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Towards a Redaction-Critical Reading of the Diatessaron Gospel

Ein redaktionskritischer Zugang zum Diatessaron betrachtet diesen Text als eigenständiges Evangelium und ist bestrebt, redaktionelle Vorgehensweisen bezüglich seiner Quellen aufzuzeigen, die denen vergleichbar sind, die von früheren Evangelisten verwendet werden. Trotz aller Schwierigkeiten, den ursprünglichen Text des Diatessaron zu bestimmen, kann das bestehende Material Aufschluss geben über die charakteristischen redaktionellen Motive des Kompilators.

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Redaction criticism attempts to clarify and explain an evangelist's treatment of his sources, in the expectation that characteristic theological emphases will emerge as the newer text is compared with the older one. Like any other method, its scope is limited. It is not concerned with the final form of the text as a self-contained literary artefact. It is author- rather than reader-centred, focusing on behind-the-scenes editorial decisions of which readers will normally be unaware. It is dependent on source-critical analysis, which may or may not provide reliable results. A redaction-critical investigation of Matthew's use of Q will prove worthless if Q never existed.

A redaction-critical approach to the Diatessaron is open to two immediate objections. First, we do not have access to the Diatessaron in the form intended by Tatian, its author-editor. Only a few scattered fragments survive, along with two late versions assimilated to normative vernacular translations of the individual gospels. Second, redaction-criticism is inappropriate to the genre of the gospel harmony, since the harmony aims only to show that the canonical gospels can be successfully co-ordinated with one another and tells us little about its compiler's theological convictions.

In response, we note first that we do at least possess all four of Tatian's major sources, and that the sequence he constructs from them may survive intact even where his wording has been altered. Second, the Diatessaron

treats Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as sources to be emended, co-ordinated, and elaborated, not as authoritative texts whose normativity a harmony seeks to vindicate. It is gospel rather than gospel harmony. Tatian's treatment of his sources is on a continuum with Luke's or Matthew's.

1. Title and Sources

The so-called "Diatessaron" receives its familiar title from a reference in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, where it is said that "Tatian composed – I do not know how – a combination and compilation from the gospels, and named it the *Dia Tessarōn*, which is still extant among some."[1] In itself, διὰ τεσσάρων appears to mean "in fourfold form," without defining that form any more closely.[2] The Greek title was not known to Syriac Christians, so Eusebius's Syriac translator has to explain it as best he can: Tatian "collected and connected and composed the Gospel and called it *Diyatessarōn*, that is, *Of the Connected* (*d-meḥalleṭē*), and it is extant among many to this day."[3] In both recensions of the Old Syriac Gospels (the Sinaitic and the Curetonian, Syrˢ and Syrᶜ), the individual texts are collectively known as *ewangelyōn d-mepharrešē* ("Gospel of the Separated").[4] In these matching formulations, *ewangelyōn d-* ("gospel of …") corresponds to the Greek εὐαγγέλιον κατά …, and the "connected" and the "separated" are the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Where there is no need to differentiate the two formats, the composite work is simply "the Gospel" for early Syriac authors such as Aphrahat and Ephrem. These writers say nothing of any link to Tatian, and they do not regard

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1 *Hist. eccl.* 4.29.6.

2 Cf. M.R. Crawford, "Ammonius of Alexandria, Eusebius of Caesarea, and the Origins of Gospel Scholarship," *NTS* 61 (2015), 1–29. As Crawford points out, Eusebius also speaks of the gospel synopsis of Ammonius as τὸ διὰ τεσσάρων εὐαγγέλιον, in the letter to Carpianus that prefaces Eusebius's gospel edition with its canon tables (NA²⁸, 89*). Thus the same expression can be used for "fourfold" works in different formats – parallel columns in Ammonius's case, in contrast to Tatian's consecutive text. Eusebius is intimately familiar with Ammonius's "diatessaron" gospel but concedes his ignorance of Tatian's.

3 W. Wright and N. McLean (eds.), *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius in Syriac* (Cambridge, 1898), 243. Cited by W.L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (Leiden, 1994), 36 n.

4 Syrᶜ *inscriptio*, Syrˢ colophon; G.A. Kiraz, *Comparative Edition of the Syriac Gospels* (Leiden, 1996), vol. 1 (Matthew), 1; vol. 4 (John), 369; F.C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da-Mepharreshe: The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels, with the Readings of the Sinai Palimpsest and the Early Syriac Patristic Evidence* (2 vols.; Cambridge, 1904), 1.2, 534; 2.30–33.

the work as a "gospel harmony." For them, it is simply the Gospel itself in its comprehensive and definitive form.[5] We will refer to this work here as *DE* (= διὰ τεσσάρων εὐαγγέλιον), to differentiate it from its subsequent conversion into a gospel harmony entitled "the Diatessaron."

Early evidence of this gospel version is preserved in a Greek fragment from Dura Europos and in Syriac texts (above all, Ephrem's gospel commentary). Late versions are preserved in Latin and Arabic translations.

(1) A Greek gospel fragment was discovered during excavations at Dura Europos on the Euphrates in 1933, in which statements about the women at the crucifixion and Joseph of Arimathea have been compiled from phraseology taken from all four canonical gospels.[6] The manuscript must pre-date 256 CE, the year in which the city was destroyed by Shapur I of Persia. Comparison with the equivalent passages in the later Latin and Arabic versions makes an identification with the Diatessaron virtually certain, strengthening the case for a Greek original.[7] The most distinctive feature of this text is its statement that "the wives of those who followed him from Galilee" stood at a distance "seeing the Crucified One" (cf. Luke 23:4).

(2) Ephrem's commentary on the Gospel preserves evidence of the wording and sequence of the Syriac Diatessaron in its mid-fourth-century form. Ephrem's work became known to Western scholars when an Armenian translation was published in 1836; this was followed by the publication of much of the original Syriac in 1963 with a further instalment in 1990.[8] Of particular interest are points where Ephrem attests divergences from the individual gospels which have been eliminated from the later

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5 For evidence and analysis, see M.R. Crawford, "Diatessaron, A Misnomer? The Evidence of Ephrem's Commentary," *EC* 3 (2013), 362–385.

6 C.H. Kraeling, *A Greek Fragment of Tatian's Diatessaron from Dura* (SD 3; London, 1935).

7 J. Joosten, "The Dura Fragment and the Diatessaron," *VC* 57 (2003), 159–175. Joosten here conclusively refutes the claim that the Dura fragment is not from the Diatessaron (as argued by D.C. Parker, D.G.K. Taylor, and M.S. Goodacre, "The Dura-Europos Gospel Harmony," in *Studies in the Early Text of the Gospels and Acts* [ed. D.G.K. Taylor; SBLTCS 1; Atlanta, 1999], 192–228).

8 Ephrem's commentary has been edited in three separate works by L. Leloir, with Latin translations: (1) *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant: Version arménienne* (2 vols.; Leuven, 1954); (2) *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant: Texte syriaque (manuscrit Chester Beatty 709)* (Dublin, 1963); (3) *Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l'Évangile concordant: Texte syriaque (manuscript Chester Beatty 709): Folios additionels* (Leuven, 1990). See also (4) *L'Évangile de Éphrem d'après les oeuvres éditées: Recueil des textes* (Leuven, 1958); (5) *Le Témoignage d'Éphrem sur le Diatessaron* (Leuven, 1962). Eng. trans. C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Oxford, 1993). Translations throughout this paper are my own.

Latin and Arabic editions. Thus supplementary narrative details occur at Jesus's baptism, where the descent of the Spirit is accompanied by a light shining on the water,[9] and on the occasion of Jesus's visit to Nazareth, when the hostile crowd actually succeed in throwing him over a cliff, only to find that he does not fall but flies.[10] There are also a number of convergences between Ephrem's text and readings specific to the Old Syriac as attested in the Sinaitic and Curetonian manuscripts. These texts have evidently been influenced by *DE*, and it is sometimes plausible to speculate about *DE* readings preserved in them even where these cannot be corroborated from elsewhere.

(3) A Latin translation of the Diatessaron is included in the sixth-century Codex Fuldensis, in the form of a new edition of an older Latin text which probably goes back to a Greek original.[11] The composite gospel text occurs in the context of a single volume edition of the New Testament, and seems intended to reopen the question of the appropriate form of the canonical gospel. Its editor, Victor of Capua, describes this gospel text not as a "Diatessaron" but as a "Diapente," perhaps because he wishes it to take its place as a fifth gospel alongside the canonical four. Victor is aware of Tatian's reputation as a heretic, but states in his preface that Tatian "provided the learned with a text that is not without value, compiling a gospel characterized (in my view) by its skilfully-constructed connections."[12] For Victor, the importance of the connections is that they (supposedly) restore an accurate historical sequence to the events of Jesus's life.[13] Victor also preserves an older Latin list of *capitula* or chapter-titles, which open with John 1:1–5; in the new edition this is preceded by Luke 1:1–4, which the earlier version omitted.[14] The Latin text is assimilated to Jerome's gospel edition. While the noncanonical details extant in Ephrem's day have been re-

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9 Ephr. 4.5 (Armenian).

10 Ephr. 11.23, 26, 27; contrast Luke 4:29–31. On the flying Jesus, see T. Baarda, *Essays on the Diatessaron* (CBET 11; Kampen, 1994), 59–85.

11 E. Ranke (ed.), *Codex Fuldensis: Novum Testamentum Latine interprete Hieronymo, ex manuscripto Victoris Capuani* (Marburg, 1868); N.J. Zola, "Tatian's *Diatessaron* in Latin: A New Edition and Translation of Codex Fuldensis" (PhD thesis, Baylor University, 2014).

12 *Tatianus quoque licet profanis inplicatus erroribus non inutile tamen exhibens studiosis exemplum hoc evangelium ut mihi videtur sollerti conpaginatione disposuit* (Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis* [see n. 11], 2).

13 In describing his quest for the author, Victor states his own view of the work's significance: he sought to discover, *quis gesta vel dicta domini et salvatoris nostri evangelica lectione discreta in ordinem quo se consequi videbantur non minimo studii labore redegerit* (Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis* [see n. 11], 1).

14 Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis* (see n. 11), 21, 29.

moved, other aspects of Tatian's redactional procedures remain intact. Thus the Lukan account of Jesus's inaugural sermon in Nazareth is divided into two widely-separated halves, the first narrating the positive reception that Jesus received at the start of his ministry (Codex Fuldensis [F] 18 = Luke 4:16–21), the second a negative reception at a point when his Capernaum-based ministry was already established (F 79 = Luke 4:22–30). Since this division also occurs in the Arabic translation (where, however, the break occurs at Luke 4:23), it is highly likely to go back to Tatian himself.

(4) A preface to one of the two recensions of the Arabic Diatessaron, dating from around the eleventh century, indicates that this is the work of the priest Abu-l-Faraj Abdullah ibn-aṭ-Ṭayyib, who translated it from the Syriac, and that "the holy gospel and beautiful garden known as *Diyā-tāsarōn*" was originally compiled by "Tityānōs the Greek."[15] (As for the strange foreign title, "the explanation of this term is *by-four*.") A colophon identifies the Syriac editor as the ninth-century lexicographer Isā ibn 'Alî.[16] As the Latin of Victor of Capua's version has been assimilated to Jerome, so the Syriac underlying the Arabic has been assimilated to the Peshitta. Both editors key their composite texts to the separate gospels, Victor by adapting the Eusebian canon tables, Isā ibn 'Alî by distributing the abbreviations *M*, *R*, *Q*, and *Ḥ* throughout the text to indicate an origin in "Matthew the Elect," "Mark the Chosen," "Luke the Favoured," and "John the Beloved" respectively.[17] In these formats, the Diatessaron has become a gospel harmony, subordinate to the canonical four, rather than a gospel – or rather, *the* definitive gospel – in its own right.

2. The Gospel Prologue

As is clear from a number of sources, the *DE* opens with a Johannine prologue, John 1:1–5. In its new context, however, this prologue is neither "Johannine" nor even "Tatianic." Where the *DE* functions anonymously as "Gospel," individual named evangelists or editors are out of place. The oldest Syriac manuscripts do not seem to have referred to them, for Ephrem's so-called *Commentary on the Diatessaron* presents itself as a com-

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15 A. Ciasca, *Tatiani Evangeliorum harmoniae arabice* (2 vols.; Rome, 1888), 1/1 (Latin), 2/1 (Arabic); A.-S. Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tatien* (Beirut, 1935), 2–3 (Arabic and French).

16 Marmardji, *Diatessaron* (see n. 15), 536.

17 Marmardji, *Diatessaron* (see n. 15), 2–3.

mentary on "the gospel" whose author or narrator is simply the anonymous figure of "the evangelist." As noted above, Arabic witnesses to a later edition of the *Diatessaron* do assign the various parts of the text to named evangelists, but this edition presupposes the normative status of the individual gospels and assumes the secondary role of a gospel harmony. In contrast, the *DE* was a gospel in its own right and had no need to highlight its own use of sources. Its prologue inevitably seems "Johannine" to those familiar with the Gospel of John, but it is Johannine only to the extent that (from a modern source- or redaction-critical standpoint) a triple tradition passage in Matthew is Markan. Like the Arabic *Diatessaron* or the late Syriac edition that underlies it, we too will identify passages as Matthean, Markan, Lukan, or Johannine – thereby reconstructing the editorial procedures that assembled this text rather than recreating the experience of its intended reader.

Tatian selects the opening of John to open his own gospel edition, and he thereby rejects the available alternatives: Matthew's genealogy (Matt 1:1–17), Mark's single line *incipit* (Mark 1:1), and Luke's prologue (Luke 1:1–4). All three of these feature in the later diatessaronic tradition, but none of them were originally present in *DE*.[18] Like any other evangelist-editor working with earlier sources, Tatian must decide what to include, what to modify, and what to omit, and his omissions may be as informative as his inclusions and modifications. It is the absence of Luke's prologue that is most readily perceptible, for the "Johannine" prologue (John 1:1–5) will immediately be followed by the opening section of the Lukan account of the annunciation and birth of John and the annunciation of Jesus (Luke 1:5–80). For Tatian, Luke's prologue is clearly unusable. It acknowledges and may seem to legitimize the gospel plurality that Tatian finds so problematic (cf. Luke 1:1). It differentiates sharply between the "eyewitnesses" and the later individuals who put the apostolic testimony into writing on their own initiative and with mixed success (cf. Luke 1:1 – 3). It thereby deviates from the collective apostolic authorization implied when Justin, Tatian's teacher, refers to gospels as "memoirs (ἀπομν□

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18 Lukan prologue, F 1. Matthean/Lukan genealogy, F 5 (Matt 1:1–17 + Luke 3:34–37); appendices to Arabic manuscripts B O E Sbath 1020 (see Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron* [see n. 3], 135–136). Manuscript A places the genealogies at the appropriate Matthean and Lukan locations within the main text. Mark 1:1 is cited in the Arabic preface (Marmardji, *Diatessaron* [see n. 15], 2–3). For Tatian's omission of the genealogies, see Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Haer. fab.* 1.20 (cited by Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron* [see n. 3], 41–42).

ημονεύματα) of the apostles,"[19] or when the followers of Marcion champion a single anonymous apostolic gospel.

Matthew's genealogy might in principle have been employed to open the new comprehensive gospel-edition, in preference to the Johannine passage – which, if it could not be incorporated elsewhere, might have been omitted. In general, *DE*'s underlying sequence is more Matthean than Johannine. While this Matthean orientation is not yet evident in *DE*'s opening narratives, it might have been otherwise: the sequence Matt 1:1–17/Luke 1:5–80/Matt 1:18–25 could have been shaped into an intelligible narrative. As a proponent of the Logos Christology learned from Justin, Tatian prefers John to Matthew, basing his gospel on the eternal divine Word rather than the descendant of Abraham and David.

On the evidence of Ephrem, Tatian's prologue takes over John 1:1–3ab unemended, down to "all things were made through him." In contrast, there are several significant variations in John 1:3c–5, attested by Ephrem and with some support from the Old Syriac (indicated by italics).[20]

John 1:3c–5: (1) ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ (2) ζωὴ ἦν (*v.l.* ἐστιν) (3) καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· (4) καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, (5) καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

DE (Ephr.): (1) ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ (2) *καὶ αὐτὸς* ζωὴ ἐστιν (3) καὶ *αὕτη ἡ* ζωή *ἐστιν* τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· (4) καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ *ἐφαίνετο*, (5) καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.[21]

At John 1:3–4, early patristic writers take ὃ γέγονεν in conjunction ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, not with χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν as in most modern translations. By inserting καὶ αὐτός at (2), *DE* converts ὃ γέγονεν ἐν αὐτῷ into a complete if compressed sentence meaning, "What has come into being is in him." The result is a three-part statement about

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19 Justin uses this term indiscriminately, whether he is referring to material from Matthew (*Dial.* 100.4, 101.3, 102.5, 103.6, 105.6, 106.4, 107.1), from Luke (*Dial.* 103.8, 105.1, 105.5, 106.1), or from Mark (*Dial.* 106.3). Justin associates these texts not with individual evangelists but with the apostolic testimony as a whole. His singular reference to "the memoirs compiled by the apostles and their followers" (*Dial.* 103.8) does not make him "the first witness to the collection of four gospels," as M. Hengel claims (*The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ* [London, 2000], 19–20).

20 In translating Ephrem's citations back into Greek, I assume that the Greek Diatessaron attested by Eusebius and the Dura fragment was substantially the same as Ephrem's Syriac one. On several occasions Ephrem refers to divergences between "the Greek" and the Syriac, and he is probably referring to a Greek Diatessaron rather than to separate gospels (Ephr. 2.17 [Luke 2:35], 5.2 [cf. John 2:2–3], 10.14 [Matt 11:25], 15.19 [cf. Matt 28:18], 19.17 [John 17:5]).

21 Ephr. 1.6: (1) ܗܘܐ ܕܗܘܐ ܗܘ ܡܕܡ ܒܗ (2) ܘܗܘ ܚܝܐ ܗܘ (3) ܚܝܐ ܘܕܝܢ ܗܘ ܢܘܗܪܐ ܕܒܢܝܢܫܐ (4) […] ܘܢܘܗܪܐ ܒܚܫܘܟܐ ܡܢܗܪ ܗܘܐ (= John 1:5 Syrᶜ).

the Logos's relation to creation. All things were made *through* the Logos, *without* him nothing was made, what was made is *in* him. At (2), the addition of the copula and the pronoun create another complete sentence, "And he is life," carefully co-ordinated with (3) "and that life is the light of humans" by the addition of the demonstrative and the consistent use of the present rather than the imperfect. In some manuscripts John 1:3c–4 reads, "What has come about in him *was* life, and the life *was* the light […]," while in others it reads, "What has come about in him *is* life, and the life *was* the light […]." In one set of Johannine manuscripts John 1:4–5 is speaking about the past, about what was or what did not happen, with the sole exception of the present tense φαίνει. In another set, present and past tenses alternate. Either way, the relationship between past and present is ambiguous. In *DE* that relationship is clarified:

John 1.4–5: (2) […] ἦν (*v.l.* ἐστιν) (3) […] ἦν […] (4) […] φαίνει, (5) […] οὐ κατέλαβεν.

DE (Ephr.): (2) […] ἐστιν (3) […] ἐστιν […] (4) […] ἐφαίνετο, (5) […] οὐ κατέλαβεν.

In consequence, the first pair of statements are smoothly and logically connected in their *DE* version: "And he is life, and that life is the light of humans." These statements are marked off from the preceding account of the role of the Logos in creation, which came about through him, which had no being without him, and which subsists in him. In proceeding to speak of life and light, *DE* identifies the Logos as the source of salvation for the present and future as well as creation in the past. Yet, it seems, this light is no new reality. It shines now, but it has always been shining; a dark world has never been bereft of light.

3. Zechariah the Priest

The transition from the light that the darkness did not overcome to Herod king of Judah and the priest Zechariah may seem abrupt. That was not the view of Ephrem, according to whom "the evangelist […] begins to say of the one whom the darkness did not overcome, 'It came to pass in the days of Herod king of Judah.'"[22] Ephrem here shows no interest in either the evangelist's sources or his identity. Knowing as we do that the evangelist was most probably Tatian and that his sources were John and Luke, it is possible to probe a little further into the logic of this transition. In John

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22 Ephr. 1.7.

1:6 we learn that "there came a man sent from God whose name was John." In the following verses John is presented as witness to the light, and these verses (1:7–8) will later make possible a skilfully constructed transition between the Lukan introduction to the ministry of John the Baptist and the remainder of the Johannine prologue:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar […] the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness, and he went into all the region about the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.") He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world […].[23]

The Luke-John transition here is a mirror-image of the John-Luke transition with which this gospel opens. John 1:1–5 introduces the Lukan account of the birth of John the Baptist, John 1:7–18 follows Luke's account of the beginning of his ministry. John 1:6 appears to have been omitted, however. For Tatian, the statement that "there came a man sent from God whose name was John" may have seemed no more than a brief and redundant summary of the Lukan birth narrative, which recounts at length *how* John came into the world, sent by God and heralded by an angel, and how he received his name, John (Luke 1:5–25, 57–66). The transition from John 1:1–5 to Luke 1:5–80 is simply an elaboration of the transition from John 1:5 to 1:6 that Tatian found in his source.

If Ephrem's citations are correct, Tatian's introduction to Zechariah and Elizabeth omitted three Lukan references to their priestly antecedents and their Mosaic piety:

Luke 1:5–6: "There was in the days of Herod king of Judea a certain priest, and his name was Zechariah, *of the division of Abijah*, and his wife *was of the daughters of Aaron and her name* was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord*, blameless."

DE (Ephr.): "There was in the days of Herod king of Judea a certain priest, and his name was Zechariah [ ] and his wife was [ ] Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, [ ] blameless *in all their conduct*."[24]

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23 Cf. F 13.3–9 = Arabic Diatessaron 3.38–48.
24 Ephr. 1.9.

It is possible but unlikely that it is Ephrem rather than Tatian who has omitted Luke's Jewish references. "Blameless in all their conduct" is probably a substitute for "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless," rather than an addition. Luke 1:6 Syrˢ would then be a harmonization of Luke and *DE:* "And they were both righteous before God, and they were walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, and they were blameless in all their conduct." If *DE* has removed the one reference to the Law, it may well have removed others.

Luke's reference to Zechariah's origins ἐξ ἐφημερίας Ἀβια displays – and is intended to display – an impressively precise knowledge of the scriptural institution of priesthood (cf. 1 Chr 24:10; 28:13). When he adds that Elizabeth too was of priestly origin and that both of them knew and scrupulously observed all the requirements of the Law of Moses, the effect is to set the birth of John (and indirectly of Jesus) in a highly particularistic Jewish context. Tatian ascribes to Zechariah and Elizabeth a more generic piety. He does not expect his readers to show an interest in the finer points of priestly genealogy, and he does not suppose that the Mosaic law is an essential prerequisite for a righteous life. The human sphere that corresponds to the divine sphere of the Logos is still recognizably Jewish, but its Jewishness has lost its sharply defined boundaries.

This erasing of Jewish particularities continues in Tatian's rendering of Zechariah's temple vision, if Ephrem can be relied upon and if variant Old Syriac readings are diatessaronic:

Luke 1.9–13: "[…] entering the temple *of the Lord. And all* the multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of *incense.* And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing to the right of the altar *of incense.* And he was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer is heard and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall call his name John.'"

DE (Ephr., Syrˢ): "*And when* he entered the temple the multitude of the people were *standing and* praying at the hour of *worship.* And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing to the right of the altar. And he was troubled *and confused* when he saw *the angel*, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him, 'Do not be afraid, Zechariah, *for behold, God has heard the voice of your prayer* and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall call his name John.'"

According to Ephrem, John's birth "was announced from the right of the altar."[25] It took place "at the hour of worship," "at the hour of prayer when

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25 Ephr. 1.10.

petitions are made."[26] The Lukan references to the hour and altar of in-
cense are missing here, and their absence probably goes back to Tatian.
Zechariah enters the temple not to offer incense but to pray, together
with "the multitude of the people" who are "standing and praying" *within*
the temple, not "outside" it as in Luke. Zechariah here participates in con-
gregational prayer and worship rather than performing the specifically
priestly rite of offering incense. His prayer, however, is offered "in the
holy of holies,"[27] from where he emerges dumb to the congregation gath-
ered in the outer part of the temple building. What Zechariah prays for is a
son, and the angel's reassurance – "God has heard the voice of your pray-
er" – is therefore an instant answer to a prayer that has only just been
made.

In Luke too Zechariah is told that "your prayer is heard" (Luke 1:10).
Yet, while the people outside are said to be praying, Zechariah's role is not
to pray but to offer incense. Again, precise knowledge of scripturally based
custom is displayed: there are pentateuchal specifications for an altar of
incense, located outside the holy of holies, on which the priest is to
burn incense morning and evening (Exod 30:1–10). In Luke, then,
there is no real connection between the occasion (the offering of incense
in the temple) and the announcement of an answer to prayer. It is left to the
reader to conclude that Zechariah must have prayed for a son on some pre-
vious occasion that is left unspecified. Tatian seems to have addressed this
anomaly by eliminating the references to incense and by inventing a spe-
cial hour of worship or prayer to serve as an appropriate setting for Zecha-
riah to pray for a son and to receive an instant response. The angelic re-
sponse is expanded, underlining its importance in Tatian's rendering of
this narrative: "God has heard the voice of your prayer." In Luke 1:13,
it is said only that διότι εἰσηκούσθη ἡ δέησίς σου. Tatian's expanded ver-
sion echoes Ps 65:19: διὰ τοῦτο *εἰσήκουσέν* μου ὁ θεός, προσέσχεν *τῇ φωνῇ
τῆς δεήσεώς μου* ("God has heard the voice of your prayer!").

As in the *DE* version of Luke's introduction to Zechariah and Elizabeth,
narrative details specific to the Jewish priestly institution give way to a
more generic piety. Zechariah was a priest, perhaps even a high priest,
but his place within the Davidic ordering of priestly divisions is no longer
important. Zechariah and Elizabeth were "righteous before God" as in
Luke, but that is equivalent to their being "blameless in all their conduct"
rather than "walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the

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26 Ephr. 1.10, 14.
27 Ephr. 1.14.

Lord." Rather than performing a distinctive priestly rite at the prescribed time and place, Zechariah offers the generic prayer of the childless within a specially constructed context.

4. Mary the Virgin

(1) In *DE* the Lukan dialogue between Gabriel and Mary is modified at several points (cf. Luke 1:30–34):

And the angel said to her, "Fear not, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, *in your virginity* you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, *for he shall save his people from sins.*[28] He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end." And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, *for behold, no man has known me?*"[29]

Mary will conceive *in her virginity*. The addition rules out a conclusion that might be drawn from *DE*'s source, that Mary receives the annunciation as a betrothed virgin (cf. Luke 1:27) but that she will presumably have lost her virginity when she conceives. In itself, "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son" does not adequately secure the miraculous event that it intends. In the *DE* version, Mary's virginity extends not only to her conception but also to her giving birth. Ephrem is familiar with the tradition that Mary gave birth in a cave near Bethlehem, and he probably knew the associated story of the midwife Salome who discovers that Mary remained physically intact even after the birth (cf. Prot. Jas. 19:1–20:4).[30] While it is unclear how far this material was represented in *DE*, a virginal birth as well as conception is evidently in view here.

Like *DE*, the Protevangelium of James transfers the Matthean explanation of Jesus's name ("[…] for he will save his people from their sins," Matt 1:21) into a Lukan context:[31]

Matt 1:21: τέξεται δὲ υἱόν, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν· αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.

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28 Ephr. 1.25, cf. Matt 1:21; Justin, *1 Apol.* 33.5; Prot. Jas. 11:3.

29 Ephr. 1.25, Luke 1:34 Peshitta. Luke 1:34: ἐπεὶ ἄνδρα οὐ γινώσκω.

30 Ephr. 21.20: Joseph is said to have "served him [Jesus] at his birth in the cave," presumably by fetching a midwife.

31 Greek text: E. de Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques* (Brussels, 1961); B.D. Ehrman and Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations* (Oxford, 2011).

Luke 1:31: καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν.

Prot. Jas. 11:3: Δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐπισκιάσει σοι, διὸ καὶ ὁ γεννώμενον ἅγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς Ὑψίστου. καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν, αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.[32]

DE: καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν, αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.[33]

Tatian has probably derived the *DE* version of this from Justin:

Justin, *1 Apol.* 33.5: Ὅθεν καὶ ὁ ἄγγελος πρὸς τὴν παρθένον εἶπε, καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν, αὐτὸς γὰρ σώσει τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν.[34]

In *DE*, however, the transfer from a Matthean to a Lukan context is also necessitated by the construction of the narrative. In Matthew, the interpretation of Jesus's name occurs in the context of the annunciation to Joseph, which must occur some time after the Lukan annunciation to Mary. In the *DE* context where both annunciations are included, it would make little sense to defer the interpretation of the name to the second of them. A redaction-critical approach to *DE* must be as alert to issues of narrative construction as to theological tendencies.

(2) Negotiating the transition from the Lukan to the Matthean annunciation will require special skills of the evangelist-redactor. In Luke, the aftermath of the annunciation is celebratory. Mary visits Elizabeth and Zechariah, she is welcomed with a prophetic acclamation, she sings her own song of triumph, and then, after three months, returns home (Luke 1:39–56). She is therefore not present at the birth of John (Luke 1:57–80). Having brought her back to Nazareth, the later evangelist now turns to another of his sources to learn what happened next. He reads in Matthew that Mary, engaged to Joseph, "was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit" (Matt 1:18). This is, indeed, as one would expect after the three months of Luke 1:56. The problem is Mary's complete silence and passivity, which contrasts so sharply with Luke's portrayal. Matthew's Mary makes no attempt to explain her pregnancy to Joseph, exposing her engagement and her person to grave danger. The Matthean evangelist may reasonably take it for granted that a Mary who protested her innocence would hardly be believed; if Joseph is to be reassured, an angel is required. Yet, given *DE*'s

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32 De Strycker, *Protévangile de Jacques* (see n. 31), 116.
33 Ephr. 1.25.
34 M. Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris Apologiae pro Christianis* (PTS 38; Berlin, 1994).

use of his Lukan source, a silent and unprotesting Mary is unacceptable. It seems that it is Tatian as well as Ephrem who addresses the problem as follows:

DE (Ephr.): "The birth of the Messiah was like this. When Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit.[35] *Mary assured Joseph that her conception was from the Spirit, but he did not accept [it]. And when he saw that her countenance was clear and her womb heavy*, Joseph did not wish to denounce Mary, being a just man, *but he did not receive her as her husband, for he thought she had had intercourse with another.* [So, in his righteousness, he lamented that he could not take her, yet he did not denounce her.] So he resolved to divorce her quietly. Therefore an angel appeared to him and said, 'Joseph, son of David […].'"[36]

The italicized passage is introduced by the particle *lam*, apparently identifying it as a citation.[37] The reference to Joseph's rejection of Mary's protestations contradicts Ephrem's own view, which is that it is inconceivable that he could have disbelieved her.[38] The passage is therefore text rather than commentary, although Ephrem may here summarize a *DE* passage of dialogue and soliloquy. Passing over the parenthesis, which may stem from Ephrem, the passage has been assembled by inserting two new elements (B1 and B2, below) into the Matthean source narrative (A1, A2, A3):

(A1) When Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together one to one, she was found to be with child of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 1:18). (B1) Mary assured Joseph that her conception was from the Spirit, but he did not accept [it]. And when he saw that her countenance was clear and her womb heavy, (A2) Joseph did not wish to denounce Mary, being a just man (cf. Matt 1:19a), (B2) but he did not receive her as her husband, for he thought she had had intercourse with another. (A3) So he resolved to divorce her quietly. Therefore an angel appeared to him and said, "Joseph, son of David […]" (cf. Matt 1:19b–20).

Here, B1 resolves the tension between Luke's active and vocal Mary and Matthew's passive and silent one: Mary *did* explain the truth of her situation, but was disbelieved. B2 clarifies Matthew's reference to the intended separation (Matt 1:19b), and makes still clearer the problem that the angelic vision is intended to solve.

The author of the Protevangelium of James faces exactly the same problem of creating a convincing transition between Luke and Matthew, but

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35 Ephr. 2.1.

36 Ephr. 2.3–4.

37 Other examples of *lam* + quotation in Ephr. 1.7 (John 1:5); 1.9 (Luke 1:5); 1.10 (Luke 1:76); 1.22 (Luke 1:13); 2.3 (Matt 1:20). For the text, see Leloir, *Folios Additionels* (see n. 8), 153 (col. 1v 23–33).

38 Ephr. 2.4.

resolves it differently. Acclaimed by Elizabeth as in Luke, Mary suffers a sudden unexplained memory-lapse and can no longer understand even her own *Magnificat:*

But Mary forgot the mysteries the Angel Gabriel had spoken. And she looked up to heaven and said, "Lord, who am I that all the women of the earth will bless me?" And she passed three months with Elizabeth, and day by day her belly grew. And Mary returned home fearful, and hid herself from the sons of Israel.[39]

As in *DE*, the return home means a transition from the Lukan to the Matthean source and a difficult encounter with Joseph. This occurs in the sixth month of Mary's pregnancy, when Joseph returns from an extended period of building activity, notices her pregnancy, and, without speaking to her, embarks on a grief-stricken monologue: "Who has done this wickedness in my house and defiled the virgin?"[40] Then the question is put to Mary:

"Why have you humiliated your soul, you who were reared in the Holy of holies and received food from the hand of an angel?" And she wept bitterly, saying, "I am pure, I have not known any man." And Joseph said to her, "So how did you get pregnant?" She said, "As the Lord lives, I do not know how it happened!"[41]

So Joseph, weighing his options, decides on separation. Then the angel of the Lord appears to him in a dream, and he understands at last.

In the *DE* version of this train of events as attested by Ephrem, the awkward and artificial memory-lapse has disappeared and there is no abject confession of ignorance: "Mary assured Joseph that her conception was from the Spirit, but he did not accept [it]." He is in the wrong, she is in the right. His slanderous accusation of adultery is in stark contrast to the acceptance Mary found with Anna and, it seems, with Zechariah. Here again is Ephrem quoting *DE:*

[...] Therefore the angel said to him, "Do not fear to take Mary," and again it is written, "He was living with her chastely," and so on, and, "Therefore they killed Zechariah, because he had accepted Mary in her virginity, for the virgins were gathered together in one place." Or it was when the children were being killed and his son was sought from his hand and he made him flee to the wilderness that they killed him at the altar, as our Lord said.[42]

Here, Ephrem refers to two different accounts of the death of Zechariah. According to the first, Zechariah was put to death for acknowledging the

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39 Prot. Jas. 12:2–3.
40 Prot. Jas. 13:1.
41 Prot. Jas. 13:2.
42 Ephr. 2.5.

virginity of Mary; the allusion is obscure, but it may indicate that *DE* made at least passing reference to Zechariah's death. The second account corresponds exactly to the Protevangelium, whose author assumes that Zechariah the father of John is also Zechariah son of Berechiah, murdered "between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matt 23:35; cf. Luke 11:51). Zechariah was put to death for failing to divulge his son's whereabouts during the massacre of the innocents (Prot. Jas. 22:1–24:4). There are, then, possible parallels between *DE* and the Protevangelium of James in accounts of Mary's confrontation with Joseph and the death of Zechariah. Indeed, the Protevangelium may have provided the inspiration for this *DE* material, although the later evangelist is more constrained by his Matthean and Lukan sources than is his predecessor.

(3) In the flow of *DE*'s narrative, Mary's virginal conception initially gives rise to joy and praise in the home of Elizabeth and Zechariah. Subsequently it becomes a *skandalon*, generating serious tensions as Mary returns to the home she shares with Joseph, and occasioning Zechariah's martyrdom. The heightening of Mary's role in this retelling of the gospel story corresponds to a certain downgrading of Joseph's.

In Matt 1, Joseph and Mary each have distinct theological roles. Mary is the bearer of the miraculously conceived child who is Emmanuel, God with us. Joseph is the descendant of David, who, in spite of the fatherless birth, secures for Jesus a messianic status as "son of David"; and he is also the descendant of Abraham who integrates Jesus into the scriptural history of the people of Israel. Prior to the birth itself, announced in Matt 2:1, Joseph and Mary are carefully co-ordinated, one representing continuity with scriptural roots, the other the inbreaking of what is radically new.

The symmetry is already disturbed by Luke, and disappears entirely in *DE.* In Luke, Joseph still retains his ancestral claim as son of David:

Luke 2:4–5: "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea to the city of David which is called Bethlehem – for he was of the house and family of David – to be enrolled with Mary his betrothed, who was with child."

DE (Syrˢ, Ephr.): "And Joseph also was going up from Nazareth, a city of Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because *both of them were* from the house of David – *he and* Mary his *wife*, who was with child – to be enrolled."[43]

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43 Ephr. 1.25: "he [the evangelist] says of Joseph and Mary that 'both of them were from the house of David'" (ܬܪ̈ܝܗܘܢ ܗܘܘ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܕܘܝܕ; Syrˢ: ܬܪ̈ܝܗܘܢ ܗܘܘ ܡܢ ܒܝܬ ܕܘܝܕ).

A statement about Joseph – that, as a member of the Davidic house, he provides the link with Bethlehem, the royal city, and with the messiahship – is reapplied to "both of them […], he and Mary his wife." In sharing Davidic status with Mary, Joseph effectively loses it. Thus *DE* omits both the Matthean and the Lukan genealogies: for Luke follows Matthew in tracing Jesus's descent through a link to Joseph that does not actually exist (Luke 3:23; cf. Matt 1:16). If Jesus is of the seed of David it must be through Mary his mother, for, in spite of Matthew, a Davidic descent through Joseph is hard to understand. When Ignatius speaks of Jesus Christ as "of the family of David and of Mary," Joseph has already disappeared from view.[44] In the Protevangelium, the child Mary is identified as "one of the undefiled virgins from the tribe of David."[45] According to Justin, Christ the son of God "existed before the morning star and the moon, and through this Virgin born of the race of David submitted to becoming flesh […]."[46] The promised virgin who will conceive and bear a son has become a royal virgin.

5. Conclusion

The so-called "Diatessaron" was originally a gospel rather than a gospel harmony. It attests not the existence of a four gospel canon, the harmony and coherence of which needs to be demonstrated, but the availability to its redactor of four or more sources, requiring the exercise of critical judgment and freedom. The redactor's overarching aim is to produce a singular, coherent, and definitive gospel book out of his plural and diverse sources. His repertoire of procedures includes *emendation*, *juxtaposition, omission*, and *amplification*, precisely the procedures that can be demonstrated or assumed in the case of earlier evangelists.

(1) A source's wording may be *emended* in order to reduce apparent anomalies or achieve a new formulation of a substantive theological point.

(2) Since meaning is in part contextual, new meanings and significances are to be expected where an evangelist-redactor has *juxtaposed* material from different sources.

(3) Redactors are not obliged to make use of all available source material, even where they are striving for comprehensiveness. Some source ma-

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44 Ign. *Trall.* 9:1; cf. *Smyrn.* 1:1.
45 Prot. Jas. 10:1.
46 Justin, *Dial.* 45.4.

terial may therefore be *omitted* where it is deemed to be problematic or superfluous.

(4) Source material may need to be *amplified*, so as to address perceived gaps or shortcomings in an earlier version or integrate it into its new context.

"Late" in relation to its individual sources, *DE* nevertheless predates the full emergence of a fourfold gospel that guarantees the integrity of its individual components. *DE* still reflects the fluidity of the early phase of gospel-writing, in which any one version of the gospel can become a source for another.[47]

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47 See my *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 2013).