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Crux Interpretum in Mk 1:2bc. The Search for a Source

Crux Interpretum w Mk 1:2bc. Poszukiwanie źródła

Abstract. The first citation of the OT in Mk 1:2a poses a significant challenge. Although the citation formula indicates the book of Isaiah as the source of the quotation, the text appears to derive from Ex 23:20/Mal 3:1. However, a particularly problematic aspect is the use of the translation of the quotation: ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου. The future form κατασκευάσει does not occur in the LXX. This raises the question of the origin of the first citation. Does it come from an early Christian source, of which the first known evidence is Mk 1:2c? One has to keep in mind that the verb κατασκευάζω is an elevated form from the point of view (often used by Josephus Flavius or Philo of Alexandria). The text of the citation holds specific authority for all the Synoptics that cite it; however, there is a change in translation in Mark. It is argued in this research that ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου might be a NT writer's translation of פָּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ. Indeed, his fixed expression, which appears only three times in the Bible (Is 40:3; 57:14; 62:10), is rendered by Aquila (Is 40:3; 57:14), Symmachus (Is 62:10), and Theodotion (Is 40:3; 62:10) with the same cognate verb as in Mk 1:2, namely ἀποσκευάσατε τὴν ὁδόν. Analogously, Mark could render the translation in the same manner as they did.

Streszczenie. Pierwsze cytowanie Starego Testamentu w Mk 1,2a stanowi poważne wyzwanie. Chociaż formuła cytatu wskazuje Księgę Izajasza jako źródło cytatu, tekst wydaje się pochodzić z Wj 23,20/Mal 3,1. Szczególnie problematyczny jest jednak sposób użycia tłumaczenia cytatu: ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου. Forma przyszła κατασκευάσει nie występuje w LXX. Rodzi to pytanie o pochodzenie pierwszego cytatu. Czy pochodzi on z wczesnochrześcijańskiego źródła, którego pierwszym znanym dowodem jest Mk 1,2c? Należy pamiętać, że czasownik κατασκευάζω jest formą podniosłą z punktu widzenia (często używaną przez Józefa Flawiusza lub Filona z Aleksandrii). Tekst cytatu ma szczególny autorytet dla wszystkich synoptyków, którzy go cytują; jednak w Ewangelii Marka występuje zmiana w tłumaczeniu. W niniejszym badaniu argumentuje się, że ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου może być tłumaczeniem פָּנּוּ דֶרֶךְ przez autora Nowego Testamentu. Rzeczywiście, jego stałe wyrażenie, które pojawia się tylko trzy razy w Biblii (Iz 40:3; 57:14; 62:10), zostało przetłumaczone przez Akwilę (Iz 40:3; 57:14), Symmachusa (Iz 62:10) i Teodocjona (Iz 40:3; 62:10) za pomo-

czą tego samego pokrewnego czasownika, co w Mk 1:2, a mianowicie ἀποσκευάσατε τὴν ὁδόν. Analogicznie, Marek mógł przetłumaczyć to wyrażenie w taki sam sposób, jak oni.

Keywords: Old Testament, New Testament, Gospel of Mark, Septuagint, OT citations.

Słowa kluczowe: Stary Testament, Nowy Testament, Ewangelia Marka, Septuaginta, cytaty ze Starego Testamentu.

Introduction

The first citation of the OT in the Gospel of Mark poses a significant challenge for exegetes.¹ The citation formula in Mk 1:2a indicates the book of Isaiah as the source of the quotation. Nevertheless, it looks like Ex 23:20/Mal 3:1 (Rytel-Andrianik 2014; Rytel-Andrianik 2016). All the more problematic, however, is what follows: ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου, since the form κατασκευάσει is never used in the LXX. This raises the question of where the first citation text comes from, and of its *Vorlage*.

In this context, Rotman suggested that “the theme of the ‘preparation of the way’ connects the quotation in Mark 1:2 with that in 1:3, which suggests that for Mark the emphasis in the first part of the quotation is primarily on Mal 3:1, from which ὁς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου is taken, rather than on Exod 23:20” (Rotman 2020, 84).

One has to keep in mind also, as Shively wrote, that “Mark uses near verbatim, conflated, adopted, and implied scriptural sources both with and without explicit markers.” (Shively 2023, 240). Moreover, as she added, “Mark’s exegetical strategy is exemplary in the prologue (1:1–13)” (Shively 2023, 245).

At the beginning, there are some texts to consider:

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Ex 23:20 | הנה אנכי שלח מלאך לפניך לשמרך בדרך ולהביאך אל המקום אשר הכנתי |
| Ex 23:20 (LXX) | Καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ἵνα φυλάξῃ σε ἐν τῇ ὁδῷ, ὅπως εἰσαγάγῃ σε εἰς τὴν γῆν, ἣν ἡτοίμασά σοι. |

¹ This article presents an updated version of the study carried out during my research at Oxford University.

| | | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Mal 3:1 | | הגני שלח מלאכי ופנה דרך לפני |
| Mal 3:1 (LXX) | | ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου, καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου, |
| Mal 3:1 (Aquila) | | καὶ σχολάσει ὁδὸν... |
| Mal 3:1 (Theodotion) | | καὶ ἐτοιμάσει ὁδὸν... |
| Mal 3:1 (Symmachus) | | καὶ ἀποσκευάσει ὁδὸν... |
| Is 40:3 | | קול קורא במדבר פנו דרך יהוה ישרו בערבה מסלה לאלהינו |
| Is 40:3 (LXX) | | φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν· |
| Is 40:3 (Aquila) | | ἀποσκευάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου... |
| Is 40:3 (Theodotion) | | ἀποσκευάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου... |
| Is 40:3 (Symmachus) | | εὐτρεπίσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου... |
| Mk 1:2–3 | Ex 23:20a/ Mal 3:1 | [...] καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ· ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου |
| | Is 40:3 | φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ |
| Mt 3:3 | Is 40:3 | οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ῥηθεὶς διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ |
| Mt 11:10 | Ex 23:20a/ Mal 3:1 | οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου. |
| Lk 3:4 | Is 40:3 | ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου· φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἑτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ· πᾶσα φάραγξ πληρωθήσεται καὶ πᾶν ὄρος καὶ βουνὸς ταπεινωθήσεται, καὶ ἔσται τὰ σκολιά εἰς εὐθείαν καὶ αἱ τραχεῖαι εἰς ὁδοὺς λείας· καὶ ὥσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ τὸ σωτήριον τοῦ θεοῦ. |
| Lk 7:27 | Ex 23:20a/ Mal 3:1 | οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου. |

The particle ἰδού is a natural translation of the Hebrew הִנֵּה, and therefore, one should not consider the citation to have only LXX provenance. Notably, however, in both the Hebrew and Greek OT texts of Ex 23:20, there is a personal

pronoun of the first person singular, but this is absent in the Marcan text. The emphatic form **אני** would be difficult to dismiss in a citation from this source.²

The Hebrew verb **שלח** in the qal is usually translated with ἀποστέλλω. Instead, **שלח** in the piel is generally rendered by ἐξαποστέλλω (Hatch, Redpath 1998, 141–145, 488–489). Why, then, is the **שלח** of Mal 3:1 (qal) translated by the Greek verb “to send” with a prefix, which is usually used to translate **שלח** in the piel? Is it perhaps to introduce grammatical and lexical parallelism with the following verb ἐπιβλέπω, also with a prefix, or possibly that, in the case of a Hebrew participle, the Greek translation is not so consistent? Interestingly enough, the verb **שלח** with the noun **מלאך** appears in the Hebrew Bible 24 times,³ but is used only twice as a participle, namely in Ex 23:20 and Mal 3:1. In addition, from these 24 occurrences, the only other non-finite form of **שלח** is used in Ezek 17:15, which is translated in the LXX by ἐξαποστέλλω.

In contrast, in Ezek 23:16, this Greek verb is used to translate a finite form of the Hebrew verb **שלח**.⁴ Is the citation’s form a result of the syntax and language choice used by the writer of Ezekiel, or a matter of the translation of the above finite/non-finite form, or both? In any case, it shows that the use of ἐξαποστέλλω in Mal 3:1 as an equivalent of a participle **שלח** in qal is not unusual.

The use of personal pronouns in Mk 1:2–3 is very problematic (cf. Delorme, 1997, 378–384).⁵ The expression τὸν ἄγγελόν μου is clearly an equivalent of **מלאכי** (Mal 3:1), just as πρὸ προσώπου σου is a literal translation of **לפניי** (Ex 23:20), but none of the Hebrew verses has both. The Marcan use of personal pronouns is the same as in LXX Ex 23:20, τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, but it differs from the Hebrew text. There is a parallelism in the use of the personal pronouns in both Hebrew texts. In Ex 23:20, the form “you” is repeated three times, but Malachi instead constructs his parallelism based on the suffix of the first person singular (also retained in the LXX text):

הנני שלח מלאכי // ופנה דרך לפני
 ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου,
 καὶ ἐπιβλέψεται ὁδὸν πρὸ προσώπου μου.

² Some Greek textual witnesses of Mk 1:2 have ἐγώ. Cf. NA²⁸, *in loco*.

³ It appears twice in the Aramaic text of Daniel (3:28; 6:23).

⁴ Both in qal.

⁵ Cf. use of αὐτός in Mk 1:3 in a citation from Is 40:3.

In this parallel structure, the form *πρὸ προσώπου* is related to *τὸν ἄγγελόν* as well as to the accusative *ὁδόν*, although the personal pronoun differs from Mk 1:2, which does not help to indicate the source of citation.

1. Search for the source and linguistic origin of citations in the Old Testament

The main problem in Mk 1:2bc is the verb *κατασκευάζω*, which is never used in the LXX for *שָׁמַר* (Ex 23:20) nor for *פָּנָה* (Mal 3:1) (Hatch, Redpath 1998, 744).

The verb *κατασκευάζω* does not appear in the book of Exodus or Malachi, nor in the LXX, Symmachus, Aquila, or Theodotion translations of Ex 20:3 and Mal 3:1. Instead, it is used more frequently in Deutero-Isaiah, the book of Wisdom, and Maccabees (Hatch, Redpath 1998, 744). The semantic field of this verb in Deutero-Isaiah can be analyzed based on the parallel verbs, as can be seen in Is 45:7:

| | LXX | MT |
|---|----------------|------|
| A | ὁ κατασκευάσας | יוצר |
| B | ποιήσας | בורא |
| A | ὁ ποιῶν | עשה |
| B | κτίζων | בורא |
| A | ὁ ποιῶν | עשה |

One feature is particularly interesting: all the Hebrew and Greek verbs are in the participial form. They are used as parallel verbs in the construction AB/AB, where A is a participle with an article. The final participle is a conclusion, but is also used with the article, as in A. This grammatical parallelism shows that the semantic field of *κατασκευάζω* is used to translate *יוצר*, and is parallel to *בורא* and *עשה*. This is not the only case in Deutero-Isaiah. Similar grammatical and semantic parallelism can also be seen in Is 43:7:

בראתיו // κατεσκεύασα αὐτόν
 יצרתיו // ἔπλασα
 עשיתי // ἐποίησα αὐτόν.

In all three cases, the aorist was translated with the perfect form, and analogous verbs were used as in Is 45:7. Similar parallelism is also found in Is 40:28, where the verb κατασκευάζω is a translation of בָּרָא, and in Is 45:9, where it is used for יָצַר. Is 40:19 uses κατασκευάζω as a translation of צָרַף in a context of “making” something. Further investigation shows that the individual words used in Mk 1:2 are found frequently in the Book of Isaiah: ἰδοὺ (77 times), ἀποστέλλω (26 times), ἄγγελός (10 times), πρόσωπον (38 times), κατασκευάζω (5 times), ὁδός (60 times). The occurrences are frequent because the book of Isaiah is a large composition; however, the choice of them by Mark, especially κατασκευάζω, is indicative of a relationship between the two texts and confirms the contact between the prologues of Mark and Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Schneck 1994, 37–42; Moyise 2005, 78–87).

Interestingly, κατασκευάζω in the Book of Wisdom has the same meaning as in Isaiah, and is used in the sense of “create” or “make” (Wis 7:27; 9:2; 11:24; 13:4, 11; 14:2). A similar meaning can be found in the Book of Baruch (Bar 3:32; 6:8, 45–46) and the Maccabees (1 Mac 3:29; 10:6, 21; 15:3, 7; 4 Mac 2:21; 4:20; 13:26). All of them are relatively close in terms of their date of final composition to the Gospel of Mark. In addition, it is worth noting that this verb is very often used in the writings of Josephus (221 times) (Rengstorf et al. 1975, 458–460) and Philo (154 times) (Borgen, Fuglseth, Skarsten 2000, 191), where its prevalent sense is that of “doing” something, without the firm reference to “creating” that it has in Isaiah. The question now is whether Mark would use κατασκευάζω in the biblical sense or rather in the sense used by Josephus or Philo, who were from his epoch.

It is worth noting that in Mal 3:1 פָּנָה is translated in Symmachus by the cognate verb ἀποσκευάζω, which in the LXX is used only once as a translation of פָּנָה (Lev 14:36). Moreover, some early revisions used ἀποσκευάζω to translate פָּנָה in the piel, as can be seen in Aquila (Is 40:3; 57:14), Symmachus (Ps 79:10; Is 62:10) Theodotion (Is 40:3; 62:10) (Hatch, Redpath 1998, 140; Rahlfs 1979, *in loco*; Ziegler 1967, 267, 334–335, 352). All of the instances, except one, refer to the book of Isaiah and are in a specific context, namely the verb פָּנָה in the piel is followed by the noun דָּרַךְ. This fixed expression, פָּנּוּ דָּרַךְ, appears only three times in the Hebrew Bible (Is 40:3; 57:14; 62:10) and all of them are translated by the ancient translators with the cognate verb ἀποσκευάζω. In the immediate context of דָּרַךְ, two further imperatives are used (used emphatically with the repetition of the same verb): Is 57:14-סִלּוּ-סִלּוּ; Is 62:10-סִלּוּ-סִלּוּ, עֲבְרוּ עֲבְרוּ. The root סִלּוּ is chosen three times. Apart from the verb סִלּוּ, the noun מַסִּלָּה in both Is 40:3 and Is 62:10 is parallel to the noun דָּרַךְ. In the context of פָּנּוּ דָּרַךְ, the noun עַם is

also used, except for in Is 40:3 (though it is used in the later targum) (Cohen 1996, 254; Stenning 1949, 131). All these characteristics show that פנו דרך should be analysed as a fixed expression rather than word by word, and the verb פנה in this fixed expression was translated with the verb ἀποσκευάζω, not in the LXX, but in the early revisions.

Does this mean that Mk 1:2c is a free translation of פנו דרך? The phrase κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου does not use an imperative form, and ἀποσκευάζω, although cognate with, is not the same as κατασκευάζω (cf. Liddell, Scott 1989). One might have sought an answer for its origins in the LXX, but the text in Mk 1:2c evidently does not come directly from the LXX either. It is even more striking when we see, as recently pointed out by Gómez, that “90% of Mark’s vocabulary is Septuagintal. The 128 Markan words not found in the LXX could be reduced to as few as 43 words whose roots do not appear in the LXX” (Delgado Gómez 2021, 385).

So where does κατασκευάζω come from? This question is crucial because the exact text is cited in other Synoptics: Mt 11:10 and Lk 7:27, and in both cases is followed by the syntagm ἔμπροσθέν σου, which is also not found in the LXX text of Ex 23:20, nor in Mal 3:1. The syntagm ἔμπροσθέν σου is the usual translation of לפני,⁶ but this form in Ex 23:20 is here translated with another expression πρὸ προσώπου σου and appears only in the first part of the verse. Does this mean that other Synoptics translated this from a Hebrew Text? If so, which one? Or did they deliberately want to avoid the repetition of πρὸ προσώπου σου and so use the other form? Furthermore, why do Mt and Lk use the same form πρὸ προσώπου σου, which is not present in Mk? In addition, they used a relatively unique phrase, which is found only in the Synoptic Gospels but not elsewhere in Scripture, ὅς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου, thereby raising the question of its origin.

⁶ The expression ἔμπροσθέν σου appears 10 times in the LXX and is always a translation of לפני: Gen 24:7; Judg 4:14; 2 Sam 5:24; 1 Kgs 3:12; 1 Chr 14:15; 17:13; 2 Chr 1:12; 1 Esdr 8:87; Is 45:2; 58:8. In addition, it appears once not as a translation of the Hebrew text (Judith 8:35); for detailed analysis of the semipreposition with the stem ינפל cf. (Sollamo 1979, 13–122).

2. Κατασκευάζω in the New Testament

To investigate this issue, it is necessary to examine the usage of κατασκευάζω in the New Testament as a whole. In the Gospel of Mark this verb is used only once, which is also the case for Matthew's Gospel (Mt 11:10). In contrast, Luke uses it twice – he uses it when quoting the passage under investigation in the same way as the other two Synoptics (Lk 7:27), and also employs it in the direct speech of the angel who announces the birth of John the Baptist who will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah (Lk 1:17).⁷ The other places where κατασκευάζω is used in the NT are few – it is found in the letter to the Hebrews (3:3–4; 9:2, 6; 11:7) and 1 Pet 3:20, eleven times in total. Only three times is this verb used in the future form, and each time the future is used, it is in the citation of the text under present investigation. Interestingly enough, in all three synoptic Gospels, the preceding citation formula clarifies that it is written (γέγραπται). Thus, where is it written? Can the Synoptic Gospels bring further information?

All of the Synoptics quote the same text, but each of the texts is different, as it can be seen below:

| | |
|----------|---|
| Mk 1:2: | Καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφῆτῃ· ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου· |
| Mt 11:10 | οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου. |
| Lk 7:27: | οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου. |

In Mark's version, there is no ἔμπροσθέν σου, which is also not found in the LXX of Ex 23:20, nor in LXX Mal 3:1. Matthew's version preserves ἐγώ, as it reads in LXX Ex 23:20 and in the Hebrew text. If Matthew and Luke are dependent only on Mark, there would be no ἐγώ (Mt) and ἔμπροσθέν σου (Mt, Lk). If they are independent of Mark, what is the source of ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου? Since these words in Matthew and Luke are part of Jesus' direct speech, can they

⁷ There is an allusion to Sir 48:10 and/or Mal 3:23.

be considered Q sayings? (Catchpole 1992, 205–221)⁸ If they both used the Q source, might Q be a source for Mark?

Catchpole and Lambrecht have claimed that Mark was familiar with Q while writing the introduction of his gospel.⁹ On the other hand, C. Tuckett and others have argued the contrary (Tuckett 1993, 162–168; Devisch 1998, 59–91; cf. the redaction history of Q 7.24–28. Tuckett 1993, 163–168; Ernst 1989, 4–80). Dunderberg, in his research on Mark and Q, made a significant methodological observation which proves the point that methodologically, such a theory that Mark relied on Q would contradict the method by which Q is itself reconstructed:

Q is normally reconstructed on the basis of the material shared *only* by Matthew and Luke. Furthermore, the existence of Q proves to be a good hypothesis if a section common to all Synoptics occurs in Matthew and Luke in a context that differs from Mark. [...] The deviations from Mark are then explained by means of Q. But as soon as Q is reconstructed, one should conclude that it was also Mark's source. So far as I see, this result contradicts the premise, which should consequently lead to a re-evaluation of the premise. That is to say, if Mark used Q as a source, Q can no longer be reconstructed only on the basis of Matthew and Luke. Q should no longer even be defined as a sayings source used by *Matthew and Luke* [his italics] (Dunderberg 1995, 502).

Therefore, one can conclude that Mark could not have relied on Q, even if Q could be proven to have existed, because Q itself is assumed to be a collection of, or containing, those gospel details common to Matthew and Luke only. In addition, there is no certainty of dating of Q to see if, in fact, Mark could have drawn on it, albeit in a way different from Matthew and Luke.

If Mark did not use Q as his source, this causes one to ask again what the source of ὅς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου is, especially since it is not present in any known written text. Is it Mark's own commentary on Mk 1:2b with the use of a rare verb, or is it his translation of Mal 3:1? Would Mark have done such a sophisticated translation, given the usual style of his Greek? If this is his commentary and not a citation, would the other Synoptics repeat the same commentary, containing the citation formula γέγραπται? Moreover, Mark does not have ἔμπροσθέν σου, which is present in Matthew and Luke.

⁸ For the Q source (Robinson, Hoffmann, Kloppenborg Verbin 2000).

⁹ Republished in a slightly revised form in Catchpole 1993, 60–78; Lambrecht 1992, 357–384; For Marks' dependence on Q see Mack 1991, 15–39; Syx 1992, 166–180.

Furthermore, where does this Greek syntagm originate? It is not found in the LXX of Ex 23:20 or Mal 3:1 and is not present in the translation of these texts by Aquila, Symmachus, or Theodotion. Is ἔμπροσθέν σου a translation from Hebrew לפני (Mal 3:1), which in the LXX is rendered with πρὸ προσώπου μου? If so, there is still no agreement on the use of the personal pronoun.

In this challenging case, other possibilities were suggested. Dunderberg wrote that “the use of the translation κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου can derive from a LXX recension unknown to us [...]” (Dunderberg 1995, 510). He also claims: “It is reasonable to think that Mark received the OT quotation of Mk 1.2b–3 as a whole from his tradition. Then he may have identified it as an Isaiah quotation because of the main part of the citation. Therefore, my suggestion is that only the scripture introductory formula (Mk 1.2a) derives from Mark, who, however, is not dependent on Q 7.27.” (Dunderberg 1995, 511). The unknown recension of the LXX is a hypothesis, but it lacks strong confirmation. Mark’s own tradition would be an option, but Matthew and Luke have πρὸ προσώπου σου absent in the second Gospel. Fitzmyer raised the possibility of a testimony book, a scholarly hypothesis, but one still lacking substantial evidence (Fitzmyer 1957, 513–537). Occasionally, it is suggested that a text could come from the memory of the writer, which is impossible to prove or disprove. Nevertheless, in the case of Mk 1:2c, where the text is repeated in the other Synoptics, this is almost certainly not the case.

Lammers recently suggested that the quotation in Mark 1:2–3 is composed of a conflation of Ex 23:20a and Mal 3:1b, to which Is 40:3 has been added. He wrote: “On the basis of its textual form, I conclude that it was taken from a Greek text. The text of Malachi 3,1b differs from that of the LXX. It is either the result of a revision or of a fresh translation from the Hebrew. Some ancient witnesses support the former explanation; therefore, it is probably preferred. The quotation of Isaiah 40,3 most likely goes back to the LXX.” (Lammers 2024, 58)¹⁰

All these considerations concern a text that is vital for the Gospel. As Meynet emphasized, «John the Baptist» and «Isaiah the prophet» are placed in parallel: John fulfills what Isaiah had announced by pointing out to Jesus (Meynet 2018, 38). In this way, from the outset, the Gospel places Jesus at its very center.¹¹

¹⁰ With regard to the quotation of Isa 40:3 Jacob it points rather to the influence of the LXX than to a translation from the Hebrew text. (René 2020, 50).

¹¹ Black 2023, 2–3. He underlined a Christological concentration and the apocalyptic aura at the beginning of Mark’s Gospel.

Conclusions

Mk 1:2b appears to be a *mélange* of Ex 23:20 and Mal 3:1.¹² The OT text in Mt 11:10 is the same as in the Septuagint, whereas Mk 1:2b and Lk 7:27 lack the pronoun ἐγώ. This suggests that Matthew may have had direct access to the Septuagint of Isaiah, a possibility that cannot be ruled out for Luke and Mark as well (cf. Is 7:14 in Mt 1:23; Is 40:3–5 in Lk 3:4–6). The Hebrew text of Mal 3:1 מְלַאכֵי שְׁלֵחַ הַנְּבִיאִים, although translated in the LXX as ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐξαποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου, could be literally translated as ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου, as it is in LXX Ex 23:20. The latter text continues with πρὸ προσώπου σου, as in all Synoptics, but also in Mal 3:1 in a parallel line to τὸν ἄγγελόν μου we find a similar expression πρὸ προσώπου σου, which should not go unnoticed.

As shown, the text of Mk 1:2c is even more complicated. In fact, ὅς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου does not come from any known written source in the OT. The future form κατασκευάσει does not occur in the LXX. The text with ἔμπροσθέν σου in Mt 11:10 and Lk 7:27 only confirms this conclusion. The possibility that Mark relied on Q is also to be dismissed because the Q hypothesis does not allow for a text that is common to Mark and to the other Synoptics.

In terms of the OT language, the verb κατασκευάζω is never used in the LXX for שָׁמַר (Ex 23:20) nor פָּנָה (Mal 3:1). However, פָּנָה in Mal 3:1 is translated in Symmachus by the cognate verb ἀποσκευάζω. The same verb is used to translate פָּנָה in the *piel*, as can be seen in Aquila (Is 40:3; 57:14), Symmachus (Ps 79:10; Is 62:10) and Theodotion (Is 40:3; 62:10). All of the instances, except one, refer to the book of Isaiah and to the expression פָּנָה דָרָךְ (Is 40:3; 57:14; 62:10). The verb κατασκευάζω is also used in the LXX in the Book of Wisdom, Maccabees and Baruch, which are close in time to Mark's Gospel, but there is a question whether he actually knew these books and referred to them as Scripture (cf. use of γέγραπται). From the biblical books he certainly knew and esteemed, κατασκευάζω is most frequently used in Isaiah, and a relationship between Mark and this book is clear. Obviously, Mk 1:2c should not be “forced” to depend on Isaiah, because the introductory formula mentions this name; however, the

¹² Such conflation of the texts is often in the postbiblical Judaism (cf. Dead Sea Scrolls) and is common in the Gospel of Mark (cf. 1:11; 12:36; 14:24; 14:27, 62) and indeed elsewhere in the New Testament (i.e., Mt 27:9–10; Rom 3:11–18; 9:25–26; 1 Pet 2:6–8).

similarity between the prologues of Mark and of Deutero-Isaiah can not be overlooked.

There arises a question whether ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου can be considered as originating from an early Christian source, the first known evidence of which is found in Mk 1:2c. Providing a clear answer to this question is challenging due to the brevity of the text; nevertheless, several considerations may be proposed: a) the use of the verb κατασκευάζω betrays a quite elevated linguistic and possibly social provenance; as such was used often by Josephus Flavius or Philo of Alexandria¹³ b) The text had a certain authority for all the Synoptics, who cite it; c) this source was known not only to Mark, because Matthew and Luke have the expression πρὸ προσώπου σου absent in the second Gospel. Thus, what would be the closest parallel to this early Christian source? Is it the letter to the Hebrews, where the elevated verb κατασκευάζω is frequently used,¹⁴ and where there are often references to the priestly ministry, as well as extensive references to Exodus and Isaiah? It seems that ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου could be a NT writer's translation of פְּנֵי פָנָיו since this fixed expression, which appears only three times in the Bible (Is 40:3; 57:14; 62:10), is rendered by Aquila (Is 40:3; 57:14), Symmachus (Is 62:10), and Theodotion (Is 40:3; 62:10) with the same cognate verb as in Mk 1:2, namely ἀποσκευάσατε τὴν ὁδόν.

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¹³ For the use of the verb κατασκευάζω cf. (Liddell, Scott 1989, 111–112).

¹⁴ Heb 3:3–4; 9:2, 6; 11:7; Except the Gospels and the letter to the Hebrews, κατασκευάζω occurs only in 1 Pet 3:20 in the same context as Heb 11:7.

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