Jesus made Capernaum his headquarters, the centre of his ministry on the shores of the Galilean lake and that he goes to Jerusalem not to carry out a ministry there but only to die. Galilee is, therefore, the scene of the beginning and centre of the proclamation of the Gospel.<sup>160</sup> A recent study points out that the inclusion of the

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<sup>158</sup> Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist*; E. M. Meyers, 'The Cultural Setting of Galilee: The Case of Regionalism and Early Judaism', *ANRW*, II.19.1 (1979), 686-702; H. Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville & London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003); S. Freyne, *Galilee, from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 BCE to 135 CE: Study of Second Temple Judaism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1980); S. Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels: Literary Approaches and Historical Investigation* (Dublin: Gill & MacMillan, 1988); Kertelge, 'Epiphany of Jesus', 105-124; R. A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society in Galilee* (Valley Forge PA: Trinity Press, 1996); D. R. Edwards and C. T. McCollough (eds), *Archaeology and the Galilee* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997); E. M. Meyers (ed.), *Galilee through the Centuries: Confluence of Cultures* (Duke Judaic Studies Series I; Winona Lake IND; Eisenbrauns, 1999); S. Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2000); J. L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press, 2000); Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*.

<sup>159</sup> Duling and Perrin note that in Mt. 4.15 (Isa 8.22-9.7) God will pour forth the light of his salvation on 'Galilee of the Gentiles', and that in Ezek. 47.1-12, the river of life flows from Jerusalem towards Galilee. They states that in Mk 14.28 and 16.7, "Galilee", itself a district of marked ethnic mixing, could be a symbol of the work of God in the *whole world*', *New Testament*, 300.

<sup>160</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936), 34.

three women (Mk 15.40-41, 47; 16.1-8), who were closely associated with Galilee, and cited by the evangelist to validate the evidence of an empty tomb, 'is an indication that the Gospel was written in Galilee and for a Galilean community'.<sup>161</sup> However, most definitively and convincingly of all, the author predicts that the post-resurrection appearances will take place in Galilee (Mk 14.28; 16.7) and thus, as Lohmeyer maintained, the Galilean community looked upon itself as the future centre of the kingdom of God upon earth.<sup>162</sup> The use of Galilean and Judaeon place-names throughout, without explanation, is also highly suggestive of provenance in close proximity to Galilee.

The social-political climate in the whole of ancient Palestine between 66-73 CE was one of war, persecution and turbulence (Mk 13.7-9). This social turmoil affected every level of society from the peasant population to the Jewish aristocracy (led by Agrippa II the last Herodian King [54CE-c.93CE]). In Mark 13.14a the evangelist places on the lips of Jesus the mysterious language of Daniel's prophecy of the 'abomination of desolation' (Dan 9.27; 11.31; 12.11) and then follows this with a warning to the Jesus movement, ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω (Mk 13.14b: Let the reader understand).<sup>163</sup> Mark, through this phrase, cautions the reader about identification of signs that predicted the Temple's destruction, which may be considered a dangerous provocation to insurgence by the Roman authorities. This terminology suggests the need for secrecy and caution in a locale in proximity to the Romano-Jewish War and the Temple. Additionally, the 'false Christs' (Mk 13.6, 21-22) have been linked to evidence of messianic pretenders

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<sup>161</sup> Roskam, *Purpose*, 103.

<sup>162</sup> Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem*, 26-35.

<sup>163</sup> Such a phrase was apparently used by the rabbis in connection with a meaning contained within the biblical texts which was dangerous to expound publically. See D. Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: Hendrickson, 1956), 427-435.

among the Jewish revolutionaries,<sup>164</sup> and the 'trials' (Mk 13.9, 11-13) to the practices of Zealots when they took over Jerusalem (*War* IV.335-44).<sup>165</sup>

In summary, having taken into account the internal evidence of the Gospel and the available external literary evidence, it seems clear that its provenance was in proximity to Jesus' area of mission. Whilst the evangelist is often imprecise about Palestinian geography, there is a very special interest and strong emphasis on Galilee. Additionally, southern Syria, Transjordan and northern Galilee and their locales in the late 60s were a 'war front' and any community living there would most certainly have been suffering *θλίψις* *οἷα* *οὐ* *γέγονεν* *τοιαύτη* *ἀπ'* *ἀρχῆς* *κτίσεως* (Mk 13.19: from such 'tribulations as has not been from the beginning of the creation; cf. Dan. 12.1).<sup>166</sup>

## 2.5 Audience

The evangelist is not explicit about the nature of his intended audience and, even though the Gospel was destined for universal circulation, scholarship has in the main concluded that it was written in the context of a local community situation and to speak specifically to that situation.<sup>167</sup> This point has been disputed by some scholars who have challenged a local focus, suggesting that the Gospels were initially encyclical and intended for circulation to a wider community.<sup>168</sup> However,

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<sup>164</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 879-880.

<sup>165</sup> J. R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ?* (Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, 10; Missoula MT: Society for Biblical Literature, 1973), 17-24 and Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 882.

<sup>166</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 36.

<sup>167</sup> Incigneri, *Gospel to the Romans*, 365, asserts that the document was written 'with a very particular, local situation in mind' but concludes that this was Roman persecution of Christians. See, contra view of S. C. Barton, 'Can We Identify the Gospel Audiences?' in R. Bauckham (ed.), *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 173-194.

<sup>168</sup> M. A. Beavis, *Mark's Audience. The Literary and Social History of Mark 4.11-12* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 175-76; R. Bauckham, "For Whom Were Gospels Written?" in R. J. Bauckham (ed.), *Gospels for All Christians*, 9-48; and more recently Peterson, *Origins of Mark*, 5, has rejected any possibility of reconstructing the Markan community from the text of the Gospel.

this argument has been effectively refuted by pointing to the New Testament letters, *Epistle of Aristeas*, *Joseph and Aseneth*, the sectarian scrolls at Qumran and the *Teaching of Addai*, all of which are in the Jewish-Christian sphere and suggest local addressees.<sup>169</sup> In support of a local focus, the Gospel includes personal names without introduction or explanation: Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus (Mk 15.21); James the younger and Joses (15.40) and Mary Magdalene (15.40, 47; 16.1). Therefore, one must assume a familiarity or recognition by the evangelist's implied audience of the individuals mentioned and a close relationship between Mark and his audience.

Additionally, Mark scatters his narrative with Hebrew scriptural quotations (Mk 1.2-3; 7.6-7; 12.10-11; 12.36), images (1.6; 12-13; 6.30-44; 8.1-10; 9.2-8, 9-13) and characters (7.6-13; 9.4, 11), without explaining their significance. He thus assumes, or has an expectation, that some of his audience possess at least a basic knowledge of the Hebrew language and scriptures. However, Mark's explanations of Jewish practices and translations of Aramaic words and phrases (3.17; 5.41; 7.11; 7.34; 15.22, 34) also suggests a concern for his Gentile audience. Both scenarios suggest that Mark's literary forms may have been intended to resonate with a mixed ethnic audience. It may be that some of his Gentile audience were proselytes to Judaism or 'God-fearers', who ultimately proved a very fruitful soil for conversion to the early Jesus movement (Acts 13.13-51).<sup>170</sup>

The Gospel itself was written in Koine Greek and composed with the needs of a listening audience in mind.<sup>171</sup> In a culture where oral performance was highly valued, one must assume an audience of Greek speakers who were capable of

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<sup>169</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 27.

<sup>170</sup> D. Flusser, 'Paganism in Palestine', *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, 2 (1984), 1095-1100.

<sup>171</sup> Dewey, 'Mark as Interwoven Tapestry', 235.

understanding the performance of the text.<sup>172</sup> In support of this hypothesis, we might add that, during this period in Jerusalem, Greek was in current use,<sup>173</sup> alongside Hebrew and Aramaic, and could be read elsewhere in the region.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, the presence of Greek documents in the Dead Sea caves (*Minor Prophets*) would indicate that knowledge of Greek had penetrated even the most fanatical religious groups. Millar describes the villages of Galilee and the Golan as remaining in active contact with predominantly Gentile cities around them (Damascus, Caesarea Panias, Sidon, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Scythopolis) and that the languages used would have been Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.<sup>175</sup> Thus, Mark's audience would probably have been of mixed ethnicity but capable of understanding Greek.

The Gospel appears to reflect an audience which was 'facing a common threat, is in tension with its Jewish heritage, is oppressed, possibly persecuted, is in need of moral guidance, sees Jesus as a paradigm for its faith and expects a speedy resolution of its problems'.<sup>176</sup> This description of the character of Mark's audience is reinforced by the Gospel's rhetorical nature, the intention of which is to ameliorate the discouragement of an audience suffering through their alignment to the Jesus movement (Mk 8.34-37; 10.30; 13.9-13), convince them that their faith was not misplaced and move them to action and/or conviction. This description fits

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<sup>172</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 52; see also Bryan, *Preface to Mark*, 155; Dewey, 'Mark as Interwoven Tapestry', 221-236; B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1924), 163; R. H. Stein, 'Is Our Reading the Bible the Same as the Original Audience's Hearing It? Case Study in the Gospel of Mark', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 46 (2002), 63-78; W. Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First-Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. the famous Greek inscription on the boundary of the Court of Israel in the Temple (which threatened death to any Gentile who entered) see, J. B. Frey (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaicarum I-II. Recueil des inscriptions juives qui vont du 111<sup>e</sup> siècle avant Jésus-Christ av VI<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère*, vol. II (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Archeologia Christiana, 1936, 1952), no. 1400.

<sup>174</sup> M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1983), 1-29

<sup>175</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 344, 350.

<sup>176</sup> Telford, *Theology*, 17.

well with the circumstances of a community located in southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee, where persecution, or the threat of it, was a reality.

There are a number of indications within the Gospel that point towards the Markan audience enduring an actual situation of persecution or a relationship characterized by tension or alienation from society as a whole (Mk 13.13: καὶ ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake.).<sup>177</sup> The Gospel's 'secrecy motif' (Mk 1.24f, 34, 44; 3.11f; 5.43; 7.24, 36; 8.30; 9.9), the sharp divisions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (4.11, 21-25, 34; 7.17) and emphasis on pre-destination (4.10-12: where knowledge is revealed to the few and concealed from the majority), are typical of groups who see themselves as persecuted (4.16-17; 8.34-38; 10.30, 38, 39; 13.9-13).<sup>178</sup> This is also apparent in the calls for repentance (Mk 1.4, 15; 6.12) and in the eschatological fervour of the group (13.1-37) whose expectation was of a heavenly figure at the end of days, not a national Messiah but a figure patterned upon Daniel's vision of 'one like a Son of Man' coming on the clouds of heaven (Dan 7.13).

Evidence has shown that an early community such as Mark's was likely to have been denounced and prosecuted by neighbours, family or friends. A common principle of procedure in the Greek and Roman legal systems was the lack of public prosecutors. The law, therefore, functioned as accusatorial and was reliant upon an accuser laying charges and presenting cases against the accused. Historians have concluded that before the mid-third century, there was no official persecution of Christians and that any actions taken against the early Jesus

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<sup>177</sup> van Iersel, 'Gospel According to St. Mark', 15-36.

<sup>178</sup> F. Watson, 'The Social Function of Mark's Secrecy Theme', *JSNT*, 24 (1985), 49-69.

movement were local, sporadic and probably largely due to public opinion.<sup>179</sup> In support of this view, Suetonius described them as a group who were punished because of their allegiance to the new movement (*Nero XVI.2: afflicti suppliciis Christiani, genus hominum superstitionis novae ac maleficae*: punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition). Exorcisms, nocturnal and pre-dawn meetings, fasts and feasts were probably seen by those outsiders observing the movement's practices, as deviant, subversive and perhaps even magical.<sup>180</sup>

When it became apparent that the Jesus movement was a separate entity to Judaism and could no longer safely hide behind the concessions that successive Roman emperors had made to the Jews, the movement (perceived as liminal within society) would inevitably have come into confrontation with their neighbours.<sup>181</sup> The Gospel narrative itself supports breaks with first-century Gentile kinship traditions and obligations by disrupting existing family practices and applying family imagery and values to their new social group (Mk 10.29-30). Disdain for country and for family was clearly disruptive to the order of the Roman state and family which had been the cornerstone of the meteoric rise of Rome. The community's apocalyptic worldview would also have been perceived as alien to their Gentile neighbours. It is plausible that tensions would also have arisen when, without the protection of the cloak of Judaism, the Markan community withdrew

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<sup>179</sup> R. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Viking, 1986), 423 & 450; T. D. Barnes, 'Pagan Perceptions of Christianity', in I. Hazlett (ed.), *Early Christianity: Origins and Evolution to AD 600* (London: SPCK, 1991), 236-237; R. L. Williams, 'Persecution', in E. Ferguson, et al (eds), *Encyclopaedia of Early Christianity*, vol. II (New York: Garland, 1997), 896.

<sup>180</sup> S. Benko, 'Pagan Criticism of Christianity in the First Two Christian Centuries', *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 23.2.2 (1979/1980), 1055-1118.

<sup>181</sup> Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 208.

from participation in the Roman festivals, probably resulting in charges of social disruption and political disloyalty.<sup>182</sup>

However, the real hostility and polemic within the Gospel itself is focused on the Jews (Mk 3.6; 8.15; 12.13) not the Gentiles, with the evangelist seeking to correct any Judaizing influences on his community. The Jews reject Jesus 'the Son' and the Gospel goes to 'others' (Mk 12.9-11); 'the gospel must first be preached to all nations' (13.10; 14.9) and the elect are 'from the ends of the earth' (13.27). The fundamental assumption amongst New Testament scholars is the view that the controversy discourses (Mk 2.1-3.6; 3.20-35; 7.1-23; 11.27-12.40; 14-15) address the Markan community directly and represent a break with its Jewish roots.<sup>183</sup> Animosity would be engendered between the new community and their Jewish neighbours as a result of the radical religious change from the mother religion to the new movement. These included the abrogation of food restrictions (Mk 7.15), the observance of the Sabbath (2.27) and the elevation of Jesus to a position far higher and more significant than that of any angel or any other intermediary figure in Judaism (9.9; 15.39). The followers of Jesus as described by Mark would be perceived by their Jewish neighbours as in a ritually marginal position: sick (Mk 1.32; 2.17; 6.5, 13, 55, 56; 16.18), sinners (2.5-10, 15-17, 3.28; 11.25) and tax collectors (2.14-16). The movement possibly alienated itself further as a result of its 'replacement motif', τί [οἶη] ποιήσει ὁ κύριος τοῦ ἀμπελῶνος; ἐλεύσεται καὶ ἀπολέσει τοὺς γεωργοὺς καὶ δώσει τὸν ἀμπελῶνα ἄλλοις (Mk 12.9: The lord of the vineyard will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others). In addition, the savage events and intense xenophobia of the Romano-Jewish War would present a credible situation for the intensification of such enmity

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<sup>182</sup> Price, *Rituals and Power*, xxvi.

<sup>183</sup> R. P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986).

due to the group's advocacy of coexistence with the Gentiles (*War II*. 411-32; IV.128-34).<sup>184</sup>

In summary, I have argued (along with several other scholars) that the evangelist's audience was a community situated in southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee who suffered persecution at the hands of both their Gentile and Jewish neighbours. The Gospel substantially reflects their need for instruction, comfort, support and encouragement. The evangelist, therefore, constructed and focused his Gospel with the purpose of deepening the community's faith, ameliorating any Judaizing influences and preparing them for the Gentile mission.

## **2.6 Gentile Mission**

By employing many wide-ranging, critical approaches to individual pericope and to the Gospel as a whole, many scholars have acknowledged that the evangelist records events in a progressive, systematic way, to indicate that Jesus himself conducted a Gentile mission. The explanatory comments in relation to Jewish practices make most sense if Mark's persecuted community (Mk 4.1-20; 8.34-9.1; 10.23-31; 13.9-13) were engaged in, or contemplating mission to the Gentiles. Thus Aramaic or Hebrew expressions are translated into Greek (Mk 3.17; 5.41; 7.34; 9.43; 10.46; 14.36; 15.22, 34); explanations are given in relation to ritual purity (7.3-5);<sup>185</sup> Jewish coinage is translated into Roman coinage (12.42) and Mark explains various Jewish religious festivals (14.12; 15.42).

The evangelist shows a great awareness and interest in the Graeco-Roman city territories surrounding Galilee: Gerasa (Mk 5.1); Tyre and Sidon (7.24-31); Caesarea Philippi (8.27) and the Decapolis (5.20; 7.31), and has Jesus

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<sup>184</sup> Donahue, *Are You the Christ?* 217-224.

<sup>185</sup> In contrast, Matthew assumes his readers would be familiar with these Jewish customs, so he omits Mark's explanation (Mt.15.1-4) and provides no explanation for Jewish customs and practices in Mt 23.16-26.

himself travelling into these areas. Thus, a re-prioritization is seen to occur in the Gospel, where the initial focus is on a mission to the Jews and subsequently the direction is reversed and the evangelist has the Gentiles taking priority. The universal message of the Gospel is, therefore, presented to Mark's audience as a theological concept which they must also carry forward and convey to their Gentile neighbours.

Having established that the evangelist is clearing a path toward a Gentile mission, we now need to confirm the presence of prospective Gentile converts in the area of the Markan community's sphere of influence. Recent archaeological excavations and historical studies of Galilee and ancient Palestine have revealed that the nascent Jesus movement did not operate in a Judaic vacuum but in a Graeco-Roman world of mixed cultures.<sup>186</sup> Given the nature of life in ancient cities and towns, where the majority of the population spent their time in communal spaces, one can assume that contact with prospective group members would not present a difficulty.<sup>187</sup> Logistically, the community would have benefited from relatively safe freedom of movement in the region facilitated by the large scale building programme of roads, cities and harbours instituted by Herod the Great (36–4 BCE) and continued by his youngest son, Herod Antipas (4 BCE–38 CE), then Herod Agrippa I (41CE-44CE) and Agrippa II (54CE-c.94CE).

The arrival of the Roman army in Palestine, under Pompey in 63 BCE, resulted in the programmatic restoration of a whole series of Greek cities. Pompey's initial sortie may not have had a huge cultural impact but by the second half of the first century it becomes necessary to contextualise investigations into

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<sup>186</sup> S. J. Case, 'Jesus and Sepphoris', *JBL*, 45 (1926), 14-22; R. A. Batey, 'Is not this the Carpenter?' *NTS*, 30 (1984), 249-258; 'Jesus and the Theatre', *NTS*, 30 (1984), 563-574; 'Sepphoris and the Jesus Movement', *NTS*, 46 (2001), 402-409.

<sup>187</sup> In the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 7-9, Thecla is described as sitting at her window listening to Paul across the street as he preached to the church that met in the house of Onesiphoros.

this region in terms of Romanization. Evidence of expressions of Greek and Roman cultures have been found in 'public and monumental architecture, inscriptions, coins and various forms of art',<sup>188</sup> and many towns and cities in the region have been described as having been 'settled predominantly by a pagan population'.<sup>189</sup>

Scholars have emphasised the Gentile orientation of Galilee, its importance as the place where the initial approaches are made to Gentiles and where the disciples are to return to carry forward the Gentile mission (Mk 14.28 and 16.7).<sup>190</sup> Γαλιλαία τῶν ἔθνῶν, 'Galilee of the Gentiles' (Mt. 4.15; quoted from Isa. 9.1; 1 Macc 5.15) was undoubtedly one of the areas of Markan mission, which by the first century 'had taken on a new actuality, encircled as the region was with Graeco-Roman cultural centres at varying status'.<sup>191</sup> Economic conditions in Galilee in the first century, under Herod Antipas, had resulted in a very dramatic rise in the population, doubling or perhaps even tripling between 50 BCE - 50 CE, due to urbanization and relative peace.<sup>192</sup> The consumer cities would have pressed the limits of local food production placing a considerable burden on local Gentile populations, who because of this oppression and the imminent or real conflict with the Romans, may have been ripe for joining this movement with its emphasis on peace and equality.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, 20.

<sup>189</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 355.

<sup>190</sup> Boobyer, 'Galilee and Galileans', 334-348. Conversely, M. A. Chancey has recently argued that most Galileans in the first century CE were Jews (*Myth of a Gentile Galilee* [Cambridge: CUP, 2002], 4) but this is running against the mainstream of New Testament scholarship.

<sup>191</sup> Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels*, 144.

<sup>192</sup> Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 36.

<sup>193</sup> Lohmeyer, *Galiläa und Jerusalem*, 26-35.

## 2.7 Conclusion

I have adopted an historical-critical approach to determine the authorship, date, provenance and audience of the Gospel. Internal evidence suggests a *terminus a quo* of sometime in the mid-60s and *terminus ad quem* of 75 CE as the probable time-frame for the Gospel's composition and that patristic sources (dating to no earlier than the mid-second century) in relation to authorship and Roman provenance, are late and inconsistent. It cannot, therefore, be reliably stated that Mark's Gospel was written in Rome and the author is giving an account of Jesus' words and deeds, based on Peter's recollections.

There is a strong possibility that the Gospel was written by a member of, and for, a specific persecuted community which may have fled to the north from Jerusalem during the Romano-Jewish War, awaiting the return of Jesus in Galilee. I have argued that the Markan Gospel's content substantially represents a reflection of the life of this community and that the internal evidence (despite some geographical errors and Latinisms) is at the very least compatible with an eastern provenance. Mark 13 is key to these discussions but like all apocalyptic literature, its language is coded, leaning towards disguise rather than disclosure. In terms of mission, historical evidence supports access to a politically suppressed, mixed population of Gentiles and Jews in southern Syria, Transjordan and northern Galilee at a time when there was receptivity to new religious ideas.

These are the views that I shall adopt and which will inform the rest of this thesis, on the basis of the evidence I have presented and with the corroboration of the scholars I have cited in support of my arguments. In the next chapter we shall look more closely at the historical, political, economic, social and cultural life in the region where I have established the Markan group was located and from where they sourced their converts to the new movement.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### ***Historical, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural Context of the Gospel of Mark***

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The discussion in the previous chapter centered on the supposition that the Markan community was situated in southern Syria, Transjordan or northern Galilee where the group were undertaking missionary activity during the period of the Romano-Jewish War. It is reasonable to assume that the Gospel, which describes persecution, alienation and apocalyptic expectations, reflects the actual situation in which the Markan community found itself. Operating within this context and in pursuit of the community's goal to attract polytheists to the movement, their engagement with Graeco-Roman society was unavoidable. Therefore, I will begin this chapter by briefly sketching the historical-political milieu in the region, which resulted in the dominance of Greek culture and Roman institutions and discuss its possible impact on Markan missionary activity.

The dominant Roman political milieu in which the movement operated led to unrest and violence. I will describe these conditions as they related to the community's interface with life in the countryside (the place of production) and in specific city locales (centres of consumption) named in Mark's narrative. As a means of hope and amelioration of these oppressive conditions, the Markan group promoted to the masses a charismatic Jewish prophetic figure, with a universal message, who advocated social and political transformation. Thus, the movement hoped to appeal to the human situation of those who were politically and economically suppressed and to those in need of individual spiritual experience.

There was, however, competition for converts from other contemporary movements.

In both the Graeco-Roman cities and the agrarian landscape there was little differentiation between the various aspects of life and, therefore, literature, philosophy, ideas and religious practices were inseparable. I will argue that this milieu, together with the political and economic situation, facilitated the geographical spread of the nascent movement's religious and philosophical ideology and provided a vehicle for the Markan mission to communicate its beliefs, which in time became both tolerated and absorbed.

The movement had a strong Jewish heritage and at this time was ostensibly still a cult within Judaism, or at the very least, has been described as a renewal movement.<sup>194</sup> Therefore, I will discuss the main intellectual currents within first century Judaism which may have posed a barrier to missionary activity among the Gentiles and necessitated the movement distinguishing itself from its Jewish roots by assuaging the restrictive Jewish laws of purity.

The Graeco-Roman popular philosophies also formed a background to the early Jesus movement and I will discuss these as they relate to the Markan mission. I will address the traditional polytheistic religious background in the form of an overview but in subsequent chapters I will examine evidence of cultic activity as it relates to specific geographical locations recorded in the Markan Gospel where Jesus is portrayed as visiting and where the Markan mission may have subsequently been operating. The importance of these cults, with their long history in the region, and their influence on the Markan evangelist and his early movement, should not be underestimated as they converged with Mark's segment of the early church and its missionary aims.

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<sup>194</sup> See, p. 8, n. 24.

### 3.2 The Region under Roman Political Rule

History has revealed that military conquest and the imposition of foreign control has an impact upon the culture and religion of the conquered. Following the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 BCE and the Babylonian conquest of Judaea in 589 BCE, Syrian Palestine was successively conquered and influenced by the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman empires. Alexander the Great's occupation in the early fourth century BCE brought the whole region under the control of Greek-speaking rulers who established Hellenistic settlements throughout the region. The precise nature of the early Hellenistic colonies remains unclear but it is known that in some cases entirely new cities were founded by Macedonian settlers. This enabled Greek culture to survive and penetrate through Palestine and Syria, thus introducing the Hellenistic period (c. 323 - 31 BCE) and resulted in the diverse religious milieu which the Markan group encountered in their missionary activity.

Constant wars led to the gradual extinction of these kingdoms, most being absorbed by the Roman or Parthian empires in the second and first centuries BCE. The Roman general Pompey marched into Palestine from Rome's newly acquired province of Syria in 63 BCE to stabilise the empire's eastern frontier. The final pacification of the area came in 38 BCE when the Romans repulsed the Parthians to the east and launched the Province into centuries of peace, prosperity and the development that came with the *Pax Romana*. The Jewish Kingdom suffered most from Pompey's settlement which annexed practically all the cities which the Maccabees had conquered. This marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty which had imposed Judaism on much of the population, resulting in long-lasting tensions between Jews and their neighbours (*Ant.* XIII.257-258, 319). This tension is perpetuated throughout the first century and the Markan evangelist has Jesus

prophesying that his followers must anticipate that ἔσεσθε μισούμενοι ὑπὸ πάντων διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου (Mk 13.13: you will be hated by all for my name's sake).

Caesar Augustus' strong rule (31/27BCE–14CE) resulted in the methodical organization of the empire and 'yielded an era of unprecedented stability and opportunity for urban life and religious freedom; an era which would last a century'.<sup>195</sup> In the patchwork of Graeco-Roman cities in the east, the *Pax Romana* even prevailed over Alexander's dream of ὁμοιότητα (oneness of mind) and was maintained by the skilful policies of Augustus and his heirs. This situation was established by military conquest and the state's threat of punitive military force, which was sufficient sanction to guarantee the flow of resources from local communities to the state apparatus. The Romans strengthened the borders, meted out severe punishment to the rebellious and for their services extracted tribute. Failure to render this up was indistinguishable from rebellion and illustrated that the 'political and economic aspects of ancient imperialism were inseparable'.<sup>196</sup> At the time of Jesus' ministry Roman dominion was well established. Mark portrays Jesus as unprepared to share in any violent response to such conditions and apparently accepting Roman authority in the enigmatic saying, Τὰ Καίσαρος ἀπόδοτε Καίσαρι καὶ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τῷ θεῷ (Mk 12.17: render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's: cf. *Gos. Thom.* 100).<sup>197</sup>

In terms of mobility of the Markan community and expansion of the movement, travel in the region became safer as strategic positioning of the Roman army had ensured the law was maintained on land and at sea. Additionally, there were positive conditions associated with the long-established Jewish diaspora

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<sup>195</sup> Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 11. Widespread unrest followed and led to a quick succession of emperors.

<sup>196</sup> R. A. Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement* (New York: Crossroads, 1989), 71.

<sup>197</sup> P. C. Finney, 'The Rabbi and the Coin Portrait (Mk 12.15b, 16): Rigorism Manqué', *JBL*, 112 (1993), 629-644, suggests the coin was probably a silver *denarius* with Tiberias on the obverse and possibly Augustus' daughter Livia on the reverse.

network and ‘evidence to suggest the prior presence of Jews in almost every location where we can trace the spread of Christianity in its first two centuries’.<sup>198</sup> Thus, through the relative stability of Roman rule and an established Jewish communications network, it was possible for the movement’s religious ideology to sweep over the ancient world into the countryside and the proximal cities.

The imposition of imperialist urban culture meant the import of some Roman institutions. The Romans organised their provinces on the basis of cities which were already there, occupied them with Roman legions (under the command of a governor or proconsul who imposed public order by force) and thus introduced a ‘double community, one of citizens and one of *peregrini*’ (*peregrini* denotes free provincial subjects of the empire who were not Roman citizens).<sup>199</sup> Towards the end of Augustus’ reign, there is evidence of fifteen thousand citizen legionaries, plus an unknown number of auxiliaries and their officers in the Syrian region (*Ant. XVII.286*).<sup>200</sup> These soldiers represented a large, heterogeneous segment of the population, who clearly stood for Rome.

After his Roman trial, Mark has Jesus subjected to humiliating treatment by Roman soldiers who mock him as βασιλεὺ τῶν Ἰουδαίων (Mk 15.18: king of the Jews); a dangerous designation as any person claiming kingship ran the risk of challenging the divine rule of Caesar. However, incredibly Mark places on the lips of a Roman soldier at the crucifixion, ‘Ἀληθῶς οὗτος ὁ ἄνθρωπος υἱὸς θεοῦ ἦν (Mk 15.39: Truly this man was the Son of God). The centurion appears to be an emblem of Mark’s ‘others’ to whom the vineyard will be given (Mk 12.9-10; Mt.

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<sup>198</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, ‘The Jews of the Diaspora’, in J. Barclay and J. Sweet (eds), *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997), 27.

<sup>199</sup> F. Millar, ‘*Civitates, liberae, coloniae* and Provincial Governors under the Empire’, *Mediterraneo Antico: Economie Società Culture*, 13 (Pisa: Instituti Editoriale e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1999), 99, 105.

<sup>200</sup> This had risen to four legions plus auxiliaries by 27 CE when Tiberius makes his report to the Senate (Tacitus, *Annals* IV.5), cited in Millar, *RNE*, 32.

21.41; Lk 20.16), illustrating that the eschatological people of Israel will include the Gentiles. Bousset in his influential work, *Kyrios Christos*, argued that the title 'Son of God' (associated with Son of Zeus/Apollo) could not be understood as a recognition of Jesus as the Jewish messiah but originated 'on Greek ground, in the Greek language' and was a formula chosen by the evangelist to express the identity of Jesus for the faith of the Gentile Christian community.<sup>201</sup> During the period under review, kings and other rulers were consistently portrayed as descended from gods or as 'son of god', 'son of Helios' and 'son of Zeus'.<sup>202</sup> In the early Roman imperial period, the title θεοῦ υἱός was also used for Augustus. The population of the Roman Near East, familiar with the ruler cult, would probably have associated the idea with this usage.<sup>203</sup>

The Julio-Claudian emperors Tiberius (14–37 CE), Gaius Caligula (37-41 CE), Claudius (41-54 CE) and Nero (54-68 CE) and the first two Flavians, Vespasian (69-79 CE) and Titus (79-81 CE), spanned the period covered by the Synoptic Gospels. The emperors ruled the region with the assistance of client Herodian kings, complicating the structure of imperial control, adding another layer to the ruling strata supported by the people and compounding the pressures on the peasantry. At the time Mark's Gospel was written, southern Syria, Transjordan and northern Galilee were subject to this type of Roman control under the auspices of Herod Agrippa II, a Jew who was unpopular with his people and entirely devoted to the Romans (*Ant.* XX.159; *War* II.252).<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: Geschichte des Christusglaubens von den Anfängen des Christentums bis Irenaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1935), 55-56, contra M. Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 22.

<sup>202</sup> D. L. 3.2; D. R. Cartlidge and D. L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. ed. 1980), 129.

<sup>203</sup> A. Y. Collins, 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God Among Greeks and Romans', *HTR*, 93:2 (2000), 87.

<sup>204</sup> M. Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persians to the Arab Conquests (536 BC – AD 640): A Historical Geography* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 191. For full

Palestine had been prepared for the absorption of Roman culture by its inclusion in the Hellenistic world and by the reign of Herod the Great (37–4 BCE). Herod is described by Millar as ‘a king of Judaea, a Jew by religion, the son of an Idumaeen father and a Nabataean mother, who was also a Roman citizen’.<sup>205</sup> Having been granted kingship by Rome under Antony (and confirmed by Octavian), Herod conquered his kingdom with the help of Roman troops and maintained an unusually tight control of the people through excessively repressive means and by exhausting his subjects economically. In many ways he played the part of a Hellenistic monarch undertaking massive building projects (the Jerusalem temple, cult temples, theatres) and founding new Greek-style cities (Sebaste and Caesarea, named in honour of the imperial family). His administration and mercenary army were Hellenistic and alien to the population of Judaea, Perea and Galilee.<sup>206</sup> Under Herod there was a triple demand for taxes from the peasantry which included: (1) tribute to the Romans; (2) the annual Jewish half-shekel Temple tax and offerings for the Temple establishment, and (3) taxes to support his vast expenditures. Indeed, Herod’s usurpation of power and his ensuing propaganda efforts may well have been a major stimulus to the nation’s longing for a messiah, considering the number of messianic pretenders that arose at his death in 4 BCE (*Ant.* XVII.271-272; 273-277; *War* II.60-65).

After his death, Herod’s kingdom was divided between his three sons. Archelaus became ethnarch of the tetrarchy of Judaea and Herod Antipas became the tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea (west of the Jordan) where he rebuilt the city of Sepphoris and founded Tiberias (*Ant.* XVIII.36). Antipas was educated at Rome (*Ant.* XVII.20-21) and Mark’s Gospel brings him vividly to our attention because of

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discussion on the Herodian dynasty and their relationship to the Romans, see N. Kokkinos (ed.), *The World of the Herods*, vol. I (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007).

<sup>205</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 235.

<sup>206</sup> Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, 71.

his execution of John, who according to Mark (6.17-29) had made a public issue over Antipas' marriage to Herodias, a marriage which violated Jewish law.<sup>207</sup> The region north-east of the Sea of Galilee was given to Herod's son, Philip, along with the title, *tetrarch*. Philip established several Greek cities, replacing the ancient northern city of Paneas with the new Graeco-Roman city of Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8.27). He also rebuilt the fishing village of Bethsaida at the north eastern corner of the Sea of Galilee (Mk 6.45; 8.22; *Ant.* XVIII.28).

After Philip's death, and apparent tranquil reign (*Ant.* XVIII.106-108), his territories were annexed to Syria and to Agrippa I (41-44 CE), a Jewish king, the grandson of Herod the Great whose upbringing in Rome made him a pro-Roman sympathizer with Graeco-Roman tastes. In contravention of Jewish strong aniconic beliefs based on the Decalogue, coins were stamped with his image and at the time of his death he was celebrating a festival of the imperial cult (*Ant.* XIX.343-351). He was replaced by another member of the dynasty, Agrippa II.<sup>208</sup> Thus, whilst the region in which the Markan group operated was in the hands of the Jewish Herodian dynasty, the rulers were Roman sympathizers with Graeco-Roman predilections.

Added to the complex political situation in the region were the Roman governors and prefects, appointed by the emperors with responsibility for civil order, the administration of justice and the collection of various taxes and tolls (the process by which the Roman state lived off its subjects).<sup>209</sup> Pontius Pilate was governor of Judaea from 26-37 CE and is described by Philo as cruel and corrupt

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<sup>207</sup> Josephus, however, records that Herod had John put to death because he feared John's influence would encourage rebellion (*Ant.* XVIII.118).

<sup>208</sup> On the reign of Agrippa II and his unswerving loyalty to the Roman cause, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. I, 471-483.

<sup>209</sup> H. K. Bond, *Pontius Pilate in History and Interpretation* (Cambridge & New York: CUP, 1998), 1-23. See also Schürer, *History*, vol. I, 257-398.

(*Leg.* 301).<sup>210</sup> Mark has the Jewish authorities deliver Jesus to Pilate (Mk 15.1: παρέδωκαν Πιλάτῳ) with no description of his official title, presumably as this local prefect was sufficiently well known to Mark's audience to necessitate no further means of identification, other than his name. Mark's mockery and crucifixion of Jesus at the hands of the Romans was intended to demonstrate to his audience that discipleship may involve persecution and harsh treatment by Rome and that this was not only foretold (Mk 13.9) but also endured by Jesus in his earthly life (Mk 15.1-37).

The Romano-Jewish War was the result of a complex array of factors, both internal and external, where tensions were endemic between rich and poor, city and country and between the Romans and Jewish elite, who fought over profits from taxation.<sup>211</sup> This explosive internal situation of social divisions and religious disputes led to large numbers of the Jewish population uniting in acts of violence against the Romans. The armed uprising, which sought independence from Rome, was compounded by Roman leadership struggles and the empire's political instability during the second half of the first century CE. The Romano-Jewish War forced those in the border areas of northern Galilee and southern Syria to define and align themselves in the emerging dispute.<sup>212</sup> If, as I have argued, the Markan community were operating in this area, it may account for the Markan evangelist's attempt to reconcile Jews and Gentiles on purity grounds (Mk 7.14-15), a reconciliation which was encouraged by Roman imperialistic rule.

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<sup>210</sup> Pilate was insensitive to Jewish objections to a new garrison in the Antonian fortress at Jerusalem, who showed a medallion bust of the emperor on their standard. He was forced to have it removed through the power of Jewish resistance and threat of violence (*War* II.169-174; *Ant.* XVIII.55-59).

<sup>211</sup> Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus*, 40-43. For full discussion on the causes of the War including the incompetence of Roman governors, the oppressiveness of Roman rule, class tensions and Jewish religious susceptibilities, see M. Goodman, *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), 5-14.

<sup>212</sup> C. Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 323-328.

The administration of Palestine under Agrippa II and the procurator Gessius Florus (64-66 CE) was corrupt and incompetent and the Romans had 'misjudged the degree to which the elites it had backed in Judaea commanded popular support'.<sup>213</sup> The Jews ultimately appealed for relief to Florus's superior, the legate of Syria, Cestius Gallus. Not only was the appeal unsuccessful, but it was soon followed by Florus's mishandling of ethnic tensions in the area of Caesarea and his plundering of the Temple treasury (*Ant.* XX.252-258). The hegemony of Rome and consequent anti-Roman feeling, predominantly felt by the lower classes, escalated into further social unrest. This disillusionment of the masses engendered hope of a 'saviour' to intervene and release them from their oppressed situation.

A spiral of violence in 66 CE resulted in the upper and lower cities of Jerusalem being held by differing Jewish factions (*War* II.423) and a large number of the population of Caesarea being murdered (*War* II.458). Unrest and war spread over the whole territory and Jewish rebels attacked 'the villages of the Syrians and their neighbouring cities' which Josephus names as 'Philadelphia, Sebonitis, Gerasa, Pella, Scythopolis, Gadara, Hippos, Gaulanitis, Kedasa (belonging to the Tyrians), Ptolemais, Gaba and Caesarea' (*War* II.458-460). This internal conflict was between 'Jews and foreigners' but also Jews 'fought against their own countrymen' (*War* II.466; cf. *Mk* 13.12).<sup>214</sup>

The problem was, therefore, geographically widespread. Gamala, an impregnable fortress located on the west of the Sea of Galilee and conquered by the Romans in 67 CE, was the harbinger of their conquest of the rest of Judaea (*War* IV.1-82). The emperor Nero feared that the Jewish revolt and the initial

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<sup>213</sup> Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East*, 41.

<sup>214</sup> The bitterness of this division can be seen in the Sicarii's assassination campaign, see R. A. Horsley and J. S. Hanson, *Bandits, Prophets and Messiahs: Popular Movements in the time of Jesus* (Minneapolis MN: Winston Press, 1985), 205.

successes of the Jews would serve as a stimulus to the eastern provinces to rise against their Roman conquerors. In April 67 CE he sent his best general, Vespasian, with the *X Fretensis* and *V Macedonica* legions and his son, Titus Flavius, with the support of the *XV Apollinaris*, to crush the revolt in Judaea (*War* III.64-65). Vespasian returned to Rome in 69 CE to claim the throne, leaving Titus to destroy the centre of the rebel resistance in Jerusalem, resulting in the destruction of the Temple in July 70 CE. The revolt ended with the suicide of the defenders of Masada in 74 CE. As a consequence of the Romano-Jewish War, as we have seen in the previous chapter, the Markan community may have re-located north from Jerusalem or southern Galilee (*Mk* 13.14), sometime between 66-69 CE, to escape the epicentre of this violent struggle and the subsequent severe famine (*War* VI.392-408).

### **3.3. Life in the Countryside**

The social pyramid in the region contained no large dominant middle-class, but rather, at the top, a tiny aristocratic group and, at the bottom, a large body of peasants, slaves, those set free from slavery and resident aliens (μέτοικοι). The majority of the population worked on small plots of land and derived most of what they ate, lived in and wore from a small geographical area, surviving at subsistence level under the creeping threat of famine, starvation and heavy taxation by the ruling power. Their oppressive circumstances were relieved by family and kinship ties and ameliorated through religion, associations and cults. Thus, society actively sought national revival and individual regeneration through

the medium of gods or human deliverers of sociological or messianic complexion.<sup>215</sup>

It is to this first-century oppressed, exploited majority that the Markan evangelist directs the message of Jesus, a product of village life himself. This message offered hope and amelioration of the fundamental problems of hunger and poverty, sickness and demon-possession. Mark's Gospel describes the disciples and many of Jesus' followers as coming from among the poverty-stricken fishermen of the Sea of Galilee and the destitute peasant class of Galilee. Throughout the Gospel, the evangelist identifies the urban elite and their retainers as opponents, in social conflict with Jesus (Mk 2.1-3.6; 3.20-35; 7.1-23; 11.27-12.40; 14-15) and the primary cause of social injustice.

Mark is scrupulous in designating only the areas surrounding cities as the places where Jesus conducted his mission in the region, i.e., τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν (Mk 5.1: the country of the Gerasenes); τὰ ὄρια Τύρου (Mk 7.24: the borders of Tyre); τῶν ὀρίων Δεκαπόλεως (Mk 7.31: the region of the Decapolis) and τὰς κώμας Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου (Mk 8.27: the villages of Caesarea Philippi). Mark's focus on the surrounding territories suggests that these areas may have been a safer target for mission and that Mark's own community may have been rurally located.

In contrast to modern, highly urbanized and industrialized societies, ancient agrarian societies had a relatively simple social structure, divided fundamentally between a tiny ruling group (under 5% of the population) with a monopoly on political-military power and the ruled (95%), representing the vast majority.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> For those Graeco-Romans who had no religious beliefs, Meeks (*Social World of the First Christians*, 181) attests to first century tombstone epitaphs repeating a joke about death: "I did not exist, I do not exist, I do not care" so often that it is abbreviated: "n.f.n.s.n.c." (*Non fui, non sum, non cuto*).

<sup>216</sup> Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, 68-69.

Socially, culturally and politically there was an unbridgeable gap between the poor and the elite, who had little in common with the lower classes, maintaining their own 'mannerisms, vocabulary, speech patterns and dress'.<sup>217</sup> A recent archaeological study, which extrapolates evidence from *Ramat Hanadiv* and *Ein Gedi* near Caesarea, indicates that the disparity between rich and poor was accelerating in the mid-first century across the whole of Palestine.<sup>218</sup>

At the time Mark was written, the ruling class was effectively draining the rural resources of the region, where farmers were tenants or owned between one and three percent of the arable land,<sup>219</sup> and the average peasant plot was six acres or less.<sup>220</sup> The peasants produced what they needed for their subsistence and any surplus was taken in the form of tax, rent or tribute to support absent landlords, the rulers, their servants, and retainers, who lived principally in the cities. Through their land ownership of large estates, the powerful urban elite (highest ranking military officers, priestly families, the Herodians and other aristocratic families) maintained control of writing, coinage, taxation, the military and the judicial system.

The Herodians, who represented part of the new elite, owned estates in lower Galilee including areas 'beyond the Jordan' (*Ant.* XVIII.36- 38; *Life* 33). The specific identity of the Herodians in Mark's Gospel is still a matter of dispute but they are mentioned in the evangelist's narrative (Mk 3.6; 12.13 and possibly 8.15) with a suggestion that they were men of standing and influence whose names imply an 'outlook of friendliness to the Herodian rule and consequently to the Roman rule on which it rested'.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location of the Marcan Audience', 118.

<sup>218</sup> Y. Hirschfeld, 'Property versus Poverty in Judea before 70', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 384-392.

<sup>219</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location of the Marcan Audience', 118.

<sup>220</sup> D. A. Fiensy, *The Social History of Palestine in the Herodian Period: The Land is Mine* (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 1991), 60, 93-94.

<sup>221</sup> H. H. Rowley, 'Herodians in the Gospels', *JTS*, 41 (1940), 27.

Galilee, situated in the north of Palestine, was at the time part of the wider Roman province of Syria and separated from Judaea by Samaria. Josephus describes two hundred and forty cities and villages in Galilee (*Life* 235) which because of the richness of the soil, supported more than fifteen thousand inhabitants (*War* III.41-43). Whilst Josephus is not famed for numerical accuracy, Galilee has been described by modern historians as ‘the most heavily populated of the various zones of large Jewish villages which surrounded Judaea itself’.<sup>222</sup> Butcher, however, argues that the term ‘village’ is somewhat ‘inadequate for the task of describing the wide variety of settlements encountered, from small agglomerations of rural buildings to “towns” of several thousand inhabitants’.<sup>223</sup> Through the translation of epigraphy, the examination of ceramics and differentiation in architectural style, archaeological exploration in the region has produced evidence of a distinction between northern and southern Galilee.<sup>224</sup> The north of Galilee, a possible location for the Markan group, with many hills and valleys has been described as having ‘fewer people and lesser settlements’ than lower Galilee,<sup>225</sup> and ‘never subjected to the same degree of urbanization in the Roman period’.<sup>226</sup>

However, these agrarian locations would not be immune to urban influences. The *Via Maris*, a route which connected Egypt with Damascus, ran through northern Galilee (see Appendix 7: Roads and Routes in the Roman Near East). This was the major east-west trade route that connected the cities and towns of the Mediterranean Sea with the towns on the Sea of Galilee and beyond to Jordan and Syria. The imperial granaries, located in upper Galilee (*Life* 71)

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<sup>222</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 347.

<sup>223</sup> Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 135.

<sup>224</sup> Freyne, *Galilee, Jesus and the Gospels*, 171.

<sup>225</sup> Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in his Place*, 144.

<sup>226</sup> S. Freyne, *Jesus: A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London & New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 54.

would also have necessitated some form of urbanization in order to facilitate the export of goods to the port of Caesarea Maritima. Thus, even though these areas were agricultural, they were heavily populated because of the size of each plot of arable land. This oppressed, rural population, just outside the epicentre of the Romano-Jewish War, was therefore large and suitable for conversion to the new movement.

### **3.4 Life in the City**

As we have seen, Mark has Jesus avoiding cities and, in particular, no mention is made in the Gospel of the two nearby Herodian city foundations of Sepphoris and Tiberias. If the Markan presentation is to be trusted, this avoidance of urban centres and concentration on rural locations may have been connected with Herod's treatment of prophet-like men such as John the Baptist (Mk 6.14-29; *Ant.* XVIII.116-120) and the subsequent ultimate outcome of Jesus' direct contact with the city of Jerusalem and its elite. Most cities in the locale of the Markan group were situated in the Decapolis (Mk 5.20; 7.31) and the Phoenician coastal plain (Mk 7.24) where the effect of Hellenism in terms of language, art and education was especially evident. We have seen that the population was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles, 'among whom strong social and cultural tensions sometimes arose'.<sup>227</sup> The cities had high-density populations with crowded conditions at home. However, approximately a quarter of the city-space was devoted to public areas and facilities.<sup>228</sup> Thus, much of life was lived on the streets, where new religions were first encountered, ideas travelled swiftly, change could be met, embraced and missionary activity generated.

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<sup>227</sup> Chester, 'The Jews of Judaea and Galilee', in J. Barclay and J. Sweet (eds), *Early Christian Thought in its Jewish Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1997), 14.

<sup>228</sup> Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 28.

Education was reserved for the urban elite and the servants of the elite, a situation which further compounded exploitation of the poor.<sup>229</sup> In the predominantly oral culture of the period, only a small percentage of the population could read. The figure most often arrived at is five to ten percent, at most.<sup>230</sup> Mark, like the apostle Paul, most probably wrote for the 'not many were wise, according to worldly standards', the 'not many were powerful' and the 'not many were of noble birth' (1 Cor 1.26-27). The Markan audience would most probably have heard the Gospel read aloud to them in the common dialect of the κοινή Greek language.<sup>231</sup>

Latin and Greek functioned as the languages of the dominant power and entered into a complex linguistic relationship with the indigenous Semitic languages of the region. Greek words were readily transliterated and absorbed into Latin and Latin into Greek (*centurio* becomes κεντυρίων; Mk 15.39). A traveller who knew Greek could be understood almost everywhere in the Roman Near East. Jesus, a first-century Jew, whose life and sayings are recorded in Greek, who is represented as talking to Romans (Mk 15.2) and to a Greek woman (Mk 7.27), probably had some knowledge of the Greek language and culture. Additionally, Mark records Jesus' challenge, Οὐδέποτε ἀνέγνωτε τί ἐποίησεν Δαυίδ (Mk 2.25: Have you never read what David did?), thus presupposing his own reading ability and that of others in rural communities.<sup>232</sup> We have seen that Mark's Gospel's linguistic character reflects a setting where Greek is the common

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<sup>229</sup> W. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: HUP, 1989), 333-334.

<sup>230</sup> Harris, *Ancient Literacy*, 272, 328-330.

<sup>231</sup> J. D. G. Dunn, *A New Perspective on Jesus: What the Quest for the Historical Jesus Missed* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 120; A. Y. Collins, 'Mark and His Readers: The Son of God Among Jews', *HTR*, 92.4 (1999), 393.

<sup>232</sup> Josephus records the presence of scripture scrolls in Palestinian villages (*War* II.229; *Life* 134).

language but shows Semitic influence, suggesting that it belongs 'to the lower-class strata of Roman-occupied Syria'.<sup>233</sup>

### 3.5 Intellectual Currents in Judaism

There is little doubt that the early Jesus movement was perceived as a cult within Judaism which 'only gradually separated from its mother religion in the course of the first century'.<sup>234</sup> Mark's Gospel reinforces this hypothesis through his use of Hebrew Scripture (Mk 1.2-3; 4.11-12; 7.6-7; 11.9); his inclusion of the Jewish concepts of an apocalypse (Mk 13.6-27) and his reference to τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἱματίου αὐτοῦ ἄψωνται (Mk 6.56: the tassels of his garment), suggesting that Jesus himself was a pious Jew who took religious obligations seriously.<sup>235</sup> I will attempt a brief outline of the intellectual currents in Judaism in the period under review in order to demonstrate the variety of beliefs, practices, groups and movements that the Gentile world confronted and even influenced, in order to set the Gospel comprehensively in its cultural milieu. However, an exhaustive discussion on the rich spiritual legacy of the Jewish people is not possible within the limits of the present thesis as it is not an easy task to describe the multifaceted, highly complex character of Judaism at the time the Gospel of Mark was written. Hellenism and Romanization had an effect on the Jews living in the region and resulted in the cult of the biblical God becoming diversified through adoption,

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<sup>233</sup> H. C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>234</sup> G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1999), 572.

<sup>235</sup> J. G. Crossley has argued that in the three Synoptic Gospels, Jesus is portrayed as 'a Torah observant Jew in conflict with Jews dedicated to expanding and developing the biblical laws', and the early Jesus movement was 'largely law observant for at least the first 10 to 15 years after the death of Jesus' (*Date of Mark's Gospel*, 123, 157). This latter point has not commanded widespread scholarly support; see Telford, Review of Crossley's *Date of Mark's Gospel*, 131-135.

adaptation, conversion and intermarriage and the Jewish religion could no longer be seen as the faith of one single nation or people but varied from group to group.

Josephus describes three philosophical sects among the Jews; the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes (*War* II.119). Mark mentions the Sadducees in relation to resurrection (12.18), the Pharisees feature extensively (Mk 2.16, 18, 24; 3.6; 7.1, 3; 8.11, 15; 10.2; 12.13) and there is no mention whatever of the Essenes. The Markan movement emerged alongside these different 'philosophies' as well as the popular prophetic and messianic movements. An important theme throughout Mark's Gospel is antagonism towards the Sadducees and Pharisees, suggesting an attempt at distancing the community from the mother-religion.

The nascent Jesus movement was different from other contemporary millenarian or charismatic movements in its emphasis on kingdom and messiah. It did not advocate the violent overthrow of Roman rule and has been described as more like a Jewish prophetic movement.<sup>236</sup> Brown has suggested that the first century communities were composed of Jews and Gentiles distinguished only by 'shifting attitudes toward the Jewish heritage' and comprised: (1) 'ultraconservative' Jewish Christians and their Gentile converts who insisted on full observance of Jewish law, including circumcision; (2) those who took a 'mediating' view and did not insist on circumcision but did require converts to keep some Jewish observances; (3) those who took a 'liberal' approach, did not insist on circumcision and did not require observance of food laws, and (4) 'radicals' who did not insist on circumcision or observance of the Jewish food laws and saw no abiding significance in Jewish cult or feasts.<sup>237</sup> The editorial comment, καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα (Mk 7.19: declared all foods clean) would indicate that the Markan

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<sup>236</sup> Chester, 'Jews of Judaea and Galilee', 24.

<sup>237</sup> R. E. Brown and J. P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity* (London: Chapman, 1982), 1-9.

evangelist is writing for a radical community, similar to Brown's fourth category (cf. Mk 2.21-22).

From 63 BCE onwards, when the Roman general Pompey conquered the Seleucid Empire, life for the Jews in Palestine was determined by the cultural effects of Hellenism, by the political-military supremacy of the Romans and the daily goal of non-transgression of Jewish laws and customs within a mixed cultural society. The Romans issued decrees exempting them from military service, from offering sacrifices to the emperor as a deity, from appearance in court on the Sabbath, portraying the emperor's head on their coins and, in areas of heavy Jewish population, the Romans were prevented from representing the image of the emperor on their military standards.<sup>238</sup> However, subsequently, there were many attempts to renege on these privileges, including an aborted attempt by Gaius Caligula to install a statue of himself for the purpose of veneration on the Temple Mount.<sup>239</sup>

Such preferential treatment and special privileges did not leave relations with other groups unscathed and there is much evidence that the Jews were often deeply resented, causing communal tensions with their Gentile neighbours who had undergone the recent historical ignominy of being ruled by the Hasmonean priest-kings. When Pompey conquered Judaea, he was welcomed by the non-Jewish people of the Phoenician and Decapolis cities as a liberator from the repressive Jewish Hasmonean kingdom. This antagonism may have presented a

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<sup>238</sup> Sanders argued that these concessions were granted uniquely to the Jews because they rendered assistance to Augustus during his civil war with Pompey (E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE- 66CE* [London: SCM Press, 1992], 146-157).

<sup>239</sup> Josephus reports that this was in revenge for an episode at Jamnia where the Jews had attacked and desecrated a new Greek altar erected for the imperial cult. Gaius was assassinated before he could complete the project (*Ant.* XVIII.261-288, 289-309; cf. Philo, *Leg.* 261-333; 207-260).

problem for the later Markan mission which was probably perceived, in some respects, to have a close association with Judaism.

Both Hellenism and Judaism had universalistic tendencies and claims but in the conflict between the two cultures, the Greeks and Romans reacted with anti-Semitic prejudice and discrimination. For their part, the Jews reacted to Hellenism with xenophobia and by drawing in on themselves.<sup>240</sup> Küng describes pre-Christian, pagan anti-Judaism as being caused by Jewish exclusive monotheism (asserting itself in the face of traditional polytheism), its prohibition of images, circumcision (regarded by Greeks and Romans as archaic) and the Jews' aggressive description of their salvation history, evident from our chief witness, Flavius Josephus' apologia, *Contra Apion* (I. 26-31).<sup>241</sup> Consequently, during the course of the first century, when threatened by a more powerful alien culture, the Jewish people underwent a severe crisis of identity and began to see Gentiles as 'demonically inspired', foreign intruders, who should be destroyed as they 'oppress Israel' (1QM. XIV 4-8).<sup>242</sup> The Markan group represented itself as distant from Judaic Law (Mk 7.19) and subsequently may have been positively perceived by some prospective converts as 'outsiders' to Judaism.

### **3.5.1 Temple and the Sadducees**

The Temple, and its priestly aristocracy, the Sadducees, had both religious and political-economic power over Judaea and other areas in Jewish Palestine, continuously from its institution by the Persians until disrupted and destroyed during the Romano-Jewish War (Mk 12.1-9; 13.1-2; 14.58; 15.29, 38). Jewish religion was centered on the cycle of Temple worship and the complete authority of

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<sup>240</sup> Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus*, 87-92.

<sup>241</sup> H. Küng, *Judaism: The Religious Situation of Our Time*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1992), 145-146.

<sup>242</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 481.

the written *Torah* (*Ant.* XIII.297) which served to provide both the divinely given 'constitution' of the political-economic-religious rule of the Temple and hereditary high priesthood, along with the fundamental traditions through which the people were governed. Mark has Jesus railing against Temple exclusivism and declaring the Temple ('God's house') to be a house of prayer for all nations (Mk 11.17; cf. Isa. 56.7).<sup>243</sup>

The office of high priest and apparently the other key offices, such as Temple captain and treasurers, were controlled by four families during the decades between the death of Herod the Great and the revolt of 66-74 CE.<sup>244</sup> Rohrbaugh's investigation (based on macro-sociological studies of agrarian societies) indicates that the high priests were the most powerful members of the Jewish aristocracy with 'political influence over the non-elite' (Mk 11.18).<sup>245</sup> At mid-first century CE, perhaps in response to serious slippage in their actual power and religious-cultural legitimacy, these families were engaged in virtually predatory actions against their own people (*Ant.* XX.181). Thus, the resentment in the Markan Gospel towards these authorities and their retainers may have been received with some empathy by those Jews who they were seeking to convert to the Jesus movement and by Gentiles who considered the influence of the Jewish aristocracy disproportionate.

For many Jews the Temple was remote and the role played by the synagogue (the platform of the Pharisees) was the focus of religious life in each local community (*Ant.* XIII.298).<sup>246</sup> In the northern Galilean area at the time the Gospel was written, synagogues were most likely simple assembly places for the

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<sup>243</sup> Josephus confirms the inscription in the Jerusalem Temple which forbids any foreigner to go into the inner court upon pain of death (*Ant.* XV.417).

<sup>244</sup> Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, 73.

<sup>245</sup> Rohrbaugh, 'Social Location', 118.

<sup>246</sup> 'By the first century BCE, every village in Judaea had a synagogue where the community would gather to hear the reading of the law and listen to the Pharisaic expositions', L. and D. Cohn-Sherbok, *Judaism: A Short History* (Oxford: One World, 1999), 37.

village, covering a broad range of communal affairs and dominated by local leaders.<sup>247</sup> In the early part of his ministry, Mark has Jesus visiting the synagogues to preach and heal (Mk 1.21, 39; 3.1; 6.2) before embarking on a Gentile itinerary. Thus, using the traditions available to him, the Markan evangelist has no alternative other than to set Jesus up as a Jewish leader, which may or may not have been problematic in terms of the Gentile mission.

### 3.5.2 Pharisees

Jewish customs and practices had not been left to chance but were consciously and purposefully formulated in detail and preserved in the *Torah*, a collection of traditions originating around the sixth and seventh centuries BCE, with strong parallels in the text with the laws, customs and myths of other ancient Middle Eastern civilizations (*Lev.* 15.11). During the early part of the first century CE efforts to maintain the *Torah* traditions clashed with the changing social and economic circumstances of life in a society different from that of ancient Israel. A process of clarification and reformulation was needed, as at no point is the *Torah* precise or detailed enough to dictate concrete practice.

This mantle was largely taken up by the Pharisees who considered themselves to be the successor of Moses, exercising moral leadership over the Jews and constituting the main thrust of resistance to the Graeco-Roman culture of wider society. Josephus refers to more than six thousand Pharisees at the end of the first century BCE (*Ant.* XVII.41-45) and whilst we do have to treat these figures with caution, they do seem to indicate that the sect was ubiquitous. The Pharisees

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<sup>247</sup> Z. Ilan, 'Galilee. A Survey of Synagogues', *Excavation and Survey of Israel*, 5 (1986/7), 35-37; R. A. Horsley, 'Synagogues in Galilee and the Gospels' in H. C. Kee and L. H. Cohick (eds), *Evolution of the Synagogue* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity, 1999), 46-69; J. D. G. Dunn, 'Did Jesus Attend the Synagogue?', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids MI & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 220.

were most likely some sort of association or 'political interest group ... with the Sadducees perhaps having been a parallel political-interest group among the priestly aristocracy itself'.<sup>248</sup> Mark portrays Jesus' relationship with the Pharisees as mutually hostile (Mk 2.6-9; 3.6; 7.5-9; 8.15; 12.13) and challenges the basis of their communal life and Law (Mk 7.19). For much of the later first century, the Markan community may have been competing against Pharisees and other interpreters of Judaism, in an effort to win Jews as converts to the Jesus movement. They may have operated at an advantage, as the peasant community on low income would have great difficulty maintaining costly purity traditions, which would disrupt peasant farming practices where contact with dead animals, unwashed food etc., was inevitable.

This Pharisaic oral tradition was later incorporated into the *Mishnah*,<sup>249</sup> which was written down in Hebrew around 220 CE, contained traditions of various ages, and inculcated a 'way of life' or social reference system (*halakha*).<sup>250</sup> Although written down much later, it permits us a lens through which to view the precepts of Judaism at the time the Markan movement was operating. The *Mishnah* is also a source for the historical background of the New Testament and although it summarizes only the Pharisaic rabbinic legal tradition, 'its comprehensiveness is representative for the place of the law in the life of Jews in antiquity'.<sup>251</sup> The Pharisees in the first century promoted separation between Jews and those who practised polytheistic religions. Any contact between the two groups was forbidden and resulted in Levitical defilement. Expansion of the

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<sup>248</sup> Horsley, *Sociology and the Jesus Movement*, 73.

<sup>249</sup> J. Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: YUP, 1988), 660-672.

<sup>250</sup> There is evidence that the *Mishnah* itself is only the latest of a series of compilations, constructed on a similar plan, the earliest of which dates to about 100 CE (H. Maccoby, *Jesus the Pharisee* [London: SCM Press, 2003], 3).

<sup>251</sup> P. J. Tomson, "If this be from Heaven ..." *Jesus and the New Testament Authors in their Relationship to Judaism* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 90.

Markan community, therefore, was dependent upon evidence that these restrictions had been eased (Mk 7.18-23).

### 3.5.3 Laws of Purity

It was, above all, the commandments about purity and food that marked the Jews off from their Gentile neighbours. Jews rejected social contact with Gentiles at meals, marriages, worship and festivals, necessitating to a large extent complete separation. Polytheistic idolatry (εἰδωλολατρεία) was a focus of non-collaboration and a means of contamination (4Q. VIII.8-11; IQpHab. XIII.1-4).<sup>252</sup> Polytheistic temples and practices were an aberration to most Jews of Jesus' and Mark's generation, regarded as ritually 'unclean' and to be avoided at all costs.

Mark's Gospel portrays Jesus as repeatedly violating the purity rules by coming into contact with the diseased, the dead, the deformed, and the possessed (Mk 1.41; 2.13-14; 5.24-34, 41; 7.24-30, 31). Jesus violates rules about the body (Mk 7.33; 8.23), about meal practice (Mk 6.37-44; 8.1-10), about times (Mk 2.24; 3.1-6) and about places (Mk 11.15-16; 12.33). Mark's Jesus offers new purity rules that imply holiness is an internal matter rather than an external one of protecting body surfaces and orifices (Mk 7.18-23). When Mark has Jesus crossing these boundaries, allowing unclean people to contact him, this polluting activity is an allegory for the inclusive nature of membership of the Markan community. Marginal and unclean Jews, as well as Gentiles, are welcome in the new group and Mark uses the Hebrew scriptures to offer justification for this (Mk 2.25-26; 7.6-8; 10.5-7; 11.17).

Thus, Mark's stories of Jesus' personal contact with Gentiles (Mk 5.1-9.29), in terms of Jewish ritual pollution, was a significant benchmark in expansion of the

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<sup>252</sup> R. Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians* (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1996), 365, 414.

Gentile mission. Additionally, whilst Paul allows the 'weak' in the community to continue to observe Jewish ritual prohibitions (Rom. 14.2-3), Mark has Jesus indicating that 'all foods are clean' (Mk 7.19; omitted by Mt 15.17-18) and states that such Jewish observances represent human traditions which can void the word of God (Mk 7.13). Mark's statements represent a much more radical break with Jewish observances than is found anywhere in Paul, who ameliorates his teaching with the caveat that, εἰ μὴ τῷ λογιζομένῳ τι κοινὸν εἶναι, ἐκείνῳ κοινόν (Rom. 14.14: but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it is unclean).

#### 3.5.4 Converts and Proselytes

In terms of competition for recruits to religious movements during the period under investigation, the evidence seems to suggest that Judaism accepted Gentile converts (*Ant.* XX.34-48; *War* II.560; Acts 6.5).<sup>253</sup> Matthew has Jesus disparagingly describing the Pharisees as crossing τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ τὴν ξηρὰν ποιῆσαι ἓνα προσήλυτον; (Mt. 23.15: the sea and land to make one proselyte). Despite this statement (which may have related solely to membership of the Pharisaic sect) there is no real evidence to suggest that the Jews undertook *active* mission to the Gentiles, although the synagogues both in Palestine and the diaspora seem to have attracted groups of Gentiles, known as god-fearers (cf. Acts 10.22, where Cornelius is described as φοβούμενος τὸν θεόν).

These individuals, who on their own initiative sought to associate themselves with the synagogue, were unwilling to undergo the rite of circumcision but were sympathetic to Jewish religious practices. This Judaic acceptance of converts appears to have been looked on negatively by the

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<sup>253</sup> M. Goodman, 'Jewish Proselytizing in the First Century', in J. Lieu, J. North and T. Rajak (eds), *Jews Among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 53, suggests that this was a 'passive' process and not missionary activity.

Romans as Tacitus remarks that the earliest lesson that proselytes to Judaism receive is 'to despise the gods, to disown their country and to regard their parents, children and brothers as of little account' (*Hist.* V.5.2). There is also a suggestion in the Markan Gospel that Jesus teaches that family should be set aside in favour of mission (Mk 3.31-35) and he prophesizes family disharmony (Mk 13.12). This disdain for country and for family may have been problematic for the Markan community as it was clearly disruptive to the order of the Roman state and family, the cornerstone of the meteoric rise of Rome.

### **3.6 Intellectual Life and Popular Ideology in the Roman Near East**

The Markan community cannot be understood solely within the Jewish tradition, as Hellenization and Roman imperialism had, of course, made a difference to the religious environment of the towns and cities of the region. This process was primarily through the introduction of Roman rulers, veterans, the army and the imperial cult which is well attested throughout the empire.<sup>254</sup> In the wider society in which the Markan movement operated, Graeco-Roman religious thought adapted itself pliantly to political, social and intellectual change by continually borrowing and assimilating new and foreign ideas.

The spiritual climate of the age also found expression in other ways as conquered peoples became disillusioned with traditional gods who had been eclipsed by broken geographical and social boundaries. Zealous propaganda was carried out in the Mediterranean by priests from the east 'bearing Pagan cultic messages of hope, delivered in ecstatic utterances and impressing audiences accustomed to cold and formal ceremonies'.<sup>255</sup> Ethnic groups, merchants and artisans retained some sense of identity by establishing local cults or forming

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<sup>254</sup> See Price, *Ritual and Power*, 78-100.

<sup>255</sup> C. Wells, *The Roman Empire* (London: Fontana Press, 1992), 80.

voluntary associations (θιασίοι; συνοδοί; ἔρανοί). These had at least some trappings of religion and were an important form of social relationship and brotherhood, synonymous with the Markan movement and the harbingers of the house-churches of the early Jesus movement. However, these social clubs or trade guilds would probably be avoided by the Markan community as they often included religious rites in honour of a patron deity.

Whilst the Romans did regularly use religion and culture to incorporate imperialism into local traditions, it is generally agreed that Rome did not systematically nor enthusiastically seek to eradicate native religious traditions. Unlike many other cultures, the Romans rarely found it threatening to their own cultural identity to incorporate the gods and rituals of other peoples into their own religious systems of beliefs. We find not merely evidence of Roman indifference to the infiltration of 'foreign' gods but also the conscious import or adoption of alien gods and rituals such as that of Mithras.<sup>256</sup> However, as we have seen with the Romano-Jewish War, religion itself could be used subversively to reassert the distinctiveness of indigenous traditions against the forces of occupation and rebellions did occur and 'tended to gather under the banner of local indigenous deities'.<sup>257</sup> Whilst the nascent Markan community and their missionary activity may have been tolerated by the Romans, they may not have been protected to the same degree as the Judaic movement.

However, as previously discussed, religion was civic, ethnic or personal and religious cults were usually established by means other than philosophical debate. The general idea of 'Roman religion' (if by that we mean the religious

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<sup>256</sup> However, the cult of Mithras did not begin to spread, through the influence of the Roman army, until the third quarter of the first century onwards. R. Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, trans. A. Nevill (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 214-215, attributes its spread in this region as late as the recall of the XV *Apollinaris* legion to Syria by Trajan.

<sup>257</sup> M. Beard, J. North and S. Price, *Religions of Rome vol. 1: A History* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 314.

institutions and practices of the capital) is a misnomer as many of the veterans and citizens had been resident great distances from Rome in *coloniae* for generations. Although the Roman component in the provinces in general borrowed ritual, representation and belief from Rome, there was no immutable blueprint to follow and, therefore, how the population in the borders of the empire gained access to Roman ritual knowledge is unclear.<sup>258</sup> In all probability, a creative process which involved adaptation and change rendered ritual in the Roman Near East unrecognizable, in comparison to the cultic activity of Rome, where the aristocracy were trained in the priestly rites which represented the 'civic élite's behavioural ideal'.<sup>259</sup>

### 3.6.1 Popular Philosophy

In the Mediterranean cultural cross-currents many popular philosophies which held views about gods and their activities, also functioned like religions to satisfy popular cravings. Whilst Platonism embraced philosophical dualism, followers of the philosopher Zeno followed Stoicism and saw the world as ordered by divine reason (*λογός*) which dwelt in the human psyche. The Stoic philosophy of ethical ideals, inner discipline and tranquility required a certain detachment from the ties of earthly materialism but was embraced by many Roman politicians and orators. However, Stoicism in itself was not an elite activity and had points of contact with both the Jewish Wisdom literature (Wis. 7.22-26) and New Testament writers (Acts

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<sup>258</sup> A channel of ritual information may have been the mid-first century work, Varro's *Religious Antiquities*, the only work on the Roman religious system under the empire (Beard, *et al*, *Religions of Rome*, 331).

<sup>259</sup> R. Gordon, 'Religion in the Roman Empire: The Civic Compromise and its Limits' in M. Beard and J. North (eds), *Pagan Priests: Religion and Power in the Ancient World* (London: Duckworth, 1990), 248.

17.28; Rom. 1.19-23, 11.36; 13.1-7; 1 Cor. 7.17-24, 8.6; Col. 3.18-4.1; Eph. 4.6; Jas 3.1-5).<sup>260</sup>

The philosophical concept of Cynicism was a body of loosely related ideas, broadly belonging to the Socratic tradition and revived in the middle of the first century CE as a moral protest against Graeco-Roman values. It rejected normative human values, such as the quest for fortune and pleasure, and its followers lived a life of austere virtue, poverty, association with the socially marginalized, economic egalitarianism and a philanthropic concern for others. There is evidence that Cynicism was present in the Graeco-Roman cities and even the countryside of the region in the first century.<sup>261</sup> The Cynics have been described as counter-cultural street-preachers attracting followers and converts, wandering from place to place, restricting their diets, begging for food, wearing short cloaks and carrying only a wallet and a staff. Theissen describes Jesus and his early followers as a renewal movement within Judaism (analogous to the wandering Cynic philosophers) forming a wandering charismatic group, posing a subversive challenge to Palestinian society by rejection of home, family, wealth and possessions.<sup>262</sup> Claims that Greek Cynicism influenced both the representation and the reality of the first-century Jesus movement have been suggested by some scholars,<sup>263</sup> and rejected by others.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> W. R. Telford, *The New Testament: A Short Introduction: A Guide to Early Christianity and the Synoptic Gospels* (Oxford: One World, 2002), 11.

<sup>261</sup> J. Moles, 'Cynic Influence Upon First Century Judaism and Early Christianity?' in B. McGing and J. Mossman (eds), *The Limits of Ancient Biography* (Swansea: University of Wales Press, 2006), 89-116 cites the first century Cynic Oenomaus of Gadara and Abnimos of the Talmud and argues 'the young Jesus could have encountered practical Cynicism, perhaps through pre-ministry visits to Sepphoris or Gadara or the latter's *χωρὸν*', 97.

<sup>262</sup> Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus*, 8-16, 14.

<sup>263</sup> F. G. Downing, 'The Jewish Cynic Jesus' in M. Labahn and A. Schmitd (eds), *Jesus, Mark and Q: The Teachings of Jesus and its Earliest Records* (London & New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), 184-215; Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 67-69; 73-74; J. S. Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 420-422.

The Markan Jesus' use of parable, aphorism and clever rejoinders appears very similar to the evidence we have of the Cynic's way with words.<sup>265</sup> Moles argues that Cynic influence is evident in the portrayal of Jesus' life (Cynic-style biography of the holy man), in his social and political attitudes, general behaviour and his manner of teaching. He also cites similarities in the specific literary forms used of *chreia* and *diatribe*. Specific in the Markan Gospel he sees parallels with Diogenes in Τίς ἔστιν ἡ μήτηρ μου καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοί [μου]; (Mk 3.33: 'Who is my mother, who are my brothers?'; cf. *D. L.*, VI.105 'The wise man is the kin of his peers') and additionally, καὶ παρήγγειλεν αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδὲν αἰρωσιν εἰς ὁδὸν εἰ μὴ ῥάβδον μόνον, μὴ ἄρτον, μὴ πῆραν, μὴ εἰς τὴν ζώνην χαλκόν. ἀλλὰ ὑποδεμένους σανδάλια, καὶ μὴ ἐνδύσηθε δύο χιτῶνας is taken to be very Cynic (Mk 6.8-9: He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics).<sup>266</sup> Marcus points out that Cynics typically wore a doubled cloak, 'so it might be suspected that Mark's *single* tunic is intended to trump Cynic austerity'.<sup>267</sup> It may be that the Markan community were perceived as Cynic-like in their activities by their contemporaries. This perception may have found favour and empathy with the poor and repressed who represented the major target of the Markan community's evangelisation efforts.

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<sup>264</sup> N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 29-35; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, vol. I (Grand Rapids MI & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2003), 58-62. For a historical survey and critique of the Cynic Jesus hypothesis, see H. D. Betz, 'Jesus and the Cynics: Survey and Analysis of a Hypothesis', *Journal of Religion*, 74.4 (1994), 453-475.

<sup>265</sup> Mack, *Myth of Innocence*, 68. On the use of apophthegms in the sayings of Diogenes, Lucian's anecdotes about the Cynic philosopher Demonax, and in the Jesus tradition, see Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 115.

<sup>266</sup> Moles, 'Cynic Influence', 93, 99.

<sup>267</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 383-384.

### 3.6.2 Greek and Roman Gods

The polytheistic religions of the ancient Greeks and Romans had been unchecked by sacred books, revelation or dogma and were primarily not a matter of belief at all but of practice: a weakness of 'presentation rather than substance'.<sup>268</sup> The deeds of new and old gods were publicized through colourful ceremonies, processions and sacrifices which would attract attention in the city streets and represented the antithesis of the early Jesus movement's house-churches.<sup>269</sup> Core members of most imported cults were immigrants or descendents of immigrants who were in competition with the Markan community and reached out to new members through various means of religious propaganda. These cults also performed a range of religious, political, economic and social functions. Doubts began to be cast by philosophers, playwrights and missionary movements upon the existence and virtues of these jaded deities who were portrayed with anthropomorphic vividness as lustful, jealous, malevolent immortals.<sup>270</sup> The immorality ascribed to the gods in legend and the rites of some of the mystery religions was a serious obstacle to the ethical progress of the Greeks and Romans and may have impacted upon the Markan community's mission to convert them. The Markan evangelist records Jesus preaching on the ethical matter of divorce (Mk 10.2-9) and later reiterates this for the purpose of clarification (vs 10-12).

It was the intention of the emperors that the towns and cities which were designated *coloniae* in the eastern provinces should mirror the religious and civic institutions of Rome itself and those established with veterans were in the best

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<sup>268</sup> J. North, 'The Development of Religious Pluralism', in Lieu, North and Rajak (eds), *Jews Among Pagans and Christians*, 188.

<sup>269</sup> See J. J. Meggitt, 'The First Churches: Social Life' in J. Barton (ed.), *The Biblical World*, vol. II (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 137-157 and 'The First Churches: Religious Practice', in J. Barton (ed.), *The Biblical World*, vol. II (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), 157-172.

<sup>270</sup> For discussion on the mythological 'level' within polytheism and its compatibility to cultic life, see J. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Maldon MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1-12.

position to do this.<sup>271</sup> Butcher describes them as ‘little islands of *Romanitas* or urbanization implanted in a sea of “foreign habits”’.<sup>272</sup> Additionally, an important aspect of integration within the vast geographical and political extent of the Roman empire, was that of Roman citizenship. The bearers of citizenship were it seems expected to recognize Roman gods, in so far as they linked the citizen to his community. The figure of *Fortuna* or Τύχη, signifying the fortune that is either given or denied to the community, enjoyed general popularity, as Roman religion was inherently a collective and not an individual relationship with the divine.<sup>273</sup> Despite increasing religious choices in the imperial period, the connection between religion and state was maintained, and at least externally ‘those who counted as “Roman” in civic terms, counted as “Roman” in religious terms too’.<sup>274</sup> Whilst Rome was tolerant and inclusive of indigenous religions in the provinces, it operated under the premise that city and society see to it that the lawful pattern of life is preserved and the gods of whatever persuasion stand guard to prevent violation of the law, a concept intrinsic in the Markan presentation of Jesus’ teaching (Mk 12.17).

Major religious festivals (*feriae publicae*), which often included public feasts and markets within temple precincts, would probably have been avoided by the Markan movement, if the requirement to avoid idolatry were taken seriously (Acts 15.20, 29; 21.25; 1 Pet. 4.13-14). However, by not taking part in these activities, the movement may have been perceived as separate and causing offence to

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<sup>271</sup> D. J. Gargola, *Lands, Laws & Gods: Magistrates and Ceremony in the Regulation of Public Lands in Republican Rome* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 75-80.

<sup>272</sup> Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 229-230.

<sup>273</sup> The elder Pliny complained that ‘in the entire world, and in all place and at all times, Fortuna alone is invoked and named by the voices of all’ (*Nat. Hist.* II.22); trans. Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire*, 17.

<sup>274</sup> Beard, *et al*, *Religions of Rome*, 317.

ordinary Greeks and Romans.<sup>275</sup> The movement's rejection of the gods and their cults may have been 'greatly resented by the common people and seen as a direct threat to their personal welfare and a personal affront to their values and beliefs'.

<sup>276</sup> This was tantamount to breaking the *Pax Deorum* whereby peace, personal safety and that of the town was kept contractually with the gods, on the understanding that the appropriate rites were performed. This concept may not, however, have been as rigorous in the rural areas, the focus of the evangelist's geographical narrative.

The situation of anonymised accusatory pamphlets and informers, in relation to converts to the early Jesus movement, is described much later by Pliny, *propositus est libellus sine auctore multorum nomina continens..... alii abindice nominate esse se Christianos dixerunt et mox negaverunt: (Epist. X.96: An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Others, named by the informer declared that they were Christians but then denied it). Pliny goes on to suggest, sed vicis etiam atque agros superstitionis istius contagio pervagata est (for the contagion of this superstition has spread not only to the cities but also to the villages and farms) and subsequently resulted in empty temples and diminished sales of sacrificial meat. A perceived resentment of the wider early Jesus movement's avoidance of polytheistic activities and the resultant loss of income generated by cultic activity is also apparent in Acts 16.19-21; 19.23-41.*

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<sup>275</sup> R. L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven: YUP, 2003), 63-65; P. J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 282-285.

<sup>276</sup> C. de Vos, 'Popular Graeco-Roman Responses to Christianity', in P. F. Esler (ed.), *Early Christian World*, vol. II (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 871.

### 3.6.3 Imperial Cult

The imperial cult was a major socio-religious institution and its observance was a significant vehicle for the expression of loyalty to Rome and the emperor by provincials, upon whose goodwill cities in the Roman Near East relied for their stability and prosperity.<sup>277</sup> It was important for an emperor to make his presence felt in every part of the empire, particularly in an area as far from Rome as the Near East. Experience taught the Romans that provinces would be likely to rebel against Roman rule if they felt that Roman authority was too distant to prevent it. The practice of deifying Roman emperors and benefactors has been described by Hyde as 'evidence of continuation of the human character of the gods and an adaptation of middle-eastern beliefs about the divinity of the pharaoh or oriental king'.<sup>278</sup> The presence of the imperial cult is found in many of the *coloniae* of the Roman Near East where the Markan community were operating.<sup>279</sup> The army was closely associated with the imperial cult but it is difficult to assess which religious beliefs held the greatest significance for an ordinary soldier due to their poor representation in the epigraphic record. The official prescription of religious life for both sets of troops was predominantly Roman and the imperial cult would undoubtedly play a significant role. However, such a disparate ethnically mixed group of men would inevitably be drawn from different religious backgrounds and may well have wished to maintain their indigenous religious identity within a Roman framework.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> de Vos, 'Popular Graeco-Roman Responses to Christianity', 879.

<sup>278</sup> W. W. Hyde, *Greek Religion and its Survivals* (London: Harrap, 1923), 11. For discussion on the development of the Caesar cult, see I. Gradel, *Emperor Worship and Roman Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002).

<sup>279</sup> For discussion on the different statuses of cities under the Empire, see Millar, '*Civitates, liberae, coloniae*', 95-113 and Sartre, 'Civic Life and Urban Development during the Early Empire', in *Middle East Under Rome*, 151-205.

<sup>280</sup> For discussion on religious affiliations in the Roman army, including the religious practices of the auxiliary soldier, see I. P. Haynes, 'The Romanisation of Religion in the

### 3.6.4 Mystery Religions

The Hellenistic mystery cults such as that of Cybele and Isis/Osiris were constantly adapting to the demands of the day and also formed part of the Graeco-Roman background to the first century Jesus movement.<sup>281</sup> The mysteries promised deliverance from fear and a saving power, which through initiation could facilitate rebirth into immortality (Maternus: *Prof. Rel.* XXII.1.3).<sup>282</sup> There are very few extant literary works dealing with the mysteries, only scattered references, fragments of hymns, prayers, mutilated inscriptions and damaged papyri.<sup>283</sup> However, Wedderburn concludes that 'a considerable amount of their beliefs are still accessible to our view'.<sup>284</sup>

The vocabulary of the mystery cults was already common in the classical period where authors call particular forms of religion 'mysteries'. The provenance and fundamental meaning of the word μυστήριον is not clear but is mostly found in the plural and derives from the verb μύεω which means 'to shut the mouth'.<sup>285</sup> The concept of μυστήριον entered the theological vocabulary of the Jews in the Hellenistic-Jewish wisdom literature (c. 200-100 BCE) in the form of polemic against the polytheistic cults (Wis. 14.15; 14.23) and as an adaptation to the

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*Auxilia* of the Roman Imperial Army from Augustus to Septimus Severus', *Britannia*, 24 (1993), 141-157.

<sup>281</sup> Scholars have put this kind of religious fluidity down to the fact that the polytheists of antiquity were so highly syncretised that they taught much the same theologies, regardless of their respective deities (Angus, *Mystery Religions and Christianity*, 40).

<sup>282</sup> Firmicus Maternus describes the Mithraic mystery religious practices along with other polytheistic practices in his fourth century work, *De errore profanarum religionum* (M. W. Meyer [ed.], *Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987], 207-208).

<sup>283</sup> The key study on the mystery religions is W. Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, (Cambridge MA & London: HUP, 1987).

<sup>284</sup> A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Baptism and Resurrection', *Studies in Pauline Theology Against its Graeco Roman Background* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 98.

<sup>285</sup> J. Finegan, *Myth and Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World*, (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), 172. It has been suggested that the root μν is onomatopoeic, 'the etymology shedding light on the essential characteristics of the mysteries', (H. J. Klauck, *The Religious Context of Early Christianity: A Guide to Graeco-Roman Religions* [London: T. & T. Clark, 2003], 83).

author's own theological language (Wis. 2.22; 6.22). It is used profusely in relation to the mystery of God throughout chapters two and four of the Book of Daniel. Μυστήριον is employed twenty-eight times in the New Testament and we find Mark placing it on the lips of Jesus when he discloses the eschatological mystery, ‘Υμῖν τὸ μυστήριον δέδοται τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ (Mk 4.11: “To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God”).<sup>286</sup>

It would be an erroneous supposition to draw the conclusion that the mystery cults were alike in all respects. It is possible in the mysteries to see their individual uniqueness and also some unifying ideas: some were frenzied and others meditative; some involved bloody animal sacrifice while others were presided over by strict vegetarians and some employed symbols such as the phallus and ear of corn to represent life giving power in the world to come. They tended to exhibit five common components. (1) Followers found deep symbolic significance in the natural processes of growth, death, decay and rebirth; (2) they were societies which performed secret rites (describes as ‘sacred pantomimes’) where gods undergo death and resurrection;<sup>287</sup> (3) admission to the ceremonies was through instruction, discipline and initiation (τελέθη: literally, ‘making perfect’);<sup>288</sup> (4) each mystery also centred around a life-death-rebirth where a god-man/woman was born, suffered violent death, passed a phase in the underworld among the dead and was subsequently reborn in either a literal or symbolic sense for salvific purposes; (5) the centre of worship was not the proclamation but the sacramental drama where Godwin indicates the initiands ‘are not there to learn something but to experience something’, involving processions with music and

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<sup>286</sup> Kee has pointed out Mark's disproportionate interest in Daniel (*Community of the New Age*, 45).

<sup>287</sup> See also *Vita Apoll.* VIII.31 where Apollonius is reported as appearing after his death.

<sup>288</sup> Angus, *Mystery Religions*, ix.

dance, fasting, plays and acts of purification.<sup>289</sup> Finally, the immediate goal of the initiates was a mystical experience which illuminated the hereafter, transcended the unsatisfactory boundaries of daily life and was acted out in an abbreviated rite which followed the divine path of the suffering and wandering god.

The first of the exotic and flamboyant oriental mystery religions to invade the Near East was the cult of Cybele, the Great Mother or *Magna Mater*, who was worshipped through much of the Graeco-Roman world and rooted in the fierce religious traditions of ancient Phrygia. The best known rite of the Great Mother was the *taurobolium*,<sup>290</sup> where initiands stood or reclined in a pit as a bull was slaughtered on a platform above them and they were bathed in the warm blood of the dying animal. The mystery of the Egyptian *Isis* (goddess of life) and her brother/consort Osiris provides a major example of a non-Graeco-Roman mystery which recognised no racial or geographical distinctions.<sup>291</sup> The most important sources for this Graeco-Roman myth are Plutarch (c. 110 CE) in his famous treatise *On Isis and Osiris*, a small fragment of the *Hymn to Isis*, and Apuleius' (c.150 CE) *Metamorphoses*, which relates the adventures of Lucius and provides a lengthy but somewhat obscure account of his initiation into the mysteries of *Isis* (see Appendix 2: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, XI.22-26).<sup>292</sup>

The mystery cult of Mithraism probably appeared in the Eastern Mediterranean in the early first century BCE and we have Pliny the Elder, writing mid-first century CE, referring to a Mithraic sacramental meal (*Hist. Nat.* XXX.2.6).

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<sup>289</sup> J. Godwin, *Mystery Religions in the Ancient World* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1981), 87. In some mystery rites baptism was symbolized by sprinkling holy water and in others it involved total immersion. At Eleusis initiands ritually cleansed themselves in the sea (Klauck, *Religious Context of Early Christianity*, 86).

<sup>290</sup> On occasions a *criobolium*, meaning the sacrifice of a sheep.

<sup>291</sup> Gaius Caligula (37-41 CE) was much attracted by all things Egyptian and under him the Isis cult received official recognition (Suetonius, *Cal.* LIV.2; LVII.4).

<sup>292</sup> L. H. Martin, *Hellenistic Religions: An Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 74. Josephus records that Vespasian and Titus spent the night before their triumph following the Romano-Jewish War (71 CE) in the Isis temple in the Campus Martius (*War* VII.123).

Mithras, an Indo-Iranian sun god, was identified with Apollo who commanded him to engage in a great struggle between good and evil in which he was victorious. At the end of the age, it was hoped Mithras would descend to earth again and raise the dead from their tombs. As in the cult of Cybele, the central feature of the ceremonial was the *taurobolium*, commemorating and repeating Mithras' primeval act where the celestial champion slays a cosmic bull. This esoteric cult does not appear to have been ubiquitous as it was confined to male members and appealed largely to the Roman military and political elite.

If one had to single out one paramount feature that distinguished all the mystery cults from other religions of the period, it would be that, like the early Jesus movement they sought a personal relationship with their gods, which was unfulfilled by the national or civic religions designed to aid social cohesion. Whilst most scholars now agree that basic elements of first century theology as it relates to the Jesus movement can be shown to have been derived from Jewish sources, there is no doubt that correspondences with familiar saviour-god mythologies, initiation by baptism and communal meals helped the spread of the movement throughout the Roman Near East. The Markan movement, therefore, had direct competition from the mysteries. Burkert has argued that the deficiency of the ancient mysteries was their 'general lack of organization, solidarity and coherence' but this 'absence of any rigid demarcation and conscious group identity means the absence of any rigid frontiers against competing cults as well as the absence of any concept of heresy, not to mention excommunication'.<sup>293</sup> Klauck contends that 'there is nothing far fetched in the hypothesis that many of the traditional

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<sup>293</sup> Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults*, 48.

polytheists who were attracted to the Gospel's preaching, even god-fearers (σεβόμενοι τὸν Θεόν) had belonged to mystery brotherhoods'.<sup>294</sup>

### 3.6.5 Astronomy and Magic

An advancing knowledge of astronomy, reverent contemplation of the heavens, magic and healing all affected religious philosophies, replacing allegiance to national gods through a belief that the sun and moon, constellations and signs of the zodiac were the real governing forces of the world and of human life. The art of astrology was mainly practised by the educated class but soothsayers were used by the poor to determine their fate through the interpretation of cosmic forces and powers, as described in Greek texts from the Roman period (*P. Tebt.* 276). Orphic conceptions like that of the seven ἄρχοντες (rulers) who from their planetary realm determine the destinies of mortals were almost universally influential and can be discerned in the background of the mystery religions.<sup>295</sup> The Markan evangelist has Jesus describing the eschatological end time using these celestial concepts (Mk 13.24-37).

All these beliefs were at home in the magical worldview of the first century.<sup>296</sup>

The Romans themselves were suspicious of many forms of τὰ περίεργα (Act 19.19: magic) which covered a broad range of activities including sorcery, divination, astrology, wonder-working, exorcisms and other practices that cross over into the realm of the supernatural (*maleficium*).<sup>297</sup> The Greek Magical Papyri,

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<sup>294</sup> Klauck, *Religious Context of Early Christianity*, 9.

<sup>295</sup> S. Angus, *The Mystery Religions and Christianity* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1966), 152-154.

<sup>296</sup> G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 158.

<sup>297</sup> Augustus burned over 2,000 prophetic/magical books in 31 BCE (Suetonius, *Aug.* 31). There is later evidence of punishment of more serious crimes such as incest, human sacrifice and cannibalism made against other individuals and groups such as the Roman republican aristocrat Lucius Catilinus and his co-conspirators (Sallust, *Catilina* 22; Dio, 37.30; Plutarch, *Cic.* 865-866). Philostratus cites that Apollonius of Tyana and his

found in the deserts of Egypt, casts light on the magico-religious world of Graeco-Roman Egypt and the surrounding areas (see Appendix 3: *Paris Magical Papyrus*).

### 3.6.6 Converts

At the time the Markan community were active, the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans were all at a point of peak receptivity for new revelations.<sup>298</sup> The clash of their cultures had reached its flash point and an extraordinary religious syncretism prevailed. To be free (ἐλεύθερος) to absorb new ideas was a cherished Greek and Roman ideal. This extraordinary religious syncretism was fostered by the Romans who found it an effective way to keep peace between the different nationalities of the empire. It was possible for private religious ideas to flourish in the background of the official state religions and become amicably intertwined.

It is probable that in this religious climate, in seeking converts to the new movement in the pluralistic villages, towns and cities of the region, the Markan community would find a receptive audience, many of whom would have been more familiar with Greek and Roman religious traditions than with Jewish traditions. The audience probably, whether consciously or unconsciously, interpreted the evangelist's narrative of Jesus' life and teaching in either Greek or Roman terms. The spread of the idea of spiritual redemption through a Jewish messiah in the form of an authoritative itinerant prophet-teacher, who called Jew and Gentile alike to action, with the promise of political liberation from the foreign ruling power (Mk 1.22), must also have contributed to the success of the early movement.

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associates were accused by Domitian of child sacrifice (*Vita Apoll.* VII.11: σὲ δὲ ἐξορμησαὶ τοὺς ἀσδρας ἐν ταῦτα παῖδα ), see D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 2009), 281, 283.

<sup>298</sup> For discussion on the receptivity of religious ideology in the Roman Near East, see North, 'Development of Religious Pluralism', 174-193.

However, missionary activity in this milieu may not have been all plain-sailing as Jesus' use of touch and speech to heal (Mk. 1.31, 41; 3.5; 5.28, 41; 6.5; 7.33; 8.22; 9.27), spittle (Mk 7.33; 8.23), exorcism (Mk 1.26, 34; 5.13; 9.27), controlling the elements (Mk. 4.39; 6.51), cursing (Mk 11.20) and invoking the name of a powerful god (Mk. 1.15, 24; 4.26, 30; 7.8-13; 8.33, 38; 9.1, 47; 10.5-9, 14-15, 18, 23-27; 12.17, 24-27, 30-31, 34; 13.19; 14.36, 62; 15.34) were all common in magical incantations.<sup>299</sup> Mark has many people reacting to these wonders with fear and suspicion (Mk 1.27; 5.15) and Jesus is considered as possessed by Beelzebub (Mk 3.22).<sup>300</sup> It has been convincingly argued that these stories, designed to prove Jesus' superiority over rival miracle-workers, originated in the Graeco-Roman milieu,<sup>301</sup> and that the evangelist saw Jesus as 'a divine man whose miracles reveal his supernatural status (especially 4.35-41; 6.45-52; 9.1-8)'.<sup>302</sup>

In the matter of intolerance, Mark's doctrine of exclusivism (Mk 1.15; 4.11, 26, 30; 9.1; 10.14-15; 10.23-25; 12.34; 15.43) differed from all traditional polytheistic religions and stood in direct opposition to the spirit of other Graeco-Roman cults. The general religious attitude was to associate oneself with more than one cult in the hope of lessening the impact of adverse fate and increasing one's likelihood of an afterlife. People were no longer sure which gods would answer them so they pulled out all the stops, covered all bases and called on gods of the Nile, Syria, Persia, Greece and Rome. Paul's epistles reflect this problem and we learn that amongst his Corinthian converts there was still an unwillingness

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<sup>299</sup> S. Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 12, 24, 113-119.

<sup>300</sup> Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 100, discusses how Celsus attributed Jesus' ability to work miracles with some training in Egypt.

<sup>301</sup> R. Bultmann and K. Kundsin, *Form Criticism. Two Essays on New Testament Research* (New York: Harper, 1962), 36-39.

<sup>302</sup> Telford, *Theology*, 102.

to exclude participation in some of the common polytheistic practices (1 Cor. 5.1ff; 7.5; 8.1-13).

The Markan community's 'exclusive' theology may have created a barrier in their efforts at evangelisation. The fact that Mark presented a religion emerging from the Jews may not, however, have been a barrier to polytheists who were familiar with their ideology and whilst it was often scorned, as we have seen, it also had its admirers. Many features of oriental belief and worship possessed a fascination for the Graeco-Roman world and the gospel which Mark preached could count this predilection in its favour. A spokesman for the God of Israel clearly would have found willing converts as monotheism was philosophically attractive, Jewish high ethics were appealing and many would aspire to emulation of the Sabbath rest.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

I have adopted an historical-critical approach in determining the political, economic, social and cultural context of the Gospel of Mark. This has led to an overview of the primary and secondary evidence of life in the first century in the area where the Markan community was conducting its mission and corrected the view that this environment was primarily Jewish, rural and friendly. The evidence I have presented has shown that the Markan community sought its path in a syncretistic, multi-religious society where there was a great deal of mutual awareness, communication and interchange between different religious groups. Roman rule was augmented by the Herodian kings who maintained economic and political suppression of the masses which led to the Romano-Jewish War. The prevailing discontent and destitution of the oppressed rural and urban population contributed to the success of the Markan mission.

In this mixed society the Jews, because of their purity laws, maintained a high degree of separation. This appears to have been condoned by their Roman overlords, established by the Pharisaic movement and tolerated by the 'outsider' Graeco-Roman population. However, there was development within Palestinian Judaism which was already part of the cultural interchange of the Graeco-Roman world. Judaism had itself apparently changed from a unified ethnic religion, to a set of sharply differentiated, competing groups.

Mark portrays Jesus' mission as beginning in the synagogues but destined to present its case to the Gentile world (cf. Mk 13.10). This Gentile world was made up of a population of mixed ethnicity who represented heterogeneous traditions that manifested themselves in a multiplicity of philosophies and gods. For Roman citizens in the province, these concepts and practices were integral to all civic, local and family activities.

The anthropomorphic gods of Greece and Rome had not intervened in the oppression of the masses and began to be surpassed by the symbolic and ritual attractions of the mystery religions, where a personal relationship with one's god could be achieved. The natural progression from this ideology was a movement towards the divine, magical, wonder-working man who promised the winning combination of deliverance from tyranny and universal redemption. The evangelist targets an audience seeking solution to economic and social repression. In his Gospel he recognizes and empathizes with their subjugated situation, proposes the solution lies in following the teachings of Jesus and demonstrates to his audience that Jesus represents the divine power which will overcome tyranny and bring justice for all.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### ***Crossing the Sea to the Country of the Gerasenes (Mk 4.35-5.20)***

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Markan evangelist redacted the material he received from tradition in order to present the story of the Gerasene demoniac in a form that would engage his Gentile audience. As discussed previously (pp. 51-53), there can be little doubt that a large percentage of the population in this region was Gentile. Mark's mention of the herd of pigs reinforces this view, as no practicing Jew would keep a herd of pigs (Lev. 11.7-8; Deut. 14.8; cf. Isa. 65.4; 66.17) or for that matter be found residing in a graveyard (Isa. 65.4). Mark's notoriously elaborate and confusing account (cf. Mt 8.28-34; Lk 8.26-39; Appendix 4: Greek Text - Mk 5.1-20) has been subject to much scholarly focus with a wide variety of interpretations, including disagreement about the exact location of the event and its historical reliability. The length and embellishment of the story suggests its importance to Mark and represents a transition point in the Gospel where Jesus is shown by Mark to extend his own mission into the Gentile arena, thus establishing a precursor Gentile mission to be followed by Mark's own inclusive programme of evangelisation.

In the wider Graeco-Roman world where the Markan community operated, there was a belief that contemporary men were endowed with divine power and could ultimately themselves become gods. These wonder-working men exorcised demons, healed physical disabilities, possessed the power of prophecy, had persuasive speech, performed miracles and were frequently set apart by an extraordinary birth and/or death. Mark makes use of these phenomena to describe

the power of Jesus to perform miracles and exhibit victory over the supernatural.<sup>303</sup>

These attributes have sometimes been said to ‘reflect the influence of the “divine man” or *theios anēr* concept’, a motif encountered in or deemed to have played a central part in stories of many wonder-workers of this period.<sup>304</sup> The New Testament itself describes Jewish exorcists (Mt. 12.27; Lk 11.19; Acts 19.13) and there are many examples in the Gentile world of miraculous healings (Seutonius: *Vesp.* VII; Tacitus, *Hist.* IV.81; Philostratus, *Vita Apoll.* IV.20). I will argue that Mark’s story of the Gerasene demoniac dramatically communicates this theme and reflects the evangelist’s intention to engage with his Gentile audience, by his representation of a heroic Jewish figure who successfully exorcises unclean spirits from a Gentile, in Gentile territory.

#### 4.2 Where was the Country of the Gerasenes?

Mark has Jesus and his disciples crossing the Sea of Galilee to the eastern Gentile side (Mk 4.35-41). Mark connects this exorcism with the name of the pagan city of Gerasa, indicating that it takes place, εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν (Mk 5.1: in the country of the Gerasenes).<sup>305</sup> The narrative continues with ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθύς ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μνημείων ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ (Mk 5.2: when he had come out of the boat, there immediately met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit). Mark’s use of the term εὐθύς

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<sup>303</sup> C. K. Barrett (ed.), *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (London: SPCK, 1974), 29-35, lists literary evidence from magical and religious papyri which relate to this period.

<sup>304</sup> Achtemeier, ‘Gospel Miracle Tradition and the Divine Man’, 174-197; W. R. Telford (ed.), ‘Introduction’ in *Interpretation of Mark* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 28, also points out that ‘critics of this view, however, have denied the existence of the *theios anēr* as a unified category or definable concept in the ancient world’. See also Weeden, ‘Heresy that Necessitated Mark’s Gospel’, 89-104, who argues that Mark was in fact attempting to combat a heretical Christology in his own community which considered Jesus to be the *theios anēr*.

<sup>305</sup> Γερασηνῶν is supported by the fourth century Alexandrian manuscripts  $\aleph^*$  and B and the fifth-sixth-century Western text of D, 2427<sup>vid.</sup>

usually implies at once or immediately. A geographical crux thus arises in that Γερασηνῶν probably refers to the large, Gentile Decapolis city of Gerasa (identified with modern Jerash) which is thirty-seven miles south-east of the Sea of Galilee. There is also some early Christian tradition locating the exorcism to areas on the eastern sea shore of the Sea of Galilee (see Appendix 5: Early Christian Tradition - Location of the Country of the Gerasenes).<sup>306</sup>

It has been demonstrated that there are difficulties when identifying ‘cities’, ‘villages’ and ‘countryside’ in the Decapolis in the first century as terms tend to overlap and administrative boundaries were not always adequately defined.<sup>307</sup> There is, however, evidence to suggest that Gerasa was in possession of a large tract of land, substantial enough to provide the obvious wealth that the city enjoyed in the first century.<sup>308</sup> However, ultimately, we do not know how extensive the territory of the Gerasenes was and by what stages it was subsequently enlarged or whether it actually extended to the Sea of Galilee at the time the Gospel was written.

A problem in relation to location of the story is also posed by the Markan textual variants designating Γεργεσηνῶν, Γαδαρηνῶν, Γεργυστηνῶν and Γεργεσθᾶν as the location of the exorcism (cf. Γερασηνῶν Lk 8.26; Γαδαρηνῶν Mt 8.28 and their textual variants).<sup>309</sup> It is important to attempt to establish the likely original

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<sup>306</sup> For discussion on the exorcism occurring in the geographical location of El Kûrsî, see Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 153-154.

<sup>307</sup> For discussion on determining the extent of Gerasa’s territory through (a) municipal calendars, (b) boundary stones, and (c) distance markers on milestones, see Moors, ‘The Decapolis city territories, villages and *bouleutai*’, 157-207. For studies of milestones relating to the extent of Gerasa’s territory in the first century, see R. Khouri, *Jerash: A Frontier City of the Roman East* (London & New York: Longman, 1986), 29-30.

<sup>308</sup> Ragaba, close to the River Jordan, is described by Josephus as being in the territory of Gerasa. ‘He met death in the territory of the Gerasenes besieging Ragaba, a fortress across the Jordan’ (*Ant.* XIII.398). The Loeb footnote identifies this fortress with modern Rajib, eight miles east of the Jordan and fourteen miles west of Gerasa.

<sup>309</sup> B. Aland, *et al* (eds), *The Greek New Testament* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; United Bible Societies, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. 1983).

reading in the Markan version of the story (the text-critical question) in order to determine what the evangelist and the Markan audience would have deduced from the story's connection with Gerasa/Gerasenes (the redaction/literary-critical question) and what basis there is, if any, for the story's actual connection with this region and for its actual historicity (the historical or tradition-critical question).

The variety of locations has been the subject of textual criticism by scholars. Γεργεσηνῶν is the most poorly attested (eighth century manuscript) and first proposed 'on the dubious basis of location tradition'<sup>310</sup> by the Church Father Origen (*Com. Jn.* VI.41.24).<sup>311</sup> Γαδαρηνῶν appears to be a conflated assimilation,<sup>312</sup> drawing its name from two major cities, Gadara (Γαδαρ-) and Gerasa (-ηνῶν). The Greek city of Gadara, also in the Decapolis (identified with modern Umm Qeis five miles south-east of the Sea of Galilee) is considered an unlikely location by scholars.<sup>313</sup> The assumption is that, because of the geographical improbability of the Γερασηνῶν location in the early Markan manuscripts, Matthew moves the location to Γαδαρηνῶν which is then assimilated into the later Markan manuscripts. Metzger argues that Γεργυστηνῶν should also be discounted as 'a scribal idiosyncrasy'.<sup>314</sup> Γεργεσθᾶν is a variant from Epiphanius which scholars believe came from a misreading or, alternatively originated from the connection with Origen.<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1994), 19.

<sup>311</sup> T. J. Baarda, 'Gadarenes, Gerasenes, Gergesenes and the "Diatessaron" Tradition', in E. E. Ellis and M. Wilcox (eds), *Neotestamentica et Semitica* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), 181-197.

<sup>312</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 72.

<sup>313</sup> Josephus (*Life* 42) refers to Gadara as possessing territory, κώμας, αἱ δὲ μεθόριοι τῆς Τιβεριάδος και τῆς τῶν Σκυθοπολιτῶν γῆς ἐτύγχανον κείμεναι (these villages were situated on the borders of Tiberias and of the region of Scythopolis). On the possibility that the territory of Gadara may also have reached the sea, see Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 127, <sup>no.1</sup>, which shows a bust of Herakles and portrays a ship.

<sup>314</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 72.

<sup>315</sup> R. G. Clapp, 'A Study of the Place-Names Gergesa and Bethabara', *JBL*, 26.1 (1907), 63-64.

Therefore, Γερασηνῶν is the most likely original designation because of its early attestation in the superior manuscripts and because *lectio difficilior potior* (the more difficult reading, provides the better reading).<sup>316</sup> It is not, in fact, inconceivable that τὴν χώραν of Gerasa was perceived by the intended Markan audience as extending to the shore of the lake and that the herdsmen who witnessed the event and who ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγρούς (Mk 5.14: fled and told it in the city and in the country) were understood to be hurrying back to Gerasa and its outlying villages. The anomaly in relation to the evangelist's geography can be taken as an indication of a limited geographical horizon of life. For small farmers and fishermen in the region, the country of the Gerasenes could simply be a large area across the Sea of Galilee, the designation of which can also be taken as an indication that these stories were developed in the proximity of the lake. It is of note that where Mark writes θάλασσα (1.16; 7.31; 9.42; 11.23), Luke, who appears to know the broader Mediterranean world and is looking at Palestine from a greater distance, writes λίμνην (lake: Lk 5.1; 8.22, 23, 26, 33).

We have seen throughout Mark's Gospel that he does not confine locations to a single place but implies instead that Jesus visited the geographical spread of the territory in question.<sup>317</sup> The tombs described in the story as the place where the demoniac lived were unlikely to be situated on the sea-shore and were much more likely in the first century to be located on the outskirts of towns and cities.<sup>318</sup> I shall argue later in this chapter (pp. 122-124) that the internal evidence indicates that vs 11-13 (which relates to pigs being driven into the sea) are a secondary

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<sup>316</sup> J. P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 666, n.19.

<sup>317</sup> With reference to the extent of territories in the region, Josephus indicates that the city of Bethsaida had fourteen villages which lay about it (*Ant.* XX.159).

<sup>318</sup> C. S. Fisher, 'Tombs: The Southwest Cemetery', in Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa*, 549-571.

accretion. Thus, I shall proceed on the basis that Mark records an exorcism performed by Jesus in Gentile territory, somewhere in the vicinity of the city of Gerasa and that this location lies at the basis of the early tradition Mark received. Mark subsequently takes this tradition and adapts it to include the destruction of the pigs episode for the purpose of engaging with his Gentile audience.

#### **4.3 Graeco-Roman Background: Gerasa**

The Transjordan region to the east of the Sea of Galilee was undoubtedly Gentile territory and Gerasa itself was a typical first century Graeco-Roman city. By including this story in his Gospel, the Markan evangelist is suggesting to his audience that Jesus made a crossing from Jewish territory in order to heal a Gentile in Gentile lands and that this was a precursor to the community's own Gentile mission in the region. The Decapolis city of Gerasa, fifty miles north-east of Jerusalem, lies five hundred and fifty meters above sea-level, in a remote, broad valley, just outside the borders of the Jewish Peraea. In the first century CE Gerasa was bounded mainly by Nabataean territory, lying midway between Petra and Palmyra. The ancient River Chrysorhoas (now a stream) ran through and separated the eastern from the western section of the city (see Appendix 6: City Plan of Gerasa). In the first century the developed Roman road system was dense and extensive and connected Gerasa with other towns and cities (see Appendix 7: Roads and Routes in the Roman Near East). The north-western road to Pella (claimed by later tradition to be the destination of the community's flight advocated in Mk 13.14; cf. Eusebius, *Eccl. Hist.* III.V.2-3; Epiphanius, *Panarion* XIX.7.7-8 and *Adv. Haer.* XXIX.7) left the city via the north gate. From Pella it crossed the River Jordan to Scythopolis and continued westwards to the Mediterranean coastal cities of Caesarea and Ptolemais.

Pliny lists Γεράσα among the cities of the Decapolis (*Nat. Hist.* V.18, 74) and in the first century it was a Roman πόλις with χώρα. Kraeling identifies the designation 'Gerasa' as probably Semitic and pre-Seleucid and claims that it preceded that of Antioch on the Chrysorhoas.<sup>319</sup> Josephus, however, consistently refers to it by its Semitic name, Gerasa (*War* I.104; II.458, 480; III.47; IV.487).<sup>320</sup> 'Antiochia on the Chrysorhoas, formerly Gerasa' is found on the earliest piece of epigraphic evidence of the city's history, an inscribed lead weight of the year 10/11 CE.<sup>321</sup>

The earliest evidence of settlement of the area goes back to prehistoric times. On the slopes east of Hadrian's Arch, flint implements were found which showed evidence of a Neolithic settlement.<sup>322</sup> There are coins of the second century CE and later literary sources which attribute the founding of the Hellenistic city of Gerasa to Alexander the Great.<sup>323</sup> Recent archaeological finds have also provided significant material evidence of Hellenistic Gerasa.<sup>324</sup> The city was later captured by the Hasmonean Alexander Jannaeus, who ruled in Jerusalem from 103-76 BCE (*War* I.104). Gerasa and its territories remained in Jewish hands until

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<sup>319</sup> A second century CE inscription found near the Temple of Artemis refers to the city as 'Antioch on the Chrysorhoas, also called Gerasa', (Kraeling, 'History', no. 30, 27). See also Kaizer, 'Some Remarks', 181.

<sup>320</sup> A. Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus Olympios in Roman Gerasa and Seleucid Religious Policy', in Kaizer (ed.), *Variety of Local Religious Life*, 135, points out that Gerasa 'is a Semitic name, attested in a Nabataean inscription of the first century BC as "Garshu"', citing J. Starcky, 'Nouvelle épitaphe nabatéenne donnant le nom sémitique de Pétra', *Revue Biblique*, 72 (1965), 95-96.

<sup>321</sup> Kraeling, 'History', 27; Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 251, 390. There is a chronological problem associated with the Gerasa inscriptions. The texts are dated by an era of which Year 1 = 63 BCE. This clearly had its origin in measures taken with regard to the city by Pompey.

<sup>322</sup> D. Kirkbride, 'Notes on a Survey of pre-Roman Archaeological Sites Near Jerash', *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology*, I (1958), 9-20.

<sup>323</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 409-410. Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 134, considers that 'sometime in the second century BC the re-foundation of Gerasa took place'. For coin inscriptions, see J. Seyrig, 'Alexandre le Grand, fondateur de Gerasa', *Syria*, 42 (1965), 25-28; cited in Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 157.

<sup>324</sup> I. Kehrberg, 'A Late Hellenistic Link Between Jordan and Cyprus: A View from Gerasa', in L. Beaumont, C. Barker, E. Bollen (eds), *Festschrift in Honour of J. Richard Green, Mediterranean Archaeology*, 17, (2004), [2006], 229-306, pls., 37-38.

it was detached from the Jewish state by Pompey in 63 BCE and incorporated under the authority of the new Roman province of Syria (*Ant.* XIV.74-76; *War* I.155-157). The year 63 BCE marked a turning point in the history of Gerasa and was recognized as such in its calendar to the very end of its life. In 105/106 CE the city was absorbed into the Roman province of Arabia when Trajan redistributed its territory.

I have argued that Mark's gospel was written between 65 and 75 CE, the period which relates to the time of the Romano-Jewish War, a crisis which impacted upon the whole region, including the territory of the Gerasenes. It is known that Gerasa and other neighbouring towns in the region felt the effects of the insubordination of the Jews against the Roman occupiers (*War* IV.487-488). Josephus records that Vespasian in 68 CE sent an expedition against Gerasa under Lucius Annius, who after storming the city 'put to the sword a thousand of the youth', made prisoners of the women and children then plundered and burned the town (*War* IV.486-490).

This account of the taking of the town is highly questionable as there is epigraphic evidence which suggests that destruction of the city on the violent scale described by Josephus did not occur. At the time Mark wrote his Gospel the city was clearly under development and participated in the life of the empire. The necessary corrective can be found in an inscription of 66 CE which bears the formula 'for the peace of the imperial house' (ὑπὲρ τῆς σεβαστῆς εἰρήνης).<sup>325</sup> This was a time when the Jewish rebellion was in full progress (*War* II 461-478). The inscription records gifts for public buildings and appears to address the troubles and apprehensions of the times. It is scarcely the sort of inscription one would

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<sup>325</sup> H. Lucas, 'Repertorium der griechischen Inschriften aus Gerasa', *Mitteilungen und Nachrichten des deutschen Pälästina-Vereins* (1901), no. 70, 49-82; cited in R. O Fink, 'Jerash in the First Century AD', *JRS*, 23 (1933), 118.

expect in a city which had just suffered capture and burning at the hands of the Romans. It is quite possible that some of the public buildings had been damaged in one or other of these many disturbances and that these contributions were needed for repairs but in both inscriptions the formula of the dedication is an expression of loyalty to the Romans. These contributions show that the citizens of Gerasa, at the time, were probably not under siege and able to make public gifts.

Further epigraphic evidence and texts appears to speak of the building of a τείχος (wall) which could possibly relate to a wall surrounding the temple of Zeus but is more likely to relate to the city wall itself constructed as a precaution at the time of the Romano-Jewish War.<sup>326</sup> The people of Gerasa appear to be invoking peace but at the same time building or repairing the ten feet thick city walls, almost three thousand five hundred meters in circumference, which enclose an area of the city incorporating about two hundred acres.

In the story of the reprisals by the Greek cities upon the Jews, it is interesting that Gerasa (according to Josephus) was exemplary and exceptional in its treatment of the Jews. The Jews who chose to remain were not ill-treated, and those who chose to depart were given safe-conduct to the frontier (*Life* 25; *War* II.479-480). The Gentiles in Gerasa had it in their power to injure the Jews but they appear at least not ill-disposed toward them, nor hostile to the Romans. Gerasa, located only fifty miles north of Jerusalem, would be in a position to provide an avenue of escape for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Agrippa had, in fact, thought it worthwhile to warn the insurgents of his time that they could expect

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<sup>326</sup> Fink, 'Jerash', 118. Contra Kraeling, 'History', 42, who does not agree that the walls were built as part of a defensive programme but formed 'part of the great new plan for the expansion of the municipality ... laid out on too vast a scale to apply in a practical way to any immediate threat'. For recent excavations of the Roman city-wall foundations, see I. Kehrberg and J. Manley, 'New Archaeological Finds for the Dating of the First Gerasa City Wall', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities Jordan*, 45 (2001), 437-446 and I. Kehrberg and J. Manley, 'The Jerash City Walls Project, 2002 – Excavations and Planning Aspects of the Roman Masterplan. A Report', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities Jordan*, 47 (2003), 83-86.

no aid from the Jews in Adiabene (*War* II.388), which appears to suggest that there was at least the possibility of aid in this city and others in the region. If Josephus is to be believed, Gerasa's sympathy towards the plight of the Jews suggests that this typical Graeco-Roman city was cosmopolitan in its outlook and not bound by local prejudices. This indicates that the city and its locale may have been receptive to the Markan community's Gentile mission which was promulgating an egalitarian message of salvation for all.

The architectural and inscriptional history of the city shows that real change and an upturn in its civic life began in the second half of the first century. Kraeling argues that the unsettled conditions in Palestine and Syria in the period of the Romano-Jewish War led to Gerasa's growth and outward transformation in the late first century.<sup>327</sup> Continuous employment would have been available to cope with the expanding civic development which probably raised the general prosperity of the community and attracted new inhabitants, including a possible influx of refugees from Palestine. The establishment of the Roman garrison under Vespasian may also have been an indication of the 'growing recognition of how important the district beyond the Jordan was strategically and otherwise'.<sup>328</sup> The epigraphic evidence supports Vespasian's establishment of a garrison at Gerasa, and is borne out by several first century inscriptions relating to auxiliaries and soldiers of the *Ala Thracum Augusta*.<sup>329</sup> Thus, this city was an ideal locale for Markan missionary activity with its developing civic infrastructure which was

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<sup>327</sup> Kraeling, 'History', 36; cf. Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 6, 376-378.

<sup>328</sup> Kraeling, 'History', 41.

<sup>329</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 199 (*Alae I Thracum*), 446-447; no. 200 (*equ[e]s Alae] Thracum*), 447; no. 201 (*eques Alae Thracum*), 447. The *Ala I Thracum* is known to have belonged to the *exercitus Iudaicus* under Vespasian and Titus.

providing work for the citizens, accommodation for the military and possible refuge for those displaced due to the Romano-Jewish War.<sup>330</sup>

#### 4.4 Gerasa City Life

The ancient city of Gerasa was uninhabited for centuries and never willfully destroyed. Thus, the existing ruins (in the modern town of Jerash) are exceptionally well-preserved and provide a blue-print of the city's first-century layout (see Appendix 8: Monuments of Gerasa). The overall town plan dates mainly from the second century CE and represents the typical Roman adaptation of the grid city plan found elsewhere in the east.<sup>331</sup> The plan mirrors the building spree that followed Trajan's establishment of the Province of Arabia. However, excavations and inscriptions show that Gerasa started to spread in the first century BCE, soon after Pompey's arrival in 63 BCE, and major building activity started in earnest in the first half of the first century CE, both in the south near Camp Hill and the Temple of Zeus, and in the north near the first Temple of Artemis (see Appendix 9: Gerasa - Temple of Zeus and Appendix 10: Gerasa - Temple of Artemis). Kraeling assigns to the last quarter of the first century, the building of the Temple of Zeus, the city walls, the *cardo* (the north-south orientated main road) and possibly the *decumani* (the east-west orientated roads).<sup>332</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 6, 376 dated c. 70 CE describes the Temple of Zeus as a place of refuge and no. 30, 390, dated c. 130 CE describes the city as *asylos*, presumably indicating the right of asylum under the *Pax Romana* (Tacitus. *Annals* III.63; IV.44).

<sup>331</sup> The best example of a hippodamian city pattern (broad, straight streets cutting one another at square angles) implemented towards the end of the second century BCE, in the Roman Near East is at Dura Europos (see S. B. Downey, 'The Transformation of Seleucid Dura-Europos', in E. Fretzschel [ed.], *Romanization and the City Creation, Transformations and Failures*, JRA Supplementary Series, 38, JRA, 2000, 154-172).

<sup>332</sup> Kraeling, 'History', 43 and C. Richardson, *City and Sanctuary: Religion and Architecture in the Roman Near East* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 101. On epigraphic evidence of first century building work in the area of the temple of Zeus, see Welles, 'Inscriptions'; no. 5, 69/70 CE; no. 6, 70 CE; no. 7, first century; no. 8, 76/77 CE, 375-379; no. 10, first century, 379-380.

It has been difficult to estimate the size of the population of the city at the time the Markan Gospel was written, as few residential quarters have been excavated due to their location under the modern town. Khouni has suggested that the city's population at its height in the second century CE may have reached twenty to twenty-five thousand people and as agriculture was an important element of the city's wealth, thousands more would have been living in villages and farmsteads in the surrounding areas.<sup>333</sup> Inscriptions in Greek, Latin and Semitic languages have revealed that the citizens of Gerasa used a variety of languages simultaneously, an indication of the heterogeneous nature of the population.

During the second half of the first century CE, work was progressing on the South Theatre, the Temple of Zeus and the Temple of Artemis and there is inscriptional evidence that generous citizens donated money to help finance these projects. Amongst these there is an inscription from 69 CE that records a gift from Theon, son of Demetrios, who is called a 'devotee' (ἱκέτης) of Zeus Olympios.<sup>334</sup> Thus, at the time the Markan Gospel was written, the community was embarking on a Gentile mission and the city of Gerasa was undergoing civic expansion. The inscriptions and archaeological remains are evidence of polytheistic religious activity. This, along with the city's neutrality and large population, would make it an ideal centre for Markan mission amongst the Gentiles.

#### **4.5 Evidence of Polytheism in the Region**

A reasonable amount is known about the polytheistic religious life of Gerasa and the city's χώρα, most of the evidence coming from the inscriptions<sup>335</sup> and coins

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<sup>333</sup> Khouri, *Jerash*, 30.

<sup>334</sup> Fink, 'Jerash', 113.

<sup>335</sup> J. D. Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence for the Political Structure and Greco-Roman Religions of the Decapolis, with Particular Emphasis on Gerasa and Abila',

from the city.<sup>336</sup> However, Kaizer has pointed out that scholars have differing views on interpretation of the remaining evidence of religious culture in the city. Rostovtzeff argued that ‘to outward view, the town was Greek, its basis was Arab, and the same is true of its religion’; Graf considered Nabataean influence in the area to be ‘extensive and considerable’; Millar, basing his argument on epigraphic materials considered that ‘the public character’ was ‘unambiguously Greek’; and conversely, Ball ‘the architecture is oriental, the temples and the cults were to local Semitic deities’.<sup>337</sup> Thus, we have a conflict of views, but it seems clear that the Gerasenes were a mixed population who had a long tradition in terms of Semitic deities. In the first century CE the evidence points to structures that accommodate Graeco-Roman deities but features of earlier Semitic gods may have been assimilated into these new cults.

#### 4.5.1 Zeus Olympios

The population of Gerasa in the mid to late first century were served by two prominently placed sanctuaries, the oldest of which was the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios, situated on high ground, located just inside and west of the south city gate, facing the original settlement which was on an adjacent small hill (see Appendix 6: City Plan of Gerasa). This temple is thought to have been located on the traditional site of the worship of the Semitic god, Baal-Shamin, or Lord of

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*ARAM*, 4, vols. I & II (1992), 331, records that there are ‘three-hundred and thirty one recorded inscriptions from Jerash and its surrounding area; three hundred and twenty of these inscriptions are in Greek and Latin, nine are in Arabic, one is in Nabataean and one in Aramaic’ and ‘Nineteen different deities are named in the inscriptions at Jerash. Zeus is mentioned sixteen times, Artemis six times and twice with Deana (sic), Helios five times; no other deities are mentioned more than twice’.

<sup>336</sup> Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 157, describes ‘*Quasi autonomous coinage*: (1) cornucopiae; (2) inscription within laurel-wreath, and *Colonial coinage*: (1) Bust of Artemis-Tyche; (2) Artemis-Tyche seated on rock; (3) Artemis Huntress; (4) Artemis-Tyche and togate figure; (5) Bust of Alexander the Great’.

<sup>337</sup> Kaizer, ‘Some Remarks’, 179, citing: M. Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 81; D. Graf, ‘Hellenisation and the Decapolis’, *ARAM*, 4, vols. I & II (1992), 34; Millar, *RNE*, 412-413, n. 2; Ball, *Rome in the East*, 181.

Heavens.<sup>338</sup> Thus, we have archaeological and epigraphic evidence that Zeus was one of the gods worshipped at Gerasa in the first century. However, there is only minimal presence in the civic coinage of Gerasa of Zeus Olympios where he is depicted on small denomination coins of 67-68 CE.<sup>339</sup> After this he completely vanishes from the civic coinage. The cult of Zeus was widespread in Syria, Palestine and Phoenicia and the epithet ὁ θεὸς ὁ ὑψίστος in non-Jewish and non-Christian texts occurs as a divine name for Zeus.<sup>340</sup> Scholars have indicated that the worshippers of Zeus Olympios at Gerasa were either Greek settlers or Hellenized Syrians.<sup>341</sup> Thus, for Mark's audience, familiar with this cult, the demon's address of Jesus in the story of the Gerasene demoniac is equivalent to 'son of Zeus'.<sup>342</sup> It is not inconceivable that when the evangelist describes people coming from the city and country (Mk 5.14-17) the Gentile audience would assume this reference relates to the polytheistic population of Gerasa and its hinterland, many of whom worshipped Zeus.

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<sup>338</sup> J. Seigne, "A l'ombre de Zeus et d'Artemis: Gerasa de la Décapole", *ARAM*, 4, vols. I & II (1992), 185-195, cited in Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 135, who considers Seigne's Iron Age finds are 'traces of an earlier settlement that has nothing to do with the Hellenistic one and with the cult of Zeus Olympios'. See also, J. Seigne, 'Découvertes récentes sur le sanctuaire de Zeus à Jerash', *Annual of the Department of Antiquities Jerash*, 37 (1993), 341-358.

<sup>339</sup> Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 158-159, <sup>no.1</sup>; Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 199.

<sup>340</sup> S. Mitchell, 'The Cult of Theos Hypsistos between Pagans, Jews and Christians', in P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede (eds), *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), 81-148, sees a single religious movement uniting people of different ethnicities and cultures but of similar monotheistic beliefs. See K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, P. W. van der Horst, (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1999), 938. See also, M. Meerson, 'One God Supreme: A Case Study of Religious Tolerance and Survival', *Journal of Graeco Roman Christianity and Judaism*, 7 (2010), 32-50, for a full discussion on the title of θεὸς ὑψίστος and εἷς θεός.

<sup>341</sup> Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 150 also cites W. Thiel, 'Politische Urbanisation und kulturelle Transformationsphänomene in den jordanischen Landschaften Galaaditis und Ammanitis während des 3 bis 1. Jhs v. Chr', in K. S. Freyberger, A. Henning and H. Von Hesberg (eds.), *Kulturkonflikte im Vorderen Orient an der Wende vom Hellenismus zur römischen Kaiserzeit* (Rahden: Leidorf, 2003), 223-236, esp. 41.

<sup>342</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 268.

#### 4.5.2 Artemis

In the polytheistic religious environment of Gerasa, there is also epigraphic evidence from the second half of the first century of the cult of Artemis.<sup>343</sup> Artemis was a Greek goddess of nature and in the Roman Near East she was often identified with local indigenous goddesses with epithets like *Thea Patroa Artemis*,<sup>344</sup> *Artemis Kyria*,<sup>345</sup> *Thea Artemis*,<sup>346</sup> or *Kyria Urania Artemis*.<sup>347</sup> Lichtenberger argues that in the Roman Near East all these epithets are well-attested for local gods of non-Greek Semitic origin.<sup>348</sup> However, as he points out, 'it is not possible to establish exactly which ancient Near Eastern goddess was interpreted as Greek Artemis but it is likely that she should be sought among goddesses like the Syro-Phoenician Astarte or Atargatis-Dea Syria'.<sup>349</sup>

The temple of Artemis, the largest of the temples of Gerasa, was located on the highest point of the western hill, to the north of the Temple of Zeus and was probably not fully completed until the late second century (see Appendix 10: Gerasa – Temple of Artemis).<sup>350</sup> This is attested by building inscriptions and the architectural decoration.<sup>351</sup> The temple was located in the Roman city centre itself, a consequence of 'expansion of settlement towards the north'.<sup>352</sup> The *propylon*

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<sup>343</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 27, first century, 388-389; no. 28, 79/90 CE, 389; no. 29, 98 CE, 389-390; no. 30, 130 CE, 390-391.

<sup>344</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 27, 388-389.

<sup>345</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', nos. 28 and 29, 389-390.

<sup>346</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 32, 391.

<sup>347</sup> P. –L. Gatier, 'Nouvelles inscriptions de Gerasa', *Syria*, (1985/1986), 62, nos. 2 and 3, 308-312 and 'Inscriptions religieuses de Gerasa (II)' in *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 32 (1988) no. 5, 151-154.

<sup>348</sup> Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 202.

<sup>349</sup> Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 138.

<sup>350</sup> C. S. Fisher, 'The Temple of Artemis', in Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa*, 125-138.

<sup>351</sup> H. Bloedhorn, *Die Kapitelle der Synagoge von Kapernaum. Ihre zeitliche und stilistische Einordnung im Rahmen der Kapitellentwicklung in der Dekapolis und in Palaestina* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 1993), 46.

<sup>352</sup> Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 133.

(gateway) stood at the foot of a monumental stairway which led to the sanctuary.<sup>353</sup>

As evidence of her popularity in the last quarter of the first century, Gerasa's civic coinage, of different denominations and types, was dominated by representations of Artemis depicted as standing, hunting, in her temple and with stag and rabbit.<sup>354</sup>

#### 4.5.3 Arabian God - Pakeidas

There is a possibility that Nabataean religion is also represented in the city, above all by *Pakeidas* and *Theos Arabikos*.<sup>355</sup> Half-way along the *cardo* there are known to be remains of an earlier temple beneath the Cathedral, which dates back to the first century BCE. This temple is connected by Lichtenberger to the Arab god(s) *Pakeidas/Theos Arabikos*,<sup>356</sup> and mentioned in inscriptions which were all found in the general vicinity of the Cathedral and Fountain Court.<sup>357</sup> This second sanctuary is the so-called Temple C and is also connected to the Roman god Dionysus, the son of Zeus by a mortal mother, and identified by scholars with the Nabataean god, Dusares, who may have been this Arabian god.<sup>358</sup> Scholars have argued that the evidence points to this temple, or its predecessor, being in existence by the middle of the first century CE.<sup>359</sup>

#### 4.5.4 Imperial Cult

The earliest evidence of Gerasa's participation in the imperial cult is found in an inscription of 22/23 CE, which mentions Zabdion, son of Aristomachos, a priest of

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<sup>353</sup> E. Thomas, *Monumentality and the Roman Empire: Architecture in the Antonine Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 87, n. 89, dates the completion of this stairway to c.145-161 CE.

<sup>354</sup> Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 138 and *Kult und Kultur*, 195-200. See also, Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 156-167.

<sup>355</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 17, 73/74 CE, 383-384; no. 18, first century, 384.

<sup>356</sup> Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 221-225.

<sup>357</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', nos. 17-22, 383-386.

<sup>358</sup> Richardson, *City and Sanctuary*, 84.

<sup>359</sup> C. S. Fisher and C. H. Kraeling, 'Temple C', in Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa*, 37, 139-148; Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 238-241; Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 144.

Tiberius Caesar and testifies to the presence of the cult of the emperor.<sup>360</sup> Zabdion bears a Semitic name but his father's name is Greek.<sup>361</sup> After the middle of the century the 'safety of the emperors and the concord of the people' becomes a stock phrase in dedicatory inscriptions,<sup>362</sup> and the *Pax Augusta* is celebrated.<sup>363</sup> Thus, Gerasa with its Graeco-Roman architecture and temples to the Semitic and Graeco-Roman gods also celebrated the cult of the emperor.

#### 4.6 Tombs at Gerasa

The evangelist describes the possessed man as living in tombs. There is evidence that in the first century the necropolis of Gerasa extended 'in a great circle around the whole of the ancient city'.<sup>364</sup> Some of these tombs were built above ground and of the architectural type that Fisher describes as 'belonging to the higher class' and 'scattered, as is customary, along the highways outside the city gates'.<sup>365</sup> Additionally, rock-cut tombs were found 'in great profusion on the hills west of the Chrysorhoas', presumably used by the less well-off.<sup>366</sup> These rock-cut tombs yielded pottery, lamps, glass and coins which were invaluable in dating their long history and establishing common burial practices. The twelve tombs which Fisher describes were in a variety of positions: (a) cut in the sloping hillside or in a slight low scarp; (b) sunk from a nearly level surface, requiring a longer flight of steps; (c) some having a pent roof consisting of pairs of beveled slabs, resting against one another; (d) regular chambers opening on a level with the exterior; and (e) roughly

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<sup>360</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 2, 373-374. Priests of other living emperors are known (no. 10, 379-380; no. 15, 382-383).

<sup>361</sup> Fink, 'Jerash', 114.

<sup>362</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 3, 374-375; no. 4, 375; no. 5, 375-376.

<sup>363</sup> Welles, 'Inscriptions', no. 45, 395-396; no. 46, 396.

<sup>364</sup> Fisher, 'Tombs', 549.

<sup>365</sup> *ibid*, 551.

<sup>366</sup> *ibid*, 551.

hewn caves with burial recesses of built masonry (see Appendix 11: Tombs of Gerasa).

Fisher describes the objects found in the tombs as having a long history that 'begins with the first or second century A.D. to which certain of the coins, lamps and earthenware vessels belong'.<sup>367</sup> Tomb 4, as Fisher describes it, is interesting in relation to Mark's story of the Gerasene Demoniac in that it is representative of the many tombs found on the hills west of the Chrysorhoas and thus on the route from the Sea of Galilee to Gerasa. He describes this as a first century tomb, 'completed and used', sunk into the ground from a nearly level surface, with the stairwell covered with a stone vault, the chamber sealed with a door and sufficiently large to accommodate a person living there (Mk 5.3).<sup>368</sup>

It can be determined from the above that Gerasa was indeed 'a city of paradoxes',<sup>369</sup> 'visibly and culturally different' from the surrounding cities of Judaea, Nabatea or even Syria.<sup>370</sup> Undoubtedly, in the second half of the late first century, it was a place of learning and a city of diverse culture.<sup>371</sup> The South Theatre, with the capacity for an audience of three thousand, was begun in the first century CE. There are beautiful temples with Classical decorative detail and other fine building that 'testify to the former splendour of Hellenistic worship',<sup>372</sup> and

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<sup>367</sup> *ibid*, 551.

<sup>368</sup> *ibid*, 550.

<sup>369</sup> Sartre, *Middle East Under Rome*, 202.

<sup>370</sup> Richardson, *City and Sanctuary*, 79.

<sup>371</sup> Gerasa was the home of the Neo-Pythagorean, Nicomachus (c. 60-120 CE) an important mathematician and philosopher whose works include *Introduction to Arithmetic*, *Manual of Harmonics* and the *Theology of Numbers*. It may be that this Nicomachus (son of Apollonios) is connected to Gerasa through an inscription from 92-93 CE: Gerasa, ἀγαθῆ τύχ[η] (ἔτους) πέμτου πεν- τηκοστοῦ ἑκα- τοστοῦ Νυκόμα- χος Ἀπολλωνίου ἐπόρησεν εὐσεβείας χάριν (To Good Fortune: Nichomachus, son of Apollonios made this because of piety in the 155<sup>th</sup> year [92-93 CE]); A. H. M. Jones, 'Inscriptions from Jerash', *JRS*, 18 (1928), <sup>no. 11</sup>, 151).

<sup>372</sup> Schürer, *History*, 37.

oriental architectural features which testify to the city's Semitic associations.<sup>373</sup> Thus, the city provided an infrastructure to support its culture and its heterogeneous population with their disparate cultic affiliations. There is also evidence of first century tombs surrounding the city which resonates with the historical core of the story of the Gerasene demoniac living in tombs.

#### **4.7 Mk 5.1-20: Gerasene Demoniac**

The following discussion will describe the context and setting of the story of the Gerasene demoniac, the evangelist's language and style, Gospel parallels, possible pre-Markan sources and Mark's redactional activity. I will undertake an exegetical survey of Mk 5.1-20, focusing on the Markan narrative as it relates to its Gentile audience who were part of the region's polytheistic religious milieu and the target of the Markan community's mission. In the dramatic account of the Gerasene demoniac there are tensions within the story, which present problems to its interpreters. It is a fundamental assumption of New Testament scholars that the evangelist received this story from an early tradition and expressed it in his own literary form. A number of inconsistencies indicate that it is probable that in the development of the early tradition elements of the story were either added or changed. I shall argue that the evangelist has injected into the narrative elements that were designed to meet the needs of his Gentile community.

It has been suggested that this Markan text presents three different levels of transmission and may be divided into three possible *Sitze im Leben*: (1) Jesus' actual exorcism of a possessed man in pagan territory on the eastern side of the

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<sup>373</sup> Ball, *Rome in the East*, 190, comments that '[t]he architectural forms, styles and details are immediately familiar to the westerner, from its massive Corinthian temples to the carvings that decorate them. On closer examination, however, this obvious 'Roman-ness' recedes, being merely a veneer that hides an essentially oriental city built with familiar oriental architectural forms'.

Sea of Galilee (*Sitze im Leben Christi*); (2) the early community's oral midrashic presentation of the event by filling in the gaps of the tradition beyond simple distillation, to convey the message of universal salvation, according to Isa. 65 (*Sitze im Leben der Gemeinde*), and (3) the evangelist's redaction, which makes the former demoniac an apostle to the polytheists (*Sitze im Leben des Evangelisten*).<sup>374</sup>

Scholars are in broad agreement with this outline, further suggesting that (1) the oral transmission arose on Palestinian soil or adjoining territory; (2) the story was anchored in the tradition because of its unusual venue; (3) the evangelist expands the story to demonstrate Jesus' triumph over the disturbing way of life of Gentiles and (4) transforms the exorcism into a story about mission.<sup>375</sup> It has also been suggested that Mark has taken the event and re-interpreted it in the style of 'haggadic midrash'.<sup>376</sup> Whilst this might be the narrative form the evangelist has adopted, undoubtedly the story also resonated on many levels with a Gentile audience.

#### 4.7.1 Position and Context of the Story

There is no scholarly consensus only numerous proposals regarding the basic overall structure into which the Markan evangelist placed the individual traditions he received to form the Gospel's arrangement.<sup>377</sup> However, a general outline of the early setting of the Gospel can be determined in that there is an introduction

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<sup>374</sup> J. F. Craghan, 'The Gerasene Demoniac', *CBQ*, 30 (1968), 522-536.

<sup>375</sup> R. Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. I (Freilburg, Basel & Wien: Herder, 1976; 1977), 283, 292-293; J. D. M. Derrett, 'Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac', *JSNT*, III (1979), 2-17; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 650-655, esp. 655, n. 26.

<sup>376</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 63; Craghan, 'The Gerasene Demoniac', 529; Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 190-194.

<sup>377</sup> For comments on the views of scholars on this question, see Telford, *Interpretation of Mark*, 9 & 48-49, n. 42, 'Mark', 205-207 and *Writing on the Gospel of Mark*, 10. See also Larsen, 'The Structure of Mark's Gospel', 140-160.

(Mk 1.1-15); a first major section where the authority of Jesus is exhibited (Mk 1.16-3.12); and a second major section where Jesus is rejected by his own people (Mk 3.13-6.6). The key themes in this early second major section of the Gospel are Jesus as miracle worker (4.35-41; 5.21-43), teacher (4.38), exorcist (5.1-20), his relationship with his disciples (4.35-41; 5.37) and the 'secrecy motif' (4.41; 5.37, 43).<sup>378</sup>

Mark has already recorded one specific exorcism carried out by Jesus in a synagogue (1.21-28), two summaries of his ministry of exorcism (1.32-34; 3.11-12), as well as that of the disciples (3.15) and controversy arising from his success at exorcism (3.22-30). Later in the Gospel he returns to this theme (Mk 6.7, 13; 7.24-30; 9.14-29) and whereas the first three exorcisms occurred on Jewish territory, the latter three occur on Gentile territory. Thus, Mark has exorcism playing a significant role in his overall record of Jesus' ministry.

The exorcism under discussion follows the miracle on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 4.35-41) where Jesus calms a storm and prevents the disciples from perishing.<sup>379</sup> At v. 35 there is a summary passage, which marks a transition in the narrative and includes Jesus saying, 'Let us go across to the other side'. At this juncture, Mark has Jesus leaving a point near Capernaum, where he is teaching from a boat (v. 36).<sup>380</sup> The passage under discussion opens with the information

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<sup>378</sup> With regard to the 'secrecy motif', the first major attack on the historicizing approach to the Markan Gospel was made by W. Wrede, *Messianic Secret*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (Cambridge & London: James Clarke, 1971). Wrede challenged Mark's historicity with particular emphasis on the 'secrecy motif' relating to Jesus' identity, which was revealed for the most part only to disciples, those who were healed and the supernatural world.

<sup>379</sup> A similar incident is assigned to the second century Jewish scholar Gamaliel II (Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Mezia* 59b) cited in E. Lohse, *The New Testament Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1976), 179. There is also a fourth century story related by Rabbi Tanchuma of the Jewish boy who calms the sea (*J. Berakoth* 9.1: cited in Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 160).

<sup>380</sup> In Mk 2.1 Jesus returns to Capernaum; 2.13 teaches beside the sea; 3.1 heals a man with a withered hand in the synagogue; 3.7 again withdraws to the sea to teach; 3.13 goes up mountain to appoint the twelve; 3.19 returns home; 4.1 again teaches beside the sea; 4.35 begins crossing to the other side.

that they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes and then Jesus (and presumably the disciples) disembarks from the boat on the east side of the Sea of Galilee (Mk 5.1-2).

There is an anomaly in terms of chronology, in that a voyage across the Sea of Galilee would have taken only two hours or so. The voyage in Mk 4.35-41 starts in the evening and the story in Mk 5.1-20 realistically takes place in daylight. This leaves a gap of several hours, perhaps indicative of an artificial connection? However, given Mark's lack of chronology when recording a series of events and the fact that the early tradition has the story set in the region of Gerasa, a sea voyage provides the most probable way for Jesus to travel. Additionally, the region seems an unlikely one to have been fabricated as an object of Jesus' visit. The present position of this story seems to point to a geographical and ecumenical move towards Gentile evangelism, possibly as a result of the preceding Jewish rejection (Mk 3.4-6, 22, 30). Following the story of the Gerasene demoniac, Mark has Jesus moving back over the Sea of Galilee to the western Jewish side where there are two further healing miracles, the raising of Jairus' daughter (5.21-24; 35-43) and the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage (5.25-34).

The exorcism of the Gerasene demoniac occurs on Gentile land and employs the pattern: Jesus' arrival in the region of the Gerasenes (v. 1); an introduction to the demoniac and Jesus' confrontation with him, emphasizing the past condition of the demoniac (vs 2-5); repetition of the demoniac confronting him and introduction to the demons (vs 6-10); the episode with the herd of pigs and Jesus' victory over the unclean spirits (vs 11-13); the response of the people who live in the region (vs 14-17) and the request to follow Jesus by the ex-demoniac and Jesus' response (vs 18-20).

#### 4.7.2 Mark's Language and Style

Mark tells the story in the third person, in simple, terse and imaginative language. The story moves rapidly from scene to scene, action dominates and a dramatic sense of urgency is present. The author uses a stereotypical style which includes the use of the perfect infinitive (δεδέσθαι, διεσπάσθαι, συντετριφθαι); participles (ιδών, κράξας, βοσκομένη, λέγοντες, ἔξελθόντα, γεγονός, καθήμενον, σωφρονούντα, ἔσχηκότα, διαμονισθείς); καί parataxis (present on forty-one occasions); incorrect use of the genitive absolute (v. 2 ἔξελθόντος αὐτοῦ; v. 18 ἔμβαινόντος αὐτοῦ); compound verb with repetition of preposition (v. 2: καὶ ἔξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου); and double negative (v. 3: οὐδὲ ... οὐκέτι ... οὐδεῖς). Familiar Markan language is found: v. 2 εὐθύς; v. 8 γάρ; vs 2, 8, 13 ἀκάθαρτος; vs 3, 15 μνημεῖον. He uses the familiar connective devices of the 'boat' motif (vs 2, 21), 'fear' motif (v. 15), and 'amazement' motif (v. 20). The early verses contain many words which are *hapax legomena*: κατοίκησιν (v. 3: dwelling); ἀλύσεσιν (v. 4: chains); πέδας (v. 4: fetters); διεσπάσθαι (v. 4: tore apart); δαμάσαι (v. 4: to subdue), suggesting the evangelist's use of traditional material.

#### 4.7.3 Markan Sources

There has been much debate relating to the sources from which the evangelist constructed this story and whether or not it represents an original unity. We have seen in chapter one that it is now largely accepted that Mark's Gospel is the result of a reshaping and transforming creative process whereby the evangelist has strung together, into a coherent whole, an extensive collection of oral and possibly written traditions, which had been circulating for decades within the nascent Jesus

movement.<sup>381</sup> The miracle material in Mark exhibits in its subject matter and structure, evidence of having been obtained from one or more specific and perhaps connected pre-Markan source. Achtemeier has made a strong case for a two-fold source underlying Mark, which he describes as a double cycle or catenae of miracle stories. The order begins with a sea miracle (4.35-41; cf. 6.45-52), moves on to three healing miracles (5.1-43; cf. 6.53-56; 7.24-37) and concludes with the feeding of a multitude (6.34-44; cf. 8.1-10).<sup>382</sup> He concedes that there is only 'a rough kind of parallelism to the two cycles' and that it is 'not exact'.<sup>383</sup>

In the case of the story of the Gerasene demoniac, the possibilities are that Mark has simply repeated oral or written sources;<sup>384</sup> redacted the oral or written sources he received,<sup>385</sup> or intertwined more than one version of the story.<sup>386</sup> Achtemeier's literary history of a pre-Markan, double cycle, miracle catenae may possibly be the source of the material for the Gerasene demoniac story but I shall argue that layers of literary activity and theological imagination have been superimposed on the original source in order to construct the evangelist's narrative in a way that would facilitate his Gentile mission.<sup>387</sup>

The lengthy, rambling story of the Gerasene demoniac has many 'problems, tensions and even contradictions', which Meier argues reflects 'a

<sup>381</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 266. For general discussion of the sources in Mark, see Telford, 'Interpretation', 1-61 and 'Mark', 127-249.

<sup>382</sup> Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation', 265-291 and 'The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae', *JBL*, 91 (1972), 198-221; Achtemeier's argument is reinforced by the fact that the second cycle of material in Mk 6.45-52; 6.53-56; 7.24-37; 8.1-10 is omitted by Luke.

<sup>383</sup> Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation', 265.

<sup>384</sup> R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. J. Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 210; Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation', 275-276 and Kelber, *Kingdom in Mark*, 50, who considers only Mk 5.1 and Mk 5.20 to be redactional.

<sup>385</sup> M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1935), 266; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 347.

<sup>386</sup> C. S. Mann, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to Mark* (Garden City NY: Doubleday, 1986), 279; Hooker, *Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 143; N. J. Torchia, 'Eschatological Elements in Jesus' Healing of the Gerasene Demoniac: An Exegesis of Mk. 5:1-20', *Irish Biblical Studies*, 23 (2001), 5. Contra France, *Gospel of Mark*, 229, n.10.

<sup>387</sup> For criticism on Achtemier's hypothesis, see Telford, 'Introduction', 18-19 and Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 181.

complicated, decades-long evolution of a simpler narrative into the baroque account that lies before us'.<sup>388</sup> The story positively represents non-Jews (in v. 20 the cured demoniac becomes a missionary and the Gentile onlookers are amazed) but seems to 'reflect an origin in a chauvinistic Jewish environment' (linking unclean spirits; places [grave-yards]; people [Gentiles]; and animals [pigs]).<sup>389</sup> The Markan evangelist does not appear to be able to reconcile these concepts which Marcus describes as 'loose ends'.<sup>390</sup>

There is a huge amount of detail in the story and the narrative does not run smoothly: v. 1 appears to weave in the familiar 'crossing pattern' to the predominantly Gentile eastern side of the Sea of Galilee but there is a clear temporal discrepancy with Mk 4.35; vs 3-5 are highly descriptive and somewhat intrusive; v. 6 appears to be a seam and repetitively strange after v. 2; v. 8 is a somewhat clumsy parenthesis which includes the typical Markan γάρ and we have two 'proofs' of the demoniac's cure (vs 11-13, the demons entering the swine and v. 15, the visible physical change in the cured demoniac).

Additionally, scholars have indicated, and I agree, that form-critically the destruction of the pigs appears to be a secondary addition 'representing perhaps assimilation to a pagan form of the exorcism story'.<sup>391</sup> As there is no other miracle performed by Jesus that destructively injures people or animals and indulges in the spectacular, there are also doubts relating to the historicity of this particular element of the story.<sup>392</sup> If the incident of the demons entering into the pigs, who then rush over or down a precipice into the Sea of Galilee and drown (Mk 5.11-13),

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<sup>388</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 650, considers that Mark has combined two accounts of the miracle; one of which included v. 1-2, 7-8 and 15 and the other v. 3-6 and 9f.

<sup>389</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 347.

<sup>390</sup> *ibid*, 347.

<sup>391</sup> Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 284.

<sup>392</sup> F. Annen, *Heil für die Heiden. Zur Bedeutung und Geschichte der Tradition vom Besessenen Gerasener (Mk 5.1-20)* (Frankfurter Theologische Studien 20; Frankfurt: Knecht, 1976), 192.

is a secondary accretion (which can be detached from the original form of the exorcism story), then this also has an impact on the location of the exorcism. The archaeological evidence which locates first-century tombs on the outskirts of the city of Gerasa supports the view that the exorcism possibly took place in proximity to the city.<sup>393</sup> Thus, the early tradition handed down to Mark may not have been specific, except to indicate that the exorcism took place in Gerasene territory and the evangelist redacted the story by adding the destruction of the pigs in order to orientate the story towards a Gentile audience.

Interestingly, Derrett has argued that Gerasa, if not received by the evangelist from tradition, may have been named as the location for this exorcism for symbolic Jewish etymological reasons 'which saw deep significance in names ... 'grš in Hebrew is a root signifying to expel and is exactly the verb for expelling a demon, while yrš is a root meaning to possess, especially possessing by forcibly extruding the occupier'.<sup>394</sup> It has also been suggested that churches in the Decapolis region adopted and 'Gentilized' this story to explain how the Christian mission started there,<sup>395</sup> and that since pigs and nakedness were associated with polytheism at this time, the Markan evangelist may have added these elements to the story for the purpose of his *Sitze im Kirche*.<sup>396</sup>

Thus, in the case of the Gerasene demoniac, Mark does not appear to uncritically reproduce the miracle tradition which he received but subjects it to embellishment and editorial interpretation. For the purpose of his own theological concept, Mark has Jesus beginning his ministry to the Jews with an exorcism (Mk

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<sup>393</sup> Fisher, 'Tombs', 551.

<sup>394</sup> J. D. M. Derrett, 'Spirit-Possession and the Gerasene Demoniac', *Man*, 14.2 (1979), 287. The aetiology of the name Gerasa could be related to Alexander the Great's settlement of elderly (γέροντες) veterans there after a battle (Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus', 151-152).

<sup>395</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (New York: Harper, n.d.), 89-90; Kelber, *Kingdom*, 50-52.

<sup>396</sup> Annen, *Heil für die Heiden*, 162-190.

1.23-26) and as a corollary to free the Gentiles from demonic uncleanness, his Gentile mission begins with an exorcism in the Decapolis. Whilst there is probably some historic event underpinning the tradition that came down to the Markan evangelist, he is primarily interested in adapting the material to make it serviceable to his own community for the purpose of expanding the Gentile mission.

#### **4.7.4 Gospel Parallels (Mt. 8.28-34; Lk 8.26-39)**

The story of the Gerasene demoniac is recounted by all three Synoptic Gospels. Mark's story consists of 411 words, Luke has 387 words (it is extremely close to the Markan version in respect of content, ordering of events and language) and Matthew severely abridges the account (160 words). All three synoptics agree that the event took place after the stilling of the storm, on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee and that Jesus later returned to the western side by means of a boat. Mark and Luke place the exorcism in the country of the Gerasenes, identified by Luke as opposite Galilee and Matthew places the exorcism in the country of the Gadarenes. However, each Gospel has textual variants in relation to the geographical location and I have argued for the earliest and best attested location which is the country of the Gerasenes (pp. 99-103).

Matthew's version has two demoniacs instead of one, which suggests he may have been combining Mark's narrative here with that of Mark 1.23-27, which he omits. Luke attempts to tidy up Mark's narrative by moving the description of the demoniac to v. 29, which once again Matthew totally omits. Matthew also omits the section where the demons are named as *Λεγιών* and, as in the case of Luke, does not record any specific number of swine. Matthew also omits the section that relates to the demoniac's request to follow Jesus and Luke has the man proclaiming throughout the city, rather than the whole Decapolis. Thus, the

fact that this story is attested in both Matthew and Luke and the coherence between the accounts (excepting the differences outlined above) suggests that the story was sufficiently embedded in the early tradition to warrant inclusion in these three Gospels by the evangelists.

#### 4.7.5 Markan Narrative

##### **Mk 5.1:**

Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν.

***And they came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes.***

It is here that Mark establishes the setting. The opening of the account stresses a key point: Jesus and his party have crossed εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης (to the other side of the Sea; cf. Mk 3.8; 4.35; 5.21; 6.45; 10.1). The term πέραν designates the region beyond the Jordan or the eastern side of the Jordan (πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου).<sup>397</sup> The setting on the east of the Sea of Galilee in the region of the Decapolis, considered to be predominantly Gentile, leads most scholars to assume that the demoniac is a Gentile and I concur.<sup>398</sup> Malbon has convincingly argued (by exploring spatial references in Mark) that in geopolitical terms, the Sea of Galilee is a boundary that separates Galilee on its western side from the threatening and unfamiliar spaces of the foreign lands outside the Jewish homeland, such as the country of the Gerasenes on the eastern side.<sup>399</sup>

Clear narrative signals within the text and ‘the intended reader’s high sensitivity to these signals’ would enable the Markan reader ‘to discern within the

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<sup>397</sup> Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 284, considers the phrase εἰς τὸ πέραν to be a ‘catch phrase’ of the pre-Markan miracle history collection (cf. 4.35; 5.21; 6.45).

<sup>398</sup> Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 274; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 274; Hooker, *Gospel According to Mark*, 143; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 342; F. J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 2002), 101; Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, I, 279-282; Schweizer, *Good News*, 113; B. M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary*, trans. W. H. Bisscheroux (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 200; Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 178-179. Contra Derrett, ‘Contributions to the Study of the Gerasene Demoniac’, 6 and 13, who determines the man is a ‘lapsed Jew’.

<sup>399</sup> E. S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 38-40.

narrative of Mark just at what point Jesus was on Jewish as opposed to foreign and Gentile territory'.<sup>400</sup> The signals on the western side were the encounters with Jewish religious leaders and references to synagogues and the temple and on the eastern side references to tombs and a herd of pigs, unimaginable except in a Gentile region.

Despite the confusion as to the boat's actual landing point, it is probable that v. 1 belonged to the early tradition that Mark received. In fact, the story is so closely linked with the preceding one (sea journey to opposite shore [4.35; 5.1]; getting into [4.36] and out of the boat [5.2]), that there seems little doubt that they are connected. This is despite the fact that, as is often the case with Mark, there is no real attempt to supply the audience with a chronologically complete series of events.

**Mk 5.2:**

καὶ ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μνημείων ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ,  
***And when he had come out of the boat, immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit***

Jesus disembarks and meets a man who is the embodiment of impurity, living in the *loci* of demons (Jb. 30.5-6; Ps. 67.6; Isa. 65.4). Mark says nothing of how the demoniac became possessed, nor does he indicate whether the man was born possessed, suggesting that the intended audience has a knowledge of possession and the corollary that the possessed becomes a social outcast. The derivatives of the adjective ἀκαθάρτος are used ten times by Mark in connection with spirits (Mk 1.23, 26, 27; 3.11, 30; 5.2, 13; 6.7; 7.25; 9.25) which are a recurring subject in the Markan Gospel. The unclean spirit (v. 2 singular, v. 13 plural) links with the ritual

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<sup>400</sup> Wefald, 'The Separate Gentile Mission', 9.

uncleanness of the tombs (vs 2, 3, 5) and will link up later with the ritual uncleanness of the pigs (vs 11-13).

In first century Graeco-Roman society (including Judaism) the existence of demons or unclean spirits, the agents of all manner of troubles, was a common worldview phenomenon (see Appendix 12: Graeco-Roman Exorcists).<sup>401</sup> Physical criteria relating to possession focused on impairments such as loss of speech (Mk 9.17; Mt. 9.32), sight (Mt. 12.22) or hearing (Mk 9.25). Hysteria, epilepsy and madness were considered the product of demonic possession, remedial cures for which were in the form of magic, witchcraft and incantations.<sup>402</sup> This bizarre behavior (Mk 8.18) was thought to be on the 'fringes of sanity', however, the personification of the 'radically divided self' is cited as the main criterion for possession and in this story Mark shows 'at least an oblique awareness of a conflict of minds (selves)' in the demoniac.<sup>403</sup>

The well-being of a demoniac was dependent upon social status.<sup>404</sup> Mark's intention was to convey that this man was clearly not wealthy, or he would have been cared for at home (Mk 7.24-30) and the subject of concern by family members (Mk 1.32; 7.26; 9.22). The rich often had the services of physicians, while lower class demoniacs were often cast out from the home and had to fend for themselves.<sup>405</sup> Some demoniacs were not confined to home or remote places

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<sup>401</sup> Rabbinic literature lists five characteristics of madness: (1) sleeping on a grave; (2) running about at night; (3) staying overnight at burial places; (4) tearing apart one's clothes; and (5) destroying what one has been given (*Str-B.*, I.491-492), see H. Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 385.

<sup>402</sup> D. D. Reese, 'Demons', in Freedman, *et al* (eds), *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. II (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 14-42.

<sup>403</sup> P. W. Hollenbach, 'Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities', *JAAR*, 49 (1981), 570.

<sup>404</sup> G. Rosen, *Madness in Society: Chapters in the Historical Sociology of Mental Illness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 64, 89.

<sup>405</sup> Hollenbach, 'Jesus, Demoniacs and Public Authorities', 571.

but were found in public places such as synagogues (Mk 1.21-23; Philo, *Con. Flacc.* 36-39).<sup>406</sup>

Derivatives of the word tomb (μνημείον) are found nine times in Mark (Mk 5.2, 3, 5; 6.29; 15.46; 16.2, 3, 5, 8) and in vs 2-3 he uses two synonyms, μνημείον and μνήμα, both of which occur in Mk 15.46. Abandoned or unused tombs had been used for centuries as dwellings for the poor and outcast (Ps. 67.7; Isa 65.4; cf. Job 30.5-6; Heb. 11.38). In the Jewish worldview, inhabitants of tombs remained unclean for seven days post-departure from the tomb (*Ant.* XVIII.38). This is contrary to the regular Graeco-Roman practice of visiting tombs, eating there and leaving food for the dead, possibly also a form of sustenance for tomb-dwellers.<sup>407</sup> (Appendix 11: Tombs of Gerasa, gives an indication of the size of the tombs found in a group on the outskirts of the city of Gerasa and hewn from naturally or artificially formed rock [cf. Mt. 27.60; Lk 11.47]).

**Mk 5.3-5:**

ὅς τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀλύσει οὐκέτι οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο αὐτὸν δῆσαι, διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν πολλάκις πέδαις καὶ ἀλύσεσιν δεδέσθαι καὶ διεσπάσθαι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετριφῆθαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἴσχυεν αὐτὸν δαμάσαι· καὶ διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἦν κράζων καὶ κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις.

***who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him anymore, even with a chain, for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out and bruising himself with stones.***

Mark uses a series of negatives, οὐδε (not even), οὐκέτι (no longer), and οὐδεὶς (no one) to emphasize the extraordinary strength and power of the unclean spirits (cf.

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<sup>406</sup> Cited in Rosen, *Madness*, 87.

<sup>407</sup> The Greeks had meals for the dead on the third, seventh or ninth and thirtieth day after the death; the Romans had a funeral meal on the day of burial (*Silicernium*), on the ninth day and annually on the deceased's birthday. Commemorations for all the dead took place at the festivals of *Patentalia* and *Lemuria*. The graves contained holes or pipes through which food and drink could be poured down onto the corpse (E. Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* [Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2003], 244).

Acts 19.16). Mark's Graeco-Roman audience would recognize the man's exceptional strength as a sign of the supernatural. Additionally, the ancient practice associated with exorcism of binding the victim is recorded by the Roman physician, Celsus (*On Chronic Diseases* I.144-152,183),<sup>408</sup> and the myth of Dionysus relates that he was captured by pirates and 'they sought to bind him with rude bonds, but the bonds would not hold him, and the withes fell far away from his hands and feet' (*Homeric Hymns* VII.12-14).<sup>409</sup>

Mark describes the man's plight. Perhaps family and friends of the demoniac had unsuccessfully tried to restrain him and now, isolated from society, he lived among the tombs where he was permitted to shout and injure himself.<sup>410</sup> Verses 3 and 5 seem to assume the character of an aside, perhaps inserted by the evangelist. In these verses the evangelist uses five terms (i.e. κατοίκησις, ἄλυσις, πέδη, διασπάω and δαμάζω) 'which are either peculiar to vs 3-5, or else occur rarely throughout the New Testament'.<sup>411</sup>

Literary connections have been suggested here with Ps. 67.7 LXX (Ps. 68.6 English): 'God makes the solitary dwell in houses, he leads forth in strength those who are bound, just as he calls the rebellious ones to live among the graves'.<sup>412</sup> Additionally, scholars have suggested that the story may be influenced by the language of Isa. 65.3-4 LXX: 'This people are provoking me continually to my face. They will sacrifice in the gardens and burn incense on the tiles to demons which had not an existence. They sleep in tombs and in caverns for the

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<sup>408</sup> P. G. Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death: Persuading Mark's Early Readers* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 148.

<sup>409</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 148-149.

<sup>410</sup> 1 Kgs. 18.28 describes Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal where devotees voluntarily lacerated themselves.

<sup>411</sup> Torchia, 'Gerasene Demoniac', 12.

<sup>412</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 113.

purpose of dreaming. They eat swine's flesh and the broth of sacrifices; all their vessels are polluted'.<sup>413</sup>

**Mk 5.6-7:**

καὶ ἰδὼν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔδραμεν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ καὶ κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγει, Τί μοι καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ὀρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς.

***And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; and crying out with a loud voice he said, 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most high God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me'.***

The man approaches Jesus, prostrates himself and identifies Jesus. As there is no indication in the narrative that the man and Jesus have met previously, this suggests to the audience that the demon possessing him must have supernatural powers of recognition. Verse 6 appears to repeat v. 2 and if, as I have suggested, vs 3-5 are external to the original account, v. 6 would be a Markan redactional link, particularly as the man's voluntary approach is combined in the next verse with disassociation when he asks Jesus why he is approaching him and suggests that Jesus will torment him. There is no indication here of any loud cries or convulsions such as we find in Mark's other exorcisms (Mk 1.26; 9.26). The demoniac's words τί μοι καὶ σοί (v. 7: What have you to do with me?) repeat those used in Mk 1.23. Mark has the possessed man at Capernaum also referring to himself as both 'us' and 'I', τί ἡμῖν καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ Ναζαρηνε'; ἦλθες ἀπολέσαι ἡμᾶς; οἶδά σε τίς εἶ, ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ (Mk 1.24: 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us. I know who you are, the Holy One of God').

The unclean spirit potently addresses Jesus as Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου (Son of the Most High God), reflecting the polytheism of the demoniac and the Gentile territory in which the story takes place (cf. Acts 16.17).<sup>414</sup> Bousset

<sup>413</sup> Craghan, 'Gerasene Demoniac', 529; Derrett, 'Contributions', 9-10.

<sup>414</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 343-344, indicates that 'one of the gates of Thebes was called *Hypsistai* from Zeus' temple there'.

argued that this was the formula chosen by the evangelist to express the identity of Jesus for the benefit of the Gentile community.<sup>415</sup> Mark's intended Gentile audience would be familiar with the designation 'Son of God'. Julius Caesar was deified in 42 BCE and later Octavian began to call himself officially *divi filius*, 'God's Son' or 'Son of a God',<sup>416</sup> and he is referred to in a letter from the emperor Claudius in 41 CE as (ὁ) θεὸς Σεβαστός ([the] god Augustus.<sup>417</sup> Likewise, Germanicus (adopted son of Tiberius, consul and commander of the eastern provinces) referred to himself as, Σεβαστοῦ υἱὸς θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ υἱωνός (son of the god Augustus [Tiberius] and grandson of Augustus).<sup>418</sup>

Collins convincingly argues that in non-Jewish and non-Christian texts this expression occurs as a divine name for Zeus, 'thus for members of Mark's audience familiar with this cult, the demon's address of Jesus is equivalent to 'son of Zeus'.<sup>419</sup> She asserts that Mark's audience 'understood the expression in their own cultural contexts and traditions', related it to divine men, workers of miracles and philosophers and would also 'associate this portrayal with the imperial cult'.<sup>420</sup> The designation 'the Most High God' is also found in the Hebrew Scriptures, mostly used by non-Israelites in speaking of Israel's God; it is therefore appropriate on the lips of the Gentile demoniac.<sup>421</sup> It has been argued that Mark inserted this

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<sup>415</sup> Bousset, *Kyrios Christos*, 54. See also: Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, 279; P. Pimentel, 'The "Unclean Spirits" of St. Mark's Gospel', *Expository Times*, 99 (1988), 174; Gabriel, 'Gerasene Demoniac', 168. Contra Hengel, *Cross of the Son of God*, 22, who concluded the title was rare in the Graeco-Roman world and had no serious influence on the early Jesus movement in Palestine and Syria.

<sup>416</sup> Price, *Ritual and Power*, 76.

<sup>417</sup> J. L. White, *Light from Ancient Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 131-137, no. 88. Also on the deification of Augustus: Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* LVI.46.1-2 and on the deification of Gaius Caligula: Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* LIX.4.4.

<sup>418</sup> V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), no. 320, 147; cited in Collins, 'The Son of God Among Greeks and Romans', 95.

<sup>419</sup> *ibid*, 90.

<sup>420</sup> *ibid*, 100.

<sup>421</sup> Gen. 14.18-20; Num. 24.16; Isa. 14.14; Dan 3.26, 42. See discussion in Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 343-344.

designation himself to replace an older formula he received from either an early oral or written tradition.<sup>422</sup>

The verbs of adjuration (ὀρχίζω) and torment (βασανίστη) usually occur in Graeco-Roman formulas of exorcism and suit the paganism of the demoniac and of the territory (see Appendix 12: Graeco-Roman Exorcists).<sup>423</sup> Matthew's parallel account (8.29) has a fuller explanation in eschatological terms, 'Have you come here to torment us before the appointed time?' (cf. Rev 20.10). Marcus points out that Philostratus (*Vita Apoll.* IV.25) 'provides a striking parallel in which a demon begs an exorcist not to torture it (μὴ βασανίζειν)'.<sup>424</sup>

**Mk. 5.8-9:**

ἔλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ Ἔξελθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. καὶ ἐπηρώτα αὐτόν, Τί ὄνομά σοι; καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Λεγιῶν ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοί ἐσμεν.

***For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He replied, 'My name is Legion; for we are many'.***

The chronological order is abandoned here and Jesus has peremptorily commanded the unclean spirit to come out. Jesus then asks the rhetorical question, 'What is your name?' and the demoniac identifies himself. The γάρ clause is typical of Mark's style and is probably an explanatory insertion to relieve the confusion of detail.<sup>425</sup> Verse 9 appears to be peculiar to Mark, as nowhere else in the Gospel does Jesus proceed in such a manner, requesting a name as part of an exorcism formula. It was, however, the practice of ancient exorcists to uncover the name of the demon since knowledge of the name was tantamount to power

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<sup>422</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 114.

<sup>423</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 248; Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 149.

<sup>424</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 344.

<sup>425</sup> Mann, *Gospel According to Mark*, 279; Torchia, 'Gerasene Demoniac', 15; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 347.

over the person.<sup>426</sup> Spells tended to list numerous names of spirits (Acts 19.13-26; PGM IV.3020; see Appendix 3: *Paris Magical Papyrus*). Λεγιῶν, a collective noun, is a military term borrowed from Latin (*legio*) that can relate to a Roman legion, normally consisting of about six thousand footmen, one hundred and twenty horsemen and a number of auxiliaries.<sup>427</sup> On the other hand *legio* is capable of loose usage, including a military term meaning ‘many’ or ‘organised might’. In Matthew 26.53 Jesus could command more than twelve legions of angels (πλείω δωδεκα λεγιῶνας ἀγγέλων) and thus the evangelist uses the term metaphorically to denote the heavenly hosts.

It stretches the imagination to think that these are the exact words of Jesus or for that matter the demoniac and inconceivable that any ancient hearer or reader would not think of Roman troops in connection with the name ‘Legion’.<sup>428</sup> Thus, it is plausible to assume that the evangelist chose this name in order that it would be interpreted socio-politically by the intended audience as a reference to the invading Roman legions and thus ‘demonic invasion becomes a metaphor for political invasion’.<sup>429</sup>

#### **Mk 5.10-11:**

καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὸν πολλὰ ἵνα μὴ αὐτὰ ἀποστείλῃ ἔξω τῆς χώρας. ᾗ Ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ πρὸς τῷ ὄρει ἀγέλη χοίρων μεγάλη βοσκομένη·

***And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside;***

<sup>426</sup> S. L. Davies, *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance and the Origins of Christianity* (New York: Continuum, 1995), 92. See also Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 344, who cites *T. Sol.* 2.1 and PGM IV.3037-3039 (I adjure you, every demonic spirit, to say what sort you are).

<sup>427</sup> Torchia, ‘Gerasene Demoniac’, 16; points out that the term *Legion* is not strictly a Latinism but ‘like other military and governmental terms, it had entered the language and is found not only in Hellenistic Greek but in Aramaic as well’.

<sup>428</sup> J. Garroway, ‘The Invasion of a Mustard Seed: A Reading of Mark 5.1-20’, *JSNT*, 32.1 (2009), 57-75; Gundry, *Mark*, 260; K. Wengst, *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, trans. J. Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 66.

<sup>429</sup> Garroway, ‘Invasion of a Mustard Seed’, 65.

The spirits wished to stay in the χῶρον around the tombs. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Tb. 8.3) expelled demons flee to the desert of Upper Egypt. Additionally, in *Test. Sol.* 5.11 a demon pleads with Solomon: 'Do not condemn me to water', and in the New Testament, 'When an unclean spirit has gone out of a man, he passes through waterless places, seeking rest; and finding none he says "I will return to my house from which I came"' (Lk 11.24). Thus, by sending the demons into the pigs, the evangelist is suggesting this is their original abode.

By the first century CE the pig had become in a sense the symbol of polytheistic practices (Mt 7.6; Lk 15.15-16; 2 Pet 2.22) and as such something to be avoided by Jews, whether it was alive or already someone's food. The *Torah* classifies the pig as an unclean animal and so forbidden (Lev. 11.7-8; Deut. 14.8, cf. Isa 65.4; 66.17).<sup>430</sup> Following this proscription against pigs, later the *Mishnah* states categorically, 'None may rear swine anywhere' (*m. B. Qam.* 7.7). A Babylonian exorcistic incantation offers a pig as an alternative host for the expelled demon.<sup>431</sup>

Gentiles, on the other hand, considered pigs ritually clean to the extent of offering them in sacrifice, as well as eating them. The sacrifice to Zeus of a piglet in the context of a purification meal is found in the *L. Sac.* from Selinous (Col. B. I.5);<sup>432</sup> five Latin curse tables from Rome (mid first century BCE) promised Prosperine and Pluto the offering of 'dates, figs and a black pig',<sup>433</sup> and there is

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<sup>430</sup> J. Adna, 'The Encounter of Jesus with the Gerasene Démoniac' in B. Chilton and C. A. Evans (eds.), *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 279-301, indicates that this may have been a reaction to the tactics of the Seleucid King Antiochus Epiphanes (175-163 BCE) who attempted to force Jews to sacrifice and eat pigs, an action Jews vigorously rejected (1 Macc. 1.47; 2 Macc. 6.2-5; 6.18-7.42).

<sup>431</sup> R. C. Thompson, *Devils and Evil Spirits of Babylonia* (London: Luzac, 1903/4), 2.10-15, cited in France, *Gospel of Mark*, 230.

<sup>432</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 152, n. 64.

<sup>433</sup> *ibid*, 152.

evidence that a pig was sacrificed to the *Lares Augusti*.<sup>434</sup> Bolt convincingly argues that '[i]n the cultural framework of the Graeco-Roman readers, the pigs are the usual chthonic sacrifices; they are involved in purificatory rites; and they act as a substitution for a person in order to rid them from the influence of the *daimones*. These pigs, moving from the man into the sea, could be seen as a sacrifice to the underworld gods, which draw off the unclean spirits for the cleansing of the man'.<sup>435</sup>

**Mk 5.12-13:**

καὶ παρεκάλεσαν αὐτὸν λέγοντες. Πέμψον ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, ἵνα εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν. καὶ ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς. καὶ ἐξελθόντα τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα εἰσῆλθον εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, καὶ ὤρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημονοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, ὡς δισχίλιοι, καὶ ἐπνίγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ.  
**and they begged him, 'Send us to the swine, let us enter them'. So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea and were drowned in the sea.**

The spirits speak collectively, requesting entry into the swine, who are unclean like themselves. Jesus agrees and the herd rushes over the embankment and drown in the sea. Again, vs 12-13 seem to be additions to the original story. Schweizer has convincingly argued that this is an ancient story about casting out a demon, which 'has been enlarged by the addition of various legendary features'.<sup>436</sup> The size of the herd ὡς δισχίλιοι is remarkable. The specification, 'about two thousand', far exceeds the number of one hundred or one hundred and fifty in a herd of normal size and even the number of three hundred or more in an extraordinarily large herd (Varro, *R. Rus.* II.4.22).

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<sup>434</sup> E. G. Huzar, 'Emperor Worship in Julio-Claudian Egypt', in W. Haase (ed.), *ANRW*, II.185 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1995), 3117; cited in Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 152, n. 62.

<sup>435</sup> Bolt, *Jesus' Defeat of Death*, 153.

<sup>436</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 112.

Having been alerted by the clue in the name of the demon, we discover that the rest of this story is filled with military imagery. The terms ἀγέλη (v. 11: used for the herd of pigs) can refer to a band of military recruits, the phrase ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς (v. 13: he gave them leave) suggests military command, and ὄρμησεν (v. 13: rushing) over the cliff suggests a battle charge.<sup>437</sup> The story's appeal to a Gentile audience is supported by Theissen's sociological study which concludes that the 'allusion to the Roman occupation is unmistakable'.<sup>438</sup> The events depicted in the pericope have been compared with Josephus' account of Titus' military and naval conflict at the lake of Gennesareth (*War* III 497-532) between the Roman forces and insurgents, where six thousand seven hundred Jews were slaughtered (some of whom came from the Gadarene district).<sup>439</sup> The reference to pigs may also reflect awareness of the boar symbol on the emblem of the *Legio X Fretensis*. This legion was stationed in Syria and Palestine in the first and second centuries, had taken part in the Romano-Jewish War and the siege of Jerusalem, and was subsequently stationed in Judaea.<sup>440</sup> Scholars have also suggested an allusion to Ex.14-15, which chronicles Moses' defeat of Pharaoh's Egyptian legions at the Reed Sea.<sup>441</sup>

Mark records a physical act of the demon departing from the man into the pigs (cf. *Ant.* VIII.48 where a bowl of water is overturned and Philostratus' *Vita Apoll.* IV.20, where a statue is knocked over). The rushing down a steep slope into

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<sup>437</sup> Derrett, 'Contributions', 5.

<sup>438</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 255. Contra P. Perkins, 'The Gospel of Mark', *New Interpreters Bible*, vol. VIII (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 584.

<sup>439</sup> Head, 'Mark as a Roman Document', 253-256.

<sup>440</sup> D. E. Aune, 'Jesus and the Romans in Galilee: Jews and Gentiles in the Decapolis', in A. Y. Collins (ed.), *Ancient and Modern Perspectives on the Bible and Culture: Essays in Honor of Hans Dieter Betz* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 230-251; also, Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 351; M. Klinghardt, 'Legionsschweine in Gerasa: Lokalkolorit und historischer Hintergrund von Mk. 5.1-20', *ZNW*, 98.1 (2007), 42, agrees with this connection and concludes 'the relationship of the symbolism of the *X Fretensis* is plausible'. Contra Collins, *Mark*, 270.

<sup>441</sup> Wefald, 'Separate Gentile Mission in Mark', 15; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 348-349.

the sea and drowning gives visible evidence that the spirits have come out of the man. As Myers has adroitly argued, and I agree, the destruction of the pigs is a metaphor for defeat of the political invaders and ‘we are here encountering imagery meant to call to mind the Roman military occupation of Palestine’.<sup>442</sup> Jesus’ condoning of the destruction of the pigs seems puzzling but finds its counterpart in the account of the withered fig tree (Mk 11.12-14; 20-21).<sup>443</sup>

**Mk 5.14-16:**

καὶ οἱ βόσκοντες αὐτοὺς ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγρούς· καὶ ἦλθον ἰδεῖν τί ἐστὶν τὸ γεγονός. καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμόνιζομενον καθήμενον ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονοῦντα, τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν. καὶ διηγήσαντο αὐτοῖς οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο τῷ διαμονιζομένῳ καὶ περὶ τῶν χοίρων.

***The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the one who had the legion; and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine.***

The swineherds flee and report the incident (functioning as witnesses, like synagogue spectators in Mk 1.27 and the crowd in Mk 9.15). It requires four times as many people to keep pigs as it takes to keep sheep and so for a herd of about two thousands pigs we are meant to think of quite a few herders.<sup>444</sup> To confirm to the reader the reliability of the story, Mark next mentions the narration of the event to those people who had arrived on the scene. Mark calls them ‘those who have seen’, to stress the reliability of the story. The verbs of ‘seeing’ feature prominently in this section: ἰδεῖν (v.14: the townspeople), θεωροῦσιν (v.15: the townspeople), and ἰδόντες (v.16: witnesses to the exorcism).

After the exorcism, the story of the Gerasene demoniac provides a full post-exorcism description of the healed person. The awkward insertion of the

<sup>442</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 191.

<sup>443</sup> For discussion on destruction of the fig-tree by Jesus, see Telford, *Barren Temple*, esp. 39-68.

<sup>444</sup> Derrett, ‘Contributions’, 6.

phrase, τὸν ἔσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα (v. 15: the one who had the legion) immediately after the description, seems redundant. The curious people from the city and the countryside come forward to investigate and find the former demoniac in sound mind and subsequently they broadcast the event. Inexplicably, the loss of the swine plays no part in any of the concluding six verses.

**Mk 5.17:**

καὶ ἤρξαντο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν.

***And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighbourhood.***

Mark records hostility here on the part of the witnesses, contra previous positive reactions of the Markan crowd who witness Jesus' miracles (Mk 1.28; 2.12). The demons παρεκάλεσαν (beseeched) Jesus to send them into the pigs (v. 12) and he uses the same terms here to describe the hostility of the witnesses, ἤρξαντο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπελθεῖν (they began to beseech him to leave). Any considerations of the motives at work here must be conjectural but it is quite surmisable that there were social implications and consequences which the audience would recognize as a result of Jesus' healing the demoniac. Mark has indicated previously that there was amazement on the part of the spectators towards his exorcisms (Mk 1.27) and that the scribes and Pharisees slander Jesus on account of his exorcisms, accusing him of practising sorcery and magic (Mk 9.38-39; 16.17) and being possessed himself by Satan (Mk 3.22).

We have seen that demoniacs and exorcists had their place in the first century social system and clearly many exorcists were operating in the region (Mk 9.38; *Ant.* VI.166). It has been suggested that demon symbolism served not only as a means for the oppressed to express their degradation but also as a label and means for the nervous dominant class to subdue those who protested against their

oppressors by blaming their behaviour on demon possession.<sup>445</sup> It may well be that Mark's audience would empathize with the reaction of the onlookers at concern over Jesus' means of curing the demoniac, as this represented a challenge to the ruling class who regularized and approved ways of dealing with demoniacs, exorcists and others on the fringes of society (*Ant.* XVIII.116-119). Additionally, the audience on hearing of the slaughter of two thousand pigs must have conjured up the terrible consequences of such an action.<sup>446</sup>

**Mk 5.18-20:**

καὶ ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πλοῖον παρεκάλει αὐτὸν ὁ δαιμονισθεὶς ἵνα μετ' αὐτοῦ ᾗ. καὶ οὐκ ἀφῆκεν αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ὑπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σους καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἠλέησέν σε. καὶ ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἤρξατο κηρύσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ πάντες ἐθαύμαζον

***And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. But he refused and said to him 'Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you'. And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marvelled.***

Jesus gets back into the boat to return across the sea, the man begs to follow him but Mark has Jesus denying this request. There is a striking similarity between the vocabulary of Mk 5.19-20 and that of Mk 6.30, the return of the disciples from their mission. In this episode, Jesus commands the former demoniac to announce (ἀπάγγειλον) what the Lord has done (πεποίηκεν) for him (v. 19).<sup>447</sup> Upon their return from their first missionary journey the disciples announce (ἀπήγγειλαν) to Jesus what they had done (ἐποίησαν Mk 6.30). Κύριος here may refer to God rather than Jesus, as it does in Mk 1.13 and 12.36-37. In the Lukan parallel the

<sup>445</sup> Rosen, *Madness*, 5-17.

<sup>446</sup> Waetjen, *Reordering of Power*, 118, has interestingly suggested that a herd of pigs this large must have been intended for the Roman army and thus their food supply was destroyed.

<sup>447</sup> What is striking about this verse is that it contravenes the so-called 'Messianic secret'. For comment on the 'Messianic secret', see Telford, *Barren Temple*, 254-255 and Watson, 'Social Function of Mark's Secrecy Theme', 49-69.

evangelist changes the wording to God (Lk 8.39). These verses are most likely the Markan evangelist's own work but contradict Mk 1.43; 3.12; 5.43; 7.36 and 8.26.

Jesus' refusal to allow the cured demoniac to be with him may relate to Mark's belief that full discipleship belonged as a privilege only to the Twelve (Mk 3.14). (However, the number of disciples is not complete, since later others are called to follow Jesus [Mk 8.34] or do follow him [Mk 1.16-20; 2.14; 10.21, 52].) This datum may be a sign to Mark's Graeco-Roman audience that the Gospel was first preached by a cured Gentile demoniac in this Gentile region and that he was commissioned for this purpose by Jesus himself. In certain cases Mark has Jesus asking the people to follow him and does not normally object to those who do follow him (Mk 10.52). Perhaps the messianic secret did not apply to polytheists as people such as the Gerasenes were not likely to misconstrue the true nature of Jesus' messianic character. This command is inextricably linked with evangelization and a commission to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. Mark has the man proclaiming Jesus' deed far and wide and it is probable that v. 20 also originated with Mark.<sup>448</sup> ἐν τῇ Δεκαοίλει expands the field of the ex-demoniac's proclamation beyond his home and even beyond the region of the Gerasenes to a much larger territory. This activity of proclamation is similar to the leper (Mk 1.45), of Jesus himself (1.15) and later of the disciples (6.7-13).<sup>449</sup>

#### 4.7.6 Summary

As Craghan has argued and I broadly concur, if Mark's secondary additions are excluded (vs 3-6: the description of the demoniac; vs 9-10: the naming of the

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<sup>448</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 133.

<sup>449</sup> It is interesting to note that this is apparently the earliest reference in ancient literature to the term 'Decapolis'. It is later mentioned in Pliny's *Natural History* (c. 77 CE) and in Josephus' *Jewish War* (c. 80 CE), see S. T. Parker, 'The Decapolis Reviewed', *JBL*, 94 (1975), 438.

demoniac; vs 12-13: the request to enter the swine; vs 16b-20a; the request of the demoniac), the original account might read:

They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit. And crying with a loud voice, he said 'What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me'. For he had said to him, 'Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!' And the unclean spirit came out. Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside and the herdsmen fled and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, and they were afraid. And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and all men marvelled.<sup>450</sup>

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

Whilst some commentators consider the location of Gerasa to be untenable on geographical grounds, I consider that the setting of the story was the region of the Gerasenes and that their territory, as was usual at the time, covered a large area. In Mark's representation of the story the possessed man is to be understood as the representative of the Gentile world as a whole. I have described the historical, political and social context of the area and demonstrated that Mark has located this story in an area of Gentile predominance which supported numerous polytheistic religious cults.

I have argued that the historical residue in the Markan text is small in relation to this story, which originated in a setting characterized by a Jewish perspective, and Mark has found it necessary to substantially redact it. Thus the story as it came to Mark from the tradition has Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee, into Gerasene Gentile territory, he heals a demoniac, the event was witnessed by

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<sup>450</sup> Craghan, 'Gerasene Demoniac', 522-536.

herdsmen and there was a positive reaction to the exorcism. The city of Gerasa supported a large military component which Mark probably represents through his redacted destruction of the pigs episode, where the allusion to the oppressive Roman occupation is unmistakable.<sup>451</sup> The Markan evangelist is reminding both Jewish and Gentile readers that the Gospel represents liberation from Roman oppression.

While some healers are regarded as servants of society, a few overstep the bounds permitted and become threats to the stability of a society and I suggest that Jesus' rejection in this story by the onlookers may reflect the fear of persecution suffered by Mark's own community at the hands of the Roman overlords. The story's importance lies in its representation of Jesus' supernatural powers to overcome the demoniac world and the extension of his mission into Gentile territory to communicate that salvation is not only for Israel but also for the Gentiles. Thus the story restates the doctrine of Mark's community. Through Jesus' own command, the cured demoniac is told to spread the good news about Jesus in the cities of the Decapolis.

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<sup>451</sup> Large bodies of troops had to be placed where they could most easily and routinely be supplied.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Aborted Excursion Across the Sea to the Eastern Shore (Mk 6.45-53) and Over Land to the Region of Tyre (Mk 7.24-30)*

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses two of the most puzzling and contentious incidents recorded in the Gospel of Mark (Mk 6.45-53: an aborted sea-crossing to Gentile territory made by the disciples and Mk 7.24-30, a story about a pagan woman who confronts Jesus in Tyre and petitions him as an exorcist). The stories of the aborted crossing to Bethsaida and the Syro-Phoenician woman are both contained within an area of the Gospel which is considered by most commentators to be part of the aetiology of Mark's Gentile mission (Mk 4.35-9.29). They are described as 'geographically and chronologically set apart from his mission to the Jews',<sup>452</sup> and classified as components of the 'bread section' of his Gospel.<sup>453</sup>

In the case of the sea-crossing Mark presents Jesus as a superhuman divine figure who has supernatural powers over the sea, but provokes misunderstanding and confusion on the part of the disciples, οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις (Mk 6.52: for they did not understand about the loaves). I shall argue that this redactional statement made by the evangelist relates back to the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6.30-44), where a Jewish crowd was fed which resulted in a surplus, suggesting that in terms of what Jesus had to offer, there was sufficient to feed the Gentiles.<sup>454</sup> However, Mark portrays to his audience an aversion to the ideology of universalism on the part of the disciples, reflected in their inability to

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<sup>452</sup> Wefald, 'Separate Gentile Mission in Mark', 3.

<sup>453</sup> The bread section, in which most of the pericopae contain some mention of ἄρτος (bread), extends from the feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6.30-44) on Jewish territory and ends with a feeding of the four thousand (8.11-21) on Gentile territory.

<sup>454</sup> For discussion on scholarly exegesis of Mk. 6.52, see S. W. Henderson, "Concerning the Loaves": Comprehending Incomprehension in Mark 6.45-52', *JSNT*, 83 (2001), 3-26.

reach the Gentile city of Bethsaida on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. He intimates that this sea-crossing was aborted (even with the intervention of Jesus) suggesting that the disciples themselves were not yet prepared to undertake a Gentile mission.

In the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, the evangelist places a contemporary, blunt and insulting metaphor on the lips of Jesus to initially reject the woman's request for help: "Ἀφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα, οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν (Mk 7.27: Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs). Later, Mark has Jesus granting the woman's request. I shall argue that this reflects Mark's intention to convey to his Gentile audience the universality of the Gospel message but also illustrates to his Jewish audience his recognition of the temporal priority of Jews before Gentiles (Rom. 1.16; Acts 13.46). I will argue against the supposition that Mark's language places on the lips of Jesus a xenophobic remark and racial antagonism towards Gentile polytheists and that these stories came to Mark from an early tradition but owe their temporal place in the Gospel to a desire on the evangelist's part to represent a turning point in the earthly career of Jesus, whereby he transcends Jewish ethnocentricity to include Gentiles in his mission.

The following chapter will describe the context and setting of the two stories within the Gospel as a whole and the language and style adopted by the evangelist. I will attempt to determine which parts of the written material have been preserved in a form used in the pre-Markan oral or written tradition. Whilst this study focuses on the Markan accounts (see Appendix 13: Greek Text – Mk 6.45-53 and Appendix 14: Greek Text – Mk 7.24-30), the parallels (Mt. 14.22-34 and Jn 6.16-21; Mt. 15.21-28) and several other first century accounts of similar

stories will provide points of intersection to illuminate the text. I will undertake an exegetical survey of Mk 6.45-53 and 7.24-30 and focus on the Markan narrative as it was received by its first-century audience, arguing that both stories represent Mark's attempt to convey the message that Jesus' ministry was a precursor to his own community's Gentile mission.

In relation to the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, I will describe the first century social and religious environment of Tyre, to determine how the setting of this pericope in this particular region may have been received by the early Markan audience and thus what the story would represent in political and cultural terms. I will investigate the evidence to determine what can authoritatively be said with regard to the Syro-Phoenician woman herself and how she would be perceived by Mark's audience, in terms of her social status, interactions with Judaism and religious background. An exhaustive discussion on gender issues is not possible within the limits of the present dissertation. Questions which relate to gender and Jewish ideas of 'impurity', however, will be briefly addressed. In the case of the aborted crossing of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida (Mk 6.45-53), the social and religious environment of Bethsaida is fully discussed in chapter seven (pp. 238-240) when I undertake an exegetical survey of Mk 8.13-9.29 where Mark portrays Jesus and his disciples visiting Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi during their final trip into Gentile territory.

## **5.2 Mk 6.45-53: Aborted Crossing to Gentile Territory**

This section of the Gospel records a confusing account of a boat trip made by the disciples in which they leave Jesus in Jewish territory; set out across the Sea of Galilee for Bethsaida in Gentile territory (Mk 6.45); an unfavourable wind causes difficulty in rowing to their destination (vs 47-50); Jesus, who remained onshore,

dismisses the crowds and prays on a mountain (vs 45-46); supernaturally sees the disciples' plight in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and walks across the lake (v. 48); identifies himself and gets into their boat (vs 49-50); calms the wind; amazes the disciples and the boat subsequently lands at Gennesaret (vs 51-.53).<sup>455</sup> This pericope has much in common with Mk 4.35-41 which describes Jesus and the disciples making an evening crossing of the Sea of Galilee, from west to east (Jewish to Gentile territory); a storm or strong wind blows up (vs 37-39); the disciples are afraid (v. 40-41); Jesus calms the storm (v. 39), and the reaction of the disciples is astonishment (v. 41).<sup>456</sup>

A distinctive theme of Mk 6.45-53 is the astonishing miracle of Jesus walking on the sea. The ability of a divine being to control the sea is a recurring motif in the Jewish tradition (Job 9.8; Ps. 77.19; Isa. 43.16; 51.10) but is considerably more widespread in the Graeco-Roman world.<sup>457</sup> Poseidon, the god of the sea, has control over its forces and in epic poetry has been portrayed as being capable of riding his chariot along its surface.<sup>458</sup> Neptune is portrayed with similar powers,<sup>459</sup> and sea rescues also occur as the result of epiphanies of gods in both classical Greek and Roman narratives.<sup>460</sup> Mark is, therefore, attributing

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<sup>455</sup> Gennesaret is not the name of a village but a 3.5 mile long plain on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, located between Tiberias and Capernaum.

<sup>456</sup> See Q. Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark: Interpretation and Method through the Exegesis of Mark 6.52* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), 268-270, for an impressive historical-redactional study of this verse and 58-67 for discussion on its context.

<sup>457</sup> A. Y. Collins, 'Rulers, Divine Men and Walking on the Water (Mk 6.45-52)', in L. Bormann, *et al* (eds), *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi* (Leiden & New York: Brill, 1994), 214 and Collins, *Mark*, 333.

<sup>458</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, II.13. 23-31 (cited in Collins, *Mark*, 328). In the Roman Near East (on the Phoenician coast and inland) Poseidon was considered to be not so much a sea god as a creator and supreme deity, see T. Kaizer, 'Old and New Discoveries at Palmyra', *Journal of Roman Archaeology*, 21 (2008), 652-664. For discussion on the cult of Poseidon as a Phoenician and Syrian deity, see Teixidor, *Pagan God*, 42-46.

<sup>459</sup> Virgil, *Aen.* V.816-821 (cited in Collins, *Mark*, 328-329).

<sup>460</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 97 and 101 (*Homeric Hymns* XXXIII.12; Aristedes, *Hymn to Serapis*, 33).

god-like qualities to Jesus, which were familiar to both his Jewish and Gentile audience.

In the Greek tradition gods also endow human beings with the ability to have power over the sea.<sup>461</sup> Alexander the Great was reputed to have such powers,<sup>462</sup> along with Apollonius of Tyana (*Vita Apoll.* IV.13) and a Hyperborean, as described by Lucian (*Lover of Lies* X-XIII).<sup>463</sup> Power over the sea in the Graeco-Roman world was also associated with rulers and kings and, ‘Gods, “divine men”, kings, priests, philosophers and magicians were all considered capable of guiding or subduing the forces of nature’.<sup>464</sup> Strelan has convincingly argued that there are obvious similarities in the status and authority of Jesus and that of Julius Caesar as portrayed in Mark. He contends both are represented as ‘powerful men of action, inspired, god-like, commanding and demanding radical obedience from their followers and of persuasive speech’, and that a story of Caesar facing down a storm was ‘widely circulated ... in story telling circles among the masses’.<sup>465</sup> Thus, this theme of a superhuman being walking on the sea would resonate strongly with Mark’s Gentile audience and Collins goes so far as to argue that ‘Gentile Christians, or anyone familiar with such traditions, would associate this story with Greek and Roman backgrounds, even if they had been instructed in the biblical and Jewish analogies’.<sup>466</sup> If Mark’s intention was to attract the attention of his

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<sup>461</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, I.182-184; Seneca, *Hercules furens*, 319-324 (cited in Collins, *Mark*, 329 and 330).

<sup>462</sup> Menander frg. 924K (cited in Collins, *Mark*, 331); W. J. Cotter, *The Markan Sea Miracles: Their History, Formation and Function in the Literary Context of Greco-Roman Antiquity* (PhD. thesis, University of St Michael’s College, Canada, 1991), 298-322.

<sup>463</sup> “There was he travelling through the air in broad daylight, walking on the water, or strolling through fire, perfectly at his ease! What! I exclaimed, you saw this Hyperborean actually flying and walking on water?”

<sup>464</sup> van der Loos, *Miracles of Jesus*, 641.

<sup>465</sup> R. Strelan, ‘A Greater than Caesar: Storm Stories in Lucan and Mark’, *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*, 91 (2000), 166-179, esp. 170, 177.

<sup>466</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 333.

Gentile audience, then recording this supernatural feat of controlling the sea on the part of Jesus would accomplish this goal.

The misunderstanding on the part of the disciples is part of a recurrent theme of incomprehension which Mark weaves through his Gospel and has been described as ‘successive and progressively worsening stages in the relationship between Jesus and the disciples’.<sup>467</sup> Even though they have been given the μυστήριον of the Kingdom of God (Mk 4.11) and a privileged position, they remain ignorant and obtuse.<sup>468</sup> Undoubtedly, the reactions of the disciples are of great importance within the larger narrative and Mark assumes that ‘there are “essential similarities” between the disciples and his audience, so that what he reveals about the disciples may become a revelation about the readers and so enable them to change’.<sup>469</sup> Although this perplexing story has the disciples confused about the identity of Jesus, the Markan text itself appears to formulate the miracle account to suggest to his audience that Jesus is the typical miracle working divine man with whom the Graeco-Roman world was familiar and with whom they could associate.

### **5.2.1 Position and Context of the Story**

The second journey to Gentile territory, the subject of this exegesis, connects with the feeding miracle of the five thousand on Jewish territory (Mk 6.30-44); the four thousand in a predominantly Gentile region (Mk 8.1-10) and the discussion on ἄρτος (8.14-21). The journey begins when Mark has Jesus directing his disciples into the boat, προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν (Mk 6.45: to go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida), again to the eastern, Gentile shore. Their destination

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<sup>467</sup> Weeden, ‘Heresy’, 89.

<sup>468</sup> In relation to commentators’ attention to the incomprehension of the disciples see D. J. Hawkin, ‘The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction’, *JBL*, 91 (1972), 491-500.

<sup>469</sup> Tannehill, ‘Disciples in Mark’, 190-191.

is not immediately reached as, διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρὲτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν (v. 53: when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret).

The disciples do finally complete a boat trip to Bethsaida in Mk 8.22, but several events occur before they are successful. Firstly, Jesus is in conflict with the Pharisees (on the western side of the Sea of Galilee), arguing against the religious laws of purity that separate Jews and Gentiles (Mk 7.1-23) and subsequently Mark continues with the narrative of the Syro-Phoenician woman (vs 24-30). Thus, it appears that Mark is using geography and the chronological order of his narrative to suggest to his audience an element of rejection towards Jesus on the part of his fellow Jews and a trajectory towards a Gentile mission.

### 5.2.2 Mark's Language and Style

Mark is a skilful storyteller but his construction is sometimes clumsy as he endeavours to mould the narrative around the themes he wishes to incorporate and the situation he and his community confront. He characteristically narrates the story from the perspective of a third person omniscient narrator,<sup>470</sup> moving rapidly through the story with dramatic step-by-step accounting, depicting the sea, the wind and the supernatural power of Jesus.

Mark includes his characteristic γάρ clauses (vs 48, 50, 52); καί parataxis (vs 45-53); and the familiar phrases τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ (v. 45; his disciples: cf. Mk 2.15, 16, 23; 3.7, 9; 3.20; 4.34, 35, 40; 5.31; 6.1, 35, 41; 7.2, 17 and *passim*); εἰς τὸ πέραν (v. 45; across to the other side: cf. Mk 4.35; 5.21); καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης (v. 47; and when evening came: cf. Mk 4.35; 11.19; 14.17); ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (v. 53; on the land: cf. Mk 6.34, 47; 15.33). In idiosyncratic Markan style, he

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<sup>470</sup> See N. R. Petersen, "'Point of View" in Mark's Narrative', *Semeia*, 12 (1978), 97-121 and Telford, 'Mark', 207-208.

changes the text from imperfect active indicative singular to aorist active infinitive; ἦθελεν παρελθεῖν (v. 48). The vocabulary is also characteristically Markan and includes: εὐθύς (v. 45, 50; immediately: cf. Mk 1.30, 42; 2.8; 5.29, 42; 6.27, 50; 9.20, 24; 10.52; 14.72); τὸ πλοῖον (v. 45, 47, 51; the boat: cf. Mk 1.19, 20; 3.9; 4.1, 36, 37; 5.2, 18, 21; 6.32, 54 and *passim*); θαλάσσης (vs 47, 48, 49; sea: cf. Mk 1.16; 7.31, 9.42; 11.23); ὄρος (v. 46; mountain: cf. Mk 3.13; 9.2, 9; 11.23; 13.14); ὄχλον (v. 45; crowd: cf. Mk 2.4, 13; 3.7, 9, 20, 32; 4.1, 36; 5.21, 27, 30, 31; 6.34 and *passim*).<sup>471</sup>

Marcus has suggested that there is a chiasmic structure to this passage, which at its midpoint 'highlights the important Markan theme of seeing':

- (a) Jesus makes the disciples get into the boat (v. 45)
- (b) He sees them struggling in their rowing on the sea (v. 48)
- (c) In the fourth watch he comes over to see them (v. 48)
- (b) They see him and are disturbed (vs 49-50)
- (a) He gets into the boat (v. 51)<sup>472</sup>

### 5.2.3 Markan Sources

The action of this story takes place on the Sea of Galilee. Some commentators have argued that this boat trip is the result of the redactor Mark splicing together two previously unrelated pre-Markan pieces of tradition.<sup>473</sup> The problem with the story is that Jesus sends the disciples off to Bethsaida (almost certainly located at *Et Tell* on the eastern Gentile side of the lake),<sup>474</sup> but they arrived in Gennesaret (a

<sup>471</sup> For detailed analysis of the language of the boat trip, see Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 63-68.

<sup>472</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 429.

<sup>473</sup> Achtemeier, 'Toward the Isolation', 89 (1970), 284; Kelber, *Kingdom*, 57-58 and 'The Origin and Function', 91 (1972), 198-221.

<sup>474</sup> R. Arav and R. A., Freund (eds), *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee. Bethsaida Excavation Project, Reports and Contextual Studies*, 2 (Kirksville MO: Truman State University Press, 1999), 150.

plain on the western side and south of Capernaum; cf. *War* III.506, 516).<sup>475</sup> Thus, the position of Mk 6.53 with its reference to Gennesaret seems rather awkward in its current situation and would fit more easily elsewhere. Hooker attributes the geographical confusion in this story to a dislocation of early traditions asserting that the detail in Mk 8.22-26 (a passage only to be found in Mark), where Jesus and his disciples did ultimately reach Bethsaida, originally followed on directly from Mk 6.52 and that Mark inserted the intervening material (Mk 6.53-8.21) from a separate source, thereby causing the geographical difficulty.<sup>476</sup> Other scholars assert that the detail in Mk 6.53 originally concluded the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mk 6.35-44),<sup>477</sup> or suggest displacement of the story from its previous association with the tradition of post-resurrection appearances.<sup>478</sup>

There has been much discussion about the actual geographical location of the disciples' intended destination and many attempts to reconcile Gennesaret and Bethsaida geographically, to either the western or eastern side of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>479</sup> However, the point is that none of the archaeological arguments relating to the exact location of Bethsaida or Genneseret for one site over another removes the incongruity in Mark's Gospel, so the confusion remains.

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<sup>475</sup> Jn. 12.21 indicates that Bethsaida was in Galilee and this has resulted in a search by archaeologists on the western side of the Sea of Galilee for a place with this name.

<sup>476</sup> Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 171.

<sup>477</sup> W. Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 187; T. Snoy, 'La rédaction marciennne de la marche sur les eaux', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*, 44 (1968), 234-236; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 906.

<sup>478</sup> C. H. Dodd, 'The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form-Criticism of the Gospels', in D. E. Nineham (ed.), *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R. H. Lightfoot* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1955; reprint 1957), 9-35. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 230, also noted this possibility. S. Miller has argued that the appearance of Jesus at the fourth watch of the night 'is associated with the resurrection, since Jesus is raised from death before the women arrive in the early morning (Mk 16.2)', *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 103.

<sup>479</sup> C. C. McCown, 'The Problem of the Site of Bethsaida', *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, 10 (1930), 32-58; B. Pixner, 'Searching for the New Testament Site of Bethsaida', *Biblical Archaeologist*, 48.4 (1985), 207-216; R. Arav, 'Bethsaida' in J. Charlesworth (ed.), *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 145-166.

Additionally, there are textual variants that can alter the accepted understanding of the geographical movement in the passage. Surprisingly, no Markan manuscript omits the troublesome phrase, πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν (v. 45), even though it is absent in Matthew.<sup>480</sup> Not all manuscripts include εἰς τὸ πέραν (Mk 6.45: to the other side).<sup>481</sup> There is the possibility, therefore, that the evangelist intends his readers to understand that the disciples were travelling along the edge of the coast in the boat. Additionally, some manuscripts omit καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν (Mk 6.53: and moored to the shore), which could indicate that his intention was to describe Jesus and his disciples subsequently travelling overland to Gennesaret.<sup>482</sup>

Other possible solutions have been posited to overcome the incongruity of setting out for the Gentile city of Bethsaida and arriving at the Jewish plain of Gennesaret. A natural explanation has been suggested whereby the strong wind blew the boat off course, or it was decided by Jesus and his disciples to alter course and disembark at Gennesaret.<sup>483</sup> The argument for this natural solution cannot, however, be maintained as Mark records that the wind ceased (v. 51: ἐκόπασεν) when Jesus joined the disciples, so there should have been no problem in continuing to the original destination, particularly with Jesus now on board who, according to Mark, was able to control the elements of nature through his supernatural ability.

It is clear from the geographical discrepancy that the evangelist has had some difficulty in inserting this pericope into his narrative but, unfortunately, as we have no real evidence of any pre-Markan written source, it is impossible to say

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<sup>480</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 268.

<sup>481</sup> P<sup>45</sup> W f<sup>1</sup> sy<sup>s</sup>

<sup>482</sup> D W Θ f<sup>1, 15</sup>

<sup>483</sup> A preferred solution proposed by Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 329; Gundry, *Mark*, 346.

definitively how the original sequence was configured. Recently and convincingly, Malbon has argued along 'structuralist' lines that the evangelist intended a symbolic interpretation of the passage, which sees the aborted voyage to Bethsaida as obduracy and failure on the part of the Jewish disciples to accept Jesus' mission to the Gentiles.<sup>484</sup> She contends, and I agree, that the material in the Gospel which follows the passage represents Jesus' educating the disciples in preparation for a later mission to Gentiles at Bethsaida.<sup>485</sup> Mark wants his readers to assume that as a result of the contrary wind (a metaphor for the disciples' misunderstanding) the actual landing site turns out to be different from the one originally intended. As is usual with Mark, his description of failure on the part of the disciples is nuanced, possibly with sensitivity towards his dual Jewish-Gentile audience.

The Markan evangelist is thus portraying the disciples as confused at Jesus' instruction to cross over the Sea of Galilee to Gentile territory and the revelation that he wishes to extend his mission to the Gentiles. It has been suggested that '[i]n the ancient world, misunderstanding was recognised as a characteristic human response to divine revelation'.<sup>486</sup> Mark appears to be using this concept throughout the Gospel in relation to the disciples and to the Jewish hierarchy in general. The essential lesson for the disciples is that there is bread for the people on the east, as well as on the west of the Sea of Galilee; for Gentiles, as well as Jews.<sup>487</sup> To reinforce this message, in the intervening period before actually reaching Bethsaida (Mk 8.13), Mark has Jesus arguing against the

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<sup>484</sup> On the missionary nature of discipleship, see E. Best, 'The Role of the Disciples in Mark', *NTS*, 23.4 (1977), 371-401; Tannehill, 'Disciples in Mark', 169-196; J. D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 91.

<sup>485</sup> Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 28-29; 41-42.

<sup>486</sup> D. E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1987), 55-56.

<sup>487</sup> For discussion on discipleship failure, see J. Schreiber, *Theologie des Vertrauens: Eine Redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangelium* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1967), 206-207 and Kelber, *Kingdom*, 45-65.

laws of ritual purity which separate Jews and Gentiles (Mk 7.1-23); travelling to the distant Gentile city of Tyre (24-30); healing a deaf-mute in the Decapolis east of the Sea of Galilee (vs 31-37); miraculously feeding the multitude on the eastern, Gentile shore (Mk 8.1-10); and then, after returning to Dalmanutha (v. 10), setting sail for Bethsaida once more. In support of Malbon's hypothesis, Smith employs literary criticism to suggest that by intercalating the above material the evangelist uses a form of 'plot suspension' and 'temporal deceleration' to hold his audience in suspense.<sup>488</sup>

Achtemeier takes the view that this aborted sea trip (Mk 6.45-53) and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26) were originally juxtaposed and represent traditional material pre-dating Mark's Gospel.<sup>489</sup> The current position of the stories in the Gospel, therefore, has resulted in geographical difficulties that Mark has created himself. However, it is my view that the evangelist was prepared to assimilate these difficulties into his narrative in order to include the material which at this point supports the Gentile orientation of the Gospel. He was also prepared to allow these to stand in order that Mk 6.45-53 would follow vs 35-44 because he wanted to interpret both these miracles in the light of the disciples' obtuseness, emphasised in the Markan redactional v. 52. The evangelist clearly did not regard the inconsistency as important and, therefore, 'topography and theology intertwine'.<sup>490</sup> The principle of *lectio difficilior potior* would suggest that εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαιδῶν stood in the Markan text from the outset as, for someone who was familiar with Palestinian geography, the discrepancy between setting out for Bethsaida (v. 45) and arriving at Gennesaret (v. 53) is so glaring that

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<sup>488</sup> S. H. Smith, 'Bethsaida via Gennesaret: The Enigma of the Sea-Crossing in Mark 6.45-53', *Biblica*, 77 (1996), 349-374.

<sup>489</sup> Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation', 291.

<sup>490</sup> E. S. Malbon, 'The Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee', *JBL*, 103 (1984), 377.

to regard either location as unintentional is to make the evangelist almost unbelievably inept.

#### **5.2.4 Gospel Parallels (Mt. 14.22-34; Jn 6.16-21)**

The versions of this story in the Gospels of Matthew and John are somewhat different from Mark's version, reinforcing Browning's statement that 'although the Gospels may sing in harmony, they do not sing in unison'.<sup>491</sup> Luke does not record this incident on the Sea of Galilee. All three of the Gospels which include the story of the sea trip where Jesus walks on water agree that it was preceded by the Feeding of the Five Thousand (Mk 6.35-44; Mt. 14.15-21; Jn. 6.1-15).

In relation to the crossing itself, Matthew basically follows Mark, though he inserts into the story the additional incident of Peter trying to walk to Jesus across the water (Mt. 14.28-32a) and omits the puzzling element of Jesus' intention καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς (Mk 6.48: and he intended to pass them by). Matthew agrees with Mark that Jesus and his disciples disembarked at Gennesaret (Mt. 14.34) but he does not say that they had been bound for Bethsaida. John states that the disciples were destined for Capernaum (Jn 6.17) and that immediately after Jesus had intervened during the storm they found themselves at their destination and there is no reference to the abating of the wind (vs 21-34). There does appear to be some disagreement in the tradition as to exactly where they landed but if by 'Gennesaret' Matthew is referring to the *plain* of that name (where Capernaum was in the general vicinity), there is no serious discrepancy between the Matthean and Johannine accounts which both attempt to ameliorate the Markan geographical problem. Thus, Matthew appears to have borrowed from

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<sup>491</sup> W. R. F. Browning, *Dictionary of the Bible* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 317.

Mark, but if John were independent of Mark, then this would be evidence that the link between both pericopae was pre-Markan.

### 5.2.5 Markan Narrative

#### **Mk 6.45:**

Καὶ εὐθὺς ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν, ἕως αὐτὸς ἀπολύει τὸν ὄχλον.

***And immediately, he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.***

Mark uses the strong verb (ἠνάγκασεν: the only Markan use) to indicate that the disciples were compelled to get into the boat and go on ahead to Bethsaida. This sets up the situation of separation of Jesus from his disciples. This is only the second occasion on which Jesus removes the group from his presence (Mk 6.7-13 is the first occasion when he sends them on a mission into Jewish territory).<sup>492</sup>

The most natural understanding of the phrase εἰς τὸ πέραν is a crossing from one shore to the other shore; that is certainly what it means in all other instances in Mark (4.35; 5.1-21; 8.13).<sup>493</sup> Thus, Mark has Jesus sending his disciples alone across the Sea of Galilee from the predominantly Jewish, western side to the eastern, Gentile side. It is necessary for him to compel them to do this, suggesting reluctance on the part of the disciples. He alone dismisses (ἀπολύει) the crowd, resolving a narrative tension introduced in Mk 6.36 where the disciples first asked Jesus to dismiss them.

#### **Mk 6.46-48:**

καὶ ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἦν τὸ πλοῖον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ αὐτὸς μόνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους ἐν τῷ ἐλαύνειν, ἦν γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος

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<sup>492</sup> Mark 6.1 indicates that Jesus 'came to his own country; and his disciples followed him' and there he taught in the synagogue, where he was recognised by 'his own people' and rejected (v. 4).

<sup>493</sup> Schreiber, *Theologie des Vertrauens*, 205-207, goes further and considers that εἰς τὸ πέραν functions not geographically but theologically, meaning 'into Gentile territory', whether on the eastern shore (Mk 4.35; 5.1) or the western (Mk 5.21).

ἐναντίος αὐτοῖς, περιὲς τετάρτην φυλακὴν τῆς νυκτὸς ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς.

**After he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them,**

Jesus takes leave of an unspecified αὐτοῖς which most commentators take to mean the ὄχλος from the preceding verse.<sup>494</sup> Guelich, however, suggests the pronoun originally represented the disciples.<sup>495</sup> Mark records Jesus praying alone, an exercise found elsewhere in the Markan narrative (Mk 1.35; 14.35, 39). The reference to evening suggests the passage of time since the feeding of the five thousand in the mid to late afternoon (v. 35) and indicates that the disciples had made scarcely any progress from evening until three in the morning.<sup>496</sup> Mark's intention may have been to suggest to his audience that Jesus' ability to see the disciples in darkness, καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἦν (v. 47: and when evening came), ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης (v. 47: in the midst of the sea) implies supernatural vision (Philostratus *Vita Apoll.* VIII.26). This appears to be the case in Mk 5.30 when Jesus becomes aware that the woman with the haemorrhage has touched him.

Some commentators suggest that παρελθεῖν here belongs to the original version of the story and echoes the revelatory 'passing by' of God (Ex. 33.19-23; 34.6; 1 Kgs. 19.11).<sup>497</sup> The fact that Mark records Jesus' intention to pass by the disciples shows that he had not come to help them but to demonstrate his supernatural powers over the elements. βασανιζομένους (straining; an eschatological term) describes the disciples physical ordeal. Mark may have intended this adjective metaphorically, as a description of the psychological turmoil

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<sup>494</sup> See Taylor, *Mark*, 328.

<sup>495</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 349.

<sup>496</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 142, asserts that the lake could be crossed, even under adverse circumstances, in six to eight hours.

<sup>497</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 907; Nineham, *Gospel of St. Mark*, 184.

of the disciples on being asked to extend the mission to the Gentiles. Here Mark appears to be empathizing with his own audience, some of whom may have been struggling with the concept of inclusion of the Gentiles.

**Mk 6.49-50**

οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμα ἔστιν, καὶ ἀνέκραξαν· πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδον καὶ ἔταράχθησαν. ὁ δὲ εὐθὺς ἐλάλησεν μετ' αὐῶν, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Θαρσείτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβέισθε.  
**but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out; for they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear'.**

The numinous term φάντασμα (not used elsewhere in the New Testament except in the Matthean parallel) denotes a ghost in both Jewish and pagan literature. The term would resonate with Mark's Gentile audience as ghosts were part of the Graeco-Roman cultural milieu.<sup>498</sup> Mark's use of θαρσέω can also be found at Mk 10.49. Mark has Jesus identifying himself with the words, 'It is I' (ἐγὼ εἰμι; literally in Greek 'I am'), which could be a reference to the divine name and a deeper signal of his divinity than simple identification (Jn 18.5-8). Collins suggests that the command, μὴ φοβέισθε (do not be afraid), found also in Dan 10.12, 'is a typical element in an account of an epiphany'.<sup>499</sup> Mark's presentation conjures up an epiphany of Jesus, revealed in supernatural power walking on the water before his disciples as the disciples cry out in terror at the sight of Jesus rather than at the waves.<sup>500</sup> Jesus is portrayed as reluctant to enter the boat, but simply wanting to reveal his true nature to the disciples by conquering the sea.<sup>501</sup> The typical Markan γάρ clause introduces the emphasis that *all* (the disciples) saw him, therefore, leaving no room for doubt and reinforcing the reality of the event to his audience.

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<sup>498</sup> Cicero, *Divination*, 1.57; Suetonius, *Nero* 34; Pliny the Younger, *Letters* VII.27; cited in Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts*, 158, 166 and 316.

<sup>499</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 335.

<sup>500</sup> Dibelius, *From Tradition*, 59.

<sup>501</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 97, defines the miracle as a 'soteriological epiphany'.

**Mk 6.51-52:**

καὶ ἀνέβη πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ λίαν [ἐκ περισσοῦ] ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐζίσταντο· οὐ γὰρ συνήκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη.

***And he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.***

Commentators consider v. 51 to be redactional.<sup>502</sup> The ceasing of the wind is only hinted at in Jn 6.21, whereas Mark indicates that the wind ceases miraculously because of Jesus' mere presence and not some spoken command, as in Mk 4.39. The disciples have watched Jesus feed the five thousand (Mk 6.30-43) and should, therefore, not be surprised to see him miraculously walk on water. In Mk 8.14-21 Mark has Jesus directly rebuking the disciples for their failure to grasp the significance of the feeding of both the five thousand on Jewish territory and the four thousand on Gentile territory. The redactional statement relating to hardheartedness in this context equals a failure to understand. Mark infers that these two miracles of Jesus should have caused the disciples to understand, just as his own Gospel is a didactic instrument aimed at teaching his own audience to understand the implications of the universal message of Jesus.

**Mk 6.53:**

Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωμίσθησαν .

***And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore.***

The use of διαπεράω is rare in the New Testament but it always seems to be used of a crossing from one side to the other (Mk 5.21; Mt. 14.34; Lk 16.26; Acts 21.2). The phrase, καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν suggests that they were still some way off shore and had every opportunity to alter course. Taylor and others consider v. 53 has a traditional base but in its present form is a largely Markan redactional

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<sup>502</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 141; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 79-80.

composition, replete with characteristic Markan vocabulary and intended as part of a summary passage, similar to those elsewhere in the Gospel.<sup>503</sup> The entire unit of vs 53-56 should be assigned to redaction and, therefore, Mark creates the destination discrepancy himself, either accidentally or deliberately to serve his purpose of a planned destination to Gentile territory. Mark goes on to record Jesus as rapidly attracting a following just as soon as he stepped out of the boat, suggesting that he was in close proximity to a population centre.<sup>504</sup>

### **5.2.6 Mk 6.45-53: Summary**

Whilst it is impossible to reconstruct the primitive version of this story, all three Gospels tie it to the feeding of the five thousand, at a high point in Jesus' Galilean ministry. Unlike other miracles of Jesus, where he seeks to help a person or persons in dire need or mortal danger, this miracle is not a 'sea rescue' and occurs even though the disciples do not appear to be in danger. Most commentators would agree that the phenomenon of walking on water does not go back to an historical incident in Jesus' public ministry but that it is a story from the early tradition, probably created by the Jesus movement to induce an epiphanic response to the divine power of Jesus over the elements.<sup>505</sup> Collins has described the creation of this pericope as 'an act of early Christian *mythopoiesis*, the construction of an incident in the life of Jesus that was intended to honour him and to win adherents to his cause'.<sup>506</sup> I agree with her argument and contend this tradition is incorporated into Mark's Gospel to accomplish his agenda of

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<sup>503</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 331; Smith, 'Bethsaida via Gennesaret', 349-374; Schweizer, *Good News*, 143; Kelber, *Kingdom*, 58.

<sup>504</sup> Gennesaret was central to some of the largest towns and villages around the lake.

<sup>505</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 216.

<sup>506</sup> Collins, *Mark*, 332.

representing Jesus as a superhuman divine figure with supernatural power over the elements.

In Malbon's discussion of the Sea of Galilee in Mark, she argues that while 'the sea is a threatening entity [in the Gospel], it is to be mastered, metaphorically, by Jesus' followers as it is mastered spatially by the Marcan Jesus'.<sup>507</sup> Disappointingly, the disciples' determination and confusion is such that they are unable to proceed at that time, even following the epiphanic revelation of Jesus walking upon water and his reconsidered decision to get into the boat with them. The misunderstanding of the disciples is a theme that is progressively developed in the Markan Gospel. It is introduced at Mk 4.13 when they do not understand the parable of the sower; they are then given private instruction (v. 34); the theme gradually intensifies when they are afraid during the stilling of the storm (vs 35-41); they could not understand how Jesus knew the woman with a haemorrhage touched him (Mk 5.31) and they cannot understand why Jesus does not send the crowd of five thousand away (vs 35-36). However, their reluctance is eventually overcome, following a period of teaching and example by Jesus and they ultimately reach the Gentile territory of Bethsaida at Mk 8.22. Mark's portrayal of the obtuseness of the disciples quite possibly reflected misunderstanding on the part of some of his own audience in terms of Jesus' divinity and his call for universalism.

### **5.3 Mk 7.24-30: The Syro-Phoenician Woman**

Mark designates τὰ ὄρια Τύρου (v. 24: the region of Tyre) as the place where Jesus encounters the Syro-Phoenician woman and what follows is a further confrontation with the polytheistic world. We are unable to pin-point the exact

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<sup>507</sup> Malbon, 'Jesus of Mark and the Sea of Galilee', 374.

geographical location of the encounter and, therefore, we must assume that Mark intends it to be somewhere in the vicinity of the city of Tyre. The account of the exorcism of the woman's daughter records a miracle by Jesus but also dramatizes the conflict concerning the place of Gentiles in the early Jesus movement. The impression created by the initial encounter between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician woman is that of Jesus spurning the woman. However, the outcome of the confrontation is portrayed by Mark as a recognition on the part of Jesus that his mission, and by association that of the Markan community, is for both Jews and Gentiles and reinforces the message that 'the power of disease and evil extends over Gentile land as well as over Israel'.<sup>508</sup>

Mark has Jesus leaving Jewish territory and arriving in the region of Tyre where he secretly enters a house (v. 24: cf. Mk 9.30). The evangelist records that a woman hears of his presence, rushes to see him and falls at his feet, begging him to cure her daughter of an evil spirit (v. 25). Mark describes the woman in detail (v. 27), there is an exchange between Jesus and the woman (vs 27-29), Jesus agrees to cure her daughter and the woman returns home to find this has been accomplished (v. 29-30).

This is Jesus' first entry into a predominantly Gentile area since the time he was asked to leave the Decapolis after exorcising the demoniac (Mk 5.1-20). We must make the assumption that Mark's Syro-Phoenician woman came from either the city or region of Tyre, which is situated approximately 40 kilometers south of Sidon. The city is located in modern-day southern Lebanon and during the first century CE it was the leading city of Phoenicia with its farmlands and villages abutting the northern boundaries of Galilee. The evangelist places the woman in a prominent position in the narrative and goes to great lengths to

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<sup>508</sup> Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 90.

inform us that she was a polytheist, by identifying her as Greek, by race a Phoenician, from Syria.<sup>509</sup> The Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman, like the woman with a haemorrhage (Mk 5.25-34), is ritually impure, as is her daughter who is possessed by a πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (v. 25: unclean spirit), yet, despite their impurity, they hope for, and Mark has them obtaining, a healing from Jesus.

The evangelist assigns an elevated social status to the woman. Theissen has argued that the Markan audience of both 'hearers and readers' would consider that 'a "Hellene" was certainly someone above average',<sup>510</sup> and her rhetorical use of the Greek language would define her as a member of the privileged, educated upper-class.<sup>511</sup> To support this assumption, at Scythopolis, 80km south of Tyre, as late as the reign of Diocletian (284 - 305 CE) an official is recorded as translating a homily from Greek into Aramaic, indicating that the simple people did not understand Greek.<sup>512</sup> Additionally, in this story Mark describes the woman's daughter as being thrown onto a grandiose κλίνη (couch),<sup>513</sup> not a κράβαττον (mattress) which the evangelist had used before in a traditional miracle story (Mk 2.4, 9, 12) and in a summary passage (Mk 6.55), which again suggests affluence on the part of the woman. There is thus general scholarly consensus that the Syro-Phoenician woman came from an affluent background and was not representative of the people Mark records Jesus encountering routinely in his ministry.

Mark's account of the exorcism of the woman's daughter is incredible from the perspective of his abandonment of the Jewish social and religious barriers

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<sup>509</sup> G. F. Downing, 'The Woman from Syrophoenicia and her Doggedness; Mark 7.24-31 (Matthew 15.21-28)', in G. J. Brooke (ed.), *Women in the Biblical Tradition* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), 133.

<sup>510</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 71.

<sup>511</sup> 'The coastal Philistines and Phoenicians became Hellenized, at least as far as their upper classes were concerned', Avi-Yonah, *Holy Land*, 213.

<sup>512</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 70, n. 30.

<sup>513</sup> *LSJ*, 961: That on which one lies, couch; used at meals or for a bed. See also W. Barclay, *First Three Gospels* (London: SCM Press, 1966), 123.

which were patent between Jews and Gentiles in the first century CE. Miller suggests that the woman and Jesus 'each represent separate worlds, since they differ in race, social status and gender'.<sup>514</sup> Gender roles in the first century Roman Near East (presumably for all social classes and religious and ethnic groups) 'dictated that no woman should have approached a man not of her family and especially not of her own ethnic group'.<sup>515</sup> The Gentile woman ignores social conventions in order to speak to an itinerant Jewish preacher alone, in a private place. She is ritually unclean on several levels herself and has just left her sick daughter, who was possessed by an unclean spirit.<sup>516</sup>

Myers has suggested that the woman's unconventional behavior, as portrayed by Mark, would have been insulting to Jesus and hence Mark has him initially rejecting her request to heal her daughter.<sup>517</sup> However, this reading does not take into account the positive reaction of Jesus to the woman with the haemorrhage (Mk 5.24-34) who also acted independently by approaching him. Additionally, there is a positive outcome to the Syro-Phoenician woman's story whereby Mark has Jesus praising the woman for her intelligence, Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον (v. 29: For this saying) and proceeds to cure the Gentile child.

Jews in the first century were subject to Pharisaic oral traditions relating to what was clean and unclean and these traditions were later incorporated into the *Mishnah* (pp. 76-78). A brief description of these traditions will enhance our understanding of the Markan audience's perception of this encounter in terms of the social and religious prohibitions against Jesus' interaction with the woman.

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<sup>514</sup> Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 92.

<sup>515</sup> S. H. Ringe, 'A Gentile Woman's Story Revisited: Rereading Mark 7.24-31', *Feminist Companion to Mark* (Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 82.

<sup>516</sup> According to Josephus the ancient purity laws were strictly practiced even during the first century CE (*Ant.* III.258-273; *War* V.227; *Apion* II.103-104) and there is also evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls (*IQSa* 2.3-4; *CD* 4.12-5.17). For general discussion on women and restrictive purity practices, see M. J. Selvidge, 'Mark 5:25-34 and Leviticus 15:19-20: A Reaction to Restrictive Purity Regulations', *JBL*, 103.4 (1984), 619-623.

<sup>517</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 203.

The *Mishnah* has six divisions,<sup>518</sup> containing sixty-three unsystematic legal and extra-legal tractates, loosely based on the Pentateuch and the oral law. One-sixth of the literature is devoted to the priestly purity rules of cleanliness, which the Pharisees, who assumed a dominating position in the life of the Jewish communities, took to be incumbent upon the entire people of Israel, in particular during the period of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the aftermath. The main principles of the system were laid down in Leviticus 12-15 but were later expanded extensively. The basic principle of purity is the antithesis between life and death, holy and unholy, pure and impure, and is further articulated in a concentric hierarchal structure.<sup>519</sup> There is no consistent boundary between the holy and the profane but the strongest forms of impurity are the human corpse, leprosy, discharges from the body (sperm and menstrual blood) and all dead animals that have not been ritually slaughtered. Gentile polytheists, and in this case the Syro-Phoenician woman, represented contamination to a Jew in terms of all of the above.

Within the Fourth Division of the *Mishnah*, *The Order of Damages*, we have *Abodah Zarah*, one of the main texts with regard to relationships with Gentiles. This includes restrictions on times of associations, trade of goods, animals, houses, food, festivals, bathing, gifts, wine libations and proximity to pagan temples. Additionally, in the case of Jews making personal contact with Gentiles, 'a woman should not be alone with them because they are suspect in regard to fornication and a man should not be alone with them because they are suspect in regard to bloodshed' (2.I.II, III). Within the Sixth Division, *Purities*, there are

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<sup>518</sup> (1) *Seeds*: about the offerings which are set apart from the harvest, with an introductory treatise on prayer; (2) *Times*: concerning Shabbat and festive times; (3) *Women*: on marriage and private law; (4) *Lawsuits*: mainly about civil and penal law; (5) *Holy Things*: concerning everything to do with the offerings; (6) *Purification*: on the system of laws of cleanliness (*ibid*, 90).

<sup>519</sup> *ibid*, 95.

seventy-nine separate descriptions of ways in which a woman would be regarded as ritually unclean. Thus, Mark's story of Jesus' personal contact with the Syro-Phoenician woman in terms of Jewish ritual pollution portrayed a significant benchmark in Jesus' own inclusion of Gentiles and points forward to Mark's own community's mission to attract Gentiles to the Jesus movement.

### 5.3.1 Graeco-Roman Background: Region of Tyre

Before communication between the characters in the narrative begins, the evangelist indicates that the woman is a Phoenician born in Syria, thus separated from the Jewish Jesus not only by religion and ethnicity but also by historical hostilities and economic suppression.<sup>520</sup> In order to understand the significance of Mark's geographical cue, in terms of its perception by the Markan audience and in terms of expansion of the Gentile mission, we need to briefly review the historical, social and cultural background of the region of Tyre.

Geographically, Phoenicia consisted of a comparatively narrow strip of high ground and a low and narrower coastal belt on the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>521</sup> It incorporated a line of ancient coastal cities backing onto Mount Lebanon, which from south to north included Akko, Tyre, Sidon, Berytus, Byblos, Tripilos and Aradus.<sup>522</sup> Millar concedes that the extent of the 'hinterland of Tyre remains essentially unknown' but suggests that Tyrian territory covered a large part of the northern half of the Galilean hills 'between the sea, the Leontes (Litani) River in

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<sup>520</sup> The designation of the woman as Greek, means she was a pagan, who was Greek speaking or Hellenic in culture (Nineham, *Gospel of Saint Mark*, 200).

<sup>521</sup> The name Phoenicia may have been derived from 'Phoinix', which means dark red or purple. See B. Oded, 'Israel's Neighbours', in J. Barton (ed.), *Biblical World*, vol. I (London: Routledge, 2002), 499.

<sup>522</sup> During the period of the Persian occupation, because of their naval importance, Tyre and Sidon were expanded southward to include large areas of Galilean fertile land. G. A. Smith illustrates that Tyrian territory is substantially expanded when the reign of Herod Antipas begins (*Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1915], 42-43).

the north and the Huleh Valley to the east'.<sup>523</sup> The evangelist records people of the region of Tyre being able to travel to Galilee and be included in the crowd which follow Jesus (Mk 3.8).

The richness, grandeur, and splendor of Tyre and its kings are detailed in the prophecies of Ezekiel 26-28 and form a strong contrast with the rural Galilean territory where Mark has Jesus conducting most of his mission.<sup>524</sup> Tyre's commercial strength is reflected in the buying power and stability of Tyrian shekels (*didrachma*), the standard currency in which the Jerusalem Temple dues were paid (*m. Bek.* 8.7; *Targ. Ket.* 13.3).<sup>525</sup> Trade included metal and glass works and purple dye.<sup>526</sup> Its narrow rural territory with limited arable land lacked agricultural resource and could not support the population it attracted, leading ultimately to expansionism and exploitation. It had no natural border with Galilee, making it easy for the Gentile Tyrian lands to expand to the south and south-east, at the expense of the Jewish Galilean farming community.

If we now turn specifically to the Syro-Phoenician woman we can explore her cultural background, religious empathies and how Mark's audience would perceive her bold exchange and proposition to a Jewish itinerant rabbi. Mark's designates the woman as a Greek and Syro-Phoenician by birth, part of the Tyrian ethnically

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<sup>523</sup> Millar, *RNE*, 293.

<sup>524</sup> Ulpian said of his native city of Tyre, *ut est in Syria Phoenice, splendidissima Tyriorum colonia, unde mihi origo est, nobilis regionibus, serie saeculorum antiquissima, armipotens, foederis quod cum Romanis percussit tenacissima* (*Dig.* L.15.1: As in Syrian Phoenicia, the most splendid colony of the Tyrians, which is my place of origin, outstanding in its territories, of very ancient foundation, powerful in war, always loyal to the treaty it made with the Romans). Cited in Millar, '*Civitates, liberae, coloniae*', 108 (author's translation).

<sup>525</sup> Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 168; F. Millar, 'Phoenician Cities', in H. M. Cotton and G. M. Rogers (eds), *The Greek World, The Jews and The East*, vol. III (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 38. G. W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge MA: HUP, 1983), 22, n. 38, records that Tyre began minting in 126/5 BCE.

<sup>526</sup> *Nat. Hist.* V.17.76; IX.63. Strabo records that the ubiquitous number of dye-works made the city unpleasant to live in, yet rich through the skills of its citizens (*Geogr.* XVI 2.23).

mixed population and a descendent of ancient enemies.<sup>527</sup> Typically, in the towns and rural territories of the region, there was an ethnic mix with Jews living next to Syrians and Phoenicians where long-standing ethnic, religious and cultural differences pervaded.<sup>528</sup>

The encounter between the Syro-Phoenician woman and Jesus is remarkable in that there is substantial evidence of centuries of hostilities between the Tyrians and their Galilean neighbours on whom they depended for agricultural produce. Whilst the Kingdom of Israel and Tyre initially appears to have conducted a friendly alliance during the times of David (2 Sam 5.11; 1 Kgs. 5.11, 18) and Solomon<sup>529</sup> (1 Kgs. 9.10-12; cf. *Apion* I.110),<sup>530</sup> Antiochus IV Epiphany's accession to the throne of the Seleucid empire in 175 BCE led to the Maccabean revolt which had a profoundly detrimental effect on Jew-Gentile relationships in the region. His determination to Hellenize the religion and culture of the Jewish people led to the successful Maccabean revolt and 'the upsurge of Jewish ethnic pride, in which was fostered a sense of contrariety to Greeks and to their "alien" cultural practices'.<sup>531</sup> The Maccabeans fought widely outside Judaea in areas including Tyre, Sidon and Galilee and Barclay describes atrocities building up 'stores of

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<sup>527</sup> S. Dalley, 'Near Eastern Myths and Legends' in J. Barton (ed.), *Biblical World*, vol. I (London: Routledge, 2002), 41, includes West-Semitic people who had emigrated from Mesopotamia and immigrants from Achaean and Anatolian. Although there were Jews in the region, from an archaeological perspective, no remains of Jewish synagogues have been found 'above a line that runs from Sasa through Baram to Qatzyon' (Z. Ilan, 'Galilee. A Survey of Synagogues', *Excavation and Survey of Israel*, 5 (1986/7), 35-37; cited in Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 167).

<sup>528</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 68.

<sup>529</sup> See 'Eupolemus' in FGrH, Brill's New Pauly, online: [http://www.brillonline.nl.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/subscriber/uid=1522/entry?entry=bnp\\_e405800](http://www.brillonline.nl.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/subscriber/uid=1522/entry?entry=bnp_e405800) (February, 2012).

<sup>530</sup> Nehemiah 13.16 has a reference to men from Tyre bringing fish and other merchandise and selling these in Jerusalem.

<sup>531</sup> J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117CE)*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 246.

animosity which were not easily dispersed and were to fester through subsequent generations'.<sup>532</sup>

In 63 BCE Pompey revised the political divisions in the Roman Near East and Phoenicia was included in the Roman province of Syria (*Ant.* XIV.30-31). Augustus' decision to appoint Herod the Great as client king of Judaea (37 BCE – 4 BCE) created even further tensions and a 'new and more ambiguous relationship developed' due to Herod's inclination to promote the 'aspirations of his Gentile subjects'.<sup>533</sup> Herod Antipas and his successor Herod Agrippa I (41CE – 44CE) were both unable to diffuse the tension and conflict of interests between the citizens of the Phoenician cities and the Jewish people (*War* II.478).<sup>534</sup>

Thus, our perception of Jesus' recorded encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman changes considerably, depending on whether we imagine him in a relatively stable and peaceful environment or in a society marked by both underlying and visible conflicts, as outlined above. Constant land grab, by both peaceful and hostile methods, seems to have been a feature of relations between the two territories due to Tyre's encroachment for the purposes of aggrandizement and Galilee's counter-move 'dependent upon the way the political pendulum was swinging'.<sup>535</sup> When the evangelist portrays interactions between the Jewish Jesus and the Gentile woman, the Markan audience would undoubtedly have brought this knowledge of mutual animosity to their interpretation of the story and considered the interaction between Jesus and the woman to be extraordinary on several different levels. Not least of these would be the removal of the social boundaries of traditional Judaism based on ritual defilement, the willingness of a

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<sup>532</sup> *ibid*, 246.

<sup>533</sup> *ibid*, 250.

<sup>534</sup> Josephus records Tyrian pogroms against the Jews (*Ant.* XIV.313-21; *War* II.478; *Apion* I.70) and Jewish retaliation (*War* II.478, 502, 588).

<sup>535</sup> S. Freyne, *Galilee: From Alexander the Great to Hadrian 323 BCE to 135 CE: A Study of Second Century Judaism* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1980), 115.

Jewish miracle-worker to heal a Gentile child and the assurance that Mark's Gentile audience could be included in a movement which promised healing for all.

### 5.3.2 Evidence of Polytheism in the Region

Nowhere is a nation's individuality expressed more than in its religion. Therefore, we should now turn to the religious life of the area and the polytheism which Mark's early audience associated with the Syro-Phoenician woman and her race. As is usual in the Roman Near East, there appears to have been numerous gods and goddesses worshipped in Phoenicia.<sup>536</sup> Evidence indicates that the Phoenician religion was rooted in the ancient Canaanite cults and may have been influenced by the religions of the Egyptians, Mesopotamians, Syrians and Aegeans.<sup>537</sup> There is no evidence to indicate that the Ptolemies and Seleucids imposed Greek institutions on the city of Tyre or its inhabitants. This is reflected in its coinage, which is evidence of 'the continued attachment of Tyre to its identity as a Phoenician city with a long and glorious history'.<sup>538</sup> The only primary systematic account of Phoenician religion is contained in the cosmogony of Philo of Byblos.<sup>539</sup> Modern studies of this *Phoenician History* regard it as a 'reflection of Greek interpretations of Phoenician religion',<sup>540</sup> and indicate that 'the concerns and beliefs

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<sup>536</sup> For discussion on aniconic (using no images and often simply a stone) representations of gods in Syro-Phoenicia, see M. Gaifman, 'The Aniconic Image of the Roman Near East' in Kaizer (ed.), *Variety of Local Religious Life*, 37-72.

<sup>537</sup> Oded, 'Israel's Neighbours', 504.

<sup>538</sup> Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 215. See also Millar, *RNE*, 289 and Appendix 16: Coins of Tyre Showing Melqart and Astarte. A further example of Tyre's connection with its past is Josephus' indication that he had access to passages from the city's tenth century BCE archives (*Apion* II.18).

<sup>539</sup> Extracts of Philo of Byblos have been preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica*; See 'Philo of Byblos' in FGrH, Brill's New Pauly online: [http://www.brillonline.nl.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/subscriber/uid=1522/entry?entry=bnp\\_e405800](http://www.brillonline.nl.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/subscriber/uid=1522/entry?entry=bnp_e405800) (February, 2012).

<sup>540</sup> Millar, 'Phoenician Cities', 46.

of Philo's age might have significantly shaped the *Phoenician History*.<sup>541</sup> In terms of the cities of the Phoenician coast, Kaizer concludes that 'the Phoenician roots of their divine worlds continued – in different degrees – to be present in the imperial period'.<sup>542</sup>

Josephus (*Apion* I.113) describes a temple at Tyre to Jupiter Olympios dedicated during the time of Hiram (980 – 947 BCE) and there is also numismatic, as well as literary evidence for the cult of Dionysus in Tyre.<sup>543</sup> Oded describes Semitic gods worshipped at Tyre in the Hellenistic period which included *Baal-Shamem*, *Baal-Zephon*, *Baal-Rosh*, *Baal-Lebanon*, *Dagon*, *Adonis*, *Resheph* and *Ashera*.<sup>544</sup> A stone altar base was found in the city with sculptured reliefs on three of its sides showing a sun god (with a radiated halo around his head), a moon goddess (both with mutilated faces) and an eagle with outstretched wings, holding a thunderbolt (the god of the sky) (see Appendix 15: Tyrian Stone Altar Base). It may be that these reliefs represent the triad of Tyre, *Baalshamen*, *Astarte* (*Ashtoreth*) and *Melqart* and thus provide evidence of the survival of non-Greek cults in a Hellenised Phoenician environment.<sup>545</sup> However, evidence suggests that the chief deity of Tyre (designated as 'lord of the city') was *Melqart*,<sup>546</sup> predominant

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<sup>541</sup> A. I. Baumgarten, *The Phoenician History of Philo of Byblos: A Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 5.

<sup>542</sup> T. Kaizer (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Variety of Local Religious Life*, 3.

<sup>543</sup> Freyne, *Galilee and Gospel*, 276.

<sup>544</sup> Oded, 'Israel's Neighbours', 504.

<sup>545</sup> A. Boeckh (ed.), *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, II (Berolini ex Officina Academica, 1843), 2271, cited in Jidejian, *Tyre Through the Ages*, 95, n. 44 (see Appendix 16: Coins of Tyre Showing Melqart and Astarte).

<sup>546</sup> Sartre, *Middle East Under Rome*, 290. R. Turcan records that 100,000 denarii were sent from Tyre to the Tyrians of Pozzuoli for maintenance of their local temple and financing of the ancestral cult and that *Melqart* was worshipped as far afield as Corbridge on Hadrian's wall (*Cults of the Roman Empire*, 170). For full discussion on the cult of *Melqart* at Tyre, see C. Bonnet, *Melqart: Cultes et Mythes de l'Héraclès Tyrien en Méditerranée* (Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 27-114.

as the city god of Tyre from the fifth century BCE to the reign of Septimus Severus (193-211 CE).<sup>547</sup>

It has been suggested that *Herakles* is the Greek interpretation of *Melqart*, and 'the identification is at least as old as Herodotus',<sup>548</sup> who tells us that at the time of his visit during the fifth century BCE, *Melqart* had a temple of great antiquity which contained a large emerald pillar and was built when the city was founded 'twenty-three hundred years previously' (*Hist.* II.44).<sup>549</sup> At the time of Alexander we have evidence that one temple was located on the island and the other on the mainland at Palaetyrus.<sup>550</sup> Lucian, a Syrian rhetorician and satirist, born c. 125 CE, travelled to Phoenicia and mentions a temple of *Melqart* at Tyre (*DDS* 3): 'In Syria too, there are temples which are almost as old as the Egyptian, most of which I have seen [including] the temple of *Herakles* in Tyre – not the same *Herakles* as the one celebrated by the Greeks; the one I mean is much older and a Tyrian hero'.<sup>551</sup>

The chief female deity of Tyre was the Oriental goddess *Astarte* (*Ashtoreth*) who was often associated with Aphrodite,<sup>552</sup> and her worship throughout the Near East is reflected in the Hebrew Scriptures. 1 Kgs. 18.19 indicates she was introduced into Israel by Jezebel, the daughter of the Tyrian king *Ithobalus* (*Ethbaal*) whom Josephus (*Apion* I.123) designates as the high-priest of *Astarte* at Tyre.<sup>553</sup> Jeremiah 44.25 tells us that vows were made to the goddess, incense burned and libations poured. *Astarte* appears regularly on the reverse of the

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<sup>547</sup> From 126/125 BCE to 58/59 CE the city minted silver shekels and half-shekels (*tetradrachms* and *didrachms*) which show the head of *Melqart* wearing the lion skin knotted around his neck with an eagle, see G. F. Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia* (London: British Museum, 1910), 82.

<sup>548</sup> Lightfoot, *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess*, 294. See also Kaizer, 'Introduction', 3.

<sup>549</sup> Cited in Jidejian, *Tyre Through the Ages*, xvii and Millar, *RNE*, 264.

<sup>550</sup> *Quintus Curtius* IV.2.4, cited in Jidejian, *Tyre Through the Ages*, 96

<sup>551</sup> Translation from Lightfoot, *Lucian: On the Syrian Goddess*, 249. Strabo, *Geogr.* XVI.23 also specifically mentions that the Tyrians 'pay extravagant honours to Hercules'.

<sup>552</sup> Kaizer, 'Some Remarks', 180.

<sup>553</sup> Jidejian, *Tyre Through the Ages*, 95, n. 47; 98, n. 65.

coinage of Tyre from 113-112 BCE to the Colonial period (Appendix 16: Coins of Tyre Showing Melqart and Astarte).<sup>554</sup> Roman coins depict a Temple of Astarte at Tyre but thus far excavations have revealed no trace.<sup>555</sup> *Leucothea*, the white goddess, is associated with *Astarte*<sup>556</sup> and there is evidence that she was also worshipped at Tyre.<sup>557</sup>

There is a paucity of archaeological, literary and epigraphic evidence about these cults and the practices associated with them. However, from the available evidence, scattered and inadequate though it is, we can see that the citizens of Tyre showed continuity with their Phoenician past, in language, perhaps in institutions, possibly in some sort of literary tradition, preservation of archives, in a continuous historical consciousness and in its religious identity. The Syro-Phoenician woman would have been perceived by Mark's readers as a follower of one or more of the polytheistic cults. It is implicit in Mark's narrative that she has been unable to obtain help for her daughter through any of these gods and had to resort to the God of Israel and a petition to Jesus to successfully heal her daughter. This may have resonated with Mark's Gentile audience who may also have been seeking an alternative to the Graeco-Roman gods in the form of a human deliverer of sociological or messianic complexion.

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<sup>554</sup> Hill, *Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Phoenicia*, 82.

<sup>555</sup> Ball, *Rome in the East*, 176.

<sup>556</sup> Turcan, *Cults of the Roman Empire*, 141.

<sup>557</sup> Kaizer, 'Some Remarks', 180, n.41 and 'Leucothea as Mater Mutata at *colonia* Berytus: A note on local mythology in the Levant and the Hellenisation of a Phoenician city', *Syria*, 82 (2005), 199-206; J. Aliquot, 'Sanctuaries and Villages on Mt Hermon', 87 and 'Cultes locaux et traditions hellénisantes du Proche-Orient: à propos de Leucothéa et de Méricerte', *Topoi*, 14 (2006), 245-264. Her mythological past included representations as the sea-mew bird and (as both *Helia* and *Ino*) deification by Zeus because of her kindness to Dionysus and Odysseus (R. Graves, *Greek Myths*, vols. 1 & 2 [Barcelona: Folio Society, 15<sup>th</sup> ed. 2003], 151, 160, 214, 655).

### 5.3.3 Position and Context of the Story

The third journey north to the Gentile territory surrounding Tyre starts at Mk 7.24 and is overland. It is a fundamental assumption on the part of New Testament commentators that the aborted sea trip (Mk 6.45-53) clearly signals an intention to visit Gentile territory and likewise, the geographical location of the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, τὰ ὄρια Τύρου (Mk. 7.24: the region of Tyre) is regarded as Gentile territory. As Wefald has convincingly argued and I concur, there are clear, narrative, geographical signals within the text, representing 'Jewish versus Gentile markers and signals'.<sup>558</sup> The intended audience's 'high sensitivity to these signals' would indicate clearly to them at which point Jesus was on Jewish, as opposed to Gentile territory. This is a region where Mark has previously indicated Jesus' fame has spread, and where Gentiles from the region of Tyre ἦλθον πρὸς αὐτόν (Mk 3.8: came to him).

The story is reminiscent of (and follows the positive portrayals of) the healing of the anonymous, ritually unclean woman with the haemorrhage (Mk 5.25-34). Additionally, there are parallels with the story of the raising of Jairus' daughter, in that both Jairus and the Syro-Phoenician woman have sick daughters, both prostrate themselves before Jesus (Mk 5.22; 7.25) and both the healings take place in the home environment (Mk 5.38-43; 7.24, 28-30).<sup>559</sup> Additionally, Mark's audience has recently heard of Jesus' exorcism of demons from a Gentile in the region of Gerasa (Mk 5.1-20). Mark has already indicated that there are ample crumbs left over for the hungry (Mk 6.43) and this motif is later re-emphasized in the feeding of the four thousand (Mk 8.8, 19-21). Mark comments that many can

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<sup>558</sup> Wefald, 'Separate Gentile Mission in Mark', 9.

<sup>559</sup> Miller indicates that in this period in the Graeco-Roman world 'girls were less highly valued than boys and they were more likely to be exposed as infants (*P. Oxy.* 744; Apuleius, *Metam.* 10.23)', *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 94.

be filled (χορτασθῆναι: Mk 6.42; 7.27; 8.4, 8) and this clearly makes reference to, and anticipates, the mission to the Gentiles.

#### 5.3.4 Mark's Language and Style

There have been a variety of forms suggested for this narrative including an apophthegm;<sup>560</sup> an 'uncharacteristic' apophthegm or pronouncement story;<sup>561</sup> a miracle story;<sup>562</sup> an exorcism with the sub-category of a healing,<sup>563</sup> and a distance healing narrative.<sup>564</sup> However, the story itself does not seem to fit any usual formal pattern. The focal point of the story, Jesus' shocking rebuff of the woman's request (vs 27-28) and the thrust-and-parry dialogue between Jesus and the woman is not present in the normal miracle classification. This is also an example of a miracle worked at a distance (2 Kgs 5; Mt. 8.5-13; Lk. 7.1-10; Jn 4.46-54) and thus it lacks the 'marvelling' that generally concludes most miracle stories.

Mark begins the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman with the idiosyncratic usage of Ἐκείθεν, to provide narrative flow to his text and to indicate that he is leaving the western side of the Sea of Galilee in the area of Gesennaret. The story includes stereotypical words and phrases such as καί (vs 24-30: ten occasions); εὐθύς (v. 25: immediately); πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον (v. 25 and unclean spirit: cf. Mk 1.23, 26, 27; 3.11, 30; 5.2, 8, 13; 6.7; 9.25); γυνή (v. 25, 26; woman: cf. Mk 5.21, 25, 33; 10.11; 12.22; 14.3); προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ (v. 25; fell down at his feet: cf. Mk 5.22. 33); δαιμόνιον ἐβάλη (v. 26; cast the demon out: cf. 1.34, 39; 3.15, 22; 9.38; 16.17); καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτῇ (v. 27, 29; and said to her: cf. Mk 5.34, 41; 6.24).

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<sup>560</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 38.

<sup>561</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 347.

<sup>562</sup> Nineham, *Gospel of St. Mark*, 198.

<sup>563</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 54-55, 114, 321.

<sup>564</sup> Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 385-386.

The account follows the regular form of the miracle story, which Ringe has designated as chiasmic in structure:

- (a) Jesus arrives covertly in the region of Tyre (v. 24)
- (b) The woman approaches him (v. 25)
- (parenthetical note on the woman's ethnicity [v. 26a])
- (c) The woman makes her petition (v. 26b)
- (d) Jesus responds (v. 27)
- (e) Focal point - the woman's retort (v. 28)
- (d) Jesus' second response (v. 29a)
- (c) The woman's petition is granted (v. 29b)
- (b) The woman returns home and finds her daughter healed (v. 30)
- (a) Jesus leaves the region of Tyre (v. 31a).<sup>565</sup>

Another Markan theme that weaves through the narrative and is central to this particular story is the evangelist's emphasis on Jesus' victory over demonic powers. Jesus' first action after his baptism is his struggle with Satan (Mark uses the Semitic term Σατανάς: Mk 1.13). This is closely followed by dramatic exorcisms (1.21-28; cf. 5.1-20;<sup>566</sup> 7.24-31; 9.14-29; Rom. 8.38-39) and Jesus' death is portrayed as a scene of cosmic darkness (Mk 15.33). The evangelist describes Jesus on the cross as crying out with φωνῆ μεγάῃ (Mk 15.37: a loud cry), which Mark employs previously to describe the screams of demoniacs (Mk 1.26; 5.7).

### 5.3.5 Markan Sources

Mark relates this story with the focus on Jesus' attitude to the Gentiles and there are details within it that stamp it as primitive. Taylor considers the primitive elements to be the location of the incident, the quest for privacy, the woman's witty reply and the cure. He perceives Aramaic tradition reflected in the vocabulary and

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<sup>565</sup> Ringe's structure in 'A Gentile Woman's Story Revisited', 82.

<sup>566</sup> When the demons cry out, they betray recognition that he is tormenting them before the appropriate time; evidently the period for casting out demons for Gentile victims had not yet arrived.

style but considers Mark primarily has his Gentile readers in mind when recording the saying, 'Let the children *first* be fed'. However, by including the words 'It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to dogs', Mark has 'followed with fidelity an existing tradition'.<sup>567</sup> Commentators have also argued that the story was created by first-generation Christians;<sup>568</sup> that the original story was of a miracle and the dialogue in Mk 7.27-28 was added later;<sup>569</sup> that the miracle story grew out of the dialogue and that the dialogue and miracle story were always together.<sup>570</sup>

Burkill has convincingly proposed the theory that 7.27b (οὐ γὰρ ἔστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν) existed originally as an isolated saying of Jesus, which then developed in the early tradition in four stages. It began as a 'proverbial' saying, to which was added the witty saying of the woman (v. 28), then Jesus is depicted as acknowledging its validity (v. 29). When Mark receives the story (7.25-30), he adds verses 24 and 31.<sup>571</sup> I suggest that the core of the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman was pre-Markan and belonged to one of his sources but the framework (vs 24, 31) which supplies the topographical details of the trip has unmistakable signs of having been composed by Mark himself, bringing it into relation with his general literary and geographical scheme. Therefore, for the Ἐκεῖθεν, the ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν (a Semitism) and the τὰ ὅρια of verse 24a and 31, we can compare 10.1 (a redactional connecting link) where we have the same usages.

A house as a place of concealment (24b) is paralleled in Mk 7.17; the clause 'he would not have anyone know it' is found in Mk 9.30; the vain quest for

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<sup>567</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 347.

<sup>568</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 661; A. Dermience, 'Tradition et rédaction dans la péricope de la Syropénicienne: Marc 7, 24-30', *Revue Théologique de Louvain*, 8 (1977), 15-29.

<sup>569</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. 1951), 145; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 461-471.

<sup>570</sup> Burkill, 'Syrophenician Woman', 24-31. For full discussion on sources, see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 466.

<sup>571</sup> Burkill, 'Historical Development', 175-177.

seclusion in Mk 6.31-34; the εὐθύς of 25a and the πάλιν of verse 31 (Mk 8.1; 10.1) are favourite Markan terms.<sup>572</sup> Additionally, and importantly, the story encapsulates a number of concrete historical details, a trait found nowhere else in the Gospel tradition. Mark specifies that the woman is a Syro-Phoenician, he designates the exact place of the encounter as the region of Tyre (an area synonymous with polytheistic cults), he informs us that the woman is interceding on behalf of her daughter who is possessed by a demon and has Jesus addressing a sincere petitioner uniquely with harsh and insulting language.

Even though the evangelist includes some editorial connecting links, there is a robust argument for historicity in relation to this story, which records a uniquely memorable event in Jesus' earthly mission. However, as the Markan account records, Jesus regularly and freely denounces both individuals and institutions that subjugate the weak. Jesus' initial refusal to the woman probably utilized a saying that was commonly used to condemn the appropriation of resources by the powerful, to the detriment of the Jewish oppressed. Thus, Jesus' use of the offensive word 'dog' (a supreme insult in the east) becomes comprehensible when viewed in the *Sitze im Leben* of the bitter relationship between the Galileans and Tyrians.

In terms of textual variants, most manuscripts omit a reference to Sidon. This may be an accidental omission because of the repetition of καί which immediately follows. Where it has been inserted,<sup>573</sup> this may have been because the cities are often linked or because Jesus later visits Sidon (7.31), or alternatively as Metzger suggests, it is an assimilation to Mt 15.21 and Mk 7.31.<sup>574</sup> In the Hebrew Scriptures a joint reference to Tyre and Sidon is commonly used to

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<sup>572</sup> Burkill, 'Syrophoenician Woman', 24.

<sup>573</sup>  $\kappa$  A B  $f^{1.13}$

<sup>574</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 95.

designate the pagan world (Mk 3.8).<sup>575</sup> The ‘yes’ is omitted in P<sup>45</sup> D W q f 565 b c ff<sup>1</sup> i, and may have been added to the Markan text from the parallel in Mt. 15.27.<sup>576</sup> It also tones down the woman’s perceived impudence.

### 5.3.6 Gospel Parallels (Mt. 15.21-28)

In Matthew’s version of the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, Jesus is accompanied by his disciples; the woman’s request is initially ignored and the disciples complain that she is badgering them (v. 23). Matthew designates the woman as a Canaanite;<sup>577</sup> the saying about the priority of the children (Mk 7.27a) is omitted; Jesus is addressed with the messianic title υἱὸς Δαυίδ in apposition with κυρίε (Mt. 15.22: ‘Son of David’); the woman’s faith is explicitly commended and the disciples, who are present, assert that Jesus ought not to concern himself with the woman. Matthew has Jesus responding to the woman’s petition with an interpretive key and the more appropriate image of a shepherd: ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel’ (Mt 15.24). Only then does he add the saying about food being thrown to the dogs (v. 26). In Matthew the “dogs” in Jesus’ metaphor are still clearly Gentiles and in particular we no longer find it said here that they are to have their turn later. After the woman’s clever repartee, Matthew has Jesus responding by saying that her faith is enormous and informs her that the exorcism is fulfilled (v. 28). In comparison Mark’s account omits any mention of faith and it is the cleverness of the woman’s retort that is the catalyst for the miracle.

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<sup>575</sup> W. L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 258, n. 51.

<sup>576</sup> Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 82.

<sup>577</sup> ‘Canaanite’ (Mt. 15.22) is a redactional substitution by Matthew, who conjures up the idea of the ancient indigenous enemies of Israel and polytheism.

It is, of course, possible that both Mark and Matthew were selectively drawing from a common source or that Matthew used an older version of the story than Mark. However, Bultmann convincingly argues that Jesus' 'discussion with the disciples does not support this, for the heightening of the element of dialogue is normally the sign of a secondary form'.<sup>578</sup> Thus, the most likely situation is that Matthew redacted Mark and the differences outlined above represent his redactional changes. The Gentile orientated Gospel of Luke does, of course, significantly omit the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman (part of the so-called Lukan Great Omission of Mk 6.45-8.26) probably having sensed the problems it raises. In early church tradition (second century Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* II.XIX, XX; III.LXXIII; IV.I; XIII.VII) the woman is described as an affluent proselyte to Judaism, becomes known as Justa and her daughter is named as Bernice (see Appendix 17: *Clementine Homilies*)

### 5.3.7 Markan Narrative

#### **Mk 7.24:**

Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου. καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς οἰκίαν οὐδένα ἤθελεν γινῶναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθη λαθεῖν·

***And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre. And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid.***

As discussed above, v. 24 is normally accepted as a Markan editorial link, complete with Markan phrases and language. There is a very close similarity between this opening statement and Mk 10.1: (Καὶ ἐκεῖθεν ἀναστὰς ἔρχεται εἰς τὰ ὄρια τῆς Ἰουδαίας [καὶ] πέραν τοῦ Ἰορδάνου: And he left there and went to the region of Judaea and beyond the Jordan), suggesting a Markan seam. In the course of the Markan narrative (with the exception of Idumea) Jesus is found to be

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<sup>578</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 38.

operating in all the places mentioned in Mk 3.7f: Galilee in Mk 1.14; Transjordan in Mk 5.1; the regions of Tyre and Sidon in Mk 7.24, 31; the territories of Judaea and Transjordan in Mk 10.1 and Jerusalem in Mk 11.11, thus, according to Burkill, 'anticipating and authenticating the church's mission to the world'.<sup>579</sup>

Mark describes Jesus' departure from the Jewish region around Gennesaret as very deliberate, Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου (24a),<sup>580</sup> with, as we have seen, most commentators agreeing that at this time Jesus moves into Gentile territory.<sup>581</sup> Again, there is no mention made of the disciples playing a part in this miracle but we cannot press this too far as the same construction is found in Mk 2.1, 15; 3.20; 7.17; 9.28 and in these cases Jesus is found not to be alone. The evangelist describes Jesus' covert entry into a house (οὐδένα ἤθελεν γινῶναι), of which nothing is said about the occupants. Commentators have argued that the occupants of the house were Gentile,<sup>582</sup> whilst others have argued that it would be appropriate to conclude that it was a Jewish home in the region.<sup>583</sup> There is, however, no means to corroborate either conjecture. Mark depicts it as a refuge for Jesus (v. 24b), in contrast to the place of his encounter with the Pharisees (Mk 7.1-23) in the preceding pericope where there is controversy. Thus, Mark's motive may have been to move Jesus into Gentile territory, as a result of Jewish opposition and an attempt to distance Jesus from them geographically for a period. However, a Gentile woman is able to find him. Mark thus suggests to his audience that the power of the Gospel transcends Israel and cannot be concealed from the Gentiles.

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<sup>579</sup> Burkill, 'Syrophenician Woman', 33.

<sup>580</sup> The words καὶ Σιδῶνος are omitted by D L W Δ θ 28 565 pc it Sy<sup>s pal</sup>.

<sup>581</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 145; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 383; Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 245-249; Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 259-260; Nineham, *Gospel of Saint Mark*, 197.

<sup>582</sup> M. E. Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 336; Downing, 'Woman from Syrophenicia', 142.

<sup>583</sup> Ringe, 'A Gentile Woman's Story', 85.

**Mk 7.25-26:**

ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ἀκούσασα γυνὴ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἧς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, ἔλθοῦσα προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ· ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦν Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει· καὶ ἠρώτα αὐτὸν ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλῃ ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς.

***But immediately a woman, whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. Now the woman was a Greek a Syro-Phoenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.***

The woman requests that Jesus ἐκβάλῃ (the violent verb, cast) the unclean spirit (πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον)<sup>584</sup> out of her daughter (τὸ θυγάτριον). The Greek suggests she is a child, rather than an adult daughter (v. 25; cf. 5.23). Later in the passage, Mark changes the cause of the girl's affliction from an unclean spirit (v. 25) to demon possession (v. 29, 30). It is probable that the initial unclean spirit was used as a link with the impurity theme of the previous section (Mk 7.1-23).

Mark introduces the woman in great detail by her ethnicity, 'Greek' and by her provenance, 'Syro-Phoenician', all of which establish her identity as a Gentile and not Jewish, nor one of τὰ τέκνα (v. 27: the children).<sup>585</sup> Rhoads argues that the woman's designation is a typical Markan two-step progression in which a general description is followed by a more specific term (Mk 1.32; 6.53; 14.3).<sup>586</sup> She is probably 'a city-dweller, separated from Jesus not only by religion and ethnicity but also by economic loyalty'.<sup>587</sup> Yet she convinces Jesus to heal her daughter, a step beyond the Jewish requirement to show kindness and forgiveness to non-Jews (Lev. 19.33f; Ex 22.21; Deut 10.18f). The Syro-Phoenician woman prostrated herself before him in a deferential position, paralleling the actions of

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<sup>584</sup> This designation later changes to δαιμόνιον in Mk 7.26, 29, 30, in keeping with Mark's style of using δαιμόνιον with ἐκβάλλω and its derivatives.

<sup>585</sup> Marcus argues that the woman is from the Phoenician area of Syria instead of the Coele-Syrian area, or that the description suggests that the woman is a descendant of the intermarriage of Phoenicians with Syrians (*Mark 1-8*, 462-463).

<sup>586</sup> Rhoads, 'Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician Woman', 353.

<sup>587</sup> Ringe, 'A Gentile Woman's Story', 86.

Jairus, the woman with the flow of blood (Mk 5.25-34) and the unclean spirits (Mk 3.11).<sup>588</sup> The fact that Mark records the woman as speaking first is uncommon and unexpected. Josephus allows Rachel at the well to start the conversation but concludes that this is what would be expected from a child (*Ant.* 1.287).

**Mk 7.27:**

καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτῇ, "Ἄφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα, οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν.

***And he said to her, 'Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs'.***

Mark has Jesus interpreting the woman's request for healing in terms of sharing a meal between Jews and Gentiles. He uses πρῶτον to imply that Israel's claim was not exclusive. His reluctant reply is in contrast to other areas of the Gospel where Jesus is reported as responding immediately to the needs of those who ask for healing (Mk 1.29-31; vs 40-45; Mk 2.1-12; Mk 5.24). Miller points out that it is significant that this story deals with the sharing of food between Jews and Gentiles, particularly when it was such a contentious issue in the early church (Gal. 2.1-14; Acts 10).<sup>589</sup>

The pejorative term 'dogs' was generally used by Jews about Gentiles (1 Sam 17.43; 2 Kgs 8.13).<sup>590</sup> Mark's Gentile audience would undoubtedly have considered this a derogatory term.<sup>591</sup> Michel, along with most other commentators, indicates that at the time, as it is in contemporary society, comparison with a dog was insulting and dishonouring (1 Sam.17.43) and 'although there are Jews who

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<sup>588</sup> The strong verb προσπίπτω rather than πίπτω is used, which suggests placing oneself at the mercy of others (*LSJ*, 1523).

<sup>589</sup> Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 99.

<sup>590</sup> Saying 102 of the Gospel of Thomas is a negative, derogatory reference which compares the Pharisees to dogs; 'Jesus said "Damn the Pharisees! They are like a dog sleeping in the cattle manger: the dog neither eats nor [lets] the cattle eat"'. Additionally, reference to a dog sleeping in a manger is a Greek proverb (E. von Leutsch [ed.], *Corpus Paroemiographorum Graecorum*, vol. I [Hildesheim: G. Olms, repr. 1965], 363); cited in Pokorny, 'From a Puppy to the Child', 323.

<sup>591</sup> See list of Graeco-Roman writings with references to dogs, crumbs and tables in Downing, 'Woman from Syrophoenicia', Appendix 2, 147-149.

speak of the faithfulness of the dog, in the main it is regarded as "the most despicable, insolent and miserable of creatures" (*Str.-B.* I.722).<sup>592</sup> Rhoads has argued that the diminutive form here for dogs may simply be to match the word for daughter, also in the diminutive at v. 25.<sup>593</sup> Mark has a fondness for the use of diminutives throughout his Gospel (3.9 πλοιάριον [little boat]; 5.23 and 7.27 θυγάτριόν [little girl]; 5.39 and 7.30 παιδίον [little boy]; 7.27 κυναρίον [little dog] and 8.7 ἰχθύδιον [small fish]).

The woman is clearly defined in Mark's story as a member of the class of persons who contributed to the exploitation of the Galileans. It could be suggested that the description of the Gentiles as 'dogs' (κυνάρια)<sup>594</sup> is indicative of the historical animosities between the Tyrians and Galileans.<sup>595</sup> Additionally, Jews considered dogs to be unclean and it is in relation to ritual impurity that Jews referred to Gentiles as dogs.<sup>596</sup> Scholars have tried to ameliorate the harshness and insensitivity of the designation κυνάρια by emphasising its diminutive form;<sup>597</sup> by directing the word dog away from the Gentile woman and alluding to a 'Hellenized domestic scene'<sup>598</sup> and by ascribing a sense of humour to Jesus' remarks.<sup>599</sup> However, it is most likely that the saying is parabolic and is meant to be taken as irony. Camery-Hoggatt has convincingly argued that '[i]n English, it is

<sup>592</sup> O. Michel, 'κύων' in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, (ed.), Gerhard Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, vol. III (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1964-1976), 1101.

<sup>593</sup> Rhoads, 'Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman', 356-357.

<sup>594</sup> D. W. Thomas indicates that in Phoenician the name בלבאמ corresponds to 'servant of the dogs', as well as faithful dog of the gods ('*Kelebh* 'Dog': Its Origin and Some Usages of it in the Old Testament', *Vetus Testamentum* 10, no. 4 (1960), 410-427. Sayings about 'dogs' in the Hebrew Scriptures portray them as scavengers who lick human blood (1 Kgs. 21.19; 22.38) and the term is used as a metaphor for Israel's enemies (1 Sam. 17.43; Ps. 22.11; Prov. 26.11; Isa. 56.10-11).

<sup>595</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 60-80.

<sup>596</sup> Rhoads, 'Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman', 356; Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 245-249; Kümmel, *Introduction*, 62; Burkill, 'Historical Development', 173; Downing, 'Woman from Syrophoenicia', 137.

<sup>597</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 152.

<sup>598</sup> Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 262.

<sup>599</sup> J. I. Hasler, 'The Incident of the Syrophoenician Woman (Mt. XV. 21-28; Mark VII. 24-30)', *Expository Times*, 45 (1934), 460.

peirastic irony', which he explains comes from *πειράζειν* and 'is a form of verbal challenge intended to test the other's response. It may in fact declare the opposite of the speaker's actual intention'.<sup>600</sup> This turns out to be the case in this pericope, where Jesus removes all barriers between Jews and Gentiles whilst maintaining the prerogative of Israel.

**Mk 7.28:**

ἡ δὲ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε· καὶ τὰ κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν παιδίων.

***But she answered him, 'Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'.***

The woman's retort where she recognises the authority of Jesus is the focal point of this story. Mark uses the biblical formula, ἡ δὲ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει and switches here to the historical present (literally: answered and said).<sup>601</sup> She addresses Jesus as Κυρίε, the sole instance of this vocative of address in Mark's Gospel. However, Burkill contends the meaning is 'Lord' and is intended 'with its messianic import ... a favourite Gentile equivalent of "Messiah"'.<sup>602</sup> There is significance of the use of this title by the Syro-Phoenician woman, who subsequently becomes 'a prototype of the faithful Gentiles'.<sup>603</sup> The term for children, τὰ τέκνα (v. 27) is replaced with τὰ παιδίων (vs 28, 30; cf. Mk 5.40; 9.36-37; 10.13-15). The diminutive form κυναρίοις (literally, 'puppies') should not be seen as a softening or humorous touch as the passage has several diminutives without significant force (θυγάτριον, κυνάριον, ψιχίον, παιδίον).<sup>604</sup>

Thus, despite Jesus' teaching on what is clean and unclean in Mk 7.1-23, Mark has Jesus' initial reaction in this pericope as maintaining the priority of the

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<sup>600</sup> Camery-Hoggatt, *Irony in Mark's Gospel*, 150.

<sup>601</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 469.

<sup>602</sup> Burkill, 'Syrophenician Woman', 33.

<sup>603</sup> J. Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich: Benziger, 1978-1979), 293.

<sup>604</sup> Burkill, 'Historical Development', 170 and Pokorny, 'From a Puppy to the Child', 324.

mission to Israel (Rom. 1.16; 2.10; Acts 13.46; 18.6). The woman appears to feel no insult in the comparison between children of the household and dogs and accepts that she is a dog and must place herself second, after the prior (πρῶτον) feeding of Israel. To some degree πρῶτον blunts the sharp edge by giving the saying a salvation-historical perspective. In some texts she continues with ναί, ... καί ('yes, ... but').<sup>605</sup> She asks to sit under the table and to be fed the crumbs that fall from the meal Jesus has prepared for the nourishment of Israel (Mk 6.31-44) and retorts that when the children are fed, the dogs also incidentally get some small benefit.<sup>606</sup> Burkill congratulates the Syro-Phoenician woman on being able 'to indicate the shape of things to come' and considers that her 'insight was foresight'.<sup>607</sup> The Markan audience would recognise this 'foresight' and relate to the woman's perception that the Gentiles were at that time being included in Jesus' kingdom.

In an urban Greek-speaking setting, the story may have been conceptualised in a Cynic context.<sup>608</sup> In support of this argument (pp. 82-84), I have discussed other areas in the Markan Gospel where Mark makes use of Jesus' use of parable, aphorism and clever rejoinders which appear to be very similar to the evidence we have of the Cynic's way with words. Alternatively, the woman could be quoting a well-known pejorative proverb which is found in Philostratus (*Vita Apoll.* I.19: παραπλήσιόν που τοῖς κυσὶ πράττειν τοῖς στουμένοις

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<sup>605</sup> See p. 178 on textual variants.

<sup>606</sup> Bultmann noted that Jewish apothegms frequently used the question/counter-question format (cited in Telford, 'Mark', 172).

<sup>607</sup> Burkill, 'Historical Development', 162.

<sup>608</sup> Downing, 'Woman from Synophoenicia', 141. Downing argues that this is not an isolated Cynic *topos* in Mark (cf. Mk. 10.17-31) and discusses others in *Christ and the Cynics* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 117-149.

τὰ ἐκπιπτόντα τῆς δαιτός: acting like a dog that feeds on the scraps fallen from a dinner).<sup>609</sup>

**Mk 7.29-30:**

καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ, Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὕπαγε, ἐξελήλυθεν ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον. **30** καὶ ἀπελθοῦσα εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς εὗρεν τὸ παιδίον βεβλημένον ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐξεληλυθός.

***And he said to her, 'For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter'. And she went home and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.***

Her rejoinder dispels his refusal and Jesus accedes to the woman's request with his motivation for granting the miracle: Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον (because of what you have said). As Van Den Eynde points out, 'the Syrophenician woman is the only person who talks to Jesus using a parable'.<sup>610</sup> The woman returns home, finds the girl healed and thrown (βεβλημένον) onto her bed, having been cast there by the demon. Healing at a distance rather than by touch (Mk 1.31; 5.41) or by the word of Jesus (1.25; 5.8; 9.25) was a motif common in the Graeco-Roman world and would be recognisable to Mark's Gentile audience (Philostratus: *Vita Apoll.* III.39). Mark does not preserve details telling us how it was determined that the exorcism was successful. The purpose of the story appears to be not simply to proclaim the healing abilities of Jesus, but to explain the early Church's attitude towards the Gentiles.

**5.3.8 Mk. 7.24-30: Summary**

This story emphasizes the Jewishness of Jesus, within the context of the cleverness of the Syro-Phoenician woman who was considered unclean. I have argued that it is relevant to consider the historical and cultural milieu in which the

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<sup>609</sup> Translation: C. P. Jones (ed.), *Philostratus: Apollonius of Tyana: Books I-IV* (Cambridge MA & London: HUP, 2005), 76-77.

<sup>610</sup> S. Van Den Eynde, 'When a Teacher Becomes a Student: The Challenge of the Syrophenician Woman (Mark 7.24-31)', *Theology*, 103 (2000), 278.

narrative of the Syro-Phoenician woman originates. Economic dependence, political expansionism and cultural distance provided fertile soil for aggressive prejudices on the side of the Hellenized Tyrians and the Jews. Mark's audience would have been well aware that Jesus, an itinerant preacher and exorcist from the Jewish hinterland, would be acquainted with the aggressive prejudices, legitimised by religious traditions, which existed between the Tyrians and his fellow Galileans. There must have been some in the Markan community who shared the sentiments expressed in the early tradition of v. 27. However, the evangelist through his redaction wished to convince them that Jesus was prepared to accept the Gentiles into his fold. This account, therefore, reflects an awareness of the socio-cultural tensions and boundaries of the time (geographical, ethnic, gender, theological) but the implication is that these obstacles could be overcome.

The account of Jesus feeding the five thousand on Jewish territory (Mk 6.35-44) with twelve remaining baskets full of bread (the number for fullness) is reminiscent of the way the Syro-Phoenician woman represents the Gentile mission. The Jews have already been fed but there are left-overs for the Gentiles. The woman, therefore, recognises the divinely ordained division between the Jews and the Gentiles but her determination portrays her as a prototype of the faith of the Gentiles'.<sup>611</sup> Thus, Mark is cleverly identifying with both his Jewish and Gentile audience whereby the Jews maintain their priority and the Gentiles acknowledge this priority.

Many commentators consider that Mark is suggesting that the Syro-Phoenician woman is being tested in this exchange, even though the word faith is not explicit in the text (cf. Mt. 15.28), Mark wants his readers to respond to the story from the perspective of Gentile faith in the recognition of Jesus as the

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<sup>611</sup> Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 90.

supreme healer, even at a distance.<sup>612</sup> Mark has portrayed the Syro-Phoenician woman's humility and determination as a prophetic sign of the faith of the Gentiles which will be realized in the future mission of the Markan community (13.10).<sup>613</sup>

#### 5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have argued that both these pericopae are incorporated into a section of the Gospel where the Gentiles are at the forefront and within a theme where Mark has Jesus 'testing' the faith of his followers. In the case of the disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Mk 6.45-52), they fail the test to recognize an 'epiphany' of Jesus and to take the Gospel message across to the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee, because of their lack of faith. They fail to recognize Jesus as the Messiah who could miraculously walk on the water but ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάνασμά (v. 49: they thought it was a ghost). Mark accents and develops this theme of misunderstanding and failure on the part of the Jewish disciples (cf. Mk 7.18: οὕτως καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀσύνετοί ἐστε; then you also are without understanding?; Mk 8.17: οὐπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε; πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν; Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?; Mk 8.21: Οὐπω συνίετε; Do you not yet understand?).

In comparison, the Syro-Phoenician woman leaves her home and sick daughter to petition an itinerant Jewish rabbi and faithfully accepts that her daughter is healed, even though she is not present at the healing. In both the account of the sea crossing and the Gentile woman, Jesus appears to initially reject those who are in need, challenges the faith of those being tested and ultimately responds positively. However, to the Markan reader this test must have

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<sup>612</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 262-263; Pokorny, 'From a Puppy', 328; Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 52-53.

<sup>613</sup> Miller, *Women in Mark's Gospel*, 101.

conveyed failure on the part of the Jewish disciples, in apposition to the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman who believes Jesus will heal her daughter and accepts without evidence that the exorcism has been successful. The corollary of the woman's faith and brilliant reply is that Mark's readers are encouraged and reinforced in their pursuance of the Gentile mission.

Mark has demonstrated that the mission to the Gentiles was prefigured in Jesus' earthly ministry and even though this was of a limited nature, following the crucifixion Gentiles could become part of God's kingdom. However, it also establishes Jewish priority over Gentiles and ameliorates any outraged sensibilities in Jewish elements of his community. Thus, the inclusion of polytheistic Gentiles in the community of the redeemed is seen to be rooted in the practice of Jesus himself, not in some aberrant after-thought. We shall see that Mark's skilful storytelling is leading the reader even deeper into Gentile territory in v. 31 when he leaves Tyre and heads for the Decapolis.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *Over Land to the Decapolis Region (Mk 7.31–8.10)*

#### 6.1 Introduction

To review, we have seen that the early part of Mark's Gospel is almost entirely devoted to a ministry by Jesus to the Jews, centered upon Galilee, where Mark records Jewish unbelief and opposition towards Jesus (Mk 2.18; 3.20-22; 6.1-6), particularly from the Jewish leaders (Mk 2.23-27; 3.1-6). This hostility reaches a climactic point in the narrative with the intercalation of the story of Herod's execution of Jesus' predecessor, John the Baptist (Mk 6.14-29). Mark then has Jesus negating the issue of Jewish impurity laws as an obstacle to admitting Gentiles into the nascent community, through emphasis on the elimination of ritual cleanliness (Mk 7.1-23). Later in the Gospel, Mark records that God's house has been made fit for the Gentiles (Mk 11.17), they are to be given the vineyard (Mk 12.9) and the Gospel will be freely proclaimed to them (Mk 13.10).<sup>614</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to examine two further pericopae related to Gentile-Jew relations: Mark's portrayal of the healing of the deaf and mute man in the region of the Decapolis (Appendix 18: Greek Text - Mk 7.31-37) and the story of the multiplication of the loaves to feed four thousand Gentiles (Appendix 19: Greek Text – Mk 8.1-10). These two episodes are connected by a temporal indication, 'Ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις (Mk 8.1: in those days) which, together with several clues in the text, have resulted in widespread scholarly agreement that the

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<sup>614</sup> Note Matthew's fuller commentary on the Markan Jesus' statement (12.9) that the owner of the vineyard will give it to 'others': 'For this reason, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (the chief priests and Pharisees) and will be given to a nation (ἔθνος) producing its fruits' (21.43).

evangelist located these miracles on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee in Gentile territory.<sup>615</sup>

I will conduct an historical-critical examination of both pericopae but will begin by briefly describing the first century political, social and religious environment of the Decapolis, the place designated by Mark as the location for both miracles, in an attempt to place his narrative in the setting of its contemporaneous religious environment. I will also investigate the cultural 'climate of credulousness', with a view to determining how Mark's first-century audience may have perceived these miracles in terms of magic and demonology.<sup>616</sup> I will interrogate the evidence to determine whether it is likely that the deaf mute was a Gentile and also to establish the ethnicity of the crowd of four thousand. Both of these determinants hinge upon Mark's topography of Jesus' travels and in the case of the feeding, considerations such as the type of basket used for leftover scraps (the symbolic interpretation of the size of the crowd) and the numbers of the loaves and baskets.

As with the exegesis of previous stories where Mark has recorded interaction with Gentiles, I will discuss whether or not the evangelist has exerted any influence on the formation of these pericopae by redacting an early stage of the tradition. I will describe the context and setting of the two stories within the Gospel as a whole and the language and style adopted by the evangelist. Whilst this study focuses on the Markan accounts and the parallels (Mt. 15.29-31; Mt. 15.32-39; Jn 6.1-14), several other first century accounts of similar stories will provide points of intersection to illuminate the text.

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<sup>615</sup> Boobyer, 'Miracles of the Loaves and the Gentiles', 77-87; Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 39; Gundry, *Mark*, 382; Wefald, 'Separate Gentile Mission in Mark', 12, n. 27; Telford, *Theology*, 99.

<sup>616</sup> Telford, *Theology*, 88-103.

Once again I shall argue that both stories represent Mark's attempt to convey the message that Jesus' ministry was a precursor to his own community's Gentile mission and that there is a progressive and sustained polemic against the Jewish leadership and the Jewish disciples. Almost all recent interpreters of Mark's Gospel recognize that discipleship is a major concern of the evangelist and a deliberate literary and theological construction. Mark acknowledges important positive features of the disciples, including the mystery given to them (Mk 4.11) and Jesus' confidence in sending them out on a mission (6.7-13, 30). However, he also makes clear that they fail to understand the parables of Jesus' teaching (Mk 4.13; 7.18); are baffled by Jesus stilling the sea (4.41); feeding the five thousand (6.32-44) and consider him to be a ghost when he walks on water (vs 51-52). Later in the narrative Mark describes the disciples as exhibiting exclusivist attitudes (Mk 9.38-41) and he ultimately presents them as abject failures (14.10-11, 37-42, 50-52, 66-72).<sup>617</sup> Mark's ideologically motivated inclusion of this motif into the Gospel serves his theological and political agenda to embrace Gentiles and align the attitudes of the disciples with elements in his own community. He constructs his narrative with the aim of criticizing these attitudes.

## **6.2 Graeco-Roman Background: The Decapolis**

The story of the Gerasene demoniac is set in τῇ Δεκαπόλει (Mk 5.20: the Decapolis) and again, following the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, Mark has Jesus taking a circuitous route ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ὁρίων Δεκαπόλεως (Mk 7.31:

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<sup>617</sup> For discussion on obtuseness on the part of the disciples and their role, see J. B. Tyson, 'Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', *JBL*, 80.3 (1961), 261-268; Hawkin, 'Incomprehension of the Disciples', 491-500; Best, 'Role of the Disciples in Mark', 371-401; Tannehill, 'Disciples in Mark', 169-196; Henderson, 'Concerning the Loaves', 3-26.

through the region of the Decapolis).<sup>618</sup> The Decapolis group of nominally ten, loosely associated, provincial Roman cities appears to have enjoyed a degree of special significance and unification during Hasmonean domination and subsequently flourished during the early centuries of Roman rule.<sup>619</sup> The cities, synonymous with Graeco-Roman urban life, had a sizable Semitic population but were predominantly Gentile.<sup>620</sup> They were located in both southern Syria and Judaea, primarily on the east side of the Jordan (apart from Scythopolis,<sup>621</sup> the largest city, which was on the western side).<sup>622</sup> Their territories appeared to cover an area from Scythopolis to Hippos in the north and Philadelphia at the south-eastern corner (see Appendix 1: Map of the Southern Levant in the Roman Period).<sup>623</sup> At different times between the first century BCE and second century

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<sup>618</sup> For data on evidence of milestones on Roman roads and linking Gerasa to other cities in the Decapolis, see S. Mittmann, 'The Roman Road from Gerasa to Adraa', *Annals of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan*, 11 (1966), 65-87; for roads linking the east of the Sea of Galilee with the Decapolis, see B. H. Isaac and I. Roll, 'A Milestone of AD.69 from Judaea: The Elder Trajan and Vespasian', *JRS*, 66 (1976), 15-19. Dion's position in relation to this road network is discussed by A. Kropp and Q. Mohammad, 'Dion of the Decapolis. *Tell al-Ash'arī* in Southern Syria in the Light of Ancient Documents and Recent Discoveries', *Levant*, 38 (2006), 134-135. For a full discussion, including aerial evidence, on Roman roads in eastern Jordan, see D. Kennedy, 'Roman Roads and Routes in North-East Jordan', *Levant*, XXIX (1997), 71-93.

<sup>619</sup> For discussion on the correlation between Decapolis Hellenistic foundation myths and the Second Sophist, see A. Lichtenberger, 'City Foundation Legends in the Decapolis', *Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archaeological Society*, 22 (2004), 23-34, whose catalogue includes only nine cities encompassing Abila, Capitolias, Dion, Gadara, Gerasa, Hippos, Pella, Philadelphia and Scythopolis. On Gerasa, Pella, Capitolias and Dion claiming Alexander the Great as their founder, see Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 14 and Butcher, *Roman Syria*, 113.

<sup>620</sup> Schürer, *History*, vol. II, 125-160.

<sup>621</sup> According to Pliny the Elder the town was once called Nysa (*Nat. Hist.* V.18, 74) and Josephus describes a sacred 'grove' there (*War* II.467 and 471). See also <http://www.livius.org/no-nz/nysa/nysa.html> (February, 2012).

<sup>622</sup> *War*, III.446. Pliny the Elder describes the *Regio Decapolitana* as Gerasa, Scythopolis, Hippos, Gadara, Pella, Philadelphia, Dion, Canatha, Raphana and Damascus (*Nat. Hist.* V.16.74), omitting Abila. In the second century CE the Egyptian-Roman geographer Ptolemy adds the names of nine new cities to those mentioned by Pliny: Abila, Capitolias, Heliopolis, Saana, Ina, Samoulis, Adra and Abila Lysanios (*Geogr.* V.14.18) and described these cities of the Decapolis as being in the local geographical region of 'Coele Syria'. For a discussion on sources, see Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur*, 6-20.

<sup>623</sup> It remains unlikely that Damascus was a member of the Decapolis, largely due to the fact that its location was not contiguous with the other cities, it did not use the Pompeian Calendar and Josephus additionally recorded that Scythopolis was the largest city in the Decapolis (*War* III.446).

CE, as the territory and political configuration of the Decapolis probably expanded, contracted and changed over time, the number of cities included in the designation may have fluctuated. After the fall of Hasmonean rule in 63 BCE, when Pompey conquered the area for Rome and the cities were divided between the two provinces of Syria and Arabia, they ceased to enjoy what was probably a former autonomous status (*Ant.* XIII.395-397; XIV.75-76; *War* I.155-156).

Recent scholarship and excavations have attempted to identify many of the sites of the cities that would have been included in Mark's designation of the 'Decapolis': Abila (Tell Ābel; Qwēlbeh);<sup>624</sup> Adraa (Dar'ā);<sup>625</sup> Canatha (Qanawāt); Capitolias (Bēt Rās); Dion (Tell al-Ash'arī); Gadara (Umm Qēs); Gerasa (Jerash); Hippos (Qal'at al-Husn);<sup>626</sup> Pella (Tabaqāt Fahil); Philadelphia ('Ammān); Raphana (er-Rāfeh) and Nysa-Scythopolis (Bēt Sheān).<sup>627</sup> Where archaeological digs have been undertaken over many years, evidence of first and second century habitation has been comprehensive (Abila, Gadara, Gerasa, Scythopolis, Pella and Philadelphia). However, Dion, Hippos and Capitolias are still largely unexplored. Raphana, though included in Pliny's list, is considered by scholars to be indeterminate in terms of location as there is no extant numismatic evidence from the city.<sup>628</sup> Given Mark's non-specific generalizations of the location of these

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<sup>624</sup> Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 49, indicates that the inhabitants of Abila (not mentioned by Pliny among the cities of the Decapolis) called themselves Σελευχεῖς Ἀβιλινοί in memory of the city's foundation in the Seleucid period.

<sup>625</sup> Ptolemy lists Adraa as being located between Gadara and Scythopolis; Capitolias between Hippos and Gadara; Dion between Pella and Gadara; and Pella between Gerasa and Dion (*Geogr.* V.14, 18). Polybius indicates that Gadara was situated across the Jordan on the mountains east of Scythopolis and Tiberias (*Hist.* V.71). Pliny has Hippos located on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee (*Nat. Hist.* V.18, 74). See Spijkerman, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 48-262, for summary notes on the location of individual cities.

<sup>626</sup> Built after Pompey's conquest, Hippos was a stop for caravans on the road to Damascus (Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina*, 273-277).

<sup>627</sup> Kropp and Mohammad, 'Dion of the Decapolis', 125-144, discuss the locations of the Decapolis cities and, in particular, the location of Dion. Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 51-52 is in agreement with the location of the site being Tell al-Ash'arī.

<sup>628</sup> M. Sartre, 'Les Cités de la Décapole Septentrionale: Canatha, Raphana, Dion et Adraha', *ARAM*, 4, vols. I & II (1992), 139-156.

miracles, we can only presume that he intended that his audience perceived Jesus as healing the deaf-mute and feeding the four thousand, somewhere in the locality of these cities.

None of the meager historical references to the Decapolis from the first century CE onwards explains conclusively what the term 'Decapolis' represented.<sup>629</sup> Josephus records that a collective civic envoy from the cities petitioned Vespasian for permission to punish Jews who had revolted against the Romans in their cities, suggesting some form of association between them (*Life* 410). This led scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to view the Decapolis as a 'confederation' or 'league' of free Roman city-states.<sup>630</sup> This view has lost favour in recent years as it has been shown that there is no real evidence that Pompey created a 'league' or 'confederation' and that 'one of the key elements in uniting the different cities' was 'that they would date their coinage and inscriptions after a new Pompeian era'.<sup>631</sup> There are no references to the designation 'Decapolis' on coins, inscriptions or other sources within the Decapolis region itself. Perhaps the cities were simply geographically contiguous or politically and militarily allied Roman city-states, sharing a common Graeco-Roman heritage and commercial and cultural interests, similar to other cities throughout the Roman provinces.<sup>632</sup>

It is likely that the Decapolis cities ceased to exist as a collective in any form in 106 CE when the Emperor Trajan annexed the Nabataean kingdom to the south and rearranged the Roman Empire's eastern flank by creating the new Roman

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<sup>629</sup> For discussion on Abila, Dion, Gadara, Gerasa, Hippos, Kanatha, Pella, Philadelphia, Raphana, Scythopolis and Damascus, see H. Bietenhard, 'Die Syrische Dekapolis von Pompeius bis Traian', in *ANRW*, vol. II (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 221-261. Also Millar, *RNE*, 408-414.

<sup>630</sup> Schürer, *History*, vol. I, 94-96; Avi-Yonah, *Holy Land*, 81.

<sup>631</sup> Kaizer, 'Some Remarks', 174. Their year one is the Gregorian 64/63 BCE, with the exception of Capitolitas.

<sup>632</sup> Josephus describes the cities of Gadara and Hippos as 'Grecian' (*Ant.* XVII.320).

Province of Arabia (*Provincia Arabia*). At this time the Decapolis cities were incorporated into the Roman provinces of Syria, Judaea and Arabia.<sup>633</sup> Mark, therefore, situates these miracles in an expansive geographical area populated with flourishing towns and cities that had sophisticated political and financial structures, mixed populations and an historical Graeco-Roman cultural heritage.

### 6.3 Evidence of Polytheism in the Region

There is limited evidence to indicate what religious life was like in the individual cities of the Decapolis.<sup>634</sup> The evidence we have is unequally distributed between the cities, with Gerasa taking pole position through its well-preserved archaeological evidence, stereotyped inscriptions, iconography of deities (preserved in reliefs and sculptures) and coinage. Most of the evidence of religious life from the other cities must be derived from images of temples and deities depicted on their minted coins, produced mainly during the second and third centuries CE. The cultic practices celebrated in these temples are practically unknown.<sup>635</sup> However, as Gerasa's history corresponds with that of the other cities, and its cultural life had many similarities during the Roman period, what evidence we have from there is of general importance to the entire Decapolis.<sup>636</sup>

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<sup>633</sup> B. Isaac, 'The Decapolis in Syria, a Neglected Inscription', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 44 (1981), 67-74, argues that an inscription found in Western Turkey which recounts the career of a Roman equestrian officer is evidence that under Augustus, and certainly in the Flavian period, the Decapolis was an administrative unit in the province of Syria.

<sup>634</sup> Lucian's *On the Syrian Goddess* on the temple and cult at Hierapolis is the only contemporary written source on Roman Syria's polytheistic cults. For discussion on the literary sources, see Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 6-20.

<sup>635</sup> Additionally, evidence can be sought from first century gemstones from Gadara and Abila which depict Zeus and Dionysus respectively (Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence', 336-337).

<sup>636</sup> For an overview of religious links between the different Decapolis cities, see Kaizer 'Some Remarks', 173-185.

Religion represented the most common expression of identity on the coins of the Decapolis, having a local-historic relevance for the cities and perhaps playing an active role in spreading and fixing notions of identity.<sup>637</sup> Lichtenberger summarizes this practice as 'diachronically a mirror image of the historic-cultural developments of a society and in the cases of the Decapolis cities these images almost exclusively form the reverse design of coins, so that they were seen as being particularly significant in expressing the identity of a city and thus a particularly suitable means for self-portrayal'.<sup>638</sup> However, these images of the 'main gods or gods of the state' represented the views of those who controlled the city and, therefore, by definition the elite.<sup>639</sup> Despite these difficulties, Kaizer observes that '[t]he parallel second- and third- century 'Roman provincial coinage' of the Decapolis cities, it can be argued, is what makes a study of Decapolis religion in general a valid undertaking, since it is precisely the numismatic evidence that contributes most to the notion of a cultural cohesion between cities which had long (in any case since AD 106, when they were split between three Roman provinces) lost any *real* linking'.<sup>640</sup>

It is not within the scope of this dissertation to discuss and identify the gods portrayed on the coinage of each individual city. However, Appendix 20: Table of Deities Worshipped in the Decapolis as Evidenced by the Early Roman City Coins, shows schematically the representation of deities on the coinage of the Decapolis cities and incorporates much of the numismatic evidence. In general, it shows that the coronated Tyche figure is represented on the majority of the coins of the cities,

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<sup>637</sup> C. Howgego, *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 17.

<sup>638</sup> Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur*, 257.

<sup>639</sup> For discussion on coinage as a form of identity in the eastern provinces, see Howgego, *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces*, 1-17 and Lichtenberger, *Kulte und Kultur*, 2.

<sup>640</sup> Kaizer, 'Introduction', 32.

along with the images of Zeus,<sup>641</sup> Athena, Herakles and Dionysus, who dominates the coins of Scythopolis. Artemis appears only on the coins of Gerasa.<sup>642</sup>

It is apparent from the numismatic, inscriptional and archaeological evidence that in the Roman period the Decapolis cities retained Semitic religious influence alongside their Hellenistic religious beliefs.<sup>643</sup> This is illustrated by the positioning of temples on high places or in prominent positions (Temple of Zeus, Gerasa; Temple of Hercules, 'Ammān and Temple of Zeus Akraios ['the one dwelling on heights'] at Nysa-Scythopolis),<sup>644</sup> enclosed temple compounds and architectural features such as the use of merlons (the solid part of an embattled parapet) and arched doorways.<sup>645</sup> In the second century, Adra'a minted coins showing an aniconic image with a legend signifying it as 'Dusares, god of the Adraënoni' (Δουσάρης Θεὸς Ἀδραηνῶν).<sup>646</sup> In addition to the inscriptions at Gerasa to *Theos Arabikos* and *Pakeidas* (p. 113), an inscription has been found at Hippos-Susita (also in Greek) dedicating an altar to the main Nabataean god *Dusares* and a graffito (written in Thamudic) from the territory of Gerasa, which invokes the Edomite god *Qos*.<sup>647</sup> Evidence has been found to support the idea that the local

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<sup>641</sup> There is an inscription, with a dedication to Titus on an altar to *Zeus Megistos* from Apollophanes, son of Diogenes from Dion, dated 79-81 CE (Kropp and Mohammad, 'Dion of the Decapolis', 139).

<sup>642</sup> For discussion, see C. Augé, 'Divinités et mythologies sur les monnaies de la Decopole', *Le Monde de la Bible*, 22 (1982), 43-47; Kaizer, 'Introduction', 22 and Lichtenberger, 'Artemis and Zeus Olympios', 133-154.

<sup>643</sup> Lichtenberger, *Kult und Kultur*, 357, argues that there is a strong Phoenician influence on the religious life of the Decapolis.

<sup>644</sup> The Temple of Zeus in Gerasa; Temple of Bacchus at Scythopolis; a Roman temple at Abila and coins from Pella show steps leading to a hill top sanctuary (Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence', 333). Tacitus records that Vespasian visited what seems to have been a 'high place' on Mount Carmel (*Hist.* II.78), cited in Millar, *RNE*, 269-270.

<sup>645</sup> Merlons and the Syrian arched doorway are depicted on coins from Capitolias (Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence', 334).

<sup>646</sup> Gaifman, 'Aniconic Image of the Roman Near East', 37-72; Spijkermann, *Coins of the Decapolis*, 60-61, nos. 1-3.

<sup>647</sup> *Theos Arabikos* and *Pakeidas* at Gerasa: Kraeling, *Gerasa*, 384-386, nos. 19-22, and 383-384, nos. 17-18 respectively. Dusares at Hippos: A. Ovadia, 'Was the Cult of the God Dushara-Dusares Practised in Hippos-Susita?' *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, 113 (1981), 101-104, pl. VIII(B). Qos in the territory of Gerasa: E. A. Knauf, 'Zwei thamudische

Semitic gods dominated the rural areas of the Decapolis where sanctuaries have been found.<sup>648</sup> There can be no doubt that in the first century CE the Gentile population of this region enjoyed religious freedom under the Romans and were supported in their pious activities with an infrastructure of temples that accommodated both Semitic and Graeco-Roman deities.

Therefore, the coinage, architecture and inscriptional evidence of the Decapolis cities indicate an eclectic mix of worship of a variety of gods and goddesses. The main source of evidence, the coinage, is mostly representative from the second century onwards but nevertheless is indicative of the polytheistic religious life of the communities. Mark has Jesus continuously engaging with these communities in this section of the Gospel. As discussed in Chapter Three (pp. 80-96) there is evidence to indicate that the polytheistic population in the Decapolis cities were open to new religious concepts. Mark's narrative suggests that crowds of people from these rural and urban communities, at times numbering thousands, were pursuing the Jewish holy man who was able to exorcise demons, heal and perform miracles.

#### **6.4 Mk 7.31-37: Healing a Deaf and Mute Man**

The story of the healing of a deaf and mute man opens with a spatial shift indicating that Jesus has travelled to a new location (v. 31). However, once again, a problem with the journey emerges whereby Mark's comprehensive travel itinerary

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Inschriften aus der Gegend von *Geras*, *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 97 (1981), 188-192.

<sup>648</sup> For discussion on gods worshipped in rural areas of the Decapolis, see Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence', 336. For general discussion on rural sanctuaries in Roman Syria, see A. I. Steinsapir, *Rural Sanctuaries in Roman Syria. The Creation of a Sacred Landscape* (Oxford: John and Erica Hedges, 2005) and J. Dijkstra, M. Dijkstra and K. J. H. Vriezen (eds), *Tall Zara in Jordan: Report on the Sondage at Tall Zara 2001-2002 (Gadara Region Project: Tall Ziraa)*, (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2009).

has inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies.<sup>649</sup> Mark, possibly combining his own and a traditional account, reports that after Jesus visited the region of Tyre (Mk 7.24) he takes an awkward, roundabout route north to Sidon (without any incident occurring there), south towards the Sea of Galilee, then south east through the region of the Decapolis.<sup>650</sup> Mark's narrative has Jesus symbolically embracing the entire Graeco-Roman region surrounding Galilee, ending up in the southeastern quadrant of the Sea of Galilee. Clearly, the destinations are specifically named for the purpose of accumulative emphasis on the Gentile nature of the region.<sup>651</sup>

The evangelist shows an awareness of the Graeco-Roman cities surrounding Galilee but once again draws back from having Jesus entering the cities themselves, ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ὀρίων Δεκαπόλεως (Mk 7.31: through the region of the Decapolis); εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν (Mk 5.1: in the country of the Gerasenes); εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρον (Mk 7.24: to the region of Tyre); εἰς τὰς κώμας Καισαρείας τῆς Φιλίππου (Mk 8.27: to the villages of Caesarea Philippi). Theissen has suggested that Mark's emphasis on restricting Jesus' activity to the periphery of districts surrounding cities 'may be historical'.<sup>652</sup> Lang, on the other hand, concludes that Mark's primary concern is theological in presenting Jesus as the originator of the mission to the Gentiles.<sup>653</sup> Both of these assertions would appear to hold some value as Mark portrays Jesus as peripatetic, covering relatively large geographical areas and attracting huge crowds, which possibly could not be accommodated in the cities. Additionally, Mark's entire Gospel is nuanced in such a way as to resonate with a rural, rather than an urban audience,

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<sup>649</sup> For a summation, see Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 144.

<sup>650</sup> For discussion on the parts of the Decapolis which led to the east shore of the Sea of Galilee, see Lang, 'Uber Sidon', 145-160 and Avi-Yonah, *Holy Land*, 169-170, 174.

<sup>651</sup> Lang, "'Uber Sidon'", 154-160 and Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 245-249, who originates the Gospel of Mark in Syria, near Palestine and claims that the evangelist locates this particular story in the neighborhood of his own community.

<sup>652</sup> Theissen, *First Followers of Jesus*, 47.

<sup>653</sup> Lang, "'Uber Sidon'", 145-160.

and as such his emphasis on the countryside serves his theological purpose to empathise with the rural oppressed and exploited majority.

Mark's itinerary leads the audience to assume that the deaf mute he encounters is Gentile.<sup>654</sup> In the Jewish context there was a perception that Gentiles were associated with deafness (Isa. 42.18-20; 43.8; Mic. 7.16). Mark possibly locates this story of a deaf man in Gentile territory to negate the idea that Gentiles were insensitive to God's word and indeed were in fact accepting of Jesus, in contrast to the Jewish community. An apparently unsolicited contact is made by a group who request healing of a deaf mute, suggesting to the audience that Jesus was already well known in the area (cf. Mk 2.3 where people bring someone to Jesus for healing and Mk 6.54 where they recognise him). The man is taken to one side and Jesus puts his fingers in the man's ears, he spits on his own fingers, applying the saliva to the man's tongue (Mk 7. 33), looks up to heaven, groans and says, '*Eph'phatha*' (v. 34; an Aramaic term meaning 'be opened'). The man's ears are opened, his tongue is released and he speaks plainly (v. 35). The story closes with the Markan motifs of Jesus ineffectively commanding the crowd to keep silent about the miracle (v. 36) and an indication is given of the crowd's astonishment (v. 37).

Thus, Mark continues to develop the motif of Jesus as healer, possessed by the spirit of God (Mk 1.10, 12; 2.8), whose considerable reputation results in crowds following him, many of whom are Gentiles.<sup>655</sup> He miraculously heals fever (Mk 1.30-31); leprosy (1.40-42); paralysis (2.3-12); a withered hand (3.1-5); haemorrhaging (5.25-34); deafness (7.31-37) and blindness (8.22-26; 10.46-52).

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<sup>654</sup> Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 223; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 393; E. LaVerdiere, *Beginning of the Gospel: Introducing the Gospel According to Mark*, vol. I (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 204; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 149; Schweizer, *Good News*, 154.

<sup>655</sup> For discussion on the name of Jesus as 'healer' in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles, see J. Moles, 'Jesus the Healer in the Gospels, The *Acts of the Apostles*, and Early Christianity', *Histos*, 5 (2011), 117-182.

In ancient societies, including the Roman Near East, explanations for the origins of these problems were that they arose from divine or demonic interference and could be resolved by a more powerful supernatural force. Jesus is represented by the evangelist as using primitive healing techniques common to healers in the Graeco-Roman world, such as touching (Mk 1.41; 3.10; 5.27-31; 6.56; 7.33; 8.22) and spitting (7.33; 8.23).<sup>656</sup> In this particular pericope complex procedure are adopted (ones more complicated than the simple laying on of hands) which the crowd had requested. In fact, Mark records the miracle being brought about by the human effort of Jesus, whereby his own body (touch and spittle) had intrinsic healing powers that were acted out through ritual.

Early in Roman history anything viewed as a dangerous and harmful act of magic was banned, except for those defined as traditions of the state or practices of the state's religions.<sup>657</sup> Despite the low regard for magic reflected in many ancient writings in the Graeco-Roman world of the Roman Near East, secret magical rituals which were used to bring about certain events or conditions are accepted by historians and archaeologists to have been part of everyday life.<sup>658</sup> The scholarly consensus strongly suggests that although many testimonies about magic are relatively late, particularly the *Papyri Graecae Magicae* (second to the sixth century CE), the practices they reveal are almost certainly much older. Thus, there is sufficient extant evidence to show that the miraculous activities and methods of Jesus recorded by the evangelist bear sufficient relationship to magical

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<sup>656</sup> For discussion on this implied disdain for the purity laws, see J. Neyrey, 'The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel', *Semeia*, 35 (1986), 91-127, esp. 108.

<sup>657</sup> The Laws of the Twelve Tables (451-450 BCE) were subsequently reinforced by Augustus, who ordered all books on magical arts to be burned. Vespasian also reinstated edicts on magical practices. For full discussion, see G. Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Wellingborough: Crucible, [1985], 1987), 2-4 and R. Cavendish, *History of Magic* (London: Arkana, 1987), 8.

<sup>658</sup> For full discussion, see A. Jeffers, *Magic and Divination in Ancient Palestine and Syria* (Leiden & New York: Brill, 1996).

culture 'to make them understandable in it'.<sup>659</sup> Similarly, the Jewish tradition also defined some practices as 'magic', attributing magical skills to Solomon (*Ant.* VII.45), Egyptian prophets (*War* II.261) and Jesus himself, whose miracles were said to have been executed as a sorcerer (*B. San.* VI.43a).<sup>660</sup>

Although 'magic' is a concept that can only be loosely defined in ancient thinking and viewed both negatively and positively, examples of this phenomenon have been found in a variety of locations and include papyri, curse-tablets, amulets and carved gem stones. There are also several references to magic and sorcery in the New Testament environment (Acts 8.9; 13.6-12; 19.19). The contents of the *PGM* are often written like recipes, requiring certain ingredients and appropriate gestures to achieve the required result, not unlike the series of processes that the evangelist describes Jesus adopting when he heals the deaf mute.

Mark's presentation of Jesus as a miracle worker was not unique. There was a strong belief in the ancient world that divine assistance could be experienced through miraculous events conducted by men with special powers.<sup>661</sup> In the late first century, Vespasian was extolled as a miracle worker who could heal the sick (*Tac. Hist.* IV.81; *Suetonius Vesp.* XIII.7.2-3). In the Jewish milieu, the first century Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa who lived in Nazareth was believed to have miraculous powers (*B. Ta'abut* 24b/25a).<sup>662</sup> In the early second century Lucian describes an exorcist from Palestine with miraculous powers (*Lover of Lies* XIV-XVIII) and a Babylonian who could walk on water (*Lover of Lies* X-XIII). Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyana, reportedly a contemporary of Jesus, was

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<sup>659</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 389.

<sup>660</sup> J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1974), 1, n. 2.

<sup>661</sup> See Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospel*, 151-165 and D. Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 2009), 161-177.

<sup>662</sup> G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Glasgow: Collins, 1977), 72ff, connects Jesus to the charismatic Galilean milieu which surrounds Hanina ben Dosa.

presented as a *theios anēr*, apparently able to heal the sick, raise the dead (*Vita. Apoll.* IV.45) and exorcise demons (III.38-39). Mark's audience, therefore, would be familiar with the concept of miraculous healing, facilitated through a man in touch with the supernatural and the secret.

#### **6.4.1 Position and Context of the Story**

I have argued that Mark progressively focuses on Jesus as embarking on a Gentile mission throughout his material in Chapters 5-8. Mark contrasts the hostility of the Jewish leadership with the positive response of the Gentiles and is at pains to point out that there is no defilement connected with the disregard of Jewish ritual washing and food taboos. This implies that Gentiles and Gentile food can be clean (Mk 7.1-23) and Israel's 'bread' could be shared with the Gentiles (v. 29). The remainder of the narrative in this section of the Gospel is made up of this story of the healing of the deaf mute in the Decapolis and the feeding of the four thousand in Gentile territory. Mark subsequently leads the audience directly to the skeptical request of the Pharisees for a 'sign from heaven' to prove that Jesus is the agent of God (Mk. 8.11-12) and the comments upon the two miracles of the loaves.<sup>663</sup> There is, therefore, at this stage in his sequence of events, manifest Markan interest in showing Jesus' compassionate response to the needs of the Gentiles.

The healing of the deaf mute is paralleled in both form and content with the healing at Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26), both of which are healings by physical means using spittle. Both stories contain commands to silence and vocabulary that overlaps extensively, such that they have been considered variants of the same

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<sup>663</sup> For discussion on the location of this pericope and the blind man of Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26), see J.-F. Baudoz, 'Mc 7, 31-37 et Mc 8, 22-26: Géographie et Théologie', *Revue Biblique*, 102/4 (1995), 560-569, who proposes both miracles were set in Bethsaida in the earliest tradition and the evangelist re-distributes them in his Gospel.

story.<sup>664</sup> These two healings dealing with hearing and seeing frame the material which the evangelist places between them, wherein the disciples are asked 'Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear?' (Mk 8.18).<sup>665</sup> Whilst the two healings have similarities, there is also divergence and it seems more likely that the two episodes came to Mark from the tradition and that he simply used the vocabulary with which he was familiar.

The pericope of the deaf mute appears to fall into five 'unequal sections': Mk 7.31 is transitional and sets the scene; v. 32 is the request for healing (made by others to emphasize the helplessness of the man); vs 33-34 the healing is described (in a chiasmic pattern arrangement used to emphasize the point [A,B,B,C,B,B,A]); v. 35 the cure takes place and vs 36-37 Mark presents the reaction of those present.<sup>666</sup> Scholars have noted a structural parallel between Mk 8.1-30 and Mk 6.31–7.37. The repeated themes and their sectional correspondence are demonstrated below.<sup>667</sup>

Mk 6.31-44	Feeding of the Crowd	Mk 8.1-9
Mk 6.45-56	Crossing of the Sea and Landing	Mk 8.10
Mk 7.1-23	Conflict with the Pharisees	Mk 8.11-13
Mk 7.24-30	Conversation about Bread	Mk 8.14-21
Mk 7.31-36	Healing	Mk 8.22-26
Mk 7.37	Confession of Faith	Mk 8.27-30

#### 6.4.2 Mark's Language and Style

Mark continues with his rapid-paced paratactic style, frequently noted by commentators.<sup>668</sup> He constantly changes the setting of Jesus' ministry throughout Palestine and beyond, suggesting a hurried journey, underscoring the urgency of

<sup>664</sup> Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 213.

<sup>665</sup> Tannehill, 'Disciples in Mark', 184.

<sup>666</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 477.

<sup>667</sup> Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, 269; Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 368-369; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 476. This sequence can also be found in Jn 6 (feeding of the crowd vs 4-14; a boat crossing vs 16-21; dispute with the Jews vs 41-46; discussion on bread vs 50-51).

<sup>668</sup> Kee, *Community of the New Age*, 51.

the Gospel message and establishing its authority in each setting. Mark records a recurring pattern of response towards Jesus found amongst the Gentiles; popularity, some opposition, Jesus' withdrawal from this opposition, healing, increase in the size of the crowds and efforts to keep people silent, which results in the opposite effect.<sup>669</sup>

The form of this narrative has been defined as a miracle story.<sup>670</sup> The language Mark uses here in the healing of the deaf mute (the thrusting of Jesus' fingers into the deaf man's ears, spitting and transferring the saliva to the man's tongue, sighing and the use of exotic terminology) has 'exorcistic connotations' and thus links the story with the first half of Mark's Gospel where exorcism dominates.<sup>671</sup> We find typical Markan use of third person plural verbs and the historical present tense of φέρουσιν (v. 32; cf. Mk 1.32; 4.22; 6.28; 8.22; 9.17, 20; 11.7; 12.16; 13.11; 15.22: often used in the sense 'to bring' rather than 'to carry'),<sup>672</sup> παρακαλοῦσιν (v. 32; cf. Mk 1.40; 5.10, 12, 18; 6.56; 7.26; 8.22: they implore) and λέγει (v. 34: cf. *passim*; he says). The characteristic use of καί parataxis throughout (fifteen occasions in seven verses) and the emblematic Markan language ὄριον (v. 1: cf. Mk 1.28; 5.1, 17; 6.55; 8.10; 10.1); οὐρανός (v. 34: cf. Mk 1.10, 11; 6.41; 8.11; 10.21; 11.10, 25, 30, 31; 12.25; 13.31, 32; 14.62; 16.19) underscores Mark's redactional activity.

However, additionally, there are many words which occur infrequently in Mark's Gospel including μογιγάλος (v. 32: speaking with difficulty); ἀπολαμβάνω (v. 33: take aside); δακτύλος (v. 33: finger); στενάζω (v. 34: groan); Ἐφθαθα (v. 34: be opened; only here in the New Testament); διανοίγω (v. 34: open); ἀνοίγω

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<sup>669</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 70.

<sup>670</sup> Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 227.

<sup>671</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 478.

<sup>672</sup> On the disproportionate use of the word in Mark when compared to the other Gospels, see C. H. Turner, 'Markan Usage: Notes, Critical and Exegetical, on the Second Gospel', *JTS*, 101 (1926), 12-20.

(v. 35: open); δεσμός (v. 35: bond); ὀρθῶς (v. 35: correctly); ὑπερπερισσῶς (v. 37: beyond all measure; only here in the New Testament), which suggest (along with the rather bizarre elements in the narrative) that the pericope is not a pure creation by Mark but is part of the tradition which Mark has inherited.

#### **6.4.3 Markan Sources**

Achtemeier, as previously discussed (pp. 121, 154), argues that the healing of the deaf mute is the final story in the triad of three miracles that belong to the second catena, received by the evangelist from the tradition. He sees this story as a unity, 'unmarked by any editorial activity', with the exception of v. 31 and Jesus' injunction to the bystanders in v. 36 to keep silent.<sup>673</sup> Marcus also detects redactional vocabulary in v. 31 and v. 36b but concludes that the ban on speaking in v. 36a may be part of the tradition inherited by Mark.<sup>674</sup> It is my view that Mark has incorporated and positioned this story into his narrative, adapting it to his own plan for his Gospel. We are unable to determine whether the story came to Mark from the tradition in oral or written form but it is clear from the language and style that Mark has conducted redactional activity upon the pericope at v. 31 and also at v. 36.

#### **6.4.4 Gospel Parallels (Mt. 15.29-31)**

The actual account of this healing has no exact parallels in either Matthew or Luke. Matthew, in fact, fashions instead a general healing summary on a mountaintop. It has been suggested that this motif stood in Mark and was accidentally omitted from early manuscripts.<sup>675</sup> However, Matthew seems to show knowledge of Mark's

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<sup>673</sup> Achtemeier, 'Toward the Isolation', 288-289.

<sup>674</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 478.

<sup>675</sup> Streeter, *Four Gospels*, 413.

material, both in his geographical statement of Mt. 15.29, Καὶ μεταβὰς ἐκεῖθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦλθεν παρὰ τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας (And Jesus went from there and passed along the Sea of Galilee) and in his summary account v. 31, which retains several features of the Markan narrative: ὥστε τὸν ὄχλον θαυμάσαι βλέποντας· κωφοὺς λαλοῦντας, κυλλοὺς ὑγιεῖς καὶ χωλοὺς περιπατοῦντας καὶ τυφλοὺς βλέποντας (so that the throng wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, the lame walking and the blind seeing). There is a non-Synoptic parallel in Jn 9.6-7 where spittle is used by Jesus, but in a slightly different way.

It may be that the deliberate omission of elements of this story on the part of Matthew and complete omission by Luke have been because of the story's 'stressed magical manipulations'.<sup>676</sup> Luke follows the Markan order from Lk 8.4-9.50 but omits the section Mk 6.45-8.26. From Mark's feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6.34-44), Luke moves directly to the confession of Peter and the first passion prediction, picking up Mark's narrative again at 8.27. It is possible that Luke omitted this whole section as he considered it contained duplications of stories, or, as some scholars have argued, he was working from an earlier version of Mark's Gospel that did not include this section.<sup>677</sup> Either way, this miracle conducted in Gentile territory with emphasis on a Gentile healing and related to the ability to hear, serves to reinforce the evangelist's theological purpose of emphasizing that any Gentile impediment to 'hearing' the word of God was removed.

#### 6.4.5 Markan Narrative

##### **Mk 7.31:**

Καὶ πάλιν ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τῶν ὀρίων Τύρου ἦλθεν διὰ Σιδῶνος εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ὀρίων Δεκαπόλεως.

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<sup>676</sup> Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 352; Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 369.

<sup>677</sup> L. Persson, 'The Gentile Mission in the Markan Interpolation (Mark 7:1-8: 26)', *Bangalore Theological Forum*, 12 (1980), 44-49.

***Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis.***

This verse is considered by many scholars to be a Markan editorial transition.<sup>678</sup> Mark's double preposition, used with the genitive, literally means 'in the midst' and is suggestive of a point inland, rather than on the eastern coast of the Sea of Galilee. As early as the third century a papyrus has changed the crucial preposition to Tyre *and* Sidon (Τύρου καὶ Σιδῶνος), which was probably an attempt to solve the geographical problem.<sup>679</sup> The reading διὰ Σιδῶνος is the *lectio difficilior potior* and probably, therefore, the original. Mark previously mentions the region of Tyre at Mk 7.24; Sidon at Mk 3.8; the Sea of Galilee at Mk 1.16 and the Decapolis at Mk 5.20.

**Mk 7.32:**

καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτῷ κωφὸν καὶ μογιλάλον καὶ παρακαλοῦσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα ἐπιθῆ αὐτῷ τὴν χεῖρα,  
***And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hand upon him.***

The verse begins with the impersonal plural φέρουσιν. What is implied about the man here, with the use of κωφός, is speaking with severe difficulty rather than being incapable of speech. It is generally accepted that Mark wants to convey that the man had an impediment caused by being either deaf or hard of hearing. The Markan *hapax legomenon*, μογιλάλον, occurs also in the LXX where it is used alongside κωφός in Isaiah's description of the coming of the Messianic age (Isa. 35.5-6: Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf [κωφός] unstopped.... and the tongue of the dumb [μογιλάλος] will sing for joy). Mark rarely uses Hebrew scriptural proof texts and his use of this language, in this

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<sup>678</sup> Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 94; Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 369; Schweizer, *Good News*, 154; Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 352; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 472.

<sup>679</sup> R. Swanson (ed.), *New Testament Greek Manuscripts: Variant Readings Arranged in Horizontal Lines Against Codex Vaticanus II, Mark* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 112.

particular geographical region, may indicate that the healing of the Gentile man is connected with Isaiah's promised age of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>680</sup> Mark also has Jesus effecting cures by touch with Simon's mother in law (1.31); healing a leper (1.41); raising Jairus' daughter by taking hold of her hand (5.41) and healing sick people by laying his hands upon them (6.2, 5).<sup>681</sup> Some manuscripts read τὰς χεῖρας (hands).<sup>682</sup> Mark is, thus, demonstrating Jesus' special healing power, communicated through touch.

**Mk 7.33:**

καὶ ἀπολαβόμενος αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου κατ' ἴδιαν ἔβαλεν τοὺς δακτύλους αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὦτα αὐτοῦ καὶ πτύσας ἤψατο τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ,  
***And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue;***

The man is taken away to be healed in private, a technique characteristic of Graeco-Roman miracles and found only on one other occasion in Mark (8.22-26).<sup>683</sup> Malbon has convincingly argued that the evangelist is giving 'a cue that we are among Gentiles' by narrating this method of Graeco-Roman healing techniques.<sup>684</sup> Hull has suggested that the verb ἔβαλεν (v. 33: thrust) would correlate with the audience's view of exorcism, whereby the thrusting would allow the evil spirit to 'exit through a particular part of the body, through an extremity, or an orifice', in this case the ear.<sup>685</sup> I agree that there are traces in Mark's pericope of typical magical exorcism language and demonic restraint, particularly in connection with the evangelist's use of ἐλύθη and δεσμός (v. 35). Spitting is not a

<sup>680</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 473; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 149; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 394.

<sup>681</sup> Witherington, *Mark*, 234 argues that the deaf mute was Jewish because the laying on of hands was a Jewish practice.

<sup>682</sup> ⲛ N Δ Σ *et al* and Mt. 9.18 is the only other passage in the New Testament with the singular.

<sup>683</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 477. Contra Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 94, who argued that performance of the miracle, before a select group, is an example of divine epiphany.

<sup>684</sup> E. S. Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener's Guide* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press, 2002), 48.

<sup>685</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 83.

technique that Jewish healers normally used, as saliva was considered a pollutant and contact with fluids that come out of the body can render the recipient ritually unclean. Therefore, the purity code here is cast aside and ritual defilement is perceived (*m. Zavim* 1-5). The evangelist gives no indication of where Jesus spits but it seems likely that he spits on his fingers and then places these on the man's tongue.

The medicinal and magical use of spittle is testified in the primary literature and is described as 'extremely popular as a folk remedy in antiquity and was even highly regarded by "professional physicians"'.<sup>686</sup> The use of spittle by famous personalities also appears to be especially effective. Philostratus relates Apollonius of Tyana using dog saliva to heal a youth (*Vita. Apoll.* VI.43); Suetonius' *Life of Caesar* records Vespasian using saliva to cure a blind man (*Vesp.* VIII.7.2-3) and Petronius' *Satyricon* records the use of spittle in a magical spell (*Sat.* 130.7-131.7). Although Pliny the Elder (23/24-79 CE) argues that the claims of professional magicians were either exaggerated or simply false (*Nat. Hist.* XXV.59; XXIX.10; XXX.1; XXXVII.75), he professes that magic itself contains some truth. Accordingly, he considers the art of the magician is effective in the areas of healing, religion and astrology (*Nat. Hist.* XXX.1). He mentions the use of saliva as a healing property many times in his *Natural History*, including the recommendation that it can calm mental anxiety if placed behind the ear with one's finger (*Nat. Hist.* XXVIII.5), it can stop an epileptic seizure (XXVIII.7), has curative powers when used by those involved in witchcraft (XXVIII.6) and safeguards against serpents (XVIII.7).

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<sup>686</sup> Marcus, *Mark* 1-8, 473.

**Mk 7.34-35:**

καὶ ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐστέναξεν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ἐφφαθα, ὃ ἐστίν, Διανοίχθητι. καὶ [εὐθέως] ἠνοιγήσαν αὐτοῦ αἱ ἀκοαί, καὶ ἐλύθη ὁ δεσμὸς τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλάλει ὀρθῶς.

**and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened'. And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.**

Groaning or sighing was a standard form of ancient magical technique (*PGM* IV.1406, 2492; VIII.768; XIII.946). Scholars have argued that the physical entity of 'groaning' was believed to force out a dumb demon by sympathetic magic,<sup>688</sup> and have assigned it to 'mystical magic',<sup>689</sup> or the drawing in of spiritual power as described in a spell.<sup>690</sup> Mark quotes Jesus as saying the Aramaic word, Ἐφφαθά and adds, 'which means, "Be opened"'. It is probable that many of Mark's hearers or readers were not proficient in Aramaic as several times he uses Aramaic words and feels the need to supply a Greek translation. He does this when addressing those he heals (Mk 5.41; 7.34), when Aramaic names are given (Mk 3.17; 15.22) and Aramaic words are used in the passion narrative (Mk 14.36; 15.34). To a Graeco-Roman audience, who spoke Greek regularly, Ἐφφαθά enhances the atmosphere of mystery and connotes 'the superior power of eastern words of healing'.<sup>691</sup> Mark appears to be emphasizing Jesus' Jewish origins whilst at the

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<sup>687</sup> For discussion on translation of ὀρθῶς, see T. Baird, 'Translating *orthōs* at Mark 7.35', *Expository Times*, 92 (1981), 337-338.

<sup>688</sup> Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 84. See also Schweizer, *Good News*, 154; Nineham, *St. Mark*, 204; Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 475. Contra Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 63.

<sup>689</sup> Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 85-86.

<sup>690</sup> '(Breathe out, in. Fill up); .... (pushing more, bellow-howling.) 'Come to me, god of gods, ...' (Pull in, fill up, shutting your eyes. Bellow as much as you can, then, sighing, give out (what air remains) in a hiss (*PGM* XIII.942-946), cited in Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 371.

<sup>691</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 119 considers the word came to Mark from tradition. Contra Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 355, who argues that this Aramaic word has no significance in this pericope and that additionally the sighing associated with the miracle was simply 'a sign of his [Jesus'] deep feeling and compassion for the sufferer... with which Mark delineates the depths of his emotions'.

same time engaging with Gentile perceptions of ‘barbaric’, powerful and foreign words that were themselves features of magic spells.<sup>692</sup>

[εὐθέως] is missing from a number of manuscripts (κ B D L Δ a1). Mark refers to the man’s ears as αἱ ἀκοαί, which is literally ‘the hearings’ (whereas in v. 33 he refers to them as τὰ ὦτα, the ears). Again, scholars have suggested that the noun δεσμός (v. 35 bond) implies demonic possession as the cause of the deafness and muteness, in accordance with the expression ‘whom Satan has bound’ in Lk 13.16 and with the use of the verb ‘bind’ in Graeco-Roman magical spells which deal with illness and demons.<sup>693</sup> It is interesting that Mark concludes that the cured man then spoke ‘plainly’; a metaphor for the uncomplicated message Mark is conveying to his audience.

**Mk 7.36-37:**

καὶ διεστείλατο αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδενὶ λέγωσιν· ὅσον δὲ αὐτοῖς διεστέλλετο, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον περισσώτερον ἐκήρυσσον. καὶ ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες, Καλῶς πάντα πεποίηκεν, καὶ τοὺς κωφούς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ [τοὺς] ἀλάλους λαλεῖν.

***And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. And they were astonished beyond measure, saying ‘He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak’.***

As discussed above, several scholars convincingly argue that v. 36 is a Markan formulation (cf. διεστέλλετο at Mk 5.43; 9.9).<sup>694</sup> The identity of the recipients of the command, αὐτοῖς, is unclear. This creates a *crux* as in v. 33 Jesus has taken the

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<sup>692</sup> See discussion, Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 85.

<sup>693</sup> G. A. Deissmann, *New Light on the New Testament from Records of the Graeco-Roman Period*, trans. L. R. M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, ET, 1907), 304-330.

<sup>694</sup> Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 213; Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, 74; Achtemeier, ‘Miracle Catena’, 288-289; Schweizer, *Good News*, 154. Contra Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 162, who argues these are from an early tradition (but he does conclude that 36b is redactional) and also Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 374. On the issue of the messianic secret, see the various essays in C. Tuckett (ed.), *Messianic Secret* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) and also Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 129-156.

man away from the crowd to effect the cure.<sup>695</sup> Mark uses emphatic language in relation to the Gentile crowd (ὑπερπερισσῶς, a *hapax legomenon*) to dramatize the positive response to Jesus and thus drawing comparison with Jewish rejection.<sup>696</sup> However, neither this withdrawal from the multitude (v. 33), nor specific instructions to the witnesses to tell no-one (v. 36) prevent the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd to the miracle which is widely acclaimed. The double use of πεποίηκεν (perfect) and ποιῆι (present) adds emphasis. There is no call to silence after the healings described at Mk 1.23-28, 29-31; 2.1-12; 3.1-6; 5.25-34; 7.24-30; 9.14-27; 10.46-52. Mark has previously reported Jesus as commanding secrecy from the unclean spirits (1.25, 34; 3.11); the leper is commanded only to tell the priest of his cure (1.44); the raising of a dead child is to be kept secret (5.43) and the pericope of the healing of the blind man contains a note of secrecy (8.26). Mark's narrative is designed to show that the miracle and, therefore, the miracle-worker cannot be hidden. The motif of astonishment which follows is a stylistic convention of the Graeco-Roman world to accentuate the greatness of the healer.

#### **6.4.6 Mk 7.31-37: Summary**

Hearing in Mark's Gospel is synonymous with understanding the message of Jesus (Mk 4.9, 23; 8.18), something that the disciples seem incapable of and to which the Gentiles are receptive. In this story of the deaf mute, Mark's intention is to appeal to his Gentile audience to open their ears to hear the Gospel and loosen their tongues to preach it. Mark appears to emphasize and engage with Graeco-Roman magical practices, language and symbolism in this setting, which would undoubtedly resonate with his Gentile audience. The proclamation of the Gentile

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<sup>695</sup> Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 150, has even suggested that the command to silence was originally only addressed to the healed man.

<sup>696</sup> Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 151, n. 4.

onlookers that '[h]e has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak', if related to Isa. 35.5-6 and the eschatological age of the Messiah, means that Mark saw its relevance for his Gentile audience, who understood and recognised Jesus' mission, as opposed to the hostility of the Jews and the obtuseness of the disciples, who at this point in Mark's narrative have not yet understood Jesus' mission.

### **6.5 Mk 8.1-10: Feeding of the Four Thousand**

Although there is no place name given within the story of the feeding of the four thousand, the last location Marks reports is the Decapolis (an area dominated by Gentiles), so he probably intends the audience to understand the feeding as occurring in the same region where the deaf mute was healed. This is my understanding and that of the majority of scholars.<sup>697</sup> The episode is linked to the story of the deaf mute by the phrase, ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις (v. 1: in those days) and the further remark, ὅτι ἤδη ἡμέραι τρεῖς προσμένουσίν μοι καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν τί φάγωσιν (v. 2: 'because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat').<sup>698</sup>

In the Markan Gospel there are two almost identical accounts with the leitmotif of feeding crowds in isolated locations (Mk 6.35: ἔρημός; Mk 8.4: ἐρημίας) but with subtle variations that the audience is required, through retrospection, to compare and contrast. It has been convincingly argued that the macrostructure of the Gospel and Mark's recurring interest in the Gentiles, predisposes the audience to associate one feeding as representing provision for Jews and the other feeding a group that is primarily Gentile but includes Jews, which represent the 'integrated

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<sup>697</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 492; Kelber, *Kingdom in Mark*, 59-62; Edwards, *Mark*, 229; Moloney, *Gospel of Mark* 152-153; LaVerdiere, *Beginning of the Gospel*, vol. I, 209.

<sup>698</sup> Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 403 and Gundry, *Mark*, 392 argue a direct link, whereas Hooker, *A Commentary*, 188, finds only a tenuous connection.

inclusive Christian community of Mark's own time'.<sup>699</sup> A comparison between the two stories brings out their respective Jewish and Gentile features.

The first feeding story of five thousand people (Mk 6.30-44) follows a section in which Jesus has encountered the unbelief of his own village (vs 1-6) and has sent the disciples out on a mission (vs 7-13, 30-31). There is also an intercalation on the death of John the Baptist (vs 14-29). The topographical detail and pointers within the narrative lead scholars to the conclusion that the feeding of the five thousand is situated in a Jewish milieu on the western side of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>700</sup> Mark records Jesus giving direction to the disciples in relation to the sitting arrangements and assembly of the crowd; ἀνακλῖναι πάντας συμπόσια συμπόσια (v. 39: literally eating 'group by group') and πρασιαὶ πρασιαὶ κατὰ ἑκατὸν καὶ κατὰ πεντήκοντα (v. 40: so they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties [cf. Deut. 1.15]). The nature of this miraculous feeding in Jewish territory has been assigned Passover/Exodus features.<sup>701</sup> This view is substantiated by the expression, ἐπὶ τῷ χλωρῷ χόρτῳ (v. 39: upon the green grass) which follows Ps. 23.2, evoking the activity of sheep/shepherd and the crowd being described as, ὅτι ἦσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα (v. 34: like sheep without a shepherd), a description appropriate to a Jewish crowd (cf. Num 27.17; 1 Kgs. 22.17; Isa. 40.11; Ezek. 34.5, 23; Jer. 23; Zech. 11.17). Mark portrays the role of the disciples as being commissioned to feed the people (v. 37), to look for food (v. 38), to settle the crowd down (v. 39) and to distribute the bread (v. 41). They had previously

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<sup>699</sup> Boring, *Mark: A Commentary*, 219. Also, Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, 274, 357, who argues that the location of the second feeding was specifically the 'Gentile hill country north-east of the lake' and that the configuration of the groups has, since the time of Augustine, been designated as Jews for the first feeding and Gentiles for the second. Contra Schweizer, *Good News*, 156, who argued Mark does not suggest that the second feeding took place on Gentile territory.

<sup>700</sup> Some commentators consider that both feedings were on the eastern side of the lake for Gentile crowds. See Boobyer, 'Miracles of the Loaves', 77-87.

<sup>701</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 408.

motioned to dismiss the crowd and intimated they could go themselves to buy bread (v. 36). These indicators suggest to Mark's audience that the disciples had no idea of the miracle to come. Following the feeding, there is found to be an excess of food, suggesting to the Markan audience that there was sufficient remaining to feed others, *viz.* the Gentiles.<sup>702</sup>

The second feeding story of the four thousand has a less elaborate setting in terms of the description of the seating arrangement of the crowd, καὶ παραγγέλλει τῷ ὄχλῳ ἀναπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς (v. 6: and he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground). Mark records that the crowd had been listening to Jesus for three days, without eating. In the first feeding of the five thousand, Mark tells us that Jesus ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτούς (v. 34 had compassion on them) because of their lack of direction. In the second feeding of the four thousand, Jesus' compassion is now directed to the specific, physical lack of food: καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν τί φάγωσιν (Mk 8.2: and have nothing to eat) and there is no criticism directed to the Gentiles in relation to a lack of leadership. This second account also reduces, however slightly, the extravagance of the first. Five thousand are fed in Jewish territory with twelve baskets of fragments remaining and four thousand are fed in Gentile territory, where seven baskets of fragments are gathered. Mark's narrative appears to indicate that there is an element of resistance on the part of the Jewish disciples: καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι Πόθεν τούτους δυνήσεται τις ὧδε χορτάσαι ἄρτων ἐπ' ἔρημίας; (Mk 8.4: And his disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?'). This contrasts with the first (Jewish) feeding where they volunteered to go and buy bread for the Jewish crowd. This gesture, one notes, is omitted in the second Gentile feeding.

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<sup>702</sup> For discussion on scholarly exegesis of Mk. 6.52, see Henderson, 'Concerning the Loaves', 3-26.

### 6.5.1 Position and Context of the Story

We have seen that the feeding of the four thousand follows a journey begun in Mk 7.24 to Tyre and Sidon to heal the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter. The preceding scene contained the long controversy with the Pharisees over cultic purity and dietary laws (Mk 7.1-21), culminating in the radical declaration καθαρίζων πάντα τὰ βρώματα (v. 19: all foods are clean or so making all foods clean). The encounter with the Greek woman in Mk 7.24-30, where her faith overcomes the 'children first' principle (v. 27), clearly shows that Mark sees this entire section as a portent of the Gentile mission that subsequently includes the healing of the deaf mute (Mk 7.31-37), the feeding of the four thousand (Mk 8.1-10), the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-30) and the healing of a boy with an unclean spirit at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 9.14-29).

### 6.5.2 Mark's Language and Style

Scholars have defined this as a miracle story.<sup>703</sup> Mark's customary καί parataxis is found on eighteen occasions in these ten verses. There is evidence of Mark's familiar language: Ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις (v. 1; cf. 13.17, 19, 20, 24; 15.29: in those days); πάλιν (v. 1; *passim*: again); ὄχλος (vs 1, 2, 6; cf. *passim*: crowd); ἐσθίω (vs 1, 2; cf. *passim*: eat); προσκαλέομαι (v. 1; cf. 1.3; 6.7; 10.49; 12.43: call); σπλαγχνίζομαι (v. 2; cf. 1.41; 6.34: to have compassion); ἀπολύω (v. 3; cf. 6.45: dismiss); ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ (v. 3; cf. *passim*: on the way); ἀποκρίνομαι (v. 4; cf. *passim*: answer); δύναμαι (v. 4; cf. 5.30; 6.14; 9.1; 12.24; 13.26: to have power); ἑπτά (vs 5, 8, 20; cf. 12.20, 22, 23; 16.9: seven); παραγγέλλω (v. 6; cf. *passim*: command); κλαίω (vs 6, 8, 9, 20; cf. 4.37; 5.4; 6.41, 43; 14.3, 22, 72: break); παρατίθημι (vs 6, 7; cf. 10.45: serve); ὀλίγος (v. 7; cf. 2.1; 6.5; 12.42: few); εὐλογέω (v. 7; cf. 10.16;

<sup>703</sup> Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 356 and Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 232.

11.9, 10; 14.61: bless); χορτάζω (v. 8; cf. 6.42: satisfy); κλάσμα (v. 8; cf. 6.43: fragment); απολύω (v. 9; cf. 6.45: dismiss); εὐθύς (v. 10; cf. *passim*: immediately); πλοῖον (v. 10; cf. *passim*: boat). Similarly, we have examples of Markan use of the historical present tense: λέγει (v. 1: he says) and παραγγέλλει (v. 6: he orders). Markan *hapax legomena* include ἐκλύομαι (v. 3: faint); ἰχθύδιον (v. 7: small fish); περίσσευμα (v. 8: excess); μέρος (v. 10: region) and Δαλμανουθά (v. 10: Dalmanoutha). Thus, there is much of Mark's style and language here but clear indications that he is using traditional material also.<sup>704</sup>

### 6.5.3 Markan Sources

Some exegetes consider that both feedings miracles are completely unhistorical or that, as seems more likely, an extraordinary event did occur which provoked the enthusiasm of the crowds and, therefore, goes back to the source of the tradition.<sup>705</sup> Others, in an attempt to make these pericopae intelligible or credible, have resorted to rationalizing the text with natural explanations, such that Jesus and his disciples offered the example of fraternal sharing, the crowd imitated them, all those who had provisions brought them out and there was soon enough for everyone to eat.

Mark has clearly included his theological motif in this second account and therefore, it is difficult to go behind the stages of the tradition to the earliest version of the story, or any historical event to strip it of its later development and interpretations or pre-Synoptic form. The difficulty of two very similar stories raises the question of whether Mark created a second story or whether two came to him

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<sup>704</sup> For discussion on the tradition of Jesus' words being connected with a 'supper', see Duling and Perrin, *New Testament*, 145-146.

<sup>705</sup> H. Clavier, 'La Multiplication des pains dans le ministère de Jésus', *Studia Evangelica*, 1 (1959), 441-457; A. G. Herbert, 'The Historicity in the Feeding of Five Thousands', *Studia Evangelica*, 2 (1964), 68; I. de la Potterie, 'The Multiplication of the Loaves in the Life of Jesus', *Communio*, 16 (1989), 499-516.

in the tradition.<sup>706</sup> Commentators have suggested that Mark received two accounts of a feeding miracle with some differences and instead of assuming that only one feeding was being documented in different ways, he allowed the discrepancies to be his pretext for portraying two different events.<sup>707</sup> On the other hand, Fowler has argued that Mark has used traditional material here for the feeding of the four thousand and that the feeding account of the five thousand at Mk 6.30-44 was created by the evangelist himself. He contends that the tensions and conflicts between the two stories are deliberate and they are meant to emphasize the stupidity of the disciples.<sup>708</sup>

It is my view that we have two parallel and independent traditions preserved in Mark, which probably came to him in the form described by Achtemeier (pp. 121, 154).<sup>709</sup> If Mark himself had simply introduced the second account, it is probable that he would have unified the two accounts and perhaps synchronised them with his own account of the Last Supper: καὶ ἐσθιόντων αὐτῶν λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας, ἔκλασεν καὶ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν, Λάβετε, τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου (Mk 14.22: And as they were eating, he took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body'). As Moloney notes, Mark's word choice is deliberate and further distinguishes the Jew/Gentile settings in the feeding episode.<sup>710</sup> The numbers are important in relation to Markan sources as

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<sup>706</sup> One tradition received by Mark and an historical event; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 401. Two distinct events in the life of Jesus; Gundry, *Mark*, 399; Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, 272; Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 357; France, *Gospel of Mark*, 306-307; Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 229. For discussion on scholarly opinion see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 950-967. An alternative view is proposed by K. P. Donfried, 'The Feeding Narratives and the Marcan Community: Mark 6.30-45 and 8.1-10', in D. Lührmann and G. Strecker (eds), *Kirche Festschrift für Günther Bornkamm zum 75. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1980), 95-103, who argued that the feeding of the five thousand is from traditional material and the feeding of the four thousand represents a Markan construction. He cites the pervasiveness of Markan duplicate expressions in Mk 8.1-9.

<sup>707</sup> For full discussion on the doublet theory, see Gundry, *Mark*, 398-400.

<sup>708</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 93-94.

<sup>709</sup> Achtemeier, 'Toward the Isolation', 265-291.

<sup>710</sup> Moloney, *Gospel of Mark*, 154-155.

they are commented upon later in Mark's narrative (Mk 8.14-21) explicitly as two separate events and distinguished carefully in every detail. In the text the evangelist places stress upon a careful association of one set of numbers with the first feeding and another set of numbers with the second feeding. This would not make sense if one feeding story were a copy of another. It appears much more likely that two stories were handed down from the tradition which over time assimilated a standard narrative form but retained their distinctive features in detail.

The numbers have been subject to a variety of symbolic interpretations, none of which taken individually are compelling. However, in aggregate and in the general context suggested above, in the case of the feeding of the five thousand (Jews), the five loaves has been associated with the five Books of the Law and the twelve baskets of leftovers with the twelve tribes of Israel or with the twelve disciples. In the case of the feeding of the four thousand (Gentiles), the number four has been associated with the four points of the compass or the four winds (cf. Mk 13.27), the four corners of the earth (Rev. 7.1) and related to the geographical worldwide dimension of the early movement's mission. In the case of the number seven and its multiples (designating the number of loaves and the excess baskets of food), this has been generally taken to symbolize the Gentiles. Gentiles were divided by Jews into seventy nations (Gen 10.1-32), there were seven heathen nations in Canaan (Deut 7.1; Acts 13.19), Luke describes a Gentile mission carried out by seventy messengers (10.1-22) and Gentiles are associated with the seven Graeco-Roman deacons, who were rivals to the Jewish disciples (Acts 6.3).<sup>711</sup> The difference in numbers has also been accounted for by the need to have a

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<sup>711</sup> The seven nations, 'greater and mightier than yourselves', include the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. For discussion against this argument, see Markus, *Mark 1-8*, 489.

majority (Jews) and a minority (Gentiles).<sup>712</sup> As there is an indeterminate number of fish in the feeding of the four thousand and two designated in the feeding of the five thousand, these numbers resist symbolic interpretation.

There is no scholarly consensus on the meaning of these numbers and Mark's designation of quantities remains a mystery.<sup>713</sup> However, even though the numbers 'four' and 'seven' may not specifically connote to a Gentile orientation for this passage, their widespread use in biblical and Jewish tradition as symbols of the whole world or creation, undeniably contrast with the number 'twelve' which specifically represents the Jewish covenanted people of God.

#### **6.5.4 Gospel Parallels (Mt. 15.32-39; Lk 9.10-17; Jn 6.1-14)**

Matthew's story of the feeding of the four thousand follows immediately upon the story of the Syro-Phoenician (Canaanite) woman. He remodels the story and alone preserves the essential features of both Markan narratives of the feedings including the distinction between κοφίνους and σπυρίδας (Mt. 14.20, 15.37, 16.9-10) and includes the whole pattern of the numbers (both in their original contexts and in his summary at 16.9-10). Matthew has a simplified, shorter (seventy-six more words in Mark) version but there is an obvious dependence on Mark for the overall framework. The fact that Matthew faithfully copies both feeding stories suggests that he was aware from other sources that there were two separate stories in the tradition received by Mark. Matthew differs from Mark in stipulating that the feeding took place εἰς τὸ ὄρος (v. 29: on the mountain) but he agrees that

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<sup>712</sup> Derrett, 'Crumbs in Mark', 12-21.

<sup>713</sup> For an interesting interpretation of these numbers and their relationship to earlier Markan pericopae and the David story (1 Sam. 21; cf. Mk 2.25-26), see J. Drury, 'Mark' in R. Alter and F. Kermode (eds), *A Literary Guide to the Bible* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), 414-416.

this was ἐν ἐρημίᾳ (v. 33: in the desert).<sup>714</sup> Matthew omits καὶ τινες αὐτῶν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἦκασιν (Mk 8.3: some of them have come a long way) and any reference to the Decapolis. Matthew adds the clause χωρὶς γυναικῶν καὶ παιδίων (15.38: apart from women and children), suggesting that these were in addition to Mark's unspecified τετρακισχίλιοι (Mk 8.9: four thousand).

Luke has only one feeding pericope of five thousand who are fed on five loaves and two fish near the city of Bethsaida, with a remainder of twelve baskets of broken pieces (Lk 9.10-17). The Gospel of John parallels parts of both Markan stories of the feedings, combining them into one pericope (Jn 6.1-14), the language of which again suggests that both stories existed in the pre-Markan tradition. John again describes a crowd of five thousand, five barley loaves, two fish and twelve baskets, (κοφίνους) of fragments (cf. Mt. 14.20; 16.9). At the time of Passover he has Jesus crossing the Sea of Galilee to the eastern side and traversing up a mountain with the disciples, who play no role in the distribution of the bread or fish. He has a multitude following Jesus because ἐθεώρουν τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει ἐπὶ τῶν ἀσθενούντων (6.2: they saw the signs which he did on those who were ill or diseased).

### 6.5.5 Markan Narrative

#### **Mk 8.1:**

Ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις πάλιν πολλοῦ ὄχλου ὄντος καὶ μὴ ἐχόντων τί φάγωσιν, προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητὰς λέγει αὐτοῖς,  
***In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them,***

Mark begins with an indication of the temporal setting and eschatological terminology found elsewhere in the Gospel (Mk 1.9; 13.17, 24). πάλιν is probably a reminder to the reader to connect the story to the feeding at Mk 6.30-44.

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<sup>714</sup> Mt. 4.18 mentions the Sea of Galilee and describes it as a region of the Gentiles.

προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητάς (calling the disciples) and λέγει αὐτοῖς (he says to them) are two of Mark's favourite expressions. Apart from Mk 10.1, Mark always uses the singular term for the crowd, which indicates that he thinks of the crowd as a unified entity, who plays a passive silent role, never occupying the forefront of the scene. There are thirty-seven occasions on which Mark uses ὄχλος, with the addition of πολὺς on the majority of occasions (Mk 5.21, 24; 6.34; 9.14). The size of the crowd reinforces the audience's perception that there was substantial Gentile interest in Jesus and a determination to follow him.

**Mk 8.2-3:**

Σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον, ὅτι ἤδη ἡμέραι τρεῖς προσμένουσίν μοι καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν τί φάγωσιν· καὶ εἰάν ἀπολύσω αὐτοὺς νήστεις εἰς οἶκον αὐτῶν, ἐκλυθήσονται ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ· καὶ τινες αὐτῶν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἦκασιν.

***'I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come a long way.'***

These deliberations of Jesus recorded by Mark seem somewhat artificial from an historical-critical perspective, as presumably he already knew what he was going to do in relation to the hungry crowd. Mark uses direct speech here (cf. Mk 6.34). νήστεις can mean hunger or fasting and is found here and in Mt. 15.32, where it is paralleled. Mark uses ἐκλυθήσονται to describe weakness caused by hunger (LXX: Judg. 8.15; 1 Kgs 14.28; Isa. 46.1) and this may be a reference to Ps. 107.4-5 which relates to the Jews wandering in the desert. Alternatively, the language may simply relate to the evangelist's cultural background. The phrase 'for three days', which magnifies the extent of the emergency, is in the nominative and unusual as Greek normally puts words for an extent of time in the accusative.<sup>715</sup> Taylor has suggested that the reference to three days 'which are not necessary to his purpose', are details Mark has received from the tradition.<sup>716</sup> 'For some of

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<sup>715</sup> Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 487.

<sup>716</sup> Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 357.

them have come a long way' may be editorial but supports the assumption that those fed in the passage are non-Jews as μακρόθεν is used in the Hebrew Scriptures to describe Gentiles who are 'far off' (Deut 28.49; 29.22; 1 Kgs 8.41; Isa 39.3; 60.4).<sup>717</sup>

**Mk 8.4-6:**

καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι Πόθεν τούτους δυνησεται τις ὧδε χορτάσαι ἄρτων ἐπ' ἐρημίας; καὶ ἠρώτα αὐτούς, Πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Ἑπτὰ. καὶ παραγγέλλει τῷ ὄχλῳ ἀναπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· καὶ λαβὼν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἄρτους εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ ἵνα παρατιθῶσιν, καὶ παρέθηκαν τῷ ὄχλῳ.

***And his disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?' And he asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said 'Seven'. And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd.***

The textual *crux* here is why the disciples doubt that a miraculous feeding might occur when Jesus has already fed five thousand people in the wilderness (Mk 6.30-44). This is a decisive point for Fowler whose valid and over-riding conviction is that Mark wanted to portray the disciples as unreasonably blind and obtuse to Jesus' authority.<sup>718</sup> ἐρημίας confirms the wilderness setting. The verb χορτάζω used here and in v. 8 (cf. Mk 6.42; 7.27) suggests eating until fully satiated and can also connote a festive gorging.<sup>719</sup>

Mark reports that the disciples have bread, even though they were commanded to take nothing on their journey (Mk 6.8), suggesting disobedience on their part. Mark uses different verbs in the two accounts: εὐλόγησεν in 6.41 and, εὐχαριστήσας here in 8.6, seen as a Graeco-Roman element supporting the Gentile orientation of the pericope.<sup>720</sup> Many scholars believe that this vocabulary is a reference to the institution of the Eucharist (Mk 14.22-23; cf. Lk 22.19; 1 Cor

<sup>717</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 218.

<sup>718</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 37-38; 93-94; 99.

<sup>719</sup> LSJ, 1999: feed or fatten.

<sup>720</sup> Lane, *Gospel According to Mark*, 270, n. 3.

11.24) or a prefiguration of it.<sup>721</sup> εὐχαριστήσας (giving thanks) is used rather than designating a blessing (a distinctively Semitic act). However, later a blessing is said over the fish and, therefore, we could simply be dealing with the evangelist resorting to variety of expression. Mark has the disciples distributing the food among the Gentiles, which to the audience suggests they are actively involved in the feeding event and with the future Gentile community.

**Mk 8.7-8:**

καὶ εἶχον ἰχθύδια ὀλίγα· καὶ εὐλογήσας αὐτὰ εἶπεν καὶ ταῦτα παρατιθέναι. καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἔχορτάσθησαν, καὶ ἦσαν περισσεύματα κλασμάτων ἑπτὰ σφυρίδας. ***And they had a few small fish; and having blessed them, he commanded that these also should be set before them. And they ate, and were satisfied; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full.***

Mark appears to reserve the fish for detailed treatment, describing them as few and small, using the diminutive ἰχθύδια. This reference to the small fish seems somewhat superfluous as the emphasis is on bread in the preceding and subsequent passages. The disciples do not initially say that they have any fish; the fish are not mentioned with the loaves in the performance of the miracle and they are missing from the gathering of the leftovers. Juvenal associates the kind of baskets mentioned in Mk 6.43 (κοφίνων) as a distinct wicker basket that 'every Jew carried with him as a part of his daily attire' and were 'in later times specially used by Jews' (Sat. III.14; VI.542).<sup>722</sup> We can conclude that Mark's specific use of σφυρίς, which was a large, woven, universal kind of fish basket, connotes the Gentiles (cf. Mt. 15.37). It is described in Acts 9.25 as being used to carry a person. The left-overs here may have intertextual relation with the story of the

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<sup>721</sup> See B. van Iersel, 'Die Wunderbare Speisung und das Abendmahl in der Synoptischen Tradition (Mk. VI: 35-44, par; VIII: 1-20, par)', *Novum Testamentum*, 7 (1964), 167-194; de la Potterie, 'Multiplication of the Loaves', 506.

<sup>722</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 274; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 343.

Syro-Phoenician woman, suggesting a divine abundance.<sup>723</sup> Mark appears to be magnifying the miracle to indicate that the crowd were fully satisfied.

**Mk 8.9-10:**

ἦσαν δὲ ὡς τετρακισχίλιοι. Καὶ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτούς. Καὶ εὐθὺς ἐμβὰς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἦλθεν εἰς τὰ μέρη Δαλμανουθά.

**And there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away; and immediately he got into the boat with his disciples, and went to the district of Dalmanutha.**

There is a considerable amount of Markan language in these verses suggestive of redaction by the evangelist. The feeding ends with the departure of Jesus and his disciples to Dalmanutha (Mt. 15.39 has the region of Magadan), the only New Testament occurrence of this place name.<sup>724</sup> Although no such location is certainly known and there is no scholarly consensus on the matter, it is generally assumed to represent an area along the north-west shore of the Sea of Galilee. Nothing certain is known of the location of Magadan either.<sup>725</sup> Achtemeier has suggested that the Markan summaries tend to mention either general locations (Mk 2.13; 3.7; 4.1) or more widely-known places such as Capernaum (Mk 1.21; 2.1). He convincingly argues, therefore, that Dalmanutha, which fits neither category, could be part of the early tradition which Mark is handing on.<sup>726</sup> The motif of a subsequent sea crossing was probably already present in the pre-Markan narrative and, 'the literarily independent John 6', includes this journey.<sup>727</sup>

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<sup>723</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 270, argues that because of the size of these baskets, the leftovers were more extensive than those in the feeding at Mk 6.34-44.

<sup>724</sup> Textual tradition of both Gospels offers a range of variants: Magdala, Magdalan and Magedan in Matthew; Dalmounai, Mageda, Magdal, Magada, Melegada in Mark. For a discussion on these variants see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 32-33, 83 and von K. Seybold, 'Dalmanutha (Mk 8.10)', *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins*, 116 (2000), 42-48.

<sup>725</sup> J. F. Strange, 'Dalmanutha', in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, D. N. Freedman (ed.), vol. II (New York, Doubleday, 1992), 4, argues that an anchorage discovered in 1971, located slightly north of Magdala, could possibly be the site of Dalmanutha.

<sup>726</sup> Achtemeier, 'Toward the Isolation', 290.

<sup>727</sup> Markus, *Mark 1-8*, 502.

### 6.5.6 Corollary to the Gentile Feeding (Mk 8.11-21)

Mark appears to give a narrative signal that Dalmanutha is on the western, Jewish shore of the lake at 8.11, as it is here that for the final time Jesus is confronted by hostility, opposition and criticism from the Pharisees who were ζητούντες παρ' αὐτοῦ σημεῖον ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, πειράζοντες αὐτόν (Mk 8.11; cf. Mk 13.4, 22: seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him). Mark's reference to a 'sign' may relate to Jewish Sign Prophets in proximity to the area of the Jewish War, of whom there is evidence during the rule of Antonius Felix (52-60 CE), Porcius Festus (60-62 CE) and at the time when the Jerusalem Temple was ablaze (66 CE). These prophets generated eschatological passion in the crowds, led them into the desert and through their 'signs' 'sought to activate God's eschatological salvation'.<sup>728</sup> One such prophet designated as the 'Egyptian' claimed that at his command (ὡς κελεύσαντος αὐτοῦ) the walls of Jerusalem would collapse, he ordered his audience to follow him into τῆς ἔρημίας (the desert) and indicated that they would make their way back to Jerusalem by περιαγαγών (*War* II.261: a circuitous route; cf. *Ant.* XX.169). Josephus describes these 'Sign Prophets' as γοήτες (charlatans: *Ant.* XX.97-99, 167-172, 188; *War* XX.188). They operated in a period of eschatological expectation and worsening political circumstances. The Markan narrative clearly distances Jesus from these Jewish prophets and records that Jesus ἀναστενάξας τῷ πνεύματι αὐτοῦ (v. 12: sighed deeply in his spirit) and indicated that εἰ δοθήσεται τῇ γενεᾷ ταύτῃ σημεῖον (v. 12 cf. Mk 13.22-23: no sign shall be given to this generation). This reflects Mark's motif that the Gospel is hidden from hostile Jews.

This very brief pericope (Mk 8.11-12; forty-seven words), specifically placed at this point in the Gospel, has the impact of emphasizing the negative role of the

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<sup>728</sup> P. W. Barnett, 'The Jewish Sign Prophets – A.D. 40-70: Their Intentions and Origin', *NTS*, 27 (1981), 693.

Jewish officials and accentuating the Markan Jesus' determination to return to the Gentile, eastern side of the Sea of Galilee; ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ πέραν (v. 13: he departed to the other side). Jesus returns to the boat (v. 11) where there is concern on the part of the disciples that they had only one loaf; this in spite of their recent witness to the miraculous feeding of nine thousand people. This leads the audience to once again focus on the inability of the disciples to see the symbolic significance of Jesus' teaching.<sup>729</sup> Mark continues his carefully crafted narrative with a progressive and relentless drive to emphasize the disciples' lack of faith and to undermine their authority. They are portrayed as opponents and outsiders and Mark characterizes Jesus' attitude toward them as 'at times bordering on disdain'.<sup>730</sup> Weeden argues that Mark's Gospel is unabashed polemic and in fact represents a 'vendetta' and 'devastating attack' on the disciples, who do not fully understand Jesus, oppose his Gentile mission and flee his death.<sup>731</sup> Whilst this view may appear extreme, the majority of the Markan text clearly has an undercurrent of disappointment on the part of Jesus towards the disciples and signals to Mark's audience that the Jewish disciples were obtuse and unreliable.

There follows a strange dialogue and conflict between Jesus and the disciples in the boat, on the subject of bread (Mk 8.14-21). Mark records Jesus as cautioning the disciples: Ὁρᾶτε, βλέπετε ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων καὶ τῆς ζύμης Ἡρώδου (v. 15: Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod). Thus the Markan feedings, which focus on the misunderstanding of the Jewish disciples and their emphasis on material bread,

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<sup>729</sup> For discussion on the connections in Mk 8.14-21 with Pauline teaching, see Telford, *Theology*, 165-166.

<sup>730</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 30-42.

<sup>731</sup> Weeden, 'Heresy', 89-104. See also Tyson, 'The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark', 261-268 who argues that Mark places emphasis on the obduracy of the disciples in order to challenge the Jewish Jerusalem Church, who were opposed to outside leadership and the Gentile mission.

are given an additional connection, in that they are related to the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. Throughout Mark's Gospel, the Pharisees and Herod are undoubtedly some of the principal opponents of Jesus and are named in association with one another (Mk 3.6 and 12.13). Mark gives prominence to Herod Antipas as someone who is anxious about Jesus (Mk 6.14-16) and has slaughtered John the Baptist, whom Mark has named as a vital individual in the beginning of the historic events of the Gospel (Mk 1.1). Lohmeyer has argued that there was a common religious and political aspiration that linked the Pharisees and Herod together, which was their nationalistic aim of a united Jewish people in their own independent state and governed by their own king. Thus, the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod would then have related to the political, messianic hopes of the two parties.<sup>732</sup>

Leaven (v. 15) is a metaphor found in the New Testament that is not synonymous with yeast and usually stands for something evil (1 Cor. 5.6-8; Gal. 5.9). This verse does not fit well into its setting and appears to break the progression of thought, an example of Mark's somewhat non-logical formation of his account.<sup>733</sup> Scholars have attempted to find an interpretation of the inclusion of 'the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod' to elucidate its meaning in the context and setting of this story. It has been regarded as 'one intrusive verse' which should be omitted as a confusing element in the argument of the section.<sup>734</sup> However, through inclusion of this motif, Mark is once again disassociating Jesus from the Jewish ruling class and reinforcing to his audience the validity of the Gentile mission.

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<sup>732</sup> Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus*, 157.

<sup>733</sup> *ibid*, 157.

<sup>734</sup> C. H. Turner, 'Marcan Usage: Notes, Critical and Exegetical on the Second Gospel', *JTS*, 26 (1924/25), 226-240; Schweizer, *Good News*, 160, considers most of this pericope to be revised extensively by Mark.

Mark records the disciples discussing this saying of Jesus and associating it with a lack of bread (Mk 8.16). Jesus is aware of their deliberations and they are cautioned about their misunderstanding and hardened hearts: καὶ γνοῦς λέγει αὐτοῖς, Τί διαλογίζεσθε ὅτι ἄρτους οὐκ ἔχετε; οὐπω νοεῖτε οὐδὲ συνίετε; πεπωρωμένην ἔχετε τὴν καρδίαν ὑμῶν; ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε καὶ ὦτα ἔχοντες οὐκ ἀκούετε; καὶ οὐ μνημονεύετε (vs 17-18 cf. Isa. 6.9: Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?). This series of rhetorical questions all express in different ways the failure of the disciples to understand (cf. Jer. 5.21; Ezek. 12.2).

Mark now records Jesus' reiterating the surplus quantities of bread when he performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand (Mk 8.19-21). Clear questions are asked and the disciples appear to produce the right answers. Evidently somewhere in this simple series of questions and the correct answers given by the disciples is hidden the key to the significance of the twelve and seven basketfuls of broken pieces. However, this surprising amount of detail and stress on the numbers of baskets of broken fragments is perplexing and illuminates neither the meaning of this comment nor the indefinable implication of these numbers. There is no real guidance within this confusing text to reveal that significance.<sup>735</sup> It is probable that the evangelist shapes the disciples' role as an 'indirect communication with the reader' and we are led to assume that there are 'essential similarities between the disciples and his anticipated readers, so that what he reveals about the disciples may become a

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<sup>735</sup> Contra Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 53-54, who contends that the numbers in the second feeding story are simply traditional details which a redactor changed slightly when duplicating the story and making it the first feeding.

revelation about the readers and so enable them to change'.<sup>736</sup> In his remodelled summary passage (Mt 16.5-12; Mk 8.14-21), Matthew drops the reference to 'one loaf' and brings the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (not Herod) into relation with the disciples' complaint of scarcity. Jesus in his rebuke makes clear that he was warning them against the infection of false teaching.

Scholars have suggested that the confusing nature of the text was the result of the influence of several traditions on the evangelist who may otherwise have 'expressed himself more simply'.<sup>737</sup> Others have argued that this section is a redaction inserted by the evangelist to harmonize the stories and also to heighten the lack of understanding of the disciples,<sup>738</sup> and the saying about leaven (Mk 8.15) is also ascribed to the tradition.<sup>739</sup> As the remainder of Mk 8.14-21 seems to be editorial, it is evident that the abundance of the food was a significant point for the evangelist, as on both occasions there was enough for a far greater number of people than the disciples thought it possible to feed. The question Mark has Jesus asking his disciples, is left unanswered. The Jewish disciples are, therefore, the object of stern criticism for their lack of understanding of these enigmatic sayings and their failure to grasp the significance of Jesus' ministry and teaching. There is no doubt that the stupidity of the disciples has a highly effective use in the evangelist's narrative, in that it is both flattering and instructive to the Markan audience. Implicit in the narrative is the motif that their devastating incomprehension is not shared by Mark's Gentile audience.

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<sup>736</sup> Tannehill, 'Disciples in Mark', 405.

<sup>737</sup> A. Farrer, *A Study in St. Mark* (London: Dacre Press, 1951), 103.

<sup>738</sup> Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 53-54, 87.

<sup>739</sup> H. Räisänen, 'Jesus and the Food Laws: Reflections on Mark 7.15', *JSNT*, 16 (1982), 79-100; Markus, *Mark 1-8*, 509.

## 6.6 Conclusion

In the story of the deaf mute, Mark continues to present Jesus as the miracle-working hero and he reintroduces the note of secrecy (Mk 7.36). The evangelist, in order to engage with his audience's cultural milieu, has included magical and exorcistic techniques and overlaid them with his theological motifs. I have argued that the essence of this pericope would be at home in the magical world-view of the first century and that Mark's audience would be receptive to the ritual symbolism described.

The miraculous feeding events make it clear that there is enough bread χορτάζειν (Mk 6.42; 8.8: to satisfy) both Jews and Gentiles; again with a temporal sequence of Jews first and then Gentiles (cf. Mk 7.27). Apart from a tenuous linguistic connection, there appears to be insufficient evidence to fully justify the suggestion that Mark associated the miraculous feedings with later eucharistic activity. However, if the evangelist is suggesting that the feedings are a precursor to the Last Supper and subsequent Church eucharist, then in the feeding of the four thousand he is extending this gesture to the Gentile community.

Likewise, any attempt to find meaning in the symbolic significance of the numbers is problematic and as the key to this coded message is unavailable to us, we cannot with certainty say that one set of numbers relates specifically to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. However, the likelihood is that Mark's first century audience were able to determine the significance and relationship between these two sets of numbers and associate these with separate Jewish and Gentile groups.

It is probable that Mark received two feeding stories from the tradition and has deliberately reconstructed these to reflect separate Jewish/Gentile feedings distinguished by the numerical differences, their geographical location and Mark's

placement of the stories in his narrative. He highlights the Jewish disciples' lack of understanding in contrast to the faith of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7.24-30) and the Gentile crowd connected with the deaf and mute man (Mk 7.31-37). Mark's awkward but deliberate editorial comment at 8.14-21 strongly suggests that the feeding pericopae had some special significance and that he saw the miracles of the loaves beyond miraculous satisfactions of physical hunger. Mark deliberately suggests a connection between the meaning of the miraculous feedings and the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod (Mk 8.15). This verse, which is arbitrarily dragged in at this point, appears to be a warning to the disciples and his own community that this leaven is to be avoided and represents the personal aspirations and exclusive nationalism of the self-seeking Pharisees and Herod.

Throughout Mark's Gospel he effectively engages with his audience to infer that they understand Jesus better than the people in the text. Thus, it would not be unexpected that the audience should know the context of these two feeding stories and to make a mental comparison between them. The evangelist is conveying to his audience that the bread, considered to be pre-eminently destined for the Jews, has to be shared with the Gentiles (Mk 7.27-29; 8.1-10; 14-21) who are ostracized by the Jews but whom Mark records as being receptive to Jesus' message. Thus, Mark reminds his community that its own universal mission was rooted in the messianic mission of Jesus. The healing of the deaf mute, the feeding of the four thousand, the hostility of the Pharisees and the disciples' lack of understanding lead us into the next phase of the Gentile mission, to Bethsaida and Caesarea Philippi.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Healing a Blind Man at Bethsaida and a Boy with an Unclean Spirit at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8.22-26; 9.14-29)*

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the fourth and final journey of Jesus through Gentile territory, beginning at Mk 8.22 when Mark has Jesus leaving the site of the feeding of the four thousand on the eastern side of the sea of Galilee and travelling to the Gentile city of Bethsaida, in the district of Gaulanitis (modern Golan) just east of the Galilean border. At Bethsaida Mark briefly reports a two-stage miraculous healing by Jesus of a blind man (see Appendix 21: Greek Text – Mk 8.22-26). The story differs from most of the other healings in Mark, as recovery is not instantaneous. In the same Gentile region, Mark descriptively records the penultimate Gospel healing and has Jesus exorcising a boy possessed by an impure spirit (see Appendix 22: Greek Text – Mk 9.14-29). This represents the last exorcism in a series in Jewish territory (Mk 1.23-28; 32-34, 39; 3.11-12) and in Gentile territory (5.1-20; 7.24-30; 9.14-29), thus re-emphasizing Jesus' Gentile mission as a precursor to the Markan community's own mission.

There is widespread agreement among commentators that the short but detailed story of the blind man at Bethsaida has symbolic value in the Markan narrative and unmistakably connects (both in language and style) with the story of the deaf-mute (Mk 7.31-37) and the later narrative relating to blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10.46-52) which occurs in Jewish territory. The metaphorical relationship between the restoration of physical sight, and the 'blindness' or misunderstanding of the disciples, continues Mark's pattern of narrating successive examples of their

obduracy.<sup>740</sup> Mark's theme is intrinsically woven into the narrative when Jesus predicts his impending death at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8.31); Peter rebukes him (v. 32); in Galilee the disciples quarrel over who is the greatest (Mk 9.33-35) and later James and John request status and authority (Mk 10.35-45). Mark casts the disciples in such a negative light that even in Jerusalem at the end of the Gospel, their incomprehension and failure are still apparent to the audience. Mark intrinsically contrasts their obduracy with the acceptance, understanding and insight of the Gentiles who are characterized as faithful and accepting of the Gospel's message of universality.

The much longer story of the boy with an unclean spirit (Mk 9.14-29) continues the theme of Jesus' exorcising and healing in Gentile territory but in this narrative the motif of failure and misunderstanding on the part of the Jewish disciples is plainly stated and no longer an undercurrent. Weeden has persuasively argued that the evolution of the disciples' portrayal in the Markan narrative from 'imperceptivity (1.16-8.26), to misconception (8.27-14.9) to rejection (14.10-72) is no accidental development ... [but] a carefully formulated polemical device created by the evangelist to disgrace and debunk the disciples'.<sup>741</sup>

It is my aim in this chapter to examine these two miracles in their narrative context to determine Mark's rationale for positioning them in this section of his Gospel where the themes of teaching, faith and discipleship are paramount. I will also attempt to uncover the redactional activity that the evangelist has imposed on any traditional material he received, for the purpose of guiding and instructing his own community. Additionally, I shall discuss whether or not Mark's portrayal of Jesus' activities mirrors the acts of other contemporary healers, exorcists and holy

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<sup>740</sup> Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 370; Hooker, *A Commentary*, 184, 198; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 391, 399, 430, 433-444; Fowler, *Loaves and Fishes*, 107-112.

<sup>741</sup> Weeden, 'Heresy', 91.

men. Literary evidence suggests this is the case, as stories of miraculous healings were circulating in the Roman Near East immediately after the Romano-Jewish War and contemporaneously with Mark's writing of his Gospel.

## 7.2 Graeco-Roman Background: Bethsaida

Most commentators agree that the reference in Mk 8.22 is to Bethsaida Julias, which lies on the east side of the Sea of Galilee near Caesarea Philippi and represents a place name from an oral or written tradition received by Mark.<sup>742</sup> In Luke's Gospel, Bethsaida is designated as the place where Jesus fed the five thousand (9.10) and it is described in Matthew and Luke (in what is almost certainly a Q saying) as one of the cities where Jesus' mission had been carried out but where the Gentile citizens did not repent: Οὐαί σοι, Χοραζίν, οὐαί σοι, Βηθσαιδά (Mt 11.21; Lk 10.13: Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!). It is also named as the birthplace of the disciples Peter, Andrew and Philip (Jn. 1.44; 12.21), although in contrast Mk 1.29 reports that Andrew came from Capernaum.

The accepted general location of Bethsaida is the east bank of the Jordan, close to its outflow into the Sea of Galilee (*Life* 399; *War* III.515; Strabo, *Geog.* XVI.2.16) and close to the *Via Maris*. This was one of the most important roads in antiquity (p. 68) which led from Egypt to Damascus. It diminished isolation in the separate 'pockets' of population and expedited the passage of the Roman armies and the general population along the Mediterranean coast (see Appendix 23: Map - Location of Bethsaida). As with most Graeco-Roman cities, Bethsaida incorporated villages into its territory. Josephus numbers these as fourteen (*Ant.*

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<sup>742</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 738, n. 56 and 741, n. 71. Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 127; Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 127. In Aramaic, *beyt zaida*, *beyt zaggadah* or *bêt šaidā* translates as 'house of the provider/fisher/hunter', see B. Pixner, 'Searching for the New Testament Site of Bethsaida', *Biblical Archaeologist*, 48.4 (1985), 211.

XX.159).<sup>743</sup> Two sites are considered by archaeologists to be important for the city and its environs: (1) Khirbet el-Araj, fifty yards from the lake shore and partly under water (perhaps remnants of the original fishing village); and (2) Et-Tell, a rocky hill about two kilometers north-northeast of the Sea of Galilee and east of the Jordan (which probably represents the acropolis of the Roman city of Bethsaida-Julias).<sup>744</sup> Evidence of settlement has been found at both sites.<sup>745</sup> The site of the city, which occupies about eighty thousand square meters, is located on a basalt extension thirty metres above the Bethsaida Plain/Golan plateau.<sup>746</sup>

This district east of the Sea of Galilee was originally Philip's territory and was located directly across from Herod Antipas' territory in Galilee. Philip elevated what was previously a village to the rank of a city in c. 30/31 CE (κώμη δὲ Βηθσαιδὰ πρὸς λίμνη τῆ γεννησαρίτιδι πόλεως παρασχὼν ἀξίωμα πλήθει τε οἰκητόρων καὶ τῆ ἄλλῃ δυνάμει Ἰουλιᾶ θυγατρὶ τῆ Καίσαρος ὁμώνυμον ἐκάλεσεν: because of the number of inhabitants it contained and its other grandeur and called it by the name of Julia, the same name as Caesar's daughter, *Ant.* XVIII.28; cf. *War* II.168).<sup>747</sup> Since Julia was disgraced and banished in 2 BCE, it is generally accepted that the founding and naming of Bethsaida-Julias preceded that date.<sup>748</sup> Thus, Mark describes a trip made by Jesus to a specific Graeco-Roman city

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<sup>743</sup> Jn 12.21 and Ptolemy (*Geog.* V.15) both locate a city/village named Bethsaida in Galilean territory. It is likely that they are referring to the same city and are probably speaking loosely from a regional geographical point of view.

<sup>744</sup> N. Kokkinos, 'The Foundation of Bethsaida-Julias by Philip the Tetrarch', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, LIX.2 (2008), 237-251; Pixner, 'Searching for the New Testament Site of Bethsaida', 207-216 and Arav, 'Bethsaida', 145-166, who convincingly demonstrate this through archaeological excavations. Contra R. S. Notely, 'Et-Tell is *Not* Bethsaida', *Near Eastern Archaeology*, 70.4 (2007), 220-230, who argues that the site's elevation, remoteness from the lake and lack of archaeological evidence from the Roman period, preclude its designation as Bethsaida.

<sup>745</sup> Finegan, *Archaeology of the New Testament*, 114.

<sup>746</sup> Geologists have argued that its distance from the sea is the result of earthquakes and landslides (Arav, 'Bethsaida', 150).

<sup>747</sup> Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. I, 171-172, suggests that Bethsaida may have obtained the designation πόλις in name only and remained only a κώμη, as there is no evidence of the city itself ever minting coins.

<sup>748</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 738, n. 56.

inhabited predominantly by Gentiles (*War* III.57),<sup>749</sup> which lay in very close proximity to Gamala where in 67 CE one of the fiercest conflicts of the Romano-Jewish War raged.<sup>750</sup>

### 7.3 Evidence of Polytheism in the Region

There is a paucity of numismatic and archaeological evidence of polytheistic religious life in first-century Bethsaida and a great deal hangs on a very thin and speculative thread.<sup>751</sup> This lack of evidence, however, does not preclude polytheistic religious activity. The city itself and its environs were typical of a Graeco-Roman city in the Near East (*Ant.* XVIII.28; *War* III.43) and it would undoubtedly have many of the characteristics of, and exposure to, key aspects of Graeco-Roman culture, including religious practices.

Excavations have revealed that there was settlement at Bethsaida as early as the tenth century BCE. The city gate complex contained a variety of early cultic installations including a gate altar and a basalt stele on which was carved the stylized figure of a horned bull, armed with a dagger.<sup>752</sup> (See Appendix 24: Bethsaida City View and Cultic Stele.) Arav has suggested that when Philip founded Bethsaida-Julias he constructed a modest temple above the remains of the city gate to serve the local cult of Julia Augusta.<sup>753</sup> He claims this rectangular,

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<sup>749</sup> *Abod. Zar.* III.7, records that there were pagan idols under the heaps of stones at Bethsaida.

<sup>750</sup> Vespasian, who had been sent to Judaea by Nero to put down the Jewish revolt, led the attack with the X Frenentes, XV Apollinaris and XV Macedonian legions (*War* IV.1-83).

<sup>751</sup> For a numismatic survey, see A. Kindler, 'Bethsaida Numismatic Survey: Seasons of 1997', in R. Arav and R. A. Freund (eds), *Bethsaida: A City by the North Shore of the Sea of Galilee*, vol. IV (Kirksville MO: Truman State University Press, 2009), 252-266.

<sup>752</sup> For full discussion on excavation of the city gate, see Arav, *Bethsaida*, 1-50.

<sup>753</sup> Arav, 'Bethsaida', 162-164. Contra Chancey, *Myth of a Gentile Galilee*, 107-108 and *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, 90-91, who is sceptical about the designation of the building. See also Notley, 'Et-Tell is *Not* Bethsaida', 227, who argues Tiberius discouraged the imperial cult of himself (Tacitus, *Annals*, IV.37) and forbade the deification of his mother where he could prevent it (Seutonius, *Tib.* 51; Tacitus, *Annals*, V.1; Dio Cassius, 58.2). See also Tiberius' letter to Gytheion in Laconia (19 CE) refusing

columned, basalt building included religious structures such as a *pronaos* (approaching hall), *naos* (main room) and *opisthodomous* (rear rooms). However, in many respects the footprint of the temple does not resemble, nor has the normal characteristics of temples of similar periods in the Roman Near East.<sup>754</sup> In addition to the structural identifications, two decorated incense shovels and a small clay figurine (purported to be Julia) have been linked to the imperial cult at this site.<sup>755</sup> The exact function and provenance of these artefacts has been disputed.<sup>756</sup> By situating this miracle at Bethsaida, Mark invites his audience to associate the healing with a city where the majority of the inhabitants were Gentiles who practised polytheistic cults.

#### **7.4 Mk 8 22-26: Healing a Blind Man**

At this point in Mark's narrative, Jesus and the disciples make their sixth and final sea crossing (Mk 4.35-41; 5.21; 6.32-34, 45-52; 8.10). They cross the Sea of Galilee and arrive at the Gentile city of Bethsaida on the eastern shore, the destination of a previously aborted journey described at Mk 6.45-53 when Jesus had ἀναγκάσειν (Mk 6.45: to compel) the disciples to get into the boat to cross to Gentile territory but they subsequently arrive at Gennesaret in Jewish territory.<sup>757</sup>

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divine honours for himself and allowing his mother, Livia, to answer for herself (trans. R. K. Sherck, *The Roman Empire: Augustus to Hadrian, Translated Documents of Greece and Rome*, 6 [Cambridge: CUP, 1988],<sup>no.31</sup>, 57). Nevertheless, evidence of the imperial cult in this period can be found elsewhere in the Roman Near East.

<sup>754</sup> Ball, *Rome in the East*, 317-356.

<sup>755</sup> F. M. Strickert, *Bethsaida: Home of the Apostles* (Collegeville MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>756</sup> R. A. Freund, 'The Incense Shovel of Bethsaida and Synagogue Iconography in Late Antiquity', in Arav and Freund, *Bethsaida*, 413-459, who argues that there is no conclusive evidence relating to this identification. See also, Chancey, *Greco-Roman Culture and the Galilee of Jesus*, 93-94

<sup>757</sup> Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 28; Wefald, 'Separate Gentile Mission', 12; Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 88. See also, Achtemeier, 'Toward the Isolation', 265-291, for a source-critical explanation for this alleged aporia in Mark.

An unspecified group of people bring a blind man to Jesus and request that he touches him (cf. Mk 1.41; 3.10; 5.27; 6.56; 7.33). The ethnicity of the man is, as with previous pericopae in this study, found to be implicit in the narrative. Mark rarely identifies characters by their Gentile ethnicity (cf. Mk 7.26) but, as in this case, prefers to use 'geography, architecture, vocation and other textual details to communicate cultural information'.<sup>758</sup> Mark records that Jesus takes the man by the hand and leads him out of Bethsaida. Taking into consideration the other magical elements of this story, it seems likely that the Markan audience would perceive this separation from the crowd, along with the spitting component, to be part of a magical healing technique.<sup>759</sup> The miracle is initially performed by Jesus' spitting directly onto the man's eyes. He asks the man if he can see anything, and the man looks up and responds with one of the most enigmatic utterances of the New Testament, βλέπω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅτι ὡς δένδρα ὁρῶ περιπατοῦντας (v. 24: 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking'). This two-stage miracle, partially successful at this stage, continues with Jesus' laying his hands upon the man's eyes. The man looks intently and subsequently his sight is restored to clear vision. Mark, invoking his enigmatic secrecy theme, then has Jesus sending the man back to his home with the instruction not to enter Bethsaida.

#### **7.4.1 Position and Context of the Story**

This story is a continuation of other healings in Gentile territory that have included an exorcism performed at Gerasa (Mk 5.1-20), exorcism of the Gentile woman's daughter in the region of Tyre (7.24-30), healing of the deaf mute in the Decapolis (vs 31-36), and now there is to be restoration of sight to a blind man at Bethsaida. Subsequently, the evangelist continues with an itinerary that involves Jesus'

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<sup>758</sup> Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 105.

<sup>759</sup> For discussion on secrecy in magic in this period, see Luck, *Arcana Mundi*, 23.

visiting the villages of Caesarea Philippi, before setting off on the journey to Jerusalem (Mk 9.30). This entire journey once again takes the audience into a geographical setting of ancient polytheistic practices including the contemporaneous worship of the Roman emperor.

As previously discussed (pp. 117-119), the complex structure of the Markan Gospel precludes any consensus on definitive divisions. However, many commentators consider that this story marks the beginning of the central section of Mark's narrative where events are geared towards preparation for the journey to Jerusalem.<sup>760</sup> It has also been proposed that the story of the blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8.22-26) and the healing of blind Bartimaeus (10.46-52) form a 'literary bracket around the intervening material'.<sup>761</sup> Within this 'framed' material, which describes the healing of a blind Gentile and a blind Jew, the Markan Jesus introduces 'the way' motif and predicts his imminent death and resurrection.<sup>762</sup>

#### 7.4.2 Mark's Language and Style

Bultmann defined this story as a miracle of healing, similar to that of the deaf-mute man at Mk 7.32-37.<sup>763</sup> Mark's familiar *κἀ* parataxis appears ten times in this eighty word pericope. There is no use, however, of the ubiquitous Markan term *εὐθύς*, probably as a result of the motif of a two stage healing. Mark continues with his usual use of the verb *φέρω* and its derivatives (Mk 1.32; 2.3; 6.55; 7.32) and *παρακαλέω* (Mk 1.40; 5.10, 12, 17, 18, 23; 6.56; 7.32). Mark adopts eight different

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<sup>760</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 323; Markus, *Mark 1-8*, 63-64; Nineham, *St. Mark*, 212-223; Guelich, *Mark*, xxxv-xxxvii; Schweizer, *Good News*, 165. Others consider Peter's confession as the final scene in the first section, see Moloney, *Mark*, 20-22; S. E. Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel* (Macon GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 83.

<sup>761</sup> Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 391; N. Perrin, 'Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark', in H. D. Betz (ed.), *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin* (Missoula MT: Scholars Press, rev. ed. 1974), 1-52.

<sup>762</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 44.

<sup>763</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 213.

words in connection with seeing or sight (vs 22, 23 τυφλός; v. 23 ὄμμα; vs 23, 24 βλέπω; v. 24 ἀναβλέπω, ὀράω; v.25 ὀφθαλμός, διαβλέπω, ἐμβλέπω). The cognate adjective δυνατός appears five times in vs 22-23, 28-29. However, the verb πτύω occurs in Mark only here and in Mk 7.33. Concentrated in vs 23-25 are the words ἐπιλαμβάνομαι, ἐκφέρω, ὄμμα, δένδρα, διαβλέπω, τηλαυγῶς, all *hapax legomena*. This argues against Marcan composition or heavy redaction at this point. Thus, in summary, there is a high concentration of typical Markan language but also a central section of language that is unfamiliar in the Markan vocabulary.

### 7.4.3 Markan Sources

As previously noted (pp. 154-155) this account of the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida was probably the miracle which ended the series of catenae received by Mark from the tradition and was displaced from its original location by the evangelist where it followed the pericope when Jesus walks on the sea (Mk 6.45-53) and preceded the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter.<sup>764</sup> By placing the pericope in its current location, Mark is guiding his audience towards interpreting the blind man as a symbol of the disciples, ὀφθαλμοὺς ἔχοντες οὐ βλέπετε (Mk 8.18: Having eyes do you not see?).

Indeed this pericope is also thoroughly intertwined with the preceding miracle of the deaf-mute, so much so that they have been considered as 'twin narratives' or variants of the same story.<sup>765</sup> There are many stylistic and linguistic similarities between the two stories, especially with regard to the following phrases, which are identical: καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτῷ (and they brought to him); καὶ παρακαλοῦσιν αὐτόν

<sup>764</sup> Achtemeier, 'Towards the Isolation', 265 and 285. Also Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 390.

<sup>765</sup> Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 108, n. 83. See also Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 213; Schweizer, *Good News*, 163, who consider that the two stories were linguistically and stylistically assimilated in Mark's source. For discussion on the two stories as parallels, see Taylor, *St. Mark*, 368-370.

(and begged him); καὶ πτύσας εἰς (and spitting into). Several other elements bear a close resemblance, such as the request for Jesus to touch the afflicted person, Jesus' response to that request, the motif of taking the person aside and the veiled request for secrecy. However, I consider the idea of variants to be improbable, since the illnesses are different, the methods of healing are not entirely the same and Mark does have a linguistic tendency to repeat himself for the purpose of consolidating his theological intent. The differences in detail between the two accounts suggest that they are independent of each other and reliant on variant oral traditions. It seems more likely that Mark has incorporated the two stories at these specific points as a pair, as he did with the two feeding stories and the two sea-crossing miracles.<sup>766</sup>

As a result of the anomalies in the language usage described above, commentators have detected some Markan redaction in the first and last sentences.<sup>767</sup> However, it is likely that the majority of this miracle story is pre-Markan as it has been preserved by the evangelist despite its portrayal of Jesus as having difficulty in the performance of the healing (unacceptable for inclusion by either Matthew or Luke). Additionally, the unusual vocabulary of vs 23-25 also suggests an account from the tradition in a source used by Mark.<sup>768</sup> However, ultimately, as is always the case in the Markan Gospel, it is difficult to come to a conclusion in relation to the genesis of the narrative but it is clear that, once again, Mark has adapted whatever source he had to meet the needs of his community.

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<sup>766</sup> Baudoz, 'Mc 7,31-37 et Mc 8,22-26', 560-569, argues that Mark received two accounts from tradition and placed them in the Gentile region of Bethsaida to emphasize the universalist theology of the Gospel and to prepare for Peter's later confession.

<sup>767</sup> Schweizer, *Good News*, 163; Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 656.

<sup>768</sup> Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary*, 420; Guelich, *Mark 1-8.16*, 429, 435-436; Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 694; Hooker, *A Commentary*, 198; Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 369. Contra Persson, 'Gentile Mission', 45. Persson has argued that Mk 7.1-8.26 was added to a later version of Mark's Gospel to accommodate 'arising of the problem of Gentile admission into the Church'.

#### 7.4.4 Parallel Narratives

This miracle story has no parallel in either Luke or Matthew (who does report Jesus' healing of two blind men at Jericho through touch, just before he enters Jerusalem: Mt. 20.29-34; cf. Mk 10.46-52).<sup>769</sup> It seems likely that the pericope was omitted, as with the story of the deaf-mute, because of its unusual healing techniques and magical elements. It comprises a list of detailed physical, therapeutic actions (and not much else) where Jesus is portrayed by Mark as resembling the typical Graeco-Roman miracle worker.<sup>770</sup> Alternatively, the other evangelists may have regarded the delay in the full restoration of the man's sight as portraying a flaw in Jesus' miraculous abilities that could not be condoned,<sup>771</sup> or they may have been opposed to Mark's theme of obduracy on the part of the disciples.<sup>772</sup>

There were contemporaneous stories of miraculous healings of blind men circulating in the region that emphasized the power of human miracle workers and the emperor. Such healings had historically been associated with the gods and were widespread in the ancient world. Stele inscriptions from the second half of the fourth century BCE, found in the temple of Asclepius in Epidaurus, contain miracle stories similar to those in Mark's Gospel.<sup>773</sup> One in particular, where

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<sup>769</sup> As noted previously (p. 209), there is a non-Synoptic parallel in Jn 9.6-7, where spittle is used by Jesus but in a slightly different way.

<sup>770</sup> M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), 128; Boring, *Mark*, 232; Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 244, n. 29.

<sup>771</sup> As commented above (p. 180), Luke omits Mark's section 6.45-8.26 and picks up Mark's narrative again at 8.27. For changes in Mark's Gospel itself from 8.27 in terms of language, style and themes, see Quesnell, *Mind of Mark*, 129-130.

<sup>772</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 692.

<sup>773</sup> Strabo, *Geogr.* XVI.2.22 also refers to a sacred grove of Asclepius between Berytus and Sidon. Eshmun was the Phoenician god of healing and identified according to *interpretatio graeca* with the Greek god Asclepius. See, A. Petsalis-Diomidis, *Truly Beyond Wonders: Aelius Aristides and the Cult of Asklepios* (Oxford: OUP, 2010), for discussion on the place of healing pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman society and R. A. Stucky, *et al* (eds), *Das Eshmun-Heiligtum von Sidon. Architektur und Inschriften*, Antike Kunst Beiheft, 19 (Basel: Vereinigung der Freunde antiker Kunst, 2005) on the Eshmun sanctuary in Phoenicia.

blindness is cured in a dream by the god, is a distant parallel in that it has a reference to blindness and trees.

Alcetas of Halieis. This blind man saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god came up to him and with his fingers opened his eyes, and he first saw the trees of the sanctuary. At daybreak he walked out sound.

Ἄλκετας Ἀλικός. οὗτος τυφλὸς ἑὼν ἐνύπνιον εἶδε· ἐδόκει οἱ ὁ θεὸς ποτελθὼν τοῖς δακτύλοις διάγειν τὰ ὄμματα καὶ ἰδεῖν τὰ δένδρη πρᾶτον τὰ ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ. ἀμέρας δὲ γενομένας ὑγιῆς ἐξῆλθε.<sup>774</sup>

Towards the end of the Romano-Jewish War, in the winter of 69 CE and in temporal proximity to Mark's recording of the account of Jesus curing the blind man, several ancient historians attribute the successful healing of a blind man to Vespasian (see Appendix 25: Tacitus, *Histories* IV.81). At this time he was in Alexandria, blockading Egypt's grain supply to Rome and waiting out the period of civil war in Italy that erupted after Nero's suicide (68 CE). This had resulted in fierce competition for the imperial throne in which Galba, Otho and Vitellius each managed to reign for only a few months. In July 69 CE the Egyptian legions proclaimed Vespasian emperor, followed quickly by the Judean troops.<sup>775</sup> In order to consolidate his precarious position, further confirm his quasi-divine suitability for the role of emperor and legitimize his claim to the throne, the Flavian propaganda machine (with the help of Agrippa and his half-sister Berenice) was galvanized in the east to promulgate stories of Vespasian's miraculous healings.<sup>776</sup> This

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<sup>774</sup> E. J. and L. Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, vol. I (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, rev. ed. 1998), 224-225, n. 18. See also, Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 392, who has suggested that this story is analogous to the Markan pericope.

<sup>775</sup> For full discussion on Vespasian's accession, see K. Wellesley, *The Year of the Four Emperors* (London & New York: Routledge, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2000).

<sup>776</sup> Berenice was a strong supporter of Vespasian and the Flavian party. She recalled her half-brother Agrippa II to Palestine to pay homage to Vespasian (Tacitus, *Hist.*, II.81). Vespasian's son Titus, when he succeeded his father as emperor in 80 CE, tried to make

propaganda, along with other prophecies and portents relating to Vespasian (cf. *War* III.399-404; IV.623; Suetonius, *Vesp.* V.6; Cassius Dio, *Rom. Hist.* XV.4) sought to bolster his claim to the throne. These stories were certainly circulating in Palestine and Syria and may even have been initiated in the region of Bethsaida/Caesarea Philippi where Berenice was located at the time.

There are, in fact, accounts of two alleged miraculous eye-witness healings attributed to Vespasian: restoring a withered hand and sight to a blind man. The blind man had been promised in a dream by the healing god Serapis (closely associated with the Ptolemaic and Roman ruler cults: Tacitus, *Hist.* IV.83-84) that Vespasian would restore his sight by spitting on his eyes (Suetonius, *Vesp.* VII.2.3; Tacitus, *Hist.* IV.81; Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* XXVIII.4.7; Dio Cassius, LXVI.8).<sup>777</sup> Eve has convincingly argued that Mark introduced spittle into the story of the blind man deliberately (and possibly also into the story of the deaf mute) in order to create an allusion to the Vespasian story 'as part of a wider concern to contrast the messiahship of Jesus with such Roman imperial messianism'.<sup>778</sup> Mark's emphasis on the process of Jesus' therapeutic course of physical manipulation and the use of spittle is similar to these testimonies and to some extent those from Epidaurus. It is highly probable that Mark and his community were familiar with this circulating imperial propaganda relating to Vespasian's miraculous deeds. Mark's portrayal of Jesus as using the same divinely inspired magical techniques as the would-be emperor would probably have resulted in his audience associating Jesus with the

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Berenice his empress but found this unacceptable to the Roman establishment (Dio Cassius, LXV.15.3-5; LXVI 18.1; Suetonius, *Titus*, 7.1).

<sup>777</sup> For Tacitus translation, see Cartlidge and Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels*, 156. For discussion on why Josephus failed to record these miraculous events during Vespasian's trip to Alexandria (*War* V.21) see E. Eve, 'Spit in Your Eye: The Blind Man of Bethsaida and the Blind Man of Alexandria', *NTS*, 54 (2008), 7-9.

<sup>778</sup> Eve, 'Spit in Your Eye', 1-17. See also K. Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1970), 162.

mighty Vespasian. Inevitably, however, this may also have caused friction, if Jesus was portrayed as competing against the emperor.

#### 7.4.5 Markan Narrative

##### **Mk 8.22:**

Καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Βηθσαϊδάν. καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτῷ τυφλὸν καὶ παρακαλοῦσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα αὐτοῦ ἄψηται.

***And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him.***

Many commentators consider that the reference to Bethsaida is part of the original tradition, although Bultmann dismisses this assumption as it clashes with the designation of Bethsaida as a 'village' (v. 23).<sup>779</sup> The text suggests that the man was sufficiently incapacitated to be dependent upon those who brought him, who remain an unidentified group but given the location, we can assume these were Gentiles. This is clearly a restoration of sight as the blind man was able to compare men and trees and understood the movement of walking described at v. 24.<sup>780</sup> Again, Mark assigns the miraculous power of touch to Jesus, which those who brought the man to Jesus initially requested. Thus, the subsequent action of Jesus applying the spittle seems superfluous.

##### **Mk 8.23:**

καὶ ἐπιλαβόμενος τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ τυφλοῦ ἐξήνεγκεν αὐτὸν ἔξω τῆς κώμης καὶ πτύσας εἰς τὰ ὄμματα αὐτοῦ, ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῷ ἐπηρώτα αὐτόν, Εἴ τι βλέπεις;

***And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?'***

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<sup>779</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 227. Contra Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 692, who argues that both Mark and Q (Mt. 11.20-24; Lk 10.12-15) agree on Bethsaida as a venue for Jesus' miraculous activity and Guelich, *Mark 1-8.26*, 431, argues that the use of κώμη here need not be a contradiction to the location as Bethsaida.

<sup>780</sup> For discussion on the nature of the blind man's disability (chronic trachoma or severe cataracts), see J. K. Howard, 'Men as Trees Walking: Mark 8.22-26', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 37 (1984), 163-170.

Jesus initially touches the blind man's hand but this does not have the miraculous effect of securing the healing, even though this has been the case previously (Mk 1.41; 3.10; 6.56; 5.27; 7.33). The use of κώμης here and in vs 26 is odd as Bethsaida had been elevated to the status of πόλις and was a considerable size (Lk 9.10; Jn 1.44; *War* III.43; *Ant.* XVIII.28).<sup>781</sup> However, it may be that the narrative described a visit to one of the surrounding villages (*Ant.* XX.159) or that, as Myers argues, this is connected with Mark's 'narrative avoidance' of cities.<sup>782</sup>

It has been suggested that ὄμματα is used by the evangelist, rather than the more normal term ὀφθαλμοί, simply in a search for 'variety of expression' and it is likely that 'the more archaic language, together with the use of saliva, is intended to suggest a more formal ritual of healing'.<sup>783</sup> In this instance Jesus is not recorded as applying saliva to the blind man's eyes with his hands, as appears to be the case in the application of saliva to the tongue of the deaf-mute (Mk 7.33) but instead (as with Vespasian) he directly spits into the man's eyes. This action of spitting into the blind-man's face is certainly open to magical interpretation and ultimately makes Jesus appear as 'either a primitive doctor or a magician – the two not always being distinguished in the ancient world'.<sup>784</sup> Εἰ is commonly used by Mark to introduce an indirect question (cf. Mk 3.2; 10.2; 15.36, 44) but here Mark uses it for a direct question.<sup>785</sup> This is the only case in the New Testament where Jesus makes this kind of direct address to the person afflicted. The question

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<sup>781</sup> Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 283, suggests that κώμης should be interpreted in the light of Josephus' remarks on large agricultural villages, 'the very many villages that are here are everywhere so full of people, because of the richness of their soil, that the very least of them contained more than 15,000 inhabitants' (*War* III.43).

<sup>782</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 150-151.

<sup>783</sup> France, *Gospel of Mark*, 324.

<sup>784</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 693.

<sup>785</sup> On the use of εἰ to introduce a direct question, see C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: CUP, 1960), 151, 158.

appears to resemble an enquiry as to whether the healing has been successful, suggesting confirmation of ‘magical’ success rather than divine ‘miracle’.

**Mk 8.24-25:**

καὶ ἀναβλέψας ἔλεγεν, Βλέπω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅτι ὡς δένδρα ὁρῶ περιπατοῦντας. εἶτα πάλιν ἐπέθηκεν τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ, καὶ διέβλεψεν καὶ ἀπεκατέστη καὶ ἐνέβλεπεν τηλαυγῶς ἅπαντα.

***And he looked up and said, ‘I see men; but they look like trees, walking’. Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored and saw everything clearly.***

This is an awkward sentence, produced by the unnecessary introduction after ὅτι of a second verb of seeing ὁρῶ. The verb ἀναβλέπω (here as an aorist participle) was used by Mark in 7.34 to indicate that Jesus and can mean ‘to look upward’ or ‘to regain sight’.<sup>786</sup> The result of Jesus’ action is a description of indistinct sight. This part of the narrative is somewhat confusing as the man has been led out of the village, presumably in private, yet sees men walking. There are many textual variants to this statement that try to ameliorate its awkwardness.<sup>787</sup> The statement is sufficiently unusual to suggest that this came to Mark from an oral or written tradition.<sup>788</sup>

The adverb πάλιν suggests that this is the second time that Jesus has placed his hands upon the man’s eyes. Διέβλεψεν, in this context, means that ‘he saw clearly’. Ἐνβλέπω, a stronger form of the verb βλέπω is also found at Mk 10.21, 27; 14.67. Marcus interprets and connects Mark’s use of βλέπω (v. 24) and διέβλεψεν (cf. Mt. 7.5; Lk 6.42) with his use of a different compound, τηλαυγῶς (v. 25: with far beaming sight). He argues that this is language that connects the first century reader with the common ancient theory of ‘extramission vision’. This is the

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<sup>786</sup> LSJ, 99. E. S. Johnson, ‘Mark VIII.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida’, *NTS*, 25.3 (1979), 377, demonstrates that where ἀναβλέπω is used in reference to blindness, it refers to regaining sight.

<sup>787</sup> See Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 594-595.

<sup>788</sup> Howard, ‘Men as Trees’, 163.

idea that beams of light rays come out of the eye to produce visions. He argues that 'both among philosophers and the common people, this theory seems to have been the dominant one'.<sup>789</sup> Taylor disagrees and convincingly argues that the use of these intensive verbs is 'tautologous' or simply repetition of the same thing, but with different words.<sup>790</sup>

**Mk 8.26:**

καὶ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν εἰς οἶκον αὐτοῦ λέγων, Μηδὲ εἰς τὴν κώμην εἰσέλθης.  
***And he sent him away to his home, saying, 'Do not even enter the village'.***

The Markan Jesus has deliberately taken the man away from the village to heal him. Mark has Jesus instructing him not to return to the village (where presumably he lived), subtly paralleling the injunctions to silence following other healing miracles but with slightly less emphasis. There are many textual variants in manuscripts presumably designed to correct this anomaly, including ὑπάγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου καὶ μηδενὶ εἴπῃς εἰς τὴν κώμην (D it<sup>d</sup> (q): Go to your house and do not speak to anyone in the village).<sup>791</sup> Bultmann has argued that the verse concluded with sending the man home and Mark has added the instruction about not returning to the village.<sup>792</sup> In the overall context of the Gospel, however, this instruction becomes part of the theme of the messianic secret and mysterious identity of Jesus.<sup>793</sup> However, all of v. 26 may be traditional and related to the

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<sup>789</sup> J. Marcus, 'A Note on Markan Optics', *NTS*, 45 (1999), 250-256, esp. 251-252.

<sup>790</sup> Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 372.

<sup>791</sup> For full commentary on the development of the principal variant readings, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 84.

<sup>792</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 213. For discussion on the text-critical question on the eight different readings, see Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 691, n. 59.

<sup>793</sup> Contra K. Tagawa, *Miracles et Évangile* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1966), 161-163 who considers that this is not part of Mark's own secrecy motif but inherent in the tradition Mark received.

conventions of the practice of magical healing where recovery of the afflicted is dependent upon seclusion.<sup>794</sup>

#### **7.4.6 Mk 8.22-26: Summary**

The motif in this miracle is primarily the Gentile man's journey from 'no sight, to partial sight, to complete sight'.<sup>795</sup> In his narrative Mark is reinforcing the faith of the Gentile man, inferred by his acquiescence to be led by Jesus to a private place, answering his questions and presumably obediently leaving following his command. The story clearly has more than a literal sense and suggests that blind people with faith can see (in this case a Gentile man). The story is positioned in the Gospel at a point where the audience connects this Gentile faith with the disciples who can physically see but remain blinded by their lack of understanding and faith. Additionally, in terms of engagement with his audience, Mark narrates this story at a time when there was an awareness of similar stories of miraculous spittle healings by men with divine power.

The journey continues, clearly marked by further geographical references. Mark informs his audience that Jesus and his disciples travel twenty-five miles northward, even deeper into Gentile territory, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8.27).<sup>796</sup> During the course of this narrative journey, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah (v. 29) and Jesus, Peter, James and John ascend a high mountain where the transfiguration occurs (Mk 9.2).<sup>797</sup> Thus, the evangelist places

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<sup>794</sup> S. Eitrem, *Some Notes on the Demonology in the New Testament* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1966), 47.

<sup>795</sup> Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 103.

<sup>796</sup> Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II, 171, indicates that these villages belonged to the territory of the city.

<sup>797</sup> Mark, by not specifying which mountain he is referring to, has generated numerous theories that include the location as Mounts Hermon, Tabor or Meron. The most likely geographical location is Mount Hermon, which covers a geographical area of c. 1,000 sq. km and touches on the territories of Sidon to the west, Damascus to the east and Caesarea Philippi to the south.

this important confirmation of the divine status of Jesus in a mountainous high place, characteristic of the dwelling places of the gods of polytheistic religious practice, to emphasize the importance and extent of Jesus' mission even further into Gentile territory and by association he reinforces his own community's commitment to this path.<sup>798</sup> The narrative records Jesus as performing an exorcism on his descent from the mountain (Mk 9.14-29) but the focus in this Gentile arena is on true discipleship and faith.

### **7.5 Graeco-Roman Background: Caesarea Philippi**

Caesarea Philippi, a city at the northernmost extent of Jesus' ministry, was the locality of the Markan transfiguration of Jesus and the exorcism of a young boy. It is located on a large plateau at the south-western slope of Mount Hermon, in the Ante-Lebanon mountain range, in a region of south-western Syria (see Appendix 1: Map: Southern Levant in the Roman Period). The city was close to the ancient main road to Tyre, the Mediterranean and Damascus and overlooked the Jordan valley's fertile northern end where the headwaters of the river emerge from a grotto and flowed through the swamps of the Huleh into the Sea of Galilee and finally into the Dead Sea (Tacitus *Hist.* V.6; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* V.16; Josephus, *War* II.168). Mark alludes to the villages of Caesarea Philippi, conjuring up the idea of a large geographical spread (Mk 8.27) comparable with the territories of Tyre and Sidon.<sup>799</sup>

The first specific reference to Paneas (Caesarea Philippi) is in the work of the Greek historian Polybius (c. 205 – 125 BCE) where he refers to the locality as

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<sup>798</sup> In the structure of the central part of the Gospel (Mk 8.27-10.52) ὁδός (Mk 8.27; 9.33, 34; 10.52: the way) occurs several times as a narrative link. Before 8.27 ὁδός is used in connection with the coming of John the Baptist (Mk 1.2-3) and post Mk 10.52, where the newly sighted Bartimaeus, ἠκολούθει αὐτῷ ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ (followed him on the way).

<sup>799</sup> See Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina*, 21, who claims 'precise frontiers are difficult to define'.

Τὸ Πάνειον in connection with a battle between the armies of Antiochus III of Syria, who occupied Palestine at this time, and Ptolemy (XVI.18.2-6; XVIII.1.3). Undoubtedly, some sort of settlement called Paneas pre-dated the building works of Herod the Great, although the archaeological evidence is composed mainly of Hellenistic shards.<sup>800</sup> At the time of Herod the Great, Paneas belonged to the tetrarch, high priest and vassal of Augustus, Zenodorus (*Ant.* XV.344), after whose death (c. 20 BCE; *Ant.* XV.359) Augustus presented it to Herod (c. 23 BCE; *Ant.* XV.360). In c. 2-3 BCE Herod's son (tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis) Philip II inherited the north eastern part of Herod's kingdom and instituted a new era in the history of the area by building Caesarea (Καίσαρεια) Philippi as the capital of his territory. He did this to honour the emperor Augustus (*War* II.168; *Ant.* XVIII.28; Pliny *Nat. Hist.* V.15). Numismatic evidence confirms the era of Caesarea Philippi began in 3 BCE but the actual date of the founding of the city remains a matter of dispute.<sup>801</sup> At the time Philip improved his capital, he would undoubtedly have settled colonists to contribute to the urbanisation of the area. This would be consistent with the policies of the Herodian client kings who introduced support in the form of Gentiles and military colonists.

After the death of Philip (33 CE) the city was moved into the hands of his nephew, Agrippa I (41-44 CE) during Caligula's reign and then passed into the hands of Philip's grand-nephew, Agrippa II who transformed Caesarea Philippi into an impressive Graeco-Roman *polis* (*War* III.514). In 61 CE, he renamed it

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<sup>800</sup> J. F. Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi: Baniyas – The Lost City of Pan* (London & New York: Tauris Press, 2004), 21. See also Moor, 'Decapolis: City Territories', 157–207, esp. 190, for discussion on the extent of a city's territory in the region.

<sup>801</sup> Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, vol. II, 170, dates the city's foundation from this date on the basis of numismatic evidence. See also, Y. Meshorer, 'Coins of Caesarea Paneas', *Israel Numismatic Journal*, 8 (1984-1985), 37-58, esp. 40, who catalogues the coins of Paneas.

Νερωνίας (Neronias) in honour of Nero (*Ant.* XX.211).<sup>802</sup> After the death of Nero and the proclamation of *damnatio memoriae*, the city name reverted to Caesarea or Caesarea-Philippi as designated by Josephus (*Ant* XX. 211; *War* III.443).

Agrippa II, who ruled the area at the time the Markan Gospel was written, successfully negotiated his way through the Romano-Jewish War without losing the support of his Roman overlords and outlived seven Roman emperors. The mint at Caesarea Philippi was active during Agrippa II's reign and the city would remain Agrippa's capital throughout his rule. He appears to have subordinated himself unconditionally to Rome as almost without exception his coins include the names and images of the reigning emperors.<sup>803</sup> Varus was appointed by Agrippa II as procurator of Caesarea Philippi. When the revolt broke out in Palestine he sealed off the town and proceeded to move unsuccessfully against the Jewish community (*Life* 52-61). At the time of the Romano-Jewish War, this was clearly an ethnically diverse society and probably included Syrians and Phoenicians. Josephus describes major segments of the population as 'the Syrians of Caesarea' (*Life* 53, 59) and a smaller Jewish element as 'the Jews of Caesarea' (*Life* 52-53, 61, 74-75; *War* II.592).<sup>804</sup> Thus, during its entire history the city was inhabited by a largely non-Jewish polytheistic population. Archaeological and numismatic evidence has shown that in the late first century CE, Agrippa II built a palace at Caesarea Philippi.<sup>805</sup> After Agrippa II's death, sometime near the turn of the

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<sup>802</sup> The name Neronias seems never to have become generally accepted (V. Tzaferis, 'Cults and Deities Worshipped at Caesarea Philippi-Banias', in E. Ulrich *et al* [eds], *Priests, Prophets and Scribes* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 197-198); Schürer, *History*, vol. II, 170. However, this designation is occasionally found on coins (Y. Meshorer, *Jewish Coins of the Second Temple Period* [Tel Aviv: Hassefer & Massada, 1967], 85-87).

<sup>803</sup> Schürer, *History*, vol. II, 475.

<sup>804</sup> Though predominantly pagan, Josephus tells us that the Jews in the region paid exorbitant prices for oil from Galilean olive groves, suggesting that the area itself was affluent (*Life* VII.4; *War* II.591).

<sup>805</sup> J. F. Wilson and V. Tzaferis, 'Banias Dig Reveals King's Palace', *Bible Archaeology Review*, 24.1 (1998), 54-61, 85.

century, this small kingdom was absorbed into the Province of Syria (Tacitus, *Hist.* XII. 23.1).

Mark's first century audience would undoubtedly have connected the location of this pericope with images of a busy Graeco-Roman city. The city plan appears to have followed the canons of contemporary Graeco-Roman urban design, in that there was a *cardo* crossing the city from north to south, colonnaded buildings and other civic monuments. The public and social centre of the city covered approximately fifteen hectares, with the residential areas located east of the cliff and springs extending to the south.<sup>806</sup> The city has several imperial connections in that, after the capture of Jotapata, it was visited by Vespasian for twenty days in the summer of 67 CE, before he advanced on Tiberias to crush the Jewish resistance in Galilee (*War* III 412-413; 444).<sup>807</sup> Whilst in the city, Vespasian was 'feasted by King Agrippa' (*War* III.443-444), an enterprise which would have involved considerable expense and facilities. According to Josephus, Vespasian offered thanks to the god(s) whilst he was there (*War* III.444).<sup>808</sup> Titus, whose presence in the Jerusalem Temple in 70 CE may have represented τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἐστηκότα ὅπου οὐ δεῖ (Mk 13.14: the desolating sacrilege set-up where it [he] ought not to be), followed the lead of his father and also visited Caesarea Philippi, having left Caesarea Maritima on the coast. He stayed there for a considerable time to celebrate the conquest of Jerusalem and put on shows where many of his Jewish captives were killed (*War* VII.23-24).<sup>809</sup>

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<sup>806</sup> V. Tzaferis and S. Israeli, *Paneas: The Roman to Early Islamic Periods; Excavations in Areas A, B, E, F, G. and H* (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2008), 174.

<sup>807</sup> Schürer, *History*, vol. II, 494.

<sup>808</sup> Probably at the Augusteum, now dedicated to Nero, who died in 68 CE and directed to either Zeus or Pan whose myth includes assistance in battles, causing the enemy to *Panic*.

<sup>809</sup> For evidence of various athletic events at Caesarea Philippi, see Z. Weiss, 'Adopting a Novelty: The Jews and the Roman Games in Palestine', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Roman and Byzantine Near East*, vol. II (Portsmouth: JRA, 1999), 38.

As previously discussed, Vespasian was in Palestine as a representative of the emperor Nero. In order to fulfill a propaganda function, stories about Vespasian's miracles were circulating at this time (pp. 246-249) alongside stories of Jesus' miraculous deeds, thus exalting both men above normal human stature. Vespasian, who came from an undistinguished family, may have tolerated the generation of this 'miraculous' divine persona in order to establish continuity with his Julio-Claudian predecessors, including the 'divine' Augustus. This popular tradition of attributing divine qualities to men was unmistakably tied to the Syro-Palestinian region but would have circulated and penetrated to other areas. Interestingly, Josephus uses the noun εὐαγγελία (Mk 1.1) for the news that Vespasian had seized power (*War* IV.618: Now fame carried this news abroad more suddenly than one could have thought. Swifter than the flight of thought, that he was emperor over the East, upon which every city kept festivals, and celebrated sacrifices and offerings for such good news [εὐαγγελία]).<sup>810</sup>

## 7.6 Evidence of Polytheism in the Region

There is evidence that from the early third century BCE through to the fifth century CE a cult and sanctuary dedicated to the Greek god Pan existed at Paneas/Caesarea Philippi. Although the name and nominal deity remained the same over this period, cult ritual probably changed over time. It has been suggested that in this region the simple cult of Pan was reminiscent of the bulls of the Caananite Ba'als, primeval gods of nature who had similar mythological attributes. These may have formed the chain binding a 'succeeding procession of deities' which in the fourth century BCE eventually merged with the Greek god

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<sup>810</sup> For discussion on the polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Jesus, see A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927). See p. 37 on the use of the term in the Priene Inscription.

Pan.<sup>811</sup> Archaeological evidence suggests that three miles from Paneas at Tel Dan, the biblical cult of the golden calf was instituted.<sup>812</sup>

At the time of Polybius' reference to the locality as Τὸ Πάνειον (XVI.18.2-6; XVIII.1.3) there was no city nearby. This was a rural site with a landscape composed of natural grottos, spring-waters, precipitous cliffs, forests and animals, constituting the requisite rural background for the institution of the cult of Pan at the cave.<sup>813</sup> The sanctuary, at least from the start of the second century BCE, appears to have been limited to the natural grotto (Polybius, *Hist.* XVI.18-19).<sup>814</sup> It is situated on a long, narrow terrace, at one end of which is the huge natural cave and below a ravine where one of the sources of the Jordan flows (*War* III.509). The cave itself is located in the left (western) corner of the rock scarp. At the end of the first century BCE there was cultic activity practised in the cave, evidenced by excavated small bowls and lamps.<sup>815</sup> Archaeological and numismatic evidence has shown that it was likely that by the second century CE a statue of Pan dominated the cave.<sup>816</sup>

In the late first century BCE, after Augustus personally turned the territory of Paneas over to Herod he built a temple directly in front of the cave of Pan, in honour of the emperor and family patron.<sup>817</sup>

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<sup>811</sup> Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 2-3.

<sup>812</sup> A. Biran, 'Tel Dan', *Biblical Archaeology*, 43 (1980), 168-182.

<sup>813</sup> Pan was the god of music, forests, desolate places, shepherds and goat-herds, possibly the son of Cronos and Rhea or Hermes and a Nymph (Graves, *The Greek Myths*, vol. I, 102-104) and represented by half-man (upper half) and half goat (lower half). Pan inhabited 'unaltered caves in out-of-the-way places' (Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 5).

<sup>814</sup> Tzaferis, 'Cults and Deities', 190-201. For details on the archaeological remains of Caesarea Philippi in the early Roman period, see Tzaferis and Israeli, *Paneas*, 1-20.

<sup>815</sup> Tzaferis and Israeli, *Paneas*, 173.

<sup>816</sup> E. Ma'oz, 'Coin and Temple – The Case of Caesarea Philippi-Paneas', *Israel Numismatic Journal*, 13 (1994), 90-102.

<sup>817</sup> Ma'oz, 'Coin and Temple', 91. Contra Wilson, *Caesarea Philippi*, 14-16, who reviews the possibilities and concedes it may have been built at Omrit. J. A. Overman, J. Olive and M. Nelson, 'Discovering Herod's Shrine to Augustus: Mystery Temple Found at Omrit', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 29.2 (2003), 40-49; 67-68, claim to have found this temple on a hillside at Omrit, two miles south-west of Caesarea Philippi. They argue that Josephus

So when he had conducted Caesar to the sea and was returned home, he built him a most beautiful temple, of the whitest stone, in Zenodorus' country, near the place called Panium. This is a very fine cave in a mount, under which there is a great cavity in the earth, and the cavern is abrupt and prodigiously deep and fed by a still water; over it hangs a vast mountain; and under the caverns arise the springs of the river Jordan. Herod adorned this place, which was already a very remarkable one, still further by the erection of this temple, which he dedicated to Caesar. (*Ant.* XV.363-364; cf. *War* I.404-406).

The imperial cult, a politico-religious institution, was imposed initially on those who were subjugated and later enforced upon the Romans themselves. The cult played an important role in spreading imperial propaganda and encouraging allegiance to the emperor who was portrayed as a god or imbued with the spirit of a deity.<sup>818</sup> Herod's erection of temples to Augustus represented loyalty and commitment to Rome and part of a strategy for the social and political organization of a diverse population. The temple, which was probably constantly re-dedicated to the current living emperor, was of a simple tetrastyle (four supporting columns on its façade) and comprised of a *naos* and decorated entrance to the cave with steps leading up to a high platform.<sup>819</sup> Philip's mint was active throughout his reign and numismatic evidence shows representations of the Augusteum along with portraits of himself and the imperial family.<sup>820</sup> The Augusteum continued to be

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locates the Augusteum 'in the region of Paneas', that Omrit is a more suitable location than Paneas and the remains of the first century temple at Omrit closely resemble the depiction on the coins of Phillip.

<sup>818</sup> The temple was probably also dedicated to the goddess Roma (Suetonius, *Aug.* 52: 'templa ... in nulla tamen provincia nisi communi suo Romaeque nomine recepit', '[H]e would not accept one [a temple] even in a province save jointly in his own name and that of Rome'. For discussion see Schürer, *History*, vol. II, 34-35, n. 27.

<sup>819</sup> The temples to Augustus in Pompeii, Caesarea Maritima and Sebaste were constructed at approximately the same time and may provide some idea of the form and style of the temple at Paneas. See also numismatic evidence in Meshorer, 'Coins of Caesarea Paneas', 37-58, pls., 7-15.

<sup>820</sup> A. Burnett, M. Amandry and P. P. Ripollès (eds), *Roman Provincial Coinage, Julio-Claudian Period*, vol. I (London and Paris: British Museum Press and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1998), 681, nos 4944-4946 and Meshorer, 'Jewish Coins', 244-246, pls., 7, 8.

represented on many of the second and early third century imperials minted at Caesarea Philippi (see Appendix 26: Coins of Caesarea Philippi).<sup>821</sup>

Excavations have revealed Roman sanctuaries (some of which were hollowed out of rock) at high altitude on the mountain area and often surrounded by tombs and ancient settlements. The sanctuaries were built and refurbished between the end of the first century and the beginning of the fourth century CE and experienced 'a frenzy of religious building on their mountainous confines'.<sup>822</sup> All dated inscriptions, evidence of tombs and the necessity for priests and civil servants to administrate the sanctuaries, lead to the assumption that this mountain area was continuously inhabited during the first three centuries CE.<sup>823</sup> In the Graeco-Roman period, the evidence suggests that the gods of Mount Hermon were of the Baal type, identified with Zeus (Josh 11.17).<sup>824</sup>

Tzaferis has argued that up to at least the end of Agrippa II's reign (c. 93 CE) the cult of Pan and the imperial cult remained the principal worship practised in the city.<sup>825</sup> Additionally, 'guided by the vogue of the time', the cult of Tyche-Fortuna would have been established throughout the reigns of Philip and Agrippa II, up to the end of the first century CE.<sup>826</sup> Evidence of a temple to the goddess was not necessary as 'a statue of the goddess accompanied by an altar and some

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<sup>821</sup> Meshorer, 'Coins of Caesarea Paneas', 37-58, pls. 7-15, is a catalogue of the corpus of coins issued by Caesarea Philippi in the first to third centuries CE. Meshorer has suggested that Philip issued a series of three coins in 29/30 CE to commemorate the founding of the city of Caesarea Philippi, p. 49.

<sup>822</sup> For the characteristics of the temples, see J. Aliquot, 'Sanctuaries and Villages on Mt Hermon during the Roman Period', in Kaizer, *Variety of Religious Life*, 73-96.

<sup>823</sup> Tzaferis, 'Cults and Deities', 190-204.

<sup>824</sup> *ibid*, 84-85.

<sup>825</sup> *ibid*, 191.

<sup>826</sup> Meshorer, 'Coins of Caesarea Paneas', 39, reports that in the sixth year of Agrippa II (66/67 CE) a coin was issued which named Neronias, depicted the head of Tyche on the obverse and double *cornucopiae* and *caduceus* on its reverse. In 88 CE an issue depicting Pan playing the *syrix*, holding a *pedum* over his shoulder was issued, and another of Tyche of Paneas, holding a rudder and *cornucopiae*.

sort of open courtyard on the agora, on the acropolis, or on any other prominent place was sufficient'.<sup>827</sup>

At approximately the time the Markan Gospel was written, the construction of the Temple of Zeus and Pan began directly on the surface of the terrace which consisted of an artificial cave housing the statue of Pan, fronted by an altar for burnt offerings.<sup>828</sup> Roman pottery from the late first century, including lamps and cooking vessels, has been found on the terrace itself and datable by a combination of associated numismatic and inscriptional evidence.<sup>829</sup> The site developed over a few centuries by adding various structures and courts east of the Augusteum along the rock scarp, at the foot of the mountain, until the entire length of the terrace was filled (see Appendix 27: Cultic Archaeology of Caesarea Philippi).<sup>830</sup> Eusebius mentions the city in his *Eccl. Hist.* VII.17 and describes a pagan festival at Caesarea Philippi where a victim is thrown down from the mountain into the

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<sup>827</sup> Tzaferis indicates that this assumption is supported by numismatic evidence of representations of Tyche on coins struck by Agrippa II where no architectural elements are present and on coins depicting Tyche from the first half of the third century, the goddess is shown within a tetrastyle or distyle temple ('Cults and Deities', 199). See also Meshorer, 'Coins of Caesarea Paneas', who describes coins issued at the time of the fall of Masada and continuing throughout the 70s and 80s. These issues portrayed the emperors Vespasian, Titus and Domitian and the reverses depict Tyche and Nike.

<sup>828</sup> S. R. Wolff, 'Archaeology in Israel', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 97 (1993), 155.

<sup>829</sup> J. Starcky, 'Autour d'une dédicace palmyrénienne à Šadrafa et à Du'anat', *Syria*, 26 (1949), 62-67; Berlin, 'Archaeology of Ritual', 30-33.

<sup>830</sup> Subsequently there appears to have been a fusion of Pan with Zeus when in the late second century a temple was dedicated to Zeus and Pan (Διό-Παν, see W. H. Waddington, *Inscriptions grecque et latine de la Syrie* [Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, repr. 1968], no. 1892), along with two dedicatory niches to Echo and Hermes and a *tabula ansata* (tablet with handles) located to the left of one of the niches which carries a mutilated dedicatory inscription dated 150 CE (Wolff, 'Archaeology of Israel', 155). The phenomenon of the sharing of a temple by the chief deity with additional deities is well attested in the region during this period elsewhere, cf. Lucian: *On the Syrian Goddess*, 30-40. At the beginning of the third century CE, the Temple of Pan and the Goats was installed (E. Ma'oz, 'Banias, Temple of Pan – 1993', *Excavations and Surveys in Israel*, 15 [1996], 1-2) and a shrine for Nemesis consisting of a rock-carved niche with a paved court, laid out east of the new temple with an inscription dated 222 CE providing the *terminus ad quem* (Wolff, 'Archaeology of Israel', 155). This temple contained marble sculptures of Nemesis, Roma, nymphs and other deities, including Asclepios and Apollo, Artemis and Hermes (E. Friedland, 'Graeco-Roman Sculpture in the Levant: The Marble from the Sanctuary of Pan at Caesarea Philippi (Banias)', in J. H. Humphrey (ed.), *Roman and Byzantine Near East* [Portsmouth RI: JRA, vol. II, 1999], 7-22).

springs below.<sup>831</sup> Even though several other cults appear to have been established throughout the history of the city, they remained of minor importance. The fact that the city retained its original name Paneas, alongside its official name Caesarea Philippi, can be considered proof that Pan was indisputably the real patron-god of the city. It is interesting that Matthew's parallel to the story of Peter's declaration at Caesarea Philippi (Mt. 16.18) places on the lips of Jesus the words, *καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ σοὶ λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν*: 'And I tell you, that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church'. As we have seen, the focal point of polytheistic religious activity at Caesarea Philippi was the rocky outcrop of the shrine of Pan.

### **7.7 Mk 9.14-29: Healing a Boy with an Unclean Spirit**

The evangelist records Jesus, Peter, James and John engaged in conversation and the disciples in confused deliberation (Mk 9.10) on returning from the mountain after the transfiguration. They meet with the other disciples, who were encircled by a crowd and are arguing with scribes (v. 14). At the sight of Jesus, the astonished crowd rushes forward to greet him. Jesus asks the disciples why they were arguing with the scribes but no response is recorded (v. 16). There is an assumption based on the continuing narrative that the controversy between the disciples, the crowd and the scribes related to the disciples' failure to exorcise a demon from a young boy (v. 18). Mark introduces a Gentile man from the crowd who has brought his severely afflicted, spirit-possessed son (v. 17).<sup>832</sup> Mark has Jesus responding somewhat irritably about faithlessness (v. 19), the boy is brought to Jesus and a convulsion immediately overtakes him (v. 20). A dialogue ensues between Jesus and the father of the boy who, when asked by Jesus how long the

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<sup>831</sup> For discussion on this ritual, see Ma'oz, 'Coin and Temple', 999,

<sup>832</sup> Most scholars designate the boy to be Gentile, contra Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 652.

boy has been afflicted, replies that he has been ill since childhood and the spirit has cast him into fire and water in an attempt to destroy him (vs 20-25). The dialogue continues between Jesus and the man (vs 21-24) who begs Jesus to help. Jesus replies that faith makes all things possible and the Gentile man retorts that he does have faith (vs 23-24). Jesus then addresses the spirit, commands it to depart and not return, whereafter it departs with a loud noise, inflicts another severe seizure and leaves the boy apparently dead (v. 26). Jesus takes hold of the boy's hand, lifts him up and he is cured (v. 27). The disciples enquire in private as to why they were unable to heal the boy and Jesus responds, Τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθῆναι εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ (v. 29: This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer). Thus, the pericope itself is bracketed by references to the failure of the disciples to perform the requested exorcism on the Gentile boy (vs 18, 28, 29) whereas elsewhere in the Gospel they are described as performing exorcisms (Mk 6.7, 13).

### 7.7.1 Position and Context of the Story

Some Markan commentators consider the Caesarea Philippi episode to be the central pericope and turning point of the Gospel, citing Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah as significant, in that before this episode Mark has Jesus gathering disciples and followers, and after this incident the narrative consists primarily of Jesus' preparation of the disciples for his crucifixion.<sup>833</sup> This story occurs in the same place in all three Synoptic Gospels: between the transfiguration and the second prediction of Jesus' forthcoming death. During this trip Peter, deep in Gentile territory, declares that Jesus is the Messiah (Mk 8.27-30); Jesus predicts

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<sup>833</sup> Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 48, designates this exchange between Jesus and Peter as a 'confrontation' rather than a 'confession' and argues that, 'Peter's so-called confession is only the initial stage in a dramatically developed story which culminates in Jesus refuting Peter and thereby discrediting his confession'.

his own death (v. 31); teaches on discipleship (vs 34-38); is transfigured before the disciples (9.1-8); the boy with the unclean spirit is healed (vs 14-29); they travel back through Galilee to Capernaum in the Jewish homeland (vs 30-33) and then the journey towards Jerusalem continues.<sup>834</sup> During the course of this journey, the disciples are emphatically represented as completely failing to understand the message of Jesus, discuss amongst themselves who will be the greatest (Mk 9.34), request positions of power (10.35-45) and thus appearing almost without exception, as in conflict with Jesus.<sup>835</sup>

### 7.7.2 Mark's Language and Style

Mark appears to be conflating several forms including an exorcism, healing and a pronouncement story (where the evangelist places on the lips of Jesus the saying on the power of faith). This story is very similar to the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5.1-20) in that it is lengthy, rambling, in parts incoherent, but contains graphic detail. Unusually, unlike other exorcisms, Jesus is addressed without a Christological title (Mk 1.24: '[T]he holy one of God; Mk 5.7; 'Jesus, Son of the Most High God'; Mk 7.28: 'Lord'). The title given in this passage is Διδάσκαλε (Mk. 9.17: 'Teacher' cf. 4.38; 5.35; 10.17, 20, 35; 12.14, 19, 32; 13.1; 14.14). In terms of Mark's language, the story continues with many of his favourite words: ἐκθαμβέομαι (amazed: cf. Mk 9.15; 14.33; 16.5, 6); συζητέω (inferring a sense of combat) used by Mark of disagreements with Jewish authorities (to argue: cf. Mk 8.11; 12.28); γενεά (generation: cf. Mk 8.12x2, 38; 9.19; 13.30); κράξειν (to cry out: cf. Mk 3.11; 5.5, 7; 10.47, 48; 11.9; 15.13, 14). A repetition of vocabulary

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<sup>834</sup> Bultmann, *History*, 64-65, argues that 8.27a (the indication that they went out to the villages of Caesarea Philippi) was originally the conclusion of the blind man of Bethsaida story and that the journey northwards was a Markan 'phantasy'.

<sup>835</sup> Contra Tannehill, 'Disciples', 169-195, who emphasizes Mark's relationship between the disciples and his anticipated readers, indicating that what he reveals about the disciples becomes a revelation to the audience, enabling them to change.

appears in this passage and is employed by Mark with efficiency throughout the whole Gospel, including here twenty five instances of καί parataxis. Word repetitions include: μαθητής (vs. 14, 18, 28); ἑπερωτάω (vs 16, 21, 28); δύναμαι (vs 22, 23, 28, 29); ὁράω (vs 14, 15, 20, 25); εὐθύς (vs 15, 20, 24); ὄχλος (vs 14, 15, 17, 25); ἄλαλος (vs 17, 25); πνεῦμα (vs 17, 20, 25 x 2); ἄπιστος, (vs 19, 24); φέρω and ἀποκρίνομαι (vs 17, 19). The pronoun αὐτός is used thirty-one times in the passage, corresponding to the Greek oral style previously discussed (pp. 46, 70).<sup>836</sup>

### 7.7.3 Markan Sources

The complexity of this story suggests that it may have been the result of a complicated literary history and because the passage contains a number of Semitisms, it has been argued that the narrative may have existed originally in Aramaic.<sup>837</sup> As discussed above, there is also a repetition of language and duplication of information about the boy's condition (vs 18, 20, 22, 26), the assembly of the crowd (vs 14, 25), the disciple's inability to exorcise the boy (vs 18, 28) and the father's plea for help (vs 17, 22).<sup>838</sup> As a consequence, some commentators have argued that vs 20-24 are a secondary accretion,<sup>839</sup> others that this story is a composite of two earlier miracle stories;<sup>840</sup> that the original story Mark received from tradition has simply been expanded;<sup>841</sup> or that the disjunction is probably due to distinctions between oral and written traditions.<sup>842</sup> Myers has noted that there is one element or term from each of the previous exorcisms or

<sup>836</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 272.

<sup>837</sup> Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 95, n. 38. See also M. Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 85, n. 3.

<sup>838</sup> Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 691.

<sup>839</sup> Bultmann, *Miracle Stories*, 136.

<sup>840</sup> Achtemeier, 'Miracles and the Historical Jesus', 476-477, argues that the stories could have been combined before Mark received them from the tradition.

<sup>841</sup> Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium*, 175-176.

<sup>842</sup> Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 439.

healing stories found in the story of the demon possessed boy and suggests that this story is one that Mark composed himself.<sup>843</sup> Jesus and his disciples are not reported as returning to Galilee until after the exorcism (Mk 9.30). Some commentators consider that the presence of the disputing scribes (v. 14), the crowd's familiarity with Jesus (v. 15) and the textual variants (v. 14: ἑλτηρόντες and εἶδόν create the possibility that Jesus approached his waiting disciples alone) indicate that this pericope may have originally been reported to Mark as a Galilean incident.<sup>844</sup>

There are a number of elements in the story that are typical of Markan exorcisms (Jesus arriving at the scene; the demoniac confronts him or is brought to him; description of the possessed's pitiful condition; Jesus rebukes the demon, commands it to leave and there is a separate statement about the well-being of the afflicted person). However, there are also some unique, untypical elements: the failure to exorcise the boy by the disciples; the detailed clinical description of the condition; a demand for faith prior to the exorcism and the omission of any Christological title when previously exorcisms have been connected with Jesus' identity (cf. 1.24; 5.7; 7.28).

There does seem to be evidence of Markan redaction, particularly in vs 14-16 where he appears to have expanded the introduction and vs 28-29 which are both full of Markan vocabulary. The verb δύναμαι (can, be able) and the cognate adjective δυνατός (possible) which occurred five times in vs 22-23, are probably Mark's redaction along with the exchange about faith (vs 22b-24).<sup>845</sup> My view is that the whole story is unlikely to have been invented by Mark but that he received an account from the tradition which he has expanded to fit his overall narrative

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<sup>843</sup> Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 254.

<sup>844</sup> Achtemeier, 'Miracles and the Historical Jesus: A Study of Mark 9.14-29', 475.

<sup>845</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 656.

framework of Gentile inclusion and once again casts the Jewish disciples in a negative light.

#### **7.7.4 Gospel and other Parallels (Mt. 17.14-21; Lk. 9.37-43)**

It is clear that this is the same incident described in all three Gospels. However, Mark's account is considerably fuller than that of Matthew and Luke (Mt. 17.14-21; Lk 9.37-43). It is not known whether Matthew and Luke had access to an earlier form of the tradition from either Q or some other source. However, it seems more likely that the present shape of their stories is due to editorial activity to ameliorate the confusion of Mark's account and to express motifs typical of their own theological understanding. The aspects mutual to all three Gospels are the failure of the disciples, the father's plea for help, the reference to convulsions, Jesus' statement about an unbelieving generation and the accomplishment of the exorcism.

Matthew's reduced account (characteristic of his foreshortening of Mark's miracle accounts) appears to attempt to ameliorate the confusion and produces a story where, as with Mark, the major emphasis is on the disciples' failure. The father's doubts do not appear in Matthew's narrative. After arriving at the crowd (Mt. 17.14), there is no mention of a dispute with scribes, foaming at the mouth, being mauled or any convulsion at the time of the healing. A man kneels before Jesus and begs a cure for his epileptic son who is suffering as he frequently falls into fire and water (v. 15).<sup>846</sup> The man reports that the disciples were unable to cure the boy and Jesus is irritated at the lack of faith (vs. 16-17). Jesus rebukes the demon and cures the boy (v. 18). Matthew continues with an inquiry in private

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<sup>846</sup> For discussion on epilepsy as a disease in antiquity, see E. Magiorkinis, K. Sidiropoulou and A. Diamantis, 'Hallmarks in the History of Epilepsy: Epilepsy in Antiquity', *Epilepsy & Behaviour*, 17 (2010), 103-108.

as to why the disciples were not able to cast out the spirit (v. 19). They are told by Jesus it is because of their lack of faith and Matthew places on the lips of Jesus the pronouncement that if they had faith comparable to a grain of mustard seed they would be able to move mountains and nothing would be impossible for them (vs 20-21; cf. Mt 21.21 = Mk 11.23).<sup>847</sup>

Luke gives a temporal indication that it was on the next day that Jesus and the disciples returned from the mountain where a great crowd had gathered to meet him (Lk 9.37). There is no indication that the crowd were overawed at seeing him, or that they ran to greet him. A man from the crowd approaches him and indicates that his only child is affected by a spirit which causes the boy to shriek, convulse, foam at the mouth and he is mauled and pestered by the spirit (vs 38-39). The man indicates that the disciples were unable to cast out the spirit (v. 40). Again there is irritability on the part of Jesus at this failure and he requests that the boy be brought to him (v. 41). The spirit attacks the boy again, dashes him to the ground, Jesus rebukes the spirit, heals the boy and returns him to his father (v. 42). Luke then records the astonishment of the crowd (v. 43). There is no explanation as to the reason why the disciples were unsuccessful.

There is some evidence that in first century society, accusations of demon possession were made against persons suspected of unexplained behaviour. The connection between magic and medicine inevitably caused epilepsy to be considered a disease of divine origin or an intervention by supernatural powers.<sup>848</sup> Exorcism was one of the main functions of the magician, where magic often

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<sup>847</sup> For discussion on these mountain moving sayings and their inter-relationship, see Telford, *Barren Temple*, 95-127, esp. 117-119.

<sup>848</sup> This idea is powerfully represented in more recent times in the German film, 'Requiem' (2006). See <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0454931/> (February, 2012).

comprised the method of cure.<sup>849</sup> Comparison of this story with contemporary exorcism traditions include the exorcism conducted by a Jew named Eleazar (*Ant.* XIII.46-48).<sup>850</sup> The possessed man has the demon drawn out through his nostrils and as evidence of having been exorcised, the demon overturns a bowl of water. This spectacle is claimed to have had eye-witnesses which included Josephus himself (ἱστορήσα), Vespasian, his sons, tribunes, soldiers and free men possessed by demons.<sup>851</sup> Philostratus also describes an account of a demon-possessed boy (*Vita Apoll.* III.38) who is cured by means of a letter, and another who acted licentiously (*Vita Apoll.* IV.20).<sup>852</sup> Lucian (*Lover of Lies*, XVI) describes a Syrian exorcist from Palestine who ‘takes in hand’ the possessed who ‘fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless, he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind’. Lucian uses similar language to Matthew’s description of the boy (Mt. 17.15: σεληνιάζεται; την σεληνέν).<sup>853</sup>

### 7.7.5 Markan Narrative

#### **Mk 9.14-15:**

Καὶ ἔλθόντες πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς εἶδον ὄχλον πολὺν περὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ γραμματεῖς συζητοῦντας πρὸς αὐτούς. καὶ εὐθὺς πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐξεθαμβήθησαν καὶ προστρέχοντες ἠσπάζοντο αὐτόν.

***And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him.***

<sup>849</sup> See R. Kotansky, ‘Greek Exorcistic Amulets’, in M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds), *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 243-277.

<sup>850</sup> For discussion on Jewish magic and the fragmentarily preserved book of *Jannes and Jambres*, written by a Jew in Greek, probably in Egypt at the beginning of the first century, see A. Pietersma, *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

<sup>851</sup> Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, 104, calculates that if this was an historical event it would have occurred in c. 67-68 CE.

<sup>852</sup> For analysis of the miracle material in *Vita Apoll*, see G. Petzke, *Die Traditionen über Apollonius von Tyana und das Neue Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

<sup>853</sup> A. M. Harmon, *Lucian*, vol. III (London & Cambridge: HUP, 1921), 344-345. See also Janowitz, *Magic in the Roman World*, 38 and discussion in Davies, *Jesus the Healer*, 90-104.

Mark describes the scene at the base of the mountain vividly, although the pronouns throughout these two verses and in other parts of the passage do not clearly qualify whether Mark is referring to the crowd, the disciples or scribes. The presence of the scribes, recognizable to Mark's audience as Jesus' opponents, is found in other areas of the Gospel (Mk 3.22; 7.1) but they are not included in either Matthew or Luke's account of this story. Additionally, after this first mention in Mark they disappear, playing no part in the rest of the story. Mark does not indicate why there was an argument with the scribes and their presence seems somehow improbable as Jewish scribes would not ordinarily be found in the Gentile region of Gaulanitis. Scribes are introduced just prior to the story of the exorcism of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (Mk 7.1-15) but they are located in a Jewish geographical context. It has been argued that the evangelist's purpose for including them here was rhetorical, anticipating Jesus' reception at Jerusalem.<sup>854</sup> The unusual note at the beginning of the narrative on the unmotivated amazement of the crowd, a typical Markan motif at the end of a healing, emphasizes to the audience that the person of Jesus himself provoked astonishment.<sup>855</sup>

**Mk 9.16-18:**

καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτούς, Τί συζητεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς; καὶ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ εἰς ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου, Διδάσκαλε, ἦνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σέ, ἔχοντα πνεῦμα ἄλαλον. καὶ ὅπου ἐὰν αὐτὸν καταλάβῃ ῥήσσει αὐτόν, καὶ ἀφρίζει καὶ τρίζει τοὺς

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<sup>854</sup> Iverson, *Gentiles in the Gospel of Mark*, 107 and Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 397.

<sup>855</sup> Nineham, *Gospel of Saint Mark*, 245-246, discusses the possible background of this motif (the awe of the people) as aligned to Moses' radiance when he descends from Sinai (Exod 34.29-35). However, different language is used in the two accounts. For those who support a parallel with Moses descending from the mountain, see Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 222; Gundry, *Mark*, 487-488, Witherington, *Gospel of Mark*, 266, Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 652, 658. Contra Taylor, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 396; Boring, *Mark*, 273, n. 55; Lane, *Gospel of Mark*, 330, n. 48 and Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 277, who associate the amazement of the crowd with Jesus' unexpected appearance and the hopes it raised.

ὀδόντας καὶ ξηραίνεται· καὶ εἶπα τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου ἵνα αὐτὸ ἐκβάλωσιν,  
καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν.

***And he asked them, 'What are you discussing with them?' And one of the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able'.***

It is not clear to whom Jesus addresses the question in v.16. It could refer either to the crowd or to the disciples, but the response comes from the boy's father, who respectfully addresses Jesus as 'teacher'. The reference to the 'dumb spirit' implies that the spirit does not speak through the boy (cf. Mk 7.37). Mark describes the seriousness of the boy's condition in a clinical manner that includes convulsions, foaming at the mouth, grinding of the teeth and bodily rigidity. Commentators have suggested that the symptoms described are those associated with an idiopathic epileptic fit.<sup>856</sup> The word 'epilepsy' (ἐπιληψία) originates from the Greek verb ἐπιλαμβάνειν, which means 'to seize, possess or afflict'.<sup>857</sup> Matthew actually determines the boy's condition to be epilepsy (Mt. 17.15: σεληνιάζομαι; to be moonstruck) and reflects the ancient belief that fits were caused by the moon although he refers to the spirit as a δαιμόνιον (v. 18: demon).<sup>858</sup> It was also known as the ἱερά νόσος or 'sacred disease', caused and cured supernaturally.<sup>859</sup> Marcus suggests that the use of καταλάβη goes back to 'very old magic conceptions according to which all diseases were believed 'attacks' and seizures by gods and

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<sup>856</sup> Edwards, *Gospel According to Mark*, 277. For discussion on the relationship to the physiological stages of an idiopathic epileptic fit (premonitory, unconsciousness, muscular convulsions, flaccid unconsciousness and recovery) and the account in the Gospel of Mark, see J. Wilkinson, 'The Case of the Epileptic Boy', *Expository Times*, 79 (1967), 39-42.

<sup>857</sup> For full discussion on ancient perceptions on the symptoms of epilepsy, see O. Temkin, *Falling Sickness: A History of Epilepsy from the Greeks to the Beginnings of Modern Neurology* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1971).

<sup>858</sup> van der Loos, *Miracles of Jesus*, 401. See also E. Magiorkinis, *et al*, 'Hallmarks in the History of Epilepsy', 103-108, who discuss an ancient Akkadian inscription which describes the condition as *antasubbû*, translated as 'the hand of sin', brought about by the god of the Moon.

<sup>859</sup> Temkin, *Falling Sickness*, 4.

demons, as documented in Babylonian medicine'.<sup>860</sup> Regardless of the diagnosis, Mark clearly narrates this pericope with symptoms similar to the popular view of epilepsy (see Appendix 28: *Aretaeus of Cappadocia*). The inability of the disciples to exorcise the boy and their lack of faith had been reproved on other occasions (Mk 4.40; 6.50, 52; 8.17-21) and continues to characterise them.

**Mk 9.19-20:**

ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει, ᾧ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι; ἕως πότε ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; φέρετε αὐτὸν πρὸς με. καὶ ἤνεγκαν αὐτὸν πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν τὸ πνεῦμα εὐθὺς συνεσπάραξεν αὐτόν, καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκυλίετο ἀφρίζων.

***And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me'. And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell to the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.***

The theme of the faithless generation has roots in the Old Testament (Deut 32.20) but also has analogies in the Asclepius tradition where scepticism was frowned upon and nothing was beyond those who believed, including a man with an empty eye socket who, although ridiculed for his belief, regained his sight.<sup>861</sup> There is an overtone of exasperation when Mark places on the lips of Jesus the rhetorical questions '[H]ow long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?' It is difficult to determine who is included in this 'faithless generation' berated by Jesus but no doubt the scribes belong to it (Mk 8.10-13 uses the same language for the Pharisees who were close allies of the scribes) but the disciples, who have just failed to exorcise the unclean spirit, are clearly the most likely culprits. A violent reaction is graphically described in the form of an epileptic fit when the boy is brought before Jesus (cf. Mk 1.26; 5.6-10).

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<sup>860</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 653.

<sup>861</sup> For comparisons and analysis, see R. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidaurus* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931), 2 and Achtemeier, 'Miracles and the Historical Jesus', 483-484.

**Mk 9.21-24:**

καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ, Πόσος χρόνος ἔστιν ὡς τοῦτο γέγονεν αὐτῷ; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Ἐκ παιδιόθεν· καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτὸν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν· ἀλλ' εἴ τι δύνη, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Τὸ εἰ δύνη, πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι. εὐθὺς κρᾶξας ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παιδίου ἔλεγεν, Πιστεύω· Βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ.

***And he asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood. And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything have pity on us and help us'. And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes'. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'***

The question concerning the length of time the boy had been subject to such attacks is not unusual in miracle stories (cf. Mk 5.25: the woman with the flow of blood, *Vita Apoll.* III.38: the boy possessed with a spirit and VI.43, the boy bitten by a mad dog). It is a means of stressing the length of the illness in order to show that it was incurable by natural means. The reference to the demon casting the child into fire and water to destroy him draws an association with demons who are frequently associated with fire and water in the magical texts (*PGM* IV.1460-1465 and *PDM* XIV.490-495).<sup>862</sup>

Mark has Jesus responding to the man with a sense of astonishment that anyone would question his ability to cure the man's son of possession.<sup>863</sup> The ambiguity here about whether Jesus or the man is the one who believes is due to the compression of this first part of the statement. This has resulted in copyists inserting πιστεῦσαι and omitting τό which changes the subject of the verb 'can' from Jesus to the father.<sup>864</sup> Later manuscripts have also been amended by copyists and correctors to add that the father cried out μετὰ δακρύων (v. 24: with

<sup>862</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 654.

<sup>863</sup> For discussion on the different interpretations of 'All things are possible to him who believes', see van der Loos, *Miracles of Jesus*, 400.

<sup>864</sup> εἰ δύνη πιστεῦσαι: D, Q, 28, 565, I<sup>aur, b, c, d, f, l, l, q</sup>, vg, syr<sup>p, h</sup>, et al; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 85.

tears), thus heightening the emotion.<sup>865</sup> The Gentile father asks to be released from his unbelief, suggesting to the Markan audience that faith is not easy and that even the Gentiles are not immune to doubt.

**Mk 9.25-27:**

ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐπισυντρέχει ὄχλος ἐπετίμησεν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ λέγων αὐτῷ, Τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα, ἐγὼ ἐπιτάσσω σοι, ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ μηκέτι εἰσέλθῃς εἰς αὐτόν. καὶ κράξας καὶ πολλὰ σπαράξας ἐξῆλθεν· καὶ ἐγένετο ὡσεὶ νεκρός, ὥστε τοὺς πολλοὺς λέγειν ὅτι ἀπέθανεν. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἤγειρεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέστη.

***And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you come out of him, and never enter him again'. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead'. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up and he arose.***

The narrative appears to indicate that Jesus acted because he saw a crowd rapidly gathering. This is a crux as in v. 15 he has suggested that 'all the crowd' had already surrounded Jesus and there is no mention of withdrawal of the boy (Mk 7.33; 8.23). This is the first occasion in this pericope in which Mark calls the spirit 'unclean' (cf. 1.23, 26, 27; 3.11, 30; 5.2, 8, 13; 6.7; 7.25). This reference to an 'unclean spirit' reflects the ideology of the time which considered epilepsy to be a contaminating and contagious disease (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* 28, 35). Mark's reference to Jesus touching the boy's corpse-like body also shows a disregard for Jewish purity laws.

Mark uses the verbs ἐπιτιμάω (rebuke; cf. Mk 4.39) and ἐπιτάσσω (command; cf. Mk 1.27; 9.25) to address the unclean spirit, which can be found in other sources (*Ant* VIII. 47-48; *Vita Apoll.* IV.20). This formula and the ritual practice (the material means or recipe) has great similarity with magical

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<sup>865</sup> A<sup>2</sup>, C<sup>3</sup>, D, Θ, f<sup>13</sup>, 33, 157, et al: Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 85.  
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ceremony,<sup>866</sup> and the terms of these commands are ‘borrowed from contemporary magical practice’ (PGM I.254-7.331).<sup>867</sup> Mark also uses this verb, ἐπετιμώω when Jesus rebukes Peter and the disciples (Mk 8.30); when Peter rebukes Jesus following Jesus’ self-designation as ‘Son of Man’ (v. 32) and at the climax of the conflict with Peter when identifying him with Satan (v. 33). A ‘dumb spirit’ is mentioned in v. 17 and an unclean spirit which is both deaf and dumb is mentioned here.

The success of the cure is often signified by an act of violence by the departing demon (Mk 1.26, see pp. 135-136); in this case the corpse-like condition of the boy. The expression ὅτι ἀπέθανεν ([were saying] that he was dead) implies that he was not dead and Jesus ἤγειρεν αὐτόν (raised him). This connects with the disciples’ uncertainty at Mk 9.10 as to what it means to be raised from the dead. The vocabulary in vs 26-27 (κρατήσας, ἔγειρε, ἀνέστη: grasped, raised and arose) is also suggestive of death and resurrection, similar to the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mk 5.41-42). The story ends abruptly, there is no response from the crowd to confirm the miracle, and the boy and his father are not mentioned again.

**Mk 9.28-29:**

καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς οἶκον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κατ’ ἰδίαν ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν, Ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό; καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεῖν εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ.

***And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And he said to them, ‘This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.’***

These verses represent a summation of the account, reinforcing the theme of the powerlessness of the disciples and the fact that the task surpassed their abilities. This private withdrawal to a house where Jesus can be questioned in secret by the Jewish disciples is a typical Markan motif of separation from the masses (Mk 4.1-2,

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<sup>866</sup> Ferguson, *Background of Early Christianity*, 231.

<sup>867</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 664.

10; 7.17; 10.10). It provides space for additional teaching and instruction reserved for particular needs of the Markan audience.<sup>868</sup> Perhaps Mark's motif of entry into a house is symbolic of his own community's house churches?<sup>869</sup> The response of Jesus implies criticism of the disciples who had failed because they had not prayed sufficiently (Mk 14.38). This forms an instruction for the Markan audience about prayer and the realization that when confronted with powerful enemies it is not always possible to overcome them.<sup>870</sup> The Markan Jesus delivers this instruction to pray as a necessity when conducting exorcisms. However, the motif does not appear elsewhere in Mark and Jesus is not described as praying before or during the exorcism, unless the command in v. 25 can be construed as a prayer.

Most manuscripts add καὶ νηστεία, 'and fasting' to verse 29. The manuscripts that support the omission are few but are the most important and so it is omitted in the RSV. The addition was probably due to the increased emphasis on fasting in the early church.<sup>871</sup> However, Jesus has a negative response to fasting at Mk 2.19 and it would be surprising if it were part of the original tradition.<sup>872</sup> This story may well relate to the inability of the Markan community to perform miracles at a time when other messianic claimants were performing signs and wonders that elicited faith and awe in their supernatural status (cf. Mk 13.22).<sup>873</sup>

## 7.8 Conclusion

Mark, once again, explicitly reports compassion on the part of Jesus towards this Gentile possessed boy and his father. This was also the case with Gentiles

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<sup>868</sup> For discussion on the Markan theme of private instruction, see D. B Peabody, *Mark as Composer* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), *passim*.

<sup>869</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 275.

<sup>870</sup> For discussion on this passage, see Telford, *Theology*, 132 and *Barren Temple*, 104-109, esp. 109.

<sup>871</sup> P<sup>45vid</sup>, κ 2, A, C, D, L, Ω, Δ, Θ, F, f<sup>1</sup>, f<sup>13</sup>, 28, 33 *et al*; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 85.

<sup>872</sup> Boring, *Mark*, 276.

<sup>873</sup> Marcus, *Mark 8-16*, 666.

associated with the stories of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5.1-20); the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (7.24-30); the man who was deaf and dumb (7.31-37); the feeding of the four thousand (8.1-10) and the blind man at Bethsaida (8.22-26). The father of the epileptic boy is portrayed as 'a prototype of the believing Christian',<sup>874</sup> and is juxtaposed against the faithless, powerless disciples who have previously shown indifference and resistance to the inclusion of the Gentiles (Mk 6.42-45; 7.18; 8.1-9, 13-21).

In both of the story of the blind man and the demon possessed boy, Mark uses the material available to him to develop his own favourite themes of mission to the Gentiles, the growing conflict between Jesus and the Jewish disciples, Jesus' miraculous power over demons and the need for faith, all of which suggests a heightened importance of these factors for Mark's community. Additionally, Mark is subjecting his audience to stories of the miraculous which involved magical techniques designed to overcome illness and the demonic elements of the supernatural world. Mark's audience would find these stories reminiscent of those circulating about other miracle-working men at this time and in this region. It is not inconceivable that the evangelist was competing with other contenders for followers to his movement in a world where polytheism was rife, other divine men were in contention and the miraculous was ubiquitous. Mark has reiterated these stories from tradition, redacted them where necessary and included them in his narrative to encourage the receptivity of his first-century audience.

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<sup>874</sup> Telford, *Theology*, 101.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### ***Conclusion***

My intention in this thesis has been to take an inter-disciplinary approach to restore the Gospel to the experience of Mark's first century intended audience. In the early chapters I have examined evidence of the authorship, setting and purpose of the Gospel as it relates to Mark's portrayal of Jesus' mission to the Gentiles (Mk 4.35–9.29). At each of the Gentile geographical locations, placed sequentially and strategically in the narrative by the evangelist, I have researched the available evidence to describe the social, cultural and polytheistic environment of the named locations and have brought this research into connection with the Gentile mission portrayed by Mark. In the subsequent chapters I have conducted an exegesis of the individual pericopae in the Gospel where Mark relates a miraculous interface between Jesus and the Gentiles in order to determine Mark's first century audience's response to the miraculous events narrated. I have argued that this interaction is demonstrated when Mark describes Jesus' healing a demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes (Mk 4.35-5.20); an aborted excursion made by the disciples across the sea to the eastern Gentile shore (6.45-53); the story of the healing of the Syro-Phoenician woman's daughter (7.24-30); a trip into the Decapolis region where a deaf-mute is healed (vs 31-37) and thousands are fed (8.1-10); healing of a blind man at Bethsaida ( vs 22-30) and a boy with an unclean spirit at Caesarea Philippi (9.14-29).

#### **8.1 Gospel of Mark – Author, Setting and Mission**

The evangelist preserves the memory of Jesus, almost forty years after his execution, when most eyewitnesses had died off and the Markan community was no longer living within Jewish constraints. The content of the Gospel suggests that

it is probable that Mark and his community are representative of the Galilean tradition, rather than an extension of the Jerusalem community. It is clear from the dialogue Mark records in Chapter Thirteen, that the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple is either impending or more likely has occurred and is, therefore, an event contemporaneous to the composition of the Gospel. Thus, the text can be dated to either immediately before or after 70 CE, in which case the description of the fall of the Jerusalem Temple in the narrative is a *vaticinium ex eventu*. The critical approach adopted in this thesis to determine the provenance of the Gospel has led to the conclusion that the external evidence relating to Eusebius and other patristic sources suggesting Roman provenance is conflicting and unreliable. The internal evidence of the Gospel itself, despite some geographical errors and Latinisms, is compatible with an eastern provenance.

There is a strong possibility that the Gospel was written by a member of and for a specific persecuted community that may have fled to the north from Jerusalem during the Romano-Jewish War, possibly to northern Galilee, southern Syria or Transjordan. The need for an account of the supernatural power of Jesus was probably necessitated by the social, political and religious situation of this community. I have argued that the Gospel is a vehicle for interpretation and its content substantially reflects the experiences of a heterogeneous population of Jews and Gentiles and represents an allegory of Mark's first century community's *Sitz em Leben*. By means of his own shaping and reinterpretation of the traditions he received, Mark encourages mission to the Gentiles, directing his attention to both insiders and outsiders. The beleaguered Markan community, under the economic thumb of their Roman overlords, still caught between their understandings of purity and impurity, is faced with the ignominy of an influx of Gentile converts to its ranks who had, from the perception of the Jewish members,

emerged from the odious polytheistic background of perversity and religious pollution.

A study of the order of events, as they appear in the Gospel, clearly shows that the evangelist was not concerned with accuracy in the presentation of Jesus' itinerary, nor the chronology of his movements. He created his narrative with a concern to solve theological rather than historical problems. His focus was the major theological issue of the community's universal mission, a thorny problem raised in the first decades of the Jesus movement's existence and essentially not yet resolved.

## **8.2 Graeco-Roman Background to the Gospel**

I have adopted an historical-critical approach in determining the political, economic, social and cultural context of the Gospel of Mark, leading to a thorough examination of the primary and secondary evidence of life in the Roman Near East in the first century. I have corrected the view that the environment of the community was primarily Jewish and rural and have presented evidence to show that it pursued its way in a syncretistic, multi-religious society where there was mutual awareness, communication and interchange between the different religious groups. This included Judaism, which was already part of the cultural interchange of the Graeco-Roman world. Mark portrays Jesus' mission as beginning in the synagogues but destined to present its case to the mixed ethnicity of the Gentile world where heterogeneous cultural traditions manifested themselves in a multiplicity of philosophies and gods.

It is accepted that during Jesus' lifetime and at the time the Gospel was written that stories of his miracles would be spontaneously recounted (Mk 1.28; 5.14, 20; 7.36) by witnesses, at the same time as accounts of other miracle-

working men were also circulating in the region. This necessitated the evangelist balancing his own portrayal of the miracle-working Jesus with that of other divine men and gods. It is not inconceivable that Mark was competing with other contenders for followers to his movement, in a world where the miraculous was ubiquitous. He presented the Gospel message in a form that would resonate with his Gentile audience's worldview in order to persuade outsiders into the fold and convince them that a Jewish rabbi held the key to amelioration of their repressed circumstances and to the kingdom of God.

### **8.3 Mark's Portrayal of Jesus' Miracles in Gentile Territory**

Mark's compilation of his Gospel was a work of selection and he had to decide how much of the tradition available to him would meet the needs of the heterogeneous community for whom he wrote. Whether he was dealing with individual traditions that had come to him unchanged or with accounts of miracles already subject to revision, he imposed his own understanding on what he recorded and adapted that tradition in the light of what he considered would be of the greatest benefit to his own audience. As modern readers we are unable to specifically determine Mark's first century audience's reception of the narrative. We can, however, safely assume that both the author and audience would be very sensitive to Jewish versus Gentile markers and signals. Mark's arrangement or rearrangements of his material included these markers and had been carried out to facilitate comprehension and resonance on the part of his audience.

The individual Markan Gentile miracles collectively form a sequence and progression that reveal Mark's intention to depict Jesus' Gentile mission as a precursor to his own. Mark records the starting point of Jesus' mission to the Gentiles as the successful healing of a demoniac (Mk 5.1-20), a parallel to the first

exorcism amongst Jews (1.21-28), both of which resulted in the spread of Jesus' fame. I have argued that the historical residue in the Markan text of this story is small in relation to the original tradition, which the evangelist has substantially redacted for socio-political purposes. The Markan evangelist is reminding both his Jewish and Gentile audience that the Gospel represents liberation from Roman repression. Whilst some commentators consider the location of Gerasa to be untenable on geographical grounds, I consider that the location of the story had traditionally been within the region of the Gerasenes and that their territory (as was usual at the time) covered a large area which included temples and cult centres associated with polytheistic gods and goddesses. In Mark's representation of the story the possessed man and the location of the miracle is to be understood as representative of the Gentile world as a whole. I have argued that Jesus' rejection by the crowd later in this story reflects the persecution suffered by Mark's own community by oppressive Roman overlords. The story was also crucial to Mark's theological intent as it promotes Jesus' supernatural powers, is the representation of the initial expansion of the Gentile mission by Jesus and through Jesus' own command, the cured demoniac spreads the gospel message about Jesus in the polytheistic cities of the Decapolis.

The subsequent excursion by the disciples alone to the Gentile eastern side of the Sea of Galilee (Mk 6.45-53) is aborted because of their lack of understanding and perceived resistance to the Gentile mission. They fail to recognize the epiphany of Jesus as the Messiah who could miraculously walk on water and ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάνασμά ἐστιν (v. 49: they thought it was a ghost). Mark continually accents and develops this theme of misunderstanding and failure on the part of the faithless Jewish disciples who are without understanding, in contrast to the faithful Gentiles. Unlike other miracles of Jesus, this miraculous walking on

water is not a 'sea rescue' and occurs even though the disciples do not appear to be in danger. I have argued that Mark adapts this story from tradition to accomplish his agenda of representing Jesus as a superhuman divine figure with supernatural power over the elements, not unlike the gods and goddesses of the polytheistic world. Mark's portrayal of the obtuseness of the disciples quite possibly reflected some misunderstanding or confusion amongst his own audience in terms of Jesus' divinity and his call for universalism.

In comparison, the Syro-Phoenician woman (Mk 7.24-30), a representative of Gentile polytheism, leaves her home and sick daughter to petition an itinerant Jewish rabbi and later faithfully accepts that her daughter is healed. In both the account of the sea crossing and the Gentile woman, Jesus appears to initially reject those in need, challenges the faith of those being tested and ultimately responds positively. The emphasis on the pagan woman's faith and brilliant exchange with Jesus suggests to Mark's audience a precursor pursuance by Jesus of Gentile converts. The evangelist records that Jesus accepted a fairly sharp distinction between Jews and Gentiles, their relative place in the order of salvation and understood the prerogative of the Jews as part of God's plan. The inclusion, therefore, of polytheistic Gentiles in the community of the redeemed could then be seen to be rooted in the practice of Jesus himself. In recounting this pericope Mark may have intended to show that there was initial resistance on behalf of Jesus to the woman, reflecting hesitation or hostility on the part of Mark's audience who perhaps were still coming to terms with Gentile interest in the nascent Jesus movement.

In the story of the deaf mute (Mk 7.31-37) Mark continues to present Jesus as the miracle-working hero, recognisable to his Graeco-Roman audience. The evangelist, in engaging with his audience's cultural milieu, has included magical

and exorcistic techniques consistent with their first century magical world-view and overlaid these with his theological motifs. Hearing in Mark's Gospel is synonymous with understanding the message of Jesus (Mk 4.9, 23; 8.13-21), something that the disciples seem incapable of and to which the Gentiles are receptive. In the story of the deaf mute, Mark's intention is to appeal to his audience to open their ears to hear the Gospel and loosen their tongues to preach it. The proclamation of the Gentile crowd that '[h]e has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak' (Mk 7.37) is juxtaposed against the hostility of the Jews and the obtuseness of the disciples, who at this point in the narrative have not yet understood.

The miraculous feeding events in Gentile territory (Mk 8.1-10) makes it clear that there is enough bread for both Jews and Gentiles; again with a temporal sequence of Jews first and then Gentiles (cf. Mk 7.27). There does not appear to be sufficient evidence to fully justify the suggestion that Mark associated this miraculous feedings with later eucharistic activity. Likewise, any attempt to find meaning in the symbolic significance of the numbers in this or the earlier feeding in Jewish territory (Mk 6.35-44) is problematic. However, the likelihood is that Mark's first century audience were able to determine the significance and relationship between the different sets of numbers in the two stories to differentiate the feedings in Jewish versus Gentile territory. It is probable that Mark received two feeding stories from the tradition and has deliberately constructed these to reflect separate Jewish/Gentile feedings. The evangelist is conveying to his audience that the bread, considered to be pre-eminently destined for the Jews, has to be shared with the Gentiles (Mk 7.27-29; 8.1-10; 14-21) who are ostracized by the Jews but whom Mark records as being receptive to Jesus' message. Thus, Mark

once again reminds his community that its own universal mission was rooted in the messianic mission of Jesus.

The motif in the miracle of the Blind Man of Bethsaida is primarily the Gentile man's journey from blindness, to partial sight and ultimately to complete sight. Mark in reinforcing the faith of the Gentile man, positions the story at a point in the narrative where the audience connects this Gentile faith with the disciples who can physically see but remain blinded by their lack of understanding and faith. Additionally, in terms of engagement with his Gentile audience, Mark narrates this story at a time when they were familiar with similar stories of miraculous spittle healings by men with divine power who overcome illness and defeat the demons of the supernatural world. In the case of the boy with the unclean spirit (Mk 8.22-30), Mark, once again, explicitly reports compassion on the part of Jesus towards this Gentile possessed boy and his father, who is portrayed as an example of faith. They are juxtaposed against the faithless, powerless disciples who have previously shown indifference and resistance to the inclusion of the Gentiles. In both the story of the blind man and the demon-possessed boy, Mark uses his material to develop his own favourite themes of mission to the Gentiles, the growing conflict between Jesus and the disciples, Jesus' miraculous power over demons and the need for faith.

#### **8.4 Final Remarks**

This thesis has demonstrated that Mark's narrative structure, framework of space and time and development of the Gentile characters inaugurates a Jesus Gentile mission. His presentation of Gentiles in this section of the Gospel is positive, emphasizing their faith (often represented through a petitioner), understanding (expressed in both word and deed) and ability to both hear and see (symbols of

this understanding). The compassion of Jesus and the faith of the polytheistic Gentiles is set against the faithlessness of the Jewish disciples, who evidence little understanding of the teaching of Jesus, opposition or at least reluctance to the Gentile mission and disbelief. It is the Gentile outsider who shows the greatest insight. These are the alienated people, who have been ostracized by Jewish strict adherence to dietary and purity laws who Jesus will not exclude from the mission. The evangelist, therefore, interprets the traditions he has received to persuade his own community that they are now in a new situation which Jesus foretold, a time after the period of embracing the Jews, a time for the conversion of the Gentiles.

The evangelist has preserved previously existing traditions of places, people, episodes in the life of and sayings of Jesus. He has arranged them into his own narrative style or creative memory, expressing them in terms of their significance for his own community and his target audience of polytheists who were currently attracted to the multiplicity of gods and goddesses of the Graeco-Roman world. Mark also reports details relating to geography, politics and cultural circumstances, all of which infuse the work with the character of an historical text but he relates this history to his own time and the needs of his own community. The more we learn about the Graeco-Roman world, the more clear it becomes that Jesus must have been understood by the early Markan community as a wonder-working healer at a time when there was competition from other charismatic leaders and miracle-working men who appealed to the 'poor'.

This thesis has set the stories contained in Mk 4.35-9.29 in conversation with one another for comparative purposes and placed them in their polytheistic religious and social setting. I have assimilated into the overall account and discussion on this section of the Gospel the current accumulating evidence of the

polytheistic environment in which the Markan community operated. Inevitably, the full construction of this thesis involves a degree of surmise and conjecture as representative, comparable data is not always fully available. However, I have demonstrated that the totality of the available evidence, both internal to the Gospel and external, is considerable and persuasively points to the conclusion that Mark has created a Gospel which encourages an interface with the polytheistic world of the Gentiles. The evangelist rejoices in διδαχὴ καινὴ (Mk 1.27: a new teaching) and this new teaching, like οἶνον νέον εἰς ἀσκοὺς καινοῦς (Mk 2.21: new wine is for new wineskins) was universalistic. It is my view that further progress will be made in other fields of Markan studies if future research takes into full consideration the polytheistic milieu in which the evangelist's first century audience operated.

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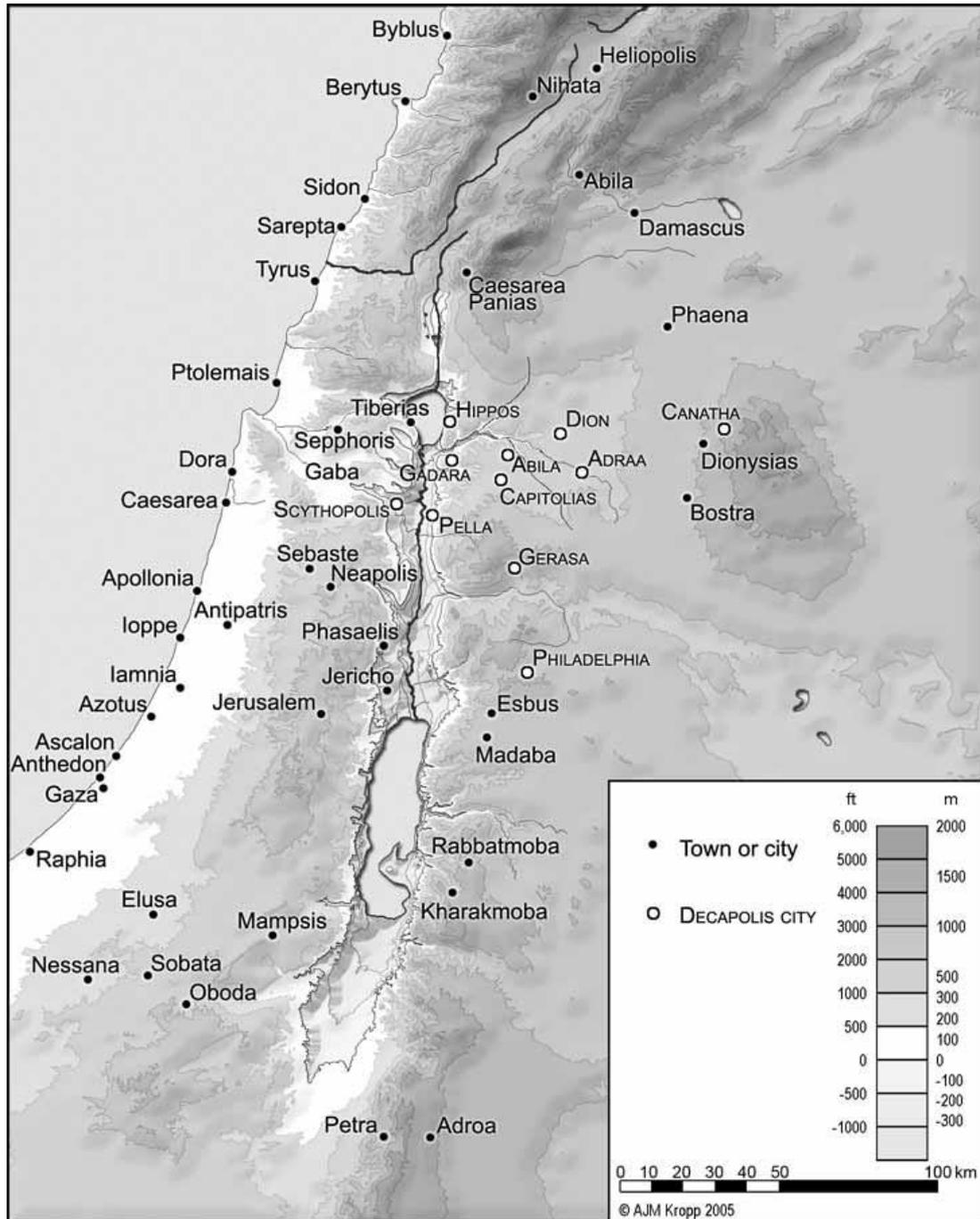
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Map: Southern Levant in the Roman Period



A. Kropp and Q. Mohammad, 'Dion of the Decapolis. Tell al-Ash'arī in Southern Syria in the Light of Ancient Documents and Recent Discoveries', *Levant*, 38 (2006), Fig. 1, p. 126.

**Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, XI.22-26**

*Then behold the day approached when the sacrifice of dedication should be done and when the sun declined and evening came. There arrived on every coast a great multitude of priests who according to their ancient order offered me many presents and gifts. Then was all the laity and profane people commanded to depart and when they had put on my back a new linen robe, the priest took my hand and brought me to the most secret and sacred place of the temple. You would know if it was convenient for you to hear but both your ears and my tongue would incur the pain of rash curiosity. I will not long torment the mind, which is somewhat religious and given to some devotion. Listen, therefore, and believe it to be true. You will understand that I approached near to hell, even to the gates of Prosperine [Persephone, daughter of Demeter in the Eleusinian mysteries] and after that I was ravished throughout all the elements. I returned to my proper place [and] about midnight I saw the sun brightly shine, presented myself and worshipped them. Behold now have I told you and you have heard, it is necessary that you conceal it. This only will I tell, which may be declared without offence for the understanding of the profane.*

'For some these are Apuleius' own words, for others they are a quotation of a sacred formula, similar to other formulae preserved for us by Christian writers. The formulae characterized, like Apuleius' words, is a series of aorists or perfects in the first person singular, following upon one another, often in asyndeton, occasionally with past participles added.

So, for instance, Clement of Alexandria quotes what he calls an Elusinian σύνθημα: 'I fasted; I drank the draught (κύνεωv); I took from the chest; having done my task; I placed in the basket and from the basket into the chest'.

Arnobius quotes the same formula in Latin, calling these words *symbola* and saying that they are the reply given when asked 'in receiving the sacred things'.

Firmicus Maternus quotes a similar formulation from the cult of Cybele and Attis: 'I have eaten from the tympanon; I have drunk from the cymbalon; I have become an initiate of Attis'. Clement quotes another version of this too, calling the word σύμβολα: 'I ate from the drum; I drank from the cymbal; I carried the sacred dish; I stole into the bridal chamber'.

A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Baptism and Resurrection', *Studies in Pauline Theology Against its Graeco Roman Background* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1987), 93-94.

**Paris Magical Papyrus**

(lines 3007-3029)

*For those possessed by daemons, an approved charm by Pibechis.*

*Take oil made from unripe olives, together with the plant mastigia and lotus pith, and boil it with marjoram*

*(very colourless) saying: "Joel, Ossarthiomi, Emori, Theochipsoith, Sithemeoch, Sothe, Joe, Mimipsothiooph, Phersothi, Aeeioyo, Joe, Eochariphtha: come out of such a one" (and the other usual formulae).*

*But write this phylactery upon a little sheet of tin:*

*"Jaeo, Abraothioch, Phtha, Mesen-tiniao, Phoech, Jaeo, Charsoc", and hang it round the sufferer: it is of every daemon a thing to be trembled at, which he fears. Standing opposite, adjure him. The adjuration is this: "I adjure thee by the god of the Hebrews Jesu, Jaba, Jae, Abraoth, Aia, Thoth, Ele, Elo, Aeo, Eu, Jiibaech, Abarmas, Jaba-rau, Abelbel, Lona, Abra, Maroia, arm thou that appearest in fire, though that art in the midst of earth and snow and vapour, Tannetis: let thy angel descend, the implacable one, and let him draw into captivity the daemon as he flieth around this creature which God formed in his holy paradise. For I pray to the holy god, through the might of Ammon-Ipsentancho".*

C. K. Barrett (ed.), *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents* (London: SPCK, 1974), 31-32.

**Greek Text: Mk 5.1-20****Gerasene Demoniac**  
(Mt. 8.28-34; Lk 8.26-39)

5.1 Καὶ ἦλθον εἰς τὸ πέραν τῆς θαλάσσης εἰς τὴν χώραν τῶν Γερασηνῶν. 2 καὶ ἐξελθόντος αὐτοῦ ἐκ τοῦ πλοίου εὐθὺς ὑπήντησεν αὐτῷ ἐκ τῶν μνημείων ἄνθρωπος ἐν πνεύματι ἀκαθάρτῳ, 3 ὃς τὴν κατοίκησιν εἶχεν ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν, καὶ οὐδὲ ἀλύσει οὐκέτι οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο αὐτὸν δεῖσαι 4 διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν πολλάκις πέδαις καὶ ἀλύσεσιν δεδέσθαι καὶ διεσπᾶσθαι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἀλύσεις καὶ τὰς πέδας συντετριφῆθαι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἴσχυεν αὐτὸν δαμάσαι· 5 καὶ διὰ παντὸς νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ἐν τοῖς μνήμασιν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν ἦν κράζων καὶ κατακόπτων ἑαυτὸν λίθοις. 6 καὶ ἰδὼν τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἔδραμεν καὶ προσεκύνησεν αὐτῷ 7 καὶ κράξας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγει, Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, Ἰησοῦ υἱὲ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου; ὀρκίζω σε τὸν θεόν, μὴ με βασανίσῃς. 8 ἔλεγεν γὰρ αὐτῷ Ὁ ἐξελθε τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἀκάθαρτον ἐκ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. 9 καὶ ἐπηρώτα αὐτόν, Τί ὄνομά σοι; καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Λεγιῶν ὄνομά μοι, ὅτι πολλοὶ ἔσμεν. 10 καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὸν πολλὰ ἵνα μὴ αὐτὰ ἀποστείλῃ ἔξω τῆς χώρας. 11 Ἦν δὲ ἐκεῖ πρὸς τῷ ὄρει ἀγέλη χοίρων μεγάλη βοσκομένη· 12 καὶ παρεκάλεσαν αὐτὸν λέγοντες, Πέμψον ἡμᾶς εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, ἵνα εἰς αὐτοὺς εἰσέλθωμεν. 13 καὶ ἐπέτρεψεν αὐτοῖς. καὶ ἐξελθόντα τὰ πνεύματα τὰ ἀκάθαρτα εἰσῆλθον εἰς τοὺς χοίρους, καὶ ὥρμησεν ἡ ἀγέλη κατὰ τοῦ κρημονοῦ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν, ὡς δισχίλιοι, καὶ ἐπνίγοντο ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ. 14 καὶ οἱ βόσκοντες αὐτοὺς ἔφυγον καὶ ἀπήγγειλαν εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ εἰς τοὺς ἀγρούς· καὶ ἦλθον ἰδεῖν τί ἐστὶν τὸ γεγονός. 15 καὶ ἔρχονται πρὸς τὸν Ἰησοῦν καὶ θεωροῦσιν τὸν δαιμονιζόμενον καθήμενον ἱματισμένον καὶ σωφρονούμενον, τὸν ἐσχηκότα τὸν λεγιῶνα, καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν. 16 καὶ διηγήσαντο αὐτοῖς οἱ ἰδόντες πῶς ἐγένετο τῷ διαμονιζομένῳ καὶ περὶ τῶν χοίρων. 17 καὶ ἤρξαντο παρακαλεῖν αὐτὸν ἀπελθεῖν ἀπὸ τῶν ὀρίων αὐτῶν. 18 καὶ ἐμβαίνοντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ πλοῖον παρεκάλει αὐτὸν ὁ δαιμονισθεὶς ἵνα μετ' αὐτοῦ ᾗ. 19 καὶ οὐκ ἀφῆκεν αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ λέγει αὐτῷ, Ὑπαγε εἰς τὸν οἶκόν σου πρὸς τοὺς σούς καὶ ἀπάγγειλον αὐτοῖς ὅσα ὁ κύριός σοι πεποίηκεν καὶ ἠλέησέν σε. 20 καὶ ἀπῆλθεν καὶ ἤρξατο κηρύσσειν ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτῷ ὁ Ἰησοῦς, καὶ πάντες ἐθαύμαζον.

**5.1** They came to the other side of the sea, to the country of the Gerasenes. **2** And when he had come out of the boat, there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit, **3** who lived among the tombs; and no one could bind him anymore, even with a chain; **4** for he had often been bound with fetters and chains, but the chains he wrenched apart, and the fetters he broke in pieces; and no one had the strength to subdue him. **5** Night and day among the tombs and on the mountains he was always crying out, and bruising himself with stones. **6** And when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshipped him; **7** and crying out with a loud voice, he said, "What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I adjure you by God, do not torment me". **8** For he had said to him, "Come out of the man, you unclean spirit!" **9** And Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" He replied, "My name is Legion; for we are many". **10** And he begged him eagerly not to send them out of the country. **11** Now a great herd of swine was feeding there on the hillside; **12** and they begged him, "Send us to the swine, let us enter them." **13** So he gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out, and entered the swine; and the herd, numbering about two thousand, rushed down the steep bank into the sea, and were drowned in the sea. **14** The herdsmen fled, and told it in the city and in the country. And people came to see what it was that had happened. **15** And they came to Jesus, and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his right mind, the man who had had the legion; and they were afraid. **16** And those who had seen it told what had happened to the demoniac and to the swine. **17** And they began to beg Jesus to depart from their neighbourhood. **18** And as he was getting into the boat, the man who had been possessed with demons begged him that he might be with him. **19** But he refused, and said to him, "Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you". **20** And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him; and all men marvelled.

B. Aland, K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, B. M. Metzger (eds), *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001).

*The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books: Expanded Edition* (London: Collins, 1989).

## Early Christian Tradition: Location of the Country of the Gerasenes

### Third Century

#### Origen: *Commentary on John VI.41.24*

*'The transaction about the swine, which were driven down a steep place by the demons and drowned in the sea, is said to have taken place in the country of the Gerasenes. Now, Gerasa is a town of Arabia, and has near it neither sea nor lake. And the Evangelists would not have made a statement so obviously and demonstrably false; for they were men who informed themselves carefully of all matters connected with Judaea. But in a few copies we have found, "into the country of the Gadarenes;" and, on this reading, it is to be stated that Gadara is a town of Judaea, in the neighbourhood of which are the well-known hot springs, and that there is no lake there with overhanging banks, nor any sea. But Gergesa, from which the name Gergesenes is taken, is an old town in the neighbourhood of the lake now called Tiberias, and on the edge of it there is a steep place abutting on the lake, from which it is pointed out that the swine were cast down by the demons. Now, the meaning of Gergesa is "dwelling of the casters-out," and it contains a prophetic reference to the conduct towards the Saviour of the citizens of those places, who "besought him to depart out of their coasts.'*

Early Christian Writing: Origen;

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/origen-john6.html> (February, 2012).

### Fourth Century

#### Eusebius: *Onomasticon (On the Place Names in the Holy Scripture)*

[Uses the name Gergesa and says that this is where] *"the Lord (Saviour) healed the demoniacs (restored those vexed with demons to sanity). Now (today) a village is pointed out on the mountains near Lake Tiberias where the swine were condemned (cast down) to death".*

Early Church Fathers: Additional Texts: Translated by C. U. Wolf (1971):

[http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius\\_onomasticon\\_02\\_trans.htm#G THE GOSPELS](http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/eusebius_onomasticon_02_trans.htm#G_THE_GOSPELS)  
(February, 2012).

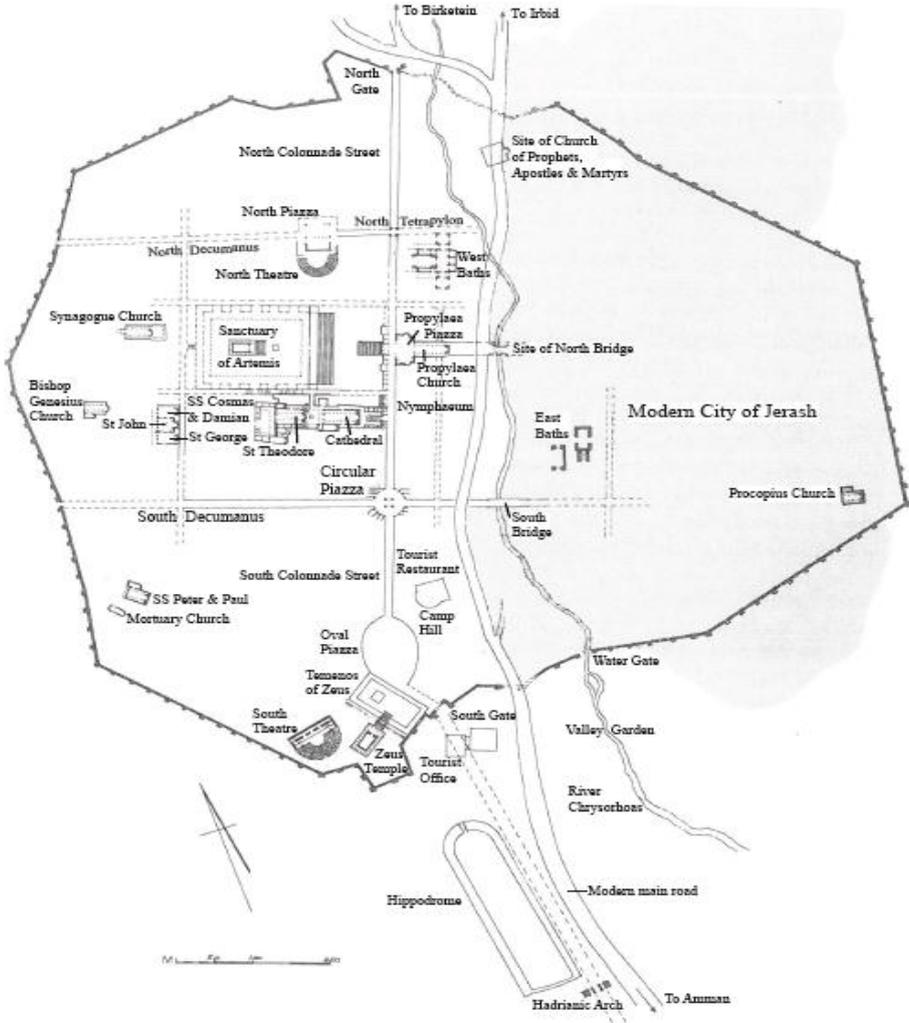
### Ninth Century

#### Eutychius of Alexandria: *The Book of the Demonstrations*

*'The church of Kuris, east of the sea of Tiberias, bears witness that he healed the man possessed who was called Legion because of the many devils in him Christ commanded them to come out from him, and they asked him to permit them to enter into swine which were pasturing there, and he gave them permission and they went out of the man, and entered into the swine; and the devils drove the herd of swine into the sea so that they were all drowned and the man was healed. The church bears witness, too, that he there, from seven loaves and some fish, fed four thousand men, besides the women and children, and they were all satisfied; and the disciples gathered from their superfluity seven baskets full'.*

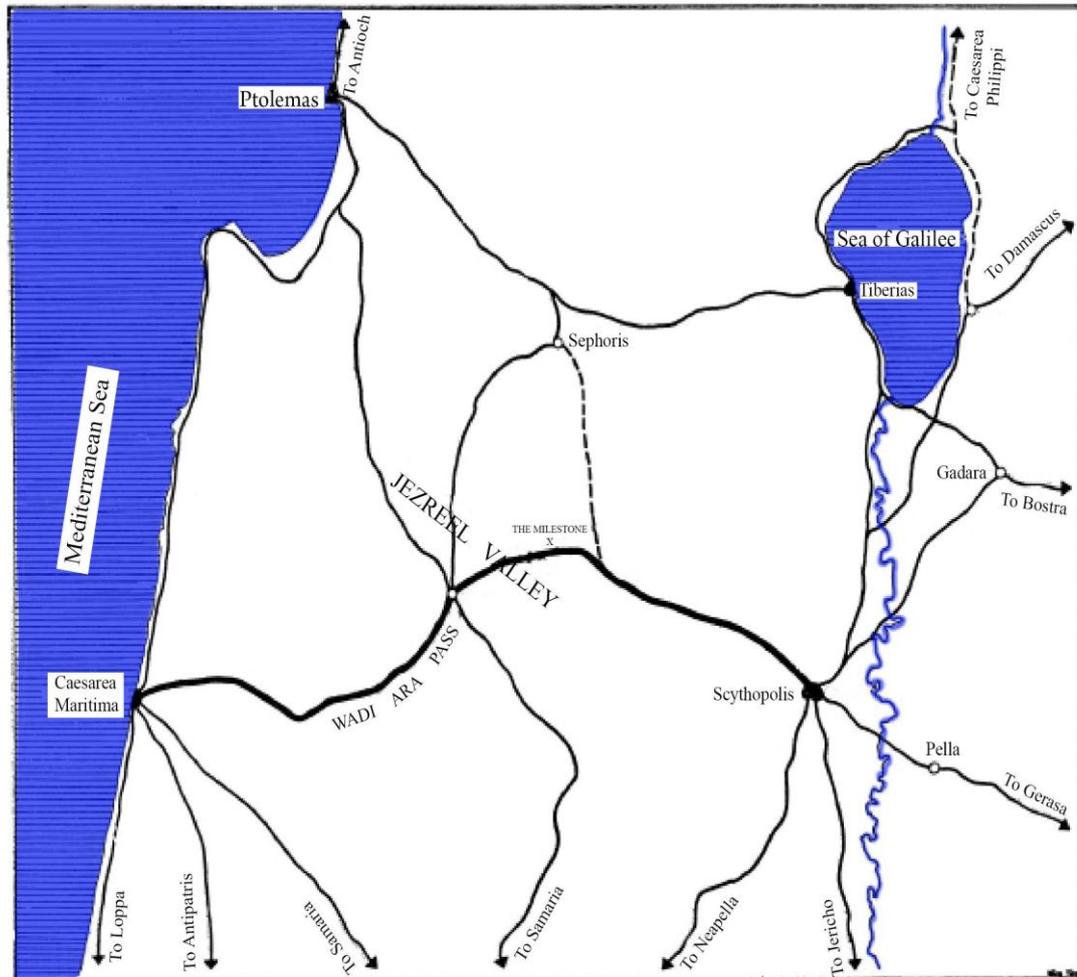
E. J. Watts (ed.), *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Syri*, 193 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 232-233.

City Plan of Gerasa



I. Browning, *Jerash and the Decapolis* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), Map 3, p. 83.

Roads and Routes in the Roman Near East



After, B. H. Isaac and I. Roll, 'A Milestone of A.D. 69 from Judaea: The Elder Trajan and Vespasian', *Journal of Roman Studies*, 66 (1976), 15-19, Fig. 1, p. 16.

**Monuments of Gerasa**

**Fig. 1: 'Atargatis panel' from Khirbet Tannur (Amman Archaeological Museum)**



**Fig. 2: Marble Head of Tyche from Amman (Amman Archaeological Museum)**



**Fig. 3: View of the Oval Forum and Cardo Maximus**



**Fig. 4: Stage of the South Theatre**



Author's own photographs (January, 2011).

**Gerasa: Temple of Zeus**

**Fig. 1: Temple of Zeus**



**Fig. 2: Detail of Niche Temple of Zeus**



**Gerasa: Temple of Artemis**

**Fig. 1: Temple of Artemis Showing Corinthian Columns**



**Fig. 2: Interior Temple of Artemis**



Author's own photographs (January, 2011).

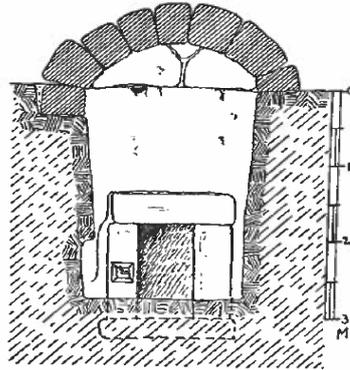
### Tombs of Gerasa

Synopsis of text: C. S. Fisher, 'Tombs: The Southwest Cemetery', in C. S. Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa: City of the Decapolis* (New Haven CN: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1938), 554-557.

#### First Century CE: Tomb No. 4

The rock scarp where the tomb was located was low and the steps at the entrance were cut into the rock, six being required to reach the bottom level. The stairwell was 1.5m wide and 4.6m long and was at least partly covered by a vault of long voussoirs. Only one series was *in situ*.

Fig. 1: Tomb 4, Section Through Entrance



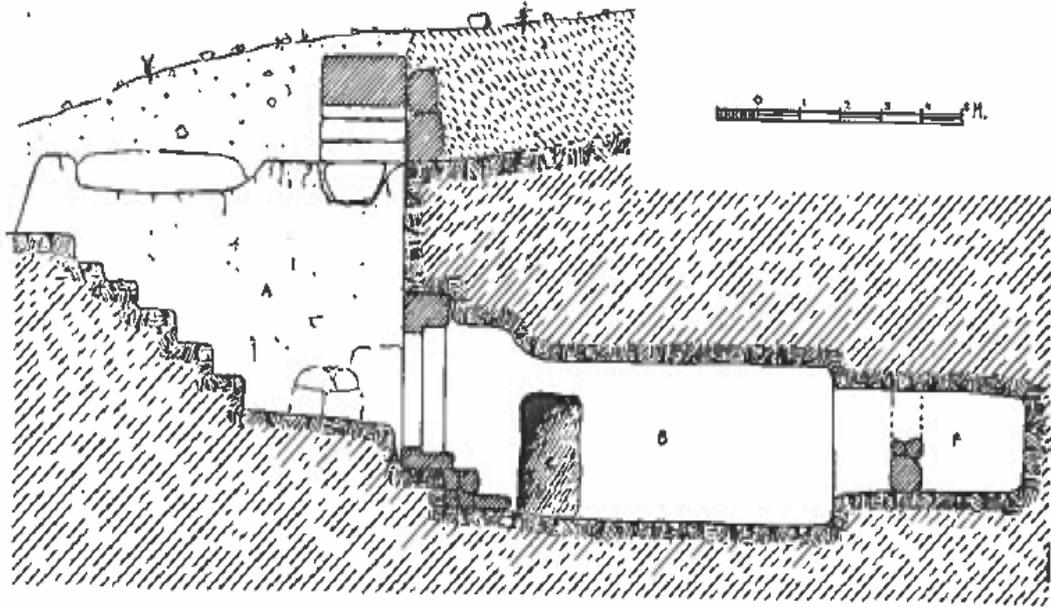
At the bottom of the stairwell the rock to the west had been broken or cut away and the space reinforced with masonry. The opening into the chamber was roughly cut and finished with finely dressed sill, lintel and jambs. The door itself was a single block of stone pivoted into sill and lintel. (Pl. CXLIIa) shows this door partly open as seen from the interior of the chamber. The door was mortised to receive the lock mechanism, unfortunately, lost. The level floor of the chamber was some distance below the lowest outer step and two steps of rough stones were added inside the opening.

Fig. 2: Pl. CXLIIa: Pivoted stone door at entrance to Tomb 4



The chamber was more symmetrical than many of the others; it was 6.0m wide at the door and 7.5m at the rear. There were six burial recesses or *kokim*. Another recess, had been begun between these two, but it, as well as a recess in the east wall, had never been completed. These recesses may have been intended for the storage of ossuaries, since no other provision was made for them. Partly under the southeast corner of the chamber was a circular pit which was unfortunately empty, so that no clue to its use could be obtained.

**Fig. 3: Tomb 4, Section on north-south Axis**



**Fig. 4: Pl. CXLIIb: Figures from Tomb 4**



The entire tomb had been ransacked, not a single object remaining in any of the *kokim*. Objects were scattered over the floor, mixed with pieces of bones and stone fragments. No complete skeleton or even a whole bone or part of any skull was found in the tomb. Apart from their not being found *in situ*, the group of objects discovered in the tomb were by far the most valuable in the entire cemetery. Three pieces were of great importance. (1) Plate CXLIIb: A large figure 0.26m high, standing on a low circular pedestal, fully draped, the left hand holding up a portion of the robe, while the right arm (partly missing) was outstretched from the elbow and somewhat turned up. On the head is a tiara. The fabric was a fine light red paste, and considerable traces of the applied colour still remain. The skin was painted light red, the dress white with red borders, the hair and features black. The pedestal was also red and had a narrow black band extending partly around it. (2) Plate CXLIIIb: The smaller piece is 0.172m high and of the same fabric as the first; the robe and skin were painted red, the headdress partly white.

**Fig. 5: Funeral Boat Lamp (Amman Archaeological Museum)**

Author's own photograph (January, 2011).



A boat lamp that was in fragments. The pieces found show that the boat was over 0.30m long, with pointed prow and stern. Loops at the four corners of the top or deck held the cords by which it was suspended. The deck was decorated in relief with a figure of a goddess, presumably Artemis, above a panel of palmettes. There were at least ten wick holes along the sides, all of them being smoked from use. On the bottom was an inscription incised while the clay was still soft (θεοῖς [...] ΙΒΕ εὐχαριστήριον: C. S. Welles, 'Inscriptions', in C. H. Kraeling (ed.), *Gerasa, City of the Decapolis: An Account Embodying the Record of a Joint Excavation Conducted by Yale University and the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem (1928-1930), and Yale University and the American Schools of Oriental Research (1930-31, 1933-1934)* (New Haven CN: American School of Oriental Research, 1938), no. 249, 461).

## Graeco-Roman Exorcists

### Lucian of Samosata: *Lover of Lies*

Everyone knows about the Syrian from Palestine, the adept in [exorcism], how many he takes in hand who fall down in the light of the moon and roll their eyes and fill their mouths with foam; nevertheless, he restores them to health and sends them away normal in mind, delivering them from their straits for a large fee. When he stands beside them as they lie there and says: Whence came you into this body? The patient himself is silent, but the spirit answers in Greek or in the language of whatever foreign country he comes from, telling how and whence he entered into the man; whereupon by adjuring the spirit and if he does not obey, threatening him, he drives him out.<sup>1</sup>

### Josephus: *Ant. VIII.45-48*

(45) God also enabled him [Solomon] to learn that skill which expels demons, which is a science useful and sanative to men. He composed such incantations also by which distempers are alleviated. And he left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return; (46) and this method of cure is great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country, whose name was Eleazar, releasing people that were demoniacal in the presence of Vespasian, and his sons, and his captains, and the whole multitude of his soldiers. The manner of the cure was this. (47) He put a ring that had a foot of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon through his nostrils; and when the man fell down immediately, he renounced him to return into him no more, making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed. (48) And when Eleazar would persuade and demonstrate to the spectators that he had such a power, he set a little way off a cup or basin full of water, and commanded the demon, as he went out of the man, to overturn it, and thereby to let the spectators know that he had left the man.<sup>2</sup>

### Philostratus: *Apollonius of Tyana, IV.20*

The youth greeted his remark with a loud, licentious laugh, at which Apollonius looked up at him and said, 'It is not you that are committing this outrage, but the demon who controls you, without your knowledge'. In fact without knowing it the youth was possessed by a demon. He laughed at things that nobody else did and went over to weeping without any reason and he talked and sang to himself. Most people thought that the exuberance of youth produced these effects, but he was being prompted by the demon and only seemed to be playing the tricks that were being played on him. When Apollonius looked at the spirit, it uttered sounds of fear and fury, such as people being burned alive or tortured do, and it swore to keep away from the youth and not enter into any human. But Apollonius spoke to it as an angry householder does to a slave who is wily, crafty, shameless, and so on, and told it to give proof of its departure. It replied, 'I will knock that statue over', indicating one of the statues around the royal Colonnade, where all this was taking place. When the statue first moved slightly, then fell, the outcry at this and the way people clapped in amazement were past description. The youth, as if waking up, rubbed his eyes, looked at the sun's beams and won the respect of all the people gazing at him. From then on he no longer seemed dissolute, or had an unsteady gaze, but returned to his own nature no worse off than if he had taken a course of medicine. He got rid of his capes, cloaks, and other fripperies, and fell in love with deprivation and the philosopher's cloak, and stripped down to Apollonius's style.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A. M. Harmon (ed.), *Lucian: Lover of Lies* (Loeb Classical Library; New York: MacMillan, 1921), 16.

<sup>2</sup> P. L. Maier, *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, trans. W. Whiston (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel, 1999), 270.

<sup>3</sup> C. P. Jones (ed.), *Philostratus: Apollonius of Tyana* (Loeb Classical Library; Cambridge MA & London: Harvard University Press, 2005), 361-363.

**Greek Text: Mk 6.45-53**  
**Aborted Crossing to Gentile Territory**  
 (Mt. 14.22-34; Jn 6.16-21)

**6.45** Καὶ εὐθὺς ἠνάγκασεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαιδάν, ἕως αὐτὸς ἀπολύει τὸν ὄχλον. **46** καὶ ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι. **47** καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἦν τὸ πλοῖον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ αὐτὸς μόνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς. **48** καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς βασανιζομένους ἐν τῷ ἐλαύνειν, ἦν γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος ἐναντίος αὐτοῖς, περὶ τετάρτην φυλακὴν τῆς νυκτὸς ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς. **49** οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμα ἔστιν, καὶ ἀνέκραξαν· **50** πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδον καὶ ἐταράχθησαν. ὁ δὲ εὐθὺς ἐλάλησεν μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Θαρσείτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβείσθε. **51** καὶ ἀνέβη πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ λίαν [ἐκ περισσοῦ] ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐζίσταντο· **52** οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη. **53** Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρὲτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν.

**6.45** Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. **46** And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. **47** And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. **48** And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, **49** but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out; **50** for they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear.' **51** And he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, **52** for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened. **53** And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore.

**Greek Text: Mk 7.24-30**  
**The Syro-Phoenician Woman**  
 (Mt. 15.21-28)

7.24 Ἐκεῖθεν δὲ ἀναστὰς ἀπῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ὄρια Τύρου. καὶ εἰσελθὼν εἰς οἰκίαν οὐδένα ἤθελεν γινῶναι, καὶ οὐκ ἠδυνήθη λαθεῖν· 25 ἀλλ' εὐθὺς ἀκούσασα γυνὴ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἧς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, ἐλθοῦσα προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ· 26 ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦν Ἑλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῷ γένει· καὶ ἠρώτα αὐτὸν ἵνα τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐκβάλλῃ ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς αὐτῆς. 27 καὶ ἔλεγεν αὐτῇ, Ἔφες πρῶτον χορτασθῆναι τὰ τέκνα, οὐ γάρ ἐστιν καλὸν λαβεῖν τὸν ἄρτον τῶν τέκνων καὶ τοῖς κυναρίοις βαλεῖν. 28 ἡ δὲ ἀπεκρίθη καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Κύριε· καὶ τὰ κυνάρια ὑποκάτω τῆς τραπέζης ἐσθίουσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ψιχίων τῶν παιδίων. 29 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ, Διὰ τοῦτον τὸν λόγον ὕπαγε, ἐξελήλυθεν ἐκ τῆς θυγατρὸς σου τὸ δαιμόνιον. 30 καὶ ἀπελθοῦσα εἰς τὸν οἶκον αὐτῆς εὗρεν τὸ παιδίον βεβλημένον ἐπὶ τὴν κλίνην καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον ἐξεληλυθός.

**7.24** And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre. And he entered a house, and would not have any one know it; yet he could not be hid. **25** But immediately a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell down at his feet. **26** Now the woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. **27** And he said to her, 'Let the children first be fed, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs'. **28** But she answered him, 'Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs'. **29** And he said to her, 'For this saying you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter'. **30** And she went home and found the child lying in bed, and the demon gone.

### Tyrian Stone Altar Base

A stone altar base from Tyre with sculptured reliefs on three of its sides showing a sun god (with a radiated halo around his head), a moon goddess (both with mutilated faces) and an eagle with outstretched wings, holding a thunderbolt (the god of the sky). It may be that these reliefs represent the triad of Tyre, *Baalshamen*, *Astarte* (*Ashtoreth*) and *Melqart*.

**Fig. 1: Sun God**



**Fig. 2: Eagle**



**Fig. 3: Moon Goddess**



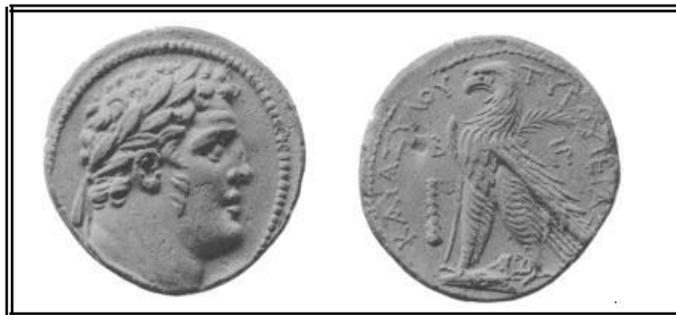
N. Jidejian, *Tyre Through the Ages* (Beirut: Dar El-Mashreq, 1969), Pls. 44, 45, 46.

### Coins of Tyre Showing Melqart and Astarte

**Fig. 1:** Tyre, Phoenicia. Late 5th century BCE.  
Melqart riding hippocamp left, bow in left hand, holding reins in other, dolphin and double line of waves below.  
Egyptian style owl standing right, crook and flail over left shoulder.



**Fig. 2:** Tyre, Phoenicia. Half Shekel. 45-46 CE.  
Bust of Melqart left. Eagle standing right on prow, club & date.



**Fig. 3:** Tyre, Phoenicia. 75-76 CE.  
Turreted head of Tyche right. Astarte standing left on galley holding patera and standard, date and Tyre monogram.



Images: <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/greece/phoenicia/tyre/> (February, 2012).

## **Clementine Homilies**

### ***Homily II.XIX: Justa, a proselyte***

There is amongst us one Justa, a Syro-Phoenician, by race a Canaanite, whose daughter was oppressed with a grievous disease. And she came to our Lord, crying out and entreating that he would heal her daughter. But he said, 'It is not lawful to heal the Gentiles, who are like to dogs on account of their using various meats and practices, while the table in the kingdom has been given to the sons of Israel'. But she hearing this and begging to partake like a dog of the crumbs that fall from this table, having changed what she was by living like the sons of the kingdom, she obtained healing for her daughter, as she asked. For she being a Gentile, and remaining in the same course of life, he would not have healed had she remained a Gentile, on account of its not being lawful to heal her as a Gentile.

### ***Homily II.XX: Divorced for the faith***

She, therefore, having taken up a manner of life according to the law, was, with the daughter who had been healed, driven out from her home by her husband, whose sentiments were opposed to ours. But she being faithful to her engagements and being in affluent circumstances, remained a widow herself but gave her daughter in marriage to a certain man who was attached to the true faith and who was poor. And, abstaining from marriage for the sake of her daughter, she bought two boys and educated them, and had them in place of sons. And they being educated from their boyhood with Simon Magus, have learned all things concerning him. For such was their friendship that they were associated with him in all things in which he wished to unite with them.

### ***Homily III.LXXIII: Baptisms***

And after three days, having begun to baptize, he called me, and Aquila, and Nicetas, and said to us: 'As I am going to set out for Tyre after seven days, I wish you to go away this very day, and to lodge secretly with Bernice the Canaanite, the daughter of Justa, and to learn from her, and write accurately to me what Simon is about. For this is of great consequence to me, that I may prepare myself accordingly. Therefore, depart straightway in peace'. And leaving him baptizing, as he commanded, we preceded him to Tyre of Phoenicia.

### ***Homily IV.I: Bernice's Hospitality***

Thus I Clement, departing from Caesarea Stratonis, together with Nicetas and Aquila, entered into Tyre of Phoenicia; and according to the injunction of Peter, who sent us, we lodged with Bernice, the daughter of Justa the Canaanitess.

### ***Homily XIII.VII: Nicetas tells what befell him***

Now the woman who bought us was a proselyte of the Jews, an altogether worthy person, of the name of Justa. She adopted us as her own children, and zealously brought us up in all the learning of the Greeks, But we, becoming discreet with our years, were strongly attached to her religion, and we paid good heed to our culture, in order that, disputing with the other nations, we might be able to convince them of their error.

A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (eds), *The Clementine Homilies and The Apostolical Constitutions: Ante Nicene Christian Library Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to AD 32, Part Seventeen* (Kila: Kessinger, 2004), 40, 41, 89, 90, 215.

**Greek Text: Mk 7.31-37**  
**Healing of a Deaf and Mute Man**

7.31 Καὶ πάλιν ἐξελθὼν ἐκ τῶν ὀρίων Τύρου ἦλθεν διὰ Σιδῶνος εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τῆς Γαλιλαίας ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν ὀρίων Δεκαπόλεως. 32 καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτῷ κωφὸν καὶ μογιάλον καὶ παρακαλοῦσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα ἐπιθῆ αὐτῷ τὴν χεῖρα, 33 καὶ ἀπολαβόμενος αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου κατ' ἰδίαν ἔβαλεν τοὺς δακτύλους αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὦτα αὐτοῦ καὶ πύσας ἤψατο τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ, 34 καὶ ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν ἐστέναξεν καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ, Εφφαθα, ὃ ἔστιν, Διανοίχθητι. 35 καὶ [εὐθέως] ἠνοίγησαν αὐτοῦ αἱ ἀκοαί, καὶ ἐλύθη ὁ δεσμὸς τῆς γλώσσης αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλάλει ὀρθῶς. 36 καὶ διεστείλατο αὐτοῖς ἵνα μηδενὶ λέγωσιν· ὅσον δὲ αὐτοῖς διεστέλλετο, αὐτοὶ μᾶλλον περισσότερον ἐκήρυσσον. 37 καὶ ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο λέγοντες, Καλῶς πάντα πεποιήκεν, καὶ τοὺς κωφοὺς ποιεῖ ἀκούειν καὶ [τοὺς] ἀλάλους λαλεῖν.

7.31 Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis. 32 And they brought to him a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech; and they besought him to lay his hands upon him. 33 And taking him aside from the multitude privately, he put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue; 34 and looking up to heaven, he sighed, and said to him 'Ephphatha', that is 'Be opened'. 35 And his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36 And he charged them to tell no one; but the more he charged them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37 And they were astonished beyond measure, saying, 'He has done all things well; he even makes the deaf hear and the dumb speak'.

**Greek Text: Mk 8.1-10**  
**Feeding of the Four Thousand**  
(Mt. 15.32-39; Lk 9.1017; Jn 6.1-14)

8.1 Ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις πάλιν πολλοῦ ὄχλου ὄντος καὶ μὴ ἔχόντων τί φάγωσιν, προσκαλεσάμενος τοὺς μαθητὰς λέγει αὐτοῖς, **2** Σπλαγχνίζομαι ἐπὶ τὸν ὄχλον, ὅτι ἤδη ἡμέραι τρεῖς προσμένουσίν μοι καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσιν τί φάγωσιν· **3** καὶ ἐὰν ἀπολύσω αὐτοὺς νήσετεῖς εἰς οἶκον αὐτῶν, ἐκλυθήσονται ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ· καὶ τινες αὐτῶν ἀπὸ μακρόθεν ἦκασιν. **4** καὶ ἀπεκρίθησαν αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι Πόθεν τούτους δυνήσεται τις ὧδε χορτάσαι ἄρτων ἐπ' ἐρημίας; **5** καὶ ἠρώτα αὐτούς, Πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους; οἱ δὲ εἶπαν, Ἑπτὰ. **6** καὶ παραγγέλλει τῷ ὄχλῳ ἀναπεσεῖν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς· καὶ λαβὼν τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἄρτους εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ ἐδίδου τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐψοῦ ἵνα παρατιθῶσιν, καὶ παρέθηκαν τῷ ὄχλῳ. **7** καὶ εἶχον ἰχθύδια ὀλίγα· καὶ εὐλογήσας αὐτὰ εἶπεν καὶ ταῦτα παρατιθέναι. **8** καὶ ἔφαγον καὶ ἐχορτάσθησαν, καὶ ἦσαν περισσεύματα κλασμάτων ἑπτὰ σφυρίδας. **9** ἦσαν δὲ ὡς τετρακισχίλιοι. Καὶ ἀπέλυσεν αὐτούς. **10** Καὶ εὐθὺς ἐμβὰς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ ἦλθεν εἰς τὰ μέρη Δαλμανουθά.

8.1 In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, and they had nothing to eat, he called his disciples to him, and said to them, **2** 'I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; **3** and if I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come a long way'. **4** And his disciples answered him, 'How can one feed these men with bread here in the desert?' **5** And he asked them, 'How many loaves have you?' They said, 'Seven'. **6** And he commanded the crowd to sit down on the ground; and he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and they set them before the crowd. **7** And they had a few small fish; and having blessed them, he commanded that these also should be set before them. **8** And they ate, and were satisfied; and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. **9** And there were about four thousand people. **10** And he sent them away; and immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

**Table of Deities Worshipped in the Decapolis  
as Evidenced by the Early Roman City Coins**

<b>Abila</b>	Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Herakles <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Herakles-Melqart <sup>5</sup> , ?Ares <sup>2</sup> , Athena <sup>5</sup> , Athena-Tyche <sup>1,2</sup> , ?Dionysus <sup>2</sup> , Astarte-Tyche <sup>4</sup> , Tyche <sup>5</sup> .
<b>Adraa</b>	Tyche <sup>1,2,3</sup> , Herakles <sup>2,3</sup> , Athena <sup>2</sup> , ?River-god <sup>2,3</sup> , Dusares <sup>3,4</sup> , Astarte-Tyche <sup>1,4</sup> .
<b>Canatha</b>	Zeus <sup>1,2</sup> , Pallas <sup>1</sup> , Dionysus <sup>2</sup> , Athena <sup>2</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Capitolias</b>	Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Zeus <sup>1,2,4</sup> , Zeus Olympias <sup>5</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Dionysus <sup>2,5</sup> , Astarte-Tyche <sup>4</sup> , Demeter <sup>5</sup> .
<b>Dion</b>	War-god <sup>2</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Athena <sup>2,5</sup> , Hadad <sup>1,3</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Zeus <sup>5</sup> .
<b>Gadara</b>	Zeus <sup>1,2,4,5</sup> , Zeus Olympias <sup>5</sup> , Athena <sup>5</sup> , Pallas <sup>1</sup> , Herakles <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Herakles-Melqart <sup>5</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Pallas-Athena <sup>2</sup> , Three Graces <sup>2</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Astarte-Tyche <sup>4</sup> .
<b>Gerasa</b>	Artemis <sup>5</sup> , Artemis of Gerasenes <sup>1</sup> , Artemis-Tyche <sup>2,3</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,5</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Artemis Huntress <sup>2</sup> , River-god <sup>3</sup> , Zeus <sup>5</sup> , Zeus Olympias with Hera <sup>3</sup> , Zeus Helios <sup>3</sup> , Sarapis with Isis <sup>3</sup> , ?Dusares <sup>3</sup> .
<b>Hippos</b>	Zeus Arotios <sup>2,4,5</sup> , Zeus <sup>2,5</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Athena <sup>2</sup> , Demeter <sup>2</sup> , Nike <sup>2</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Nysa-Scythopolis</b>	Dionysus <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Zeus <sup>2</sup> , Zeus Olympias <sup>5</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Athena/Demeter <sup>2</sup> , Nike <sup>2,5</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Nysa <sup>5</sup> .
<b>Pella</b>	Pallas <sup>1</sup> , Herakles <sup>2</sup> , Apollo <sup>2,5</sup> , Athena <sup>2,5</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Nike <sup>2,5</sup> , ?Asclepius <sup>4</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> .
<b>Philadelphia</b>	Pallas <sup>1</sup> , Herakles <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Asteria <sup>2,5</sup> , Dioscuri <sup>2</sup> , Demeter <sup>2,5</sup> , Tyche <sup>1,2,5</sup> , Athena <sup>2,5</sup> , Astarte <sup>1</sup> , Melqart <sup>5</sup> , Nike <sup>5</sup> .
<p><b>KEY:</b>            (1) G. A. Smith, <i>The Historical Geography of the Holy Land</i> (Gloucester MA: P. Smith, 25<sup>th</sup> ed. 1972), 406.*            (2) A. Spijkerman <i>The Coins of the Decapolis and Provincia Arabia</i> (ed.), M. Piccirillo (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1978).*            (3) G. F. Hill, <i>Catalogue of the Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia and Persia in the British Museum</i> (Bologna: Forni, 1965).            (4) M. J. Price and B. L. Trel, <i>Coins and their Cities: Architecture on the Ancient Coins of Greece, Rome and Palestine</i> (London: Vecchi, 1977).            (5) A. Lichtenberger, <i>Kult und Kultur der Dekapolis. Untersuchungen zu Numismatischen, Archäologischen und Epigraphischen Zeugnissen</i> (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 442-455; Plates 14-22.            * Based on the work of L. F. J. C. de Saulcy, <i>Numismatique de la Terre Sainte: Description des Monnaies Autonomes et Impériales de la Palestine et de l'Arabie Pétrée</i> (Paris: Rothschild, 1874), 284-401.</p>	

Revised and updated table, after: J. D. Wineland, 'Archaeological and Numismatic Evidence for the Political Structure and Greco-Roman Religions of the Decapolis, with Particular Emphasis on Gerasa and Abila', *ARAM*, 4 I & II (1992), 339.

**Greek Text: Mk 8.22-26**  
**Healing a Blind Man**

8.22 Καὶ ἔρχονται εἰς Βηθσαϊδάν. καὶ φέρουσιν αὐτῷ τυφλὸν καὶ παρακαλοῦσιν αὐτὸν ἵνα αὐτοῦ ἄψηται. 23 καὶ ἐπιλαβόμενος τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ τυφλοῦ ἐξήνεγκεν αὐτὸν ἔξω τῆς κώμης, καὶ πτύσας εἰς τὰ ὄμματα αὐτοῦ, ἐπιθεὶς τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῷ, ἐπηρώτα αὐτόν, Εἴ τι βλέπεις; 24 καὶ ἀναβλέψας ἔλεγεν, βλέπω τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ὅτι ὡς δένδρα ὁρῶ περιπατοῦντας. 25 εἶτα πάλιν ἐπέθηκεν τὰς χεῖρας ἐπὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ, καὶ διέβλεψεν, καὶ ἀπεκατέστη καὶ ἐνέβλεπεν τηλαυγῶς ἅπαντα. 26 καὶ ἀπέστειλεν αὐτὸν εἰς οἶκον αὐτοῦ λέγων, Μηδὲ εἰς τὴν κώμην εἰσέλθης.

8.22 And they came to Bethsaida. And some people brought to him a blind man, and begged him to touch him. 23 And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the village; and when he had spit on his eyes and laid his hands upon him, he asked him, 'Do you see anything?' 24 And he looked up and said, 'I see men; but they look like trees, walking'. 25 Then again he laid his hands upon his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and saw everything clearly. 26 And he sent him away to his home, saying 'Do not even enter the village'.

**Greek Text: Mk 9.14-29**  
**Healing a Boy with an Unclean Spirit**  
 (Mt. 17.14-21; Lk 9.37-43)

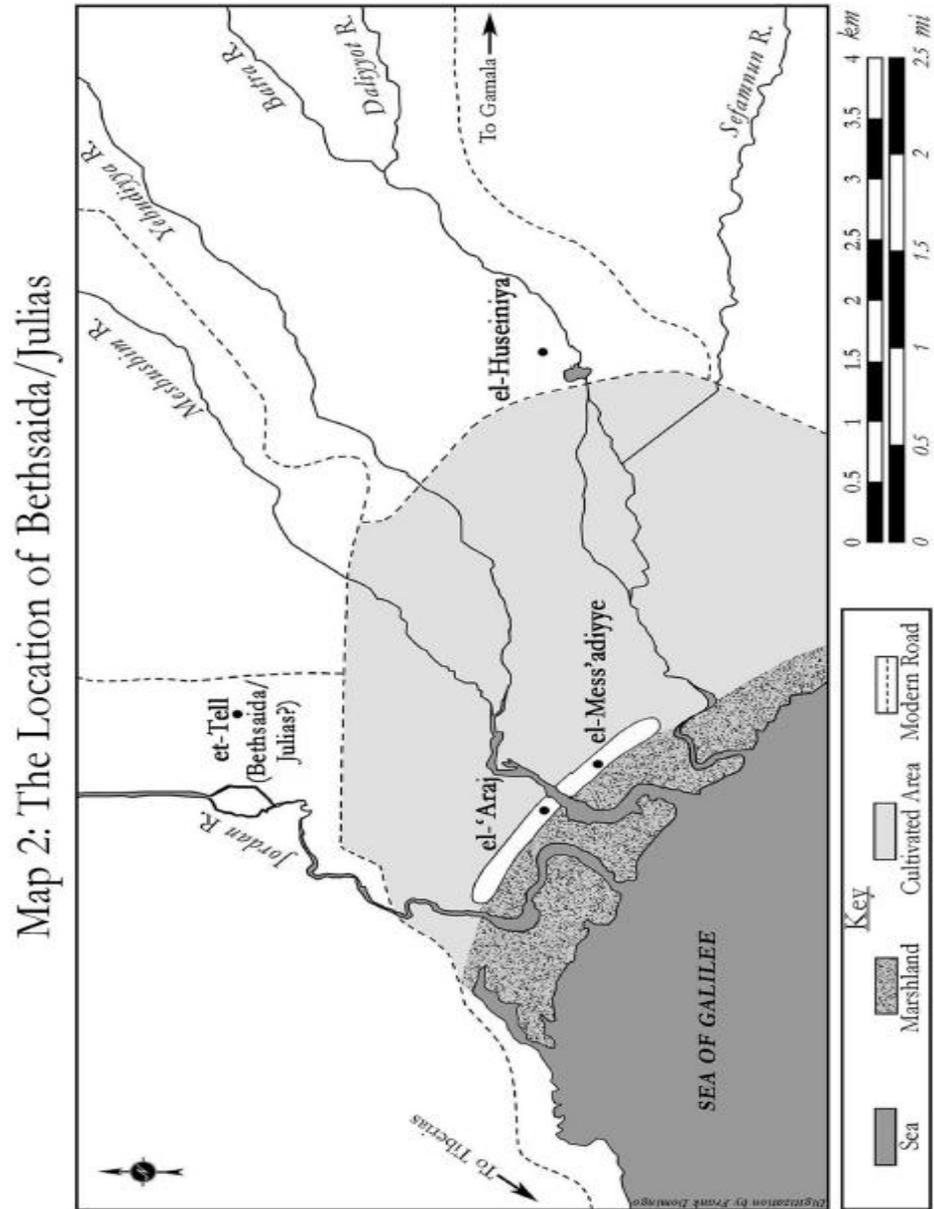
9.14 Καὶ ἐλθόντες πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς εἶδον ὄχλον πολὺν περὶ αὐτοὺς καὶ γραμματεῖς συζητοῦντας πρὸς αὐτούς. 15 καὶ εὐθὺς πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἰδόντες αὐτὸν ἐξεθαμβήθησαν καὶ προστρέχοντες ἠσπάζοντο αὐτόν. 16 καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν αὐτούς, Τί συζητεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς; 17 καὶ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῷ εἰς ἐκ τοῦ ὄχλου, Διδάσκαλε, ἦνεγκα τὸν υἱόν μου πρὸς σέ, ἔχοντα πνεῦμα ἄλαλον. 18 καὶ ὅπου ἂν αὐτὸν καταλάβῃ ῥήσσει αὐτόν καὶ ἀφρίζει καὶ τρίζει τοὺς ὀδόντας καὶ ξηραίνεται· καὶ εἶπα τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου ἵνα αὐτὸ ἐκβάλωσιν καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυσαν. 19 ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς αὐτοῖς λέγει, ὦ γενεὰ ἄπιστος, ἕως πότε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἔσομαι; ἕως πότε ἀνέξομαι ὑμῶν; φέρετε αὐτὸν πρὸς με. 20 καὶ ἦνεγκαν αὐτὸν πρὸς αὐτόν. καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτὸν τὸ πνεῦμα εὐθὺς συνεσπάραξεν αὐτόν, καὶ πεσὼν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐκυλίετο ἀφρίζων. 21 καὶ ἐπηρώτησεν τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ, Πόσος χρόνος ἐστὶν ὡς τοῦτο γέγονεν αὐτῷ; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν, Ἐκ παιδιόθεν· 22 καὶ πολλάκις καὶ εἰς πῦρ αὐτὸν ἔβαλεν καὶ εἰς ὕδατα ἵνα ἀπολέσῃ αὐτόν· ἀλλ' εἴ τι δύνη, βοήθησον ἡμῖν σπλαγχνισθεὶς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς. 23 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Τὸ εἶ δύνη, πάντα δυνατὰ τῷ πιστεύοντι. 24 εὐθὺς κράξας ὁ πατὴρ τοῦ παιδίου ἔλεγεν, Πιστεύω· Βοήθει μου τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ. 25 ἰδὼν δὲ ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὅτι ἐπισυντρέχει ὄχλος ἐπετίμησεν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀκαθάρτῳ λέγων αὐτῷ, Τὸ ἄλαλον καὶ κωφὸν πνεῦμα, ἐγὼ ἐπιτάσσω σοι, ἔξελθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ μηκέτι εἰσέλθῃς εἰς αὐτόν. 26 καὶ κράξας καὶ πολλὰ σπαράξας ἔξηλθεν· καὶ ἐγένετο ὡσεὶ νεκρός, ὥστε τοὺς πολλοὺς λέγειν ὅτι ἀπέθανεν. 27 ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς κρατήσας τῆς χειρὸς αὐτοῦ ἤγειρεν αὐτόν, καὶ ἀνέστη. 28 καὶ εἰσελθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς οἶκον οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ κατ' ἰδίαν ἐπηρώτων αὐτόν, Ὅτι ἡμεῖς οὐκ ἠδυνήθημεν ἐκβαλεῖν αὐτό; 29 καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτο τὸ γένος ἐν οὐδενὶ δύναται ἐξελεθῆναι εἰ μὴ ἐν προσευχῇ.

9.14 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd about them, and scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed, and ran up to him and greeted him. 16 And he asked them, 'What are you discussing with them?' 17 And one of the crowd answered

him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a dumb spirit; **18** and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able'. **19** And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me'. **20** And they brought the boy to him; and when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. **21** And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has he had this?' And he said, 'From childhood. **22** And it has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you can do anything, have pity on us and help us'. **23** And Jesus said to him, 'If you can! All things are possible to him who believes'. **24** Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief! **25** And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again'. **26** And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, 'He is dead'. **27** But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. **28** And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' **29** And he said to them, 'This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer'.

Map: Location of Bethsaida

Fig. 1: Location of Bethsaida/Julias



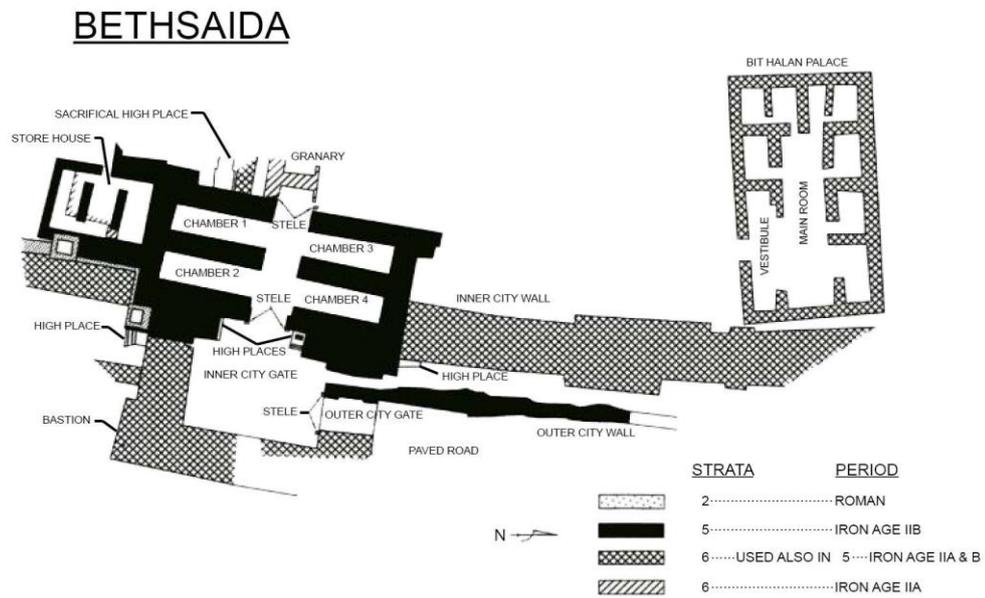
N. Kokkinos, 'The Foundation of Bethsaida-Julias by Philip the Tetrarch', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, LIX.2 (2008), Map 2, p. 240.

**Fig. 2: Aerial View of Bethsaida**



Image: Bethsaida Excavation Project: <http://www.unomaha.edu/bethsaida/> (February 2012).

**Bethsaida City Plan and Cultic Stele**



**Fig. 1 City View**

**Fig. 2: Basalt Stele with Carved Figure of Horned Bull from Bethsaida City Gate**



Figs. 1 & 2 Images: Bethsaida Excavation Project: <http://www.unomaha.edu/bethsaida/> (February, 2012).

**Tacitus, *Histories* IV.81**

Throughout those months in which Vespasian was waiting in Alexandria for the season of the summer winds and a calm sea, many miracles happened, by which were exhibited the favor of Heaven and a certain leaning toward the divine in Vespasian. One of the commoners of Alexandria, who was known for the loss of his sight, threw himself before Vespasian's knees, praying to him with groans for a remedy for his blindness, having been so ordered by the god Serapis, whom the nation, being most pious, worships more than all others. And he prayed to the emperor that he should stoop to moisten with his spit his cheeks and the eyeballs.

Another, whose hand was useless, ordered by the same God, prayed that Caesar should step on it with his foot. Vespasian at first laughed; then, at the same time, he was moved to fear by the thought of the infamy of failure and to hope by the prayers of the men and the voices of flattery. Finally, he ordered it to be determined by physicians if such blindness and debility could be conquered by human powers. The physicians handled the two cases differently; in one, the power of sight had not been destroyed and would be restored if the obstructions were removed. In the other, the joints had fallen into deformity; if a healing force were applied, it would be possible to restore them. This was perhaps the wish of the Gods, and the emperor had been chosen for divine service. At any rate, if the healing was achieved, Caesar had glory; the onus of failure would belong to the poor beseechers. Therefore, Vespasian, sure that his good fortune was able to achieve anything and that nothing was incredible, with smiling face, standing amid the excitement of the tense multitude, did what he was asked. Immediately the hand was changed to a useful one and the day shone again for the blind man. Both cases were told by those who were present, and even now when lying has no reward.

D. R. Cartlidge and D. L. Dungan, *Documents for the Study of the Gospels* (New York & London: Collins, 1980), 156.

### Coins of Caesarea Philippi

**Fig. 1:** Bronze Coin, 19 CE.

Obverse: Laureate bust of Tiberius to right

Reverse: Tetrastyle temple, date between columns, name is around temple



**Fig. 2:** Coin of Agrippa I, 40-41 CE.

Obverse: KAISWNIA GUNH SEBASTOU, draped bust of Caesonia to left.

Reverse: DROUSILLA QUGATRI SEBASTOU, Drusilla standing facing, head right, holding Nike and branch



**Fig. 3:** Coin of Agrippa II, 65 CE

Obverse: DIVA POPPAEA AVG, distyle temple with seated figure of Poppaea/DIVA

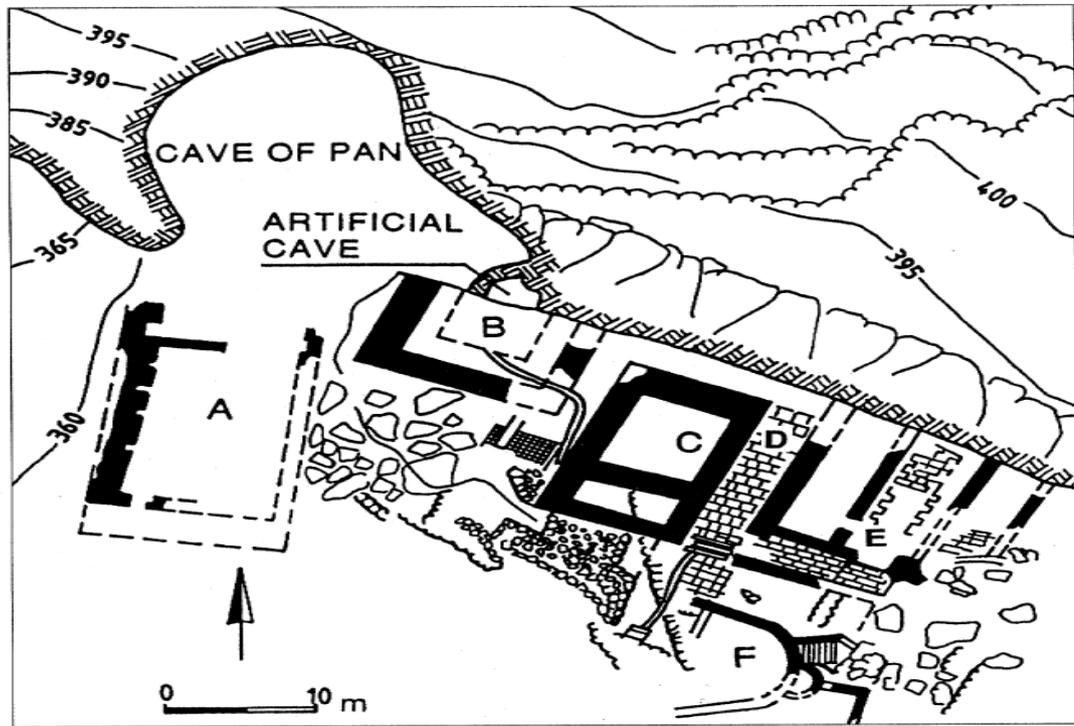
Reverse: Hexastyle temple with figure of Nero



Images: Catalogue of <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins> (February, 2012).

**Cultic Archaeology of Caesarea Philippi**

**Fig. 1: Plan of the Sanctuary of Pan at Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi (after Ma'oz, 1996)**



(A) Probably the Augusteum; (B) Court of Pan and Nymphs; (C) Temple of Zeus and Pan

A. M. Berlin, 'The Archaeology of Ritual: The Sanctuary of Pan at Baniyas/Caesarea Philippi', *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, 315 (1999), Fig. 2, p. 29.

**Fig. 2: Cave of Pan and Niches**



**Fig. 3: View of Terrace where Temples of Augustus and Pan were situated.**



**Fig. 4: Artist's Impression of Temple Complex**



Figs. 2, 3, & 4: Image: [www. http://google.co.uk/imgres?q=Images+Caesarea+Philippi&hl](http://google.co.uk/imgres?q=Images+Caesarea+Philippi&hl) (February, 2012).

## Aretaeus of Cappadocia

### ***Aretaeus, Consisting of Eight Books, on the Causes, Symptoms and Cure of Acute and Chronic Diseases***

#### **Book I.IV - 'On Epilepsy', 111-113.**

When the malady has taken deep root, it baffles the skill of the physician, nor is it removed by any change of age, but lives and dies with the patient. Sometimes the disease, from convulsions and distortion of the limbs and eyes, is attended with excessive pain, and the mind is affected with *mania*. The fight of the paroxysm is truly melancholy, and the termination is attended with shame, from the spontaneous flow both of the faeces and urine, besides, the form and origin is beyond all belief, for some imagine that it is sent from the moon as a judgment upon the impious, hence is derived the name *facer morbus*, which it may likewise have obtained from other reasons, perhaps from the magnitude of the disease, it being customary to call everything great by the name *facer*, or from the cure not being affected by human, but divine power, or from the appearance of the man being possessed with a demon, and it is not improbable that all these conspired to affix the appellation. If the disease is of long duration, the patients are not without danger even in the intervals, they are torpid, dispirited, dejected, and shun all intercourse with men. [N]or does age render them more mild in their nature, they are wakeful, and troubled in their sleep with many strange fancies, they have a detestation at food, bad concoction, their colour disappears and their countenance is of a leaden hue, torpor of mind and insensibility render them slow of perception, they are dull of hearing, the ears tickle, and there is a buzzing noise in the head: their speech is perplexed, and the tongue falters either from the tendency of the disease, or wounds which hath received during the exacerbation, it is convulsed, and twisted different ways in the mouth. [S]ometimes too the disease disorders the understanding to such a degree, that a total infatuation takes place. The cause of these affections is an excess of cold conjoined to moisture.

#### **Book 1.V – 'On the Paroxysms of Epileptics', 244-246.**

In the attack, the person lies insensible, the hands clasped together by the spasm; the legs not only plaited together, but also dashed about hither and thither by the tendons. The calamity bears a resemblance to slaughtered bulls; the neck bent, the head variously distorted, for sometimes it is arched, as it were forwards, so that the chin rests upon the breast ... The tongue protrudes, so as to incur the risk of a great wound, or of a piece of it being cut off, should the teeth come forcibly together with the spasm; the eyes rolled inwards, the eyelids for the most part are separated, and affected with palpitation; but should they wish to shut the lids, they cannot bring them together, insomuch that the white of the eyes can be seen from below. The eyebrows sometimes relax toward the mesial space, as in those who are frowning, and sometimes retracted to the temples abnormally, so that the skin about the forehead is greatly stretched, and the wrinkles in the intersuperciliary space disappear: the cheeks are ruddy and quivering; the lips sometimes compressed together to a sharp point, and sometimes separated towards the sides, when they are stretched over the teeth, like as in persons smiling ...

distension of the vessels in the neck; inability of speech as in suffocation; insensibility even if you call loudly. The uttering is a moaning and lamentation; and the respiration a sense of suffocation ....The pulse strong, and quick, and small in the beginning ... but when they come to the termination of the illness, there are unconscious discharges of the urine, and watery discharges from the bowels and in some cases an evacuation also of the semen ... the mouth watery; phlegm copious, thick, cold and if you should draw it forth, you might drag out a quantity of it in the form of a thread ... They accordingly spit out foam, as the sea ejects froth in mighty tempest; and then at length they rise up, the ailment now being at an end. At the termination, they are torpid in their members at first, experience heaviness of the head, and loss of strength, and are languid, pale, spiritless and dejected from the suffering and shame of the dreadful malady.

J. Moffat (ed.), *Aretaeus, Consisting of Eight Books, on the Causes, Symptoms and Cure of Acute and Chronic Diseases* (London: Logographic Press [1785?], repr. 1980), and <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodid=ECCO&docid=CV> (February, 2012).

F. Adams (ed.), *The Extant Works of Aretaeus, the Cappadocia* (Boston: Milford House, [1856] repr. 1972), 244-246 and, <http://www.chlt.org/sandbox/dh/aretaeusEnglish/page.4.a.php?size=240x320> (February, 2012).