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ORDERING GOSPEL TEXTUALITY IN THE SECOND CENTURY

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Abstract

This article interrogates how several second-century figures ordered a pluri-
form Gospel corpus. Focusing on approaches to Gospel plurality visible in the
Epistula apostolorum, Tatian the Syrian, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Ammonius of
Alexandria, we argue that a number of Christian readers—across the Roman
Mediterranean, from Alexandria to Gaul and from Syria to Rome—employed
similar approaches. Drawing on evidence for second-century reading prac-
tices, we demonstrate continuities in both textual practices and concep-
tual frameworks that illuminate Gospel reading and writing. These figures
engaged Gospels in multiple dimensions—horizontal juxtaposition of parallel
material and vertical coordination of narrative sequence—in order to map
relationships between imperfectly parallel texts. These spatial textual prac-
tices enabled synthetic reading of an emergent pluriform Gospel corpus.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past century and more, scholars have devoted immense
attention to the emergence of a fourfold Gospel canon. Scholars
debate when and for whom four Gospels—four particular Gospels

1 The idea for this article emerged from a conversation between the two authors.
Jeremiah Coogan drafted the discussion of Ammonius, the introduction, and the
conclusion. Jacob Rodriguez drafted the discussion of EpAp and Tatian. The
authors jointly drafted the section on Irenaeus and revised the material together.
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attributed to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—became a canon of authoritative Gospel texts. Yet scholars often overlook the varied practices through which early readers charted a pluriform constellation of Gospel texts. In this article, we seek to reorient the conversation by drawing attention to how early Christian thinkers negotiated Gospel similarity and difference. Although several of these figures engaged a corpus corresponding to the emergent fourfold Gospel, the practices on which we focus did not require—and do not always reflect—this fourfold construct. For this reason, we center the materially embedded practices—taking notes, making lists, constructing tables, and so forth—through which second-century figures negotiated a pluriform Gospel corpus.


3 At the same time, the figures and texts that we discuss in this article centre on a corpus of Gospel texts that does largely correspond to the emergent fourfold Gospel.

The hermeneutical and philological challenges posed by textual plurality are fundamental to many disciplines, both ancient and modern. In the ancient Mediterranean world, scholars sought to make sense of parallel texts attributed to Homer and other esteemed figures. Historians grappled with the perennial concerns afforded by parallel texts, divergent details, and conflicting timelines. Writers of technical literature synthesized sources in order to offer better accounts of varied technologies. And, of course, textual plurality mattered for Gospel readers, both before and after the emergence of a fourfold Gospel.

Building on recent scholarship on readers and reading cultures in the Roman Mediterranean, we focus on the strategies that second-century Christian figures employed to map the complex geography of their Gospel texts. To introduce the challenges of coordinating a pluriform Gospel corpus, we begin with the ‘Gospel through four’ produced by Ammonius of Alexandria. We then analyse two earlier compositions, the mid-second-century Epistula apostolorum and the Gospel produced by Tatian in the later second century; both incorporated material from multiple existing Gospels in order to offer new narratives. We turn finally to Irenaeus of Lyons, who analysed a complex landscape of Gospel literature and theorized the shape of a Gospel corpus. Each of these texts navigates the similarity and difference of multiple

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7 M. Asper, Griechische Wissenschaftstexte: Formen, Funktionen, Differenzierungsgeschichten (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2007).
8 Not all second-century engagement with Gospel material and not all new Gospel texts primarily reflect the activities of readers. A number of scholars have argued for the role of secondary orality in Gospel production and reception. Nonetheless, in this article we focus on second-century practices of reading.
10 As we discuss below, the sources for second-century Gospel reading pose certain challenges; the evidence is—to varying degrees—fragmentary, versitional, or late. We have approached this matter with caution by building our arguments on the aspects of these second-century projects that are clearest in our sources and least open to debate and by discussing major alternative interpretations where relevant.
existing Gospels, characterized by similar but different narrative sequences and by overlapping but distinct parallel material.11

In this article, we articulate the varied ways in which these second-century figures and texts engaged the complexities of a pluri-form Gospel corpus and locate these textual practices in a broader second-century context.12 Building on the work of William Johnson, the concept of ‘textual practices’ is fundamental to our approach, providing a framework for comparison both between different projects of Gospel reception and between these projects and wider second-century habits of reading and writing. We emphasize how second-century figures engaged the burgeoning corpus of Gospel literature. As we argue, their practices of Gospel reading simultaneously involved a vertical dimension (appreciating the sequence of individual Gospels) and a horizontal dimension (observing similarities and differences in Gospel parallels). The spatial thinking that we describe involves both physically spatial practices and conceptual negotiation in two dimensions—and these two are often intertwined. This bidirectional mode of reading in the later second century differed from the practices that characterized the composition of Gospels and other prose narratives in the first-century Roman Mediterranean. In contrast with second-century readers and writers of Gospel literature, earlier writers of biographies and histories generally used one main source

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11 Following Johnson, we note that such textual practices are ‘intimately bound with active interrogation of the text—which itself implies an abiding confidence that texts, especially classic texts, have a depth of meaning that repays the group’s efforts at interpretation and discussion’ (Johnson, Readers, p. 202).

12 Important studies that locate second-century Christians like Justin, Tatian, and Irenaeus in wider intellectual currents of the second century include K. Eshleman, The Social World of Intellectuals in the Roman Empire: Sophists, Philosophers, and Christians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and J. Secord, Christian Intellectuals and the Roman Empire: From Justin Martyr to Origen (College Station: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020). Johnson, Readers, focuses on readers and reading culture that orbit around the city of Rome. Similarly, most of the second-century Christian figures we discuss in this article—including Justin, Tatian, and Irenaeus—have significant Roman connections. Ammonius in Alexandria would seem to be an outlier in this regard. We do not know enough about the Epistula apostolorum to make strong claims about where it was written or read. Christian textual practices across the Roman Mediterranean, from Gaul to Syria, nonetheless appear to be shaped by intellectual developments centred on the metropolis. On second-century Christian readers in Rome, see also G. H. Snyder (ed.), Christian Teachers in Second-Century Rome: Schools and Students in the Ancient City (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
at a time. They did not hold together the vertical and horizontal dimensions of multiple sources in the way that we observe in second-century attempts to organize the pluriform Gospel corpus. While no sharp break divides first- and second-century phenomena, we discern a substantial shift over the century (or more) separating Luke and Ammonius.

**AMMONIUS: JUXTAPOSITION**

The philosopher and textual scholar Ammonius of Alexandria, who flourished at the end of the second century or the beginning of the third, illustrates one of the ways in which Christian thinkers charted the vibrant constellation of texts about the words and deeds of Jesus. Ammonius’ approach illuminates how second-century figures negotiated Gospel plurality.

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13 Greek and Latin historiographers up to the second century often used more than one source to construct their accounts (e.g., Arrian, *Anab.* 1.praef; 7.15.5–6; 11.6.1–3; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Ant.* 1.7.2–4; Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.53; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.154), but seldom used sources in close parallel. Moreover, their aim was not to preserve parallel accounts to be read simultaneously, but to craft their own narratives from the building blocks that they quarried from earlier sources. Cf. F. G. Downing, ‘Compositional Conventions and the Synoptic Problem’, *JBL* 107 (1988), pp. 69–85; ‘Disagreements of Each Evangelist with the Minor Close Agreements of the Other Two’, *ETL* 80 (2004), pp. 445–69; R. A. Derrenbacker, *Ancient Compositional Practices and the Synoptic Problem* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005).

Ammonius’ project is, regretfully, mediated to us only via a brief description by the fourth-century bishop-scholar Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–339 CE).15 We begin with Eusebius’ report:16

Ἀμμώνιος μὲν ὁ Ἀλεξανδρεύς πολλὴν ὡς εἰκὸς φιλοποιίαν καὶ σπουδὴν εἰσαγηοχὼς τὸ διὰ τεσσάρων ὡμίν καταλειπον Εὐαγγέλιον, τῷ κατὰ Ματθαίον τὰς ὁμοφώνας τῶν λοιπῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν περικοπὰς παραθείνων, ὡς ὀξεῖας συμβήνῃ τὸν τῆς ἀκολούθησας εἰρμὸν τῶν τριῶν διαφθαρῆναι ὡς ἐπὶ τῷ ὅρθῳ τῆς ἀναγνώσεως· ἐνα δὲ σωζομένου καὶ τοῦ τῶν λοιπῶν δι’ ὅλου σώματός τε καὶ εἰρμοῦ εἰδέναι ἄγας τοὺς οἰκείους ἐκάστου εὐαγγελιστοῦ τόπους, ἐν όις κατὰ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀφορμὰς ἀκολούθησιν φιλολόγως εἰπεῖν, ἐκ τοῦ πονήματος τοῦ προειρημένου ἀνδρὸς εἰληφὼς ἀφορμὰς ἀριθμὸν δέκα τὸν ἀριθμὸν διεχάραξά σοι τοὺς ὑποτεταγμένους. (Ep. Carp., lines 3–14)

Ammonius the Alexandrian, exerting great industry and zeal—as is fitting—has left us the ‘Gospel through four’. He juxtaposed the corresponding sections of the other evangelists alongside Matthew’s Gospel with the unavoidable result that the coherent sequence of the other three was destroyed insofar as concerns the web of reading. But in order that, by the content and sequence of the remaining evangelists being preserved throughout, you would still be able to know the distinct passages of each evangelist, in which they were compelled by love of truth to speak in their own way, I have adopted the raw material from the work of the aforementioned man, but have inscribed the ten canons that are attached for you below by a different method.

Ammonius thus restructured multiple existing narratives to create a new Gospel text, creating a textual space with two dimensions: a horizontal relationship of parallel juxtaposition and a vertical relationship of narrative sequence.

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16 Greek text: NA28, pp. 89*–90* (trans.: Coogan, Eusebius the Evangelist, pp. xv–xvi).
We focus first on the horizontal dimension. Ammonius ‘juxtaposed the corresponding sections’ from multiple evangelists (τὰς ὀμοφώνους τῶν λοιπῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν περικοπὰς παραθείς, lines 5–6). That is, he engaged a pluriform corpus of Gospel texts. Segmentation was integral to the project; Ammonius identified ‘corresponding’ material in Mark, Luke, and John, and placed these blocks of material alongside their Matthean parallels (reflecting, of course, Ammonius’ judgment about what material was parallel). Ammonius employed spatial practices to make sense of a complex Gospel corpus.

We turn to the vertical dimension. As Eusebius reports, Ammonius ‘juxtaposed the corresponding sections of the other evangelists alongside Matthew’s Gospel’ (τῷ κατὰ Ματθαίον τὰς ὀμοφώνους τῶν λοιπῶν εὐαγγελιστῶν περικοπὰς παραθείς, lines 5–6). Matthew provided the sequence for Ammonius’ new Gospel text. As a corollary to this Matthean sequence, non-Matthean texts were disrupted. After all, Matthew does not always arrange material in the same order as Mark, Luke, or John. This feature of Ammonius’ project prompted critique: Eusebius complained that his predecessor’s actions had ‘the unavoidable result that the coherent sequence’ of the other Gospels was destroyed (ἐξ ἀνάγκης συμβῆναι τὸν τῆς ἀκολούθιας εἱρμὸν τῶν τριῶν διαφθαρῆναι, lines 6–7), a result that Eusebius found undesirable. The problem of sequence, so central here, occurs in many early projects of reading a pluriform Gospel corpus.

Ammonius produced a new text that Eusebius described as a ‘διὰ τεσσάρων Gospel’ (τὸ διὰ τεσσάρων…εὐαγγέλιον, lines 4–5). Both dimensions—horizontal juxtaposition and vertical sequence—worked together to create a new Gospel: a creative spatial arrangement of multiple existing sources into a new composite text. Like an exploded-view diagram that enables one to observe interactions between the various parts of a mechanism, Ammonius’ project deconstructed into its constituent components the complex process of ordering Gospel plurality. He created a space for both horizontal juxtaposition and vertical sequence. The Ammonian project thus affords a vantage from which to analyse earlier textual practices that orchestrated a pluriform (sometimes quadrifform) Gospel corpus.

Yet Eusebius’ description was intended to explain the impetus for his own novel reconfiguration of the Gospels; it does not answer all of our questions about Ammonius’ project. The absence of other evidence—direct or indirect—means that it is impossible to answer a number of these questions. But the uncertainties highlight broader issues of scholarly practice and compositional method—not only in Ammonius’ project, but in the work of his varied predecessors who likewise engaged multiple Gospel texts.

First, we remain uncertain about the mise-en-page of Ammonius’ juxtapositions. Eusebius informs us that ‘Ammonius the Alexandrian…juxtaposed the corresponding sections of the other evangelists alongside Matthew’s Gospel.’ How did Ammonius do this? Most scholars have described Ammonius’ Gospel as a synopsis in the modern sense, comprising four parallel columns for four parallel Gospels. This model is easy to visualize, offers contemporary analogues, and coheres with Eusebius’ complaint that the ‘other evangelists’ were disordered by the imposition of Matthew’s sequence. This reconstruction also parallels two other

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tabular projects: Origen’s third-century *Hexapla* and Eusebius’ fourth-century Gospel canons. Scholars have imagined an arrangement corresponding to Origen’s *Hexapla*, especially because Ammonius is thought to have been the teacher of the Christian Origen, providing a human connection to accompany the technological similarity. The other comparandum, the Gospel canons, is why Eusebius describes Ammonius’ Gospel in the first place; Eusebius presented his canons as an improvement. These histories of scholarship invite us to assume that Ammonius’ Gospel took a similar tabular form to later projects.

Yet a different model deserves consideration. In his history of Roman information technology, Andrew Riggsby demonstrates that empty cells were rare in Roman tables. In a related essay, Riggsby observes that Origen’s *Hexapla* arranged parallel material with corresponding elements in each row; with rare exceptions, every cell in Origen’s design is full. The same, however, could not have been true in Ammonius’ project. Regardless of how one divides Matthew into sections, many lack parallels in other Gospels. The greater differences between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John than between the different Greek versions of the Jewish Scriptures mean that numerous cells in Ammonius’ design would have remained empty. These technological considerations lead Riggsby to propose a different model. Instead of a four-column synopsis, Riggsby suggests, Ammonius created an annotated Matthew. He added the ‘corresponding sections’ of other Gospels alongside the relevant Matthean material but did not arrange each Gospel in a distinct column. On this reconstruction, while Ammonius juxtaposed parallel material with a running text of Matthew, he did not distinguish the additional texts spatially from one another.

We observe further late ancient analogues to this arrangement. A number of annotated scrolls and codices from late ancient Egypt, studied by Kathleen McNamee, offer examples; particularly relevant to Ammonius’ Gospel is McNamee’s discussion of

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'scholar’s texts’ that collated variants in their margins. William Johnson also discusses a number of papyri from second-century Oxyrhynchus in Egypt that preserve traces of collation in marginal annotations; explicit mention of such collation is preserved in the second-century CE letter P.Pet. 30. Origen’s Tetrapla offers a further comparandum for the collation of multiple texts in the margins of an edition. The well-attested practice of annotating alternate readings in the margins illuminates Eusebius’ use of the verb παρατίθημι (‘to place alongside’) to describe Ammonius’ work. Eusebius used the same verb (παρατίθημι) to describe the placement of alternate readings from the Greek versions in the margins of the Tetrapla; the evidence for Eusebius’ work in this regard is preserved in colophons to the Syro-Hexapla. Texts compared in this way are assumed to be multiple versions of the ‘same’ text. This may indicate that Ammonius understood ‘Matthew’ and other Gospels as different versions of the same textual phenomenon (‘Gospel’). We surmise that, like the parallel texts annotated in McNamee’s examples or in the Tetrapla, Ammonius may have marked his parallel texts with an attribution of their source. Does the exploded-view quality of Ammonius’ project suggest that Eusebius is describing work in progress, an intermediate step toward creating a new synthetic Gospel like Tatian’s? This may be suggested by the similarities between Ammonius’ διὰ τεσσάρων Gospel and Origen’s Hexapla; Origen juxtaposed parallel texts in the Hexapla as a first step toward creating the new edition known

26 B. Marsh, Jr., Early Christian Scripture and the Samaritan Pentateuch: A Study in Hexaplaric Manuscript Activity (Studia Samaritana 12; Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming 2023). Eusebius and his teacher Pamphilus continued to work on Origen’s Hexapla–Tetrapla project long after Origen’s death. Ptolemy the Astronomer, working in the second century, similarly used the verb παρατίθημι to describe annotating additions and corrections in the margins of a manuscript (Geogr. 2.1.3).
as the *Tetrapla*. It is also suggested by Origen’s *Comm. Matt.* 15.14, where he explicitly declined a parallel-column approach to the Gospels—even though he had used such an approach for the Jewish Scriptures. Origen implied that the reason for this decision was an unwillingness to conflate the Gospels into a new composite edition that would dissolve their individual integrity. While one cannot decide conclusively between these alternative models given the state of the evidence, they highlight a recurrent question: how important was it to distinguish different sources of Gospel material?

Second, while Eusebius described Ammonius’ project as a ‘Gospel through four’, what does this indicate about Ammonius’ material? If Ammonius found identical material in another Gospel—which occurs frequently with Synoptic parallels—would he have redundantly included it alongside Matthew? We do not know. Furthermore, did Ammonius limit himself to material he found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? Even if Ammonius used these texts as his primary sources—as implied by the description ‘Gospel through four’—we should not exclude the possibility that he included additional material. A number of other figures in the second, third, and fourth centuries—including some who vocally privileged a collection of precisely four Gospel texts—occasionally cited additional Jesus material (sometimes attributed to specific written Gospels). The evidence does not answer this question either.

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28 This reconstruction of the relationship between *Hexapla* and *Tetrapla* follows Gentry, ‘Aristarchean Signs’, pp. 146–7.

29 In *Comm. Matt.* 15.14, Origen discusses scribal errors that lead to divergent Gospel narratives (ad Matt. 19:16–22, the rich young man) and compares Matthew with parallels in Luke, Mark, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Origen contrasts this engagement with Gospel similarity and difference with the *Hexapla–Tetrapla* project that addressed the diversity of Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible. Origen states that he had not attempted a similar project for the Gospels because he feared recrimination.

30 Most scholars assume that Ammonius used only Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Yet although Eusebius focused on a fourfold Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, we need not assume that Ammonius’ project was so constrained. At the same time, the decision to include additional material need not be understood as a rejection of the emergent fourfold Gospel corpus. As discussed below, both *EpAp* and Tatian employed material not found in Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. Even Origen’s ‘sixfold’ *Hexapla* included additional columns in some books, especially the Psalter (cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.16.2–3; Epiphanius, *Mens.* 7 [Syriac 50c–d, ed. Dean]).

31 E.g., Clement, *Strom.* 2.9.45.4–5; 3.6.45.3; 3.9.63.1; 3.9.64.1; 3.13.93.1; 5.14.96.3; Origen, *Comm. Matt.* 15.14; *Comm. Jo.* 2.12.87; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.25.5; 3.39.17; 4.22.8; Jerome, *Vir. ill.* 2; *Comm. Matt.* 23.35.
Third, what did Ammonius do with material that had no Matthean parallel? Numerous sayings and narratives are absent in Matthew but present in other Gospels—especially John, to a lesser extent Luke, and even occasionally Mark. Did Ammonius exclude this material because it did not fit his Matthean structure? Did he incorporate it at an appropriate point? Did he collect it in an appendix at the end? Previous scholars have proposed each of these solutions, but one cannot answer this question with the available evidence.

These uncertainties about Ammonius’ project prompt questions about how earlier second-century figures grappled with similar challenges posed by difference in the Gospels. What textual technologies and readerly practices might one use to organize a pluriform Gospel corpus? What Gospel texts does one use? What should one do with material that does not fit one’s chosen structure? Ammonius negotiates a plurality of texts by means of creative spatial arrangement, placing four Gospels in the same artefactual geography. He addresses an ongoing question: how should one bring order (τάξις) to a variegated constellation of Gospel texts? This, in turn, requires resolving questions of parallel and sequence in a pluriform corpus. In the case of Ammonius, Matthew provided sequence, while he incorporated further material from other texts (primarily Mark, Luke, and John). Ammonius offered a complex Gospel text; the spatial reconfiguration of textual knowledge afforded new possibilities of reading. Ammonius’ approach opens up a window into the practices employed by those reading and writing Gospel texts in the second century. These practices—especially


33 Von Harnack and Zahn (in a later, revised position) argued that Ammonius left blank space in the Matthew column in order to accommodate material without Matthean parallel: A. von Harnack, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius: Erster Theil (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893), pp. 406–7; Zahn, ‘Exeget’, p. 7. Riggsby, ‘Learning’, also suggests this as the most likely option.


35 Crawford leaves the question open (‘Ammonius’, pp. 7–8, 22; Eusebian Canon Tables, pp. 64–5).
visible in the *Epistula apostolorum*, Tatian, and Irenaeus—are the focus of the present article.

**Luke And Justin Martyr**

Before turning to examples from the later second century, a brief word must be said about Luke and Justin. Neither Luke nor Justin offers clear evidence of reading Jesus books in the two-dimensional, spatial mode that we find in Ammonius’ project and in the other figures we discuss below. Yet both Luke and Justin hint at textual practices that would facilitate later two-dimensional Gospel reading. They both excerpt material from earlier Jesus books and rearrange this material into new compositions. Luke does so in the process of writing his own Gospel. Justin employs conflated Gospel material for works in other genres. 36

Both Luke and Justin read multiple Jesus books together. On the Farrer hypothesis, Luke would be reading Mark and Matthew; on the two-document hypothesis, Luke would be reading Mark and Q. Luke excerpted sayings from one source (Q or Matthew) and interspersed them across the narrative outline of another source (Mark).37 Justin’s use of both Matthean and Lukan distinctive material and redactional features demonstrates that he engaged (material from) Matthew and Luke together.38 He mentions plural εὐαγγέλια (*1 Apol.* 66.3) and refers to multiple ἀπομνημονεύματα (*1 Apol.* 66.3; 67.3; cf. *Dial.* 100.4; 101.3; 102.5; 103.6, 8; 104.1; 105.1, 5, 6; 106.1, 3, 4; 107.1), thus gesturing to conceptually

36 We are agnostic about Justin’s use of a separate composition that synthesized material from multiple Gospels, but his use of conflated Gospel material, especially in *1 Apol.* 15–16, is clear.


separate Gospels even while he conflates sayings and narrative material. Justin’s most concentrated collection of logia (1 Apol. 15–16) reflects Matthew’s narrative sequence. One can discern a progression from Matt. 5:28–30 to Matt. 7:21–23 in 1 Apol. 15–16, with most (though not all) of the intervening material in sequential order. Outliers exist (corresponding to Matt. 4:10; 9:12; 19:11–12; 19:16–17; 22:37), but these pericopes, in their surrounding narrative contexts, relate to the material in Matt. 5–7 to which Justin juxtaposes them. Justin offers this sequential and contextual Matthean reading while also conflating the wording with Markan (e.g., Matt. 5:29–30//Mark 9:43) and Lukan parallels (Matt. 5:32//Luke 16:18). While some similarities in wording may have been present already in Justin’s Matthew, the overall pattern suggests that Justin read Matthew’s Gospel with an eye toward the narrative sequence of the passages that he synthesized with Synoptic parallels.

Luke and Justin thus both engage Jesus books in ways that anticipate widespread later practices of reading multiple Gospels along vertical and horizontal axes. Scholars have suggested various technologies that Luke and Justin employed to facilitate these reading

\[\text{ἀπομνημονεύματα},\] as a plural noun, could refer to a single work in antiquity (e.g., Xenophon’s Ἀπομνημονεύματα Σωκράτους). In the period after Justin, the term became a technical genre term for memoirs; see H. Koester, ‘From the Kerygma-Gospel to Written Gospels’, NTS 35 (1989), pp. 361–81; W. V. Cirafesi and G. P. Fewster, ‘Justin’s Ἀπομνημονεύματα and Ancient Greco-Roman Memoirs’, EC 7 (2016), pp. 186–212. Justin may be an early example of this development. Justin’s use of ἀπομνημονεύματα in synonymous relation with εὐαγγέλια in 1 Apol. 66.3, however, suggests that he uses the plural ἀπομνημονεύματα to refer to multiple texts. This is confirmed in 1 Apol. 67.3 by the parallel with the corpus of Jewish prophetic writings and the communal reading of those texts; see J. Rodriguez, ‘Justin and the Apostolic Memoirs: Public Reading as Covenant Praxis’, EC 12 (2020), pp. 496–515.


Perrin (‘Justin’s Gospels’, pp. 93–109) is too optimistic in concluding that Justin had a ‘complete’ Gospel harmony.
practices, but the evidence does not allow more than conjecture. In the remainder of this article, we focus on late second-century projects that develop these dynamics of synthetic Gospel reading.

**Epistula Apostolorum: Epitome**

We turn to two projects of Gospel writing that address questions of sequence and parallel. The first of these texts, the *Epistula apostolorum*, is a second-century text whose origins remain uncertain. Preserved partially in a Coptic translation and some Latin fragments, it remains complete only in medieval manuscripts of a late ancient Ethiopic translation. The Vorlage of these translations was probably Greek, and scholars agree that it was written around

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the middle of the second century.\textsuperscript{44} \textit{EpAp} is a ‘consensus document’,\textsuperscript{45} written in the voice of the 11 apostles (excluding Judas).

\textit{EpAp} negotiates a pluriform corpus of written Gospels, both through the eclectic assortment of Gospel material that it employs and through the textual practices that it reflects. Some scholars have argued that \textit{EpAp} attests a fourfold Gospel prior to Irenaeus.\textsuperscript{46} Others maintain that \textit{EpAp} is a Gospel in its own right, continuing a process of Gospel writing that extends from Mark to the later Synoptics and John, proliferating in further Jesus books that would only later be deemed ‘non-canonical’.\textsuperscript{47} We do not wish to enter that controversy in the present article. We focus on the author’s working methods, by which the author identifies particular chunks of Gospel material and arranges them in sequence. What are the textual practices demonstrable in the construction of this new composition that rewrites earlier Gospel texts?

\textit{EpAp} 3.10–12.4 summarizes numerous stories to offer an epitome of Jesus’ life.\textsuperscript{48} The selection of material suggests a pluriform Gospel

\textsuperscript{44} The majority dating for \textit{EpAp} falls between 120 CE (e.g., M. Hornschuh, \textit{Studien zur Epistula Apostolorum} [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1965], pp. 116–9) and 170 CE (e.g., Schmidt and Wajnberg, \textit{Gespräche Jesu}, p. 402). The parameters of dating are established by Jesus’ enigmatic prediction in \textit{EpAp} 17.2 that the parousia would take place 120 (Coptic) or 150 (Ethiopic) years following Jesus’ dialogue with the apostles. Since this numbering is enigmatic, it is best not to be more precise than Julian Hills (\textit{Tradition and Composition in the Epistula Apostolorum} [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008], pp. 8–9), who considers \textit{EpAp} to reflect a Christian milieu in the mid-second century.

\textsuperscript{45} We borrow this phrase from Jens Schrörer (\textit{Jesus zum Neuen Testament}, p. 326), who uses it to describe the Acts of the Apostles.


We discern both horizontal and vertical engagement with a pluriform Gospel corpus. The author’s textual eclecticism indicates that they were reading Johannine and Synoptic Jesus books together—likely John and Matthew, plausibly also Luke. This


51 Matthew/Luke agreement: Matt. 9:20 (ἠψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἰματίου αὐτῶν)//Luke 8:44 (ἠψατο τοῦ κρασπέδου τοῦ ἰματίου αὐτῶν)//EpAp 5.3 (ἌΠΔΗΠ : ΡΔΗΠ : ΔΛΗΠΠ); Luke/Mark agreement: only Mark (5:9) and Luke (8:30) include the name ‘Legion’ (λεγίων) in the exorcism narrative in the Gerasenes; EpAp 5.10 includes the name (ἌΠΔΡΓ).

52 EpAp 4.2–4; Infancy Gospel of Thomas 6.3; 14.2; Irenaeus, Haer. 1.20.1.


54 Pace Hannah, ‘Four-Gospel “Canon”’; Hill, ‘Epistula Apostolorum’; and Hill, Who Chose the Gospels?, pp. 169–72, we are not convinced that EpAp offers clear evidence for use of distinctive Markan material. Yet this absence does not necessarily exclude Mark either; since so much of Mark is absorbed into Matthew, there is relatively little distinctive Markan material to draw from. We therefore avoid basing our argument on the presence or absence of Mark.
eclecticism, and the condensation of Gospel narratives in epitomized form, suggests that the composer had the conceptual framework to divide these Gospels into sections, to excerpt distinctive material, and to rewrite this material into a new sequence, thus creating a new work with its own literary and theological possibilities.

The author’s decision to include so many different patterns of Gospel material may indicate that the author had identified and categorized both unique material and various patterns of overlap between Gospel texts. Attention to both unique material and different patterns of material suggests detailed engagement with similarity and difference in these sources. *EpAp*s horizontal reading differs from what we discovered in Ammonius’ Gospel; here it is oriented toward identifying similar material rather than toward conflating parallel passages, since the epitomized form of the Gospel material in *EpAp* does not require the author to integrate a similar degree of parallel detail. *EpAp* negotiates a pluriform Gospel corpus in large part by circumventing the need for either conflating or choosing one version over another. Nonetheless, the compositional practices of *EpAp* imply engagement with the complexities of parallel material in a pluriform Gospel corpus.

*EpAp* also offers a new vertical narrative sequence. The Gospel epitome begins with the Johannine prologue, offers a Synoptic birth narrative, initiates Jesus’ public ministry with the wedding at Cana, fills Jesus’ ministry with Synoptic episodes, and concludes with a Johannine resurrection appearance. John, rather than Matthew (as for Ammonius), provides the narrative macrostructure for *EpAp*’s account of Jesus’ words and deeds—but *EpAp* nonetheless engages the same conceptual challenge as Ammonius. Moreover, the integration of Synoptic and Johannine material into a single narrative resembles what Tatian would later do in his Gospel. 55 Moreover, like Tatian’s Gospel, the author’s creative juxtaposition

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of episodes from multiple Gospels suggests a particular theological Tendenz. Themes of water and blood flow into an allegorical reflection on baptismal faith in EpAp 5.21–22. Episodes involving physical touch build to a resurrection scene where the Johannine emphasis on touching the risen Christ is prominent (EpAp 11.7; 12.1). Christ’s power over the waters and the physical touch of the incarnate Christ are central to the theological impetus of EpAp (cf. 2.1; 3.4–5). The Gospel epitome in EpAp reflects intentional arrangement of this earlier material.

We might therefore ask what conceptual tools and textual practices EpAp reflects. Segmenting existing Gospel narratives into episodes—whether paratextually or mnemonically—was a preliminary step for comparing parallels side by side, identifying similar patterns of shared material, and juxtaposing episodes into a fresh composition. These compositional practices reflect elite readerly habits of interrogating textual structure and locating distinctive material. Although the composition of EpAp does not require Ammonius’s parallel juxtaposition, the author’s segmentation of Gospel material, their ability to excerpt and condense these sections, and their construction of a new meaningful sequence involve the same dynamics of multi-Gospel textual geography. EpAp thus reveals nuanced two-dimensional engagement with Gospel material along contours that resemble the emergent fourfold Gospel.

**Tatian: Integration**


57 Cf. Watson, ‘Miracle Catena’.

58 Tatian is not the only second-century figure to whom a combined Gospel is attributed. Jerome states that Theophilus of Antioch (fl. c.169–83 CE) compiled a Gospel from multiple previous texts (quattor evangelistarum in unum opus dicta compingens, Ep. 121.6). Elsewhere, Jerome instead says that Theophilus composed a Gospel commentary (Vir. ill. 25.3). Jerome’s statement in Ep. 121.6 may
him among other second-century intellectuals.\textsuperscript{59} He composed a narrative of Jesus’ life that he titled simply ‘Gospel’, as reflected in the Eastern reception of his work.\textsuperscript{60} The Western reception, following Eusebius, has often referred to Tatian’s work as the \textit{Diatessaron}, an interpretive move that read Tatian’s work through the lens of an ascendant fourfold Gospel canon.\textsuperscript{61} Since the present project investigates second-century Gospel reading, we refer to this work as Tatian’s ‘Gospel’.

The evidence for Tatian’s project is fragmentary and complex.\textsuperscript{62} Since his Gospel is no longer extant, Tatian’s sources and method remain obscure; the text remains notoriously difficult to reconstruct. One manuscript is extant, dating to the second or third century, but the attribution of this fragment to Tatian has been questioned.\textsuperscript{63} Scholars therefore reconstruct Tatian’s Gospel from the quotations, allusions, and lemmata of a fourth-century Gospel

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\textsuperscript{61} For a survey of references to Tatian’s composition, see Petersen, \textit{Tatian’s \textit{Diatessaron}}, pp. 35–67.

\textsuperscript{62} Even the language of Tatian’s composition is contested. Some argue for a Greek initial text and others for a Syriac one. One scholar has proposed a Latin composition. In an unusual compromise, Watson argues that Tatian’s work was available in Greek and Syriac, ‘both probably prepared by Tatian himself’ (\textit{Fourfold Gospel}, p. 65).

commentary attributed to Ephrem the Syrian, a fifth-century Latin Gospel text in the manuscript known as Codex Fuldensis, and a ninth-century Arabic Harmony preserved in several manuscripts. Ephrem’s Commentary is the most reliable guide to Gospel from other sources than the Dura fragment. For the manuscript, see the edition of Parker, Taylor, and Goodacre; cf. the editio princeps (C. H. Kraeling, A Greek Fragment of Tatian’s Diatessaron from Dura [London: Christophers, 1935]) and the excavation report (C. B. Welles, R. O. Fink, and J. F. Gilliam [eds.], The Excavations at Dura-Europos Conducted by Yale University and the French Academy of Inscriptions and Letters: Final Report 5, Pt. 1: The Parchments and Papyri [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959], pp. 73–4). If the Dura fragment is a manuscript of Tatian’s Gospel, it would be the only direct evidence. If the Dura fragment is not a witness to Tatian’s project, it offers additional evidence for expansive Gospel writing in the second or early third century.


Tatian’s Gospel and is the primary basis for our argument. The Latin and Arabic texts cannot be relied upon for Tatian’s wording—and there is always the possibility that they have been expanded to include material that Tatian did not—but they remain valuable for the sequence of material in Tatian’s Gospel. Although Tatian’s precise wording often remains inaccessible, we can be reasonably confident of the sequence when these three major witnesses agree.

Tatian continues the project of synthetic Gospel writing along the same compositional lines as Luke. He interweaves multiple Gospels (at least Matthew, Luke, and John; we suggest also Mark) in order to produce an expanded text. Tatian integrated narrative structures, redactional features, and distinctive material from Matthew, Luke, and John, and probably Mark. He also included several brief units of material about Jesus that are paralleled in other sources.

Tatian employed Matthew, Luke, and John. For example, from Matthew, Ephrem comments on the visit of the Magi, the Matthean antitheses, the fish and the temple tax, and several Matthean parables. From Luke, Ephrem comments on the annunciation of the birth of John the Baptist, Jesus the boy at the temple, and several Lukan parables. Ephrem begins his Commentary with a reflection


68 Especially because the title ‘Diatessaron’ may be a later attribution, we should not assume that Tatian used exactly four Gospels. The title does, however, indicate that later readers saw Tatian’s composition as referring to four sources (cf. e.g., Eusebius, Hist. eccl. 4.29.6).


on the Johannine prologue, and includes Johannine episodes such as the wedding at Cana, Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus’ festal visits to Jerusalem.71

Tatian’s use of Mark is less obvious, but Ephrem’s Commentary reveals several instances of Markan redaction.72 (1) Ephrem describes the spirit as the one who ‘casts’ Jesus out into the desert (cf. Mark 1:12).73 (2) In the episode of Jesus healing the haemorrhaging woman, Ephrem records the Markan reference to Jesus’ garment, ‘who touched my garments?’ (Mark 5:30).74 Furthermore, Ephrem states that the woman ‘perceived within herself that she was healed of her afflictions’ (cf. Mark 5:33)75 and that she had spent her money on doctors who were unable to heal her (cf. Mark 5:26).76 (3) Ephrem relates a story in which Jesus heals a blind man in stages, and he recounts how the blind man finally ‘saw everything clearly’ (cf. Mark 8:25).77 (4) When Jesus heals the epileptic demoniac, Ephrem preserves the saying, ‘I command you, mute spirit, come out from him and never come back again’ (cf. Mark 9:25).78 (5) Ephrem includes the name of the blind man healed on the road to Jericho, Bartimaeus (cf. Mark 10:46, 50).79 Moreover, Ephrem mentions the Markan detail that Bartimaeus ‘abandoned his cloak’ (cf. Mark 10:50).80 (6) Ephrem

71 Prologue: John 1:1–5 (CGos. 1.3–5); wedding at Cana: John 2:1–11 (CGos. 5.1–5); Jesus’ visit with Nicodemus: John 3:1–21 (CGos. 16.11–15); raising of Lazarus: John 11:1–46 (CGos. 17.1–10); Jesus’ festal visits to Jerusalem: John 2:13–20 (CGos. 15.23); John 5:1–18 (CGos. 13.1–4); John 7:1–19 (CGos. 14.28–29); John 12:1–8 (CGos. 17.11–13).

72 Barker (‘Tatian’s Diatessaron’, pp. 136–8) identifies several examples of Markan redaction in Diatessaron witnesses; we expand his list below, focusing on Ephrem’s Commentary as the most reliable source for Tatian. Although Ephrem knew the four separated Gospels, repeated Markan material in the lemmata of Ephrem’s Commentary and the presence of this material across witnesses to Tatian’s Gospel indicate that it was part of Tatian’s composition. On Ephrem’s knowledge of the separate Gospels, see M. R. Crawford, ‘The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian’, Hugoye 18 (2015), pp. 9–51.

73 CGos. 4.4: Spiritus sanctus traxit, evexit eum in desertum. This passage is preserved only in the Armenian and is less secure than the other examples. The Latin is Leloir’s translation (Commentaire de l’évangile concordant, version arménienne, 2.35–36).

74 CGos. 7.6: ملشد كحص:.

75 CGos. 7.16: حمهم لحم عصبة بمسكحة عم صمام:.

76 CGos. 7.19.

77 CGos. 13.13: ملشد كحص:.

78 CGos. 14.15: حمهم لحم عصبة بمسكحة عم صمام:.

79 CGos. 15.22.

80 CGos. 15.22: ملشد كحص:.
even preserves a Markan intercalation in CGos. 16.1–5: Ephrem first mentions Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree; then, he comments on the Temple incident; finally, he resumes the discussion of the cursing of the fig tree, citing the lemma from Mark 11:20 that presupposes the Markan intercalation. The evidence thus strongly suggests that Tatian used Mark’s Gospel.81

Tatian’s use of other Gospels is more difficult to establish than his use of the four Gospels that became canonical. The presence of non-canonical sources in Tatian’s Gospel has been debated by scholars since at least the nineteenth century.82 Of 11 or so proposed parallels with non-canonical Gospels,83 four appear

81 Further Markan redactional features that are present both in the Arabic Harmony and Codex Fuldensis might be added to these six cases of Markan redaction in Ephrem’s Commentary. Features present both in the Arabic Harmony and Codex Fuldensis include the Markan parable of seeds growing secretly (Mark 4.26–29; Arabic Harmony §16.49–52; Fuldensis §77); the healing of the deaf and mute man (Mark 7.31–37; Arabic Harmony §21.1; Fuldensis §87), located in the same narrative spot in both the Arabic and Fuldensis (i.e., between the episodes of the Canaanite and Samaritan women); the man who fled the scene of Jesus’ arrest naked (Mark 14.51–52; Arabic Harmony §48.45–47; Fuldensis §93); Salome at the crucifixion (Mark 15.40; Arabic Harmony §52.23; Fuldensis §171).


83 These non-canonical details are (1) that the man with the withered hand could not work (cf. Liège and Stuttgart Harmonies at Mark 3:1; cf. Jerome, Comm. Matt. 12.13, who says he found this fragment in evangeliuo quo utuntur Nazareni et Hebionitae); (2) that Satan took Jesus to ‘Jerusalem’ (cf. Matt. 4:5//Luke 4:9; τὸ
only in the post-Fuldensis Western vernacular tradition and therefore do not meet the methodological threshold of the ‘New Perspective’ in Diatessaron studies. (They may instead be later developments without connection to Tatian’s own project.) The remaining seven fragments resonate with a variety of texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel according to the Hebrews, and the Protevangelium of James. The systematic use of another text as a ‘fifth’ Gospel is not demonstrable. The non-canonical fragments in Tatian’s composition resemble the floating units of Jesus material (sometimes called agrapha) that

\[\text{ιουδαικόν} \text{ marginalia to Matt. 4:5); (3) Jesus’ command to Peter to forgive the sinner seventy times ‘in one day’ (CGos. 14.22; Aphrahat, Dem. 14.44; Gospel according to the Hebrews apud Jerome, Pelag. 3.2); (4) Barachiah the ‘son of Joiaide’ (cf. Jerome, Comm. Matt. 23.35, attributing this detail to evangello quo utuntur Nazareni; see also the capitularia of some manuscripts of Zacharias Chrysopolitanus’ Commentary on In unum ex quatuor at Chapter 141); (5) the splitting of the ‘lintel of the temple’ at Jesus’ crucifixion (cf. Jerome, Comm. Matt. 27.51, attributing this detail to a Gospel according to the Hebrews; see also the capitularia of some manuscripts of Zacharias Chrysopolitanus’ Commentary, Chapter 170); (6) the mention of ‘another rich man’ (cf. the sequence of the Arabic Harmony §§28–29; the Latin text of Origen’s Comm. Matt. 15.14, referencing a ‘Hebrew Gospel’ that speaks of ‘another rich man’); (7) the fire or light at Jesus’ baptism (CGos. 4.5; Justin, Dial. 88.3; Codex Vercellensis at Matt. 3:16; Codex Sangermanensis at Matt. 3:16; Gospel according to the Hebrews apud Epiphanius, Pan. 30.13.3–4); (8) the woes at the crucifixion (cf. CGos. 20.28; Syr Ε Luke 23:48; Aphrahat, Dem. 14.26; Doctrine of Addai, f. 18; Codex Sangermanensis; Gos. Pet. 7); (9) the murder of Zechariah on the altar (CGos. 2.5; Prot. Jas. 22.1–24.4); (10) the ‘flying Jesus’ (CGos. 11.24, 27; Aphrahat, Dem. 2.20); (11) Jesus’ saying, ‘where there is one, I am there’ (CGos. 14.24; Gos. Thom. 30). This list consolidates observations from the studies listed above, particularly Phillips, ‘Diatessaron – Diapente’; Petersen, Tatian’s Diatessaron; Hill, ‘Diatessaron, Diapente, Diapollon?’.

84 Of the fragments listed in the previous note, (1), (2), (4), and (5) do not appear in Eastern witnesses (Ephrem, Aphrahat, Arabic Harmony, etc.), nor do they appear in the Fuldensis Gospel.


We turn from Tatian’s sources to his compositional methods. When we tabulate the sequence of the material from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that Ephrem cites in his *Commentary on the Gospel*, several important observations can be made. On the horizontal axis, Tatian included material from each of the four Gospels. This is true of distinctive material from Matthew, Luke, and John (and from Mark, if we accept the multi-stage healing of the blind man as Markan distinctive material). Tatian’s desire to include is especially visible in episodes that appear in all four of these Gospels. If we may recover the intra-pericope sequence of the empty tomb account from the correspondences between the Arabic Harmony and Codex Fuldensis, we find that Tatian densely interweaves Matthean, Markan, Lukan, and Johannine elements. The Arabic Harmony (§52.45–47) and Fuldensis (§174) both include key phrases from Matthew 28:1, John 20:1, Luke 24:1, and Mark 16:3 in the same sequence, bringing order to polyvalent resurrection material. (This complex shared sequence makes it overwhelmingly probable that the sources reflect Tatian’s order.) After interweaving elements from Matthew 28:2–8, Mark 16:3–4, Luke 24:2–8, and John 20:1 (Arabic Harmony §52.48–53.7 and Fuldensis §174 mostly agree in their ordering), both the Arabic Harmony (§53.9–24) and

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87 Mills, ‘Wrong Harmony,’ questions the reliability of Fuldensis for recovering the intra-pericope sequencing of Tatian’s Gospel, but the extent of correspondence between the Arabic Harmony and Fuldensis in the resurrection narrative suggests at least remnants of Tatian’s order.

Fuldensis (§174) insert the Johannean account of Mary’s first visit to the tomb (John 20:2–10). A few sentences later, the Arabic Harmony (§53.35–61) and Fuldensis (§177–78) both start alternating between the Longer Ending of Mark and Luke 24:10–35, sandwiching the Emmaus episode (Luke 24:13–35) between Mark 16:12 and 16:13. These observations demonstrate Tatian’s spatial practice of organizing material from multiple Gospels on the horizontal axis.

We turn to the vertical axis, narrative sequence. We find that Tatian is versatile in the ways he handles episodes from different points in separate Gospels. He includes Luke’s version of the sinful woman anointing Jesus’ feet early in his Gospel (Luke 7:36–50; CGos. 10.8–10) and includes the Matthean (Matt. 26:6–13)//Markan (Mark 14:3–9)//Johannine version in its Johannine position (John 12:1–11) before the triumphal entry (CGos. 17.11–13). Yet Tatian’s Gospel had only one Temple incident (CGos. 15.23), differing from both the Synoptic and Johannean narrative locations. Tatian appears to place the Temple incident at a separate feast that Jesus celebrates in Jerusalem, a year before his final visit to Jerusalem.\(^8^9\) No single Gospel dominates the sequence of Tatian’s composition.\(^9^0\) Instead, he coordinates the sequences of Matthew, Luke, John, and (as with the intercalation of the fig tree story) even Mark. The opening and closing frame for Tatian’s Gospel is Johannean, and he builds the Johannean festal chronology into the structure of his text.\(^9^1\) At the same time, the macrostructure of Tatian’s Gospel, as reflected in the sequence of pericopes throughout, is primarily Matthean, with Johannean blocks interspersed in this narrative structure.\(^9^2\) Yet Tatian’s order is not mechanically Matthean, either; material occasionally appears in Lukan or even


\(^9^0\) Tatian’s sequence has been a central subject of Diatessaron scholarship. See inter alia Petersen, Tatian’s Diatessaron, and Barker, Tatian’s Diatessaron.

\(^9^1\) On John’s festal chronology in Tatian’s Gospel, see Barker, ‘Narrative Chronology’.

\(^9^2\) Tatian’s project is framed with John’s prologue and Galilean resurrection appearances and he negotiates the relationship between Johannean and Synoptic material so as to preserve key features of John’s festal sequence. Yet much of the Synoptic material cannot be structured by John, since there is no corresponding Johannean material to structure it. For this reason, Matthew is also architectonically central. On the joint Matthean and Johannean structure that predominates in Tatian’s Gospel, see Baarda, ‘Διαφωνία – Συμφωνία’, esp. p. 150. Baarda does not recognize the substantial section of Tatian’s Gospel structured by Luke and Mark.
Markan sequence, either for reasons of narrative coherence or because there was not an obvious home for non-parallel material.93

These observations invite a question: what technologies facilitated Tatian’s complex negotiation of multiple Gospel texts? Bruce Metzger suggested in 1977 that, in order for Tatian to accomplish such meticulous work without clunky repetition, he would have needed to consult four individual Gospel manuscripts simultaneously, annotating them as he used each pericope, and marking them off in order to avoid redundancy.94 Yet the intricacy of Tatian’s Gospel combinations may have required a more sophisticated technology than four manuscripts in the hands of (enslaved?) scribal assistants; Tatian’s control of multiple imperfectly parallel narrative sequences may imply a physical map by which to coordinate these textual trajectories.95 Tatian’s weaving of the Johannine festal pilgrimages to Jerusalem into a Synoptic narrative scheme, and his solution to the placement of the temple incident, would have been difficult to execute without a visual aid to the textual geography of the four Gospels. Tatian could even locate Lukan redactions of triple and double tradition (which Luke often scattered across his narrative in different locations than either Matthew or Mark) and insert them into this Matthean and Markan sequence; this would have been difficult without a graphic tabulation of multiple Gospel sequences—perhaps resembling what Ammonius developed. Given Tatian’s nuanced negotiation of parallel Gospel material, one might imagine that he constructed a synopsis to facilitate his project.96

93 On the basis of Ephrem’s Commentary, we deduce that Tatian followed the sequence of Mark 2:1–28 and Luke 5:1–6:5 against Matthew (CGos. 5). Tatian also appears to follow Mark’s sequence from Mark 9:14–29 to Mark 10:2–12, against Matthew (CGos. 14), and much of the Lukan sequence of the passion narrative against Matthew and Mark (CGos. 20). See the Appendix.

94 Metzger, Early Versions, pp. 11–12.


96 This is precisely what was proposed by Baarda (‘Διαφωνία – Συμφωνία’, p. 151), who asserts that ‘one of the required preparatory tasks was to create a kind of synopsis of the sources’ since Tatian’s ambitious project ‘could not be fulfilled just with “scissors and paste”’. This is as much as Baarda explores this tantalizing technological suggestion. Baarda does not differentiate between the columnar synopsis and the annotated running text, the two alternate models we discussed for Ammonius. In either case, Tatian’s Gospel does not run precisely according to the order of any other Gospel—unlike Ammonius’ Matthew-structured Gospel—which raises questions about how he would have structured such a preliminary project.
Tatian integrates both larger narratives and granular textual details, engaging both narrative sequence and parallel material in a way that reflects hermeneutically and technologically sophisticated practices for negotiating a pluriform Gospel corpus.

**IRENAEUS: MAPPING**

Writing around the year 180 CE, Irenaeus presented four Gospels as distinct and yet unified, a quadriform whole. Irenaeus’ theology of the fourfold Gospel is well known, but our present concern is the conceptual and material practices that facilitated his spatial engagement with these four Gospels. This has received far less attention. Irenaeus’ negotiation of a pluriform Gospel differs from that of Ammonius, EpAp, or Tatian; he did not produce a new Gospel. Nonetheless, his engagement with the multiple Gospels reveals the same dynamics of spatial thinking, in horizontal and vertical dimensions, that we have explored throughout this article. Irenaeus engaged his four Gospels as distinct works. He was an active reader, engaged in thinking both horizontally and vertically about the Gospels. Spatial engagement with Gospel literature included both the production of new Gospel texts and broader practices of Gospel reading that have left their traces in texts—like Irenaeus’—about Gospels and Gospel writing.

Irenaeus’ horizontal engagement with parallel Gospel material is clear in his use of distinctive material. He analysed both

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100 These practices continue in third- and fourth-century figures like Origen and Eusebius; cf. Grafton and Williams, *Christianity*; Crawford, *Eusebian Canon Tables*; Coogan, *Eusebius the Evangelist*.
parallels and the absence of parallels, including sustained attention to distinctive material. Irenaeus’ treatment of distinctive material implies horizontal reading and spatial practices of comparison.\(^{101}\) (We return below to think about the technologies involved.) We see examples in Irenaeus’ treatment of both Luke and John.

In *Haer.* 3.14.3, Irenaeus identifies approximately 27 episodes of Lukan distinctive material.\(^{102}\) Irenaeus differentiates between distinctive and shared material as follows:

\[
\text{Et omnia huiusmodi per solum Lucam cognouimus, et plurimos actus Domini per hunc didicimus, quibus et omnes utuntur.}
\]

All things of this kind [i.e., distinctive material] we have known through Luke alone, and many deeds of the Lord we have learned through him which also all [the evangelists] mention.\(^{103}\)

\(^{101}\) As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, it is possible that these lists of distinctive material were produced prior to Irenaeus. This would not diminish the significance of Irenaeus’ lists as evidence for spatial engagement with Gospel literature. In his framing comments, Irenaeus makes clear that he is using this list of distinctive Lukan material to think in both vertical (narrative) and horizontal (comparative) terms about Luke’s Gospel. This is true regardless of whether Irenaeus created the list himself or derived it from others. The prior existence of such a list cannot be demonstrated from the available evidence, but if it could be confirmed it would provide further evidence for our model by showing other second-century readers engaging Gospels along both vertical and horizontal axes. The Lukan distinctive material discussed by Irenaeus implies a corpus corresponding to Irenaeus’ fourfold Gospel as the basis for identifying what is distinctively Lukan; we note in particular that his list of distinctive material does not include material found in Luke–Mark parallels or Luke–John parallels (suggesting that Luke was compared against Mark and John, and not just against Matthew) but also that it does not omit obvious major blocks of Lukan distinctive material (suggesting that the list was not constructed by comparison with other Gospel texts that overlapped with Luke). The Gospel corpus implied by such a comparative project makes it unlikely that such distinctive material lists antedate the mid-second century.


\(^{103}\) Authors’ translation. Note the language of categorization (*huiusmodi*, reconstructed by Rousseau in the SC edition as *tā tòv nàvō* and of attribution (*per solam Lucam*, reconstructed by Rousseau as *diā mónon τοῦ Λουκᾶ*). Cf. *Haer.* 3.15.1, in which Irenaeus emphasizes the importance of material available only through Luke’s account (*per Lucam*) and the similar appeal to distinctive Matthean evidence (*per Matthaeum*) at *Haer.* 3.16.2. Compare Johnson’s discussion (discussed below) of the attention that elite second-century readers devoted to diction and usage—including the sorts of phenomena that we might classify as matters of redactional tendency and distinctive material.
Such knowledge implies practices of detailed textual comparison. Obviously, Irenaeus did not have Stephanus’ chapter-and-verse division system to designate these 27 distinctive Lukan episodes. Instead, Irenaeus uses key words or phrases to identify these Lukan episodes. This use of key words or phrases might reflect either mnemonic or written lists. Irenaeus’ manipulation of these units of material as distinct entries in a list is evident in the parataxis of *Haer.* 3.14.3, punctuated by the formulae *et* + episode theme in the accusative, *et* + episode theme in the genitive, *et de* + episode theme in the genitive, and similar formulae. For example,

*Plurima enim et magis necessaria Euangelii per hunc cognouimus, sicut Iohannis generationem...et aduentum [καὶ τὴν ἔλευσιν] angeli ad Mariam... et quod duodecim annorum [καὶ τὸ δώδεκατη] in Hierusalem relictus sit... et quoniam aput Pharisaeum, recumbente eo [καὶ ὅτι παρὰ τῷ Φαρισαίῳ, κατακλινομένου αὐτοῦ], peccatrix mulier osculabatur pedes eius et unguen-bat unguento...et duaitis [καὶ τοῦ πλουσίου] qui uestitur purpuram et iocundatur nitide... et de Pharisaeo et de publicano [καὶ περὶ τοῦ Φαρισαίου καὶ τοῦ τελώνου] qui simul adorabant in templo... et super haec omnia post resurrectionem in via ad discipulos suos quae locutus est, et quemadmodum cognouerunt [καὶ πῶς ἔγνωσαν] eum in fractione panis. 106

For we have come to know very many and important things of the Gospel through him [i.e., Luke], for example, the begetting of John... and the coming of the angel to Mary... and that he was left behind in Jerusalem at twelve years... and that as he was reclining at table with the Pharisee, a


105 Compare the likely Greek *Vorlagen*: *καὶ τῶν/τῆν/τῶ + accusative episode theme, καὶ τοῦ + genitive episode theme, and καὶ περὶ τοῦ + genitive episode theme.

106 Only the Latin text is preserved; the Greek text in brackets is Rousseau’s reconstruction.
sinful woman kissed his feet and anointed him with perfume... and of the rich man who was dressed in purple and took delight in fancy things... and about the Pharisee and the publican who were worshiping in the temple at the same time... and [that], in addition to all these things, after the resurrection, he spoke to his disciples on the road, and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.\textsuperscript{107}

The paratactic prose of \textit{Haer.} 3.14.3 suggests that Irenaeus accessed Lukan distinctive material as a mental or written list.\textsuperscript{108}

Similarly, Irenaeus engages the Johannine distinctive material of Jesus’ celebrations of Jewish feasts in Jerusalem in their Johannine sequence. In \textit{Haer.} 2.22.3, Irenaeus presents a Johannine sequence for Jesus’ ministry, focusing on distinctive Johannine material: the wedding at Cana in Galilee (cf. John 2:1–11), Jesus and the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:1–42), Jesus healing the centurion’s son (cf. John 4:43–54),\textsuperscript{109} Jesus healing the paralytic beside the pool (cf. John 5:1–15), Jesus feeding the multitude by the Sea of Tiberias (cf. John 6:1–15),\textsuperscript{110} Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead (cf. John 11:1–44), Jesus’ withdrawal to Ephraim (cf. John 11:54), and Jesus’ visit to Bethany (cf. John 12:1–11). Irenaeus thus provides a table of contents, as it were, for the first half of John’s

\textsuperscript{107} Authors’ translation.

\textsuperscript{108} Although Irenaeus presents Lukan distinctive material in broadly Lukan sequence, he rearranges several episodes, especially parables and sayings. These occasional changes in sequence may suggest a mental list but may also reflect a slightly disordered written one.

\textsuperscript{109} John uses the term ‘royal official’ (βασιλικός, John 4:46), but Irenaeus calls this official a ‘centurion’ (et filium centurionis absens uerbo curait, \textit{Haer.} 2.22.3; SC 294.218). This indicates that Irenaeus is conflating a Johannine episode with a Synoptic parallel (ἐκατόνταρχος, Matt. 8:5–13//Luke 7:1–10). That Irenaeus has the Johannine version in focus is clear by the quotation: ‘Go; your son lives’ (vade, filius tuus uiuit, \textit{Haer.} 2.22.3; SC 294.218; John 4:50). Even as Irenaeus is thinking about John in vertical (narrative) sequence, his engagement also reflects horizontal (parallel) comparison between Gospels. Although Eusebius connected these three passages in his Gospel canons, Origen links Matthew and Luke, but not John (\textit{Matt. Frag.} 154).

\textsuperscript{110} The healing of the paralytic by the pool has a Synoptic parallel (Matt. 9:1–8//Mark 2:1–12//Luke 5:17–26), and the feeding of the 5,000 has an even closer parallel (Matt. 14:13–31//Mark 6:32–44//Luke 9:10–17). In both cases, Irenaeus signals that he is drawing from the Johannine version (locating the healing by the pool and the feeding by the Sea of Tiberias). Tatian and Irenaeus address similar questions, although they do not consistently answer them the same way.
Gospel (until Jesus’ final week). He tells us that the material is what ‘John, the disciple of the Lord, records’. Irenaeus thus identifies both material present in one Gospel but absent in the other three and also material present in more than one Gospel—all while maintaining their sequences even in comparison.

Irenaeus’ engagement with Gospel similarity and difference on the horizontal dimension intersects with his vertical awareness of Gospel sequence. Not only do the lists of distinctive Lukan and Johannine material reveal attention to narrative sequence, but we find further evidence in Irenaeus’ discussion of Mark. Although he does not cite Mark as much as the other three Gospels, Irenaeus engages Mark’s Gospel as a whole. This is noteworthy since Mark had largely remained hidden in the shadow of Matthew and Luke in the first half of the second century. Irenaeus speaks of Mark ‘commencing his Gospel writing’ and of what Mark says ‘towards the conclusion of his Gospel’. Irenaeus can thus

111 With the exception of the withdrawal to Ephraim, each of the episodes that Irenaeus lists corresponds to one of the later τίτλοι from the Johannine manuscript tradition, although Irenaeus does not mention all of the episodes that appear in the τίτλοι. This suggests similar practices of identifying Gospel material. On the Johannine τίτλοι and their emphasis of the ‘wondrous’, see J. Knust and T. Wasserman, ‘The Wondrous Gospel of John: Jesus’s Miraculous Deeds in Late Ancient Editorial and Scholarly Practice’, in M. Tellbe, T. Wasserman, and L. Nyman (eds.), Healing and Exorcism in Second Temple Judaism and Early Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), pp. 160–91.

112 sicut Iohannes Domini discipulus meminit (SC 294.218).


114 Given the significance of Matthew in shaping second-century Gospel reading (including Irenaeus’ Gospel reading), it is surprising that we do not see an explicit engagement with Matthew’s sequence that parallels Irenaeus’ survey of Lukan and Johannine material. It is possible, however, that Matthew is so central to Irenaeus’ Gospel reading that this would have seemed superfluous. On Irenaeus’ reception of Matthew, see D. J. Bingham, Irenaeus’ Use of Matthew’s Gospel in Adversus Haereses (Leuven: Peeters, 1998).

115 On Mark’s reception in Irenaeus, see Verheyden, ‘Four Gospels’.

116 Haer. 3.10.6: et Marcus…initium Evangelicae conscriptionis fecit sic… in fine autem Evangelii ait Marcus… (SC 211.134–36). For similar discussion of the significance of Irenaeus’ citation of both the beginning and end of Mark, see Verheyden, ‘Four Gospels’, p. 184.
visualize both the bookends of individual Gospels and their narrative sequences. The vertical (sequence) and horizontal (parallels) axes converge in *Haer. 5.21.2*, where Irenaeus lays out the Matthean sequence of temptation narrative (Matt. 4:1–10, bread → temple → kingdoms) but says that he is quoting the wording from Luke (Luke 4:1–13). As these examples show, Irenaeus compared Gospel material with a spatial command of both narrative and parallel.118

Attending to textual and material practices brings into focus Irenaeus’ detailed engagement with a fourfold Gospel and, moreover, his negotiation of this corpus as a single canonical space composed of four distinct yet interwoven narratives.119 It also invites further analysis of the other examples we have discussed in this article. Irenaeus organized Gospel narratives into narrative-theematic units (e.g., the sequential lists of events for Luke and John); this approach differs from the projects of Ammonius and Tatian, which focused first on parallel material. It has more in common with the summary form in which *EpAp* engages a pluriform textualized Gospel corpus. Unlike *EpAp*, though, Irenaeus employs this conceptual map for granular comparisons of parallel Gospel material, which brings him closer to Tatian and Ammonius. Unlike the other examples discussed here, Irenaeus’ approach to the Gospels is not bound to a single narrative sequence. It is not Matthean like the project of Ammonius, or primarily Johannine like *EpAp*, or composite like that of Tatian. His approach to Gospel sequence—in keeping with his emphasis on preserving a fourfold Gospel—enabled him to think about both parallels and divergent Gospel narratives.


119 The famous passage in *Haer*. 3.11.8 also suggests attention to the distinctive content and character of each Gospel (e.g., καὶ ὁ ποιήσας ἡ τῶν ζῴων μορφή, τοιοῦτος καὶ ὁ χαρακτήρ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου).
Irenaeus’ spatial engagement with Gospel literature may reflect mnemonic practices in addition to writing on physical media. Here one might compare William Johnson’s discussion of elite Roman reading culture in the second century. Johnson describes practices of remembering and reviewing passages from a text that were considered ‘worthy of note’. These include striking diction, unusual vocabulary, or useful *sententiae*. As Johnson writes, ‘reading and memorizing are by habit intertwined’. It is not difficult to imagine that educated second-century readers such as Irenaeus—or, indeed, the other figures discussed in this article—might have engaged in such a practice when reading Gospel literature, including identifying distinctive material and constructing

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120 Mnemonic devices themselves are often spatial, as in the case of the ‘memory palace’. On such mnemonic practices (including spatial mental maps) in the Roman Mediterranean, see Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.7; 11.2, with F. A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Oxford: Routledge, 1999 [1966]), pp. 1–26 (Yates underestimates the access that educated and wealthy individuals had to the technologies of literacy). On mnemonic practices broadly, see M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Attention to mnemonic practice in the extant scholarly literature focuses on oratory, with less attention to reading (but see Quintilian, *Inst.* 2.7).

121 Cf. Johnson, *Reading*, pp. 118–20, discussing Aulus Gellius’ habits of reading and note-taking with reference to *Noctes Atticae* 17.2. Gellius describes both memorization of literary material and the practice of making notes. He states that, when reading, it was his practice to ‘recall and review any passages…which were worthy of note (*adnotamentis digna*)’ (*NA* 17.2, LCL 212: 200–1); he presents this as an exercise of memory. This mnemonic practice, however, does not conflict with taking written notes; in the same passage, Gellius offers a series of reading notes—and, indeed, much of the *Noctes Atticae* might be characterized as reading notes. For Gellius on remembering and writing down textual oddities, see further *Noctes Atticae* 19.7 (cf. Johnson, *Reading*, p. 191). A parallel to Gellius’ practice of note-taking is offered by Clement of Alexandria; cf. J. M. F. Heath, *Clement of Alexandria and the Shaping of Christian Literary Practice: Miscellany and the Transformation of Greco-Roman Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). In a further example not discussed by Johnson, the conclusion of Aelius Theon’s first-century *Progymnasmata*, preserved in Armenian, discusses the reading practices a teacher should inculcate in students (§14 [*Théon: Progymnasmata*, ed. M. Patillon (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1997), p. 106]). Theon focuses on how one engages after reading: one recalls the text, organizes the main points, and remembers the best passages and their structure.

122 Collections of *sententiae* and *chreiai* like the Sentences of Sextus and even the Gospel of Thomas might reflect such reading practices (cf. Gathercole, *Gospel of Thomas*, pp. 137–43).

mental maps of the texts. Yet, as Johnson demonstrates, mnemonic practices were intertwined with excerpting and writing. Whether Irenaeus’ strategies of textual summary and segmentation were physically applied to divide his Gospel texts (with section divisions or τίτλοι) or to preface his Gospel books (with a ὑπόθεσις or a list of κεφάλαια) remains impossible to demonstrate. Summaries may have been transcribed elsewhere (perhaps on wax tablets or in a parchment notebook) or may have been part of a memorized textual map. Nonetheless, Irenaeus’ detailed attention to Gospel similarity and difference—in terms of both parallel material and varied narrative sequence—demonstrates that he engaged the fourfold Gospel as a two-dimensional textual space.


After Irenaeus, one can observe similar textual practices in the work of Clement of Alexandria (fl. c.190–210 CE). In Quid dives 4–5, he gives the Markan version of the rich man episode (Mark 10:17–31), and acknowledges the other parallels as occupying the same conceptual space. He says they do not agree on particular wording here and there, but they ‘all exhibit the same symmetry of meaning’ (πάντα δὲ τὴν αὐτὴν τῆς γνώμης συμφωνίαν ἐπιδείκνυται). In Quid dives 17, he describes Matthew as a redactor adding ‘in spirit’ to the beatitude ‘blessed are the poor’. In Strom. 4.6.41.1–3, Clement discusses those who ‘transpose the Gospels’ (τινες τῶν μεταθέντων τά εὐαγγέλια) and gives an example of integrating Matthean and Lukan beatitudes; he also improvises on beatitudes in similar ways to Gos. Thom. 68–69 (cf. Watson, Gospel Writing, pp. 423–4). All of these demonstrate that Clement read the Synoptics horizontally. Christians were not the only ones to compare Gospels. Origen’s response to the second-century critic Celsus suggests that Celsus was aware of differences between Gospel texts (Cels. 2.27), on Celsus’
Conclusion

New Testament scholarship over the past century has exhibited a persistent fascination with the emergence of a fourfold Gospel canon. There are good reasons for the time and labour devoted to the subject. The articulation of a fourfold Gospel composed of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (not always in that order) is a pivotal development in the history of early Christian reading. Moreover, it is central to the formation of the collection we know as the New Testament, and thus to the discipline of New Testament studies itself. Canon intersects with important questions of reading, technology, and authority. At the same time, a focus on the emergence of an authoritative list of books has often eclipsed further important historical phenomena. In this article, therefore, we redirect attention to reading and technology. What are the textual practices—both material and conceptual—by which Christians in the second century negotiated a pluriform constellation of Gospel texts? These textual practices are, of course, interwoven with broader questions of reception and of the emergent fourfold Gospel canon: how one reads parallel texts together depends, to a certain extent, on which parallel texts one chooses to read. In the present article, however, we shift the focus away from canon in order to call attention to a broader, but neglected, practical and hermeneutical question: how does one read parallel texts together?

As we have argued, a number of second-century Christians engaged a pluriform Gospel corpus through sophisticated textual practices. As with any historical reconstruction, our analysis is imaginative. We have used the work of Ammonius of Alexandria to examine the textual space in which readers engaged Gospel literature. A range of other ancient readers—from Theon and Quintilian to Gellius and Galen—enable us to ask better questions and imagine new possibilities. As we have demonstrated, second-century projects of reading and writing Gospel literature engaged two dimensions—vertical narrative and horizontal parallel—in variegated ways and for divergent ends. Nonetheless,
these varied practices—dividing texts into units, listing pericopes, excerpting material, arranging Gospel texts side by side, integrating parallel material into new narrative compositions—each contributed to the spatial imagination that characterized engagement with Gospel literature in the later second century. These scholarly practices are attested across the Roman Mediterranean—in Alexandria, Syria, Rome, and Gaul—as Christian thinkers used increasingly sophisticated textual technologies and hermeneutical strategies to negotiate similarity and difference across an emergent fourfold Gospel corpus.
### Appendix: Tatian’s Macro-Sequence in Ephrem’s Commentary on the Gospel

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ORDERING GOSPEL TEXTUALITY
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Key:
- MkR = Markan Redaction.
- MkS = Markan Distinctive Material.
- JFst = Johannine Feast (feast numbers given in original Johannine order).
- Shaded = guiding the sequence.