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Mk 1:1–3. A Later Addition to Mark's Gospel?*

Mk 1,1–13. Późniejszy dodatek do Ewangelii wg św. Marka

Keywords: Mk 1:1–3; the use of euangelion; textual affinity in the Gospels; OT citations in the NT; Oxyrhynchus 5073.

Słowa kluczowe: Mk 1,1–13; użycie terminu „ewangelia”; tekstualne powiązania w Ewangeliach; starotestamentalne cytacje w Nowym Testamencie; Oxyrhynchus 5073.

Abstract. In contrast to J.K. Elliot, N.C. Croy and other scholars who claim that “whatever was before Mk 1:4, it was not Mark 1:1–3,” it is argued in this research that such an opinion is not supported by the textual and linguistic evidence. Close analysis of the expressions and syntagms such as ἀρχή, εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καθὼς γέγραπται, κατασκευάσει, comparison between Mark 1:1–3 and Mark's Gospel as well as comparison with Mt 11:10//Lk 7:27 show linguistic affinity between Mk 1:1–3 and that Gospel, other Synoptic Gospels and NT in general. Moreover, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 5073, most probably the earliest textual witness to the beginning of Mark's Gospel preserves Mk 1:1–2. Therefore, it seems that Mk 1:1–3 belongs to the same time and space as Mk 1:4ff.

Streszczenie. W przeciwieństwie do J.K. Elliota, N.C. Croya i innych naukowców, którzy utrzymują, że „cokolwiek było przed Mk 1,4, nie był to tekst Mk 1,1–3” niniejszy artykuł ukazuje argumenty w świetle których taka opinia nie jest do utrzymania z punktu widzenia tekstualnego i lingwistycznego. Pogłębiona analiza takich wyrażení i zwrotów jak ἀρχή, εὐαγγέλιον Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καθὼς γέγραπται, κατασκευάσει, jak również porównanie Mk 1,1–3 z całą ewangelią Marka oraz relacja między Mt 11,10//Łk 7,27, ukazują podobieństwo lingwistyczne Mk 1,1–3 z ewangelią Marka, innymi ewangeliami synoptycznymi i ogólnie NT. Ponadto Papirus Oxyrhynchus 5073, najprawdopodobniej najstarszy tekst początku Ewangelii Marka zawiera Mk 1:1–2. Dlatego wydaje się, że Mk 1:1–3 należy do tego samego czasu i przestrzeni co Mk 1,4nn.

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Some scholars have claimed that Mk 1:1 or Mk 1:1–3 is a posterior addition¹. Elliott even writes: “It is (...) fascinating to speculate what Mark actually composed before 1.4 (a genealogy or a birth narrative of Jesus and even of John), but whatever it was, it was not Mark 1.1–3”². Indeed, whether or not the beginning of Mark’s Gospel is a later insertion is a crucial question for the study of Mark’s Gospel. During this investigation, the main hypotheses surrounding the issue of the posterior inclusion of Mark 1:1–3 will be examined. This research will discuss the linguistic questions posed by the text as well as the possibility of the physical loss of parts of manuscripts. In conclusion, some textual observations will be proposed.

First, let us examine the reasons behind the suggestion that Mark 1:1 is a posterior addition. N.C. Croy claims: “It is perhaps sufficiently provocative and paradoxical to suggest that we lack the beginning of the Gospel that begins with the words, ‘The beginning of the Gospel’”³. Croy suggests that Mk 1:1 is a posterior addition (second century). He argues that ἀρχή in Mk 1:1 betrays the nature of a superscription rather than an original text⁴. The argument is taken from codex D, where a combined colophon and superscription is found: εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ ἰωάνην ἐτελέσθη, ἄρχεται εὐαγγέλιον κατὰ λουκᾶν. In support of this hypotheses, it is true that a similar heading is found in the same codex at the beginning of John’s Gospel, and, in addition, some of Paul’s epistles have superscriptions with ἄρχεται in such codices as D, E, F and G⁵. However, as Croy himself admits, these are later additions, not from the codices themselves, but changes made from the sixth century onwards. Moreover, in these instances instead of the noun ἀρχή, which is in Mk 1:1 the verbal form ἄρχεται is used.

Croy also takes other examples, such as superscriptions found in certain manuscripts of the Gospels and the Pentateuch, yet these examples hardly support his suggestion that Mark 1:1 is a posterior insertion since they are even

¹ In the chronological order: E. Nestle, “How Does the Gospel of Mark Begin,” pp. 458–460; J. Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci*, p. 3ff; F. Spitta, “Beiträge zur Erklärung der Synoptiker,” *Der Anfang des Markus-Evangeliums*,” pp. 305–308; R. Way-Rider, “The Lost Beginning of St. Mark’s Gospel,” pp. 553–556; J.K. Elliot, “Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?,” pp. 584–588; N.C. Croy, “Where the Gospel text begins,” pp. 106–127.

² J.K. Elliot, “Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?,” p. 588.

³ N.C. Croy, “Where the Gospel text begins,” p. 127.

⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 121; cf. E. Nestle, “How Does the Gospel of Mark Begin,” p. 458; R. Way-Rider, “The Lost Beginning of St. Mark’s Gospel,” pp. 554–555.

⁵ With a few exceptions, these codices have this heading for 1 Cor, Gal, Eph, Phil, Col 1 and 2 Thes, 1 and 2 Timothy and Tytus. For the precise data cf. C. von Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (8th ed.), I, *in loco*.

later in date, from the tenth century onwards. Furthermore, they contain the name of the book in which they are found, with the impact that they can therefore be recognized rather as an extension of the primitive superscription found in various sources, such as κατὰ μαθθαῖον etc.⁶ Even in the case of the examples he gives from the Greco-Roman writers, from which the earliest are Dionisus Thrax (second cent. BC) and Erotianus (first cent. AD), it is rather doubtful, that Mark would know these writers and, once again, these superscriptions were later added to these manuscripts, as Croy admits. Nevertheless, the first noun in Mark's Gospel has intrigued other scholars, too. Elliott suggested that “ἀρχή elsewhere in Mark is temporal (10:6; 13:8,19)”⁷. but in all these three occurrences, ἀρχή is a part of a direct speech of Jesus, instead Mk 1:1 is a part of narration, therefore cannot be treated in the same way⁸.

In addition, some scholars have emphasised that the noun εὐαγγέλιον occurs eight times in the Gospel of Mark in which, in seven of these instances (1:14; 15; 8:35; 10:29; 13:10; 14:29; [16:15]), it has the meaning of “divine plan” and refers to Jesus' sayings (not actions) or is a résumé of his teaching, and only once does it denote an example of Jesus' messianic activity (Mk 1:1)⁹. However, it is unclear as to whether εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in Mk 1:1 means gospel “about Jesus Christ” (objective genitive)¹⁰ or “by Jesus Christ” (subjective genitive)¹¹ or is even intended to have both meanings¹². Secondly, one cannot exclude the possibility that Mk 1:1 should be linked linguistically to Mk 1:2, thus εὐαγγέλιον would not mean just the messianic activity of proclaiming the Gospel, but an explanation that this is “the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ [Son of God] as it has been written by the prophet Isaiah”. This explanation is not unknown in other Christian sources, as can be seen from Rm 1:1–4

⁶ N.C. Croy, “Where the Gospel text begins,” pp. 122–124.

⁷ J.K. Elliot, “Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?,” p. 585.

⁸ It is more plausible, as Guelich and others have suggested that “we have no comparable of this noun used to introduce a complete literary work” R.A. Guelich, “‘The Beginning of the Gospel’ Mark 1:1–15,” p. 8; cf. also M.E. Boring, “Mark 1:1–15 and the Beginning of the Gospel,” p. 52; G. Arnold, “Mk 1:1,” pp. 124–126.

⁹ Cf. J.K. Elliot, “Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?,” pp. 584–585; idem, “Mark and the Teaching of Jesus,” pp. 41–45; N.C. Croy, “Where the Gospel text begins,” p. 115.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Pesch, “Anfang des Evangeliums Jesu Christi,” pp. 108–113; R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, p. 9.

¹¹ Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 35–36; G. Dautzenberg, “Die Zeit des Evangeliums,” pp. 223–224.

¹² R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 53; J. Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, 146–147; S. Haręzga, *Jezus i Jego uczniowie*, p. 40.

or Rm 10:16 (papyrus P46 L14v)¹³. It also should be noted that the expression τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ in Mk 1:14 has a unique meaning and is not repeated in Mark's Gospel, and, interestingly enough, appears in the Pauline literature (Cf. Rm 15:16; 1 Thes 2:2, 8–9). Thus the use of εὐαγγέλιον in Mk 1:1 does not mean, of necessity, that this opening section is a posterior inclusion, which originated in the postbiblical Christianity.

Another main point to be addressed in the discussion is that the title/name Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ occurs in Mark's gospel only in Mk 1:1¹⁴. It has to be stressed, however, that by linguistic analysis we cannot extrapolate a syntagm from its structure. In fact, there is not just a name *Jesus Christ*, but the whole genitive structure τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ to consider. The noun εὐαγγέλιον appears at the beginning of major sections in Mark's gospel and is usually linked with the name *Jesus* or *Christ* (Mk 1:1ff with the form Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ; Mk 1:14ff with the name ὁ Ἰησοῦς; Mk 8:27ff with the name ὁ Ἰησοῦς and the title ὁ χριστός). Moreover, εὐαγγέλιον is also in the farewell speech (Mk 16:15) as possible *inclusio* of Mark's Gospel¹⁵. Furthermore, the form Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is common in the NT, where it appears 107 times and to these one can add also 95 occurrences of the reverse use of the name/title Χριστός Ἰησοῦς in various forms (from which 30 times Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ)¹⁶. Again, sometimes the noun εὐαγγέλιον is connected with the name/title *Jesus* or *Christ*, in particular in Pauline literature (cf. 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 3:6; Phil 1:27), similar to what is found in Mk 1:1.

Indeed, still further linguistic analysis will lend support to the view that the text of Mark 1:1–3 does not appear necessary as a posterior addition. It should be noted that in Mark καθώς always follows a main clause¹⁷. The textual evidence, does not exclude the possibility that verses Mk 1:1 and 1:2a are one phrase, thus καθώς does not start a new sentence. The use of καθώς is unique, however, in the sense that the clause which precedes it lacks a finite verb, but the other verbless sentence in Mark's Gospel is found in Mk 13:8: ἀρχὴ ὧδίνων ταῦτα. Interestingly enough, again we have the noun ἀρχή, and thus there are

¹³ Cf. NA²⁸, *in loco*.

¹⁴ R. Way-Rider, "The Lost Beginning of St. Mark's Gospel," 554–555; J.K. Elliot, "Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?," p. 584.

¹⁵ Although one has to be conscious that Mk 16:9–20 is the so called a „longer ending.”

¹⁶ K. Aland, *Vollständige Konkordanz zum griechischen Neuen Testament*, I, *in loco*.

¹⁷ Mk 4:33; 9:19; 11:6; 14:16, 21; 15:8; 16:7; J.K. Elliott, "Καθώς and ὡσπερ in the New Testament," 55–58, esp. 56.

two clauses without a finite verb in Mark's Gospel, both with ἀρχή¹⁸. In fact, in the LXX as well as in the NT ἀρχή is always used without a finite verb¹⁹. Therefore, καθὼς not just follows a verbless sentence, but rather follows a sentence with an ellipsis of a finite verb.

It is true, then that certain linguistic features of our opening section make it unique. Yet, that is not to say that this is necessarily evidence that our passage is a posterior addition. Mark 1:2 is the only instance in this Gospel where the expression καθὼς γέγραπται introduces a citation. This expression, though, is commonly used in the NT before or after citations or just in narrative sections, in particular in the letter to the Romans, therefore it was not unusual to write καθὼς γέγραπται²⁰. Moreover, this expression was known to Mark, since it is present in two other occurrences in his Gospel (Mk 9:13; 14:21), both in a direct speech of Jesus, from which the former one is linked with Elijah. It is worth mentioning that in Mk 7:6 ὡς γέγραπται appears, and, as in Mk 1:2, is linked with the name of the prophet Isaiah. In addition, citations of Ex 23:20a/Mal 3:1 or Is 40:3 in the Synoptics are always introduced with the verbal form γέγραπται, except Mt 3:3, where we have the participle λέγοντος, and thus its usage in Mark 1:1–3 was not unusual and, therefore, does not necessary indicate that the section is a later addition.

There are other arguments to claim that Mk 1:1–3 is a later addition. It has been suggested that the additions to the beginning of Mark's Gospel were similar to those appended as an epilogue (Mk 16:9–20), in the sense that they were taken from other canonical gospels²¹. In contrast to Mk 16:9–20, however, there is no textual evidence to Mk 1:1–3 to justify such a claim. Furthermore, it is true that Mk 1:1 demonstrates unusual textual variation²², but this is mainly in respect of the use of the form υἱοῦ θεοῦ, which usually is considered as an omission of one part of the homoioteleuton²³. Croy raises the question of the scribal practice of using ἀρχή and τέλος as lectionary markers, but, as he recog-

¹⁸ There is also a verbless sentence in Mk 1:3, but it is a citation. For the list of nominal sentences in Mark's Gospel cf. J.Ch. Doudna, *The Greek of the Gospel of Mark*, pp. 4–5.

¹⁹ Num 24:20; Prov 1:7; Wis 14:12; Sir 10:12; 29:21; 37:16; Hos 1:2; Only Sir 1:14 is it used with the infinitive. In the other occurrences, there is no verb at all. Matt 24:8; Mk 1:1; 13:8; Rev 3:14; 21:6; 22:13. In Revelation we find a unique usage, to describe God.

²⁰ Matt 26:24; Mark 1:2; 9:13; 14:21; Luke 2:23; Acts 7:42; 15:15; Rom 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 15:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor 1:31; 2:9; 2 Cor 8:15; 9:9.

²¹ J.K. Elliot, "Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?," pp. 588.

²² R. Way-Rider, "The Lost Beginning of St. Mark's Gospel," 554; N.C. Croy, "Where the Gospel text begins," pp. 106–110.

²³ C.H. Turner, "Markan Usage," 150; R.A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 6; M. Buscemi, "Critica textus di Mc 1," 73–74; W. Willker, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek Gospels*, pp. 5–6.

nizes, such practice probably began in the sixth or seventh century. In contrast, perhaps “patristic evidence that vv. 1–3 were an integral part of copies of Mark’s Gospel is firmly established for the preceding century” as Elliott argues²⁴. It is true, though, that Mk 1:2–3 is the only place in Mark’s Gospel where the citation comes from the narrator, but is it enough evidence that it was added later?

In this discussion some textual observations have to be proposed. The citations from Ex 23:20a/Ml 3:1 and Is 40:3 are the only citations present in all three Synoptic Gospels in exactly the same text type, except Matthew’s addition of ἐγώ (cf. appendix)²⁵. Moreover, only in these three instances the verbal form κατασκευάσει is used in the NT in the unique expression: ὁ κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου which does not occur in the LXX:

Mk 1:2	ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὁ κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου.
Mt 11:10	ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὁ κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.
Lk 7:27	ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὁ κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδόν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.

The text of Ex 23:20a/Ml 3:1 is always used in the NT reference to the same person, John the Baptist. Furthermore, there is a very similar introductory formula, sometimes identical, where the verbal form γέγραπται is repeated as well as having the reference to Isaiah. Therefore, one might ask whether the other Synoptics were not influenced by Mk 1:2–3 when citing Ex 23:20a/Ml 3:1, considering this unique verbal form κατασκευάσει and indeed the complete clause. Far from being an insertion, then, it may be that Mark 1:1–3 was in fact original rather than a posterior addition.

After the linguistic discussion of Mk 1:1–3 there is also a question regarding the possibility of the physical loss of sections of the manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark. It has been suggested that the first verses of Mark could have been lost as a result of damage to the original manuscripts²⁶. Way-Rider claims that not all the original text of Mark’s Gospel survived. His argument is based on the pagination of the codices \aleph , A, B where the number of pages/columns

²⁴ J.K. Elliott, “Mark 1.1–3 – A Later Addition to the Gospel?,” p. 586. However, one has to be aware of the later date of the patristic manuscripts, which could be influenced by the biblical text.

²⁵ For instance cf. use of the pronoun αὐτοῦ in the citation from Is 40:3 absent in LXX.

²⁶ R. Way-Rider, “The Lost Beginning of St. Mark’s Gospel,” pp. 553–554.

can be divided by four in the Gospels, though this is not the case for Mark; however, it would be difficult to prove that fourth century codices respect the same layout as the first century text. Furthermore, it is important to consider whether the original version of Mark was produced on a scroll or as a codex. The initial sections of a roll were frequently detached and lost, and so one might expect part of the text, like an opening section, to be lost. However, it is commonly recognized that Mark's Gospel was written rather in the form of a codex, the book-like format of which means that such a loss is unlikely. In addition, in the earliest preserved codices, Mark is never at the beginning or at the end of the canonical sequence of the Gospels, making the possibility that an opening section was lost even smaller. In fact, as Way-Rider also admits, most often the Gospel of Matthew lacks its initial section and the Fourth Gospel lacks its final section as can be seen in the table below, since they are generally found at the start and end of the canonical sequence of the Gospels respectively²⁷:

Codices	Total	Initial Section Lacking				Final Section Lacking			
		Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn	Mt	Mk	Lk	Jn
Unicals	37	13	6	6	6	9	6	6	11
Minuscules	131	17	4	1	6	2	3	3	16

In terms of the textual evidence, it is important to consider three amulets that preserve the beginning of Mark's Gospel. Actually, one of them, namely papyrus Oxyrhynchus 5073, seems to be the oldest witness to Mk 1:1–2, and it is dated at the end of the third and beginning of the fourth century, so probably earlier than the *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* codices²⁸. Interestingly, in this source the text of the Gospel is preceded by a superscription: ἀναγνώτι την αρχην του ευαγ'γγελιου και ιδε (Read the beginning of the Gospel and see). Then follows the Greek text of Mk 1:1–2, which in translation means: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus the Christ. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: 'Behold, I will send my angel before you, who will prepare...'" Without entering into detailed analysis of this text, it is another argument in favor of the presence of Mk 1:1–2 at the beginning of this Gospel. Moreover, the mention of an angel in the citation fits well to the phylacteric purpose of an

²⁷ The table taken from R. Way-Rider, "The Lost Beginning of St. Mark's Gospel," pp. 553–554.

²⁸ G.S. Smith – A.E. Bernhard, "5073. Mark I 1–2: Amulet," pp. 19–23.

amulet, as a guarantee of angelic protection. The other two texts which preserve the beginning of Marks' Gospel used as amulets are PSI VI 791 (=PGM 19) [fourth/fifth cent.]²⁹ and P. Vindob. G 348 [sixth/seventh cent.]³⁰. Both preserve the opening lines of the four Gospels in canonical order. Although they are from the fourth/fifth century onwards, they witness to the importance of the text of the beginning of the Gospels to the early Christians.

Appendix

Mk 3:1/Ex 23:20a and Is 40:3 in the New Testament

Mk 1:2–3	Ex 23:20a/ Mk 3:1	[...] καθὼς γέγραπται ἐν τῷ Ἡσαΐα τῷ προφήτῃ· <i>ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου·</i>
	Is 40:3	<i>φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ.</i>
Mt 3:3	Is 40:3	<i>οὗτος γάρ ἐστιν ὁ ῥηθεὶς διὰ Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ.</i>
Mt 11:10	Ex 23:20a/ Mk 3:1	<i>οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.</i>
Lk 3:4	Is 40:3	<i>ὡς γέγραπται ἐν βίβλῳ λόγων Ἡσαΐου τοῦ προφήτου· φωνὴ βοῶντος ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ· ἐτοιμάσατε τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου, εὐθείας ποιεῖτε τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ·</i>
Lk 7:27	Ex 23:20a/ Mk 3:1	<i>οὗτός ἐστιν περὶ οὗ γέγραπται· ἰδοὺ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου, ὃς κατασκευάσει τὴν ὁδὸν σου ἔμπροσθέν σου.</i>

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²⁹ K. Preisendanz et al. (ed.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, pp. 207–208.

³⁰ R.W. Daniel, “A Christian Amulet on Papyrus,” pp. 400–404.

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