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Ancient Compositional Practices and the Gospels: A Reassessment

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To Amy-Jill Levine, Mentor and Friend

Recent studies of ancient compositional practices and the Synoptic Problem have validated the Two-Source Hypothesis and challenged the “Augustinian,” Farrer–Goulder, and Griesbach Hypotheses. These studies conclude that, according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, subsequent evangelists would have adhered to the Greco-Roman conventions of working with one source at a time and not working backward through a text. The present essay adduces counterexamples such as the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Hever, which predates the Gospels, and Tatian’s *Diatessaron*, which postdates the Gospels. Upon further examination, simultaneously accessing multiple sources and reordering those sources were established compositional practices in the first century. Moreover, every solution to the Synoptic Problem necessitates such scribal conventions. Therefore the lesser extent of these ancient compositional practices does not privilege the Two-Source Hypothesis over its rivals.

Recent studies on the Synoptic Problem by Robert Derrenbacker and Gerald Downing have investigated ancient compositional practices and have concluded that scribes could not have conceivably accessed multiple sources simultaneously within a single pericope (micro-conflation) or moved forward and backward through a scroll (radical reordering or reverse contextualization). Compared with Griesbach, Farrer–Goulder, and “Augustinian” Hypotheses, the Two-Source [110] Hypothesis requires the fewest instances of micro-conflation and radical reordering. Therefore Derrenbacker and Downing have validated the Two-Source Hypothesis and challenged the viability of its rivals.

In this essay I do not endorse any particular solution to the Synoptic Problem. Instead I demonstrate that Derrenbacker and Downing have overstated the difficulty, and underestimated the prevalence, of micro-conflation and radical reordering in early biblical literature. One example is a Jewish text predating the Gospels, the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever, which has not yet factored into studies of ancient compositional practices and the Gospels. Another key text is Tatian’s second-century harmony of the Gospels; the scribal and redactional tendencies of the *Diatessaron* have not been described accurately in recent studies. Compared with these two texts in particular, all Synoptic Problem hypotheses involves fewer and less complicated instances of micro-conflation and radical reordering. Therefore the greater or lesser extents of these compositional practices do not *prima facie* privilege any one solution to the Synoptic Problem over any of its rivals.

I. EVIDENCE FOR MICRO-CONFLATION

According to Derrenbacher, since writing desks did not appear until the middle ages, ancient writers tended to work with only one source text at a time. He thus considers micro-conflation “mechanically unworkable and unattested in ancient literature.”¹ Downing similarly mentions the difficulty of maintaining “close attention to both scrolls together.”²

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¹ R. A. Derrenbacher, Jr., *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem* (BETL 186; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 257. For endorsements of Derrenbacher’s argument, see Alex Damm, *Ancient Rhetoric and the Synoptic Problem: Clarifying Markan Priority* (BETL 252; Leuven: Peeters, 2013), xxxv; Dennis R. MacDonald, *Two Shipwrecked Gospels: The Logoi of Jesus and Papias’s Exposition of Logia about the Lord* (SBLECL 8; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 88.

² F. Gerald Downing, “Disagreements of Each Evangelist with the Minor Close Agreements of the Other Two,” *ETL* 80 (2004): 445–69, here 446; see also *idem*, “Compositional Conventions and the Synoptic Problem,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 69–85. C. M. Tuckett long ago considered the Griesbach hypothesis problematic because it requires “an almost continuous

In light of ancient compositional practices, then, Downing and Derrenbacker argue that the Two-Source Hypothesis proves the most plausible solution to the Synoptic Problem, for it requires far fewer instances of micro-conflation than do the “Augustinian,” Farrer–Goulder, and Griesbach Hypotheses.

The purported infeasibility of this scribal practice would extend beyond the Synoptic Problem. New Testament scholars have long presupposed the technique [111] of micro-conflation when explaining the relationships among John and the Synoptics, the *Gospel of Thomas* and the Synoptics, as well as the Apostolic Fathers and the Synoptics. The Johannine account of Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem may show familiarity with the parallel accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.³ *Gospel of Thomas* 39 may conflate the “scribes and Pharisees” (Matt 23:13) with “the key of knowledge” (Luke 11:52).⁴ The combined

process of ‘careful comparison’, taking one word from here, one from there, and weaving them together” (*The Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis: An Analysis and Appraisal* [SNTSMS 44; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983], 46).

³ Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (NTD 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 187–9, see also 3–4; for John’s use of all three Synoptics, see also Andrew Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005), 26–38, esp. 31–2.

⁴ Bertil Gärtner, *The Theology of the Gospel of Thomas* (trans. Eric J. Sharpe; London: Collins, 1961), 36. Also, the beatitude concerning the poor in *Gos. Thom.* 54 could come from Luke 6:20 and “a reminiscence of the Matthean ‘kingdom of the heavens’ at the end”

beatitudes to the poor and the persecuted in Pol. *Phil.* 2.3 could be a conflation of Matt 5:10 and Luke 6:20.⁵ I do not claim that micro-conflation is the only way to explain these sayings. I rather intend to show that scholars have not been wrong all along to claim it as a plausible explanation for such parallels.

Ancient readers could easily dictate multiple sources for a writer to conflate.⁶ William Johnson has even demonstrated that at Oxyrhynchus reading, copying, and

(Mark Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels: The Case for Thomas's Familiarity with the Synoptics* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012], 51).

⁵ Kenneth Berding, *Polycarp and Paul: An Analysis of Their Literary and Theological Relationship in Light of Polycarp's Use of Biblical and Extra-Biblical Literature* (Supplement to *Vigiliae Christianae* 52; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 58–9; according to Berding, Polycarp would also have accessed *1 Clem.* 13.2 for the maxims in *Phil.* 2.3. Similarly, *2 Clem.* 9.11, “For even the Lord said, ‘My brothers are these who do the will of my Father,’” may quote a lost source that had already harmonized Matt 12:50 and Luke 8:21 (Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990], 351).

⁶ For the suggestion of dictation, see Delbert Royce Burkett, *Rethinking the Gospel Sources, Volume 2: The Unity and Plurality of Q* (SBLECL 1; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 31; Goodacre, *Thomas and the Gospels*, 150; Christopher Tuckett, review of R. A. Derrenbacher, Jr., *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem*, *JTS* 58 (2007): 187–90, here 189. See also Sharon Lea Mattila’s conclusion that the *Diatessaron* was

correcting texts were the work of a scholarly group rather than an individual.⁷ In what follows, I adduce simple text-critical conflation in the transmission of the Gospels as well as increasingly complex micro-conflation in scrolls from the Judean Desert and in Tatian's *Diatessaron*. These examples show the feasibility of micro-conflation in the composition of the Synoptics.

Derrenbacker likens his methodology to textual criticism, and he explicitly mentions text critics' preference for "non-harmonistic" readings.⁸ He does not [112] acknowledge that harmonistic variants provide quintessential instances of micro-conflation. A singular

"the product of a group effort...with the aid of dictation" ("A Question Too Often Neglected," *NTS* 41 [1995]: 199–217, here 215).

⁷ William A. Johnson, "The Ancient Book," in *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (ed. Roger S. Bagnall; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 256–81, esp. 276–7.

⁸ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 51. Regarding textual criticism and the Synoptic Problem, see, for example, Gordon D. Fee, "Modern Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem: On the Problem of Harmonization in the Gospels," in *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (ed. Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee; SD 45; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 174–82; Peter M. Head, "Textual Criticism and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem: Oxford Conference, April 2008; Essays in Honour of Christopher M. Tuckett* (ed. Paul Foster et al.; Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 115–56.

reading in \mathfrak{P}^{45} provides a clear example.⁹ Matthew and Luke record similar exhortations in which Jesus says that humans should not worry about food and clothing because, according to the principle of the lesser to the greater, God provides for birds. Whereas Matthew 6:26 begins, “Look at the birds of the sky” (ἐμβλέψατε εἰς τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), Luke 12:24 begins, “Consider the ravens” (κατανοήσατε τοὺς κόρακας). At an early stage of transmission, some witnesses assimilated Luke to Matthew, for according to Codex Beza Luke 12:24 reads, “Consider the birds of the sky” (κατανοήσατε τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ). According to \mathfrak{P}^{45} Luke 12:24 reads, “Consider the birds of the sky and the ravens” (κατανοήσατε τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τοὺς κόρακας), a conflation of the original reading and the assimilated variant.¹⁰

⁹ \mathfrak{P}^{45} contained the Four Gospels and Acts; the dates for this papyrus range from the beginning to the end of the third century. Singular readings are variants that appear in only one witness; given the abundance of NT Greek manuscripts, in all likelihood these readings originate with the individual scribe. For the importance of singular readings, see Ernest C. Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (NTTS 9; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 106–24 [originally published as “Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text,” in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship* (ed. James Philip Hyatt; Nashville: Abingdon, 1965)]; James R. Royse, *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* (NTTSD 36; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008); Juan Hernández, Jr., *Scribal Habits and Theological Influences in the Apocalypse: The Singular Readings of Sinaiticus, Alexandrinus, and Ephraemi* (WUNT 2.218; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006).

¹⁰ Colwell, *Studies in Methodology*, 113; Royse, *Scribal Habits*, 187.

It is easily imaginable that a scribe engendered the earlier assimilation from memory without looking up the verse in another gospel. The conflation, however, only emerged through the copyist's (or a reader's) visual contact while collating two manuscripts; the καί is a dead giveaway.

Micro-Conflation in Texts from the Judean Desert

Micro-conflation definitely predates the transmission and the composition of the Gospels.¹¹ Among the biblical manuscripts at Qumran, the pre-Samaritan 4QDeutⁿ conflates the Priestly and Deuteronomic explanations of the [113] Sabbath.¹² According to Exod 20:11, God ceased work on the seventh day of creation, whereas Deut 5:15 reminds

¹¹ Scribal conflation dates at least as far back as the seventh century B.C.E., for Jerrold S. Cooper has demonstrated that the Standard Babylonian version of the Epic of Gilgamesh has clumsily conflated “the two dreams of Gilgamesh foretelling the coming of Enkidu” from the Old Babylonian version (“Gilgamesh Dreams of Enkidu: The Evolution and Dilution of Narrative,” in *Essays on the Ancient Near East in Memory of Jacob Joel Finkelstein* [ed. Maria deJong Ellis; Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences 19; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977], 39–44, here 39).

¹² Jeffrey H. Tigay, “Conflation as a Redactional Technique,” in *Empirical Models for Biblical Criticism* (ed. Jeffrey H. Tigay; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 53–98, here 55–7; see also Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 30–32.

the Israelites of their slavery in Egypt. The small scroll 4QDeutⁿ contains Deut 8:5–10, which is joined to Deut 5:1–6:1; the text interpolates Exod 20:11 at the end of Deut 5:15 before turning to the commandment to honor one’s parents.

Compared with Exod 20:11 MT, 4QDeutⁿ omits one direct object marker (תא) and changes the finiteness of the final word, the verb to “sanctify.”¹³ Otherwise the interpolation in 4QDeutⁿ consists of two and a half lines totaling twenty-six Hebrew words.¹⁴ Such length and extent of verbatim agreement tell against the scribe having recalled Exod 20:11 solely from memory.¹⁵ The scroll also shows signs of the scribe’s (or a reader’s) visual contact with an exemplar, given that the words “any work” (כל מלאכה) in Deut 5:14 extend into the

¹³ At the beginning of the interpolation, the scribe added “the phrase ‘to sanctify it’ (לקדשו) as a noticeable seam” (Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture*, 32).

¹⁴ For transcription of 4QDeutⁿ, see Esther Eshel, “4QDeutⁿ: A Text That Has Undergone Harmonistic Editing,” *HUCA* 62 (1991): 117–54, here 127; see also Sidnie Ann White, “The All Souls Deuteronomy and the Decalogue,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 193–206, here 201.

¹⁵ According to David Carr (*Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 228–9), “proto-Samaritan” Qumran texts combined Exodus and Deuteronomy through visual copying; by contrast, composite texts such as the Nash Papyrus probably were written from memory. The Nash Papyrus of the Decalogue combines some Priestly and some Deuteronomistic elements, but only the Priestly rationale for the Sabbath appears; regarding a scribe writing the Nash Papyrus from memory, see Innocent Himbaza, “Le Décalogue du Papyrus Nash, Philon, 4Qphyl G, 8Qphyl 3 et 4Qmez A,” *RevQ* 79 (2002): 411–28, here 419–21.

margin farther than any other line in the same column. Esther Eshel notes that, except in one other case in 4QDeutⁿ, כול is written *plene*, and so defective spelling may here—as elsewhere at Qumran—indicate a scribal correction.¹⁶ I suggest that the scribe originally omitted כל מלאכה due to *homoeoteleuton*, since “all your work” (כול מלאכתך) in Deut 5:13 stands at the end of the line directly above. Simply put, the conflation of Priestly and Deuteronomic Sabbath rationales in 4QDeutⁿ unmistakably establishes micro-conflation and harmonization as Jewish scribal practices at least seventy years before the composition of the Gospels.¹⁷

My comparison of scribal and redactional traits of Hebrew and Greek texts [114] from the Judean Desert aligns with recent work by John Kloppenborg, who considers the high degree of verbatim agreement as well as occasional conflation and reordering in certain Dead Sea Scrolls.¹⁸ Kloppenborg concludes that Matthew and Luke’s practices are more like these “wooden copying techniques” from Qumran, as opposed to Greco-Roman historians

¹⁶ Eshel, “4QDeutⁿ,” 118 n. 6.

¹⁷ Sidnie White Crawford dates the scroll between 30 and 1 B.C.E. (Eugene Ulrich et al., *Qumran Cave 4 IX: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Kings* [DJD 14; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995], 117).

¹⁸ John S. Kloppenborg, “Variation in the Reproduction of the Double Tradition and an Oral Q?” *ETL* 83 (2007): 53–80, here 74. Similarly, vis-à-vis Greco-Roman composition, the synoptists appear more “middlebrow” according to Loveday Alexander (“Luke’s Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing,” *NovT* 28 [1986]: 48–74, here 60–61) and Mattila (“Question Too Often Neglected,” 217).

and biographers.¹⁹ Downing has nonetheless asserted that a third synoptist's conflation of two earlier Synoptics imagines "that an early Christian author stepped intellectually, technically, and even technologically right out of his contemporary culture, without the slightest precedent to guide him..."²⁰ According to Downing, a suitable precedent would need to show both micro-conflation and "extensive continuous verbatim parallels."²¹

To meet these criteria, I adduce one other example that shows a far more complicated process of conflation than either Downing or Derrenbacker has yet considered. Indeed the transition from scribal conflation to redactional conflation had already occurred before the first synoptist wrote a gospel.²² In 1952 Bedouin discovered the Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIgr), a text dating near the end of the first century B.C.E.²³ Soon thereafter Dominique Barthélemy designated the text as *kaige*, given

¹⁹ Kloppenborg, "Variation in the Reproduction," 77.

²⁰ Downing, "Compositional Conventions," 82.

²¹ F. Gerald Downing, "Writers' Use or Abuse of Written Sources," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 523–48, here 525.

²² Regarding the shift from scribe to redactor, Jeffrey Tigay observes, "In principle, the 'scribal' preservation of double readings [i.e., conflation] does not differ from the 'redactional' practice of presenting two variant accounts of the same theme or event" ("Conflation as a Redactional Technique," 55).

²³ Emanuel Tov, with the collaboration of R. A. Kraft and a contribution by P. J. Parsons, *The Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (8ḤevXIIgr)* (DJD 8; The Seiyâl Collection 1; Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 26.

its tendency (for example, in Zech 9:2) to translate גַּם (also) as *καίγε* (even; at least).²⁴

Robert Kraft initially questioned whether the *kaige* scroll would show systematic dependence on the LXX.²⁵ This question is now settled, as proven in part by numerous hapax translations.²⁶ That is, certain [115] puzzling translations would be nearly impossible if the *kaige* were an independent translation from Hebrew to Greek. For example, Nah 3:12 MT compares fortresses to “a fig tree with first fruits” (תאנים עם־בכורים), which the LXX

²⁴ Dominique Barthélemy, “Redécouverte d’un chaînon manquant de l’histoire de la Septante,” *RB* 60 (1953): 18–29; repr. in *Qumran and the History of the Biblical Text* (ed. Frank Moore Cross and Shemaryahu Talmon; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). Barthélemy’s monumental study appeared a decade later: *Les Devanciers d’Aquila: première publication intégrale du texte des fragments du Dodécaprophéton* (VTSup 10; Leiden: Brill, 1963).

²⁵ Robert A. Kraft, review of Dominique Barthélemy, *Les Devanciers d’Aquila*, *Gnomon* 37 (1965): 474–83, here 477.

²⁶ Tov, *Greek Minor Prophets Scroll*, 104; see esp. “Introduction” (102–6) and “Textual Relations” (145–53). My references to “the *kaige*” are intended only for the revision of the Book of the Twelve; I do not draw conclusions regarding a wider *kaige* group or *kaige*-Theodotion, the limits and characteristics of which are much debated; see Chapter Nine, “Theodotion and the *καίγε* Revision,” in Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 142–54; see also Tim McLay, “*Kaige* and Septuagint Research,” *Textus* 19 (1998): 127–39.

translates rather inexplicably as “fig trees for watchmen” (συκαῖ σκοπούς); there the *kaige* scroll reads σκοπ..., and dozens of other such examples establish that the *kaige* is a revision based on the LXX.²⁷

In fact the *kaige* intended to bring the LXX into closer conformity with the Hebrew. For example, the LXX translates יהוה צבאות (Lord of hosts/armies) as κύριος παντοκράτωρ (Lord almighty), and yet without exception the *kaige* prints the Tetragrammaton in paleo-Hebrew followed by τῶν δυνάμεων (of the forces/troops). The *kaige* even shows a concern for matching the word count of its proto-Masoretic *Vorlage*. In Zech 1:3 MT יהוה צבאות appears three times: the LXX writes κύριος παντοκράτωρ in the first instance, omits the second phrase altogether, and abbreviates the third as κύριος; by contrast the *kaige* writes יהוה τῶν δυνάμεων all three times. The *kaige* scroll is replete with these types of corrections.

The Minor Prophets Scroll is thus a Greek text approximately twice as long as the Gospel of Mark and decades earlier than the Gospel of Mark. The *kaige* is *ipso facto* a continuous micro-conflation of a proto-Masoretic Hebrew text and the text of the LXX. The *kaige's* textual phenomena leave clearly distinguishable traces of each of those sources. The *kaige* scroll, Dead Sea Scrolls such as 4QDeut^a, and textual variants in the transmission of the Gospels suffice to refute Downing's contention that in the first century, “Conflation was itself only rarely attempted, and then very simply effected.”²⁸

²⁷ Tov, *Greek Minor Prophets Scroll*, 104–5. Elsewhere I have discussed these examples in arguing that Justin Martyr conflated the *kaige* and the LXX of Zech 9:9 (James W. Barker, “The Reconstruction of *Kaige/Quinta* Zechariah 9,9,” *ZAW* 126 [2014]: 584–88).

²⁸ Downing, “Compositional Conventions,” 70.

Micro-Conflation in the Diatessaron

Tatian combined the separate gospels into the *Diatessaron* in Syriac between 163 and 185 C.E.²⁹ Recent scholarship has questioned whether the *Diatessaron* even serves as an appropriate analogy to a third synoptist's *modus operandi*.³⁰ Some claim that there is insufficient evidence of the *Diatessaron* "in its original language."³¹ [116] Others assert that Tatian and a third synoptist stand at "far separated points on the trajectory of authoritative written tradition towards canonization and textual fixation."³² Thanks to Louis Leloir's painstaking work on Ephraem's Syriac commentary on the *Diatessaron*, there is a sufficient sample of Tatian's wording in its original language.³³ Moreover, the one or two preceding

²⁹ William L. Petersen, "Tatian's Diatessaron," in Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 403–30, here 428–9.

³⁰ Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 160.

³¹ Eric C. S. Eve, "The Synoptic Problem without Q?" in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 551–70, here 567. It is, however, fair for Tuckett (*Revival of the Griesbach Hypothesis*, 43) to point out that Thomas R. W. Longstaff relied on the Dura Europas fragment in Greek and an English translation of the Arabic version (*Evidence of Conflation in Mark? A Study in the Synoptic Problem* [SBLDS 28; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1977], 10–42).

³² Alan Kirk, "Memory, Scribal Media, and the Synoptic Problem," in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 459–82, here 481.

³³ Louis Leloir, *Le Témoignage d'Éphrem sur le Diatessaron* (CSCO 227; Louvain: CSCO, 1962); *idem*, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant* (Chester Beatty

Synoptics must have been authoritative for any third synoptist in the first century, just as all four gospels must have been authoritative for Tatian in the second century—even though canonization per se had not fully emerged. The strongest point of comparison is that the *Diatessaron* is longer overall than any single gospel and yet Tatian compressed or omitted individual pericopae; similarly, on the supposition of Markan priority, Matthew would have created a longer gospel by compressing Markan episodes and including new episodes.

Since the *Diatessaron* does serve as a fitting analogy to subsequent Synoptics, it is necessary to clarify the nature of Tatian’s conflations. Sharon Mattila claims that “for the major part of the *Diatessaron* the conflation is block-by-block, only becoming more complex when the pressure to reconcile and combine conflicting details in the parallel gospel accounts necessitates it.”³⁴ In other words, Tatian predominantly would have worked with one source at a time, as Derrenbacker and Downing would expect. Mattila adds:

In the more detailed conflational passages of the *Diatessaron*, an innovative variation of the same [block-by-block] technique has been employed. Here verses have been harmonized with contradictions in *details* that are present or absent, therefore the conflation is phrase-for-phrase, but it is effected in much the same manner. Hence this new

Monographs 8; Dublin: Hodges Figgis, 1963); *idem*, *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile Concordant* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8 [additional folios]; Leuven: Peeters, 1990). For an overview of Leloir’s “unrivaled” contribution to *Diatessaron* studies, see William L. Petersen, *Tatian’s Diatessaron: Its Creation Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 25; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 314–8.

³⁴ Mattila, “Question Too Often Neglected,” 205.

technique, while being an innovation, is not *sui generis*—it does not emerge out of nowhere. It stems from methods that have already been in use, but it *stretches these to new limits*.³⁵

Mattila is correct to point out the mechanics of conflation predated Tatian, [117] who then conflated more texts more intricately than his predecessors. Mattila is also correct that there are instances of block by block conflation in the *Diatessaron*, but it is mistaken to characterize the majority of passages in this way. Following Leloir's numbering, fewer than one-third (23/76) of the sections in the *Diatessaron* consist of a long block from a single gospel.³⁶ Almost all of those blocks are Matthean, Lukan, or Johannine *Sondergut*.³⁷ Since there is no parallel to conflate, "block by block" is the only possible way to incorporate material appearing in only one gospel.

In the vast majority of cases, Tatian actually works phrase by phrase from one gospel to another—oftentimes tacking back and forth, even among three or four gospels. In other words, "more detailed conflational passages" in the *Diatessaron* are the norm rather than the exception. For example, Tatian calls the blind man at Jericho (§53) by the name

³⁵ Mattila, "Question Too Often Neglected," 205, emphasis hers.

³⁶ Leloir, *Témoignage d'Éphrem sur le Diatessaron*, 12–69.

³⁷ There is no apparent Markan *Sondergut* in the *Diatessaron*. Matthean *Sondergut* includes Matt 1:18–28 (§3); 2:3–23 (§5); 20:6–16 (§50). Lukan *Sondergut* includes Luke 1:5–79 (§2); 2:2–35 (§4); 2:48–51 (§6); 10:39–42 (§24); 15:13–32 + 16:9 (§44); 13:1–8 (§46); 16:19–31 (§49); 19:5–9 (§52). Johannine *Sondergut* includes John 1:1–5 (§1); 2:1–11 (§12); 4:7–45 (§37); 5:5–46 (§39); 7:3–28 (§47); 3:4–16 (§56); 7:37–8:58 (§61) + 9:2–39 (§62) + John 10 (§63) + John 11:1–45 (§64).

Bartimaeus (بَارْتِمْيَا), which appears in Mark 10:46b and is *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. Yet in the *Diatessaron* Jesus commands the blind man to “see” (,Ϡ), which corresponds more closely to “look up” (ἀνάβλεψον) in Luke 18:42b than to “go” (ὑπάγε) in Mark 10:52b.³⁸ So there Tatian harmonizes Mark and Luke. Another example of Tatian’s micro-conflation occurs at the crucifixion (§73) where Jesus is given wine mixed with gall (Matt 27:34), and he says not only “Father forgive them” (Luke 23:34) but also “Woman, behold your son” (John 19:26). The *Diatessaron* is replete with such micro-conflations of two or more gospels within a single pericope. The micro-conflations required by the “Augustinian,” Farrer–Goulder, and Griesbach Hypotheses are fewer and simpler than those Tatian would produce approximately a century after the synoptists.

Micro-Conflation in Matthew and Luke

Studies of the Synoptic Problem only rarely consider the bearing of Old Testament quotations.³⁹ Neither does the issue figure prominently in studies of ancient compositional practices. Yet, on the supposition of Markan priority, Matthew and Luke necessarily micro-conflated Mark and LXX Isaiah. Regarding the purpose of the parables, for example, Jesus

³⁸ In Matt 9:29 Jesus touches the blind men’s eyes and says, “Let it be according to your faith;” in Matt 20:34 Jesus only touches their eyes.

³⁹ As an exception, see Mark Goodacre, “The Evangelists’ Use of the Old Testament and the Synoptic Problem,” in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 281–98; see also David S. New, *Old Testament Quotations in the Synoptic Gospels, and the Two-Document Hypothesis* (SBLSCS 37; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993).

quotes or alludes to Isa 6:9–10 in all three Synoptics. [118] In Mark 4:12, Jesus paraphrases, “so that looking, they should look and not see; and hearing, they should hear and not understand; lest they should turn and it be forgiven them.”⁴⁰ Luke 8:10 would then abridge Mark, “so that looking, they should not look; and hearing, they should not understand.”⁴¹ Initially Matt 13:13 would change Mark’s subjunctives to indicatives, “because looking, they do not look; and hearing, they do not hear nor understand.”⁴² Then Matthew (v. 14) would quote Isa 6:9–10 LXX verbatim—a string of forty-seven words: “In something heard, you will hear and should not at all understand; and looking, you will look and should not at all see.”⁴³ Even according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, then, a second synoptist was already checking his gospel source’s OT quotations against the LXX and micro-conflating both sources.

Luke also evinces micro-conflation of Mark and LXX Isaiah. In the prophecy related to John the Baptist, Matthew (3:3bc), Mark (1:3), and Luke (3:4bc) give identical quotations of Isa 40:3 LXX: “A voice crying out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his

⁴⁰ ἵνα βλέποντες βλέπωσιν καὶ μὴ ἴδωσιν, καὶ ἀκούοντες ἀκούωσιν καὶ μὴ συνιῶσιν, μήποτε ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἀφεθῆ ἑαυτοῖς (Mark 4:12).

⁴¹ ἵνα βλέποντες μὴ βλέπωσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες μὴ συνιῶσιν (Luke 8:10).

⁴² ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνιούσιν (Matt 13:13).

⁴³ ἀκοῆ ἀκούσετε καὶ οὐ μὴ συνῆτε, καὶ βλέποντες βλέπετε καὶ οὐ μὴ ἴδητε. ἐπαχύνθη γὰρ ἡ καρδία τοῦ λαοῦ τούτου, καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν βαρέως ἤκουσαν καὶ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν ἐκάμμυσαν, μήποτε ἴδωσιν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς καὶ τοῖς ὠσὶν ἀκούσωσιν καὶ τῇ καρδίᾳ συνῶσιν καὶ ἐπιστρέψωσιν καὶ ἰάσονται αὐτούς (Matt 13:14; Isa 6:9–10).

paths straight;” the synoptists’ quotations match the LXX verbatim except that all three agree in using the pronoun “his” rather than “of our God.” At that point, Luke (3:5–6) adds—with minor variations—the next two verses from Isaiah. Derrenbacker actually addresses this phenomenon in a discussion of the Griesbach Hypothesis: “Luke supplements Matthew’s quotation of Isa 40,3 by adding two subsequent verses from the prophet (Luke 3,5-6).”⁴⁴ However, Derrenbacker nowhere mentions that Luke’s supplementation in fact constitutes micro-conflation and that this instance of micro-conflation must be admitted for the Two-Source, Griesbach, Farrer–Goulder, and “Augustinian” Hypotheses alike.

The Two-Source Hypothesis also necessitates Matthew’s and Luke’s conflation of the alleged Mark–Q overlap passages.⁴⁵ Derrenbacker appeals to the possible reminiscence of Q to mitigate the toil of micro-conflation.⁴⁶ If that be the case, however, then Luke could rely

⁴⁴ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 145.

⁴⁵ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 214 n. 8 [re Luke], 239–50 [re Matthew]; see also see also *idem*, “The ‘External and Psychological Conditions under which the Synoptic Gospels Were Written’: Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem,” in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 435–57, here 443 n. 27. On the categorization of Mark–Q overlap as problematic, see Mark Goodacre, *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002), 163–5.

⁴⁶ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 258; see also Kirk, “Memory, Scribal Media, and the Synoptic Problem,” 475.

on his reminiscence of Matthew for the Minor Agreements [119] according to the “Augustinian,” Farrer–Goulder, and Griesbach Hypotheses. I would rather not appeal to memory at all, so instead I posit that Matthew’s and Luke’s purely voluntary micro-conflations of Mark and LXX Isaiah suggest that this scribal and redactional maneuver was simply easier and more firmly established than Derrenbacker and Downing have imagined. The occasional micro-conflations in Matthew and Luke—according to the Two-Source Hypothesis—are far less extensive than the ceaseless micro-conflation involved in the production of the *kaige* scroll of the Dodekapropheton, and the conflational processes in the *Diatessaron* involved greater difficulty in a greater number of cases than those of the Synoptics, regardless of one’s preferred solution to the Synoptic Problem.

II. EVIDENCE FOR RADICAL REORDERING

According to Derrenbacker, scribes would have avoided the difficult task of working backward through a source text, a process known as reverse contextualization;⁴⁷ he also uses the descriptor “radical reordering.”⁴⁸ Nevertheless such reordering appears in the *Diatessaron*, the *kaige* scroll, and—as Derrenbacker admits—the Gospel of Matthew according to the Two-Source Hypothesis.

Radical reordering proved no insurmountable problem in the construction of the *Diatessaron*. In working with Lukan *Sondergut*, at one point Tatian moves from the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 (§44), backward to the warning about repentance and the

⁴⁷ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 257.

⁴⁸ Derrenbacker, “External and Psychological Conditions,” 441.

tower of Siloam in Luke 13 (§46), and forward again to the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16 (§49). Incorporating Johannine *Sondergut* is even more tortuous. For example, Tatian locates Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles according to John 7 (§47); Tatian later works backward to Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:4–16; §56), and later still Tatian works forward again to pick up the rest of the Feast of Tabernacles discourse from John 7 (§61), which is relocated—along with the remainder of the Fourth Gospel—to passion week. The *Diatessaron* thus evinces extensive radical reordering of Lukan and Johannine *Sondergut*.⁴⁹ Moreover, Tatian moves forward and backward even more frequently to locate and harmonize multiple versions of a single pericope. As compared with Tatian, then, any third synoptist would not only work with half as many sources but also produce far fewer cases of reordering.

The *kaige* scroll of the Minor Prophets likely evinces reordering, for 8HevXIIgr presents the Dodekapropheton in the same order as the Masoretic text.⁵⁰ The LXX follows a [120] different order, as seen in the third-century C.E. Freer Codex the Minor Prophets and the fourth-century C.E. Codex Vaticanus.⁵¹ The scribes who produced 8HevXIIgr most likely

⁴⁹ In §15 Tatian skips ahead to Matthew 12 and then returns to Matthew 5 in §16; otherwise Tatian tends to move forward through Matthew's gospel. Tatian also tends to follow Mark sequentially.

⁵⁰ MT: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi; the order from Jonah to Zechariah is extant in 8HevXIIgr.

⁵¹ LXX: Hosea, Amos, Micah, Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

had to reorder their LXX *Vorlage* by moving forward to Joel, backward to Amos, forward to Obadiah, backward to Micah, and forward to Nahum.

Regarding the Synoptics, Michael Goulder suggested that at times Luke conscientiously worked backward through Matthew.⁵² Mark Goodacre, a Farrer–Goulder proponent, considers this “the most implausible element in Goulder’s thesis on Luke’s use of Matthew....”⁵³ Derrenbacker similarly asserts that such reverse contextualization is “not a technically feasible option.”⁵⁴ Yet Derrenbacker admits that according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, “Matthew frequently deviates from the order of Q, and on...several occasions...deviates from the order of his Markan source as well.”⁵⁵ For example, Matthew compiled the Sermon on the Mount by repeatedly moving forward and backward through Q; also, Matt 8:28–9:26 would move forward and backward through Mark 5:1–20; 2:1–22; 5:21–43, just as Matt 10:1–16 would move forward and backward through Mark 6:7; 3:13–19a; 6:8–13.⁵⁶

To mitigate unavoidable reordering according to the Two-Source Hypothesis, Derrenbacker suggests either that Matthew recalled Q from memory or that Q could have

⁵² Michael D. Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (2 vols.; JSNTSup 20; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 581–3.

⁵³ Goodacre, *Case against Q*, 118 n. 33.

⁵⁴ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 202.

⁵⁵ Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 253.

⁵⁶ See the helpful chart in Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 260–265 (Figure 33: Matthew’s Use of Mark and Q).

taken the form of a *Ringbuch* or codex.⁵⁷ However, there would be no fair reason to deny Luke’s reminiscence of Matthew for the Minor Agreements or—as John Poirier has noted—Luke’s use of Matthew in codex form according to the “Augustinian,” Farrer–Goulder, and Griesbach Hypotheses.⁵⁸ I find it problematic to hypothesize any synoptist’s use of a codex, given that the earliest references to the codex come from Rome in the middle and end of the first century C.E.⁵⁹ In all [121] likelihood, reordering was manageable in the composition of

⁵⁷ Regarding memory, see Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 243; *idem*, “External and Psychological Conditions,” 452; Kirk, “Memory, Scribal Media, and the Synoptic Problem,” 464–5. Regarding Q as a *Ringbuch* or codex, see Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 37, 225; cf. Johnson’s comment: “...the assumption that a reader could mark and locate a passage more readily [in a codex] is based on exaggerated modern notions of the difficulty of using a bookroll” (“Ancient Book,” 267).

⁵⁸ John C. Poirier, “The Composition of Luke in Source-Critical Perspective,” in *New Studies in the Synoptic Problem*, 209–26, here 224–5; he elsewhere suggests Luke’s use of wax tablets (*idem*, “The Roll, the Codex, the Wax Tablet and the Synoptic Problem,” *JSNT* 35 [2012]: 3–30, here 10–14).

⁵⁹ Those citing Quintilian and Martial in late first-century Rome include Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 50, 52, see esp. 49–66, “The Transition from the Roll to the Codex;” see also Derrenbacher, *Ancient Compositional Practices*, 32–3. According to Adam Bülow-Jacobsen (“Writing Materials in the Ancient World,” in *Oxford Handbook of*

the *kaige* scroll, which predated any attested form of the codex. There is no basis for asserting Matthew's technological or mnemonic superiority in defense of the Two-Source Hypothesis.

III. CONCLUSIONS

In summary, micro-conflation involves accessing multiple sources simultaneously within a single pericope, and radical reordering involves moved forward and backward through a source text. To some extent, every solution to the Synoptic Problem necessitates these scribal and redactional processes, but the Two-Source Hypothesis does so the least; the Farrer–Goulder Hypothesis requires more, and the Griesbach Hypothesis requires the most.⁶⁰ Although Downing and Derrenbacker have rightly shown that the Two-Source Hypothesis would more closely resemble Greco-Roman compositional practices, additional points of comparison have demonstrated that the Two-Source Hypothesis and Farrer–Goulder Hypotheses require Matthew and Luke to employ even less complicated scribal and redactional maneuvers than had already been achieved.

Papyrology, 3–29, here 18), an earlier reference comes from Sabinus and Gaius Cassius, Roman jurists in the first half of the first century C.E.

⁶⁰ Derrenbacker, “External and Psychological Conditions,” 444.

Degree of Difficulty: Prevalence of Micro-Conflation and Reordering

1. Tatian's *Diatessaron* (163–185 C.E.)
2. Griesbach Mark
3. Greek Minor Prophets Scroll from Naḥal Ḥever (late first century B.C.E.)
4. Two-Source Matthew; Farrer–Goulder Luke; “Augustinian” Luke
5. Two-Source Luke

As shown by the *kaige* scroll of the Minor Prophets, thoroughgoing micro-conflation of two sources—along with probable reordering—predated the Gospels by several decades, if not a full century. A century later than the Gospels, the *Diatessaron* achieved thoroughgoing micro-conflation of four sources and radical reordering of Luke and John. Any third synoptist would fit neatly along this trajectory. Two or more literate people could thus use scrolls and dictation to produce any one of the Synoptic Gospels. In the end, ancient compositional practices do not privilege any one Synoptic Problem hypothesis over any other.