

7Q5 and the Gospel of Mark

by
Giuseppe Guarino



The picture to the left is the famous 7Q5 papyrus fragment, found one of the famous Qumran caves. It is part of a scroll dated 50 AD.

Some scholars believe it is part (6:52-53) of the Gospel of Mark.

Is it really possible that the Gospel of Mark had already been written at such an early date and had already reached the Qumran community?

It is difficult, if not impossible, to underestimate the magnitude of such a discovery, if time and research will prove it to be correct.

1. THE FACTS FOR THE IDENTIFICATION WITH MARK

The identification of the fragment 7Q5 with Mark 6:52-53 is not yet unanimously accepted. Though, I believe, if not abundant or overwhelming, at least sufficient and reasonable evidence has already been provided to this end by some scholars of the past 30 years.

It was Joseph O' Callaghan who first noticed how the Greek letters of this papyrus fragment would not possibly combine with any other known Greek text except that of the Gospel of Mark 6:52-53.

The text of Mark 6:52-53 reads:

“οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ’ ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη. Καὶ τ(δ)ιαπεράσαντες ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν Γεννησαρὲτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν.”

King James Version

“For they considered not [*the miracle*] of the loaves: for their heart was hardened. And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore.”

Let us see how the text must have been in the scroll.

ΣΥΝΗΚΑΝ **Ε**ΠΙΤΟΙΣ ΑΡΤΟΙΣ
ΑΛΛΗΝΑ **Υ**ΤΩ **ΝΗ** ΚΑΡΔΙΑ ΠΕΠΩΡΩ
ΜΕΝ **Η** **Κ**ΑΙ **Τ**Α ΠΕΡΑΣΑΝΤΕΣ
ΗΛΘΟΝ ΕΙΣ ΓΕ **Ν**ΝΗ **Σ**ΑΡΕΤ ΚΑΙ
ΠΡΟΣΩΡΜΙΣ **Θ**ΙΣΑΝ



O' Callaghan was led to this passage by the unique detail of the **NNH**, found in the fourth line, with which, he believed, no other passage of Greek literature would so perfectly fit like the Marcan identification with the mention of the town of Gennesaret.

Another very important fact in favor of the identification of the fragment with the Gospel of Mark, is the space between what today corresponds to the end of Mark 6:52 and the beginning of Mark 6:53 – see the picture to the right.

(πεπωρωμένη – space - Καὶ διαπεράσαντες). In today's books, when a paragraph or a sentence ends and another begins, we find a simple period. It is conventional of today's languages. The same was represented in the writings of the time by a space, left between the end of a section and the beginning of another. This perfectly fits the context of Mark.



This fact is so evident that the NKJV Greek English Interlinear New Testament, for example, entitles the narrative beginning with verse 53 as follows: "Many Touch Jesus and Are Made Whole."

The RSV also heads the passage beginning at v. 53: "The Healing of the Sick in Gennesaret."

The scribe of the 7Q5 manuscript left a space exactly to the same end. This is a very strong point in favor of the attribution of Mark.

2. DIFFICULTIES

The difficulties arising in this portion of Scripture are quite interesting.

Gennesaret: town or region? – a textual problem

The website www.biblos.com offers a list of the variant readings for Mark 6:53. I thank the owners of it for letting me use their work.

Westcott and Hort / Nestle-Aland 27th ed. / United Bible Societies 4th ed.

Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν

Tischendorf 8th Ed.

Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν

Greek Orthodox Church

Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἀπῆλθον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν

Stephanus Textus Receptus (1550) and Majority Text

Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἦλθον ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν

Biblia Sacra Vulgata

et cum transfretassent pervenerunt in terram Gennesareth et adplicuerunt

It is amazing how a little change in the order of words and the presence or absence of εἰς before Gennesaret may change the meaning of a passage entirely.

The translation of the Majority text and of the Textus Receptus is that in the King James Version. "And when they had passed over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and drew to the shore."

The Revised Standard Version follows the so called Standard Text, the Nestle-Aland, followed also by Westcott and Hort, Tischendorf and the UBS. It translates: "And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore."

The Majority text speaks of a land of Gennesaret.

It is recorded in history of a town of Gennesaret that existed till the times of the Assyrian rise. After that, until the times of Jesus and after, no town existed in that site. The lake was called Gennesaret, just like the land and probably being named so after the town of old.

If the original text of Mark included εἰς before the name Gennesaret, the Gospel would be clearly indicating the name of a town.

Let us see the occurrence in the Gospel of Mark to prove this assumption.

In Mark 1:21, 2:1, 8:22, 9:33, 10:32, 10:33, 10:46, 11:1, 11:11, 11:15, 11:27, 15:41, εἰς comes before the name a the town.

In Mark 1:14 εἰς is followed by the article -τὴν- and then by the name of the region of Galilea. The same in Mark 14:28.

In Mark 1:39 the example is quite similar to the above. “εἰς ὅλην τὴν Γαλιλαίαν”, “In all the land of Galilea.”

εἰς is clearly followed by the article when indicating a region. Similar construction in Mar 10:1, Mark 16:7. If followed by the name of the place without the article, invariably Mark speaks of a town.

Considering the above facts, the construction of the Standard Text, requires that at the times of Jesus there was a town named Gennesaret.

Such a thing is not proved by history. More probably, the reverse is true. At least, as far as archaeological evidence is available today.

The famous Jewish historian of the first century, Josephus speaks in his writings of Gennesaret as a region. He also mentions the lake bearing the name.

The evidence in favour of the reading of the Majority text is overwhelming. My preference for the Majority text is spoken of in an article available in my website.

The Traditional reading is perfectly in accord with what we know from history. But more than this, it appears evident by the context too, that Mark doesn't speak of a city, that a region and not a town must be intended in the passage.

But how can we explain the rise of any of the two differing variant readings and consequently determine which one is the possible original?

It is hard to explain. Maybe some scribe-editor tried to amend the text and changed it to say what he believed it actually said, if he believed that Gennesaret was a town. He changed it according to the marcian use. The simple mistake behind that was that there was no town of Gennesaret at the times of Jesus.

7Q5 complicates the matter even more, since if we want the text of Mark to fit its surviving letters, we have to omit the words ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν altogether. So, the text in it would say: “Καὶ διαπεράσαντες ἦλθον εἰς Γεννησαρέτ καὶ προσωρμίσθησαν.”

Thiede explains this in a very interesting way. It is his opinion that the textual variant reading found in the Qumran scroll is the original one. Since it was written before the year 70 AD, it spoke of a town of Gennesaret, well known at the time the Gospel was written – so he believes. Later, with the Romans destroying it, the words ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν were added to avoid confusion in the reader's mind between Gennesaret the town and the lake bearing the same name.

Personally, I consider this possibility quite remote, for the reasons already explained. I believe it would be more probable that this sentence had fallen victim of a scribe following a consolidated practice, very well attested by the surviving papyrus manuscript, to omit whatever he thought unnecessary. Or even shorten the text by omitting it and adding εἰς.

We have to admit we do not know.

This difficulty weakens the point for the identification of 7Q5 with Mark but by no means it makes it impossible.

The **v** of the second line and the **δ - τ** letter change in the third.

A letter that deserves particular attention is the **v** in the second line.



The text of Mark fits only if we believe the fragment to read: **των** in the second line. This way we can believe it to be a part of the whole sentence of verse 52: “ου γαρ συνηκαν επι τοις αρτοις ην γαρ αυ**των** η καρδια πεπωρωμενη”

Thiede is convinced that what we see today is what remains of a **v** and the identification with Mark is sure. He brought the dilemma to the attention of the Israel Scientific Police Department to analyze the manuscript with a special microscope. The identification with the letter as a **v** seems to have been confirmed.

Another detail we need to explain is the **t** of the third line, which would be replacing the **δ** at the beginning of the word **διαπεράσαντες**.



Studying modern Greek one of the things that I had to notice was the fact that, for example, the word used also in the Koinè Greek of the New Testament **πάντα**, “panta” – all – is today pronounced “panda.”

Something similar happens today in English, where words like *better*, are pronounced by Americans as if the *tt* would be a *d* in the mouth of an English person.

In my land, Sicily, people have a natural tendency to pronounce the Italian *t* with a soft *d* at its place.

In this so common perspective, so natural a change in common languages between the *t* and *d* sound, it should not surprise anyone if such a change occurred during the first half of the I century too, especially in a language used by non native speakers.

Thiede gives evidence of such a *d – t* change occurring in a Greek writing in the town of Jerusalem. This simple example would be enough to accept the change in the spelling as due to the current pronunciation of the Greek word in

the Jerusalem area. Often scribes were writing under dictation. Of course, this would make it easier misspelling the words entering the text according to the accent of who was dictating.

The reading of the works of Thiede has been for me a personal, incredible journey, into the potentials of a branch of studies that most of New Testament students, including myself, so little know of: Papyrology. Thiede's, as O'Callaghan's approach, to old papyrus and manuscript evidence in general, is entirely different than the scholars' we are used to find mentioned in Textual Criticism books or Commentaries on the Bible.

Usually, the results of critical studies in the text has resulted in affecting even the dating of the manuscripts of the New Testament, causing, if Thiede's position will prove correct, a great damage to all the fields of Biblical studies.

The point can be very easily represented. Critics believe the Gospels to be a late product of the first century. This is an assumption. There is no objective evidence to prove it historically. Theories and not facts, though often contrary tends to be insinuated in the mind of the readers of their books. To their conclusions the scholars must arrive analyzing the text itself as we know it today. It is not much to rely on, since it is all close to be depending on personal judgment of scholars only. Is it any wonder that the school of Baur concluded that the Gospel of John was a product of the II century? P125 – discovered too late to stop Baur's wrong speculations - stands as conclusive, objective evidence against his very intriguing but false assumptions.

Are we at the dawn of a new day, when 7Q5 can provide conclusive, objective evidence that late date to the Gospel's originals are to be revisited and reconsidered? May be.

It is necessary to remind the reader how historical evidence, on the other hand, points to the unanimous belief of the early church concerning the Gospels. They were believed to be the product of honest eyewitnesses of the events told.

Eusebius bishop of Caesarea in the early fourth century wrote his famous *Ecclesiastical history*, where he clearly states what the so called traditional view has been and is. Let us enquire into his text and consider his own words.

“So greatly, however, did the splendor of piety enlighten the mind of Peter’s hearers, that it was not sufficient to hear but once, nor to receive the unwritten doctrine of the gospel of God, but they persevered in every variety of entreaties, to solicit Mark as the companion of Peter, and whose gospel we have, that he should leave them a monument of the doctrine thus orally communicated, in writing. Nor did they cease their solicitations until they had prevailed with the man, and thus become the means of that history which is called the gospel of Mark. They say also, that the apostle (Peter,) having ascertained what was done by the revelation of the Spirit, was delighted with the zealous ardor expressed by these men, and that the history obtained his authority for the purpose of being read in the churches. This account is given by Clement, in the sixth book of his Institutions, whose testimony is corroborated by that of Papias, bishop of Hierapolis. But Peter makes mention of Mark in the first epistle, which he is also said to have composed at the same city of Rome, and that he shows this fact, by calling the city by an unusual trope, Babylon; thus: “The church at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you, as also my son Marcus.” 1 Pet. v.13.”

The Ecclesiastical history of Eusebius Pamphilus, translated by Isaac Boyle, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1991, pages 64-65.

Of course, Eusebius’ words deserve more respect than blind acceptance, but they reflect what must have been the church feelings and beliefs at such an early time of its history, in the first twenty years of the fourth century. At the same time, his words also communicate to the reader the church’s deep respect for the Scriptures and their apostolic origin and consequent authority.

The critical schools of the XIX and XX century have long traveled in an entirely opposite direction, which I must add, seemed to be led only by the blind desire to disprove the traditional faith of the Church. Such an approach would be worth of little or no mention if such was the attitude of people outside of the church. On the contrary, it is a strange and noteworthy phenomena that this tendency has risen inside the Church and the Christian schools.

O’ Callaghan and Thiede and their approach to the New Testament manuscript evidence, on the contrary, though do not receive the traditional testimony of the church, at the same time, move forward in the direction of it,

looking for the truth of the Gospel history, with the same attitude of deep love and respect due to God's Word.

Further research is needed. So far, I would be very inclined to believe that Mark's Gospel was really there at Qumran.